

# Featured Stories

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## **An Eulogical Panegyric on Voice, Death, and the Death of Voice**

### **Giovanni Ferrari Wolfram**

Hi, ahem, hello everybody. Let me just breathe in and... we'll get right into it.

Thank you to Alicia for translating.

I knew what I would be saying at Alan's funeral from the moment I met him,

The same thought that his scribbled notes had given me at first, and ever since, came to me as soon as he had died.

Here it, um, here it is. The thought.

*How can a deaf guy be so fucking loud?*

Okay, okay stifle the sobbing laughs, you all know what I mean.

Alan never traditionally used his voice, but he never took that as an excuse for silence.

He was willful, and strong, in a way that seemed magnanimously larger than the quick post-it notes he would hand you.

I-I um... Sorry,

I was always impressed by that. He never missed out on the spectrum of human interaction, even though a pretty huge part of it was blown out before he was born

... He would always say, a huge part *for you*.

But he could pass you little jokes that were understood to be between the two of you.

Where his voice failed him, the elasticity of his facial expressions acted as a better supplement than any awkward cough or groan.

God, it's— you know, one year I was determined to take the extra step for us.

I had joined this online forum and I felt ostracized because I didn't know sign language,

How could I be with a deaf guy and not know ASL?

So, I started taking classes, in secret!

Because all of you who knew Alan knew how much he hated “catering,”

That's what he always called it. He would tell me, write to me, don't do that, don't cater for me.

I was always ready to give the spiel and disclaimer to whatever hotel clerk or waiter, but he hated that.

And I was determined,

I was ready and happy to put all this work in.

You know, for the ASL classes

In my mind, the way it was was that I was doing all this *for* him.

I guess, but.

The truth is that he was catering for all of us,

he was forcing and translating himself to be legible,

to be understood.

When I had gotten enough to be able to ask him for simple things, like

can you unclog the drain

and I could contort and distend my hands enough to be read,

to be understood, he just looked sad. And disheartened.

And I said, I said,

I did all this for you, so we don't have to write

You know, you miss a lot when you take the time to write something,

Or read my lips.

What do we miss? He wrote.

I asked him, don't you want to be able to converse with me? Isn't there some incandescent quality to spoken, or gesticulated, conversation?

Isn't there something special, something important about, about...

At this point my hands were shaking too much to write. My brain was shaking too much to think of gestures, or connect them to words. And, I think I turned away or something, like this.

So he couldn't read my lips.

That was the first time I had done something like that.

I had never used the superfluity of my voice in a way to disconnect him from what was being said.

If he couldn't see what I was saying, then I would write it. Same for our friends, his family, my family. I had never turned away like that.

I mean, I still don't, I never will— God, of course I'm crying now—

Was he— was it that he thought he was a burden?

Or, was it more like he wanted to do it all his own way?

I, uh, I r-really hope it was the latter.

...Oh-h...

Ha, err, God, s-see what I mean now? I just keep yammering on. Two loudmouths, we are— were.

The Wednesday after he died, I found his notes.

I remember watching the orange sunset that October evening.

Usually we would have walked down to the beach, sitting on our very own benches that no one else was allowed to use.

Alan had even put signs on it.

I was sitting on that same bench, replacing the vandalized signs as we always did on Wednesdays, whatever time sunset would come.

Alan had had it down to a science.

I walked home from my lonely bench and I went into his office.

I had been, um, sleeping there.

He had this hidden closet in there— why it was embedded into the wall and painted the same color, I do not know.

I think he liked the illusion of confidentiality where mundanity ruled.

But he *did* have a secret: his personal notes.

Not the fleeting ones, that he threw around or crumpled up.

Not like a collection of receipts,

*one large coffee with sugar and no cream for Alan, no point screaming it :)*

He didn't keep those, just like we don't keep our overwhelming assortment of half-thoughts and phrases, the ribbons that wrap up whatever we can point back to as significance and call a life.

Not those ones.

I remember some nights, I'd walk over to him and lightly tap his shoulder. He would, sort of nonchalantly, try to cover up whatever he had been writing,

like an embarrassed teenager, drawing with the unbecoming insecurity of a novice.

I never looked. At what he was writing.

He deserved something, if I could rip away my voice from him, why shouldn't he?

For a few weeks, I refused to open that box. It was filled with looseleaf papers, orange post-it notes and pads of notes. But I hadn't read a word, it felt like, well,

A betrayal.

To do so.

...I know he's gone.

But I can't betray his voice.

His voice that had been gone his entire life. That I had heard, and felt. That had so strongly enveloped me. The same voice that came from nowhere, yet that echoed and shuddered my bones,

So obviously, so clearly, so undeniably.

And to feel that I would be hearing the most intimate, and most final, whimpers of a dead voice. Well, honestly,

It felt overwhelmingly like murdering him.

We met in the linguistics department at University. He was happy that I hadn't made a joke about his condition. I asked him, what condition, being deaf? He said, God no! Being a linguistics student!

That's an old joke for our college buddies.

After my failed attempt to speak within the confines of ASL, we split up for a little while. I was receiving my PhD, he was already teaching. He wrote me a letter. And after hearing his voice again

I was resolved to never lose it again.

I have it right here, the letter, but I'm not going to read it, don't worry.

I'm not a murderer, certainly not a thief.

Not only would I be stealing his voice, but I'd be giving it to you, these aspects of his voice here, they were designated as mine.

He always told me that there's so much more to our voice than what we signify and how it is. That no person's mouth... curled like mine, no erotic movement more pleasurable than my lips flailing to say 'rural.'

Uh-h-h...God, sorry, just one...

Here's how I'll end this embarrassment of my voice.

By stealing another's, one often stolen by Alan himself.

“silence is the language of god,

all else is poor translation” - Rumi

*Giovanni Ferrari Wolfram, a New Yorker now living in Florence, Italy, is a former 4th-grade teacher transitioning into a literary career. As a prospective MFA candidate, his writings reflect a keen interest in human and societal interaction, shaped by his experiences in education and life abroad.*

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## **The Futures That Never Come**

### **Hayley Mah**

This morning's shimmers trickle from the icy sky and pool in the garden, their golden hands gently prying open basil leaves as they thread around the stalks of tomato plants, wrapping Mira's son in warmth against the November chill. Mira watches as her little boy, with his mother's dimples and his father's frown, crouches in the dirt with sticky hands. Grimacing, she plasters another bandage over the cuts and scrapes on his knees, adding to the layers standing out against his dark skin like patchy foundation. She knows he's annoyed by the plastic between his skin and the soil, as though his bones are itching and he can't scratch them, but it has to be done. And in any case, the mess of bandages seems to complete him, a picture of disorderliness with scraped-up knees and Mira's staggered stitching securing the pockets onto his shorts. Crumbs of earth from his dad's side of the garden and his mom's delve into the messy seams, the only place where they will ever embrace. Mira notes the five crayons her son pulls out of these pockets today: an off-brand orange; the last sliver of an earthy green (a result of too many depictions of obnoxiously large trees); a deep red one he received in a Valentine, broken in half from the force of his little fingers; and two from a Crayola set Mira brought home for him, a hot pink and a muted beige. Mira knows he can't read the label of any of them—he's only five, the word “periwinkle” means nothing—and besides, the dampness of soil has seeped into the wrapping too often, causing the paper to warp and peel. The boy selects the green and gets to work sketching his mother's wilted flowers, though there isn't much green to colour. She's glad her son seems to embrace it, but Mira hates to admit she's never been good at keeping flowers alive. She always finds herself watching helplessly as brown creeps up each petal until the flowers look like burnt, dehydrated onions. Nonetheless, she keeps them rooted in her garden, averting her eyes from the kitchen window overlooking it while she wipes down her counters, and hoping, every time she unlatches the gate, that she'll step into flourishing petals again.

However, the garden seems more barren every day, and her husband has decided it's his duty to remind her. A month ago, at the dinner table: “You know, Paul from IT was telling me his wife makes this wonderful cucumber salad from her garden. Imagine that—” he twirled Mira's store-

bought lettuce on his fork “—cucumbers. Right from the garden. They’d probably be perfectly crisp when they’re that fresh—not like the soggy ones from Safeway. Or that banana cake you make when you let the bananas go to rot. Too mushy.” She makes banana bread, not cake. And everyone else loves it—she’s been asked for the recipe so many times that it’s the only post on her Facebook. The only person who refuses it is him. Why does that bother her so much? Two weeks ago, lugging this thought with her, tucking it into her suitcase along with all the others, she left for her hometown of Calgary alone, entertaining the idea of roleplaying her life before her husband, tasting the past and the future in one spoon. It was painfully easy to let her life slip out of her fingertips—night after night of lying awake next to him in bed had given her plenty of time to plan an escape route. Though she doesn’t remember thinking of it in this way when she left, she can see that she did know, even then, that what little trust she had left in him was gone. He checks his watch often but seems chronically late. He changes his mind quickly, forgets every highlighted date in the hallway calendar, and worst of all, he’s a lawyer. The tension peaks in the evenings, so much that she often expects to find scratches in the walls the next morning from the talons unsheathed by the flurries of aggression in their living room. Yes, when she left for Calgary, letting go of that was simple, but grabbing hold of another life wasn’t. For Mira, flying back to her hometown felt a lot like being thirteen and waking up from a sleepover to open the front door to her mother’s face—strikingly unfamiliar yet almost embarrassing after only one night spent away. Cowtown was for Thanksgiving and Christmas, not a place to go running from the life she’d chosen, and stepping onto the plane felt like giving up, like the aged rings of her trunk were rotting, cracking and peeling off. Every night away, she lay precariously near the edge of her queen bed, careful to avoid the centre since that felt like she was taking up the space for two, lying on the shadow of her son.

Yet, while Mira slept in her childhood bed inside the familiar walls of her parents’ house, her PhD suddenly seemed like it could do more than help with spelling homework. She no longer spent her time wiping applesauce off the walls, combing her son’s hair, and googling “how to trick your toddler into taking medicine.” She still didn’t turn off the alarms for 4:57 and 5:01 on her phone (she hasn’t in a decade), but when she woke up, she stretched and watched the sun, instead of listening to the incessant hum of her refrigerator while stuffing a lunch bag with almond butter sandwiches and banana bread. Still, every moment seemed wrapped in the guilt of absence, her ankle unstable and fragile without the weight of her son clinging to her leg, dragging behind her. Gaps between her fingers where those sticky hands no longer intertwined, her wrists felt limp without her son pulling her to soccer practice and art class. When it came down to it, she didn’t know if she could let go of another future. Sometime during that week, drunk and delirious on cheap wine, Mira wrote a rambling letter to her husband, chucking it into the mailbox and slamming it closed. In the morning, she took a walk of shame across the tiny front lawn and brought it back into the house (placing a light yet purposeful kick on a smirking garden gnome holding two knobby thumbs up). The letter remains in between the slats of their bed and the mattress, the saliva seal unbroken. She’s thought about what she wrote so often that her memories have begun to warp and decay, the letter’s details changing with the sheets, indeterminate, an inky Schrodinger’s cat.

Even now in her garden, the past seeps into the present once more as she lies in the soil next to her son, staring up through a lattice of yellowing stems. They fragment the smear of clouds into a stained-glass mosaic as she morphs the letter again, tracing the greying leaves that blanket the

soil she used to work so hard to maintain. Perhaps, on those pages, there is the story of a life without husband and son, the undiscovered end of the highway well beyond her exit. On her fifth birthday, her new fish died; an hour later, watching the flaming wax cascade down her five candles, she first gripped onto the idea that she was running out of time. Since then, she's always clung fiercely to the past, leaving claw marks in it as she wrestles with time while trying to grab back the present. She never wants to see today in a box neatly labelled "past." As though in accordance with her thoughts, the sun seems to be setting quicker than ever tonight. The shadow of her son lengthens into the bushes as the sun dips below him. As he hands Mira his drawing ("Looklooklooklook!"), the shadow extends his own arm. His garish drawing makes Mira grimace. It's a tasteless work, portraying him and Mira in clown makeup, watering the dying flowers. Her husband is obsessed with the circus—maybe it's his dull, white-collar job, or his suburban evenings. Their house is decorated with circus memorabilia, and their son already has a wardrobe full of stripes and polka dots. She imagines the boxes she'll have to pack if she goes through with this—flamboyant clutter, probably making a honking sound and cream-pieing her when she tries to close the cardboard flap. Looking at the hideous drawing, she was suddenly struck by a thought: why did they call them paintings? They should be called painteds. She began to giggle uncontrollably. Perhaps she, too, was a doomed paradox, aging forever yet always-already done. Reaching thirty felt a lot like arriving at an expiration date, her youth souring, but also like she was reaching a deadline—the point beyond which she could no longer change the life she had chosen for herself. She told her friends she didn't need any gifts, for how could they purchase time back?

"Gorgeous drawing. It's your best clown yet, son." Her husband's grating voice pulls her eyes down from the sky and her thoughts back into the garden. He waves a hand in her direction. Why are his nails so neat? What kind of 30-year-old man cares about having well-manicured hands? Her own nails are crusted in dirt and dry from immersing her hands in scalding dishwater. She conjures a smile and prays it looks natural. "I cancelled the reservation tonight. I'm exhausted." He picks a piece of dirt off his pants, "How much could've happened in two hours?" Mira turns her cheek away from the sun, raising her son's drawing to shield herself. "Lots. I thought about Bubbles today."

"Who?" he asks, not waiting for a response as he points to the drawing. "Did you see how he used the softer colours for the Auguste cloqn and the hot pink for the Pierrot? Anyways—" he drops his bag onto the soil, reaching a stupidly refined hand into it, "—doesn't sound like much to me." Furrowing his brow, he unzips another pocket.

"Fine. Well." Mira takes a breath. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. "Why don't you ask—why don't you ever ask?" *And Bubbles was my FISH. My short-lived fish.*

"I'm calling them and asking for the reservation back," he says, locating his phone and slipping it out of the bag. He turns, slamming the kitchen door behind him.

Mira chokes out a laugh. Another scene for her son to draw and embellish with clown makeup: the latch on the back door closing. The cars rushing past on the Henday. His stupid clown music blaring from his phone in the kitchen. Her son's voice, sickly sweet: "Mom, can we get ice cream?" Calgary (failure). The suitcase upstairs, tucked in the back of her closet. A Wikipedia

article about the Netherlands, sitting open in an incognito tab. “Will, it’s November.” The sun hastily weaving a tapestry of light and dark, her son’s shadow already spread thin across the yard. A thorn working its way through her sock. The letter, shapeshifting underneath their mattress. Fragile sprouts under the decaying leaves, pushing through the soil and reaching for the sun. “Get in the car.”

*Hayley is currently 15, and a Chinese-Canadian emerging writer living in Vancouver with a remarkable sense of humour. Oddly enough, her least favourite subject is English, though she adores writing.*

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## **We Love Better When We Know We're Running Out of Time**

### **Valencia Aguiar**

Mum was losing her patience. We'd been at the hospital for 25 days, and Dad still wasn't getting any better. She'd spent all these nights by his side but seemed so irritable lately.

"He's not even making an effort to get better", she said that morning, throwing her hands up in exasperation.

"He keeps the light on all night. Turns the AC up suddenly. Murmurs for hours on end. All so I don't sleep. Come morning and he doesn't want me going home. Even if just for a few hours!"

I stare at her. She hasn't slept in 72 hours, I tell myself. We owe her some complaining time.

Dad hears her complain to us later that evening. I see the sadness in his face. His eyes well up with tears, and it fills me with anger.

"Get yourself together and try and be nice. Or else go home," I tell her, choosing anger as my way of dealing instead of silence/ignorance.

He doesn't talk much that night. No murmurs, no requests for the light to be switched on. Then off. Then on again. He gets through the night without a word.

Mum had chosen to stay back, and she slept through the night. She'd finally managed to get some shut-eye.

Early that morning, we tried getting Dad to talk. He was staring at the ceiling. At us. At the walls. But blankly. The doctors came in. We were told his condition had worsened and that he didn't have much time.

For the next few hours, Mum was who she was for the last 27 years of their marriage. A lovely, kind wife.

But she was also kind with love, you know what I mean?

She sat by his bed, holding his hand and stroking his hair. She spoke lovingly. "Do you need the fan? Are you cold?" He kept silent.

She was different, and it wasn't just because she slept well that night. She knew she was running out of time. I knew she regretted how she had been the last few weeks.

"SAY SOMETHING!!"

Nothing. Not a sound.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know. I love you."

He smiled, a tear rolling down his cheek. He could hear us. He placed his hand on hers. I had never seen this exchange of love between them over all these years.

We left the room. Dad dozed off on Mom's shoulder as she spoke to him. He seemed happy. At peace.

Five years later, my living room. My husband and I have been arguing for the last 2 days. Where to eat? What to eat? Why is the room messy? Why the trash isn't emptied yet?

He gets an email informing us that his flight leaves tomorrow. He's going away for 6 months, for work.

The following 2 days, we're different.

We make each other breakfast.

We have lunch together, with a comfortable silence.

No television. Just us.

We go out for dinner.

We clean the room.

We laugh and sing.

We hug more often.

We talk.

I lay my head in his lap and he strokes my face.

We make love.

We tell each other about how we feel.

"I'll miss all of this", I say, not knowing how else to say everything that I want to.

We love better when we know we're running out of time. We really do.

*Valencia Aguiar is a freelance writer based in Goa, a coastal village in India. A pharmacist by profession, but writing has always felt like my true calling. I love to read, write, and blog about my thoughts.*

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## **A Love Letter to London**

**Gomathi Sridevi Radhakrishnan**

Dear London,

I am not sure how many have expressed feelings for you, but I was never confident enough to do until now. I wish I were brave, just like how your Celtic name Londinous describes you.

When I was a child, I became aware of the gorgeous beauty that you hold. I remember my early years when I spent singing the song, 'London bridge is falling down' like rhymes.

I have admired you from very far everyday. I might sound like a stalker, but I have secretly watched you on television and controlled my heart to stop beating so fast.

There were times when I felt jealous of people having their eyes on you. But who could I blame? You are one of the gems I wanted to treasure with my heart.

My heart always did a 360-degree cartwheel whenever I caught a glimpse of your beautiful ' Millennium Wheel.' I felt the sparkling moment when my eyes met with your gorgeous London Eye.

I love how you believe, "Love has no language". You are kind enough to speak more than 300 languages, yet you couldn't decipher the language of my heart.

I want to walk around the busy streets and get lost with you in Philpot Lane. And just like those two mice eating cheese, I wish we were tiny enough not to be seen by others. But this time, we wouldn't fight for the cheese sandwich but rather feed each other.

I remember my college days when I talked about your 'Phonebooth Stuffing' fad. Back in 1959, around the post-World War 2, you joined in this trend.

And now I want to be stuffed inside the phone booth with no one but you. We could talk, giggle and laugh without paying bills for the call.

We could spend our evening together by having a glass of Gin. But don't worry, I won't let you go back to the 'Gin craze' which happened to you in the 18th century.

I hope you will handle my heart carefully because it is fragile as glass, just like the Shard. I will let you see inside my soul, like how I can view your beauty from the skyscraper.

I can already imagine the time running fast when I would be with you. For once, I will beg Big Ben to have some mercy on us. I wish to stop that clock needle in the Elizabeth tower and hope time freezes.

I don't think I would ever visit the Arctic poles anytime soon. Will you promise to take me to the Tower of London, where Henry III was given a polar bear as a present?

After dinner, we could get lost in your forest and hide inside the one square mile in the city. We could end our date night by looking at the beautiful fireworks on Guy Fawkes Night.

Sounds fun, right? Now please answer me.

Will you do the honour of being my date?

With Love,

Your Admirer.

***Gomathi says, "I am Gomathi Sridevi, a budding writer. Having completed my Sociology degree, I took up interest in societal matters and loved to pen down my thoughts through articles and short stories. My passion for writing can be attributed to my childhood habit of reading newspaper everyday. I made efforts by contributing my ideas on societal matters through articles in several magazines to provide deep insights on harsh reality of the society."***

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## **Christmas Whisky**

### **Cody Outcast**

"So, how did you lovely couple meet?" My old friend Rachel gazed at my wife and me curiously.

We looked at each other tacitly. I knew for sure we both had the story in mind. Now might be a good time to reminiscence.

*I visited Hong Kong on Christmas Eve. I rarely enjoyed the Christmas vibe though the holiday atmosphere in Hong Kong was said to be splendid. I sat outside a music bar near Victoria Harbor, sipping my whisky. Never was a fan of alcohol, but I was just desperate to understand why people in the movies were so avid about this thing.*

*The taste was quite strong, maybe too strong for me to handle. It was like fire lit on my tongue whilst my saliva army was busy battling against the devil. I was certain that the dizziness would kick in at some point, but it rushed in my veins all too abruptly. My head began to play Merry-Go-Round before Merry Christmas.*

*The night sky, blurry yet mystical, became the backdrop for the flood of people near the bay. Visitors squeezed together like slugs, winding in one direction. I was uninterested in the huge Christmas trees in the distance and was confused about why so many people stormed it just for a selfie. Soon I realized that they came for something more grand.*

*Everyone stood still, stared at the sky, and waited. Suddenly, fireworks splatted all over the canvas of the sky. Each explosion was a symphony of light, painting strokes of reds, greens, and golds across the heavens. They danced, flickering and shimmering, leaving trails of glittering embers that gently faded into the night.*

*Utterly amazed, I walked out of the music bar, towards the crowd. I joined the crowd. Exclamations, chatters, and footsteps, all surrounded me as I was pushed and bumped around. I tried to flow with the current, but suddenly, a tickle on my back.*

*A girl asked if I could take a photo for her. She was all by herself, so I thought I would just give her a hand. At that moment, I thought she was nothing more than a backdrop for the beautiful fireworks. But as I handed the phone back to her, she gazed at me soulfully, as if love was rioting in her heart. She must've followed me here to interact with me. Her blushed face and gorgeous smile had nowhere to hide. At this moment, the fireworks were nothing more than noises.*

*"Kiss me." She tried to convey her message in the sea of people.*

*I trembled when I heard her words. I could hardly believe it. A girl fell in love with me at first sight, and she was just my type. Still, I hesitated to act since I was a passive person when it came to relationships.*

*"I think you look cute." She added.*

*On the spur of the moment, I decided to go all in. The rest is only romance.*

*"It was a silly story actually." My wife replied to Rachel in an artificial tone, breaking my string of thoughts. She continued: "I was alone in Hong Kong for Christmas, and I really wanted to see the fireworks. I asked a young man with an honest and innocent countenance to take a photo for me. The whole time, he was acting shy and did not utter a single syllable. I thought he was drunk cuz I could smell his whisky breath. I asked him about this but he was just weirdly staring at me blankly. Maybe he didn't hear me because of all the noises, but he should definitely not have*

stared at a girl for this long. I liked men that were unique and enigmatic, but sometimes they were so damn strange, you know.”

Rachel burst out laughing, slapping her thigh and clutching the chair. She must’ve felt the same way.

My wife looked at me again. This time, with a playful and romantic smile.

“He didn’t reply, so I jokingly asked if he was a mute. Suddenly, he held me in his arms and kissed me. I resisted at first, but that Christmas vibe, that whisky scent, that warmth in the cold lonely winter completely filled me! He may not be the best communicator, but he sure is a hell of a good kisser.”

***Cody Outcast is a Chinese student studying computer science in CUHK Shenzhen. He is the author of Destined and Fable Syrup. His short story “Rakish Bird” won the first T.L.O.P weekly contest. Cody is also a province English speech champion, and he is a game development, movie, chess, basketball, trading enthusiast.***

# Featured Poems

1. Rose-Hearted by Emma Wells
  2. Sharing My Feelings by Lucy Hulton
  3. Shadow and Light by Ananya Prasad
  4. Tapestry of Love by Athena Chelsea Mozo
  5. Essential Love by Ayesha Binte Islam
  6. A Friend or a Fire? by Amy Z
  7. Kuda Simhaya (Little Lion) by Rian
  8. Love by Vita Luna
  9. A Sonnet of My Love for You by Dana Andrea Zarate Datu
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## **Rose-Hearted**

### **Emma Wells**

Petal-soft,  
peachy folds  
hide velveteen centres  
as cloaks mask heroes;  
layers unfurl  
as shy children  
at birthday parties,  
warming unnoticeably  
until they pop  
as opened corks  
spilling as liquid honey.

Petals cascade -  
unravelling as ballet shoes  
in lovers' tender hands.  
Exposed epicentres  
are darkly-alluring  
as scorched beating hearts:  
flesh is raw, unsheltered  
like King Lear  
beneath stormy skies,  
crying to be saved.

*Emma is a mother and English teacher. She has poetry published with various literary journals and magazines. She enjoys writing flash fiction and short stories.*

*Emma won Wingless Dreamer's Bird Poetry Contest of 2022 and her short story entitled 'Virginia Creeper' was selected as a winning title by WriteFluence Singles Contest in 2021.*

*Recently, she won Dipity Literary Magazine's 2024 Best of the Net Nominations for Fiction with her short story entitled 'The Voice of a Wildling'.*

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## **Sharing My Feelings**

**Lucy Hulton**

I've come to accept sleeplessness as a game. At midnight,  
I revisit you – I catch you. Standing under my doorframe,  
Or waiting next to a flowerpot: you look serene and I don't.

It's so hard to see you and so hard to let you go.

I long for your flesh; my lips don't need to touch the edge

Of your wine glass to know you turn my blood to dust.

I sense you desire me – and almost – I approach you.

But morning takes over and I'm stuck cutting my toast

Wondering how I can make us share the same jam jar.

*Lucy Hulton is currently in the first year of her PhD at the University of Salford where she is investigating the intersection of multilingualism and technology. She enjoys writing poetry and short stories and she is currently working on her first novel. When she is not writing, she enjoys reading about plant, fungi, and bird identification, then walking outside to put her knowledge to the test. She also runs [Sparkling Tongue](#), an experimental literary magazine.*

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## **Shadow and Light**

### **Ananya Prasad**

In a shimmering gown, she tiptoed bare feet

Across the floor, filling the space

With light, watching shadow flee

Watching- as he ran and made haste

Every time she woke from sleep

Light rushed forth, scattering colours

Trying to find him in crevices deep

As he hid from his silent lover

A life with him was a dream of hers

But ignored and unanswered, were her pleas

Shadow would hide, with moose and fern

As she longed with her heart, to be free

She watched him, from her palace above

And the desires burning in her heart, burnt her soul

And turned to hatred, her vows of love

This obloquy consumed her whole

But shadow lived, happily, just in her view

And that was his contrite crime

For light stumbled in his haunts, her thoughts askew

And painted her hands red with his family's life

Thus shadow cowered, trying to hide

With dripping red dress and smile

She surrounded him from all sides

And lived happily ever after with the love of her life

*Ananya says, "Hello! I'm a 17-year-old high school student. I have been writing since the age of 11. My works have been featured in a national-level magazine, and I run a blog. Beyond the world of words, I'm a keyboard enthusiast, a painter, and an avid reader—Agatha Christie being my favourite author. Inspired by Taylor Swift's songwriting and Enid Blyton's creativity, my poetry draws on my personal experiences and the media I consume. It is a blend of diverse influences. I'm excited to share some of them with you!"*

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## **Tapestry of Love**

**Athena Chelsea Mozo**

Have you ever seen such tapestry,

As beautiful as what love can be?  
Deciphering it diminishes the artistry,  
Of how magical love is when it's free.  
Free from the walls that people can't see.  
It starts out soft and hidden, completely safe,  
Then with one sudden glimmer from their eyes,  
One smile, one joke, and one spark. You crave.  
A beat or two then it's roaring as your heart flies,  
With both hands reaching as to save face.

It's set in motion, no chance to stop,  
What's bound to happen is to happen,  
A harsh breath, a calm smile, panic pop.  
A cold breeze, a hot summer, and then,  
Their efforts, not a facade but nonstop.  
I'm afraid of what they say, the source,  
Live, they say. Live, for you are alive,  
What's yours is to mine,  
What's mine is yours,  
Be free, let love run its course.  
A crack starts to form, a hole on my walls,  
Letting it all happen, as my heart falls,  
To their hands, to show their soul,  
To prove that fear is no goal.

Strings intertwined, patterns done, and tapestry made.

I love you and all its connotations,

Created a passage to see who I am,

To see who you are, passed my expectations.

No more wall left a wide and open dam,

Pass the waters, is a tapestry of emotions.

I love you. I had, do, and will.

*Athena says, "I am a grade-12 student currently going to Taguig Science High School. I live in the Philippines and I am 17 years old. I am a woman and have an interest in writing especially in the English language. My hobbies include writing, art, painting, drawing, music, and more. I have written some works on my own that encompass various themes. I dabbled in a multitude of styles and have yet to capture the unique niche I want. I write short stories, essays, poetry, and more recently, novels. I am trying to submit my work in order to widen my horizons."*

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## **Essential Love**

### **Ayesha Binte Islam**

How selflessly had she spared her comforts—

Sleep or TV or whatever else there could be

as entertainment.

She attended upon the delicate soul

just exposed to the winding ways of the world.

And the journey through those ways!

Oh! How difficult!

The fragile soul cried out loud

because the difficulties seemed quite overwhelming—

the pang of hunger  
or when it couldn't sleep.  
Then, with enough care,  
and enough love;  
she handled it,  
and taught it to be strong  
enough to travel through the winding ways of the world.

*Ayesha Binte Islam is an undergraduate student, hailing from Bangladesh. Writing is her hobby.*

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### **A Friend or a Fire?**

**Amy Z**

I miss that time  
Spent without care  
When we were strangers  
And nothing more  
He meant nothing  
No friend, nor foe  
Until he boasted  
About his scores  
Competition,  
The burn of thrill  
I turned it into  
A full on war

We know damn well  
It's both our faults  
That a spark of flame  
Became a roar  
Sometimes my gaze  
Slams into his  
A tension so bright  
It almost shines  
But we do not  
Exchange a word  
Conversing instead  
Through subtle signs  
We are simply  
Not this, nor that  
Just the blurred red shades  
Between the lines  
And I still wish for the days  
When my heart was just mine

*Amy says, "I am a student at Macleans College. Besides writing, I enjoy art, ballet, and watching movies during which I attempt to predict which characters will be killed for the plot. I usually spend my weekends staring at my blank computer screen, trying to write (without avail)."*

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**Kuda Simhaya (Little Lion)**

**Rian**

Its icy as we walk  
frosted slates under clumsy shoes  
Hand in hand through the bluster  
Yours is too smooth, too small  
To be wrapped up in bleeding calluses  
But you do not complain so I do not either  
You don't say anything – Do you know how?  
I love you more than I know you  
When we were younger, we picked brambles  
Fingers stained with the blood of our conquests  
We were kings, grinning as red ran down our cheeks  
You were too small too soft to brave the thorns  
So I did it in your stead – do you remember?  
Like those berries, we forgot to savour youth's sweetness  
It burst across our tongues leaving bitterness behind  
I would've done anything for you – I still might  
Nobody warned us that it was a slippery slope  
One we rushed down, blinded by January's sun  
Until those thorns I saved you from  
Became the hulking swords we hold to each other's throats  
I love you more than I know you  
You love me more than you like me  
I am harsh and selfish and bitter

You're explosive and cruel and naive

I grip your hand extra tight so you don't slip on the ice

You cling to mine like a mast in a storm

I'm so sorry, darling, please forgive me

*Rian is an aspiring young writer/poet who loves the use of imagery and prose to bring out emotions and experiences that otherwise feel indescribable.*

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**Love**

**Vita Luna**

LOVE LOVE  
L hope LOVE hope L  
O hope fear fear hope O  
V time heart beating in time V  
E hope fear fear hope E  
L heart soul you L  
O me heart O  
V yours V  
E mine E  
LOVE  
VL

*Vita Luna (née Vita Luna Jansen) is a Dutch graduate of English Literature. She has published two romance dramedy novels, 'Love and Loss in Camden' and 'Daniel, David & Denise'. She also released another novel, called 'Breckan and Co.'s Strange Discoveries Volume 1: The Facility', which is a kind of science fiction thriller for middle grade and up. 'Volume 2: The Aftermath', 'Volume 3: The Search' and 'Volume 4: The Escape' have just been released. She hopes to continue sharing her imagination with the world.*

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**A Sonnet of My Love for You**

**Dana Andrea Zarate Datu**

It renders one defenseless against a touch

Gasping for breath when they catch your gaze

Or when they kiss you feel your heart crutch  
And leave your senses hopelessly muddled and in a daze

For it is never patient nor gratefully kind  
Tugging along any care for life's meaning  
Leaving the inflicted stumbling as if blind  
And without it, the earth is left in its grieving

Love's beauty is no gift nor circumstance  
Even less a priceless indication of being  
It is your graceful smile, that leaves me in a trance  
And lips trembling for want of this lovely feeling

So long as my heart can beat, and my hands may write  
So long lives my love for you through this lonely night

***Dana says, "I am a high school senior who wishes to share her writing pieces and to continuously cultivate and develop her writing skills, all with the goal of being able to interpret the world around her, real and imaginative, in the form of the written word."***