

# FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE  
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# EDITORIAL STAFF

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Melanie Han  
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Ana Surguladze  
Veronica Valerakis  
Colleen Halupa

## **WANT TO JOIN THE TEAM?**

Please visit our website for more information. [florafiction.com/contribute](http://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](http://florafiction.com/submit)

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The start of our third volume is themed, "New Beginnings." For the past two years, many have been asking, "When will we get back to normal?" The stark reality is, we are living in the "New Normal." As we learn to accept our situation as it is, as 2022 carries on, we carry our hopes, dreams, and desires to shed the negativity from the past. 222 is considered an "angel number" and can be seen as "beginning," which ties in with its meaning as a representation of a new start.

For some, the change can be slow and painful. For others, change forces people to adapt quickly. A new beginning can be a New Year, or just a dream revisited. You don't have to change much, or at all. Conversely, you can change everything about yourself. Your life is up to you.

Take this time to be kind to yourself. You have gotten this far, and whatever you have in store, you are ready for. Take a peak at our issue filled with art, photography, poetry, and short fiction to see what this theme means to others around the world. Inspire your own New Beginning.

*xoxo*  
*Flora Ashe*





"Credentials" by Clair Gaston

## Rose Knows

BY: ZACH MURPHY

Every autumn day Rose passes by the hot air balloon field in Stillwater, wishing she had enough money in order to go up for just one ride.

Last winter had not just taken a toll on Rose, it took nearly everything she had left. Now, she has a frostbitten toe and a frostbitten heart.

Rose knows that even the happiest golden leaves grow weary when they catch the first gust of winter's harsh might. Rose knows that if the sun ever decides to go away for good she'll try to make it promise to come back. Rose knows that if she would have had her life together, her adopted boy Frankie would still talk to her.

Across the air balloon field, sits a pawn shop. A pawn shop is a depressing place when you've got nothing to pawn, nothing to sell, and not enough means to buy anything. A job application turns into a hopeless slate the moment you see "Three years of experience needed."

After staring at her weathered reflection in the pawnshop window, Rose turns around toward the field and observes an unattended hot air balloon. She crosses through the dewy green grass, looks around, and decides to hop into the balloon's gondola.

The balloon is much bigger than Rose thought it would be. Her eyes widen as she gazes up at the balloon's bright rainbow colors. Suddenly, a pair of balloon tour guides run toward her, yelling "Stop!"

Rose quickly unravels the ropes from the ground, boosts the propane flame, and takes off into the sky. From this view, the falling leaves look like fluttering butterflies. Rose knows that when she comes down she'll be in a lot of trouble. So she squints up at the sun and gives the balloon some more power.

**Zach Murphy** is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His debut chapbook *Tiny Universes* (Selcouth Station Press, 2021) is available in paperback and e-book. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.



# BLUE

BY: JENNIE NOONKESTER

Standing on the beach, feeling the wet sand squish between my toes, and letting the tension of the late school year fuse out of my soul into nature, I close my eyes. I hear a constant and comforting sound as the waves reverberate through and around me. It is quiet except for the sound of the motion of the waves and the occasional bleep of a gull in the sky.

“I am finally here,” whispered to the bird.

The motion brings tranquility and a kind of composure to my frazzled soul. As I move toward the water, its cool touch pacifies and appeases my spirit. With each step in a descending plain until the tops of the waves touch my elbows, I catch a glimpse of the panoramic dome that encases humankind. The color is brilliant as the Memorial Day breeze touches my nose. The ocean and sky seem to play with one another and hold hands. Their mold took form in the most sacred and ancient of days. They are separate but the same. The water that I touch one day soon will evaporate, become a cloud, and burst forth filling up the deep. The waves play and argue, and they heal me. The radiant color speaks to me: it calms my fear. It is majestic. No wonder Jesus retreated to the boats among fishermen to find rest and friendship. The beautiful blue mixes, plays, and makes the earth unique and mysterious. The little fish amuse themselves beneath my back as I float with my toes and face to the sky. The sun reflects the blue hues all around me. I feel God for a moment shining on me. I know it is the sun because I learned this as a young child; however, my soul believes it is something more. The warm beams comfort my hurting and tired soul. Let the blue color fill me: may it wash away my struggles.

**Jennie Noonkester** is a high school teacher with two boys living in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. She graduated from William Carey University with a Masters of Education degree.





"The Knower in the Womb" by Anastasia Kytsebina

Anastasia Kytsebina is an 18-year-old from a province near Yekaterinburg.





"Night in Songzhaun" by Mauricio Paz Viola

Paz Viola is an Uruguayan contemporary artist, currently lives in Beijing, China.



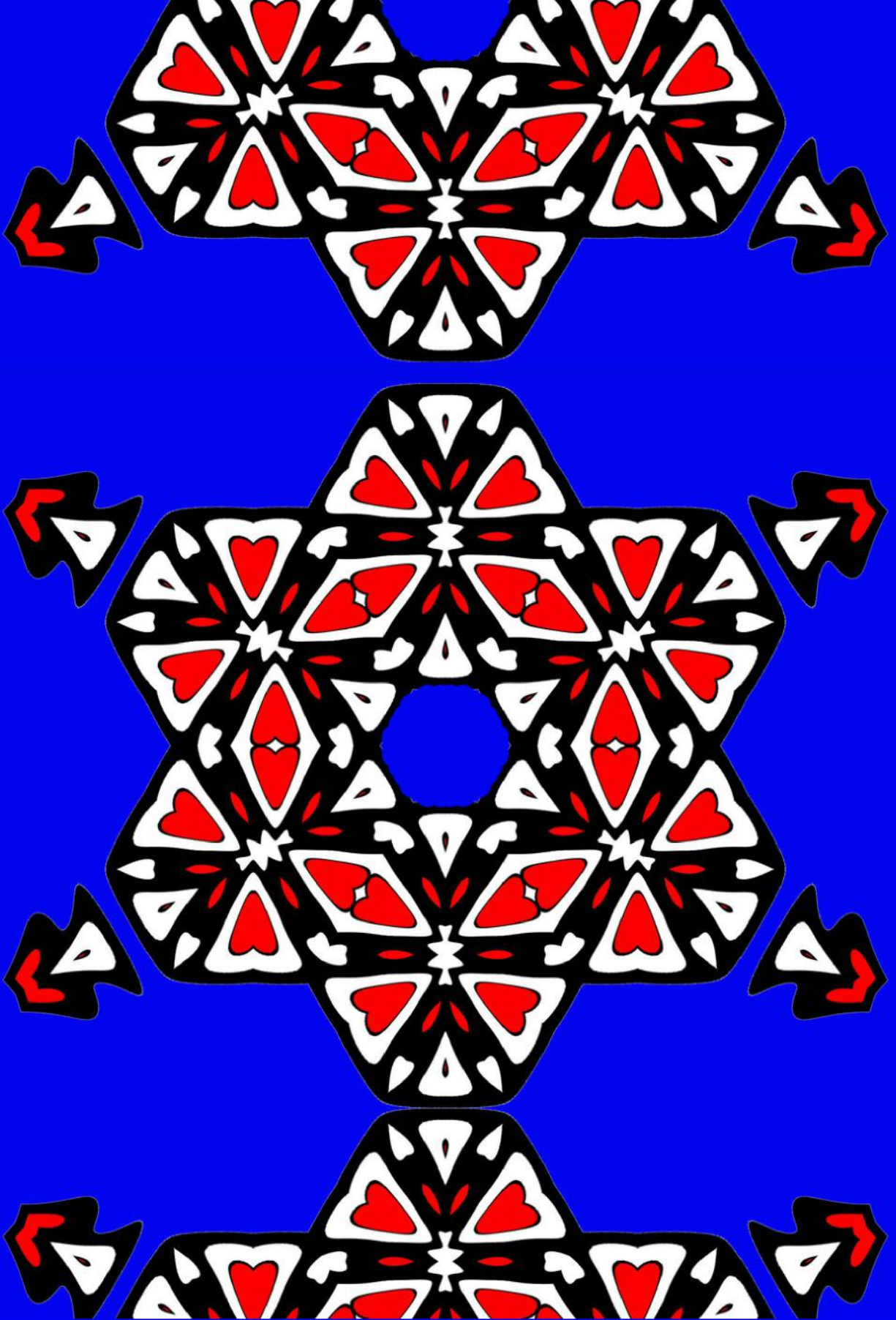
# Don't give up, the beginning is always the hardest.

BY: DUANE ANDERSON

I ran the marathon,  
but the beginning was the easiest,  
my legs were fresh,  
I wasn't sweating, or running out of breath,  
but maybe I had it all wrong,  
and if I had given it much thought  
on the number of miles I had to run,  
I may have been psyched out,  
giving me second thoughts  
of not running it at all,  
but I held fast, finishing the race,  
walking across the finish line with a smile.

**Duane Anderson** currently lives in La Vista, NE. He is the author of 'Yes, I Must Admit We Are Neighbors,' 'On the Corner of Walk and Don't Walk,' and 'The Blood Drives: One Pint Down.'





"Heart Roulette" By: Edward Michael Supranowicz

Edward Michael Supranowicz has had artwork, poems, and flash fiction published in the USA and other countries.





# Switch

BY: PETER ANDERSON

It's this or run the risk. It'll be awkward at first. Intentional beginnings frequently are. Intermittent burst of endorphins will ease the transition, followed by a calm that mimics sunrise. Bird twitter in the distance, a feeling that all's right with the world, this new world, new to you, not to others, not to those who've been here waiting for you all along. And of course they're better at it, they've had more time but don't compare. Before you know it, you'll be like them. A pro, an adept. Comfortable in your skin and in that easy chair after a hard day's. You'll know every word before it's spoken, exactly when and how a particular spoon is going to be lifted seconds before it is, the angle and rate of acceleration. Deja vu will be your second cousin, your childhood friend. Then one day with a start you'll realize predictability's seeped in through the cracks despite all the weather stripping. It's that time again. Already? You want to ask, but don't. It's either this or run the risk.

**Peter Anderson** grew up outside Detroit and now lives in Vancouver, Canada. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Unbroken*, *Sublunary Review*, the *American Journal of Poetry*, *MoonPark Review*, *Best Microfictions 2022* and others.



"Fishing for Answers" By: Ellen Wallenstein







"Animal Tubes By: Ellen Wallenstein

**Ellen Wallenstein** was born and raised in NYC. She is an artist, photographer and professor of art. Since 2020, she has been making daily cyanotypes on cloth, with flowers, cubes, animal totems and glass-plate negatives.











"Pond of Snow" by Davidson Sauveur

**Davidson Sauveur** is a multimedia artist who takes inspiration from nature and explores the unknown. In efforts to achieve a meaningful visual.







# Writer, Revisited

BY: SARAH DAVID

Today I dropped off containers of old pills,  
 Peeling off the labels of Dexamethasone,  
 Ondansetron,  
 Loperamide,  
 Prochlorperazine.  
 Peeling off the year I spent bald  
 and placing it into the blue and white container.  
 I sealed it shut.

Today I sat in a green chair with a folding armrest,  
 One where nurses draw your blood.  
 I stare into a yellow sign,  
 "Call, Don't Fall",  
 its triangle the only distraction in sight  
 Magnetic waves soon heat my body,  
 Clicking as they switch currents: the sounds of alien warfare.  
 My doctor knows pain in four languages,  
 but I can't even find my mother tongue when  
 chemo's fog steals my words:  
 A writer without a voice.

I've counted days in needle sticks and IV bags,  
 The time I couldn't  
 Pull  
 air  
 into  
 my  
 lungs  
 Sending in a flurry of nurses,  
 oxygen tanks and blood pressure cuffs,  
 Earning myself extra steroids and saline,  
 an extra hour in four beige walls.

Today I left the hospital, arms wrapped tight  
 in bloodied gauze,  
 But I felt wind through opened windows,  
 felt your hands on my hips,  
 Watched sunsets bleed into dust,  
 and children grow into new shoes,  
 Cried for those without a cure,  
 and held their echoes in my heart.

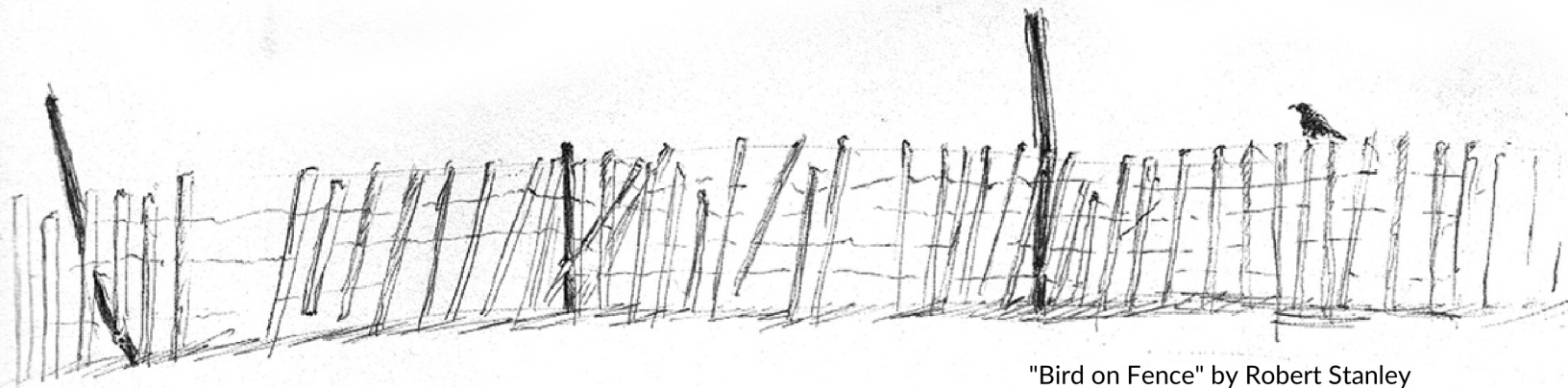
**Sarah Davis** is an English teacher with an MA in Creative Writing from Northern Michigan University. My short fiction has appeared in Harpoon Review, Thrice Fiction, and elsewhere.





"Untitled" by Davidson Sauveur





"Bird on Fence" by Robert Stanley

## The Call of the Wild

BY: HOLLI TERRELL-CAVALLUZZI

On the other side of the moon  
there is stillness.

Barn owls shower supersonic  
sound among the pine trees.  
There is a world untouched by human hands.  
Nature, unfixed in its belongings.

The world borders human yard-  
where wild life merges  
a hypervigilant green lawn.  
Faux green grass  
as green as turf green can be.  
On the other side  
of the moon  
is where I will be.  
Collecting bright  
Unkempt moonlight.  
Nature.  
A world I call all my own,  
once in a while.

**Holli Terrell-Cavalluzzi** lives in Wilmington, North Carolina, where she's made a home by the coast. She spends her days writing poetry and prose, which started in graduate school somewhere between practicing yoga and attending classes.





Resolved Mystery" by Robert Stanley

**Robert Stanley** makes artworks probing causes and effects beyond what can be first seen, the chaotic connections of life. He has exhibited and is in public and private collections around the USA and Europe.





"On the Dot"  
Aurelija Pestene





"On the Dot" by Aurelija Pestene

**Aurelija Pestene** is a lithuanian mixed media artist based in Denmark with a batchelor degree in applied photography.



## Soon to Graduate

BY: EILEEN SATERIALE

A box of spiders from a toddler's old shoebox rests in the young man's room along with some plastic dinosaurs and action figures. The little boy used to play with those toys and create interesting stories.

He knew the names of all of the spiders and dinosaurs.

He loved having them fight each other with one proclaiming victory over the death of another.

Of course, boys did not play with dolls, so he had a collection of actions heroes lined up on the dresser.

Now fantasy novels and college textbooks are scattered all over the room.

A computer hard drive sits in the corner.

I remember the day this boy was born.

Soon he will graduate from college.

It will be interesting to see what he does with his life and what becomes of the box of spiders

**Eileen Sateriale** lives in Massachusetts with her husband of over thirty-five years. She has had poetry, short stories and non-fiction articles published in print and on-line media.







# Too Much Weight to Carry

BY: BARBARA HURWITZ

**W**earing twenty unwanted pounds and bearing the weight of a critical mother, Eleanor was determined to free herself of both. But today, she had to find a mother-approved, Saks Fifth Avenue labeled, black dress required for walking down the aisle at her baby sister's wedding.

Her grip tightened on the steering wheel as she trolled the aisles of cars in the Saks lot. When finding no sign of her mother's white Jag, her shoulders fell from her ears, and she resigned herself to the task.

"Ugh! These doors are so damn heavy. Must have been designed to keep the weak out," she muttered to herself stepping into the perfume-scented vestibule.

The shopping experience was far less painful than imagined and in less than an hour, she was prancing back toward the exit swinging a tissue stuffed shopping bag. That's when she heard the grating sound of every syllable in her name stretched out in song. Eleanor bit the inside of her cheek and froze in place. You can do this, she told herself.

"Eleanor," her mother said again as she sashayed closer. "Tell me you finally got a dress for the wedding."

"Yes, I did." Eleanor stretched herself a bit taller, stiffening her backbone.

"Well, let me see. Take it out," her mother said helping herself.

"Oh honey, this is the same dress Julie's wearing, and she's already had hers shortened and taken in at the waist. You'll have to return this."

A tight-lipped smile traveled up to Eleanor's eyes, and she nodded while pushing the shopping bag into her mother's arms.

"You know, Mother, I'll just have to wear that backup dress I have from Target," she said employing the affected French pronunciation. "Now, be a dear, and return this for me. I've really gotta run."

Eleanor blew an air kiss in her mother's direction before letting the heavy door ease shut between them.

**Barbara Hurwitz** is a veteran teacher who has found a new voice through creative writing. She enjoys writing flash fiction and poetry.









Get drawn in by the currents  
that always pull you back  
to help you remember  
where to find a  
better version of you.

"Get Drawn In" by Maggie Swofford

Get drawn in by the currents  
that always pull you back  
to help you remember  
where to find a



# Life's Force

BY: THOMAS ELSON

**O**n track to win his third consecutive Sacred Heart Invitational basketball tournament - his major contribution since becoming pastor of the parish where he was baptized - he paced in front of the bleachers yelling, "Full court press!" "Rebound! Rebound!"

Then, from the stands? A sound. A forgotten voice.

Is that-? Don't look up. Just coach your game.

At the age of forty-two he was a monsignor, a mostly ceremonial title, nevertheless, his mother was proud. She seemed almost eager to present the white cloth she received at her son's ordination. She had rehearsed her response to St. Peter's ultimate question, "What have you done for the Lord?" At which point she would hand him the cloth, then reply, "I gave Him my son." With a mother like that it was hard to stay grounded.

It had been a long haul for both mother and son since Sister Hildegard recognized his ability to learn quickly and retain facts with ease. Then, a few years later, Sister Margareta discovered his skills in writing and public speaking. The bishop provided a scholarship to Notre Dame. He emerged seven years later with two seasons of varsity basketball, a degree in Religious Studies, and, to the surprise of everyone, except his mother, an M.B.A. Within a year after his ordination, he had successfully negotiated his first assignment by avoiding the hazards of a jealous pastor, eccentric parishioners, and miniskirts.

After the basketball game, in his bedroom at the rectory, he placed his Roman collar in the top dresser drawer. He lifted the cloth separating his collar from the bottom of the drawer. An old Brownie snapshot - two and a quarter inches square with edges as if trimmed with pinking shears. Pre-Kodachrome - whites too white, grays almost transparent, patterns nearly indistinguishable.

He had kept the photo since that night during their senior year when they parked and climbed into the backseat. On a whim, before he took her home, they drove to their old grade school, walked to the south wall. He twisted the film advance on the side of the camera. Placed his thumb on the shutter lever. Shifted his eyes toward the viewfinder. He felt his thumb slip off the lever. He wiped his fingers on his shirt. At that moment, with only the moon and a streetlight, she smiled, moved her blouse off her right shoulder, posed, and said, "Take the picture. Now." He repositioned his thumb. A split second before he flicked the lever, she swirled and hiked her skirt as if dancing the can-can.

The intensity of that moment – a detour before entering the seminary – he carried deep inside as an invisible badge. That touch of life most seminarians had not experienced, and tonight it re-emerged when he heard her voice in the stands.

He often wished he could contemplate about more spiritual matters, because the things he did think about carpet-bombed him with guilt. Nonetheless, he was much sought after in the confessional; since, irrespective of the sin, he gave a gentle penance and always asked his parishioners to pray for him.



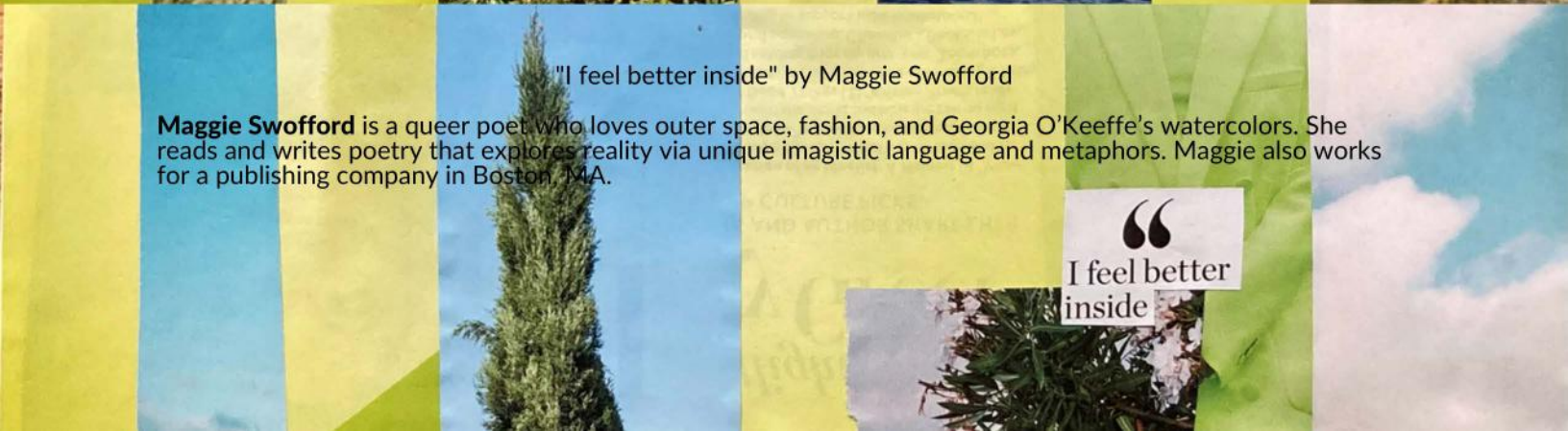


“  
I feel better  
inside”

"I feel better inside" by Maggie Swofford

**Maggie Swofford** is a queer poet who loves outer space, fashion, and Georgia O'Keeffe's watercolors. She reads and writes poetry that explores reality via unique imagistic language and metaphors. Maggie also works for a publishing company in Boston, MA.

“  
I feel better  
inside”























20/2/22

"Proud" by Nicola Brayen

Nicola  
Brayen









"Cyanotype Ferns" by Hope Friedland





"Cyanotype Ferns" by Hope Friedland

**Hope Friedland** is an award-winning visual artist, working in watercolor and mixed media. She also creates artists' books. She writes articles about art education, teach people of all ages and direct a large group of artists.



# Another Look

BY: MORIAH HAMPTON

The third time he cut through the yard I decided to follow him. I'd just laid my son down for his afternoon nap when I noticed the same man, wearing the same army jacket and hunting cap, clearing a path from the road. He's not a stranger here, I thought, passing my brother Daniel's old room on my way downstairs. Outside, I walked around the house and spotted the man close to the field out back. I started towards him without concern for what I might say when we met. Coming near, I began to notice characteristics that were already familiar: curly black hair stuck out from his cap, his left foot dragging with every step. I began to recognize the man, sure that I knew him just as I knew Daniel had lived in the room upstairs of our parents' old house. Yet I couldn't explain how I knew him. It was like trying to picture a room behind a door that had always been closed. A surge passed through me. I grew determined to see who the man really was. Before I could reach out to pat his shoulder, he turned swiftly. I looked up as his features erased his entire face. He stiffened, then said, "I won't do it again." He left while I watched his figure grow frail against the field.

Afterward, I stood in Daniel's room for the first time since the movers took his things away. For years, my parents kept his room exactly the same. I couldn't after we moved in. I looked at the empty room, at the walls, the floor, the closet. I looked for any remaining sign of him as my son stirred awake down the hall.

**Moriah Hampton** received her Ph.D. in Modernist Literature from SUNY-Buffalo. Her fiction, poetry, photography, and photopoetry have appeared in *Wordgathering*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Brief Wilderness*, *The Sonder Review*, and elsewhere.





"Dog Walk" by Regina Silvers

**Regina Silvers** is a Carter Burden Gallery and NYArtistsCircle Steering Comm member. Former teacher, art consultant, museum spokesperson, gallery director, TriBeCa StudioTour director; Manager of The White Street Studio, TriBeCa, NYC, where she draws and paints.



## FRESH BEGINNING

BY: DUANE ANDERSON

Morning headed into afternoon,  
afternoon into night,  
light into dark,  
a place where I had spent  
much of my life.

Show me where the light begins  
for one tired of living in the dark.  
Show me morning,  
a new day,  
cinnamon rolls fresh out of the oven.

**Duane Anderson** currently lives in La Vista, NE. He is the author of 'Yes, I Must Admit We Are Neighbors,' 'On the Corner of Walk and Don't Walk,' and 'The Blood Drives: One Pint Down.'

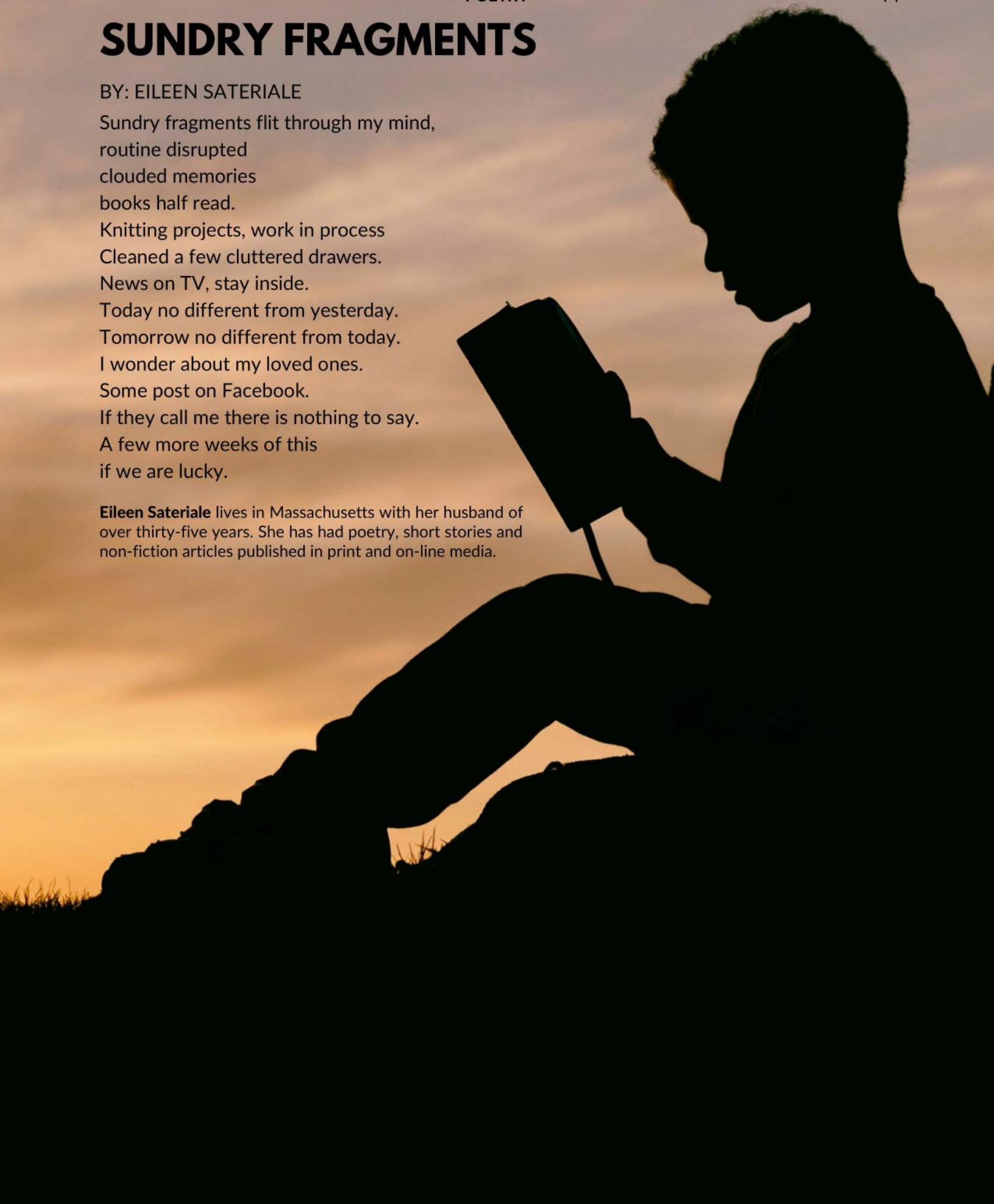


# SUNDRY FRAGMENTS

BY: EILEEN SATERIALE

Sundry fragments flit through my mind,  
routine disrupted  
clouded memories  
books half read.  
Knitting projects, work in process  
Cleaned a few cluttered drawers.  
News on TV, stay inside.  
Today no different from yesterday.  
Tomorrow no different from today.  
I wonder about my loved ones.  
Some post on Facebook.  
If they call me there is nothing to say.  
A few more weeks of this  
if we are lucky.

**Eileen Sateriale** lives in Massachusetts with her husband of over thirty-five years. She has had poetry, short stories and non-fiction articles published in print and on-line media.



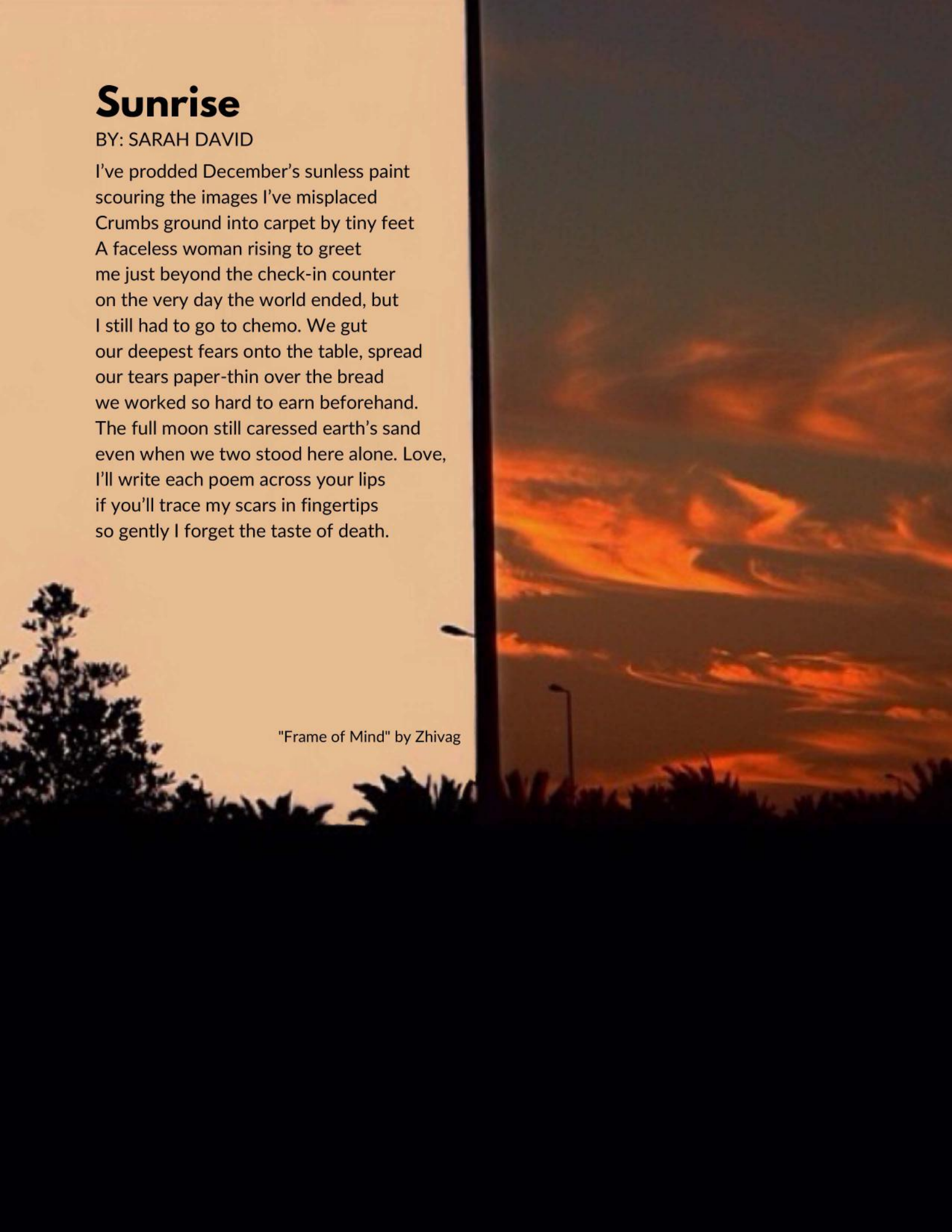


# Sunrise

BY: SARAH DAVID

I've prodded December's sunless paint  
scouring the images I've misplaced  
Crumbs ground into carpet by tiny feet  
A faceless woman rising to greet  
me just beyond the check-in counter  
on the very day the world ended, but  
I still had to go to chemo. We gut  
our deepest fears onto the table, spread  
our tears paper-thin over the bread  
we worked so hard to earn beforehand.  
The full moon still caressed earth's sand  
even when we two stood here alone. Love,  
I'll write each poem across your lips  
if you'll trace my scars in fingertips  
so gently I forget the taste of death.

"Frame of Mind" by Zhivag







**Zhivag** is self-taught artist with difficulty expressing herself in words. This is where art comes in, finding a way to say everything that is hidden between the lines. The skill to express onto a canvas with pure confidence and no shadow of doubt.





"Gaia" by Audrey Frank Anastasi





"Creation" by Audrey Frank Anastasi

**Audrey Frank Anastasi** is a prolific feminist artist, working in painting, drawing, collage, mixed media, & printmaking. She is also curator, gallerist, educator and arts advocate. She has had 20 solo & 200 group shows.







# Somewhere, Next Fall

BY: JAMES B. NICOLA

As Rome fell, you and I were somewhere, then,  
as chromosomes and genes, which found a way  
to become what we became, and rise again.

As Eve and Adam left the first garden  
we started to become. And on the day  
the Christ died, you and I were somewhere, then.

Through every war—yea, any time that men  
and women have wreaked harm, or gone astray,  
whatever we are, was, and rose again.

And here's the hope: That we have withstood ten  
thousand million losses, and still can say:  
If the world ends, we shall be somewhere, then,

able to act, or not act. Too often,  
it has been not, and there's been hell to pay.  
Yet whatever we were, managed to rise again!

Our issue—heirs, art, rage—shall be there when  
the end to come, comes; therefore I inveigh:  
That Fall shall find us somewhere, too—and then  
whatever we become, must rise again.

**James B. Nicola** is the author of six collections of poetry, the latest being *Fires of Heaven* (Shanti Arts). His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience: The Practical Guide to Live Performance* won a Choice award.



"Flowers for AVS" By Aristo Vopěnka

# Dear Dream Doctor

BY: RONY FÉRAT

Everything has bashed in  
then everything was healed.  
A lack of misery has caused  
that my dream is not fulfilled

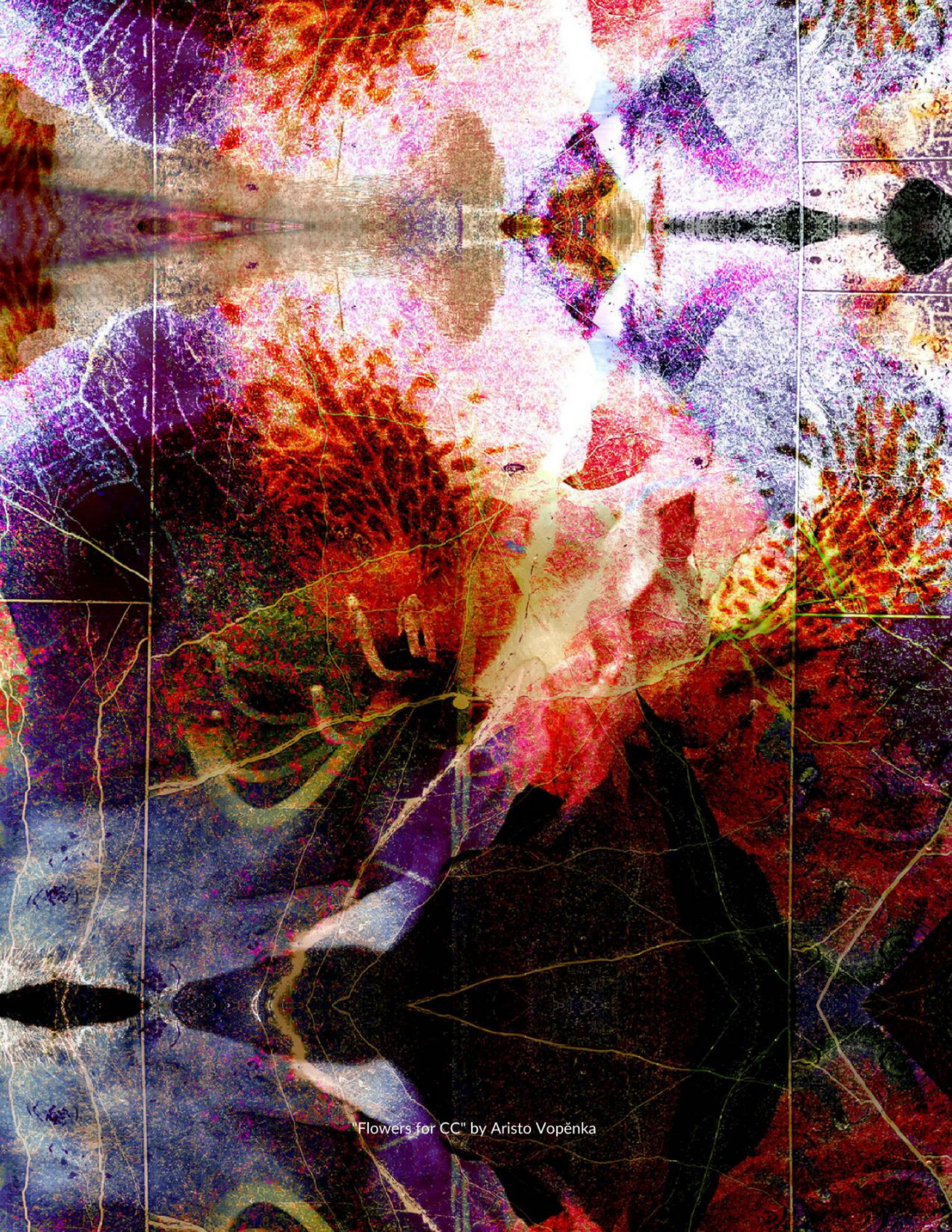
Yet,  
I dreamed about In and Deed:

The conspiring lady invited me in  
her front yard, she picked up the phone and I picked up the  
right card, both immediately fell for her blaze but the last  
moment arrived with her common-sense whose gaze was  
severe and whose deep regard would endorse - She is here, and  
together we will not reinforce  
our troop.

The deed is done  
with common-sense in loop.

Rony Férat lived on three continents and speaks four languages. She identifies hybrid formats, underlining the potential for the individual to belong to a group. She is a writer and a translator, a filmmaker and and a pedagogue.



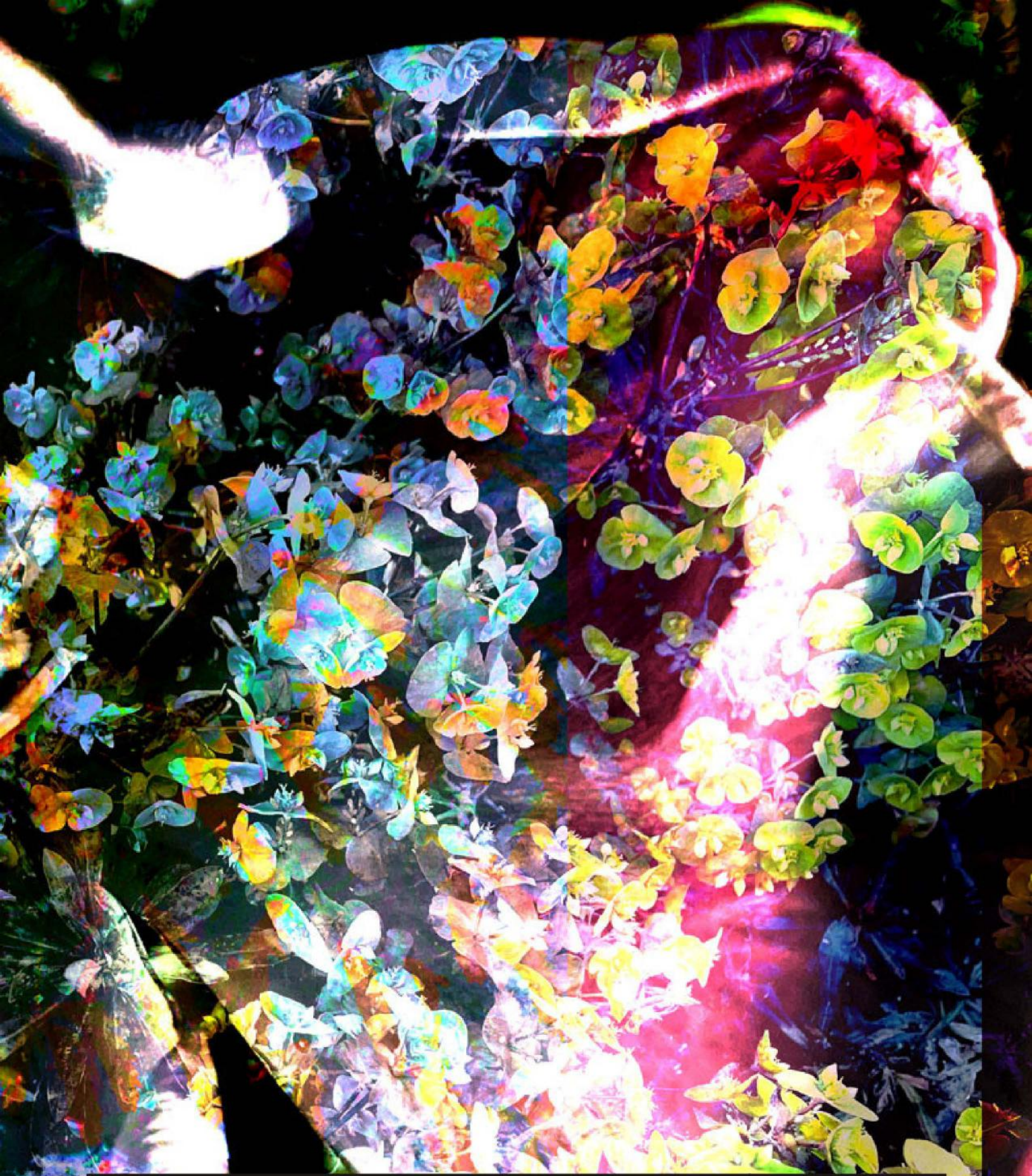


"Flowers for CC" by Aristo Vopěnka









"Flowers for MBA" by Aristo Vopěnka

**Aristo Vopěnka** is an artist and film director, born in the Netherlands and working from Brussels, Belgium. Vopěnka uses a variety of artforms, in his recent work Vopěnka explores the boundaries between photography, illustration, painting and print.



# If the See Stood Still

BY: LAUREN ROSE

what would you do  
if the moon  
sighed still  
if the ocean's riptide current  
sloshed still  
if the roar of salty chaos  
held  
suspended  
for one moment

for one moment  
if the wind  
shook still  
for one moment  
if the birds  
screamed still  
if the shifting sand  
swelled still  
stopped changing  
if the clicking clock  
held her tongue  
ticked  
none.

what would you do  
how would you change  
what would you say  
who would you hold

tick  
tick

**Lauren Rose** has a BFA in Creative Writing. Her previous work has been published by Cardinal Sins, Peregrine Journal, Running Wild Press, and others.















"Open"

**Beatriz Dominguez Aleman** is a Chilean-Puerto Rican photographer and Anthropologist who explores the themes of intersectional discrimination, gender and racism through the art of edited photography.





"Wake With the Dawn" by David Bromley

**David Bromley** is a teaching artist with a background in Fine Art Photography, Painting and Cartooning. He is based in Richmond, Virginia.

*David J. Bromley*







# Her Rehearsal

THOMAS ELSON

**A**n early August evening. Orange streaks slash the base of the horizon. Several stars and a few clouds emerge. On the second story of the apartment complex clubhouse, tables are laden with food around which young men and women—still kids, really—mingle, flirt, and gaze—some intently, others casually, all with motives. Chlorine, alcohol, pheromones, and who knows what else rises to the second-floor balcony where she sits. From inside the clubhouse flows a confluence of Aramis, English Leather, and Brut which, to an experienced nose, would signal desperation.

She, a former lifeguard and competitive swimmer, tall and proud, tilts her chair back and rests her head against the wall outside the clubhouse. She stretches to capture one of those evening breezes that simultaneously heats and cools, then repeats itself so long as she remains static.

Droplets stream down the side of her glass, she sets her drink on the mesh-topped table, rubs her palms dry, leans forward so she can see the promenade below. That's where she spots him. Tall and slim, thick hair, solid and strong. The kind of young man who might have North-Sea-blue eyes and drive a Porsche, or a Harley, or both, maybe even pilot a small plane. Possibly not even divorced with two small children. But, certainly, unlike her father, not the type who drinks to excess and is a serial adulterer.



A shout directs her attention toward the deep end of the pool as a stubby, bespectacled man doffs his t-shirt, deposits his glasses, drops his jeans, displays gaudy swim trunks, and dives in. He swims underwater without emerging until he touches the far side.

On an impulse, she walks down to the pool and approaches the tall man with thick hair. She inhales hints of leather and newly sawn oak as if from her father's house, followed by the aromatic scent of pipe tobacco before someone takes a match to it.

She searches his blue eyes, smiles, then, in a burst of bravado, reaches for his shoulder, taps him - nudges actually - and he tumbles into the pool.

Water spews. Ripples from the pool rise from his flailing arms. Water hits onlookers. The crowd silences. She hears his cries for help. He, unable to swim and afraid of the water, begs to be rescued.

She kicks off her shoes. Jumps into the pool. Extends her arm below his neck. Moves her hand across his chest, then under his bicep, and, after a strong kick, grabs the edge of the pool. She pushes as others pull him out.

**Thomas Elson's** stories appear, or are forthcoming, in numerous venues, including *Ellipsis*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Bull*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Flash Frontier*, *Ginosko*, *Short Édition*, *Litro*, *Journal of Expressive Writing*, *Dead Mule School*, *Selkie*, *New Ulster*, *Lampeter*, and *Adelaide*. He divides his time between Northern California and Western Kansas.







"Break the Horizon" by Vincenzo Cohen

**Vincenzo Cohen** is an Italian classically trained nature painter and photographer. He graduated in Fine Arts and then he achieved the degree in Archeology. His work consists in reworking life and travel experiences through different techniques and media.









"Wild Horse" by Vincenzo Cohen











"Readaptation" By: An Tran

**An Tran** is a self-taught artist based in Hanoi, Vietnam. Her surrealist art style is mostly biographical, including her bizarre self-portraiture in familiar environments, to highlight the interconnection between fear and hope, melancholy and growth.











# Free Fall

BY: KATE MAXWELL

**W**hen she fell pregnant, she finally understood why it was described as a descent. One day, she was striding through life, buoyant with meetings, assignments, and searching for cheap skiing accommodation with her boyfriend. That same afternoon, a thickening red line on a white stick sent her free-falling down the rabbit hole. The next morning the doctor just shrugged his shoulders, glancing at her over his glasses.

“Even a 99 percent effectiveness rate leaves a margin of possibility,” he reminded her. Cathy tried to unfurrow her eyebrows.

“But intrauterine devices are meant to be the most reliable of contraceptives.”

“Well, unfortunately, the fetus didn’t read the brochures,” he snorted, obviously chuffed with a line he didn’t get to use much.

She’d almost laughed when she told Sal, not because it was remotely funny, but because she had never seen him look quite like that. Mouth agape, eyes blank; he looked like somebody had pressed the pause button on his handsome face. She could almost read the subtitles below his head, *But I’m only twenty-three. We’ve been together less than two years. What about our holiday? This isn’t meant to be happening for ages. Yet, through the seas of nausea, and heaving over cold ceramic bowls, she knew she wouldn’t change this reality. It was done. Maybe this was the only certainty she had right now, and she couldn’t even explain why.*

It was no use trying to hide it at work. She was pale, off coffee, and rushing to the bathroom too often. Reactions varied from genuine congratulations to some tasteless innuendos about that being a desperate way to nab a man. She normally would have taken offense, but in the first few months, it felt like she was moving underwater: her words garbled, everything a struggle, and nothing made much sense. The skiing trip was canceled. She stumbled on with her online degree vaguely planning a deferral. She watched workmates interview for new roles. She bought her first baby book but could not bring herself to open it. Family, friends, and even her parents’ cleaner gave her tiny socks, singlets, and homemade booties. She and Sal stored them in a box under their bed, staring at them from time to time, in terrified awe. Ultrasounds had not been able to locate the faulty device and the doctor told her there was nothing more to do but wait. No kidding? she’d muttered in her head. Or maybe out loud. It was hard to distinguish these days.



The next thing to do was find an apartment. They shared their creaky old inner-city terrace with Cath's uni friend, Sonia, and mad, fun Adam. Every weekend was a party. The place was always full of friends, music, and food. But the party vibe was increasingly hard to tolerate when she spent so much time crouched over the toilet. And it was hardly a place for a baby. So, about three months in, when the morning sickness (what an inadequate descriptor) had begun to ease, they started searching for a flat. Nothing in their budget in the inner suburbs. Not even a studio. Sal was still only casual teaching. He used to prop his elbow upon the pillow some evenings and admit he wasn't sure that teaching was his thing. He was thinking of going back to study Psychology or even Business Studies.

"Just do it, Sal. Don't settle for something your heart's not in."

But that was then before Cath fell.

Sal got a job out West, in some suburb they'd never heard of, for the last two terms of school. Next year, he said, he would take anything. Cath was only temporary at the office and when her yearly contract ran out. That was it. She was already behind in her marketing degree and had no idea how she'd finish it. Eventually they found a two-bedroom unit in the Western suburbs. Clean enough, and closer to where Sal was now working but thirty minutes away from most family and friends. The rabbit hole led to so many tunnels and doors: leading to doctor's waiting rooms, bank manager's offices, and unfamiliar corridors taking them on an endless, winding tunnel with few signs and no map.

Sal's family started talking about a wedding.

"Salvatore, you need to give baby respectable home. Must do right thing!" his mother cried.

But with all the scrambling to find their feet, marriage was not something they'd time to worry about. Sal asked tentatively if she wanted that, knowing Cath's answer already, but she just rolled her eyes.

"Not now. I don't know. I know it would make your family happy but that's not a reason to get married. And neither is a baby." She kissed him, "I do love you, but I think the thing I really want is a backrub."

One of the last doors they opened was the Meet Me door. Despite the wild and painful introduction, when Cath cradled her sticky, puffy-eyed boy to her breast she was struck. A wave of intense emotion engulfed her: otherworldly, almost like warm sunlight entering her body and radiating outwards. The surgeon cleaned the snickering yellow and black intrauterine device, found during the emergency caesarean, and presented it to Sal.

"I'm going to frame it in the baby's room," Sal said.

"Maybe not," she laughed.

So, after a long and treacherous fall, Cath felt she had finally landed. Not exactly where she wanted to be, but with a clearer view and many new doors to open.







# SWITCH

BY: PETER ANDERSON

It's this or run the risk. It'll be awkward at first. Intentional beginnings frequently are. Intermittent burst of endorphins will ease the transition, followed by a calm that mimics sunrise. Bird twitter in the distance, a feeling that all's right with the world, this new world, new to you, not to others, not to those who've been here waiting for you all along. And of course they're better at it, they've had more time but don't compare. Before you know it, you'll be like them. A pro, an adept. Comfortable in your skin and in that easy chair after a hard day's. You'll know every word before it's spoken, exactly when and how a particular spoon is going to be lifted seconds before it is, the angle and rate of acceleration. Deja vu will be your second cousin, your childhood friend. Then one day with a start you'll realize predictability's seeped in through the cracks despite all the weather stripping. It's that time again. Already? You want to ask, but don't. It's either this or run the risk.

**Peter Anderson** grew up outside Detroit and now lives in Vancouver, Canada. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Unbroken*, *Sublunary Review*, *the American Journal of Poetry*, *MoonPark Review*, *Best Microfictions 2022* and others.















"Off-Grid" by Mei Seva

**Mei Seva** is a multimedia artist and photographer born in Albania and raised in New York City. Through collage, photography, video art and painting, she seeks to deconstruct the world around her and reconstruct it through art, adding vibrant colors and imaginary worlds and realities.











# A New Year Flood

BY: HR HARPER

There is a hole in this wall of feldspar and quartz.  
There is a hole in the rain.

Gopherwood hardly holds us all  
in the dawn of the new era of sun-leaking days.

Yet like seeks like only on whims of last resort.  
Order twists reason in the newly wild winds.

In the seed vault rain-green tendrils pledge to climb  
a stem from the root of time.

In the library of catastrophic gaffs  
hangs an icon of the image of melancholy, just for laughs.

After cubits of chaos comes a paltry branch  
in an arc of light. A promise of gravity to salvage time.

We, perhaps, did not destroy enough of our garden home.  
Our birdbrain negligence is given another chance.

The myths of progress and the chronographic bones  
are tossed into the air with simian glee and freedom chimes.  
Clean and unclean eyes without beasts, our divining stones,

are throwbacks, vestigial purification, three knocks on a raintree.  
Let's, you and I, construct a celebration. We're free.  
Let's clear-cut some old-growth shame,

let's dynamite through a received, impassable mountain  
of cinematic range. Let's have forty days of not thinking about it.  
It is time for my sons to see me drunk and naked.

For birds to return from the archipelago of scorched earth.  
It's time at last for life without covenants or grievance.  
Let's recover from our addiction to grievance.

**HR Harper** is a poet living in the redwoods above Santa Cruz, CA. While writing poetry over the years, he only began to publish in 2021 and has had several poems published in literary magazines.











# Coming Out

BY: STEPHANIE RUSSELL

Someone asked me today what's it like coming out as me  
all the contradictions between body and mind  
and I didn't answer straight  
never do  
how can I  
when the truth would scare earthquakes into blushing  
and I know I should run for cover when it shakes the roots of stone and brick  
when the golem throws the world off its axis  
rends the gossamer threads that hold us together  
as we dance to the tune of a rising sun and it kills them in a rage of broken truths

Spectral light filters through the shuttered window as I lie on the gaoled floor  
cold as the look from the man who mocked me because he knew he could  
and no one fixed the leak in the tap that drips on and on  
and I wonder who the hangman is today  
is he bad or is he kind  
and will they forgive me for what I've done when the good book said my sin broke the back of evil  
when a thousand purgatories and hell itself are not enough to clean the smell from the white sheets

Keep breathing two hundred fathoms deep  
find the peace that only fish will ever know  
and the light that bursts forth kindles a fire inside brighter than diamond  
stronger than the touch of cold contempt  
and the mother of all lost souls knits another web of threads that say again  
I am here  
I am me  
let's dance  
and no  
I'll not linger in the seventh circle of hell for the sins of those who wrote the book  
I'll burn so hot you can warm the ice that set in your veins  
and together we'll build a new world  
brick by brick

**Stephanie Russell** transitioned to female quite late in life, slow to catch on you might say. But it makes for entertaining observations on the poetry of life.





"Ginkgo Fanning" by Molly Heron

**Molly Heron** focuses on the connection between a small sample of the botanical world and the planet as a whole, microcosm reflecting the macrocosm to reconnect with the beauty of what we have.



# A New Leaf With Liam

MAX SCRATCHMANN

**S**he was determined to turn over a new leaf with Liam and put the past firmly behind them. After all, Liam had secured a new job and they had all moved to a new town in the back of beyond: all Massachusetts white picket fences and pumpkin-colored sunsets; monthly PTA meetings and a field-sized garden to tend to. Pure Norman Rockwell America, bottled and sold in a jar.

And yet.

And yet, the past niggled her like ravenous cancer. It was unwilling to be packed away in storage—like the walnut dining table her grandmother had left her—and lived, instead, in the murky shadows of the upstairs guest room and the dark pools beneath their long winding staircase. Hungry. Insistent. Jabbing her, ruining her peace of mind, intruding on her dreams.

*It hasn't gone away, has it?* she said to him that Saturday morning, the sky a frigid steel blue, tingling with the promise of the first frost. He just shrugged his shoulders, saying more with his silence than any words could express.

**Max Scratchmann** is the crazed genius behind Poetry Circus, the Edinburgh-based spoken word theatre company, and is an illustrator, writer and performer in his own right.





"Cascading Hydrangea" by Molly Heron





"Spring Botanicals I" by Lois Bender

**Lois Bender** is a New York artist working in painting and printmaking with a lifelong focus on gardens, landscape and nature. She is curating a show about gardens now in New York.





"Spring Botanicals II" by Lois Bender

*Lois Bender*



# African Violet Babies From a Single Leaf

BY: LOIS VILLEMAIRE

A plethora of healthy leaves  
I chose one from the middle row  
the sweet spot, cut from the mother plant  
per instructions, adding root hormone.

For weeks the leaf rooted in a tiny vase  
on a shelf in the kitchen window  
nourished by water and sunlight.

*We may not be aware of the exact beginning  
of a process for change and growth.  
Perhaps it's an idea evolving beneath the surface  
or in the clouds of our minds.*

One day I gently lifted the leaf  
from its watery cocoon, not only were roots  
extending like wavy corn silk,  
there were miniature leaves  
born beneath the water.

I returned the stem in all its glory  
to the vase, allowing more time  
for the fragile babies to strengthen.

*Transitions can be difficult,  
a possible turning point in any process.*

When my sister passed away,  
I planted the hydrangea bush  
in the garden to console me  
with its return each spring.

I honor the row of lirioppe in my backyard,  
planted by a close friend before she left us.  
I can rely on the rebirth of grass-like leaves  
topped with a crown of lavender blooms.

My African violet babies are planted and thriving  
like fresh ideas, reminders of the rebirth  
of the growing season, and new life to come.

**Lois Perch Villemaire** resides in Annapolis, MD. Her stories, memoir flash, and poetry have been published in a number of journals and webpages. Her poems have been included in several anthologies. Lois is at work on a chapbook.





"Apple Blossoms and Lamp Post" by Ellen Pliskin





"Misty Woods" by Ellen Pliskin

**Ellen Pliskin** is a painter, printmaker and photographer with studios in New York City and Cheshire, Connecticut.









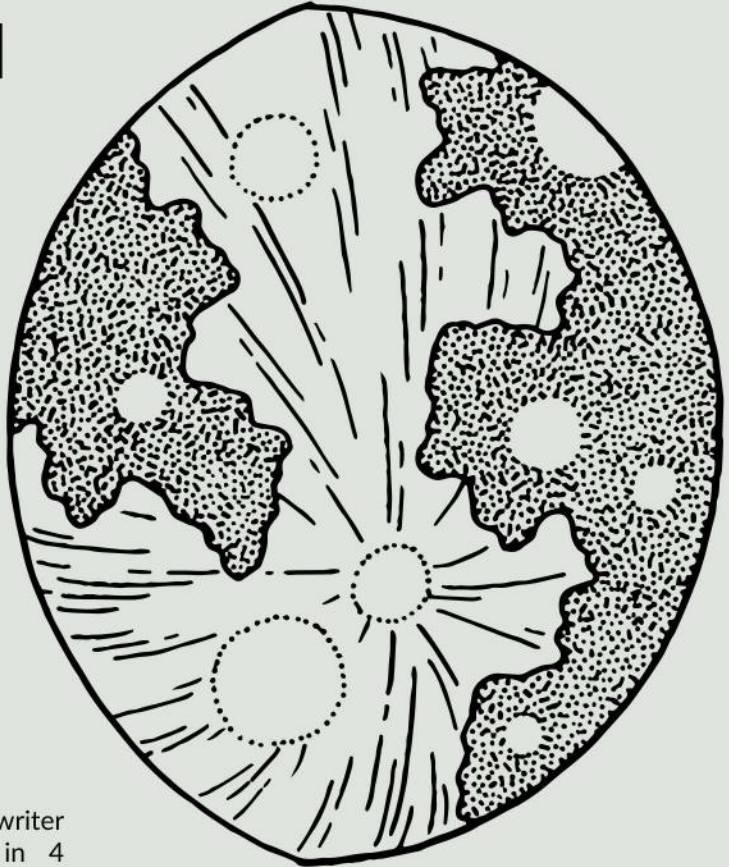


# All will be good

BY: EDUARD SCHMIDT-ZORNER

The years will pass,  
eagles will circle up in the sky,  
roses will be picked for someone,  
and a wreath braided for a head,  
flowers be bound for a grave.  
And the sun and the moon  
will set the rhythm  
for day and night;  
tears will flow  
and laughter will be heard.  
Everything repeats itself  
and goes down again.  
The eternal cycle.

Eduard Schmidt-Zorner is a translator and writer of poems, short stories, and haibun in 4 languages, member of a few writer groups and an Irish citizen born in Germany





















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