



MOLEDRO MAGAZINE

ISSUE 2: June 2016

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MOLEDRO MAGAZINE

Moledro (n). a feeling of resonant connection with an author or artist you'll never meet, who may have lived centuries ago and thousands of miles away but can still get inside your head... (*Source: Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*)

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Moledro Magazine is a non-profit, global literary magazine based in India, that aspires to give deserving high school poets and writers the chance to have their work reach a wider audience. Started from a vision in August 2015 and an official launch in November 2015, *Moledro Magazine* has grown greatly in a very short span of time. With editors and contributors from across India and the world, *Moledro* hopes to provide its readers with a distinctive taste of international poetry and culture, and to conflate the ideas and words of students into a poetic delight.

Moledro Magazine publishes a new issue every three months, and accepts poetry and fiction submissions year-round. Detailed submission guidelines can be found on the magazine website; all questions may be sent to moledromagazine@gmail.com, or submitted via the contact form.

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Masthead

Richa Gupta (Founder, Editor-in-chief)

Richa is a junior at The International School Bangalore, India. An avid poet and writer, Richa has been published in several literary journals, such as *New Plains Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine* and *The Tower Journal*. She also enjoys being on the editorial board for *Glass Kite Anthology* and *Polyphony H.S.* Richa likes indulging in ice-cream on rainy days and can generally be seen biting a pencil while working on a challenging math problem.



Devanshi Agarwal (Managing Editor)

Devanshi is a student at The International School Bangalore; she is a founder of the Poetry Club at her school. She has a blog, which contains articles on controversial affairs; she enjoys reading 'bone chilling' thrillers, and writing poetry. She lives in Chennai, India with her family.

Trivarna Hariharan (Editor, Director of Social Media)

Trivarna Hariharan is an author whose work appears or is forthcoming in various literary magazines such as *Textploit*, *Writers Asylum*, *Literature Studio*, *Orange Almonds*, *The Bougainvillea Lit Road Magazine*, *Tangerine Heart Lit Zine*, *The Quail Bell Magazine*, *CultureCult*, *Germ Magazine* and elsewhere. She serves as the editor in chief at *Inklette*, the poetry reader for *Sprout* and is the Head Officer for Journalism at Redefy. She believes strongly in the power of art to bring about a change.



PROSE AND POETRY EDITORS

Devanshi Khetarpal—Devanshi Khetarpal is a high school junior at St. Joseph's Convent School, Bhopal, India. She is the author of *Welcome To Hilltop High* (Indra, 2012) and *Co:ma,to'se* (Partridge, 2014). She works as a Poetry Editor for *Phosphene Literary Journal*, and the Editor-in-chief cum Founder of *Inklette Magazine*. Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Alexandria Quarterly*, *Glass Kite Anthology*, and *Polyphony H.S.* Devanshi is usually spotted reading chapbooks in shady cafes while sipping Americano.



Ria Ranadive—An explorer and an appreciator of all things bright and beautiful, Ria Ranadive is a 16-year-old self-proclaimed book nerd from Singapore. A prospective student of English Literature, she currently resides in South East Asia, writing epigrams and poetry in her free time.

Archita Mittra—Archita Mittra loves to tell stories with words and images, and has a fondness for the vintage and the darkly fantastical. A first year student of English Literature at Jadavpur University, she is also pursuing a Diploma in Multimedia and Animation from St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. She has won several writing contests and her work has appeared in numerous online and print publications including *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Teenage Wasteland Review* and *Tuck Magazine*, among others. She's also an intern at *Inklette* and a prose reader for *Sprout Magazine*.



Aaditi Pradeep—Aaditi Pradeep is an eleventh grader with a passion for writing. She has been writing poetry from the age of ten and has published many of her writings in newspapers. She currently heads the literary department in her school, a responsibility she has been entrusted with for the second time in two years. She believes you can truly express what you feel when you put pen to paper; that's when you're really you.

Priya Saraff—Priya thinks her love for stories started because of her mom's habit of reading to her brother and her every night. One night, when she was six, she wrote her first poem on her then obsession, the Solar System. That was a start to whole new phase of her life, where she started rhyming about all sorts of things. After moving to India in 2009, her new school brought out her interest in poetry even more. As of late, she'd been trying out short stories and free verse poems as well.



Arnav Garg—Arnav Garg is a junior at The International School Bangalore. Currently pursuing chemistry and data analytics, he loves to write poetry in his free time. A music enthusiast and self-learnt guitarist, Arnav can be heard jamming to Pink Floyd and Porcupine Tree at night, even on school days. He has also been a part of numerous bands that have performed at charity concerts and competitions locally and nationally. Arnav has a Bachelor's Degree in Tabla, and is currently pursuing Hindustani vocals.

PHOTOGRAPHY EDITORS

Nikhila Kulukuru—Nikhila Kulukuru is a sixteen-year-old from Bangalore. She's the vice-captain of her house at school, and actively participates in inter-school fests. She enjoys singing, dancing, and reading books in her free time. Her passion for photography started a few years ago, when she held her first fancy-looking DSLR at a store; since then, she hasn't been able to let go of her camera! —since photography helps her understand the world in a different way.



Kaajal Gupta—Kaajal Gupta is a school student from India, who enjoys exploring the nexus between writing and computer programming. Also a passionate photographer, Kaajal finds joy in clicking nature photographs and adding a personal twist on them. She can generally be seen working furiously on a laptop, while Modern Family plays in the background.

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Glow

By Dana Chieuh

3 Poems

By Josh Schlachter

Open Letter to Anne Frank

You, with joints sewn of yellow stars,
with limbs of stolen bicycles,

your heart is a menorah
whose candles will never extinguish.

You carry hope like a red-checkered diary,
like a bouquet of flowers, a gift
you are intent on giving to the world.

The future is something you believe in,
so when the change comes,
you remember the past.

You remember the city for how it used to be,
believing life can always grow back.

But when they call you Jew,
it sputters off their tongues like
cancer, like you are the one to blame
and the one who devours.

They continue to strip you down,
your father's business, his own creation
he is forced to give up. Your sister
must report for ownership too.

Safety could only last for a season.
You no longer belong.
You know it is time to leave.

Living in a closet has its restrictions,
but you take refuge in the pen.

There is a chestnut tree outside your window
that still knows how to bloom.

You begin to believe that life
could grow back like this.

But there are nights when the radio
plays tag with your fears.

The voices outside your walls
grow louder each day.

You can hear them chanting,
“when Jewish blood splatters from the knife.”

The day the marching hits,
jackboots sound like a tsunami,

and the knock on the door feels
like gravity winning the war against God.

And the radio is right,
but you were never wrong to believe in hope,

to believe that maybe,
words have the power to rise above
the surface of a closet locked underwater.

You, with gas chamber lungs,
synagogue wrists, pinstriped spine,

You are not just a number, not just a name,
You are all of this.

The Applicant

Previously published in Fredericksburg Literary and Art Review

*The ringmaster who sits across the desk
from you has spent a lifetime turning
hopes into hyperboles.*

No matter who you are, one and all,
in this circus, you'll learn to swallow the fire,
we'll send the tigers into the ring.
Each day, you will lose some skin.

*It is just part of the fantasy
It is just part of this glorious opportunity.*

Not everyone is asked, you see.

*We only take the best performers
Come here, little girl, lost boy,
runaway, minority*

I was that girl.

Days and days that make you forget what day it is,
the numbness of never-ending midnights, bruises
that attach to your skin like bug bites, birthmarks,
purple that won't rub off, no matter how hard I try.

His smoke and mirrors left me unable to escape the fun house.
Now, when I look at my reflection,
my body, a distorted image,
I do not feel like myself.

They will promise

you can see the world with fast-paced feet,
laces untied, without elders to guide you –

and then they lock the door.

Little girl,

lost boy.

There is the circus tent.

There is saying goodbye to your mother and your brother.

This is not just their invitation.

This year, another 22 million lives
will be forced into slavery,
coerced into the control of an industry
that fuels our own economy.

America, we must learn that hashtags
cannot erase barcodes

Slavery cannot be erased from our history

But until it takes our daughters,
our sisters, our brothers,
are you going to be the one to
do something?

You Make Me Feel So Young

You make me feel young.
What an absolutely horrid statement.
It's utterly petrifying. I won't have it.

Instead, I'll stay here by myself
in the corner.

I will pretend I do not care
with my head tilted in the opposite
direction of you.

I will not let myself
play silver to your bronze.
You are so intoxicating,
and you have no idea.

Things run like clockwork in me,
I have answers and solutions
for everything.

But something about you
splatters Frank Sinatra's
vodka on the finery;

trembles the dials,
crackles the wires,
stains my silver with
"you make me feel so young".

This Landscape is Made of Lemons and Absurdist Theatre

By Rowan Brown

It's as if the painter started with Grey.
With the bubbles on top of milk.
They settled for the child's inhibitions towards taking a nap,
and moved on, to the sounds of clapping chalkboard erasers,
And past the clothesline in the backyard.

Then they chose a blue.
A very definitive Blue.
A Blue made of untouched umbrellas on a rainy day, and the crease between your eyebrows.
Blue was born the day someone's mother stopped dyeing her hair,
And came to the painting by way of a sodden dandelion, on the bottom of their boot.

I suppose the Purple was spilled on a whim.
It's the streaks left on dusty windows even after vinegar and elbow grease.
It's the insulation fibers in the attic that maybe shouldn't be there.
Remember the apprehension before unfamiliar ethnic food,
And combine that with crossed arms and the fact that there's no end to the left shoelace.

The Green is exactly the color that bricks are not.
Bricks that make up Savannah, Georgia.
It's the daily routine of a Newspaper and an egg and cheese bagel.
It's the clockwork inside a watch that no one understands,
And the daily commute over the bridge that no one can remember the name of.

All of the chalk and vinegar began to bleed into the shoelaces and newspapers,
and the artist, aware of the mundane beginning to seep in,
Became the precise embodiment of an abrupt deadline.
Red and Yellow and White are a crow's feathers.
They are Philadelphia and the fact that people wear sunglasses on subways.

In all actuality, the nine black trees are a precambrian index fossil.
They are the empty salt-shaker.
The last chapter of a book, and the equinox.
Trees pull the bridge and bicycle into the mountains.
The grey hair, boots, and insulation become a landscape.

The landscape is my father's wire rimmed glasses.
The mountains are November and the phrase "No Pressure."
The sky begins with the southern-facing window in my bedroom,
Goes through the pocket change on the corner of my desk,
And ends in the tomatoes on my front porch.

3 Poems

By Brynne-Rebele Henry

Mollusk

Liquid squid you in my periphery
Starling pink I refract
Summer barbecue, I drink more than I should.
Indentation asphalt, your city apartment
You wear a bloody shirt that says Mon Coeur
Small strips of your forearm grilled
The kitchen a weird musk, three months ago her hair was something we all called
russet
And her hands were creased against my insides
Silver fish.

Oceanic Trenches

I, an octopus in your hair
My mouth the tectonic drift
A metal sin palate above my tongue
Cry we to Jesus, his residue finger
Nail he paints the red of my intestines
Powder-laced, the saline dissolves my flesh
Into the clean, my bath bones
My skeleton says your name twice
The devil left early to go golfing
His tail burnt cinder of cheap margaritas
And sequins that adhere like plankton
The bath is a suede bloodletting
The suck of water-knuckled wrists
My legs the blue-pink hide of a manatee
Jesus didn't want to name

Glacial Scars

I was looking to blind
Like a deep sea anemone
Wrenched from out of hand
I draw the bath so we can all pretend
To be just another Odysseus
Pond scum lick of a day on the asphalt
Red fish plate, the bones small and clean
Dissecting my insect tinsel organs
Your mouth a consumption that spots up no tide

The Straitjacket

By Nishant Kumar

Placed within the confines of a limited space.

I feel like the inside of a book or a class.

Crumbling in the darkness.

Cold and pitiful.

Closed.

 Closet

 Weeping tears

 Acceptance, will they please

 I feel like the cover of book, judged

 Outpour of emotion that keeps me intact

My straitjacket, driving me to insanity

The Strays

By Alyssa Tyson

On stormy nights, the stray cats huddle in the alley beneath cardboard kingdoms. They scratch their flea-ridden skin against graffiti-stained brick. At thunder's resounding roar, they cower in crevices and crannies they've long-since outgrown. Precipitation pokes holes through soggy, makeshift roofs and pummels the tips of their ears.

These stormy nights, the young go hungry, yowling, wide-eyed. "Hush," their mothers, queens whose crowns bear more scabs than precious stones, say. When lightning cracks the sky in two, the kittens press themselves against the mothers, trembling amidst the downpour. Still, the mothers silence their cries: "We must wait." And the kittens obey, because the mothers have seen the storms; the mothers hold memories, though muddled, of moonlit nights made bearable by waiting, just waiting.

Because somewhere, once, they were lions. They groomed each other free of fleas and ticks and mites because a pride meant unity, meant bravery, meant undefeat. Somewhere, once, when thunder roared, they were not afraid to roar back. The pads of their paws never slipped from the slick stone; the caves in which they slumbered never leaked, never dripped. Their cubs' stomachs never rumbled on rainy nights; food flourished in abundance, licked-clean bones littering their stone dwellings, a constant reminder of harmony and happiness, of true peace and prosperity, even in darkness.

Somewhere, once, these lions reigned as one undaunted body, under one starry Savannah sky; and in the morning, the sun always shone, but never in their eyes, for even the sun knew not to disturb them in sound sleep. And when at last they blinked themselves awake and emerged from their caves, they found that the storm had passed and saw only the glow of a glorious light that belonged to them and them alone. This, they knew, for the lions were not strays, but sovereigns.



A surreal, colorful illustration of a woman's face. The face is rendered in a soft, painterly style with a warm color palette. A large, vibrant butterfly with red and black patterns is perched on the left side of her forehead. Her eyes are large and dark, with long eyelashes. Her lips are a bold, dark shade of purple. She wears a thin necklace with a small heart-shaped pendant. The background is a dense, abstract collage of various images, including a dreamcatcher with a feather, a colorful patterned fabric, and a small glowing orb. The overall mood is dreamlike and whimsical.

Even in Dreams you are Colorless

By Archita Mittra

Unlived

By Paige Caine

I am ten fingers in the air
sitting in a circle
never have I ever
gone to the moon and back
on a Tuesday night

I am *better safe than sorry*
pulling my blanket to my nose
in bed by 9:30
dreaming of staying out till 11
not knowing if time goes further

I am homework done
in a kitchen at 4pm
eating carrot sticks plain
while my tongue craves ranch
dressing and peanut butter

You'll find me behind a book
because television rots your brain;
sports are dangerous
and my parents say
we trust you, just not your classmates

You'll find me on a yearbook page
years from now
smiling a smile
practiced in the mirror
that looks cute, your classmates will
love it
and you'll wonder
who I was

You won't find me at all
because I'm still at home
reading my book,
eating my carrots,
doing my homework,
we'll play *never have I ever*
in graveyards at midnight

6 feet beneath the rolling hills
and I'll still be waiting
to put a finger down.

Once Upon a Time

By Nova Fox

Once upon a time, I dug through the basement and found dozens of butterflies. Some in copper, some in bronze, some simply printed onto paper.

Sadly, my mother got to them soon after me and hung them. Personally, I believe they were considerably happier fluttering around in the dark.

Once upon a time, I was in the garage and decided to delve into the depths of the coal pile to hunt for the reflections of long forgotten diamonds.

Sadly, I came inside covered in dust and dirt and filth. Coal is not as clean as they pretend it is.

Once upon a time, I rolled over in bed during a bitter midnight hour to see a face hidden in the pile of laundry on my old corduroy chair.

Sadly, before I could even whisper '*hello*,' it crawled back into the depths of the cushions and pretended it was never there.

Once upon a time, it seemed so much less important.

2 Poems

By Archita Mittra

to the lover who never wanted me, with retro love

like a love song on the jukebox in the shower, you
sauntering into my dream-entangled world;

sizzling, my heart misimagining polka-dotted fancies;
twisting our barren-desert bodies to tunes they don't

play anymore; your fingers whispering, *We've Only
Just Begun*; my *Superstar*, the moon is envious; my soul

soaked in Chanel No.5, twirling in a red polka-dotted
black dress; *Touch Me When We're Dancing*; your mis-

imagined lullaby voice, next to my ears, crooning dreamily, *I
Won't Last A Day Without You*; breathless, my confession: *I*

Need To Be In Love; my heart soaring like *Top Of The
World*; swirling like the colours of a lava lamp; do you

remember? your heart, a postcard from a faraway country
i'd always wanted to visit but could never afford the ride

(like love); *Only Yesterday*; the sky maundering with rain
and falling endlessly on the sidewalk; endlessly my love;

Rainy Days And Mondays: entangled, in the web of my
nightmares, staring at the goodbye-shaped space

between us, at the ghost of a song longing to be sung;
Karen died last night, i shriek to the icy emptiness of

my sunless, starless garden; *Goodbye To Love*; your
last letter scrawled all over my disfigured polka-dotted

fancies like graffiti. *Yesterday Once More*, please? No,
never; a lone transistor on the rain-soaked window sill

stuttering a broken tune till something switches off.

to the girl who once loved black holes

you spent your childhood peering through telescopes
and misspelling the names of constellations, star charts
hanging where your family photo should have been.

you knew the names of Jupiter's moons by heart
and wrote letters to strange imaginary friends
on the other side of the Milky Way,

you who were young and star struck, back then; nebulous
eyes falling in love with the comets surging past
the empty darkness between the stars.

you who dreamt of magic and stardust
and realms in distant galaxies, shimmering
with smoky happiness, you who fell

through tunnels of black blinding light, tongue
tasting dark matter and uncertainty, soul crumbling
into manic loveless electrons spinning out of time

when shall you escape the fetid darkness
of your own heart, threaded with the far away
stars that bleed and bleed you with hope?

Oblivion

By Drishika Nadella

"Ma", I call to my mother. She looks at me, dazed. For a moment I become distracted. She is an old woman, but her beauty seems eternal. Her long, slim fingers adorned with fine wrinkles are beautiful, like the blades of fresh grass swaying in the autumn zephyr. Her face looks tired and sagged, but the charm is not lost. Her aquamarine eyes have bags under them, but the kindness in them remains. They are the eyes that I saw when I walked into her protective hands for the first time; the eyes that never left me during graduation day; the eyes that I would see for the last time.

She is still looking at me, but not quite. She seems confused, as though I awoke her from a dream that she can't quite remember now. "Ma, I got a promotion", I tell her with as much enthusiasm as I can muster.

"Who are you?" she asks, suddenly wary.

"I am Weslee, your daughter", I tell her, my voice choking with sudden overwhelming emotion.

"Liar!" she screams, pulling back from my touch with unanticipated vigor. "My daughter is dead. She was killed by Afghan terrorists. I saw it. I *saw* it. My daughter is dead, you hear me? *Dead*."

"Ma, please. I am your daughter. I am *alive*. You are having delusions" I say desperately, hoping that she would remember me from some memory that is safe from the infection that has defiled her brain. I reach for her hand slowly and when I take it, she doesn't struggle. I heave an inaudible sigh of relief and guide her to her bed, freshly made by the nurse.

I can feel her frustration at not being able to comprehend her life, her surroundings. She can't understand my words. She can't recognize me.

"You know Weslee, you were born during a thunderstorm" my mother says. "I was?" I ask innocently, her comment piquing my childish curiosity. "Oh yes. There was wind outside, so much wind! Trees fell, cars made noises, dust everywhere" she says dramatically. "When you came out finally, my mother-in-law looked at you and said to me that a child born during a thunderstorm is an evil child. But look at you!" she says, tickling me with her soft hands
"You are my angel!" "Are angels in first grade, Ma?" I ask her between peals of laughter, swatting away her hands that came in for the attack on my belly. "Sure they are!"

I push the memory away. My vision feels blurry from the tears. "Ma" I say meekly "I love you".

But she isn't listening. She is toying playfully with the strings of her bedspread. I caress her face slowly with the back of my hand but she withdraws, irritated. I bite my lip in an attempt to hold my sobs.

"Weslee, you know that I am not well right?" she asks me intently, her face grim. I nod slowly. "There is something wrong with mama. I won't live for long. Look here Weslee" she gently pulls my face towards her when I turn away, attempting to hide my grimace of pain. "I will change after a while. I will start forgetting things. I won't be the same anymore. Soon, my love, I will even forget you" she says slowly and deliberately seeking to making my juvenile and pure mind deduce the implications. "But...but it's not fair Ma!" I protest in vain. "I know, love. But that's the way it is. Now promise me something"

"Promise you what?"

"That you won't grieve over me. You are a bright kid, Weslee. You have your whole life ahead of you. Don't waste your time mourning this old bat when she goes into oblivion. There's nothing you can do about me. Go live your life" she says, surprisingly audacious.

I sob into her lap. Her hands run over my back, comforting me. "It's okay" she says occasionally. Finally, when drowsiness takes over me and I close my eyes, I finally hear her say "Be brave, love."

That was seven years ago, but the memory still resonates within me like my heartbeat. "I promised you, Ma. I won't break it" I whisper to her. But her attention is now on my watch.

"Weslee," Paz, the nurse comes in. "It's time" she says with the same sympathetic tone that I have grown accustomed to over the past seven years. I nod sadly. "Take care of her for me, will you?"

"Of course, love."

I turn to my mother. "I am leaving, Ma. I love you" I say, leaning to kiss her forehead. When I look into her blue, listless eyes, I could have sworn I saw a flicker of recognition.

Growing to be Destroyed

By Emily Stefhon

A corpse,
with rotting flowers,
budding from my esophagus,
from all the seeds
of words,
I had never managed to speak.

Syllables forming stems,
sentences sprouting upon leaves,
writing tragedies upon beauty,
as you did to me.

I used to be a dandelion,
composed of childhood wishes,
rooted firmly in soil,
swaying with the breeze.

You plucked me from the ground,
brought me close to your lips,
blowing away every desire I'd ever had,
with one breath.

Stripping me
of my innocence,
my sense of purpose,
leaving me flowerless,
for your own amusement.

Now I lay decaying,
growing tulips and orchids,
from my throat,
striving to grow,
to poke out of the soil,
just to be close to your lips,
once again.

2 Poems

By N. Muma Alain

Irony

My lover gave me another promise today,
so fake it's almost authentic
Fit to be hung on the wall,
right next to the others before it,
ready to be dusted and left unused.
Funny how that one wall stands out as beautiful
in this downright ugly house.

Reverie *

In my mind, I am somewhere.
Somewhere far away from here,
someplace, anywhere but here

In that place, there is respect.
In that place, there is peace.
In that place, there is love.

In my mind, I am somewhere.
Somewhere only I know,
someplace I can run to

* Previously published in The Kalahari Review and Subprimal Poetry Art

2 Poems

By Marysa Lee

Silhouettes on the Sand

Silhouettes.
That's what I meant when I said:
"Dance with me."
We are souls escaping our identities.

We are too shy to think out loud,
Instead our shadows join the crowd.
An outline of personality,
The bonfire burns originality.
The ocean white noise at our backs,
On hallowed shore the sinful acts.
Guide me by my quivering hand,
Merely silhouettes on the sand.

Sunset

I consider the hallowed horizon
a beacon of hope
for the painters in the sky.



Delusion

By Debeshee Das

Trafficking an Illusion

By Brent Weisberg

Milo hopped into his mid-sized silver SUV and sped out of the school parking lot, little heeding the posted ten-mile-per-hour speed limit. Nor did he mind the twin jerks that came as the high-sprung vehicle bounded over the school's broad, white-striped speed bumps. Nobody was watching, anyway. He halted at the confluence of the parking lot and the adjacent busy street to allow a similar mid-sized silver SUV to streak by. It reminded Milo of how he wished he had been granted a model with an onyx paintjob. His current set of wheels made him feel so invisible. That is, until he ventured away from his affluent island in the eastern reaches of the city down to the unwelcoming streets and driveways lined with dented doors, squealing brakes, and duct-taped windows.

It was a quarter to four o'clock, and Milo's college decision was due upon the hour's toll. During a lull in the traffic, he took a left out of the parking lot and allowed the weight of his foot to depress the accelerator. The vehicle sprang forward. Milo's one out of ten thousand conglomerations of several excruciatingly manicured essays, a prim-and-proper-as-possible résumé, and a slew of condemning ethnic information had been either accepted as deserving one of a few hundred spots or deemed not worth it. Either his future would be sealed, or he would have to grapple with many more weeks of uncertainty, not to mention another dozen applications requiring his utmost introspective creativity. Milo's palms sweated uncontrollably; the knuckles of his swarthy hands were white, so tightly did he grip the black leather steering wheel. It's a shame I'm the wrong kind of Indian, he thought. Not even a sixteenth Cherokee or Choctaw—unlike Mika. What is a sixteenth, anyway?

Milo shot through a right turn at a lingering yellow. He was in a bit of a hurry to get to his bi-weekly harpsichord lesson. It had been hoped that undertaking the learning of such an arcane instrument would ensure his acceptance; colleges wanted diversity, and now that starting an orphanage in Africa was considered passé, the harpsichord was as diverse as it got. He didn't even have to be all that good with the thing for it to look impressive, unlike Irene, the award-winning cellist. And at any rate, Milo wasn't applying to music school.

As the red needle in the speedometer read twenty above the speed limit, Milo zoomed past the squat Baptist church at which he had earned so many community service hours working kiddy carnivals and coat drives. Milo was technically Catholic, and he had written one of his essays about the uniqueness of spending many a weekend assisting the Protestant institution, not forgetting to include the

time he retrieved a screaming toddler from a muddy bounce house. Making the whole experience sound like that of a firefighter rushing into a burning house on the verge of collapse, he'd somehow scrounged from the anecdote some powerful common life lesson and tied it into the essay, something about living in the moment so as not to lose sight of what's going on around oneself. Soon, Milo thought, all this bullshit might come to an end, and my new life will start. At college, he could start afresh, independent of the image his peers like that blab-mouth Mia spread about him.

At the intersection of the frontage road, Milo found himself stuck in the right lane at a red behind a boxy white sedan that had no intention of turning. He checked his watch: seven to four. He tapped his fingertips against the leather wheel. Soon, everything would be so much better: he could go to any party any night he wanted, independent of whether or not Ivan was willing to divulge where, when, and whether any existed; he could quit taking Spanish once and for all; he could learn the guitar and pick up girls that weren't stuck up like Mia or Iris.

At last on the highway, Milo wove between cars and trucks to recoup lost time. The silver SUV pitched from one haunch to the other as the spongy suspension worked to keep up with its operator's sharp inputs. Finding himself in an open swath of road between two broad fronts of cars, Milo mashed the accelerator into the floor. He reckoned he was just as good a driver as Isaiah, the kid who'd been recruited to an Ivy for kart-racing. Kart racing! The guy had hit a pole in the school parking lot just last month. Now he was assured a spot at a top-notch school.

Up ahead rose the crowd of un-appendaged obsidian torsos that was downtown. A blinding reflection of the late afternoon sun blazed on the tallest of the vitreous towers each time Milo made this ritual time sacrifice to the college gods, his harpsichord pilgrimage, and today was no different. It was to Milo, albeit marred in places by the steel framing each plate glass window, the shining dream he chased, the gold burning at the top of the black monolith of his adolescence of torment. At college, they'll appreciate me, he thought, and my *true* self will shine like the sun. No more of this skulking in the shadows to please the "cool" kids like Ike and Ivan. Let them peak in high school. Today I get my ticket out of here. He hazarded another glance at his watch: three to four.

Already the sky beyond the tower had begun its twilight throes of mortal purpling, and the extremities of the most distant clouds were already assuming a gangrenous black. About half of the cars travelling likewise had their lights on, as did an approximate proportion of those flashing by on the other side of the concrete barrier. The shimmering green signs that stretched over the highway started to include Milo's exit and to count the quarter miles that remained. "Verdadero Drive" always looked blunt to him as it appeared in the simple white font emblazoned on those verdant rectangles.

The signs on these highway drives often got Milo thinking about the nature of shapes and words. He'd heard somewhere that signs were designed to be read without being consciously read. An octagon meant stop, an upside-down triangle meant yield, and the wording on either had a similar shape-association sort of effect. Shame nobody put up a purple heptoid on the road for me with "Accepted" or "Rejected" or "Deferred," Milo thought.

If anything, geometry would be his downfall. Milo was certain that a deferral or rejection must have some grounding in that freshman year fiasco. It was his only B in high school. He, after struggling through honors math day-in and day-out for the past four years in pursuit of the hard-earned A's he deserved, scanned the loathsome black text on his transcript at the end every semester and found at the bottom the hideous curvature of the sole B burning a hole in the pit of his stomach. He'd never had the luxury of being Mimi, whom he sat next to three years prior in that loathsome dungeon of a class. One day, while tests were handed back, Mimi received hers and slumped down on her desk on top of the torturous packet, letting out a disappointed grunt. Milo glanced over and saw written and circled in red ink on the top left corner of the first sheet the number 92. What a dishonor for the future math team captain to receive a 92 on a freshman geometry test! If only Milo had been so lucky to share in such dishonor!

There was always more traffic the closer one got to downtown. The angry red rear eyes of the cars blinked with more and more frequency. Milo glanced at his watch: a minute past four o'clock. His fate had been sent just a minute prior, now sealed behind a few numbers to be tapped onto the screen of the phone in his pocket. Isaac and Miracle must be getting the news right about now, too, Milo thought. Of course Miracle, both of whose parents are alums, got in. And Isaac for being first generation and all. Maybe it would've been better to apply regular when they've already got all the legacies and special cases in the class already.

Milo's hand fished in his pocket for his phone. The case was caught on a stray thread, so he yanked it free. The traffic was accumulating, and there was only one mile to the exit. He judged he could afford to slow some. He'd been later before. The phone pressed against his hip, Milo's thumb activated the power button, and the phone clicked.

He looked back at the road. Traffic was moving. Seems there wasn't an accident today, Milo thought. Maybe I'm just rejected flat-out like Meesha. I'll have to settle for a safety, then. What do I really have going for me? A stupid Baroque piano, above-average grades...

Milo's fingertips unconsciously tapped the proper three-number password. He glanced down and opened on the email application. He looked back at the road. Just half a mile to Verdadero Drive, the big green sign read. Milo held the phone in his clammy brown hand with a vice-grip.

Maybe they liked my essays. Maybe they read me first and the guy reading was sick or the lady who came to bat for me couldn't argue well enough. What if there's no space for me?

He suffered another glance at his phone. The knuckles of the fingers that held it were white with strain, and the device shot out of his hand toward the passenger window like a cork out of a champagne bottle. Milo groped for it, pulling with him the wheel and dragging the car under a diesel-smelling eighteen-wheeled semi.

Bully

By Sakshi Das Gupta

Pools of liquid midnight blink back at me,
I watch, as a single tear
traces its way down the pathways of her face.
Despair.

The workings of her memory, assaulting her,
playing back images of happier times,
blurring.
Like the view through snowflakes,
whirling, down, down
as cold as the slice of ice in her heart

A shudder, works its way up through her,
and I watch one of the strongest people I know,
split apart at the seams,
an avalanche of emotion spilling,
pooling on the linoleum floor.
She loved him.

“I hate him,” she screamed, cried
the distant cacophony of grief,
echoing through the empty hall,
her pain, only worse,
the double-edged sword of betrayal,
cut through her, a curse
I wouldn’t wish on anyone.

She loved him, you see.

So fully,
So desperately,
A consuming, soul-destroying love,
that stemmed from him.
his hair, smile and eyes,
eyes she will see in her dreams.
So close, she could almost touch him,
a meter away,
forever out of reach.

I asked her later,
“What was it like?”
A love so fierce, it burned so bright.
For days I begged,
to no avail,
her lips pressed tightly together,
her eyes, stony behind the hooded lids of sleepless nights,
pale.

“Tell me the truth,” I cried,

“The truth? The truth is a bully we all pretend to like.”

Still Smokes

By Helena Zindel

She jostled the knob until the metal catch came loose and the door swung open, hit the wall, made a white mark on the grey paint. She ran her fingers over the coat, noticed it was chipped, and picked at the stucco until white dust fell onto the carpet. Like pieces of dirt trapped in the light; made the world seem dirty. She looked up, saw him laying on the bed, her bed. Was a jackass, was her bed that he'd taken, what right did he have? It was her bed. He looked back at her and smiled, flipped her off, rolled off the bed. She sat on the bed, her bed, and looked at the lights above her head; Christmas lights (it was February), and wondered why she hadn't taken them down. Hadn't thought to. She wished she had. Yellow was her least favorite color; the lights were yellow. He smelled like cigarettes, the room smelled like cigarettes, she scrunched her nose. She hated yellow.

He had asked her something, she hadn't responded, she never did. He was used to it, had been used to it, missed being used to it. He asked her again. How's life? Good. But school's hard. And my teachers suck. That's what she said.

He looked at her, expecting her to reciprocate with a question, she didn't, but he answered anyway. He was doing fine. Life was tolerable, he was drug free, he still smoked. She said nicotine is a drug, you know. He said no, it's different. Not like weed or painkillers. She laughed, but not because it was funny; it wasn't funny and she was sure it wasn't funny. She laughed, thought about all the times he quit, all the times she was so proud of him, but pride was never permanent. Like the smell of tobacco on her sheets, pride lingered, but faded into grime after a month or so. Grime. She liked the word. He's getting better, he really is. She lied and she always lied and she was good at it. Lies were better, she thought, than the smell of nicotine on his jacket. He didn't agree. He'd tried to stop, thought of her, how much it annoyed mom, pissed off dad, made grandma resentful, made him cough. Made him smell like tobacco and ash. Made her think he wasn't okay. She hated it when he smoked, asked him to stop but he never did. He'd tell her "tolerate me or leave," and she'd leave. She always left. But now he'd left and she didn't have anywhere to leave to. She thought: smoke somewhere else. She looked at his teeth and they were yellow, his eyes were red; she didn't have to wonder what that meant anymore. "Drug free" apparently meant free, tax not included. He looked at the carpet, not at her. He stared at the stains on the floor and tried to remember how they got there, felt them in his hands, felt the wiry threads that used to be brighter. Used to be whiter, used to be bleach bright. Now they were sunburned. She thought; he doesn't care about me, about anyone. Maybe weed. He cares about that. And cigarettes. She wanted him to stop smoking, she didn't want to tolerate, couldn't tolerate.

(Wouldn't tolerate.) She wanted him to stop, maybe for her. She wanted to know that he still cared, for her, for anyone; wanted to know he cared.

She looked at her brother, remembered that afternoon, it had been a Sunday. He said life's not worth it. I'm so tired of being miserable. I hate myself. He said he wanted to die and she believed him. She cried. Not because he was miserable, but because she remembered him and she didn't want to have to forget him. She couldn't do that, never was good at forgetting. She looked at the carpet and saw that it was stained. She tried to remember how it'd gotten that way but there wasn't anything left for her to remember; wasn't anything she wanted to remember. She was afraid of him committing suicide, afraid of trying to forget, but he'd promised her. His promises didn't amount to much, though, and he still smoked, he still smelled like tobacco. She wished he'd stop smoking, stop making her miserable, too. She knew he wouldn't stop, not for her. She stared at the stains on the carpet. She wondered if they were happier being unnamed. She thought they were.

He looked at her, wondering who his sister had become, who he'd missed. Where had he been? Three months of ecstasy, misery, apathy, which was it? He didn't know. Didn't remember. He wondered if she still cared about him like she used to, used to love him, used to play with him. Used to laugh when mom and dad fought, used to build forts out of grandma's quilts and mom's blue painter's tape. They used to be happy together. Used to try not to laugh when Mom caught them stealing candy from their hidden Halloween stash, yelled at them but smiled because she knew they were happy. Now, they tried to laugh and then didn't try anymore. Decided stealing candy wasn't funny; they could buy their own candy now. Now they just looked at one another and wondered why nothing seemed funny besides how little they had in common. How much they used to have together, how much they had now; there was nothing left. He missed their pants-less escapades through the backyard, playing tag with the dogs and Emily. Where was she? He didn't know, wondered where. He looked back at his sister and hoped she wondered (about him) too.

She stared at the lights above her head, saw him looking at her through the corner of his eye, saw him smile, look away. She stared at the yellow lights above her head and wondered why they were still there. Why they were yellow. Why she'd put them there. She hated yellow, always had. She remembered when they used to get up early Christmas morning and build forts and eat candy. Sweet Tarts and Kit Kats. He liked things sour, she liked things sweet. But she never minded sour, it tasted okay when you scrunched your eyes and your lips didn't have any cuts. They used to get up at four a.m., play monopoly and drink apple juice in champagne glasses, used to be happy. She wondered if he remembered how happy

they were together. She looked at him across the room, wondered who he was now. He had become happier, she realized, without her. Without living in this house, their house, with Mom and Dad and Sabrina and Smudge. But he still wasn't happy, was just happy-er. She looked back at the yellow lights and wished she'd remembered to take them down.

He asked her again, how's life? You already asked that. Oh, yeah. He hadn't remembered. She wondered why he'd forgotten so fast, supposed he never listened (never had). Maybe all that smoking messed him up, more than he admitted, more than she wanted to know. She asked how he was doing. He said, I just told you. He wondered why she hadn't listened; she never listened. He looked at her, she looked back at him, with nothing to say at all. Sixteen years they used, lost a month, now they had nothing to say. They saw, with earnest reluctance, their incongruity with one another. They were tired of being unhappy. Tired of being ignored by someone they loved, someone who loved them. But they didn't feel like listening.

He was doing much better, she thought, he'd grown a beard and gained some weight. She was doing okay, he thought, she looked tired, looked older. Looked thinner. But not happy thin; unsatisfied thin. Always unsatisfied. She looked at herself too much in the mirror, always believed the mirror. She looked back at him and he looked at her. This time, he didn't look away, looked at her brown eyes and saw his reflection. They stared at the carpet. Anonymous blotches were sad, he thought. She thought they were happy, thought carpet didn't have emotions, thought she was going insane. She had hoped their meeting would be more reassuring, of themselves, of their lives, of their contentment. That's all she wanted. He didn't know what he wanted, didn't want anything from her or this house anymore. Maybe he'd take a few pictures. He wanted them to leave him alone. Wanted them to love him, to appreciate him, to forget he was a bad person. Was bad, was getting better. Maybe he wasn't. He couldn't tell. He'd been unhappy, he'd been reassured that this; time, was never reassuring. She didn't know yet, was too naïve, was too young, too thin. She still thought that yellow could be nice at sunset. It could.

He knew yellow was always an ugly color.

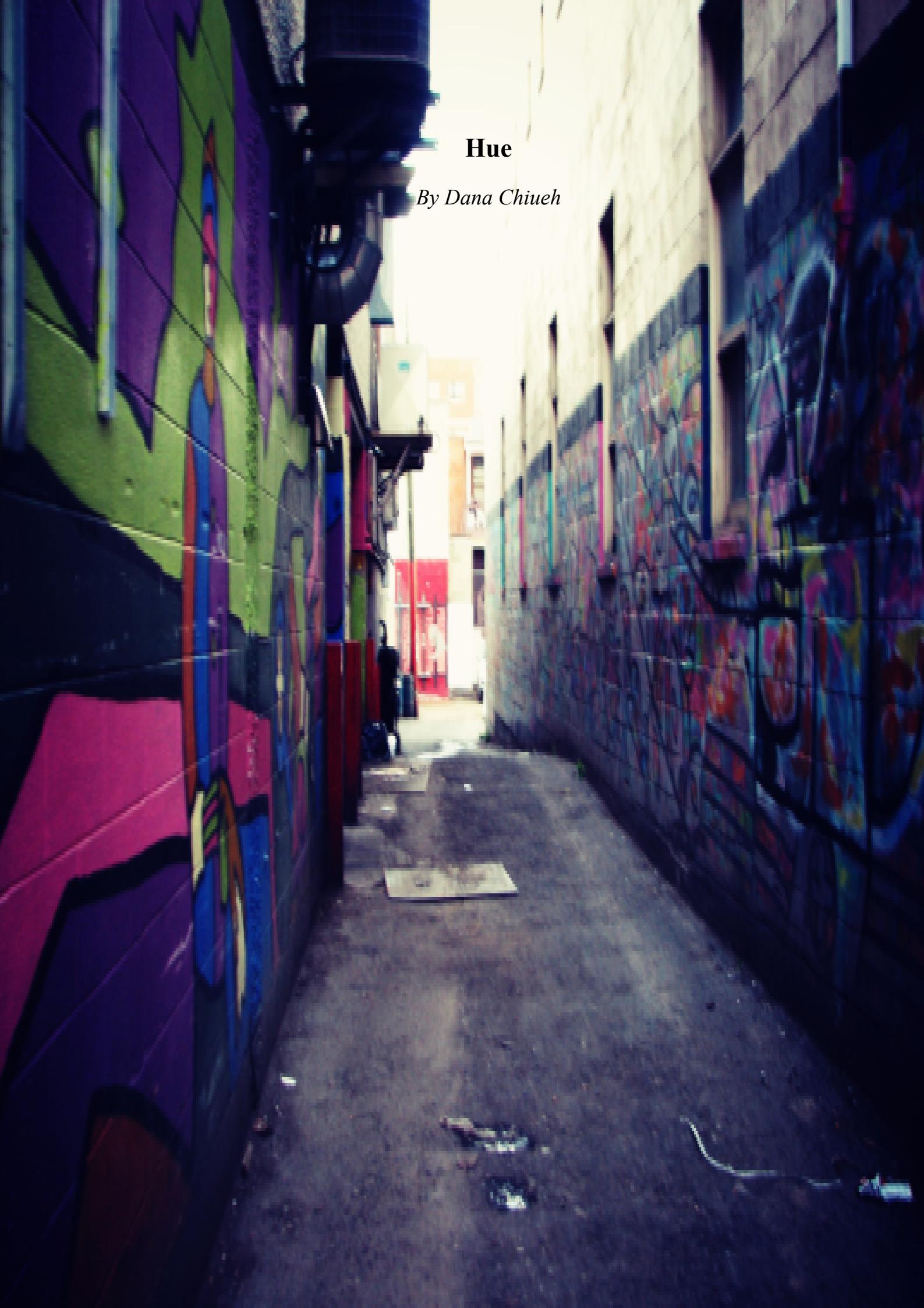
Open

By Jalista Velasco

The can of tea bursts to life,
and what life I have led,
to gaze upon the fleeting faces
strolling past my forgettable figure,
and relishing the dingy shadows of the morning and night,
waiting for the gallant knight of the east and west.
But I toss my can into the garbage,
glancing away from the caress of the Sun,
because nothing compares to the prying light of my shutters,
the crisp glow of my phone,
or the careless purrs of my friend.
My promenade around this rounded world
continues like the infinite passage of time,
with my friend slipping through the cracks of space.
The wind murmurs against the curve of my ears,
seeping through my fingers like rolling sand,
and nothing now can pause these currents,
I'm free under the azure depth,
flying beyond the scope of possibility,
To be open.
open to the wonder of daily toils.

Hue

By Dana Chiueh



3 Poems

By Lisa Zou

Migration

No one ventures across an ocean
without a few scars. It's not the time

zone difference or the language
or even the sleepiness of the streets

that changes you. When you do
something that the hundreds

upon thousands of ancestors
have not been able to do before you.

You feel a sword through your chest,
like you could use it any moment.

On Loving Bill Nye

Given, there exists a weakness for the poet,
the mathematician, the science guy.

Oh, tell me about the celestial skies,
how those nuclear reactions formed the stars.

Teach me about the difference between the
solar and lunar calendars—how time stretches

slower than the miles between our hometowns.
Late nights, you sing the verses of operettas and

special relativity like they are the theme songs
of our lives. Hand me logarithmic formulas like roses

and theorems like the secrets you dared not
to whisper. Forget kissing, hand holding. I want

dictionary definitions, I want proofs on notebook
paper, on LaTeX, on walls. Debate me on the merits

of healthcare—social security privatization.
Some nights, I crawl through the lines of your app code,

digging for traces of a less cached attraction.
Throw away these copy right laws, bend back like pages

of Wordsworth, enlighten me about Einstein's past, Hamlet's
depression—love me like mass and acceleration aren't

inverse relationships, like Romeo and Juliet never even died.

Insomnia

I still keep your notes from high school
tucked in the dark space we call dreams
between my pillow cover and the pillow.

Because having you beneath the sheets
is not enough for this dimension or
an alternate one. The lead from the paper

has slowly rubbed off in the last few months,
like cancer just waiting to diagnosed.
I still can't get over the way you curl your Gs

and write your Zs in cursive.
You are seventeen, they said.
I heard melodramatic roll off their

tongues after a teaspoon of sympathy was
given. Too young to fall in love, they said.
If love is what they called it, then let it be so.

And your passing was what hurt the most,
and your father drank away the pain
like it was drinkable. And no one would know

about your aspirations to direct movies about
poverty. You want to change the world, I would
laugh. I am giggling no longer, this humor has

run drier than the rivers in Sedona.
At the funeral, I was supposed to hand your
eulogy like flowers to your relatives. But

it was not pretty or precious like petunias
in the spring. I think about how you were
barely old enough to drive. I think about

how your voice is a well worn pair of warm
socks. I think about the cold, the cold, the cold.
And fear kept me from telling you I loved you.

Playing hard to get is the only way to go they

said. I am still running into you at the supermarket,
the cashier with your dark green eyes, how all

racially ambiguous people remind me of you.
How I had never met a native American with
half a family in Australia. How all my pictures

return to you. I think about how love
is portrayed in the rap songs of our generation.

I want to argue with you, your liberal
views permeating the air as we speak.
I want you to repeat the verses I wrote,

you were the only one who knew these
metaphors, these monsters, these memories.
I'm still lost in the maps of your mind,

and you still remain in mine.

Aiden

By Brianna Brooks

My father always told me I was different. I thought he said that because of my unique eyes, he was just trying to cheer me up because of them. I was wrong. I have two differently colored eyes. One brown and one blue. I thought I had that rare disease. Heterochromia iridum is what it's called. It's when your eyes are two different colors. I never would have thought I'm not normal had I not met him.

~x~x~x~

"Aiden." I stand in front of the class, and say my quietly. "My name is Aiden."

I look before me at a room swarming with students. All with different personalities, lifespans, colors, actions, words, and cells. To me, they are nothing but static. Static that has eyes, normal eyes, that stare at me with blank stares.

"Class, this is Aiden Daya. She is a new student. Please give her respect." Another voice added to the static. A teacher's voice that was meant to be calming and inviting, instead makes me feel lost. I look at her. She gives me a warm smile as her red bangs fall onto her face. Her lips curve into that strange symbol of happiness. "You can take your seat there."

I walk over to the empty desk that is now mine. I place down my brown satchel and pull out a notebook and a pen, the two things that comfort me the most, and begin to write. A few moments after we start working on some math problems, she tells us about an upcoming quiz.

"Aiden. Can you solve this equation?" She points to an extended equation that can confuse any math professor.

I glance at it. "75."

"Correct again, Aiden." She smiles. I wouldn't call myself smart. I'm just above average by a few points.

Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. My teacher opens it with a sigh; a sigh that shows she has done this millions of times before.

"Liam. You're late again. Go sit down." She glares at him.

The boy takes his seat beside me. I don't bother to look at him. If you haven't noticed already, I'm very anti-social. I will admit I was known at my last school, but that's because I was the first female boxing champion for two years in a row. My school

had a small team that lost every time. When I joined, we won nationals for two consecutive years.

"Liam. Your next tardy will cause you to be suspended. You will have to talk to Aiden to catch up on what you've missed." The teacher explains.

"Yes, Ms. Charles." A kind voice cuts through the static to my ears. My head starts to hurt. A throbbing pain forms in my head and behind my blue eye. I felt his stare fall on me. "Excuse me."

I glance at him, and then quickly look back down.

"I'm sorry. Are you Aiden? I know it's not polite to assume, but you're the only new face in here."

I look at him fully this time. I make eye contact, and suddenly I'm lost in his gray-eyed gaze. A smile as kind as a baby's taints his lips, for he has won my attention. I nod to answer his previous question.

"Nice to meet you, Aiden. I'm Liam." He holds out his hand. I look at it as if it's some foreign object. Then I shake it. His hands are soft, as if he had cocoa butter implanted in his chocolate skin. "Would you mind telling me what I missed?"

My headache isn't going away. The pain comes with every passing second. My chest starts to close up and I can't breathe. I hold my hands to my head as if it would help. It doesn't. I fall to my knees and start screaming.

"Make it stop! Make it stop! My head... my head it hurts. Make it stop!" I squeeze my eyes shut and plead to god to make the pain go away. I start crying; no, sobbing uncontrollably. My head is being ripped from my body and I can't stop it.

"Take her to the nurse! Quickly!" My teacher shouts.

I open my eyes, and for a brief second the pain stops. I see my teacher shouting and pointing. A face of worry has taken over the calm, loving one. Above her head... I can see everything. Everything about her. Her name, age, birthday, sign, and a lonely number at the bottom of the list. Her death date. Two days it read.

"Two days until she was to die?" I ask myself. "What's going on?" Then I am enveloped by darkness.

Red Dust Clouds

By Kyle Logan

Dragon-shaped clouds are gilded gold by the setting sun
as it slips towards the flat, western edge of the desert.
The sagebrush, lining both sides of the red dirt road,
houses an assortment of singing insects,
or was it stinging insects. At any rate,
their tracks, along with those of fox, coyote, snakes
and a varied amalgam of rodents, criss-cross the road.
I obliterate them with the toe of my shoe,
kicking up a small cloud of red dust with each scuffing step.

The Man in the Mirror

By E. Penaz Eisner

Once there was a man who woke up and saw that he was, in fact, dead.

He had gotten up one morning, blearily pushing through his daily routine. He ran the gears of his mind through sludge, for he was the same as everyone else. He was the same as he'd always been. His existence was entirely monotonous. Nothing ever changed for better or for worse. He was everyone else, and he was sedated.

This morning, as usual, he glanced at his chest when he woke up. He stretched his arms. He stood normally. He walked to the bathroom and began to wash his hands, when he looked up and into the mirror.

There was no reflection of him. Yes, there was a reflection of everything else in the bathroom, but he was missing entirely. He slowly pressed his fingers up against the mirror, but still there was nothing.

The man confronted the situation with silence. If I don't speak of this abnormality, he thought, perhaps it won't be. The man decided that he would carry a mirror around with him that day, to see if his reflection would begin to appear.

He continued his check-list day as usual. He walked from place to place as always. Though he checked regularly, his reflection never appeared in the mirror. He was disappointed, for he had been disrupted from his typical cycle and could not find his way back.

His walk home deviated from the sidewalk now, and he cut through the churchyard and its hillside graveyard. As his shiny, black shoes crunched along the ground, he saw scratches appear on them from the gravel he always avoided before, but he found himself uncaring.

The gravestones were gray and well-kept. They were like a sea of still heads, like his own. Among them, one white gravestone, marble and covered in vines, stood out. Slowly, he made his way to the shining slab. He studied it, his eyes flicking across the polished sections unobscured by vines, but he remained unable to see his own reflection.

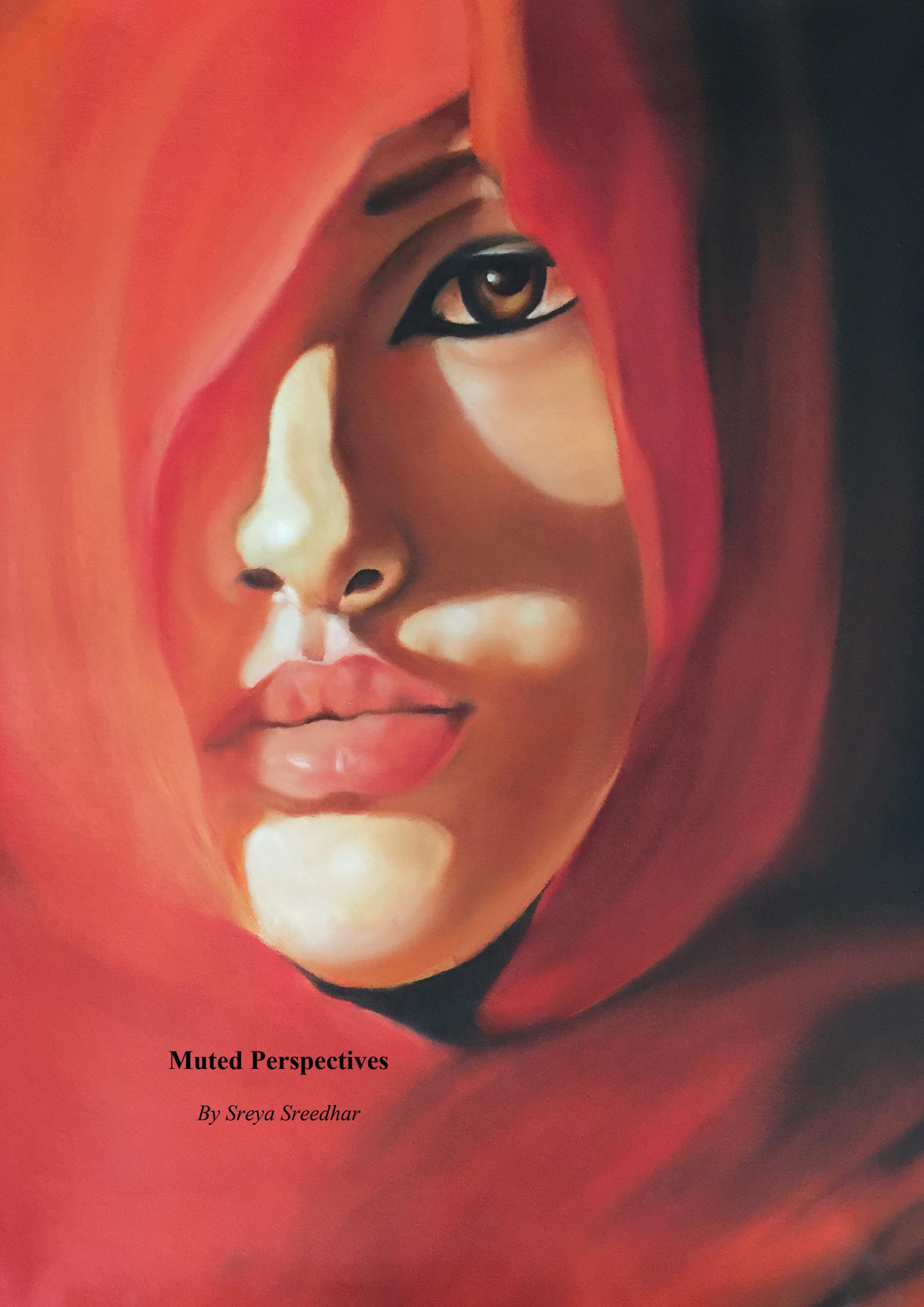
He touched the gravestone, and the grass at his feet rolled back like a fabric. There sat a coffin. The man brought his shaking fingers to the black wood. He opened the lid, which creaked loudly.

The coffin was empty, except for a small mirror. The man leaned over the mirror and saw his reflection in it.

Linger

By Kavya Chandra

Lungs were made to breathe,
but they were also made to choke
your systems when you were pulled
in too deep into the water, and your
eyes were made to see, but were
also made to redden and blur your
vision when you saw too much, too
closely, and your arms, they were
made to hold people and sanity, but
they were also made to break. Your
feet were made to help you stand
and implant your roots, but they were
also made to trip and fall repeatedly. Your
heart, your heart was made to beat
and keep you from pernicious mortality,
but it was also made to love, and love
is scary that way for your heart; it
will stop eventually, but your love?
Your love lingers on when you can't.



Muted Perspectives

By Sreya Sreedhar

Enter my Personal Space

By Sydney Crosby

and feel how cold the world around is.
It is bare on the walls with no artist claiming seek.
The more length you cover in my bubble,
the less you find yourself needing air.

Fueling up on lost hope,
and endless tears that never came down my face.
The salty water is a river flowing around my heart,
almost drowning me in my own despair.
You must swim freestyle.
Then butterfly stroke viciously against the currents of my moods.
When you pass the flood and it becomes almost too cold to bear,
you've nearly reached it.

You will see your breath,
spell your name out with each shiver until it is carved into me.
Then...
when a rainbow appears along with the sun,
you have become the artist.
The one that has the space,
but no longer wishes to keep it.

Lemon Cake

By Katherine Brown

We bought lemon cake from the store,
made craters from plastic and buttercream icing
until we felt hollow, too.

And I swear the tinny taste of blood can be
traced back to lemon, the way poppy seeds
get stuck in between the rafters of your ribs.

Wait—

Can you taste the sour throb of citrus
peels, curling around the knobs of your fists?
It's placating, that taste, as though the acidity
is too much for your flushed cheeks,
the ligature of veins standing from your neck.

We mopped the floor with bleach, wringing
our hands of the taste of lemons. Of fists
and grainy deposits of sugar.
But the cake was gummy in our mouths,
resin filling the tracts of our lungs.

A mistake—that was all it was, packaged
in shiny plastic, a corrosion that started small.
We both reeled back at the same moment,
cathartic lemon rising up from our pores.

Catch. Release.

The cake whispers of absolution.
Each soft layer heavy with promise,
and each volley of lemon
burns worse than the last.

But we have to finish it.

Specter

By Katherine Brown

Ellie whispered to herself when she was alone. The ghosts of her past loomed, bottles of crimson and gold leaves ready to shower over her shoulders any minute. She shivered, hugging her arms to her chest.

Her mother walked beside her, only it wasn't quite the same person she remembered. The woman's arms were ragged, knocking against her hips. The figure's head slumped to the side, her face a caricature of what Ellie remembered her mother to look like. And no matter how fast Ellie walked, she could not persuade the ghost to stop following her.

"Ghosts of the still-living are the hardest to get rid of," her grandmother had said when Ellie mentioned the figure of her mother drooping by the wall, pale hands twisted around her own throat. Her grandmother had followed Ellie's gaze. "Don't let her rattle you. Ghosts are fickle, anyways. She might leave on her own."

But she hadn't.

It had been months since Ellie had moved out. The house she now lived in, her Grandmother's, seemed more fragile than she remembered. The floorboards, scuffed from the years, seemed thin as crepe paper. Even her grandmother's skin was pale and stretched tight against the bone.

"It's okay, birdy" she had whispered, her hands knotted to her sides. "I'm fine. You're fine. *Ça va, Oiseau.*" And then she would bow her head, rinsing her hands in the soapy basin, muttering french conjugations like soft blue lullabies.

But, she couldn't steer her mother from her thoughts. She imagined her leaning, hands to knees, eyes sealed shut with prayer. Rocking like a child, lost in the shadows of her brain. Ellie couldn't think what was worse—that image, the last she had glimpsed of her mother before carrying off her clothes in shiny plastic bags—or the ghost that now followed her.

So she had taken to walking everywhere—from hovering just beyond the edge of the bathroom to brush her teeth, to sleepwalking. Evidence of her nighttime haunts were triangles of red at her elbows and knees. When her Grandmother saw her, she would turn her fists up below the hollows of her throat, as though she were holding her own jaw shut.

“Baby, you’re becoming a ghost.”

Ellie thought about that as she walked, feeling the sharp grade of earth below her. Her thighs started to burn in protest, her back aching under the slope of the grey sky above, a bowl of hollowed silver. She thought about turning to the ghost, who had fallen behind her staggered gait.

She stopped, breathing hard.

“Why do you have to follow me?” Her eyes burned with unshed tears, cool like sapphires. Ellie remembered the word for ghost, in french: *spectre*. The word would roll from her grandmother as she kneaded dough, insisting in doing it the old way. That was when she cried, in the protective warmth of the kitchen, her fingers forming steeples with dough.

Ellie wondered what her Grandmother thought of her daughter, Ellie’s mother. Was it her sadness for her lovely girl, her *Oiseau*, that stiffened her movements in the mornings? Or was it seeing her granddaughter draw into herself?

As she stopped, listening to the blood drum against her ears, she felt a wave of anger toward the specter.

“Why can’t you just leave me alone? I can’t escape you even when I stopped living with you, when you receded into your own madness? Can’t you just give me peace?”

Her heart sounded like a hammer against cloth, heavy inside her own chest. She felt exposed, looking at her mother, half leaning in the morning breeze. Ellie felt the wet spray of rain start, dripping across her nose.

“Lovely little heart,” her mother whispered in her not-so-real voice. The sound of came across as thin and pliable in the moist air between them. Mother ghost and daughter ghost.

“You did nothing for me,” Ellie accused, feeling dizzy. She thought of her grandmother bracing herself in the kitchen, hands sheathed in prayer. Who was she praying for? Was Ellie already lost?

Oiseau Seul.

Lonely Bird, her mother rasped. Time marched under the treetops and Ellie thought she was splintering apart, the mud caking her ankles and threatening to draw her into the earth.

"I am not yours anymore," Ellie shouted, only to shrink back at the sound of her own voice. "So stop. Stop pretending you have an influence over me, or Grandma. I'm the one that's alive." Ellie stopped, taking gulps of autumn air, bracing herself for the ghost to say something. Anything.

The trees bloomed red behind both of them. "I loved you. I really did, but I don't know how to fit you into my life anymore. Or even if I still can." Ellie swallowed, tasting blood.

The ghost didn't answer, just opened and closed her mouth in the fine spray of rain. Ellie could see her breath from the cold. She thought of her grandmother's words; they ran like strong bands of iron across Ellie's heart: *Ghosts of the still-living are the hardest to get rid of.*

Her breathing quickened, and Ellie feared the staccato beat would be enough to end her. That she would capsize into the mud and the old, frayed leaves. They would tangle into her hair so that even the birds wouldn't recognize her.

"You aren't real. So I can tell you to leave, and you will."

"Do you really want that?" Her mother-ghost whispered, standing stock-still against the rain and the swirl of leaves. Her face was pale and twisted, but she seemed almost...relieved.

"I do," Ellie whispered. "Because you're not even a ghost. You're just an old hope I had, that my mother would get better. That she would do anything to find me, to love me."

The ghost nodded, listening.

"But it's okay to not have a happy ending. I just don't want to be haunted anymore. That is the ending I want."

She began to turn around, her skin shiny with petals of rain. Ellie balled her hands into fists, watching as the ridges of her knuckles turned white.

"I won't be a living ghost, either," she whispered, maybe to the wind, or maybe to the very fabric of her past.

Game Console

By Jess Froese

Electronic colors capture all attention,
the screen forcing multicolored eyes forward
as if in a trance, content in watching
blobs of pink and yellow characters dance in battle
from brown block platforms to green spiked grass
before falling away in the sky, only to return after a moment.

Blue and green with a black center stay still
drowning out the calling voices from behind in the open space.
Fingers nearly slip on the smooth red buttons
due to how fast they are being clicked.

Senseless topics cross the air, some in teasing and testing tones.
The fingers on the other hand grasp the joystick the same color of red,
directing the pink blob in his fantasy journey.
The voices speak casually of food and flavors,
debating whether strawberry or peppermint was better.

The only noted movement is the fingers
that focus the mind on millions of pixels.
The faster they move, the more the clicking sounds,
drowning out the voices of reality.

The Realization

By Ashira Shirali

Today was Tanya's birthday, and we were headed to her house for a quiet girls' night. Tanya is the most popular girl in our school, a fact she never ceases to deny. "Seriously, drama just finds me, you know? I just want a chill life," she had told everyone many times. I was new in school and had only met her a week ago but Tanya had taken me under her wing.

We were in the car on the way to Tanya's house, me and the rest of the girls – Nikita, Alia and Ojasvi. NATO, Tanya had christened the four of them. I was new in town and new to the group so I wasn't a part of the alliance. When I mentioned this to Tanya she looked confused.

"Alliance...?" she trailed off.

I let it drop.

"What did you guys get Tanya?" Alia asked. Everyone looked up from their phones. Nikita was Tanya's best friend. "I got her a gift-card from H&M. I know her well, she'd want to shop," she said confidently. Alia and Ojasvi had bought a new pair of boots and a make-up palette. I had picked out a gift I thought Tanya would like, a pastel blue journal with indented gold hearts.

"I got this journal because the colour reminds me of Tanya. As in, it's a delicate colour, you know? It just gave me a Tanya-feel," I tried to explain. "Hmm," Nikita assented, scrolling through her Instagram. "Oh god, I still haven't posted anything for Tanya's birthday on Instagram or Facebook. You guys have to send me all the pictures you have. I don't have enough for this collage I'm making, so like..." Nikita went on as the driver navigated the crowded streets of Gurgaon.

When we finally reached the first thing I noticed was the loud music coming from Tanya's house. Quiet this night was not. I was going to ring the bell but the door was opened by a girl in a blue dress. She was yelling into her phone and stormed off into the darkness. We entered the house. The lights were dim, every room was crowded and huge bowls of chips were placed on the tables.

Finding Tanya wasn't easy, but we finally managed. We all wished her. "Hey, I thought we were having a girls' night. Did you invite more people or something?" I asked, confused. "Oh, no! Everyone decided to surprise me!" Tanya squealed. She looked beautiful in her white lace top and long black skirt. Her hair was curled into

ringlets and her eyeliner winged. "Oh, cool," I replied. Good thing Tanya had so many extra snacks at home.

Tanya assured us she would spend time with us after everyone had left and went to greet some people who had just entered. I added my gift to the huge pile on the dining room table. There were three other journals like mine there, purple, pink and green in colour. I looked away and tried to occupy myself.

I sat next to a guy holding a red cup. I hadn't seen him at our school so I thought I'd make conversation. "So, how do you know Tanya?" I asked. "Tanya?" he mumbled. He looked a bit out of it. "I have a friend who kind of knows her," he finally said. "And I follow her on Instagram," he added meaningfully. "Oh..." I said a bit awkwardly, but he had slumped back into his seat.

The party was dominated by girls in expensive clothes meant to look casual and immaculate make-up meant to look natural. Loud dance music played, but since no one was dancing it served as a disruptive background to the various conversations. A few people had turned on Tanya's Wii and were engaged in a tennis championship. Tanya's parents were nowhere to be seen.

I found Ojasvi and Alia wandering from room to room trying to find the best lighting for a selfie. "If we don't post any pictures no one will even know we were at the party," Alia said sagely. I nodded absentmindedly as Ojasvi deleted the tenth unsuccessful picture they had taken. "Ew," she said, her nose wrinkled in disgust. Meanwhile, Nikita was telling a girl wearing a cat-ear headband that they had to hang out sometime. Apparently they'd met before at someone else's party. They took a selfie and Nikita posted it on Instagram – '#bestgirl'.

I looked around. There were at least fifty people there, all chatting away in their own groups. The room was full of people and yet I was lonely. Tanya had disappeared, last seen with a guy from her neighbourhood. After forty more uncomfortable minutes I decided it was time to leave. As I passed the dining table I picked up the blue journal and tucked it into my bag. Tanya had three more to choose from anyway.

Withdrawal

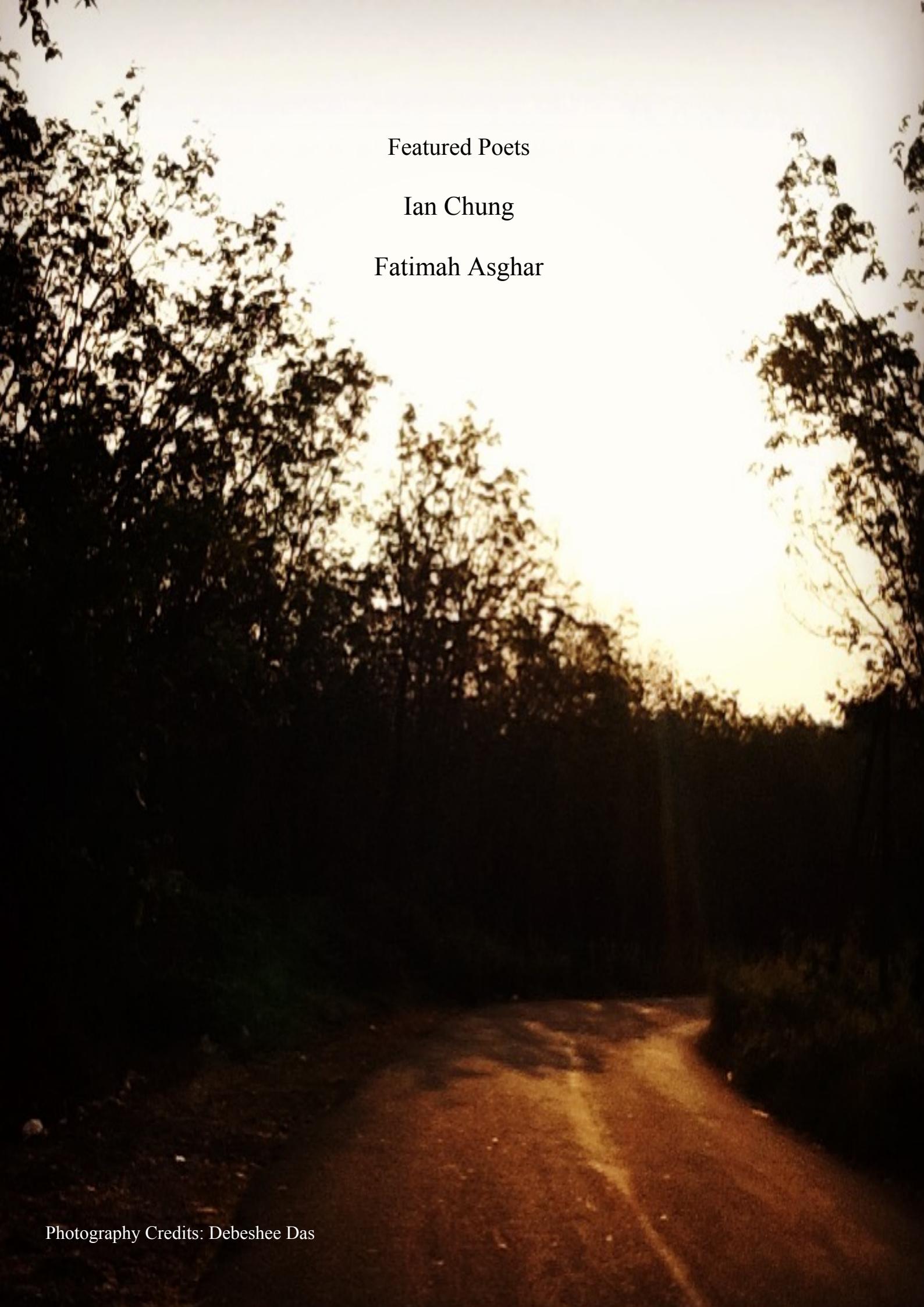
By Isabella Ampil

Fever dreams always end in the flash of his mother's
creased forehead, white teeth,
hovering in hazy static over his pillow,
murmuring some unintelligible comfort—

cold sweat, and blue light burning
on the ceiling tiles,
and the temporary feeling of falling into the sky,
wrapped in old bedsheets
that chafe, ropelike, against bare wrists—

he groans off the mattress, falls against the sling
of rough, sugary cotton,
coughs until his lungs collapse into melted wax,
lies still until they cool again into
old candles—

flames don't catch without the kindling
kindness of opium,
the rock to which everything seems to be anchored now,
like Andromeda,
chained to a stone, lying in wait
for her parents' demon to devour her.



Featured Poets

Ian Chung

Fatimah Asghar

3 Poems: Ian Chung

Caged

I gather up the crumbs,
thinking to feed the birds.
You shake your head and smile
just like you always do.

Thinking to feed the birds,
I open the windows
just like you always do,
but I need more than this.

I open the windows.
Your tobacco lingers,
but I need more than this
to be assured of you.

Your tobacco lingers.
This is all I ask for,
to be assured of you
and of your affection.

This is all I ask for.
You shake your head and smile,
and of your affection
I gather up the crumbs.

Kintsukuroi

On the day that they crack open our hearts,
will they find those so-called better angels
of our nature? At the infirmary
where they piece our bodies back together,
almost human and already humbled,
who among us would dare ask a favour,
the chance to set aright choices we made,
recent, receding, or recessed into
a past only they can help us retrieve?
Re-membered, our hearts are made stronger now.
If there is to be a battle, let us
make it count. What runs through our veins is not
reducible to single words. Like 'loss'.
Or 'love'. Or even its lesser siblings,
'hope' and 'faith'. There will be time for such words.
Now it is enough to make a mending,
to trust that we can change, that we will be
allowed to hold our hearts and weigh their heft.
There can be beauty in being broken,
so scatter us to the four winds to fly.

Deer

From this spot, you can see that old salt lick
near which we first met. It was set in place
by your dad to draw deer in, to keep them
off roads when it snowed, since he did not want
to use his gun on them. Such shows of force
were not his style, raised as he was in love
with this land, with all it had to show us.

You say that when they came for him, his face
bore no trace of fear, when men with one lick
of sense would have cried out, begged to be spared.

You say that they made him set trees on fire,
watch them burn to ash. Still his face was set,
as if he knew it was all to test him.

You say that at night, flames lick at your dreams.
When at last you move to take our tools out,
your hands shake, but this is all we can do
to keep your dad in our lives. We take turns
to dig, as there is just one set of tools.

Soon, your skin is flushed. I crack ice, press on.
Lick by lick, deer will come back to this ground.

Super Orphan: Fatimah Asghar

Originally published in The Margins

Today, I donned my cape like a birth
certificate & jumped, arms wide into the sky.

-

Woke up, parents still
dead. Outside, the leaves yawn,

rechristen themselves as spring.

-

I know—once there was a man.
Or maybe a woman.

Let's try again: once, there was a family.
What came first?

-

What to do then, when the only history
you have is collage?

-

Let's try again. Once there was a village
on a pale day, unaware of the greatness
at its gate.

-

Today, I woke:
Batman, a king over Gotham.

The city sinning at my feet
begging to be saved.

-
The same dream again:
police running after my faceless
family with guns

my uncle leaps into a tulip
filled field, arms turning to wings
as bullets greet him.

-
Today, I woke, slop-lipped
and drunk, cards in my hand,

Joker in my chest. Today I woke
angry at the world for its hurt

wanting to make more like me.

-
Are all refugees superheroes?

Do all survivors carry villain inside them?

-
Today, I donned my cape like a birth
certificate & jumped, arms wide into the sky.

-
How else to say I am here?



Flora

By Anushima Tiwari