

Written by

WORDS

Afra Ahmad

Yasmine Ameli

WORTHY

Shannon Cumberbatch

Gabriel Johnson

WORKING

Jard Berebours

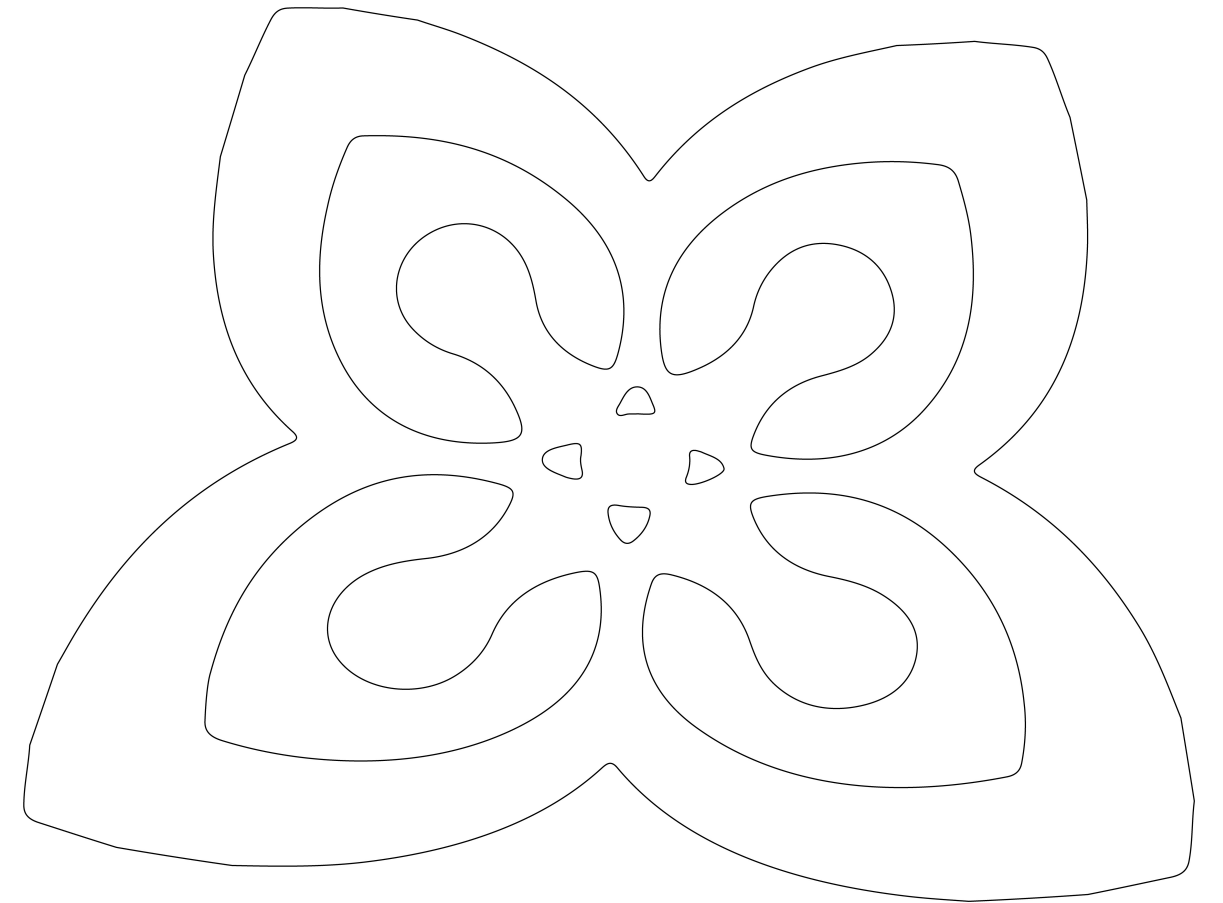
Nnenna Loveth

TOWARD

Sophia Pinto Thomas

Edited by Alula Hunsen

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Designed by Cierra Peters

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TOWARD

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Alongside our community-centered economic and cultural work, we at the Boston Ujima Project have concerned ourselves with narrative: how do we frame what we do? And, perhaps more importantly, what narratives are arising from our membership and broader networks that describe what we see, experience, and make? What are *our* stories?

Narrative work allows us to explore not just our stories, but forms and modes of telling them. While we frequently publish essays and interviews, the opportunity to publish more creative works, and to call on oral traditions and imagination, presented itself this spring. Amidst a flurry of poems submitted to one of our digital publications, the *Ujima WIRE*, a patchwork of words emerged

describing how we reckon with frustration, enemies, and regret.

We are excited to share the words we're working with, working towards, or working against. We aren't yet where we want to be—this zine largely represents a capsule of tribulations. Yet a glimmer of hope emerges in the end, one path among the many we might take together to get free.

With care,
Alula

Afra Ahmad

WORDS WORTH WORKING TOWARD

Ask a man
on a ventilator
with scant moments
left in this world

he'll let you know
how severe
the flame of
regret is. Don't
tell me you learn
from heartbreaks.

The enervated flames
expand,
resembling
undesirable cells
that smother frangible bones,
that prick shrivelled flesh,
that jab and
then draw the sabre out,
again and again.

Regret is a
cacophonous fire
louder than cries
of blood dropped
on the ground
during war,

REGRET

competent enough
 to render
 you deaf
 for the rest
 of your
 life;

 regret fails to
 extinguish,
 even when pails of
 cold water
 (a sip of which
 could save a dying man)
 or soft-salmon joy
 douse it,

 even when treated
 slowly and tenderly
 (the way
 physicians clean
 wounds and
 drape them
 with milky gauze,

 shower wounds with
 a sprinkle
 of care and a week's rest
 and they will heal),

but the pain of regret
 lasts;

 this ache
 never halts.

 I have grieved
 enough to know
 you learn nothing.
 You slowly devolve
 into numbness.

Yasmine Ameli

HOMETOWN NOCTURNE

WORDS WORTH WORKING TOWARD

After seven years south of home, I unpack
my sedan
in my mother's garage under whose hood
the neighbor kids and I
once gathered for lightning storms, the rain
a pelting white sheet we dared one another
to cut through.
We combed the New England woodland
brush that flanked
our houses for miles, climbed stonewalls
and stepped over wire
fences from the old dairy farm, stumbled
upon a WWII memorial's
crumbling stone tower and divisions of
flags
—the sheer number of which a French girl
once told me was so American—
and she was right. In the town center, a
band played Beach Boys' covers.
At the high school football field, speakers
blared the score.
A small clique of immigrants' kids huddled
on the frosted bleachers.
We guessed at the identity of the student
under the costume of The Colonial,
our town mascot in navy blue and gold and
with an old/new empire smirk.

Motorcycles, trucks, and antique cars
revved
up the street toward the Candy Mansion's
car shows off Route 20
where fair rides pinwheeled and children's
ice creams slid off their cones.
A town guide brags that White City—what
we called our downtown—
was once an amusement park, replete with
funhouses and minstrel shows,
until the whole of it burned down in a fire.
In my teens,
it was a shopping complex where I scooped
frozen yogurt flavors like potato
from melting tubs and then asked others'
parents for a ride
home to the other side of town where our
porches smelled of basmati.
At twilight, Baba Bozorg and I looped the
neighborhood,
pausing at the gap in the trees where a train
to elsewhere called
from its tracks, once before dinner and two
times after.

Shannon Cumberbatch

WORDS WORTH WORKING TOWARD

i hope that if one day
the rubble from what was once your sanctuary
becomes your sky
and your ground the mass graves of genera-
tions who died
from days and decades of genocide
trapped in a purgatory between two realms
hoping for peace in the after-life
after living through hell
i hope that if one day the light from
explosions in the sky
seep through the cracks of concrete like
sunshine
while suffocating smoke swallows fresh air
threatening to choke you as you wail in
despair
hoping someone will hear you
that someone is there
that someone who sees your suffering
will care
before it's too late
before you prepare for your final sunset
while the weight of the wreckage rests on your
chest
threatening to crush you and take your last
breath
hoping you'll be found and liberated, even if
in death

(QAHR)

SHANNON CUMBERBATCH

and that the souls of those who chose com-
plicity to protect
their comforts live in eternal unrest
i hope that if one day as you lie awake,
crushed in a tiny space that may soon become
your tomb
where the booms from bombs replace the
songs of birds,
that you can't still hear the silence of cowards
across the world
claiming calls for your safety and solidarity
cost too much

are too controversial

take too much time
are an affront to their funders and they don't
want to lose a dime
i hope that if this moment arrives,
that the masses possess the conscience and
courage you lack today
that they consider the cost of your life and
their souls too much to pay
i hope they don't seek solace in silence
and make you stream the screams
of those carrying limbs and limp corpses
killed in colonial violence only to believe your
oppressors lies when they deny it

i hope they don't try to balance both sides of
genocide
and condemn your resistance
while debating whether your children count
as innocent lives and have the right to
existence
i hope that when the dust from mass death
settles
when truth defeats the propaganda machine
and in hindsight when everyone agrees that
this was ethnic cleansing a preventable
genocide
as we watched a nation state annihilate entire
bloodlines live that you remember where you
stood today,
and what you did
that your words of condemnation, equivoca-
tion and commitment to both sides while only
one side is occupied and silenced while
suffering genocide
are memorialized
i hope you remember
because we, and history, will never forget
this is the legacy you were pressed to protect

Gabriel Johnson

WHO ARE YOUR ENEMIES?

WORDS WORTH WORKING TOWARD

My enemies are those who run from the sun

Those who bleed the green of the earth for a cheap knockoff, my enemies are the pigs who walk n talk n shoot but don't die, the middle man who keeps a hand in the shit and another in the soap but greets you with both,

the banker who put a dollar value on your human need, the store that tags made-up numbers on our essentials, stringin' along workers with paychecks as neckties,

the government building audaciously standing in the way of us planting something useful, the armchair charlatans who'll break it all down live from the couch while ain't a soul in the community vouch for em, the apolitical artist who'd rather see a comma on a check than their community on the come up, my enemies are those who smile upon yesterday and pray it's reborn as tomorrow

My enemy is my reflection who sits stagnant when he must struggle

Jard Lerebours

LOVE IN THE TIME OF CAPITAL

WORDS WORTH WORKING TOWARD

I love you
So I will give you what is left of me
After working this 12 hour shift
–nothing left but tip-out, aching muscles
and disdain

I love you
So allow me to give you what is left of me
After serving the Black bourgeoisie
Saltfish, plantains, and oxtail
From home, like Two Mommy would cook

I love you
So let me lavish you with this sewing ma-
chine
Make us clothes to wear in a future where I
don't have to put on
This poorly ironed white button down and
these masculine jeans

I love you
Will you make space for the red to spill out
of my mouth –
The beginnings of a class consciousness,
Red gashes strewn across my ghastly fingers
Calluses forming on poet hands

When we escape this nightmare

JARD LEREBOURS

I will be pretty, wearing my mother's red
satin shirt
And your bleached hair will shine under the
Atlanta sun

I loved you
But how will the underclass
Hold one another and survive
Among these ruins of empire

I kiss you soft
All is not lost yet.

Sophia Pinto Thomas

TABLE OF MY THOUGHTS

WORDS WORTH WORKING TOWARD

The table is a land on which
I have to spread the news:
from overseas and underground,
a pessimism flows,
& synthesis — is slow.
I take my brains and lay them
on the table; I take stock of what—
from all the world— they know.
the words spin out like crows,
very clever, flying urgently:
Yemen. Gaza.
food and water.
Congo crying,
see Sudan;
we all look on
at children bombed,
heat increasing,
planet harmed—
& then my brains across the table
break!—I don't know what to say!
The synthesis of hope inside
is slow— as breaking— day;
The hope is photosynthesized
from pain, and stubborn ways,
where all my thought surround themselves:
they ask what world— awaits—

Sophia Pinto Thomas

WORDS WORTH WORKING TOWARD

The sleepless nights transcend themselves.

They coalesce to something close
to striving,
as the waters wait,
and rolls of death are rising.

The dawns arise horizonlines,
and bring the color close to something —
blinding; in my bed, alone,
I watch the waters rise —

the waters wait in cues of cold,
from days I see — providing me
with evidence for battles now
that keep my hope — reviving;

I sleep at night, awake, prepared
for something we're not hiding.
A flood will come — in heat, and blood,
and all my dawns — are rising.

NOTES FROM THE SHORELINE

Nnenna Loveth

JOSEPHINE
WEBB

WORDS WORTH WORKING TOWARD

If they ask me whether or not I did that
shit?

I did.

And that's all I have to say on that.

Or according to the "record" it is.

If you ask me whether or not I did
what they said I did

I'd say, have you ever been bone tired?

So tired your body moves only by miracle?

That you feel like hollow air shifting be-
tween weights?

What would you do? You'd sleep, right?

What if your waking and dreaming lives
look like mirrored nightmares?

When Mr. and Mrs.

woke me that night to fix them tea
beat me

upon my inevitable mistake

what if I told you, I wasn't awake?

That I wasn't a murderer.

That I was fighting nightmares
and killing monsters in my sleep.

That I was a teenage girl doing as she was

told.

They said *You fix me a drink and do it right
this time negroe girl!*

And so I *did* follow orders.

I fixed the drink like I should've the first
time.

Like every Black girl needs to know how to
do.

A potion for a problem of whiteness and
manness—
a little root here.

A trace of this there.

And done.

Now the problem fast-asleep.

The Man and Missus don't wake no more
with complaints and neither do their
daughters.

I just wanted to rest
now we all get to sleep.

I thought it was a sign
when I found the arsenic
behind the clock in the living room.

That in the nightmare I was living
sand from an hourglass mixed in with the
brew

if used right might be able to take back the

time that was stole' from me.

What's that thing y'all say these days? Black
girl magic or something like that? Let me
tell you

I never felt more magician than that mo-
ment.

Owning and turning the clocks of life for
once

instead of having the gears grind on me.

Black girls gotta live on their own prayers
and magick in this world and I had potions
to perfect.

Moment for a minute.

Sand for an hour.

Powder for a purpose and a sip.

Ships to enslave and capture
captured my girlhood in their stead.

Did the papers say how the daughter went?
Right like a ship into the night she sailed.

When they jailed me
told me I was guilty

I said no, *I am a harbinger.*

A merciful magick.

They only had to die once.

I had to be Black and woman in this country
forever.

Alula Hunsen

EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

WORDS WORTH WORKING TOWARD

Skip to the thrum of the rhythm circle on
your doorstep,
Guide your eyes across the way as you and
yours schlep

to the sunlit strip on your corner,
a stone's throw from the tree-lined con-
course
and a few heartbeats from concrete

Witness:

Bikes loop as parents scoop their young
from schools that have flipped upside down,
The students run the classroom aground
and answer essential questions like

How do I share gratitude?

What futures can our presence will into time?

Teach essential skills like,

Exploring your spiritual purpose

Imagining a world without bonds

Finding the best hill to climb

Your footsteps land on soft soil,
the ultimate developer's foil

ALULA HUNSEN

a garden grown out of love that seeds col-
lective work and fosters soul through toil
the result of shared effort and clear levers
your sister's career and your brother's fami-
ly grow next to peppers

we make the world in our effort/to partici-
pate
a people's power can't abide just this date,
so we declare and dedicate

everyday democracy day

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Power rests on your shoulders, lands in
your fates
Burden is collectivized across your neigh-
bors' and your weights

The revolution is resolution
In high definition you'll find

the 4th dimension of your will cuts through
space
and imbues time with unavoidable pace

Our steps, through our choices, leave a
world ground and

bound to what we decide and how we lace

the soil with our grace; how we vote the bal-
lots of love and care with our faith.

Decide: our destinies in struggle shine
brightly as the distance awaits.

Afra Ahmad (she/her) is a writer, poet, visual artist, and calligrapher. Based in Taiwan, she holds a Bachelor's degree in English Literature. She writes about everything under the sun: from dark issues of the society to problems faced by teenagers to imparting chunks of wisdom through her poems, stories and write-ups. Her works have appeared in various magazines including Iman collective, Afterpast Review, A Thin Slice of Anxiety, Punk Noir Magazine, and more. Find here written work here, and take a look at her visual artistry here.

Yasmine Ameli (she/her) is an Iranian American poet and essayist based in Massachusetts. Her writing has appeared in POETRY, Ploughshares, The Sun, the Southern Review, and elsewhere. Passionate about democratizing writing, publishing, and arts funding resources, she works as a holistic writing coach for creative writers seeking guidance on cultivating sustainable writing practices, developing manuscripts, submitting writing to literary magazines, and applying for grants, fellowships, and residencies. To learn more about her writing and consultation services, find her at yasmineameli.com and on Instagram @yasmineameli.

Shannon Cumberbatch (she/her) is a recovering public defense attorney, former non-profit managing director, and educator who advocated against injustice in the courtroom and workplace. Poetic expression is one of Shannon's most soothing sources of catharsis, sharpest tools of resistance, and most accessible container to hold emotions too heavy and messy for a simple paragraph; it's always been her most intuitive outlet to illustrate unspeakable injustice. Shannon's poetry and prose has been published in the Harvard Black Letter Law Journal, the Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Justice at St. John's University School of Law, and the Washington University Journal of Law & Policy.

Gabriel Johnson (he/him) is a 23-year-old in the belly of the beast, painting a clear portrait. He's an organizer with the All African Peoples' Revolutionary Party, a public health worker, and a dedicated New Bedford, MA resident; he's fighting as hard as possible for sumn' holier than this.

Jard Lerebours (he/they) is a Jamaican-Haitian anti-disciplinary storyteller from Long Island, NY. They approach art-making as a conversation between friends and family in communion. He deeply cares about this communal approach by way of a West Indian upbringing in a loving village of cousins, aunts, uncles, great uncles, grandparents and great grandparents. The goal of their work is to capture the nuance, joy and responsibility that comes with living, breathing, Black being.

Nnenna Loveth Umelo Uzoma Nwafor (they/she) is an Igbo lesbian poet, dancer, and facilitator, who descends from a powerful ancestry. Nnenna's matrilineal history has led them into deep inner-healing and ancestral veneration work; she writes, facilitates, and dances for the ultimate purpose of addressing the disconnect that wh*te-patriarchal-coloniality has created between us and our senses. Their work explores Black g*rlhood, Black queerness, Igbo Cosmology, Sensual play and rituals of healing. Nnenna published their debut chapbook, *Already Knew You Were Coming*, with Game Over Books in January of 2022 and has also been featured on Button Poetry, WBUR's ARTery, and VIBES. When they speak, their ancestors are pleased.

Sophia Pinto Thomas (she/her) is a sister, a student, and a poet, born and raised in Boston. Her poetic practice is more and more turned towards hearing the birds, bearing witness to the world, and trying to change it one rhyme at a time. Sophia enjoys painting, going to protests, and babysitting the many toddlers in her neighborhood of Roxbury. She is thrilled to share her art with others. Sophia posts poems on her Instagram page (@sophiapintothomas), and shares mixed media art and writing on her free Substack newsletter, 'Thoughts Across Bostonia'.

Alula Hunsen (he/him) is an Editorial Manager at the Boston Ujima Project, working on narrative-building towards liberatory urban futures.

Cierra Michele Peters (she/her) is the Director of communications, Culture, and Enfranchisement at the Boston Ujima Project. She works as an artist, curator, designer, and organizer with projects that attempt to examine visual, spatial and sensory representations of Blackness.

COLOPHON

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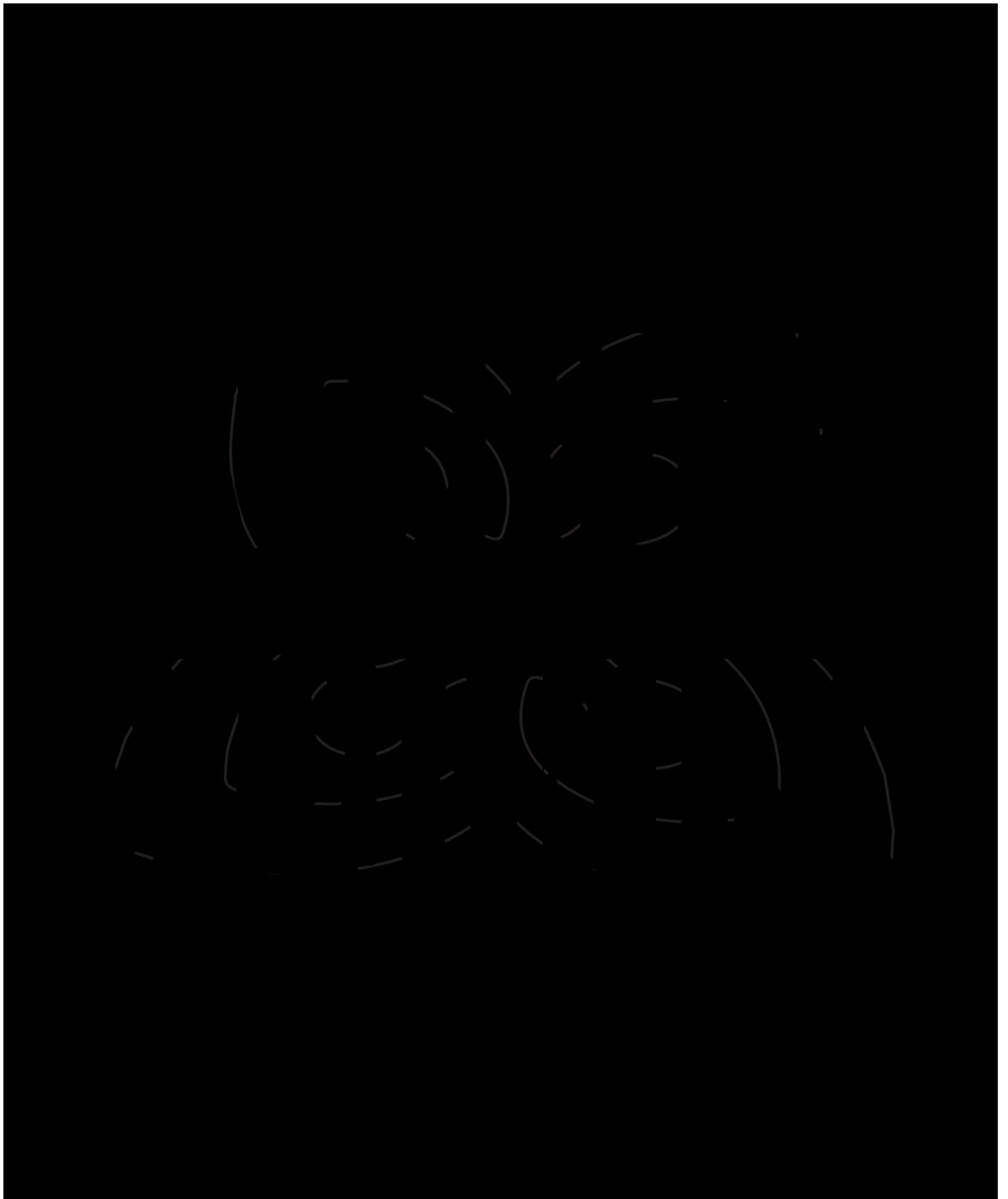
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