

BETWEEN THE LINES

PEACE AND THE WRITING EXPERIENCE

2024



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An anthology of poetry, prose, and photographs created by Between the Lines participants from Bangladesh, India, Morocco, Pakistan, Slovakia, and the United States, facilitated by the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.



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FOREWORD

ROMEO ORIOGUN, BETWEEN THE LINES PROGRAM COORDINATOR

In a world often marked by division and discord, the poems and stories within this anthology stand as a testament to the enduring power of art to transcend boundaries and foster a deep sense of shared humanity. The contributors to this collection—hailing from Bangladesh, India, Morocco, Pakistan, Slovakia, and the United States—have come together under the Between the Lines program at the International Writing Program. Through poetry and prose, they have put together a rich gathering of perspectives and experiences celebrating the diversity and common threads of our human condition.

What strikes me most about the works contained in this anthology is the profound love for their craft that each participant demonstrates. Their dedication to honing their voices, their relentless pursuit of authenticity, and their courage to step into the depths of their experiences are seen in every word and image. These young writers exhibit a maturity and sensitivity that goes beyond their years, offering insights that are at once personal and universally resonant.

Equally remarkable is their ability to love and show compassion across cultures. In an era where differences are often highlighted and used to drive wedges between us, these creators have chosen a different path. They have embraced the unfamiliar, extended their hearts and minds across geographical and cultural divides, and found beauty in the diversity that enriches our global community. Through their works, they remind us that empathy and understanding are not just possible but essential for a more harmonious world.

J. M. Coetzee once wrote that, “The secret of happiness is not doing what we like but in liking what we do.” This sentiment beautifully captures the spirit of this anthology. These participants have found joy and fulfillment not merely in the act of creation but in embracing the challenges and opportunities their craft presents. Their passion shines through each piece, illustrating the profound truth that true happiness lies in loving the process as much as the product.

This anthology is more than a collection of creative works; it is a celebration of what can be achieved when we come together with open hearts and minds. It is a testament to the transformative power of art and the enduring hope that, through our shared creativity, we can build bridges that span our differences and unite us in our common humanity.

To the readers of this anthology, I invite you to immerse yourselves in the vibrant world these young artists have created. Allow their words and images to touch you, to challenge you, and to inspire you. In doing so, you will be part of a beautiful dialogue that transcends borders and brings us all a little closer together.

ARIBAH FARZEEN SHAH

Serendipity

The ringing of the cyclist's bell as the newspaper is delivered
And the starling chirping from her nest in the walls of my house
Wake me up every morning as dawn becomes a new day
When I am away from home, I realize those are the sounds I miss in
immeasurable amounts

I look down my balcony to appreciate the familiar view;
The asphalt road and leaves glistening from the sunlight
I see vehicles passing by and hawkers ready to start their business
At that moment, everything feels alright

The simplicity of the present delights me while
the intimacy of the environment gives me comfort
I look to the sky and dive into the hues
It is a feeling that nothing can contort

BARBORA BREZA

Bunny tales

Bunny Bunny, why are you blue?
Would you rather be a different hue
Bunny Bunny, why are you grey?
Choose a different colour today
Bunny Bunny try to be green.
Maybe you could finally be seen
Bunny Bunny try yellow next
That is my final request
Bunny Bunny try maroon
You will find your colour soon
Firetruck red will feel at home
But all I feel is alone
Do orange so you may run in the sun
But changing colors isn't that fun
Choose pink, to compliment my eyes
But I don't want my colour to be accessorized
Look at that purple butterfly, the way it flaps its purple wings
I don't want to match the butterflies in the springs

Logolepsy

I tend to overreact, overthink and over necessitate
But words are used to express and extraordinaire
The story speaking from my heart
Words and sentences are like art
I paint something bold

Something with bright colors, and gold
Something with sparkles and neon lights
Something you can't get out of your sight
Something that brings delight
Something from space
Something you cannot replace

To leave a lasting mark
on all who read my work
To all my thoughts,
which in darkness lurk
To play with pronouns,
adjectives and verbs
To be crowned her majesty,
king of all the nerds

Friends till my memory fades

I wish we never met
Because I wish we never had to say goodbye
I don't think you noticed the sadness in my eyes
As I watched you all leave
Knowing you wouldn't return
How could a friendship so short,
have such a fiery burn
Worst part is you don't miss me
And if you do,
not the way I miss you
The jealousy in my brain
creeps into my heart
The life I once lived without you
is tearing me apart
Hating everything, hating you
Not knowing what to do
Trying to neglect the truth
As I slowly forget the memories of my youth
-Forelsket
the smell of smoke
on my jacket

CALLIE XIA

Cri de Coeur

It never was about the party or the crimes,
For you, it's only love.
It never was about the holy or the sins,
For you it is just love.

Why am I scared to hold your hand?
When for you it's only love?
Why am I scared to read Wilde again?
When for you it is just love?

You are wild at heart, I am Wilde at heart.

It never was about the bann'd books or ads,
For you it's only words.
It never was about the facism or the hate,
For you it is just words.

Why am I scared to read the news?
When for you it's only words?
Why am I scared to write again?
When for you it is just words.

Your words free you, my words imprison me.

It never was about the money or the deaths,
For you it's only blood.
It never was about the drag queens or the bars,
For you it is just blood.

Why am I scared to walk the streets?
When for you it's only blood?
Why am I scared to live again?
When for you it is just blood.

My blood is on your hands,
My life is in your votes.
I am—We are worth
Less than your beliefs.

Don't tell me about the Holocaust without telling me about the Pink Triangle.
Don't tell me about the colonisation of ancient cultures without telling me about the Third Gender.
Don't tell me about history—without telling me about love.

CHARLIE RIVERA-GU

All At Once

Georgia is a rider,
Thrill-seeking and high-achieving,
Her courage and speed prove her to be,
A great scooterist-radical-we can all agree.

She races down the asphalt streets,
Her clothes stick to her like wet sheets
The wind strikes her face,
Her hair is up in space,

A shift of her weight on the board,
A subtle change in direction,
Making errors, she cannot afford.

The charm on her handlebar chimes,
One last time as she collides,
A splatter of liquid on the ground,
The asphalt bleeds carmine

A white gown,
A ringing sound,
People in blue surround,
A dull pain, a shrouded face,

Georgia is forced to give up the chase.

COLETTE LEE

Fractures

Halmeoni's words play on repeat through my head like a broken record and a mantra to keep me from slapping Eomma. The way the light left her eyes will never leave my mind, but something that has been engraved even deeper is how I was the one there holding her hand. Tears running down my cheeks still gross and oily from flight. Eomma nowhere in sight. Eomma hadn't even greeted me when I landed or acknowledged it so I had to find my own way to the hospital, too tired to bother with her ready excuses about her struggles as a single mother. I couldn't even pretend to lie to myself that she was anywhere nearby. I later confirmed that she had indeed been somewhere else nowhere nearby. She had been working at the local bar, like it was a normal Friday night.

Halmeoni's hand turned white as she clenched my hands at 11:33 pm on Friday, so I called Eomma. It went to voicemail. She texted, asking if it was "really that serious" to bother her on one of her busiest nights. Even after knowing Halmeoni's situation, she turned on "Do Not Disturb."

Halmeoni made excuses for her daughter, repeating how hard Eomma's life was as a single mother, as if she was the only one. She told me the love she felt when she first held me at four years old, how she regretted the time she missed with me. She emphasized that I tell Eomma she was sorry.

Halmeoni's words stop me from slapping my Eomma's face. 'Eomma' insinuates respect and affection, but Halmeoni filled the fractures and crevices my Eomma created in my heart, through her home cooked food. Eomma was furious when she learned Halmeoni was taking care of me. She refused Halmeoni's money, ripping and burning her checks and gifts, and with it, my respect for her.

Eomma's face snivels, with tears and snot. "This is a load of bull," I slump in the dinner booth. Eomma frowns. Her eyes are a chasm of darkness, screaming for pity, with a tint of anger.

"We've been over this, tokki-ah," As if she changed Halmeoni's sheets and bathed her head to toe with a washcloth. "I was working, 'cause I've been strapped for cash lately," her eyes drifted throughout as long as they did not meet my own. I rip and tear the dinner's white disposable napkins, so I don't do the same to my skin, or Eomma's.

"Halmeoni was a terrible eomma to me, when I was growing up, you know." I can catch glimpses of my tears and cracks Halmeoni healed in her, but hers are still raw and oozing. She tries to shove the tears back in, trying to reinforce her identity as an independent single mother. I take her hands. I want to hear more about this side of Eomma. "I blamed her for how I got bullied throughout primary school. I thought it was her fault the other kids didn't accept me. Like the bulgogi and kimchi she packed me, the thick accent I inherited, exposed my cover." A mountain of used tissues has accumulated by our table as we blow them with snot, the tower of snot tissues soon overcoming that of my ripped napkins. At some point, I had moved over to Eomma's side of the booth to hug her, my head nestled in her side like when I was small, her hand idly twirling through my hair. With an ear to her chest, I can hear each shudder of her breath, forcing me to acknowledge that the fire in Eomma's eyes has not only been diminished by Halmeoni's death but by her own age. With that I slowly just squeeze her closer, whispering "I'm sorry" from Halmeoni and myself.

DOROTA MIŤKOVÁ

Seventeen

I have a distant memory of what it felt like
waking up in the morning, my hopes reflected in the sunlight.
Now the sun doesn't shine the same,
And here I am
Wanting to change my family name.
I believe I can do this on my own
Praying that the faith won't be my downfall.
After all,
This is how I was raised
Farming potatoes with dirt on my pants.

Chasing success, living, so I die with grace.

The world is not big enough for all of us.
That's a lesson I learnt while covered in dust.
Sometimes I wonder what my sister would say,
Then I realize it doesn't matter
She will never pay.
There is something about the silence before the slaughter,
It's my last chance to remember that I used to be someone's daughter.

They say 17 is such a lovely age,
a chance to fill in a blank page.
It really is a shame I turned out this way,
Only seventeen and my hair already gray.

DIVYA SUBRAMANIAN

My Slice of Paradise

The boy next door once told me he had come from heaven.

“It’s a beautiful place,” he used to say. “The trees are always bursting with diaphanous foliage, the oceans are always calm and warm, and the mountains crown the entire sky with their sharp pinnacles of persistence.”

I never believed him, and I told him as much. He never pushed his point, but he never let it go, either. He always used to say the same thing every time, as if he had read it from an old textbook: “I know you believe me.”

There was nothing interesting about my neighborhood. Children played, and children cried. The sun shined, and the wind blew. People argued, and people laughed. We all existed, but I could not say that we lived.

I yearned to see heaven, though. I wanted to fly through ethereal perfection.

Every day, I went to the boy’s house. Not one day did the conversation shift. Every day, I rolled my eyes, but not one day did his steady statement drift.

After I had heard that sentence for a solid twelve years, I asked him to take me there, to his heaven. We were in our twenties by then, and the young man next door still intrigued me. “I want to see the vivid green of the trees,” I begged. “I want to swim in the glistening seas. I want to summit the tallest mountain and touch the stars. Please take me there.”

But he shook his head. “I’m afraid that’s not for me to show you,” he said, the mischievous glint in his eye replaced with an idle tear of melancholy honesty.

When I asked why, he responded like a parrot: “Why do you think?”

He never relented, but I never ceased to pester him. His description of his paradise piqued my interest in ways that physics and politics never have.

One day, I marched up to his door, rapped three times just below the peephole, and declared with unabashed bravado that I would find this mystical world and return with marvelous mementos for all to take part in the wonder it offers.

I searched for this paradise for four decades. I braved the musty jungles, the crashing falls, and the thundering hordes of stampeding animals within my heart. My trousers tore, the soles of my boots practically disintegrated, my bones cracked, and my muscles creaked. Pushing sixty-five, I had lost out on my young adulthood and middle-aged life, having given up my family, my friends, and myself for a baseless tale. My memories haunted me, an eternal reminder of my happiness sacrificed. Finally, after all this time, an iota of doubt reentered my heart. I knew I could not continue like this, forcing myself on a wild goose chase, training my body to be hungry for what no longer looked like a banquet but rather a pile of abandoned leftovers. Now, my mind had collapsed, writhing in conflict, condemned to the recesses of its turmoil.

I was standing on a mountain that final day, my arms and legs quivering in the cold, jolting to the rhythm of the wind cracking its whip against my bruised back. I could barely stand. I had not rested for three days, hunting tirelessly for this apparently nonexistent paradise promised to me all those years ago by a mysterious boy with a dimple on one cheek and a silvery glint in the opposite eye. My hunger for this heaven had faded, engulfed by the shadow of my thirst for the simplest necessities for survival. I see the bright sparks illuminating the night sky twirling around, etching a story into the depths of the dark black abyss. I see my memories replaying in flashes of realization, filling my heart with so much emotion that I could explode.

Memories.

They control me. Every moment of my past—every compliment, every sentiment, every mistake—influences my present state. It sets my future in motion. I dwell on what came before; I live in the past.

I whirled around, saluted the thunder above me, and touched my feet back to level ground. I ran, leaving my sorrows, confusion, and desires behind me. I cried, my tears tracing the path of a loser on the splintered earth and my cheerless heart.

I returned home broken, a fractured form of the image appearing in my mirror. I returned with nothing to show but skin embroidered with scars, eyes worn blind by incessant searching, a heart wrinkled by loneliness, and a mind nagged by failure.

I returned to a land with sunlight seeping through emerald petals framing the sky. I returned to a land with mountains stretching higher than the moon, shielding our valley from danger. I returned to a land with shimmering seas of stunning ombre blue hues. I returned to a land where the songbirds hummed a melody of peace, and the children danced to the beat of their own hearts.

And I knew. The boy next door had been right all along. Everything came rushing back to me, memory after memory, my heightened senses alight once again.

Memories.

I have the power to control them. Every moment of my past—every compliment, every sentiment, every mistake—has a place in my thought process. I use them to set my future in motion. I live in the present. I look to the future.

As the sun rose to usher in a new day, I knocked on his door once more. I rapped barely below the peephole three times, just as I had on the day I set out on my journey.

But it was not my neighbor who answered.

“Can I help you?” the old woman at the door asked.

“Y-yes. Do you know about the boy—well, I suppose he would have been an older man by now—who lives here?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, dear. He moved away years ago—something about sharing heaven with the world around him.”

I couldn’t help but smile.

The boy next door had been trying to tell me the same thing since the day I first met him.

Our lives are heaven.

ELLIE KEUM

his digits of life

the hum of the monitor
corroding seconds of existence,
digits of life lived.

the unadulterated innocence
brought by squeals of joy,
chalk dust flies in the air
fat tears, chubby cheeks
emerging with smiling eyes.
the concentrated seconds
aligning our hands for the perfect high-five
a brief sound, my palms still tingle.

the taste of fierce love
crashing upon me by days spent.
the touch of his finger
drawing shapes fleetingly on my back,
fringed with permanence on the surface of my skin.

the calm cove on a hailing day,
still an open book
never reluctant for an embrace.
his forearms, sturdy metal beams
molding to the heat of my body.
the heart agrees to a rhythm
that cannot again be conjured.

now it meshes with the monitor,
time between beeps increasing,
thinning proof of life.

FELIX MITRO

Is It Sweet?

*There might be something, lodged deep in my throat
I try to swallow it, only to choke
Constantly found, though it is never sought
As if not there, until you feel its poke*

*Dreading the absence, of things still not here
Deafened by whispers, that I can't quite hear
Half-formed memories, of things yet to be
Blinded by visions, that I cannot see*

*Each greedy gulp, makes it harder to eat
With each and every taste, it gets less sweet
A bitter nightmare, that was never dreamed
I have lost my taste; tell me, is it sweet?*

*A presence of something, digs through my throat
Makes itself known still, by making me choke
A constant presence, that cannot be fought
Presenting as absent, just to provoke*

*An unsure certainty – this is not right
Don't know how or why – but I must be right
A punch to, and a feeling from the gut
That my throat's inside, shouldn't be all cut*

*Each starved mouthful, gets harder to resist
With every lick and lap, it grows less sweet
A sour daydream, that might not be dreamed
I have lost my senses; tell me, is it sweet?*

*An absence of feeling, eats at my throat
I almost can't tell, as I start to choke
An absence, present longer than I thought
Presenting falsely, wrapped in a sweet cloak*

*Choking on the words, I have yet to speak
Surely, there is an answer I can seek?
Pained by the words, you have yet to say
Surely, there has to be another way?*

*Each hungry swallow, brings closer to it
With each bite, you learn – it was never sweet
A tasteless something, that I hope is dreamed
I have swallowed my tongue – and choked on it*

JENNA NESKY

Classroom

Green

like a penny out of breath. In
Schaeffer Hall, through

the geometric windows,
those mathematical screens, I see

the sky first, then a gathering of
clouds. All we do is watch

as the leaves
on the sidewalk

step back and forth like
a guilty child's feet. The man

says Paradise. The man says
Cobra. I look at the images

shown to us: face of goat, human
body, a sacrificial lamb—

Minotaur's daughter.

Jumpsuit orange, gum pink, dancer blue,
the joined hands of children

in the image
on the table.

This is not an explanation,
the man says. Just a warmup.

In a hall of poets: green sun,
green pasture, greenest river.

I see a key,
a clock,
a sailor's hat.

KELSY ESMOIL

A detached offer

At times, I feel detached from the world around me.

I observe deeply, but I doubt my adequacy.

The small details of the bigger picture stand out to me rather than what others notice.

Everybody looks but nobody notices.

Questions linger about what is “Normal” or “Rational.”

Even without receiving anything in return, I feel the need to give back.

To give and give. I’d offer my entire soul if the world would take it.

I would rip the skin off my back, and the hair off of my head, if it meant that the world would tolerate me.

I ponder whether my inner thoughts will ever reach the level of calmness that I try to exhibit.

Just like a kid switching a light switch on and off, My mind switches between craving familiarity to desiring change.

On

Off

On

Off

Never feeling both at once disrupts the desires I profess

...only I am to blame for the mindset I have created.

NEDA RAVANDI

Tuesday Morning Grocery in Montparnasse

He hears her next to the tomatoes. *Baleh*¹, she says, *Baleh*, a word round and juicy and fresh like the red ovals on which she rests a lightly manicured hand. One finger- delicate and scarlet-tipped- drags slowly over the skin. Her nail digs gently at first, and then harder. It's pointed razor-thin. He holds his breath, anticipatory. Abruptly, the fingers return to her phone, and he hears a sharp, biting *Nemidoonam!*² as the voice moves in the direction of the peppers.

He follows quietly, worn penny loafers padding softly across the checkered floor. The voice drifts to the left, barely perceptible over crashes of *merde!*³ and *putain!*⁴ as teenaged boys clamor in front of the butcher's table, little ripped lists from their mothers in hand. The cleaver comes down rhythmically, glinting off the fluorescents as it slices through sinewy muscle and tendon. He hurries past the crowd of boys, head down, listening, deferent. The voice toys with him, dancing between aisles. A spice rack looms up from the linoleum. One misstep, and a little glass bottle of fiery paprika crashes down to the floor at his feet, dusting him red. With a hasty apology to a nearby clerk, he continues onwards, resolute.

Past an aisle of butters there is a flash of fingertips. He watches them wrap around her phone, rest lightly against the side of her neck. The polish on her index fingernail is chipped at the top. He wonders at this chipping. *Nah, nah. Doost nadaram!*⁵ The nails are alive with her consonants; they dance, tapping at each other in a sharp polka. Her fingers still. His heart quickens. He is melting in his loafers. He feels his body turning to mush, softening, layer by

layer, under the cheap tartan of his wool coat. Sweat beads gently down his temple, cooled fast by the butters, which glare at the heat spilling off him in rivulets. The voice drifts closer. The butters start to wilt. He swipes heavy knuckles down his face and listens.

That night, as hot breeze blows in from the veranda, he faces himself in the mirror with a razor in hand. Blue flecks the sink, remnants of the evening's uncompleted project, which sits mournfully at his easel in the half-light, haphazardly draped with a fading cloth. He drags the razor carefully down the side of a soap-slick jaw. It nicks him anyway, and red blooms angrily in a starburst at the front of his ear. Smarting pain swipes at him, bright and needle-thin. He thinks of a gentle nail dragging over tomato skin, gentler vowels dragging over the din of the grocery. In a dream that night he is back in the store. Heavy hocks of ham glisten pink in their casing, offset by the studded-gem cliffs of the spice rack. It is silent. Burst tomatoes litter the ground around his feet.

¹ "Yes" in Farsi

² "I don't know!" in Farsi

³ "Shit!" in French

⁴ "Fuck!" in French

⁵ "No, no. I don't like it!" in Farsi

In Defense of Unromantic Romance

Upon rereading the sample of work I'd submitted to this program, I realized that all my pieces were about relationships. Romantic, familial, strangers in passing, but all dealt with connection in some form or another.

Another recent revelation- if I may be so presumptuous as to use that particular word- was that I write like a poet within my prose. This remark- handed to me by a very enlightening workshop instructor- I took first as a compliment but then as mere observation.

I think another way of saying what she told me is that I write romantically; I write love. And obviously there are different connotations of the word, connotations involving hugging and kissing and third base (and past it), but what I mean by that is that to write with intimate, almost uncomfortable detail is to write romantically. And what else can I do? What else is there to do, when I see right in front of me the purple diamond battalion marching down my classmate's dress, dust mites dancing a foxtrot in the afternoon light, the simmering sun melted down past the drapes? Detail is love for the thing described. It is romantic, in the truest sense.

NOOR EMAAN

Heaven (inspired by Heaven by Mitski)

Silver, the color of my nails today as I watch my sweat lidden hands come to life. The soft beam of the sun is akin to this mattress. The sheets enwrap me, covering the flesh from the world. I turn.

My lover, a glow. This must be heaven.

Her soft brown hair spreading across her back, waves and the sound of her breath. In this locked foreign room away from the world, it is not time to get up yet. The outside waiting for everything to fall back into place. in maybe 10 minutes?

All of our love, fills all of our room, I think back to you and what led up to this. Was it your voice that captivated me.

I stare at her form, 5 minutes more, the subtle wrinkles of her face. Time will pass from your body and I'll still remember your face, my life taken out of me.

She finally stirs, "you're awake early," that drowsy morning voice. I nod, words lumping already. It is all I can do in her presence.

"I'll have to leave in a bit" ' ' "I know"

Finally awake, she stretches her body, the normality of the action stirring an emotion in my stomach as she gets off the bed, looking around. Maybe for clothes. The softness of the mattress is no longer there.

"Do not leave me." I wished to say.
"Hm?" She asks.
"Nothing."

None of us say a word, it is always like this. A soft brown bedroom with the mess of the furniture and a bed and you and me. Always silent. You say nothing when you know that one word of yours fills my heart and strikes something within me.

I watch, dumbfounded as I see her back, clothes on now, black t-shirt, faded out. The smell of bitterness, you're making the coffee you like. I'm in the bed still, I forgot where we are. I smell. My heart in my chest as you drink it. Did you leave some at the end as always?

'I have to go now, I'll see you around.' That's it. The parting of ways. See I never took part in the parting, did I? No, only you did, so quick to run away from me. The door shuts, not even a glance, I watch it.

Nothing ever changes, I get up, as always. I take a turn around the room. Taking in the scent of you and the coffee. I pretend I'm a willow.

The coffee sits on the table growing cold. All I do is stare at it, as if living, there's no use.

So I sit and think of you. Thinking about you, taking the cup of bittersweet emotions and sip on the rest of the coffee you left. A kiss left of you. Heaven

Imposter

A temple in between the imperial mosques
last night, i found it again
it shows up under my pillow every now and then
greets me and leaves me
hollowed out as I wait

It told me of how he met the several suns
surprised, they've never seen the night
clattered glass, the ink finally runs out
a mist of silence in the summer

as I make sense of patterns and images
of the temple's tales
they all look the same to me,
there's too much effort there
he leaves again, a gentle touch of a petal
taking my wishes away with it

I hear trees gossiping about us
my feet hurt and there's an excess of the world
how do I fill up that ground beneath me? What am I to do with this? i
can't paint

A leaf takes it away, it's not my fault
there's no use
the temple will always come back

MUSFIRAH AHMED

Existence

9, 8, 7, 6 was not only the countdown to 2021 but also a countdown to a boy's life, who was standing just beside me, planning to jump from a 10 story building. A crowd was whispering. The murmurs already killed the man inside. 3,2,1,0 the man jumped. I saw life shattered in front of my own eyes. It was my first encounter with the thing called death. Life is something complicated for me. Why does a person live? Ambition? Goal? But how about the person who just wants to go with the flow and die peacefully? I had a chance to meet an assassin who was excellent in medicine. I asked him, 'Brother, why have you become an assassin when you could become a perfect doctor? Honestly, assassins are not favored by the public while they take a doctor as a God.' He answered that with a warm smile on his face, "Little girl if you know how to save, you know how to kill. The doctor and assassin both get to watch death from up close. You become a true assassin or doctor when you know the meaning of life." Genuinely, in my opinion, people usually don't live for themselves. They live for the person they cherish. Some people live so they can love that cherished person more. You have only one life, so why don't you make it rememberable? At least one person, make one person be thankful to God that he or she was able to meet you. I have such seven people. I may not be able to meet them. They may not know about my existence. But I find myself lucky enough to know them. The next generation even might not be able to know that there were such angels on this earth. They were able to melt a million hearts. They have become the cause of my euphoria. They helped me to find my serendipity. They taught me how to love myself. They filtered my world. Drew out my inner child at the moment I was drowning in the abyss. They have become my moon. I found my persona, my time in them. I shined under their shadow. Whenever I broke down, they reminded me that I am bulletproof. There will always be someone for me if I ever need to cry, always. They will soothe my pain and sorrow so that I can fly. That "someone" is me, **MYSELF**. So, I LIVE.

RHEA ABRAHAM

Curtain Call

The glacial touch of the springtime breeze envelops me like the embrace of a cold-blooded being. The songbirds sing a hauntingly euphonious melody that echoes through the park. I've never been here alone before. The dewy, luscious green strands of grass delicately prickle my bare skin, the underlying scent of petrichor permeating through the air.

Cotton candy clouds scatter throughout the skies like a scrambled jigsaw puzzle.

The flowers are in full bloom. The solitude tears open the emptiest of vacancies in my soul. *Appa's* not here to remind me to tie my shoelaces every time they come undone. *Amma's* not here to make me wear more sunscreen.

blinding sunlight—
a childhood disappears
into the foliage

So I watch silently as the sun's ever-glowing streams of liquid gold seep into the watercolour skies with nobody beside me. The monsters that lurked in the arcane abyss beneath my bed are long forgotten. My perpetual dread of elevators is now but an invisible speck in the back of my mind.

bleeding skyline—
salt-stained cheeks
from raging streams

A caged bird's first taste of freedom. I am overcome by a sense of bittersweet. To spread my wings is to metamorphose. But will it be all worth in the end? Once I take flight, will the breeze embrace me with loving arms or will I call the insipid pavements home all my life?

bloodstained moon—
my future's ghosts
paint over past scars

ROBYN LAM

Life

The sky littered with white, soft clouds watches over all that bask under its bright eye. The birds sing and glide above us, resting on the rustling, tall trees. And as the wind combs through our hair, we dance, sing, and laugh all night long.

It's not empty, yet it's quiet. The ground is flooded by the never-ending rows of green, brightening the once bare view crafter in our heads.

And as the sun goes down, a new world opens, bringing light to us all. An infinite cycle of a dream-like place.

bright sky...
ravens circle and
croak paving a new
season

Anew

Leaves fall
and chills
spread across
the Earth

as she blows cold
gusts towards the
world

The plants:
shrink: withdraw: rest

The animals:
leave: run:
hide

The people:
shiver: protect: cover

The world
slowly comes to
a stop

And they wait
for the her to arise

To come
back and
welcome
them with open arms

To be
smothered with
warmth

and that
gentle feeling
when
she looks after them

But right
now she is
gone

Replaced
with someone new

We can only
count until she is
born anew

SEHRISH TAHIR

The Search

Lets bring sunshine from the land far away
Lets steal some rays from the sunrise in the way

In my search there was so much intensity
In my longing i brought a star with me

The star was so bright that all lights were dim in front of it
I have brought that eagerness that gives peace to the soul

The moon is sad and so is the moonlight
From where do i bring that knowledge that quenches the heart's thirst

The whole world is inside him and me
I have brought the key to the place where all secrets are hidden

When the secret was revealed to me, i lost my senses
From where do i bring that heart which can hold the entire sea

When i got goosebumps i came to know i was confronting him
From where do i bring that question which has all the answers in it

When i opened the knot then every hurdle was easy
Everything demystified in front of me which my mind couldn't comprehend before

When it was clear i saw that there was no one except me
Who i was searching for in the holy place , he was in my heart all this time

Now that i speak to him in my heart , i came to know
He is the judge and he is plaintiff and I am reflection of everything he is

TAMKANAT MALIK

A forgotten place

It often fascinates me
How we exploit nature,
Disfigure it,
Only to abandon it,
Leaving it to the jaws of time as
And time; a traitorous fiend,
Purposefully does not preserve it
For what is born must die
But does it?
Because the prejudices of time
Are often seen in vibrancy
As it soft caresses the forgotten,
Vines reclaiming the brick and stone
The buildings crumble, yes, but in their decay
Another spark of beauty elicits
One testifying resilience, a tangible proof of rebirth
Here in the ruins, a story unfolds
What may be forgotten by man is not lost to the earth
For Gods divine hand restores, with silent might
A forgotten place to man
Transforms to nature's sanctuary

SIENNA BURNETTE

Qualified

What makes you qualified
To define someone by their looks?
What classes did you take?
Tell me about the toxic books.

I'm interested, as a leader myself,
Why did you choose this as your hobby?
You've taught them "Don't make it about your persona,"
"Make it all about your body"

Now they dye their heads the same.
They change the way they dress and talk
Anyone who hasn't hopped on trend
Will become the laughing stock.

You make quite the business
Taking away their individual lights
Molding them into dolls of clones
But you're qualified, so it's alright

Just Pick Something (Villanelle)

I stand here asking, what to wear?
Do I wear flashy, or plain?
Red, Green, Blue? I don't really care.

I stand here thinking, shoes! Nike Air?
Let's go Jordans or Mary Janes?
The black High Heels? I wouldn't dare.

I walk asking, what about hair?
I'm thinking slick or Lion's Mane?
So Curly? Fluffy like a hare?

I'm wondering, would it be fair—
To wear pink proud and not seem vain?
I'll do it. I don't mind the stare!

I stand here asking, what to wear?
Today, I chose pink. What a drain.
I'll shine I guess. Others, beware!
Black, Brown, White? I don't really care.

One Legged Chair

I never liked it until now, well, more like early this year
A while ago, I would laugh at it with jeer
But now I'm shocked to say, that this is a newfound love
For months it's been hidden, a fiery hand in a glove
It wishes to break free, and feel the breezy air
But all it would get? A disappointed stare.
It betrays the norms, and it can be poison
It leaves the rulers asking, "how, of all things, were you chosen?"
It's shady at first glance, but below is a spot of light
But it isn't enough, it doesn't bring the rulers delight.
I hold the glove with regret, and wonder why I even care,
This thing I love is unsupported, like a one legged chair

ZAINAB ACHEKHLAF

A tear for yesterday

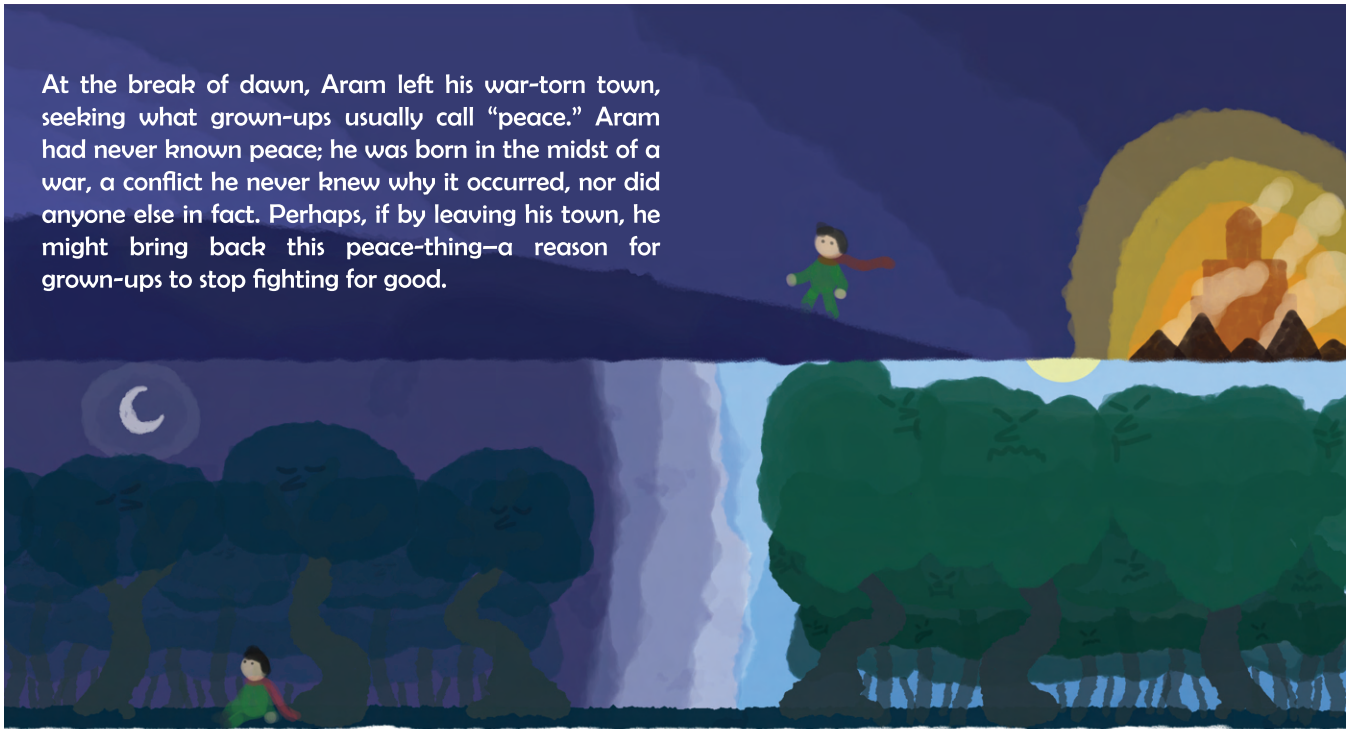
As my hands crafted, someone drew near,
A gentle presence, yet nothing appeared.
I felt a breeze, soft and fleeting,
Halting my work, my heart beating.
I chased that breeze, breathless in flight,
To a place of flowers, and skies so bright.
The blue above, a sight unseen,
Too beautiful, too much like a dream.
Then reality struck, sudden and stark,
I was elsewhere, lost in the dark.
A dream world, a universe apart,
Where comfort found its way to my heart.
But there she stood, in joy and pride,
My grandma dear, by my side.
She smiled, her touch a balm,
Oh, how long it'd been since I felt calm.
I asked her presence, her spirit near,
After years of absence, so dear.
She kissed my brow, a silent embrace,
Wishing me love, in that sacred space.
And then I woke, a tear in my eye,
A memory fading, but still nearby.
For in that dream, she visited me,
A bittersweet gift, of love and memory.

Why him?

Oh, if you knew the dreams I dream each night,
We laugh like children, pure and bright.
Our hands entwined like young love's tale,
In your warm arms, my fears grow pale.
Your voice, a melody, so sweet and clear,
A soothing song I long to hear.
In dreams, we're happy, love's embrace,
But cruel reality shows its face.
My eyes open, and I see,
A picture questioning my sanity.
I try to think of others, move on,
"He's happy with her, why hold on?"
"Let go of the pain that haunts you so,
Forget him, it's the way to go.
Why do you love him?" my mind asks slow,
"I'd be mad not to," my heart lets flow.
"Do you want him just for you?"
My brain insists, pushing through.
"It's hard not to wish it so," "Why him?"
"Why another, when he exists?"
"He brings you sorrow," my mind does say,
"Yes, but he's my joy each day."
My brain falls silent, nothing more,
Then whispers, "I love him too, at my core."

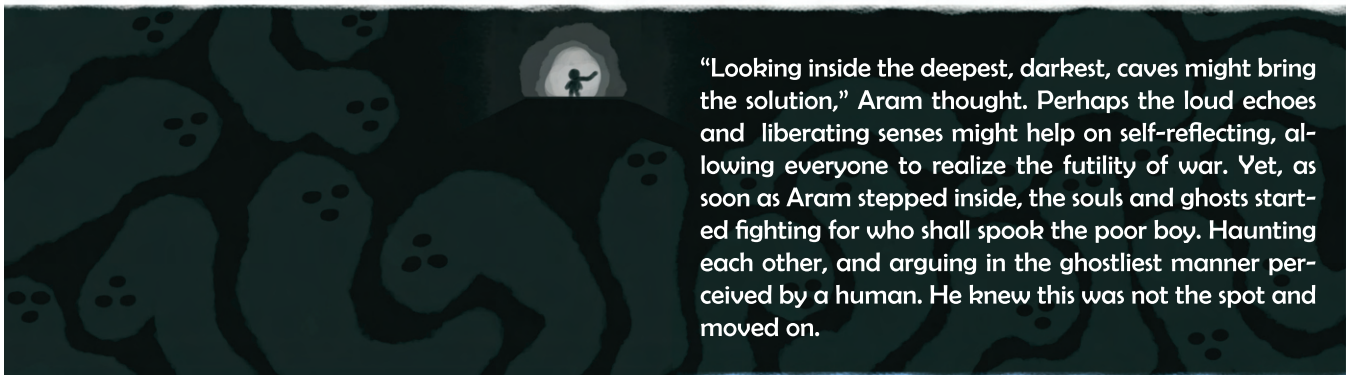
OMAR KHATTALA

At the break of dawn, Aram left his war-torn town, seeking what grown-ups usually call “peace.” Aram had never known peace; he was born in the midst of a war, a conflict he never knew why it occurred, nor did anyone else in fact. Perhaps, if by leaving his town, he might bring back this peace-thing—a reason for grown-ups to stop fighting for good.



The forest provided a good refuge for his first night in the wilderness. The owls signing their lullabies, the crickets playing their nocturnes, and the rustling trees performing the most soothing of symphonies all reminded him of his quest to find peace. Perhaps this was the place. Perhaps he doesn't have to search for too long.

However, as the sun rose into the sky once again, the trees began to compete for sunlight, their canopies moving left and right, jolting against each other. It became clear that even when something is abundant, conflict shall occur. Aram gathered his tiny bag and left.



“Looking inside the deepest, darkest, caves might bring the solution,” Aram thought. Perhaps the loud echoes and liberating senses might help on self-reflecting, allowing everyone to realize the futility of war. Yet, as soon as Aram stepped inside, the souls and ghosts started fighting for who shall spook the poor boy. Haunting each other, and arguing in the ghostliest manner perceived by a human. He knew this was not the spot and moved on.

Far to the east, laid a kingdom, ruled by a king, who governed no other subjects but himself. There was no one else in his entire vast kingdom. Maybe solitude is the key to peace—if there was no one to fight, no fights shall occur. But it only took a moment before the king began arguing with himself, eventually resorting to throwing punch at his own face. Aram nodded left and right without muttering a single word, and continued his journey.





Perhaps the land of the wise statues would provide the answers. The statues muttered big words with deep voices, seemingly important and grand. “Wisdom it is,” thought Aram. “Perhaps if everyone wizened up, maybe that’s what it takes to stop war.” Yet, before long, the statues began to move and clash, arguing who was the wisest and the most knowledgeable of all. “This was not it” thought the boy.



In a far meadow, Aram stood in the middle of a field of flowers. There were blooms of all kinds and colors—the red, the purple, the yellow, the spotted, the stripped, the cones, the stars, and everything in between. Each and every flower was different, unique, yet together, they drew a sight to behold.

Finally, Aram came to understanding what peace is: it is acknowledging that we do not need to be similar, and we do not have to agree on everything. Peace arises when we view our diversity as a source of strength, where the convergence of the different ends of the spectrum enhances the beauty of the overall image. That is where peace truly resides.

The End

FACULTY BIOS

ROCHELLE POTKAR is a prize-winning poet, author, and screenwriter based in Mumbai. Author of 'Four Degrees of Separation', 'Paper Asylum' - shortlisted for the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize 2020, and 'Bombay Hangovers', her recent prize-winning manuscript of poetry 'Coins in Rivers' releases in April 2024 by Hachette India. She co-curated the Glass House Poetry Festival, India. Alumna of Iowa's International Writing Program (2015) and a Charles Wallace Writer's fellow, University of Stirling (2017), this is her fourth consecutive year as a creative-writing teacher for IWP programs.

VLADIMIR POLEGANOV is a Bulgarian writer, translator, and screenwriter. Author of *The Deconstruction of Thomas S*, *The Other Dream*, winner of the 2017 Helikon Award, and *Past Continuous* (2024). His short story "The Birds" was featured in Dalkey Archive Press' anthology *Best European Fiction 2016*. Winner of the Association of Bulgarian Translators Prize (2020) and the Krastan Dyankov Award for translation (2022). In 2016, he participated in UI's International Writing Program. He's been a BTL instructor since 2020, and - since last year's first day of the BTL Program - has been taking care of a rescue magpie called Ori.

TARIRO NDORO is a genre-bending Zimbabwe writer of short fiction and poetry. Her debut poetry collection, *Agringada: Like a Gringa, Like a Foreigner* was the recipient of a National Arts Merit Award for Outstanding Poetry Book, and her most recent novel manuscript was longlisted for the 2023 James Currey Prize for African Literature and was a Spring '22 Fellow of the International Writing Program and a participant in the University of Johannesburg's inaugural JIAS Writing Workshop. Tariro is currently a doctoral fellow in Public Health and is excited to meet this year's BTL cohort.

SENKA MARIĆ (poet, novelist, essayist, editor; Bosnia-Herzegovina) is the author of three books of poetry, most recently *Do smrti naredne* [Until the next death] (2016) and the novels *Kintsugi tijela* (2018) and *Gravitacije* (2021), translated into English as *Body Kintsugi* and *Gravities*, and to several other languages. The former received the 2018 Meša Selimović Award for best novel in BiH, Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, the English PEN Translates Award 2022, and was shortlisted for the 2023 EBRD Literature Prize; *Gravitacije* won the 2022 Štefica Cvek Award for feminist writing. Marić often participates in European literary events, teaches writing workshops, and is the editor-in-chief of the online literary magazine *Strane.ba*. Her participation was made possible by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the US Department of State.

COUNSELOR BIOS

ADRIAN ENZASTIGA is in the Playwright's Workshop at the University of Iowa, where he also teaches in the Rhetoric department. He writes on themes of identity, belonging, and social justice issues, usually through a comedic or absurdist lens. His favorite Pokémon is Turtwig.

RUTH THOMAS is a poet and Iowa City local. Originally a fiction writer, with work previously published in the *Ice Lolly Review*, and *Aster Lit* she was introduced to spoken word poetry in 2019 and has been writing poetry ever since. They have competed in both local slams and state competitions (and sometimes they even win!), and has opened for poets such as Patricia Smith and Ebony Stewart. Ruth volunteers with youth spoken word program *IC Speaks* as an assistant director, youth coordinator, and slam team coach. When not behind the mic stand, they love to still be on stage acting and singing, or finding somewhere quiet to drink boba, crochet, and binge watch video essays.

MOFIYINFOLUWA O. is a Nigerian writer living between Lagos and Iowa City. Her work is concerned with emotional interiority as experienced by women alongside body, memory and desire. She is the founder of The Abebi Afrononfiction Institute and Award committed to spotlighting powerful stories by powerful women. Her work has appeared in *Guernica*, *The Black Warrior Review*, *Lolwe*, *AFREADA* and has been selected as a 2023 Best American Essay Notable Entry. She is the recipient of the 2024 Stanley Award for International Research awarded by The University of Iowa. She is currently at work on her debut memoir interrogating the body and its relationship with desire.

SEAN ZHURAW was born and raised in Philadelphia where he teaches English and Creative Writing at the Community College of Philadelphia among other local universities. His poetry and translations of the Austrian poet Theodor Däubler have been published in *ANMLY*, *Boston Review*, *The Hopkins Review*, *Tin House*, *The Offing*, *Defunct*, *TYPO*, *Denver Quarterly*, and maybe even elsewhere. He is a graduate of Columbia University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he was awarded a Capote fellowship and the John Logan poetry prize selected by Donald Revell. He is proud to be a BTL counselor for the tenth consecutive summer! He and his husband care for two cool cats.

STAFF BIOS

ROMEO ORIOGUN is a Nigerian poet, essayist, and the author of *Sacrament of Bodies* (2020), *Nomad* (2021) and *The Gathering of Bastards* (2023), as well as three chapbooks. A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, he has won the Nigeria Prize for Literature, the Alice Fay Di Castagnola Prize, the Brunel International African Poetry Prize, and was a finalist for the Lambda Prize for Gay Poetry. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, *Harvard Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *Narrative Magazine*, *The Common*, and elsewhere, and are translated into several languages. As of 2023, he coordinates IWP's youth programming.

RAZAN HAMZA is a senior at Cornell College, studying Psychological Sciences and International Studies. She is a poet and an eboard member for Lyrically Inclined, Cornell College's poetry organization. Also for Cornell, she is a coordinator for the International Student Orientation. A member of the International Student Association there as well, she takes part in the annual Culture Show, for which she represents her home country of Sudan. Razan spends her Saturdays tutoring immigrants and refugees in English, and all in all enjoys every opportunity in which she can engage with people of various cultures.

GRACE MORSE is an essayist from New Orleans, Louisiana pursuing her MFA at the University of Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program. She is emphatic about her passion for memoir, her birthstone, and the ever-deepening politics of her body. Her most recent essay is forthcoming in CRAFT Magazine, where it was also shortlisted for the 2023 CRAFT Flash Prose Prize.

SEHRISH TAHIR is a 2024 BTL chaperone and the Head of the Guidance Counselling Department at Lahore Grammar School- OPF, Pakistan. She has a Certification in College Advising from Columbia University and a rich career of 16 years of experience in college advising.

OMAR KHATTALA is a Moroccan BTL graduate from 2016 session, currently a chaperone in 2024 session, and a medical doctor. Omar is known for his passion for writing fantasy, usually with undertones reflecting real-life issues, a philosophy he terms "fantasy serving reality." Omar usually explores the themes of hope, love, mental health, amongst others. He is also a digital artist, utilizing his art to enrich and provide more layers to his narratives, whether it is whimsical drawings to accompany the stories he tells, or medical illustrations for pedagogic purposes. Omar usually enjoys stories with rich world-building and multilayered characters, and he hopes that his tales will positively impact youth in particular, and readers of other ages in general.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

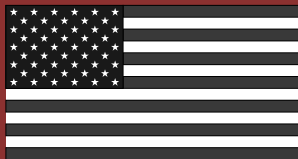
PEACE AND THE WRITING EXPERIENCE

An anthology of poetry, prose, and photographs created by
Between the Lines participants from Bangladesh, India,
Morocco, Pakistan, Slovakia, and the United States, facilitated
by the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.

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