

## Across Time

by Andrea Balingit

1 second ago I met you. I passed by the café I have always visited since it was built, the café that saw the happy days, the sad days, the days I reminisced of the past, of *us*. The days when I tried to prepare myself should I ever meet you again.

2 hours ago, I never thought I would pass by the café and see you sitting alone on a table behind the window, sipping from a steaming mug.

3 days ago, I tried to prepare myself for the day when I would meet you again. I prepared my lines, the sheepish smile I would show you, the poised laugh I would give if you had said something funny even though it wasn't.

But it all went away when I saw your face. You didn't see me; I was frozen in my spot outside the window. I realized nothing would ever prepare me in seeing you again.

4 weeks ago, I sat alone at that same café table, sipping my cold latte as I wondered when you would appear, when we would finally meet. I had taken note of your appearances and the date of your birth over the years and noticed we always met in your 24<sup>th</sup> year. We should have met a year ago, but I knew not to force myself into your narrative.

5 months ago, my heart yearned for you. I could no longer wait and searched for you. I saw you enter a mall with your friends. There was such a joy in your face that I thought I was the only one who could uncover it.

My heart bloomed with happiness and pain. I wanted to be in your arms; I wanted to be part of your happiness too. I tried to approach you, but when I got closer to you, I couldn't breathe. I couldn't say anything. The pain seemed to have been magnified.

Until you walked away and lengthened the distance between us.



6 years ago, I dreamed of us lying under the stars. We were a tangle of sweat, skin, and sheets. Your voice brushed against the tangle of my dark hair, “I love you.” Your voice that I had not heard for years, that echoed every part of me, every waking hour, as clear as the first moment I met you. *I love you, I love you, I love you.* The voice that would make everything fade away, a spell that lifted me from misery.

I woke up crying.

7 decades ago, we stood in front of our newly built café. You stood behind me, your arms snaked around my waist as you snuggled your chin on my neck. “This café will forever prove our love. I may forget but this café will prove that my love for you will forever blossom across time. No matter what happens.”

8 hundred years ago, you were a prince, and I was a commoner. We met at a masked ball the kingdom had thrown. In your pristine white suit adorned with medallions, I recognized your blonde hair and sweet smile beneath your pearl mask that covered half of your face.

We danced across the ballroom for hours. You never took another woman’s hand but mine. You never left my side, a nameless woman who only had a faded white dress and a mask made of sticks and flowers.

And, when you took off your mask, I fell in love all over again.

9,000 years ago, you found me wandering in a forest. You were a king who kindly gave me shelter. You were a king who loved me, even though I told you you shouldn’t.

I was a princess who loved a human king even though it was forbidden.

100,000 years ago, in earth time, I was born as a princess of a nearby planet that wielded magic and was more advanced than Earth. In my studies, I happened to read about a new planet that started to show signs of life and I became fascinated.



My fascination led me to break my own kingdom's law and travel to Earth using forbidden magic. I knew death would be the answer when I came back; I chose to hide on Earth instead. I learned to suppress my magic and live as a human. I was not far from humans; the only difference was I did not belong on Earth.

11 years we lived in peace: I as your concubine, you as the king. You loved me more than anything else. And I cared for nothing but you.

I was content with my life. It was filled with happiness and bliss, and I thought it would be like that until I died.

But my brothers found me—found *us*. And cursed us for eternity for a foolish mistake—that I will never regret—I had made in my youth.

I, who would live forever with youth and beauty, and you, who would live a short life every time you were reincarnated. We would meet again, I with all our memories and pain, and you in a clean slate. We would repeat our love, our promises, and the heartbreak when you die.

12 seconds had passed in the present time. You gazed back at me from the window.

You have been reincarnated three times since then, and I have carried pain in my heart for thousands of years. But the smile on your face always wiped that away. Your love for me always made me forget everything else but the present.

And I realized I would do it all over again as long as I can still have you, even for a small amount of time.

