

# DREAMS

US



# REALITY

Made by REMSS TYWI

# RE Mountain Secondary 2023 Young Writers Initiative



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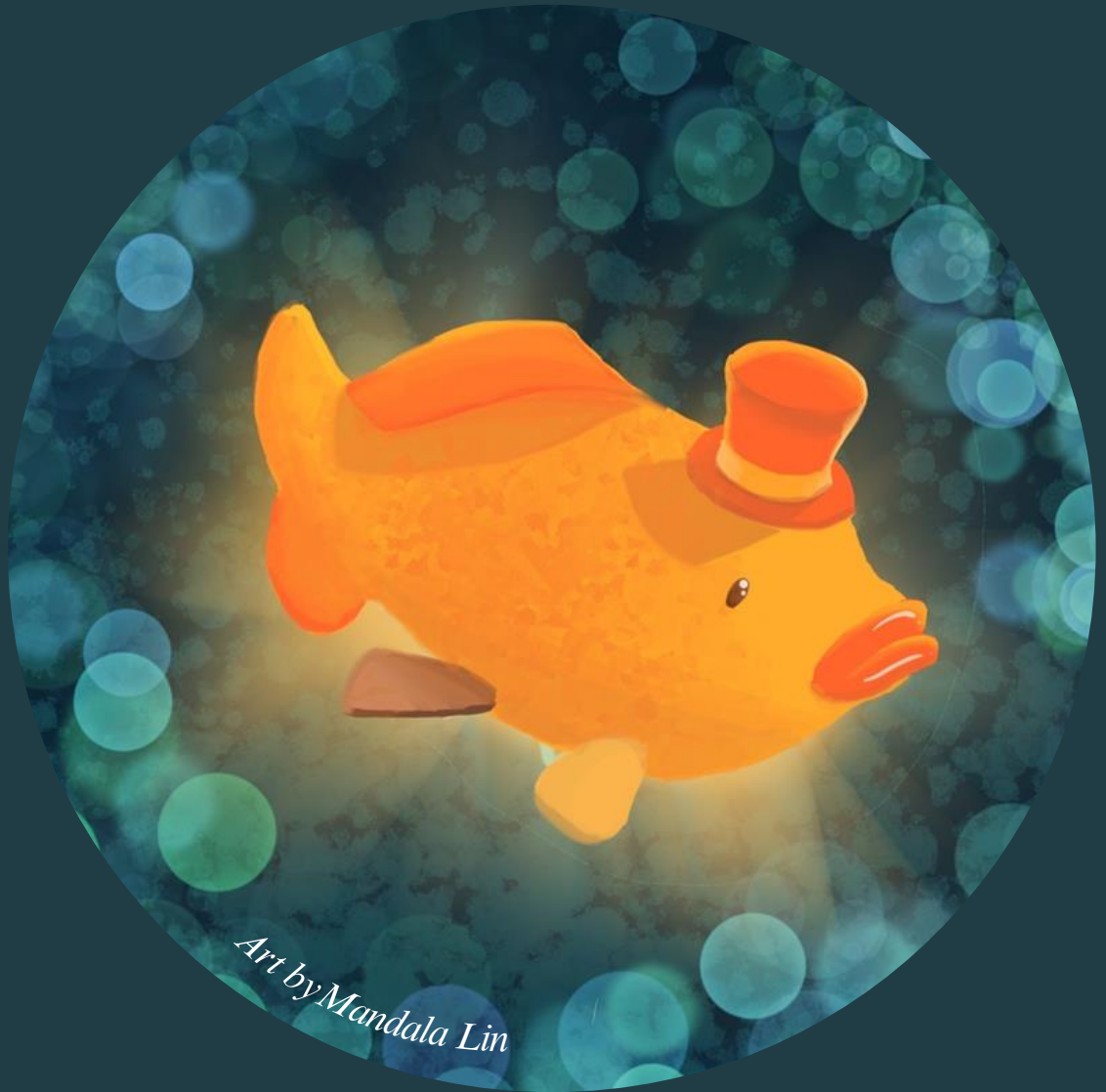
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Thank you to the RE Mountain **Photography Club**  
and **Art Club** for submitting the visual works  
included in this magazine!



# A Letter from the Editor

Dear readers and writers,

I first founded the Young Writers Initiative Chapter at RE Mountain Secondary on a whim in September 2022. I recalled the good memories I made in TYWI's summer poetry camp several years ago and how the friends I met and stories I shared there changed the course of my writing path. I wanted to bring that kind of community and connection to the students who loved to write at my school! Starting this TYWI chapter was a brand-new challenge for me, and I'm very grateful to have so many great friends and classmates who showed up to support this writing club. At our first meeting, I never expected the classroom to be as full as it was when I walked in. Writing often feels like an individual activity, just us scribbling words silently or reading to ourselves. Watching so many young writers show up at lunch on Mondays to laugh and chat and write together was incredible to me. As writers, I'd say our biggest dream is probably to see our stories published and shared with a community that appreciates our work. So here's to all the amazing writers, designers, editors, and artists who made this magazine possible! Thanks to you, we've turned this dream into a reality.

Keep writing and keep dreaming!

*Luna*

*Photo by Sebastian Unrau  
(Unsplash)*





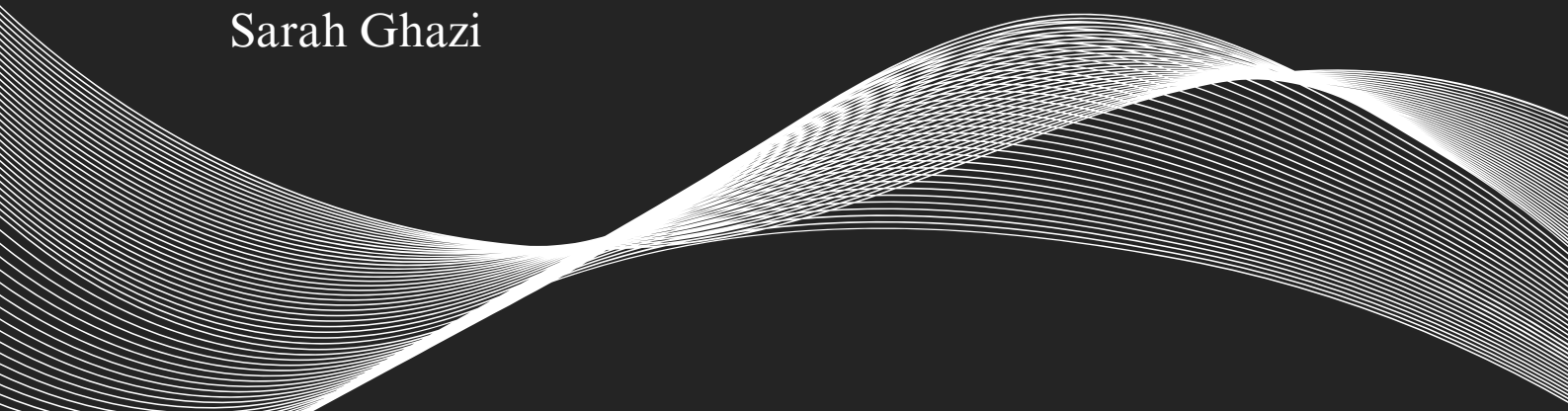
*Photo by Justin Yu*

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# Table of Contents

even now you dream

by Lucy Yin

*pg.8*

Another Dream

by Em Wong

*pg.9*

drowning in dreams

by Luna Yin

*pg.12*

Smoke and Mirrors

by Sanghee Han

*pg.13*

Goodbye

by Euri Jeong

*pg.14*

In The Paddy Field

by Sanuli Wijayasundara

*pg.16*

Ray

by Iris Mou

*pg.18*

Mr. Sports

by Aden Seongjin Lee

*pg.21*

Awake

by Jacob St. Jean

*pg.23*



## **Bread Euphoria**

by Nicole Lee

*pg.26*

## **What Could Have Been**

by Sarah Ghazi

*pg.28*

## **Normal Standing Still**

by Adrin Ma

*pg.31*

## **Not a Dream But Reality**

by Geena Sandhu

*pg.32*

## **You dreamt of a universe**

by Emma Zhang

*pg.33*

## **A Celestial Residence**

by Jimin Lee

*pg.34*

## **Reflections and Illusions**

by Naya Torrecampo

*pg.36*

## **broken dreams**

by Amy Fu

*pg.40*

## **Tearing the Dream's Grip**

by Ashley Heo

*pg.41*



# even now you dream

by Lucy Yin

you are lost in your  
invisible hope & will.  
even now you dream



*Photo by Tasha Marie  
(Unsplash)*



# Another Dream

by Em Wong

The dreams got worse after Aria disappeared.

They've always been there; startlingly vivid, lulling me to sleep in the middle of the day, causing a bleary daze when I wake. I usually forget them moments afterwards, left with nothing except wisps of imagery and a stray thought. But after Aria, each dream is unforgettable.

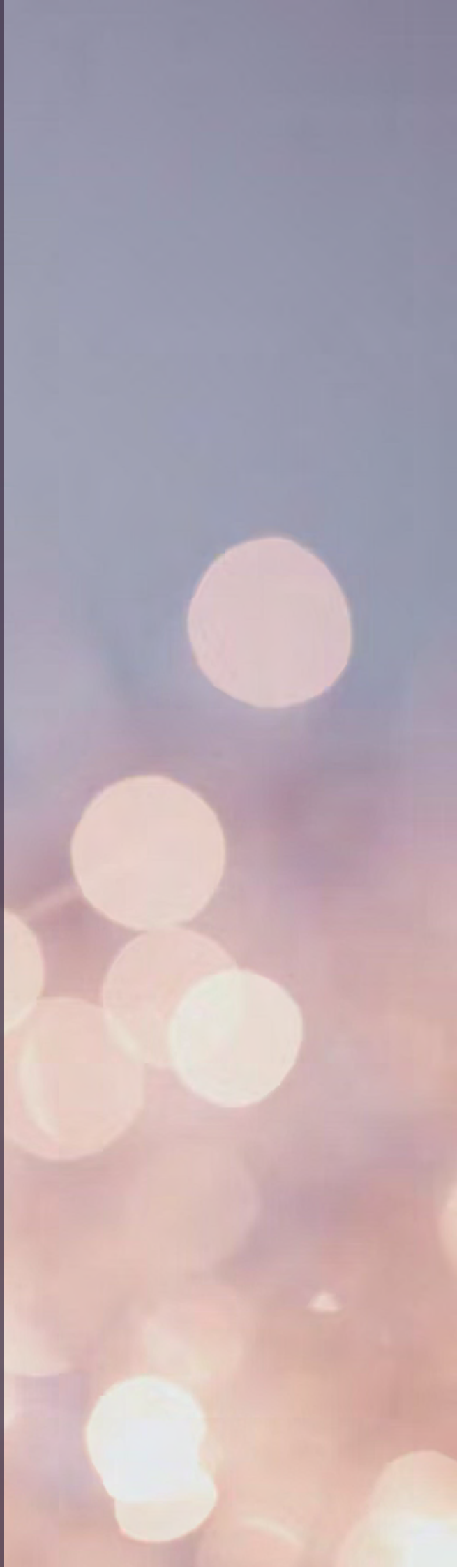
She disappeared on an unremarkable Wednesday, but it only became apparent that she was gone by the Saturday of that week. Everyone asked me, her alleged best friend, where she was. I could not answer. By the next Wednesday, there were Instagram posts littered about with her name on them and her school photo, where she smiles awkwardly at the camera like she's being held at gunpoint.

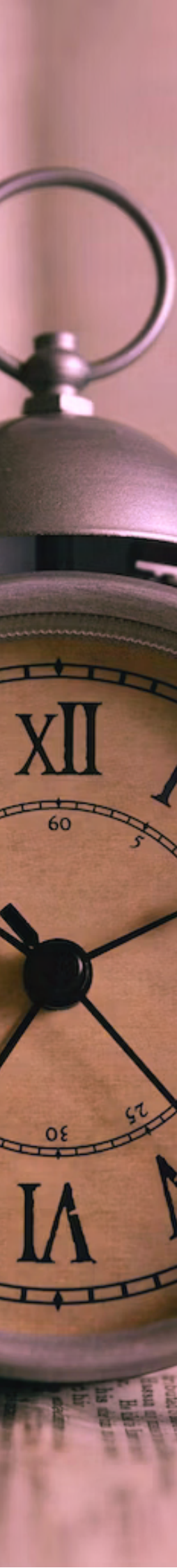
Three Wednesdays later, I'm sitting in class, scratching the back of my head as I explain to the substitute teacher that I have narcolepsy and no, I didn't fall asleep because she's a boring teacher. She rolls her eyes like she doesn't believe me but goes back to the whiteboard as my classmates snicker around me.

I'm doodling a star at the corner of my page because honestly she is a boring teacher, when there's a tap on my shoulder. The drumming of two fingers, *onetwothreefourfive*.

"You okay?" Aria's big eyes bore into mine, gently tucking a strand of hair behind my ear. I feel heat flush to my face as I jerk up in my chair.

*Photo by Alexander Grey (Unsplash)*





“Yeah, just hate math, you know,” I answer after a beat too long. She laughs.

“You can ask me for help later if you’re confused,” she promises. I nod.

“I definitely will.”

Later that night, I pull out my math homework and reach for my phone to text her.

The last text is from three weeks ago. She never saw it.

I blink down at my phone as drops of water land on the text bubbles.

Right, I can’t ask her for help.

“I’m worried about you,” my mom says at breakfast, stirring oatmeal with a wooden spoon. “I know it’s been hard without your friend, but you need to keep up with your schoolwork. You’re in grade 11; this is when your grades matter!”

“I know, Mom.” I fiddle with a ring on my index finger. “I’m not that behind, I can catch up this week.”

“And no more falling asleep in class. Your teacher says it’s happening more frequently lately.”

“Mom, I told you, I can’t control it,” I protest, clenching my jaw. She always says this.

“Do I have to take your phone away at night to make sure you sleep early?”

“No! It’s fine, okay?” I carry my bowl to the sink and scrub it. “I don’t even look at my phone at night.” It’s not even a lie. Without Aria, there’s no point checking my phone anymore.

I’m on the bus to school when she plops down in the seat beside mine, hefting her backpack into her lap. I pull my earphones out of my ears.

“My mom is so annoying,” I say without preamble.

“Did she threaten to take your phone again?”

“Yeah. Anyways. It’s not like she ever does it.” I tuck my earphones into my bag. “How are you?”

“Dead,” Aria answers, like she always does — ambiguous and impossible, never quite enough to tell me anything of substance.

“Understandable,” I say instead. “It’s too early to be alive.”

“I know. Let’s skip class and go back to sleep.” She laughs, saying things I know she would never do, like she always does.

“Charlie. Charlie!”

I blink, staring up into a vaguely familiar pair of eyes — some girl that lives a few blocks away from me. Kate, I think.

“We’re at the school now,” Kate explains.

“Oh, thanks.” I look at the empty seat beside mine. Aria never takes the bus.

Three days later, *onetwothreefourfive*.



“Wake up, or you’re going to be mad at yourself for sleeping through chem again.”

“It’s okay. You’ll teach me later, Aria.”

“Charlie. You know Aria’s gone, right?”

I look up at my classmate, then to my left, where Aria was sitting only a moment ago. She’s not there.

“Yeah. Bad dream.”

She’s sitting at my desk, shuffling through my math textbook. It’s the first time she’s been over at my house.

“I didn’t ask yet. How are you?”

“Dead.”

“Don’t die.” My heart pounds but I say it before I can stop myself. “I love you.”

“...I love you too, dummy.” She doesn’t meet my eyes.

“Not like that.”

“Sorry.” She grabs my notebook and circles the first question. “Come on, you need to square root this!”

“Right.” I swallow past the lump in my throat and resolutely wipe at the corners of my eyes. “Silly me.”

“They found her body.”

I look up from my cereal, my spoon falling into the milk. Four Wednesdays since she disappeared.

“Charlie, I’m so sorry. It looks like she’s been dead for a while. She was in the river not far from here.”

“She’s not dead,” I argue, “I called her last night. She came over and helped me with my math homework.”

“That must’ve been a dream, honey.” My mom ruffles my hair. “I’m so sorry. You can stay home today if you need to.”

“It’s okay, I want to go to school,” I say. Seeing her is the only reason I don’t dread going to school.

“Okay. Take care, dear.”

“My mom is so annoying.”

“Did she threaten to take your phone again?”

“Something like that. Oh, I didn’t ask yet. How are you?”

“Dead.” Aria tucks her hands in her pockets. “I want to go to sleep.”

“Don’t go, I need you.”

“I’m right here, silly,” she teases, but her gaze drifts. I know it’s awkward for her when she knows that I’m in love with her. But I’m still Aria’s best friend. And I’ll get over it eventually.

“Charlie, wake up, we’re here.” Kate taps my shoulder.

I look at the seat next to mine. Another bad dream.

*Photo by Jill Dimond (Unsplash)*

# drowning in dreams

by Luna Yin

do you battle your  
broken breath?

counting  
minutes down to  
midnight  
the world seems to  
overflow at times  
and you let it sink  
let it swirl  
in your mind;  
a saltwater sea  
of swelling tides

inhale and exhale  
the sponge of lungs  
can never take a  
deep enough breath,  
the oxygen shallow  
in your veins.  
someday  
you'll cut beneath  
the surface to find  
clear blood,

dig beneath  
your bleached bones  
for an anchor  
long swept away  
by surging waves

soft fingertips scramble  
but no, child  
your chest squeezes  
the inward pressure  
unbearable

you will choke on  
the foam  
of frantic bubbles

the fight is  
ever freezing  
ever numbing,  
slowing limbs  
to a sleepy stumble  
until eyelids slip shut  
and bodies float above

the taste of sweet warmth  
replaces cold salt  
when you finally  
drown in these dreams



# Smoke and Mirrors

By Sanghee Han

*Drip drop. drip drop.*

The mirror stares at me, taunting me. Was my skin always this pale color? Didn't mother compliment me on my brown eyes? My brother always called me short, didn't he? Why

*Drip drop. Drip drop.*

Smoke swirls around me, and I take in a deep breath of charred dahlia and snapdragons.

*Drip drop. Drip drop.*

A pair of clear blue eyes stare back at me. I blink and the eyes blink back. I move my arms, my gaze not leaving the mirror. A pale, almost sickly white arm moves in sync, graceful like a dancer, and regal like a queen.

*Drip drop. Drip drop.*

The scent of the flowers should feel overwhelming in the air, but I've gotten used to the familiar scent of black dahlia and snapdragon. The ever present perfumes, always clears my mind of any doubts, it's intense aroma enveloping me.

*Drip drop. Drip drop.*

The mirror image squints; I never had a brother. A dainty giggle escapes my lips, why did I ever believe I had a brother

*Thisiswrongthisiswrongthisiswro-*

*Drip drop. Drip drop.*

The scent of dahlia calms me.

I stare at the figure in the mirror, sh- I have clear, vapid skin, free of any blemishes, freezing blue eyes and a tall poised figure.

*Drip drop. Drip drop.*

Yes, this is who I am.

*Photo by I.am\_nah  
(Unsplash)*



# Goodbye

By Euri Jeong

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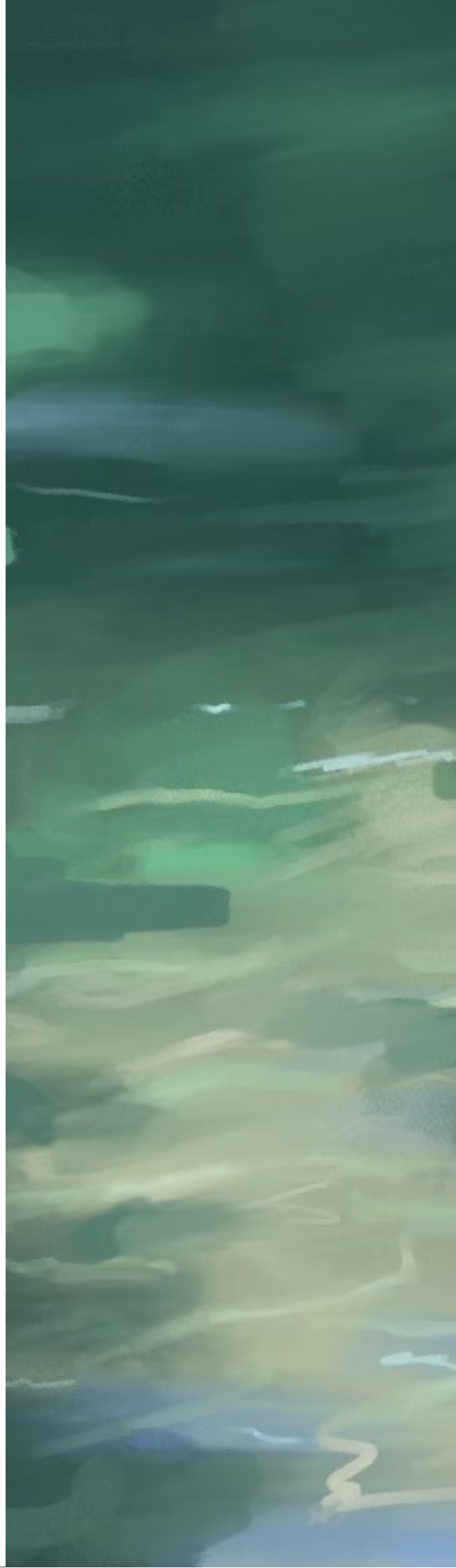
"Goodbye"

Today, I say goodbye again  
As the darkness fades to light.  
Some days I desperately cling on  
To the whisper of family.

The familiar guilt falls around me.  
Today, I say goodbye again.  
Tears glistening  
As my eyes open to the pale dawn.

O, how the light is so cruel.  
The flash and the crash echoes forever.  
Today, I say goodbye again.  
But I know that so long as night falls,  
The dreams will wait for me

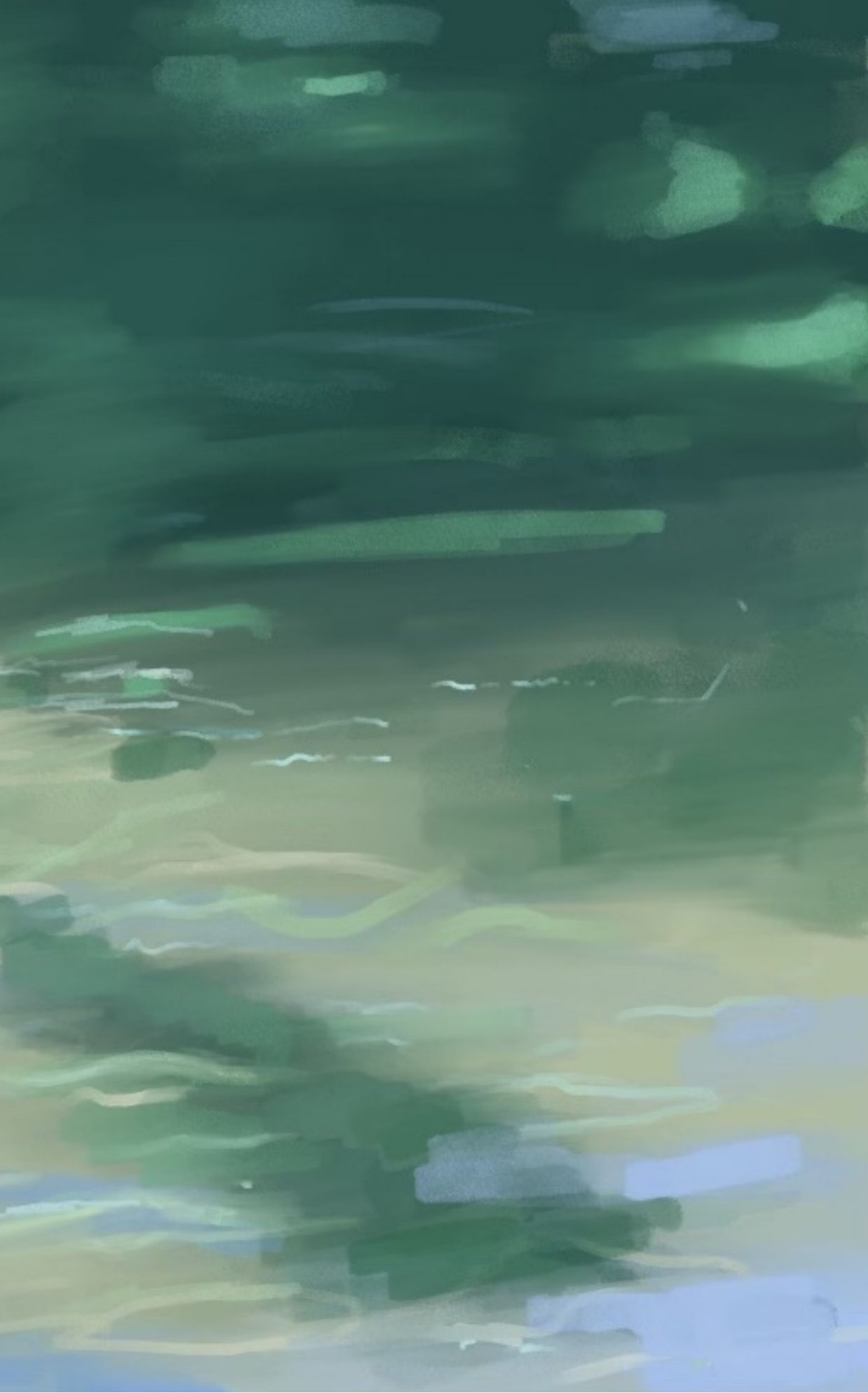
So I wake,  
The fantasy is fresh in my empty self.  
I watch the cluttered room around me.  
Today, I say goodbye again.





*Art by Mandala Lin*

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# In The Paddy Field

Sanuli Wijayasundara

In the paddy field,  
the verdant grass glistens.  
Uniform tendrils of the crops,  
distinct only by the assorted slivers of sunlight that glisten on their surface,  
swallow my legs whole.  
I wipe my weary face.

With my meagre hydration depleted,  
The worn and tried rag sitting damp on my head doesn't do much  
in the face of the beating sun.  
Its heat screams in my ears.  
Akka wails.

"This work is merciless with its labour," she says between gasps of humid air.  
I pass her a faint smile.  
She rejects it promptly with a scoff.

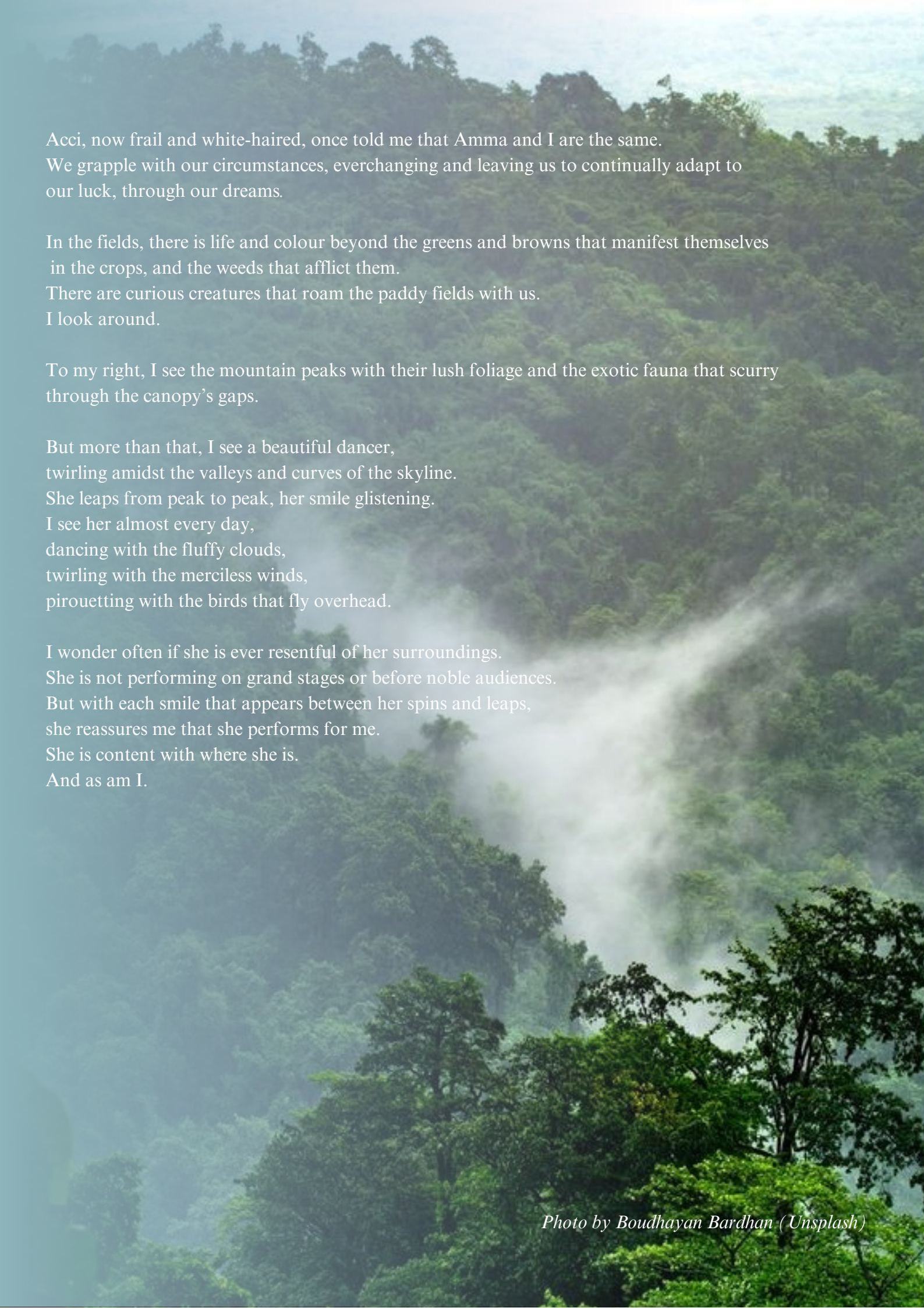
Amma works faster than me and Akka.  
She sorts through the patches of damp soil and crops effortlessly,  
leaving me to pity my stagnant collection that lay in the basket Acci made for me.  
Akka calls out to her.

"I'm hungry," she says.  
She is defeated by the heat and humidity, sitting now,  
in the sludge of water and dirt below her.  
"We're almost done," Amma assures; though, she has said in response to every futile cry and objection  
Akka throws in her direction.

I glance at Akka and Amma.  
Akka grudgingly resumes her work, moving her hands gradually  
back to picking out the ripe crops.  
Amma is hard at work, unphased by these forlorn conditions.  
Though I cannot compete with Amma's speed and precision, I can see  
she is like me.

*Photo by Michael Nicholson (minic.com.au)*





Acci, now frail and white-haired, once told me that Amma and I are the same.  
We grapple with our circumstances, everchanging and leaving us to continually adapt to  
our luck, through our dreams.

In the fields, there is life and colour beyond the greens and browns that manifest themselves  
in the crops, and the weeds that afflict them.  
There are curious creatures that roam the paddy fields with us.  
I look around.

To my right, I see the mountain peaks with their lush foliage and the exotic fauna that scurry  
through the canopy's gaps.

But more than that, I see a beautiful dancer,  
twirling amidst the valleys and curves of the skyline.  
She leaps from peak to peak, her smile glistening.  
I see her almost every day,  
dancing with the fluffy clouds,  
twirling with the merciless winds,  
pirouetting with the birds that fly overhead.

I wonder often if she is ever resentful of her surroundings.  
She is not performing on grand stages or before noble audiences.  
But with each smile that appears between her spins and leaps,  
she reassures me that she performs for me.  
She is content with where she is.  
And as am I.

*Photo by Boudhayan Bardhan (Unsplash)*



“Ray? You listening?”

A voice snaps me out of my daydream as I fumble for the right words.

“Uh, yeah I’m, uh, we’re talking about your dogs, right?”

Christie’s face lights up as she goes back to rambling about herself. Her blonde ponytail sways back and forth as she goes through a wide variety of gestures to detail her long-winded stories. I absentmindedly nod along and sip my cold coffee as I start zoning out again. *How did I get here again?* I ask myself, trying to remember how I got into this tedious situation. *Oh, right. Both of our office shifts ended, and Christie wanted someone to come with her for coffee.* I quietly sigh into my cup of coffee, which goes unnoticed by my co-worker. *Why did she ask me of all people to come? And why did I agree?* I glance at the clock from the corner of my eye. 6:30pm. We got here at 5:30.

Not wanting to entertain her for any longer, I get up from my chair and try to keep my voice free from annoyance as I tell Christie, “I’m sorry, I just remembered that I have something to do at 7.”

She looks surprised that I did anything but sit there, and a small bit of concern appears in her eyes, but she quickly flashes me a smile and says, “Oh yeah! We’ve been here for a while, huh? I guess it is time to leave. You’re really great company, Ray! It’s *amazing* to have someone who listens like you do. You know, when we first met, I’ve always thought that you were the edgy, lone wolf type of guy with how quiet you are at work but-“

I quickly say a firm, “See you at work tomorrow,” before walking out of the café as fast as I can without hurting her feelings. I hardly hear her response. I make a beeline for my car and begin the drive home, mildly irritated by her comment. After a short drive full of tired yawns, I make it to my apartment and head straight for bed. As I slip under the covers, my tiredness seems to fade away, and I rest happily under my blanket as I fall asleep. I can’t wait to see her again.

*I find myself sitting at a table in the middle of a building. I can’t quite tell what kind of building it is, but I’m sitting all by myself as everyone goes on about their day. I look down and see a beautiful teacup with a familiar pink flower hand-painted on the polished white ceramic. The teacup is full of honey milk tea, her favourite, with two sugar cubes floating on top. I smile faintly, imagining her sitting across from me. When I look back up, I see a woman with dark wavy hair on the other side of the table. She smiles.*

*“It’s wonderful having you here, Ray. I missed you.”*

*I miss you too.*

*“I’m happy you’re here.”*

*So am I.*

*“How was your day?”*

*I don’t want to talk about it.*

*I imagine the two of us sitting next to each other on the couch. A TV show is running on the screen. Her colorful paintings decorate the walls. The house smells like freshly baked cookies. I imagine a plate of them on the table in front of us. I glance to my side and see her right there as the scene shifts, nibbling on a cookie. She offers me one and I take it. White chocolate chip, interesting. I lean on her shoulder and we both remain silent, absentmindedly watching the TV show. Eventually, I notice a vase of white flowers on the table. Was that always there? Suddenly, she freezes and stares blankly ahead. I stand up and try to wake her, but no matter how much I shake her, she doesn’t respond. She looks terrified. I turn my head to the side and the scene starts changing on its own. White fills my vision and disappears moments later, and now I stand in front of a church. That church.*



*No, no I'm the one in control.*

*I try my hardest to imagine any other scene with her, but it's all in vain. I can't escape. I begin walking through the church, heading towards the back door. I try to wrestle control over myself, but no matter how much I struggle I can't win against whatever force is leading me towards the back. The door opens and I'm pulled into a graveyard.*

*Damn it, not this again. Please, I don't want to see it.*

*An open casket lies in front of me.*

*I see her inside, sleeping peacefully on a bed of white flowers, her body covered with barely noticeable stitches.*

"No!" I find myself shooting upright in my bed, clutching the blanket with trembling hands as I try to calm my breathing.

"Agh...damn it..." I hiss as my vision blurs. My head is plagued with thoughts about her funeral and the day she died. Even while awake in this room, surrounded by mementos of my dearest fiancée, it's impossible to erase those memories. I don't know when I woke up or how long it took me to stop crying, but the glow on the walls had changed from pale blue to soft white by the time my eyes were dry again.

I hate the colour white.

I glance at the clock on my nightstand. 11:21 AM. Work started a couple hours ago. I sigh, trying to dig deeper into the comforting warmth of my bed. No point in going now.

My phone rings and I ignore it, but it doesn't stop. Groaning, I reach over and grab my phone to see who's calling. It's Christie. Of course it's Christie. Apparently, she's tried to call me for a while now as I have quite a lot of missed calls listed under her name. Knowing that she isn't going to give up anytime soon, I answer the phone. Before I can say anything, she immediately starts to ask questions.

"Ray! There you are! Where are you right now and what are you doing!? I had to come up with an excuse for why you aren't at work and you know how bad I am at lying! Not only did I have to come up with the actual reason but I also had to explain why *you* weren't calling in! God, Ray, honestly, what would you do without me?" There's a long pause with neither of us speaking. She's clearly waiting for an answer, but I really don't feel like talking right now.

Eventually, I hear her sigh. "Did you dream about Dahlia again?" she gently asks. I still don't answer her.

She's taken my silence as a yes, as she tries to continue the one-sided conversation. "...I...don't know what to say, Ray. I'm sorry for your loss." Words can't describe how tired I am of hearing that phrase. They aren't sorry, they can't be. It isn't their fault and it's none of their business.

"I know it's probably really hard on you," No shit Christie, I was going to *marry* her. We were supposed to be happy, together.

We were supposed to be alive, together.

My vision is blurring again.

"But the accident wasn't your fault. It's the damn drunkard's fault." Hearing that from Christie is strange. I'm used to hearing her being angry about something, but this venomous tone she's speaking with is so...different from her usual frustrated voice. It sounds like she's about to cry too.

There's another long pause where I can hear Christie angrily sighing on the other side of the phone multiple times. She must be trying to figure out something to say. "Ray, there's so much out there for you still...she's gone, Ray.

"There's nothing any of us can do to bring her back." Yes, there is. I can bring her back whenever I want, to wherever I want.

She isn't dead. She's with me.



“I miss Dahlia too. She was so warm and bright and kind,” Christie laughs, a small sad one. “She made work so much more enjoyable. And it was obvious that she loved you, you know. She’d watch you go around the office from her cubicle with a dreamy glaze over her eyes, just like you did. She’d come to me and fret about what to wear or give to you, almost exactly like how you would come to me asking what kind of pastries she would like the most. Honestly, it was kind of infuriating how I became the middleman of my two best friends who can’t seem to ask questions directly to each other, but I really enjoyed watching the two of you be happy together. You both deserved it.

“...I don’t think she would want to see you like this, Ray. We both know her. She wouldn’t want you to let her death take over your entire life.”

...Is that why you’re still able to live like nothing happened?

I hear someone shout Christie’s name over the phone. “Coming!” she calls out happily, as if she hadn’t just played therapist for me.

“I need to go, Ray. I won’t be able to call you for another few hours. Take care of yourself until then, okay? I’ll come by as soon as I’m able. Make some food, go on a walk, just do something to get yourself out of bed. And...one last thing,” she adds quietly, the hesitation in her voice overwhelmingly clear. I already know what she’s going to say.

“Please get rid of the knife from your nightstand. They belong in the kitchen. For cutting food. I don’t think I can stand losing both my best friends-“ Bitterness quickly wells up inside of me. *She just doesn’t want to have herself hurt.* An angry “Ugh,” comes out of my mouth before I can stop it, just loud enough for Christie to hear. She stops talking to think about what I said. She gasps and quickly starts backpedalling, trying to explain what she meant.

“Ray, please, I didn’t mean it like that you know what I meant! Don’t hang up I-“

I don’t care what she means. She doesn’t care about Dahlia as much as I do. She never could. I end the call, not wanting to hear her talk anymore. I put my phone back on the nightstand and turn my back to it. I refuse to let go of Dahlia when she’s right there in front of me, just out of reach. I close my eyes and try to forget about everything that just happened, focusing instead on the two of us in a park.

There’s no point in trying to fix reality when I have full control over my flawless dreams.

*The sun is warm, the sky is clear, and the wind blows gently throughout the park. I’m sitting on a bench, watching a dog and its owner play with a frisbee. Children are scrambling all over the playground with their parents sitting nearby, some of them choosing to play with their children instead of gossiping about them. I turn my head to the side and see a woman with dark wavy hair wearing a beige sun hat sitting next to me. We’re holding hands, doing nothing but basking in each other’s presence.*

*I turn back around and see someone painting. I can’t make out what they’re painting. She notices the painter as well and pokes my shoulder, wanting to get my attention. I turn back to face her, and she leans against me, hugging my arm and nuzzling my shoulder.*

*“You know, my colours were muddled without your guidance.”*

*What?*

*“Your gentle light defines my world.”*

*Oh, these are lines from one of the sappy poems in your books, right? Haha, where do you find them, anyways?*

*“Shut up and let me finish. Can’t you see I’m trying to flirt with you?”*

*Alright, alright. What’s the next one?*

*“...I hope you remain like the stars above. Eternally bright for centuries to come.”*



# Mr Sports

by Aden Seongjin Lee

“You are not meant to be an athlete. You just don’t have what it takes.” I have heard this seemingly hopeless advice from numerous coaches throughout my upbringing. However, I can’t help but still love sports. When imagining life as a sports athlete, my eyes grow wide and round, and I drool in happiness. Although I love playing sports, I know that I do not have the innate skills to become a world star one day. I know I should only dream of my greatest desire to become a star athlete and be realistic about my life. Thus, my goal to become a sports marketing manager became the next best dream to attain. My name is Aden Lee. I am a proud sports lover; my love for sports defines who I am. Ultimately, I see myself as an active individual, a strong planner, and a social person through my love for sports.

A “couch potato”. “Lazybones”. Sometimes “a tree that only breathes to live”. These were some of the common expressions my family and friends used to describe me. After a day studying at school I spent all the time I have left resting at home. I literally did not move a muscle. I felt exhausted from studying, and all I wanted to do was sleep or lay on the couch. However, my life on the couch led me to feel sadness and despair over my situation, yet I did not know what to do. Trying another activity would only exhaust me more. “Get your butt off the couch Aden, and go out!” My mother had had enough of me laying around and kicked me out of the home one summer afternoon. So, I did get out of the house.

As I walked around the neighborhood, I coincidentally bumped into one of my classmates. Although I had the burning desire to run away and return home, I knew I had no place to go, so I accepted his kind suggestion to play football with his group of friends. As his friends embraced me with their “hey”-s and smiles of welcome, I instantly felt excited. The feeling of my blood pumping, sweat dripping, and rapid breathing hyped me up with sheer excitement. With the sudden peak of energy, I played the best I could. Of course, I was horrible. But my horrid skills only brought encouraging words that fueled me. “Hey, what about kicking the ball this way” or “I’ll try passing it to you next time, but try throwing it higher toward the net.” With encouragement and patience, I scored a goal for our team. The feeling of such accomplishment brought the chemicals of endorphin to erupt and fill my body! Ever since my first exposure to football, the sense of being alive heightened me. Through sports, I find great joy and happiness, and I have met people that aid me in making my life more interesting. Ultimately, I feel the most like myself on the field, playing as my heart pumps with active delight.

After that game of football, I became interested in various sports; soccer, swimming, basketball, lacrosse, tennis, and badminton. Whenever I saw the clock ticking its way closer to the 3 PM mark, my heart ticked away in the delight of going out to play soon. But unfortunately, academics soon became a less significant part of my life. Because my interest was geared more towards playing sports, my academic grades began to plunge into a frightening dark hole, so dark that I was on the tip of the ice in needing to repeat my grade. The day I got my report card is a year I cannot forget. The deep pain in the pit of the stomach churned into even greater feelings of regret, embarrassment, and shame are something I cannot forget. Worst of all, the look of disappointment as my parents’ furrowed brows marked both fury and indescribable frustration made me feel like someone had just punched me hard in the gut a thousand times over. Although my parents admired my interest in sports, they sat me down and warned me that my love for sports could only continue if I learned how to manage my time properly. To support me, they gave me a planner where I



had to check off each task from school before going out to play. Yes, it was initially very challenging because sometimes my schoolwork took a lot longer than I had anticipated, but going out to play after completing all my work made my time outside feel even more like heaven. The feeling of accomplishment was better than anything in the world!

Staying at home mulling around all day brought about the exasperating words, “get your bottom off the couch for once!” However, the nagging soon dissipated as I got more involved in sports. I relish playing with my friends who share the same passions as me, and I especially enjoy the time we spend hanging out afterward. Although it may seem trivial, putting my blood, sweat, and tears into playing sports and having those moments where I can bond with my friends always gave me a taste of happiness. Laying on the couch, I thought it was my place of comfort and happiness. Watching television and laughing about its entertainment, I thought, was the way to live life. However, sports exposed me to new people, teammates, and friends. Sports allowed me to find the inner real me. As much as I was delighted by playing sports, I also found great pleasure in being accepted and belonging to a group of people that brought out the best parts of me. When I dribble my way to the hoop, then shoot and score, my friends cheer me on with their boisterous, encouraging shouts of “Woohoo, way to go!” When I kick the ball to a teammate to encourage him to score, I give the warm, energizing encouragement of “Great shot!” Sometimes, when the throw does not go so well, everyone is there to pat each other on the back to express that it is okay and that there will always be a next time. Through sports, I identify myself as a social person who knows how to be there for his friends from the happiest to the worst of times.

Hence, when asked to define my identity, the first thought that comes to mind is sports. Sports changed my life in various positive ways, making my everyday life more active, organized, and social. Sports defined me as an individual who lives every day happily with laughter, amazing friends, and a balanced school and social life.





# AWAKE

by Jacob St.Jean

John opened his eyes. He took in the beauty of his surroundings and yelled with jubilation. The periwinkle flowers around him swayed to silent wind under a clear, sapphire sky. John ran forward, joy engulfing him. But as he ran faster, dread began to fill a pit inside of him, the joy retreating. He ran faster and faster; he closed his eyes, but when he opened them again he was in the thick of a city, graffiti covering the buildings close by. He struggled at first to see in the dark, but was forced to run forward when he heard thundering footsteps behind him.

“Do you really think we will let you get away?” a man declared behind him in a commanding yet raspy voice. “You have no value, not anymore.”

“STOP IT!” John forced the words out of his mouth. The man's laughter was overwhelming. But as soon as it had started, it was over.

BEEP

“Sir! What should we do, sir!” said a scrawny, young soldier. The landscape was full of corpses and blood, painting the snow a crimson red. “Sir! We need orders sir.” repeated the soldier. John started to respond, started to say that he was no commander, that he knew not what orders to give. But then the dread, the foreboding feeling washed over him like a wave at high tide. The man was behind him, wearing an onyx suit and staring at him with a blank expression.

”Give up.” the man said. John refused and ran again.

BEEP

John was at home.

*Perhaps I am home, thought John. Perhaps I am not. This feels wrong, where was I? All he could remember from before was snow. Snow, the smell of blood, and, and a man! A man of evil. Why is he evil? But I feel truth in his voice.* He walked through the halls of a home he remembered, but the memories were hard to think of. They felt as though they were from a dream. He stopped by a window, looking out into a forest, where there was a sign. He ran to the door of the house with an unknown urgency and read the sign.

WAKE UP. Immediately as he read this, an uneasy feeling swept over him, and he felt a strange sense of déjà vu. He turned around quickly, but was too late because there was a man just behind him.



"Leave this place, feel the embrace only death can provide," he whispered in a grave tone. So John ran, and he ran, and he ran, and he ran into the forest, trampling plants. Into the dark, until he reached a meadow, a break in the forest. In this meadow was a lone mirror, standing upright and gleaming with the pale moonlight. Cautiously, John walked to the mirror and looked at it. Looking back at him was not his own face, but the man's, staring with eyes obscured by black glasses. Suddenly, he grabbed John! And then all was quiet, and all was still.

BEEP

John woke up, finding himself lying on a cliff. The salty sea breeze caused him to shiver, as he laid in the grass. *Is this Ireland?* he wondered, *or... maybe Scotland?* He laughed softly, because he thought that perhaps he was free from what had been haunting him these past years. And yet that *feeling* still resided within him. That feeling of doubt and fear, and disremember. That... lethologica. But he was free, wasn't he? Sadly that disremember filled him. He had no idea how he got to this Scottish cliff, no idea. Suddenly he was falling off the cliff, by his own action or something else, he did not know. Faster and faster until...

BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, BEEP

John woke up and dressed for the day; a suit, a tie, the bunnet hat that his father gave to him. He left his apartment and headed to the escalator. He went on along with a woman who had straight black hair, and a scarf around her neck.

"Where are you headed today, miss?" John asked.

"An orchard," the woman said, "where the scarlet apples taste delicious and their aroma is everywhere." At the word scarlet, John recalled something:

Blood.

Gunfire.

*A battle? I've never been in a battle,* he thought. John got to the bottom floor of the building and bid the woman farewell. He walked outside into a bustling city, where there must have been hundreds of people walking about. He saw a boy, with a bunnet similar to his own, and moved towards him. He followed the boy for some time until he started running. John began running to catch up with the boy, but the boy was ever out of his reach. Ever. Suddenly the boy stopped.

"WAKE UP," said the boy. This shocked John. Wake up? Why would he tell me this?

"Boy!" John yelled, "Come back!" But the boy was gone. Lost to the crowd.

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP



“WAKE UP JOHN! WAKE UP!” cried a woman. John opened his eyes, slowly. Memories quickly flooded his brain. This was... his wife. He had been asleep, trapped in dream after dream ever since his son had passed away. “Blessed almighty! You're awake!” John smiled. *It was just a dream.* But the woman, his wife, was much older looking than he recalled.

“How... how... long... have I been... gone?” he managed to ask. He then looked around; the room was all white and there was a machine in the corner beeping slowly. A nurse walked by.

“Ma'am please don't startle our patient,” she said in a tired, yet not unkind voice.

“I'm sorry Sarah,” John said in a whisper, tears welling in his eyes as much as in his wife's. The hospital was neat, and he was comfortable.

“You don't have to be sorry John,” she said, weeping quietly. “You are here now and that's all that matters.” *Finally, out of the dreams, into reality.*



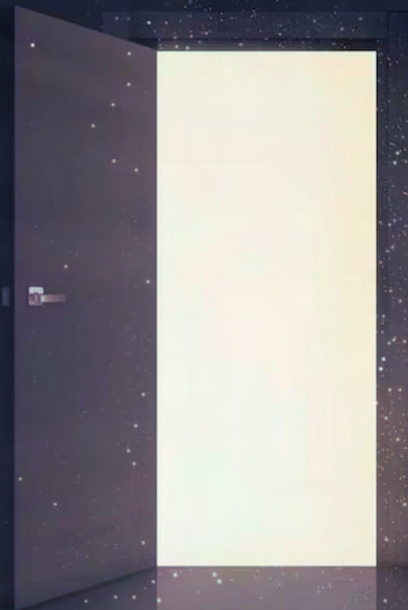
# Bread Euphoria

By Nicole Lee

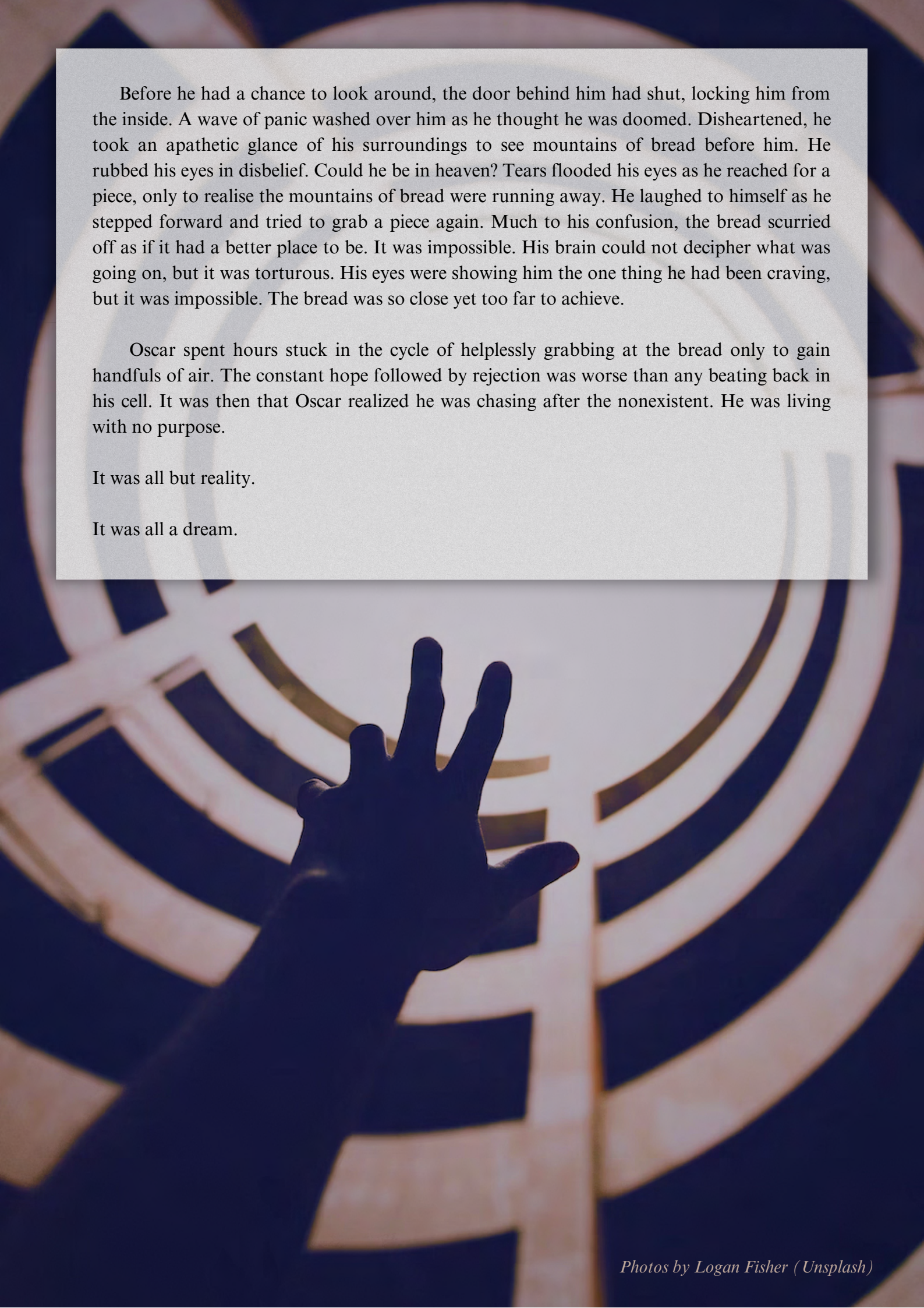


*This was it.*

Oscar was surrounded by guards as he was escorted into the entrance of the room that was worse than death. This room claimed the title of being torturous beyond human imagination. The number 4 was emblazoned in deep red ink across the steel door, the sound of shrieks and screams welcoming him from behind it. With a clang, one of the guards unlocked it, revealing nothing but pitch darkness. Before long, Oscar's eyes were of no use and he was good as blind. It was as if he was swallowed by a black hole. For a few hour-like minutes, he plopped down onto the floor and sat staring into space as his mind occasionally conjured up images of bread. Bored, he figured there would be no harm in taking a walk around and exploring, given he was already in room 4. He had nothing to lose. Oscar slowly got up and trailed his fingertips along the walls to get a sense of how big it was, but as soon as he reached a corner, he felt a door knob. His mind began to fill with all sorts of scenarios as a sense of false hope rose in him. Trembling from hunger and excitement, he slowly turned the knob as it— much to his delight— opened up.





A hand is shown in silhouette, reaching out with fingers spread. The background consists of a series of concentric, overlapping circles in shades of blue and white, creating a tunnel-like or maze-like effect. The lighting is dramatic, with the hand and the circles appearing to glow from within.

Before he had a chance to look around, the door behind him had shut, locking him from the inside. A wave of panic washed over him as he thought he was doomed. Disheartened, he took an apathetic glance of his surroundings to see mountains of bread before him. He rubbed his eyes in disbelief. Could he be in heaven? Tears flooded his eyes as he reached for a piece, only to realise the mountains of bread were running away. He laughed to himself as he stepped forward and tried to grab a piece again. Much to his confusion, the bread scurried off as if it had a better place to be. It was impossible. His brain could not decipher what was going on, but it was torturous. His eyes were showing him the one thing he had been craving, but it was impossible. The bread was so close yet too far to achieve.

Oscar spent hours stuck in the cycle of helplessly grabbing at the bread only to gain handfuls of air. The constant hope followed by rejection was worse than any beating back in his cell. It was then that Oscar realized he was chasing after the nonexistent. He was living with no purpose.

It was all but reality.

It was all a dream.



# What Could Have Been

By Sarah Ghazi

---

A faint light filtered through the wrought-iron bars of the minute window, casting a soft glow on the mottled concrete of the cell. It was a small room really, barely large enough to contain a meagre cot and an unremarkable latrine, leaving just enough room for a convict to pace fruitlessly, completely alone with their thoughts. Opposite to the window was a large iron door, where a small eye slit punctuated the solid metal, blackened and battered with age.

It was one of many cells, identical in appearance, stacked side by side, situated on that lonely hallway in a prison made to stifle the rebellious ideations of common riff-raff.

The silence that was commonplace during the fading hours of the night was shattered by the sounds of a wracking cough, the hacking fit reverberating through the cracks and corridors of the prison wing. It would be one's presumption that the walls caging those roused by mutterings of dreams and change would be thick enough to stave off ideations of revolt and revolution, yet they felt thinner than the wings of the dragonflies that buzzed come springtime.



From his place in the corner, perched atop his bed and pressed snugly against the icy cement, prisoner B - 003951 was dragged away from his fragile repose by the echoing of those horrible coughs. Taking a moment to adjust to the darkness draped over his surroundings, he was greeted only by the sight of that black iron door, faintly illuminated by the light of an obscured moon. He rubbed any remnants of sleep from his bleary eyes and shifted upright with a small creak of his cot.

Only silence followed. The ever present silence.

Cold.



Isolating.

Disheartening.

Padding the walls to drown out the embers of murmured aspirations could only do so much, but the presence of that suffocating silence, ever impersonal and uncaring, served as the best remedy towards the sowing of hope. In a land with such frigid air, nothing would ever grow again.

The prisoner remained upright for a few moments more before drawing his knees towards his chest and sinking into himself.

He stared.

The door stared back at him.

The quiet remained unbroken.

A fate such as the one afforded to him by the hollow cell was the furthest thing from the end B - 003951 had envisioned for himself. Away from the camaraderie of a shared dream and the deafening roar of streets set ablaze. If anything, it seemed to promise a swift end; a death that would lead to martyrdom, rallying on those who remained to strive for that dream, carrying their ambitions onwards. Not the detached dismantling of their fellowship and of their spirit. Not how those who were ultimately insignificant would be filed away like the documents of a long settled legal dispute.

Those bonds they had formed, forged in the fires of conflict and urgent reform, should have held strong. But all there was to show for them were the freezing walls of a room too small to contain those now extinguished ambitions.

The regime they had opposed had long been on its last legs. The people were unhappy, unfulfilled and slowly dying; there was no better motivation to oppose a government leeching away their very livelihoods. The underground opposition had grown, and soon, their country had been plunged into the midst of a bloody, brutal revolutionary war. Casualties mounted on both sides, the tide of the conflict ebbing and flowing with each bitter defeat, each triumphant victory. Innocent people had died bloody, brutal

deaths, yes, but their battered bodies shielded the hopes for a brighter future amidst the rain of gunfire.

That was, until, it was deemed a waste of ammunition dealing with common rats.

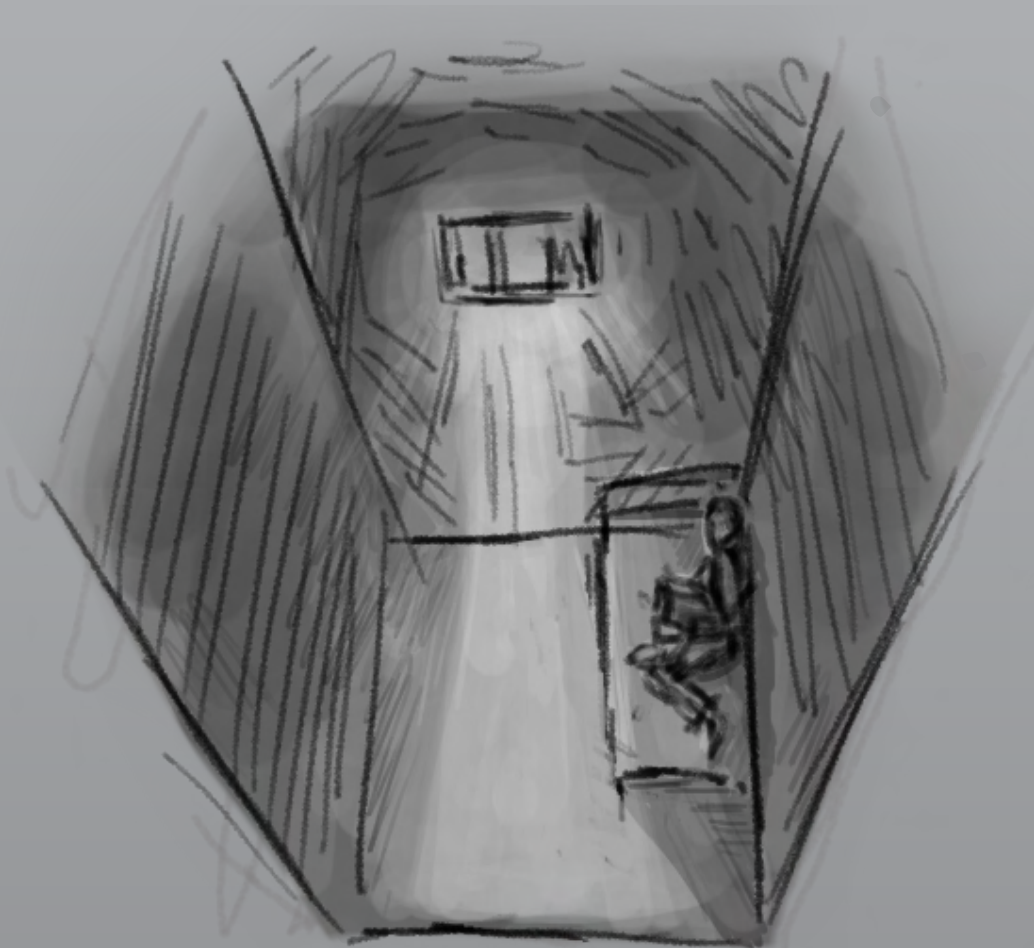
Hundreds. Thousands. Maybe even millions, sent to watch the fires of revolution be smothered before their very eyes from a lonely cell. Left to suffocate on the smoke that filled their cages as their very lifeblood turned to poison. All that remained were the embers of a dream that once seemed so close to fruition.

The silence stretched on, no sign of the coughing's return. B - 003951 shifted back on his cot, the mattress stiff and unyielding.

Nothing more disturbed the night.

---

The cold air whistled through the wrought-iron bars of a minute window fixed to a solitary cell in a lonely prison. The quiet enveloped each and every crack and corridor of the prison wing. Perched atop his bed, pressed snugly against the corner, prisoner B - 003951 shut his eyes and dreamt of what could have been.





# Normal Standing Still

By Adrin Ma

---

My life is normal.

Everyday, I lay awake in the covers,  
Dreading the morning sun as it waves hello  
To the lonely clouds that reach for a friend  
To hold it's trembling hands

Every morning, as the wisps of winter fade to spring,  
I feel the cool blades of grass beneath my fingertips,  
The start of the food chain,  
A sacrificial placeholder,  
For few can give to the many.

Every afternoon, I watch the clock  
Ticking until the sands of time remaining  
deplete, until freedom is achieved.  
For freedom isn't just a movement, nor an action,  
It is the ability to be unrestricted, let anything happen,  
Stand in the face of authority,  
And be allowed autonomy.  
But, when you're young,  
Discourse shrouds what lies beneath.

Every night, I watch the skies,  
Hoping for a glimpse of what could be.  
To catch a slight,  
To catch a sight  
That could validate an existence so futile,  
That could signify a possibility beyond  
what the depths of creativity could conjure.



# Not a Dream But Reality

by Geena Sandhu

## PERFECT WORLD

I wake up, and the world around me seems like fantasy,  
vibrant colours everywhere, but it's all natural.  
Mythical creatures everywhere you look, above and below,  
in the sapphire blue sky or crystal lakes between jade grass.

It seems like a dream.

But this is no dream.

This is home.

## PERFECT PERSON

I feel like I'm in a dream.

She can't possibly be real.

She's so beautiful, perfect lips, vibrant eyes, flawless skin.

And her laugh, her personality!

I don't deserve her in any dream.

But this woman is dream no longer.

Because now, she is to be my wife.

"I do."





# You dreamt of a universe

without the dirt & grit & sun-baked seorch that clings to you, still. Here, we are groundless-hearts hooked & stomachs strung to catch fish, their glass eyes reflecting yours, which reflect mine, which reflect open air & sea. You carve me a ring from the bones. (Too sharp, & not the right kind for wishing, but I do, anyway.) If I were braver, I might have said something about white flesh & scales getting stuck in my teeth but then I see the look on your face when you say you love seafood; your skin sagging. I swallow- cavities & all, my gums a rare red. But in this life, blood is the closest thing we have to fruit & florals, its metallic taste leaving us reminiscent of nectar. Everything else is soaked in brine, in salt. Also song. In June, we eat cake (sodium-flavoured) & sing *happy birthday* twice, once for each time you've said "I love you". You notice then, when my voice shakes, & you notice when I grow to colour in my textbooks & dot my i's with stars & scribble couplets instead of calculations; you notice three months later when I cry at a parent-teacher conference but not at the funeral we missed, so maybe now, in a powder blue August, you will have finally realised what I knew long ago: that my heart reels in too quickly, too delicate to be pierced, that my mouth may forever remain ravenous & rotten, & that even in our dreams, we are left with nothing but a vast ocean & our worst fears- me, blurry-eyed, longing for soil & sun, & you, with only a daughter, born of peach blossom & promise & fragility.

By Emma Zhang

Photo by Trevor McKinnon  
(Unsplash)





# A Celestial Residence

By Jimin Lee

I let my world embrace me and bring me closer to its core. With each step I took, the crystalline liquid underneath me rippled like when raindrops hit the ocean. Each circle was wide and spreading. They were free, just like me.

I tried my best not to tip sideways, even though there were forces of wind that blocked me from falling. The ground was very narrow, as if it was shaped like a single floating cylinder, with water dripping from its sides.

My world has a lot to offer in terms of textures, sounds, and whimsical beings. Its sublime existence is what I hold dear. The light breeze coming from my left and right, the splash of light from gaps beneath my feet. This was such a wonder.

I came to a halt as there was light so luminous it blinded me. My eyes strained to look. It was a door, an open one, with a small gap that shone towards me. Pausing, I peeked through the gap, and soon enough, I was at the other end.

This world, this place really has no end. In fact, this place behind the door is quite eerily nostalgic. Its ambience intrigued me. Each tree stood straight; it was rather orderly and silent. Everything was verdant—covered in all sorts of greens. Moss, fern, ivy, everything grew upon each other. There was a clear sense of sustenance, of everlasting life in this luscious green palace.

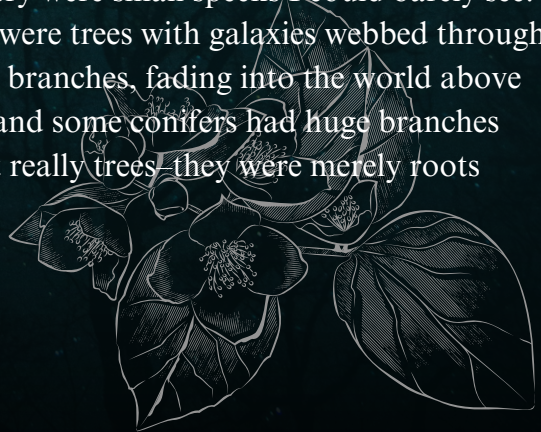
There were sunset-coloured auroras that webbed through each tree, binding them together. It was a plethora of life, all tied to one another like stars in constellations.

How majestic, I thought. I reminisced about everywhere I've entered before. The majesty of everything in my world always stunned me to the core. This forest was a hive. Everything worked for each other. I stood and examined each and every tree, as meticulous as that seems. There were signs of life in the plants themselves. Each crease in a tree was a home for moss, which held pearly stars within them. The ground was very humid, it was even light as well. Each tree yet had their roots deeply established here from the start of time.

I ambled through. With no straightforward path to follow, this green sanctuary wasn't as "orderly" and "reserved" as I thought. I took my chances and kept going into loops. Suddenly, the auroras were below me and the greenery were small specks I could barely see.

I opened my eyes wider and looked down. There were trees with galaxies webbed through their leaves. Some had shooting stars fly out of their branches, fading into the world above them. Fungi and mushrooms took over some trees, and some conifers had huge branches that almost reached me. It was as if the trees weren't really trees—they were merely roots supporting what was becoming of them.

*Photo by Max Saeling  
(Unsplash)*





I was startled, in awe of this world. That's when I felt something shake underneath me. I ignored it. Sometimes my vision would blur, but I knew it was because of the new environment. This stellar universe confirmed how there are multiple sides to sublimity. All of my experiences here were memorable ones, as they all intrigued a sense of wonder. Besides, wonder is what keeps me going. It resides within me in this ethereal palace. My train of thought was interrupted, above me the stars looked like feathered specks of dust. I was unsure if it was the defect of teleportation, as there were moments where everything blurred.

I motioned myself and turned backwards, in hopes of returning to the ground.

Seeing my surroundings turn white, my body came to a halt. Was I floating or falling? I don't even know. The light dispersed, becoming shades of rainbow. Everything was in stripes, my heartbeat increased and fell to a plateau. It was so silent that it felt immense. The ringing and the beams of light were endless.



The walls were full of rust. Gray ash resided in the gaps of rubble. Shattered glass was everywhere. Silent as the winter air, vast as the moon. It was endless, shapeless, an eternity of nothingness.

There she laid, beneath the rubble. Unable to sleep, unable to face the end. Each second her body gained dust, eaten away by her shell in an endless cycle of decay. First the eyes, then her heart, and now it was time for her brain.

Her will laid in the blankets of false eudaemonia. Forever to be hidden, forever to be isolated.





# Reflections and Illusions

By Naya Torrecampo

---

The rain splattered mercilessly on the grass. Raindrops echoed and pounded on the casket and even then, you would still be able to hear my mother's sobs. I looked down at the burial site and then up at the portrait.

My sister was always perfect; her face gleaming amid the gray weather.

Blonde hair in perfect waves and eyes resembling calm clear skies.

The face of pure life meeting death? No. Everyone at this funeral knows it should have been me.

...

Ever since the accident, there were always clothes or empty bottles of wine on the floor to come home to; if this house can still be considered a home. Everyday my mother would always go through the same routine. Sleep. Get up to eat. Drink. Sleep. When I came home from school, she wouldn't even notice me and would only stumble past the stairs to her room. No simple acknowledgement of "Hello" or "How are you?" The silence in the house was loud enough to block out all other possible distractions or conversations that could have been had. Neither of us talked about it and no one ever started.

We hadn't said a word to one another until a few months had passed and one day I came home to my mother murmuring to herself over another bottle. I did the same routine I always did. Ignore, avoid, as if I was never here. I'd walked past the dining table and put one foot on the first step when I heard my mother say, "How was school?" with enthusiasm that had been absent for months. I froze, the conversation seemed unnatural.

"Good, Mom," I replied.

There were a few beats of silence and long stares, as if she was drinking in my presence until finally, she spoke again.

"That's good, Lexie," she paused, "that's good."

And with that, all my composure left me. *Lexie*. Not Ellie, Lexie. I opened my mouth and felt all the words that have never been said over these past few months come to the surface, but as I saw my mother turning back to the table with a content smile, I stopped. I swallowed the rush of emotion back down and the words that were never said remained unsaid.

...



The sun shone bright through the canopy of leaves as I got out of the car. “Have a good day, Ellie! Be safe!” shouted my mother as she honked and drove away. The halls seemed less crowded today and smiles greeted me instead of condolences. Class started with our tests marked and being passed back. The professor stopped at my desk with my paper as I glimpsed the letter A in red ink written on the corner. Everything seemed to be falling into place like the last piece in a puzzle.

During lunch period the bathroom line freed up. Other students often used this time to meet up with their friends and fix themselves up with the mirror. Once again, I was greeted with smiles. It was starting to feel eerie, like a replaying memory. I turned and washed my face in the sink and looked up to see a familiar face that wasn't mine. The face that was staring back resembled me, but there was a glimpse of someone else. As I watched, my reflection shifted between my sister's and my own. The world started to blur before me. I noticed the details that were overlooked before. The time on the clock wasn't clear and the words on the paper were fuzzy lines becoming more obscure the more I tried to visualize it. With that, everything was swallowed by shadows.

...

I stared up at the ceiling as the fan spun in constant circles. The alarm clock beeped at 7:30 sharp; clear and distinct. *It was just a dream.* I got out of bed and walked towards the mirror. The same reflection stared back at me; only this time, it waved. *My reflection waved at me.* Ripples started to appear and move on the surface of the glass as the hand reached out, following the arm until a whole person was standing before me. We were exactly alike except for the way she carried herself. The way she held her head high was as if she didn't feel like she was taking up too much space. Like the space needed to make room for *her*. She gave off the impression that she was supposed to be here, but she wasn't. “Who are- *What* are you?” I stuttered. She or *I* didn't say anything. She simply looked at me and smiled. A part of me was wondering if I was still in a dream. The reflection walked out of the room and down the stairs as I stood there speechless. There was no scientific or even sensible explanation for this. It shouldn't have been possible. I raced out of the room and slowed down to the last few steps of stairs to see the reflection or what was a reflection having a conversation with my mother. It brought her to tears and even made her smile. “Thank you, Ellie,” she croaked. After embracing each other the reflection walked away and towards me. “What did you say to her?” I asked. She stared as if observing me intensely. “The words you never said.” she replied.

...

Within a few weeks the house returned to what it looked like before everything changed. The floor was clear of clothes and bottles were no longer a necessity. The reflection managed to do what I couldn't for months. She made my mother live her life again. We co-existed in a way, her moving in and out of the mirror every time she was needed for something I couldn't do. She aced every exam; went to social events that I did not want to go through and helped whenever my mother needed something. She reminded me of my sister that way, being flawless in every way humanly possible. It made me live my life as if I had a cheat code, so I never questioned it. It became so natural that I didn't even notice when she went from a part of my life to living it. Every day she would come home with a trophy or an A and even started to build her own relationships with my friends and family to the point where I had no choice but to lay in bed and watch the ceiling fan turn in constant circles. As if I had just woken up from a dream that never ended.

...



Soon, weeks turned into months and the small warning in the back of my head had become sirens loud enough that it was impossible to ignore them anymore. I was barely able to leave my room anymore. On the days that I did try to, the reflection was already down the stairs making her presence known. She greeted my mother with the same sincere smile I always saw in that dream. She had my sister's smile.

...

The sky turned from the clearest blue to a foggy midnight as the day went by. My reflection would come back around the same time to return to the mirror. As scheduled, the familiar face appeared before me. Strangely enough, I didn't hear anyone coming. It was either because of that light airy walk of hers or simply because I was too focused on what I was about to say next to notice anything. "I want you to go back to the mirror," I blurted, "for good this time."

We stood there in silence for a few moments, with her observing me like the first day she stepped out of the mirror.

"No." she stated.

I blinked. "No?" I asked. That was one of the rare words she had ever spoken to me. The only times I had seen her interact was when she was with other people and even then, I never got the chance to hear her form words as I watched from a distance.

She took a few steps forward, "I helped you get your mother back on her feet. I made her and your friends proud by receiving all those trophies or grades. As far as I know, everyone wants me here."

"But I *am* you." I deadpanned.

Her blank, unreadable face became quizzical. "Are you?"

The question was enough to demand silence from me. She was right. *She* did the things I couldn't. *She* said the words I couldn't. *She* was there for everything. *I wasn't*. "The difference between dreams and reality is action. I saw that on one of the posters on the school bulletin board. Seems a bit cheesy to me, but accurate." she stated. "What do you want? Why are you here?" I pressed. The more she stayed the more I felt like I was being pushed into a box, crammed into a space and unable to get out. Her eyes flicked slightly to the right behind me. I realized how close I was to the wall. *And to the mirror*. I wasn't the only one who wanted the other gone. She lunged. I ducked and stepped aside, but not before she could trip me, knocking me off my balance. I hit the floor hard and winced. She started making her way towards me as I stood back up once again. We grabbed each other's shoulders and began pushing each other in front of the mirror. The surface of it began to ripple and glow. Our shoulders were only inches away from the mirror when we were blinded by a sudden flash of light. The world disappeared before our eyes.

...

I watched as my mother gave me a smile before going to school. She told me good luck on the upcoming math test and to be safe. My friends greeted me as I walked down the walls with a carefree stride and a calm smile. Life seemed to be going perfectly for me, or her. I watched from the other side of the glass as she went on with her day. Being trapped in here, wherever this is, started out with a wave of anger. Anger that I was stuck. Anger that she took my life. Anger that there was a sliver of myself telling me that she was right to. Days had gone by, and that anger turned to acceptance.



I was able to move between any surface that gave off a reflection, moving swiftly like a current through glass or even water. It was around the time when my sister passed away and I was watching through the reflection of the gravestone as my mother placed a bouquet of flowers and the reflection of me stood beside her comforting her. My mother placed her hand in the center where my sister's name was engraved. I placed my hand level with hers. It's as if I wasn't alone. "Ellie?" a voice asked. I turned around to see where it came from. Until now I was confident that I was alone in here. The person stepped into the light, illuminated by the gray skies on the other side of the reflection. A familiar face emerged from the darkness. "Lexie?" I called. I didn't move. She shouldn't be here. She *can't*.

"You were dead. I- I saw it. The car-" I stuttered.

"That wasn't me." she replied. Lexie gazed at me with an exhausted look, like she's gone through this story a million times in her head. The same look I had on my face after the anger.

The realization hit me. "*How long have you been here?*" I asked.

She gave me a tired smile, "How long have I been the perfect daughter?"

All the grades, the trophies, down to the *smile*. Everything I was taught to be had never been real at all.



Photo by Farzad Serdagaht  
(Unsplash)



# broken dreams

by Amy Fu

I wake up with a pounding in my head  
I wake from the nightmares that seize me with every night's dream,  
Hide and seek from the monsters that live rent-free.  
Standing tall on the hills, wreaking havoc down below.  
Death chases me. I chase back.  
And when it finally gets close, fear finds its way.  
I am only a ghost that can watch and not prevent

I wake up in cold sweat, rust coating my tongue.  
I wake with shame and anguish, a multitude of emotions  
But vengeance rises like a tsunami and ends the flood.  
The world is dead, filled with only greed and pride.  
Anger takes its toll on life  
So I let it burn away, heat consuming all  
Finger to the flame, seeking wholeness

I wake up to a drifting feeling, calm washing over me  
I wake to see the sun shining and the birds chirping, spring in all its glory  
Reflect, healing and peace of mind  
The valley hosts a rainbow of colour, yet it is still calm  
Rebuilding will take its time  
But the pace will increase, brick by brick  
For this is not the first time I've broken the mirror in my mind





# Tearing the Dream's Grip

By Ashley Heo

People often say dreams are merely fiction and don't affect reality. *What nonsense.*

Hazel stood in the center of a small square room. All four walls were made of mirrors, creating an eerie atmosphere that made one feel constantly watched. A chill trickled down her spine as the gaze of the infinite pairs of eyes in the mirrors pierced through her. A familiar wooden table stood a few feet ahead of her when she looked ahead. On top of it lay three shimmering golden cards, all face down on the table's surface.

Hazel had been in this room countless times before. She dreamt about this exact same room with the exact same table every night. The only things that differed on each occasion were the illustrations on the front of the three cards. *Can they be called illustrations?* They seemed like regular drawings at a glance, but it was impossible to miss the slight movements in the graphics once one took a closer look. The cards were just as mysterious as their powers. *Yes, powers.* These cards were unique – *magical, even* – since the ever-so-slightly-moving pictures on their front sides could tell Hazel her future.

Hazel gulped as she slowly crept toward the table to get a closer look at the cards. She could feel the ominous auras the cards constantly gave off. Her fingers twitched in anticipation even though her head desperately told her to run away. But from the countless nights she had spent in the room, she knew she must flip the cards if she wanted to wake up. Taking a deep breath, she pinched the corner of the left-most card and flipped it.

*A clock*, one with a deep red rim and two pointy hands that read 8:30. The faint ticking of clock hands began to echo in the room, but Hazel couldn't figure out where the sound was coming from. Gently setting the card back down on the table—this time face up—her hand moved toward the second card and flipped it over.

A close-up picture of a black cat caught Hazel off-guard. As she examined the card a little closer, its whiskers gently swayed with every exhale. At the same time, its deep honey-yellow eyes pierced through her own – strong enough to leave an afterimage whenever she blinked. Laying the card back down, her hands hesitantly slid the last, right-most card toward her and flipped it.



*Oh no.* Hazel's eyes caught the picture on the card; it was a hand covered in blood. *This can't be good.* Her hand shook violently, but her fingers seemed glued to the thin, glittering card. *Drip...* Hazel's breath caught in her throat as viscous crimson liquid oozed from the card onto the marble floor. The dense fluid quickly filled the enclosed chamber and continued to rise. Hazel desperately tried to swim, scream, run – do anything she could to escape – but her feet were stuck to the ground, and her cries were soundless. Within seconds, the fluid completely engulfed Hazel, and gooey crimson liquid gushed into her throat when she opened her mouth. The clock's ticking sound echoed in her flooded ears as she sank into complete unconsciousness.

Hazel's eyes shot open, and she stayed unmoving beneath her heavy blankets for a moment, trying to gather herself. Breathing raggedly, she sat upright on her bed as she registered her surroundings. Her head pounded; she could feel her veins struggling to keep up with her panicked heart. Sweat soaked through the back of her t-shirt and drenched her forehead. Gradually, her breathing slowed enough for her to calm down. That was when she remembered something: SCHOOL! Hazel shot her gaze toward the red-rimmed clock on her wall – 8:30, it read. Immediately, she sprinted out of her room to get ready. As she stumbled to put on her shoes and raced out of the house, she cursed her damned dreams with all her heart.

*I must stop my dreams.*

\*\*\*

A chilly breeze seeped through Hazel's thin cotton shirt, and she couldn't help but shiver. The sky overhead was as gray as Hazel's uneasiness; she had been anxious that day at school because of her dream and the terrible occurrence it foreshadowed. Death. Murder. Accidents. Every possible scenario flew through her mind, but none were even remotely pleasant.

*Swoosh.* A pitch-black figure shot across Hazel's vision, jolting her out of her worries. She felt as if her heart had skipped a beat but managed to hold her stance. A lean black cat stared back at her, its eyes the same deep yellow as the cat on the card in her dream. But as Hazel slowly leaned forward to examine the animal more closely, the cat abruptly turned and dashed away, disappearing around the corner of a building.

The rest of the walk to the art studio was monotonous – no car crashes, no calls from the hospital informing Hazel that one of her loved ones had been injured. But it was much too early to feel relief because the cards in Hazel's dreams *never* lie, and what they foreshadow can *never* be prevented. Once, about a year ago, one of the cards in her dream had shown her an illustration of a heart broken in two. Hazel had predicted that it was forewarning her relationship with her boyfriend, but no matter how hard she tried to prevent it—and she tried very hard—her boyfriend broke up with her that day.



Hazel could not recall when she began getting these magical dreams, but that was to be expected since she barely had any memories from her childhood. A car crash, she was told by her parents. The dreams had been there once she regained consciousness, but she wasn't sure if she had already had them before or if they were the accident's aftermath. One thing she did remember though – a light. A clear recollection of a blinding white flash that was undoubtedly from before the incident. She knew it wasn't a post-traumatic memory of the accident because the crash, at least from what she heard, happened in broad daylight. This memory may be her only clue in stopping her magical – but more like cursed – dreams. Two of the card's prophecies had already come true; she must be quick.

During the painting session, Hazel continued to dwell hard on what the bloody hands could symbolize. Every other sound blurred except one within her mind reminding her of the worst possible scenarios. More than often, her hand froze over the canvas, and paint dripped from her paintbrush without her noticing. As it turned out, pondering on life-changing problems and painting simultaneously doesn't work well together. Outside, the sky had already turned a shade of ink blue, reminding Hazel that time was running out with every second passing. Hazel bolted out of the building as soon as her class ended and started toward her house. This is bad. Despite contemplating this issue for the entire day, she had not found a viable solution. The closer she got to home, the more powerless she felt.

Meow. A small but distinct sound flowed into Hazel's ears, and she stopped to look around to find its origin. Although it took a few seconds, she found the black cat from earlier sitting on the flowerbed by the sidewalk. Its smooth black fur was wholly camouflaged in the darkness of the evening; it would have been impossible to locate it without its eyes standing out in the blackness like two honey-coloured stars in the night sky. Then it abruptly stood up and turned away, but before it began walking, it turned its head to stare at Hazel again. Somehow Hazel knew what the cat was doing; it was commanding her to follow it. She trailed after the cat as it moved between buildings, roads, and parked cars. Thankfully, the streetlights gave Hazel enough visibility to proceed in accordance with the creature. She knew it was stupid and she knew it was strange. Following a cat in the night? Who knows where the cat will lead her to? Is the cat even leading her somewhere, or is it simply running away? But Hazel trusted her gut feeling. It was practically begging her to follow, so she did.

By the time the cat had stopped, Hazel was panting and wheezing. She looked around at her surroundings; they were at a park. Hazel knew this park. She had seen this place in the picture albums her parents kept. From what she'd seen, it seemed she had come here very often as a child, but she never had the chance to revisit it after the accident. The cat led her further into a secluded area of the park, and there lay an old, rusty blue door that looked as if it were a hundred years old. Hazel shivered as she slowly stepped toward it and raised her hand to grab the cool metal handle. As suspicious as it looked, Hazel wasn't scared. Instead, her heartbeat was quicker than before, not from the running or fear, but from anticipation. The strange familiarity from the door made Hazel confident that this was the key to stopping her magical dreams. Slowly, she turned the handle.



As soon as the door creaked open, the familiar blinding white light engulfed Hazel, making her flinch and shut her eyes closed. When she hesitantly opened them again, she found herself in the same enclosed mirrored room from her dreams. Not a hint of the blood that filled the chamber earlier could be found. The square table stood ahead of her, but instead of three cards, there were only two this time. Carefully approaching the cards, Hazel raised her hands to flip the left one as usual. Still, a foreign question engraved on the table caught her eye and halted her. ‘Do you want to know your future?’ The words yes and no were inscribed above the two cards. Hazel was sure her past self would have chosen yes as the answer. But this time was different; she no longer wanted to know the future, or rather, she no longer wanted her dreams to control her destiny.

“I won’t let my dreams control my reality anymore,” declared Hazel as she flipped the card under the engraved no.

As Hazel flipped the card, long shadowy arms shot out from its frontside and grabbed her by her head. They scratched, pulled, and shook her, seemingly trying to pull her into the black void that was the picture on the card she picked up. Hazel struggled to escape from their grasp, but the hands yanked at her harder the more she wrestled against them. Rip the card, a voice murmured; whether it was from within her own mind or not, Hazel didn’t know. But it couldn’t get any worse than this. Still struggling against the savage ghostly hands, she grabbed the card with two hands and tore it apart as hard as possible.

*Drip... drip...* Once the card was ripped in half, the shadowy hands disappeared in the blink of an eye. Thick crimson liquid leaked from the cut section of the card onto Hazel’s hands and floor. Hazel felt herself losing consciousness as her vision blurred; the last thing she saw was her blood-covered hands, precisely like the ones she saw in her dream.

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A sliver of golden sunlight peeked through the curtains. It illuminated Hazel’s room as she slept beneath her warm, cozy blankets. The sudden brightness woke her, and she slowly opened her eyes. As Hazel leisurely took in her tranquil surroundings, she smiled.





# Contributors

**Aden (Seongjin) Lee** is the writer from South Korea. He started writing since he was 13 years old. One of the things he liked is to read a novel.

**Adrin Ma** is a 16 year-old poet and musician from Vancouver, Canada. Whenever enjoying some downtime, they love writing dramatic poetry and comedy songs to share with their peers!

**Amy Fu** is a trash panda who has done numerous projects on nuclear science, founded area 52, had a brief stint on earth-616 as a reckless driver and plotted her world domination (failed... or has it?). you can often find her on sale in the produce aisle, dreaming about being bit by a radioactive spider and starring in the fourteenth sequel of spiderman or nowhere at all because she is simply a figment of your insanity. she continues to create random misfits with her imagination and her love of storytelling(although not always accurate) will continue to sustain her english grades- barely...

**Ashley Heo** is a 16-year-old student born in Seoul, South Korea. Despite her studious reputation, she is a passionate anime/game/webtoon enthusiast. Whenever she grins into the distance for seemingly no reason, she is thinking of her favourite character(s) from her favourite games and series.

**Em Wong** is a 17-year-old aspiring writer from Vancouver, Canada. When they're not suffering through school, they love writing stories and songs and going out with friends.

**Emma Zhang** is a Chinese-Canadian writer with a love for story and art. She hopes to share more of her works in the future.

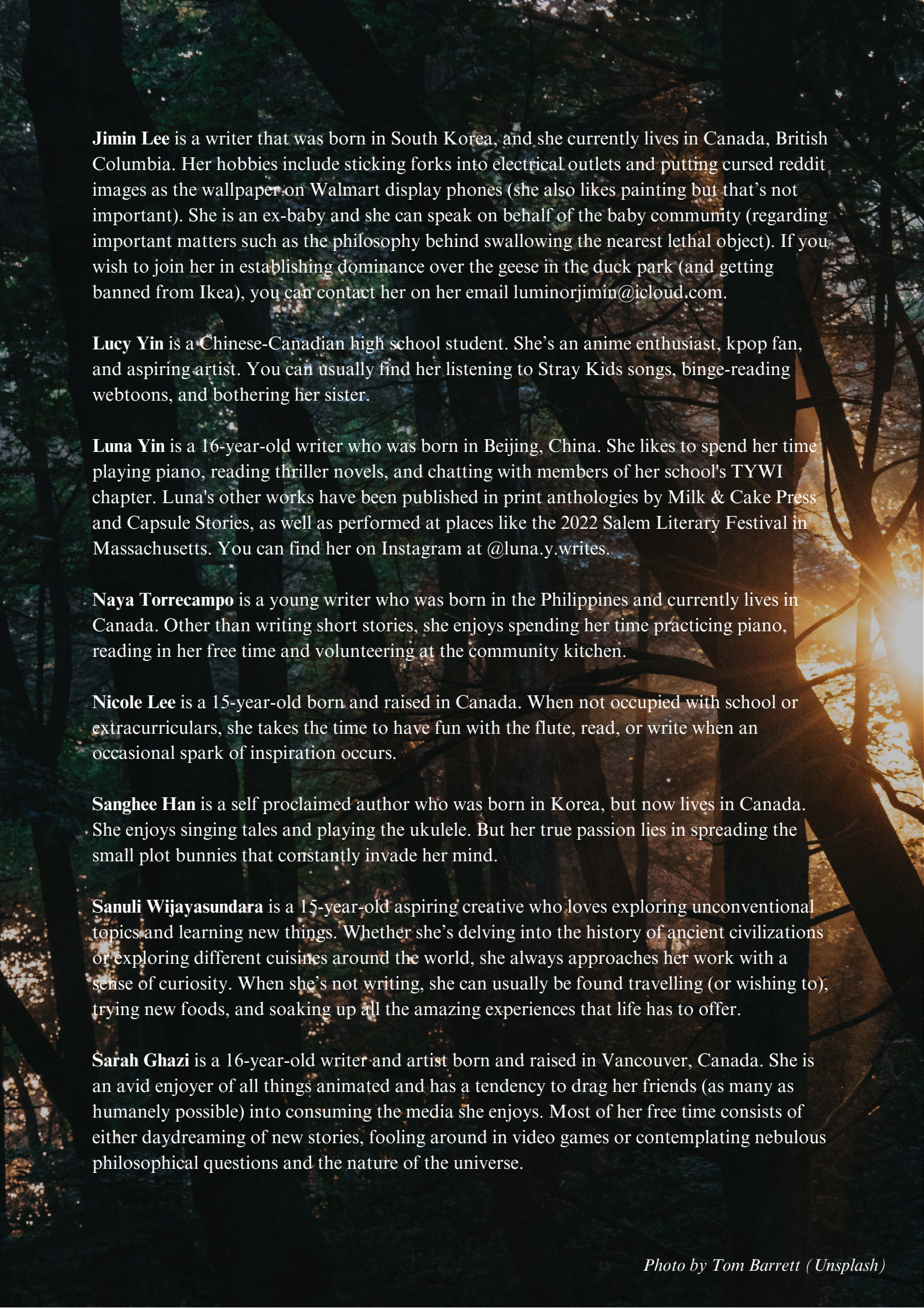
**Euri Jeong** is a 15 year old student at R.E. Mountain Secondary School, British Columbia, Canada. She is a huge fan of Kurzgesagt and Twosetviolin, and enjoys playing the piano, reading books or articles in her free time.

Born in England but now in BC, Canada, 15 year old **Geena Sandhu** is someone who spends too much time in worlds of fiction, whether it's watching, reading, or writing something. Her whole world revolves around anything and everything but reality. Good luck finding her fan fiction account if you wanna reach her or read more of her work.

**Iris Mou** is a 15-year-old student whose hobbies include reading, writing, and playing video games. She enjoys seeing all the various forms stories can take and aspires to be a person who can craft them for others as well.

**Jacob St. Jean** is a 15 year old bibliophile, who currently lives with his cat in BC, Canada. He spends his time thinking up all sorts of fantastical universes, and occasionally writing them down.





**Jimin Lee** is a writer that was born in South Korea, and she currently lives in Canada, British Columbia. Her hobbies include sticking forks into electrical outlets and putting cursed reddit images as the wallpaper on Walmart display phones (she also likes painting but that's not important). She is an ex-baby and she can speak on behalf of the baby community (regarding important matters such as the philosophy behind swallowing the nearest lethal object). If you wish to join her in establishing dominance over the geese in the duck park (and getting banned from Ikea), you can contact her on her email [luminorjimin@icloud.com](mailto:luminorjimin@icloud.com).

**Lucy Yin** is a Chinese-Canadian high school student. She's an anime enthusiast, kpop fan, and aspiring artist. You can usually find her listening to Stray Kids songs, binge-reading webtoons, and bothering her sister.

**Luna Yin** is a 16-year-old writer who was born in Beijing, China. She likes to spend her time playing piano, reading thriller novels, and chatting with members of her school's TYWI chapter. Luna's other works have been published in print anthologies by Milk & Cake Press and Capsule Stories, as well as performed at places like the 2022 Salem Literary Festival in Massachusetts. You can find her on Instagram at [@luna.y.writes](https://www.instagram.com/luna.y.writes).

**Naya Torrecampo** is a young writer who was born in the Philippines and currently lives in Canada. Other than writing short stories, she enjoys spending her time practicing piano, reading in her free time and volunteering at the community kitchen.

**Nicole Lee** is a 15-year-old born and raised in Canada. When not occupied with school or extracurriculars, she takes the time to have fun with the flute, read, or write when an occasional spark of inspiration occurs.

**Sanghee Han** is a self proclaimed author who was born in Korea, but now lives in Canada. She enjoys singing tales and playing the ukulele. But her true passion lies in spreading the small plot bunnies that constantly invade her mind.

**Sanuli Wijayasundara** is a 15-year-old aspiring creative who loves exploring unconventional topics and learning new things. Whether she's delving into the history of ancient civilizations or exploring different cuisines around the world, she always approaches her work with a sense of curiosity. When she's not writing, she can usually be found travelling (or wishing to), trying new foods, and soaking up all the amazing experiences that life has to offer.

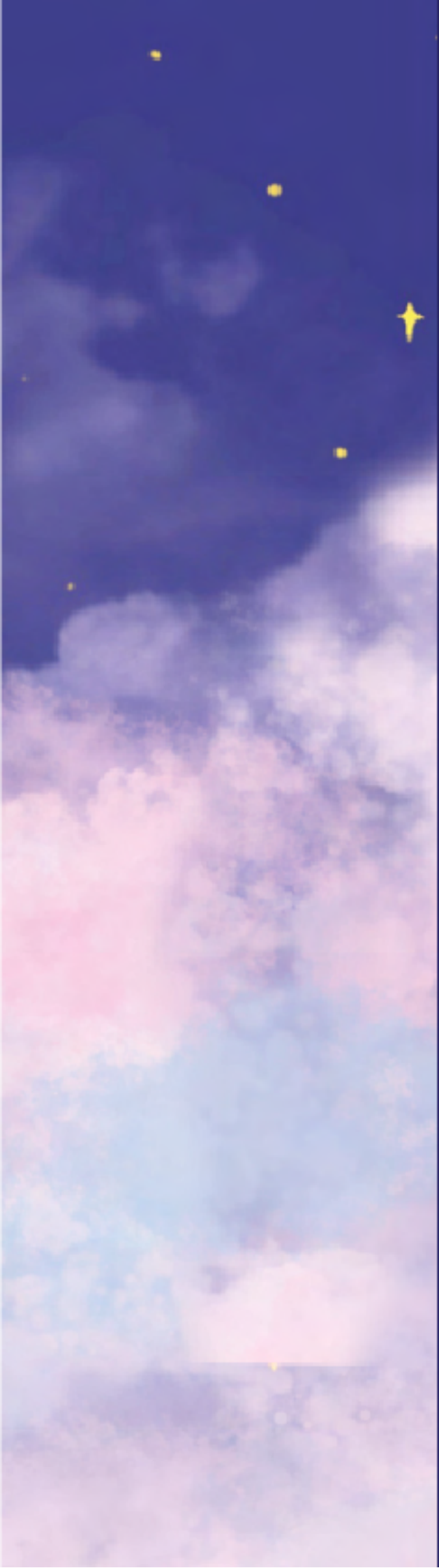
**Sarah Ghazi** is a 16-year-old writer and artist born and raised in Vancouver, Canada. She is an avid enjoyer of all things animated and has a tendency to drag her friends (as many as humanely possible) into consuming the media she enjoys. Most of her free time consists of either daydreaming of new stories, fooling around in video games or contemplating nebulous philosophical questions and the nature of the universe.





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