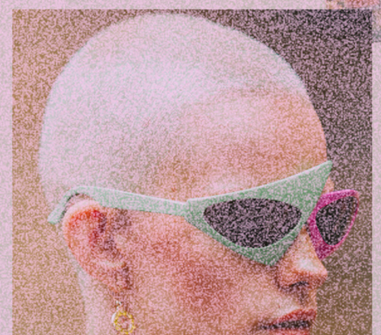
Beautiful



MemOriEs

Fion Li
@tea_and_socks

Kassandra Kurek

We'll Meet Again In My Dreams

The metallic, primary coloured bars await. The air smells crisp, fresh, and bright as my shoes crunch through a display of nature's art. Light in weight and spirit, my small body explodes with energy uncontained. There was a bake sale this afternoon, and the orange icing of a pumpkin cupcake remains a breathless shadow on the corners of my lips.

Oh! There's the bell. Bouncing off of the fluffiest clouds I could find in the sky, I burst through the doors. Snoopy is waiting for me on the projector screen, ready to entertain. His black and white silhouette leaves a wandering thought of a time long past. "A treat," my warm, comforting teacher says. Hugging her is like hugging a brand new pillow, and I feel safe.

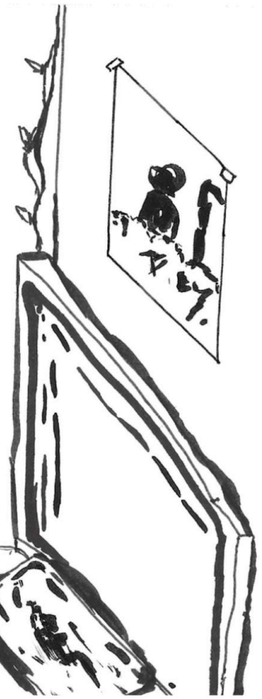
Living off of the high of being eight years old and free to explore what life has to offer, I lay on the floor unbothered by the dust and tell my best friend about my day. Her black eyes seem intrigued and inquisitive, but she doesn't respond, her golden-furred mouth opening into a small smile. Our souls tie together in understanding.

I could live this day forever, and in my dreams I have. All that is left is the understanding of freedom, of joy, of love. As an adult chasing glimmers of happiness that once was, all I can do is dream.

childhood bedroom

Welcome home beautiful
it's always nice to see ya

it's been too long, really.



taylor_webb
esnoozysastre

Everything Else Just Happens

By: Sarah Perlmutter

I only dream in the evenings
when the sun starts setting and
after-school sitcoms muffle my thoughts.

Sugary cereal only exists if you are eating it;
the dew smells like honey;
I possess magic;

princes look like rock stars;
there are loud cars for convenience sake;
water whispers terrible things.

They make sense and they don't,
and I can't quite remember if
the prince falls in love with me or
I escape first.

The Impact of Poetry

By: Mireille Shenouda

Poems can transport and inspire

With soft words or harsh ones like fire.
It is an undeniable fact:
It has a significant impact.
Either soothing like a calm sea
Or gentle like a bird's melody.

It can also encourage to rebel
When mishaps occur like hell.
The urgent need to unwind
Can disturb seriously our mind.
In both cases, words can flow
Writing feverishly, revealing our woe.
Or transporting us to a peaceful island
Burying our misery in the sand.

Endurance is a virtue
Strength of character must ensue.
The distress that life causes
Life is not a bed of roses.
People believe and feel
That poetry has the power to heal.
Extroverts will agree with me.
Introverts will disagree.

Optimism is a cure
Helping us to endure.
Let's gather to read poetry
And accept life's journey
With its joys and sorrows.
That's how a human being grows.

Gutters

Theo McQuiggan

The one thing I'll give the VP is that she lets me read in the office lobby. Most teachers want me to sit quietly and "contemplate my wrongdoings." As if. I didn't even do anything wrong.

"Sit there." Mr. Lawrence from history class escorts another girl to the chair beside me. She looks my age, but I've never seen her before. But from her pink miniskirt and sparkly halter top, I doubt we'd ever run in the same social circles. (That implies I even have a social circle though). Her arms are crossed over her chest, chestnut curls billowing down her back, scowling so deeply her face looks ready to break.

"What're you in for?" I ask. "Broke a nail?"

"Fuck off!" she snaps.

"Jeez, never mind then, I was just asking."

"Yeah, by being a bitch about it."

"Sorry, okay? You're not one to talk though, FYI."

She snorts unkindly. I look back down at my comic and sink deeper into my black hoodie. That's what I get for trying to talk to a pretty girl.

"Some asshole stole my pager," she says. "So, I punched him in the gut."

I look back at her. "Which asshole?"

"Jerry or Jeremy or something."

"Jeremy Mcintosh. Yeah, he is an asshole. Good news is that he probably won't try that again. He acts tough but the second you fight back he folds faster than tissue paper."

She snorts, the corner of her lip pulled up in a smirk. “Glad to know. How about you?”

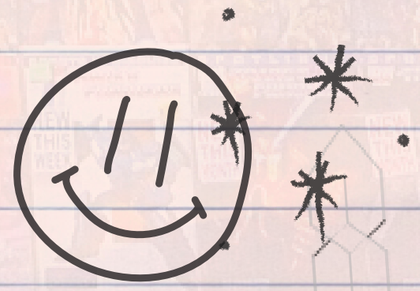
“Reading in class.”

“Seriously? That’s it?”

“Well...I may have told the girl who was flicking my ear non-stop to fuck off while I was reading.”

She throws her head back and laughs loudly. Her voice is deep, rich, and lovely. When she stops, she offers her perfectly manicured hand out to me.

“I’m Drew,” she says.



I take her hand. “Ava.”

“What’re you reading?”

“Batman/Superman.”

“The new ones or the original Loeb run?”

My eyes go wider than the records from my dad’s old collection. “You know about comics?”

“A bit. My twin sister loves them, so I listen to her rant about them all the time. Batman is her favourite.”

“Well, duh. Batman’s the best! He’s one of the greatest heroes and doesn’t have a single power. That’s amazing!”

“I guess,” she sighs.

“You don’t agree?”

“He’s just so...broody.”

I scoff but I’m still smiling. “Again, duh. He’s Batman! Being broody is like his whole thang.”

"I like Superman better. At least he’s happy about saving people.”

“But he’s so *boring*.”

Drew scoffs this time. And just like me, she keeps grinning. “People only think he’s boring because he’s not all dark and moody like Batman. But he always tries to do good with a smile on his face, even when it’s hard. I think there’s a lot more beneath his bright colours and smiles. You just have to look deeper.”

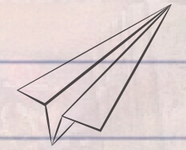
We stare at each other for a long moment. We say nothing, yet I feel like I’m starting to understand much more.

“You wanna read with me?” I ask.

“Sure.” Drew moves her chair closer. She leans over me, and I notice she smells like rosewater. I like rosewater. “Christ, my sister was right, the art is terrible.”

I snort and shake my head. “Yeah, McGuiness wasn’t the best.” I flip to the next page. “Hey, wanna hear a fun fact?”

“I’m all ears.”



“The spaces between the panels are called ‘gutters.’”

“Like rain gutters?”

“Yeah, because they’re long, thin, and wrap around something big.”

“Oo, that’s cool!”

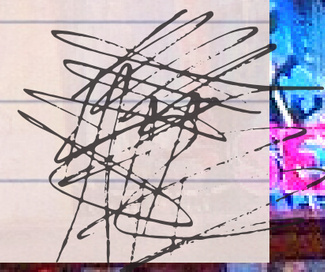
“I know right? It’s also because they’re the empty space between what’s supposed to be the interesting parts. Catch the runoff and all. But I think the gutters are way more important than people think.”

“Totes agree. They determine the pacing and how you read the story.”

“Exactly! Comics wouldn’t be comics without them, but people overlook them.”

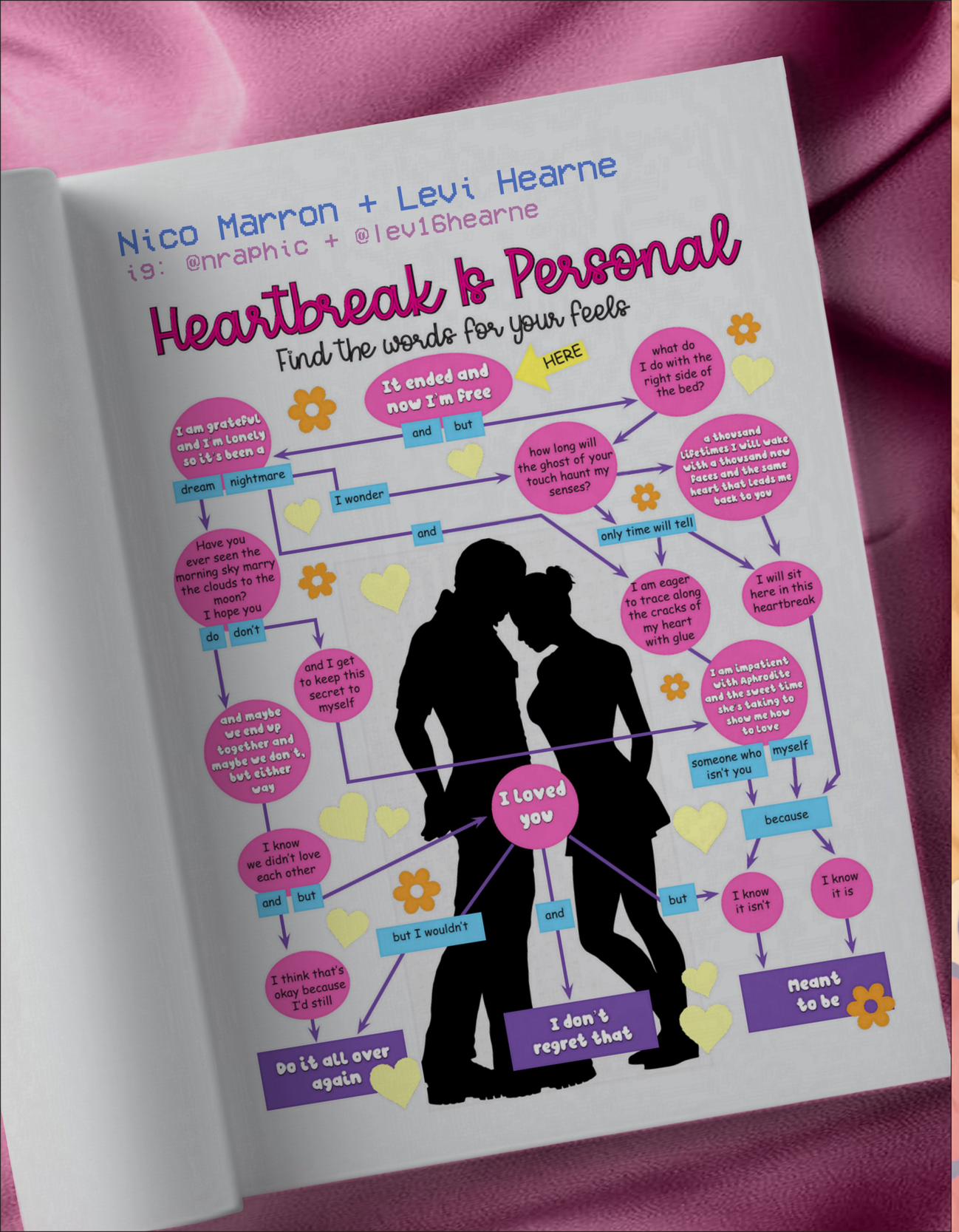
“Well, sometimes the best stuff is found in places people don’t notice. But the more interesting ones know where to look.”

Our eyes meet, smirks matching almost perfectly.



“Yeah,” I say. “The gutters can be pretty fun.”

“Totally,” Drew agrees.



IG: @samanthacarlyk

"When Friends Become Frenemies, The Pain of Toxic Female Friendships"

Samantha Kaszas

Every woman I know has been there; caught in a vicious, toxic relationship with their best female friend. "Frenemies". It's a label and a lifestyle that has been shoved down our throats by society for years. Some of the greatest hit teen movies and books centre around the theme of toxic female relationships: *Mean Girls, Thirteen, Gossip Girl, the Betty & Veronica comics.*

It's so normalized, no one bats an eye when they get wrapped up in one themselves – or see someone they love in the vicious cycle. In fact, the notion is now a widely accepted cliché as people believe "girls are catty" and "women are cutthroat in the workplace." I've been told when I have a job interviewer, I should hope that it's a man because women are jealous of each other. Is any of this true? Of course, there is an element of truth to most outdated stereotypes but there is *so much more* to it.

Growing up, I had a string of parasitic friendships that started as young as 6 years old and lasted throughout my teen years. Every time I was able to shrug myself off one of these girls, a new one would eventually appear in my life. Now that's not to say that I was just some listless victim in the situation. I definitely had my part in these harmful relationships. There was something addicting about constantly trying to one-up my friend.Trying to prove myself to her whenever she put me down. Daring myself to do reckless things and behave in ways I was uncomfortable with, in order to make myself seem cool and desirable. Each of these acts would eventually result in shame and anguish afterward. At the time, I was unable to clearly see what was going on and how harmful our friendship was. To both of us.

What is it that makes girls or women act in this way? Finding a friend, an ally, a sister, only to turn the relationship into a soul-sucking, parasitic exchange. I, for one, believe that there is *a lot* of pressure,especially on girls and young women, to be an image of perfection.Desirable,fun-loving,feminine,and at the same time "one of the guys." I think that a girl's best friend can become her outlet. Her safe place where she can divulge all of her insecurities, fears and failures. But she's too insecure to be comfortable with that level of vulnerability,and without having the tools to deal with all of these negative emotions, her outlet, her best friend, becomes the target of her abuse. Someone she can belittle and demean, so that she can feel superior.

This is sad. It breaks my heart to see women hurt each other *but* yes, it is human nature. This is not a female only problem but it is a specific type of relationship that I have experienced and seen in other women,that I think is expected and normalized by our society.

Eventually, I gained some clarity on the things that were making me miserable.I discovered that my own toxic friendships were among them and I cut those girls out. Cold and clean. I was honest. I told them that they had hurt me,that I didn't feel like the person I wanted to be around them, and that I needed to move on.It was hard, but it was the beginning of a healing process that would eventually allow me to find truly wonderful female friendships.

For a while, I wasn't able to manifest those friendships. To be honest, I didn't know how to be a great friend either. I turned my attention to boys, to men. I became a "one of the guys" girl. I was happy to hang around guys. We had a lot of the same interests at the time: food, drinking, and video games. They usually didn't put me down and often made me feel good about myself. I know what you're thinking: "Isn't that just because they wanted to get in your pants?" Well actually, yes, you're absolutely right.They *did want to get in my pants*.This didn't matter to me though.I was so eager to feel like I belonged somewhere that I was happy to play that role, of the just-a-guy-girl, the object of my friends' desire. This new found fulfillment was short lived, however. Eventually, my guy friends got tired of being "just friends"; now I was coaxed into romantic relationships with my male best friends, for fear of losing them too. I was also bitter and jealous towards other women. I became a girl who said, "I'd rather be around guys. Girls are so bitchy."

I told one of my current friends that I had once been a "woman hater" and mostly hung out with guys for a period in my teen years. She laughed and said, "Ohhh, you were one of *those girls*." As she said those words, shame flooded my body. My jealousy and resentment of other women is not something I was or am proud of. It was something that was borne of anger, hurt and intense insecurity. Luckily, it was something I was able to transform.

After high school, it got easier. I don't know about you, but I was meeting many more like minded people who were also eager to make genuine friends. From what I understand, that is the experience of many who have the gift of going to a post-secondary school. While I attended film school,I met many wonderful friends, *female friends*, that are still great friends to this day! Those girls became the girls who I grew with, who challenged me, and who I shared my insecurities with, safely. Now, along with my best female friends, I was pushing myself outside of my comfort zone; I was daring myself to do new things but it wasn't coming from an unhealthy desire for approval, it was coming from a place of curiosity and of growth. These were the friends I became a woman with. These were the women who showed me that friendships are supportive, are fun, are beautiful.

Once you discover how to be a true friend, and you connect with others who are also ready, it *just gets better and better*. My best friends now have helped me through some seriously dark places. They have helped me gain perspective on emotional situations that I am too close to, to see clearly. They have encouraged me to go after the things that I want, and believed in me when no one else has. They are the inspiring and beautiful people that I get to share the joys and anguishes of my life with. *They are there for me.*

The older I get, the more grateful I am for these genuine friendships. As I mature, I realize that being "cool" doesn't really mean anything, and it's certainly not worth having a friend that you put down just to make yourself feel good (or vice versa). If you are in this situation, if you are hurting because of a friend, I just want to say that I get it. I've been there, I understand how easy it is to fall into a toxic friendship. On some level, it is natural. To be competitive with our friends, to want to be the alpha female; but we don't have to follow that basic nature, do we? I think we are finally starting to get it. As empathy and mindfulness techniques become more commonplace in our society, we understand each other more. When a girl is having issues with another girl, less and less will her mother say, "Oh, she's just jealous of you, honey." And hey, pop culture is starting to get on board with powerful feminine relationships! Just look at *Booksmart (2019)* the biggest hit teen female flick of the last decade!

So pay attention to the friends in your life who make you flourish, and nurture those friendships. If you find yourself in a toxic friendship now, be gentle with yourself and forgiving to yourself and your friend. Try to be honest about your own shortcomings, and salvage the friendship if it's worth it. If it's time to move on, you'll know. Bottom line is, friendships should feed you, not drain you.

"Female friendships that work are relationships in which women help each other belong to themselves."

-Louise Bernikow

DIY Y2K INSPIRED TOP

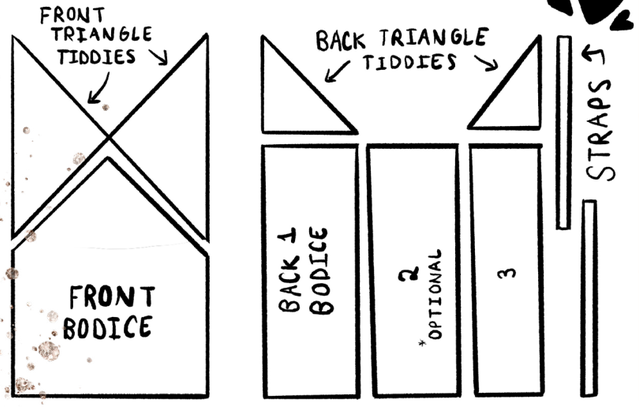
@cloudeus

SUPPLIES:

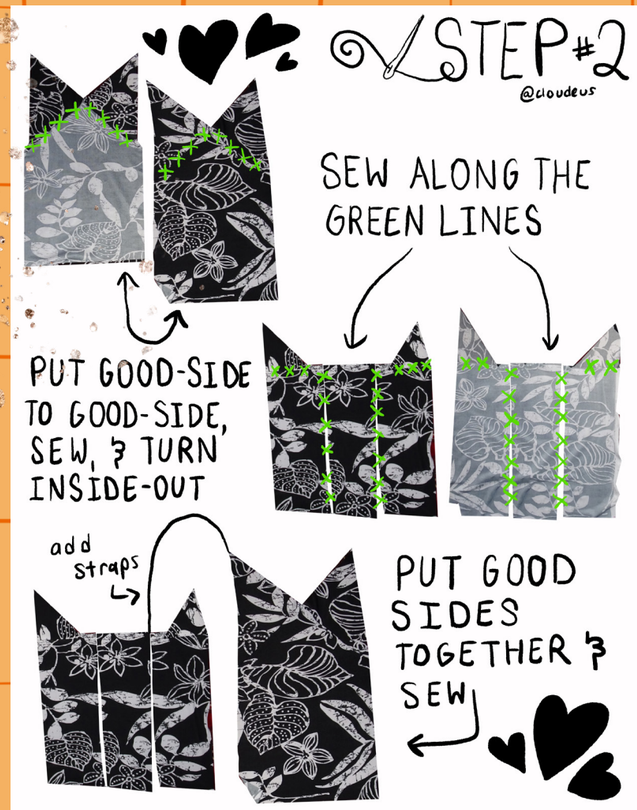
FITTED T-SHIRT for refrence →

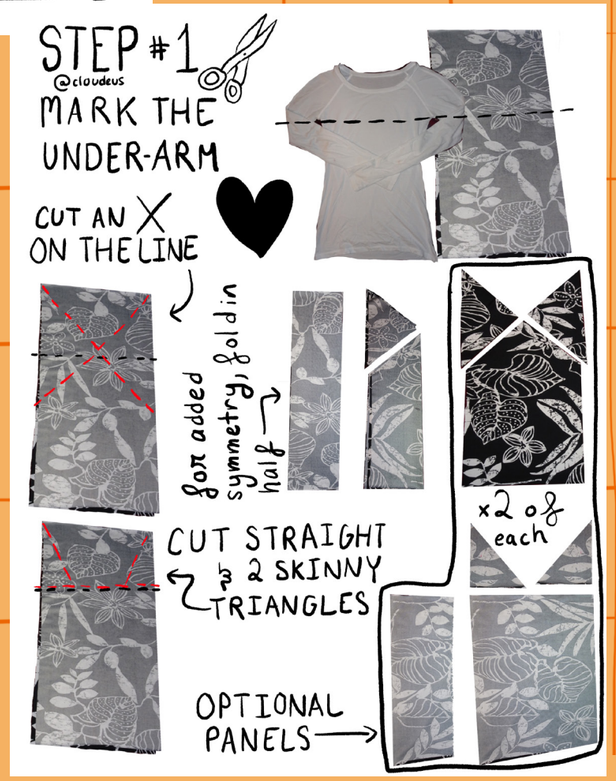
STRETCHY FABRIC

1-1½ meters of fabric



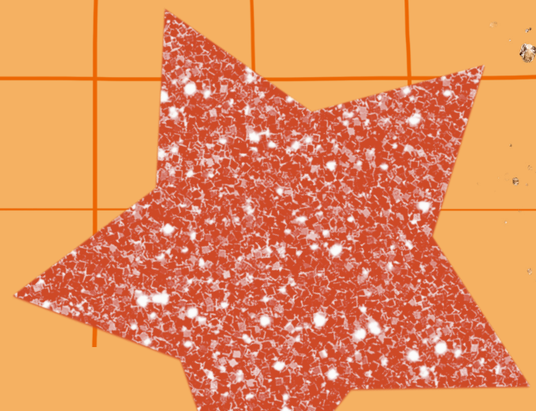
Thats Hot! Y2K Inspired Top





Claudia Matas

@cloudeus



CW: mentions of negative body-image, eating

The Body

Mirror, the mirror I cover with a bed
sheet to avoid seeing the fat on my skin.

Morning, the morning is when I love eating
my favorite meal now I sit at the table
with an empty bowl and my stomach empty.

Boys, the boys at my school made my body
sexualized from the age of 10.

Girls, I’m so sorry for the life we
thought would be filled with love and
romantic dates.

Maybe it gets bett.....

Ava Boa

IG: @avainparis

Calculations

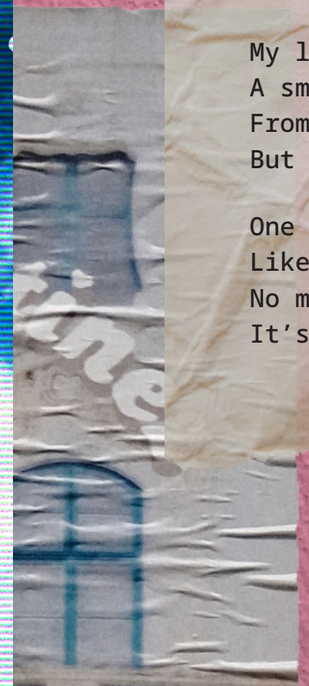
Elisha Alladina

5 stars
Minus you
All alone
Not two

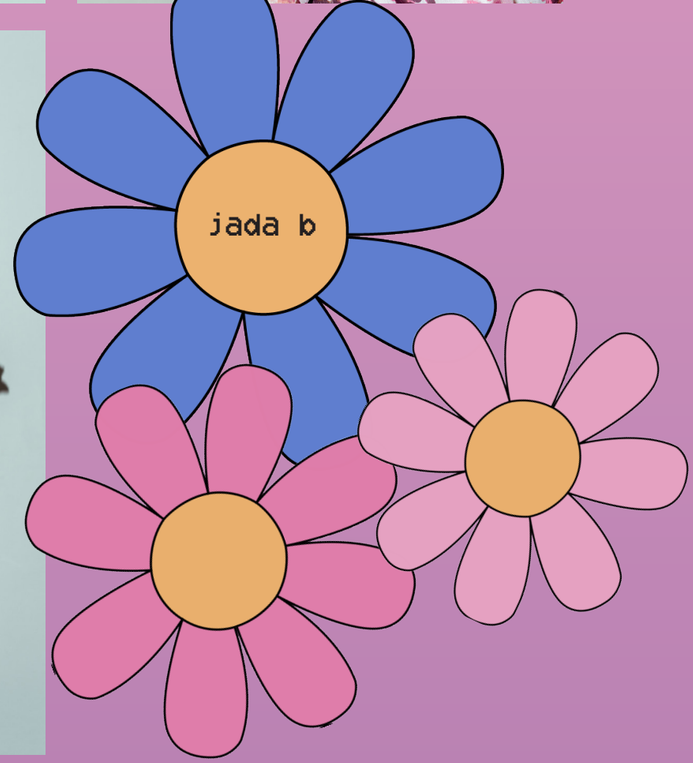
Loneliness
It multiplies
we’re divided
By all these lies

My love is
A small fraction
From a big space
But with no action

One sided
Like a square
No more you
It’s so unfair



if i were
a teen
in the
2000s


jada b

nicki nicki nine doors

vanessa egan

IG: @vanessaegann

i want to write a poem
about the way i play nicki nicki nine doors
the way i bulldoze wildflowers to leave on your front porch
braid them with praises strand by strand
how before they can drown in my perfume
i have strangled them in anxious fists

how i hoard every raisined petal within a bursting closet door
alongside timid doorbell chimes
and every pitter-patter to the side of the house
snickers concealed by your maple tree
clacks of pebbles on a bedroom window

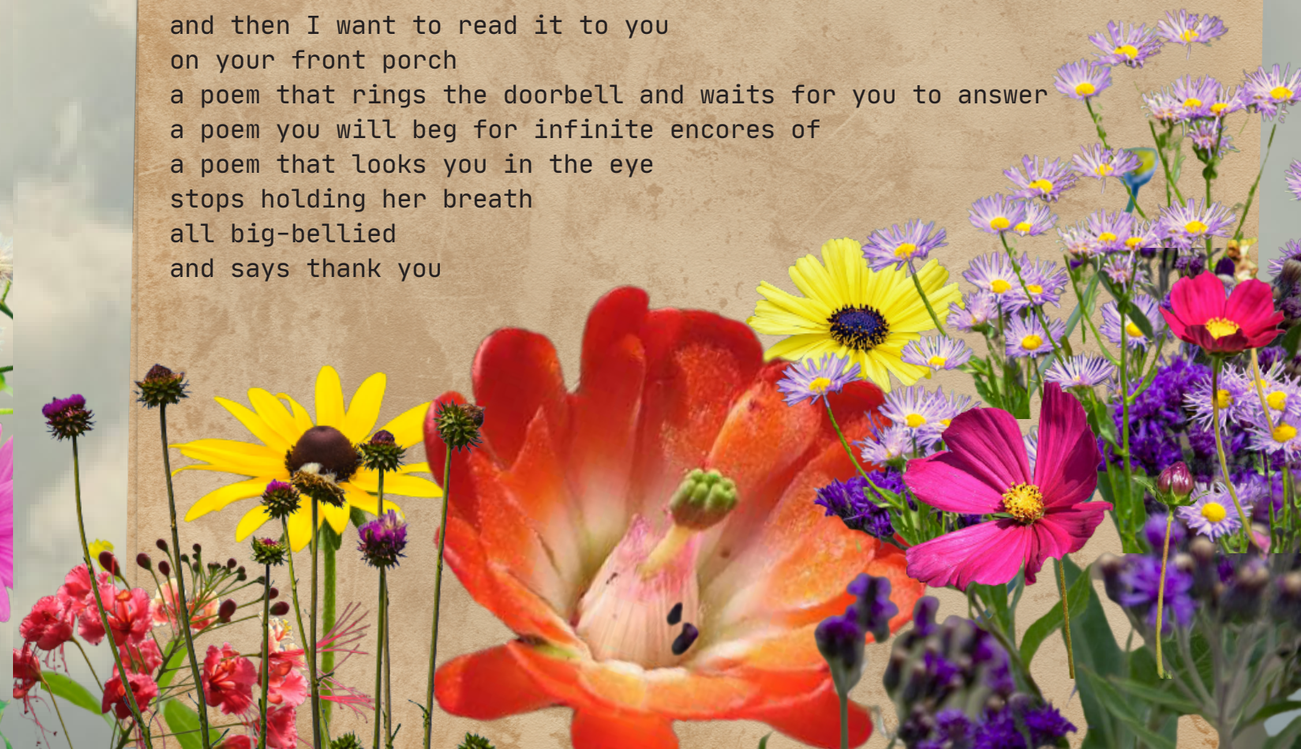
i want to write a poem
about how I am 12 years old
and will never see another birthday cake
how every day is sunday in july and i know that you are home
and though i am unacquainted with the ways in which your hours tick by
i pray that this phantom knock somehow transcends cable cartoons
and puzzles
and twilight sagas
pray that you daydream of my grass-stained light-up sneakers
surfing and skimming the pavement that joins my cul de sac to yours
how they come to a halt just before your castle at the end of the court
when my toes reach out for one another, ankles melt into the sidewalk
when I try to sprout a mane in a matter of minutes

in my head
this is the moment you've been counting down in science classes
and soccer practices
the moment that has parked you at your front door since dawn
this *prank*
this *buffoonery*
this *immortal punchline*
the thing you've been *longing* for
the top shelf cookie jar

i want to write a poem about how I twiddle my thumbs on your front porch
every day
preparing to drop this grenade of flimsy exiled meadow
only to muster a spell of dismay that shrinks me back
through my bedroom door
another bouquet in the graveyard closet

i want to write a poem about the way I play nicki nicki nine doors
a poem about all the bouquets I never threw at you
the toes tapping, pansies wilting
that mama could never be proud of
i want to write a poem that sculpts monuments of you in the morning
from all the rose petals that got lost at sea

and then I want to read it to you
on your front porch
a poem that rings the doorbell and waits for you to answer
a poem you will beg for infinite encores of
a poem that looks you in the eye
stops holding her breath
all big-bellied
and says thank you



A Different Childhood

Breda Gjyzeli

I didn't have a ‘normal’ (Canadian) childhood. Partly because I did not grow up in Canada, and partly because I didn’t have parents from ages 4-9. That may sound a bit dramatic so let me clear it up.

My parents left their home country, Albania, and family, myself and my siblings included, to build a better life for us here in Canada. I was four years old when they left, and nine when I came to Canada and finally reunited with my parents. My grandmother and aunt were my primary caregivers during those years, along with many more close family members. It takes a village to raise a child and it takes several of them to raise three children who were abandoned by their parents. Okay, maybe abandoned is a strong word.

Although significant to my life, that’s only a part of the reason I believe I didn’t have a similar childhood as my peers and could never really relate with them. For example, I never watched key childhood movies and shows like *Hannah Montana*, *Toy Story*, *Cars*, *High School Musical*, *That’s So Raven*, *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, shall I go on? By the time I moved to Canada in 2011 I was just starting to learn English, so my primary shows were ones that my peers watched when they were much, much younger. These included classics like *Toopy and Binoo* and *Max and Ruby*. By the time I had properly grasped the English language, the iconic Disney shows listed above were coming to an end and I was catching the tail end of shows like *iCarly*, *Victorious*, *Good Luck Charlie*, and *Wizards of Waverly Place*, and subjectively inferior Disney channel productions like *Austin and Ally*, *Liv and Maddie*, and *Jessie*.

All this to say that people look at me weird when I say “Actually, I’ve never seen that” about one of their favorite movies or TV shows. No one ever asks me about *Winx Club* or *Sailor Moon*. . .and I’m kind of mad about it. Let’s talk about them! They’re great shows!

This phenomenon of mine has carried over to my relationship with my boyfriend, 10% of which consists of him making fun of me / hating me for not knowing some of his favourite movies. Whenever I have a conversation with him and his family, the number of children’s movie references that I don’t get is almost embarrassing.

I also don’t have the same relationship with my parents that most people do. Most moms can recall the embarrassing moments of their children’s lives easily. My mom wasn’t there for a lot of those moments. However hard I had it as a child - admittedly not that hard because I barely noticed their absence, or at least barely remember it - my parents had it much harder. To be away from your children for five years in an unknown place with no close family sounds like a nightmare and no small feat. But they are the reason I am able to speak this language and write silly stories in my free time and pursue my passion. So I am eternally grateful.

Anyways, other than that, my childhood in Albania did consist of some normal (I think) activities, like playing dodgeball in the street, coming home with skinned knees, playing with my friend’s pet turtle, and pretending that I *accidentally* grabbed my sister's school notebook instead of my own when it was actually premeditated because I had forgotten to do the homework. Yeah, my aunt gave me a stern talk about that when she found out. But I think it’s the usual shenanigans eight year olds get up to.

The 2000s were a crazy fun time and many people growing up in that era have mostly the same experiences. Here’s to hoping someone can relate to mine.

Lemon Juice

Aimee Bernardo @bernardo.aimee

I am twelve years old.
Lemon juice runs cool and sharp down my hands as I massage it into my scalp, and it burns. I use the last of my willpower to turn my jet black hair light brown. To be pretty. To be worth something, one day.

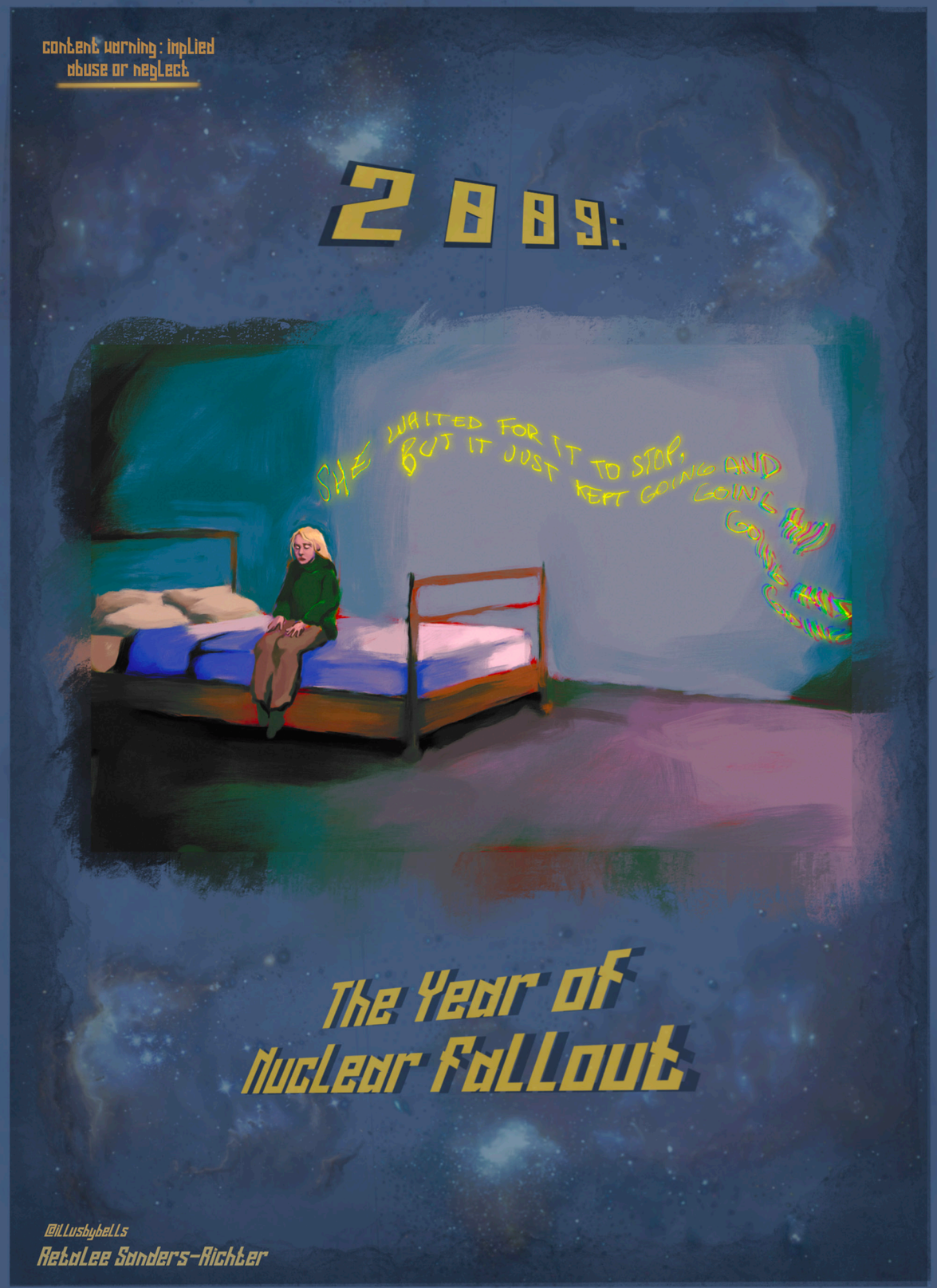
I am thirteen.
My eyes are a dreamer's – not imaginative, not hopeful, but the outlines of everything I look at are blurry. I find the shame I wear makes my plastic rim glasses too heavy for my face. I massage my eyes until they are red.

I am fifteen.
My grandmother's clothespin clips my skin and it hurts like her words, it leaves a shallow mark on my nose in comparison. I struggle to breathe for twenty minutes for twelve seconds of satisfaction before the cartilage expands back into its original shape. Smiling is sin; my nose stretches with happiness. I have decided that being lovely is better than feeling joy.

I am sixteen
and I place the burden of liking myself on someone, anyone, else. I dig my fingertips into my cheeks, straighten my hair, bottle up gentleness and force it down my own throat. In my mind I am Other, daintiness and quietness and none of me, and I long for it like I hold myself hostage.

I am nineteen
and I sink a little deeper into the earth. I barter with the sun for just a little more time, ransom the warmth, try to cradle it into the deep. Watch it slip from my fingers. And again. And again.

I am twenty-one.
I am all and none of me. I pass sixteen on the sidewalk. Catch a glimpse of fifteen in the mirror. I hold twelve, in fragments, on my bedroom floor. I am empty, needing to be filled, full, in need of an outpour, boundless.
My palms still itch for lemon juice.



6:49 am in my childhood bedroom

CW: implied self-harm

kayla mcintosh

IG: @kailuahs

TWT: @kaylamcintosh

i wonder what my mom was like when
she was my age,
nineteen and wide-mouthed about everything,
if the world convulsed around her, too.
there is a razorblade in my suitcase
but i have to let my teenage self go;
self-induced theatries and all.
adults don't hurt themselves in crooked ways
and i am almost there.
i am afraid of losing my teeth and i
want to be scropionic but can never look anyone
in the eyes long enough to possess them;
i wash away easy and maybe this is what
she left like.

COMFORT

Astrid Tanton

Hello are you awake
Never mind I'll just go to bed
Left on read at least I get the
comfort of knowing you saw it
Maybe I deserve better
I should go for better
But you are just so comforting to me
Left on read at least I get the
comfort
At least I get the comfort
Bright screens dull my eyes
Hope you'll call tonight
I know you wont
I'm on my own
You'll text me at one
Then call me at two
I'll be ready by three
Then over by four
Bright screens dull my eyes
Hope you'll call tonight
I know you wont
I'm on my own
You'll text me at one
Then call me at two
I'll be ready by three
Then over by four
Maybe I deserve better
I should go for better
But you are just so comforting to me

At least I get the comfort
At least I get the comfort
At least I get the comfort
Bright screens don't dull my eyes
Please don't call tonight
I hope you wont
Better on my own
You'll text me at one
Ill decline your call at two Won't be
ready by three
Then over by four
I got to let you go
It's time to let you go
I can't answer the phone
I got to let you go
It's time to let you go
I can't answer the phone
Bright screens don't dull my eyes
Please don't call tonight
I hope you wont
Better on my own
You'll text me at one
Ill decline your call at two Won't be
ready by three
Then over by four

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BASEMENT

ANIME IN THE DESERT

Sarah Asif @sarahasif86 @sarasif_art_stuff

One of my fondest memories of 2009 is watching an anime called HunterXHunter. Back then, I was nine years old and living in Saudi Arabia. The first time I watched this anime was with my brother and it was completely in Arabic! Considering neither of us knew Arabic, we guessed the entire story from the four words that we understood. I had just learnt how to use YouTube and was only allowed to watch TV for two hours after school. Regardless, those weird times are still close to my heart, and I wouldn't have had it any other way. I made this painting together with my brother and cousin as a reminder of those times. It includes the four main characters of the anime :)

MILLENNIUM TROOPER

SONJA GIVETASH

Somnophile Insomniac

Jules Pechersky

And if I'd been able to sleep now, then what?
Nightly houseguest of dream or reluctant visitor of reality?
Strange translations, rotations, and rearrangements of the parts of reality

Without the bite of it,
The ennui and all the modern fixings –
Just pure plain unadulterated empty-mindedness

Ignorance and thrill-seeking
With my good semi-human friends

In landscapes made beautiful by the unconscious processes of my mind

And music that brings tears to habitually dry eyes.
Maybe I'll stay up a bit longer –
Else I won't want to wake up.

IG: @slav_on_a_skateboard

Retalee Sanders-Richter @illusbybells

Cabin Fever

CW: blood/gore, murder

FADE IN:

EX. SUBURBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD - LATE EVENING

A man climbs out of a car parked in the driveway of a mid-dle-class bungalow. The vehicle is a beaten-down 1958 Ambassador Station Wagon, and the man is a repressed, middle-aged office em-ployee donning a wrinkled suit. His name is JAMES CALLAWAY. He's haggard as he makes his way down the cement walkway towards the house. He arrives at the doorstep, his one hand occupied by his briefcase, the other opens the door with a slight nudge. During a moment of contemplation for which the door gradually opens, JAMES sighs heavily before stepping into the darkness, as if to surren-der to what lies within.

WIDE SHOT observing the home with the door now sealed shut. The lawn is manicured, but the flowerbeds are bare. All the windows are darkened. The building exhumes an unnatural stillness.

INT. ENTRANCE HALLWAY OF BUNGALOW

JAMES
(Dull)
Honey, I’m home.

No reply. JAMES walks down the hallway towards this kitchen. MATCH CUT TO his dress shoes, they scuffle on the hardwood floor. His steps are slightly staggered as if expecting a response from someone. The shot returns to his upper half and JAMES appears apathetic, emerging into a
lightened area.

JAMES
Sorry for not being home for dinner. Paul had us in late again.

INT. KITCHEN

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the kitchen as he enters. It’s comprised almost entirely of pastels. The walls, cabinetry, and appliances all are a pale blue. Under normal circumstances, it would be welcoming, but the monochromatic scheme now renders the space cold and empty in the absence
of company.

JAMES looks miserably down at the stovetop.

INSERT CLOSEUP of pork chops, mashed potatoes, and green beans, cold on a ceramic plate.

CUT back to JAMES, he blinks slowly, before picking up the homemade meal and abruptly opening the door underneath the sink and throwing it into the trash.

JAMES then retrieves the peanut butter jar and jam from the cupboard and constructs himself a sandwich on white bread.The meticulously clean countertop is littered with stray crumbs. He smiles to himself, almost smugly as he then pours himself a glass of milk from the fridge.

PAN TO JAMES sitting at the kitchen table. The hum of the the fridge seems to lull him into a passive state, he shoves the sandwich into his mouth, washing it down with the milk.
There is a long moment for which JAMES drinks it, gulping greedily as the camera pans closer. His trance is broken upon placing the empty glass on the table, and he finally notices how eerily quiet it is. He looks to the clock hanging beside the fridge. It reads 10 PM.

10:00

JAMES
Hey, I know I told you I wouldn’t be doing this anymore.

A beat.

JAMES rises from his chair; he doesn’t push it in as he exits, and he also leaves the glass. both are done without consideration. He heads down the adjacent hallway, presumably towards his bedroom.

INT. HALLWAY

CLOSE ON JAMES. His facial hair is beginning to grow back; there are heavy bags under his eyes. His hair is dishevelled, and his tie is loosened. He appears agitated as he speaks. He wants to be heard.

JAMES (CON’T)

It’s just, well, Paul has his way of weaselling us into doing his job on top of our own. Christ, I wonder how that man gets paid more than m-

JAMES freezes, he tilts his head.

INT. CONTINUOUS

The door to the room at the end of the hallway is slightly ajar. This is when JAMES realizes something isn’t right.
Approaching the bedroom, the once softened noises

heightened as he draws closer. the air is heavy with dread. He opens the door.

CLOSE UP of JAMES’s expression. His confusion has turned to terror in a matter of seconds. The noises halt. It lingers there.

INT.BEDROOM

ELIZABETH (O.C)
(shrill)
It’s not what you think! I can explain.

PULL FOCUS to include the silhouette of a woman sitting on a bed, draped in a sheet. Her shoulders are bare, and her lush brown hair falls in tendrils around the base of her neck. By the inflection in her tone, you know she is desperate.

Time seems to seize, and silence is replaced with the ringing of JAMES’s ears. Terror now dwindling away, shock renders him speechless. JAMES’s paled complexion is only further accentuated by the yellow streetlights streaming in the window.

The woman descends from the bed and approaches him cautiously, the sheet still concealing her, her arms reach out towards him longingly.

ELIZABETH (CON’T)
Darling, please...

CUT TO JAMES’S POV to reveal that his wife is covered in blood. All up her hands and arms, across her exposed chest, and splatters painting her delicate cheekbones, the red seems to consume the entirety of her tiny frame. Her eyes, framed by heavy lashes, seem to glow in the dusk as if she was otherworldly, or feral. Elizabeth despite this, is breathtaking in her beauty.

ANGLE ON the bed, where there lays a body. Its features are shrouded in the shadows, it remains unresponsive to the commotion. The ringing seems to crescendo for both JAMES and the audience. In addition to it, JAMES’ pounding heart becomes alarmingly audible.

JAMES is captivated by the horror of it all. He takes a breath to compose himself. His heart still racing.

CW: abuse

At the End Again

Aodhán Campbell
@aodhan.soup

It may seem strange, but there's this book. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, if you're interested. I promise, it's well worth a look. This book taught me a lesson. It's a lesson that saves me every single day in a bigger way than I can even begin to convey. Before I tell you that story, I have to tell you this one.

I got my first copy when I was twelve and I refused to read it for years, looking at the cover through fearful tears, because it had been a gift from my father. The book was a bother, gathering dust and to my displeasure, existing. Picked out for me by an addict, a cocaine fanatic, my user and abuser, bruiser of pride who raised a pathetically undignified, bleary-eyed, cast-aside son. Living with him was the end of the world.

When I was seventeen, he left, leaving my mother bereft but not before the deft-fingered theft of art off the walls, money from the bank, wine from the basement and life as we knew it, widening the rift between us then building a barrier through it. It grew from a puddle to a pond to a lake to an ocean and life seemed to slow to slow-motion when our bankruptcy cost us our house. Losing my home was the end of the world.

I left behind most of what I'd known, with no room to own what I owned in the space we could afford to rent. I sent my things ahead and with them went that book. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. It sat on my shelf as I lay in my bed cursing myself and misfortune. At my lowest point, the end of my world, that book my only friend, I picked it up and read it through the end. Then again, and again, and again.

It's about a man named Arthur Dent whose entire world ends and then ends. His house and then his planet demolished, his way of life abolished, a sacrifice for some other asshole's paradise. That's the way it goes. Cast adrift, he gets a lift through a universe of which he knows nothing. The first grounding, sensible sounding things he encounters are the words "Don't Panic" in big friendly letters on the cover of a book. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.

These words, "Don't Panic", are the same words, in fact, that I have tattooed on my back to remind me that life isn't over. There's no Vogon attack, I'm going to be fine and if ever I'm not then that book and those words are my lifeline. Remember that when it feels said and done, when life comes completely unraveled and your race feels run, there are worse things than the things that end your world.

Some people will love you from birth and others will cause way more trouble than keeping them in your life is worth. They come and go, they live and die, the stains that hardship leaves, be they blood, sweat or tears, will dry. Don't treat anything like the end of the world. Take my advice, or like Arthur's and like mine, your world just might end twice.

Film Diary

Salma Hamid

IG: @lovelyzsalma

CW: Homophobia, swearing, verbal abuse, mentions of physical abuse, mentions of suicide, colourism, misogyny, alcoholism.

Film diary entry #1: Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham
Date: January 25th, 2002

Went to the theatre with Shubhi and Jasneet today to see this movie. Mummy kept urging me to go and watch it after she had taken Dadi and Papa last week to see it when I was in class. The movie was nice, and the songs were catchy. I think Sharukh and Amitabh make for a good father-son duo. I started crying during the scene when they reunite, and Amitabh is lightly slapping Sharukh and scolding him for never reaching out to him. Though, I did think it was pretty unfair that it was Amitabh who had kicked out Sharukh, his son, for marrying a poor girl when they're a rich family, but then, once they're reunited, blame Sharukh for never having reached out in those ten years of separation. When I asked Dadi about this, she said it's always the child's responsibility to reach out and make the effort, even if it's the parent at fault. I always thought the person at fault is the one who must reach out.

Afterwards, all of us snuck into another theatre to watch A Walk to Remember. We each got a Kinder Surprise afterwards, and I just gave the toy to my sister, Zareen. She had to remind me that she's thirteen, as though she's so old. Jasneet drives now and has her own car, which means I get to play music I like now instead of the Mohammed Rafi Papa always insists on playing. Although Avril Lavigne really dominates the stations now.

Film diary entry #2: Lagaan and Mohabbatein
Date: February 14th, 2002

I woke up to nearly all my cousins talking and laughing downstairs. That, and my bras all thrown onto the foot of my bed, since Mummy said it would be inappropriate to have them drying in front of Ali. I decided to let her know that when I forgot my purse at his house last week, I found them under his bed, right next to a stack of Playboys.

She did not look pleased.

After coming downstairs, we all hung out and played, much to Zareen's begging, Super Mario Sunshine. Mummy made pilau and tandoori chicken, which I had picked up with the girls last week (they had begged me to ask for extra big breasts too, but that I avoided). We all ate on the living room floor, while the adults stayed in the dining room. Of course, we had to pick a Bollywood movie to watch, since all the adults would be mortified by Hollywood's sex scenes. The cousins advocated for Mohabbatein and Lagaan, since the former at least has a kiss scene, so I had to go to the Blockbuster in the plaza to get it.

When I was looking through the tapes, I bumped into Ishrat from school. Though our parents talk to each other now and then (the automatic solidarity of immigrant parents, as Zareen puts it), she and I have rarely interacted. I honestly find her kind of intimidating. It's exactly why I couldn't help but smile when I saw the tape for Shrek in her hand. She told me it was for her little brothers. I waved my tape at her and explained my choice. She grinned and told me her own grandparents would curse and gasp if they were to see a make out scene.

Before I left the store, she asked me what I was doing for Valentine's Day, and I honestly told her I had always spent the day with my family. She then told me that she and her girlfriend had broken up a few months ago, so her own plans were down the drain. I didn't know how to respond. I mean, of course, I know gay people exist, but it's talked about so little in my house, especially like a normal thing, so hearing her mentioning it so casually was a foreign thing to me. I kind of hate that it felt so foreign.

Mohabbatein was good. All the adults cleared their throats at the kiss scene. During the dance scene with Uday Chopra and Shamita Shetty, all the girls were giggling. When Shamita was dancing her part, Ali asked why my face was bright red, and Zareen laughed that I was thinking of Uday. That hadn't been true. I was just watching Shamita.

Afterwards, we watched Lagaan, but a quarter way through, we started laying out sleeping mats in the living room while the adults started going to all the bedrooms. All the cousins fell asleep on the mats halfway through the movie.

Film diary entry #3: Devdas
Date: July 20th, 2002

The girls and I went to see Devdas today, to celebrate summer break. It's about Devdas, who's been in England for the past ten years and has just returned to India and reunited with his childhood love, Paro. After his family humiliates hers, her mom marries her off to a richer man out of spite. Devdas then becomes an alcoholic and frequents a brothel, where a tawaif falls in love with him, when all the while Paro is still in love with him too.

Devdas seemed like a jackass, though. He hits Paro across her head with a necklace to lessen her vanity and leave her a "mark of his love." He even shames Chandramukhi, the tawaif, for her job, even though he comes to the brothel every night. He even mocks Paro for being "illiterate," and ditches her when their relationship is exposed. It was all screwed up. God knows how those two women fell in love with him.

I told Mummy about it, and even complained about how Paro actually went through with the arranged marriage with a guy twice her age. It was pretty unfair considering she had to get married just because her mom was stupid enough to make a promise on her daughter's behalf, without any permission. Mummy told me that even if it's unfair, Paro loves her mother, so it's her duty to do what her mother says, right or wrong. I don't see how obeying your parents by getting married to a guy twice your age is a declaration of love, but whatever.

Film diary entry #4: Hum Saath Saath Hain
Date: August 28th, 2002

Shubhi and Jasneet rented out a tape for Hum Saath Saath Hain today and came over to my place. As we were watching it, Dadi came over and sat on the couch. She praised the eldest son in the movie for being so dutiful and obedient with his mother even after she betrays him and treats him unfairly.

"I think I would've at least protested if Mummy did such a thing."

Dadi laughed. "Then, you don't want to know what I'd say about you."

This time, I was acutely aware of my face burning. "Speaking my opinion is disrespectful?"

"If it disagrees with your parent's. Then, your silence is respect for their opinion."

"Then, why isn't their listening respect for mine?"

Dadi shuffled onto her feet. "Because you're the child. Same rules apply for grandchildren too." With her pointed look, I sunk into my seat.

Afterwards, we all went to our old middle school's basketball court and played with a few younger kids as the sun set. Eventually, the girls had to go home, and I insisted on staying a few minutes more. They didn't know that I was planning to call Ishrat from the new Nokia phone Papa had gotten me and ask her to meet me there. Her and I hadn't talked at all since Valentine's Day, other than saying "hi" in the hallways, but then we ran into each other at the gas station last week. She told me she liked the butterfly pins in my hair, and I suddenly had an urge to ask her to meet up one day.

So, we did, and once the sky darkened, it began to rain, and she gave me her jacket. It was such a typical movie gesture that I felt my face heat up like crazy. Even my palms got all clammy. She walked me to my door and told me that the jacket looked good on me and to return it to her another day. I didn't know what to say, or even think, at that moment, so I opted for assuring her I'd wash it, and proceeded to run into my house. I can't even imagine what she thought at that moment.

For God's sake, it even smells like her.

Film diary entry #5: Return to Neverland
Date: December 18th, 2002

Mrs. Michelle made us watch a Peter Pan movie the day before winter break starts, somehow forgetting that we are seventeen years old. At least it gave some semblance of relaxation for senior year. It was actually kind of nice. It reminded me of Zareen and I watching Peter Pan during the greyest days in January to remember the magic of winter and snow. I felt so giddy today at the sight of the softly falling snow outside the school window and on my way home on the bus.

Also, I had spotted Ishrat across the hallway and had yanked her jacket from my locker and ran to her. When I gave it to her and turned to leave, she looked disappointed, so I went back to her.

"What's wrong?" I had asked.

She visibly hesitated. "I don't want to bother you."

"Why would hearing what you have to say be a bother?"

She said that truthfully, she had left me the jacket so that I would have to make plans to hang out with her again to give it back. So, I did.

Ali had then come up to us and asked with an obnoxious laugh if we were dating. Ishrat paused quietly, obviously realizing we knew each other. But I told him to fuck off. Unfortunately, he insisted on staying so I dragged him away, mouthing a "sorry" to Ishrat and feeling humiliation rage through me. He told me to beware, or else people would think we're the cast of the second Fire movie.

Film diary entry #6: Fire (1996)
Date: January 30th, 2003

Holy shit, Fire is a brilliant movie. It deals with all hardships that girls go through, what with having disrespectful husbands who expect perfect wives. Also, I now know what Ali meant - - in Fire, two women fall in love and seek solace from their husbands with one another. But it's so much more than that. It also shows the hypocrisy and abuse women deal with.

I asked Papa why Nandita Das, the actress in it, rarely shows up in films. He said it was because of the nonsense film she was in. I asked which, already nervously anticipating the answer. He said the lesbian one, proceeding to go off on how the Canadian director of the movie is trying so hard to drag Western ideas into India and ruin our culture. I asked him why he thinks gay people don't exist in India, to which he asked me if I grew up in India, and if I didn't, then I don't have the answer, he does. He told me he knows India, so he gets to speak on it. I understood the silent demand: I don't get to.

Dadi overheard us and to change the subject, added it's because Nandita Das is dark. Aishwariya Rai is much prettier, according to her. I wanted to add something but looked at Papa too soon.

Film diary entry #7: Spirited Away
Date: April 15th, 2003

Every spring and summer, the park by our house hosts movie nights, where they play a film from a projector and prop up snack stands wrapped in twinkle lights. Zareen and I always bring Papa's lawn chairs and blankets, along with some of our own snacks.

Today they played Spirited Away, one of my sister's favourites. Halfway through the movie, she began whining for more popcorn, practically shoving me off my chair to retrieve some for her. For someone who loves to pretend like she's an adult, her voice can hit such a high pitch. I finally snatched her popcorn bowl and went to the stand.

"It's pretty, isn't it?" I had heard from right behind me. I flew around to see Ishrat.

"Hi!" I practically squeaked, giving Zareen a run for her money. "What are you doing here?"

She wordlessly pointed at the enormous screen ahead of us, smiling slightly when I nodded knowingly. "I'm here with my brothers. They love Miyazaki." She paused, looking nervous. "Do you want to join us?"

She and her brothers ended up migrating to where Zareen and I sat. Zareen teased Ishrat for befriending her older sister, to which Ishrat replied that I was sweet, and she really liked spending time with me. I felt the urge to bite my fist to resist grinning too hard and I spotted Ishrat holding back her own laughter. Zareen also taught Ishrat's brothers the hand clapping games she played growing up. It was a good night. It was the kind you knew, at that moment, you'd fondly look back on in the future and miss.

Film diary entry #
Date: April 23rd, 2003

I watched no movie. I just had to write down that Ishrat said that she thought that the birthmark on my neck was pretty. I almost forgot at that moment that I always covered it because it was darker than the rest of my body. And that as a child, I always asked my friends if we could play inside so that I wouldn't feel ugly.

She thought I was pretty.

Film diary entry #8: Mujhse Dosti Karoge
May 25th, 2003

In Mujhse Dosti Karoge, the guy and girl in it are willing to marry other people just for the sake of keeping the peace in their families and their friend group. The guy was sort of promised to an old friend of his but ended up falling in love with their mutual friend, within their trio friend group. But, when he and the mutual friend were about to announce their relationship, they discovered that the old friend's father had passed away, so the guy decided to stay with her, as to not cause her more heartache.

Mummy said it was also to maintain happiness and peace within the family. She said that is what good children do, they sometimes sacrifice to make their families happy. That sometimes a lifetime of self-sacrifice is worth the peace it maintains. But, I think, why let go of your happiness to hold onto others? Though, who am I to talk?

All I said was, "I don't really agree," to Mummy, and she returned my glance with such a glare, that I felt Zareen giggle beside me. I felt no such urge. I'm surprised that I had even said it. I don't think I'll repeat that mistake.

When we returned home from Khala's place, Mummy told me to never show her that kind of embarrassing behaviour in front of our family ever again. I decided arguing wasn't worth it. Again.

Film diary entry #9: Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam
Date: July 17th, 2003

Yesterday, there was a block party in our neighborhood. The kids were having a crazy water gun fight, and the girls and I joined them. They were blasting music on the boombox. I wanted to change into my pink bathing suit, but Papa would forbid it. Today, I didn't argue against it.

Afterwards, Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam was playing on the television, so we watched it after dinner. Mummy made us halwa and we ate it for dessert. When I remembered Aishwarya Rai was in it, I nearly cried at what I knew that meant for me. In the film, she attempts suicide when her parents are forcing her to marry Ajay Devgan and stay away from Salman Khan, who she loves. She ultimately marries Ajay.

Papa waved his hand at the screen. "See? This is what our traditions are all about. Obedience."

I went to bed that night with Dadi patting layers of skin whitening powder on my face. "Why do you think Aishwariya Rai won Miss Universe? Why do you think Nandita Das is never seen anymore?"

Speaking of, Aishwariya Rai has also set this trend of the sleeveless shalwar kameez with a matching dupatta. I want to take Zareen with me to the shop tomorrow to look for something similar. I love how hers is such a pretty blue.

Film diary entry #10: Shrek
Date: July 18th, 2003

I was listening to my Walkman on the bus, eyeing all the townhouses and big, grey buildings when I felt someone's arm press against mine. I turned to see Ishrat's smiling face. She picked away a flutter of white powder at my scalp and I sighed in exhaustion, sagging against her. She let me have some of her Fanta and invited me to her house.

As it turns out, her little brothers adore Shrek, along with Miyazaki films, so she rents it nearly every few months. She told me she's actually grown to like it. I smiled at her, and she held my hand. I squeezed onto it, feeling my ears burn when she locked our fingers.

When the movie started, she left the floor we were seated upon and spent a few minutes in the kitchen. She returned with two cups of hot cocoa, and a pillow to brace behind my back. She carefully handed me the mug, blowing on the drink, and covering the hot side so that I wouldn't touch it. I sipped on it and said, "You know, with all this attention, you can totally order me to clean up after."

She didn't laugh. "Why would I order you to do anything?"

Film diary entry #11: Sinbad
Date: August 15th, 2003

We kissed. My hands are shaking in excitement. We went with his little brothers to see Sinbad. We then dropped them off at his house and went on a trail nearby. I told him that I wish he'd give me his jacket every time we met, just so I always have a reason to see him as soon as possible after. He asked to kiss me, and I held him. Zareen keeps asking why I'm beaming so much and am only listening to Alicia Keys.

Film diary entry #12: Princess Bride
Date: October 2nd, 2003

I shouldn't have let her kiss me outside the house. I was just so clouded by the movie we had watched at the theatre and what I feel for her.

Papa saw and slammed the door open, dragging me inside. He screamed at me. I screamed back, asking him why what I did was so wrong, why I must follow his standards instead of what I want, why I cannot love who I love, why he is ruining my life just because I do not feel the way he feels. He asked me why God gave him a daughter he's so ashamed to have, why he was punished with a cursed daughter who speaks back even when sinning? Why have I disappointed him? I'm not asking myself this, he asked me this. Zareen keeps asking why I'm crying so much.

Film diary entry #13: Kal Ho Naa Ho
Date: November 24th, 2003

After going to the movie theatre, Papa complained about how the main character was horrible. I was annoyed by her for most of the movie, as well, for she was spoiled and unappreciative of her loving family members, like her siblings and mom. However, Papa's war with her had to do with how she treated her grandmother -- who was constantly attempting to set her up in arranged marriages without her permission and insulted everyone else in the family who was innocent and good. Naina, the main character, always responded with anger towards her grandmother.

Mummy sighed. "It is so disappointing to see children who disobey and speak back to their elders. They bring our culture to shame. They bring their parents to shame." She eyed me from the rearview mirror, and I felt a burn. In my eyes, though.

I went to bed, staring at the ceiling. I didn't want to disappoint them. I don't want to disappoint them. I can't disappoint them. I grabbed the powder Dadi left on my dresser.

Film diary entry #
Date: December 6th, 2003

It felt wrong. It felt so wrong. Her mouth was trembling and for the first time, her hand felt cold in mine. Even her mouth, when it pressed a kiss to my head, felt icy. As she got smaller and smaller from my gaze in the whirlwind of white snow, I had never felt so freezing.

It will make things better. Things will be better. They'll be proud of me. I will ensure they are. I felt no warmth. I had so little time.

April 2nd, 2007

Dear Diary,

Nadia is such a fucking bitch. Today, she, me, Papa, Mummy and Dadi went to the theatres to see Namastey London. It's a movie about Katrina Kaif's character, Jazz, going to India with her parents and being forced into an arranged marriage by her parents. And, yeah, I get it's supposed to be a fucking romantic comedy, but Jazz is painted an evil villain, the encompassment of modern society and lack of morals, simply for being pissed her parents set her up in an arranged marriage. She was bratty in some unnecessary moments, yes, but the movie totally villainized her for rejecting being coerced into marriage with a guy she barely knew. Rejecting that kind of shit isn't a Western thing, it's a reasonable thing. They also painted her best friend in such an evil light for wanting to help her escape the marriage. Bollywood is so fucked.

Anyways, I was trying to convey this to Mummy, who had labelled Jazz as a disgraceful child for acting the way she did. And I could tell I was winning the argument, since Papa pulled out the "I'm from India, I have more experience, it isn't your place to say anything" card. I can tell I'm winning when he resorts to such a pathetic counterargument. I received even more confirmation of my standing in this argument when Mummy said, "We're your parents, not the other way around, so trust that we are right."

But then – but then! Nadia had the nerve to agree with them and say, "You're eighteen, and you don't know any better, so of course you'll side with the child in the movie and not the parent. She is wrong for disobeying her parents. It's disrespectful and shows her lack of love."

She is so bigoted; I swear to God. We were even once re-watching Kal Ho Naa Ho, and in that movie, they make it this huge fucking run-on joke that the two male characters keep ending up in "gay" situations, which mortifies one of the guys' maids. I asked my family why it was such a big deal if they were gay, and Nadia said, "Because that isn't acceptable in our culture, so it's embarrassing if they are public about it." Holy fuck, my blood boiled. She's probably never even spoken to someone who wasn't straight.

And for someone who thinks maintaining the fucking culture is so damn important, she sure picks and chooses what she wants to keep. I still catch her putting on that white powder and hiding the birthmark on her neck. When I ask her why, she says the splotch is ugly to her. I wonder if she's ever even tasted freedom. So cold.

Sincerely,
Zareen

Life Support

Spray Painted onto an 18 x 24" canvas, this painting of Madison Beer was made to commemorate her first studio album "Life Support". Incorporating an intergalactic theme in relation to the album, this painting was created using mixed mediums and was delivered to Madison at her show on October 18th, 2021.

If you like this piece, check out the video that was made showing the process of this painting! @kiannacreates on Instagram!

Kianna Sumitani

kiannasumitani.com

DREAMS

Aimie Homem

the Church bell rings
as I run down the street
with my baby blue dress
flowing behind me
shining in the light
peeking around the bushy leaves
that surrounds and tugs me.
Sitting alone in a dark, quiet room
I reflect back and feel myself cry
For a girl in a blue dress whose left behind
And a woman in a red dress who’s lost in time.

The Trail of Ashes

Nayab Ahmar

IG: @nayabscreativespace

CW: graphic violence, graphic mentions of gore and cannibalism, graphic depictions of injuries.

It was the jolt of the car that woke Gul from her dreamless sleep.

Rubbing her eyes clear, she looked out the window, unsure how much time had passed during her impromptu nap.

Her eyes widened as she took in the dense forest of shocking red, yellow and orange hues that appeared endless on all sides.

It was winter. It was snowing.

But it's as if the trees are stuck in fall.

But it wasn't just the over-saturated fall trees that made her sleep flee faster than being doused with cold water. It was the iridescent sheen of the leaves, an effect perhaps created by the soft sprinkling of snow as it fell from the sky, before it covered the ground entirely. If one didn't look closely, they'd think the very leaves were glowing from within, fluorescing as the trees swayed to the hidden melody of the wind.

Never in my nineteen years would I have thought I would see leaves that could. . .sparkle, she thought in wonder, watching as the leaves danced around the car before landing gracefully on the snowy road.

Before they're crushed mercilessly by the screeching tires of the car.

Shaking off the intrusive thought, Gul turned to ask her parents, "Mama, Baba, aren't you seeing the forest?! How are there *fall* trees here when it's the peak of winter-"

"I know, that was our reaction when we saw them for the first time too," her Mama laughed, "But isn't it so beautiful? The tour guide we met last week said they were some special native species to Ashbourne."

"You should've come with us, Gul. If you think this is amazing, wait 'til you see the town square." Baba told her, smiling at her through the rear-view mirror, "And since you're awake, why don't you record the little journey we have left?"

"My hands are hurting since I had to record practically the whole way since you were sleeping!" Mama chided, joining in with Baba's teasing as usual.

"We're moving here, not going on some vacation, so why do we have to record it? We can explore it anytime. . ." Gul muttered, but took out her phone, nonetheless. She recorded the beautiful scenery in silence for a few minutes, before she realized her phone was at 2% battery.

"My phone's almost dead," she declared, with a little too much satisfaction.

"Hey, you're just saying that because you don't want to make the video!"

"It's for real, Mama! You can check, see?"

"Okay fine, here - have my phone." Mama replied, handing her the phone. Sighing in defeat, Gul took the phone and started recording again.

The forest really does seem endless… where in the world is Ashbourne in here?

As she entertained her thoughts silently, a dark flash amongst the bright canopy of the trees caught her eye.

A bird?

The dark figure appeared again for a moment, but this time closer to the ground.

Huh… it looks too big to be a bird.

It was so fast she couldn't for the life of her see what it really was.

"Did you see something in the forest? Like on my side?" she asked her parents, keeping her hand steady. At least she could replay the video later to see what it was otherwise it would bug her forever.

"I didn't see anything, maybe it was an animal?"

"Maybe," Gul replied, unable to help the unease that crept into her voice.

“What did it look like?”

She was about to reply to Baba when it appeared again.

This time on the ground, right at edge of the forest.

Is it. . . facing us?

“It’s there!! Look, there-”

“Where? I can’t see anything-”

“I can’t look, I’m driving you know-”

In the midst of their chaos, the dark figure had long disappeared. But Gul was sure of one thing.

It was no bird or animal.

“It looked like a person,” she revealed, shivering as chills suddenly invaded her body. “And whoever it was, waved at us.”

“Maybe it was someone from the town? The houses are scattered throughout the forest.”

“But it looked like it flew from the canopy and landed on the ground...” Gul whispered, gulping.

Something isn’t right.

“Maybe you saw two different things, Gul. First the bird, then the person!”

“Maybe. . .”

I hope so.

Guess they’d find out when she replayed the video.

Not wanting to concern her parents with how shaken she really was, Gul quietly put the phone down and started reciting all the prayers she remembered for protection.

Just in case.

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being brought back to life anyway, I had

The beauty that was the town square *almost* made her forget about the encounter with the dark figure.

She wished they would’ve had time to step out and explore the town square for a bit, but they couldn’t because the movers had apparently reached the house already. Also, her parents had to go pick up her grandparents right after, who had just flown into the closest city because they were planning to stay for a month to help them settle in.

I’ll explore the town with Nano — she does love to window shop. Maybe we can find some cool antiques.

Even from inside the car, the beauty of the town square was astounding. A heavy layer of snow lay on the ground, but it was covered with so many of those stunning iridescent leaves that footprints were barely visible. A startingly black fountain in the shape of a juniper tree stood proudly at the center of the square, sparkling water pouring out its branches. Parents sat on ornate benches that lined the sidewalks, as children ran around throwing snow at anyone who dared come their way. Petite shops covered with vines and vendors selling everything from meat buns to jewelry lined the streets. Gul was sure she saw a cozy looking café, *was it called something like Sweet Garden Tearoom*? And what looked like a shop selling dresses called *Seam Daydreams*. People stared as their care drove by, and it was then Gul realized she hadn’t seen a single car, or even a streetlight.

But Mama and Baba both work from home and they know I’ll be taking virtual classes, so they’d never move somewhere where there was no internet, much less electricity.

It was as if Ashbourne was frozen in time.

Maybe the people just want to preserve the past in the town square, and everyone still has all the necessities in their homes, she thought, searching for electrical lines but not finding any obvious ones in the sight.

Gul was so lost in her mind, that it was only when they reached the edge of the square that she noticed it.

Although there were plenty yellow, orange and even a spattering of brown leaves, it was the screaming red ones that had overwhelmingly covered the snow.

It looks like the ground is bleeding.

Suddenly, the town square didn't seem as beautiful.

"Gul? You're not going to throw up, are you?" she heard her Mama ask, concern lacing her voice.

"She just looks tired to me. Since when does Gul get carsick?"

"I don't feel carsick," Gul said, voice cracking as she prepared to say it next. "But something doesn't feel right."

"And what is this something?"

"Just this place. Ever since that figure on the road, I've just been getting a weird feeling."

"Hmmm. . .that can happen, with new places. It'll take time to adjust."

Making a noncommittal sound in agreement, Gul just thought, *I don't think that's it. But hopefully that's all it is.*

The house was not exactly what Gul had imagined it to be. She had expected a cozy cottage, not the sprawling cabin that greeted her as they drove through a rickety wooden gate. The garden, if one could even call it that, was overridden with shrubs and weeds, and vines so thorny they pierced through the snow as it fell from the sky. Leaves littered the ground from the surrounding forest, an occurrence Gul was already getting used to seeing. Also, flowers of every shade from pinks to purples to reds peeked out from under the snow. They were brimming with life despite the constant downpour of snow.

It's like the snow doesn't affect the growth of any of the plant life here. . .it makes no sense.

"Gul, why are you still in the car? Come take this inside." Mama yelled from outside the car, which apparently had stopped a while ago considering her mother had already half emptied out the trunk, while her father was speaking to the movers parked ahead, closer to the cabin.

Wow, I really am out of it today. How did I completely miss the movers?

"Sorry, I'm coming!!"

Thankful for the tinted windows, Gul quickly wrapped her well-worn red hijab around her head before stepping out to help take the suitcases inside.

The past few hours had been a flurry of movement as the movers rushed to get all the furniture inside. After helping a bit, Gul had retreated into the garden where she had discovered a wooden swing. She had wanted to watch the video from the car, but that phone had died too. And the socket hadn't worked when she'd tried to charge all their phones. Instead, she had been mindlessly swinging on the wooden plank attached to the tree, trying to bask in the serene quiet despite shivering almost violently from the cold that assaulted her cardigan. Her cardigan wasn't thin by any means, but apparently the cold here would need a full-on winter jacket, which was currently somewhere in one of her boxes.

I should probably find my jacket if I want to stay out longer.

Sighing, she made to get up when suddenly she felt someone push the swing so hard, she almost flew off. Gripping onto the rope, she frantically looked around to see who exactly had thought it would be a fun prank to scare the life out of her.

But there was no one.

Panicking, she jumped off the swing, tripping and scraping her knees in the process before she ran back to the safety of the cabin.

Too shaken to care that her parents were speaking with someone, she rushed to them, yelling "Mama, Baba *therewassomethingoutsideanditpushedmeofftheswingandIthinkitwasajinn-*"

"Woah, slow down Gul, I can't understand a word you're saying!" Mama chided but pulled her closer into a hug anyway, sensing that something was very wrong.

"Something pushed me off the swing," Gul gasped out, still desperately trying to catch her breath.

"Oh, I apologize for that young lady. It was most likely a kid from the town, they're little menaces, they are!"

She turned to the elderly man standing next to Baba, who was probably the person her parents were speaking to before she had run in yelling like the world was ending.

"But I didn't see anyone."

"Ah, those kids know the forest like the back of their hands, they do. Must've run off when your back was turned."

That makes sense but… never mind. I better just stay away from those kids, then.

Embarrassed, she apologized, “I’m sorry if I worried you, I think I’m just paranoid by nature or something…”

“No, no, it’s quite alright. I’ll be giving those kids a good ol’ chiding, I will!” He promised, but his eyes twinkled with warmth.

He reminded Gul a bit of her grandfather, so she smiled with as much warmth as she could muster given that she still felt shaken.

“Gul, this is Mr. Walsh, he’s the resident tour guide of Ashbourne! Mr. Walsh, this is our daughter, Gulab, who couldn’t make it to the tour last week because of an exam.” She smiled politely as Baba introduced them.

“What an exotic name it is! What’s it mean, young lady?”

“It means rose,” she said, teeth gritting as she realized how out of place her family would be here. When they had driven through the town square, she had barely seen any diversity, much less a hijabi like herself and her Mama. That was the one thing she’d miss about the city — at least there she hadn’t felt too out of place.

Well, better get used to being exotic.

“Well, how beautiful is that!! We’ll call you Rose then, no?”

“I prefer Gul, thank you.” She said, stopping the urge to roll her eyes.

It’s not the first time someone’s tried westernizing my name, but it sure doesn’t get any less annoying.

Noticing her growing annoyance, her mother pulled her aside, “Gul, why don’t you go explore the house? You didn’t even pick a room, so we put your furniture in a random one. Go see if you like it, otherwise we can tell the movers to switch it for you.”

She nodded gratefully before turning around to make her way up the stairs first. But as she turned around, something at the entrance of the door caught her eye.

As she approached the door, she realized it was a package of some sort.

No, not a package. A food basket.

It was rather pretty, with ribbons attached and everything. A glittering scarlet letter even peeked out from between the wrapped sandwiches and a jar of honey. Gul hesitantly ripped it open, reading what was written:

Welcome to Ashbourne.

We are elated to have you here,

In this humble town we hold so dear.

Please accept this as a token of our appreciation

And please do come by to visit us at our location

Follow the trail of ashes

Until you reach the place

Where nature and man clashes

You must find the way

To come today

Yours truly, The Ash Family

Read the rest of the story on The Continuist website, by scanning the QR code below....

CW: fake blood and middle finger

OMG girl im literally dead LOLZXD

OMG

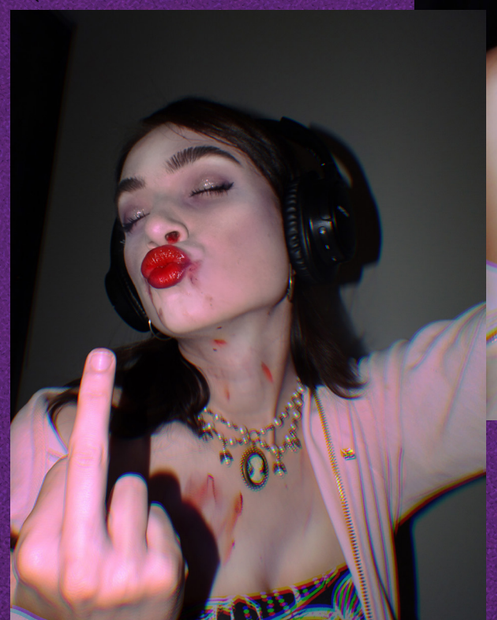
OMG

OMG

OMG

OMG

OMG



OMG

OMG

Claudia Matas

@cloudeus

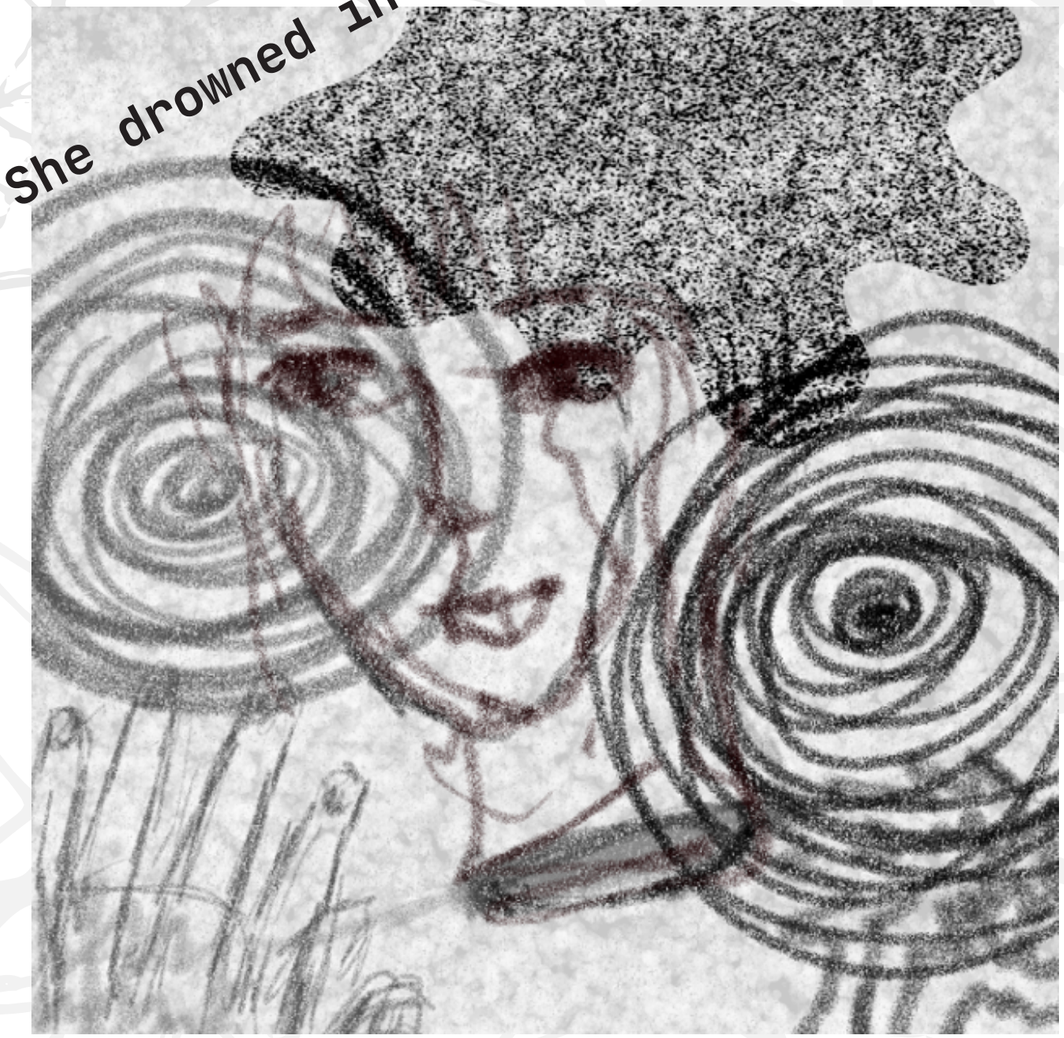
Grey

a stream of consciousness

by Tatsbita Sadikin

IG @catsbita

She drowned in grey



Should I be grieving over her?

The present color when I overthink.
I hate to see it for my furniture, it's displeasing,
and I'm repulsed. Impersonal, and it's dull.
My senses engulfed in phlegmatic antagonism,
Don't identify with grey.

You agree, black and white outfits look better on people
This aesthetic on Pinterest boards is pleasing to look at,
Chess boards would be better as my walls.
Black and white: "Universal", and "timeless"

But have you met those with black and white minds?
I have, but you'll never catch me in their definite spaces,
For the steps I take lead to an endless grey void,
the varied perspectives, the edge of many cliffs to spiraling aches.

But for the first time in nearly two decades, I think I'm thriving
in my habitat: those with grey minds.
It exceeds the greyness of Mom's and Dad's hair,
more vivid than my grandparents' hair.

Black does not mean wrong.
And white does not mean right.
Contrasting, but shouldn't be opposing.

Grey, some argue is the opposite of black and white
But what does that mean?
Should it mean anything at all?

Grey,
this color comes to me naturally and on my hair
if I've lived long enough someday.
For now, it has been my mind and this bed cover.

Grey
≈ Blessings and curses: knowledge for my acceptances,
Fondness for my roots— But I still question home.
This place where I often feel like
I'm further away from the person I used to be.
She drowned in grey,
Should I be grieving over her?
Why should this matter?

ROOFTOP

versions of me

zeynep oz
@zeyneptho

If I could, would I even take the time back?
Would I be able to stand a different version of me?
One that's not so grown,
One that wasn't forced to grow in the first place.

Would I wanna be a little kid, again?
Make no mistakes, live as I wished;
Would I keep living knowing those were the best days of my life?

I keep wishing I could take it all back,
And not take it all for granted this time.
I keep wishing a miracle would happen, and I'd be home again;
Hug my loved ones again, tell my friends I loved them.

They say forever isn't that long when you love someone,
Somehow; forever's my hell,
Where I keep missing it all,
Praying that one day,
It'll be all over.

Just Like The Waves

Shadman Chowdhury-Mohammad
@mr.shadmanz

You wish you held in the anger,
Instead of releasing it.
Because you have released it wrongly,
And now you are remorseful.

Your mind is flooded with remorse.
The mind that was once
Empty of turmoil, has become intoxicated By a burning, oxidizing poison,
Called remorse.
This poison is spreading from your mind, To your heart, to your lungs,
And the rest of your body.
You will no longer be able to love with tenderness, Breathe with freedom,
And move with grace.
The poison of remorse has paralyzed your movements.

You visit the beach
On a breezy, autumn evening.
You observe the waves and their movements. Oh, how elegantly they move.
How gracefully they dance.
It is as if they are not disturbed by any temptations.
You wonder why you have failed to live
In the same motion that these waves dance in. You imagine the person you would have Become by now,
If you avoided the people
Who have caused you suffering and distress. You imagine how happy you would have been If you could wake up every day without fear, If you could sleep soundly every night,
Without the remorse that is clinging to your heart. You would be moving elegantly, freely,
And innocently,
Just like the waves.

JURY

Call me crying and tell me the story of how you felt
so lonely I said you're lying then tell everyone that
you wish you never knew me
I, i fight long days
It's not just them it's in my head and it keeps me
awake And you, you’re not like me
I wear my heart on my sleeve
You'll make sure you keep yours away from me
And don't forget that night you said you want me, said
you need me So tell it to the jury, jury
So tell it to the jury, jury
And my, my heart aches for you
I wish you didn't play the game like a drug to you
And hold, my head up high
I hear their words
I hear their lies
You’re not gonna waste my time
And don't forget that night you said you want me, said
you need me So tell it to the jury, jury
So tell it to the jury, jury
Don't forget that night, said you want me, said you
need me So tell it to the jury, jury
So tell it to the jury, jury
And don't forget that night you said you want me, said
you need me So tell it to the jury, jury
So tell it to the jury, jury
Call me crying and tell me the story of how you felt
so lonely I said you're lying then tell everyone that
you wish you never knew me

Astrid Tanton

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I'm Sorry

By: Josiah Roche

I remember stalking you through the forest. We woke up long before the sun rose, long before people woke, just as your day was drawing to an end. Sleepy eyed, and cold toed, we stumbled from our beds. Hot days were met by cold nights, so we bundled up and piled into the jeep. Open top, the air whipped through our hair; I was happy I brought a blanket. I was set on finding you. Not too long into our search, our path was cut off by giants; we screeched to a halt. Such elegant giants, with kind, inquiring eyes, towered over our jeep. As they passed, their trunks stretched out and grabbed at any branch that had the misfortune of hanging within their reach. We continued on our way after you. We searched for you but heard or saw no sign of you deep in the jungle. As dawn approached, we made our way to open ground, searching for some hint of your presence. The sun continued to rise, and suddenly we saw them: there they were, your tracks buried deep in the ground. I was in awe at the sheer magnificence of your print. Even more driven to find you, we hopped back in the jeep. We looked, no, we searched, intent on revealing where you were hidden, but you outwitted us, slinking with the shadows. Eventually we came across a group of people leaving the jungle from where we originally came. You had shown yourself to them, without fear or hesitation, aware of the power of your being. We chased after you once again. I was 12 at that time. I lay awake in bed that night, thinking about my missed chance; that day my heart broke, that day I was sorry.

But now I hear that you might not be around much longer. I read today that there are less than 4,000 of you left; just a century ago that number was over 100,000. Today my heart broke; today I am sorry.

I mourn to think how many brothers and sisters you have lost. I wish I could say you're the only one, but you're not. I wish I could say I had no part in this, but I can't. I wish I could say I could do something, but I don't know how. What I do know is I can't do it alone.

There are fewer than 4,000 tigers left in the wild today. In the year 1900 there were over 100,000. A 2019 report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, an independent intergovernmental organization comprised of members from 130 governments, has found that up to 1 million species on this planet are threatened with extinction, many of which will be within the next few decades; that is 1/8th of our planets total species.

When will enough be enough? Why are we so complacent about our own destruction? Who, other than ourselves, will keep us accountable?

We the people, transcendent of borders, nationalities, ethnicities, sexualities or religions, we are the people, and only we hold true power. The only time is now. Our time is now.

We need to wake up. Once and for all, we must wake up.

THE RISEN

by SKYPOLAR

IG @justin_pye

BLAH BLAH BLAH

The same is true for people who think all the time. Just as you have to stop talking to hear what others have to say, you have to stop thinking to find out what life is about.

If you talk all the time, you'll never hear what anybody else has to say. Therefore, all you'll have to talk about is your own conversation.

The most ordinary sights and sounds and smells. The textures of shadows on the floor in front of you. And it is only through stopping fixing conceptions on the world of colour and sound that you really begin to hear it and see it.

If you wake up you're gonna wake up; and if you're not ready you're gonna stay pretending that you're just a

"Poor little me."

City Lights

Rebecca Rocillo (she/her)

TW: Mention of an explosion, implied car crash

smooth sailing steady cruising
gliding down a freshly-paved freeway
neon splash and gleaming heels
the glitter fever glow of the city
whirling around us

take my hand
(i can't help it if it trembles sometimes)
thick blue lipstick, brilliant blush
your eyes shine too brightly
streetlights, electric heat
mingling with the rain
blue grey yellow lime green lightning purple
the black chalk crumbles around your eyes
sliding down your cheeks
i wipe it away with my thumb
pour on the gas, now
watch the technicolour world
whorl by

we're running on borrowed time, baby
childish desperados running through a lonely desert
searching for the ship that takes us home
forever searching
hand in hand
glide on, now—

explosion, brace for impact inevitable
an instant, your hand in mine
flying
the neon world flies with us

BAYBIRDS

Jules Pechersky

IG: @slav_on_a_skateboard

CW: Mentions of violence and death

She glanced over the hazy waters, that small form sitting there on the dock. Long white hair streamed down her back, down the shoulder blades that jutted out of her skin. It was the first time that she had been here alone since Erin died, and she felt it. A piece of refuse danced through her long, thin fingers before she cocked her arm back and threw — directly into the garbage water it flew in an arc. The sky was orange-grey, vast, and low with smog; on the horizon lay the ghostly outline of the city.

Mira stood then, not bothering to brush herself off. Her tank top and shorts were already caked in grime, dirt, and stains from the waste. She picked her way across the dock, slowly, languidly, not particularly interested in returning home. One hand shielded her from the sun as she walked; her face was scrunched in a grimace, half-lit in gold. Overhead, seagulls screamed and dove.

Walking eased her; the tension in her back began to unravel as she followed the pathway between the massive mountains of garbage that gave Junkaway Bay its name. Mountains of treasure, Erin had called them. They'd spent blistering summer days buried deep inside of them searching for discarded parts, or if they were lucky, full pieces of technology that only needed a bit of fiddling to work again. Radios, cell phones, microwaves, cameras, even old TVs. They'd been so excited when they finally got the ancient Panasonic to work for the first time. Not only had they been able to find it untouched by other junkies, which was on its own extremely rare, they managed to get it running with a power supply they'd nicked from a busted computer and adapted with some spliced cables.

It had been one of the best days of Mira's life. She and Erin were whooping and hollering, jumping around their hideout with triumphant joy. He'd stopped for a moment, whipped around, and a rush of words came from him as if released from a dam, "Mira Mira Mira okay, what do we watch? We gotta start with Rocket Hill Raiders, you found it so it's gotta be good, or maybe we can watch Strikers again. We can get popcorn and everything and we've got the cushions now so it'll be like a spec-ass movie theater and we don't gotta pay nothing for it, nothing at all. We can set up the lights too and dim 'em and shit like they do there, and it'll be a million times better, like, people are actually gonna be paying us instead, we're gonna run 'em out of business!"

He laughed then, a giddy laugh. Mira couldn't help laughing too. He was that kind of person, infecting everyone around him with his cheer and determination and relentless optimism. They'd sold parts to some other junkies, biked to the city, and used the cash to pick up popcorn from one of the movie theaters in town. It was a shabby old place that only played documentaries, but their popcorn was the best and cheapest of all of them. At least, Erin thought so.

Then they'd lain on their bellies on the yellowing floral couch cushions in their hideout and munched popcorn, pointing and yelling at the screen every time someone's limb came off. At some bits, Erin had the shabby fleece blanket they shared all the way up to his eyes, and he would covertly cover them whenever anything got too brutal. Mira pretended not to notice but it filled her with a fierce protectiveness over him, an overpowering feeling that if anyone would ever make fun of him for something like that, she would beat the shit out of them.

She couldn't protect him enough, clearly. Just like his older brothers and everyone else in that godforsaken neighbourhood, he'd gotten into the gang life.

"I'm gonna get us out of here," he said, bouncing up and down and grinning wide. "You'll see, I'm gonna get rich like Kev did, and we're never gonna have to hunt through garbage ever again. We'll leave this place and do whatever the fuck we want. We can live in the woods in one of those fancy ass cottages with a TV and a hot tub and tons of space and a living room with a proper couch and everything. And a coffee machine! And we can get a guitar and maybe even a piano and we could just do whatever we want all day, go out and explore the woods if we feel like it – it'll be our place, and there won't be no motherfuckin' cops or carvers or junkies telling us what we can and can't do."

Mira knew what happened to kids that joined the gangs and became carvers. They'd get murdered, or carved, or imprisoned. She even knew of a good many that had died running calls for the carver lords, falling off buildings and splattering onto the asphalt like cracked eggs. It was a dangerous and difficult life. But she also knew that Erin would be okay because he was always okay. She'd seen him leap gaps between the tallest skyscrapers, escape burning buildings that he'd set on fire, and jump off rooftops coming out with nothing but a thumbs up and a grin. Every time she worried for him, he'd insist that it would all be alright, and she had nothing to worry about, and from every one of his adventures he'd come out not just unscathed but brimming with excitement.

"Did you see that? Did you see that, Mira?"

But this time he wasn't okay.

He'd been running a call and a carver from another gang found him. It wasn't even in the news; Mira had come over to his family's apartment and found his mother bent over the kitchen table wailing and his older brother staring at the wall. She stood there in the doorway, the sense of something horrible rising in her stomach, and then his mother lifted her face and looked into Mira's eyes, and sobbed,

"I'm sorry, Mira."

It must've already been a year now, she realized as she turned on the intersection outside of Junkaway. She crossed the parking lot and unlocked her rusty old Sokudo from the tree that was hidden from view, where Erin used to lock up his bike too. Hopping on in one smooth motion, she rode through the parking lot and out onto the street, alone.

FOOLISH - ALICE [WITH TOMA]

I'm a fool, for keep loving you
Don't know what to do
Just waiting for you

Time still passing by
But tonight, I will make you mine

Bridge:
And I'll buy you flowers that you like
Will kiss you slowly under the moonlight
So Let me into your heart tonight

Chorus:
Let me into your heart tonight
You are so cool that I'm just a fool
Just keep falling into you

Rap:
Yuh, you been racing in my mind,
Got my mood elevated every night
Sunrise, sunshine, I be daydreaming when the day are bright
But that's alright, can see your eyes.
When I close mine, I long for yo smile
I be so high, you're the drug.

Got 99 problems, girl you is every single on of them
I can't control my
Feelings for you,
I love the little things,
The slight thought, of you,
Can turn me over,
Can u let me come closer,
U know I care for you
I'm lying down, and thinking bout chu
I'm dying to live right beside you

Wishin that love be like a day fly
Grow wings, fly as high as the waist height
Flowing but knowing we'll neva reach to the ... sky above
I remember how you say distance kill this love

See I've been flying round this globe
With the hope of see you,
Candles lit, with light meal
Right after 9, a be right by you side

Chorus again:
Outro Rap:
I be flying miles high,
For that smile, I've found my way to earth
I have the urge to stay
Well…you know, wise man says:
Only fools rush in,
But I, can't help
Falling in love,
With you…

Love you

It’s such a pity
That we’ve thrown away all our love and replaced it with greed
And what’s in it for me
We don’t know what to say to each other
So we stare at blank walls
Just another missed call
You’ve got me beat up and bruised
I crash into you
Another night
Another fight
What should I do
Cause i just wanna love you
I just wanna love you
What should i do if i try
You push me away so i’ll keep it inside
I just wanna love you
But i guess you don’t want me to know
I used to read your mind
Now i look at you and i don’t get a single sign
I’m losing my mind
You’ve got me beat up and bruised
I crash into you
Another night
Another fight
What should I do
Cause i just wanna love you
I just wanna love you
What should i do if i try
You push me away so i’ll keep it inside
I just wanna love you
But i guess you don’t want me to know
Cause i just wanna love you
I just wanna love you
What should i do if i try
You push me away so i’ll keep it inside
I just wanna love you
But i guess you never wanted me to know
Know, know, know
To know

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lost in my thoughts,

with no sense of direction as to where the world, or my life, was heading. After mourning many losses, a wave of depression swept over me and it wasn't long before I realized

the impermanence of things

This past year and a half has encouraged a lot of self-reflection. I had the time and the mental space to re-evaluate the path my life was taking, reflect on past experiences, and even update my dreams for the future. It was also a year of loss, missed opportunities, canceled plans, and change. The minor adjustments to daily life combined altogether to create a whole new way of living. Naturally, I'm an overthinker; and with all that extra time and space to think, I found myself

the impermanence of things
the impermanence of things
the impermanence of things
the impermanence of things
the impermanence of things
the impermanence of things
the impermanence of things
the impermanence of things

The Most Important Decade in Our History

Josiah Roche

That’s the lyric to a song Spotify decided I wanted to listen to. It echoes a sentiment I see clanging about all around me. We are told our 20’s are a time to party, a time to make sure we live to the fullest, a time to enjoy our youth. We are implanted with this FOMO, a fear that we are going to look back and regret ‘not having fun’, whatever that means. You see it in advertisements, it’s shoved down our throats in music, and Hollywood glorifies the concept like it’s a — on second thought, I’m not even going to go there. We are encouraged to waste away the most driven, open minded, and purpose seeking time of our lives. I’ve had to step back and challenge these deeply ingrained thoughts, and as a result ask myself why I hold them.

The best years of our lives. What comes to mind when you hear that phrase? An image of you curled over your walker as you try and pick your cellphone up off the ground at the ripe age of 80? Maybe, but for some reason I doubt it. The years where you toil from 9-5 pouring your sweat, blood, and tears into someone else’s company, only to be paid a fraction of what you’re worth? Maybe, but for some reason I doubt it.

The roaring 20’s, that’s what comes to my mind. I don’t know about you, but pop culture has made me associate the best years of my life with my 20’s, and it makes me so damn anxious. Anxious to make sure I don’t waste a minute of these years. I want to live, love, explore, and feel, hard. I want to spend time with my friends, see the world, and make memories. But why do I feel so panicked to pack it into such a short time? I don’t know. I truly don’t. Perhaps the same reason we hold a lot of the views we hold: we were told to. Whether implicit or explicit, we were told to.

Our 20’s truly are a beautiful time. We are so full of energy, so full of drive, and perhaps most importantly, so hungry for purpose, and so full of naivety. We haven’t been crushed by the world, at least not yet. We still have that fire burning within us, pushing us up, up, up.

I look around me and I see that anxiety, I see it in almost every single one of you. Our social lives have become the most important aspect of our existence. We fear the thought of looking back on our 20’s and wishing we had done it differently. Wishing we had spent more time at the beach, more time backpacking as a privileged tourist, more time sleeping around with different, exciting people, more time just being free. So we sacrifice our future freedom as we waste away our energy, spending these years filling our cup of social satisfaction, sitting on a patio conversing with our friends, avoiding anything that might be uncomfortable, truly uncomfortable. I’m not judging, I include myself in this, but it doesn’t feel like me deep down; it feels trained.

Whenever I feel something is influencing me to act a certain way, I stop, and I ask myself why. Why am I made to feel this way about my 20’s? Who stands to gain? Who stands to lose? I think some people call that critical thinking. Me, I just call it thinking: not taking what we’ve been fed at face value.

I’m not here to sit and spew conspiracy theories, to be honest with you, I’m not entirely sure why I am sitting here writing this. I think I just want to challenge some of these preconceived notions we hold. To challenge ourselves to ask why we hold them, and what could replace them. To challenge ourselves to be uncomfortable, and to discover the beauty that such discomfort holds. To challenge ourselves to use this time in our lives to step back and look at our world. We’re part of a society that educates us to get a job, be safe, and create a comfortable cocoon around ourselves and those we love. We aren’t even taught how to actually make money, just how to get a job, and make money for someone else.

We in the West live these lives of comfort; we go about our daily routines in blissful ignorance to the reality of our world. But it’s not truly ignorance. The information is out there, we just don’t want to make ourselves uncomfortable by facing, accepting, and then dealing with it. We live behind a curtain, in a fabricated world, propped up by what is on the other side of the curtain. Our lifestyle in the West (only a minority of the population), is sustained by almost everyone else. The suffering we see in our world is not a random occurrence, and our opulence comes at a price, and a heavy one at that; just not one we pay, and so we go on with our days. We spend our 20’s having fun, our 30’s settling down, and by the time we’re 40 well “that’s just the way the world works”, is what we’ll say. How horrifying.

If we don’t use the most energetic, driven, and naïve time in our lives to instigate change, will we ever? I look around me and I am embarrassed. No, that word doesn’t do it justice. I look around me and I am ashamed, ashamed at the world we created, ashamed at the values we hold, ashamed at who we have become, when we could have become anything. And so I refuse to waste my 20’s chasing fleeting feelings of satisfaction. I refuse to stand idly by and take part in what we have become.

No, this is our 20’s. This is when we do what everyone told us we couldn’t. This is when we stare back up at those who look down on us. This is when we take charge of our present, and we build the future. This is our 20’s.

I HEAR YOU

I am writing to the cobwebbed place that never gets swept,
That still sits under layers of dusty feelings -
Collecting neglect.
You deserve a change.
I'm listening to you;
I am sorry I did not take the time to hear your tears
Or the subtle ways you pulled at my heart.
I tried so desperately to ignore your hurt,
Thinking that pushing through made me strong
But all I did was leave you waiting like a hungry child
To be fed at suppertime.
Come here,
Lay your trembling hand in mine -
I want to feel your chilled fingers and read their pain;
Open your thoughts -
Share your truths, even if the jagged words would
Scrape my heart.
I want to know what hurts,
Teach me how to hear the moonless places that
Could be frightening,
For treading through their darkness
Can bring us into light.

by kayla mcintosh

The Open Road

@poemsbyjulia

Julia McGolrick

i was on a trip with my father and i couldn't help but stare in absolute awe at everything we passed during the 5 hour drive

trees shedding their green for a more favourable red, truck stops, cornfields, thousands of other individuals coming from wherever and going who knows where

it got me thinking about the open road, the journey, and how it reminds me of a love i once knew.

you see on the open road there is no destination. where you come from and where you're going are of no importance.

there is a moment, stretched out in time, that feels like it might never come to an end. the air smells sweeter, cleaner than it does in the city.

the wind blowing against my skin feels like the caress of fingers i haven't felt in years. it reminds me of you.

it reminds me of a love where i cannot exactly pinpoint the beginning and the end.

a love where i'm still on the road but you might be a few cars ahead of me now, or possibly not even within my sightline.

it reminds me of a love where we wanted for nothing. we would be in the middle of nowhere but my god how magnificent nowhere is when your face is right next to it. how easily i could stare at these landscapes for the rest of my life if it meant i could turn to tell you every aspect of their beauty. how the freshness of the green grass reminds me of your eyes and how every time they fell on me i felt like i had been born anew. how i feel like this car, this mere vehicle of transportation is what is bringing us towards a salvation of sorts. a reunion.

i was wondering why i felt more alive on this trip than i had in 2 years. it felt like the beginning of something.
it feels like the journey isn't over.

the road i'm on now, well it's lengthy and it's beautiful
it has diverged many times now, still unsure of where it is going, but oh is it ever still going, aimlessly, without direction, and i am enjoying the ride, sitting in bliss with the azure sky locked in my gaze, and right now i want for nothing. i'm okay with a few pit-stops along the way.

but with everything left in me, every hope, every dream, every kilometre,
even if it means running out of gas and pushing the rest of the way,
i hope it leads me back to you

LAYOUT DESIGNER

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*Currently in the process of renaming

It’s now safe to turn off your computer.