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25 SILENCE

The Wells Street Journal



ISSUE 25

SILENCE

THE WELLS STREET JOURNAL



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ISSUE 25: SILENCE

Foreword

The Wells Street Journal is a London-based biannual literary publication run entirely by the University of Westminster's Creative Writing MA and Professional Writing MA students. The Journal was developed to give students their first experience producing a literary publication and to create a space for writers from all backgrounds to establish themselves and learn from one another.

Our theme for this issue is Silence. Silence can be a magnifying glass to reality; it can evoke feelings of peace, solitude, loneliness, and reflection, and can be both comforting and unsettling. We use words to fill the quiet, yet Silence can expand reality, inviting endless interpretations. This is reflected in the wide range of works featured in this issue.

We hope that within these pages, you are able to uncover something about yourself and develop new ways to understand the world around you. Most importantly, we encourage you to keep on letting your voice be heard as we find meaning in the silence between words.



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Poetry



3 AM in Our Kitchen

Madeline Townsend

For the first time, the pain in my chest and the tears on my cheeks are welcomed. Hunched over the counter, mouth agape because you never fail to make me cackle, I suddenly do not feel so small in this big city. I am like a kid again, suppressing my laughter during hide and seek while we try not to wake our friends with our muffled giggles.

Spices and ingredients cover the counter, wind blows in through the windows and even though I don't know my own address, I am home.

Home is the stillness in my chest, seeing that look on your face when neither of us can force air down to our lungs because we are just too damn funny.

A silent smile forms as I pick the blonde strand off my shoulder, and I don't mind that I have done so several times already. Instead, it has settled my rapid heartbeat in this foreign apartment.

Because even when the laughs do not come after a long day, the peace of your understanding and the warmth of your hug reminds me what friendship can do for the human heart.

A clink of wine glasses, our loud fire alarm and confusing laundry machine have transformed into the music you play on our miniature TV. We follow its rhythm for our nightly rituals, and suddenly, I don't mind cooking the chicken if it means you don't have to because you hate it so much.

And when I finally catch my breath, I know I will never forget our late nights in the kitchen.

Ache
Khan Haque

Longing stretches you from two ends
your feet sink into the earth
as your head is reeled into the clouds
You see over a mountain top
while the summit, still, rests above
You are a tree that grows into the sun
As the roots worm through the mud
you see them rip in opposite directions
And you have a better image of what's
behind you, than in front

You commit yourself to drawing a violet
thinking of it alive and spry,
As it stares dead from the paper
With this little lie,
you survive the stretching from both ends

Your heart says that-

Your mind sees a person of many
The blood sees a God
As the Earth keeps turning-
You move away from the mountain top
Left with a terrifying realisation of dirt

But you see a faint summit in the distance, painting
yourself closer

You commit yourself to drawing a violet
thinking of it
As it stares back from the paper

Still not telling the truth
You live for the stretching from both ends
Don't you?

A Peaceful Morning

Daytona Winter

Silence is an acquired taste, much like black coffee; unbearable the first few times you try it. Yet after a while, it becomes non-negotiable in the mornings. The first time you drink coffee, you tend to need copious amounts of sugar just to be able to stomach it.

However, the more you drink it, the more you crave its authenticity.

Next thing you know, your cabinet is filled with vast amounts of coffee beans from all over the world. Funny enough, the two paired together are nothing short of serenity.

It makes me consider the truth- it was never really the coffee I loved so profoundly all along. The mornings when I get the opportunity to sit in silence are when I truly feel in tune with my mind and body. Before, I always attributed that feeling to the elated effect of caffeine. As I have gotten older, silence has revealed the parts about myself that I adore, the parts I detest, and the in-between.

It is during quiet mornings that I am able to organise the nitty-gritty thoughts and really understand my feelings and mood of the day.

Silence is not always enjoyable, it is hard to hide from your truest self with no distractions. But I think that is what is beautiful about it; you ride through the waves of emotions that do not have to be said aloud.

It is effortless to hide from yourself and all of the hardships of life these days. Especially with the world readily available at our fingertips to keep the noise of your mind at bay. How could you not?

Because of silence I have grown to love myself for who I truly am. That was something I always thought to be unachievable, as I was my biggest critic.

Presently, I enjoy the silence. It grants peace and freedom within my mind, as I drink my unaltered cup of coffee.

Birding

Daytona Winter

As I sit in the still morning,
I notice the world around me so attentively.

The sounds of the city I disregard each day,
dogs barking; crickets singing: a herd of traffic on
their way to work.

Then,
A soft warble pierces the background.

A wave of excitement surges over me,
and suddenly I am engrossed into a euphoric
embrace.

Feeling relief from the soreness of my reality,
As if I was as light as a feather and nothing else
matters.

Was it always this way,
and I just overlooked the simplicity of it all?
Or has something so small as a chirp revived my
sense of awareness in the mundane?

Chaos | Stability

Dawn Web

When I lack stability

I curl up

Crawl into my bed—as daylight strikes my window

Breathe silence, inviting darkness

I pull the covers over my eyes

Inviting only the

Two-by-four light

My phone screen seeps in—to my eyes.

When I lack stability

This desperation to pull up my socks, knee high

Lace me up and run

Run far away

As if rushing will keep me at a distance

Far enough, away, from the very thing reaching me
unstable

And yet,

I want to go

Going deep into the forest
I peel back the branches and find my reflection
Where the water ripples beneath my feet
Traces the frames of my shoes
My socks are wet
A mirror here
Staring back at me
There is a river dividing me
From jumping to the other side
I should get out of this water
Will I make it if I leap?

Or should I wait 'til found, scavenged—
But then, when, I realize even *if* I gather ALL
I cannot deny, there is no guarantee
That the bridge I create will not break
My fate
Trapped in this state
There's a lot at stake

When I lack stability

I dive deep into the depths of my mind searching
Capacity to stay on routine,
It has already been Broken
Try, I do
To go—the extra mile

String along those muscles, get up, go out
Shower, brush your teeth, and smile.
Make your bed, clean your shed
Drink a tall glass of water.
Eat some food
You know that will increase your mood

Yet, I lay here—
Starving.

*This poem was first published by Vivid Illusion
Creative Studios, in the poetry collection and
album "Red Corner"*

De-arrest
Dawn Web

“How’re you?”

I’m okay.

I made it out
Out of the march
A success

Without a grand parade
“I can’t go in there”

So, we walked—around
Away
Nearby
So we—could still be—a part
Peaking in, from the outside
Looking over the fence.
Going up the hill.
Glancing back,
Mumbling over your shoulder,
“They are following *us*”

My head is a carnival
The clowns have arrived

They waited
Waited till all the kids had gone
To close in
To team up
With their blue suits
To serve and protect
But what from?
You've got it all wrong
You've got it all wrong

There were so many of them
We're outnumbered
They were armed
We meant no harm

The metal wrangling
Them surrounding, grabbing
A tab of speed, but in my head
Sinking into quicksand
No time to think,

Less than half a puff of smoke
Quicker than they spoke
But you remain calm, did as you were told
As they tightened up around and cut your wrists
One of us — in chains
I am your witness

A thunder-crack, grappling my breast
Scarlet rushing beneath my skin
Running down, chest to palm
Salt beading between my fingers
My hand reaching out for yours
My vocal chords bleeding out to those
Near
Waiting—for just-action, out here
In fear

To be scooped up
A blockage, in the way
Am I gonna be restrained?
A leech latched on
The salt there, now detached
As I watched

You get tossed into the back
Clicking clack
Everything went black

They are just so deranged and in so much pain
They feel so much shame
How do I unwrap this gift?

How do you de-arrest
When you are so small?
Be loud
Make noise

“How are *you* ?”

*This poem was first published by Vivid Illusion
Creative Studios, in the poetry collection and
album “Red Corner”*

Facing the Inevitable

N. Dahir

Slow

I feel slow

I can feel the ticks and tocks of each passing
minute

I feel the hollow 'in-between'

Suspended, not frozen

Pause

Another pause

And more pauses and breaks

Is it unlawful to crave the quiet?

Nature is all around and exists loudly

Or is it gentle?

I am unsure

I feel the breeze of uncertainty on my face, fingers
and feet

But there is no sound here

I am the sound

I, within the crevices of my tender brain

I myself, I am the loud noise

My head begins to hurt

Silence is pain

Silence is too truthful
I do not wish to face the reality

Silence is too truthful
I do not wish to face the reality

I do not wish to be reminded
Of mortality

Silence is scary

So I yell, loudly
And a passerby looks my way
I fell validated
I try to establish contact
A mere acknowledgement of both our existences
Silence.

The empty space responds with a muted echo
Not even a dull “hello” or a peep

Silence is inevitable, I think.

Ghost Alley

Ibrar Sami

— A Prelude to Silence

The street dogs
closed in around me,
tails gently wagging—

in the eastern sky
the moon hung,
a perfect circle.

A guard stood watch,
cutting through the sleeping night—
darkness pooled in his eyes.

Still,
he gazed down
the deserted road.

“Sir, where are you headed?”

I feigned the weight of a heavy day
it felt as though the road itself
were walking
across my body.

“How far is Ghost Alley?”

He lifted his eyes
toward the tilting moon
and murmured,

“That place recedes
into the distance of your past.”

The hungry dogs
were still there,
circling me,
their tails wagging.

I cast another glance down the road
and realized—
the storm that had arrived
just moments before
shaking everything
before falling silent,
was only a prelude
to a catastrophic storm.

Graveyard Ladybirds

Zareena Hamill

Don't give me that look...
You don't have to leave.

You strolled into Death's garden
to rest peacefully.
You chose my home to sit still
against the wind's dancing trees.

Just a living statue,
perhaps to camouflage
the rain in your face.

My red beetle coat shines
as it hides bruised wings.
Then, I scurry and glance
at your turned face.

Those reversed human beads,
those dull whites of your eyes.
Have seen a world far bigger than I.

For a while, I stayed.
Staring at a human face:

humbled with silence.

You gave my small world privacy
with one dazed look,
instead of the usual deaths
I heard your kind took.
Summer in this place is full
of insect executions.

I've never left a human so patiently...
You choose not to notice.
As I spot your face once more:
Tired. Poor... Vacant.
Like the big petals of stone
you brought.

Moments of Suspension

Holly Trundle

Silence.

Shower hiss cascade ceased,
its tumbling flow of sound stilled,-
I breathe.

In the vacuum, unheard noises grow -
Nostrils bellow blow octave highs and lows,
Swift swish skin sweeps dispel droplets,
Aircon drone sucks steam through outlets,
Distant doors thud,
Doppler voices rise and fall.

Static, listening human statue –
Lights, unmoved, click dark on walls.

Brusk towel friction, drying action,
Scours, saw-like, chafing cells.
Pit-pat splashing, feet cross floor tiles,
careful, pool splash mind controlled.
Sitting, notebook open, scribing,
Turning pages whisper round,
Busy beat of the day forgotten,

Soul at peace, surveying sound.

Silence.

Moments of suspension,
Stage for over-shadowed players,
Space for solo exploration,
Lifting aural Salome layers.

No Contact

Kiera Cz

Sunday felt like a promise to me, but
I never gave much thought to what my last words
to you might be.

My friends will console this silence:

“Moving on is an intricate science, but
no contact is definitely for the best.”

As if one day I'll wake up and love you any less.

On Hungerford Bridge

Gail Campbell

To Remedios Varo

The watcher from the other side
Was often in my aunty's home.
Word has it, the watcher and his kind
Feed on strong emotions,
Repressed feelings that sometimes burst
The bounds
Behind closed doors,
The feeling of weeping, not the sound.

In these spooky dwellings there are movements of
dust,
Cold currents,
And I believe the watcher roosts there
Like a sleepy heron,
Unkempt feathers and skinny legs
And the knowing eye of a bird.

In later years it was imperative
To live with a cat or a dog,
A fish or a frog, maybe a chameleon,
So that the watcher, not a known animal lover

Got bored,
Flew out the sky-light.

After I quit smoking, the tethers on feelings
Came undone.

I was bent over with silent hiccups tearing
Their rollercoaster path through my breast:
From the corner of my thundering head
I saw the watcher shaking with glee.
I assumed he left glad and smugly, for he blinked
many times.

The other day, I spied a Pied Wagtail
Swirling through the fog
Lost on Hungerford Bridge,
Little bird caught my tears in his crystal alembic,
Clutched close to his heart.

Page Turner
Angelina Abello Licea

Rushed beginnings illuminate focus onstage.
Broken creaks with strings of rust, a quiet
symphony.

With an index finger and thumb, turn the page.

Tension strung through the board of a melodious
face. Don't risk the snap from the peg for the
desired harmony. A hitch of a breath – listen for the
pace.

Urge to pluck, rather, callused fingers mimic rage.
Both rest before the solo in a one-person
symphony. With an index finger and thumb, turn
the page.

Ignore dragged slurs that show measures to
embrace. Instead, separate the vibrating waves of
the pained melody. A hitch of a breath – listen for
the pace.

A kiss of a bow over markings to erase.
Through the echo hold of a body, a faint memory.

With an index finger and thumb, turn the page.

Anticipate the single note that makes the audience
brace,
absent whispers save seats, no room for apology.
A hitch of a breath – listen for the pace,
with an index finger and thumb, turn the final page.

Pause

Zareena Hamill

Sometimes we *crave* a quiet life.
Somewhere still
so our thoughts have **S P A C E**.
Moving through, wandering by,
to reflect and simply be.

Sometimes we *crave* a quiet life.
Somewhere thoughts can
rest,
waiting patiently.

That life I seek is invisibly **L O S T**.
Somewhere peace
and tranquillity meets...

That candlelit silence.
That future is a flame.
Your home will be as bright
as the light of day.

When those unquiet hopes lie in
the **D A R K**,
remember the garden-sound life.
We must stray
From black hole busyness...
To find a glowing winter cabin
melting against our worried world.

Something I sought
for a long time
stares back.
So, while my eyes are still...
I must **P A U S E**.

Poem 1
Debotri Ghosh

Silence is the echo of all the noise we carry within. Outwardly, we wear masks, play roles, and show the world who we think we should be, but in the quiet moments alone, we meet ourselves in truth. In that stillness, we feel our desires, our fears, our dreams, and the whispers of our souls. We see beyond the layers we present to the world and glimpse the raw, unspoken self beneath. Silence is not punishment; it is a gift that allows us to discern what is truly ours, what we long for, and what we seek from those around us. In its gentle embrace, the soul speaks—and for the first time, we can listen to, not just hear, who we truly are.

Poem 2
Debotri Ghosh

Do you know what silence takes from us?
A love we once hoped would last a lifetime.

Silence is not empty; it is heavy.
Heavy with unsaid truths, unspoken fears,
and words that arrive too late.

The one you wish to keep forever is waiting,
reading your pauses, understanding your quiet,
holding on while patience turns into ache.

Don't lose the rare soul
who hears you even when you say nothing.
In a world that rushes and hardens hearts,
such understanding is a miracle.

Speak before silence becomes goodbye.
Open your heart while they are still listening.
Because some people don't leave
when they stop loving you,
they leave when they grow tired of being met with
silence.

Quiet Chaos

Elle Leavoy

My mind went quiet.
I didn't know who I was without the noise.

My thoughts were so loud,
constantly talking over each other.

Every thought wanted to be heard.
Every voice demanded attention.

I couldn't catch my breath.
I couldn't keep up.

Is it naive to assume everyone's mind runs on full
amplification?

Like a speaker turned to maximum volume.
The bass rattles the trunk of a car.
The music is so loud it vibrates through your
bones.

I didn't realize silence was an option.
My brain has never run still.

Gradually, the noise slowed.

A diagnosis finally gave words to what I'd been feeling.

The world around me never changed.
It was I who changed the way I learned to live in it.

The chaos that felt embedded in me finally paused.
There was room for peace that I didn't realise existed.

For the first time,
I could focus.

I was able to live through a day
without being bombarded by the constant,
uninvited pondering.

I can now fall asleep without replaying every
word,
every mistake,
every moment on repeat.

Resting in the silence,
in the in-between of what was once familiar,
and what has become calm.

Radio Silence
Heather Wastie

for Sharon

Radio silence
sits in a shell,
stops transmitting:
painful as hell.

No talking,
sighs or groans,
homing in
on the creaking of bones.

Overwhelming
world be still,
let me hear nothing
but fear my breath might spill.

Radio silence
sings in a bowl,
waves crashing
soft in my soul.

No confusion,
doubt or fear;
silence from worry:
salt in my ear.

Unpolluted
layers of calm,
silence finds me
chugging with a comfortable alarm.

© *Heather Wastie*

Self Help
Ewen Glass

Self Help

I took my old self out back
and throttled him;
returned alone and current;
six people commented
on how fresh I looked.
The muscles around
my thumbs ached.

Sensory Overload

N. Dahir

The stillness of the palm trees at dawn
The vacant tarmac bleached from the bitter cold
Quiet afternoons indoors
There is a sense of peace here.

Late nights when sleep overwhelms the majority
But there you lie, as inconvenient eyes stare up
into the ceiling
You can hear your heart quiver in between the
cotton sheets
There is a sense of discomfort here.

Masking behind the thoughts that prance
arrogantly in your mind
You mistook the lump in your throat for a stranger
A sad melancholy pricks the soles of your feet
There is a sense of urgency here.

No one is around
Is it loneliness or silence?

The thoughts begin to grow louder into a
crescendo

Yet outside the stillness is deafening
Like a black hole you sink deeper into nothingness
An empty void.

There is a sense of mystery here.

‘Who is louder?’
Your mind shouts back
Your body quick to contain itself.

The silence remains, it lingers on
Until dawn comes
Then morning
The engine of a bright red car rescues you.

You wake once more
And the alarm bell rings with glee
Silence it seems, was but another dream.

Silent Messenger

Holly Trundle

Silence, I crave,
while facing fear,
footsteps hushed, breath bated.
Strained ears cock,
digits draw near,
swift, sharp bite awaited.

Mute the gate,
cold latch and clasp,
slow swing whisper hinges.
Soundless stealth sought,
fending foe's grasp,
rasp or crunch synch cringes.

Silken slither,
tiptoed presence,
cloak the creeping stranger.
Each new challenge
gloved in silence,
dare the unseen danger.

Silent Rain

Lidia Karanfilovszka Zikic

*Some whiteness
swallowed all my thoughts.
I sink deeply underwater
and I stay here mute
for such a long time that
I start growing gills on my neck.
No trace of conscience.
No trace of brain power.
Empty and light.
I exist in silence
and
with each bubble
I release muted words
no one has ever heard,
no one has ever thought.
The bubbles multiply and raise above,
heavy rain starts to fall from them;
and it doesn't stop...
it doesn't stop.*

The Blanket.

Serhii Chernovolov

original translation from Ukranian by Bohdan Horon

the blanket is yelling at me again like a scary kite:
no, man, it's not possible
i'm not your hideout
when you pull me over your eyes,
the world does not change,
literally, nothing changes
people keep dying
people keep losing their parents
people suffer over the lost possibility
to suffer over bullshit
people are drinking coffee,
doubling its value in favour of the new gods
and it's still not enough,
not enough intolerance, tears and despair
broken fingers are weaving camouflage nets
and it's not enough
no message from the front lines
could pull you out of the dopamine hole
their lives must be unbearable, no, even more
unbearable than this word
they have been broken in half, and every trek to

home is cold
oh, God, you're so amusing,
the pillow also couldn't hide the fact
that children are immersing in the romantics of the
trenches
that on your morning streets the occupants are
crawling like lizards,
the ones, who cheer in pubs for your death,
that your home slowly but surely has been
destroyed
you have a job, a woman, a cat,
while the butchers are tearing apart the guts of
guys from Brovary
you have events, concerts, smiles,
when someone's last sun rises
there is no right to escapism here,
and other romantic bullshit of youth,
leave that Buddhism to the mountain rivers,
here are the fucking steppes and blood on every
route
sweat runs down real people's cheekbones,
thousands of wrinkles are fighting for the sunlight
if you want to leave, then leave
if you want to live — then calm down and enjoy the
silence.

*This poem was translated from Ukrainian into
English by Bohdan Horon.*

The End to an Odd Beginning

Chante-Marie Dante

The thousandth time I've spent at the ceiling
The ceiling is where my dreams were I glided on
top
But I've left myself at the bottom
I was drowned out by black water
The muckiness swallowed my lungs I've met a
thousand shadows
They are a kaleidoscope of nothing And nothing
It's depth means everything
And nothing at all
So I floated back up
To reach where my dreams are

The Silent Scream / Falling

T.L. Brennan

I have to tell you what the dog just did!

I greet with a groan – maybe later –
the babbling brook of the domestic everyday,
I'm too busy seeking the resounding epic.
In two hours, a shrill, unfamiliar voice
will be the last sound - a cacophony
of next-of-kin, contact, sorry, bearer, news.
And I am the figure in *The Scream*,
alone with the high frequencies of grief,
so beyond piercing they are inaudible,
swirling around me to form a silent whirlwind,
a vortex of pain,
and I know that I am falling,
falling, falling,
falling.

The Words

Lidia Karanfilovszka Zikic

Touch my unspoken words,
feel them under your fingers
like a rose with its thorns.
Look at my unborn words.
Caress them with your eyes:
gently, boldly, roughly.
Imagine my words.
They hurt the silence
with the impatience of not being told.
Drink them as wine,
as water,
as milk.
Eat them as bread,
smell them,
taste them,
and if you can,
go ahead,

try to

speak them.

Thinking About the Weather

Madeline Townsend

I have been told to write about what is on my mind, but I do not want to think about you, so I will think about the weather in this foreign city. I love how much it rains here. My quiet heart follows the tap, tap, tap, of the rain hitting my forehead.

I miss your smell.

Although sometimes I miss the sun and look for when it peeks through the clouds, saying hello. Through the crowded streets, you can find me standing speechless in a sliver of sun before continuing down the shaded sidewalk, with a smile on my face.

I wonder what you are doing right now.

I really love listening to the rain against my window at night, on the couch in the living room. I fall asleep with the water in my ears and you in my mind.

Are you thinking about me?

The weather here is very unpredictable. The wild thunder breaks the silence in my mind and I am brought back to my body. I can check my phone for any sign of deception and still be caught walking without my umbrella, unaware I have been tricked.

Just like you.

My favourite days are when it is cold enough to need a scarf but not so cold that you need gloves. I can be at ease in my jacket, swipe on my phone and pretend you are right next to me.

I cannot just think about the weather, so I will think about you and how much you hate the rain and cold.

Where the Light Lingers.

Ibrar Sami

Jabed Dewan—
do you remember him?

Holding the dying pulse of life,
he remained alone—
a solitary witness to being human.

But is being human
ever so simple?
Listening to stories of decay,
he had stopped—
within the shadowed recesses
of himself.

One day,
through the corridor of prohibition,
he arrived at a window—
to catch a fleeting breath of relief.

Yet no one watches,
no one reads
the unwritten lines
of his heart.

He is then
an anonymous, invisible citizen.

Before dawn,
a storm sweeps the city.
All windows close their eyes,
but only Jabed
keeps his open

Hands pressed against the window frame,
he discovered
a hidden pulse.

The rain stopped.
After the final lightning,
he closes the window.

Who Decides

Chardonnay Vasiana

When he decided the whores and the users must go, they rejoiced, saying sin earns its due.

When he decided those whose ancestors built the land with blood and bone could not remain, they said it was a choice, abandonment, and so the loss was deserved.

He came for the woman who bore a bastard not by will; they said she was unworthy, her body was her only crime.

He came for the merchant of gifts and wishes; they said he was false if his wares were unable to save him.

He came for the ill who could not provide for themselves; they said their presence disrupted the order.

When he came for the chosen one, they said righteousness was only a disguise.

Then he came for those who fed the needy; they did not argue, only believed the worthy are never judged incorrectly.

Then he came for their own family,

and when the fear stirred —
still they turned away.

Those who arrived on the train,
full of fury, bearing witness,
soon ran out of steam.

All who stood as jury fell silent.
And when it was finished,
when nothing remained to take nor lose,
all who risked nothing,
all who saved their comfort,
all who denied humanity,
never again.

Prose



Audiation - Song Without Sound

Julia Jorgensen

I often think about how Beethoven must have felt. He and I began losing our hearing at the same age. There's something about that that always gets to me. Not that I'm vain enough to compare myself to him in any other context, but I was fresh off the high of first place in the Chopin Competition and a red carpeted future when the ringing started. Then the buzzing. Then the static. Then the quiet.

There are other composers who understand some of the immensity of the loss. We have a weekly support group, actually. Many join over Zoom, immersed as they are in international works. We practice various sign languages together, and try to help each other keep playing.

Apparently, Beethoven eventually died of alcoholism after years of social reclusion. The hearing still listen to him, all these years later, and that soothes the sting of the story somewhat for me—but still. I can never quite shake knowing that they hear him now, when he couldn't hear himself then. I can never quite shake the image of him standing with his back to the roaring crowd as the

orchestra decrescendo, knowing that he himself ended in silence and isolation. And I can't help wondering if I will share the same fate.

The thing that hearing people forget about sound is that it is tactile. We can lay our fingers over the keys, the strings, the drums, and the vibration flows through particles into our nerves and muscles and bones. In a way, I hear better now in the silence than I ever did before, because I feel what's missing so much deeper and keener. Beethoven was able to continue composing after the loss of his hearing through a process called audiation, or the imagining of sound. Many in the deaf composing community find it to be a cleaner liminal space where noise is transmuted into movement and form, depth and breadth, thick and thin—so much more dimensional than notes on a page. The emptiness between is as vital as the noise itself. Sound cannot exist without silence, and we are called to hold it.

In our group, they remind us to remember the importance of that capacity, to not view deafness as a disability, to not fear the quiet as a threat, to not hear the silence as a suffocating ocean of nothingness. Sometimes I can. When I see the light in deaf children's eyes as they place their hands on my piano.

When I feel the rumbling of my strings and the song plays in my mind as clearly as it did when I was a child, too. And sometimes I can't. When my fingers shake against the smooth white keys or a smooth brown bottle. When I know with absolute certainty that it would have been easier to have anything else in the world taken from me. When I think about how, when my wife told me to leave by scribbling it on a napkin, I took all my things that made sound, and did without the rest.

At the premiere of his Ninth symphony, closing his Ode to Joy, the deaf man continued conducting, unaware of the crowd's standing ovation behind him until his Contralto turned him around to see the applause. It being that song in particular stirs something vast and aching within me.

I wonder whether, in that moment, conducting his praises to gladness and gratitude, at the height of his celebration and triumph over the insurmountable, Beethoven was happy. To witness the joy on people's faces, the movement of the crowd, the aplomb of his peers. Was it enough? Or did he wish silently, as I do, in that quiet space in our minds between sleeping ears, to only be able to hear the music one last time?

Child of April
Isabel Kilevold

The swan's head is tucked beneath its wing. The stream of the river cradles the crib of white feathers. A thick fog hangs heavy over the April morning. Dewdrops form like pearls on the spiderweb spun across the bridge's metal railing. I cross it, but cannot quite see where I place my feet—still damp from standing in puddles of melted snow at the threshold between winter and summer. I pause as I hear the deafening sound of silence.

I am balancing on a fine line between yearning and reminiscence. The arrival of spring takes me back to my morning walks when I lived next to the river. I think about the quiet beauty of grey clouds reflected in the water, and I cannot help but long for a version of myself that is long gone. I linger in the memory of the days when I skipped across cobbled pavements and was not afraid of falling into the canal. The sight of a flower cured every heartache, my untarnished skin not yet scratched by grief. She was still breathing back then.

Frost clung to the meadow when spring awakened this year, like sleep crust still lingering in her eyes. When I opened my eyes on the morning of the spring equinox, I prayed to God for her to wake up too. It was three weeks before her birthday, and, in my mind, she would blow out twenty-two candles on a chocolate cake with pink icing. Sometimes I dream about her only to wake up and be reminded that five years have passed since we last spoke. I remember how bright the sun shone the day she left; then spring turned grey, and yellow became the colour of a broken heart.

Grief is not the knife in the chest I was expecting. I spread my arms wide and waited for a stab that never came. I thought death would arrive with a rupture, but its erosion is quiet and slow. It comes crawling, leaving small scratches—just deep enough to break the surface of my skin. If you keep the knife inside the wound, you can stop the bleeding—yet here I lie, at a loss for blood. Regret is not tender with the vulnerable heart.

Daphne Willows' fuzzy sprouts mimic the fluffy plumage of a gosling. Born from broken eggshells, grey pillows drift on the blue water; a mirror image of clouds floating across a blue sky. Will it free me or leave me fragile—to break out of my bud and bloom?

A Baby's Breath blossom, picked and left to dry.
Death rests on a pillow of moist soil; still, my chest
rises and falls in a steady rhythm.

Equanimity

Anissa Duffourg

I challenged myself to write this piece in silence. No music, no TV playing in the background, no rain sounds. Only me, my computer, and complete and utter silence.

This old friend has followed me around ever since I was a child. I wasn't one to fuss or throw tantrums in the local supermarket. I wasn't one to particularly enjoy socializing either. I liked being in my own corner of the world, surrounded by my toys or anything remotely interesting that would catch my attention. I would stare at the delicate mosaics on the floor of my childhood home, admiring the pattern of flowers and vibrant colours all around me. Silence allowed me to set my imagination free, to observe and be exalted of God's creations. As small as the world is when you're a young child, boredom never found me.

Adults called me the quiet kid, the soft and calm little girl, too shy to talk to others. Yet something always troubled me when they described me: they always had a tone of pity in their voice when talking about my character.

“Don’t worry!” they would tell my mom, “she’s just a little shy, more on the reserved side, but she’ll open herself up eventually!” I would look at them with incomprehension. I sat and thought about these words, trying to understand, dissecting them until none of it made any sense. I could not come to any conclusion on the supposed unpleasantness of being quiet. I started studying my peers at school, their behaviour, the way they talked and moved, forming a chaotic symphony I could never quite learn to play. I thought perhaps the teachers wanted me to scream and run around the class, but I could not do such things. I was exhausted by simply gazing at them.

Regardless of what adults would say, I continued to find contentment in silence as my companion. I wasn’t isolated— I developed deep friendships along the way, but it was always with girls who appreciated the quiet times the same way I did.

Silence made me feel comforted, balanced, aligned with both my heart and the earth beneath me. Silence meant collecting moments where I was free of constant dialogues, where my dreams were alive, where the sounds of nature transcended into harmony. The rustle of the wind between leaves, the rattle of pans in the kitchen,

the drops of rain falling on my window, the strange noises a house makes when no one is talking. Silence was beauty. It allowed me to feel beauty.

Then something changed when the other children at school added new adjectives to the adults' description: weird, odd, strange. Did my lack of chatter make me that peculiar? Was I saying the wrong things? Why was everyone else so obsessed with the constant need to fill the space with noise? Should I make more effort to be more like them and less... like me?

These questions started to haunt me. I began to analyze every microscopic detail of anything I said. I subjected myself to mental torture, yet I did not feel in control; something beyond me invaded my head and led me into relentless anguish. I would close my eyes at night and see this shadow dancing, mocking me, making a fool out of me by whispering out loud all the doubts and fears I locked away. The thoughts were endless during daylight as well; they filled every room I walked into. And suddenly, everything became loud.

I started dreading the very thing I had so deeply cherished and protected for years.

As soon as a room felt too empty, my heart started racing, my breathing became short and turbulent.

Silence became deafening, filled with tumultuous screams, as my thoughts took hold of me every time I found myself alone. My phone helped me bear the weight of the soundless air. I filled my mind with shiny bright colors, videos of cats falling down the stairs, and the hollow voyeurism of other people's lives.

I felt like I was in control. In control of my thoughts, in control of my being. But the more I tried to fight it, the more I spiralled into exhaustion. Something changed when I let the distressing thoughts flood in and recognized them for their true essence: mere representations of a false reality I had encased myself in. In that moment, I felt a growing calmness wash over me, and I began befriending silence again. I felt it return, gently brushing my ears, and instead of panicking, I sat at its table. The cold shadows departed, allowing the world to brighten. I found myself noticing again; the rise of my chest as I breathed the fresh morning air, the rhythm of my heartbeats drumming, the softness of a life slowed down.

I wasn't fleeing silence, I was seeking refuge from the self I didn't know how to hold. I believed a greater force was clawing at my mind, yet I had been the one shaping it all.

As I am finishing writing this piece, still in complete and utter silence, I can feel someone smiling at me, the little girl I used to be, the quiet kid, always off in the clouds. She looks happy now that I have finally let her be.

Grant Me the Illusion

Sadie Rosa

That damn range hood over the oven, the dog growling at workers outside, the squealing that circles through the house when the dishwasher is loaded incorrectly, that one ceiling fan that taps with every turn. An inordinate volume of sounds by midday. If only I could pause it, for just a few moments; long enough to give my brain time to itself, maybe the building pressure could ease. Enough so, I can appreciate the blessings that come from the very things that taunt me. The issue is what my brain does with that lull. It doesn't rest or experience relief in the calm it's been offered. No, it fills that space with involuntary thoughts.

I can try to blink them away, or fill up that space with gentler thoughts, ones that I've curated myself. What is the worst thing that could happen right now? Would you like to know? No? Well, here it is anyway. It'll persist. Ruminating on what I haven't done, reminding me of the shameful things I've tried to bury, presenting me with anything other than the quiet I'm chasing.

If silence meant peace, I'd welcome it. That statement might seem hopeless, I know. But I've learned there is a sweet spot between deafening silence and incessant noise. The trick is to determine which sounds can fill the void, while keeping my brain from shattering under stress. The whistling of wind, the kind that rustles trees; rain tapping at the window, waves collapsing onto themselves. They grant me the illusion of silence, without flooding me with dread. Because silence is never really silent for me.

I See You

Violet-May Davey

Walking down the narrow pathway, the forest trees were swaying slowly as though they were dancing in the wind. The moonlight was bright, showing us the path ahead. Every step we took was exposed by the crunching sound of leaves under our feet. Noises echoed around us, from distant hoots to eerie whispers, floating across the area. The air grew colder as we continued forward. The whispers increased in volume, shadows began to appear, peaking at us from behind the trees. The narrow path seemed to grow longer as we moved. The only thing keeping us sane was each other.

“How much further do we have to go?” Owen complained.

“Not far now.” But the truth was that I had no idea myself.

Every so often, we could hear twigs snapping and wolves howling. Creatures scurrying and bushes shaking. In the distance, we could see little lights. We started heading that way until we realized that they were glow-flies and not the campsite lanterns.

We stopped. The others were looking around as I recalled the events that led us to this point.

We were grouped together for summer camp at the New Forest, alongside the rest of our classmates. A class of thirty teenagers travelling together in an old yellow school bus.

I sat next to my usual gang of friends, surrounded by the buzzing voices of excitement. In our group was Owen, a 15-year-old with dirty blonde hair in a long, messy quiff, bluish-grey eyes, white, tanned skin, and the personality of a problematic toddler. To his left was Odette, his fraternal twin, who had a pixie cut, green eyes, and an opposite personality. Behind Odette was Austen, a 16-year-old with caramel skin, brown eyes, and black hair in a man bun. He was my best friend, the one I was closest to. Then there was me, Charlie. A 16-year-old with red hair cut into a mullet, blue eyes, and pale-white skin. I am known as the group's leader.

Once we arrived at the campsite, we got a brief on the many activities offered and the various places we were allowed to explore. The campsite was surrounded by pathways that wound around the New Forest like a network of veins. Some more visible than others. With signposts and markers, guiding many campers on trails of interest.

One in particular, the “Open Trail,” branches off to a nearby stream, where students and campers are able to observe aquatic life and watch the natural landscape. Our teacher told us that this path specifically was the one on which we must remain.

As opposed to the forbidden paths, which have no signposts and are usually covered with thick, overgrown foliage. Our teacher said there was one, known as the “Forgotten Path,” where many have claimed to hear whispers. Anyone who ventured down this path would be consumed by the forest walls, never to be seen again.

We spent the day exploring hidden clearings, finding bench spots for scenic views. I led the way with Austen at my side, pointing at all the signs. The twins were behind us, bickering like usual, deciding who would tell what to their parents when the trip was over.

After a few minutes, they were quiet. Austen and I turned to look at them, only to see Odette leaning over a hole in the ground. We could hear Owen shouting from within.

“Help! I think I hurt my ankle!”

“We’re coming, Owen!” Odette said before climbing down. We followed, not wanting to separate. We helped Owen up and realized that

there was no way to go back up; there was a lot of foliage.

“We need to go a different way,” I said, looking around.

Odette pointed to a narrow path. “What about there?” We nodded. There were no signs, so we ended up on the “Forgotten Path.” We continued walking.

Now, as we looked, our surroundings were covered with tall, overbearing trees. Odette was clinging to Owen, who had his arm around her. Austen stood next to me, his head scanning the trees for a hidden path. His face turned pale after a moment, and when I followed his gaze, I could see why. At first glance, the trees looked normal. But hidden slightly between the trees were a pair of bright white eyes. They belonged to a blurry, shadowed figure that was watching us - as though we were its prey. Though we could not see its body, whispers seemed to spill from it.

“What ... is that?” Whispered Austen, turning his head towards me.

“I’m not sure ... we should probably leave,” I said before beginning to step back. The others followed my lead, putting distance between us and the figure.

Want to play a game? A low raspy voice spoke.

“What?” Owen uttered.

Let’s play a game.

“What kind of game?” Asked Odette.

The figure spoke once again. *A game of hide and seek. You try to find your way out of here.*

Or... The shadow pauses.

Become forgotten.

Looking at each other, we never realised that the game had started until we heard counting.

1...2...

We all took off running, Owen’s ankle no longer hurting.

3...4...

None of us dared to look back. Our screams echoed throughout the forest.

5...6...

Our fear grew with every step; the counting still seemed close by.

7...8...

Up ahead, there was a clearing, and without thinking, we divided into pairs. The twins ran left, where the path seemed clearer. Whilst Austen and I went right, where the foliage was only increasing in thickness.

“Did we go the wrong way?” Austen yelled in panic as we continued to run, his hand grasping mine. I never answered.

9...

There was no way of knowing how far we had gone into the forest. All that could be seen were overgrown branches, positioned as though they were a group of slithering snakes.

10...

Everything became silent. We stopped running.

Ready or not... Here I come...

In that moment, I knew that we had to find the others, to make sure that we all got out of here together. The voices came to a halt as Austen and I began sneaking around, looking for any sign of those creepy white eyes.

Some time had passed, and it seemed as though we were still lost. Everywhere we turned looked the same. Then we began to hear the familiar sound of heels.

“That’s Odette!” Austen smiled in relief and ran towards the footsteps before I could say anything. I stayed put, wondering if it was a trap that Austen just fell into?

After a few minutes, I decided to follow. The trees seemed to loom closer, their branches tangling around me like skeletal fingers, waiting to

grab me at any moment. I glanced at the night sky, feeling as though I was forever lost, when all of a sudden, I heard my name.

“Charlie! Where are you?” I hid. The voices grew louder until they just stopped. I snuck a glance and saw that my friends were all together. I ran to them, and we all cheered in excitement, forgetting to be silent.

“We have to go!” Austen said. We went to move when we felt a new presence behind us. Turning to see, everything went black. Only four words could be heard.

Peekaboo...I see you ...

Noise Complaint

Courtney Risner

I can't hear my neighbours anymore.

They don't argue through the walls or drag furniture across the floor at odd hours. No television hums reruns late into the night. I never hear footsteps above me or laughter bleeding through open windows. Grills go unlit for barbecues. Birthdays pass without off-key singing. No one is calling a dog to heel, tugging a leash down the sidewalk, cursing under their breath when dogs do what dogs do on their neatly trimmed lawns. It's like my neighbours are never home.

I suppose that's what I should have expected, moving into a "*nice, quiet*" neighbourhood. Though some company would be great, from time to time.

It *would* be nice to overhear keys fumbling at the lock, boots wiping on a mat, a door opening into waiting, outstretched arms. To catch half a phone call while someone paces the pavement—to inherit a stranger's secrets unintentionally and keep them anyway. I'd like to hear Spanish spoken on the street again, just loudly enough that I could repeat it under my breath and try to understand.

Music spilling out through a propped-open door or a cracked second-floor window— to hear it again later, live in a bar, louder now, layered with voices, sung wrong, but sung together. The *na na na of Hey Jude* passed around like something everyone owns, the *la la la of Crocodile Rock* stretched too long because no one wants it to end. To experience the roar of a football game on a Sunday afternoon, one side rising, the other falling, sound ping-ponging back and forth until you can feel it in your chest. To hear the exact moment someone becomes a hometown hero, the kind of cheer that arrives before the replay does.

But my neighbours aren't home.

Did I ask for this? I don't remember typing "quiet hours enforced" into a search bar or checking a box on my ballot that said "fewer voices, please." I never called a number or asked anyone to lower their volume. Still, the quiet seeped in, uninvited, like an answer to a question I didn't ask.

But someone, somewhere, must've complained. They said it would only be a few people. The dangerous ones. The bad seeds.

But I don't remember the man who sold tamales in the park being anything but gentle, the soft ring of his bell announcing him before you saw his cart, the hiss of steam when he lifted the lid, and his patient smile as he explained how to eat them. I don't recall the woman who braided hair on her stoop being a threat, with the quick snap of rubber bands, the low, happy murmur of neighbour children drifting in and out of her chair. The café that stayed open too late wasn't a problem either, with the scrape of metal chairs pulled back again and again, spoons knocking against chipped mugs, laughter breaking loose in the doorway and spilling out into the night. And the music—the songs born in places I've never been, melodies older than borders, rhythms surviving empires that fell centuries ago—didn't sound like something that needed silencing.

I miss the noise of my neighbours.

I noticed when the world kept its shape but lost its warmth. When voices weren't even cut off mid-thought, their thoughts never reached the air.

Apartments emptied before leases ended, shoes still lined by the door, lights left on in rooms no one returned to, mail gathering in thin, accusing stacks. Class lists shifted, leaving students shifting uncomfortably next to empty desks.

Work schedules rewritten, lunch tables inched inward, chairs pulled closer together to pretend to fill the space they once did, but never filling it the same.

Names were taken first. Then bodies. Then voices. Claiming they were just displaced when they were erased. The joy had been cleaned right out. And cleanliness, I learned, comes with a horrible, deafening sound:

Not sirens fading out or a final train rattling into the horizon.

Not chaos nor disruption.

What disappeared was softer than that. Quieter. The kind of sounds you only miss once they're gone.

Wind still moved through trees, but nothing answered it. Streets stretched wide and empty, waiting for something that never crossed them. Rooms felt unsure of themselves, as if even the walls had forgotten what they were built to contain.

The Earth hollowed out with each lost symphony of screen doors slamming shut behind bare feet in the summer, the cacophony of a crowded theatre all catching their breath at once, the clamour of bodies pressing close, of voices overlapping, of being alive together.

Here together.

Beautiful noise like that can't just be stopped.
It has to be siphoned away.

Like colour leaching from fabric. Like warmth draining from a hand left unheld for too long. Like blood pulling back toward the heart and never returning to the skin.

Without voices, language collapsed into memory.

Without music, time stopped keeping rhythm.

Without laughter, the future lost its cue to come in.

This— our world without sound— doesn't echo. It isn't worth answering, anyway. Every step feels wrong. Every movement too loud, yet too empty to matter. You begin to realize how much of being human depends on response, on the world answering back. The small mercy of knowing you were heard.

And still, nothing rushed in to replace it. No peace. No clarity. Only the understanding that nothing was coming to revive what had been removed, and that this absence was the point.

We like to forget this part, but the universe began in silence too.

Not the kind we manufacture, but the kind before anything had been taken.

No voices. No music. No argument. Just the world suspended, holding its breath, waiting to be broken open.

Then came the Big Bang— violent, radiant, disruptive. The loudest noise we've ever known. Matter collided with itself until it learned how to sing. Until something answered something else for the first time.

Noise was never a threat.

It was the evidence: that we are meant to be here.

And now, smothered down by our own boots to quiet again, the world feels unfinished. As if humanity reached its end not with fire or fury tearing up from Hell, but by slowly removing itself from the room.

We came from nothing. We are very good at finding our way back.

Shhh

Tanisha Banik

1. THEM

She spotted me in the Christmas market that evening, which was a rare event in itself. Placed between a pile of knitted scarves and woven hats, there I was, a dreamcatcher in the mix. I didn't have a price tag. Maybe the seller couldn't figure out how to monetise dreams. And so, my crow feathers collected dust, while I waited for someone kitsch enough to pick me. And there she was, an arm around her husband, wonder in her eyes, carrying her heart on her hip - her little girl.

She took me home and placed me over her bedroom windowsill. That evening changed the trajectory of both our lives.

2. *HER*

I am an angry woman, ambitious to the point of covetousness, sometimes borderline vindictive. But then, no one asked. Everyone assumed a narrative that suited their convenience. Soft spoken. Good natured. Loving mother of an infant, living a “happy” life after marrying her teenage love from college. Dutiful daughter who carved a life her family expected.

For me, everything changed at unlucky 13. My innocence was snatched away, and my trusted one shushed me into silence. Since then I’ve learnt my voice doesn’t belong to me. But at least this anger does!

3. *THEM*

I entered her subconscious to calm a thunderstorm. But instead, my feathers stood up like goosebumps. It was damp, pitch black, unexpectedly fleshy and alive.

There were large boxes glued shut and chained to one another. White pillars caged the space, stalactites and stalagmites of memory. Each box was neatly labelled like spice jars on her kitchen cabinet

I tried opening them again and again, but failed. The deeper I went, the darker it got. Nothing seemed to be working until I saw the labels. The nearest one read, “2014, Forgive and Forget.” Another, “2013, Just another jerk.”

I glided further, until I traced the largest: “2009, Family matters.”

I fought the lid with all my strength. It wouldn't budge. Dawn pressed closer. Desperate, I closed my eyes, gathered every thread of warmth in my web, hugged the box tight and softly requested: “Let me unshackle you.”

4. HER

I've constantly blamed this anger on my monthly shedding and changing hormones. Little did I know how innate it is. This rage was an heirloom passed onto me, from the beginning of patriarchy. Silence was worn so elegantly, for so long, that even the mask started to look like the truth. But everything changed the day I had an ultrasound. My scan revealed a girl.

I cried tears of joy all day, clutching the sonograms until nightfall.

And then the nightmares began. Every night I saw her growing older in my dreams. I treasure her laughter, her loud voice, until I can't, and then it all changes. I see myself chaining her feet first, limiting movement; and she lets me. I see a metal piece tied onto her waist protecting chastity. She gives in. Each night it ends with me sealing her mouth and blindfolding her from the unwarranted truth - the brutality we face as women. But tonight, I pray.

I believe when nothing works, faith does. This is not how I want my daughter to be. I fight against my lucid dreaming, trying to scream and end our suffering. But no voice comes out of me. I feel angry towards the dreamcatcher. Tonight we could've saved her; saved us. But there she was in purple, struggling to breathe. I've cuffed her hands, too. *What a cruel mother!*

Suddenly a gentle voice echoes:

"Let me unshackle you."

I remember faith and fear don't go together. And so one more time, I trust and surrender.

5. THEM

The lid opens to my surprise, revealing a memory - a dark room, a funny movie playing on the TV. Everyone is cosy under shared blankets. This is her family. She is cocooned beside one of her uncles. Everyone is laughing, except for her. But why?

To my horror, I see him squeezing her growing breasts while she squirms in silence. After much effort, she sits up and hurries outside the room. I follow. Inside the washroom now, she is staring at her reflection with bloodshot eyes.

I expect her to sob. But she slaps herself instead. Again and again until she shrieks so loud the door shudders. Yet no one notices. Her cries are silenced by the laughter outside.

She walks back to the room. Her uncle calls her back to the same spot. She looks elsewhere. He calls louder, and she complies.

I stand there, disgusted. These labelled boxes contain memories that killed her voice, her autonomy, day by day. This box is chained to another one, “2009, No one will believe you”.

Inside this one, she is speaking to someone she trusts, her aunt, her mother. But that doesn't matter. They are holding hands.

“You can tell me. I promise I won't tell anyone. Have faith,” says the trusted one.

“I c-can't,” she says.

“Faith and fear don't go together. Remember?” the trusted one.

“It's him, my uncle. That night after dinner and the movie... and again the next day in the car... when you all made me sit on his lap because there was no space. He did it to me...”

A shadow of disbelief crosses her face.

“Are you sure? Absolutely sure? Did you share this with anyone else?”

She nods in denial, teary eyes looking for hope.

“Shhh, shhh now. Listen to me carefully. This is our family matter. Don’t say this to anyone. Everyone loves him. He is charming. Also, no one will believe you. Keep your distance. The past is past. Forget it. It’s nothing. Now, wipe your tears and don’t go near him. Ok?” She instructs.

“Forget and don’t go near him”, she repeats with a broken voice.

“It happens to us all, shh and forget,” murmurs the trusted one. The lid closes.

Looking around, I realise the space is filled with traumas that would take ages to unpack. I have to act quickly. I cannot fathom failing her like her trusted ones.

One last time, I look around, properly acknowledging all her lived experiences. With that thought, I summon the Sun God rising on the horizon.

My feathers puff up, and woven threads light up, radiating brighter until the light illuminates all the dark corners of her mouth. The heat melts her shackles. Boxes open one after the other, freeing the burden placed on her tongue. But it also withers my feathers, charring my wooden web. With my dying breath, I bless her:
“Speak!”

6. *HER*

Tonight is different. I scream into the void:
“She doesn’t have to live the way you did. You can make her life better. Just let her be!”

The white pillars still enclose the space. If I could move even one, maybe my daughter could escape. So I resist. I push. I push with all my might.

A crack forms. A glimmer of light slips through. Suddenly, a voice echoes:
“Speak!”

The light surges, bright enough to blind me. The space turns weightless, as if something heavy has finally been lifted off.

I wake up sweating with my mouth wide open, gasping for air. A bright orange hue leaks through the slit of our curtains. The sun is rising. My daughter is curled into her father, safely sleeping in the arms of her trusted one. Now it falls on him, on us, to uphold her trust at all costs. I kiss her forehead, and remember why I named her Ushana: my first rays of the sun.

The Lighthouse Whispers

Krishiv Joshi

The lighthouse loomed; a dark blotch of regret.

I stood there, stunned, at the edge of the overgrown forest – fenced in by the tangles of dry wild grass. All around me, the forest was a graveyard. Trees stood split and hollowed, their wounds scabbed. Fallen trunks lay where they had collapsed, undisturbed, as though the forest itself had stopped speaking. Everything about this place carried the quiet of something already lost.

Before me, the windows of the lighthouse were hollow and obsidian, like the empty eyes of a skull, watching my every move. No curse, no ghost – just the echo of a moment I could never undo. A frigid wind whispered through the broken eaves, carrying with it the weight of my previous mistakes. Once, this place belonged to my brother and me. We would race across this very lawn, our laughter devoured by the crash of the waves below. We would dare each other to climb the spiral stairs, to touch the lantern room.

The house had breathed with warmth, every room filled with light and voices that overlapped

like music. The house still breathed, but now it exhaled dust and silence, each room hollow, every sound swallowed.

They said the lighthouse had been empty for decades, but I could have sworn I saw a faint light flicker from the top window. Like a heartbeat. Something in the rhythm of the way he used to knock at my door – three small taps and a pause. The lighthouse was not just shining; it was remembering.

Without warning, the ground was yanked from beneath me, like a carpet pulled away. Waves crashed against the barren, rigid rocks, each one an alarm bell. The echoes of his cry filled the silence as his screams waged war on the wind. Waves struck against the rock in a steady rhythm, just as they had that day. Creepers had concealed the lighthouse, hiding my previous mistake.

Finally, I slowly stepped towards the tower. This had been our secret fortress. Our kingdom above the sea. Our sanctuary from the world. But now, it felt different. The sky hung low like a shroud.

I pushed the heavy oak door, its hinges crawling through my ears like a wounded creature. My breath shallow, missing its rhythm. I forced myself inside. Timed to my step, a violent gust

hurled the door shut behind me, the CRASH echoing like a last sign for me to retreat.

Inside, cobwebs strangled the walls as though the tower had been weaving its trap for me long before I arrived. Dust breathed from the cracks. Portraits of long-dead lightkeepers clung to the wall, their faded eyes watching and accusing, hungry long after their flesh had gone. The lighthouse was not a building – the lighthouse was a carcass, battered, emptied, and left standing; its spirit extinguished, its soul reduced to silence.

The staircase coiled upward, its missing bones a silent act of sacrifice. With each step, the walls caved in, drawing me deeper into its rotten core.

At the top of the stairs, the attic yawned open. Scattered across the darkness were fragments of my childhood: a teddy with one button eye hanging loose, a wooden rocking horse, picture books swollen with damp. They should have been harmless reminders.

I remembered that teddy. I called him Cool Chris, after my favourite character from my favourite show. I had won it in a seaside fair, just out of town, when I was six. My brother was crying in my mother's arms when he did not win anything. I still remember pressing it into his hands and saying:

“You keep him. He is cool enough for the both of us.”

From that moment on, he always slept between us, through the storms clawing at our windows, through the tornadoes attacking our house. We took him everywhere, from the lighthouse to our home. Seeing it now – matted, darkened, bleeding – was like watching my childhood rot in front of me.

The rocking chair, which was mine first, was now a relic of my childhood – vanished. We used to climb on top of it and race each other. We filled the void with our laughter. Creak. Laugh. Creak. Now all that was left was... Nothing. Silence.

I sat curled up in this damp forest of reminiscences, beaming at the place where he left this world, where he never said “goodbye,” never said anything ever again. Yet, something caught my eye. A small movement. A shift of light? A figure? No. Just the shadow of the sky and my memory filling the rest of the drawing. My brother. My mind conspiring horror into the dark.

It was not him standing there.

Yet a ghost lingered, a memory haunting the space.

The lantern room’s shattered windows looked out over our cliff, where we once played heroes.

He insisted on being Superman, climbing the rocks with a towel knotted around his shoulders, shouting: "Watch me, I can fly!"

The knot never held properly; the towel kept slipping, and he stopped more than once to retie it with clumsy fingers, impatient to keep climbing.

I always caught him – every fall, every leap, every reckless grin. Just doing what I was meant to.

I still see that moment, that glimpse of failure. His small body running through the lantern room, the towel fluttering behind him, his laughter rising like light from the morning sun. Then the world paused. Time locked itself in place. Sweat trickled down my temple. I stood frozen in the doorway, every muscle locked, like a deer caught in the glare of headlights, as I watched him plummet, disappearing over the edge, my voice abandoning me.

I did not run fast enough.

I did not jump after him.

I did not save him.

Pain slammed into me like a physical weight, dragging me from the dream. My chest heaved, knees trembled, as I forced myself upright, forcing my legs to obey, to move towards the place where everything changed forever.

I stood there for a moment, unsure whether to move forward or turn back. The lighthouse no longer felt as threatening as it once had, but the memories it held still pressed in around me. I took a breath and stepped closer, drawn toward the window despite myself.

Approaching the window, where the same wind from that day greeted me, a few words escaped my sombre lips: "I am so sorry. Goodbye, Max."

The wind that had once shrieked through the tower, clawing at the windows, was gone. Only stillness remained. The lighthouse no longer moaned; it held its breath. The world paused with me. Silence stretched around every broken wall, every shadowed corner, every memory. This silence no longer crushed me. It settled gently, like an open hand. And for the first time, it was enough.

I left the lighthouse for good this time. My steps no longer trembled; the guilty weight that had hunched my shoulders had slipped off, leaving me free. I was finally liberated from this prison that had chained me long enough.

In all this time, everything had changed; things departed, things arrived; yet still...

The lighthouse had loomed; a dark stain of a mistake.

A mistake that I could now bury in the past.

The Mirror and the Razor Blade

L.E. Garrett

There's something soothing about the silence created by water rushing over your head. Some might call it deafening- but what's the difference? I turn my shower on and set it as hot as it'll go.

I just want to feel something.

As I'm stepping into the shower, I notice my razor leaning against my sink. I stare at the metal tool as the shower gets to temperature. After testing the water, I unscrew the razor and take the blade in with me.

The water burns, and my skin quickly turns red. I'm shaking and can hardly support my own weight. I sit and let the water pour over my head, blocking all other sounds except for itself- and the sound of the blood pumping through my veins.

I stare into the blade's fragmented reflection, only my right eye staring back. I don't know why I grabbed the blade, and I don't know what I plan on doing with it.

Gently pressing the edge against my wrist, I think about how long it would take for anyone to find my body - it would probably be my landlord looking for his rent.

This thought starts to become too much for me, and I remove the razor from my skin.

I spin the blade between my fingers, and as it comes around for a full 360, the razor catches the light and flashes an intense glare into my swollen eyes. This makes me sick, and I throw the blade out of the shower and start to cry. Head between my knees-- I just sit there. *Was leaving home any different than me dying?*

After what could have been seconds, or could have been hours- probably just minutes- the water runs cold, so I shut it off and just continue to sit there sobbing until I get tired enough to go and fall asleep.

The Shape of Silence

Sufyan Valrani

Silence is not the absence of sound.

It is presence.

I learned this in the early mornings, before the city remembers how to be loud. When the streets are still and even the birds hesitate, there is a brief window where everything feels suspended. In those moments, silence settles into my chest like a held breath. It is gentle, but it is heavy. It asks nothing, yet somehow expects everything.

As a child, silence terrified me - it signalled that something had gone horribly wrong. It meant the television had been turned off after bad news. It meant adults whispering behind doors. It meant waiting rooms and unanswered questions. Noise felt safer, then - laughter, music, the chaos of playgrounds. Sound was proof that life was happening.

But growing older teaches you that noise can lie.

There are rooms full of voices where nobody is heard. There are crowded streets where people move past one another like ghosts.

There are conversations that fill the air yet leave nothing behind. Silence, I've learned, doesn't always live in quiet places. Sometimes it lives inside us.

I first noticed this during a long car ride through the desert. The road stretched endlessly ahead, framed by sand and sky, with no buildings, no signals, no distractions. The radio fell quiet. No one spoke. Outside, the world looked vast and untouched. Inside, my thoughts grew louder.

I felt silence in my body - not in my ears, but beneath my ribs. It arrived as a slow pressure, tightening with quiet persistence. It made space for memories I hadn't invited and questions I didn't yet know how to answer. Silence does that. It creates room. And in that room, everything you've been avoiding finally finds you.

There is comfort in that kind of silence, but also vulnerability.

Silence exists in hospitals, where machines breathe for the room and time slows to a sterile crawl. I've felt it in exam halls, where hundreds of students sit together yet remain utterly alone, each heartbeat echoing in private. I've felt it during difficult conversations that end too soon, when words fail and only eye contact remains.

Silence has texture. Sometimes it feels sharp, like unfinished sentences. Sometimes it feels hollow. Sometimes it feels warm, like sitting beside someone you love without needing to speak.

Grief has its own version of silence.

After loss, the world doesn't go quiet - it keeps moving, talking, asking things of you. But something inside becomes muted. Familiar sounds feel distant. Even laughter arrives wrapped in guilt. Silence becomes a companion, following you from room to room, settling beside you at night. It teaches you that absence can be loud.

Yet silence is not always sorrow.

There is a sacredness to shared quiet. Sitting next to someone without filling the space. Walking together without commentary. Studying side by side. Exchanging glances instead of sentences. These are the moments when silence becomes language. When presence is enough.

I acknowledge silence as the space between waves. The pause between breaths. The gap between heartbeats. It is not empty, it is essential. Without silence, sound would have no shape. Without stillness, movement would lose meaning.

In a world that rewards constant output — notifications, deadlines, opinions — silence feels rebellious.

We are taught to fill every gap, scroll through every pause, speak before we've fully listened. Stillness makes us uncomfortable because it removes distractions. It asks us to confront ourselves. Sometimes I too avoid silence for exactly that reason.

But when I allow it, silence becomes a mirror. It reflects who I am without performance. It shows me the thoughts I've buried under schedules and responsibilities. It reminds me of what matters when everything else fades.

Meditation taught me this slowly. In the beginning, silence felt unbearable. My mind raced. My body resisted. But over time, I learned to sit with it. To notice how silence moves through me — settling in my shoulders, softening my jaw, slowing my breath. I learned that silence doesn't demand perfection. It only asks for attention.

There is also courage in silence.

In choosing not to retaliate. In listening instead of interrupting. In holding space for someone else's pain without trying to fix it. Silence can be an act of strength, a refusal to let noise dictate meaning.

And there is silence in growth.

Before every decision, before every transformation — the seeds begin in silence. So do realizations, so do endings.

I think about how silence exists at both extremes of life, at the first breath and the last. Between those moments, we spend years learning how to speak, how to express, how to be heard. Yet, it is silence that frames everything. It is the backdrop against which our lives unfold.

These days, I seek silence intentionally. In the early mornings. On long walks. In pages of unfinished writing. I let it sit beside me while I think, while I create, while I simply exist. Silence has taught me that I don't always need to fill space to be meaningful. Sometimes, being present is enough.

Silence is not emptiness.

It is potential.

It is where reflection lives. It is where healing begins. It is where truth waits patiently.

And when I finally listen closely, I realize:
Silence has been speaking to me all along.

The Sound of Invisible Eggshells

Chelsea Warren

Lottie thought of how her mother, Beverly, snarled insults at the older woman who took their order just a few minutes ago. The woman, with a heavy accent, had asked her mother to repeat her order and that sent Beverly over the edge. The older woman tried to explain herself, stumbling over her words, but it was too late—not that she really had a chance to begin with. Lottie had to step in, as she often does, with pleading eyes and apologies that could never compensate for her mother’s disruptive behavior.

“When your life’s not going well, you’re mean,” Lottie said. She took a long sip of her water, which had thankfully arrived before the unnecessary confrontation.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Beverly asked.

It was astounding to Lottie how unfazed her mother was by the chaos she caused or the condition their food *might* arrive in.

When things don’t go how you want them to, you explode, and think things only seem to happen to you, *only* you, so fuck the rest of us, right?” she responded.

Lottie's voice grew legs to stand on. She was ready to spill her guts.

"Excuse me?" Beverly was stunned. "I'm *not* doing this with you today, Lottie."

Lottie also thought of how, on the way to the restaurant, her mother went on and on about Aunt Maye, her Dad's sister. Aunt Maye had reached out to her mother to "clear the air" on past differences. To Lottie, it seemed like a good start to mend the blatant dislike her aunt and mother held for one another. She once, naively, asked her mother about the root of her agitation, but learned as a child that it unlocked jarring reactions to the topic. Often leaving Lottie paralyzed by the force of her mother's volatile emotions. It devoured so much space that Lottie thought it would be best to swallow her own.

It was going surprisingly well, Beverly admitted, until Maye brought up Cynthia, her husband's cousin. The family, or rather Beverly, just learned that Cynthia was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Maye was desperate for assistance and began enlisting volunteers for the rotating schedule to help with caregiving. Maye emphasized that the family didn't want Cynthia, who was only in her early forties, battling the illness alone. She had received no hesitation from anyone until her conversation with Beverly.

It ended with Beverly telling Maye that she would need to speak with her husband before giving a definite answer. Less than thirty minutes after the meetup, Beverly was added to a separate “family” group chat. It was formed to discuss the options available for Cynthia. Beverly was furious.

“Your aunt only put us in that group chat because she knows your father and I are retired,” Beverly said, like she finally cracked the code.

Lottie’s stomach was hungry for her anger.

“No one visited your father when he had his triple bypass surgery. The nerve! Why don’t they just hire a home nurse?” Beverly complained.

“Maybe they can’t afford one,” Lottie noted. Beverly grew quiet.

Lottie then reminded Beverly that it was her husband’s idea to exclude his family from visitation after his surgery. Her husband only wanted his immediate family there: his daughter and wife, while he recovered. Beverly was pleased with his decision and stood at his side, beaming with pride. She gave him reassurance that she would be the one to let his siblings know.

It was obvious to Lottie what truly upset her mother, but the timing was inappropriate. Not a single person, on her Dad’s side, reached out to her mother directly as each day of his recovery

passed. They all went around her to speak with him, as if her presence was nonexistent.

“I’m sick of walking on eggshells around you. It’s exhausting,” Lottie said, her appetite long gone.

“I would *never* speak to my mother like you speak to me. A child *should* never—”

“I’m not a *child* anymore, Mom. I’m thirty,” Lottie argued back.

“*Thirty?*” Beverly questioned. “That can’t be right. My *baby* is thirty?”

Lottie watched her mother’s face soften. It was shocking for Lottie to see her mother resemble the one photo she kept from childhood. A school picture showing her mother, at seven years old, with bright eyes and a toothy smile. It was the last picture taken of her mother in Georgia before she was sent to live with her grandmother in New York.

“Your *daughter* is thirty, yes,” Lottie said matter-of-factly.

If only Lottie could fully relax into this version of her mother. The one where she could imagine her mother as the child in the photo to restrain her annoyance. From past experiences, Lottie remembered that it would never last long.

“You look *just* like your father. Act stubborn, just like the bastard, too.” Beverly laughed.

As she gently squeezed Lottie’s hands, two

new servers approached with their meals, refusing to make eye contact with either of them.

“I hope this is what I asked for,” Beverly said off-handedly, taking a few bites of her salad before announcing that she was full. Lottie left her burger untouched.

Beverly flagged down one of the new servers for containers and the check. Lottie was set on ordering an Uber to take her home. She excused herself with a fake smile plastered on her face.

Lottie rushed into the restroom with eyes glued to her phone in hopes of timing her departure perfectly. Distracted with confirming the correct pickup location, Lottie collided with a woman leaving the restroom. It was the older woman, with the thick accent, who took her order earlier. The woman’s eyes were red and irritated. Remnants of crumbled tissue pieces scattered all over her worn face. Before she could give her apologies, the woman scurried off past her. Lottie took continuous deep breaths to calm herself inside the safety of the bathroom stall. She continued repeatedly until she matched with an Uber driver.

The sharp pain in Lottie’s chest remained as she returned to the table with sweaty palms. She thought of telling her mother of the state the older woman was in, but knew it would cause a scene.

Lottie shrank in her seat and told her mother that her Uber ride was two minutes away. Beverly was quiet for a long moment before standing abruptly.

“I forgot to give you something on the way here,” Beverly said. She searched around her enormous purse with glassy eyes. The look on her face made Lottie question her decision. She saw her mother as the seven-year-old child in the photo for the second time.

Beverly finally found the two packs of Peach Rings submerged in her purse. It was Lottie’s favorite candy when she was a child.

“Let me know when you get home,” Beverly spoke down at the table. She pushed the candy towards Lottie and rushed out of the restaurant.

Lottie had to pick herself up, as she often does, after her encounters with her mother. When the guilt stings worse than she anticipated, she found the Uber waiting out front with two packs of Peach Rings clutched in her hand—the bag with the containers of her mother’s salad and her burger conveniently left behind.

The silence in the silver Toyota was suffocating. Lottie tried to open her mouth to ask the driver to turn on the radio, but her lips tightened. She was afraid her voice would betray her. Instead, Lottie rolled down the window to let the sound of the wind and city carry her home.

The Wake

Lucía Verónica

Eloise was still looking out the window. It was an early Monday morning, and she sat there, motionless for hours, staring into nothing as she tried to process what had happened and what her coming days would be.

She spent two hours tossing and turning in her bed, not knowing what the right way to feel in this situation was, if there's even a right way at all. Despite growing up hearing about her grandmother's various unnamed illnesses, she knew none of them were real. Laura didn't fit the sweet grandma stereotype, and she had her own way to get what she wanted. Her most frequent one was pretending to be sick to get attention and manipulate those around her. So, how did this happen?

Her dad came with the news the day before. It was unexpected. Every afternoon, Laura would go to the entrance of her house and stand in front of the window to look out at the park. For years, this was her only activity because she didn't anticipate that her antics would backfire and she would fall into her own trap.

Her husband, Hector, used her “illnesses” to keep her indoors. They had a complicated relationship, to say the least, and this was his way to control her. They spent years engaged in passive-aggressive ways instead of talking about their problems. They hurt each other and continued as if nothing had happened, accumulating resentment that was never expressed.

That Saturday afternoon, as she was about to do her usual routine, she slipped and fell in the entrance of her house. It didn't look serious, but they took her to the hospital out of precaution. It turned out that she broke her hip and needed surgery. The doctors said it should be a routine procedure, and everything was going to be fine, but her heart gave out during the surgery.

As soon as she heard the news, Eloise hugged her dad and decided to go to the wake with her mom to accompany him. He was in charge of all the funeral arrangements, since none of his siblings were responsible enough.

Going with him wasn't a simple decision. The wake was going to be held in her grandparents' house, and to go there meant going back to a place filled with terrible memories. A place where they had been incredibly unhappy.

The relationship with that side of the family was pretty much destroyed, and they went no contact. For years, their behaviour was questionable, and it seemed every so often that they enjoyed creating problems out of nowhere. At some point, their actions got worse and ended up bordering on psychological abuse. But none of that mattered. Her dad needed them, and they wanted to be there to support him.

Suddenly, she heard a knock on her door, and Eloise snapped out of the trance in which she had been for hours.

“Yes?” she asked.

“Hun, do you want to eat something?” asked her mom.

“I’m not hungry,” she said, looking calm.

Her mom closed the door, and in that moment, she couldn’t help feeling guilty for not expressing her emotions. Society says that you should feel sad when a relative, especially a close one like a grandmother, passes away, but how are you supposed to feel about someone whose unkind behaviour affected you so deeply?

Despite her best efforts to avoid it, the memories kept flooding back, overwhelming her.

One after the other, still no tears and no pain. She felt disconnected from her body, and a quiet emptiness lingered within her.

As soon as they were ready, they took a taxi to go there. It was a 45-minute ride from their flat to the house, plenty of time to talk about any arrangements that needed to be made for the funeral when they arrived, but they all stayed quiet, not knowing what to say.

When the streets became familiar, Eloise realized that they were just a few minutes away. Her heart was pounding. It has been eight years since she visited that place.

Memories came rushing back, and it was harder to breathe. The houses in the neighbourhood were still the same; it seemed like nothing had changed. The same colours, pharmacies, the shops where she used to buy sweets whenever an uncle gave her and her cousins some money when they were kids, the same people... everything. They got out of the taxi and started to walk the long rock pathway through the middle of the park that led to the entrance.

As they slowly approached, she noticed these little yellow and orange Lantana splashed everywhere. As a child, she loved them because they looked like tiny flower bouquets. She remembered years ago, when she wanted to do something special for Laura, she cut several Lantana to give them as a present.

Her cousin liked the idea and did the same. They ran to the house to surprise her. She was bouncing from foot to foot when she saw Laura and ran towards where she was and told her that they got her flowers. Laura received them and gave her cousin a hug and kiss on the cheek, telling her how touched she was with the gesture. When it was Eloise's turn, she looked at her with eyes devoid of feeling and just said, "Thank you." Time stopped. She started to feel her throat getting tighter, but mustered a thin smile, trying to cover her feelings.

Eloise wanted to be loved by Laura and always did these small gestures, waiting for her to have any demonstration of affection, to no avail. She stopped remembering and realised they had finally arrived. The house hadn't changed since the last time she was there. It had two entrances; the first one was an aluminium bar door surrounded by a red brick wall, which had the same aluminium bars installed in the window opening without any glass. Very 70s. It faced directly to the park and into an open-air patio with no ceiling, which acted as a transitional space and led to the second door, which was the main entrance to the living room. When they got to the first door, one of her uncles was there with a friend.

He looked at them, surprised, and his eyes filled with sorrow. He hugged his brother and approached Eloise and her mom.

“Thank you for being here,” he said. There was some honesty and tenderness in his voice that they had never heard before.

As they entered the house, the rest of the family was sitting there, talking to friends and neighbours who had come to offer their condolences.

When they noticed their presence, Valentina, Eloise’s aunt, approached first.

“How have you been?” she asked.

“We came here because...” started Eloise’s mom.

“You don’t have to say anything else. I am sorry for everything we did,” she interrupted her.

“Everything is in the past,” Eloise assured her.

Her aunt looked at her and told her how grown she looked. She told her that she could say her goodbyes at the coffin.

Eloise felt dizzy. A quiet dread took over her body. With a fixed gaze, all of these memories swamped her mind, trying to understand why her own grandmother treated her like that. She spent all those formative years screaming into a void without ever getting a reason.

Why?

Did she do something wrong?

One question after the other and still no response.

And then, she saw her lying there and cried, “Why were you so mean to me? Why didn’t you love me?”

Everything was over, and she realized that she was never going to get an answer. She would never know if there was a reason at all for her behaviour. And that silence will stay forever.

Visiting Silence

Georgia Loosley

The nursing home where my Nan lives is locked in a time loop, where its residents play out the same day over and over. Where I bring a different version of myself to each visit. The home exists on an isolated plain. Constant. Silent.

Mum presses the intercom on the black metal gate at the entrance, eliciting a piercing ring for a few seconds before a successful buzz. The gate slowly opens with a long creek, disturbing the peace of the sleepy Midlands suburb around us. I make a silent prayer for it to go faster so we can get out of the bitter January afternoon. The air is soggy, and the sky holds a grey promise of imminent rain.

We enter the house, and I immediately feel twelve years old again, as though crossing the threshold has transported us back in time. Mum's heeled boots clip and clop on the plastic floor, leading us down a small hallway. She signs in with one of the familiar nurses, Ivy. Her bright smile and chipper greeting feel jarring compared to the general mood, but I suppose we should be grateful for her positive temperament.

Ivy leads us to Nanny's closed bedroom door and gives three courtesy knocks before putting a key in the latch and pushing the door open.

I inhale the familiar scent of stale cigarettes and old perfume. The only sound is the drip of the broken cold tap in the ensuite bathroom. The room is painted clinical white, and there is a clear differentiation between the furniture that was here when she arrived and the pieces we brought in to liven the space up. In the far corner of the room, in a blue armchair, sits my nan. She is slouched low, resting her head on her hand. The tartan skirt she wears sits just below her knees, exposing her pale legs, which are painted with blue and red veins.

Her green eyes stare past her nose, and her hair falls over her face. Even at the mature age of 79, she still hasn't gone totally grey, with shades of black and brown littered throughout.

"Hello, Mother!" Mum says brightly.

Nanny looks up, one eye fixing on us, the other lazily pointing to her right. Her lips are parted, and at first, she looks like a child whose favourite activity had just been interrupted. Then, realization hits her.

"Oooooo!" she coos excitedly, her lips curving into a crooked smile.

“Hi, Nanny,” I say as I approach and lean down, enveloping her in a hug and kissing her cheek. Her low, croaky laugh reverberates through me as she settles into my embrace.

My mum greets her in a similar way before launching into all the gifts she has brought: a dry-cleaned coat, Pears soap, and the new Vogue, just to look at. She fills the space with updates about our lives, telling stories of the recent escapades of my younger sister at university. All the while, Nanny seems to transport in and out of our world, looking off into corners of the room every few seconds, nodding her head or laughing in the wrong places.

“I also got you...” mum sifts around in her handbag before pulling out, “a new lipstick!”

This seems to finally grab Nanny’s attention.

“Ooooh look!” she exclaims, taking the lipstick from Mum and opening the lid, “That is a wonderful colour, very unUSUAL.” The last three syllables are drawn out loudly.

As she rubs the gloss along her bottom lip, her eyes glaze over.

“That’s a lot of product on there now, mum.”

Silence

“Mum?”

Silence

“Mum!” my mother says much louder this time.

Silence.

It weighs down, suffocating and all consuming, as Nanny travels further away from this realm, her hand still absentmindedly running the lipstick back and forth. Her eyes fixate on the wardrobe on the far wall, as she says:

“Oh, I don’t know about that...”

She isn’t speaking to us.

“Nanny!” I almost shouted.

She turns, putting the lipstick down and looking at me through her lazy eye.

“Now, look,” Nanny says suddenly, “I’ve got a skirt for you. It’s Jaeger, all original cotton and design.”

She gets up and shuffles over to the Ikea wardrobe to retrieve the skirt.

“Will it do for you?”

She holds up the garment, which is 20 years too old for me, and probably 5 sizes too big. No time has passed for her.

I decline her all too kind offer, and my mum quickly changes the subject by inspecting her physical health. She pays particular attention to my nan’s feet, which have been a cause of significant discomfort. Sitting her back down, Mum prods nanny’s wrinkled toes, eliciting small wincing and whines when she finds a particularly sensitive corn or bunion.

“Right, well, I’ve brought the Badedas, so we can do you a little foot spa?” Mum offers, and Nanny eagerly accepts. It’s not often that she allows people to touch her, so my mum takes advantage of the opportunity and leaves to get supplies.

Alone with my nan, I shift around slightly as I perch on the side of her bed.

“So…” I begin, “what did you have for lunch today, Nanny?” I say, attempting to fill the room with some kind of conversation.

My nan, however, does not respond. She has, again, moved to a place more real to her than me and my mundane conversation. Her mouth moves as though she is talking, but no words come out – just small, whispery sounds with no substance or meaning to me. She must be talking to the voices, and whatever they are saying seems funny as she giggles to herself. Her most vocal delusion is that she is ‘ex-SAS, trained to kill’, and only stays in the home as a form of recovery from the many torturous sessions she has endured behind enemy lines. I always worry that she is haunted by fake memories of traumatizing situations, so her laugh is welcomed. I can’t imagine what it must be like to live with that level of paranoia.

Mum returns from her mission, carrying a washing-up bowl and a glass of whisky. She hands the whisky to my nan and demands she relax back into her chair as she fills up the bowl with warm water from the ensuite sink. She places the bowl on the floor in front of my nan and squirts a good amount of the bright green soap into the water, swishing it around. The woody scent of horse chestnut engulfs the room, which seems to relax my nan. She leans her head back onto the chair as Mum begins washing her feet. I think it might be the most loving image I've ever seen.

It occurs to me then that it's likely that my nan rarely experiences any type of calm, quiet, or peace. The nattering in her head must be constant at this stage, whether it be comical or terrifying. For all we know, she could be constantly bombarded with voices that disturb her, delight her, or scare her. But we, the people in the peripherals of her reality, will never know what she sees or hears. For us, it is silent, whilst she plays out her life in a realm we can never access. I hate the thought that I can't meet her in that world, or properly bring her into mine.

"You alright?" My mum questions, laughing slightly.

“Yeah, yeah.” I try to sound reassuring, not wanting to upset her, and wonder if I’ll tell her my thought process later during our drive home. Mum turns back to my nan, who has again drifted off into her own head. This time, mum doesn’t bother trying to bring her back. Instead, she looks back down at my nan’s feet, sighing to herself, the sound of the lapping water filling our reality.

Where is Everybody?

Talia Cuomo

“The light is fading,” Lilith says to herself. Her voice is loud and reverberates against the four solid walls that box her into her prison. The dim lights fixed to the ceiling flicker. Lilith repeats herself as she watches them; her words feel unnatural as they leave her mouth, but she likes how they punctuate the pin-drop silence. She shakes her head, turning her attention back to the giant window built into the left wall.

The interior of the spacecraft is five meters in width and seven and a half meters in length. She knows these dimensions to the millimetre. The light continues to flicker at irregular intervals and is the only thing that saves her from absolute darkness. There are boxes overflowing with books, photographs, and films spread across the floor. The HD projector no longer works, and she knows that the diminishing light will soon render everything else useless. There is no food or water to be found; she has no need for sustenance of that kind.

Outside is empty. Lurid, white light from distant stars and planets breaks up the darkness,

but it is so far away it might as well be a hallucination. That is something Lilith has been experiencing much more often as of late. Last week — although it could've been last year — she thought she had seen a spaceship. It had been bright red and shaped like a flying saucer. It got closer as she banged on the glass, before it zoomed away into the darkness.

Her radio went dead a long time ago. When she turns it on, there is a low buzzing noise. The power is dying, so now she is careful and only turns it on briefly. She has given up on ever hearing anyone's voice again, but the static reminds her of music. When combined with the incessant tapping of her fingers against the glass of the window, she can sometimes hear a gentle piano reminiscent of the work of Bach. Music is something she misses greatly. She doubts she will ever hear it again.

When Lilith hears the blood begin to rush in her veins or her heartbeat slamming against her chest, she talks to herself. Sometimes she recites verses of poetry, other times she recalls facts from the scientific papers she once wrote. She assures herself that time and distance are her only enemies. It is inevitable that something is out there and eventually will stumble across her. Although she is unsure what state she will be found in. Occasionally, she has conversations with shadows

on the walls. If she's lucky, she talks with the creatures that appear at the window. She knows they aren't real, but it helps her to cope all the same.

"Nothing out there. Nothing at all," Lilith whispers. As she sits slumped against the wall, staring out into the darkness, she wonders where everyone has gone. She scrapes on the glass and imagines an asteroid hitting Earth, reducing it to a fiery wreck of shattered rock. It is more likely that the loss of signal has some innocuous explanation, but it hurts that she will never be sure.

With each day that passes, Lilith's hope for rescue diminishes. A part of her still believes the radio will burst back to life, her team assuring her that help is on the way. Or that an alien species will find her drifting through deep space and save her or, preferably, find a way to kill her. She would be fine with either. Yet as time goes on, she starts to doubt that anyone is out there at all. That doesn't stop her from yelling at the top of her voice, nor does it stop her from banging on the windows in a frenzy. It's all futile, of course, and she knows it. No one is listening.

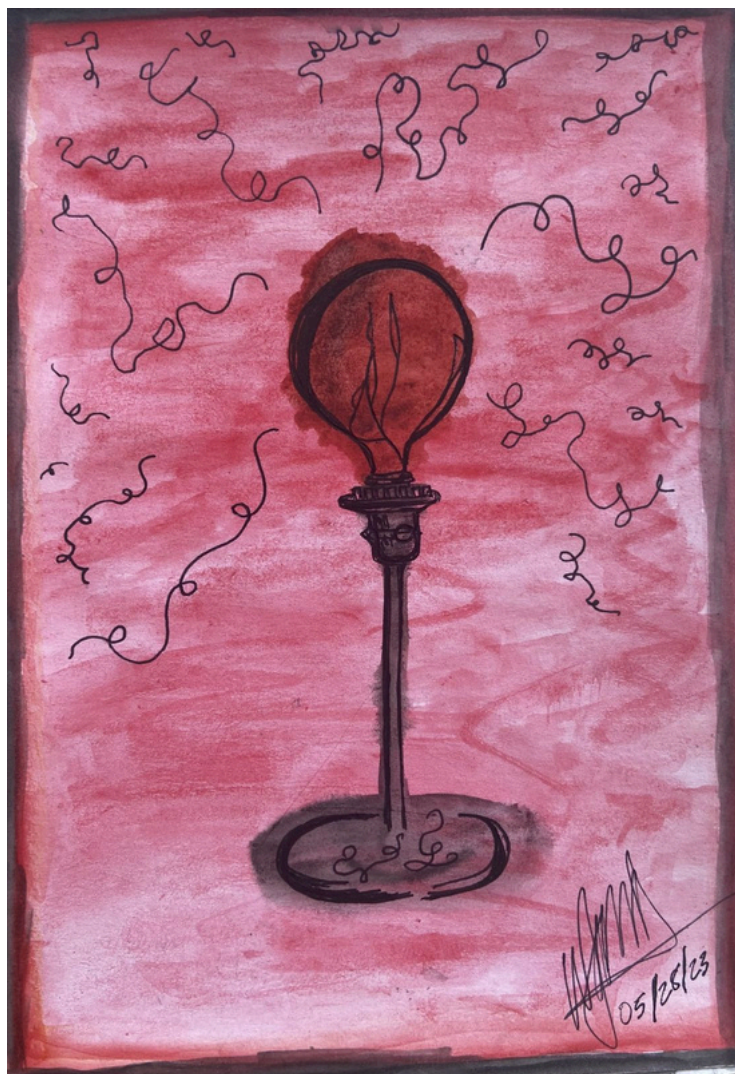
Recently, Lilith has taken to praying. Her whole life, she dealt in fact. Yet when she looks at where that has gotten her, she decides she needs to believe in something. Her mother had once said

that God had a plan for everyone. She fails to see what this could be in her case, but she begs for an answer all the same. When God ignores her, she begs to die. She knows she cannot; the serum running through her veins making sure of that.

That isn't to say she hasn't tried. Her wrists have proved impenetrable. Lilith stares at her hands, free of the wrinkles she knows she is due. What was once freedom and a fail-safe has turned her body into a prison; frozen in time from the day she left Earth. She could open the ship's door, but she doubts the suffocation would be enough. One of these days she will be brave enough to try. After all, she has nothing but time.

Art Work





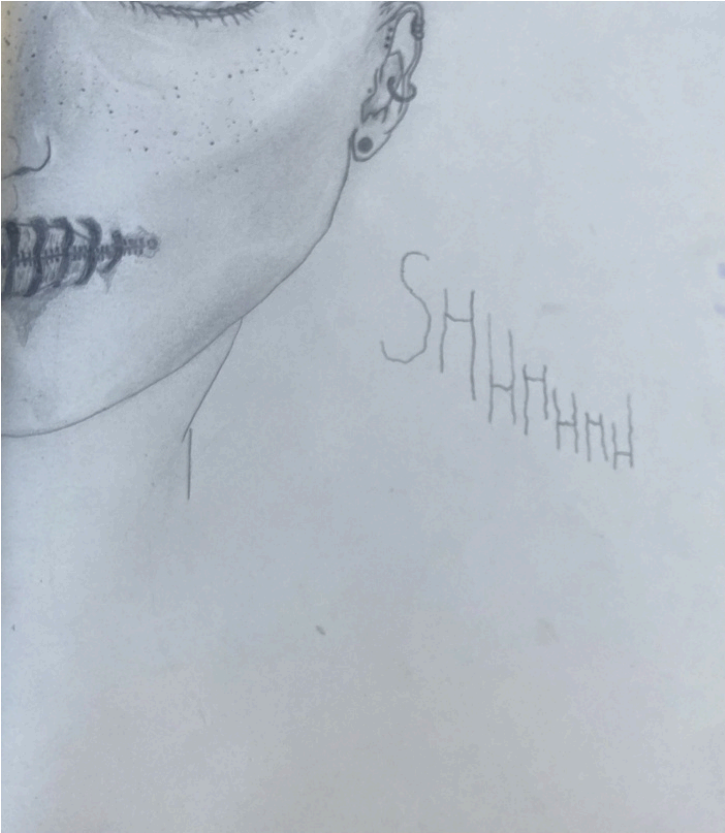
*"Light me moody", watercolour on paper
by Dawn Web*



*“the ghost on wings” pencil on paper,
by Isabel Kilevold*



*“Personal” acrylic on canvas,
by Dawn Web*



*"Zippers [Shh]" graphite pencil on paper,
by Dawn Web*



*"dystopia" watercolour on paper,
by Dawn Web*



"Silent Defiance", charcoal on paper
By Alexandra Beata Mari



*“Silent Contemplation”, Digital Art
By Nina Engineer & Alexandra Beata Mari*



*"the silence is deafening" pencil on paper,
by Isabel Kilevold*

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Meet the Authors

Madeline Townsend is pursuing her Creative Writing MA with hopes of finishing her fantasy novel. She hopes to continue her education for her doctorate to become a university professor in fantasy literature and a fantasy author.

Khan Haque is a writer exploring the stillness of life through poetry. Haque won the UOW Diving Bell Poetry Prize in 2025 and has had work displayed at ArtiSip and the Soho Poly.

Daytona Winter has always loved to write. She never took it seriously, but it has now become her antidote. Winter also loves birding. She finds that to successfully bird watch, you must be silent, which has given her a lot of time to face herself in her truest form.

Dawn Web is a queer, Canadian, mixed-race, inter-artist, award-winning performer & published author of “Red Corner.” They’re a BSc alumna and is completing a BA, Inter-Arts Entrepreneurship & Creative Writing, Minor in Neuroscience at Dalhousie University alongside their MA in Creative Writing at the University of Westminster.

N.Dahir is the author of *Tales of When*. Dahir enjoys poetry and, on some days, happens to find the courage to put thoughts on paper.

Ibrar Sami is the pen name of Bangladeshi writer Samiul Bashir. As a cancer survivor, his poetry and prose explore memory, time, silence, and resilience. His work has appeared in *Ink, Sweat and Tears, Ultramarine Literary Review, Navy Pen, Mosaic Lit Journal*, and *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*.

Zareena Hamill is a mixed-race East Londoner, specialising in environmental poetry for her MA in Professional Writing. She is fascinated by the way we display our words. From concrete poetry to how we visualise narratives, Zareena believes that poetry welcomes the nurturing whims of eco-silences against the urban hustle.

Holly Trundle is an observational poet and writer - passionate about people, poetry and good writing. She has had a varied, people-centred career and uses her writing and social networking to raise awareness of cancer and mental health, and to share her respect and fascination with Nature. Holly loves slugs!

Kiera Cz (she/her) grew up here and there. She is now obtaining her MA in Professional Writing at the University of Westminster. After studying Rhetoric and Creative Writing in Canada, she moved to London to pursue a career in the writing world. Her poems and prose focus on heartbreak, love, and the romanticism of domestic, everyday life.

Gail Campbell holds a degree in English Lit with Creative Writing. Since then, Campbell has worked various jobs: online second-hand bookseller, pet shop assistant, poetry co-facilitator, bead shop assistant, claims management postal assistant, London Zoo gift shop and admissions, and hospitality assistant. Campbell also paints portraits.

Angelina Abello Licea (she/her) is a Cuban-American author from Louisville, Kentucky. She is currently pursuing an undergraduate BA in English and Spanish at the University of Eastern Kentucky. Her writing explores concepts of love, music, culture, race/ethnicity, and bilingualism, labelling her overall well-rounded.

Debotri Ghosh is a journalism and mass communication graduate with a master's in JMC. Currently pursuing my second MA in Digital Media and Storytelling at the University of Westminster. Ghosh has written since childhood, drawing on observations, emotions, experiences and human expression.

Elle Leavoy is a Toronto-born writer based in London. Her stories drift between romance and self-discovery, reflecting on social issues and personal struggles that shape the human experience. Through her work, she examines how relationships and individual choices intersect. Her focus is on creating narratives that are intimate and socially aware.

Heather Wastie British poet and singer/songwriter Heather Wastie lives in Kidderminster. A former Worcestershire Poet Laureate, in April 2025, she published her ninth poetry collection, YOU ARE HERE, a diary of lockdown, including her own photographs. Much of her work is inspired by oral history interviews. For more, see <http://wastiesspace.co.uk/>

Ewen Glass (he/him) is a screenwriter and poet from Northern Ireland who lives with two dogs, a tortoise and a body of self-doubt; his poetry has appeared in the likes of Okay Donkey, Maudlin House, HAD, Poetry Scotland and One Art Poetry. Bluesky/X/IG: @ewenglass

Lidia Karanfilovszka Zikic is in her final year of Creative Writing and English Literature at the University of Westminster. She writes poetry, short stories and is currently working on her novel. Drawing and painting are other passions of hers, and she often includes her art pieces alongside her writing.

Serhii Chernovolov is a writer from Ukraine, writing poetry through a state when silence is not an option, mainly because of the voices in your head.

Chante-Marie Dante is a poet and writer born in the UK. In 2019 and 2020, she was published in the Young Writers Anthology. Then, in 2023, she was published in T'ART magazine. When she is not writing, she loves spending time with her Jack Terrier, Oreo.

T. L. Brennan is a writer / artist / non-musician / academic who often writes about mortality, including a long essay that will be published soon.
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Chardonnay Vasiana is an Afro-Caribbean playwright and poet from London. Her heritage and world experience heavily inspire her work. She's currently completing her MA in creative writing at the University of Westminster.

Julia Jorgensen is an American author, but only admits to it under duress. She is from Colorado, but has lived in Chicago and Oregon, and is now residing in London with her partner and cat.

Isabel Kilevold grew up on the quiet edges of Oslo. She now lives in London, where she writes prose, poetry, journalism, and diary entries. Her work drifts through existentialism, grief, and the body, her words guided by a Gemini moon, a heart tuned to music, and a deep sensitivity.

Anissa Duffourg is a French graduate of Sciences Po Toulouse, where she completed a master's in International Relations. Now working for a nonprofit in Madrid, she has loved writing since childhood and seeks to reconnect with creativity through politically engaged work and reflections on human relationships, with oneself and others.

Sadie Rosa describes herself as a nobody; simply a stay-at-home mom based in the U.S. who took pleasure in creative writing in her youth. She is now reigniting that lost enjoyment with her self-reflection on silence.

Violet-May Davey is a British author and poet with four short stories, eleven poems and two art pieces (one as cover art) published. She loves reading and visiting museums and theatres, and is currently taking a BA in Creative Writing and English Literature at the University of Westminster.

Courtney Risner is a creative from Chicago who relocated to London to pursue her MA in Professional Writing. With a background in advertising, copywriting, journalism, and political science, she aspires to work in publishing and hopes to one day become a published fiction and fantasy author.

Tanisha Banik is a researcher in the day, and a writer by nightfall. A woman with anger, ambition and drive, but also kindness that her mother instilled. She has been writing since the day she learned the craft, and intends to continue as long as her mind remembers how.

Krishiv Joshi is an author from India, currently based in Dubai. They enjoy writing and psychological fiction, often inspired by places and the emotions they carry. Their work explores how settings can shape stories and reflect human experiences.

L.E. Garrett was born and raised in Orange County, California, before moving to London to complete his undergraduate degree. He has written and directed a short film, *THE ARTIST*, which premiered at the 2024 OCC Film Festival, and is looking to publish his debut novel, *THE TRUTH ABOUT ECSTASY*.

Sufyan Valrani is a Sindhi student from the United Arab Emirates who explores silence, reflection, and human connection through writing. Drawn to quiet moments and inner landscapes, he believes stillness holds its own language; stories can transform absence into meaning, helping us listen more deeply to ourselves and each other.

Chelsea Warren is a writer based in New York and lives with her Russian Blue cat named Luna. She is heavily inspired by the works of Toni Morrison, Roald Dahl, and James Baldwin. Chelsea writes for sensitive readers by exploring complex themes and characters who triumph against all odds.

Lucía Verónica and raised in Lima, Peru. She has built a career as a translator and interpreter. Now she is pursuing her dream of becoming a writer. Curious by nature and led by instinct, her interests shift across genres and ideas; her next obsession is just around the corner.

Georgia Loosley is a writer and maker from South London. She has a background in events production, marketing, and social media, and is now studying for her MA at the University of Westminster. Her work explores themes of mental health, femininity, and complex relationships, investigating the human condition and asking 'why?'.

Talia Cuomo is studying BA Creative Writing and English Literature at the University of Westminster. She has a passion for writing science fiction and is currently working on a novel. When she is not writing, she can be found playing the guitar, reading or looking through her telescope.

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Madeline Townsend

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by Isabel Kilevold*

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(back cover art)

*medium acrylic canvas,
By Dawn Web*

Hidden Spaces

(inside cover)

*acrylic on canvas,
by Dawn Web*

Nightjar

(poetry chapter art)

*charcoal on paper,
by Alexandra Beata Mari*

Silent Audition

(prose chapter art)

*charcoal on paper,
By Alexandra Beata Mari*

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