

# *The Gryphon*

*Spring 2025*

**MC**

**MONTGOMERY  
COLLEGE**

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The Gryphon is a mythical beast with the head, wings, and upper torso of an eagle and the body, hind legs, and tail of a lion.

# *The Gryphon* **2025**

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# Contents

- Cover -- Manasama - Safiya Mowlana
- 6 -- Art One - Jeff Santiago
- 7 -- Poems by Strangers - Peninnah Victor
- 7 -- Rebirth - Gabrielle Yimginia
- 7 -- Untitled artwork - Alejandra Bolanos Manzanares
- 8-9 -- Leaf-Stained Pavement - Killian Sibug
- 10 -- Black Ink Pen - Sara Heydari
- 10 -- Textile - Safiya Mowlana
- 11 -- Distortion - Safiya Mowlana
- 11 -- Disorderly Recount - Sara Heydari
- 12 -- Rejection - Gabrielle Yimginia
- 12 -- Trust - Alexander Maurer
- 12 -- Mono - Safiya Mowlana
- 13 -- Inner Child - Esha Manoj
- 14 -- Black & White - Bailey Mathis
- 14 -- Reflection - Safiya Mowlana
- 15-16 -- Liquid Mirror - Killian Sibug
- 17 -- Self Love - Gabrielle Yimginia
- 18 -- The Unmasking - Peninnah Victor
- 18 -- The String - Raenelle Turner
- 19 -- Untitled artwork - Kayla Matibag
- 20 -- Three Hearts, One Broken - Astoria Siahaan
- 20 -- Someone Who Loves You - Astoria Siahaan
- 21 -- I Am - Chenkin Kaden
- 22-23 -- A Mother Unspoken - Maimouna Barry
- 24 -- I Remember - Astoria Siahaan
- 25 -- Three Sisters - Asma Abbas
- 25 -- Tunnel - Yusuf Benya
- 26-28 -- A Funeral for Ears - Maimouna Barry
- 29 -- I Am - Sahil Kharel
- 29 -- Only I - Melisa Ayala Orellana
- 30 -- From Me to You - Kayla Matibag
- 31 -- Listening to Blue - Kayla Matibag
- 31 -- Pottery One, Two, Three - Kayla Matibag
- 32 -- I Am - Emma Poch
- 32 -- Untitled - Sara Heydari
- 33 -- Nature Is the Dancer I Want to Be - Kayla Matibag
- 33 -- On the Shore - Yusuf Benya
- 34 -- Editorial Staff



Peninnah Victor

It excites me to think that there's a poem out there  
Written by Someone I've never met,  
But somehow replaces my words  
Frames and rearranges them into a garland of not flowers but  
thorns  
Where every word pierces through my soul  
Where every line rings in my ears and  
plays flashes of memories  
All of this done by a stranger  
Someone I've never met  
But someone who's met my soul.



Untitled

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Alejandra Bolanos Manzanares

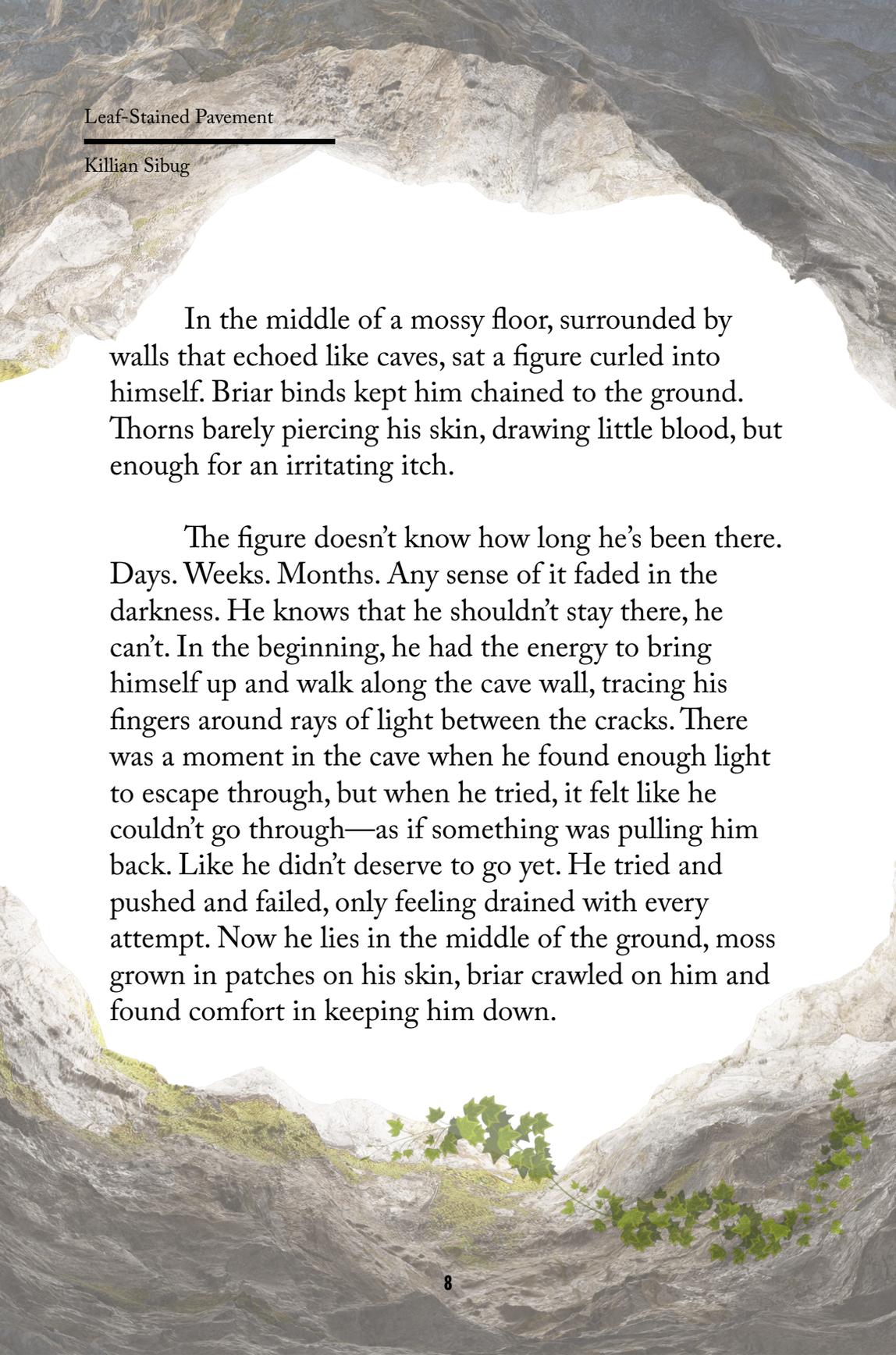
And in the chaos,  
She found her way,  
She found her identity.

For yes, the ultimate goal in life  
Is to attain happiness,  
Beyond any obstacle.

To find balance,  
And to be true to oneself,  
Such is the key to human life.

Gabrielle Yimginia

---



In the middle of a mossy floor, surrounded by walls that echoed like caves, sat a figure curled into himself. Briar binds kept him chained to the ground. Thorns barely piercing his skin, drawing little blood, but enough for an irritating itch.

The figure doesn't know how long he's been there. Days. Weeks. Months. Any sense of it faded in the darkness. He knows that he shouldn't stay there, he can't. In the beginning, he had the energy to bring himself up and walk along the cave wall, tracing his fingers around rays of light between the cracks. There was a moment in the cave when he found enough light to escape through, but when he tried, it felt like he couldn't go through—as if something was pulling him back. Like he didn't deserve to go yet. He tried and pushed and failed, only feeling drained with every attempt. Now he lies in the middle of the ground, moss grown in patches on his skin, briar crawled on him and found comfort in keeping him down.



But there was a day it changed. A wall of the cave collapsed; leaves followed, blown in by a wind. They met him on the ground, surrounding him, and fell. He managed to pick a leaf up. Light bounced around it as he twisted the blade between his fingers. Warm in a way, he felt comforted. Then the itch of the briars came back. He scratched at it, finding little relief. He went back to the blade and wrote that it hurt. That it bothered him. That the thorns irritated him. That the itch hurts him. That he's hurting himself. And without warning, the itch disappeared. The figure looked down and the thorns weren't there, only the tendrils of a plant that began its retreat. He found a release in his binds through his writing. Through his admittance.

The briar blood on his ankle melted into ink. He wrote until he was capable of moving again. To trust he wouldn't fall again. Picking up the leaves and using ink to paint words on the leaf blade. Once a leaf was filled, it crumpled into dust, and he found the next one. With each leaf, he found himself closer to the light without resistance. The figure managed to reach the opening of the cave in the end, straight into the forest he's always known. It was his hands that touched the lining of the walls last, parting with each step he took on the steppingstone ahead of him. Leaf-shaped prints stained the path as he left.

Black Ink Pen

---

Sara Heydari

Last week I made a stop at the supply store  
I bought myself a new, black ink pen  
This pen is a link between you and me.  
This pen is as quick as a traveling lady,  
eager to keep a record of her loves.  
With its pointed tip, .5, like a thin thread that keeps  
us stitched together.

This pen is as bittersweet as our shyness, funny how words failed us.  
Sharp like my wits when I'm not so tensed up around you  
Spills as I do when I am forced to speak, back against the wall with not  
much choice  
It has a boldness to it like the kind I wanted you to possess.  
Making marks recklessly, the pen as messy as you and I.  
I wanted more intention behind my choices,  
so I got myself a new pen at the supply store.



---

Safiya Mowlana

Textile

Safiya Mowlana



When did I let  
melancholy swallow me?

When did you hand  
it to me, so free of grace  
it was shameful?



When did I trade my  
femininity for  
dominance?

When did you abandon  
your post?



When did shame begin  
to follow my love?

When did I trade  
intimacy for a shadow?

Disorderly Recount

Sara Heydari

## Rejection

---

Gabrielle Yimginia

The sadness caused by rejection—is it a reflection of our insecurities, or is it due to the love we had for the protagonist?

This is the question I ask myself every day.

Rejection hurts immensely.

The best physical manifestation of the effect of rejection is standing in front of a mirror that highlights all your imperfections, both internal and physical.

It feels as though your deepest flaws and regrets are being listed in an insensitive way.

The magnitude of rejection's effect on a person lies in their self-esteem, their self-mastery and narrative, and their self-confidence.

When all these conditions are met, rejection itself transforms into deliverance. A mentally healed person who faces rejection experiences it as liberation. They are grateful because they firmly believe that anything aligned with them cannot reject them.



Safiya Mowlana

---

Mono

You ask too much of me. My story is nauseating. It'll gut you. Split you open and spit on your remains. You really want me to vomit up my soul and serve it to you on a silver platter? Give me time to choke up pieces first - so I don't suffocate. You ask too much of me. How am I to be loved by you if you must carve out my heart to see if it's worth loving? How am I to let you have your way with me without promise of you staying? You want me, but you must look at me bare and bone to know for sure? You ask too much of me. Why must you see blood for you to know I have a heart? Why must I lie naked for you to see my scars? You do not have to know where I have been to know where I will go. You ask too much of me.

Alexander Maurer

---

Esha Manoj

Deep within a beating heart, from one fractured soul, manifested two beings.  
One suffocates within a bulbous vile wall of flesh of her own making,  
desperately trying to breathe as she chokes on the fumes of her identity burning  
just out of reach.

The other is long and stretched thin by the responsibilities they heap on their  
head and toes, with the softest broken smile,  
one which blooms when an existence understands the magnitude of What It  
Means To Love,  
curving up to meet doe eyes surrounded by the evidence of sleepless nights.

The trapped one watches behind her barrier as the stretched one treats *Every.  
Single. Thing.*

With the heartbreaking kindness that follows the realization it is the most  
selfish path to defy the past and future fate-

But never turns to her.

The trapped one's eyes water as she watches their carefully straightened back  
get smaller and smaller as they walk away, one slow step at a time.  
She was so young, she can only do so much, please-  
Why aren't they taking her too?

The child opens her mouth to call out to the weary one, to ask for the support  
she craves, for those tender hands to reach out to her just as they do for  
everything and everyone else  
but nothing comes out.

*She has no breath left to cry for help.*

Instead, she gags on the ashes of a fire she lit with her own flint,  
struggling to put it out with the tears helplessly streaking the soot on her face.  
But what to be done?

The trapped one is ensnared, bound within a blazing fortress  
and the long one, with splinter smiles yet the gentlest touch,  
is too hollow to turn around and see what they are leaving behind.  
The free one has learned the meaning of forgiveness and promised  
to never look back.

Bailey Mathis

You feint left, right, diagonal, up, down, discourse  
Is disallowed—only “truth”—  
Holiest of holies—lay down your sword  
For the end of the day brings the fate of your world.  
Nothing sacred, hail your men  
As slaves, not martyrs for the battle you won.  
Overplay your hand—lose more than your head—  
Confidence, grace, respect.  
Games of wits, turns of phrase  
Brought down by a binary code.  
You writhe, you hope, you renege on your word—  
Words, words, words... nothing means anything,  
Anything goes—immoral laws stand  
And backs break for the king  
Work, work—nothing ever does.  
Sacrifice all for the title you gained—  
It means nothing when no one is left.

Reflection

---

Safiya Mowlana



I always hated to look at myself in a mirror. Well, not just any mirror, my bathroom mirror. Every time, I looked like I was shattered. A mosaic of images that resembled me from other people's expectations. Longer hair. Makeup. High pitched voice. But none of them were me. Not truthfully at least. My voice was trained to be high from chorus. My hair's longer since I haven't learned to cut it on my own yet and I always like to do a half-up. Makeup helps me accent parts of myself that I like. Without a reflection, I'm comfortable in my body, I know how I look to myself and that's what I love most. I'm not the typical man. I'm the man I want to be. At least in the ways I can without help. For now. But when I look in that mirror, I see what everyone else sees. I hate it. It feels like I want to crawl out of the floating array of shapes and pieces to shatter the glass. At the very least the mirror would match my reflection.

The feeling subsided when I got to college, I found people that saw me the way I saw myself. And I thrived in it. I could act unapologetically without catching myself and needing to hide. Be involved in things that I stopped myself before because of my doubts and not wanting to be misgendered. I grew to be comfortable in myself that I didn't need to care—if I wanted it, I would achieve it. I built my image from the ground up and I'm proud of who I am and what I've done. But it does get to me sometimes.



The misgendering, misinterpretations, and miscommunication—or lack of it in the first place in my parents' case. Back in their house, I'm not the thriving college student, I'm the eldest that they debate whether I'm an adult or their baby. Allegedly prepared to for when I leave but refuses to let me grow. Every time I look in that mirror, I hate that I can see it too. What they see. What everyone else who doesn't know me sees. I lead a double life that wasn't my choice but is my circumstance. Minus the action-packed thrills, replaced by emotional exhaustion. There's only so much anyone can take, that I can take before I punch my mirror and crack it. We finally match.

From shards of the mirror to my broken tears, I find myself at a lake. In its serenity, there was no judgement, no hiding. I sat by the edge, allowing my tears to fall abandoned. They dropped into the lake and made a wrinkle. I peered over. I could see the cracks swirl together and the misshapen reflection complimented me. I could finally see Me in this liquid mirror, and I smiled. I'll eventually get them to see how I view myself. I want it and I will achieve it. Ripples can make the biggest waves, and I plan on being a tsunami.

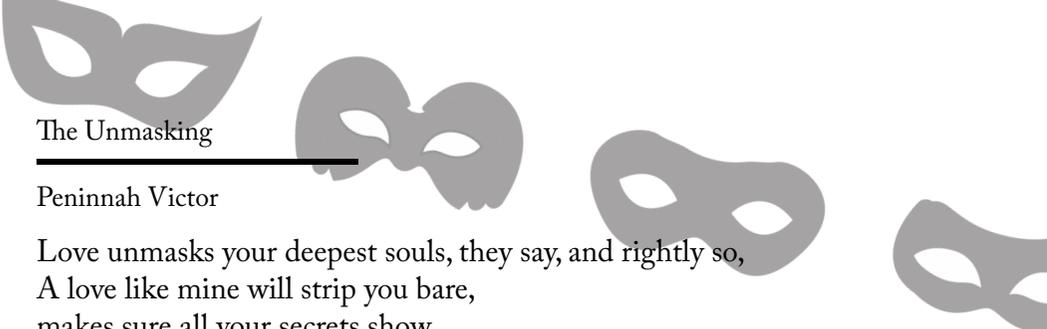
Gabrielle Yimginia

And suddenly, I felt like I owed myself an apology.  
Yes, an apology for putting others before myself.  
An apology for prioritizing the presence of someone by my side  
over my health and self-respect.

Instantly, I broke down in tears, shouting, crying, and begging God  
to forgive me and make me better.  
It was in the midst of those tears that I found the answer to my  
cries, to the pain of a lifetime.  
This answer came instinctively from my mouth, and I said,  
"I try to be better, but this fight is against myself, against the little  
girl who's felt alone since childhood."

As simple as it may sound, that was the answer to the pain of an  
entire life.  
This simple response explained all my discomforts, all my  
shortcomings, and all my sorrows.  
The habit of being neglected and abandoned had planted within me  
the desire to be accepted and loved.

The desire that one day, someone would love me so much and make  
me their priority without any prior request, without logical reason,  
and without limits.  
The longing to feel, in unspoken words, that loyalty, devotion, and  
love forever.  
In the unknown of true love and the yearning to feel it, I made a ton  
of mistakes in my life.  
Yes, I made a ton of mistakes trying to be loved.



## The Unmasking

---

Peninnah Victor

Love unmask your deepest souls, they say, and rightly so,  
A love like mine will strip you bare,  
makes sure all your secrets show.  
It pulls you closer, then forces you to stand before the glass,  
I stand in awe of what I see, while you can barely pass.  
The face that stares back at you, a monster in the frame,  
Clear as crystal, raw and true, my love whispers all your truths.  
It rips away your masks, exposes all your sins,  
Vile yet forgivable i say and  
run to the embrace it, while you turn and flee into the day.  
You call yourself a warrior bold, but you're not quite the same,  
For in your heart, you fear the dark, you shy away from pain.  
I stay, my heart with monsters' eyes, a language we both know,  
I speak to them, alone again, while you run from what you owe..

What used to be a blanket is now undone.

One by one, the strings came together.

She made the blanket throughout years of her life;

As for now, it took 20 years to make.

The number changes every 365 days.

What used to be a blanket is now undone.

The blanket's material was soft—

Soft, comfortable, and large.

The blanket was able to stretch and provide comfort to others.

The blanket was able to help and love.

The blanket was there to protect and catch tears.

What used to be a blanket is now undone.

The string of the blanket came apart,

And what was once a blanket is now a single string.

What happens when the string is broken—

The single string that's left?

What happens when the string is broken?

Please, Jesus, let me in when I face self-death.

What used to be a string is now undone.

One by one, the strings fell apart.

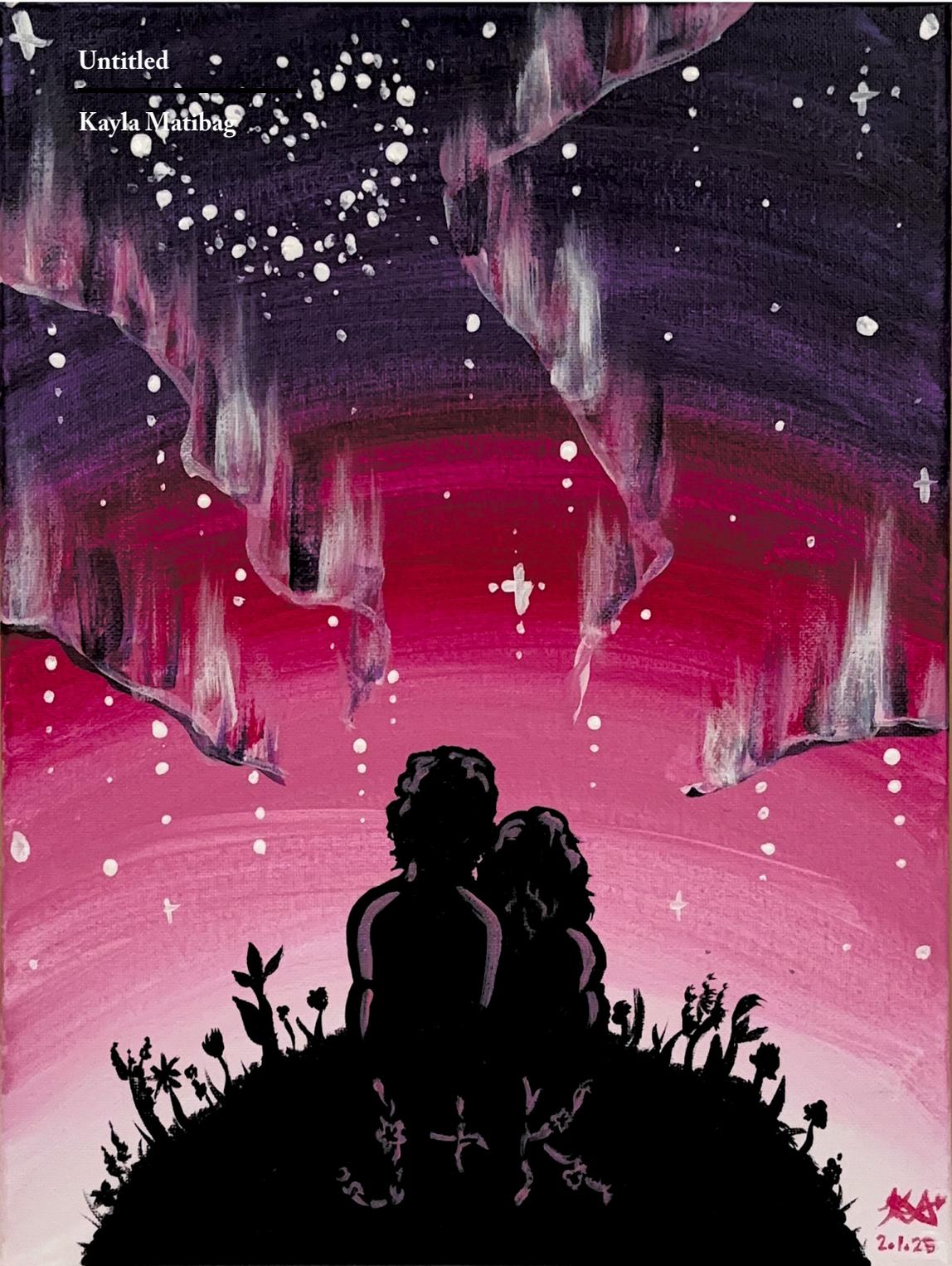
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## The String

Raenelle Turner

Untitled

Kayla Matibag



three hearts, one broken  
reach for a hand, an excuse  
run where no one can be found  
reach a dark corner, privately  
whisper the lies you've made to  
protect yourself from the truth  
you run away  
speak of nothing, lean against their  
shoulder, shed a tear silently  
stay quiet, see nothing  
listen in when needed, pretend  
to sleep  
put on your mask when you're  
noticed  
don't forget to talk  
at least a mumble  
no time to think  
keep your mask on til you sleep  
three hours in, you still pretend  
find your mask, hold composure  
if you let it take over,  
who will you go to?

never in my life  
have I ever felt like this  
a true pain to hide  
always in my heart  
heavy streams, never ending  
a silence transcends  
witness my heartache  
my prayers stay true tonight  
an endless longing  
never have I thought  
forever a misery  
a sleepless darkness  
a love you deserve  
safety and satisfaction  
always remember  
a place you can find  
comfort and tranquility  
someone who loves you

---

Someone Who Loves You

Astoria Siahaan

# I Am

---

Chenkin Kaden

I am the tearing of muscle, the pain that refines,  
A furnace of will where discipline shines.  
Each morning I rise, rebuilt and anew,  
Stronger in mind, in body, in view.

I am my father's sailor, steadfast and bold,  
Disciplined, driven, with iron to hold.  
Through storms, I have wandered,  
through tempests I've sailed,  
Yet never once faltered, never once failed.

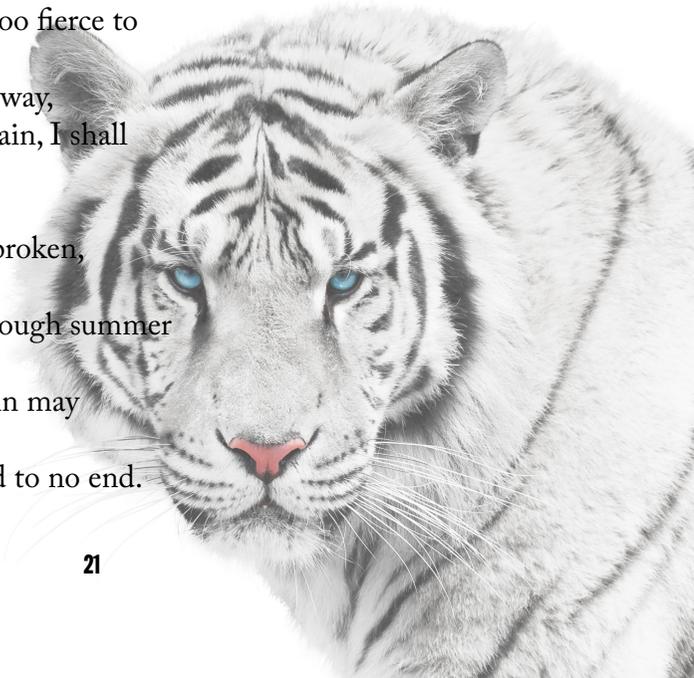
I am John Locke, a thinker untamed,  
Seeking to challenge, refusing the chains.  
Old institutions may tremble and shake,  
But the truth is the hammer no force can break.

I am the White Tiger, distinct and rare,  
Marked by my difference, too fierce to scare.  
Older, yet wiser, I walk my way,  
Through jungle and mountain, I shall never stray.

I am the Appalachians, unbroken,  
standing tall,  
Standing through time, through summer and fall.  
The wind may howl, the rain may descend,  
Yet I remain firm, unmoved to no end.

I am the waters of Harpers Ferry,  
strong  
Rushing through barriers, pushing far along.  
Like rivers that are carved  
through stone over the years,  
I sharpen through struggle,  
reshaping my fears.

I am the long grass, proud and untamed,  
You cannot cut me, I cannot be maimed.  
Like water, fire, stone, and air,  
I change, I endure, I rise, and I dare.



## A Mother Unspoken

---

Maimouna Barry

My mother is like a comma,  
The separation of ideas  
Or the continuation of a point  
A life she has brought me into  
Still in progress, still in motion  
An interruption i was,  
And an inconvenience I continue

My mother was never a full sentence  
Never came to a full stop  
You can hear it in her walk and when she takes a breath  
Waiting to exhale  
And when she does, incomplete  
A disappointment without fail

She already passed that down to me  
The built in rejection of being  
The built in dissapointment of self  
The built in guilt off recieving

Love is not apart of her dna  
Like the maternal mitochondria in the both of us only know what it knows  
She knows I will never know  
True acceptance of myself

You are my mother  
My first enemy  
Yet the brightest star in my life  
My first friend  
Yet the biggest critic to my strife

I punish myself with what I think your punishment will be  
I neglect and alienate myself before you can  
I beat you to it  
I did it first  
So in that way, you don't ever need to

I already did it  
I already starved myself for 3 days and looked sad when I needed to  
I looked how I thought you wanted me to  
So that my sorry didn't seem untrue



I play a role  
This life is like a stage  
I react to you  
And never let you know how I truly feel

I never let you tell me how you truly feel  
I already punished myself  
So that I'm pitiful enough for excuse  
I'm sorry is not enough from me  
And it will never be what you deserve

My life is lived for you  
It has been since the day you became a  
door,  
Opening into a world you promised for  
me  
I immediately became the object of your  
expectations  
The frame for your conditions  
The essence for your existence  
All for me to call you "Mom"

I depended on you  
And you'll depend on me  
I hurt you  
And you know how to hurt me  
I hurt you  
Yet you choose to hurt me

I'm new here  
I've only known you half your life  
I'm only a fragment of your story  
A piece of your legacy  
Something you can choose to claim or  
let be

But you're an unconditional for me  
You're not a maybe, a might be, or an  
option to me  
You are the start  
You are my beginning  
You are my mother

I cannot believe I came from you  
And you looked at me with disgust  
You looked at me with pity and hints of  
regret  
I looked at you with what I was taught was  
love and what I was taught was pride  
You looked at me because I am only half your  
life

I want you to know I am my own person  
But I couldn't have been without you  
I take you for everything  
All the hurt and the pain that you put me  
through

But I'm glad you did  
Because without it, I wouldn't be an extension  
of you  
I wouldn't be the essence or the object of  
what is your truth  
I wouldn't be your second heart  
Or your second breath  
I would just be a piece of meat  
Floating in a sea of meaningless memories

I love you  
Nene, I love you  
Mother, I love you  
I hope that you love me more than your duty  
to  
More than your role  
More than what you supposed to

Because I cannot imagine my world without  
you.

## I Remember

---

Astoria Siahaan

I remember the dark void my eyes saw until my life flashed before me and woke my eyes with a powerful bang and all I saw was still a dark void and a small hint of the road ahead of me.

I remember the tiredness of my eyes and the slur of my speech and everything slowing down, but all I could hear was his voice gently speaking to me and giving me comfort despite the cold dark wet air that surrounded our touch of a close-knitted hug.

I remember the confusion I felt when my dad gave me his final hug and kiss at dusk, while the neighborhood is still waking up, the strangers in our house murmuring some kind of nonsense, I, still sleeping on the couch, listening the trembles of my father's love.

I remember the soft touches and the gaze of his soft eyes, the gentleness and how he holds me close and tight, with the consistent stare I hold upon him, he brings me in closer and leaves one peck on my head and cheek.

I remember the torture of laughter, never-ending, the cramps of our stomach and the cries of our lungs, and nothing could or would stop us, and at that moment we all knew this was the best high we have ever felt in forever.

Asma Abbas

An aging house, sun shining through  
cracks,  
woods behind that brimmed with  
mystery,  
walls and desks adorned with  
knick-knacks  
they lived there, the sisters, there were  
three.

Trekking through the large open  
woods, they felt so free  
running along a lazy creek, and  
skipping rocks.  
Inseparable, the sisters were happy to  
be three.  
like children, they believed the fun  
would never stop.

Books at the kitchen table,  
they laughed, they talked, they played.  
The youngest always in search for the  
elders appraisal,  
now she peers into their desolate room,  
wishing that they'd stayed.

An aging house and an apartment  
the sisters were two and one.  
Routine had become boring and  
redundant,  
so the girls still found ways to have  
some fun.

Roads dark and streaked with rain,  
the lights smeared in the reflections of  
dew,  
when they were together the sisters  
could hardly complain.  
"I'm just happy I get to see you!"

They found solace in late night drives  
always wanting to grab some food.  
Though they now had separate lives,  
like in the old days, they laughed, they  
talked, they chewed.

A state, a campus, and an aging house.  
The sisters were no longer three.  
One left behind, one moving forward,  
and one with their spouse.  
Though they do meet, their visits are  
brief.

The woods no longer rings out in cheer,  
the house, asleep  
awaits their return in a miserable state  
Wanting the girls to come home, back to  
their keep,  
because only then is the house awake.

Maimouna Barry

Jayahthi's mother didn't open her door, much less knock. The girl sat at the corner of her bed, waiting for the wooden wall to swing, making way for a short woman and her jangling arms to embrace her. She waited for footsteps to run up the wooden steps that cascaded from her room, anticipating the familiar taps at the carpeted steps. As she waited, she surveyed the coveted life that lay furnished around her – a queen size bed at the center of a room with four walls, limbs at the mercy of her complete human body, and a stomach that never starved. Yet, her eyes were wet and her mind was full of tar, with only a glimmer of hope that maybe, her mother would follow the routine she always had.

Jayahthi's mother has had access to her daughter's brain since the day she was conceived. Her power was in her ears, hardwired to the very thoughts in her daughter's brain. She used to reminisce about the first time she heard her daughter's two halves swimming towards each other in her womb, and the happiness she felt when she realized the voices that wailed in her sleep was of the life she was soon to be carrying. In the early years of Jayahthi's childhood, she remembers using the first day of kindergarten to test the limits of her power, curious if distance could wain it. Sure enough, every thought Jayahthi had, her mother heard. From the ouches at recess to the excitement of coming back home, Jayahthi's mother always knew.

Jayahthi's mother also knew that Jayahthi wanted to kill herself. She's been like this since she was young, since her first spark of self awareness. Jayahthi's mother hadn't realized her anticipation for the day her daughter realized she was brown, but when it came, all Jayahthi's mother felt was disappointment. Disappointment that her daughter, her mind, would also have to endure the ills of this world. But Jayahthi's mother didn't know that her daughter's newfound awareness would manifest itself into a monster.

Jayahthi hated herself. Her mind sought to undo all the lavishes of a life her mother had built for her. She innately believed she didn't deserve any of it. Every mistake she made was another reason to make another scar, and another reason to lock herself in her room up the wooden stairs. Every thought she had felt like it was echoed into a vacuum and ceased to be real. Jayahthi didn't notice how transparent her suffering had been, until she realized someone else could hear them too. Hear the monsters she made. Hear them, exactly how Jayahthi saw them. One day, as Jayahthi cried into her cut up arms and bruised legs, the hand of her mother found itself on the blade of her shoulder, almost as if it was summoned. The comfort was only for a moment, for when Jayahthi looked up to see her mother's face, her cheeks were as dull as Jayahthi's, and her mother's eyes were more sunken than her own. The sadness became shared, as if the monsters she once suffered alone to were now her mother's too.

The extent of Jayahthi's mother's blessing would soon be discovered to be a curse, as it would trick Jayahthi's mother into thinking she knew it all. Jayahthi's mother worried, ached and cried along with her daughter, praying for these thoughts to fade and for the hormones to lessen. Hoping for God to cut her daughter's mind some slack. But what Jayahthi's mother didn't know was that what she knew was only what she heard. Jayahthi's mother couldn't feel the cuts on the arms and thighs, the many attempts at suffocation, and the sound of shaking painkillers in her daughter's palms. Jayahthi's mother heard numbers, countdowns, that lasted until 80. She heard gasps, and hisses, and curses. She heard exasperation after every failed attempt. This is when she'd run.

Jayahthi's mother would fly up the stairs as if gravity had no effect on her. Her clothes disheveled and her mind a mess, she used these faint and almost impossibly quiet cues sent directly from her daughter's mind to alert her of the worst. She thought if she could interrupt it, she could stop it. If she was there, she could help. She didn't know what to do... she was frantic. Her ears received Jayahthi's call for help, and her instincts would lead her to autopilot. She realized this was her duty, to use her power to save her daughter. But every time she flung the door open, and swiped the bottle from her daughter's frail hands, or the scarf from her neck, Jayahthi's mother's mind deafened a bit. Her baby wanted her life gone. And it didn't seem like she had the power to stop it.

So back in the room, Jayahthi sat. She had soon figured out that the pattern of events was undeniable – her thoughts sparked a panic in her mother, and her mother was her diffuser. She knew her mother would come running. So, this time, she didn't find a razor blade, nor anything tight to tie. She just sat and thought. She cried, and let her thoughts materialize. Jayahthi's arms turned to bone and her skin became darker. Every breath she took felt like she stole it from someone else. She felt like she wasn't meant to be here. She believed she was not supposed to be born. She felt like she wasn't supposed to be loved, or take up space. She despised herself for doing so, for even living. She felt deeply, as she did the many times before, and waited for the door. And she sat for so long, the handle began to look like decoration.

The morning after, Jayahthi's mother made herself breakfast and tea. She ate quietly as her daughter stood at the end of the table, her hollow face streamed with traces of hot tears and eyes darker than the nights she couldn't sleep. Demanding her mother why she didn't come to rescue her, Jayahthi threatened that she was truly going to end her life. That she was going to do what she's always wanted. Her mother looked up slowly, her ears red and swollen. The night was long for the both of them. As Jayahthi had sat the night before, waiting for her mother to save her from herself, Jayahthi's mother was pulling at her ears. She yanked and jerked and plugged, anything to stop herself from feeling this pain. Anything to stop herself from hearing her daughter's mind. She began to believe what was funneled into her ears, and began to believe her eavesdropping all these years were more than a curse; a punishment. Jayahthi's mother gave everything for Jayahthi to live the life she never could. Even her ears were for Jayahthi; she began to hate herself for being able to hear Jayahthi's thoughts and not being able to console them. She was spent. Hopeless, and left with nothing but bruised ears, she said to Jayahthi:

“I only want what makes you happy, Jayahthi. Your peace and your happiness is all that matters to me. I love you so much.”

Jayahthi's mother attended the funeral in washed-out gray clothing, with a white veil draped at the crown of her head. The attendance was small, and scarce in people. The casket was blank, shiny and new. Jayahthi's mother's face, lowered and still, was covered as she accepted condolences from the loved ones around her. They called her brave. Self-less. A wonderful mother. The ceremony was beautiful, sweet and short, since there was not much life to recognize. The pews of the funeral parlor emptied, and Jayahthi's mother was left with the casket. As she grazed her hand over the polished wood, she touched her ears, and listened. Nothing. No thoughts but her own crossed her mind. She was satisfied.

As Jayahthi's mother descended the steps of the building, a plump and healthy looking Jayahthi waited in front of her path with her arms open, her smile as wide as her incoming embrace. Her hair was full, and the spots of baldness from nights of pulling had faded. She had covered her cuts with bracelets and wrist bands, and her eyes sparkled seeing her mother walk towards her. Her mother smiled too. As they embraced, Jayahthi unveiled her mother, and lightly stroked the sides of her head where her ears used to be. The scarred and calloused marks of what used to be Jayahthi's mother's greatest power, were now marks of her past. Her ears were gone, tucked away in that wooden coffin. Her sacrifice to her daughter lifted both their burdens.

Jayahthi's mother realized as much as she heard Jayahthi's aches, her pain for her daughter was reflected back into Jayahthi. She couldn't bear for her ears to be the guilt of her child's life. She couldn't help that she could hear everything for her daughter, and that she could respond as quickly as she wanted to, but she could help how it affected her.

Jayahthi's pain was hers to bear alone, and that gained her a newfound reign on her own emotions. She wasn't a puddle to be soaked up, or rain to be caught. She was Jayahthi, who is as human as her mother. Her tarpool of depression was hers to receive support, not to be shared. She wasn't an equation to solve, or a sequence to interrupt. She didn't feel tethered to her mother's emotional wellbeing due to her distraught. Her guilty conscience had built up in her brain every time her mom came to save her, and her mind would twist her mother's helplessness into a burden. Jayahthi had to know she wasn't a burden. So Jayahthi's mother stopped answering the distress call to share the distress. A cycle had to be broken, a crutch to the crutcher.

And Jayahthi lived to see another day.

I Am

---

Sahil Kharel

I am nothing and everything,  
I am the path to an awakened being.

I am a mountain that is still and calm,  
I am a sand that won't fit in a palm.

I am a river carving stories in stone,  
I am the melody of Karnali's tone.

I am the shadow of Everest's grace,  
I am the calm on Buddha's face.

I am a footstep on a foreign street,  
I am intersection where dreams and  
hard work meet.

I am the echoes of my family's voice,  
I am the weight of their sacrifice and  
my choice.

I am the curve where economies bend,  
I am the model that predicts the trend.

I am a prayer that rose with the temple  
bells,  
I am the story that my journey tells.

I am Sanatan, the truth ever known,  
I am the seed from which dharma has  
grown.

I am nothing and everything.

In the endless night  
Appeared so far away  
The Star and I

I cheekily watch the  
Star  
For many countless nights  
Wondering when the Star will  
become mine

The line between Heaven and  
Earth  
Suddenly became hearth  
With the cold months passing by

The Star and I  
Hand and hand  
The Star glistens in sight  
Nothing felt so right

Felt forever  
Nothing could break this endeavor  
Until ever was in forever to never  
The Star happens to be losing its  
tender

The truth I couldn't bear to  
remember

The Star  
Couldn't stay much longer  
Even if I tried

What once was mine  
How could a Star shine so bright  
Extinguish the light from inside

Only I

The Star did not need me  
The Star and I  
Was only I  
In the endless night

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Melisa Ayala Orellana

From Me to You

Kayla Matibag



Listening to Blue

---

Kayla Matibag

A hug from behind. His voice melted into the fingerpicked chords.  
The mirror would remind him of how much he longed for yours.  
He began to confess. Poured his heart out.  
You found that his loneliness could not be cured by the mouth.  
His thoughts speak louder than any comfort you could give.  
Every day he'll cower through the sad song he lives.  
The adlibs speak his truth. Not even he knows  
How long he spent his youth wanting to be alone.  
After he's done, the piano still sings.  
While his message hums, forever echoing.



Pottery One, Two, Three

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## I Am

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Emma Poch

I am the echo of footsteps on a dewy morning,  
fading into normalcy as they string  
from day to day,  
coalescing into a constant.

I am the squirrels who chatter  
and murmur  
and flit left and right in fear  
and eventually forget to fear at all.

I am an exchange cut short by the roar of  
exhaust.

I am brow, furrowed  
and a step forward  
taken to get just a little closer.  
I am a step back in reply.

I am a vulture circling, hungry,  
I am the cars driving by,  
I am the mother mourning,  
I am the runner passing,  
Leaping over the scatter of blood and viscera  
so it doesn't get on my shoes.

I am roadkill worn to a nub against the  
asphalt,  
dragged along by the ridges in the wheels.  
I am the onlookers, aghast,  
helpless to do anything but watch.

I am the hum of airplane engines overhead,  
Ceaseless.  
I am sorry for all of it.  
I am covered,  
claimed,  
consumed by mold  
And it is so much brighter than anything else  
I've ever known.

A walk in the snow  
Through the forest it covered  
I want to go further today,  
inside this snowy forest.  
Wrong shoes on my feet tread forward  
Fearless, I have these paths cemented  
in my memory  
I turn my head every 4, 8, 12  
minutes  
Footprints disappearing!  
Never mind that,  
my wrong shoes tread forward.  
I like to look back every 4, 8, 12  
minutes  
and see no trace of my steps  
I am so lonely in this forest  
The beauty it beholds amazes me,  
my head cannot come down.  
Life has granted me sight of this forest  
4, 8, 12 minutes and here I am  
Like I've been birthed in this place,  
no proof of me before or after.  
Lonely and craving the birds above  
my head  
Though I never really longed for their  
songs in the summer.

Untitled

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Sara Heydari

## Nature Is the Dancer I Want to Be

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Kayla Matibag

Let my dance captivate like fire  
Attracting the eyes of the audience  
Aching with burning passion  
Let it be as versatile as wind  
Breezing then blizzarding  
Blowing them all away  
Let my body flow like water  
Creating ripples from within  
Crashing when the time is right  
Let it be as grounded as earth  
Doing things on its own  
Desiring for balance

On the Shore  
Yusuf Benya

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