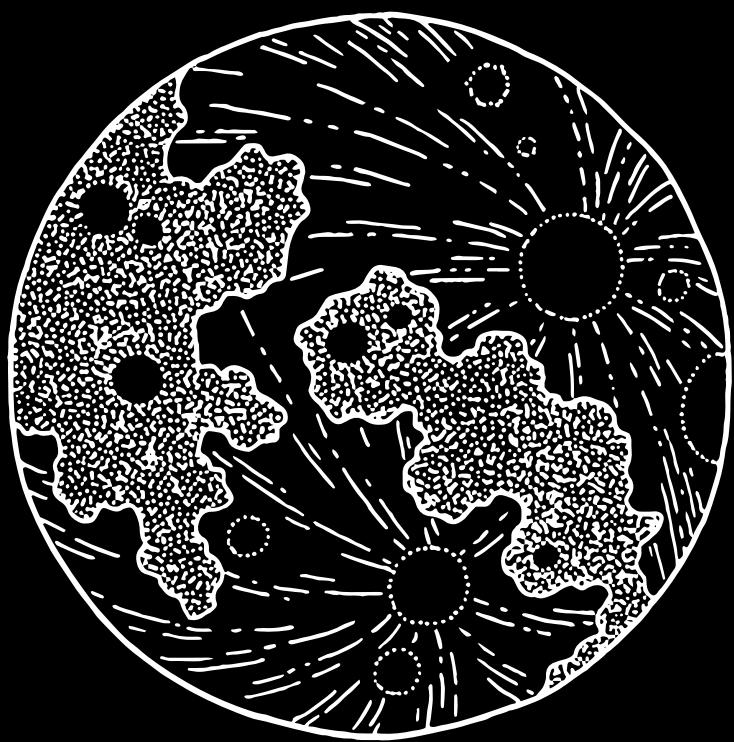


# SCINTILLA





# *from us to you...*

To the reader,

Thank you so much for reading Moonbow Magazine's second issue! We are so excited for you to step into our world again and explore all the moments that make life worth living.

For this issue, the theme was SCINTILLA, which describes a small spark or moment in life. We asked 'What are the tiny, perfect moments in your life?' We focus so much on the big moments in life and getting from one place to the next, but what does it look like when you embrace every moment, no matter how big or small it is? What role do those parts of our life have with us?

In the issue, we explore the different significant moments in our lives, especially the small ones we may overlook. Perhaps small moments aren't something that needs to be made way bigger, and maybe simplicity in life can be complex. SCINTILLA is all about embracing our lives, no matter what form they take.

Signed,



# Please Don't Poke the Belief System

Yasmine Diaz | 23

I was born at but there isn't much to remember besides what was told to me years later: C-section. Two parents. Low red-blood cell count. A healthy newborn, brought into the world on the fifteenth day of the tenth month of the twenty first century. Or as I like to call it, my first sign. 10-15-2000. At some point in elementary school I figured out with my newly obtained multiplication skills that the numbers in my birthday are all divisible by 5. Which happens to be the hour I was born. Even though my birthday is public information, I guard it like a secret. Or I guard the fact that the numbers can do a cool thing with another number associated with my birthday a secret. In life, it is possible for two seemingly unconnected events or things to miraculously happen at the same time. This is known as a coincidence. Life has a way of reminding me that I'm not really in control with coincidences like this. Everything that could and will happen to me only exists in some small corner of everything to ever exist. I have a belief system of sorts, but one summer I learned, it's not impenetrable.

When I was old enough to take into account that my parents also had birthdays, I made another discovery. There is a one month divide between all of our birthdays, with me being sandwiched by my parents. As the only child I thought this was just the icing on top of the cake. By the time I could think about coincidences, I wanted to test my luck. So whenever I was home and it was nearing 2:15, I would wait for the Daily drawings of the NY lottery. Before each numbered white ball could fizz up the tube, I would shout out a number. As to not cheat, I wouldn't look down at the tank of numbers. Instead I would look right at the announcer somehow creating a psychic bond between the two of us. There were dozens of times where I actually called out numbers and had it spoken back to me by the announcer. But none of it really mattered because I was too young to play Lotto. So close and yet so far away.

Before I got into high school the belief system I was prescribed was on normal ground. I had been raised Christian and did the whole communion thing. Every Sunday for six months I woke up at 8am, went next door to the church I was baptized in and sat in a school room with kids I never met in my life. Nothing in that room made a lasting impression on me besides one memorized prayer. It all ended with me in a white dress, my hair blow dried and straightened for the first time in my life, and a crisp wafer that I was told not to call "The Christ Cookie" in front of anyone.

My belief system went like this: There is someone up there who knows exactly what you're doing. Not like St.Nick who in return either gives you gifts you want or gifts you didn't ask for. But someone who dangles lottery numbers and makes sure your birthday is between your parents.

My mom is the one who brought the white dress and the straighter. She even paid more than 50 dollars to have my pictures taken at the mall. My dad is the one who, when confronted with evidence of a brown stain on my white communion dress minutes before the family gathering, told me it looked like a shit stain and made me laugh. They can both be described in this way: my mother handles things as they come and not a second later; my father handles things at their worst if he can't put it off any longer.

For a long time I did believe there was someone up there. A big someone I could talk to and beg for an escape from the multiplication table in school. But I didn't believe in the way that my family did. My aunts, my mom's sisters, can pick a favorite bible verse while I don't know any off the top of my head. My mom keeps a bible under her pillow, not for prayer but for another reason. On the island, they grew up going to church every Sunday and outside of that they were taught education by nuns, as told by my mom. They are a God-fearing immigrant family. My aunts and my grandmother still go to church every Sunday. My dad, raised by a God-loving immigrant, tells me he went to church when he was little. When he and his five siblings were younger, they ran into a Spanish witch (Brujeria) and denounced her spirituality. But once when I asked him to name five v.i.p.s from the Bible he said 'there's only two people I need to know, the father and the son'. That's why there's a framed picture of Jesus Christ (I think?) outside our kitchen.

Everyone, excluding my aunts and grandmother, has taken to the occasional “It’s all God’s will” laissez-faire approach. My mom never forced me to say grace before dinner or go to church. The times I did go, which were very limited, I couldn’t really connect the way my family connected. Mostly because every time I stepped foot into The House it was a wake. I would step into church wearing all black, wondering who would burst out crying during the speeches and if the food after the wake would be stale afterwards. Early on in my life I associated church with death and I could never unlink the two. I don’t know if I really am the least religious one in my family, but I do know that every thanksgiving, by the holy trinity and everything between, I have never been picked to say grace. So maybe I’m not an atheist just yet.

I can also blame my subtle aversion to religion on me finding Tumblr at a young age. At age 11 I was scrolling through the site with the pretext of God watching over me and I didn’t care. He wasn’t going to come down and stop me, there were other important things to do and more important people to check on. I came across a black and white blog that posted pictures that I had never encountered before. When I first joined Tumblr I was more on the colorful Disney side. Cute animations of movie clips, bedroom wall ideas, and pictures of mascara lathered eyelashes. This account was the exact opposite of Disney. It had upside down crosses, strobing black and white Gifs, and screencaps from the tv show Skins (UK). Skins featured many things like drugs, sex, and violence all from a teenage perspective. It took a lot of courage for me to even scroll through the page during the day let alone follow the blog. But once I did that I knew there was no turning back.

During a summer day at my mom's office, I took over a computer in the back room. I was switching between multiple tabs of Poptropica, Tumblr, and Youtube. On my screen was the black and white account, with a link to a music video from some artist. I clicked on it, Born to Die by Lana Del Rey. Every thirty seconds I paused the video, scared that my mom or her co-workers would catch me. I was more scared of my mother than God, she's the one who could give me an ass-whooping in real-time. It took some time to work up the nerve to watch it fully through. At the age of twenty, there is nothing about the song or the video that should've absolved me of religion. However, maybe that's because I'm not 11 years old anymore and I have that specific Lana Del Rey album on vinyl. But back then something about the video and that black and white blog made me subconsciously create a new belief system. Something personal and impersonal.

At some point, between the moment I graduated middle school and became a Lana fan and before I entered freshman year of highschool, I had a new way of system of my own. It goes like this.

*I'm Yasmine. From Brooklyn, New York, New York. The United States of America. North America. Earth. Solar System. Milky way.*

This has been a stream of thoughts that I had when I was younger. I would think about my place in our universe. I pictured myself from above and then zoomed all the way out like they do on Google Maps. Except I would go further away because Google can't take pictures of our galaxy, or universe for that matter.

When I used to do this, I got scared. I felt that my worth as one of billions of human beings was diminished and that nothing I did really had an impact beyond my little corner of the universe. It was a lot for a kid to be thinking about, but I was always the “know it all”. As deemed by my father, because I always had an answer to everything. The hot water isn’t coming out strong at home? They must be working on it downstairs. What’s the one movie with the cars? Fast and Furious. In my defense, when I was younger people tended to ask me questions and I gave them answers. Doesn’t mean I always gave the right ones. My avid imagination could provide some comic relief or sooth worries for people.

Along with knowing it all and my creative imagination, I wanted to know what death felt like, while still being alive. I had attended more than enough funerals to know what it looked like. Still I knew there was something different about being the body that didn’t move as opposed to one of the bodies that could. As a kid I don’t think I was morbid, I just strayed on the side of curiosity. And figuring out what death felt like was the realm where my curiosity took me. There were times I would lay down in the starfish position and shut my eyes and just think of darkness. Everything in my room turned off so that nothing would distract me as I tried to focus on not feeling my limbs. I would try to lay as still as paperweight. These little experiments didn’t last long because something would always take my focus away, aside from being the “know it all” my self-awareness is very present. I would feel my nose itch or a car alarm would go off outside. Sometimes when I felt like I was going too far, I would pull back. The feeling of numbness would become too much and I would realize that curiosity did kill the cat and I should not let it kill me. I haven’t done that experiment in years, which could be because every year I age I grow closer to death, so I don’t need to imagine what it feels like. But I think the shrinkage of my free time has also played a part in it.

In highschool, this way of thinking actually helped me. I got a 64 on a test? Well, nothing or no one outside of our galaxy wasn't gonna know anything about it, don't worry about it too much. I had a big project coming up? A star in the sky that shined in my window could've been the same one seen by Frank Sinatra. All of my problems only mattered in my corner of the universe. My mistakes couldn't reach the far ends of the borough let alone the state or country. It helped me remember that the whole world doesn't revolve around me. To some extent, I did myself a disservice by thinking this way. It was only towards the end of high school that I figured out I was a hot commodity to the male species.

This is the belief system that I made up. It might seem scary to some people, but to me it's comforting. It helps me see outside of myself and my goals, taking the focus off me and putting it out into the world. I've heard the phrase "so many things had to happen for you to be here" and I think I've seen some equivalent of it on a highschool poster, which automatically makes it true. I just choose to focus less on the whole big bang leading to me and more of the inverse. Me leading to something else- something preferably small. For example: the Eggos that I covered in syrup and cinnamon for breakfast.

# Laxmi Road

Sitara Mitragotri | 16

In a road that has outgrown us, remembrance carves jasmine-inked rivers into bedrock. The lamps stream patchworks through puddles. By a saree stall, another long-tailed myna falls into its reflection, talons clutching the bare skeleton of a betel leaf. It is not even monsoon yet, the vendor thinks, drying its feathers with her leather hands, face submerged in carmine and frayed fabric. Fingers that remember every layer of silk recognize when the road is a chrysalis. Young, yet bleeding the night's embers onto her cotton sleeves. Raw, yet spewing coconut oil onto asphalt. Somewhere, she remembers, she slipped its weathered threads into the shore. She grazes the collarbone where strings of white pickets and soda tabs once sat. On a road we cannot roam, she ties her jhumka to the myna, and tosses it into the night.

# I find you in an abandoned aquarium

Sitara Mitragotri | 16

here it is warm, soft from planting baby  
water lilies, raw from treading dirt through  
paper lace. skin inked in purple marks, each  
scar turning water to milk. two fingers  
held to boneless flesh. underneath a manta  
ray is nothing but soul, & eyes along every  
part of its body but the head. the fossils are  
in the seaweed, fragmented. in there you are  
not even a vision & before glass walls, you  
are not even a being. which is better? that in  
swimming from shore, we've molded to the  
sea. if you are the hunter, I will be the prey &  
if you are submerged, I will be the current.  
you twist the frayed threads of my back pocket  
& I, your sun-bleached ends. the morning light  
burns the cichlids into silence. I press my lips  
into yours & we let ourselves sink.

# cooking lessons

Sitara Mitragotri | 16

my mother brought only a plastic bag to California.

*for you*, she says, handing the miniature kitchen equipment for playing house.

But mainly, *so you can cook with me.*

& to my mother, I am *pressed small* by California, tossed from a hospital window into poppy embers before the first embrace. first gaze, first word, smeared in salt wind & trout.

In her steel container, the flour fossilizes her paper knuckles. she holds my palm to melting ghee. *it will remember you, child.*

I know that she is preserving these words in jars of pickled mango and ginger.

*it is what ripe lemons can never give you.*

& in the kitchen, my knife cut runs dry of men playing cattle herd, grazing bruised cornfields when the mines spit rust & combing the silken dirt of these fractured ghost towns.

She tells me to protect my fingers.

*They are your inheritance.*

Fragmented skeletons in river-stained pans & starved, brass-bellied fish on a cutting board.

We fry okra in cumin and coriander, slow and steady.

We eat the bhaji with bandaged fingers.

It's okay if we sit at different tables.

# Avonlea

Sitara Mitragotri | 16

& the tomato leaf is fragrant, despite the whiteflies we've displaced. in a junkyard we've renamed, a pedal is printed along your spine and a bike wheel curved around your jaw. The wind has stirred memoriam to a melody— a merchant takes a matchbox. a son, a fishing line. a father, a ring. into the weathered threads of your palm. we've sorted fingerprints and thick consonants from minerals. pawned them off like mancala pieces. your turn. this sunset will bleed & you will know each way your skin will tear in this field. my turn. give me your calloused lips, one after the other. let this be your last memory, stashed in the crest of a hydrangea. a fruit cup for your window. a windmill for your kite.

# a beginner's guide to planting tulips

Sitara Mitragotri | 16

# Streams

Morid Hadi | 17

Before I realized

Before I could prepare myself for it

The path of my emotions curved ever so slightly to the left

And I thought it would drift back in

Like a brook that connects again down the line

Oh what a Fool I was to believe that

I laugh at myself now

The original path can't even be seen by the naked eye anymore

It only lives in my mind

To be recalled bittersweetly

Memories in themselves are evil

They seem so close

But in reality they are a random points In time

Us drifting through it And can't return

I don't have a choice but to keep floating down this stream

Wishing And dreaming of it to turn right

Sometimes it gives me to false hope

It turns right for a Day or two

But then again

It violently turns left

Why didn't I realize of its deviation

I could've fixed it right then And there two years ago

# the eternal Chase

Morid Hadi | 17

Running through the Field trying to escape from "the end"

Every weed,

Every blade of grass,

## Each my memories

All interconnected roots in me.

Slowly reaching a cliff side and knowing this will end at some point

## A gentle whisper enters my ears

"You yourself don't know the reason for your escape so why not give up"

I went quiet and slowed down

But now I'm standing at the edge of my existence

The fates have catched up to me

Waving they're scissors around the strings of my life

## Slowly getting unraveled around me

I should be happy to be let go

Because the bitter truth is,

they're right

I don't know the reason of my existence

So I accept it and let go

But dear reader whose reading this

You know I didn't give up

So I fight back grab the fates in my hands and say

"I may not have a reason"

"I may never have"

"But I will continue to stare life in its soul" and say

"The sun may rise in hell in my eyes but god's grace will make it heaven one day"

And that hope is my fuel for running till this Day

# Childhood Rituals

Annelies Mohle | 23

Soft like eyelid sunshine

Soft like a lilac breeze

Soft like nostalgia

Soft like rhubarb leaves

Soft like fairy wishes

Whispered through the trees

Soft like a rose petal

Offered with a please

On dirty grass-stained knees

Our own mythologies

things i want to tell you but won't:

Annelies Mohle | 23

we kissed in my dream last night

and i woke up with a profound sense of loss

but we texted today

so i guess there's that

# Third Date Snapshot

Annelies Mohle | 23

His hand in mine on my thigh

Billy Joel plays as he drives

He tells me that he loves this song

And I think he means the words as he sings  
along

# Windows

Annelies Mohle | 23

The girl on the 10th floor across the way  
Is making her bed  
Her friend steps into view  
Throws a pillow and they laugh  
White sheets float in the air  
And I close my curtains

# The Resounding Silence

Claudia Wysocky | 20

The silence was resounding—

Stifling as it crept into my every thought.

The silence was all consuming—

Reshaping every crevice of my imagination.

The silence was foreboding—

As the thoughts of my mind seemed to echo off the walls.

I wanted the silence to break,

But it seemed to gain on me, twisting around my heart—

Wrapping its chilled fingers around my throat.

I was powerless to stop it—

But something sounded, a bang, a crash—

Piercing through the shroud of endless silence.

—My heart?

Was I finally falling apart,

At the thought of my own silence?

No—

It was the door.

And with it, came a flood of noise—

Tumbling into the room, overwhelming every thought I had.

A bang, a crash —And smoke.

Was it a fire?

Was I wrong about the silence?

Or had it only been hiding,

waiting for this moment to consume me?

No—

Oh—

My dad's smoking again.

# Broken Mug

Claudia Wysocky | 20

It was a cold, clear day in the second week of April.

I remember that it was a Saturday and that I was in the kitchen making coffee for the two of us.

I remember taking the cup from me and holding it up to the light to see if it was clean. There was a smear of coffee on the rim, but the coffee inside was still clear.

I remember how the light shone through the coffee and made the liquid glow.

I remember how he stood over me then, and how my heart fluttered like a bird. I froze.

He took the cup from my hand and threw it against the wall. It shattered into a thousand pieces and I remember watching as they fell to the floor like rain.

I opened my mouth to tell him that it was his fault, that he should have known what he was doing, but then I remembered that it was me who did that to us.

I took the broken pieces of ceramic and put them carefully in the sink in case there might be some use to them later.

I cleaned the place I had thrown my heart at, cleaned the place I had thrown my soul at.

I swept up the pieces of my life, as dull and meaningless as the fragments of ceramic.

I carried them to the garbage and threw them in, along with the fragments of my body.

# Beautiful Things

Claudia Wysocky | 20

Beauty: Something so rare to this world;  
For beauty only lives in the mind of its beholder,  
And the beholder's gaze be not wiser, nor older—  
Than she, the Universe, from which inside her we  
smolder.

Simple minds cannot admire true beauty,  
It is not an object that can be coveted;  
Oh!—Simple minds you cannot see,  
Beauty is too not something someone did.

It is what keeps me living;  
The reason as to why I subsist—  
Do not try to comprehend,  
Lest your reality be betwixt.

For I am the true beholder,  
And only I know what beauty is. . .

# Star of My Life

Ilie Alexandra-Maria | 18

If I knew that the Fates would thread my following years based on one simple glance at you, I'm not sure if I would have poked my eyes out or glued them wide open.

“Girls aren’t supposed to fall in love with boys,” my mother used to say. I’ve lived my whole life waiting for the boy who would write poetry about me, listen to love songs, imagine me, and hug his pillow to sleep as if it were my body.

But that all changed when you walked past me back in freshman year. Like a shooting star lighting up my night sky, I could have never imagined I was going to be the one filling pointless pages and then tossing them in the trash, as I do with tissues I blow my nose in.

I still blame the sun for making your honey eyes swallow me and your auburn hair glow, but who am I kidding, even if the sky crumbled down and the rains washed the earth away, somehow, you’d find a way to shine. I still blame myself for noticing these in the split second you looked at me as you hurried towards somewhere- I hope not towards someone.

Four years have passed, four years I have spent wondering “Why?”. Years where I knew you entered the room just from the way my palms began to sweat, and my heart wanted to leap out of my chest and jump into yours. Where every time you looked in my direction, I swallowed it whole, living from the crumbs I felt like you spared me. When I finally got the courage to approach you, oh wasn’t I setting myself up for my own demise? And when we kissed behind our teacher’s back on that trip, I knew the blade already over my neck began to sink deep.

I don’t even know if I want to turn back in time to feel your warm hands around my cold body once more, your lips softly touching mine, or exorcise you out of my memory, since your ghost keeps haunting me when I try to sleep.

I softly beg you to burn out at once and let me try to navigate the unknown of the night on my own.

# Moments (Vignette #1)

Kummi Sandra | 22

We're sitting on your shitty bed,  
Made with both our quilts, sandwiched  
('I won't steal the quilt if you don't steal the bed!')  
Our backs are against the wall.

Your aftershave has worn off by now,  
After a long day's work, and  
I just can't help it,  
I want this moment to last forever.

But it doesn't. It can't.  
The moment breaks.

I get up from the bed to write a poem or two,  
You go on your laptop and,  
Now we're at different corners of the room.  
It's peaceful, but it's without you.

I'll have to get used to it,  
Know that you love those moments too.  
But since they can't last forever,  
I hope I keep having moments with you.

# Let it Steep

J.L Kies | 26

Swaddled in a slate fleece blanket and glaring at the dimmed screen before me--still far too bright for someone who lurched out of bed barely forty-five seconds ago--I waited for class to start. The gentle steam from the rooibos tea licked at my chin from its place on my desk, an offering from Mom to help kick-start the long digital school day ahead. She lessened the sugar content from my usual dose, she told me in my sleep-drunk haze, “because we all need to cut back on sugar.” But it would have to do; there was no way I was going to get up again just to add more.

Starting a college program in 2020 meant doing so remotely, and meeting all the other sufferers/students through a Discord server. With the application opened on my rightmost monitor, I scrolled through in the discussion of everyone’s unanimous exhaustion. Staying up until the sun rose--even pulling all-nighters--as often as we did to finish assignments was a collective experience, and one that I wouldn’t have survived without their shared frustrations.

As we waited for our communications class to begin--keeping our bitching secret within the channels of our server--I leaned forward to test the temperature of my drink with the tip of my tongue. A middle-aged man's face consumed my laptop's screen upon heated impact, and I recoiled with a numbing burn, scraping the pain away with my teeth. Kelly glanced over the list of attending students as he greeted his viewers. I tiredly mirrored his good-morning smile out of reflex--thank you, ingrained customer service experience--despite keeping my camera turned off to my greasy ball of an updo, and then shrunk further into my blanket cocoon.

Thankfully, there were a handful of students in our classes that never failed to have their faces onscreen and their microphones equipped, gearing for discussion--or trolling, when it was the right teacher. Me and a couple others would periodically pipe in via chat when we were called on or had a different input, as to still get participation marks, just without the anxiety or body dysmorphia of my face on display to people I'd never met in person.

I don't remember the topic of conversation--if we were going over formal email writing, creative scripts, or the nerve-wracking speech assignment at that point. But fifteen-or-so minutes in, I shimmied my hands out of the embrace of my comforter and awkwardly reached over my mug to the keyboard. The instructors didn't always engage with the textual chat, either completely ignoring it or claiming they couldn't see it at any convenient time for them. But Kelly did, understanding mental health and accessibility, and encouraged us to participate in any way we comfortably could.

“There’s a comment in the chat from Jade,” he had announced, tilting to the side of his viewfinder where the narrow chat window would be. “They said--”

The rest of his words became a static whine in the back of my mind. All I recall from that moment was thinking: They?

My fingertips danced along the handle of my teacup.

*My name isn’t even obviously unisex.*

The steam had dissipated, but the ceramic was still warm.

*I mean, I guess it technically is. I’ve just never met a guy with my name. And he can’t see my face, so I guess that’s fair. Respectful, even. For a guy like him, at his age, not to assume someone’s gender...*

I had already been considering building my pronoun repertoire--I assigned both “she” and “they” to myself as roles in the Discord--but hadn’t yet heard someone use the latter to refer to me. From within the black borders of the computer that encased Kelly’s face, an undeniable smirk was reflected back to me.

I scooped up the mug and relaxed back into the soft shell of my blanket with the tea close to my lips. The proper sound of the lecture slowly hummed back into my ears, and as I sipped the bitter red tea, I was surprised by just how sweet the liquid tasted.

# 木漏れ日

Madison Bailey | 20

this soul is heavy;  
i feel it weigh on me.  
though i can't put it down,  
sometimes i can see  
the point of carrying it-  
its duty to me;  
for without the soul  
i am not free  
to feel that gentle glow  
from a wandering sunbeam-  
to see a small drop of dew  
fall from the leaf of a tree.

i carry this soul  
despite the difficulty  
because it is the price  
for the small delights  
life offers me.



SERENE

# Who is Serene?

Serene is making her mark on the world. Her newest single ‘Touch,’ released September 2023, is a deep expression of loving and expectations through deep, R&B, afro-inspired melodies. Since the release of her single, she has embraced developing her artistry and being spontaneous.

Serene credits her start in music, when she began making music in her bedroom in just the seventh grade. “I love being able to create when the mood strikes. Sure I’ve gone to studios and I’ve collaborated with others in different parts of the world digitally, but none of my music would be where it is today if I hadn’t started learning production off YouTube University in my bedroom so many years ago.”

For the creative process, Serene doesn’t have one. At least not in the traditional sense. “Most of my music is not created linearly. Sometimes I’ll start off with a beat and build from there, coming up with a topic that I feel fits the vibe, and writing whatever comes to mind. Other times, I’ll be called to write about a personal experience, so I focus on the words and melody first and come up with the beat later.

Oftentimes, I’ll see or hear a phrase that I’m drawn to and I’ll find a way to make it fit into a song. So there’s no real process other than being ready whenever inspiration or opportunity strikes.”

# On Touch

Serene's newest song 'Touch' starts out with a soft but entrancing flute, accompanied by dreamy beats that make themselves known on an afrobeat-inspired track. Her smooth, deep, and rich vocals float over the track in wonderful harmony. It's a slow deep R&B track that serenades whoever listens.

When creating 'Touch', Serene was pretty frustrated with it. The beginning stages of dating, it's complex and complicated, and the lighthearted beat is meant to contrast the confusion in the lyrics. It's relevant in the age where dating is at our fingertips, and expectations might not be set up.

"That's exactly how dating feels," Serene said. "Sometimes it's extremely joyous and flowing perfectly, but oftentimes you can predict a less than ideal outcome if you had looked or listened hard enough in the beginning. This is also why, for this song, instead of showing my signature purple colour, I made the visuals shrouded in red to represent the red flags that we may overlook when getting into something new. I no longer wanted to deal with people where the vibe was 'you just want to touch' while 'I just want to feel'."

# Her Sound

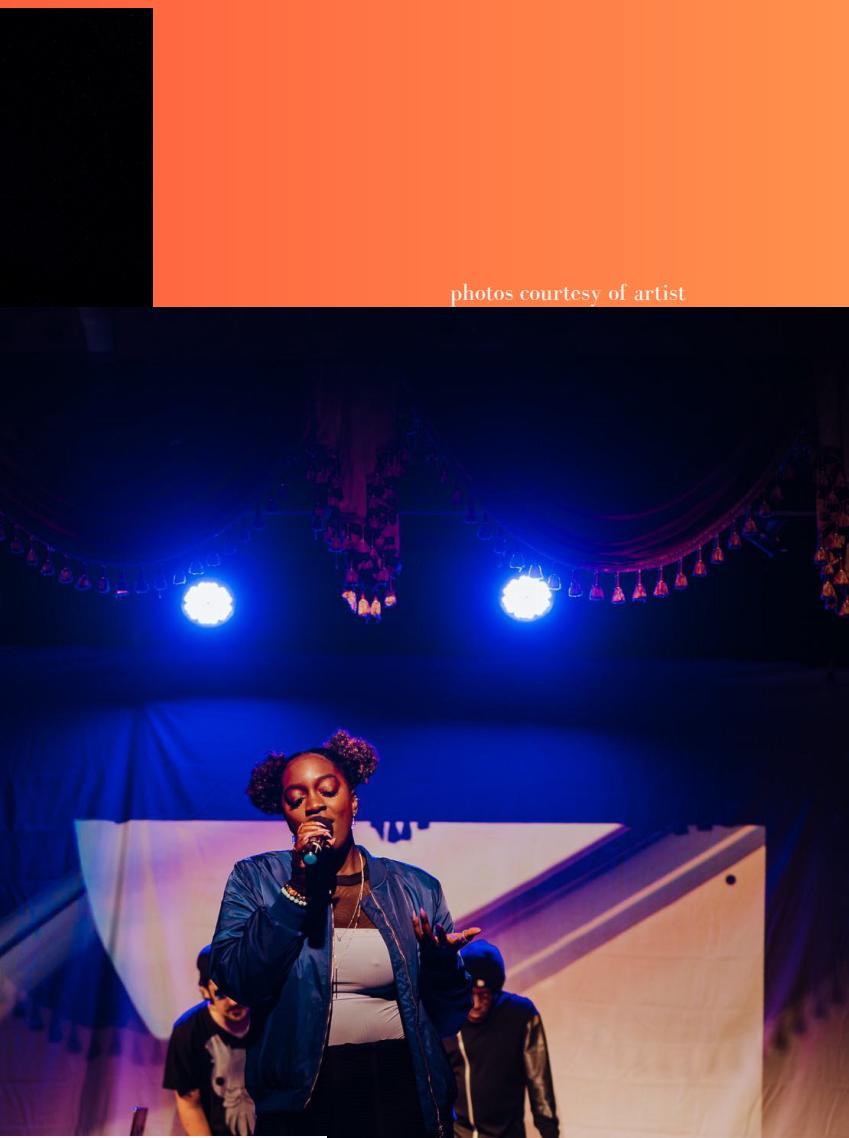
It's ultimately an expression at the end of the day. That's how Serene would describe music making. "Sometimes it's hard to find the words for how you're feeling but you hear a song that connects to your soul. That's what I hope to inspire with my music. I want to be the voice that others are looking for within themselves. Most of my music is very emotional or situational because of this. I want people to be able to listen to my music and relate. We don't all go through the same things, but I believe music has the ability to connect us, move us, and heal us."

This connection moves through TikTok, where one of her songs went viral on TikTok, which she had no idea about. "My notifications weren't working at the time, so when I got the call from my collaborator to check it out, I was completely taken by surprise! I loved seeing the response to people wanting to hear the full track."

That moving power works through all of her music, even the unreleased ones. Although Serene is always working on new music, she's working on her first album. "It's something that's been on my mind for a while and I think it's time to make that dream a reality."

Issue 2 begs the questions 'What are the tiny perfect moments in your life?' to Serene, it's every single moment of music-making. "Even if I don't end up using the song or melody or beat, it's another opportunity to create and express. It's something that can take me out of my normal day-to-day worries where I can choose to create anything at that moment. To me, that's what brings the most joy in the music, so it became my biggest priority."

photos courtesy of artist



# Rings For Your Gift Now

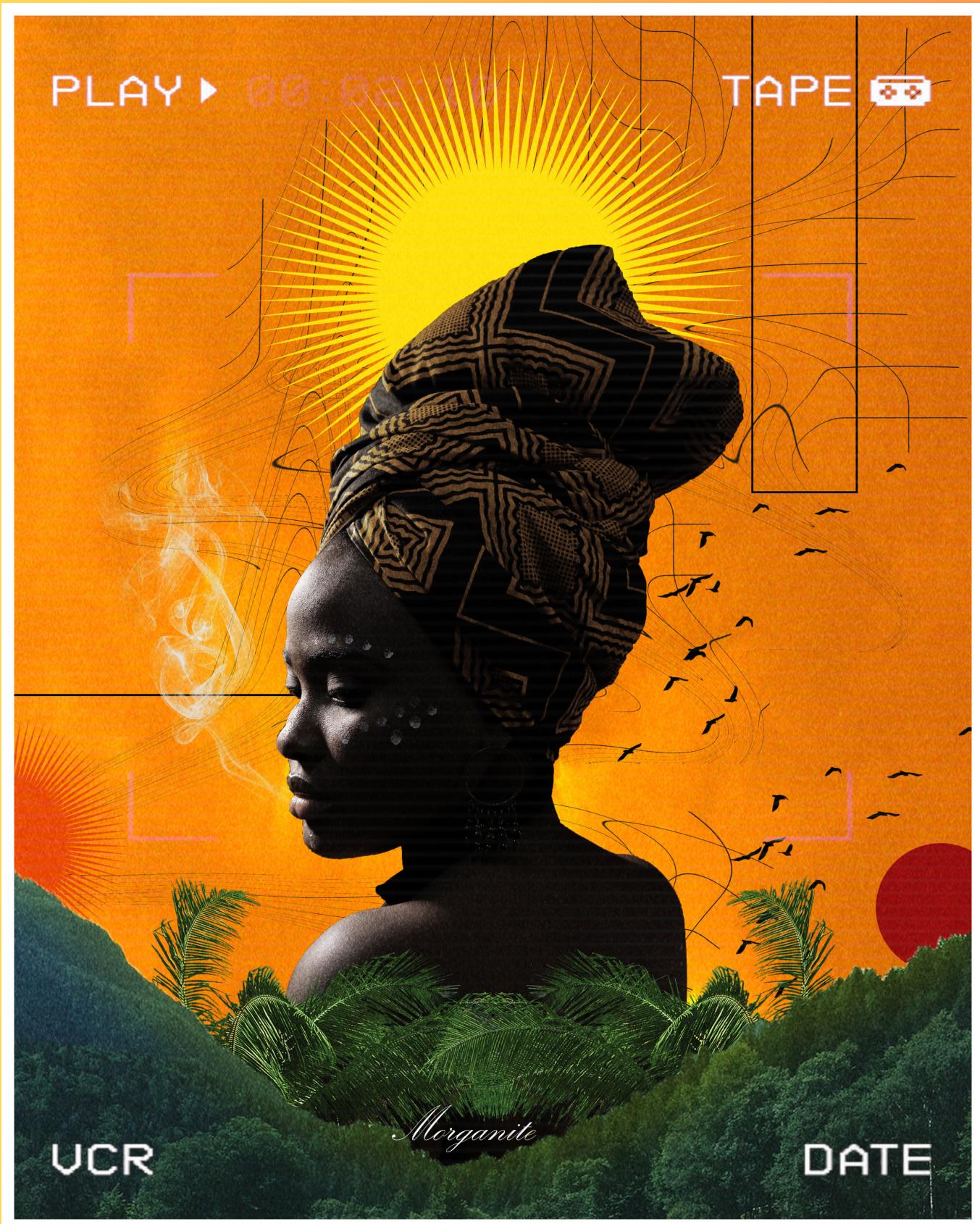
Grace Halls | 14

You held my hand so you could fidget with my ring,  
No concerns about the pinches scarring or turning gold maroon,  
After I'd spent three hours making your 'Secret Santa',  
Although you'd never recognise your name in my font.

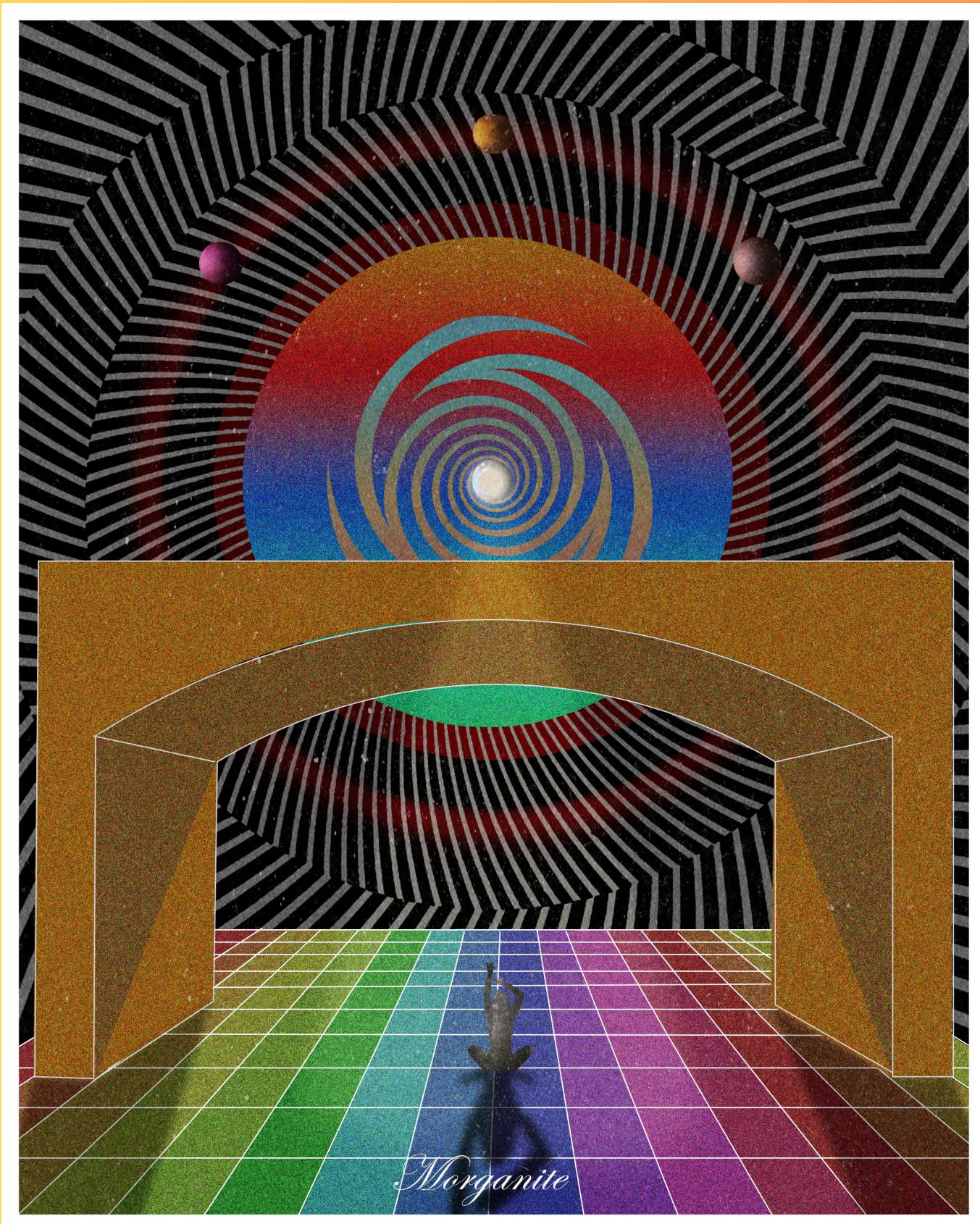
You didn't even stand when I grabbed back at your hand for a twirl.  
Just pulled away with my skin.  
So don't start stories when I sob on the last disco square,  
Your square turning yellow and mine burning purple.

I know what I'll get for your fifteenth birthday,  
But I'm not going to wait up till midnight to give you the first message,  
When I wouldn't even cut your calendar once a day.  
Let alone on the anniversary of the bad thing only you know about.  
Although you didn't scar that into my calendar, you have no responsibility  
to reassure me not to handcuff myself to a future I don't need anymore.

You're a myth about to have enough evidence to prove you awful.  
I was going to give you this journal to prove why my eyes are cut but I  
don't sob in public.  
But then this is the love poem for your gift,  
So I can't feel of anything worse now.  
I'll wrap rings up in white chiffon for you instead.  
I'll irritate myself about what you'll do with the red on the midnight of  
November fifth.



“Daybreak”, Morganite, 22



“enlightenment”, Morganite, 22

# Rest

Emilia Koziol | 21

I check to see if you're still breathing,  
Standing in your doorway in the middle of the night.  
Your chest rises and falls, just as it should,  
And yet I can't help but wonder if it's a trick of my eyes.  
It's so dark.

I stand in your room for a couple more minutes,  
Watching you sleep.

I'm almost sure that you're sleeping.

I press a kiss to your cheek.

I go back to my room to stay awake until morning,

Keeping myself up,

Wondering what I would do to try and save you.

Hoping it will never have to come to that,

Don't make me pull the plug.

# Dead of Winter

Emilia Koziol | 21

Lemon blossoms in the  
Dead of  
Winter.

Floral and sweet

With a touch of effervescence.  
Oh how I love the bitter cold  
Biting at your cheeks.

They're pink.  
You look good in pink.

# Sentiment

Emilia Koziol | 21

The smell of your soap sits gently  
Across the top of your skin  
Kissing your shoulders.

I watch you with  
A kind of subtle anticipation  
Followed by electricity.

It's a complicated dance  
With unsure steps  
A tantalizing push and pull.

# Classic Campari

Elana Walters | 20

3 parts Prosecco

2 parts Campari

1 part sparkling water

15 mL citrus mist

1 orange

4 extra strawberries

plus  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz of bitter desire

to make

my heart

strain against

your

sweet past

& twist the fire into smoke

combine this riff with a dash of dreams,

to garnish that stiff slice of mine

and serve it dry,

so

I

can

brace

that

bittersweet with you

# Transitory

Holyn Thigpen | 23

Once upon a time there lived three siblings, all bestowed irregular names by regular-named parents who, it can only be assumed, hoped to bless their children with the kind of whimsical, storied lives that evade the Jims and Janes of the world.

My brother, Chance, got off easiest: not especially rare, easy to spell, and a perfect set-up for jokes about taking a Chance, a fighting Chance, and - my personal favorite - a fat Chance. My dad based the name on Paul Newman's drifter-turned-gigolo character in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, which has become weirdly pertinent as Chance, at eighteen, has grown into a kind of Gen Z Casanova, invited to a different sorority formal every other weekend and carrying a condom as routinely as an ID card.

Cira, meanwhile, may as well cut her losses and go by Sierra, her unofficial alter ego born from the brilliant minds of Starbucks baristas and elderly neighbors. Convention has triumphed over my parents' intentions, as people insert a third syllable with the cool nonchalance beholden to those who refuse to read user manuals. Cira has spent her eighteen years (yes, they're twins) compensating for the fact that her name has no origin story, no familial significance, no reason for being unique other than the fact that my parents liked it. It's no wonder that she's now passing into transgressive territory the best way she knows how: not rushing for a sorority in college and wearing Arctic Monkeys T-shirts to the grocery store.

And then there's me, Holyn, twenty-three. "Like the country, but without the D on the end" has, against my will, become the great mantra of my life, and I'm forever irked by the fact that technically, phonetically, it should be pronounced with a long O. Shopping for furniture somewhere even less cool than Ikea, probably, my parents met an employee who sported this deceptive spelling on her name tag, and the rest is history. I've spent an inordinate amount of time pondering what to do with a name that no one has ever heard or will likely ever hear again. The best plans I've concocted are to become a one-name pop star or shave my head, neither of which quite suits me.

As siblings, we unite on few fronts except our names, which have become a guaranteed ceasefire and, more importantly, a point of endless catharsis. Assuming all siblings have at least one quality, complaint, or trauma that binds them together, ours is a relatively loose one, free of painful experiences save that of our parents' divorce (boring) or a tree falling through the ceiling of Chance's room (He slept through it.) Instead, we've come to understand each other as a trio of wannabes, vying for identities that fit perfectly with the first names that confound us. Lately, Chance has taken to getting spontaneous tattoos of "profound" Japanese symbols; Cira has convinced herself she'll have her own campus radio show in a matter of months; I have started waking up at five a.m. and doing crossword puzzles in semidarkness. Against our will but, rather, by some incidental factor in our DNA, we are a family of day-dreamers turned dream-chasers, glued to the idea of self-definition and disciplined by our babied egos.

Congratulations, mom and dad, because the first names worked: your children are hooked on being “somebodys,” as much as these somebodys elude them. We’re like the siblings in the Royal Tenenbaums without the child prodigy part - or the Roy children without a throne to jostle for. I’m not delusional enough to think that we’re at all unique in our siblinghood; if anything, we’re merely a mediocre example of most middle-class, American families. But to be in this time of life - in the throes of daily LinkedIn alerts and “when will you get your old furniture out of my basement” texts from grandma - is to be in perpetual doubt of both your nature and nurture. Who else but my brother and sister can I turn to when I’m having these doubts? Who else will understand that I’m questioning X because mom told me Y? Who else will nod along when our childhood home becomes the unexpected object of so much nostalgia?

My stage in life - and all the insecurities and false epiphanies that accompany it - has somehow, against my most certain beliefs - been confirmed and validated by a brother who eats liver every other day “for the vitamins” and a sister who genuinely believes she’s going to befriend a rogue surfer. As amateur adults, my siblings have become more real to me: no longer the little kids hogging the TV but full-fledged, thinking, feeling people who should definitely consider therapy. Here they are: old enough to do inner child work, but my brain continues to insist they’re ten years old and late for the bus. The first time I heard Chance mention sex, I felt like a Bachelor contestant learning she’s been eskimo sister-ed in the fantasy suites. Yes, I expected it, but was I mentally prepared for it? Hardly. Even now, when Chance spills me the latest details on his sexual escapades, I’m slightly scandalized and (I hate this) a little jealous. My brother has a better love life than me, and I don’t know if any amount of time will make that less upsetting.

The last six months have been a particularly strange barrage of milestones and movement for our family. I don't know if the three of us have been in one house together for more than a week at a time, as we've gone back and forth between our parents' houses, left home, returned home, and traveled for noble pursuits like one-night stands and Instagram material. Laymen may call this a collective "transitional stage," but I'd liken it more to a sitcom that gets cancelled because of its half-assed plot lines. We're all likable characters, don't get me wrong, but our storylines never last more than a few episodes - someone's always going broke or romanticizing the past or falling for another standup-comedian (not that I would know). It's not like we're avoiding each other; we're simply testing the waters without one another til - if we're lucky - we have some kind of revelation.

One day, in the not-too-distant future, this distance will be permanent. My interactions with my brother and sister will be limited to holidays and birthdays and the occasional family vacation, maybe a wedding or two. Whether these reunions are filled with booze-filled accusations or laughter by the fireplace, I really can't say; that fully depends on whether Chance continues provoking me with random Joe Rogan videos or I abandon modern technology to go work on a farm in some former Eastern Bloc country. Statistically, I'm sure there are thousands of potential outcomes that would preclude weekly catch-ups and warm invitations. However, when it comes to Chance and Cira - the people I spent years of childhood taunting and blaming and locking in the laundry room - I'm cautiously optimistic about our ability to go the distance.

At this point in our unofficial living experiment - in which our parents have realized the odds of us being on a plane over the Atlantic are just as likely as us being at a friend's house - we've found a comfortable corner of space in each other's lives. And sometimes when I doubt the security of this corner, I remember that if any of us wanted to break ties completely, we would have just done so already. If you're wondering the number of times I've considered deleting Chance's phone number and purposely mispronouncing Cira's name, just know that it's up there and only getting higher. But frankly, life without these twin menaces wouldn't be nearly as fun, and I secretly relish the rare moments these days when we're all in the same room, either yelling or napping or watching John Wick with such enchantment you would never think we'd seen it five times already.

For now, things are transitory. Chance just left for who knows how long; Cira will be back in a few weeks for Thanksgiving; I'm awaiting out-of-state job offers with the anxiousness of a castaway sending up smoke signals. None of us can say where we or the others will be next without a certain degree of guesswork and/or light bullying. I, personally, hope to see myself living in a warehouse loft with a hairless cat and an expensive espresso machine, wiling away the hours writing melodramatic plays and rubbing said cat with special cat lotion. But maybe, if I'm lucky, Chance will crash on my couch from time to time, or Cira and I will plan annual trips to obscure nature destinations. Maybe, if I'm lucky, we'll make time to watch more stupid movies and reminisce on the many times our names were misspelled...because we're Holyn, Chance, and Cira Thigpen, and that's just what we do.

# The Things I Missed

MG | 18

At times like these I tend to think back,  
back to the days where I had someone who would talk to me,  
back to the days where I had something to have fun with,  
back to the days where I had somewhere to go back to,  
back to the days where the air was clean and the sun was warm.

Now I have left.

I have left that place for too long.  
I have left for a place too far to return.

The people I cherish,  
the things I like,  
the places I adore,  
all gone.

None of the days back then have I ever thought I'd miss that place this much.  
None of the days back then have I ever thought I'd miss those people this much.

Everyday felt like a routine.  
Something I took for granted.  
Something I didn't think I'd feel attached to.

Until I lost it.  
Until I lost it for too long.

Only now that I'm too far gone have I realised that,  
that place was home.

# What do you call it? Love? War?

Hrichita Paul | 19

the person I used to quarrel with  
just after entering the classroom  
has gone missing for a while

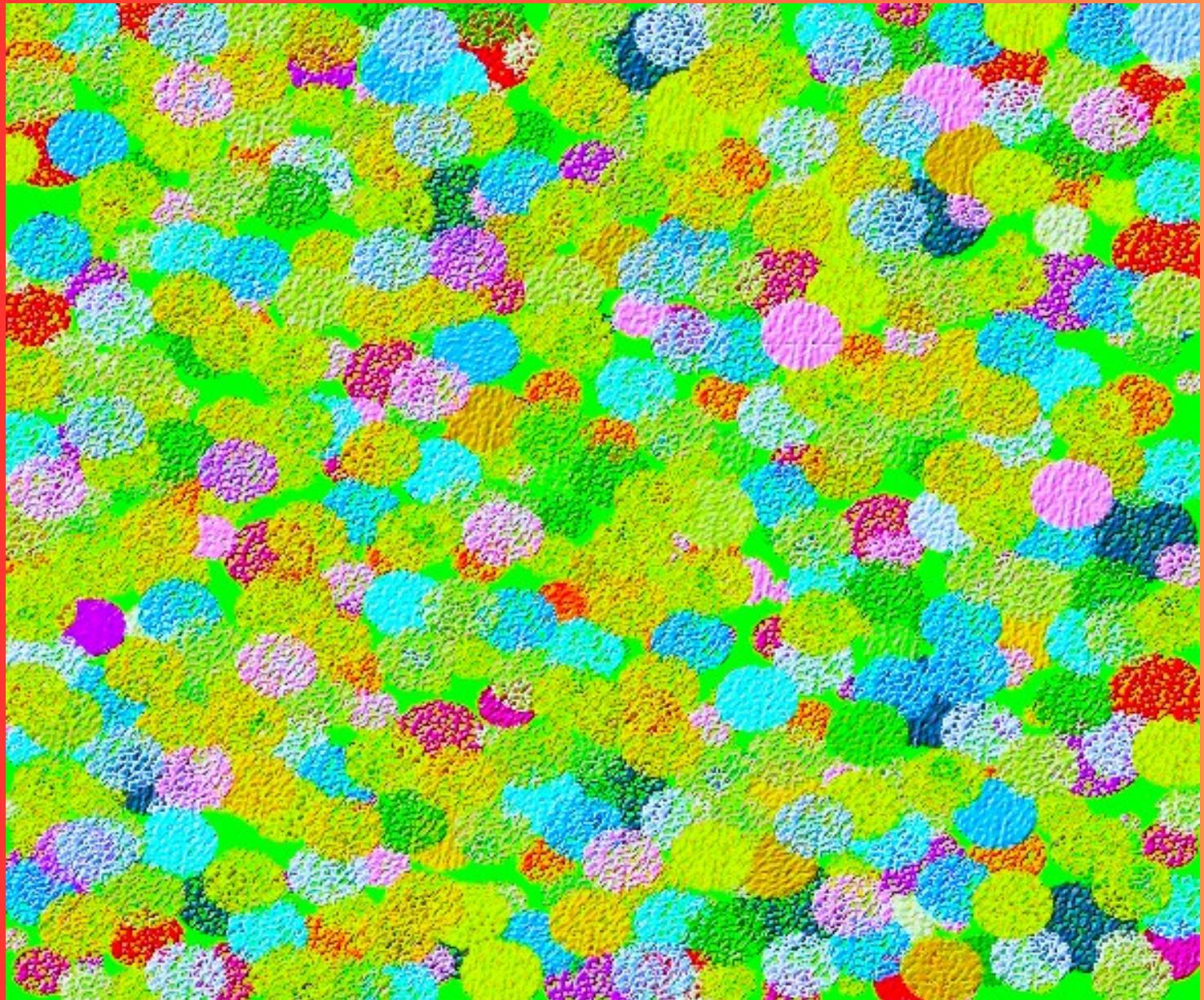
the person who manages  
to get on my nerves like no one can  
can't be seen anywhere nowadays

Later you realise  
those moments weren't nasty  
they were intimate

someone to break my patience  
was what I needed  
someone to see my not-so-perfect demeanour  
is healthy

for me, for love  
I allow myself  
to feel, breathe and flow  
& the person who takes my breath away  
is back, beautiful than ever  
full of love and sweet mischief

even then, we will always quarrel  
we must quarrel



“Getting Beyond,” KJ Hannah Greenberg



“Emerging,” KJ Hannah Greenberg

# DANCING IN WATER

Anne Whitehouse

*for Eiko and Koma*

A frame of driftwood  
in the current's ebb and flow—  
clinging to the frame,  
the dancers, stiff as driftwood,  
curve slowly into stones  
while water runs over  
their stilled forms.

In time they come alive,  
are rippling reeds,  
swaying stem and buried root,  
variously wind, tree,  
flower, naked breath  
that swells behind  
the push to give birth.

The dancers are in the river,  
the dance is in the river,  
the dance is the river.

From outside in I found this story:  
she almost died,  
and he brought her back to life.

Dried leaves, discarded and scattered—  
let them go; new ones will grow.  
A cricket perched on a twig,  
graceful and humorous  
at the close.

# THE RACCOON

Anne Whitehouse

Across the flooded path  
in the gray December dusk,

I saw the raccoon  
at the same time that it saw me.

Startled, we stopped, and stood utterly still,  
each taking the measure of the other,

its clown face funny and sad,  
a mask in the mist.

I let out a breath; it dissolved,  
and I felt lightened at last

of workday pressures that count  
each minute and make them all pay.

A space opened in my life,  
and the animal stepped in,

alien, mysterious, yet inexpressibly close.  
I felt the world calling to me,

place of my origin and my destiny,  
my sister! and my soul's habitation.

The moment expanded and contracted;  
the raccoon turned, and waddled away.

It was gone in a flash, like a vision  
that leaves its spectral imprint on the mind.

# THE DECISIVE MOMENT

Anne Whitehouse

*“The decisive moment, it is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms, which gives that event its proper expression.”*

-Henri Cartier-Bresson

On a glorious June evening  
after the retrospective exhibit  
of Cartier-Bresson's world-spanning art,  
I strolled into Central Park,  
and left the path to climb the rock.

Below me, a woman approached the arch under a bridge  
trailing two leashes connected to twin beagles.  
The heightened perspective, the swirls of motion  
made a picture Henri might have taken.

Early summer light, bright but not blinding,  
warm but not hot. It went through me,  
tinting my mind like wine through water.

My vision created frames as I walked,  
keeping violent emotions at bay,  
where what seems threatening  
can be studied from an inner distance,  
like the way one walks around a sculpture  
to view it from all angles.

No matter how tenuous I think are the ties  
that bind me to the miserable past,  
I am not deceived;  
heartstrings can be played on,  
and twist and tighten  
at a moment's notice,  
like a devilish phylactery  
strangling the life out of me.

Surprising the pain that endures  
or perhaps not strange—  
enmeshed in desperate, unequal trials  
I had no chance of winning,  
I buried my feelings so deep  
I couldn't find them  
and turned my heart to stone,  
that slowly is softening.

# METEOR SHOWER

Anne Whitehouse

We lie on blankets in the grass  
grateful for the scratchy wool  
in the sudden chill of night  
deep within the virgin forest  
at a family reunion far from our homes.

Scanning the sky for falling stars—  
there goes one! and there another!  
Persistent trains, bright fireballs—  
in the great immensity  
a crescent moon crosses to Jupiter,

and snatches of conversation fly up  
more intimate now  
we are hidden in darkness  
and can express what  
we might not say otherwise.

At every instant we are  
what we have been and will be,  
our forebears who live on in us  
we remember, we resemble.

Everything in the world is mysterious  
formed of tenuous substances  
evanescence and oblivion  
the equivocal element of time.

With a stone I dug up a clod of dirt  
a little farther away I laid it down silently  
and under my breath I whispered  
*“I have changed the earth.”*

The deed was minimal, the words exact,  
and I needed a lifetime to say them.

# LATE SUMMER, BLOCK ISLAND

## Anne Whitehouse

The air gray, still, and parched.  
The rain, when it comes, is a sprinkle  
dripping silently on the ground.  
The mourning dove's call is backdrop

to the sea's suck and ripple  
that speaks of longing  
and sadness, buried hopes  
like lost wrecks off rocky shores.

From the marshes comes the trilling  
of red-winged blackbirds, in the thicket  
the cardinal's chirp, the meadow lark's whistle,  
chatter of a hawk chased by crows.

In the afternoon, sunlight behind  
banked clouds glints off a sea  
as pale as isinglass, reflecting back  
my memories as I write,

until the day when words will be  
all that are left of me,  
words and images  
and other people's memories.

Bury my body deep in the earth,  
but may my soul roam free  
in the shadows under the trees,  
in the dancing hearts of flowers,  
  
the setting sun and the rising moon,  
the barred clouds and winds that move them,  
the waters where I love to swim,  
beloved haunts of my essential solitude.

# Done With Love

John K. Plaski | 27

Bahram and Firouz Bagheri didn't know what to wear for tomorrow. All of February had been freezing, but, suddenly, the weatherman reported that this Saturday was going to be in the sixties with gale-force winds coming from the southwest. None of Bahram's summer shirts had been carried down from the attic and washed, and Firouz only had winter sweaters to wear. Both of their spring jackets were missing too, but neither owner looked too hard for them Friday night, after hearing the weather report, or Saturday morning after breakfast. Both search-and-rescue operations were done half-heartedly as well. Bahram shuffled from one end of the house to the other, rummaging around as he went; then, when he reported to Firouz that nothing could be done, she retraced his snail's trail through all the closets and came to the exact same conclusion.

Both shrugged and settled on black: black tops and pants, plus a black headscarf for Firouz. It had been forty-three days since the funeral, and neither of them had moved away from the color of coal, or even announced any intention of transitioning from outfits dyed so strongly they resembled plate armor.

In fact, one waited for the other to broach the topic, or, better yet, to miraculously appear wielding the smallest thing with the slightest speck of color. Bahram craved emeralds gleaming around his wife's neck while Firouz pined for paisley ties heralding her husband's presence. But both had grown mute and cowardly, not to mention exhausted, in those forty-six monochromatic days since the phone call from the hospital.

They went to work and ran errands with the same slow, mute rippling of muscle as when they sat on the couch together every evening and soaked in the nightly news: solitary as mollusks, boneless and nerveless as they huddled inside their blackened shells. They went to bed the exact same way too: lying side-by-side like two skeletons unearthed from the same gravesite, both assigned to the front lines in the fiery afterlife whilst their bones and chainmail melted into the pale sand surrounding them.

But, all things considered, black wasn't a bad choice. It was sturdy. And whether there was a little or a lot of it, black grabbed people's attention. Besides, in some strange way, Bahram and Firouz wanted to be seen that Saturday: roughly two hours before they were witnessed by a barista that stunned them both, neither one admitted this craving to the other as they dressed and turned and discovered that the other had chosen black as well.

And neither one confessed that going out was going to be terrible: this was fully understood through their sighs and sidelong glances after the phone rang Friday night. Bahram slowly pocketed the receipt for the framer the following morning while Firouz expressed her foreboding by crossing out "food shopping" on Saturday's to-do list and moving it to Sunday. They just needed to accomplish one task that day: no need to make things harder than they already were.

But difficulty manifested either way. It wasn't even ten o'clock, and the temperature outside was already above fifty degrees. Too much dead grass and salty mud covered the earth while all the branches in the trees stood naked against the blue, cloudless sky. The wind whipped them into a frenzy as it battered Bahram and Firouz: it yanked the air from their mouths and slammed their cheeks against slabs of sun-warmed granite the moment they stepped outside. And as they drove into the center of town, there were too many joggers and dog walkers and people not even bothering with jackets today. Dressed in long black sleeves, Bahram and Firouz felt like disciples leaving their temple in order to journey amongst the unrepentant masses.

Twenty minutes passed between this comparison and Firouz placing her parcel in the backseat of the car. She then asked Bahram if there was anything else he wanted to do that day. And before answering, he stared through the windshield at all the movement outside of the vehicle, plus the stifling brightness, refusing to look in the rearview mirror at the wrapped picture staring daggers at him. He didn't glance at Firouz either.

“Do you want to do anything else?”

Ten minutes earlier, they pulled up to the curb in front of the framer after five minutes of circling the neighborhood in search of parking. There was some righteous indignation coming from them both, hating how everybody flocked everywhere once temperatures rose above freezing, even if it was just for one day.

Bahram turned off the car, then got out to open Firouz’s door. It was a regular habit of his, but, today, Firouz would have appreciated exiting the vehicle on her own time. Then, fifteen minutes later, Bahram ordered coffee for himself and glanced at Firouz to give her order, not even asking if she was ready to talk to the barista. And eight minutes after that exchange, white ceramic fell onto a black tabletop like hailstones upon the crops of the wicked.

Both privately admired the irony at play as they begrudgingly agreed that this parking spot was extremely fortunate, considering the unspoken errand still ahead of them. Bahram opened the shop door too. Everything inside was made of right angles. Hundreds of corners of frames, fashioned from polished wood and metallic trim, clung to the walls and created a forest of columns pointing straight to the heavens. Several empty frames leaned up against the counter and various work stations, containing themselves and bits of others. Somewhere in the back, somebody was using an air hose.

Bahram pulled the receipt from his pocket and slowly unfolded it; a bead of sweat blossomed on his left temple despite it being cooler indoors. Meanwhile, Firouz stared down at a mahogany frame lying close by. She made no indication of wanting to ring the bell on the counter, so Bahram sighed and tapped it once. It clanged, and a brassy ringing hovered in the air for at least five seconds. The whooshing in the back stopped, then resumed.

“Hello! How’s it going?”

The voice came first, then the speaker. An older woman dressed in a khaki jumpsuit leapt through a doorway hidden amongst the corners. Her hair, slowly weathering from white-blonde to grey, was gathered into a tight bun on top of her head.

“How can I help you two?”

She rested both palms on the counter and leaned forward, like a pro, as Bahram glanced at Firouz. She nodded at the owner but didn’t step away from the mahogany frame beside her. And realizing in that instant that he had been shouldered with everything, Bahram cleared his throat, shuffled up to the counter, and handed the inquisitor his receipt.

“We’re here to pick up,” he murmured.

The framer gently pried the paper from his hand before studying it closely. She recognized her own handwriting after awhile, nodded, and disappeared into the back.

“Sorry it took so long!” She shouted, memory jogged after fifty-five days of silence.

“It’s alright,” Bahram answered.

“We tend to get backed up sometimes.”

“It’s alright.”

The proprietor reemerged after Bahram’s repetition, carrying a wide black frame ahead of herself with both hands. She gently laid it atop the nearest work station and gestured for Bahram and Firouz to step closer.

“What do you think?”

Bahram, so bold, so lonely, looked first. Then, he turned and gestured for Firouz to look too. And seeing the edge of all things resting upon this countertop, knowing that something lying in the same room as her must be unavoidably real, which both witnesses had learned forty-three days ago, Firouz approached the work station and stared down at what had been brought in fifty-five days ago and forgotten until eight last night.

It was a rectangular frame, roughly two feet wide and eighteen inches tall, made of wood stained black. The bright overhead lighting made the grain bleed through as silver as a grey matte encircled two smaller rectangles.

And letting Bahram's shoulder shield her from the worst, Firouz started at its rightmost edge and methodically glanced to the left, beginning with a glossy photograph. Its colors were potent, like puddles of syrup and powder: pomegranate for the plush carpet beneath three pairs of dress shoes, myrtle and almond for the suits and gown, pistachio for the headscarf, and saffron to fill in the wall in the back.

Hues materialized first, then the faces. Firouz stood to the left, smiling. Bahram stood to the right, smiling even wider. Mahmud gleamed in between them, his face the brightest of the three. His teeth, his curls, his glasses, and the belabored sheen across his forehead all caught the camera's flash and multiplied it exponentially.

All three of them were joyous. Not *joyful*: bodies filled with feeling, like mannequins are stamped with satisfied sneers. But *joyous*: the windstorm endlessly encircling and replenishing itself.

The second rectangle was slightly taller than the photograph beside it, its paper the color of frost with the text in the center reading "Dmitri Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Minor (1933)." Underneath was a string of thin black loops:

"To Mom and Dad. Done with love. Mahmud."

Ten minutes later, Bahram ordered black coffee; then, extemporaneously, Firouz ordered hot jasmine tea. They were dining in, so both drifted towards a small table pushed against one of the picture windows.

Bahram and Firouz each pulled out their own chair and took a seat. They stared outside rather than at each other. Two men wearing reflective vests were sweeping debris away from the curb and into a large dustpan. Powdered glass sparkled in the sunlight amidst jagged chunks of black plastic and several bent sprigs of chromium.

Both mourners watched this process intently. Forty-five days had passed since Bahram signed off on Mahmud's crumpled Corolla sitting atop a flatbed truck. Forty-four days had passed since Firouz opened the plastic envelope stamped with "Property of Mahmud Bagheri" and discovered a pair of eyeglasses with both lenses missing.

"What do you think?"

The framer smiled at them firmly, used to certain answers and expecting the same from these two customers as well. Neither Bahram nor Firouz moved at first, petrified by what laid on the counter before them. Then, one of them gurgled.

"It looks *wonderful*."

"I'm glad you like it!"

The framer pulled out a calculator and started punching in numbers.

"So, where are you going to hang this one?"

Bahram focused on pulling out his wallet as the usual small talk commenced, so Firouz was left to make conversation.

"I think in the upstairs hallway," she whispered.

“That’s nice. And who’s the young man in the middle?”

Bahram dropped his debit card. And thirteen minutes after plastic struck carpet, two sets of ceramic mugs in saucers clattered together as the barista placed Bahram’s coffee and Firouz’s tea on their table. She hoped they would enjoy, but both were too startled to thank her as she disappeared inside the darkened coffee shop.

Their eyes, used to sunlight and shrapnel, slowly adjusted to a dimmer reality on this side of the glass. They first saw white ceramic against black wood; then, they watched the barista walk away and thought, with a secret, sluggish acknowledgement that didn’t even feel like thinking, that the barista was probably a delight to cuddle in bed with.

Bahram wished he had given her a tip instead of instinctively tapping “None” on the keypad. And Firouz wished she had smiled at her when she was done mumbling her order.

“He’s our middle son. Mahmud.”

“He plays the piano?”

The framer pried the debit card from Bahram’s sweaty fingers as Firouz smiled faintly.

“Yes. Very well, actually. This was his last concert before graduating.”

“That’s wonderful! It’s a great piece. I was listening to it as you walked in.”

The framer stepped away from the counter, brandishing the card.

“I’ll be right back.”

“*Actually*,” Bahram croaked. “Could you wrap this up before we leave?”

Both stared at their drinks now. Outside, bits of glass and metal were being swept off the curb, but specks stubbornly glimmered between the cobblestones. Five minutes away on foot, without holding hands, a black frame wrapped in brown paper laid in the backseat of the Bagheris' car.

Bahram wondered when this second collision had occurred, and who had taken what away with them, imagining Mahmud's emptied Corolla lying atop that flatbed truck, bent into the shape of a horseshoe; Firouz inspected her tea and wondered at the possibility of someone breaking into their car and making off with the frame wrapped in brown paper. But even then, Mahmud's glasses still sat inside her bedside table at home, going nowhere. She couldn't call anybody about that problem, not even her two other sons.

And nobody else could be bothered either: they had already given the mandatory three days of food after the funeral, and the standard mourning period ended three days ago too. Besides, the chill of February had departed for a single day: everybody would be out walking and breathing in the sunny air. And neither of her two sons wore glasses. They wouldn't understand.

Besides, what could anybody do for Bahram and Firouz in this cavernous coffee shop full of black dyes, dark polishes, shadows, and silhouettes? Bahram looked up from the bottom of the well shimmering beneath the rim of his coffee cup. Firouz finished staring at the amber mirror cupped between her palms and matched his gaze.

Then, both raised their drinks to their lips, blew lightly, and took long, patient, suffering sips. Focusing on the bubbles and specks floating beneath their noses, they briefly forgot about the other. And once their cups were returned to their respective saucers and pushed towards the center of the table, they got to work on the autopsy.

Firouz cut around and through her husband and kept Bahram's nose and the hairs at the ends of his eyebrows that poked up higher than all the rest. Bahram focused on the rectangles of skin separating the corners of Firouz's eyes from the locks that trailed in front of her ears; these two patches, which he liked to think of as gems, were a shade lighter than the rest of her face.

Firouz moved on to her husband's chin while Bahram inspected the edges of his wife's scalp. Both scanned the other's hands, knowing them so well but not recognizing any carryovers in Mahmud: Bahram had no musical abilities, much to Firouz's chagrin, and Firouz's family had little patience for art of any kind. Again, much to her chagrin.

They kept up this silent game of pasting together body parts, drawing from parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, neighbors, coworkers, celebrities, and even their own sons. It was a bit like graverobbing, but neither one felt ashamed about it: they were sitting inside a coffee shop on a warm winter morning, putting a puzzle together.

And once the visual components were put in order, other senses followed. There was not much in terms of taste: Mahmud had dedicated himself to the piano from an early age, not the oven. Touch came after, lingering on his handshakes and hugs as Bahram and Firouz both hated themselves for immediately focusing on something as shallow as appearance, leading to even more touch following this burst of criticism, as if to correct this error as quickly as possible. Mahmud's curly hair refusing to glide through wooden combs: first Firouz's, then his own. His shirts and pants dutifully ironed by Firouz too, before she insisted that he do it himself.

And in that moment, Firouz felt her own hands clasping one another inside the mosque, bereft of anything solid to satisfy them, pinching her wrists hard enough to draw blood. Then, Bahram felt crumbs of soil tumbling out of his palm on a January morning so cold that it burned his cheeks. He later found yellowish crud cowering under his fingernails and refused to put his right hand under running water. Yet, when he awoke the next morning, both of his hands were spotless, and his heart felt like it had been scoured with a wire brush.

There wasn't much smell either, and sound inexplicably eluded them: there was too much coffee and tea in the air, besides the roaring of the espresso machines and the chattering of people on the other side of the shop. Firouz knew that every child had a particular fragrance, like butterscotch, or post-rain windstorms, and she hated herself for not being able to recall Mahmud's. Bahram tried replaying the opening notes to Shostakovich's "Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Minor" in his head and boiled against himself when he couldn't even do that. He had spent so long rehearsing the pronunciation of "Shostakovich," not wanting to sound like a fool in front of his coworkers and Mahmud's professors.

And rather than staring up at their partner, so perfectly miserable in their recollections, and glimpsing the cobbled-together thing that wasn't Mahmud looming over their shoulders, Bahram and Firouz Bagheri stared at the center of the table pushed up against the window. It was bright blue outside while, on this side of the glass, they both wore black, hands tucked out of sight. Two mugs resting on white saucers sat between them.

Then they both tried again, even angrier at themselves for messing up, and at each other for not stepping in when desperation was so obviously painted on their partner's face: how can you go on like this, and how can you go on letting *me* go on like this?

Yet, both tried again. There were bins of rubber toys, and tiny knit sweaters packed away for summer with sachets of rosemary and lavender tucked inside. The tightly-knotted funk of an "accident" buried beneath liberal use of baby powder and a fresh cloth diaper. Three young faces, stretched downward by hunger, snapping back to life once dinner materialized under candlelight, every mouthful a miracle. The body of a man rocking back and forth atop a cushioned stool as his hands darted across the keys, every note a miracle. Two tiny hands sweating inside two larger hands as all three of them walked to school under applauding elm trees, every step a miracle.

Bahram and Firouz refocused and saw each other again. Both of their mugs floated high above their heads. Then, they fell back onto their saucers as blurs of white and shattered with two off-tempo cracks that made the entire shop fall silent. Black and beige liquids flew in arcing waves and splashed steaming-hot upon the tabletop and floorboards as heads snapped towards Bahram and Firouz, who slowly turned to study the audience they had suddenly acquired.

Eventually, heads swiveled back to their original positions, and the shop's usual bustling resumed in small, upward increments. A minute later, after much dripping, the barista that Bahram and Firouz thought was cute walked over with a wet rag and a trash can and sorted out the mess. She didn't apologize or make small talk: she wiped down their table, then carefully gathered the broken thirds of the saucers and mugs and dropped them into her bin.

Bahram thanked her and watched her walk away; then, he looked down and saw a minuscule stain streaking across his right pant leg: blacker resting inside black, visible only to him. Firouz stared at a single teardrop of coffee that the barista had missed while mopping up: it sat inside the table's dark wood grain, beautifully cloaked to everyone but herself.

Outside, the wind roared as the cleaning crew departed with dustbins full of what used to be a motor vehicle; and inside, the barista wrung her rag out in the sink, sending eight dollars and ninety-two cents gliding down the drain. And sitting in between these two poles, Bahram and Firouz Bagheri smiled at their own incomplete portraits and the unframed traces, the gifts, that had been left behind for just the two of them to contemplate.

# letter to my first love

Aigerim Bibol | 16

Do you remember the summer we spent chasing fireflies under the night sky? The way they flickered like stars in the dark, illuminating your face as we danced beneath the ephemeral glow? It feels like a lifetime ago, and yet the memories linger like the scent of rain on a warm summer evening.

I replay our relationship in my mind. One fateful encounter in a café that led to quiet nights and sunlit days spent side-by-side. The soft hum of conversation around us faded into the background as we shared our hopes for the future, sipping coffee that tasted like the promise of new beginnings.

I heard your favorite song on the radio the other day. The lyrics stirred something in me that I can't quite place. For a moment, I was back in your arms, swaying to the music as it wrapped around us like a warm embrace. I wanted to etch the memory of your presence onto my skin like constellations of stars. I wanted to drown in the depths of your eyes, those vast oceans of azure.

To be eighteen again, with the future unfolding like a flower in bloom. At eighteen, our love was infinite and our dreams ever-present. Eighteen, and the world was ours.

I should have memorized every part of you. The way you crinkled your nose when you laughed. The subtle fragrance of your favorite cologne, a hint of smoky incense and sun-kissed petals lingering in the air. Lazy afternoons spent lying on the grass, fingers entwined. The way you whispered sweet nothings in the hushed moments before dawn, made promises you couldn't keep. Do you remember us, and the love we thought would last forever?

In my mind, the echo of your laugh reverberates like a beautiful melody that lingers long after it fades away. I can still feel the warmth of your touch, remember an embrace that felt like home. I hold you in the quiet corners of my heart and cherish every moment we shared.

I think that I might always be a little bit in love with you.

# Ars longa, vita brevis

Syd M | 20

still breathing, yes,  
dum spiro spero  
to create, create, create,  
make, make, make,  
write, write, write,  
like I'm running out of time;

there are never enough moments,  
per aspera ad astra  
they come and shoot so quickly,  
caught at the edge of sight,  
to see, see, see,  
hear, hear, hear,  
feel, feel, feel,  
their light, voice, warmth;  
through the darkest hour,  
luceo non uro  
energy igniting to flames,  
traces of sparks follow the dust,  
it is coming together,  
the words, words, words,  
rhythm, rhythm, rhythm,  
passion, passion, passion,  
a masterpiece or midnight thought;

still breathing,  
running out of time,  
but I cannot compose it all,  
have to work, work, work,  
refine, refine, refine  
finalize, finalize, finalize,  
ars longa, vita brevis

# Stubborn, Beautiful Mess

# Syd M | 20

words scatter across the pages,  
trying to dance and carry the messages,  
little splotches of ink on the lateral palms,  
filling the little ridges between the epithelial cells, imprints,  
as the pages fill with recalled encounters;

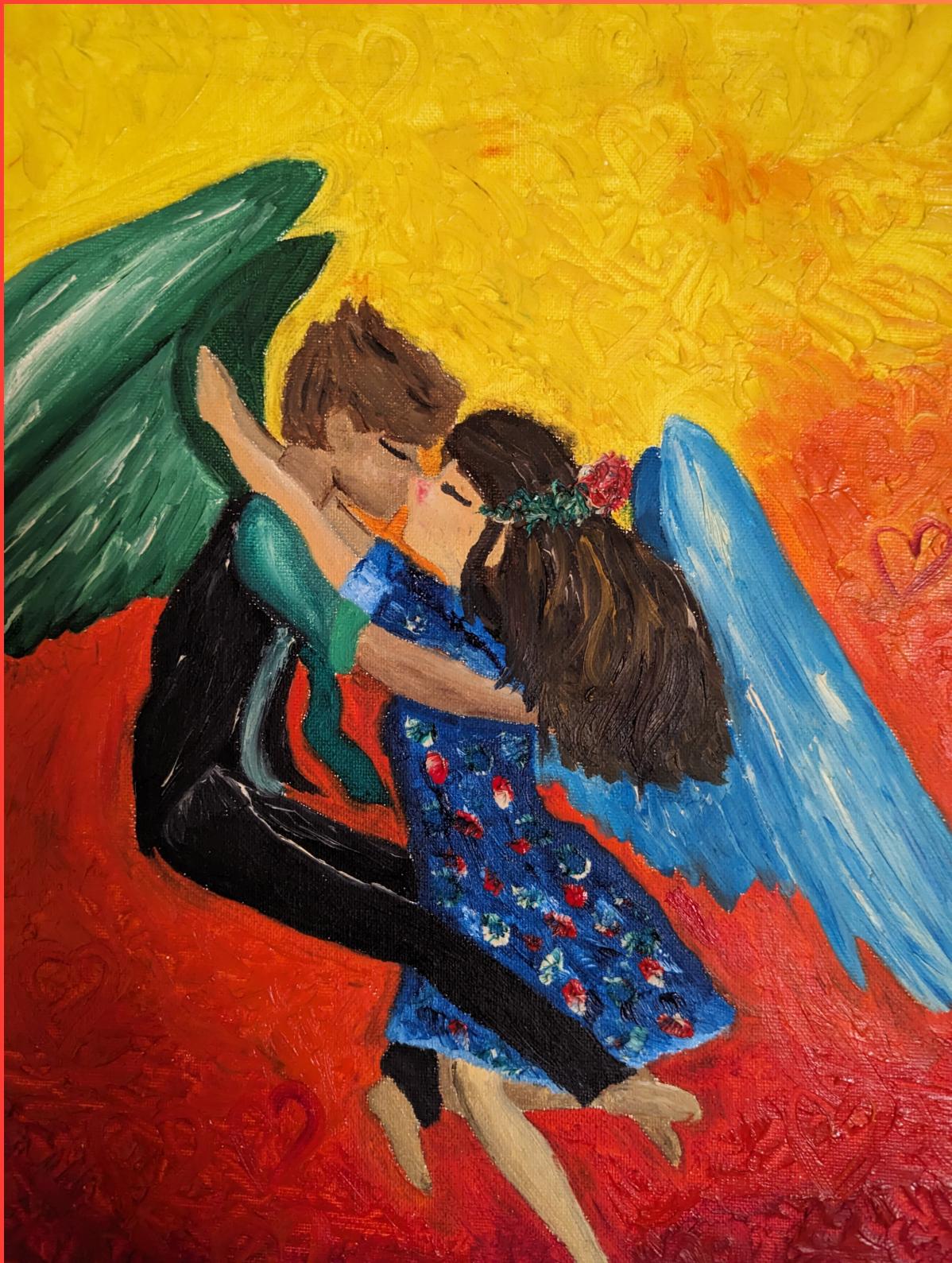
how these moments blossom,  
cascading to bigger memories that trigger,  
the limbic system, to bring back the smallest details,  
scents of the mist flowers, parades of monarchs,  
dancing, exchanging bows, gathering the nectar, oh how gorgeous they were;

how the smallest droplet of rain,  
brings back the moments of childhood bliss,  
teal rubber boots stomping on the puddles,  
splashes of adam's ale collect on my jeans,  
mama yelling at me to come inside to not catch a cold, oh how much she cared;

how the first sip of coffee,  
changed my routine and beverage preference,  
without a thought, just sparked,  
ignited an eros for the bitter, acidic liquid bark,  
that serves as a coping mechanism and alarm clock to me;

how freedom on the eagle's wings felt,  
as my locks of raven hair fell past my shoulders,  
revealing the truest version of me, a burden lifted,  
something perhaps insignificant to others,  
grants the purest form of comfort to me;

how i wish i could compose all these little moments,  
that bring nostalgia close to home,  
that tell the stories of how i came to be,  
a stubborn, beautiful mess that wants to take dust  
and create stars brighter than we can fathom.



“moment of young love,” Syd M, 20



“Talk To Me,” Syd M, 20

# Gentle Creatures

Morgan Lyons | 23

*Utopia... What if it's not one place? What if it's not one ending? Today was a small portion of my life, made up of a patchwork of quiet utopias.*

A thrush visits the birdbath in the backyard. Things have been quiet out there for a few days, but it's a hot one today. The sun is beaming down and the air is sticky with humidity. So the thrush arrives. She stops for a drink, then sits in the chilled water. The breeze ruffles her feathers as she looks all around, safely guarded by a dense hedge and fence. She meanders around the edge, letting the sunlight hit her again. I know I have other things to do, but there's something so captivating about her, watching this bird rest for a moment. She takes the time to fully dry her feathers, puffing up her chest, letting her tail feathers dangle in the bath water. When she is finished, she leaps from the edge, running through the grass and vanishing into a secret place in the hedge just big enough for her. It feels so sacred, taking the time to watch the peaceful joy of animals; these creatures who let you exist just as yourself.

Later, I take my dog for a walk. We keep each other company, silently motivating each other, and things really are quiet when I'm with her. She lets my stress fade into the background for a while, there is no awkwardness to this silence. We know each other; I know her favourite places to explore. She understands when I need to stop to take off my jacket or slow down our pace. I know tomorrow we will return here, to our little utopia together.

Maybe I don't need to wait for my utopia. Maybe it's utopias plural, and maybe it's made of moments, not one place. Animals just existing around me helps. Those quiet moments, watching birds playfully splashing in the bath make me so happy that I chose to look out the window. They teach me how to exist without pressure to produce something; no grandeur, just the chance to catch my breath. Maybe it is not just my utopias that bring me joy, maybe its shared moments with heartstrong creatures like my dog, watching her elation as I put on my sneakers; she knows they are my favourites, and that when I put them on we will likely be going on a journey together. Learning from her unfiltered joy, letting it spill over into myself, is my paradise. Even better, it's a paradise I can return to. A recurring utopia whenever I walk with my dog, watch a bird preen, or visit dancing butterflies and bees among vibrant plants.

# Quiet Journeys

Morgan Lyons | 23

Soft fur

Little legs

This bee is determined

Trustworthy antennae

Translucent wings

She flies through worlds

Overgrown lanes- no such thing

No need to cut, no need to prune

She watches flowers conquer fences

And congratulates them

Gently lands on their petals

Little feet find their footholds

Gossiping with blossoms

Swapping pollen blends like exchanging whispers

Soft lullabies

This bee is tired

Wings folding together

Feet curling under

“Tell me a story.”

The flower does; spins her a tale full of sunlight

Nourishing beams which taste of cosmos

Stories of rainfall and rainbows

Sensations of roots reaching deep

And making a home

This bee dreams of warmth.

# Notes to Mirrors

Morgan Lyons | 23

You saw me with the long hair

Pulling it back

Tying it up

Holding it away

So much

Too much

Holding it back, tilting my head, wondering what if

It was short

No, not short enough

Trips to the hairdresser

A fringe

A bob cut

Frizzy. Uncomfortable, unnecessary

Hairdryer, shampoo, conditioner

So much time, so much effort, so little achieved

Still too much

Not just frizz. Not just tangles. Not just appearance.

Deeper than that.

Maybe you knew before I did.

You saw how I wore it, ponytail, braid, pigtail

Messy bun

You watched as I hid the long strands, tucked them down my collar, watched

as I pretended my

hair was so short there could be no ponytail

Did you know? Did I know?

It took years of what ifs.

Years of, I can't, way too radical. Way too drastic.

But then, you saw me. You saw me smile.

Saw my shoulders, unobscured, saw my head, so much lighter.

You looked on as I closed the door, walked right up to you

Running my fingers though the strands, the short short strands

Got some hair gel, the type from the men's aisle, the type I'd always  
wanted to try

Too much? Maybe, but you knew I didn't care.

I could make it spike, stand up like I'd been electrocuted

Stepping out of the shower, I'd run to you, beaming at the natural mess,  
the wild look, the  
effortless chaos

You did not beam back, but you did not need to

You never needed to

All you had to do was stay with me, observe, show me

Reflect me

# On Cleaning Out Your Personal Inbox

Megan Wahn | 25

The IT floor always felt cold. Like “you should probably pack a sweater with your lunch” kind of cold. Seymour never complained about it. He couldn’t really—he almost exclusively worked from home, the virtue of having a job that operated almost entirely through screens. He’d been coming into the office more though, because being at home meant getting constantly reminded he was alone. That Louise had left. That Louise wasn’t ever coming home. Though she did have the courtesy of leaving her rather expensive engagement ring behind on the kitchen counter, where it still sat to this day. Ice cold office it was.

Seymour sighed. Later evenings were always slower, most all IT tickets having been resolved in the beginning portion of the day during the height of employee productivity and when most tech difficulties arose. Now everyone was wrapping up work before the weekend, which basically meant dicking around with your computer open until the end of the day. If Seymour was at home, this would offer prime time for laundry or chores or to play a bit of *Red Dead Redemption*. But he wasn’t at home. He was in the office. He could socialize and talk to his co-workers, but that stressed him out too much so instead he was playing his fifth round of online chess while his colleagues played paper football until one of them heard a set of Gucci loafer-clad feet clunking down the 20th floor’s weirdly hollow and sloped floor towards their bank of desks asking for help resetting their password.

Contrary to his current set of sorry circumstances, Seymour actually really loved his job. You wouldn’t expect it but working in tech for a big media company basically meant you were God. Or maybe not God...maybe like consult to God—the quiet puppet master that no one paid attention to but who pulled all the strings from behind the thick, velvet curtain. And the Gods up in the Olympus of the C-suites might get paid thousands of dollars more than him, but nothing could fell a God quite like tech problems.

Seymour pushed his wire framed glasses up his hooked nose—an unfortunate feature from the time he broke his nose walking into a poll in high school—and sighed again, prompting Nora, his desk mate, to shoot him an inquisitive look that immediately made Seymour shrink his too-large- for-his-desk-chair body back towards the glow of his desktop. “Sorry,” he muttered. Nora shrugged and returned to filing her nails.

His screen flashed, letting him know it was his turn on on-line chess, but looking at the digitized black and white pieces made his brain want to crawl out of his skull. He quickly exited the page before he could think better of it. He inhaled through his nose, being mindful of the noise he was making this time. He *needed* to find something else to do.

Theoretically, Seymour could technically just leave and “work from home” for the rest of the day. But that would mean another chunk of hours getting constantly reminded he lived there alone. And that he still needed to box up all of Louise’s things and send them back to her. And also pack up his own shit because he could no longer pay for that house by himself and he needed to move to his parent’s house in New Jersey in the next month... which he still hadn’t informed his parents about.

He checked his ticket docket, but nothing had been added in the 15 minutes from when he’d last checked (or if anything had been added, one his co-workers had already picked it up). He checked his work email (nothing) and then, because he had nothing else to do, he logged into his personal email.

Now he’d had this email for over a decade and these days only touched it if or when he was applying for jobs. Normally seeing the 70,000 unread emails overwhelmed him, the total over 100,000 emails even more so. Today on the other hand...

Seymour looked at the clock in the lover right corner of his screen. He still had another twoish hours until 5:30 and it wasn’t like he had anything else better to do...

\*Response needed\* meeting minutes

Your April 2011 Checking Statement is now available  
Team call Friday

Seymour kept everything—hence why 100,000 emails currently crowded his personal inbox. He's always lived in constant paranoia that everything might one day serve a purpose, always hesitant to throw something away at the risk it might one day prove important. That's why he always answered yes, he would like a physical receipt (even if it would end up getting vanquished to his pocket, and fished out as a lumpy bit of impromptu papier-mâché after laundry day). Why his countertops were an elephant graveyard of opened mail. Why there are always a few long-deposited checks from months ago littered on the edges of his desk.

As such cleaning his inbox more so meant organizing all correspondence into different clearly labelled folders that disappeared from his main inbox while remaining searchable should he ever need to know how much his subscription to The Atlantic cost him in November 2016. Once he got into the groove, he found the process therapeutic. Scroll all the way down, begin clicking your way up to the top. Keep or erase. If keeping, sort into the appropriate box. Otherwise, to the trash it goes. Then he starts his way back down again and watches the numbers dwindle.

The passive act of a partner never returning home (though was it ever really home?) upended his life and left him with zero chance for closure, but this digital corner of his world seemed the most tamable. Plus, he figured it wouldn't feel as emotionally harrowing to pack away. It's kind of fascinating how the chaos of your life can sometimes be neatly sorted into boxes when you actually carve out the time to do it.

is this normal for you too?????

NOTICE: Rent overdue

Travel itinerary for backpacking trip

Seymore ends up staying in the office well past 5:30. He's so focused on his computer—the LED glow washing over his unshaven face—that he doesn't notice the dusk light fading to darkness. It isn't until the maintenance staff accidentally turns the lights off on him that he realizes he should probably head home. All of his co-workers have long since left, using the excuse of the impending weekend to clock out of work half an hour early to go get shift faced. He'd immediately said no to the invitation when it'd been offered to him.

Now, as he packs all of his stuff up to catch the train to his cold apartment, he wishes he had accepted the invitation—if anything to not feel cold, hollow, and barren for just one moment. To be around someone, even if it was a stranger, so he could trick himself into believing he could be loved or at least liked.

## Everything to Everyone

### UPS Update: Package Scheduled for Delivery Tomorrow

It takes an hour to get back to Rockaway. Louise had wanted to live on the beach, dreamed of a cottage in Montauk, while Seymour preferred to stay in New York to keep his commute simple. That had been one of their first fights, and Seymour had fancied himself a genius at the time when he'd proposed the compromise of moving to Rockaway. He felt like he'd cracked the code of life, and figured out how to get everything he wanted—the pretty blonde girl way out of his league, the secure job, the life in the city. Plus they'd have more space out in Rockaway. It was a longer commute, sure, but well, you couldn't always have everything. And besides, they could have the city and the beach. Now, as he walked down the street to his apartment, he resented the squat two-story house with its peeling white paint he'd Louise convince him was "quaint," wrap-around porch and swing, ample room for a home office, and the proximity to the beach that heightened the current bone-stabbing chill of winter.

He'd put off actually walking home for as long as he could, strolling the boardwalk from the train station. He'd ordered some tacos off a food truck and ate them while sitting in the sand. Around midnight, he entertained the notion of just sleeping on the beach but then shivered from a gust of particularly violent wind. So he pulled his wool coat (Louise bought me this, he'd thought to himself when he put it on earlier this morning) tighter around him and packed up to head home.

He showers, methodically washing and scrubbing every crevice of his body. He wipes a circle out of the foggy mirror and catalogs himself, trying to see what Louise maybe saw. Gangly limbs that all coalesce into a soft middle. Hair seemingly everywhere. Maybe he should've shaved more? Perpetually pinched features that make him always look vaguely anxious. Medium length black hair that always dries in strings, making his hair look greasy no matter how many times he washes it. He lays in his and Louise's bed—with its plaid comforter and lumpy mattress all nestled in an oversized garage-sale-find wooden bed frame—for all of ten minutes before he launches his body off the mattress. He pads back downstairs. He grabs his laptop from his work bag, opens a bottle of beer, and plops down on the cracked leather couch (also probably found at a garage sale).

Meeting moved to 4 pm

Some of my poetry...

When he'd been working earlier, Seymore had realized his sorting requires a bit of inspection. You need to know the exact nature of something to help determine where it belongs. And unfortunately, not all subject lines are indicative of the exact contents of an email, so a certain amount of skimming is necessary. Except—and the other thing he quickly realized—all it takes is one word or mention of a name in an exchange with someone, and then skimming turns into reading and reading turns into reminiscing, and suddenly he finds himself taking a marginally masochistic trip down memory lane. Still this task feels better than laying like a board on "his side" of the bed, nervous of rolling over in his sleep as if he could crush the figment of his imagination he's pretending still sleeps there.

This first chunk of emails come from recent years. The contents feel fresh in his mind. He can remember that the random email sent from himself is a to-do list. The vaguely worded missive from his old boss is easy to interpret and sort into a corresponding box. There's the contract from that one job that elicits a thrill of victory even now, and the still-smarting rejection from another. He sips his beer and clicks through.

QUESTION

[no subject]

Preliminary presentation deck

UPDATED presentation deck

He ends up falling asleep on the couch, waking up to beer spilled all over him and thankfully none on his laptop. After he cleans everything up and makes himself a cup of coffee, he returns to his inbox and works throughout the rest of the day.

By this point, he's started to encounter older messages that feel blurrier to his memory, though the haziness sharpens upon further investigation. Some he looks back on with fondness mixed with notes of embarrassment. There are the anonymous poetry submissions he'd made (deleted). There's the intro to U.S. history homework from a seventh grader who's probably in college right now from his brief time side hustling as a tutor (he reads that one for a quick laugh, and then deletes it). A few celebrity blind items from when him and Louise watched *The Bachelor* (deleted). Messages with the super-intendent of his first apartment (deleted). Job acceptances (kept in a folder titled "Job application confirmations," both for future networking and to remind himself that someone actually wanted him once).

Thank you for applying

New job opportunities

Is this reality TV star associated with a cult?

He works throughout that Saturday, breaking only eat, go on the occasional walk, and play Red Dead Redemption. He sleeps again on the couch (this time on purpose) and wakes that next Sunday at noon but with a single-minded determination to finish. As he delves deeper, the dots between previously disparate points in his life get connected. He realizes the random consultant he briefly exchanged emails with in university ended up becoming a colleague at one of his last jobs. He finds himself frequently suppressing the sympathetic urge to reply to forgotten emails from years ago, or desperately wishing he didn't sound so damn annoyingly eager in all his responses.

Your purchase summary  
Please log these files  
Did you want your shirts back?

He finds the end late that Sunday evening. He hasn't done laundry and there's no food in his fridge, but he's down to one final page of messages. In between the monotony of week-to-week life captured within each email are moments of personal memories. The break up from his high school sweetheart freshman year of college (when she confessed to cheating on him for half a year) summed up in a note about exchanging each other's stuff. The first correspondence between him and Louise, which happened a few weeks later. He remembers he knew he wanted to marry the petite blonde with the green eyes and kind smile just a few months later. The last email his grandfather sent him about his poetry reading before the dementia kicked in.

(He's not quite sure which folders those emails belong to. He doesn't think it's the trash, no matter how much they might hurt.)

It was nice meeting you ;)  
Saw this and thought of you  
Some notes on the poems, with love

The inbox hits zero sometime around 9 p.m. Everything's either sorted into a folder or in the trash bin. He slumps back against the cracked cushions of his couch, feeling his mind finally cross off the Sisyphean task. It proves an equal source of utter relief—an unencumbered breath—and emptiness. All the problems of present he'd tried to ignore with a dedicated mind are still there. The not-packed boxes. The empty home. The looming end to a lease.

Nothing's changed—nothing's solved—and he'll need to confront it all soon. For now, the memories from the last few decades that he's tucked away into digital folders in his inbox feel littered across his mind, unpacked from their forgotten box and strewn across the floor.

Seymore indulges in a moment of lingering on the evidence of some of the most formative moments of his life. Then he closes his laptop, picks up a roll of masking tape and walks towards his bookshelf, already mentally scripting what he'll say to his parents tomorrow morning.

Statement notification from your doctor's office

Just wanted to confirm

# JOEASH



# Joeash and *Serenity*

Based in Calgary, Alberta, trio Joeash go over their musical journey with exploring genres, all wrapped up in their new EP.

Although they've all known each other since their youth, their origin story is described as a simple time of fooling around and making some music. "We didn't know where it would take us. We just knew that this was a passion of ours and something we enjoyed doing."

Serenity, the group's new 4-track EP, dives into new music genres the group hadn't explored before. "We rapped, we sang, we had hard-hitting hype songs, a song for the heartbroken peeps, and a cute wintery song fit for the holidays. Contrary to the word *Serenity* this project is wild, chaotic, and hyper, but it also includes sweet, swinging-your-feet, songs, ultimately having the listener feel serenity."

One of the goals was to release the EP, adding to the group's three other singles released in 2021 and 2022. Eldest member Josh urged front the release of the EP, when one karaoke night, they performed a song in front of people. "Flip 5 and a Mexican and their hit song "Butterflies" really inspired us to get this thing off the ground and pursue our passion for music production."

For all of them, however, it seems like the entire EP was significant to them. To member Josh, he couldn't choose a favourite. "They all bring different vibes to the table." For Jay, his favourite track was *Hideaway*. "This was our first time having the opportunity to work with another artist from Calgary, who is also really, really talented." For the youngest member Joe, *UP RN!* was his favourite song. "We made our first ever music video to go alongside it and the whole creation process of it was a blast. A lot of things to improve on from a filmmaking standpoint, but also a lot of things learned."

# Their Sound

The creative process for the EP was simple as Josh often creates a simple vocal melody before sending it off to Josh and Jay, who create the lyrics and melodies. Soon they meet up and simply record their music with a light, carefree air.

Recording music had its twists and turns, however as they first formed. “In 2020, when recording Dreamworld, which was then called ‘Lullaby’, Josh ate ice cream and got sick, resulting in us having to postpone the track for 2 years. Then back in October, we went to Jay’s university to record some of the songs, and Jay fell asleep on the floor.”

With this creative simplicity, making their content means more to them, very deeply. “Art is an expression of emotion, feelings, even ideas that we try to convey through our music. We hope to inspire people who love music to just have fun with it and see where it takes you. We spread positive vibes only.”

Perhaps the simplicity within the complexity in which they make their music is what makes their music charming and endearing. There’s a certain wonder and importance of the tiny moments in their music-making, leading to all of their great moments together as a band.



photos courtesy of artist



# Patter

Lucy Rattner | 20

The rain has gentle hands.

It cannot fit all of me in its loving palms,  
but it knows me anyway.

The patter against my window takes me  
gently as I rock to sleep.

A shadow casts against my room  
and flowers hang above me.

I grow, I grow, I grow.

# serene

M.S Blues | 18

days of beauty,

‘tis one of my greatest wonders—

*how did mother nature conceive such a sight?*

*how did she make such—*

*exquisite days*

*or such glorious nights?*

*shall it never be known*, says local legend,

*because secrets are supposed to be kept secret.*

however, i like to assume that the serene beauty was created by lovers,  
who nurtured their offspring with such care.

# the moment i knew

Alexis-Rose Abendanio | 19

The sun broke through the clouds as four little words confirmed my new life.

“Your father is dead.”

“My father is dead?”

*My father is dead.*

The calendar would now be a constant reminder of what we would miss out on.

He is dead on my prom night.

As I walk down the stairs of my house,

each step reminds me of his long, labored breaths of air.

In my satin blue dress and my hair curled into spirals,

I wait to find him sitting on the couch, a look of disapproval clear on his face as he grieves the

young girl I once was while celebrating the woman I’ve become

But, I’m met with his smile carved onto a wooden box that sits on a dusty shelf covered in

knick-knacks

He is dead at graduation.

He sits inside a heart-shaped pendant around my neck as we dance across the stage together.

It hits me as I walk up to my family for photos that he no longer exists.

He lives in tattered picture frames and eight-year-old flash drives.

The paper in my hand signifies the future that I have yet to meet.

But how do I move forward without fear of what I’m leaving behind?

*Who I’m leaving behind?*

He is dead at my wedding.

In my white satin gown, my brothers lead me down the aisle, their arms hooked around my own

The man who will love me forever waits at the altar,  
but the man who loved me first is nowhere to be seen.

Just an empty seat next to my mother and a last name that I'm going to give up

Only in my memory is he alive, and I fantasize about rejecting apologies that I know will never

come as I miss out on my father-daughter dance

Apologies about how he should've been a better man  
or how much time we wasted screaming back and forth like two little kids.

My father is dead,  
and his death killed a part of me.

It took three years, five months, and twenty days to realize that I have carried and will carry him  
in everything I do.

My writing is like a museum of relics while he is the muse.

His face haunts me as I stare in the mirror or as I sit in a hospital bed  
And instead of the sickly sweet smell of expiration—that I couldn't quite wash off—I hold in my  
hands a newborn face, all too similar to a face I once knew.

It's at that moment I realize

My father is dead,  
but he never really left.

# Poem I Wrote After Seeing the Barbie Movie

Lucy Rattner | 20

Oh this heavy humanness in my heart

that holds me

It soaks up regret and puts it on the rack to dry.

I am no longer wearing heels--

I walk in curves and dress in longing.

I can count to a million and that is a fact.

Leave me to my garden.

# Work Day

Lucy Rattner | 20

Where have you gone?

I do not see you the way I used to, yet  
my heart only knows what was.

I take my lunch in the back room and sob.

# Thunder

Lucy Rattner | 20

The sky is darkening  
and my heart is lightening,  
listening to the drums in the clouds  
that roll like hills in my dreams.

Pink peeks out and says hello,  
how do you do,  
would you like to see me dance?  
I graciously accept.

And then it is ecstasy for me,  
love pouring down from the heavens,  
telling me I may wait in peace.

# Popped Balloon

Tatum Bunker | 18

Setting sun sets south

Contrary to normal

I feel different today

No one watched me smile

Today I let my balloon go

I watched it pop

Lucky for me, I felt nothing

Always yet nevermore

# Anniversary

Tatum Bunker | 18

The rocking chair creaks

It is windy

The flowers rustle

The wind chimes ring

We stood here together

We laughed

But now I only laugh

# Dry Paint

Tatum Bunker | 18

Where were you  
On the 8th of June, 1883?  
Were you with a lady  
Dressed in white,  
Blushing pink with sweet delight?  
Or were you on the shore  
With brush and easel,  
Watching a young sir flirt and tease her?  
Did the years go by too fast?  
Focusing too much on the future and past?  
Painting love and setting suns,  
Mornings after and cinnamon buns  
Why are you bluer than the skies?  
People don't believe your lies,  
Keep painting gentle waters, soft laughter.  
The couple sweet will pay you after.

