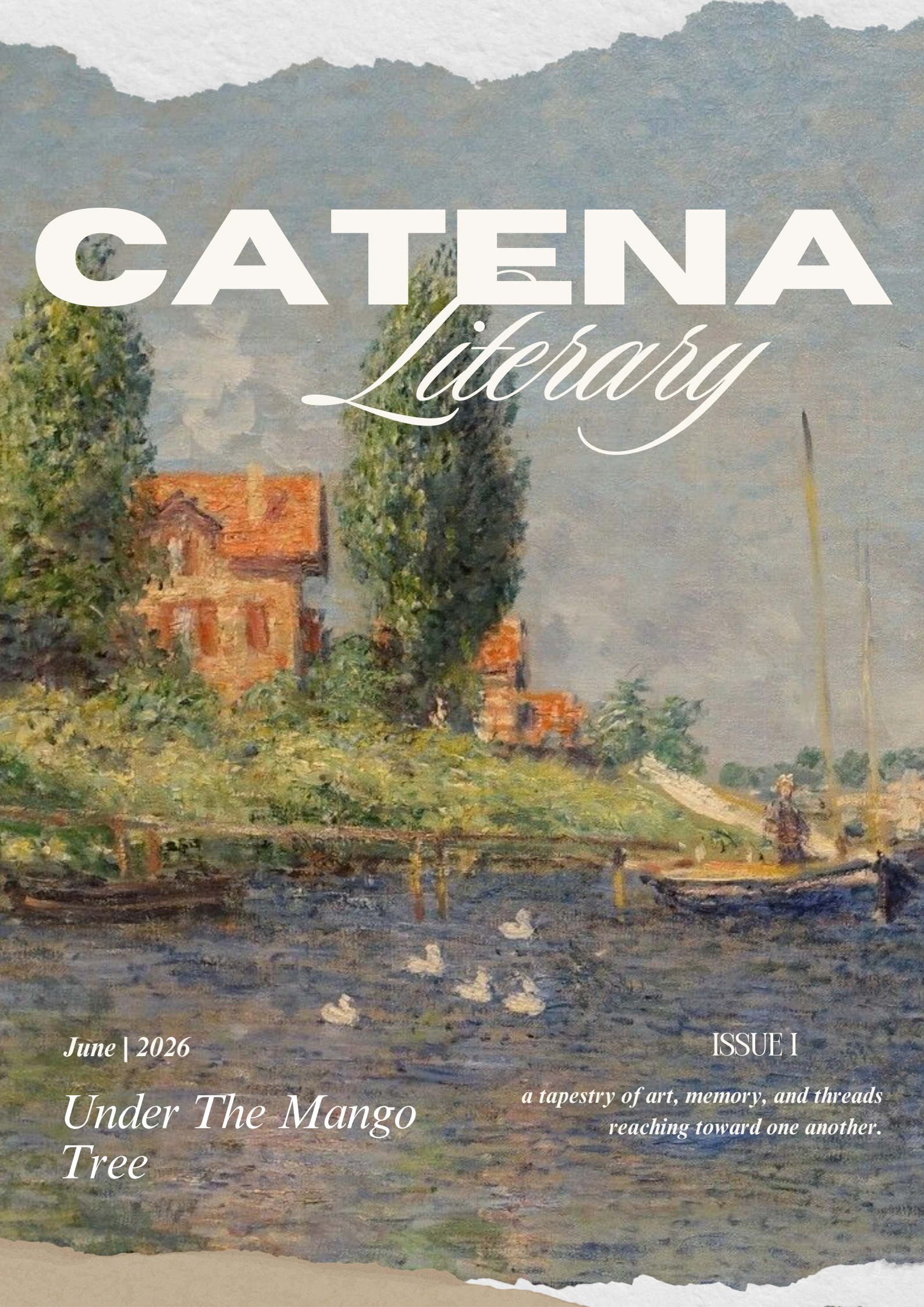


The background of the cover is a painterly illustration. It depicts a coastal scene with a red-roofed house on a hill, tall trees, a boat on the water, and swans. The style is soft and impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a muted color palette. The title 'CATENA' is in a bold, white, sans-serif font, and 'Literary' is in a white, cursive script font, both centered at the top.

# CATENA

## *Literary*

*June | 2026*

ISSUE I

*Under The Mango  
Tree*

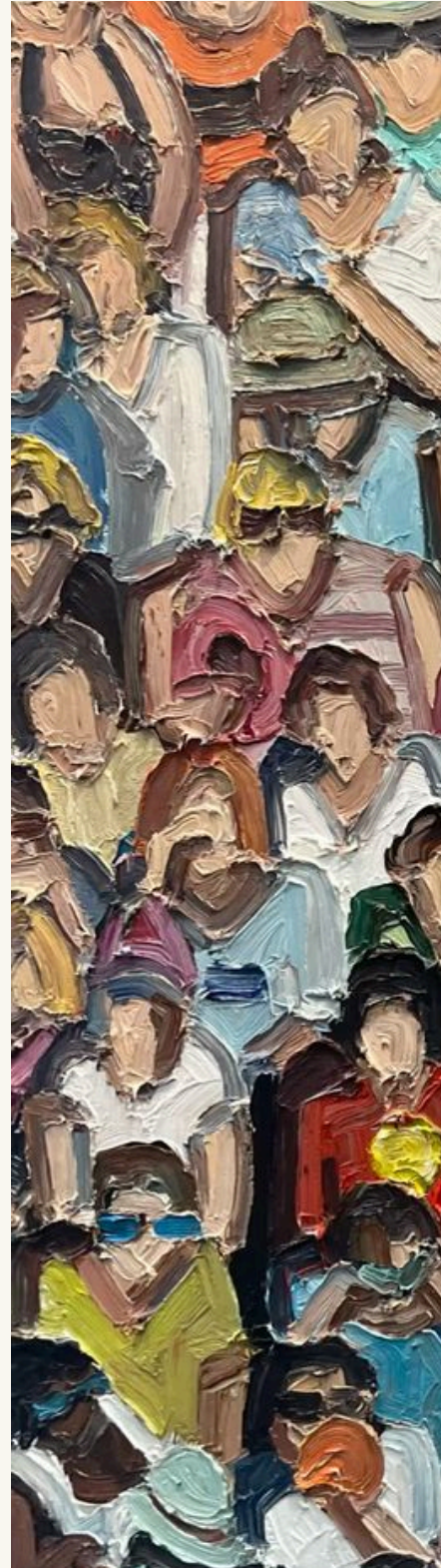
*a tapestry of art, memory, and threads  
reaching toward one another.*



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---

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# EDITOR'S *Note*

Dear readers,

Welcome to the first issue of Catena Literary.

*Under the Mango Tree* is rooted in the intimate moments that connect us to memory, place, culture, art, and one another. At Catena, we believe in the threads that weave together poetry, art, and the self. The pieces gathered here are a testament to the ways art reaches toward itself and others, each work extending a thread that contributes to a larger tapestry of connection.

Curating this issue has been a privilege - witnessing verses, brushstrokes, and thoughts find one another and take shape within these pages, each submission carrying its own world, and each world reaching toward another.

Thank you to *Aditi*, our Creative Director, for shaping the visual ethos of our first issue, and to *Yannah*, our Managing Editor, whose stewardship brought this issue to fruition. To all our creatives, thank you for the threads you brought to this chain.

Thank you for being part of our beginning. We hope you find something to carry with you from under the mango tree.

*-Sifath Agarwal*

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**"PAINTING IS POETRY  
THAT IS SEEN RATHER  
THAN FELT, AND  
POETRY IS PAINTING  
THAT IS FELT RATHER  
THAN SEEN."**

**-LEONARDO DA VINCI**



# MESSAGES FROM OUR

## *Creative Director*

### AND

## *Managing Editor*

---

Bringing *Under the Mango Tree* to life felt a little like piecing together a memory by collecting fragments of stories, artworks, colours, and emotions, then finding a way to let them speak to one another. As I worked on the visual identity of this issue, I kept returning to the feeling of summer afternoons: warm, nostalgic, and alive with possibility.

Every illustration, layout, and page was designed to feel like an extension of the work it holds. It has been a privilege to shape these pieces into a space where art, words, and memory can meet.

Thank you for joining us for *Catena's* first issue. I hope you find yourself somewhere within these pages, and carry a small piece of them with you when you leave.

- *Aditi Menon*  
Creative Director

Our first issue has been a great learning experience. It meant embracing the inevitable chaos and being able to untangle it to become a chain again. We watched various art forms converse, and diversities interconnect to become what we call '*Under the Mango Tree*'.

Our team has worked hard to turn their passion for literature into this issue. And so, I thank our team wholeheartedly for all their efforts. Thank you to every contributor who entrusted us with a thread from their world.

We hope to keep showcasing talents. Some that still reside in notebooks hidden in the bedroom corner, and some that have already found their place in the world, all are welcome. I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed making it.

- *Yannah Ramchandani*  
Managing Editor



# Meadow Dreams



*By Chloe Harris*

This original artwork by Chloe Harris is published by Catena Literary with first serial rights and has not been previously published online or in print.





# *For An Insect Or An Optimist*

Rot and boil this sickly sweet being  
Flesh swollen in sun  
Ripped to half pitted / Swathed  
On its side in vulnerability  
Lie and Lie  
Fester for the others  
Coming for the night / march and teeter  
To rip and dissect  
Billions of earth's finest creatures  
In person and size



To crawl in and take  
Giving to the fruit  
It's meaning once more  
Before corrosion removes / vivify anew  
This meaning to give  
A sweet smell / a fresh taste  
And birth an entire colony  
With a pit far too useless  
For a mammal

**-Zoey Wheeler**





# SUNSTROKE:

## *summer through an artists eyes*

---

RADIANCE

**By Rishika Didwania**

Summer never arrived to me as a weather. It arrives as a palette left open too long, pigments softening at the edges, colours quietly melting into one another. It enters like a warm varnish settling over a canvas, changing not the subject but the way the eye receives it.

An artist does not meet the summer in degrees and forecasts. Summer appears in textures. It lives in the rough grain of the sun-warmed walls, in cracked pavements carrying stories of footsteps, in linen sleeves sticking slightly to skin. It exists in the powdered softness of dust floating through a studio window and in the thick honey-like drag of paint across stretched canvas.

Its tones are deceptive. People speak of summer as bright yellow and blue skies, but it feels more layered than that. Summer is burnt sienna resting beneath gold; it is amber stained with exhaustion. It is pale peach fading at the corners and deep rust collecting where shadows refuse to disappear.

Noon is a harsh wash of white, almost overexposed, while evening softens itself into dilute pink and muted violets, as if someone dipped the horizon into water and watched the colours bleed. Even silence changes its surface in summer. It becomes heavier, slower, rustic, textured like unfinished clay beneath fingertips. Time itself feels less polished. Hours stretch and fold like fabric drying in the sunlight, carrying creases that never fully disappear.

Perhaps that is why artists find themselves returning to summer again and again. Not because it is beautiful in an obvious way, but because it refuses to stay flat. It layers itself endlessly. Every shadow contains another colour; every warmth contains another memory. Summer is not a season to be observed from a distance. It is a canvas still wet with paint, asking not to be looked at, but touched.



# DAISIES

*In Sunlight*



***By Chloe Harris***

This original artwork by Chloe Harris is published by Catena Literary with first serial rights and has not been previously published online or in print.



# THE TOUCH

*The fire*

When we were ten, we were the world.  
We were its lords and its servants.  
The boiling summer and crushing winter  
Bowed down to by our intertwined thoughts,  
And every moment was a millennium.

The summer before we turned eleven,  
The boys and girls still flirted and bowed and  
dipped  
The germs flitting about by opposite  
chromosomes  
Still deadly to the touch, and worse by mouth,  
An item loved and feared to love.

And the setting sun, causing creeping darkness,  
Touched us and penetrated our marrow.  
To be near one another then was a choice,  
One we made merrily and in alliance,  
Pliable stomachs filled with mallow and cocoa.

One day, down at the creek, news dispersed:  
Two called our own betraying the tribe with a  
kiss,  
Shared by the lake, a memory made infinite  
By the matching stones tossed in its current.  
The day two escaped from the acquiescent gates







From them on, the summer became a purge.  
How many could escape before the others  
caught wind?  
And soon, how could the others remaining  
evade teasing?  
The branches holding dangling limbs and  
doughy bodies  
Adapted to hold less now until the generation  
passed.  
When we were ten, we were the world  
And when we were eleven, the world became  
inadequate.  
Dull in comparisons to the wonders a body can  
hold, Grey when put against the colors of  
another's eye,  
Those memories infinitely hold of ten and  
years before.

**-Zoey Wheeler**



# SUMMER TIME *in my life*

*By Tanaaya Agarwal*



Before summers became all about tedious projects, tuitions and studies, they were my happy place. Summer afternoons involved sneaking some popsicles from the fridge and lazing around all day. I used to binge cartoons and spend hours playing outside in the scorching summer heat. Everyday when I got home, fresh mangoes used to call out my name and practically beg me to eat them. It was my heaven. Then for two weeks we would go to my grandmother's house like every Indian kid has. There used to be cycling around the colony and sleeping till noon without a care in the world. Summer camps, courses and just being carefree was my summer till 6th grade.

But the best part of summer was sitting in the garden in the evening. Not too late, just around five thirty when birds and butterflies were still around. The sun's rays used to kiss my face as I played with a flower on the ground and just took the fresh air in.

From 7th to 9th grade, I not only studied but did every teenager's version of "timepass" mixed with a touch of stupidity. All this was before tuitions and studies took over, I used to dance to songs and jump around in a way that would surely embarrass me today. There used to be hour-long conversations between friends and somewhere along the way I just lost all of that. Then would come the dreaded summer cold, a result of an unhealthy combination of ice cream, cold water and sitting near the air conditioner which my father begged me to turn off.



Honestly, this is probably why summer media remains my favourite kind of media to consume. They are such a throwback. Sure I didn't blow up an island or choose between two boys like in 'We were Liars' or 'The Summer I Turned Pretty' – spoiler alert. They just bring back memories of every summer that has been, and make me look forward to every summer that could be.

All of that seems so long ago and yet it feels like it happened yesterday. Before 10th grade took over and my life became tuition, homework, study and repeat; summer was the favourite time of my life. It still is really. Trust me, Mumbai heat is no joke and there will be some point in May when you start sweating your life's worth, just waiting for rains to get here. But it's all worth it for the memories that will last a lifetime. And summer always had my heart and it always will.







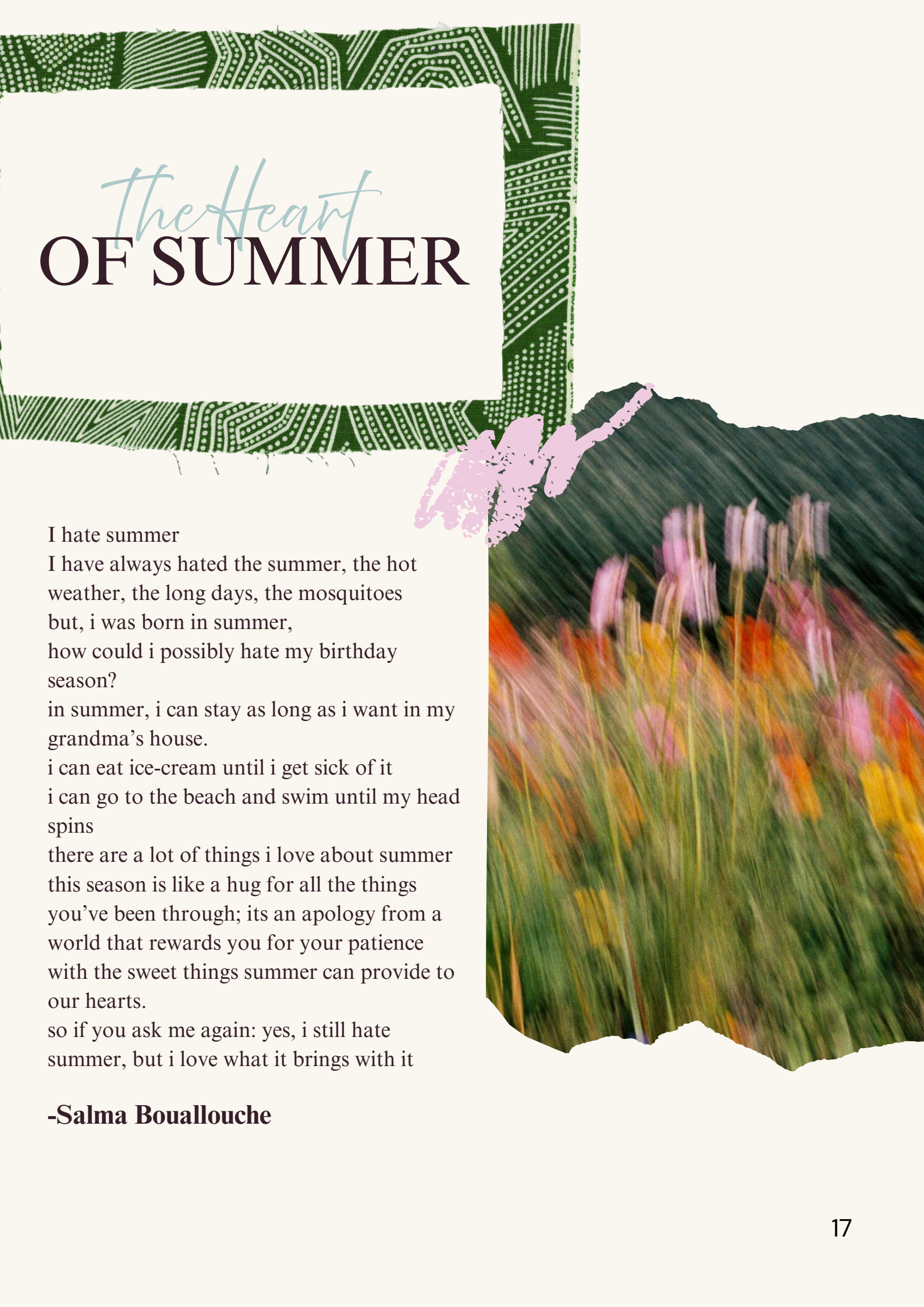
*“When will the summer gaze upon us ?”*

I ponder about you, my beloved, our September nights suspended in vast skies  
Dazzling fishtail palms blown by the nimbus clouds brimming with envy  
Your chestnut eyes twirling upon the vague skyline,  
As fabrics of golden novelty dance upon the Bauhinia saplings, parched for growth  
Smiling sunflowers press upon my wayward hand, urging me to hold yours  
Caimito trees, sickly sweet, with the fruits beholding my discreet fondness  
How you were once mine, beneath the relentless waves of the Pacific that unraveled  
time

I’m sorry flourishing flowers weren’t enough, to make you linger in our paradise  
My love, I care not to ask why  
With your lemonade berries and manzanaitas that carved your pavement,  
Etched into your basalt heart, reticent and unwavering to hold  
I understand you have fled away, what is there to utter to whom I once loved?  
Not even if I pluck a thousand Eschlozias will make you come back this May,  
Not even if I cry a thousand summers away to see you once more

**-Liane Dizon**





# *The Heart* **OF SUMMER**

I hate summer

I have always hated the summer, the hot weather, the long days, the mosquitoes but, i was born in summer, how could i possibly hate my birthday season?

in summer, i can stay as long as i want in my grandma's house.

i can eat ice-cream until i get sick of it  
i can go to the beach and swim until my head spins

there are a lot of things i love about summer  
this season is like a hug for all the things you've been through; its an apology from a world that rewards you for your patience with the sweet things summer can provide to our hearts.

so if you ask me again: yes, i still hate summer, but i love what it brings with it

**-Salma Bouallouche**

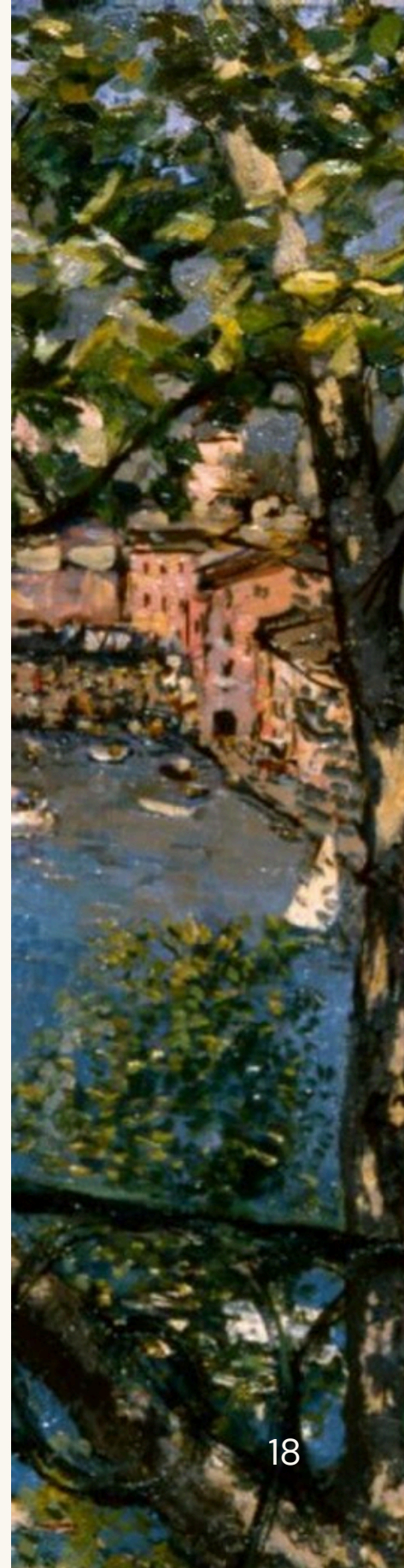


# THE GLEAMS THAT FORGOT TO LEAVE

*-Somewhere, We Are Still Barefoot Beneath The Trees.*

There was a golden hour  
That lived between the trees  
Like a secret the earth trusted only to children.  
Somewhere, the wind was teaching the leaves  
How to dance without touching the ground.  
I remember running through hours like a wild little myth,  
With warm dust on my ankles.  
And cola strips melting sweetly on my fingertips.  
Sometimes summer feels like a place that still remembers me,  
Like the trees are secretly waving when I walk by  
And the wind keeps trying to tell me something important  
But gets distracted playing with my hair instead.  
The evenings always felt magical.  
Everything turned golden and soft,  
Like the whole world had been dipped in honey.  
And somehow the smallest things felt enormous,  
Icy mango juice dripping down my wrists,  
The sound of bicycles racing before sunset,  
Someone calling me inside before dark.  
Now whenever summer returns,  
The world feels slightly enchanted again—  
As if somewhere beyond the trees,  
Childhood is still barefoot, still glowing,  
Still filling its pockets with fallen stars.  
Somewhere, hidden among emerald shadows,  
A tree still keeps our laughter  
Folded carefully between its blossoms  
Like a letter too beautiful to throw away.

**-Shivani Kumari**







# FEW MUST READS

## *During These Summer Times*



*Recommendations from Catena's Editorial Team*

*From our shelves to yours - a small collection of books we carried through the golden stretch of summer. We hope you find a book here that stays with you long after the season ends.*

1. *Circe by Madeline Miller*
2. *Emma by Jane Austen.*
3. *Giovanni's Room by James Baldwin*
4. *East of Eden by John Steinbeck*
5. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain*
6. *Under The Tuscan Sun by Frances Mayes*
7. *Malibu Rising by Taylor Jenkins Reid*





I've always been fond of  
Summer evenings and nights,  
The embrace of the warm breeze  
And the streetlights  
Flickering like fireflies;

I love how mellifluously  
Cicadas sing,  
But more so the feelings  
Stirred in me —  
The kind that only  
summer dusks can bring.

## A YOUTH *written in summer*



Summer dusks always  
Tend to leave me in awe —  
A landscape,  
I could only once  
imagine drawing.

Now I saunter on these streets  
Humming summer's song,  
Trying to capture the essence  
Of this sweet freedom  
For which my soul always longed.

And I wave at the animals,  
I dance in the ball of swaying trees,  
I cheer over the young bird's flight,  
Soaring so high and carefree.

Ah! I love the summer's evening sky —  
How it gently melts  
In the embrace  
of the warm, merry night ;

How people roam, sit  
And chat in delight,  
Under the languishing sunset  
And blooming moonlight.

Oh! How I'll always remember  
These summer evenings and nights,  
And the fragment of youth I spent  
Under those warm starry nights.

*-Lewis Waldemer*





# The Incomplete SUMMER

While most summers ripen slowly  
in a grandmother's backyard,  
under a mango tree heavy with fruit and memory,  
mine arrive in fragments.

In cardboard boxes,  
in the sharp rip of tape,  
in metal trunks that carry more past than present.

You might ask why.  
I would say, welcome to a life in olive green,  
where every other summer is not a season  
but a quiet departure,  
an uprooting of a version  
I had only just begun to recognise.

Half-packed rooms,  
walls echoing with what used to belong.  
Memories stack themselves into corners,  
a mirage of things —  
too many to hold,  
too endearing to keep.

The sun does not soften here.

It presses down  
on furniture wrapped like unfinished stories.

This is my random Thursday.



A school year left mid-sentence.  
Friendships scattered like loose pages.  
Places not meant to be lived in,  
only remembered.  
While others return to the same tree,  
I learn to leave before anything ripens.  
And yet,  
somewhere between departure and arrival,  
hope slips in quietly.  
It waits  
in unfamiliar streets,  
in houses that echo at first,  
hollow and hesitant  
until they begin to hold your voice.  
A new address inked onto parcels.  
First footsteps,  
on soil that does not know your name.  
Doors that open to spaces  
that start to feel like your own.  
And once again, I begin,  
not from the start  
but from wherever I have carried myself to.  
Learning each time  
not just how to arrive,  
but how to bloom  
in borrowed summers, beneath no single tree.

**-Ishika Arya**







# SUMMER:

## *The Golden Resurrection*

**By Samaira Gupta**

Ballads drift toward golden ages, conjuring the allure of glorious times  
Ardour, nostalgia and embers of longing ascending to life from the cadence of rhymes  
In clandestine letters sealed in bottles, adrift on frozen seas across interwoven timelines  
What once echoed as madness and chaos now turns, like venom transmuted into sweet wines.

As beneath Verona's stars, draped in the warmth of summer air, Romeo's gaze first found Juliet's  
As honey-coloured clouds poured down all shades of amber, where the sun and horizon met.

It descends like halcyon, winding back the clock at the final breath of the grim  
Dark bark traced against sheets of white snow dissolves into scandalously luminous scenes  
Like when Aphrodite drifted across glistening fields, as the earth burst with foliage and petals  
As a rare golden light decoded the landscape into summer's whispered love letter.

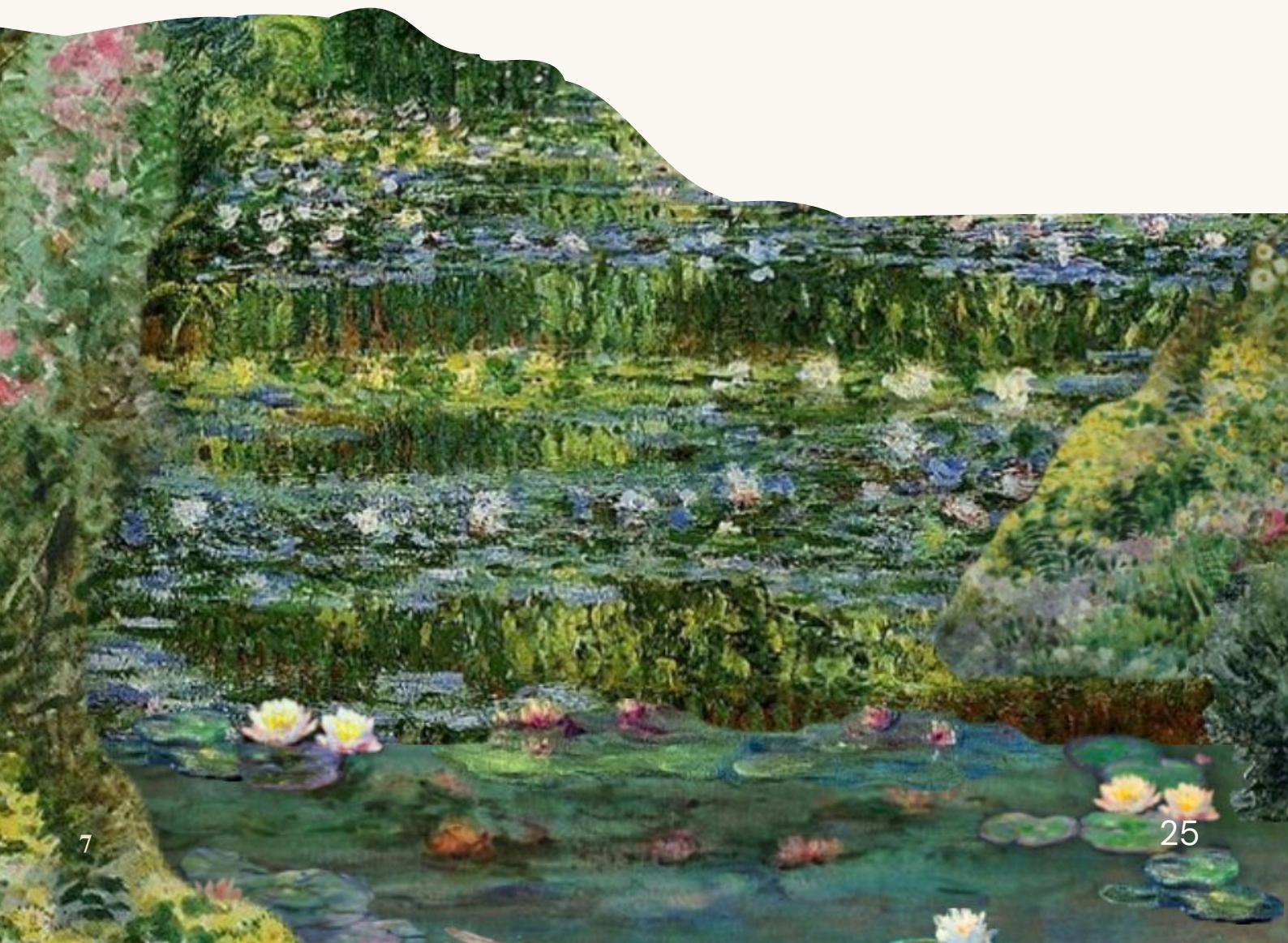


For the wind to carry painted butterflies and perfume and an opalescent glare  
For sleeping lilies to stir from winter's slumber, their petals unfurling fine and fair  
For canopies to reclaim the sky and weave sunlight into amorous mosaics on the floor  
For orchards to unlock their chambers of sweet nectar seeping into the sap of swelling orbs.

Beneath the mango tree, we settle into swaying grass, sipping the liquid steeped in its essence;  
Sparkling lemonades dance across our tongues, leaving a gentle yet sharp tang  
Lavender drifts, the seraphic keeper of luck, the doorway of nostalgic reminiscence  
Carrying us back to when mothers plucked a sprig and wove it through their daughter's tresses.

With the tide of time, the skies blush into fire as the patient sun sinks slowly down  
As canyon walls grow heavy with the shadows of cowboys riding toward the glow of their town  
The prairies ripple in the zephyr, haze dissolves, as the lionhearted cowboys stride over the sand  
Campfires bloom as red flames waltz, and stars spill wide across the black vastness.

The summer's reign reclaims the earth, gilding all that winter left behind  
Breathing gold into bare branches, pouring warmth into the corridors of the mind  
Every petal, every amber sky, every mango-sweetened afternoon a sacred find  
The earth sheds its pale shroud and dresses itself in the richest shades of bloom  
As if the season itself were a ballad, endlessly faithful, endlessly kind  
For summer does not merely arrive — it resurrects, each time more golden than before.







# Summer Through Two Lenses

**BY ADVAIT KAMATH**

Summer has always felt like it has two sides.

One side is full of ripe mangoes, melting ice cream, and carefree afternoons that seem endless. The other side comes quietly, with hot roads, sleepless nights, and the strange feeling that growing up changes even the seasons we used to love.

As children, summer felt charming in the simplest ways. Days stretched endlessly, free from alarms, classrooms and homeworks. Mornings began slowly, afternoons were spent watching cartoons and evenings filled with playful moments ending with sticky hands from mangoes and ice cream. Summer vacations felt like freedom itself - a pause from the world where joy existed in mundane moments.

But adulthood changes the season altogether. The same summer that once brought excitement now feels exhausting. The heat feels unbearable, the days feel harsher and responsibilities leave little room for rest. Crowded localities, uneasy nights, incomplete work and constant routines slowly replace the carefree feeling summer once carried. The season itself has not changed but the people experiencing it have.

Summer can be called a season of contradiction. It is often associated with adventure - road trips, beaches, golden sunsets and blossoming flowers. Social media fills the season with images of laughter, travel and perfect moments under bright skies. Yet beneath all that brightness, summer can also feel deeply lonely. Long afternoons grow silent when there is no one to share them with and watching others make memories can sometimes intensify the feeling of being left behind. The same sunlight that warms one person can make another go cold.

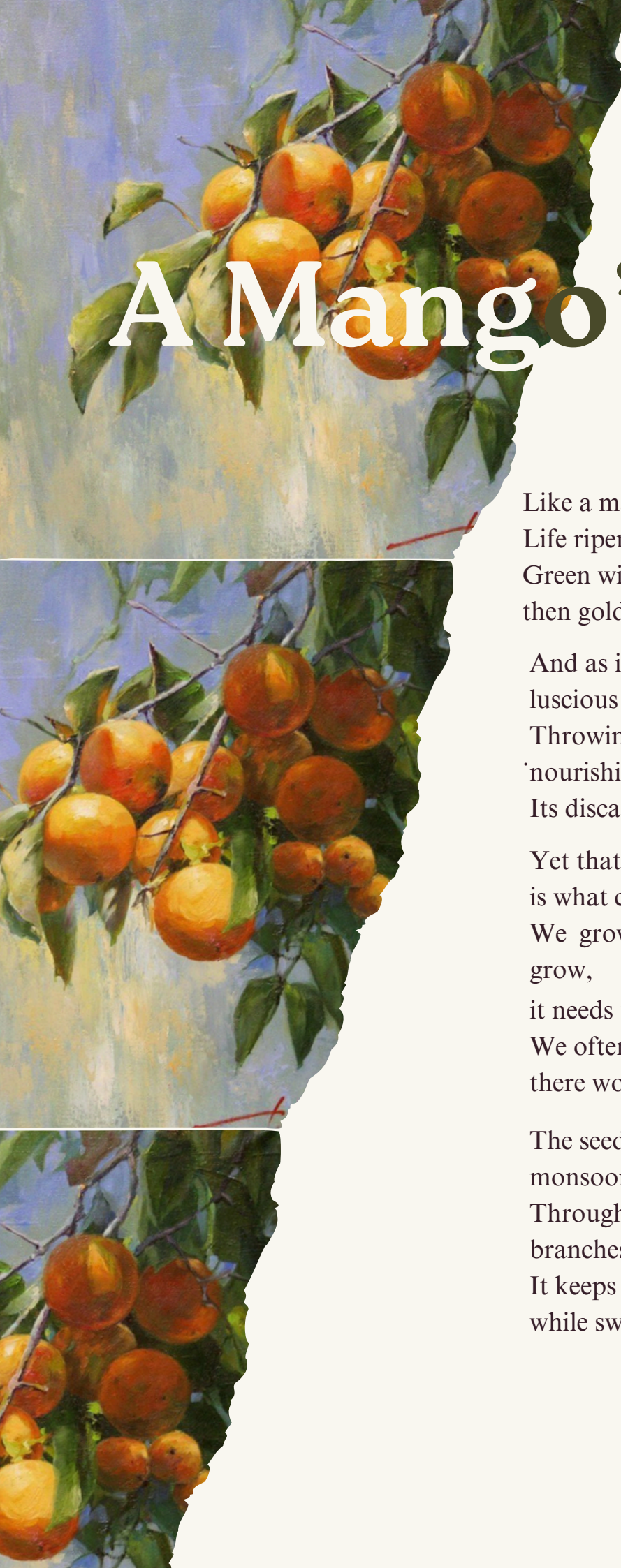


That is the strange beauty of summer: it holds opposites at the same time. It can feel freeing and exhausting, joyful and lonely, heartwarming and overwhelming. For some, it becomes a season of escape and happiness; for others, it becomes a reminder of pressure, change and distance from the unsophistication of youth.

Maybe that is why summer connects with us so deeply. It reflects not only the world around us, but also the phase of life we are in. As we grow older, the seasons change with us. In the end, summer is more than just heat or sunshine - it is a cluster of emotions, memories, and contrasts that everyone experiences differently.







# A Mango's Core

Like a mango in the summer heat,  
Life ripens slowly  
Green with bitterness at first,  
then gold under the unrelenting sun

And as it matures we focus on the sweet  
luscious fruit,  
Throwing away its hard, inedible yet  
'nourishing core  
Its discarded- for it no longer has any use

Yet that stubborn core  
is what carries the fruit to fullness.  
We grow the plant for its fruit- yet for it to  
grow,  
it needs the part which we cannot swallow.  
We often forget that without it,  
there would be no sweetness at all.

The seed which bears every storm, the  
monsoon winds,  
Through parched summers and bending  
branches  
It keeps the mango whole, allowing it to grow  
while sweetness gathers quietly around.





Perhaps people are the same.  
The grief we bury,  
the sharp words we still taste years later,  
the loneliness that hollowed rooms inside our chests-  
The fake smiles and bittersweet regret  
These become the seed.  
Hard to swallow  
And harder to keep.

Yet,  
Compassion ripens from loneliness.  
Wisdom grows from regret and experiences.  
Kindness develops as a result of the harsh rains  
And growth comes from merely surviving the days.

People, too, like the fruit,  
sweet in laughter,  
sour in anger,  
soft in love,  
and stringy with memory.  
Desired not because they're flawless but because they're  
true  
For life is a kaleidoscope of hues.

So perhaps the discarded core  
is not ugly at all.  
Maybe it is the proof that we endured.  
Our flaws are not separate from our beauty  
but the reason it ripened.

The flesh is what we see,  
what feeds the body  
but the seed is who we are,  
what feeds our souls.

But at the end of the day, we all try-  
Try to leave the rotten core behind



# Roots

tired, i take a seat  
at the roots of the mango tree

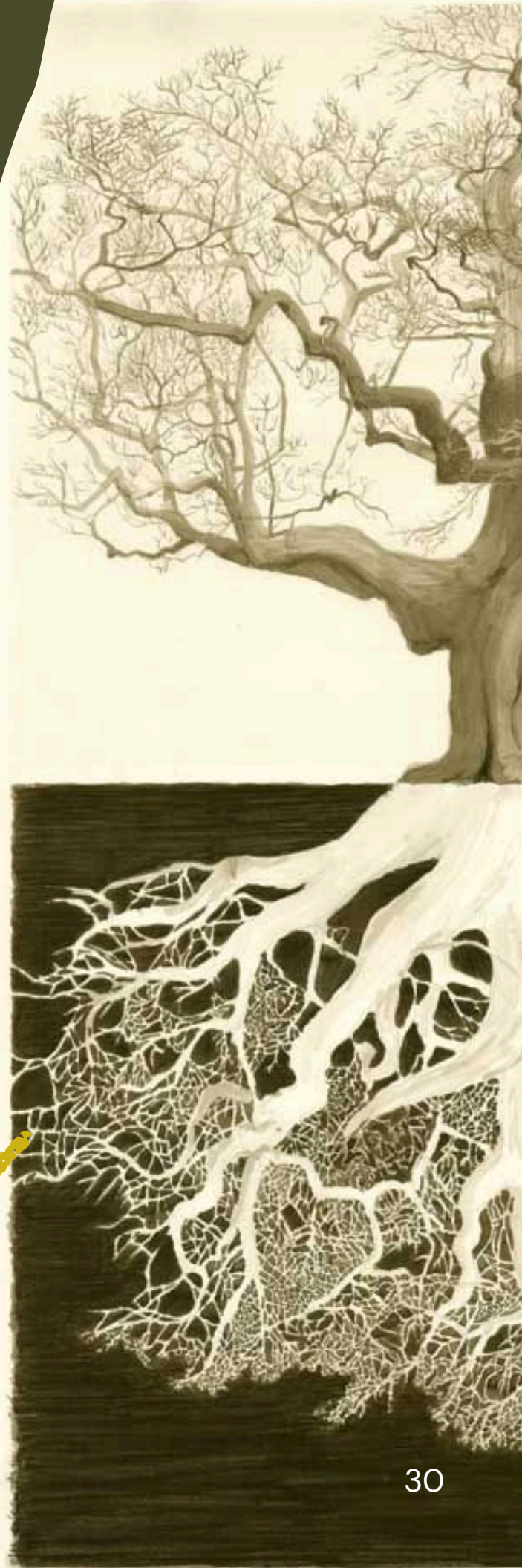
do you remember when we watered it  
when it was small, tiny, young  
almost as tall as us?

do you remember when the first  
mango ripened  
and we devoured it  
as we watched the sun set?

would you remember, though  
when one fruit turned into two  
and it was too much for me, yet too  
little for you?

now all of its fruits have taken bloom  
yet they're gone so soon  
just like you

-Sasi Kondru





# 12 THINGS WE LEARNED WHILE BUILDING A MAGAZINE

*Between drafts, conversations, and countless threads of connection, we learned quite a few things about building a magazine. Here are twelve of them, gathered from the journey of creating Catena's first issue.*



## 1. Every Detail Tells a Story.

A magazine isn't just its writing. Typography, spacing, colours, illustrations, and layouts all shape how a reader experiences a piece.

## 2. Creativity Thrives On Collaboration.

The strongest ideas emerged through conversations, feedback, and the coming together of different perspectives.

## 3. A Theme Is More Than a Title.

The challenge wasn't choosing *Under the Mango Tree* but, finding ways to let that feeling echo through every page.

## 4. Done Is Better Than Perfect.

No issue is ever truly finished. At some point, you have to trust the work, let it go, and allow it to find its readers.







## 5. Untangling Knots

Problem solving has been an interesting patch of the road to create an issue, how to be able to break down a problem into pieces that feel more solvable and coming to an appropriate solution.

## 6. Conversations Of Value

Conversations hold importance when both sides reciprocate understand. Hence, to be able to converse better, with both, our team and the readers.

## 7. Differences Create Depth

The value of diverse opinions is held high. It highlighted what we believe as a magazine and brought unimaginably amazing outputs

## 8. Building Together

Understanding to become more accommodative, on as to how to work in a team better and understand their work perspective.



## 9. Curating Is An Act Of Listening

The role of an editor is not to make every work sound the same, but to hear what each piece is trying to become and help it breathe.





## 10. Every Submission Is a Thread Of Trust

What feels like a detour often becomes the very thing that gives a project its character, leading it somewhere more interesting and human



## 11. Embrace The Pivot

A magazine is built on trust before it is built on pages. Every submission is a piece of someone's inner world, entrusted to your hands.

## 12. Community Is Created Through Invitation

Art is rarely waiting to be created, and is more often, waiting to be welcomed, and the act of making space for it is a creative practice in itself.





# Finding Summer

By Eshmeher Kaur

It's the one time of year nostalgia hits, harder than a recurring wave crashing at a rock. Its warmth is a hug from the sun. The sun's rays; its golden arms stretching at you, illuminating every dark space. Summer is easy, kind and happy.

Summer is the grains of sand holding together a castle, the satisfaction of an ice cream in the heat and the laughter shared making quiet rooms loud. Summer is a feeling, a good feeling.

Summer is freedom from life. It's a pause, a semicolon in a long paragraph. It wants you to breathe. It's an escape from rules. It's when even falling feathers sway side to side, trying to hold on to passing time.

Summer is a positive remembrance, it's an idea, an interpretation of a perfect picture. It's a painting that everyone understands differently but smiles when they look at it. The blank canvas; our minds, the brush; our experiences and the paints; our feelings.

Finding summer should not be restricted to a specific period, but any time a grey cloud is hung over us. We need to find the ease, the kindness and the happiness when we are down. It's memories of laughter, joy and satisfaction that flash a smile on our faces when the tears run down. It's the breaks we need when work is burdening, when you don't know what to do.

Finding Summer isn't finding a season, it's finding sanctity in something. It's finding home when home isn't enough.





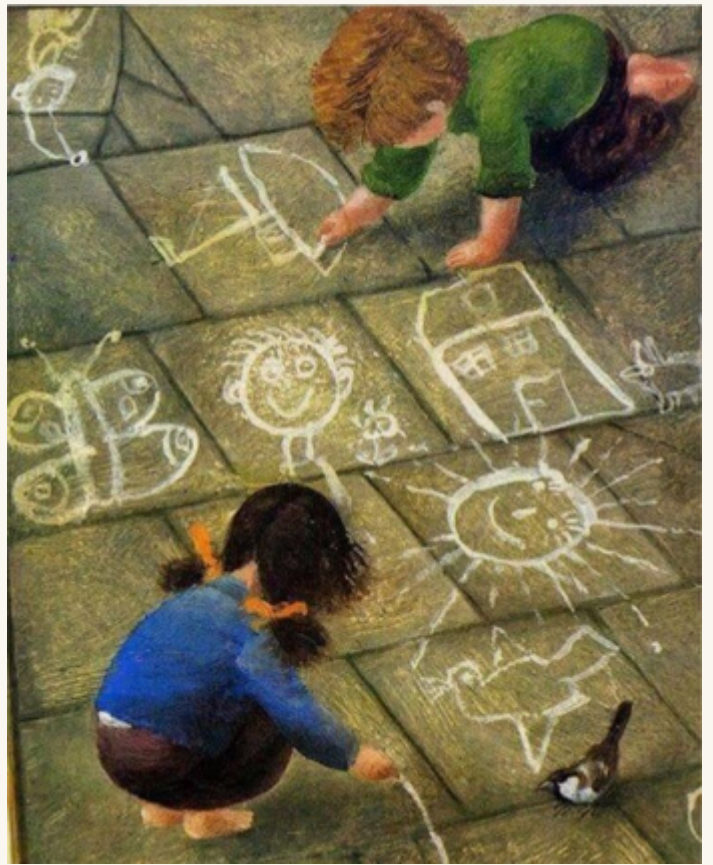
We didn't bother with knives; we just peeled them with our teeth right there, the sweet, sticky juice dripping down our fingers and staining the cuffs of our school uniforms. It tasted like freedom, like a secret we all shared, like the exact color of a 4:00 PM sun. In those moments, with the salt from the nearby beach still crusting on our skin, we felt entirely permanent. We thought the afternoon would just keep stretching into forever. But adolescence is an unstable transition. You don't notice the exact moment the movie changes from a children's story to a coming-of-age film.

You just wake up one day and realize the backyard feels smaller. The neighbor's fence is no longer a towering fortress, just rusty iron. The games have stopped. You look at the old textbook, and the mango stains on the cover have faded to a dull, quiet brown.

We spent so much time trying to read ourselves into someone else's story, never realizing that the geography shaping who we were was already written on our skin—in the sunburns that peeled away like old paper, and the lingering, sweet ache of a youth that melted before we even knew it was summer.







# *Empty Summers*

by Rishima Gupta

There was a time when summer meant movement.

Not the still, heavy movement of hot air pressing against your skin, but the movement of suitcases dragged across airport floors, grandparents waiting at arrival gates, and getting flagged at security for packing tens of metallic toy cars and chocolate milk. Summer meant buying gifts for cousins I only met once a year, my parents barely managing to pack with the airplane cabin weight limit, and leaving behind the polished glass towers of the UAE for something louder, messier, and far more alive.

As an immigrant child, summer used to arrive with anticipation long before it actually began, from when we began packing our suitcases weeks before our flight. Maybe because my birthday falls in July, midsummer, I measured my life through those visits. Each summer became attached to a different version of me-the 3year old who cried when her mother went to buy her gifts, and the first grader with her frozen themed birthday party, summer was the beginning of another era.



In the UAE, summer existed behind closed windows and humming air-conditioners. The sun was something to escape. But in India, we ran directly into it. Every afternoon stretched endlessly under the mango tree near my grandparents' house. My cousins and his friends and I would disappear outside for hours with no plan at all. We chased each other under the sun, created new games to play, and came home sweaty and sunburnt.

And then came the summers during COVID- the strange, paused summers that seemed to blur into one another. For the first time, summer did not mean flights booked months in advance or getting spoilt by grandparents. Our house felt silent, relatives became faces on phone screens, and the idea of 'going back' suddenly felt uncertain. I remember how odd it felt to stay still during a season that had always meant movement. Slowly, everyone changed in those years without even realizing it. Cousins grew older in separate cities, and the closeness that once felt automatic became something that needed effort. By the time the world reopened, the summers I returned to no longer felt exactly like the ones I had left behind.

Now, I live in India permanently. Ironically, the country I spent my childhood waiting to return to no longer feels the same. In my head, 'vacation India' and 'home India' are two different places.

Every summer I feel like I'm missing something, and that I've left something behind. Maybe it's that part of me that I left behind when I moved. Sometimes i still feel like I'm on vacation, and haven't bought the ticket back home

The airports are gone from the story. The excitement of 'going back' has disappeared because there is nowhere left to return to. And maybe that is what growing up feels like; realizing that sometimes you miss a feeling more than a place.





I recently visited the places of my childhood summers, expecting to find a piece of the person I left behind. Instead, I found an exhausting stillness. The courtyard was quiet. My cousin and his friends have grown up, scattered by the winds of career, ambition, and their own adult solitudes. Everyone has classes, entrance exams, jobs, or their own lives pulling them elsewhere. We no longer talk about school drama or subway surfers; instead we discuss our future goals and dream colleges, and how soon we'll be left fending for ourselves.

I used to think the sadness came from missing the UAE, but it doesn't. I don't miss the houses or the city itself. I miss that **FEELING**, the version of summer that existed between two homes. The version where every visit felt like a break from real life.

Now summer feels heavier.

Longer.

Quieter.

Sometimes the afternoons feel so still that they almost hurt. The heat presses against the windows, the ceiling fans hum endlessly, and the days stretch forward without the excitement they once carried.

Just an emptiness.

As though somewhere along the way, summer lost its voice. The season stayed the same, while we all quietly changed inside it.





# NOSTALGIC

## *summery*

By Mishti Saxena



We grew up reading old English textbooks where summer was a polite affair. It belonged to children who sat under the shade of foreign oaks, drinking lemonade while a gentle breeze turned the pages of their neat lives.

But our summer didn't know how to be polite.

Our summer was a loud, breathless thing that lived in the dust of the back alley. It was governed by the strict, unwritten laws of backyard cricket—where hitting the ball over the neighbor's fence wasn't just a six, it was an automatic declaration of war. We played until the sun dipped so low it turned our long, lanky shadows into giants, our knees scraped, our t-shirts damp with sweat and the fierce urgency of youth.

The real magic, though, wasn't in those printed pages. It was hanging from the heavy branches of the mango tree at the edge of the yard.

There was an art to gathering them. We would stand underneath the canopy, squinting into the green-and-gold light, looking for the ones the birds had started to peck—the sure sign of sweetness. We'd throw a worn-out sneaker or a stick up into the leaves, holding our breath until a heavy fruit came thudding down into the dirt.

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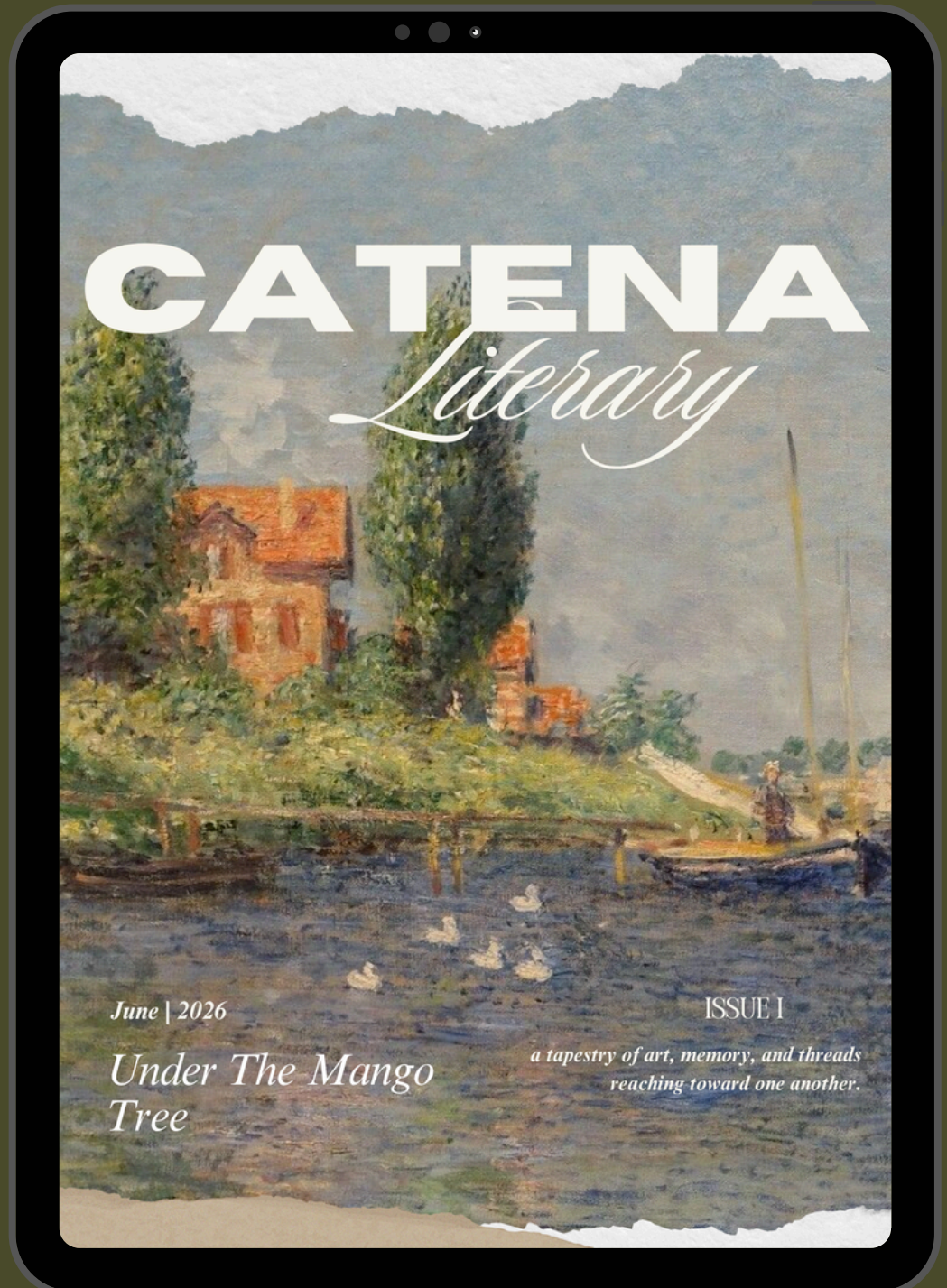
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