

I have no mouth so I must write



Crisologo, Jocson, Layug, Pabillano, Ramirez

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Warming Up

Cyril James Layug

Humanity is just warming up.

I say, as the dawn of modernity is in sight
With technological advancements seen left and right
Making our lives easy and light
The future is here and the future seems bright.

I say, as my skin is scorched by the summer sun
With temperatures high its record second to none
Thinking it's the urban heat, modernity's consequence for one
Yet days grow warmer, and it's felt by everyone.

I say, as I realize this is not a natural phase
When disaster rates and intensities have raised
The urban air quality putting me in a daze
Maybe modern conditions are not worthy of praise.

I say, as I sat on the bench, finding leftover tissue
Where I picked it up, and to the bin I threw.
A feeling of satisfaction within sparks anew
Yet feelings were dismissed, as I knew there's more to do.

The Machine-made Human

Sky Ramirez

The machine said,
use the middle lane then
turn right in two kilometers
and you'll reach Kayzon Avenue.
So the human went.

The machine said,
add 2 cups of water
and 1 cup of rice
and a teaspoon
of this factory-made seasoning
then put it in this cooker.
That way, you can eat.
So the human obeyed and ate.

The machine said,
type this and that,
and change this and that too.
But then the machine
went and wrote by itself,
so the man would have to do nothing.

Yet the human once
knew the way to Quezon Avenue
or knew to ask other humans too.
They once knew how to cook
with only experience gained
by failing, trying, and learning.

Humans once imagined and wrote,
and machines would only help with writing.

The human made the machine.
But now, machines have made the human
one who wakes neither by the sun's rising
nor the rooster's crowing,
but by the alarm's ringing.
One who has lost their instinct to do
without first asking Siri, Google, or ChatGPT.
One so reliant on artificial intelligence
that they've lost their own brilliance.

The Weight of Weight

Stella Crisologo

In one life, you will live hundreds. What I mean by this, is that in one life, you will come to create, enjoy, loathe, and tolerate hundreds of versions of yourself, some more ephemeral, some more persistent than others. What I mean by this is that you will have versions of yourself you will grieve, and you will have versions of yourself you will try to bury, but will fail to do so. These ghosts of your own person will haunt you as you discover the turbidity of your life. These ghosts will watch over you and come out of your throat in broad daylight, in a conversation, in a meal.

The worn-out saying that the only thing that is constant is change only begins to hold weight when you realize that the things you don't change are the things that you choose. What I mean by this is that the parts of yourself— regardless of how inconsequential it may be, from the way that I dressed to the passions I decided to pursue, will stay the same unless you actively fight against who you think you are.

When you decide to finally take the bull by its horns and redirect the course of your life, embody your idols, and mold yourself into the person you want to be, there can be serious consequences. For most of my life, I had internalized both the good and bad parts of who I was, never to change or to see a better day. I assumed that everything that came my way was something I deserved and that I was never meant for anything more. When I did realize that I had the autonomy to change the trajectory of my life, even a little bit, I was overwhelmed with a sense of bewilderment that mimicked fantastical awe. For months, I'd write in my diary and fantasize about

changing who I was, from possibly being a dancer or a carefree clubber, or virtually anything I wanted to be.

But the things you don't change are the things you choose. The things you leave behind when you change, quickly become the things that you hate. If who I was as a person was a library, comprising of the tics, mannerisms, dreams, and fears I held close to my heart, with a newfound sense of evolution, I pretty much turned to the library and trashed it to the ground. When I decided that I could change, all of the books of who I was were scattered on the floor and forgotten to the wind.

I quickly grew obsessed with developing into the person I wanted to be. I wanted to run away as far as possible from the girl with crippling insecurities. I burned what ego resided in the old parts of me and swallowed the ashes. At the very top of my list, however, was losing weight.

Losing weight was always a concern of mine. I have been large, and slightly overweight for most, if not all of my life. At the ripe age of 8 years old, I started what would have been a steady chain of diets. My first fruit cup was handed to me by my mother on a quiet Sunday afternoon. No one else was at home ate what I did. No one else at school was ever told that they were too large at the age of 8. I didn't even know that size was bad until I held the fruit cup in my hands and wondered why I couldn't have chips or candy. This diet would shrivel and fail, and come back again, stronger, this time with more heft. Every time I'd start a diet, whether it was calorie counting, reducing carbs, running, or cutting out sweets, my appetite and desire for food would come back fiercer, and consume a larger part of who I was. In that library, if my introversion or my passion were the size of decent textbooks, my obsession with my weight was the Bible, the thickest version, in all languages, propped up on a lectern

in the middle of the room. It was given attention at all times, the sunlight of the room illuminated all the ways I hated myself. In my own memories, I was a pain to remember because of the space I occupied and the disgust I elicited. I hated the way I looked beside my friends, the way my form would hunch over all of my friends. The way I could never wear what they were or could hope to imagine myself in their clothes. Dressing and looking different at your age is an incredibly isolating feeling. Being thin became the ultimate object of my desire. Being thin meant more friends, respect, being treated as an equal, and most of all, realizing real beauty. Being large meant that people would compliment every last thing before your actual appearance, like your hair, your outfit, and your makeup.

The idea of really changing, and losing weight, was enticing. It was, pardon the irony, having me salivate and froth at the mouth. I wasted no time using the force of an authoritarian leader in establishing discipline in all areas of my life. When I started the only diet of my life that worked, I ate a measly 1200 calories every single day and did HIIT workouts every other day. This was a stark contrast to when I was a varsity athlete at my high school, where I was my team's pride and joy for being the strongest player, who carried her weight like a badge of honor. When I started this diet, I cherished the idea of becoming a frail little girl, who would finally, finally become beautiful.

At around the same time, I was in a long-term relationship with my high school sweetheart. A part of what drove me to lose weight fast was that he had come from an incredibly fit, borderline toxic, and conscious family who used to make comments about my size. When he watched one of my varsity games for the first time, they went out of their way to tell him that they were afraid of my weight, or that I was on the (unpleasantly) heavier side.

You could imagine that this was the final nail that drove me to the ground. A girl never forgets what people say about her body, much more the family of her beloved. From there, I made my departure as the girl who was always large. I wanted to take less space. I wanted to shrink. I wanted to be unrecognizable. This event amplified my consciousness of other people's opinions and the fear of being perceived, and being only remembered for the unsightly space I took up. At this point in my life, I would have rather not be seen than be seen and be met with careful, trailing eyes. A glance at the way my legs pile on a chair. A double take at the curve of my tricep. Being told that the prettiest parts of you are how you did your makeup or the way you chose your outfit for that specific occasion, is almost a backhanded compliment. Is my weight such a hindrance that it automatically disqualifies me from being called beautiful? I understood my position as someone who fully had the privilege of being able to change the way I looked. There is a sense of guilt that waves over me when I realize that several people around the globe do not have the resources, or even the technology necessary to live in a body that they can consider theirs and one that they are happy with. There are people who risk their lives, whether by putting themselves through underground treatment or working extra hard to access certain facilities in order to live in a body they felt was theirs.

The only thing I needed, in theory, was the stubbornness and the mental fortitude to lose weight. It is my fault for being fat, and my fault for feeling bad that I felt fat.

Discipline and self-awareness are key to losing weight. But what they don't tell you is that the older version of yourself, the one that you hated, begins to fade— and I'm not only talking about the physical image. Yes, you let go of self-indulgent and careless habits, but you also let go of all the love you gained from when you were your older version of yourself. You let go of all of her insecurities, and

somehow you cram it into an identity that demonizes the older you, that demonizes, looks down on your family and the love that they shared through food. Somehow you find yourself with a thinner, more beautiful version of yourself that couldn't hate herself more.

For a while, it did work. I got compliments and realized the repulsive nature of pretty privilege. Receiving comments from friends I haven't spoken to in years, or receiving likes from my high school bullies lit a flame in my soul. I felt sick being delighted at the thought of getting thinner and becoming unrecognizable. I was getting rid of what I hated about myself the most, so why was I so sad?

I am a large lady because I was blessed with my father's height but cursed with his family's large legs. My favorite treats and meals are so close to my heart because I have countless fond memories of sharing them with my family. One whole burger all for me while my parents shared halves, and paid with the last coins my mom had. Gummy smiles and three full pumpkin baskets full of candy. Bringing home my father our favorite chocolate chip cookies. Midnight snacks shared on the floor by the stairs. Pasalubong, because my mom remembered I had a bad day. Grins on our faces as we slurp on richly sour and savory soup on a cold day.

In my home, we called each other "chubby," but it was never an insult. Actually, far from it. It was almost a way of telling the other, "I see you for what you are, but I love you anyway." Sharing food, talking about food, sharing the burdens of our size, where the letters and sounds of our love language. How was I supposed to refuse, or even worse, retch out the supper my mother made with love? How was I supposed to enjoy being my family's daughter when everything that threaded me to them was something that I was beginning to hate?

The hate is what drives you to be a better version of yourself. You need to hate her. You need to vomit at the thought of rolls. You need to erase the image of the slightly overweight child who never thought she could be beautiful. It is my fault for being fat. It is my responsibility to hate the girl that is fat to get rid of her.

And the mirror. When you are the striking image of your parents with weight and begin to lose it, you feel yourself grasping for them. My biggest fear is not looking like them when they're gone. Being a small family, there aren't many of us to go around to remember them. I am the sole protector of my parent's memory, but here I am burning it to the ground by rejecting the ways in which they loved me and made me in their image. My curves were carved with care and toil. The plumpness in my cheeks, and the strength in my arms, were my parents' pride and joy. When you spend most of your life scrapping for money to feed your child, the baby with a fully rounded belly and milk dripping from their lips might as well be a trophy. To them, it didn't matter that I was fat, so as long as I was healthy and happy.

These are all the ways in which love is tied to the canonical part of myself that I hated the most. In so many ways, I wanted to depart from a faulty, undesirable version of myself but failed to consider that these are parts of me through which I remember my family. If I tore down the library, they constructed it. They wrote the books or saved money to buy them. Before I even dreamed of living a hundred lives, they built a hundred for me.

Such is the emotional turmoil of wanting to become someone else but wanting to cherish the fruits of your parents' labor. When they age, it feels like you go from holding water in a large basin to holding water with cupped hands. You press your fingers together and hope that nothing drips from in between the cracks. Your life ex-

pands, and you feel that the world that they created for you begins to crumble and deteriorate.

What does it mean when the parts of my body I hate are the best ways I can remember my mother and father? What does it mean when I continue to pursue these extravagant lives, a hundred more lives, to run even further from the lives I lived with my family? I am always my mother and father's daughter but will be less so when I shave off 20 pounds, my face slims, eat our snacks less, and go into a fitness-crazed-workout phase. I love being my mother and father's daughter, but I hate the daughter. I hate how she looks in public, but she is the only way I can hold my family close. I'd claw the flesh on the sides of my arms and my torso to create ripples of red and inflammation. I'd stick fingers down my throat to love me but love my family a little less— with the acidic sting of bile paling in comparison to the tear stains on the sides of my eyes.

And it's humbling really. Icarus flew too close to the sun, and I had to sit with the weight of dissonance between being the person I wanted to be and leaving my parent's daughter behind. It is a long road, but the only way out is love. Instead of running my mouth about all the ways I hate myself, I can only stop hating my parents' daughter when I start loving her. There is a lot of dissecting and cautious correction when you talk about loving yourself for something you originally hated. The hundred lives I lusted, and cried for, really pale in comparison to the hundred lives I have lived in the company of those who love me. Maybe the torment of body dysmorphia doesn't completely go away, but I'll dive deep into the cushion of those who do love me to soothe the ache. It is much harder to raise a loved child than a beautiful one. It is much harder to hate yourself into a person you love.

Mister Cupid, Aim Properly!

Allan Dave Pabillano

キューピッドさん！

ちゃんと狙ってね！

Love.

Love binds two people closer. Afterward, they get married, build a life together, and spend the rest of their lives happily committed to each other.

Often when we talk about love in the Japanese setting, we think of middle school, influenced by anime and manga.

My name is Yosuke Aoyama (青山 陽介).

Right now, faced with the troubles of love, I stand in front of my beloved. By the cherry blossoms, with the wind blowing through our uniforms, she was there standing beautifully as I saw her.

“Ah, were you the one who called me? What did you call me out here for?”

ドキドキー

I'm nervous. But I've come this far!

“Maeda-san, I have something to tell you. These past few months, I've been thinking about you and...”

I bend over and protrude my arm forward awkwardly.

“P-Please go out with me!”

My heart continuously beats.

For a while, there was stifling silence between us. It feels heavy. To prevent myself from panicking, I stop my train of thought before it snowballs.

“I-I’m glad you think that way...” she replies.

My face lights up and I stand straight.

“R-Really?! Th-Then—”

“...but I have a really embarrassing question.”

She looks left and right.

She can’t seem to look straight. When she does, she finally speaks.

“Wh-Who are you again?”

“Wh-What do you mean? Weren’t we seatmates for two whole semesters? I remember talking to you a bunch of times!”

“I-Is that so? I never noticed. So, um... I—”

“I?”

“I’m sorry! I don’t think I should be in a relationship with people I don’t know!”

She bolts out leaving me.

I fall to my knees.

“Did I just get... rejected?”

What's worse was she didn't even remember me...

My hands naturally curl into a fist and punch the ground.

“DAMN IT! DAMN IT ALL!”

My first love...

That... that was the day my heart broke, never to be repaired. Ever since that day, I swore to never interact with 3D girls ever again. 2D girls are simply better. I can have as many girls as I want, and they can never hurt my heart!

...

..

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Many months later...

ピンポン、ピンポン、ピンポン

The sounds of my game echo throughout the room. My room itself was pretty messy – empty chip wrappers and finished instant ramen cups sprawled onto the floor, dusty windows and furniture, like my shelves of light novels and manga. There was bound to be an outrageous amount in-between them and that’s not even addressing the floor, crumpled paper from homeworks, dust bunnies from the corners of my room, and used clothes. But it didn’t really matter since my family would only ever see this anyway.

“Pull. Pull. Pull.”

I continuously use up my 10-pulls in my gacha to go for the latest banner. I was pulling for Tomoko because a new alt skin released with her in a maid outfit with cat ears.

At last, when I used up 9th 10-pull ticket, at last, I see that golden color!

My eyes widen, I couldn’t believe it!

“NO WAY! AHAHHA! AN SSR UNIT! FINALLY IN MY HANDS!”

I jump in glee; I simply could not contain my excitement.

“For the next banners, thankfully I have enough Mana Orbs to pull for Rika, Kanae, Ayumi, Kana, and Alice. Here’s to hoping I get them within 30 pulls.”

“Now, now, this won’t do,” a voice of a girl speaks in my mind.

“Wh-What?!”

I drop my phone on my bed and frantically search around. But there’s no one around.

Did I mishear that? Because that sure didn’t feel like it came from my game.

Opening the door to my room, I looked left and right, yet no one was there.

“Maybe I was imagining things after all?”

I close the door and turn around. There my vision was blessed with something I’d never seen before.

“A-A-Ah-”

No words would come out of my mouth from shock, so much so, that I ended up dropping my phone.

ドン!

“Good day to you, Yosuke. God has sent me to you.”

An angel has appeared in front of me! She had brown eyes, blonde hair, white wings, and wore a white tunic that covered her upper body to the feet.

“A-Am I dreaming?”

She tilts her head.

“How could you be dreaming, dear Yosuke?”

I take gentle steps and slowly move toward her, but make sure I have appropriate distance. From that spot, I take all sorts of glances at her.

There's no doubt about it, she's an angel. Her wings are a little more ruffled than one would expect, but that's beside the point. Where did she come from?

Seeing as how the window was open, she probably came from there. Knowing that the apartment I lived in was too far from both the ground and roof, I assumed that she couldn't have come from both options and simply had to be a supernatural being. I mean, the sunlight shining deliberately at her almost felt like intentional.

I pinch myself and feel pain, then I look at her and poke her cheek.

It's soft.

My mouth forms a wide smile, and I jump in glee.

“AHAHAH! I WIN! I ROLLED AN SSR IN REAL LIFE TOO! I'M A WINNER!”

Thank God!

Clasping my two hands, I pray fervently sending my thanks. After that, I face her.

“Did God send you to become my girlfriend?!”

“Good heavens, how did you come to that conclusion? That simply is not possible.”

“But why?!”

“Because an angel and a human create a Nephilim. Anyways, I have come here for a different reason.”

“So... you won’t be my girlfriend?”

“As I said, if an angel and human were to undergo intercourse, the result is a Nephilim. So having a relationship is out of the question.”

I pick up my phone and go back to playing my gacha.

“Wh-What are you doing?” she asks me.

“If you’re not going to be my girlfriend, then I’m not interested. Shoo shoo!”

I wave my hand dismissively.

“Well, that’s exactly the thing! I have come in here to deliver you the news that God has decided to give you a girlfriend!”

“Oh?”

Dropping my phone, I sit upright and listen earnestly.

“Okay, I’m listening.”

“So, you know that Japan has had a declining birth rate over the years?”

“Please don’t sprawl such sad facts on my face, it just makes me sad...”

“God was really worried, you know? He said be fruitful and multiply! So, when He saw the state of Japan, He decided to help!”

“He sent you here, so I can get a girlfriend?”

“Exactly.”

“Yes! Though, how could I be sure that the girl I’ll find is the one for me?”

“It’s God! Rest assured; you will meet the one for you.”

Win! Absolute victory!

“But on one condition...” she utters.

“Hm?”

“God will guarantee you the one you spend your eternity with... in exchange that you become cupid.”

I stare at her flabbergasted and wait for more words to tell me ‘It’s all a joke!’. But from the looks of it, she was finished with her sentence.

“...You aren’t joking?”

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

“...You’re telling me to become cupid? Doesn’t that sound outrageous?!”

“If I may speak my humble opinion, I find it pretty surprising for you to accept all of this pretty casually. I thought you’d be more skeptical.”

“I’ve got no time for overreacting. When there’s an opportunity, I’d seize it! No questions asked! But to be cupid? Sorry to say this, but I suck at love! I’ve got no touch in bringing people together.”

“Can you let me finish?”

“Okay...”

“In order to seize a girlfriend, you first must become cupid and successfully bring 100 couples together within a year.”

“Am I hearing correctly? Did you just say 100 couples?”

“Yes,” she tilts her head, “Is there something wrong? Sounds pretty low, doesn’t it?”

“What the hell?! No one said I had to spend Valentine’s Day every day?! You’re saying I have to experience couples getting together in front of my eyes?! That’s torture!”

“Why is that? Does it not please you to see love being made?”

“I’ve been single all my life! That’s poison!!!”

“You’re just overreacting. Here,” she says.

When she spreads open her hand, a bow and 5 arrows with heart-shaped tips, spawn from nowhere. I grab them and examine its features. While I couldn’t identify what type of wood it was made of, it seemed really clear, smooth, and polished. Testing the integrity of the string, it was firm. Finally, the tip was very pointy, thus concluding my inspection.

“High quality. But that still doesn’t mean I’m agreeing to it!”

“Too late.”

With a clap of her two hands, two wings appear behind my back, albeit smaller in magnitude.

“What?! NO! I look goofy as hell!” I yelp, “I’ve never heard of an angel that forces a job on someone!”

“Aw... No more quarreling, let’s get started right away!”

“Right now?! Don’t you need to improve my aim first?”

“Hmm...”

Scouring my room, she finds a piece of paper, crumples it, and throws it to me. I catch it, in return.

“There,” she points to the trash can on the other side of the room, “throw it.” So, I comply and shoot it perfectly towards the trash can.

ドン!

“Perfect! You’re ready!” she celebrates

“Perfect! You’re ready!” she celebrates.

“I sure don’t think so!”

“Time is gold! Let’s go!” she says whilst stepping on the window slider.

“What are you doing? Aren’t we going down the stairs?”

“Silly! I’ve got wings, I’ll just take you somewhere!”

Is it me, or did she drop her half-assed formality earlier?

“W-Wouldn’t the people see us? Wings and all?”

“You worry too much!”

Running towards me, she gets down, takes my hand, and yanks me toward the window.

“WOAH! WOAH! WAIT! I’M NOT READY!”

Jumping out the window, her wings spread forth, and along came I.

“ARGHGHGHGH! AHHHH! HELP! I’M FALLING!”

I was gripping on her hand for dear life. Both of my hands struggle to latch on to her right hand. She lifts me up and grabs both my arms to stabilize me.

“Calm down! I’m still adjusting,” she tells me.

The altitude was rapidly declining, so quickly, that it almost felt like I was going to plummet to my death. Thankfully, the pace picked up and with a flap of her wings, we reached high heights. Once I calmed

down, I open my eyes and got a good view of the city from up above.

“Woah! It looks so cool from above!”

“See! You just worry too much.”

“Hang on, you hadn’t answered my question. Wouldn’t people see us?”

“Only you can see me, as I am your assigned angel. You, on the other hand, are in contact with me, so you’re currently invisible.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“Also, I have another question.”

“Ask away.”

“Can I fly?”

She chuckles.

“Of course not, foolish Yosuke! Those wings are merely design!”

“Oh.”

I slump knowing that they serve no purpose. That would justify having wings, at least. “There,” she points to a salaryman walking

through a crossing and rapidly descends to him.

“ARGHH!!! SLOW DOWN! SLOW DOWN! ARGH!!!”

We land near a ramen shop.

“Good, that’s our first target! Yosuke, are you ready?” she looks at me and gets surprised by my state. Well, I mean, I was literally foaming.

“Yosuke?!”

With no consideration at all, she shakes my body to make me regain my consciousness. Unfortunately, it worked.

“GWAH! I think I saw the light, a second ago,” I utter.

“Geez, Cupid-san, if we’re going to progress, you need to get used to heights!”

“Isn’t that asking too much for a newbie? And what did you just call me?”

“Cupid-san. Well, they said Japan had honorifics, so I added ‘-san’ to your current occupation title.”

“Please call me Yosuke. That sounds a lot better.”

Despite that, she doesn’t respond. In fact, she looks for someone yet

again in the crowd.

“Who’re you finding this time? The partner for the target?”

“Exactly, so Cupid-san, please keep an eye on our first target.”

She didn’t listen...

I grunt.

“Fine.”

A minute later, she taps my shoulder.

“There, can you see that girl? With the long black hair, blue blazers, gray dress pants, red heels, and pink purse?”

“Where?”

Taking in my mind, those details. I spot our second target.

“So, uh, should I aim now?” I ask for reassurance.

“Yes!”

She hands me the 5 heart-shaped tip arrows, now with an arrow quiver, as well as the bow. Copying what I had seen in the movies, I take an arrow, make sure the tip faces the target, and nock the arrow.

I think it's pretty obvious that I need to hit both of them to cause the reaction.

"Cupid-san, take aim!" she commands me.

"Alright!"

Confident in my ability, I pull back the arrow against the string and shoot for the salaryman first. Seeing the arrow fly, it meekly loses strength along the way, and falls to the ground, far away from the target.

"Damn it, too far!"

"Wait!"

"I can do it!"

"Don't do it!"

Just as she was about to stop me for some unknown reason, I had already prepared the next bow shot and raise the angle higher. Then off it went.

"Oh no," she worries.

"What?"

I watch the arrow hit the man's shoulder and it fades into the air

like the other arrow. He stops walking immediately.

“Bullseye! Now for the next-”

“Why didn’t you listen?!”

“What do you mean? I got the target! All I need is the-”

“Fool! The effect of the love arrows is not limited to people! You should’ve waited for 3 minutes for it to have worn off!”

“Oh...”

From thereon, we watch as the man drops everything and kisses the area of ground where the other arrow landed like a madman.

“Uhh, don’t worry. I can fix this.”

“Wait, no!”

I aim for the woman and thankfully, it hits.

“Yes!”

“No!”

Much like the man, she kisses the ground obsessively and upon eye contact of doing the same ritual-like thing, they shake their hands.

“I see you are an enjoyer of dry cement as well, madam. You have refined taste,” the man utters.

“Likewise. I am glad someone sees how attractive the road is today.”

With the two of them cackling together, a crowd of people form around them watching in disgust.

“Uh...”

“Just listen to me for once...”

“At least, it takes 3 minutes, right?”

“Cu-pi-d-sa-n,” she approaches with glaring red eyes, “That would only apply to an unpaired love arrow. Love arrows that have been paired or more, last for a whole day!!!”

“So... uh... on to the next pair? Ahahaha...”

チー

She clicks her tongue and murmurs.

“Imbecile...”

I... didn't mishear that, did I? She clearly clicked her tongue and cursed at me... is that sort of action allowed?

Miss Angel, clearly infuriated goes and hunts for the next pair.

“I’m sorry if this is the wrong time to ask, but what’s your name, Miss Angel?”

“Seraphina.”

I’d spent three arrows already, which means I have a total of-

2 arrows left. Enough for a pair. Surely, I can’t fail now.

“Have you found a pair yet?” I ask her.

“I’m not telling until 3 minutes have passed.”

Damn, I must have really lost her trust, huh?

“Just to make sure I don’t make any more screw-ups; are there any other rules I’m supposed to be aware of?”

“Thankfully for you, Cupid-san, that’s about all there is. Shooting an arrow will release an unpaired love arrow and will take 3 minutes for the effect to dissipate. On the other hand, if you shoot arrows within a 3-minute interval of each other, then they would be paired.”

“I see, that’s good to hear.”

The conversation ends there. As we had to wait for a bit more, it felt awkward. I had to break the ice somehow since I was mainly

responsible for it.

“So, Seraphina-s-san... Why did I get chosen? Why, out of all people, I get chosen? Surely, there are other people out there like me.”

“Hm... let me think... if I had to give a reason, I’d say it was pure coincidence.”

“Huh? Th-There’s no criteria or anything?”

“None, that I would know of.”

Hehhhhh... is heaven actually, like, not regulated by a system or anything?

Thankfully, my mind stumbles upon a good topic I’d been wondering about.

“How’s heaven like? Is it as good as they say?”

“Yes, heaven is a beautiful place, we live amongst the clouds and watch the people closely.”

“A-Are there any computers or any technological stuff?!”

“What?” she bursts out laughing which wipes out my smile, “We live in service to God. For what reason would we need computers? We are content with what we are given.”

“Aww...”

Does that mean there are no video games in heaven? Isn't that just pretty sad?

But that justifies my time playing around. If I can't have them in heaven, best to do it now!

“Al-”

However, Seraphina cuts me off.

“Three minutes have passed,” she points at an innocently walking male high-schooler,

“Aim at him!”

“Got it.”

I really hope this isn't a scam... Quite late to be considering those thoughts, though.

Let's go all in!

Much like last time, I take an arrow, make sure the tip faces the target, and nock the arrow. My sight is looking straight at him, through the arrow.

“Aim properly, Cupid-san!” she cheers which queues me to let go.

シュー

The arrow springs forward soaring through the air, unfortunately, it lands short of my shot and instead lands on an unsuspecting high school girl.

ゴクリ

I gulp nervously as I feel the disappointment of my ‘employer’.

I-Is this the feeling of failing a job interview?

“Aha, aha, AHAHHAA! W-Well, I wasn’t cut out to be cupid anyway, s-so-”

As I attempt to lower my bow to signal my resignation, her right hand grips my wrist. Then, I look at her face.

“EEK!”

She looked like she was about to kill me.

Is she actually going to kill me?! That can't be right? She's an angel! Wait a minute, I can't be so sure... She might tell this to God. I might be receiving a blacklist to heaven! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! WHAT DID I GET MYSELF INTO?! I SHOULD'VE THOUGHT ABOUT THIS MORE CLEARLY! I DON'T WANNA

GO TO HELL!

As I was snowballing into the abyss, she pointed out to another high school guy.

“We are not wasting more time. Aim for him, Cupid-san,” she said with a frightening tone.

“R-Roger!”

“Make sure to aim higher, dammit! If you aim straight, of course, gravity is going to pull it down. Isn’t that common sense?!”

“R-Roger!”

Following her instructions, I fix my form, aim at my next opponent. This time, once I set the arrow directly to my eye and my opponent, I lift it slightly with respect to the distance. Pull and...

“RELEASE!”

シュー

The arrow flies into the air and it finally seemed like it was going to hit my opponent. But I may have failed to account for one small thing.

“Oops.”

The arrow lands on a plate full of cake that happens to be nearby. My arrow had curved west because of the wind.

“The wind current...”

What happened next was an embarrassing moment for society to forget. Let's simply chalk it down to barbarians fighting for food, for two entirely different reasons.

“Uh...”

I've got no more arrows.

I turn to Seraphina.

“Ahahaha... I may have screwed up again... can I have more arrows please?”

Her face stares at the events unfolding at the café where my arrow landed. She seemed like all hope and life had been drained out of her.

Did I... perhaps take the arrows for granted?

“Um, you do still have arrows... right?”

She falls to her knees, and I once again get a view of her ruffled feathers. Really messy despite her orderly appearance which was really odd. She bawls her eyes out.

“It’s over! It’s all over!” she cries.

“Seraphina... arrows?”

She faces me beet red and sniffing. She looks utterly defeated. After making contact with my eyes, she avoids her gaze and puts her two hands to her face. She faces away from me.

“I... I have no more arrows!” she screams.

“H-Huh?! That doesn’t make any sense. You said we’re supposed to do this for 100 couples! Then you should clearly have more, or at least, be able to produce more than a measly 5!”

She stops covering her face and looks at me, messier than ever.

“5 is measly?! You’re mean, Cupid-san! After all I did to conjure them!”

“5... is tough? I don’t know how much power arrows take, but aren’t angels supposed to be really powerful? I thought they actually looked like a whole set of eyes that say, ‘Be not afraid,’ or something along those lines?”

She sniffs and sniffs and her wings move to wipe her face. Some feathers fall as a result.

“Those are Thrones! And uh... I’m uh... I’m sort of... on probation.”

I have a bad feeling about this.

My expression turns serious. Furious even.

“What are you really... Seraphina?”

“I’m... a fallen angel.”

“...”

I breathe in and breathe out.

Well, shit.

An Endless Day

Sky Ramirez

Dawn breaks,
and tired— she stands,
with the feeling of dirt
climbing her aging bones.
She trudges to her daily toil.

Spotting stains on the floor,
her brows furrow, spine bends down,
calloused hands grip then drag
a plastic mop down grindingly
against the floor, forward, backward,
left, right— and then again
until the stain is no more.

The cold, white floor tiles gleam,
But muddy footsteps sound nearby.
A weary breath escapes her.
Like so, the day goes on.

Eventually, she clasps her measly cash,
but it's resignedly exchanged
for the cheap familiar food
that keeps her going a little bit longer.

Streetlights flicker in the night,
And with the crumpling of an empty paper plate,
She trudges toward relief.
Finally, dust blankets her shoulders
But relentlessly does dawn break

Reminiscence ʌnəʊsɪnɪməʃ

Cyril James Layug

Crashing waves roar from behind
The cool breeze flowing through his skin
Passing time at the lagoon nearby
As he crouches and gazes at its still waters
Now sitting in a tranquil state
Like the waters, unmoved, unbothered
Admiring the sight, seeing his reflection
Thoughts flow, emotions swell, as tears form
Dropping into a ripple of sentiments
As his silence and contemplation unveil its depth
Like a river of respite, as recollections rush
Echoing every experience
Formed from fragments of feelings
Of days long past, of days happiness once filled
Now days so blue, like the lagoon
Now days chaotic, like the waves behind
Crashing down, like his world, as tears form
Yet he wipes it off
And stares at the disturbed waters, his muddled reflection
As he watches it become still once more
As it pieces back together his person
He realizes, like the waters, he should too
He stood, now walking towards the sea
Gazing at the horizon, approaching tomorrow
going back moving forward
to redeem himself to change himself
With a determination
To live without regrets

Shattered Sun

Nile Jocson

Prologue

When I was sent to stay in Astera-232 for the first time, I got a glimpse of space and its vast empty nothingness. Nothingness, because none of it was reachable to humanity, and thus, space was completely useless to us. Everything is just too far apart, and we didn't have the technology to explore all of its features yet. I was sitting in the observation deck of the ship, looking out into the ocean of star systems, galaxies, and nebulae. While we didn't have the technology to travel to them, we did have the technology to observe them in their full beauty from far far away; field magnifiers enabled us to discern if there was indeed life in the Earth-like exoplanets, and back then it let me look at the deep gray craters of Pyrum, the eruption-like coronal mass ejections of HST-156e5, and the curved light coming from behind Gigantua, a supermassive black hole.

But something else had caught my eye; something that I've only heard of, and had never seen before. An enormous disk of gas and space dust spinning around a fixed point at unimaginable speeds; it looked like a spiraling flame, burning with the color and fluidity of an aurora borealis. A jet of ionized matter shooting out from the center of it, so bright and blue that it looked like an intergalactic laser; but I could see each wave, each pulse and cloud of space stuff being launched at near light-speed into deep space. And at its center, the absolute dark; the blackest thing in the universe, so dense and inescapable, that even light is indefinitely jailed inside of it.

This was a quasar. The brightest thing in the universe, being pow-

ered by the darkest thing in the universe; a metaphorical yin-yang, and the greatest paradox I have ever set my gaze upon. This was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

Quasars gave me a new hope for humanity, a new hope in the science of celestial phenomena; a new hope that we would finally escape the gravity well of our own Sun, and transcend the shackles of our Solar System prison. I'm sick of us, sick of the fact that we have to deface our own planet just to survive. All this technology to make our lives better, but at what cost? Earth has been suffering, and humanity has been too. The irony is not lost on me; that to make so much effort to better our lives, has only sent it deeper into hell.

The unpickable lock of energy lies in the quasar. I'm certain of it. If we somehow managed to harness its power, we would have 100 duodecillion joules of energy per second, at the very tip of our fingertips. We would rule the galaxy with Earth at its center, just like how the supermassive black hole in the center of quasars remain in complete gravitational control of entire galaxies. We would have enough energy to sustain the conquest of humanity until the last breath of the universe. Earth would finally be spared from our destruction.

Today, the key to this unpickable lock has been forged. By my blood, sweat, and tears, I have made the glorious quasar come into life.

Luminescence

The Earth is a polluted and disgusting mess. It's been scarred by centuries of misuse and abuse at the hands of humanity. All of its natural resources have been exhausted; rivers trashed, lakes dried up, forests shaven clean and mountains bored completely through. But there are still some places of relative paradise here in the desolate Terran wasteland; I, for one, live in a particularly peaceful prairie in the middle of what had once been the Chinese border together with my husband. While the lithosphere on Earth has been thoroughly ruined, the sky still remains clear, unscorched and uncaring of the events of the past millenia. Looking up, I am still bombarded by the blue tint stretching from horizon to horizon, I can still pretend like I could eat the clouds above that look like tasty white cotton candy, and I can still feel the rays of the Sun absorb into my cheeks as I wake up on top of my window-side bed in the morning. It's a wonder how the sky could live on as the beautiful thing that it was centuries ago; my great-grandparents, their children, and their childrens' children all remember the sky in the same way, because the sky looked the same to all of us.

Nothing compares to the beauty of the Earth; not the luminous white flowers that sprout out of the pitch black soil in Eclipta, nor the saturated mesa-like color bands of the mountains in Geraea. I've been to every single planet that humanity has colonized ever since we've perfected faster-than-light galactic travel, and even though their features have remained unaffected by the destructive gaze of humans, I wouldn't look at them the same way as I look at the Earth; my home.

This patch of land that my family has been living on was gifted to us by the Galactic Council, the administration that governs over each and every planet that humanity has spread to. Before this, we lived in the bustling city of Bacoor in the Philippines. But ever since

other planets have been colonized, no one has been allowed to stay in the country, nay, the whole planet even. All Filipinos have been forced to move to other planets, with most migrating to Oblivia. We're lucky that we get to just stay here on Earth; right now, the only people allowed here are the people that have been employed to rehabilitate the land and the waters.

I was the proponent of using the jets of ionized matter from far away quasars as a source of energy, the technology that we now call 'relative capture'. Relative capture has removed the barrier of limited energy in research and technology, allowing us to funnel gigantic amounts of power into our systems without wasting a single gram of a planet's natural resources. Without relative capture, humanity would not be colonizing and naming thousands of planets after plant genera; without relative capture, humanity would not be able to terraform uninhabitable planets, or be able to transmute common materials into the rare elements that are only found in the dust clouds of supernovae.

I had retired from astrophysics five years ago because my job had been fully done at this point. Relative capture has been reaching its practical limits, and there is pretty much nothing that can be done to optimize it further. The unfortunate fact is, the energy of a relativistic jet from a quasar billions of light-years away would have redshifted considerably before it reaches the Earth. The only factor now affecting the maximum energy output of relative capture is the distance of the quasar. Relative capture only actually redirects the jet into a collector; it doesn't amplify the jet or create energy from something that isn't already there.

I miss the life of a researcher, and I wish that there was more to do; but frankly, I enjoy resting in the countryside with my husband even more.

“The night sky is so gorgeous today.” I said as I lay down in the recently-cut grass, looking up at the black-blue sky. I give a short glance to my husband Lyco, wondering if he’s also admiring it.

“Indeed it is.” he replies. “It’s also gorgeous how it’s been years and you still make it a thing to always point it out.”

“Indeed I do. Well, the thing is that it always is beautiful.”

“Yes. But I’m reminded more of how fucked we are when I look at it.”

“Why is that?”

“We’ve been trying to darken the sky ever since the Industrial Revolution. We’ve made all the effort to deface it just because, yet the only thing that happened is that it became gray for like, a century. That’s barely a blip in the whole scheme of things.”

“If this is what you think about every single time that we’ve lied down here, then you’d be even more fucked than ‘we’ are.” I retort, jokingly.

“But it’s true, isn’t it?”

“I’d rather the sky didn’t become gray for a century. If we’d continued down that path, it would’ve been like that until the end of time instead.”

“That’s also true. Thank god, I guess.”

“I guess?” I exclaim in feigned disgust.

“I’ll get some more nachos.” he said, giving me a sly smirk. He gets up out of reach of my arms. “You ate them all and left me nothing, you monster.”

“You know I love nachos. And karma. Do get me some more though.”

The widespread usage of relative capture as the primary source of energy on most planets have made the night sky even prettier; in my opinion, at least. Bright yellow streaks litter the sky, and they are the relativistic jets of different quasars being redirected into the planets governed by the Galactic Council. It’s impossible to see, but those streaks are curved with the radii of thousands of light years, angled incredibly precisely, in order not to miss the collectors and wreak guaranteed havoc on what unprotected matter lies beneath. While yes, the energy would have dissipated from travelling in empty space for what used to be an unimaginable distance, the ionized matter would still be carrying joules of energy in the range of decillions. For context, humanity, even now with our massive energy usage, have only used 521 yottajoules of energy in total since the dawn of time. Total relative capture would provide way more than that in a single second, and what it could generate in this singular second would last humanity even beyond the final heat death of the universe.

Of course, no one needs this much energy, so relative capture is designed to redirect only a small part of the jet, so that only a percentage of the energy is harnessed. But in theory, it would be possible

to achieve total relative capture with the machines that we use today. But imagine, imagine if the relativistic jet somehow misses the target collector and absorbs into the ground; what damage would be done to the exposed planet below? I pray that this scenario would never play out in real life, the way that it plays out in my mind every time I notice the magnificent yellow lines in the sky.

“Sorry for the wait. I melted some cheese too. Don’t dip too much, okay? I made this cheese for me, not you. I’m merely letting you share.”

He notices something from the corner of his eye, something that he’d never seen before. He stops just above my field of vision. I look at where his eyes are pointing at, and a spectacular sight cuts all my focus from the view of the Milky Way galaxy around it.

A yellow beam of light.

This beam of light isn’t anything that I’ve seen before; I could tell that this was from very far away, and yet, it puts all the lights in the night sky to shame. The stars around it are completely drowned out by its intense glow, and it looks like its swallowing even more as it travels space. I forget about everything for a second, as I admire the incredible sight.

“That is the most awesome thing that I’ve ever seen in my life.” he says.

I remain frozen in place on the ground, wondering where this beam of light came from. Then it hits me. I stand up and rush inside the house to get my personal field magnifiers, and I look at the enlarged beam in order to see its details. My worst suspicions were confirmed.

The pulsing and the speed of the beam were unmistakable, and its color was textbook; this was a relativistic jet. But this was different; this jet was setting the area around it on fire with how potent it is. This was orders of magnitude more powerful than the jets we use in relative capture, and the disaster that would happen if this hits a planet would be unimaginable. My face grows red.

“Helia, are you okay?”

I don’t reply. My hearing has blurred from my anxiety, and his voice now just sounds like garbling to me. I start to panic, thinking about what had gone wrong at this exact moment. This is the same as the unbearable scenario that had been replaying in my head over and over again, and to say the least, this is not good. The destruction of a planet or even just the lasering of a city is unimaginable, and the consequences would be extreme, for our civilization as a whole. How did all my failsafes fail? All my safety nets cut? How could I fuck up this badly? My mind started spiraling, like how the cloud of gas and dust spirals around a quasar. Right now, I am a mere particle in that dust cloud, and it is getting dizzier and dizzier by the second.

And then the phone rang.

I have no mouth so I must write is a collection of creative works meant to represent the both the magnum opus and the hideous, the celebrations and woes that emerge from the recesses of our minds. Containing both poetry and prose, *I have no mouth so I must write* delicately handles pieces of the human experience and reality, beautiful and somber.