

Aporia.

Issue Four

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Ten voices. Seven countries. Poems, essays, fiction and haiku —
gathered from the widest map Aporia has yet drawn.

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FROM THE EDITOR

On the widest map we have drawn, and the small true things on it

When we began *Aporia*, we made a quiet promise: to read everything that arrived with real attention, and to say yes whenever something told the truth. Issue Four carries that promise further across the world than any issue before it. Ten writers, seven countries — China, Serbia, Brazil, Argentina, Pakistan, India, and the United States — and work that moves from poetry to personal essay to short fiction to haiku. It is the widest map we have yet drawn.

But the map is never what moves us most. The small true things on it are.

Consider the range. From China, Yufei Ran gives a heron a voice that answers every question with another ripple: “I don’t have any feathers left to spare.” From Argentina, Zoe Abril Gauna writes in Spanish of things “born of dream,” spores the ink abandons. From Pakistan, Umer Ali watches a classroom clock move “with the speed of a dying star.” And from India, Amruta Mone turns the loss of a small companion into a poem that never once says the word for grief — only “I turned eighteen. You remained five.”

These are not pieces written to be liked. They are pieces someone needed to write — and we are honoured they trusted us to hold them. Some of these writers had never submitted anywhere before. Every one of them did something only they could do.

If you are reading this and wondering whether your own voice belongs here: it does. Aporia exists for exactly the writer who is not sure yet — the one with a poem in a drawer, a story half-finished, a language that crosses borders. Send us the thing you cannot not write. We are still reading everything. We are still saying yes.

POETRY

Day Heron's Confession

Yufei Ran

Shanghai Starriver Bilingual School, Shanghai · China

Yufei Ran is a student in Shanghai, China. She writes about night herons, mangroves, and the occasional day heron. Her poems and occasional rants reside in a sketchbook, which remains stubbornly free of drawings.

SHORT FICTION

The Nightmare Maker

Masa Simic

University of Novi Sad · Serbia

A measly few bills were crumpled in his pocket. He could already see the cashier's disgusted expression when he pulled them out to pay for the cheapest cigarettes available. She'd take them reluctantly, as if they smelled.

Money is money. He would counter, even though she would say nothing. The apologetic smile he would force would feel like sour milk on his lips.

He didn't have enough money for the casino, he knew, just for that one pack of cigarettes. Later that afternoon, he would have to ask his mother for more. An ailing woman, she knew where the money went and still never refused. And when he got a big win on the slot machines, he would give her some of it, of course.

And it was after the encounter with the cashier, in which contrary to his expectations, her expression had remained neutral and beautiful and she had even greeted him with a Have a Nice Day as he left - he was fiddling with the new pack, then fiddling with his old blue lighter - when a fluttering skirt caught his eye and he looked up. That's when he saw her.

Blue eyes and hair so dark it could have been black, just like he'd remembered. Ever since her, he had never been with any woman with blue eyes and dark hair. He tried once, but he couldn't get hard and the woman left his bed quickly. This never really happens, he said. She

didn't reply. And how could he ever explain?

Thirty years had gone by since he had left the blue-eyed girl. He had never known her name. Just her screams, and then the silence that followed. When he stood over her, he saw that her eyes had changed – they had lost something invisible and whatever it was, it altered her entire face. In that moment, she reminded him of his grandmother – her eyes had changed just like that once the cancer had spread to her brain.

People die when they decide to.

He'd heard his village whisper whenever an older person died.

She gave up, so she died.

It was time anyway, she'd lived long enough.

She had a happy life, she had many grandchildren.

Once it had been over, he had tried to placate himself with these words for a moment. But the cold guilt he felt washed over him immediately, he felt it down to the toes in his military boots. He hadn't taken them off in days, and splatters of blood decorated the socks he was wearing – the only socks he had.

She wasn't old, she had not lived very long.

The lighter he had been fumbling with slipped out of his sweaty grip, clattered on the concrete. The blue-eyed girl moved towards the doors of the same grocery store he had just been in. She might even have her groceries scanned by the same indifferent cashier.

The house had smelled like burning candles – there hadn't been electricity for weeks when they had come in. And they had found them, and they had dragged them all out. And after an hour, a screaming metallic smell had replaced the scent of wax.

As the girl came closer to him, head down, her hands moving rapidly over her phone screen, a tote bag slumped over her shoulder, his body burst into cold sweat. He was holding his unlit cigarette between his two fingers for dear life.

But something wasn't right - this he realized as the girl nearly reached the doors. Her features were distorted – thicker lips, a longer nose. Her eyes weren't tearful, weren't full of futile rage.

Thirty years.

He remembered.

Thirty years had passed. If this had been her, she would be a middle-aged woman by now. She would be holding a more practical bag or even one of those strollers that older women dragged behind them to the market. She might have even had a small grandchild toddling alongside her.

Of course, though, only her remains had aged thirty years. They were in a cemetery a three hour ride away,

It was not her, and it was not her ghost.

He expected the realization to relax his body, steady his breath, but it didn't. He stood, soaked in freezing sweat in the August shade, his fingers now crushing the cigarette.

Masa Simic is a writer based between two countries – Canada and Serbia. She aims to explore guilt, shame, and other emotions humans try to ignore. Her favourite thing in the world is the first breath you take after diving headfirst into the sea.

PERSONAL ESSAY

English Teacher's Daughter

Amanda Bissoli Torres

Escola Canadense de Brasília, Brasília · Brazil

"You're the English teacher's daughter. How can you not understand English?"

That question pulled in my mind as I entered a school where every subject was taught in English. For most of my childhood, the language felt distant. My mother, a single parent, moved us to the capital for her teaching job, and through her position, I received a scholarship to attend that school. It was an opportunity—but also a responsibility I felt every day.

For years, English was both a barrier and a mirror. My classmates spoke it naturally, while I struggled to keep up and often stayed silent in class discussions.

To improve, I rebuilt the language step by step. Paragraphs became puzzles I worked through at home, and textbooks turned into challenges I slowly learned to navigate. Music became my escape: even when I did not fully understand the lyrics, I connected with their emotion. Playing guitar also helped me express what I could not yet say in words.

Over time, persistence changed everything. From sixth to ninth grade, I faced doubts and comparisons, but each challenge strengthened my determination. Slowly, English became less of an obstacle and more of a passion.

Today, I read, write, and participate in discussions with confidence. I am preparing for the Cambridge B1 and B2 exams. I have learned what language represents more than words.

Watching my mother teach reinforced this lesson. I saw how language can open opportunities. It showed me that communication is not just about grammar, but about giving people a voice.

I now understand that belonging is built. I want to study communication and political science to help others find their voice and to use storytelling as a way to connect people across different experiences. English was my first challenge, but it has become my bridge to understanding the world and my way of expressing who I am.

POETRY · SPANISH

Thanatos

Zoe Abril Gauna

Buenos Aires · Argentina

Zoe Abril Gauna is an environmental management student based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She writes poems shaped by disappearance, native plants, and the quiet persistence of place. She writes in Spanish, and many of her poems begin with the wind that crosses her hometown of Florencio Varela.

POETRY

Ordinary Afternoons

Umer Ali

MCDC, Karachi · Pakistan

Umer Ali is a writer from MCDC in Karachi, Pakistan.

PERSONAL ESSAY

The Archive of Girlhood

Jane Butler

Lovettsville, Virginia · United States

How much of a person truly survives? In October of last year, I found myself transcribing graveyard records for a small cemetery in southern Maryland, the middle of nowhere, really. I was bored out of my mind and stumbled upon what I thought to be the perfect autumn weekend activity. Unusual, a bit spooky, and picturesque in a morbid and delightful way. Quickly, it became painstaking, trying to make out names of people long dead that had been scribbled haphazardly on yellow paper, in faded pencil. The journey was frustrating to say the least. It struck me how horrible it was that this was all that remained of these dead people, a name one could barely make out with any level of certainty. Everything they had been, lost irrevocably, to time and other greater things. I'm not much different from them at all though, most of me lives in a little Christian Dior shoebox.

Christmas morning when I was fourteen, gifts were piled under the tree and the smell of pine needles and something (sickeningly) sweet and vaguely chocolatey filled the air. I opened my last gift, a little Dior rollerball perfume in a pristine white box. I still have the box, but gifted the perfume to a friend of mine. It had always smelled strange on me, too floral and almost uncanny, and it wasn't my favorite fragrance at all, just the cheapest one they sold. The box itself, however, was a symbol of luxury that excited me to no end. The gold logo, DIOR, written in that iconic clean font, the slightly textured rigid box was nicer than any other gift box I had ever had. The box, to my

mind, has since become a magical vessel of sorts, containing scribbled "I love you!" notes, my first paper crane I ever folded, earrings from my first Nutcracker performance, pretty wax seals, numerous cards and polaroid pictures that I am too sentimental to ever let go of.

The box is small and filling up quickly. Perhaps I am somewhat ruthless in deciding what items make the cut, but I have never struggled to make that decision when the time came. Intuitively, I know what is important to me, what items hold memories that I don't ever want to forget. Some feelings are too poignant to not hold on to. What these objects are able to say is definitively the most valuable thing about them. They are completely honest and absolutely vulnerable in a way that nothing else in my life is. I have hidden behind a great many things to try to evoke a different personality. I change the way I laugh or the way I speak depending on who I am surrounded by, and I allow myself to be molded and influenced by people I don't even respect because I am too malleable. Even in my own journals, I embellish details and exaggerate, in hopes that my future self will see me as someone more admirable than I am. With these little trinkets and mementos though, they know exactly who they are and they possess the ability to transport me back in time to the most vivid memories I could ever belong to.

So, I am the curator of my little museum of everything I love. These things are somehow the most intimate part of me, but anyone else could open that shoebox and see only a bunch of random objects, even garbage. My first boarding pass when I flew alone overseas and was terrified. The bracelet someone special made for me last summer. The birthday card my best friend wrote for me when I turned sixteen. These things don't objectively hold any meaning at all, but to me they

mean everything and more.

Now I am taken back to that graveyard. I frequent cemeteries often, when I need a place to sit or to wander. Maybe, these people do exist in more ways than I had thought. They are more than names that are nearly illegible and fading, but they lived lives and had stories to tell. They had their loves, their impact, and their own shoeboxes.

Jane Butler is a writer from Lovettsville, Virginia, United States.

PERSONAL ESSAY

Traveler

Bonnie Yang

Rancho Cucamonga, California · United States

Hello. My name is Bonnie Yang. I like chocolate, sparkly nail polish, and fountain pens. My favorite days are Wednesdays and when it rains.

And I hate it when people speak simply to hear their own voice, so I will choose each word perfectly.

I do not like to talk much. Not unless I have to.

When I talk, do not follow me with a chart showing rising action, climax, and falling action. Do not ponder my hidden meanings, I have none. Assign as much meaning as you want to my words, they have none. I do not speak as an art, that is not my skill.

I am simply here to tell a story.

The story of why I found it necessary to start talking starts with my dad.

My dad has severe gout. In Cantonese, we call it 風濕 which means painful wind. A single breeze brushing over your foot is enough to have you crumble to your feet. A rich man's disease my grandfather calls it, brought on by years of consuming meat and beer.

I find it funny. My father's name is 梁, named after the sails of the mighty junk boats. A gift from his father to a friend leaving for America, naming a son who wishes you a good trip. The friend fell to

gambling and drinking and his son inherited a restless foot. A traveler.

One with the wind to their back and their home behind them.

My father took us, limping. He took my mother to Niagara Falls, her schoolgirl dream. He took us out of school to start dreaming.

Dreaming of Pollocks, Statues of Liberty, Golden Gate Bridges, Redwoods, and cowboys on trains.

He limped behind us as we followed the Freedom Trail in Boston. As we squawked at Picassos and names of others I forgot, he waited in the museum lobby to rest his leg. As a rite of passage, he pinched my face at Harvard and made me promise to bring him back there one day with me in a black cap and gown. He has stopped making those jokes now, thankfully.

After many years, we saved enough for a trip to Paris. The tourist trap. Unoriginal and tacky, but still romantic. For us.

We did everything right.

We took a photo of the Eiffel Tower framed by our hands in the shape of a heart. We drank espressos by the Seine- pinkies up. We said "une baguette s'il vous plaît" to the bakers in blue aprons. We tried escargots and my little brother loved them. When I saw my first French cat (Blue-eyed, black ears, white face, and pink nose) I snapped a picture of her. She blinked at me before hopping off the window sill. We did battle before the Mona Lisa, squirming against the mass of heated bodies trying to fit her into our camera frame.

We were the perfect, obnoxious, American tourists.

My father took us, limping, to the French Army Museum. We followed him silently down the dark stone corridors, nearly empty of tourists like us.

A left here.

Down the stairs.

Another right.

Wrong room, must have been the one before us.

We fell silent. Father was not a tourist today.

Then we were in a darkened room, away from the main galleries. We were looking at the golden robes of an emperor.

Later, when I did more research on my own, I realized that it was the robes of emperor K'ien Long. I had never heard of his name in my AP World History classes. (I got a five on the test)

Father was quiet. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other. I saw him reflected in the glass.

I wonder what he was thinking.

The robe that was worn by the kings of his home. Now found in the darkened room of some museum in another country. With scarcely a plaque to its name.

I wonder if he thought of his limp. How, he too, was in a country reduced to such a small form when he should have been a king at home.

I wonder if he likes his name.

Bonnie Yang is a writer from Rancho Cucamonga, California, United States.

POETRY · SUITE

I Held Out My Hands And He Gave Me The Sun.

Aaranya Rakhunde

Narayana Vidyalayam, Chinchbhuvan · Nagpur, Maharashtra, India

POETRY

Left, Right, Up, and Down

Amruta Mone

Vidya Vijay Bal Mandir, Madhya Pradesh · India

Amruta Mone is a writer from Vidya Vijay Bal Mandir in Madhya Pradesh, India. Her work draws on companionship, grief, and the ordinary moments that quietly become lasting memories.

HAIKU

Two Haiku

Sumit Chauhan

Princeton, New Jersey · United States

Sumit Chauhan is a writer from Princeton, New Jersey. He is drawn to thresholds — doorways, dusk, the sentence just before the one that matters — and to everything a person keeps but never uses. He owns more travel tidbits than books, and more books than he could ever hope to read, and remains unbothered and mildly satisfied by both.