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# All That Comes Apart

Yannis Añonuevo  
Amber Balgan  
Lou Francia

Allanis Mika Quiatchon  
Angela Danielle Ranes  
Francelle Taguinod

Published  
December 2024



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# I am enough

By Angela Danielle Ranes

A fragile boat, its wood worn and thin,  
bears me, adrift  
on the stiffened sea of unfulfilled expectations.  
Beneath, a depth that terrifies.

Sailing on, ripples slowly mature  
into a harsh wave that swells,  
banging against the frail wood.

Water invades, cold and ruthless,  
its presence is creeping higher.  
The boat shifts beneath me as  
its weak frame is disturbed.  
With nothing to hold on to,  
the sea of uncertainty claims me.

Is anyone there? Please—  
save me.

I gasp, drowning  
under endless expectations.  
My mind is in quiet chaos. I grapple  
with the what ifs: regrets that whisper  
“you're not enough,” pulling  
me down into the abyss.

Am I enough to piece together the fragments  
scattered like broken coral  
as water closes around my chest, and  
the world blurs to shadow?

The ocean's taste burns in my throat,  
a bitter reminder of my misery.  
But beneath the chaos of the waves, I hear  
my heart. It's beating  
for the goals forgotten in the tide,  
the strength that I choose to ignore.

Am I enough to rise, to break the surface  
of dreams that weigh like anchors,  
dragging me beneath the waves?

I twist, I writhe,  
my limbs tangled in the sea's embrace—  
unyielding, suffocating.  
Still, I kick. I fight as my lungs beg for air.  
With a surge, I break through—  
I break through the water,  
the weight of doubts that anchor me.  
The sea no longer swallows me whole,  
it only carries me forward,  
and I, with every stroke,  
break free.



# Earth's Weeping

By Angela Danielle Raney

At first, it whispers shyly,  
brushing against the lively, lovely leaves,  
tapping softly on rusted tin roofs.  
Children, of all ages, collected the tiny, fleeting  
beads, slipping through their fingers—  
freely embracing the open sky.  
But then it grows bolder.

A terrifying shout replaces its gentle hum.  
It knocks on doors and  
bangs against walls and windows.  
tearing laundry from their lines,  
sending umbrellas into faraway nowhere.  
Streets blur under its relentless touch and  
turns puddles into mischievous lakes.

Then came the surge—  
thick, brown fluid  
swirling with earth's grief as it  
swallows the land whole,  
as if claiming it by right.  
It rushes over fields, once green and tall,  
wheat swaying like golden waves,  
corn lined up to the horizon.  
It slashes the earth,  
declaring battles with the trees,  
tugging them down unapologetically.

In the town, it rushes through houses  
as an unwelcome guest slipping through every  
vulnerable gap  
rummaging through chairs, toys, and even lives.  
People stumbled in its crushing currents.  
Their shouts were silenced by the rain's roar.

At the quiet echo of the storm's retreat,  
the world stood still.  
Silence was broken only  
by the drip of water and the murmur of what had passed.  
Their hands moved like whispers—  
lifting fractures of broken homes,  
salvaging the fragments of lives  
that the water had almost swallowed whole.

Their eyes lingered  
on the earth's wounds etched by the storm's fury.  
No one dared speak of the rivers  
clogged with the tokens of our regrets  
or the trees clinging with desperate roots.  
Under the sun, still hiding  
behind thinning clouds, they began to rebuild.  
They knelt in the softened soil.  
Each seed, a silent apology, pressed into every scar,  
as if it could heal everything in a breath.

# Return

By Amber Balgan

The church bells are tolling. Gathered between the altar and the coffin are a family of six, each one in tears about the loss of the beloved breadwinner son, Arvin. Always working hard to make sure the rest of his family can be happy, and brushes it off, no sweat. "May he find peace in heaven." Arvin's close friends and colleagues mourn and pray in silence by the pews.

Arvin must be on his way to the afterlife. His family had already left the chapel where his funeral mass was held.

It's been a sorrowful day today, hasn't it?



Eyes wide open.

Arvin stands awake in an empty room. Pitch black, everywhere he looks. No semblance of space or time exists here. He doesn't know how long he'd been asleep, though surely it felt only like a few hours. This must be purgatory, then.

He tries to get up and walk around. He can't see or feel anything. He's unconfident to reach and take a step because he can't even feel the ground he's standing on. He tries to speak to the void, yet not a sound is heard, not even an echo of his own voice, not even his own voice as it exits his mouth. He can't even feel his lips move.



It seems impossible to interact with the world now. Arvin is clueless of what his family is up to. He doesn't know who cared about his stupid, stupid death. He hopes his eulogy was something nice, or that at least nobody laughed at how ridiculous and embarrassing it seems to somehow die to a stray metal pipe falling off a truck on the highway.

Here he was, wandering around in the void for what felt like weeks, silently reflecting and awaiting his judgment, whether he would end up in heaven or hell. He began to feel again every experience he's remembered. He's become happy again, he's become sad again, he's become enraged again, he's become flustered and confused and silly and horrified and proud and worthless and emotionless and vivid again. He's been venting in forced silence about how everything he's worked for went to waste, he's been venting about how much of a burden his breadwinner status was, he should be glad that he died but there's that tinge of remorse that he hadn't taken the choice to slow down. Not that anyone could notice him and his emotions, but when did being alone ever stop Arvin from feeling things?

He starts recounting everyone he's met. His family. His boss. The random people on the street asking for directions every now and again. His former classmates and teachers. His cousins that he visits every Christmas. His neighbors. Laura.

...Laura. How beautiful she was.

The savior that brought him out of the monotony of his office. The one he'd willingly set some time aside for, because she'd done the same for him. Laura was one of the few people Arvin can freely show himself and not just be a cog in the machine. Both Arvin and Laura were imperfect but they understood each other. They were the perfect match.

The memories start to rush back in. Their first date at a cafe within walking distance of their office. Mutual assistance in paperwork. Conversations about their daily lives, about their plans for the near future, their families, their feelings, random fleeting thoughts, their mental health, on a bench in the street after work. Laura's beautiful face, a face Arvin can never forget. Arvin's smile, a rare but charming and sincere smile only Laura can see. Their desire to see the other happy, and their reassurance and comfort when the other wasn't feeling well. Laura was so much better than Arvin at this comfort thing, but she knows Arvin can do the same.

How beautiful her soul is.

"Happy birthday, Arvin. I brought you some cheesecake. I know you've always loved these, I hope you can enjoy some from up there. I know we haven't hung out often but I hope you can rest now. I miss you."

"Dad. You can't just keep spending his money like this. He's dead."

"How about you learn from him and start working?"

"How about you get off your alcohol addiction first!?"

"Oh, so now you're making it my problem?"

"I am NOT fuelling your addiction. You need to stop. Now."

“Anak. It’s no use. I’ve tried to stop him several times and nothing has worked. Please leave him alone. It’s the best we can do.”

“But he wasn’t like this when Arvin was alive!”

“Maybe he’s just trying to cope, ate. I know you would have done the same thing.” “No I wouldn’t.”

Arvin’s still busy saying random things and trying to jog backwards and upside down at the same time, as if he had a voice and legs. He doesn’t know it’s his birthday; it’s impossible to know what day it is today, anyway.

Solitary confinement is hard, but sensory deprivation is even harder. He should have been seeing hallucinations by this point, where are they?

He must be just his soul then, it felt like years and he still can’t prove his soul is in his body right now. Of course he’s a soul stripped from his body. He doesn’t know where or when he is. He can’t feel his own body touch itself. He can’t speak. He can’t hear. He can’t see. He doesn’t know which way is down.

He’s beginning to wonder. Do Heaven and Hell not exist, or is the queue to be judged just that long? Is this what forever really means? Does God exist? Do *any* gods exist?

The afterlife is a maddeningly lonely place, isn’t it?

It’s All Saints’ Day. Arvin’s family is back at his grave again. It’s unusually sunny for a day in November. His family prays the rosary. There are kids mucking about and making noise nearby, and their mother desperately trying to get them to shut up.

Arvin's too used to this senseless and sensationless state he's in. He swears it's been years and nothing's happened. He's this close to doing the nearest thing to killing himself that a soul can possibly do: stop thinking and go unconscious. Heck. He might as well just do—

“Psst. Don't disturb them.”

*“But moooooom.”*

“No. They're busy praying. Go play somewhere else.”

“Fine. Jess, race you to that tree over there!”

“Wait... what is that?”

“OH—”

Everyone in the graveyard is running about in all sorts of directions, apologizing and pleading like it was the end of the world. Some are attempting exorcisms. Some are hiding in the pews of the nearby chapel. Some have run off to the streets to warn everyone else. Some are choosing to stay in the graveyard, ever so cautious about their every step.

The blinding Big Bang of noise and color refuses to settle. Arvin's ears would bleed if he still had ears. His eyes would explode if he still had eyes. Arvin only becomes more confused as time passes, why were his senses suddenly brought back, and why now of all times?

“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,”

“As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.”

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,”

“Amen.”

“WHAT IS THAT GLOWING THING???”

He could barely make out his grandmother holding a rosary and her family praying along. He’s still not adjusting to the return of his senses. It’s disorientating, and it would be physically painful if physical pain somehow applied to souls as well.

He hides in the soil for an hour to rest his eyes and ears. All he can hear from six feet under is a tinge of panicked screaming muddled by the jittering of every critter in the soil, the blow of the breeze above, and the rustling and gravelling of the plants over his head. Once he gets back up he spots a cold slice of cheesecake still in its box, with a card next to it.

*I miss you. – Laura*

He’d eat a fresh one if he had a mouth, but this one’s moldy. Plus, he couldn’t even pick it up if he tried. He’s back on Earth. Might as well try speaking again.

“h...h.h.h..hee.hel.l..lo?..?”

Of course. Nobody can hear his malformed voice. He’s a soul, and nobody can hear a soul stripped from its body. Nobody notices any souls wandering about the Earth because everybody’s assumed they’re all having the time of their lives in Heaven or burning eternally in Hell.

“...is that you, Arvin?”



Nevermind, they've definitely noticed. Everyone in Arvin's family stood back.

"y..yye.es..."

"Arvin, answer me. Give me a sign."

There's no point in speaking anymore. Nobody can hear Arvin, that's how it always was. Arvin wants to run away for a while.

"Don't touch the light. I don't trust it."

"Ma. I can feel his presence. Let me have this."

"We don't know for sure."

"I'm tired of this. Let's go home before anything bad happens."

The glowing light follows them home. They don't trust it. They walk faster, close the door behind them, and shut all the windows, but it's no use. That stupid light can phase through the walls anyway.

"What do you want from us!?"

Oh. The house is full of smashed bottles of alcohol. The rest of his family is covered in scars and scratch marks. Arvin's money has been emptied almost entirely on wasteful things. And everybody was fine with it.

Arvin now has a message to deliver. He may not have a mouth, but who said words were the only way to communicate?

He leads his family to a wall full of awards, honors, certificates, and graduation photos. One blink of an eye later and his family are looking at a wall on fire.

The scent of ashes continues at the opposite side of the house, specifically at the several bottles of alcohol his family recklessly spent with the money he earned from his blood, sweat, and tears. Every piece of property the family owned, one by one, soon went ablaze. The last few standing pieces were a bunch of memoirs and family photos, and even they were reduced to ashes.

Arvin's family are frantically calling the fire department for accounts of a house spontaneously catching fire. Each one covered head-to-toe with burns, some probably already dead, many yelling "I'm sorry!" to no avail. No amount of begging can redeem their sins. The fire department's unavailable.

Arvin leaves as satisfied as his wretched soul can let him be. Revenge is the only way he reasons a soul can. It's late at night. He's storming off to his old office.

"ARVIN!" "..."

"Arvin, please listen." "..."

"Arvin. I don't know what your family's been up to with what you're doing, or why you're so upset, but you saw me and I saw you for what we were. I trusted you. I *cared* for you. Why are you doing this?" Laura's pants are on fire. "AAH-, ARVIN, LISTEN TO ME."

The look on Laura's face couldn't be more concerning. She was clearly stressed from having to deal with her own dead ghosts of family members, and now she's got one more. Was her lover consumed by bloodlust?

“What happened?”

Arvin hints at the burning house in the distance.

“You did that?”

He nods.

“Why?”

Arvin burns a crude drawing into the bark of a nearby tree.

“...oh. Excuse me, I need a little time for myself.”

Laura walks off to a bench a few blocks away. Wailing noises can be heard from the woman, complaining about how horrible of a lover she was and that she felt like she didn't care enough.

Arvin's starting to rethink burning down that building. She's the reason he didn't burn it while he was still alive, and seeing his own rage hurt her was enough to remind him of that. A flood of regret rushes into his soul, as much as his soul could let him feel. He slowly moves toward Laura, and parks by the bench as if to say “I'm sorry.” The two of them, sat on a bench talking about things, just as it was before Arvin's fatal accident.

“...what?”

Arvin still can't be heard, but Laura saw the signs in his heart, as if she could actually hear his soul talk.

“No, I should be sorry. I'm sorry I haven't paid enough attention to what was happening in your life. I'm sorry I couldn't find a way to help. I'm sorry I didn't give you enough time even when I was juggling my own problems.”

“It’s not okay. I’m unforgivable. I did this to you.”

“The damage has already been done! I can’t bring you back to life, even if I wanted to.”

“Why are you forgiving me?”

“You wanted to return the favor?”

Laura had cared enough for Arvin to make him feel like his time spent at the office was actually worth it. Now is the best time Arvin showed Laura once more that he cares, too.

The light guides Laura to a certain coffee shop a few blocks from their office. “Here? In the place where we had our first date? What’s the point?”

“But what about you?”

“It’ll be fine? If you insist.”

Laura sat on the same table that she and Arvin had their first date, this time ordering just for herself. The atmosphere had a tinge of gloom, but with Arvin around it seemed strangely comforting, just as it was when he was still alive. No talking, just silent contemplation on both ends.

Soon they were sitting on the bench again. Even more silent contemplation. After a while, Arvin breaks the silence. His soul glows a certain way, as if to say “I understand, and I forgive you. You are enough.”

“Am I really?”

“I feel like I don’t deserve this.”

Arvin’s unsure how much his soul can convey the message

“You deserve the whole world, and yet you set your sights on the people you truly care about. There’s something beautiful within you. Truly, thank you for all the time you’ve set aside for me.”

Laura’s ugly crying. Her tears can be heard from all the way to her home. Arvin quickly scorches a little message on the bark of another tree. It read:  
I miss you too.

It’s getting really dark. Laura’s family is wondering why she isn’t back yet. Now she’s a woman ugly crying and walking back home. All she could let out to Arvin was a bittersweet and broken “Thank you, and goodbye.”

The clock strikes midnight.

Arvin’s back in the void. Oh no.

That fleeting moment where he was somehow miraculously brought back was enough to make him regain some of his emotions for the meantime, until they deplete again. He’s sent his posthumous message out to everyone he wanted it to reach. He dreads what happens next year and the year after, if he’ll have to relive that Big Bang every time. Especially when his every sense is utterly ruined.

It’s been an emotional day, hasn’t it?





# Beyond the Divide

By Yannis Añonuevo

In the bitter cold of the night, the fire cackled with the rustling of the forest brush. Pror, a battle-hardened Majungasaur captain, was telling the origins of the long-standing Human-Dino war to his squad. Ruk, Luc, and Pror's other squadmates were sat in a circle around the campfire as Pror's horn glistened with the fire while telling the story.

"Oi, listen up," Pror said with a raspy, campfire story voice. "Millions of years ago, the asteroid that was gonna kill us all somehow missed, which caused us dinosaurs to be the dinos we are today. Through generations, oi, these two races lived in harmony and shared the Earth's resources".

"Harmony, pfft. Words out my *maju* tail.", commented Ruk, the squad's vice captain.

Pror continued, "But, *oi*, as the dinosaurs' intelligence grew, the humans saw a biiiig problem with that and thought that the existence of dinosaurs threatened the existence of the humans themselves. the existence of humans themselves. As a result, *oi*, dinosaurs have been exiled from the land of humans and were forced to make do with what they had. In this divide, while humans built their complex machines and whatoi, we dinosaurs just grinded our physical and hunting capabilities to their peak."

“Legend says that in dinosaurs like us Majungasaurs, there are those born with a special body part like my horn here.” Pror said as he points to the horn on his forehead. Luc, a rookie on the squad, exclaimed “Oh snap! Those are called Bloodhorns in the myths right, Cap’n? Those who get super strong if the horn’s user mixes blood with a human?”.

Pror replied with a hopeful smirk, “Well, yes oi. But myths stay myths because they’re usually untrue. But who knows, oi? It just might be.”

His face suddenly turns serious. “Anyways, oi, start packing up. We still have to get recon on the human base.”

As they finished packing up their camp, Pror’s squad—widely known throughout the Dino Armed Forces as the Red Scales—disappeared into the shadows. This small group of Majungasaurs—known as the Red Scales—were not the largest or strongest dinosaurs, but generations of evolution had turned them into the perfect assassins.

In the thick of the night, they crept along a berm that overlooked a human base. It was heavily reinforced and guarded—there were watchtowers that covered every angle surrounding the base and tens of armed human soldiers patrolling the perimeter. Pror carefully observed the base, looking for any opportunities to gather meaningful intelligence.

“Cap, what in the maju would be their reason for having this many soldiers?” whispered Ruk.

Pror replied, “I don’t know, oi. But we’ll just continue observing to find out.”

As the squad was observing, a great beam of light streaked through the sky; its light shone so bright the pitch black night turned into day. Pror and his squad simply looked at it in awe and disbelief as a deafening roar quickly followed.

“Move! I don’t know what that was, oi, but we might’ve been spotted!” Pror yelled to his squad.



Regrouped and unscathed, the Red Scales discussed their next plan of action.

Pror asserted, “Whatever that explosion was, it was a tremendous show of power, oi. Human weapon or not, it is our job as a recon team to assess what happened and report back to headquarters. Gather your weapons; we are going to investigate the explosion site.”

As the squad arrives at the explosion site, they are greeted by a grim sight. A massive crater with torn, lifeless bodies of humans and dinosaurs lay before them.

“Dozens of dead bodies... Humans. Dinos. What the hell would have caused this?” Luk said subtly after witnessing the horror before him.

Ruk, also in shock, replied “I don’t think even Cap knows, but we should do our maju best to investigate.”

As they further approached the crater, they felt a strong force surfing through the air, pushing and pulling against their scales.

Pror crouched near the center of the crater beside an enemy soldier, then suddenly... clank! A piece of glowing rock suddenly attached to Pror’s weapon, and clung on like a magnet.

“What... is this?” Pror asked, feeling more and more uneasy. He immediately yanked it off and stored it into his equipment pack to give it to the Dino Research Team.

Just as the Red Scales were starting to go more around the crater, Pror’s sharp senses detected a human squad, led by an exceptionally strong captain, was rapidly approaching. “Company!” stated Ruk, who also sensed the enemy squad.

Feeling the imminent danger, Pror ordered the Red Scales to once again retreat and head back to base immediately, as they had gathered enough information about the strange explosion. In just a few moments, the squad had disappeared into the shadows and arrived back at the base’s science division.

A few hours after handing off the glowing rock sample to the Triceratops Research Team, the scientists were in utter shock to learn that the fragment was not from this planet; rather, it was from outer space.



“This simply isn’t from Earth. It’s like nothing we’ve ever seen before.” said Trei, a supervising researcher in the lab.

Pror replied, annoyed, “So? Oi, Get to the point!”

“Mr. Pror, it seems that the catastrophic asteroid that nearly wiped life out from the face of this planet millions of years ago... has returned. Our worst fears have come true. ”

After hearing this news, Pror’s heart sank. He broke a cold sweat as this was what had been lingering in the back of his mind as soon as the rock fragment stuck to his weapon a few days ago.

“Oi, how in the hell should I tell my squad this news? More importantly, how are the dinosaurs gonna react to this news?” Pror panickingly asked the scientists. “How much time do we have?”

“Not long. Days, or a week at best. Since you saw the humans at the crater too, they must have discovered the same, grim truth too” replied Trei. “But back to the fragment, it seems to have an energy source—something we could possible harness if given enough time and resources...”, he added.

“But we don’t have enough time!”, Ruk said as he barged in the room.

Pror looked around the room, still unable to process the deathly hand they had been dealt by fate; he saw his reflection—and his horn—in the mirror, and suddenly grabbed Trei by the collar. “Oi, listen! If the asteroid from myths is true as I have thought earlier, then there’s a chance that the Bloodhorn myth is also true, eh?!”.

“W-well... I-I don’t know...”, replied Trei.

Ruk, starting to see how the pieces of this puzzle are falling into place, asked Trei, “Is it possible that if we mix maju human blood and place it on Cap’n’s horn, we could tap into a great power that could obliterate the asteroid?”.

“Once again, I do not know; however, I think it’s worth giving it a shot. But where on Earth will you find a human that will cooperate with a dinosaur—a killer warrior, at that—like yourself, Mr. Pror?” Trei replied.

Pror smirked and simply said, “Oi, I know a powerful human that can probably maximize this horn’s power potential—just not willingly”.

Ruk, realizing what his captain had been thinking, immediately volunteered to accompany his captain, and best friend. As this was reported to the higher-ups and no other timely solution was available, they had no choice but to allow this mission.

The next day, the two Majungasaurs set out to infiltrate the heavily guarded human headquarters. Their target: Bristol—the most powerful human soldier to ever live. His reputation was well-known throughout the dinosaur ranks as the Dino Butcherer, with a tally of 59 confirmed kills.

“Maju! Are you really sure with your decision, Cap? Sounds like the dumbest maju thing you’ve ever thought of! That bastard killed so many of our kind!”, Ruk whispered.

Pror muttered, “Oi, my brother, I simply need you to trust me now. It’s for that very reason, oi, why I believe he is the only one who can fully harness my Bloodhorn power”

With guards lurking in every corner, the pair had to rely on their evolutionary stealth advantages to slip past any humans; however, just as they had reached their target destination, a strong presence suddenly appeared behind them.

“Yo, stinking dinosaurs.” said the deep, bellowing voice behind them. “What’re ‘ya doin’ in my house, HUH?!”

It was Bristol, standing menacingly behind the two Majungasaurs.

Turning around and showing no fear, Pror exclaimed, “Oi! Don’t go acting like some big shot! I’m here to talk to you about the asteroid. You’ve probably heard about it, oi.”

Bristol's fists clenched , "Obviously. That's why this base is on high alert. What about it, eh?"

"You know about the dino myths about the asteroids and the Bloodhorns?", asked Pror, gaining confidence.

Bristol laughed in the face of the captain, exclaiming "Those fairytales? Ha! You expect me to believe those? Not only that, but to give my previous blood? To your filthy kind?".

"Oi, well, do you have any other solutions? Maybe you don't have any considering you are talking to us this much, heh.", said Pror as he grinned. "Oi, that huge rock on a collision course with our planet won't care about our puny war. Dinos... humans... it'll end us all if we don't try anything soon, oi."

After a tense pause, Bristol lowered his guard. "Fine. But if you're lying—"

"Oi, don't worry, I know how this goes," Pror interrupted.

"You'll kill me."



Having been successful in persuading the dinosaurs' greatest enemy into joining hands with them, Pror, Ruk, and Bristol returned to the Dino lab. Pror and Bristol were hooked up to the machine that will perform the Blood-Bond Ritual.

Everyone from the dinosaur headquarters had gathered to see this once-in-a-lifetime spectacle—a dinosaur and a human working together, and the two strongest ones at that.

“I sure hope this works,” said Trei. “We only have one shot at this.”

“Oi, bring that maju on! We either obliterate this asteroid or die trying!”

“Heh, I at least admire your determination, dinosaur.” Bristol replied, as he reached out his hand for Pror’s claws to dig into.

Their mingled blood slowly dripped onto the glowing fragment. A growing energy could be felt radiating from the Majungasaur’s horn all throughout the planet. As energy started coursing through Pror’s body, a blinding light filled the room.

Pror and Bristol started screaming as the insurmountable power brought them agonizing pain. Each second, the power between them grew tenfold.

Trei exclaimed, “It’s working! At this rate, we’d have enough energy to obliterate that damn asteroid! Just hold on a little longer, Mr. Pror and Bristol!”

Bringing out every ounce of strength left within them, the two started thinking of the individuals they cared for—their squads, families, kin, race. They must go through this pain in order to save the planet.



Visions of the asteroid appeared in their mind—a giant fireball on a collision course straight for Earth. All they could think about: completely destroying it.

Pror said, “Bristol! “I need more of your strength. Pour more of it into me!”

The people watching this spectacle simply watched in awe as this cooperation between a human and a dinosaur was never seen before.

Bristol nodded, gripping Pror’s horn with all of his might. An even greater energy flowed into Pror; the scientists watched in awe as the fragment shone so bright it could be a star on its own.

“Finally! Mr. Pror! We have enough energy to obliterate the asteroid! Please, aim it at the asteroid and pour your all into it, this is our only shot!”, Trei exclaimed as he was on the edge of his seat. Pror’s vision sharpened, and for a moment, he felt invincible. He raised his horn, directing the energy outward, as if reaching for the asteroid itself.

“Do it, you maju!” Ruk shouted. “Save us all, Cap’n!”

With all his might, Pror unleashed the might energy at the asteroid. Tearing through everything in its path, it was a force so great that it had one goal: to save the Earth by blasting that space rock into oblivion.

As the great beam of energy hit, the rock shattered into a million fragments, disintegrating into harmless dust.

As everyone in the crowd cheered as they saw the complete destruction of the asteroid, the two heroes, Pror and Bristol collapsed. The intense energy they had released and endured had taken a huge toll on their bodies, and they realized they did not have long to remain in this world.

“Oi, we did it,” Pror murmured with a grin, as that is about all he can say.

“Did we really do it?” Bristol asked, voice hoarse, eyes wide with disbelief.

“Hey, you two! Don’t lose your grip! Don’t tell me you did all that just to die here. You’re heroes!”. Ruk cried, as he realized they didn't have much time left.

As the cheers of the crowd grew louder, both of the warriors’ strength grew ever so weaker.

“You know, it’s not so bad. Going out like this” remarked Bristol, teary-eyed and smiling.

“I get it... We get to save the planet. We might have even ended the war with this one. It’s just unfortunate that we can’t see the world finally at peace” replied Pror, struggling to breathe.

Tears welled up in both of the warriors’ eyes, as they feel their souls slowly leaving their body; however, they smile as they finally reach the light at the end of the tunnel.

They had become beacons of hope. Legends for future generations to tell stories about. They would forever be known as the two brave warriors who bridged the seemingly impassable gap between humans and dinosaurs through a common enemy in the giant cosmic rock that threatened the Earth's destruction.

Statues of the legends will be erected, as they are the ones to bridge the divide and forever end the war that plagued humans and dinosaurs for generations.

# Until the Night Breaks

By Francelle Taguinod

## Before Midnight

Maya De la Cruz ran down the hallway, her footsteps echoing one after the other, her breath catching as she pushed open door after door. The marble floors reflected the light of the moon, shadows stretched unnaturally as if they're there to mock her desperation.

"Ate Evelyn!" she called, her voice cracking and almost gone.

They were just arguing an hour ago. Evelyn had been running around the ballroom, barking orders left and right to finalize the last details of her twenty-first birthday celebration. "Everything must be perfect. This isn't just a party," Evelyn said, zipping through waves of people with a clipboard in hand. "It's Dad's formal announcement. Tomorrow, I will inherit De la Cruz Holdings."

Maya followed her sister's steps throughout the crowd, her eyes followed Evelyn with worry. "And are you sure you're okay with that?"

Evelyn remained silent, but even with the bustling crowd around them, that silence was the loudest.

Now, Maya's desperation mixed with panic. Where is her sister?

At the end of the hall, the study door was ajar. Maya froze as the faint light from the moon wasn't enough to illuminate the dark room. But she could have sworn she smelled something metallic.

She pushed the door open.

To her horror, her older sister, Evelyn lay on the floor, her business suit that she always used to deal with clients, now stained red, and a knife with an ornate handle protruded from her chest. Blood pooled beneath her as the metallic smell continued to fill the air.

"No," Maya whispered. Her knees buckled as she collapsed next to her sister. "No, no, no!"

She cradled Evelyn's body close, her tears spilled onto her face and fell onto her sister's body. "Ate! Wake up, please!"

Maya's pleas were cut short as the grandfather clock behind them began to chime. Midnight.

The sound reverberated through the room, each clang heavier than the last. The pendulum swung wildly, and the air itself seemed to shake.

All of a sudden, Evelyn's blood retreated into her chest. The knife vanished, The then-lifeless body of hers reversed, her final breath going back into her body.

Next to her, Maya suddenly collapsed, her head was throbbing as she screamed. Nothing was making sense. Time was reversing, pulling her with it like a tsunami.

And then suddenly– She blinked.



Sunlight peeked through the curtains of her bedroom window. The faint smell of coffee and toast entered her nose.

Maya looked around frantically, trying to understand what was happening. Her phone then buzzed on her bedside table.

She snatched it and stared at the date.

September 14.



### **During Midnight**

"Maya, where are you?" Evelyn De la Cruz furrowed her eyebrows as she checked over her list once again. Her sister was needed to provide artistic touches to the party as Evelyn recognizes her lack of ability in that department.

After a few more minutes of giving organizers particular orders and rechecking details yet again, finally, Maya showed up.

"There you are! Alright, regarding the flowers– wait," Evelyn paused to touch her sister's hair. "Did you put on extensions?"

Maya's shoulder-length hair had become waist-length, which confused Evelyn as to where Maya even got the time to put extensions on.

Maya swatted her sister's hand away with her free hand. Evelyn noticed that Maya herself was holding her own notebook, but hers was already full, tabs spilling out from the edges.

"Nevermind that. Ate," Maya stared. "You'll die tonight."

Evelyn's face scrunched up for a second, then she waved her sister off. "What is wrong with you today?"

"You don't remember because everything resets," Maya explained as she flipped through her notebook, revealing notes and patterns that were written so fast, Evelyn couldn't even read it. "But I do. I've watched you die over and over again, and no matter what I do, I can't stop it."

Evelyn crossed her arms and paused. "Maya, you do realize how insane you're sounding right now, right? You're saying I die? Every night?" She scoffed. "Yeah right. I told you to stop watching Sci-fi TV shows."

"You don't get it!" Maya cried, desperate to be believed in. "I am not crazy, ate. Every night, I see it happen. The clock strikes twelve, everything rewinds, and we're back."

Evelyn just sighed as she rubbed her temples. "Maya, I don't have time for this."

As Maya's pleas fell on deaf ears, she resolved to try something different. "Fine, just follow me," she said as she dragged Evelyn towards the study.

She dragged Evelyn out of the ballroom and into the long, marble hallway. Evelyn quietly followed her grimacing sister as they walked.

Maya avoided this hallway; the shadows unsettled her. But now that it was daytime, she and her sister were basking in the sunlight that came from the windows. The marble floors glinted as if to signify something hopeful.

They reached the end of the hallway, wherein the door to their left was ajar. Maya pushed the door open and went inside the spacious study. To their side, a brown study table was filled to the brim with papers, all with the same scribbles and patterns to the notebook that Maya had shown her sister before. In front of them, a grandfather clock stood, its gold pendulum swinging periodically.

"So why are we here?" Evelyn picked up a handful of papers and began reading them. "This is the clock that resets everything. This is the reason why we're here." Maya folded her arms. "A clock? Seriously?"

"I know it sounds crazy, ate. But every time you die, I hear the chime— all from this clock. And everything rewinds." Maya explained.

Evelyn raised an eyebrow, "And no one remembers except you?"

Maya nodded. "It's like... everyone resets, but not me. I've spent a year watching the same day play out."

Evelyn still didn't believe her, but seeing how serious her sister has been for the past few minutes makes her waver. "Maya, I still think you're insane. But... If what you're saying is true, then what's causing it?"

"I don't know." Maya admitted. "But it always ends in the same way. You die, ate. Over and over. And I just... can't do this anymore."



Evelyn sighed. "Fine. What do we do now?"

They spent all day trying to understand the notes that were on the table. For the past year in the time loop, Maya had claimed this room as her study. Before, it was rarely used. It had been a storage room for years, its dark corners and cluttered surfaces a quiet afterthought in the bustling household. But Maya needed some space as she went on, which is why this was where she would compile all her findings and realizations about the time loop. But ever so often, when Maya would leave the study, Evelyn would coincidentally come in here and meet her end. Evelyn would grimace whenever she would see dried spots of blood on papers here and there, but this just solidified Maya's story of her dying.

Night fell, and Maya refused to leave Evelyn's side.

"You're not going anywhere without me." Maya said as she clutched her notebook tightly, new tabs springing from its edge.

Evelyn rolled her eyes, "I'm not a child. I think I can handle staying alive."

"You don't understand!" Maya snapped, her voice cracking. "I've tried this before. Every time I think I've figured it out– I think I've saved you– something still happens, and you die!"

Evelyn stayed silent. "Fine, I'll stay close," she muttered.

But as the evening progressed, Evelyn's sense of responsibility resurfaced. People called for her attention, and organizers needed last-minute decisions. Soon, Evelyn was swept back into the chaos of party planning.

Maya tried to warn her, reminding her of what was about to happen, but Evelyn just brushed her off. "I'm staying in public. Nothing will happen with this many people around."

This aggravated Maya, but she couldn't do anything. She just kept quiet and followed her sister closely.

At 11:30 PM, Evelyn's phone buzzed with the usual call. When she was about to answer, Maya grabbed it, declined the call and glared at her sister.

"I said no phone calls!" Maya whispered icily.

"It's probably just Dad," Evelyn replied. "Do you think he's out to get me too?"

Maya dismissed that thought. Despite her constant vigilance, the crowd kept on getting bigger and bigger. It was too thick to navigate, the loud chatter of people added to the confusion of the two siblings.

Maya paused for a moment, lost in thought, when she realized that Evelyn slipped out of sight. Maya's stomach dropped as she realized Evelyn was gone.

Once again, Maya rushed out the ballroom, looking for any trace of Evelyn. Tall woman, dark long hair, lavender suit, Evelyn is not someone to lose in a crowd. Panic set in as she pushed past the crowd, and into the long hallway.

She ran and ran, her breaths coming in short gasps. She finally reached the study, but she paused as the door was ajar.

Inside, Evelyn was on the floor, blood pooling beneath her. The ornate knife once again protruded from her body, this time her stomach.

"No!" Maya screamed, dropping to her knees.

And right on time, the grandfather clock began to chime. Midnight.

Maya barely had time to register the scene before the world folded in on itself again. Everything reversed, the knife disappeared, and... she blinked.

As she gasped, she sat up on her bed. She clutched her blanket as the morning light blinded her from the window. She checked her phone.

September 14. Again.

Maya's tears spilled silently as she stared at the familiar date. She'd failed. Again. After a dejected moment of self-reflecting, Maya got up and went to business.

The two siblings met at the ballroom once again, with Evelyn ordering people around as usual, when suddenly, she paused and clutched her head.

Maya went to her side to assist her, and Evelyn held on for support. "Just a headache," Evelyn explained, "ever since I woke up, I keep having strange images of a knife?"

Maya's eyes widened. She suddenly tugged on Evelyn as they both ran to the study.

“Does this place look familiar?” Maya questioned as soon as they reached the room. Evelyn looked around, her eyes wide in shock. “Is this... where I got these?”

Evelyn lifted her blouse up to her stomach, which revealed numerous scars, all the same length, all the same width, just different locations.

Maya gasped as she saw these. Thoughts raced through her mind for answers about why only now did the scars show themselves, but none fit right.

Although tired of it, Maya explained the events that happened to Evelyn, and Evelyn, having physical scars to prove it, believed right away.

Maya rambled on and on again about her worries, but she was snapped away from her thoughts when Evelyn interrupted, “We don't have time to waste. If I'm really going to die again tonight, let's stop it this time.”

Maya nodded, her determination flickering back to life. “Okay. Here's the plan.”

They agreed to keep close that night, and just look for anything that was out of the ordinary. People were bustling again as usual, planning for the big party tomorrow. Maya and Evelyn stuck together as their eyes scanned the room.

“I've been watching these people for months,” Maya whispered, nodding towards the crowd in front of them. “That janitor there near the stage, he avoids you like the plague. And that organizer over there by the lights, he'll ask you about a detail about the spotlight every time, without fail. And our tito, Marco... Something's off about him.”

Evelyn then glanced at their uncle, who stood at the edge of the room, his laugh too loud, his smile too forced. "He's always been bitter about Dad cutting him out of the company. But would he really...?"

Maya didn't reply as she found that possibility too painful. She avoided thinking about it for months which is why she was only starting to investigate him.

She flipped through her notebook, adding notes about the movements of each suspect. The organizer nervously checking his watch, the janitor hovering near the study, Marco's darting gaze.

At 11:30PM, Evelyn's phone buzzed with that same mysterious call. She glanced at Maya, who gave a firm shake of her head. This time, Evelyn declined the call.

"Good," Maya smiled. "Now let's stick together."

But the crowd had other plans. Organizers asked once again for Evelyn's attention, dragging her from place to place despite Maya's protests.

As the minutes went by, Maya's anxiety deepened. She pushed through the crowd, searching for Evelyn. As she reached the study, she pushed the door open and saw Marco stood over Evelyn, knife in hand.

"Stop!" Maya screamed, lunging forward to grab the knife.

Marco turned, startled. Evelyn broke free of his grip as he began to fight with Maya.

"Why are you doing this?" Evelyn struggled to speak.

Marco sneered, his voice low. "You think your father built this empire on honesty? He took it from me. I'm just taking it back."

Maya twisted Marco's hands and wrenched the knife free. She ducked low, rushing like a bull, and shoved him to the ground. Marco's face distorted, trying to find a way to win.

"I have tried so many times to stop this. To think that you were the culprit." Maya was consumed with rage as she faced her uncle. But to her surprise, the weakened Evelyn slightly grabbed her shin, looking at her softly.

Maya's determination faded. She didn't want to be like her uncle. She made up her mind.

She screamed, swinging the blade in her hand. Marco covered himself with his hands in fear, but nothing ever reached him. Instead, glass shattered.

Maya used the knife to destroy the grandfather clock. She engraved the knife in the middle, stopping the gold pendulum from reaching the other side.

With this, the room erupted into chaos as the clock chimed. This time, the bells sounded distorted, trying so hard to make a sound. Time once again folded on itself, and everything reversed. And then, Maya blinked.

She suddenly sat on her bed, her mind racing and her heart pounding. Sunlight streamed from the window, brighter than usual. The smell of coffee floated from the kitchen. Trembling, Maya slowly reached for her buzzing phone.

September 15.

She let out a shaky laugh, tears spilling down her cheeks. It was finally over.



## After Midnight

Maya found Evelyn in the kitchen, sipping coffee as if nothing happened. The sight of her sister made Maya's knees weak.

She hugged her from behind, which surprised Evelyn, but she hugged back nonetheless. "We did it." Evelyn whispered. Maya smiled once more. "Happy birthday, ate."

The rest of the day was filled with laughter as the birthday party finally commenced. Guests were shrieking with joy as they socialized with other elites, not knowing what took place in this very building the day before.

Later that evening, Evelyn approached her father, Lawrence De la Cruz. Her hands were clammy as she approached the stern man.

She was ready to accept the company, but Maya urged her to speak her mind to their father and do what she really wanted to do. And after the whole situation from yesterday, newfound strength and confidence surged through her. She's finally ready.

But as Evelyn approached her father, her stomach churned. She had practiced the words in her mind, but now they tangled on her tongue.

"Dad, I... I can't take over the company."

She spent the next minutes explaining why she can't, and over time, her tone grew steady, much like her determination.

"I've spent my life doing what you wanted, but this isn't what I want," Evelyn confessed as she lowered her gaze. "I hope you understand."

Lawrence studied his daughter, his expression unreadable. Then after what seemed like eternity for Evelyn, Lawrence reached for her hands.

"I raised you to be decisive, anak. If this is your choice, I'll respect it." Lawrence said with a smile.

Evelyn exhaled as relief washed over her. Unbeknownst to them, Maya was listening not far from them, and she smiled as well, watching her sister finally get what she wanted. For the first time, the clock struck midnight– and nothing happened.

Time had moved forward at last.



# Amnesia

By Quiatchon

*I knew I was gonna end things when I went to see him.*

People say that there are three stages in a relationship. The romance stage is where two persons become attracted and start to fall in love. It is the phase where you feel the excitement. This electrifying feeling of connection with the person. It is the time that made you believe in magic and its wonders in the body of a person that you love. However, just like the common phrase, nothing is perfect in this world. Here comes the second phase of love, the conflict stage, where the disagreements begin. You start to see the imperfections of one another. You hurt and disappoint each other. They say that this part is the hardest of all. And only those that overcome this stage finally get to the third and last phase, the commitment stage, where real love comes in.

It was nearing the end of March when I first saw him. I went to this billiards place in Intramuros called Mags—everyone at school called it that. A variety of students from Letran, LPU, PLM, and Mapua were staying there to pass the time between classes. I was going to meet my friends there when I saw him sitting in a corner waiting for his turn to play. NGL, he caught my eye. He had this soft boy, lover boy type of aura that got me a bit curious about him. I think the heavens favored me when I found out that he was a friend of a friend and was also a twelfth grade student from my school. I hated to admit it but yes, he caught my eye at first. But just that—nothing more, nothing less. In fact, I wasn't even looking for someone to be in a relationship with at that time. I've been burned, and I should learn from it at once.

Days after that, I started going back to Mags during my vacant periods, with the pure intention of learning how to play billiards. It was just a five-minute walk from school, a perfect little escape for a stressful week. Each time I went, he was there looking all too serious. Funny enough, I saw him more at Mags than I ever did at school. We've had small talks, became friends, and played a few games together, and over time, I got to know him. It was slow, but I found myself starting to like him. It all began with his smile. From a distance, I would watch him play, catching a glimpse of his smile as he landed a shot. It was effortless, pure. Knowing him as someone who has undergone a lot of traumas and pain, I liked to see him smile. From that moment on, I've told myself that I'll do whatever it takes to keep his smile on his face for a longer time because he deserves that.

For weeks, we talked and chatted with each other every single day, never seemed to run out of words like it was the most natural thing in the world. Each time our schedules matched, we would eat out and stroll along the streets of Intramuros, just enjoying each other's company while exploring the endless charm of the old city. During our finals, he was there to support and help me to study for exams. I was an overachiever and he's not. He wasn't the type to attend class on time or go an extra mile with academics, but he was there. It was 5:30 in the morning and he was by the school gate waiting for me. He was holding printed materials just so I could review better. He would change his ways just for me. *Who wouldn't fall for a guy like him?* He would accompany me with errands and make time for me whenever I needed a shoulder to lean on.

He became my rant buddy, my advice giver, and most of all, my best friend. With him, the mundane became something extraordinary, like the city streets we walked together, so familiar yet filled with new stories waiting to unfold. As time went on, I found myself growing more drawn to him—not just for who he was as a person, but for the kind of man he was becoming in my eyes. I liked how carefree he was, and how he just did what made him happy without overthinking it. I also liked how he was such a good friend to his peers. In him, I saw a very loving person. He would do impractical things for me that I wouldn't even dare to do for myself. He pursued not just me, but also my parents. He would shower me with random gifts and things that he thought I might need. He would walk me home even if his house was leading in the opposite way. He didn't just pursue me; he pursued my parents too. And most importantly, he was always and in all ways there for me.

Over the months, I realized how lucky I was to be with a person like him and how I would deeply regret losing him. So I thought to myself, yes, I would love to explore the wonders of life with him. And we became officially together on the 4th of August. For a while, it felt like everything I could've wanted. Things were easy, and fun. He was all I could wish for. We were sailing smoothly in our relationship up until a change of environment happened. We were about to embark on our college years in different schools. We've become busier than before, barely saw each other, and our schedules never lined up.

*When the gaps grew too big, that's when doubts started creeping in.*

With this set up just like any other relationship, I started to have doubts. I was too focused on always being on the receiving end that I wondered if I was enough for him. Doubts after doubts. Was I enough for him? Did he really love me, or was I just someone convenient? Could I trust him? Was I losing myself trying to keep us together? And the worst—what if he found someone better, someone closer, someone who could give him more than I could? I CAN'T TAKE IT. The overthinking drove me insane. The things that I liked about him started to turn into the things that I hated about him. I hated how carefree he was, making immature decisions at times. I hated how he'd go out of his way for his ex in ways he didn't for me. I hated how friendly he was with everyone—it made me jealous. I hated how he had more time with them than with me. I hated how they could be there to spend lots of time with him and I can't. I hated how we had changed. I hated how we went from spending time almost everyday to barely seeing each other in a week. I hated being far from him.

*If love was meant to make you feel at peace, then why does this love hurt? It pains me to be in this situation, overthinking each night.*

So I've decided. On October 29th, I was about to meet him for the last time. It was a casual date that we had planned. After class, I headed straight towards his school. I was walking on the alley towards his school gate, fully decided to finally end things after numerous debates in my head. At that time, I thought it was what's best for us.



It was around 4 pm, the sun was still up. I was beside the street food vendor waiting for him to come out. After some time, students started to stream out, and here I was trying to search for him through the crowd. Strange enough, I can't feel anything. I've been through a lot of overthinking, sadness, anxiety, and burnouts but at that time it felt numb as if I was done with it. I wasn't struggling but I'm also not happy at the same time like something in me has died. After waiting for a couple of minutes, I finally saw him. And there he was, walking towards me with a smile on his face. This familiar view. It hit me like a wave. A sudden burst of emotions streams out of my blood vessels. It is that smile. Suddenly, everything felt right as if it was just what I was looking for. I've felt alive again. I remembered how I first fell in love with his smile at Mags. The scenes from before kept flashing back in my mind. How I tried to catch a glimpse of that smile. How I treasured it so much and how I promised myself to keep that smile on his face for the longest time. What was I thinking? I almost broke my promise and lost what we had over nothing.

And then I realized something. Perhaps, the opposite of love is not hating but rather forgetting. Forgetting the reason you fell in love in the first place, forgetting that feeling that made everything worth it. Somewhere along the way, I let myself forget. But in that moment, seeing him smile, I remembered.

# Warning Signs

By Lou Francia

the shadow of your body is projected  
onto the half-painted wooden walls—asleep,  
at peace only with yourself. a warm glow engulfs you.  
outside is the convergence of all the neon lights:  
a false sight of security (trust me, i'd know).

out there, i've seen how  
boys plead for mercy, convince  
badged-officers of a deserving life  
only meet their end—faced blotted out,  
bodies under cardboard-scribbled accusations.

within these walls, they brand us as guilty.  
our only crime? to live in these streets—  
our haven between heaven and hell,  
where we are engulfed by the smell of smoke  
and the taste of mildew in gutters, but where our  
neighbors call us by our real names.  
where our hair prickles under  
the unforgiving sun, but seek solace  
in bad karaoke and coke  
at the corner sari-sari store.  
where we shiver in the howls of the  
monsoon wind, but find warmth in  
pressed bodies and tattered bedsheets.

our so-called guardians  
will not save you, but i will.  
i will sheathe you in my arms;  
in my bruised, cigarette-pucked skin.  
when the voices call our names,  
i will cover your ears  
so you do not hear the screaming.  
when predators break through our doorstep,  
i will etch our initials into the bones of these walls  
so that our voices echo through its cracks.  
when they fire their gunshots,  
i will trace your lips so i remember our last breaths.  
i know now, that the day i yearned for justice  
was the day i proclaimed myself dead



# Up Here

By Lou Francia

maya birds circle like carousels  
around empty skies: an infinite blue.  
to them, i am but a stranger  
watching life through a glass cage,  
yearning for more than  
late nights and migraines,  
more than this endless solitude,  
awaiting the decision of the gods  
to break me out of this curse of repetition—  
stuck on rewind.

cameras freeze the instant of revelation:  
    *i shall no longer await*  
    *the decision of the gods.*  
on the ledge, arms outstretched—  
    i plunge straight through the glass;  
the taste of liberation dancing on my lips.

so this is what it means to break free—  
anxious palpitations put to halt,  
soaring above the skyline that was never mine,  
racing the early rays of dawn,  
chasing the horizon that cries out my name.

a brief glance back—  
regrets littered in the spaces between  
unfinished lyrics on scribbled paper,  
a boy running past with his newly-tuned guitar,  
old-timey tunes spilling out  
from my grandmother's bedroom.  
this was life.  
all i leave behind.

then, a last visit.  
my lover on the couch, deep in a whirlwind slumber.  
in his soft breaths, i am reminded  
of our fleeting happiness—  
of ice cream and childish laughter,  
of ghost kisses and fingers entwined,  
the tang of salty flesh and air.

for a split second, i am tempted to return,  
to go slip back into warm, tender nights  
and sweet comforts in my lover's arms.  
to no risks and no regrets.  
i linger a while: a last act of rebellion—  
watching life from up above.

finally, i turn forward and decide.  
as above, so below: new beginnings, but no goodbyes.  
i continue to glide alongside the maya birds  
into the vast, endless sky.



In Partial Fulfillment of  
Creative Writing 10