

# FLORA FICTION

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## SUBMISSIONS

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 our website for details.

[florafiction.com](http://florafiction.com)

Looking to advertise? Contact [hello@florafiction.com](mailto:hello@florafiction.com) for more information.

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As an artist, you're often afraid to share our work with others. You devalue your creativity, labeling them as hobbies. You tell yourself and others that it would be a dream to make art and earn a living, but you doubt it could happen because of what reality tells you. Reality tells you that being an artist isn't a real job. Reality urges you to put your artistic skills to use in something useful.

Naturally, you're afraid. You're afraid of putting yourself out there just to prove those naysayers right. You fear rejection, failure, and even success. You ruminate in your own thoughts, attempting to perfect everything about our work while criticizing your every motive. You take advice from your peers and close confidants, despite them not knowing much more than you.

Too many times, you compare yourself to others, especially other artists in similar fields. You compare age, accomplishments, and notability when in fact, there is nothing to compare to because there is no one like you. You are the only one who can do, so don't be afraid.

To those who submitted to the inaugural issue of Flora Fiction, thank you. It's been a true pleasure to experience what you had to show and say.

*xoxo*  
*Flora Ashe*





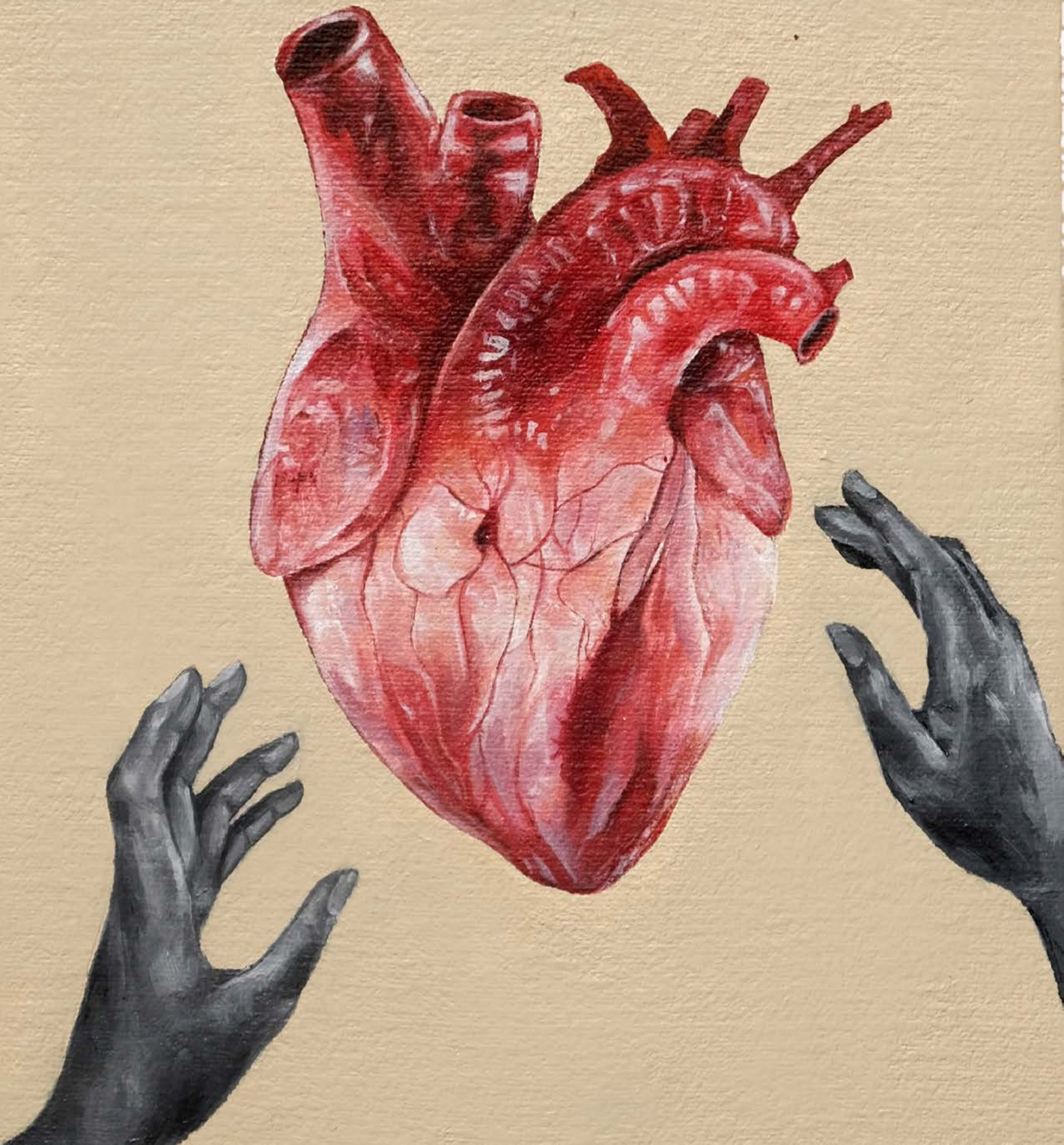




her eyes confined under a pas de deux  
of stars like a '50s noir.  
film



Shara Francisco is a 20-year-old Filipino artist based in Manila, Philippines. Combining realism and minimalism with traditional mediums and organic materials, the theme of her paintings is inspired by the varying perspectives from people she has had random yet wholesome conversations with. Instagram: @sharafrancisco\_







# Enclosure Acts

BY: BEN NARDOLILLI

Writing poems, part of my armor,  
Against what? It's a mystery,  
Though I know the unknown is part of it

Despite these attempts at protection  
Outrageous slings and arrows  
Keep coming and wounds pile up.

These little threats can find a way  
On through between the lines,  
Just now, a rent check cut my finger.

Commenters say it's the very act  
Of trying to put on armor that's wrong,  
It entices hidden forces to attack.

Such antiquated views, yet who am I  
To assail their armchair theories?  
I am making armor and writing poems.

Trying to be an independent authority  
Is a poor defense, fealty is fleeting,  
An absolute monarchy is needed.

If there are any resources here to levy  
In defense of my poor bailiwick,  
I can't find them in the commons.

I put up a fight, survived a siege,  
And armed a ferocious bard  
With endless songs about my exploits.

Though these are mostly tales  
Of using various ales to compose writs  
And thereby avoid reality's summons

Co-Executors and administrators come,  
I'm done being an author,  
You can call me dead and take over.



**Alina Kashitsyna** was born in Ukraine, studied landscape architecture in Saint-Petersburg, Russia, and currently lives in Athens, Greece, where she studies interior architecture and design. As an artist, she shows interest in visual arts (installations, photography, performance, digital and video art) and sound design (sound & music composing and performing). She constantly takes part in exhibitions and art events in Greece and abroad. Visit: [alevtinka21.wixsite.com/alinakashitsyna](http://alevtinka21.wixsite.com/alinakashitsyna)

Watercolor by: Alina Kashitsyna



# Disorientation

BY: BEN NARDOLILLI

Clouds in bloom, Garibaldi  
draws a sword at a green wall,  
the fountain is dry,

The fountain empty,  
a red fort standing still,  
figures dressed in shadows.

A cup for a black dome,  
squirrels and birds, each  
flying in their own way,

Pelts drag along on the leaves  
feathers embrace the asphalt,  
a perpetual race.

A head heavy with fire, another  
filled with brown rain, some  
fields tamed, some pulled back.

**Ben Nardolilli** currently lives in New York City. His work has appeared in *Perigee Magazine*, *Red Fez*, *Danse Macabre*, *The 22 Magazine*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Elimae*, *The Northampton Review*, *The Minetta Review*, and *Yes Poetry*.  
Visit: [mirrorsponge.blogspot.com](http://mirrorsponge.blogspot.com)



# Dar es Salaam Delicacies

BY MELANIE HAN

Nose pressed up against the window, I wait  
for pitter-patters to turn to pelting poundings  
as hundreds of flying ants rise upward,  
dizzying my eyes and swarming my head.

So predictable: Tanzanian rainy seasons.

“Dad! Come on!” and he brings them as always:  
bright yellow boots and clashing pink raincoat  
with words on them I can’t yet read, words that  
Mom says I’ll learn in school next year.


Tupperware in hand, I rush out,  
dancing to a chorus of wings: a flapping frenzy.  
Within minutes, I have plenty of the squirming creatures,  
my prized possessions, enough to make Mom proud.

Back at home, the three of us busy ourselves.  
Dad hangs up my dripping raincoat while  
I tug away at endless wings while  
Mom heats up the stove and readies

a drizzle of oil, a handful of flying ants, a pinch of salt;  
sizzling in the pan, they fry quickly.  
Then, around the table, Mom, Dad, and I sit,  
munching and crunching our seasonal snack.

So predictable: Tanzanian rainy seasons.

And even though I lived through many of them,  
I can no longer recall whether the flying ants  
tasted more like bacon bits or burnt popcorn.  
So I wait, nose pressed up against the window.



Melanie Han is an avid traveler and a poet who was born in Korea, grew up in East Africa, and is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing in Boston. She has won awards from Boston in 100 Words and Lyric, and her poetry has appeared in several magazines and online publications, such as *Fathom Mag*, *Ruminate*, and *Among Worlds*. During her free time, she can be found eating different ethnic foods, studying languages, or visiting new countries.



**But this is a  
pain I enjoy:**

white hot  
needles, tingling  
first my right foot,  
then my legs as  
scalding water  
swirls greedily  
around my belly  
and my chest,  
finally closing  
a hand around  
my throat as  
I sink. I think  
about the irony  
of me in this  
claw-foot tub  
soaking in artificial  
eucalyptus oil  
as real, live  
eucalyptus trees  
char to ash,  
their oils igniting  
and releasing  
waves of fire.  
And if I really  
tried hard and  
remembered  
the memories  
I blocked out  
of the many  
droughts I  
lived through  
as a child  
and the fires  
I put out  
as a teen,  
I would maybe  
do something  
more, but  
right here,  
I just drop  
beneath the  
silence of the  
still water.













# THE YAWN

BY HARRISON GATLIN

The yawn escaped from the mouth of a young, freckled woman lying in bed with her blue-haired girlfriend; from there it made its way to the sofa where their dog Michelangelo, sprawled like a nude, caught it and carried it into the backyard, where it slipped from Michelangelo's slobbering jowls into the unsuspecting grin of a blonde neighbor boy peering over his fence at the women in the window.

With two languid gulps of air he passed the yawn to his mother who was waving goodbye from the driveway before heading to work. It overtook her as she raised her ultra-insulated thermos of coffee to her lips, then it possessed an older woman with large, jocular hoop earrings on the highway who didn't mean to be looking at her neighbor-in-traffic but was.

Like crazy scissors, the yawn cut a zig-zagging pattern through the cars on Interstate-10 before climbing down from an overpass and up to the entrance of the Texas state fair. It worked its way up the line and entered the fair free of charge, circling a couple of merry-go-rounds and a Ferris wheel in pause, where, from the Ferris wheel's apex, it ripped through several air currents and boarded a low-flying jet plane via a passenger gazing out the window.

The journey through the plane was slow, many of its inhabitants drifting in and out of

consciousness, but the yawn eventually reached the cockpit in the mouth of a tall, wavy-haired Argentine flight attendant carrying apple juice to the pilot, who, speaking in Spanish, for the plane was headed to his hometown of Mexico City, converted the yawn into radio waves and passed it over the microphone to the flight control headquarters of Aeromexico, where it was resisted but ultimately accepted by 79 of the 182 employees on the premises.

One of these employees, Gonzalo Valencia, a humble, balding man in his 40's who had had a relatively equal balance of ups and downs in his life—his baldness was offset by a very healthy patch of chest hair—was particularly enamored with the yawn and couldn't seem to let it go.

He brought it by car all 215 kilometers from the office to the village of Cuernaval where his family had lived for the past five generations, accompanying him that evening to the funeral of his grandmother María Carla in the flower-pocket dirt lot behind Cuernaval's only church, a steeple-less white adobe thing that could've been made of salt. At just the wrong moment, that is, when Gonzalo was giving his beloved grandmother's eulogy, the yawn broke out of his jaw and ruined everything.

**Harrison Gatlin** is an extrovert living in isolation in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. This is his first publication; he wrote it in 2019, and any resemblance to worldly epidemics, pandemics, or infodemics, real or otherwise, is purely coincidental.



**Veronica Valerakis** lives on Long Island and loves spending my days writing at the beach. She's an English major with a minor in Public Service at Adelphi University, graduating May 2020. She hopes to continue using poetry as a way to share her experiences as a young, American woman pursuing a career in both politics and writing. Instagram: @the.fearless.dreamer

## Wanderlust

My feet keep moving.  
 They keep moving.  
 Even though I feel  
 Likelnevermove.  
 I knock on doors  
 Until my knuckles  
 Bleed.  
 I walk so far  
 I get blisters.  
 But I feel likelnevermove.  
 Like I'm a rollercoaster  
 Going up and down  
 But never changing  
 Location.  
 I'm always  
 Tethered  
 D

O

W

N

## Great Expectations

I want to close you up like a book  
 That I've read too many times,  
 But still do not understand.

I wish I could end this chapter  
 Simply by closing a leather-bound book.  
 I wish it were that easy.

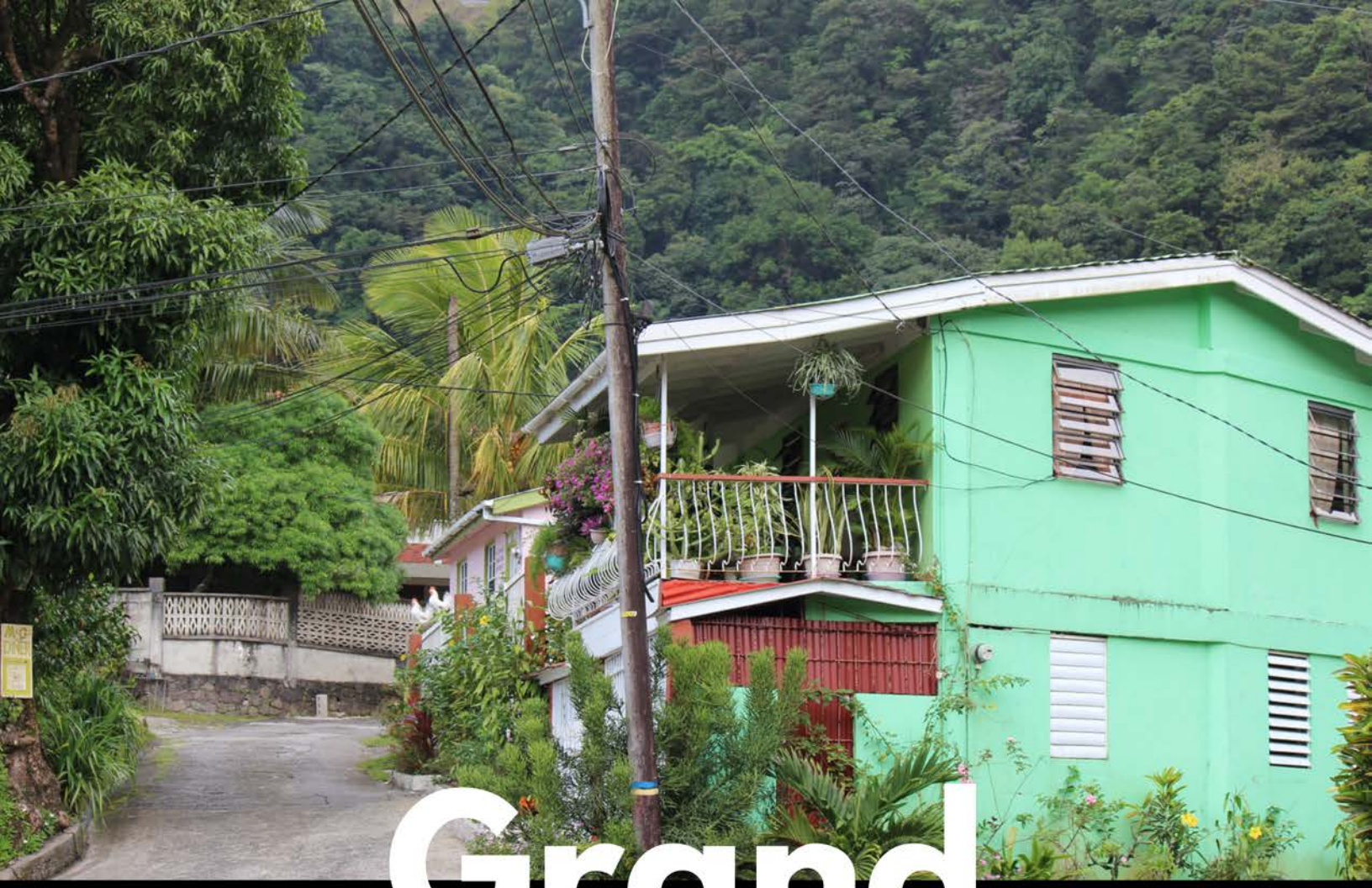
To forget you.  
 To move on.

But you are the poison in my pen  
 That makes my ink bleed  
 Your name on every  
 Damned

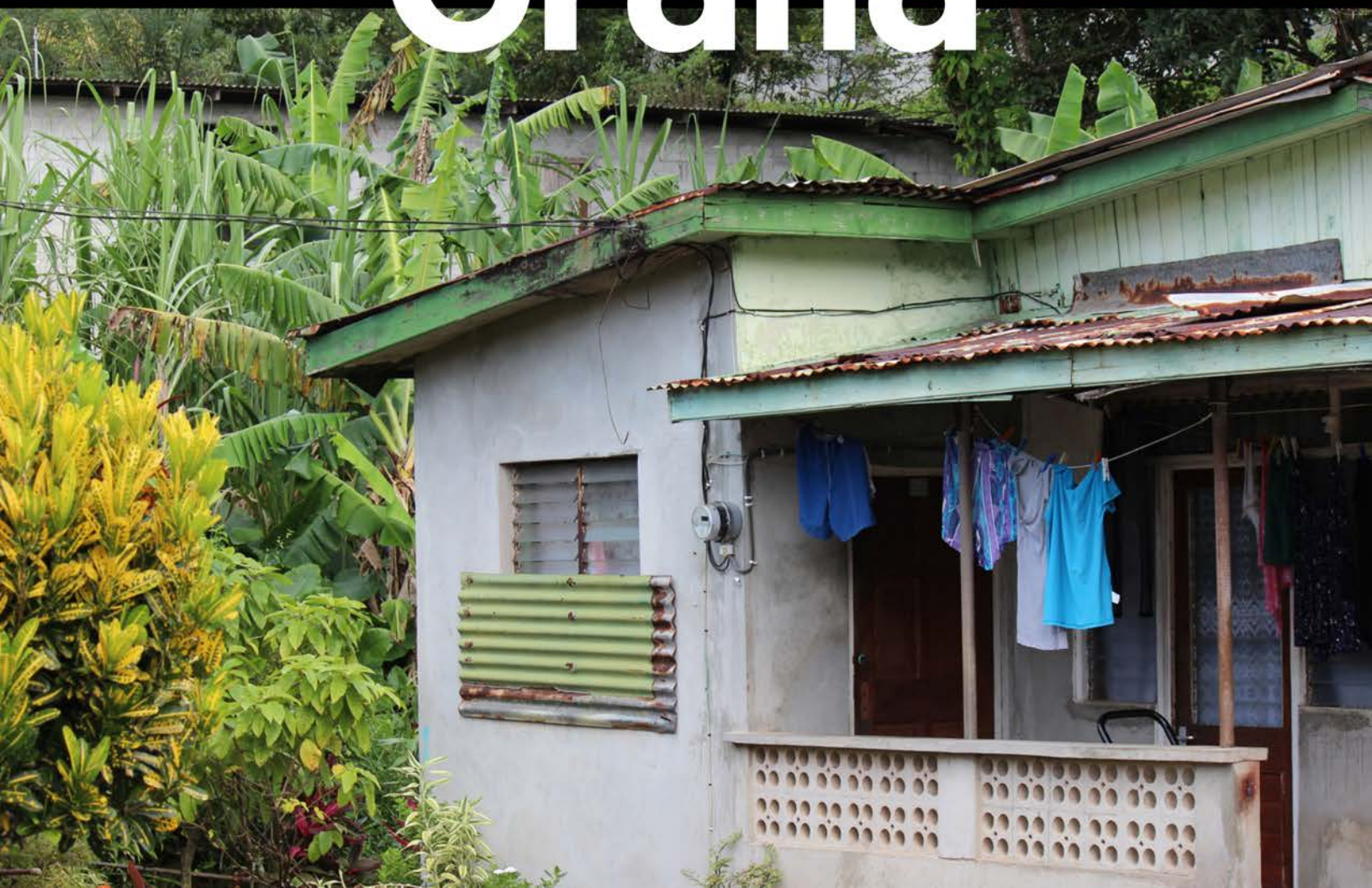
Blank  
 Page.

I can't wait for the day  
 When I stop seeing you  
 Smile in my poetry.

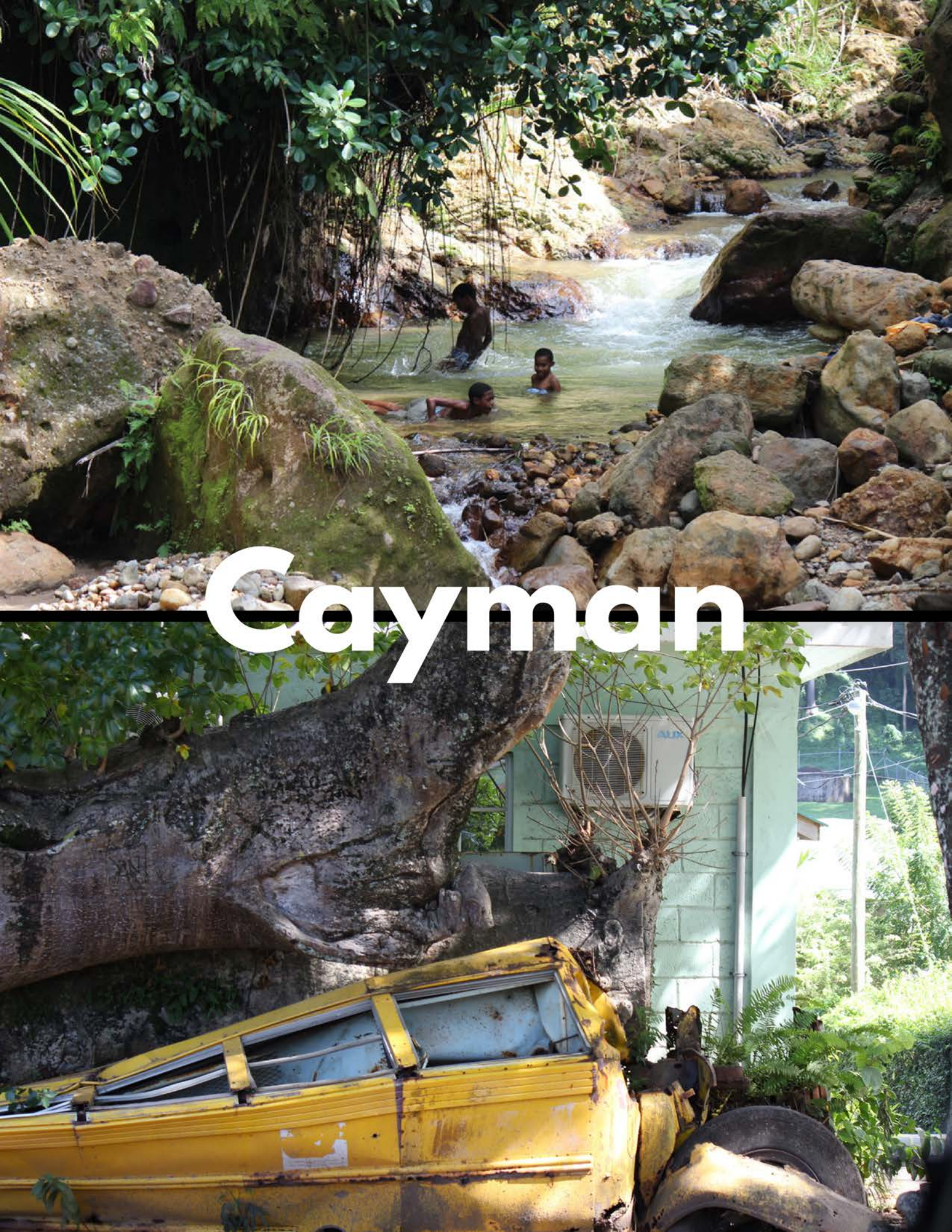




Grand







# Cayman





# FIGHT

BY: ROBERT BEVERIDGE

**Robert Beveridge** (he/him) makes noise ([xterminal.bandcamp.com](http://xterminal.bandcamp.com)) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in Collective Unrest, Cough Syrup, and Blood & Bourbon, among others.

rain washes your scarred leg, carries away dead skin and those annoying flies. keeping to the square you walk again, flick hair from your eyes, lighter in your jacket pocket to deflect chill. are you clever? you don't know.



# OUTAGE

BY: HENRY BLADON

the scheduled power  
outage was a plan to  
force people to  
start talking  
to each other  
but it simply  
ended in fighting,  
so that was  
a failed experiment  
wasn't it.





# IN THE PINES

BY: N.T. MCQUEEN

His socks suck from the moistened boots and leave footprints like shadows across the creaking boards, a slight hesitation as if the balance of the moment hinges on every step. He rolls the damp, muddy ends of his overalls below his knees and sits beside the wicker basket bundled in blankets.

He leans forward on the rocker, his tawny-stained hands on his knees, and once-overs the child consumed by cloth. The dark stain of his hand all over the pale layers. He feels the forgotten muscles of his cheek pop as he smiles down and he flips a corner from the child's mouth and fixes his gaze on every rise and fall of that precious sternum.

Beyond the cloudy window, the hounds bark. He tells himself he did right. He kept him above water and the rain off his face. He tells himself he looks like me. Just like me. But he sees her in the boy, in the way his brow sours. He vows to himself that the boy won't live like he did. He will be a man of men. Not like his daddy.

The child whimpers and he rocks the basket with his callous hand and coos to the boy. He tells the boy he ain't made a sound since that night so why you go on about it now.

The cracked guitar leans beside the rocker and the child fusses. Light presses into the windows and creeps across the musty wood of the cabin. Highlights the flecks of dust stirred by life. She told him he would never know his father and he told her, long ago, he would never lay a hand on her but they both spoke only words.





The light caught the dust again, free to show itself from its hibernation. He muses that most everything, whether good or bad, light or dark, is hidin' out somewhere. The child begins to cry and he rattles the basket again but the child's voice rises like a swell in his ears. His shooshing lips futile.

Maybe, a bark or harried men's voices creep behind the cry of the child and he can hear her voice again excoriate him saying Percy, the boy ain't gonna fit in nowhere. Not from where he came. Not with that blood in his veins. And he watches the boy cry, swaddled loosely in the white, stained blankets, he believes, somehow, the boy knew this even before knowing. Shush, now, they gonna hear. Quiet now.

A shadow, perhaps, crossed the foggy window. This time the distant voices made their presence known. Furtive, violent men clutch instruments designed with no benevolence in mind, passing under pines and through ferns in a furious wake.

His soiled cap clings to his brow and he lifts the bill and lays it down at his feet. Bony scarred fingers rise up and fetch the guitar by the neck, cradled in the grooves time has pounded into his body. A lugubrious baying echoes closer now.

Percy pauses, callous fingers on the callous strings, the child crying, and his fingers march along the frets and the steel.

*I have the blues before sunrise, tears standing in my eyes.*

The child calms and Percy can see those moist, slate eyes comfort to the sound.

*I have the blues before sunrise.*

Howling outside and the crush of underbrush. Boots sinking into mud. He watches the boy through blurry eyes.

*I have to leave, leave you, baby. I'm gonna leave you all alone.*

Above the guitar, the hound's nails scratch across the porch and the violent voices cry out for his blood and hers. But the boy listens and, louder now, Percy strums.

*Well, now, goodbye, baby. I'll see you on some rainy day.*

A boot crashes into the front door. A ragged voice calls for him by name. He tastes salt upon his lips and admires his boy a moment.

*You can go ahead now, darling.*

The splinter of wood. The child smiles at him and he returns the smile to his boy but he sees her dimples upon those cheeks.

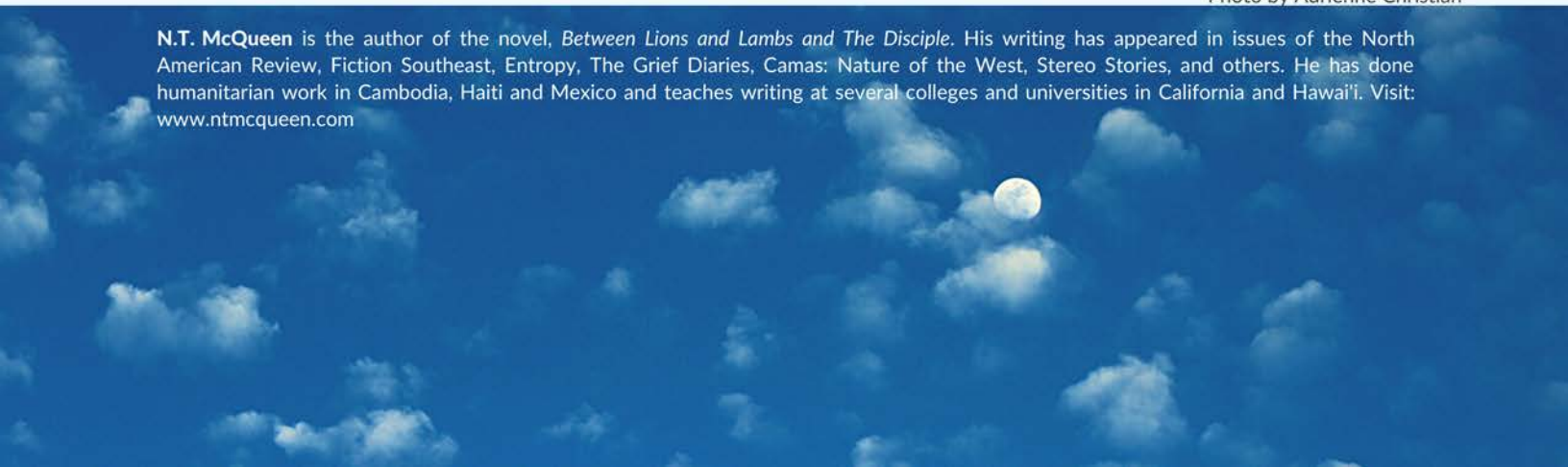
*Cause I want you to have your way.*

And her brother holds the reins of his hounds and calls him by name.

But he only sees his boy.

Photo by Adrienne Christian

N.T. McQueen is the author of the novel, *Between Lions and Lambs and The Disciple*. His writing has appeared in issues of the North American Review, Fiction Southeast, Entropy, The Grief Diaries, Camas: Nature of the West, Stereo Stories, and others. He has done humanitarian work in Cambodia, Haiti and Mexico and teaches writing at several colleges and universities in California and Hawai'i. Visit: [www.ntmcqueen.com](http://www.ntmcqueen.com)





# Editorial

Once I was as you. Word-proud.  
Come see now what I did not then:  
No one hates their own voice when  
Singing alone and aloud

The secret of our rise and fall  
Is tomorrows and yesterdays:  
The sun smiles, frowns and decays  
Today never comes at all;

We learn in its sluggish delays  
To think of death-the-creeper  
Not as legend's grim reaper  
But as a coughing official.

# Half-Truths

My mantle is ripped  
Not fashionably upon thorns but  
Where I tripped  
Upon the door-handle  
Balancing on my laptop half-shut  
This candle

**Hibah Shabkhez** is a writer of the half-yo literary tradition, an erratic language-learning enthusiast, a teacher of French as a foreign language and a happily eccentric blogger from Lahore, Pakistan. Her work has previously appeared in the Rockford Review, Qwerty, The Blue Nib, Ligeia, Cordite Poetry, Headway Quarterly and several other literary magazines. Studying life, languages and literature from a comparative perspective across linguistic and cultural boundaries holds a particular fascination for her. Visit: <https://hibahshabkhezic.wordpress.com/>





Photo By: Annalyn Miller [timeaftertime611.wordpress.com](http://timeaftertime611.wordpress.com)



Forget the World with Me By: Tabitha Novotny



# GARDEN VIEW


BY: ALEX DOUGLAS











**CREATIVITY  
IS THE  
NATURAL  
ORDER OF  
LIFE.**

-Julia Cameron



# BEAUTY

BY: ABRA HERITAGE

beautiful things are never perfect.

my favourite mug is cracked and stained  
but it still holds the warmth,  
reminds me of home,  
the full, soft taste.

the face i wear is blotched and unadorned  
yet it smiles, laughs, cries,  
it lets me look at you,  
at the beauty around.

and my blue jumper  
tearing at the edges and collar,  
shows more signs of love  
with each loose thread.

the picture frame in the living room  
with crooked-teeth smiles,  
windswept blush,  
radiates times of peace.

these lines lie in imperfection  
no measure, rhyme or rhythm  
and maybe that's what makes them beautiful,  
they're defiant, brave.

after all,  
there's a difference between beauty and  
perfection.

instagram: @abra.heritage  
twitter: @abraheritage



# Bubble-Gum Pink

BY DIANE D. GILLETE

A bubble-gum pink bus pulls up in front of my father's house, and from the front steps, I watch my best friend, Carla, hop out of the driver's side. She comes to the sidewalk and spreads her arms and her grin in her best "ta-da" pose.

I can feel the eyes of Mrs. Vanderbilkens peering at me over her hedge of pale pink rose bushes, gardening shears forgotten in her hands. I suspect my father will later get an earful about maintaining the previously agreed upon aesthetic of the community. This, in turn, will most likely spur my father to take it out on me by having another talk about my future, like having some kind of solid plan beyond delivering pizzas and making noise about taking some classes down at the community college.

Carla looks at me, her hands shoved in the back pockets of her cut-off jeans as she rocks back and forth on the balls of her feet. I focus on her old Kelly green high-tops. They sort of complement the color of the bus in a weirdly compelling way. My mind swirls around a baker's dozen of questions and land ultimately on the words painted across the side of the bus in an electric purple.

"What's a Lipstick Warrior Monkey?" I ask.

Carla beams and says, "Not what. Who. They were only the best punk rock indie band to ever come out of Toledo."

"Were?"

"Well, they would've been huge if GiGi hadn't caught Mimi screwing her brother's boyfriend." Carla clarifies.

I try to follow that reasoning, but its irrelevancy has me staring at the bus again, slowly shaking my head. Carla pulls her hands from her back pockets and flutters them at her sides, her grin deflated. She isn't looking me in the eye. I haven't responded correctly.

"But what's it doing here?" I say.

"Mimi sold it to me for dirt cheap. It's got a kitchen and a shower and everything."

I sit on my father's front step and see, not a bubble-gum colored bus, but three years of Carla's shifts at the One-Eyed-Cat Shack, waiting tables and paying rent for the cheap-ass studio across the street so she wouldn't have to buy a car.

She'd been saving for something big.

Freedom, she says. Freedom, apparently, is bubble-gum pink and just as sticky.

"We can finally get out of here," Carla says, "Hit the road. Live the life of the nomad. It's like we always talked about."

She's right. Friday nights by the river, drinking cheap beer and counting days until graduation. Spinning dreams like cotton candy about escape and adventure. But graduation blinked out in two seconds. Three years later, we're still here.

I realize my mistake. All those years of lusting for freedom, for escape, I never once realized she's serious. She never once realized I'm not.

A flush blooms across Carla's cheeks, and we both turn our gaze to the bus because staring at this ugly pink thing is easier than looking truth in the eye.

**Diane D. Gillette** lives, writes, and teaches in Chicago. Her work has appeared in over 50 literary venues including the Saturday Evening Post, Blackbird, Hobart, and the Maine Review. Visit: [www.digillette.com](http://www.digillette.com) or follow her on Twitter @digillette



# Firenze

BY: WILLIAM JOEL

A bus loop traveled through the town;  
we sat up top to see the sites. The  
second time we got off on some street.  
Which street? Don't know, except  
there was a shop where prints were pulled  
and hung to dry. I saw a print we could  
afford. I bought the print and took it home.

And this is what my mind still sees  
when looking at this memory  
of Italy and sweet Firenze,  
where David dwells in cold repose,  
while voyeurs circle, checking lists.  
But David does not gild our wall;  
he stands in mute regard,  
his warm illusion to the touch.

The colors of our print reflect a warmth.

All things are connected. That's the premise of what **William J. Joel** does. Each of Mr. Joel's interests informs each other. Mr. Joel has been teaching computer science since 1983 and has been a writer even longer. His works have recently appeared in *Common Ground Review*, *DASH Literary Journal*, *The Blend International*, *Liminality*, and *Chronogram*.



# The Episode

BY: RITAM TALUKDAR





# Suspect Device

BY: PATRICIA WALSH

I mill through the weekend, unexploded.  
An incendiary ignored, even in passing.  
A weapon defused before it even opens its mouth  
taking hints from the cliques, a bomb sheltered.

Not even a shattered dialogue breaks the ice.  
Stiff drinks all round, a code unbroken.  
Not even a desirable looks my way,  
stealing kisses for the opportune moment.

The fireworks bombed, the lanterns escaped  
past injury, tattoos singing the narrative  
at once unspoken and outspoken, too,  
sinking alcohol into your vessels.

The obligatory pizza does its whip-around,  
only to the invited. The rest play on Facebook,  
the noise is foreign, ultimately futile  
as I struggle with conversation, picking up joints.

They don't have to laugh, I can do it myself.  
Gesticulating oddly to no-one at hand,  
lips move to the invisible, holding an audience  
falling asleep at an earlier hour, ensconced.

Maybe, a detonation will bring us together.  
Distill my kindness over fashion and attitude  
how more incendiaries bring out the best in me  
an aftermath of satisfaction, a fate stalled.



# A Fraction of a Bounce

BY: PATRICIA WALSH

White bones under skin,  
carve like a multinational  
on its staff, logistical suicide  
bleeding for attention, stanching as required.

I wish you wouldn't run like that;  
circles of concentration burst like soap,  
knocking trinkets to the ground  
hollering like the damned, for entertainment.

My favourite dictate lies unanswered.  
Some rabbit's footfalls in its mission  
to bribe the gods, a harbinger of luck  
dissolved like an infatuation, a job undone.

So much for experience, cheap though it is.  
To sugar-coat otherwise is elusive stuff,  
some pale orgasm bolts the home door  
dissatisfaction all around, a bed undone.

Nothing succeeds like excess, like freedom and tears.  
A fine wine ablated, a bone laid bare.  
Slicing through circumstance, a thing to savour  
once the token foot slams the door.











**Michael Shelton** is 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.





# PLEASE ALLOW CAMERA AND MICROPHONE ACCESS

BY: ADRIAN SLONAKER

A webcam image,  
the fantasy of futuristic cartoons  
predicting robotic domestics and jetpacks,  
framed forget-me-not flecks in stormy-gray eyes,  
and any fret-furrows and puffiness  
from needling nights were  
nullified by the right light.

A voice made wispy by willpower and  
the uncanny lack of an Adam's apple  
encouraged you with  
coos and breathing borrowed from  
those three sylphlike Stevens sirens—  
April and Connie and Inger—  
conveying fondness  
and desire from your  
anonymous interlocutor and  
lifting you out from  
musky clouds of  
loneliness and lethargy.

The mustache-lined smiles of pleasure  
and beeping callbacks every evening  
verified that you craved it—  
as did I—

for three weeks and four days  
until your online liveliness  
was deactivated.

**Adrian Slonaker's** work has been published in *WINK: Writers in the Know*, *Ez.P.Zine*, *Page & Spine* and others. Crisscrossing North America as a language professional, *Pushcart Prize* and *Best of the Net* nominee, Adrian, is fond of opals, owls and fire noodles.



## ENCOUNTER IN WHITEHORSE

Under clod-like clouds too thick  
for the aurora borealis to penetrate, the  
Yukon River crackled a greeting beneath its  
icy shell while log-cabin skyscrapers and  
silvery evergreens slept or possibly  
played possum.

The coyote, who's furry  
ears rose at the terminus of a frosty road,  
filled the night with its answer:  
nip-nip-nip.

Not a baleful howl or a gritty  
growl, just the  
nip-nip-nip of playfulness and pep,  
the tiny grin in its voice mirrored  
by the one on my face.



# SONNET FOR YOUTH

BY: MAVIS MAY

I collect my thoughts in a melting jar.  
Crafting my way, having nothing to say  
I am clueless how I've come so far.  
Everything I want is kept in the invisible bay.

Marzipan castles and marzipan dreams,  
Carriages full of phantasms and myths,  
There's no place for me in this realm.  
I'm left with chimeras if I remove the pith.

On the last ride, I am escorted by fables.  
So much time to solve riddles and puzzles  
Alone - no surreal characters around my table.  
O, needless pipe dreams got me so frazzled.

I don't want to be this starry-eyed,  
Both of my hands are entangled and  
intertwined.

Mavis May is a 19-year-old aspiring writer from a post-Soviet country.









# Trees of Heaven

Those are tough trees  
growing in slums.

With no need of rich soil  
or pruning, they rise  
in abandoned lots.

These are trees that  
survive rubbish, rodents  
noxious chemicals.

Not easily cut down,  
they stand against  
gaunt tenements.

Climbing skyward,  
delicate palm leaves  
flourish flowering pods.

Trees of Heaven give  
children glimpses of bright  
emerald each morning.

Stars play peek-a-boo  
between their branches  
through long nights.

Who has said a taste of  
paradise is only for the rich?

**Joan McNeerney's** poetry has been included in many literary magazines such as Seven Circle Press, Dinner with the Muse, Poet Warriors, Blueline, and Halcyon Days. Four Bright Hills Press Anthologies, several Poppy Road Review Journals, and numerous Spectrum Publications have accepted her work. Her latest title, *The Muse In Miniature*, is available on Amazon.com and Cyberwit.net. She has four Best of the Net nominations.





# the door at 2:00AM

BY: D.S. MAOLALAI

sometimes at night  
on my way to the bathroom,  
I still expect to turn  
and see you standing,  
wandering lost, forgetful,  
and half-naked  
from your door.

your voice  
is bone,  
like empty halls  
in hospitals—  
likely  
you will never see this house again.  
the wallpaper you chose  
so homely,  
and knocking  
on the toilet door  
and calling  
at 2:00AM.

my feet  
are blue flowers,  
and frost  
on frozen tile.





# you won't intimidate me

BY: LINDA M. CRATE

you wanted only  
my flowers  
soft petals and fragrant scent.

you wanted only my  
fragile and vulnerable parts.  
you forgot the meaning

of persephone;  
it is the bringer of destruction,  
& i will destroy anyone

seeking to steal my light  
and shatter me into the darkness  
of nightmares.

do you not think i've had  
enough of death?  
every winter, all the flowers

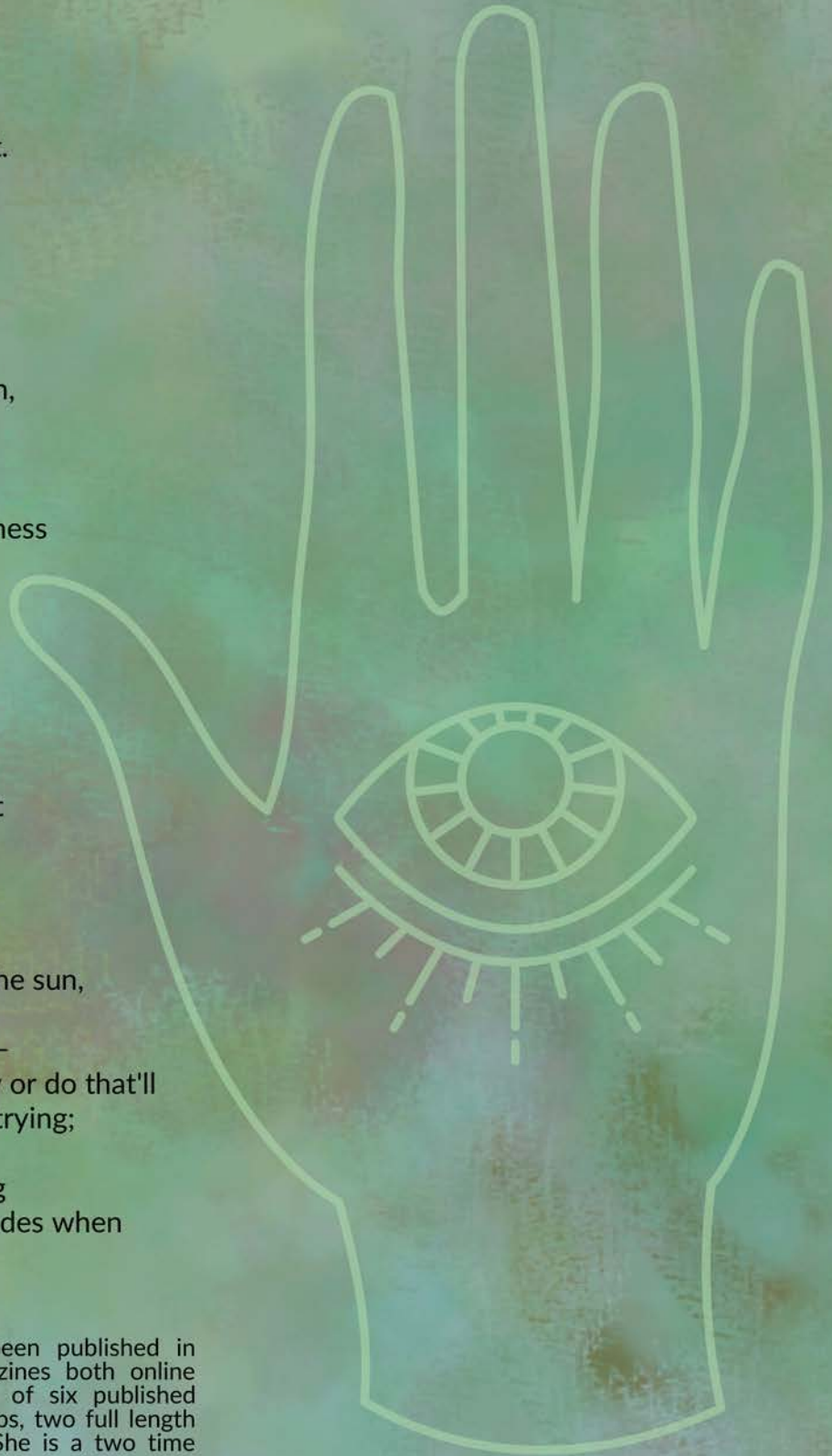
pass away,  
i have seen so many innocent  
creatures perish in the cold.

i do not only dance with life,  
but i also walk with death,  
likewise, i don't only sing in the sun,

but i dance in the moonlight—  
there's nothing you could say or do that'll  
break or shatter me, so stop trying;

or i will give you a death song  
that'll send you straight to hades when  
he is in ill humor.

**Linda M. Crate's** works have been published in numerous anthologies and magazines both online and in print. She is the author of six published chapbooks, two poetry micro-chaps, two full length poetry collections, and a novel. She is a two time nominated push cart nominee.









# THE ARTIST

BY: RAY CECH

Jonathan walked into his wife's studio, the one extravagance they agreed to when they moved to Manhattan almost two years ago. It wasn't big, but the two large windows captured perfect light for her hobby.

He looked at her canvas and said, "What's that, Amy?"

Frowning, Amy turned to glare at her husband. "Don't you recognize 'Strawberry Fields,' over in the park?"

"Really? That looks more like a—like a jungle for God's sake."

Amy turned slowly, very slowly. She peered at Jonathan with squinted eyes and tight lips. The studio was silent except for the ticking of the Seth Thomas clock on the wall. Jonathan felt he may have crossed a line. Amy's voice rushed out. Her eyes, not leaving his.

She said, "Well, if you're such a damned great artist, why don't you come over, and show me what it should look like, then."

Jonathan backed off and watched Amy lay her brushes down on the easel. She walked over to the window that overlooks Central Park and Strawberry Fields, Yoko Ono's memorial to her deceased husband, John Lennon. Amy stood there, her back to Jonathan, who now suspected that her anger may never erupt.

Jonathan's mind stretched to reach a hopeful resolution while Amy tugged at the window. Years of paint have sealed it shut, and all her CrossFit training at the 92nd street YMCA failed her. Jonathan didn't understand why she wanted the window opened, but thought reaching out in a gesture of reconciliation just might be a good idea.

"Here, let me..." He said. Before he could finish, Amy's fist punched into his chest. He staggered back into the easel. Colors of the rainbow splattered the floor and Jonathan looked a colorful clown. He slumped against the back wall, his face expressed pain. "What the hell?"

Amy spun around like a shot-putter. She clutched the easel. Her face contorted and her once golden hair was streaked in greens, yellows, and browns. She released. In a perfect arch, the easel shattered through the window, floating six stories down. It met the sidewalk in splintered profusion; brushes, paints, canvas, pallet all follow. Amy made a clean sweep. The studio turned to an echo.

To Jonathan, still braced against the wall dappled in paint and picking shards from his hair, it was like watching a movie. A movie in slow motion. A movie in 3D. A movie he was sure would have no happy ending.

**Ray Cech** is originally from New York City but has lived most of his life in Los Angeles where he wrote nonfiction stories for sports magazines. He now resides in Ocala, Florida and teaches, The Art of the Short Story at a local learning center.



**Life is a struggle for everyone, especially for those who must search to find themselves. It's a pressure I fight daily. The only thing I don't have to fight for is poetry. It flows from everywhere, and I have no trouble catching it.**

-Ana Surguladze



# EPIPHANY

BY ANA SURGULADZE

I'll walk in the alleys of your mind,  
I'll borrow your sadness for a while,  
Which one's better: love long-lasting or  
love part-time?  
Three years or three nights?  
Hard feelings or momentary delights?  
For there's no such thing  
as metaphorical as love,  
meant to be felt,  
supposed to make you drown,  
no matter how it starts,  
it ends—because it had no beginning  
at all.  
People say love is blind,  
Isay it's blind leading the blind—  
both destined to lose the consciousness  
of their minds.  
Don't we already know, it's a surplus in the world of emotions?  
Aren't you tired of hearing the sound of explosions?  
The only thing I offer is leaving,  
to the distances where poems have no titles,  
where desire is tried and unbridled.  
Take whatever you have, mislay love,  
lose track of whatever you're sick of  
but keep reminding yourself—  
we'll part our lips along some point of the way,  
it will be nothing like the winter, but the beginning of eternal  
May.



# Stay at Home

By: Karolina Schön

ONE  
BIG  
BOX



What is it  
like to live  
alone?

~~Fucking~~  
~~Boring~~

living alone  
with quarantine



bored but not sad

new  
friend



Quarantine  
day 3



I'm without brain

Quarantine  
day 5

getting  
depressed

I need some  
human contact



I wanna  
help  
people  
but how?

at least stay  
the fuck at home!

It's ok babe  
you are not broken

you don't always  
have to be strong  
but you need to  
pull yourself back  
together, then go  
back to being the  
 badass you were  
meant to be.



haha elich

wanna  
see  
✓

what else  
I can say

you are  
annoying



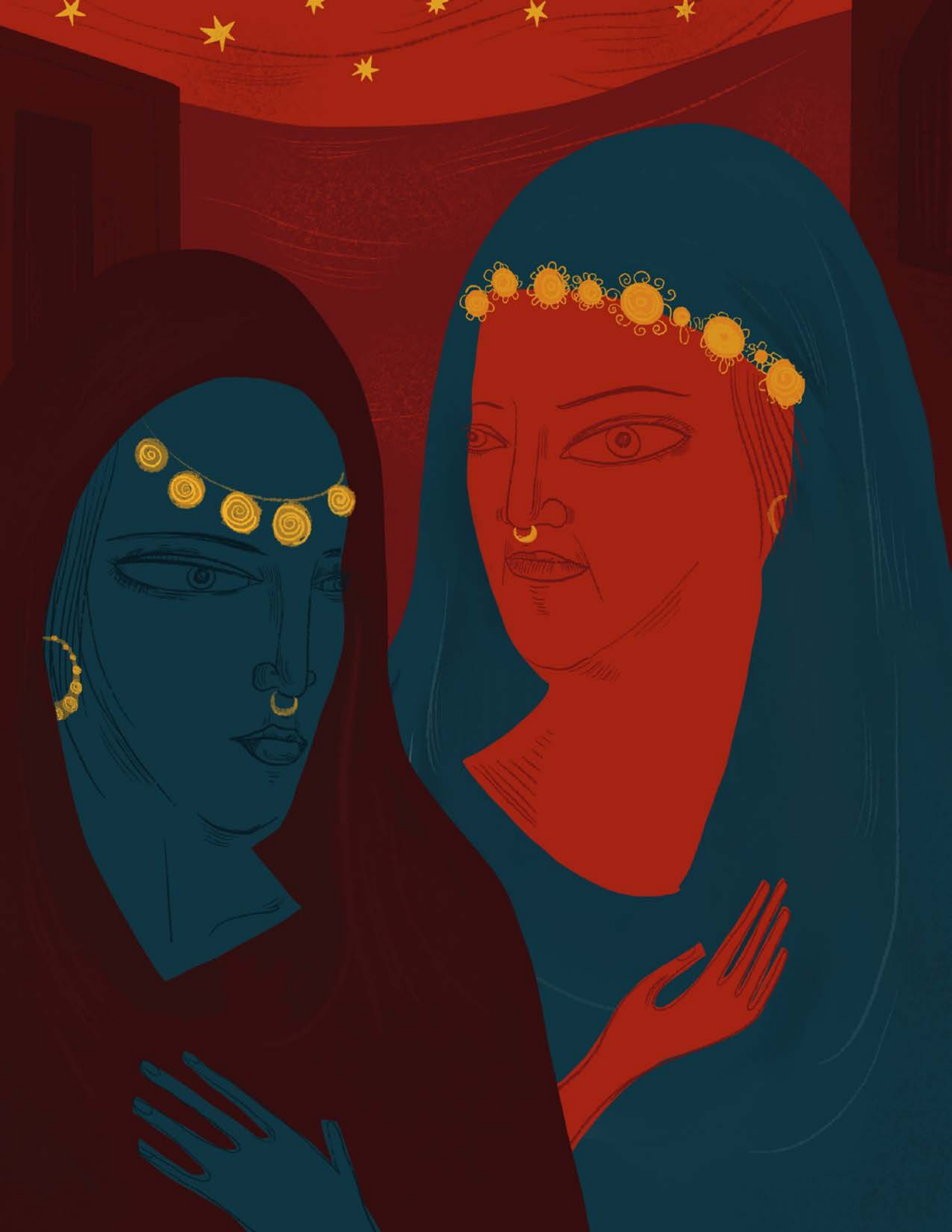




**Ann Marie Sekeres** went to art school and learned to paint a long time ago. She showed a bit around New York in the 90s, but wasn't where she wanted to be. She became a happy museum and nonprofit publicity director, and started a family. She found out about the Procreate drawing app from an illustrator she hired, stole her kid's iPad and has been drawing every day since. Instagram @annmarieprojects









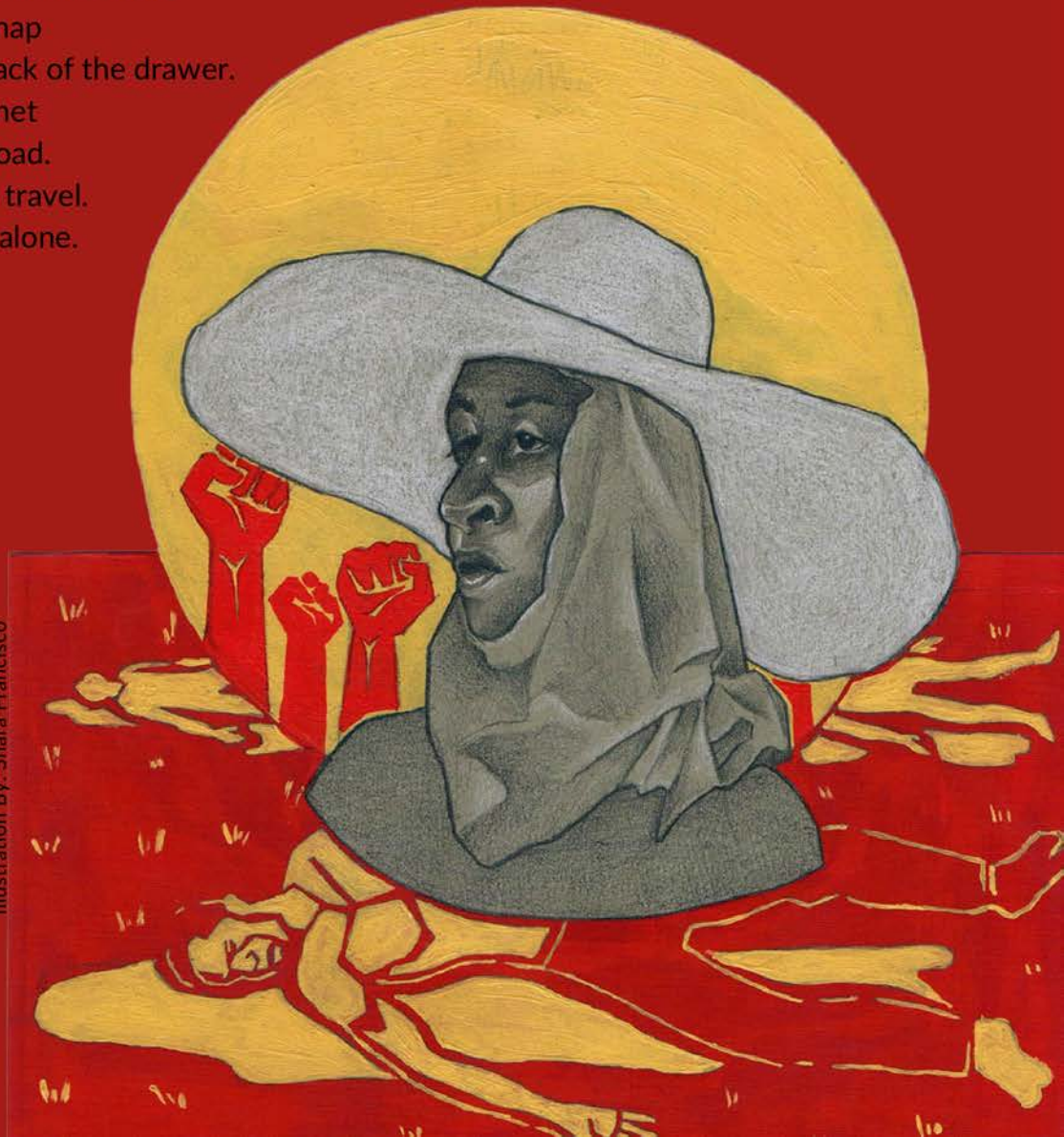
# Wrong-Headed Prophet

BY: BRUCE MCRAE

I've a face like a torn curtain.  
A face like a punched wall or rat's dinner.  
Like a smoking battlefield.  
What Shakespeare would tag, rudely stamped  
and curtailed of fair proportion.

A stranger in stranger times,  
a frightener of small children,  
I'm not the prettiest angel in the choir,  
my face like a crumpled map  
jammed in haste to the back of the drawer.  
Like a dog chewing a hornet  
or car crash on a desert road.  
Where few are known to travel.  
Where the unloved walk alone.

Illustration By: Shara Francisco









# Sunflower

**Jonathan Brooks'** photographs have been published in numerous magazines, anthologies, and periodicals. His photos have been featured in major movies like *Mike & Dave Need Wedding Dates*, *Uncle Drew*, and the Emmy nominated short film series celebrating the 50th anniversary of National Endowment for the Arts, *United States of Arts*.

His work has also appeared in television shows like Oprah Network's *David Makes Man*, Bravo TV's reality show, *Southern Charm*, The CW's, *The Vampire Diaries*, and Germany's *Only Love Counts*. His work has been exhibited in Miami, NYC, Amsterdam, France, Germany, Greece, and the UK, including Art Basel, the Louvre, and the biggest billboard in Times Square. Visit: [JonathanBrooks.net](http://JonathanBrooks.net)

















# Concentric Demotion

BY: JENNIE NOONKESTER

It had been a long day for Brenda. She began her day with the typical racing to get the children up, fed, and off to school. Following hours at a mediocre job to be ignored and underappreciated by everyone.

Oh, to be a woman in a man's world. Even after all the institutional turnovers, social demonstrations, and legislation, the manacles still remain, stifling and stagnant; just not as tight.

Brenda sat waiting for her turn for her yearly, already postponed twice, "visit" to the female doctor. She quietly smiled to herself with the idea to be able to really spread her wings and fly. To do the things that make her heart leap for joy, yes to do that; however, there is usually some religious, political, or social protocol to keep the servant joy in place.

Her children are a special joy, but they have their lives and purpose, and must move on with and also without her, God willing.

She felt the corduroy underneath her resting fingers. The waiting room couch had a certain uncomfortable bounce about it, making the awkwardness of the procedure ahead more dreaded.

Brenda had been taught by her mother to cross her legs and say, "No, thank you." to any love interests. So, the idea of hoisting her legs up in a factory-like contraption, with a doctor splitting her bread, goes against everything that was instilled in her as a child.

At least the room smells like vanilla.

Looking down, she noticed a pile of secondhand children's books lying near her foot, just sticking out from underneath her seat. The assortment reminded her of the type her children loved to read. She saw that it was a picture, puzzle book, the kind that's sold at an art museum, and pick it up at the top banged, frayed, and crayon marked edge.



Brenda smelled a slight water logged smell due as she thumbed through the pages. It must've endured many a spilled drinks, or had been left by outdoors. She stopped on a page that had rows of overlapping, concentric circles.

The circles themselves were spiral-shaped like round peppermint. Yet, instead of the red coloring, the bands were striped blue, black, yellow, and coral, like a snake. The rows interweaved and the snake bands grew larger, coiling near the edge. Its eye moved to the middle of the circle, tightening into a black hole.

Brenda fixated motionlessly at the design. She paused only to adjust her contacts because the paper started to wobble a bit. After adjusting her eyes, she noticed that the picture did move individually of the stagnant paper.

A quick, ping of relief waved over her when she realized that the picture was a pseudo-motion illusion game.

The complexity of the design and position on the page created a kind of motion hallucination. Brenda scoffed at her own delusion.

Then, the meaning of the illusion became clear to her. The design of a progressive life marching toward a grandiose end, only to be motionless, trapped by biological design.

A tear slowly moved down her cheek, leaving the taste of salt touch her mouth. Wiping the moisture away, she scolded herself for the lack of public discretion of her emotion.

Brenda tried to be perfectly coordinated, well calculated in education, and follow all the cultural whims of society. All this was to feel as though she was moving forward. In actuality, she stopped doing the things that unveil her true, inner self.

So she sat as a lifeless, turning wheel, trapped within in a dream where she ran but never moved, just like the transfixed illusion she held in her hands.

**Jennie Noonkester** is a mother of two teen boys and currently lives in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. She graduated from William Carey University where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in history and religion, and a minor in English. Most of her religious studies focused on Biblical archaeology. She's currently the Student Service Coordinator for the Hattiesburg High School Career and Technical Education Department. Instagram @jennienoonkester. Twitter: @jmn2433





# THE COOKERY BOOK GIVEN TO YOU BY YOUR MOTHER

BY: S.B. BORGENSEN

The book, with yellowed pages and curling corners marked, "How to Bake a Cake to Net Your Lover"

answers 'tween the blue/grey linen covers with recipes for love affairs of hearts in the book you've had for years from Mother.

Take a large bowl—crack six eggs of plovers but, careful now, for here's the tricky part in how to bake cakes that capture lovers

write another message above hers 'add honey to the cherries or they're tart' in the cookbook given by your mother.

Rest a while, then you'll discover the secrets hidden in your mother's charts, "How to Bake a Cake to Keep Your Lover"

The pages tell so much more than recipes impart in the book given years ago by Mother, "How to Bake a Cake to Love your Lover."

Internationally published, **S.B. Borgersen** writes, knits socks, and walks her smashing dogs on the south shore of Nova Scotia, Canada. Her favoured genres are short and micro-fiction and poetry. She's a longstanding member of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia and an enthusiastic member of the international online writing group for ex-pats, Writers Abroad. Sue's collection of 150 micro fictions, *While the Kettle Boils*, is to be published by Unsolicited Press in early 2021. Visit: [www.sueborgersen.com](http://www.sueborgersen.com)



# BREAKFAST NOOK

BY: KEN CARLSON

Brad had been enjoying his breakfast, scrolling through his phone, reading the cereal box, looking out the window down at the alley. He started with two cups of coffee, moved onto toast with butter and strawberry jam, then segued into a bottomless bowl of Lucky Charms. Was it healthy? No. Did he care? No.

"Why are you still here?" Sarah asked.

"I've been asking myself that a lot lately," he thought to himself. He also thought it better to keep his mouth shut and go on eating.

The breakfast nook, she called it. He sat there on a worn thrift-shop wooden chair in the corner of the Boston apartment kitchen. The breakfast nook was also the lunch table, dinner haven, and homework central. It was the only table in her apartment not covered with books and papers. The windows next it looked out at a rusty fire escape and another brick apartment building.

Sarah shuffled over to the coffee maker. Her hair, a wreck. Her outfit, two-day-old sweatpants and a t-shirt her ex got for running a 5K three years ago; probably the only thing he ever saw to the end. Her parents bought her the bathrobe back before her undergrad days. She kept pads, pencils, and an unopened pack of Kools in the pockets.

"He's fat," she thought. "He's not the one. He was the rebound from Dave."

When Brad had asked her out, her girlfriends said she should have a little fun. As she made her way to the table with her HELLO KITTY! mug, she wondered when the fun would start.

"I'm serious," she asked, "Why are you still here?" She took the chair opposite him, arms folded, her question and presence accentuating the visual pinning of him into a corner.

"What is it, money?" She said, "You don't have a place to stay? No friend to crash with 'til you find something else?"

Brad put down his spoon and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. He shook his head slightly.

Sarah continued, "You couldn't take the hint, yesterday? We talked about this. I told you everything, right?"

Brad shrugged, his two-day shadow and receding bedhead blended into his frayed flannel shirt and the off-color walls, long overdue for a repaint.

Sarah took a sip of coffee. Wasn't bad. He had been bringing better coffee than she ever bought when he stayed over. At least, that was something.

She snapped up the box of Lucky Charms from in front of him. This brought him around.

"What?" Brad said in a raspy voice.

"You think this is funny?" She shouted. "You come over, bring this cereal no nine-year-old would eat in the huge, the family-sized box. Family-sized. What family? I told you last night we'd never be able to have children. I can't." She slammed the box down and looked off to the side.

Brad cleared his voice and said, "I know."

The two sat at the table for a couple of moments. Sarah sniffled and wiped her eyes. She moved her chair around the side next to him. She took a spoon from his bowl and tasted some Lucky Charms.

Not exactly magically delicious, but not bad. The pink hearts and blue diamonds bobbed in the milk among the crunchy bit one had to endure to enjoy the sweet. Brad poured some more into the bowl, following up with milk.

"You want to go to the library later? Maybe, go see a movie?" He asked.

She shrugged and said, "Sure."

**Ken Carlson** is the author of *Get Out of My Way! The Annoyed Commuter's Handbook*. His recently published humorous essays and short stories can be found online at *Defenestration*, 365 Tomorrows and Literary Heist. @KenCarlsonaid.





# PUPPETS

BY: LYNN WHITE

The puppets are drowning now.  
Their usefulness has passed.  
They were always made  
to become shadows,  
to be discarded  
by the string-pullers  
when the audience was seated.  
The glove puppets and sock puppets  
are floating away  
already,  
tumbling like clowns  
in the waves  
and soon  
even the shadow puppets will vanish.  
Maybe, then  
the puppeteers will reveal themselves  
put their power on display  
temporarily.  
For soon, it will be time  
for them to change  
their shape  
and re-emerge  
to find new clowns,  
new clowns to seduce the audience.

**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 the Pushcart Prize and a Rhysling Award. Visit: [lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com](http://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com)





Illustration by: Michael Shelton

# POEMS

BY: ERICA ABBOTT

On my darkest days  
 No one offered me a light  
 So I built a fire.  
 -light

You're a paradox—  
 Just a drop in the cosmos;  
 My whole universe.  
 -love

I've wielded my pen  
 Watched as the ink spilled like blood  
 On war-torn pages.  
 -my weapon

Erica has been writing poetry for the past 15 years. She works full-time in inbound marketing and loves writing and seeing musical theatre in her free time. Instagram: @poetry\_eric



# exulansis

“the tendency to give up trying to talk about an experience because people are unable to relate to it”

the bright white scars on my arms and legs  
form a constellation of sadness.

if you show me yours  
i'll show you mine.

a poker game where we all have shitty hands  
but pretend we are winning,  
like a fan that won't stop spinning  
and instead spins faster every time.

you say, "i promise i'm happy."

it's the feeling when you stare at a word so long  
that it doesn't look right.

# power lines

our arrangement was no-strings-attached,  
but by the end,

i was attached to so many strings like a  
puppet and you were the master.

**Alyssa Harmon** graduated from the University of South Florida St. Petersburg with a bachelor's in English Writing Studies. She's been working on two collections of poetry she hopes to publish one day. In the meantime, she's had poems published in magazines and journals like *Merrimack Review*, *Minerva Rising*, *The Wild Word Magazine*, *Semiotics-An Anthology on Modern Love, Sexuality, Shaking the Sheets Magazine*, and *Odet Journal*. Instagram @lys\_harmon.



# Internal Inferno

BY: HEARTILLARY

Don't really know where I'm at to be honest, disillusioned with the blend of past, present & future. Trapped once again in a 9-5 where the novelty has worn off wishing the week away only for a sawn-off shotgun 2-day weekend that always goes too quick. Crumbs of tranquility and bliss are always short-lived. They never last. A vicious cycle is destroying my soul and I'm only 17 months into my new role. Mind, body and soul tossed to and fro. I'm just sick of going down so many different routes, to end up in the same routine. What do all these experiences mean? What are they all for? I took a leap of faith and gravity decided to perform a chokehold on my last glimmer of hope.





# Morning Call

BY: JOHN GREY

Phone rings.  
Early morning.  
It can only be bad news.  
I don't want to answer.

The morning cannot be the usual  
sun-shining, egg-shell cracking,  
bacon sizzling affair.

It's sound tracked by the ring of dread.  
It's a horror movie  
that overlays virulent midnight  
on vulnerable 7:00AM.

That phone won't stop ringing.  
Soon the answering machine will pick up.  
But whoever's calling surely knows I'm here.

And what if someone died.  
Or they need my help.  
How can I ignore  
the pressing problems of ones I know.  
I'm as much a part of that  
as I am the good times.

I nervously pick up.  
It's a wrong number.  
So something I'm unaware of  
has happened to someone I don't know.  
That still doesn't help.



# The Colors

BY: JOHN GREY

The city's green where it has no other choice.  
Or dark brown where light falls on the waters.  
It's spring in its parks, and weeds of sidewalk cracks.  
And in the song of birds that can bear up to the traffic.

At night, the colors vie with neon.  
Hues glow like something subterranean.  
People surface here and there  
on their way to clubs and bars and restaurants.

Their faces are painted by patterns on the loose,  
stripes of shadow, particles of fire,  
the glamorous sheen of their flashier selves,  
while their eyes glance up just enough  
to glint with the stars' bright passion.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Dalhousie Review* and *Qwerty* with work upcoming in *Blueline*, *Willard* and *Maple* and *Steam Ticket*.





# Cotton Candy Changes

BY: KATIE KERIDAN

Even though I've always loved the way cotton candy smells, I've never actually liked the way it tastes. I shook my head again, assuring the man I didn't want to buy a bag of the spun sugar.

He muttered something and then walked off. The way the cotton candy bags hung from a pole over his shoulder made it look like he was carrying a small tree, an exotic variety, where the sweet-smelling pink blossoms were enclosed in plastic.

It could have come straight from the fantasy novels I liked to read, and that made part of me smile, even as the rest of me felt bad for telling the man no. It wasn't his fault. Most people probably would have handed over their money without a second thought, but I had to think twice. I couldn't afford to just throw around the little I'd managed to save from babysitting and working at the library.



I sighed and rested my forearms against the metal railing, wishing my best friend would hurry up and come down from the Ferris wheel. I hated heights so much that I didn't even want to look up and wave at her. Besides, I'd probably just see her making out with whoever she was recycling this week and that would only remind me how incredibly limited the dating options were here. Not that anyone else seemed to mind.

Yet again, one more way I didn't fit in.

I glanced back over my shoulder, not sure why I suddenly felt so uneasy, other than that carnivals always made me feel on-edge. Honestly, it was probably because carnivals were able to do something I couldn't: leave this hole-in-the-wall town far behind and go somewhere else. Fairs always seemed to magnify things, highlighting everything you wished you'd never see in the funhouse mirrors, and amplifying already loud noises.

They also magnified my own feelings of discomfort, the ever-present soreness that came from chafing against small-town constraints.

I felt the familiar wave start to rise, and the hot swell of wishing my life was different broke against the reality of knowing that I was never going to leave this place. No one did. I blinked a few times, trying to get rid of the tears that suddenly appeared in my eyes.

I wasn't normally so emotional. Poor people like me didn't have the luxury. I did what had to be done and then lost myself in my books; reading was my one escape, and I retreated to it as often as possible. I thought about the book currently stashed in my purse and wondered if anyone would think it odd if I pulled it out.

I sighed. Of course, they would think it was odd, and I didn't need to add any fuel to that fire. I was about to turn back to the Ferris wheel, looking for anything that would distract me, when I saw him.

He was standing in the shadow of a striped awning, leaning up against a wooden beam. When my eyes landed on him, I felt like I'd bumped up against the electric wire that ran along the fence surrounding my house.

I shivered, even though the sun was shining brightly overhead. Swallowing hard, I met the man's gaze. A slow smile began to carve its way across his face and, almost as if I was being pulled, I found myself walking towards him.

It wasn't that I was unfriendly, but I didn't make it a habit of starting conversations with total strangers, especially when they were random men!

As I crossed the distance between us, the man's look became so deep and searching, I worried he was gazing into my soul, if I had one.

I had the urge to tighten my coat around me, but since it was August and I wasn't wearing one, I settled for shivering again.

"Not a fan of cotton candy?" he asked as I came to a stop, a few feet in front of him. His voice was deep and strong, and I briefly imagined it turning into ropes that wrapped themselves around my wrists and ankles.

"No," I managed to say. "I've never liked it. I don't even really like fairs."

"But everyone goes when they come to town," he said, and something glinted in his eyes. "After all, you wouldn't want to be left out when everyone talks about it at school on Monday."



I only just managed to stop my mouth from falling open. How did he know the exact reasoning behind my decision to come here?

I shrugged, not wanting the man to see how much he'd unnerved me.

The way one side of his mouth rose higher than the other said he knew he'd hit a sensitive spot. I turned my attention to the small building behind him, taking in the flowing chains of beads that served as a curtain.

"So, what do you do here?" I asked, desperate to change the subject.

His expression softened to one of genuine pleasure. "I'm a change waker."

I stared at him, not sure I'd heard correctly but also not wanting to be rude. "A...um, what's a...change waker?"

The man smiled as if he wasn't the least upset about having to explain himself. "I awaken changes in people."

I knew I was gaping, but I couldn't stop myself. Even as some rational part of my brain said that no such job actually existed, I asked, "What kind of changes?"

"Oh, any," he replied with a wave of his hand. "Small, seemingly insignificant changes that only mean something to the person who wants them. Or big changes, alterations on a grand scale." His eyes held mine. "Life changes."

My heart began to pound harder against my rib cage. "How do you change someone's life?" I said.

The man pulled aside the beaded curtain.

Glancing over my shoulder at the Ferris wheel, I took a deep breath and stepped inside.

**Katie Keridan** made her literary debut at ten years of age when she won a writing contest by crafting a tale about her favorite childhood hero, *Hank the Cowdog*. Since then, Katie has continued to write, and she enjoys sharing her writing with others who relate to feeling different, misunderstood, or alone. Visit [www.katiekeridan.com](http://www.katiekeridan.com). Instagram: @katiekeridan



**Have no  
fear of  
perfection,  
you'll  
never  
reach it.**

-Salvador Dali



# What It Took

BY: THOMAS M. MCDADE

Gagging my knees  
behind hers  
as snugly as a quill  
to migrating wing  
I cup a breast  
soon hatching  
a nipple  
mid fingers  
rousing her awake  
and as her palm  
nests my knuckles  
my fingers slip  
apart not in geese  
getaway  
fashion  
or victory  
but thankfully  
in peace—  
sheet flies  
off as if bought  
at Goodwill  
a donation by  
a dead magician's  
kin—a wealth  
of his tricky scarves  
and handkerchiefs  
stitched as one—  
it took such  
wizardry.



# Finger Things

BY: ALLIE EADY

Are you Happy?  
Glowing White screen Reflecting Silver keys,  
Tanned fingers with Fake Hot Pink nails.

On the left middle finger,  
A Silver band with three  
Tiny  
diamonds, that surround one  
pearl, but on the  
Middle Finger.

The right, a Dead lady's emeralds  
Caged in Rotting gold,  
And Crowned with a diamond that Screams,  
Bury me.

The index finger on the right hand,  
Just a memory  
Cheap and Glittery.  
Time couldn't hold you there.  
Neither could this piece of Shit, but  
You wear it.

**Allie Eady** is a senior undergraduate student from Birmingham, Alabama, currently studying at the University of Alabama with a major in English and minors in Creative Writing and Spanish. She is a co-editor for *Call Me [Brackets]*, a student-led literary journal, and has had previous publications in *Blount Literary Journal*. She aspires to continue writing poetry and creative nonfiction, as well as venturing into the publishing field herself.



# PROJECT NONNA

BY: CAROLINA DUTCA





**“It didn’t  
matter how  
big our house  
was; it  
mattered that  
there was  
love in it.”**

-Peter Buffett











An aerial photograph of a beach. The top left shows a sandy beach with some driftwood. The rest of the image is dominated by turquoise water with white foam from waves crashing against a rocky shore. The rocks are dark and jagged, creating a complex pattern of white foam and turquoise water.

# SINKING SHIPS WHERE THERE ARE NO RAINBOWS

BY: LINDA IMBER

Negativity, caught in a web, having emptied power  
from your own hands.

Grown old before your time, having forgotten  
the directions to the jolly pathways of childhood.

Bad habits,  
stirring the air as if ringing a vesper-bell.  
Reservoirs of goodwill quickly depleted,  
shackling you to servitude of repeat performances.

Past Failures, sitting on your chest,  
so you can't pull yourself up,  
drinking so reverently from the bittersweet cup of temerity.

Wasted time,  
continually dodging all the need-to-dos.

Guitar strings unplucked, flags not unfurled.  
Pointless fears, worry and fretting  
about small things that creep and crawl through  
one's tunnels of consciousness.

Do not let these weigh you down.  
For too soon, you will naturally be seeping into the earth.

**Linda Imbler** has five published poetry collections and one hybrid ebook of short fiction and poetry. She is a Kansas-based Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Nominee. Visit: [lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com](http://lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com).



# NIMBUS LOFT

BY: DANIEL OVERTON

I

A shadow lingers,  
Long into the night,  
My mind wanders,  
Deeper into You  
Gentle, Peaceful Tender  
I sigh within my domain.  
Every thought is you  
A warmth of cool embers,  
Shades of violet.  
Now, I see  
And brilliant Blue  
Everything before me.  
In this reflection,  
Now, in focus,  
I see You  
And only You.

II

A sound of deep  
And blissful thunder  
Rumbles in harmony  
Of memories before me.  
Quiet morning,  
Come quickly now.  
A beautiful sigh,  
From the one I love,  
Shades of light  
Come into view.  
A white bliss  
And then a gentle kiss.  
Days of Rain  
And Autumn's Fall.  
Here with You  
All things are new.

III

A dim lit light,  
Among a thorn of fire.  
A low lit candle,  
In the shadow of the sun.  
A warmth grasp  
Of the one I love.  
Never forget, oh,  
Never let go.  
There are songs  
And there are whispers.  
The sweet tune she sings.  
Ah, gently kiss her.  
In the end,  
When all is nigh,  
I remember you  
In morning's, early light.

IV

Impressions of you,  
In colors, light and blue,  
Soft clouds and distant rain  
A portrait in bane.  
Strokes of colors  
Captured in pictures.  
Nothing does justice  
Quite, just like us.  
A memory is distant.  
A moment is gone  
When I'm with you,  
Where we belong.  
A window in this loft,  
Beckons calico.  
Gazing into You,  
A quiet, gentle view.

V

Of calico and silk,  
One amiss and one adored.  
I grab hold of one,  
Await a rising sun.  
Endure together,  
Always forever.  
A pure fire  
Could never sever.  
Rain, heavy rain  
A cool crisp dawn.  
A low lit cinder.  
In cold December,  
Ode in voice,  
Ode in song,  
Here we lay.  
Low we sway.



# Isadore's Wallpaper

BY: LOIS PERCH VILLEMAIRE

Isadore gazed around his bedroom grinning at the zoo wallpaper. He delighted in the colorful cartoon animals that greeted him: pink giraffes, green lions, monkeys and elephants. The wallpaper was pale yellow with light blue stripes, like cages at the zoo.

When he wasn't feeling well and had to stay in bed, and the animals kept him company. The seals balanced on balls. The monkeys hung from trees by their curly tails, while hungry giraffes nibbled at the leaves on the tippy top. Mother said he could go to the real zoo someday.

Isadore squinted as morning light filtered through the pink flowers on the dogwood tree that leaned against the house. He pictured himself climbing out the window onto the sturdy branches of the tree and making his way skillfully to the ground.

Downstairs, he heard Mother preparing breakfast. The pop of the toaster and the whirl of the orange juicer made him hungry. The smell of coffee meant that he'd better rush to see Papa.

As Isadore hurried down the steps he thought he heard Papa say, "This trip might be too much for him."

"Papa, do you mean me? We are going down the shore today, right?"

Papa glanced at Mother as his lips tightened into a serious face.

"Yes, just be careful. Enjoy Atlantic City. I wish I could go, but I have to work."

Papa picked Isadore up for a goodbye hug, one that seemed to last longer than usual. He left for his job at the dress factory where Isadore sometimes visited.

Isadore liked running his fingers along the endless rows of hanging patterned fabric and watching Papa operate the noisy machine that made buttonholes. Someday, he would teach Isadore to use the magical machine and they would work side by side at the factory.

Polly, Isadore's sister, came along on the outing. She provided extra help for her adored little brother. Isadore had a Buster Brown haircut and the same clear blue eyes as the rest of the family, but not the same good health.

Dr. Gold made house calls to listen to Isadore's heart and check his breathing. Even though Isadore would soon be six years old, he had never experienced the excitement of Atlantic City.

They entered the busy Broad Street Station in downtown Philadelphia. Isadore was amazed to see so many people, especially other children like himself, on their way to an adventure.

Inside the coolness of the train station, Polly buttoned up her brother's blue double-breasted coat. She and Mother wore long, ruffled dresses with wide-brimmed hats. Isadore covered his ears when the steam of the locomotive pumped, and the powerful whistle blew.



Isadore thought about the fun of being the train operator, the person in charge of that whistle. The platform trembled and it smelled like something was burning. Polly lifted him up to reach the steps into the train.

"May I sit next to the window?" said Isadore. He watched as the scenery of a park flashed by and imagined the day that he would meet other boys to play baseball on a real field.

After arriving in Atlantic City, they went by horse and carriage to an area with many hotels that had large covered porches overlooking the beach. They followed the crowds to the bathhouses where a photograph souvenir was taken of the three of them seated in a special automobile. Afterward, they rented bathing attire.

On the beach, Isadore liked the way the air smelled like salt and fish. There were colorful umbrellas and striped awnings arranged to provide cover from the sun.

Isadore explored the gritty sand with his fingers and toes. He built castles and made footprints where it was wet and squishy. He thought about living in a house as big as a castle. He discovered slimy seaweed and collected seashells of all shapes. Isadore inched closer to the shoreline.

Polly joined him. They held hands and jumped over small waves. He wanted to let go of her hands and dash off, diving into the biggest waves and swimming all the way to where the pale green ocean met the sky.

Later on the boardwalk, he was fascinated by the blinking lights, rows of rolling chairs filled with people, and amusement rides. He pretended to be a tough cowboy sitting in the saddle of a brightly painted wild horse on the musical carousel.

He breathed in the aroma of roasted peanuts and buttery popcorn, but didn't feel hungry. Isadore sat on a bench to rest a bit and began to dream about being in his bedroom. He imagined taking a magic carpet ride home.

When Isadore coughed so much that he felt too tired to walk, Mother and Polly took turns carrying him as they made their way back to the station for the return train ride.

He didn't remember the bumps and sways of the train, Mother's soft humming, or being carried to bed. When he opened his eyes, he saw the zoo wallpaper and heard the familiar heavy footsteps of Dr. Gold coming up the stairway. Tears filled his eyes and his head throbbed. He practiced taking deep breaths and waited for the doctor.







# the loop

You awake to find yourself back in the arms of the person you almost killed. You are both nineteen-years-old once again. He is baby faced and shirtless. The curly chest hair rises up to your nostrils, smelling like home. You rest your head on him. He smiles in blissful ignorance, unaware that all of this happened before. Somehow, you're able to remember everything.

You realize that you are reliving the beginning moments of this six-year relationship. The calendar in the corner of your dorm room reads September 3, 2011. One month in. You try not to panic as you search fervently around the room with your eyes. Why are you here?

Maybe, this is an opportunity for atonement. A chance to alter the past before the wrongs are committed. The wrongs committed by you. Maybe, it's purgatory, an eternal punishment where you relive this tumultuous relationship again and again. As soon as it ends, perhaps you will find yourself once again at the beginning, waking up in the chest hair of this blissful being you're destined to destroy.


It might be less painful if he were in on it, too. Instead, he smiles innocently, enraptured as he is by the promise of young love. At least, it appears to be young love. Your body is nineteen-years-old, but your heart is as heavy as that of a crone. Heavy with the weight of multiple disappointments, setbacks, and rejections.

You can't see its color, but you're sure it's a pale grey, deadened by the refuse of unrelenting and unforgivable shame. It occurs to you to wonder at how some people can push their sin so deep down that they almost forget it exists. Untethered to their evilness, living in a world where the mistakes they made never even graze the surface of their skin. You envy such people.

Perhaps, it is this shame, this sin, that restarts the loop. As you wake fully to the present moment, you realize that you've repeated this same loop more times than you can count. You also realize that you've never managed to free yourself from the end result. Never been able to set this person—this unaware victim who looks at you so lovingly—free.

Trying to not alert him of your wakefulness, you search your mind for solutions, scenarios where this saga might play out differently. You resolve yourself to end it once and for all. This time, the loop will not restart. This time, you will awaken him to the monster that resides within your bones. This time, you will set him free.

**Monte-Angel Richardson** considers herself to be 50% data wizard and 50% magical girl. When she is not rewriting short stories based on her nightmares, she spends her time researching violence and trauma and wrangling big data at the University of New Mexico. When she's not busy plunging deep into the depths of the collective unconscious, Monte-Angel enjoys eating noodles and watching birds  
Visit: [mtangele.wordpress.com](http://mtangele.wordpress.com)











# NIGHTLIGHTS

BY: MARANDA RUSSELL

My love,  
were not all natural  
dreams forgotten?  
The skeleton  
crawled about the floor,  
rattled up the chimney,  
and bathed her hand in sleep.  
Nightlights pulsed  
while strange children  
found new mothers  
in the faces of the night.  
Once all were safe  
her fears sat down  
by the quickening fire,  
warming the nursery.

**Maranda Russell** is a multi-award-winning artist, author, poet, and blogger who also happens to have high-functioning autism. She lives in Dayton, Ohio with her husband and 3 cats. Visit [marandarussell.com](http://marandarussell.com)



# CHRYSALIS

BY: FABRICE POUSSIN

Tight within another skin  
her essence smiles inside  
warm in the safety of the forest  
she awaits the moment to emerge.

Wings like hands in a prayer  
she moves as if a wave in the walls  
the body liquid with grey matter  
eager to become bone and be free.

Through a gentle membrane she lives  
a new heart pulsating in those clouds  
made of ancestors but a day old  
in the light she glows strong as a star.

Soon she will plunge into this life  
simple in the invisible apparel  
I will catch her before she falls  
to save her from a hungry earth.







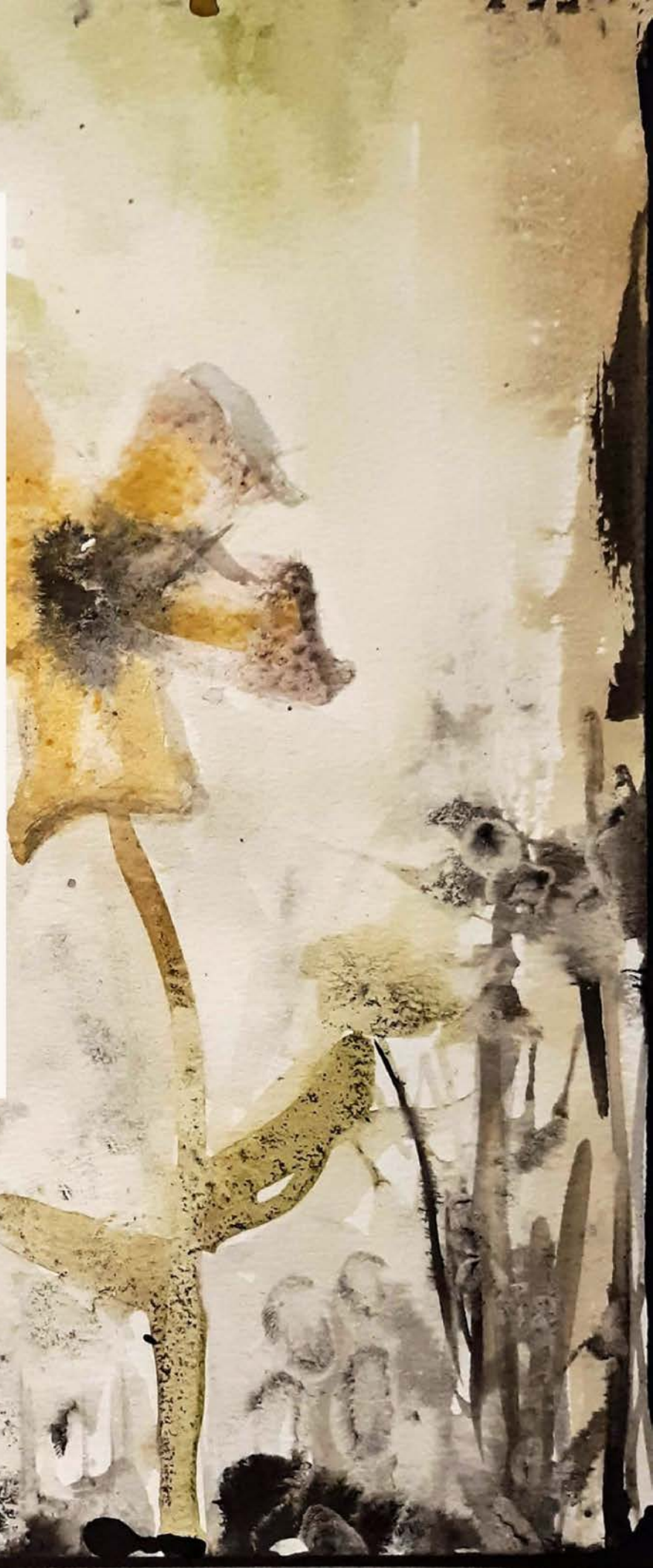
**Shannon Gardner's** ethereal mood in her work reaches the extreme and addresses the taboo. Her use of watercolor, line, and dot work assists the viewer to observe the Asian aesthetic Wabi Sabi; appreciation of imperfections. Through her work she explores natural and organic techniques used to imitate nature. Facebook: @shannonelizabethsart #stevenspointartist



# Madness of the Bee

BY: MARK HEATHCOTE

Curvaceous white rose  
how—potently, aromatic  
it is to delve quite freely  
one's passionate nose  
tasting upon your tongue  
the madness of the bee  
who, sumptuous,  
all summer long  
dances in bliss with sultrier  
honey honed senses.  
Sweet harlot of the brier  
give up your remonstrance  
hold fast—that's all I acquire  
just one single kiss  
honeycomb, upon my lips.  
Arms wrapped around your bodice  
trembling without, remiss  
Till the sun and moon, ellipse  
Ah, the kiss. The kiss of bliss.







# Appetite

BY IFEANYICHUKWU PETER EZE

Whoever we like, we follow.

We don't remember how we followed Chiron, our host. It must be a long, long time, a story our dead grandparents can tell. We wanted to live with him for as long as his body—slim and fresh, and supple in places—fed us blood.

Today, we go to church with him. It's not the first time. He sits on the front pew, squeezed like a worn cloth among other bodies. We bask in the warmth. His white shirt shone under the fluorescent light like a transparent landscape. It excites us.

We loiter on it like wanderers. Someone behind him reaches out, grabs one of us, and feeds them to their thumb and index finger. They press and rub, frantically mixing our body and blood until we turn to rolls of black dirt, only to flick off.

Our epitaph rides on the wings of our smell and tickles his nostrils.

We tease him with another biting sensation under his shirt.

We see the shame on his face. It sits like his shit. He dips an empty hand into the offering box and left the church.

The song from the choir filters like chants of jeer, hitting a chord on each of his steps. He trudges past the shops without acknowledging the greeting of Mallam Tukur.

Before he put on the shirt this morning, the one he bought at the bend-down-select for fifty naira at the open street market, on the roadside from work yesterday, he beat it in the air repeatedly as though to wade off evil spirits. He's sure the pressing iron is hot enough, too.

He sleeps without the lights. Night is our day. We make sure he wakes up earlier than his alarm clock. He knows when we bite. Our bite is a silent pact, not like the mosquitos. Those creatures, they whine too much. Especially around the ears. We hear they have history with those parts of the body.



When Nara, Chiron's ex-girlfriend, left him, he slept in the arms of drunkenness. We drink from him until we're fat like balloons, too full to crawl back into the corners of the bed.

She didn't want to sleep in the house anymore, just after two days of coming to stay. It has been a month since any lady came. The last one almost washed us off existence.

How we survived, we can't say. She called us vampires, starved ones. When she came the first time at night, we were glad. Her fair skin invited us. We roamed about and waited for sleep to hug her. Under the chill of the air conditioner. Our suck lasted a few seconds. We don't remember her name. That's good for our memory.

Nara left because she was beginning to catch us on her. Her body was a dark, plump, chocolate bar. Chiron used to call her, "My chocolate bar." We left the real chocolate she kept on the table for the roaches to enjoy.

When she slept, her breath sang songs for our feast. The rashes we created on her was a sign that she accepted us. But, she scratched them and they became wounds. It made her angry. We preferred her sick than angry. We wanted to follow her to where she lived and build our places there.

Today, Chiron ransacks the room, upturned the single settee, the bed, and traces us, brushes us off, smashes our eggs, and our spots on the walls, everywhere. Then, he bathes us with the spray. The new one he bought at Mr. Tukur's shop down the road. Not Rambo. No Bygone. Not Mortein. On the body of this one, written boldly in red is, *Tanisher*. It had caricature images of us lying dead, dying, running from dying, buried under the flood of the spray.

"This one na final," Mr. Tukur says through the gap in his front upper teeth demonstrating with his fingers on the nuzzle.

After Chirons soaks us with Tarnisher, he takes everything outside like someone who is preparing for rapture. The sun fries us. He even takes out the books on the shelf whose pages we decorated with black spots like maps. We suffocate.

We choke. We burn. We die.

Chiron clears his throat as he stepped into the room. Breathing hard from the trek, and sinks into the settee. The frown on his face succumbs to sleep. We wait for his snoring to fill the room.



**Cheol yu Kim** is a Korean artist who has studied fine art in Korea and the USA. He's currently working on six hold-screen drawings that uses traditional shapes of eastern Asia's old artworks to present landscape. Cheol incorporates his own invented images every piece. He builds, destroys, and reassembles unique forms until it becomes his own.







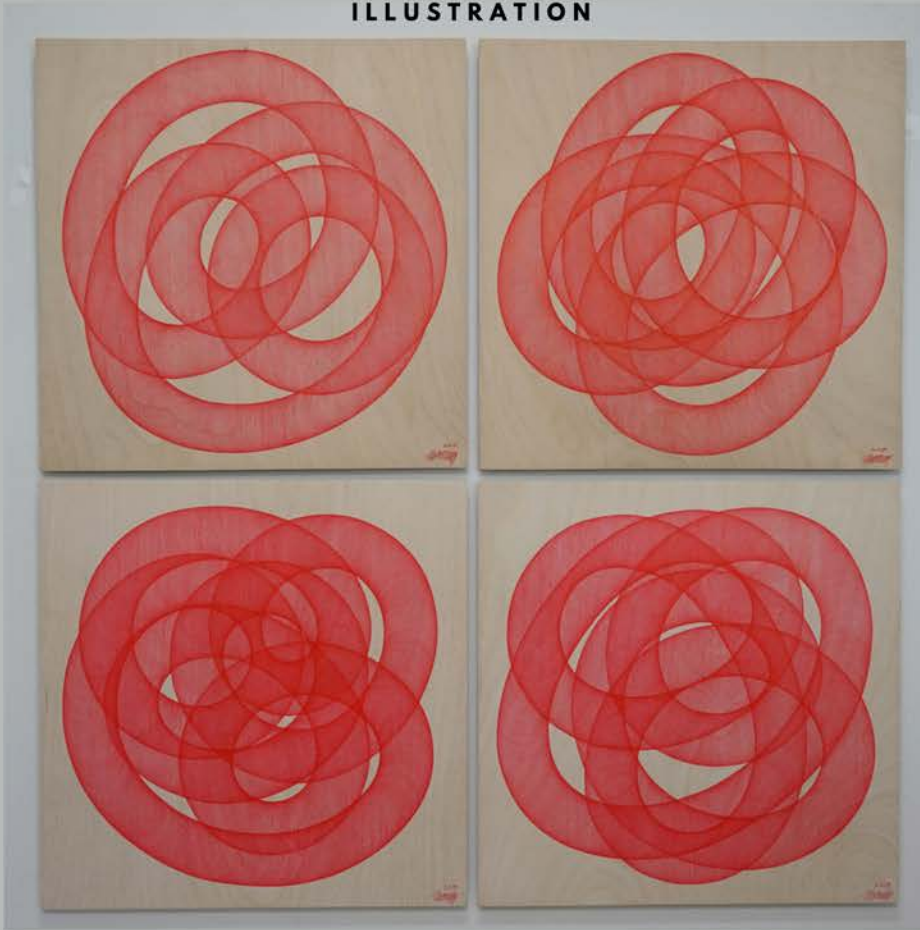
*"I start at the line between consciousness and familiarity. My memories and experiences intermingle with my dreams and imagination, making reality unclear. Art helps me deal with life, one step at a time."*







ILLUSTRATION







**Oksana Reznik** is a Ukrainian artist who explores human presence in the environment and a trail that remained. She combines her own feelings, memories and imagination with certain places or situations.  
Visit: [oksanareznik.com](http://oksanareznik.com)





# Earth is an intrinsically flammable planet

BY: L. KIEW

carbon rich seasonally dry  
widespread lightning volcanic eruptions

humans clearing the forests and  
dry grass filling interstices of trees and shrubs

so careless dropped cigarette bud engine sparks  
unattended campfires fireworks

wildfire burns land by acres everything taken  
in a few minutes disorientation heat and smoke







# SpaceRox

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

Sasha Miles lives with her family on the moon she partly owns with the government. Her husband, Walker, is an astrophysicist. Together, they inhabit a biodome with their four children: Jolene, Ellison, Dolly, and “Monty” Montgomery. Being away from humanity is lonely at times, but the Miles mansion is big enough for comfort, and has artificial grass for the children to play.

In the projection room, Sasha prepares to enter a conversation with her board of directors. She’s the president of SpaceRox, the first U.S. company to mine for meteorites. An ideal meteorite has a combination of iron, nickel, cobalt, gold, platinum, and iridium. It’s worth approximately \$10,000.00 a gram and is used to make anything from jewelry to golf clubs and augmented reality headsets.

Sasha faces her meteorite-made conference table. Her own reflection stares back at her: black hair tightly pulled back into a long ponytail and large glasses around her green eyes. She gestures from left to right over the center with her manicured hand. A digitally projected menu screen appears. Her fingers follow a sequence, opening a holographic chat, pinging with dialogue. She’s reading along when her six-year-old, Monty, bombards through the door.

“Mommy, come play with me,” he says. His dark hair flops over his face.

Before addressing her son, Sasha types on an unseen keyboard: What’s the current status of available resources?

“Mommy’s working right now,” she says to Monty. She tucks loose strands of hair to reveal his similar green eyes. “I will later.”

A notification bell alerts Sasha with a message from geologist, Dr. Hart: Mining is at a halt. Resources are rapidly depleting. Limiting production is recommended.

Alicia McIntosh from marketing adds to the chat: What about revenue?

Sasha types her own opinion: Raise prices and limit production. Create a higher demand.

Marcus Johnson, the Chief Financial Officer, replies: Could backfire and we lose public interest.

Monty, still in the room, tugs at Sasha’s arm for attention. “Now, please,” he whines.

Sasha flashes a stern gaze at him. “Go play with your brother and sisters, I’ll join you after.”

“Yes ma’am,” Monty says. Hanging his head down, his shoulders slump, and he shuffles his feet out of the room. Sasha watches him for a moment, and grimaces at the pain she feels in her chest.

The ding of the chat brings her back to work. Chou Ming of Public Relations writes: I agree. Society’s obsession with SpaceRox has led many to take out second mortgages and malnourish their children just so they can afford to fit in. Let’s not make it worse.

Sasha scrunches her face and stands. She turns off the hologram and picks up the chair she was sitting on, lifting it over her head, then bringing it down against the table. A loud bang echoes. No damage. She pulls at her shirt collar, loosening its hold. Looking across the room, she sees—beyond her glass enclosure—a darkened Earth, shadowed from the light.



# Dear Lover,

When darkness consumes me, I see you, a bright white light.  
I hear you, sweet honey, through the hate I've been told.  
At times my heartaches. I feel you, entirely delicious.  
Each day, I breathe for you when I can't on my own.

Your voice, a blanket, keeps the coldest parts of me warm.  
Your touch, a flame, sparks my soul with connection.  
Your words are all I hold onto to feel sane.  
Your actions are all I adore to know what's right.

I learn the meaning of love  
with you. I open myself to trust even  
the bad parts and the ugly. Before,  
I didn't trust myself. I didn't love myself.

We met in past lives and you found me  
again. I will find you next time. You are  
the part of me I didn't know I was missing.  
We're bonded for life and beyond. You and I.

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



# I need you because I love you.

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

Moments with you clear the darkness clouding my vision.  
Your voice feeds reassurance to the light inside.  
Melodic and masculine, sing the song of my heart.  
And all the times I've felt unworthy, you reveal my true value.

You, by my side, is all I need. We could live  
under a highway, without everyday luxuries, and still I'd sleep  
soundly under the stars. I lean on the structural sanity of  
your stoic demeanor, even if at times, you struggle to hold on.

You saved me from the dangers of my past.  
You protect me from my present self.  
You are my reason.







**Thank you for reading.**





# ***FLORA FICTION***

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