



HaluHalo Journal

# Issue II

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May 2023

# FOREWORD:

As we reach the publication of our second issue, we find ourselves ruminating on what HaluHalo Journal is. It is not an infant, wobbling on its first steps, but it is not yet old, not yet seasoned.

It is *ripe*.

It is fresh with new voices; it is creativity poured into words and images. From Luke Tan's stunning "passing" to Alyssa Wong's expansive "Heart of Gold," to Briana Ifland's tributary "Maria Clara," the works in our second issue seek to examine and expand, to probe and explore. This issue seeks to capture the beauty of diversity, because there is so *much* of it.

HaluHalo Journal is a journal that both is ours and yours. In reading the second issue, we hope you see how much beauty we can deliver.

Buckle your seatbelts - this issue's a hefty one.

Without further ado, we hereby present 68 pages of incredible prose, poetry, and art.

Much love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary" with a stylized flourish at the end.

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# Cover Artist Spotlight:

Issue II's cover piece, "Georgetown, 2022," was created by **Jim Xi Johnson**, a budding digital and film photographer based in Ireland. His photography has been featured in An Áitiúil Anthology, The Martello Journal, Orange Peel Magazine and was awarded the DCU Arts Bursary in 2022. His photography tends to be introspective and observational, searching for the mundane and quiet details that often go overlooked in life. Outside of photography he enjoys calm music, long walks and longer video essays. For more of his work, check out his Instagram @jx.jpegs.

# The Resting Seamaster



**BY: LORENZO VICTORIANO**

# Eating dinner with your parents

BY: SATURN BROWNE

The surface of the ಪಾಲಕ್<sup>1</sup>  
reflects like a lake:  
overgrown  
with green envy & the nails  
your mother got done just yesterday—  
a special occasion. She didn't  
let me forget.  
Their sharpness piercing  
the silent air. The *elephant*  
*in the room*,  
I'd say, but I know that it  
wouldn't have made her  
laugh. Now,  
the chairs: the velvet faded,  
though still heavy & just  
as demanding.  
I watch as  
the rice turns cold. Pellets  
hardening & we  
become characters in a soap  
opera: not quite Romeo & Juliet,  
though, we aren't that classy. Even

when the dog knocked  
over the plate of naan,  
no one bent over to pick it up. That  
is to say: I'm  
sorry there is nothing left to ruin.



# dreams (keep the lights on)

BY: LUKE TAN

jellyfish clouds suspended in / sweaty bottles of rich summer /  
*[tropicana grovestand high-pulp calcium enriched?]* / golden  
ichor textured with crumpled plastic bags / *[78mg Vitamin C?]*  
dancing in the mouth / and dripping out through the ears /  
floating vertigo balanced of tangerine suns

*boy, I sure love orange juice!*

*wait, mom, aren't I allergic?*

rise and shine and smile / to whirring fans and LED bulbs /  
blazing eyes are too heavy and confused / too bitter and sour  
in the light / little incandescent fires taunt me / but through  
blurred vision i can still see / lovely weather and smeared  
orange sunsets

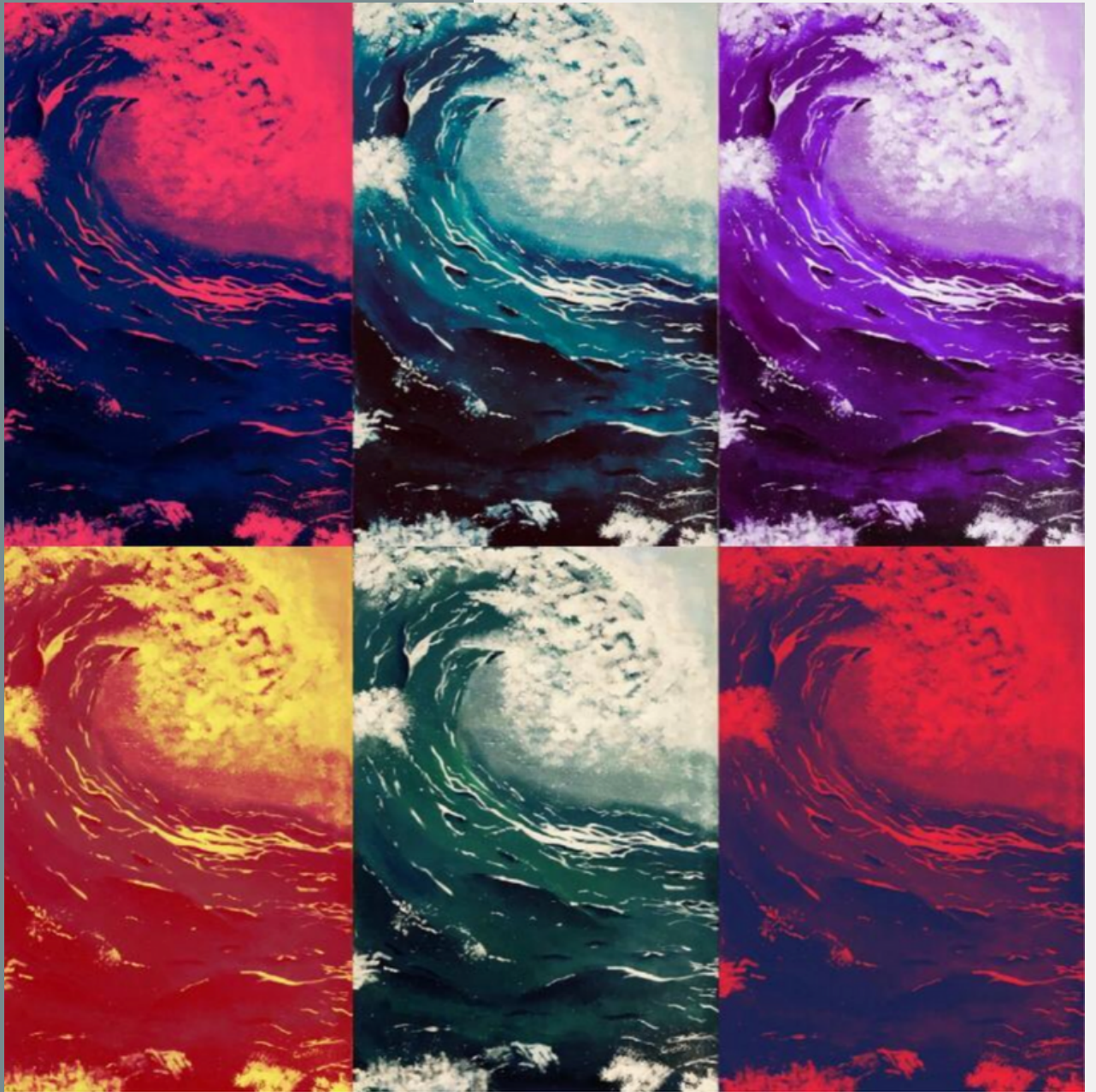
*it was yummy as a child!*

backward vision is a blind cave bat / fly forth and fly high for  
something bright / for some fruit for me and you / let's share a  
slice and a saccharine memory / because isn't it all so

round and orange and / lovely and shimmering and precious  
and / fleeting, so share a sweet moment with yourself

*over a glass of orange juice, let's talk for a while*

# Rhapsody



**BY: GUNIKA BERIWAL**

# Heart of Gold

BY: ALYSSA WONG

[June 27, 1283]

Before I was even alive, I loved you. That is what I was made to do.

I am, to be blunt, her replacement. I am more than a lucky token, like soldiers of the past would've received. I am her gift of sorrow and desperate wishes, her love brought to life. I am a handkerchief to soak your tears, a friend to give you the hugs she cannot. And though compared to other living things, I am sorely lacking, I wish upon my heart of gold that I could tell you the depths of my love. One needs not a beating heart for such emotion, and I hope that I can show this to you despite my limitations.

Tonight, I watch you scribble with an intensity you've never displayed before. It's as if you're possessed--knuckles white and the force of your fingers bending the cheap ballpoint. Your braids are wound around your free hand, and you tug at them absently, angrily. A thousand crumpled drafts form a mountain at your feet, and as your restless feet shuffle and bounce, you crush dozens of declarations of love, of hate, of secrets, and of lost dreams.

*Dearest Sera,*

*Today is the 673rd day since the war began. The 500th day since I left. Do you count the days too?*

*Sending my love,*

*Dearest Sera,*

*There are rumors the warlock we're fighting has the ability to twist people's minds. His people call him the Prince of Dreams. People say he drove the late prime minister mad and that he's behind the riots and coups. They say he only needs a person's name to walk into their dreams.*

*But don't worry--no one knows me.*

*Sending my love,*

*Dearest Sera,*

*The war camps are a mess. People are disappearing left and right--desertion, assassination, and hundreds of unreported deaths. The old commanders have disappeared or died. The soldiers have disappeared or died. Our armies now consist of undead hordes and the few commanders callous enough to drive the rotten waves forward.*

*Do they still send the fallen home? I feel like the mountain of corpses waiting to be revived just keeps growing.*

*Sending my love,*

I tap your ankle, but you don't seem to notice. So I climb the mountain of crumpled letters, slipping here, bracing as the pile collapses there, until I reach your knee. From there I grab the edge of the desk and haul myself up.

*Dearest Sera,*

*I don't know what to do. I can't even send letters to you. You think I'm dead.*

*Sending my love,*

You drop the pen and tear the words off your notebook--it was the last page. You exhale. Stare at the empty covers and the inkblots.

I tug on your sleeve.

You finally notice me and examine my animated body curiously: a round head, a handkerchief skirt, and four stubby limbs all cut from the same mahogany red muslin. "Oh. Hello." You look so dumbfounded, it makes me wonder if you forgot you brought me to life mere hours ago.

I hold one of your fingers between the two ends of my arms, pulling you away from the pen. *Stop writing.*

There was a time when you lived for these letters. You wrote pages and pages each day and dreamed of her replies. But now you agonize over it. You think too much. You only hurt yourself.

I pull your finger with all my strength, but you don't understand. You pick me up between two fingers, move me aside, and reach for the pen again.

I push away the pen, shake my head.

“You don't want me to write? Why?”

I totter to the edge of the table, stretching out one arm to touch your heart.

“I know. It hurts. But...” You shove away from the table. The paper mountain beneath you collapses. “I can't even send these. Why the hell am I writing this?”

I offer my arms, and you wrap me in a hug. “Thanks. I just really miss talking to Sera.” You reach for the notebook again and curse when you remember there are no pages left. “I need... paper. Newspaper.”

You find some rolled up in a drawer. The headline reads: CHURCH DEFILED BY ANTI-NECROMANCY GRAFFITI. Slowly, it dawns on you.

*Dearest Sera,*

*If you see my name in the news, know this: I'm alive. I'll be home soon.*

*Sending my love,*

[June 28, 1283]

In the hour before dawn, you bring me to the ruin of a library. Before, those slabs of limestone shone brilliant white. The doorway held a beautiful frieze. Then, when the army still consisted of the living, hundreds of soldiers had chipped off bits of the frieze as souvenirs. Now, there is rubble and ash. You reach into a pocket and withdraw a handful of gold hearts--each 10 grams of pure gold--and toss it into the wreckage

like one might feed bread to geese.

I know you haven't forgotten the old dream. That one day, you and Sera would save enough to buy a storefront on Main Street. It would be a toy shop, but without shelves or glass cases. Instead, there would be dozens of little friends running on hearts of gold. Customers could greet the doorknocker as they entered. Sera would sew behind the counter. You'd take care of the toys. Some days, you'd buy fresh flowers and decorate the apartment above the shop and Sera would laugh at your silly antics. In your dreams, your whole world was encompassed by this little storefront and the apartment above it.

The day they realized your terrible power, they lined your friends up against a wall. *Bang bang bang*. They said you were one of them now: unknown, nameless—safe. And then they showed you all the gold the country had to offer. They said it was all yours—yours to raise a new army. They said that with you, they would quickly win the war. And you thought, *I am the richest woman in the world*.

“Wake,” you command, and the marble figures--boars and dragons and knights on horseback--stir. Hearts fuse to marble. They break away from their stone setting.

“My name is Kata Merlo,” you say, brown eyes cast in frosted gold. “Spread the news.”

The creatures shamble away. Three knights take rough-hewn spears and hack away at the walls of the library. Limestone sparkles as it shatters. I see letters forming.

You leave the library. By the time you reach camp, the sun is shining, so you head straight for the morgue, where the undead have already begun bringing you wagons piled high with corpses. The day is spent sewing gold hearts into the cavities of where the old ones once beat.

A heart is more than ten grams of gold. A heart is will and passion. A heart calls forth the best in people. It carries dreams and tries its best to let one live long enough to achieve those dreams. It searches for other good hearts to keep one company. I wonder if those gold hearts rattle around in the hollow chests of the undead, bouncing off the walls and trying to escape. I wonder if they ever warm, or if they just stay cold.

Yet how can I say that? I am so small, I can't hold an entire heart. You had to bite off a corner and feed it into my stuffing like I was a baby bird. If I am less than undead, and the undead cannot compare to a living being, then what am I worth? Do my hugs even give you warmth?

Today, you lean over these putrid corpses as they stir. Hands dripping gore, a distant look in your eyes, you whisper to each, "You shall fight for none but I."

[February 12, 1282]

You ran home with your hand extended high, waving a piece of paper like a flag. "Sera, I've done it! I've got it!"

You slammed the paper on the table, then fussed over the crinkled edges. She almost laughed at your scrunched expression, the way you shoved your hair out of your face. But she held a piece of paper as well, hidden behind her. And the message it contained would ruin both of your lives.

Instead, she smoothed one hand over your back. She wanted to see you celebrate. To commit your smile to memory. "We have our shop?"

"Yes! City council approved!"

You paused to regain your breath as the triumph and adrenaline settled in your skin. It felt like fireworks. Then you noticed Sera's half-hearted smile. "Sera?"

She embraced you, pressing her cheek into your neck. "Congratulations, Kata. This is incredible." But something cold slipped down your back--tears.



You pulled away, frowning. “Sera? What’s wrong?” But before she could speak, you heard the rustling of paper behind her back.

172 days into the war. Everyone knew very well what happened when that white envelope landed on your doorstep. You’d never seen one before--an impossible record--but everyone knew the draft.

You wrapped Sera in a hug. You didn’t know what to say. That’s all you did, and the two of you stood in silence until your chests hurt from the pressure of each other’s arms.

You broached the subject at dinner. “We can wait until you get back to start the shop. It’ll be better if I graduate university first anyway--”

Sera set down her fork. “Kata--”

“To be honest, I was worried university and opening a business simultaneously would be too hard--”

“Kata... I wasn’t conscripted. *You* were.”

Your eyes darted to the letter laying on the corner of the table. “Wh-what?”

“They’re conscripting everyone with magic. Your university is shutting down because all the students are getting sent to the front lines.”

That night, you lay in bed alone, swaddled up to the chin in Sera’s hand-sewn quilts, glaring out at the unimpassioned moon. Sera’s half of the bed was cold--after a few hours of tossing and turning, she’d extracted herself from your arms. You heard the stairs creak on her way downstairs.

You remind me of you then, just over a year younger, but a child compared to you now. Staring out the window, swallowing your fears, wondering why you won’t just let your tears fall. Wishing Sera was beside you. Asking yourself, *remember the toy shop?*

[June 29, 1283]

You wake to find me sitting on the pillow and smile at my oversized button eyes. “Hi, you.”

I pat your cheek and it makes you smile some more.

The morning is overcast. You buy today’s newspaper. WHO IS KATA MERLO? Pictures plaster the page. A thousand times over, your name is etched on walls, drawn in ashes, painted on wagons. You walk through camp and survey the few living soldiers huddled around campfires with canned soup. You used to look at their faces and wonder if you would recognize them when it was time to give them gold hearts. You never would.

Today, you listen to their stories. You smile when you hear them say your name.

[February 13, 1282]

“Kata.”

You woke to the sound of your name on Sera’s lips. It was still dark out, and you squinted through the dim light of rose-scented candles.

Sera was in her nicest blouse and she’d brushed back her hair. A tray of steaming pancakes and fresh fruit lay at the foot of the bed.

“It’s four in the morning,” Sera said. “You leave at six.”

You smiled, pushing down your exhaustion. “Pancakes? Sera, did you sleep at all?”

She shrugged--a definitive no, then. “Enough. Come, try some.”

You shoveled a few bites into your mouth and grinned at her with your mouth full. Maybe it wasn’t that good, and maybe you acted a little bit exaggerated, but if this was the last memory she’d have of you, you wanted to be ridiculously in love. “I love you so much.”

“Love you too.”

You offered her a bite, and when she declined, you insisted until she accepted it. After that, you two took turns eating until the stack was just crumbs and syrup.

“I’ve got one last surprise,” Sera said. She reached behind her to reveal me--a rag doll sewn together hastily with running stitches and cheap mahogany red muslin. “A little friend to keep you company while you’re away,” she explained. “It doesn’t have a name yet and I think we’re out of gold hearts, but...”

“She’s perfect,” you said. You laughed and threw your arms around Sera, kissing her and crying and laughing until the sun rose.

[May 8, 1282]

You weren’t good enough. You joined the regular foot soldiers while your friends from university were placed in elite units. But all you had were kindhearted toys.

In your trial, you said, “I can bring things to life.” But when the rubber duck only bounced and squeaked, you were deemed useless.

[September 29, 1282]

The war camps were already falling apart. So much ground had been lost that it was barely more than bedrolls in a field of soot. Then one day, after yet another rout, your platoon was chased off through the woods. When the captain finally collapsed, the rest of you realized you were far, far away from friendly territory.

The captain died. It could’ve been from any of his various wounds. One of the survivors was his brother, who watched the captain’s final moments mutely.

After a long silence, you brought up the inevitable “We can’t carry a dead body all the way back.”

“Do we bury him here, then?”

The captain’s brother was hesitant. “He would’ve wanted to be buried in our hometown. I want to bring back as much of him as possible.”

“What if...” You cleared your throat. “Does anybody have gold? Watches, jewelry?”

A few people nodded.

“I can use magic. I think I can make the body walk back on its own. If it works, we won’t need to carry anything.”

It was unheard of. But you melted together old keepsakes and formed a misshapen heart of gold. When the captain sat up, your platoon cheered.

[July 20, 1283]

Because I don’t sleep myself, I watch you sleep instead. You’ve been forcing yourself to sleep even when you can’t. You try dream journaling and curse when you can’t remember a dream or can’t remember details. Tonight, I nearly jump out of my stuffing when you speak:

“Who are you?” you say. On your pillow, I move closer. Your eyes dart around beneath closed lids. A smile curves your lips. “Prince of Dreams. You’ve seen my name in the news.”

You continue. “I’ve watched this war kill tens of thousands. I’ve seen your people razing my cities and my creations trampling your empire. I’m tired of this and I want an end. And here’s a promise: If it takes a month or ten dozen, I will claim all that fight in your name.” You laugh, but it’s more snarl. I try to smooth those twisted expressions off your face. “Surrender now, Prince of Dreams, or drown under the weight of the people you’ve killed.”

I imagine the killer you face within your dreams. Is he mad? Does he fear you? *Come on, I plead, End this war now. For Sera. For you.*

And then you pause. You become reflective. I wait for a long time. Finally, you say, “I’ll think about it.”

[December 2, 1282]

The captain’s heart gave out as you reached safety, ushered into the war camps by medics. You were pulled away from the group. Suddenly, you stood before the Nameless Council.

“They say you brought a dead man to life and he walked a hundred miles.”

“It’s not quite life--”

“With only a gold heart?”

“Yes--”

“Why aren’t you with the other mages?”

“My skills weren’t... useful enough, sir. I make toys.”

Laughter echoed. “And the undead, evidently. How many can you sustain?”

“I... don’t know..”

“Can you make them fight?”

You stopped yourself. You saw now the power you wielded. “My creations are harmless and friendly when they think for themselves, sir.”

“I daresay we’ll think well enough for them. Lieutenant, place an order for ten thousand gold hearts. Welcome to the ranks of the nameless, soldier.”

*Dearest Sera,*

*I’ve been promoted. I won’t be fighting anymore and you’ll be receiving a huge paycheck soon!*

*Sending my love,*

*(They say I can’t use my name anymore)*

[December 23, 1282]

*Dearest Sera,*

*I haven’t heard from you in a while. Are you okay?*

*Sending my love,*

[July 21, 1283]

You sit on the edge of your bed with your face in your hands. I wish I knew what was going on now. When you first brought me to life,

I knew everything about you. But you don't tell me things. I was supposed to be your friend, and now I am just a mute doll.

You throw yourself into bed. Shut your eyes. After hours, your breathing becomes even, and late, late into the night, you speak. "I accept."

[June 27, 1283]

You forgot about me after months away. But one day, as you were planning to run away, you sorted through all your things to see what you could carry. And you happened upon me. A dusty relic from a happier time.

You held me in your hands and cried that night--ugly, shaky sobs. You reminded yourself of the toy shop, cursed how you couldn't run away for Sera's sake, for the toy shop. Your magic would be recognized instantly. This war would rage on, and you were lost within it, a thousand miles away.

The next night you brought back a corner of a gold heart. You split my seams with a pocket knife and tucked it into my stuffing, using a thread pulled from an old shirt to sew me back up. You wondered if you even remembered how to imbue creations with love--I very well could end up another one of your undead soldiers.

I remember staring up at you from your fist, my head lolling back against your fingers. You brought me up close to your face to examine me, and when I leaned forward and hugged your nose with my little muslin arms, you laughed so hard I fell from your face. Childlike, you watched me for the rest of the night, trying with all six inches of me to tidy your room and make you smile.

[July 22, 1283]

You don't go to the morgue today--instead you sit down and write a letter. You pull out a newspaper--the one about your name--and cram your message into the margins. You read it over, sign it--and that's when

the door bursts open.

The Nameless Council charges in. You crumple the newspaper and throw it under the desk, then grab me from your shoulder and throw me into the shadows as well. I bounce on the grimy floor until I hit the crumpled newspaper. From the shadows, I watch as two of them force you to your knees.

“Kata Merlo, is it?”

You smile up at the men surrounding you. “Took you long enough.”

A pair of large boots pace before you. I tremble with every step. “We... took the time to plan carefully.”

“Then surely you haven’t forgotten that while you command my armies in battle...”

The walls shudder. The door collapses inwards. Outside loom thousands of undead. I press myself into the shadows.

“... I am master to all the dead.”

Men scream and undead charge. You wrest yourself free and throw yourself across the room, extending one hand to grab me and the newspaper. The ground shudders, the walls collapse inwards, and I just barely cling onto your fingers as you break out of the room. You run and run until you’re free of the war camps.

Atop a dark hill, you watch putrid masses swarming the camp. Lights go out. Bushfires ignite. You see a few scrambling figures escaping. One young man--practically a boy--runs up your hill, but when he sees you, he turns tail and flees.

“I’ve got a job for you.”

I turn and look up at you. From this angle, your dark face is framed by blades of grass and moonlight. You crouch down and place the crumpled newspaper before me.

“Deliver this to Sera.”

It’s an insane request. Sera is hundreds of miles away.

“Please. Do it for...”

I wasn't made to take orders. I was made in a time when your creations were meant to be friends. Staring up at you, I remember my lingering question--what am I worth if I'm only a rag and a scrap of gold? I cannot give you warmth. I cannot speak. I cannot replace the love you miss.

I take the newspaper in my arms.

Because you are my friend, and I'll do anything you ask of me.

You smile. "Thanks."

We set off in opposite directions. You walk towards the border. I walk home. I shuffle through crowded cities with this balled-up letter. When I lose hold of it on windy peaks, I chase it for hours and hours. I gather grass stains. I stuff myself with dandelion seeds when my muslin splits and my stuffing dissolves.

[January 2, 1284]

I reach home only to find Sera has moved out of your old apartment. Defeated, I wander the snowy city. Something pulls me to the storefront you were planning to buy. White trims and a large display window. A doorknocker of the crescent moon kissing her shadow.

A sign is painted in pink: *Little Friends for Children*.

I run to the door and heave it open with all my strength, but the door slams shut before I can drag in the newspaper. As the bell on the door tinkles, I stare at my newspaper trapped on the other side of the glass.

"Good morning!"

I hear Sera's voice for the first time in my life. Gentle and soft. Exactly like you remember.

She hurries into view in her shop uniform--an embroidered dress with a denim apron full of sewing supplies. She pauses when she doesn't see a customer.

I run towards her and she gasps when she sees me. "Are you--?"

She kneels down and offers a hand for me to climb on. I do, and she brings me close to her face. "What happened to you, little one? You're



falling apart!”

When she says it, I realize how I must look. Fraying hems, loose stitches. A head full of gashes and stuffed with dandelions. Distantly, I recognize that my heart is finally slowing after all these months of wear and tear. I want to melt into the warmth of her palm, but there is one last thing I must do. I raise one leaden arm and point towards the door.

Sera misunderstands. She thinks you're waiting outside and her eyes light up. She all but runs--and finds no one.

I point to the newspaper. She picks it up--it's wrinkled and stained. But she smooths it out and reads it.

*Dearest Sera,*

*I was the necromancer. When this country was on the brink of collapse, the dead I brought back allowed the war to go on. And it's gone on for far too long.*

*I'm so sorry. I could've won this war. But I'm so tired, Sera. I made a deal with the Prince of Dreams. I'm safe, and you'll be safe too if you come and find me.*

*Sending my love,*

*Kata Merlo*

# Cultivate



**BY: DANIELA LORRAINE BRUTAS**

# A Note from the Artist:

Inspired by the Classic Filipino folk song “Magtanim Ay Di Biro,” **Cultivate** is a tribute to the country’s agriculture industry, which constitutes the foundation of sustainable development. “Magtanim ay Di Biro” translates to Planting is not a joke-- from bending all day long to plant rice to having no time to sit or stand. The song is an interpretation of a farmer’s perseverance, as they face tiresome tasks such as ploughing, planting, watering. This piece acts as symbolism and underlines the lack of support in training, finance, and infrastructure boost, and the disadvantages caused by intermediaries.

# MAKILING

**BY: BELLA MAJAM**

There's a poem caught in the hollow of your throat, but he is no longer interested in what your body has to offer. Take a knife. Kneel beside your bed frame. Drag it across the wood. You are now fifteen and three cities away from English teachers who write *absolutely brilliant!* on the topmost corner of your yellow pads. You ought to get it right.

In the poem, there's a boy, a girl, and a ghost. The boy does not believe in ghosts; the ghost does not believe in ghosts, either. But the girl takes the boy by the hand and leads him through a thicket of trees, nothing but paper and pen in his pockets, and begs him to listen. *Don't you hear her? She's calling out to you.* In the heart of the forest, the boy looks at the girl in her sand-white skirt, ears perked up to the silence. *I do.*

There's a poem caught in the hollow of your throat, but there needs to be minor changes. Only idiots believe in ghosts in this day and age. Say it was a love poem. Say you wrote about a boy and a girl who are separated only by the walls of a fifty-year-old dorm, their breaths steady and similar as they sleep.

He dreams of her palms and their warmth on his cheek; she dreams of the letter she keeps in her desk drawer—*Do you miss home? May I take you there?*

Sigh. Lift the knife. Close your eyes. In the other beds, your roommates dream, and you know: you will not finish it. Maybe you'll try again tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow after that.

Climb onto the top bunk. Kick the thin, rumped sheets around your legs. The mountain chill seeps into your skin. Let your hands trace the name you carved onto the ceiling, its letters thin as a wrist. Hum it, like a prayer. Outside, in the dark, the silence of the night waits. Listen. Listen.

# Velvet Voices

**BY: RAPHAEL SALISE**

The story according to them:

All you said was no. I watched you leave, your silhouette  
sinking into the horizon.

And since that day, the sun never rose again.

The story according to us:

All you said was not here,  
but in walls that couldn't hear  
us breathing;  
confine me  
in spaces,  
in between  
concrete.

I watched your skin,  
pouring on mine, we  
mold the clay pot  
until the sun  
finds us leave,

Your silhouette  
sinking  
intoxicated right? we  
blame it all on the bottles  
always on the bottles  
too many to count  
too much spent:  
time, money, I can go on  
and on, watch me go on  
down, like  
the horizon.

And sincerely yours,  
write back to me  
that day, the stop, please, hun  
never  
(come back)  
rose  
(come back)  
again.

# Yellowing

**BY: HANIN RAMADHANI**

Years passed, full of curses  
on the prayers born with me.  
In this journey, the prayers paled  
along with my tongue,  
for the sour and fear  
I had against giants  
on this yellow earth.  
I came home  
to the yellowed prayers,  
but not my tongue.





# Your Soul

BY: ELLAIJAH MAE T. AMADO

# Jack tv on channel 33

BY: POCH SALDANA

Pizza Hut days and watching Marge wrestle the monorail when men who took over our nights were still finding a start. Mad TV with the sound turned down so Lolo wouldn't wake from well-deserved one-AM lulls, when hacking slowed to coarse breath and the strange shows that were supposed to be shut off left in-jokes worth laughing about that only the kids under this roof would find worth in remembering. Leaving the sala bare, with no cause, except keeping the home office company while mama talked to Tito Lito from New Jersey

Where's New Jersey? Where all this shit came from. Except for Yao Ming and Cloud. They're from here kind of. Different places--are countries being taught already? That's fast as hell about visiting next

summer. When three months became a blur except for the rodeo in St. Helens, where the old lady talked about a clover leaf under horse trots and the stupid-big Jenga pieces fell on a guy who majored in civil engineering. Mentioned playing Pokemon and changing numbers. Meant exchanging. Kept pretty far away after since that shit's kind of suspect but whatever seemed pretty chill still. Keeping appearances. Keeping in touch like an uncle who only comes every other Christmas. The ease of knowing a waning comfort, watching Letterman before rain cuts the lights out.

# disfigured

BY: KAY LEE

you ask me for a pair of eyes.  
they hang on little silver strings  
from the ceiling like little paper cut-outs.  
some are brown and some are black,  
but you look at me from across the room  
under an overhang of flesh  
and i look up at them all and think,  
*you will not take black eyes.*

there are one two three  
colored eyes on the ceiling  
and i count them  
as if i would count  
shooting stars.

i stand on my tippy-toes to reach for them,  
and i brush the edge of one.  
again- and again, but it does not fall.  
i look back at you.  
you look at me from across the room, ask me  
for a pair of eyes.

there are no eyes hanging from the ceiling.  
i reach up and dig my fingers into the grooves

of my skull. the flesh squelches under  
my thumb, and i take care not to scratch  
the sclera. it burns. it doesn't burn.

it feels

like you, staring at me without a word  
hiding under shadowy flesh.

it feels

like the pills i've buried in my shirt pocket.

i pull my eyes out, and i pull my veins along with it.

i hold out my eyes out into the black.

there is blood under my fingernails,

and i want to scratch it away,

but then i would drop

the eyes.

you take the eyes. you do not touch

my flesh.

*"do they fit?"*

i want to ask, but there would be no meaning.

this is the script. those are my eyes

in your skull, and none of us

are making it out of here.

*(night falls.*

*you ask me for a pair of ribs.)*

# Penang Butterfly Farm, 2022



**BY: JIM XI JOHNSON**

# passing

BY: LUKE TAN



# Maria Clara

BY: BRIANNA IFLAND

*Inspired by a postcard photo addressed to a  
Conching, from Felicing.  
Circa 1920s, from the collection of G. Gonzales.*

*Maganda—*

the word ricochets off my  
American tongue  
like a bald-eagle bullet.  
When it makes its exit wound,  
it is a disheveled,  
faltered, half-formed performance  
of my ancestors.

Mother, how do I bridge the canyon  
Carved by white man's iron fist?  
Which crack bright islands  
And buries vibrant nations?  
Can your arms truly hold your child  
When you are stuck on shores  
Seven seas apart?

*Alampay*

I wear yours and I'm a goddess, center-stage,  
Draped in pineapple fibers  
Fine threads woven in a loom.  
Barely touching my shoulder,

It hovers like a nervous  
New lover's hand.  
Or a blooming petal  
On a newborn flower.  
How much of this is costume? Caricature?  
How much of it are the echoed remnants of you?

I have tried to build the bridge over white man's canyon  
Since I was taught of borders and foreigners,  
Played in apple-pie-baseball dirt  
And closed my eyes, dreaming it was Mindanaoan sand.

But my home is nestled in the ravine,  
Where I swim in the in-between.  
I can reach you there, still,  
Grasping your hand like in prayer,  
In the shade of our family tree,  
In kundiman lullabies,

steamed buns and stews,  
and every—

*Mahal Kita.*

It floats in my mouth naturally,  
Delicate and musical and home



I love you, I love you, I love you.  
There is religion  
Which grows in a mother's heart.  
A hot flame.  
Hotter than iron fists,  
Or bald-eagle bullets.  
It burns through this life,  
And the next  
And the next.

# A Look Back



**BY: ANNIE MARCELINO**

# a study night

BY: JAKE MALAYA

i pricked myself awake  
and widened my crusty dehydrated eyes  
fixated them against the searing blue screen  
held my finger over the mouse that never fit my hands  
scrolled mindlessly through prints of lecture notes  
hoping all this was printed in that mental photocopier with the  
ink that barely runs

leaned forward so as not to let my spine sleep  
leaned back again so as not to let my body snore  
stretched my neck so it doesn't get stiff  
sighed because it was already getting stiff anyway  
eyed every person passing by like a vigilante  
envying how much freer they all seemed

because in my mind  
instead of being trapped in mental cages, mock-up stages  
i traveled continents, traversed dimensions, crossed  
multiverses  
explored every cranny of opportunity, experienced every  
possible emotion  
flew away like a jay, blessed others like an angel  
and best of all, imagined and rewound all of those dreams like  
overused film tapes

sadly bound by that blood pact and an overwhelming promise  
i could only just dream of better days  
while i sat behind the coveted plastic desk  
in a rowdy dormitory too messy for its own good  
mindlessly complying  
endlessly pining

but the curtains for the scene beckoned to close  
so i bid farewell to the lecture notes  
closed my laptop with a resounding click  
that was enough for the study night today  
eat, school, sleep  
i guess i'll carpe diem another day

# An Ode to Kaz Brekker's Hands

BY: THEO ITCHON

You can dig your gloved hand into my chest, you know.

I swear I won't mind —

Go on: first a finger, then another.

Coat the black leather in my gore,  
you dark feathered thing, you.

Greed is your mercenary, true enough;

it may bow to you.

*but what of those that won't?*

What of the bloated skin,

and the unrelenting undead?

That's where you're human, isn't it?

In those you tuck under your gloves.

Perhaps when your brother dipped you

in the river Styx, he held you by your hand.

He hasn't let go yet, has he?

And what of the girl with the knives?

Surely by now,

you know she would sooner hand you her blade

before she would ever scratch you with it?

Do you defy the gospel of Saints

because it so offends you?

Or is it because it is unflinchingly real in the strands of her  
hair?

And you can never bring yourself to touch her —  
no, you're far too broken for that

You'd sooner chop your own hands off.  
What's the matter, Rietveld?  
Afraid you'll never escape your boyhood?  
Your hands are the only real thing about you,  
and saints do you

*despise that.*

Hands that are a hybrid tether and murder weapon —  
how do you intend on getting out of that  
sickboat, away from the Reaper's Barge  
with all that weight on you?

And those are just your hands,  
we haven't even gotten to the heart yet;  
but then again they are one and the same,  
aren't they?

You may not want to know this but this is what you are:

*a sleight of hand.*

And she is that which

*vanishes.*

So better get on with it, boy.

You're only half corpse (for now.)

Better swim to harbor (and fast.)

She is still waiting.

Make good use of your hands —

for once.

# A Wardrobe of Identities

BY: GERSHOM MABAQUIAO

My maternal grandfather has *great* taste in patterned shirts - plaid, striped, flower-patterned designs of various bursts of color. He loves color: the more vibrant, the better. "It's the colors that I wear more than the clothes themselves," he always says. It is simply a way for him to commune with the world without words. The colors speak to him, then speak for him once he puts them on, each hue a part of his personality- what he likes and what he's like.

Unlike him, I don't have a colorful wardrobe. Most of my clothes are either hand-me-downs or bought from *ukay-ukays*. But I do have a different kind of wardrobe and its contents speak to and for me, too- one comprised of books, a collection of roughly 300 works of fiction, with splashes of nonfiction, philosophy, psychology, and history here and there.

'Have you read all of these?' is the usual question my friends ask whenever I show them my collection- displayed on a makeshift bookshelf in my sister's bedroom, overcrowding a nook near the upstairs window, filling a huge *balikbayan* box to the brim in my brother's room, and littered in stacks along our wooden stairs. The question somehow swells my spirits with pride. I've always viewed the shelves of paper and ink as an extension of myself, like my grandfather and his clothes.

In fact, I was told I craft a Self from the fictional characters that speak to me the loudest, pulling out garments of personalities that I mix and match to present what I hope passes for an identity.

"You have a habit of introjecting," said a guy I dated before who majored in Psychology.

My response: I had to. It's a way to relearn myself, I told him, to go back to where I started or, at least, figure out who I am comfortable enough to be.

“Like you said,” I told him, “We can't really make a perfect copy of those we imitate.” But a part of me still asks, *Will I ever find an identity I will consider original? My own?*

I feel like somewhere along my growing up, I kinda lost sense of who I was (or maybe I never really got a firm idea of the identity I want to create). So I find solace in absorbing fictional identities to ‘retrace my steps’ in hopes that it will help me move forward.

Maybe, in this psychological closet raid, a consistent “style” reveals itself, at the very least.

## **NOAH SWEETWINE**

Currently, my favorite garment in my wardrobe, the one that always sits closest, is Noah Sweetwine from Jandy Nelson's *I'll Give You the Sun*. He's this eccentric boy who claims he can see people's souls as animals. Colors speak to him. He'll get along well with my grandfather. He has an ‘invisible museum’- a psychological archive of surreal painting ideas inspired by his own life. He's not afraid to be as sensitive, romantic, and as weird as he can possibly be. I like him. I want to be like him.

A friend I made online introduced me to Noah. "You remind me a lot like him," she said. She sent me the book for my 19th birthday with a note that read: “Happy birthday, Noah. Read about yourself.”

At first, I was hesitant. I was in the middle of trying to fight against the introjecting thing by enforcing a year-long reading slump.



At that time I was already aware of my tendency to obsessively internalize and anchor myself to the personalities of fictional characters, trying to live their lives to cope with my struggles with reality.

For months I put off reading the book until eventually, my curiosity got the best of me. I fell in love with the book, although I didn't really see myself in Noah when I first read it. Or at least I didn't choose to see it.

But some lines resonated with me:

1. "'...maybe a person is just made up of a lot of people,' I say. 'Maybe we're accumulating these new selves all the time.'"
2. "A broken heart is an open heart," and,
3. "Quick, make a wish. Take a (second or third or fourth) chance. Remake the world."

It gave me a different perspective when it came to using my wardrobe of identities. The book became my bible. Every time I started the book over for my favorite lines, I saw more and more of what my friend meant about seeing Noah in me. There is a part of me that Noah's character tries to make me remember, a Self I lost and am trying to find again. He encourages me to be true, to be honest, and authentic, which for some time I have failed to be.

## **READING SLUMP**

Between 2014 to 2015 I had lived a lie. I pretended I still went to my classes as an engineering student, meanwhile spending the money my parents gave for my tuition to buy more and more books to fill the emptiness I felt inside.

I submerged myself in fictional worlds- Panem, Narnia, Hogwarts, Lorien, Mirrorworld, and Inkworld, to name a few- to escape the reality

of the horrors bestowed upon me each morning. I scrambled through pages, looking for bits and pieces of myself I couldn't seem to form properly. *What kind of person would my family, my peers, strangers, would everyone like?* The books piled up, until I became a Frankenstein monster of fictional characters, made up of mismatched pieces of personality that barely formed a person.

And then my parents found out about my little secret. They stopped providing me with all sorts of support and I was forced to find work to look after myself.

But at least the lies stopped. I was free to be as miserable as possible without hiding myself under stitched-up pieces of identities. I just read books to pass the time, to live life barely stepping out of the house for three years, apart from work. Until I grew tired and enforced the reading slump.

## **LOVE ALWAYS, CHARLIE**

That was in stark contrast to when I went back to the Philippines for college in 2013. I always kept a book with me because I was the only one in our batch of graduates from the Philippine School Doha who went to UP Los Baños. I knew people, sure, but they were from the past six schools I went to before PSD; I didn't exactly have good memories with them.

The constant presence of a book in my bag was a reminder of my six friends in Qatar who reintroduced me to reading (I'll talk about them later on, as I trace further back in my history with printed pages). They, both my friends and the books I read, had been my family when my biological one failed to be. They also had been the only people I could actually consider my friends.

That time I saw myself in Charlie from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Like him, I knew how it was to be the quiet kid who reads books and sees a lot of things. But the universe had its way of twisting even my twisted coping mechanism: I didn't know introjecting Charlie would entail me to the same fate as him with a relative.

His tragic experience with Aunt Helen was reflected in Kuya Pablo, the seventeen-year-old nephew of my grandaunt's husband. My experience with Kuya Pablo was the reason why I grew scared of virtually every person I saw around me (maybe also why I now identify as demisexual). Even the slightest touch sends my skin crawling (I was never comfortable with hugs since then).

I tried to find reasons not to go to class- to no avail. I got sicker and sicker by the day, both psychologically and physically, until going to class for the last few weeks of the semester became a nightmarish notion akin to Stephen King's horrific imagination. Needless to say, I failed all of my classes in the very first semester of my college life.

My parents were furious. They wanted me to process my readmission as soon as I could, but I couldn't even get out of bed to eat. I was in a constant loop of crying and feeling numb. But they firmly insisted.

Okay, I said. I'll go back to school. Except I didn't.

## **NICO DI ANGELO, THE GHOST KING**

I never brushed my hair for as long as I could remember. My hair always fell down across my forehead and is never brushed up.

I had messy curls, dark eyes, and a constant sullen expression, like Nico di Angelo from the Camp Half-blood books by Rick Riordan.

I imitated Nico since I met him in Titan's Curse, probably because I saw myself in him to some degree. He was once an enthusiastic, lowkey annoying kid who loved his older sister, Bianca. When- *Spoiler alert!*- Bianca died, he became this silent, reclusive presence shrouded by death (he's the son of Hades) and mystery.

Like him, I was supposed to have an older sister, too. The difference was my mom lost her due to a miscarriage. Unlike him, I never got to know my sister but I desperately wished I had the chance. Since I learned of this information from my grandmother when I was nine, I always imagined what it would be like if my sister were alive, and wondered if maybe the reason why I found it so hard to be the eldest child was that I wasn't supposed to be.

Like me in the first few years of high school, Nico found solace in solitude and chose to stay away from most of the people from Camp Half-blood, until he realized he had unlikely friends there.

And so he decided to give things another go, to start over.

## **SILVERTONGUE MEGGIE**

"It's okay, *'nak*. You can just start over and be anyone you like."

This was what my mom told me whenever I transferred to each of the seven schools I'd been to before college. I took the advice close to heart. For my senior year in high school back in 2012, it took months and a lot of hit-and-miss for 'anyone you like' to mean someone who had actual friends, because for the longest time I had avoided it. I used to think, "Why bother? I'm going to leave this school soon enough anyway."

But when you live in a place where mountains and trees are

replaced by sand dunes and wide roads that stretched for miles, keeping everyone at a distance and shrouding yourself in mystery wasn't very ideal. We had to go to Qatar in 2012 when my parents made up after twenty-two years of separation. I was fourteen.

Everything just felt dormant and stale. I started to lose myself- my identity, my mental health, and my attachment to what was happening in reality. I knew no one apart from my own family, and my relationship with my family at that time wasn't exactly friendly. I had a hard time seeing eye-to-eye with my father, who I barely saw until we moved with him. My mom grew more distant and indifferent to this civil war, too, once more consumed by her new work.

I started acting out. I got jealous of my siblings, who were each a parent's favorite. Our family developed an unspoken agreement that I would always stay in the house whenever the family went out. That way everyone won. The downside was that I was always alone with my crippling thoughts.

*It's okay*, my mom said. In truth, it wasn't. I didn't feel like 'anyone I liked' at all. I was a ghost walking in and out of rooms- there but barely existing, barely living.

So for senior year, I decided to change that, to wiggle out of that shell of mystery, to 'start over' as my mom taught me. I managed to include myself in a circle of friends. Together we formed a sort of weird, reverse Breakfast Club. We were this band of loud, obnoxious geeks who hoarded seven spots out of the class' top ten and whom no one really made fun of because geeks were somehow cool in the desert. Go figure.

Finally, I felt like I belonged somewhere.

They were the ones who reintroduced me to books. We had a year-level competition for the school's Reading Week. Each section was supposed to build a reading nook. Of course, our little group took charge of most of it. Janella, the de facto leader of our group, and Natalie assigned people to bring as many books as they could. Evan let us borrow a spare bookshelf. Dian and Sarah brought a carpet, beanbags, and a bunch of plushies. I took care of the decorations since I had a knack for crafts.

Students from other sections can borrow from each other's nooks. People opted for Harry Potter first, of course, so I never really got introduced to it in book form till much later.

The first book I held in a long time, though, was a book no one grabbed from the nook: *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke. It's a story about a man who could read characters and objects out of books, but never managed to read something out of what he himself wrote.

This ability manifested instead in his daughter, Meggie. She was the only known "silvertongue" who could read things to life out of her own writing because she had such a beautiful imagination.

I liked her. I saw a part of myself in her character, a part I didn't even know I lost. I was reminded of the storybooks I used to read with a childhood friend, who until then had eluded my memory; how the scenes seemed to come to life all around us before we transitioned from reading to roleplaying to relive the stories. It felt as if, for the longest time, I was holding my breath and only now broke the surface.

Meggie sucked me into the world of fiction.

I asked my friends for book recommendations, and what they

liked since I was relatively new to this bookworm thing. They introduced me to Percy Jackson. Everyone fawned over his dorky, rebel antics, especially Natalie, whom I had a huge crush on since the first day of senior year.

I devoured the Percy Jackson books because of her and studied what Percy was like. He had green eyes, windswept hair, and kind of a naive persona. I could never have green eyes so I settled for other things. I grew my hair longer and tried acting smart yet clueless to impress Natalie. Weird and cringe, I know. In a way, though, it worked, if only because I looked stupid, which made Natalie laugh. Natalie said I didn't have to copy Percy for her to like me. Great, I thought, I knew I could never look as great as Percy anyway.

I was actually more like Nico di Angelo from that same book series.

## **UNFAIR BOOK FAIRS**

I've always snarled at the idea of books when I was in elementary school, though. Especially whenever the annual Scholastic Book Fairs happened. Students were given bonus points in some subjects if we bought books from the Fair. My classmates bragged and compared their hauls and the stubs that flaunted their additional grades. I, on the other hand, who only had twenty pesos every day (fifteen if the day was shortened) had to settle for working my ass harder to match the grades they bought.

I guess I associated the presence of printed pages with the kids who were the reason why:

1) I never went near a basketball court since I transferred to Maquiling School in Los Baños at eight, because some of my sporty classmates used to throw a basketball at my head since I wanted to be like Troy Bolton so much. "You'll be fine," they said. "You have all this

fat protecting you like a shield."

2) I stopped wearing my hair up or running it with a comb when was five when I transferred to another Christian School in Brgy. Real, because "Sure, you can be as smart as Jimmy Neutron; you had the same foreheads, anyway."

3) I stopped singing in front of most people when I was four because I *shouldn't* like being a melodious, vibrant, and enthusiastic mermaid like Ariel.

I can't exactly pinpoint when it started, but one day between all that and so much more, I stopped being 'anyone I liked' like my mom told me and opted to be someone people can't entirely figure out. I started talking less and controlled the expressions that once had been so plain to read on my face. I put on this cloak of mystery around myself to keep everyone at a distance.

What's interesting was my classmates seemed to drink up the facades I made. So I banked on that. Sometimes obscurity is a comfort zone. I put it on when I started high school in Letran and when I transferred to Tagaytay City Science National High School the following year.

## **STORYBOOK BEGINNINGS**

Some studies say all kids start crafting their identities by introjecting ideas and attitudes from their parents, or at least parental figures. Growing up, I never got to experience that. My dad was absent for the first fourteen years of my life. My mom did what she could, hopping from one job to another that offered a better salary that could support me, my two younger siblings, and her parents. She was more used to being an office girl. Back then, Daddy Bing, my vibrant grandfather, had also worked as a van driver in a terminal in Balibago. I've always been under the care of Nanay Mely, Daddy Bing's wife, but



she never really liked kids much; she simply left me to watch cartoons or look at pictures in storybooks while imprisoned in my crib.

I guess since I was a kid, I didn't really mind. I was busy being too curious about everything. I've always brought them pride by being a quiet, 'behaved' little ball of fluf (who, occasionally had *the worst* temper tantrums).

If not for relatives, kids could learn about themselves by making friends. But then I never really had a stable set of friends for the most part, except for my six friends from Qatar and this little boy whom I consider my first-ever friend.

He lived across the street from our house and used to climb down the nine-foot wall of soil that distinguished the wealthier part of the neighborhood where his house stood, from our part of the subdivision where the two-story houses fit snugly side by side. Since I can remember, we played together every afternoon and read the storybooks I grew up with. We even were seatmates in the subdivision's Daycare center.

We were inseparable. He made me promise we'd be classmates till we graduated elementary school. Of course, three-year-old me agreed.

But then my mom transferred me to another preschool after my first year in Daycare, and this little boy, who I considered my best friend, stopped talking to me when I invited him to read storybooks with me on the first day of classes.

From that moment, hence, my mom made me transfer schools whenever she felt like I wasn't getting the right education she paid for. I've hopped schools the way she hopped jobs. She just wouldn't stop

chasing the next best thing, which meant I never really got the chance to make actual friends, much less best friends.

I never touched my storybooks again for the majority of the following years because they reminded me so much of the friends I had lost. I didn't want to be anywhere near printed pages. I didn't want to be reminded so much of what I'd lost.

## **BE ANYONE YOU LIKE**

*It's okay. You can start over and be anyone you like,* my mom always told me. I realize I only took half this advice to heart. I always knew how to start over and over countless times, but only now am I starting to realize what it means to *'be anyone you like.'*

What kind of person do I want to be? I don't completely know yet. But I'm learning how to make my own garments, to start from scratch, or at least take bits and pieces from the things in my wardrobe of identities that will match and will speak for me.

I went back to school and actually pursued a degree program that would make Meggie, the girl who writes magic, proud (I'm a writing major in the UP Los Baños Communications Arts program). I'm painstakingly slowly patching things up with my parents and siblings. I'm accepting that brokenness is not equal to worthlessness. And when something doesn't work, I remind myself: *It's okay. I can just start over and be anyone I like.*

It's a process, but I'm getting there. I want to go back to that little kid who had a constant look of wonder in his eyes and who had a friend he hasn't lost yet.

I still see that boy whenever I go back to Calamba on weekends,

but I still haven't gotten the chance to talk to him again. Maybe one day. If ever that happens, I can't wait to tell him stories I'll pull out from the wardrobe of multiple selves I've lived.

# For Peacock to Peacock



**BY: ANZA PUTRI**

# A Note from the Artist:

**For Peacock to Peacock** is about a message for you who are want to build your character but still don't know where and what supposed to be. And you can see the peacock standing very strong and brave in the environment. This artwork wants to tell you about you have to build confidence and stand outside the world and face what happens in the future with creative and innovative like their colorful fur.



# I Miss It

BY: ANNIE MARCELINO

# Author Biographies:

(in order of appearance)

**Saturn Browne** (she/they) is a writer from New England. Her work appears in *SoFloPoJo*, *Gone Lawn*, *Eunoia Review*, and more. She is the inaugural Connecticut Youth Poet Laureate and an Adroit 2023 mentee in poetry. Her debut chapbook, *BLOODPATHS*, was published in April with Kith Books. She loves A24 films, matcha, flowers, and the mountains in their hometown of Nanning, China.

**Luke Tan** is a 16 year old writer/photographer from New Jersey. In his free time he enjoys scrolling through eBay for bad vintage camera deals that he will never buy, and he hopes you have a nice day!

**Alyssa Wong** (she/her) identifies as Hoa Cantonese and aroace. She is 17 and a junior in the Bay Area, California. Her writing and art has appeared in Scholastic Arts & Writing, Bluefire 2021, the Zoetic Tapestry Project "Reconnect" Gallery, and more. Outside of writing and art, she loves cooking breakfasts worth waking up for. You can find more of her work @dragonfruitworlds on Instagram or [alyssaportfolio.com](http://alyssaportfolio.com).

**Bella Majam** (15) is a student at the Philippine High School for the Arts. When she's not writing, she can be found printing cat stickers or curating Mitski playlists. You can find her @beclaurr on Instagram.



# Halu

# Author Biographies:

(in order of appearance)

**Raphael Luis J. Salise** is a Creative Writing graduate from the University of the Philippines Mindanao. He likes to read poems, essays, and fiction by Filipino authors as he someday aspires to become successful like them. Raph is currently balancing law and literature as he studies at Silliman University College of Law in Dumaguete City. At 24, Raph still has so much to see and so much more to give.

**Hanin Ramadhani** (any pronouns) is a 23-year-old writer based in Indonesia. Their works have appeared in Trash to Treasure Lit, Unstamatic Magazine, and Asam/Garam. Besides writing, they enjoy experimenting with make-up, headbanging to metalcore songs, and (occasionally) cooking. Find them on Instagram/Twitter: @mortalpoems.

**Poch Saldana** is a 23-year-old, non-binary sociology student from the Philippines who currently resides in drizzly Portland, OR! When they're not working on a new writing project, Poch often spends their time learning about the culture and importance of "play" in our modern world.

**Kay Lee** is a tenth-grader attending Korea International School in Seoul, South Korea. She is currently putting together her writing portfolio and was recently accepted into Juniper's Young Writers Program.



# Halo



# Author Biographies:

(in order of appearance)

**Brianna Ifland** is a half-Filipino Creative Writing/Multimedia Production student at the University of Arkansas. Despite burning through many middle school Lisa Frank journals, Brianna began to write seriously through high school playwriting. She's since been featured at the Arkansas New Play Festival and Fellows for Two, and is set to have her work in Paper Crane Journal. Brianna is also passionate about film, theatre, and radio.

**Jake (16)** is an aspiring writer and a high schooler from the Philippines. When he isn't too busy in school, he's writing all his WIPs simultaneously in front of his laptop. He currently has that ever-growing pile of books to read, beautiful scenery to capture in pictures, and stars to reach. The world's your oyster, kid.

**Theo Itchon** is a poet from the Philippines, working as a creative writing teacher to the Filipino youth. Their poems have been published in Thimble Lit Magazine, Eunoia Review, Unbroken Journal, and others. Talk to them on Instagram @theoitchon.

**Gershom Mabaquiao** is a 25-year-old writer from the Philippines. He earned his bachelor's degree in Communication Arts from the University of the Philippines Los Baños. His works have been published in Tint Journal, Inquirer Young Blood, Adelaide Literary Journal, The Unconventional Courier, and Circles Magazine. In his free time, he collects and reads books, tries one new thing each week, and work being a better advocate for people like him who are queer, living with HIV, and battling mental health issues.

# Journal

# Artist Biographies:

(in order of appearance)

**Xavier Lorenzo Victoriano**, or Enzo or Xavier for short, is 23 years old and currently residing in Manila, Philippines. He is a proud graduate of De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde with a degree in Export Management. He has just started taking photography seriously 1 year ago, nevertheless, it has been such an insightful and fun process to bring beauty through captured memories. In his creative journey so far, he has been immensely blessed to have been featured in an Italy-based photographer's magazine entitled "Forgotten Films" and have been featured by a collective called Reorient Art as their featured artist in IG. His hope is that through the photos he takes he can bring out the charm of things that are often overlooked and show how things that are so simple could bring so much uncut beauty to others. His photos and videos can be found through his IG (@en.soy) and tiktok (@ensoy\_).

A plethora of pieces strung together; **Gunika** is an ambitious seventeen-year-old, a voracious reader and an enthusiastic painter. Her works are inspired by her life experiences, the books she reads, and the music she listens to. Her head is always filled with an ocean of thoughts, bizarre ideas and random facts.

**Daniela Lorraine M. Brutas** (brutas.danielalorraine@gmail.com), also known as 'Raine' is an aspiring classic romance novelist and contemporary artist. She was immersed in the beauty of writing through purposive storytelling. Raine also enjoys acrylic painting. She often finds herself painting from inspiration in her dreams dedicating pieces to her own life. Most of Raine's works are heavily influenced by this expression of the subconscious mind from life's usual predicaments. She is also the author of the blog, Clouds&Raine-A Dreamer's Space (<https://theyourlifeonthego.wordpress.com/>).

Issue

# Artist Biographies:

(in order of appearance)

**Ellaijah Mae T. Amado**, twenty-four, lives in Central Luzon Bulacan and is very much passionate about creating visuals that focus on telling a story. He is also passionate about summer vibes and sunny energies.

**Luke Tan** is a 16 year old writer/photographer from New Jersey. In his free time he enjoys scrolling through eBay for bad vintage camera deals that he will never buy, and he hopes you have a nice day!

**Annie Marcelino** is a 16 year old junior based in the Bay Area in California. She is Filipino-Korean, and her art is heavily influenced by her culture (seen in sampaguitas or mugunghwa sprinkled in her pieces). As a junior, her mind is usually on college/common high-school stresses, and she likes to reflect this transitional period in her artwork as well.

**Anza Putri** is a 24 year old from West Java, Indonesia. She is interested in art and design, but sometimes she likes musical theatre and poetry (not much but). Her favorite Indonesian poet is Chairil Anwar.

# Issue II



# HaluHalo Journal

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