

A photograph of a reindeer in a snowy forest. The reindeer is in the center, facing left, with its head slightly lowered. It has dark brown fur and small, pointed antlers. The background is a dense forest of snow-covered trees and branches. Snow is falling all around the reindeer, creating a soft, white mist. The overall tone is cold and serene.

FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE
VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 4
WINTER 2024

Table of Contents

SHORT STORY

<i>Senescent Winters</i>	7	Don Noel
<i>Meeting of Waters</i>	29	William Cass
<i>Kiki Says</i>	42	Zach Murphy
<i>'Tis The Damn Season</i>	66	Annie Earnshaw
<i>Not Good with Names</i>	93	Paul Lewellan

CREATIVE NONFICTION

<i>after he says, "I love you"</i>	36	Anesce Dremen
------------------------------------	----	---------------

POETRY

<i>Gardenia in Winter</i>	15	Philip Lisi
<i>Moonlight on Snow</i>	18	Maureen Schirack
<i>Ethereal Winter Wood</i>	22	Edward Roth
<i>Re- thinking Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight</i>	27	Sarah Das Gupta
<i>Good morning'</i>	33	DS Maolalai
<i>Grandiosity</i>	41	Michael John Bohane
<i>In Take</i>	51	MT Angel
<i>From Frost to Warmth</i>	55	Eldora Betsy Lyngdoh
<i>No One</i>	57	Craig Kirchner
<i>New Years</i>	59	DS Maolalai
<i>Day Dreams</i>	61	LaVern Spencer McCarthy
<i>Dark Side</i>	75	Loren Dell
<i>You called me Mama</i>	79	Martha Ellen Johnson
<i>Porphyria by the Fire</i>	80	Frank William Finney
<i>Middle of Nowhere</i>	82	Rick K. Reut
<i>After the Wind</i>	89	Allan Lake

ILLUSTRATION

	Eric	12	Marshall Gillchrist
	<i>Freezing Barbed Wire 2</i>	19	Ondřej Vavrečka
	<i>Freezing Barbed Wire 1</i>	20	Ondřej Vavrečka
	<i>Fantasia Winter Frost II</i>	21	Lois Bender
	<i>Double Blind</i>	35	Amanda Althoff
	<i>Fern Forest Blue Moon Frost</i>	38	Lois Bender
	<i>Secret Room</i>	43	Alexandra Büssing
	<i>Wintern</i>	47	Darija Stipanec
	<i>Distant but Cosy home in midnight frost</i>	50	Dr. Meeta Sinha
	<i>Untitled</i>	63	Nasta Martyn
	<i>Untitled</i>	64	Nasta Martyn
	<i>Frozen 1</i>	73	Amb. Dr. (HC) Sonjaye Maurya
	<i>White Tesla</i>	82	Alexandra Buessing
	<i>Blinks of the soul I</i>	86	Darija Stipanec

PHOTOGRAPHY

	Cover - Timeless	0	Amanda Althoff
	<i>Winter Photo 2</i>	5	Louis Faber
	<i>Whispers of Winter Among Silent Tree</i>	6	Anastassiya Neznanova
	<i>Bird Nest</i>	9	Connie Helena
	<i>Barred Owl</i>	10	Laura Rodley
	<i>Frosty Branches on January 2nd</i>	11	Kasper Bergholt
	<i>Frost</i>	13	Joe Farina
	<i>Bare and Frozen</i>	16	Katharine Weinmann
	<i>Neighbors</i>	24	Clarissa Cervantes
	<i>Hudson River Ice</i>	25	Molly Heron
	<i>Hudson Snow</i>	26	Molly Heron
	<i>Turtle Pond Ice</i>	28	Molly Heron
	<i>Winter Photo 5</i>	31	Louis Faber
	<i>Winter Photo 1</i>	33	Louis Faber
	<i>Peach Sunset</i>	34	Sara Caporaletti
	<i>Double Blind</i>	35	Amanda Althoff
	<i>Epitome</i>	39	Katharine Weinmann
	<i>Finnish Night</i>	40	Giulio R.M. Maffii
	<i>Snow Selfie</i>	42	Connie Helena
	<i>Winter's Shimmer</i>	44	Katharine Weinmann
	<i>Snowy Sunset</i>	45	Anastassiya Neznanova
	<i>Tableaux Automatique: Leave Alighton</i>	48	Robert Matejcek
	<i>Tableaux Automatique: Cold Snap</i>	49	Katharine Weinmann
	<i>Frigid Blur</i>	52	Katharine Weinmann
	<i>A cold walk at the Helsinki seaside</i>	53	Riitta Oittinen
	<i>Messenger</i>	55	Amanda Althoff
	<i>Tableaux Automatique: Ice</i>	58	Robert Matejcek
	<i>Bokeh</i>	60	Jonathan Brooks
	<i>Red Winter with Flying Dotg</i>	62	Mark Blickley
	<i>Christmas Past</i>	65	Jonathan Brooks
	<i>Dudo Snow</i>	68	Giulio R.M. Maffii
	<i>Overripe</i>	69	Melea Chew Roberts
	<i>Winter is Dead!</i>	70	Dr. Helge H. Paulsen
	<i>Winter Forest Footsteps</i>	74	Rod Raglin
	<i>Lit is the Path Well Travelled</i>	75	Melea Chew Roberts
	<i>Cold Isolation</i>	77	Giulio R.M. Maffii
	<i>where is the train</i>	78	Giulio R.M. Maffii
	<i>In search of Water</i>	84	Vyacheslav Kabanov
	<i>Tranquil Elegance of Winter</i>	87	Amanda Althoff
	<i>Veil of Winter Mount Yotei's Silent Embrace</i>	88	Amanda Althoff
	<i>Flames of Ice</i>	91	Laura Rodley
	<i>Cascades</i>	95	Amanda Althoff
	<i>Still Life</i>	96	Amanda Althoff

EDITORIAL STAFF

Melanie Han
Prince Quamina
Veronica Valerakis
Colleen Halupa
Ana Surguladze

WANT TO JOIN THE TEAM?

Please visit our website for more information. florafiction.com/contribute

INTERESTED IN SUBMITTING?

Flash fiction, poetry, illustration, and review submissions for website content are accepted on a rolling basis.
Entries for the seasonal Literary Magazine are done quarterly. Please visit florafiction.com/submit

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Winter came hard this year. It did not ask. It took. The kind of cold that gnaws. That settles in the marrow and stays. The trees are bare and the wind has no softness. All that is left is what can endure. And that is something we understand.

This is the season where silence speaks loudest. The sun becomes distant. The moon is nearer, sharper. Frost writes its name across the windowpanes and does not bother to ask permission. At midnight, the world holds its breath.

Midnight Frost is not warm. It does not glow. It does not beg. It waits in the dark for the ones who can see it, the ones who know there is beauty in what bites.

This issue is for the quiet ones, the ones who feel everything and say little. For the dreamers who find ghost stories in icicles and love letters in the wind. For artists who can paint with cold light and poets who can make silence sing.

We asked for truth, and you gave us winter. Brutal, beautiful, and still.

This marks the end of Volume 5. Five volumes. Five years. Each one has been a kind of pilgrimage. Through seasons and shadows, through doubt and delight. We have built something here, slow and real. Word by word. Page by page.

Thank you for walking with us. Readers. Writers. Makers of light. You are the fire we gather around, even now. Especially now.

Next year waits. Quiet. Blank. Full of possibility. We will meet it together with new stories, new dreams, and new pages to turn. The frost has come. Let it in.

xoxo
Flora Ashe



"Winter Photo 2" By: Louis Faber



“Whispers of Winter Among Silent Tree “
By: Anastasiya Neznanova

Senescent Winters

BY: DON NOEL

It snowed for a few hours last night, barely enough fluff to make a snowball. It's been like that all season; snow squalls instead of snowstorms. Connecticut has had less than half its normal snowfall so far this season.

It has been nonetheless the cruelest winter in my long memory: Nights buried in stygian blackness, cold more penetrating, winds more biting.

That is counter to everything we know about climate change; it is the product of advancing years. We who are octogenarians and nonagenarians have different perceptions. As we near midnight, so to speak, winters grow harder to bear.

When my wife and I first settled down to raise a family, we had a wee house out in the country, on the edge of a woodland with a pond in back. I invested in a small tractor, a trailer cart and a chainsaw, and laid in a prodigious stack of firewood that kept our living room toasty enough that our one-year-old was comfy without bulky sweaters.

I did my fuel-gathering clad only in a wife-knit sweater and wool cap, along with a Levi's jacket that I often laid aside as I warmed to my work. (Warming to one's work is a phenomenon of youth to middle age; there comes a time beyond the mid-century mark when hard outdoor work produces more shortness of breath than warmth.)

I might have felt virtuous about my fuel-gathering, but our neighbor down the road put me to shame: Seventy years old, he managed an old-fashioned two-man saw all by himself, and brought in more firewood than I did—and brought it home in a wheelbarrow, not a tractor-drawn cart.

In our second winter out there, the pond froze solid. By solid I mean more than six inches thick; I used the chainsaw to be sure we were safe. I have a photograph of the whole family standing on the ice in mid-pond, serenely confident, no one stomping feet to warm them. Nowadays, I would gladly stomp my feet to warm them when I walk out to the parking area, but hesitate, lest I slip on a few wispy slivers of melting ice. Instead, I retreat indoors and exchange boots for wool slipper socks. We got into skiing, too, in those early years, mostly cross-country treks through the back woods and meadows. Cross-country skiing, like cutting down forest trees, makes bulky outerwear not merely unnecessary but uncomfortable. We tried downhill skiing, renting the equipment at a nearby commercial ski slope, but that was an expense. It also called for down parkas, both to keep us warm going up the rope tow and to minimize bruises when we fell on the way down.

Rope tows? Today's elegant aerial seats with vista views hadn't been invented yet. You grabbed the rope with both hands in an awkward arms-spread posture not unlike crucifixion, and endured a bumpy tow up the hill. There were then, within a reasonable drive, only two slopes with such—forgive the pun—pedestrian equipment; they were open to skiing in the days and sometimes weeks after heavy snowfalls. Nowadays, there are almost a dozen ski resorts in Connecticut, all equipped with gigantic snow guns that can coat the slopes despite temperatures well above freezing. On late-fall or early-spring days, TV weathermen love showing video of snow being blasted into the air and floating down.

And snow angels! Flop down on your back in a half-foot of snow, spread your arms and fan them up and down. Hard to do without getting a little snow down your neck or up your cuffs, but I never hesitated to get down and show my three-year-old daughter how to do it. I wouldn't try it today, partly because I shiver just thinking about snow down my neck, but also because if I get down in the snow I may need more than a rope tow—maybe a derrick—to get me back up.

What I couldn't do for my little daughter was re-create the sledding in my junior high days. In a tag sale, my Dad found a pair of sled runners ten feet long, which we framed with galvanized pipe to make a massive sled that could hold a half-dozen or more of us. The girls were happily—and safely, given bulky outdoor wear—squeezed between boys. Our house was the last one near the foot of a long road up Lookout Hill. Public Works always plowed the unpopulated length of the road with a raised blade, packing the snow into a hard, slick surface.

That sled was a ton to drag up Lookout Hill, but it was well worth the effort: we rocketed down, our girlfriends clutching us and screaming their delight. The plowed pavement from our house on down slowed the sled somewhat, but it still would have slid through a busier road at the foot had it not been for the ashes conveniently produced by coal-burning furnaces in our homes. We spread the ashes generously in the final yards, and managed at times to strike a shower of sparks as the sled stopped safely short of the trafficked road.

Cold? Of course not. Winter was easier to enjoy back then.



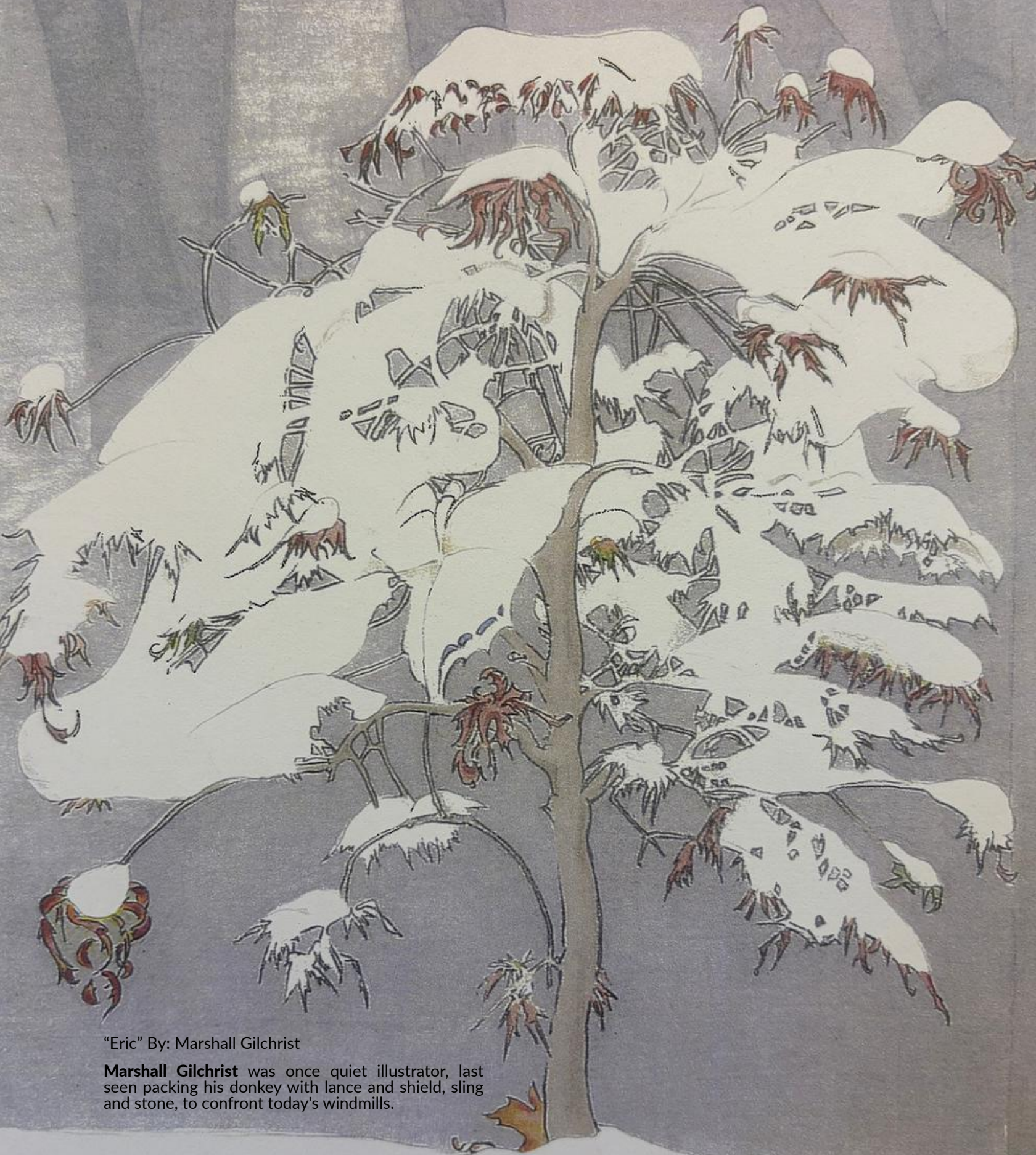


" Barred Owl" By: Laura Rodley



"Frosty Branches on January 2nd" By: Kasper Bergholt

Kasper Bergholt (b. 1978) is a Copenhagen-based photographer who explores vintage equipment, architecture, objects and fauna, with exhibitions worldwide and memberships in Scandinavian & British photographic societies. Master of Arts from University of Copenhagen.



"Eric" By: Marshall Gilchrist

Marshall Gilchrist was once quiet illustrator, last seen packing his donkey with lance and shield, sling and stone, to confront today's windmills.

"Frost" By: Joe Farina



Joseph A Farina is a retired lawyer and award winning poet, and a pushcart nominee and sometime photographer. He has three books of poetry published, *The Cancer Chronicles*, *The Ghosts of Water Street* and *The beach, the street and everything in between*.



Gardenia in Winter

BY: PHILIP LISI

I took the gardenia out to winter in the garage,
against the wall we share with our neighbors.
The plant may stand a chance against the cold.
This year, I have a grow light for it—full-spectrum light,
even if it is not the life-giving rays of the real sun.

My hands reach around the blue planter
as I lower the pot as carefully as I can.
I see the spot of oil on the asphalt floor,
and I see my father there, too.

Half inside, half outside
his dark blue 1965 Volkswagen Beetle,
his slender leg could be crushed
if my mother pushes hard against the car door
or tries to pull him all the way out of it.
She could tear him out of the car.
She seems stronger than he is,
despite how slight she was then.

I can still hear them—
she is begging him not to go to Ventnor,
voice at full volume—
*All that way to that shitty beach,
with those cranky old people.
Don't even bother coming back
if you leave me here, don't even bother!*

As I carry the gardenia from the screen porch,
I can still see her at the side door of the garage—
she is lunging toward him and does not see me.
*Please Ma, just let Daddy go.
He'll be back by Sunday night.*
She turns to look at me, and her eyes are black,
and when she turns around, he slams the door,
whips his slim body into the front seat
and backs out of the garage.

Crying, my mother walks past me to go upstairs
to her room, closes the door.
We will not be eating supper tonight.
I am not sure where my sister is—
somewhere in the house, holding one of the cats
and crouched down in the back the part of her closet
just as she always does when she hears them fighting.

The gardenia might not live through the winter.
The leaves are already turning yellow and dropping,
but maybe there is a better chance for it out here.

Philip Lisi lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he teaches English by day and writes poetry and flash fiction by night alongside the ghost of his cantankerous Wichien Maat cat, Sela.

"Bare and Frozen " By: Katharine Weinmann





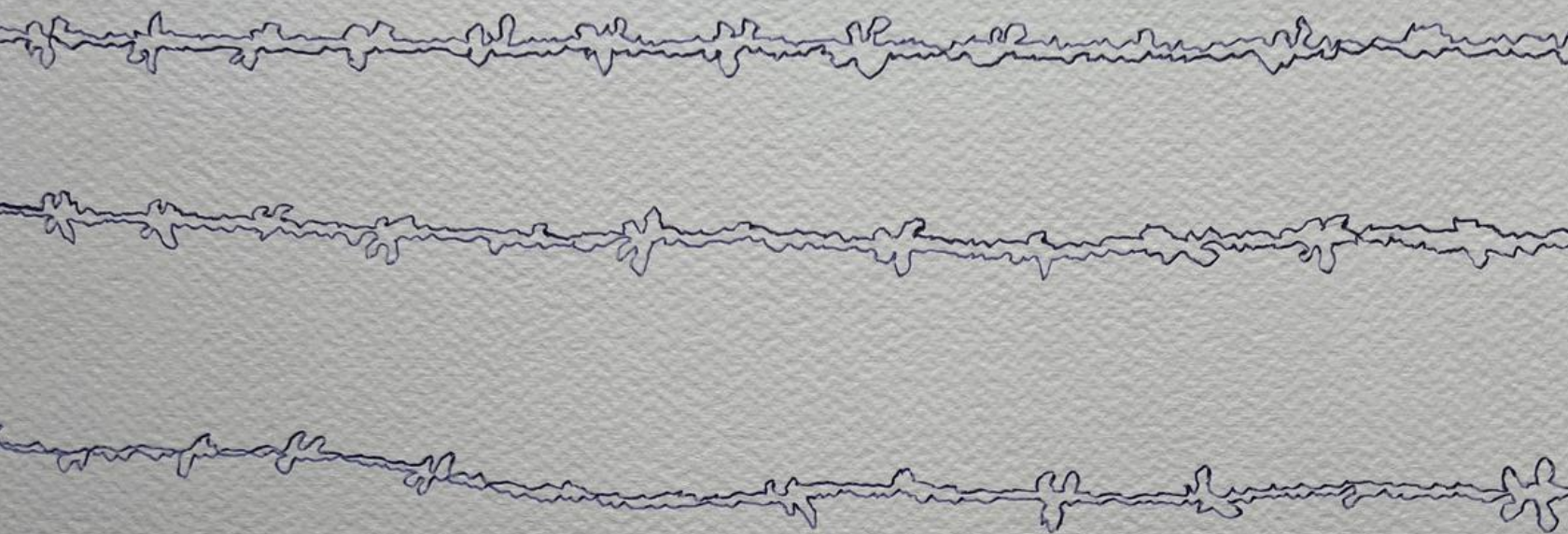
"Snow Flowers" By: Connie Helena

Moonlight on Snow

BY: MAUREEN SCHIRACK

In the darkness of my room, I slip off the covers as an exhale of brilliance pulls me to the window. A waxing gibbous moon illuminates the ground in celebration of the night pageant that unfolds below. Moon glint reflects off snow highlighting leafless trees whose knitted branches pose in prayer honoring this tilt of the earth. Fruitless apple trees stretch their lightened branches upward. Empty winterberry bushes ruffle in the slight breeze. Moonlight caught in the folds of winter's cloak reflects the wild spirit of the night sky. Slim shadows and silhouettes of fenceposts on this canvas of silver splendor grow taller. The moon and me and radiance witness the chilled night wrapped in white. In search of seed, a possum lumbers across the smoky-gray stones of the creek bed laced with ice. The snow a map of her excursions. I too breathe in the luminosity, inhale moonbeam's quiet song soothing the slumber of other mystical beings who hibernate beneath snow and duff. Luna, goddess of evening, tell me the secrets of your celestial force, the enchanting spirit that balances the seen and unseen. Fuel the light inside me. Empower me with your iridescence. I feel your magic as the play of light invokes a whisper, a hush. The moments of solitude settle. The vast immeasurable abyss, outrageous,, astonishing, sublime. I turn away, stepping back to the darken room realizing my life is only half the show.

Maureen Schirack is a writer from Ohio. She holds a BA in English from Kent State University and an MA in English from The University of Akron. Her poetry appears most recently Hellbender Magazine, Last Stanza Journal, and the Red Cedar Review. Maureen enjoys tending her garden, walking with her dogs Waylon and Reba, and writing poetry.



"Freezing Barbed Wire 2" By: Ondřej Vavrečka

Ondřej Vavrečka is an artist, musician, filmmaker and teacher in FAMU, Prague, Czech Republic. His practice varies from poetic interventions to complex conceptual forms dealing with actual, archival or futuristic question. His works abound with a specific sense of humour.



"Freezing barbed wire 1" By: Ondřej Vavrečka



"Fantasia Winter Frost II" By: Lois Bender

Lois Bender is a NYC artist whose work features themes of nature, garden and climate change. She approaches her work as if turning a kaleidoscope, changing colors, silhouettes and dynamic flowing energies.

Ethereal Winter Wood

BY: EDWARD ROTH

Within the wood of frozen trees and time,
All is still but lost and wandering snow,
And complaining branches, burdened with rime,
Which strain in the wind, bending to and fro.

The forest, composed of poplar and pine,
Not dead, but no longer completely alive,
Preserved. Liminal. Crystalline,
A symphony suspended 'till Spring revives.

The silence and the forest, untainted,
A glade that remains secluded-obscure,
A world with corruption, unacquainted,
And here, only here, all is pure.

This is my forest where everything shines,
Within a wood, frozen in time.

I dream again

-trivial battles and victories.

Edward Roth is on an expedited schedule to graduate high school. He enjoys writing, poetry, and making short films. Edward has gotten a few of his poems published, and is in the process of writing a novel.



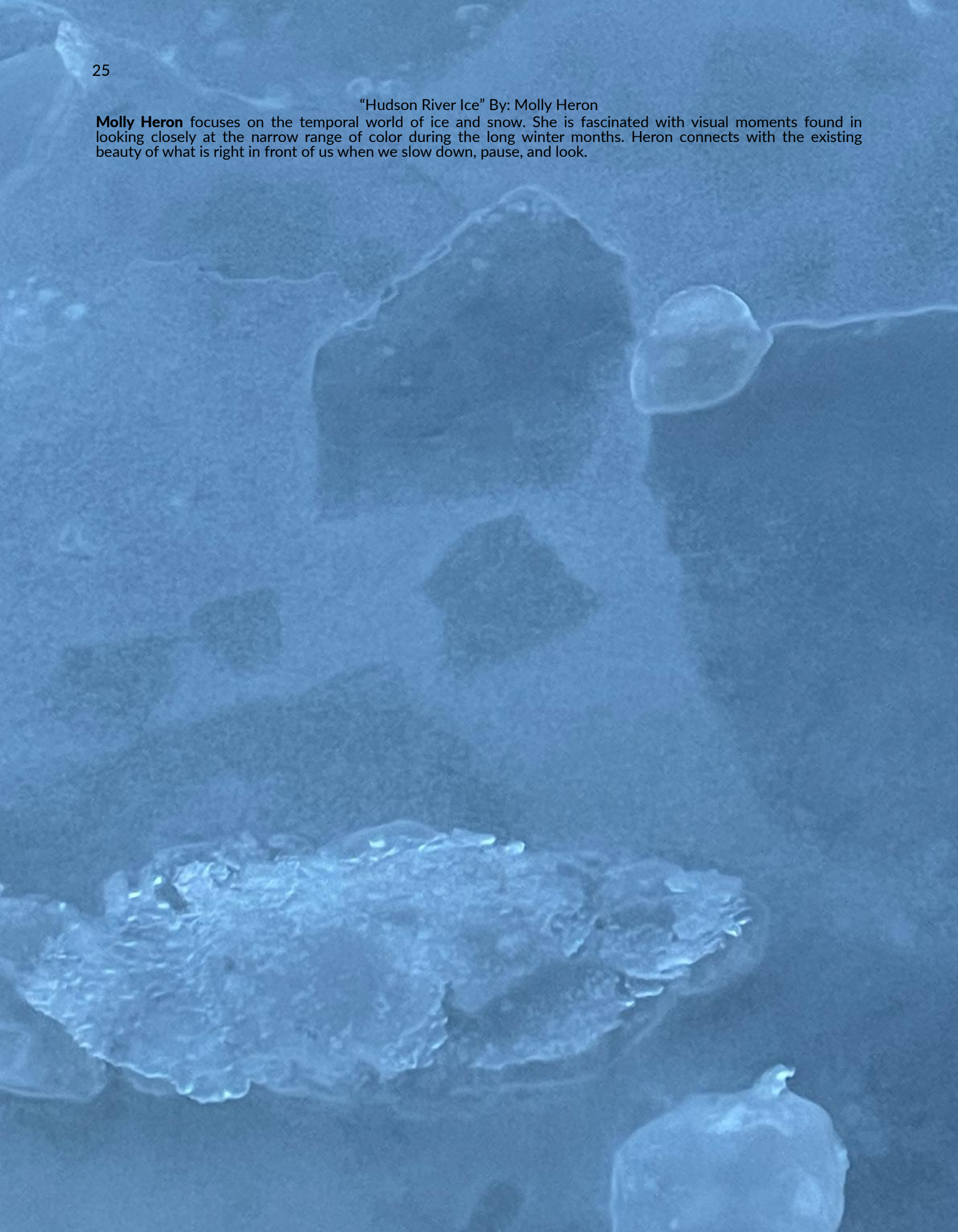
"Neighbors" By: Clarissa Cervantes

Clarissa Cervantes is a researcher photographer. Her photo gallery includes images from all over the world, where she finds inspiration to share her photographs with others through her creative lens, inviting the viewer to question the present, look closer, explore more the array of emotions, and follow the sunlight towards a brighter future.



"Hudson River Ice" By: Molly Heron

Molly Heron focuses on the temporal world of ice and snow. She is fascinated with visual moments found in looking closely at the narrow range of color during the long winter months. Heron connects with the existing beauty of what is right in front of us when we slow down, pause, and look.



"Hudson Snow" By: Molly Heron



Re- thinking Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight'

BY: SARAH DAS GUPTA

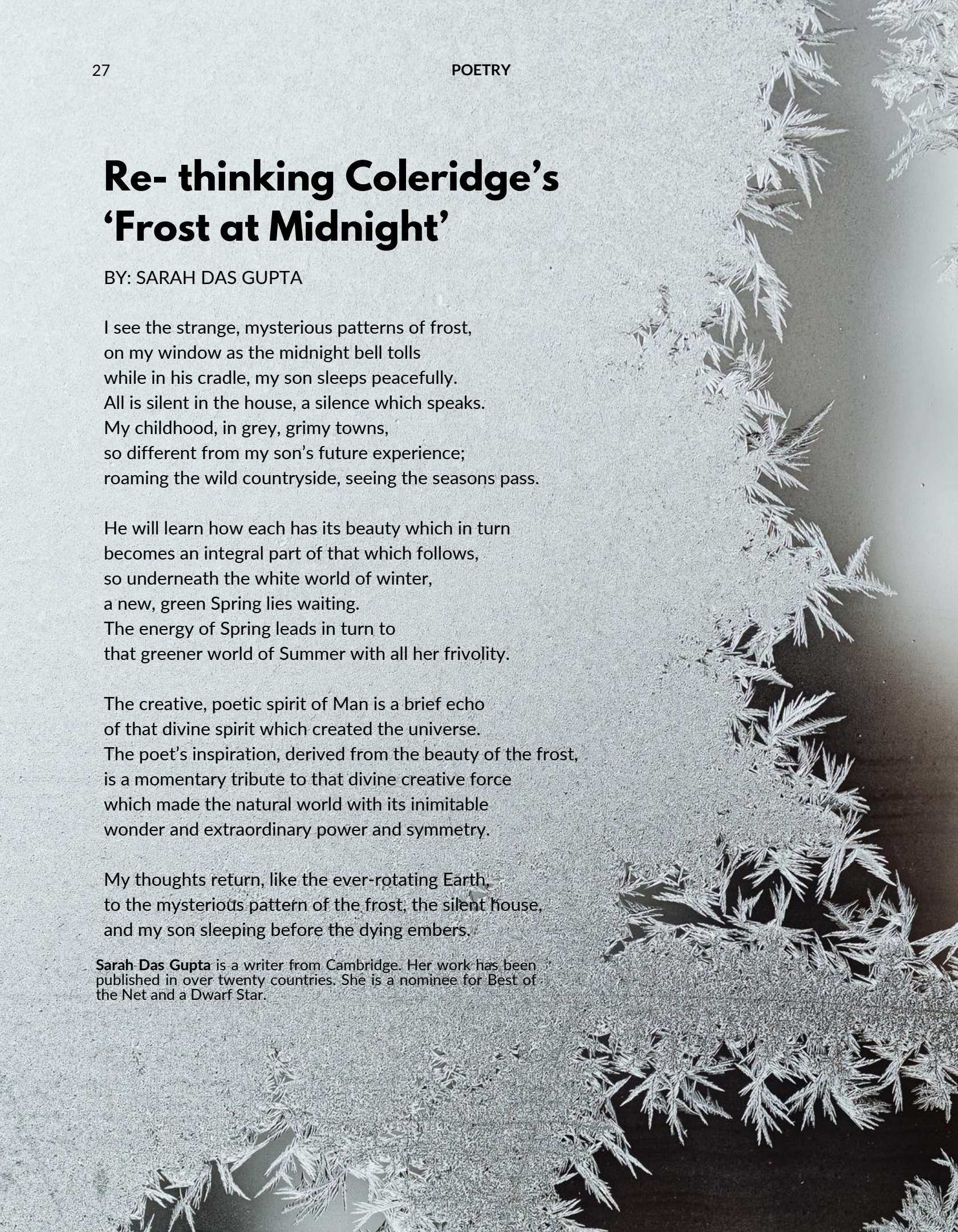
I see the strange, mysterious patterns of frost,
on my window as the midnight bell tolls
while in his cradle, my son sleeps peacefully.
All is silent in the house, a silence which speaks.
My childhood, in grey, grimy towns,
so different from my son's future experience;
roaming the wild countryside, seeing the seasons pass.

He will learn how each has its beauty which in turn
becomes an integral part of that which follows,
so underneath the white world of winter,
a new, green Spring lies waiting.
The energy of Spring leads in turn to
that greener world of Summer with all her frivolity.

The creative, poetic spirit of Man is a brief echo
of that divine spirit which created the universe.
The poet's inspiration, derived from the beauty of the frost,
is a momentary tribute to that divine creative force
which made the natural world with its inimitable
wonder and extraordinary power and symmetry.

My thoughts return, like the ever-rotating Earth,
to the mysterious pattern of the frost, the silent house,
and my son sleeping before the dying embers.

Sarah-Das Gupta is a writer from Cambridge. Her work has been published in over twenty countries. She is a nominee for Best of the Net and a Dwarf Star.





"Turtle Pond Ice" By: Molly Heron

Meeting of Waters

BY: WILLIAM CASS

It had been nine hours, mostly sleepless, since Ruth had happened upon the text string on her husband's cell phone. He'd been taking a shower; she was already in bed. They'd been waiting for a text from their son about a pending job interview, so she'd grabbed his phone from the nightstand when she heard the ping and swiped the screen. The text that appeared was from a number she didn't recognize and concluded in a string of lustful messages and photos; the latter sort included many of her husband's naked body parts.

Ruth gasped, dropped the phone back onto the nightstand, snapped off the lamp, and turned away in the sudden darkness. Her husband's off-key singing came from the shower. She squeezed her eyes shut against the sensation of falling, falling in a bottomless well.

In the morning, Ruth feigned sleep until she heard her husband finish dressing for work and his pickup truck crawl away in a blanket of new snow down the driveway. Twenty minutes later, she stood in her flannel robe and slippers gazing numbly through her reflection out the kitchen window into grey winter light while the kettle heated water on the stove. A sound like a whimper came from the garage, startling her from her stupor. She turned off the burner, hesitated, then crept into the garage. Her husband had left her car parked in its regular spot the night before after borrowing it for work; he'd found his truck's battery dead the previous morning but was late for a meeting, so she'd taken care of its replacement with AAA. Like usual, he'd arrived home late and ate the dinner she'd left warming in the oven for him at the kitchen table alone while she watched television in the living room.

A louder whimper arose from the back seat of her car. Ruth's eyebrows knit as she peeked through the rear window. A three-legged Corgi looked up at her from the floormat, its milky eyes as wide and pleading as those that had stared back at her from the kitchen window seconds before. She opened the door, and it hobbled out at her feet, licking her hand. Its body shivered against her ankles as its tail wagged beside the stump of its missing hind leg. A cacophony of confused emotions invaded her as she reached down, scooped up the dog, and carried it inside the kitchen.

The dog's whimpering and shivering continued, so she wrapped it in dish towels and set it down over the floor's heating vent. Ruth filled a bowl with water and another with a leftover chicken breast she tore apart, then set both in front of the dog. While it greedily ate and drank, she inspected the tarnished metal tag dangling from its neck.

It included the name “Daisy”, an indecipherable phone number, and an address. She collapsed in a heap next to the dog, rubbed its back, and wept.

During the next dozen minutes, Daisy emptied both bowls, laid her grizzled head on Ruth’s lap, and regarded her with those cataract-glazed eyes. Finally, Ruth wiped her face with the heel of her hand, heaved a sigh, and said, “Come on, then. Let’s get you home.”

She pulled an overcoat over her robe, grabbed her keys, wallet, and cell phone, and carried Daisy out to her car in the towels. She set her on the passenger seat, started the car to get the heater going full blast, then entered the address on Daisy’s tag into the directions app on her phone. The destination appeared to be in a neighborhood only a couple of miles away. While she drove, she found herself scratching Daisy’s head as her tail thumped the seat.

Ruth approached the address on the tag slowly, which was to a small house near the end of a gravel road bordering a short stretch of woods. She parked under a tree across from it and up a house. Sparse snow had begun to fall again in windy gusts.

Several moments passed before a woman emerged from the house’s front door clutching a loosely belted, kimono-like garment to her midsection. When she turned towards the woods and whistled, Daisy crawled over the console onto Ruth’s lap in response. It wasn’t until the woman had straightened facing the road that Ruth sucked in her breath in recognition. She’d met her at her husband’s office Christmas party several weeks before; she worked in the company’s marketing department, and Ruth and her husband had sat across from her during the dinner portion of the party. Ruth had been moved by the woman’s warm, gentle manner; she was moved for a different reason by a red rose tattoo on the exposed top portion of the woman’s right breast that she recognized from the string of cell phone photos she’d stumbled upon the night before. The woman cupped her hands to her mouth and called Daisy’s name. The towels fell away as Daisy strained, whining softly, towards the window.

An urge overcame Ruth to march up to her husband’s lover and slap her face or drive somewhere far away and leave Daisy on the side of the road to fend for herself. Instead, she watched the woman’s shoulders begin to quake, felt her own slump, and opened her door, releasing her grasp on Daisy. The dog made an ungainly attempt to run through the swirling wisps of snow across the road and up to the house but didn’t bark until reaching the front walk. At the sound, the woman’s eyes found the dog, she bent down, and welcomed Daisy’s awkward leap into her arms. She closed her eyes, relief overwhelming her face, as Daisy’s licking tongue smothered it.

Ruth gave the two of them a final glance, then clicked her door shut and drove away stifling silent sobs. She shook her head hard against the inconceivable elements that had led her to that moment. Then, not knowing where else to go, she headed back towards home.

William Cass has published over 350 short stories. A nominee for Best Small Fictions and Best of the Net, he’s also had six Pushcart nominations and won writing contests at Terrain.org and The Examined Life Journal. He’s published two short story collections with Wising Up Press and has another scheduled for by them in March.



"Winter Photo 5" By: Louis Faber

Louis Faber is a poet living in Florida with his wife and cat. His work has appeared widely in the U.S., Canada, Europe and India.



"Winter Photo 1" By: Louis Faber

Good morning

BY: DS MAOLALAI

starting my car at 7:40am.
the wipers arc up,
taking mist off the morning
like a hand on a mirror
in a bedroom ensuite. I'm relaxed, engine warming
as night shifts from the vents
and is followed by a heat
going over my fingers
like a pair of gloves left on a windowsill.

the fruit market depot is active already –
trucks pulling in and deliveries loaded
and unloaded to forklifts by unionised men
holding cigarettes and shouting instructions
which come toasted and mingled with steam.
men wearing hard hats and hi-viz yellow jackets
pull across recently laid tarmac, black and smooth
as a new leather coat. I weave in between them,
pausing and acknowledging their pauses
as they work and make way in their work.

at home my wife brews machine coffee,
feeds the dog and checks her phone
for messages. pigeons scatter up
ahead of me and cluster behind on the road,
picking at fallout from boxes tipped sideways:
apples and vegetables, pieces of cardboard
and crushed black- and blueberries,
a scent which comes in through my vent.

DS Maolalai is "a cosmopolitan poet" and "prolific, bordering on incontinent." His work has been nominated thirteen times for BOTN, ten for the Pushcart and once for the Forward Prize, and released in three collections; *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016), *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019) and *Noble Rot* (Turas Press, 2022)

"Peach Sunset" By: Sara Caporaletti

Sara Caporaletti is a visual artist working in mixed media. Caporaletti received her MFA from American University.





"Double Blind" By: Amanda Althoff

***CONTENT WARNING: SELF-HARM AND DEPICTION OF VIOLENCE FROM A SURVIVOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

after he says, “I love you”

BY: ANESCE DREMEN

After the rape, he says, “I love you,”

then boomerangs into a snore. I gawk at the stucco. Counting the dots is as futile as counting my ‘no’s. So I mull over unwritten words, the cute panda sketch he gifted me, and how I’m scheduled to open the library at 7:15 AM. I roll towards him to cuddle, but quickly retreat; his body reeks of beer. It’s the first time I’m smelling Budweiser, my father’s cologne, since I ran away.

The clock throbs 5:00 AM. I write a note informing him I have work, and he ought to drink water. I don my winter jacket to recede to my dorm where the communal shower is empty.

I turn the shower knob all the way to the left, then step head first into sputtering heat. It doesn’t provide relief. Scouring my skin with soap doesn’t scrub away the last few hours. My tender remains ache, having absorbed unlubricated thrusts. At least I successfully shielded my despair through heightened moans which quickened his release

to get the fuck off me. I’m nothing better than a scratching post for the male orgasm.

The water doesn’t burn; the campus must have a safety monitor to prevent scalding temperatures. I claw at my chest. I need hot water to not just pamper this flesh a pulsating pink, but to mar it. I look down at the angry scratch marks on my chest. I did that.

I suck in my breath.

There’s at least two hours before anyone will bother showering. Plum towel shielding my profanity, I collect pink scissors from my room then return to where steam thickens tiles. I place the scissor’s leg on my right thigh and double over with desire.

Scissors upon skin never make a sound. Cutting is not like it’s shown in films; blood isn’t that thick. Blood swells differently depending on the device. Razors offer an immediate, soprano pain and leave papercut-thin invisible scars. By the time I make seven or eight incisions, the first slit begins to bubble. Razor indentions evaporate quickly. Whereas when using scissors, I swipe my skin and seconds later, three or four droplets hover: bulging raindrops on a windshield.

Scissor wounds tingle like a long, dull yawn; their shallow gashes take weeks to heal. The pleasure of self-harm is wincing long after the blade has been cleansed: scraping skin when tugging down pants in the washroom stall, gasping softly in class as legs are crossed, and the reassurance of running a palm across bare legs, plotting the next landscape.

I pause before indenting. My boyfriend will see this. Perhaps if I shave, I can pretend to have nicked myself. I never had to be so strategic. Previously, I simply ensured they were covered by clothing. But how can I hide scars from a man who warps the atlas of my body?

I drag the blade along the hollow of faded scars and shiver in anticipation. Where? Where? Where? He's not a very detail-oriented guy. Maybe he won't notice at all.

When I used to cut every day, I often planted thirty or forty new scars. I found comfort in the growth of their branches, how both thighs glistened crimson dew. For years, cutting was the only way to silence the hateful voice within: *never good enough / everyone hates you / whore / everything you do is a mistake / you are the freak people wish would die / no one will ever love you*. The thick forest along my thighs wasn't the embrace of love I needed, but it etched away enough hatred that I grew fond of the pain. Then dependent.

How long has it been since I last cut?

Relapse musters a will to get through another minute, to survive another hour, to carve away the hateful voices, and to proceed beyond passive-aggressive interactions with patrons at the library and confident classmates who come from worthier homes.

Shouldn't have ever quit.

The blade caresses the furrow of my hip. I inhale sharply as my skin puckers. It's the first time I'm tracing a singular line over and over again. Is that how designs are carved into the smooth surface of pottery?

/

I thrust the scissors deeper into the rut of my sunken hip. *This is for letting him touch you / this is for thinking you deserve anything / this is for remaining silent after your boyfriend said, "I love you."*

/

/

Anesce Dremen is a U.S. writer and educator often found with a tea cup in hand, traveling between the U.S., China, and India. She is working on her first memoir.

ILLUSTRATION



"Fern Forest Blue Moon Frost" By: Lois Bender



"Finnish night" By: Giulio

"Finnish Night" By: Giulio R.M. Maffii

Giulio R.M. Maffii was born in Florence (Italy). He has published in many international magazines also as a visual artist. He collaborates with "Bubamara Teatro" Theatre Company.



"Dudo Snow"
By: Giulio R.M. Maffii

Grandiosity

BY: MICHAEL JOHN BOHANE

Everything around him
appeared sharper, brighter, more alive.
He took a deep breath, sprinted across the grass,
thrust himself upwards,
flew into the sky, over the trees,
through the clouds, then out again.
It was terrifying, yet at the same time intoxicating,
wondrous, magical. As he raced across the sky
he wound his body
into graceful pirouettes,
one minute lifting his body up to the heavens,
the next plunging down to the treetops
from where, at the last moment, he soared upwards again.
Suddenly he became motionless.
The air itself seemed to have stilled,
as soundless as the dead of night.
He hovered there for a while
before he plunged down
onto the electric power lines—
which was his objective all along.
The crackling of his body
stirred flocks of crows hidden in the surrounding trees.
Hundreds of them; thousands.
They swarmed around him in huge undulating waves,
calling out to him.
Just as swiftly they disappeared back into the trees.
He often has this dream.
His therapist told him
that dreaming of flying
can indicate a form of grandiosity—
a distorted superiority complex.
He found it difficult to disagree with her.

Michael John Bohane started writing poetry a few years ago after having created several full-length plays and numerous short plays, twelve of which have been staged. He enjoys writing poetry most of all, having now written more than 150 poems.



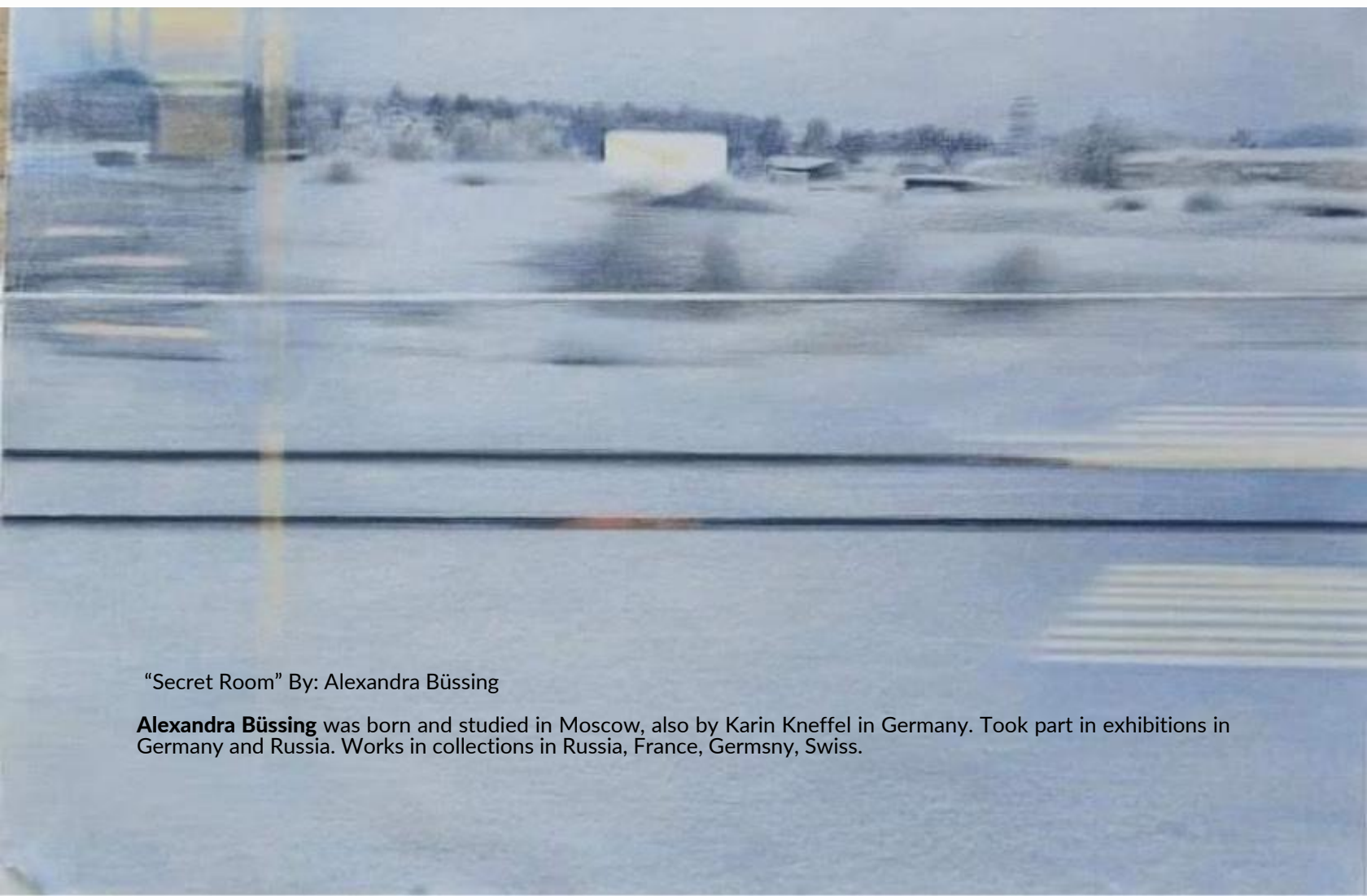
“Snow Selfie” By: Connie Helena
“Creative Type.”

Kiki Says

BY: ZACH MURPHY

Kiki says the stars are dead, but I don't believe her. We hop trains, we smoke clouds, and we steal snacks. Kiki says no one wants us, but I don't believe her. We look like icons, we make the trees laugh at our jokes, and we stitch our hearts with golden thread. Kiki says our time is running out, but I don't believe her. We let our voices echo through empty tunnels, we dance with alley cats, and we sing to the flickering streetlights. Kiki says we're sisters for life, and I believe her. We have a secret handshake, we have the same colored eyes, and we visit each other in our dreams. We are the shining stars, we are the daughters of the night sky, and tonight, we're not going back to that awful home until after curfew. After curfew.

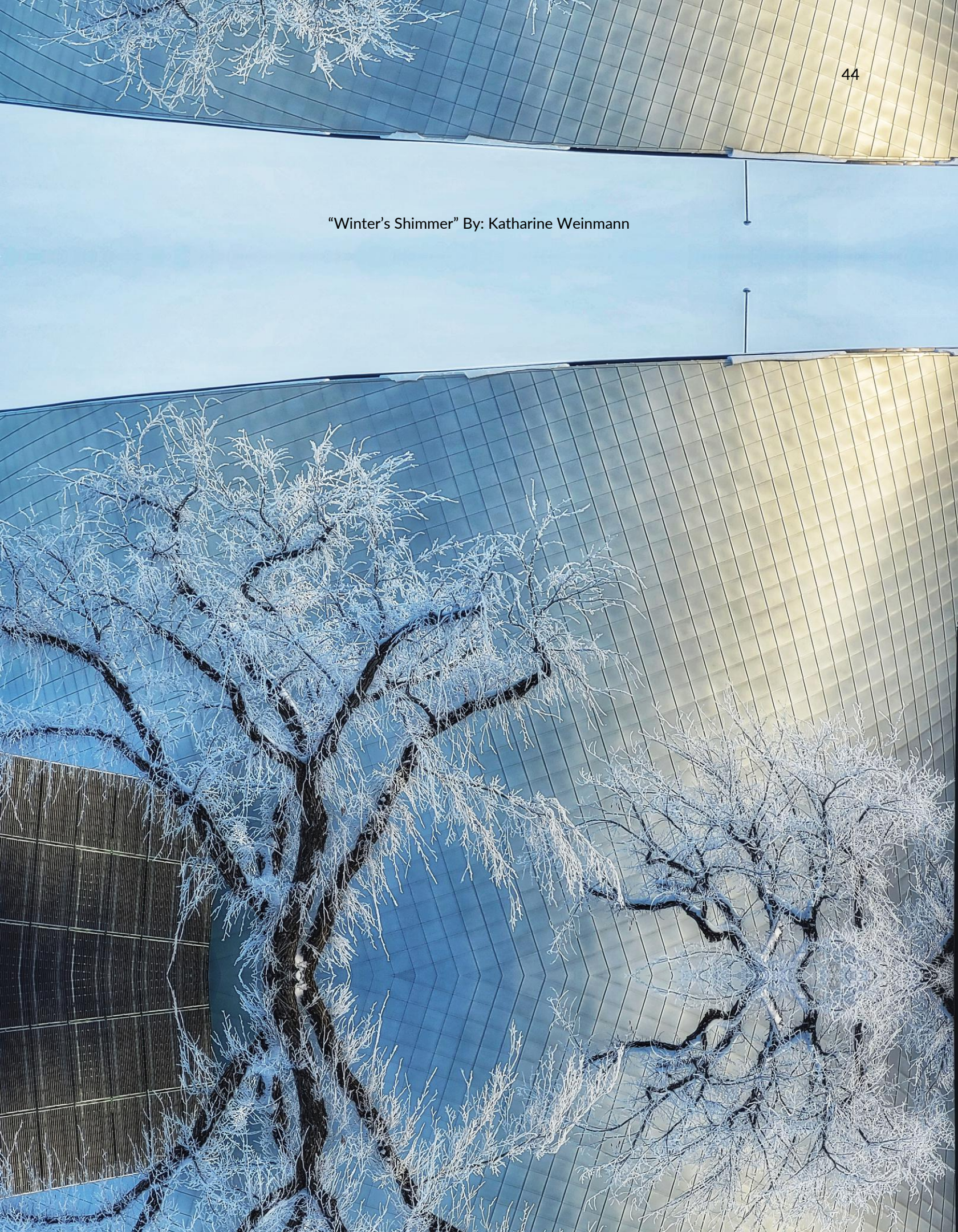
Zach Keali'i Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. He lives with his wonderful wife, Kelly, in St. Paul, Minnesota.



"Secret Room" By: Alexandra Büssing

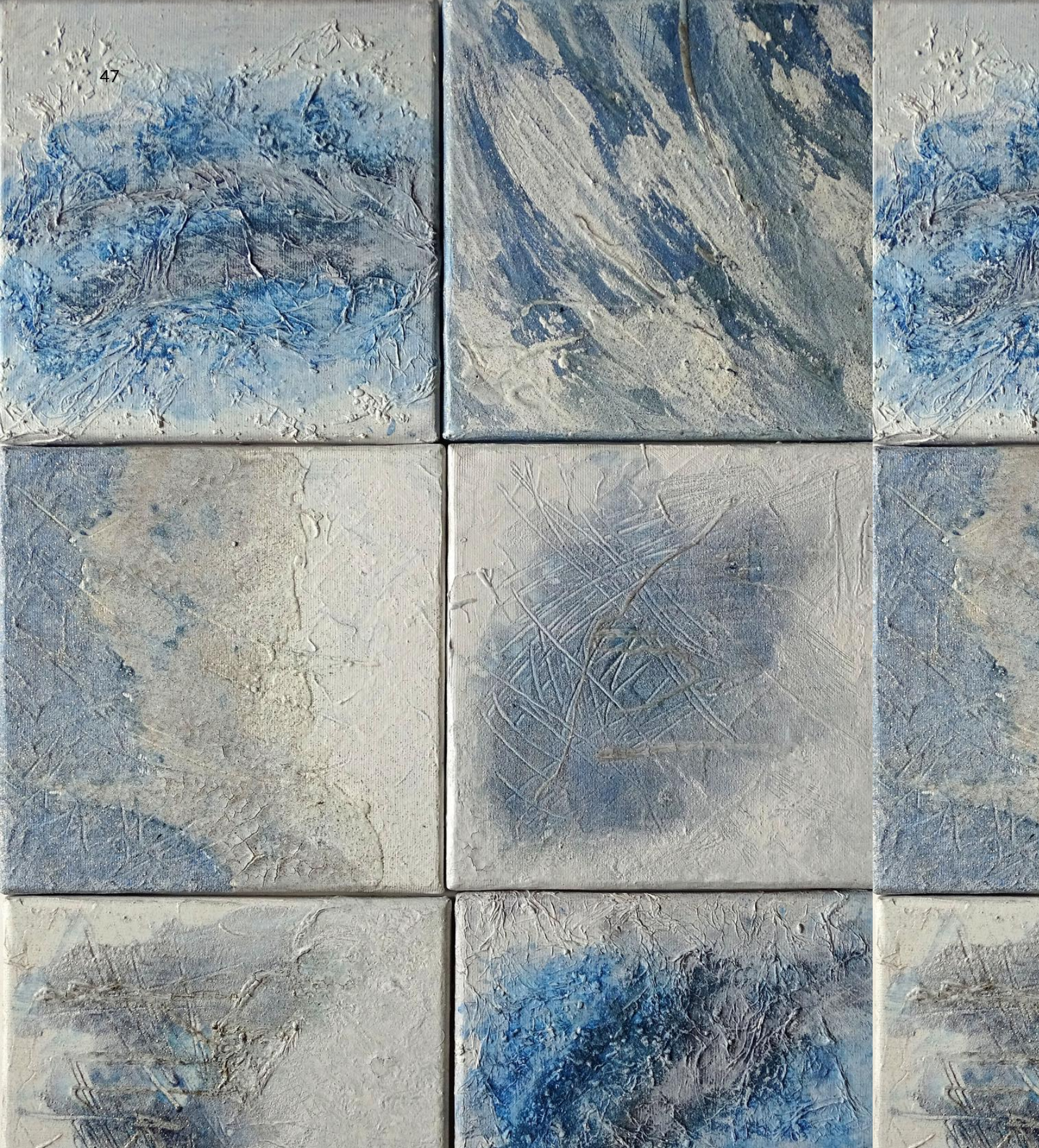
Alexandra Büssing was born and studied in Moscow, also by Karin Kneffel in Germany. Took part in exhibitions in Germany and Russia. Works in collections in Russia, France, Germany, Swiss.

"Winter's Shimmer" By: Katharine Weinmann









"Wintern" By: Darija Stipanac

Darija Stipanac was born in Rijeka, Croatia. Graduated at interdisciplinary study of Fine Art and Art History of the Teacher Training Faculty at the University of Rijeka, Croatia in 1997. Had several solo exhibitions and participated in art exhibitions in Croatia and foreign countries.



"Tableaux Automatique: Leave Alighton" By: Robert Matejcek



Tableaux Automatique: Cold Snap" By: Robert Matejcek



"Distant but Cozy home in midnight frost"

By: Dr. Meeta Sinha

Dr. Meeta Sinha is a gynaecologist by profession, but passionate about creating fictions and paintings. Her paintings are mostly in oil medium on canvas board. Passionate for welfare of adolescent girls, helping, treating and educating more than 20000 girls till now.

IN TAKE

BY: MT ANGEL

Endless hours have been spent to reach this precipice.
From the apartment, to the ER, to the insurance claims, to the sedatives, to the referrals, to the breakdowns,
to the moment in which I now reside,
suspended, vulnerable,
staring at the face of a stranger
with my sanity folded neatly in their notebook.

Before I can decide if you can hold my fears,
prior to my stabilization,
you must take me in.

Intake takes approximately 50 minutes,
3,000 seconds spent recounting my demons.
Intaking my sins, my guilt,
carefully quantifying the quality of my madness:

7 years in treatment.
3 mental health disorders of record.
1 active prescription.
3 unfilled.
2 crises in the last month.
2 insurances to bill.
6 diagnostic tests to take.
7 numbers and letters on my driver's license.
5 on my insurance card.
5 years since my first suicide attempt.
3 months since my last panic attack.
5 months since the last depressive episode.
7 years of recovery.

Measurements of me,
Memorized after countless missteps and mistakes.

I am taken in.
I am calculated and assessed.
No feedback is provided.
No warmth radiates from the receiver.
Only carefully written notes.
Only scanned documents.

First comes intake.
In taking me, I expose myself again.
Hoping that this time,
my intake
will not overtake me.

MT Angel considers themselves to be 50% data wizard and 50% magical girl. When not writing dark fiction novels and short stories based on her nightmares, they spend their time researching violence and trauma as a doctoral student and wrangling big data. In addition to plunging deep into the depths of the collective unconscious, MT Angel enjoys eating noodles and watching birds.



"Frigid Blur" By: Katharine Weinmann



A cold walk at the Helsinki seaside.



By: Riitta Oittinen



It was freezing. I could hardly use the camera.



Riitta Olttinen writes and photographs mainly in Brussels and Helsinki. Her photos have been exhibited internationally. She is originally from Helsinki and loves snow.

From Frost to Warmth

BY: ELDORA BETSY LYGDOH

The night was still, the frost did bite,
A chill in the air, a lonely sight.
But then I saw him, small and alone,
A child in the cold, without a home.

I rushed to his side, with a heart so true,
And wrapped my coat around him.
His eyes looked up at me, with a gaze so wide,
And in that moment, our hearts did reside.

The hospital's warmth, a refuge from the cold,
A place to heal, a story to be told.
Of a child's past, of struggles and strife,
But also of hope, and a new-found life.

A mother's tears, a family's warm embrace,
A reunion so sweet, love that time won't erase.
The midnight frost, a night so divine,
Brought us together, a love that's truly mine.

Years went by, and the child grew strong,
Bright and successful man, a strong heart.
Forgotten the past, but not the love we share,
A bond that's unbroken which truly cares.

Eldora Betsy Lyngdoh is a multifaceted artist celebrating women's resilience and beauty through sculpture, poetry, and painting, exploring nature and humanity's intersection, and empowering others through creativity and self-expression always with passion and love.





No one

BY: CRAIG KIRCHNER

It was almost a mile,
cold and damp,
but the sun was bright
and we walked.
I don't remember the movie,
the Earl was famous for double features,
but when we came out it was dark,
frozen and desolate.

There was a half inch of ice
on everything, every surface,
as though spray painted on.
There was no calling
for a ride or a taxi,
there was no driving
until it was salted
or melted.

We had held hands
in the movie.
I had caressed her thumb
in the palm of my hand,
a simple sign of affection,
it fit like it belonged,
needed the warmth,
maybe some notice of love.

The trek home we held hands,
held everything.
She had a lower center of gravity
and could ice skate.
I struggled, a lot.
We got home, my parents were away,
we held each other, warm
under blankets and guilts all night.

I had never, have never seen ice like that
and it occurred to me in the movies,
before the ice,
that I had never held hands before,
not meaningfully.
I'd never and have never
done this before. No one else
comes to mind since, no one.

Craig Kirchner has been nominated for the Pushcart three times, and has a book of poetry, *Roomful of Navels*. He's been published in *Chiron Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Flora Fiction*, and eight dozen other journals.



"Tableaux Automatique: Ice" By: Robert Matejcek

Robert Matejcek is originally from North Dakota. He obtained his BA in Art, Magna Cum Laude, from Fontbonne University in St. Louis, Missouri. Robert's multi-disciplinary work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally.

New Years

BY: DS MAOLALAI

my friend thinks the year
should start on the first day
or last day of march. I think I agree.
rats and people are born
anywhere, anytime, but that's when
you get sheep and it's when you get
flowers and hedgerow-
born protected birds. and the day
is still light when you get
out of work. you can stop for a drink
on a patio. it makes sense –
it does – but would still be a hassle
to organise. plus I do like the world
turning over the way it does now:
in a darkness. this year
at another friend's house
overlooking the city was pretty
impressive: amateur fireworks
rising like dandelion seeds. it was raining
and overcast and people still howled
loud as trains coming into a station. we even
sang songs and discussed resolutions
which I find frankly tacky
but it wasn't the place to say that.
someone even said that she'd go
to the gym more – that kind
of uncynical night. look: I think the year turns
when you tell it to turn. any night you decide
is the new year. if you like, drink
champagne tonight: no-one will stop you.
if you like then quit smoking
or go to the gym.

"Christmas Bokeh" By: Jonathan Brooks

Jonathan Brooks' photographs have been published in numerous magazines, anthologies, and periodicals. His Photos have been featured in major movies and television shows. His work has been exhibited in Miami, NYC, Amsterdam, France, Germany, Greece, Scotland, Switzerland, and the UK. s' photographs have been published in numerous magazines, anthologies, and periodicals. His Photos have been featured in major movies and television shows. His work has been exhibited in Miami, NYC, Amsterdam, France, Germany, Greece, Scotland, Switzerland, and the UK.

Day Dreams

BY: LaVERN SPENCER McCARTHY

My Siamese and I have run away
in dreams, to Egypt where the sand is white.
She purrs a gentle song this winter day.

A harem girl with colored scarves, I sway
with burnished dancers weaving left and right
.My Siamese and I have run away.

If we grow tired of bells and harps, we may
escape to Cairo when the moon is bright.
She purrs a gentle song this winter day.

Her sleepy eyes, half open, seem to say:
Conjure a handsome sheik in blazing light!
My Siamese and I have run away.

The sleet is on the window pane. I pray
we do not waken to that dreary sight.
She purrs a gentle song this winter day.

Until the storm is past, we must obey
that camel call that lures us with its might.
My Siamese and I have run away.
She purrs a gentle song this winter day.

LaVern Spencer McCarthy is a poet who loves to write poetry on many different subjects. she is a state and national awarded poet and a life member of Poetry society of Texas.





"Red Winter with Flying Dog" By: Mark Blickley

Mark Blickley grew up within walking distance of New York's Bronx Zoo. He is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild and PEN American Center. His latest book is the flash fiction collection, *Hunger Pains* (Buttonhook Press).

"Untitled" By: Nasta Martyn

Nasta Martyn is an artist, illustrator, writer, poetry. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in designer. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week.





"Untitled" By: Nasta Martyn





'Tis The Damn Season

BY: ANNIE EARNSHAW

After all the paper had been cleared off the floor and the kids took their toys up to the playroom, Bennett was struck again by the heavy realization she had no idea what to do. Too old to get presents she could play with, she received a vegan cookbook and nice dish towels from Williams Sonoma, the kind she was too cheap to buy herself. She didn't want to work because that went against everything Christmas Day was supposed to be. Reading didn't interest her and neither did helping her mom and sister-in-law make Christmas dinner.

Around noon, she got a text message from Tyler next door. Meet me at the old park?

Bennett didn't know what to say to that. Half of her worried that Tyler wanted to realize whatever childhood sexual fantasy he'd had that was tied to the park by their elementary school, but the other half would've sawed off her big toes with a plastic knife to get out of the house.

Nobody was downstairs, so Bennett stuck a note to the fridge with a plastic alphabet magnet, grabbed her dad's keys, and figured someone would eventually notice she was gone.

Tyler was still sitting in his dad's truck when Bennett pulled up. His music was so loud she could feel the bass in her chest. She had to knock on his window before he noticed her.

"What's this about?" Bennett asked, tucking her hands under her legs, surprised to find Tyler had turned on the seat warmers.

Tyler shrugged, turned down the music. "I used to love this park."

"And you're here to reminisce?"

Tyler let his head drop back against the headrest. "Do you like Denver?"

She nodded.

"What do you like about it?"

That it's not fucking Connecticut was her first thought. "The outside," she said instead. "I like how the rocks are red."

"The weed must help."

"The weed certainly doesn't hurt," she said with a small smile.

He went silent, then pointed to a patch of grass over by the treeline about a football field away. "Remember how we used to play kickball over there? With those big rubber balls from Target?"

"Remember the time you kicked Evan in the face and broke one of his teeth?"

The back of his neck flushed red. "I still feel bad about that."

They stared at the park like they were reliving an imagined reel of their childhood. The town had replaced the old swing set, which was all metal and probably a tetanus risk, with a fancy new one whose rubber-coated chains wouldn't crush the kids' fingers.

The jungle gym was the same except for green plastic attachments on the railings and roofs. There was a new bridge over the creek that ran along the side of the park with a tall railing kids couldn't climb over. When they were nine, Tyler, on a dare, jumped into the water and licked the bottom of the creek.

"I don't like New York," Tyler said, flexing his hands before wrapping them around the steering wheel.

Bennett turned toward him. "You don't?"

He shook his head. "There are sirens all the time."

"You want to leave because of the noise level."

He worked his jaw before speaking. "The sirens mean some guy got shot in an alley, or an investment banker had an overdue heart attack," he said, somewhat exasperated. "People are always dying."

"People die here," Bennett said, running her hands up and down her arms.

"You know what I mean," he said.

She didn't, not really.

Tyler was silent, staring out the windshield, his jaw set. "I'm thinking about coming back."

"Back here?" she asked, incredulous.

"Think about how we grew up." He looked over at her. "We were happy, weren't we? As kids?"

"I guess," Bennett said, analyzing his features to figure out what happened to him.

When they'd seen each other two months ago during his long layover in Denver, falling asleep on her couch, shoulders brushing, he seemed perfectly content to fly back to New York. "Why are you even thinking about kids?"

"I don't know," he said. "Aren't you?"

She thought of her dad, when he looked over at her mom with this knowing expression that encapsulated how he felt about her: more than a wife or a lover, but a companion, someone he continuously chose to spend his time with.

She glanced up at Tyler; he was already looking at her.

"No," she said, stopping herself from letting the image of their life extrapolate further. She kissed him once, lingering, her fingers whispering over the day-old stubble on his jaw, then slipped out of the car.

•••

Bennett flew back to Denver the next morning. She lied to her parents and said she'd gotten the date wrong, she had to leave a day earlier than she'd expected. They were disappointed, of course. But they were pragmatic people; it wouldn't do any good to have Bennett miss her flight. The change fees were ridiculous these days.

A thin wire of guilt wrapped around her lungs as she remembered the thirty-minute call with United customer service. In the end, she had to pay an extra fifty bucks, but the idea of staying there another minute made Bennett want to crawl out of her skin. She told herself she was young and a little stupid and had nobody to answer to but herself. No boyfriend, no baby suckling the perkiness out of her boobs, not even a dog to demand she get back in time to pick him up from the kennel. She told herself she was alone, she liked it that way.

As Bennett dug one last time through the hamper, she found Tyler's sweatshirt, the one she'd kept for the past two months. She debated whether or not to leave it, then pulled it over her head. She'd give it back next year.

Annie Earnshaw is from (just north of) Charlotte, NC and has a BA in English from Elon University. Annie's fiction explores family dynamics, identity, and the female experience. She also writes in the lifestyle and wellness spaces; her favorite topics to cover are wellness trends, mental health, and body neutrality.



"Dudo Snow"
By: Giulio R.M. Maffii



"Overripe" By: Melea Chew Roberts

Melea Chew Roberts is a multidisciplinary writer, artist, and creative thinker who embraces all forms of expression. Passionate about communication and self-discovery through art, their work often reflects themes of identity, emotion, or growth.



"Winter is Dead!" By: Dr. Helge H. Paulsen

Dr. Helge H. Paulsen (born 1969/Flensburg). Studied social sciences at the University of Hanover, majoring in culture/art sociology. Degree: Doctor of Philosophy. – currently working as a freelance journalist, curator and art photographer. Photographic work published in international art magazines. Participation in various art fairs in Germany and exhibitions in various national galleries. Member of the Museum of Photography in Braunschweig.



"Winter Blues" By: Clarissa Cervantes







"Frozen 1" By: Amb. Dr. (HC) Sonjaye Maurya

Amb. Dr. (HC) Sonjaye Maurya is an eminent Indian artist and curator with international recognition. He is a self-taught artist, who has dedicated his life to art and artists. He is a part of growth and development of art scene. Apart from many national and international letters of appreciation and accolades, Sonjaye Maurya is also a 'Kala Ratn' awardee.



"Winter Forest Footsteps" By: Rod Raglin

Dark Side

BY: LOREN DELL

Afternoon darkness slides down
From the western hills
Hiding the remaining day.
Even the snow turns black,
Unable to hold on to luminescence.
It's just too much to bear.
The new year begins blind
Without color.

Then, the half light of
The quarter moon
Sits belly first
Above the hills-
Shines just bright enough
To color the evergreens-
A polished emerald set
In a crown of sterling
Silver fields,
I assume.
Since I am on the
Dark side.
What color shines from me?
No gem, but a
Pale drop of polished stone
Waiting to be seen
In the anonymity of night.

Loren Dell is from northern Colorado and has taught creative writing and poetry/fiction analysis for many years and worked as a radio news reporter in Austin. She loves hiking and backpacking in the Rocky Mountains.



"Lit is the Path Well Travelled" By: Melea Chew Roberts





"Cold Isolation" By: Giulio R.M. Maffii

You called me Mama

BY: MARTHA ELLEN JOHNSON

Last night I dreamt of you my lost child now grown. We were on a long night journey. Cold. No stars. With mufflers and coats pulled tight around. You wore those yellow mittens. My silly Christmas gift before the break. Trudging on and on. A new path. Snow crunches under foot. I lead. Your steps in mine.

We came upon the small cabin alone within the vast landscape. Shivering, exhausted we entered. Stomped the snow off our boots. Tossed our coats in heap on the chair. Silent. Warm and cozy. Heated by the old Jøtol stove stored in my basement unused since you left and I did not know why.

A lush green velvet upholstered sofa with a cozy woolen afghan to wrap around knitted in my favorite pattern - "Mended." Your pink froggie there resting on a pillow. I had thought it lost. My mom's crewel embroidery hung above the door with summer vines and flowers and birds. LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

I prepared hot cocoa with the heavy whipping cream you always loved. A cup for each. We are sitting on the sofa now. You hold my frail hand in yours. "Mama, do remember your dream of the millions of luminous threads joining all living things within our garden and without?"

"Yes, I do, my baby."

Martha Ellen lives alone in an old Victorian house on a hill on the Oregon coast. Retired social worker. MFA. She writes to process the events of her wild life.

"where is the train" By: Giulio R.M. Maffii



Porphyria by the Fire

BY: FRANK WILLIAM FINNEY

Pull off your pyjamas, love,
and sit beside the fire.

I'll mix us up
a scorpion bowl

to help fuel
your desire.

They're skating
on thin ice outside;

the stairs
are slippery.

We'll stay inside
all wintertide.

Just us.
Just you and me.

Frank William Finney is the author of *The Folding of the Wings* and a tome's worth of sundry poems. His work has appeared in many journals, magazines, and anthologies since the 1980s. He once made a snowball in Switzerland.

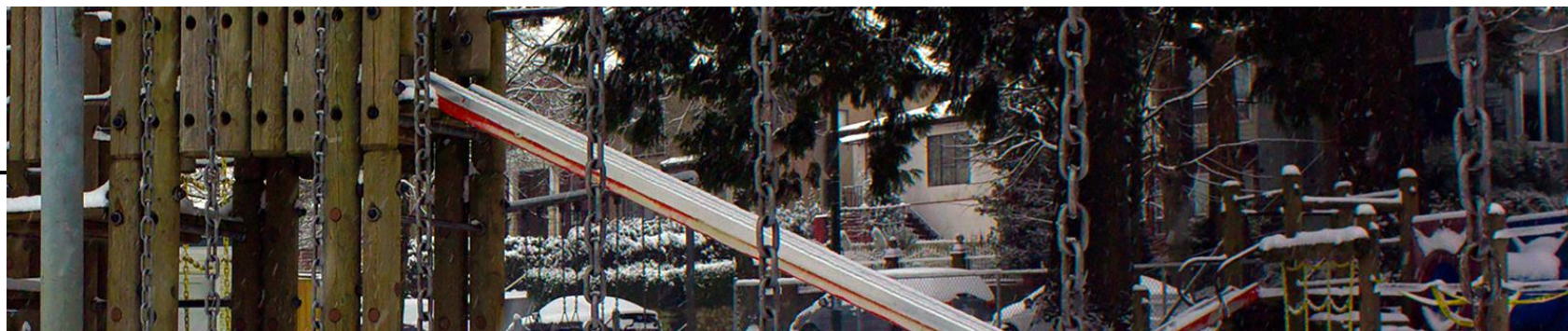


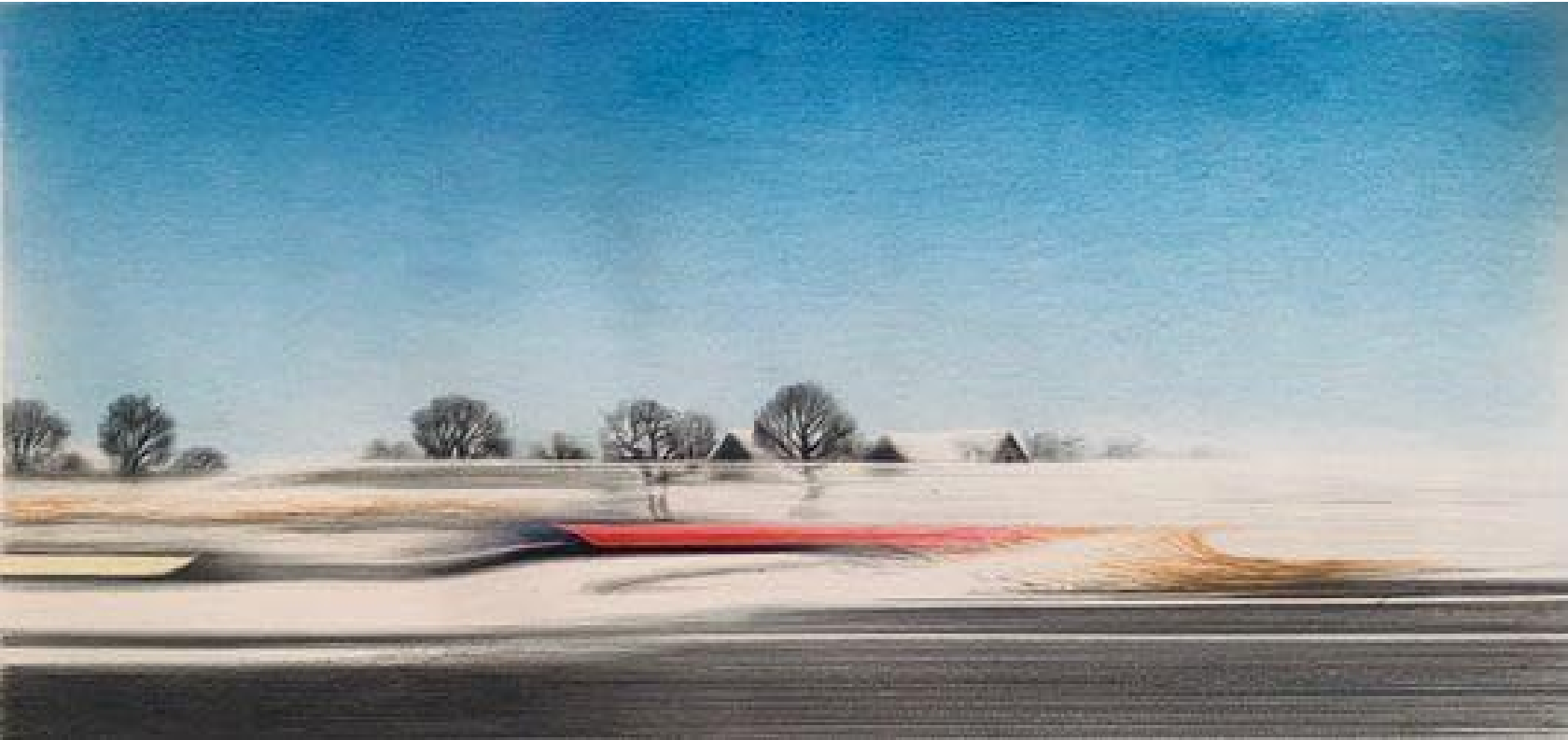




"Winter Playground" By: Rod Raglin

Rod Raglin is a journalist, photographer, editor of an online community newspaper and author of fourteen self-published novels, a collection of short stories and two plays. He lives in Vancouver, Canada.





"White Tesla" By: Alexandra Buessing

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

BY: RICK K. REUT

..right in the middle of
nowhere. You turn off
course to a quiet street
under a falling sheet
of very deep and slow
paper-like snow...

REPRINT FROM RICK RUET'S BOOK, P. 227

...right in the middle of nowhere. You turn off course to a quiet street under a falling sheet of very deep
and slow paper-like snow.

Rick Reut was born in 1984, in the USSR. He studied philosophy at EHU in Minsk, Belarus, and literature at Saint Petersburg State University, Russia. For most of his life after graduation, he has worked as a translator and a tutor of English as a foreign language.

"The Sledding Hill" By: Rod Raglin







"In search of Water" By: Vyacheslav Kabanov

Vyacheslav Kabanov was born 8 april 1981. An artist-photographer, working with photography, studying photography. Since 2009, after graduating from the Institute of culture, he has focused on creating art projects, studying photography and teaching.



"Blinks of the soul I" By: Darija Stipanic





"Tranquil Elegance of Winter" By: Amanda Althoff



"Veil of Winter Mount Yotei's Silent Embrace" By: Amanda Althoff

Amanda Althoff is a writer and artist from Europe, currently working on her doctoral dissertation in archaeology. Her multi-media works are interested in textures, patterns, and conversations with nature both in subject and materiality.

After the Wind

BY: ALLAN LAKE

Having quietly *come into a bit of money*,
which might sound a bit sticky but was
not enough to cause shortness of breath,
he didn't buy a splendid new vehicle.
Nor did he snore to Dubai or cruise Hawaii.
He did buy a winter coat of a quality not
previously considered. Not even on sale.
He wondered if he should seize such a rare
opportunity to change his life then laughed
out loud as he walked along a silty canal
then stopped for fruit toast and coffee
at a cafe where they would pan-fry toast
just how he liked it. He had lived simply
by necessity while managing to feel
fortunate before his wee windfall,
didn't have any debilitating maladies,
did have writing table, food in fridge,
enough clothes and books in rows.
Travel on-line meant no delayed flights,
no lugging worn luggage [which even
sounds Heavy]. In still sound mind,
it was settled. Egg for breakfast, morn-
ing stroll, lunch of spuds, greens, tin
of beans, perhaps a chop, habitual
siesta before kite flying or haiku
hunting. Not much – but enough –
was new. He'd continue to be
just what he was, invisible
neighbour in the land of Oz
tralia.

Allan Lake is a migrant poet from Allover, Canada who now lives in Allover, Australia. Coincidence. He has published poems in 20 countries. His latest chapbook of poems, entitled 'My Photos of Sicily', was published by Ginninderra Press. It contains no photos, only poems.

"Waves of grain" By: Sara Caporaletti







Not Good with Names

BY: PAUL LEWELLAN

Henry Briggs noticed the box on the table in front of him: a 1000-piece puzzle from White Mountain. *1000-pieces? That's a lot.* He hated jigsaw puzzles.

The collage contained best seller book covers: *The Godfather*, *Animal Farm*, *Catch-22*. He remembered *Animal Farm* from high school. The animals talked.

Henry noted a bookshelf with stacks of puzzle boxes, board games, pot holder looms, clear plastic cups filled with crayons, rolls of white butcher block paper, Nerf balls, and Rubik's Cubes. This was not his office. Where am I?

"You look tired, Henry."

Her voice startled him. The woman across from him had silver hair and bright eyes. *Attractive.* She wore a pale blue argyle sweater and a silk scarf. *Nice tits.* He watched her put a puzzle piece in place, completing the cover of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She was working the puzzle with him. "Do I know you?"

"I'm Arlene...." He shook his head. "I come every Wednesday and weekends when I'm not traveling for my audit work." She hesitated. "You are my best puzzle partner."

Puzzle partner? What the hell is that? He took another look. *Arlene?* Henry knew his way around pretty women. He leaned in, "I'm not good with names."

"I know." Her patronizing tone surprised him. "I don't take it personally."

Henry pushed back from the table. Her pencil skirt was knee-length. When she crossed her legs, he felt a familiar stirring. I'll ask her out for a drink at the Radisson. Get a room if things go well. First he had to remember where he'd parked the BMW. "Do you come here often?" *Lame.*

Arlene shifted in the chair. She adjusted her skirt. She forced a smile. "I come here all the time."

Henry inventoried the room: six tables set with four place settings of plastic utensils and paper napkins, an open area with two sofas, rockers, and a half-dozen loungers, a kitchen with a counter and stools. Two Hispanic women in scrubs were cutting chocolate frosted slices of sheet cake and plating them. "Why?"

"To see you, of course." The smile looked genuine. "I miss you, Henry." She patted his hand.

I'm going to get laid. It was a crude thought. Fortunately he hadn't blurted it out. He wasn't normally this awkward. My illness. He had a vague sense... Someone had told him... What? He struggled to recall the diagnosis.

The woman was in her early sixties. He preferred younger women. He wouldn't tell her that...

She looked as though she'd just come from the office. He used to work with women like her back when he... what had he done? He studied her face. A plain face. Subtle makeup, carefully applied. Intelligent eyes. A flash of red on the lips. I'd fuck her. No ego there. He was who he was. It's what he did. When the moment came, he would know the right line to close the deal. He leaned in again. Nothing. "I've forgotten your name."

"There's so much to remember these days..." she laughed. "I'm Arlene..." She squeezed his hand. It was a familiar touch. "Call me Bunny."

"Bunny?"

"My husband called me that when we..." Her face flushed. "Well, you know...." She grabbed another puzzle piece. She'd said too much.

"I don't want to piss him off." He needed to be careful. He never acted on instinct alone. He was intentional. With his high profile job, there was no room for scandal. He had a momentary flash of a large corner office with an imposing walnut desk. Behind the desk was... her!

"Believe me, if something happens between us, my husband will never know." She picked up another puzzle piece. "Not that he would mind."

"Well then..." Was that an invitation? He scanned his surroundings. A dozen people, some in pajamas, were shuffling to the tables set for a meal. "Maybe we should get a room..."

"There's one down the hall we could use." He moved to stand up, but she touched his hand to arrest him. "No sex today."

"Why not?" He hadn't meant to say it aloud. It sounded petulant or pout. He tried again. "Why not?" That was better. Almost flirtatious.

"Because you can't give consent."

"What does that mean?"

"You were a defense attorney. I am a prosecutor. Two sides of the same judicial coin. We know in matters related to sex, it is all about consent." She reached out and took his hand. "Even if I wanted to have sex with you, I can't. Your diagnosis makes you incapable of giving consent. I hope you understand."

Henry blinked. An attractive woman in a pencil skirt was sitting across from him. She picked up a puzzle piece. On the table in front of him was a puzzle from White Mountain. 1000-pieces! He looked around. "Where am I?"

"At your place, working the puzzle I brought."

"Great." He hated jigsaw puzzles, but he'd play along. *Maybe I'll get laid.* He hesitated. "I'm sorry, I've forgotten your name."

Paul Lewellan lives, writes, and gardens on the banks of the Mississippi River along with his wife Pamela, who is also his best friend and accountant. They're raising a rescue kitten named Caitlin Cat.









FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 4

WINTER 2024

Flora Fiction Literary and Arts Magazine. Volume 5, Issue 4 Winter 2024. Copyright 2024 Flora Fiction. All artwork and literature contained in this publication are copyright 2024 to their respective creators. The ideas and opinions expressed within belong to the respective authors and artists and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors. Any similarities to person living or dead is purely coincidental. None of the contents of this publication may be reprinted without the permission of the individual authors or artists.