



“Infinity Books” by Alyssa Archambault

# Issue 06

# INTERSECTIONS

Persimmon Review

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# EDITOR'S *Note*

Dear Reader,  
Welcome to “Issue 06: Intersections” of  
*Persimmon Review*.

The editorial team is proud to present an issue that focuses on the social, personal, and cultural factors that shape who we are as writers, artists, and humans. We curated pieces that explore the concept of intersections, whether literally or figuratively. Through these pieces, I hope that you are able to reflect on moments of change, conflict, and connection in your own life.

Thank you to the contributors who submitted their work to make this publication possible. Additionally, thank you to the readers and social media followers. The growing support for *Persimmon Review* has been truly meaningful. It is an honor to share the creative pieces of talented writers and artists. I hope this issue inspires everyone to start something new. Happy reading!

-Emily Kim  
*Founder, Editor-in-Chief*

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# THE FINAL DANCE

by Adithi

‘Ammamma’ means maternal grandmother in Kannada. Since the last four months it had come to mean depressing visits to the dimly lit room at the psych ward of City Central Hospital. She had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s three summers ago when she fainted at the fruit shop down the street and had to be carried to the hospital. I rushed from my office as soon as I got the call, apparently she had been able to blurt out my phone number in her half-conscious state.

Holding the MRI scan, the neurologist pointed at the tiny black patches, “See here? These will slowly eat into the surrounding grey.” he said.

Despite our best efforts at cajoling her to stay with us, she wouldn’t agree to move out of her house. So we hired a home nurse and decided to visit her thrice a week, and call twice a day. Although her symptoms were beginning to aggravate, she was not causing any trouble yet. Until one day, four months ago she took off while the nurse was in the bathroom. We searched for hours in vain, finally a family friend found her on the street several miles from home. No one knew how she had gotten there, or what she did, it was almost nightfall. I tried to get her to talk but she wouldn’t relent. She suddenly seemed very distant, lost in thought, trapped in her own head. She stopped eating, started throwing tantrums and barely got out of her room. One day I made sago payasam (porridge) and brought it to her. When she refused, I joked that she wouldn’t have gotten to eat any if tatha (grandfather) was around since it was his favourite dish. She looked at me blankly, my smile faded when she asked unfazed, “Which tatha?” A few days later she had the same vacant expression when the doctor said, “Your granddaughter will be visiting you often, don’t worry”.

I dreaded walking through her door, each day fresh horrors seemed to await me. Although the diagnosis prepared one for what was to come, it wouldn’t protect them from being shattered when it did. Ammamma was beginning to turn very irritable and detached. She didn’t care about any updates on family members. Neither did she enjoy reliving old memories that we brought up. Her lucid moments started shrinking day by day.

One day, as soon as I walked into her room, she flew out of bed and grabbed my



shoulders, “Can you hear that?” her eyes were twinkling. “It’s Kapi!” I was too stunned to speak, she wouldn’t let go of my arm until I had recognized the faint alaap of the raga, its unmistakable notes soaked in devotion and disdain wafting through the hallway into her room like the scent of a dying flower because the fragile voice most certainly belonged to a man ripe with age. The next thing Ammamma did was most shocking. She dropped my hand, walked a few steps to the centre of the room and parted her feet into a V and sat in a half pose, the Araimandi. She did the namaskaram (salutation), the little ritual done before performing any Bharatanatyam dance. Even at her senile age, it was obvious she had the perfect gait of an experienced dancer.

That evening, I stopped by her house. I wanted to know more about this woman who until now had only been my ‘Ammamma’. I rummaged through her wooden cupboard; inside the locked drawer were pictures of my mother’s wedding, me as a baby, and a few of her with tatha. I fished around for more than an hour, but there wasn’t anything else. I wasn’t sure what I had expected to find, but I was convinced that she had lived a life I knew nothing about.

The following days she seemed more cheerful, whenever she heard the old man sing, she would get up and dance. And when it ended, she would go back to her bed as though none of it had happened. When I asked her why she never told us that she had learnt Bharatanatyam, she dismissed the conversation entirely. Sometimes I would bring up dance as a subject of discussion with her. But she was extremely moody in giving answers, and whenever I tried sneaking in a personal question, I was met with complete silence.

One morning, I was a little late to meet her. The nurse opened the door to let me in, and our mouths dropped when we saw her empty bed. She was missing.

“How is it possible? Didn’t Vasantha lock her room?” the nurse said, panicking, “Vasantha! Indu Malini madam is missing!”

I looked around, where could she have gone? The old man was singing again, I followed the voice down the hallway and stopped outside the slightly ajar door, a couple of rooms down the corner. Ammamma was inside, dancing gracefully like a peacock that had opened its feathers in the rain. It occurred to me that the old man’s singing was her rain.

I saw the old man, a few steps away from her, back hunched, but standing, eyes glued to her, the most wonderful expression of awe and admiration on his face.

He was singing “Nee mattume en nenjil neerkkiraay.” meaning “Only you are in my heart” in Tamil. I turned around, wiping the stream of tears from my cheeks, and walked back, “I’ve found ammamma” I told the nurse. We waited until the song died down. The nurse told me that the old man had been in the hospital for almost a year now. His Alzheimer’s was in the final stage.

That evening, I walked past his room and was shocked to see the housekeeping staff cleaning it. He had succumbed to a cardiac arrest just a few hours ago.

I couldn’t meet Ammamma’s eyes while breaking the news of his passing. When I finally looked up, she stood up and grabbed her suitcase. I held her hand, “Ammamma, I’m so sorry” which she shoved brusquely. She pulled out a shawl from inside, and touching it gently said, “I wore it on my silk adiyar (costume) on performance days”. Then, in a split second she tore the hem of the shawl revealing a photograph hidden in the layers of the fabric. It was a black and white picture of her in costume, hands in the air, eyebrows furrowed up, the most evocative Karuna rasa portrayed on her face. Seated in the background, as if mimicking her gesture, flanked by the Mridangist and violinist on either side and singing, was a young man. “That was the last time I danced. Appayya (father) found out about him and I was forbidden to dance anymore.”

That night after dinner, I decided to stay with her. I slept on the couch in her room and when the nurse came with breakfast the next morning, she picked up the photograph lying on the side table to set the tray. Before I could take it, Ammamma snatched it from the nurse’s hand.

She studied the picture for half a minute, then, giggling, looked at me and said, “When did you start clicking your photos in black and white?”

# THE TALE OF STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

by Cassiel Blake

At an intersection in the sky

Two shooting stars stopped

To say hello at once

Maybe by the sheer will of the universe

Something we call coincidence

For a while, they stood there

Admiring each other's glow

They'd spill the contents of their souls

Trying to get to know

The other corner of the world

They justified it as love

A secret bond between those

That had no reason to be one

The light of the moon

And a simple passerby

A mix of overflowing light and a dim rock afloat

Two beings from separate worlds

Meeting up in the heavens for asylum

One of them inevitably left

And the other could only pass in silence

That's the tale of star-crossed lovers

Two bodies of light that intersected in the sky

Leaving behind trails of rich gold

And landing on opposite sides

Of a universe in which they were fated to say goodbye



# MUSE

by F.S. Blake

When past muses hide their grace  
And I'm digging for a line  
All I do is see your face  
And the words start growing their vines

Your eyes and lips they do inspire  
Words for a thousand books  
And I the poet do acquire  
Strength and stanzas from your looks

Joyfully recalling the days of our past  
Your lyrics begin their start  
To capture in ink at long last  
Secret passageways of my heart

For when our weathered palms did fuse  
You became my forever muse.

# PARTY FOREVER

by Audrey Bourriaud

At the end of the line  
She had arrived  
When the weather is cold outside  
A warm subway is not a shameful bed.

Deb—she told herself last night—  
The “F” is better for you, girl,  
Better than that women shelter  
And better than freezing to death.

So, she sat and she slept in car #9502  
Through Queens, the City, Brooklyn, the frozen dew, the horns  
The announcements, the chimes, the beeps, some inept swaying  
And finally that crystalline jingling of stationary trains cooling down.

It was three days to Christmas  
And three minutes to departure—she was still well  
She was dreaming of an old party she gave  
On the pier. Lots of beers—Someone, no reason, jeered at her classmates.

Rocking the Eighties, they’d come—instead  
Of going to Passaic—to Coney-Awesome-Island  
Less prosaic—she hooted—as they wanted to party  
Forever—They felt they had a life ahead.

It was two days to Christmas Eve  
People used to light festive candles and sparklers  
And sometimes accidentally set on Fire their Christmas trees  
If only the man had fumbled his lighter

But he leisurely walked to her and lit and held his lighter  
Long enough for her clothes, her hair, her flesh to catch on Flames—A killer  
With a will, but no why—No particular reason  
He stated from his prison.

Debrina, we know you are now debris  
Of long awaited dreams of forever parties  
And a line on a list of never-ending femicides  
You died—We ache—You died  
And that's all we are left with.

# PONT DES AMBASSADRICES

by Audrey Bourriaud

## *Ambassadors Bridge*

*“The letter ‘n’ looks like a little bridge”, my mother says  
To her students – letter found in crucial words for kids, like “non” (no) and “nom”  
(name)  
And “Noël” (Christmas) – Mom has them write first their first name after she’s  
compared Each letter to things  
They love the “n” because she introduces it as “la lettre-pont” (the bridge-  
letter), an abstract thing she makes familiar, and immediately, they become friends.  
Common sense – writing made easy, unscary*

*I am glad throughout history ambassadors criss-crossed countries, bringing  
governments and sovereignties together, limiting wars, bridging differences and  
“différends” (disagreements)*

*I am glad bridges are architectural ambassadors of our shared traveling needs, and  
paths to our trades, and a testimony of our common curiosity and interest  
Over rivers, bays, “détroits” (straits), I am glad they walk with their long steel legs  
Because my wife is from Windsor – and I am from Detroit  
We regard the Ambassador Bridge as our beloved-hyphen*

*She-and-I feel very much hyphenated*

*My mother-in-law once saw a big piece of old Ambassador Bridge detach  
And plunge with a stubborn gravitas to the water  
It got me thinking: when diplomatic relationships crumble, cave in, are we all placed  
under country arrest? Do we only become grounded?*

*Or cellar-sheltered?*

*But, I keep an optimistic mind, because new bridges are built as we speak, because  
In France, my mother keeps teaching her students the alphabet,  
And because the letter “n” does look like a little bridge.*



# DEAR YOUNGER SELF

by Sarah (Ember) Bricault

You're not my type.  
And I'm not yours, but  
sometimes we fat-finger the swipe  
and I'd like to say I'm flattered, but  
really it's just awkward, thrown  
together by unhappy circumstance.  
And of course both of us are me,  
and overly polite,  
and positively uninterested, but  
we keep finding ourselves here  
frowning at our reflection, fingers  
to the glass, wanting to connect, but  
that isn't desire you're feeling, love,  
it's dissonance —  
you'll never understand wanting  
by telling yourself to love yourself  
you can't tell what to do  
I see you now in photographs  
smiling so, but I know what's behind  
the curtain, and this song and dance  
isn't for me, agreed? I am older  
than we were, and I can say with  
absolute confidence  
that I would never swipe you right —  
never text never call never write  
I am busy living a life you will never find  
trying to impress me.  
Look away from that mirror, love.  
Be the impressionable one, let linger  
your eyes on others and you will  
find the one who smiles true —  
the woman I love isn't you

# BECKY

by Anthony Brown

For a beloved coworker to get this much praise  
would mean my heart's overflowed with compassion for how much you mean to me.  
Did you say you wanted a large vanilla,  
three cream and sugar light ice?

Every time you walk in, I'm always surprised  
by the different things I expect: pink and purple split, a pink pony club type of hairdo  
and an attitude that makes my unfathomably  
tough days' worth it all.

Now where did you get that purse? And why  
didn't you get me one of those luxuriously fashioned hats you constantly wear?  
You don't get to be sad until I get you one  
of your coffees, yet again.

How many times have you dyed your hair? What  
exactly are you trying to accomplish by showing me as many colors as you have?  
All of us know that you're the pinnacle  
shine of the whole rainbow.

Go ahead and hand me that bag of food, because  
I'll be damned if I had the audacity to just stand there and let you get disrespected.  
Don't waste face on a randy because  
they're all Randy's in this house.

Excuse me Becky, were you talking to me? If so  
I didn't hear you and need you to repeat what you just said to me once again.  
Did I just lie to you? Well, I guess  
that makes our interactions unique.

Don't be running tardy to the party Ms. Pokémon Go  
Go Go to Little Caesars once again for pepperoni pizza and another treat.  
Is the mimikyu in the back of your window  
your own intentional doing?

It's the end of the day, at the end of the day. The most  
energetic of people eventually get tired after a pretty long, sometimes exhausting night.  
I'll see you when I work next time, I promise  
to get both of us our much-deserved coffee.

# 21 FEELS LIKE A CANDLE BEING BLOWN OUT

by Brooke Burris

or maybe one the second that it is lit.  
it's too early to tell.

i'm starting to think this year will taste  
more like getting older  
than being young and dumb

wondering what happened to fifteen  
years of lost love  
while there is still so much left to show for it

remembering—  
how it rained  
both times we laid you to rest

there will always be new beginnings  
twin ferns hung out on the porch

i dare you  
look into the future and tell me,  
is this one?

# I CAN'T TAKE OFF MY BEAUTIFUL FACE

by Taylor Elise Colimore



Please view the interactive element of this sculpture here:  
[https://youtu.be/7trkABHN\\_pU?si=xiFR28kxa29xDeL-](https://youtu.be/7trkABHN_pU?si=xiFR28kxa29xDeL-)





*My body is not on display and I am beautiful. I choose to cover myself with icons, drape myself in bright colors, curate phrases to be sprawled across my chest, tie ribbons to my curls, hang jewels from my ears, apply glitter to my eyelids; but this is not for you to look at. Do you think I am beautiful? Why do you look at me? Who gave you permission to look at me? I am not an object on display for your attraction.*

I CAN'T TAKE OFF MY BEAUTIFUL FACE is a touch reactive sculptural object both conceptually and literally in conversation with viewers in the gallery. Through the use of different coding techniques, the object talks back and forth between other objects in the space and also to the viewers if triggered by their touch. Conceptually, this object was created from experiences I have had where I felt disrespected, taken advantage of, or judged on the basis of my self-expression. The installation of this exhibition creates a space for my object, representative of myself, to participate in conversations without being interrupted by unsolicited comments. However, due to the nature of an exhibition, viewers are invited to enter the gallery and further to even interact with the objects thus interrupting this conversation. The illuminated objects, when touched, go dark and make a jarring sound to startle the viewer in an effort to advocate for the object's own autonomy. Artwork Statement: My body is not on display and I am beautiful. I choose to cover myself with icons, drape myself in bright colors, curate phrases to be sprawled across my chest, tie ribbons to my curls, hang jewels from my ears, apply glitter to my eyelids; but this is not for you to look at. Do you think I am beautiful? Why do you look at me? Who gave you permission to look at me? I am not an object on display for your attraction.

# MYOCARDIUM

by Kenzi Day

Corners are for waiting. Surely, where two bustling streets meet, so shall we. But my corner is empty- save the flickering fluorescents from the cafe that closes at six. I never see the workers, I fear sometimes they are ghosts with beating hearts, and so I close in on myself like a pair of tattered wings and seldom move until the veil of night does the same to the sun. At night, the road rests- no longer writhing under boots and stilettos and double-decker buses that pass on opposite sides. I, too, shall rest, and allow myself to settle into cracks in the pavement where the corners meet. Embrace the liminal. Ajar is the door, but the door is not a jar- the door leads out, whilst the jar has an imbecilic child-lock, and keeps in air and spiders and seedless jams. The door only opens to let people slip out, back in- I fruitlessly beg each time. Turn this way, I tempt fate. Most often they flock downstream, or up to the cross on the corner, where a mother prays for her heedless son, and the Father deplores the day he forsook one, and the wreckage of kids he veiled in Holy Water sink into stones on the front steps because nothing in this world is truly holy. Even Hell sits at the foot of the cross. The Magdalen and a pin-up. And beside them, Time waits for the dead, in a half-shiver, half-dance, somewhere between silk and stone. I watch as they split down the streets like tendons, prying themselves apart like The Red Sea- a tide violently clawing at a shore until it is bloody. My view of their corner is ideal, where the road turns to the crescent. It's like clockwork; it's like some mob of sickly limerence. I can see it in the red-mite threads that burrow into their wrists and bind them. They suck their blood, and turn their stomachs to a marriage bed, where they unify in searing acid instead of gold bands. I fear them. If that were me, I'd incessantly ink small black squares on my skin and suck them out with syringes until I was sure I was clean again. Perhaps that is why my corner is so empty. Because I fear the mites, and most arachnids. I try to keep them at bay. The folds in between the layers of my brain are sacred, I can't have those who get in-amongst them getting bitten. But to stare down a never-ending hall is too daunting, so I watch the corner. I watch ever brief, breathless moment where each path momentarily converges, then runs parallel. They sin at the corner, split into two, seeds bared; kissing crimson juice from the other's fingertips; kissing newly-scarlet lips like it's the first time they've bled. Then they rivulet. Back to the cross, to the fork in the road. And I shouldn't, but I smile, because all is fair in love and war, when they meet at

the corner and collide. To see war over there is peace for me. Though it is silent here, it is never war, and any desire I have to bridge the gap and transverse to the corner where dissected hearts intertwine and share atriums dissolves into a distant beating. It may occasionally hum in my bone marrow; an occasional thread may unravel and tug me closer. But to split a heart and slide a septum between the divergent is a plea for infection, and I am clean.

# TAKING FLIGHT

by Olivia Dimond

I knew Dottie McGovern for fifty-five years. I knew everything about her. She always put her left sock on before her right. She never missed a Bulldogs broadcast, even during her worst days. The secret ingredient in her mashed potatoes was—well, I can't tell you that. McGovern family secret, and I may not be family, but I'm pretty close.

Dottie and I met through her husband, George McGovern. A wedding present for his young bride: 222 Birch Lane, on a plot of land that would grow into the Jocelyn Hills subdivision. One brief honeymoon at a nice hotel later, George shipped off for Vietnam. I kept her company while he was gone. She poured all her energy into helping me grow, just like she did with the baby kicking up a storm in her stomach. She believed I had the potential to be the home her son would grow up in. I'm proud to say that I was.

Little Thomas McGovern was born exactly nine months after his parents' wedding, to the day. (Dottie claimed he was simply a punctual child, but her sister always implied that maybe Thomas was not exactly conceived in that honeymoon suite.) He came so punctually, even, that the squalling baby was born on my freshly installed bathroom tile. When Thomas's daughter Ellie finally got to hear this story in all its gory detail when she was fifteen, she stared at her bird-boned, knobby-kneed, white-haired grandmother and promptly declared her a badass. Dottie told her not to swear, but Ellie knew she saw Dottie smile when she thought Ellie wasn't looking. I have to say—I agree with little Ellie. Dottie was indeed a badass.

Thomas was soon joined by the twins, Elizabeth (Ellie's namesake, Elizabeth was always very proud to announce whenever she introduced her niece to anyone) and Adaline. Thomas always wanted a brother, but never got his wish.

After George's fatal aneurysm in his early sixties, Dottie struggled. I did my best to help, ensuring no pipes exploded or electricity went out. I didn't even let a light bulb burn out or a smoke alarm battery chirp. But there's only so much a house can do to fill a human-sized void. Luckily, Thomas knew just what to do.

He and his wife thought some young children might brighten her days, and they did. Mine, too. Three rambunctious boys—Georgie, Sawyer, and Holden—to run around the halls and color on the walls. I didn't even mind the scribbles when it came from those three! Then along came little Ellie, nursed in the same room Thomas had grown up in. It was not exactly according to plan, that was for certain. But I doubt Ellie and her

brothers could imagine not growing up with their grandmother in the ground floor master bedroom. Even if it meant the three boys slept in bunk beds like the Brady boys until they were all well over six feet tall. I always loved when *The Brady Bunch* played on my TV set—such beautiful architecture!

Now, I'd never claim favorites. But I got to watch Ellie, like her father before her, grow up. From the day her mother sat in the bathroom and peed on that little white stick, to the day Ellie shoved more boxes than I could count into the back of a Toyota RAV4. I was there for it all. We didn't always get along. Ellie once threw open a door so hard she sent the doorknob through my drywall! But at the end of the day, watching her drive away brought tears to my eyes. Or, well, it would've. I settled for a faucet drip in Ellie's bathroom instead.

And of course, darling Dottie. Watching her heart slowly give out had been agonizing, a never-ending wondering of when the shoe would finally drop. I'm grateful it finally did. Dottie went out quietly to meet George in the great beyond. The relief that it was finally over was as palpable as my popcorn ceilings.

From a legal perspective, there was no question about it: Thomas and Julie McGovern were my proud new owners. For how much longer, though, I wasn't sure. What had passed for expert craftsmanship in the late sixties, shag carpets and green bathtubs, had not survived the test of time. It wasn't that Thomas and Julie were letting me fall into disrepair, no. But it was clear that the stopgap measures they'd been clinging to were not going to hold much longer, and all four kids had flown the coop. The roots calling all of them back to 222 Birch Lane were fading, and fading fast.

Really, it shouldn't have been a surprise when Thomas and Julie announced they would sell. Elizabeth and Adaline had given their blessing, and the four not-so-little ones had, too. The cracking foundation holding me up finally had an appointment to be looked over by professionals. The landscapers would start making a weekly pilgrimage for the first time in...well, let's just say, too long.

By the time Ellie and the boys came home for Thanksgiving, less than a year after Dottie's death, they could be forgiven for wondering if they were in the wrong driveway. The sky blue paint had been whitewashed. The shutters now shone a boring black. Fresh mulch stench clung to the air as the little dark shards peeked out from underneath carefully raked leaf piles. It was none of the character and charm they were used to. But the realtor told Thomas and Julie this was what was "in" now. So I let it happen with only minimal protest. I mean, my front lawn hadn't looked this good since pre-Y2K.

Julie came rushing out to hug Ellie, smothering her and then Sawyer in loud, smacking kisses. They laughed all the way up the porch stairs, ridiculous Thanksgiving



wreath hung up on the door. At least Julie's horrible taste in decorations hadn't been squashed. Well, the kids called it horrible—I happened to like it. Brightened the place in the gloomy winter months.

The sweet sounds of Georgie and Holden fighting over the remote greeted them inside. Holden's boyfriend and Georgie's fiancée sat on the large sectional sofa, bemused smiles on their faces as they watched the boys. Sawyer and Georgie were over thirty now, but I would always think of all three of the young McGovern men as “the boys.”

All those loud, boisterous noises of another successful family holiday were a balm to my poor nerves. The physical changes to me were clear: this painting had been taken down, that wallpaper had been redone. The kitchen had never had a backsplash and now there was a black and white one that looked just like the new exterior. But the physical meant nothing as long as I could still witness this joy a little while longer.

Ellie's room had gone through several different redecorations in her twenty-four years of life. The four-poster bed was probably the only thing that had remained throughout its various iterations. Her desk, most of the books, and the more precious knick knacks had moved with her to California. Everything that had been left behind was now faced with three boxes: keep, trash, donate. Julie had cheerily told the children all about the boxes, also stashed in the boys' room, at dinner. She hadn't reacted to the wide-eyed gazes of her offspring, but I saw them. I could sympathize with them. Saying goodbye is hard.

But here in Ellie's room, it didn't look quite like a goodbye. Once the boxes were packed, I knew it would. I watched Ellie take in her bedroom for what might be the final time. She exhaled shakily. Her eyes searched my walls as if to memorize them.

Her gaze caught on the two glass animals sitting on top of her dresser. Both had belonged to Dottie. The swan had been a jewelry dish, its body a little holder protected by the moveable metal wings. The duck was mere decoration, a gift from George who'd always called her his duck. Ellie had turned those little figurines into her toys when she was three. Dottie had made her displeasure known at the time, strongly telling her not to break either one. Yet she'd never taken them away.

Dottie died the week before winter break Ellie's senior year of college, and so on Christmas morning Ellie opened a small box containing the duck and the swan. The whole room had gone misty-eyed as Adaline had choked out, “She would've wanted you to have them,” when Ellie's own parents couldn't find the words.

As grown-up Ellie reached out to hold them, I saw the eager little arms of three year old Ellie reaching for them with those chubby little hands of hers that had always grabbed the reins of life without fear. She cradled the figurines close to her chest. I felt



that Ellie and I were probably wondering the same thing as she held them: what would've happened to this little glass menagerie if Ellie hadn't had her childhood obsession with them. Would they have been thrown out as soon as Thomas and the twins started sorting through their mother's things? They were just items, but they held memories in their little glass bodies.

George and Dottie had not been overly sentimental people, traits they'd passed down to the younger members of their family. Had George been part of the conversation to sell the house, I knew exactly what he would've said. We all made such wonderful memories here. *Why shouldn't another family get the same opportunity?*

*And besides, Dottie would add, it isn't really the place that matters. The location may carry the memories, but it doesn't hoard them away. They are yours to do with as you please.*

As I watched Ellie lovingly wrap her swan and duck in old sweaters and place them in the *keep* box, I knew we would all find the courage to do just that.

# TETHERED

by Cindy Fang



# TESCO MAN AND OTHER ABSTRACTIONS OF LOVE

by Paloma Maria Freitas

An open (and interrupted) letter, written in front of the Earl's Court Tesco Supermarket to the most attractive man I have ever seen:

London, England, 5 August, 2024, Noon-ish

Dear Tesco Man,

Your radiance and beauty are unreal. If you could take a step further and become an imagining, a permanent mirage locked into place mid-aisle, I would be most grateful. I would know how to proceed. You would be fictional.

Yours truly—

Unfortunately, as soon as you talk to a man (or a woman) it breaks the illusion. There is a rhythm and a sound to their voice, meaning a place they are from, grounding them in reality. Even in saying hello, they betray personality, demeanor. They are no longer an aesthetic in motion but a real human person. And that should be wonderful. But this means they've become real. And I don't know what to do with real people. I can't make them into or make them do what I want, use them to fertilize budding ideas, realize my issues through therapeutic play, send out calls to action, and point out injustices.

It is possible for me to love real people, though. But I always become bored with that eventually... Except for the times they grow bored first before I am able. Which makes me cry over them, because I was starting to think I'd been proven wrong.

I'd ask the Tesco man to prove me wrong, but he is gone now. He left while I was thinking. He hopped off the blank black page of my mind and onto the pavement outside the store without my direction. Free will won't always allow a second draft, and happenstance rarely requests a third.

That's not to say this interaction won't happen again, with someone else, of course, maybe in an ALDI or an M&S. Because being places with other people and grocery shopping are two things that have to happen quite a lot. And unlike visiting other public places, going to the grocery store means coming in contact with possibly anyone. People who like being outdoors go to parks, and people who like exercise go to the gym, and people who like Chinese food go to Chinese restaurants... but everyone has to go to the grocery store. For the purpose of maintaining everything I have just said, I will presently ignore the fact I usually have my groceries delivered and instead return to my imaginary correspondence.

Dear Tesco Man,

I am so honored to have looked at you for a few moments and admired you for many more. I now know love at first sight. Moreover, I know how dangerous it is. I was so satisfied in the moment, I forgot to do more than stare until you were gone.

Truly,—

There is no need to sign off, to finish the message. There is no message. No interaction. No further knowledge gained or given. I am distraught. I did not say anything, and he is gone now forever. But I never would have. His existence, in the context of my desire to do nothing more than gaze at him again, remains forever an abstraction of love.

P.S.

6:40 pm, in bed with no lights or covers on, a few days later

I think this counts as a personal essay. And something I know from middle school speech writing competitions and nonfiction audiobooks I've downloaded onto my phone and investigative journalism podcasts about cults and financial crimes is that these sort of stories are supposed to have conclusions, often profound self-realizations factored from the absurdities of life you'd never imagine would lead to a self-reckoning, except that this most likely isn't your first time either with, say, the work of a Sloane-Crosley-type or a deep dive video into the history of a Garfield-themed restaurant found on Youtube. You know there must be an inevitable end to each chapter-heading-framed explanation and commentary of conceptually-tied quirky anecdotes and hypothetical questions.

A few days after I called my mom at 5 am to cry about this interaction with the world's most stunning man to ever grace a supermarket, she sent me a video that had popped up on her social media feed. A few days after writing down what I had assured myself was a profound experience no one but I, who sees and endures the world so differently, could ever fully cognate... my mom sends me a song by British musical comedy duo "Flo and Joan" about meeting someone in a Tesco and how they will think about that moment for the rest of my life." She tells me, "You could have written this song," as if I wouldn't know why I was sent this.

If this was, in fact, a personal essay or a Bo Burnham act from 2018, I would realize it now: the conclusion. Or rather, I would recreate that process of realization for the reader, conveying it through a single instance of enlightenment. I would write that I am not alone anymore, that I never was. That I am at least a little less of an anomaly in my own eyes, in my own mind.

And with a conclusion, there would be closure. And it would be satisfying for everyone involved. And I'm guessing the truth is why I'm not very good at writing personal essays.

Sincerely.



# ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, TIME DEVOURS

by Cassie Frisbie

When you called me from the closet  
Your mother couldn't save you  
She'd gone out to the liquor store  
And hadn't thought to tell you  
In the end, Kronos devours us all

When my mother sat you at our table  
And made you a pancake breakfast  
Your eyes shone with the glimmer  
From the circlet on my head  
In the end, Kronos devours us all

Who would have thought that you would be  
The golden child, and I the king of empty halls  
In the end, Kronos comes for us all

When we emerge from his digestion  
When we emerge from long gestation  
In the end, Kronos crowns us all  
Ichor dripping from the thorns



# DOLLAR TREE ON 9/11

by Michael Livingston Frisbie

shopping cart flagpoles  
is their answer to  
the city's meth problem.

a woman is talking to  
herself or the cereal boxes.  
a man with a gun on his hip  
browses the beer cooler  
before buying a box of  
Minnesota Ice.

there's a tatted-up girl  
with a belly ring below  
her cesarean scar  
buying dollar store diet pills  
smacking at some nicotine gum

and the cashier is telling me  
where she was when the towers fell  
but I'm just nodding politely  
waiting to get the hell out of there  
because despite the florescent  
humbuzz it's still  
*too damn quiet*

maybe i'll get up on the counter,  
take of my shirt,  
spin it around,  
hoot and holler,  
but the cashier tells me  
"\$6 -er, yeah, that"  
because she's too superstitious  
to say my total.

# WHEN I DASH ACROSS A DON'T WALK INTERSECTION

by Keith Gaboury

at 40th and Broadway, Death's  
warm body almost hugs me

as a SUV almost flattens me  
into one of Mama's blueberry pies

hot from a Thanksgiving oven  
three decades ago

and it's still steaming somewhere  
within my cluttered hippocampus.

At 40th and Broadway, thankfully  
I'm not a blueberry pie.

According to Consciousness  
as illuminated by my high school

guidance counselor, I'm alive  
yet do I deserve to be?

Thirty Thanksgivings ago,  
Papa cut into a blueberry pie

a week after Aunt Mary's neck  
snapped. Now I dive

into Mama's Royal Cafe.  
With a smack

of crimson lipstick, a waitress  
nods one greasy hello.

“A slice of blueberry pie, please.”

“We’re all out, hun.”

“Just give me all the blue-  
berries you have.

I’ll flatten them  
like a SUV squishing a brain.”

# A BEING OF INTERSECTION

by Margaux Herry-Simon

What sadder sadness and what more devastating pain than being denied the option to do more? What more upsetting truth for a young child with a heart full of dreams and a body of ambition to be refused access to the interdisciplinary? To be kicked into a predefined box that has too little room to allow for fighting back?

I have been that young child. I have been in the body that contained the ambition. I have lived with the hopeful heart, but I was never taught to nurture my interdisciplinary nature. Instead, I was taught to hide it. I was plagued by society's implicit assumption that the multiplication of interests leads to dissolution, while never understanding the insinuated desire for an absolute completion in learning. Doesn't the beauty of things lie in the very learning that happens when you deepen your interests for them?

Of course, there is truth to the perfectionist narrative. There is value in learning to do things *well*. There is value in *trying your best*. I do not believe that there is value in limiting yourself, though. I do not believe that there is value in perfecting your craft at the expense of who you are, and there is definitely *very* little value in conforming to rigid standards for the sake of societal approval.

I am stubborn. So I learnt. And I accumulated interests. And I never stopped. There is beauty in this stubbornness, far beyond the mere achievement of keeping oneself intact. The interdisciplinary artistic process is one of pure creativity. It is one of inspiring paths that collide gracefully. It is one of intersections, and at these intersections lie not only the charm of inspiration, but also the elegance of authenticity.

There is a little girl within me that resides in the belief that she could never be herself. She clings onto this idea that being yourself requires to strip away your passions. This little girl has peeled herself naked, only to find out that her lack of layers is making her unhappy.

I am now the adult that keeps this little girl safe. As her protector, I feel the need to emphasise that the purpose of art is not to confiscate yourself. In fact, my ideas intersect *into* my art. May we all live in the intersections that fuel our beings, without the worry of being too much.

# INTERSECTIONS

by De'Ja Imani

Intersections

Where our paths meet & cross again.

Where life meets— the Start & the End.

We face intersections in all parts of life—

The streets, the home, & somewhere in our bones.

What does it mean when we pass these things? Do we change or do we continue being?

Intersections, Who Do You Mean?

Is it the Black & Brown & Everything in Between?

Or

Is it the Gay & Straight & Whoever People Choose To Be?

I Believe—

Who we choose to Be. No one is the Same & Why should we Be?

We ALL want Love, A Home & Food To Eat.

That is our RIGHT!

Intersectionality.

# MISSING PEACE

by Lorelai Jean

There once were two lovers.

It could have been a love like a man and wife, or like the first love of teenagers, or like a love that blossoms after years of friendship. It could have been all of these, but it wasn't. However, like most loves, this one does not end happily.

One worked in a flower shop. She spent her afternoons pruning and sinking into the greenery. Her mother owned the shop, and her mother before her, and her mother before her. Each generation had welcomed the growth of anything that would. Ivy clung to the crumbling brick exterior, and dandelions grew in between the crack in the tiles. The flower shop was swarmed with little brown field mice and birds of all kinds; you would think it was an aviary. This was how the lover liked it. Many had claimed them a family of witches—not the scary ones, but the kinds that would tend to wildlife and could heal an ailment, all with a gentle hand. The lover and her family just laughed, but did not deny they would nurture anything sent their way.

The other lived above a bookstore. The house contained the odor of the store below it; an atmosphere of ink-stained hands, yellowed pages, and a film of dust. Dust was the only uncleanliness to be found, however; the lover detested clutter. This was also a family business, but not one the lover took part in. He loved to read, but longed for the pace of a life found only in books. Every day, the lover would go out in search of adventure, leaving behind his father who had grown grey, yet remained spritely and shared his son's spirit. Unfortunately, the father encouraged the lover's spirited questing.

I say "unfortunately" because the lover's roaming brought him upon a flower shop one day. The packed shelves of plants, seeds, and various rodents did not disturb the lover as he would have expected, but he supposed the aroma of nectar had done something to calm him. It was while inspecting a chrysanthemum—or was it a dahlia?—that the lover noticed he had caught the attention of another. Their eyes were drawn to each other with the gravity of stars, but the girl was called away before either could speak. 39



From that day forward, the young man would come to the flower shop. One day, an inspection of foliage. Another, he would bring cubes of cheese for the field mice. Eventually, the florist spoke. She asked why he should need to come to the store every day, and buy nothing. Surely there is something he is seeking and has not found.

The son felt the heat of embarrassment climbing up his chest, to his neck, to his face. He has been searching for something, he explains. A dahlia—or was it a chrysanthemum?—for his father. This, of course, was not the truth. The lover had not found his truth yet.

Dutifully, the daughter guided him towards the store's selection of flowers. She explained to him the benefits and downfalls of both plants. As she spoke, a delicate shade of pink blossomed on the apples of her cheeks; from what, neither he nor she knew. The lover became increasingly aware of his eyes on her, caressing her face like the careful hand that holds a dagger to flesh. She grew warm, but refused to give him what she expected to be the satisfaction of meeting his gaze.

If only she knew. He was enraptured, ensnared, enticed by her from the first. This would be his demise.

The lover continued to visit the flower shop, ever asking questions about whatever plant he happened to stand in front of that day. Eventually, he discovered her routines, and made use of this knowledge. When she was working with flowers, he happened to be in need of a daisy. When she was tending to the mice and birds, he brought nuts and seeds. And surely she noticed?

In the witch-like habits of her family, the florist had been taught to trust in destiny. This is what she believed when a handsome man stumbled into her shop that first day. This is what she continued to believe when he continued his visits. The lover trusted Destiny, in its divine wisdom, and so made minimal efforts to enhance her budding romance. She made polite conversation, and began to share jokes. And thus her love blossomed and flourished.

However, his father, ever the realist, had taught the lover that one makes his own fate. This was why he persevered with his journeys to the flower shop. This is what he continued to believe when she started more conversations and made more jokes. The lover trusted Perseverance, in its endless yearning, and so made many efforts to

strengthen his new-found romance. He laughed at all of her jokes, and listened intently when she spoke. And he continued to write the chapters of his new love.

Then the boy's father became ill. He could not abandon his father or their business. The lover's shop visits became less frequent.

If this was not enough, the man felt a tug upon his heart. This, he realized, was the yearning of artists. The words the poet could not say, but did not hesitate to write. The crying voice of the lovesick singer that no one would hear. The vibrant splatters of the tortured painter that lay undiscovered in a warehouse. The kind of love where nothing can be done but want. The lover felt this for the florist and his father, who were both torn ruthlessly from his grasp like a leaf blown relentlessly by the wind. He tried everything: went to every doctor, tested every home remedy, whispered every prayer. His father weakened, still. He attempted to search in his father's collection of books for something, anything that could be useful. He never slept, never ate, never spoke, except small reassurances to his father. Sometimes, in his haze, spots of light through the windows would make him imagine she was there, holding, comforting, caring in the way only she could. It was in these small moments he allowed himself to dream. He saw images of a life where his father was healthy, where he was allowed to be with her. Unfortunately, these were only dreams.

The boy's shop visits became less frequent.

This was when the lover began to feel a pull she had not felt before. She began to believe she was cursed, to be tempted so thoroughly, and to be just as quickly and harshly rebuked. She felt a swell of sadness, akin to the pain caused when one holds her breath underwater for too long. She recognizes now the ache felt by those who have been stolen from. The loneliness of the orphan. The yearning of the homesick apprentice. The grief of the previous owner of an heirloom. From there, she began to deteriorate. The lover believed she was being shunned by Destiny, or perhaps it was playing a cruel joke. Either way, she lost her faith in the very entity that had built her. Her head hung, no longer held up by her family's expectations. She ceased to care. She did not work as diligently: let customers wander helplessly, answered questions vaguely, no longer went about tending to what were once her most treasured creatures. She did not laugh, did not cry, did not feel. She felt only when imagining him. In these daydreams, she would laugh at one of her own jokes. They would share the simplest of touches. A held hand, or a swift peck on the cheek. In these little worlds, she felt something like happiness.

This is where the story of the lovers ends. The boy did not return to the shop. He sank into a craze of work, becoming one of the busy faces you pass on a city street. The girl lost her shine. She fell into a pit of neutrality. She continued to work for her family, and grew to own the flower shop, but did so with a lack of passion. Eventually, they found others that suited them all right, and began to forget their agony. But something was always missing. Something that cannot be described, but has been felt universally by all those who have lost.

# DURING MY TRAVELS

by Matthew Lee

The sun was reclining already, for by then it was  
mid-autumn. My travels were coming to an end,  
and I wished to say a proper farewell. I went  
and faced the streets with ravening eyes, gulping  
greedily the pennants and small buddhas,  
hanging carcasses and sweetmeat, waves  
of fezs and foreign gesticulations, the candied  
winds burnished with delayed expectations.  
Oh, these myriad joys! Though my feet tire and ulcerate,  
and my breath rots and my eyes fill with stubborn tears,  
I would like to take this memory in my hand like  
a small mandarin, unwrap these precious minutes  
and swallow the day whole. What I am dreading, truly,  
is my return to that stale bed of mine, where I  
will screw my eyes shut and labour to paint over  
the rough-edged canvas of my mind this street  
I saw near the end of my travels.

# WHAT'S NEXT?

by Leslie M.

He says my name  
in a way that seems sacred,  
it means nothing to him,  
but it's engraved in my heart.

I know everything's in the mind,  
but I feel a twinge in my chest,  
it feels good though,  
something I could live with for life.

Like a bullet your lover just shot you with,  
you take it with excitement and awareness,  
you know it's gonna mess you bad,  
but you're gonna stay so he sees you bleed,  
and witness your languid breaths of lust.

He astounds me,  
reminds me I'm little,  
makes me wanna turn him into a criminal,  
be the desperate and willing victim.

I'm not religious but,  
I'd revere his existence  
every single day,  
I'd map his body,  
keep it to memory,  
until I'm an extension of him.

I'd be his joker,  
play whatever part he needs me to,  
be the villain if it makes him feel better,  
he wouldn't even have to ask me to.

# LUNCHBOX FRIENDS

by Leslie M.

I was the best of both worlds,  
sometimes the worst,  
but definitely, I was between them all.

I was called a liar,  
a poser,  
they affirmed I was pretending,  
but actually...  
what did they know about it?

In the middle of a rivalry,  
the disgust among the others,  
we were just teenagers,  
who else can be that tedious?

# WITH FRAGILITY ALL IS FRAUGHT

by Carissa Ma

What's it like to run in mud? To feel yourself falling but not quite  
as your shadow abandons you? You said  
it feels like dragging along what holds you back, of pushing  
forward, forward, until you notice that even on the darkest of days,  
the grass is lush green and fresh under the bruised sky.  
Losing thoughts, losing caution, losing the shoes.

Do most losses add something? You as a biologist would know  
that we're a series of mistakes. By now,  
I'm used to black tea that's watered down by a quarter or a third.  
Already, the sound of you uncapping a thermos seems beyond recall. Wet is clouds  
that refuse to rain. You had me asking, what is a lesser white?  
A blue din in my ears, sad of eye.

The barren noise of thunder shaking up the night was beautiful  
because it reminded you of rain in Göttingen. What is that like? You didn't say.  
The streets were translucent with rain today, waiting  
for closure that never came.  
How do you keep your composure? The bridge is flooded at my end,  
while your feet are dry.



I imagine you  
kneading a dough, the soft matter dimpled and resisting. I imagine  
the way you eye a dog stretching towards warmth—

How does the light taste on your tongue? What's the texture of your shadows  
that agitate mine? How does it feel when ours meet, like touching a secret  
or chasing fire?

You were reading in the near-dark. The unique slant of your shoulders, still corners.  
You talked about bike trails painted a startling blue. Your hand on the handlebar  
was warm like muffled stars. As we said goodbye, you held onto your bike  
like a shield. It was 30 minutes before midnight. Gently,  
questions distilled on my skin like dew. Gently,  
my heart hoped with a kind of hope beyond speech.

Can love be the day  
when we run towards where our hearts are headed? Can it be simple like that?  
*Es gibt.* There is/it gives.  
Crashing seas and heavy skies. Seaweed and peat. The taste of smoked fish  
on our tongues. Silence sits,  
glistening like sugar.

# LETTER TO MY FRESHMAN SELF

by B. Mckenzie

I wish I could write a letter to my freshman year self. I'd like to tell her lots of things. I'd tell her to never procrastinate on a writing assignment and I'd tell her the world won't end if you're a few minutes late to one 8 a.m. class. Most importantly, I wish I could tell her to never make freshman year for granted.

My freshman year of college is my personal pinnacle of nostalgia. Life felt like one of those low budget teen films starring Asa Butterfield or Shailene Woodley where all the characters wear quirky clothes and do stupid stuff with their friends. A playlist of music by artists that no one knows about and a collection of ironic thrift store t-shirts clearly define this era of my life. I often find myself nostalgic about making smores in the freshman commons and nostalgic about arguing with my old roommates. I'm nostalgic about walks in the woods at night and bad grades scribbled in red ink and inside jokes shared with people I don't talk to anymore. Where has all the time gone? All of a sudden, it was just another moment in time that I can never experience again, existing only in memories and movie ticket stubs.

I'm a junior now and I turned twenty years old this past semester. I'm a real adult, sort of, but sometimes I still call my mom on bad days and sleep with a soft, pink stuffed animal named Archie. I feel like a child, a teenager, and a woman all at the same time. I'm learning how to deal with this feeling while still turning in my Canvas assignments on time.

During move-in, I told my friends that their dorm room felt "more mature" this year. Perhaps it was the lack of old street signs covering the beige walls or the addition of a bookshelf with actual books on it. Perhaps it was just the people living in the dorm. When I look into the eyes of my friends, they are different eyes than the ones that I used to look into as a shy 17 year old who was tasting college for the first time. We all have different eyes, still youthful, but now a bit more jaded and tired. I think we all feel like children, teenagers, and adults all at the same time.

I hate that we're all so busy now. I haven't eaten a dinner this semester where all of my friends have been present at our designated Cobo table. Someone always has work or a project or practice. Friday night movie marathons rarely exist anymore and 2 a.m. Cookout runs have turned into 2 a.m. study sessions. Where has all the time gone?

To me, it feels like a season finale of my favorite show, full of changing character arcs and complicated cliff hangers. I'm looking forward to what's next, but I'm grieving what's been left behind. It's sort of a "leaving Eden" moment, a coming of age, an acceptance of responsibility, a point of no return. Life feels real now.

I wish I could write a letter to my freshman year self, but I cannot. Time stops for no one and I must learn to make my peace with that. Maybe someday I'll feel the same pang of nostalgia for my junior year as I do now for my freshman year. My only hope for myself and for my friends is that we do not take growing up for granted.

# HOW TO SPEAK A THRESHOLD LANGUAGE

by Mikal Wix

Terror has a heart all its own.  
It makes no sound except the farrago  
of long vowel sounds, a scream —  
and maybe the word evolves  
to signify the stone in my throat,

or perhaps absolution is my plume  
forever *coming soon* to a screen  
near you, or like mother said,  
“a fox will scream over open water  
just to worship its own shape.”

To see that the surface  
is reflection, grinning like the wake  
of a boat crossing the Levantine Sea,  
over the Pliny Trench gaping wide,  
where the oldest known ocean crust  
in our world crouches in wait.

We are a number, bodies in a flock  
counted by machines, drones above,  
Argo-floats below, that ride currents  
where absurdity is no discrepancy.

The safety of groups is elemental  
but for the scrimshaw warning  
how feeling is assailed by men,  
the nets stretch across the oceans  
to remind us that anchors secrete  
the empyrean scent of fear.

We maunder song to mourn mother,  
sing to watch civil twilight descend  
on children, our words bounce over  
the *closed controlled access centre*  
of Samos Island’s barbed wire fences  
designed to future proof barbarity  
of crossing the Herodotus Basin,  
yet it strikes a drum on the page  
the sound heard when cabal begins.

# OPUS IN ISTANBUL

by John RC Potter

Music is a constant in my living room,  
from my favourite radio station, TRT3;  
mostly classical or opera, sometimes jazz,  
occasionally easy-listening, or even pop.  
But it's the classical music that inspires me,  
capturing and overtaking my imagination.

I write and listen in syncopation  
as I am taken on a journey,  
across these many memories and miles  
to another creative landscape.

It is a pathway but not an escape:  
From the cradle and lastly to the tomb.

# THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN IS AN AB WORKOUT MACHINE

by Z. Qidwai

There is a patch of sunlight that streams through the net door at the furthest wall of my father's study. It is on the second floor, or the first, if one incorrectly considers the ground level to be the "first" floor of the house. That patch of sunlight often hits the top part of what we called "The Exercise Machine". The Exercise Machine was an ab workout machine, but it had a different use when it came to seven-year-old me. The patch of sunlight hits the headrest of the machine, and I scamper up the near horizontal length to curl up there, the top warm with the subtle stickiness that came with manufactured-in-2001 rubber.

Even if I were smaller, I still would not be able to contort myself enough to completely fit onto that sun-warmed patch of rubber. But I try. It was a joy that I had looked forward to every late afternoon I had lived in that house. And when the sun had not quite peeked through, and the rubber had not been warmed yet, I was a grizzled mountaineer, and the grey length of the machine was the rugged terrain of an unnamed mountain. It would only be named once I managed to trek up the manually adjusted steep incline, carving out a path to the summit where I sit and catch my breath.

My legs are swinging over the edge, and I am still light enough to not tip the machine over. A year later, I have to weigh the seat down with heavy medical textbooks.

In front of me is a shelf on the wall, floating off the floor. The machine is the only way I can reach it. I balance myself carefully, making sure to adjust as needed. I lean forward to graze the spines of the books on the shelf. They are my father's medical texts, with miscellaneous books interspersed in between, and I want to know what secrets are hidden in them.

If I grab a book and can't move back fast enough, I will fall face first onto a floor I don't know is carpeted or not. The floor can be carpeted in a dull grey that comes with age, but sometimes it isn't, and I can see the familiar mineral pattern of the tiles when the minutes shift.

Either flooring is not made to cushion falls, so I learn to balance my weight across the machine. I don't always catch myself in time, so I tumble down the mountain, and beyond the arch of the handlebar gateway. Sometimes I am sent hurtling over the edge, and the mountain peak gets smaller as I fall and fall and fall, the wind blowing through my hair. If I focus my eyes just right, I can see glittering dust suspended in the sunbeams. I spend an eternity falling, and the magic of the room lands me gently. The dense heat weighs me down and the warm wind lifts me up. I am immortal here.



I lay here every day, occasionally on the dull, itchy carpet and more times on the cool, granite floor, tracing over the imbedded mosaic with a little finger. I hear late afternoon prayers and brace myself; I am the heel that escaped the Styx once more. I wrap myself in curtains of fading light and watch the sun drown between the gaps in the net door.

# BYRD HOUSE

by James Roach

I vomited  
among the evergreens  
and free-range chickens,  
in this backyard of  
1890s domesticity.  
A beautiful piece of history  
on our cleaning schedule today,  
adorned in intricate molding  
and filigree door knobs,  
all punctuated now  
by my retching.  
I cross my fingers  
the person working  
upstairs doesn't have  
his window open, has only heard  
singing birds over the  
gagging and heaving  
I'm harboring  
among the flowerbeds.  
I go back to working,  
wiping spring's dust from  
antique window sills,  
trying to ignore the fever in my cheeks  
igniting across my face,  
a struck match of queasy.  
Leaving,  
I drive home in a  
haze of worry and sweat,  
taking my sickness with me.

# FRAGMENTS OF US: HOW MEMORY SHAPES TIME

by Jasleen Kaur Sethi

Time and memory are two forces that shape the essence of human experience. Although these concepts seem like stark opposites; time is linear, objective and constantly progressing forward, while memory is subjective, non-linear, and fragmented. Even though they differ so much, both of them are essential to understand how we as an individual perceive ourselves and our past experiences. Together, they weave the narrative of who we are and how we understand ourselves. The intersection of these two is what helps us shape our understanding of self, identity and history.

Memory is a mental process of receiving, encoding, storing, and then retrieving information. However, it is more than often a process which is influenced by our emotions and past experiences. As time progresses, we carry the fragments of our memories which ultimately shape, whether consciously or unconsciously, our present. We construct our present selves- our actions, habits, reactions, emotions, feelings- on our preset notions stored in our memory. How we see ourselves- our fears, our ambitions, our desires, our relationships- are all affected by the memories we carry of our past.

Although memory is an imperfect reconstruction of past events and our recall value, it still is an evidence of how the past lives within us and impacts trivial as well matters of great significance of our life. Memory acts as an anchor to our personal timeline which allows us to navigate time. And as discussed earlier, memories are largely influenced by our emotions attached to them. Certain events or periods of life live in our minds as vivid as yesterday and are easy to recall.

While, others blur into the background like an episode of something that happened a long ago. Memories of being in love live within us longer than mundane episodes of our routine. Similarly, a traumatic episode of any kind can weigh heavier in our heart and leave a lingering imprint than any other joyful memories. We are prisoners of our mind- no matter how much time progresses, some memories stay fresh like a recent event in our mind.

Naturally, memories fade as time moves on. What lingers is a blurred recollection- a vague sense of how we felt, fragments of the surroundings, and maybe a few words of the conversation we had. As years pass, it's mostly the emotions that stay with us, like the

warmth you felt on a sunny day, holding your lover's hand for the first time. We might be able to recreate that day, but it's our memories that truly let us revisit those moments.

Unlike memory, which enables us to jump back and forth through different moments in our life, time is a relentless force-always moving forward. No matter what you do, or don't do, it passes. It can feel fleeting when we're happy and unbearably slow when we're suffering. But time, itself, is constant, fluid and ever-progressing phenomena.

The intersection of time and memory is the only concept which allows us to reminisce- to look back on lived moments. These moments create our personal history. When we jot down our timeline of life on a page, that's what personal history is. When that history is shared, passed down, and echoed by others, it becomes collective history.

For instance-you might have never met your great-grandfather, but you've probably heard stories of his life passed down in your family. You might have listened to great episodes of his life shared by your family. You were not a part of that time or the original memory, but you are still connected through a shared cultural memory. It might be a story of their migration, a war tale or personal anecdotes of achievement or struggles.

In the modern era, technology has significantly altered the relationship between time and memory. With the advent of digital media- photos, videos, social media and the internet- the way we document and recall moments has transformed. Technology has made it easier to store memories in photographic and video graphic formats and those are easily accessible for recollection too. Though it is a boon to preserve our cherished moments somewhere safe, it is also a bane for keeping so many memories and creating a 'memory overload' for our system. Although technology has made it easier to store and retrieve memories and revisit the timeline for our convenience, it has also ruined the sensory experience of recollection triggered from revisiting an old place, reaching out to and reconnecting with an old friend, reading a letter, or hearing an anecdote. The human and sensory touch of these emotions have diminished with technology.

Many films and books have explored this beautiful intersection of time and memory. They have provided a bridge between theoretical ideas and creative representation. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* questions whether erasing painful memories would free us or rob us of our essential selves. *The Time Traveler's Wife* explores the bittersweet consequences of time's unpredictability on love and memory. Similarly, *Memento* reverses

time's linearity, forcing viewers to experience memory as a disjointed, unreliable narrative. Even *Interstellar* blends time dilation and memory, where decades pass for some while minutes pass for others — showing how love, memory, and human connection transcend time itself.

As we age, the intersection of time and memory becomes even more poignant. Aging impacts our brain's capacity to store and retrieve information. And yet, as we grow older, our ability to reminisce becomes a way of preserving and making sense of the passage of time. Even though our ability to recall specific details weakens, the emotional resonance of certain memories often grows stronger. The past becomes a repository of moments of youth, of past triumphs, failures and treasured emotions that define our sense of self. Memory becomes a way to hold onto the past and simultaneously come to terms with the inevitable march of time.

This tension and harmony between time and memory is a rich, layered experience that creates the unique tapestry of human existence. This profound and complex relationship helps us construct our identities, our histories and our connections to others. In the end, time may carry us forward, but it is memory that roots us — shaping not only how we recall the past, but how we live in the present and dream of the future.

# [CROSSROADS & CROSSWORDS]

by Grayves Stonne

Through endless lovers, you were shaped,  
molded by untouched hands,  
whispered into existence by unheard voices,  
you were named, like the stars you learned to call.  
Fragments of people you have or have not met pieced into one, singular  
*you*.

You learned to speak like her, who brought you comfort,  
lean closely as she soothes you,  
onto her shoulders,  
your mind engraving her words,  
own vulnerability opened to her  
voice.

You laugh like him, whose bellows resonate to your core,  
laugh with him at anything,  
when he finds amusement in everything,  
you are equally inclined to  
feel entertained,  
like smiling in mirrors while  
crying.

You tie your hair like her, who in her determination glows,  
share in more than ambitions,  
her dreams are yours put to action,  
gleam so brightly,  
to prove, to  
seek ideals till  
completion.



You do not realize how far you've traveled—  
how many paths have converged for you to stand  
at this very crossroad,  
countless centuries, continents, and cultures flow within your veins.  
Each a thread in your tapestry, a fabric in your patchwork quilt.  
Do not worry that you have not lived, for others have, *in you*.

# GIRL AND FISH

by Irina Tall



# CROSSROADS

by Ariana Whiteford

I feel we are at a crossroads, torn between the tropic of cancer and the equator. Adjacent travelling lines but our limbs always find a way to interlock. I see two sides of the same coin, where families are large, that one aunt smokes, cousins bicker and babies are bilingual. I followed our family trees with eager feet, pushing off from the earth, with my finger tracing the branches and leaves until I stub my toe on a partition. A wall between our reaching branches. Suddenly the two sides become clearer, one tree is pruned in a cleaner shape, the branches more spaced out than the other crowded tree. A crisp evergreen, stately in nature. I peer down and notice the pine needles that have pierced the soles of my feet. It couldn't be more different from the shrub beyond the confines of the wall; with its tangled appendages and its littering of soft leaves sprinkling from it. A crooked willow bound to shed eternally. The differences become overwhelming and I can't help but feel overcome with doubt and dread underneath the looming canopy of eyes. It is here I feel our perennial bond under stress from root interference.

Distance grows between us like our respective trees develop. As time passes I feel like we resemble opposite aliases on a compass, rather than branches meeting on middle ground to plant roots of our own. It's not a sensation that stings or aches, but a stirring and spinning that leaves one nauseous and pale. Winded or whiplashed by the sudden altering of a future I believed was concrete, like a playground I once played on.

Perhaps the hurt comes from a wound I didn't realise was still weeping. A scraped knee from my childhood when the tears came from feeling lonely rather than a trip, fall and thump. A boarding pass wouldn't work to bind a wound, like a plaster doesn't compare to the comfort of those that are 1,892 miles away. I know a younger version of you had to digest a stronger version of that feeling in a dorm room, so far from home, with only a two way radio to talk to your brother. Sometimes I believe in a distant liminal space a gingham clad girl with tear stained eyes is asking a crying boy clutching a walkie talkie why he's crying.

How could I not miss early mornings with my mum and Abuelita? Eating maria biscuits before the heat of the day takes over. It's my grandparents small patio filled to the brim,

with neighbours calling down; harmonising with the sounds of conversations below, creating a symphony that echoed across the apartment block. It's paellas in the mountainous outskirts at my prima's parthella. It's arid but rich- the gold dust dirt, washing across the plains when the wind caresses the land. It's a paradise that weathers 45 degree heat and the inches of snow in the winter. It's a soldier with a thousand mile stare watching oncoming desertification and drought with no fear.

You grew up in a different climate, one with the voices of street food vendors calling over the haze of scents and steam. You loved your Poa Poa's house like I loved my Abuelita's but you were and still are more boisterous and commanding than I. For you it was red envelopes on Chinese New Year, your mother's steamed fish- fresh from the cyan harbour and sticky skin from the oppressive humidity of the city. The people like the cuisine, poached under the heat of the humid atmosphere, yet still vibrant and bold. The airlessness of typhoon season grasped the city in its clammy hands, and the restless child that you were would be ushered inside to practice piano instead of playing sports.

It is I who now feels restless under the eye of the storm. Pre-existing disturbances whipped up the winds, winds begin to roar and speed up into a tropical storm and when the winds are too strong, it develops into a typhoon, which spins and destroys. I've never stepped foot in your land, but through a few interactions I have felt the smothering humidity and the coldest of shoulders- neither of which provide any respite from each other. Like an alien seeking the reprieve of a climate controlled spacesuit, I cannot cope with the frost nor the steam. To feel so out of place and alone, that I feel lightyears away from what was safe and secure. It is simply too much.

I can only cry because there is nothing I want more than you- but we couldn't be more different. This martian has no place in the monsoons of this land. So I'll wipe my tears and try to calm the tempest that has been simmering since I inherited it from the women that preceded me and wait for the typhoon to decay. Instead I will picture a life where there's lantern festivals and fiestas. Where everybody feels welcome and everyone has a place at the table. A time when my cantonese is less shitty and you can roll your r's. When I don't feel I'm not in control of my own future and when I trust you more to bridge a gap over a chasm of hurt. We'll be together as one; what was once observed to be jagged edges will be actualised as puzzle pieces that have not yet been interlocked.



# THE SHADOWS OF OUR MINDS

by Claudia Wysocky

Can	I
touch	your
hair?	Place
my	hand
on	your
shoulder?	Feel
the	warmth
of	your
body?	Your
presence	my
anchor,	keeping
me	steady.

But	in the
darkness	of the night
when	I close my eyes
and	feel you near
I	know
you	are
not	here.

# A CHILD FROM THE EAST BROUGHT UP ON THE WESTERN INTERNET

by Kay Yu

my mother tongue has cried and fled.  
I dive into a pool of latin alphabets,  
soak up the western world of swirled fonts,  
buzzword-peppered thread of twitter rants,  
the dystopias, the fantasies. the american dream  
means something new, for a curious teen  
bored with their reality.

it's escape and assimilation  
to a world I've never been  
and I try to excuse it— there's plenty that's shiny:  
bending gender laws,  
the overripe fandoms,  
the endless stream of comfort offered.  
there's safety of reading in another tongue  
so that perhaps the words won't quite reach  
if by chance they were meant to hurt.

I have found there's freedom  
in asserting thoughts of my second language  
to shed the baggage dragging my first.  
so I can pretend it's another me,  
make believe I belong overseas.  
maybe I will get acceptance  
and read some written fantasies.  
(I can't read novels in my mother language—it hurts.  
did you know that? do you know me? the one who is real?  
will you love the me that came first?  
will you tell me it's okay to go back  
to the world where I am less than perfect,  
the place where I make lasting impacts?  
tell me to stop scrolling, stop belonging-  
I live a life that's so different from here,  
and I'm so afraid reality will disappear.  
tell me to speak my own language,  
to write it deep in my skin,

to love it. goddammit, I can't love it.)

# WINTER SOLSTICE

by Yan Zhang

*Sometimes it gets too cold to write  
outside. The coldness hinders  
my mind in a way,  
but apparently not today.*

Then, a gust of wind blew,  
and I shivered.

Turning towards a year's end,  
putting fingers onto the keyboard,  
pulling my hand from my pocket, constantly,  
I have to be careful with what I write, it seems.

The wind is on my nose.

I turn my head. There's the double door.  
Christmas decor on its left face.  
Lady Starbucks stares at me serenely,  
a faint smile paints her lips. She's usually  
green and white, but here she's brown  
against off-white like coffee on iced oat milk.

There's a man sweeping the leaves on the ground  
just behind me, the sound of brushing  
my own hair. They crackle against each other  
after being lifted, after lying there for so long,  
but only for so long, like opening an ancient  
volume from the middle, I hear the cracking of its spine.

The gusts of wind that keep coming  
won't carry them. They know.



*I sit before those double doors,  
my fingers on the keyboard.*

# CONTRIBUTORS

## **ADITHI**

Adithi is a computer science engineering student and writer based in India. She has published poems in magazines like Thread Lit Mag and articles in The Hindu newspaper. She writes in both English and Kannada.

## **CASSIEL BLAKE**

Cassiel Blake is an 18-year-old aspiring novelist and poet from Romania. His literary inspiration currently stems from the wide range of emotions that can be explored through describing intense imagery and experiences. Using poetry and prose as tools, he strives to provide comfort through musings about the beautiful, and sometimes through the more grotesque and irrational sides of life. Some other works of his can be found in the 8th volume of The Yellow Light magazine and the 2nd issue of The Psyche's Pen.

## **F.S. BLAKE**

F.S. Blake is a Bronze Star decorated U.S. Army Veteran and Pushcart Prize nominated poet. He is a published photographer, traveler, advanced SCUBA diver, philanthropist, entrepreneur, and proud husband and father. He has poems published or forthcoming in O-Dark-Thirty, As you Were: The Military Review, The Wrath-Bearing Tree, and Line of Advance. His first chapbook, Terminal Leave, is available from Finishing Line Press. His poetry career began during his sister's wedding.

## **AUDREY BOURRIAUD**

Audrey Bourriaud is a French-American writer, visual artist, and teacher based in Michigan, where she lives with her partner and their two cats. Her collection of short stories, "Dix histoires d'amour de Paris et d'ailleurs", was published in 2023 under the name Sonia Alba. Last year, she received the Cranbrook Elizabeth Bennett Writing Award. Her visual art can be found at [www.beauandre.com](http://www.beauandre.com).

## **SARAH (EMBER) BRICAULT**

Sarah (Ember) Bricault is a neurobiologist, avid crafter, and poet. Her fascination with the mind and how it processes information often finds itself in her poetry, as do themes related to mental health. Sarah's work can be found in High Shelf Press, The Poeming Pigeon, and elsewhere. For more information on Sarah, check out [SarahBricault.net](http://SarahBricault.net).

## **ANTHONY BROWN**

Anthony Brown is a fourth-year student at the University of Cincinnati studying Creative Writing & English Education with certificates in Copyediting & Publishing, Professional Writing and Screenwriting. In his free time, he loves listening to music, going out for coffee, and his mother's cats back home. A huge horror & gothic fan, he composes writing of all sorts. Anthony's goal as a writer is to encourage others to never be afraid, and to speak their mind whenever necessary. Anthony's work has been published under Short Vine Journal, Fellowship of the Unmoored and Wingless Dreamer.

## **BROOKE BURRIS**

Brooke Burris was the kind of child who would wait for the world to fall asleep before sneaking under the bed with a flashlight and a book. In truth, she still is. She has been writing poetry since 2022, though she likes to believe she has always been a writer—she just hadn't realized it yet. Her work first found a home in the anthology *\*Campfire Confessions\**, and in 2023, she and her best friend self-published a collection titled *\*In a Field of Flowers\**. By day, she teaches high school Marketing, but in her free time, she can be found reading, writing, learning guitar, and soaking up the great outdoors. She is grateful for the opportunity to share a piece of herself with the world.

## **TAYLOR ELISE COLIMORE**

Taylor Elise Colimore is a multimedia artist and performer from Baltimore, Maryland and is currently living and working in Richmond, Virginia. In 2022, she graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a BFA in Kinetic Imaging, a program with emphasis areas in animation, sound, video, and performance art. Taylor greatly values experimentation and play in her creative practices often creating projects with craft and fiber materials and then further manipulating and enhancing the works digitally.

## **KENZI DAY**

An English Literature Student with a deep-set love for all things wordy and artsy.

## **OLIVIA DIMOND**

Olivia Dimond loves finding ways to reinvent the stories we think we know. Her fiction has appeared in Miniskirt Magazine, Midlevel Mag, Idle Ink, and others. When not writing, she can be found singing around her apartment and making messes in the kitchen. You can follow her at [oliviadimond.com](http://oliviadimond.com) and on Twitter @livdimond.

## **CINDY FANG**

Cindy Fang, who also goes by cinchiko, is an illustrator based in Vancouver, Canada. Inspired by finding wonder in everyday life, her work captures moments of the human experience, weaving in between dreams, memories, and reality. Currently, she is focused on creating whimsical illustrations for picture books for youth.

## **PALOMA MARIA FREITAS**

Paloma Maria Freitas is an American writer and theatre-maker currently based in Edinburgh, Scotland. She received a BFA in creative writing from Southern Oregon University. Her fiction and poetry has been published in various journals including Sunspot Lit, Superpresent, and a Messy Misfits Club. Her short story "Broken Statues" featured on the short-list for the Bridport Prize. Additionally, her play "Pen Marks" debuted at a London arts festival in June 2024.

## **CASSIE FRISBIE**

Cassie (they/she) is a 23 year old poet, aesthete, artist, and plant mom based in Springfield, Missouri. Inspired by both classic Romantic and midcentury Confessional poetry, she seeks to blend these styles into something deeply personal, that puts words to their utmost test, touches the hearts of readers through imagery they can relate to, and honor through artistry the most basic point of language: to make one understand. Cassie lives - of course - in Springfield, with her husband Michael, their tuxedo kitten Colette, and her myriad plant children.

## **MICHAEL LIVINGSTON FRISBIE**

Michael Livingston Frisbie is a writer and recent alum of Missouri State University with a B.S. in Entrepreneurship. When not writing he likes to play chess, drink coffee, and walk in the woods. To learn more about Michael's writing, visit his Instagram @michael.frisbie.writer. He lives in Springfield, MO with his wife.

## **KEITH GABOURY**

Keith Gaboury earned a MFA in Creative Writing (poetry) from Emerson College. Kelsay Books published his full-length poetry collection *The Cosmos is Alive* in 2023, and Falkenberg Press published *Still Human* in 2025. Keith lives in Oakland, California. Learn more at [keithgaboury.com](http://keithgaboury.com).

## **MARGAUX HERRY-SIMON**

Margaux Herry-Simon is currently an undergraduate music composition student at McGill University (Montreal, Canada). While her primary focus lies on music, she takes pride in getting involved in as many artistic and creative disciplines as possible. She recently released her first EP, composed of four original songs she wrote and performed herself, which allowed her to deepen her love for writing even more.

## **DE'JA IMANI**

De'Ja Imani, a fashion and poem enthusiast sharing their art with the world.

Creating from freedom and sharing with intention.

Check out my socials for more- @dejtheentity & @docxrhythm

## **LORELAI JEAN**

Lorelai Jean is a freshman in high school near Chicago, Illinois. When she's not on the lacrosse or soccer field, you can find her baking brownies or curled up with a book.

## **MATTHEW LEE**

Matthew Lee is a writer and editor living with cancer in Melbourne, Australia. His work can be found or is forthcoming in Meniscus Literary Journal, North of Oxford Journal, and Neologism Poetry Journal, among others.

## **LESLIE M.**

Leslie M. is a young, undergraduated woman who finds herself inside the pages of the notebook where she writes her poems by hand in pencil, since she was a child she's loved to create stories, and some years ago she ventured into poetry and has made a private little collection of poems that are a piece of her heart and life experiences, she knows how important art is to make us feel seen and less lonely. She loves sunrises and her dog.

## **CARISSA MA**

Carissa Ma is an Assistant Professor of Anglophone Literature at Florida Atlantic University. Outside of teaching, she enjoys hunting for vintage treasures at thrift shops and is currently attempting (with varying levels of grace) to master surfing.

## **B. MCKENZIE**

B. McKenzie is a Digital Media and Journalism student from the Memphis area. When she's not writing poetry, scripts, and stories, you can find her taking sports photos and watching comic book movies.

## **MIKAL WIX**

Mikal Wix, a Queer writer and literary worker, has been featured in literary journals, such as Pleiades, North American Review, Sonora Review, River Heron Review, Portland Review, and Pinch Journal. He serves as poetry editor at West Trade Review, and his work can be found here: <https://linktr.ee/mikalwix>

## **JOHN RC POTTER**

John RC Potter is an international educator from Canada who lives in Istanbul. He has experienced a revolution (Indonesia), air strikes (Israel), earthquakes (Turkey), boredom (UAE), and blinding snow blizzards (Canada), the last being the subject of his story, 'Snowbound in the House of God' (Memoirist). The author's poems, stories, essays, articles, and reviews have been published in various magazines and journals. His story, 'Ruth's World' was a Pushcart Prize nominee, and his poem, 'Tomato Heart' was nominated for the Best of the Net Award. The author's gay-themed children's picture book, The First Adventures of Walli and Magoo, is scheduled for publication. He enjoys duties as the editor of the online journal Masticadores Istanbul.

Website: <https://johnrcpotterauthor.com>

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## **Z. QIDWAI**

Currently in their twenties and pursuing a PharmD, Z. Qidwai balances their academic life with a deep love for writing original fiction, fan-fiction, creative non-fiction, along with mapping their way across diverse music genres. Their eclectic tastes extend to literature and film, with a particular fondness for dinosaurs, magical girls, and the eldest daughter syndrome.

## **JAMES ROACH**

James Roach (they/he) is a queer, trans, sober poet who suffers and revels from the embarrassing and magical ordeal of falling in love. He writes at night because that's the safest time for vulnerable thoughts. He currently lives in the moment but often relocates to the past because sometimes, that's the only place the sun rises.

## **JASLEEN KAUR SETHI**

Jasleen Kaur Sethi is a former Assistant Professor with a heart set on writing and quiet reflection. She is currently seeking spaces where her words can find a meaningful home. She envisions a world where her thoughts flow effortlessly onto paper, like a gentle stream, rather than falling in restless, scattered bursts like a summer rain offering no relief.

## **GRAYVES STONNE**

When her emotions couldn't be contained in art alone, Grayves turned to poetry. Romanticizing the mundane parts of life and being nostalgic of the past, she loves adding personal details to make her works truly hers. If she's not racking up more unfinished projects, you'll find her binge-watching theories of her favorite movies, notably Coraline. She hopes that through writing, she will never lose sight of the precious moments in life.

## **IRINA TALL**

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

## **ARIANA WHITEFORD**

Ariana Whiteford is UK based writer with Spanish heritage. She writes about cultural identity finding it's way into all factions of life.

## **CLAUDIA WYSOCKY**

Claudia Wysocky, a Polish writer and poet based in New York, is known for her diverse literary creations, including fiction and poetry. Her poems, such as "Stargazing Love" and "Heaven and Hell," reflect her ability to capture the beauty of life through rich descriptions. Besides poetry, she authored "All Up in Smoke," published by "Anxiety Press." With over five years of writing experience, Claudia's work has been featured in local newspapers, magazines, and even literary journals like WordCityLit and Lothlorien Poetry Journal. Her writing is powered by her belief in art's potential to inspire positive change. Claudia also shares her personal journey and love for writing on her own blog, and she expresses her literary talent as an immigrant raised in post-communism Poland.

## **KAY YU**

Kay Yu is a Korean teen writer and artist. Kay loves physics and reading fiction. They live to create.

## **YAN ZHANG**

Yan Zhang writes poems about her shadow, sitting in a café, the tree outside her window, the market around the street, and more. She edits for The Literary Times, Inlandia, and Paper Cranes Literary. She serves as Acting Leader and editor for the poetry platform "Fourteen Lines." While she is not writing, she enjoys wandering around her house while listening to music or watching a great episode of Law & Order.

# COVER ART

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## **ALYSSA ARCHAMBAULT**

Alyssa Archambault is a photographer who loves to capture and showcase the magical in the mundane, the fascinating in the familiar. Her work has been published by Red Wolf Periodical, Snowflake Magazine, and The Chronicle, among others. She dabbles in most art forms, including theatre, painting, and jewelry making – she sells her art and jewelry online and at local craft fairs. You can find her on Instagram at @artbyalyssadakota.

THANK YOU

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# R E V I E W

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