



OPEN HEARTS



# ! · OPEN · HEARTS · !

A MENTAL HEALTH ZINE  
BY BLACK, INDIGENOUS AND PEOPLE OF COLOUR

**Cover design by Skina Shah.**

*Skina Shah is a 16 year old Pakistani girl with no interest in becoming a doctor.*

**Created through  
The South Asian Women's Community Centre  
1035 Rachel St, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor  
Montreal, QC H2J2J5**

## INTRODUCTION

The Open Hearts zine is a project by the South Asian Youth Collective, based in Montreal, aimed at giving space to the real stories on the subject of mental health of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour).

This zine consists of creative non-fiction, including but not limited to: prose, personal essays, diary entries and poetry. We understand that the experience of mental health intersects with racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and other oppressions. We want to use writing and sharing as a tool for collective healing, also using this project as a medium to build connection and amplify the voices of BIPOC in our community.

This zine will be a resource for the youth in our programming in the Greater Montreal area, as well as available for distribution for the community at large.

For any inquiries, or for more information on purchasing a copy, please contact the South Asian Youth Collective at [sawccyouth@gmail.com](mailto:sawccyouth@gmail.com).

We hope that you enjoy this publication!





There is a place inside my head that I have created at every stage of awareness

Where the words

**ACCEPT, EMPOWER, CELEBRATE and EMBRACE**

*Echo* in my ethos, and have kept me afloat

I want to feel normal

I want to be normal

My normal

I **am** normal

It is a place where I can't just dance, I can soar, swim even

So I'll show them, that I am *able*

*Mina Iyer is a 29 year old Non-White and Tamil Astro-Dyke living in Toronto.*





## EXHAUSTION

BY JOSIANE MÉNARD

*Mental health is still a taboo in our communities. Women of colour are expected to be the backbones of households, families. We're often not allowed to express how we feel. I wrote this poem in a particularly dark period of my life. I'm sharing this piece for those who feel alone. You are not. Hold on, sis. Better days will come.*

\*

### **exhaustion**

here i am, empty  
emotionally and physically drained  
there's no more strength left in me  
i rely entirely on my family

seeking help and  
speaking my truth and  
sharing my darkest thoughts were  
the scariest choices i've ever made

i've never been this tired  
my brain shattered to pieces  
where's the cruise control feature  
when we most need it?



bits of hope  
still wander in my head  
i'll hold on to these  
if all else fails

*Josiane Ménard is 29 year old Black writer from Montreal.*

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DTR TALKS  
PLANE TICKETS  
AND HOW TO SCARE PEOPLE AWAY  
BY GOYAVE SYLPHES

I had tears in my eyes today because  
The planet is too vast  
And time is too linear  
Too punctual  
And these flatlands can't help but bore me  
After the sinuous greenery of the mountains we wandered through  
For the past weeks

We were swimming in pools of warm smiles  
Pockets under our eyes said  
I'm sorry I'm tired but I still love you

Now that I wake up to blue under eyes  
smudged by me  
I find myself spending time waiting  
but

Now feels lonely  
Waiting feels like now  
Now feels like waiting  
So, waiting feels lonely

They say waiting isn't quite the same as living

They tell me  
Live now and breathe now and eat now  
Stop trying to dive through time and space

I thought I was sick  
But really, the queasy feeling of the past few days is  
Jealousy  
I'm not sure what jealous feels like  
I'm not even sure what there is to be jealous of  
Just that I'd rather be there with you  
But then again I can't see myself there anymore  
What we've shared this summer wasn't yours or mine;

I thought I was sick  
But that it was okay because you'd stay indoors with me  
And make me noodle soup

I've never been a girl with a boyfriend,  
I've only had relationships

So I apologize for scaring you like that  
And you know what the stupid thing is?  
It's that I loved you so much  
That I actually mean that.

*Goyave Sylphes is a 23 year old franco-congolese woman.*

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## BREAK THE SILENCE FREE YOUR SOUL

BY YOBINI J KRISHNAR

Growing up you never think you'll ever experience the consequences of mental health. That you will feel the numbness and loneliness, even though you're surrounded by millions of people, including the ones you love and cherish. You're taught at a young age that you will end up having a great magical fairy tale of a life. Living in a Sri Lankan Tamil household, you are expected to do as your parents' wishes to be able to have that happy ending. The number of times I hear my parents, my aunties and uncles say : you need to do well in school, dress appropriately, follow your religion and culture, behave in a way to keep the family's honour, and I can go on and on... But in matter of fact, the reality is no one tells you the difficulties you will face throughout your life. No one tells you it is okay to not be perfect and it is okay to be yourself. No one tells you to follow your dreams and do whatever makes you happy. No one tells you that there are chances you will make mistakes and it will be okay. No one tells you that you have the support you need out there when you endure consequences of mental health regardless of how it began.

Some individuals say if you can't see it with your own eyes it is not an illness and it is not a problem. I say this is not true! You cannot but me in the same category as someone else because we do not feel normal and even so, what does it even mean to feel normal to begin with? My experience of depression can be defined by it being a vicious cycle of pain, regrets, humiliation, self-hatred, numbness and loneliness but the cause behind it can never be same for someone else feeling the same way. We all experience different things in different ways. When you lose yourself and become a question mark, the world around you starts to become dark

and regardless of where you are or who you are with there's no real emotions that you feel or that can be defined. You hide the negativity and walk around with a smile, which is simply a mask we are forced to wear by our society, our community, our loved ones to not make them feel uncomfortable or even guilty. How is that even fair? Why do I have to pretend everything is okay but when it truly isn't. Why do I have to keep hurting in silence to keep others happy? When will I have my chance to speak? When will I have the chance to finally be myself? When will I have the chance to be free?

I do think to myself, if I were to speak, which story will I even begin with? I have been a prisoner trapped inside my own mind without a voice. Afraid of others and afraid of being my true self. It feels as if I am constantly drowning with fear and have no air to breathe, no hope to seek and no happy ending to fight for. For once, I wish this world was different, I wish I was able to tell the people what I have been enduring throughout these years. A safe environment with no judgments, no criticisms, no hate, just love and acceptance. To have my loved ones by my side supporting me and telling me everything will be okay, just take the time you need to heal. These are just dreams I have and knowing them and myself, I do not even know if that could even be a possibility without destroying the relationships we have built throughout these past two decades. I kept my head high and pretended for so long but in fact I was hurting and wanted everything to end. Wanted the pain, the humiliation, the loneliness and especially the numbness to end. I even thought this was it, no one would care if anything happened to me. My fear of hurting the people I love stopped me from going through my decisions to end everything.

With time and with the right support I have been realizing that I just want to be accepted and stop hiding from the world. I want to be able to shine and show what kind of person I am. I wanted people to know I am not a nobody. I am a somebody and I am worth to be heard and speak my mind about anything and everything. I should not be judged based on my previous actions or on experiences

that I have survived. I will not be defined by other and I am sure not someone can be put in a category. I am my own person and I know I am strong, independent, funny (even though my jokes are very bad), beautiful, intelligent, determined and courageous. With that said, do I still have a lot of work ahead of me? The answer to that is YES!!! Because I know that my mental health will always be a part of me. One thing to remember is that this is a life-long journey and you and I are not alone. I still have not told my story but one day I will say it and I will be proud not only about myself but also about it. My advice is to take a chance and talk to someone, anyone or even write it... Any step is a path towards healing and being able to just thinking about seeking help is something extraordinary. The trauma you face and feelings you have are real and do not let anyone tell you that they are not true. YOUR story matters, YOUR mental health matters and YOUR love matters!!

*Yobini J Krishnar is a 21 year old Tamil Sri Lankan, bisexual woman born in Montreal.*

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*Navneet Kaur, who is a physics and math Joint Honors student at McGill, seeks to portray elements of misery, affection, defeat, assault and ecstasy in art and writing. In her work she presents women as warriors. Born in Amritsar, India, Navneet believes that breathing life into art has the power to heal and inspire.*





## ENCROACHMENT: BORDERS

BY MARISSA RAMNANAN

I look down at our hands intertwined  
fingers delicately twisted together like rose vines  
mine, golden and supple,  
yours thin and calloused, a milk and honey contrast,  
and i gasp-  
a sharp prick of a thorn.

it is in that moment that i remember  
the color of the flesh that i am wearing  
the way it so perfectly  
eclipses yours  
and i tremble,  
afraid.

i hear my mothers voice, like a bullhorn, starting to hum  
getting louder and louder,  
until the grating shrieks of my ancestors are all that i can hear.  
the shouts of protest, the spit of disgust,  
and worse yet,  
the pity.

"his family will never love you the way ours do. what are you doing, you poor, stupid  
fool"

hammering into my skull,  
loosening tooth from gum, tongue lolling and numb with self-doubt.

and you,  
you see it in my face. see something amiss.  
and steal kisses across the soft parts of my wrists,

confused.

and i, while swallowing glass, slowly dismantle myself from your reach, your love,  
my skin sticking to yours like acid,  
leaving us with nothing but bone.

and our ancestors sigh an Atlantic of relief,  
and cheer.

but it falls on deaf ears,  
and i crawl into myself,  
try to gag your breath from my lungs,  
but it's no use.

a howl escapes me,  
low, ragged and desperate.  
the taste of blood and submission on my tongue.  
i bow my head as if to pray,

i cant help but love you.

*Marissa Ramnanan is a 21 year old Trinidadian woman of Indian, Barbadian and English descent.*

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## IF I DIE BURY ME NEXT TO MY FATHER

### BY MUGABI BYENKYA

*If I Die Bury Me Next To My Father*  
*If I Die Bury Me Next To My Father*  
*If I Die Bury Me Next To My Father*  
*If I Die Bury Me Next To My Father*

*Writing this has me remiss*  
*As I reminisce on the softness of your kiss*  
*On the coarseness of your stubble*  
*On the intricacies and intimacies of soft masculinity that you taught me*  
*Daddy*

In an interview with the New York Times, Barack Obama says:

*"There's a wonderful quote that I thought was L.B.J.'s, but I could never verify it: 'Every man is either trying to live up to his father's expectations or make up for his father's mistakes.' I spent a lot of time trying to figure out, in the absence of an immediate role model, what it meant to be a man — or in my case, a black man or a man of mixed race in this society. But as Bryan said, there's no checklist. It's only later you realize the things you may have done in search of that absent father."*

Reading this felt like being sucker punched in the gut, as I reflected on the things I have done and still do in search of my absent father. I eat papaya regularly because it was my father's favourite fruit. I grow my beard out because my father did. I have an affinity for brown because it was my father's favourite colour. I have often wondered whether my father would be proud of me and the man I have become. I have an intense desire to prove myself to my father and gain his pride and recognition. My father got a full scholarship to do his Masters at Waterloo. This led me to apply to the University of Waterloo for my undergraduate degree. I wanted to prove that I could gain admission and a hopeful scholarship to his alma mater. I wanted to prove that I was my father's son. I wanted to prove that I was my father's equal. I wanted to prove that I was what my father always wanted me to be: *better*

*than him*

On March 15<sup>th</sup> 2010, I gained admission and a scholarship to do my undergraduate studies at the University of Waterloo. I ended up turning them down due to a better offer from the University of Kansas but I held on to that admission letter as a badge of pride. I had proved myself to my father. But was I better than him?

On September 27<sup>th</sup> 2004, my mother told me not to go to my friend's birthday party.

*I should have listened  
Instead I chose to forego  
Heeding her, now my tear drops glisten  
Like reflections because I'm missing, missing, missing  
you*

...

*My Mother told me not to go  
I should have listened  
Instead, I chose to go  
Came back to you in the hospital*

I never saw my father healthy again. The next morning, he was airlifted out the country and 9 months later he passed away.

*My mother told me not to go  
I should have listened  
I beat myself up over the last time I saw my father healthy*

*It's filthy  
and self-hating coming from one as disabled as I  
One of my father's most traumatizing memories was seeing his own father in a  
moment of weakness  
My father always wanted me to be a better man than he  
So to myself, I offer forgiveness*

*Mugabi Byenkya is a disabled, Black queer writer born in Nigeria to Ugandan parents.*

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BULLY ME A BUDD  
BY BASSAM

*Previously published in poetry collection 'bliss in die / unbinging the underglow'  
from Swimming with Elephants Publications  
released March 2018*

living with body dysmorphia  
and eating disorder  
is like having the rich white jock bro  
you went to high school with  
as a roommate  
in a one-bedroom apartment

the one who picked on you  
for being overweight  
while eating lunch in the cafeteria  
turned kitchen you both share  
spends all the money for bills and rent  
on fast food they guilt you for eating

hogs the phone line  
leaving you unable to talk to

anyone for help  
makes you believe that you'll  
always be that friendless loner

except now  
they actually -want- to  
hang out with you

in addition to being your roommate  
they're also the personal trainer  
and nutritionist you never asked for  
or maybe you did  
when your consciousness wasn't clouded  
with haunting taunts of locker rooms  
constantly asking if you lift  
(anything that isn't your self-esteem)

shares a bed with you  
keeps you up all night  
body-shaming you in your sleep  
because you can never be too  
far away from nostalgic trauma  
and the yearbooks are kept  
in another room

informs you that  
fat-burning pills are an adequate  
and necessary replacement for breakfast  
and you can have as many as you want  
(they don't contain any calories)

always coming up with  
new diets you should try  
leaving the television on  
and magazines open, as reminders  
of the models you'll never resemble  
(fools you into thinking that you should)

blames your mother for  
feeding you too much while growing up  
when she could afford it  
and teaching you how to stay hungry  
when she couldn't

always gives you their  
unsolicited and hurtful opinion  
on your clothing choices  
no matter how much you  
try to fit in



(people or pants)  
you won't  
because you're always  
wearing that thick skin  
their designer brand abuse should  
never have permeated

jokes about how bulimia is a bully  
and that "throwback Thursday"  
is a day-long binge-and-purge  
down memory lane

cares enough about you  
to tell you to stay as hydrated as  
the toilet bowl you bury the  
guilty meals in:  
because there's more than one way  
to flush out the ugly  
and change comes from within

(mind you, it's change for the better!)

so grab the most hated parts of you  
like talons clutching prey  
and throw yourself away

convinces you that  
despite the emptiness  
they're your best friend forever  
and that self-care doesn't  
exist when whatever sense of self  
you may have doesn't  
exist without self-harm

reminds you  
that even though you cohabit with  
an inner toxicity you'll  
eventually die from  
that yours is the only  
name on the lease

and the tombstone.

*bassam (they/them or xe/xim) is a queer Jewish person of Middle-Eastern descent and a longtime sufferer of body dysmorphia, bipolar and eating disorder.*

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LOVE. YOUTH.

BY SELENA DIAMONDS

The way Bollywood movies demonstrated love was how I wanted to fall in love. I wanted my love to be an “us against the world” type of love. A type of love that made me want to sing through fields of sunflowers with my beloved. A type of love that seemed like the heavens above specifically made you two for each other and no one else. A type of love that transcends every rebirth your soul takes.

Growing up I was never really exposed to people actually being in love- well, not according to my definition of it. The only time I was exposed to love was from Bollywood movies. As unrealistic as those movies were, the love seemed very real.

When I was younger, no one I physically knew was in love. I didn’t see any kisses being stolen, an innocent flutter of an eye or even a hug of comfort. To me, my parents were not in love.

To be honest, I’m not even sure they still are. Without the people in my immediate circle showing me what love is and how to show it, I felt lost and was on a mission to seek it for myself.

First, I fell in love with myself. My grandmother raised me and she was the first person to show me what love is. She was the one who changed my diapers, fed me, signed my agenda for school. She was the one who took me in and raised me like her own daughter. She is my mother. From her, I learned to love myself. She never treated me like I didn’t belong with her family and that made me humble. She always encouraged and supported me and that gave me more confidence. She did anything and everything for me and taught me selflessness.

Through the ages of my youth, my grandmother taught me more about myself and who I was as a person. I began figuring out what I believed in, how I dealt with conflicts, what kind of relationships I wanted with family and friends. The more I thought about these things, the more I fell in love with myself.

*Selena Diamonds is a 26 year old Punjabi woman.*

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LONDON FOG KISSES  
BY SERENA BHANDAR

we are woven  
limbs spread across your coat  
on the grass as serpents  
and our lips flutter and swim,  
hands playing hair like a harp.

our kisses  
taste of london fogs  
from before this interlude,  
were nonexistent.  
as they whisper mist from our mouths,  
are everything.

my senses peak at  
brushed tongues  
fingers entwined  
and sing sunlight,  
your body and mine.

*Serena Bhandar is a queer Punjabi and Welsh community worker and writer from Cowichan/Lekwungen/WSANEC territories on Vancouver Island, BC.*





## TO BLEAK A DAY BY EMINA

When I woke up today  
I couldn't tell if it was morning yet  
there was no generous sun and no sparkling stars

If I knew where to find the Sun  
I would write to it  
But all I can say today is,  
it is too bleak a day

I stand miserable and desolate  
among ecstatic and elated crowds  
I stand under an abandoned streetlight  
waiting for it to lit, perhaps even flicker a bit

I am fazed with a shard of glass in my feet  
bleeding deep and deep  
without a trace of scarlet on my skin

I am bestowed with a dystopian oblivion  
as if I was always in this moment  
as if I will always remain in this moment

Yet some shades of painted faces, with colors I can't comprehend,  
keep murmuring that 'this will go away'  
as if it is just a breeze  
as if I have had my window closed all this while  
as if it will be only this day.

*Emina is 21 year old and South Asian.*





## QUESTIONS BY ROBYN

Sometimes  
I wish I had the courage to ask my mother  
Why we lived in a motel when I was just young enough  
To remember  
But not understand

Why my father had another family  
Why he let them go for us  
But eventually went back to his wife  
After we were born  
Leaving you  
With two infant children

Why, did he have the heart to leave us  
When you ripped out yours and buried it in this foreign country  
Because even if you would starve  
You would feed your children

I want so desperately to know  
How much it hurt when you left your mother  
How hard it was knowing you were the other woman  
Or to let your children grow into strangers  
With alien tongues  
How impossible it is to make yourself understandable  
When you yourself do not understand

Mother  
Do you hate me some days?  
When you think of your home country  
And wonder  
Is this really home?  
Do you wish you never had me sometimes  
When you want to make yourself back into the person you were without me  
But can't stand tall when I cling onto your back  
Because I have yet to be able to stand on my own

Do you ever regret being my mother  
Instead of a doctor  
The one you once were—

For I am the reason why you stay  
In a harsh place you hate  
Because the sun always shines a little brighter on the colder side

—You die slowly  
Because decades ago you unrooted from familiar grounds  
To a new place where ice freezes your veins  
But where I can flourish

Do you ever wish I wasn't there, mom?  
I do.  
I was the hand wrapped around your wrist  
Binding you to this place

Some days  
When I feel more smaller than I did on better days  
I would think how easy  
It would be to just disappear  
And how then, you could finally go back  
To the warmer places  
And be able to speak



Without being misunderstood  
Without given looks by strangers  
Without the frustration of being unable to speak

Do you hate me,  
Like I do?  
Because I do, mom  
Regret is a heavy thing  
Especially when it weighs down my existence  
Down  
Until it sinks into the shadows  
Where I was never born  
And you are happy

*Robyn is a 15 year old second generation Chinese, questioning woman.*

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## SLAP BY ANONYMOUS

It always felt like a slap in the face.  
the moment I walked into my surprise birthday party  
the day he told me he loved me  
watching my sisters run into my arms with joy,  
feeling my aunt's arms wrapping around my crying body,  
the music flooding my heart as my best friend dances beside me,  
my friend worrying for my thoughts are scary  
my parents calling the police afraid for my life  
my roommate banging on the door scared I would never answer  
my best friend crying for me to return to her

the slaps become punches  
until I feel like I'm thrown around  
and it's too painful to move

they save me  
and they haunt me  
seeing love from people in my life  
is the hardest realization  
because my mind rips it apart



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倩鈴鈴音  
BY LOW SHIN LING

倩鈴鈴音, pt. 1

do you believe in magic?  
because i do,  
for the way my tongue gently touches the roof of my mouth when i say my name in  
Mandarin  
rings the bells in my head  
that take me home  
to humid Malaysian nights  
like Dorothy's ruby slippers.

do you believe in magic?  
because i do,  
for the way my Japanese name echoes in my ear  
brings back the ocean waves  
i heard in the seashell i picked with my grandfather  
from the seaside of the town my mother grew up in.

do you believe in magic?  
because i do.

倩鈴鈴音 pt. 2

do you believe in magic?  
because i don't,

for the way my jaws clench when i say my name in Mandarin  
brings me back to when the kids in school called me "the japanese kid",  
the foreigner,  
when i grew up right in the humid malaysian nights.  
just like them.  
when they said "my people" raped their ancestors  
after reading about the japanese occupation of malaysia in sejarah\* textbooks  
as though i was not one of them,  
as though i terrorised my own home.

do you believe in magic?  
because i don't,  
for the way my japanese name echoes in my ear  
reminds me of the countless times the japanese choir kids  
repeated "maybe you should just sit aside and watch,"  
while they happily played with each other during break time,  
games i did not know because i did not go to the japanese school like they did.  
my japanese tongue tied itself tighter every time  
i had to read manga alone in the corner of the choir room.  
sometimes, i swear when i speak in japanese,  
the familiar echo rings in my skull,  
"maybe you should just sit aside and watch."

do you believe in magic?  
because i fucking don't.  
what's magic without purity anyway?

\*sejarah = malay for 'history'

*Low Shin Ling is 19 years old, Malaysian and Japanese, queer and androgynous.*



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## SADNESS BY NAVNEET KAUR

I was told I carry too much sadness with me:

Maybe like a brown paper bag inflated with foul breath

Or maybe like a water tank spilling water from all ends-

waiting for someone to turn off that grey pipeline climbing up the  
cracks on the icy sidewalk-

I was told I carry too much sadness with me:

But when I don't,

I'm too loud, too out there.

Like a car honking with its blaring horn,

Like a monster that engulfs their space,

A dementor only with blood vessels and 125 pounds of fleshy skin.

Like a ghost climbing up your body,

Clinging to you,

Refusing to leave the room.

I was told I carry too much sadness with me.

But well that monster that triggers you like bullets-

Well, it's illiterate.

So that bright red SORTIE sign outside that door-

It means nothing to him.

*Navneet Kaur, who is a physics and math Joint Honors student at McGill, seeks to portray elements of misery, affection, defeat, assault and ecstasy in art and writing. In her work she presents women as warriors. Born in Amritsar, India, Navneet believes that breathing life into art has the power to heal and inspire.*

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## JOURNAL ENTRY #16

### BY HAR LEEN

i still remember the first day i couldn't step out of the house. no one was home, and i was getting ready for school. that morning felt unusual right from the start, although the word "usual" had lost all meaning for me long before that day. i woke up in hesitation, scared to plant my feet on the floor, scared to start the morning. i scrambled around the house, shaking so much i couldn't help tripping a few times. when i looked into the mirror, i saw nothing there. and i was crying. people cry all the time. i wondered how many cried because they were alive. i didn't really want to know the answer.

but there were not enough reasons to be dead as there were to be alive that morning. i had a class that day. i needed to leave my house, get on the bus, get on the train, walk to my university, into my building, up the stairs, and to my classroom. i needed to get out my glasses. i needed to ask someone for a piece of paper because during the morning frenzy i had forgotten to put any books into my bag. i needed to pay attention. i needed to take notes. i needed to fight the intense urge to fall asleep because i was so tired from crying all night, racing thoughts consuming not only my mind but running through all the bones and muscles of my body until i felt so cold and weak i could not fight them anymore. i needed to keep from crying out from the sudden fear of a panic attack. i needed to make sure i didn't get a panic attack. i needed to ask my professor at the end of class if i could get an extension on the final essay.

so many reasons, yet when i got to the front door, makeup already smudged, hair not brushed and stomach in knots, i froze. i put my hand on the doorknob and let it rest there. the universe's combined forces could not move me from that spot. i knew that, but i still tried to move. when i did, i felt instant regret as my body retaliated, sending pain to my legs and back. my chest started to tighten. i tried to continue crying, but now it was replaced with gasps for breath.

maybe i didn't fight hard enough. but at the time my weakness was my anxiety attacks, and i was completely obedient to them. if they wanted me to die then i would not show any signs of wanting to be alive.

still gasping for air, hot tears now streaming down my face, legs now feeling like mud, i returned to my bedroom, put my bag on the ground. i lay down on my bed. closed my eyes. i waited until the anxiety was done making playground of my body, and felt it slowing going back to its different hiding places in the caves of my bones. when numbness came over me, i was relieved.

i'm just taking a sick day, i decided. the next few months i fought more intense battles. always stopping at that front door, terrified of the other side. i would develop a fear of leaving the house altogether. if not paralyzed by fear and gasping for breath by the experience of leaving the house, i would still not be able to get on a bus, or a train. even the thought of being in a car would send shakes through my body. talking to people would become something that would emotionally cripple me. taking a deep breath would become one of the most challenging tasks of my day. i would swing on a pendulum between screaming out in pain and not feeling anything at all, never being able to decide which is worse.

and i would never let myself believe that i had it bad. i would never believe that i had any reason to cry at all. i still think that didn't. but what i would believe in is the strong hatred over myself. in my cowardice. feeling shame and disappointment over not being able to turn a doorknob.

the thing about anxiety is that sometimes it goes away. but i live my life the way girls walk down dark streets at night, constantly turning over my shoulder. into the past. a persistent feeling that i'm being followed and will at any moment get beaten into the ground.

at the same time hoping it's true and that it will finally kill me.

*Har Leen is a 26 year old, queer, brown, chronically ill and chronically depressed Punjabi woman.*



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*Mysha is a 15 year old Bengali woman.*

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FEBRUARY 20, 2018 – TOO SAD TO WRITE  
BY AISHA D. CHAUDHRY

i feel like there's a hole in my life where i have to push people away to be happy. i don't know if it's because i've been depressed in the past but i also don't know what is causing it. my life is good, i have a roof over my head, food, family and , if anything i should be grateful but it doesn't feel enough. i always find myself alone but not because no one is there but because i choose to be alone but it hurts and all i want is for someone to hold me and tell me it's going to alright. i don't know what's wrong and i don't feel like something is wrong but i can't shake it out of me.

*Aisha D. Chaudhry is a 18 year old Montréalaise woman of Filipina and Pakistani descent.*





DIARY ENTRY DECEMBER 27, 2017  
BY SELF\_SABOTAGE

I'm drowning  
The gaping hole in my chest  
Refuses to be silenced  
I feel so miserable  
My body seems to always attack me  
Pain resides in my lower back  
Throbbing down my thighs  
Resting on my ankles  
My head wobbles with drowsiness and dizziness  
I hate being forced to lie  
By Dadu and Dada  
As if I'm exaggerating  
That lying is better than being honest  
About the fact that I've never felt more hopeless  
At least I can fall asleep now  
Which is good on its own.

*Self\_Sabotage is a 20 year old Bengali woman.*





## A CRAZED PERSON BY ANONYMOUS

Mentally ill is what they would categorize me under  
Depression, social anxiety and self-esteem disorder is what  
they say I have  
Red pills, blue pills and white pills are the medication  
they would give me  
They would try to fix me back to the person I once was  
However I am not a broken doll that needs fixing  
I am not a lab rat for you test your medication on  
I am a person, a human being, mentally ill or not

*Anonymous is a 16 year old woman.*





ALMOST LOVE  
BY JOSIANE MÉNARD

you've taught me  
how I want to be touched  
how I want to be seen  
my sweet, almost love

you've taught me  
how men are not all the same  
that some of you out there  
handle our hearts with care

you've taught me that being me  
is nothing to be ashamed of  
and that I am maybe  
just a little bit special

there could have been an us  
but timing had other plans  
we quickly turned to dust

your presence was a gift  
that I will forever keep  
wrapped with ribbons and silk

know that i will never settle  
for less than what you've shown me  
my sweet, sweet, almost love

*Josiane Ménard is 29 year old Black writer from Montreal.*

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## FATHER'S DAY BY NEEM RÉAL

I want to pick up the phone  
and talk to someone that can relate to how I feel right now...

Fatherless on Father's Day

I think of Laurent, but his dads just sick  
I think of Oscar, but his dads just absent  
I think of Simran, but his dads just shitty  
I think of Sean, but his dad survived the bullet

There's no one i can speak to about how I feel.

No one I know that's lost a father.

And then I remember,

My sisters.

*Neem Réal is a brown Punjabi non-binary person living between Toronto and Montreal. They are trans, demisexual and pansexual. They are a sexual assault survivor and cancer survivor. They live with chronic pain, depression, anxiety and other chronic illnesses.*







***Special thanks to Aisha Chaudhry for turning the idea of  
Open Hearts into a reality.***



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