

Love Letters

Teen Creative Magazine



Issue #02: Gratitude

Remastered August 2021



Editor's Note:

I

When making this remastered version of our second issue, *Gratitude* we were fascinated to see how much we've changed since the end of 2020. Much like the leaves in autumn, our magazine is always changing.

This is the second issue in our effort to remaster our original three issues into the new digital issue format. Originally, this issue was published on our blog on November 30th, 2020.

We originally chose this theme due to the Thanksgiving holiday that takes place in November. Through this remaster, the theme has taken on new meaning. We have so much gratitude to everyone who has supported our magazine. Whether by submitting, reading or just following, we are thankful for all of it!

We hope you enjoy these old works in a new format!

-The Love Letters Team





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- *Maestro* -

Claudia Wee

1

she composes seamless, beautiful melodies
and shapes the sound of our ensemble
with the wave of her hand.

i want my groove in the tempo controlled by
her body
moving to the rhythm of her own device.

she cues the direction of our symphony
and the music on my heart
is a playlist curated by her.





- *Maestro* -

Claudia Wee

2

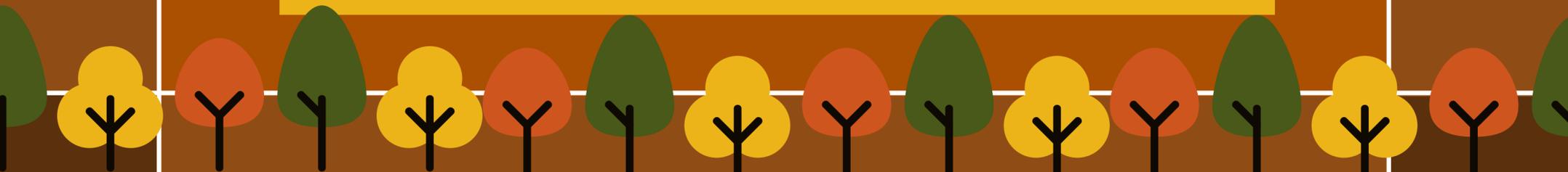
i want her to desire modulations
to the minor key sometimes
to lose herself to somber harmonies.

she constructed the concept of time in her sleep
so all the time in the world belongs to her
just as how all of me is hers.

i want to take my time, take my life
to study her orchestration
and everything it means to her.

About the Poet:

Claudia is a music enthusiast who very much longs to better understand herself and the world around in - in all it's beauty. she occasionally expresses this desire and the lamentations that come from which through the written word.





- *Train Whistle Blues* (song) - 3

Naomi Leites

Check out the full song here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb_baWSWvGA



Train Whistle Blues

Naomi Leites



0:13

3:01





- *Train Whistle Blues* (song) -

4

Naomi Leites



Lyrics

oh the morning is breaking
and so is my heart
when i think of the mornings
that we've been apart
when i wake in the morning
and open my eyes
you'll be deep in your sleep
like a child

what a shame that i lost you
the day i came home
and since then i've been
sitting and thinking alone
if i saw you again then i'd
never let go
but you're deep in your sleep
like a child

when the train whistle blew
and it took you away
there were so many things i

had wanted to say
but the thing about life is, it
turns out okay
even though we've got train
whistle blues

mmmmmmmm
mmmmmmmm

when the train whistle blew
and it took you away
there were so many things i
had wanted to say
but the thing about life is, it
turns out okay
even though we've got train
whistle blues
but the thing about life is, it
turns out okay
even though we've got train
whistle blues



- *Embrace* -

5

Naomi Leites



About the Artist:

Naomi Leites (artist behind *Embrace* and *Train Whistle Blues*) (she/her) is a senior in high school living in Seattle! She has loved writing, music, and art in general for as long as she can remember. She writes short stories, poetry, and songs, and is the song co-editor for Love Letters Magazine.

You can also find her work in issue #03: Joy!





- *Gratitude (Op-Ed)* -

7

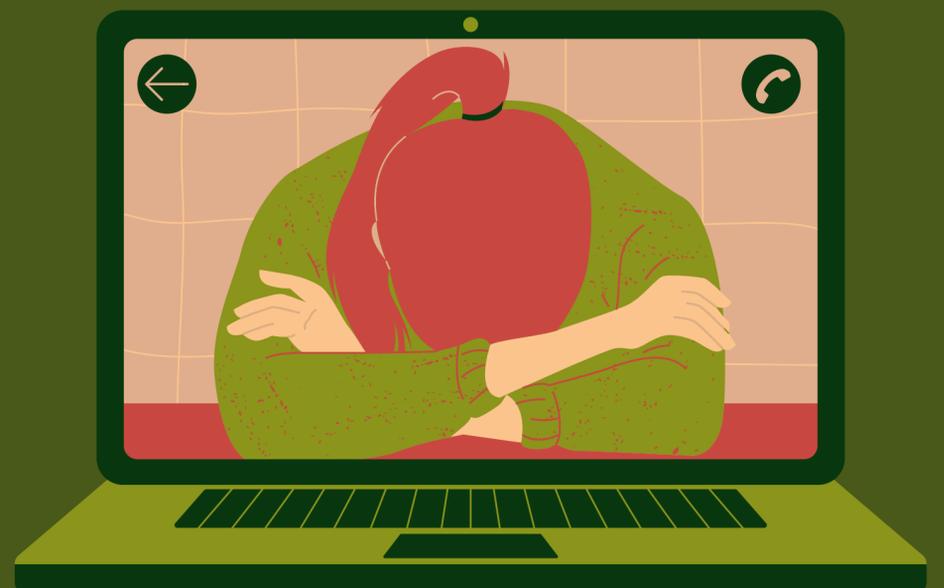
Lauren Asmussen

At the very start of the pandemic, I looked forward to the projected two-week break from trying to balance school, homework, dance, and my job...

It sounded like a brief getaway from all of my responsibilities to relax and collect myself, and a lot of others felt the same way. But as weeks turned into months and cases continued to climb, it got harder and harder to tell the days apart as it felt like I was reliving the same experience over and over again.

I've heard from so many of my friends that all they want is for things to go back to normal. Things like going to high school football games with hundreds of your classmates and moshing at concerts alongside thousands of strangers who've been exposed to god knows how much bacteria are all completely out of the question for as long as we can tell. Not only has it become more of a hazard to travel on vacations or for work, but it can be just as dangerous to go to the grocery store or reunite with your closest friends.

Safety regulations, restrictions, and cancelations have taken some of the most exciting things that my friends and I looked forward to away. Larger events like the Bumbershoot Festival, Harry Styles concert, and the TMG tour were all plans we made almost a year in advance that we don't have anymore. I've spent the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and my birthday alone at home with my family, rather than visiting my grandmother as my family has on those days for the last seventeen years. Even my normal routine of physically going to school, dance, and work is a distant memory.





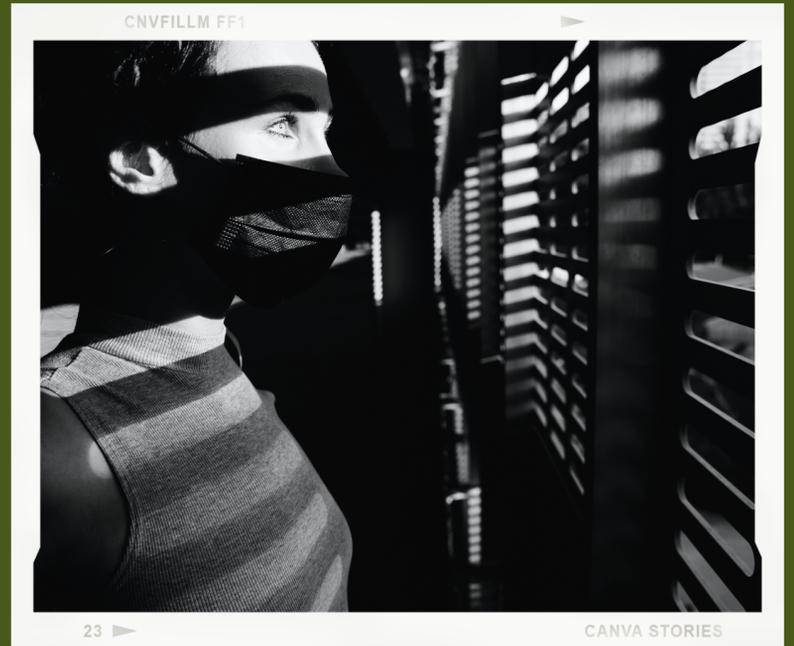
- *Gratitude (Op-Ed)* -

8

Lauren Asmussen

Earlier on, it was easier to try and find a silver lining and stay hopeful that things would soon go back to the way they were, and anything we missed we could make up for later. A lot of people made do with what they could and settled for drive-by birthday parades and parking lot hangouts. By now, some of those people have thrown caution to the wind for the sake of trying to maintain normalcy despite the risk, and others have eased into a routine that nine months ago would've made them a hermit. I, personally, am one of the latter.

So, for those like me, who have only a fraction of the social interaction they used to and feel like each day is bleeding into the next, how do we deal with the impact this pandemic has had on our emotional state? A lot of us have sunk into intense amounts of frustration, anger, depression, sadness, or just detachment from our feelings as we've adapted to a routine where we don't get to do or see most of what used to make us happy. What can we do to stay as emotionally healthy as possible when it feels like there's nothing to be grateful for?



I remember that I used to keep a gratitude journal for a yoga class at my school where every day, I would write three things in the last 24 hours that I was thankful for, and three things in the next 24 hours that I looked forward to. I would often write that I would get to see my friends at lunch, or that we'd listen to music in art class, or that I'd had a good day at dance the night before. The point of the journal was to notice little things to be grateful for that you may've taken for granted, and it served its purpose exactly how it was supposed to. I had a much more positive outlook on the things that happened around me and looked forward to what every day had to offer. Even when I had a bad day, it let me recount what good there was to look back on.



- *Gratitude (Op-Ed)* -

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Lauren Asmussen

It's funny that the journal was for writing about things I took for granted, because now that I don't get to do any of what I wrote about anymore, I can see that I really did take the little things for granted. That's part of why it's just so hard to find a reason to be thankful in this pandemic, because you realize that you don't have some of the smallest things that used to be there, even on your worst days, to keep you grateful.

But gratitude is about recognizing and being thankful for what you have here and now, and what you've already experienced. If you try to find happiness by looking forward to what opportunities could possibly come in these times, chances are you're going to be disappointed. Practicing conscious gratitude for whatever it is you still have is one of the best things you can do for yourself. If you're not used to finding things you can be grateful for when it feels like there isn't anything, there's no time like the present to start. If you have a roof over your head, that's something to be grateful for. If you've had the chance to eat something today, that's something to be grateful for

If you have clean water, if you have clothes on your back, if you have a bed to rest in, those are all things to be grateful for. Your body is constantly working to keep you safe and protected, and that's something to be grateful for. Keeping a gratitude journal for yourself and writing down what you're grateful for will absolutely improve your outlook over time. You don't have to convince yourself that these are the most amazing things in the world, but recognizing that you have something at all, no matter how small, is enough to make a change.

About the Author:

Lauren Asmussen is a senior in high school. She has been a dancer for about 5 years now, and is really into music. She loves to see how what's happening online, in the media, and in the world keeps people entertained, as well as hearing what opinions people have to share.



- Fall Recommendations - 10

The Love Letters Team

What are we listening to?

On My Radar

Carter Ace



Are You Even Real?

James Blake



Goodbye Yellow Brick Road

Elton John



Skinny Love

Bon Iver



God is a woman

Ariana Grande



Skin

J. Human





- Fall Recommendations - 11

The Love Letters Team

What are we reading?

The Curious
Incident of the
Dog in the Night-
Time
by Mark Haddon

The Hate U Give
by Angie Thomas

White Teeth
by Zadie Smith

Call of the Wild
by Jack London

My Name is
Asher Lev
by Chaim Potok

The Story of the
Lost Child
by Elena Ferrante

Slow Violence and
the
Environmentalism
of the Poor
by Rob Nixon

Paper Towns
by John Green

Six of Crows
by Leigh Bardugo



- Thankful -

12

Ash Reynolds

Of course, I have no ulterior motive when I tell my sister I am grateful for her...

There is absolutely no reason that I would butter up all my family members as we sit around the Thanksgiving dinner table. I even say a few things about my Uncle Bruce, who I can't stand.

I tell my sister I'm grateful for her forgiveness and always seeing the best in others. I tell my mother I'm grateful that she thinks so highly of me even when I can't always live up to it. I tell my father I'm grateful that he doesn't always pick up on my bad habits and is always kind to me. I even tell my Uncle Bruce that I'm thankful he came all this way just for Thanksgiving.

I do not tell my Uncle Bruce that I'm not grateful for the fact my sister gets visibly uncomfortable every time he is near. I absolutely do not mention that. I also don't mention that I'm not grateful for the fact my mom is a certified Uncle Bruce apologist. Nope, none of that.

Instead I go around the table buttering up all my relatives. I layer on the charm as much as I can and they all seem to appreciate it.



Uncle Bruce even flashes his disgusting yellow teeth at me as he smiles for the first time all day.

After dinner, I help my mother put away dishes in the kitchen. We talk about how the dinner was and other meaningless stuff that I'm not particularly thankful for while we scrub dishes and put leftovers in tupperwares.

"Thank you for being nice to Uncle Bruce," says my mother, quietly. "I know you two don't get along too well." "Well," I shrug, "things have a tendency to work themselves out."

I excuse myself to the bathroom and take care of a few other orders of business while I'm away. I return to the kitchen from outside and continue scrubbing and the grime covered plates and chatting with my mom about my plans for the future.

She interrupts my college talk with, "Do you smell smoke?"

"You know," I say, "I think I do. It smells like it's coming from the backyard."

The whole family bustles out of the various rooms they had found themselves in and flows out into the backyard where there is a massive fire erupting out of our fire pit. My mother shrieks and starts uselessly trying to blow it out.

"Where's Bruce?" she shrieks. My other relatives shrug and look around helplessly. "Bruce will know what to do," she repeats to herself, hurrying back into the house.



- Thankful -

Ash Reynolds

For the first time all Thanksgiving I do feel thankful for something. As I stand with my hands in my front pockets staring at the flames burning, I feel grateful that my mother will never find Uncle Bruce. The orange flames dance merrily in front of me as my heart glows with gratitude as I realize she will see the best in me as she always does. I'm grateful my sister will forgive me no matter what. I'm grateful my father won't pick up on this bad habit. I'm grateful that I finally took care of business. I'm especially grateful that Uncle Bruce came all this way to see us.



This Thanksgiving, the thing I'm most grateful for is that they won't suspect a thing.



About the Author:

Ash Reynolds is a junior in high school. They have always loved writing and have been doing it since they were a little kid, as well as other forms of art like drawing, photography and music. They are the social media co-runner and prose co-editor of Love Letters Magazine.

You can also find their work in issue #03: joy!



- *Earthly Pleasures* -

14

Zoe Cunniffe

it took me a long time to realize life
was fragile.

you know, you're fourteen, you
watch death on the news,
and you offer up prescribed
empathy, but then you go running
and your ponytail bobs in the air,
and your stomach is all knotted up
over the act of living. you don't think
about the thick, flowing blood
in your veins, keeping you afloat.

then you're seventeen, such an
elegant age,
but nothing settles right, and you
stop sleeping in your own bed,
stop assuming you will shift into
place
when you leave your hometown. it's
those nights,
meeting your own bloodshot eyes in
the mirror,
that you decide what kind of change
must be made.
no more fretting over plastic

happiness, stacked up on your
dresser,
the futility of a store-bought smile.
you want to burn instead.
how did you claw your way here
from teardrops staining
the shower floor? when did you stop
counting your steps
on the way to school? there are so
many earthly pleasures to collect
now.

you spend your frail days studying
droplets on the mirror,
reflecting back eager green eyes.
you overthink the feeling
of the steering wheel at night, of
dewy grass at dusk,
of the sky tilting the sun's rays in
endless new directions.

it's so delicate! so easily wasted! get
out of your head,
get out of your bones! you measure
the beauty of different times of day,
choose five pm to step outside
because the colors scream softly





- *Earthly Pleasures* -

15

Zoe Cunniffe

every night before they die. you
dip your head back,
admire the cloudy haze, spin
around in the middle of the
road.

you decide you'll miss yourself
when you get older,
so you pick a different type of
flower every day,
and imagine yourself as a thief
who can't resist falling hard
for small pieces of artwork. and
then, you walk home, flower in
your fingers,
your trophy for another day of
breathing it in
with all your might.

About the Poet:

Zoe Cunniffe is a poet
and singer-songwriter
from Washington, DC.
She has previously been
published in literary
journals such as
Meniscus and The
Showbear Family Circus.



- Ask the Editors -

16

The Love Letters Team

What are you grateful for?

"Family, friends and
my dog!"
-Ruby Bennett (prose
co-editor)

"I'm thankful for friends
and family and our new
president elect!"
-Ash Reynolds (prose
co-editor)

"I'm grateful for
chocolate, sleep and
friends!"
-Naomi Leites (poetry
co-editor)



- Ask the Editors -

17

The Love Letters Team

How do you show your gratitude?

"Checking in on friends and family or buying little gifts for people that I think would brighten their day!"

-Ruby Bennett (prose co-editor)

"Usually doing something small and kind or just asking people how they're doing"

-Ash Reynolds (prose co-editor)

"Sending people memes or videos that remind me of them or doing something else to make them laugh"

-Shira Zur (Head editor)





- *Something Special About Staria Ace* - 18

Reyna Ace



My cat played with her toy mouse for the first time in years last night..

It was bizarre seeing her have so much energy after being so motionless for so long. The doctor said she had problems with her heart, leading to inactivity. It comes with old age, I guess.

Considering everything I knew about her health condition, it was shocking to see her play with the little blue mouse on the end of the white string, Twirling through the air with her claws out, pawing desperately at the tiny rodent that taunted her from the air. My brother and I howled with laughter when she got so excited she let out a sharp hiss at the toy.

The past few years of my cat's life were spent asleep. Well, scratch that. They were either spent asleep or eating or begging to be fed. Her ear splitting meows would echo from the kitchen into the living room as my brother and I fought over who would be the one to feed her, (hint: it was very rarely me). After she would eat she would curl up in a little ball on the couch and pass out for a few hours before getting up and repeating the process.

We got my cat when I was around four. It was important for me to have her around when dad left. She filled his spot on the couch and played with the mouse toy back when she still had energy. Now she sits there and sleeps. A few claw marks dot the cushions from her glory days. It's not so much dad's spot now as it is hers.





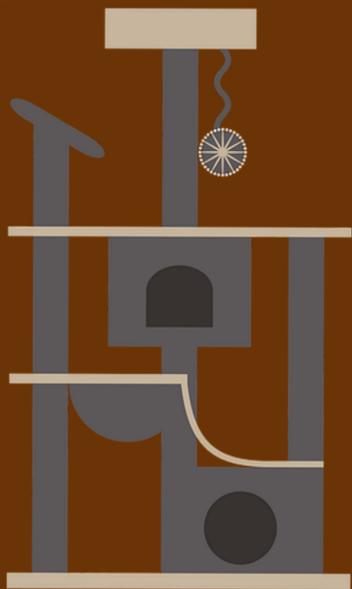
- *Something Special About Staria Ace* - 19

Reyna Ace

“I haven’t seen her with this much energy in years,” said my brother, staring in disbelief as my cat leaped across the living room to chase the mouse.

“Me either,” I replied, dodging a missed swipe from my beloved pet. “Are you feeling better, Staria?” I asked in a sing-song voice staring into my cat’s eyes.

Her green eyes were dilated with excitement at playing again. Her ears angled backward alertly on her head and her tail bobbed up and down on the ground with excitement. Staria obviously didn’t reply to my question seeing as she was a cat who’s brain can’t comprehend the complexities of human language, but I felt like her answer was clear. She continued to dart around the room making my heart glow with joy at seeing her happy again.



I don’t know if it was some kind of divine timing or whatever, but she passed a few days later. She was seventeen years old so it’s safe to say that it wasn’t completely unexpected. She curled up peacefully at the foot of my bed and closed her eyes for the last time. I stroked her back not quite realizing what was happening until it was over.

Initially, I was struck with sadness. But eventually that would transform into something greater. Sure, I was sad that Staria passed onto the next of her nine lives but in the following week of her passing I felt something else. I felt strangely grateful as I looked back at old photos of her attacking my brother when he used to jump around and throw toys her way. I laughed when a video from when we first got her appeared on my mom’s Facebook archive. There was a tinge of sadness with each memory of her but the twinge was overshadowed by the ever present feeling of gratitude.





- *Something Special About Staria Ace* - 20

Reyna Ace

I'll probably get another cat when I move out and start my own life, but I doubt any cat could match Staria's level of greatness. Seventeen years of her greatness. Sure, the last few years were spent feeling a little low, but that last night where she played with the mouse again made up for it. So yes, while I mourn the loss of my pet, I think I'm more grateful than I am upset. There was something special about that cat.

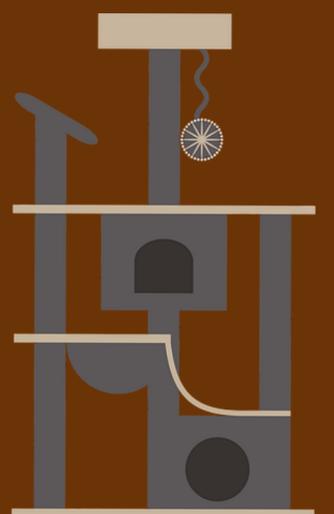
People say that cats aren't very loving. Unlike dogs they don't need constant attention and don't give much back in return. I think that's a lie. Although sometimes stoic and antisocial, she still captivated my brother and I's love for twelve years. You might not believe it, but there was something special about that Staria Ace.

Something worth being grateful for.



About the Author:

Reyna Ace is a sixteen year old girl living in Salt Lake City, Utah, who loves to skateboard, hang out with friends and write whenever she gets the chance. She was published in this magazine last month.



Thanks for Reading!

Looking for more to be grateful for?

Check out our website for more!

www.thelovelettersmag.com



Check us out on social media:

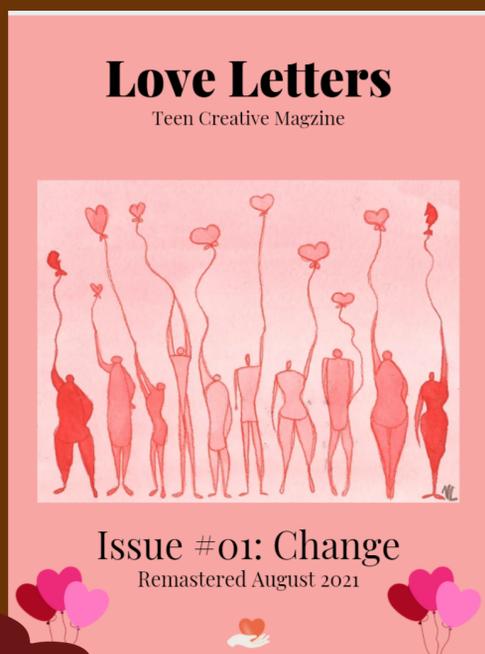
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Cover art by our prose co-editor Ash Reynolds!

Love Letters Chronology

#01: Change

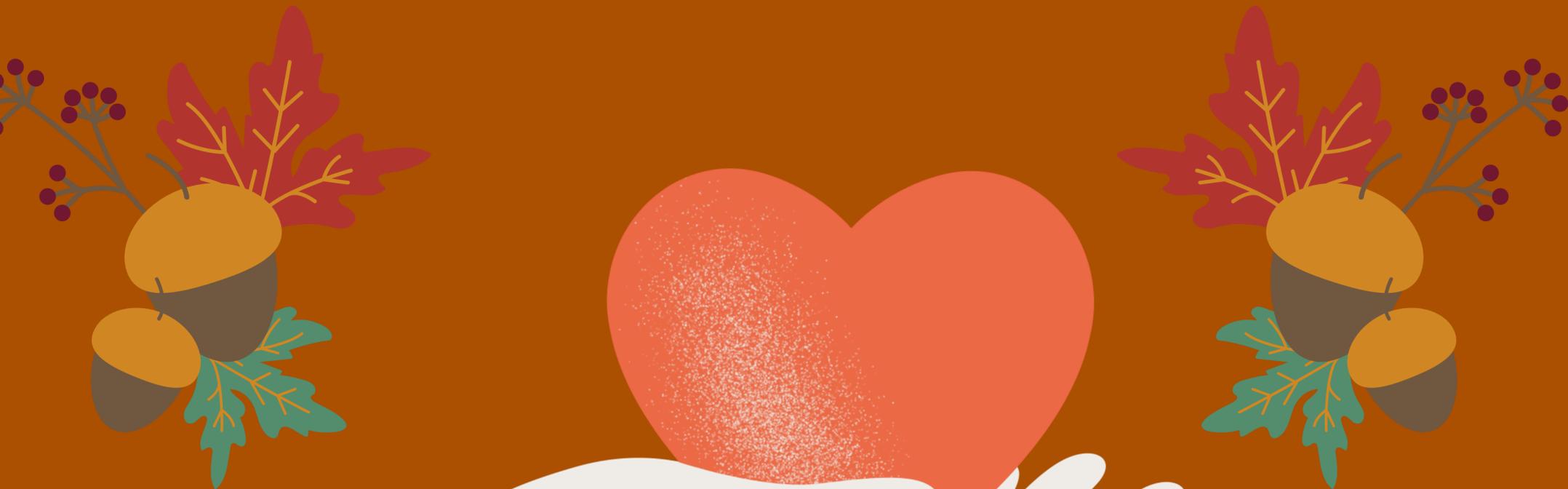


#02: Gratitude



#03: Joy





Love Letters Magazine

