

# *from us to you...*

To the reader,

Thank you so much for reading Moonbow Magazine's third issue! We are excited for you to explore the feeling of love and the role it plays in our lives.

For this issue, the theme was AMOREVOLOUS, which describes the feeling of loving. Whether it be love for a partner, family, a friend, or a pet, so we asked “What does loving look like in your life?” What role does love have in your life? Love makes the world go round and is consistently infinite, no matter where we go.

In the issue, we celebrate the idea of love, and all its nuances and complexities. We celebrate that love is infinite and is all around us. We celebrate that love 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 Art: "Amorevolous" by Esosa Zuwa

# Hearth

A. R. Tivadar | 26, Romania

In towering buildings of cold concrete  
Goddess Hestia warms through pipes  
My family gathers to serve dinner  
With wine made of plum and pear  
Kinder Chronos and snarky Rhea  
Sister Hera and a man better than Zeus  
My smart little niece with golden hair

Well, a quarter of life has passed  
And Aphrodite has no sway on me  
Or perhaps she deliberately ignores me  
I'd just rather not deal with that stress  
I have books, painting and our little Athena  
Perhaps I shall be the wise spinster crone  
Surrounded by who she loves nonetheless

# I will love myself

A. R. Tivadar | 26, Romania

I'll do it myself, if nobody will yearn for me,  
If my heart will not yearn for anyone either,  
Then I shall love myself.

When I paint portraits of me, my own muse,  
Aquiline nose, wood print teeth, renaissance gut,  
I learn loving myself.

When I read supernatural tales of woe, comedy,  
Adventures in other worlds, like a young child  
I make myself happy.

When I lay my aching head to sleep at night  
Wondering why can't I ache with love too,  
I will comfort myself.

# A rendezvous in Cyprus

Ali Ashhar | 25, Jaunpur, India

The scintillating island of Cyprus  
signifies million beautiful stories in a way, but  
our story is beautiful in a million ways.

The morning sunrays pervade the horizon deep,  
gentle breeze from the sky serenades a sonnet.  
She holds infinite emotions enveloped in  
the magnificent shores of her eyes  
the rippling waves around testify her prodigy  
as we stand on the nearby bridge;  
time stops in the moment—  
for us, it was like an era.

We sit down to read Shakespeare and Shelley.  
Impressed and inspired—  
she becomes the gorgeous theme  
and I turn into a momentary poet.  
We sip cappuccino  
and stroll through the boulevard of dreams.  
I try to pen down the verses in between.

Fate has its own course  
it writes the moments in the most vagary ways—  
meant to lived once  
and cherished forever.  
The sun bids adieu for the day  
as we crave to chase down the fleeting moments.

The birds make way to their destination  
as the day's work is done;  
we head to our matured selves  
to counter what life brings next.

# On The Idea of Love

M.T Gray | 20, Jackson, USA

See, love, looks so beautiful...

So easy.

But the concept, though, the sheer nature of love

Is just one of those complicated things

So unappealing.

So tragic...

... actually,

No. Ours was tainted by my toxic grasp

What if ours was beautiful?

But you were loving *me*.

That's why we struck such a disaster

So then, maybe our love wasn't ruinous

I, simply

Ruined love.

# Things you do not know... I think

Cairo Evans | 16, USA

I used to look at you with loathing;

I wanted to steal the stars inside you and kiss each one.

My jealousy morphed into longing,  
morphed into needing.

I knead my hands like bread each time I see your face,  
Round and smiling and oh my god you're beautiful.

I rely on you like an exhale;

I breathe in the complexity of you.

I'm going to die someday,

If not by your smile-

But from your heartbreak.



# sheltered space

Erin Latham Shea | 22, Wolcott, USA

I have a slow-burn temper scaling  
your stairs with splintered fingers,  
indignantly denying assistance - reminiscent  
of able-bodied tunnel vision from adolescence.  
I inherited a stoniness toward men, amplified  
by my body's rebellion. Saving up  
to buy a shower chair before my 23rd  
birthday. A cheetah-print cane. I only  
let my hair down in your bed where  
you anoint me with peppermint oil  
as salt melts on my tongue with stifled tears -  
allergic to gravity and expecting punishment  
born of indulgence: dirty sheets swaddling bodies  
suspended from first light, whispering  
“good morning” into your hairline. We latch  
not for the sake of recovery. I peel back  
the curtains with cosmic uncertainty.

Order me a silent confession with helpless  
heat - an Indian summer - the hours  
I finally allowed myself to shapeshift.  
I'll write it on your back (a gun on the nightstand),  
sandpaper neck and a crystal ball skull.  
I'll trace it into your bathroom mirror with  
desperate breath (invisible disability,  
casual flesh). I'll ask you to love me  
(with breaks in between) by the light  
of the refrigerator. I'll teach you my body's  
invocation of time - stubborn, vast; lovely, weary -  
I'll teach you forgiveness in a language  
of frown lines and thin skin. My art  
of clinging and parting. Remember, as I do,  
that crip time is intimacy, unyielding  
transformation. Punctuated desire.  
Crip time finds an exoskeleton to don in the  
dark and can't bear its weight by dawn.

You hold my hips as a futurist, encircle  
me in the sheltered space just shy  
of a sick bed. Patternless, we rest and  
rise, disembodied and beautifully bruised.



Q1.X



# Who is Q.I.X?

We got the opportunity to interview our first K-Pop group ever for Moonbow Magazine. Q.I.X is an independent trio from South Korea who are all breaking barriers by being some of the only queer K-pop acts.

**Q: Can you introduce yourself and the group you are part of?**

Hi, we are Q.I.X! We are all queer and trans, gender queer-identifying group, including all staff. We are a group who wants to bring our art, music, and activism to heteronormative world.

**Q: What is the origin story of you (SEN) and Q.I.X? How did you start from being a professional dancer and then towards being an idol?**

I (SEN) joined Q.I.X after Prin asked me to join. Since Q.I.X is open to work with an artist who identifies as queer and who is also an activist, I wanted to add my value to the group.

**Q: What does art mean to you? Who do you hope to inspire in making your music and what message do you spread? How do you face criticism from people who don't understand how you want to express your art?**

Even though we are introduced as a K-pop group, we don't want to limit our work to just music. That's why we collaborate with other queer artists such as photographers, videographers, etc. Our producer Jiyeon has been writing all of our singles so far and we think our messages that we want to say in the songs are in line. Their experiences as queer artists and activists have really melted into our songs. We don't necessarily feel like we have to make anyone who doesn't get it understand us or our art. That might be a bit beyond our capacity at the moment. Haha.



# On Breaking the Mold

**Q: What is it like being queer in South Korea, especially as an idol? What kind of barriers did you face in getting to where you are today?**

We are fortunate to be surrounded by a very giving and loving community. Our queer community and human rights organization help us grow as artists a lot by inviting us to perform, talk, etc. It's been a really beautiful journey for us.

**Q: What does being queer mean to you, especially in a place where it's not accepted by most people? Does the overall societal view prevent people from listening to your music?**

We don't think that Korea is a country that doesn't accept queer people. According to a survey conducted by [hrcopinion.co.kr](http://hrcopinion.co.kr) in 2022, 37% said yes to make South Korean society more inclusive with queer people whereas only 39% said no. It's not a big difference in the answer. 46% of people agreed that our society needs to be more open to transgender people. We believe that these answers were possible because of our queer and trans ancestors and seniors who have been living their life as who they are and have put so much work on changing society. We also want to add more positive responses.

**Q: What is it like being an independent artist in k-pop? What's the independent music scene in South Korea like? Is it harder or easier?**

It's difficult to make a living as an artist in general at times like this. As many QTZ know, we are very self-made artists. Even though we have a great support from Jiyeon, our producer, who shares resources from their K-Pop producing career, we still need financial and physical resources to keep our group going. However, we are very lucky to have a fan base all over the world. It's really a big inspiration for us.

# On Music

**Q: Which artists or people have inspired you and the music of QI.X?**

Right now, all of our collaborators are very inspiring. ONE, took our very first photos for our singles 'Lights Up'. Lien was our mixing engineer. Many other queer artists are definitely a big, big inspiration. All the drawings, cover dance videos, cover singing videos from QTZ as well!

**Q: What do you guys hope to accomplish within the next year and years to come?**

We want to take slow steps and build strong relationships within ourselves. We have so much to learn and grow as people and artists.

**Q: What does love look like in your life? What does it encompass and challenge?**

Love is our inspiration and challenge. We want to express our love for each other, the world, all precious creatures, fans, community, dreams and peace through our art. Love is definitely a fuel for our creation. Love can make us vulnerable, but it can also give us the greatest courage to overcome our fear. We appreciate the fact that we feel safe to share our love with each other and with our fans. So that keeps us jumping into everything ahead without fear.

You can find them on Instagram @qix\_official!





photos courtesy of artist

# Breathless

M.S. Blues | 18, California, USA

The leaves crunched under her boots, while the thick wind sang dulcet melodies against her ear. A lot had occurred recently. The goddamn challenges of teenagehood. She didn't understand why adults downgraded them, they were real and they were valid.

*(What? Being in love? That isn't a challenge)*

Surely, it was.

The boot's resilient heel clicked roughly against the concrete as she continued to walk.

Helplessly, she thought of him.

Her hair fluttered behind her shoulders.

Her eyes blinked.

She sniffled.

*(If only he could just...)*

Love is absurd. It is a waste of time. She knew that. She also knew there was no point in thinking about this anymore. But yet, there was. The validity behind her thoughts may have been thin, but it was still there, radiating from her doleful heart. You know what they say about the heart, though, how infectious and persistent it is. Shameful, even.



The walk continued for another ten minutes. She crossed the rocky pathway between the roads and hissed at the rocks that dug into her foot. Relief came shortly once she returned to the sidewalk. She proceeded, comfortably.

It was a cool day. The sun shone on her back, but the wind continued to warble.

*(Almost home)*

Homework. Chores. Other obligations.

So much to do, but at least she wouldn't endure the persistence of those screaming thoughts she had about him.

At least.

She passed by a familiar neighborhood and felt a wave of reminiscence hit her. She smiled at the aging houses that were contrasted by a modern apartment complex. She still remembered when it was being constructed.

Crazy how time flies by, huh?

*(Yeah)*

It was crazy, alright.

Home was close now, precisely fifty feet down the street.

Step after step, breath after breath.

The jingle of keys rang in her ears. It felt so close, now.

Another leaf crunched under her heel, as her apartment came into sight.

*(Home sweet home, here it comes)*

“Hey.”

*(Am I dreaming?)*

*(Did those two cups of coffee fail to do their diligence?)*

She paused in her step, but didn't turn around. Not because of fear or even anticipation, but because she desired confirmation. She was hearing things in the wind, surely. That would be the only logical explanation, because there was no way he was here. Absolutely not. They hadn't corresponded in months, nor did they (he) show any desire to. There was a tense wedge between them and she sincerely believed it would remain there, even if the previous chapter of their lives was closed. You could shut a book, but that didn't mean the contents just vanished from your memory. She knew that better than anyone.

*(Nobody is there)*

She took a deep breath.

“Annalise.”

No way, no way.

“Annalise, can you please turn around?”

*(GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD!*

*No... No)*

Abruptly came a headache, followed by a breeze of shivers.

Because he was behind her, but it just...

*(Look at him, Ann*

*Look in his eyes)*

Her mouth quivered as she reluctantly moved. She turned slowly, eyes looking over her shoulder. She wished these were just the voices in her head playing tricks on her again, but that wasn't the case. Reality was here, smacking her across the face.

His sickening, rich chocolate brown eyes were looking at her.

His lips, not smiling or frowning, just a mundane line without indication were pointed at her.

His hands gripped the handlebar of his bike, his feet planted against the ground. He stood before her.

“What are you doing here?” She leaned against the nearest tree.

He opened his mouth to respond, but didn't do so immediately. Instead, he let his face rest with a distinctive softness. He lowered his shoulders, looking into her eyes, hazel eyes with tsunamis of emotion that were ready to destroy the lands of her composure. He sighed softly. He knew he caused that.

“I don’t know why I’m here, exactly.” He answered earnestly.

She sighed as well. “That can’t be,” She felt frustrated now, because how dare he. How dare he avoid her for months, forcing her to soak in a state of anguish, then suddenly waltz back into her life wanting to talk to her. *How dare he.* “You can’t just exit my life, leave me with a broken heart, then crawl back in as if nothing happened. That’s not how this works.”

Her voice cracked, which she despised. Damn vulnerability! To hell with it!

The singing of the wind became howls now.

“I know,”

*(Does he?*

*Does he really?)*

“Do you?”

“Yes, I do.”

Defense crept back into her soul. “How can I trust that?” She challenged him. “How do I know you’re being sincere? What if this is just another tactic you’re using to play with my heart again, huh?”

Guilt painted his face, she could see it.

“I know I screwed up.” He raised his hand and pushed through his intricate curls. “I wish that things ended... Differently.”

“Differently?” She scoffed at him, unable to restrain the penetrating exasperation that increased by the second. “You didn’t just...”

“Annalise, please.” He closed his eyes, shaking his head.

“No.” She sniffled, little beads of sweat beginning to grow on her neck.

“I don’t want to listen to whatever bullshit you have to say.”

He looked at her again. “You haven’t even let me explain why I’m here.”

“That’s because I don’t even want to hear what you possibly have to say.” She crossed her arms over her chest. Then, she took a deep breath and sniffled once more, trying to find some sort of composure through all of her fury. “You hurt me without a goddamn care in the world. I refuse to waste anymore time on you ever again.”

His look of guilt deepened. “Annalise,” Her name rolled off his tongue softly, as he set his bike against a nearby pole. She observed him with genuine wonder. He proceeded to step forward and stand a few feet away from her. It was a remarkably close distance, and she wasn’t sure whether to accept the concealed warmth within her soul that appeared or chastise him for these antics. “Can you just please let me talk for just a minute?”

His voice was extremely soft, like his hair.

*(I ran my fingers through it before)*

“Fine.”

He nodded softly. “Just hear me, Annalise.” His voice was like another note in the wind that sang. “I know I hurt you and I’m so sorry I acted the way I did.” There was a sentimental depth in his tone, along with a familiar sweetness that began to diminish her frustration. “I treated you like shit, and I didn’t realize what I had before me.”

“That you did.” She replied.

He sighed. “I know, Annalise.” He shook his head, taking another step. “But, I want to fix it. I want to fix everything.”

She sniffled. “It’s too late.”

He took another step.

*(What is he doing?*

*What the hell is he doing?*

*What-)*

Then, her hands felt warm.

She looked down, only to see him holding her hands, interlocking their fingers.

He caught her eyes seconds later, smiling softly.

“I’m going to be the person that you deserve.” He slowly pulled her into his embrace, before leaning in and kissing her.

Forget the breeze that smacked her, it came full throttle now.

A few seconds later, she pulled away, her eyes drowned in affection with sparkles of curiosity. She blinked, licking her lips. As much as she wanted to abandon her anger towards him and kiss him like no tomorrow, she knew that wasn't smart. She needed to articulate herself to him, not just leave him in ignorance of her feelings.

He smiled slowly at her. "Annalise, I love you."

*(... Don't do it*

*Remember what he did to you*

*How he treated you*

*He **hurt** you*

*But-*

*I still love him)*

She tried to speak, to tell him that she never stopped loving him, she was just hurt. However, her lips wouldn't move out of the little part they were in. All she could do was look in his eyes, hoping they conveyed the words her voice refused to let her speak.

He smiled. "I left you breathless."

*(We'll fix this*

*Him and I are strong,*

*We will fix this)*

She nodded and entered his arms once again, bringing her lips onto his. A paradise came upon them, as they savored one another underneath the tree. Leaves lightly rained on them and the sun winked at them.

When they broke apart, he parted his lips a bit, mesmerized in the same way she was moments ago.

She smiled. “And I just took your breath away.”

“Annalise!”

“Huh! ... What?”

“You were fallin’ asleep on me! Jesus, would you mind paying attention for once?”

She rubbed her eyes tiredly and sighed.

*(You were dreaming, foolish idiot!)*

“Talk about being hopeless and pathetic.” She murmured under her low breath, looking out of her bedroom window, ignoring her friend and the remarks that followed.

*(It was just a dream, a silly dream  
You should know,  
A fantasy never gets you anywhere,  
It just leaves you breathless,  
Foolish idiot)*



# if you find me, will you know me?

A.K. Nielsen | 16, Nevada, USA

your name

on the lips

of everyone and everything.

washing onto my shore, leaving residue

of sharp seashells that dig into my toes;

and when I hold it to my ears, I hear

only my fears echoed

having been here

nauseated and terrified, back to the shoreline

knowing you through word of mouth

and short meaningless conversation

transmitted through grain, like salt to water

the bitter taste that somehow meant the world to me

I wish you'd see me

I wish you'd let me carve myself into your world, be the seashell you

pick up on your vast beautiful shore, listen and not just hear.

(but I wish nothing of myself upon anyone.)

to chew on our cheeks, and stare at the moon

A.K. Nielsen | 16, Nevada, USA

peace

at the center of my

chest, my

core

calm waters

lapping onto my shore

the moon and its tides, kissing the sea

oh, what a beautiful life, beautiful winter

these late nights and their clarity

when the world goes silent is when i become most awake;

how lovely it is, to have someone who wants you around

how lovely to love and be loved

how lovely to have people like this in your life

things to look forward to, newly discovered freedom

how lovely to be rediscovering home, day by day, through the people

who love me

rather than a place, a set of roots.

how lovely to rebuild a home on top of ashes,

on top of what i loved before

# The Fox

Isabel Wall | 25, UK

You appear always in the bubble of silence. I am ungainly, I lose my balance and shift my feet, but you never need to adjust. Every step is precise. You move as elegantly as a ballet dancer, with no agonising over what step to take, no debating. Unlike you, I am not sure I belong on land, or perhaps not on two legs.

I wonder how long you are here before I see you. In the dark you can remain hidden as long as you please. But I hear shuffling and when I strain my eyes I can make out shades of red in the porchlight pooling in the grass. My mother's hair was your colour. I inherited her looks, but neither of us possessed the richness of your fur, the bright gleam of your eyes. I don't think you can see me through the kitchen window, though you seem to sense, always, my presence as an intrusion.

Like me, you are partial to salted chips. Like me, you slink in the shadows, the unwelcome scavenger at the corners of the party. My father would have chased you from the garden with the fishing net. You flee from the light; night is my favourite time too. But I do not go out in it, because I fear the things that may lurk there. You do not let such fears stop you; out into the night you tread dutifully every sundown. How does it feel to run with the wind rushing along your sides in a dark wood?

You are the ghost flashing by the garden gate, the unexplained rustle at the open window. You are the screams in the night. When I first heard you, I thought demons were at my door. What god granted you that devil's laughter? Why do you visit me every night, white eyes in the shadows, seeing me while I search blindly for you? It is not fair that you can always see me when I so rarely see you. Must you trot about so silently? If you were human, you would know it is only polite to announce your presence as you arrive. I would not sneak into a dinner party, lurk by the corner table, and cackle at the stroke of midnight. I would never be invited anywhere again if I did. But you do not have to worry about that, do you? In truth, I have no need for such concerns either, yet still my mind fixes upon them, spins them and tugs at them until they are frayed, exhausting itself with thoughts upon thoughts upon thoughts that have nowhere to go.

You need not think, you only do.

Nothing ensnares you. You run through the forest, you climb the gutters and stalk the roofs. I could run too, I could clamber where I pleased - I have always wanted to climb up onto the kebab shop's roof - but I would fear people's stares and the images of me that would appear. I do not want to exist in other people's heads. You don't worry about such things. There is no one watching you, watching you watch yourself. How does it feel to be free?

I like that when I ask you these things, you do not answer. You are so safe to love.

You did not come tonight. I waited up for you. I even left the kitchen and sat on the ground outside. Still, I shouldn't still feel disappointment when someone doesn't show up. You made no promises to me. In any case, it is better to be detached. You do not wait for people, you have more important things to do.

It is strange to sit alone in the dark. As I was melting into the night scene, I began to wonder if I existed. I was as inconsequential as a worm or a fallen dandelion wisp. Nothing saw me, no one knew me. How wonderful to be so invisible. When I go out in the day, I like to feel that I am going about unseen, tiptoeing through the streets as gazes slip idly past me. But people do see me, and sometimes they look too closely. Unlike you, I do not usually have night's cloak to shield me. Do you know how lucky you are, to be able to hide from the world? I cannot bear to be seen, for stares are scorching, they grate my flesh to ash. My hair is like yours, and people notice it. That is one thing I do not envy you. If you did not have such colour on you, I expect you would go out in the day more, blending into the chalky brick and dark tarmac. But you are orange, or red, a generous person might say, and thus all eyes are drawn to you. I understand.

The world has dawned now. I feel terribly naked in the light, dirty and bare, sleep's deserted crust. My feet have dug into the earth, I have made my seat deep in the soil. I am alive and the garden is awake and shuddering in the aftershocks of a night drizzle. My face is damp; when did it rain? Perhaps I fell asleep. Is that when you came? Did I frighten you away? Did I miss you padding past me, pausing to inspect my slumbering form, a gormless giant snoring in the grass? Always you see me before I see you. Such eyes. Such silence.

The air is still, yet chills of a winter wind slip through to brush my face. A warning for what is to come. I flap my jacket open and shut like a birds' wings. Did I see any swallows this year? September has crept upon me, and I don't recall seeing a single swallow. My mother used to love seeing the first swallow of the year. She loved the red in their tails, true red, not the russet that we share. Like you, she shied from the gaze of humans. Her coat, a lovely dark green of the deep forest, still hangs on my door, untouched since the spring before last.

Oh - you are here.

You are looking at me. Oh, I am embarrassed for you to see me like this, a red-eyed, weeping beast. Please, do not look too closely. I am sleepless, I am a shell of empty grief, discarded on the shoreline at dawn.

But in the grey light I can see your fur is matted. You are lean and there is a furtive look in your eye. You did not mean to be seen in the daylight either. Both of us are better suited to the shadows.

I feel I must apologise. We lower our heads to each other, and pass hastily by with eyes averted, I, to the kitchen, and you, towards the woods.

My house is no warmer than the world outside. Thoughtless with cold, I put on my mother's coat with quivering fingers, hot tears cutting down an icy neck. At the sink I fiddle with the kettle, wipe my cheeks with one hand. I have winter skin, rough and dry; when I rub it falls away like snow. I look up, and there you are again.

You came back.

Your eyes are very kind. My mother's coat hugs me tight, she was always so much smaller than me. Frail, but she loved you so. She used to leave you scraps by the steps in secret where my father could not see. Did you know, when you came that night, that it was not her at the door? Did you know it was me, hiding in the dark kitchen, holding myself tightly together for fear of falling to pieces on the russet tiled floor?

You are at the door when I open it. I expect you to flee at my appearance, but you stay rock-still, gazing upward. Your confidence dazzles me; you have never come this close before. It is the scent, isn't it? You smell her on me, your eyes are fixed. You must not judge, you know, for you are not looking so put together yourself. I can see my image in the black pool of your eye, a messy brush of hair, a hedge-witch.

The sun is a red flower, it has turned its face upon us both. It offers a little warmth in a world of ice. Never does it consider not rising from its bed, never does it even think to do anything but love this world. Let us sit a while, all three of us, each in our own red fire.

# The Wanderer

Isabel Wall | 25, UK

"There you are," she sighs. "You found me in the stars."

"Stars? You are in the grass."

Her hand wraps around his wrist and down he tumbles at her side, rolling over to face the glittering ceiling.

"Little astronomer." He tucks her hair behind her ear.

She shakes her head, kicks her legs towards the heavens. "I am Aphrodite. You must love me before it's too late."

He laughs at that, but takes her fingers and kisses them, one by one.

"My Aphrodite."

The sounds of night in late summer surround them, the buzz of cicadas and the screech of the owl barely scratch their little globe of silence. The stars are watching, but soft, she sleeps. He lies awake a little longer, the night watchman, tracing her form in the dark.



Do you remember those summer nights on the grass? I slept with stars across my vision. You kissed me then, and I was awake once more. You brought me to life; you see. A statue of marble, but in your eyes, I was made fleshed, morphed into something golden, something star-kissed. With you, I was other; I was something I cannot conceive of now, a form I cannot recreate on my own. Under your gaze, I bloomed like a flower who had been waiting all her life for someone to breathe life into her. I loved the way you saw me. I loved who I became in your eyes.

All this from you. Under your gaze, I was afire. Under your touch, on earth again, my star-wandering ceased. I exist, I exist, each kiss a whisper; *You are real.*

Then the colder winds came, and I was alone on the grass under the weeping sky, rotting among the browning leaves.

The lover wanders and suffers. Where is my Penelope, awaiting my return? Where is Ariadne, waiting on the other side of the labyrinth? I find myself on the shore at dawn, drawing sand circles among the empty shells cast off by the waves.

I remember once I was asked, “You want him?”

And my answer was; “Too much. Far too much.”

I knew even then you were not safe to love.

Like you, the sea slips through my fingers. But it comes back, always comes back, though it is drawing away too, so slowly it is at first unnoticeable, offering less and less of itself each time, until I am alone on the sand again, watching it linger just out of reach.

Come back, come back.

*No, the sea chides, you do not love me.*

So I move, a little closer, to touch it again. A leisurely crawl down a swelling stretch of sand. The sun has not yet risen, and I am chasing the waves. Sometimes I wonder if this is all life is, clawing blindly for love in the dark. Sometimes I wonder if I was simply made to crave, to need.

There are many beautiful things I cannot hold. The moon, the sea, old friends, the orange glow of the sunrise. So what if you are another to add to the list?

Yet the strings in my chest are taut, a finely thrumming tremor of pain. They call for you to love me again. Love me so that I may take on more corporeal form. I am barely alive now, their gazes slip past me, my edges are fading. I feel as if I am waiting for you to breathe life into me, turn my stone to flesh once more.

But there is the gull, soaring into the waves and out. There are the sanderlings, running on tiny legs back and forth across the sand, outrunning the impossible every time.

There is so much world to love, so why is all of mine trapped on you? Is it because I feel the world cannot love me back? Is it such a cold, unfeeling thing? Yet the grass cradled me that night, and the stars kept watch over me even when sleep took you. The wind plays with my hair, urging me forward, forward, towards the sea that thrums with life, life, life.

Am I not a part of this world?

The sea folds me into its icy embrace. Never has the cold agreed with me, yet now I sink so easily beneath the waves, into a silent world. Once, twice, I let the sea take me, mould me into some other form, a sea creature with scales for skin. Give me a scallop shell to encase myself in, which no one can prise open and poke at my soft insides. Better yet, make me a siren, a predator, let me lure my prey to the rocks.

The gulls are screaming when I break the surface, sunlight-soaked, raw, gasping-

СЕРОУА

# Who is Cecoya?

Today, we got to interview Darryl, known as Cecoya. He's a student in New Jersey who has been rising on TikTok as a music artist.

## **Q: How did you get to where you are today? How did you start out?**

In terms of music, I'm only at the beginning, but I'm almost done with my school year and I'm super excited to focus on making and marketing more music. I made my first song at the beginning of December and didn't think too much of it until I showed my girlfriend the song. I used a pair of headphones and the BandLab app for the first three songs I made during my break. I just invested in a mic, though, and when I'm finished with my final exams next month, I plan on recording my first song on my MacBook. After posting the song, I marketed around for a bit, and it got some good traction.

## **Q: What is your creative process like?**

Honestly, I'm not one to sit and think too deeply. Most of my songs were written while recording; the entire chorus in "In My Heart Again" was made on the first listen-through of the beat. My process is to just feel the beat and the words; I love creating songs that give 'goosebumps,' so I focus on making the listeners feel that. I try to avoid listening back to my music too many times as well; otherwise, I start to hate it. Anyway, yes, my whole process is to kind of have that ball rolling and try to finish that song without thinking too deeply. Part of my process comes from the lack of time I have trying to balance the gym, school, and my social life.

## **Q: What does music mean to you? In making your music, who do you hope to inspire and what message do you spread?**

I was inspired by Steve Lacy's TED Talk "Bare Maximum." Being in school, I don't have a lot of money to work with. I used those Apple headphones, and honestly, it was tough trying to record at the start. But I knew I wanted to make that song despite my circumstances. I kept trying and whipped it up, and it was so tedious trying to mix with no experience or any clue on what I was doing. But I still did it. I hope to inspire people that you can do it no matter what and to work with what you have the best you can. Music is like a little escape for people, and that kind of leads to what it means to me. Making and listening to music feels like I'm in my little creative world; it's like an escape from my hectic life.

# On His New Releases

**Q: Tell us about 'Let You Go At Last'. What inspired you to drop this song now? What theme and sounds did you intend to explore?**

There was no particular inspiration for the song, but I knew I wanted to make a super emotional song with power, if that makes sense. The chorus drop kind of slaps you in the face along with my vocals; I wanted the song to be like a riser, constantly going up until those high notes at the end of the song. The whole theme is heartbreak, but it's also supposed to be like breaking free from that heartbreak. The tape clicking in at the start and clicking out at the end is almost like a last message to that lover. The beginning robotic voice, the chorus, and the verse convey heartbreak, while the bridge into the final "let me go" represents breaking free. This is finalized with those high notes, which act kind of like that euphoric feeling of "letting go," leading into the almost haunting "I let you go at last" before the tape clicks out. It's all just a story of a bad breakup, and I feel like that rising and coming back down (the chorus switching back into the verse) is the perfect sound for that.

**Q: You've said that you want to pursue a music career while in college. What's the dynamic like between those responsibilities and your music dreams?**

Honestly, it all depends, sometimes it's super stressful and other times it's pretty chill. I'm taking a break from a bit of studying as I'm typing up these answers. I know I want to pursue a career in this field, but a part of me feels like I might regret not chasing music when I'm older. Right now, I'm super focused on my schooling, but I'm approaching the end of my year. After my year, I'm going all in on music from April to September, hoping to blow up. Even if I gain enough traction to do music full-time, my mother's wish was for me to finish university, and I feel like I owe it to myself and her to get my degree. All in all, it's stressful, especially with my classes.

**Q: Do you have any upcoming releases? What can you say about them?**

Yes, I have three new releases since 'Let You Go at Last': 'You're Worth Every Mile,' 'Don't Cry I Know,' and 'In My Heart Again.' These songs were also created right after I made my first song. 'In My Heart Again' is a love song, 'Don't Cry I Know' is an acoustic song, and it's a bit on the sadder side, but it's super peaceful and perfect for those late-night walks. 'You're Worth Every Mile' is kind of like M83; it has more of a focus on ambience.

# His Sound

**Q: How do you keep yourself grounded as an upcoming artist?**

I make an effort to maintain a social life, but it's easy to get caught up in school and music marketing. Lately, hitting the gym has been crucial for staying grounded.

**Q: How do you define authenticity in terms of your music and yourself?**

Honestly, I'm focused on maintaining my style of music. Many artists try to emulate others, but I want to stay true to myself and create music that represents who I am.

**Q: How would you say that you have grown as an artist from your first release to now?**

I've come to realize that marketing plays a crucial role in succeeding in music. I've improved my mixing skills and have been dedicating time to enhancing my vocal abilities.

**Q: What's it like being an independent artist in today's day and age? Do social media trends and virality make it easier or harder?**

I made a cat edit on a separate TikTok account, and it got around 180k views, which were unexpected but amusing. Nowadays, it's easier to gain traction and potentially go viral with one successful video, which I find interesting. I believe this era presents a good opportunity for newcomers in the music industry.

**Q: What are you working on? What are your goals for this year?**

As of right now, I'm focused on passing my course this year, and my goal for this summer is to build a fanbase and hopefully gather enough support to do some shows next year. I currently have three to four songs written.

**Q: What does love look like in your life?**

My girlfriend and the sunrise at 5 AM. Nothing beats that for me.



photos courtesy of artist



# this is what (my) loving (unfortunately) is like

Rani Suresh | 19, Pakistan

My dearest, this love looks like I'm standing up on a bridge, expecting to reach you from 20 feet up, but it also looks like closing my eyes and reaching for you in an almost lifeless dream easily & it all turns shades of blue and red and everything in between. you call out for me but I'm gone, I'm gone so far away, finding a way to reach you but there is something I can't fathom- a distraction, perhaps a person or a thing, making it seem like I'm a child intrigued by jugglers on the street while the whole world passes by. I'm sorry it is getting a little too late, I never wanted it to be this late but I can't help it even if I try. I love you but I'm so far gone within myself that our now-long-gone intertwined paths are now parallel- never meeting, never ending. if I find you at dawn, I'd call for you like a ship waiting for the anchor. If I see a glimpse of you at dusk, be the boat and I promise to be the lighthouse. if we find each other in the middle, reach for my heart instead, you will find it in dolor like you always do.

# Over and under

Taryn Elease | 22, New Orleans, USA

## *Over and under*

Like a neatly folded towel on a cruise  
Pleats filled with red flags that I tried to color yellow  
Blind loyalty because that's what felt right  
Even as my feelings got lost in those neat plates  
I chose to ignore them  
and their burden  
Too scary to voice the fear of losing it all

But I lost it all when I lost myself along the way  
Scattered as the towel still managed to unravel  
After all the work of faking perfect  
The fear became the reality  
But it seems some things are meant to happen

*Inspired by Over + Under by Sarah Kinsley*

# Dream a dream for me

Taryn Eleese | 22, New Orleans, USA

This is for those who have never been in love  
who don't know the warmth and certainty of I love you  
Or wake up with a built-in + 1 to every outing and event  
or an excuse to not to attend at all

A stranger to unconditional love after a royal fuck up  
someone still there to tend to your bruised ego and embarrassment.

The over-romanticization of a fated soulmate seems  
like nothing short of a drunk fairy tale.

The only things missing are the loyal sidekick  
And the brooding villain

But so fucking what  
Is it so bad to dream of the dancing in the rain love  
The somethings in the water love

To return home  
Crawl into bed embraced by warm covers  
And a warm body.

Unable to control the smile that dances faintly on your lips as you drift to  
sleep.

So, in bliss that not even rain can dull your shine.  
Oh, to be young and in love

Well for now  
to be young and dream of love

# I've been in love

Taryn Eleese | 22, New Orleans, USA

I've been in love

With rain as it's pours down in spring showers

The way eyes twinkles even if I'm not in view

The way nature has never looked so vibrant since I wanted to be  
alive again

The way lyrics melt together into a singular perfect melody

I love love even if I mostly believe it will never happen for me

I love it unconditionally anyway

Because I'd rather the universe love one me

with the sun rays and the melody of birds chirping

than search high an low for the same type of expansive love in a  
person who can only give a cup full

# Forbidden Fruit

Kaci O'Meara | 20, Glasgow, Scotland  
in this bed

I lay with the apple

and temptation by my side

shining, silently begging

for my lips opened wide

serpent tongue poisons my ear

speaking not for what's right

would falling again for the genesis of sin

be worth every consequence

if temptation is stronger than my will to fight?

would it ruin your life and mine

if I took a bite?

# too much on your plate

Kaci O'Meara | 20, Glasgow, Scotland

There will always be an extra seat at my kitchen table  
an extra knife  
an extra fork  
an extra dessert spoon  
ring any time of the day  
breakfast, lunch, or dinner I'll have it on the way  
pull up a chair, cry into the tumblers  
*talk to me, friend*  
scrape your problems onto my plate  
you'll never be putting too much on it  
I have a big appetite  
I promise there's plenty of space  
I'd rather keep you fed  
than have your needs starved  
purge up all your problems  
so I can feed you words baked with love



# untitled

Kaci O'Meara | 20, Glasgow, Scotland

*“do you think we are best friends*

*In every universe?”*

I asked, so did

the raven

the mouse

the butterfly

even the sunflowers

and the waves

*“absolutely, fate has ordained*

*we befriend each other”*

you replied, so did

the crow

the cat

the moth

even the cosmos

and the shoreline

# untitled poem

Rae LaGrange | 17, Edmonton, Canada

in my despair i have found a friend,  
loneliness, she calls herself,  
she sits at the edge of my bed,  
singing her psalm of misery,  
clawing at my skin and begging,  
hoping, that i will let her consume me,  
she eats away at my heart,  
praying that it will become weak,  
praying i will succumb to her seduction,  
she pouts when i do not notice her,  
she draws me in with hopes, with words,  
she serenades me with her raspy voice,  
i find myself in her waters,  
and find myself empty once again.

# Phosphenes, Heat Rising, and Skin Deep

Fabio De Sousa | 27, South Africa

## **Phosphenes:**

Landscape of dusk.

Mired in heartache, I roam sightless.

Caressed in your palms, heartache is wiped clean from my eyes.

Stars fall shimmering, my pilgrimage ends.

## **Heat Rising:**

Burnt roses fade.

Wisteria blossoms on stolen bare-skin kisses.

Cigarette smoulder, their exhales hanging sensually.

The heat of passion rises.

## **Skin Deep:**

Devotion deeper than skin.

Worries pried from furrowed brows with acrylic tips.

Life's nectar drunk on glossed lips.

Heavenly bodies in motion.

*phosphenes*

landscape of dusk

mired in heartache, I roam sightless

caressed in your palms, heartache is wiped clean from my eyes

stars fall shimmering, my pilgrimage ends



## *heat rising*

burnt roses fade  
wisteria blossoms on stolen bare-skin kisses  
cigarettes smouldering  
their exhales hanging sensually  
the heat of passion rises



# Moon Phases & Corner Booth

Fabio De Sousa | 27, South Africa

## **Moon Phases:**

Bear witness.

The waxing and waning of diverging paths.

Convergence of the star-crossed, once sundered.

Intertwined in twilight destiny.

## **Corner Booth:**

Moment in time.

Jukeboxes play the heart song of poets.

Blueberry milkshakes and pool cues, our Sunday comforts.

Soft leather booth, our sweet escape.

# Someday I'll Love Ashley

Ashley Hong | 17, California, USA

*After Frank O'Hara, Roger Reeves, and Ocean Vuong*

Ashley, why are you afraid?

You find solace under the rusty petrichor - back hunched and feet bare on the iron needles that prickle against the calluses that adorn your heels and toes.

This is the only home you know.

Ashley, what is stopping you? Let our spines uncoil like your sepia violin as the peg's unwinding clicks vibrate beneath your scathed fingertips; Watch the sylphlike A-string squirm from its sepulcher and exhale a ring of autonomy, seemingly misplaced underneath your confined gaze.

They would holler that such is sacrilege; such shame.

But Ashley, cover your ears and look far ahead. Let us adjust our thick glasses and witness the red chrysanthemums bear fruit, where its pollen romances the buzzing bees and morphs new love to drunken lust; cacophonies of war cries and whirring wings create a harmony of cannibalistic desire, painting the sea of crimson into stripes of yellow and black;



happiness and death. See, Ashley, that is  
life: a contradictory juxtaposition  
in which absurdity is the truth,  
and rancor comes with beauty.

Ashley, don't be afraid. Carve love into the back of your  
cracked eyelids and let our fingers intertwine in sticky honey. Let  
our limbs fall  
flat and mingle against the patina once more, before we whisper our  
final goodbyes. And perhaps, someday, when they  
say you did not change, you will walk on  
perforated heels through mother nature's sprawl, wavering  
freely with the eastern urban winds and  
your unwinded A-string,  
alive and in harmony, in a  
currant home, without me, Ashley.

# The beautiful life of agog and delirium

Olivia Burgess | 18, Surrey, England

and what about house keys  
& cool sunglasses &  
& painted toenails  
& I got this it made me think of you  
& trains departing, biology lessons & school runs  
& skincare regimens & scalding authenticity  
& forever and ever & white lies  
& sandalwood candles in kitchens  
& rain plans & pillows breathlessly dented  
& siblinghood, tapping piano rhythms on fingertips  
and there'll be library books needing return & incense to burn  
& lumps in my throat & brushing hair away from faces  
& tupperwares stained with the ghost of tomato soup  
& colourful leaflets pressed into sweaty charitable palms  
& herby fish for dinner  
& nostalgia, bass, longing  
& hamsters & headaches from crying  
& emerald grasses & vanilla yoghurt  
& dishwashers & loved-up stereos  
& self-portraits & half-chewed jokes  
& worn tyres, spine broken books &  
& tossing & turning  
& glittery gravel & cool calm collected  
& love's synonyms & used guitar strings  
& the proof of goodness, wholeness, warmth &  
my whole life is this one sentence story prompt, this universe in a clamped  
fist,  
all of this, this, this,  
infinite.

# Sibling

Olivia Burgess | 18, Surrey, England

Nathan has a pluck of hair courageous,  
a phoenix plume at the crown of his head.

Americans call it a cowlick,  
though I do not know any other term.

Ahoge, hair whorl.

He's had it all his life,

as far as I know,

carried like a small charm

from chubby, food-smearred toddler

to taller-than-me teenager,

voice broken and cornered by youth.

I hope he never gets shy

and starts to slick it down in a hurry,

I hope hair gel never alters

the very fabric of his root cells. That way,

he can still carry the piece of my brother,

the piece I will always know.

# Ode to Nana's House

Olivia Burgess | 18, Surrey, England

There are three tiny jars lined up above the washing machine containing pennies, paper clips, and bright white buttons and seventy magnets of the fridge, a dazzling geography of Malaga and deepest Turkey, a London bus and a French baguette mingling like the glassware in the cabinet with one glass panel missing from that one Christmas party where everyone got a bit carried away. No longer in use, the old fireplace is filled with silver pinecones and the china is dusted every so often, enough to tell stories with like the girl and the songbird and the lover so fitting for a house of love. Upstairs, with a carpet so blissfully soft you could melt, the cushions are crocheted landscape and the doll's house contains another small, wonderful life with no recent photo anywhere from the last ten years of the children with toothy grins and equally gap strewn-smiles of the couples of varying height gaps and arms round waists a show of doubles, like the religious collision of evil eyes and crosses congregating in the same alcove under the stairs the way she walks backwards and doesn't have to look to fetch a bowl under the sink from the polite piles of crockery and look to the garden of eternally green grass where the beings and ghosts and dazed energies sound like children's laughter and the gorgeous squint of a bright summer morning.

# Lessons I've learnt about love from my rabbits

Olivia Burgess | 18, Surrey, England

Nothing is rushed. Every movement, every sniff, every minor nose twitch is deliberate, silent communication filling the gaps with a rich air.

Leave time to listen to the wind every morning, to huddle into yourself and scan the landscape for predators, to cosy up and realize that you are quite safe, you are safe and sound.

Always stay close and never stray away, even with the noise of impending doom, one must always stick together if you truly love each other nothing can ever bring you down.



SEN&E



# Who is Senae?

We got the opportunity to interview Senaé, an up-and-coming R&B artist with a dreamy flair. She's a singer/songwriter based in Baltimore, Maryland.

**Q: How did you get to where you are today? How did you start?**

I've been singing since I've been a little girl. I started in the choir in church, but I always was moving to different ministries so that ain't last long! Then in middle school I was a complete theatre nerd and anything musical related I was obsessed. I can recall being so annoying, just screeching out Broadway songs in the halls near my performing arts classes. This was around the same time I started writing music and poetry. Then, in high school, I took my first real private lessons and was classically trained. In my house, I grew up listening to the likes of Anita Baker & Otis Redding, so I can say I have a really wide appreciation for all types of music. I've been honing my understanding of singing and music forever, and writing was something that was mainly used for cathartic purposes.

**Q: What is your creative process like?**

I wish I could say my creative process was more linear, but it happens with a ton of twists and turns. Typically, I derive song ideas from subjects I want to communicate, and other times I derive them from what I think other people/the world is communicating back to me. I'm a real big observer so I'm always people watching and while on the bus or at work or in class I just jot down stories of these people & how they make me feel or what it is I think they want to say. Then from there, I work with my friends who are engineers, producers & songwriters to fully flesh out the song. It takes a village!

**Q: What does music mean to you? In making your music, who do you hope to inspire and what message do you spread?**

Music to me is like breathing. A necessity to living & yet we often take it for granted. Sound and music surround every single aspect of our lives. For me, there are many times when good music (subjective) is hard to come by, & it's hard to make, especially when I'm anxious or not fully present. But music will always be what I return to because it's so natural and leaves so much room for refinement and exploration! When I write, I hope people feel my humanity, and through that offer themselves space to feel/express their unique humanness. It's the only thing we all share, so whether the song is sad or happy or angry or whatever, that's the main takeaway I hope they leave with.



# On *Loose Ends*

**Q: Tell us about ‘At Loose Ends.’ What was the process in creating this project and what themes or sounds did you explore?**

‘At Loose Ends’ is my debut EP that was released in October 2023. I’m 20 years old, so all the information I have to go off of in my life as of now, is my turbulent experiences of my adolescence. I wanted to make a coming-of-age project, but one that felt more realistic to me. My teens were spent riddled with anxiety, good friends, bad situationships, awkward moments, big dreams & a lot of questions. A few of the songs were recorded in 2022 so they were the first few songs I ever released. The others were recorded in a long session. I tried to include as many emotions as I could in this EP. ‘The Bluest Eye’ for example is about how tired I am of being the same, living the same, how petrified I am of getting older, & my intense desire to flee the country. I’m not the best with categorizing music but I would say it ranges from R&B to indie to dream pop.

**Q: How do you keep yourself grounded as an upcoming artist?**

A lot of times I’m not grounded. I exist in a lot of chaos emotionally and mentally (or at least I think it could be defined as chaos). Like my brain is constantly analyzing and sorting and figuring stuff out. That’s where I get most of my song material. I think it’s in the centre of all that chaos that I begin to find my peace. Meditation and prayer help me when I’m feeling too lost. But my #1 rule I think is all things can be used for good, even the weirdest uncertain of feelings!

**Q: How do you define authenticity in terms of your music and yourself?**

Authenticity, I think, requires me to make decisions and keep track of how each decision makes me feel. It’s intuitive, so I think the more you are comfortable seeking out things that could be your sound or voice or whatever, the more you can trust and listen to yourself. That’s authenticity to me.

# Her Sound

**Q: How would you say that you have grown as an artist from your first release to now?**

My very first release, 'Not a girl anymore', I recorded with a jacked-up mic from Amazon, an audio interface, and some cords. I had a goal to write out my feelings and release music and I did it. Since then I've been to several studios, performed in several shows, and have written with others. I say all this to say that the conviction to write good songs is still there, but I'm more confident in my pen and have more artists around me to help & inspire my process! And shameless self-promo, the very first song on my 'EP I.N.A.G.A' takes my first release and is spliced with conversations and affirmations from friends. I think it sums up everything I just said but sonically.

**Q: What's it like being an independent artist in today's day and age? Do social media trends and virality make it easier or harder?**

It's stressful. Especially because I'm like always overstimulated and always too tired to check every app and always trying to minimize my screen time. The world/industry right now can make people feel kind of invisible without the social media following. But there are so many amazing "TikTok" artists, and artists on Twitter, Instagram and in my hometown that remind me of why I'm an artist. I try not to pay too much attention to trends unless they feel true to me. I think developing your taste artistically is more sustainable in the long run! I hope that gets me somewhere.

**Q: What are you working on? What are your goals for this year?**

I hope to just be more organized and allow myself to be my best. Time is sometimes like my biggest enemy and I'm always in a battle to use my time in the best way possible. I've been working on staying present because I daydream through a lot of my life.

**Q: What does love look like in your life?**

This is a good question because I love thinking about love and how I engage with it and centre it in my own life. This is a very idealist, water sign thing to say, but I think love is one thing that connects to everything. So love is in me, around me, in others, beneath and above me. Even when I get caught up in bad relationships and friendships, I remind myself that love is everywhere and that it starts with me. Then I never, ever truly feel alone.

photos courtesy of artist



# soul-searching across time

Alana Fu | 20, San Diego, USA

it is midnight at 4 am and  
ambulances are screaming all around us like  
a wild nightmare  
and the damp riverbank is swallowing our souls  
like molten earth and i try  
to tell you that i want to  
love you for fifty years more  
and as we sit silent and quiet,  
basking in the brutal stillness of  
the moon's cruel halo  
you ask,  
will you gather the stars with me?

it is midnight at 4 am and i think  
that to love is to live  
and loving and living and being alive in  
this moment with you is how to exist  
and you hum a broken chordless melody  
spilling from your heart  
onto your lips like a milky haze,  
you smile at me like you know me inside and out.  
and we skip pebbles into the leaden water  
and my arms grow numb because you are  
ever-present and beautiful and in this moment  
you tap my shoulder gently,  
like a kiss from the wind.

it is midnight at 4 am and  
somewhere out there you are tracing constellations,  
your fingers etching the sky without care  
and i am counting the craters speckling  
the moon's surface and somehow  
we are forever apart together.  
and you whistle faintly a note  
i have never heard and never will again  
but it sounds like the chorus of a hundred swallows  
and a hundred bullfrogs and even  
fifty-seven light-years apart,  
i can see your colors.

it's midnight at 4 am and at  
the end of the world  
and the sun quenches its burning splendor  
into the cold warmth of the sea  
as the planets collide in a shower of  
pixie dust that rains down to our feet  
and your hand is clasped in mine as if  
we are drowning.  
and here, at the end of the world,  
when the sun expires in a burst of purple flame,  
you tell me that you know what love is  
and my basket of stars is full  
and at the edge of the abyss of humanity  
you are with me and i with you.

and love at midnight at 4 am is you, my friend.

# Shelter

Phoenix Ning | 21, USA

The winter storm rages on the inside.  
Drip by drip by drip, the raindrops freeze.  
Icicles impale my heart like three of swords.  
Teeth of frost sink into my ribcage.  
My body is cold. So cold.  
Shivers. Tears glistening like shivers of glass.  
Fingers trembling without a hand to hold.  
Body shuddering without a family hearth.

Then I met you.

Under a set of unlikely circumstances.  
Under a sea of winking stars.  
You see me like no other.  
With smiling eyes that warm my skin,  
and kind, kind words that thaw my ice.  
You say you don't have a way with words,  
but you pick and choose phrases the way  
a poet pick and choose rhymes.

With you, the foreign concept of love  
becomes a familiar, everyday rhythm  
as usual as the rapid thud-thud-thud  
of my pulse every time we embrace.  
Your arms come around me like wings.  
They called you beast, freak, monster,  
but you are my beauty, forever, mayflower.  
With you, I no longer feel alone.

I find my shelter in you.



# Cooking for a Friend in a Kitchen the Size of Six Footsteps

Eleen Khwaja | 22, Lahore, Pakistan

Your asthma's acting up again.

On the counter,

You're coughing out a poem about oranges

While peeling a thumb of garlic.

You still hand me three cloves more than I need.

*"You remember whatshisface from freshman year?"*

*The one with asthma who sat a row behind us?*

*You know the guy who ran over his girlfriend?*

I rattle a pan with a loose handle.

It has a curve of patina near the centre

Next to a crater of aluminium-melt.

You don't feel like talking anymore.

*"I always wanted to leave a wheel of Brie up on the moon,*

*With one of those tiny Hawaiian umbrellas on it."*

I get a dry snort and I'm upthere, baby!

Three steps to the left there's a doorjamb with an ant altar,

I've only ever seen them eat each other, those damn cannibals!

You ever eat what you've carried?

Three steps to the right and I'd feel your knee curd

Like a puddle on a shipwreck.

I turn to the right and fox-trot over dead water,

*"I wonder if he ever read her that poem about oranges."*



# Harmony in Tragedy

W.E. Everheart | 16, Alexandria, Egypt

Muse of timeless tales

Sing to me, love's enduring tale.

With a song weave the lovers' strife,

And blend the threads of love and hate.

Sing melodies that echo woe and pain.

Play strings and dance for love's sweet refrain.

Unite the hearts that long gone,

In a tragic dance of love's wicked art.

Sing of lovers, star-crossed yet bold and free,

Their tale of fervor yet to be told.

Beneath the weight of the oldest enmity,

Thus, seek of love boundless and free.

O muse, Sing to me true,

Of Romeo and Juliet, love and tragedy

Guide my pen with words that ring.

In harmony with love's eternal sting.

O Verona, what misery has befallen you?  
For a grudge, a hatred, now broken free.  
From this misery, a union did bloom.  
Both wicked and tender, into love gloom

Shiny but peaceful, and forbidden to share,  
A union emerged from a legacy of despair.  
Oh, the woes that were sown by Eros' arrow's,  
A noble goddess entwined in love's gentle game.

Yet the shadows cast upon their hearts,  
Blinded were their eyes from the start.  
Though deemed a sin by most, it set thee free.  
As love's soft music echoed, embracing thee.

# Death's Maiden

Masroor | 19, Lahore, Pakistan

Like an unfinished dream,  
chasing you through the cracks of consciousness,  
my heart crumbles into ashes,  
ashes to air;

I envy the petals pressed on your lips,  
soaking them with their fragrance,  
against the coldness of yours,  
as sadness strokes the fine thinness of your brows,  
cradling the slumber in your eyes:  
sleep, sleep into the silence of this night;

frail like Death's maiden,  
breaths strangle your throat,  
yet you dance like a broken doll,  
on a gypsy's grave,  
prostrating to harks of your beloved,  
like a peacock's frolicking feathers embracing lonely  
lifelessness,  
veins sprouting across your breasts,  
you unfold like a poem,  
written on palms of water lilies,  
entwined tendrils of your ankles,  
tangle you to your fall;

I devour you in devotion,  
you who has fallen so gracelessly,  
I baptize you with obscenities of my kisses,  
my fingers seeking solace in the ghosts of your flesh,  
gesticulating through the discourse of oeuvre,  
and you burn—  
you burn with a gentle touch of paleness,  
between the spasm of pain,  
withering you into ineloquent verses,  
like old cigarettes snuffed, drying in attics,  
decaying into the vileness of your love,  
as it eats you away,  
as it eats me away.

# untitled prose 1

Victoria | 16 , Unknown

i like the way your body responds to every touch of mine. i like the way you tip your head back everytime i sneak up from behind. i like the way you turn away when you smile. i like the way those eyes light up everytime i arrive and plead me to stay. i like the way your hips sway when you don't even try. i like the way your body instinctively turns to me when we talk. i like the way your eyes search for me in a crowd when you know I'll be there. i like the way your lips part when i look at them. i love the way your heartbeat escalates when I'm close to you. i love the way your fingers entwine with mine. i love the way you sneak glances at me so no one would notice. i love the way you have eyes only for me, as if I'm worth the attention. i love the way you look at me, as if I'm worth being adored. i love the way you touch my cheek, as if you're afraid to bruise it. i love the way half of your writings are about me. i fucking love you.

# untitled prose 2

Victoria | 16 , Unknown

i want a person. a person who's my person. my home, my comfort place, my love, mine all mine. who loves me and cries with me and isn't close to anyone the way they are with me. someone who listens to my rants and vents to me and only me and doesn't wanna eat pizza without me so they save it and bring it the day after even though they know ppl will laugh at them. a best friend, a lover, a partner in crime. someone who shares my love for taylor swift and pinterest and books and rain and the moon and most importantly, me. someone who's so sure of me that they don't need anyone else. someone who's only comfortable with me and loves to be by my side and hypes me up like there's no tomorrow. someone who's not afraid to be 'ugly' in front of me and expects me to love them when they're messy because i will. ill adore the ground they wall upon and they'll treat me like a goddess. i'll tell them all the gossip and they'll respond with 'no way that happened'. someone whose ideal friday night is watching a romance movie one day and partying our hearts out the other. someone who loves the food I cook for them and kisses my face when I mess up. someone who's confused as to how they got to this side of me who's not afraid to talk for hours on end when i regret opening my mouth at a social event.

i want love.

# Our Love was Made From Stardust

Syd M | 20, Dallas, Texas

*Dedicated to A.D. Terry*

If the stars sacrifice their light, kiss the sun goodnight, envy the full moon's might then ///

trust that you are my voice of reason, my deepest desire, the key to my patience;

If the astronauts dedicated their lives to solving perplexing riddles, constructing metal scraps to

rockets, calculating the mysteries of the universe then ///

attraction pulls us close, a moon and Earth dancing in orbit, falling and falling with heaviness of

our souls belonging to gravity;

If the partner that has compromised misery, replaced uncertainty with communication, taken

lonely days and blessed them with romance then ///

affection is uncalculating, our souls were crafted from the same stardust, a perfect mold to fill

my heart with peace;

If a thousand planets had to die for us to meet, it was worth it.



# Oh, to Be Loved

Syd M | 20, Dallas, Texas

Her soft strawberry lips,  
Piercing periwinkle irises,  
Voice of the autumn rain,  
Gorgeous hair of many hues,  
Scars of a survivor,  
Intelligence that attracted wise men,  
A woman that would never  
Be in my arms;

Oh, to be loved,  
By her grace and majesty,  
Feel those peachy hands grasp,  
My waist as we dance,  
In the midst of the Evergreen,  
Feel those fingers pull my collar,  
To have our lips greet each other,  
As the wind prances around us,  
*Sa'uhibuk 'iilaa al'abad hataa tahtariq alnujumu,*  
I'd whisper;

This heart that is genderblind,  
In regards to love,  
Has yet to be loved,  
By a woman,  
Someone in between,  
Or not at all;

It almost seems redundant  
To identify as someone that loves  
All genders,  
When only men have sought my aura;

Perhaps,  
I do not possess the qualities,  
Goddesses would desire,  
Though I'd give my life to say,  
*Anti Nour 'aynay.*

1 I will forever love you until the stars burn - Arabic

2 You are the light of my eyes - Arabic

OoAK



# Who is OOAK?

We got the chance to interview the upcoming Vancouver rapper OOAK who has been growing viral on TikTok, and has a brand new EP “Amuse Bouche”.

**Q: Can you introduce yourself and what you do?**

My name is OOAK and I’m a rapper born in Toronto, Ontario but I live in Vancouver now.

**Q: How did you get to where you are today? How did you start out?**

I started out writing poetry when I was 16/17 years old. When I was about 18, I randomly decided to put one of my poems over a beat I found on YouTube and it sounded decent and started writing music from there

**Q: What is your creative process like?**

My writing process usually starts with hearing a beat that I like and then going from there. I only talk about stories going on in my life, whether it’s street stuff, family stuff, personal things or relationship stuff.

**Q: What does music mean to you? In making your music, who do you hope to inspire and what message do you spread?**

Music is an opportunity for me to express myself in a healthy, being introverted as someone who doesn’t talk a lot. It’s one of my main outlets for real. I just want to be able to connect to other people through real-life situations or feelings others are through as well.

# On *Amuse Broche* & His Music

**Q: Tell us about your newest songs 'OMW' and your newest projects? What themes and sounds did you intend to explore?**

The song OMW was kind of like me talking to myself, reminding myself how far I've come and even though I'm not where I wanna be yet I'm on my way to getting there. I just dropped a 4 song EP called "Amuse Bouche", which is just a little taster of what's coming this year. It touches on my past relationship, displaying humility as well as some motivational lyrics as well.

**Q: What upcoming projects do you have planned? And elaborate about your past projects and how they represent you. What can you tell us?**

I've had an album ready for over a year but wanted to create a community or fan base before I drop it, so for now I'm gonna flood the streets with a bunch of singles

**Q: What do you think about the Vancouver rap scene and the broader Canadian rap scene? What do you desire to contribute to it?**

I think Vancouver's rap scene is in a weird place where artists are still trying to find their identity and pull inspiration from other cities. But there's a lot of hidden talent like myself and I just wanna bring back bars and real raw emotion in a way that the new generation can relate too

**Q: How do you keep yourself grounded as an upcoming artist?**

I just always try to remember where I came from and try not to take any of it for granted.

# His Sound

**Q: How do you define authenticity in terms of your music and yourself?**

Authenticity comes from being honest with yourself and putting your true self in music in whatever form.

**Q: How would you say that you have grown as an artist from your first release to now?**

I can look back at the first mixtape that I made when I was 19 and say I was genuinely not very good, but a part of being a great artist is being confident that you'll get better, and that's what happened. It took me 6/7 years to find my sound and can finally play music and be proud of what I'm creating

**Q: What's it like being an independent artist in today's day and age? Do social media trends and virality make it easier or harder?**

There are a lot more opportunities to get on as an independent artist than ever with social media. It's all about consistency, which is the hardest part is staying disciplined.

**Q: What are you working on? What are your goals for this year?**

I'm working on a bunch of new singles to drop this year, hopefully, a couple of collabs from some dope artists. My only goal is to put out great music and whatever comes from it, I can live with

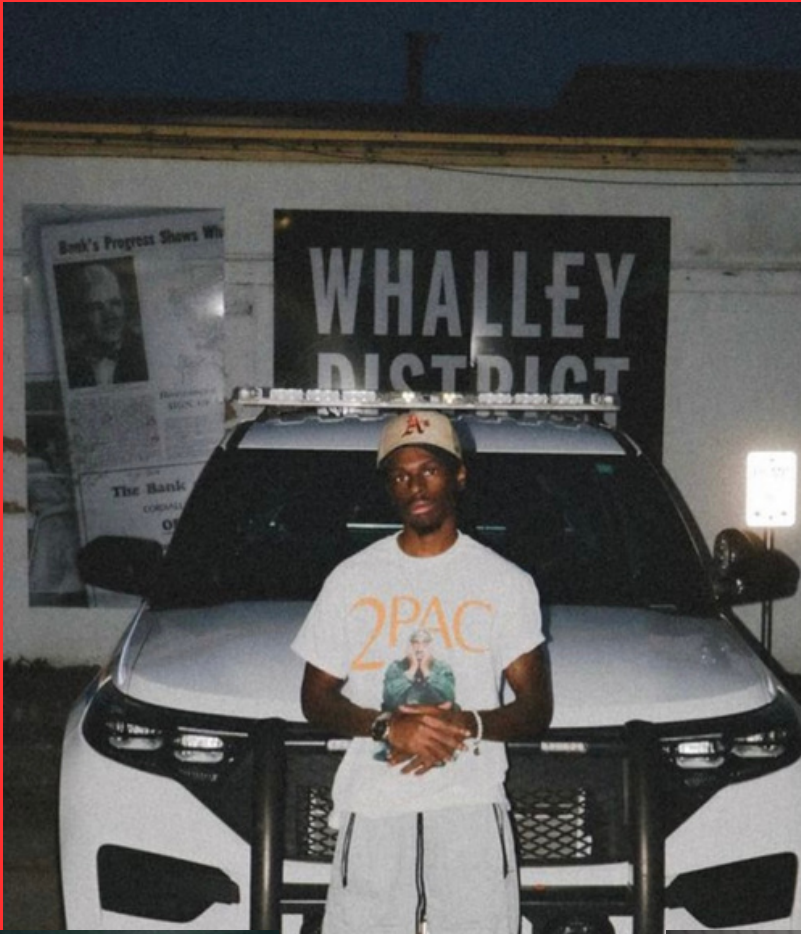
**Q: What does love look like in your life?**

Love is about finding happiness with yourself. What makes me happiest is taking care of my moms, family and people closest to me. As long as they are good I'm happy for real.

Listen to [OOAK604](#) wherever you get your music!



photos courtesy of artist





# Mirror On the Wall

Faith Denise Morales | 22, Philippines

Mirror, mirror on the wall,  
Tell me, what is beautiful-  
These bumpy, pinkish-red pimples,  
Or some clear, rosy cheeks;  
Tell me, what is beautiful-  
These rough, uneven blackheads,  
Or some soft, pointy nose;  
Tell me, what is beautiful-  
These greasy, oily, shiny patches,  
Or some clear, glowing skin;  
Tell me, what is beautiful-  
These multicolor shades of dark spots,  
Or some magazine-like fair chin;  
Tell me, what is beautiful-  
These wrinkly, basket-deep pockmarks,  
Or some smooth, refined face;  
Mirror, mirror on the wall,  
Of course, the answer's the latter,  
To be the fairest of them all.  
Mirror, mirror on the wall,  
Tell me, what is ugly-  
Of course, the answer's the former,  
To be hideous of them all.  
But mirror, mirror on the wall,  
It doesn't have to be bad at all.

It's what makes me flawed;  
It's what makes you human.  
I am not perfect,  
And so are you.  
Society's standards are lies,  
Kept to feed us demise.  
For thousands of years,  
Many hearts were boxed,  
Many bodies were destroyed;  
Many eyes were deceived,  
Many souls were ripped.  
Hold onto your belly fat.  
Feel your stretch marks and scars.  
Look at your face.  
Give in to your body's embrace.  
This is normal.  
This is not a "curse".  
You don't have to meet their  
"beautiful".  
You just have to be "you".  
You are beautiful.  
It will take lots of patience and time,  
But you will give you the love you so  
wanted to find.  
So mirror, mirror on the wall,  
  
Ignore other's reflections,  
And embrace your bare own.

# Love Me At a Distance

N.A. Kimber | 27, Caledon, Canada

“To the moon and back,”

he whispers.

“Through hell;

Against heaven.”

His love is a pledge to leave,

but to return,

as though his love

is something to prove.

It is easy to love at a distance.

To love a memory

instead of a person.

I ask why his love

does not let him stay?

Is it not just as grand

to come to bed with me?

To take me by the hand?

If your love needs must be proved,

then love me at a distance

no greater than the living room.

Love me enough

to journey to make a home.

Love me enough to take me

wherever you may roam.

# Or So I've Heard

N.A. Kimber | 27, Caledon, Canada

It is hard to recall a time when we were strangers.

What I did not know you as well

as I know the rhythm of my own heart;

the stuttered cadence created in my walk.

There was a time that your name

was not familiar on my tongue,

the sound new and fresh as rain.

How strange it is to imagine I could not know you,

when it feels as though our souls

have always been one.

I could find your hand in any darkness.

Would know you by the warmth you bring.

And though I can stand to be alone,

it is a gift to be alone with you.

To be comforted by your silence -

how easy it is to meet your eyes across the room.

A thousand ways of speaking

without a sound being heard.

The gentle art of knowing;

of being known.

That is love - or so I've heard.





# I love you the way pink tastes

Cara Morgan | 26, Maine, USA

I love you like strawberries and sugar. Like chilled lemonade, how it leaves a sting in my throat. You are the aftertaste I crave, darling. You are the last sip of a sunset. A bite of raspberry cloud that explodes into a pineapple surprise. I love you like that.

Like bug bites. Like sore cheeks from smiling too much. Like the coals of a campfire. They whisper their final secrets to us. We promise the dark to keep them. I love you like catching fireflies. Like squishing one on accident. The light of you brilliant on my palm. I can't put it back. It was an accident, I'm sorry. Like that.

Pink like laughing so hard we cry. Like dancing. Like a full moon. How we howl. How we long. The moon is not always a friend. There are many nights we scratch the ceiling of our dreams.

I love you like so many love songs. Like neo soul. Like jazz. Chasing the beat. Always late. Just a little. We are constantly improvising. We try, we do. Sometimes we hide in separate places. But mostly when I reach out, you are there. I hold your hand and you squeeze mine back. You love me like that.

I love you the way pink tastes. The way orange feels. That warm sound of yellow. I love you always. Ever ending. A dusk dying or a dawn rising, I cannot tell. Bathing the sky

in pink.



# Message in a Bottle

Cara Morgan | 23, Westmeath, Ireland

Yours would be written in  
An old beer bottle  
The type we used to pair  
With lazy evenings and slow sips  
Watching cars trudge by  
Listening to crows complain with bitter caws  
That made you smile

Yours would be written on  
A page from a book you had to convince me to vandalise  
Before you, all graphite marks and scribbles were heinous in a book  
Defacing its prestige  
Ruining its face  
You were the one  
Reading with a pencil in your hand  
Immortalising your thoughts in the margins  
Laughing as I squirmed, telling me,  
“It aint a museum piece.”  
Not trapped in the place where objects went to die  
Cornered behind glass  
Fading away  
Your books lived fiercely  
Trusted with your words  
Your creases on its spine  
Rings from your coffee cup  
Dog ears marking places you couldn't bear to lose  
Unless it was a gift for me  
“You'll love this, it made me think of you.”  
That was feeling seen  
That was feeling loved  
Known  
Accepted

Yours would be in pencil  
Yes, we covered this  
Pencil on paper, gentle scratches  
A sound we both grew to crave  
Me, scribbling down poetry  
You, delicately remarking on your favourite characters  
Novels as your journals  
Using the front page to record the date you started, where you read, how you lived in  
that pocket  
of time:  
“May 2022, University Park. Just painted my nails  
For the first time in a year,”  
Accompanies a smudge  
Of blue nail polish

Yours would say something simple  
Simple for you  
Words leaping from your pencil  
Eager to be a part of your world  
A handful of words  
Only you and I could translate  
Inside joke, hidden memory  
Snapshot from a mundane day you could bring back to life

Yours would escape fishing nets  
Tumble through storms, ride through waves  
Yours would have a life of its own  
Choosing to obey you  
Washing up on the shore of our beach  
The one tourists turn their nose up at as we laughed  
Yours would still be legible  
As I held it in my hand  
Sunlight hitting off the glass  
Your message peering out at me  
From the inside of the bottle.

# Rest

Cara Morgan | 23, Westmeath, Ireland

Rest

What if I don't have to earn you

Work to deserve you

What if you are here for me

Catching me

Holding me

The silent promise of a cool pillowcase, a soft duvet

The sweet nothing of closed eyelids

Rest

What if I meet you

Befriend you

Instead of fighting you

Instead of cursing you for whispering to me

Quietly suggesting a nap, meditation, ten minutes

Of simply existing rather than executing complexities

Rest

Do you understand

That I am scared

Guilt ridden

Nervous to meet you

After hearing about your habits

Habits of time wasting, lulling me to sleep

Wasting productivity

Do you forgive me for dreading your call?

Avoiding you

Pushing past you

Rest

Am I giving in by wanting you?

Is it laziness? Am I not enough?

Or am I listening finally

To the right voice

Your voice

One of reassurance

One of clarity, of certainty

That my body, my mind, my health

Deserve you

Deserve to reconcile with you

Deserve time, deserve care

Deserve to know that if restoration is the goal

Then rest, you are productive

You are needed

You are loved.

# Questions for a Pair of Jeans

Cara Morgan | 23, Westmeath, Ireland

Dear denim;

Do you belong with me?

Do you hug my curves?

No, not squeeze them

Not choke them

But embrace them without force

Like my body is something precious

For you to adorn, to protect, to emphasise

Do you understand?

I was not made to fit into something

I was made to explore

Clothes, styles, identities

Would you help me on my journey?

Or would you trap me

In a struggle to zip over my belly and crush myself

To please you?

Do you bring me elation?

Wrap me in power, hold my secrets

With genuine pockets?

Or is it an illusion; folds of fabric forever sewn shut

Promising practicality in the form of ersatz zippers and phoney snaps?

Your answers come slowly as I run my fingers over you

Hold you close one last time before I let you go

To someone whose life you can fit into

While I move on to jeans

That were made to fit in mine.

*in everything, love*

