



FLORA FICTION

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

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

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Courage is the lion inside all of us that yearns to come out. Courage is a decision, an action, and a thought. Every moment of every day we experience discomfort. Some chose to avoid it, others are forced to push through and carry on. Courage is getting up in the morning, even when you want to stay in bed. Courage is telling yourself you are not defined by your past or what has happened to you. You define yourself.

Courage is about forgiveness and trust. It takes courage to ask others for help, and it takes trust to receive it. Courage is being who you are and becoming who you're meant to be. It's a process, ever-evolving, and changing.

I used to think I didn't need others. I thought I could do life on my own because I was hurt by those around me. I felt like the only person I could rely on was myself. In my years, I have learned that life is the opposite. I need people. We need people. We all need each other.

This issue is dedicated to the Editorial Staff. Each issue contains a part of them, and it is in coming together we create something beautiful. Thank you.

xoxo
Flora Ashe

PHOTOGRAPHY

"Female Gaze" by Celine Lundqvist

Celine Lundqvist focuses her work on female empowerment and equality issues.



SPARKS THAT MELT THE SNOW

BY: ANZA KELLER

There are sparks that melt the snow
And days that feel like burning dust
There is something in the sunlight
You remember, but can't collect
It tastes of skin no longer touched
There is strength and speed and pain
But in the wind now is a memory
And each day the missing train
You wait for fireflies
While there is lightning on the tracks
And with a lighthouse in the distance
It moves closer while thunder claps
But is that thunder or the train
Is that lightning or the spark
Did you die that day or realize
Life is faster than you want
You are hopeless, weak and small
It is luck that's kept you safe
Gliding fire through the grate
You step into fear's bastille
And suspended in the air
You can do nothing but wait
So you wait for fireflies
To light a spark that melts the snow
And char the wind to glowing ash
As falling from the sky
Face lifted toward the sun
Now, then and tomorrow
land lightly on the tongue
So did you live that day or realize
Life is longer once undone

Anza Keller is an actor and writer from the West Coast currently living in Chicago. She has long been drawn to the world of the arts, finding solace, inspiration, and pieces of herself in the written word.



"Female Gaze" by Celine Lundqvist



The Courage of Wayward Girls

BY: PENNY KOEPEL AND CLAIRE MATTURRO

We painted peace symbols in vibrant pinks and purples with bright orange borders on poster boards in grade school and tossed off the art teacher's scolding that those colors clashed because peace symbols looked braver to us blazing in Dayglo fluorescence.

We ran through woods in dime-store flip-flops and fringed cutoffs and were sunburned and fast as the boys we later raced down alleyways fearlessly hands free on banana bikes while ignoring commands to act like young ladies.

We snuck out of junior high football games and risked hitchhiking downtown at night because anything was better than watching those jocks crash their thick bodies into each other while cheerleaders leapt inanely over nothing.

We smelled like Winstons and weed and sometimes that Jovan Musk which we shoplifted on a dare but never really liked as much as the patchouli oil and sandalwood incense that lingered in our long, straight hair.

We rode Easy-Rider style on the backs of rebuilt Harleys to join the peace marches with men chanting hell no we won't go as we wrapped wet bandanas around our faces while confronting police loading tear gas canisters.

We grew up bold with our unnerving faith in streets we never found on maps and felt the first prickles of age on skin rubbed tender by the loose gravel we skidded through rather than turn around.

We reveled giddy and headstrong in the full plenty of youth heedless that the shiny sharp pieces of the rules we broke would become a collage of clashing colors blazing on a beige wall in a house where older people live.

Penny Koepsel and **Claire Maturro** co-authored the novel *Wayward Girls* (Red Adept Publishing 2021), a psychological thriller. Koepsel is a psychologist and Maturro a former lawyer. Both have poetry published in various journals.

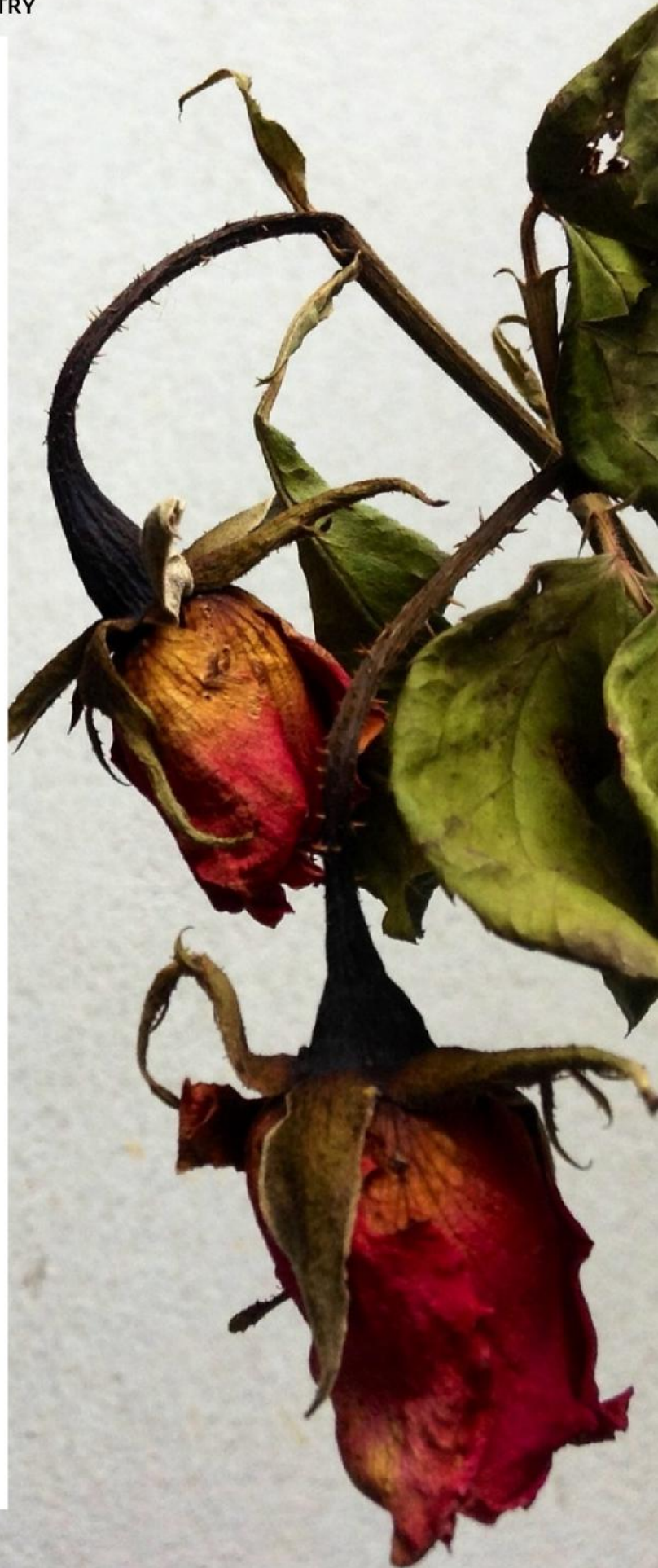


Audrey Visits Hospital

BY: JAMES GERING

A grey-frame hospital bed encloses her frail mother after surgery. A bell cord grips the pillowcase and morphine drips into the cannula piercing her mother's papery skin. Audrey imagines the tense truce between pain and pain killer, and she understands with a visceral jolt that her mother will actually die one day, this woman who created a makeover world for herself and her children after a safety-net at her husband's aerial circus act freakishly trampolined him into the Afterlife. The young woman in the next bed wakes groggily – once-lovely Leonie of the Kings Cross streets, her skin now yellow-hued, courtesy of her fatally damaged liver. Audrey feels yellow-hued about her skill for sniffing out safety and clinging to it. Leonie senses the guilt in the room and summons it over. Her gaunt fingers grip and caress Audrey's arm, grip and caress. Your mum's a sweetie, Leonie says you look after her, now, you hear?

James Gering is from the Blue Mountains in Australia and has been writing for decades. James's first collection of poetry, 'Staying Whole While Falling Apart' came out with Interactive Press in 2021. He welcomes visitors at jamesgering.com.







"Strength" by Christine Lozano

Christine Lozano is a self-taught photographer from El Paso TX.



Apology as Introspection

BY: LULA NINI

When we first met, I told you
how self-destructive I could become.
To speak this would air the malady out of me,
I was sure of it, that somehow you would capture
my masochism and reshape it.
I admit, I'm blindly toxic at times,
caught in the tides of hurting and apologizing,
where rage is recognized as an afterthought
having already erupted, flooded, and hardened
the air between us. The closer we become,
the more unfortunate you wear my face.
Forgotten scars on old skin, your new skin
appears unbroken and somehow mine,
and I fight myself trying not to sacrifice it.
I'd like to think I give you my worst parts
as a testament to our closeness.
I'd like to think I pulled you in without corruption,
that I haven't made you a part of me,
that I'm not misshapen.

Lula Nini (she/they) is an eclectic artist that draws from many sources, translating the poetry of life with words.





"Meant for this world" by Carl Yonder

Carl Yonder is a Military Brat and a practitioner of Transcendental Meditation, ideas for his work travel through the subconscious, where they are transformed into something both new and yet familiar.

"exhale a glimpse of the universe" by Rosina Lui



Rosina Lui is a 20-year-old artist from Hong Kong, currently residing in the Netherlands. She finds voice within the interplay of paint, dance, textures, and words, interwoven through the fluidity of abstract emotive language.

Budapest Balazs

BY: ZARY FEKETE

We arrive at Balazs's neighborhood after about 20 minutes of driving. It has quite standard 13th district Hungarian dwellings, towering 70's and 80's era communist block housing, patchwork quilts of lives stacked on top of one another in fabricated concrete patterns. I park the car and there's an awkward pause. I'm expecting him to get out. But he reminds me that I need to meet his father. This was the part of the conversation from earlier that I hadn't quite understood.

"Why do I need to meet him?"

For the first time that night, Balazs pauses. His body, skinny even for a 16-year-old, twitches with nervous energy. He says, "You see. If you meet my father then he will know who you are and then he will allow me to visit your coffee shop again on another Friday night."

This makes complete sense to me, and a moment later we are in a cramped metal elevator slowly creaking its way up to Balazs's apartment on the 6th floor. The elevator clanks to a halt, Balazs produces a key, and then I'm inside his home.

The apartment is filthy. The entryway is stacked with bricks and cement (Balazs's father is a mason). There is a dark hallway that leads off to the left. The kitchen is on the right, dimly lit with a single bulb. His father is standing in the kitchen, naked except for a pair of briefs and a stained t-shirt, cooking pork chops on an ancient skillet and filling the kitchen with smoke. Every surface is covered with unwashed plates, sticky forks, and buzzing flies.

Balazs steps forward and introduces me. I tentatively reach out my hand, and his father shakes it with the instant camaraderie that comes from living shoulder to shoulder with ones' neighbors in the 13th district of Budapest.

Balazs turns back to me with a smile and says, "Do you think it will do?"

I'm uncertain, "What do you mean?"

Balazs's grin doesn't fade. He says, "Next Friday. Could we invite everybody over here after the coffee shop closes? I'd like to host an after-party."

Immediately I am trying to picture all of the students who usually come to our Friday night coffee shop fitting into this tiny, wretched kitchen. I realize that this is Balazs's way of being generous. I also can't stop thinking about the flies. I want to save face for him and to avoid embarrassment for me.

I say, "Is there a bigger room? Somewhere with more space?" (And cleaner...I'm hoping.)

Balazs says, "There are three other rooms. But the other three families live there. Won't this do?"

He says this matter-of-factly with a hint of shy confession. And, the moment he says it I suddenly notice the two dirty mattresses that are stacked in the corner of the kitchen...or rather I should say, the kitchen/bedroom where Balazs and his father eat and sleep. I look back at Balazs and see the complete joy and hope in his eyes.

I say, "This will do."

Zary Fekete has worked as a teacher in Hungary, Moldova, Romania, China, and Cambodia. They currently live and work as a writer.



"Peace like a River" by Katya Shubova

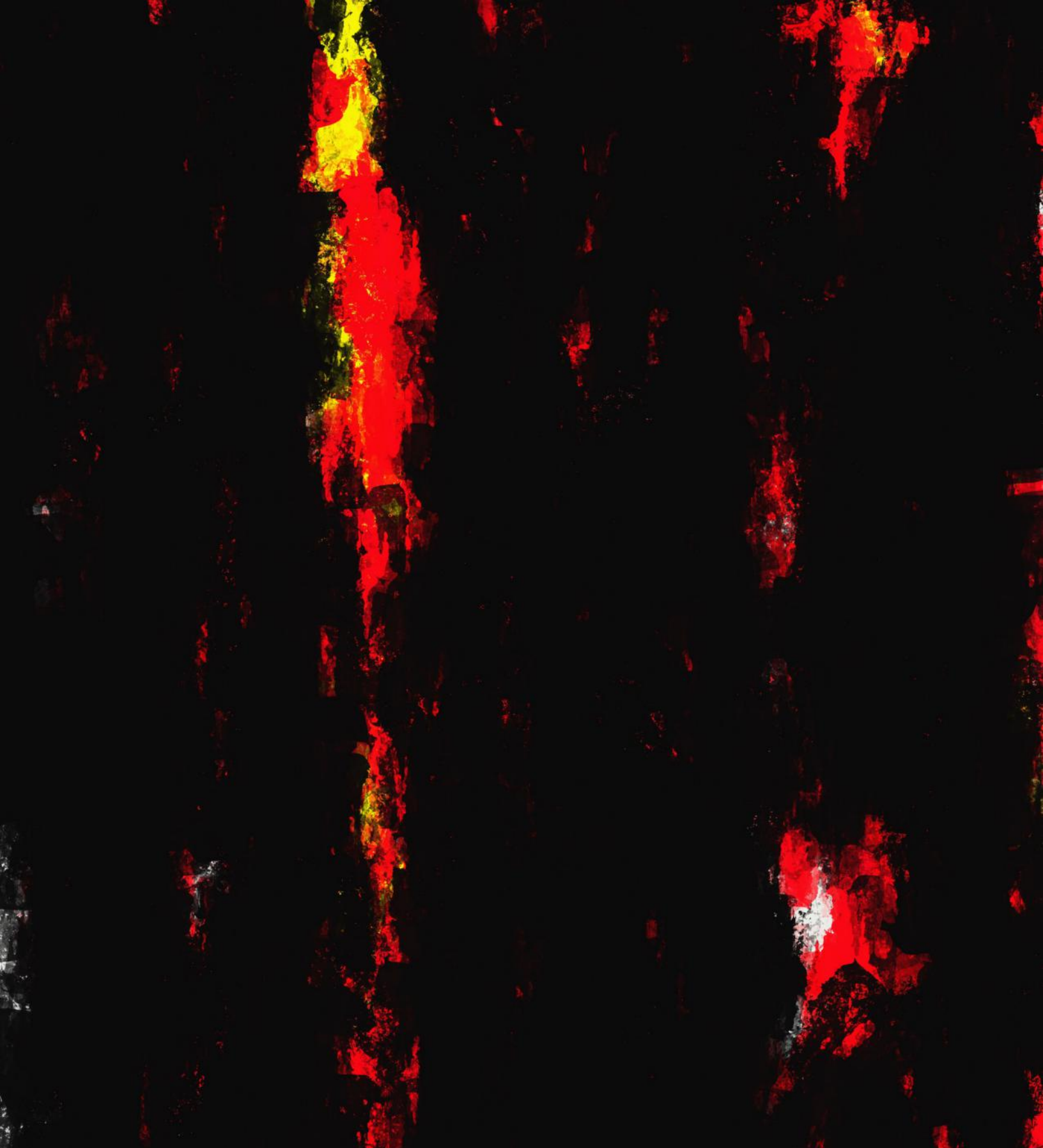
SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

BY: DAVID BANACH

Each thing has it within itself
a thing becoming something else. Gasoline
is potential energy just waiting
to burst into flames, and in being only
what it is the cloud has within itself
to rain.

And I want to be a better person,
though I'm not yet
and yet I can feel it in me now what wants
to leave this me behind. In Verona
in 1731 Countess Cornelia Zangheri Bandi
spontaneously burst into flames and was consumed,
so badly did something in her long
to be another thing.

And even if you are simple in this moment
only happy there is a future you existing
not yet here muddying the deep waters inside,
complicating blurring the mirrored surface
of yourself. And in the dark curled in sheets
beneath the warm skin I can touch
unseen and building waiting to combust
a new you is longing to burn so bright



"The Rage Which Gives Life" by Edward Lee

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America.

ILLUSTRATION

"Drawing a Face" By: Pratick Mallick



"The Voyage" By: Pratick Mallick



Pratick Mallick passed BVA from government college of art and craft Kolkata in the year 2011 in painting. Right now a practicing artist, doing exhibitions, workshops.

Dalton

BY: CARL PALMER

Wayne was his name
before he left for war,
now calls himself Dalton.

Seven teenagers joined army
buddy plan after high school
class of '65.

Newspaper picture
posted permanently in city hall
shows seven salutes to our flag
before boarding the Ft Bragg bus.

Seven young men:
Wayne, Dennis, Alan, Lester,
Tommy, Oscar and Ned
Only Wayne comes home.

He sits on the sidewalk
by a back bench
that same bus depot,
each day every day all day,

over fifty years
watches wavers wave goodbye,
witnesses riders welcomed home.
His cardboard sign displays their names:

Dennis

Alan

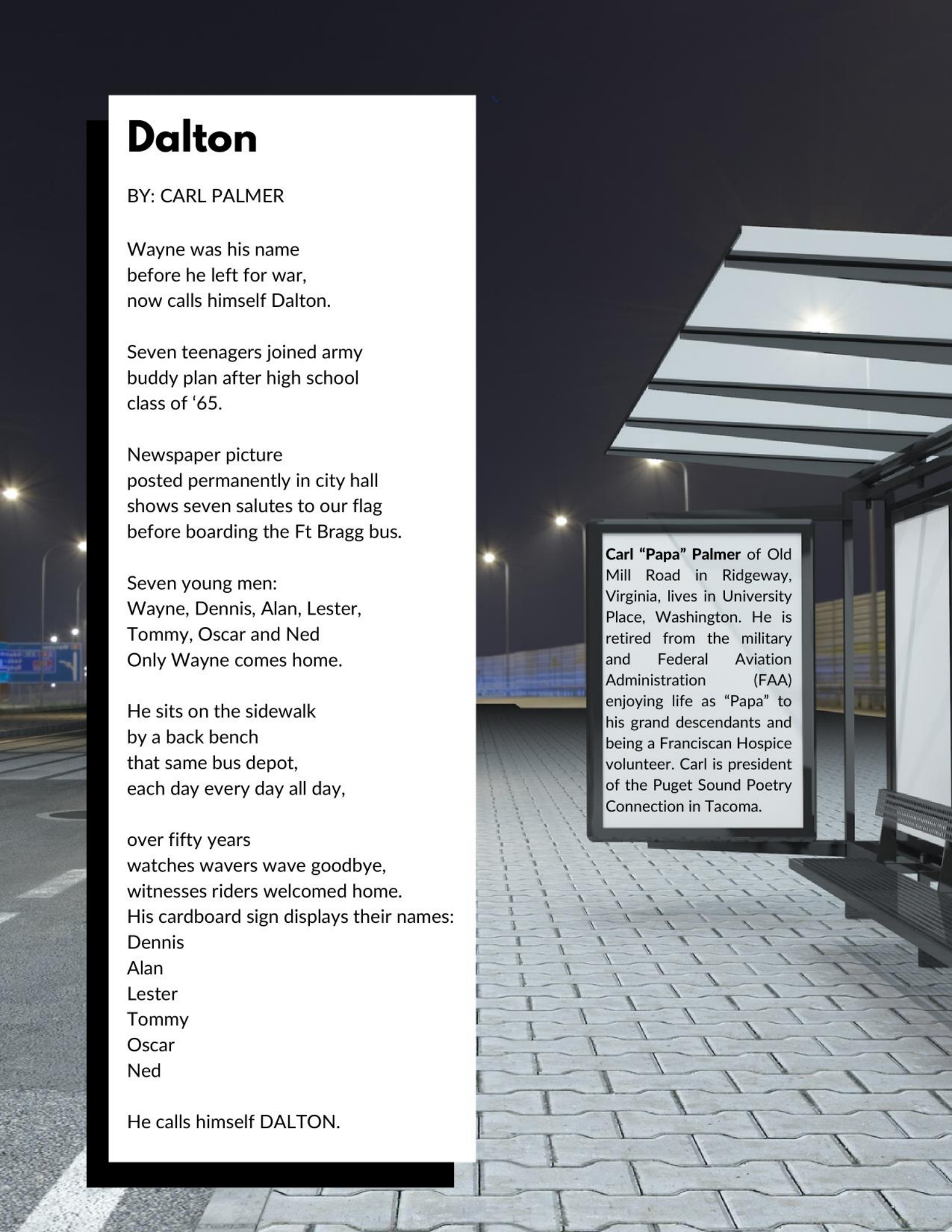
Lester

Tommy

Oscar

Ned

He calls himself DALTON.



Carl "Papa" Palmer of Old Mill Road in Ridgeway, Virginia, lives in University Place, Washington. He is retired from the military and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) enjoying life as "Papa" to his grand descendants and being a Franciscan Hospice volunteer. Carl is president of the Puget Sound Poetry Connection in Tacoma.

H

"Outlying" by Ricardo Hutagalung

Ricardo Hutagalung is from Indonesia. He is interested in Surrealism and loves to draw posters & covers. Ricardo also enjoys painting.



To Jennie: My Grandmother's Mother

BY: LOIS VILLEMAIRE

I've known you only in three black and white photos
as a girl from Raseiniai in a pleated dress with ruffles
to the top of your neck sitting beside your sister
the hair on your forehead arranged in a perfect curl;
a mother circled by four daughters;
a widow in a shapeless black dress in 1942
nearing the end of life's journey.
You were the sorrowful bride in an arranged marriage
to an older man in another village in 1884
while your true love Nathan was directed by his parents
to make his way to America because
it was dangerous for young Jewish men
to be conscripted into the Russian Army.
How did it feel to have no voice or choice
when you and Nathan were placed on divergent paths
never expected to cross again?
He moved across Europe by train,
sailed over the ocean on the Polynesia to Ellis Island,
yet that is not how your story ends.
He sent for you and you appeared in Philadelphia,
holding the hand of your 2-year-old son,
child of that arranged marriage.
How did you traverse 5,216 miles?
What obstacles did you encounter along the way?
In this new land you and Nathan created a family.
For me that is where your story begins.

Lois Perch Villemaire resides in Annapolis, MD. Her stories, memoir flash, and poetry have been published in a number of journals, magazines, and anthologies. In addition to writing, she enjoys yoga, photography, and raising African violets.



"Runaway" Stefan Stoikov

"PST88" BY IGOR ZUVEZ







"Wild Hunt" by Stefan Stoikov

Stefan Stoikov is from the city of Izmail, Ukraine. His interests are graphics and painting; portraits and figurative compositions.

THE DIARY OF DMITRO

BY: JOHN STECKLEY

December 1, 1905

I can't sleep. I am so excited. My mother gave me a diary. She says my life is starting again so I should write about it. I will write in English – my new language. We are on a ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean. We are leaving our home in Kiev and traveling to Canada for a new life. We are going to a place called Winnipeg in the middle of Canada.

The wind is strong, the waves large and scary. The ship rocks like a cradle. But we will have a new life.

November 3, 1915

I enlisted today. I became one of those “brave young lads” old people talk about, one of the guys that are cheered when they board the train headed east on the first steps from Canada to the European Front. Walking into the enlistment office, waiting in line, and talking with others doing the same as me, I feel part of something. I now truly feel that I am Canadian. I am no longer an ‘immigrant boy’ as I have often been called. All the other lads enlisting with me were born in Canada. Now we all are Canadian soldiers together. We are all part of the 52nd Battalion.

When the process was over, the man in charge stood up straight and saluted me. Then he said, “Congratulations, young man. You are now part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.” I saluted him back and snapped my heels together as I have seen others do before me.

I wonder whether this will be my career, my future after the war: a soldier. I will keep a diary of the battles I serve in, and everything that happens. My children, when I marry and have kids, will read it someday, and be proud of their father. I will be Dimitro the hero to them.

April 10, 1917

I can't sleep. Yesterday we fought at Vimy Ridge. So many died an ugly death in the trenches. I look around me and all I see is where my compatriots died, their blood mixed with mud.

July 10, 1917

I can't sleep. We were ordered today to move on to engage the enemy. I just couldn't do it. It is not just because there is a good chance that I will die. That would bring about the end of the pain I am feeling. I just can't continue to watch my brothers dying all around me. I threw down my rifle and said, “no more”. I was then put in a makeshift prison where I am now.

September 12, 1917

I can't sleep. I have been convicted of cowardice. I will face a firing squad in less than a month. I am 22 years old today.

October 9, 1917

1st Entry

I can't sleep. My last day is beginning. Soon I will be out there besides the pole in the middle of the camp. It will be like one of those passionate plays the nuns used to make us watch back home in Kiev. But there will be no martyr or no saint this time. No hero.

2nd Entry

Dawn is here. No one is looking at me, except when they think that I am not looking back. Do they think they will see in my eyes what their own eyes will be facing only too soon in this dismal place? We have all looked at it too often over these last two years, especially at Vimy Ridge. We usually hear death before we see it – a metallic scream, an explosion, and then one of our boys letting out a sound no one should have to hear. Then there are the sights – blood, earth, bones, parts, and bits of everything else that was once human. I never wanted to be heard or seen that way by the men whom I have shared trenches with. I guess that's why I am going to be hearing the inevitable from a short distance and seeing nothing soon. Will I feel anything when I am shot, or will there be just death? I wonder what they'll say to my parents. I hope that they lie and say that I died in battle. A large part of me did.

Third Entry

I was led to the pole by hands that gripped my arms tightly. A priest walks beside me, his words more a soothing sound than anything with meaning I could hold onto and carry with me to my grave. They let me write my last words. I wonder what will happen to my diary. I will hand it to the priest. I hope he keeps it. For I will otherwise disappear on paper except for the dried ink of "tried," "convicted" and "executed" in some official record. Here I can state my honest opinion. I am glad I don't have a wife and children to share the word 'coward' for the rest of their lives. But I am just Dimitro a man who fought in the trenches and died because of it.

Last Entry

My brothers-in-arms stand a little more than a few paces away from me in a line of strict military order. Form must be maintained now more than ever. They are not the men who stood beside me in battle. My comrades have been spared that at least. I have chosen not to have a blindfold, so at least they will say, if they speak of me at all, that 'he faced death eyes open.' Let God have mercy on their souls. They can only do what they were told. I hand my diary to the priest.

Afterword

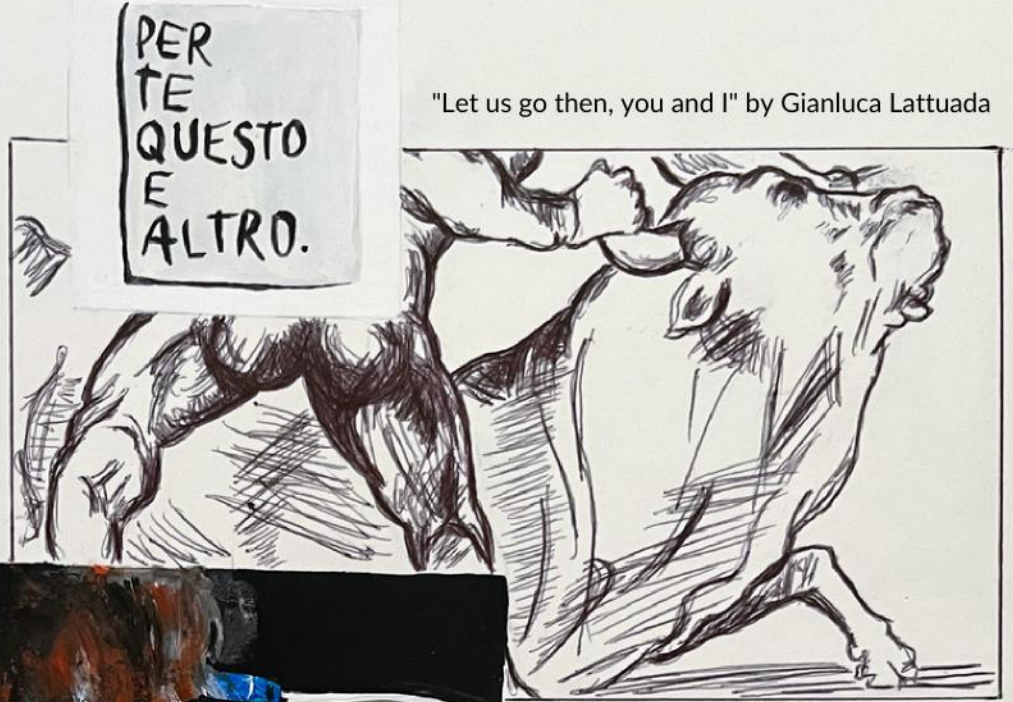
Many Canadian soldiers wrote war diaries during the Great War. This is an imagined series of diary entries for one man, Dimitro Sinizki, the only soldier in the Canadian armed forces in World War I to be executed for "cowardice." I firmly believe that he was no coward, just traumatized, a victim of the war.

John Steckley a retired college professor who has learned to write stories in his retirement.



"Eyes & Butterflies" by Ruth Eskender

Ruth Eskender was born in Addis Ababa, May in 2001, She's currently a 3rd graphic design Student in Alle school of fine art and design i have exhibited in different group and solo exhibitions.



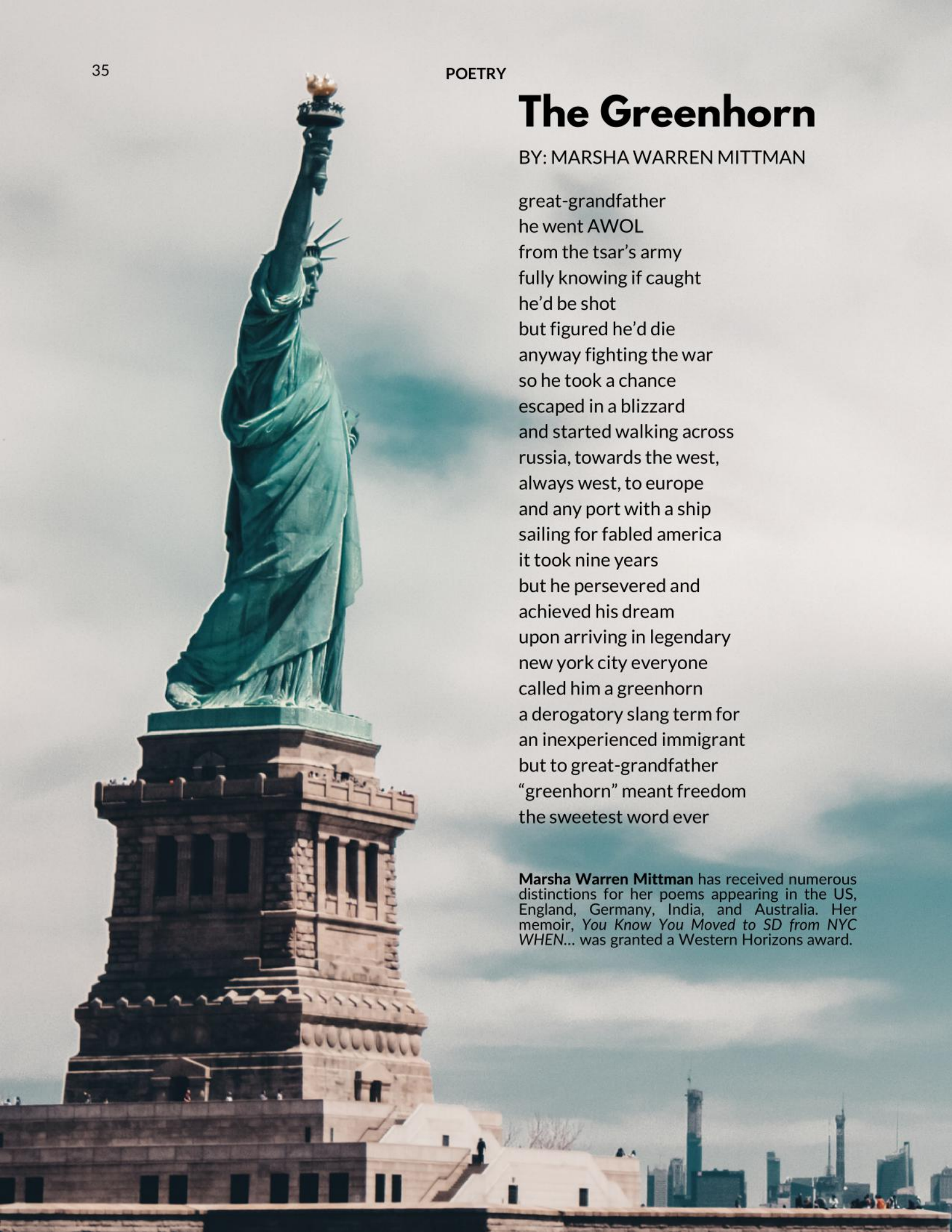


"Let us go then, you and I" by Gianluca Lattuada

Gianluca Lattuada (Milan, 1988) is an Italian artist, published writer, creative director, cultural curator.

The Greenhorn

BY: MARSHA WARREN MITTMAN



great-grandfather
he went AWOL
from the tsar's army
fully knowing if caught
he'd be shot
but figured he'd die
anyway fighting the war
so he took a chance
escaped in a blizzard
and started walking across
russia, towards the west,
always west, to europe
and any port with a ship
sailing for fabled america
it took nine years
but he persevered and
achieved his dream
upon arriving in legendary
new york city everyone
called him a greenhorn
a derogatory slang term for
an inexperienced immigrant
but to great-grandfather
"greenhorn" meant freedom
the sweetest word ever

Marsha Warren Mittman has received numerous distinctions for her poems appearing in the US, England, Germany, India, and Australia. Her memoir, *You Know You Moved to SD from NYC WHEN...* was granted a Western Horizons award.

I, Kashmir

BY: JONATHAN FLETCHER

My parents must've once been one,
affectionate in their protectorate.
No longer, though. Each more
concerned with amassing verbal
arsenals than how partitioned I felt,
they treated me like territory.

What does your father say about me?

You don't have to listen to your mother.

Long and formal,
lettered and numbered,
like a U.N. resolution,
their custodial ceasefire,
approved by both, broken by both,
proved fragile amid proliferated threats:

I won't let you see Alex.

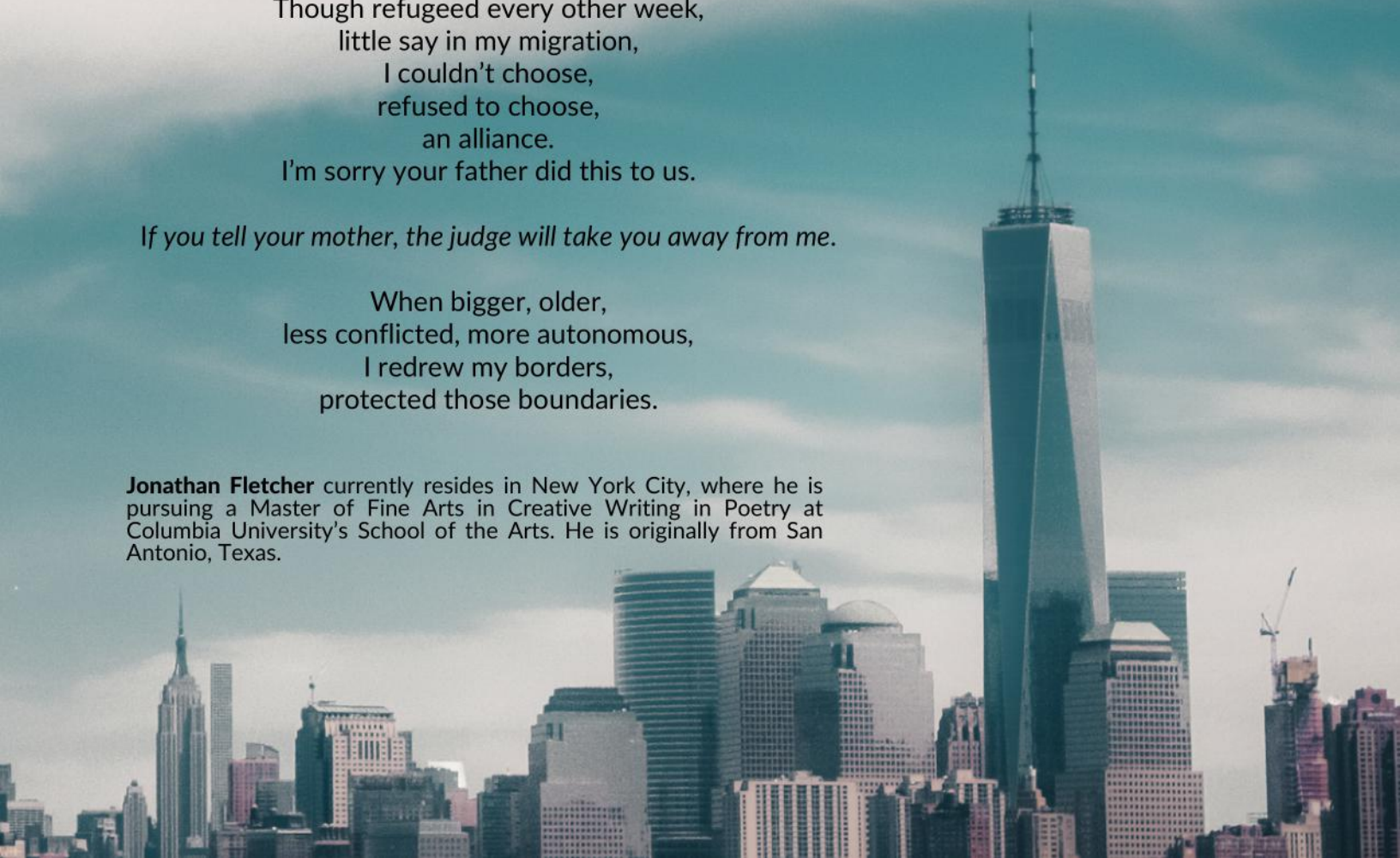
I'll call CPS on you.

Though refugeed every other week,
little say in my migration,
I couldn't choose,
refused to choose,
an alliance.
I'm sorry your father did this to us.

If you tell your mother, the judge will take you away from me.

When bigger, older,
less conflicted, more autonomous,
I redrew my borders,
protected those boundaries.

Jonathan Fletcher currently resides in New York City, where he is pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing in Poetry at Columbia University's School of the Arts. He is originally from San Antonio, Texas.



Safe

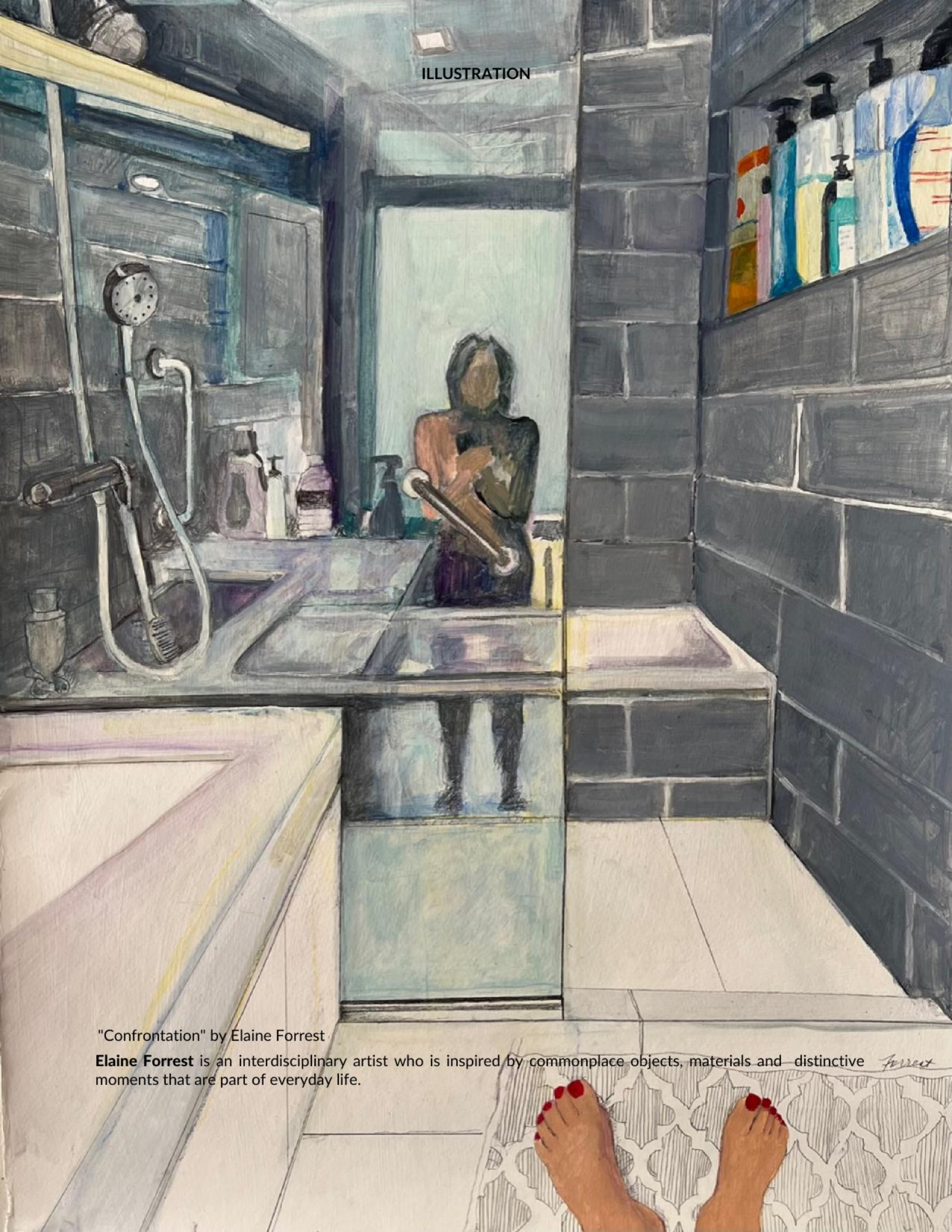
BY: RACHEL LOUGHLIN

I asked my body
What she needed:
To move
To breathe deep long breaths
And walk for hours
Under astonishing skies
Stretch deeper grow stronger
But also brave enough
To bring the hidden pieces into the light
To be seen
And to see
To desire
And be desired
To be chosen
But not possessed
To inhabit old stories
And write new ones
Without shame or apology
To simply be in this body
Fully present
Fully held
Safe

Rachel Loughlin graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University where she won the Undergraduate Poetry Award. She is a graphic designer, eternally optimistic gardener, runner, muralist, and writer living in Richmond, Virginia. Rachel explores the intersections of nature, sensuality, and deconstructed spirituality through her poetry.



ILLUSTRATION



"Confrontation" by Elaine Forrest

Elaine Forrest is an interdisciplinary artist who is inspired by commonplace objects, materials and distinctive moments that are part of everyday life.

Forrest

UTI

BY: ABBY COMEY

Willow texted me to meet her at the drugstore in the strip mall next to my parents' house. It didn't make sense. There were drugstores closer to her place.

I told her no, then added a crystal ball emoji so I didn't seem too sincere.

My parents and I watched a Jeopardy rerun. Mom set out Bagel Bites on a cutting board—middle-class charcuterie. The elementary school teacher we were rooting for lost. She was gonna use the money to buy flexible seating for her class.

I thought of the kids in their motionless desks. It made me profoundly sad.

I stood up and said something about tampons. My parents looked worried. Part of me wanted them to stop me, but I was twenty-four. I could go anywhere Willow wanted.

I found her in the supplement aisle.

She was wearing a black velvet dress, knee socks, and Mary Janes. A headband in her hair. Two halfhearted slashes of dark eyeshadow. Over it all, like an apology, was a trucker jacket. I kept my distance, wary of the weed smell that would confirm it was Tom's.

She didn't look surprised to see me. I was wearing flannel pajama pants and a Knicks sweatshirt that was so old you could barely read the logo. I'd put on a bra at the last second because I didn't want anyone to see my nipples, which was stupid because the sweatshirt was so baggy, and no one was looking at me.

"I need to pick up a prescription," she said.

There was a Doja Cat song playing. Half off iron supplements. A laxative display.

"They close in five minutes."

She shrugged.

"So, we have five minutes."

I followed her to the counter in the back, grabbing a box of tampons on the way. There was a sign that said Please wait behind this line to allow for customer privacy. I hesitated before crossing it.

She told the pharmacist her name. It always sounded like a joke. It belonged on a t-shirt, a ticket, or a playlist. The pharmacist barely glanced at her. He was too young to have kids who listened to Willow and too old to listen to her himself.

When she took the white paper bag, she crushed it closed with her fist, like it was fast food and she was trying to keep the heat inside. The pills shook as she lowered it to her side. Maraca, my brain said, because, at our core, we're all just toddlers who get pap smears.


She paid for my tampons with her prescription. Afterward, she wandered down the makeup aisle and picked up a box of anti-clump mascara. I'd never seen her wear it before. She liked that her eyelashes were blonde.

"They're antibiotics," she said, not looking up. "I have a UTI."

"You're supposed to pee after sex."

She shook her head, putting the box back.

"I went swimming in the creek."



The music stopped.

The store will be closing in three minutes.

I'd tried to show her the creek behind our high school, but she'd never wanted to go, even when we were kids. I wanted her to put it in a song—something about moss-covered rocks and crushed beer cans, only better. Weirder. Images only she could conjure, even though they'd been there all along. I never pictured us in swimsuits. I saw her in a lacy black bra and underwear set, things I knew she didn't own.

I didn't picture myself at all.

I asked her whenever we were both in town, which was more and more often now that I was unemployed and she was working on her new album. She liked to be home to write. She'd dragged Tom all the way out to the suburbs. I had to be home because my latest novel bombed and I couldn't afford rent in the city.

The song switched to Don McLean. Willow relaxed.

She pulled the jacket back over her shoulders. I trailed behind her to the greeting card aisle. She collected obscure ones—cat condolences and teacher retirements. She picked up one for a fifth birthday. It had a dog dressed as a cop on the front. I wanted to say something funny.

She slipped it behind a bar mitzvah card, out of sight.

"ACAB," she said. It was the joke I'd thought of, stolen from thin air.

A teenager in a red vest walked up to us. He froze when he saw Willow.

"We're about to close."

"We'll leave. I'm so sorry."

Three Grammy nominations and still so kind.

We stood in the parking lot. I'd never been there that late before. I didn't know they turned out the lights in the Walgreens sign. I guess they didn't feel the need to advertise to the truckers and loners.

"I left Tom."

For the first time that night, she looked at me. She looked at me like she wanted me, like I'd passed whatever test this all had been. She looked at my mouth, which turned me the fuck on.

She hadn't made the decision when she first called me. It had taken her three aisles and four verses of "American Pie."

She was still wearing the jacket. It made her look small, and I'd never wanted anyone more in my entire life. I'd spent years wanting her, and here she was offering herself to me outside the drugstore by my parents' house.

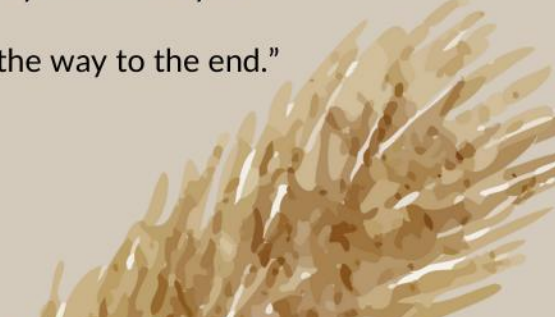
It would make a good song, better than the creek.

I hugged her because she looked like she was about to cry. She wasn't the type of pretty that looked good with red eyes and swollen lips. Vulnerability washed her out. I let her hide her face in my shoulder. I was right. The jacket smelled like weed.

When I pulled away, she was still looking at me. Mouth eyes mouth eyes.

I told her I had to get home.

"Take the antibiotics all the way through," I added. "All the way to the end."







"Proud Mary" by Igor Zuzev

Igor Zuzev's art, whether photography or painting, aims to establish an emotional connection. He explores his feelings about topics and what they mean to him.

"Foreboding" by Igor Zuzev





Beaver Dam

BY: LYNDA WEBB

Unkle Rex, two old goats, all with thin lips told the tale of Iron Creek gold. My brother was gullible, yet his pitcher-for-ears flowed with the old man’s conversations that were filled with nuggets left by miners too tired to remember the trail deep in the wilderness. We took a day hike in the Gila: two oranges, a mongrel dog, me, my new Keds that squeaked on bare heels as we climbed over lava rocks, down stumps through raspberry stickers, bear scat--trudging and sliding into Iron Creek, guarded by a flock of wild turkeys.

The dog drank deeply, and snapped at a rainbow trout who ignored the intrusion of gold pans and churlish jaws. An afternoon storm loomed. A timber rattler sunning six feet of skin stretched its tapered head forward seconds before my rubber met its hissing tongue.

Rain came, falling hard and we hovered in the hole of the long-fallen Ponderosa Pine’s roots, providing shelter from hail. “Mary full of Grace,” we chanted as drizzle misted and we planned a shortcut just over that ridge we thought, hidden in the clouds.

Dog limping, bleeding heels, we walked, into our fear of brooding ancient trees whose tops were scraping the falling evening, whispering in their boughs of Hansel and Gretel until their low-slung branches became stairs in the moon-rising sky. My brother climbed. Climbed until he spotted a weathered sign--Beaver Dam: eight miles of hope, a campfire and to see our parents’ heads bowed.

Lynda Gerdin Webb has a MA from the University of Texas at El Paso where she studied fiction with Raymond Carver.



"You can't see it" by Marie-Julie LaFrance

Marie-Julie is a Canadian/Métis illustrator. Diagnosed as a Highly Sensitive Person (HSP), she is highly detail-oriented. Some of her work has been published in *Éclair Magazine*, *Passengers Journal*, *Artells* and many more. She also has worked (as an illustrator) with *Leading Edge Magazine*, *Flash Frog Magazine*, and other magazines and publishers.

"Only you" by Marie-Julie Lafrance



The Biology of Courage

BY: MARK BLICKLEY

My name is Jull Soares and I am a bastard. This is not a particular opinion that I, or anyone else that I'm aware of, has placed on me. It is objective truth. My mother was an unlicensed sex worker and neither she nor I have any inkling of who fathered me, although a couple of gringos are among the suspects.

There is nothing more painful than longing for things that never were. Many of my friends grew up with fathers and when I was young, I was very jealous. However, based on what I've witnessed in films and in real life, it doesn't seem that I missed out on much. If you are loved—it doesn't matter by whom or how many—you'll be fine as long as you feel worthy of being loved.

I am old now, but I do not think that I fear death. Sometimes I get upset that while I am rotting in the dirt others will be drinking beer and dancing, or laying on a beach with closed eyes, caressed by the sun. My love of history has been an enormous help in smothering my panic of not being alive.

Ever since I was a child, I've adored hearing city elders tell stories about Cartagena. How my ancestors fought and killed the Spanish invader Juan de la Cosa when he tried to steal a 132-pound golden porcupine from our Sinu temple. And how we citizens repelled an attack of the English armada that included George Washington's half-brother Lawrence. Or when the great North American female matador, Patricia McCormick, one of the finest bullfighters of her time, slew a bull at the beloved Circo Teatro. Streaked in blood, she knelt by the animal she just killed and stroked its head while screaming out, "I love this brave bull!"

I can accept and enjoy that all these events took place without my being alive to witness them, so why should I regret events I will be unable to experience after I die? I have come to believe that when we die, we return to wherever we were the year before our birth. As I was born in 1959, I will simply return to whatever I was doing in 1958 and that's where I will be for eternity. There seem to be very few second chances in life and I suspect the same will be true in death.

Sleeping in public can give you interesting insights into human nature. It's been my experience that the good are pretty evenly matched with the bad, although it does tip a bit more in favor of the positive. Many people think I'm just a homeless misfit and don't realize I'm actually giving them a chance to join me in creating a temporary public family. Compassion and cruelty are what I frequently dream about while I sleep on this beautiful ledge, and what I often wake up to.

Since I was a child, I've always hated shoes. Most men like to appear tough. If a person really wants to be tough it must start with their feet. Our ancestors probably went tens of thousands of years traveling in their bare feet—tough, grizzled, calloused—but not indifferent. Growing up without family except for my mother, I don't think of being shoeless as a sign of poverty. I am walking in the footsteps of my ancestors and each step I take is headed in the direction of a family reunion. The soles of my naked feet scrape along the same paths where the souls of my forebears once walked. Please forgive my clumsy attempt at poetic wordplay, but it is a holy trail.

A human head should always be cradled. That is why I always carry a pillow in my pouch. A good pillow allows you to dream in color. My pillow is very old and even when I wash it has a distinctly peculiar smell to it. That's because of the many beautiful dreams and disturbing nightmares burrowed inside it. My sweat and tears puddle into the stains of my life. A kind European visitor once told me I should consider my pillow as a work of textile art. I'm not sure what that means, but I like how it sounds.

Freedom is isolation. Slavery is the obliteration of isolation. I abhor flophouses, government housing, and charitable hostels. Once you lose your ability to desire isolation, you become a slave. Creativity can only flourish in silence and solitude. If I was in some kind of forced shelter, do you think I would be writing in this notebook and accompanying these words with images torn from magazines, newspapers, and catalogues? The European woman who told me my pillow was textile art also said that I have a collagist mentality when I showed her a few of my notebooks.

Do not pity me as homeless. Celebrate me as one who possesses the special gift of being able to live alone. Sometimes I am forced to enter the dark doors of slavery by, but I maintain the wherewithal to escape back into freedom and return to this colorful ledge.

And so here I lay, precariously balanced between moments of exaltation and the fear of being disturbed. In between those two points lies the secret to a healthy and productive life. Boredom is not having nothing to do, but feeling like nothing is worth doing. No one volunteers to experience life. We don't have a choice. That is why anyone who completes this journey without taking shortcuts is heroic.

Can you spare a few pesos in support of a pilgrim's progress?

Thank you.

May you be spared a life of inertia in motion.

New Yorker **Mark Blickley** and Ukrainian photographer Katya Shubova collaborated on the ekphrasis flash fiction, "The Biology of Courage." Mark's text is based on Katya's powerful Cartagena, Colombia photograph.



"In Bed 2" by Teuta Pashnjari



"In Bed 3" by Teuta Pashnjari

Teuta Pashnjari is a fine artist currently studying at TAMK in Finland and at ICART in Paris, France. Originally from Albania, Pashnjari is now based in multiple countries. Constantly seeking inspiration and motivation throughout her artistic journey, Pashnjari's creation style is focused on figurative and representative subject matters in connection to their environment and backgrounds

Half the Night

BY: CYNTHIA BERNARD

My stomach isn't working right.
Bubbles, gurgles, twinges and sighs
Kept me up for half the night.

I've got hives too, quite a sight—
Neck, belly, all over my thighs.
My skin just isn't working right.

Aching and stiffness are my plight;
Take my meds, don't eat those fries.
They kept me up for half the night.



Silvering hair could be a delight
If I were searching for a disguise.
(It's clear my thoughts aren't working right.)

Crinkly skin is another blight.
Wondering what else will arise
To keep me up for half the night.

Yes, growing older can be a fright—
Perhaps some wisdom will be the prize.
When my life is working right
No longer up for half the night.

Cynthia Bernard is a 68-year-old woman who is finding her voice as a poet after decades of silence. She lives on a hill overlooking the ocean, 20 miles south of San Francisco.



"Fear" by Katerina Orel

Katerina Orel, an artist born in 1989, depicts human emotional world and city images. Creating intuitive and sensuous works, balanced between expressivity and clarity of forms, she sees value in spreading artist's feelings to the viewer.



"Leaving Paradise" by Maria Eliza Kouloudi

Maria Eliza Kouloudi is an Illustrator and scene designer, originated from Greece and based in Berlin, Germany.

Brave

BY: RACHEL LOUGHLIN

You ask me
What will I tell the children?
Will I keep this from them
Should we protect their innocence?
And I don't think you know
My children
Listened to police copters
Smelled teargas
And knew. They knew
We were there to say
The police should stop shooting
Black people
Who armed only with
Cell phones, or toys or black skin
So don't tell me
They won't understand
When they see this scene
They saw the place we walked for
milkshakes
Burned and looted and leveled
The saw police lines
And how monuments to whiteness
Stand between the people and power
How the bodies on the line
Thrown on the ground
Choking on the clouds of gas
Beaten into silence
Are the ones speaking truth
That lies always walk right through
Wave their flags with impunity
On ramparts
Sit on pedestals

But they have also seen the statues come
down
With their own eyes
They have seen the people speak rainbow
truth
on alabaster stones
Rode the bending arch
Like a roller coaster this year
They held space for the tide as it rose
And yes, they will watch this ship go down
And will stand witness
When they finally burn
Their own house around themselves
I won't tell them this will make them safe
I will tell them
What we chanted on the streets
That this is what democracy looks like
It is not what it looks like in books
It is broken glass and windows and f-bombs
And desperate stories
And near misses
And flashbangs all night
But what is it worth
To know in your bones
That voices together
Can make stone tyrants fall



Queer Club Nights

BY: LULA NINI

Extra femme.
Extra elixir
in my cup.

I want to be
out of body,
handed over

to the music.
My god,
tonight

I'm monotheistic.
My presence
is my prayer

and childhood dreams
of becoming a dancer
are found again.

My god,
these bodies
don't bend to break.

They bend
towards the light,
phototropic

for fluorescent pinks
and blues and greens.
Sweat is like jewelry:

dew on morning leaves.
We always leave
in the morning.

Don't they say
the night
is destined for freaks?

How the night's shadow
precedes it,
pulling you in

like a rip current.
So I say,
pull me in, then.

Steal me
from the afraid
and make a freak of my nature.

"Follow the wind" by Tetiana Kylivnyk



T. Kylivnyk

T. Kylivnyk

I Traveled this Far Because I Love You

ZACH MURPHY

The Antarctic cold definitely feels a lot different from the cold in Idaho," Adam said.
"Sure does," Rodger said as he flicked the mini-icicles off of his thick mustache.

"Once we cross this next glacier wall, we'll have reached the edge of the earth."

Adam and Rodger trudged on with their overstuffed backpacks through the wintry terrain, looking like a pair of snails with shells full of climbing equipment and survival supplies.

"I really think we should turn around," Adam said.

"But we're almost there," Rodger said.

Rodger pulled out his map. A harsh gust of wind swept it off into the snowy distance.

"See!" Adam said. "Even the wind is telling us to go back!"

Rodger checked his compass. The red needle was frozen stiff as if it had given up on doing its one and only job. Rodger tapped the glass face of the compass, but the needle wouldn't budge.

"It's so cold that the compass broke," Adam said. "If that isn't a sign, I don't know what is."

"It's not broken," Rodger said. "It's just confused."

Adam sighed and rolled his eyes. "How much further do we have to go?"

Rodger pointed ahead with the focus of an olympic athlete. "If we keep moving, we should get to the glacier wall within an hour," he said.

Adam came to a halt and forcefully planted his boots into the snow. "I have something to tell you," he said.

"What?" Rodger asked as he hiked on.

"I don't really think the earth is flat," Adam answered.

Rodger choked on his own snot from laughing so hard. "You're kidding," he said.

"Rodger!" Adam said. "It just doesn't make sense!"

Rodger stopped. "Wait," he said. "You're being serious?"

"Yes!" Adam answered.

"Did you not watch the YouTube documentary I sent you?" Rodger asked.

"No one ever actually watches videos that people send them," Adam said. "Especially when they're two hours long."

"Then why did you decide to come?" Rodger asked.

Adam took a deep breath. "I thought it would be a good bonding experience."

Rodger squints. "A bonding experience?"

"I just feel like we've been drifting apart from each other the past few years," Adam said. "Like, there's this fracture growing between us."

Rodger took a seat in the snow. "I've always wanted to accomplish something amazing before I turn thirty," he said. "You know, to prove that there's something special about me."

"Please don't go all Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront* on me," Adam said.

"It's true," Rodger said. "I feel like my life has been disappointment after disappointment."

"You've been my best and only friend for almost my whole life," Adam said. "That's a pretty awesome accomplishment."

Rodger entered a deep stare. "I'd shed a tear right now but it might freeze," he said.

Adam smiled. "Let's go," he said as he held his hand out to Rodger. "Let's get to that glacier wall."

Rodger grabbed Adam's hand and popped up from the ground. "To the glacier wall!"

Adam dusted the snow off of his coat. "After that, I'm not going any further."

"There is no further," Rodger answered.

Adam took another deep breath as they traveled on.

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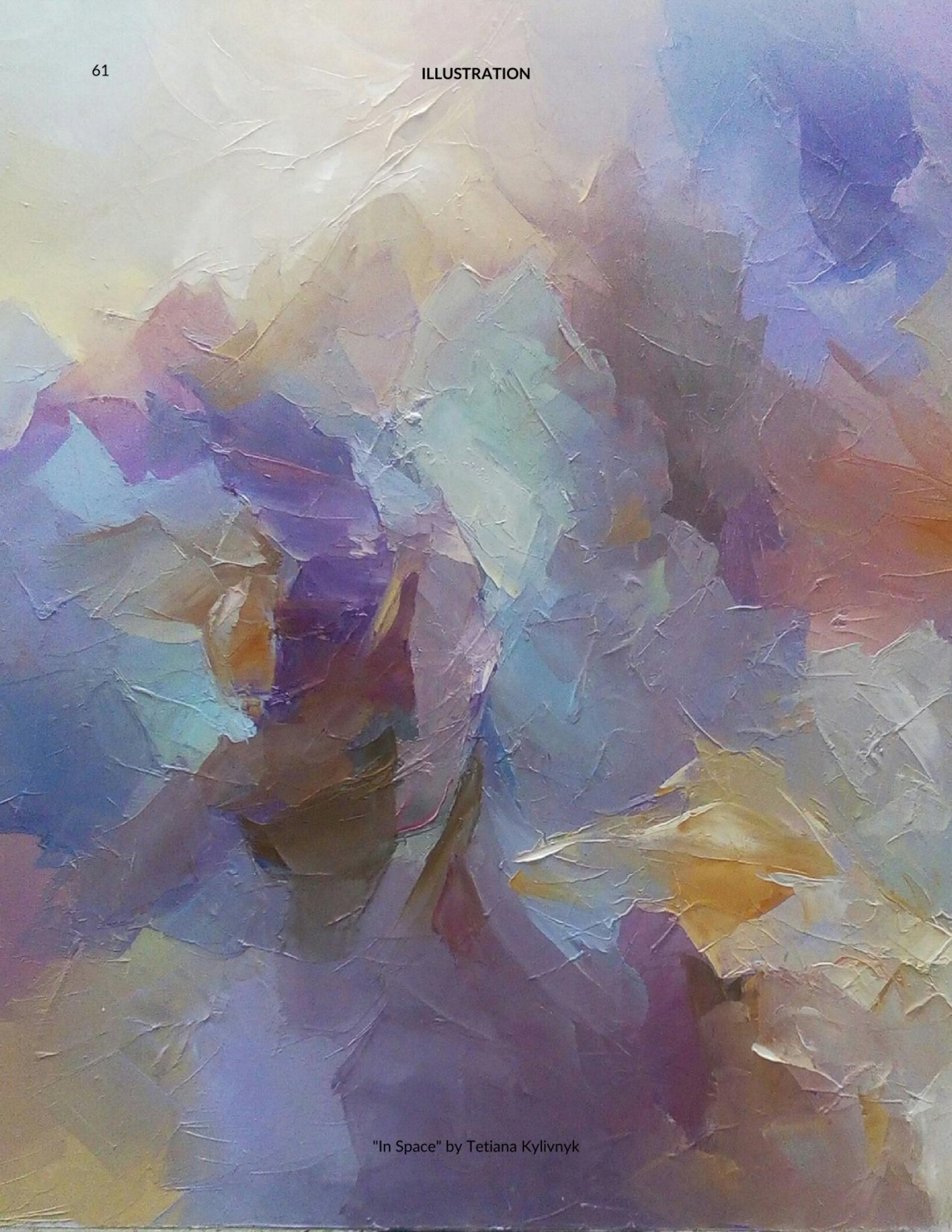
After scaling the glacier wall, Rodger and Adam pulled themselves to the top of the summit and gazed ahead. The sun's fading rays shone a gentle glisten across miles and miles of frozen tundra.

Rodger dropped to his knees. "It's not the edge of the earth," he said.

"But it sure is a beautiful view," Adam said as he placed his hand on Rodger's shoulder.



Tetiana Kylivnyk is an artist of oil painting and artistic textile. She graduated from the Republican Art Pedagogical School by the name of I. Repin (Chisinau, Moldova) and Lviv National Academy of Arts (LNAA, Lviv, Ukraine). She is a member of the National Union of Artists of Ukraine (NUAU) and International Association of Art (IAA) Europe. More information about the artist on the website: taniakilivnik.com



"In Space" by Tetiana Kylivnyk

"Splash" by Tetiana Kylynyk



The One

BY: R.P. SINGLETARY

For the woman who'll be beautiful in thirty-five years," John said. I smiled against my nerves, smudging lipstick on my front tooth. I raised my napkin and lowered my head. The linen's starch rubbed my gum raw.

"You think I'm kidding?" he asked me.

Me, the twice-divorced ingénue flirting with Social Security benefits, he's asking me about my looks in thirty-five years? I wasn't sure I'd gotten the lipstick off my tooth, but I mouthed a half-smile and sipped my water, giving me time to think. Out of nervousness, I touched my neck. I was glad I had Grandmother's necklace repaired before our latest trip.

"I never heard that answer before," I said.

He swallowed more red wine. Then he pushed away his empty plate.

"I'm being honest," he said. "You never heard that line?"

I shook my head.

"Listen, I'm being honest. I like all this." He waved his hand out into the space of the private dining room. "I like all this, wine, travel, the good life. I want a deserving woman to love, and it's child's play to think any of this lasts. Maybe I was joking about beauty. I didn't know what else to say."

"You don't do that with women," I said to myself. "Especially at our age." I nibbled at the lamb remaining on my plate. I had been ravenous. Now, I was mad with my doubts.

"I'd never label you dishonest, John."

He chuckled. I drank more wine.

"These past six months have been the best, Marie, but I need to know what your intentions are."

"What my intentions are?" I asked myself this time. My word, I'd asked untold bachelors the question that I didn't have answers to myself. John startled me. I didn't know. Maybe he was the one. I wasn't prepared. The last six months had been great, beyond super. We were known around town back home as an item, but John confused me. He could play the crotchety old man better than any other, but then he would draw me back in with his schoolboy charm. I liked him. I liked him a lot. I knew that much for sure. Unlike the others, he was almost too good to be real, and I liked that, liked having the doubt. It kept things real. "I'd like to think I'm pretty enough now, without us having to plan for the next thirty-five years, John!" I said.

I knew my words made no sense. He knew it. The crazy talk answered him, and we laughed. He knew me by now. Little was work with him. No posturing, no secrets, no pretend. His years of working in sales and traveling the globe had taught him to read people. Even the uncertainty unfolded with a natural refreshment, a welcomed fantasy. "Oh, I am fantasizing. I don't even know what I'm looking for. At this age?" I said to myself.

"That's a given, honey," he said. "You're a forever beauty. I just don't want this to be so focused on our youth." He winked.

Now, I laughed and almost spilled the last of my wine.

"I'd hardly say we shop in the youth department, as nice a thought as that may be."

"I mean—"

"Yes, John, please tell me what you mean."

"I mean to say that I think you're the one."

I put down my glass for fear of squeezing it into pieces. I released my other hand's grip in my nervous lap.

"Are you proposing to me, sir?"

"Well, not exactly, I mean, well, I mean—well, what if I am?"

"You know I'm old school."

At those words, aging John took to his knee. I looked around, said "Oh, nooo, nooo," and helped him back up. He had almost stumbled.

"Not here, please. Even at my age, what with our last bell about to ring, but you know, I've never been a church bride."

"I saw in your albums. Always beach weddings, on the sand."

"Yeah," I said. "I'd really like one. Do they still wear white? Does it even matter these days? Are ministers still involved? Do folks even have weddings anymore?"

"What I'm trying to tell you is that none of that matters."

"Maybe not to--"

"It matters to me if it matters to you." He corrected himself fast.

I felt my shoulders relax. The conversation didn't surprise me. Over the last several dinners on this trip, I now realized he just couldn't do it. Courage or the timing? Even at his age? If I live thirty-five more years, I will never come to understand the men of our world.

Looking down at my hands and fingers in my lap, I counted three deep breaths and felt Grandmother's pendant rising and falling above my cleavage. John noticed. That was his thing. (I do understand that much about men.) Our eyes met. We laughed again. He reached across the table, and I met him halfway, his talcum-dry hand mopping up my perspiration.

"Women don't sweat; they perspire," Grandmother told me as a girl every afternoon at the park playground. She'd reared me herself. I don't know what she'd say about all my marriages. Or the divorces. Actually, I do. I smiled. "A different type of playground this century, Granny," I said to myself.

"Playground?" John said. "Don't tell me we're only playing around here." He squeezed my hand.

"Oh no, not at all, John, I was just thinking of a family story. I'll tell you sometime..."

"You couldn't be any more beautiful than you are today, or any day, today or fifty years from today, unless you're holding my hand all those years and happy to hold it, too. What do you say, mademoiselle?"

Our gazes locked. I rubbed the heirloom around my neck, as if for luck perhaps. With my other hand, I squeezed his, this time feeling a sweaty palm against mine.

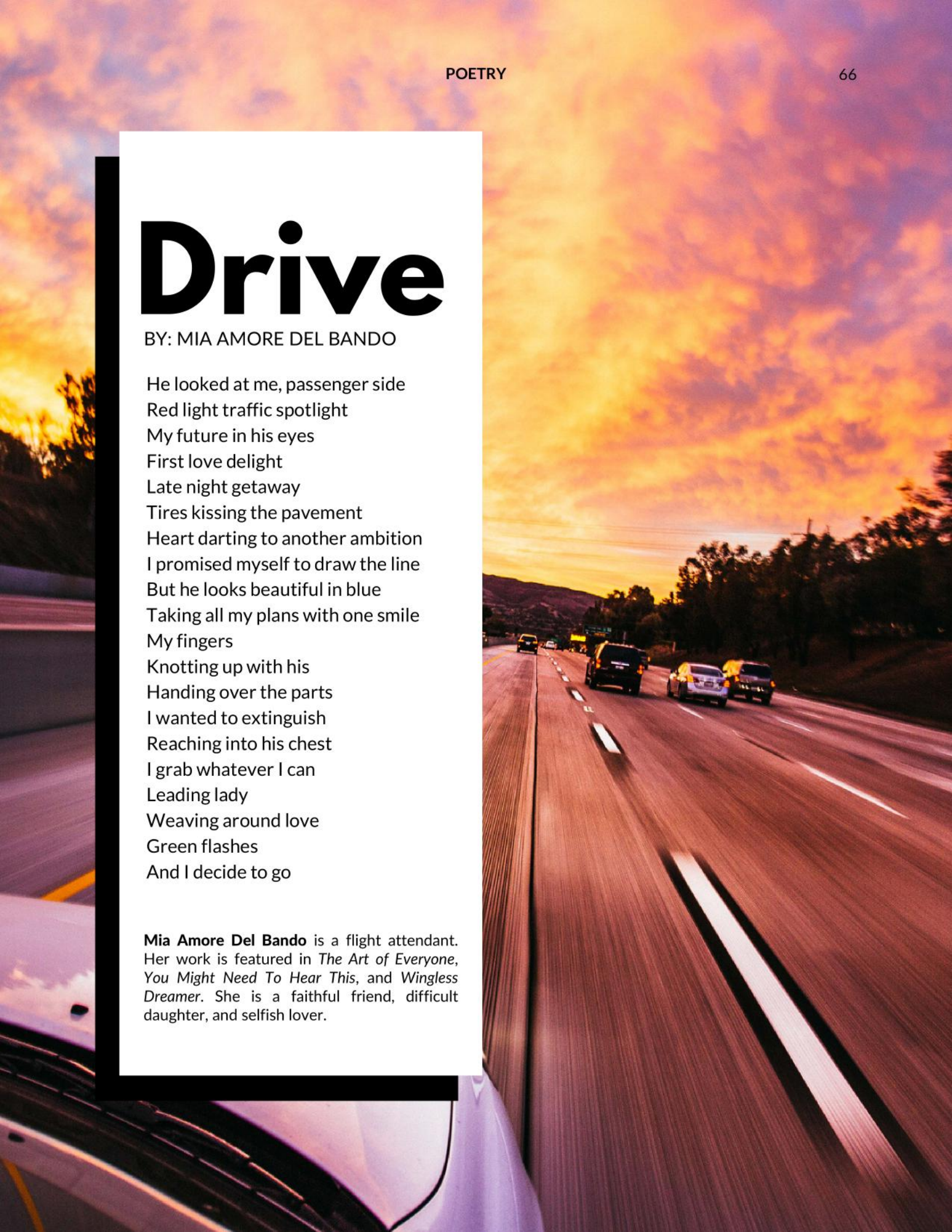


Drive

BY: MIA AMORE DEL BANDO

He looked at me, passenger side
Red light traffic spotlight
My future in his eyes
First love delight
Late night getaway
Tires kissing the pavement
Heart darting to another ambition
I promised myself to draw the line
But he looks beautiful in blue
Taking all my plans with one smile
My fingers
Knotting up with his
Handing over the parts
I wanted to extinguish
Reaching into his chest
I grab whatever I can
Leading lady
Weaving around love
Green flashes
And I decide to go

Mia Amore Del Bando is a flight attendant. Her work is featured in *The Art of Everyone*, *You Might Need To Hear This*, and *Wingless Dreamer*. She is a faithful friend, difficult daughter, and selfish lover.





Sorry

BY: MIA AMORE DEL BANDO

He's apologizing on the other line
White noise scratches my ear drum
Begging for the words to reach my brain
Everything I prayed for before
Registering through the speaker
He's explaining very well
The incident and how it destroyed his character
Painting his words with honesty
Coating them with regret
How I am the girl he wanted
When another was on his mouth
Clean politician answers
Dry voice, genuine tone
I'm counting the minutes until
This monologue ends
He patiently waits for a response
The heroic act of claiming responsibility
Disasters leading to my door step
Asking for forgiveness is a privilege
Cradling our future in my palm
I gently hang up



"Faith gives us the courage to face the daily difficulties. It doesn't have to be a religion, but if you don't believe in yourself, you won't be brave. Even if we are always aware of death, we should be brave to be able to enjoy life."

"We Draw Courage from Faith"
By: Helge H. Paulsen

D.C. Al Fine

BY: NICOLE DUFALLA

A thick glossy varnish freezes
swirled mahogany grains
in time; in this time, before.
Moths in amber.

My long neck, strong
enough to heave thunderous
chords through dark silence,
cradling soft whispering rain.

Nylon tendons flexing,
straining, stretching to run
into the skies; echoing
through clouds, with songbirds.

You took me between your legs, my nylon
strings plucked by your dirty fingernails. Stained
with the soil of my sisters,
my mothers,
my aunts.

Silent, lake, still; I count
floorboards on stage, studying
deep red velvet curtains; thunderous
cheers drown wailing

rain. Piercing the surface, racing
to silent depths; imprinted
with connecting circles. Oscillating,
tears in perfect C, crying melody

to crowds hearing only music, skimming
across calm waters. Vibrations dampen.
Silence. And I am plucked again.

Nicole Dufalla is a professor who lives in Colorado. In her free time, she enjoys writing and getting lost outside.



it is all in you

BY: DAVID BANACH

do you remember the sunlight the running just as fast as you
can and the grass that stains your new shoes green and how
mischief was our religion hiding from time out on the river
finding a place where you couldn't be found flowing and floating
do you remember the ground still warm on your back looking up
beyond stars fingers still barely touching and bodies matching minds
silent breath slowing into sync letting the darkness into our eyes
pupils wide open fireflies bursting like thoughts in an empty head
can you remember it even now in the nothing the hopeless the rush
of thoughts you can't control in the I want-to-die it's-too-much
in the running away crisis crunch of cannot go on always ever
it is all in you this summer this fire when your heart first opened
and you can let it all gush out again no more then no more now
ever its summer forever it is all even then it was all in you.

David Banach teaches philosophy in New Hampshire, where he tends chickens, keeps bees, and looks for lessons in the sky. He also does the Poetrycast podcast for Passengers Journal.



MY TOUR DE FLORIDA

BY: BARBARA HURWITZ

I swung my leg over the bike's horizontal crossbar with the same level of confidence I had when mounting Pinto for my initiation to horseback riding. Suffice it to say, the horse and I were bouncing to opposing rhythms with a brutal meeting in the middle. But I was an avid bike rider in my youth, and they say you never forget,

So, I was willing to give it a whirl when invited to join a few women on a six-mile journey around their Florida community where my friend Laura was eager for me to buy.

The vintage bikes set in the front of the condo were spanking clean and shiny. The one I'd dubbed Bubblegum called out my name, but Laura declared the pink one hers, leaving Spearmint, her husband's bike, for me to ride.

Laura's face pinched hearing the names I'd given her bikes, but I can't help personifying things close to me—my car is George, my African violet I call Peri Winkle, and my sourdough starter is Bradley Cooper.

We peddled off, meeting up with the others on the palm tree-lined trail, and in no time, I was left bringing up the rear. The terrain was flat, the trail smooth, but I'm a slow peddler. After the first mile, the humid air had energized the frizz in my hair but did nothing to lubricate my weakening legs. By the end of the second mile, sweat trickled down my forehead, my parched tongue shriveled, and my knees felt like rubber. "You can do this," I encouraged myself. And finally, rounding the third mile, I heard voices and captured a glimpse of Bubblegum settled on the pebble road leading into a construction site where Laura thought I'd find my new home.

The women already settled on the manmade beach and were sipping chardonnay by the time Spearmint and I had arrived. I called out and waved as I psyched myself for the dismount, thinking nothing could be as bad, or painful, as the dismount from Pinto. But as I shifted all my weight to my right leg planning to swing my left over the crossbar with grace, the bike and I toppled onto the gravel, tearing my leggings, skinning my knees, and shaming my pride.

Laura came running, helping to disentangle me from Spearmint. "Oh no, are you all right?" she asked, examining the bike.

"I'm fine," I said, scraping off the tiny pebbles embedded in my hands while apologizing for any damage to Spearmint, whose skin was evidently thicker than mine and fortunately came through unscathed.

With a false grin, I joined the giggling women entertained by the choreography of my less than graceful arrival. One handed me a consolation glass of wine, and as the conversation moved on, I pretended to follow, but my mind was focused on how to get Spearmint the three miles back home. Just like with Pinto, this ride was to be a one-way journey.

Barbara Schilling Hurwitz has found a new voice through creative writing. Her pieces have been published in several literary journals, and she won runner-up in the Montgomery Magazine Fiction Contest in 2018 & 2019.





"Salmon and Wood Stump" by Sio Jaya

Sio Jaya is from Indonesia, Her artwork takes a critical view of social, political and cultural issues. In her work, she reflects on the various unconsciousness



"Hope" By: Emel Çevikcan

Emel Çevikcan is an artist working in İZMİR as an art teacher at the Ministry of National Education.

Henry Hudson (c. 1565 – disappeared 23 June 1611) was an English sea explorer and navigator during the early 17th century, best known for his explorations of present-day Canada and parts of the northeastern United States. On his final expedition, while still searching for the Northwest Passage, Hudson became the first European to see Hudson Strait and the immense Hudson Bay. In 1611, after wintering on the shore of James Bay, Hudson wanted to press on to the west, but most of his crew mutinied. The mutineers cast Hudson, his son, and seven others adrift; the Hudsons and their companions were never seen again.

Wikipedia contributors. "Henry Hudson." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2 Aug. 2022. Web. 19 Aug. 2022.

DRENCHED

BY: GANELLE LESNEW

Sideways sculling sliding thisaways
Hissing with accusation
A week of heaped baby bunting
Stalking me sulkily.

Henry Hudson died discovering
Abandoned in his namesake bay
And now I wonder
If, in the end, he wished he'd just stayed home.

I haven't slept in 60 days
To tell by the slant of the mid-winter sun
Heaving exhausted against the window pane
Drooling absently onto the carpet.

And what did Henry say to his son
In their tiny boat
Once his ship had sailed away
Did he only stare?

As I stare at you
You impossibly tiny stranger
I don't know what you want from me
And if I did, I'm sure I don't know how.

The snowy windows are sea storm gray
As your wailed demands
Crash across the bow
I'm pretty sure we're sinking.

Ganelle Lesnew lives in Berkley, Michigan with her cat, dog, and child. She raises money for nonprofit organizations and loves naps.

PHOTOGRAPHY

"Pondering" by Daniel Orr

Daniel Orr has been translating curiosity into a body of work that is about minimalist beauty for 30 plus years. His pieces are impressionistic and abstract, but rooted in subject matter that is recognizable.

1992

BY: DC DIAMONDPOLOUS

A black cloud of smoke near the intersection of Florence and Normandie drifted toward Mrs. Kim's California Dry Cleaning store in South Central Los Angeles. She turned the sign to closed and locked the door. Her husband phoned telling her to come home. The jury had acquitted the four white police officers accused of beating Rodney King. Trouble had begun.

She'd seen the video of the policemen clubbing the man when he was down. Didn't seem right.

The Kims, in their 50s, socialized with and hired only other Koreans. With their two daughters, they lived the American Dream in a Korean cocoon.

A year before, Soon Ja Du shot Latasha Harlins, a black teenager, in the back of the head in Du's convenience store and spent no time in jail. Since then, Mrs. Kim's black customers would grab their clothes and leave without saying goodbye. She didn't kill the girl, but she felt guilty.

Mrs. Kim hurried as she took the money out of the cash register and put it in a bag with the day's receipts. She wanted to leave before Mrs. Johnson came for her 6:00 Wednesday pick-up. She was a good customer, and they used to make friendly chitchat about their children. But an awkwardness had grown between her and the tall black woman with dark-red hair and pretty fingernails.

Mrs. Kim grabbed her keys. She remembered the folding security gate had to be closed, but when she got to the door, she saw Mrs. Johnson park her car. Mrs. Kim rushed to the back and hid, waiting for the woman to leave.

No justice, that's what Mrs. Johnson thought when she parked her car in front of the dry cleaning store. Times like this made her heart drag, made her so angry she wanted to go to that Simi Valley Courthouse and burn it down, down to where her heart lay. Then she saw the closed sign on the door and caught the birdlike figure of Mrs. Kim scurrying away.

Ever since the Du woman went free, Mrs. Kim, once good-hearted and sociable, never looked her in the eye, never smiled, not even a goodbye.

She considered changing cleaners but she'd been going to the Kims for years. She liked how they cleaned her hospital uniforms and choir robe and could depend on her weekly 6:00 pick-up.

KFWB reported incidents of rioting. Mrs. Johnson locked her car. Smoke funnels dotted the late April sky. She wanted to get her cleaning and get home to her husband and two sons.

As she walked to the door, she didn't like the unchristian feeling she had toward Koreans she did business with, but why treat all black people as if we were going to rob them?

Mrs. Johnson knocked on the door. With no answer, she pounded. "I saw you, Mrs. Kim," she shouted, rattling the door. "I need my clothes now!"

Embarrassed, Mrs. Kim came out from the back. Trembling, she unlocked the door and opened it. "So sorry. Husband wants me home."

She went behind the counter and reached for the conveyor switch when a loud crash spun her around.

Mrs. Johnson shrieked.

Across the street, young men were throwing bricks at Mr. Choi's liquor store. They ransacked his business, darting out with cases of beer and cartons of cigarettes.

"Call the police," Mrs. Johnson shouted.

"Line dead."

A mob of looters smashed the windows of Mr. Lee's shoe repair shop. Rioters charged down the block, raiding stores and then setting them on fire.

Security alarms blared over car horns, breaking glass, screams, and hooting.

Mrs. Kim sobbed. She watched, paralyzed by the violence as real as the Korean War of her childhood. The whole block went up in flames. "Oh no, they come for me."

Mrs. Johnson shouted, "Do you have a gun?"

Mrs. Kim turned to answer when a brick crashed through her front window. Glass shattered. They both screamed.

"No. Ball bat. We go out back."

Mrs. Johnson ran around the counter and snatched the bat from Mrs. Kim.

A loud boom rocked the building. Mrs. Johnson ran to the window. In the alley, a gang of teenagers was smashing car windows, pouring gasoline inside, and torching them. One of the boys wore a Lakers jersey, and another an LA Dodger cap turned backward. Those boys could be her sons. Their rage was her rage.

Yet she held onto Dr. King's teachings of love and nonviolence.

"We trapped," Mrs. Kim cried, standing beside her. "Where police?"

The front of the shop exploded. The smell of burning plastic overwhelmed them.

Mrs. Johnson slid the bolt back and opened the door.

"I go too."

"No. Stay here."

Ball bat in hand, Mrs. Johnson, as pissed-off as she'd ever been, walked into the alley, into the smell of gasoline swirling in thick smoke and the sound of sirens wailing and dogs howling. Her heart ached for her people, but burning down their own neighborhood? She prayed to Jesus as she walked into the madness.

"You with the Laker jersey," she yelled. "I know your mama." She choked the handle of the club. "You think she'd be proud of you?"

"You wiggin' out, lady," he said, strutting toward her, moving his hands gangsta style. "You don't know nothin'."

At 5'10" she was at least 4 inches taller. She took a step forward. "Get your homies and get out of here, or I'll tell your mama what you've been up to."

They were locked in a stare-down.

His dawgs stopped to watch.

"C'mon," Laker jersey said to his homeboys. "You don't tell my mama nothin'," he muttered and swaggered away.

Mrs. Kim ran to her van, unlocked it, started the engine, and opened the passenger door.

Mrs. Johnson jumped in. She thanked the Lord for their deliverance.

"Glad you come," Mrs. Kim said with tears in her eyes as she floored the gas peddle and tore down the alley.



Yula Robin Kim is a London-based artist who grew up in Asia, Polynesia, Africa, and Europe. These diverse environments have given her ample cultural and environmental experiences to draw upon in her work. Her life in Polynesia, Africa, and Europe especially stimulated her ability to see the inherent aesthetics of nature, enlightened her gaze, and helped her to consider the significance of nature in our lives, and society, as a whole.

Unconventional Rita and The Water Fountain

BY: RICHARD M. ANKERS

Rita glowers at the water fountain. The water fountain shows no sign of life. "You see this?!" she rants. "This is the reason the world's in such a state." "Because it's not running?" "Because it's broken," she corrects. "Well, I'm not having it. Time someone did something about it."

"See you tonight," I say, as she storms away.

Rita waves a dismissive hand in reply.

She's not home when I knock on her door. Rita's mum claims she thought her with me. My shrug is less than reassuring. Lies are not my thing.

I try all the usual haunts from the park to the corner shop and the gym to the coffee shop where everyone lounges like lizards. Not one of them has seen Rita. This continues for days.

...

Rita's return is marked by a slap that echoes through her quiet street. Everyone hears it. There are faces at windows and noses sniffing the air. Some children laugh. Others shiver. One old chap has a heart attack, he's so shaken up, but his wife says he has them all the time. I watch from the roadside as Rita's dad gestures her inside. She looks rough. Very rough.

School comes and goes without Rita. Three of us go round to hers, but Rita's mum just glares. We don't even bother asking. Our friend is not at her window despite our staring. I miss her usual finger-flipping more than I can say. The others don't notice the bashing coming from the garage, but I do. A plan hatches.

...

I return at night. The garage lights are on and all of the family is in there. Rita is smeared with what looks like grease or oil, it's dark and hard to tell, but it's everywhere. Her mum and dad aren't much better, sweaty and red-faced. Bob, their dog, is holding a long metal pipe he's mistaken for a bone. He sees me and barks. I scarper.

This is my evening routine for another three days and marks a week of Rita's odd behavior. At the start of the second, she is back at school, though not in class.

...

Rita bangs and clatters and whacks and shouts. The water fountain remains silent. Mister Burns, the caretaker, tries to maneuver her away, but Rita kicks up such a stink he relents and fetches the headmaster. He fares worse. Her finger wags more than Bob's tail when teased with a biscuit.

The cops come. Rita wields a wrench. I position myself between them all like a superhero.

"Take this," she says, passing me a tool.

I raise it like Thor his hammer. I forget what it's called.

"Not them, me," Rita tuts.

For a second, I think she wishes me to bash her head in. Just a second, I'm pleased to say. She nods to the tap, which is turned upside down. I belt it as hard as I can.

The faucet revolves like a puppet's head, slow and steady, coming to rest opposite where it started. Rita turns it on to a rush of clear, fast-flowing water.

Only when she tests it, her head positioned directly underneath, do I see her cry. Her tears merge with the water like an angel's with the rain. When she stands back up, they're gone.

The police take her away, but not for long. What could they charge her with, the unconventional fixing of school property?

•••

I visit Rita, knocking on her door with some of my old gusto. Her mum answers.

"Have you seen, Rita?" she snaps.

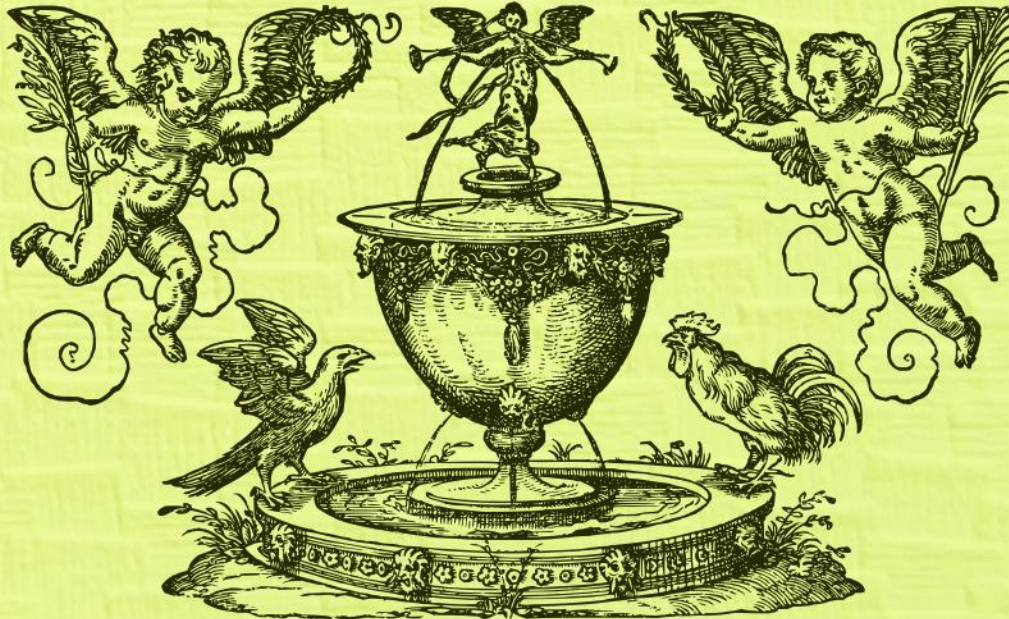
"Where is she?" parrots her dad, a beer in one hand and a belt in the other.

"I have no idea," I answer. "And I wouldn't tell you if I did."

They are the bravest words I've ever spoken. I even imagine myself as tough as Rita for at least a few seconds, though I'll never be as good a plumber.

None of us see Rita again.

Richard M. Ankers is the English author of *The Eternals Series* and *Britannia Unleashed*. He feels privileged to have been featured in magazines worldwide. Richard lives to write.



BE BRAVE



"Be Brave" by Jonathan Brooks

Jonathan Brooks' photographs have been published in numerous periodicals and featured in major movies and television shows. His work has been exhibited globally, including Art Basel, the Louvre, and the biggest billboard in Times Square.



Regain Courage

BY: EDUARD SCHMIDT-ZONER

When you look into an abyss
and you cry about lost realms
then it is the moment
when you should realize
that the lost paradise
is within you, a bliss,
like an affluent garden
full of fruits and seeds.
Free yourself of rules,
traditions, conventions –
be only you, only you,
break out, throw overboard,
defy pruning, trimming,
a lot of trees grow free
into the sky. Refuse, deny,
and exercise resistance.
Give words an asylum
in the moment's fleetingness.
Shout into the void.
Turn thoughts and images
into resounding, resonant songs
that you perceive from far
as soothing voices
of encouragement.
Experience encounters
that give you hope
that there is more
than this small instant.
Fearlessly
watch the hourglass.
Every grain of sand,
a chance for you.

Eduard Schmidt-Zorner is a translator and writer of poetry, haibun, haiku, and short stories. He writes in four languages: English, French, Spanish, and German. Lives in County Kerry, Ireland for more than 30 years.



"Foliage" by Annette Nichols

"Tiny House" by Annette Nichols





HIBERNATION

BY: EVELYN SYMES

Her father's chest rises, hesitates, then sinks back to rest in the valley of his once-muscular body. Behind her, she hears the soft snore of her husband as he succumbs to sleep. She nudges him. He snorts and sits up, blinking himself into awareness, stretching his arms into exhausted wakefulness, and meets her eyes questioningly.

She shakes her head and looks back to watch the rise of her father's chest once more and feels her own breath escape—only now aware she's been holding it, waiting for the soft whoosh that signals his intake of air, before she can release her own dread-filled breath.

Her husband stands and rests his hand momentarily on her shoulder before shuffling out of her father's bedroom to theirs. The house is cold, not the bitter winter cold that cuts to the bone, but the damp, shivery cold that presages Spring. The crocuses, her mother's favorite flowers, have bloomed and withered leaving purple smudges on the dark, sodden ground newly bereft of its snowy comforter.

Daffodils are sending tender, green reconnaissance shoots up into the freshening air to either slow or quicken the arrival of new stalks and buds. Too soon, and they will spend their hoarded energy populating a wasteland bereft of buzzing, hungry suitors eager to impregnate their fertile ovaries. Their long winter sleep wasted on stillborn flowers. Too late, and their offspring will wilt in the punishing heat of summer, producing small, dry, bulbs starved of the nourishment needed to survive long winters and awaken to bring forth new life.

She knows this. Eyes closed, she pictures her father, his clothes loose from the long winter fast, striding across the fields in Spring, filling his fists with the dark soil, holding it to his nose, gaging the readiness of the life within. His laughter as he bursts into the kitchen, hands loamy black. "Mama," he'd say as he pulled her mother to his body, nestling himself against her plump bottom, cupping her breasts in his big earthy hands, "I'll be spreading manure tomorrow. Best have one of them big breakfasts."

Her mother's returning laugh. "About time," she'd say brushing the soil from her apron, turning in his arms to kiss him. "Not much left of you."

"The best bits are still wick," he'd whisper in her ear.

Blushing, sidestepping from his arms, her mother would shyly look at her. All of them complicit in the awakening of life, the return of appetites reduced, the acknowledgment of appetites indulged in the dark days of hoarded delights.

Her father's breath pauses.

"It's Spring tomorrow, Dad," she says. "Tom walked the fields this morning. Things are early, but then they've been getting earlier for a while. I fixed him a big breakfast like Mom did for you. But he's not like you; he gets anxious. He won't eat much until he's made up his mind whether the land is waking or not."

Her father's lips twitch. He takes a deeper breath, pauses as if to speak.

She holds hers, again releasing it only when her father's face smooths into stillness on a shallow chuff of air. "Dad," she whispers, then quickly wipes a wayward tear from her cheek. "Please." She doesn't know what she asks of him. But fears it is too much.

Maybe it's for Mercy. The young priest comes every week now. He has since her mother's passing. He's a nice young man. Her father's only the second parishioner he's administered the last rites to; her mother was the first.

"Kyrie Eleison," she intones and presses her hands together, "Christie Eleison." She looks at her father's gnarled hands, then at hers. She has his bones, his sinews, his long lanky form. Like him, she thins over the long winters and fattens in the Spring.

What is Mercy, she muses, but the earth's rhythms. Ninety years he's lived in that mercy and given it to every living thing. I cannot ask him to stay.

His breathing changes. His eyes dart back and forth under his eyelids. "Daughter," he says. She leans over him tilting her head to hear better. "Remember, the chipmunks by the tractor shed. Put out some acorns," he pauses, "I have a bag for them..." he frowns.

"By the chicken feed," she says for him, "in case they wake too soon."

His lips negotiate a lopsided curve. "Yes."

The frown returns. "Things are off-kilter," he murmurs. His hands fumble across the blanket, searching for her mother who can no longer warm him in the cold Winter nights nor feed him on the pale Spring mornings, so he can muster his strength to call life from the land.

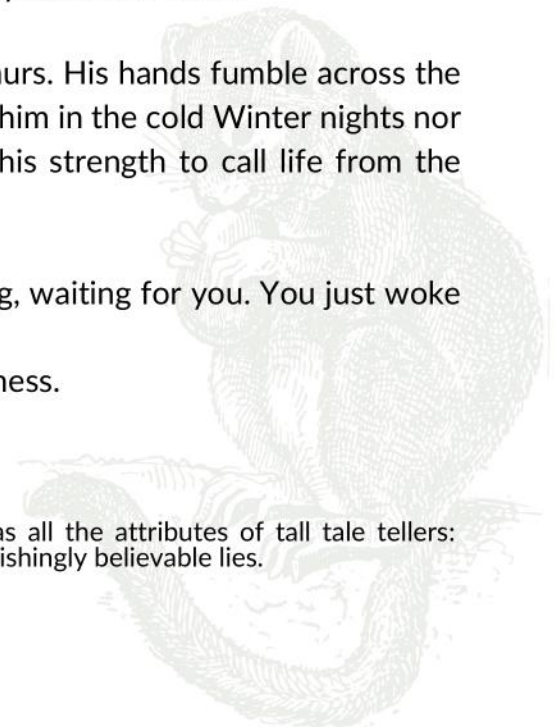
One last time he opens his eyes.

"Go back to sleep, Dad," she says. "She's hibernating, waiting for you. You just woke too soon. Like the chipmunks."

"Acorns," he sighs. His breath finally drifting to stillness.

She waits, breathes, then closes his eyes.

Evelyn Fletcher Symes comes from a long line of storytellers and has all the attributes of tall tale tellers: exaggeration, understatement, and an uncanny ability to fabricate astonishingly believable lies.





"Dylan" by Annette Nichols

Annette Nichols is a Visual Artist from the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area who does not believe in artistic limitations. In addition to her gestural abstract paintings and floral illustrations, Annette occasionally exhibits her photography.





"Along the Earth" & "Fall" By: Ellen Pliskin

Ellen Pliskin is a painter, printmaker and photographer. Her works have been on view in 6 United States Embassies as part of the U.S. State Department's Art in Embassies Program.







SAINT AMBROSE
CATHOLIC CHURCH
612 1365





Changing Reality

By: Ashley Wilson

Each day, it's supposed to get easier, but each day, I still think of you. There's an internal conflict that lingers inside me, leaving me to want to feel nothing for you while also missing you. Do I miss you or is it the idea of you? I suppose every daughter wants her father in her life, no matter how evil. But when that evil comes to hurt you, you must decide between yourself and your love for someone else. You cannot make others who you want them to be.

I imagine you, in prison, behind bars. I imagine you, a frail, old man who grows smaller with the ever-curving scoliosis and hunch back. I remember touring the jail over the summer interning at the courthouse. With the other interns, we watched inmates from the tower. The jail was everything that they thought it would be, but the thing that scared me the most were the men and their leering eyes... and that was just the jail. I can't imagine what prison is like.

What's the difference between jail and prison? The sentence. Jail is 365 days. Prison is a year and a day. But it must be more than the sentence. Everything is negotiated, gotta have a good lawyer. The irony is that I'm becoming one, not to help you, but to help myself and others who have been hurt by people like you. Used and abused by the very people who were supposed to protect them.

Because the reality of you using me for your own personal gain defies human nature, I was left wondering if the reason you did those things was because of me. I could not accept that the person who was supposed to love and protect me was willing to throw me away like I were disposable.

I used to want to kill myself because I thought then someone would notice or care about me. It was because of you. You made me believe in hating myself because you hate yourself. You wanted me to be everything you were, so you weren't alone. You wanted me to serve you and I couldn't anymore. When I needed space, the last thing you told me was that I was the one "making you fucking guilty."

And that was something I had to say in front of a room full of strangers, at a Grand Jury to testify against my own father. For you, I feel a tremendous amount of pain. It's a pain that pierces my heart and makes me sob as I write this. Runny nose and uncontrollable. I don't know what's worse. Having a father who loves you but dies, or having one that's alive but abused you?

I know what you're thinking, it's probably best he's not in her life. Of course, I agree with you. I'm the one here, at law school, becoming the opposite. My worst fear is that I'll become like you. I mean, I am half of your blood. My mom says that anyone can give birth; it takes more than that to be a father... but you were still mine for a while, weren't you?

Since I saw you at trial seven months ago, I regressed. I tortured myself. I strained my relationships in isolation, and I hated every time I cried over you. Now, I accept that this is my truth. It is nothing to be ashamed of. I accept that I can yearn for you while also recognizing that you are not good for my life. I did my part when I forgave you. I told you I did. Now, I can forgive and protect myself.











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