

Love Letters

- Young Adult Creative Magazine -



- Issue #09: Secrets -



Shhhh...are you curled up in your favourite reading spot ready to uncover some anonymous secrets and love letters?

Dear Readers,

The Love Letters Team and I were especially enthusiastic about this theme because, well, who doesn't like to "spill the tea" a little?? To revive the essence of our magazine's name, we opened a section on the website where anyone can submit an anonymous love letter. You decide what "love" means to you and to what or whom the letter will be addressed! In this issue, we have incorporated our very first submissions of love letters. We hope they inspire you to reflect on something or someone that you are passionate about and take a try at writing one of your own! I think you may find that free writing about these feelings can be therapeutic, fun, and even bring closure. The beauty of sharing these poems and letters on an inclusive, safe, and public platform like Love Letters Magazine is that you never know who else may benefit from your honesty. As you read this issue, maybe notice if you relate to any of the writers or if it brings you any comfort. Everyone has their secrets, some that weigh on us and some that don't. The goal of this issue is to recognize that parts of those burdensome secrets can actually be held by others whether you know them or not. In the spirit of celebrating the ability to all learn from each other, we thank and admire everyone who chose to share their secret or love letter with us!

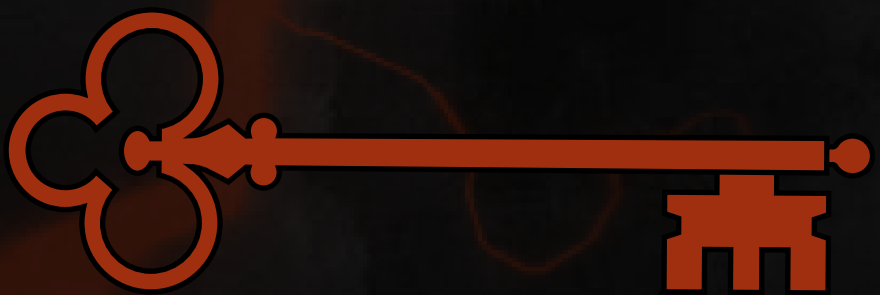
Happy reading and take care <3

Jaya Valji, co-founder & co-runner of Love Letters Magazine



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- *Ophelia Drowns In The Bathroom* -

1

Caela Magale

she finds herself lying on the floor
palms pressed on the cold tiles
dried flowers

for what we all know they were watered down with heartbeats, pure static
all thumping, growing on crestfallen, downtrodden planes
and this is the closest she could ever be
in all her dissociating glory
diving headfirst, chasing her end
not without wildflowers and a swan song
this is the closest she could get to being one of the silhouettes
just a movement in a pair of almost blank rather lifeless eyes
this is the closest she could ever get to not feeling and feeling everything,

years' worth of pain all at once

so finally

she finds herself lying on the floor surrounded by all of her

“you don't understand”
but sweetie, somehow, i do

sometimes meeting your self-destruction halfway is the calmest it'll ever let you be



Caela Magale

Artist's Statement

"[This poem] talks about self-sabotage and self destruction and the urge to do something bigger, more darker than it all but never being able to do so because of underlying reasons and so such instances are best let out in secret (such as the comfort of bathroom tiles). The title comes from Ophelia, the character who suffers quite a tragic fate in Shakespeare's Hamlet. The speaker likens themselves to her, hence being called Ophelia's muse"

-Caela Magale

About the Poet

Caela Magale is a writer and author based in the Philippines dabbling in both creative and technical freelance works. She is the author of *Tenants of Melancholy Hotel*, a poetry collection. Her pieces have been published in *Silakbo PH*, IndieCo's forthcoming *SILAKBO* anthology, and are also included on *NOVICE*'s upcoming issue. She is a writer for *Outlander Zine*, *Meadow Mouse Zine*, *Babbles Magazine*, and *Periphery Magazine*. You can find her reading, or thinking of which color to dye her hair next when she's not busy writing.





– Ghost –

3

Claire Beeli

“I don’t know if I should tell them about you yet...”

You frown, tilt your head to the side. Blood, mixed with pebbles of membrane, dribbles out of the wound in your skull. “Why not?”

“After they...” I nod to the blast site in your head, slumping into the couch.

“They said that if I told anyone, they would kill me. And her.”

You won’t meet my eyes. You don’t like her, the girl I was hurrying to meet that night, the night when I found you. I could tell you a thousand times that she was nothing, that she meant as much to me as a crack in the sidewalk, but my words would go in through one side of the hole in your head and out the other.

And I would be lying.

“Do you still want to go to her?” you finally ask.

Memories flash. A white car full of men, most of them boys. I’m hurrying to her house, walking with my head down on the opposite side of the street.

Bang. A girl I didn’t know, her head cherry pie on the sidewalk. You.

I run home, text her that I can’t ever see her again. I don’t tell her why; that those boys in the white car knew who I was, that they knew I was hers, even if my parents didn’t.

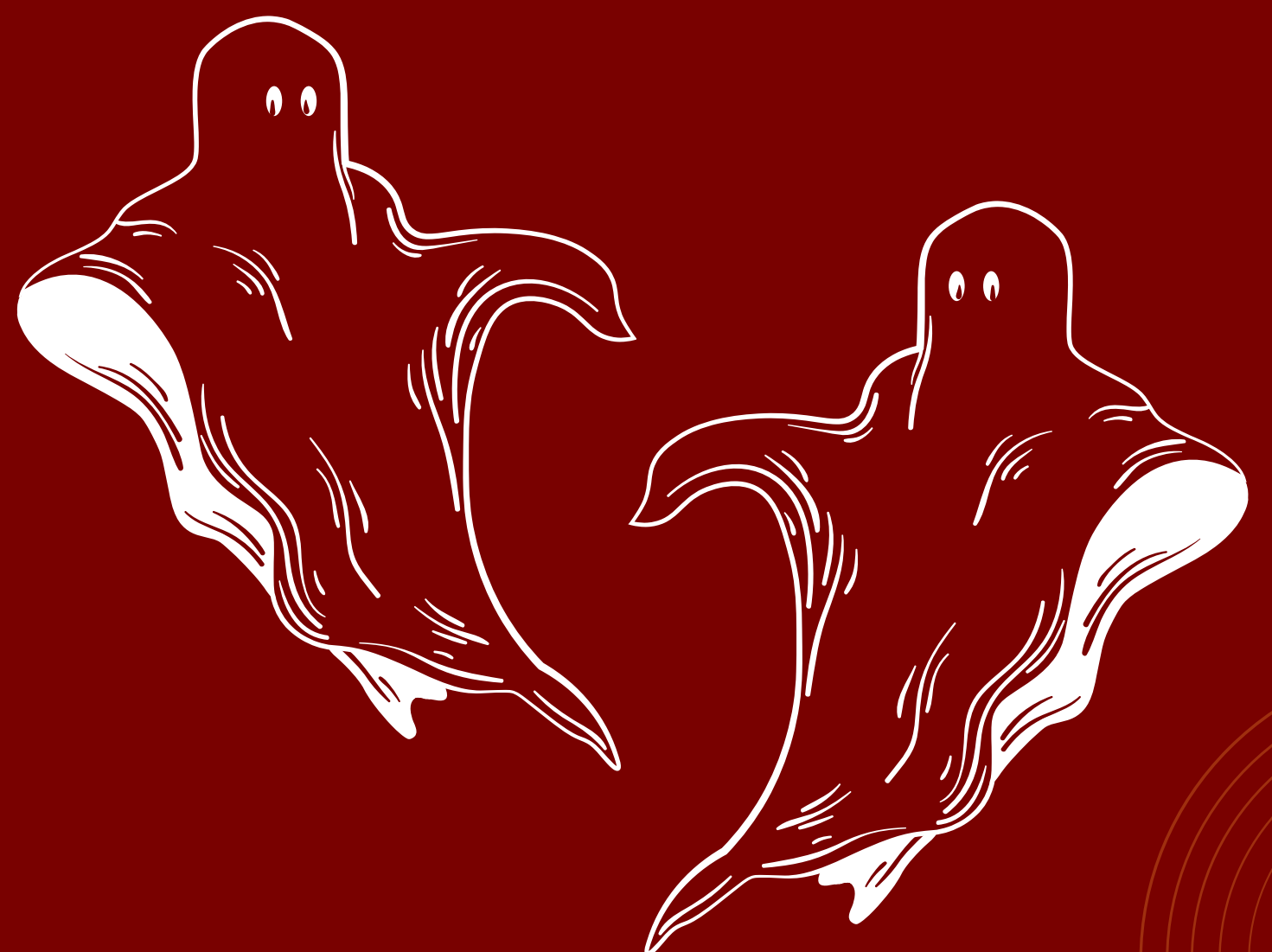
“No,” I lie.

A sheep brain is plopped wetly on the lab table in front of me, and you’re still following me. You watch over my shoulder.

You lean over the brain and a drop of blood from your wound plops down into its tray, catching on blonde strands then sliding down, falling in, ripples like a tiny atom bomb explosion. I have to pretend not to see it.

My lab partner is trying to talk to me but so are you. I’m trying to watch the boy on the opposite side of the classroom at the same time, one of the boys from the white car, and he keeps shooting low stares at me— *if you tell anyone you’re dead*, the stares say— and something is eating me from the inside out.

A parasite, it feels like, but guilt is more likely. *That’s what we should be dissecting*, I think, *not this poor sheep. Whatever’s gnawing on my ribs.*





– Ghost –

4

Claire Beeli

“Are you?”

My lab partner is looking at me, looking at the sheep brain, which looks like a big clump of old strawberry preserves.

“What?”

“I asked if you’re okay. You don’t have to do this lab, you know. Mr. Barnes said that you can sit it out and do the worksheet instead if you’re uncomfortable, or if you’re feeling sick or something.”

“I’m fine,” I say, turning away from my partner and toward the dissection tools. “Totally fine. Are you ready?”

My partner nods. “Yes,” he says.

“I’m not ready,” you say, your voice like a hollow wind through trees, and I ignore you, trying to read the lab instructions instead. “That brain looks like my brain, only older. Grosser. Did you see the vigil they held for me yesterday? My dad was there, crying and everything. Lots of candles. There was a priest, even though I don’t think God is real. Or didn’t, I guess.” You sigh, propping your wispy elbows on the table, face resting on your hands.

“Maybe you should go to the police. It would be nice for the people who killed me to be caught.”

I nearly drop the scalpel. Why would you choose today, of all times, to ask me to report your killers? It isn’t like you’ve cared about justice for the past week you’ve followed me. There are a million questions I want to ask, but I cannot speak to you here. *Why are you so passive about everything? Don’t you care that you were murdered?*

Am I crazy? Is this all my fault?

I imagine your father, your mother, candles flickering, people crying, surrounded by tiny, mournful flames. A wake, your skin pale, eyes closed, delicate flowers, people who loved you weeping.

And the people who did this to you. Still free, because I won’t speak up. Because that thing chewing me up from the inside out is also whittling away my will to do anything at all, and mostly because every time I think about it, my heart accelerates to a hundred and fifty beats per minute and I can’t breathe and I have to think about something else.

I cut into the sheep brain, hard, and red blood spurts from the incision like a weak fountain, sharp copper filling the air.

“Sure you’re okay?” my lab partner asks.

“Great.”



– Ghost –

5

Claire Beeli

News colors move like lava lamp blobs behind my eyelids. The blue of a headline, the red of breaking news. I'm sinking deeper and deeper into the couch every second, and I can't seem to find a way out besides closing my eyes and letting sleep take me away. But the remote is on the coffee table three feet away, and I can't reach it, and you're sitting next to me but you can't touch real things so you can't get it either, so I'm left not-watching the news.

Listening and kind of seeing it through the flesh filter of my closed eyes.

“Breaking news... The unsolved murder case of a fifteen-year-old high school student, Layla Jenkins, has reached a major breakthrough. According to reports, the killing was a gang initiation shooting. Five suspects were present in a vehicle, plus one gang initiate, the alleged killer.”

I startle awake, blindly lurching from the couch and onto the carpeted floor and freeze there, staring intently as the red-haired anchor speaks. “One of these suspects has come forward, seeking a deal in exchange for the identities and crimes of the others. Details are still being sorted through, but a trial is to take place sometime in the next few weeks.”

A picture flashes on screen, a school ID photo; the boy from my science class, grim-faced, stoic in front of a cloudy gray background.

“Layla,” I say, testing the name out. It fits my tongue like a wave.

You say nothing, but you stand from the couch. You won't meet my eyes.

“They caught them.”

You say nothing.

“Will this... free you? From having to be here? In all the movies, once the ghost has accomplished what she needs to, she vaporizes.”

“I'm not a ghost.”

“You didn't answer my question.”

“I can't be freed because I'm not here. I'm a figment of your imagination and you're going crazy,” you say like you're saying “*you have red hair*” and not “*you're going insane.*”

I look at you. Stare for a moment. Shrug. This feels too small for a moment so big.

“You got what you wanted, right?” I ask. “This is a good thing. The killers have been apprehended. You can leave me alone now.”

You take a step back, fold your arms in front of you as if to protect yourself.

“What?”



Claire Beeli

“Sorry. I just meant... you don’t have to stay, right? You can go wherever dead people go to be at peace.” I wince. Something in my throat feels too hot and thick, like white-hot metal twisted around. “I mean, you’re free. You don’t need to follow me around anymore to make sure I secure your justice. Or whatever.”

“Okay,” you say slowly. You push your hair back behind your shoulders, then do it again. “Okay.”

You turn around slowly. Walk through the kitchen, out to the side screen door. You pause, silhouetted in silvery outside light that passes through your form only a little. Mostly solid. Waiting for me to stop you.

The moment snaps like a leaf from a branch and you blow through the door. I won’t ever see you again.

The trial is a supreme failure of justice. It turns out that one of the boys in the gang was some rich kid who happened to ‘sink’ into the wrong crowd, as if the quicksand of poverty took advantage of this poor boy and sucked him in. His daddy hired a lawyer, and in defending the rich boy, the lawyer also somehow got the others off. The actual killer only got probation, since he was under 18 and the lawyer framed it as some sort of accident.

I watch on the couch for days, the TV remote never leaving the spot between my leg and the worn couch fabric, but I never know enough. My parents notice how strange I’m acting and won’t let me watch the news, exiling me to my TV-less bedroom. They also won’t let me out of their sight, so I can’t visit *her*.

She’s the reason I was even out that night, away from my parents, the reason why all of this happened, and I lost her all the same. Secretly I hoped that, once you left, I could go back to her; that without your interference and my guilt, we could finally make something of ourselves together. She liked arcades more than anything; I wanted to take her on a date to one. Stupid, I know.

I go to school. Over and over. I eat a jelly-filled donut and think of your split skull, but the thought isn’t potent enough to keep me from the donut. The boys from the white car are all gone, moved away or homeschooling, but traces and whispers linger like ghosts. *More* ghosts, that is.

I see her sometimes in a flash of red in the hall, a daffodil at the flower shop, a poem with too many rhymes, but I never act on it. I never act on anything, it seems. When my parents banned me from seeing her, I did not act. When you were murdered, I did not act. And now that you’re gone, now that the justice you deserved is gone, I still refuse to act; I still will not stand on creaky legs and move, do something, anything. I can’t.



– Ghost –

7

Claire Beeli

They catch up with me on a hazy Wednesday in January. I'm walking at night, location broadcasted on Snapchat, eerily close to the place where they blasted through your brain, and then the boys are all around me, as if coalescing from the mists. I stand as still as I can, clutching my hands behind my back to hide their shaking.

Seven minutes later I lie, face-down and dead, on the pavement.

Fifteen minutes later, I am found. Another girl sees me, but this time, there is no ghost, no guilt. She wasn't there. She didn't see them. Only shock, disgust. She can barely hold her stomach down at the sight of my body, drilled into the ground by a bullet. I can't think anymore, but if I could, I would wish you were there. You would've understood.

Thirty minutes later, they find my phone, still recording, in the back pocket of my jeans.

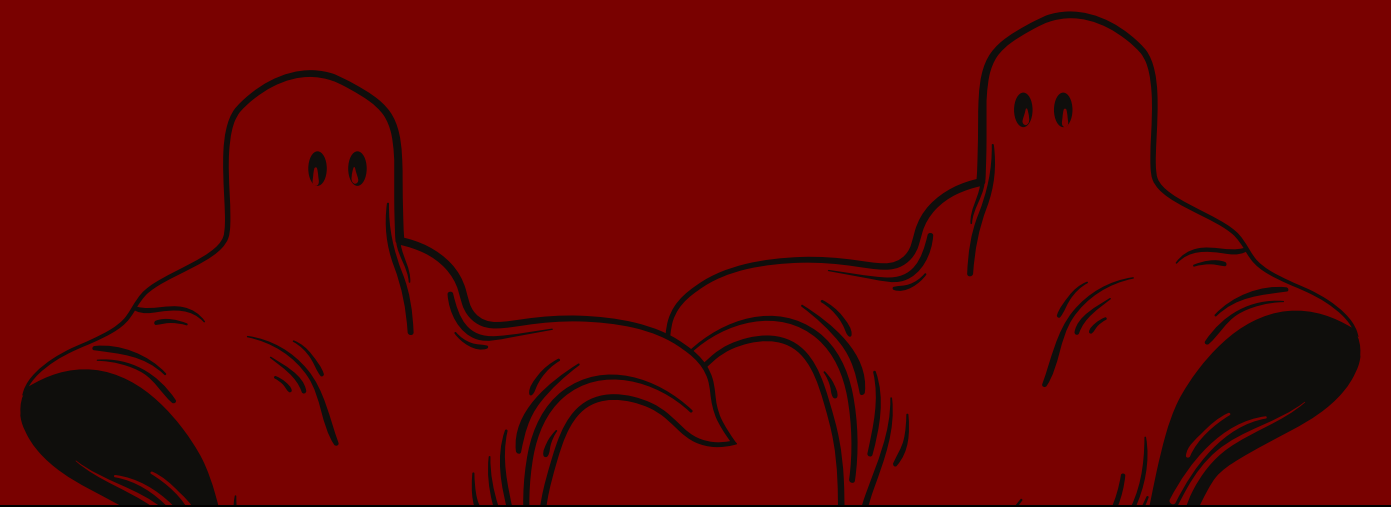
Three hours later, they identify the voices.

A year later, they are gone, locked away somewhere gloriously dark with delightfully rancid food. She will always remember me now, as the girl she left behind, as the girl who left her behind.

And you, you and I, we're left together, in that unknowable place where people go when justice is done.

Artist's Statement

"Ghost" is the story of a young woman, the narrator, who has witnessed a murder. The ghost of the murdered girl is haunting her, but the narrator won't tell anyone out of fear of being labeled insane or put in danger. The ghost is the narrator's secret, but it isn't the only thing haunting her."



About the Poet:

Claire Beeli (she/her) is a high school junior from Long Beach, California. Her work has been recognized by Sister Cities International and the New York Times Learning Network, and published in Seaglass Lit. When she's not writing or reading, she's digging through antique stores or trying to wrangle two very large cats.



**Recently, we opened
up a form for our
readers to submit
secrets to...**

**Here are some of the
most interesting
responses....**



"Sometimes, I find that people don't understand how I think, so I give up explaining things to them completely".

"sometimes i feel like i don't like my sister and i feel bad because she's family, but idk it's just challenging sometimes. is that weird?"

"i unironically love riverdale. it's kind of a modern classic in my opinion"

"one of my friends kissed my ex and doesn't know that i know 😊"



- *Loved Me More* -

10

Cece Lu

for my mother, because we're still healing

mother, mother, did you realize that

because my father hates your culture

you raised me with half of one, and condemned me
to living with neither?

mother, *māmā*, do you know how *desperately*
i long to be held?

do you (omnipotent reader) know how i cried when i learned
that my father always called me half of *princess*
and that the chinese name my *māmā* gifted me
includes the radical for *heart*?

(always half, never whole. here's a secret:

i was born broken in two.)

i want to live in a world where my mother is my best friend.

(you loved me to the point of creation, and i will

love you to the point of forgiveness.)

because it all comes back to love. do you love me
do you love me do you love me do you love me

do you promise? are you telling the truth?

i'm sorry for the secrets, for the lies.

because 我疼你, despite it all, despite the bruised knees
and the tear-stricken eyes.

because dad used to call me *niczka*, before
he threw me to the wolves.

because, *māmā*, you named me 思思 and
everyone i love calls me 姐姐,



- *Loved Me More* -

11

Cece Lu

(the overthinker,

the poet,

the eldest daughter.

tarot cards for the girl infatuated with *reclamation*.)

you *ruined* me, mother, mother, *father*,

because as much as i long for love sometimes i scream
if this is love then i do not want it

because if what you gave me was love,
then maybe love is the thing in the dark.

some nights i want to be loved more than i want to be
alive, because i was built with *wanting* deep in my bones,

and you did nothing but *take away*.

but you care for me in the only way you know how;
cut-up fruit and late

nights sitting on my bed,

because maybe you wanted a daughter and maybe i wasn't

but i'm trying. *you love me like blue skies*

& a peeled-open tangerine.

and sometimes it's enough.

疼 got lost in translation and

turned into 疼, too. 爱.

我疼你 anyways, always,

(i love you and it will hurt until the end of time.)

you made me broken and you made me angry

and you made me ready to scream.

you made me fucked up and you made me

beautiful,



- *Loved Me More* -

12

Cece Lu

and you taught me
to love so deeply and so unforgivably
that it cuts like a knife.

despite it all, māmā,
i'm sorry i'm sorry i'm *sorry*.

a secret: despite it all, i'm a bad daughter,
because i still court the notion
that you should have loved me more.

About the Poet:

Cece Lu (she/they) is a mixed-race and lesbian writer and poet, currently in her last year of high school. Drawn to art, music, psychology, and the beauty of humanity, she can be found yearning about kitchens, romanticizing oranges, and daydreaming about publishing her debut novel. Their work appears or is forthcoming in the *Origami Review* and the *Lunar Journal*.

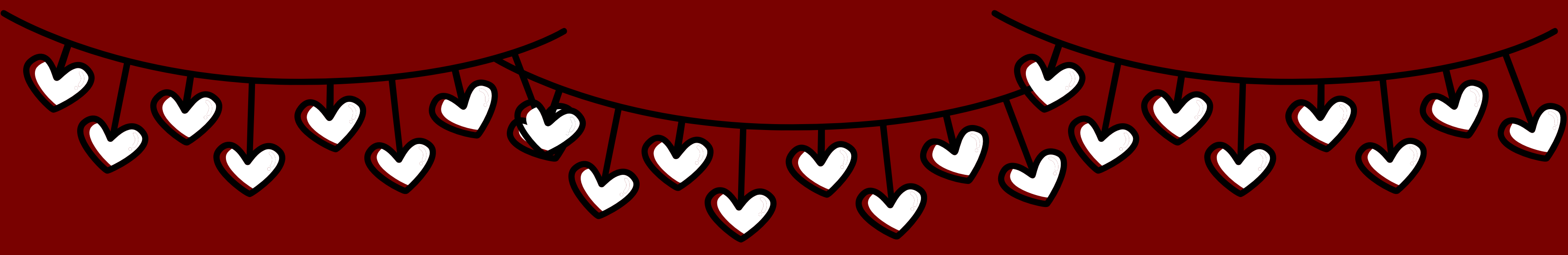




Artist's Statement

"My mother is maybe the most important person in my life. If daughters are reflections of their mothers and vice versa, I think my mom and I share the same internal conflicts surrounding love and resentment, because we do both deeply and viciously and with equal fervor. My piece, 'loved me more', is at its root a collection of secrets that I wish I was brave enough to let my mother hear. She and I don't really understand each other, maybe because of our cultural gap (I am nothing if not an immigrant's eldest daughter) or maybe because we're extensions of each other; my mother sees me as what she could have been, and I see her as what I'll become. 'loved me more' is me trying to come to terms with my resentment for how she raised me, but also how much I love her and how I'll continue to love her in spite of it. It's me acknowledging the parts that still hurt and the parts that bring me joy, and hating myself because my biggest secret is that I still wish that she loved me more, despite it all. I'm still learning how to let those things coexist within me, and maybe that's a secret, too."

-Cece Lu





- *To My Love [Who I Haven't Met]* - 14

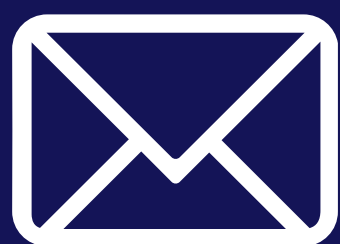
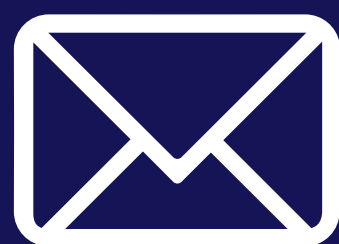
Reece Wright

Dear My Love,

I hope this letter finds you well; or at all. My love, I miss you dearly and weep for the day you return. Write to me when you have time - I don't want to disrupt your life too much. My hands have grown cold awaiting your touch. The palms of your hands when you cradled my face. How you looked at me when the light of the moon framed me the right way. Your side of the bed remains untouched, but mine became wrinkled after my nightmare last night. The nightmare where you never came back, where I never met you. Outside, the trees are whispering and the crickets are jumping. They await your arrival too. In the morning, I play my guitar, the one my grandmother gave me. I sing our song, the one we haven't discovered yet. When you come back, we shall watch movies together and dance until forever reaches its limit. How is your life? What is it like? Do you think about me? I think about you, and if you weren't you, you would understand why. The refrigerator is full again. I filled it with your favorite snacks in case you make an unexpected appearance. I implemented ink in the walls - our walls. They're full of the letters I wrote to you, but was too afraid to send. It's special. The longer you're away from someone, the more you miss them. If that is the case, I miss you more than the clouds miss the sky. More than anyone has ever missed someone.

Occasionally, I go outside and try new hobbies. I discover a new one every day. Sometimes I play a sport, today it was golf - your favorite sport. So now, the pads of my fingertips have become more calloused, covered in blisters. Evening is creeping up and I'm feeling a cramp, a desperate ache in my hand. As I look up, I see it. The distinct patterns of the sky. A touch of blue, spots of yellow, and streaks of orange. I wonder, do you see it too? Clouds have moved over and covered the colors, and there is a great dark shadow covering them, the colors. The ones that connected me to you. I've considered a million different ways to phrase these words and the shapes of my letters, but none of it is enough. None of it will ever be enough, because nothing is enough if it's not you. When you find me, I will be waiting as patiently as anyone could dream of being. I will wait until the earth dissolves, and even then I will continue to wait. Because no wait could ever be too long if it's for you. And so, I lie here with my pen itching to escape my grasp and an empty pallet of thoughts. The numbers on the alarm clock are flashing angrily in bright red block letters. It is time for me to go to sleep. It is time for me to leave you. So, my love, good night. I will write to you again, but I must go - turn off the lights, lock the doors - do all the things you would do. I miss you. Come home.

*Sincerely,
Your love*





Reece Wright

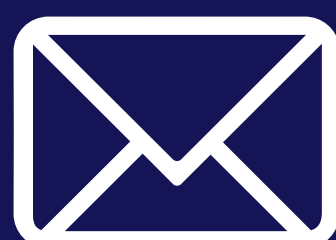
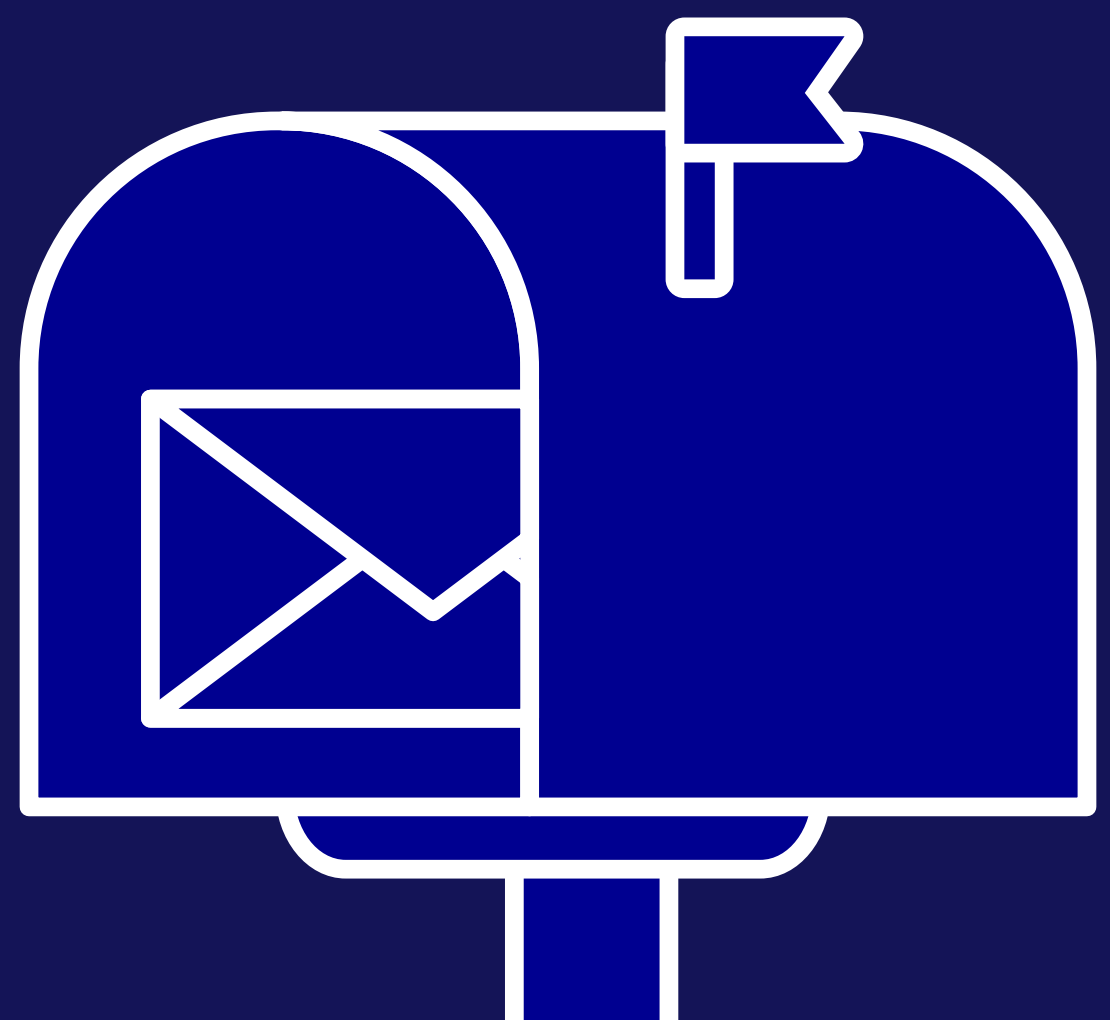
About the Author:

Reece Wright (she/her) is an African American High School student from Fort Worth, Texas. She enjoys writing about topics that have power and purpose, and can leave an impact on people. Reece began pursuing theater and took an interest in writing while attending Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts. She hopes that her literary contributions will inspire youth and young adults to open their minds to limitless possibilities. Her work has previously been featured in Bloom Magazine, The Star Collective, Renouveau Media, and White Noise Zine.

Artist's Statement:

"This relates to the theme because the idea of being afraid of never finding love inspired it. And so, it is something that is often voiced, but not something everyone feels comfortable talking about; like their own secret. I wrote this piece because it's one of my secrets, a secret that I am afraid of never experiencing love. "

-Reece Wright





– *scotch-taped* –

Skylar Peck

the crown scotch-taped to
my head threatens to capsize:
the crown i beaded together with
glass marbles that sliced open my
veins crude stand-ins for diamonds.

(must i remind myself
some things are born not made)

//

sullen are the eyes piercing through
the blades of my ribs. i pull my shirt back
and the crown topples over. now showing in the cinema
called *the mirror*: a cheap barbie rip-off.

//

a bee-sting-esque sensation tugging at the corners of my
vision. reject reality
—or what i've convinced myself is reality.

(only if the ugly duckling
didn't have to become a swan)

//



- *scotch-taped* -

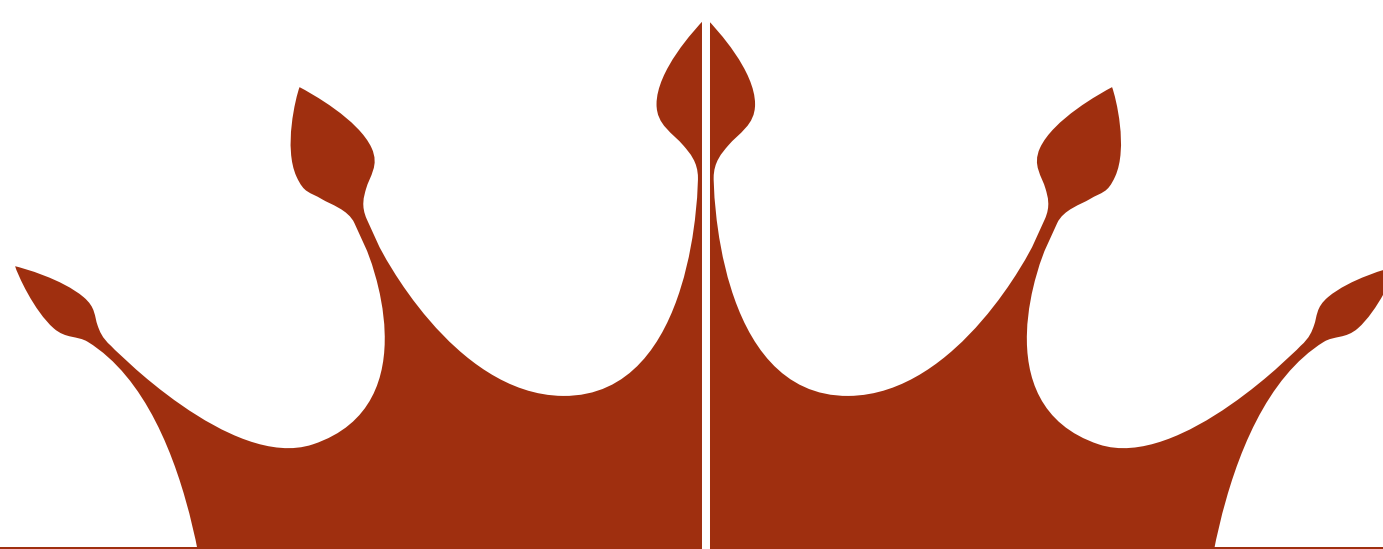
17

Skylar Peck

i cannot pull myself out of this whirlpool as long as
i am reflected in the water drowning me.

//

empty rolls of tape painting a portrait of
frailty on the tiles // my supply
is running out



About the Poet:

Skylar Peck (she/her) is a young writer from South Korea. She writes poems to help herself make sense of real-life events, experiences, and issues. Her work appears in *The Daphne Review*, *Blue Marble Review*, and *Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine*, among others.

Artist's Statement:

"scotch-taped" relays what goes through the mind of someone who wears a mask of confidence, beneath which they are secretly insecure about their appearance. This speaker's thoughts grow increasingly fragmented toward the end, and this represents the decaying effect that their shrouded lack of confidence has on them."

-Skylar Peck



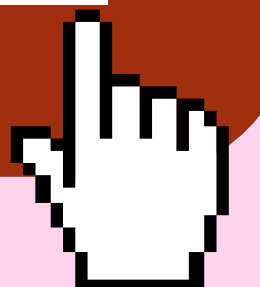
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The Love Letters Team

SUBMIT A LOVE LETTER

Running with the theme of our magazine, we've decided to begin accepting submissions of actual love letters! You can submit an anonymous (or signed) love letter to anyone, or even anything. Check it out on our website for a chance to be featured! On the next page, you can see an example of what we're looking for.

<https://www.thelovelettersmag.org/submit-a-love-letter>



- Dear My Unrequited Love - 19

A Love Letter To An Unrequited Love

Dear My Unrequited Love,

I've been thinking about you a lot recently. The love I had for you was my achilles heel.

No matter how far I got, or how much progress I made in forgetting you, you always came back.

It's been almost 2 years since you've rejected me and I miss so many things about us.

I miss the way we had meaningful conversations in person, not hidden in text messages

on a phone. I miss the way your eyes crinkled as you smiled, I loved that the things I say were

making you smile that way. I miss the way we had everything in common, from being a geek

about certain television shows to listening to indie music. I miss how you would help me with

picking out my outfits because I struggled with color theory. I miss you so much, words are

unparalleled to describe it.

However I love that I can put myself at a distance now, not worrying about every single

interaction that happened between us. I love that I can hang out with other people and not feel

guilty about it. I love the lessons I've learned through loving you, the easy and the tough ones. I

love that I can love you like an old lady remembering one of her past flings.

I hope you find someone good in your life, and I hope that someone loves you as much as

I did. I hope that they make you smile over the big things, and the smallest. I hope that we can

meet each other in another life and have our happily ever after. But, I hope most of all that

someday you understand the love I've had for you.

From,
Caitlyn





- Birthday Letter -

20

A Love Letter To Anyone You Wish

Dear you,

I love you so goddamn much that I don't feel entirely myself when you're not there.

Do you know what I do when I'm angry, sad, or just really happy? I think about you, about how you'd react to the amazing news, or just use you as a thought of comfort to bring me back to a happier place.

And God, I can go on forever about how amazing you are, and you know what? Nothing is stopping me today.

You inspire me everyday. Every day you live and breathe is another day I wish I were just like you, another day I wished for your ceaseless kindness, unwavering intelligence and amazing wit. You have so much talent, so much knowledge, you can be anything and everything you ever wanted to be. I'm so proud of how far you've come since I've known you. I'm envious of everything you have managed to accomplish and attain.

I believe something that has always drawn me to you is your acceptance towards others. To elaborate, you don't have strong opinions about how people should be and act, you're accepting of everyone else's personalities and natures. You don't attempt to change how someone feels or judge someone for their past, you have this marvelous ability to give someone a noun that everyone craves more of, especially in adolescence. You give others freedom.

When I'm around you, I'm never worried about being embarrassed or being judged for my opinions.





- Birthday Letter -

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A Love Letter To Anyone You Wish

You're one of the few places where I feel completely safe to express who I am and I will be eternally grateful for the haven that you continue to provide me with. If it ever were the case, I would, without a second thought, trust you with my life.

My fathers always told me that friends come and go in life, that family will continuously and always be the constant. I believe what he says here is true, almost all friends do come and go, particularly as teens.

But I believe this saying enough to tell you that I don't consider you my best friend.

'Best friend' doesn't even come close.

You're my platonic soulmate.

Essentially, you help me keep a secure faith in the capabilities of the human race.

This letter doesn't feel finished, and I don't think it ever will. There will always be too many things to say

and not enough words in the universe to delineate them. But, as you said, that's what parks are for.

Enjoy your sixteenth year of life, never forget how special you are and how much I love you.



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