

IN OUR OWN WORDS:

# QUEER

6 VISUAL STORIES BY YOUNG PEOPLE



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VISUAL STORIES BY YOUNG PEOPLE

First edition 2022

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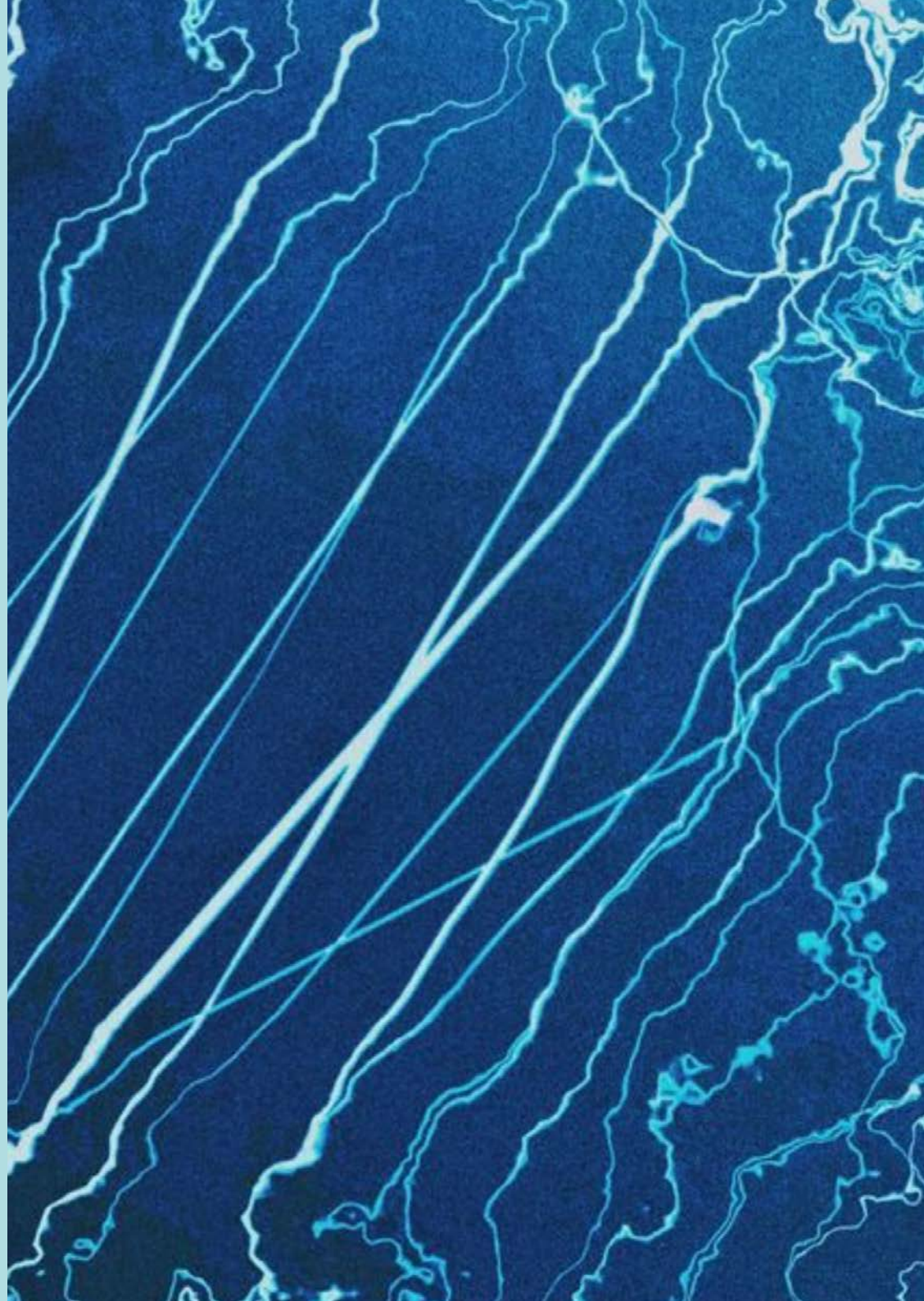


# Project Description

‘QUEER: In Our Own Words’ was a three-month transdisciplinary mentorship project that brought together twelve Nepali queer storytellers, six writers and six artists allocated through an open call. The main objective of this project was to create a safe space for the Nepali queer community of artists and writers to learn and explore their writing and visual storytelling skills. By giving access to multiple resources of art, writing, and networking, each element of the mentorship was designed to support the participants to be empowered and in control of their narrative and tell stories that respond not only to their personal experiences but also to the whole community.

For three months, the participants attended several physical and online workshops facilitated by queer artists and writers from Nepal and the UK during the project. The sessions supported the participants in different aspects; the artists and writers explored several perspectives, practices and techniques to dive deeper into their crafts. Similarly, through sharing sessions, the participants also got exposed to queer activists who have been relentlessly fighting against queerphobia in Nepal. This engagement highlighted how they could use their art and writings to support the queer movement.

Besides receiving continuous guidance and feedback on their journey from our team and the facilitators, three mentors of queer community from diverse social backgrounds also guided the participants throughout the project. Their constant feedback and suggestions played a considerable role in supporting our participants in the creative process. Lastly, in December 2021, the participants participated in a physical exhibition that more than 1000 people attended. They showcased the progress of their creations to explore the context of public displays and prepare them for the Women of the World Festival.





# About British Council

The British Council builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language.

Arts has been central to the British Council's cultural relations work. We create new relationships between artists, organisations and audiences to develop stronger and more inclusive creative sectors around the world. We help artists break new ground, support creativity and innovation, increase capacity by building skills to support livelihoods and cultural enterprise, extend safe spaces for creative exchanges and contribute to research and policy.

In our own words is a platform that enables people from diverse backgrounds to tell their stories. The pilot edition of the programme in 2020 featured young people who collaborated with illustrators to tell stories focusing on gender and mental health.

# About Kaalo.101

At Kaalo.101, we aim to create a socially conscious, completely independent creative space that uses art to uplift emerging Nepali artists while engaging with our surrounding physical, social and cultural environment through an accessible, communicative and collaborative exchange.

During our journey on the “black train”, we renovated four traditional Newa houses in Patan DIY-style into exhibition spaces, residencies, studios and libraries, where we continuously explore intentional and sustainable co-creating and -existence. These spaces are used for a permanent multimedia urban art collection, exhibitions, workshops, mentorships, concerts, reading circles, discussions, experimental artists, and community-led projects. However, we go beyond Kaalo.101's walls to facilitate art festivals (for example, in collaboration with MicroGalleries and POW!WOW!Worldwide), as well as exhibits in abandoned homes and hidden courtyards around Patan.

Kaalo.101 is not only a physical space but also a safe and comfortable home for our diverse and transcultural family of versatile artists and activists. We support people with questions and aim to offer a safe environment to present any kind of contemporary art and express criticism by providing solidarity and empowerment. We value the vibe of an accepting and supporting family and don't try to fit anybody's ideas about art and society but explore our own possibilities, values, beliefs and non-hierarchical coexistence.

We encourage individuality and empower people to go beyond what they expect is possible — we aren't just an art space but a living, breathing house that aims to make art accessible by challenging capitalism, hierarchies and ideas such as the colonial white cube: We aim to offer a potential form of expression for anybody without taking elitist art narratives and gatekeeping into account. Our house, the art in it and the connected community try to relate Nepal's cultures, histories and heritage with contemporary perspectives to share experimental works and thoughts that connect to both contexts. This juxtaposition of our physical and cultural setting with contemporary, critical and progressive approaches, alongside our majorly Nepali (but as well international) community, gives us fertile ground to continually learn, unlearn and relearn from each other and the space around us.

IN OUR

OWN WORDS

– Prologue –

someday someone is going to point out  
that I don't take longer pauses  
in between my cigarette puffs  
someday somebody's going to notice me  
tapping my foot incessantly  
My nails that I have bitten and made them look,  
let's just say, not pretty  
Right. My indecisiveness.  
Where do we begin to unravel this mystery?

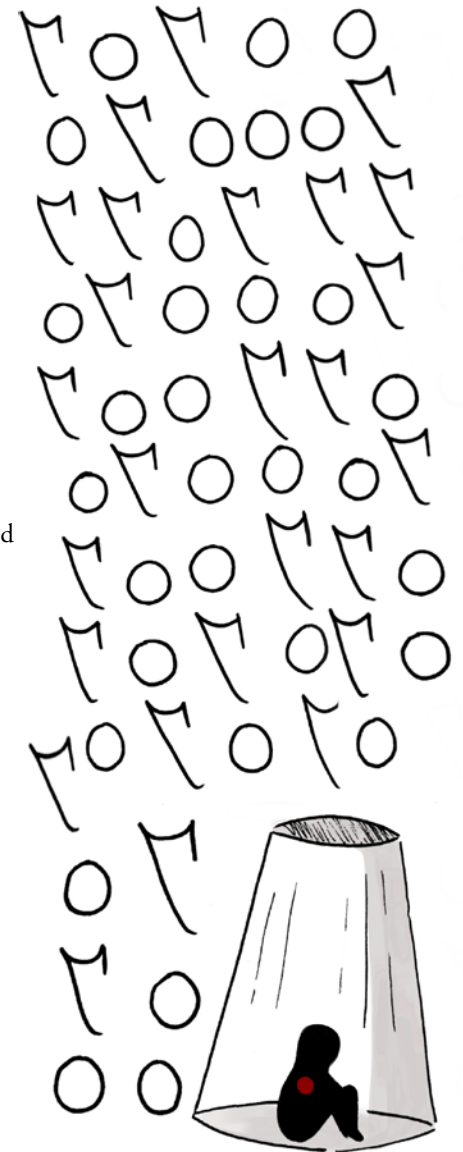


Confined my storm  
Restrained the yearning  
The yearning to reach for a shameless state  
Sparked with the desire for more without judgement  
But my flame dimmed  
Boarded my windows of light  
The twirling of fire, the rhythmic steps  
Igniting the light towards my reflection  
Although my existence is still a burning enigma

A misunderstood tale  
Combustion of lies  
Where we lie  
Ashen ground devoid of life  
As the candle breathes its last flick of flame  
Our pyre has long been made by the unnamed

Death with a name at last  
A hand shoots out of the forsaken land  
Now grounded with gratitude for arms that pulled  
me up  
No longer do roots bind  
Through the embers, I wake  
Skin lingering of cinder and smoke  
Old bones blazed, taking shape  
Like metal forged on fire  
Now sharper, undone yet unafraid

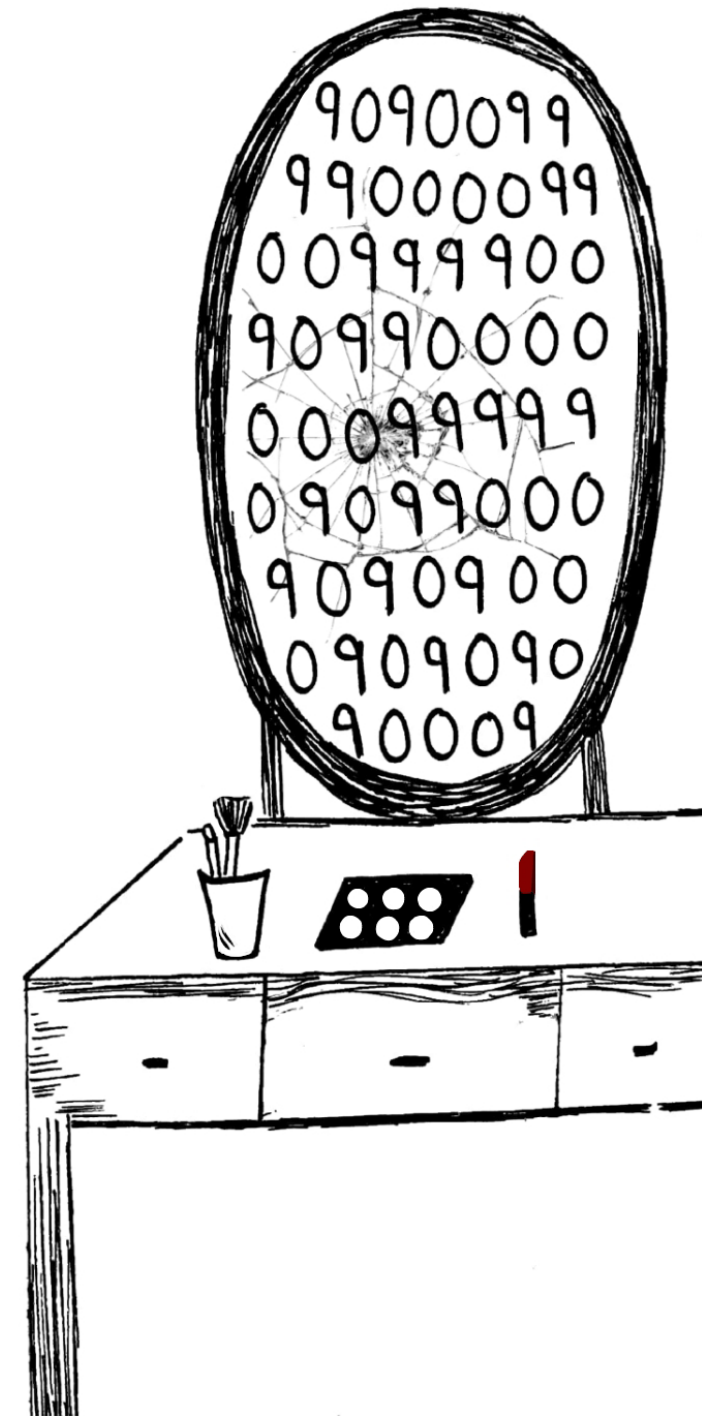
Growing through soils of solitude,  
Wandering for Solace  
Like a foxglove in a desert  
Travellers came to visit but never to stay  
Detached, I parted ways  
Gone with the wind,  
I let go



Gripping fear smashes the reflector  
The face on the wall is not my own  
The golden circle is an eyesore  
Into a lightless space  
The knot lodged on my throat  
As I labor with the lexicon  
For the pretentious privileged

Wish the language we communicate in  
Turned the table  
And pointed the responsibility at  
those who have always fitted in.  
“Why didn’t you extend the table?”  
“Why is inclusivity your nightmare?”  
For I am a purple alien  
Peering through a dark closet  
In this world riddled with  
The normalcy of blues and pinks  
What passport do I apply for  
To visit the towns of cellulitis  
Is it the red one?  
To stop by the flab lands  
Or perhaps it’s the green one?

The skin that I was born with  
feels foreign as I look into the mirror  
In layers of socially acceptable fabrics  
Do I carry extra luggage of androgyny?  
To prevent the eye rolls of passengers  
Whom I don’t even owe my queerness





In this journey as a black sheep  
I long to be seen with secrecy  
Like the ocean carrying  
ambiguity in abundance  
I resonate with the ocean  
Her depth unfathomable  
Home and a homewrecker  
She is salty and so am I  
But kind when calm  
She is resilient, I am hardly one  
Trying or Pretending to be.

I have flown so far as told  
like a lifeless fish  
Suffocation persists  
As I try to rise  
above the mediocre normative  
A castaway, conforming to society

But I rebel subtly  
Made friends and foes along the way  
who relate and resent my tiny revolutions  
deconstruction comes with its demands  
you cave in to fit the clan most times  
and surprisingly chances to flip the narrative  
there's no winning here  
whatever it takes, I will kiss the glory  
as I keep swimming towards breaking the binary



#### – Epilogue –

Some days i break the binary,  
most days i find myself broken  
While attempting to dismantle  
Societal constructs buried deep into my subconscious  
There is neither an agenda nor a need for attention  
Just a human with angst trying to get by  
Because I breathe and I am valid.





### **Birat (he/him)**

Birat Bijay Ojha is a queer man from Itahari. He has been working as a content writer in a professional capacity for a little over a year now. He writes poetry and rants about social injustice issues on social media. He loves to watch series and sitcoms, travel, and read novels.

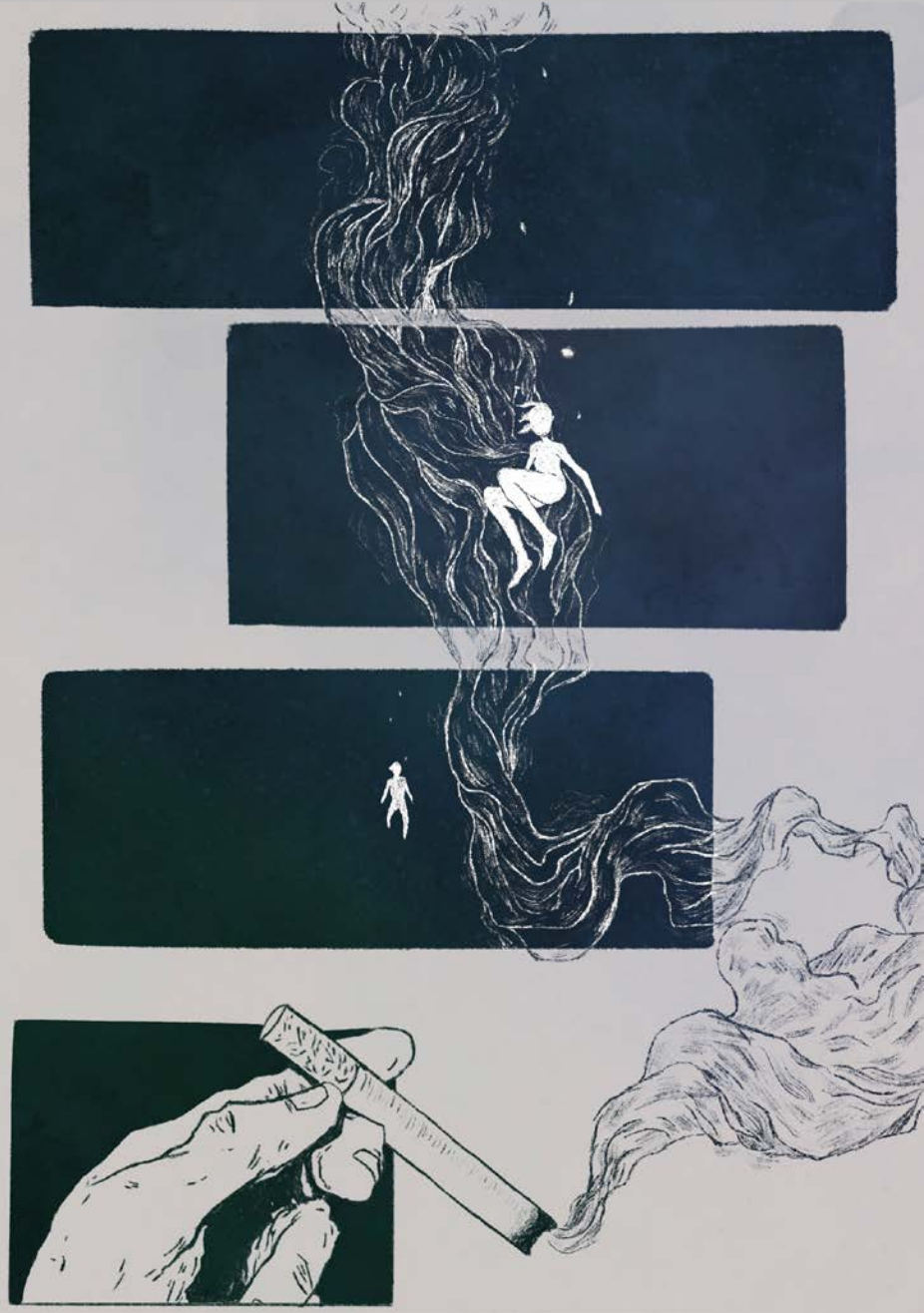
*Instagram account: @bwriteous*

### **Forest (they/them)**

Forest is a queer artist who has interests in various things. They have a versatile art style and prefer their works to have a metaphorical level. Art is a form of therapy and a medium of expression for them. They would like their creations to be warm and make one feel at home or maybe teleport them into a new world or perspective.

*Instagram account: @forestghibli*

# Suvi/Jharana





It was now my turn to introduce myself.

"Hi, everyone. I am-" was all that I had managed to say before all hell broke loose. My classmates laughed. As their laughs got louder, my voice got smaller. I ended up not introducing myself properly and sat silently on my seat that entire day. This was my typical day at school. I stayed away from everyone, tried not to bother them in fear of being bullied.

I understood pretty quickly that everyone pushed me away due to my appearance. My obesity didn't make things easier for me and made the comments I received even worse. Middle schoolers only knew so much about others' feelings. They failed to realize that there was more to me than that. But so did I.

Nothing has really changed since then. I overheard the only person I called my friend joking about my insecurities with others. She hasn't realized yet that I am faking my smile when we hang out. I have been creating excuses in my head to avoid confronting her.

It's okay, I tell myself. It's okay. It's okay.

But who am I kidding? Who am I kidding really?

It's not okay.

I am not okay.

The heaviness in my chest suffocates me. Maybe it's the winter air, I say. Or just the cigarette I smoked an hour ago.





Ever so easily denying the emotions I am carrying. I am filled with a lot of things nowadays, heavy with emotions and words both. But both of them spill never or spill all at once that it's scary.

Sadness seems like a home to me; almost like my default state, and maybe that is why I thrive in sadness, in not having to worry about what would go wrong when you are already at the bottom of the pit anyways and I let people thrive off of me, use me to get themselves out of the pit, it seems.

Honestly, the only thing worse than sadness is momentary happiness. The only thing worse than an enemy is a friend who turns out was a snake all along.

This has become my reality as I seek to find an equal world. Initially, I gave in to silence. Now, I have realized that silence won't work. The intense emotions I have kept with me for years have only started coming out as words recently. Today I write with anger and honesty. The day I accept the world as faulty and unequal it is and lose hope is the day my pen stops, and my words get lost somewhere. All I know is that today is not that day. Today I write, today I am hopeful.

I tell myself I will write the pain away.  
So, that is what I do.  
I write.



### **Suvi (she/her)**

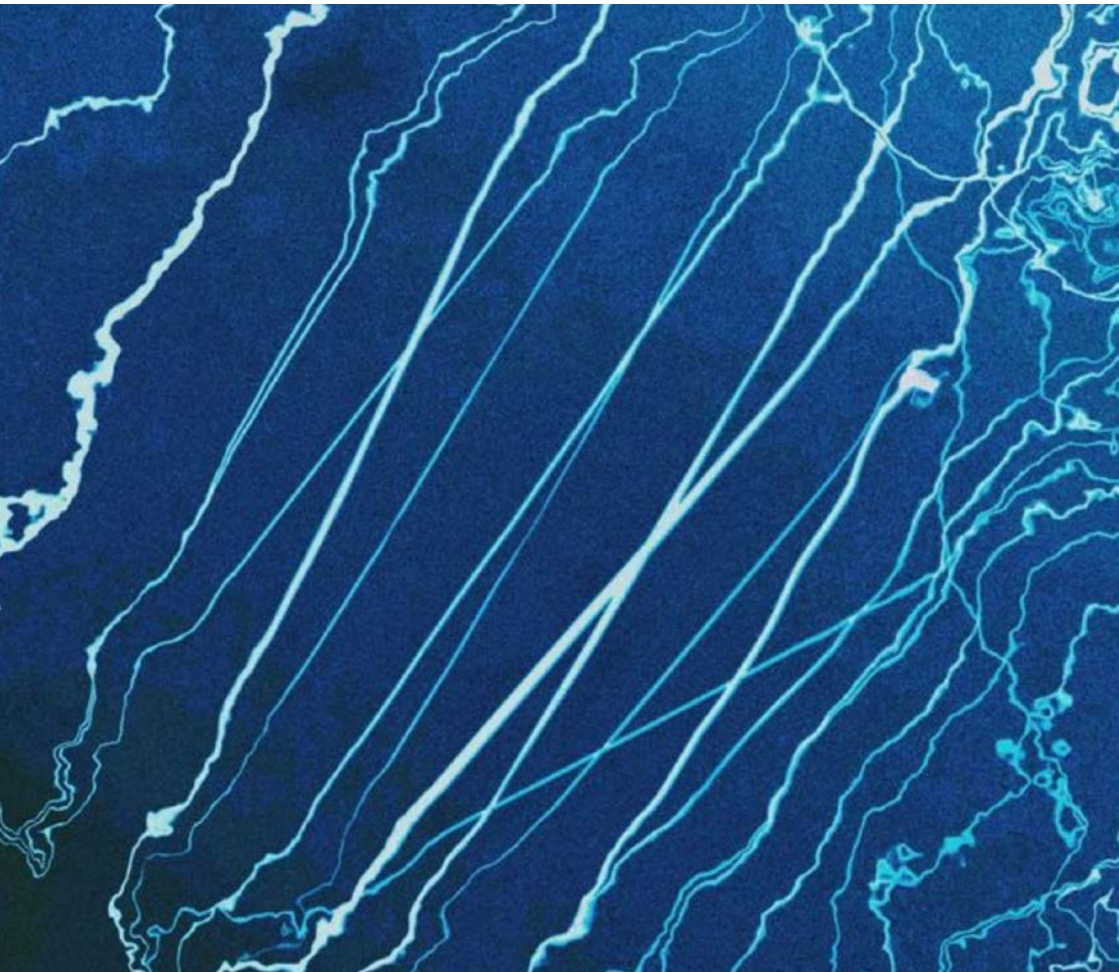
Suvi, who also goes by Summer, is an 18-year-old writer taking a gap year trying to figure things out. Writing has been an essential part of her journey in trying to understand herself. She has found a home in words and hopes people will find a little bit of home in her words when they read them.

*Instagram account: @suvi.zz*

### **Jharana (she/her)**

Jharana is a queer-identifying individual. She has graduated from high school and is currently taking a gap year. Making art, watching anything queer, or having a concert of her own are some of the things she does the most. Art, for her, is the only thing that makes her lose track of time.

*Instagram account: @shreesbjharana*



IKE A LONELY TIRE  
BASKING IN THE SUN

IKE THE COMPACT  
WIRES SUSPENDED ON THE POLES

IKE THE TIRED CHAIR  
WAITING TO HOLD ANOTHER WEIGHT

IKE COLORS OF  
SOMETHING ABSTRACT AND  
SILVERY GRAY

SOMETHING CHANGED  
YOU & I



SOMETHING CHANGED THE FLOW OF TIME. BETRAYAL WAS A COLOR, BRIGHT FOR SOME. DUBIOUSLY DRAB FOR SOME OTHER. LIFE WAS STRANGE BUT STRANGE IT SHALL BE. WE WERE THERE & HERE WE SHALL BE. LIFE WAS STRANGE & WEIRD IT SHALL BE. YOU WERE IN FRONT, HAVING YOUR SIGHT SET ON ME.

STARING AT EACH OTHER ONLY TO SEE THAT INSIDE YOUR EYES THERE ARE MORE POWER, STRUGGLES, CONFUSION. THE PLIGHTS WE FACED CHANGED US INTO SOMETHING ELSE.

CHANGED US FOR THE BETTER BECAUSE WE BEGAN TO SEE THINGS FOR WHAT IT IS. & EVEN AFTER GIVING YOU THE BEST I HAD. YOU HAD TO CHOOSE TO STAY QUIET. I HOWEVER WAS THE LOUD ONE. I BARKED. YOU LISTENED. I SHED TEARS. YOU STIFFENED. I TOLD TRUTHS. THE ONES I OWNED. TRYING TO CHANGE THE ENDING AND BEGGING FOR





YOU TO STAY LONGER FOR US TO SEE  
WHAT WE COULD BE.

I KNEW YOU, OUR HEARTBEAT IN A  
RHYTHM. STEALING TIME & RACING  
COLORS. I KNEW YOU & YOU WERE  
HAUNTING MY MIND & IMPACTING  
MY HEART, LIKE FLOWERS TRYING TO  
BLOOM ABOVE BARBED WIRES.

RELIEF, WHEN YOU FINALLY SEE THAT  
YOU ARE NOT A SINNER.

FOR WE BOTH WERE WINNERS.  
AND HERE I WAS, CHASING THOSE  
SHADOWS WHOM I USED TO TALK TO  
ONLY BECAUSE YOU CHOSE TO STAY IN  
THE SINCERITY SERENE; WHICH WILL  
SOMEDAY BE YOUR CALAMITY. FOR YOU  
ONCE SAID THAT YOU WERE CONFUSED  
TO ME. BUT... THIS WAS ABOUT THE PROCESS  
THE SERVER; TRYING TO FIND ITS PATH  
LIKE A LOST WANDERER PONDERING ABOUT  
THE THINGS THEY ONCE HAD.



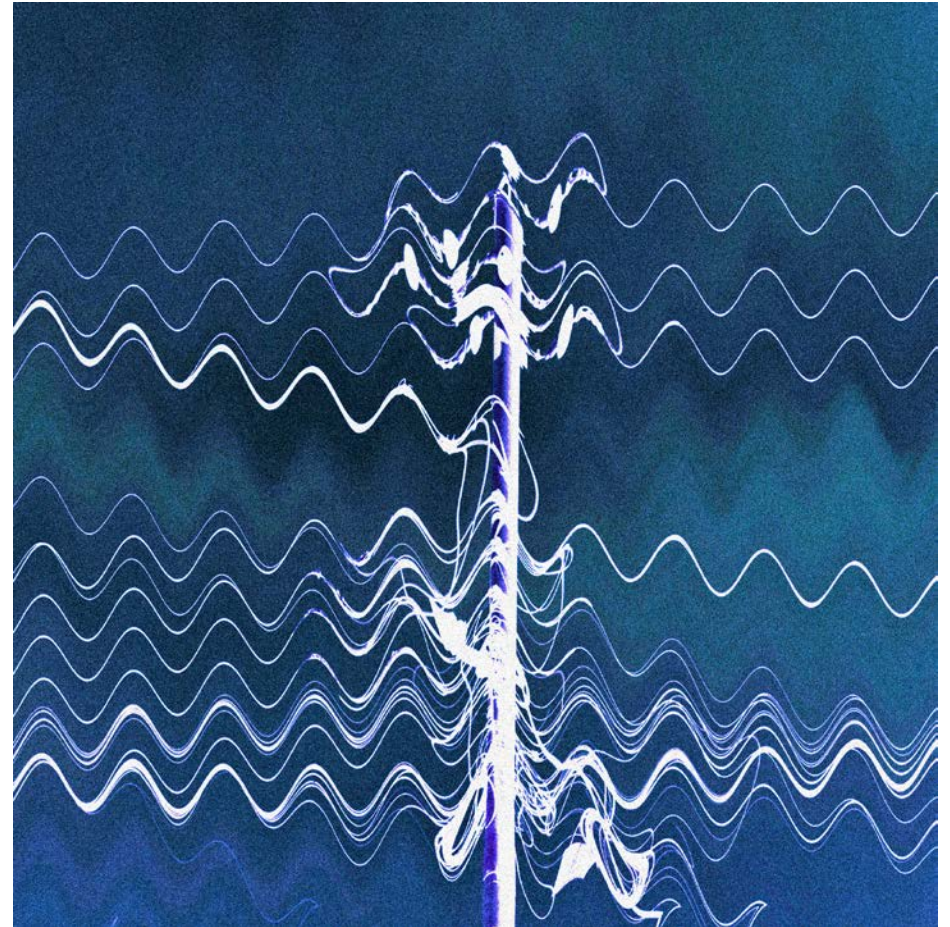
NOW, MAYBE THAT IS WHY WE BOTH HAVE NOTHING BUT CONFUSION. NOTHING BUT DEVASTATING THOUGHTS FOR THE ACTIONS TO SHOW CONSEQUENCES. WE HAVE LOST, MY DEAR. LOST THE GAME OF WALKING AND FALLING IN THE DARKNESS. BUT, WE PICKED OURSELVES BACK ONLY TO SMILE AT EACH OTHER BECAUSE, IN THE END; WHATEVER WE WENT THROUGH; THE SHAME; THE CONFUSION; THE SELF-DOUBT; THE HESITATION. IN THE END, EVERYTHING CAME TO A STOP WHEN THE WORLD TOLD US... "GOOD JOB."

TO ME, FOR BEING BRAVE ENOUGH TO TELL THE WORLD WHO I WAS. TO THEM, FOR OBSCURING THE PARTS OF THEM THAT I WAS PRAISED FOR. FOR THERE WERE TO BE CONSEQUENCES NO MATTER WHO YOU SHOW YOURSELF TO BE. LIKE THE FACT THAT I WAS OUT OF THE CLOSET & THEY WERE FIGURING WHAT QUEER MEANS TO THEM & WHAT QUEER MEANS TO ME

NOW, LOOK, HOW THIS  
HAS ENDED.

I BELIEVE IT ENDED THE WAY  
IT STARTED...

IN CONFUSION. FOR **QUEER**  
IS ABSTRACT JUST LIKE  
YOU AND ME



### **Prabigyan (he/him)**

Prabigyan is a writer who believes in nothing but nostalgia. He loves writing words under the daylight sky until it turns dark, until it is humid to cold. Prabigyan thinks of life as an inspiration that never goes.

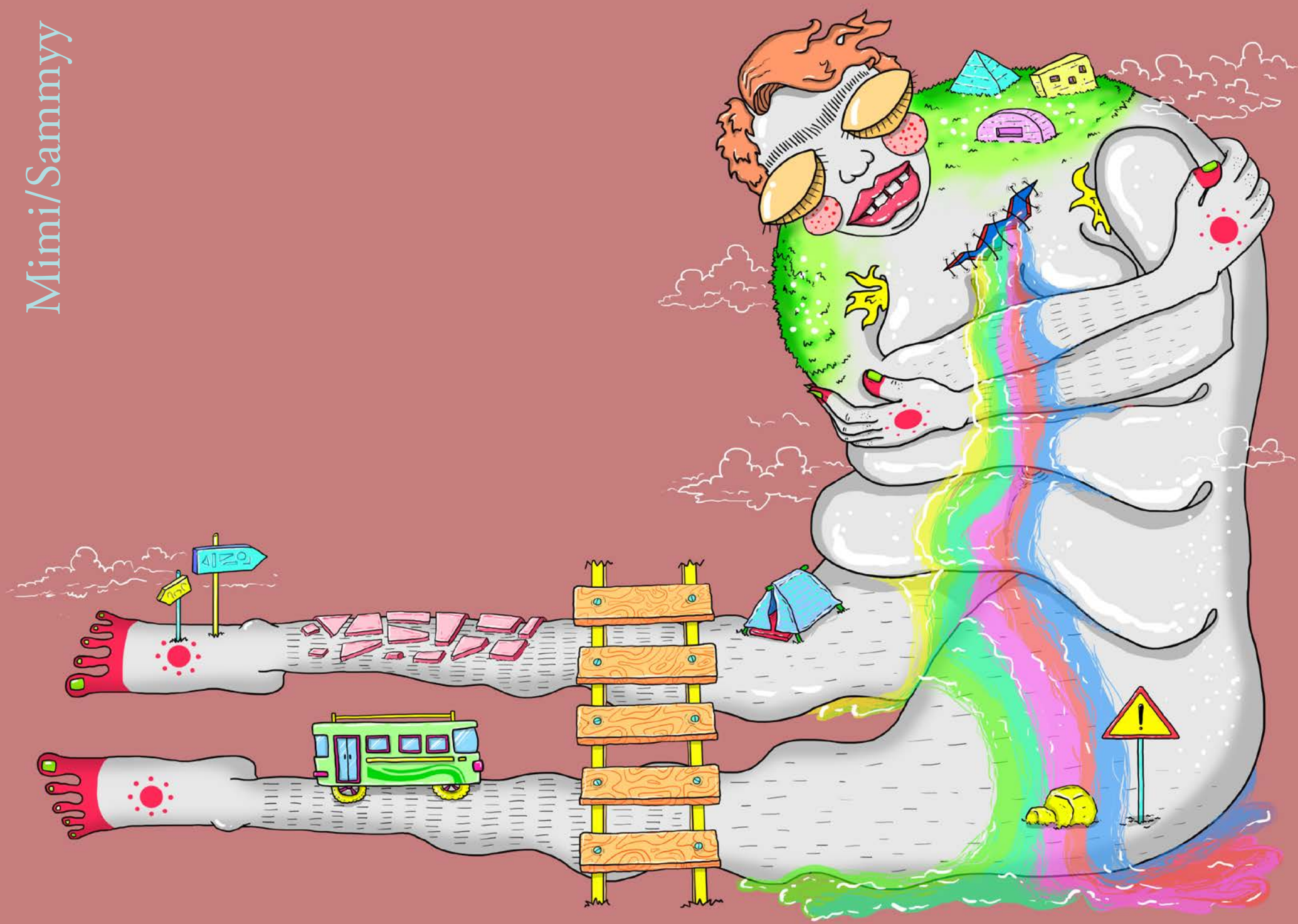
*Instagram account: @prabigyanaryal*

### **Jyoti (she/her)**

Jyoti Shrestha is a visual artist who likes capturing random shoes on the street. She's doing her MBA, tried running a bar, organises gigs, and is a human who is always on an exploration to find the best tea in town.

*Instagram account: @ztstha*





My Queerness layd in a narrow alley

Stuck.

Too troubled to toss and turn

However,

I woke up to find my softer, easier, comfortable side

And it was surrounded

Not by flowers or rose petals or woolen balls nor

huge mattresses

But it was a circle

I was awoken!

A whole lot of people;

I found MY SPACE?

And somewhere between and beyond

The lights reflected

And I saw a room full of people painted in rainbows

There I saw my colors

My monochromatic light-adapted a few

And I painted myself in yellow, green, and teal

Purple, pink, and blue.

Now my space has colors and I can pick mine;

Change whenever I like





### **Mimi (she/her)**

Mimi does not understand many things about and around her. Learning and making “things” for her is a medium of solace and expression. She uses it as a therapy to calm herself down. Everything she chooses to do is to break the monotony. Her works usually revolve around her experiences relating to reality, identity and fantasy.

*Instagram account: @o\_mimi\_cha*

### **Sammyy (they/them)**

Sammyy, who also goes by Sam or Purple, is a non-binary human but constantly juggles up between terms that are used for gender fluid. Art, travel, and poetry is their thing. They are an avid reader who loves travelling and are amused by adorable children and kind villagers every time they meet them.

*Instagram account: @\_\_\_\_\_ymmas*

## Prologue

There once was a story of two people, a girl and a guy. The story began as most stories do when our two characters meet. Our characters meet through pure coincidence when they are asked to become each other's pen pals. Is it a mere coincidence or are they destined to meet each other? A lot of things brew when people meet and our characters are no exception. Could something bloom between them or could it possibly be more?



WARD FROM YOU HOPE  
IN MY SIDE TOO I'M NOT  
E TO BE HONEST WITH  
SOMETHING FROM NOWON  
MY ENTIRE NAME  
KNOW

WEIRD AND I DONT  
ME. IT JUST DOESNT  
ENT FIT WITH ME.  
ENT PERSON ENTIRELY  
IE ANY MORE.

WEIRD ABOUT ALL

08/09/2015

Hello A,

I did it! I came o  
initially pictured it, b  
my bags and  
num just said "We kn  
of worry. I mean, it's n  
years.

They're still unsure a  
they are ready to listen  
coming out" videos on  
pushed me to the edge  
with my relatives thou  
and I dont want my f  
Especially my 80 year o  
up get a stroke. Since I'm  
her favourite :p)  
Still it feels like a weight  
problem though, I really  
know if he lik  
I do

13/05/2010

Hello,

I am Aarya, your partner for the pen-pal assignment from my school. I'm a 13 year old who likes to read books and go on walks. That should be sufficient for an introduction, right? I hope it is..

For the assignment, I asked the school if we could send emails instead of letters but ma'am said it has to be letters for it to be valid (very old school, I know).

Anyway, I am looking forward to writing to you and hearing from you!

18/05/2010

Hi Aarya,

I am Siddhartha. Your fellow pen-pal. I think that is enough for introductions :) I'm 13 too, I like the color yellow and I have a dog named Bruno. Nice to meet you!

P.s: You can call me Sid.



08/10/2011

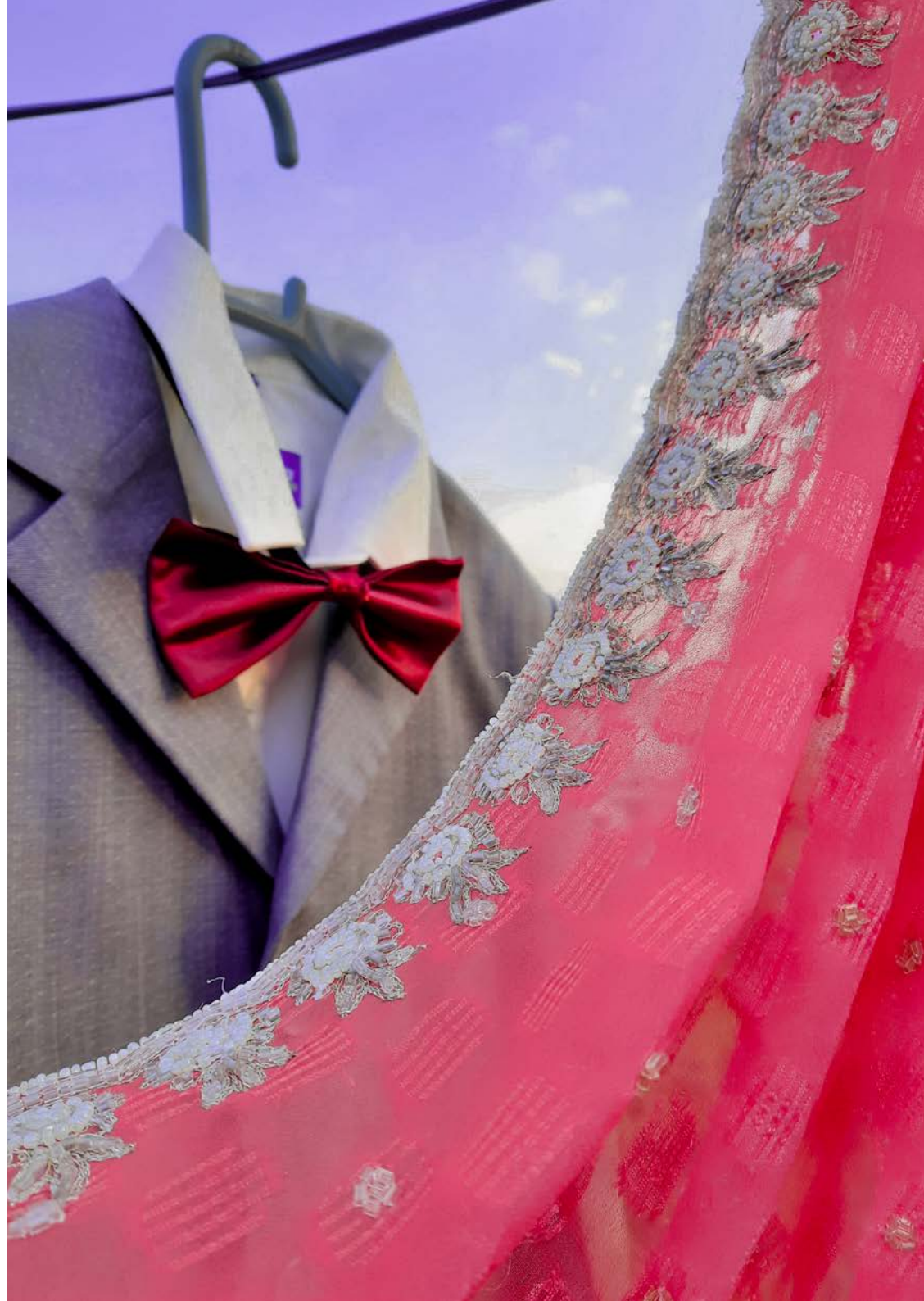
Dear Sid,

How was your day today? Mine was really weird (everything about being 14 is freaking weird!!!). But today was the epitome of that. I got my period today, which isn't a weird thing to me but suddenly I'm being treated differently by everyone at home. I couldn't even go get a snack from the kitchen earlier. And my mum told me that i'm finally a woman now yikes!! I'm starting to think being mushy pupae is a better transitional stage than being a teenage girl lol. I have to go to a wedding party and my mum seemed as if I decided to cut off my family when I said I wanted to wear a suit like my brother and dad instead of a sparkly lehenga. this entire growing-up thing is not as fun as I thought it would be.

10/10/2011

Hello Aarya,

One could only hope to be as pretty as a butterfly in their adulthood. I hope you feel better soon and that your cramps don't hurt as much. I heard that some cramps are as bad as pregnancy pain. Drinking ginger tea usually helps my mother so maybe you could try that? I'm sorry I can't help much. I wish I could try a lehenga without having people look at me like I grew horns on my head. I am so sick of daura suruwal, like it's so basic and only has grey, brown, and mud-green options for colour. Talk about being dull! I once tried my mum's saree but the look my dad gave me still makes me so sad. I know I looked great in it but I can't really try it unless I'm home alone :”(





*23/03/2012*

Hi Sid,

Hope you have been keeping well. I had an awful day today and wanted to tell you about it. Remember I told you that I cut my hair really short? Like guy haircut level short. A lot of seniors are making fun of me for my hair. They're calling me a Chakka. They were pointing fingers and laughing at me. That was not as bad as those that don't even talk to me anymore. They look at me and whisper things to themselves. I don't have that many friends left. I don't know why cutting my hair would be such a big deal. My cousins do it, my dad does it. Why is it that they get to cut their hair short but I don't? Do they get called Chakka for having short hair too? Do you get called names for your hair too? I just don't understand this hair business. Who makes these rules for how people are supposed to look anyway??

*28/03/2012*

Hi Aarya,

I am so sorry to hear how things are at your school. Things are hardly any better here. I don't get called chakka for my hair as much as I do for how I am otherwise. People make fun of my walk, my talk, and how I move my hands. They call me girly and feminine. Changing rooms are the worst. I have to wait for everyone to get out for me to change in peace, or else everyone looks at me all weird like I am the one they need to be scared of instead of me being scared of them (real ironic). Don't get me started on how bad the bathrooms are. I always make sure that I'm the only in there so I don't have to deal with all the stares and gossip. I hate going to an all-boys school, especially because I like boys. I don't even know why I like them at all, they can be so mean. There was once a guy who pretended to like me back just so he could laugh at me with his friends. It had felt real for me even if it was all gags for him.

*02/09/2014*

Hi Sid,

It's been long since I last heard from you. Hope you are well. Things are weird on my side too. I'm not sure how I am feeling if I have to be honest with you. I wanted to ask you to do something. From now on, can you call me just 'A' and not my entire name? It's not a big deal but I don't know, names are weird and feelings are weird and I don't really want to be called by my name. It just doesn't feel like it's mine.. like it just doesn't fit with me. I feel like I am turning into a different person entirely and this name just doesn't belong with me anymore, I think i've outgrown it. Names are so weird and I feel so weird about all of this.

*05/09/2014*

Dear A,

I understand. Thank you for sharing that with me. Things can be so weird sometimes. I think my mother knows that I'm gay. Right now, she's at the part where she acts like she doesn't know anything and hopes it goes away. Well, good luck to her because I tried that and it simply doesn't work that way. Anywho, last week, I bought myself a maroon woven skirt when I went shopping with my friend. I really want to wear it but you know how my dad is, there really is no getting through to him. I wish they would realize that my masculinity isn't in my clothes or who I like. I wish I didn't have to hide this part of me from them.







*08/07/2015*

Hello A,

I did it! I came out. It wasn't as dramatic as I'd initially pictured it, like with teeth knocked out and me packing my bags and leaving town kinda thing but my mum just said "We know" and asked me to pass the bowl of curry. I mean, it's not like I didn't give hints over the years. They're still unsure about certain things but I think they're ready to listen. Honestly, I binge watched "My Coming Out" videos on Youtube and that pretty much pushed me to the edge. I still can't talk about it openly with my relatives though since they're super old-fashioned and I don't want my family to suffer their stupid comments. Especially my 80 year old grandma who would straight up get a stroke since I'm her first grandson (and definitely her favorite :P). Still it feels like a weight has been lifted. There is another problem though, I really like this guy, Sam. I don't even know if he likes guys or not but he is cute. Gay or otherwise, I do want to get to know him. Will keep you updated ;)

*16/07/2015*

Hi Sid,

I'm so happy for you!!! I am so glad it turned out for the better. And TELL ME ABOUT THIS SAM GUY!!! You better not leave out any details moving forward, if you know what i mean ;))))

Sad news on my side tho, I don't think my family is taking the whole gender thing well. I'm not sure if I'm taking the gender thing well. It's all so messy right now but I'm sure things will work out. If it doesn't, well, Kathmandu here I come!

12/06/2016

Dear Sid,

Hope you're doing well. I'm doing fantastic! And I CAN'T WAIT TO MEET YOU!!

Before anything else, I have news for you!!! I'm alex, not 'A', not 'Aarya', just Alex. Yeah, I think I like the sound of it. It took me so long and I think I found a name that fits.

I am all packed and ready to come to Kathmandu next week.

After living all my life here in Bhairawa, I'm finally ready to move away from all that I know. A new place, a new beginning, a new ME!!! This is all so exciting. I am REALLY looking forward to going shopping together and finally getting rid of my "girl" clothes(my mother should never hear of this). You are free to bring Sam along ;) See you soon <3

14/06/2016

ALEX! ALEX! ALEX!

So nice to re-meet you Alex :)

I am so so happy that you found a name that's yours and I'm so happy that you shared it with me. And guess what! I have news for you too!! Sam finally asked me to be his boyfriend (I know! Took him long enough!!)

After all these years I'm so happy that I will get to meet you. I can't wait to see you in real life and also introduce you to Sam ;))) He is so excited to meet you too!

Have a safe trip to Kathmandu! I can't believe you're actually coming here..

On another note, I think we should move to e-messages from letters, what do you say? It's time we take a leap anyway :)







### Epilogue

There once was a story of two people, two queer people with their own individual realized identities. The story began as most stories do when our two characters met. Our characters met coincidentally and became pen pals. A mere coincidence gave them a chance at finding solace in each other along with the power of sharing one's story. A lot of things brewed when they met and the best thing they made w together was friendship. They found something much more special than what they thought they had and in their own words they wrote a beautiful story of themselves.



### **Sj (they/them)**

Sj is a queer rights activist and research enthusiast. Their work is centered around fields like activism, education, and resource creation. They are passionate about environmental sustainability, equity, and inclusiveness. They love talking about queer issues and feminism.

*Instagram account: @aess.jaey*

### **Sam (he/him)**

Samundra, also known as Sam is a 5th-year medical student who's balancing his life with his love and crazy addiction to plants, science, and art. Currently, he manages #ProjectHeArt2HeArt, a project through which he tries to bring people closer through the shared life experiences told from the medium of art.

*Instagram account: @sam\_\_grg*



Not just looking at you, but seeing you

The awkwardness and weirdness—I could feel that in the air,  
Terror was everywhere,  
My wholeness—so unclear,  
If only I could disappear...

Oh dear, I barely knew myself or maybe I already knew way too much. But there I was the younger version of me, totally attached to my queerness yet so distant from it.

On the edge, I lied...  
Swaying my body, my queerness. Full of joy and dauntless.  
YET -  
Petrified. Isolated. Disoriented.  
I felt everything all at the same time.

Tired, I used to stare at my reflection in the mirror, fighting my inner demons, and society's expectations. They all occupied my mind, blocking the way forward. A dark cloud hovering over my head, nothing on my mind but existential dread.  
I was afraid. Afraid of losing myself or...had I lost myself already? Then there came the comments:  
"Oh, the way you talk, the way you dance and walk—that's so strange!"  
"Maybe you should change."

Change? They wanted me to change?  
Now that I look back, I ask, "For what? To adjust  
in this heteronormative world? To exist, really?"  
Exist...Maybe...But does our existence have  
any value when we can't be ourselves?  
So, we are supposed to feel liberated  
in a cage? That's ridiculous!



As I look back, I know I am  
surviving and growing. I need to be  
kind to myself.

I write letters to myself to read them  
in the future because I am excited to  
see what my future self will discover.  
Letters of growth, of kindness, of  
pain, and mostly love. Yes, I don't  
know what's in store for the future.  
There's no certainty of that. But I'd  
want my future self to have the best  
of things.

"Hi,  
How are you feeling? Today, I feel  
like I am the happiest person alive.  
You know, I am not about to share  
my accomplishments or anything  
right now. Not even falling in love.  
Hmm...I just feel all elated and  
happy for no reason. This feeling  
is not necessarily going to remain  
like this forever. But for now, at this  
moment, I feel so liberated and I  
feel like I can do anything. And you  
know, I got you. I am here to tell you  
that happiness might not last forever,  
but you can always treat yourself  
with total kindness, okay? Sending  
you loads of hugs. I love you!"





Society has a narrow way of viewing people who are diverse in their own ways. They tell us that we have to be a certain way, look a certain way, and meet all the expectations of society. And that then only will we be acceptable to live in a society. Our queerness, diverse gender expression, and our awesomeness make them uncomfortable, they say. All the negativity, shame, and toxicity that society ingrained in us—affects us, making our inner child suffer. But slowly, I'm trying...trying to be self-aware, compassionate, and loving to myself.

I try to find numerous ways to connect with myself—be it through writing, making art, or talking to myself—all the ways that reflect me. They, in turn, help me to be my authentic self. And every time that happens, I feel more empowered, I have a clear sense of self, and discover abundant ways to hold space for myself. A true revolution I'd say!

So, I look at myself in the mirror, have conversations with myself, and sometimes, even take myself out on a solo date. I find homes in words, art, places, people, and imagination. Anything that makes me feel safe, seen, and heard, is home to me.

These days, when I look at myself in the mirror, I let out a smile and tell myself:

"You are amazing!"

"You are always growing and you've come a long way"

"I'm proud of you."

I try to shower myself with love, but there are days when I even engage in negative self-talk. I am only a human after all. But regardless, I try to hold myself accountable. I try to be gentle and loving to myself.

I am a work in progress. A tree swaying in multiple directions during a strong wind, but still grounded.

### **Sezz (he/they)**

Sezz, who's currently in the final year of a Bachelor's degree in Social work and English literature, identifies as a queer individual. Their passion lies in writing - although they write occasionally, writing is a therapeutic form of expressing their feelings.

*Instagram account: @sezzites\_\_*

### **Lisa (she/her)**

Lisa is an illustrator who loves to explore culture, traditions, and identity through her works. In her illustrations, she is fond of using traditional attires and jewellery, and she often merges her interests in fashion and culture in her creations.

*Instagram account: @\_isakumari\_*



"they say  
this world isn't for you  
Why then was I born into it,  
if it wasn't for me."

- Phurbu tashi



