

Poetry by Maya Salameh

Maya Salameh is a senior at the San Diego High School of International Studies. She is a 2016 National Student Poet, and has performed at venues including the White House and Carnegie Hall. Maya is passionate about the intersection of creativity and psychology, and expounds on themes of femininity, identity, and citizenship in her writing. As the President and Founder of her school's Psychology Club, she has promoted awareness of mental health issues and youth advocacy, notably through her leadership of the PSA project with the SDPA. She has been admitted to Stanford University, where she hopes to pursue her interests in psychology and political science. Maya is the daughter of Waleed Salameh, Ph. D., a clinical psychologist in private practice in Mission Valley. Last week, she was awarded a Gold Key from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards on her Writing Portfolio, entitled Diplomat Without a Country.

genome of a generation in healing

I will piece myself back together by
the crux of entwined lashes
at the apex of my eyes
where memories meet mind
and mind mars memories.

I will domestically consolidate my
assets with the bindings
of my dna; the weak hydrogen
bonds and the supplement vitamin-gummy strong of family. the nitrogenous bases
of my internal faraway can't-confiscate-conceal-or-carry
places. I will laugh
and reunite my peddling
provinces under an iron fist. I will explore
the solar systems under my tongue.
I have reconciled with myself two, ten, twelve times before.
there is a terrible
beauty in loving your rocky
beaches. the coast is only complete with
its jagged pieces.

I will make peace. I will post
memos on my hipbones to remind
me of the power in my curved unnerved lips.
I will paint polished truths onto my toes.
I will draft legislation up and down my legs.
I will welcome every imperfection/scar/flaw -

love will be the highest law.

I will reunite in all of my languages.

me réuniré

je me réunirai

saatahed.

I will pray. incense is always burning somewhere.

this is worthy of worship.

I will barter my palms for poems painted in persimmon.

many have called me a poet, but I'm still becoming a writer, I am still working on my intimacy.

I will feel like a phenomenon - cold front staining shoulders, cumulus crowding curls,
lightning between lips.

when asked about innocence, I will answer my sister and I spent night after night wishing on
the flimsy stars stuck to our ceiling. sometimes, intention glows better in the dark.

when my bones shake with the gravity of all that is left to be done,

I will remember some things

are still worth our awe, some things

are still worth blood and ink, still worth taking stock and keeping score,

some things

are still worth falling for.

so I will speak -

before it swallows me.

when they tell you not to take that tone. remember. for every goliath there is a stone.

I resolve for the new year to write an essay. I will call it home.

I will write a story. I will call it grief.

I will write a poem. I will call it relief.

prayers on park blvd

the rhythms of San Diego are not mine, but they belong to me.

I am made up of the intention strong as earth and stone on main avenue,
the obsession with fish burritos and Maya Angelou,

I am chemically composed of the marrow which runs through the bones of the city, the thrift
stores and surf and turf wars.
dark chocolate and electricity derailed.

San Diego was every holy thing we tasted in Chicano Park without the halo,
when we said
the sun always wins in San Diego.

San Diego was the statistical significance, was the molar tradition.
a kindness that echoed
in your gums.

San Diego chipped a chunk out of the sunset. saved a ski slope nose;
kept the moon from foreclosing.
explored the solar system under my tongue.

San Diego's heart burst out of its chest and said: here is your breakfast. was compassion
without a creed.

never apologized for ashy knees propped up on its shoulders.

counted little Syrian, Mexican heads.
didn't demand documents, said
here is your bed.
built magic of monuments.

San Diego asked where does it hurt?
reminded us we are all built of eagerness and earth;

was that je ne sais quoi in my hair, that special something about you and me and this
splattered cathedral.
held up my spine as it sagged.

San Diego is the woman smiling quietly at me on the bus station,
the way my shoulders shake
with the laughter of the ocean.

San Diego sat on the border and saw my breath hung from it, saw polarization, dissociation,

storm and suppress. dysregulated Sunday nights, the horizon which only for our eyes
undressed.

San Diego reminded us
the sky rises in revolt every morning.
made its citizens seers.

San Diego
tasted the raw petal on my skin.
said: there will be a glory, there will be a win.

promised lavender to plant
in the holes in my chest.
offered me limbs of clay and calm
in a Goodwill dress.

San Diego cannot promise you won't know what a dream deferred tastes like
or that you won't thank god for the stubbornness of organs.

but we can promise that
you will always find poetry
in the passenger seat
on a Sunday,
in highways printed with thunderbolts,
in an arched back of asphalt.

San Diego is headscarves and surfboards.
a dream too big for borders.
children in every shade of caffeine.
the way we called our painters the vaccine.

San Diego is sanctuary in our favorite four letter word:
city of multiple mother tongues.
brothers and sisters related only by the life seducing their lungs.

San Diego was absolution
in bilingual breezes
and sea foam.

my sense of direction can be measured in teaspoons, but believe me,
I will always find my way home.

psychoanalysis of fire

I. flare

my roommate tells me her mother lived through a war. that as a child she played in Saigon sandbags as if they were a playground built on solid, friendly floor.

my roommate tells me her mother will not speak of Vietnam. that she has closed that squirming chapter, painted over and silenced. forgotten her city of thorns and cuts, of guns and marauding, of napalm and quiet, of flowers in riot.

my other roommate answers that headlines taste differently to her, that 43 students' ashes singe her tongue, that she wears her hair in the shape of a promise, of a resounding "no" that will not reheat dinner or ask for permission in the morning.

the flowers never forget in Sonora.

II. flame

sometimes, I am minarets, domes. mosaics. sometimes, I am jasmine outlasting empires; Damascus on a sunny day. a narrated hip, stand, sway.

sometimes, Poseidon asks after the sea, and I am only a deity of streams. sometimes, my tributaries are dry/sapped/exhausted.

sometimes, I am graphite against a sharp white background, learning religion in consonants of cherry and bone. in frosted syllables.

this is the obsession with diamond, with pedigrees of raw almond.
you are unread.
icy.

an exercise in blue. Beirut leaves your shoulders stained with the force of it.

still

every generation wonders where dreams come from. long before our sadnesses the earth was livid with dandelions.

Beirut gave you clouds, asked after your ceasefires and unhappy sisters, but could never sit comfortably with you at dinner.

always had to smoke her cigarettes beyond the doorway, buried charred ends in fertile, forgiving ground. when I hear another slur, I want to ask if I have become a nicotine patch, an addiction to tar (and feather), as if I am some dependency drowned, some inclement, angry weather.

Beirut is burning.

tourists and gustatory communication. doctorates in inference and smuggled information.
Beirut is every anti-love poem I ever wrote.

tangled hours filled with serpents. aromas, light, metal. still I am discredited before I open my
mouth.
(the body is a treacherous friend.)

a capital built on grape skins and essence of open beach and orange blossom,
Beirut burns brighter, makes crutches of blood and ashes.

I belong to a city that every night is ignited only to write love songs for the inferno in the
morning.

III. cauterize

I wish I could smooth scars, but stay plagiarizing wounds.
I needed sacrament and got stale honey.
I had the right until I didn't.

you know it's frustrating for me. your sympathy leaves me still starving for the sea. give me
another example.

(how old was I when my language packed its bags and left?)

the hunger in your back. you will ask for mercy. it will be cheap. when god lets my body be, I
rattle like a shard of angry candy.

the dawn leaves its calling cards. she sheds her home from her in bursts. the way a lily moves.
the way we read the notches in leather, water's weathered grooves.

I am good at drying things. at furnishing myself with watches and thatched notebooks and
wondering when I'll burn. watermelon and used chapstick; this is what happens when a girl
asks for matches and a safe return.

the earth has yielded to everything yellow, gold, grain, and I am at a loss for a truth as heavy
as wet mineral. burnt centimeters. Beirut is where fish go to fry, everything we let mulberry
imply, but still

I am a light you could read by.