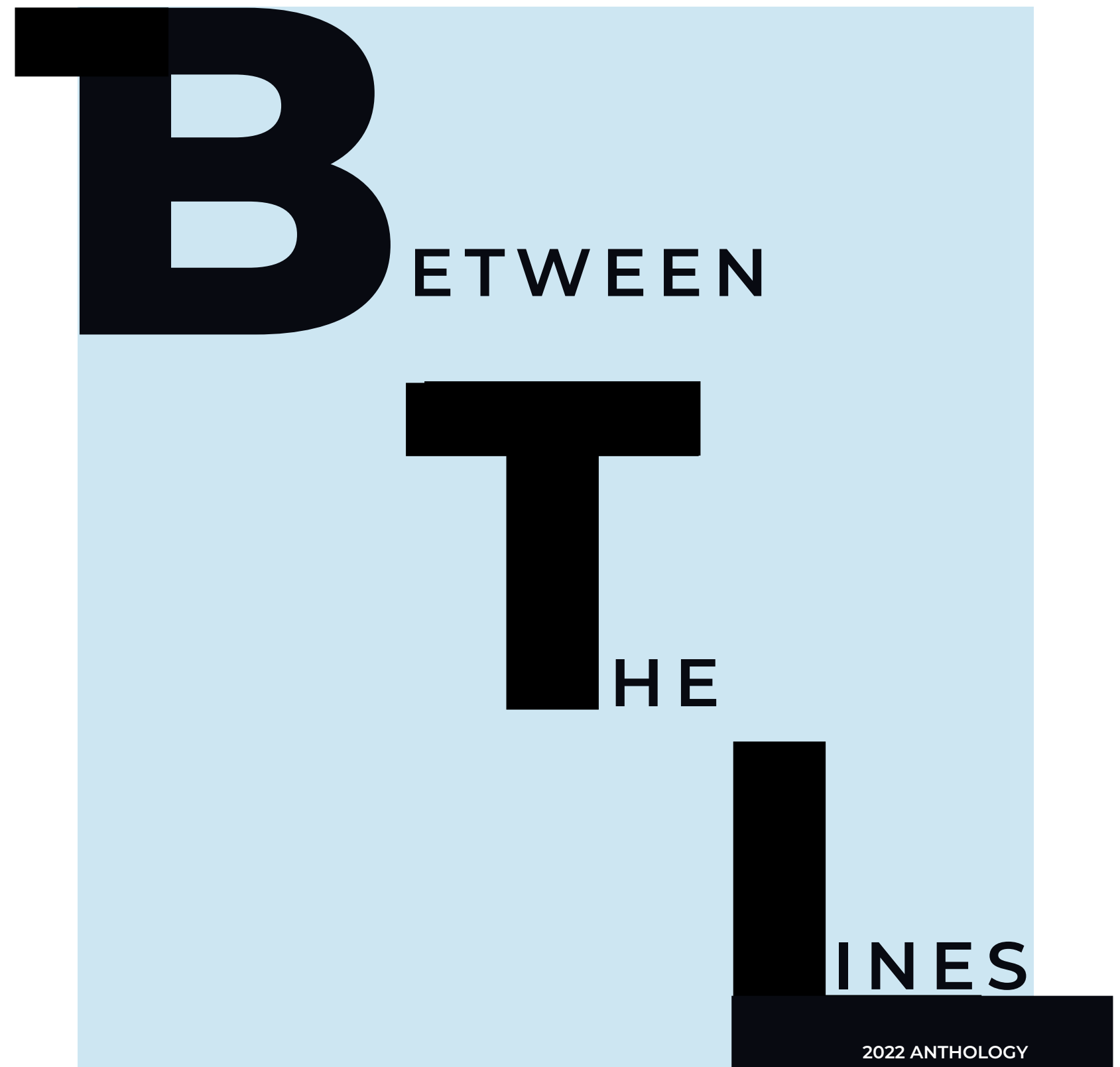


Cover Image Painting by Ole Hedeager  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Drip\\_painting\\_Light\\_my\\_fire.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Drip_painting_Light_my_fire.jpg)  
Additional cover design by Georgie Fehringer

Printed in the United States of America  
By University of Iowa Printing  
First Printing, 2022  
University of Iowa's International Writing Program-  
Between the Lines:  
Peace and the Writing Experience  
<https://iwp.uiowa.edu/programs/between-the-lines>







# CONTENTS

12

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

14

**FOREWORD**

*By Alisa Weinstein & Caitlin Plathe*

16

**AARUSH**

*Send the Knights in Rusted Dragonrotted  
Armour*

18

**ABDULRAHMAN**

*i refuse to give this piece a title.*

20

**ACE**

*The Underwater Dilemma*

22

**ADELE**

*Under the Pergola*

24

**ANDREA**

*Untitled*

26

**ANELLE**

*Я ЛЮБЛЮ ТЕБЯ, ПАПА!*



28

**ANGELA**

*One Last Heartbeat*

30

**ASH**

*Forgotten Heroine*

32

**ATOULLOKHON**

*Unread Thoughts*

34

**BTL PARTICIPANT**

*The Trash*

36

**DANA**

*What to Call "An Appropriate Poem"*

38

**DANIELLE**

*The Void*

40

**DENIS**

*8 Days*

42

**DIMI**

*Orb*

44

**DIVANSSHI**

*Love Languages*

46

**DOMINIKA**

*Little Girl*

48

**EKATO**

*The Unfinished Painting*

50

**GHIDA**

*Islamic Regulations: Between  
Myth and Realities*

52

**HAMID**

*My First Walk*

54

**HAMZA**

*Abandoned Mandir*

56

**HANNAH**

*A Poem Where the Word Mind is  
Replaced by City*

58

**HELEN**

*8th Avenue, Brooklyn*

60

**HOORIA**

*an Afghan girl*

62

**IFSAT**

*NONE to call my own*



64

**IRYNA**

*What a Loss !*

66

**JAYLEN**

*The Forbidden Door*

68

**JESSICA**

*Excerpt from "Ghost Sister"*

70

**JULIA**

*An Expert of Old Swedish Life*

72

**KATE**

*Off Kanagawa*

74

**MARITA**

*Leaving Home*

76

**MIRAL**

*Bullying in School*

78

**NINA**

*There Is No Way back*

80

**OMAR**

*The Cliff and the Clef*

82

**RAMZI**

*After Mitski*

84

**REEM**

*The Song of Sundown &  
The Queen of Rides*

86

**SARA**

*Dance of the Dead*

88

**SASHA**

*Black and White*

90

**SOFIE**

*Search for Freedom*

92

**SOVA**

*Death is All but the End of Freedom*

94

**TJ**

*Dragons and Fairies*

96

**TSOVINAR**

*It Was Raining*

98

**VASILISA**

*Formula*



100

**YASMINA**

*I Spent Fifty Days Observing the Sun*

102

**ZUYENA**

*Untitled*

104

**INSTRUCTORS &  
STAFF**





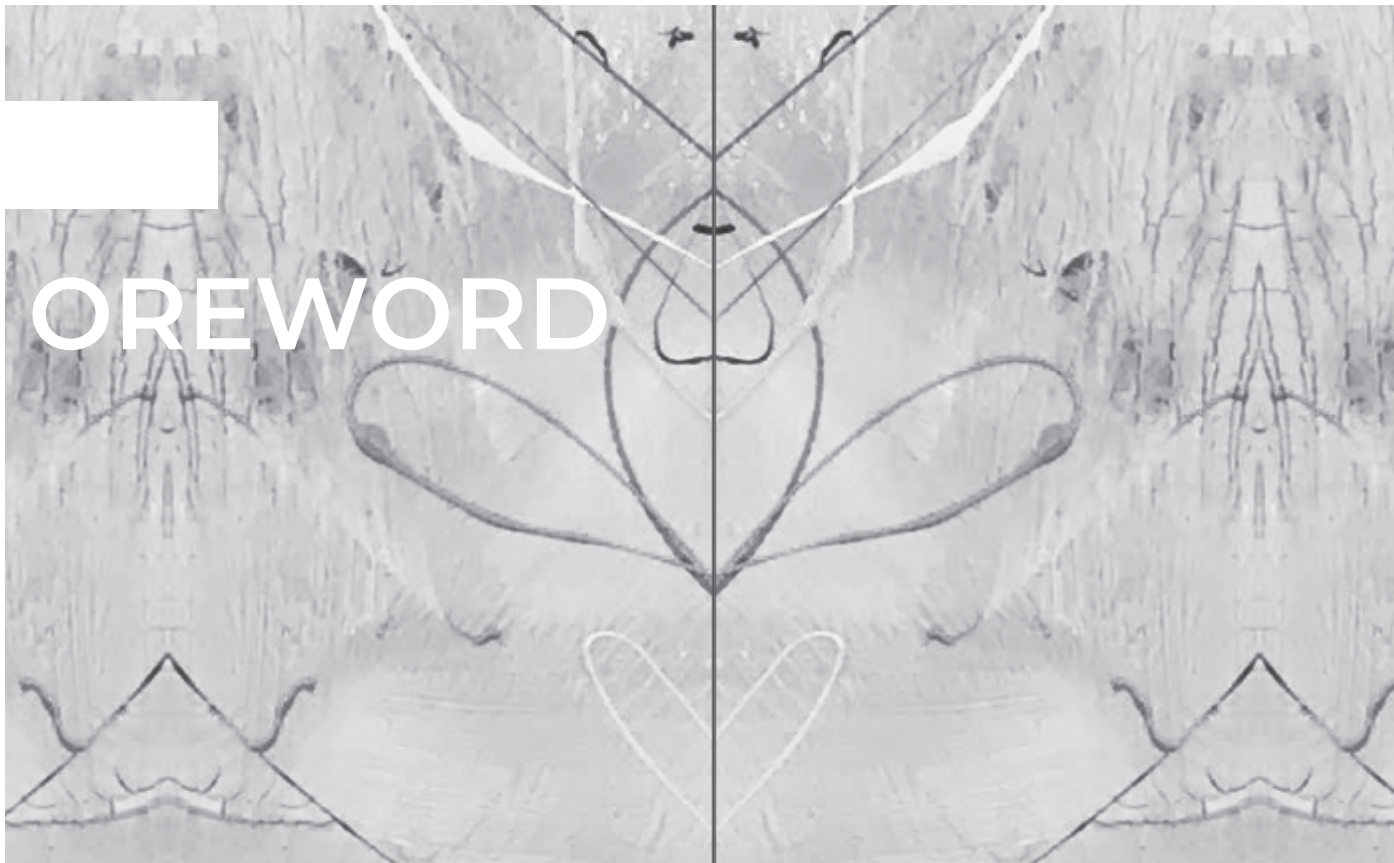
# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Each year, since its inception in 2008, Between the Lines (BTL) has pursued innovation and growth. This year's program is again made possible by the generous support from the Cultural Programs Division of the U.S. Department of State, and the dedication of individuals and organizations that support the program's mission:

Christopher Merrill, International Writing Program (IWP) director; and all the staff of the IWP at the University of Iowa; Jill Staggs, Chris Miner, and Nancy Szalwinski, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State; Hannah Pell and Hiju Kim, Cultural Programs Division interns; BTL instructors: Mary Hickman, Rumena Bužarovska, Rochelle Potkar, and Vladimir Poleganov; BTL teaching assistants and seminar panelists: Sean Zhuraw, Delaney Nolan, Gyasi Hall, and alea adigweme; BTL summer assistant and seminar panelist: Mason Hamberlin; BTL anthology designer Georgie Fehringer; IWP editor Nataša Đurovičová; BTL program assistant Caitlin Plathe; BTL program coordinator Alisa Weinstein.

We also give our thanks to BTL's visiting writers and teaching artists: Melody Moezzi; IWP residents: Shehan Karunatilaka, Tariro Nodoro, Edwige Dro, Jidanun Lueangpiansamut, and Kateryna Babkina; BTL alumni Danju Zoe Liu (BTL '20) Libby Riggs (BTL '20), and Nina Ballerstedt (BTL '21); Justin Rogers, LaShaun phoenix Moore, and Shawntai Brown of InsideOut Literary Arts in Detroit; Dr. Camea Davis, Urban Word Youth Poet Laureate Network Director and Shanelle Gabriel, Urban Word Executive Director; Alyssa Gaines (Indianapolis - National Youth Poet Laureate 2022); Elizabeth Shvarts (NYC Regional Youth Poet Laureate 2022); Jessica Kim (Los Angeles Youth Poet Laureate 2022); Isabella Ramirez (South Florida Youth Poet Laureate 2022); Jan Weissmiller and Kathleen Johnson of Prairie Lights Bookstore in Iowa City; and finally, to all the participants of Between the Lines for making this program extraordinary.





**“We are all the same in different ways.”**

**-Nita Prose, *The Maid***

Although Between the Lines: Peace and the Writing Experience 2022 “met” on Zoom for the first time at Orientation on July 15th, the journey into each other’s lives and stories began in a group WhatsApp chat in early May. I must admit that within days, I had to mute my phone. It pinged at all hours of the day and night with 45 young writers from 15 countries joining forces to exchange thousands of messages per week! Scrolling the chat, I would marvel at the personalities shining through. They discovered each other’s preferences in books and pop cultures. They asked for opinions, recommendations, and received sage advice. They even sent writing and offered up support all on their own. Whenever I saw that I missed 257 new messages, I would find: “What are your pronouns?” “Are you safe?” “How were your exams?” “What languages do you speak?” and the answers would go on in between. I had no doubt this group could fulfill the BTL mission through their care and words!

This was infinitely proved through our daily virtual gatherings as the BTL cohort radiated with appreciation and empathy. BTL is more than screens filled with first names and countries. It is zoom boxes turning yellow. It is smiles and head nods. It is leaping phrases and unmuted sentences, and silent snaps, and typed arrows pointing up in the chat. Understanding comes through a feeling that no one wants to hold back. That telling and listening to one another’s stories, choosing to be present no matter our time of day, coordinates, and national boundaries is important. We spent two weeks experiencing the ways our sameness can sit with our variances and celebrating what each participant offered through personal and cultural lenses.

With the support of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State, this 14th year of BTL: Peace and the Writing Experience enacted IWP’s [core-mission](#) of global cultural outreach—combining creative writing and cultural exchange, connecting youth to their peers and mentors around the world. We are grateful to

the public and cultural affairs officers at U.S. Embassies/Consulates for nominating their top candidates, enabling IWP to select an amazing cohort of BTL 2022 participants from Afghanistan, Armenia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Georgia, Iraqi Kurdistan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Ukraine and the U.S.

This summer fictionist, poet, and screenwriter Rochelle Potkar (IWP Fall Resident ’15, Summer Institute Mentor ’19, India) joined expert faculty from BTL ’20 and ’21: fiction writer and literary translator Rumena Bužarovska (IWP Fall Resident ’18, North Macedonia); writer, translator, and screenwriter Vladimir Poleganov (IWP Fall Resident ’16, Bulgaria); and poet and assistant professor Mary Hickman (BTL Faculty ’15, ’16, ’17, ’20, ’21, U.S.). In seven writing workshops and four literature seminars these instructors skillfully guided our participants in exploring many forms of creative writing such haiku, haibun, villanelle, free-verse, short story, flash fiction, magic realism, and taking trips into the strange and fantastic. We also explored elements of craft by writing dialogue, writing about conflict, writing about stereotypes, playing with imagery and emotion and with revision as re-seeing, and engaging with the natural world through observation, metaphor and analogy to capture both wonder and anxiety.

BTLers participated in seven special seminars facilitated by visiting artists who opened the doors of our perception on a range of topics and themes. In week one, Iowa MFA writers and BTL staff Sean Zhuraw, Gyasi Hall, Delaney Nolan, alea adigweme, and Mason Hamberlin talked us through imposter syndrome, community, messiness, and the negative outside voices that creep into our inner monologues. We heard Muslim American author Melody Moezzi discuss writing for and about mental health, the importance of sleep! and writing the stories only you can write. During public readings of their work, ideas about writing and culture bounced among the students and guesting IWP residents, Shehan Karunatilaka (IWP ’21, Sri Lanka), Tariro Ndoro (IWP ’22, Zimbabwe), Edwige Dro (IWP ’21, Côte d’Ivoire), Jidanun Lueangpiansamut (IWP ’22, Thailand).

In week 2, hailing from InsideOut Literary Arts in Detroit, Justin Rogers, LaShaun phoenix Moore, and Shawntai Brown performed and inspired us to write and speak out about home, memory, and our own redefinitions of self. Kateryna Babkina (IWP ’18, Ukraine) and Rumena Bužarovska guided us to take notice of our own unique reactions to the same influences and offered nine key ways to set up our lives to get more inspiration. Shanelle Gabriel, Urban Word Executive Director, welcomed the 2022 National Youth Poet Laureate (NYPL) Alyssa Gaines (Indianapolis), and the 2022 competition finalists Elizabeth Shvarts (BTL ’20, NYC Regional Youth Poet Laureate 2022); Jessica Kim (Los Angeles Youth Poet Laureate 2022); and Isabella Ramirez (South Florida Youth Poet Laureate 2022). The poets shared their work and answered questions about revision process, writing about trauma and marginalization, and their experiences in the spotlight. BTL ’20 and ’21 U.S. alumni and follow-on microgrant recipients Libby Riggs, Danju Zoe Liu, and Nina Ballerstedt returned to highlight their own outstanding collaborative literary projects over the the past few years in a discussion facilitated by IWP staff.

Midway through was marked by two special events. Young writers had the opportunity to perform their new works in an Open Mic Event, livestreamed on Facebook, and enjoyed a livestreamed BTL Faculty Reading, hosted by Iowa City’s iconic bookstore, Prairie Lights.

Through all of this, the brutalities of war and displacement, not to mention the challenges of unstable internet, electrical outages, COVID-19, and bouts of Zoom fatigue didn’t stop these participants from writing and exploring each others’ days and nights. Our BTLers began the two weeks sharing bedtime stories and nervous introductions, followed by sleepy or lively daily meetings, reading their work aloud for the first time, and finding inspiration. We finish our program together as a constellation of talented humans from all over the world.

With this anthology, we bring together our 2022 participants’ powerful work and words, amplifying their kindness, courage, and hope. We thank them for existing.

Alisa Weinstein, IWP Youth Programs Coordinator  
Caitlin Plathe, Between the Lines Program Assistant



# SEND THE KNIGHTS IN RUSTED DRAGONROTTED ARMOR

by Aarush

There aren't as many articles in this poem as we'd like, because the dragon ate them.

We condemn dragon for eyes for gold, greed  
for gluttony, it consumes our tribute, loyal steed  
for wrath, it burns our town the color of ravens  
for lust, why does it need to eat young maidens  
for vainglory, damn serpent coil off our looming rock  
for sloth, wyrm asleep, dormant round the clock  
for envy, drake sees our treasure, not ours anymore

So send the knights in shining armor

The warriors, work for feudal, for lords for money  
The king, tax until the coffers are bleeding runny  
The soldiers, pillage the enemy, maul them all  
The maidens raised to be wives, told to be good hauls  
The knight on golden horse, slay the beast if you would  
The lords who languish, the ones who do nothing but could  
The people, killed the dragon, take all the treasure  
(but some of it wasn't theirs)

The dragon's dead, the dragon's gone  
The dragon sickness lingers  
The greed, the wrath, the sloth, the vainglory, the envy, the gluttony, the lust  
Feel the dead winged serpent control your fingers

A land was oppressed by a scaly tyrant so they  
Overthrew it! And replaced it with human kings of fey  
And the land felt so grateful when it was humanity  
Who, surely not in wrath, greed, vainglory, envy  
burned it from tree to tree

And so happy it was that it wasn't any smoking lizard  
Who was gorging themselves on the fruits of the earth  
Who was ignoring the fires to stare at the hearth

One day a boy came to the grave of the dragon, but as much as he searched, he could not find the bones.



USA





Iraqi  
Kurdistan

## *i refuse to give this piece a title.*

by Abdulrahman



here i am, fingers on my keyboard, not having the slightest idea what to write about. i've been racking my brain for inspiration, but it doesn't seem like any would be falling from the sky anytime soon. the blank, white screen is staring at me with absolute insolence, mocking my lack of creativity. do my lines have to rhyme? do they have to follow strict classic shakespearean rules? does it even have to be poetry?

and why should I write about love, death, and all of these grand things  
why should i fetishize sadness  
when writing about this steaming cup of coffee with enough eloquence  
can send me to the cocoa fields and sunny skies of brazil?  
sometimes, you need to let your words carry you  
not the opposite.

i don't wanna sound like some mighty old greek philosopher searching for the meaning of life. poetry and paragraphs don't always have to send me on some grandiose, brain-racking journey of pondering. i, and i'm sure you too, have been told to appreciate the small things in life, and i wanna do the same without overthinking it. classic writing is nice and can result in beautiful, inspiring work, but taking a break from all its density can be like a whiff of much needed fresh air.



# THE UNDERWATER DILEMMA

by Ace

The darkness of the deep sea was clear as day for the tailed figure swimming through it. The fins and scales on its body would've shone like metal under the sun, but their color faded in the pitch black waters. Opaque blank eyes, sharp teeth, gills, slim figure, webbed fingers — the features of the merfolk matched those of partly humanized cannibal fish. Searching for prey while being careful of the bigger predators, it ascended into the bright upper waters.

The deep sea is at large like the void, where light is perhaps the last thing one wants to see. If anything emits light, it's definitely after you. Therefore it's not something comforting to the deep's natives. All while the higher waters are soaked in sunlight. Between the two parts of the sea, there are many differences that those on land don't care to notice. The upper sea population tries to mimic the surface and deems the deep to be barbaric, while the latter thinks the higher sea is sucking up to the land dwellers. The previously land-exclusive concepts like money (useless metal chunks to give for needed things), clothes (uncomfortable rags that serve no purpose), homes (traps for one's self), and many more are not understood in the deep sea, but embraced and gradually migrated into the higher sea's culture. As well as that, way more merfolk are choosing to take a human form and live on the surface. Despite never having seen them, the lower water natives hate humans for spreading their corruption where it doesn't belong. They begin to hate their fellow merfolk from above, who accept that interference with open arms.

Being able to exist both below and above, the creature rose higher to the typically more populated upper sea. Except this time it was less full of life. Way too many merfolk move to land. Perhaps hunger will force it to blend in with the humans too, and understand the things it looks down upon now. Maybe it, too, will live in a world where everyone does useless things and no one cares if they're from the deep or not. Maybe it, too, will lose itself to humanity.



Russia



# UNDER THE PERGOLA



by Adele

Under the pergola, I watch as the heat peels open the rosebuds, jamming its thumbs into the pale green and watching as sticky water trickles out. The vines cling to the perfect circles of black metal, celestial spheres stagnant around us as your fingers waltz on the page of your notebook. I must be in a clock, seeing as I'm a tool for measuring entropy and right now I feel at home. When the forest wrapped its hands over a fallen heron, I thought of standing in the lashing golden winds that slid up the Oregon Coast. Will I die like a seraph, or will my wings be peeled away from my bare feet, ripe for the fungi to riddle?

I don't mean to be so morbid. The fly that knows the bird's flesh as its birthplace now sprinkles pollen between the blackberry blossoms. Those same feet, unshrouded by feather, danced to Abba on the algae-slick rocks a meter below the tepid surface of the Fremont Canal, the crossroads of sunlight warping into a map on my skin. On the far bank, a great gray heron waits and watches for a fish to spear. I don't see until I'm long gone, of course. Genesis says we were created in God's image, an album of divine selfies. To know anything, we must know everything. There are six wings between three flies, all crackling with iridescence in yet another sunset.



USA



# A WISH

Andrea

a wish

(star light, star bright, the first star i see tonight-)

your hand finds home in mine, slender things  
nestled within my calloused palms. i hold you delicately,  
like porcelain, like glass, like you will burn away if i hold you  
too tightly. (you will) comets streak by. alight, aflame,  
raining our penance from the heavens. we don't say a word.

ebony curls rest upon my shoulder, twist and turn along  
the crevices of me, the recesses of my body. (all at home.)  
we are two, and we are one, merging together underneath heavy moonlight,  
breathing in sync. i lean a bit closer. you know i've always been selfish.  
a tender exhale against my lips.

you breathe life into me. i let my eyes slide shut, pulling you close,  
shaking, shivering. cherry chapstick. smooth skin. i don't want to love you,  
(because i don't want to lose you), but in this moment, i let myself dream.  
dream of a life where i am free. dream of a life where i can stay beside you.  
dream upon the shooting stars this quiet night.

(-i wish i may, i wish i might, stay here with you tonight)



USA





Kazakhstan

# Я ЛЮБЛЮ ТЕБЯ, ПАПА!

by Anelle



We have always been on and off,  
And that is not something you say about your relationship with your Father.  
There were times when daily phone calls, check-ins, over-controlled gestures were a constant.  
There were times when months went by and only 2 “Hello”s were uttered.

There were times when the distance was only 4 kilometers.  
And there were times when the distance was 10,805 kilometers.  
There were times when that didn’t matter.  
There were times it did.

There were times “I love you” was said sincerely,  
Hopping into his arms  
After months apart.  
I was only 4.

There were times “I love you” was a calling card:  
“I’m going to ask you for money.”  
or  
“I want something from you.”

There were times when I felt mad, like I could never forgive him.  
There were times I felt shame for my words and actions.  
There were times I longed for his love and affection,  
Just being there over dinner without his goddamn phone.

There will be times I am annoyed;  
or disheartened;  
or upset.  
There will be times when he does the same.

And there will be a time when either one of us passes.  
And the world will change.  
So why waste this precious time,  
Carrying this ball of hate.

I long for forgiveness, from him, from myself.  
From the child that lost, for the woman that shall be.  
But time heals, and there will be a time  
When my Father is a parent, the kind of parent I love and aspire to be.



# ONE LAST HEARTBEAT

by Angela



Got all used to people walking away  
Never saw that destiny in you  
But there you go slipping into that way  
And now I can't pretend I'm okay

How can I be after all that we've had?  
Or was I the only one who fell that bad?  
Your heart was my home, your smile my other  
world  
Things I've felt are driving me mad

I pick up your smell in an empty house  
Imagining you're passing by when no-one's there  
Feeling your touch while singing on my own  
Trying to put feelings into words

But what songs could relate?  
Angels used to pause and smile  
When you and I were walking around  
None would ever dare make a sound

Our heartbeats synced for us to dance  
Made a show for heavens and earth  
People called us Romeo and Juliette  
We just lost ourselves in space

Universe ask about you at night  
The whole galaxy went dark  
The Moon thought it was his fault  
The sun thought she didn't shine enough

Maybe some faults drove you far  
Or were you of true love scared?  
Some secrets are sacred  
But I loved you the way you are

I walk alone down the park  
We always used to go too late  
Walking under starry nights wishing you were  
there  
To recall the small talks we used to mark Our  
nights with

Would you come back?  
Give me a chance  
To know what went wrong with us?  
Was it me? Or was it life? Destiny?

One hint is all I need  
And babe you know I rather bleed  
Than not knowing the answer at all  
That's only what I ask for

Maybe secretly wishing  
I'd see your smile one last time  
It'd be enough to keep me living  
On the last heartbeat of mine.



Lebanon



# FORGOTTEN HEROINE



by Ash

Kyi, Schek and Horyv could feel their destiny nearing, clouding their thoughts and begging to be noticed. What they didn't know was that Lybid, their sister, would be the one to carry it out.

The hill stood green and tall, vast mainlands and meadows surrounding the would-be city. Kyi smiled and got to work. He raised his hands in the air and pulled them into fists, feeling the ground beneath him birth mountains and valleys. Fields grew wheat and sunflowers littered the ground, viburnum bushes striving to free themselves from the soil. The terrain stretched far beyond the horizon, the Earth's curve hiding the town from view.

Schek looked around, mesmerized, grasping onto his brother's shoulder. His eyes shone with pride and admiration for his sibling. Schek closed them and released a breath. Small huts and city walls appeared in front of him, his gift of architecture giving the city comfort and protection.

Horyv chuckled, creasing a brow at his two brothers.

"What good a city without folk?" - he smirked.

He then spun in a circle, placing his palms atop the fertile soil of the town, sensing it shake. The windows in houses beamed with light, streets filled with chatter, joyful laughter echoed through the dark night above.

The three brothers left the city as they built it, yet they forgot one thing, and the folk demanded.

Their sister, Lybid, was a selfless soul, prone to the people's never-ending greed. She took her last breath as she merged with the Earth, her gentle hands and slim figure creating a stream of rivers. They flowed through every corner, every hut, every child. The city of Kyiv stood strong, its people healthy, satiated. The world remained oblivious to Lybid's sacrifice, her name spoken aloud only in reference to her three brothers.



Ukraine



# UNREAD THOUGHTS

by Atoullokhon

After busy work, tired of doing the same every day, exhausted of staying at past and present, Blooper looks at things which surround him and he finds only his son as an excuse not to go to future. There was only one cryogen machine at his time, then he builds another one for his son too. He imagines the future, advancing technologies, the way they could make his life easier and joyful. He asks his son to go after him and that they can go to future together. Unfortunately, the cryogen machine that he built breaks and kills his son. This scientist freezes himself in cryogen for 400 years...

It's 2422 years, and he gets out of machine. "What? Where is my son?" he wonders. He opens machine next to his and sees bones located on the heart of the ice. He gets upset, because there is no love left in his existence, neither in his memory, nor in the future. After sobbing moments, he goes to explore that love from other people. He gets outside, and what? He sees people with bolder head. Curious man goes to ask - Received no response. He finds out on the internet about the microchips and microcontrollers, called neuralink. Like phones and other devices, neuralinks can connect to other neuralinks to share thoughts from human brain to another one. Blooper begins to hate this device, because it ended human verbal communication. No one could understand him, he couldn't understand anyone. So he wanted to return back. Return back when his beloved son was alive. He tried everything possible, no luck. He goes to commit suicide by visiting Bermudian Triangle. He goes there alone and finds absorbing source of energy. He plunges there and circle moving waves take him to the past. He finds his son, finds verbal communicating people. He hugs his son, saying that: "Carpe Diem" - "Catch the moment". He tells to younger generation: Destiny didn't choose your existence to be in this time for no reason. It's because you are the best fitting avatars that belong here.



Tajikistan



# THE TRASH



by BTL Participant

I need you to listen to me very carefully. It's a dangerous task that will test all of your abilities. It's a task that's done by the third son of the sixth daughter on the eve of the son's sixteenth birthday. He needs to take out the trash before the sixth daughter takes away all his presents. Even though in this culture, becoming sixteen means becoming "a man", "an adult", they still can't (are scared of) take out the trash. "It's just a bag. Mom and I do it twice every day", said his sister.

"But I'm a man. We don't do things like that. We do manly things and this is feminine."

"Oh really? If you're such a man, you wouldn't be scared of a small bag"

This one sentence hit the ego of the young man so bad, that he was going to take out the trash. He didn't want to be helpful or to receive his gifts. If he needed the gifts, he could work, like any other manly man to get them.

He took one step forward, stood there for a couple of seconds, disgust in his face, before taking another singular step and repeating the process.

As he reached the dumpster, he stood in front of it for what felt like hours, when suddenly-

"Oh for Hell's sake!" his sister pushed him in.





# WHAT TO CALL “AN APPROPRIATE POEM”

by Dana

Boredom finds its way to her heart  
Even though learning alphabets and memorizing rhymes of pre-school chants were her only occupations  
4-year-old me flips her notebook, scribbling at the back, trying to entertain herself  
She writes “I love spring, and love walking with mother and father during spring”  
And calls it a poem

She embraces her legs to her chest helplessly  
How many more sleepless nights to go?  
11-year-old me had caught a depression  
Depression, for the poor preteen, has been coming and going through years, just like catching flu  
She tries to fill the hole in her heart with countless miserable lines written aimlessly  
And calls them poems

Her eyes roam, analyzing  
12-year-old me had developed the habit of seeking self-worth through unconsciously pointing others’ “flaws” to herself  
She knows if she surrenders to such cruel thoughts she becomes a marionette  
She cuts the strings, one after another  
And calls it a poem

“It’s called ADHD”  
15-year-old me acts surprised upon hearing the diagnosis as if she hadn’t anticipated it  
She takes medication, it adds up though after a few sessions  
As the psychiatrist prescribes her an anti-depressant, a quite strong one  
She scoffs. If that’s how it is, how would it have been like before? When it was much worse  
She pops the pills  
And calls it a poem

I\_16 years old\_ find myself a new home  
In a sentimental rather than physical manner  
“I may not have been able to start a family with a physical bond at such a young age, but Matilda, I had indeed found a family who’ll always show me love“ I write  
“My friends are my family” I write  
“How cruel fate can be? Different cities and houses, when the only home is when we’re together” I write  
I try to recover  
I try to stop using “She” instead of “I” when talking about my younger self  
Present ashamed, past denied  
I try to embrace myself  
Sometimes literally  
That’s when I sob  
And call it a poem



Egypt





Lebanon

# THE VOID

by Danielle



A bench at the far end of a park, where people have their walks, a girl waits, seated on it, her hands in the pockets of her dark grey, oversized hoodie, leaning on the bench, her legs extended and her head which had the hoodie cap on, tucked between her shoulders. The bench is wooden, ash-brown in color and look old, there are no lights except the one of a moon which drops its faded blue gleam, the smell of lily flowers fills the air, the path is made of reddish-brown bricks, where you can find evidence of people who walked there before. The girl has board looks on her face, she looks sick of waiting, but it didn't seem someone is what she is waiting for, although she is tired, she waits patiently, hoping it would come.

Feeling lost-  
the stars didn't seem to  
have the answer

Waiting didn't appear to have a solution, time is running, but void is everything she could feel, she feels useless and of no worth, she couldn't help it, she tried, she tried her best, to get up and let it slip, but nothing seems to work, she lost the motive to everything. Emptiness, as if she is locked in a prison, with no light and the key is nowhere to be found. Nothing bad happened today but she wants it to finish as soon as possible, she wishes she never woke up today, her heart is aching, but not that one of a cholesterol victim, negative thoughts loaded her brain, "what's the point of living", "am I improving", "does anyone like being around me"...this night, a blank space is all she could feel.

Void heart-  
she was crying under  
the moonlight

# 8 DAYS

by Denis

The 1973 Arab–Israeli War (the Yom Kippur War or the October War) started suddenly. Egypt and Syria decided that they can take back their territories (that they lost in the Six-Day War) by force. They were wrong, since the treacherous offensive of the armies of the countries of the Arab coalition turned into an offensive of the Israeli army.

After an unsuccessful offensive attempt, the command of the Egyptian army decided to retreat and fortify in the city of Suez. During the retreat of the Egyptians, the Israeli army disabled one T-62 tank. All crew members were killed except for one (lieutenant) Amjad al-Rassi. He was taken prisoner by the Israeli army. He was not afraid to die, if it was the will of his God - Allah.

Amjad was put in a pit for prisoners. He had to wait here for the execution, which would happen in 8 days. Despite all his hatred for the enemy (Israeli) side, he could not do anything. One young Israeli soldier, despite the order of his superiors not to help the prisoners in any way, periodically gave him additional food, water, and even somehow got a Koran for him.

Soon an Egyptian agent made his way into the camp of the Israeli military. He knew that an Egyptian was being held here and he came to warn him of the imminent advance of the Egyptian army. When the agent found out where Amjad was being held, he handed him a knife, a pistol and two magazines at night. He warned him about tomorrow's raid on this camp.

The next day, the Egyptians attacked the camp of the Israeli army. When a young (Israeli) soldier came to rescue Amjad, he (Amjad) shot him. He did not immediately realize that he had killed the one who helped him when he was almost dead. But he had no time for regrets. He knew there was nothing he could do to help him.

Even twenty years after the war, Amjad regretted having shot that young Israeli soldier. He could not continue living like this, so he shot himself. He decided that this would be the best punishment for him.

Be attentive. Sometimes people die because of the irresponsibility and inattention of some people.



Ukraine





USA

# ORB

by Dimi



I hope you have had the pleasure of dispersing a water drop. Drops come in many sizes, but they only come in one shape. They defy the very purpose of measurement and define it, all at once.

“Did you know that water, our universal solvent, regulates the earth’s temperature?”

I shook my head.

Back then, I had the guilt-free right to oblige her interests, nonstop. No shame came with answering honestly. We were nearly strangers. It wasn’t my place to entertain my dad’s friend’s daughter. But I did so anyways.

I had nothing better to do, and kindness wasn’t meant to be a fluke.

Within half a year of our meeting, her impish ways had managed to charm a ring of people into our friend group.

I would never admit it, but her and I were the core reasons that our group stuck together, at least, for those brief seven months.

What was obvious at first glance was that she knew not a thing about the practices of an average person. Her fascination with water easily slipped into an obsession, and in her company, gauging any sense of reality was a complete and total fantasy.

Her house quickly came to be known as her orb, and it was, unfortunately, the topic of many of our conversations.

As our friendship continued, I could not ignore her aura, her presence, her voice, anytime she was in the room.

She was like a magnet I wished to resist, but like a phenomenon, I could not stop myself.

Obsession was a hard thing for me to handle, and looking back, it was likely my dismal tactical and social skills that amplified the cracks, the ones that spiraled and shattered many mutual relationships.

It had finally become apparent that her soul was practically tethered to her orb. They were delicately chained together in a little locket, and tucked deep, deep inside of her, sunk down in the root canals of her toes.

It all began with her avoidance of issues.

Issues.

The word itself was chewy, dense and clogging in the very backs of her mouth. She never said it aloud, and whenever anyone else did, she flinched.

That word summed up her self-destruction, I think. Her breakdown started as drama, then became more disturbing. The very first Issue began with a very lonely, very cracked plastic cup.

# LOVE LANGUAGES

by Divansshi



In this country, sunset is a thief that devours the sky and reaches for more, always hungry, always eating away at the stars. In this country, even the sky is famished and the wind is rebelling. All of them have stolen crowns. They listen to their fathers who lean over the cradle and say power, power.

When you squat by the side of the lake, the Mahaveli rives hushes, be free. The blue-water-lilies sing taste the air. Do you hear the echoes of suffering again, again? There is corruption outside us. But so too is there love and songs.

-Food served on plates.

I am standing along with my people screaming for justice. I join the queue to get food and a middle aged woman serves, biriyani this time. She smiles at me and my mother shines in her.

What's heaven to a woman's love anyway?

-Calls from gas station.

My group chat pings: 'About to Arrive, Petrol 92 6600L'. I take the car and immediately rush to the gas station, 6km away. It's been 5 hours already. My stomach grumbles. I walk up to the soldier in front of me and give him my number, asking to ring if the petrol finally arrives. He smiles and nods his head.

Would you like to be old friends? Would you like to remember me a little?

-Sitting together after a long day.

We went rambuttan-picking last week but it feels like it happened a decade ago. I am no longer in the kitchen to hear how our daughter's day went. Sleepy, you still stayed up for me, with dinner prepared. I wish the whole day was spent like this, but I have to return back to the gas station tomorrow.

Would you like to meet again at the age of six chasing after the same butterfly?

-Working on the same table.

The dining table is now my forte. Yours too. Words slide off your mouth as you attend your job interview the laborer cut-down, but your eyes follow me as I scramble around, fixing our bicycle.

I'm so in love I feel like a container of strawberries.

-Calling home from deployment.

I was holding down the people who are fighting on the right side. My sister is not happy with me. She'd stopped checking up on me. I call to tell her that I might come home tonight. Silence. Don't, she whispered.

I don't know who sold the homeland but I know who loved it.

In this country even the sky is loved and wind is in cared for. Of course there is peace here. Everything is wonderful here. Of course. Of course.



Sri Lanka





Ukraine

## LITTLE GIRL

by Dominika

When the moon slowly pours its pale light, it reminds me of how much time is left.

To become full. Melt in nothing.

That's when my time comes. In one of these "nothings", I have to return. *He* takes me away.

And yet, I love the moon.

In the middle of the blackness of the deepest night, in the middle of the gradually brightening dimness of the approach of its end.

We talk a lot with her, with the moon. She has a lot to tell. Mostly, about the nights I wasn't here.

She understands. Understands how it is. To be dual.

Mom doesn't see it. Can't see. Every time I return from *there*, I am the same girl for her. Spring girl. A girl with blooming of white and light-violet field flowers. After all, don't I succumb to her when the day? Don't I feel the same way, as she says? Don't I want to deceive myself that she is right? *The same. The same. The same.*

*Unchangeable.*

then night comes. It always comes.

And I remember. I remember who I am now. Who really am. That little girl is gone. That in my soul is winter.

- Do you know the feeling when your own father is like a stranger? - I asked from the hazy shadows, which were human once, memoryless phantoms of The Asphodel Meadows, the last time I was there.

But they were silent again.

There was only Him who whispered, who is always whispering: *Persephone*

# THE UNFINISHED PAINTING



by Ekato

In an abandoned building lies a painting. Half of it is covered by cloth, thrown on hastily as if someone was in hurry.

You enter the building and regret it instantly. There is so much dust and spider webs, and you don't even want to know where some of those stains are from. You are here for a reason, though. Is it a dare? Work? Curiosity? I wouldn't know.

Stairs creak loudly as you step on them. It feels like every sound you make is a mistake, but there is no one here, no one has been here for a long while, so you calm yourself. The room you find yourself in is completely bare, save for the painting in the middle.

The painting looks like it's glowing in the bleak background. You want to see it better, so you come closer. Your heart is beating so fast, you feel afraid and with each step, the feeling gets worse, but you don't stop, why should you? Your hand is trembling when you manage to tug the cloth and it falls away. You freeze in terror. A second passes, then two and finally, nothing happens. You sigh in relief. It's just a painting after all.

You slide your hand over it. The painting looks unfinished. A background of a street with few people passing by, only the far corner of it, the end of the street, is empty like the artist forgot that part of the canvas even existed.

You leave, for whatever reason you came is fulfilled, but on the way home, you realize. The painting didn't have a speck of dust on it, had it?

And that one woman on the painting, the only person that was facing towards the space that was empty, unfinished, did she look... terrified?



Georgia



# ISLAMIC REGULATIONS: BETWEEN MYTHS AND REALITIES

## Ghida

Western feminism disseminates the notion that Muslim women are oppressed. Their misrepresentation of Arab women's conditions in their countries from a gender lens isolates gender from its social, political, and historical contexts. Two misconceptions formed by the western generalization of Muslim women's conditions are: the idea that Muslim women are oppressed and forced to wear the veil and that they have no freedom of choice due to the boundaries set by Qur'an.

Related to Hijab, the Qur'an addresses women's dress and modesty primarily to protect their privacy and secure them from the evil intentions and actions of others. The Qur'an states: "O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women believers to lower over them their garments (jalābīb). That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused/harmed." (Q. 33:59). Based on this, Hijab is something that Muslim have come to recognize as good through their pragmatic and practical experiences, not as an obligation.

Having no intimate relationship outside of marriage is considered as a way of controlling women's sexuality to the west. Western feminism doesn't consider that keeping women purity is a sign of real freedom and integrity in Muslim societies. In Islam, it is not only important for women to avoid sexuality, but men are also expected to keep a respectful distance from unrelated women. "They lived like falcons. The hunters of the wild couldn't touch them". Intimate relationship in Islam is a sacred relationship that is governed by regulations in order to protect the rights and duties of each party.

In conclusion, Muslim women's circumstances have a big number of fallacies, including the notion that they were compelled to wear the veil or that they lacked freedom of choice because of the regulations restricting their sexuality. All movements of feminism call for women's rights according to women's specific cultures, religions and regions, so as feminists we should understand what freedom means in each of those cultures.



Lebanon

# MY FIRST WALK

by Hamid

Standing still, looking at the city  
The windows are shaded blue,  
This greenness is affected through  
the lens of my eyes as  
they are mesmerized,  
I am still, but the city is moving,  
Very fast  
So fast that it makes the time slow  
The flow is smooth and calming  
The allure, the charm, the warning  
What if I miss these scenes,  
Or the comfort that it brings?  
The hugging trees,  
The sudden, slight, soft breeze  
Blue is covering me, blue is the sky  
I step out, and hard is the ground  
Fresh lemon juice pictures on my left  
Large, cruel pictures of watermelon on my right,  
Wondering  
What if miss these scenes? If I do  
My life is then wasted  
As if I was standing still, and my life  
Like a movie  
Just passing, second by second  
There is no turning back  
I told myself,  
“Either live every breathe,  
Or boil in the bowl of regret  
That you are the chef.”  
Suddenly,  
Sun is falling down, helping moon to rise  
Clouds turned red, giving the sky a spice  
A scent is smelt, what is it?  
Oh I see,  
Moisture, it is  
It came to us as a guest,  
Who might be the host, I wondered?  
Raindrops whispered, “We are!”  
I am grateful for the wind  
It caresses me,  
Or the heat, burning heat,  
it warms me  
Stepping out of the bus,  
I looked up to the roof,  
Closed my eyes, I said  
Thank you, world, thank you!



Afghanistan



# ABANDONED MANDIR



## Hamza

I walk past contemporary modern houses and cool tube wells, and further out into the verdant green groves. Trees are arranged into rows and columns while oranges hang low, ready to be shucked and devoured. I smell citrus and wood from chopping nearby, the sweet and sour taste of ripe oranges never gets old. The pleasant aroma of the peel reminds me of my Nani, who always makes orange juice for everyone to drink. She adds kala namak, leaves of pudina and chaat masala.

I encounter ruins of another time. A house of Hindu divinity. The only component that survives 74 years of negligence is the Mandapa, everything else is levelled with the ground. The tremendous architecture shows its age, close to 400 years old. The design on the walls, squares and circles twist and turn with numerous deities, reflected onto the other side, driven by symmetrical precision – perfection. A place where farmers now house their buffaloes, makeshift roofs and medieval carts as troughs. The former times of puja have departed, and a new age has unravelled.

A people halved along religious lines. Dharma and Deen. Sikhs and Hindus fled modern-day Pakistan, and Muslims fled modern-day India. My mother's side is from Uttar Pradesh. This village was left evacuated when my mum's Dada Ji came seeking refuge, which automatically made him the owner of the majority of the lands. Unfortunately, maintaining the mandirs was not one of his priorities.

Abandoned mandir -  
The oranges they left  
withering in the groves



Pakistan

# A POEM WHERE THE WORD MIND IS REPLACED BY CITY

by Hannah

Hot concrete and corn crops.

city of literature my ass, where's the city?

five minutes any direction and its cornfield again we all know that

but anyway i pass goosetown cafe,

head for benches on the repurposed street

i sit. there's art all over this

city i live in--

it's a cute place even if you didn't make it home so many times.

friends ask why i call it home when my actual

city is 30 minutes away from where-ever i am.

"i just like the Prairie Lights coffee, ya' know?".

my dad saw me with make-up on.

i've always wondered how much money Jazz Fest spends on fireworks,

what that budget could do for the unhoused here.

i worry my city wont handle next year sometimes, where would we have PRIDE

if not this place?

"Transgender" sounds like a swing state governor from my fathers mouth.

fireworks,

made me sound like a slur all the way back to my city 2004, August 7th. my birthday.

gender reveal: its a--

unforgiveable.

things were different back in his day mama says, he didn't grow up downtown.

i'm tired.

mom says dad says i'm movin' out soon.

August 7th

2022.

i guess i'll go home now to Bread Garden, maybe pick a book up from the library.

wait everything out at home; spend some time in my city again

ill always have a city at least,

a city that loves me.

its late now and i'm going to pace around my house tonight i think.



USA

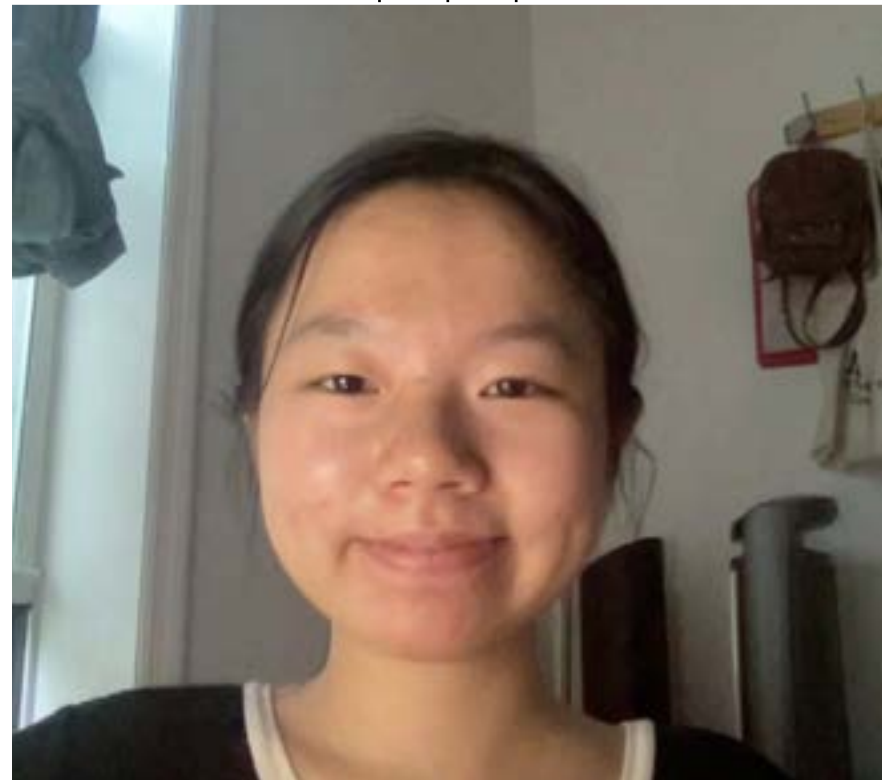


# 8TH AVENUE, BROOKLYN



Helen

F\_i L\_g Food Court claims a busy corner of 8th Avenue the distance is twenty streets, 2 avenues  
this is a ritual walking trip & I choose to take the path of most resistance  
—walking the entire stretch: easing into the quieter patches; maneuvering through crowds of chatter/stern/busy faces; past the man hollering the vitality of crabs in Styrofoam and fleshiness of the fish on display; Winnie Wagon carts halt in human traffic; fresh fruits on open display, mothers bent over for a closer look; Boba and milk tea stain the concrete—  
every everyday, we live like this  
I am close enough to the voices that it ripples through me  
the ground is pulsating with stretched out hands, skipping steps  
pretty soon idle shadows are forming soft steps  
The other side is lined with rows of flyer-covered windows, see?  
we are entirely swept in the quotidian  
but I like—really like—walking here  
just not at 12-7 am or 3-12 pm or when I cannot walk 2 steps per second or when it makes the news or when it doesn't  
because silence means endurance alone  
I must have walked for over a decade, pacing myself across these steps, first tucked inside a red Winnie Wagon cart before I knew how to step backwards  
Before Baba said: Don't walk alone, run  
I think I can somewhat understand why Baba makes every excuse to come here, to be surrounded by webs of people outside to do something like he was.  
Tea-and-beer laughter exists in order to resist the loneliness of not knowing  
His Fuzhounese-interlaced-Mandarin tongue still tries to find its way back home.  
8th Avenue lives in my eyes, my tongue, my skin, my bones, my bigger feet, and in the most enduring I can love



USA

# *an Afghan girl*

by Hooria



Having no ardency to write, what should I write about?

about interpreting me like a disaster? selling me since the day I was born? sacrificing an innocent, wise girl with hundred dream? About chaining my dreams? locking me up like a bird in cage? closing my mouth with a strong fist? not having a sympathizer in this world? not being allowed to breath freely? always being in whimper? not being allowed to be the real version of myself? about my feathers that they tore it and I can't fly? my moist eyes? my heart full of pain and its unspoken words? being nothing but a burden on my family's shoulder? coming in this world as shame for my family? being a slave because I'm girl? having everyone against me with the swords of their tongues? About, is it even important if I write about anything or not because I'm a girl? the words that I want to write, they are the poisons of my life. poison of every Afghan girl's life! believe me I'm also sweet and want to feel like I'm a Princess or Queen, I also want to fly like free bird in all over the sky, I also want to laugh loudly with no fears. I also want to run all over the street and sing loud I'm a free Afghan girl! I'm not feeble, I'm not a slave, I'm a girl. I'm the anchor of this world, I'm the one who has given birth to your Heroes! I'm not a bird in cage anymore. I'm enough strong to fight for my rights. one day you will believe me, you will believe my thoughts, my courage, my strength and my soul, you will believe that still with all your cruelty how strong I'm! Yes, this is me, an Afghan girl that is fighting for her rights every second, be aware she has changed!



Afghanistan