





# THE UC REVIEW

University College Literary Journal

A biannual literary journal of University  
College at the University of Toronto.

**Coach House Printing**

This journal was produced and published on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. We acknowledge our collective responsibility to uphold, protect, and center Indigenous people and land. We stand in solidarity with other marginalized nations, and conversations on decolonization and reconciliation.

*Spring 2023*

## **Masthead**

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## **Editor's Note**

To our beloved UC Review Community,

I would like to warmly welcome you to our spring 2023 issue, “The Supermarket”.

This beautiful issue draws on the many intimate and nostalgic feelings our contributors associate with supermarkets and foods, as well on topics of migration, trauma, and the self. Paying tribute to cultural spaces whilst calling out modern colonialism and gentrification. We are thankful to the contributors for creating creative spaces for reflect and reminisce about these subjects.

I hope you can enjoy this issue as both a celebration and testament to the importance of food, culture, and community.

Sincerely,

**Maria Vidal Valdespino**  
Editor-in-Chief, 2022-2023  
*The University College Literary Review*

## Acknowledgments

The spring 2023 issue, “The Supermarket” welcomes all the feelings of joy and nostalgia we tie to grocery stores, markets, and in intimate exchanges. It is truly a labor of love and would not have been possible without the help of everyone at the UC Review, Coach House Press, and the UCLit.

I would like to express my great gratitude to our Senior Editors, your commitment and love for the UC Review has been invaluable. To Allison, it has been such a delight working with you these past three years, your guidance and contributions are appreciated greatly. To Xarnah, your creativity and ideas have been such cool additions to the UC Review. Lastly, to Camille, no words would be enough to describe the gratitude I have for all your contributions this year. From your encouragement and support in ensuring events and gifts ran smoothly, to your guidance and friendship. Thank you for everything, and I will miss you all greatly!

Thank you, Senior staff, Sylvia, Mailey, and Laiyena, I am so thankful for your initiatives and efforts in the creative and editorial process. The dedication and passion for the editorial process is not forgotten, as well the creative direction of this issue was so wonderful. To our Associate Editors, Janine, Nithya, and Jewel, thank you for all your thoughtful and creative contributions this semester. May you continue to grow and find yourself in the arts. Thank you to our copy editors, Nora, Melissa, Nithya, and Olivia, for your commitment to ensuring editorial excellence.

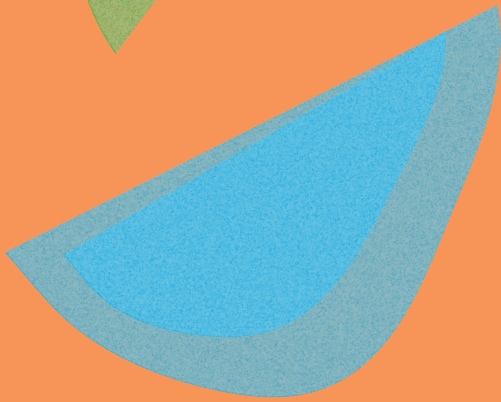
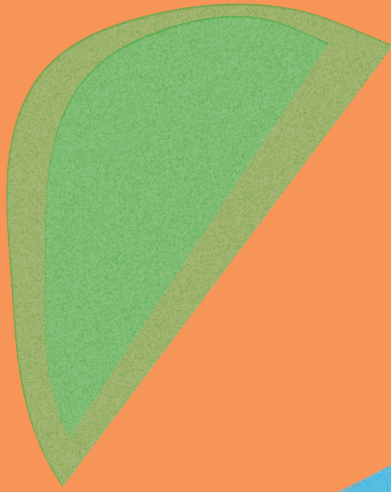
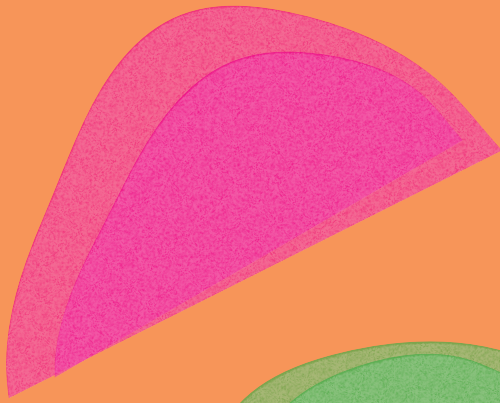
As always, thank you to John and Coach House Press for their amazing support. I am beyond grateful for the endless support John has provided in ensuring that both the Winter and Spring issues would be as beautiful as imagined.

Lastly, thank you to all our contributors and readers as we would not have been able to create these issues without you.

**Maria Vidal Valdespino**

"Time passes and you go from me  
Like peach petals from Niagara orchards,  
You fade and the bud is dry,  
Hard, secret and colourless"

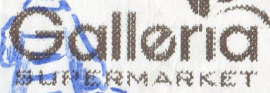
-Miriam Waddington (UC 1939)  
Excerpted from Poem, *Changes*



## lychee princess

*Audrey Lai*

My mother still brings home lychee fruit in late autumn, apologizing: “not ripe enough,” showing me greenish-pink shells peeking through netted red produce bags. Mom tells me an emperor’s concubine loved lychee so much he had them delivered across the country just for her, from Guangdong to Chang’an, from courier to courier. She translates a poem I cannot read, wherein the concubine smiles, seeing dust from horses in the distance. She says I am like the concubine, a lychee princess. I peel the fruit, revealing its milky insides. As I eat, juice dribbles down my chin. I picture Mom seeing my favorite fruit in the supermarket, thinking of how surprised I’d be to see my favorite fruit past its harvesting season. Its saccharine sweetness tinges my lips.



# Galleria

SUPERMARKET

351 Bloor St. W Toronto, ON M4W 1A7  
 HST: 721322527R10001 Invoice#: 2442148  
 TEL: 416-596-6177 2023-03-09 13:18:14  
 www.galleriasm.com Hazel Jung/4

## GROCERY

GLICO 김치 푸자	EA	1.69	1
GLICO POCKY STRAWBERRY	EA M	1.69	2
NONGSHIM SHRIMP CRACKER	EA H	0.79	4
CHUPA CHUPS	EA H	0.79	5
CHUPA CHUPS	EA H	0.79	5
DELI & READY MEALS	EA M	11.99	3
Hard Pork Cutlet & Rice			

TOTAL NUMBER OF ENTRIES 5

SUBTOTAL 16.95  
 HST (13.00%) 1.98

TOTAL 18.93



## A Love Letter to Asian Supermarkets

*Christina Dinh*

## **Bag of Walnuts**

*Cherry Gallacher*

Pale brown and packed  
in stacked silence. I bought you  
and ought to make good  
on both promises: health to me;  
for you to see the light of day after your  
long shelled night. Give me your fibre. It  
won't do to grieve your fate nor  
to pity the sorry state  
of a neglected walnut. Collected,  
stripped once already,  
what stops me now?



## how the everyday domesticates

Jeanne Polochansky

the Sainsbury's in London—  
a refuge for my mother  
from my spine slowly twisting  
where I deleted the photos I took like a tourist  
of the flowers at the front of the queue  
and learned to fall  
into step with the locals

the corner stores in San Miguel de Allende—  
protruding lighthouses  
towards the dahlia *Parroquia*, the *Santuario*,  
which I followed even as the shuttered windows  
the cobbled path the fresco walls  
bid the sickness in my chest

the mall mart in Almaty—  
drive up north enough  
to gaze upon the transplanted *ivory* of my childhood  
when I was too young to really go  
anywhere else  
and too foreign  
to understand words  
that weren't on the sticky labels



超級市場

港式

7.99  
3.99  
KAREN'S

## **Dead fish See**

*Katherine Zheng*

The dead fish stared back at me.  
i suppose it had no choice—  
its lack of eyelids (its lack of life),  
despite all its efforts  
it had no choice but to stare at me,  
for as long as i stared at it.  
But my eyes would always give first,  
watering like the sea that it had been snatched from;  
a blink—taunting, mocking it.  
i suppose i was fascinated by these creatures—their looks (their eyes),  
the way their scales glimmered in the fluorescent light,  
almost grotesque; their slimy bodies stacked upon each other—  
an aquarium for the dead,  
displayed for my viewing pleasure; an array to choose from.  
Who looked the prettiest? Fattest? Tastiest?  
Who was worth the money?  
They all looked the same to me:  
eyes wide—glassy,  
as if sugar had caramelized and hardened upon the irises  
shining for the humming fluorescent light like the moon shines for the sun.  
And i would try not to blink, worried i would miss something—  
worried that in our infinite staring contest,  
i would one day win.

## **a 'small' chat**

*Karen Kan*

## Corner of My Eye

Allison Zhao

The parrot has been bothering me for a while now. It's pecking at my peripheral vision. You're rolling a mango in your palm next to me in the fruit aisle. Left-handed. Bad luck you are, I tease. *Mano sinistra*. I turn away and the parrot pierces the mango's bright flesh with the tip of its beak.

You steal a kiss from my cheek while I unlock my apartment door. We are windblown and sharp-boned, and it takes me two tries to get the key twisted right. The handles of my grocery bags are wrapped around your wrists and the parrot hops over the threshold in perfect step with you.

*This is what it's supposed to feel like*, I tell myself. We've both forgotten that I needed milk, but I can take my coffee black for a week. If the parrot pulls too hard at a strand of my hair while you put the strawberries in the vegetable drawer, well, that must be what it means to be at home.

The parrot has been bothering me for a while and it won't go away. Weeks later, we're on my sofa and the parrot is turning its head to look between us. You know what phone call I just got, and you tell me, *Everything happens for a reason. It helps to believe that.*

Meaning well has nothing to do with how wrong you can be. I believe that like I believe in the parrot. I have to tell you I'm going insane, and that there's a bird on your shoulder, and that I think it has dug its claws into my spine and is holding me at arm's length. Parrots should not be so silent.

*I wish I had any of your faith*, I say. You say something about needing to go, and I don't know if that means for milk or for good, but my door is closing and something bright moves in the corner of my eye. Colourful and fracturing. I give in and look squarely, and the parrot is not there.

Tbilisi, Georgia

Janine Erika Go



## apple

*Gillian Chapman*

CW: hospitalization/suicide attempt

when i woke up  
i saw the world anew.

when the doctor pulled the tubes  
out from bruised blue vein  
and told me i could go  
but hid the rest of the pills  
from me

i think i took the wrong life  
from the coma.

i saw the street  
december dawn on the snow  
morning crowds faceless  
smoke billowing from the grate  
in great white clouds

the old man crouched at the crosswalk  
like peter at the gates.

i saw the flowers  
roses lilies chrysanthemums  
bundled in bouquets by the till  
for a friend or lover  
to place inside their basket  
petals pressed beneath a bottle  
of cheap red wine  
plastic packet of almonds  
overpriced strawberries

didn't peeters paint something  
like that?

i saw the apples arranged  
red green golden yellow  
wax-shined saccharine spheres  
shipped fresh from eden  
plucked in dozens from the tree

i picked the prettiest one  
not to eat but to keep  
in the bowl on the counter

when i saw it the next morning  
it made me sob.

i knew soon enough  
the world would sour again  
the apple rotten from the core  
but for a day or two

i saw the world  
and it was beautiful.

# Fruit Stall

Kelly Vu





## orange popiscles and milk chocolate

*Devarya Singhania*

i grew up with the sight of only one cozy supermarket—

whose name could only echo from a broken pronunciation by the lisp on my tongue.

grandmother took me with a smile at any hour, to pacify the singular tear caressing my face from mom's scolding. grandmother knew that even splurging just ten rupees for the milk chocolate and orange popsicle would inject a joy incomprehensible to my uncles, aunts, dad and mom grandmother, smiling, knew that—

the shopkeeper knew every maneuver of mine, every step of mine from the stacks of crisps, to the stumbles on the fallen cartons until

the aisle adjacent to his desk, for that's where the freezer was.

it didn't seem to bother grandma that i'd wander ten minutes extra as i'd try to purchase something different

but the salt of that tear could only seek sleep in the lullaby of the milk chocolate's sugar.

she'd stand across from the shopkeeper, and every glance of mine towards her returned a smile as endearing as it was overwhelming. mom often scolded me, and i would cry, but grandma never hesitated for a voyage with her miniscule companion.

grandma always protected me from mom's attacks, but mom wasn't offended.

she'd glare as i skipped towards the market but return a half-smile when the orange popsicle dressed all portions of my beige cheeks and nose.

grandpa accompanied us sometimes too, but his legs wove a tale of a dismembered melody.

i returned to grandma's house last winter—trembling in the cold, now an adult.

my sister's growing old too, ten now.

i used to be ten and staying at grandma's house.

i could see her hands tremble slightly, and her legs were pale and cold as she walked.

so i took my sister to the same warm market; now renovated and chaotic.  
i knew if grandma saw my tear today, she'd shudder not and still bring me  
to the market. but she didn't see the tear; i couldn't show it.  
the tremors in her hands echoed the woes within,  
and she tried relishing the orange popsicle with me.  
but her teeth are sensitive now, and evoke not the same charm nor glee.  
now i'm an adult, in the cold of a foreign land.  
as i struggle for the warmth of her hand, in the cozy supermarket.

## **My Mother's List of Ingredients**

*Fizza Qasim*

Halfway across the world  
The supermarket is different from home  
Foreign, but now my own  
I struggle to accept the loss  
Tears form and a storm brews  
However, all is not lost  
Our supermarket and mine  
Share one thing in common:  
My mother's list of ingredients



## Seeing in Reds

Sabbah Yasin

s k i p p i n g through Chinatown I lost a red pair of slippers, while  
ambulance sirens criss cross with  
bustling reyedllow pom pom hats on kids laughing,  
flashing electric-red sour-candied lollipops, chasing orange traffic lights, and  
gnawing screeches at my search. I'm stuck  
like a pylon chewing crimson fire gum. So,  
pungent pinching red onions steam  
roads. I trip on sesame beads, fragrant jasmine rice and long beans.  
Skaters juggle keys in baggy camouflage pants,  
parkour over wooden benches-bunches of star anise.  
Perfectly round tomatoes varnish the sun as if Picasso had left an oil smudge,  
smudges heap in cardboard boxes 2 for \$1 or dollar for two, *that will do*,  
“*stinging onions!*” leeks leaking eyes, but these rubies are  
shaded by parties of bamboo rows, pomelo, and  
freshly squeezed sugar cane, balanced by the vendor's  
pink pitaya thumb shouting, “we got 2 for 1!” So,  
my nose navigates citicipes:  
sauté garlic with plump overly ripe tomatoes  
like water balloons smashing the pavement  
just about to POP!  
as if silky worms fall out their deceased holes,  
slime coating bok choy. *Caution it's hot!*  
watch its blemish squeeze you  
boiling the  
crowds' directions  
*oozing*,  
reds.

## Dad & Me

Skye Anacta

## Reflections from Aisle 9

*Sofia Moniz*

I dread going to the grocery store, with its glaring artificial lights and bored-looking employees. As I walk through the aisles, I often pick up a few words of a language vaguely familiar to me—Old Portuguese Women complaining about their husbands, or, occasionally, bragging about their grandchildren. They push their carts to the deli counter where they wait in line for the Sunday roast they'll have to start on as soon as they get home from mass. They pick up tins of tuna and sardines from the canned foods aisle. They agonize over which bottle of olive oil is for cooking and which is best soaked into bread. It's never my goal to eavesdrop, but I can't help hearing what they're saying. Even when I wear headphones, their voices cut through, giving a distinct nasal tinge to the music playing in my ears. It's like when I was bored at mass and tried to look out the stained glass windows: as much as I tried to focus on what I knew was beyond them—the flower garden, or the snow falling, or the trees losing their leaves—all I could ever see were the pictures on the windows.

My trips to the grocery store always take longer than they should. I stare at the shelves, hesitating each time I put something in my basket, as if someone is scrutinizing every decision I make. Of course, *I am* being watched. By the security cameras, by the Portuguese Women, maybe even by Jesus Himself, like my Sunday School Teacher always told me He was. Whoever it is, I can't help but feel like They're waiting for me to mess up, like I'm letting Them down just because I don't want to touch anything pink and slimy, or open a can to reveal its contents staring back at me. I almost expect Grandmother to be around every corner, chatting with the Portuguese Women. For better or for worse, She is always in the back of my mind; an omnipresent family heirloom, passed from mother to daughter—like the various figures of the Virgin Mary perched and plastered throughout Her house, that She once told me I could have when She died—an inspiration, a constant reminder of a standard I can never live up to. Everything a Mother should be.

When I was in elementary school, I went to Grandmother's house every morning before school. She would ask if I was hungry, then escort me into the kitchen without waiting for a reply.

The only way Grandmother knew how to show love was through food, and Her idea of love involved a great deal of self-sacrifice. No matter how early I arrived at Her house, breakfast was always ready and waiting in the kitchen. She cooked big dinners every Sunday, slaving away over bubbling pots of octopus stew She couldn't bear the texture of. She always had sweets for me that She never touched, and kept milk in the fridge so that I would grow big and strong. Returning the love, naturally, involved sacrifices as well. I choked down tall glasses of milk, chewed on tentacles, and accepted cookies I was too full to enjoy. I reminded myself that She was such a good grandmother. The least I could do was finish my milk.

As I got older, Grandmother stopped praising me when I finished my plate. Offers to try Her cookies were replaced with equally generous offers to test out Her bathroom scale. No longer in elementary school, my daily visits became weekly. Her customary greeting shifted from, "are you hungry?" to, "did you get taller?" and, "did you lose weight?" As usual, She would guide me inside, having made the judgement that I was simultaneously too much and not enough. I would sit and watch Her cook while She told me Her plans for the week. She had never had a job or learned how to drive, so Her weekly trip to the grocery store in my father's minivan provided Her with some much-needed structure.

Grandmother had always wanted a daughter and never had one, so when I came along She was eager to have someone to pass down the recipes Her mother had taught Her. I learned the Portuguese names for all Her dishes, some traditional, some made up—like "box-fish," frozen fish sticks She often ate on Fridays. She told me that we eat fish on Fridays because Jesus died for our sins and it was the least we could do. This didn't quite seem to follow, but I couldn't help staring at the crucifix nailed to Her wall and feel that somehow, by forcing down the horrid mush, I was playing a part in alleviating His pain.

As I spent more time with Grandmother, I began to pick up more and more Portuguese words and phrases. I would hear Her calling me stubborn under Her breath when I refused to drink my milk, and the exasperated *Menina não come nada*, which, over time, became the proud *Rapariga não come nada*. I hated being called stubborn. It felt so improper, so un-feminine. Where would we be if Our Holy Mother had told the angel Gabriel She refused to carry the son of God in Her womb?

As I learned in Sunday School, it wouldn't have made a difference. By the time God thought to send a messenger to inform Mary of Her situation, the Holy Spirit had already "come upon her," a choice of words that the boys in my class thought was hilarious, but a fact that I found horrifying.

In a rare instance of taking Our Lady's lead, I became passive. I stopped making an effort to learn Grandmother's native language, opting instead to sit silently at the family dinner table and let the sounds wash over me. But try as I might, I still couldn't block out Her commentary.

At some point during every family gathering, Grandmother would pull me aside to tell me what She thought of my clothes and how I looked in them. She always made a point of telling me how much She had weighed when She was my age. I don't remember any of the numbers She told me—only that they were always lower than what I saw on the scale.

As much as I dreaded turning eighteen, I took solace in the knowledge that at the very least, I would finally be safe from that particular comment. By the time Grandmother's eighteenth birthday rolled around, She had already walked down the aisle of a Catholic church to the man her father wanted Her to marry, vowed to the Heavenly Father that She would accept any children God bestowed upon Her, and flew across the Atlantic to make it happen. At the tender age of eighteen, She already had the trajectory of Her life set up for Her. If Her wedding hadn't quite sealed the deal, Her swollen belly—carrying the first of three sons—sure did.

I can't tell the difference between a quality bottle of olive oil and the cheap stuff. I can't eat salted cod without gagging. After being passed down for generations, my family's recipes will die when Grandmother does because She refuses to write them down and I will never learn them. I can't cook well enough to feel comfortable subjecting anyone else to the food I make. I will never wake up before the sun rises to clean my kitchen. My voice will never make an unborn baby leap for joy. There is no space in my apartment for thirty statues of Our Lady. Grandmother finds it profoundly disappointing that I have no plans to give of myself, as She has. As much discomfort as I feel facing the grandmothers at the supermarket, I am comforted by the knowledge that I don't have to enjoy my time there.

I am not destined for a life where I most look forward to my weekly trip to the grocery store.





CANDY SH

Captain Gardsu  
Istanbul

Каракой

Lajena Imran

## Swashbuckler

Allison Zhao

I got sick on Sunday night after dinner and Mother sent me back to school on Wednesday. She stuck her thermometer under my armpit and didn't let me look at the number on it, but she said she couldn't miss another day of work. Mother worked at the grocery store close to my school. That's how she always knew when prices were going up. She never worked Saturdays, but I heard her tell Auntie on the phone, while she was packing my lunch, that this month she might have to. I was still hot all over, but at least I didn't feel like throwing up anymore, and I remembered to bring my favourite book about shipwrecks and buried treasure to school. In the car, Mother said that I should try my best to eat both halves of the sandwich she'd made.

There was a newness to being back on the classroom carpet with all the other kids. Like they'd already gotten used to being without me. The big spelling test was coming up and my colouring sheet with a sailor from last week had disappeared, even though I'd put my name on it. Miss Moore said she'd given out field trip forms yesterday and she'd saved one for me — just half a piece of paper that Mother needed to sign. I looked at it while putting it in my backpack. It wasn't asking for money. The top edge was cut wobbly.

During afternoon recess, I crouched alone by the fence at the edge of the schoolyard, sticking my hand under the chain links to get to the gravel on the other side. Now I figured the heat and the shaky lines were because of all the sun, cooking the pavement and making my head feel tight. Dusty stones of the right size and shape went straight into my pocket, because that was how people collected jewels when they had a lot of them. Maybe Miss Moore would let me have one of the glass beads that she kept in her jar for board games. They were all different shades of blue. The taste of Mother's whiskey stuck to my back teeth and the scratchy feeling in my throat hadn't really gone away. Maybe that was what it took to be a real pirate.



Shiraz, Iran

Janine Erika Go

## **My Path home**

*Fizza Qasim*

We steal a kiss behind the apples at the supermarket  
Hiding from the world  
You pick out my favourite apples and I pick yours  
We still act twenty while running on thirty  
I pack the bags and you grab your card  
Once, we would hug out the goodbyes  
And take our different paths  
Now, they've merged  
Because you've become home

## **The fruit of Our Struggle**

*Maria Vidal Valdespino*



The  
Fruit  
of our  
Struggle

m

## **the old dream**

*Alyssa Donnelly*

He loves my kitchen. Every day he warms my doorstep  
like a stray dog, nose low as he tells me about his dream,  
the old dream, the dream about bread. The intricacies  
of flesh and food folded into square rolls of fresh ciabatta,  
each one the length of his hand, or mine.  
If I let him in, he'll make us sandwiches.  
His secret is honey, drizzled like dew over a bed  
of arugula. He wants my hands sticky, wants them to leave  
sweetness behind. But i'm only ever hungry after he's gone,  
lifting the leftover darkness with his shoulders, steam  
rising like grace from bread-bearing palms. I'm only ever hungry alone  
in the early light, kitchen laid bare as the end of a tragedy. Alone,  
I go back to bed and dream of dough, expanding. The universe  
in an oven. The old dream, the dream about bread.

Mestia, Georgia

Janine Erika Go



## **Bought, never used.**

*Weston Smith*

In the dark of the spice cabinet  
sits a plastic bottle  
filled with oregano  
only seen when others are moved  
yet never touched  
by hungry fingertips  
or grasped ravenously  
by someone who loves ~~me~~ herbs  
because maybe earth itself  
never wanted ~~me~~ it  
to do anything but count  
days passed in the dark  
an entire existence made of  
wondering why ~~it~~ I was  
bought, never used.



## Market Smoothies

*Sabbah Yasin*

picker of fruits  
discerns boisterous  
markets, lush arugula blush lychee  
soils rooted in locality.  
free sample signs: Bite into  
tropics, juice bar, and fresh waves;  
peeling pineapples, coconuts, and mangos it seems.  
He is in sync — potent sips while packing prolific punnets,

savoring salty-sweet treats, while  
seagulls streak white ribbons on his hibiscus sleeves.

An equanimous smile enters  
sudden discoveries,  
He is in sync in the market,  
devouring  
dreams...  
abreast palm trees.

# Behind the Counter

*Chloe Simmons*



## The Evening Shift

Katarina Kojic

Diane was just sick of it.

“—And another thing: twenty-five cents for a bloody plastic bag is absolutely ridiculous. I’m already a tax-paying citizen. I don’t give a *rat’s ass* about these damn turtles you’re trying to save. I’m just trying to support my family here and—”

Looking down at the conveyor belt, only two items stood: a single coconut and a bottle of bleach. *Definitely essential items for a family’s survival*, Diane thought. And the best part? The total was only seven-fifty. The bleach was on sale for only five dollars after the company went bankrupt because of some faulty products. The coconut was only one-fifty since it was, well, a *coconut*. How *dare* Diane charge this middle-aged man for a twenty-five-cent plastic bag that he didn’t even need? God gave mankind two hands for a reason. Then again, He also gave mankind a brain, except this prick, seeing as he was wearing sunglasses at this hour.

“You know what? I want to speak to your *manager!*”

*Screw this*, Diane thought. “Here you go, sir.” She threw the bag without charge onto the conveyor belt, pressing the button to move the man’s stuff away from her. If he wanted a free bag, he was going to have to pay it back in manual labour. She just wanted him to get the hell out.

The register’s monitor read 8:45 PM. The supermarket had closed fifteen minutes ago, there were still two customers in line, and Diane was absolutely sick of being here. To make matters worse, the only thing waiting at home for Diane was an unfinished two-thousand-word essay due tomorrow on an enlightened despot in eighteenth-century Russia. *How exciting*. She couldn’t tell if the man in sunglasses was giving her a dirty look as he bagged his items. *Good riddance*.

“Next, please!”

A young woman walked up, in a long blue dress with white polka dots. She planted her items on the conveyor belt, her shoulders weighed down by fatigue.

“Hello Diane, how are you?”

Mrs. Walker was a regular customer, coming in weekly with her seven-year-old son. It was always a pleasure to see them, as they were some of the only kind customers Diane had seen in her three years of employment.

“I’m okay, Mrs. Walker. How are you doing this evening?”

“Ah, I’m just doing my best, you know. Sullivan is still in the hospital and the doctors say his liver doesn’t look too good.”

Diane didn’t know what to say to that. She didn’t like Sully too much. He had only ever come into the shop a few times, always smelling of beer and sweat. Once she noticed that his knuckles were bruised. He caught her staring while she cashed out his lotto tickets. *The hell are you looking at?* he had asked. *Nothing*, she replied.

Everyone in town knew that Sully had been sick for a few months now. Rumours from the hospital revealed that apparently the doctors hadn’t expected him to make it this long; his liver should have failed already. Somehow it kept working—but barely. *It shouldn’t be too long*, Mrs. Walker had told Diane a month ago. *He’s too low on the transplant list for anything good*.

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Walker.” There was nothing else to say.

Mrs. Walker’s eyes looked distant, seemingly unaware of Diane’s pity. It was only now that Diane noticed how old Mrs. Walker looked: her eyes wrinkled, her frown lines more pronounced. Her dyed blonde hair was starting to look dull, the grey roots already showing. Her eyebags were purple from stress and sleepless nights at the hospital. Diane learned about the different shades of colours that could paint an eye through Mrs. Walker. A dark purple from insomnia. A faint bluish-grey from age. Bright red from crying. Sometimes they were a deep violet and blue with pale concealer that failed to cover—

“MOM! MOM!”

A small boy appeared from the aisle, his brown hair messy as he ran towards the two ladies, an excited gleam in his eyes. He wore a stained Celtics jersey and his fingers gripped a bright red box with a cartoon of a leprechaun on it.

Mrs. Walker snapped out of her stupor. “No Todd, not today.”

Todd was out of breath. “But... Aunt Kelly... gave me... some money... for my birthday—”

“We need it for Daddy’s surgery, don’t we, Todd? Imagine if you were sick. Daddy would do everything in his power to help you, so you have to do the same.”

Diane doubted that. Last February, Mr. Walker had come to the store with Todd for a couple of beers. Todd had looked fine, his jersey clean and his hair combed. Yet something seemed off. It was the same look that plagued him now, his sudden burst of energy dropping. An anchor must be weighing on his heart, dragging him down.

Down

And down.

A few hours later, Mrs. Walker had stopped by herself to buy some pears and concealer.

The memory vanished as the sound of Todd’s voice brought Diane back. “But I only need one more card and then my set is complete! I just need Bill Russell and then I won’t buy anymore—”

“ENOUGH! You got the same damn cards the last four times we bought the cereal. And those four boxes of cereal are still sitting on the cabinet gathering dust, *uneaten*. No more wasting money. We have to save up for Daddy’s surgery.”

Todd seemed to make himself smaller.

Mrs. Walker’s eyes softened. The damage was already done—no going back now.

“I’m sorry Diane, how much?”

“Fifteen dollars, Mrs. Walker.”

She took out her wallet, scrounging up her change. Diane couldn’t help but notice that the wallet was pretty empty.

“I’m sorry Diane, I forgot. I already have some eggs at home! I only need the milk and bread.” She pulled out a ten-dollar bill.

“No worries, Mrs. Walker. I’ll just put the eggs back after my shift.”

Diane started cashing her out. There was still one man left in the line behind them. Now the store was practically empty, with the security guard having clocked out at 8. *I just need to get home and finish that essay.*

“Oh I’m sorry, it’s twenty-five-cents a bag, right? I need one, please.”

“Free of charge.”

“Pardon me?”

“Free of charge, Mrs. Walker. I doubt that one bag will kill a turtle.”  
*What a dry joke, Diane.*

Mrs. Walker cleared her throat. “Thank you, Diane. Todd, we best be on our way now.” She gave Diane a small nod and Todd ignored her completely. At this point, Diane just felt drained. *One more customer to go.*

“Hello, sir, I can help you next.”

The guy looked nervous. He put a single pack of gum on the conveyor belt. Really? *This guy had to come to the store this late just for a pack of gum?*

“Okay sir, so your total will be two dollars—”

“PUT YOUR HANDS UP!”

Diane stepped back, her hands raised. The man pointed a sharp object at her.

“OPEN UP THE REGISTER AND NO ONE GETS HURT.”

Without a second to waste, Diane dutifully opened the register, accidentally knocking down the carton of eggs she had left on her counter. *Screw this. I’m not about to get killed over this stupid job.* Diane stepped back as the man went behind the counter, shoving bills in some plastic produce bag. He rested the sharp object on the counter, the blade looking threatening—wait.

“Sir, is that a butter knife?”

“JUST STEP BACK AND NO ONE GETS HURT. JUST STEP BACK—”

Diane stared at the yolky mess everywhere. It was on the counter, dripping on the floor.

Drip.  
Drip.  
Drip.

*I'm sick of this shit. I'm SICK of this.*

“Take all the money, sir. I have an essay to finish.”

The man looked confused as she walked away. Before she made it to the door, she made sure to throw her store vest behind her. The robber could have that too, if he pleased.

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Diane didn't know what happened after that; she never came back. She didn't end up finishing that essay either.





## **Contributors**

### **Alyssa Donnelly**

*She/her - New College - Year 4*

Alyssa Donnelly never knows what to say, but sometimes she figures it out in writing.

### **Audrey Lai**

*She/her - Trinity College - Year 1*

Audrey Lai is a first-year student at the University of Toronto studying English. She is an associate editor for The Trinity Review, an editor for LOAD, and a writer for The Strand. In her free time, she enjoys watching sitcoms, overanalyzing Taylor Swift lyrics, and trying not to trip in platform shoes.

### **Allison Zhao**

*She/her - Victoria College - Year 4*

Allison Zhao's work has been featured in the UC Review, the Trinity Review, Mnerva, and Acta Victoriana. She has a newfound interest in collecting poetry chapbooks and recently has been thinking a lot about goodbyes.

### **Christina Dinh**

*She/her - Innis College - Year 2*

Christina is an illustrator who struggles with the mortifying ordeal of being known.

### **Cherry Gallacher**

*She/her - Arts & Science - Year 3*

Cherry is a third year exchange student from Edinburgh, studying cognitive science, who enjoys writing and playing instruments.

### **Chloe Simmons**

*She/her - University College - Year 1*

Chloe is a fan of art markets and berets. She has an orange cat named Midnight and likes to go on long 4am walks through Queen's Park.

## **Devarya Singhania**

*He/him - Woodsworth College - Year 1*

Devarya is a first-year aiming to specialise in English Literature. He absolutely adores (to an extent he can almost physically breathe them) the poems of Keats, Poe and Owen, inclining towards Romantic and Post-War Poetry for their imagery. He has been immensely involved with creative writing for over a decade now, having published five poetry collections (yet), and written for online magazines. While poetry blankets the majority of his headspace, his time is best spent listening to Taylor Swift (especially Reputation), rewatching The Big Bang Theory/Brooklyn 99 or talking for short spans of two hours over the orange trees and purple skies he crossed, with anyone in a five-foot radius :)

## **Fizza Qasim**

*She/her - University College - Year 3*

Fizza Qasim is a third year UC undergrad double majoring in Conservation Biology and Environmental Ethics. Fizza grew up always hearing her father dramatically recite the Urdu poems he created (known as shayari). Her father's deep appreciation for the Urdu language and poetry inspired her to try it out as well. As a child of immigrants and a hopeless romantic her poetry is centered around writing a love letter to her future partner and to her past.

## **Gillian Chapman**

*She/her - Victoria College - Year 4*

Gillian Chapman is an undergraduate student at Victoria College. She studies History and Art History, but secretly prefers writing poetry to essays. Born in Vancouver, she was raised in Tokyo, and now lives in Toronto. She is not quite sure where her home is, but she misses it.

## **Janine Erika Go**

*She/her - University College - Year 1*

Janine is from Manila, Philippines. She loves exploring the city of Toronto in her free time.

## **Jeanne Polochansky**

*She/her - Victoria College - Year 2*

Jeanne Polochansky is a psychology specialist student and a published poet. In addition to her third year at Acta Victoriana, she is Editor-in-Chief of The Spectatorial, an undergraduate editor at Inkblot: The Undergraduate Journal of Psychology, and Digital Content Writer at the Innovation Hub. She tends to write about loss and longing inspired by her identity as a first-generation Kazakh-Canadian and studies in the arts, and is awaiting publication of her first novel.

## **Karen Kan**

*She/her - Victoria College - Year 4*

Karen is often found baking in the dark of her kitchen and adding to her growing collection of art WIPs. One of her life goals is to adopt a cat. Preferably multiple.

## **Katarina Kojic**

*She/her - University College - Year 2*

Katarina is a second-year UofT student who likes to read, crochet, and watch television, especially soccer. She gives grandparent energy and tries to romanticize her life at UofT while \*sometimes\* doing well in school work. She currently is a senior editor at the Spectatorial and is trying to branch out!

## **Katherine Zheng**

*They/them - Victoria College - Year 4*

Katherine is a writer and artist, with an interest in queer and diasporic studies that are often featured in their work. You can also find them as the Creative Director at The Spectatorial.

## **Kelly Vu**

*She/they - University College - Year 2*

Kelly Vu is currently a second-year student at UofT double majoring in archaeology and art history as well as minoring in anthropology. Some of her hobbies include shooting film on her spare time and hopes to work in the art field in the future.

## **Laiyena Imran**

*She/her - University College - Year 2*

Laiyena finds comfort in pancakes, room temperature coffee, reading, unsettling women giving in to their internal rage, and Oxford commas.

## **Maria Vidal Valdespino**

*She/her - Victoria College - Year 4*

Maria Vidal Valdespino is an avid lover of all shades of pink and green, enjoys grapefruit kombucha and is rediscovering herself.

## **Skye Anacta**

*She/her - Woodsworth College - Year 1*

Growing up in Vancouver with their Filipino family, Skye was interested in many forms of media, mainly Percy Jackson. They were an overall independent child. Thus when she graduated, she set her sights on Toronto.

## **Sofia Moniz**

*She/her - New College - Year 1*

Sofia loves reading books, thinking about books, talking about books, and writing about books.

## **Sabbah E. Yasin**

*She/her - University College - Year 4*

Sabbah E-Najuf Yasin began writing poetry to navigate her emotions and express self-reflections on topics ranging from family, love, trauma, philosophy, and spirituality. She is currently a student at the University of Toronto, studying Sociology and Philosophy, and English. In her free time, she enjoys reading self-development books, fantasy short stories and poetry, and basking in the subtle notes of coffee, walking in Highpark, exploring Toronto's music scene, and nurturing friendships.

## **Weston Smith**

*He/they - Innis College - Year 4*

Weston Smith is a student writer and poet living in Toronto. He has recently released his first book, a memoir titled *This Body of Water*. His work explores themes of loneliness, queerness, and religious trauma.

## **Creative Details**

### **Chole Simmons' Work**

Photography

The photo is of the back of a grocery store's butcher. I was inspired by how cold and clinical it was for a place otherwise filled with colors and life.

### **Christina Dinh's Work**

Collage, Pencil Crayon Drawing

Inspired by my love of Asian grocery stores and the immense amount of culture that exists there. The piece contains my receipt from Galleria, a list of ingredients to make Bibimbap, my favourite Asian snacks/ingredients, and a variety of people that I have seen in Asian supermarkets.

### **Janine Erika Go's Work**

Photography

These photos were taken in the summer of '22, right before I entered university. I travelled quite a bit with my family that summer and the photos I take are my souvenirs from each trip.

### **Karen Kan's Work**

My piece is a digital illustration, titled "a 'small' chat". The illustration depicts me with a grandmother who strikes up a 'small' conversation with me. This is set at an outdoor Chinese market, a place I would often frequent while growing up.

### **Kelly Vu's Work**

Photography

This photograph was taken on film using Kodak 200 and was taken around fall of 2021. The final title is "Fruit Stall." This photograph was taken while testing out a new camera, even though this photograph was taken in Canada around the fall season, it depicts produce that are not typically grown in the region such as papaya and cactus fruit.

## **Laiyena Imran's Work**

Photography

Tourist Shop in Karakoy displaying ethnic mosaic lamps.

## **Maria Vidal Valdespino's Work**

Digital Illustration

This digital illustration draws upon the nostalgic feelings of wandering in the mercados of Mexico City and reflecting on the generational struggles of womanhood and migration as a first-generation immigrant in Canada. I used Procreate to draw this piece.

## **Skye Anacta's Work**

Digital Illustration

This piece was done digitally through the program, Procreate. The work reflects the grocery trips the artist went on with her dad, in which she witnesses his weird buying habits. The supermarket can be loud and overwhelming, but these two remain silent.





