

VOICES

2024



WANT
TO BE HEARD

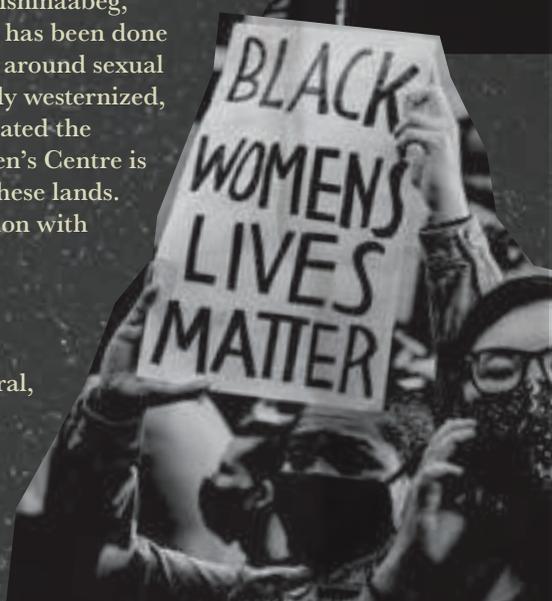


LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Women's Centre acknowledges that we are situated on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations of the grand River. This land is the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee Peoples. We acknowledge the harm that has been done surrounding the rights to Treaty land. The teachings we hold around sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, are predominately westernized, and diverse expression of gender and sexuality have long predated the colonization of Turtle Island. We acknowledge that the Women's Centre is not the first community of Women and Trans individuals on these lands. We are actively learning about how to incorporate reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples into our education, initiatives, and events.

We acknowledge those that have come before us.

We stand in solidarity with the local communities of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee Peoples.



WELCOME TO VOICES



Voices has been an active platform for students to share their expressions since 1995. These expressions come through the form of visual artwork, poetry, photography, short stories, and more. Voices is the celebration of diversity in storytelling. It provides an expressive space for individuals to tell their story. It reminds us that change comes through a variety of ways.

We have been through so much together. With all the negative events that go on in the world, Voices reminds us that there is opportunity for growth in us all. Community is the basis of this platform, just as it is for anyone seeking support and comfort. We want to acknowledge that Voices is used as a platform to support a community looking to express their hardships and triumphs.

Voices is an annual zine that is launched during International Women's Week. This year, we are focusing on the History of Feminism. As you read through this publication, you will notice the colours and images. This represents the strength of the intersectional feminist community and how far we have come. We hope that you feel empowered when listening to these voices as they will contribute to change.

We would like to thank the incredibly talented artists, poets, and writers that contributed their thoughtful and brilliant pieces to this publication. We would also like to thank those that came before us as they helped us to create a platform to share our Voices. We now present our 2024 edition of VOICES.

WITH LOVE,

Stephanie Hand, Samantha Beneteau, and Prithvi Nair
Women's Centre Service Coordinators and Literature Director

BARBIE PINK NAILS

SYLVIE POTJE

today i painted my nails with barbie-pink nail polish. two layers.
when i finished, i added a coat of sparkles on top.
pink glittery nails.

i examined my work
each sparkling finger.
i asked myself, "do i like them?"
do i? i don't know.

i wasn't exactly a tomboy as a kid.

i wore my hair long, i liked singing and dancing, and i played barbies with my sister
i knew i was a girl, even beyond a physical level.

but i had standards for myself:

strict rules for how i'd behave in public.

- i would never wear spaghetti straps.
- i would never wear makeup.
- i would never wear a scrunchie.
- and i would never, ever, paint my nails.

i would solemnly obey

these rules in my mind.

i would let them define me

determined not to be like other girls.

translation: not to show weakness.

i would scoff at the girls in my class who liked ponies and mermaids.

i was convinced that i was free from the stereotypes that left other girls in little pink boxes, tied tight with frilly bows.

maybe, somewhere buried deep in my nine-year-old brain, i liked the colour pink.

maybe, if i let myself, i would have loved experimenting with my mother's lipstick.

but before i'd even learned what the word "injustice" meant, i'd learned that feminine traits were bad.

being girly was synonymous with being weak.

being masculine meant you were strong.

and so, i did everything in my power to keep myself from being associated with femininity.
and i was proud of it.

in my polo shirts and cargo shorts, i thought i was free from gender bias. i thought i was so secure in my own expression, that i'd never be mistaken as an "girly girl".

these days, though, i look back and think:

perhaps i was the most insecure of all.





because somehow, i'd ended up believing in the exact rules that i wanted to fight against. by trying to combat meaningless stereotypes about what a girl is, i'd accidentally affirmed to myself that those stereotypes existed.

i placed myself on the "strong" side of the fence, among the boys. i planted my feet in the thick grass and rubbed mud on my face and pointed at the girls and said "look, i'm not like that."

when i switched sides, i became the very enemy i was trying to oppose.

i look back on myself as a child:

i'd spent so much time avoiding becoming the villain, i failed to realize that the villain was something else.

it was not me.

the villain was every fairy tale with a fragile princess who needed saving.

it was the patronizing tone that teachers used on us in class. it was the slogans on girl's t-shirts at Walmart. it was make-up ads.

it was every time Hollywood gave us a "female hero" who you knew was brave because she looked and acted just like a man.

i was so desperate to escape that narrative, that i didn't realize that the narrative itself was the problem.

because a woman shouldn't need to be more masculine to be perceived as strong.

a woman should have just as much right to wear pink as she does to choose not to.

a woman shouldn't need to fundamentally be a man to be respected.

this is a concept i am still learning.

my relationship with my gender expression is ever evolving, as i finish my teenage years.

but right now:

i am 18 years old.

and for the first time in my life, i have painted my nails barbie pink.

as i examine them in the bathroom light,

sparkles reflect across the tile.

this time, i don't worry about what anyone else thinks it means.

i ask myself, "do i like them?"

and the answer is finally...

yes.



BUTTERFLY

CHERRY

It started one summer,
I dreamt up the perfect girl
Whose life was far from reality
And it felt so pure

She'd escape the pounding in her head,
What a great actress she was
Each season she grew more
With a better cast in her world

Only this summer had felt different,
She had nothing planned,
Everyone had vanished
Her plot suddenly felt bland

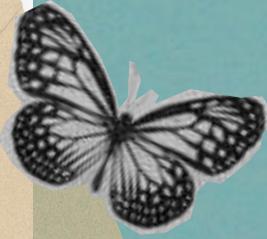
It was like a beach without sand
There was bad music without the band
No more luxury without the brands
This was definitely not God's Plan

I can't live this way, she said
As she sat in disbelief on her bed
Everyone was showing their best life
She too, needed to find that spice

And so she searched her creative mind
To figure out how to spend her free time
It eventually came to her
As she stared outside her balcony pondering
She caught the sight of a cocoon on a leaf

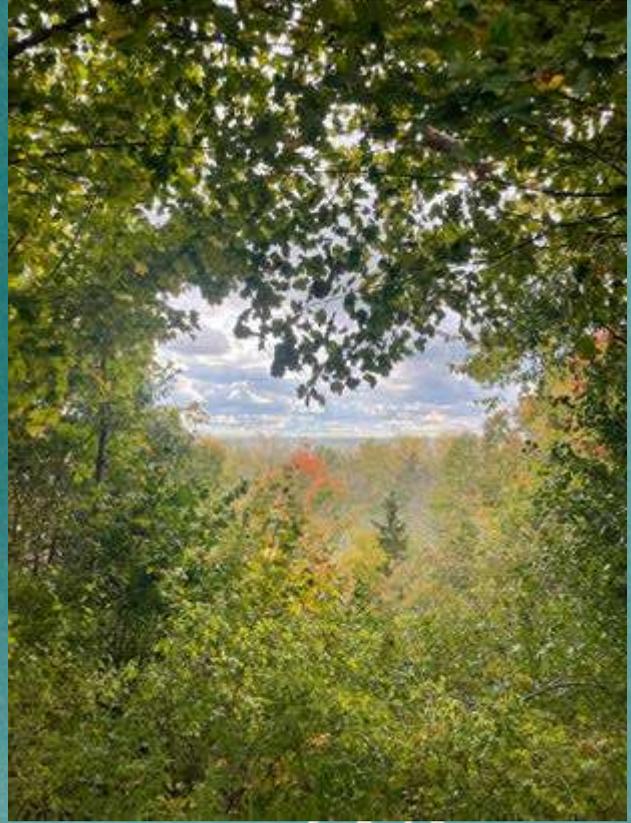
It wasn't entertaining for sure
The caterpillars life was brief
But it was in its transitional stage

The most mundane but crucial one too
Soon it would spread its wings
And fly away to see the world from a new view



STEPHANIE HAND
CALM

NATURE'S HEART



REBECCA

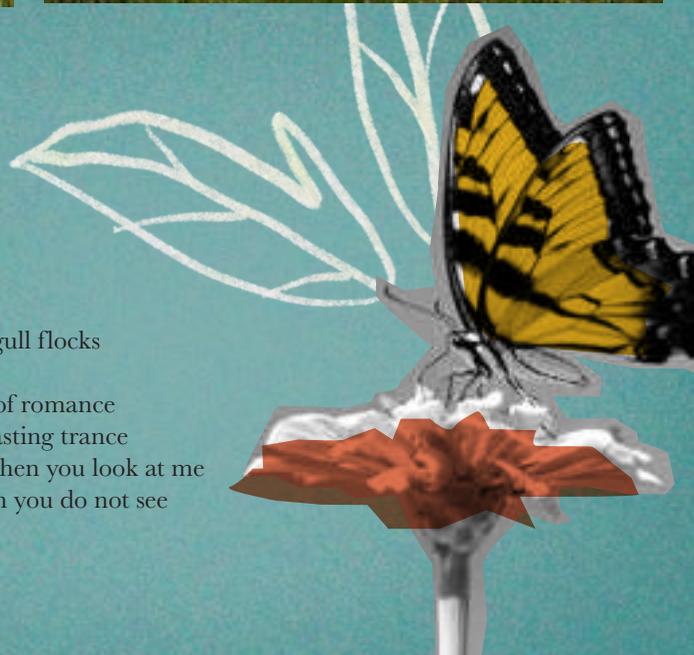
SOPHIE SMITH

You liked the garden and I liked the sea
New voice in the air, same four o'clock cups of tea

Tangled cherry red roses holding back the clock
Refusing to fade with the tide breaking under seagull flocks

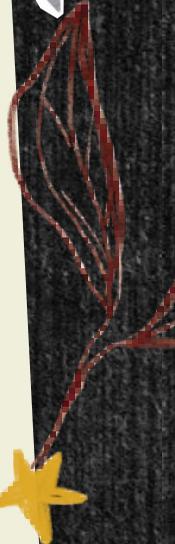
I dream of lilacs, tulips and lavender in paintings of romance
In dreams I go past these stonewalls in their everlasting trance
Your sister says you've never looked happier but when you look at me
A frame for all you had and all you lost, my person you do not see

Too young to know, too in love to care
One name born again, only not mine to bear



CAN I TELL YOU A SECRET? I DON'T FIND THE NIGHT SKY SO BEAUTIFUL

ANNA MALIK



What I'm saying is that the moon does nothing but remind me of how little we are. (And the stars are already dead and sometimes I feel like I am too and I am scared I am scared I am scared I am—

Sometimes you look up at the night sky and tell me to wish on a star, and I wish that you'd look at the drops of dew on the grass around us instead.

What I'm saying is that you don't need to look so far to find stardust.

But you know that already.

Can I tell you another secret? When your fingertips grazed the vein traveling down my wrist I knew it wasn't an accident and I wondered why you had to love the dead parts of me first.

If you'd like to take me apart to search for pieces of the things you want you can. I know how it hurts to love something so far away. I know.

You once asked me what it would be like to touch a star and I told you that it wouldn't be possible, but what I really meant is that I hope we never find out.

(What I really really meant is that I already know)

There are a lot of questions I'm afraid to ask you but the biggest is this: if the sky was made of water would you look at it the same way?

Don't answer that.

What I'm saying is the next time you tell me to wish upon a star I will wish that you could see the inside of your veins, and then I will pluck an eyelash from my eye and give it to you so you can wish the same.

(The moon is just a rock, you know. But the last time I said that you got upset)

Anyways

I am not so far if you ever decide you'd like to love a living thing.

YOU WILL BE ALRIGHT

JESSICA SMITH

you will be alright. it will take some time, lots of tears and hard work to heal, but you will.
you will continue to grow and heal. you will never stop learning about yourself and the
beauty that is living or the strength you hold in your soul.

you will break the generational curse of bottling up your emotions and letting them age in
you like 40 year old scotch.

you will learn to appreciate your ability to feel emotions strongly and see it as a gift rather
than a burden. you will rediscover your love for life. you will learn to honour your inner
child and acknowledge that all along, none of it was your fault or yours to carry.

you will travel to all the destinations you dreamt of those nights you didn't believe you could
ever escape this town, and see the world from other perspectives.

the memories and beliefs you carried all these years that broke your back were never yours
to carry. the blame that you put on yourself like a branding wasn't your mark, nor was it
your fault.

you will heal from this, there will come a day that you will find peace and solitude in your
body.

you will be alright.



I AM NATURE

SAMANTHA BENETEAU

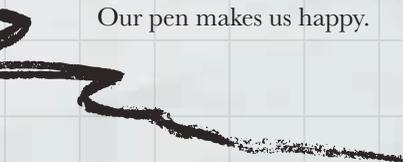
I am awoken by the sun as it plants soft, warm kisses upon my flesh
I arise from under a willow tree where I have left an imprint in the long grass
Proof that I am a part of this world,
Proof of my existence among beauty
I am interrupted by the sight of myself in the water and I realize
My hair falls just above my shoulders, curly and light
Just like the vines that crawl up and hang down tree branches
My eyes are painted the colour of the soil that nourishes and supports the vegetation around me
My skin is the colour of a pale pink rose and is adorned with bright blemishes
Just as an abundant fruit bush is adorned with berries
My arms, strong and stable, resemble the branches of a reliable oak tree
My chest wide and soft pays homage to the sprawling hills around me
My stomach resembles the lake on a windy day,
Every bump and curve representing ripples in the water.
My legs stay rooted in the ground,
Like the stalky stems of a sunflower
Thick hairs shelter my body
Just as the thorns on a rose bush protect their delicate flowers
I am a kaleidoscope of natural phenomena
I am nature.



PEN VS SWORD

FABIHA JAHAN AHMAD

They say the pen is mightier than the sword.
But would it be wise to bring a pen to a swordfight?
As they also say never to bring a knife to a gunfight.
But why is the sword fighting the pen?
Is the sword fighting the pen?
Or is it another pen that's fighting the pen?
Another pen whose blood red ink fades with time.
But still, it refuses to go out of life.
It aggressively scribbles back what was erased,
Piercing into the paper as it does.
Tearing apart the very words that it was writing,
The words it desperately wants to be true.
Meanwhile, our pen has moments when it has no clue.
It draws pretty birds and flowers,
Sometimes even changes colors,
Because it is one of those 6 in 1 multicolored retractable ballpoint pens.
It writes new ideas, theories, stories, poems and love letters,
Over the same torn pages and the faded words of the blood red ink pen.
It makes everyone excited.
Everyone tries to push the 6 buttons together.
Change the color mid-sentence just because.
Or at least thinks about doing those things.
Our pen makes us happy.



A SKETCH TO A SONG

XIN YUN LEW

PAINFUL REMINDER

RACHEL MORAISE

Fall. And feel
the air rush past.
It always seems
to get a head
start.

So gravity
conducts my movement.
It robs me of
my sure footing,
tugs at my hand,
begging me to join it.
But winds me before
I can give permission.

I want to put up
a fight,
but I'm already down.
It seems the ground
has won.
And my shattered bones
want to return
to the dust from which
they have come.

I never thought
that I could forget how
to breathe until now.
Shallow breaths just about
find their way out
from my lungs.

Adrenaline silences
the screaming
of my body,
so it escapes
through the lips
of my soul.

Agony reminds me
that I'm alive.
So why is everything
growing dim?

Agony reminds me
that I'm alive.
So why can't I feel
a thing?

Agony reminds me
that I'm alive.
So, why isn't my body
trying to survive?

It wants to quit;
wave the white flag,
and forfeit
its territory
on this gravitational field.

I am longing
to taste victory.
But how can I come back
from defeat,
when my body
has made its peace
with loss?

I am numb
to encouragement,
yet agony reminds me
that I'm alive.

Adrenaline evaporates
like sweat
dissipating
from burning skin.
And I finally realise
that agony
was never
the antagonist.



DARKNESS ALL-CONSUMING

KAELI WOLF

As I walk down the carpeted steps of my house, I realize this is the first time I've left my room in a few days. Oops. The pile of dishes I've collected over the last month rattles uncomfortably in my hands, my arms threatening to give out if expected to hold this load much longer. I walk quickly to the sink and place my pile down as gently as I can. *I'll do them when I get back.* My eyes are sore from sitting in my darkened room staring at a screen for four days, but a deadline is a deadline.

I slide my worn-out converse onto my monster-socked feet to go for what I've been calling my "Inspiration Walk." I try to go for a late-night walk once a month to clear my head of the jumbled words drawn together by the string of a deadline. I reach for the doorknob and then remember that it's mid-November, definitely not T-shirt weather.

I creep back up the stairs to my rancid-smelling bedroom to grab my favourite oversized hoodie and jacket, since I haven't gotten around to getting a new winter coat when mine ripped last year. Tiptoeing back down the stairs I finally reach the door, but touching the doorknob stuns me briefly, as a flash of darkness takes over my vision with a single touch of the deathly cold metal. I blink a few times and my vision returns as I look back at the worn carpet on the stairs and the stack of books haphazardly balanced on the side table next to my favourite reading chair tucked into the corner. I look over to the fur-covered couch and find Rascal, the fur causer. I grin seeing him sleeping on the couch and shake my head. I just need some real light, even if it's only the moon.

I close the door behind me, the loud noise almost making me jump, and I hope that didn't wake anyone. I feel a chill slither down my spine and look out to the street. Nobody. *Get it together.* I turn back to the door and lock it before walking carefully down the perpetually creaky steps that lead to the sidewalk.

The streetlights flicker as I walk down the street, passing houses so dark I can see my reflection. I stop at the edge of the cul-de-sac and ---

STEP INTO THE LIGHT.

The feeling interrupts so suddenly I almost jump. Moving into the flickering light of the streetlamp I let out a heavy breath and a cloud forms before me. I don't think it was this cold up at the house. I shrug. *Probably just wasn't paying attention is all,* I try to convince myself.

I turn left and keep walking, but where the lights were flickering before, this street seems to have no lights at all. *You're not a child, you're not afraid of the dark, Elias.* I hesitate, turn around to see if there would be a difference if I'd taken a right turn instead. All I see is dark. *Where's the moon?* I wonder faintly. Okay, I know this street, there's nothing to be afraid of. So, I keep walking down my original turn. A breeze blows softly against my cheek, lifting the hair off my forehead.

I take a deep breath and close my eyes. *I really need to get out more.* As I think this, I open my eyes and see something shoot through my peripheral vision. I turn, my heart rate increasing as I search the shadows for

any further movement. Nothing. Again. *Maybe I should just go home and go for a walk tomorrow, in the daylight, when I don't think there's something in the shadows out to get me.*

I turn around to begin my trek home, but the moment I do I see something 10 feet in front of me. A shadow looms under the now fully lit streetlight, a human-like figure encapsulated in shadow, with grotesquely long limbs and a foreboding feeling following it. Where I wish there were eyes there are pits with a white glowing light seeping out, and I know it is watching me. I squeeze my eyes shut tightly go away *go away it's just my mind playing tricks on me.* I open my eyes to a well-lit street, empty of beings and creatures all.

I stand here for what feels like hours, muscles tense and taking gulps of air through my nervous laughter. *Wow, I probably look crazy right now.* Slowly, I calm my breathing and start walking again. The street feels safer when I walk below the now humming streetlights. I shake my head and take a deep inhale of the crisp air. *What a bad idea this was.* You would think I'd have learned my lesson about the connection my brain makes to the work that I'm writing, that if I write about living shadows I will *hallucinate* living shadows, but here I am in the middle of the night believing I'm seeing things that I just finished writing a story about.

My shoes slap on the sidewalk as I walk towards my street accompanied only by the shining moon in the sky. *Wait, where did the moon come from?* I swore it was a dark night when I left my house, wasn't it? I stop walking. *No, no, I just didn't look in the right part of the sky is all.* Home. I need to go home and get some sleep. I start walking again, but after about 5 minutes I start to realize that I didn't walk this far down the street. I look around and the houses seem blurry, I can't see my reflection in the windows anymore. The streetlights are out, *when did they go off?* I can't seem to remember if they were ever on at all. Were the lights on? Could I see in the first place?

I keep walking, and walking, and walking, but I don't seem to be going anywhere. The faint idea of a hamster running in a wheel but never gaining any ground flits through my mind, *am I the hamster?* A chill shatters down my spine and my teeth begin to chatter. I wrap my hands around my arms and rub, hoping to instill some warmth into my now frozen bones. *Where am I?* I look around for street signs, houses I'll recognize, something, but while I feel like I'm somewhere I've been before, I have no idea where here is. I'm shaking uncontrollably, my body so cold I can't move, all my muscles are tense to the point of pain, and I don't know where I am. *Why am I here? What's going on? Why am I here again? Wait, again? What do I mean, AGAIN?*

I collapse in a ball on the sidewalk, my knees tucked up to my chest. I rock back and forth to find some comfort. I'm losing my mind. I wrap my fingers in my too-short hair and tuck my head into my chest while closing my eyes as tightly as I can manage. *This isn't real, none of this is happening in reality. I'm dreaming, this is all just a bad nightmare, it has to be.* But when I open my eyes again, I'm surrounded by shadows that seem to be moving closer, their long fingers reaching out to touch me.

A prickling sensation makes the hair on my body stand on end as those spindly fingers reach me. I squeeze my eyes shut and clench my hands into fists, centering myself on the feeling of my nails nearly puncturing the skin of my palms. I feel the air get forced from my lungs as I am pulled in a direction that feels like down. I drag my hands along the packed dirt which verifies I am being dragged downwards. *What's going on? Where are they taking me?*

My pulse quickens as I realize my situation. I am being torn to the underground by living shadows, essentially being buried alive in the process. Fuck, what the hell am I supposed to do? I feel something wrapped around my ankles, maybe hands, or at least what I assume would be sad excuses for hands on a creature made entirely of shadow. *If it's made of shadow, how is it touching me right now?* My chest feels tight, my breathing laboured. I try to kick, but the grip this thing has on me accompanied by the quick descent is making it kind of hard.

*I'm going to die. I'm going to die I'm going to die
imgoingtodie Icantbreatheicantbreatheicantbreathe-*

--I land hard on the ground. I finally open my eyes only to find utter darkness. My breathing quickens and my body starts to shake uncontrollably. My palms are slick with sweat which mixes with the dirt already coating them. I feel my way around the space to find myself in an empty hole. There is nothing here, just me and the darkness. *And the shadows.* The room is round with packed dirt, the smell is awful, like rotted fish left in the sun except all enclosed into this small space. This tiny space. Very deep underground. No sound. Nobody to hear me scream. No light to watch myself die by. I am completely and utterly alone, deep in the earth, with nowhere to go and only one thing to think about. *What do they want with me?* If the smell is any indicator, I'm probably their next meal. *But why take me all the way down here to eat me?* I hear myself chuckle sardonically and almost jump at the sudden noise. When was the last time I heard my own breathing, when was the last time I heard *anything?*

My chest grows tighter as my breathing quickens. *Where am I?* I know I'm underground somewhere, I'm deep, deep, underground. I can feel the walls closing in on me in the darkness and I can suddenly feel the walls touching me, crushing me. Moving in for an embrace of death, to consume me deep in the bowels of the earth. *Am I still on Earth? Where else could I be? Where did they take me? How many of them are there? Can I survive this? How many people has this happened to? What exactly are their plans for me? Is it going to hurt? It's going to hurt; I'm going to hurt. I hurt now, I'm being crushed by the Earth, by the packed dirt stuck under my fingernails, by the ramblings in my mind. This isn't real this isn't real this isn't real. If I say it three times, does it become true?*

I feel the muscles in my neck tensing, my body shaking uncontrollably, but it doesn't feel like it's my body, it feels like the experience of someone else that I'm only witnessing. I am looking at myself, the tears streaking down my—Elias'—face and the uncontrollable tremor wracking through my body, I can sense the thoughts running through my head, and I know that somewhere this is supposed to be my body, this is me, but I just can't find the connection. I can see my body as if I'm floating above it, viewing it like a specter. Maybe see is too strong a word since the encompassing darkness asserts my blindness even as I exist outside my body. *Snap out of it.*

I'm suddenly forced back into my body, and force myself to take a deep breath. It doesn't help much, but it's enough that I seem to have control of myself again. I look around the room and see nothing, the darkness is too dense for these human eyes to witness. I move slowly around the room, feeling my way along the walls, searching for an exit. I find a small hole, barely large enough for me to crawl through, but I crawl in despite the voice in my head warning me it's a bad idea. I move through the tunnel with my knees dragging in the dirt and my nails accumulating more dirt beneath them. The air grows warmer as I keep moving, and the rotted smell grows stronger. I'm moving slowly to feel my way through the tunnels, trying to find a turn or an exit that can take me back to the surface. At this point, I'm relying on distant hope that I am still on Earth, and that there is an exit that I can escape through, but it feels more and more distant

the further I travel with no difference in the structure of the tunnel.

I keep crawling through the tunnels as slowly as I can, hoping that I'm not making enough noise for the creatures to return for me. I make the mistake once of opening my nostrils and nearly vomit on myself. *Yep, definitely rotting bits of corpses, great.* I just have to keep moving, eventually I either have to find a way out of here OR a faster way to death, basically a win-win because I at least would not be left wondering when death would find me again. The air is getting harder and harder to breathe, *shit I'm heading down not up,* as I fall into a cavernous space, but I don't hear myself hit the ground.

The air here smells different, warm, comforting, like home. I feel the light warming my eyelids, so I open my eyes to find myself standing in the kitchen, my roommates arguing passionately while one of them stirs something on the stove. I feel a smile grace my face, *so it was only a nightmare.* I stand just outside the kitchen, leaning against the wall, and watch my roommates argue, something I've witnessed oh so many times, but the dream I had last night makes it feel bittersweet. *Oh, I've missed this.* It takes me a moment to realize that I know they're talking, but I have no idea what they're saying, it sounds like gibberish, all garbled together with no distinct words. I shake my head and rub at my eyes, thinking it's probably just exhaustion, but even then, the false conversation continues. I watch as the scene slowly deteriorates, the walls falling away, the furniture disappearing. Then the three of them all look at me at the same time, a dead look in their eyes and an eery feeling slinks its way from my toes to my spine. *Something is wrong.*

They start to smile, their skin tearing as the sides of their mouth move further than the skin can give, but they don't seem to feel the pain. A black cloud seeps out of each of their mouths, coalescing together and moving slowly towards me. I try to move, but my feet are stuck to the floor. The floor that is shifting before my very eyes from the hardwood of my home to packed dirt. *No no no. It was a dream; this is still part of the nightmare.*

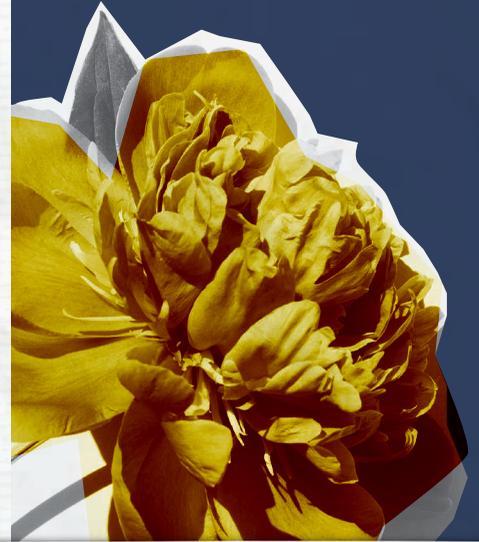
I feel my chin start to tremble as I watch my friends faces melt away to reveal only shadow. Where once I found comfort, I again find my fear mirrored back to me. The rest of the room melts away to reveal a cavernous space lit well-enough for me to see the levels of spectators, the shelves of Living Shadows, and I, in the centre of this distorted arena surrounded by what used to be my roommates. The mouths are no longer there, just the brightness of their eyes glowing, watching me. I blink and find that bars have materialized around me, and, looking down, I see my clothes are torn, shredded really, and hang disgustingly off my near-skeletal body.

It's going to be okay, but as I watch the creatures in front of me move closer to my cage, I realize I never had a chance of escape, I have always been here, and I will always return. I feel my face move into a smile, and I witness the same clouds of shadow seep from my lips, and I watch as I become that which I had once feared.

EPIPHANY

SRUTHI AMALAN

As I lay beneath a man-made aurora borealis,
I visit myself, properly, for the first time.
I knock on the doors and greet the stranger that opens them.
Her body is blue and bubbly, bursting with ink.
I'm desperate to see everything, so I dare not blink.
I'm dying to only be here, so I do not think.
I walk past the doors and into her home;
Infinity where I thought a hollow would be.
Within it, she rose and crashed like ocean waves,
She embraced like a mother and cut like a knife.
And in turn, so did I.
I caressed her curves, I bit her skin,
I soothed her temper, I hit her in
all the places she stored her secrets untold,
All the knots that hold her pains of times old.
Her ink drips, drips, drips
Onto the page of my body and mind.
Her living room clocks slip, slip, slip,
Out of focus, quietly resigned.



BROKEN BOTTLES

GIANNA GLENNY

I will keep running,
My hair following me blissfully
My mind in a furry
Ready to let it all out
I don't know what to say
I don't know what to keep
I have always lived in a bottle of confusion
Somehow awake when fully asleep
My dreams follow me into places unknown
When I awaken I am far from home
People see me, but do they really
Do they know my secrets, or my mind
Do they know what places I do find
When I turn into a maze, a place so hollow
Will you be there at the right time to follow
Precisely not, and that's okay
I have been made to live this way
A bottle of confusion I will always be
'cause I am still searching for the woman I ought to be

CAN WE TALK ABOUT IT?

AMY LIU

You want to talk about my love life,
Who I'm seeing,
Whose eyes have looked into mine,
Which places we have gone and which cars I have been in,
But I don't want to talk about it.

You want to talk about him,
Or the multiple hims,
The one with brown hair, the one with blonde hair,
The Denmark one, the Chicago one, the Muslim one,
But I don't want to talk about it.

You want to know how I feel about each one,
Who has treated me right,
Who has been thrown out of the equation,
Who made me first,
Who made me second,
Who made his way into my heart, and who came back out again,
But I can't tell you -- I can't really talk about it.

For when you talked about how the two of you went to check out a place uptown,
A place downtown,
And how in a few months or so, one person went east and the other went west,
He said,
She said,
I said,
"I've heard of things like that, but I've never truly had it."
When you talk about the happy things,
The places you will go together someday,
The pictures you have already taken,
The families that have enlarged in your names,
I also can't talk about it,
Although, for a moment,

I want to talk about him,
And for a moment,
I feel like I can talk about it,
Until I realize that I can't,
For one person is flesh while the other person is only in my head.





Instead,

I want to talk about how I took a rotten bus down to Port Credit and walked to the end of the wooden dock,

I bought a medium latte from the local café Archtop and sat for an hour, debating whether to buy a raspberry cheesecake dessert or not,

I watched a dozen geese gawk at me, and I gawked back,

I really had nothing else to do,

Took the bus back,

Window shopped to second-love,

And bought five things the next day,

I bought, I bought -- I just bought.

I want to talk about what happened when I went to see My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2 in theatres with a single ticket,

2016,

I looked to my left,

I looked to my right,

I laughed, and I want you to know that it was genuine,

I want you to know that I sometimes wake up in the middle of the night,

And I get this feeling like there is already someone by my side,

I toss,

I turn,

I touch my pillow, stroke its edges and kiss it a good, good rest of the night.

In fact,

I want to talk about the studio that I might live in on my own,

Ten years from now,

I will have a row of plants -- but some will grow and some will die,

I will want to clean the plates in the sink -- but one or two will always remain,

I will want to pass at least two hours staring at the ceiling,

Wondering if I will be held in someone's arms,

Or if my arms will grow cold from the lack of body,

Or perhaps,

The lack of war others have waged in my head,

Yes,

I want to talk about that,

Can we talk about it?

I can talk,

Please — let me tell you all about it.



PERENNIAL

ORIANNA LILY JIWANI

Sometimes we make the same mistakes
over and over again
sometimes we draw the same face
again and again.
Perennial
means to die and to come back again the next year
stronger,
thicker,
brighter,
truer to your core.
More truer to me.

Sometimes we rewrite the same words
over and over again
Sometimes we change the dialogue and say I love you in different ways,
Again and again
It's perennial, this version of you, this
past
present
and
future version of you.

Sometimes we cry,
Again and again.
Sometimes we
heal,
break,
destroy,
make
over and over again.
Why else should this be,
But the seasonality of being.



TANDEM
DIYA DRABU



PINK FLOWERS

RADHA VYAS

“Mom! Again?”

“What’s wrong with you? Why have you been celebrating this day, decorating the whole house with flowers and candles, for years? Why do you spend countless hours going to those high, desolate mountains? I just want to know what is so special about today.”

Gia tried to dodge it with a weak smile.

“Hey, Mommy, why does your smile seem to answer my thousands of questions even though you are silent? Today – I mean it – I can’t bear your silence anymore. Just say something! Why is this different and so special? Wh-”

“It’s your mother’s birthday!” Gia cried.

“Don’t joke. I know your birthday is in the coming months, not today.” Tim countered.

“I said your mother’s birthday. I’m not your mother. And I’m not in the mood for fun either.”

Tim was stunned. He didn’t understand why everything suddenly seemed strange. The tears Gia had been holding back – for so, so long – now spilled from her eyes. Once she calmed down a bit, a name uttered from Gia’s mouth, accompanied by a storm of emotions.

“Tina,” Gia croaked. “This story begins with a cold winter evening. Sam and I were preparing to move into a new house. I was winter, but we had no idea what the weather would be like, so we left early to reach out new home.”

Tim’s eyes shined with intrigue as Gia continued.

“When we arrived, our new neighbours – Tina and Johnny – were standing outside their house, waiting to greet us. You were just six months old, bundled up in Tina’s arms. Tina and Johnny were so kind, we immediately felt a connection. Joyful days quickly passed, and soon we had been living in our new home for a month. But behind Tina’s smile, there was always some restlessness, and I realized was hiding something.



“Huh? Hiding something – what do you mean, Mommy?” Tim asked.

Gia smiled, too lost in thought to reply, and continued her story. “After a while, I couldn’t stand it anymore. I marched over to Tina’s house, determined to find an answer. I saw down on her couch, and she turned to grab us some water. I sat, waiting, until I heard glass break in the kitchen. I rushed out and saw Tina lying on the floor. She was fading in and out of consciousness, surrounded by millions of glass shards.”

“Oh no! Mommy, what happened? What happened?!” Tim cried.

“I rushed Tina to the hospital – you see, Johnny wasn’t home at the time. After she was admitted to the emergency ward, we called Johnny immediately. Sam and I were so scared – we had no idea what was happening.”

Tim started to tear up. “Mommy,” he said softly, “Was Tina ok?”

Gia looked at him sadly. “We sat with Johnny, and he told us the truth. Tina had stage five brain cancer. For months, she had been pushing through the pain, doing her best to survive for you, for Johnny, and all of us. She hadn’t told Sam or me because she wanted us to cherish our time together. She didn’t want thoughts of treatment or tests to fill our brains, just as cancer plagued hers.

When he told me, I was speechless. I couldn’t believe Johnny – my dear friend – had held this secret alone for so long. For a while after, Tina remained in the hospital. Johnny rarely left her side, and Sam and I supported him throughout. You, not even a year old, came to live with us. They wouldn’t let you visit her because you were too young, so Sam and I alternated between taking care of you and Johnny. I would stay with you all day at home, making sure you were safe and loved. Sam would come in the evenings, watching over you all through the night. For a year, we followed this routine, each of us steeling ourselves what was soon to come.

We did our best to make Tina comfortable when it happened. We hugged her. We cried. We reminisced about our happiest memories. The four of us were there all day, until it was only the three of us.



Johnny, Sam, and I sat in the lobby for hours. I sat stonelike, staring at the floor. Reality hit Johnny first. A terrible cry came from his mouth, and he collapsed. Sam and I couldn't save him – he wouldn't have wanted it. Johnny died the same night as Tina.”

Gia looked over at Tim. Tears flowed freely down both faces. “Tim, I decorate this house with pink flowers on this day because they were her favourite. I go to the barren mountains because I can still feel her there. We used to sit and talk on those cliffs for hours.

Time, I have always considered you my own son. Sam and I loved you from the moment we met you, and we love having you in our family. Every day I see Tina and Johnny in you. But I also see a unique young person, and I love that person so much. But if you feel I have done anything wrong after hearing all this, I understand, I promise you, though, that I will never, ever stop loving you. I will nev-”

“Mommy, after hearing this, how could I not love you? You are amazing; my respect for you has increased a thousand – no, a million – times. I couldn't ask for a better mom. I just love you, mom.”

“I love you too, my sweetheart.”



MOMENTS OF JOY
MONISHA SAREEN

STRENGTH

DIYA RANJAN

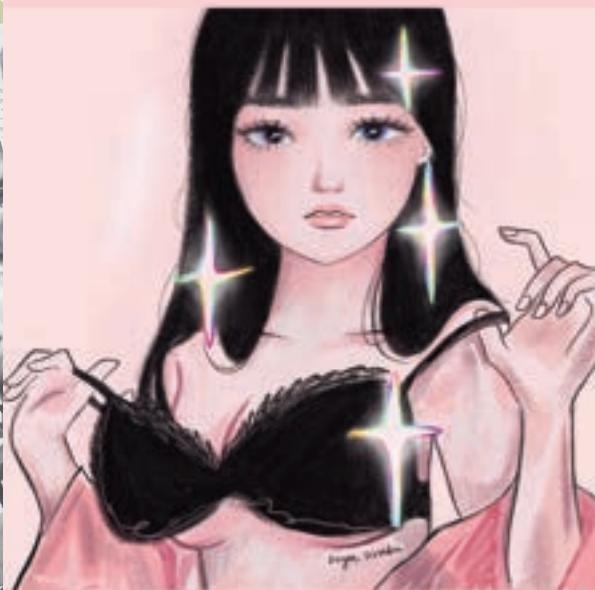


CLAIRE BERNARD-MOREËL

There are things I wanna say out loud
Yes, tell you, again and again, tell all.
You are - like sunbeams through dark clouds
Or these fallen amber crispy leaves
I crush in fall - Falling for your conversations
In front of a crackling fire
I drink your words - Would you listen to mines?
Believe me it grieves me you not seeing
My devotion - but I vow to have you
Trust that you matter - helped by these few lines.



A LOVE LETTER
DIYA DRABU



WE ARE THE EYES

SYLVIE POTJE

when I was younger, I learned that the average human lifespan was 72 years.

I didn't question it.

but now, reading the headlines in the news:

Only 11 Years Left to Prevent Irreversible Damage from Climate Change

Earth Could Cross the Global Warming Threshold as soon as 2027

Climate Change Will Cause the End of Civilization by 2050

...suddenly, I start to wonder.

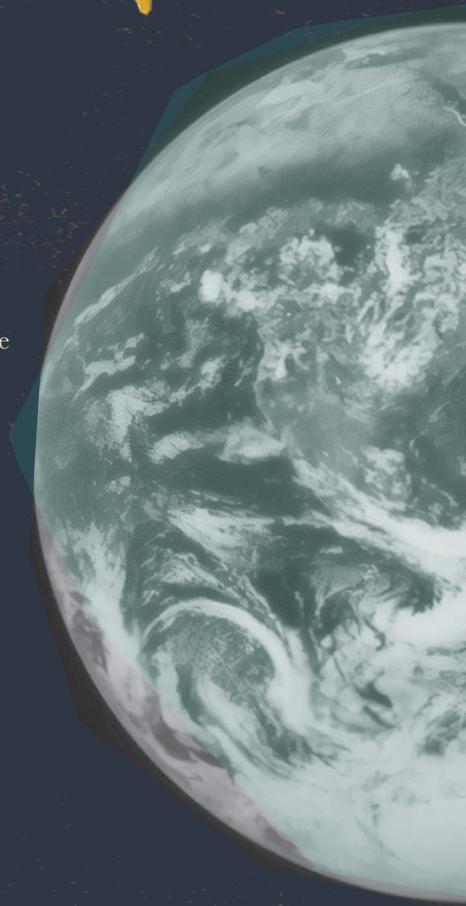
I wonder if I'll ever own a home surrounded by trees
have my children grow old without worrying about the air they breathe
if walls of gray will smother walls of green
or if the floods and the storms will wash us clean

will I see ice in the winter, will my children know cold?
will the snow still fall, will the leaves turn gold?
it's fine, they say, or so I've been told
We're handling it, child, it's under control."

I stand here today because I've seen that it's lies
the promises made are tossed easily aside
they talk about money, and turn a blind eye
as the forests fall and the sea levels rise.

so why?

why aren't you *trying* enough?
are the stakes not *high* enough?
have we not *suffered* enough to attract your attention?





or is it because, when the worst comes along
you'll be old, or dead, or gone
but the children of Earth
we'll still live on
in this world that you created, abused, and left behind.

so I'm speaking out because I'm done being quiet,
we can't deny that the climate is dying; it's science
a promise is fine, but *we need an alliance*

the young and the old, united and stronger
for a cause we can't just ignore any longer

and the guidance of us pilots will quiet the non-compliant
and the cheaters and the liars, we will speak out and *defy* them
and together we'll rise, and cut through the silence

because we are the eyes
to the future we see

because we are all ears
to those who believe

because we are the mouths
to declare what we'll be

and we are the hands,
who will soon set us free.

BRAIN GIRLS

AVA DEGANIS

“It’s just a short evening stroll,” Molly told herself as she left her friend’s apartment. She didn’t mind the November chill. Cook Streets’ atmosphere, though still filled with youthful energy, was sleepy. Molly heard a pop song booming from a distant open window. The street was sprinkled with only a few people here and there, and they didn’t seem afraid. Why should she? Molly secretly thought she was invincible; she knew it sounded stupid, but she couldn’t shake the feeling. She did keep her head up and eyes observant -- as observant as she could’ve been anyway. But she stepped out of the apartment lobby with the pure naivety of a girl who hadn’t seen the worst of the world yet. It was endearing in a way.

The sidewalk glowed amber from the streetlamps above. The footfalls of Molly’s treasured boots nearly echoed in the quietude of the night, entrancing her. She’d bought them on sale a few weeks prior. The smooth, brown leather complimented the blue jeans she wore. She also had on a white sweater, layered with a beige corduroy jacket. Molly felt undoubtedly pretty. She felt a little bit buzzed too.

Molly’s hands felt like forgotten clumps of clay -- cold and stiff. She kept them buried in her pockets. Late fall air, fresh and brisk, pinched Molly’s cheeks. And the faint clouds from her breath put a smile on her face.

“I’m not drunk,” the girl insistently whispered to herself. If she was Pinocchio, her nose would’ve protruded to the other end of the city.

“Well, I’m not too drunk.” Molly’s mind felt disconnected, similar to a brain in a glass jar. Like the kind you’d find in a creepy science lab in an old-school horror movie.

“I’m a brain,” Molly exclaimed, much louder than her previous soliloquy. She passed a tired middle-aged woman having a smoke. She gave Molly a concerned look. The sweet yet dirty cigarette air seeped into her nose, reigning her briefly back into reality (and away from brains in glass jars).

“You are alone, at night, walking in the city. And you are drunk,” warned the often ignored but good conscience deep within Molly’s thoughts.

“And of course, you are a wom--”

“Hot chick!” interrupted a man’s voice. This was certainly not what Conscience was going to say, and she was irritated about being so rudely interrupted.

As she approached Topsy Tammy’s, Molly could see the four university-aged boys standing near the entrance of the bar. They looked as if they were waiting, perhaps for their Uber. Or maybe for the next “hot chick” to walk past.

“Where you headed tonight babygirl?” asked the same boy. He wore a black muscle tank with grey sweatpants. A tiny gold cross hung from a chain around his neck, and flickered in the light of the nearby streetlamp. On his head was a backwards snapback, which covered much of his brown hair, and possibly

his devil horns. Molly didn't dare look at their faces, their eyes, but she could feel four sets of pupils on her. Stinging her like entitled hornets in a mist of cologne.

There were almost always unruly crowds outside of Tippy Tammy's. If she were clear-headed, Molly would have crossed the street at the last crosswalk, avoiding this interaction far in advance. But her head was as overcast as the Vancouver sky. And she couldn't cross the street now, not with traffic zipping back and forth.

Was she trapped? Like a brain in a glass jar?

Molly braced herself as she rushed past the group.

She held her breath, and clenched her fingers around her house key.

But they didn't touch her. They didn't touch her?

"They didn't try anything, just keep going," Conscience piped in. The boys yelled hateful things after her, slurs that shouldn't be written in such a paper. They shot anguishing words like arrows, but remained at the front of the bar.

Molly's feeling of blissful prettiness faded away. She no longer felt pretty when she'd looked over her shoulder, terrified of who might be following her. Nor did she feel pretty when she finally reached home, peeping between the blinds at the too-good-to-be-true emptiness outside on the street. And as Molly relocked her front door for the sixth time, her prettiness drifted away like dandelion seeds in the wind.

Her sense of invincibility was shattered. The girl felt brainless. As she lay awake in bed that night, she realized that was the reason her prettiness left.

"I'm not a brain," Molly sighed. This time, completely sober.

"No, you most certainly are not," Conscience replied. "Not tonight at least."

Would a brain girl attempt walking home alone and drunk? Would a brain girl stand up for herself in the presence of terrifyingly arrogant men, proving she isn't weak? Should a brain girl venture out at all, tempted by having just a bit of fun? Are brain girls supposed to feel guilty? She was being interrogated by her own mind. Molly sighed once more and closed her eyes. She was grateful to be sleeping in her bed.

"You should feel grateful," Conscience scolded. "You are lucky that they only catcalled you. They could've put their hands on you, followed you home, or ra--"

"Enough!" she cried, jolting upright like a Jack-in-the-box.

Molly decided that she wouldn't drink again for a while.

She also concluded that she was not a brain girl.

But in a world where women are always at risk, can any of us truly be brain girls?

“You have free will”

This is what was said to me when I was hesitant about dying my hair for the amusement of my friend. Sitting there in the cafeteria talking about the pink box dye looming in front of me, with my frail strands of hairs coming down to my mid back.

“You have free will”

When I got my Blackberry flip phone with a keyboard and realized I could play brick breaker in class. I had the choice to listen or to smash the bricks with the rubber balls.

“You have free will”

When I didn't like cantaloupe and I was a baby about eating more. I didn't like the texture, it was soft and gooey and the sugar made it too sweet. I didn't want to say no, but saying no felt rude so I said “okay”. You must have noticed, because you told me:

“You have free will”

That I could go to a party if I wanted to, and stay there until after 10:00. That was a rule, you couldn't be out at 10:00. 10:00 had a lot of zeros, like a count-down clock. Coming home, there was no one to tell me that I wasn't allowed.

“You have free will”

You can tell me if you want to. Telling you was probably the worst thing I ever did. I didn't need to tell you that.

“You have free will”

I stopped calling. Calling hurt, so I stopped. I decided that I could decide not to call if I didn't want to, I could choose not to pick it up if I didn't want to.

“You have free will”

I can choose to be friends with you, but also to leave. I chose to leave, because why would I continue to sit here and listen to you tell me that. I cannot just sit here and let those ugly words leave your mouth.

“You have free will”

Not in my thoughts I don't. I can't stop thinking of you. Stop telling me that. I don't, I never did, I don't know if I ever will.



ECLECTICITY'S CHEST (PUBERTY 2)

ZANAE KENDALL

I forgot because the wind had touched me in places I couldn't caress
The forgotten mind of my younger, filled with such an insatiable hunger
Heavy laughter pricking at my skin
Barking by my ears cold whispers the nose; the heavy winds
Carried what could've been repressed
The air fresh and freezing carried with it reminders of the child
Between fiction, reality, and the past
The sweat beneath my breasts and the fat carried on my hips and ass seemingly made my
journey harder to tolerate
Barely up the steps, the unbound chest collapsed in on itself
Curled up, my face pushed against my pillows
my chest doesn't brush against the blanket but the tender bud does
My pillow doesn't delicately embrace my stubble
Doubt lingered in my mother's voice girly as ever through mine
Maybe she smelt the desperation to avoid the embarrassment
But relief was suffocating
I'll have a couple more years of being a part of my family
this grief has turned into long painful strokes on my body
A cut across the chest where joy lasts in its creases
The rejection is not forgotten but should have found a place
To run out into a dark space never to be touched
Love haste
found afoot

LONESOME IN THE PASSAGEWAY

PRITHVI NAIR

Shadowed, uninviting blindness
Wandering through the flickering darkness, lurking in the narrow corners
Into a place I probably shouldn't be
Yet, I trudge on. Alone with fear and anxiety
Sturdy towers agglutinating together
Mounting over like a forest of stones
Drowning in endless wonder
The well-lit lane for gloom, uneasy for my pulsing heart
Twisted and turned inside out
First going right, then to the left
Whether I look in front or behind
I saw no freedom from the stones
Dead End.



FIND AND FALL

YASHIKA VAHI

I feel like I am slowly being picked apart,
You will become someone, my mind says to me,
All I ever truly do is write,
Beauty on the outside,
Lately I've just been in front of the mirror,
Or inside my head,
Existing everywhere and nowhere,
Why do I run away?

I ask more than I need,
This cold and this room,
My love and my cruelty,
My ambitions and my desires,
There is no right answer,

I find and I fall
And I fall and I fall,
You will become someone, my mind says to me,
All I ever do is write, I wonder,
It's the price I've already paid,

Even if it hurts, what does it matter to me?
You write like a dog begging for his treat, I say to myself,
Pushing away the world,
So desperate and so sleek,
You write like a dog begging for his treat,

Perfect in your eyes,
All you need to be is perfect in your eyes,
All I ever do is write, I wonder,

If I become someone, will I ever be me?



BLISSFUL MEMORIES

PRITHVI NAIR

The dog is getting chased by the villains in a parking lot
The gang says—

“Run Scooby, Run!”

A gush of wind passes by, the little lamb—I mean dog, runs away faster.
I murmur in annoyance, my baby’s grip is getting tighter.

Please Go Away

Once again—

A gush of wind passes by, the little dog is running away faster.

“Run Scooby, Run!”

It scurries across the pavements, the gang follows.

Mama is scurrying away, dad follows.
She is not running anymore, mama run.

Tighter.

Ow.

She screams.

One hand wraps around her neck, two golden rings illuminates by the TV light.

One gold band on the index. One broken promise on the other.

He breaks her knees and suddenly I see my lamb lying on the floor.

She is nothing less of a bloody stain on the carpet floor.

One hand returns to her neck, two golden rings illuminates by the TV light.

One gold band on the index. One broken promise on the other.

I turn away in annoyance. You’re distracting me, I huff.

My baby left my side. Nothing remains except that stain on the carpet.

Anyways—

“Run Scooby, Run!”

It scurries across the pavements, the gang follows.

I remain.





YOU

STEPHANIE HAND

I remember sitting on my couch, minding my business
It's like a switch went off instantly
You became violent, I became fearful
I ran to my mother's room, seeking an explanation for what was going on
But it's ok, right?
You were just a one-time thing that would eventually leave
But you didn't
You came back to haunt me every night
You told me I was dying of some new disease everyday
Creating a toxic environment, just for attention
You told me to always be sad
Always be worried
Never trust anyone
Never trust yourself
Never enjoy being
You made me think about hurting the ones I loved
You made me think about hurting the one person I could depend on
I told you I had the ability to function by myself, but you would never listen
I know you were trying to protect me
I'm mad at you for telling me I couldn't be loved
I'm mad at you for telling me no one ever cared
You made me live in the past when I was ready to move on
But after all the pain, the guilt, the hurt
I forgive you
You made me the person I am today and for that I am eternally grateful
I no longer live in your shadow
I live along side you
You are apart of me
In case no one ever told you...
I love you

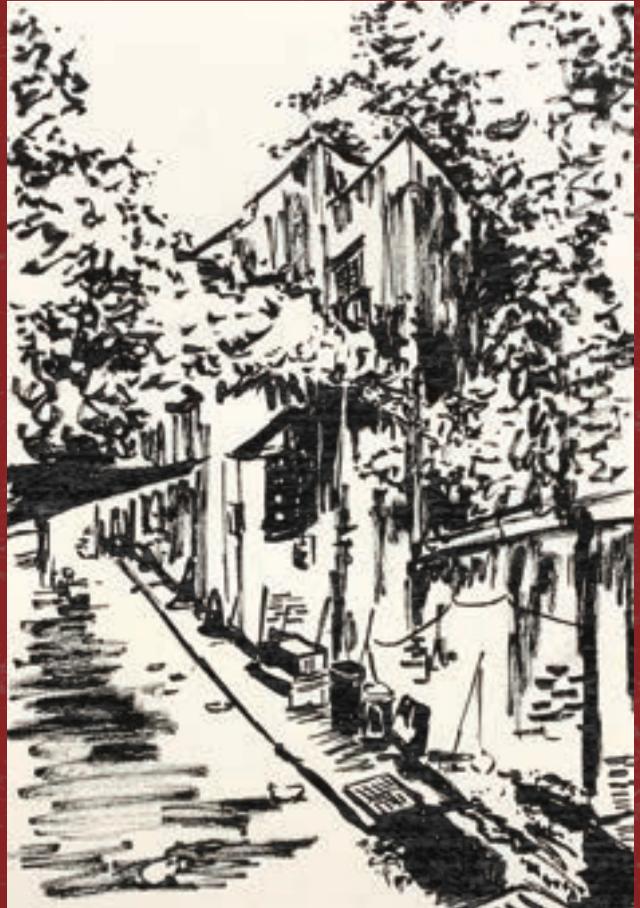
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HANA KARIM

when she was born, her hair was a startling shade of black,
not the light browns, glossy blonds, curly reds,
a telltale yin amongst the yang
smoky it was called
dispersing from the very roots she was given
with no qualms or regrets
i cannot regret myself
the Strand of white hair,
found on every young girl's head
twisting and turning, falling down
mine's that in between
both curly and straight
a fairy's touch, it is rumored,
bestowed the Strand
past every fairy's wish is a belief in more
It must be protected
who are you to decide this?
we all protect Ours
we keep It clean
tie It up like a crown
smoky black seeping into the Strand
crimson flames at the tips
white hot, blazing
she asks, where is It
interwoven in every strand
he says, what have you done
intertwined light and dark
they say, what are you doing
from black and white comes gray
and from gray comes smoky armor
how can i rise anew if not from ashes?

A QUICK SKETCH OF A FAMILIAR PLACE

XIN YUN LEW



भगवा

RADHA VYAS

वीरों की धरा फरि आज
जली देहसँग प्राण है
गंगा का कारण अब
बना रौदरराज है
संस्कृतकी वरिसत ने
ठानी जयजयकार है
दलि में लएि भगवा यौवन
उठा आज तूफ़ान है

NATURAL BEAUTY

RADHA VYAS



CLAIRE BERNARD-MOREEL

*Could you hear me when I was screaming for you in my head?
For the longest time I thought we were resonating
Was it only my own echo reverberating?
I should have voiced what I believed was ours without being said
Now your sentences sentenced me to crumble like a house of cards
Once more i'll have to be reshuffled: will I draw the joker or the queen heart?*

CARNIVAL

ASTER MUSTAFA

Bustling crowds and janky lights
Poorly strung tents with vendors alike
A faded and blurry memory calls out to me in the night

A mother and her kin, wading through tight lines and commercial kites
She illuminates like the soft flame of a candlelight
Keeps me warm and safe, through the passing sights

In the present day I hold myself close
In tear-stained clothes
Hoping to remember my mother from prose.



MOONLIT SYMPHONY: ILLUMINATING THE DEPTHS OF THE FEMALE MIND

ZUNARIAH SHAHZAD



Having an alien around the house is more of a pleasing experience than one would think.

Sure, there's the occasional blue globs with butter-like consistency, the languid, glowing, once-perfectly-dead dust-bunnies lounging around, or trailing after you here and there, and the constant, relentless skin-shedding.....

Point is—There were ups and downs!

If you thought about it, it really isn't all that different from having any other regular good ol' human roommate.

Or as P0b likes to call them—I mean, us—homo sapiens, which is kind of racist if you ask me, and P0b didn't really need to take my “no homo” joke so literally, especially since just last week he decided to learn more about the human race's comedy culture and then decided to simply eat all our (my) laundry as “just a prank”, like who would do such a thing—

I mean, yep, it's chill. It's going great! Just spiffy!

We do normal roomie stuff too, and like, what even normal at this point, right? HAHAAH—

I am always down to learn and delve into different cultures after all, and share my own with outsiders, even outsiders of just this planet. How they (mis)interpret sports as contemporary dance, and contemporary dance as conspiracy messages using the human body to twist and shape out sweaty symbolic characters is beyond my control, right?

I've done the best I can.

Let's focus on the good things, yes?

We don't shoot hoops, but we enjoy video gaming! Though I can't game with my own friends anymore with P0b around, seeing as I can't come up with a liable excuse as to why his voice echoes and statics throughout an otherwise smooth call.

Truly though, P0b makes a really, really, good teammate. I would be jealous if not for all the ranks I've climbed and new records I've broken thanks to him, he's great at war-games; All those other all-human teams can grind their teeth and fizzle in envy instead! To think that I once found those elastic, morphable appendages of his appalling!

Frankly speaking, I've still yet to get accustomed to the garlic-smelling puss its nails oozes out during the early mornings, but that's beside the point.

It doesn't hurt that it's verily amusing how he strictly calls ourselves “Blitz Buds” when we play either.

He, surprisingly, enjoys trashy, outdated sitcoms, especially the ones with cliché plotlines: a dramatic change of heart, then a cringey resolve to the conflict. As an avid sci-fi and thriller enthusiast, it isn't really my place to judge, seeing as my intrigue led to me “adopting” P0b in the first place.....I just



think that it wouldn't hurt to add a good kick or twist once in a while. My eyes have been enslaved to an onslaught of continuous vapidness since P0b's curt arrival.

I would procrastinate on my smartphone like a normal person, if not for him licking it clean, dry and malfunctioning last month.

That aside, it's all been great, just great. Sure, I avoid the TV whenever those grainy fingers curl comfortably around the remote, but when I do get a say in what we watch, a bucket of unbuttered popcorn is generously shared between us.

Sure, buttered popcorn tastes way better, but those blue globs, what with their putrid stench and texture, have officially ruined butter for me, especially how they drip, drip.....

Drip. Drip. Drip—

That's when I noticed my oatmeal was blue.

Oatmeal I've been shoving aggressively down my oesophagus for a while now, mind you.

My oatmeal, my therapeutic bowl of serenity holding my waning sanity together, one of the few things left that had been truly mine during my sacred me-time, ruined by none other than—

“P0B!” I yell, head hot and sizzling, ears buzzing and vision vibrating, everything suddenly pounding and throbbing everywhere, all at once.

Even as my temples started to sharply sting, an instinctively fear and wariness braced myself for—

P0b rounded the corner, or perhaps more accurately: slithered. The gloopy blue in the bowl started crystallising into an icy white starch with an ombre hue.

Contrasting against the ghastly way he moved, the sight of P0b himself invaded the room with much vigour and disturbance.

Out came a havoc of countless dried-up, ashy, yet thick “twigs” twisted together, with limbs hanging unnaturally off the sides, like a limp rag doll with arms uncannily long and unproportionate. Out top of his “torso” sprout more “twigs”, too graceful and too tentacle-like. Thousands of them crept out, all different girths, some needle-like, and some as coarse as rope, carrying him in a spider-like prow. I know, for a fact, just how much P0b could “grow”, carving his width into height, stretching thinner and thinner, into an unearthly figure of 100-feet tall, looming over you effortlessly.

Which is why we don't play basketball together.

At this point, I don't even know if we could keep doing anything together.

With what resembled a deep, dark abyss, his “mouth” morphed into a childlike, innocent, yet twisted, grin, his watery eyes twirled out, meeting my deranged gaze.



“P0b, for the last time,” I start, seething. “What have I said about private goop-y time?”

“PPRRRIIVAATTEE-” I winced as his croaked voiced echoed, but my rage did not deplete.

“YES! EXACTLY! Private means no interfering with me! Seriously, P0b, you’re giving me a headache!”

P0b’s watery eyes rolled curiously. I take a deep breath.

“This be head,” I gesture, then mutter. “A bad case warrants a visit to Henry the 8th.”

Not expecting P0b to get the reference, or any of my jokes for that matter, I continue booming. “I’m sick of this, of you!”

Those watery eyeballs start leaking sludge.

Whether from the sight, the boiling, bubbling fury or the relentless ambush of headache cramps, I start feeling nauseated, but I babble on.

“You’re a pain, you’re a headache! You’d think one wouldn’t last long, just a minor inconvenience. It never is! You never are! Do you know how much of this disgusting blue stuff I’ve consumed at this point?”

I dig into my temples, sliding down the couch, where the “dust-bunnies” have all huddled-up, peering up at us like frightened children.

“It feels like this droned and drawn-out game of tug, coarse ropes hugging my brain too tight, until eventually, it gets even tighter, squeezing out tears and screams. Like a millipede, it—you-crawl and weave, crushing my skull and sanity. That’s what a headache is! That’s how you make me feel!”

I look up dejectedly, only to find P0b twisting out a smile, eerily sinister, and.....dancing? With my skull still gnawing on my brain, I ignore this.

“I know I said I wanted more of you and your kind to be a part of me.....but I think we’re too different.....I-I need space.”

A beat.

“.....I see.....”

A chill shoots up my spine.

P0b’s usual high-pitched, echoing voice was now uncannily mellow, barely above a whisper.

“.....I fix.....Move things forward.....faster.”

With that, P0b starts twisting horrifically into the ground, as if he’d caught fire, and started to slowly disintegrate.



Squeezing my eyes from the disturbing sight and the splitting migraine, I sit in loud silence.

I've done the best I can.....right?

What now? I should seize this newfound freedom, right? Reconnect with my fellow homo sapiens?

Truth be told, I've always felt like an outcast to society, which was another reason why I'd been infatuated with P0b.

There's got to be other stuff, right? Stuff unrelated to that slimy, wrinkly brat.

Well, I haven't gone out in months, having always feared P0b wandering off.....

Oh no—

Ignoring my spiralling vision, I dash for the door. Far too abruptly, I feel a thousand wrinkly “twigs” cradle me, breaking my fall, assaulting me with an overwhelming scent of garlic.

“P0b? Oh god, P0b, I'm so sorry—This awful headache won't stop, then I went off on you, I didn't mean—”

“.....shh.....I fixed! More us.....Like you said! More space.....Like you said!”

I look up to not only P0b's face stretched into an ecstatic grin, but behind him—

The land was barren, and now a sludgy blue; gravely war-torn. Ungodly skyscrapers made of not metal and glass, but twisted “twigs”, tower 100-feet tall, either standing deathly still, or flailing about with intensity, as if caught in a nightmarish, synchronised dance.

The TV, my phone, my friends, everything.....I realise three months too late.

Now locked in a dark, hysterical state, I manically muse how I once thought I'd get to skip the whole “communication” nonsense with an alien roommate.

A searing pain shoots through me like a lightning bolt, causing me to curl up in agony.

That's when I noticed my torso was blue.....crystallizing in a dreadful shade of ombre.

My vision swam, further nauseated by the sight of pores forming, oozing globs of blue.

An icy breath bites my skin, P0b's whispered words freezing my heart; and quite frankly, I'm not sure if that's a metaphor, I'm not sure of anything anymore, but I still hear P0b as clearly as I feel that slightly acidic spit plant on my now blue and chapped cheek:

“.....become us.....like you said! Blitz Buds for life!”



A LOVELY LETTER TO DISTANT FRIENDS

LAURA LEWIS

When you remember me fondly,
And perhaps miss me,
And wonder if I miss you too.
Take a chance.
Ask me what we were,
Because I've lost too many good friends to ruthless time.

I've lost friends that...
I would swim to the depths of the oceans for them,
 Even under the pressure of a thousand fathoms.
I would take on their sentence and pain for them,
 Even if I was guiltless and they were not innocent.
I would jump from the highest precarious bridges for them,
 Even when vertigo takes hold of my senses to the point of paralysis.
I would look for them when they've disappeared into thin air,
 Even if it all might've just been my imagination.
I would trust in them forever,
 Even if they went astray and wandered far from me.

Time took my friends
Like a untied boat to a stream.
As the friendship drifted out of view
Thanks to the river's slow, but ever present, current.
 I didn't even see them go,
 They were just gone.

Time took my friends
Like a heavy gavel to a table.
The hammer sentenced the end of our era,
When place and circumstances ended, so did we.
 Neither of us made any effort at all,
 To stay or to go.



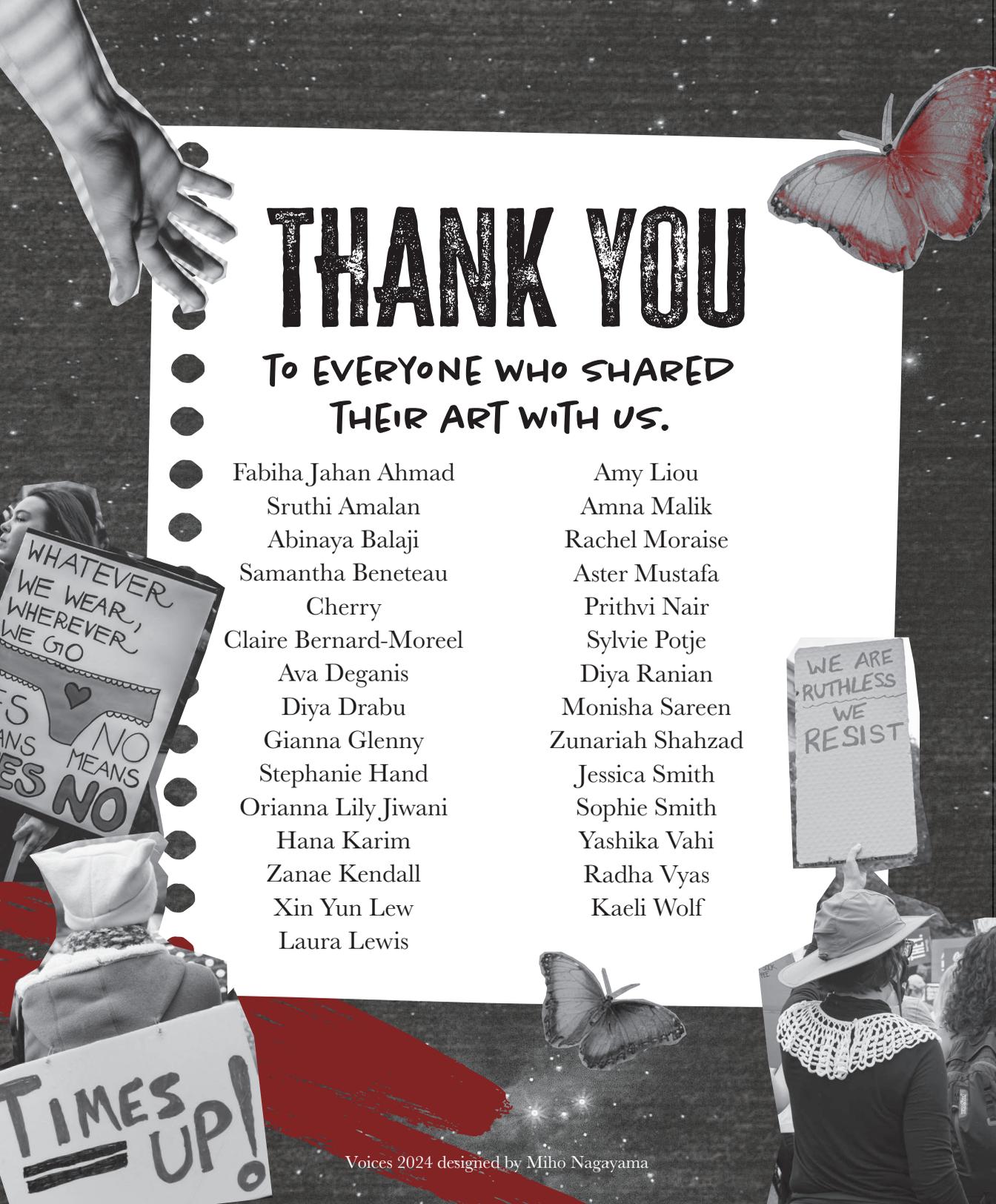


Time took my friends
Like a kite left on the ground.
I felt the strong breeze coming for us,
While I did nothing to stop the string from slipping out of my grasp.
I wish I realized how important you were
Because I think about you every day.

Time took my friends
Like whispers in the wind.
I thought that they were all around me,
But when I looked around the air, it was just the wind.
I hoped you considered me a friend,
Because I thought that you were mine

Time took my friends
Like forgotten promises.
There was intent, there was a certain joy in giving,
But actions failed when life blocked the path.
You meant well, so if you still remember me,
I would like us to try again at friendship.

We were once friends,
you and I, but time has interrupted our conversations.
So, as good friends reunite after great travels apart,
Consider that I missed you, and thought about you in the time that time
took from us,
And I want us to return together as if no time has passed at all,
Like old friends do.



THANK YOU

TO EVERYONE WHO SHARED
THEIR ART WITH US.

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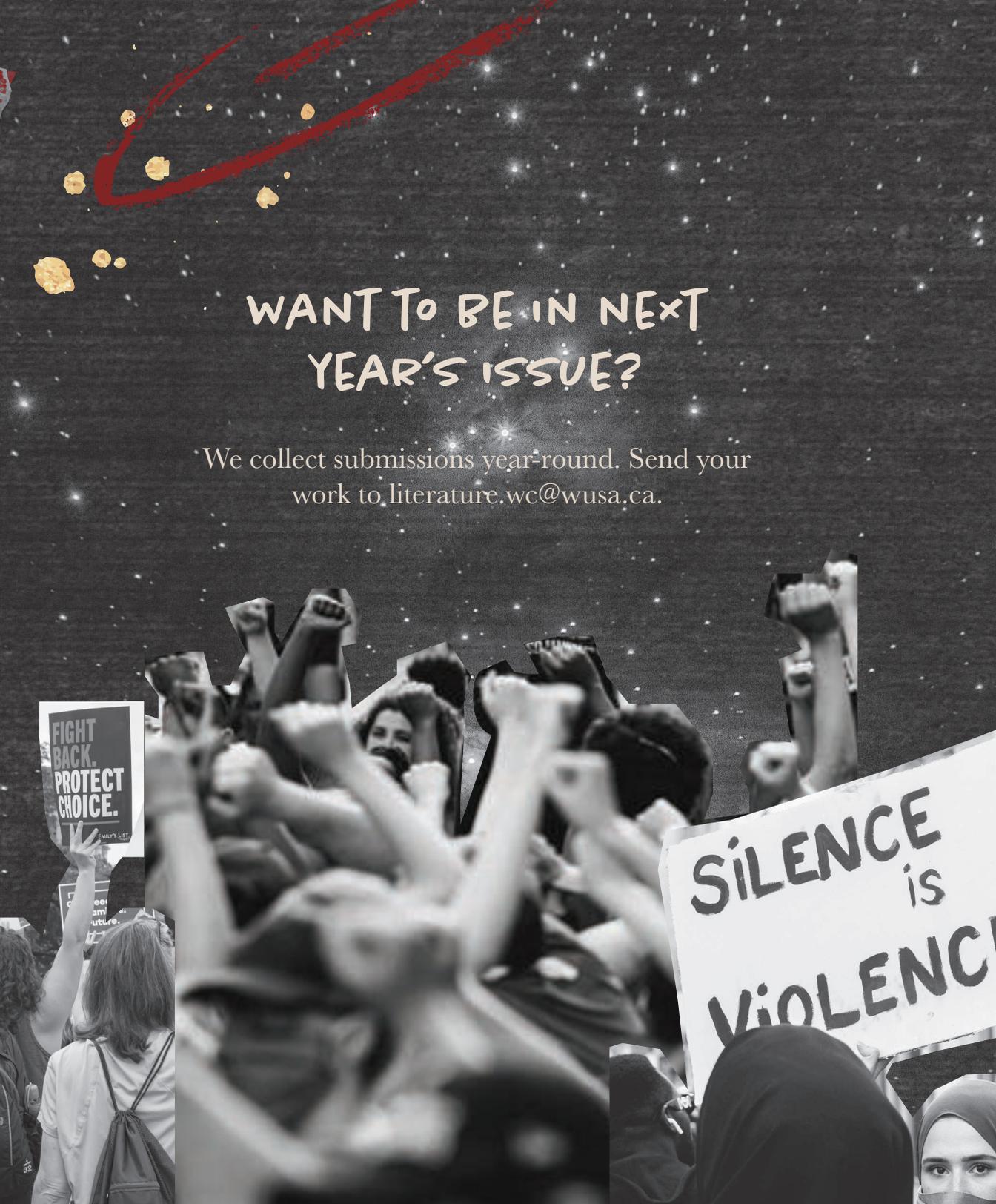
Radha Vyas

Kaeli Wolf

WHATEVER
WE WEAR,
WHEREVER
WE GO
NO
MEANS
NO

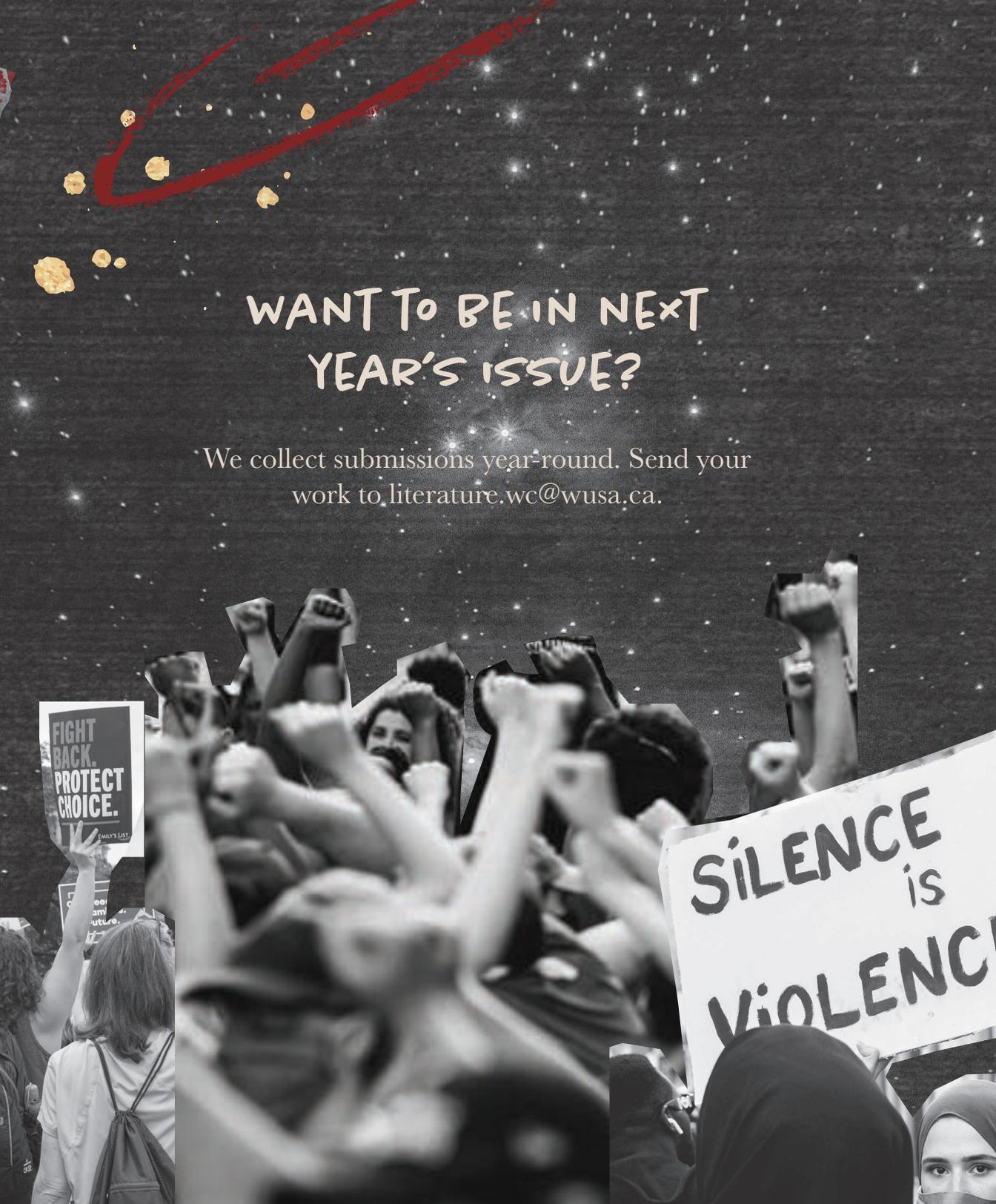
WE ARE
RUTHLESS
WE
RESIST

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UP!



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