

a collaborative journal




muse



Sunsoak

summer 02

Sunsoak



Fling open the windows of hope and
let sunbeams of joy come dancing
in— even when the sun has long
been down.

Dear Muse,

As I write this, I can hear
the birds outside — pigeons
cooing and building their
nests. Sitting on the wall,
just watching the world.

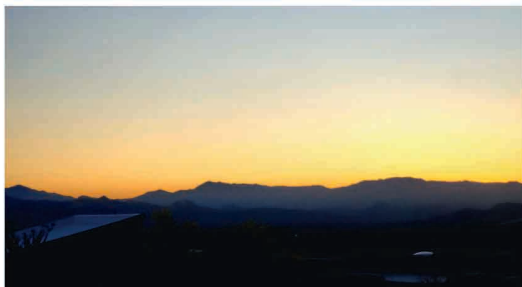
Welcome to the second issue
of the collaborative journey
that is the Muse Zine.

Dedicated to summer, these pages
of poetry, paint and pause
embody the theme of Sunsoak.

A season of ripening —
the harvest, the bloom;
to Sunsoak is to let in
the light and grow to
towards the sun.

Just like the pigeons,
sitting on the wall
and watching the world
really is the vibe — enjoy ♡

Dani



Resting on sweet tea fields
we count daylily stars;
the flow of all
my burdens escape.
She's where home is found.

Hands wrapped in bouquets,
her smile brightens my everyday
faster than the sun can rise
and the flourishing
of morning glories.



Claire Kroenrig

social: @clairerosek



Unbeliebabe

social: @unbeliebabe

they brought us peonies the day you died.
 while you lay silent, chestnuts bloomed and lilacs.
 sunflowers crowned the church aisle-
 lavender sprigs at your gravesite.
 you left and summer exploded a million times.
 grief grief grief
 love love love

Low Deschamps



Georgia Scholes

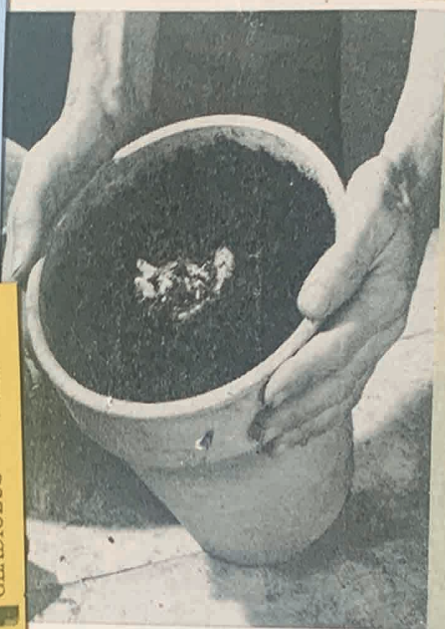


Megan Frank





Mark Bickley



Hayeon Choi

Hayeon Choi is a multidisciplinary artist from Canada. This *Lucky Girl* series invites the viewer to look closely, and within.

Could you tell the story behind this series; what inspired it?

I was going through a tough transition phase where I left behind a lot of people and habits deeply rooted in my whole identity. The confusion behind my why and blindly following my heart to move different was hard to navigate, especially alone. What really helped me during this time of deep faith was affirmations. That was what inspired this series. My initial intention behind it was to create pieces that were eye-catching so that you'd want to look at it often, and without much effort, positive affirmations are planted into your subconscious, transforming you into a version that lives courageously in alignment.

What drew you to using affirmation as a subject in your work, and in life?

I really believe in being mindful with my language and the way that I frame things. I still allow myself to be human, have days or weeks where I feel like I don't know what I'm doing or why I'm even trying but the skill I've developed over the years of consistently coming back to loving myself through words and seeing the positives over the negatives has truly changed my life in such a beautiful way. I really believe that this is something for everyone.

Is there a memory, place or season of your life connected to this body of work?

I think these were the first pieces I made that felt like I was making something from me. Not trying to make something that just looks cool or trying to imitate someone. I had a lot of fun connecting with myself then and those are the memories I carry with me when I look back at these works.

Where do you find inspiration and beauty for your art?

In the limitations. I've been very conscious about my consumption the past few years and all of my recent works have been created with things I already have. Being very limited in material and resources has led me to push my creativity into my processes and create such beautiful interesting things. I'm excited to share them soon.

What would you tell your younger creative self?

I would tell her she handled everything perfectly.

social: @westvancouverart

Has your relationship with art changed over time?

I used to pressure myself a lot about being consistent, making technical improvements, and completing projects, (even though I never cared about that stuff before pursuing a career out of it!!!) but I've now given up on all of that. Currently, I'm in a phase where I am creating based on what I feels right to me. I have lots of projects that are in progress. I work on them when I feel like it, even if its for a few minutes, or sometimes start a completely different project in a totally new medium. It's like I am creating with the piece itself, allowing it to breath and rest, exist as is, instead of forcing things to happen.



Current small joy?
Espresso shots!

What feels like summer?
Muted blues - watching the Vancouver ocean as the sun is fading and breathing in fresh air by the trees all around

How do you create best?
Music or silence.
Nothing I have to pay attention to.

What are you loving lately?
Pop classic films.

Your art practice in 3 words?
Unfolding, unbound, truthful

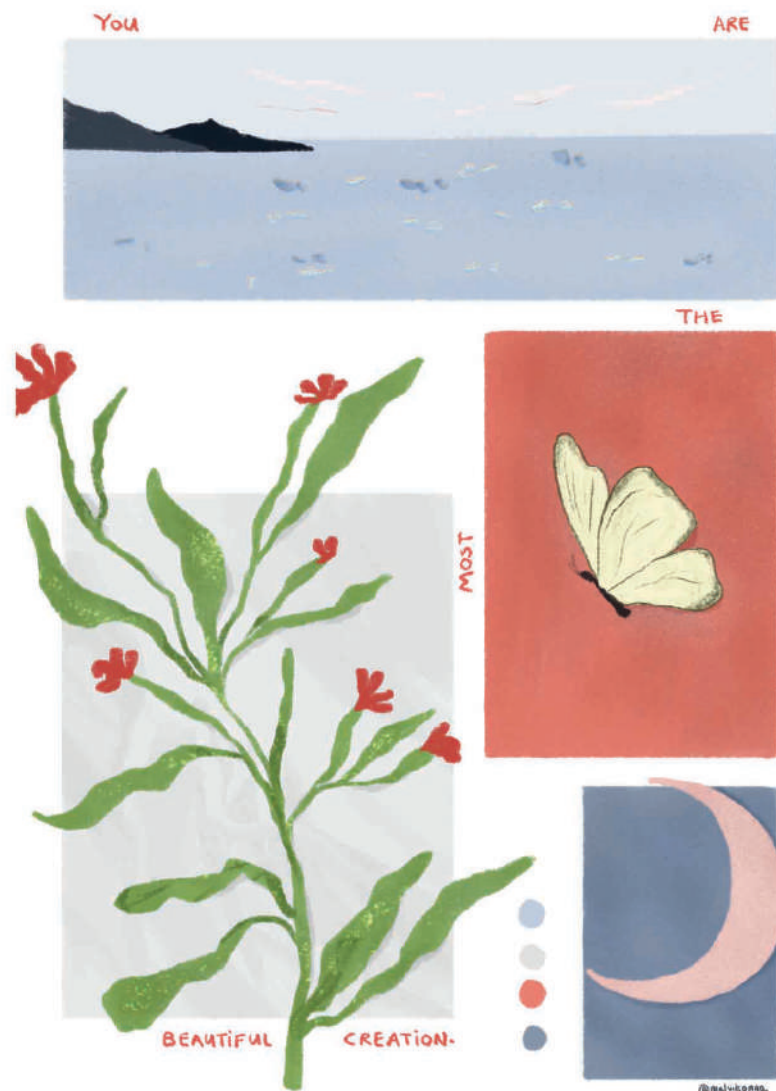


Look for the light
It's all around us
From the warm sun beating down
From the glisten in the water
From a fire ablaze

Look for the light
It's inside all of us
From a partners warm loving arms
From a glisten in a twinkling eye
From a spark that keeps the fire going

Samantha Murphy





Malvika M.

i dream of the hues the sun casts
 windowsills drink the colour like milk.
 the crown moulding gathers dust
 where the caulk has quietly chipped away with time.
 the shadows make up stories with dappled light.
 sunbeams leaking through the rustling leaves
 until autumn bites through their shrivelling veins.
 the water soaks up warm honey and reflective gold.
 effervescent and shimmering sunglint
 surrounding the skeletal remnants of the west pier.
 it is golden hour and i wonder what colour it was
 when i finally saw the world as it was—
 temporary.
 i guess it does not matter,
 for now, i see it in bloom.

Muskan Thakkar

Dear summer sun,

Whether it was your grip or the spellbinding childhood nostalgia that give a hue of perfection to the summers I used to spend with my grandpa on the island of Lemnos I have no idea, but this is a love letter to you. To all the ways in which your kind, occasionally biting embrace would alter my days, influence them.

From the early mornings when your energy was so magnetic that, even while you were still asleep, beyond the horizon, you willed me and grandpa to wake up for challenging walks on the rocky cliffs by his house. He would fill up the large red thermos with herbal tea and carry it like a cross-body bag with a makeshift handle, as we walked in the dusk-covered paths. As you came up more and more, my grandpa's dog which we'd always take with us, would chase the tiny shadows that gulls' bodies created in your light. Grandpa would explain to me how to tell the time by your position and I would always forget and beg him to retell it time and time again. I admit past a certain point I did remember; I knew it by heart but I could see that it brought him joy so I asked again and again, "Grandpa, tell me again what the time-telling ritual was?"

And then when you came up, clocks hitting ten, we would be back home, in his little two-floor house. I'd boil grandpa's coffee in your soft light entering through the lacy curtains, hung by grandma before her passing. We'd both sit at the all too-big kitchen table, eating whatever goat cheese there was left from grandpa's best friend, who owned a dairy farm. I'd look at you getting higher and higher in the sky and rush grandpa to finish quicker, we had no time we were in a chase with you. To which he'd always remind my childish brain that we had time for everything, "More than enough". We'd pick fruit from his garden post-breakfast and I'd always find my way onto the fig tree. I used to love sitting at the topmost branch and looking out past the wheat fields, into the sea. I'd admire the way your light bounced off the water making it seem like molten gold, as I stuffed fig after fig in my mouth, juice running down my bare arms, seeds caking up under my nails.

When you'd take your position at the very top-most part of the sky in your daily promenade, grandpa would take me to the beach. He'd sit with his friends- people from the town, soldiers from the Civil war, old classmates. They'd drink ouzo in tall glasses, foggy from the cold of the ice, that you'd illuminate and make them seem like freshly dug-up crystals. I'd be in the water in the meantime playing with items found at the beach. I remember one year I had gathered apricots from a tree nearby, put them in a tiny green plastic bucket, and was trying to wash them in the sea. As the current hit, it

greedily took them and carried them in different directions. I tried catching them, going after each one, I really was determined...but there were too many and the water was stronger. I almost drowned that day. Grandpa saved me. He was mad. All I remember is his tan hand reaching for me as something sent by the gods and his face- angry and demanding an explanation as to why an experienced swimmer was in that situation, as your harsh light blinded me from behind him, equally displeased.

As you'd get tired and start descending back towards your rest, life on the island of Lemnos would slow down even more. Grandpa would continue sitting with his friends at the same table now they, all together, would drive the boredom away by solving the newspapers' crosswords. Their screams of, "That is obviously wrong, are you stupid," would float through the air, cooked to perfection by your weighing heat. I'd be in the water in the meantime, in the very shallow part of the shore, just before it all turned to just sand. I'd bury my hands deep in the golden-brown substance and relax every muscle in my body, letting the current gently rock me around. I felt your rays on my back, softly caressing it, whispering secrets in an unknown language I wish I could decipher, but my mind ran empty and I just couldn't.

Your magic was somehow present even in your absence. In the conversations had after dark with the older kids in the town, sitting on the streets that you had warmed up. I'd listen fascinated to stories of love, drama, and heartbreak shared in hushed whispers from lips cracked from the cocktail of your light and the salt in the air. You were present everywhere from the tan on the arms of each and every one of us, through the hairs-lightened to shades of blonde and copper, to the rosy cheeks burned by your persistent sunlight. Even in the street lamps, producing artificial light, paling in comparison to yours, the paint of which came off in chunks under the daily exposure to your rays. And in a way I have a feeling that all of us loved you, every person who spent even a singular summer on that island knows just how connected and deeply rooted you were in our lives.

So, thank you, my dear summer sun, for tainting those bygone seasons in the colour they now have, for making them beautiful even if only locked away in memory I still dearly love and cherish.

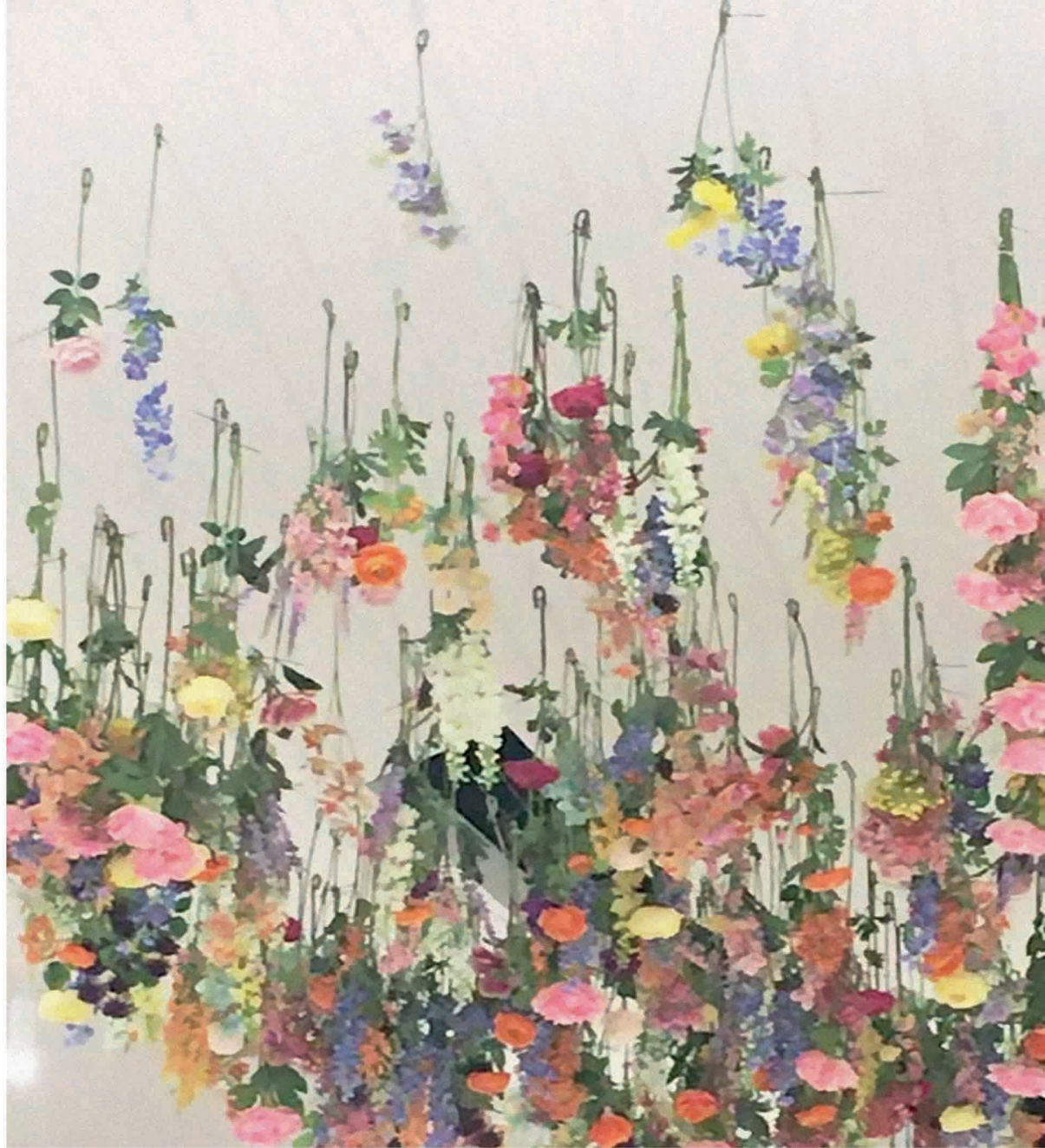
With all the love I hold in my heart,

Yours truly

*Anna
Chakarova*



Alice Wilson



Hyacinthetic

I can be the noon light
that streams through the canopy
of leaves, or the old growth itself,
dappling my warmth upon everyone,
even those who gather to cut me down;
the ground under you seems so soft from here
pats of upturned moss, individual blades blurring
into verdant fur that makes me ache with want
to reach out with my crawling vine arms, perennial
where you kneel, hang your head, shamefully
sharpening your axe just beyond my view
as I hold you, your weary form, entangling roots,
either naively trusting or intentionally ignoring
the strategic, secretive syphoning of nutrients
I would have happily shared, had you asked
this forgiveness; holding me tight, under
damp earth in my fingernails, all shrivelled up with rot,
I'm realizing I've lost by seeing this as the only path
to connect, move forward
within this world
that never stops
buzzing, machine
perfectionism
whirring on.
I'm learning
that if I have anyone
to forgive, it is younger me
for the years I twisted
myself, ripped
at dried petal
bunches, pared away
into an excellent doormat;
harder still,
I must forgive
my current self
for growing
thorns, turning
to a bed of nails.

Maxwell O'Toole

social: @maxwellwriteswell



Porshe Caina

social: @porshelana



Splitting an orange
Citrus flies through the air
And fills your nostrils with anticipation

Peeling an apple
Carefully carving away the bitter outside
Revealing inner sweetness and vulnerability

Plucking a grape
Squeezing gently to find the perfect one
Only wanting to share the best parts of you

Picking a berry
Succumbing to the randomness of life
Unsure if it will be sweet or sour,

But taking a bite anyway

Samantha Murphy



Emma Long

Nandita Bhatia

You decide to walk home. You're not wearing the right shoes and you've got tights on, which could spell disaster. But getting the train means getting home and sitting in an empty house that should be cleaned but you don't want to be the one to clean it, don't want to sit in the silence. You want to form a few more freckles and hear the grasshoppers chirp and walk and walk until your feet hurt enough that nothing else will matter.

You enter the field through an arch in the trees and the insects sing to greet you. The tall grass irritates your hand but you leave it swishing there as you walk. A tractor does widths across your vision, your path. You have a horrible vision of it cutting you down, into ribbons, blood soaking into the yellowing ground, your tights in shreds, twitching, twitching. This does not happen and you walk on, passing the tractor with no issue.

It's an effort to lift your knees and your forehead begins to bead sweat. You've forgotten what it's like to sweat. You turn your fan on the second you wake up and your office is air conditioned. You don't run anymore.

The field defers to the road and you walk past the village hall you had your fifth birthday party in. You walk past your teacher's old house, the one you used to wave at from the car, the one with the black door. You tiptoe across the cow grate. The cows aren't out today. Your mum's ex ruined your nineteenth birthday here because he drove too fast past the cows and your mum got scared and you were screaming and screaming and calling him all sorts, so loud that people came out of their houses. You screamed across the car roof that he was evil and you hated all men and they were all the same and you wondered if this was what womanhood would be, if the first day of nineteen was a look into what was to come.

Your foot crunches through a sunbaked cowpat and you have an idea for a story about a girl trying to clean cow shit off her clothes. You shake your head a second later, embarrassed.

Without the cows the road is long and boring and you're self conscious that people are looking at you from behind their steering wheels thinking what is she doing walking along this road but you know that no one is thinking that and you have no reason to feel this shame— you are just trying to get home.

Past the cow field now, crossing the Jubilee river. There's a car park here your dad used to swivel into, dropping you off early in the morning so the dinner ladies could drape a little high vis vest over you and you could walk to school with them and your friends. You remember the walk as a gruelling one, trekking across uneven ground, nicked by sharp stones, stung by nettles, tired and bruised by the time you got there. Looking back, the whole ordeal probably only took fifteen minutes.

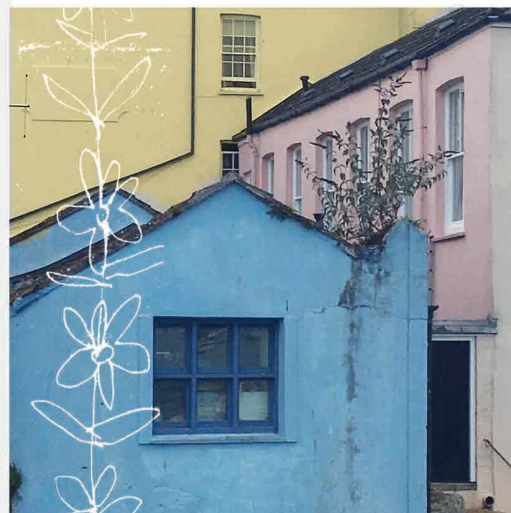
You're sweating a lot more now and your fringe is starting to dampen. You pass the house your hairdresser almost bought but didn't because the repairs were too extensive.

You stop on the bridge, the new one they built too big. The river glides beneath you, reeds swaying in the current. The water looks cool. You breathe in, out. You are only halfway home.

Summer has caught you off guard. The solstice sailed past without you noticing. Soon it will be the dead of August and you will be different. Sooner still comes September. Will you know yourself by then? If you walked this way again would you think of the same things, remember the party, the cows, the screaming? Or would you recall the walk, memories of memories stacking up to form a person. Summer has begun, and you have just been born.

You cross the bridge and keep walking.

Poppy Jackson



social: @glassbeadcollective



Christine Karapetian

past lives
it was july when i finally saw the fairies again.
dancing in time with the slow rhythm of my heart.
head visionary.
i am a child of imagination.
ripe with the experience of a twenty-three year old.
so now, i live in harmony with
my past lives.

Muskan Thakkar



Brambles Tether

Nestled beneath rocky ridge, hidden almost out of sight,
An allotment flourishes. Nurtured closely, though not by man,
Paddock looming up above, a winding lane below,
Over yonder, a field bearing sovereign grain. Green,
Beyond what eye can see, untended. Stems
Dancing at my kneecaps, and berries not yet ripe.
I loiter, watching, uncalloused hand cradling woven punnet.
My rose, juvenile, though only by three years, traipsing through the brush,
Toothy violet grin, outstretched palm smeared the same hue.

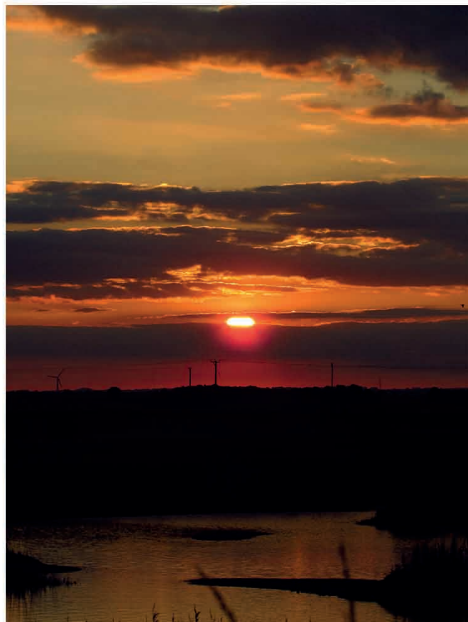
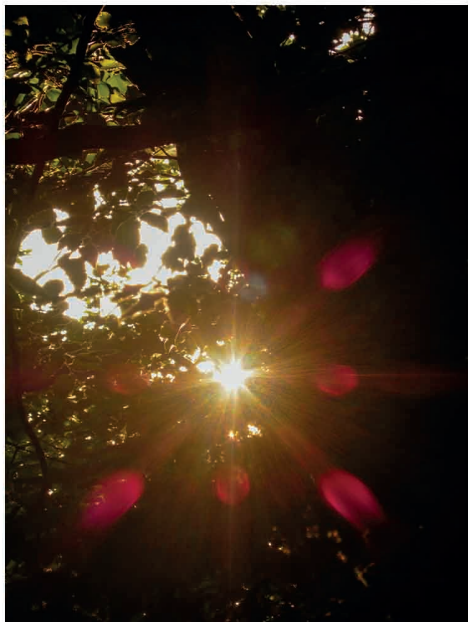
Suspended sun, almost Tuscan, and my beloved-
Wheat blonde braids now flecked with gold.
No words exchanged, only flesh-warm drupe.
The stain of love, diluted, adorns my skin, the palette of our pledge,
Soon to be changed, though still elusive yet.
Midday meal long-forgotten, we eat our fill, feasting,
On fruits of labour not our own.
Basket brimming, thorny snare escaped for searing tarmac,
Azure butterfly battling the gentle northern breeze.

Dutiful scrubbing cannot sanitize our slate.
Muddling formula, born of our mother's blood,
Redolent aroma penetrating crumbling brick.
Under moonlight, cosy adolescent epoch clings.
We dance atop worn tile. Flavours emulating pirouettes
Upon our weary tongues, one chipped china bowl
Pallid as cartilage, two silver spoons.
Nectar lingers beneath fingernails, set to taint virginal leaves
This blessed day lost to the blur.

Tay Buesnel

Anna Kirsanova





Jay Walls



Kenna

Balkis Hmida

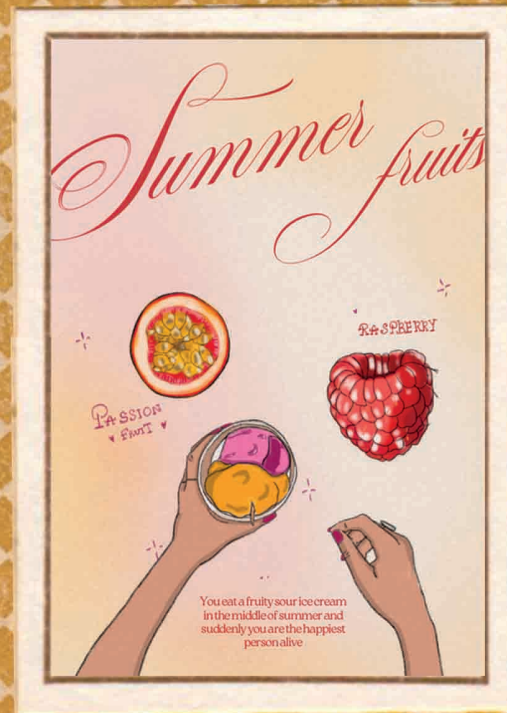


I counted the hours in the hush of the rain, through whispers of frost that forgot my name. Where dreams lay like seeds in the cold, heavy clay, till the breath of the sun called them softly to sway.

The crystal waves dance, catching gold in their skin, like the joy that was sleeping, now burning within, and orchards release their long-guarded delight, as peaches drip amber in slow, melting light.



Their sweetness runs warm, spilling down to the ground. Each drop sings the song of the season unbound. And I know as the dusk folds the summer away, after every long night comes the promise of day.



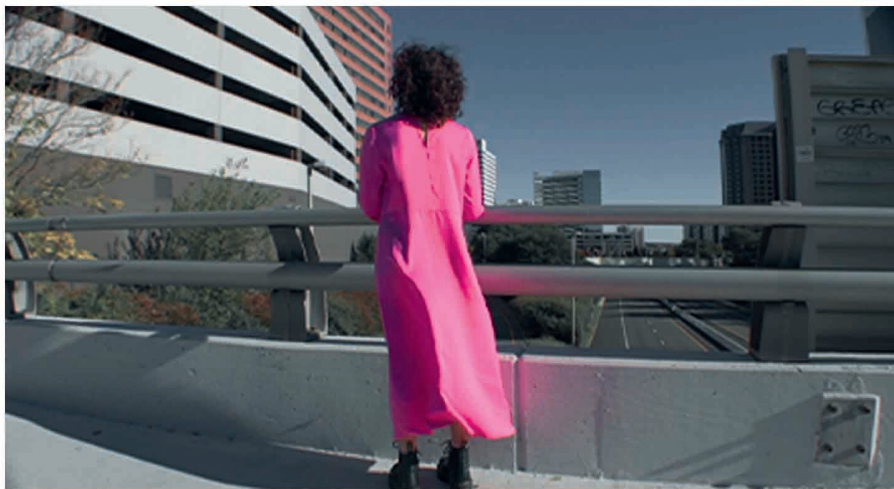


Lydia

social: @lydddn



Chloe Henson



Taylor Elise
Colimore

social: @taylorcolimore



Afterimage

The swollen sun sits,
tightening its grip.
To find a way to harness it,
to touch the tip of its bleeding lip
that drips and oozes in my eyes.

A blank stare
that penetrates radiating
black and red incisions,
dug out discs.

The sun, it softens slowly
looking at the longing.

A scratch in the eye
to spot out the centre of sight.

To leave a flood
of blood orange
broken off light.

A flash that flickers
I am lost to the world,
that slips beyond me.

Soundless ringing
in its momentary stain
un-obtained source.

An inner-beaming brightness
unexplained blinding
explained over and over
to forever burn into every single core.

Lara Kester

Carmen Ruiz

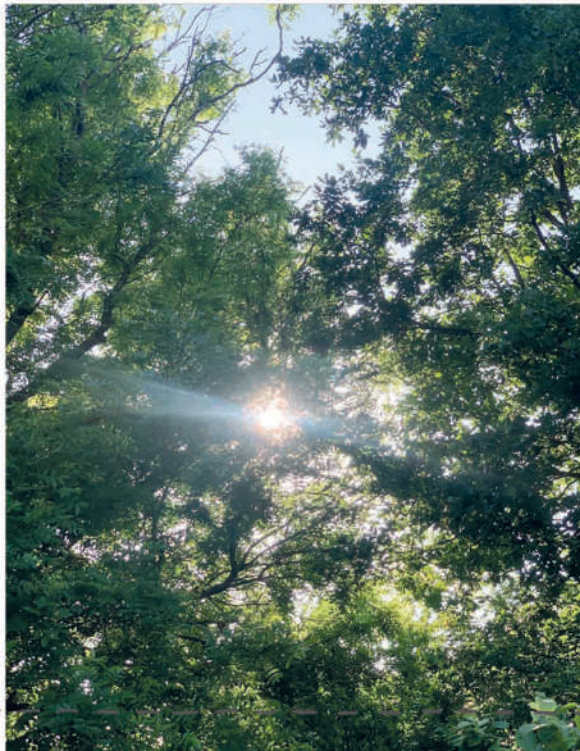


The sun is kissing my skin,
Making me sweat.
My clothes are sticking to my body,
But I'm still climbing these stairs.
I want to see the view of the city,
With the sun kissing my skin.

Calypso Morgan



Divya



sun drenched

The sun had felt like a blessing back then, thoroughly washing away any of my remaining sins. I had blinked rapidly, surprised by the sudden light, my eyes half-closed, and still I was able to get a glimpse of the courtyard from a distance, full of people, overdressed parents and anxious kids alike. I, for one, was all alone, and in my floral shirt and black, new leather jacket, I felt rather lonely. Despite that, though, in my chest had already begun to bloom hope, a newfound sentiment which I, hungry, having been deprived of any kind of good feeling for so long, readily welcomed.

At that moment, it had seemed as if the whole world was meant to fit in the palm of my hand, shiny and oh, so inviting.

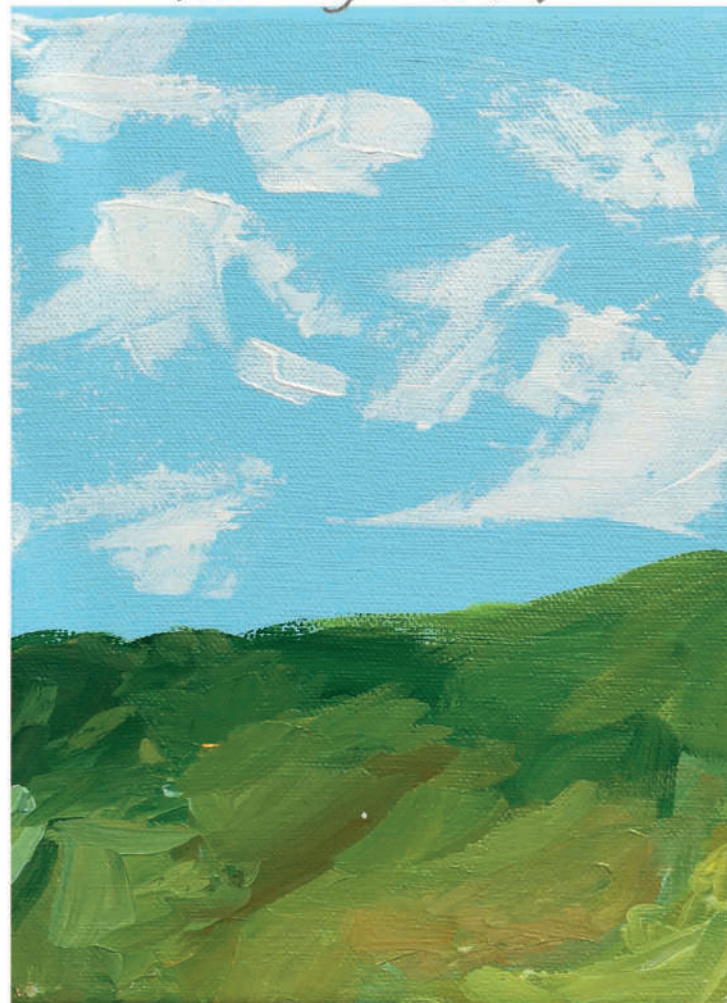
And you, because of course it had to be you, welcomed me with a small smile and an outstretched hand. With the sun drenching us in its September warmth, the last remains of a summer gone, I had taken that hand, feeling the same lingering heat radiate from your tan skin, and from your amber eyes that I would inevitably grow to hate fiercely.

Lee Vandeleur



Luyin Cao

Vitalii Goncharov





Roony Puga

sun poisoning.

Ah April, how your tepidity rocks me to drowsiness. I'm sitting in somebody else's sun-warmed car, too-warm car, scorching leather on bare skin, listening to Fiona Apple right before my ten a.m and I'm not thinking, not really, April you free me from the shackles of my necrosing brain. I eat clementine after clementine and pile up their peels and wait for life to start back again, to not feel like the grey afternoon of a bored child in 2004. April, epicenter of my year, I wait for the quake that inevitably follows you. The freshness, the sweetness don't linger but the lukewarm, citrusy waft you leave behind is nauseating, compelling. You are the numb numb numbness of an anesthetized lip, I get addicted to biting you to soreness and am left with a gaping wound come May. April you are a state of perpetual haze and I'm sleepwalking right through you, the eternal sunshine on my spotless mind. Just like black coffee still tastes like being fifteen, you remain vestigial of a time so ancient I can barely make it out, parentheses clasping my childhood between their two airtight lips. That's what you are, dear, sweet April, a segment of a life once half-lived and mistakes long forgotten. You fill my ears with cotton and pump my veins with tranquilizers and let me forget me more, let me drift to places only accessible under your influence.

I'm in a sort of desperate, miserable love with you that I keep quiet and nap away.

Miel



Mills Brown

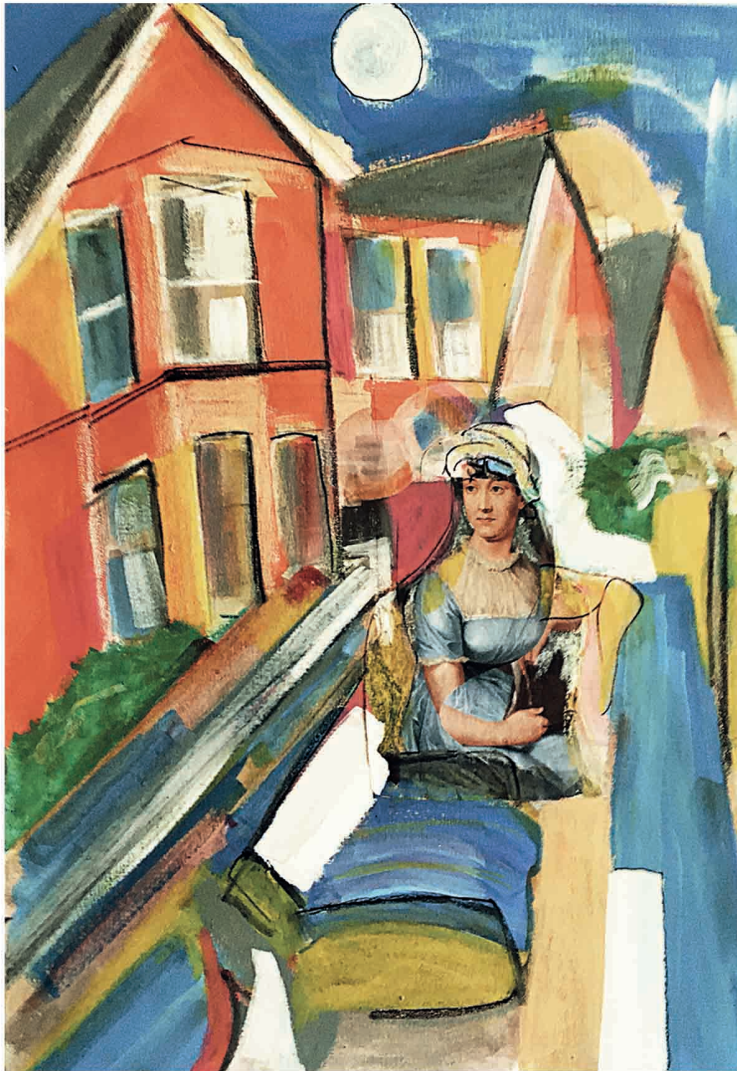
social: @mills_brown_

Cardinal

As I sat in the ravine, you flew over my head.
 You are a cardinal, flaming red and fleeting as all time is on Earth.
 You watch me from the treetops, riding the maples,
 and sometimes, you're bold and greet me right at my doorstep.
 I wonder, what different forms did you take before you settled on the cardinal?
 Did you take a chance to flutter through the olive orchards with the wings of a butterfly,
 or float through the Mediterranean sea as a cluster of algae carried by the waves?
 Did you nourish the southern fig trees surfing on sun rays,
 or did you sprawl across the ocean in little crystals of salt?
 40 days you sailed the world over, looking for closure,
 but how do you begin to say goodbye to the endless earth once you've fallen off the edge?
 In many ways, I feel closer to you
 now that I know you're with me everywhere.
 You've felt my step, as you've experienced the strained stretch of a blade of grass.
 You've eased my stuttered breaths soaring through the warm summer breeze.
 Leaving the Earthly realm doesn't mean leaving me behind,
 it means leaving bodily restrictions, stretching your soul past arms reach, enveloping the world.
 You traded pain and aching backs and hearts and fluorescents,
 And gained transience, the comprehensive earthly experience.
 All you had to do was say goodbye to the physicality of life,
 And carry on with only love as your ribboned anchor.
 Fly on by, wrap the globe in your infinite warmth,
 Just make sure to catch a glimpse of me in your travels.

Zoe Loukin

social: @zococchini



Sean BW Parker

A Hundred Ways To Two-Hundred Pages

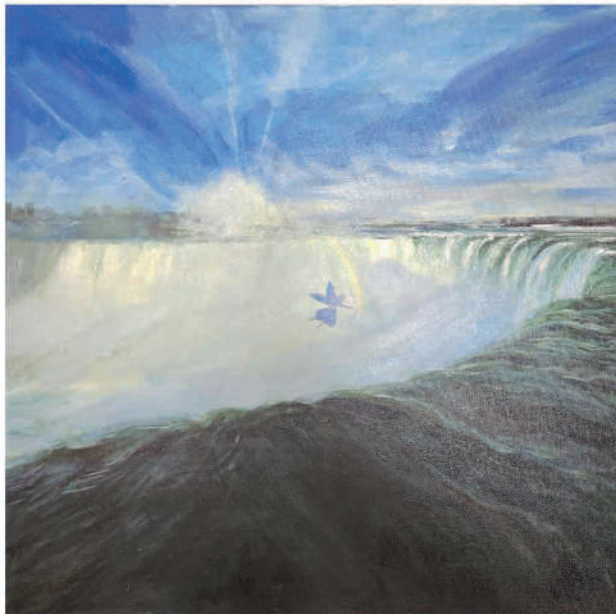
Take God away from me, if that is what you need,
And not what you want, if it is the sand you must
Stand in and then I will sink into the desert if you
Want me still, I allow you your freedom, aloud, I
Wish to be every flying dove in your sky, and if I
Could afford it, every cloud and every droplet of
Silver rain, I allow you to invite forever into my
Home, darling, if only you knew of every touch
In between us and what it has led to in my mind,
If only to keep you only, and leave the rest behind.

It rains so heavily in June, and when I get home to
Take my clothes off, I think of you to keep the
Warmth on, I wish you would kiss me, just for a
Day or two, for a month or even longer, hold my
Hand if it might just become your warmth, let me
Be somebody to you, if you would just buy a place
With a kitchen, let the news wait until tomorrow if
There is one, I wish there was not a single goodbye,
And even if there was, I could and should not try.

In your pool of intricate attention and absence, the
Water is still in the beginning of summer, but in my
Head it has begun to freeze, coldness has enveloped
Each heartbeat, and I hope it reaches my memories,
Please do not forget it, darling, and do not forget
Me, I have no more words until next we meet, no
More stories to write, take me away, bring me back
Home or on a honeymoon holiday, next time, next
Time, time drags my body to and fro, the sand
Is the next destination, your prayer is my only end.

Leya Kuan

Hara Kostopoulou social: @hara_kostopoulou



Yunyao Hu

social: @yunyao861

She's so beautiful that the jewellery she wears
increases the jewel's beauty
The sunflowers look at her instead of the sun
And the planetary systems envy

She looks at the chief jewel in a tiara and it's
begging to be one percent of her
Even the stars peek from space and request the
God to let them visit the beauty hither

Her presence by alone makes the dead flowers
come back to life
And her Love turns the rocks into roses

She can make hell look fine
And her eyes, like marble, shine.

Her hair is a puzzle
Which my soul is stuck in

She feels like the queen of an extinct tribe
And yet, I won't write much, because words even
a fraction can't describe

Swaraj Azordex Ghule

social: @nonexistent_azordex



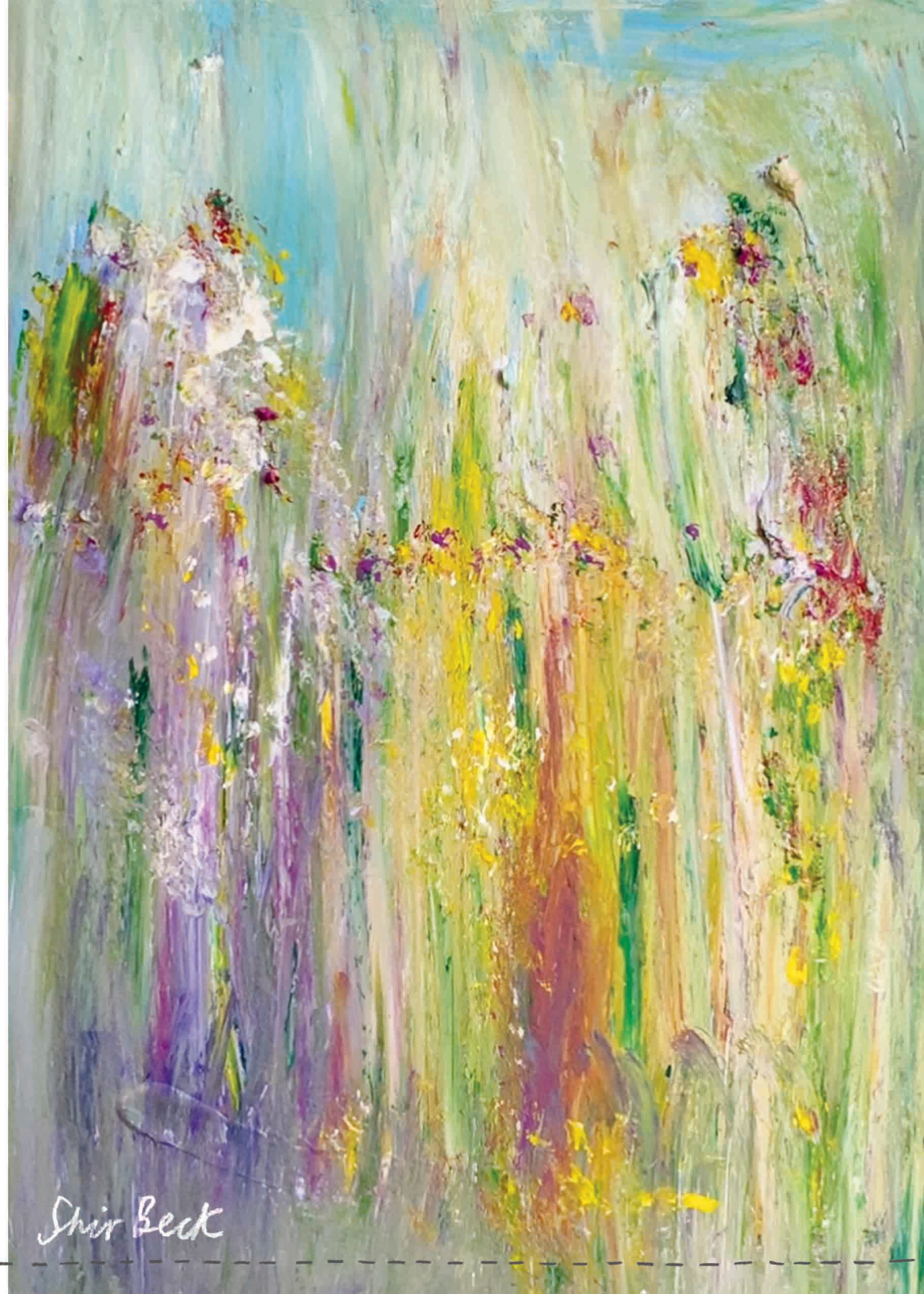
Vincenzo Cohen

it's late afternoon in the meadows

A slow scattering of dappled sunlight
bears its mysteries with gentle musings.
Counting the petals streaked across her cheeks,
dare I say we have all we ever wanted?
Everything, after a while, yearns for home.
Flowergirls in linen dancing about
gardens we've never stepped foot in,
haven't we ever heard the conversations of the lilies?
I can't say for certain,
just exactly what it'd feel like, to rest amongst the swans,
knowing that all could be bliss.
let the petals scatter where they must,
memorise how warm it must've felt.

Faith

Shir Beck



The days in June tie up the loose ends of winter and spring, the earth damp from residual rain, the air thick with impending languor and the song of young mourning doves. There is a heightening stillness in this transitional season, the weeks unfolding before us as they always have, but with less urgency—in humanity's collective but unstated agreement that the promise of summer takes the edge off, all of us in a daze in the sauna-like heat. Ever since I was a child, I dreamt of summer evenings, crepuscular in my emergence from the shadows of my bedroom to sit by my parents' glimmering swimming pool, eating gobs of mint ice cream in my pink metallic swimsuit with a silver-plated spoon.

Summer is the season of love, as I found as a young adult, and a time in which one can cast away their day-to-day identity and try on a new one for size. I often did this while I was in college, meeting a variety of men under the guise of "doing it for the plot," or in other words, writing about it on my Tumblr, when really, I was attempting to recover from my parents getting divorced after my father's innumerable affairs.

Nine summers ago, I dyed my black hair to a fiery and unnatural shade of red and Instagram direct-messaged an indie musician my ex-boyfriend and I had been a fan of. As I recently saw on an Instagram reel, it is never enough to end a relationship and disappear, but rather, one must become omnipresent and infiltrate their ex's favorite genre of music or film by way of getting noticed by the creator(s) of said music or film, which is often accomplished via Instagram DM. Upon reflection, I wonder if I was ahead of my time, or if everyone who has experienced heartbreak desired this brand of pointless (but-still-delectable-in-the-moment) revenge. I found my muse in this musician, a rhythm-and-blues revivalist with a coiffed mane and thick horn-rimmed glasses. He was ten years my senior and had released several successful albums, but when we met in 2016, hit a lull in his career. He almost immediately responded to my direct messages, which were a simple, I love your music and I live near LA and we should meet soon, and we did, at Canter's in Los Angeles one week later.

"I used to be 2% body fat when I was younger," he said as we were sipping milkshakes in the diner. "I'm trying to get back to that." He raised his brows, three pronounced lines etched indelibly on his forehead, beginning, middle, end. His skin, freshly shaven and otherwise unblemished, bestowed a childlike appearance on the 30-year-old. I breathed in, enamored of the scent of sweet sandalwood and amber, dizzied by the realization that the person next to me was the artist behind the songs that had scored my previous relationship, his voice pressed into the grooves of the vinyl I once spun in my ex's college dorm. He resembled an amalgamation of all the men I had loved before, and oddly, I thought, that list included my then-recently estranged father, who also had dark hair and glasses and stood the same five-feet-and-ten-inches as the musician.

"You know," he started, "this would shock my mother. But I made about six figures through music, and I put all that money straight back into my career. I spent it all," he emphasized, closing his fist. I nodded my head eagerly, furrowing my brow to show I was listening. "And now, it's slowing down," he continued. "Spotify has ruined everything for musicians."

The bill came. He asked if I would mind splitting it, and I wordlessly slipped my debit card into the pocket of the black server book. He quickly looked away, as though I had stood up on the table and began a naked rendition of one of his songs.

I placed my hand on his shoulder, my newly red strands curling defiantly in the humidity and tangling around my upper arm. "I'm sorry," I said. "I still think you're incredible."

He asked me if I was a fan of concerts and invited me to one of his shows in Central California, which was several hours from where I lived. I agreed to attend, asking my best friend to come with me and making plans to embark on the long journey several weeks later.

I became obsessed with him. We texted every day, and despite his inattention to me or my interests, I imagined that this summer romance could last. We made plans often at the last minute as though our dates were clandestine meetings. I acquiesced, going from

town-to-town with my fake ID to meet him at his favorite bars to imbibe caipirinhas and listen to him critique how I hadn't read much of the literary canon but called myself a writer. He had been an English major at a state university and was a self-proclaimed bibliophile. My rebuttals came out sparingly, as though my throat was full of cotton, as he quizzed me on his favorite authors, smirking in his superiority as the obscure references mounted before me.

"Maybe you can change your major. I'd probably suggest a writer's workshop or something," he said. "When I did that, it made me feel better to see how bad everyone else was."

Despite his biting criticism, I wrote about him on my Tumblr, inspired that I was dating a famous—or, at least, somewhat known by at least a few people—musician. Instead of being locked in my bedroom on my laptop as I had in childhood, I spent summer days in lonely coffee shops wanting to be seen listening to his discography in my noise-cancelling headphones as I typed the words, we spoke only past midnight and he told me he would be waiting for me after the dozens of the flights in the months to come in reference to his forthcoming tour. I drove three-and-a-half hours to his show in Central California and very nearly didn't get in since he forgot to put my friend and me on the guest list, and afterwards, spent a few moments with him backstage, realizing that he was asking me to leave when he said he needed time to decompress.

"Are you sure he doesn't have a girl in every town?" My mom looked at me quizzically.

"Of course not," I said, "He's chosen me." I cradled a Roy Orbison biography in my arms I had picked up from the local library, thinking I was the musician's Claudette Frady.

He told me over text that he was no longer interested just as my junior year of college was about to begin, my muse gone almost as quickly as he had appeared. It wasn't anything I did, he explained, more that he just wanted to be free. I had been taken advantage of. I regretted having been so stupid. I dreaded having to tell my friends, and worst of all, my ex who I had gloated to when we exchanged messages a few weeks prior.

I dyed my hair back to black before seeing him for the last time, transitioning from musician's-girlfriend-but-not-really back to college student with recently divorced parents processing this trauma through a Rolodex of men who were mature in age but not emotion. I went to college parties and switched off between vodka, rum, tequila, and wine and gained ten pounds. I sang a lot of Amy Winehouse. I drew my eyeliner on in a noticeably thick line that nearly reached the tails of my eyebrows, joking to my friends that they could tell how I was feeling that day by how thick and upturned my wing was. I felt like a child again, soft and doughy in an ill-fitting swimsuit, on display for the world to perceive. I realized I was depressed and sought therapy. Summer had been an excuse to let my inhibitions fall away, but the outcome of my actions had had the opposite effect.

When I think of summer now, nearly the same age the musician was when we first met, I am more realistic—there is the promise of long and languorous afternoons, the cerulean sky and bronzed limbs. There is also the unending presence of the white-hot sun, congested highways, and asphalt that cooks eggs—and feet. There is the prospect of perspiring in crowded supermarkets and standing in seemingly endless lines for tubs of expensive ice cream impacted by shrinkflation. There are days so hot that one is forced to either stay inside or go to the air-conditioned time capsule of an indoor shopping mall. Worst of all, there are the summer flings, and by the time I met my husband, I had more than I could honestly count.

I saw the musician a few years ago on an unseasonably hot late spring evening, my frontal lobe fully intact, and I watched him hit on my friend as I snuck off to the bathroom. He was still the same, and I was content in the fact that I wasn't, the air heavy with birdsong and sweet wine, the promise of summer before me and the potential for adventure, but it wasn't him, it couldn't exist outside of me, it was in the strands of my hair, the legs that carried me into the obsidian night. The tips of my fingers, my mind's eye.

Summer was everywhere, she was the muse.

Taylor Harrison

social: @tharrisonwriting

July, my Honey

I contemplate the ripe apricots high on the tree.
Orange and golden hues shine like beacons
of light in the darkness of a stormy night.
Brave little lighthouses guiding July wanderers
through the heartbreak of facing another year.

Nestled in the lap of this blooming orchard,
I have time to watch the bumblebees
playing hide and seek in a nearby larkspur.
Their screams of joy, a buzz so kind,
July's ever-lasting heartbeat drums on.

A ray of sun pokes through thick leaves,
warming my arm with a lingering kiss.
July, my genuine lover, your embrace
a comfort so similar, it makes old ghosts
come alive to bemoan their lost summer loves.

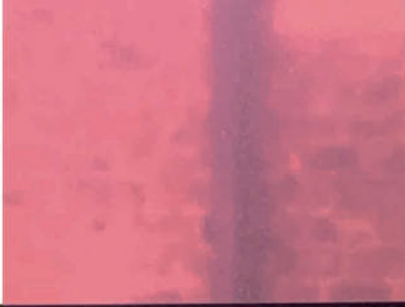
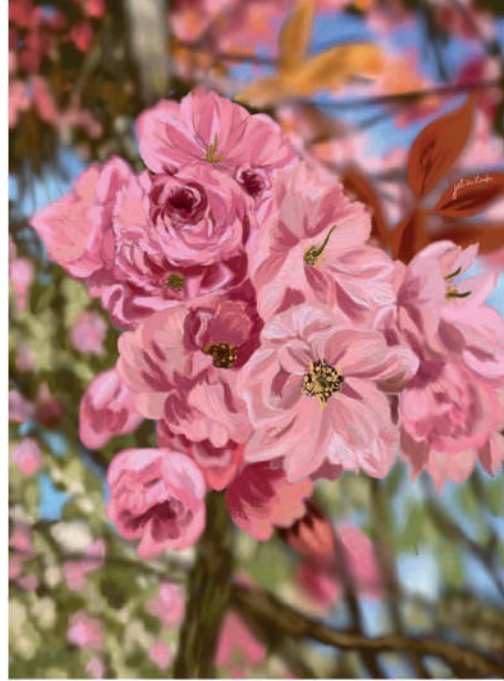
Oh, July, I inhale your apricot-tinged air,
honey for my aching throat.

Alison Ehringer

Zhanna



Julia Kado





K.



Letter to the Perpetrator

"it's not your fault"
i write to you in my note

you made me feel horrible
but that wasn't the only blow

i write how good you made me feel
and how it didn't outweigh the bad
but I wonder if it was real
the look of love you once had

as i continue writing to you
i'm convinced so much more
that leaving is my best option
and you too it is best for

what you said that night
showed me this is what you want
not a doubt in our minds
my final hours are up

so when you read my one page letter
and you realize it's too late
i wonder if you'll change your mind

probably not
oh well

probably not
oh well

probably not
oh well

don't moan your empty goodbyes
don't shed those familiar crocodile tears

we all know you wanted this
you made it oh so clear
t

i'll say "it's not your fault"
i'll say you didn't break me

but we all know you did
you broke me in half, baby

it's far too late for apologies
far too late to take it back
far too late to change the story
far too late to replace the empathy you lack

goodbye my love
i still miss you
i forgive faster than you can blame
i love you, always and forever
even though you don't feel the same

Caroline Gilroy



Thea A.



Sweet darling of the sweltering sun

grey mud made your cheeks rhinoceros skin
as you cast yourself on the patio,
hose-watered hair slapping like a yarn mop against the surface.

you were wearing that white sundress sprinkled with cornflowers—
the one you outgrew a few months ago but begged Momma not to throw
out—
and your Sunday shoes, the shine all worn off

like the melted visions of orange and yellow fairies in the overgrown front
yard.
as the sun milked sweat from your brow and left a wet ghost of your limbs
on the stone,
you smiled wide and toothless,

uncaring that your parents would gasp and scold
at your state of disarray
in your Sunday best.

oh, young girl, wide grin,
summer's darling, face bare in the July heat,
your voice dances inches from my larynx

when I roll down my sunroof
and lift my hand through the window to feel the wind between my fingers
or when I am tempted to give the cashier a fake name for my order;

how may I coax you out
like beads of sweat on a midsummer day?

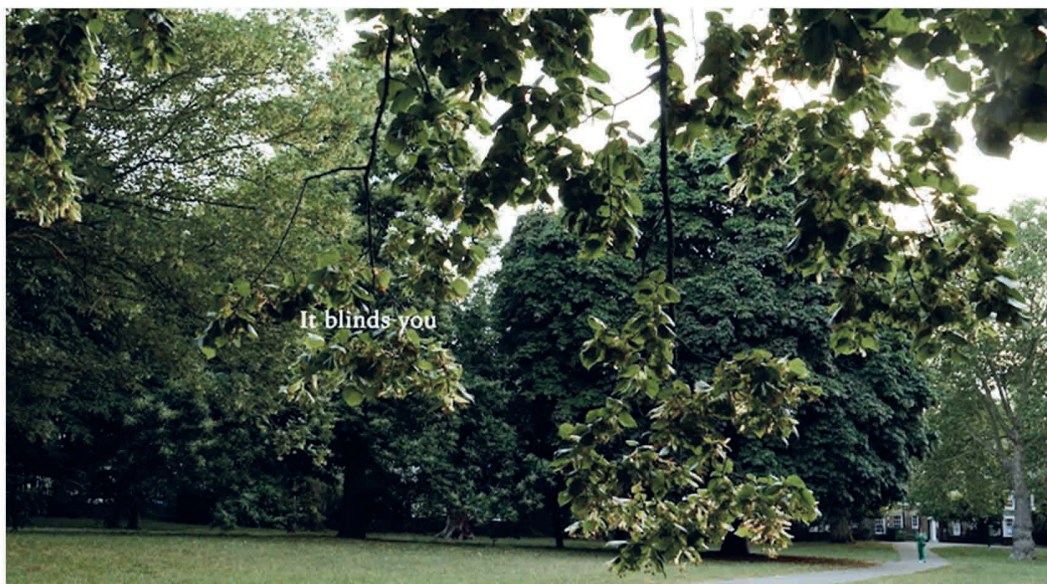
Sarah Watkins



Hopefully one day you can forgive me



I cry eight hours a day



It blinds you



You lost it

Shiva Bar



Sara



thank you!