

SPRING 2023

ISSUE 02

THEPLAYFULPORPOISE

# THE PLAYFUL PORPOISE

LITERARY MAGAZINE FOR YOUNG WRITERS

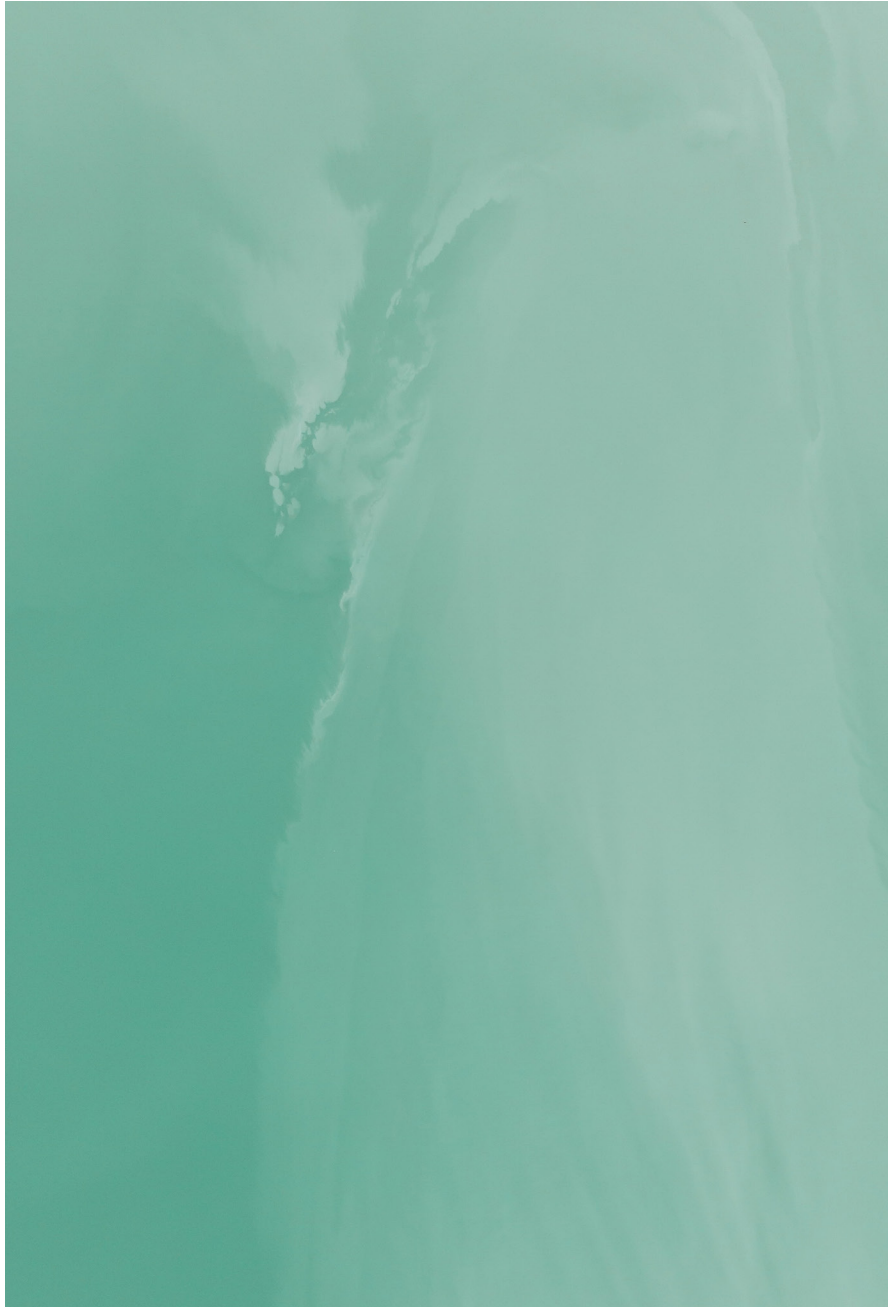
**Issue II**

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# BROKEN GLASS REFLECTION

*By CK*

---

I am an actor. I put on masks for a living. I pretend to become others, even if only for a little while. My goal is to execute someone's behaviors perfectly enough that I can replace them when the time comes. I have gone by countless names and will continue to go by more, each seamlessly blending into my current identity. Tonight I am Camille. Camille, who receives dozens of roses after each performance, loves to talk to the audience, and secretly always sips a blue raspberry Icee before a show.

I gaze into the floor-length mirror of Camille's dressing room, putting on my makeup while sipping my icee. I smile, watching my reflection mimic each motion. Each swift, decisive stroke alters bits and pieces of my face. No one can convince me that I skimp on even the most minute details. That is the only way to stay alive, especially tonight.

Tonight is the night.

And I am ready.

I remember when this journey began, how I reached where I am now, sitting in a chair, transforming my appearance to bait my next target. As a kid, I remember watching Mulan, and I was convinced that my destiny was to be her. I was inspired; I wanted to save the world, so I decided right then and there I would. I would be

fearless. I tied my hair up into a ponytail and began training. I kicked, punched, and defended myself from the imaginary blows of my opponent until I reached my destination. The sword. The grey, plastic kids' sword. It was my brother's sword, technically, but he quickly gave it up when I began training daily. I reached on my tiptoes, barely tall enough, and snagged the sword off the dresser top. Then I ran to find my parents and begged them to cut my hair with a sword, just like Mulan. Little did I know how far my ambitions at that young age would take me.

Tonight I am the famous Camille, a rising actor in the smallest state being watched by all. Every move I make must be precisely what Camille would do. Otherwise, my cover will be blown. At the moment, the real Camille is somewhere else. I am unaware of her exact location, but she is somewhere. She is likely fine, probably drugged someplace, such as in her hotel room,

where she will wake up having no recollection of tonight, believing that tomorrow is tonight, all out of sorts. But she will shake off the feeling and continue the rest of her life on the path she has chosen as an actor. I know this because I have been watching her. She is resilient. That is part of the reason I chose her; this will not wreck her life. In fact, it will give her more attention, and producers will be queuing around the block to talk to her for fifteen seconds, pleading with her to join their show while subtly asking questions about me. In a way, I am helping her.

Until the capture, no one knows where I am or what happens, but they know I will

complete each job. I have caught countless ruthless criminals and sent them off to prison,

deceiving them using people they know. The murders, the abusers, the cartel members; they all fall to me, and they soon know it. My traps are perfectly plotted, and once they are captured, they quickly realize they have been tricked. They know that it was me. Tonight, in this ornate theater in a small city, I will take down yet another criminal, and send him away. Then I will pack my bags, move on to my next target, and start the process all over again, infiltrating someone else's circle.

I continue watching the mirror with its dim light bulbs surrounding the border and sticky notes of items or events to be remembered by

Camille as I begin braiding my hair, seeing how it has grown out again.

Camille is obsessed with her reflection, and I watched her stare into her mirror for hours, simply observing her face. I, on the other hand, despise mirrors and find it torturous to sit here patiently waiting for the show to begin, but I stay true to my role and gaze into the reflective surface. I must act as Camille does or all of this will be for nothing.

As I stare into Camille's mirror, another memory surfaces, a less pleasant one. One I have sworn not to think about, yet still, I find myself remembering. Goosebumps begin to appear on my arms as I recall that day.

It was our annual fair day; each year, the fair comes to town for a week during the summer, and my brother and I wander the fair together; while walking around, you smell the popcorn, funnel cakes, and cotton candy. The tantalizing aroma of absolutely irresistible fried goodness floats on the breeze tempting you as you walk around. They had roller coasters, Ferris wheels, and rides through different themed buildings. You could have your fortune told, see people do unbelievable tricks, and throw balls at bowling pins or balloons to win prizes. The fair had it all.

That year I was bored. My brother had ditched me. I was wandering alone, waiting for my brother to finish riding every single ride with his friends, when a tent caught my eye. It was a red tent with gold trimming. The plaque read, "Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall."

They rarely decide to include a new booth. This one must be entertaining.

I walked towards the tent to get a closer look. Curiosity spurred me, and I pushed through the flaps of the tent, stopping inside the entrance to let my eyes adjust to the darker lighting.

"Hello and welcome to the mirror maze where your greatest desires and deepest fears will be revealed," a man in a magician's suit called.

"Um. Hi."

"Would you like to go through the mystical mirror maze? It is very eye-opening. It is surprising."

Well, it's not like I have anything better to do.

"Sure."

---

*"I peered into the maze and began my journey. As soon as I walked in, I became disoriented. Fake walls and real walls blended together."*

I don't have anything to lose. It'll be a piece of cake.

"Alright, step this way and enter please."

I followed him as he led me deeper into the tent.

"Here, please put on these gloves. That way if you touch a mirror, it does not smudge and give away hints to others. You have an hour to find your way through this maze, this maze of mirrors. Good luck! Enjoy your stay."

"Thank you," I called. Although, I found that he was already gone. I looked around, confused about how he managed to disappear so quickly.

I suppose it's time to start. The plan is to get in and get out. Show them how easy this is.

I peered into the maze and began my journey. As soon as I walked in, I became disoriented. Fake walls and real walls blended together.

I heard a click and saw another panel click into place, blocking my entrance.

That's strange, who did that? And why? Was it the guy?

I stared at the new panel, willing it to give me answers.

There's no way to go but forward now.

I inched forward, touching each surface, doubting every step.

It's all a trick. There is no escape.  
Slowly, panic set in as I touched each mirror and attempted to find the next passage. My vision was unreliable with all of these illusions. I was forced to rely on my other senses, and touch was my biggest asset.  
I walked around the room clockwise, attempting to remember which location I had entered from sometimes wandering around the room multiple times in circles. Mirror mazes are not for the weak.  
Challenge accepted, maze.  
Adrenaline coursed through my veins as I made my way through twists and turns.  
Sometimes I felt as if I was moving backward. Everything was identical, and I lost track of where I was and who I am. All I could do was keep moving forward and hope I would eventually reach the exit.  
Whoever invented this is an expert. This is harder than it looks. I dragged my finger along one side of the mirror in each section and continued to find my path. The mirrors went on and on. I had no clue what pattern this maze made or what time it was.  
It's kind of late to worry about this now, but what happens if I don't finish in an hour?  
Will someone come to rescue me? Will I be stuck here? If I became lost, someone would come looking for me, right? Someone would notice. They must, I hope...  
I tamped down my fear and pushed forward.  
Focus on finding the exit. Then you won't need rescuing.  
I wandered and wandered and wandered. The gloves became like a second skin to me, sticking to the moisture on my hands. I let my touch guide me, unwilling to lift my hand from the walls. After wandering for what felt like years, everything suddenly came to a stop. I took an entrance and ended up in the final mirror room. I could tell because it looked different than the others. It felt final. I looked at all the surfaces and began to touch them.  
I was officially lost.  
They're all solid. That's not supposed to happen. There's supposed to be an exit to this maze. I must get out. I need to. I can't be stuck here.  
My breathing became erratic. The floor began to tilt. My vision began to blur.  
There is no escape. It was a trick. I'm going to be carted away never to be seen again. No one will know to look for me because no one knows where I am.

I lean against one of the mirrors, imagining horrific futures as a slave, a dead body, or anything anywhere but here at the fair; my home, my family, my life; all of it gone.  
Tears begin to slide down my face while thinking about all I have lost just by entering this maze. The one time I go somewhere alone, I am fooled. I wallowed in self-pity until my charm bracelet caught my eye.  
I saw Mushu, Mulan, and Cricket staring back at me, urging me to keep fighting. I wiped my tears and tried to think.  
Try. Think. Do something. Don't just give up. Don't go down without a fight.  
I cleared my head and took a deep breath. I absorbed my surroundings and looked for potential tools.  
Look, I can do this. Think. Wall. Wall. Wall. Oh, look, another wall. There are no cracks between the mirrors I can wedge my fingers in. No way I can climb up and over with the mirrors at least 6 feet high.  
There's nothing here. This is the perfect trap. It's all over.  
I sighed, sliding down the wall to sit down. After walking for so long, my feet began to cramp. I reached down to massage them. Stupid heels. I shouldn't have worn them to the fair. What was I thinking? They only cause pain. I should've worn sandals. Something dainty that doesn't sink into the grass like spikes. Spikes... my heels.  
I grab my heels, rejoicing that I wore them even though I was cursing them seconds ago.  
I picked a mirror, hoping that it led to the outside world, and aimed for the center.  
I swung my heel.  
Crash.  
The glass shattered. It was now a spiderweb, and there were multiple shards of me.  
I swung my arm again, putting all my strength behind the swing. The glass continued to spiderweb. One more swing and the glass shattered down like crystal rain. I quickly covered my eyes, waiting till the glass settled. I looked up and saw the outside world.  
I'm free. I am free.  
I carefully picked my way through the glass shards, thankful once again for my heels, this time for the height they gave me.  
I looked around to check if anyone noticed my escapade. No one was watching me.  
Everyone seemed to be minding their own business. I quickly went to find my brother staying far away from the red tent and mirrors, my one weakness.  
There's a knock at my door that snaps me out of my recollection.  
"It's almost showtime Camille."  
"I'm almost finished, John."

“Okay. I’ll see you soon.”

After that mirror maze, I vowed to be unbreakable. I promised myself to never be caught in a situation like that again. I bury that memory where it belongs; I put on my finishing touches, slip on the white toga and sandals, smile, and leave my room.

As I walk backstage, I breathe in the familiar smells of the theater; the scent of perfume from the audience, the dust from the hidden crevices, and the flowers for all the performers; all of it brings me comfort. It brings me to the present, to my mission. Tonight I am righting a wrong that occurred years ago. One that others are still being fooled by.

I peek through the curtain and observe the theater. It is empty right now. Rows of dark red chairs sit folded up, waiting to be occupied. The boxes that used to exist where the upper class could sit above and watch the play while looking down on others. The large chandelier fills the air with a warm glow reflecting off the bronze circle around it. The candelabras light the path for the audience. The intricate, detailed patterns carved and painted on the roof and walls. The red sashes hang from the roof, covering the stage until it is time. I soak in all the mysteries this

old theater contains, letting them wash over me.

After months of rehearsing, we are finally ready to perform. We are doing a classic, Julius Caesar. I am Julius Caesar tonight, and this is our final show.

I pace back and forth, mentally preparing myself to get into character one last time. I flit from group to group, chatting with everyone, as Camille is a favorite among all groups. While I am walking around, someone daintily places a laurel wreath on my head. I spin around and meet my brother’s eyes.

“Break a leg,” he whispers, covertly handing me the sword. The sword that has led me to the career I have chosen. It has become my good luck charm before every performance. I tuck it into the folds of my toga, planning to leave it in the dressing room.

“Thank you,” I whisper back. He nods and disappears into the shadows, waiting until I make the arrest. I look around, soaking in the scenery. The scenery I will never come back to after tonight.

Tonight.

I close my eyes.

I am ready.

“Five minutes until show time,” a stagehand calls.

I visualize the audience moving to their seats in the dimly lit theater. The small excited children, the bored teens, the dreamers, and everyone else I am hoping to impress tonight.

I quickly walk back towards my dressing room, feeling the sword brush against my leg.

Before each arrest, I practice my battle moves in a coordinated

attack against an imaginary opponent.

I slide my sword out of the toga and take my stance, placing one foot slightly in the front and the other firmly planted behind. I swing the sword around, testing its weight and getting reacquainted with its balance. Once I feel ready, I wield the sword twisting it in simple patterns, progressing to more complex patterns as I go. I become in the zone, focusing only on me and my sword. Nothing else matters.

“Camille, are you ready?”

There is a knock at the door.

“Yes, just one second.”

My practice interrupted, I quickly toss my sword into a flower vase, watching it do a spin, landing silently, and open the door. I’ll just finish a bit later.

“Camille, we’re on in one minute. You need to be out there,” John states, ushering me out of the room.

I flounder for an excuse to have thirty more seconds, following him with one backward glance at my dressing room door.

It’s too late now. I must continue as if I had finished the battle.

I walk towards the curtains, John dragging me into place. I try to gain composure while rushing through everything. Then I am on the stage, the lights shining on me with the conspirators crowding around me, trying to gain my attention.

While I am confused and attempting to calm the rowdy crowd, Casca “stabs” me first.

The rest of the conspirators follow suit. All is going to plan until I feel a sharp pain in my side.

I gasp and double over, clutching my side.

I pull one of my hands up toward my face. It is sticky with blood. Nausea hits me as I realize what this must mean.

I’ve been stabbed.

I look at my fellow actors, some of whose backs are turned to the audience covering up my injury, searching their faces until my eyes rest upon Brutus, my target, with a real bloody dagger in his possession. He holds it up so I can see, and I realize it is not a dagger. It is a shard of glass. One from the mirror maze of long ago. My eyes widen. He smiles maliciously, enjoying my revelation.

“Et Tu Brute?” I shout as loudly as possible, waving my blood-covered arms, attempting a silent call for help. It fails. The audience thinks this is part of the show, part of the magic. They clap. I struggle to stand up, and I stumble. My breathing becomes ragged as I lose more blood and feel the pain.

I turn towards the audience.

“I... thank you, thank you for this time.” I lay on the ground, no one willing to help me for fear that they would be next.

The scene ends, and I am dragged backstage by stagehands. My

My brother finds me and  
rushes to my side.  
“What happened?”  
“Brutus. He... stabbed me. Real knife.”  
My brother’s face widens in terror.  
“He knew. He knew this whole time.”  
“How? That’s impossible. That was long ago. Why  
would he remember your face?”  
“I’m the only one... who ever escaped. I...”  
“Save your breath. Are you saying you haunt him  
because you are the one that got away?  
The one that knows his secret and has the power to  
destroy him.”  
“Yes.”  
I cough, blood trickling from my lips.  
“Don’t leave me, please. Not like this. The ambulance  
is on its way. You’ll get better.”  
“No. It’s... it’s too late. Go. Catch him... make him pay.”  
My brother hesitates and then nods.  
“It will be my honor to take up your torch and carry  
it.”  
“Thank you.”  
I lay on the floor, trying to find the breath for more  
words. Words I should have said long  
ago.  
“I’m sorry.”  
“For what?”  
Tears form in my eyes, imagining what will come  
next, what he will find out about me  
when they identify my body. I struggle to brush my  
wrist, my makeup smudging to reveal a  
number, a zero. One of the eight numbers that  
identify me as former prisoner 85626-401;  
convicted of forgery, identity theft, and one  
unintentional murder.  
“I’m sorry. I tried.”

*“I struggle to brush my wrist,  
my makeup smudging to reveal  
a number, a zero. One of the  
eight numbers that identify me  
as former prisoner 85626-401;  
convicted of forgery, identity  
theft, and one unintentional  
murder.”*

---

C K is a college student who is driven by her passion for writing. When she’s not writing you can find her with her nose stuck in a book, much like Belle. She is currently working on her debut novel and hopes to pursue a career in writing.



*By Catalina Cisneros*

# INDELIBLE DELICIOUS

---

Come share some lemon drops with me  
Little drops of sunshine that they are  
The taste might just stay in your mouth forever

Please, have some chocolates with me  
Dreamlike and creamy, indelible delicious  
Holding your heart so it's warm and never sinks

I want to give you some jelly beans  
Plant them and, i promise you, they will grow  
And you will soon have one of every color imaginable

Crinkling under my feet, the shells full of what once was  
and what may have been, or what still may be someday

The emptiness of moving on—

# SLEEP

---

I see myself  
On the sand by the sea  
Do I seem satisfied?  
I suppose we'll see

When i slip through the seams of the sea

I've been pinned  
With the tip of a pin  
Within its thin tip  
Lies sin, inconspicuous sin  
Hard to pin, it's hard to win  
But in this din of iniquity i am pinned

A beautiful bee teaches me how to be  
"Be a bee," it says, "and become like a bead on the  
sea"

I beam and I concede. "Alright!" I say. "After all, I  
need to let it be how it will be."

I see myself  
A bead on the open sea

The ocean's shimmering shifting shaft of light  
Tossed by the waves, i close my eyes

And at long last i fall asleep

Catalina is a high school junior. She likes cats and enjoys sleeping, free writing, and thinking about friendship, memories, and other mysteries of life.

# LIFE IN THE WIND

*By Catalina Cisneros*

---

Life's a peculiar thing, isn't it?  
One moment I swear I can see the wind  
And the next it sweeps me up on its wings  
And I blow around in it for a bit, so free, carefree  
Until it stops  
And I see you  
Looking out over a bridge at the tumbling sea  
So beautiful, so deep and so blue

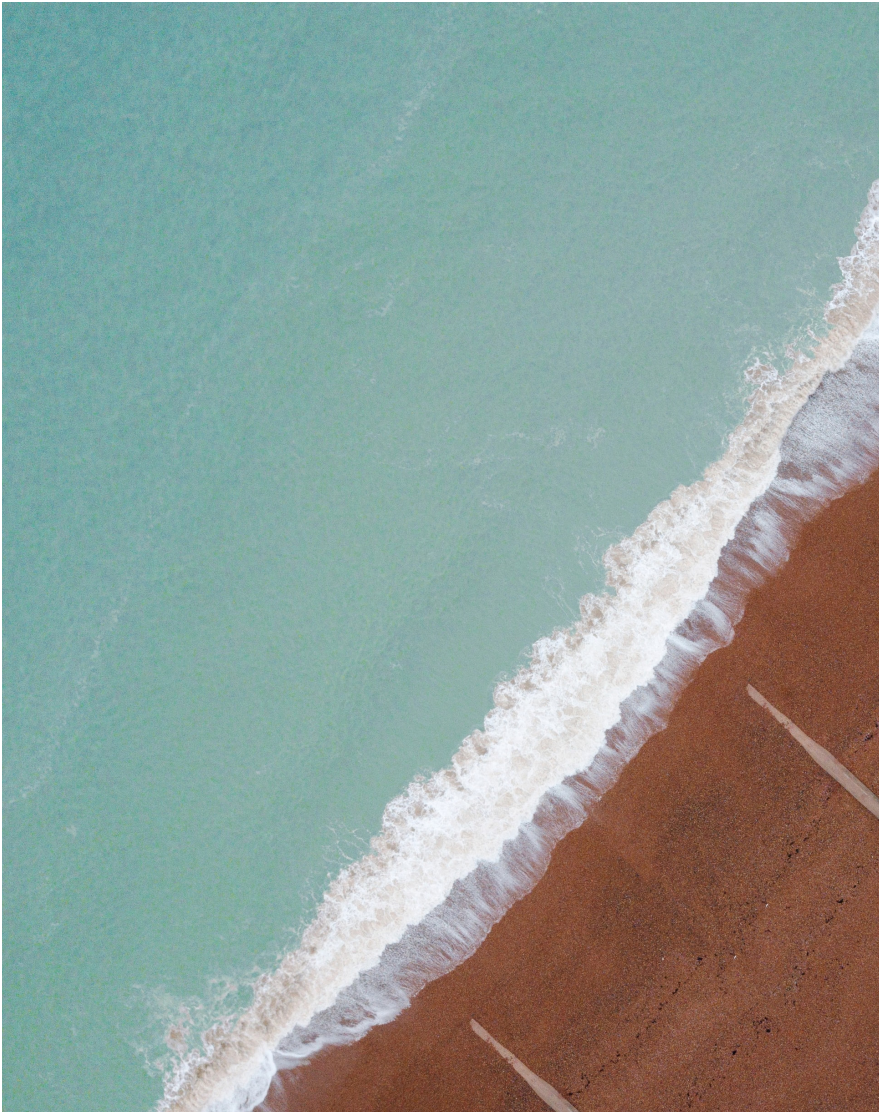
The wind blows again, and again I go with it, now wet and cold  
It stops  
I see all of us laughing, telling each other jokes after a long  
day  
Sunlight spilling in from the window, dispelling shadows  
untold  
I smile and wave

Once again the wind comes, rushing in my ears as I go  
Twirling and dancing but really just following its lead  
Life is easier when you're shown where the seeds should be  
sown  
But still I stop  
And I see all of you, and me  
Dancing together to music only my heart could know  
I'm so excited, I leap  
And with that I soar high into the sky  
And miles and miles below me I see  
You all living and talking, cloaked in sunlight so dear  
The clouds around me whisper excitedly,  
"How lovely the view is from up here!"  
And I turn to them, smile, and agree  
It really is something, isn't it? Worlds away, yet so near  
I felt like life just started and stopped, a leaf caught in an  
intermittent breeze

But now I see, it was really moving all along, though I couldn't  
say why  
Swirling around just like the syrup in the ice cream we had  
together  
Flowing along just like the stream where we fished together  
Little bits of gold glimmering underneath, which we panned  
out together  
That's when it hits me  
It's moving, moving on away from here

I tell the clouds, "It's a fine view from here,  
but it's even finer on the ground  
After all, you can't go for a swim  
if you only watch the water, afraid to drown."  
And with that, I come back down from the sky, sure that I'm  
right  
Though I worry that nothing will be as it seems

I float around for a bit, not making a sound  
Watching the cars rush past in this sparkling town  
I see you and join you before the sun leaves for night  
I think I am here, though this might all be a dream  
But something makes me want to dance around  
I sweep back and forth around the room in my ballroom gown  
Dancing to the music that fills the air and sounds like sunlight  
My head is still misty, and I don't think anyone sees me  
Until suddenly you turn around  
And for a moment I expect to see you frown  
But instead, you give me a smile so bright  
That all I can do in reply is beam  
"Hello there," you say.



Gabriel Aguirre Has written poetry since his sixth grade year. He has found a love for the fine arts ranging from music, painting, drawing, and writing.

# ASHES AND PAIN

*By Gabe Aguirre*

---

So here I am alone again. The silence is so peaceful, so beautiful, so maddening. I can feel myself slowly slipping away. I have been forgotten and I no longer have any sense of happiness. It was stolen from me like everything else I promised myself I would take back. You stole it from me but it's not like you care anymore, I don't think you ever did. You only cared about yourself. I was willing to give everything to see you happy and you break my heart with the same silence you brought me out of. Now I fade into ashes and then when I am gone I will cease to exist and no one would ever remember me. Just know this, I may disappear but the pain that you and everyone else caused me will never die because the pain is its own separate

being. It is the monster you all feared and the one you made me into. You made me into a monster and told me to try and fix myself. I will not be resting in heaven nor will I suffer in hell. Instead I will live in a place that is as empty as the promises you made. That place, that void is where the love I had for anyone will be imprisoned and fated to try and find a way out of. However, it will all be pointless because there isn't a way out. You can live with this because you will never know because you never cared.

# LIMBO

*By Avani Sundaresan*

---

You know you look like a foreigner. You lack their arms, their nimble heads, their ginger touch. You lack their ability to move with grace; you have clunky footsteps, your friends used to say. You lack what makes them so very special.

When they first found you, coughing up dirt, from the Underground, you spotted yourself in the reflection of their beady eyes. You took in your matted hair, your wild eyes. You knew they were wary, you had the angular features and flushed face they had grown to despise.

And so, they took you. They studied you. They kept you in a hospital room that smelled too strongly of bleach. Sodium hypochlorite, they called it. The rest of the humans, they said, were in a catatonic state. They used the word limbo, the only world that could not be translated from Old World to New World. You were forbidden, they said, to speak Old World. For a while, it was all you could repeat to yourself. Limbo, limbo, limbo.

You traced the word on the roof of your mouth. Said it slowly, spelled it letter by letter. It was the one word you could keep, one that was yours. Limbo. You accentuated the syllables, willed yourself to never forget. Limbo.

They think you are stupid. They try to and teach you their alphabet, their way of life. You don't understand their customs. You can't hold their sticks right. You don't understand their stoic gestures, the strange way they hold their thumbs and forefingers together to represent Hello. Their dialect had sharp clicking noises and hisses your tongue couldn't quite make. Not the way you were raised — --soft vowels and smooth sentences. Your voice would raise when you were angry, trembletrembled when you were sad, and crackcracked when you were happy. They were monotonous, yet sharp. They tried to make

you understand but you couldn't. They didn't bite their nails like you did when you were nervous or curl up the ends of your hair in hopes of smoothing out your split ends. They didn't crack their knuckles when they pondered. They were composed and they were stoic. They have learned to be this way.

You remembered how you spoke of them, how your family whispered about them. Vile creatures, your mother used to spit out, and you would nod your head vigorously in response. You missed the Old World. You missed all the things you took for granted. You missed the ocean, the one you claimed got your freshly straightened hair ruined. You missed the grains of sand that stuck to your skin after coming out of the water. You missed filling up gas in your father's old truck. Kicking the side of it when you were angry so many times it had a permanent dent. You used to be resentful, but there was no longer anything left to resent.

You had to give them credit for trying, they tried to win you over. They researched everything about you from top to bottom. They found that you liked hot chocolate and fuzzy blankets, and delivered promisingly. A week later, a game of Scrabble was on your desk in the hospital room alongside the materials you needed to paper mache — --something you remembered hazily posting of your interest about several years ago. More often than not, you found Human Psychology 101 laying around, and from what you could decipher in New World, scribbles of "development" and "positive reinforcement?" written.

You walked into your room one morning finding the walls covered in posters of a boy band you had a brief obsession with when you were 11. They hoped you'd be delighted. You weren't. For a while, you could not speak. You didn't try to speak New World. You repeated your sacred word to yourself every night over and over again like a silent prayer. You hoped it could be carved into your brain somehow. You hoped it could bring back the ocean, the sand, even your father's old truck.

One day, you prepared yourself to ask the seemingly obvious question. It had been on your mind, throughout the fuzzy blankets, Scrabble, and "positive reinforcement." You practiced, sounding out the clicks until you could speak roughly, but not incoherently. You chose one of them to ask, one

that looked non-threatening. The one you chose was folding your blankets, one you firmly believed could be harmless.

She barely blinked when you approached. You asked, in a series of snaps and pops, imitating New World like you had seen countless times. Why am I here? Am I special?

She looked at you for a moment, her gaze unwavering. You had looked into the same pair of beady eyes so many times, you were used to their lack of emotion. Finally, she spoke. It was harsh and seething. You thought you chose someone who looked “innocent enough.” She spoke in Old World, so you would understand.

“You are here because you hid underground, like a coward during the Great Reckoning. Do you think that makes you special?”

You paused, were taken aback. You hadn’t heard Old World in so long, you almost believed it was a dream. She spoke again, this time quieter. “You are not special because you hid. You are ordinary, just like the rest of your people. There have been many like you...haven’t you seen? You are what we call the Limbo.”

---

*“You are not special because you hid. You are Ordinary, just like the rest of your people. There have been many like you... haven’t you seen? You are what we call the Limbo.”*

Avani Sundaresan is a high school sophomore in California. When she's not writing or reading, she's watching K-Dramas or baking chocolate cake.

It isn't Marley's fault that they are here. Of course he would be blamed for it, though, a beating perhaps, or a scolding if his boss was feeling particularly kind. A harsh punishment for something he will not even remember.

He only wished he had been warned about this when he signed up for the job, not that it would have dissuaded him anyway. He had already known that he wanted to be a ferryman. It was the best job they offered around here.

So, yes, if he were given another chance, Marley would pick ferryman over watchguard duty any day. He wasn't good at his job by a long shot—he had never been good with feelings, and most newcomers always seemed to be burdened with an extra dollop of sad. But hey, at least he always got them across in one piece, which could almost be considered a miracle due to the sheer amount of people who jumped into the seering hot river.

Marley shivers at the sight of the ash that was beginning to line the riverbank. It hadn't always been there, he thinks. Or at least he hopes, seeing as he cannot remember. One of the perks of being a ferryman was that every day blurred into nothingness.

He stops rowing, looking back at his passengers. There are six of them, and though they were all fairly easy to tell apart, their faces were all set in such determined stares, that it cast them in an almost eerie light.

Marley shakes his head, turning back to his oars. There is something different about this children, something almost similar to life that makes him feel on edge, like he is close to danger.

His boss would not be happy at all. Normal passengers were usually crying, or shaking, or demanding him to take them back. It was a standard part of Marley's routine to ignore them.

He knew that other ferrymen, Don, for example, tried to comfort his passengers or talk to them, but Marley knew that was pretty much the same

# DEARLY FORGOTTEN

*By Marcellus Parker*

---

thing as lying to their faces. They would never be alright. Things would never get better.

He just really didn't see the point of feelings in general. It was a 'being dead' thing, he was told, but Marley disagreed. It was a life thing. Year and years and years of doing the same thing over and over and over again will do that to you. Hollow you out like a pumpkin and leave you there alive, but with barely enough left to make it worth it.

These passengers are interesting enough for Marley to notice them, which is unusual for him. Something about the eyes, Marley thinks. They possess a sort of glow unlike every other person he had ferried. They were like the sparklers Marley used to light once a year with his mother.

Marley frowns. His mother? He doesn't even remember having one. A vague sort of chill passes through him, like he has done something he wasn't supposed to do. Marley jerks, his shoulders moving upwards as if he could shake off the feeling like a wet dog.

His mother?

Marley could not think of a time where he had a family. It scared him, really. Everyone had a family, did they not?

Maybe the time with his mother had been so traumatic that he had blocked it out in the so many years he had been here. He had heard of that happening to people.

The boat comes to a halt, causing Marley to jump. He had thought there was much longer to go, though

perhaps his thinking had consumed much of the time, like it had a tendency to do.

He steadies it with his pole, turning back to his passengers, who were still watching, waiting.

“We’re here,” he announces, the words like sand, grit, stone. How many times had he said these words? How many people had he delivered?

The children begin to clamber out, much of their crazed fire burnt out in the journey. They seem much more jitterish now, nervous.

Good, Marley thinks. Being nervous was being careful, and being careful was being safe.

One of them, a girl with long black braids, gives Marley a small smile as she passes by him. Marley frowns in return, confused. If he didn’t know any better, he would have thought the girl was pitying him, which, of course, was absurd. His job was the best you could get here. She’d see. She’d see when it came to selection day.

He watches them trample on to the reception desk, either not seeing, or completely ignoring the other people swarming around them. It was clearer now, the difference, when there was something to compare it to.

The passengers he usually carried were dull, like a piece of metal turned over in the ocean for too long, the life sucked and pulled and drawn out of them long before they reached the shore. But these children were like radiant gems, bright and full and perfect. They were practically gods compared to the rest of them, him included.

Children were much less common here, though not scarce. Six, though, at the same time could almost, almost be considered an anomaly. But down here, you could never rule anything out.

Marley looks until he realises they have disappeared out of sight and turns his boat around, ready to head back. He is almost hesitant to set off, knowing that all memories of the passengers will have disappeared by the time he picked up the next ones.

Still, he rows on, determined to set an example for the other

ferryman. Marley was not someone to give up just because he felt like it.

The currents pull him faster, as if they can sense his reluctance. He is sighing, just about to load the next passengers on when something shiny catches his gaze.

It has been so long since someone has actually paid him for his work. He never expected it, and it wasn’t like he could do anything about it, but it is always a nice surprise when somebody leaves something in the boat.

Marley rarely finds anything exciting enough in life, so the fact that his heart is beating faster than normal surprises him. The other ferrymen have often compared him to a rock, large, unchanging. A crude comment usually followed not far behind it. His eyes brighten, the closest to dancing flames that they have ever been in his entire life.

Marley pulls the boat away from the shore, not wanting the other ferrymen to notice. He is smiling now, isn’t he? (It is closer to a grimace, but it is there. Mostly.)

The boat rocks as Marley bends down and picks up the treasure, a glittering silver necklace. It is cold, far colder than even ice, so much that it threatens to slip from his fingers and fall into the water.

Marley holds onto it, a stubborn sort of sheen painting over his face. The children are fading from his memory now, and he knows that soon they would be gone for good, a blur in his brain.

That sparks something in Marley. He brings the necklace up to his face, as if he could somehow ingest the memory and keep it somehow, out of sight from his boss. And then—

Light.

Marley drops the necklace, covering his eyes from the heat he had grown unaccustomed to underground, barely even registering the slight splash as the necklace hit the water, destroyed for good now.

Six children.

Ann. Lacy. Floyd. Sarah. Josh. Sam.

Marcellus is a bi-racial, sleep-deprived idiot, who comes up with worlds on a whim, and probably needs a bit more sanity (send help). They own a cat, a doormat that vaguely resembles a dog, and a never ending amount of books and candles.

They are friends overground, bonded by the familiar love of reading. Ann is the oldest. Lacy has a cat. Floyd is too loud. Sarah, smart. Josh, a joker. And Sam. Sam was just trying to figure themselves out.

It was Ann's mother who they were coming to get. She had died two months ago, an underlying sickness that she had always had, but had vowed never to tell the children.

Wait.

Died.

All at once, a rumble of memories rain down on Marley, one after the other, leaving him no time to breathe, no time to think.

He is a librarian, and he loves it. He has a wife, newly wed, and with a baby on the way. He has a dog.

He is twenty-two, and driving home from work when he sees the tree, turned over by the roots. There is a person there, clothed in pure ink, eyes like fire. They tell him his wife is dying. They tell him he has a choice.

It isn't a hard decision when he trades his life for his wife's. Marley, even while living, has never had much of a life. But his wife is sunshine and rain. His wife is laughter and color. She deserves to live, and Marley would die for her a thousand times over.

He cannot remember anything after that.

The gentle nudge of his boat against the shore fills him with a foreign sense of dread, like everything he had done was false. Like everything would play out to the same set of cards, each and every time. Of course the boat would come back by itself. It always did.

Marley glances over his shoulder, though he knows it is all in vain.

Even though the children were alive now, they would not be for much longer. He knew, now, that the longer you spent down here, the less you would know, and the less you knew, the less you were human. His boss had it all figured out.

Their memories would be taken from them, slowly, like flour be sifted out. They would not remember who they came from. They would not remember who they are.

Marley reckons that he will see them again, in a week or two.

Watchguards, possibly, or perhaps ferrymen like him. He half wonders if Ann knew he was her father. He wonders if he will recognise his wife when he sees her. Probably not. She was not supposed to die anyway, just like he was not supposed to remember.

He can escape, if he really wants to. Trade being a ferryman with something else. A father, he thinks, then quickly shoves away. He has never been one of those. He cannot be one now. Marley knows he is too much of a coward to leave. Maybe that was what his boss was relying on.

Other boats are beginning to dock now, and Marley knows that he should get off the boat; he has stood there too long already.

He can see Don coming over, a cheerful grin lining his face, though now Marley can see the dead gleam of his eyes. Everything is dull when you have seen life. Everything is false when you have glimpsed reality.

"Everything alright Marls?" he calls as Marley clammers out, forcing himself to nod at Don.

"Yeah," he says. "Everything is fine."

Already, the life is leaving, evaporating almost before his eyes. He has no necklace now. He will not remember anything after this.

Don looks worried. "You sure?"

"Yeah. Just tired, that's all."

Don laughs, matching his steps with Marley's as he slings an arm around his shoulder. "You work too hard. Boss says you've been around forever!"

"Forever," Marley echoes, his smile weak. It seems that he has been here longer than that.

His head throbs, a dull ache, though he cannot really remember why. The last lot of passengers, perhaps, were especially rowdy.

He is glad he cannot remember them, he tells himself. It makes his job so much easier. And a ferryman is, after all, the best job you can get here.

He would not change it for anything in the world.





*By Gabriella Fisko*

# LOST SOUL

---

Some say death comes with a white flash  
A glance at what came to pass  
When one's blood stops running and the limbs stop moving  
When the mind stops racing and the heart stops beating

But there is a death more painful and more permanent than  
others.  
A part of the soul becomes lost  
Causing a broken feeling.  
There is no blood dripping from the knife,  
Just tears falling from innocent eyes  
Until all runs dry.

The body stops jumping for joy  
The mind thinks nothing but sad thoughts  
And the heart no longer feels anything, though it keeps beating.  
The soul, in the end, is killed  
Forever, lost.

Gabriella Fisko started writing poetry when she was in fifth grade. Although she doesn't write often, she tends to write about things she loves. She also loves to create written works, including short stories, books, plays, music and musicals. Aside from writing, she also loves playing video games and coloring.



## ON BELATED- NESS

*By Shamik Banerjee*

Now that I, this partition make,  
do not bemoan it, do not break;  
do not wish if my stay was long,  
what come now may, comply along.

I have loved you in your fairest lights,  
I have loved you in your lousy nights;  
since now this love, encumbers you,  
then, joyfully, unlade it too.

Do not repent now, do not cry,  
do not roll with high-lamenting sigh,  
do not shed now unprofiting tears,  
the dead sees not, nor feels nor hears

But make your heart this thought discern:  
if love once vowed, it must not turn;  
that unfeigned it is, make realise,  
else grieve not when one meets the skies.

## VERSE FROM A DYING WIFE TO HER HUSBAND, AS READ BY HER DAUGHTER

‘Bear rumination of this short plea;  
which anyway will short not be,  
when I shall die:  
if deep solitude should intrude thee,  
then do not sigh;  
to a new bridelock but make thy vow  
and make enow.  
And with one affianced ensure me—  
whether goes a day, a month or year,  
my children, on my absentee,  
must never tear;  
and, of all, care most as thou carest,  
for my daughter eldest.’

This, the daughter, on a daybook read  
which writ her mother dying abed;  
and long bethought in her forfairn eyes—  
all that could be sans her demise—  
the brothers would not ravish her voice,  
the elders would not dere repeat,  
the father would respect her choice  
and life itself would not maltreat.

Shamik Banerjee is a poet and poetry reviewer from the North-Eastern belt of India. He loves taking long strolls and spending time with his family. His deep affection with Solitude and Poetry provides him happiness.

# ASIAN AMERICAN ALLEGIANCE

*By Allison Zhang*

---

As the morning bell rings, the teacher gestures for us to rise from our seats. She does not bother to ask us to repeat after her, the routine already stuck in our minds, but simply goes ahead and recites the Pledge of Allegiance. We follow, our hands on our hearts and our eyes on the flag, our voices as strong as we can possibly manage. I hear myself echoing all the voices around me, like I am one of them. But when I glance around at the sea of faces around me, none of them look like mine. As solemn as my face is, my heart does not reflect that.

My house is nestled within a group of four houses with a shared courtyard. The two houses in front both have the American flag hanging there, the two flags arched in such an angle that it looks like the flags are serving as a doorway into the courtyard. It's like a metaphor for the country of America to be protecting us. I remember when I was younger, I asked my father if we could put up an American flag too. My father replied, "But we are not American. We are Chinese."

I asked, "Why don't we put up the Chinese flag, then?" My father chuckled, and shrugged. He never answered my question.

People call me an Asian American, or a Chinese American. I am someone from two

countries, and I don't know which country I am supposed to be loyal to. Most Asian Americans chose to say that they are loyal to both. At school, we speak English and read Walt Whitman and the Great Gatsby. We eat cold chicken fingers and sip cartons of chocolate milk, laughing with pale-skinned, light-haired children around us. When we get home, we switch to Chinese. If we're not good Chinese children, we speak Chinglish, a comprehensible blend of Chinese and English.

We eat fluffy jasmine rice and stir-fried vegetables, meat with heavy sauces, and drink cold oolong tea or bottles of aloe vera. We share bags of Doritos with our friends at school and crunch on shrimp crackers at home.

Sometimes the difference is a gift, a chance to experience the best of both worlds. My

mother and I shop at the local Asian supermarket for chili oil sauce and silver carp, and then we head to Costco right after to pick up mini pizzas and dino nuggets. I smile when my white friends exclaim in delight over the Chinese snacks that my mother serves at a playdate, or when we grab boba together for the first time.

Sometimes, the worlds conflict. It is the squirmy discomfort when a tall blonde boy in my class asks me why I am eating gray roots for lunch. It is the expression of surprise and slight disgust on his face when I tell him that it is stewed bamboo. It is the "Oh" he says. It is the silence when I cannot find my voice, and when he walks away.

My culture is still defined by others, by America. From what food is acceptable and what is not.

Sometimes, I wonder with whom I am allied. I want to say that I love both worlds, but I know I can't really say that. Not with political tensions rising between America and China, when words like 'trade war' and 'china virus' are thrown around on the news.

You don't know whether you can trust white people anymore. In your hometown, a young white man tries to beat up an old Chinese lady who resembles your grandmother. Your neighbors are white and they give you home-baked Christmas cookies every year. You sit in front of the television, watching the 2022 Winter Olympics, and even there, political tensions are rising. If you say you are

Chinese American, which country do you compete for? There is no right answer because the other one will hate you. Figure skater Nathan Chen is slandered on the Chinese news because he is Chinese American and he competes for America. Freestyle skier Eileen Gu is slandered on the American news because she is Chinese American and she competes for China. The real game is not the one on the ice.

Sometimes you see people who are biracial. You wonder how they juggle it all, feeling like there is never one country to come home to. You wonder if it is easier to fit into two countries they both belong to. Their belonging can never be questioned. When the proof of their belonging is in their blood, their identity cannot be denied.

I once told my mother I wanted to be like my classmates; I told her I was American. I remember my mother replying, "You are Chinese. Even if you were born in the US, all people will see is your Chinese face." For second-generation immigrants, when you are born on American soil but all people can see is the color of your skin, there is no guarantee of your identity. Your blood is not perceived to be American. I think I understand why my father didn't answer my question. My father once received a text from an old schoolmate of his in China. His schoolmate had said that if my father didn't return to China, he would lose all respect for my father. When I'm in China, I am the American girl. In the US, I am the Chinese one. Minority immigrants don't fully feel accepted by either country, perpetually an imposter in our own skin. There is too much pressure to identify with a country, but I've never felt truly loyal to either of them. I don't pledge allegiance to an American flag; nor do I pledge to a Chinese flag. I swear allegiance to my family, to the people who've loved me and sworn allegiance to me. I am a wandering soul, my family is the only anchor that pulls me down. I wonder why we are forced to recite the pledge of allegiance every day at school before we even know what allegiance is. The state does not care about you the way your family does. It does not sit in the dim lamplight, a little after midnight, explaining physics problems to you. It does not smile at you and make you dinner and tell you to eat more. It does not smile at you

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*"I swear allegiance to my family. To the goals and dreams I want to reach. To each and every person, experience, memory, and thing that has lifted me to this moment, to these words."*

as you climb up. It does not catch you when you falter and fall down.

I swear allegiance to my family. To the goals and dreams I want to reach. To each and every person, experience, memory, and thing that has lifted me to this moment, to these words.

Allison Zhang is an avid writer, poet, and speech and debater. Growing up in Silicon Valley, she discovered a love of the written word while surrounded by a world of tech.



*By Riley Willsey*

# I THINK

---

“I think I love you,”  
Is what I say  
In our meeting in my mind,  
Everything goes fine  
But to speak those words aloud...  
Sunny confidence behind a cloud,  
The heart shines through,  
“I think I love you.”

# BEE FRIEND

---

I was befriended today  
By a bee-friend,  
Sitting on my car window,  
He clung on even at 55  
And reminded me to stop and smell the roses,  
The ones he pollinates,  
The honey of his friendship is sweet,  
I love my bee friend  
And he loves me,  
He flies off under the full moon  
And reminds me again,  
My bee friend.

A beautiful bee teaches me how to be  
“Be a bee,” it says, “and become like a bead on the  
sea”

I beam and I concede. “Alright!” I say. “After all, I  
need to let it be how it will be.”

Riley Willsey (yours truly) is an unpublished writer from Upstate New York. He (I) writes extensive amounts of poetry, but dabbles with the short story as well. The following two poems are titled “I Think...” and “Bee Friend” I thank you very much for reading and considering my work. This work is not a simultaneous submission.

*By Brynn Gardner*

# THESE HALL- WAYS I WALK

---

I traverse these halls to find statues of you  
The wood warped and worn, but still holding true.  
You smile, or cry, or laugh, or talk,  
All over this place, these hallways I walk.

You stand in dark rooms behind unlocked doors,  
The handles are rusted, vines hang towards the floor  
And in each old room, I know I believed  
That forever, we both would hold onto the key.

In your halls doors are shut, locks out of repair  
Hiding my well-weathered statues in stale, lonely air.  
And it's not your fault, it's just how it goes.  
And I am not immune to rooms staying closed,

but

Some day soon I'll return from the depths of my mind  
Tell you tales of the halls, what I'd found, what I'll find.  
Then you'll smile, or cry, or laugh, or talk,  
But you'll never remember these hallways I walk.

Brynn Gardner is a high school freshman from Texas. At five years old, she decided she wanted to be an author and hasn't changed her mind since. When she's not writing you can find Brynn singing, crocheting, reading, or stressing.

Claire Beeli is a writer from Long Beach, California. Her work is published or forthcoming in Polyphony Lit, Block Party Magazine, and Love Letters Magazine, among others. When she's not reading, writing, or volunteering at her local library, she's being crushed by a dog bigger than she is.

"We begin on a star," the story man says, peeling his socks off. He places them neatly on the A-frame rack beside the fire, props his feet up, and leans back against a wall that stretches to the sky.

"Which star?" I ask.

"Doesn't matter. We won't be there long. It's far, and bright, and yellow, is all you need to know. The girl was born there, and she shot down to the world atop it, riding it like a great horse."

"That doesn't make any sense," I say. "How could she—"

"Doesn't matter. She landed on the earth feet-first, hopping onto the ground. Her small feet sank into the soil, and she began to walk, leaving her star—now gray and dull—where it landed.

"She found a village, and in it, a mother. The mother let her sit near the hearth, let her touch the soft blankets, and let her eat seafood stew. She gave the girl a name."

What's the name? I wonder, but I don't want to voice my question. I don't want to be made fun of again.

But it's like the little brown-haired man can read my mind, because he winks at me and says, "Her name was Rin. She was very small, but the mother let her stay in the warm house with the soft blankets, and she began to grow. She grew taller and stronger. Each day she could carry more water, and could carry it farther. Once, though, at the well, Rin looked into the water and saw her face."

"Had she never seen her reflection?" I can't help it this time; the question slips out. At least the other children aren't here to witness my embarrassment, long tucked in bed.

"Not once. She never thought to look into the bright star-metal, although she could have seen it there, or into any of the lakes she passed as she walked. The mother was not poor, but she was not wealthy enough to buy glass windows and shiny plates. Rin didn't think much at all about how she looked until that day at the well.

"She first thought it a stranger, someone looking through and up at her from the

# FROM STARS

By *Claire Beeli*



well-bottom. It was a broad face, with strong bones and flat planes of cheek and forehead. A good face. Rin, though, had not realized she'd grown. She'd thought herself a child still, and when she looked into the well and saw a woman's face, she was frightened."

"And what happened?"

"She ran. She dropped her water, left her mother, and ran, the opposite way of a star she no longer remembered, out to where she didn't have to see her reflection."

I frown. That can't be it, can it? Stories are supposed to end cleverly, or happily, or sadly.

Not like this.

The story man leans back again, folding his pale arms behind his head. "That's all. Rin is gone forever."

"I don't like that story," I say. A little bit of me hopes he'll change it. Just for me, so that I'll like it better.

"You aren't supposed to."

"What's the point of it, then?"

He shrugs.

I glare at him.

"Good night."

"Good night."

The fire winks out with his eyes. I'm left alone in the shadow of that great wall, and the stars aren't even very bright. Still, I lie down on the prairie grass to watch them, and in my mind, I begin to shape a story of my own.

# THE STORM

*By Caspian G-H*

---

Closing her eyes, Mary Rummel inhaled the smell of rain. The warm mist of the tea drifted up in her face, ghosting gentle touches over her eyelids. It was so easy to be drawn to reminiscence by that gentle gust, to touch, to dreams of cradled arms, feathered obsidian, wind worn. She shook her head, clearing away the daydream; there was work to do. Swiping the sack of breadcrumbs off the table, she began to climb the ladder standing in the middle of the room, her hard-soled shoes click-clacking against the metal rungs with each step. The rustle of the sack at her side was soft but echoed throughout the almost solemn silence of the observatory. It seemed that with the oncoming storm there were more and more crows come to visit her every day. They didn't bother her; more birds meant more companions, and she could always do with more. They were her only waking company, in fact they were the only company that seemed to stick around. Once her laboratory had been filled with company, scientists studying the movement of the stars or the patterns of the weather, laughing and talking and screaming, now only she and the crows remained to fill the empty spaces where they had lived. At least the crows didn't argue or scream like her former colleagues. She had really grown to detest the screaming, the arguing. It was not just her colleagues that had screamed, screamed at her. Screamed, till her ears grew sore and her arms shook and tremored with exhaustion. A commotion of dark fluttering feathers and rubbing beaks ran through the crowd in the rafters as she neared the top of the ladder. The

crows were eager to be near her, passing excitement like a wave from one bird to another. From her perch above the clutter of her living space she could see the dark and pregnant storm clouds huddling, knotted on the horizon like the furrowed brow of the sky. She would need to bring the lightning rod up onto the roof soon. The old tower with all its little metal instruments perched on the top of that cliff was no stranger to lightning or storm, both of whom seemed to visit more and more frequently as the years rushed on, racing terrified away from past days, years, so long ago. It had been years since she'd seen the moon, living hid by the dark storm clouds that seemed to cluster with crows in the sky. The crows were her friends, she might love to remain among them forever. There was so much she needed to do to get prepared. The crows swarmed, rustling, about her. They buffeted her from all sides crawling creases across her clothes and she all but melted into their support. She could feel them everywhere, claws running smooth tracks across her scalp, wings brushing up her leg, beaks lightly scraping and swirling across her skin and through her hair. Vaguely, in some way, a memory breached, of when, once, in years past, she'd been taken to carnival and in a dim red and white striped tent she had seen a woman in glittering green sequins and a tall swaying hat. Watched as a long snake, rippling with muscles and clicking dragons' scales trailed from her dripping sleeves and twined round her arms, eyes glittering dark shining and round. How the woman's eyes had glittered dark shining and round. Her parents would say she had an overactive imagination, but she knew the real reason the woman was so at peace with the snake, why she didn't fear it. It was why Mary didn't fear the crows, or falling from so great a height, as they butted and batted her about like a boat in a great typhoon. She felt at peace with them like soul with a million halves and in her dreams, she knew they felt that way too. Sometimes she wished to be



one, could almost see the sharp clawed hooks tipping her fingers, crooked and cruel and beautiful. On her mouth a hooked beak, tearing into silent screaming, wings to fly away, to bluster through clouds and scream high in the rushing winds, all slicked back feathers and volcanic bead eyes. To waltz with the storm, exultant above the clouds. She knew the power in the storm; when she closed her eyes she could just hear her voice. Slowly, dreamlike, her heels tipped back over the edge of the top ladder rung, twenty feet above the cool concrete floor.

Again, she shook her head, and brushed a feather from her hair, she couldn't be distracted by daydreams. After the sack was emptied and the crows had had their fill and the rows returned to the black mob draped across the rafters, she was always left slightly lonely, empty, her ribcage swinging open like a door ajar. She closed her eyes, deep breath, recenter, just like the therapist, the one that had lived down the mountain, had always said. She climbed, click clack click clack, down and stored the ladder in some dusty corner.

Mary Rummels had a few errands to run before the storm hit. She was running low on food, and The Storm is not kind to the unprepared. Sighing, she grabbed her wallet and pulled on the old gray jacket, left here by some previous company. She could wear it now that it had stopped dripping. The engine of her old dusty car pattered to wheezing, choking life, rumbling beneath her like a gentle earthquake. She started off down the long road that curled its way round the cliffside above the glittering sea floor of blinking lights and humming whispers of the town below.

She went, bouncing slightly, the roads had never been maintained as well as they should have, past the old rotting graveyard by the river. It was long since full, marching soldiers, coughing children, old men rotting unattended in their studies, company, leaving, limp fingers, broken glass. An old woman in a faded blue dress was weeping, washing old clothes in the river, hands stained and dripping and shaking. Mary sighed; some things

couldn't be helped of course. The woman really shouldn't be out this late, not with the storm coming into town. The Storm is not kind to the unprepared.

The storm began to pick up as she rumbled into town, damp dress folds of wind and static sweeping across the shadowed ground, leaving everything dewy and dank. A few minutes later, right on the edge of town she passed a young woman attempting to hurry an old man inside a large black Victorian styled house.

Mary remembered that house from years ago, back when it had been abandoned. She'd spend hours there hiding, climbing exploring all the little dusty corners where a child loves to play. Sometimes she'd just lie on the ground in the main room, listening to the weather's dance, symphonic through the echoing hallways and untouched chambers. Sometimes shed be alone, sometimes not. Sometimes at night Mary remembered picking lint and small wooden splinters from a gingerbread cascade of tangled hair, lit by moonlight sieved through the cracked floorboards above. Smiling eyes and shining mouths, soft whispered goodbyes in the night.

Sometimes there'd be nights where she'd remember the voice turning high and windy, breathy whispers blowing at gale force, hurricane winds, gingerbread hair changing from bright embers to ash, golden honey eyes hardening to round and glossy volcanic rock.

Warm finger pads tracing her jawline clearing like a blurry photo to hooked claws, still gentle, still caring, but with none of the softness of her moon graced duchess.

Back then the house had stood tall to the worries of the storm, queen and beauty above all, but progress moves ahead, and now she stands a shell of her former self. Mary had felt she could never forgive them, those developers, but had found her hatred too eroded with time to a dull ache.

Now light from a fireplace cast flickering, dancing shadows from within. The woman's face was crinkled, worry lines creasing around her eyes, colorless as if washed by age.

Glancing warily, suspiciously, around she tried to

hurry, urgency carried in the tense of her arms and sharp of her movements. The man stumbled, slipped, and slowly, careful of his own fragility, sat down on the bench and leaned back, chest rising and falling with open mouthed breaths and oscillating lips. The woman wrung her hands through hair and ducked inside to stoke the fire. Mary heard her say that she'd be out soon to collect him. Mary tutted, he was old, too old to be left alone like that, something could happen. Strange possessiveness flared up within her, would the young woman be loved by the storm, not like she was, but... No, the storm would never be kind to her, not like Mary. She gripped the steering wheel, knuckles white; she could feel the angular plastic rim through the rubber grip. The Storm is not kind to the unprepared. Deep breath, move on, she drove away, let her hands relax around the wheel. A few minutes later she pulled her car into the parking lot and climbed out, her grey hair thin and winding, whipped in the wind as the storm wound smooth fingers braiding through her hair and down her scalp. A homeless man was huddled close to the entrance to the store to try and stay out of the driving wind. He had a tin can filled with glittering coins and was idly rattling them as he huddled beneath the awning. She fished around in her wallet and gave him her last 1\$ bill. he sniffed her a thank you, red nose running. She pocketed her wallet and headed inside, feeling the warm air rush in thick around her. She felt bad for him, the man didn't even have a jacket on, he would be vulnerable out there all alone. The Storm is not kind to the unprepared. She slowly paced through the aisles of the store, heels clacking metronomically. She had always found something calming about the store, especially when the air was empty hall quiet and crystal still. The world was so dark through the scratched and dirty windows that it seemed the only things that existed were right there in the store, like a swirling snow globe, forever locked in picturesque stillness, floating within an endless void. She

sometimes imagined that that's what the insides of a storm cloud feels like. The shelves seemed picked clean of most goods. Most people knew how to prepare for the storm, staying home, hiding out. She grabbed a few vital things, magnesium supplements, silverware. She'd need to be prepared; the storm wouldn't wait for her. It never had, not before. Not in her dreams, when she tossed turbid in the night and heard the voice, high and smooth like roaring thunder and pouring rain racing through swollen rivers, felt it brush over her skin raising goosebumps and leaving dew, a gentle cool breath, high winds and caring strokes. She needed to get home soon. She paced quicker, adding to her cart breadcrumbs, then after a moments deliberation a couple cans of soup and some meat. It pays to keep up appearances, if people who think you're still alive are more likely to do a wellness check. The crows were always hungry, and with the coming storm they'd need all the food she could get. They would eat, of course. At the cash register the teenaged girl behind the counter gave her an odd look but Mary didn't mind. "Cash or credit?". She handed over her the money and grabbed her bags. On her way out she wondered why someone that young would be out working all alone, especially with the storm coming. She must be one of the only ones out in the whole town. The girl grunted and leaned back. Mary noticed that the girl's skirt was dripping as she left the store. Oh Well, she thought. The Storm is not kind to the unprepared. The homeless man had dropped his can. He was no longer making any effort to avoid the driving rain but in fact laying right in it. The rain pitter pattered on his rumpled glassy skin. His chest, his shirt was torn and dripping, soaking and wet. Mary thumbed the 1\$ bill in her back pocket. The man really shouldn't have been out this late; there plenty of good homeless shelters in the area. It was irresponsible really to still be about. The Storm was

not kind to the  
unprepared.  
Outside the graveyard a faded gray dress hung on a  
clothesline, hem dripping like so many  
tears. She stood, hands too dripping, over the woman  
that lay on the ground, perfectly still,  
dripping, beside the river where she had wept. The  
Storm was not kind to the unprepared.  
The old car grumbled to a stop outside the  
observatory doors as the sky groaned and rain  
crashed around it. She hauled her groceries inside  
through the howling gusts, slamming the  
door shut against the protests of the winds outside.  
One of the crows lighted gently on her  
shoulder, rumbling quietly and rubbing silky  
feathers across her cheek, like dreams of cool  
soft fingers and windblown mist. She set the bags,  
not as gently as she might have wished,  
down on the kitchen table and began loading the  
goods into her fridge. She was grateful  
for her company; she told her things.  
The beginnings of the storm raged around the tiny  
oasis of calm within the laboratory.  
Rain poured down as the wind howled its melancholy  
laughter, flapping shutters and all  
the lose things she had forgotten to tie down around  
her. She set the magnesium fizzing in  
a metal bowl, the silver ware on a warming grate by  
the fire.  
The thousand black eyes of the flock followed her,  
glinting round volcanic beads, as she  
opened the control panel, flicked the switch. Smooth  
mechanical clickings echoed through  
the little room, she watched the lightning rod rise  
slowly up to its position, glinting chrome  
in the muted light leaking down from the storm  
clouds, dark and swirling with the promise  
of rain. She watched as brilliant streaks of lightning  
echoed off of it. She watched as they  
flitted their way dancing down the length of it.  
The magnesium water drenched down her head and  
trailed across her bare skin. Slightly  
glowing, the silver rods bent around her biceps,  
clutched sizzling round her neck. She  
heard her hard-soled shoes clacking up the stairs  
with each step. She pushed open the  
doors, hearing the brush and squeak of hinges  
beneath the roar of falling rain. She stood in

the doorway, feeling cold rain pelt her skirt, chill  
wind push cold fingers across her scalp  
and round her waist.  
The crow flaps out, lands a few feet in front of her  
and cocks her head. Deep breath in,  
inhale the scent of rain. Cold skin, she's waiting.  
Deep breath out, I'm not quite ready but  
we wouldn't want to keep her. She closes her eyes.  
Mary Rummel stepped out on to roof,  
hand outstretched. Lightning cracks. A crow cries.  
The Storm is never kind to the unprepared.

Caspian is a writer, artist and  
avid doll collector. Currently he is  
working on creating a corset out  
of bootleg pokemon cards

# TERMINAL

*By Joshua Nunez Sandoval*

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Joshua Nunez is a student that enjoys pondering upon fictitious scenarios and scribbling down anything that comes to mind to preserve and fossilize. Thanks to the mentors and teachers he had in his endeavors, he was able to learn English and writes every time he has the chance.

I look through its windows,  
To see the monstrosity  
That this engine has made me see  
“An eye for an eye until there are no more men”  
That’s what it has come to be

Out of the tunnel comes a train,  
Cheery in its stroll  
Feeding off the coal  
Feeding off of souls it has taken

Allusions, illusions, delusions  
“Can’t you see there’s no better solution?”  
We’re mortal, we’re losing  
A constant battle of our own choosing

And as the train stops dead in its tracks,  
Like a mob, they ravage for life  
“For gold, for glory, for liberty!”  
No fear, no wrath  
A search to flee your haunted pasts

I should not go  
I cannot go  
I’ve got my own duty to attend  
And you’ve got families to defend

But the machine we have created  
A cycle of pain, a cycle of war,  
Now took away, what kept me ashore

But the tunnel,  
it keeps evolving,  
It keeps engulfing,  
it keeps divulging.

Let the casualties that came before  
Let them be known,  
For the tunnel, we have created  
Has manufactured our encore

I thought I saw it  
Approaching savagely  
As the light shone,  
But it was nothing but a shadow by the storm,

Are you pleased?  
Are you satisfied?  
Twisted machine they’ve brought to life

Out of the lane,  
Nothing but a vision  
Our terminal mission

But in the end, with sweat and blood  
Until the train stops dead in its tracks,  
We’ll keep on feeding the machine of our design  
How bold.



*By Fischer Whitehead*

# UNSPOKEN SECRETS UPON AN ENDLESS OCEAN

---

Ships reach the crest and ascend to the top of the blue mountain,  
The air intertwines the smells of salt and spices,  
The crew calls to their captain,  
And the Captain Peter answers with gospel.

People pitter patter through the puddles across the deck,  
And do not fear and do not fret.  
They know of their safety,  
As the captain has downed the delinquents of the sea,  
With unfathomable fury.

The captain greets the passengers,  
With a tip of his cap,  
And a shake of the hand.

The captain wakes up every morning.

He can feel.  
He can see.  
He lives.  
But he is dead.

A secret even kept from him,  
Are the invisible hands and blades,  
That take him apart each night.  
The slice his skin and muscle,  
And peel it off his body. They bleach the bones and remove the heart.  
They  
take his brain and slice it in two. The remove his intestines and then,

They replace it all.  
A new heart is beating,  
A new brain is given.  
He wakes up every morning,  
Feeling like something is missing.

But he will never find out what.

It must be a secret.  
That will be hidden deep within the depths of silent water.  
Goodnight sailors.

Fischer Whitehead is a Junior at Brophy College Preparatory, and is a part of the poetry club and varsity swim team. He is a new writer with interest in free verse poetry and art. With most of his inspiration coming from music, this is his first submission of poetry.

# TEMPORAL DIS- PLACEMENT

*By Jingyi Liang*

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## Prologue

With the tip of my pen poised a few millimeters above a dog-eared notebook page, and my room drenched in the distilled sound of gaudy reality shows from the cramped living room of my Spanish neighbor, I listen as the cacophonous summer night outside returns to a semblance of quiet.

A stream of thoughts slowly washes away the restlessness of my heart. Holding onto each abstract thought, I begin to fathom the elusive shape of a repressed desire.

A desire to write about our experience of time. Not in the sense of the ticking clock behind me, but the perceived temporal existence, the work of our minds, which, unlike our bodies, are not confined to the present.

Every morning, I wake up to two realities – the physical, immediate reality teeming with sights and smells, and the parallel, imagined reality unfolding in my consciousness.

In this constructed reality, the mind's unique mechanism of memory and imagination transcends all artificial boundaries of seconds, hours, and years.

Our minds roam despite our rooted bodies.  
On the drift of remembrance

The crowd has a queer, submerging charm not unlike that of the ocean. Dodging one umbrella after another upheld newspaper while the enveloping street scenes reinvent themselves, I feel like a swimmer in the sea. I've always loved a light drizzle like this, invigorating especially in the somnolent afternoon hours. Taking a turn into the children's park down a forest path, I am immediately enfolded in a rain-washed earthiness, which I inhale with an almost unquenchable thirst. I relish in a few moments of rare solitude until a woman appears at the end of the trail, hurrying as if late for an important appointment. Her apparent rush and the air of deliberate tastefulness about her feel like an extension of the urban sense of purpose I've never quite grown accustomed to, having spent my entire youth in the English countryside. As she passes, the lingering traces of her floral

perfume cast a spell over me. A subtle blend of woodiness, sakura, and morning dew. I can't quite discern what my consciousness is trying to salvage from the dormant sea of memory, but I remain in a motionless trance, afraid to disturb this incomprehensible process. A few seconds later, the frail partitions of my mind finally give way, and the tides of vivid remembrance come rushing into my consciousness.

My last morning walk in Tokyo 3 years ago.

A slight drizzle. Spring blossoms. Metropolitan speed.

I now inhabit my past self who tirelessly fixed her gaze on every house she passed.

The glimpse into the privacy of the Other offered tremendous solace, as if HER Tokyo resided in the domesticity of empty living rooms. Not the one printed on tourist not the one cast in a futuristic and mystifying neon glow, not even the one in *Lost in Translation* that restores contemplative calm in her heart every time she revisits.

She saw chairs left askew on the balcony where plants were starting to wither. She

caught a glimpse of the Impressionist art on the wall, clashing somewhat with the inviting wooden dining table. She saw five Christmas nutcrackers arranged horizontally on a window sill.

She then conjured up a life – relatable in its humanity, rejuvenating for its exotic

charm. 9am breakfasts with freshly brewed coffee, private conversations on the dinner table, living room drenched in a serene, diaphanous light on Saturday afternoons...

She relished the feeling, much like when an author delves into the conflicted

thoughts of the character and you, in a space of a few pages, become their immediate confidante.

Wading along the forest path through the waters of remembrance, I relive vignettes

of the past, as fresh and palpable as the canopy above me. A waft of night air through my half-closed window rustles the pages of my notebook,

Jingyi is a fervent lover of stream-of-consciousness narratives, soft rock songs and abstract, deep conversations. She loves to spend her time catching up with the city's newest art exhibitions, discovering new cafes, and reading her favourite female writers such as Virginia Woolf and Susan Sontag.

pulling my mind back to the present. My Spanish neighbor has switched to a documentary, its filtered monotony oddly soothing.

On togetherness and solitude

I often think about the way we connect with one another – how the duet of language builds towards a cathartic crescendo where we both know, almost telepathically, that a connection is forged.

I yearn to be seen, to feel the gaze of affection caressing my sensitive skin. But my body sighs, betraying my unbounded comfort in the shades, the corners, and the tunnels where my selfhood, liberated now from the grasp of public scrutiny, stretches into expansive shapes.

I still remember that night with George and Anna many years ago. We were an inseparable trio in college. George and I were still together then. With them, I can be whoever I am at the moment. I stay afloat in the fluidity of my emotions.

No politeness. No expectations. No pressing social obligations. In a small, tenebrous Turkish diner, we talked while sipping hot Apple tea from ornamental cups. Anna, who is a Buddhist, was talking about how the next generation of Dalai Lama is chosen in Tibet. As our conversation progressed from the innate call to awakening to karmic affinities, I felt entranced in a mythic atmosphere much like my first impression of Lhasa several years ago.

Unmooring my mind from the dock of the present, I sailed to the Potala Palace, where the tangy incense-laden air permeated the sunset hour. I lingered there for a while, in my renewed memory of Tibet, while in the present Anna and George busied themselves with their perennial debate over the historicization of science. Later on, we went to a dessert bar where pop songs from recent years were blasting over the speakers. It was impossible to resume our serious conversation, so we resorted to lighthearted chatter. An attractive, bohemian man in his twenties kept singing to his girlfriend whenever one of his favorite hits came up. We watched in amusement. I thought of how I might have enjoyed the company of someone like him – energetic, wild, unorthodox. George is the opposite – rational, gentle, thoughtful.

Watching him search for the etymological origin of the word 'sugar,' which we brought up a while ago, I felt an ephemeral instant of suffocation. George would never take me on his motorbike for a midnight ride, wake me up at 3am to go dancing on the street, or hitchhike across the country without a thorough plan.

I was suddenly reminded of an image in a novel I read a long time ago, where lovers are depicted as trees growing in the shade of each other. I thought of how the sanctuary of intimacy, nurturing as it is, may also prevent us from growing in other directions where we might flourish in a different way.

Perhaps part of me still longed for the smothering heat of zest, the magnetic pull of a reckless soul.

I carefully shelved this thought, closed the drawer in my mind, and asked George whether the word first came from Latin or Persian with full, genuine interest.

Somewhere along my journey of absorbed recollection, my neighbor turned off the monotonous documentary. This sudden descent into quiet inundates my heart with a wistful longing for those convivial moments with George and Anna, now painted over by the brushstrokes of memory.

On the temporal ambiguity of daydreaming

On most days, I dream.

It's like being in a self-directed theater where past memories and imagined future happenings are enacted as if they were the pulsing heartbeat of the present.

In the realm of daydreams, all artificial temporal boundaries are lifted.

Time becomes fluid, liberating the self that has been gasping for air.

In this temporal ambiguity, I feel a state of lightness, where all existential weights are lifted, where I am engrossed in the imagined Now.

Ultimately, we invent time to impose order upon chaos, to salvage an illusion of stability from what is otherwise a cavernous hole where all that ever happens to us is an eternal fall.

So, what if we fall?

# XI YANG CAI

By Allison Zhang

---

I imagine I am a brave explorer, or a warrior queen swinging in the forest. The red bar up ahead seems so daunting, as one hand reaches out for it. For a fraction of a second, I don't think I can make it. But then my hand firmly clenches onto the bar, and I laugh out loud. "Look at me, Baba, look at me." My father smiles up at me, his arms wrapped around my tiny waist. "Good job. Now let's do the next one."

//

Tiny streams of water clasp together, letting their long fingers caress each pebble on the riverbank. They engulf it, then release it in a jet of bubbles, merging back into one and dancing away to the next. Shrubbery lines the bank, along with saplings, their leaves olive green and tinged with gold. The little creek ran just outside the University Village in Berkeley, where I lived with my parents. "Yangyang, do you want to do something fun?" He asks. "Yes!" I reply excitedly. He lets me climb onto his back, and then, he jumps over the creek in one fluid motion. My hands tighten, as his lips curve into a smile, and my tiny laughs ring in the cold air. We stare at the creek together. "Can I touch it?" The question bubbles up. "The water, I mean." He scoops a handful of it and smiles. "It's cold." I dip my tiny, chubby fingers into the creek, sucking in a breath as the ice-cold water pierces my skin. In that moment, there is joy. It is joy before I understand what joy is. It is the joy in those instances where nothing else exists, so pure and so fleeting.

//

I walked down to the stream, my hand clasped in my father's. The water has grown, slender fingers turning to gentle torrents. It was deeper, maybe waist high, from the rough estimate of my toddler's brain. I could once walk down to the creek easily on relatively flat ground, but grasses now

grow between rocks on a steep incline from the path. I tighten my hold on my father's hands as my feet clumsily find their way onto the crevices of the slope, the grasses providing soft padding. I hear the laugh of my mother, and so I bound down quicker at the sound of her voice, and I see her.

Soon, my father and my mother are laughing together as they plunge their hands into the creek, their hands closing around green patches. They come up with bunches of leafy green plants, tiny streams of water dripping through their fingers. I don't understand why they're laughing, but they're grownups, so there must be something to be happy about.

Xi yang cai, they tell me, the green stuff is xi yang cai. It tastes good, they say. I bend down over the green patches, fascinated. The xi yang cai is growing everywhere, dotting the top of the water.

"Look, Yangyang." My father says, pulling a leaf off a plant and handing it to me. I sniff it. For something that's supposed to taste good, it has no appeal to me. It seems ... bland. It has no strong scent, not like the jasmine fragrance of aromatic rice or the tangy smell of stir-fried meat or the salty, divine aroma of vegetables sizzling in oil and sauce, or any of the foods that come from my mother's pot. I stare at it dubiously, before tentatively taking a bite. It is horrible.

It's bitter and leaves a disgusting aftertaste on my tongue. My father laughs at me, "You can't eat it like that!"

I wrinkle my nose and toss the green plants back into the water. I leave the xi yang cai to the grownups.

//

Living at the university village were the four happiest years of my life. I remember walking through the neighborhood with my father and watching kids play soccer, maybe aged around seven but who seemed like giants to me. I remember eating the blackberries from the vines that crept through the community garden, my fingers and lips stained with purple juice. I remember plucking a plump tomato off the vine in my parent's garden plot, and feeling the rush of pride as my father patted me on the head. I remember eating mini chocolate-dipped vanilla ice cream cones from Trader Joe's every day during the summer with another girl who lived next to me. I remember the excitement etched onto my face the day I found a white bird egg on the playground bench.

//

"Why can't you just understand it?" My father asks, not even bothering to mask the



exasperation in his voice. The most daunting part of school is always the physics problems. "Okay, I'll explain it again. So, look at this diagram, when the electron is attracted to the conductor, the other side, the insulator, carries charge ..."

"Wait, how does the conductor attract the electron again?"

"Why can't you let me finish? You're asking me, so be humble! Wait for your turn to ask questions!"

"But Baba, ... I was confused, I wanted to clarify something before we moved on..."

"NO! YOU WAIT, UNDERSTAND. YOU WAIT TILL I'M DONE."

We don't speak again that night.

The creek is hardly recognizable. The water sprints, it's muddy, and the grass around it grows thick and high. But the small trees and saplings around the creek, the little baby trees that I knew, have grown over the years with me. No longer does the creek look like a creek, it looks like a mangrove forest. The trees have grown to twenty feet tall, and grown so thick that it is impossible to peer through the thicket to even see the creek from the path. The only way to see it is to take a small winding trail from the path, and make it through the forest, before you can see the creek run through the middle of it.

The water seems too dark for me to touch it, and with a pang of longing, I remember the icy water slipping through my tiny fingers. Just as the water of the creek slips through my fingers, the joy of the moments slip away from our grasp so easily, and the minutes, the days, the years of my life slip away so quickly. The creek, the university village have changed.

I am no longer that chubby little girl with little pigtails and tiny hands. I am almost fifteen now, my hair cut short, and nearly two feet taller. I've experienced grief and triumph and disappointment. I am the same person, yet I am not. The creek is the same creek, yet it is not.

Because at the heart of both of us, if we can get through the thick groves of trees, we are the same within. Within fifteen years worth of walls, walls made of unique experiences, the memories of our childhood are still there. They are still there.

I can remember the icy feeling that electrified my fingertips the moment I brushed the surface of the clear creek. The creek remembers the soft touch of a little, black-haired girl some 15 years ago. The pure joy that filled both of our hearts then lights us up even now. No matter how many hands have touched the creek since then, staining its waters muddy and black, that joy is always there.

//

My feet can touch the ground. As I swing from branch to branch on the steel monkey bars, red paint chipping off, I laugh. I call out to my father, who is sitting on a bench. "Baba, look! My feet can touch the ground." My father looks up and holds up his phone. He snaps the picture.

//

I find those chocolate-dipped vanilla ice cream cones at Trader Joe's for the first time since my childhood. When I hike around the creek near my new house, I discover xi yang cai in its waters. I pick a few leaves, and I hold them up to my nose. I take a sniff, and I smile.



# HERO'S LAMENT

*By IlaKav Sur*

what hero is happy, really?  
the red roses stain the white lilies  
as blood stains the skin.  
oh, how is it so thin?

to be covered in a tapestry of scars,  
for every adventure, each so hard  
to get through to the end, where the trophy lay  
but all their efforts too often went to waste.

years later, they're appreciated,  
but always so late, we've never deviated  
from our pattern of sorrow and sadness,  
for the hero will win, but does it ever end in gladness?

let's try a promise, to never again  
leave the hero to rot in vain  
because not one hero has ever had a happy ending,  
so let's end this pattern that's so unrelenting.

let us promise to one day,  
let a hero be happy.  
let us promise that one day, one day,  
we won't look away.

we won't look away.  
we'll stay.  
because the hero has problems, too,  
but has anyone ever helped them through?

# GREED OF DETERIORATION

while traipsing through the silver sea,  
the sunset fish swims around the debris  
that encompasses every crack and corner,  
causing every creature to mourn  
the beautiful sea that now ceases to exist  
stuck in the void created by the greed that humanity  
could not resist  
was it truly so powerful, that hundreds among  
thousands  
were forced to bow and cower  
to its might and vigor?  
was it truly, or is humanity just composed of  
cowards?

*By Olivia Fisko*

# MAYBE IT'S FINE

Olivia Fisko has written poetry because they like writing about their feelings, putting them into words, and expressing emotions through poetry that people can read.

---

Maybe it's fine

Walking up and down the halls, getting pushed around  
Feeling like a leaf blown around in the wind  
Getting bumped into with no apology attached  
Being tripped or stopped in the hallways  
Like when that leaf comes to finally hit the ground

Maybe it's fine

To let those girls talk behind my back  
Like the wind that whistles through the trees  
To let my peers turn their backs on me  
Like all the shadows that the firelight paints on the walls

Maybe it's fine

That I have no one by my side  
Just like when one tree is cut down and leaves another to stand  
alone  
That the friends that I once had left me behind  
Like the last slice of pie on the table

Maybe it's fine

That those people who made fun of me got away with it  
That those people who supported the bully  
Like the people who support and hope for the rain to come  
That supported my heartache and torture

Maybe it is fine

That, that leaf that got blown around

Maybe it is fine

That the apologies never came for jostling me around

Hi! My name is AJ, I am a young poet, centering my art around my lived experience as a queer, non-binary Asian American! This piece was written in an attempt to describe what it is like to live outside the gender binary, and in alignment with my authenticity. Thank you for reading!

By *Allie Jones*

# I LIVE OUT- SIDE

---

I live outside  
My home is painted in bright blues and greens  
Which attract butterflies into the bird's nest  
The windows are doors and  
The sun rises in the west and  
The backyard has a front porch and  
My picket fence is pink and curvy  
It reminds me of my pink  
my curvy  
Trees grow inside the house and  
Bed frames sleep outside where the stars  
Glow in the dark on the ceiling  
I have a garden in the closet abundant with fruits  
My labor is fiction  
I am not  
Perceived here,  
I exist and exist again  
The moon hangs from the old moss trees  
Like a disco ball  
Reflecting off the blades of grass who  
Sing their favorite song to the ladybugs  
That crawl across them  
After a long day of rest  
They rest some more  
As we all should,  
I have no mirrors except the pond  
My only real reflection lies in the eyes of my Mother  
My Nature  
How I love,  
Love, I love  
How I Love  
Living  
Outside

# OPERATION THEATRE

*By Shamik Banerjee*

---

The bulb, matt-red, when made its glow  
to hint what was being done:  
that unwell Edna's surgery,  
had therefore begun.

After all years of smart and wrack  
and from each strait and moan;  
we hoped and pray'd her detriments,  
would ere away be flown.

Whene'er the room's door thresh'd and  
twitch'd,  
or little to and froed;  
atremble, we all stood up then,  
our restive pulses grow'd.

The temple near did frequent we  
with new festoons and flowers;  
and so occupied, could not know,  
when fled the upsun's hours.

For fifteen hours, there we sat--  
faith-hearted in God's name.  
I hid my tears and consoled each;  
to me they did the same.  
And when first light of dayspring broke,  
we bode the news of grace;  
a nurse egressed and near us stood,  
but with silence on her face.



# Philosophy:

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The Playful Porpoise is a literary magazine created by and for youth across the globe. This magazine's mission is to give young writers an international, online platform to showcase their voices through their skills in all realms of writing. Because of the difficulty many young writers face in getting published in general literary magazines and spaces due to competition with more experienced and seasoned writers, The Playful Porpoise accepts submissions only from young writers to promote equal opportunity. All writers ages 12 to 21 may submit to the magazine for the opportunity to be published and recognized.

# Policies:

The Playful Porpoise asks for First North American Serial Rights (FNASR) from all writers that submit to the magazine. Therefore, writers give the magazine the right to be the first in North America to publish the material once and after, all copyright to that material reverts back to the writer. Writers who have published their work elsewhere prior may also submit to the magazine; from these writers, the magazine asks for One-time Rights. Submissions are free and are accepted via Google Form. The Playful Porpoise evaluates submissions based on creativity, originality, technical skill, pacing, diction/syntax, among other criteria.

# Colophon:

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