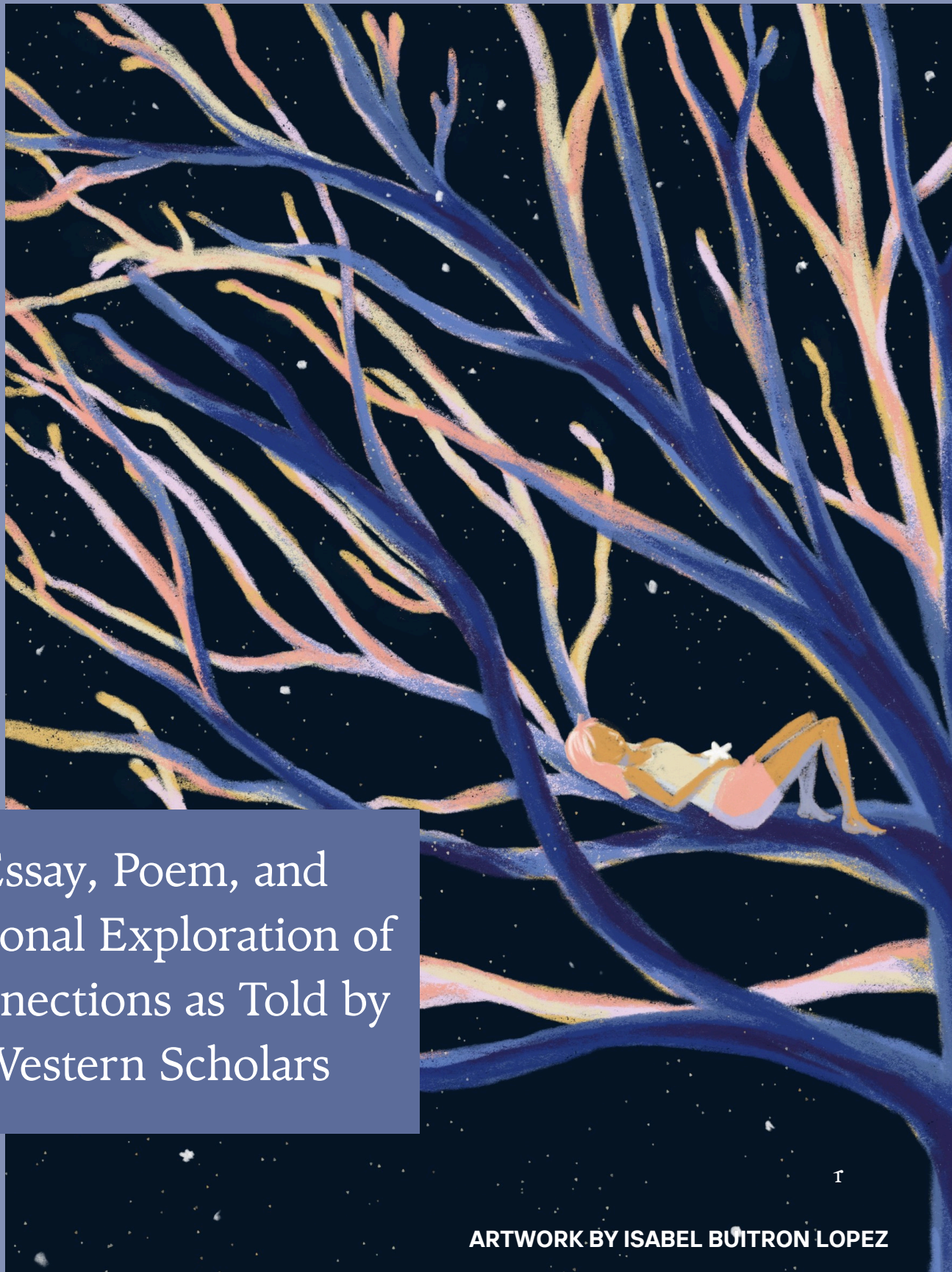


CONSTELLATIONS:

The Connections that Shape us



Essay, Poem, and
Fictional Exploration of
Connections as Told by
Western Scholars

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Photograph by Ralph Bou Abboud

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Photograph by Kate Klassen

A Foreword from the Editor

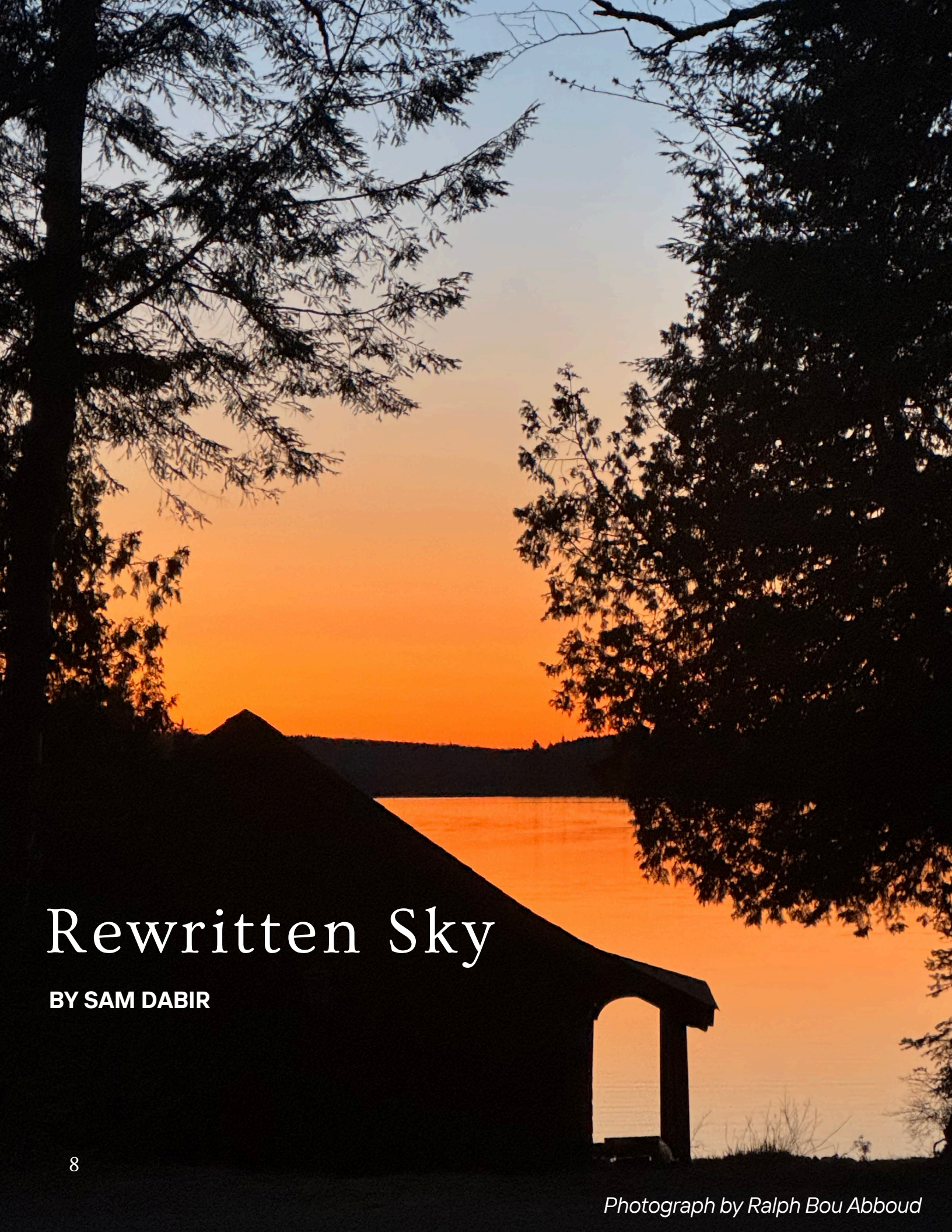
The task of choosing the theme for this magazine is always met with great deliberation as we seek a word, a concept or an idea that will anchor our creative outputs for the coming year. However, when the idea of constellations and connections was presented, an agreement was made almost unanimously. Whether it be a result of our acknowledgement of the world's pressing and constant need to recognize the value of human connection, or the inherent beauty and complexity of constellations themselves, is unknown. Throughout these pieces, we explore the idea of connections through the idea of constellations; constellations, though composed of stars not physically connected, form intricate patterns to which we assign some significance. Like connections, they transcend our earthly notions of unity. We hope you will enjoy our artistic interpretations of connection in a world that is in need of such reminders.

Anargi Perera
Editor In-Chief

CONSTELLATIONS OF BECOMING

GRACE LEVINSKY





Rewritten Sky

BY SAM DABIR

The sky is unfinished.
Every night, it asks to be rewritten.
Lines appear, disappear,
inked in light, erased by time.

Nothing up there stays loyal
to the shape we gave it.
We mistake repetition for truth.
Because it looked the same yesterday,
we assume it will again.

But the stars drift.
The patterns loosen.
What we once called certain
slowly becomes suggestion.

Perhaps meaning was never meant
to last forever,
only long enough
to be useful



LESSONS FROM SENIORS AND CHILDREN: HOW INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS SHAPED HOW I COMMUNICATE

RAYAN FARAHVASH



Art by Malak Al-Aubaidy

I want you to take a moment to think of a complicated topic you understand well and believe is important for the general population to understand. Are you equipped to explain it to a friend in another field? How about a 10-year-old or a 60-year-old? These questions have evolved the way I approach information communication throughout my undergraduate career, challenging me to convey my knowledge to general audiences.

I was taught that even the smartest scientist or most skilled clinician will struggle to excel if they cannot communicate their knowledge. You may be the best doctor in the world, but if you cannot explain the reasoning behind a treatment to a skeptical patient in a way they understand, you have failed them. The ability to communicate meaningfully with others is what truly sets experts apart. Whether conveying a complex scientific concept or offering reassurance and clarity, communication is a skill unlike any other, and it develops differently for everyone. For me, this lesson was heavily reinforced through tutoring children and volunteering in retirement homes.

As a tutor, I was expected to explain novel concepts to children in a way they could understand. At times, I failed to recognize implicit assumptions I was making, leaving out details simply because they felt obvious to me. This created a gap between my students and me. I unintentionally reinforced a power dynamic in which they viewed me as significantly more capable. Unsurprisingly, this shut down their curiosity and engagement. More importantly, it meant I had lost their trust and failed at my primary responsibility: communicating knowledge.

The first step toward improvement was learning to meet my students where they were, so I started thinking deeply about their questions, identifying gaps in understanding through the questions, and adjusting my explanations accordingly. Something as simple as replacing a definition with an example or pausing to ask why they thought an answer was correct, transformed lessons from one-sided explanations into conversations. When I explained fractions using slices of pizza instead of numbers on a page, or related biology concepts to characters from shows they watched, they leaned forward when learning, asked questions, and most importantly, stopped apologizing for being confused. These moments reminded me that confusion is not a failure of intelligence, but often a failure of explanation.

While volunteering in a retirement home, many residents were curious about the kind of work and projects I was involved in. When I answered that my undergraduate thesis was in stem cell research, keeping my explanation short and technical proved insufficient. They probed further, asking thoughtful questions, and I often felt unable to respond in a way that satisfied their curiosity. At times, I realized the challenge I was facing wasn't a lack of understanding, but an inability to translate the complex themes into language that was accessible and meaningful to them. This required a different kind of attentiveness.

Residents brought lived experience, curiosity, and skepticism, and they were unafraid to challenge vague or incomplete answers. When I described stem cell research as “working with cells that can become many different types of cells,” it sparked follow-up questions: Why does that matter? Who does it help? What are the risks? I learned to frame my work in terms of real people like patients with diabetes, neurodegenerative disease, or injuries. One resident compared stem cells to uncommitted workers waiting to be trained, an analogy I now find myself reusing. In those moments, I realized that effective communication is often collaborative; understanding emerges through dialogue and not just explaining concepts.

I noticed how small shifts in communication could fundamentally change an interaction. These experiences also made me more aware of how easily authority can silence others. When someone perceives you as the “expert,” they may hesitate to ask questions, challenge ideas, or admit confusion.

I became more deliberate about dismantling that perceived hierarchy and invited questions early in conversations, normalizing uncertainty, and acknowledging when I did not have an immediate answer. Ironically, admitting what I did not know often strengthened credibility rather than diminishing it. As I continued to develop, I began applying these lessons more broadly. Writing lay summaries for my courses forced me to confront how easily jargon can obscure meaning, and how clarity often requires deeper understanding, not less. If I could not explain an idea simply, it usually meant I had not fully grasped it myself. I started approaching presentations and written work with an audience-first mindset, asking myself not just what I wanted to say, but what someone unfamiliar with the topic needed to hear first.

Whether studying pharmacological interventions or communicating research findings beyond academia, I now see communication as a responsibility rather than a supplementary skill. The ability to translate complex ideas into meaningful understanding is what allows knowledge to have impact. My goal is to continue refining this skill by seeking feedback, engaging diverse audiences, and remaining attentive to how my words are received so that the science I care deeply about can truly serve the people it is meant to help. This skill is not one that simply makes individuals better communicators, but is the glue that holds together scientific understanding and public interest.

A SEA OF STARS
ISABEL BUITRON LOPEZ





CONSTELLATION OF CHOICES

MOHAMMAD BALAR

Choices arrive like distant, patient light,
So small at first, they vanish in the night.

A yes said once, a no that learns to stay,
A pause that gently turns into a way.

A door left open, not for fate, for air,
One step, and suddenly you are elsewhere.

At first, they scatter, nameless, out of view,
Like stars that do not promise what they do.

Then memory lifts its pencil to the sky,
And draws soft lines where none were passing by.

Was it chance, or will, or something in between,
That set a quiet moment in the scene?

The sky stays silent, wide, and unconcerned,
It offers no instruction in return.

Still we connect, because we need a guide,
A map to cross the dark from side to side.

The brightest points are not the only ones,
The faintest lights still shape what life becomes.

What mattered most, what briefly brushed the day,
What almost was, what slipped, what went away.

All of it gathers, steady, overhead,
A constellation drawn from what we said.

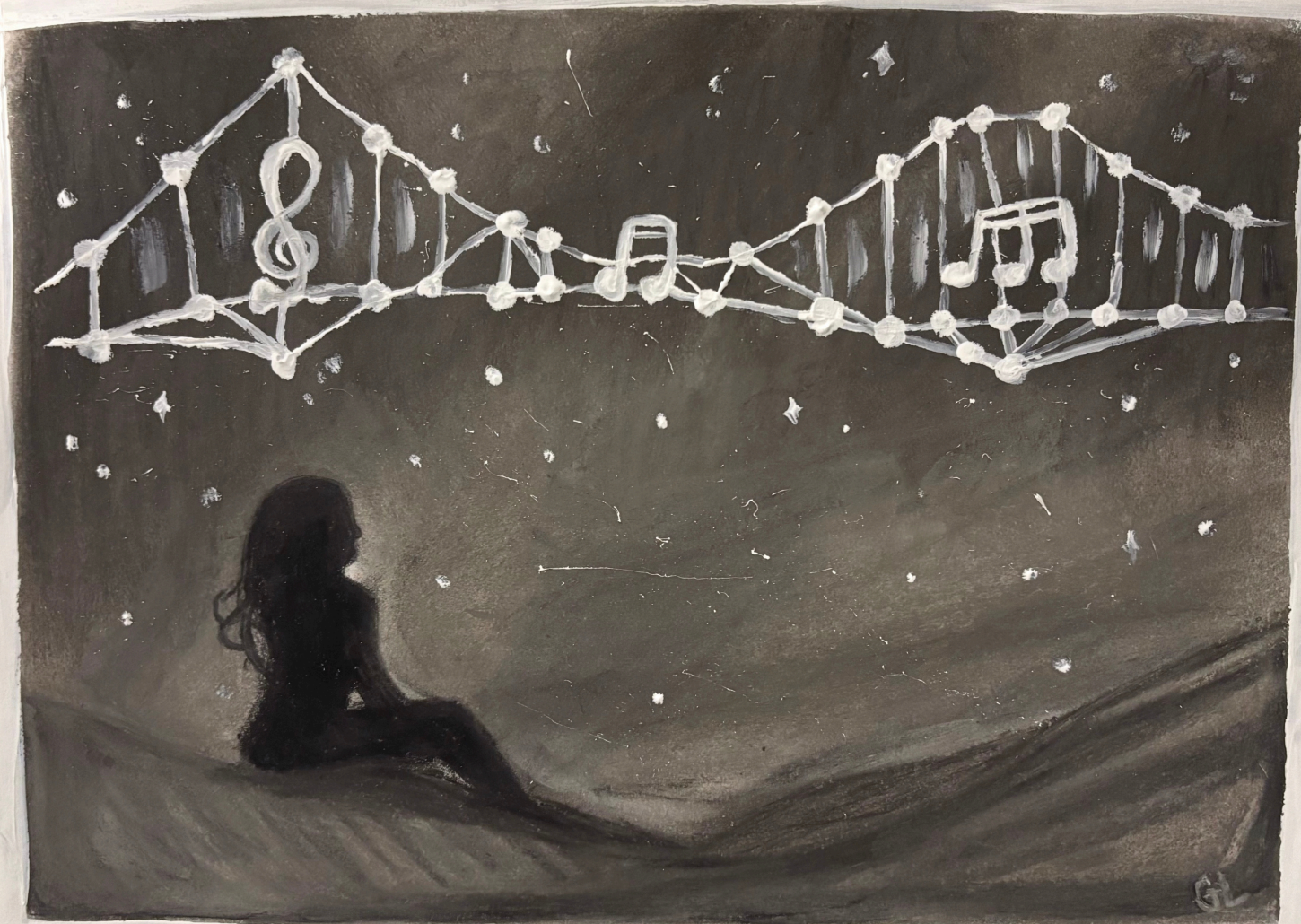
Not because the stars explain themselves as true,
But because we choose a pattern to get through.

Photograph by Kate Klassen

LYRA: HOW MUSIC CONNECTS US

KATE KLASSEN

In my final year of high school, I began leading a weekly singalong with the recreation staff at a nearby long-term care home; at first out of curiosity, and then out of something deeper I could not yet name. I have always believed in service, and I have always believed in music. I wanted to see what might happen when the two met in a room full of people who carried long histories inside them. I wondered about the kind of connections that could be formed through the sharing of music.



Each week, we set up a simple karaoke-style session and invited residents to sing along. The room transformed instantly. A melody would start, and faces, still a moment ago, would brighten. As heads lifted and toes began to tap, a few tentative voices would rise into the air like birds testing their wings. When familiar classics came on, the whole room seemed to breathe together. Sometimes a resident would take the microphone, surprising everyone, including themselves, with the strength and memory living in their voice.

As the weeks went by, the music served as a bridge between myself and the residents, and between the residents and parts of their own lives that time had tried to quiet. I began to learn their stories, their rhythms, their ways of listening. One resident, Jack, fascinated me. A retired philosophy professor, he carried a distinct alertness behind his gentle eyes. After each session, he would ask about my studies, my plans, my questions. He responded to my admiration for his wisdom with a soft laugh: “I know so little,” he would say, which somehow made him seem even wiser.

One Sunday afternoon, after the singalong had ended and the hallways had settled into their usual hush, I heard a familiar classical melody drifting down the corridor—the kind of piece that reaches straight into the chest. Following the sound felt like following a thread. Jack’s door was open. Inside, he was moving slowly and freely, his body tracing shapes in the air. He had tears in his eyes, yet he did not look sad. When he noticed me, he smiled through the tears and turned down the music. “It’s just so beautiful,” he said. “I couldn’t help myself.”

In that small, sunlit room, I understood something: connection is not always built through conversation. Sometimes it is built through the shared experience of being moved; by a song, a memory, a moment of joy that escapes explanation. In a place where many people seemed to be dimming, Jack was unmistakably bright and defiantly alive. He had not stopped reaching for beauty.

Watching him dance, I realized how I want to live: fully, richly, and responsively, open to the world’s quiet invitations.

The experience taught me more than I expected. Music doesn’t just lift spirits; it builds bridges between souls that might otherwise pass quietly beside one another. It reminded me that creativity and vitality don’t vanish with age - they transform, deepen, and sometimes become even more urgent. And I learned that volunteering isn’t simply giving; it’s receiving, being changed, and becoming connected in ways that linger long after the last note fades.

Music brought us together. Connection kept us there.



Photograph by Ralph Bou Abbad

CHOOSING ALIGNMENT OVER BRILLIANCE: Finding Meaning in a Crowded Sky

By Ralph Bou Abboud

From social media influencers posting their 5 a.m. routines, colour-coded calendars, and never-ending productivity, to students “humbly” bragging about their internships and leadership titles on LinkedIn, it can often feel like everyone has it all figured out. It’s easy to show the good: the promotions, the acceptances, the milestones that fit neatly into a caption or a resume line. What is harder to show—and maybe easier to ignore—is the exhaustion that simmers underneath it all.

While everyone appears as a shining, bright star, it feels strangely hollow, as though it is just a facade on display. Stars competing to be the brightest rather than part of a pattern. A sky overcrowded with light, yet somehow lacking direction. In this version of success, visibility matters more than meaning and being seen takes precedence over being fulfilled.

The root cause is not always immediately apparent. However, a simple perusal can reveal that it all boils down to society’s prioritization of competition over collaboration. While competition amongst individuals is an essential catalyst for innovation and progress, it is an unsustainable way of measuring human worth.

This competition is not theoretical; it plays out daily in classrooms, conversations, and leadership spaces. To demonstrate academic rigor and not to learn more from one another, students quietly compare course loads. Internship recruiting cycles begin earlier each year, turning first-year students into resume strategists before they even have had time to explore what truly interests them. Group chats circulate lists of “must-have” extracurriculars, as though one’s purpose can be assembled from a checklist. Even collaboration becomes strategic. Peers are viewed not as partners, but as rivals occupying adjacent lanes toward the same narrow definition of success.

People are chasing the same jobs, clubs, or titles not out of curiosity or purpose, but for prestige and validation. People no longer pick up interesting hobbies and activities with the intention of getting anything out of it but rather being able to show something from it. Even leisure is no longer immune. Getting into sports like long-distance running becomes a performance quantified and shared through Strava statistics. Rest days feel unjustified unless earned. Social media platforms reward consistency, optimization, and visibility, quietly disciplining those whose growth is slower, nonlinear, or private.



Photograph by Ralph Bou Abboud



Photograph by Ralph Bou Abboud

Moreover, competition turns what should be motivation behind self-improvement, discovery, and learning into a zero-sum game, where one person's success feels like another's failure. In this framework, rest is rebranded as laziness, and uncertainty is treated as weakness. Productivity becomes identity, and identity becomes something that must be constantly defended. What makes this competition especially corrosive is that it disguises itself as a choice. Students are told they are free to pursue whatever they want, yet are funneled toward the same handful of outcomes deemed "impressive." When everyone is chasing identical markers of success, the result is not excellence, but homogeneity—many bright stars clustered too tightly together, competing for the same space in the sky.

Burnout, then, is not an individual's failure to keep up, but a collective consequence of systems that reward constant output and punish pause. It is the natural outcome of a culture that asks people to always be optimizing, improving, and proving themselves, often to an invisible audience. We are taught to shine, but never how to sustain ourselves.



Photograph by Mohammad Balar



Is doing things with intent becoming extinct? Maybe. But it does not have to be that way. The problem here is not ambition itself, but ambition without direction, and movement without meaning. A sky where every star tries to be the sun would collapse under its own gravity. Brilliance, when in isolation, becomes destructive. Without alignment, light turns into noise.

So how do we choose alignment over brilliance? The answer does not lie in dimming ourselves, but in understanding how we relate to one another. Constellations are maps, not trophies. For thousands of years, they helped humans navigate oceans and deserts—not by showcasing the brightest star, but by forming patterns that made sense. A single star, however bright, cannot guide anyone on its own. Therefore, meaning emerges only when stars are viewed in relation to one another. It allows each person to occupy a place that matters, that contributes, rather than fighting to occupy the same center.

This perspective matters far beyond classrooms and resumes. Life does not unfold in a straight line, yet we continue to measure it as though it should. Early in the 20th century, scientific advancements proved that stars continuously shine and emit energy, from the moment they first form to the moment they die. However, they aren't always visible. They disappear in daylight and are obscured in cities saturated with light pollution. The same is true in our lives: value does not cease to exist simply because it is unseen. Not all growth is legible, not all effort is performative, and not all brilliance demands an audience. Some light does its most meaningful work quietly, waiting not to outshine, but to endure.



Photograph by Mohammad Balar

Those Who Compose Us

BY ANARGI PERERA

I am but a collection—

A collection of the beliefs that were
ingrained in my heart.

Of the stories told on warm evenings as the
sun made its descent in the sky,

and the traits that shape my sense of what
is right and wrong.

A collection of the melodies that floated
from our mouths and danced on our ears

and the recipes that were passed down,
accumulating subtleties with each year.

My face, a collection of a nose, a mouth
and eyes, none of which are uniquely my
own.

I am but a collection—

My heart, my mind, my spirit:
a collage portraying an everlasting
connection with those who came before
me.







Fading Constellations

then

by Favour Babasola

“Everyone who you have known
May not remain in your life forever...”

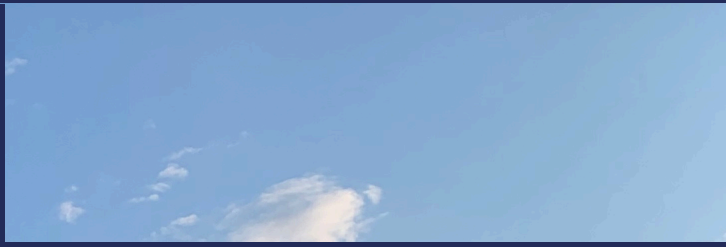
The last time we were together marked the beginning of an end.

The tassels of our caps were freshly flipped to the left, and the stiff fabric of our graduation gowns brushed awkwardly against our legs with every step, as if warning us we were about to breach the unfamiliar. It had seemed only natural that we concluded our graduation day, our first step into the uncharted waters of adulthood, in a place that remained a constant throughout our high school years: the mall food court.

We had met by chance on the first day of school, after fate in the form of an alphabetized seating chart arranged us to sit beside each other at the back of the class. Sunlight slanted through the blinds in thin golden stripes across the room. Nametags reading “Saiph” and “Rigel” were placed at the heads of two hardwood desks that were etched with the doodles and initials of students long gone. Instead of embodying the roles of attentive students, we spent the entirety of first period lost in whispered conversations that felt more intriguing than anything on the board. De-streamed math at 8 a.m. is what most would deem a curse- yet it became the birthplace of the most cherished memories of my teenage years.

Starving after a long day, having to stay seated for a bit longer than our 14-year-old brains could handle, we escaped to the adjacent mall a few bus stops away in hopes of finding something to eat. The automatic doors slid open as we walked in, the air warm and thick with the smell of fried food. After grabbing the greasiest meals we could find on the menu of a rundown burger place, we found ourselves at a booth in the corner of the room. The seats squeaked as we slid in them, and the metal table felt cool against our fingertips. We were strangers in every sense of the word, yet we conversed in a way that suggested otherwise. We were birds of a feather, it seemed, and the friendship we founded lasted well beyond that first day. That booth in the food court became our public place of solitude, where we studied, relaxed, and debriefed, always treating ourselves to a meal to memorialize our achievements, no matter how trivial.

Photograph by Kate Klassen



This time, our discussions carried a weight with much more finality than any other we ever had at that very table. Rigel told me how excited he was about his family finally accepting his choice to study music, his eyes shining in a way that I had never quite seen before. I, in return, gushed about my acceptance into the best university in the country for architecture, the words feeling foreign and unreal even as they left my mouth. We left the food court that day with promises to keep in touch, assuring each other that nothing between us could possibly change—even as we moved into this new phase of life.



The world was a much simpler place back then. We desperately reached for the stars that carried our dreams, expecting our fingers to graze them, and we rendered our ambitions infallible. And we, most stupidly, believed that what we had would transcend the ebbs and flows of time and last forever.



There was no explosive conclusion before we parted ways, nor was there any malice or ill will between us. Yet, the curtains closed on the story of our friendship all the same. Gradually, as the physical distance between us increased and our new realities became more concrete, the calls and the “how are you” texts became few and far between. Unread messages lingered like unopened letters, with timestamps, rather than words, overtaking our chat logs. I sometimes wish he had given me a reason to hate him. It would have made it much easier to say goodbye and consider that chapter of my life put to rest. Instead, I remained in limbo between the regret of words unsaid and the anticipation of what was yet to unfold as I embraced what lay ahead.





Photograph by Ralph Bou Abboud

now

“...But long after they are gone
Their essence remains, etched in your soul.”

Older and infinitesimally wiser, a lot has changed from the cozy, familiar rhythm of my teenage years. With such significant time having passed, living in a new city as an established architect with a wider social circle, Rigel's name did not often surface my mind. Time mellowed out my melancholy about our friendship ending long ago.

Yet the essence of my old friend and what we experienced together irreversibly remains with me through every breath I take. Every second we spent together in my formative years contributed to shaping the woman I am today, ensuring no cause for grief or lamentation. His tendency to smile in the face of tribulations always inspired me to remain joyful in times of stress, and his aspirations to reach great heights allowed me to dream big, too. These qualities from our time together are kept alive with every action I make and are irrevocably embedded in my demeanour and disposition. People always claim that nothing good can last forever. And in most ways, this is true. Whether it is a flower sprouting from the ground or a nascent human life, everything has an expiration date. However, the impact of experiencing good in our lives remains evermore imprinted on one's heart and soul, the connection remaining as concrete yet distant as the stars of the night sky and the constellations they lie in.

On a crisp autumn day, I stroll along the sidewalk toward my new apartment and savour the feeling of the golden leaves crunching beneath my feet. The air carries the familiar coolness of an approaching winter, and I can't help but shiver. From the radio of a small thrift shop with amber light spilling from its windows, a song from his newest album begins to play. The melody drifts outward and follows me as I walk, soft but unmistakable. A warmth blooms in my chest, laced with something achingly tender that consumes me stronger than ever before, and I can't help but smile and wonder if he feels the same as I do.

Before I can give myself the time to hesitate, I pull out my phone from my jacket pocket. My fingers hover over the screen for merely a heartbeat before pressing send.

"do you still go out for food to celebrate your wins?"

And before I could put my phone down, his reply flashed brightly on my screen: simple, immediate, and unmistakably him.

"always"

Beneath the same starry sky, the distance between then and now seemed a little bit smaller.



ANDROMEDA
MALAK AL-AUBAIDY



FILTERED, FAMOUS, AND “FOR YOU”

by Ekroop Jassar | Photography by Ralph Bou Abboud

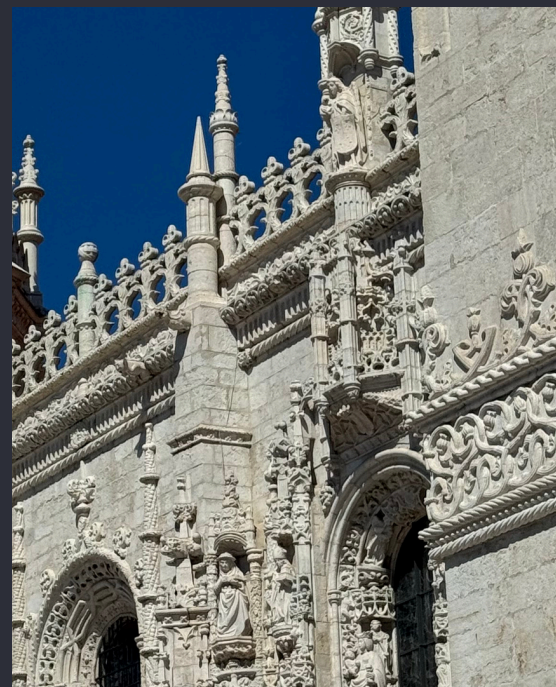
In real life, interactions are messy, with awkward pauses, jokes that don't land, and days we don't look our best. Online interactions are meticulously curated to present a refined image of ourselves. Both shape our lives. Both can feel real. But what happens when we build connections based on optimized versions of ourselves?

It is evident that social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are designed for people to seek approval from viewers. With public counts for likes, shares, and comments, people are likely to post content based on what they think others will appreciate, rather than what they find meaningful. Even chat-based apps, like Snapchat, allow us to seek approval from others by integrating the ability to save some pictures while forgetting others. These features of social media have a tight grip on our self-esteem and condition us to seek external validation. With online approval being a big determinant of self-worth, we must question if in-person validation carries the same weight.

Apart from self-esteem, social media also creates unrealistic standards that are encouraged by celebrities and influencers. Many lifestyle influencers create content with idealized daily routines, making followers feel a sense of inferiority about their lives. We often overlook the fact that influencers create content professionally, so on top of the time and effort they put into their content, they get paid for it. Another increasingly common phenomenon is parasocial relationships. Many influencers post engaging story-like content that makes their followers feel connected to them, despite not personally knowing each other. This obsession with online figures creates comparisons, idolism, and relationships that would not exist in real life.

Beyond lifestyle and idealistic social media figures, social media is now a significant source of information for many young people. News outlets, political podcasts, and social media influencers occupy a great deal of the online space. This is by far the most convenient way for young people to access information, making it an easy way to shape their world views. Although this can be a way for people to learn about activism and the world around them, it is just as easy to fall into extremist pipelines. Because social media allows for free speech, people with bigoted views can share their opinions and influence impressionable minds to think in the same way. The social media algorithms will push similar content to individuals, creating an echo chamber effect that strengthens and reaffirms their ideologies. While social media can be a powerful tool for spreading information, we must remain diligent in conducting thorough research and forming our own opinions.

Online connections can be meaningful and unlock opportunities to connect with others in ways that used to be unimaginable. Social media can inform and inspire us, but it also pushes us to perform for an audience that is supposed to feel like a community. Since this hybrid online–offline world is not going anywhere anytime soon, the goal isn't to eradicate social media, but rather to use it consciously. We should post for ourselves, question what we consume, and be realistic about the depth of our interactions. The point is to protect the person behind the screen, ensure they never feel inferior to their online version, and empower them to make educated connections with others in the online realm.



Photograph by Ralph Bou Abboud



Photograph by Ralph Bou Abboud



Photograph by Mohammad Balar

In Conclusion

Within these pages, the Scholars Publications team delves into the connections — past, present, and future—that shape and illuminate our lives. From linguistic reflections on society's tendency to promote burnout to visual portrayals of the constellations that bind us together, the pieces reveal the complex and diverse nature of human relationships. Like the unique and interrelated constellations in the night sky, each contribution comes together to make the publication shine brighter as a whole. I hope this magazine inspires anyone who explores its pages to be more aware of the constellations that mould our souls, and be appreciative of the ways we help one another grow.



Favour Babasola

Junior Editor

Scholar's Publications, 2026

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