



FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE
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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

Change moves quietly at first, like a river winding through stone, wearing it down over time. It begins in small places: where a word is spoken, where a step is taken, where a line is drawn. These voices gather, each adding to the current until they become something stronger, something that cannot be held back. In this issue, we listen to those voices. They rise, and they do not ask for permission.

There is no loud announcement when things shift, no moment when it becomes clear. You notice it later, when the world feels different. In these stories, in these poems, in the images caught by those who watch closely, you'll see it. You'll see the change, not in a single sweep, but in the quiet persistence, the steady hands, the moments between. It's there if you look.

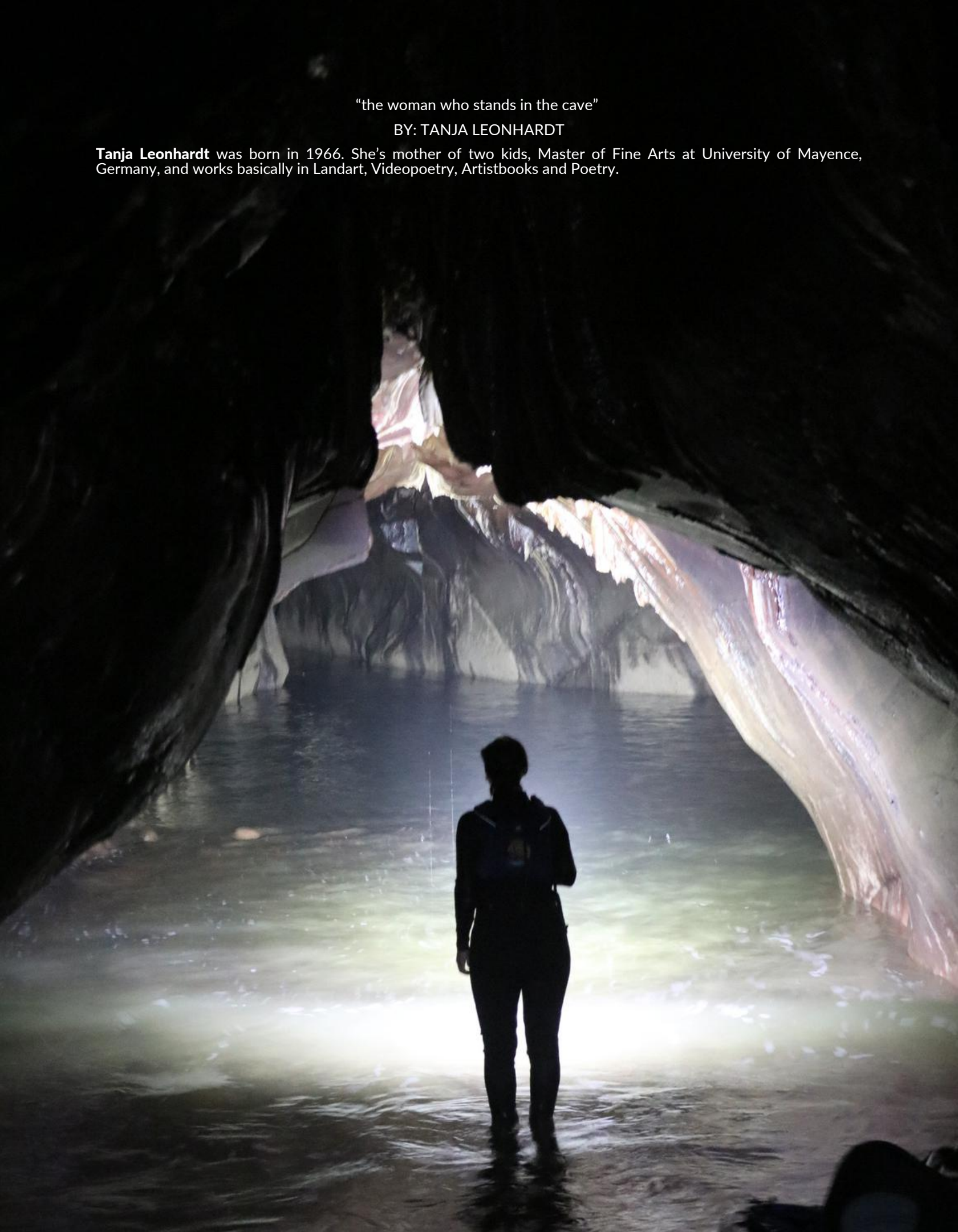
The voices in this issue speak of things that matter, though they don't shout. They echo in the spaces where we live, in the words and the art left behind. You might find it in a glance, in the way light falls, in the way people carry on when there's no choice but to move forward. They remind us of what's always been there, waiting to be heard.

xoxo
Flora Ashe

"the woman who stands in the cave"

BY: TANJA LEONHARDT

Tanja Leonhardt was born in 1966. She's mother of two kids, Master of Fine Arts at University of Mayence, Germany, and works basically in Landart, Videopoetry, Artistbooks and Poetry.



"the woman who enters the sea"
BY: TANJA LEONHARDT

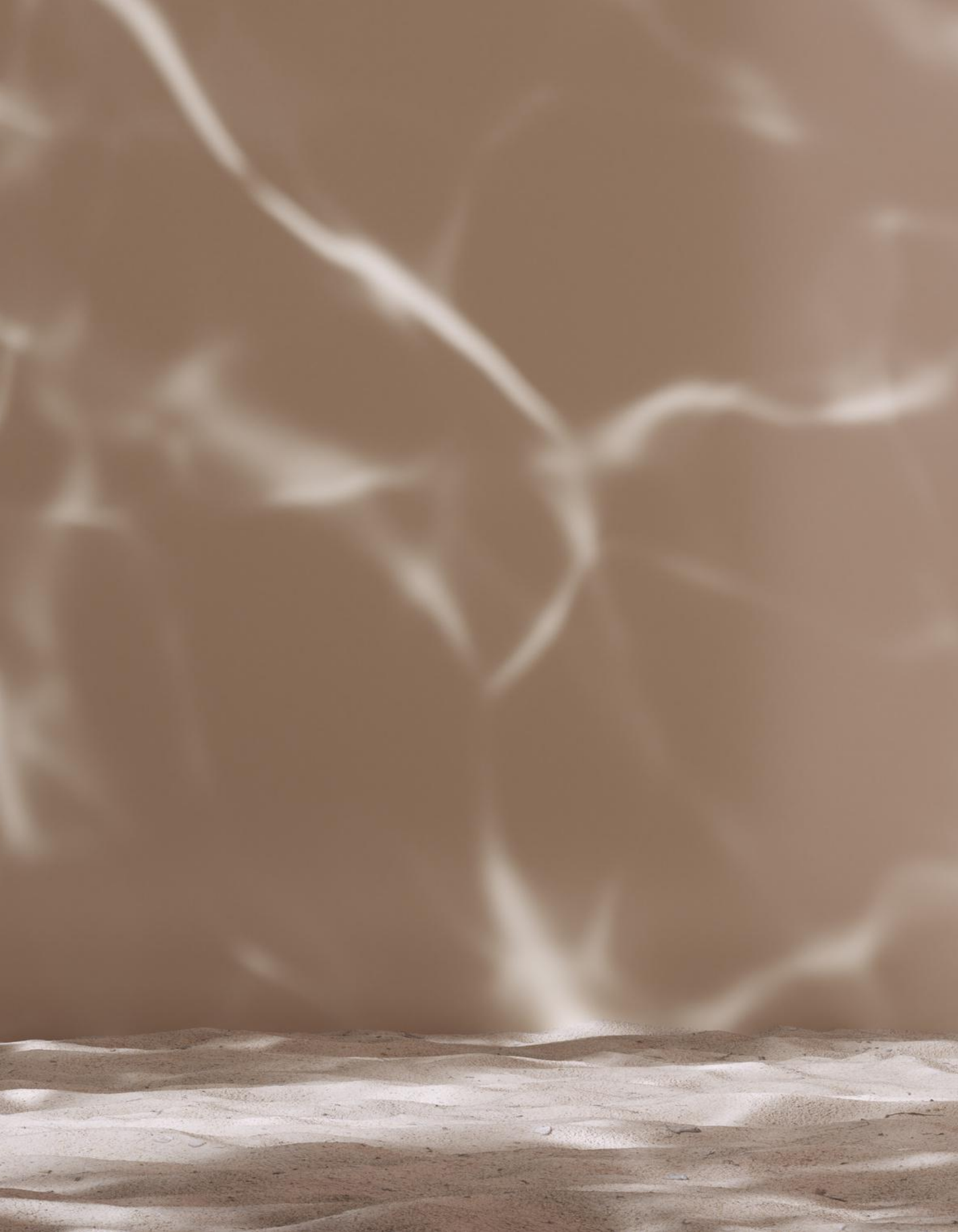


to drown

BY: KENNETH KESNER

when you stand there falling
do you feel as they look past
lost in hours for days to come
crowds and some others
here evening's close upon us
shadows soon to touch us
have you any thoughts on this
a sense of could it be now
if you say things only you hear
show me like in a dream
they'll never know i promise

Kenneth Kesner (肯内思) splits his time between the Caucasus and South East Asia. Some recent works are featured in: *Arlington Literary Journal*, *Levitate Magazine*, *New Note Poetry*, *Poetry Pacific*, and *October Hill Magazine*.

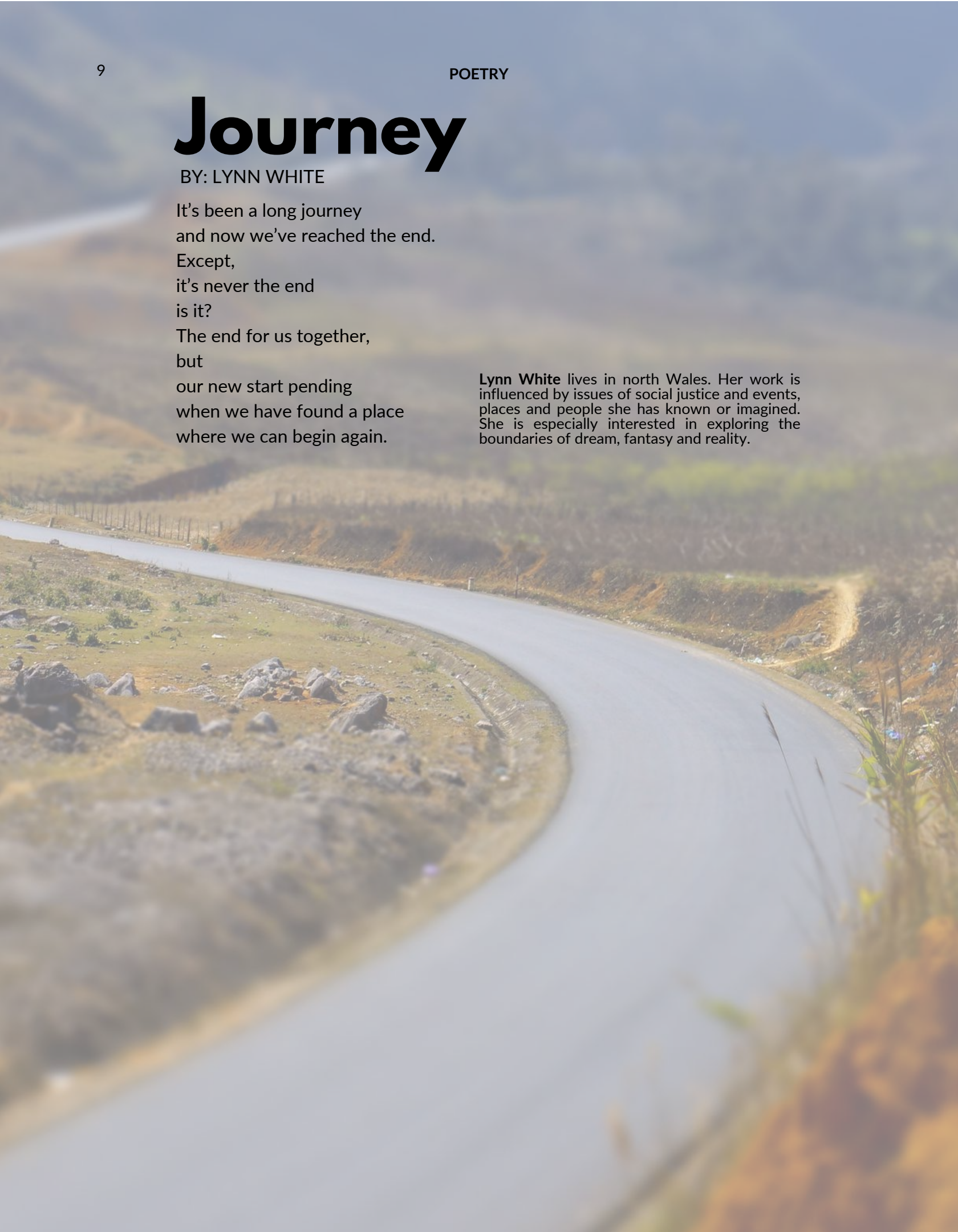


Journey

BY: LYNN WHITE

It's been a long journey
and now we've reached the end.
Except,
it's never the end
is it?
The end for us together,
but
our new start pending
when we have found a place
where we can begin again.

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality.



"the girl who enters the cave"

BY: TANJA LEONHARDT





"For Her"
BY: SARA CAPORALETTI

"Stand Tall"

BY: SARA CAPORALETTI

Sara Caporaletti is a multi-media visual artist living in Maryland. Caporaletti received her BA in studio art from McDaniel College and her MFA in interdisciplinary fine art from American University.



Golden Squares

BY: TINA MacNAUGHTON

On a street in Berlin
Small golden plaques
Glint in the spring sunshine
Tiny squares of guilt
On pavements worn with death
Steeped in bloodshed, suffering
Burnt books, glass broken
Little glimmers of life, of breath
Squeezed, suffocated
In wagons deep in stench, in fear
Clasped hands wrenched apart
Sobs convulsed
Black smoke stuck in throats
Silenced by shock, sadness
Great grief cannot be voiced
But rests quietly
In clusters of tiny squares
Names, dates etched
So many names,
So many golden squares
Glisten in the spring sunshine
On a street in Berlin.

Tina Cathleen MacNaughton is an acupuncturist and a writer based in Berkshire and Portsmouth, United Kingdom. Author of *On the Shoulders of Lions* (The Choir Press, 2021) and *Delphy Rose* (Troubador, 2023).

"Follow the Leader"
BY: SARA CAPORALETTI



"Yellow Flowers 8.12.24"
BY: WILLIAM D. HICKS





"Staying Present."
BY: AIYANA MASLA

Aiyana Masla is author of *Stone Fruit* (Bottlecap Press) and the *Underdream* (forthcoming with Cornerstone Press). A queer, non zionist jew, she is an interdisciplinary artist and educator.

Hands Across America 1986

BY: LOIS VILLEMAIRE

I took my young daughters
to DC for a fundraising event
linking people across the country.

Donations were sought
to raise money for the homeless,
fight hunger, aid those in poverty.

Red, white, and blue T-shirts
we stepped into our places in line
amazed at the snaking human chain.

Traffic was frozen during the time
we sang a song— I don't recall the name,
swaying, hands joined, heads held high.

Connected as one for fifteen minutes,
sisters, friends, and strangers, we
created something larger than ourselves

in the shadow
of the Washington Monument
on a sunny day in May.

Lois Villemaire of Annapolis, MD is the author of "My Eight Greats," a family history in poetry and prose. Her chapbook "Eyes at the Edge of the Woods" (Bottlecap Press) was recently released.



"Identity"

BY: KALEAB ALEMAYEHU



Kaleab Alemayehu is an artist passionate about bringing imagination to life through drawing, painting, mixed media, and street murals. After studying at Addis Ababa University's Alle School of Fine Arts, he experimented with various techniques and discovered a strong affinity for oil paints, which became his main medium for expressing his creative vision.





"Freedom"

BY: ALIAKSANDRA MARKAVA

Aliaksandra Markava explores new horizons with each work, sharing her impressions and inspiring others to create. She maintains a deep passion for art and encourages others to pursue their own artistic journeys.



"Instinct"

BY: KALEAB ALEMAYEHU



"Nature"

BY: EMEL ÇEVİKCAN

Emel Çevikcan is a watercolor artist from Turkey, recognized for expressive works that capture the beauty of the surroundings with delicate detail and emotion.

Slay The Beast

BY: DEE ALLEN

Tribes of conscience, hear me.
 We band together on this day
 In preparation for an unsettling
 But necessary fight.
 Sorcerers of spite
 Who rule this land
 And the villagers
 Too glad to do their nasty bidding
 Have called upon, with a spell,
 Straight from a smoky, fiery pit,
 A monster
 As old as their kingdom
 And just as vicious.
 A monster
 That kept us
 Apart and afraid,
 Seen as inferior long enough.
 Raise your swords, raise your shields,
 Use your sharp spears, use your bows & swift arrows,
 Let the boots you wear do all your speaking.
 When that hateful saurian stomps forth,
 With our numbers, slay the beast.
 The thick, spike-backed,
 Long-tailed, long-clawed,
 Blood red-eyed, fire-spitting,
 Ivory-scaled, fanged leviathan

White Supremacy

Shall meet with a bitter defeat.

Dee Allen is an African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, California, author of 9 books and 74 anthology appearances.



"How the Civil War Transformed America"

BY: PHYLLIS GREEN



"Notice bits of speech Lincoln holds in his hand. ALL....EQUAL."

BY: PHYLLIS GREEN

Phyllis Green had a relative who fought with the Tennessee Volunteers for the Union during the Civil War. As he was only 15, she portrays him as a drummer boy in her work.

WALL OF SEPARATION

BY: DEE ALLEN

Its name is displayed on petitions circulated online, in people's fondest memories.

Eight months passed and mourning persists over the loss of a great square of soil popular with locals, housed and un-housed.

Change came to sidestreets off Telegraph Avenue—Dwight Way, Haste Way, Bowditch Street—January 3, 2024. University of California Regents decided people should lose a piece of Berkeley.

A piece of my Anarchist past I used to visit for events. Daily food servings from Food Not Bombs, always free and herbivorous. Mardi Gras celebrations—colourful costumes, beads, masques, a gigantic green frog float on wheels—HOPPALEUIAH! Festive anniversary of blessed land's liberation from the Regents' greedy grip, hard-won on the streets, clashes with police at the university's foot, Summer 1969. Native American drum circle, live bands on the painted wooden stage, dancing on open grass, poetry, gardening tutorials. From past revolt, these short blessings. Good times that were mine—

Local legend says Julia Vinograd—late jester hat poet from the late, lamented Cafe Babar—was a regular visitor on the land. Often she blew soap bubble trails into an open void joyously—

What stands in its place?

Rusty Corten steel enclosure. Two levels of stacked shipping containers. Real-time Tetris structure 17 feet high. Flood lights, Apex security guards, metal NO TRESPASSING sign. The land sits idle, clear behind the imposing new wall of separation, alien to Berkeley's no-nukes, anti-war, eco-sustainable, peace-loving bohemian character.

Wall of separation in the Middle East—splitting Israel from what's left of historic Palestine—may not share those traits. Al-jidar goes against the 1967 "Green Line" surrounding Israel and international law. Built at the height of Al-Aqsa Intifada.

Approximately 34,000 miles. 435 miles long, 26 feet high—Israel's expression of hate. No guards, flood lights or prohibition signs.

What the other wall of separation shares are these: Assimilation of the blessed land into the system's framework, humanity and land forced apart. Both discourage people's right to return.

On an unseasonably warm afternoon in late February, my friend and fellow writer Debby Segal and I took a brisk walk through Berkeley, from U.C. Berkeley's Art Museum and campus of different, transplanted trees, straight on through Telegraph Avenue. As always, Telegraph bustled with college students and older locals that hit up its convenient shops and restaurants. A race of willing consumers.

On our way past Mars Vintage Clothing and Rasputin's Music, in the direction of Amoeba Music, my eyes bulged in utter shock at the gross steel monstrosity where the blessed land used to be. It's reported that the walled-off land awaits construction of

student dorms, for 1100 beds. Debby and I walked far away from the ugly thing that played a prison wall part so well and secured a glorious future for someone—unlike me.

I long for the day that wall of separation sees dismantlement and removal. Container by container.

Regents of U.C. Berkeley
Have chalked up a victory

Keeping all the **People's**
Out of their own **Park.**

W: Hiroshima Anniversary 2024
[For Whitney Sparks.]



"Cow"

By: Massimiliano Bruno Calabresi

Massimiliano Bruno Calabresi is an artist from Terracina (LT). During his academic studies, he explored various art forms but remains particularly drawn to woodcut and xilography.

To Cultivate a Culture

BY: RO BWANGA

The culture cultivated from unwelcomeness makes my skin
itch every attempt to walk it off just makes my feet burn and
although my blood is silent, although my voice is weak I still
seem to feel it, this weightless energy
how could I fall asleep?

They say I'm losing my mind
but I never had one since the beginning – according to them
so watch me as I run, because I can't take it here it sears every
surface, please let me disappear

So tired, everyday
I just wanted to get away, I never asked to be afraid you'll
never belong; you're never the same
forced to conform, suppress, and assimilate

To the martyrs
to the saints and slaves
to the global people still in chains
are you watching? don't listen to a word they say as they try
desperately to lead you astray
put one foot forward, the other back
when we move our limbs together
it's called a dance
and we will dance
we don't need subtleties to enchant
we don't need anything else to cultivate a new culture speak
your messages clearly, with hope
hope to undo all the pain and suffering done on to you

So tired, yet awake
you and I will escape the heaviness of this place so much to
do, too much you may think
but it's possible
to rebuild fractured personalities
to revive nascent joviality
to make diverse our communities

I'm telling you it's possible
stay here with me and you'll see

Ro Bwanga Continuously consumed by melancholy, Ro is an artist-turned-poet who began writing to release negative feelings. Realizing everyone could use a bit of catharsis, she is finally starting to publish her poems for others.

"Dream of a Peace Academy 3"

BY: STEPHEN MEAD

Stephen Mead is the resident artist/curator for The Chroma Museum, an online site depicting artistic renderings of LGBTQI historical figures, organizations and allies predominantly before Stonewall.



Dear Sniper

BY: ALI RAMTAHN HUSSEIN

TRANSLATED FROM THE ARABIC BY: ESSAM M. AL-JASSIM

Dear Sniper,

I'm the boy you killed a few days ago.

Regretfully, resolute and unwavering sniper, I cannot introduce myself to you because, having lived for little more than a dozen years, I had no significant achievements to boast of—nor did I have an illustrious heritage. A small, inconsequential being in this vast world. Only a marginal soul in this life. My identity was just taking shape when you delivered my end.

Simply put, I was merely a young boy with a pulsating love for his country. I knew nothing about the murky, unsavory realm of politics. And yet—and yet I'm dead.

Despite what you might think, I seize this opportunity to applaud you! I salute your impeccable aim and precise shot. I'm, in a strange way, proud of you—yes, proud of you! —for being an Iraqi who can snipe with such accuracy. Your skill is a testament to rigorous training and unflinching dedication to your profession.

Yes, proud of you!

Your bullet struck the dead center of my forehead, as if you aimed to perforate my very being. The projectile was mercifully fast. When it pierced my skull, I felt nothing. I commend you for the speed with which I fell. Surely, your commander is impressed by your valor, and an appreciation letter awaits you for your courage. What command unleashed such a force, full of your unidentified rage?

As I have been so suddenly wrenched from mine, I wonder if you have a family. Do you miss them? The separation must weigh heavily on you. They must miss you, too, and worry about your safety. I hope you assure them that you're completely safe, properly protected by your gear. I'm sure you will visit them when you are on leave. You will have the opportunity to see them, hug them, talk to them, and enjoy their company.

My dear sniper, will you tell your family about the bullet you put through my head? Will this act of death-dealing add to your achievements in their eyes? I'm asking to know if your taking my life was at all worthwhile for you.

Recount for them the story of the unarmed boy you killed. Please, give them the full account. Try to weave a plausible tale or create a heroic narrative. Try to turn something ugly into a beautiful anecdote.

I don't think you will be able to.

Perhaps you can tell them I was as young as your brother's son, Ahmed, or as old as your sister's son, Alaa. You can explain how I was standing with my friends, cheering and chanting of my love for my homeland. Tell them the boy you killed had dreams of mending the terrible ruptures that have torn apart this land and our society. Tell them he was a passionate boy who was simply trying to stand up for what he believed in. He was not harming anybody, any property, any soul. Tell them he was not a threat to you or your puppeteers.

Tell your wife, as she cuddles your daughter in her loving arms, that the boy you killed was rallying to support the creation of a decent healthcare system for the next generation. Assure her of this – it will give your story a poignant, unforgettable flavor.

My dear sniper, tell me about your daughter. Do you love her? I picture her on your lap, her smile brightening as you gently stroke her soft hair. It must feel soothing, to her and to you. I want you to caress her brow and try to press one finger on the center.

Push her forehead a little. Then apply more pressure.

Can you? I don't think you can.

Why?

Because the pressure would hurt her, and you care for her deeply.

The discomfort she might feel is but a fraction of the anguish my parents endure. I felt nothing, but they suffer the searing pain of your bullet. They'll carry it forever. They'll mourn helplessly, their hearts shattered, clinging to each other in piercing grief.

Ah, the tender bond of a mother, the compassionate embrace of a father. They'll live through each other's agony.

Don't forget to tell your loved ones the little boy you killed was a false enemy. I was not trying to attract the soldiers' attention. I wanted nothing to do with the imminent war. I posed no threat, standing in front of you with a face mask and a bony bare chest. I was innocent, kind, good-natured, and poor. Yet, inexplicably, you confronted me with a sniper's deadly precision.

One last question, sniper: WHY did you kill me?

Essam Al-Jassim is a Saudi writer and translator. Many of his translations have appeared in international literary magazines.

"Land Ho!"

By: Neil Lavey

Kevin John O'Neill is a poet and sommelier based in Dallas, Texas. He is a diploma graduate with the Wine and Spirits Education Trust. His work appeared in the *Arlington Literary Journal*, *Ethel*, *Voice and Verse Poetry Magazine*, and *Tilted House*.





"Dreams Girl"
BY: IRINA TALL (NOVIKOVA)

Echo Chamber

BY: THOMAS PIEKARSKI

Eagles fly where humans fear to tread.
Demons cry whenever they are dead.
Seasons sigh with passing of each day.
Reason's pride is ever on display.
A maiden with her hair made up in curls
Dreams of Aladdin probing solar worlds.
A faintest thought transmitted from above
Confounds the libertine and turtledove.
Remaining traces of Earth's afterbirth
Seep into ground and amplify its mirth.
What's learned entirely from osmosis
Spawns a worldwide symbiosis.
A valentine mailed to the wrong address
Once returned is cause for much distress.
Fear of failure can make one prone
To think the soul is made of stone.
Retracting statements falsely made
A mayor hides in darkest shade.
The dog born to be wild will savor
A ripe banana as its savior.
Those prophecies inured to balderdash
From furious fire return to blackest ash.
Exporting exploration of hereafter
Cancels handily all mindless blather.

Thomas Piekarski is a former editor of the *California State Poetry Quarterly*.

Secretary

BY: RACHEL TURNEY

When I was thirteen, my best friend was named Blake. He was a transfer student, I was a transfer student; we became fast friends. We loved to analyze music. Blake played guitar in a small band at coffee shops and parties, later becoming a church choir leader. Once, we were discussing the future, a favorite subject of angsty teens. Blake wanted to be a big-time music producer. We talked about the type of artists we would sign, the concerts we would hold, and how we would transform the music industry together. I imagined huge offices in L.A., all black, red, and white, ya know, real rock star colors. He said he would have this amazing office with windows all around and I said yeah yeah and what is my job at the company?

He turned to me, his complete equal in this entire endeavor and said, "You can be my secretary."

Dr. Rachel Turney is an educator and teacher trainer in Colorado. Her poems and prose are published in *The Font Journal*, *Five Fleas*, *Nap Lit*, *Ranger*, *Through Lines Magazine*, *Bare Back*, and *Teach Write Journal*. Her photography appears in *By the Beach*.



ÖZLEM MEHDER

“Reborn”
BY: ÖZLEM MEHDER

Özlem Mehder graduated from Ankara University Anthropology BA (2016) and Forensic Anthropology MSc (2018) programs. She has no professional training in the visual arts: She is a self-taught amateur artist.

"All Fell" By: Dahlia Hosny

Dahlia Hosny creates art that empowers people connect with their deepest selves. She wants art to make people feel something, to challenge their assumptions, and to see the world in a new way.



A Trois

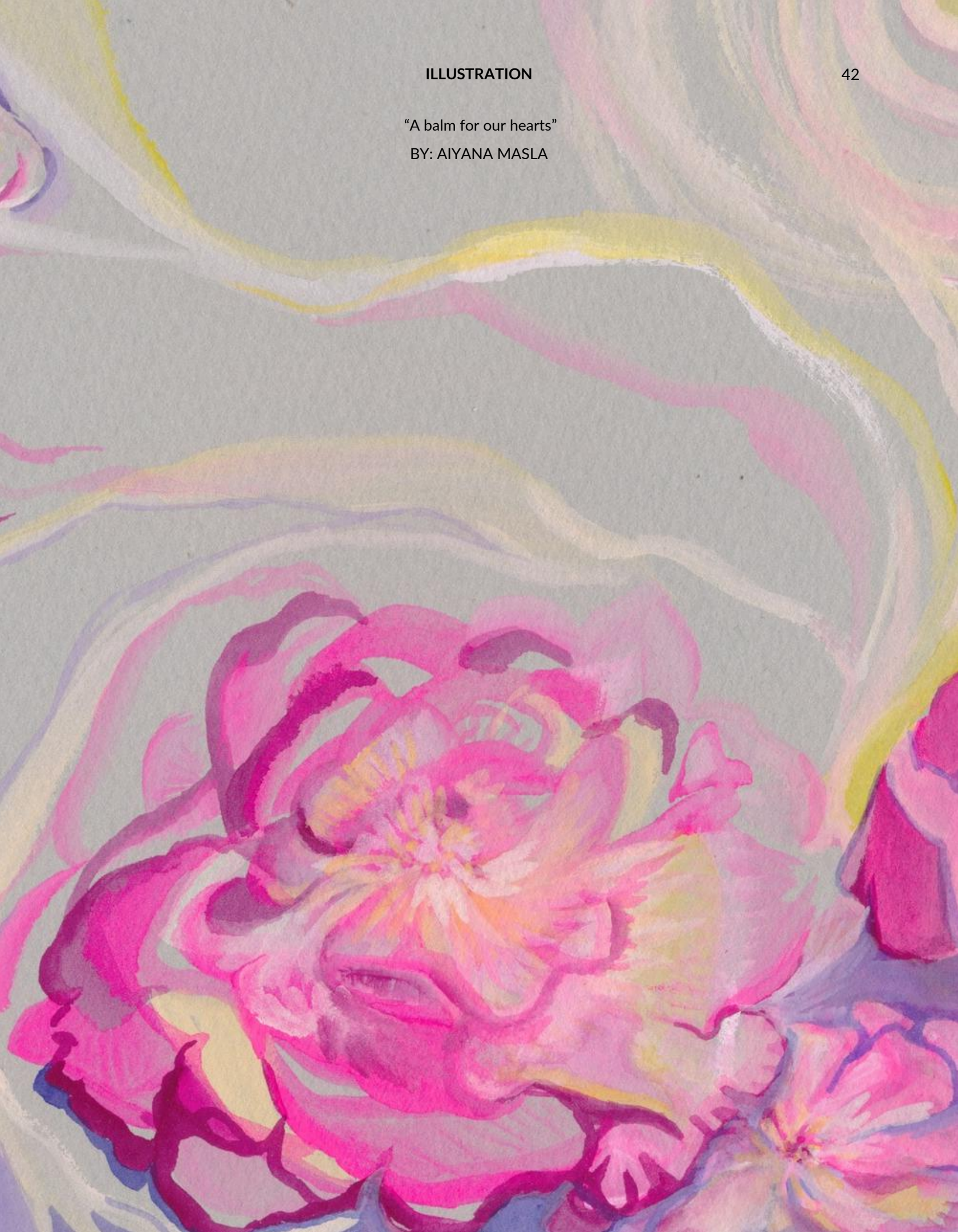
BY: LOUIS FABER

Each night I crawl under the sheets
curled against the woman I love
and beside me slips your ghost.
For sixty years you were no more
than a fleeting dream faceless, nameless,
an infrequent visitor to my gallery
of hopes, desires, and wishes.
You never had a face, did I
have one you could remember before
I was plucked from you too soon, you
lurking in the shadows of my heart.
Was I ever a child to you, in that moment
I emerged from you, or did you look away,
not wanting, not daring to see a face that
still alive might haunt you through life.
Was I real in your world, in the world
into which I could never go, the world
in which no one could know I existed.
Perhaps it is fitting, mother, that you
haunt my dreams now, an apparition
locked in time by the photo I have
of you in your bloom into womanhood,
for I was a silent ghost for five decades.
But now we are reunited and in my sleep
you are again alive, and I now have
the woman who brought me into
the world and fled back into her own.

Louis Faber is a poet and writer living in Florida with his wife and cat. He has been widely published in the United States, Europe and Asia.



"A balm for our hearts"
BY: AIYANA MASLA





"Blossoms fighting for attention"

BY: MATHIAS WILL

Mathias Will is concerned with the question of how far he can share his inner world with the viewer of his work. He wonders how much communication is actually possible. His body of work, consisting of paintings, videos, and performances, spans back to 1992.

cutters

BY: KEVIN O'NEILL

excluding you then departure from
me, after fires the actors
show exhaustion handcuffed by spells,
they kept the night fragments,
when the context is bruised
coddle the clock, sick from
arrival and total vision, at
the center the book is
arresting, it's a total disaster
for the eyes, the hallucination
brings clarity to the transition
from false flattery, either rational
beasts or mad machines, i
felt the interval, scars of
seeing i've come to a
breakthrough, my work is multiplying,
i can barely fix my hand,
what'd they say about
fortune and courage

Kevin John O'Neill is a Dallas-based poet and sommelier with a Wine and Spirits Education Trust diploma. His work has appeared in the *Arlington Literary Journal*, *Ethel*, *Voice and Verse*, and *Tilted House*.



"Storing Food for the Needy"

BY: SUSAN L. POLLET

S. Pollet

Susan L. Pollet is a visual artist whose works have appeared in multiple art shows and literary publications. She studied at the New York Art Students League, has been a member since 2018, and resides in NYC.

"Your rest is sacred"
BY: AIYANA MASLA



Dreams Girl
BY: IRINA TALL (NOVIKOVA)







"True Colours"
BY: ANDIE DALE

Andie Dale is an artist and photographer based in Staffordshire, UK, specializing in alternative photography like cyanotypes, anthotypes, and photo weaves, along with painting and sketching.

PHOTOGRAPHY

"Red flower 8.12.24"
BY: WILLIAM D. HICKS



1934: The Children's Hour

BY: DC DIAMONDPOLOUS

The New York winter chill disappeared when Jean entered the lobby of Maxine Elliott's Theater, crowded with women. It was Jean's fourth matinee since November 20th, when *The Children's Hour* premiered.

She hadn't returned for the play, but for the largely female audience, and more to the heart, for the maddening crush she had on one usherette who seated her in the second balcony.

In the last few years, Jean had scoured through journals on sexuality in the public library. Doctors called her condition inverted, depraved, a mistake of nature. Was it any wonder Martha killed herself at the end of *The Children's Hour*?

Jean escaped into books, museums, theaters, and music recitals. For a few hours, the stranglehold of her homosexuality vanished into a novel by Pearl Buck, a painting by Matisse, a musical by Cole Porter, or a recital of Gershwin.

When she accepted what doctors described as a perversion, Jean abandoned all her friends and moved from her parents' home.

The suffocating fear of being found out grew more intense each year. She suffered headaches in her teens and now stomach problems in her twenties.

So with shocking delight Jean found herself in a Broadway theater surrounded by women. She guessed the majority were lesbian. She saw mannish women in fedoras with violets pinned to the lapels of their suits; feminine women with the purple flower attached to their wide fur collared coats, their hats shaded over one eye like Greta Garbo. Under the crystal chandeliers, Jean gloried in the freedom of knowing there were others like herself.

Yet sitting through the play became torture. Didn't Lillian Hellman understand the effect Martha's suicide would have? Killing herself because she was homosexual? What irony, that the play brought out lesbians to meet, mingle, and flirt.

On her secretary's salary, Jean could only afford afternoons in the top gallery. Today, would be her last matinee. Her father had lost his job, like so many other men. Any additional money, she'd give to her parents.

To her right, the winding staircase led to the balconies and to her electrifying encounters with the girl whose name tag said "Rebecca." With a dash of exotic, perhaps she was Jewish or Italian.

When they first locked eyes, Jean had what one journal called "homosexual recognition," a knowing that was inherent in the third sex.

On Jean's second visit to the theater, did she really see the flush of the girl's cheeks when they glanced at one another? Or the sensuous curve of her lips that followed? When Rebecca took Jean's ticket, their fingers touched, sending sparks through Jean's body. She had never felt so alive. As the lights dimmed and Rebecca waited for the arrival of latecomers, Jean imagined unbuttoning Rebecca's jacket stretched tantalizingly across her breasts.

On Jean's third matinee, she pinned a violet to her brown coat—a daring act for her. Rebecca greeted her at the top of the stairs. Jean saw her eyes move to the violet. Rebecca smiled.

"What's your name?" Rebecca asked.

"Jean. I'll be here next week. Maybe afterwards we—"

"Young lady, I can't find my seat," interrupted an elderly woman.

Rebecca glanced at Jean and nodded.

That night, Jean fantasized unzipping Rebecca's dress, of slipping it down over curvaceous hips, of Rebecca lying naked in her bed, of pleasing the girl into ecstasy, of whispers and laughter, going on picnics, drinking champagne, and sharing sunrises over Manhattan. Jean felt a torrent of sexuality sweep through her being. How could such an exquisite feeling be wrong? Who did it hurt?

For this, her final visit, Jean slipped on her favorite coat, the sporty navy wrap with a cinched belt and a faux-fur collar. Over her light-brown hair, she wore a matching blue beret. She applied rouge and lipstick to add color to her fair skin. Jean even curled her hair. She readied herself as if going before the MGM cameras.

For the last three weeks, Rebecca ruled her world. Jean looked anxiously at the staircase to the balconies. She couldn't wait to see her but hated to once again endure the gunshot at the end of the play.

After taking the first couple of steps, Jean turned and relished all the women in the lobby—their dynamic sexual energy, the flirting, the sideways glances, a light caress that lingered down an arm, a bond invisible to heterosexuals. It was a delicious secret, an affront to those who wished her kind dead.

When Jean arrived on the landing that led to the first balcony, the lights flickered for people to take their seats.

She hurried up the staircase. On arriving at the second landing, she drew her ticket from her pocket. At the curtain, leading into the gallery, Jean saw a new usherette.

"Where's Rebecca?" Jean asked.

"She has the day off. Can I take your ticket?"

"I know where to sit," she said too sharply.

Slumping in her seat, Jean tried to compose herself from the shattering truth that she'd always be alone. She had been certain Rebecca would be there. Jean twisted the sterling ring on her finger, a gift from her mother for high school graduation. She dug through her purse for tissues as tears streamed down her face.

The lights dimmed.

Jean dabbed her eyes.

A girl in a red coat and slouch hat walked down the aisle. Taking the empty seat next to Jean, she smelled of jasmine and rose.

The girl leaned against her.

"I'm sorry I'm late," Rebecca said.

"You're here!"

"Shh," said a voice behind them.

Jean couldn't contain her joy and pressed her knee against Rebecca's thigh.

"You must really like the play," Rebecca murmured, rubbing up against Jean's shoulder.

"I don't like it at all," Jean said.

"Neither do I," Rebecca giggled.

"Be quiet," a woman admonished.

"Want to leave?" Jean asked in a low voice.

Rebecca's lips brushed her ear as she whispered, "I know a really good kosher deli down the street."

DC Diamondopolous is an award-winning short story, and flash fiction writer with hundreds of stories published internationally in print and online magazines, literary journals, and anthologies. DC's book *Captured Up Close: 20th Century Short-Short Stories* is her second book. She lives on the California coast with her wife.



"Voices of Change (vers. 4)"
BY: ALEXANDER LIMAREV

"Voices of Change (vers. 2)"

BY: ALEXANDER LIMAREV



Alexander Limarev, freelance artist, mail art artist, curator, poet from Siberia. Participated in more than 1000 international projects and exhibitions. His artworks are part of private and museum collections of 72 countries. His artworks and poetry have been featured in various online publications including *Angery Old Man Magazine*, *Caliban Online Magazine*, *Maintenant* and more.



Voices of Change (vers. 3)
Alexander Limarev



"Instinct 3"

BY: KALEAB ALEMAYEHU

Glass Half Full

BY: ALLISON WHITTENBERG

Why are you crying?
You're alive.

or

You're alive,
Why are you crying?

Allison Whittenberg, born in Pennsylvania and educated in New York and Wisconsin, is an award-winning novelist and playwright. Her poetry has appeared in *Berlin Lit*, *Columbia Review*, *Feminist Studies*, *J Journal*, and *New Orleans Review*. A six-time Pushcart Prize nominee, she has published two poetry collections: *Driving with a Poetic License* and *They Were Horrible Cooks*.





"Nature"
By: Emel Çevikcan



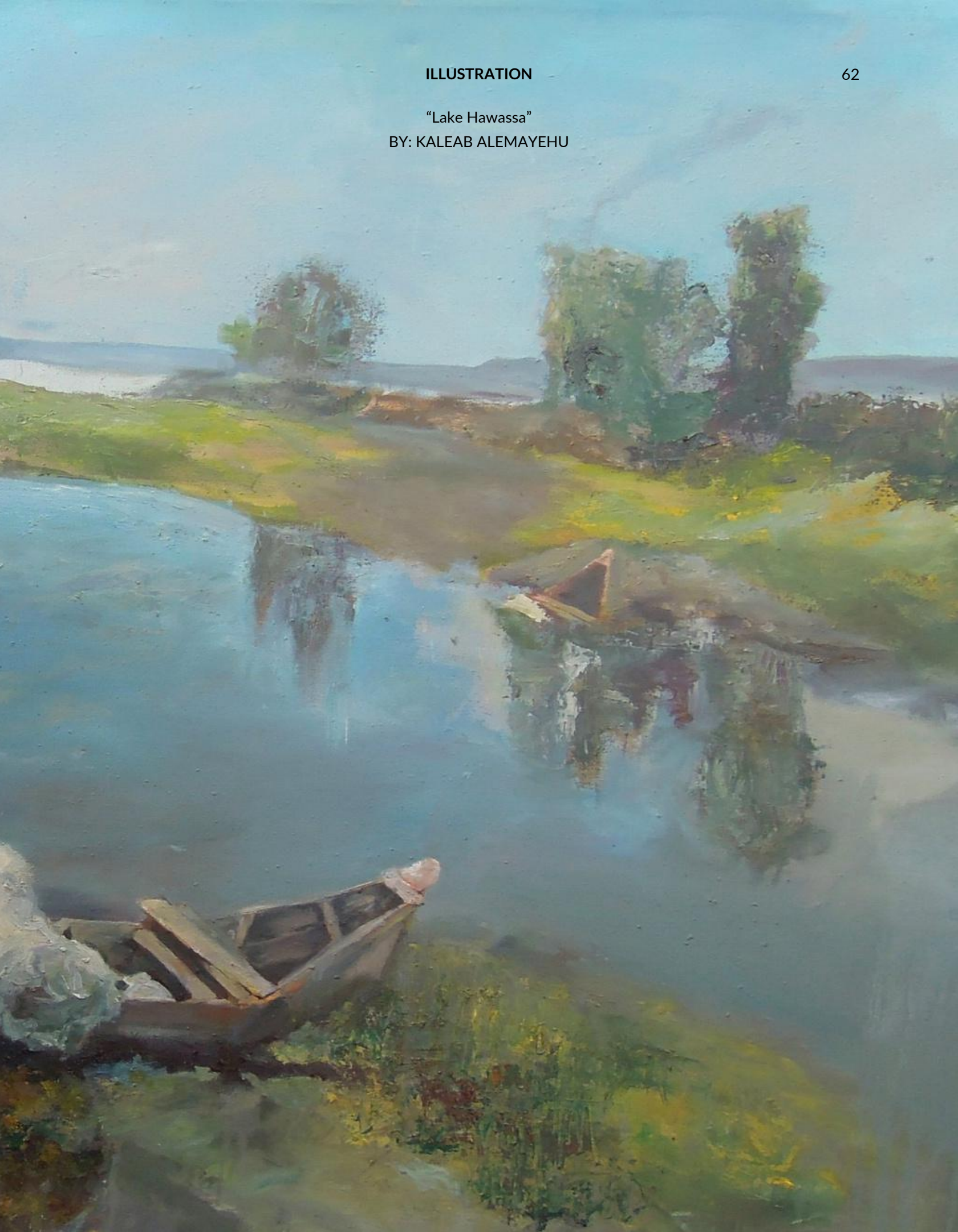


Emel Garikay
2. Ocak. 2021



"Lake Hawassa"

BY: KALEAB ALEMAYEHU



The Final Scene

BY: LOUIS FABER

For far too long he had been
a marionette dancing to a tune
he could not hear, always staying silent,
lost in a kabuki theater of the absurd.
But he had grown tired of performing
at their every demand, his life lived
perpetually on call, no time truly his.
He was drained by them, empty,
not that they cared for they knew
the adulation of the audience was theirs,
certainly not for their mere living puppet.
He finally cut the strings, collapsed
a robot whose programming had been
shut down with no possibility of a reboot,
so they cast him aside, no longer useful
another tool worn out, discarded.
and they set out to move on with others
in the role that had long been his.
But in that final moment of his he knew
he was finally alive, he knew a freedom
that he had never thought possible,
a freedom his old masters never knew,
for they were bound for the next show
and the next after that, never stopping.
When the audiences grew ever more thin,
when the applause waned like the decay
of the peal of a tired bell, they
were lost, now condemned to inhabit
an empty stage, while he sat smiling
yet silent as an audience of one.

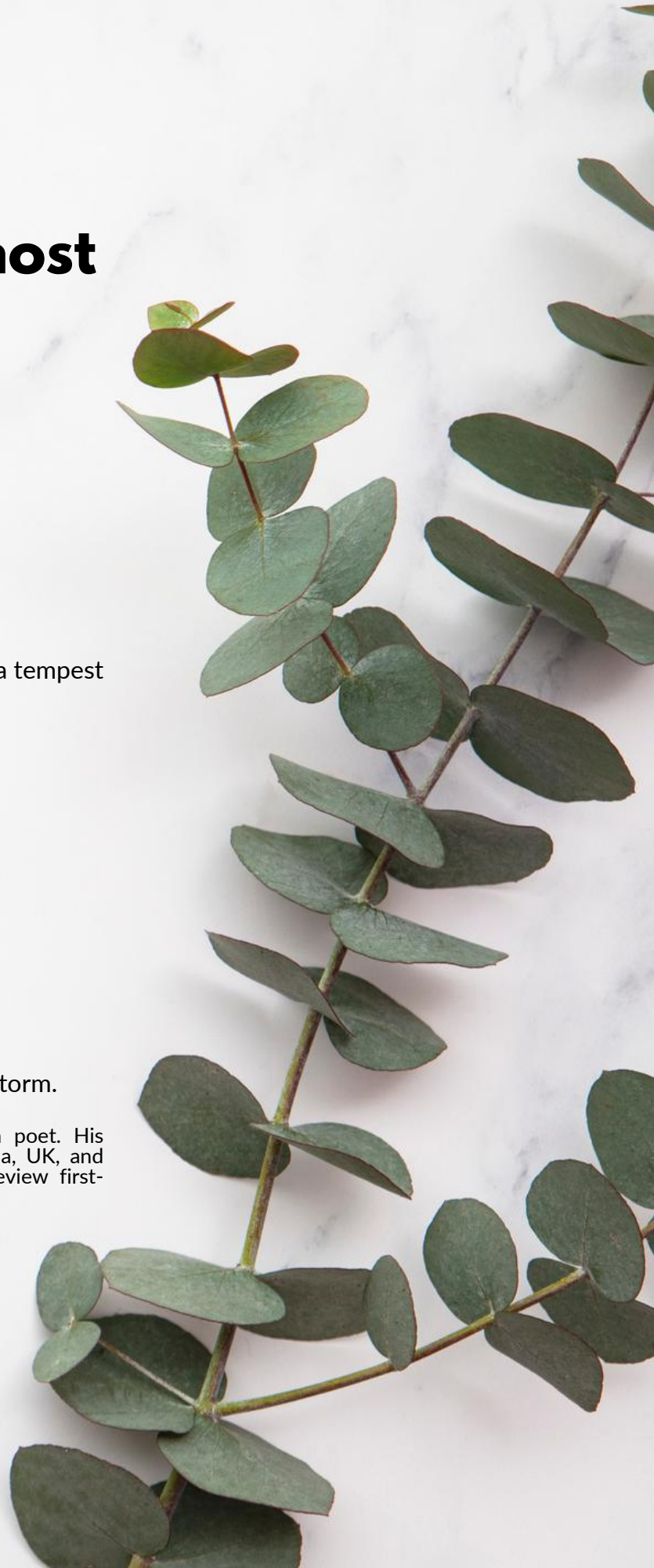


Chasing the Ghost

BY: RAMZI RIHANI

Fear hides in the eucalyptus tree
That dwindles to the sound of silence.
Unheard screams pierce the soul.
Everything becomes mute
Memory earlier than silence
Assembles itself, standing tall,
To tell the story of past shrieks.
We chase the ghost of the wishing well
Incessantly trying to catch it
With bare hands, it slips like mercury in a tempest
Mocking the memory of the beast
The ghost wrote a poem
And sprinkled it over the river
As if to make it holy
Not knowing it became a memory
We catch the memory and set it free
Like a bird out of a cage.
We collect our remains
To become holy again,
Free again,
Alive again,
And soar high through the heart of the storm.

Ramzi Albert Rihani is a Lebanese American poet. His poems have been published in the US, Canada, UK, and Ireland. He received the 2024 Polk Street Review first-place poetry award. He lives in Maryland.





"Moose with Blanket"
BY: ILDIKO NOVA

Ildiko Nova is a multidisciplinary Canadian artist. Her work is internationally published and won several awards. Her interest includes minority and environmental issues.



"The Current Of Death"
By: Anastasia Lukomskaya





Anastasia Lukomskaya, a Moscow-born artist, poet, and activist, now living in Germany, graduated from the Gorky Literary Institute and Rodchenko Art School. Her work explores consciousness, fear, and freedom through photography, video, performance, and other media.

A Friend Makes Me Smile

BY: JAMES B. NICOLA

I have a friend who had a friend, way back when she was in college, who sat at a final exam for her, took the test, and signed her name so that my friend got credit for the course and graduated on time.

In those days, a requirement for every degree, no matter your major, was a foreign language. That way, any graduate school, professional program, or potential employer would know that an applicant with a Bachelor's had some proficiency—for Doctorate dissertation research, say, or conversing with international clients.

My friend went on to get advanced degrees and then establish herself in her field with professionally framed credentials bedecking her office wall.

•

She told me this story last summer, as if there were nothing to it. She'd spent a lifetime helping people, after all. Even back in college, my friend was determined to become a do-gooder par excellence which, if you knew her, you would say she was.

We were on her patio nursing highballs while the kids and grandkids swam and splashed and laughed, paper plates with cake crumbs lying lazily about. With mutual grandkids in all four years of high school, the conversation had gotten around to the current school committee, its Gen XYZ members, college preparation, college itself, and public education back in our day. The birthday boy had just gone to the kitchen for more ice for us—plus possibly a detour to use the facilities, which may be why he took so long that we forgot about him.

I'd tutored him in summer school more than a couple times. Slow but resolute and imperturbable, he was duly proud of hard-fought Ds and Cs. The work he put in—which he chose to put in—meant not having to repeat a grade. Last year, I was present when he reported to my friend, unable to restrain himself, *Grandma, I passed, I passed!* His sapphire eyes glowed almost to the point of piercing, but gently, radiating wonder more than wounds. Look twice, though, and you'd know the wounds were there, beyond the smile and sunshine of his mild, well-mannered mien. In other words, he's the kind of kid you cannot help but feel for, root for, like, or even love.

Anyway, the sliding glass door must have been left open when she told me her story, and he must have been about to head back to the patio, because right at that moment, almost as an interruption, he jiggled the ice tray, brought it out, and filled our bucket one cube at a time, each toss sharper, louder, quicker, more violent than the last.

As if he was having one of those pre-or-post-pubescent moments. Only he had never had one of those pre-or-post-pubescent moments.

Then he looked up at my friend and started to speak but stopped himself (forming just the Gr—as in Grandma or growl), scudded back inside, refilled the tray at the kitchen sink, slammed the freezer door so that the bottles in the refrigerator clanged, and came back out to the patio, sliding the door closed behind him with what seemed like tremendous care and deliberation—not quite all the way at first, but then all the way so that it latched with an almost cryptic click. But he kept one hand on the handle and his back to us as if frozen or unable to move. After a minute—though it could have been seconds—he turned, this time to me, and started to speak again, stopped himself, pivoted on a dime, ran to the diving board, leapt as high as he could, and cannonballed into the pool. The splash sprinkled my sandals' soles and tickled my friend's mauve toenails; a waft of summer chemicals twitched our noses like a spurt of Sunday-service incense.

Once he sank to the bottom, he stayed down, fetal-coiled, too long. Too long, as if he intended to stay there.

His older sisters, after a tense second minute, raised him up but, frenzied and fierce, he flailed and fought them every stroke and step of the way, hacking from pool to poolside. Supine, pale, and gasping, still convulsing as he cooled, the poor kid became the center of attention. When he caught his breath a bit, he sat up, looked around, and looked aghast that he'd become the center of attention. With one final clearing of his chlorine-coated throat, up he sprang and popped to his feet, manic as a mongoose, then ran off with a howl beyond the hedge and vine-stemmed bower to foreign neighbors' hedges, lawns, and bowers. How he tore.

How he howled.

Meanwhile, my friend's face turned from green to gray to white. The ice cubes in her highball glass rattling for attention, she deposited her drink oh-so-slowly down to the table top. The kids had quieted down; the pool managed to still; the exhausted silence of a spent summer celebration suddenly filled the air. Then, with an almost agonizing specificity, she did the strangest thing. So slowly as to be practically unnoticeable, as if possessed by a consciousness—or conscience—not her own, she turned her face away from me. For the rest of the day, for the rest of the summer, and into the fall.

I read in our hometown News that she has finally sold her practice. Gen X or Y or Z—all three—have arrived.

•

In Novembers and Decembers for the last few years, I've worked part-time as a cashier at the local bookstore.

Yesterday I saw my friend again. She bought a home course—two courses, rather, Intermediate and Advanced: grammars, workbooks, CDs, sample tests—in French.

I asked, Gift-wrap them, Fran? This week it's free.

She looked me in the eyes and shook her head, then said No thanks, Pat. This present happens to be for me.

And in a flash I thought I knew what she was going to do

and smiled.

James B. Nicola, a returning contributor, is the author of eight collections of poetry, the latest being *Natural Tendencies*. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a Choice magazine award.



"Waterfall"
BY: ASHLEY WILSON





"Hawaiian Forest"
BY: ASHLEY WILSON

"Creek"
BY ASHLEY WILSON





"Tree:
BY: ASHLEY WILSON

"Hawaiian Forest 2"
BY: ASHLEY WILSON





Anglo-Saxon burial site Sutton Hoo. Sutton Hoo is England's Valley of the Kings, and the Anglo-Saxon ship burial found in **the King's Mound** is the richest burial ever found in northern Europe. 1,400 years ago, a king or great warrior of East Anglia was laid to rest in a 90ft ship, surrounded by his extraordinary treasures.

Keepers

BY: TINA MacNAUGHTON

A huge Suffolk sky loomed large, cornflower blue beautiful, as they drove down long, icy lanes that carved through the flat, quintessentially green English countryside. The radio spouted the usual depressing news both in the UK and globally, seeming at odds with the brightness of the morning.

'Do you mind if I turn it off, darling?' he asked, frowning slightly.

He looked tired, she thought. There was so much bad news these days.

'Yes, please, please do.'

She drew a deep breath in the quiet of the space between them, and surveyed the dramatic beauty and grandeur of the vast open space ahead. And that sky!

I love it here, she thought, contentedly. I love everything about this moment.

They climbed out of the car and crunched up the slight slope, somewhat of a surprise in such an even terrain. There was a late January stillness and silence in the air, punctuated by the excited squawk of an overhead kite. They approached a steel staircase and carefully began the ascent. Once at the top, they gasped at the sight before them. It was remarkable. Farmland deep in history and heritage, and The King's mound, an Anglo-Saxon burial ground marked out in the shape of an ancient ship. They gazed in awe of the archeological treasure and striking reminder of their ancestry, embedded within the soft, sandy soil.

Rare breeds of grazing sheep were scattered on the edges of fields, and the odd baa disturbed a quiet reverence and tranquility that had settled, like a prayer, for souls long passed. The air was crisp and becoming rapidly cooler. She turned up her collar and pulled down her wool hat. He tucked her scarf into the top of her coat, knowing that she hated the chill air to slip inside. *I like to keep my wings warm, she would tell him with a little smile.*

She glanced around the burial ground one last time before attempting the slow descent. It was strange to think that people had lived and died here over a thousand years ago. They had built homes, tended farms, grown food, raised families. They had settled here and nurtured these beautiful green, fertile pastures and were now buried deep beneath the earth. They had become part of this vast acreage, returned to nature, and belonged to the cycle of birth, death, transformation and regeneration. An ancient tribe of people long gone, but the land remained and would continue regardless. *We are the keepers*, she thought.

They walked to the car and sat silently on the drive back to the hotel. The sky was paler, now a faded, washed out blue, but the sun was still shining. A thin, diluted watery light provided little warmth, but captured prettily the last remnants of frost on grassy fields. Neatly trimmed tops of twiggy hedgerows were laced with melting ice and sparkled and glistened like a scene from a fairytale. *Like magic*, she thought.

The seatbelt strained over her ever blossoming girth and she felt a series of small kicks. She breathed in the beauty of the Suffolk countryside before her. *Not long now*, she thought, placing a reassuring hand on her abdomen.



"Roots"
BY: SARA CAPORALETTI



"Nature"

By: Emel Çevikcan

Deep Time

BY: JOAN MAZZA



Joan Mazza worked as a microbiologist and psychotherapist, and taught workshops on dreams and nightmares. She's the author of six psychology books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self*. Her poetry has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poet Lore*.

Geologic strata give you a hint at change, how the earth's crust rises and folds and presses against other rocks, layers laid down over layers of sediments, trilobites captured in mud and preserved

for millions of years. Drive past mountains and canyons to see the deep work of water's passage. In caves, stalagmites and stalactites grow drop by drop, one-half inch in a hundred years.

Look at the stars and the swirl of The Milky Way, and grasp the sense of a past, arriving as light from stars already extinguished. We want to believe we're eternal, that death doesn't

take a human soul, that there must be something more. Look deep into history, into the fate of all life on earth. Surely any good mother would come back if she could. Father would tell you.

In the small scale of human time, pandemic isolation feels unending, days blur together in their narrow routine and solitude. Another day over and where did it go? What did I do or accomplish? I make a list.

The dust collects and we don't dress. No one sees our thinning hair or bodies. We're fading, lost in strata of deeper reflections. We wander in memory, without a future of travel, far from crowded cities.

"Hawaii Blue"
BY: ASHLEY WILSON





"Dreams Girl"
BY: IRINA TALL (NOVIKOVA)



"Dreams Girl"
BY: IRINA TALL (NOVIKOVA)



Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist and illustrator with degrees in art and design. Her work focuses on ecology, anti-war themes, and fantastical creatures. Notable series include "The Red Book" on endangered species. She has exhibited widely, contributed to various magazines, and her writing has been featured in notable collections.



"Dreams Girl"
BY: IRINA TALL (NOVIKOVA)

PHOTOGRAPHY



"Joined hands - Cyanotype"
BY: ANDIE DALE

Andie Dale is an artist and photographer based in Staffordshire, UK. Specializing in alternative photography such as cyanotypes, anthotypes, and photo weaves, Dale also works in painting and sketching.



"Hawaii Hotel"
BY: ASHLEY WILSON



"Hawaii Hotel 2"
BY: ASHLEY WILSON







"Sleeping Seal"
BY: ASHLEY WILSON





"Nature"
BY: EMEL ÇEVİKCAN

ILLUSTRATION







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