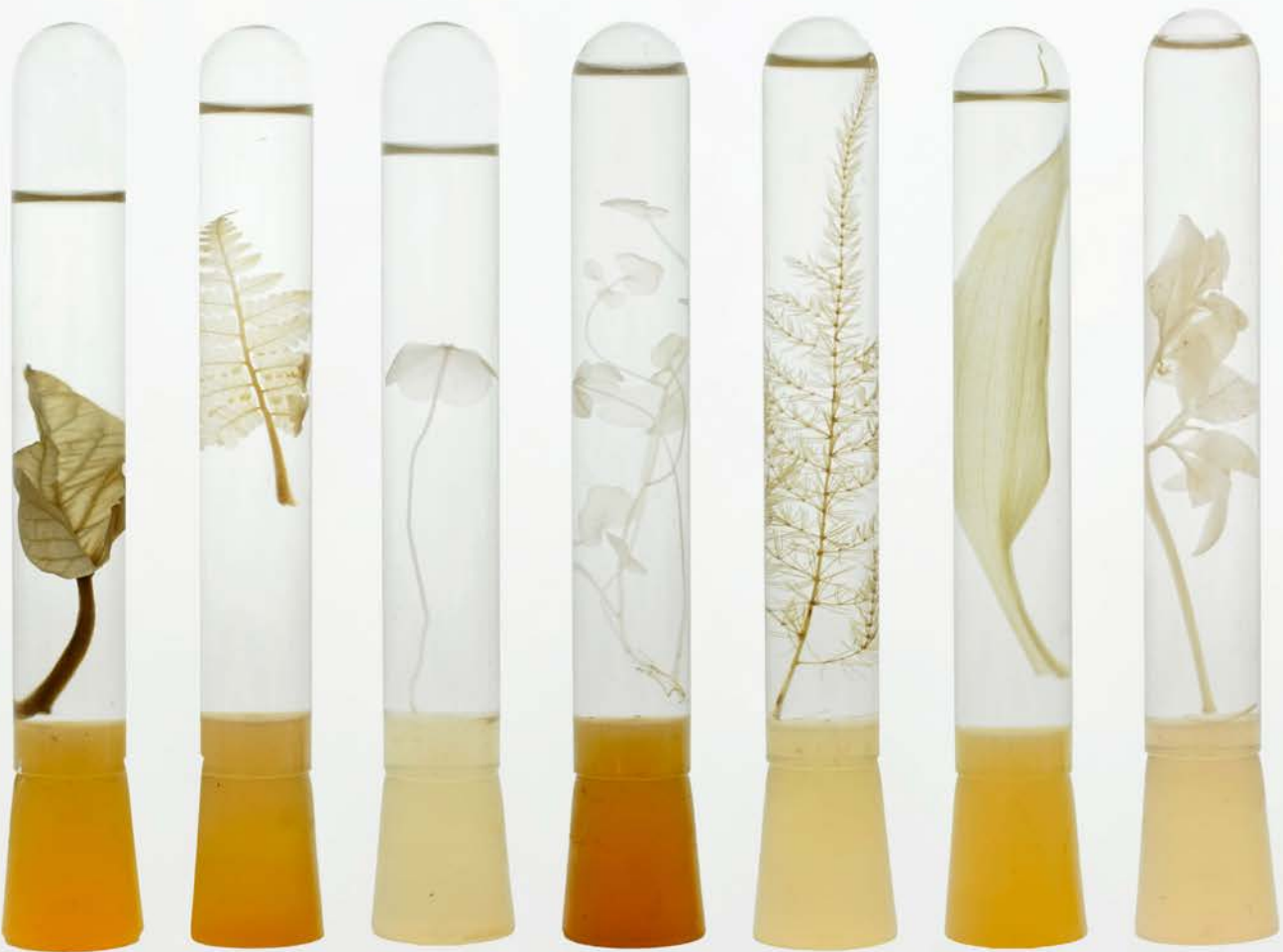


# FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE  
VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 3  
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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

At our lowest point, we're most receptive to change.

2020 has hit us all in different ways, yet many of us feel the same: isolated, depressed, anxious, and defeated. So much time in solitude shows us a side of ourselves we struggle to accept. The flaws we so readily forgive in others, we shame within. We blame our upbringing, or current circumstance, because it's easier than admitting that it's really you whose in control of your future.

Self reflection is the confrontation of accountability. When we chose to ignore the blatant signs of our bad behavior, we exhibit a cognitive dissonance in which reality conflicts with our current beliefs. Discovering that these beliefs may be false is so painful that many of us chose not to reframe our paradigm, and instead, stuff these thoughts into a compartment of the brain that's already beyond capacity.

The theme for this issue is, "Changing Colors," representing not only the change of season but metaphoric change. Change is necessary. Whether we like it or not, we must move with change rather than fighting it. We must put our feet forward, not backward. There is much outside of our control, but what's within our power is our action. What's done is done. What you do next determines who you are.

Thank you to all who submitted their work. We wish to include as many artists as we can. We hope you enjoy this collection of art and are inspired to embrace your creativity.

*xoxo*  
*Flora Ashe*





# Forest

BY: ANAIS KARENIN

Forest's colors are chemically extracted from plants until they become transparent. This work is a subjective experience, expressing the search for "Nature's Soul." This method was based in the following questions:

- *What defines nature?*
- *Does green color define the forest?*
- *Is it natural for a colorless plant to change color?*

**Anais Karenin** is an artist and a Ph.D. researcher. Her work explores contrasting relations with nature with artificial materials. From installations, sculptures, sound and performances, her work establishes symbiotic relationships between distinct elements, questioning the frontiers between natural and artificial, through impermanence and animist view. Visit: [anaiskarenin.com](http://anaiskarenin.com) or [@anaiskarenin](https://www.instagram.com/anaiskarenin)

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# THE COLOR OF FINDING HOME

BY: CHRISTOPHER CROUCHER

**W**hen I arrived, I was far too exhausted to notice the colors. They didn't register until a few days later when the weariness wore off and I was able to truly open my eyes and look around: everything was brown.

"This city is so brown," she said, and it was. The sandy brick tenements standing since the Industrial Revolution; the burnt coffee-colored water of the vast river that split the city in two; the oil slick pavement on the relentlessly rainy days; they were all shades of brown.

The familiar land I had come from was brown too, in its own way, when I left. The last stand of the summer's conquering heat had seen to that. Over the many years, I had come to expect that the tired plants would soon reanimate for one last crimson performance before sleeping through winter. However, at the end of August when I left, everything was buff, tan, scorched. Even the grass, vibrant green in spring, seemed breathless and choked. It mirrored the way I felt; listless, dry, and longing for a deep drink of the silvery forest green that awaited me across the ocean.

And then I left.

But what I saw on the other side was nothing like I'd imagined. It wasn't until late autumn that I really began to awaken to the reality of my new surroundings. I expected at least some color other than brown to emerge. I was disappointed. The leaves, stubbornly holding onto the dull olive color that bordered on brown for far longer than I imagined they could, weren't going to ignite like they did in the place I'd left. Come the short dusky days of early winter, the leaves simply paled and gave up as the rain battered them to the ground. It was gray heavy rain, not even the pearly blankness of white snow. Just gray that amplified the brown.

That was when I knew that I had really left, and suddenly I felt sadness over what I had lost in the transaction. Where were the trees? Not the ones in the parks. Not the ones placed there, curated to feel like a forest. Where were the real, true, wild trees whose leaves would burst into flaming glory before shedding 'til spring or shine emerald through the winter?

---



The morning on the shortest day was gossamer golden through mist and purple hills. This landscape wasn't brown; it was vibrant with stony shades and heathered fields, and even, as I finally was able to see, deep forest green grasses jeweled with drops in the floating silver fog and sunlight. No, there were no trees, but through the mist I had finally found my eyes and could really see the nuance of color throughout the new land. The sunset, barely five hours later, brought with it a scarlet glow that cast lavender shadows long across the fields. The full ivory moon rose brighter in the twilight verdigris than I had seen in years.

The next morning, I set out for my return to the city in the dun darkness. As I traveled, I noted the newly the blues mixed with browns and whites along the way, browns that were now croissant crust golden and agate rust. February brought early cherry blossoms, rosy pale breathing life into the gray-washed sepia days. Spring brought such vibrant flowers of crimson and coral that I was compelled to sit and breathe in the smoldering glow, even when they were in the curated forests. The hills were now tawny brush shot through with gorse orange and heather purple that met the watery blue-gray sky.

The cycle began again but I finally understood it. As I let myself see the colors, they changed in front of my eyes and I let this new old world, so different from what I'd imagined and so different from the place I had known before, become a home.

I was in a new world. Well, it was an old world, but I was new in it. Even when I left the city, thinking to escape into a romanticized daydream of color in the hills and valleys, they too were an optical illusion of russets and beiges that seemed to go on forever. I was a stranger in a strange land with new words, new habits, new smells, new rhythms, and one old color. And I felt swallowed in it.

Until I let go and gave in to the colors.

Slowly I began to perceive the pink of the roses along the pathway home. Those roses lasted well into the winter. Clearly it required a heartier soul than I'd seen before to glow with a bright blush like that even through the bleak, icy rain. Then I began to recognize the sky. Where the leaves refused the fiery display, the sky blossomed each night into an undeniable shock of pink, gold, and violet when the sun dropped between the steely cover of the ever-present clouds and the mahogany horizon.

At the very depth of winter, I journeyed by train far from the city, to the literal ends of the earth in this new old land. I crossed a channel of the northern ocean, the color of a hazel eye; mostly mottled steel blue shocked with a profound fir green otherwise barely present in this land. I arrived in the inky night, with not a light to pollute the sky; only the nearly-full cat eye moon.

---

**Christopher Croucher** is an artist working in many different mediums including but not limited to dance, fiber arts, painting, drawing, sculpture, music, and storytelling. Each type of art is an exploration of a different type of energy. Some are textural, some are color based, some are visceral. All are ritual. Visit: [ccroucherpointe.com](http://ccroucherpointe.com) or [@manenpointe](https://www.instagram.com/manenpointe)

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Cynthia Hollenberger's photography celebrates the sheer beauty of science, nature, and art walking hand in hand. This collection of images takes a look at the greens and golds of late summer before autumn changes develop. CindyH Photography is based out of Arena, Wisconsin.





Photography By: Cynthia Hollenberger | Instagram: @CindyHPhoto | Facebook: CindyHPhotography





# AFTER HIROSHIGE'S MAPLE TREES AT MAMA, TEKONA SHRINE AND LINKED BRIDGE 1857

BY: CYNTHIA GALLAHER



It's number 94 from 100 Views of Edo,  
far enough from the city center to be a dream.

Japan's autumn climbs crisscross  
to this mountain

Where forest's burnished hands  
wave and cheer as the annual pilgrims parade.

They do not merely linkbridge to shrine  
But pass from summer to sublime,

To view momiji at their peak,  
before such fiery tossings

Streak groundward,  
dissolve under death celebrations of white.

**Cynthia Gallaher**, a Chicago-based poet, is author of four poetry collections, including *Epicurean Ecstasy: More Poems About Food, Drink, Herbs and Spices* (The Poetry Box, Portland, 2019), and three chapbooks, including *Drenched* (Main Street Rag, Charlotte, N.C., 2018). The Chicago Public Library lists her among its "Top Ten Requested Chicago Poets." Visit: Twitter @swimmerpoet, Instagram @frugalpoet, Facebook @frugalpoets



# AUTUMN'S END

BY: ELLARAINA LOCKIE

Green alters to Grand Canyon colors  
in age-old October chemistry  
of England leaves.

Chameleon change of life,  
Like the midway metamorphosis  
en route to old age  
Where verdant clarity of youth  
and variegated complexity  
of early adulthood  
combine in full spectrum.

I see me and a multitude  
of midlife sisters.  
Our hormones sucked out  
by nature's straw.  
Chlorophyll leached from our leaves  
leaving ruby orange amber splendor  
that has been there all along.

Some of us still gripping  
boughs for security,  
grasping bygone shades of green  
that shift to bouts of blue.  
Indigo depressions clash  
with earth-tone beauty,  
and become brittle with the fear  
of forthcoming winter.


Others of us float gracefully  
to the ground grandmothering  
into sunset colors,  
Or cluster in commiserating piles  
Watching the balance of us  
blow carefree in newfound freedoms  
on fall's final breeze.  
Gilded in sunlit brilliance  
of acceptance,  
we blaze into the inevitability  
of autumn's end.

**Ellaraine Lockie** is widely published and awarded in as a poet, nonfiction book author and essayist. Her fourteenth chapbook, *Sex and Other Slapsticks*, was recently released from *Presa Press*. She also teaches writing workshops and serves as Poetry Editor for the lifestyles magazine, *LILIPOH*.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: GUILHERME BERGAMINI







Brazilian photographic reporter and visual artist, **Guilherme Bergamini** has developed projects with photography and the various narrative possibilities that art offers for than two decades following him graduating 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, he's participated in collective exhibitions in 30 countries.

## A CERTAIN BIRTHSTONE

BY: ADRIAN SLONAKER

October's fortunes include a talent show for aging foliage, a frenzy of horror flicks and opals on cider-scented, crisp afternoons, splitting light into dazzling hiccups of hues, mixing mauve and vermilion and lemon and melon with shades chasing each other in a multichromatic game of tag or pirouetting like ballet dilettantes through clouds of dry ice, a pearly mosaic pregnant with flash and flourish more psychedelic than the display case at any head shop and a chimerical carnival to be envied by Seurat and his dots.

Language nerd, **Adrian Slonaker**, lives in Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada and is fond of rock 'n' roll music, thunderstorms, owls and expressive eyes. Adrian's work has been published in *WINK: Writers in the Know*, *Ez.P.Zine*, *Gnashing Teeth*, *The Pangolin Review* and others.





**Anne-Julie Hynes** is a multidisciplinary artist from Montreal, Canada. Her work reflects a strong and powerful relationship to landscape and nature. She works with different mediums such as painting, photography, collage and sculpture. Visit: [annejuliehynes.com](http://annejuliehynes.com) or Instagram: [@annejuliehynes](https://www.instagram.com/annejuliehynes)







PHOTOGRAPHY BY: CATALINA ARANGUREN

# GREEN

BY: MARGARET GARCIA

Margaret Elysia Garcia is the author of short story ebook collection *Sad Girls and Other Stories*, and the audiobook, *Mary of the Chance Encounters*, and the co-founder and director of Las Pachucas, Latina theatrical troupe. She teaches creative writing and theatre at California Correctional Center in Susanville prison through the California Arts Council Arts in Corrections program.

I am older now but I am green.  
Backyard climbing ivy green  
Fern leaves out-stretched green  
So deep and dark green  
It doesn't seem real green.  
Like a boxwood hedge green,  
Labyrinth green.  
Green like California after 10 days of rain:  
Biblical, lush and surprising,  
Like you can't recognize where you are green,  
Growing green, palm trees shooting out into blue sky  
and dotted clouds against hillside green.  
I do not have time for this green.  
I am not bowing down to you, green.  
I am here for the earth, for the stars.  
For everything and everyone trying  
To get in here and out of here alive green.  
I am birth stone emerald green.  
Salad green, what comes next green.  
That's my green.



# HARMONIC DISTANCE

BY: DON NOEL

**A**t first, Drusilla rather enjoyed the solitude. Harmony Acres' ceaseless activities were mostly enjoyable keeping retirees

engaged and alert, but a respite was pleasant.

By now, though, social distancing -- staying in her apartment with meals and mail brought to her -- was a drag. Daughter Belinda reminded her by phone from Vermont every Sunday: "You're 86, Mama. A likely target for that virus." Still, a drag.

This morning she punched off her old wind-up alarm when it clattered at 7:30, and slept until 10. Probably needed sleep, but that didn't erase a twinge of guilt. Doubling down on indolence, she skipped her wake-up shower -- hot, then cold, then brisk toweling -- and slipped on a housecoat.

She had her usual spartan breakfast -- yogurt with honey, hard-boiled egg, whole wheat crackers, and a cup of very good tea brewed properly in a ceramic pot -- and browsed the newspaper. "This is brunch," she said aloud, persuading herself not to indulge in another mid-day meal.

She put an apron over her housecoat to wash the dishes. Taking it off, the housecoat shouted slothfulness. She went back to the bedroom to dress.

Now properly attired for a day in which she mightn't meet another soul, she cleared her desk of several days' half-read mail, deleted her email inbox of dross, and checked her calendar. Mid-day yoga and pool exercise: cancelled. All committees: cancelled. The cafeteria's online display recited what she'd ordered, which would be delivered soon by a wraith who'd put it on the hallway shelf, ring the doorbell and disappear lest they breathe at each other.

The newspaper reported a study by a prison reform group -- one of a dozen causes she supported and so was inundated by -- showing that solitary confinement fostered suicidal tendencies. She fingered her wrist for a pulse, and decided she was not suicidal.

She went out on her porch to look across and down to a dozen-and-a-half neighbors' porches and terraces. No one to even shout to.

She considered a phone chat with Lucy Parker, who sat next to her in the residents' choir -- back in the day -- but hesitated, lest she seem craving attention.



She considered a phone chat with Lucy Parker, who sat next to her in the residents' choir – back in the day -- but hesitated, lest she seem craving attention.

She weighed phoning Hattie Ogden, who was 95 and always lonely. She was also very deaf, though, played her television very loud, and wouldn't or couldn't turn it down.

By mid-afternoon, she tuned in the Metropolitan Opera streaming service – she was a supporter and subscriber – and made the TV play a favorite, *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Thumping from the apartment below. Augustus Pompeo – a retired clergyman with an extraordinarily apt name -- was a fat old man who didn't like opera. In fact, he liked only church hymns, and kept a broom handy to remind her by rapping on his ceiling, which was her floor.

"Sorry!" she bellowed, hurrying to diminish the volume. The rapping continued; she turned it down further. Brother Augustus, as he liked to be called – even in his youth, she couldn't believe he'd ever been Augie or Gus – was 90, all faculties failing except, unhappily, his hearing.

Fat Brother Augustus must have decided to tolerate her diminished opera; the thumping stopped. She got out her sewing basket and gave the opera half-attention. Typical Richard Strauss: Slightly dissonant prologue, stage-setting stuff. She could get up and find a barnburner like *Boheme* or *Traviata*, but Strauss's more demanding music would stiffen her spine. She tried to listen for what few sparse melodies came to Strauss in Bavaria or Berlin or Vienna or wherever he composed.

Finally, near the end of the first act, she put her mending down to give the opera full attention. The "aging" Marschallin – supposedly only 32, not much more than a third her own age! -- was, as always, struck by the certainty that her young lover – 17! – would someday abandon her for someone his own age. Strauss had her reflect on her passing years: "Sometimes I get up in the middle of the night and make the clocks all stop."

Drusilla had never stopped any clocks, even when Howard died four years ago. She listened now, trying to tune out Strauss to hear the measured beat of the grandfather clock his parents gave them as a wedding present. She'd considered skipping its weight-and-chain winding, but decided that would be too maudlin.

The Marschallin -- Renée Fleming, made up to look younger than her real 58 but nothing like 32 – was kanoodling with a contralto whose butch haircut or wig made her almost believably a teen-aged stud. Drusilla had never had a lover half her age, let alone cradle-robbing. There's opera, she thought, and there is real life. Real life had been pretty good.

Fleming sang on: "I feel the weakness of everything temporal right down to my heart . . . everything dissolves, what we reach for."

"No!" Drusilla shouted, bringing a chastening thump from Augustus. "It's still a good life, and not over yet! We'll all get past this pandemic, and get back to enjoying old age!"

"Time is a weird thing," the Marschallin sang. "Around us, inside us . . . in the mirror she trickles, in my temples she flows . . . silently, like an hourglass."





# A Gentle Letter

BY: JOHN MORGAN

From Kandahar, Cousin Patrick was returned to his parents, with a flag and a ribbon and a gentle letter, hand-delivered. He could not beg pardon from the pulsing last supper of his own eucharist, served in the dust made mud.

From Da Nang, Uncle Jack returned to his wife and child, with a ribbon and the remaining portion of himself. His body did not die but did not quite survive the cannibal feast of ferrous wine and ruined host.

These grave decades later, Jack collapses into the only home that comforts him. The iron no longer wet, the bone pitted and brittle as chalk, the mud now dried to dust, he holds his son and waits.

**John Morgan** studies creative writing at the Harvard Extension College and lives in the foothills of the Andes, where the air is clean.





PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ELLIE BEAUDRY



## **A Willow Read House**

BY: KUSHAL PODDAR

An eidetic willow reads the house,  
chuckles at the acts, bends in tension  
having a sneak peek at the knives  
kept in a leash inside the blindfold of drawers.

Today it follows the house-daughter's narrative  
sprawled all over the living room, stairs,  
and even between the couches' operose clefts.  
And  
for a moment her face floats up to the caliginous pane.

If the tree would make a scrapbook with those  
the pages would expunge the moments every Autumn.  
The knives would remain. The face - in some orphanage.  
Death grows up to be death.

Author of seven volumes of poetry including, *The Circus Came To My Island*, *'A Place For Your Ghost Animals, Eternity Restoration Project-- Selected and New Poems* and *Herding My Thoughts To The Slaughterhouse--A Prequel*. Visit: [amazon.com/Kushal-Poddar](https://amazon.com/Kushal-Poddar)



# White and Black Days or Piano Keys

BY ÉRIKA E. GARZA

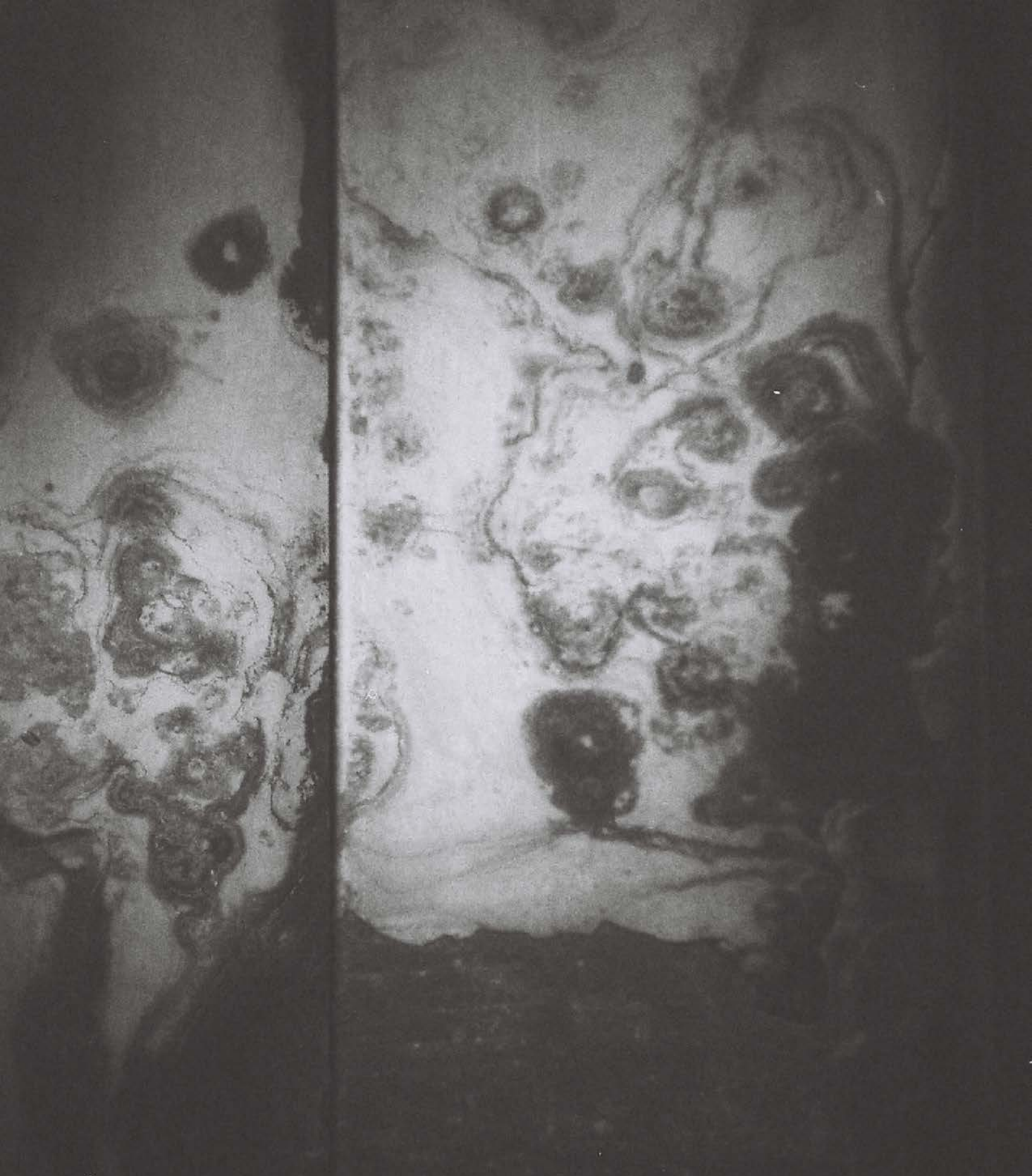
My white days are blank, empty lonely pages  
 in my boring life, I feel sad for many days  
 I don't feel like doing anything  
 it's hard to get out of bed  
 it's a daily struggle  
 I used to go to the gym at 5:00 in the morning  
 but not any more  
 it's easy to cry for any little thing  
 sleeping doesn't come very easily  
 only when it's time to wake up  
 I feel sad for many nights...

Black days  
 are the result of many white days  
 of too much  
 sadness sitting silently slowly secretly sleeping suicidal songs  
 But then, she kicks in  
 tells me to get up, move it,  
 do something productive  
 write a poem  
 or clean, wash clothes or wash dishes, wash wash wash everything away  
 at 3:00 in the morning  
 because there's not  
 enough time  
 during the day  
 these are my black days, *horror vacui*,  
 you might think I'm happy  
 but in reality, I'm angry  
 and I want to talk fast  
 and buy the world  
 and do everything I didn't do before  
 during my white days  
 all at once  
 all over again  
 and I'm reckless and carefree  
 and I feel pretty and confident and outspoken,  
 like the person I want to be  
 but it's all a halloween mask,  
 fake, scary and temporary.

I like my gray days better,  
 even when it's not my favorite color.  
 They are basically not all white or all black  
 not empty or full, just in between.  
 Kind of mixed in a good way.  
 In perfect harmony, like piano keys.

**Erika E. Garza** holds a Bachelor's and Master's Degree of Fine Arts in Spanish from UTRGV. Her poetry has been selected to be published in *FEIPOL Anthology 2018*, *Boundless 2019* and *2020*, *Dreaming: A Tribute to Selena, I Sing: The Body*, *FAME* *RGV Magazine* and *Revista Tierra Firme*.





Photography By: **Mila Djajic**. She was born 1998 in Novi Grad (BiH) and is currently at the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade, scenography department.





PHOTOGRAPHY BY: MILA DJAJIC



## Another Life

BY: BAISALI CHATTERJEE DUTT

Old buildings  
with red oxide floors  
and green, wooden window frames.  
Black and white photos  
of long-ago ancestors  
with secrets in their eyes.  
A lace tablecloth,  
a vase of roses,  
a vintage cake-stand  
and jasmine tea served in porcelain cups.

Jamdani saris,  
silver earrings,  
long hair  
and the late afternoon sun.

These images  
bubble in my mind's eye  
and I crave to replicate  
this aesthetic in my own life.  
I long for a touch of sepia  
to colour my graying days.

**Baisali Chatterjee Dutt** is a writer, editor, teacher and theatre artist living in Kolkata. Her poetry has been published in various magazines and anthologies, print as well as online.

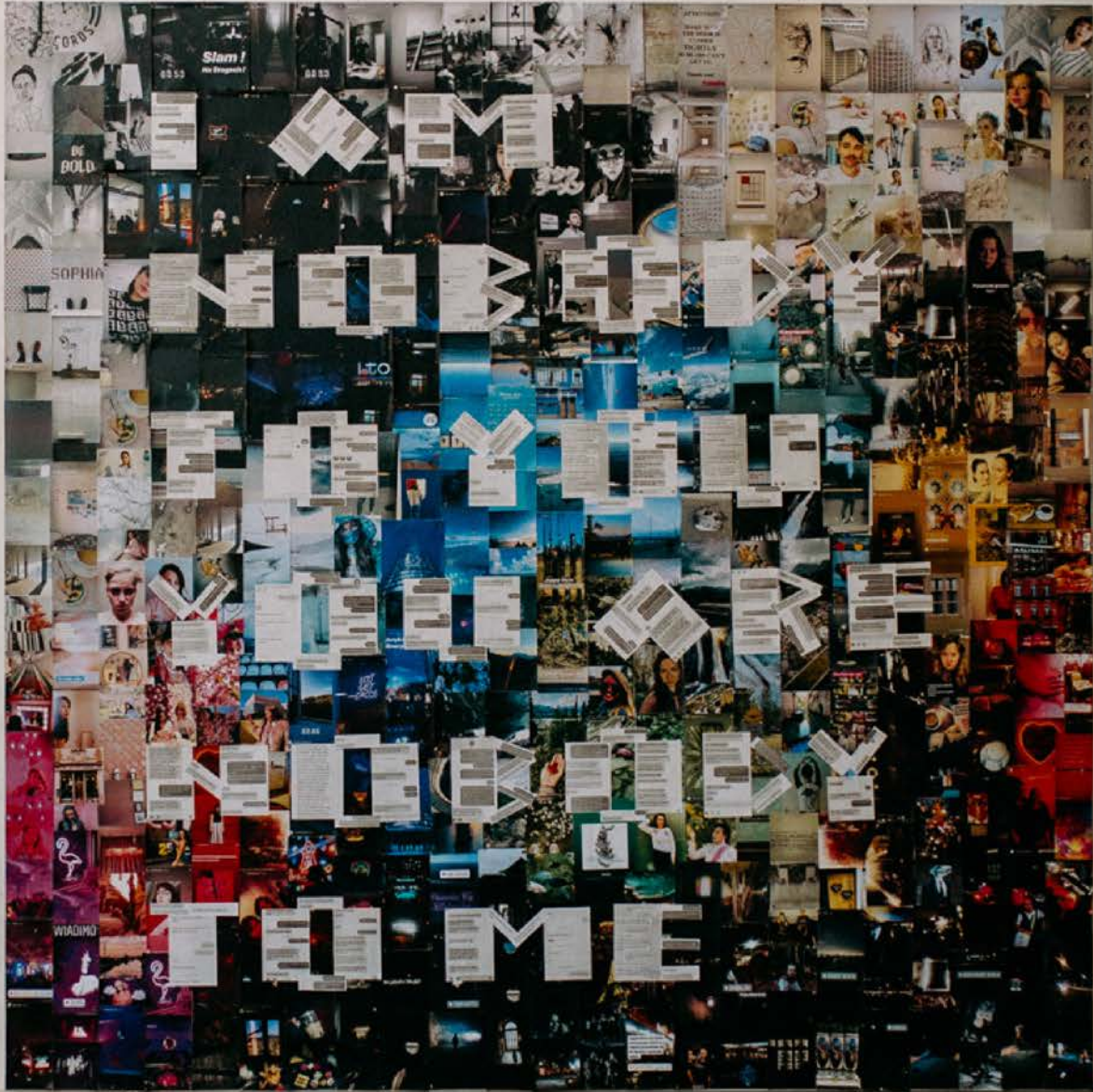




Photography By: **Ellie Beaudry**. She is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice engages with current environmental issues by exploring connections with the natural environment. She received a BFA and BS in Environmental Engineering from Cornell University in 2020.



**Dominika Karc** has a Masters degree in Sculpture from Gdansk's Academy of Fine Arts. She organizes exhibitions as a curator in Artformator Gallery, Gdansk Stogi. Her work has been shown in Warsaw, New York, and Pennsylvania. Visit: [dominikarc.com](http://dominikarc.com) or [@dominikarc](https://www.instagram.com/dominikarc)





# Whale Songs

BY: WILLY LANDON

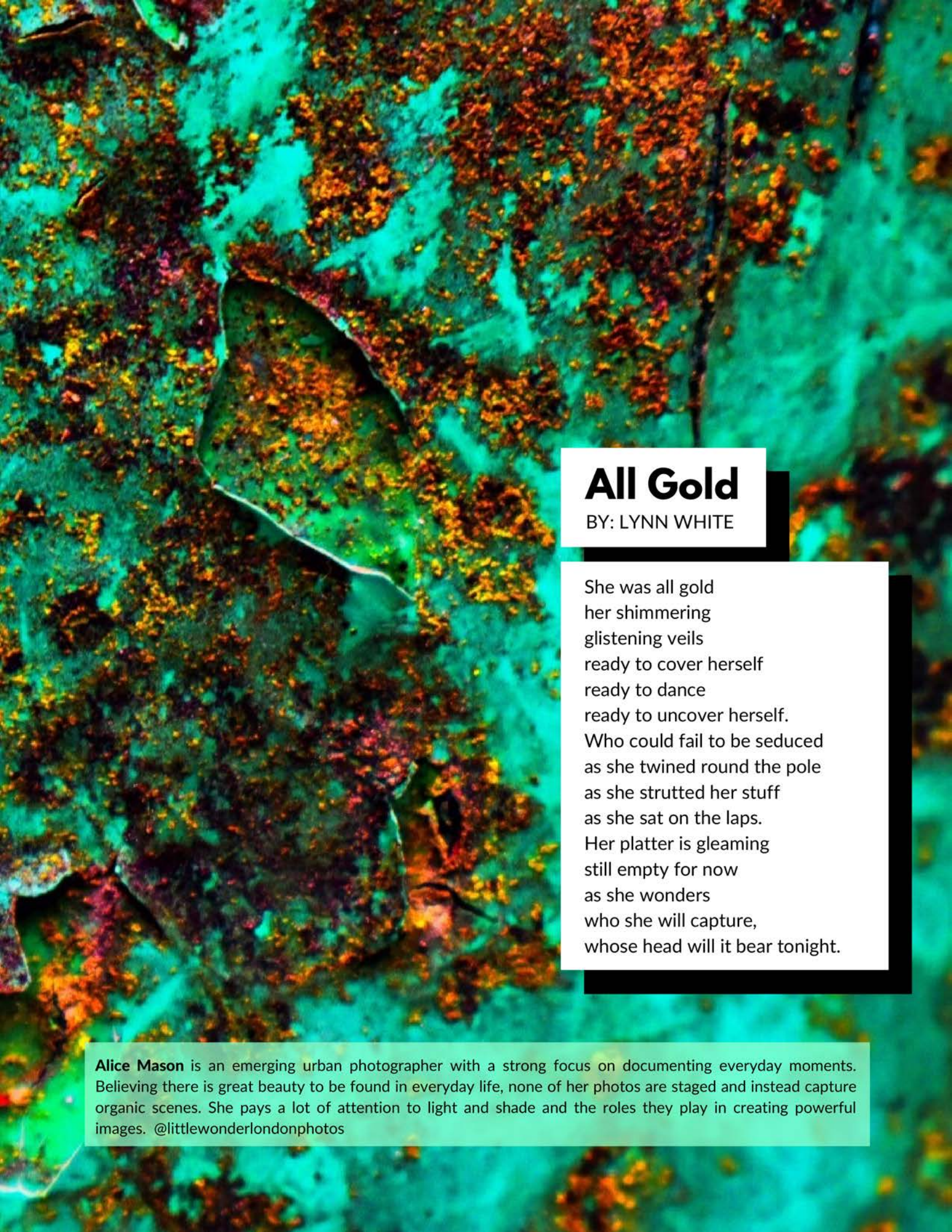
I read somewhere that whales spread songs  
Like, a pod will start a melody off the coast  
Of Greenland, and soon enough they're singing it  
In the Indian Ocean. So what's that  
Workshopping process like? Which whale is the  
First to hum a bar, and whom does she hum it for,  
And does it escape as a stutter, whispered  
As silver bubbles into the chill and the dark,  
To find a partner to pick up the tune?

And I read somewhere that elephants  
Mourn the deaths of those they've loved,  
They return to the site of a herd member's death  
On the anniversary of their passing, year after year  
Perhaps imagining what they were thinking as their  
Gargantuan lungs drew their final breaths, and their  
Spirits left to do the things their bodies were too big  
To do—like climb a tree, or bound in shallow puddles,  
Or curl up and make a home in a baobab leaf.

And I read somewhere that to forget a person,  
All you have to do is walk back and unread the book  
They let you borrow, sneak up behind yourself  
As you stare into that person's eyes for the first time  
And turn your chin to make yourself look away,  
And then finally and perhaps most importantly,  
Take yourself by the hand at the moment you  
Went to ring that person's doorbell for the first time  
And put your arm around your shoulder and lead  
Yourself quietly away, to go back  
Home and climb into bed and listen  
To whale songs instead, and sleep.

**Willy** is a writer, illustrator, and comedian based in Chicago, Illinois. This is his first poetry publication.





## All Gold

BY: LYNN WHITE

She was all gold  
her shimmering  
glistening veils  
ready to cover herself  
ready to dance  
ready to uncover herself.  
Who could fail to be seduced  
as she twined round the pole  
as she strutted her stuff  
as she sat on the laps.  
Her platter is gleaming  
still empty for now  
as she wonders  
who she will capture,  
whose head will it bear tonight.

**Alice Mason** is an emerging urban photographer with a strong focus on documenting everyday moments. Believing there is great beauty to be found in everyday life, none of her photos are staged and instead capture organic scenes. She pays a lot of attention to light and shade and the roles they play in creating powerful images. @littlewonderlondonphotos



## Look, look! The stars!

BY: LARA ABUALI

The sky is still stained green from all of the yellow of the sunset.  
In the west, a strip of peach remains, sinking slowly underground.  
Polaris. In all her might. Until her light extinguishes she is our savior.

My last two dreams involved the sea. Dark blue, bright blue, undulating sand.

If I were to drive four hours or fly two hours or walk nine hours I would be able to taste salt.

I could touch the mongrel stones left from a time when everything, everything, was underwater.

I cannot. I would have to do a million other things before then. And I would not be able to see the stars, Polaris, Jupiter, Mars, or Sirius from beneath all that water. But imagine. The bottom, where nobody has reached, of an eerily empty ocean. Stars glittering like miniature suns, blue and yellow and red. All of them, everywhere, speckled like flecks of paint. The crickets do not sound the same across the world, though they rub limbs in unison, communicating through the might of the heavens. Imagine a form so massive you cannot hear the cricket, the tiger, the glaciers breaking, the plates of the earth cracking like china. Imagine wearing the universe as a halo, infinitely larger than everything. Imagine being alone. Alone and hearing nothing. Not engines sputtering, nor the zips of coats and dresses. Nothing. This is how the tail of a meteor feels, falling and falling and falling until it dissipates into a foreign atmosphere, as all of our predecessors watch. Now imagine becoming a mongrel, a mutt, as every pebble has. Imagine being covered in dirt only to be uncovered by water, only to be covered by dirt again, then toppling into the abyss as the planet splits in half. A mongrel of earth, magma, and the infinite vacuum. Now, as the world heals itself, you are stuck in the center, a hollow full of blackness where old stars go to die. Forced to wait until the next split,

or come to the conclusion that you, too, are a fallen star. That your livelihood is over, now that you have been tarnished not only by the earth but by the deafening sounds of life above you. Moons and suns flicker in unison.

Polaris, your savior, has stopped shining.

Your halo is gone, cracked into a million pieces,  
the unlucky fragments of mirrors.

You, the remnant of a time sought after,  
are left to waste away at the center of the world.

Lara Abuali is a Palestinian-Canadian poet based in Jordan. She was born and raised in Hong Kong. In 2018, she won the highest poetry prize of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, and published her first collection of verse. She is preparing to publish her second collection soon.



# THE OTHER SHORE

BY: LARA ABUALI

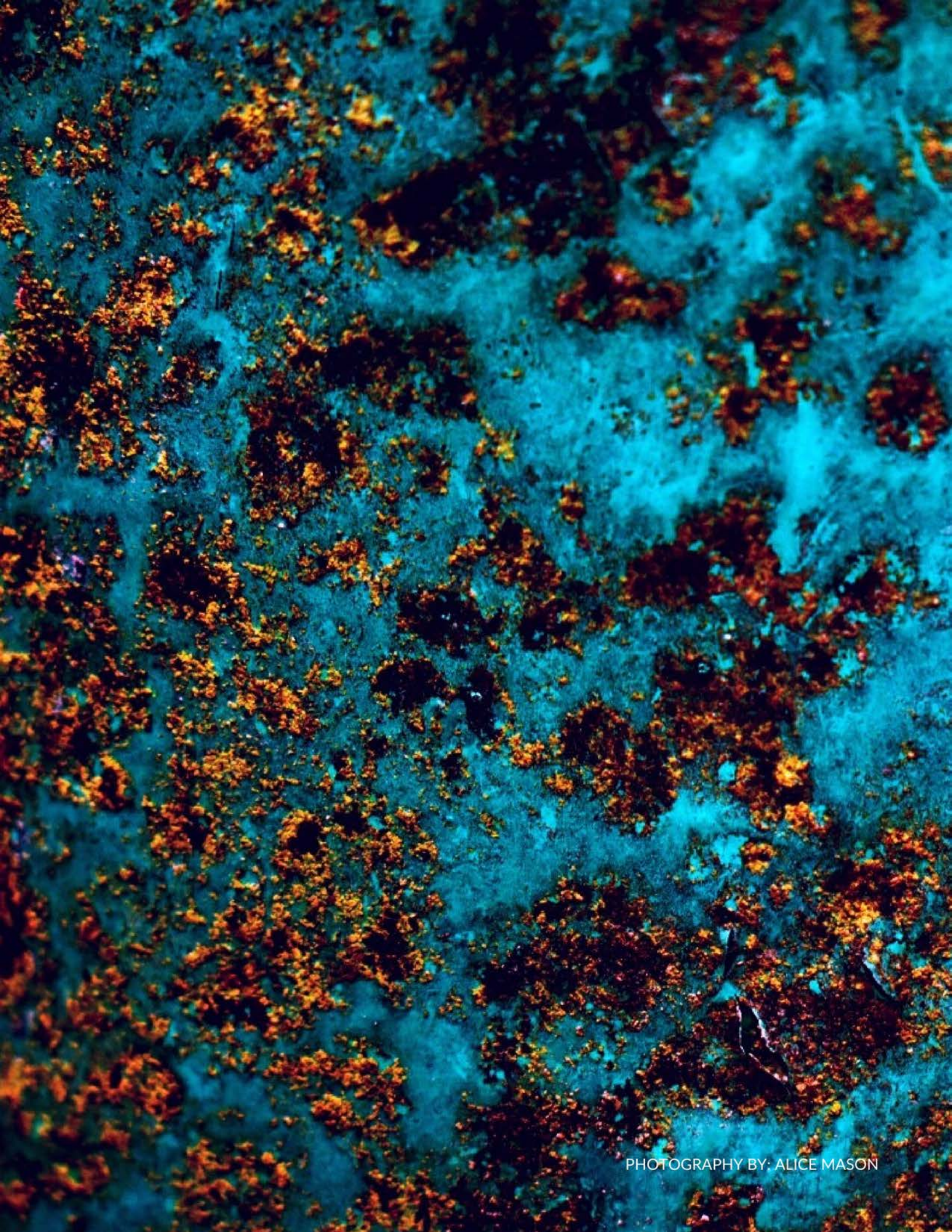
If I am alone  
truly alone  
nobody else, no hand touching my shoulder from above,  
then it was me,  
it was me who saved my own life.  
it was me who did not die  
it was me  
it was me  
it was me

Not alone,  
but afraid of the end  
Not afraid of the end  
but of life  
of lacking it  
of staring with glazed eyes at everything around me  
of sitting  
of standing  
of walking in fear.

Perhaps it was me who saved my own life  
I knew there was more than those little grey boxes  
The wooden desk in my bedroom  
The cotton of my shirts  
There was more.  
I know it now.  
Here it comes, like a river,  
meandering for the first time, sweet and light,  
strawberry milk.

Perhaps my life will devolve, yes, into something worse.  
And perhaps I will wish I had ended it when I wanted to.  
But that is a gamble I will not take.  
I opened my eyes for the first time on a beach—I saw  
the pink of the water, the grain of the sand between my little toes,  
the smell of salt and ice, that bitter sun on my fat cheeks.  
My father taught me to swim, on my back in the sea,  
held my hand as I walked out of the water—  
I refuse to go before he is able to walk me out of the  
water.  
I cannot. I will not.  
I crossed into that sea and I felt my feet reach the deep, I felt myself launch  
onto my stomach, I looked down and I saw the fish underneath me,  
I looked up and I saw the sun above me, I felt my skin blister and darken, I  
felt the moon soothe my peeling back,  
I felt the heat of the summer and the crackling cold of the winter,  
I will reach the other shore.





PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ALICE MASON





# Counting Blues

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BY: CYNTHIA GALLAHER

Look to the sky on an icy morning  
and count your blues

shades of

powder, copen,

cobalt,

china, cerulean,

delft and steel,

midnight, denim.

Cobalt,

cobalt blue,

the presence of this color is sometimes  
the only indication if

a vintage oil painting is real  
or a forgery.

cobalt,

the cool impartial judge.

Metals closets with cobalt cures

bathe patients in automatic blue.

Blue,

healthy and full,

coherent, healed,

completed,

but with a touch of loneliness

in your independence.

You can go it solo,

have no need for others,

like the needs of purples and aquas  
that float on the periphery  
of your coolness.

Blue,

cool kingpin of the spectrum:

chilly blue water pouring

from a blue-enameled pitcher  
turns the lips blue.

Blue purity.



**Sania Salman Dar** is a prize-winning photographer based in Lahore. Her recent works include designing a book cover for Jayant Kashyap's, *Unaccomplished Cities* (Ghost City Press, 2020).





# In The Blue Of The Night

BY: LYNN WHITE

The town had a reputation for greyness  
for granite  
and slate,  
for mist  
and rain.

It was not an undeserved reputation  
but what she remembered most  
were the night skies,  
the blue, blue night skies  
midnight blue  
bright skies  
lighting up the people  
making them shine  
and shimmer  
glowing with life.

Nobody saw the grey.

**Lynn White** lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. She was shortlisted in the Theatre Cloud 'War Poetry for Today' competition and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Rhysling Award. Visit: [lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com](http://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com)







**Golnoush Behmanesh**, MFA holder in painting, lives and works in United States, focuses on social and environmental context, and has more than 15 individual and group exhibitions.



Illustration By: **Kate Massey**. California based, experimental visual artist working with acrylics, watercolor, and resin to create three dimensional surreal paintings. Visit: Instagram @pocketfox3301





# Blossom

BY: MIRANDA HAYNES

Fallen and flawless.

Rising and damaged.

The looks given behind closed doors and through open windows.

Whisper like lilac blossoms and anger

as sharp as the broken vase lying on the cold linoleum floor .

Slow dances in the privacy of public rooms.

Sweet gestures and two way mirrors.

Security within opaque transparency .

Fast and fading.

Slow and growing .

Flawed ink spotted paper and desperate decayed roses.

Shattered glass sparkling like stars on that first cool autumn night.

Poisoned lips laid on like feathers.

Secrets emitting a sickeningly sweet odor, masking ugly lies

and even uglier truths.

Miranda is a senior in high school who is looking to put their art into the world.  
She tries to illustrate both the beauty and darkness found within ordinary life.







# SHADES OF AN ABUSED GIRL

BY: NASA CHIMEZIE

First, I was a lost child,  
who couldn't quite forget what  
peace felt like and have forever  
to figure out if it is a thing or  
another Santa Claus event.

Then I became a weary lady,  
one that yearned for a slice of  
peace, some quiet in her mind,  
a few uneventful night rest and  
a heart devoid of resentment.

Yet I aged into a broken woman,  
One that can never be whole again,  
torn by the dismay of lost yesterdays  
clad in the emptiness of today.

Each shade is a piece of me,  
formed by the trauma inflicted  
by another's lust:

A child this moment;  
untouched in some ways,  
yet soiled.

A lady the next;  
full of vile and contempt,  
you flee before she unravels.

Quite the aged woman sometimes;  
Weary, slithering through life,  
weighed by hurts, time halt and leaped!  
Leaving behind different hues of me

**Nasa** is a teacher of the mind because it's beautiful device that loves words.  
When not writing or sharing knowledge, Nasa is exploring worlds within  
books.





ILLUSTRATION BY: MICHAEL SHELTON



# OUR LAST RACE

BY: SHELBY VAN PELT

"So, what are we going to do?" Your question hangs in the air like one of the gulls hovering over the trash bins on the pier. A shrug twitches my shoulders.

"Tonight," you clarify. "It's my last night. What are we going to do?"

I slouch. "I don't know. Whatever?"

Your eyes crinkle at the low-slung sun, which glows amber on the freckles that have collected on your cheeks all summer. Somehow, they're already fading. I inhale, savoring our smell of sunscreen and sweat with a hint of marina mildew and greasy gasoline.

We swirl our bare toes in the thick water of the brackish bay, our tanned legs dangling from the dock. This has always been our spot, our dock. I should tell you. Right here, right now.

You turn to me, head tilted, and say, "People are going to Leland's later. We could go."

No doubt this is true. People are always going to Leland's. Our graduating class might have been tiny but there's still that one person whose house people are always going to.

I frown. "So, your last memory of me will be drinking shitty beer in Leland's basement?"

"Oh, come on, we're best friends!" You knock my arm with an exasperated sigh. "And I'll be home for Christmas."

"Of course." My voice comes out flat.

"Cheer up. I might not be living around the block anymore, but it's not like I'm going to Jupiter."

We've been best friends since nursery school. Your mom likes to say we were practically born two peas in a pod. But now you're headed to university. I never doubted you would; you're so smart. While you're sitting at a varnished desk learning Greek Mythology, I'll be canning fish at the warehouse, like both of my parents. The moments where you and I exist in the same universe are ticking away with the setting sun.

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You leave tomorrow morning. That's why I need to tell you tonight. I follow your gaze to the edge of the marsh where a bird that looks too clumsy and leggy to fly snatches a huge silver fish. It pumps its awkward boomerang wings, somehow lifting its thrashing load over the seagrass, the beneficiary of some evolutionary serendipity.

Impossible, and yet.

Would anything I say change things? Your mum's hatchback is stuffed, the dorm-bound duffels and crates mashed against its windows. I saw it when I picked you up earlier.

"Hey." You pull your dripping feet from the water and slip into your sandals. "Race you back to the bike rack?"

"You're on," I say, doing the same. But I lag. Intentionally.

Someday, I'll have kids of my own who park bicycles on that rack. I can picture my future house, which will be small but well-kept, on the outskirts of town, and have a green square of grass in the front yard. You won't be there. Here.

Beyond the marsh grasses, the sun's last sliver sinks into the shimmering bay. You're already way up the path, winning our last race. I let you go. To the last blush of crimson in the sky, I whisper the secret I've been carrying for so long.

"I love you."

When **Shelby Van Pelt** isn't feeding her flash-fiction-writing addiction or compulsively editing her debut novel, she's probably tripping over one of her cats while wrangling one of her children. She lives in the Chicago suburbs.





**Victoria Miteva** is a visual artist based in North Macedonia. Her work includes painting, photography, land-art, installation, soft sculpture. Has a MFA of Painting.  
Instagram: @adularescenca













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# THE PURPLE ENDING

BY: IVANA TURUDIC

I can't go back to where my roots are. Not that I can't travel right now, but I can't move in time. The memory of my mother's side of the family goes back to my great-grandfather, whose portrait I've saved in the new house on the island.

I know some ninety-year-olds who told me they wouldn't be here if he didn't help them get penicillin from America for their ancestors. I treasure his journal as well as letters among my grandfather and his brothers and sisters. Those were the times when people on the island were still Titans.

My mother moved from the island when she was only fourteen for education. So many from my family did. When she brought my father and their close friend for a visit, the friend was disappointed. He said churches and castles and villages were lovely, but he expected it to be so much bigger; especially the outdoor oven for baking bread in the old house. That is because he didn't know my mother was born in the dusk of the age of Heroes. The period that was long gone, save for the memory of some few people. The fading away of eras is something very subjective; they usually withdraw in silence, gradually.

The brutality of the Grand War ended my great-grandfather's life and the wealth of our family. The killers tossed his library and other things they couldn't understand into some barn. My grandfather then tried to support the family by growing lavender and it worked. Every spare moment that he had, he spent reading. After he'd come back from the fields in the evening, by the lights of the candle he would read Jules Verne to his children. Many people from the village would drop by to listen. One evening, when reading aloud, one man got there too late, so he asked: "What happened to Arturo?" That remained the saying for someone coming late to the spot.

My grandfather was telling my mother that on the island, you are always in touch with the whole world. Her surviving, maternal grandfather travelled two times to China and America, so she wanted to see the world as well. Her father, my grandfather, told her all she needs to do is dip her toe in the sea. I remember one story he picked up somewhere and told my mom. She told it to her students and me.

It was the story of an Eskimo boy named Kayfesh. Kayfesh lost his father, the hunter, in his early teens. He wasn't strong enough to hunt yet, and he had a mother, brothers, sisters and grandparents. Also, amid ice and snow, he couldn't quickly dip his toe in the sea to invite the awareness of the vast world around him.

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I know my grandfather from pictures only, but mom told me he looked and had gestures of Gary Cooper so I can imagine him telling the story. I have his temper, and mom is dramatic like him when telling stories. I can also remember his elder brother's letter, my granduncle Mijo whom I met, that reproves him over his temper.

Anyway, other hunters would give their surplus to Kayfesh's family, but it wasn't enough. Hence, grandmother and grandfather decided to go into the wilderness alone, which was the custom of ending life for people of old age. Still, they were not old enough to have to go that path.

My grandfather would explain that with scarce resources and a rough climate, some customs are a necessity. My mother would listen in awe and my grandfather would ask her not to be judgemental.

Kayfesh came up with the idea, just like my grandfather, to grow lavender—which is one of the trademarks of the island today. He found an elastic and sharp fishbone, he rolled it with fat into a ball and set a trap for animals. When a big bear got there to attack weak Kayfesh, he noticed the ball and ate it. Nobody hunted this way before, and it worked only in theory. The boy didn't know what was going to happen. The animal had the yummy ball but soon started choking in pain. That was the first successful hunt for Kayfesh. The way to support his family. He used his wit to find a way around the tragedy. Like my grandfather, he didn't have time to mourn his father. My grandfather also used his wit for similar inventions when making lavender oil.

My grandfather loved the stories of the Wild West; he travelled the world with his books and worked in lavender fields. The people that remember him and the old times are going one by one. They call their stories gancice, but no one is listening to those stories anymore. Usually, people would tell them at gatherings in the evening after reading Jules Verne or after telling strange Eskimo tales. Those were the stories when regular people were heroic and witty, long before the island became a tourist spot. I wish I were a storyteller like the ones of times long ago so the flavour of that age would linger just a little longer.

Maybe, some stranger will feel the scent and colour of untold stories resting in the purple lavender fields during the season. Maybe someone will feel the microcosm of the island connected to other microcosms as particles of an incredible endless web, and it will all make sense as the story of Kayfesh made sense to the islanders.

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**Ivana** has a background in philosophy, linguistics and literature, and writes nostalgic pieces about her roots. She's curious about the world, but changes dream destinations rapidly, so she rarely travel other than in her imagination. Still, some interests are strong until this very day, and when she does travel, she always find a way to the heart of things, behind the offered scenery.

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# MY MOTHER'S COLORS

BY: MAGGI MCGETTIGAN

**Y**ou could always tell my mother's mood by the color of her face. Too Tired To Talk was ghost white, Too Drunk a deep red, Come and Hug Me a sad, pale pink. Sometimes it was a mix, and I'd have to piece it together like a puzzle. A blotch of frustration against pale exhaustion, like a firework in a white sky, meant stay away and you're on your own for dinner.

When I was really young, I thought I was responsible for the colors, and I tried to make them change. If she came home from work in Angry purple, I put on a record she liked and stayed out of her way and watched the purple turn pale until I could climb into her lap. As I grew up I took less responsibility for it, learned to live with it like seasons, and just watched the changing colors as the evenings wore on.

The day I left home started distant yellow, somehow paler than white with deep blue circles under her eyes. Her cheeks looked like dried out old paste, yellowed with age. She made me breakfast without speaking, but as we ate, a sad pink crept in, and she offered to help me pack. But by noon she was sipping on an amber glass, and the deep red of Stay Away rose up from her chest and neck. By the time I turned to say goodbye she was blotchy red and purple, crying on the couch. I kissed the top of her head as if she were a child and left.

In a short stint of sobriety she learned to laugh at it. I visited more often, we sat on the rotted porch and talked about our past in a hazy, forgetful way. I told her about her changing colors but I focused on the good: the bright pink cheeks of true laughter, the creamy white of contentment. Maybe it was my fault for pointing it out, because she started wearing more make-up, so it was hard to see Too Drunk deep red until it was too late.

She didn't make it to my wedding, wouldn't have behaved if she did, but the sunset over the bay was that sad pale pink, with wispy white clouds, colors of her softer moods. In a photo from that day my face was pink too, reflected from the sky, or by my own softening mood.

**Maggi McGettigan** is a writer and educator living in Downingtown, PA. Her work has appeared in Halfway Down the Stairs and The Stonecrop Review.

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# I LOVED A GODDESS

BY: MYDHILI VARMA

Waiting in line, fiddling with the paper chit labeled Token #756, I brace myself to confront my ex, who up and vanished the day before our wedding and became an overnight spiritual sensation. Three years have gone by since that night when my life turned into a grief cycle.

Sometimes, I think I might've missed some sort of hint before she took off—something unsaid in our last conversation: a twitch, a blink, a slight raise of the eyebrows... I cook up grand theories, every one more preposterous than the last and scrape for meaning in my dried up pot of life.

After the event, I was flinging things with vengeance across my shabby one-room partition house and punching the walls in frustration, cursing my landlord for asking me to keep it down. Then were days of curling up in bed with the pillow that sometimes took her place, wasting away, wishing myself dead, followed by moping and venting with my drinking buddies, making elaborate personal investigation plans of tracking her down and reclaiming my love, only to go back to rummaging through a rusty trunk full of her belongings that had long lost her distinctive smell, looking for an elusive clue.

"You will go mad if you keep this up," my friends said.

If this is how madness begins, then I must already be mad because I feel quite confident for a man about to give a piece of his mind to a spiritual leader surrounded by umpteen security guards. I'm more alive than I have been all the years she spent away from me.

I step out of the serpentine queue of her followers and take a good look at her. She might be wrapped up in that saffron saree, but she is still my Pattu. I can feel her cool cheeks in my hands if I close my eyes and let go. She's as beautiful as ever, if only more so. Her skin and her hair glows, and it's impossible for me to peel my eyes off her, even as a security guard shoves me into line.

For a moment, I imagine her getting up from her grand high-backed chair, marching towards me and demanding to know why I bothered to turn up without a kulfi. Our meetings never happened without the ten-rupee kulfi I religiously bought her.

Memories of her kulfi-tasting kisses still linger in my heart, turning sweeter with every passing day. I practice the different ways to address the Virgin Goddess who now helms this palatial ashram in the outskirts of Mumbai, granting wishes and performing miracles. Do I call her, "Your Holiness," "Goddess Supreme," "My love?" All of them seem wrong.

I don't want miracles, I want answers. Why did she desert me? Was the divine-calling-at-midnight-story an elaborate ruse? Was she secretly waiting for me to turn up to resume our lives together? Is my Pattu still mine? If not, indulge me with one miracle and I will begrudgingly believe her transformation, leave her alone and go back home. Just one miracle. Levitate, conjure, anything.

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My turn finally comes. I stand before her, a bundle of nerves, awkwardly hyperventilating and unable to put my agony into words. All my resentment melts into a puddle and I want to wipe my sweaty hands on my sides and take her face in my palms. I don't because standing before her glowing form is simply too much for me. I gasp and my eyes spill tears of relief and acquiescence

She blesses me. Her palm on the pate of my head does something weird to my psyche.

"No kulfi shops open at this time," I say in my mind. "Sorry, Pattu."

"No matter," Her voice echoes inside my head.

I gasp at this soundless answer to my thought and fall at her feet, sobbing. The guards are quick to peel me away from her feet but my sobs don't subside even after I am outside the ashram. I stand in the middle of the road and cry like I have never cried in my life. Her acknowledgement is enough to see me through this life and the next. When my eyes are dry, the sun has disappeared behind the hills. A sigh leaves my lips as I walk my way back to the bus stop. I go home with the realization that I was touched by divinity.

**Mydhili Varma** has co-written anthologies titled, *Urban Shots: Bright Lights*, *Fox Hollow Stories*, *Otherwise Engaged Journal (Vol 5)*, *Word Doodle Lit Mag*, and *Disquiet Arts*, and is currently working on a YA novel. Facebook: mydhili.rvarma



ILLUSTRATION BY: MICHAEL SHELTON





Illustration by: **Guido Nosari**, an artist between Milan & Berlin, who has participated in several art residencies and has multiple awards. Visit: [guidonosari.wixsite.com/madre](https://guidonosari.wixsite.com/madre) or Instagram: [@guidonosari](https://www.instagram.com/guidonosari)





## WHEN I COME OUT OF THIS

BY: WILLY LANDON

I'll be wearing that shirt you like,  
Clean-shaven, blazing, blue and gold,  
And my I won't be holding my hands up  
In front of my face. I'll stretch 'em out  
In supplication, pen at the ready and  
Another one stuffed in my back pocket  
Just in case, to ensure I can sign on the  
Line, and I don't have an excuse this time  
For why I didn't pick up. And you won't  
Hear me explain that Saturday would be  
Better, because I'll shave and drink  
Glass after glass of water, and spin in my  
Sheets for a solid eight hours, and leaf  
Through my archives, and pray, and  
Learn the names of the flowers in the park  
Across the river, and press my collar, because  
I'll be wearing that shirt you like.





## Low Sunset

BY: KELLI LAGE

Faces coated in tangerine hues. Green fields, get a glimpse of the golden tassels to come in autumn. Your honied hair now a fiery auburn in the center of the nether horizon. I look down at my fingertips bewildered at how olive mingles so smoothly with the candlelight orange of the evening. Galloping alongside us, our dog, Cedar in color and name, now tinted in the bronze of an ancient statue. I whisper how I wish we could live in the low sunset of each night's beckoning. You tell me, "Then nothing would grow."

**Kelli Lage** lives in the Midwest countryside with her husband, and their dog, Cedar. She's working toward a degree in Secondary English Education, and is here to give readers words that resonate.



Illustrations By: **Ana Jovanovska** is a Macedonian artist and hold a MFA in the Graphic Art Field. She had 10 solo and more than 150 exhibitions around the world.



## Found

BY: KELLI LAGE

When he found me, I was frostbitten. Laid to rest among winter's bellows. I bared my teeth showing him, to trek on elsewhere. He stepped closer, slow drops of fire dripped off his lips and onto my palms. My color took form, melting the last bit of snow caught in my throat. My olive skin flushed to roseate horizons. My tawny irises grew to chocolate as his warmth tore through my veins. He lifted me from the hollow and honeysuckle waltzed around my nose. I gazed upward and found myself in a spring garden. My dirt-covered, threadbare garments, faded a white gown now hugging my body.





# AMAZING GRACE

BY JOHN LAMBREMONT, SR.

Through days of alternating rain and heat,  
the unattended plant pot has quietly sprouted  
an uninvited weed, escaped from early pulling.  
Already risen four feet skyward,  
turned from light to dark green,  
its thick leaves broad lances capped  
with arrowheads atop and aside,  
which hold gathered herds of aphids grazing  
as pairs of green flies jitterbug above.  
Its head, a veined silhouette of stalks,  
now bears a crown of the finest lavender,  
multi-tasseled minute blossoms  
with gold buttons at their center,  
blooms of a kind not before seen,  
some of the prettiest wildflowers  
that have ever been.

**John Lambremont, Sr.** is a Pushcart Prize nominated poet from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, U.S.A., with B.A. in Creative Writing and a J.D. from Louisiana State University. His poems have been published internationally in many reviews, including *Pacific Review*, *Sugar House Review*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Pattaya Review*, and *The Minetta Review*. John has many full-length poetry collections such as *Dispelling The Indigo Dream*, *The Moment Of Capture*, *Old Blues*, *New Blues*, and *The Book Of Acrostics*, and his chapbook, *What It Means To Be A Man*.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ALICE MASON





## AN EXTRACTION

BY JOHN LAMBREMONT, SR.

Extract the thin strands  
of bent, twisted metal  
driven deep into my limbs,  
like pulling pin bones  
from a slab of fish  
and watching red blood  
seep across pink flesh.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ALICE MASON





**Bertrand Goalou** is a French globetrotting artist, exploring the world to capture everyday moments and transform them into vibrant and colorful paintings. He visited almost 70 countries on all continents and held multiple international exhibitions. His artworks offer a unique, travel experience, gaining traction as real-life international travels are suspended. Visit: [bertrandgoalou.carbonmade.com](http://bertrandgoalou.carbonmade.com) or Instagram: @bertrandgoalou





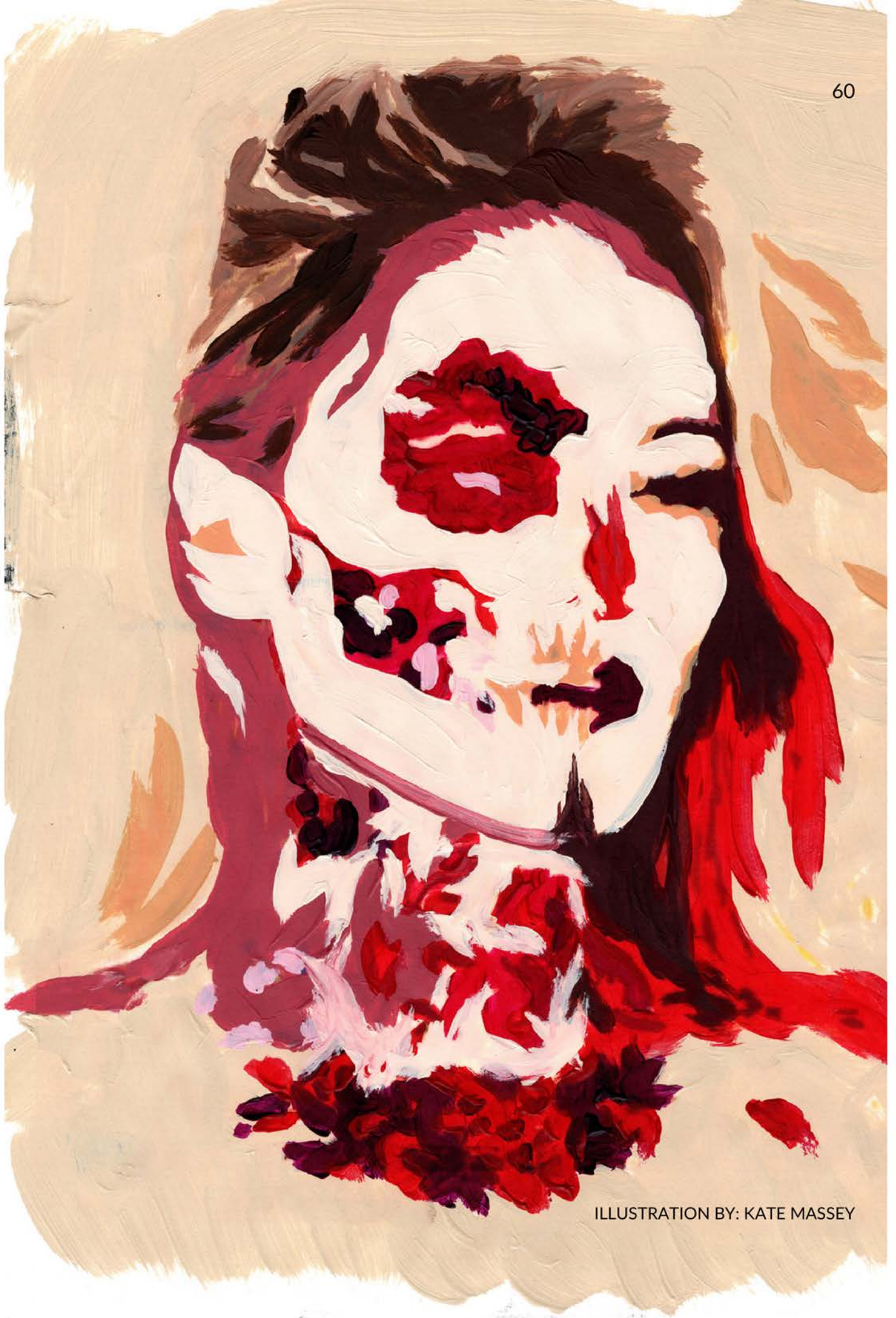


ILLUSTRATION BY: KATE MASSEY



# RED

BY: NICHOLE PIENKA

Behind his lids, a scarlet veil cloaks his world, a product of the blaring sunlight through the windows without drapes. His eyebrows desperately try to meet and form a line of pain under his aching forehead. Joe wants his world to freeze this way to avoid the shock of liberal light invading his slumber.

It's Tuesday, he remembers and groans. He stumbles out of bed, his eyes still closed off from the white room. Only once he faces away from the source does the redness disappear. Breath rumbles through his cracked lips as he enters the bathroom with the intent to shower. Sufficiently clean, he rubs off the steamed mirror with a swollen damp hand. The man looks half-dead. Fiery blotches consume his face while vicious sanguine snakes devour his hazel irises. Five angry lines barely stand out on his left cheekbone. No one will notice.

Hellish numbers glare out from the alarm clock on the dresser next to his wife's resting body, marking out Joe's fate if he doesn't hurry. Her cherry lips part in the languidness of sleep. They contrast so greatly from her bloodless skin and captivate him even in his mind's red alert of tardiness. A strange impulse to give her a warm good-bye kiss flashes through his mind. He blinks away the thought as if it never occurred.

\* \* \*

Carol shifts as if something had slowly started burning her. She welcomes this warmth as a comfort in the frigidity of the room's atmosphere. She flinches with every use of muscle as hot needles ravage her senses.

Swallowing with a dry throat, she nearly gags. Copper — she tastes and smells it. She will never acclimate to its acrid bitterness. Waking to this inflamed state of loneliness makes her feel marooned. She feels abandoned on Mars with lungs choking on a mercurial haze even as she moves through the house.

A sea of memories creep over her like volcanic lava. Her toes cannot touch where there isn't something waiting to set her pain alight. It looks as though an earthquake has devastated the house. A messy corpse of curtains lie curled at the mercy of the bedroom window, the splinters of a desiccated chair scattered as an explosive random in the office. A sticky smear of rust-colored goo stains the chestnut stairs, a fresh wound in the kitchen wall leaks plaster entrails. These corporeal things are amendable, can be bandaged up and healed.

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Ignoring the attention of their material possessions, she pads through the remains toward the infernal cabinet that had a hand in the surrounding anarchy. She desires it to forget and he wants it for power.

Her skull feels raw on the inside. Maybe her devil will remedy that with another good bash into a countertop, shattering her skull into glistening garnets like the mostly empty rum bottle he'd aimed at her last night. It will save her the oxygen to pump into her cardinal organs, all internally dull and grayish-pink unlike her burgundy-shaded outer-reality.

She stares headlong into her wine glass of swirling crimson about to douse the flushed kerosene rushing through her veins. The cool vessel fits her rosy lips perfectly to satiate her need to forget, to burn out the tawny taste.

This is their world now through ruby-colored glasses.

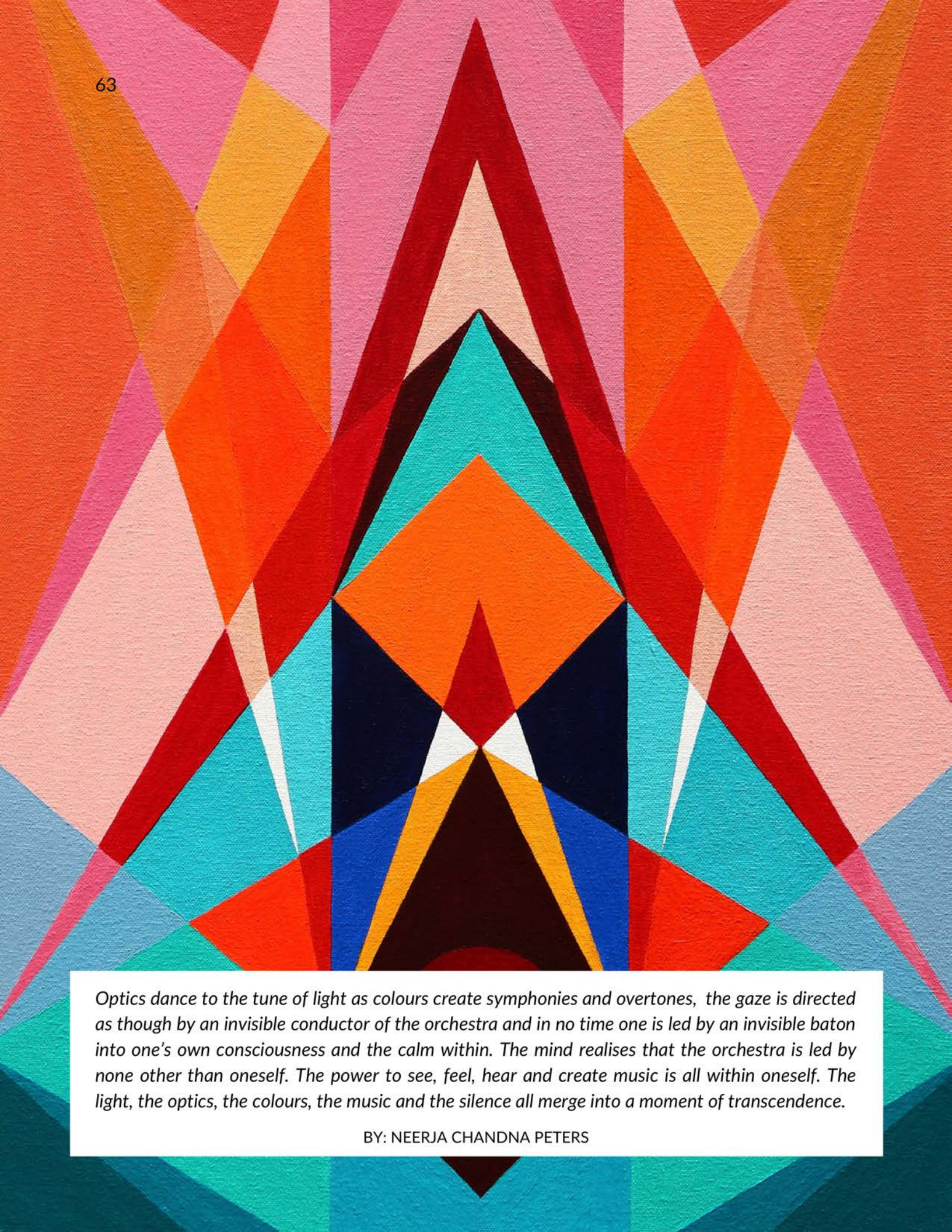
Even when she closes her eyes, the red remains.

**Nichole Pientka** is a published poet and fiction writer. Writing is her passion, but by day she manages a program for first-generation, minority college students for a non-profit. Her work has been published by Festival Writer and the If and Only If Journal.



Illustration By: **Michael Shelton**. He's from Washington D.C. He moved to Florida in 2008 and has been drawing since he was 12. He prefers pencil and paper sketching to digital. He's inspired by fantasy and sci-fi.





*Optics dance to the tune of light as colours create symphonies and overtones, the gaze is directed as though by an invisible conductor of the orchestra and in no time one is led by an invisible baton into one's own consciousness and the calm within. The mind realises that the orchestra is led by none other than oneself. The power to see, feel, hear and create music is all within oneself. The light, the optics, the colours, the music and the silence all merge into a moment of transcendence.*

BY: NEERJA CHANDNA PETERS









11/20





**Neerja Chandna Peters** is an artist and writer by passion who left her physician's job and found her language in spiritual expression through painting abstract geometry. Visit: [Duendestudio.com](http://Duendestudio.com) or Instagram [@neerjapeters.art](https://www.instagram.com/neerjapeters.art)





# Grandfather Tree Chamber Pot Quiddity Off Color Soliloquy

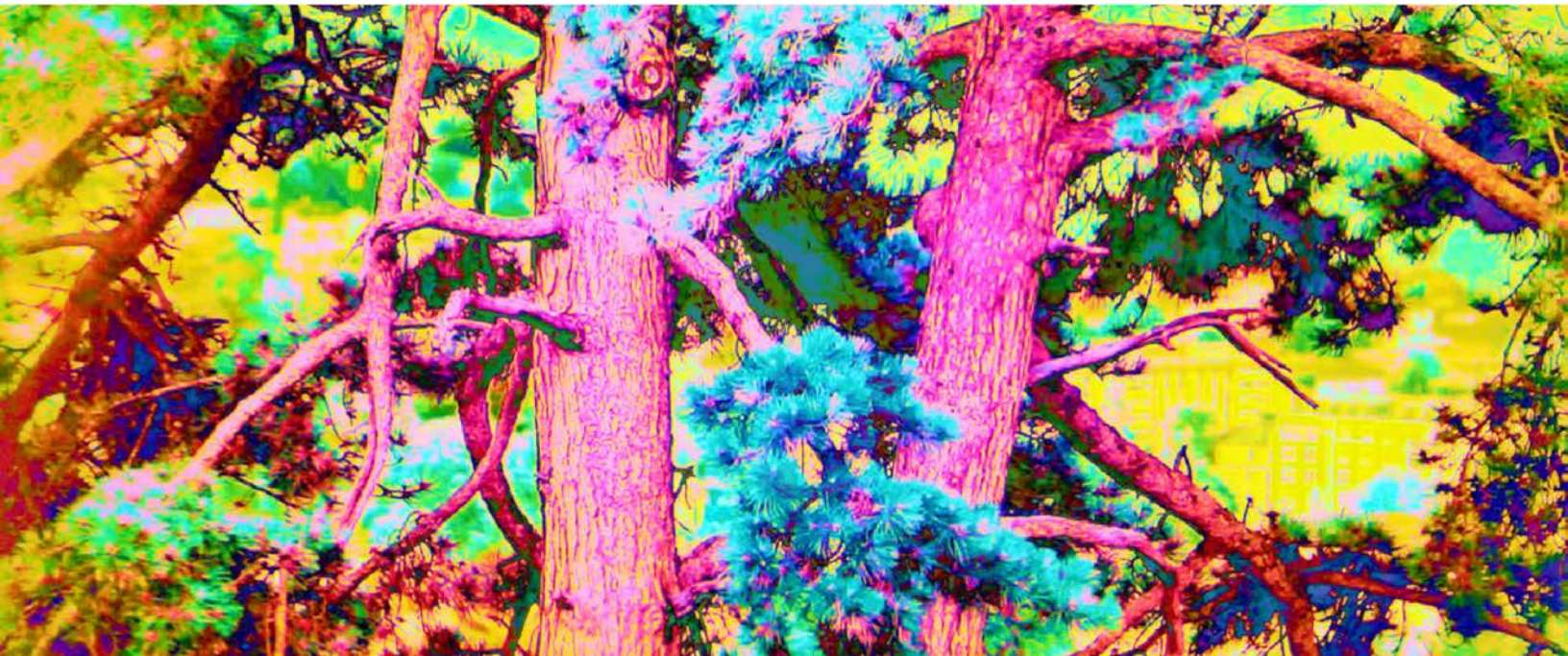
BY: GERARD SARNAT

**Gerard Sarnat** MD's won San Francisco Poetry's 2020 Contest, the Poetry in Arts First Place Award/Dorfman Prizes; has been nominated for a handful of recent Pushcarts/Best of Net Awards; authored *HOMELESS CHRONICLES* (2010), *Disputes, 17s, Melting The Ice King* (2016). He's widely published including recently by academic-related journals Stanford, Oberlin, Wesleyan, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Pomona, Brown, Penn, Dartmouth, Columbia and many more. Poetry was chosen for a 50th Harvard reunion Dylan symposium. Visit: [gerardsarnat.com](http://gerardsarnat.com)

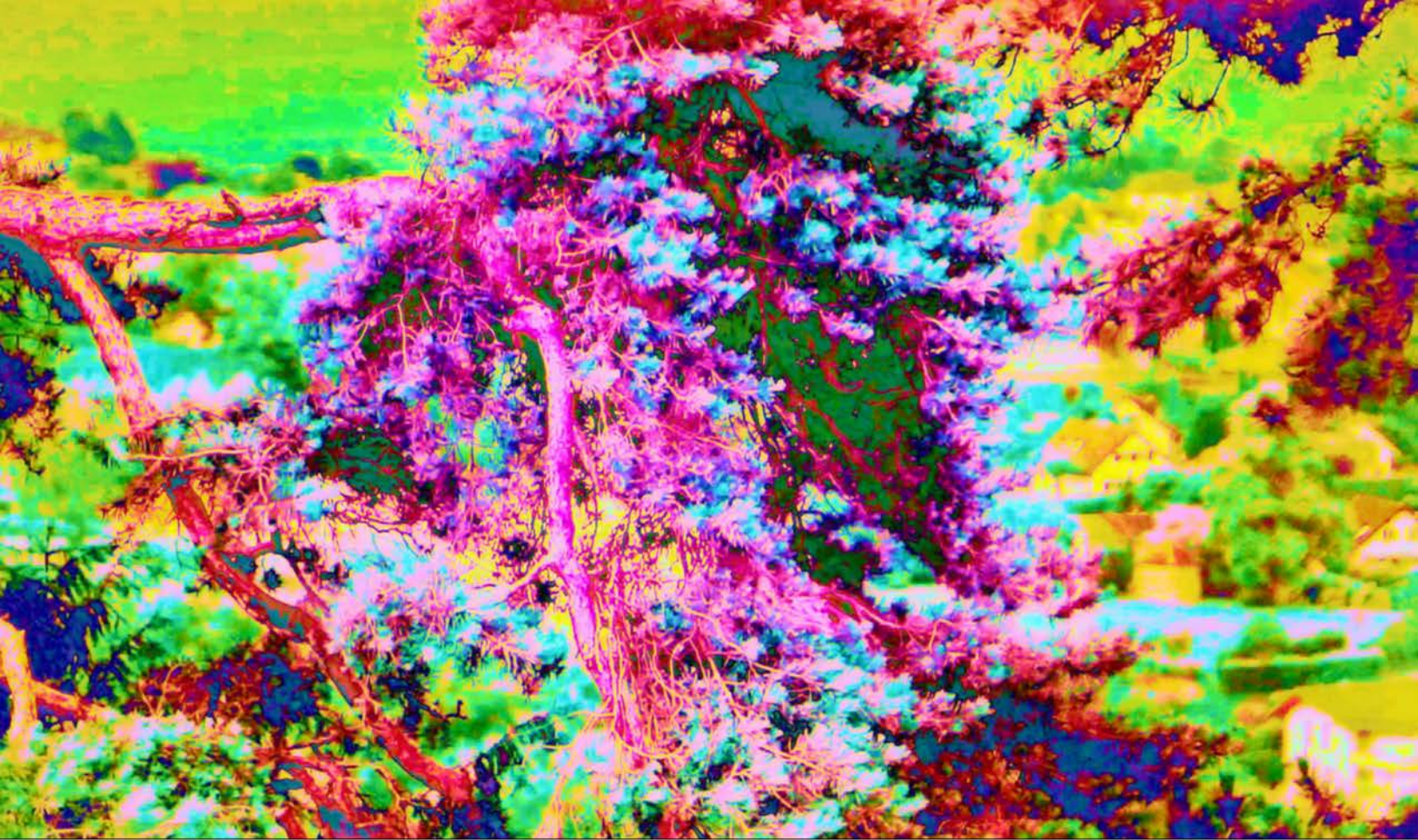
The generous invite did not give train info  
but told where to land a private plane.

Blazing star swallows rock grotto's  
cattail pond hatchery trail,  
owl perch above oak creek teepee,  
otters' den below toad hall,  
rainbow hollow hallowed new moonlit  
bat barracks; your butterfly  
chrysalises shudder under mossy rock  
cedar showers along river bluffs  
while fawn-lily caterpillars hideout among  
cock-a-doodle-doo sleepytime notches.

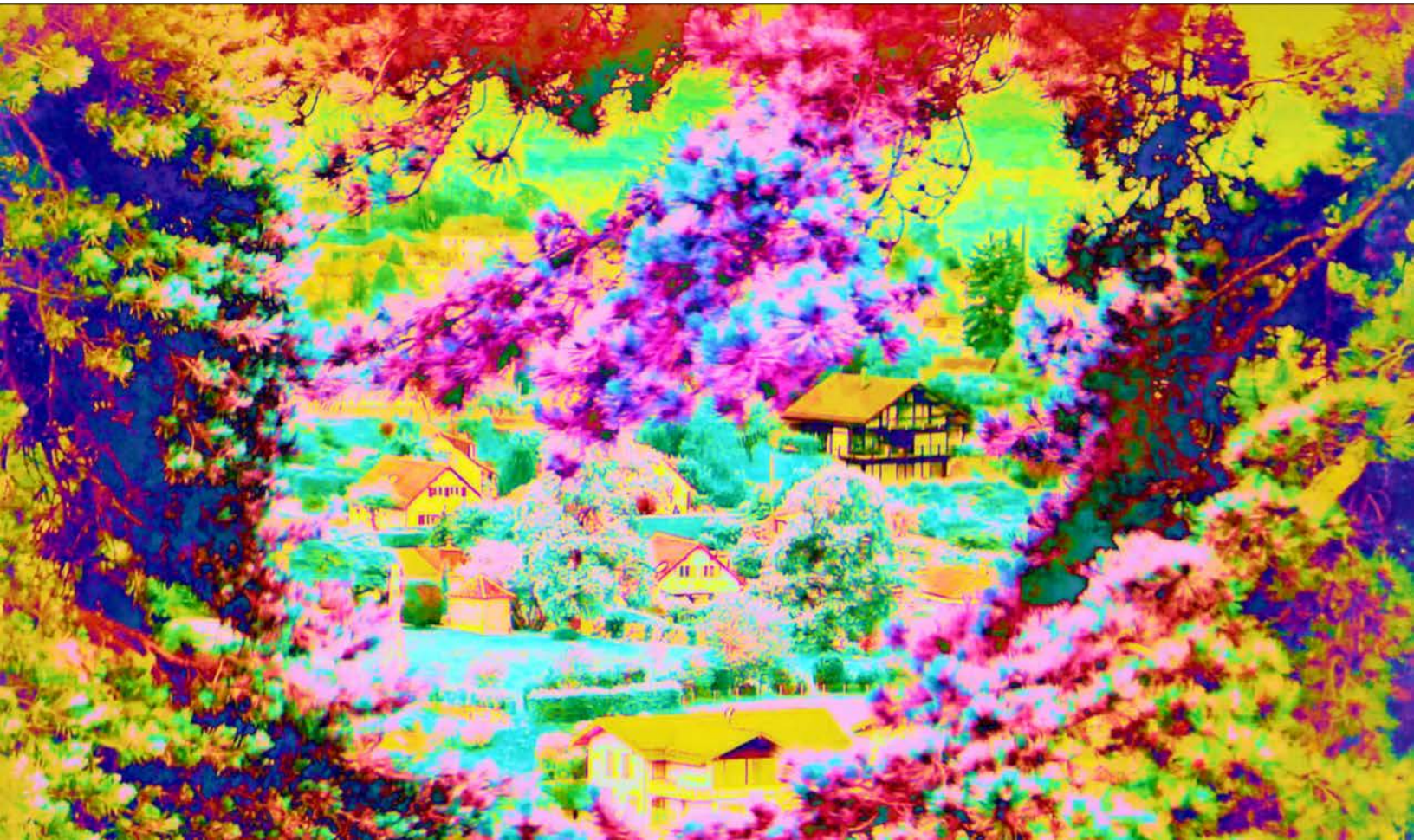
Little lakes loop through sunrise meadows  
past my logging milled hill bald spot.







Photography By: **Ruxandra Mitache**. Working with painting, photography and video, Ruxandra's work tries to capture the plasticity of the medium. Inspired by the interaction of light through different mediums, Ruxandra explores the complex concept of perception and the abstract juxtaposition of the stable and unstable media. Visit: [ruxandra-mitache.com](http://ruxandra-mitache.com)





# THE ARTIST

BY:KARIM RAGAB

Julian Revel, of the Reveling tribe, was a precocious girl. She was fifteen years old when she decided that she wanted to be a great artist. The greatest her village had ever known. Reveling was located at the base of snow-capped mountains in a valley where pine trees swayed and cougars roamed. It was an old village, older than anyone remembered.

There were great stories still told of people like Hector Revel, who managed to climb every mountain in the whole spine, taking a single stone from each peak as proof of his deed. He worked on it for many years, only summiting the nearest, lowest peaks in great old age, with his closest friends. There was Ruby Revel, who cooked the first of the red fruits and ate them in front of everyone.

The whole village thought she was crazy; they knew the fruit was poison, and that Ruby would die. Everyone was proved wrong when Ruby chewed, swallowed, and grinned, living and earning her name. There was Prophet Revel, who told everyone that he had visions from God, saying to be kind, to (all!) be kings and queens, and to love life more than anything but God, for it was all sacred. Prophet bowed his head to the sun until his scalp was burned.

Julian wanted to live like one of these heroes. Everyone in her village did. They each accomplished this in their own unique ways, interpreting the story of their individual souls. Julian knew what she wanted to do. So, one day, at the age of fifteen, she began her work. She started by blessing the whole world. She gave respect to her ancestors and her elders and helped her mother and father raise her younger siblings. This was, she knew, the necessary foundation for art, for true art that would please God. Because that was her real goal. Julian, more than anything else, wanted to be pleasing to God her creator, and nature her creator.

She walked far from her village one day, a journey of several hours. The sun crossed the sky as she traveled. Every now and then, on the way and upon her arrival to the spot she chose (she decided based on what felt right, and nothing more), Julian would look up and stare into the sun without hesitation or protection.

She didn't mind going blind. Some of the best people in her life were blind, including her grandmother, who still smiled and sang as she sipped tea every morning. Julian's spot was a beautiful one. It was the edge of a great cliff, a clearing amongst the trees, a place littered with dead pine needles. Julian sat at the edge of the cliff and sang a song for God. Then, sleepy, she lay down close to the edge and fell asleep. It didn't matter that she didn't "officially" start her project, because Julian knew the truth.

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Life was the ultimate art. What she actually created didn't really matter. It would be a reflection of her soul, and more than anything, Julian wanted a beautiful soul.

When she awoke, all of the stars were out, watching her. She was pure enough that she didn't even need to ask: she knew what it meant. The Milky Way streaked the sky. The big dipper descended toward the horizon, so infinitely far away it boggled Julian's mind. Still, she knew she'd cross that distance in time. All she had to do was live... and die.

Julian was blessed enough to find two dead trees amongst the pines. Asking God for permission, and believing she received it (she saw God in her mind's eye: conscience), Julian used her hands to tear down the dead trees. The timber was good, strong, flexible. Julian knew she could work it into her vision: a ladder to heaven.

The ladder came together easily. Julian spent all day working on it. She found vines in the forest and wove ropes from their fibers. She used the vines to lash the rungs of the ladder to the poles. In the afternoon of the second day, as the sun was setting, the ladder was complete. Julian propped it against the highest tree, the tree with no low branches, and she began to climb.

She climbed as the earth spun around and the sun fell away for another night. Still, it was a full moon. The moon reflected the light of the sun and so, even though it was dark, Julian could still see where she placed her hands and feet. The bark felt rough, and the tree felt alive. She could almost taste the sugary sap that ran through the great creature. The tree was older than her and it would outlive her. Julian felt humbled to be able to climb.

Eventually, her ladder topped out, and Julian had to rely on the branches. She did a trick here. She climbed onto the still-thick branches high up in the tree and, reaching down, she pulled up her ladder so that she could climb even higher than the tree's topmost branch. It took fifteen full minutes to prop the ladder against the branches right, to balance it so that Julian was somewhat sure she wouldn't fall to her death. Then, ready as she'd ever been, Julian began to climb.

Julian Revel spent all of the second night watching the stars. They were so beautiful she wept. As the sky brightened, Julian began her descent. Right when she touched the tree again, the sun pierced the horizon. It was so beautiful, Julian couldn't help but look and watch and witness the sunrise. The sky was pink and gold.

She returned to her village exhausted on the third day. There was nothing left to do. Julian told everyone the story of how she had built a ladder to the stars. She told the truth and excluded no detail. Everyone was highly impressed by her great masterwork.

Then, Thomas Revel, Julian's younger brother (Thomas was only a baby, one week old), began to cry. Julian smiled. She knew that the artwork would never end. It was too beautiful to stop, ever. Perhaps when the sun exploded, it would all be over. Until then, she knew, nursing her brother in her arms, cradling him, singing him a lullaby, all there was to do was live, and love.

**Karim Ragab** is a writer from Cleveland, Ohio. He has had his work published in several literary journals, including *Vine Leaves* and the *JJ Outre Review*. In his free time he enjoys long boarding and reading anything he can get his hands on.





Illustration By: **Andrea Herrera**. She is an illustrator and art student based in Miami, Florida. She creates art to tell stories and to express the great pains and joys of life. Her aspirations are to work in the industry and help create the great stories of today. Visit: [andrea Herrera.artstation.com](http://andrea Herrera.artstation.com)





**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. Visit: [argia.photos](http://argia.photos)



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# The Day After Independence Day

BY: THOMAS ELSON

In the days before air conditioning when oscillating fans provided fleeting relief, and winter chills were waylaid by Franklin stoves placed in the kitchen near the stairway to warm upstairs bedrooms, Aunt Josephine, a large, smiling, accommodating woman, the first born of a family of five, stood in the town's only grocery store with her younger sister and nephew staring at a cold, blue tube almost six inches long.

Their husbands remained in the 1953 Plymouth. "Hell, one grocery store is just like any other."

\*\*\*

They had risen at four-thirty, and, while the men milked, the two women stoked the stove, visited the outhouse, prepped the Windsor oven, gathered eggs, pulled a slab of ham, sliced it, returned the remainder to the aging room, hauled milk from the milk barn, worked the small hand pump attached to a pipe that ran from the windmill into the kitchen, started the Coleman coffee percolator, laid out the men's breakfast of ham, sausage, scrambled eggs, homemade biscuits, bread baked the day before, newly-churned butter, milk as fresh as that morning's sun, remembered to bring the butter and jelly to the table, ate while standing, washed and dried the dishes, placed a towel over the glasses in the rack, swept the floor, rushed to the outhouse one more time, then changed into hand-sewn flour sack dresses, nylons, and the same type of shoes their grandmother wore, came downstairs, and loaded the car with the necessities for a pre-McDonald's day trip. As long as they returned by six that evening they'd be okay. "Cows don't milk themselves."

\*\*\*

In the refrigerated grocery store aisle, Aunt Josephine, holding the six-inch blue tube, said to her younger sister, "Pauline, look at this. What do you think?"

"It's only ten cents."

"For a dime I could buy-"

"Look." She handed the cold blue tube to her younger sister.

"Just put 'em in the oven and in less than twenty minutes- Jeez."

"Come over here." Her younger sister motioned toward the frozen food section.

"What are those?"

"T.V. dinners."

Aunt Josephine touched the rectangular package of frozen chicken, peas, a dollop of mashed potatoes, and four apple slices.

"Why?" She placed the package back in the freezer and returned to reexamine the blue tube.

\*\*\*

Back home that evening, they served supper with the blue tube biscuits, said nothing, but planned to return to that grocery store. After all, cake mixes were a dime, too.

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# Continuity

BY: THOMAS ELSON

He likes this warm feeling. Not so much their extended evening, not the release, nor his sitting in the passenger seat next to the six-foot blond in the mini skirt driving her green Jag, nor even the rising sun.

What he likes is leaving her and getting into his own car parked under his re-election campaign billboard in the parking lot of the book store where his father had taken him at the age of twelve, one block down from the church where he brought his wife a year earlier, and that warm feeling of continuity.

**Thomas Elson's** short stories, poetry, and flash fiction have been published in numerous venues such as Calliope, Pinyon, Lunaris, New Ulster, Lampeter, Selkie, Pennsylvania Literary Journal, and Adelaide Literary Magazine. He divides his time between Northern California and Western Kansas.







PHOTOGRAPHY BY: KARINA KRISTOFFERSEN MCKENZIE









# A METHOD TO MADNESS

BY: GANDHALI SAWANT

I step out into the balcony  
to stare at the approaching traffic.  
The vehicles come to an abrupt halt  
and honk their vexations  
at the red traffic light.  
The drivers light their cigarettes, and  
release a puff of smoke  
in lieu of the carbon emissions of their vehicles.  
From where I stand, they look like a poorly  
coordinated orchestra struggling in the grasp of  
a conductor who is oblivious to their performance.  
I think of ways to do the same.  
Channelize my anger through a medium,  
I pick up the blade once again.  
But the cacophony stops,  
as the light slowly turns green once again.  
The drivers flicking away their cigarettes,  
grab the steering wheels and prepare for the race.  
They exhibit a synchronized routine,  
as each one now remembers what they were  
supposed to be doing all along.  
There is a method to this madness, after all.  
I straighten my back, drop the blade  
and go back to my room.

**Gandhali Sawant** is currently pursuing Doctoral Research from the Department of English, University of Mumbai. Her poems have been published in 'Love As We Know It' a poetry anthology on love in modern times by Poem Pajama, and 'Masques' an anthology on poetry of identities by CultureCult Press.

















Born in 1992 and raised in the sunny island of Barbados, **Kadieja O'Neal** is a multidisciplinary artist working predominantly in paint and photography whose practice thematically focuses on exploring physical and emotional relationships. Kadiejra graduated in 2017 from Toronto's Ryerson University with a BFA in Photography and has since been exhibiting works locally and internationally, with shows in Canada as well as the UK.







Illustrations By: **Kourosh Jeddi**. MFA Studio-Art Grad based in Florida, focusing on interchange typography and printmaking. Visit: Instagram: @kourosh.jeddi





**Karina Kristoffersen McKenzie** makes digital art, prints and textiles based on teachings of tibetan Buddhism. She lives by the sea in the southern part of Norway. She has exhibited in New York, Venice and London. Visit: [karinamckenzie.com](http://karinamckenzie.com)



# RAIN FROGS

BY: PRIYADARSHINI DEORI

The first time I saw one I was lying on the floor trying to beat the summer heat with my arms and legs spread out to cover the maximum area on a cool surface. I wasn't really paying attention and so, when I saw something flash by, I assumed it was a trick of the light.

It was hot, humid and in the distance, the sky was changing its colour from clear blue to dark grey. My grandmother said she could smell the storm in the air and went on to recount some legend about frogs bringing rain. I ignored her.

The next time was no trick of the light. I definitely saw something zoom past my bed and behind my wardrobe. However, I only figured out what it was in the evening, when I came into my room after a shower. On my bed, right next to my pillow, was a tiny, brown, slimy-looking frog. I wanted to keep it, give it a home. But my mother refused to let me. I even named it Tinku.

"It will attract snakes," she said. In our language, these frogs are called Pat Beng, which literally translates to Leaf Frog and apparently, they make a very good meal for snakes.

I showed Tinku to my grandmother and she said, "Frogs bring rain! Let it out." I took Tinku outside and left it in the rain. The storm predicted by my grandmother was probably on its way. It was already raining cats and dogs. Maybe frogs do bring rain.

Inside, there was a commotion. My dog was sniffing and chasing something around while my mother, with a plastic container and cardboard in hand, was following my dog. The scene was confusing but over the years I have learned not to question such things. They wore matching hunting expressions on their faces. So, I let them do their job.

I retreated to my room but the scene there was even more chaotic. On the furniture and the walls were tiny, slimy looking creatures leaping around. There were frogs all over the place. They were of different colours. Some green, some brown. There was a jet black one and a unique one that was off-white, with green stripes. I am pretty sure I saw one that changed colours too but that may have been a trick of the light again.

I went out to see what fruit the joint hunting mission had yielded and there, I saw my mother proudly holding up the container, covered with a piece of cardboard and a tiny frog inside.

"Whew!" she said. "These things know how to leap."

My dog did a happy little victory lap and both of them proudly went to put the frog back in the garden, in the leaves of grass where it belonged. I realised it was going to be a long night. Of catching frogs and escorting them back to the rain.

I rolled my sleeves, grabbed an empty plastic container and some cardboard from the kitchen and set to work. By then, the rain had subsided to a drizzle. The storm predicted by grandmother never came.







# CHANGING COLOURS

BY: KIERON P. BAIRD

Some people find autumn a melancholy time,  
the months in which the world begins to fade away.  
The once proud leaves fall to the ground—slowly, at first,  
then in masses until all the boughs are bare.

Me, I find it beautiful and misunderstood.  
A blur of vying shades; ever-changing colours.  
This isn't the end, it's more like a brief respite—  
a final brilliant burst before winter takes hold.

Like the phoenix, the trees will be reborn anew:  
taller, older, wiser; altered but still the same.  
Green will once again monopolise the landscape...  
yellows, reds and browns will be but a memory.

Yet the promise of twilight will always be kept.  
One of the ancient quadrants; autumn will return.  
The woods will glow once more come that fated season  
and thus, the endless cycle remains unbroken.

**Kieron P. Baird** is a published writer, on a personal journey of self-discovery and improved mental well-being. His work has appeared in both print and online. Recent examples include: *Speculative Books - The Centenary Collection*, *The Glow of Emerald Light*, *Flashes and Flora Fiction - Literary Magazine*. Kieron has a First-Class Honours Degree in Animal Biology and lives in Central Scotland, UK.





# THE USEFULNESS OF SPACE

BY: KAITLIN KALK

the vertical migration  
towers above any land-bound train  
even those metal cranes  
have only a small, incomplete glance  
of the bounds  
that encompass this rocky sphere  
deep down the worms burrow  
and even deeper  
earth's microbial foundation  
makes use of soil, rock, and water  
and other mediums we have deemed uninhabitable  
a home is a home  
be it sludge, twigs, or bricks  
and a family is a family  
be it beetles, slugs, or herds  
whatever appendages protrude from the trunk  
they are still arms and feet  
and however small the individual  
together, they still form fleets  
so goes the pattern  
from one, to two, to three, then many  
until they outgrow  
the foundation which sustains them  
and they rediscover zero

**Kaitlin Kalk** lives in Raleigh, North Carolina and spends her time working as a nurse's aide for the elderly. She shares many of her poems on her facebook account.





# ANSWERS

BY: RICK MCELHANY

early shifts  
are in intensity of green  
subtle transitions in hue

brightness as hot as sunlight  
as constant as arc of day  
as deep as memories

shifting arcs  
blend with a fading  
a shedding of masks  
revealing ever present  
pigments

slowly  
all caches  
drop, sway  
settle as answers

**Rick** is a retired Data Processing professional. In the 90s, his poems and short stories published in regional publications and online journals. Since moving to California, at the turn of the century, he has continued writing (off and on), but have only recently resumed submission of pieces.







# I AM THE AUTUMN

BY: BEN WARD

I am the kind glow of clinking embers  
Heating the draft at your feet;  
The swirling tobacco diffusing in your capillaries,  
The brisk spirit dwindling in dependable flask.

I am the ceasing of cicadian song and the  
Slowing of your eddying thoughts.  
They deepen into dark emerald pools  
Of secret reflections buried in loamy banks and  
hidden aloft with the glacially growing  
Lichens on conifer trunk.

I am the ephemeral Autumnal,  
When wandering warblers return to noisy tropics;  
Where fat bears and greedy squirrels trod on  
Fragrant damp aspen leaves,  
Decaying with finesse on the quieting soil.

Within me the Astral draws nearer,  
The juniper resolves his winter stance;  
The moon takes on her pensive face,  
And the coyotes more grateful for their vesper snack;  
I am the Autumn which you seek.

I am the Autumn which you seek,  
The tides of cooling breeze which  
Tumble rounded arboreal crowns;  
The chilled night air which  
Sets your dreams at ease and  
Rustles your bivy in rocking slumber.

I am the Autumn which you cherish,  
The kindly release of summer's grasp,  
The toe-numbing trout streams  
Leaping with rising caddis and mayfly;  
Blueing blueberries and reddening raspberries.

I am the Autumn which you see,  
The softening sun and rising of color—  
Verdant green replaced with psychedelica,  
With pulsating-vivid-imaginarium-color;  
The yellow orb-weaver's hovering  
Body and patient snare.

I am the Autumn which you eat,  
The wonder harvest, the bounty of  
burgeoning change preceding the yearly death;  
The blasting of one final effort before  
Dark and cold soak down to roots.

**Ben Ward** is a field biologist living in Oregon. He enjoys both good company and the quiet of aloneness.





**Ashley Wilson** is a 26 year-old writer from St. Augustine, Florida. She graduated from University of Florida with a Bachelors in English.

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# WINTER SOLSTICE

BY: TIFFANY LINDFIELD

It wasn't long ago: Sun-kissed daisies swayed in light breezes—dancing,  
Almost waving, attention. We noticed them, their soft yellow  
Faces. Turning, unfolding for a sun beaming 93.466 million  
Miles away. Their stalks remain—hollowed now—but long gone those  
Bright faces. Petals and leaves, dead, trampled to a cold, hard  
Ground below. Under quilts of snow, ice, rain, and late leaves to Fall.  
Bright bursts of yellows, reds, and oranges faded to  
Rust, tattered with holes. Tree branches, bare and  
Shaking in frigid winds, whistle for reapers.

The Earth is dying. She forsakes the sun—apathetically,  
Indifferently. It is her dance, her rhyme, and she moves in  
Sync to time and space—the moon tagging along like a  
Puppy dog, wagging its own set of conditions:  
Eclipses, waning crescents, and a  
New moon shines on a chilled lake covered in ice.  
Vodka on the rocks?  
To warm us toasting reluctantly, reverently to this Winter Solstice.

**Tiffany Lindfield** is a social worker by day, and heart working as an advocate for climate justice, gender equality and animal welfare. Visit: [tiffanylindfield.com](http://tiffanylindfield.com)

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# RECALLING THE FUTURE

BY: SAMANTHA LUCCHETTA

It is yesteryear  
on New Year's Eve  
you're with me  
at some party that plays old music  
for young people  
and there are lights that cast  
shadow puppets out of moving legs

The Scottish song plays  
and you look at me  
and you ask me what's the matter?  
Why do your eyes look so sad?

In between the seconds  
in between the years  
I looked at you  
and I recalled the future.

The lines in your face  
became hills and valleys  
you had gone  
silver  
I asked you about tonight  
and there was quiet  
But you took my papery hand  
into yours  
and you said to me, we were so different then,  
those years ago

Time has become another face  
on a missing person's poster

But it's still yesteryear  
I tell you I just want Sinatra to play

You pull me into the sea  
of puppet legs,  
and I close my eyes.  
We sink into the sounds of New Year's  
as we both try to find  
forever.

**Sam** is an emerging photographer and writer from Toronto, Canada. She once considered a career as a photojournalist, but got sidetracked. Nowadays, she combines her love for the bizarre, the environment, and world folklore and mythology to create for the sake of creating.









## "I CAN CHANGE."

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

Your skin against my skin is complete comfort. Side by side. Your arm drapes over my waist. Your hand holds my wrist. Breathing on the back of my neck. This is the only place I want to be. Stop time and lie with you in bed. More so, in the morning. Our bodies have equalized to an ideal warmth, settling between cool and toasty. I'll do anything to protect the moments between us that are simply sweet because it's the everyday with you I live for.

I look at you from the corner of my eye as we sit at the breakfast table, eating dinner and watching reality TV. You sense me staring at you and smile between bites of fried shrimp and rice. Sometimes, I find it difficult to accept you love me.

"Why?" you ask.

"Because I find it difficult to love myself," I say.

"You should always love yourself."

I shrug.

"You don't love yourself?"

I shrug, again.

"If only you could see how I see you."



I try to. Every time I look in the mirror. Every time a self-deprecating thought flows out of the depths of my subconscious, I do my best to let it travel through and out of me. I close my eyes, breathe deep, and ground myself.

But it's such an upward hill battle. As I recognize the negative thoughts that swim with my everyday life, I'm doing my best to allow them to move past me. From the moment I found out I had depression, I wanted it to end.

Healing the mind is different. You can't put it in a cast and not use it. You can't take a pill and make the pain go away. You have to face it over and over again. Each wound you heal will tear open each time with its individual trigger.

Most of the time, I'm able to manage. Sometimes, though, the trigger is too intense and the violet thoughts of suicide return in mixes of deep blue and red. Worse, I don't want to tell you because I don't want you to worry. I don't want to tell anyone.

The problem is emotions are irrational and the more you try to understand them, the more detached you grow. Emotions are powerful, not provable. You may be able to explain how you're feeling, but asking why is truly irrational.

I wish I knew how to make you understand me. Truth is I don't understand parts of me either. Maybe, its best not to know. What I do know is that your arms around me is enough. When you make me laugh, you let me forget. You sing sweet songs that calm the noise in my head. You teach me how to value myself.

I notice all the times you stand by me at my weakest. You show me unconditional love, and in return, I show you my true self. I stand by you, always.











**Thank you for reading.**



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