

from us to you...

To the reader,

Thank you so much for reading Moonbow Magazine's first-ever issue! We are so excited for you to step into our world and leave inspired and prompted to explore the deeper implications of creativity in life.

For this issue, the theme was NOVALUNOSIS, which means the excitement upon looking up at the stars, so we asked 'What makes you feel infinite?' What makes you feel bigger than the current form that you take? Self-expression and the idea of existentially thinking beyond yourself are important to understanding the roles we take in the world right now.

In the issue, we celebrate the idea that uncertainty is a part of life, and perhaps the unknown is something beautiful, something alluring, rather than something dangerous to avoid. 'What makes you feel infinite?' is more than just looking at the stars and feeling things. It's about expanding our current perceptions of our humanity through a creative form.

Signed,



Cover Design by S. Kavi, 23, Dallas, TX

On the beach, beneath the universe

Arryn Liu | 19, Hong Kong

I thought the moon alone, in her fullest,
most iridescent form,
was beautiful enough
and that the stars, forming the spine
of the Great Night Dragon
caught on a fishing hook,
as though foreshadowing something
unspeakable in any other language,
were the epitome of perfection.
Yet, on that moonlit night
we were there, sitting on a bamboo mat
at the sandy shores,
with neither a word between us,
gazing at the mere fragments
of what were perhaps once
parts that made up something greater
that now became the parts of a wider universe,
or perhaps even living, breathing beings
deemed worthy by whatever deities pulled
the strings behind the scenes
with the moon hovering at the far corner
dimly-lit, but not unseen.

A shame, really—you've never really believed
in any of the universe's methods of disclosing
its secrets to the select few,
who dedicate their lives
to finding meaning in a world
which appears to have none until
it is assigned. Still, there could have been
a thousand precious chests filled to the brim
with gold and gems under the sand,
treefuls of coconuts and pineapples
on the verge of falling off just
begging to be picked off,
and plenty of fish beyond the rushing waves
waiting to be caught,
yet none of that would have been able
to compare to what I saw in those eyes of
yours
as we contemplated a different sky altogether
on that moonlit night at the beach.

Bamuni Hills

Shamik Banerjee | 27, India

Among its great relicts I saw
Fine stonework 'mid the trees,
Greenswards and mounds, bedwell'd the grounds,
With flowerets and bees,
Where, at daylight, Bushlarks in flight,
Went warbling by a shaw.

Old epigraphs in Sanskrit bore
First Kali Yuga's tale,
On statues, plaques, on pavement tracks,
On each rubble and spale,
Did make me steep in knowledge deep,
Of Indian godlore.

Asleep beside a Banyan stipe
Was a batch of sages;
Their skylad form, through cold and warm,
Got leaner with the ages;
Yet in their mind, no sorrow pined
And no tumult did gripe.

From its pinnacle I did see
The Hazarapar Lake
Of Tezpur stade where did pervade
Beauty in every wake,
And gave the blocks, the homes and flocks
Their lovelihead to me.

And flow'd there through sinuous ways
Great Brahmaputra's stream,
'Neath apert sky, it drifted by
Bearing the gold sunbeam,
Like innocence of childlike sense
In heart's wide playfield plays.

Long there I did remain and mill
Arrided me it's peace;
No dismay could with grief atray,
Joyness I did not leese;
And when came eve, I set to leave
With thoughts of this fair hill.

The Night Globe

Shamik Banerjee | 27, India

The night globe is fair and selly.
I watch its elliptic belly:
a muster of points- dangling there;
and I, dwarf creature, standing here,
am full o' fright, of an argument,
or a shatter'd goal, of discontentment.
To-morrow, what brand gestures will hold—
new wonder or, my doldrum old?
Will handiworks so contribute,
sweet effects of my labour's fruit?
Or, would my centre be at peace,
and verves, 'til dying breath, release?
Och! when such thoughts my mind entrail,
and I have swam a gloomy sail,
I take my eyes to the star-fed way,
then all my ruffles, broom away,
as life- not somber; I construe,
the prismatic roles are but one view,
whose form is like an airy cod,
it bursts when thorn of death is prod;
and think meself: this vastness has-
pivoting stars, huge spheres of gas;
if such eclectic thread, God turns,
and that our final sites are urns,
if all's beinghood is graced by Him
then why for me, His care be slim?

The Hump

Shamik Banerjee | 27, India

I upped the road along the hump,
on a footpace by left hand;
with brambles on the land,
and many tangled trees in a clump;
I upped the road along the hump.

I stopped upon the edge of a cliff,
to glance at the city view;
the houses and the crew;
ant-like bikes moving as a whiff;
I stopped upon the edge of a cliff.

The doors and windows seemed like eyes-
gawing a distant stare;
a sighting very rare;
their chalky roofs that touched the skies;
the doors and windows seemed like eyes.

This hump, to a pavilion went--
many visitors were going;
and motors- like wind blowing;
to where the slope had curved and bent;
this hump, to a pavilion went.

I heard then, some squawks and tweetings
and a sound like pleasing pipes,
o'er light-poles of several types!
but knew not of their nests or seatings;
I heard then, some squawks and tweetings

I downed the road and hump, and then;
I carried with me the rhyme
of the beauty of this time;
I downed the road and hump, and then,
I pledged to visit here again.

Silent Valley

Shamik Banerjee | 27, India

Brown-pointed sprays and withes hang down,
Thick boles engirdle 'round one's eyes;
From far Nilgiri hoists its crown,
Sun thrings where deep the forest lies;
A greyish trail, dense side hedgerows,
The straight view's like a curved green light,
Where more advanced, greener it grows-
A macaque and civet in sight-
On seeing tourists, little fley,
Their stunned faces ask, "Who are they?"

'Ka-Kow', 'Squawk-Squwak' above the head,
Chant the Weero and Yellowbill,
The black-necked Nightjar from its bed,
Of branches, hear them sing full-still;
From canopy, fast crinkling sound,
As if furred paws approaching on,

To turn both sides and see around,
Before one does, the sound is gone;
If large pawprints seen on the trails:
Elephants crossing holding tails!

A long clough 'twixt each mountainside,
Passes with River Kunthi's stream,
The view of Western Ghats that hide,
In cloudcapt ridges comes like dream;
Sweet peace here diuturanal be,
For no Cicadas crack at all,
No timbrels of cacophony,
Herefore this gorge, we 'silent' call,
And mountaintops with turquoise hue
Benamed thereupon, 'Hills of Blue'.

To Indus River

Shamik Banerjee | 27, India

In Tibet, from the Kailash mount,
Along its highland vale,
You come aflow as if a fount,
Rolls down a spumy dale;
How quick about a bending stream,
You make the lissom pass;
While gilds your face the bright sunbeam,
And hails the swayful grass;
You leap over boulders and rocks,
And watch a swimming floe,
You watch the gliding seagulls' flocks,
And watch a plateau glow;
You cross Kashmir and cross the Leh,
Traverse the Pangong Lake,
Then merrily, your lengthful way,
Towards India make.

By Punjab's Mustard fields and lea
And gamuts of rice mills;
With Ghaggar, Beas, Satluj, Ravi,
Flow by the verdant hills;
The daily working Bullock carts,

The Banyan leaves that trindle,
The rustic children's jolly hearts,
And hay the farmers windle,
You greet Nanga Parbat's ranges
And touch full northern Hind,
You meet Himachal's high granges,
And advance on to Sind;
From Peshawar's ridges and cliffs
You enter Pakistan,
And through its long and wide massifs,
Meet Chenab at Multan.

Kabul River, Panjnad joins you,
Joins you the little creeks,
'Indus', 'Jhelum', this land coins you,
As you flow neath their peaks;
The nearby bucolic huts glow,
With avidness they cheer,
And all of Rawalpindi know,
Your coming course they hear;
No place to you remains a roun,
You ripple through each land,
Men laud as if a king with crown,
In great grandeur does stand;
Then eterne beautyness of you,
In Arabian Sea,
With love, mixes the waters blue,
From coast of Karachi.

Wishing Star

Willow Faust | 21, California, USA

So this is how I got in this mess. By “mess” I mean this excruciating state of a pool of melted nerves. I call it Anticipating the Awkward. Mom calls it “my problem”. Dad just calls me a “psycho who needs a girlfriend (and maybe then he’ll be normal)”. He will be happy to know that my current mess is all because of a girl.

What happened was I was in English class and talking to my friends. My friends Mom calls “good influences” and my Dad calls “a bunch of nerds”. I told Jonah I was biking to the abandoned field at the edge of town on Saturday to watch the meteor shower—the one that’s technically on the property of that ramshackle house (where the stoners like to smoke, the skaters like to hang, and the cool kids like to hook up), but the whole lot is abandoned and empty. It’s supposed to be perfect conditions, I told him, clear sky—prime location. Right here in Berry Falls. Most likely the last one before we graduate.

He said no, he couldn’t make it. But Lila overheard—the girl who sits in front of us, the girl Jonah knows I’ve had a crush on ever since she transferred into our AP Physics class and sat by me and a few friends to avoid the popular crowd. Which she was a part of for a while, but I think she ended up too weird for them—too smart, too honest, too quiet, too goth. Stuff like that.

Anyway, she turned around with her eyes curious and before she could even say anything and before I could stop him, Jonah went and invited her to my event for me. He shot me a smile, a you’re welcome, but I felt more like punching him in the face than kissing his boots.

“I’d love to see the shooting stars,” she had said. “I have a few wishes I’d like to request from the universe anyway.”

So now I’m in this mess, and it’s Saturday evening, and I’m supposed to head out for the meteor shower at 8:00. To meet Lila. Who I barely know, aside from rumors and English class where she makes comments about feminist characters in the books we read, or AP Psychics where she sometimes chats with me about the silly names of the people in our textbook word problems. But anyway, I still think she’s cool. Mom would like her, I figure, unless she’s secretly a drug addict, which I don’t think she is. I don’t know if Dad would, I can’t seem to do anything right with him these days, but he’d probably be proud I talked to a girl.

I check the clock, sigh, and think about how awkward it’ll be under the stars. Maybe Jonah should’ve gotten her number for me. I could’ve texted her to cancel; I could’ve climbed on the roof of our house to scope out the meteors there. God. Dad’s right. I’m a psycho. Mom’s right too. Problem psycho. Just a mess.

I shout through the house I’m leaving. Then I leave.

At 8:10, I'm almost convinced Lila won't be here. I'm lying down on the blanket I brought, scrutinizing the sky, my eyes falling on the shape of the familiar constellations. They're perfect, congruent, and in place. They've been like this for thousands of years; the moon, the stars. Stable, consistent; predictable, and mappable. No shooting stars yet. Fleeting.

"Hey," says a voice. Lila sits down next to me. I didn't hear her come up, but across the lot her the bike is toppled against mine.

"Hi," I say, swallowing. My anticipated awkwardness has officially transferred from anticipatory to in-action. "You haven't missed anything."

"Cool. Sorry, I'm late. My mom needed help with something. Then she got all excited that I was going out with a friend."

"No problem."

Silence. The crickets in the field chirp. I wonder if there are people in the abandoned house, hooking up, smoking, drinking, mapping each other's bodies like stars.

"What were your wishes?" It's the only thing I came prepared to say. I've been wondering since earlier this week.

Lila sighs, stretches her legs out. She lays down flat on her back, about a foot away from me. "Wouldn't it be fun, being a shooting star?" She doesn't answer my question. Maybe she didn't hear me.

"Well," I say, scanning the sky. "No. You're burning up and dying. The meteoroids become nothing."

"Not nothing," Lila says, kicking my shoe with hers. "Law of Conservation of Mass."

"Right," I say, my cheeks burning, hot like a meteoroid. "They no longer are meteoroids, is what I meant."

"I know," she says. "I was just teasing."

"Oh," I say, quietly, unsure if she even hears me.

"But still," she says. "It'd be beautiful to fly through the sky like that, a simple little star. Then you're dust."

“Yeah,” I say, though I’m not sure how much I agree. But she seems so cool saying it like that. Maybe it would be nice. Just for a moment.

“What are you gonna wish for?” Lila asks, even though she never answered when I asked her. I wasn’t going to wish for something, not originally, not until that day in class when Jonah invited her. I started thinking about wishes I might have: less of a mess, the nerdiness is fine but could I please have a little more charm? Or the ability to dance before the end of the year and senior prom, good luck next year in college, a girlfriend, maybe even the courage to ask Lila to prom.

“You first,” I finally say. But she shushes me and points. A streak falls through the air, capturing my breath. Just as soon as it flies, it dies; my breath releases.

“Wow,” I say, because this is my first shooting star. I’ve come out before, listened to the scientists and their predictions, but never actually seen them. Rotten luck, I’d figured, bad conditions, I’d figured. But I caught one today. I don’t tell Lila it’s my first. I don’t tell her I had low expectations in the first place because I’ve been coming for years and never seen one.

“Did you wish?” Lila murmurs, her body warm next to mine. My own body feels energetic, like the meteoroid electrified my pulse.

“Oh,” I say. “I forgot.”

“Maybe there will be another,” Lila says, turning to me and smiling; I can see her face underneath the light of the moon and the stars. The teens hooking up in that house, if they are, probably can’t see each other, no one’s paid the electricity for years. The teens hooking up in that house, if they are, don’t even know about the meteor shower, probably aren’t as nervous, because it sure feels easier to be nervous when you’re under something as vast as the night sky. An abandoned house like that, with four walls and a roof, is contained. I feel exposed, like anything could happen. Maybe a meteor will fall and hit me right in the chest, maybe my worst secrets will just spill out. Maybe there are no more meteors, and it’s just us and the stagnant, predictable stars.

“Maybe,” I say, and wonder if she wished for hers.

The Silence of Something Too Deep

Devon Webb | 25, New Zealand

It feels stupid to tell the air I miss you
how long has it been & when did you forget me
how inconsequential was I really
all the while slipping further & further
into an unsustainable wish on a
star that didn't reach across the sea
only fell & sizzled out in the
silence of something too deep

How outdated was that dream
how many weeks did we falter
when was the moment it stopped
did you ever read my letter

I think of you thinking
this girl, she loved me too much
it was four days, darling
but I wish it was more like forever.

STARDUST

Devon Webb | 25, New Zealand

Technically,
93% of our body
is made up of stardust.
So, what if
when one star explodes
all its atoms create
a specific group of human beings
& these humans
are scattered across the world at random.
But their energies
continue to vibrate at the same frequency
and when these energies meet
there is a subconscious communication
as two souls are drawn together
by some higher power
& you can't quite describe it
you can't quite explain
but you feel as if you've known them
forever.

These are the divine fates.

These are your soulmates.

These are the ones

born from the same star.

DRINKING THE OCEAN

Devon Webb | 25, New Zealand

Looking at you is like trying to drink the ocean,

overwhelming in its magnitude

& incapable of quenching my thirst.

Looking at you is like having my reflection dance before me in a thousand points of light,

dazzling & terrifying

in its clarity.

Sometimes I wish that I could hold you

but how do you hold water

when it does not keep its form,

sometimes flowing towards you

& sometimes flowing away?

I wish that you would stay

but nature refrains from such stability

& so I follow the smell of your salt water,

chase the sound of your sea,

& forget so quickly, so easily

what it is to breathe.

THIS IS NOT A LIKE POEM IT'S A LOVE POEM

Devon Webb | 25, New Zealand

This is not a like poem it's a love poem
& it is here to say
that you were the best thing since the very beginning
& it kinda baffles me how I knew soon as I saw you
maybe 'cos you're beautiful or maybe just
some kind of vibe
the energy you get when you mix purple & blue
like a midnight kinda quiet
or maybe it was just Divine Mumma
with her big flashing arrow pointing right at you.
You get better and better
the more I know you
which seems an impossible concept
'cos how can someone go from an idea to a reality
& exponentially improve
I guess the reason includes
your dazzling lack of ego
which I guess is an aspect of being angelic
& your total lack of capacity
for hatred or anger or jealousy
swapped out maybe for an extra dose of sadness
which I wish I could take from you
the way you transmute my pain & rage
without even intending to.
My heart goes through
the entire reincarnation process when I look at you
from life to death to life again

& if tomorrow never came while you were
treasured in my gaze
I probably wouldn't notice
See all my overdue I love you's
must've got lost in the mail
or maybe that's a lie & I just addressed them
to myself
'cos I suppose in a way my love for you was
for me &
me alone
an unrequited glory that kept me afloat
that gave me hope
that made my world just that little bit more
brilliant
but at the end of the day with you so far away
I want you to know about it
I want you to know the way you took my
heart &
made it softer
the way you gave me something to
dream about every night
waterfalls on repeat like a lullaby
I want you to know that you're the best thing
in Auckland City
& that you look like the way all the

lights drip into the harbour
when you're driving back over the bridge at night
& that when I saw you part of me stopped looking at
anybody else
cos there's nothing more precious or majestic than you
with your shy smile and your perfect music
& the way you get excited when you talk about something
you're passionate about
& the way you really listen
& the way you love with the same tender ferocity as I do
& I guess it was a good thing it wasn't me
who received it
'cos it would've tainted the
infallibility of the whole affair
& my love for you would've been a weapon or a wound
instead of a blessing, a comfort & a muse.
At the end of the day I wanna tell you
that none of them were like poems
& all of them were love poems
'cos this was never a trivial thing
this was never like the rest
'cos you were the best,
you were always the best
& my heart's an eternal gift to you
reciprocated by its own truth.

IN SKYRIM, SOLITUDE IS A CAPITAL CITY

Devon Webb | 25, New Zealand

My mother says my life is disappearing
not in a mean way she is just concerned
she thinks I'm doing nothing when
I am doing so much
How do I explain to her,
how could my life disappear
when Skyrim has an Anniversary Edition
in Skyrim, Solitude is a capital city
& I am revered
even though I don't even do the main
questlines
I'm not even saving the world
just frolicking with my pet rabbit
picking flowers
& baking bread
& casting useless spells just for fun

I, too, thought it might be lonely to be alone
to be not in love with anyone
but I play Skyrim Anniversary Edition
& my entire heart explodes
the world is in my throat
like the tallest mountain in all of Tamriel

See I have fast travel at my fingertips
I have so much to explore
I have quest markers in my head
I'm just taking a leisurely detour

Life is a lot like Skyrim Anniversary Edition
so many purple mountain flowers everywhere!
& blue mountain flowers! & red mountain flowers!
& maybe even some tundra cotton!
& if you're patient & you pick them all you will be rich!
In Skyrim Anniversary Edition you stop & fight a ghost
& suddenly you have a whole farming enterprise
which is a metaphor for abundance upon reflection
sometimes I'm climbing a mountain
& I just stop & stare at the remastered snow
which is quite simply sparkling
is there not such beauty in these minuscule things

& when the time comes to be a completionist
to accomplish shit & have a conflict
I shoot my dreams so straight like an arrow
I get a cinematic kill shot
oh I am so OP

oh I'm taking my sweet time about it but
I'll slay dragons
I'll write my life like lore
& little nerds with too much time on their hands
will read it like books on shelves in Skyrim

& when they put the book down
they'll look at the purple mountain flowers just like I do
& think huh
what abundant wonders in this open world.

solace

Vienna Webber | 13, USA

god, how she loved the night sky. the silence and serenity of the stars was her one and only home, where she went when all went wrong. the stars never judged her, they only ever listened. growing into a sanctuary where she would seek refuge from the turmoil and chaos of her personal life. in the darkness was a sense of peace, and harmony. those nights, nothing but her breath and the flipping of pages could be heard. for all she cared, people could make fun of her and call her a loner all they wanted. she didn't need their validation. all she needed was the stars at night. to her, all the constellations had their own story. whether it was of sorrow and despair, or joy and love. the night was everything to her, a helping hand, a therapist, even a friend. it was with the night that she found solace. and it was with the night that she died a peaceful death. her soul lived on in something greater. in the stars. her spirit, interwoven with the constellations, was etched into the place she loved forever. others would look up to her, and find the same solace she did in the stars. and just as the stars never judged her, she never judged them.

Isla Ross



Who Is Isla Rose?

Isla Rose is no stranger to introspection. Her first EP, *No Answers*, was released in March 2023, and is a delicate yet powerful exposition and expression of her inner self, through imaginative indie-pop melodies. Since the release of her first body of work, she has embraced growing up, self-exploration, and tapping into what goes beyond.

Originally from Louisville, Kentucky, Isla Rose now resides in London, England. “I started as a drummer, playing in different bands for fun. I never thought about creating music for myself or embarking on a career as an artist.” The journey beyond high school led Rose to do some internships within the music industry, but she wished to be more on the creative side of things, so there she found herself at a sound engineering school in London, with the intent to produce for other bands. Still, the pandemic halted her and led her to make her music.

“I never learned a tone-based instrument so I taught myself the piano and started writing some songs. This became my debut EP ‘No Answers’.”

On *No Answers*

“No Answers is ultimately a reflection of my coming-of-age journey and path to self-discovery.” The EP was birthed during the pandemic, drawn from personal experiences, inside her bedroom in London, alongside David Schoenwetter.

The creative process is often simple, like a melody or a random idea, according to Rose. “Surprisingly, these spontaneous lyrics often turn out to be deeply connected to my life experiences. Being a drummer, I’m always looking for ways to incorporate interesting beats. I also like to blend different genres that take listeners on a storytelling journey.” Isla Rose likes challenging the traditional notion of having super crisp, pop-sounding music. “I like my songs to sound a bit more raw, edgy and not as processed. I just think it fits my voice and songwriting best.”

I’m Sorry, the ballad of self-acceptance reflecting difficult growing pains, is what Rose would say is her favourite and most significant track of the album. “This song captures the love and torment that can come with self-discovery.”

The song is also the source of what Isla Rose thinks is the craziest behind-the-scenes fact. “When I did my first dance rehearsal for my *I’m Sorry* music video I got motion sickness - I’m not a dancer! My crew never let me live that down.”

Her Sound

But even through it all, she believes art is a powerful thing. “Art, to me, is a powerful medium of expression and connection. Through my music, I hope to inspire others to embrace their uniqueness, question ideologies, and explore their own journeys of self-discovery. I believe that by sharing my vulnerabilities and experiences, my work can resonate with people who may have faced similar challenges.”

The inspiration also comes elsewhere, like from various artists. “Woodkid, Lana Del Rey, Mazzy Star, Glass Animals, and Florence and the Machine have significantly influenced my musical style.” Rose credits their unique sound and storytelling abilities, which have helped her create music that resonates emotionally with listeners.

Issue one begs the question, “What makes you feel infinite?” For Isla Rose, it’s “the feeling of being connected to the world and people around me. When I create music, I’m tapping into a cosmic flow and a supernatural force. Songs become a way to share emotions and experiences that connect all of us on a deeper level. Music lets us all be part of something greater, and that’s an incredible feeling!”

photos courtesy of Isla Rose



Pacific Nights

Syd M | 20, Texas

The sun touches the horizon,
its rays waving goodbye to the
salmon and tangerine clouds above,
becoming dimmer with every minute,
Til the last bits of light fade away;
walking along the shore,
sand grinds between my toes,
collecting at the soles,
brushing like sandpaper,
tips of broken shells surprise,
the wind carries the scent of crisp seaweed,
then the pacific reaches out,
greet me with its frigid touch,
sediments coming to a rest,
then dragged back to the deep abyss:

...
we collected wood from my grandparents,
along the shore, and willing strangers,
built a bonfire to brew turkish coffee,
smoke and alkyl pyrazines fill our lungs,
the smell of home lingers;
we sit together around the embers,
exchange stories and laughs,
brew more coffee and eat roasted pita bread
just us, the surrounding strangers and the pacific;
the moon's light reflects on the waves,
pulling the tides, dragging them back,
shards of broken shells reveal,
foam and water chilling crisp to touch,
gloving my feet with it's frost:

...
bursts of lights illuminate the sky,
decorating the navy with diamonds and glitter,
sapphires and garnets,
emeralds and stones,
each glitter bomb with thunder following;
sparks attempt to meet the stars,
clouds of smoke linger to block,
the moon's essence but proves to be,
resilient and brighter than we know;
the pacific's song still can be heard,
even with the roaring of the fireworks,
it calls me, brings the feel of home's comfort,
sediments pull and grind,
if only my soul could stay here forever.

The Universe's Poetry

Syd M | 20, Texas

the night sky once ruled my imagination,
brilliant lights and energy spreading,
to the suddenly growing universe,
electrons dancing in orbit,
around the neutrons and protons,
atoms, molecules, compounds,
compressing into stars,
clouds of stardust and novas,
decorate the void with,
halo glitter and crazy diamonds,
moons eclipse midnight suns,
constellations tells stories of our cultures,
marble planets with magnificent, incalculable storms,
that can turn us to mere particles,
speed of light delivers our means to survive,
yet the distance is just right, that we do not burn,
without it all, we could not exist,
without the formation of the smallest particle,
we would not exist,
the universe is an epic poem;

even with a map of your galaxies,
i'd never find you,
the seven wonders of the world,
could never hold a candle to your,
infinite curiosities and darkness,
the heaviness that weighs in my heart,
belongs to gravity;

i'd die a thousand deaths,
just to see what I dream,
because you're as beautiful as endless.

Desiderium

Kanna | 17, Norway

It's 1:40 AM on a warm summer night.

I am losing you like I am losing July.

You never called &

I stopped sleeping.

I want to sit in your car again,

I want to see your smile again,

I want to hear your voice again.

Again..

Again...

Again?

Again: Why don't we start over?

Let's meet up in front of my house again.

Again: Let's go get some ice cream

& talk about our favourite dreams again.

My hands are branching out into the open starless sky

With all my might I begged for you back.

But none of the gods heard my plea

So here I am cutting my hands, hoping you would reach for me.

Again..

Again...

Again?

February

Blanka Pillár | 17, Budapest, Hungary

Somewhere there was a crossroads near the border, in a smoky child's face with round eyes. Low blue and yellow brick houses and dark green pine trees surrounded it, and in summer, the purple statices opened in the garden, in spring, the hot sunlight stretched across the forest canopy. The first memory of round eyes was of this landscape, where years of warm embraces and happy barks were repeated over and over again. They called this place Life; it was as they imagined the world of fairy tales. Until now.

Something shook the earth. It shuddered, deep and angry, as if the grey sky had fallen. Morning dew covers the blades of grass, and a thick mist has descended on the cool ground; even the air is swirling backwards, and the birds are flying far away. They run out of the brick house and stare at the Thursday shadows. The button eyes watch as all the spring, summer, autumn, and winter gather in two grey canvas bags, as the faltering zipper is pulled on the resin-scented warm wool sweaters and the smiling stuffed elephants, as the Mother and Father pray in whispers, as they lock the door of Life without a key. Lacking a vehicle, they walk away from the crossroads, the low blue and yellow brick houses, the dark green pines, the purple statices, and the memory of warm embraces and happy barks. The round child's face fills with hot tears, with the helpless sorrow of incomprehension and lack. She doesn't know where the touch of silky grey dog-tails and the fresh scent of the short-cut lawn has gone; before her and behind her lies an endless sea of concrete surrounded by barren trees. All around her, words she had never heard before, harder-sounding names of unfamiliar places are repeated with terrified powerlessness in their voices.

Meanwhile, the time's arrow marches on, the wind picks up, and the horizon bends to dark blue. The Mother takes a brown bun from her canvas bag, caresses the child's cold face, and then holds the tiny body close to her, cradling it and humming the song she used to sing when the family was ill. The melody rings sweetly, filling the lonely night and drowning out the deafening noise of strangeness. Twilight and dawn meet; the dust is heavier on the feet, and the eyes look wearily into the bare winter. Farther lies Life than the round eyes and the darkening child's face could possibly look back.

They can only guess where they are going as they leave fading footprints on the edge of towns, hoping to cross something larger soon. They dare only believe that the sun will come out the next day, that there will be night, and that the clear sky stars will shine with the same piercing light.

Scenery

Blanka Pillár | 17, Budapest, Hungary

I forgive him for the little lies. The little fibs that slip away and the broken promises that go unkept. He always tells the same lies, and sometimes I believe him because the story paints itself like a vivid oil portrait; first, the figures are painted, then the background, then the corners, edges, contours, and finally, it becomes as if it were a real scene on the canvas of life, but only the immensity of human imagination has made what could never be real. It tells me what I most desire, so I reach for it with all my heart, stretching out my soul's arms to preserve all his lips whisper and hold it within me for eternity. I love him with all my heart, but when my reality is keen-eyed, it sometimes smells like the scratch of jagged-edged infidelities in the dawning light or the wistful night. The cold realization slips into bed beside me or touches me as I walk.

Today we take it into our heads to walk around the riverbank. We get caught in the cool January breeze, and he starts coughing. I take off my thin pink cotton scarf and wrap it around his neck with careful movements. He gives me a weak half-smile and walks on. My chest gets hot, even though my whole body is shivering from the winter's minus temperatures.

Sometimes we stop. We look at the broken-legged seagulls on the slippery waterfront stones, the sloppy sidewalk ahead, and the footprints of giddy pedestrians. He rubs his hand as we spy on one of the old buildings covered in melted snow. His fingertips are almost purple, so I tug off my black fabric gloves and slip them on his frosty palms. He thanks me quietly. His silent words creep into my consciousness like angelically soft notes, wrapping my trembling body in a gentle embrace.

Barely perceptible, the milky-white sky opens, and it drizzles, but we are unperturbed. We sit on a stinging bench and stare silently at the glistening toes of our wet boots as they tread the snowy ground before us. Somewhere in the distance, expensive hand-painted plates clink, light pages of newspapers crinkle in the city breeze, the iron bells of a dilapidated church jingle, and a delicious golden-skinned duck in a warm oven is being prepared. I feel him move beside me, and I put my head down. He sways back and forth with folded arms while tiny particles of dripping snow fall on his knitted flame-red Angora sweater. I slip my thin arms out of my expensive loden-lined coat and place them on his back. He looks me in the eye. My tongue curls and confesses at seeing his delicately delineated perfect face. It humbly admits the truth it has admitted so many times before and hopes. It hopes that, for once, its love's answer will not be a lie. But once again, he replies, I love you too. I-love-you. He utters this gracious lie delicately. The first syllable is trust, the second is passion, and the third is loyalty. He feels none of these, yet he testifies to them. He savours the shape of the voice. First bitter, then sour, then finally swallowed. After all, it's only one word. But for me, it's so much more: I put myself in his hands.

Maybe that's not how it all happened. I've been sick for a while now; my lungs are weak from the January freeze. Every time I close my eyes, I try to remember our last story. Embellish it, add to it, rearrange it, change it. Maybe one day I'll grind it to perfection, and that word won't ring so false. Or the memory will turn yellow, like old letterhead, and no longer matter. Or maybe "I love you" will become just another fluffy word to be whispered in the harsh winter, bored, picked up by the wind, carried far away, across the world, to where it means nothing.

Far from the eager, greedy arms of my soul.



"untitled" // Cyrus Carlson, 15, Lindstrom, USA



"untitled" // Cyrus Carlson, 15, Lindstrom, USA

Mother

Anmol Priya Desai | 23, Tucson, USA

="On the world's summit I birth forth the sky: The Father
my home is in the waters, in the ocean as mother"
—Rigveda 10.125.7

I count sixteen rotting carcasses, twenty shredded tires
and two almost car crashes on the way to Tucson
from Phoenix; where my mother kept my brother
in an eighty eight degree room for a decade as punishment.
We helped him set up a personal AC unit,
purchased, carted and lifted upstairs in secret. Extended
the tube to swallow the outside air. Stepped around
his piles of clothes on the floor. Sifted through
dirty tissues, anime figure boxes, tabobell trash, and broken clocks.
Explained that he cannot allow himself to suffer.
When I told my mother this is what we'd done, she sobbed.
Explained her woe: the heat was supposed to be his punishment.
Cried her cry: what about me?
Watched TV for six hours until four am.
My mother sometimes asks why did you turn out this way?
Forgetting her namesake: Goddess
Durga and her ten divine weapons.
Forgetting that she gave birth to a babe with a blade
nestled in its throat. Forgetting that she lent
me her sword: Ganesh's gift of knowledge.
She must've forgotten that she dropped her blade
in the womb. That must be why she kept forgetting
to buy my brother an air conditioner year after year.
That must be why she cried when she found out,
excreting her pride. That must be why she bound
herself to that couch. That must be why she said
he deserves punishment. That must be why I lost
my mother in a sea of shells on the ocean shore,
the sea swallowing a woman in search of her sword.
The hills rise and fall and my little red car rides
them like waves. My lover places his hand on my thigh
and I apologize for asking him to bear the weight
of an ocean. His half closed eyes slug to a close,
weary from the installation and organization the night before.
The saguaro wave hello and goodbye and I ask
for their knowledge in this landlocked desert
far away from the ocean.

The Definitive



Who is The Definitive?

Hailing from Calgary, Canada, the definite moment for The Definitive is in the making. *Worlds Away*, the band's debut album is an electrifying, hard-rock body of work that likens itself to the explosive discography of Greta Van Fleet and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. *Worlds Away* ultimately embraces a raw, yet upcoming story of the Definitive themselves.

The band credits their start as something unexpected with all of their different backgrounds. “Dylan, the guitarist, and Vaughan, the drummer, met at a guitar open mic at a bar when Vaughan approached Dylan after his set and exchanged contact info. Vaughan had met Duke, the lead singer, at a country battle of the bands where Vaughn was playing with a cover gig under the Duke Domino Band.”

Three out of four members discovered their sound through a performance of *Use Me* by Bill Withers. After that gig and some jam sessions, the three guys decided to write original music before meeting Evan, the bassist.

The Definitive credits jam sessions for their inception and call themselves a “really big jam band.” Their creative process for incorporating certain ideas and to them “A big part of how we write our songs is someone brings up a cool riff which sparks inspiration from the rest of the band and we jam on it. Once we start creating, we bounce ideas off each other in terms of how the songs should be structured and what we want to do musically, rhythmically, and lyrically. In terms of what ideas we incorporate and ideas we challenge, there is a fair share of ideas that we try out that we end up not using because we collectively can't see them developing into something we really love.”

On *Worlds Away*

For their newest album *Worlds Away*, they know the album was created organically, such as the band themselves. “*Worlds away* is something that was created super organically. We wanted to create something that would not only be a great album to listen to for people who really enjoy just the music aspect of an album, but would also serve as a bit of a treat for those who like to dive a bit deeper into lyrics and the significance of song titles, the way the music is put together, and the stories the lyrics tell as the album progresses. On the one hand, we wanted the album sonically to really have that 70s influence with a modern twist. The lyrics also take a turn more towards getting ready to depart on a massive trip in *Worlds Away*. In the same respect, it’s also a story of us and how we are starting out as a band and where we are looking to get to.”

“It’s hard to choose just one favourite song. Our top favourites are *Riding High*, *Legacy*, and *Ignition*.”

Their Sound

For art as a whole, art is significant to the whole band. “Art, for us, holds a place super close to our hearts. We all grew up surrounded by music and, in turn, grew to love not only listening but also learning to play some of our favourite songs. We hope we can inspire anyone and everyone who will listen to our music to be inclined to try to learn an instrument, even if it’s just for fun.” The Definitive would also love to grow to the local, live music scene in their hometown of Calgary, citing performing at the King Eddy dive bar, a sought-after venue for Calgary musicians. They would love to even bridge the gap between Canada and the US for live rock music.

For issue one, the question “What makes you feel infinite?” is asked. For The Definitive it’s “the music and being in the moment when we are all playing makes us feel infinite. Just being able to vibe off of each other and really feel everything that we are playing is one of the coolest things for us.”



photos courtesy of The Definitive

On the Train to Seoul

Isabelle Wei | 15, Hong Kong

from Busan, the sun, softly thrumming, runs
between light & rain. Morning breathes an opaline
breeze. The seats smell orange, like a bowl

of oranges. My mother's eyes soften,
lids falling, butterflyed. Her fingers weave flowers
between rings, palms, the view

behind the window a painting, escaping.
I lean forward to touch the water, like glass
beyond the frame, lean forward to touch

jade against jade, soaked by the drenching
colour demands. I don't realise it is the train
that runs, while the world around us

remains stone. It is a month before I unravel
different tones of silence. Like the way names
talk themselves into belonging, or how colours

wind up belonging to names. I wonder if jade ever
grows jader—jaded. I wonder if colour ages. The sky:
blue fading. Remember our names:

jade, jader.

the starry heavens above me & the moral law within me
Genevieve Hartman | 24, Rochester, USA

after anselm kiefer

i laid down under the night sky with you.
i was living hidden. the parts of me i could not love—
my fear, my fears—i bared to you to take or leave.

you spoke of getting high in cold shacks
& joints passed around bonfires crowded with strangers,
stories that still burn bright in my mind.

who knew that somewhere beyond the walls
of god, people could be free? could
love themselves without condition?

you offered me friendships closer than
i had ever known, shared your happiness
—your living—to help replace what i had lost.

those moments have long passed
& i know the feelings of happiness
will pass & sorrow will trample me again.

but tonight, alone under the stars, i remember
that i am alive & i am not dark inside forever.
there burns here a line of light that leads me to the heavens.

i will hold the memories close when the stars are gone.

A Conversation With Stars

Christina Ellison | 23, Spring, USA

I caught a piece of the Milky Way
when I was shy of nine, firmly seated
atop my father's broad shoulders,
holding a mason jar to the heavens -
dark and endless but bearing brilliant light.

I waved the container back and forth,
mirroring my sister's vigor
as she raced up and down the hill,
my father and I standing at the crest.

One by one, stars twinkled inside,
nebulous gases filling the space in-between,
their celestial fire warming my hands.
I capped the jar, a metallic ring cutting
through my sister's huffing and puffing.
I placed my prize on my nightstand,
gazed in awe as the lights swirled around and around

and around nine years later the mason jar cracked.
The snap seized me from sleep,
the fracture fragmenting, spiderwebbing,
until the container kaleidoscoped
into sparkling light, a stained-glass window
of a church harboring my growing distress.

All at once, the jar collapsed into glinting shards,
jagged glass mingling with earth-bound stars
that would never return home, the useless
stainless-steel cap sitting on a mound of nothing.

Why can't you fly? I whispered to the dimming light.
Why can't you? *The stars replied, their voices waning.*
I'm afraid, I said. *If I am captured in a mason jar,*
I still want to return. The stars laughed, more a whimper
than a bang. *Is that not what we wanted?*

Iceberg Eye

Christina Ellison | 23, Spring, USA

Sing your ballad to the missing moon
so she returns to our pitch-leaking sky.
Practice the beat, remember the tune
and sing your ballad to the missing moon
this heavy evening in haunting June.
The night is without its iceberg eye.
Sing your ballad to the missing moon
so she returns to our pitch-leaking sky.

Mourning Stars

Christina Ellison | 23, Spring, USA

Orion once watched deer prance about,
the bucks knocking their antlers when sparring,
the fawns asleep in the warmth of the sun.

Cygnus once watched birds flit from branch
to branch, the woodpeckers hammering,
the thrushes snatching worms from rich soil.

Ara once watched churchgoers go
to their humble bethel housed in the woods,
the tolling bells resounding, resounding.

Every constellation observed the forest thrive
until fog made a home amidst the canopy,
blocking their view of the earthen floor.

Cassiopeia and Cepheus could no longer
witness their subjects milling around
like ants traveling between the trees.

Pyxis couldn't help those who'd forgotten
their way, couldn't help them find Polaris,
couldn't guide them from east to west.

Lyra's tune, once melodious, turned frantic,
turned somber. No more patterns
were made in the skyful of stars.

And all the while, Horologium tocked, marking
the minutes, the years since the fog arrived,
its pendulum in a ceaseless sway.

Climb, Climb

Christina Ellison | 23, Spring, USA

I hear her when I'm meant to sleep,
watching Luna moths dance around a single candle,
casting shadows against the window pane.
I pretend the fae have come to visit, to steal
my hours away from me, to grant me sleepless nights
as she calls:

climb, climb.

Every night as the fae carry on instead of dreams,
I create visions for myself
in vain hopes that one might elicit a sagging eye
and I can escape the sun that is the moon.

Every night as the fae carry on instead of dreams,
I steal moments from the day and keep them in my mind
in vain hopes that one might elicit some meaning, any meaning,
and I can escape this rugged world.

I steal the flowers the boy next door picked,
whose fingers were pricked by its thorns, and
I steal the rotted bucket that contains water for a stew
no one eats, and I steal the strings entwined in the braids
of a girl I knew, and I steal and I steal and I tuck them away for
nights such as these, yearning for day.

The yearning can only last so long,
So when she next she calls,

climb, climb,

I whisk past the fae who never cease their fluttering and I
whisk past the windows aglow with single candles and I
whisk past the boundary toward the looming obelisk,
barricade of my dreams, siren of the night, and I

climb, climb

up her black-peppered white, reaching
with hands meant for more menial tasks.

I seize those visions I have torn from the world,
every memory replacing my dreams,
and scatter their remnants among the sky
where there they become the stars.



"Stargirl Dreaming" // S.Kavi, 23, Dallas, USA 49



"She Cries Stars" // S.Kavi, 23, Dallas, USA



Grace Gardner

Who is Grace Gardener?

Philadelphia-based singer Grace Gardener brings her deep catharsis into a fascinating indie-folk EP, *Peach*.

A self-taught music connoisseur, Gardener's EP *Peach* tells the story of the music and instruments she grew up with, truly and wholly by herself. Raised in Dallas, Texas, Gardener grew up teaching herself instruments such as guitar and piano. "I was in a few bands in high school but only ever did lead guitar. I moved to New Orleans for school, and majored in neuroscience and public health for my time in undergrad, but ultimately left a couple semesters after COVID hit to focus completely on music."

Later in the fall of 2021, Gardener released her debut single *Parcel* before releasing *Deny Me*. "By that time, I'd moved back to Texas to be with my family. After releasing my EP in the spring of 2023, and going on an opener stint for a few tours around that time, I moved to Philadelphia.

On *Peach* and *Tiny Habits*

Parcel holds a special place for Gardener, and she regards it as her favourite track off of *Peach*. “It’s the one I worked hardest to produce, and it’s the most fun to play live.”

Peach is a completely emotional piece that tells a collective story of the hardest parts of heartbreak and loss on its own, according to Gardener.

“It was really meant to be a catharsis project.”

Deny Me, on the EPs tracks, is self-described by Gardener as a “really personal story”, involving the people she respects and the actions she wasn’t proud of.

“The simple version is I had harboured feelings for a friend for a long time, and while I thought they were reciprocated, things fell apart very quickly and painfully. I think for most of the song, chronologically speaking, it can be interpreted as both a love song and a heartbreak song. I first wrote it as the latter, and by the time the song was out, I felt very resolved about the cause. I released the lovesong version of “Deny Me” six months after the original version came out.”

Gardner reveals the fact that most of this EP was created in solitude, writing, recording and producing all from her Texas apartment. But she recently embarked on a “Tiny Tour” with musical trio Tiny Habits.

“Tiny Habits has cultivated a really great listener community and I was lucky to be able to get to know everyone. I have really enjoyed touring and I really look forward to doing more of it. I look forward to seeing more representation of chronically ill folks on the road, too — that’s the one thing I get nervous about while on the road since I have a few chronic illnesses.”

Her Sound

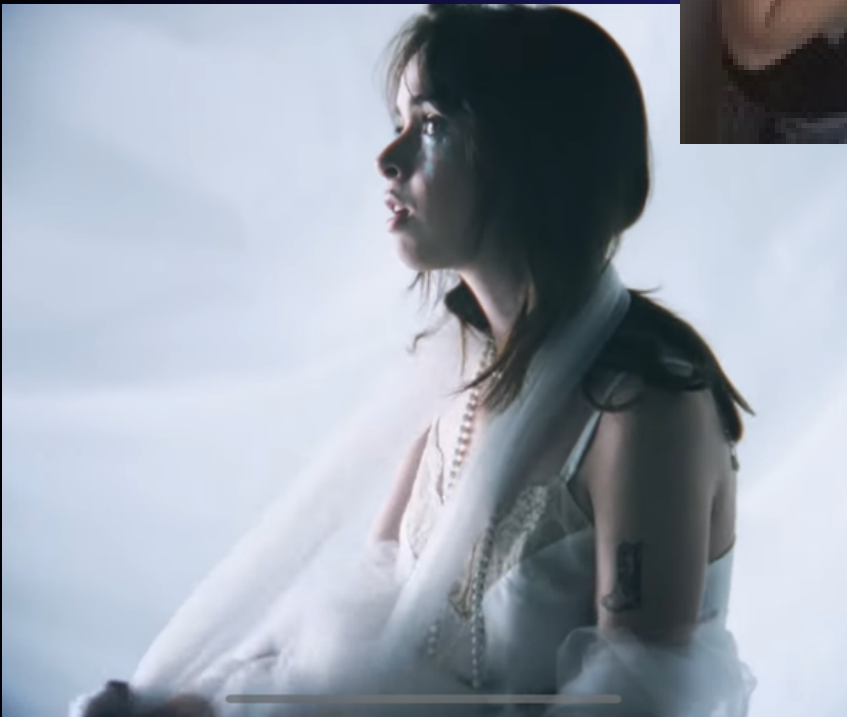
Some people who inspire Grace Gardener as an artist are Olivia Barton, Madison Cunningham, Tommy Lefroy, Adam Melchor, and Leith Ross. But even with the inspirations, Gardner doesn't cite any musical influence on her.

“I wanted to emphasize to myself to just follow my instinct on what to add. As I develop as an artist though, I absolutely gain musical inspirations.”

“I felt like that was valuable given the vulnerability of what I was working with, but I've really enjoyed working with other musicians more recently. I've written some of my favourite songs with my friend Caroline Carter, for example. I can't pinpoint a moment, but quite often it'll be that one of us comes up with a line out of nowhere and the other will just sigh and go “Oh hell,” or have to scream into a pillow. “

Issue one begs the question, “What makes you feel infinite?” To Gardner, the answer is simply music.

“It was always what made me feel so sure and confident about making my decision to leave school. I had no ground to stand on, and the only person who had faith in the project for a long time was me (until I met my music director, Nelson Capote). It's this unquenchable drive to create and get my feelings out on paper, out through sound. I have never been happier or felt more able to take up as much space as I want than when I'm creating music. I think it ties back to mine in a way that really shows passion and drive. I think it's easy to spot an artist who doesn't put all of themselves into what they're doing and what they're creating, and I've always connected far more with artists whose music is made with every ounce of them.”



photos courtesy of Grace Gardner

Star-Crossed, Star-Straight

Esosa Zuwa | 17, Calgary, Canada

I have eyes everywhere, gazing around this vast universe looking
for a new story to immortalize

But my heart cannot help but grow heavy when I peer into the
Milky Way, past the belt of light,
and see it

The sun and moon

In their beautiful cosmic race

Chasing each other in an infinite time loop that goes nowhere

He burns bright and hot, radiating his decaying warmth to the
rest of the system

However, it's not enough for her

Because she cannot move beside him

Because she runs away like she is trying to freeze away his love
But he chases her, yearns for her undying love, desperate to glow
onto her

It is not enough because she runs

It's only when an eclipse dawns the universe that they may cross
paths

Even for a tiny blip in the space-time continuum

He reaches out to her to show his burning love for her

And she feels it bathing in his golden glow

For a moment she thinks she wants to stay in this forever

But then time passes and they separate into their own mortal orbit

And she becomes used to the cold again

Comforting her

Healing her

And punishing her

Punishing her for not bathing in the eclipse

So he finds earth

Close to him, and basking in all of his radiance

The earth absorbs the afterglow of love

Which she can feel its remnants slowly lick her like a budding fire

But it's not enough

It will never be

Chemiluminescence

Kirsten Sto. Domingo | 20, Phillipines

Our shiny black shoes scattered on the marble floor,
squeaking feet turned silent as our socks made us
slipping and sliding. Back then,
outer space was contained in a big truck.

We're off to learn about science! Stars! Galaxies! Constellations!

Eager to witness the wonders of the universe,
we crawled like toddlers towards a tent as large as our classroom.
The teachers gave us glow stick bracelets
so we could see each other in the dark.

Our small bodies became specks; our minds became planets.
The night enveloped us, replaced our pupils with stars.
All of us looked like stars too, each one marked with neon.

Of course, it was still daytime outside.
The teachers told us to go out, and they folded up the tent.
The sky deflated in mere seconds, and soon the stars were stars
no more.

We rummaged for our shiny black shoes scattered
on the marble floor, silent feet turned squeaky. Now,
outer space was contained in a big truck once again.

We're off to learn that magic isn't permanent! Everything's an illusion!

I watched as our glow stick bracelets lost their light.
Once again, we're stars, still unidentified and unnamed—
no neon to keep us from blending in.

Dot: a nonet

Kirsten Sto. Domingo | 20, Phillipines

Dot-sized pen stain on your crisp white shirt—
please keep me unlaundered; treat me
as a star against the back-
drop of your black black sky.

I want to be the
one that keeps you
searching for
proof of
life.

> Me (Greater than Me)

Kirsten Sto. Domingo | 20, Phillipines

You will always be greater than me,
just look at your sprawling might.

Have the astronauts ever seen
the way you shimmer, starry night?

Just look at your sprawling might
and you don't have to doubt your hands.

The way you shimmer, starry night?

The edge of your grand entrance is my land.

You don't have to doubt your hands:

Have the astronauts ever seen

the edge of your grand entrance is my land?

you will always be greater than me.

Just Imagine

R.S | 25, India

Just imagine if this fleeting time,
Somehow our hands could bind.
Would it be a sin or crime ,
To relive it, rewind?

Just imagine if seasons could be flipped,
Like coins in air.
Would sombre autumn then be skipped,
So that spring only be there?

Just imagine if our thoughts could fly,
Like birds with gently flapping wing;
When they'd soar and touch the sky,
What stories they would bring?

Just imagine if the golden sun,
Would never shut its eye;
How will the countless stars then burn
In the dark and gloomy sky?

Quiet Reflection

R.S | 25, India

What will had God to so compose
And impale the briers with the rose?
Why moon was cursed with scar and blight
Which gleams in sky with borrowed light?

Why did he let the woes outweigh,
The joys that render hearts so gay?
A frugal span to Spring bequeathed
While Winter longer lived and breathed.

To ones who loved no respite bestowed,
Fondness who feigned, merrily bestrode;
Doomed to live who willed to die,
Who revered life, took to the sky.

If I'm such a dreamer, why can't I sleep?

R.S | 25, India

If I'm such a dreamer, then why can't I sleep?

Perhaps I know in dreams too

You will distances keep;

While I rummage through

The remains of a withered day,

Even in my dreams you might refuse to stay;

Barely balancing on the edge of the cliff,

Holding on to the hope "What if, what if?"

The shafts of the day fall and dissipate

And fall in the abyss of night so deep;

But still, for fear of losing you,

Though I'm such a dreamer

I cannot sleep.

the divine

Risha Mae Ordas | 27, Baguio City, Philippines

I do not exist

I am but a collection of chosen hysteria

The toxic weeds of a child

Desperate to live

A parasite who grew

From the hunger

And ambition to be loved

Being loved is a pipe dream

I know no dream

I know no love

To be loved is a paradox

To love is to grieve

And to grieve is to love

I am a paradox

I desire to live

As much as I desire to die

Death is as rich as divine wine

And divine love is rich in both honey and venom

I am simply not of the world of the divine

Rather, I am the divine

starry palmyful

Natalie D.C | 20, Pittsburg, USA

fill my palms with microplastics // the kind we used to find amongst the gravel at Trader Jacks' flea market // tiny balls, we called them // green, yellow, blue & white // like stars in the sky // like kaleidoscopic cosmic bodies // that sowed the land with constellations // my sister & i always thought they were a glitch in the simulation // turns out humans just wanted to see space beneath our feet // now the soil-stars fill a jar as our mantelpiece // a centerpiece of our childhood // spent picking pretty things off the ground // beads, toy soldiers, dandelions, the universe // it's universally cruel how these trinkets now lay in a bag in the basement // collecting stardust // never again to burn white-hot like the joy powder // of our infant hearts // high on sugar & ignorance.

The View From Halfway Down

Blanka Pillár | 17, Budapest, Hungary

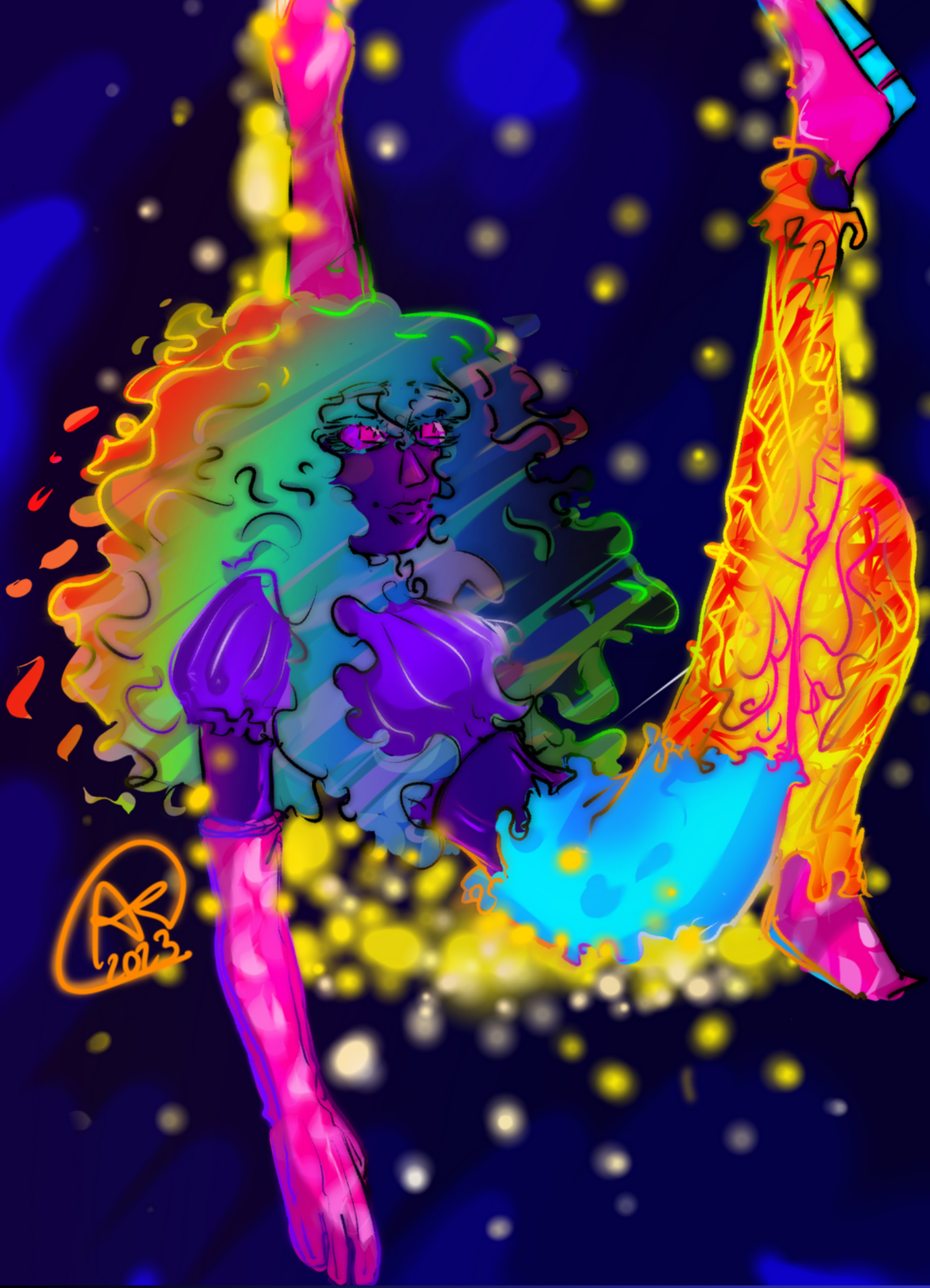
Now, floating on the shining altar of nothing, I have a confession to make. No longer will I seek fine excuses, no longer will I escape into the warmth of a benevolent gloom. Here I stand against the blinding azure cool, Below me, above me, beside me, emptiness. There is no trace of humanity, only I breathe faintly. I prepared this speech when I knew I was coming here. Or rather, that I was prepared. Or maybe I was being made here all along, made to be here. The freezing winds of the cloudy night blew the thought into my ears that I must go. I took out this paper, full of ideas. It didn't say this then, just sketches of crossed-out roads. Now the paths are filled with curved stones, silent footsteps, and thoughts. Now, this blue light is twisting every bone in my body, I see my torn tendons, my missing heart, and my weak body slowly turning to dust. So, I must confess, yes, it is the only right thing to do. I know someone will hear this now, I feel it in my relaxed muscles, my liver, my kidneys, my toes. There must be an angel somewhere because I deserve better than this. With all of my promises, I only wanted better. A hut in a gale, a fireplace in a snowdrift, gentle darkness in a bright flood of light. Here, however, my pleading tears turn sour, my accusatory answers bounce off the wall of infinite space, my dew-shy wavering is futile.

Have I ever sent anyone else here myself? It is because of them that all this has happened, I cannot help this repeated fatal misfortune. They were swallowed up in their own swamps. I had to let them all go. Except for Last. When I pushed him there, he tried to climb out of the thick swirl of dirt, but I pushed him back. I did it for him. Yes, for him. It was better for both of us. I no longer heard the muffled edge of his words, his constant, nerve-wracking complaints, and then, perhaps for the first time in my life, I felt good. And after all, it was a nice place to be, wasn't it? It's not so bad here. I'm getting used to ice flowers on my marrow, and it's nice to be alone.

Now I'm waiting for someone to show up. I listen to the quiet click of the clock of nothingness. Nothing moves. Time doesn't flow, and the stifling air doesn't move. Let me go back where I belong, to all that is wronged, to another martyr's struggle, to the embrace of bitter happiness, to the soft quilt of silken regret! I have no place here, nor ever shall. I wish I could have loved more, in fact, that's what I know best. I knew. Perhaps I was too good for the land of swampy mud, shedding too many tears in the dust of dry sandy deserts. No, that's not true. Nothing is.

I don't even know what I was going to say anymore, even though I've been preparing to tell you all this since birth. I've told everyone I've ever been around the planet that they'll regret it all when they look back on it at the last dawn. That my greatness would one day be repaid, and they would stand alone in the burning pits of a burning hell. Behold, I was the mire, the marsh, the mud. I was destined to poison, to creep unnoticed into the veins of the mind and heart, to wear away the fragile sparks of joy that seemed eternal. I have fulfilled my sublime destiny, I have done my best, so why am I here? I only did what I had to do, what I was asked, what I was begged to do.

I am paying for them again, this time with my own skin, the whiteness of my teeth, the beauty of my face. Why is no one here to pity me? I am the most wretched of all the broken-winged cicadas and blind hawks, nor do I have the reward, the comfort, the wing or the eye that I deserve in this place. Now I lose everything, as the earth turns around the extinct light of the black stars. Ever since I first opened my eyes, I have wanted to enter the azure ring nice and clear, but my body and soul grow more impure with each passing moment as the thread of life joins between the fingers of my stumpy hands. I can lie no more, as I have always done, Nor would I have anyone to deceive with the bitter ode of my own sorrow. Only one thought emerges from the depths of my skeleton as the claw of emptiness slowly reaches, and the blue light breaks the remnants of my glassy eyes. All I think of is what Last said before he was swallowed by the bottomless swirling cruelty: 'Now I hope we both die'.



"untitled" // Ash K. Gray, 17, United Arab Emirates

Ghosts in the Night

Louie Dobson | 20, North York, England

I don't believe in Heaven.
People tell me that I should,
they say I need solace.
Mummy used to tell me
when people leave,
they become stars.
Helicopter lights in the distance.
Silver sequins on black satin.
A billion lightyears away,
flickering like Christmas lights.
Blinking bulbs out of reach,
never out of sight.
Burning balls of gas screaming into nothingness
flaming and collapsing from the sky
like Icarus and Morningstar fell,
crashing and scorching the blanket of night.
Twinkling so innocently.
Drawing shapes with their bodies like oil paints.
Bears and hunters and big dippers.

Where do shooting stars go?
What are they running from?
They've all the time in the world to sit and burn,
like a spec of dust on the lens of the telescope
yet they flee.
Are they scared?
Lonely?
Do stars get homesick?
Do they long for what's gone?
Do they try to wrap their arms around memories long faded?
Maybe they just want to be remembered.

And what of supernovas?
Do they feel pain?
Flesh flying from bone?
When they explode do they know all the colours they project?
Their blood is blue and purple and orange and pink and red.
Do they know how much beauty we see in their tragedy?
A dying star is an event,
an occasion,
A dying star isn't grieved,
it's documented.
It's not science,
it's a soul,
longing for a homecooked meal,
their favourite song,
the bed of their childhood room.
Perhaps they're so sad they simply cannot bear it.

Why do we only wish on falling stars
as they tumble towards the edge of the lantern-lit horizon?
Why burden them with our earthly prayers?
They had dreams too,
once upon a time,
before they became a star.
What saddened them so that they wanted to fall?
Who did they miss down below?
A mother's embrace?
A lover's caress?
A child pulling at the jean cuff on their leg?

I look to the sun.
She is the brightest and the biggest.
Us mortals are chastised for even looking upon Her,
She is a sacred body.
Dangerous,
Volatile,
Fatal.
One of these days She'll kill us all.
Someone must have loved Her very much.

Perhaps Heaven is safer
than being one dot in a constellation,
a candle,
or a tea light.
But when the sky is kissed by twilight,
and millions and millions of lost loves
sing in choral harmony against the backdrop of the just set sun,
flashing and glowing,
drenching their mourners in their crystal light,
I challenge you to name a more beautiful sight,
than the never-ending sea of ghosts in the night.

The Shepherd

Brandon Shane | 27, California

My life is hidden in the stars
and all the yelling are noises
I'd rather forget as mad men
toil on their gurgling engines
& machines wane in the sky.
I look through the telescope
and see Mars, Jupiter, Saturn
"This is the works" I say with
a smile, only because father
used to say that whenever he
was happy & I haven't heard
those words since. Lanterns
on grassy fields at midnight,
with the looking glass & wine,
"There's Venus," I whisper into
the dirt and wonder if he can
hear me, but I have never been
alone, look at the wonderful
company here; Moon, Mercury,
owls atop branches, and father
remains with me still. Home
feels small along cosmic ruins,
but why can't I feel like a giant
& why do I gaze at the ground
whenever someone notices I'm
still alive? "Morning," says the
gravedigger, "Goodbye," says
the coroner & I am breathless,
watching woolly clouds migrate
like sheep on a hot summer day,
aching against a familiar tombstone,
"It's okay," I say softly, "It's okay."

On a Swing Under the Stars

Ash K. Gray | 17, United Arab Emirates

The endless void

Blue, then black,

Sends a chill up her back.

As she swings she hears them sing.

The echoes of a million stars serenading.

So far away, yet always close

Over her head and under her nose.

Off she hops and ahead she goes,

tugging lightly at her clothes.

Looking up, she proceeds,

and prays they grant

some of her wishes —

some of her needs.

The Land of Zees

Kristine N. Dade | 21, Montreal, Canada

It didn't matter how patient or still he was, his efforts at inviting tranquillity were steadily ignored; Killion couldn't get a wink, lick or touch of sleep. It was not the clock's ticking or tocking keeping him awake. It is a noise, stable and committed enough to make a bed out of as the world melts to nothingness while one ventures off with the mind and its dreams. The clock and its noise, like a bed, is a promise of company until return.⁴

But unluckily for Killion, when he welcomed sleep, he felt he was still there, simply lying with his eyes closed. There was no submersion, or feeling like he was taken to some deep place. He was just lolling on the surface like a piece of foam in water, or beer can, or plastic bag, or whatever else that did not belong in water, yet still was there. His body was tired, and his mind was opposed. It thought it had better things to do, while his body closed its eyes to the restlessness above and stayed put. There is a war occurring, unknown to anyone else who finds themselves awake, and he plays both sides, like *tick, tock, tick, tock*.

For peace of mind, he makes a tour of the house. He checks the fridge to see what is missing or on the verge of finishing, and makes sure the doors are locked. The curtains closed. He washes the few dishes, which very well could have been like found objects in a swimming pool, in his sink. He sits at the dining table and answers emails, though leaves his friends alone because he doesn't have that much energy. He already anticipates the direction of the exchange:

You good?

Pull up then.

Let's get faded.

Nah, I'm tryna quit.

You think you better than us?

Instead, he orders his heavy body to his car to move it and avoid being ticketed. He doesn't go anywhere else because in his state, he knows he might not come back.

Before making his way under the covers, he showers. His body thanks him for this, but resumes being a burden. It is slow and stubborn; it is like the warning of an elastic nearly reaching past the point of tautness. So he hurries back to his room, the apple fragrance swirling out after the open door, his wet feet slapping the floor. He leaves the tiles soapy, the mirror steamed and the light on.

He couldn't stand to have this light off - without it, his mind alerted at the humidity in the room, convinced something was growing, an evil, tentacled thing that would pull him into the darkness and never spit him out. He would be kept there by it, like a little secret, and no one he loves will ever know.

So the light stays on. And a look over the shoulder is necessary.

His body eases onto the sheets in the same delicacy as a falling feather, muscles knowing the peace of being reunited with the clock's rhythm. To his surprise, his leg started on its own, like it was late for something, it worked to leave him. Killion sits up, watching his leg, then the foot of the bed, and his leg again. Between the two was a small being, about the size of a figurine, scurrying over the folds of the sheets.

“What the... FUCK?”

He jolts and brings himself to the top of the bed, then freezes there, staring at his own body sleeping on its side.

“This is a joke...” He chuckles, bowing his head.

The thought of being shocked right out of his body amuses him, and lightens his worry. Killion had read stories online of out of body experiences, never thinking to take them seriously. He only understood them to be metaphors for some part of themselves, but as it happened to him, he still could not take it any more seriously. Looking over, seeing himself from the outside, the way part of his face compressed on the mattress, his limbs lying disorderly, his durag slipping off.

“Does this mean I’m not myself?” He wonders, then laughs and runs a hand over his face.

“Oh, I don’t know who I am! Oh, no!”

The tiny figure stands just at the foot of the bed, where his blanket is toppled over, and it jumps off. Killion moves to where it had been, hanging his head under the bed, he sees the little, inky black body. Its eyes were formed like glowing suns and from them, rivers of gold trickled down, and even shimmered off of it, all around, like fairy dust. The creature beckoned.

“Well, I guess I gotta go find myself now!” He continues with fake concern. Flipping himself over, and to the tight space underneath, he follows.

What had been a dusty floor, home to the socks he had dropped ages ago, paperclips and other miscellaneous nick nacks, gives way to a river he lands into. In any other instance where water would have killed, this river preserved him; it did not wet him, in fact, he could breathe it. It was light as silk, soft as fur, and it lands around him like a cloak. It carried him, the stream followed at the tail as the train of the garment. Where he is, is not entirely a forest, not entirely outer space. Mushrooms, in the place of trees, begin to rise in the distance, and the scene grows cool, as the flip side of a pillow. The world around him was a sleepy blue hue, clouds are at a touching distance, bright fireflies swim about mountainous bushes of hydrangea, purple and white. The wave placed him atop a tall, spotted mushroom where the little black bean of a being, sits. Killion knew he wanted rest, but did not expect for his body to abandon him at his first step on the pileus. It happened so quickly, it is as though he tripped, then slipped straight to the brink of unconsciousness. He sinks into the plant, relinquishing all hold of tension in his body. His little guide’s head peered into his line of sight, its face appearing upside down, and left. When it returns again, it tosses a bundle of monarchs over him; a blanket of butterflies. Thank you, Killion whispers, and the little thing gives him a slow blink. The sky above feels alive, he thinks. It shines like it is speaking, its words pouring into his heart, and the last thing he remembered was his former belief of shooting stars solely existing in love songs and movies.

What makes YOU feel infinite?

