

Preface

I wrote Gentle Pain in spring 2024 for the Anthems for the Anthropocene song competition hosted at Drexel University. The submission reviewed by judges was revised and released on Spotify later in 2024.

I developed the cover art for this lyric booklet and accompanying discussion in June 2024. I formed the digital illustration from four AI generated images prompted with the phrase “gentle pain.” These images are included below, though only traces of their existence are recognizable in my final art work.



Figure 1: DeepAI generated in
“Decorative Art” style.



Figure 2: DeepAI generated in
“Surrealist Sculpture” style.



Figure 3: DeepAI generated in
“Post-Impressionist Painting” style.

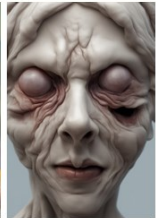


Figure 4: DeepAI generated in
“Grotesque Art” style.

Gentle Pain

Maya Hope Hillis

Poet's Note

Gentle Pain is about a future that is safe to believe in. A possibility that is just one life away. A painful, gentle future could only exist generations after my time, or it could only exist for my life, maybe that one life compounds... Whatever, whenever, if ever doesn't matter. What matters is that I see the vision: a future without violence.

Violence, not conflict. In my hoped-for future there is still pain, discomfort, and conflict. Conflict is valuable and wonderful when inspiring redirection to an even sturdier existence. Pain should be listened to, but it doesn't need to be violent. Learning to appreciate inevitable discomfort, and building from its meaning is promisingly gentle.

The future I see is not catastrophic, but it's not a utopia. It's life, and to be alive, and to be alive resiliently. The only future I have it in me to hope for is a future that can handle itself - unafraid of consequences, in remission and relapse, empathetic not calm, hard and persistent and painful and gentle. A beautiful horror.

The future I wrote this song for is the only one I see as good that I know is achievable.

Gentle Pain

Maya Hillis

*I breathe it in
The air as it falters
I'm swallowed into deep waters
But a break in the cover
Light falls onto colors
Like sky in the summer
Alive and beautiful*

*I'm afraid of optimists
And record high degrees
And the terrifying consequences
Of being naive
What of my wasting time
To rising tides and ashes?
What of my wasting body
To evicted masses?*

*Just how it ends is anyone's guess
So forget statistics and picture this:*

*So vivid green you could sneeze
It's raw as rain
It's not silent but
A quiet gentle pain
Focused right in frame
A vibrant refrain
It's just one life away*

*I'll drink it in with poetry
And sober up with the plainly
Terrifying consequence
Of evading all that pain
From discomforting times
Comes transformative hours
Of my wasting body
Will grow flowers*

*How to shape the end is anyone's guess
So forget logistic picture this:*

*So vivid green you could sneeze
It's raw as rain
It's not silent but
A quiet gentle pain
Focused right in frame
A vibrant refrain
It's just one life away*

*Resignation of ancient strength is treason
Despair demand less of us but
What's a life without a reason?
A life without a reason.*

*I breathe it in
The air as it falters
I swallowed in the deepening waters
And as the surface breaks
All the colors quake
Like summer rain
And gentle pain*

Judges Comments

“Brought a **tear to my eye**. Amazing lyrics!”

“This composition embarks on a **poetic journey** through both its **sonic landscape and conceptual themes**. While I appreciate the song, it veers slightly towards **esotericism** in both its composition and lyrics. Nonetheless, thank you for sharing this intriguing piece.”

“Very **intelligent lyrics**”

“The song structure could have been stronger and more defined to allow the audience to catch on and sing along. That would have added to its impact. I **wasn't sure which section was definitely the hook or refrain**. The sections and arrangement could have been more identifiable and definitive.”

“**Lovely, plaintive voice**. Creative varied use of the rhythm section. Very thoughtful and poetic lyrics.”