



Oct. 2023

ISSUE III

HalutHalo Journal

FOREWORD

Dear reader,

It was around this time last year that HaluHalo Journal was born, and perhaps fittingly so. Autumn is a season of rebirth and contemplation, gratitude and community. In creating HaluHalo Journal, we hoped to carve a space where the thoughts of young minds could flow without restraint, where their dreams could be fully visualized in words and images.

Now, our editors span countries and oceans, representing the unique thoughts of Southeast Asian writers and artists across the globe. They are truly the backbone of this issue; without the thoughtful criticism of our poetry, prose, and art editors, this issue could not have been created. But we also thank our readers, our submitters, and most of all, our contributors. Their writing and art have touched us deeply, offering an introspective glimpse into their Southeast Asian cultures.

In “apology fruit,” Robina Nguyen offers a nuanced perspective into Asian family-oriented culture, while in “XII. (as slow as possible),” March Abuyuan-Llanes explores their identity in the heart of Cubao. Alex Romero depicts an intimate intergenerational relationship in the poem “Lola,” and Tony Pan colors a striking landscape in “white umbrella.” These pieces represent only a handful of the wonderful collection that has brought Issue III to life.

Issue III is pensive, but most of all, heartfelt. As you read this issue, allow yourself to feel a wide expanse of emotions, and be true to yourself, always.

Much love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial letter.



COVER ARTIST SPOTLIGHT:

Errizqi Dwi C

Errizqi Dwi C, or usually called Erriz, is an Illustrator based between Jakarta and Bogor, Indonesia. His work mainly consists of editorial illustration. He also has a keen interest in Art, Journalism, and Science. When not working, he enjoys listening to K-pop, reading manga, and looking at cute cats on the internet.

The cover piece is titled *Rafflesia*.

“*Rafflesia* represents our uniqueness, our differences, how we can still be a part of a bigger world in spite of everything. Just like how a rafflesia fits in and survives in the wild.”

It is a flower that is only found throughout Southeast Asia.

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Atlas stirs in his sleep

BY: LAWRENCE DIASNES

He stirs in his sleep beside you, and in your wakefulness you pretend to be a professor giving a lecture on his topography. In the half-light he is rendered down to a genre of abstraction, and so you explain him as a silhouette of a giant buried in a shallow grave, or perhaps a pimple on the skin of the earth, perilously close to a cystic eruption.

You do think of him as a giant, in many ways. For one, he seems to have one foot on the past and another on the future. The bulk of him on the sheets is an undeniable landmark of the world's grievances. His hair is an overgrowth—an unkempt garden—of every species of warfare. *Just two weeks ago another lawyer was shot dead in Cebu*, he told you yesterday. *And some men were refugees for about a hundred feet until they fell off from the plane they were holding on to.* You don't know why he cares so much about these things, or why he seems to want you to care about them as well. He grinds his teeth, mumbles something incoherent, but you don't bother to lean in and understand. You're convinced that he speaks multiple languages in his sleep. And it's true, for in one of his dreams he speaks the jargon of underpaid nurses declaring their resignation.

He stirs, and you wonder why he can't always be like this: just spread out on the bed, flat and mute and unfenced as a virgin field of study, your area of expertise. You remember that all over his back is an archipelago of dark spots, lessons in bullet form on his body's geography. *From here to here*, he lectured you once, *is an avenue that used to be the namesake of a dictator's father.* Here is a sculpture of a disembodied arm that memorializes a general who led a rebellion against the Spaniards. *This is the coastal road where the body of an unidentified woman was found early one morning; hands zip-tied, mouth gagged, eyes blindfolded, no signs of rape.* And here is an island of people who can remember a time when *super typhoon* and *storm surge* still didn't sit well on local tongues.

You survey his neck. It's barren, you think, so you plant a kiss there. He stirs yet again. The silhouette of his shoulder juts out like a headland, perhaps one that is in danger of collapse, eroded by the relentless ebb and flow of time and history. The dog whimpers on the floor, and you begin to wonder if they're charting the same nightmares. What are you missing out on? You try to observe him more closely, but in the dark he is more ambiguous than usual, an open ending that is up for your interpretation.

Tomorrow, you promise yourself, as you have promised yourself many times before, you will begin to navigate his deserts, set fire to the greater regions of this mystery: must he carry the weight of the world on his shoulders? Or is it the heavens that he has condemned himself to bear? You can't remember for certain. But you're pretty sure that this world is a burden as great as the skies.

Tomorrow, perhaps at breakfast, you will begin to meet him halfway, profess your love to him, ask him to pardon your indifference, forgive all your misconceptions. But for now, your hands don't make a move to massage the pinched nerves beneath the skin of his dissatisfactions. Instead, you go back to sleep, facing the wall.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lawrence Diasnes is a 24 year-old frustrated writer from the Philippines. He enjoys reading short story collections by dead writers and has a habit of jotting down overheard scraps of conversation.





white umbrella

BY: TONY PAN

Can I see you in Spring?

BY: KRISTA OREJUDOS

underneath the heavy
blue sky like damp water
pressed onto a canvas,
the brush cracks a yoked
sunset, melting scenic hills,
grassy leaves, and
brown earth tones with
muted pastels around
my eyes.

yellow eyeliner floats
around the white clouds
above the gazes of many eyes
belonging to lovers, to
children, to parents, to you,
and I,

and I.

almost color my throat
black with a gray cliché,

*“the sky looks
like a painting”*

is not how i want to
describe spring when
spring is its own shade
of color.

like the wistful
cherry blossoms, have it be
as warm as the
first time we held hands
at the sunflower field
inside the moonlit room where
we said hello and waved goodbye
to an old portrait of us.

scrub,
scrub,
scrubbing,
away my imagination of you

with a pink beauty blender,
the bruised blemishes of last winter and the
previous presences of march,
april, and may, split apart
from the imagined reality and
the reality we live in.

they paint into a faraway
fever dream like the one that
i had been promised to experience love
like no other since last spring.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Krista Orejudos is 20 years old and is a rising senior at the University of Washington; she is currently studying English: Creative Writing with a minor in Diversity. Her works encompass many themes of intersectionality of her Filipino American life and she tries to include nuances of Asian American experiences for her readers to relate to or for them to experience from a new perspective. You can find her poems at the University of Washington's Asian American organization, Homeroom, and she hopes to continue writing for herself as well as have a career in publishing to help uplift the voices of BIPOC communities. You can follow her instagram accounts @krista_orejudos and @whatsonkristasmindpodcast.



Lola

BY: ALEX ROMERO

Lola believed in heaven, maybe because she prayed and went to Sunday Mass all her life, but she believed she was invited there. I never paid much attention in church. Still, I prayed that I would be invited, too. I was sure Lola would make it to heaven after she died, but I was still afraid to exist on Earth without her. The other night, I woke up in cold sweat praying that she would live forever. I was so swamped with anguish that I could choke on it. When I called Lola, she instructed me to look at the moon. And so the stars revealed themselves one by one and there it was—the moon. If something should be called holy, this is it. *Are you looking na?* she said. *Yes Lola, I'm looking,* I said. *Good, now listen to me, anak. We are looking at the same moon, and we will always look at the same moon, no matter where I am.* Struck by a yearning so deep, that from here on out, I am no longer able to see the moon, no longer able to say goodnight, without thinking of Lola. Before hanging up, Lola reminded me never to fear death, because one day, we will meet again in heaven. I asked her, *Can we meet on the moon instead?*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex Romero (25) is a native of Queens, New York. After earning his BA from Sarah Lawrence College, he taught English in a fishing village in the northwest of France. In 2022, he was awarded the Matt Leone Fellowship at Colgate University. He is a 2023 Lambda Literary Emerging LGBTQ Voices Fellow. His short story, "Our Little Manila," was selected by Tia Clark as a finalist for the Plentitudes Prize in Fiction. He was also long-listed for Uncharted Magazine's Novel Excerpt Contest. His short fiction, essays, and poetry appear or are forthcoming in Drunk Monkeys, Maudlin House, Mister Magazine, BULLSHIT LIT, Treehouse Literary Review, and The Coachella Review, among other publications. A former reader for Taco Bell Quarterly, he is a staff writer for Surging Tide Magazine. He has received support from Tin House, the Southampton Writers' Conference, the Joseph F. McCrindle Foundation, Key West Literary Seminar, the Jane Hoppen Residency at Paragraph, the de Groot Foundation, the Unterberg Poetry Center, and more. He is completing his MFA in creative writing at Columbia University, where he was appointed as a Chair's Fellow. He is at work on a short story collection. He lives in New York City.



Shape

BY: KOO HUI RU

Disguised by simple things,
the world starts to exist for the moment
Outside, the kids are playing with the tapestry of the rain
twisting their wisp of hope
into the shape of this dream
Inside, words that can spin the earth are lying flat
waiting to be filled with mundane experiences
A new beginning is worn by this body
who walked through the door to touch the dream
It has fallen asleep
On this shapeless existence

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Koo Hui Ru is a 25-year-old Malaysian who writes in Mandarin and English. Her Mandarin short stories have been published on Wen Yi Chun Qiu. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in English Literature.



“Sakay! Aalis na! Aandar na!”

BY: DANIELA LORRAINE BRUTAS



The baby bus, also known as mini bus is considered “King of The Road” in Cavite. This cultural symbol of the province are the most popular and affordable means of public transportation. This eye-catching and colorful vehicle with flashy and vibrant accesories can be seen plying through the busy streets of Cavite City, Naic, Rosario, Kawit, Noveleta, and of course, my hometown, Bacoor. Unlike traditional jeepneys, baby buses can take in more passengers up to 30 people.

XII. (as slow as possible)

BY: MARCH ABUYUAN-LLANES

Cubao, I am killing myself
 trying to make
 a monastery of you. (Here
&impossibly human–) Your
 tricycles &processions,
your stray dogs &their songs–
Mercy me. In this hour
 of hours (impossibly hallowed)–
 I speak to the Lord,
 &Listen to the birds,
 &catch myself dying
 again &again.

I say: I know, as your child,
 I was born in destruction's way–

But look at me:

 How dare I survive
 as slowly
 as this? Immolation after
immolation: my days held
 between every attempt
 at greatness &at death.

 Hold me. I am nothing
 but a child,
 19, &kissing pain.

I've been praying
 the rosary
 everyday
 &living everyday
like a rosary.

Protracted
as a poem,
(protracted
as a war.)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

March Abuyuan-Llanes is a self-taught 19-year-old poet from Quezon City, Philippines. Fixated on contradiction, locality, and the occult, they write poetry, divine visions, and fanfiction about death/desire, imperialism, and gender. They have work in surfaces.cx, Ilahás Literary Journal, Olney Magazine, and elsewhere. They edited LIGAW anthology, an anthology zine of militant poetry from emerging LGBTQ+ poets from the Philippines. They dream of one day playing a Vivaldi recorder concerto for their friends after the revolution. You may follow them on Twitter and Instagram @magmartsa and find more of their work on magmartsa.neocities.org/writing.html.



Nothing good ever happened on December 7th

BY: GAYLE DY

First there were the bombs

on the morning of 1941

no amount of smoke signals

rising from the ashes would be enough to overturn

the fleets poised to create ruin

Agamemnon once said that truth is the first

casualty of war but what ever happened to spirits once they die?

i'm afraid my sins cancel out

what if there are bad people in heaven

the one good deed I did this week

like the evil men of Sodom & Gomorrah?

Daddy says don't be gay but support men who do crimes

i've long since stopped listening

to what old men like Larrybird,

born on the same day as me

have 2 say i wish i shared a birthday w/ Ladybird instead

thinking she was in luv w/ someone

who turned out 2 be gay

so that's one common denominator we have

can't say much for Imelda Marcos,

who was stabbed by an assailant

with a bolo this day in '72

calling it her second lease of life, i wonder if i'll

be lucky to be given the chance

to fuck the world over twice

also, a great many earthquakes rumbled &

so begun uprisings & war & death—all that fun stuff

but in 2001, a girl was born legend says that her mother,
holding the baby grenade for the first time already knew
how much of an explosion she would make

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gayle Dy is a Chinese-Filipino poet and aspiring filmmaker from the Philippines. She is a graduate of Creative Writing from Ateneo de Manila University and is the author of the chapbook, God Save The Girl. She loves nature walks, picnics, books, and Greta Gerwig amongst other things.



indian culture



BY: LUA SHEEN

apology fruit

BY: ROBINA NGUYEN

her pruned hands tremble,
milky, salt tears curdling and
dampening the crushed
blood oranges
beneath her stained fingertips
with calloused,
weathered fingers
she offers
me cold-cut
plums from

the cracked, plastic
cooler
they're her
apologies i think, as
i squeeze the
plump, purpled flesh
until juice slicks
my pink palms
and
when the refrigerator lights
flicker on, i taste
the dampness of her
regret
it's my mother's
language,
the clean slice of
her kitchen knife
filling the

ilent spaces between
my ribcage
but the ripe
fruits do not
fill the sweet void of
“i’m sorry”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robina Nguyen (she/her) is a Toronto-based student and the current Editor-in-Chief of The Outland Magazine. Her work is featured or forthcoming in Shameless Magazine, Ambré Magazine, The Los Angeles Times, Disobedient Magazine and West End Phoenix among others. She loves to paint, haunt local bookstores and argue about the Oxford comma.



An Ode to Staying Inside

BY: CAILEY TIN

what nobody talks about / breaking away from your shell / are the insides. / the insides are home / the roof leaks and my tongue / licks the sky's spits of rain / the familiar taste of unpurified water. / the maintenance inflation rate skyrockets / every five days / but in none of them do my showers have hot water.

every day I scrub my skin on ice, praying / that it melts and the red scratch marks it leaves can bury itself / burrow from the cold./ hibernate and never be a result of hardened icicles / from shower heads again. / my legs jitter but my teeth never chatter. / my neck stays bent and dry. / I haven't washed my hair in months / I don't keep any left. / I don't know what type of water / is ricocheting inside my stomach / but it's hard to thirst for more / when I'm being poured down with something / to drink.

every night I lay on the floor / and think of the surfaces / I haven't scratched. / I've grown so used to being paralyzed / it hurts to move. / it's not difficult to break / into this shell / but a thief's burden is always / coming out. / I don't know what my head will look like. I don't know what I will be / without this dirty scalp / wasting away.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cailey Tin (she/her) is a Southeast Asian-based staff writer and podcast co-host at The Incandescent Review, columnist at Paper Crane Journal, and Incognito Press. Her work has been published in Fairfield Scribes, Alien Magazine, Cathartic Lit, and more. When not writing, she can be found reading about the global economy or shamelessly watching cartoons on Netflix. Visit her Instagram @itscaileynotkylie.



To Atis,

BY: EURI CARREON

Sweet stricken fruit
of knowledge, neither
revokes the need
to seek a thing of citrus.

Better yet, find it near
galleons of old Manila
in a platter; fractured
at the kitchen in a ceramic
bowl—can never be linked
with tints of summer's rust.

The taste: pale flesh
and adolescence
fresh off tropicality.

On variations:
the threats of falling branches,
epitaphs of broken arms,

now an autopsy of childhood
history.

Now you see it's arabesque
suckled black seeds of

kinship longing. Poisonous
seeds, fragrant foliage
of ripen memories.

Arrest your hands in mine
as I whisper to your mouth,
 an anecdote of coiled bodies,
by virtue of green pearls,
 sop of sap, an antidote
to soft bruising—So to recap,

Take a bite, slice, do it gently,
 and remind ourselves; the coming

of no winter, without ache.

After Sappho

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Euri Carreon was born and raised in Bulacan, Philippines. He is a 19-year-old undergraduate pursuing a BA in Comparative Literature at the University of the Philippines Diliman.



Reborn in Gemini

BY: NIDA MUBARAKI

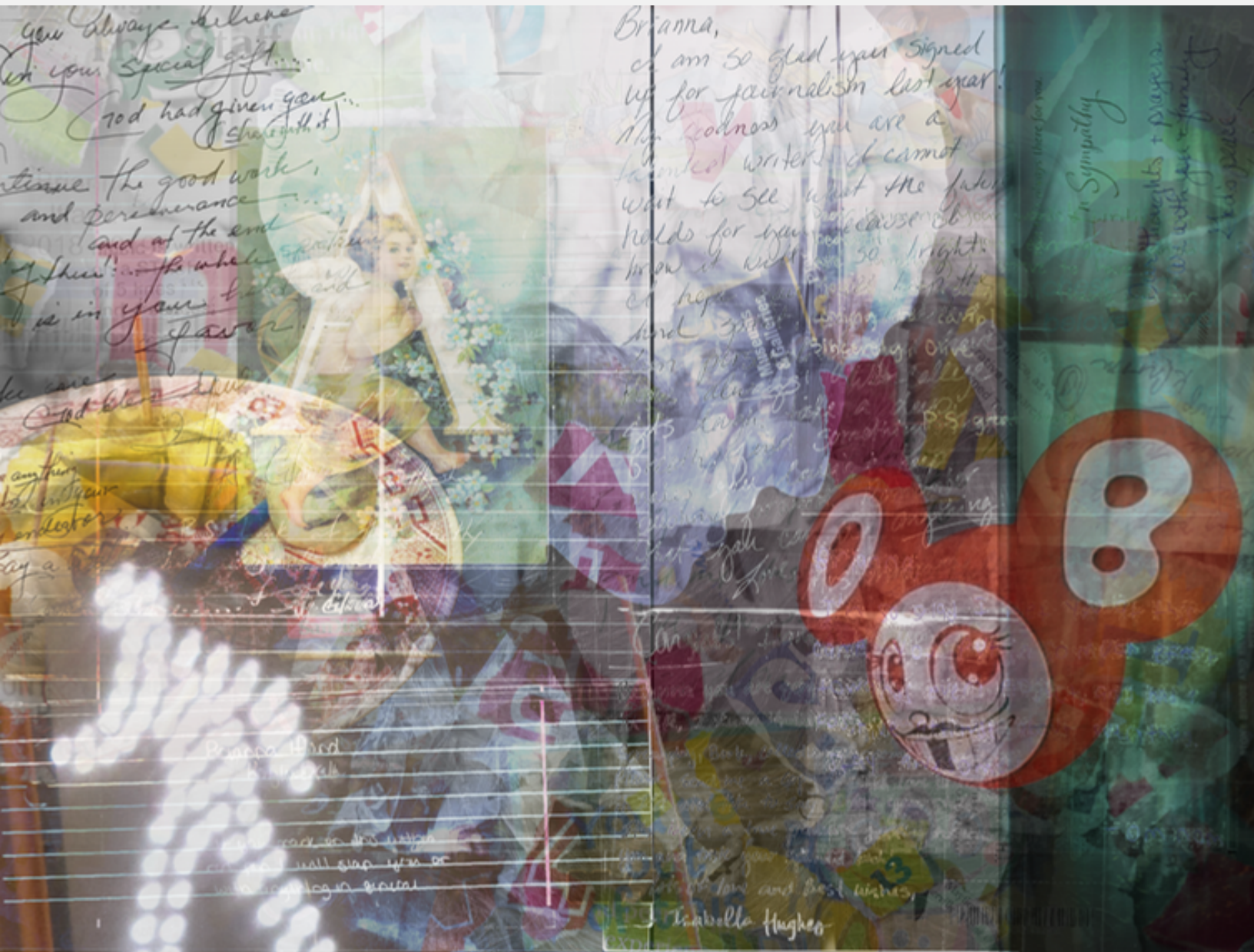
The weeks since I had my last summer sunset outside had stacked like books at the New York Public Library's wooden shelves, all dusty and lost in translation like a memory from a past life of sorts. It was the first June in years where I could drink lemonade and it meant nothing more than a tart liquid in a plastic cup, a s'more or two at the bonfire, a little bit of conversational sugar to bide the time without sweat or stomachaches. The blazing sun nor the embers dancing at my bare feet caused me much inconvenience—do I no longer cry at every inconvenience? Do I no longer wish for a world more tender, more warm? The world is warm enough, and I am bathed instead of smothered in it. Today the birds sing no more about all the worries and the cookies from the winter (did they taste good? I create, but I never indulge) but instead about the little something else about me that everyone seems to love. Maybe I'm not loved for my hard mind or my soft body, but there's the thing, the all of it, the facetious sweet quirk of me that only comes aglow on Fridays like these. Today taught me that, and also that sugar is not unforgiving, but simply just sweet. The only thing that sugar is meant to be is sweet. Tomorrow I, too, will learn to be like sugar.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nida Mubarak (she/her) is an Asian-American obsessive writer, reader, actress, and singer based in Central New Jersey and Philadelphia, though her ancestry dominantly hails from the vale of Kashmir. Her work, which stretches from poetry to plays to prose, tends to be the tiniest bit autobiographical, with concentrations on girlhood and the human experience. Her work has been recognized numerous times by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She works as a senior editor, Twitter head, and contributor for The Empty Inkwell Review. When she isn't pressing her pen to paper, you can find her performing onstage, writing film reviews on Letterboxd, baking vegan pastries for her friends, or reading in her room curled up with her cats and a cup of coffee. Email her at nidamubarak@gmail.com or find her on Twitter (@pennedbynida).



From the Bin



BY: BRIANNA DELIMA IFLAND

MOTHER DEEREST

BY: QUINN HUANG

My headphones successfully block all the construction noise of Washington Heights outside, but not the voices living in my head. They're a chorus of songs I've never heard before in languages I don't speak. They speak of people whose names are foreign to me, perhaps picked out of random pages from Nai Nai's old telephone book. They show me stories of rickshaws and markets open only on Sundays and laughter shared over Chinese New Year meals.

These voices grow too loud, a deafening cacophony that renders me paralyzed. When they do, the accompanying images aren't the sepia-tinted, nostalgia-infused family album pictures of a warm dinner table or a newborn baby's first time coming home. It's black and white and marred with static lines, haphazard and crackling, transporting me into a world that exists only in my head, that feels too real to be plain imagination. Invisible monsters gnaw on my emotions and turn me into a hollow person until it chooses to subside. They always come with a sharp stab in my stomach. Always freaks my boyfriend but whenever I petrify and stop blinking for a couple seconds.

These horrendous horrors started nearly a year ago, becoming wilder as I'm nearing my twenty-eighth birthday on the next sunrise. Every day they come and go whenever they want, oftentimes as a rude awakening in the middle of my sleep. Midnights are filled with banshee screeches and stabbing pain under the skin of my stomach. Under those circumstances, there's only one thing I could do: grab my tin of graphite chinks and art paper. Moonlight illuminates my tiny desk and guides my fingers as the images pounce out of my head and spill onto the sheets. No one believes me when I say I'm not an artist, telling me the sketches strung up around this corner of our small brownstone beg to differ. People call me ridiculous when I say my hands take a life of its own once my fingers are wrapped around those chinks. I never mean it as a metaphor.

Pushing off my desk, I pull off my headphones and gaze at the hand-drawn enigmas strewn across the walls, as if watching me. Some are fantastical and dark. Like my most recent, where the black graphite shrouds the paper like dense plumes of smoke.

MOTHER DEAREST (cont.)

But jagged tendrils make it unmistakably recognizable as fire. Flames shoot upward, licking up fourteen finless koi. Or this one, an emerald deer without its front legs prancing among tall wild grass next to two headless tigers conjoined by their rears submerged halfway in black water.

Others are more lifelike—a busy farmer’s market, a congested intersection, or a warung with its curtains drawn. But there’s always an unsettling aura emanating from the disorderly lines of these realistic drawings. The market stalls are empty, cars lie overturned across the busy streets, and a broken plank obstructs the only entrance of the warung.

None of these are the Philly streets I grew up on; I recognize them as Jakarta from the pictures Papa showed me, where he and Mama came from. The city where Papa’s favorite nasi goreng was, where Mama gave birth to me. The city that rises the same time the sun does but doesn’t sleep when the moon is out. That bustles with life and burning passion.

The city where Mama’s soul lives on even though her body doesn’t.

Who knows her even though her child doesn’t, because the city killed her first in the wake of its darkest moment for our people.

I never knew what she looked like. The stories she would’ve told to put me to sleep died with her when Papa boarded that plane with nothing but his only baby and the clothes off his back. He never told me how Mama died, and that’s probably best for both of us. After all, we don’t find life among the dead.

Climbing back into bed, I reply to Dad’s text confirming his visit in the morning. After I turn my phone off, I try to sleep. The moment I close my eyes, a soft breeze tickles my skin, licking the crevices between my toes. Despite the sweltering summer, the breeze is cool. Cold, even, like smoke from dry ice. All my windows are tightly shut, too, a habit Papa nurtured since my childhood. “So the looters can’t get in, right?” I kept on telling him nonchalantly. But he never liked me saying that.

I put a sweater on, but no amount of fabric can wick off the cold. Goosebumps run up and down my skin as the icy mist swirling under my skin swells. As if it’s coming from inside me.

MOTHER DEAREST (cont.)

Tension squeezes its talons around my chest, and I writhe, buck my back, gasp for air. I try to scream, but with the air knocked out of my lungs, I can't reach my voice. Gritting my teeth, I push upward with whatever strength I could muster. My nails dig into the skin on my palms, hard enough to draw blood, but not strong enough to break the surface.

Then I'm catapulted upwards, sitting up straight. My stomach churns with the threat of vomit. I swallow the bile that rises to the back of my throat. It's happening again. The voices, a thunderstorm of crackling static and cataclysmic uproar, more violent than ever.

Fighting past the paralysis, I leap into my desk chair. Despite the obstinate quiver of my hands, they manage to tightly grip the graphite chalk. It disappears into my fist, manifesting as scraggly black lines slicing and splitting the sheets of yellow paper splayed on the desk as my hands glide over them. I beat my own allegations of not being an artist as a face takes form—misshapen head, horror-filled eyes, lips frozen in a scream for help.

A single continuous beep occupies the hollow of my skull. My head throbs with the squall of angry mobs, turning the frost inside me into a searing burn. Heat blooms across my skin. Like a knife slashing my flesh, sharp pain twists my stomach. No matter how much I wince or try to scream, this pandemonium doesn't end.

Phantasmic memories of a dystopian city cloud my mind. Smoke rising from unfinished skyscrapers stings my eyes, the rancid smell of burning rubber punctures my nostrils. A primal fear grapples my chest as I draw skeletons of cars with broken windows and missing tires, burning buildings, and Chinese grocery stores being looted. Crying mothers holding their crying children for dear life as men run around them with sticks and batons. Streets cry from under piles of debris and ashes. A tsunami of people crashes against cops in brown uniforms. Anarchy like I've never experienced but seem to remember vividly.

My fingers drag across the mental images I've transferred onto the paper. Bedlam melts under my fingertips, swirling into ghosts of this imagination that transcends reality, this memory that breaks the threshold of cognition.

I clutch my head as the uproar in my head swells. When I open my mouth to scream, a high-pitched shriek comes out. It isn't my voice. I scramble to my vanity and meet a reflection with bloodshot eyes. But that isn't me.

MOTHER DEAREST (cont.)

It's a beautiful Chinese woman. Round cheeks, wavy hair in a messy bun, a thin wisp of scarlet streaming down the corner of her lips. Misshapen head, horror-filled eyes, lips frozen in a scream for help. I collapse to the floor with tears running down my cheeks, the twisting stab in my stomach intensifying. I curl into a fetal position as I clutch myself, as if on the precipice of death.

My apartment door barrels open. I look up and see my boyfriend stumbling in, what I suppose was meant as my neatly wrapped surprise gift freefalling from his hand. My dad totters in behind him. "Robin, what's going on?"

"The woman," I pant. A familiar stranger—a face I've never seen, but her memories latch onto mine.

Outside, the indigo sky has been replaced by a mellow blue, the sun replacing the haunt of the moon's silver. Papa helps me up from one side as Antonio props my shoulder from the other. Antonio tends to me, wrapping me in his real arms and trying to return my own memories to me. Usually it works, but right now, it doesn't.

Then Papa sits beside me, last night's drawing in his hand. His tears blot the paper.

"That's her, isn't it?" I ask. "May 14, 1998. She was stabbed in the stomach. That's why we came here."

"She was twenty-eight when she died." Papa's eyes are a mix of horror and wonder. "She was a brilliant artist."

This is impossible. My heart gallops with the realization, my chest tightening. I look at myself in the mirror again. The woman screams back at me, and I'm not me anymore.

Because how can you remember something you didn't experience?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Quinn Huang (they/them) is a 22-year-old writer whose stories act as a love letter to their intersecting Chinese and queer cultures. They're still in their California era despite relocating back to their hometown of Jakarta, Indonesia, where they're planning their next big adventure—albeit fictional ones. When they're not writing, they can be found at a coffee shop somewhere chugging down a large iced coffee that makes them walk twice as fast as everyone else or wearing a flour-covered apron perfecting their next chocolate chip cookie recipe. Their work has been previously published in BLEACH! Magazine.



My hands to progress

BY: BLAISE DIVATA

Beyond
twenty years
of practicing
love being all
my hands can be
horrible
grand
nothing
precious
It will be
lacking
when I descend
but damn
living
has never been
satisfying
until now
And if now is
the only time
to live
then whatever
forever
could bring is
bearable

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Blaise Divata (they/them) is a 23 year-old, multidisciplinary artist born, raised and based in Iloilo City, Philippines. Other than writing poems, they also love to paint, and write extensive journals. They take great inspiration from nature, the human psyche, and a lot of their own life experience.



that night at izakaya

BY: TONY PAN



thank you for gifting me something I won't make art with

BY: CAILEY TIN

if anything, I was a puzzle board of a flower / missing its stomata / in human form, with only a brain for a heartbeat / I can spell each / gap between my words / like a missing tooth / I haven't stomached any other form of creativity / but I can taste its vacant space / with the decaying thread from the time there was / a loose tooth / I requested for a scissor to stick into my mouth / and cut it off / instead you passed me a box / so bending, I peered in / chest collapsing inward / no; I didn't hold my stature / frail bones and sagged spine / when the lid snapped shut. / now I'm trapped with curiosity / and darkness. / but oh! / this gift feels like a lung, two lungs / feels like mockery / it's my stomata / the missing piece / the placeholder of the vacancy above my ribs but I can't swallow / it's too different from tasting / and this, too small / inexact as felt by my remaining teeth / my bones have expanded / to fill in every hollow room / all the pieces cling together and hold each other's hand / I, growing & growing / thank you for gifting me a mismatched piece / misfitting lungs / this prank taught me lessons of a lifetime that one / art is made from nothing / and two / this tightly shut box instructs me / to keep breathing / nevertheless.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

***Tony Pan** is a 14 year old poet and photographer from New York. He has worked as an associate editor at Aster Lit. He specializes in travel and street photography and likes shooting in details of urban city lifestyle. In his free time, he is either searching for inspiration for his poetry or watching crime scene documentaries.*

***Daniela Lorraine B. 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/>)*

***Lua Sheen** is a 23 year old and from Malaysia. She is a self taught artist and loves to create artwork. Nature, people, emotions and culture inspire her to draw.*

***Brianna DeLima 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.*

HaluHalo Journal

Issue III



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