



FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE
VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 1
SPRING 2024

Table of Contents

POETRY

<i>Exposure</i>	09	Susan Shea
<i>The Last Drops of Creamer In My Mug</i>	11	Dominic Moore
<i>Recurring</i>	12	Em Meyer
<i>Wild Nights on Seine</i>	14	Amanda Hayden
<i>Once a Teacher, Always</i>	18	Ivanka Fear
<i>Life in Lilies</i>	21	Anza Keller
<i>Dear Phyllis</i>	28	Jenna Bean Veatch
<i>Oxherding: The Exhaustion of Sunday Morning</i>	53	William Waters
<i>if I had married you</i>	59	Tina MacNaughton
<i>Dilemma in Wooded Daylight</i>	63	Diane Funston
<i>The Time I Ran Away</i>	67	Arvilla Fee
<i>Man On the Moon</i>	78	Norla Chee
<i>When I Learned Enya's Castle was 20 minutes away</i>	79	Amanda Hayden
<i>You Are Everything</i>	80	David Banach
<i>Someday Over the Rainbow</i>	82	Ivanka Fear
<i>Star-Crossed Lovers</i>	92	Mark Heathcote

SHORT STORY

<i>Sworn Secrets</i>	44	Dawn DeBaal
<i>As I fade Softly</i>	55	Yuna Kang
<i>Last Words</i>	93	Maggie Nerz Iribarne

CREATIVE NONFICTION

<i>Dear, Phyllis</i>	29	Jenna Bean Veatch
<i>Unexpected Ordeal</i>	32	Obiotika Wilfred Toochukwu
<i>On Trees and Growing Up</i>	69	John Blaylock
<i>Slide Gently Into the Water</i>	74	Jenna Bean Veatch

ILLUSTRATION

<i>Urban Symphony</i>	14	Dahlia Hosny
<i>Frog Concerto</i>	15	Mark Blickley
<i>Harmonizing Reverie and Reality</i>	17	Chapman Shum
<i>Planet of Love and Peace</i>	19	Ketevan Merkviladze
<i>Winter in Tokyo</i>	20	Ketevan Merkviladze
<i>Son Mektup "Last Letter"</i>	24	Dahlia Hosny
<i>Dream</i>	25	Irina Tall
<i>Winter Girl</i>	26	Irina Tall
<i>Butterfly and flowers in flower</i>	27	Shirley Smothers
<i>Lightness of Me</i>	29	Maria Dimaki
<i>April 17th</i>	30	Maria Dimaki
<i>Love Through War</i>	35	Jason Chee
<i>The Ship</i>	36	Nanthini Raj
<i>Sperlonga sea</i>	37	Massimiliano Bruno Calabresi
<i>Adopting Johnny</i>	41	Audrey Larson
<i>Forgot Keys</i>	42	Audrey Larson
<i>Koi Fish</i>	73	Nanthini Raj
<i>Rainy Day</i>	77	Nanthini Raj
<i>Half Crazy on a Full Moon & As the Raindrops</i>	85	Edward Michael Supranowicz
<i>Abstract 167</i>	90	Binod Dawadi
<i>The ruler once said</i>	93	Daniela Cicciarelli
<i>Long Time Ago</i>	95	Daniela Cicciarelli
<i>Daydream</i>	97	Daniela Cicciarelli

PHOTOGRAPHY

<i>Cover - Dreamy Dusk at Lake Shoji</i>	0	Anastassiya Neznanova
<i>The Pastel Dreams</i>	5	Anastassiya Neznanova
<i>Daydream Zen</i>	7	Tammy Higgins
<i>Where Do You Come From</i>	10	Robyn Braun
<i>Daydream Zen</i>	13	Tammy Higgins
<i>Phone Photography</i>	22	Cindy Hollenberger
<i>Sodium Light</i>	23	Kevin Vivers
<i>the eye</i>	33	Dr. Helge H. Paulsen
<i>sleep well</i>	34	Dr. Helge H. Paulsen
<i>Daydream Zen</i>	40	Tammy Higgins
<i>Spring Up Here II</i>	43	Robyn Braun
<i>Spring Up Here I</i>	47	Robyn Braun
<i>Phone Photography</i>	48	Cindy Hollenberger
<i>Trio</i>	49	Kevin Vivers
<i>QAL</i>	50	Kevin Vivers
<i>through the looking glass</i>	51	Catalina Aranguren
<i>Water View</i>	52	Sara Caporalett
<i>Above the Clouds</i>	57	Anastassiya Neznanova
<i>The Inner Glow of the Dream</i>	60	Anastassiya Neznanova
<i>You're Gonna Go Far</i>	61	Gina Gidaro
<i>Komorebi</i>	64	Anastassiya Neznanova
<i>When You're Alone</i>	65	Gina Gidaro
<i>whimsically wild</i>	68	Gina Gidaro
<i>let go</i>	71	Gina Gidaro
<i>Dreamscape</i>	80	Sara Caporaletti
<i>Always Reaching</i>	83	Gina Gidaro
<i>House of Coves</i>	86	Mia Amore Del Bando
<i>Monte is Better Than You</i>	87	Mia Amore Del Bando
<i>Your Highness</i>	88	Mia Amore Del Bando
<i>Welcome to Wonderland</i>	99	Mia Amore Del Bando
<i>Phone Photography</i>	91	Cindy Hollenberger

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Veronica Valerakis
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WANT TO JOIN THE TEAM?

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

INTERESTED IN SUBMITTING?

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

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As we celebrate the fifth anniversary of *Flora Fiction*, we explore the theme “Reverie & Reality.” This collection navigates the delicate veil between the dreams that inspire us and the realities that shape us.

In these pages, you are invited to explore a world where daydreams and reality blur, where thoughts—both intrusive and serene—whisper secrets of a life both lived and imagined. This issue harbors experiences, capturing the quintessence of human yearning intertwined with the raw truths of existence.

Let each piece inspire a sense of wonder and recognition. May it provoke reflection on the reveries that visit you in quiet moments and the realities you navigate each day. This edition is an invitation to journey through your own experiences, to find solace and understanding in the reflections of others.

As we mark this milestone, reflect on the paths we all walk—the seen and the unseen, the light and the shadow. May this anthology serve as a companion and a guide, starlit by the dreams of those who dare to envision beyond the horizon.

May these pages stir your imagination, challenge your perceptions, and offer a sanctuary where dreams and reality converge.

xoxo
Flora Ashe







PHOTOGRAPHY



Daydream Zen By: Tammy Higgins

Tammy Higgins is a writer photographer and poet. She is a metalhead, gamer, 57 years old, and has Ms. Born in Northern NY living in Southern NH.

Exposure

BY: SUSAN SHEA

I want to take all of the family members,
I have been venting about in my poems,
up to the softest part of a slow-moving
pillow cloud.

To show them,

I am a many-headed creature,
who wears all of their minds,

sees through all of their eyes,

trying to piece all of our stories
into a bright ceremonial pattern,

sewn with every stitch of our tender
and coarse truths,
into a cape
we can all put our arms in,

letting sweet air billow around us,
so we can stand tall,
riding wiser, going forward
shoulder to shoulder.

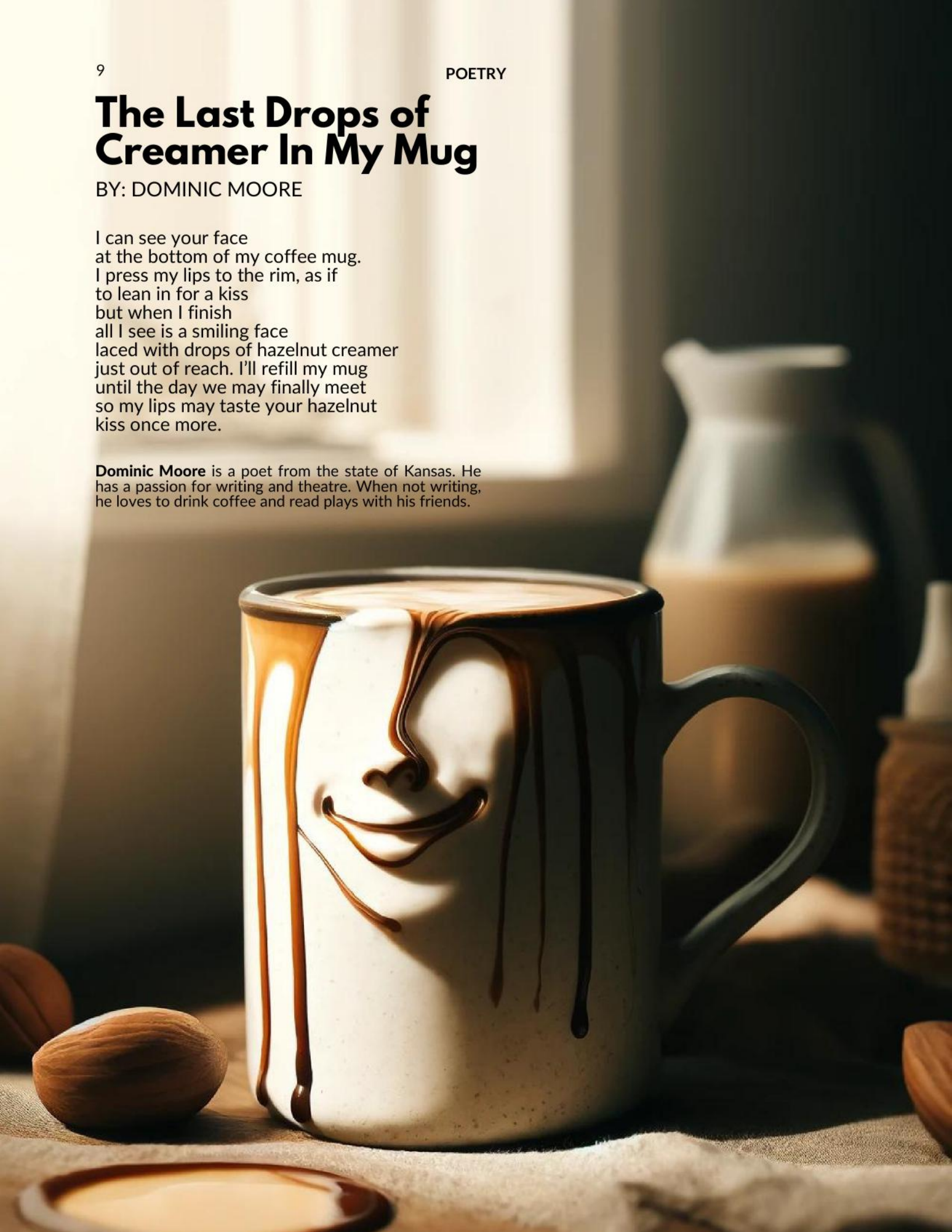
Susan Shea is a retired school psychologist who returned to writing last year. Since then, almost 100 of her poems have been accepted by publications including *Ekstasis*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Across the Margin*, and others.

The Last Drops of Creamer In My Mug

BY: DOMINIC MOORE

I can see your face
at the bottom of my coffee mug.
I press my lips to the rim, as if
to lean in for a kiss
but when I finish
all I see is a smiling face
laced with drops of hazelnut creamer
just out of reach. I'll refill my mug
until the day we may finally meet
so my lips may taste your hazelnut
kiss once more.

Dominic Moore is a poet from the state of Kansas. He has a passion for writing and theatre. When not writing, he loves to drink coffee and read plays with his friends.





"Where Do You Come From" By: Robyn Braun

Robyn Braun is an artist and writer in Edmonton, Alberta. Her debut novel, *The Head*, is out this Spring with *Great Plains Press*.

Recurring

BY: EM MEYER

You awake to tears
laughter, that strange
ache that can only
be from a missing thing

the half-told story
the faceless friend
the baby that never
nestled beneath your ribs

the favorite of your
childhood homes,
warm even when
put together just wrong

fade beyond
the background as you
make breakfast, go
and come from work

while in shadowed corners
dog eared and alive
a whole world
waits for night.

Em Meyer has written poetry since they were a teenager attending art school. In the time since, they have gained a bachelor's degree in creative writing and three wonderful cats.

PHOTOGRAPHY



Daydream Zen By: Tammy Higgins


Wild Nights on Seine

after Emily Dickinson

BY: AMANDA HAYDEN

On the rocking boat, we gaze up to the slick moon, this wild
serendipity, our Jungian collective of nights
sweating the sheets together into a particular kind of wild
giddy plunge while the rest live ordinary nights
yet our mouths stretch agape as if we were
painted into Starry Night's swirl, a Paris I
have dreamed of since I was a girl, with
opaque waters who ripple with pillow talk, how do I love thee?
Paris je'taime, watch me arch my back like a lioness wild
under the silver bow luminating dusky knotted nights
drink me up, lap me like a kitten would
as if you have never been this hungry, as if you will never be
again after me, others oblivious to the heady dose of our
stained glass accents, our ecstatic ebbing howls, our taste of lupine luxury





ILLUSTRATION

"Urban Symphony" By: Dahlia Hosny

Dahlia Hosny is creating art that empowers people connect with their deepest selves. Wanting her art to make people feel something, to challenge their assumptions, and to see the world in a new way.

Dahlia Hosny

Frog Concerto

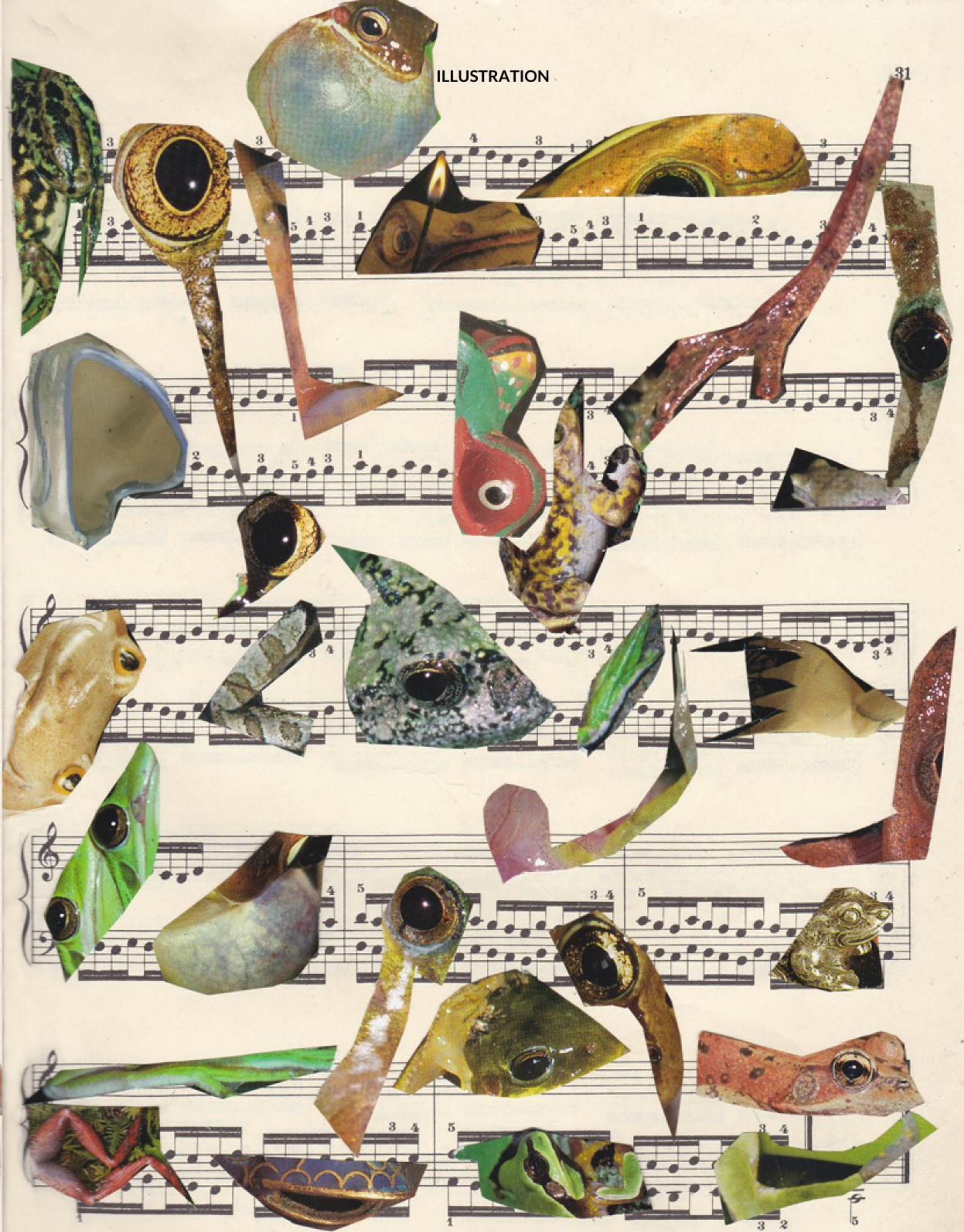
By: Mark Blickley

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

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"Harmonizing Reverie and Reality" By: Chapman Shum

"The 13 years old, blind pianist **Chapman Shum** embodies the seamless fusion of reverie and reality through his music and art. With his soulful performance at the piano against the backdrop of his vibrant splashy painting, it's as if the melodies of reverie have come to life in the realm of reality."

Once a Teacher, Always...

BY: IVANKA FEAR

Living the dream.

My lifelong dream to be a teacher
is exactly that – a daily nighttime dream,
my recurring nightmare.

After three decades of education
the instructing never ends,
my subconscious mind ever teaching,
the conscious, learning teachers don't quit.

Teaching was my life's work.

My second home was school.

But now, night school offers no comfort,
disinformation allows no rest.

On autopilot, as if ingrained,
I automatically linger in the classroom.

An automaton programmed to remain,
roaming halls in a deliberate search.

Missing students from my class.

Losing kids on field trips.

Skipping yard duty.

Forgetting lesson plans.

Neglecting marking.

Confusing schedules.

Arriving too late.

Headline reading:

School Teacher Found

Wandering Halls at Night

in Search of Missing Students

Forgot she had Retired.

Ivanka Fear is a Slovenian-born Canadian author. *The Dead Lie* was her debut novel. *Lost Like Me* is the second book in the series. Ivanka is also the author of *Where is My Husband?*



"Planet of Love and Peace" By: Ketevan Merkviladze

Ketevan Merkviladze was born in Tbilisi, Georgia. She is a self-taught artist, translator, and teacher of the German language by profession. Some of her paintings have been sold abroad, mainly in Germany and America, and paints to order. A variety of subjects distinguishes her creations. In it a large place is given to the culture of different peoples: for example, she has many drawings of Native Americans, Japanese geishas, and African women.

ILLUSTRATION



"Winter in Tokyo" By: Ketevan Merkviladze


Life in Lilies

BY: ANZA KELLER

It begins with the soft annihilation
Of my own beating heart
And ends with a life
In the middle distance
The time between the two
I can't make up
But I will say this of my delay
It is hard to break your own heart
As though it were a porcelain
Piggy bank of white and blue
Knowing there may be nothing but you
Amid crusted penny hopes
And quartered dreams
Yet I can't shake the feeling
That there are blossoms in the atria
The irregular beating murmur
Of gardenias against glass
Veins flood with jasmine vine
Looking for light beneath the skin
And I could swear there is the taste
Of bloodied peonies in my throat
Though for now I walk the same path
I wait to hear you at the door
This is my life in lilies
And it is just enough
I want so much for it to be
Just enough
But there is a hammer in one hand
As I hold your own in the other
For years I've held nothing else
And still,
It is the slowest sequence
Of my life
Watching the hand that lets go

Anza Keller is an actor and writer living, predictably, in New York City. She considers writing to be perhaps her greatest confidant and truest lifelong companion.





"Phone Photography" By: Cindy Hollenberger
Cindy Hollenberger has been calling Herself a backyard photographer lately, finding beauty and awe locally. She enjoys pushing the phone camera to do its best.

"Sodium light" By: Kevin Vivers
Kevin Vivers quotes Popeye, the Sailor Man,
"I yam what I am and that's all that I yam."





"Son Mektup 'Last Letter'" By: Dahlia Hosny

Dahlia Hosny

"Dream" By: Irina Tall





"Winter Girl" By: Irina Tall

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich.



“Butterfly and flowers in flower” By: Shirley Smothers
Shirley Smothers is an amateur Artist, Writer and Poet. She recently self published her second book *Solasta*.



Dear Phyllis,

BY: JENNA BEAN VEATCH

January 23rd, 2024

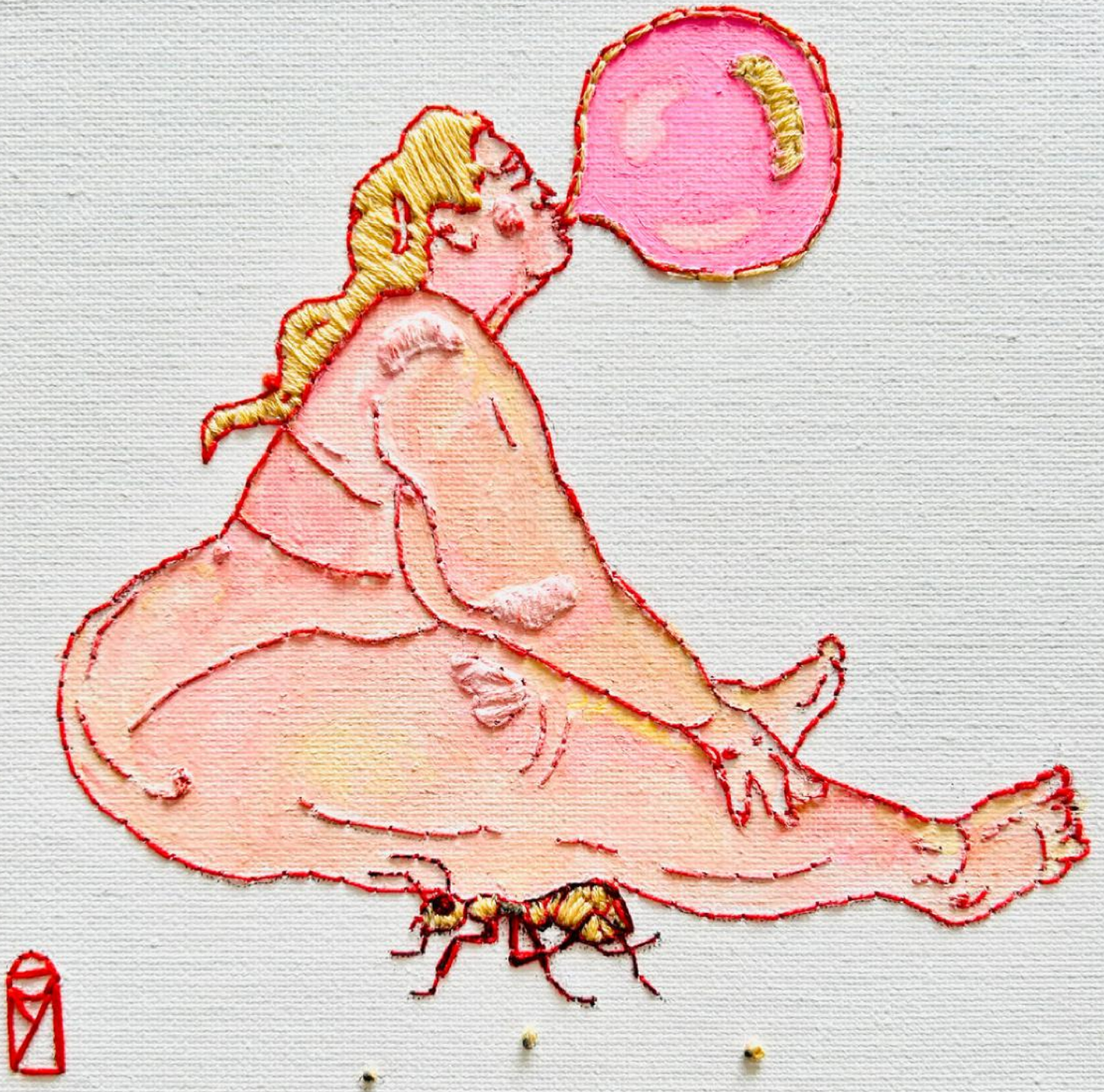
Dear Phyllis,
My 4-year-old and I found your notebook in the street. There was no name or contact information written inside the front cover, so we decided to use the notebook, interspersing our own notes (and narwhal drawings) with yours. It wasn't until today that I discovered, written deep inside the notebook, your email address, birthdate, and password. (Don't worry. I promise to forget it immediately. My memory's crap because I haven't gotten a good night's sleep in 4 years, so this won't be a problem.)

I see that your birthday is coming up in a few weeks. Seventy-nine! I'd like to return the notebook to you, along with a birthday gift. I've learned some things about you, Phyllis. I see that on October 21, 2022, you had two slices of buttered toast and one cup of coffee with half-and-half for breakfast; one-and-a-half cups of cereal with half a cup of milk and a banana mid-morning; five crackers with two pieces of cheese, tea, and water for lunch; tuna casserole and three oranges for dinner; and five crackers, half an apple, and celery for a nighttime snack. You've experienced so much in your nearly 79 years, Phyllis. And yet—I say this with love—there is so much more. I would like to introduce you to flavor, Phyllis. Lemongrass sausage, môle, baba ghanouj, Castelvetrano olives, Turkish apricots, puddings made with rose and cardamom... Have you ever met cardamom, Phyllis?

To be fair, there were surprises for me, too. How was the choreography class you took? Maybe we could go together someday, when I've got more free time. Solo parenting has me pretty overwhelmed, to be honest. But I know you're busy, too, with all those medical appointments. I imagine it's not easy, getting old.

My writing now mingles with yours—observations of the destructive effects of capitalism, rambles about the incredible love and incredible exhaustion of parenting. Did you have kids, Phyllis? Does it get easier? What did you do when you felt like it was all just too much? Did you ever have a moment when you just gave up on trying to do anything, turned on some sad music, laid down on the floor, and stared out the window up at a tree, watching the birds and letting yourself cry? Are you still in need of a moment like this? Maybe I won't send you a basket of foods from faraway places after all. Maybe I will give you a window and a very old tree. Maybe we can both lie on the floor, you in your home and me in mine, and send each other birds.

Jenna Bean Veatch is a multi-disciplinary artist, teacher, facilitator, and queer single mama by choice who has been accused of creating "pure, unadulterated, heart-stopping whimsy." She has made dance-theater shows, music, stop-action animation, written work, delightful objects, connections, community gatherings, and one gorgeous little human.



"Lightness of Me" By: Maria Dimaki

Maria Dimaki is an artist, interested in the human form, working on x-rays and embroidery on canvas..



"April 17th" By: Maria Dimaki

Unexpected Ordeal

BY: OBIOTIKA WILFRED TOOCHUKWU

I am finished," Ogochukwu blurted. Due to her discernment and spiritual sensitivity, she quickly observed that the defecation in front of her compound was not ordinary nor a childish act. Someone went in the night or early morning to defecate at the entrance of her compound which she cleans every Sunday morning. In her village, Amankwo, so many have died from removing unknown and strange feces in their compound or neighborhood. It has been a channel for the transfer of swollen leg (*enyi ure*) or poison to a targeted enemy. Ogochukwu retired, carrying out her routine clean-up. "They are after my life," she said. "I cannot be fooled. They want to take me unawares. It is the same battle I inherited from my husband's family. They want to dispossess every member of the family of their inheritance." This happened at the same time that her husband was struck in the eye by a strange insect. He has been sick ever since. Threatened, Ogochukwu abandoned her morning occupation in search of a solution. She remembered the powerful medicine man, Onunkwo, and made haste to reach out to him.

"Good morning, Onunkwo," Ogochukwu greeted over a phone conversation. "I need your urgent attention in my compound."

"What is the problem?" Onunkwo asked. "They have dropped another bomb at the entrance of my compound which will detonate anytime. I would like that you come and see it before any further action to avert the imminent danger," Ogochukwu explained.

"In that case, wait for me a little while, I just left Eke market. I will turn around to come and see you," Onunkwo assured.

Ogochukwu gathered her three children and prayed together. She could not engage in any warfare prayers because of the level of her faith. She may not always attend Sunday Mass but her belief in traditional African religion is strong.

Ogochukwu used to live in Ikeja, Lagos with her husband. She had a comfortable life until Uchenna, her husband, suffered a setback in business. Due to hardship and suffering, she was forced to return to the village in Aguata. She went to her father's house for sustenance. After several years, she went to her husband's house and persuaded her husband to come back to the village and stay with her. She suggested that her husband take up a hire purchase of Keke tricycle or open up a small shop at Awka which is closer to the village.

Uchenna did not accept the survival ideas raised by his wife. He is used to Lagos and would want to continue struggling in Lagos. Uchenna had a fair share of wickedness and oppression perpetuated by villagers. Four siblings of Uchenna died mysteriously and he is left with just one sibling.

Ogochukwu has the full knowledge of how to neutralize charms, amulets, and talismans, even spells in operation but she doesn't want to risk endangering her life. Even though she attends Mount Zion Deliverance Ministry, she has contacts of native doctors,

herbalists and seers who will divine for her and offer her maximum protection. Ogochukwu wished and tried to entangle a rich man who would care for her and her children but it has not been smooth and seamless. She has been hooking up with men on social media and on the streets believing that things will work out. She regretted that she is no longer single as she underscored the get rich quick syndrome among youths and 'yahoo boyz'. Despite all these, Ogochukwu was determined in gaining victory over her enemies.

In a trance, Ogochukwu saw a woman who went to call a priest for the sacrifice done at the entrance of her compound. The woman woke up in the morning to see the sacrifice: egg, biscuit, sweet, white and red piece of cloth tied and packed together. While the woman was coming home from the morning Mass, she invited a young Catholic priest to help her remove the oddity. The priest came, prayed, sprayed holy water, scattered the sacrifice, and took the egg with his right hand, pointing out that such rituals are powerless. Before the priest could get to the parsonage, his right hand was swollen and he became threatened as well. Before Ogochukwu regained consciousness, Onunkwo, the medicine man, was already in her house. Both defied the stench, odor from the fecal substance as Onunkwo brought out his Ikenga and went round the feces.

"Uchenna, your husband, is almost blind because a flying insect entered his eye," Onunkwo asserted.

"That's true," Ogochukwu responded. "Now, they have come to give you a leg sore (eny iure)," Onunkwo said as he threw three seeds into the feces. "What should I do to the person who did this to you?" Onunkwo asked.

"All I want is O biara e gbu m, gbuo onwe ya. I will desire 'Back to Sender'. Whatever evil the person had intended to come to me or my family, should go back to him or her."

"You can now remove it; the poison has been neutralized. Have no fear about it. Maintain 'live and let live' principle (onye biri, ibe ya biri) and no man would be able to harm you."

He brought out a piece of herb and gave Ogochukwu to chew. He equally gave a powdered substance to spray at the compound upon waking up every morning. Onunkwo was about to leave when he turned back and looked into the eyes of Ogochukwu and asked, "Can you be my lover?"

Ogochukwu had never thought about having an affair with a medicine man because many of them in the village are diabolical, wicked, and vengeful. She managed to ignore the request by raising another issue. "But please, sir, how much would I pay you to fortify my family and I?" "Oh! You don't have to pay a dime," Onunkwo assured her, "just give me a chance to love you, that's all." Still looking for an escape route, Ogochukwu held his hands, shook it and promised to pay him a visit. "Make sure you keep something for me on the third market day, I would not like to see anyone in your house on that day," she pleaded. Joyfully, Onunkwo left her house without further demands.

"HMMMMM, my goodness!" Ogochukwu hissed as she entered her house.



"the eye" By: Dr. Helge H. Paulsen



"Sleep Well" By: Dr. Helge H. Paulsen

"Love Through War" By: Jason Chee

Jason Chee is a member of the Navajo tribe and live in New Mexico with my daughter and two cats that own me. I am an 85-year-old artist and retired illustrator.





“The Ship “ By: Nanthini Raj
Nanthini Raj is an Advocate and Solicitor who loves painting in my free time.

"Sperlonga sea" By Massimiliano Bruno Calabresi

Massimiliano Bruno Calabresi is an artist from Terracina, Italy. Recently graduated in Printmaking in the Academy of Fine Arts in Frosinone, Italy.







Daydream Zen By: Tammy Higgins

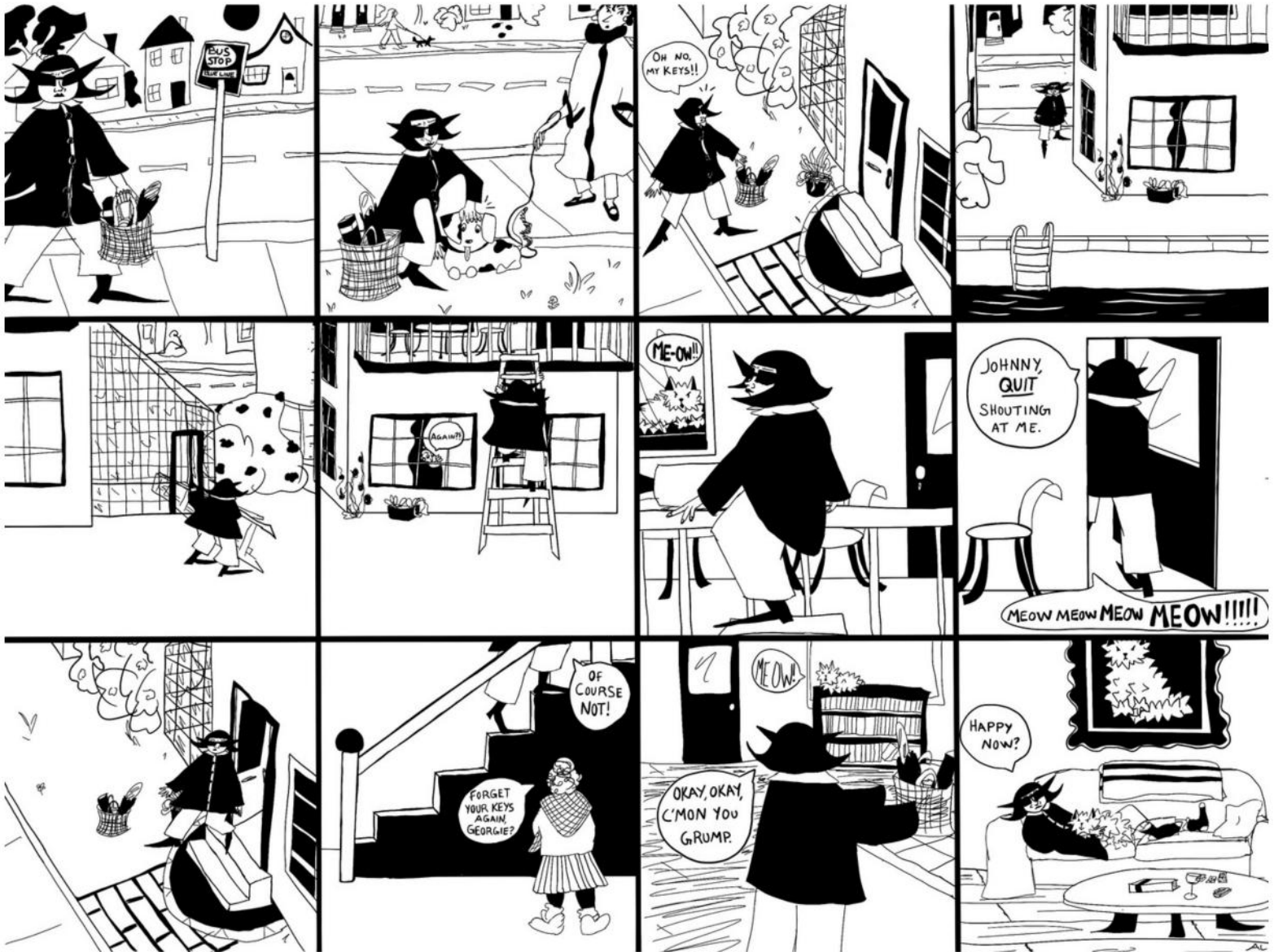


"Adopting Johnny" By: Audrey Larson



Audrey Larson is a queer artist and writer who lives in Bellingham, Washington. They are known for their love of dreary beaches, public libraries, and old bicycles.

"Forgot Keys" By: Audrey Larson





"Spring Up Here II" By: Robyn Braun

Sworn Secrets

BY: DAWN DeBRAAL

Lights out!" The counselors called, walking through the building; they shut off the main switches, killing the lights. Friends Cara and Lanie were at an overnight lock-in. It had been a fun camp day with trust-building exercises like falling back into the arms of a stranger, trusting you'd be caught, and another exercise to understand what it was like to be elderly. They smeared glasses with Vaseline, put in ear plugs, and had to go through an obstacle course without tripping. It was an eye-opener, plus they'd met some cute boys: Trevor and his friend, who acted as part of the obstacles. Cara spent a few minutes talking to the guy and fell in instant love. Later, she put his name on a slip and left it on the table.

The note said, "Come and visit me tonight, bring your friend. We can talk after lights out." The girls retired to their room.

"It was so much fun!" Cara said to Lanie. "Did you see Trevor? Wow, he is so cute!"

"And his friend, what's his name, wasn't bad either!"

"Oh, I didn't catch the other guy's name. You're right. He wasn't bad—not as good as Trevor." Cara laughed. "Don't freak out, but I left Trevor a note on the message board saying what room we were in, so if you hear a knock on the door, it could be that he and his friend are stopping by."

"You didn't!"

"I did. This is the only night we're here, we leave tomorrow."

"It has been so much fun and eye-opening, too. I never realized how hard it is getting older." Lanie stopped talking after the sound of a gentle tap.

"Who's there?" Cara whispered through the door.

"Trevor."

"Mark," the boys answered. The girls grabbed their hands in the dark. There was no light; if they turned on the lights, the counselors would know they were breaking curfew. They jumped up and down in excitement.

"Just a second," Cara called out and whispered to her friend. "So, do I open the door or not?"

"I know you liked Trevor, but I don't remember Mark," Lanie said, doubting the safety of opening the door. Cara opened the door before Lanie could stop her, letting the guys sneak in.

"It was fun today." Trevor said, "Where can we sit?" He felt his way from the door, bumping into Lanie. "Oops, sorry."

"Just sit on the floor," Cara said. From the sound, the boys took a place on the carpet.

"Trevor, thank you for coming. It would be fun to get to know each other better. I was impressed with your acting today."

"Ah, thanks. I normally throw myself into things like that. Mark did his fair share, too." They talked and laughed, and soon, Cara called Trevor to the corner of the room, where their talking turned into a make-out session. Lanie was shocked but remembered what Trevor looked like. She understood why her friend was carried away.

"So, do you want to kiss a little?" Mark asked. Lanie didn't know what to say, but since Cara was preoccupied, she kissed Mark. An hour later, they let the boys out the back door.

"Wow, that was something," Cara said.

"Mark was a good kisser," Lanie agreed with her friend.

"It was kind of exciting. Not being able to see one another, just going with your gut?" Cara asked.

"It was. I'm sorry this was just a one-night thing. We won't see these guys ever again. I don't even know where Mark is from."

"I don't know where Trevor is from. Maybe he's in a neighboring town. Wouldn't it be great if we met at this retreat and found the love of our lives?"

"Love of your life? That's being over dramatic, don't you think?"

"Lanie, it could happen, you know. Stranger things have happened."

"I know, but you just met the guy. You don't even know where he lives! We'd better go, we'll be late for breakfast. I'm kind of shy about seeing Mark this morning," Lanie said as she shut the door behind her.

"Me too, but about seeing Trevor. It was just kissing. It's not like we were loose women." The girls headed for breakfast, searching the cafeteria for the boys.

"There's Trevor over there; he's with another girl," Cara sniffed indignantly.

"I don't see Mark anywhere."

"Cara, Lanie." The girls looked up from scouring the room. Too dorky guys approached them.

"Do we know you?" Cara asked.

"It's me, Trevor," the acne-faced guy said. Cara's face fell now that she recognized his voice but chose to deny it.

"No, Trevor is over there," she pointed across the room.

"Yeah, that guy's name is Trevor, too. I was thinking about last night."

"Last night? What are you talking about?" Cara asked, looking confused.

"You know, making out."

"I didn't make out with anyone. Lanie, did I make out with anyone last night?"

"No, it was lights out, and we hit the sack and fell asleep. Come on before they run out of food." She grabbed her friend's hand and dragged Cara to the food counter.

"I can't believe we made out with those nerds!" Cara whispered hysterically.

"We didn't make out with nerds, we made out with Trevor and Mark. Two hot guys from the lock-in." Lanie laughed, handing her friend a food tray.

"We will never speak of this again," Cara said fiercely.

"Never."

"Swear."

"I swear."

Dawn DeBaal lives in rural Wisconsin and has published over 600 short stories, drabbles and poems in online ezines, and anthologies.



"Spring Up Here I" By: Robyn Braun



"Phone Photography" By: Cindy Hollenberger

"Trio" By: Kevin Vivers





"QAL" By: Kevin Vivers

"through the looking glass" By: Catalina Aranguren

Catalina Aranguren was born in Colombia and was raised in Venezuela. She studied at the Art Institute of Chicago as well as Speos Photographic Institute in Paris. She currently lives in Madrid with her three boys, husband and giant dog.



PHOTOGRAPHY



"Water View" By: Sara Caporaletti

Oxherding: The Exhaustion of Sunday Morning

BY: WILLIAM WATERS

The dreams
They reoccur:

Sometimes
you are
a speeding ticket

--Sometimes
a couch.

I know
It doesn't matter
That we
cried once

After
Doing it
So hard
We giggled.

At this point

I wouldn't
Change

A thing;
But I want

To Change
Everything.

I want
You

To surprise
Me

With a cup
Of coffee

When
I least

Expect
It;

I want
You
To be

On the
other end

Of the
phone

When
It rings;

I want
You

To laugh
About us;

--about
Something.

The dreams
They reoccur:

Sometimes
You are
A
Couch...



As I Fade Softly

BY: YUNA KANG

How easy it was to disappear,

like glass, thinly spun fibers of gold, laced across the window pane, cold frost, a garment of discontent. She wore it heavily, it didn't fit, but still I see her dancing across the lawn, heavy winter Qipao, furred, un-ugly. Ugly girlie, with her crooked teeth and the angles harsh across her face, which most women call a canvas, but for Li-Pao, it was abstract art.

A sculpture, shattered glass again, freckles across a luminous forehead.

She wasn't really Asian, she didn't like to call herself so. She came to Missouri by adoption, and was supposedly Korean, but her parents named her Li-Pao, no characters attached, a name that means nothing.

She takes off her shirt when it is mid-summer. You can see scars then, from mosquitos and fleas and rapid ticks. Even after years, they leave dirt-brown blotches on her skin, frequent crowns that refuse to fade with time.

Her back is made of freckles.

Most women, you can trace stars from those errant dots, entire pictures of rabbits and demigods and snow. For Li-Pao, they are radical, random strokes of smeared ink and melanoma daring to merge. She has no cancer, she said, it just runs in the family.

She takes off her skirt to jump in the lake.

And her skirt had huge, ostentatious snowflakes knitted across it, my grandma did it, she laughed. Her grandmother was an old white lady with foggy glasses and snot on her fingers; she loved Li-Pao.

Li-Pao's parents died when she was young.

"Twice an orphan, twice the luck." She would say.

But I had dreams that her freckles and moles would enlarge, grow huge, and threaten to devour her slanted face. We sometimes saw each other in the night, and she would lean against the wall, where moonlight gives shape and size to fantastic window panes.

"Don't let me go, John." It was a quiet voice, unlike her battle cry when she was hunting for ladybugs or fireflies or diseases tropical.

I had dreams that cancer would sprout from her chin, from a punched-in skull, blossoming erratically like garlic flowers untended. I had a dream where I plucked the carnelia that had grown from her remains, fried it with chili oil in a wok, and served it with rose petals. It was deliciously brittle; it tasted like bones.

And I had a dream where I saw her face hollow on a platter, eyes flickering with worms, and she was saying:

"Don't you believe in me, John?"

And I didn't.

I had to go,

"I had to go", I said then.

And she didn't believe me, but she hitched up her powder blue skirt, and ran across the yellow-green grasses.

"Look John," she said then, turning her face abruptly from mine.

"The sun is setting."

And it was an ordinary sunset, with only faint streaks of yellow and grey to enliven the dying sky. I was going to college I said, but really I was going anywhere, going everywhere to get away from the image of Li-Pao dying. I couldn't stand it, but when I saw all the pine trees swaying, and the clouds fading away into the night, I thought that I was going to die if I left her. I wish I had rescinded my application, or unpacked my stuff. I wish I could have stayed here with her forever, looking at the boring, dying, sky.

It's like a postcard; Li-Pao illuminated against the sky, gazing at the grey world. She saw something I could not see; she was something I did not know. Obscuring, rotting, and profoundly beautiful, she refused to die.

She reaches out. Her hand is like glass against the alabaster sky; I think she is trying to touch the sun.

I wonder, even today,

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





if I had married you

BY: TINA MACNAUGHTON

if I had married you
we would have lived in a pixie cave
deep within a woodland glade
with pine trees shading us
and birds singing our praises
each morning
if I had married you
I would have bathed in your gaze
I would have fed you nectar
and honey blossom, awakened
you each morning with sweet kisses
and caresses
we would have made tender love
each evening under silvery starlight
and each morning in the dawn glow
we would have had two sweet
faerie children, fair-haired,
prettily frail
if I had married you
you would play strange notes
on the harpsicord, softly singing,
murmuring, lost in your dreams and thoughts
whiling away your days, cat-like in lazy languor
and then you would leave me
if I had married you
I would sit waiting, waiting,
longing for your return
I would note the absences with tears
I would question the stars and the moon
and lay wondering where and with whom
if I had married you
I would want you to be gone.

Tina MacNaughton is a poet and writer from Berkshire, UK. Her novel 'Delphy Rose' (Troubador) has an 80's music background and she has written a collection of poetry, 'On the Shoulders of Lions' (Choir Press). She is a practising acupuncturist who loves to swim in the sea, walk and dream up stories.



"The Inner Glow of the Dream" By: Anastasiya Neznanova





"You're Gonna Go Far" By: Gina Gidaro

Gina Gidaro has a bachelor's degree in creative writing and a minor in studio art from Ohio University, and received a graduate certificate from the Denver Publishing Institute. She is passionate about stories and anything spooky.





POETRY

Dilemma in Wooded Daylight

BY: DIANE FUNSTON

Do I dare to make a move?
Do I dare to offer a fresh-picked peach?
Would her alabaster skin
warm beneath my rough-hewn hands,
or cause her to cower in shyness?

She bathes in beauty, before my sight.
Hidden by sylvan sheaths, draping branches
frame her in repose, rinsing in shallow river;
she rises, reticent, dries off,
her ample curves smooth as polished agate.

I stare transfixed, at her modest climb
to riparian hollow, she slips into
cotton coverings, I sigh as straps
snap me back from reverie,
do I even daydream her soft flesh?

I kneel, rigid as oak,
as she passes by, unaware
of my caught breath,
my shaking fingers, unaware
still, of my secret presence.

Do I follow her?
Would she believe my innocent pursuit,
or think me perverse,
allowing the sight to pleasure me,
without her touch,
or even a knowing glance.

Diane Funston has been published in journals including *California Quarterly*, *Lake Affect*, *F(r)iction*, *Tule Review*, *San Diego Poetry Annual*, among others. She was Poet-in-Residence for Yuba-Sutter Arts and Culture Her chapbook, "Over the Falls" was published by Foothills Publishing in 2022.

"Komorebi" By: Anastasiya Neznanova



PHOTOGRAPHY





"When You're Alone" By:Gina Gidaro

The Time I Ran Away

BY: ARVILLA FEE

I stood in the open doorway, inhaling
the scent of earth and worms and grass.
A summer storm had brought fresh rain,
and the leaves took long, luxurious sips
long after the storm had passed,
as if savoring a glass of Dom Pérignon.
My chest tightened with longing,
and I announced to the collective household,
I'm going for a walk, and I walked. And walked.
And walked.
I finally come to rest at the top of a green hill,
flung myself down in a bed of sweet clover
and closed my eyes.
I didn't care about the dampness or dirt;
I wanted to bury my face in all of it,
wanted to sink into the dirt like a seed,
hide just inches beneath the topsoil,
feel the warmth of the sun as I began to sprout.
I imagined myself growing, leaves reaching
roots burrowing, spreading, getting stronger.
I imagined bursting forth—a new creation,
a blossom opening, the scent of me carrying
for miles and miles as I waved in the breeze.



"whimsically wild" By: Gina Gidaro

On Trees and Growing Up

BY: JOHN BLAYLOCK

There was a tree that grew through a hole in the back deck at my grandparents' house. The hole was meticulously cut around the tree, and my brother and cousins and I would shove pinecones through the space between the edge of the hole and the trunk of the tree. When we were young, the space was large enough to push even the biggest pine cones through and watch them disappear into the void. They'd fall into the darkness and roll out onto the path that led to the front of the house. When we ran out of pinecones, we'd retrieve the fallen ones, run back to the hole, and start all over again. I'd like to think we stopped because the tree grew and as the trunk got wider, the space diminished. The truth is we grew up before the tree did and simply stopped trying.

My grandparents lived in a town called Paradise. Some people think of paradise as a tropical vacation spot where the water is clear and Mai Tais are delivered straight to your beach chair. My Paradise was cold. Maybe I'm remembering the mornings or the winters, or maybe I just like cold days better and choose to associate memories of Paradise with the kind of weather I prefer today; it was a crisp kind of cold, and, in my mind's eye, as I walk up the steep driveway that leads from Roe Road to the front of the house, I pass the mailbox on the left and the quails forever nestled in the bushes on the right. When I reach the top of the hill and pass through the large gate of the chain-link fence, I choose between the path that runs alongside the house and the one that passes the carport and the shed and the woodpile. Both paths have been well-traveled and lead to the back of the house, so they both lead to the tree.

In 2018, a fire raced through Paradise that destroyed most of what I remember, including the house that had once belonged to my grandparents. "Paradise is burning," my cousin said in a text when news of the fire broke. The subtext was clear: "Our childhood is burning." By this time, my grandparents were gone, and the house had long since been sold. My brother and I had driven through Paradise four months prior on a road trip. We passed by the house and decided not to knock on the door, as we knew the inside would feel unfamiliar, and it would have been awkward for the new owners if we'd started pushing pine cones through a hole in the back deck. Four months later it was gone. The house. The deck. The hole. The tree? The quail? If my brother and I had known then, on that road trip, that it would be our last chance to see what our childhood memories had grown up to be, would we have changed our minds and knocked on the door?

My parents planted a camphor tree in the backyard of our house in Orange, California when I was born. I grew up believing it was my tree and, even as a kid, considered it a symbol of who I was and who I would become. By the time I was twelve it had died, though for the longest time it just sat, alive, but not growing.

I was horrified that the thing representing all I was destined to be had died. When we finally removed the tree, we planted a time capsule of family heirlooms and notes and toys at the spot where the tree once stood. I think there's even a picture of the camphor tree in the box, but I don't think the people who will eventually dig it up will understand that the tree in the photo represented a kid who was afraid of dying before getting the chance to find his light. They'll just think this family had a weird obsession with a tree. And maybe that's true too.

A few months ago, I watched the news with a similar sorrow to what I felt when Paradise was burning as a fire raced through Lahaina, Maui, a place I'd also come to love after many years of spending New Year's Eve there. As I'm writing this, the media reports signs of life sprouting from the Lahaina Banyan Tree. Does that mean there's hope? Must there always be a metaphor? A part of me wants to drive back to Paradise and see if the tree is still there even though the deck is gone. Why am I so drawn to the hopeless optimism I find in trees? Maybe I think the natural world knows things we don't and so it's worth paying attention. Or maybe I just like trees.

My parents still live in the house where I grew up, and a few years ago my dad had an arborist over to his backyard. The yard was full of trees now, and there was one tree in the back that had mysteriously crept up and was taller than the others, a tree my dad didn't remember.

"What's that tree?" my dad asked Joaquin, the arborist.

"That's a camphor tree," Joaquin replied.

How it got there was anyone's guess. Joaquin said it was unlikely that it had come from roots of the old tree, though it was probable a bird had a seed and dropped it. A seed from the original tree? Sure. Optimism again? Maybe. Metaphor? If you'd like. I don't think the new tree represents all I'm destined to be, just like I don't think "all I'm destined to be" means the same thing now as it did when I was twelve. But I do know that this new camphor is big and just as mysterious as the void that was once underneath my grandparents' deck.

John Blaylock lives in California and holds an MFA from New York University. He teaches creative writing at Chapman University and California School of the Arts and is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild.







“Koi Fish” By: Nanthini Raj

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Slide Gently Into the Water

JENNA BEAN VEATCH

My child is the most beautiful person that has ever walked the face of the earth, and he can't even walk yet, because he's only six-and-a-half months old, and while he is an incredibly amazing baby, even incredibly amazing babies can't walk at six-and-a--half months.

Or,

My child is the most beautiful person who has ever lived, and so far he has only lived for 200 days, which means that in Earth's 4.53 billion years of existence, there have only been 200 days (or maybe 203 by the time you read this) of the most gut-flopping, breath-sucking, squeal inducing beauty the world has ever known.

See, he looks like this:



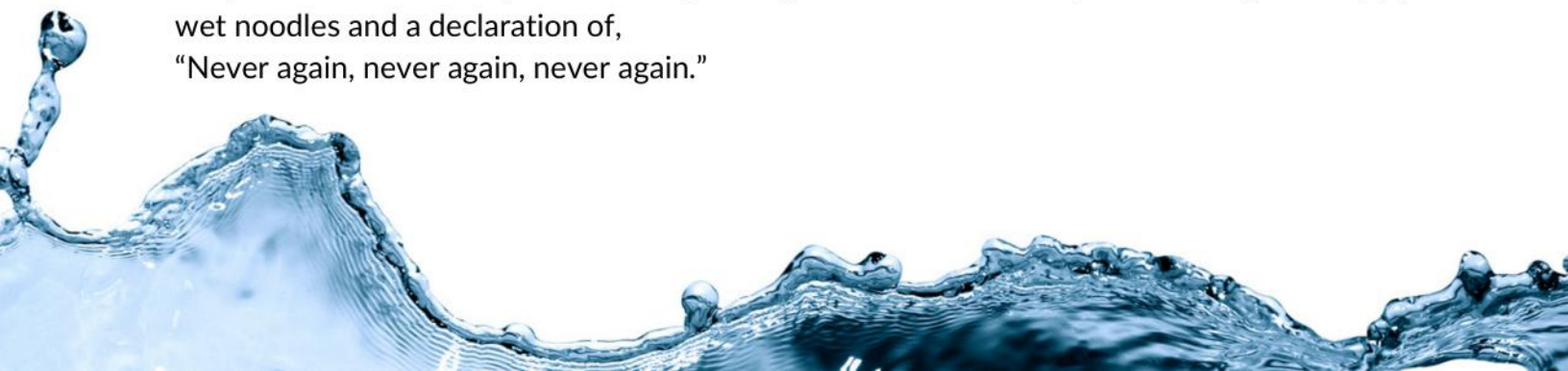
What I really mean is,
I did not know I could love this much.
What I really mean is,
I love him so much that sometimes I am terrified.
What I really mean is,
beneath this outrageous, radiating, vibrating joy
is a deep sadness
that comes from knowing that someday
he will leave.
And leave.
And leave and leave and leave.
And I don't want to burden him with that sadness.

•••



•••

In my dream, there is a house.
On a cliff.
By the sea.
In the house hangs a trapeze.
I surprise my brilliant trapeze artist friend
by telling her that I want to make an act for the trapeze.
Surprise her because my one lesson years ago had ended with my arms feeling like floppy
wet noodles and a declaration of,
“Never again, never again, never again.”



But I have decided that I can find shapes and movements that don't require the massive biceps I lack,
that I can create the illusion of strength,
and that the illusion is enough
for the sake of beauty
and getting to fly.

The house is for sale.
I am not the buyer
(I can't buy a house, not even in my dreams),
but I am there.
The buyers are a couple.
A man, a woman. Maybe some kids.

When the idea of jumping is first brought out into the open, I am a solid "Hell no." The rock table is flat just beneath the surface of the water below.
But after some discussion, I am ultimately convinced that the wind will help me clear it.
And so,
I do it.
I jump.

And the wind changes, and I know I will not make it.
Suspended in the air, I speak the words aloud.
"I am dying."
And then,
"Tell my mom I died happy. Tell her I was living in joy."
I want her to know.
Because I am.
Now, finally, I am living in joy.

I come down onto the rock
and,
cushioned by my own soft flesh,
slide gently into the water.

I do not die.



"Rainy Day" By: Nanthini Raj

Man On the Moon

BY: NORLA CHEE

a dog day's night
august heat flashes flare
flowers sigh to lay skin bare
summer's heat refuses to relent to twilight
each laying claim to the other side
moon and sun like brothers scuffle
diamonds twinkle beneath window ruffles
like naughty boys stealing wide-eyed
peeks under lady's skirts
moon's amorous fame flames passion
like drought thirsty roses baskin'
in a rare mornin' mist in the desert
wearing only a sprinkle of rose
cut fresh from the stem this full moon
lying on satin sheets anticipating soon
the relief of monsoon flows
below the open window roses
stick out their tongues intuiting the rain
i lie open almost insane
under the lune's titillating closeness
exposed to the energy of the first strikes
of lightening against the solitary night
just as rain brings respite
the man on the moon winks at my delight

Norla Chee was born to the Oneida Turtle Clan and born for the Navajo Tower House Clan. She lives in New Mexico and sews doll clothes and quilts while watching old westerns when not writing.

When I Learned Enya's Castle was 20 minutes away (Donegal, Ireland)

BY: AMANDA HAYDEN

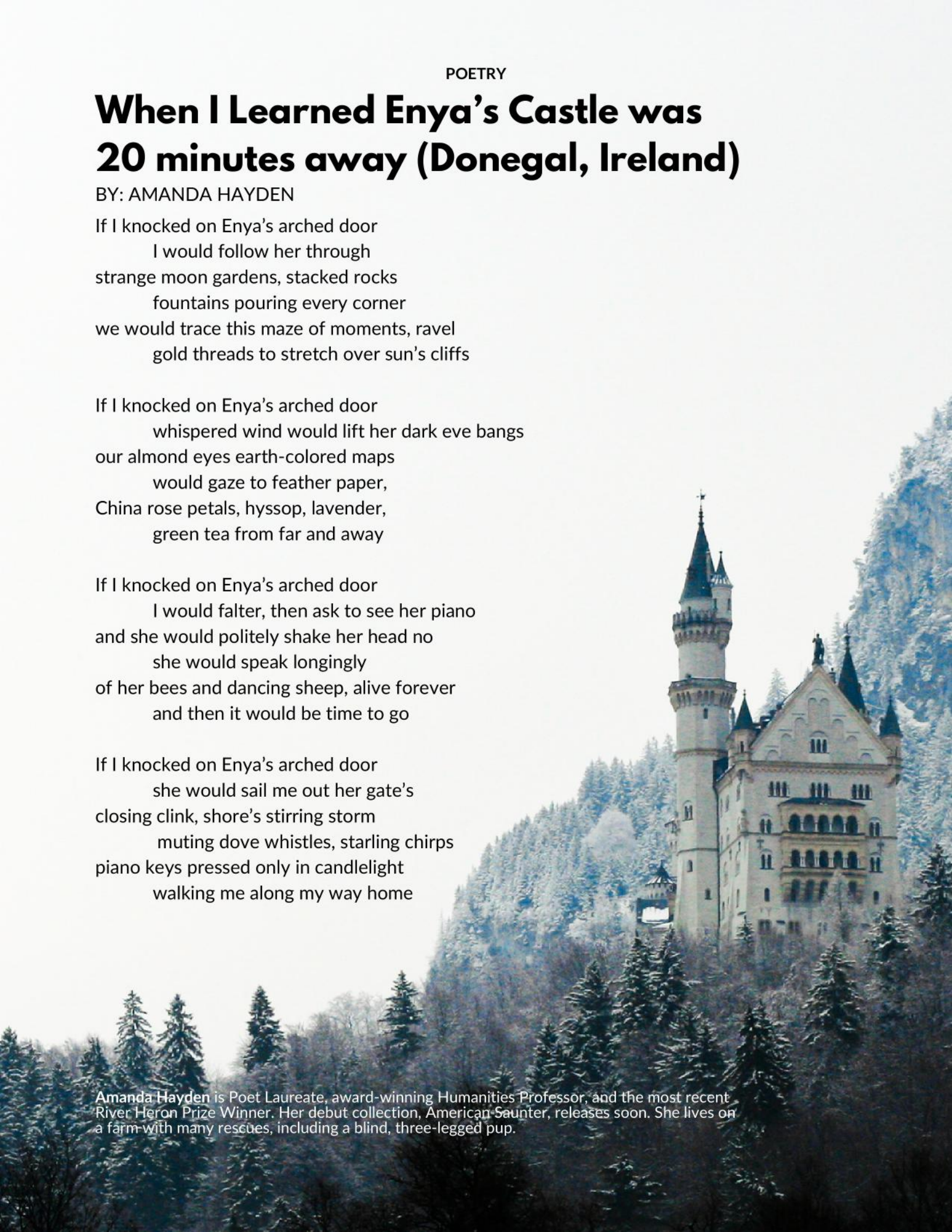
If I knocked on Enya's arched door
I would follow her through
strange moon gardens, stacked rocks
fountains pouring every corner
we would trace this maze of moments, ravel
gold threads to stretch over sun's cliffs

If I knocked on Enya's arched door
whispered wind would lift her dark eye bangs
our almond eyes earth-colored maps
would gaze to feather paper,
China rose petals, hyssop, lavender,
green tea from far and away

If I knocked on Enya's arched door
I would falter, then ask to see her piano
and she would politely shake her head no
she would speak longingly
of her bees and dancing sheep, alive forever
and then it would be time to go

If I knocked on Enya's arched door
she would sail me out her gate's
closing clink, shore's stirring storm
muting dove whistles, starling chirps
piano keys pressed only in candlelight
walking me along my way home

Amanda Hayden is Poet Laureate, award-winning Humanities Professor, and the most recent River Heron Prize Winner. Her debut collection, *American Saunter*, releases soon. She lives on a farm with many rescues, including a blind, three-legged pup.



You Are Everything

BY: DAVID BANACH

Every moment is a lie, for nothing
ends and everything is forever
passing away.

This patch of sky, line of clouds,
marching one by one off stage,
extends even to the dark void heavens.

This passing breeze seeks the ends
of earth, and this sunlight ray rushes with you
off into an expanding universe, following
and leading, to the big bang beginning still with us.

And this grandchild in my arms is my
infant daughter and this fall morning, the day she
started school and that school is the square
brick building of my first grade, now
a home for old folks.

This now is then, and my elbows warm on
the car roof still rest next to yours, and the turtle we
saw still digs in the sand as we watch, turtles all
the way down, and I never can escape you any
more than these clouds can outrun the sky.

David Banach is a queer philosopher and poet in New Hampshire, where he tends chickens, keeps bees, and watches the sky. His poetry is featured in Neologism Poetry, Passionfruit Review, and Terse.

PHOTOGRAPHY

"Dreamscape" By: Sara Caporaletti



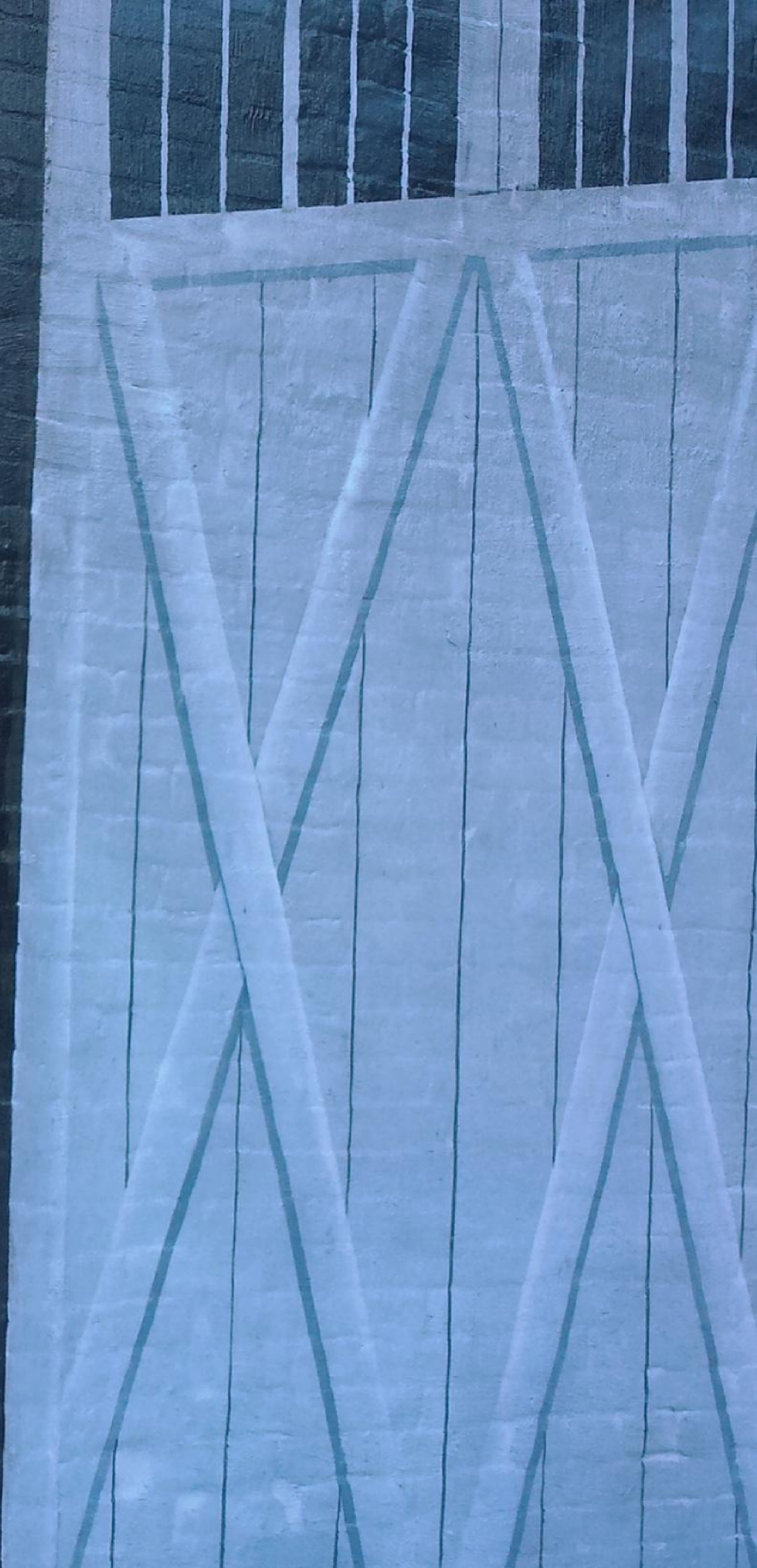
Someday Over the Rainbow

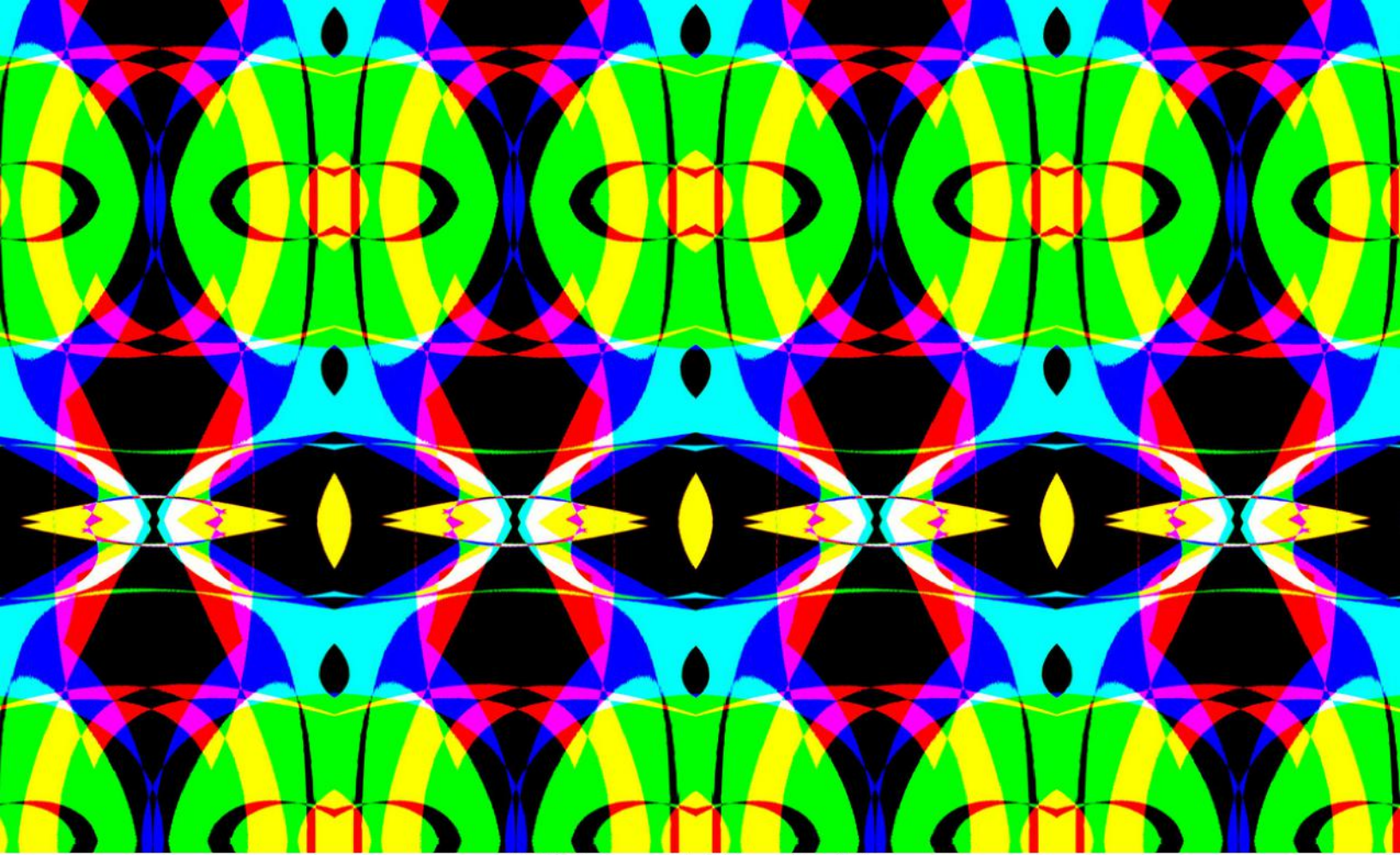
BY: IVANKA FEAR

You and I,
on an Alaskan cruise,
sail away on a crisp clear blue highway
reflections of white grey jagged gems
shimmering as we lean against the railing
hop on that Rocky Mountain train
slice through nature flanked by pristine aqua pools
visions of snow-capped Goliaths
overlooking pristine territory as we peer through the bubble
drive out east to see the ocean
follow the Cabot trail shrouded by a blanket of green
images of blue against blue expanse
mystical as we meander along the path
relax in our Caribbean water villa
wade in the crystal rejuvenating waters
sensation of silky pearly white sand through our toes
intoxicating as we sip exotic cocktails
visit the ancient cities of Europe
tour the historical sites of bygone civilizations
essence of mankind's spirit permeating our skin
immersing us in the culture as we explore the old ruins.
I, in self-isolation
on my shabby couch,
look out my window on a dreary November day
thoughts of history and nature and rainbows
dancing through my brain and hoping...
Someday

"Always Reaching" By: Gina Gidaro



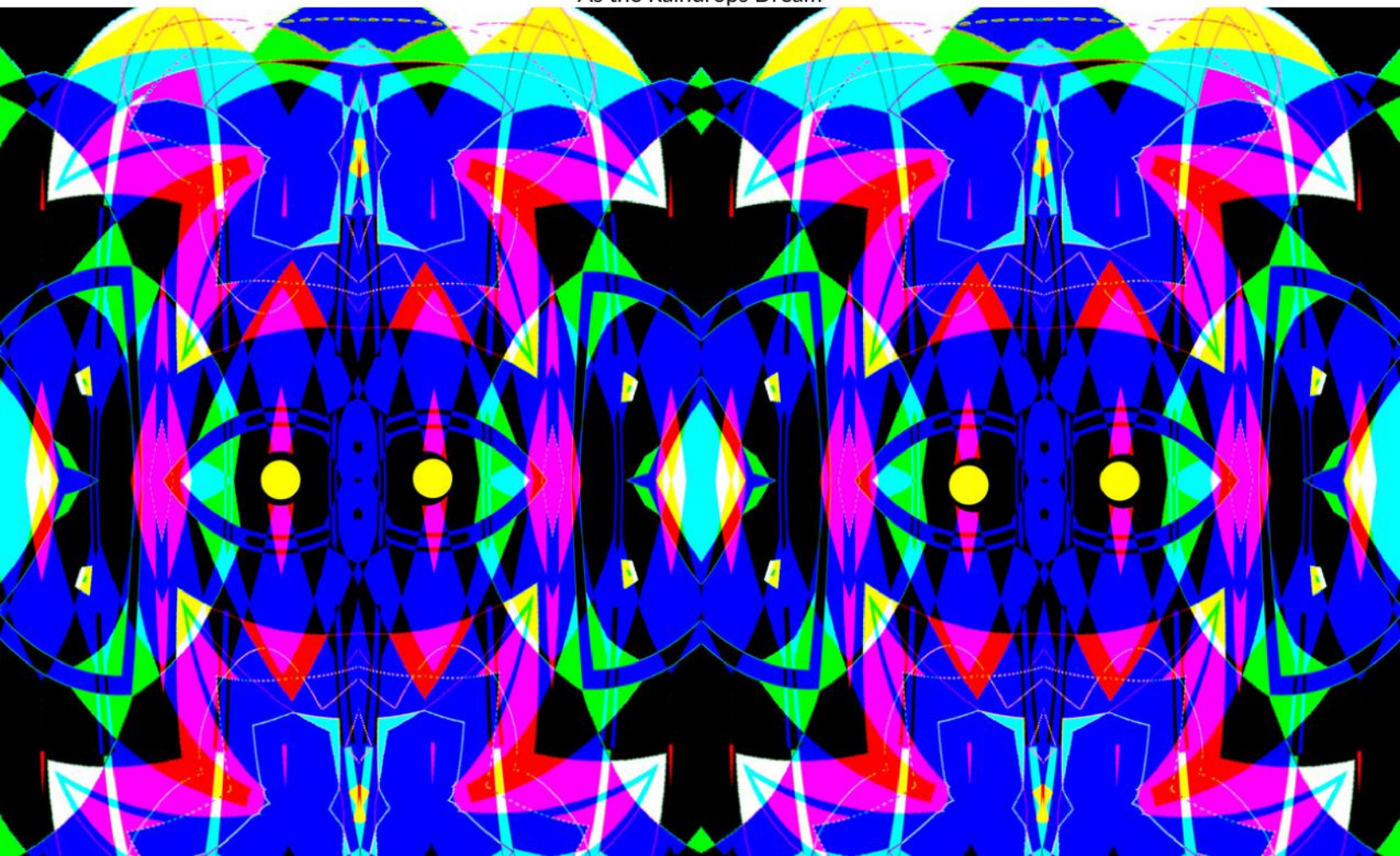




"Half Crazy on a Full Moon Day 1a"

Edward Michael Supranowicz grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has had artwork and poems published in the US and other countries.

"As the Raindrops Dream"



"House of Coves" By: Mia Amore Del Bando

Mia Amore Del Bando is a Mexican/Filipino author, photographer, and creator. Her poetry book Fragments of a Woman's Brain by Nymeria Publishing debuts in June 11th, 2024. Pre-Orders are available April 2024.





23.3.24

"Monte is Better Than You" By: Mia Amore Del Bando

"Your Highness" By: Mia Amore Del Bando



23.3.24

"Welcome to Wonderland" By: Mia Amore Del Bando





Abstract 167 By: Binod Dawadi

"Phone Photography" By: Cindy Hollenberger



Star-Crossed Lovers

BY: MARK HEATHCOTE

Vocally, you are a dream
With a baritone voice on the phone
But visually, I could drown
Eyeing your James Dean looks, your blue-eyed pouts
Lips as lush as two red plums
Oh, if we were star-crossed lovers
I would want to tighten the ligatures
Even if I was bleeding, drifting unpleasantly away...
Oh, if I could wink without a wry smile
I'd give you a wink that would make you smile
That would curve up for a while
Boy, you're such a reverie-
Oh, I could daydream,
You belong to me. You belong with me.
Oh, if we were star-crossed lovers
We could be lightening conductors
And yet set each other free, moving, dancing
Boy, you're such a catch in your ripped jeans
And your Converse all-star trainers
I believe the universe has brought you to me
Oh, if we were star-crossed lovers
I would want to tighten the ligatures
And cocoon in your arms, my heart and soul and even if
Changes came and gave me wings. I wouldn't fly
No, I wouldn't fly away from you.
Oh, because my heart is now as sticky
As superglue darling next to you.

Mark Andrew Heathcote is an adult learning difficulties support worker. He has poems published in journals, magazines, and anthologies online and in print. He resides in the UK and is from Manchester. Mark is the author of "In Perpetuity" and "Back on Earth," two books of poems published by Creative Talents Unleashed.

illecito permanente per tutto il tempo in cui non si provveda come la legge prescrive ai suddetti adempimenti, potendosi ipotizzare un nuovo reato permanente solo per l'epoca successiva alla condanna.

"The ruler once said" By: Daniela Ciccirelli

La tesi difensiva della società, la quale pretende di avere commesso una sola violazione della legge (che imponeva di preporre un soggetto iscritto nell'albo) essendosi astenuta dal provvedere alla preposizione, e non già di dover rispondere al

41 disciplinano gli effetti, operati dalla nuova normativa depenalizzate, non riguardano, esame, che già erano stati depenalizzati (L. n. 706 del 1975) per i generali in materia di successi (5945/82, *Foro it.*, Rep. 1982, voce 6824/82, *id.*, Rep. 1982, voce 149).

Last Words

BY: MAGGIE NERZ IRIBARNE

The room was completely still, oblivious to my demise. The fire waned, flickering in the grate. The wind howled on the moor, challenged the sides of the house, the window panes. Judith, also unaware of my passing, slept on the divan. I whispered her last words spoken to me, "Sister, we are running out of time!" She'd studied me with dry, serious eyes. Her hand held the pen above the page, pushing me to finish the book.

I didn't expect to linger, to have this sense of the room, all the spaces in the house. I could hear the maid Betsy's soft snores from her cold little bed upstairs. I regretted never giving her an extra shawl. I could feel the emptiness in Father and Bertram's rooms, the tightly made beds untouched for many years now. My senses exited the house, swept the moors. The purple heather, its insistent ubiquity, its persistent beauty, despite, in spite of recurring storms.

Ah! The expectant, waiting church bells, the hidden stars and sun and moon. Yes, things were much bigger than I imagined, but much smaller too. The rat scurried behind the kitchen cupboard, the broody chicken sat on her egg, the worker bees buzzed, warming their queen. I approached my sister's sleeping form. How beautiful and kind she was! The love I felt overwhelmed but did not sadden. I shifted my glance to examine my own body laid out stiff, lifeless on the opposing couch. I marveled at all that wasted time fussing, of smoothing my hair and pinching color into my cheeks, worrying about my scars, my plainness.

I examined the book's unfinished pages. The story lived on in my presence, my consciousness. I moved the pen, the words colluding, extending and twirling, spinning and swirling. The ending came, brighter than Judith and I imagined! I released our heroine, allowed her joy, new life. She would not be swallowed by grief and heartbreak. She would not wander the moors alone. I couldn't help myself! I laughed, a deep sound I didn't recognize as my own. It echoed within my own ears, reverberating down the halls of the house, out of doors.

"Tricia? Tricia!" Judith stirred, rose, crossing the planks to find my corpse. She fell across my chest and sobbed. She was the last of us left and I pitied her.

"Why do we attempt these long stories," she once asked me, "when we so often take ill, die so young, so quickly?"

“What else are we to do with the tales bobbing in our heads?” I replied, knowing it was not much of an answer. Judith, Bertram, and I spent our childhoods holding one another captive, spinning stories of dark woods and generous lords and mysterious ladies, spending wondrous, magical hours doing so. Without our mother, ours was a sad life. Our imaginations provided some escape.

Judith did not notice the finished book. Well before its discovery, she ran for the maid, Betsy, she waked and buried my body, she noticed the signs of her own consumption. When she finally found the unmoved book upon the desk, she read with amazement, assuming those last lines were her own forgotten inspiration. Pleased, she wrapped the pages and sent them to the publisher.

Soon, she passed too, cold in her own bed. With nothing left, the windows blew in, the papers scattered, the walls collapsed. Released from our stories, we flew from the page, the demands of story. Reunited, we whipped in the wind, loose, frenzied, free. In life, we believed composition our greatest joy. Now we knew something else.

Maggie Nerz Iribarne is 54, lives in Syracuse, NY, bakes up sometimes crispy, sometimes dense, sometimes fluffy cakes of curious people and places.

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Svolgimento del processo. — Con la sentenza ora impugnata per cassazione, il Tribunale di Oristano respingeva l'appello proposto da Rosina Fadda contro la sentenza del pretore della stessa città, con la quale, in adesione al parere espresso dal consulente tecnico d'ufficio, era stata disattesa la domanda di pensionamento per invalidità, avanzata dalla suddetta assicurata nei confronti dell'In.p.s.

Il tribunale rilevava che: il consulente del pretore, attraverso un'indagine completa ed esauriente, con sottoposizione del soggetto a tutti gli accertamenti clinici e diagnostici che le malattie menzionate facevano apparire necessari, quali la tachimetria e dioscopia del torace, la radiografia della colonna cervicale e lombare, l'eletrcardiogramma e la visita specialistica, aveva scoperto nell'assicurata « un'osteolombalgia senza caratteristiche definite funzionali, sindrome dispeptica con disturbi astenici, nevrosi, sindrome depressiva reattiva di modesta entità, miopia secondaria età » concludendo invece la lombovertebrale risultando del tutto normale della norma di paragonarsi ai radiogrammi di un individuo del medesimo sesso e della stessa età, e che, per tanto, procedeva all'opacimento

...na che lo stesso giudice nell'...
 ...za che si ripete non avrebbe
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 ...differenze tra i due istruiti, quali
 ...parqueti sono formulate solo a
 ...una sola delle parti, e in ogn'

FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 1

SPRING 2024

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