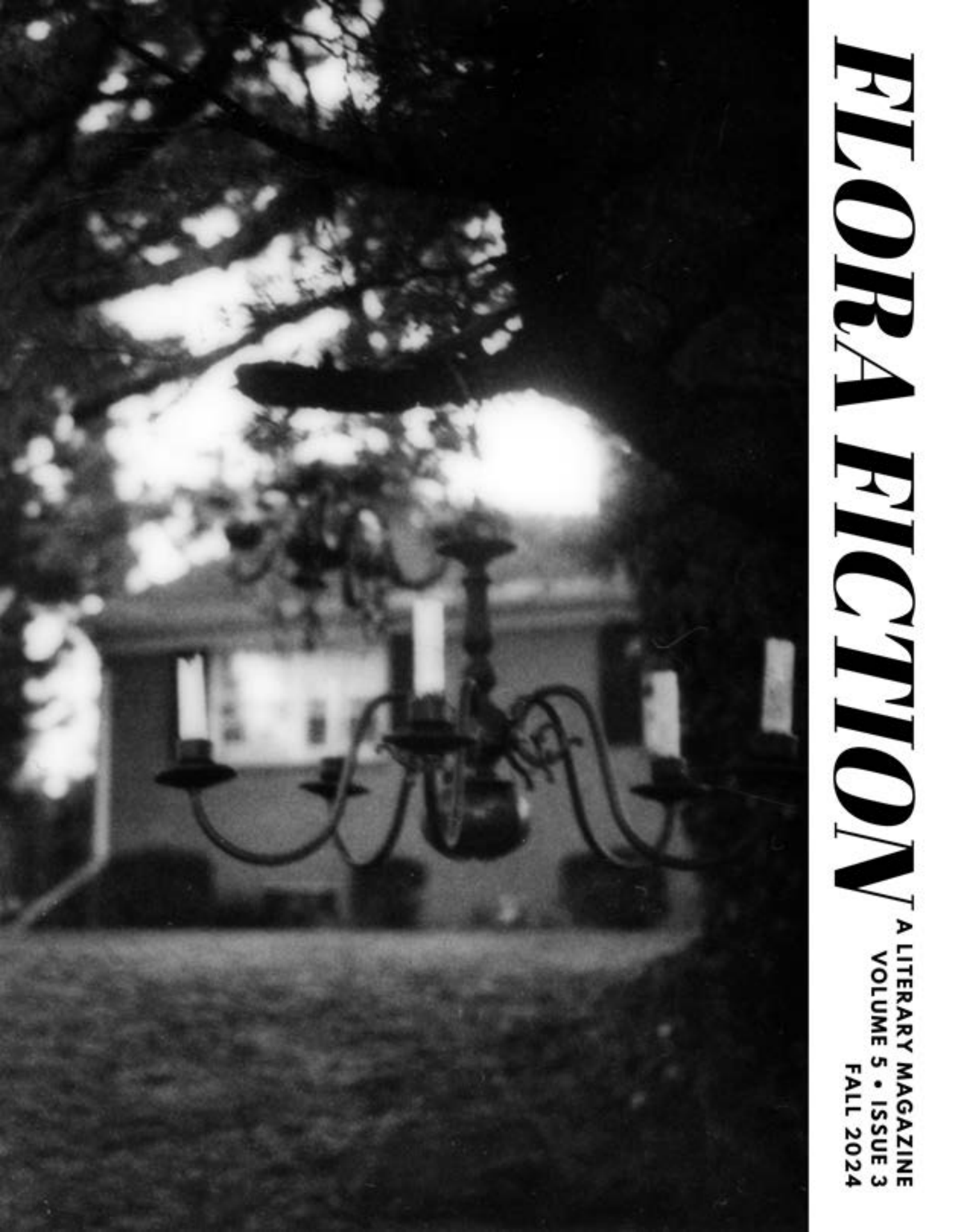


A black and white photograph of a chandelier hanging in a room. The chandelier is ornate, with multiple curved arms and candle-like lights. In the background, there are large trees with dense foliage, and a building is partially visible through the branches. The lighting is soft, creating a moody atmosphere.

FLORA FICTION

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EDITORIAL STAFF

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Prince Quamina
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Colleen Halupa

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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

Sometimes, creation demands silence. Sometimes, the stories we seek to tell do not come when summoned but wait, lingering in the shadows, taking shape in the quiet. This issue has taken longer than we hoped, shaped by unforeseen circumstances, yet perhaps that delay was its own gift. For Fall 2024, we bring you "Whispers in the Dark," a journey into the unseen and the unsaid, where shadows breathe, and the night listens.

Imagine stepping into a forest at dusk. The air cools against your skin, and the world softens into silhouettes. The path ahead disappears into a tunnel of trees, their branches twisting like old stories. You take a step forward, then another, drawn by a sound you cannot quite name. It is not loud. It is not near. But it calls to you.

That is what this issue is about: the pull of the unknown, the allure of mystery, the beauty and terror of things half-glimpsed. These are the stories we do not tell in the light. These are the poems that find their rhythm in the silence. These are the images that emerge only when the world grows quiet enough to see them.

We sought out creators unafraid to linger in the darkness, to listen to its secrets and translate them into words, colors, and forms. The works gathered here are not only haunting; they are alive. They breathe with the weight of questions unanswered, with the tension of what is left unsaid. They do not shout; they whisper.

And so, we ask you to read slowly. Let each page unfold like a shadow stretching at dusk. Notice the quiet moments, the spaces between words, the glint of light against the dark. There is power here, in these stories and poems, but it does not rush to reveal itself. It waits for you, patient and steady, like the night.

Thank you for waiting with us. Thank you for stepping into the quiet, for trusting what whispers in the dark to guide you forward. The shadows have stories to tell. Listen closely.

xoxo
Flora Ashe

PHOTOGRAPHY

"Chair Study"

By: Annette Nichols

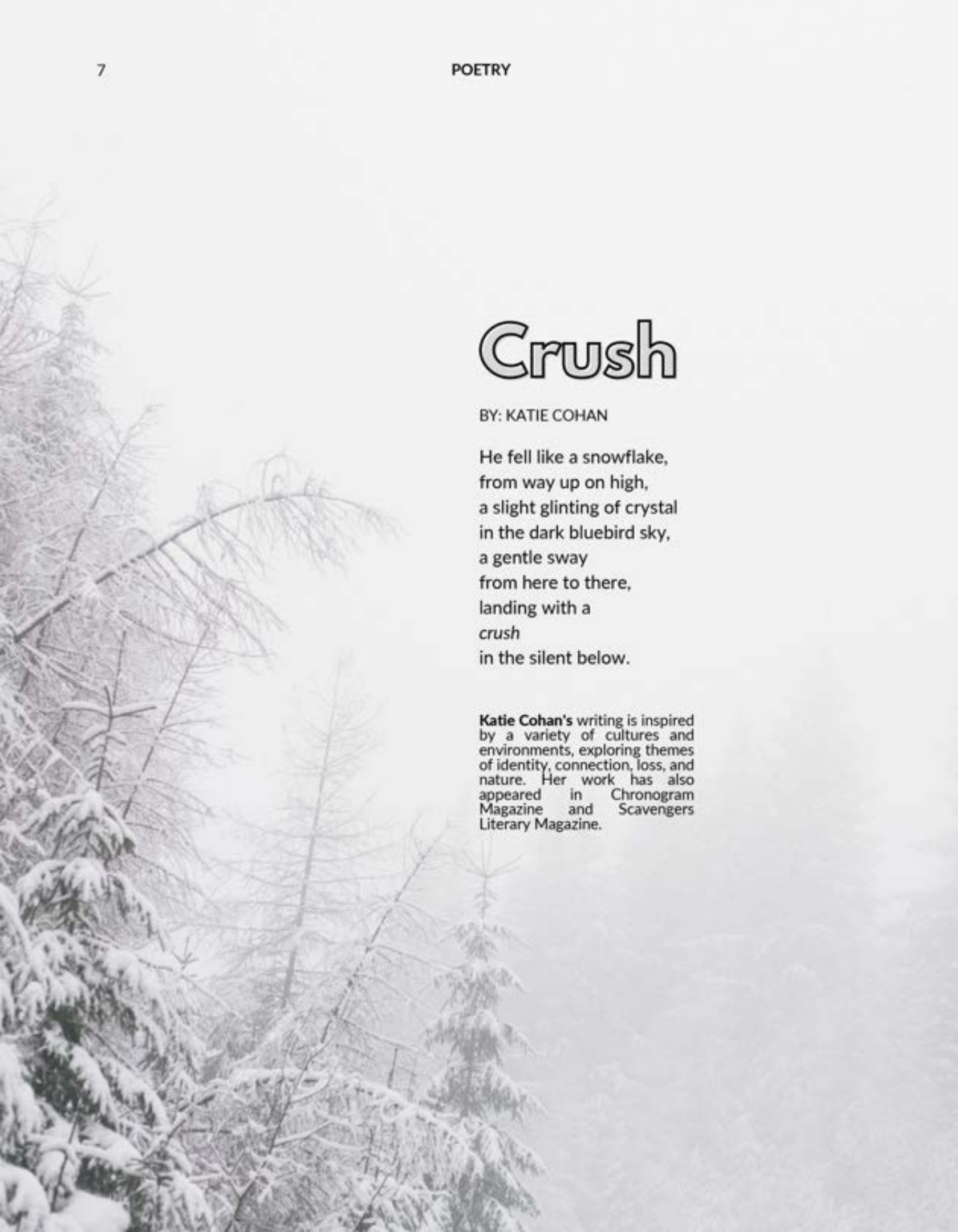
Annette Nichols is an American visual artist who likes to take a visceral approach in her work by creating layers using various mediums that articulate a sense of emotionalism and depth. Her artistic direction is largely influenced by music and film.





"A Little Crazy"
By: Dafna Steinberg

Dafna Steinberg is a lens-based artist living and working in Delaware County, PA, just outside Philadelphia.



Crush

BY: KATIE COHAN

He fell like a snowflake,
from way up on high,
a slight glinting of crystal
in the dark bluebird sky,
a gentle sway
from here to there,
landing with a
crush
in the silent below.

Katie Cohan's writing is inspired by a variety of cultures and environments, exploring themes of identity, connection, loss, and nature. Her work has also appeared in *Chronogram Magazine* and *Scavengers Literary Magazine*.



"New Year's Eve Fog"
By: Annette Nichols



"Big Easy"
By: Dafna Steinberg

Junction

BY: YUNA KANG

I am waiting.

For chalk strewn days and sunlight, books of fairy magic and nose goes! laughter and childhood hoopla and fun. Climbing the monkey bars and scraping my knees on pigeon-poo blacktop spreads. Spreading out like the horizon, (fun), watching the sun go down.

And we're sitting, feet out, watching the sky turn blue. Old adults now. 22 and 24.

My socks burn on the dirty concrete. Floor. I am floored by you, flabbergasted. In love, but not really in love.

Mood rings, silly bands, ribbon hair, braids and bangs and headbands and plastic pearl necklaces. Nail polish from Claires and an old Justice t-shirt. All of the things we once were.

"It wasn't too much," you said, stretching out. To touch your toes.

"Remember how we had to do this in P.E?" You lean forwards, an effortless touch. "I never knew why we had to do it anyway.

What a dumb thing to do."

And I could've said, well gymnastics, or flexibility is important to the young soul. Or mind, stretches are good to do before exercises. And also it kills time. When you work with kids, a lot of what you do is just killing time.

But then you look up at the sky. The cumulus clouds are culminating in the sandy air, mists emerge, I think I see a peachy blue fuzz growing. The Sierra mountains are vast and a distant pinpoint in the flat suburban eyeline. Snow threatens to clutter the points of this world.

And the sun sits above us, flat and growing. (don't look directly in the light!). But I am tired of lecturing you and besides.

You touch your chest; where snug flatness used to bind; scars now proliferate. (Did it hurt? Are you okay?) but I don't get it.

I think we have hurt each other too much; I want to say. There is too much history here. We are not kids anymore; we do too many things, that are different; us. I don't want to say it though. It explodes in my throat, this threat, the puncturing of our half-ruptured relations already.

"I didn't understand and I wasn't supportive," I want to say, but it isn't enough.

"I'm sorry I made you fight for us," or, "I'm sorry you had to be patient with me." All of these things accumulate, like the memory of a bad kiss, or walking home alone at night. The parking lot lights shuttering on and off, leaving you aghast in random, hectic, night.

But then you touch my hand. Hold it. And I know why we're friends, because you understand, or rather: we understand each other.

And things have been distant and will be distant from now on, and it's okay. We recede from one another like mountain to city, town and habit, past and memory alive. Bound together by the same threadbare hopes, looping into one another, occasionally wrong, occasionally; we make each other cry.

Until next time. Sitting in the blue suburban sun. Legs outstretched, sweating, in the Sacramento sun.

Yuna Kang is a queer, Korean-American writer based in Northern California. She has been published in journals such as *Strange Horizons*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and many more. Their work has been published in multiple languages. They were also nominated for the 2022 Dwarf Stars Award, as well as the 2024 Best New Poets Award.



"In The Clearing"
By: Dafna Steinberg

"The Invasion"
By: Christina Maile



Face Time



SHE'S A POPULAR
SPOKESPERSON FOR
A NEW AD CAMPAIGN.



WHICH
SHE HEARS
REPEATEDLY.

AND
IS RAXON
WORKING GREAT
TONIGHT?!



HER FACE IS LOOKING OUT
AT PEOPLE IN MANY PLACES.



COMPELLING PEOPLE
TO BUY PRODUCTS.



SO MANY PEOPLE ARE
ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING
IN, LOOKING IN AT HER.

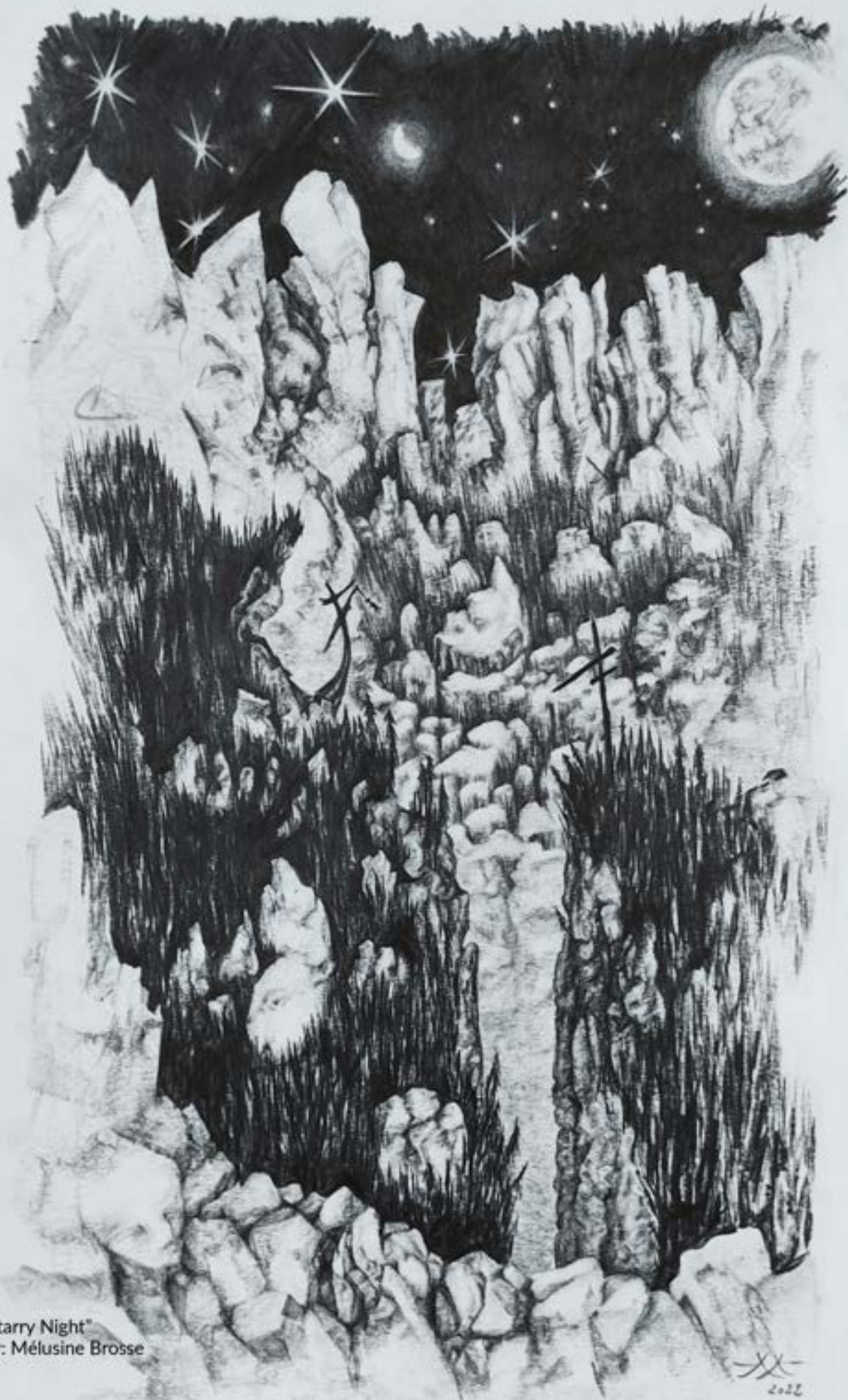


THERE ARE NIGHTS THOUGH WHERE
SHE WISHES MORE PEOPLE WERE
REALLY INSIDE WITH HER.



WHERE POWERFUL
ELEMENTS DO
MORE THAN SKIM
THE SURFACE.

THE END



"Starry Night"
By: Mélusine Brosse

XX
2022



"Nymphosis 1"



"Nymphosis 2"

By: Mélusine Brosse

Mélusine Brosse is a French artist. Lifelong dreamer, professional misfit. Trying to breach the space between the dark spaces of consciousness and reality to open a window on the Now.



"Magma"

By: Mélusine Brosse

Wanted

BY CAMERON ALLAN

The thought I had just now.
The one that was going to change
everything. Round out the story,
fill in the holes, finally break through.
It should be doing about ninety
on the road to the place where all things
I didn't write down dwell, off the map,
on the precipice of remembrance,
there in the dimness, laughing, mocking.

Cameron Allan is a 27-year-old poet based in Aspen, Colorado. Cameron graduated from Middlebury College in 2020. He is an avid skier, mountain biker, and rock climber.

DELUGE

IT IS EARLY EVENING IN THE CITY WHEN PEOPLE ARE BUSTLING FROM WORK AND TO... HOME, PERHAPS, OR A NIGHT OUT. SOME FUN. THE ATMOSPHERE CAN SOMETIMES BE A BIT CHARGED.

STORY: PATRICK MCEVOY ART: RANDY VALIENTE LETTERS: RACHEL DEERING

ON THIS EVENING THEY FEEL SOMETHING DIFFERENT, THE ATMOSPHERE CHARGED TO THE NTH DEGREE.

LIKE A STORM MAY BE COMING.

THEN THEY SEE...

GHOSTS.

EVERYWHERE.

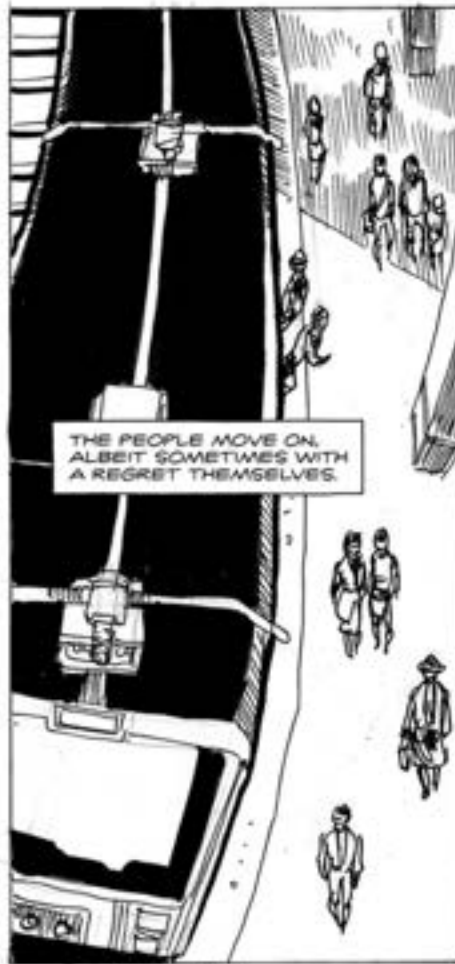
PERHAPS MOST DISCONCERTING, EVEN BY THEIR HOMES.



THE GHOSTS SEEM
TO REACH OUT.



THEY HOVER, ALMOST
GIVING OFF A PALPABLE
SENSE OF YEARNING.



THE PEOPLE MOVE ON,
ALBEIT SOMETIMES WITH
A REGRET THEMSELVES.



UNSURE WHAT TO
DO, THEY GO INSIDE.

CLOSE
THE DOOR,
QUICKLY
PLEASE.

HOPING TO AVOID
BEING DROWNED
BY THE GROWING
MELANCHOLIC
CURRENT.

THE GHOSTS DISAPPEAR,
BUT THEY ARE STILL THERE,
WAITING TO APPEAR AGAIN,
MAYBE HOPING TO BE SEEN
ONCE MORE... AND FELT.

AND THE PEOPLE HOPE
THE PRESENT MAY
PROVIDE ENOUGH
FOR EVERYONE.

THE END



"On the Way"
By: Fabrice Poussin



"Light at Last"
By: Fabrice Poussin

Please Do Not Sleepwalk On My Property

BY FLORA OSOBI

Please Do Not Sleepwalk On My Property.
The trees are watching your laden eyes
Scan the area for treats and pies
Gretel's cries still haunt each leaf
But rest assured this dread is brief

Please Do Not Sleepwalk On My Property.
The wolves here wear no friendly guise
A county fair, you are the prize
Red's bright hood appears a sword
With one strike grandmother is floored

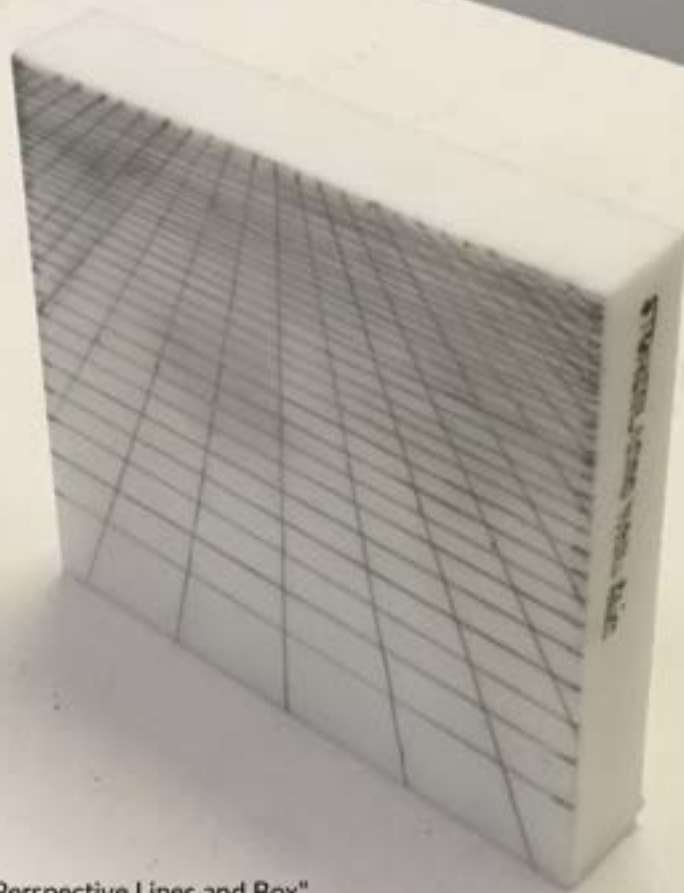
Please Do Not Sleepwalk On My Property.
The porridge cold, the beds unmade
A greedy Gold begins her raid
This family of three, how will they bear?
Only fire sees them seek what's fair

Please Do Not Sleepwalk On My Property.
The spinning wheel draws blood for gold
His wanton curse, loud and bold
Rumpel's lies pierce worse than knives
They swarm your heart with heavy hives

These stories told to scare the young
Are whispers born from shadows keep
In your mind they're so far-flung
Be conscious of what you sow and reap.

Flora Osobi is a law student from the UK. When not immersed in legal text, she enjoys writing poetry that inspires her to think creatively and challenge conventional thought.





"Perspective Lines and Box"

By: Georgina Haly

Georgina Haly, 51, is a painter who spends her days creating art, enjoying coffee, and reading good books.



"Cow"

By: Massimiliano Bruno Calabresi

Massimiliano Bruno Calabresi is a digital artist passionate about portraying the bond between animals and humans, often set against imaginative landscapes.





"Murmurs in the shadows"

By: Alka Chadha Harpalani

Alka Chadha Harpalani is an artist, researcher, art writer, and former professor. Alka has edited *Artistic Narration*, received prestigious awards, exhibited widely, and published extensively in renowned journals and magazines.



"Obsidian View"
By: Josie George

Josie George is a full time artist, specializing in botanical art and tattoo style art and illustrations.



"Night Pollination"

Trevor Coopersmith is a Los Angeles-based artist creating nature-inspired sculptures and murals, with a BFA from UCSB, an MFA from Otis College.

Pumped-Up for Next Gig

BY MARK BLICKLEY

"Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow."

—Last words of iPod creator Steve Jobs.

I don't remember any of my previous incarnations. This one just ended with the sound of my heartbeat replaced by booming defibrillator jolts. I can hear being zipped into thick plastic but I am not afraid. Aimless transmigration drifting will play no part in my future.

I don't understand why I came back as a drummer, an impoverished, financially unsuccessful percussionist ridiculed for a passion that labels me a bum, a perpetual adolescent, irresponsible and selfish. But creating music by pounding on those stretched skins until they vibrate me into mysterious intervals of bliss is an addiction I never want to kick. I've never considered myself religious or spiritual at all, but now that my gig has ended, I realize I spent my 47 years on earth as a priest. I cannot define this mystical bliss. When words and intellectual thought cannot describe a thing, it's called a mystery. That's why they created the word God. God is a musical term for irrational explanations of sacred truths.

We are all born musicians. At the time of my inception, Mom's heartbeats were the first organized rhythmic sounds I heard. Four months inside her womb I joined her with my echoing heartbeats, and then I pulled away to create my own unique beats and rhythm.

Musica Humana. Bookended between the first beat I heard from my mother's heart is the final beat I heard from the artificial rhythm of a defibrillator, tuning me up for my next incarnation. It's a much slower, angrier beat. When it couldn't tune up the instrument called my body, I am discarded. Defibrillator is electronic music—a no-no for true musicians who spurn the use of living drummers in favor of techno-drum machines. Defibrillators, not Schoenberg or Stravinsky, are responsible for the atonal music of the spheres.

Mom hated me becoming a musician. She said I would end up poor, drug addicted, a wasted life. Yet she loved music and streamed it so often it most certainly inspired me to take up drumming. I've never felt closer to her as when I replicate her heartbeat with my sticks. Every time I pounded or brushed those skins, I now see I was paying homage to my mother and the in-utero cadences she bestowed upon me.

As a drummer, I am the heart of a band's rhythm section. Heart arrhythmia is an irregular beat—I've done it plenty of times on stage and while jamming with other players, though I called it musical experimentation. Strange how we never know during our life how often we are rehearsing our death. My heart arrhythmia is genetic. The same musical rhythm from Mom that gave me life also killed me.

All lives are musical compositions and decompositions. Does the tune end abruptly like a song at a live gig, or does it fade away through artificial manipulation, like a recorded song that doesn't know how to end so it keeps getting fainter and fainter until it slowly disappears? Should one just keep going as long as mechanically possible or should one issue a DNR directive in order to cease and desist? Sound waves never truly disappear, they just keep getting weaker and weaker until they transform into thermal energy units, which are eternal. That is the true definition of human harmony we call soul music.

There is no single moment of death, but a series of mini-deaths. Hearts continue to beat after breathing stops. Skin cells remain alive several days after death so we can trade in our worn drum kit for a fresh set of skins. It's a reverse audition where the drummer doesn't try to get accepted into a group but decides to join a new human group with which to ignite innovative and invigorating percussive riffs.

There is a white light at both ends of this tunnel, but they are simply stage lights that can really be a pain in the ass when performing. I pound my way through them even though it's hard to see fellow band members and my audience. But this white light has dark shadows sprinkled within and these are musicians hoping I will jam with them in our next life. I am sandwiched between the white theatrical lights of past musical performances and future ones, as I inch closer to a new incarnation and my next gig.

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).





2019
K.B.

"Art" By: Kateryna Bortsova

"Ethereal"
By: Arvilla Fee





"Self Portrait"
By: Kateryna Bortsova



"Tolerance"

By: Kateryna Bortsova

Kateryna Bortsova, a painter and graphic artist with a BFA and MFA, has exhibited internationally and won awards, including the 2015 Emirates Skywards Art of Travel competition.

Don't

BY: MEETA ELLISON

Deny my knowledge
Neglect my needs
Defy my trust
Ignore my desire
Accept my leaving
or
Reject my love
Just Don't

Meeta Ellison, whose pen name is Emily Wright, is a dyslexic writer with a degree in Humanities and extra credits in creative writing from the University of Toronto. Ellison has a successful blog and four completed manuscripts.



"Buried"
By: Brittany Worlinsky

Brittany Worlinsky has exhibited nationally and internationally, including shows in Florida, California, and Korea. Her work has been featured in *The Party* film and exhibited in Malibu and Santa Monica.



"Naked"
By: Arvilla Fee



"Beauty on the Grave"
By: Dr. Helge H. Paulsen

Dr. Helge H. Paulsen, a social sciences PhD, is a freelance journalist, curator, and art photographer. His work has been published internationally and exhibited in German galleries.

Go on, Murder Your Lovelies

BY: NATHAN CHU

Screw the cover letter, the resume, the statement of purpose,
The poem, the summary, the synopsis,
The novella, and novel, and novelette

Slash their throats and let
Letters spill red
Into white space

They seek to trap your soul in lines
So few, so cramped
Our hearts in a couplet

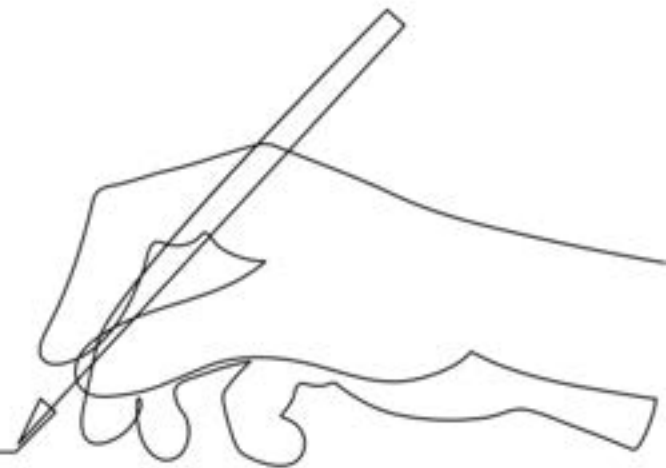
How to jam
Things so bizarre
Arrayed with limbs
And flailing

Evolving(?) past
The writer's hand
And slopping on their desk

Bag it up and mail it
To someone who cares.

Nathan Chu (they/them) is a Washington State writer and teacher who enjoys cooking, flailing around on the bass guitar, and practicing Japanese.

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Originally published in *Imposter: A Poetry Journal*. (Vol. 4, issue 2)



"From my sketch book"

By: Srimati Rashmi Trivedi





Rashmi Trivedi is India based visual artist, finished her MFA from M.S.University Vadodara, Gujrat India. She received government senior fellowship 2023 and junior fellowship. She presented her work nationally and internationally.

Keeping House

BY: UMA PADMASOLA

As houses go, I have known no other. Partitions and offshoots grow on ours, like generation after generation of parasitic children. My family has known no other. The house grows bigger. The house grows more hostile. I have nowhere else to go. I have my family to think of.

Today I aired my room and set it to rights. I breathed dust off my old diaries. The edges of the pages had softened, they were no longer sharp. The memories had softened too, like jagged pieces wrapped in cloth. I skimmed through them and wherever there were blank pages and missing memories, I filled them in from imagination.

My daughter helped me. Her name is Farrah and I love her sharply. My love for my child can never be blunted or muffled. She is an exhausting child at times, but she can never suck it out of me.

We took my clothes out, folded them, and put them away. We stitched sachets of fragrant dried flowers and spices to put in the cupboards. Farrah is good with a needle, and as a matter of principle ignores the scissors, breaking the thread off with her pointy little teeth. We were pleased with the sachets after we completed them. Farrah held them to her cheek. She has a sachet filled with lavender and love that she sleeps with. She keeps it under her pillow. Our pillows are filled with sawdust and wood shavings. They have a comforting scent.

Farrah asked for a story. She devours stories. All our books have bled their ink and are unreadable now. I opened one of my diaries, old enough to be innocuous, and I read out an entry that I had filled in from my imagination. Farrah said it was too good a story to put her to sleep. That was a pity; more often than not, the only sleep we manage to get is in snatches during the day. But it flattered me. I would write more for her sake if I wasn't so afraid of running dry.

Farrah opened her toy chest, made of leftover wood from a coffin. (There is nothing coffin-like about it, except that it groans a little every time.) It has mermaids and scallop shells carved on it, just like a treasure chest. Farrah's father can carve wood if he can do nothing else, bless his heart. His wooden toys and carvings keep us going. It's not easy to keep a house like this going..

Anyhow, Farrah was busy with her toys, so I got busy in the kitchen. I cooked a lunch that should satisfy anybody reasonable. I take my family's nourishment seriously. I see to all the cooking. I keep this house fed.

Farrah's father ate quietly and gratefully. He always does. He knows he must keep his strength up. But Farrah was unreasonable. She lay down on the stone floor and flailed her limbs as though she was making a snow angel on a hard frost day. I can never withstand her tantrums for long. She knows this, wicked creature. As soon as I gave in she latched onto me.

I floated through the rest of the house in a hazy fatigue. The house dripped blood, some of it my blood from that afternoon. When I was hazy like this it was easy to imagine that I could see a stealthy ripple in the walls.

The blood dripped through the night. Impossible to sleep through the sound of it. Farrah's father was still in the woodshed. I could hear him chipping away at the wood. He worked all day and night to keep us going. When I heard him at it I couldn't sleep. It felt indecent to sleep when he was working himself to the bone. He didn't have the strength to fell trees anymore, and had to depend on woodcutters.

I lay with my eyes open in bed, and thought of the morning. I would have to clean the blood. I see to all the cleaning. I keep this house spotless.

In the morning I would learn the house again. There would be another alcove, perhaps. Or a window would deepen to make a seat in front of it. A window seat would be nice. I could settle down to read a book there, when I have a spare moment, when I'm not drained of energy.

Farrah lay awake too. But she didn't stay in bed, not even when I was stern with her. She padded out of the room. I listened to her feet fade away. I couldn't hear her anymore. Then I heard the groan of her toy chest.

In the morning I slept.

Uma Padmasola lives in India. She reads tarot when she isn't reading books. She experiences writing as inevitable.



"Diego Sleeping"

By: Eric Kollin

Eric Kollin is an artist/illustrator, who resides in NYC. Currently, he has been trying to capture moments of feline magic, simultaneously embodying beauty, danger, grace, playfulness, love, & disdain.



"Blue Mosque"
By: Brittany Worlinsky



"Labyrinth 289" By: John Hampshire

Heroes Under the Bridge

BY: ATEF OBEID

Translated from Arabic By: Essam M. Al-Jassim

The schoolyard walls pressed in on me like a prison. At school, I shrank back every time they called my name, overwhelmed by shyness and shame. Everyone knew who my father was.

To them, he was just a lunatic, wandering the village alleys at night.

Back home, my mother no longer bothered to ask why I was upset—she knew well enough the cause. My father sat with us, lost in his own world, inspecting his bread before smiling. But the smile would fade, and he'd struggle to swallow. At random intervals, he would spring up without warning and dash for the door, disappearing into the narrow streets. Hours later, he would return with his clothes soaked—whether from rain, sweat, or the water thrown at him by idle passersby.

My mother would take care of him. Once he calmed, he'd sit beside me, sipping tea. I'd complain about the bullies at school. "They beat me every day, Dad. Some even splash water on my clothes." He'd chuckle and then lie on the floor, staring up at the ceiling on the far side of the room.

My mother told me that Dad had been a prisoner of war, captured by Israel in Sinai in 1973. She often sighed as she recounted the day he returned. When she'd gone to receive him from captivity with the other returnees; he had not recognized her. She had cried. He had merely smiled.

"The families of the POWs cried too. I wished he hadn't come back." Mother sighed before adding with despair, "I told him, 'I'm your lifelong companion and the mother of your child.'" Then she had collapsed into sobs.

He had smiled at that, but she could only cry. One of his fellow returnees told her the Israelis had beaten him with wooden cudgels until blood dripped from his scalp, soaking his once-soft black hair. My mother had brought him back home, hoping things would return to normal.

Every July, my mother took Dad to a hospital in Cairo, ensuring his mental state was still recognized by the state. If she didn't, the last door through which we could support ourselves would be slammed in our faces, and the few pounds the government threw our way at the beginning of each month would disappear. These few pennies were our compensation for my father's lost mind, along with everything else that was lost.

This year, my mother reached out to the drivers in our village and neighboring villages, hoping she might convince one of them to take us to Cairo. However, everyone knew him, and they were well aware that going with him was an uncertain and risky venture. They'd all heard the story of how he'd escaped from a car, darting through Cairo's streets the previous year, and how the Cairene women had laughed at him from their windows as my mother had chased him in her flowing jalabiya. Eventually, my mother found a man to take us—though he demanded double his normal fare.

We set out early in the morning; I sat up front, while my mother and father sat in the back. They both seemed much calmer. She held his hand to help him feel safe. She also did her best to reassure the driver, who threw his eyes up every now and then, glancing nervously into the rear-view mirror, awaiting the moment when panic might strike.

My father didn't seem to notice us and kept staring out the window. At one point during the drive, my mother tried to put some food in his mouth, but he turned away. She offered him some water, and he drank as if in a daze. Then, he began to cough lightly. Again, the driver's eyes filled the rearview mirror, which jostled from side to side like the rest of the car.

Our driver didn't have much experience with the streets of Cairo—he was one of those who had sold their brown land to buy a colorful car. He grew more flustered, and signs of bewilderment appeared on his face as we neared the city.

As soon as the busy streets swallowed us up, he stopped to ask a pedestrian for directions to the hospital. "You'll need to cross the Nile over the Peace Bridge. The hospital is just past the Israeli embassy," he said.

As we neared the crowded bridge, my father leaned in and whispered in my mother's ear, "Do they have an embassy here?"

Sensing a brief moment of lucidity, I told him about the boys at school—the beatings, the water splashed on me. He smiled. Then, abruptly, he jumped from the car and fled, refusing to cross the bridge. My mother ran after him, her rural jalabiya billowing as the city women cried over a woman chasing the remnants of a man.



"Exposed"
By: Brittany Worlinsky

"piercing the shadow"

By: Katharine Weinmann





"Waiting"

By: Sonjaye Maurya

Amb. Dr. (HC) Sonjaye Maurya, an internationally acclaimed artist, has received numerous awards and honorary doctorates globally. He was nominated for the 'Padma Shri 2024.'

Darkness in the Eye of Hurricane Milton

BY: CLAIRE MATURRO

As the eye of the hurricane crosses over and wind furies skid to a stop, invasive darkness seems to strangle her with wet fingers in the sudden chilling spill of covering quiet; a dog's distant bark the only sound louder than her breath and heartbeat in the black room.

After the hurricane's eye pushes east, in a room opaque from outages, spectral noises clamor then calm only to whirl again as objects strike shuttered windows, and trees give up roots and unearth; masked in treacherous blackness, her cat begins to yowl.

In the bleak gloom before full dawn, percussive gales fade like a train traveling far north, and she crawls into bed, nesting in the strange silent darkness of a space without the drone and glow of electricity; chainsaws, sirens, generators not yet roused.

The news is still unheard: how many have died? From the shroud of blackness, sepia toned light emerges with the shadowed sun. She whispers morning prayers and offers gratitude for gifts which remains; knowing darkness did not devour all, she rises to the waiting work of recovery.

Claire Matturro is a former lawyer and author of eight novels, including a series published by HarperCollins. Her poetry appears in various journals. An associate editor of Southern Literary Review, she lives in Florida.





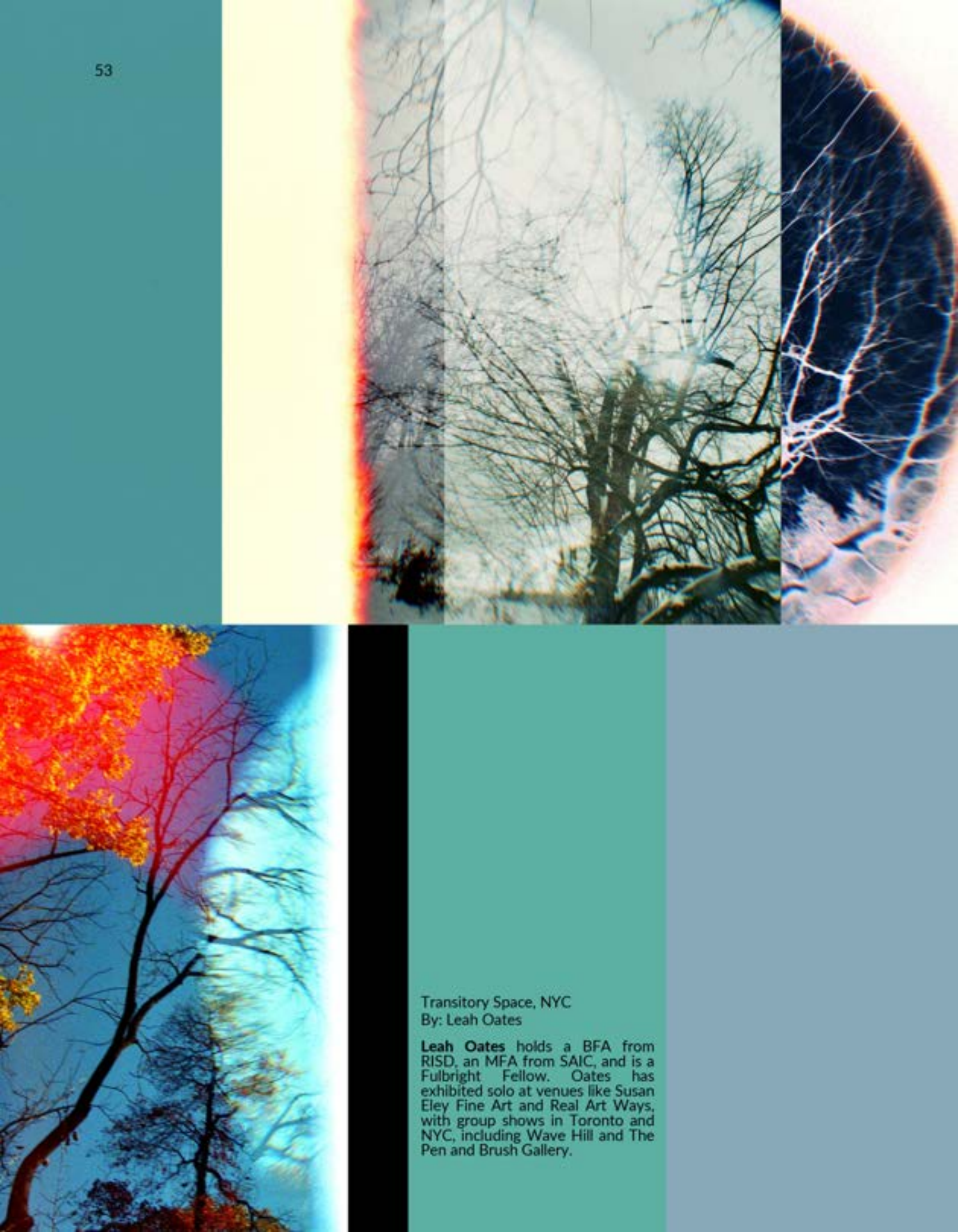
"From dark to light and vice versa" I-IV
By: Karina Kristoffersen McKenzie

Karina Kristoffersen McKenzie makes digital art, prints and textiles based on teachings of tibetan Buddhism. She is an artist, buddhist, psychologist, massage therapist and art therapist living in Norway





Patrick McEvoy has had work showcased in different mediums. Recently in 2024 he has had illustrated work appear in Apricity Press while also directing and writing a short play for Secret Theatre's One-Act Festival.



Transitory Space, NYC
By: Leah Oates

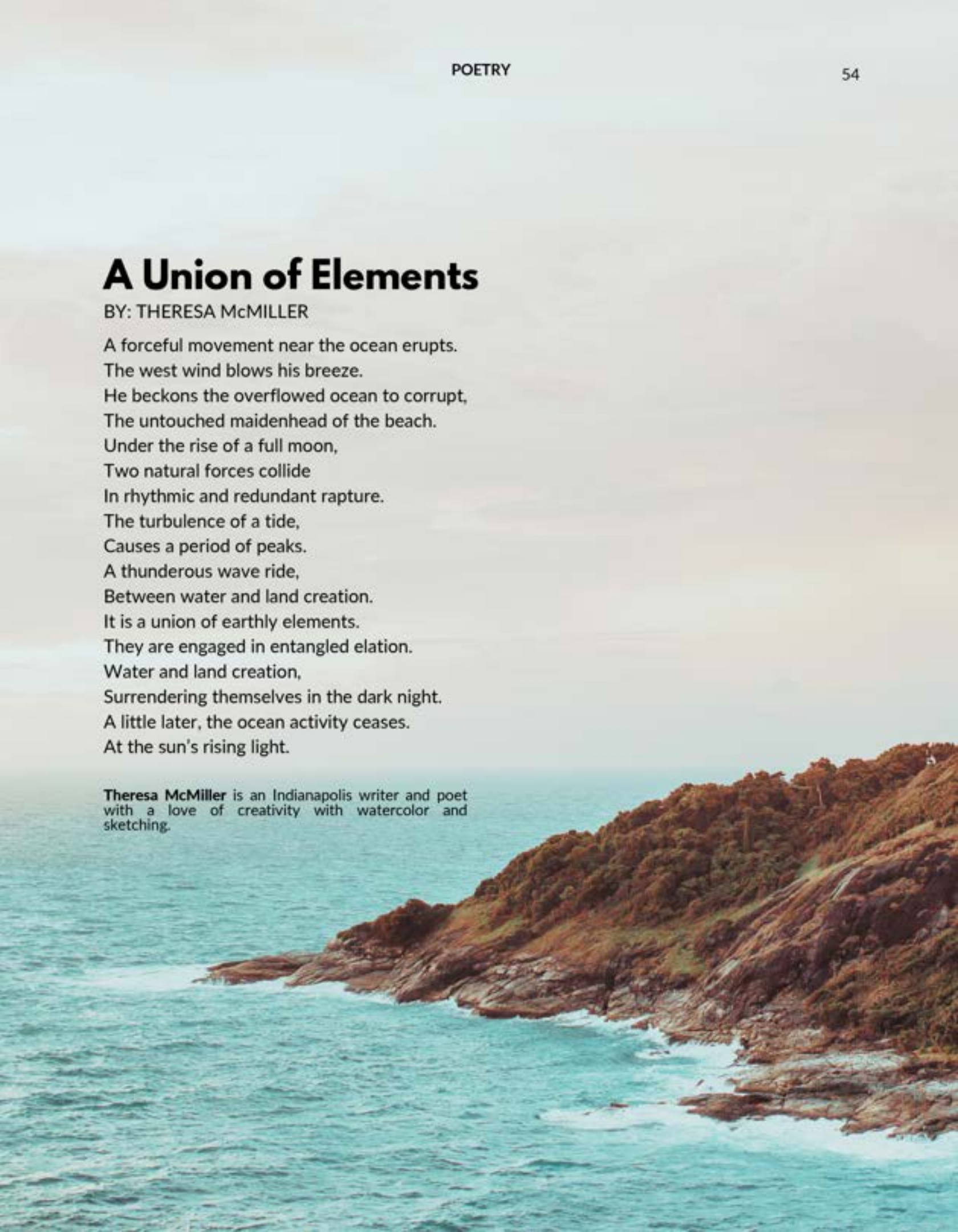
Leah Oates holds a BFA from RISD, an MFA from SAIC, and is a Fulbright Fellow. Oates has exhibited solo at venues like Susan Eley Fine Art and Real Art Ways, with group shows in Toronto and NYC, including Wave Hill and The Pen and Brush Gallery.

A Union of Elements

BY: THERESA McMILLER

A forceful movement near the ocean erupts.
The west wind blows his breeze.
He beckons the overflowed ocean to corrupt,
The untouched maidenhead of the beach.
Under the rise of a full moon,
Two natural forces collide
In rhythmic and redundant rapture.
The turbulence of a tide,
Causes a period of peaks.
A thunderous wave ride,
Between water and land creation.
It is a union of earthly elements.
They are engaged in entangled elation.
Water and land creation,
Surrendering themselves in the dark night.
A little later, the ocean activity ceases.
At the sun's rising light.

Theresa McMiller is an Indianapolis writer and poet with a love of creativity with watercolor and sketching.



Atacama Desert

BY: NATALIE BISSO

When the Atacama Desert blooms,
The whole Earth is covered with flowers,
From the depths, from under the bark, stubbornly
Life will break through, embraced by the winds.

And the scorched earth will be transformed,
Enjoying the intoxicating aroma,
And the celebration of life will last forever,
Secrets of the eternity of nature exposing.

Natalie Bisso is a poet and writer. It is published in all countries of the world in 45 languages. Doctor of Science, Honoris Causa. HONORARY FIGURE OF WORLD LITERATURE AND ARTS, academician MARLEY. Founder and President of the International Literary Association "Creative Tribune"; Winner of competitions and recipient of orders and medals.





"We look around outside"

By: Tammy Higgins

Tammy Higgins, 58, is a writer and photographer from Northern New York, now living in Southern New Hampshire. She enjoys free verse poetry, heavy metal, wildlife, and gaming.

Fluent in Worlds

BY: MELANIE HYO-IN HAN

Korean whispers 내가 비밀을 말 해줄게
 I will tell you a secret
 and I perk up my ears let the words
 within me coexist
 worlds of tale and steel unfurl
 threads of 한글 pieces of English
 dance the 강강술래
 the traditional waltz
 phrase patterns fabric magic
 한글 syllables alchemize with English ones
 elements of each fuse
 aspire create
 literary treasure maps

Melanie Hyo-In Han was born in Korea and raised in East Africa. She is the author of *Abecedarian*: Banff, Canada (kith books), *My Dear Yeast* (Milk & Cake Press), and *Sandpaper Tongue*, *Parchment Lips* (Finishing Line Press). Learn more about her at melaniehan.com.



"Timeless Horizons"
By: Faezeh Mohammed Hassan

Faezeh Mohammed Hassan is an Emirati artist with three years of experience, participating in numerous group exhibitions and holding three solo exhibitions locally and internationally.

An abstract botanical artwork featuring a dense, overlapping pattern of stylized plant forms. The design is created using two primary colors: a deep, textured blue and a light cream or off-white. The blue areas form the background and the outlines of various plant elements, while the cream areas fill the centers of these shapes, creating a high-contrast, almost woodcut-like effect. The forms include elongated, pointed leaves, some with serrated edges, and several large, multi-petaled flower heads. The overall composition is dynamic and organic, with a sense of movement and growth. The texture of the paper is visible throughout, adding to the tactile quality of the piece.

"Out of the Blue Botanica"
By: Lois Bender



"Out of the Blue Botanica"
By: Lois Bender



"I know a bank where on the wild thyme blows"

By: Lois Bender

Lois Bender, a New York City and Hamptons artist, explores the enchanting mysteries of moonlit gardens, capturing their magical, silvery-golden atmosphere.





"Night"
By: Kateryna Bortsova

"shimmering"
By: Katharine Weinmann

The Undead Mr. Kendall

BY DAWN De BRAAL

Burt Kendall, a pharmacist, owned the Kendall Pharmacy on Mill and Town Streets in Oakwood. The three-story building was a mainstay downtown.

Burt was an easy-going man who was a pillar of the community well respected by everyone. He had a secret he never told anyone, for if the town had known, they would have stepped away from the man when he walked the street to open the unique building.

The bell on the door clapped loudly as he pushed it open. Burt flipped on the lights and checked the heat. He didn't need to wear a coat because he lived above the store and exited the back door to enter the front.

He stepped behind the counter and pulled out several powders, mixing them without a thought, guided by their whispers, which gave him the recipe shortly before he died.

Yes, I said he died, but the potion he was given resurrected him. No one knew Mr. Kendall's exact age. Some guessed he was between seventy-eight and one hundred years old.

Mr. Kendall was over one hundred and twenty. Most of the people who knew him twenty years ago were dead. He regretted not giving them the formula to become like him, but he did not know the consequences of being undead.

The spirits who whispered the life-giving potion also lived through him, giving him insight into the townspeople. Everyone thought he was a wise man, but he was a possessed man.

The bell rang as he polished off his life-extending elixir. It was chalky and coated his tongue, and he hated its taste but loved what it did for him, giving him another day in this world.

"Good morning, Mrs. Anderson." The slight woman dressed to the nines with a peacock feathered hat came in with rubber covers on her shoes. She was always so well put together. He favored her, and they'd spent many hours talking about life. She handed him her script.

"I'll have this in about an hour if you have shopping to do," Burt put it off to the side. She looked disappointed at his busyness and left. Burt worked the prescriptions in the order he'd received them, picking hers to fill. His heart sank. The drug Mrs. Anderson was prescribed was an end-of-life pain script. He had noticed her getting thinner, and her step faltered as she climbed through the door.

Anita Anderson was short for this world. The whispers in his head swirled.

"You can fix this."

"No," he answered the voices in the air. "I can't; it's not natural. If I leave, the town no longer has a pharmacy, which is how you convinced me to drink the potion. If Anita died, the city wouldn't be affected by her death."

The voices wouldn't leave him alone, so Burt mixed up the potion and put the jar in the bag. When Anita walked in, he gave her the prescription.

"I only had one prescription. You made a mistake." Anita said, pushing the potion back at Mr. Kendall.

"No, dear, that is not a mistake. I want to share my secret of longevity. This potion, if drunk shortly before you die and taken every day after, will keep you living."

"That's not possible, Burt." Anita laughed.

"Oh, but it is. If you miss a day, your body will cease to survive. Try it if you'd like, and I will supply you with your daily dose."

"Burt, what is there left for me? I am ninety years old and have outlasted my husband and, sadly, my son. I have nothing but our friendship to get me out of bed each day."

"Our friendship was all that I had when I died."

"You're not dead, Burt." She took her hand from his.

"I am undead, Anita."

"What does that mean?"

"It means before I died twenty years ago, I drank this potion. I woke up the next day and have survived each day by drinking the potion again. The secret to eternal life was given to me by the voices." Anita pushed the potion into the bag of pills and took it with her. Burt hoped she would follow his orders.

Each day she walked by, Burt could see the love of his life grow weaker and thinner. He'd wave out the window, but she would turn away, not wanting him to talk her into extending her life. It was not as God intended; she was ready to rejoin her husband and child. Being old was not enjoyable to her; everything hurt.

She was on her deathbed, having taken the pain pill. She didn't call anyone, preferring to die alone. Each morning, the neighbor called, and if she didn't pick up, Zelda was to contact the authorities. Anita did not want her body to explode because no one had found her.

She was losing her conviction to do as God intended as the pain grew. Instead of taking another pill, she mixed the potion into the glass of water on her nightstand. It was chalky and tasted terrible, but as soon as she got it down, the pain in her body was gone.

Burt went to check on her; she was dead; he looked at the empty jar of potion and pocketed it. She had waited too long. He closed her eyes and left. Burt refused the potion the following day, wondering how long it would take. The voices whispered to him, tempting him to continue, but he was heartbroken. The whispers told him that his end would come if he didn't take the potion soon.

He no longer had the will to live. He was filling prescriptions when Anita walked in the door looking healthy. Burt gasped.

"Anita, I saw you, and you were dead."

"I did as you told me and took the potion moments before my death."

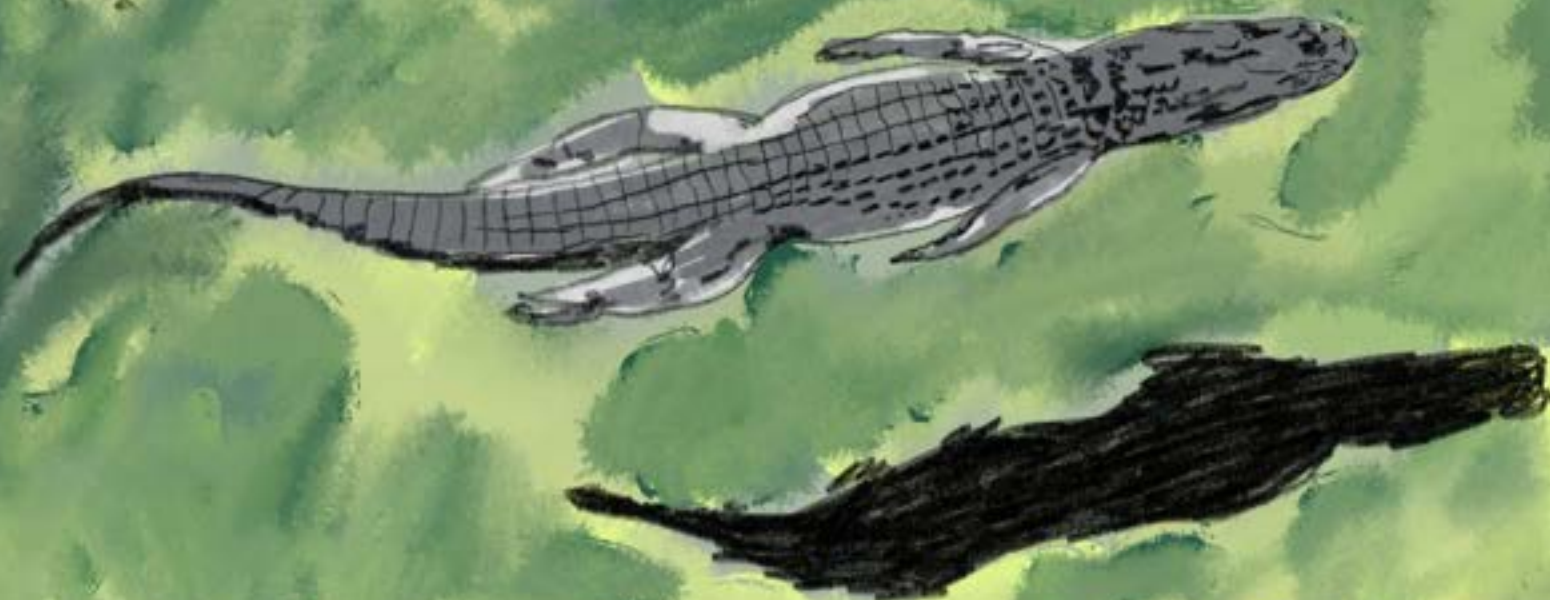
Burt was saddened to see the skin peeling from both of his hands. The whispers told him it was too late to change his mind.



"Scream"

By: Francesco Puliga

Francesco Puliga is an illustrator, comic artist and character designer. He works traditionally and digitally.



"Alligator" By: Désirée Jung

Désirée Jung, a Vancouver-based artist, has published widely and participated in global residencies. Her video poems have won awards, and her nonfiction piece, *Dispatches from the Womb* was a 2023 Pushcart Prize nominee.

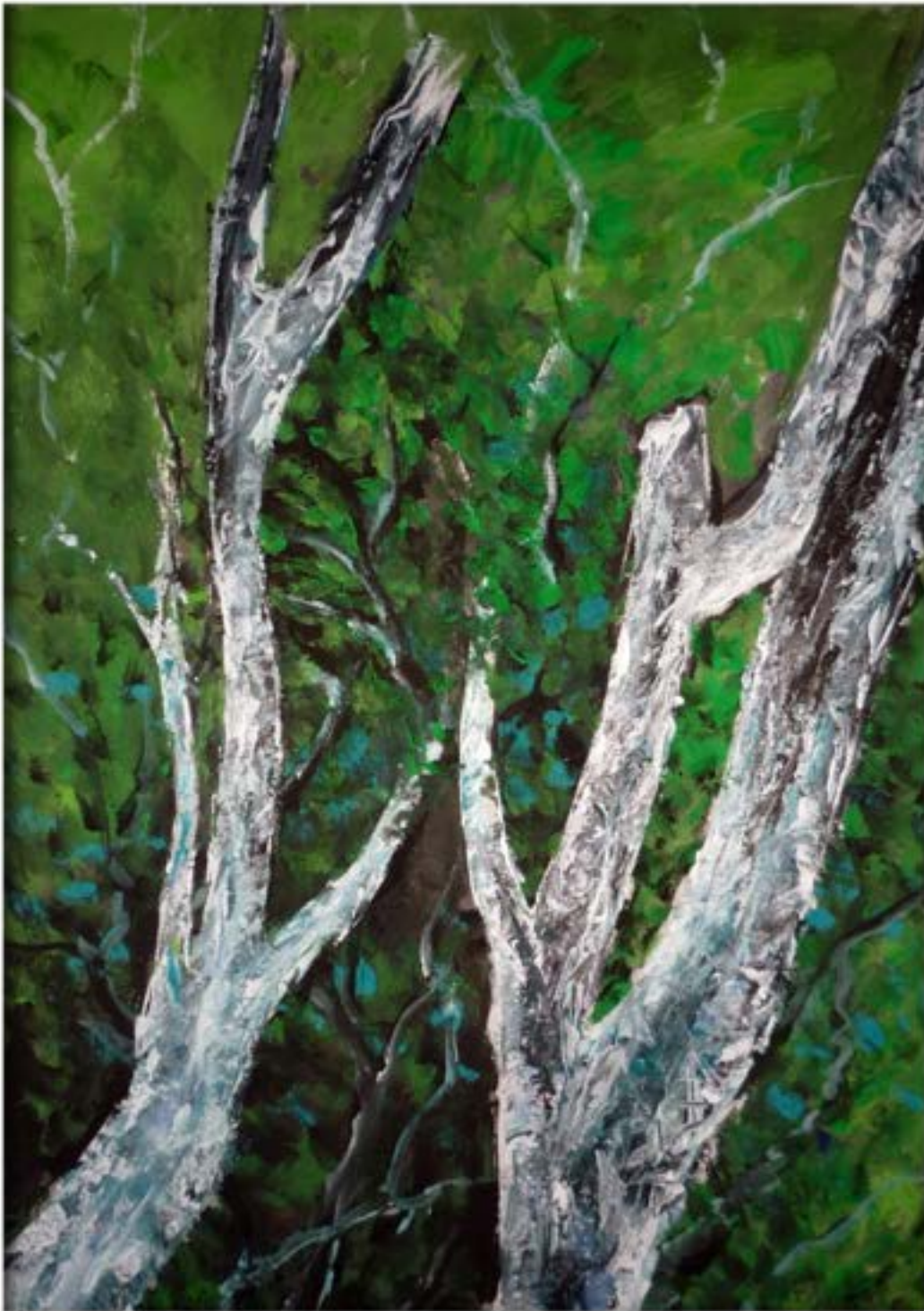
As The River Flows

BY: GEORGE FREEK

It's time to part ways.
My home again becomes
an alien place.
You disappear
into the darkening night,
although as I look in to my mirror,
I still see your face.
In my garden, the flowers
are choked by weeds.
I have no interest
in planting new seeds.
A thousand drops of rain
stain my window. Beyond it,
the wind roams recklessly.
Yet the river still crawls,
like a wounded snake,
to be swallowed
by an infinite sea.

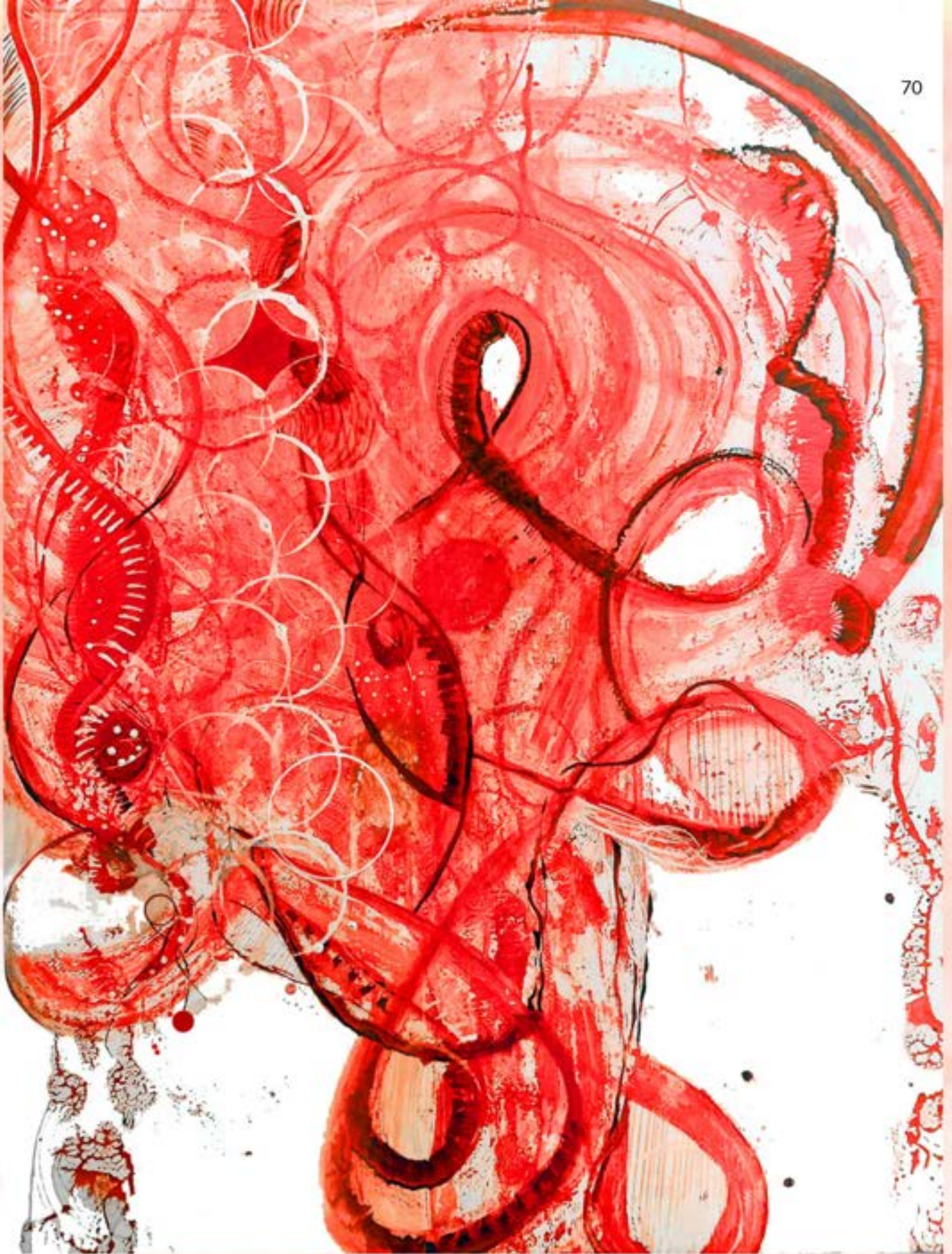


George Freek's poem "Enigmatic Variations" was recently nominated for Best of the Net. His poem "Night Thoughts" was also nominated for a Pushcart Prize.



"The Old Couple " By: Sonjaye Maurya





"Red Astral Uterus" By: Emelly Velasco

Emelly Velasco, a Dutch-Mexican artist and founder of the new art movement, Metaphysical Abstract Menstrual Art (MAMA). Her work seeks to redefine the feminine experience through the conscious use of blood as a transformative medium, inspired by Mayan, Aztec, and Christian traditions.



"Valkyrie"

By: Maria Umanets Valkyrie

Maria Umanets is a Ukrainian artist and art influencer. Her work is a reflection of internal experiences on current societal issues and the individual as a whole. Maria has been developing her unique artistic style. She combines traditional techniques with her development - paints that glow in the dark or semi-darkness. These paintings accumulate light energy and reveal themselves in the darkness, thus reflecting the depth and meaning. In this way.

"Succubus"





A Rose By Any Other Name

BY: PETER KACZMARCZYK

A rose by any other name
is still a trite symbol, a tired cliché,
a burst of color that quickly fades.
I always have some in a vase,
nurtured as my memories are,
memories of all the lost loves
that for one moment bloomed bright,
now only pressed petals, crumbling and decayed.
A rose by any other name
pierces your skin, bleeds you till you cry,
to be remembered only through cloudy filters
and flipping through the pages
of nearly forgotten days.

Peter Kaczmarczyk is a lifelong writer raised in Massachusetts. He writes short stories in poetic form with perspectives that come with age. Peter has been published in several dozen journals and anthologies.



"Night Fall"

By: Christina Maile

Christina Maile is a visual artist and writer, her work is figurative and narrative driven, reflecting on themes of feminism and the environment told as fairy tales and violent spirituality.



"Optimism" By: Sonjaye Maurya

"Silence and tears" By: Amir Fazelian

Amir Fazelian is an Iranian artist from Hamedan, known for his large-scale photorealist portraits. He studied Urban Design at Islamic Azad University.



PHOTOGRAPHY

"I'm Sorry Mama"
By: Dafna Steinberg

Flashes

BY: PETER KACZMARCZYK

Sometimes in the darkness I see flashes of what I could be,
of the essence that hides beneath the stoic face,
the contrived wisdom and calm controlled demeanor.
Quickly though they are gone, again lost to my cynicism,
masquerading as realism, that so often comes off as self-centered pessimism.

Sometimes in the darkness there is a brightness, a flash of an internal smile,
a moments view of what as a child I once thought,
of the person it is too late for me to become.

Sometimes in the darkness I am lost in wonder.
Would you have liked me more if I could have shown the world
that I had personality, was not just another self-indulgent wannabe?
Did you even need me to show the world
or would it have been okay if I had just shown myself.

I was always an artist trapped in the body of a drone.
Thought myself a desperado, a noble loner,
when all anyone could see was a solemn face,
doing good only to turn, pour a drink and fiddle away the day.

Sometimes in the darkness I still see those flashes
glimpses of what you say I am.
But I cannot believe either of us,
for you don't know me at all,
and I know myself far too well.

"From dark to light and vice versa" I-IV
By: Karina Kristoffersen McKenzie





"Survival mode 1"

By: Mehreen Hashmi

Mehreen Hashmi is an eminent visual artist exhibiting in different countries for over a decade, a graduate of the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, a curator, and an educator who has initiated several art ventures during her practice.

"Survival mode 2"



Two Tequilas

BY: FRANK WILLIAM FINNEY

Intuition warned
our mouths to mute.

But one tequila
broke the ice.

Glances melted
frozen fears.

The second shot
set sparks to pyre.

We tried in vain
to douse the flames.

Last time
we defied the smoke

Next time
We'll inhale.

Frank William Finney is a poet from Massachusetts. He's had a bunch of poems published over the years and has won a few prizes. He's still (mostly) left-handed.



"Sunken Road Of Industrial Landscape"

By: Alexey Adonin

Alexey Adonin is an Israeli abstract surrealist painter known for his intellectually stimulating, futuristic works. Blending abstraction and symbolism, his art explores profound themes, inviting viewers to reflect on their creativity and inner worlds.





"Life Underground"
By: Janette Schafer

"From dark to light and vice versa" I-IV
By: Karina Kristoffersen McKenzie



By the Sea

BY: LOIS VILLEMAIRE

I was there by the lonesome sea,
longed for peace and safety,
listened to the language
of gulls and syncopated waves
beating on swirling sands.

I am here lonesome by the sea,
unafraid to be swallowed by currents,
beside a collection of sturdy shells,
each one a promise to myself,
as footprints dissolve in a row.

I'll be lonesome here by the sea,
absorbed by scents of seaweed,
eyes fixed on the dusky horizon
dimmed by blankets of doubt
where a sleepless tide kisses the sky.

Lois Villemaire of Annapolis, MD is the author of "My Eight Greats," a family history in poetry and prose and "Eyes at the Edge of the Woods." She researches family connections and propagates African violets.

In the Morning

BY CAMERON ALLAN

In the morning, let's take our coffees overflowing
to the little wooden table beside the window,
caught in post-dawn's clear golden light; set
them down, and sip them slowly, letting the excess
seep anew into the surface and settle into dry brown
circles overlapping the ones we made yesterday.

Cameron Allan is a 27-year-old poet based in Aspen, Colorado. Cameron graduated from Middlebury College in 2020. He is an avid skier, mountain biker, and rock climber.





"Life Underground"

By: Janette Schafer

Janette Schafer is a Realtor, photographer, and writer living in Pittsburgh PA.

September Night On Washington Sidewalk

BY PIERRE MINAR

A light rain falls
I love easily
Tears rise in the morning
They say the sun also rises
Impatient for signs,
I cross, rain on my glasses

Pierre Minar was born in Beirut and lives in Dallas. When not writing he can be found sorting his spoons.



"Beauty of Fall" By: Sonjaye Maurya



Forgive Them

BY: AMANDA HAYDEN

My memories have grown sweet
writing to resolve troubles

we always hurt the ones we love
words we can't take back were spoken

I would have helped you a thousand
times over, but I didn't know how

I didn't have to be in the room
to hear you call me

bewilderment in your expression
I felt the helpless agony of it

long after, I felt your presence still
spirit unbound by walls or places

I've heard you pound your cane
into the floorboards in night's hours

whisper through the hallway
we can't run from life

Amanda Hayden is a Pushcart Prize nominee and 2023 River Heron Editor's Choice Winner. She lives with her family, many rescues, including the blind Vinny Valentine.



"Something is Out There"

By: Arvilla Fee

Arvilla Fee is an author and photographer with published work in over 70 magazines. She has two full-length poetry books.



"Frankenmaze" By: John Hampshire

John Hampshire, a Fine Art professor at SUNY Adirondack, has exhibited nationally, including in New York City and Rhode Island. He works from studios in Troy and New York City.

Dear Cancer

BY PHILL IBSEN

It is a hot Sunday afternoon. By the window I sit, taking slow breaths, counting my heartbeat while battling the tears cockling at the emblem of my eyes. Outside, the congregation is exalting in hymns. The hymns are not to praise the Lord, nor to thank Him for the daily bread. The hymns are for me.

Everyone here--my parents, siblings, and friends--wants me to feel less lonely. Friends tell me to be strong, that being with you is not a death sentence. Whenever they speak, I reduce myself to a package of statistical data. My mother says that arranged marriages need perseverance. My father, while gripping Mum's arms in assurance, says that true love grows with time.

That is how I know that mine for you will grow over time.

Last night, I sat on the edge of the bed while staring into the broken mirror on the wall. I was staring at what we have become - two estranged bodies immersed in a single fracture - then I cried. I never cried in bewilderment or self-loathing the same way I did the first time I found out that I was to be yours forever. I never broke anything, nor tried to cut myself with broken porcelain, nor tried to jump out of the window. Yesterday was different. It lasted for ten minutes, the shortest it has been since I married you three years ago.

Three years is nothing short of thirty-six months, but for us, it has been a rollercoaster; and for you, it has been the greatest epoch of your lifetime. For a woman who has relinquished her dreams, for a woman who is coming to terms with the reality that she will never sustain a life, three years can feel like an eternity. Three years can be time traveling through a limbo struggling to claw your way out - like dreaming a dream swearing to yourself to remember every nautical detail about it, but as soon as you wake there's nothing.

The first time we met you were cold, stoic, silent, and cuddled up to me like a teddy bear for comfort. When the doctor broke the news that you were terminal, I wept and watched your eyes gleam in heroic astonishment. Finally, you had me, this girl you have always dreamt of, watched, and preyed on in silence.

You followed me along the dark alley; grabbed me by the throat, my back against the wall. I watched the teddy bear in you grow into a ferocious nocturnal nightmare--a serpentine bear clawing itself in and out of me.

You stood there with a glistening devilish smile like a shadow that only came alive in the dark. You laughed as you took time and made my fragile body your temple. You knew that, no matter how loud I screamed, how much I begged you to stop, how fast I ran, or how much I spent on treatment, you were here to stay. Because you love me.

You said that you could live without me, but you cannot be without me. For the times that you offered your hands, I refused them. How could I take them when you were a stranger betrothed to me? How could I trust you enough when your eyes stared back at me like an open casket? Did it ever occur to you that I never wanted you in the first place? Should I be rejoicing that out of them all, you made me yours? Did it ever matter how I felt? Did it ever cross your mind that I never, not even for a scintilla of a second, wanted you to call me yours? You never mattered to me, but why should I be surprised when that is how you treat your lovers, both women and men alike, like an inanimate object to toy with, push around, and then discard?

You knew that the only place I could wind up was in your cold embrace. You were always there, counted my tears, and together we cried. I began getting close to you and cooing next to you. I started listening to you. And when you said that chemo hurt, that I should stop hurting you, I nearly listened.

I confess there has always been a part of me that yearns to detach from you, and that part, however silly, will always fight for its freedom. But you know that already, the same way you knew that loving you is impossible, so you left me with no choice but to accept you the way you are.

This forced marriage drains my body. I cannot bring myself to hate you more than I already hate you, Cancer. That kind of hate only consumes me like the fire that you are. And now you fit me like the dark to an endless hole, with your hot breath boiling inside my body each time you make love to me.

You are now a part of me as I am a part of you. Without you, I could be free. Without me, you cannot be. You keep on rupturing in my body, bones, and blood, causing growth. Any attempts I make to get rid of you; chemo kills you and the good cells too. I hate being caught in the crossfire between you and me. Every time I hurt, you rejoice. It's your way of trying so hard to make me smile, and trying hard to resist you only makes it impossible for me to smile.

I am afraid you are the one thing that will take me to my grave. When I'm gone you will seep through the earth's crevices. You will take on another human as though I never existed. Will you remember me? Will you at least make it hurt less as I wait for my untimely demise? Will the pain and pleasures we have succumbed to mean something to you?

Will you visit my grave one day and say, "Here lies a worthy host of all time?"

Let's fight again during chemo.

Your beloved host,

Phyla.

Phill Ibsen is a creative writer and director from East Africa, who is a curious and observant individual, constantly exploring the threads of human connection. Often quiet and introspective, Phill finds solace in writing and reflecting, using his craft to delve into the intricacies of human experiences.

3:30 A.M., Jetlag Thoughts

BY: MELANIE HAN

my eyes are forced
open once again
betrayed by the
silent pull of jetlag
i gaze at the dark
ceiling and listen to
my partner breathing
watch the rise and fall
of his chest and resist
my phone, i already know
what time it is outside
the world is still asleep
but my relentless
companion, jetlag,
distorts the boundaries
between dreams
and consciousness
i dance disorientated
struggling silently
as i wander through
the hours stretching
across continents
in night's grasps
i wait for pre-dawn
when the waking world
will realign with mine

"From dark to light and vice versa" I-IV
By: Karina Kristoffersen McKenzie



"The Last Flight"
By: Arvilla Fee





"mysteries beyond and within"
By: Katharine Weinmann



"autumnal antiquity"
By: Katharine Weinmann





"the writer" By: Fabrice Poussin

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