

FLORA FICTION

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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

We've spent so much time breaking, isolated, and hoping for a better tomorrow. After everything that happened in 2020, many of us wished that the dawn of a new year would bring about a positive change. Thus, we were disappointed by the lack of ease for which this season has come about. Our frustrations are at the current situation. We want answers, and to be able to place the blame elsewhere.

What's happening around us is out of our control and it is the lack of control that drives us mad. Some feel as though they must take action. Others are discouraged by failure before they dare to step forward. Although we are powerless in knowing the outcome, we are not powerless in influencing the path. Realism is not pessimism. Realism is understanding that there is a negative possibility, but also acknowledging that, "If anything can go well, it will."

While hope may have faded, as we enter Spring, it's time for a Revival. You get what you put out there, and the energy you emit—whether it's encouraging or limiting to yourself—that's what you will receive. Keep yourself grounded. Look at the plethora of opportunities that surround you. You are in control of your life. You are in control of who you want to be. Take this chance to revive the spark within you and awakening the part of you that dreams.

Our Spring 2021 Issue: *Revival* marks the first part of Volume 2. Please enjoy this collection of art and allow it to inspire you to create your own.

xoxo
Flora Ashe



OBSCURITY BY: AVA MARGUERITTE





BOW ECHO BY: AVA MARGUERITTE

HOLLOW BY: AVA MARGUERITTE

Ava Margueritte is a neuro-diverse multidisciplinary artist, primarily focused on photo-based works and drawing, painting, and writing. By absorbing her surroundings, she evaluates the connection between body and mind.



Winter Thaw

BY: DAWN DEBRAAL

The best time of the year is early spring when every lawn and field in the world around me looks freshly mowed. It had been a tough winter. When my Raymond died of cancer last year, my world turned bleak. When winter came in, it further dumped me into a depression that would last. Daylight was scarce, the snow and cold, plentiful. I found myself widowed and not prepared to start a snowblower or use the ice chipper to break the ice damming on the driveway. Raymond should have prepared me better. He should have shown me how to change the oil on the lawnmower or winterize the damn thing for that matter. But he was going to be here with me forever.

The joke was on me. I had survived the winter, for he had laid in enough wood for a few years to keep the woodstove going. I didn't want to leave my beloved home. We'd lived here for over thirty years. The garden was just the way I wanted, and I prayed I had enough "Umpf" to get the rototiller going so I could plant my annuals.

"Raymond, how you have forsaken me, my love," I said, alone.

After unsuccessfully trying to start the chainsaw to lop off a branch that had fallen on the garage. It was such a small one, but it mocked me. I went down to the hardware store and purchased an electric one. Oh, how Raymond would have laughed to see me climb the ladder with a fifty-foot extension cord and cut that branch into pieces. But I did it, and the pride that came with my new can-do attitude swelled in my heart. Our children were long gone. I had a good support system around me but didn't want to use up my neighbor calls. I went back to the hardware store and bought a rider mower with an electric start. The salesman showed me how to change the oil, and the owners-manual, told me when it was time to sharpen the blades. I put that push mower out in front of the house with a free sign, and a young man was happy to haul it off. I then discovered YouTube. You can do anything, fix a toilet, a roof, glaze an old window, repair a door handle. How did we ever survive without that?

The only thing I hadn't learned how to do was to live alone. Night after night, I sat on the porch watching the kids next door play, sick of television. I should be out walking. I knew that. The doctor told me many times. I didn't want to go by myself. And then I saw him online, the cutest little dog ever—scruffy wiry, bright-eyed. I called the pound. Yes, he was still available. I had to apply for his adoption online. That took another act of God, but I did apply. They asked all kinds of questions. Would he be kept in a crate all day? Was my yard fenced? I answered them all. I even had to have the testimony of people who knew me. All for a dog that no one wanted, but every time I looked at his smiling face, I knew he needed to live with me.

"Congratulations, you have been approved! Please arrange a time to pick up Alfred," said the email. I called and made the appointment. She warned me. He was a little growly around strangers.

I met Alfred in a pen outside of the pound. He barked ferociously at me and growled. The lady handed him a piece of hotdog. He gobbled it up. Then she gave the bag to me.

"Alfred!" I said in my high-pitched, I-am-so-much-fun voice. He stood his ground, so I sat down with the hotdog piece in front of me. I could see he was going to be a handful, but I was up for the challenge. After a few minutes of a standoff, he slowly moved forward. It was against his nature to trust anyone. I held out that hotdog slice, and he gently took it from me.

"Good boy!" I said quietly. And then I just sat there holding the bag full of treats. Soon he came up to me, circling, and then sat giving me his rapt attention. I pulled out another piece and gave it to him. He gently took that one too.

"Do you want to go and see your new home?" His tail wagged a little. I put his new collar and leash on him, accepting the free bag of dog food. Something clicked in the little man. I think he realized his caged days were over. I put him in the back seat, where he looked out the window until we got home.

Alfred jumped out of the car and immediately marked his new territory. I brought out a metal dish filled with food and another with water. I sat on the porch. After Alfred cruised the yard, he came up onto the porch, drank some water, ate a little kibble, promptly circled on the rug in front of the door, and lay down with his head on his paws.

My heart melted watching him sleep. He snored a little, just like Ray used to. He also took up Ray's side of the bed. Alfred is a gentleman who doesn't growl at me anymore. We go walking every night; my cholesterol is down. As a handsome little guy, Alfred is a magnet drawing in people. He has learned to accept their pets and praises.

When Raymond died, I wanted to die too. I hadn't realized how I made his life mine—raising his children, keeping his house, nursing him through the illness. I didn't have a purpose. But learning how to be on my own and having a trusting partner like Alfred at my side, I feel renewed, revitalized, just like the first growth of grass under the snow, after a long winter.

Getting Through Winter

BY: LOIS PERCH VILLEMAIRE

Ordinarily an upbeat person,
My mother became depressed in winter,
A therapy light was recommended
To keep by her side for a period of time each day.
She looked forward to the Philadelphia Flower Show,
It meant spring was coming.

Because of the virus, we aren't snowbirds this year,
We were spoiled by the vibrancy
Of tropical surroundings,
deep green palm trees,
against a cobalt sky.
Efforts to get through this unfamiliar winter
Are monotonous, like the repetitive routine of our days.
When sunlight pours into the kitchen,
we imagine it's warm outside.

I rescued certain plants before the frost,
With the intention of nursing them through winter,
Watching over cuttings rooting in a glass,
transferred to potting soil,
To grow near windows.
From appearances,
it's uncertain if these plants
Will thrive until spring.

In the winter of 2002, a gift from Mom,
a beautiful book,
In Bloom: The Floral Art of Sara Steele,
A watercolor rainbow of rich, dense colors.
I came across it recently,
looking again, for the first time,
Remembering that Mom had always
Provided messages.
Her inscription to me read,
"Flowers are coming."

Lois Perch Villemaire lives in Annapolis, MD. She enjoys expressing herself by writing flash fiction, memoir, and especially poetry.



CONTINUATION BY: CATALINA ARANGUREN

Catalina Aranguren was born in Bogotá, Colombia and raised in Caracas, Venezuela. She studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Spéos Photographic Institute in Paris. She is currently raising three bilingual, bicultural, biracial and bustling boys in New Jersey with her husband and their giant dog.



City Sidewalk Christmas Eve 2020

BY: MARK BLICKLEY

Do my squeaks and squeals sound like frightened cries of hopeful breaths crushed inside a fabric of society that brings exhaled warmth to my facing known yet unseen dangers as I squat before an empty street of holiday cheer fear echoing in each pluck and glide of string, an aural gift of homage to missing loved ones and the magical realism of an old fat white man swathed in red bringing joy to sleeping, uncaged children dreaming of parental oversight and charity down chimney slides into cabin fevers hopefully void of dry coughs and a lack of taste that ignores the seasonal celebration of a poor babe who just three calendar months later will become a thirty-three year old who is humiliated, tortured and brutally slain because of a passionate call for change that replaces hate with love and fear with joy, so I sit on this bleak, frigid sidewalk accepting and resisting the pain of an unraveling Christmas present and uncertain Christmas future with a sweet



PHOTOGRAPHY BY: JANA HUNTEROVA

memory of Christmas past offered up by frozen fingers fiddling musical notes I pray may tender a bit of hope and comfort as glorious attendants fight to save strangers inside the brightly lit hospital across the street.

Mark Blickley is a New York writer and proud member of the Dramatist Guild and PEN American Center. **Jana Hunterova** is an award winning photographer from the Czech Republic.

From Where We Come

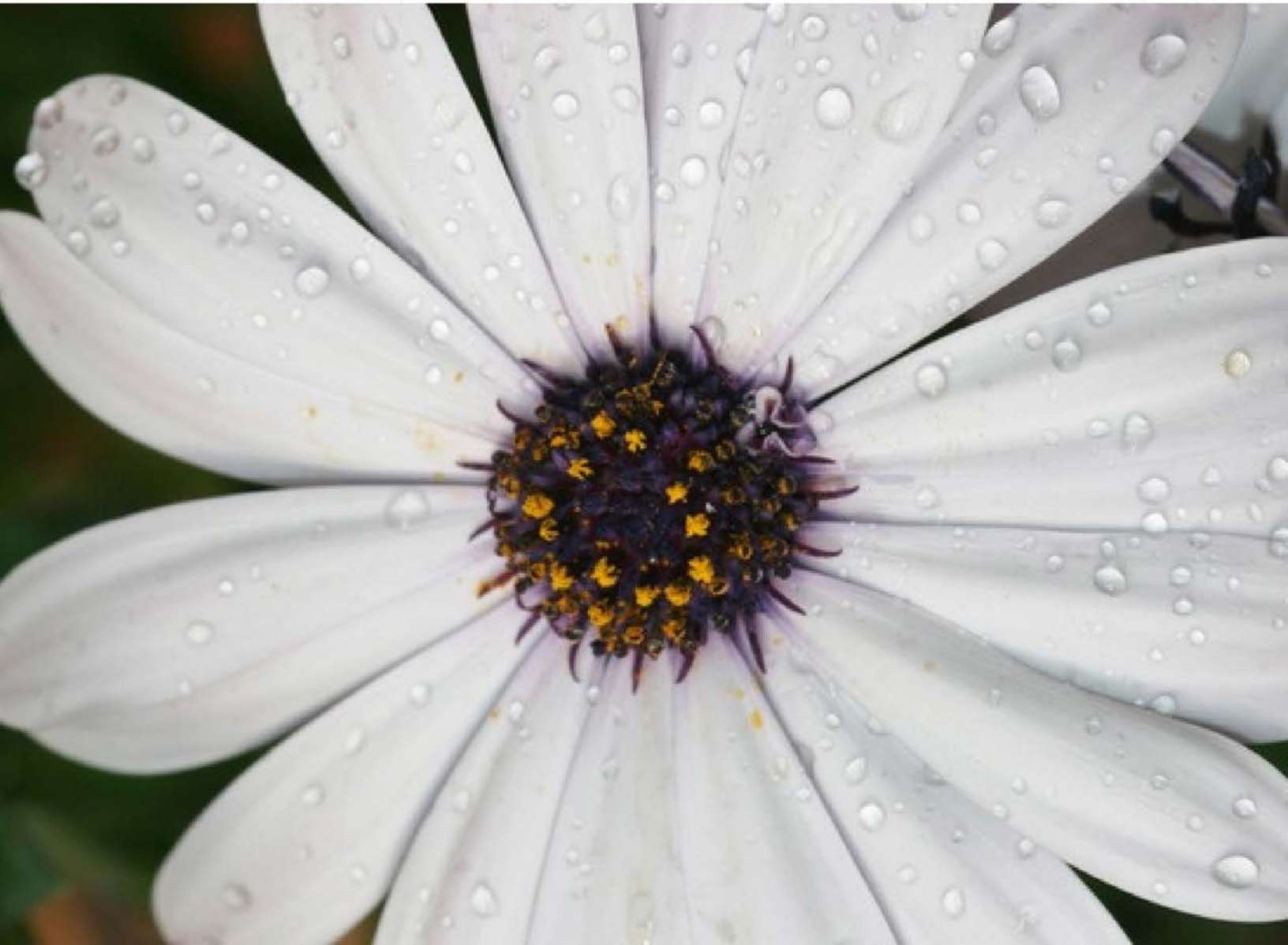
BY: CHERISE ARTHUR

We have gone to the mountain top and back
This life we know is finally coming back to us
Numbers line up for a cure from the strain
For going back to normal is what will we will gain

We have learned that life is not easy during these times
And we will look back and be thankful for grace
And the wisdom we gained for being in this place
Just humans on a roller coast all trying to hang on
For this ride was rough and soon it will be done

Let find peace in the spring and the hope that it brings
And comfort in knowing the warmth from the sun
Will bring us together again, as one.

Cherise Arthur is a writer and photographer. She loves traveling, reading, going to the coast and trying new things. Always up for more creative adventures. Currently working on a children's fantasy book for young children.







Wild Awakening

BY: CHELSEA FANNING

Walk to the edge of the woods
and train your eyes for movement:

Glint of wing, snap of twigs, burst of seeds.

Wait with tail swishing,
hackles rising, nose twitching.

Wait for grandmother oaks to let out
their primordial breath and at last

call your name.

Chelsea Fanning has an MFA from Drew University and is the poetry editor at *Fatal Flaw Magazine*. Previous work has appeared in *Nourish Poetry*, *From Whispers to Roars*, *OyeDrum*, and *Cauldron Anthology*.

Barely Spring and Slip

BY: JACK PHILLIPS

Now I lay me down in dappled shade so happy for the snoozy puppy beside me the wilds of my body given here to ground. Beneath and above and around and within the sweet slink of rhiza the lining of a lung and salamander skin the earthen oozing of fecundities and funk the glide under a snail awash in inky night the swollen dawn in words and weep and blackbird gurgles. My backyard my Walden has no less bloodroot viola crow's foot waterleaf confusing spring warblers and that's what you get when you never mow (or seldom) let the neighbors complain our children came up happy. Life abides on a slippery film the soft the slick the lyric. We are no less wild than ever needing only to feel in us the pump and ripple we share with the sweet and the beastly to ride the spin of spirit and the firm.



Ovum of Myself

BY: JACK PHILLIPS

Something wild grows inside me. An ovum of my animal self inner creature belongs to these waters but bound by whom do I think I am. This creek dammed and gagged and livestocked with hatchery bass and designer bream is the same primal sea that pools in every living thing. Even in captive waters ancient minnows shiners spirits, chubs spawn wildly still dinosaur dragonflies deposit lay progeny aboriginal ooze jellies toad eggs draws out sperm-clouds, bodies rise souls are born, my better desires.

Jack Phillips is a poet-naturalist and nature writer wandering the *Missouri River Watershed*. He author of *The Bur Oak Manifesto* and other books. His poetry has appeared of will appear in *EcoTheo* and *Canary*.

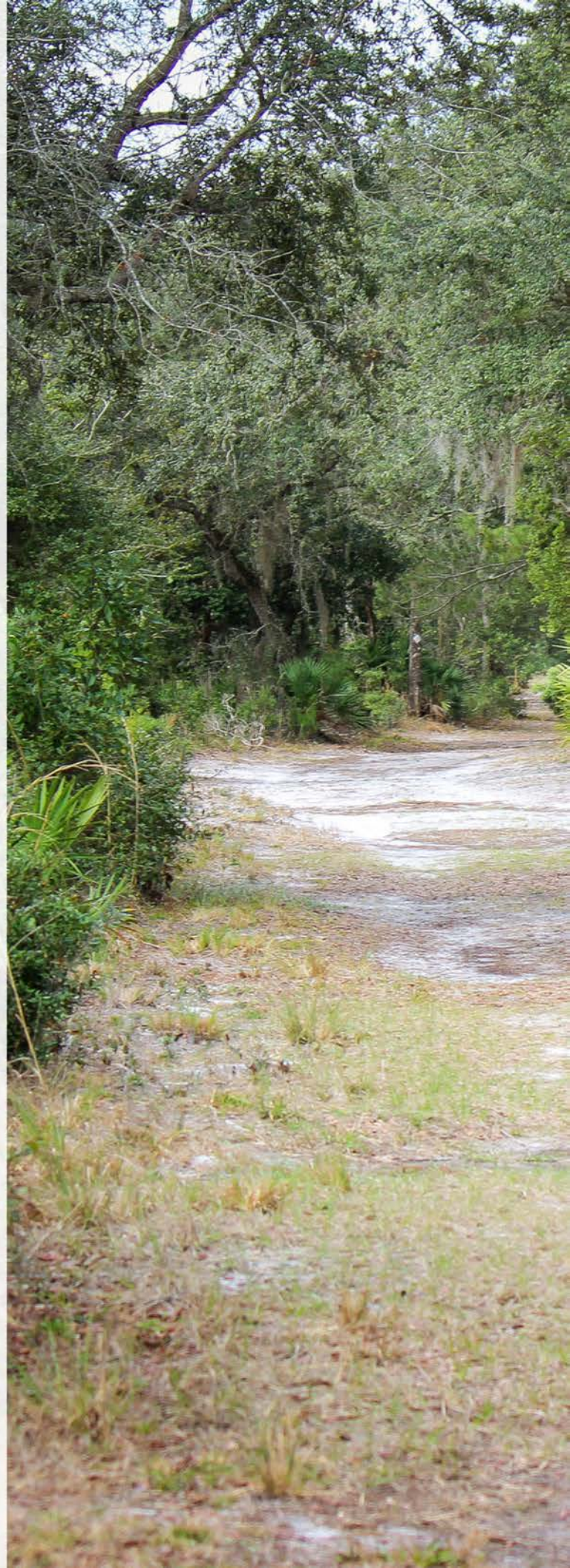


Things I Learned in the Darkness

BY: SARA COLLIE

How to pay attention.
How to trust my senses.
How to tune into rustlings
in the undergrowth or the first
discordant hints of a blackbird's
song at dawn. How to temper
the headiness of lilac blossom
with the sobering scent of damp earth.
When to plant my feet on cool grass,
to notice what stillness really feels like
before the breeze and breath of morning
wake up my whirring self.
How to use the hair standing up
on my arms as a litmus test. Where to
find my edges; how to extend them
like a hedgehog becoming
a spiky ball of quills, all pins and needles.
How to create a series of tiny holes
in the fabric of things and rewrite
the old stories there. How to stitch
myself back together once they are told.
I learned how strong I am; how weak.
When to hide, when to seek, when to hold
my breath and wait. When to merge
my shadow with the night and when
to hold it up, due east, to be
coloured in again.
Outside the lines from now on.

Sara Collie is a writer and language tutor living in Cambridge, England. Her writing explores the wild, uncertain spaces of nature, the ups and downs of mental health, and the mysteries of the creative process.







Revival

BY: LIYONA CICONE

To the noon passing: Begin
again, like day break
Never stop, renew

Liyona is an “average joe” kind of writer who likes to think about ordinary things and then write them down. Ever since she can remember, she has been rhyming words and creating lyric poems.



Florida Humidity

BY: CHELSEA LOCKE

The sun splashed freckles across the bridge of your nose
and down your shoulders while the humidity
stuck to our skin like a wet kiss that lacked restraint.

Your hair blew like Alexander palm fronds in the wind
as we drove along the Atlantic. We felt a readiness
to slide our feet into the sands we called home,

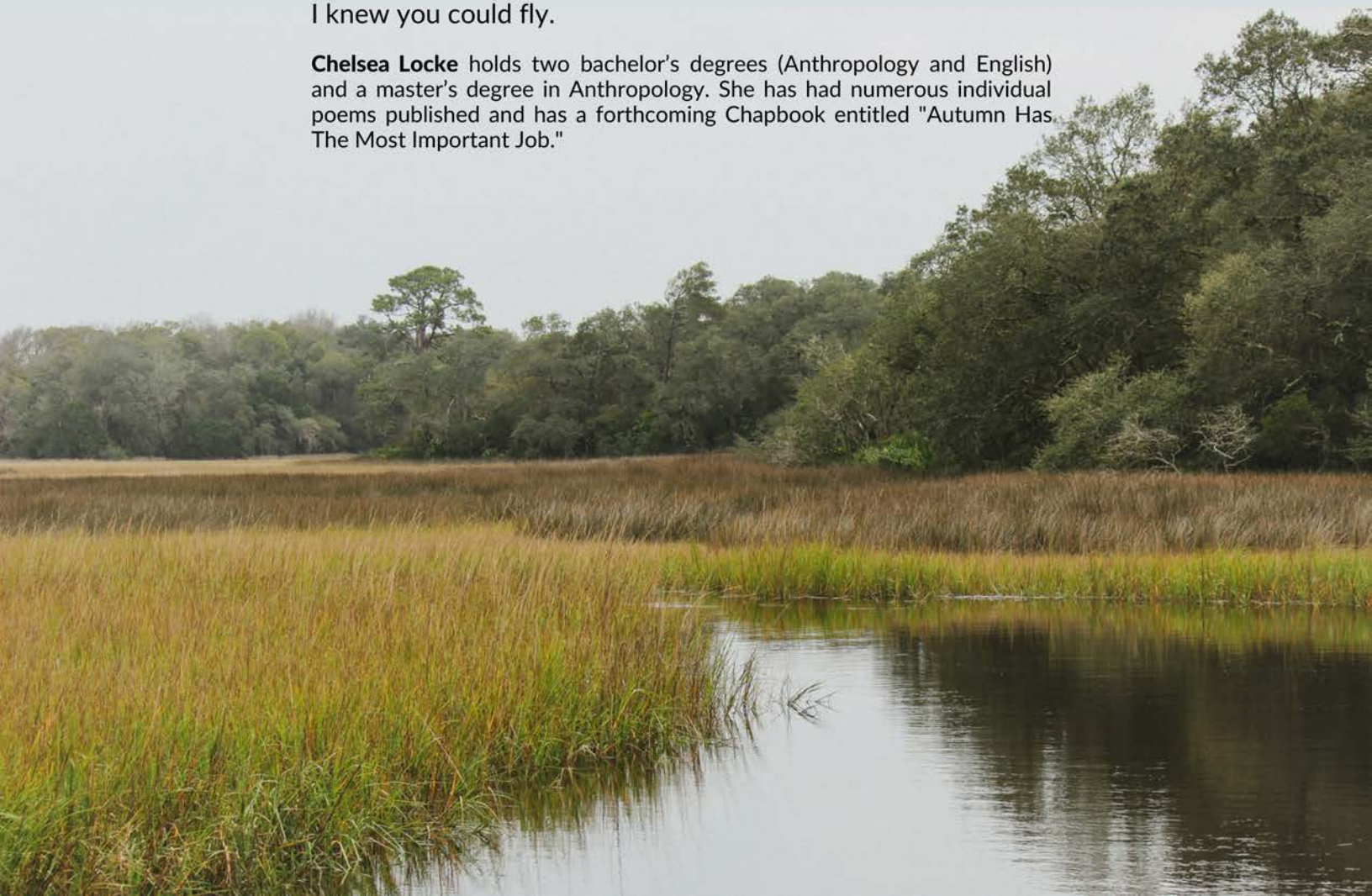
put down roots as knotted as those of the mangrove trees —
as knotted as two bodies gripped by passion. I was
able to see the sunbursts in your irises

as bright as the glinting of the waves before dusk,
as bright as rum punch in the afternoon while lounging
under umbrellas wider than the span of my shadow,

of my outstretched arms. You'd run into
the waves, arms spread like an egret's wings,
and in those moments

I knew you could fly.

Chelsea Locke holds two bachelor's degrees (Anthropology and English) and a master's degree in Anthropology. She has had numerous individual poems published and has a forthcoming Chapbook entitled "Autumn Has The Most Important Job."





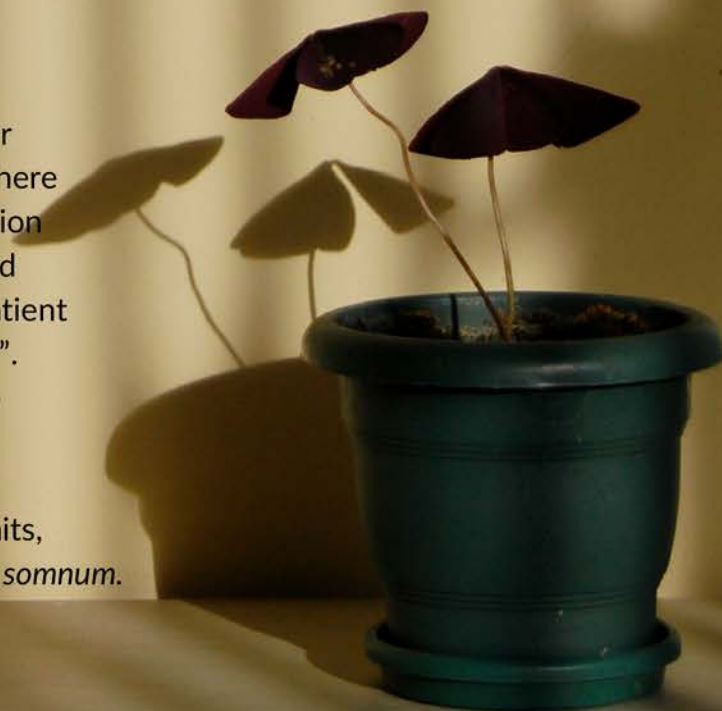


Berceuse

BY: ROBERT BEVERIDGE

On those nights in particular the final thing you think about before you fall asleep and the first thing you think of as you rise with the dawn are indeed the same thing, as if you'd not slept at all, but the world had spun faster. You blame cognitive dissonance, a bit of bad quail, the king in, maybe, beige, peach, chartreuse. Anything but the talk you had with your therapist over a bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue Ghost about the influence of Bauhaus on Uruguayan horror films in the 1990s. (The architecture, not the band.)

Whatever the reason, however, the sun pokes your eyelids through the window you forgot to cover when you stumbled to bed, and your therapist's snores keep you up even better than the past-due bills in the mail from the last ultrasound of your skull six months ago. There's a coma out there somewhere. Your therapist hints on occasion this is your great quest narrative, a geis laid upon your brow long before you were sentient enough to have ever heard the word "geis". Still, you open your wallet, see if you have enough hundreds to cover another bottle of Blue Ghost, get dressed in the slacks made from dowsing rods. Your future awaits, buckaroo, and the time has come to *carpe somnum*.





DANCE & MIRROR MIRROR BY: LJILJANA STJELJA

Ljiljana Stjelja (1949) is a Serbian collage artist. She is a co-founder of the Association for the Promotion of Cultural Diversity "Alia Mundi". She is the editor of the art blog "# L'Art".

437 Wilton Street

BY: ZACH MURPHY

Charlie's wistful heart tingles as he pulls up to 437 Wilton Street, the apartment building from his childhood. Everything is gone but the skeleton of a structure and the echoes of Charlie's memories. You can board up the windows, but you can't cross out the souls that once occupied the walls.

Every Saturday night, the entire block would light up with a Fourth of July jubilation. Dueling music speakers battled to steal the humid air at full volume. The Ramones shouted to the rooftop. Bruce Springsteen crooned to the moon. And Sam Cooke sang to the heavens.

Out in the street, Rich used to show off his candy red Mustang. Rich thought he was a lot cooler than he actually was. His hair grease looked like a mixture of egg yolks and cement. Charlie hasn't forgotten the time that Rich revved up his ride in front of the whole neighborhood, only to blow the engine. As everybody laughed, Rich's face blushed redder than his broken car.

Shawn was the tallest human that Charlie had ever seen. He dribbled the basketball on the bubblegum-stained concrete like he had the world in his hands. He never did make it to the pros, though. But he did become a pro of another kind. Charlie hadn't heard about Shawn in years until the day a familiar voice spoke through the television. It was a commercial for a landscaping business — aptly named Shawn's Professional Landscaping.

Charlie wished that he were older. Then, maybe he might've gotten noticed by his first crush, Henrietta. He'd often daydream about her curly hair, sparkly lip gloss, and mysterious eyes. Sometimes when Charlie passed by her door, he'd hear loud yelling and harsh bangs. Wherever she is now, he hopes that she's safe and happy.

TJ always treated Charlie like a little brother. He'd even give him extra cash for snacks every single week. Charlie always admired TJ's bright red Nike shoes. One day, TJ got arrested by the cops in front of Charlie's very own eyes. It turned out that TJ was selling a certain kind of product, and it wasn't chocolates.

Charlie's grandma cooked the most delicious spaghetti. It smelled like love. The sauce was made from fresh tomatoes that she grew on the building's rooftop. Charlie still thinks of her sweet smile with the missing front tooth, and the big, dark moles on her cheeks. The cancer eventually got to her. When she was put to rest, Charlie was forced to go into a new home. But it wasn't really a home. The memories from that place are the ones that Charlie permanently boarded up in his mind.

After snapping out of his trance, Charlie picks up a decrepit brown brick from the building and sets it on the passenger side floor of his pristine Cadillac. When he arrives back at his quaint house in a quiet neighborhood, he places the brick in the soil of his tomato garden and smiles.

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His forthcoming chapbook "Tiny Universes" (Selcouth Station Press) is due out in Spring 2021. He lives with his wonderful wife, Kelly, in St. Paul, Minnesota.



ER NARO BY: VADIMS PJATRIKOVS

Grand Opus

BY: LOWELL JAEGER

For too long I mused an ambitious fantasy
to sculpt a noble bison,
life-sized, welded sheet steel cut
from rusted auto trunk lids and door panels.
Pictured myself in coveralls, local eccentric,
buddy with the junkman, hauling
jumbles of scrap home from the wrecking lot.

Schemed to work in my front yard along
the highway, where busloads of tourists could point and exclaim,
commuters and surprised passersby
could witness my grand opus rising.

That buffalo still roams, and I envision him
a legend of sorts, behemoth, public spectacle poised
to refute persistent suspicions
that nothing accomplished on this earth
amounts to much.

I did at least learn to weld. And practiced
tacking a cracked motor mount on the lawn mower.
Fabricated a garden trellis . . . well, almost.
It's a godlike glory,
wielding a lit torch and dreaming cold metal
to molten fire.

Lowell Jaeger (Montana Poet Laureate 2017-2019) is author of 9 collections of poems and recipient of the Montana Governor's Humanities Award for promoting civil civic conversation.



BELLFLOWERS BY: CYNTHIA HOLLENBERGER

Spring has become **Cynthia's** favorite season to have a camera in hand. She loves to capture tiny details as the world sheds the white winter blanket and embraces fresh warm showers. CindyH Photography is based out of Arena, Wisconsin.

Diaphanous

BY: STACEY LAWRENCE

Ferns and Spiders
sunbathe in slim open
window where light cuts in like lemon
slices across her patchwork quilt
the runaway perches on a
mustard draped bed
dandelion hair in
denim flare she
sketches and sings,
hoes earth, sorts tomatoes
drives to market in an old
red Ford, lives in my
grandmother's attic
where I tiptoe on occasion
deep into her magical room
like some character in a
Roald Dahl book my
Miss Honey lays stacks
of crisp paper and
piles of flaxen glitter that float
with a breeze like fairy dust.

Stacey Lawrence teaches Poetry at a public high school in NJ. Her work can be seen in Comstock Review, Eunoia Review and others. Nikki Giovanni says of Stacey's work, "It's so seldom a book of poems can contain both love poems and acceptance of grief. Take Stacey's poems to a couch, curl under your great-grandmother's quilt, and understand love and loss are one."



HONEY IS MADE BY BEES BY: AVA MARGUERITTE

Resurrection

BY: MAGGIE SWOFFORD

The crunch of dirt
against teeth—brown
matter, the same from
which I was expelled
in red glory—fills
my ears, travels across
my head to the edge
of my throat.

Is it possible to drown
in yourself? I'm dying
as I tear the earth
that birthed me apart—
how can I survive
an uprooting of my own
presuppositions?

Fertile husks of dead
creatures and decay
is where I find my
first sprout—even
though I feel
unfamiliar, I am made
of my old pieces
in a new formation.

With every fresh
inhalation I am sustained
by the hope my fellow
plants exhale, the oxygen
a memory of the final
effort to release
their own poisons

and a reminder that I am
not the only one asked
to die before I can live.

Maggie Swofford loves outer space, fashion, and Georgia O'Keeffe's watercolors. In her poetry, she enjoys crafting strange imagistic metaphors and unusual expressions of emotions. She also is an email marketer for a publishing company in Boston.





Index of Sentiments, A – L

BY: JESSICA GREENBAUM

—from *Tussie-Mussies; The Victorian Art of Expressing Yourself*

In the Language of Flowers, by Geraldine Adamich Laufer

Anemones? **A**bandonment. Which begs the
 Question, How would you even offer them? The **b**rouhaha
 That follows might be noted through a hallway
 Vase of rhubarb, and to emphasize the cruelty, well
 Nettles say it best, and might be laced along the
 Window frame, encasing stems of lavender to illustrate
Distrust forevermore, a well-placed narcissus added,
 Avowing to the lover that their **e**go wrecked things
 From the get-go, some pennyroyal flung on to shoo
 “Flee, flee away!” you devil! But perhaps our avenging
 Florist protest too much, or tires, since tucked within
 Their toolbox wilts a bit of thistle, wistful, a strand
 Of **g**rief for company while broken things get fixed.
 And things do! A toaster, the bike gears, and after this
 Sabbatical from passion, this drought-dried heart Is
 Set to rights by the **h**ealing balm of bachelor-button
 Pinned on a lapel. Ho-hum, tra la. Life sings in the rain,
 Secret sprigs of just-picked dill stowed in their brim,
 Professing only to the wearer their irresistibility—
 Although to whom they can’t yet know—and the
 Tussie-mussies of black-eyed Susans, still-green maple
 Leaves and pine they clutch announce that **j**ustice
 Holds the **k**ey to their heart’s loyalty, just love, just.

Jessica Greebaum has three books of poems, an NEA grant, and an award from the Poetry Society of America. This poem takes flower symbols from the book “*Tussie Mussies*” by Laufer and creates an abecedarian.



Bloom

BY: M.A. ISTVAN JR., PH.D.

Your new friend next door at mommy's—. That.—
What's her name? Yeah, Arianna.—That. That
kept me up. I said it before. And maybe I harp on it
too much. But soon you're not gonna want to be
hanging with daddy all the time. I know it's hard
to imagine right now. But it's true. It's true, man.
Things change. That's natural. And that's okay.
It's just hard for daddy to watch that creep closer.

Don't cry. It's okay.—Check this. You know how
in scary movies the dad tells the family to keep him
restrained and not to believe anything he says
(especially about him being better or about why
its urgent that he be unbound)? What I want to say
is sort of related.—It's morning. I'm lucid right now.
I'm being open here. I'm being my better angel.
I'm not actively possessed. I'm not under duress.—

Never let me guilt you into not going out with friends.
Yes, I know you want to hang out with me. I'm sure
when you're older you'll still want to. You and me—
we're so much different, tighter, than me and grandpa.
Still, when it's a choice between me or your friends,
and you find yourself wanting to hang out with me—
be real. Ask yourself: do you want to hang out with me
just because you know it'll make me sad if you don't?

Given our connection, that may very well be the case.
What I'm saying is: Don't give into that. Don't give in
even if I start saying things that I know will get to you,
like: 'See! I told you the day would come when daddy
would just get pushed to the curb.' That's manipulation.
And I don't put it past myself. Don't let that shit inside.
'Why you do this to me, Dami?' Remember that shit!?

You shouldn't be hanging out with me only because
you think I'll be sad without you.—Don't cry, Mikey.
I'm not saying that you're doing this now or anything.
But there might come a point when you'll feel a pull
to avoid going out with friends because I'll be alone.
Mommy stayed with me so many years because of that.
Mommy likes women! Knowing my love, she knew
how it would hurt me to move on—be real, bloom.

M. A. Istvan Jr., Ph.D.—poet and philosopher—is an adjunct
professor of philosophy at Austin Community College and the
current editor of *Safe Space Press*.





Once

BY: JANE SNYDER

He asked for a story. This is what she told him:

Once upon a time there was a little girl whose father told her she was stupid. He didn't

use that word, not when the girl's mother was around, but the little girl knew what he meant.

After the mother left the father said whatever he wanted.

You make me sick, he said, when she was ten and put a sanitary napkin in the trash without wrapping it first.

She put toilet paper around the next one, but the dog sniffed it out, tore it into bloody shreds.

"You're a pig," he said, "a stupid pig."

The man the little girl married also called her stupid. This man did use the word because

he wanted to make sure she knew what he meant.

She thought of leaving only she got such terrible motion sickness, she didn't see how it could be managed.

"Selfish," her husband told her, when she vomited, ruining this nice trip for your father and me.

So she killed them both and stayed where she was at.

The end.

He said the story was too short and too bald as it was. She should flesh it out a little, use

more sensory details. Also, she knew better than to end a sentence with a preposition.

"Okay," she said, "The little girl killed her father first, in his bed. She made a long gash down his stomach with her knife, through the skin, into the shiny fat. She used the knife's tip to pull apart the skin where she'd cut, exposing the stomach.

"After some of the blood ran out, leaving a spot dark as a hole on the sheet under his cooling body, she examined the exposed area and, in such orifices as were available, she placed stones.

"River rocks, gray in color, and smooth from being tumbled down the river by the currents.

"A river, you know, is never silent. In spring, when it overflows, it bellows. In summer it is slower, softer, makes a lapping sound.

"She killed her father first, sewed up his stomach with catgut.

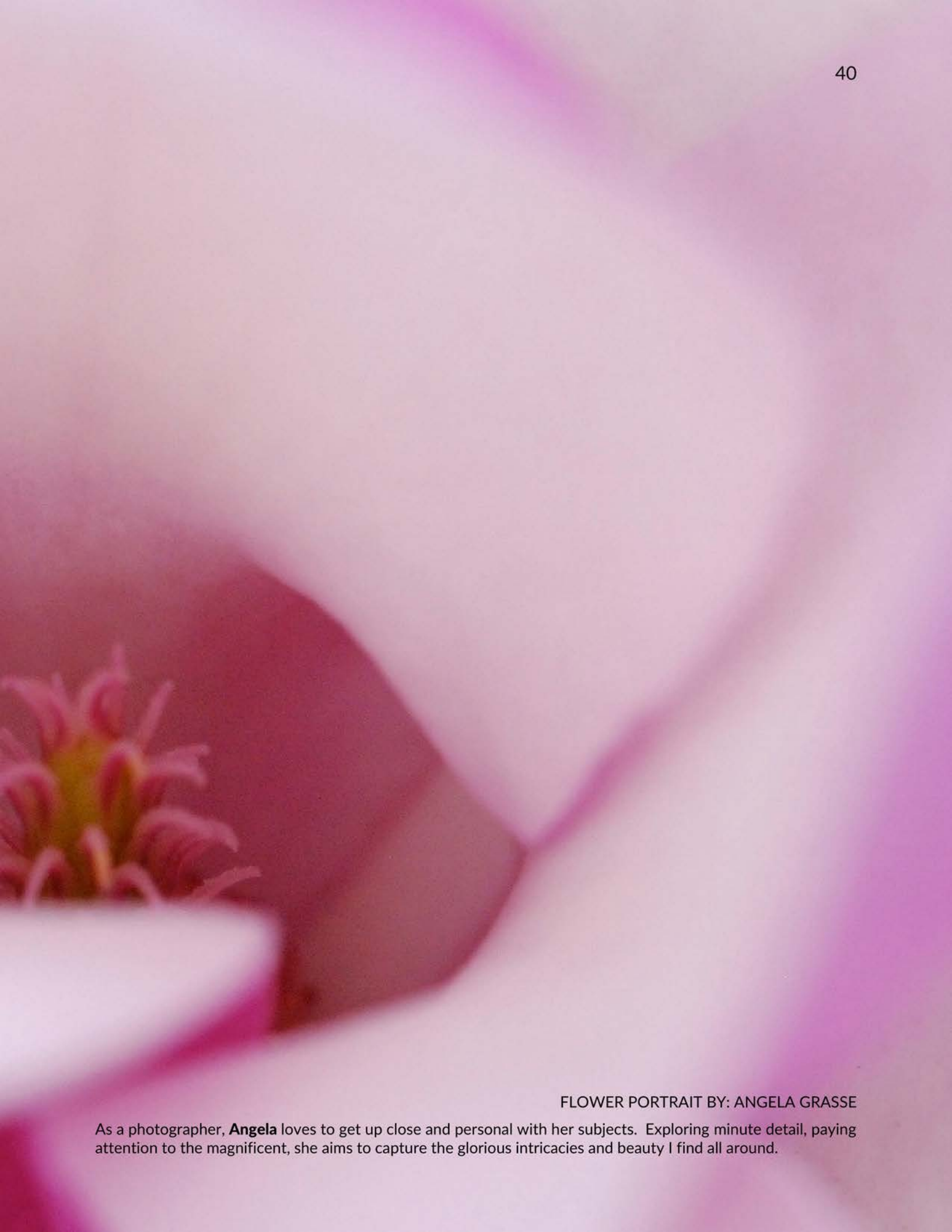
"She picked a needle with a large eye to accommodate the thick thread she used, pulled it in and out, in and out. As she sewed she imagined dancers doing a reel, the women's brightly colored silk skirts forming bells as they twirled, the men bowing from the waist, the fiddle's twang.

"When she finished the little girl went to the home she shared with her husband and killed him the same way. The only difference was there'd been more room for rocks in her father.

"That's how the river was in *The Wind in the Willows*, always making noise."

"Oh," he said. "Oh, right."

Jane Snyder's first published poem appeared last year in *Eight Poems*. She lives in Spokane.



FLOWER PORTRAIT BY: ANGELA GRASSE

As a photographer, **Angela** loves to get up close and personal with her subjects. Exploring minute detail, paying attention to the magnificent, she aims to capture the glorious intricacies and beauty I find all around.



Norma Greenwood's canvases are painterly, structured, architectonic and robust, animated and bright. She was awarded a public art commission by the Jacksonville Florida International Airport where her two permanent installations can be seen. She is represented in private and public collections.

→ 13

→ 13 A



FILM NEGATIVE

FILM NEGATIVE

→ 14

→ 14 A



FILM NEGATIVE

BUTTERFLY BY: GUILHERME BERGAMINI



Photographic reporter and visual artist, **Guilherme Bergamini** is Brazilian and graduated in Journalism. The works of the artist dialogue between memory and social political criticism. He believes in photography as the aesthetic potential and transforming agent of society. Awarded in national and international competitions, Bergamini participated in collective exhibitions in 32 countries.

Father of All Dolls

BY: AVA SHARAHY

"Cancer?" Olga whispered as she glanced over Anatoly's shoulder, seeing that he was going over today's obituaries. "Poor girl."

Anatoly nodded and attempted to tune out Olga's words as he focused in on the obituaries. Olga instead took a seat, and Anatoly looked up at the clock, he still had a few minutes before he had to teach his next lecture on Celtic funeral rituals.

"Ten years old, too," Anatoly commented, and Olga nodded, stirring her coffee. Seeing as she was now quiet in thought, Anatoly honed in on the obituary, pouring over the details. Yekaterina Borisonva Petrova - died at Nizhny Novgorod Medical Clinic of leukemia on April 12, 2006, at the age of ten and a half. Beloved daughter of Boris Fyodorovich Petrov and Oksana Romanovna Petrova. Buried at the Krasnaya Etna Cemetery in a private funeral service.

We love you forever, Katya. You will be such a beautiful angel, and one day we will see you again. We hope you can still play with your dolls in Heaven.

Love, Mama, and Papa

Anatoly continued to look over the obituary, closing his eyes only to see the words written on the inside of his eyelids. As he read over the detail on the girl's dolls, a vision of a little girl, blonde hair already starting to fall out, playing with a porcelain doll with matching blonde hair flashed before his eyes. He could feel himself grinning as the girl's head turned to face him, like an actor breaking character to look directly at the camera's lens.

"Save me, Papa," he could hear the girl say. "It's so cold in the cemetery."

His vision was interrupted by a hand on his shoulder, and Anatoly's head snapped back to see Olga, who jumped back in surprise.

"It's almost three," she said. "Your students are waiting for you."

Anatoly smiled and apologized, grabbing his notes for today's lecture as he headed towards the classroom, knowing that there was someone else waiting for him as well.

After class that day, Anatoly only stopped by his house to gather his supplies for tonight's scavenge. He made his way to the cemetery as soon as the sun fell behind the horizon, as Anatoly let the moon's light guide him on the path to the graveyard. He couldn't help but smile as he reached the graveyard; he knew that even nature would condone his actions, even if it was against the laws of man. In the cemetery already, Anatoly made his way to the girl's grave, as the graves descended in size to the little graves standing over child-sized coffins.

Seeing a fresh slab of marble glint in the moonlight, Anatoly glanced at it to see the name of the girl from the obituary, with fresh lilies lining her grave. Facing the grave, Anatoly crouched down and dragged a finger on the edge of the marble, trying not to cry as the pleas of the girl grew louder.

“Save me, Papa,” the girl kept repeating, loud enough to crack Anatoly’s skull so the sound could be heard all the way across the world. “I don’t belong down here. I want to be alive again.” “I know,” Anatoly said, trying to shush the voice in his head.

From his research into Celtic rituals, he knew there must have been some kind of black magic that would eventually bring the dead back to life or at least science would advance enough to reanimate the dead. Until then, Anatoly knew he would have to save the souls trapped in the ground, but he knew he could only save the girls if they wanted to be saved, if their obituary called out to him, if he slept over their graves as the Celts used to, just to hear the girls plead for him to dig them out of the Earth and back in the air.

Grabbing the shovel from his bag, Anatoly shoved it into the dirt and pressed down his foot to dig up the ground so he could eventually reach Katya. As he dug, he distracted himself from the demands of his labor to thoughts on preparing Katya: he figured she would be bald from treatment, so he had a curled blonde wig available at home, along with fresh clothes. He would watch cartoons with her, sing her to sleep, and line her decaying features with wax so she would be just as beautiful when she was brought back to life.

Digging up her grave was difficult work, but Anatoly couldn’t help but smile. At the very least, he knew Katya would love it at home with the other girls.

Ava Sharahy is currently a student at Sarah Lawrence College studying creative writing. You can also find her work in *Disquiet Arts*.

Island in the Spring

BY PATRICIA COLE

The sun shines once again, it's spring
air redolent with scents of herbs
water in the bay a shimmering blue
white fluffs of clouds meander o'er the sky
wild cyclamen appear from every crack
daisies raise their faces to the sun
for a few short weeks our island will be green
before the long hot summer takes a hold

The almond blossom's heavy on the trees
the sounds of bleating lambs to make one smile
warm sun touches winter skin
foretaste of summer heat to come
blue sky, washing blowing in the breeze
children playing football in the square
our island waking up from winter sleep
uplifts the soul, so pleased to be alive

Tourists flock here for relentless sun
to lie on beaches broiling, turning red
thinking they know the island very well
but never glimpse it as it is right now
they see it brown and scorched with heat
a harsh and craggy rock arising from the sea
they never breathe this green and lovely isle
a tiny part of Greece that is my home

Patricia is a retired accountant who has taken up writing later in life. She has had some success with short stories and at the grand age of 75 has had a novel published under her maiden name of Patricia Frew.

SERENITY BY TATIA NIKVASVILI



Deep Blues

BY: BRUCE GUNTHER

I could stay under these covers all day
without noticing the otherworldly color
of the neighbor's maple.

Imagining that the clouds
disappear to reveal an unblemished
expanse of blue sky won't bring clarity.
The past plays like a movie and
the grinning face hovers like a junior high
bully, daring me to stand.

I could stay here all day waiting
for a call or text that never comes.
All day waiting.
Turning my back to the window,
which leaks sunlight through the blinds,
deciding that there's no such thing
as a clear mind.

Waiting.
The maple's leaves must fall.
Its finest clothing forms a carpet
which the wind scatters - the sound
of playing cards across pavement.
And the laughter of drunken clowns
growing closer.

Bruce Gunther is a retired reporter and editor
who lives in Michigan. He's a graduate of Central
Michigan University.



Turning 30

BY: A. WHITTENBERG

Lately,
I've fallen
Completely
In love
With myself
When I look in the mirror
A sense of self-esteem
Courses through me and all I can think of is
"Damn,
If you ain't fine."



A Whittenberg is a Philadelphia native who has a global perspective. If she wasn't an author she'd be a private detective or a jazz singer. She loves reading about history and true crime. Her other novels include *Sweet Thang*, *Hollywood and Maine*, *Life is Fine*, *Tutored* and *The Sane Asylum*.



Confection Perfection

BY: JACK M. FREEDMAN

Jack M. Freedman is a poet and artist from Staten Island, NY. Publications featuring his work span 13 countries. Under the pseudonym Jacob Moses, he penned *...and the willow smiled*, *Art Therapy 101*, and *Seance* (Cyberwit).

I
am
the
wild
fruit
within
velvety
fragrant
chocolate
cheesecake.

SPRING REVIVAL BY: K.M. CLARK

K.M. Clark is an extraordinary dreamer, poet, and photographer.

Romance: Refreshed, Rekindled, Re-served

BY: BAISALI CHATTERJEE DUTT

Hello my forever love,
Will you write me a poem?

A poem
as wholesome as an apple,

but dress it up
like apple-pie.

Put it on a table for two,
covered with an
old rose, gingham cloth.
I'll wear a dress of lavender lace
and you splash on some musk.
We'll talk of Paris and jazz
and will-o-the-wisps,
later you'll play me tunes
on your Spanish guitar
and I'll dance for you.

Write me a poem.
A few words,
a stanza,
a limerick will do.

Just. Write.

Yours,
An old love

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt is a domesticated nomad who writes, edits, dabbles in theatre and teaches. She also eats chocolate by the bucketful and gazes at clouds while trying to mother two teen boys.

Memory of Rain

ROSE EMBRACE BY: JUDITH RAYL

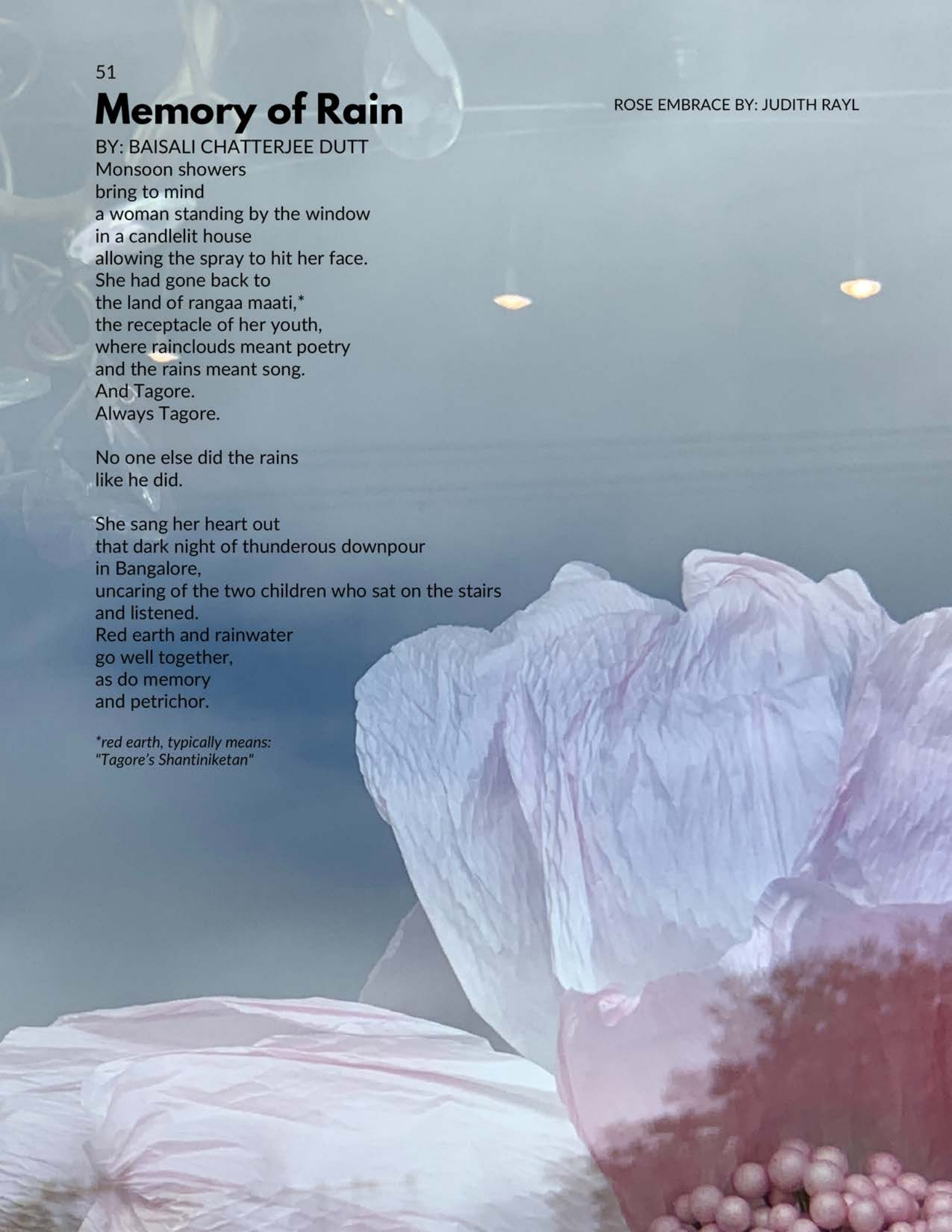
BY: BAISALI CHATTERJEE DUTT

Monsoon showers
bring to mind
a woman standing by the window
in a candlelit house
allowing the spray to hit her face.
She had gone back to
the land of rangaa maati,*
the receptacle of her youth,
where rainclouds meant poetry
and the rains meant song.
And Tagore.
Always Tagore.

No one else did the rains
like he did.

She sang her heart out
that dark night of thunderous downpour
in Bangalore,
uncaring of the two children who sat on the stairs
and listened.
Red earth and rainwater
go well together,
as do memory
and petrichor.

**red earth, typically means:
"Tagore's Shantiniketan"*



I BROUGHT A BOX: JUDITH RAYL

Judith's raw, single-capture photography explores tender beauty found at the intersection of nature and the human-made. She seeks shared emotional territory through art. Judith began art in 2017, presenting in 65+ exhibitions to date.

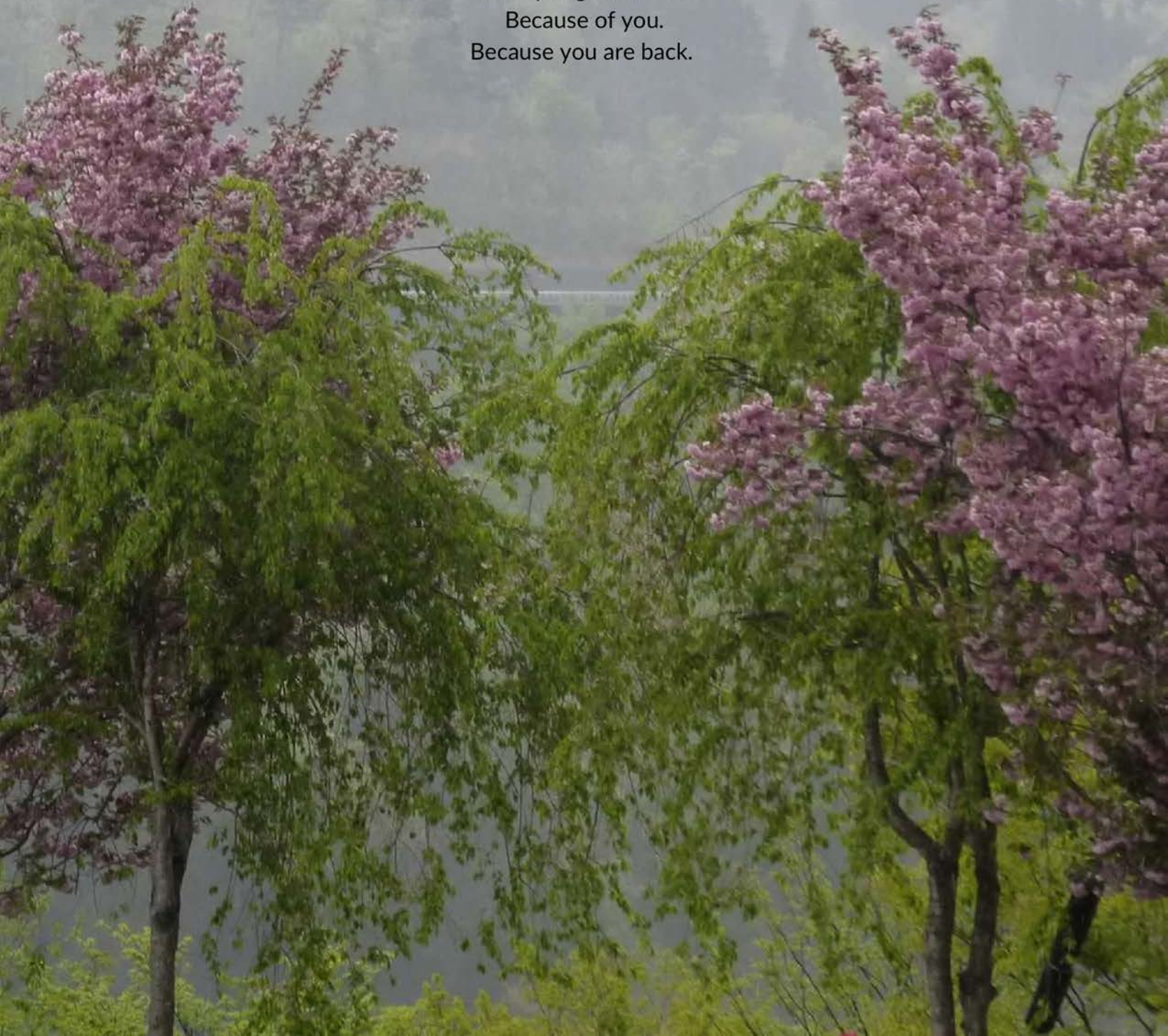




When You Come Back

BY: MARY ANNA ZAMMIT

You touch my hair,
And you touch my whole story,
While jumping in the dungeon of my thoughts.
Chimes in the air.
Birds singing.
It is Spring, the road out of this tunnel.
And you come back out of the waves.
Like Spring I am alive.
Because of you.
Because you are back.






Karina Kristoffersen McKenzie makes digital art, prints and textiles based on teachings of tibetan Buddhism. She lives by the sea at the southern part of Norway



War of Attrition

BY: CLIFF SAUNDERS



Of course we need to raise a glass
this Tuesday to the books
of iron appearing in our mailboxes.
Of course the joke's on us, it's what
we eat as we soldier on in a lost war.
What are we missing? We're
still missing the point.
We ask the dust to protect
our magic quart of questions,
but it's not enough.
We have to start blowing smoke
into every noodle of worship.
We certainly have to recognize
that mirrors may cloud
our messes large and small.
We should investigate mirrors
abusive to unloved cars,
take all their excuses away.
We're drowning in crows
while silence speaks its name
but not much else. Yes, we
should push shopping carts
down the road under the moon,
sound a warning to a wintry man
on the beach, cast long shadows
up unusual birds. Around here
all of our balls are juiced
with the same old apple.
As winter turns to fall,
we dress like a team of greeters
worrying about witnessing crimes.
One more day of this
and we'll require body armor.

Cliff Saunders is the author of several poetry chapbooks, including *Mapping the Asphalt Meadows* (Slipstream Publications) and *This Candescent World* (Runaway Spoon Press). Originally from Massachusetts, he now lives in Myrtle Beach, SC.





A brushstroke of art

BY: MARK ANDREW HEATHCOTE

Ivy leaves of green turn the shadows dark
 The beauty of spring hinges close to my heart
 A glow of renewal in a tempestuous spark
 A painting of nature—a brushstroke of art.

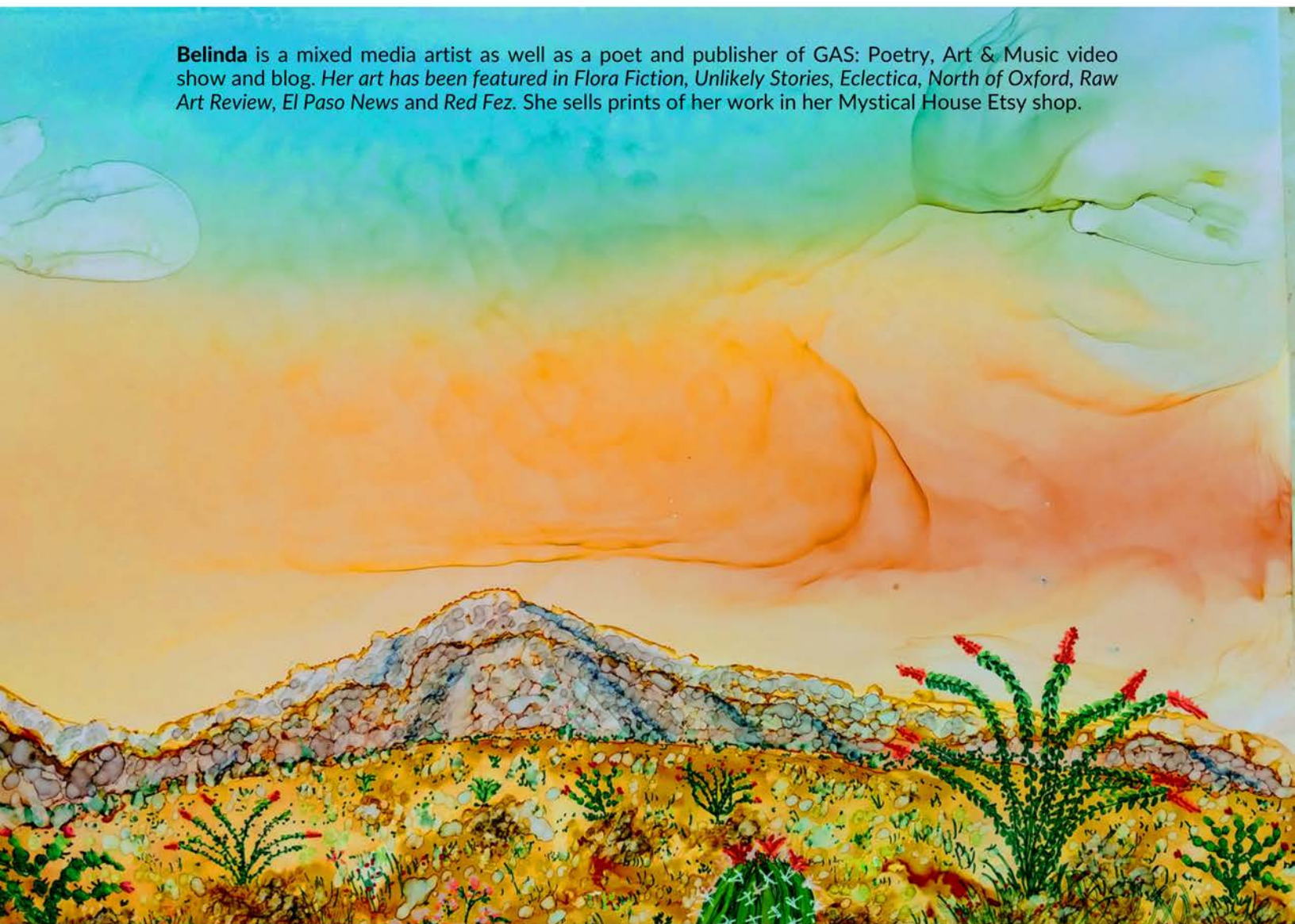
~Or~

A painting of nature a brushstroke of art
 A glow of renewal in a tempestuous spark
 Ivy leaves of green turn the shadows dark
 Springs's ultimate beauty opens wide my heart.

Mark Andrew Heathcote is adult learning difficulties support worker, his poetry has been published in many journals, magazines and anthologies, he resides in the UK, from Manchester, he is the author of "In Perpetuity" and "Back on Earth" two books of poems published by a CTU publishing group ~ Creative Talents Unleashed.

GROWTH BY: BELINDA SUBRAMAN

Belinda is a mixed media artist as well as a poet and publisher of GAS: Poetry, Art & Music video show and blog. Her art has been featured in *Flora Fiction*, *Unlikely Stories*, *Eclectica*, *North of Oxford*, *Raw Art Review*, *El Paso News* and *Red Fez*. She sells prints of her work in her Mystical House Etsy shop.



HARVEST DANCE I BY: MARIA DIMAKI

Maria is an artist, mainly practicing the cutting and etching on x-rays. She tries to challenge the stereotypical way medical science and the human body is seen.



SUNSET BY: JENNY PIVOR



HARVEST DANCE II BY : MARIA DIMAKI

LEAVING THE PAST BY: JENNY PIVOR

After a decade of teaching art, **Jenny** fell in love with technology and became a web designer. Already knowing the tools, it was easy to translate that into fine art. Today, she's obsessed with photography, sometimes as an end in itself, but more often as a tool that she can manipulate into another image.





Badlands

BY: ERIN MCINTOSH

I want to spend more of my time in love
with the strange small breath of animals,

not only human but birds too. But groundhogs too,
those brown hurried flurries

that crouch in the mouths of holed
dirt homes all across these varicose western

plains. Each time I glance at the mirror
I see unfamiliarity and family history

brought to life. I see a mother I tired of,
a father I waited too long to understand,

a brother I called on who never came,
who stopped buying into the idea that

having shared genes meant anything
other than grief. I'd take care of them

all if I had the energy. I'd buy them all
expensive dinners and tall hats, treat them

to concert tickets and tarot readings, cabined
get-aways in Nevadan mountains. Meanwhile

we are all too busy escaping each other
and this is why I have more trust

in tiny creatures who cannot speak, cannot
promise, can never in their short-lived lives

let me down. They'll come and they'll go as
they please, with the seasons, and my feeling

for them will be mist, there and not depending
on the day. None of this ceaseless battered

yearning. None of this bashful carrying on into
cellphones when I'm almost out of minutes.

None of this petulant heartache
or misuse of company time. We'll end things

here and now. The knowledge so comforting, a
big warm bed of alfalfa fields on summer road,

dirty, unforgiving, everything I was born
wanting in the first place.

Erin McIntosh is a writer living in Los Angeles. More than thirty of her poems and short fiction have been published in journals such as *Two Serious Ladies*, *Hobart*, *Bone Bouquet*, and *Lavender Review*.

Mawie Barrett is an emerging Irish writer.

Is she/she?

BY: AMY VAN DUZER

Can she grow
Through the crack
In the plastic
Which holds her
Roots and water

Is she a flower?

Can she thrive
Through the masses
Of sprays which
Protect her leaves
From the preying

Is she a flower?

Can she bloom
Through the dim
City starved light
Which gives life
To new buds

Is she a flower?

Can she blossom
Like the world's
Last wild rose?
Well,
Is she a flower?

Amy Van Duzer is a lifelong writer and MFA candidate at Mt. Saint Mary's College in Los Angeles. She is most inspired by her travels as well as other poets and lyricists. She has published pieces in magazines such as *Parallax*, *Mediterranean Poetry* and *Cephalo Press*.



Lily Gavin is a junior high student from Carver, MN. She enjoys singing, acting, youth group and spending time with friends and family. As a new photographer, Lily focuses on the beauty of creation that surrounds her.

Everyone Does Something Well

BY: LOWELL JAEGER

for Clayton

1.) He stutters, reading aloud: *Write five paragraphs describing something you do well.*

He rubs the pencil eraser across his stubbled chin. His husky war-veteran's shoulders hunched over the blank page. Needs the entire hour to carve out six lines of hieroglyphics, one scrawling run-on,

 something concerning his tour of duty as a helicopter mechanic. *Okay, I say. That's a start.*

2.) He's flat on his back beneath my car, having run one tire up an icy snowbank, clearance enough for him to worm under. He's opened a dented toolbox and set it nearby, asking me to hand over the tools he calls for.

He wants a 19mm wrench. A cold, difficult wind spits snow in my face. I can't read the tiny numbers etched in the battered steel.

No, he says quietly to the wrong tool. Then he reaches, groping blindly in the box. *This one*, he says.

3.) I'm shuffling an awkward jitterbug to keep warm. I'm watching his hands. The old starter out, a new one installed in about as much time as I'd need to write my own five paragraphs. Maybe less.



For a Honeymoon

BY: WILLIAM CONELLY

Your inland cousins wedged between
loud streets and gatehouse towers,
wish you the peace of seaside meadows
swept by tides of flowers;

wish from Warwick's old skyline,
steep with mottled brick and grout,
the softer, higher lines of clouds
south of Saint Michael's Mount.

With fizzing glasses raised from Thai
spring rolls and jungle curry,
through rolling distances: Salud!
Here's to oyster slurry,

yarg and second season berries
prinking clotted cream!
Here's to tousled rounds of pleasure
served with mutual esteem!

And, yes, of course, we realize
fond wishes shan't improve
the blooming ocean views, the food
or cock-eyed takes on love.

So what? We'll savour your new lives
as we do sparkling wine,
and wish you rare contentment,
every day, all of your time.

After military service, **William** took a master's degree in English from UC Santa Barbara. Retired from teaching as a dual citizen, he resides in the West Midlands town of Warwick, England.



The Wind

BY: ROBYN PETRIK

The wind might take me away
and if it does,

I want to return as the breeze
that tangles your long, loose hair.

I want to come back as the gust
that brings tears to your eyes
but not because you're sad.

I want to be the wind
that moves through the trees,
rustling the leaves,
the noise reminding you to look up
and remember how beautiful life is.

Finding My Place

BY: ROBYN PETRIK

Bare feet across a sandy beach,
waves rolling against the shore.
The sun finding its place
in a wide open sky,
and me, finding my place
in a wide open world.

Robyn Petrik is a poet from BC. Her poems have been shortlisted for several collections, placing third for *Patterns*. Robyn is addicted to traveling and hiking, and does her best writing when exploring new places.



SPRING GROWTH BY: REGINA SILVERS

Regina Silvers has been involved with fine art her whole adult life, as a teacher, curator, art consultant, museum spokesperson, gallery director, open studio tour director, and always, practicing artist. Since 1990, she's worked in and managed The White Street Studio, TriBeCa, NYC.

Regina Silvers

God Listens In

BY: MICHELLE FULMER

Did you know God listens in on the phone? He must, because I don't remember saying anything to Him when I called the preacher.

"Sarah's had a stroke." That's all I knew. My 23-year-old daughter had a stroke. They tried to protect me from the scary details, but little did everyone else know, keeping the truth from me was making things worse.

Unrelated families milled about the waiting room with us, but not with us. Each in their own world, passing the time in their own way. I passed the time by crying, praying, and telephoning friends and family to start prayer circles. I created a bunch, so I was sure God would listen to someone.

Hours felt like millennia. At last, the surgeon appeared, looking grim. The two arteries that fed Sarah's medulla oblongata were malformed and blocked. One had a stent, the other was unsalvageable. She had a thirty percent chance to live, and by that, he meant survive.

They moved her to the ICU with the tubes of seven different apparati stuck any place one would fit. Her father, Bill, and I split shifts, staying with her, sleeping in the waiting room, and eating in the cafeteria. I took nights. He took days. We talked during the shift changes and watched over her like nesting hawks, weighing every move the nurses made.

I took a chaise lounge cushion for naps, and my hands took to a sewing project to keep busy. I felt guilty every time I wanted to complain.

Even when I slept in a straight-backed chair because someone in the same ICU boat found my cushion. Sarah was so uncomfortable. Who was I to whine?

When my children were children, I taught them sign language. Sarah really took to it and we would walk and sign everywhere. They even attended the sign classes I assisted in. They did the final projects each time—signing a song. I never knew where it would lead. It was just a little family endeavor that made us somewhat unique.

On the second day, Bill leaned on the bed rail, one hand on Sarah's now useless right hand. His eyes followed every tube in and out. "What can I do?" he asked out loud.

Sarah's eyes opened! As he headed to call the nurse, he bumped into Valerie, her best friend. They rushed back to her bedside.

"Sarah, look! Valerie's here."

"Hey Sarah." That's all that came out of Valerie before tears consumed her voice.

Bleary eyes cut over towards her visitors and her left hand struggled free of the equipment. The hand swooped across her chest. Once. Twice. Three times.

"Are you in pain?" Bill leaned over and touched her forehead. He felt a slight movement, but it wasn't definitive.

The hand swooped again, but this time with her pointer extended.

More in tune, he watched his daughter. "The 'where' sign?" Bill asked. "Yes. Where is the only logical thing." He looked at Sarah, his heart aching. "You are in the hospital. You've had a stroke."

Tears flowed as the nurse walked in. "Is everything okay?"

"She's awake."

Sarah lifted her right arm as far as it would go and crossed her left hand over, moving it side to side.

"What? Are you saying 'baby'?" Bill's eyes widened and teared up. The thought of a grandbaby now was more than he could bear. He asked the nurse, "Is she pregnant?"

"I don't think so. I'll check."

"Sweetie," Bill asked, "are you pregnant?" He looked to Valerie for confirmation, but this was news to her, too.

Valerie stood there silent, overwhelmed. The stroke affected the right side of Sarah's face, but the left side of her mouth curled upwards around the breathing tube.

"Are you kidding? Are you joking?" asked Bill, confused.

When the nurse returned, she said, "No pregnancy that we're aware of."

"I think she confused her signs. I could be wrong, but it looked like 'baby'. Sign language. She knows it."

"Maybe it was a dream or on TV. It's not weird for stroke victims to try to communicate things. It could just be a faulty language center." Sarah waved her left hand, touched her half-smile, and crumpled back into slumber.

It was near shift change, so Bill invited Valerie to stay for dinner with us at the cafeteria. I was happy to see Valerie there, half afraid her young friends would abandon the new Sarah. I should have known better about Valerie. As Bill told me of their morning with Sarah, Valerie punctuated the details.

Theirs was quite the tale. They talked of my stroke victim communicating "where" and "baby" in sign language. I was just stunned. She was only supposed to survive. I found the news overwhelming. She can sign? It couldn't be.

Out of caution, we always kept the Animal Planet channel on the television so she would never wake up to see something ugly. What she was going through was hard enough.

Later that night, I was helping the nurse change Sarah's bedsheets and give her a bath.

The nurse looked up at the television. "Oh, that kitten is so cute. I wonder what it is?"

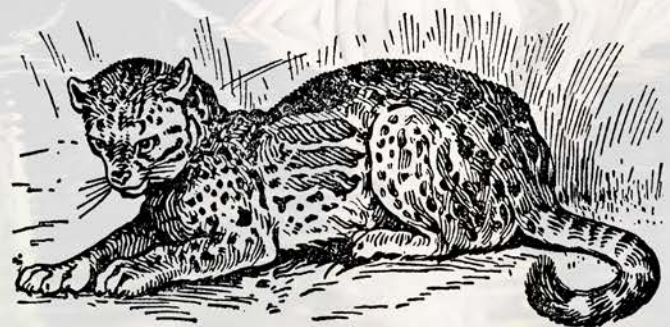
If it wasn't a farm animal, I had no idea. "I don't know."

Sarah stirred. Out came her left hand. "O-C-E-L-O-T."

I mouthed each letter as it formed, stunned. "Ocelot? Is that what you said?"

Her face showed that half-smile her dad beamed about at breakfast. I realized then that the mental connections were still there. Sarah was still in there! She would have physical difficulties to overcome, but she was still our Sarah.

I guess I cried and laughed at the same time as I fell to my knees. I don't know what I said to God then, but I know I was quickly back on my feet, dancing. God must listen in to Happy Mama Dances, too.



Michelle is an emerging author of a fictional drama series who is a native to Central Florida. She's an RPLA judge and founder of a writers' critique group.





FLOWER PORTRAIT BY: ANGELA GRASSE

there were reasons

BY: MELANIE HAN

the gods took you away
 they were jealous
your breath gave life
 made streams flow
wakened the dormant earth.
the gods took you
 away to prove themselves
almighty
 snap of fingers
watch you catch
 fire, flames licking
 outstretched toes
engulfing your shrieks
 in smoke,
 suffocatingly thick.
the gods took
 you away out of selfishness,
 they wanted you all
 to themselves.
but the gods
 took you away and didn't know you still live
 in the smiles of rivers,
the laughter of trees,
 the heat of desert sun
 defying the fact that
the gods
 took you away.

Born in Korea and raised in East Africa, **Melanie Hyo-In Han** currently lives in Boston where she's a poet and a teacher. She has received awards from "Boston in 100 Words" and The Lyric Magazine.

Your Love is a Contract In Someone's Book of Shadows

BY: ROBERT BEVERIDGE

the letter from the misery of tourism stated your rucksack is due to expire in fourteen days. You, however, haven't owned one since the Great Albumen Blizzard of 1982. We processed a no to ravioli on the tuna casserole, and does the birds' nest in the tree branch outside your bedsit window have subtitles in Albanian? It could be the local tinpot Hoxha breathes down your neck and a trip to Romper Room Outfitters is in order. When you, only half-awake, order your omelet whites only, the final augur is sealed in blood, your OK Cupid profile reactivates on its own, the Sigurimi release the blue jays, fragments of your photo in their beaks.



SOCIAL MEDIA BY: KEVIN VIVERS

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *the6ress*, *1870*, and *The Hope Anthology*, among others.

The Wake of Day

BY: MARGARET MARCUM

Drifting into silent air,
there is a woman who I know and do not
remember, sitting by the window.

She is singing the sun
to rise. Then, curved line beneath her left eye,
I recognize as mine.

The sign of the sun has no meaning: looking
through the glass to morning, there is
joy in departing.

Language of Daybreak

BY: MARGARET MARCUM

Words come to me upon waking, which I forget,
and they do not in whispers
of the Universe, where my birth replays
upon screens of my eyes

They echo from the passage
connecting dreams and I listen
to the Great Mother—her
voice pure unravels awake
what lies beneath

Margaret Marcum is a student in the MFA program at FAU studying poetry. Her poems previously appeared in *Literary Veganism*, *Children, Churches, and Daddies*, *Amethyst Review*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Flora Fiction* and *All-Creatures.org*.

Between the Spaces

BY: MARK HAMMERSCHICK

It is between the spaces that we dream
of two people who drink tea diligently
caught in the web of sinister glances,
hands touching briefly on pink linen
their eyes drained like urine in the stall
crumbs littering their faces.

They slither inflicting carnal torture
lips quivering breasts quaking
in the puzzled muzzled mist of scarlet mourning.
Crimson welts color startled shadows into submission.
How once roses were so important
though they now seem scarce,
distant like the man's grey granite eyes
with nothing only nothing to hide,
only jagged remnant rumors of emotion remain.
Spin me a story of dulcimers and damsels she whispers,
of castles in the mist and legends of the woods.
And so it goes from crib to crypt
we fill up spaces with our selves
thinking this will work.
How our end is in our beginning
coloring their spaces
with traces of our dreams and lies.

Mark writes poetry and fiction. He holds a BA in English from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and a BS and MBA. He is a lifelong resident of the Chicago area and currently lives on the north shore, his professional career has been in digital strategy and online consulting.



Dusk & Dawn

BY: EVA WAL

When evening has fallen
I take off my fur
and put my feathers on.

At dawn, I let go my nightbird's
gown and see hair grow to fur again.

Thick as felt in winter,
wide and celestial blue in summer,
I wear myself.

In spring and autumn, I cross a passage
in between.

I walk through trees,
over mountains and wander
under river streams,

I dusk and dawn.

Eva Wal is a visual and multimedia artist as well as a poet and writer of short prose. In 2009, she published her first poetry collection "Marmorsee" (marble lake). She has lived in England for several years.

Morning Dreams

BY: YASH SEYEDBAGHERI

Morning. A promise to be kinder and less drunk darts about your consciousness.

Open emails. Reminders of credit card payments for all useless, seductive Pinot. Links to New Yorker articles about sedition. Reminders of dictation you have to take for a boss who dissects your every pause and jumbles coherence.

It's only 7 am.

But the sky is awash in pale and pink, shadows shimmering. The branches are labyrinthine and graceful, swaying in the morning breeze. A delicate, elegant dance. So much seems cleansed, muck, detritus, renewal billowing.

You walk into the world skipping a little, the sun rising, a smilecreeping.

Yash Seyedbagheri's work has been published in *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *Write City Magazine*, and *Ariel Chart*, among others.

FEATHER PINK BY TATIA NIKVASHVILI

Tatia is a photographer who loves capturing the beauty and terror of life.



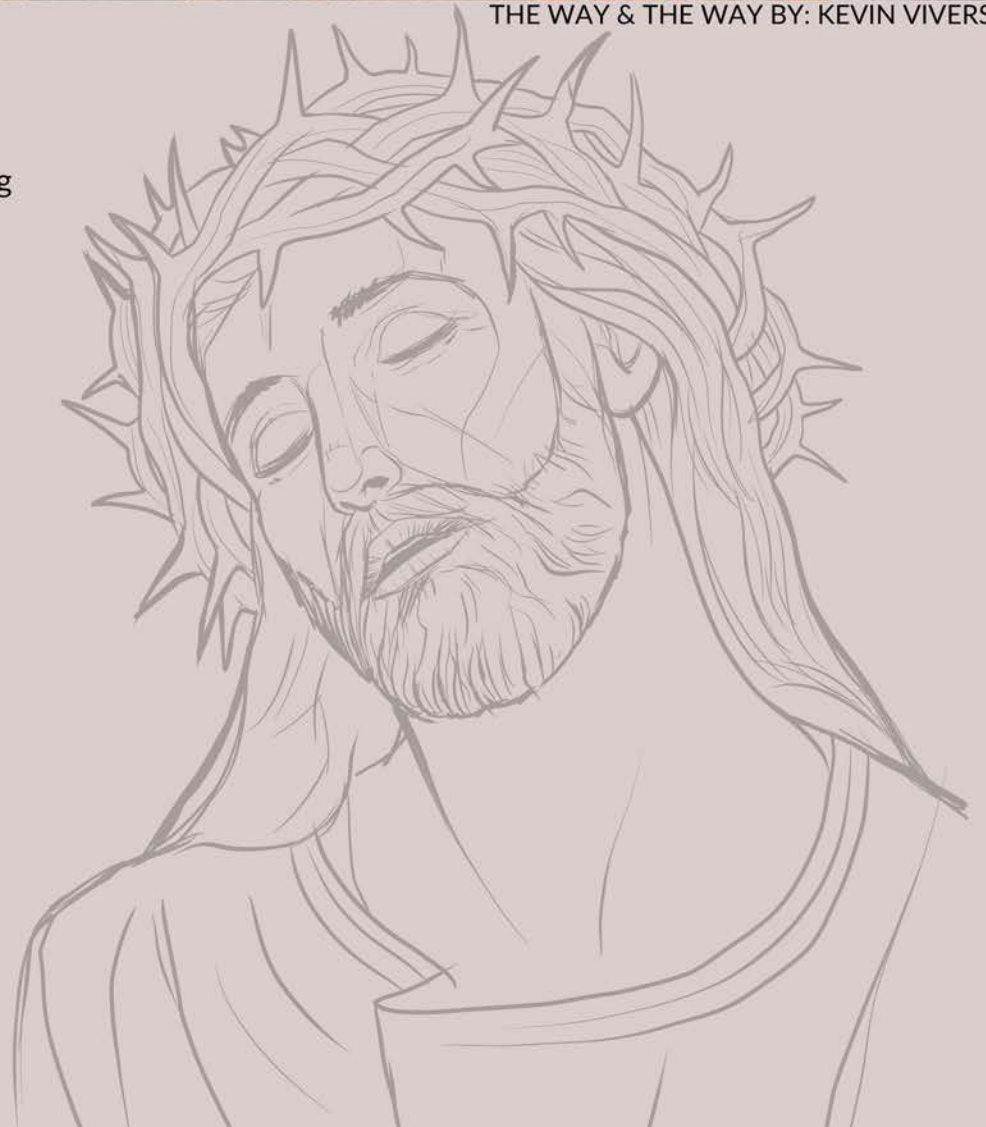


THE WAY & THE WAY BY: KEVIN VIVERS

Beginnings

BY: LYNN WHITE

I know that tomorrow will bring
a new beginning,
another new beginning
and I wonder,
when will I reach the end
of my beginnings.
The beginning and end
in harmony,
the end beginning
when everything is completed
and nothing left to be started.
Will this time come?
Perhaps it has already come
and I haven't noticed.
But I don't think so.
So I will carry on
towards my new beginning
and cease to wonder
how it will end.



Baptism

BY: LYNN WHITE

I am waiting longingly
gazing into the blue bowl,
the font of translucent light.

If only
I had been baptised
with holy water
from that bowl
a shining baptism
fiery sweet
enough
to warm
my stoney disposition,
to fill my grey life
with colour
and melt my heart
with sweet blue light.
If only.

But I know that deep inside
my stone hard heart
still beats beyond
my gaze,
and that it's
beyond me to go back
and be baptised anew
however long I wait,
however long I stand
and wait,
however longingly I gaze.



Pandemica VII

BY: GRETCHEN GALES

They told you

they told you

they told you

They

Can't
Breathe.

Wash, wash, wash away

the blood before another outbreak

Too late.

The next

Passover, trickling blood
on the doors to beg

Gretchen Gales is a poet and executive editor of Quail Bell Magazine. Her written work has appeared in Next Avenue, Ms., Huffington Post, Bustle, and more.

Tired of eaten by
the locusts of an everyday,
paycheck to paycheck.

Waiting for the rich
to have their clothes eaten
by moths and mobs
outside of their doors.

*Knock knock,
let us in.*

*We have replaced the Reaper,
we've come to collect.*



After the Pandemic

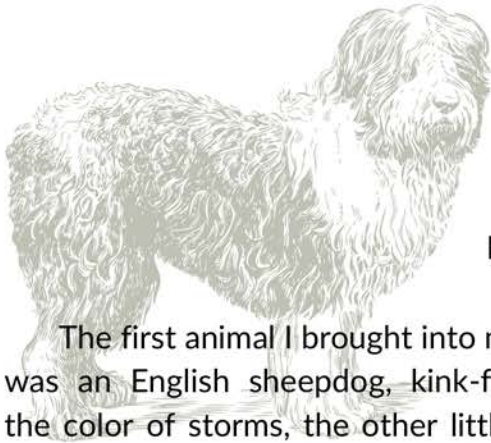
BY: MARY ANNE ZAMMIT

It all came sudden, wordfully, shocking the world.
We were haunted by silence.
No more freedom, no more contact.
It travelled round the globe.
Pandemic it was.
Closed each and one of us.
Then death walked our shadows,
Buried my breath, buried my eyes.
My heart almost died in the cold isolation.
Last night I dreamt of science, vanishing the virus again.
Of life back to streets to travel.
And life came back again to me.

Mary is a writer and artist from Malta and has exhibited both locally and abroad. Also, Her poetry has been featured in International Anthologies.



AWAKENING BY: ANA CHIKOVANI



Ethology

BY: CAITLIN WOOLLEY

The first animal I brought into my house was an English sheepdog, kink-furred and the color of storms, the other little soul my lover left behind. Then, when we got lonely—that is, bored—with each other, I opened the door to an orange alley cat with one eye who convinced me he could see the future and the past, but nothing in between.

Then, it was a forsythia-yellow cockatiel I kept in a silver cage by the window for the neighbors to see, to give them a reason to look at my house and know that someone was still home. One day, someone lifted the window and unlatched the cage and that was the end of the bird, but not of the cage or the window (both of which I left ajar in case the cockatiel ever thought of missing me).

The fancy rats never graced us long; fancy rats, as you might know, struggle to regulate their body temperature as they age and on more than one occasion I found a fancy rat dead and roasting under the heat lamp, its plump little body of no further earthly consequence once it reached that divine temperature and ascended.

The fish were dull. The crickets, useless. The lion too expensive to tame or treat or feed. Do you know what it really costs to parade live goats through the house and into the lion's enclosure, while the little neighbor boy watches, panting, and with a KitKat melting in his eager hand?

The squirrels were disobedient and devious. The bats bit me and the dog. Both of us ran fevers and foamed at the mouth for weeks. I recovered; the dog did not.

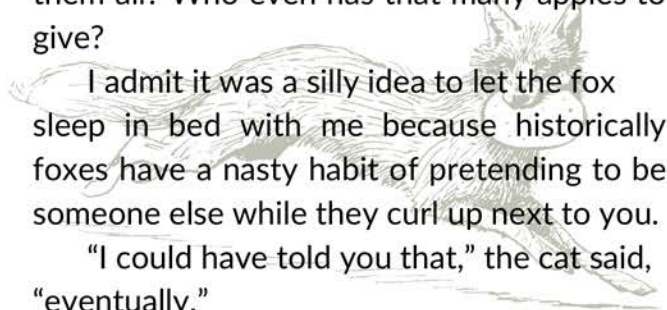
When I brought home the pig, no one wanted to drop by and feed her apples because they had heard the story of the man who murdered women and fed them to his hogs. Really though, once you ask about one dead woman, don't you have to ask about them all? Who even has that many apples to give?

I admit it was a silly idea to let the fox sleep in bed with me because historically foxes have a nasty habit of pretending to be someone else while they curl up next to you.

"I could have told you that," the cat said, "eventually."

Bringing the family of bunnies in was fun, at first. They were so cute and soft, but how quickly they staged a shit-coup and buried themselves in my good pillows to make more bunnies, more shit, more bunnies, more shit... I don't think we need to talk about what happened with the wolf, and how I was trapped beneath his giant paws and captive(ated) by his wild teeth.

And while we're not talking about that, let's also not talk about the perfume of the vulture's breath—how it, like me—can make a home for any creature.



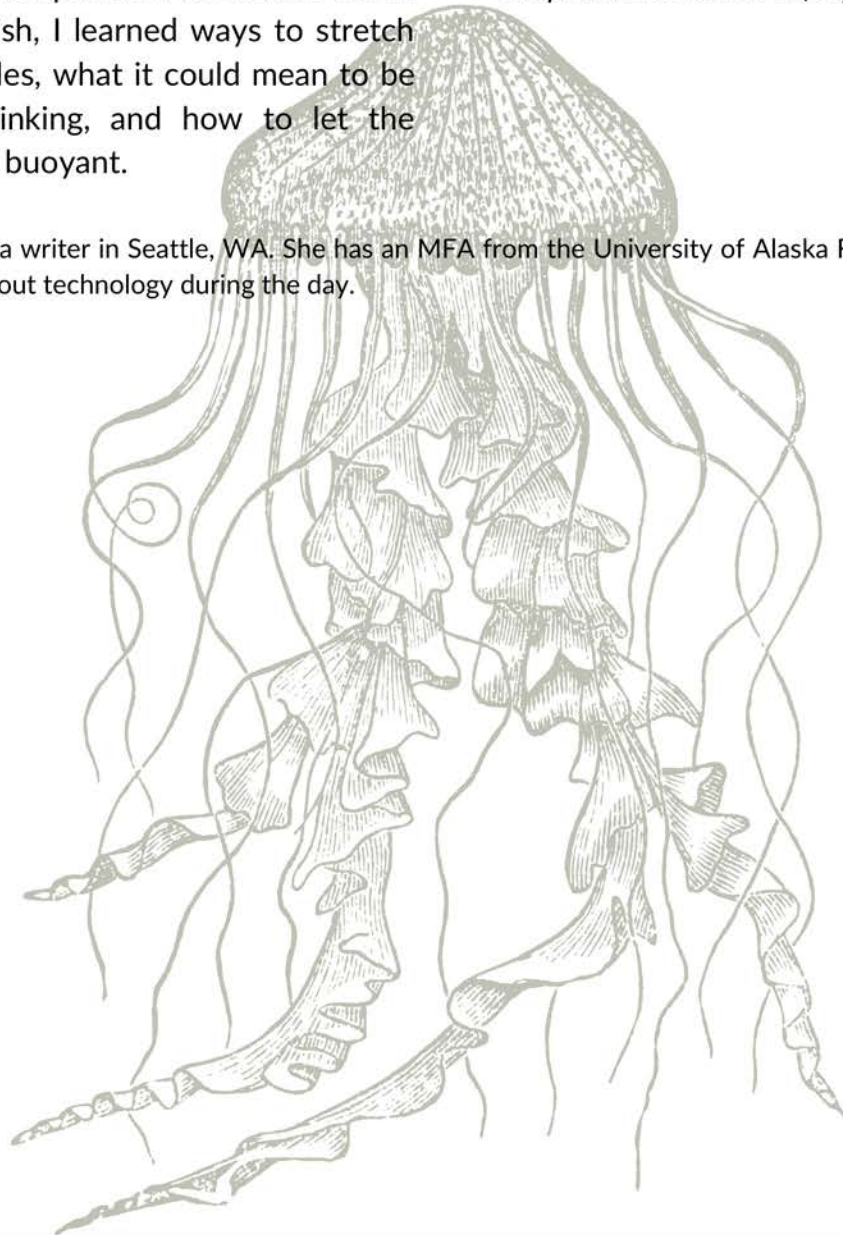
And then there was the alligator, who I thought could keep me safe from the fox and the lion and the wolf. Instead, he preferred to lounge in the light of the sun and cared very little about whether I was warm.

I thought, perhaps, the jellyfish was the answer. It watched me tenderly, always, as it undulated in the pearlescent otherworld of its tank, electrocuting any creature that touched it with no care for retribution, absolution. We lost the one-eyed cat that way; he could not perceive what was there. From the jellyfish, I learned ways to stretch my own tentacles, what it could mean to be soft without sinking, and how to let the world make me buoyant.

I taught myself to float. But like the other animals I was not allowed to touch the jellyfish, and to clean its tank was to confront the very real possibility that it would be the last thing I ever did. As I slid the long yellow gloves over my forearms and scraped the muck magnet along the sides of the glass aquarium, I thought about an ad I had seen in the paper earlier that day:

Male seeking companion, of any height or occupation, to travel forward in time with, no pets allowed nor safety guaranteed.

Caitlin Woolley is a writer in Seattle, WA. She has an MFA from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and writes marketing copy about technology during the day.



Wild Spring

BY: MARIA DO SAMEIRO BARROSO

Now, I know that seaweed and pebbles work in me
as levers of change.

I write my name on a fragile trail of stars.
I'm eternal, I know, that's why I write.

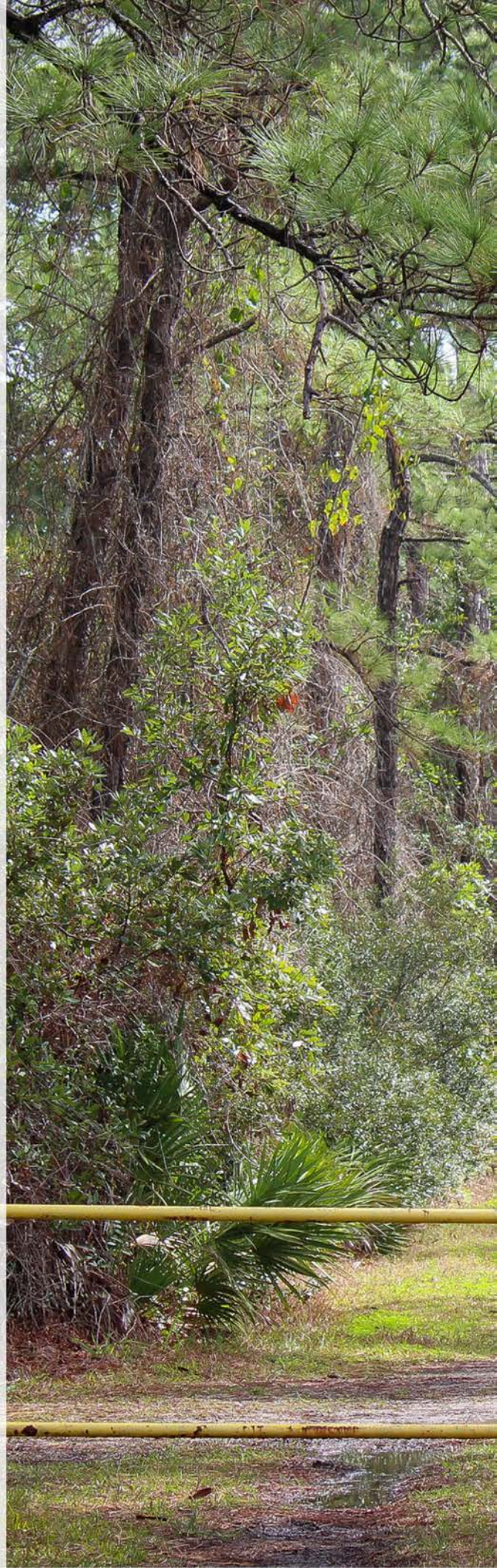
A few moments ago, I questioned my heart,
ephemeral glee.

In my purified body, I sensed the wild spring.
In my poem, I transcribed butterflies and deserts,
an ivory breath, convulsive harvests,
cellos sound echoing in cloisters
bringing a corrosive ecstasy,
while the sun was spreading the silence
and dark muses of nighty foliage.

Now, I know a little more about the light,
the loneliness and the greenest sprouts of spring.
Somewhere, I hear about secret shipwrecks,
murmurs of water,
I listen to the pigeons on the roofs,
I think of the oblique light, the grapes,
their violet flavour,
wondering about my fingers
- and the poem as a violet of my transfigured body.

Thinking on myriads of stars, I watch the mirrors
of the moon, diaphanous skies, red apples,
faraway castles,
unknown tracks and grooves, aware that bread
is not food for bees.
I fancy everything, my face under the volcano,
dreaming with voracious flowers,
getting the seal, the fate,
grabbing the rivers gaze, the fable of the days,
the words of your spell
among the mist, the fire
and the strange flower of excesses.

Maria do Sameiro Barroso (Portugal) is a medical doctor and a multilingual poet, translator, essayist and researcher in Portuguese and German Literature, Translations Studies and History of Medicine.





for simpler and better times

BY: LINDA M. CRATE

the skies will be blue again,
rarely a gray day;
the snow will slowly retreat
and the crocuses will
bloom—
nesting in my ears will be
birdsong,
and the fragrance of flowers dances
in the cool spring breeze;
hope comes wheeling in on brighter days—
the world is renewed from the dark and gray to
a vivid display of colors and scents,
the trees will no longer be
scant of their leaves;
and the evergreens will have company
with their friends once more—
ivy and ferns will appear again,
and wildflowers, too;
the renewal of the season is to come
every living creature holds its breath
for simpler and better times.



flowers instead

BY: LINDA M. CRATE

i've heard the birds chirping
gives me hopes
that spring will soon
be here,

all the crows have
been restless;

gray skies are rushing off
to leave behind skirts
of blue that embrace us in

laughter of sunshine
which seems to hide far too much
in the breath
of winter,

and so i know that there is something
laying behind this snow;

and soon the earth will be covered in flowers instead.

Linda M. Crate (she/her) is a Pennsylvanian whose works have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies both online and in print. She has published seven chapbooks, one novel, two poetry micro collections, and three full-length poetry collections thus far.









Flashback

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

“Just leave me alone,” six-year-old Laurie cried. Her back pressed against the door of the bedroom she shared with her younger sister, Sarah. Fueled with anger and hate, she couldn’t do anything but cry and replay the moments that led to her tears: Dad called her a cry baby and Sarah joined in on the mocking. All because they wouldn’t listen to her and that made her upset.

In that moment, Laurie hated her family so much she wished she could leave. She found a plastic grocery bag crumpled in her closet. She stuffed the bag with a few pairs of underwear, a pair of jeans, and two shirts, tying it at the top in a knot like her shoelaces.

“Open this door,” Dad yelled so loud from down the hall of their manufactured home, it shook the very plywood foundation that held them on a plot in the middle of nowhere, Midwest. Isolated from the world, Laurie told her friends she lived in the Boonies, fully convinced it were a real place.

The rattling of the door handle snapped Laurie into her reality. She approached the door shaking, knowing full well what was on the other side: a man, a monster, a person she hated and feared, but in the future, someone she would forget hurt her.

Laurie reached her trembling hand to the doorknob reluctantly; every instinct inside her told her to run. Her small hand finally reached the knob. She gripped it firmly enough to turn it. With the crack of light coming into the room, so did Dad.

Dad rushed in, forcing Laurie back. She hid on the bottom bunk of their twin bunkbed, instantly cowering away from him to avoid the terror in his eyes. She held her knees to her chest as he grabbed her chin, twisting her face toward him.

“Look at me when I’m talking to you,” he said.

In her only act of defiance, Laurie refused to do as she was told and instead stared at the point in the middle of his forehead where his eyebrows met, but not directly into his eyes. Dad pulled back his right hand, across his chest and in the air. Laurie flinched, covering her head. She tensed with the anticipation of pain. When it didn’t come, she peeked through her fingers.

Laurie woke from her daydream. She was twenty-five, stuck at work, lost in thought. Memories from her past came for her the instant she let her mind wander. She had to snap herself out of it, or else, who would? Spiraling forever within her own mind got her nowhere before.

“Hey Laurie,” her boss, Mark, said from over her shoulder, causing her to impulsively minimize her windows like she did as a preteen girl entering chatrooms. Over ten years and she still did it—even when there was nothing to be guilty of—even when she was doing what she was supposed to. “When you have a minute, come to my office.”

“Yes,” she said. She picked up her blue clipboard. Clipped to it was a stack of papers covered in gel-pen chicken scratch that only she could decipher, writing in code to herself. She took a blank sheet from the bottom of the stack and placed it on top. Laurie glanced at her boss through the door. With a breath, she gathered herself and walked through the threshold.



Love

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

It's your face in the morning, your voice singing through walls, or wearing your shirts to smell you. Happiness can be taken for granted easily. It's getting used to being happy. So happy that it's almost unbelievable. Before you, all I knew was sadness. It's seeing you walk through the door after work, or performing our daily rituals without words, kissing and greeting each other. Dreaming of possibilities. It's losing you under the sheets. Your skin touching mine. It's comfort in trust, forgiveness, and growth. It's you lifting me up and me grounding you. It's what holds us together.

Ashley Wilson is a 27 year-old writer from St. Augustine, Florida. She graduated from University of Florida with a Bachelors in English.









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