

FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE
VOLUME 6 • ISSUES 1 & 2
SPRING 2025



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Veronica Valerakis
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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

It has taken us longer than we hoped to bring you this issue. The truth is simple: I have been wrestling with myself. There are seasons within us too—times when the light takes its time to break through, when what wants to bloom waits just beneath the surface. I have been in one of those seasons.

Spring does not rush. It unfolds. Petal by petal, it leans into the air. Slowly, surely, it becomes what it was meant to be. That is how this issue has come to you—not all at once, but through the patient work of waiting, of listening, of letting something grow in its own time.

“Unfolding” is our theme. It is about emergence—the quiet push of roots in the dark, the slow shift from stillness into motion. It is about beginnings that are not finished yet, about change that is not clean or sudden, about the beauty of becoming.

This is a call for what is in-between. For the almos^ts and the not-yets. For the stories still stretching toward the sun. For the poems that hover like mist. For the art that shows us where the cracks let the light slip in.

We are combining spring and summer here, because both are seasons of growing, of stretching out into warmth, of learning to take up space again. This issue is about that same tender work. The imperfect, the evolving, the alive.

xoxo
Flora Ashe

"In the Quiet Meadow In the Quiet Meadow" By: Arvilla Fee

Arvilla Fee lives in Ohio and loves to read, write, travel, and have snacks on hand. She's been extensively published and has three poetry books available on Amazon.



"See Me at Your Feet" By: Arvilla Fee



Dirt

BY: KRYSTYN LEE KAVANAGH

My love is not a neglected garden
Sometimes I splash some cash on a couple of roses and hire a fancy crew
But that's not what it is.
My love isn't some overgrown patch of weeds
I could water it less, let it dry out a bit, and let the hose rust in the sun
But at least it's not a jungle.
It's not a wild thing like you think it is.

Krystyn Lee Kavanagh feels crafting bios proves more challenging than composing poems, and she prefers to share who she aspires to be rather than a static description.

"Sun's Grace" By: Arvilla Fee



PHOTOGRAPHY

"Olympia Still Blooms" By: Arvilla Fee



Wild Flowers

BY: IHOR PIDHAINY

There they were — those concrete slabs:
a perfect dozen pitched in a pile,
man's resignation to laziness.
Sitting since Winter of early Spring
(grass weeds grown out-from-under told me so)
they spoke of the imminence of change,
the weak sterility which buys man time-
much as impotence buys opportunity.

And there were flowers (living in the
abnormal cool of August) coloring the
simple lawn, lining the inner
sleeve of the driveway. The owners of the
cottage cared for them. Its face was shown
in the growth of those flowers.

And leaving that afternoon
after the fight or words or argument
(depending on whose vision you believe)
driving back, thinking I shall not phone
I shall not send a dozen red roses,
knowing that even flowers grow through
the cracks of this city's sidewalks.

Born in Canada, Ihor Pidhainy lives in the American South. His poetry has appeared in Washington Square Review, The Alchemy Spoon, Northern New England Review. Bottlecap Press has published his chapbook "Meditations on Fathers and Sons."





Hydrangea

BY: MAUDIE BRYANT

I couldn't remember the flower's name—
it curled away like yours did.
The creases around your eyes, once
folded in a map of living, fade.
Blue, like the bloom, drains
into something pale: periwinkle, maybe—
a hush of color. Each bulbous cluster
offers a secret: bouquets
nested in each fruiting sprout,
as if the plant keeps giving,
even in forgetting.

The scent—barely there—
sleeps beneath my skin.
Petals and leaves,
soft as your ghost behind a door,
soft as the breeze that cups my cheek—
your hand again—
shaking the branches
until glitter spills from the sky.

Maudie Bryant is a Pushcart-nominated poet and multidisciplinary artist whose work explores memory, identity, and the quiet disquiet that lingers beneath the surface. She lives in Shreveport, Louisiana, with her husband and two young sons.



"Lippi Girasole" By: Jessica Russo Scherr

Jessica Russo Scherr is an American artist and educator based in Germany. She works at the intersection of photography, painting, and printmaking, transforming reality into richly layered images that combine technical precision with creative experimentation.



"Hidden" By: Sara Caporaletti

Sara Caporaletti is a mixed media artist based in Maryland. Her work focuses on identity, faith, anatomy, and capturing ordinary moments.





Letter for Mia

BY: LOUISA PRINCE

Six months had passed since Denise had called Mia, her only surviving child.

She smirked, the image of a small redhead with unruly curls, her jaw set in a pout and tiny fists clenched “No dress mummy ... I hate dresses.”

An hour of coaxing, whispering gentle words like one might to a spooked colt—all to no avail. No, her daughter would never make the first move.

Recollections of the words that stung had long since evaporated, leaving an empty void she filled with a routine that surrounded her in a bubble of one. At first, it allowed her to avoid the truth, but its tendrils wrapped around her heart like a poisonous vine. Until now when time's relentless march and a heavy burden cornered her.

Denise dialed the number, her breath constricted at the mechanical click and Mia's recorded greeting echoing down the line. Her grip faltered, sending the clattering onto the kitchen counter. The long spider-web-like cracks forming over its display mirrored her broken resolve.

Tremors shook her hands, signs of the diagnosis she could no longer evade. Denise settled into the chair by the kitchen table, her pen poised above the paper before her.

Dear Mia,

I believed I had more time, but isn't that a mistake we all make? I'm leaving you with the guide I used all those years ago.

She paused, glancing at the dog-eared book on the table. The one that taught her everything she needed to know. With a sigh, she returned to her letter.

A cherished gift of nurturing my creatures, a healing legacy your father introduced to me when needed most. I can see you reading this letter, asking yourself if my mind has already failed me? It hasn't. Today I've kept the clouds at bay but back to the point. You've got more in common with them than you think. While you're tending to them, I want you to know:

1. No hive thrives without its queen. She gives everyone purpose. While you nurture them, I hope you'll find that sense of direction you're missing. Allow them to anchor you like they once did for me.

Denise's vision blurred, recalling the rhythmic click of wooden slats while her husband assembled her first beehive. She'd resisted at first, but before long awoke each morning, planting nectar rich shrubs that supported them. Her routine helped pull her from the grief of losing her baby boy.

She blinked, returning to the uneven scrawl on the page.

1. A colony survives through cooperation. Bees don't gather nectar for themselves. Like us, they seek connections, because survival isn't a solitary effort. A life without love, alone, is like an empty hive.
2. They're guided by instinct, not words. We can learn a lot from that. Trust your intuition and assess more than the words spoken. When people's actions reveal their true character, believe what they're showing you and walk away.
3. Bees protect what matters to them but adapt to the seasons. They swarm, erecting barriers against external threats, but know when to leave to hunt for food. We would benefit from their wisdom, learning when to go versus when to grow.

Denise's fingers jerked, and her pen slipped, marking the page with blue ink. Memories of sitting in her doctor's office flooded back, along with how the chill of the room mirrored the frost blanketing her front lawn. She gritted her teeth, recalling him outlining how Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease would trap her within a mute shell.

1. Remember that when a bee stings, it bears a cost. Like them, each interaction we choose comes at a price that we must evaluate for its worth. Be careful of what you give—make sure it merits the toll it takes.

Nurture them as I did, but more importantly, take care of yourself too.

Love, Mum

Her hand steadied when she lay down the pen, imagining her daughter navigating a world she no longer belonged to.

Louisa Prince, is a late bloomer from Melbourne, Australia whose writing centres on family and health. Her work has appeared in CafeLit Magazine, New Plains Review, and Flora Fiction Online



"Emerging" By: Margaret Marcum

Margaret Marcum has an MFA in creative writing from Florida Atlantic University. She is author of the poetry chapbook, *Recognition of Movement* (Bottlecap Press, 2023).



Unfurl

BY: GLENIS MOORE

The pale sun glistens on the rain-splashed window
reflecting diamonds, like the snowdrops at the lawn's edge.
Daffodil buds nod in the breeze, while a robin sings
to declare the garden his before the swallows return
to skim the pond of last year's nymphs.
The sleepers will arise to reclaim the woodland tracks,
snuffling through primroses in their search
for dozing slugs and the bluebells will bloom again
turning the glades to a shimmer of violet
where the branches stretch towards the warmth
they have wanted for so long.
Tomorrow may be cold but today is nature's dawn
and soon the cats and I will join the frolic
as life begins to unfurl once more.

Glenis Moore is a poet who currently lives in the flat lands of the Fens just outside of Cambridge UK with her partner and three rescue cats. When she is not writing, she reads, makes beaded necklaces, knits, cycles and runs slowly.

ILLUSTRATION



"Magnolias" By Ellen Pliskin

Ellen Pliskin is a painter, printmaker and photographer. Her studio is in Manhattan and she is a part of the State Department's Art in Embassies Program.

"Illuminating" By: Margaret Marcum



PHOTOGRAPHY

"Young & Old" By: Katie Cohan

Katie Cohan's photography aims to capture the subtle, ethereal details of the natural world. She also writes poetry, which has appeared in *Chronogram Magazine*, *Scavengers Literary Magazine*, and a previous issue of *Flora Fiction*.



retro realms of wonder

BY: JOSEPH FARINA

Pixelated realms beckon me back
A nostalgic whisper in the digital haze
a click, and worlds unfold, blocky and bright
A symphony of 8-bit sounds, a hero's call

In Mario's mushroom kingdom, to run and jump
Goomba-stomping, flag-grabbing, timeless thrills
The Legend of Zelda's Triforce shines
A hero's quest, ancient and endless

Ultima's virtues guide the fellowship
upon Britannia's shores and lord British's wisdom
seeking the codex, the Avatar's quest,
to enlightenment and a hero's fame

In these pixelated lands, I find a glimpse of younger days
A digital dreamtime, ageless and true
Where heroes rise, and legends fall
And the adventure never ends.

in the measure of spring

outside the open door
half the horizon
holds up an illusory sky
barren fields melting
form their own inviolate border
a lone raven lifts its wings
a shadow over muddy mirrors

stacked summer chairs wait
to be used again defrosting
in the returned sunshine

the air whispers a tentative welcome
the scene floating in low mists
mirage-like change begins
the resurrection unfolding before tired eyes
the contours of earth reappearing

separation
sandalwood scented candles
sweet baby James and mateus
sets the mood, to remembrance
and then the feel of absentees
pressed again into the past
reawakening the distant pain
resurrecting the thrust of separation

unfolding letters in anger torn and written over
her name crossed out forever

Joseph A Farina is a retired lawyer and award winning poet, and a pushcart nominee .His poems have appeared in Philadelphia Poets,Tower Poetry, The Windsor Review, and Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century. He has three books of poetry published ,The Cancer Chronicles and The Ghosts of Water Street and The beach,the street and everything in between.

"Envy so what" By: Anna Barzotti



"Going Somewhere" By: Anna Barzotti

Anna Barzotti is a multi disciplinary artist who draws, writes and makes video art and short films as a way of fully exploring her creativity and collaborating with her local community.







"Errare humanum est" By: Katerina Orël

Katerina Orël, 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.

VOWS

BY: ED DAVIS

Brittney wasn't my favorite niece, but I liked her well enough. According to my brother Frank, she'd been out of rehab and allegedly clean for a year.

"I need to ask you something, Aunt Alice," she'd said yesterday, first time she'd called me, *ever*.

"Shoot," I said. I didn't know if I was willing to get involved with a former druggie.

"I need to ask you in person."

So here I sit at Kindness Coffee, monitoring my late-afternoon anonymous brothers and sisters stuck inside their screens or staring vacantly. Britt was five minutes late. A creak of the door, swoosh of icy air and here she stood across from me; wearing a baggy, grey hoodie, too-tight torn jeans and fingerless gloves. Exactly the same disguise she'd worn when she used, except her blonde hair, formerly sculpted into various punk configurations, was buzzed to within a quarter-inch of her scalp. If I hadn't known better, I'd've thought she just got out of jail.

I gave her my best espresso grin. What I got back was watered-down decaf. I didn't take it personally. She'd been through hell—about which I knew something. My ex-husband was an alcoholic, in fact died of "complications" from his "disease," the fiery wreck that sent him to an early grave. Brittney hovered, one gloved hand on the chair back, possibly pondering a run for it.

"Sit," I say. Some say I have a persuasive voice. And face. That's my disguise. You don't teach behaviorally challenged middle schoolers without armoring up. Britt sat, as if she sensed (correctly) there'd be no second chance with me.

"I want to join the Benedictines," she blurted.

"The Benedictines?" I stalled. Duh, there was only one monastery in town, with nuns and monks living separately on their sprawling acres outside town. And why was she telling me this? Did she think I had an open mind after twenty years among teen lepers? Before I could probe, she jumped in feet first.

"Before I petition to join the order, I want you to mentor me—you know—" She made a circle with a finger protruding from her non-glove. "Toughen me up, get me ready for . . . for . . ."

"The cloistered life."

"Yeah." She placed her left hand atop her right to keep it still. "Whatever."

It was too soon to snort, but I did. "And what do you think a mentor does?"

Trapped, her eyes flitted up, down, sideways—but she was back in a flash, which I liked.

"Tell me the brutal truth about myself?"

"They didn't do that for you in rehab?"

She flicked it away. I imagined her in meetings, not listening, trying to be invisible, to be in an alley scoring. Finally:

"Not enough. Before I take a vow, I need to know who I am, not just who I'm not." Her eyes were knives. "Drunk, junkie, whore, slut."

"Okay." I laid my hands on the table. Concession hands. Maybe negotiating hands. Not fighting hands. If I wanted to strike my opponent (metaphorically, of course), they'd never see it coming. "You're a sober drunk who needs to wear better clothes, get an education and a job—join civilization, fucked-up as it is."

Her head snapped back as if I'd landed one on her chin. "Didn't you hear me? I want to leave civilization!"

I give myself major credit for not laughing. "Oh hon, nuns are some of the most 'civilized' people you'll ever meet. I was the beneficiary of their 'enlightened' educational methods for eight years. They'd lost the slaps and ruler slams, but discovered the shame game. And in a convent, they're all crammed together, hell-bent on being holy."

She didn't say what she might've: *But you've never taken a vow*. She knew I'd eat her alive. I deal with cast-off kids who've thrown chairs at teachers; stabbed classmates with scissors; spat, even peed, on peers. If "teaching" them for two decades wasn't a sacred commitment, then what was it? The pay sucks, my status is below the janitor's and I'm exiled to a separate building. Britt was looking at me as if she smelled my martyrdom (*not* a superpower).

"Hence," she said, "the need for a mentor who'll empower me to plunge into the vipers' pit." That wasn't recovery talk. My brother's oldest child was a reader, like me. I sat up straighter, let my hands fall to my lap, glanced sideways at the window. Outside, late February sun slid down the sky toward the horizon, gilding a day formerly suffused in gloom.

"I'd want you in school," I said.

Tiny glint of a smile. She thought she'd won.

"You'd have to get your G.E.D. and go to college."

"Yes! I've been thinking about studying art or history, maybe even—"

"Not a chance, hon. I mean a trade, like H/Vac, radiology, dental hygiene."

"*But . . .*"

"Nuns need AC, X-rays and clean teeth just like the 'civilized' do, sweetheart."

She warred with it for half a minute, had had her heart set on "easier and softer." She plucked napkins from the holder and tore them into long strips as if making bandages. I knew I'd probably lost her. No way I'd take anything back. I liked her the same way I like the kids who torture me the worst. But I would not agree to mentor a druggie, family or not, who wouldn't bust her balls for me. My real superpower was razor-wire/rock wall boundaries.

She tossed up her napkin strips, let them parachute back to the table. "Whatever you say." A heartbeat, then: "Auntie Alice."

I kept my smile to myself. Hard as I'd grown from years of sparring, sometimes with full-body contact, I was still somebody's Auntie Alice. I was in deep water now. Only one way to go: up toward the light.

Ed Davis has immersed himself in writing and contemplative practices since retiring from college teaching. Time of the Light, a poetry collection, was released by Main Street Rag Press in 2013. His novel, *The Psalms of Israel Jones* (West Virginia University Press 2014) won the Hackney Award for an unpublished novel in 2010. Many of his stories, essays and poems have appeared in anthologies and journals such as *Write Launch*, *The Plenitudes*, *Slippery Elm*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, and *Bacopa Literary Review*. He lives with his wife in the village of Yellow Springs, Ohio.



"Quod petis est nusquam" By: Katerina Orël

*ariete**Virtus**fortior*

"Virtus ariete fortior" By: Katerina Orël

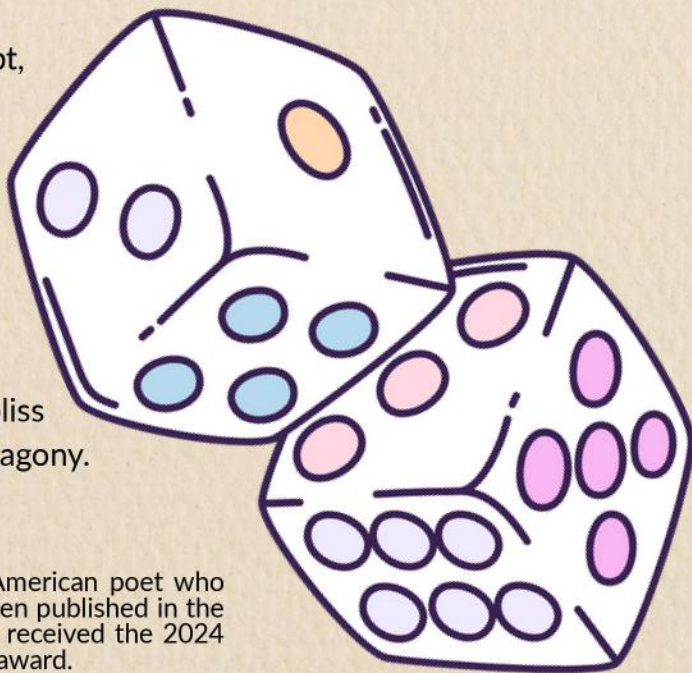


Roll of a Dice

BY: RAMZI ALBERT RIHANI

He climbs the stairs seeking heaven.
He does it again and again,
not knowing what awaits him.
Repetition is a sign of perseverance.
Expectation a sign of limitation
An encounter of a different kind is coming.
Is it wonder or revelation that drives him?
Is it confidence or uncertainty that pushes him?
Faith or doubt?

Questioning advances the doubt,
but he is not sure.
His insurance is his blind faith
that gives him confidence.
The lack of it opens his mind
but makes him vulnerable.
Conviction and hesitation
battle in his head.
A roll of a dice determines his bliss
and relieves him from his inner agony.



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

Sunday Thoughts

BY: QUINN GEAGHAN

Sunday Blues
Noonday hues

I dive into the unknown,
rushing toward tomorrow—
still wondering
if there's light left in my heart.

Horizons keep shining.
My heart keeps beating.

I've always lived in solitude.
The air thickens with sound.

"I'm alive,"
I whisper.

But where do I go now?

You've worn me thin.
You never understood.

I lay my skin out to dry—
it no longer calls to you.

And you,
drenched in hunger
nothing can feed,

cling to purity—
then disappear.

Quinn Geaghan is a passionate poet from New Hampshire. In 2020, she took a creative writing class at Nashua Community College, where her love for literature and poetry was first sparked. She has since had many of her pieces published in various outlets such as *Bakunawapress*, *Poetry Catalog*, and *Spillwords*.

"Ferris Wheel" By: Ashley Wilson



"Rockville" By: Ashley Wilson





ON MY BIRTHDAY

BY: GEORGE FREEK

I don't get out of bed.
I drank wine as a thousand stars
passed over my head.
I stared at the darkness
as if it were
an incomprehensible book.
The dreams of my youth
were unsatisfactory illusions.
I know that soon
I will no longer be here.
As death draws near,
life will go on without me.
It brings me no cheer.
I watch a shooting star
burn and disappear.
It won't appear again.
In my mind I feel its pain.

George Freek's poem "Enigmatic Variations" was recently nominated for Best of the Net. His poem "Night Thoughts" was also nominated for a Pushcart Prize.







"Unfolding" By: Margaret Marcum

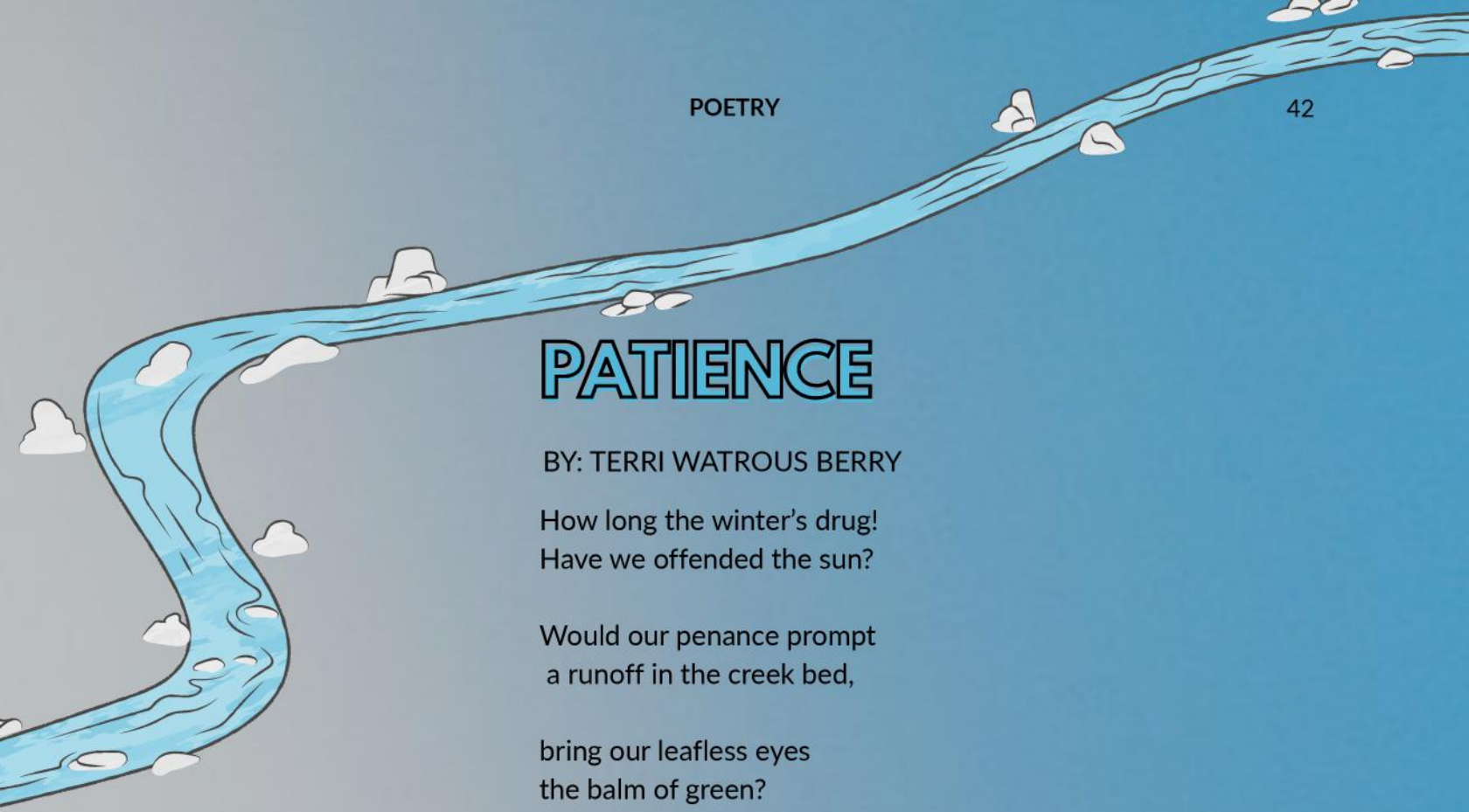
"Sakura in Central Park" By: Ellen Pliskin



PHOTOGRAPHY
"Flower Circus" By: Jonathan Brooks



Jonathan Brooks' photographs have been published in numerous magazines, anthologies, and periodicals. His Photos have been featured in major movies and television shows. And his work has been exhibited in internationally.



PATIENCE

BY: TERRI WATROUS BERRY

How long the winter's drug!
Have we offended the sun?

Would our penance prompt
a runoff in the creek bed,

bring our leafless eyes
the balm of green?

It seems gray days
have brought us blinded

back to the ways of Spring,
she is having her way with us,

she is biding her time,
even now as we whine like

children in the dining room,
she's busy planning

a paradise for our picnics
in the summer yard.

Terri Watrous Berry is a Michigan writer whose work has appeared over the last four decades. This year her poetry was included by *Red Rose Thorns*, *Culture Cult*, *Libretto*, *Ghost Lite Lit*, and *Moss Piglet*.





The title 'ALPHA' is rendered in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font. Behind the letters, a set of large, brown antlers with multiple points extends upwards and outwards. A light-colored animal skull is positioned behind the letter 'P', with its snout pointing downwards.

ALPHA

BY: MEGAN KUNZ

Curved impressions in the snow. Stiff and crusted over; the icy wind works quickly. Downy flakes hardened into unforgiving diamonds. He presses into one, feels the diamonds shatter beneath his weight, puts his nose to the ground and breathes, breathes, breathes. The scent, gamey and wild, climbs through him, until it pushes everything else to the background.

He looks to his left. To his right. More noses to the trail. Odors coursing, directing, beckoning.

The pack's eyes lock on his—amber orbs seeking for what cannot be spoken. His eyes flash and a guttural sound escapes his lips. Low at first, then high, high, higher. A song, a summon, a warning.

The others answer, adding their own voices to his. A symphony of the wild. A song of hunger, survival, power. Their voices break the arctic air.

His paws carry him in a trot as he follows the scent that is now locked inside of him, pressing him on, pushing him to move, move, move.

Stronger now.

Fresher.

Closer.

His sprint gains momentum. Arctic wind pulls at his thick fur, a confusion of greys that cascade over his body, thinning at his legs and on his muzzle. His ears are lifted, pointed and listening. He doesn't look to his side. He knows the others follow. They always follow alpha.

Forward, his muscles pull, strong and burning.

A white brume bursts into the sky. Frantic calls fill the air. Wings flap, leaving behind precious feathers; feathers that defend against the anger of the arctic chill. But lost feathers are better than lost flesh.

He pays no attention to their wails, their plump bodies. They are nothing compared to what waits.

And then he sees.

Antlers.

Like long fingers curled and bent, beckoning him closer, closer, closer. Brown and cream fur draping over so much flesh, so much meat.

His yellow eyes rove over the herd. His muscles twitch. He can already smell it.

A wound.

Blood.

Weakness.

The twitch inside him builds, builds, builds, until it explodes. His body lunges forward. The others follow, approaching from all sides.

The herd perks their heads, antlers still. In an instant they race one another for one more day to live, to breathe, to lick up the earthy mushrooms of the tundra, to taste the woody tang on their tongues.

He pulses with adrenaline. The blood, the wound is close.

The strong ones push ahead, their antlers jostling as their bodies rush.

The injured one is left behind.

Powerful grey bodies, thick with fur, surround the wounded animal. She is trapped, confined. She has no hope.

Though she fights like she does. Nostrils flare. Eyes bulge.

Alpha springs for the white fur, the patch wrapped like a gift around the animal's throat.

But he misses.

Snarls fly from his throat, a guttural reprimand.

They are not finished.

One more burst of power, energy, brawn.

His lungs pump. His muscles contract.

He reaches the animal again.

Hind legs gather force, then propel him through the air.

Teeth sink.

They tumble together, lives entwined.

A bellow rises from the wounded animal. A cry for help. But the others are long gone.

More snarls, more grey. More teeth sinking into flesh.

The animal jerks, desperate to free herself.

But grey fur smothers the brown and soon the animal lies still, yielding, subdued. Though unwillingly made, hers is an offering of the greatest order.

Howls arise. An announcement. A kill.

Alpha growls, his teeth bare and tipped with scarlet.

Powerful jaws tear at the still offering. Droplets spray through the air, hovering orbs of crimson before they color the snow.

He tears again, each time the hollow in his belly becomes less so.

He turns and leaves. His pack, his brothers and sisters are fed.

But there are more bellies to fill.

He makes his way back over the crust of snow, this time with less urgency, less drive.

She smells him before he arrives. Her head pokes out of the den.

Five more follow.

They hop and pounce to greet him. Alpha. Sire.

He leans down, taking in their smells. Earthy and wild. And they smell of him. Their flesh is his flesh. Their bones, his bones.

Small muzzles sniff out his own. Five tongues swipe at his jaw.

The warm flesh in his belly rises in response, an answer to their pleading.

He opens his mouth and a soft mound falls to the ground.

The pups yip and push as they fight to have the biggest share. Their greedy mouths consume the softened meat in seconds and they are back, licking, begging for more. Once again, his body responds, though he would rather keep the nourishment for himself.

The pups tumble and pounce on one another, knowing that if they don't fight for their share, their lungs will not continue to fill and their bodies will not continue to grow.

Again, they return, their small tongues seeking his jaw.

This time, he growls. No more. What's left is his own.

He turns to her, sends his muzzle into her warm neck.

She nuzzles him back. The pups ate meat from his belly, rather than milk from her own body. She has given them life, succored them and nourished them. Now, it is time for her to regain strength.

He nuzzles her again.

Go. Nourish your body. Live another day.

She leaves, her agile frame eagerly making its way to the howling calls in the distance. Her jaw twitching and her belly aching.

He lies down. The pups topple over one another to reach him. Small, clumsy, weak. Yet, they are learning from alpha. They will grow. Their bodies will become hardened and powerful. Their jaws strong. And when alpha returns his body to the earth, they will still roam upon it, their howls will still break the arctic air. His bones are their bones. His flesh, their flesh.

Megan Kunz is a homeschooling mother of four who manages writing only in the still morning hours. When not engaging in the aforementioned pursuits, she can be found in her garden, in the mountains, or planning the next adventure around the world that may, or may not, occur.



The Prayer of a Neglected Dog

BY: DOUG STOIBER

Undo the knot that binds me to this ring of hammered iron
My rescuer, my savior! raise the closure of my prison pen
And I will follow you to my last step once free of capture,
Neglect, and deprivation, suffered in this squalid den

Take me with you to a place where I can lap cool, quenching water
My raw and rasping throat to find relief so thoughtlessly denied
A place where you will need and want me ever after
Where I can there regain my confidence and my pride

Be generous with food for me, so long without a scrap to nourish
I will earn my meals, and ever thank your generosity
My mind and spirit, skin and sinews soon to flourish
And all my love and duty to your safety, as you have savioed me

Just four square feet of space, a corner of your bedroom floor
Where I can rest, while always guarding by your side
For these small blessings, I will sacrifice my life and more
If you will loose my rope, and as my master, will abide

There is so much in me that will your soul make warm and glowing
Your days will be my life, devoted just to follow you
If by your side I leave this dismal cage of bleakness knowing
That within a human's heart I can these dreadful bonds undo

Doug Stoiber writes poetry and short fiction and is a member of the Mossy Creek Writers in East Tennessee. Nine of his short stories and a dozen of his poems have been selected for publication in literary journals.







"Cactus" By: Fatemeh Najafi

Fatemeh Najafi is an Iranian visual artist with a background in civil engineering. She blends structure and imagination in her mixed media works, exploring identity, emotion, and transformation through detailed, thoughtful compositions.

"Beautiful Botany" By: Bridget Schmid

Bridget Schmid is an undergraduate student at the University of St. Thomas studying creative writing, journalism, and theology. She has photography published in the *Summit Avenue Review* and reports for *The Crest Student News*.







"RED" By: Jonathan Brooks



Mushrooms

after Kelli Russel Agodon

BY: LOIS VILLEMAIRE

Find me wild
about portobello mushroom sandwiches,
planting annuals in the backyard
after Mother's Day,
hearing a favorite author
has written a new book
coming soon
like a date with a cherished friend.

Praise a spring day
warm breezes and low humidity,
an unexpected call
a voice I have been longing to hear,
walking where plants revolve
around flowers and towering trees,
praise the gifts of nature
nothing is asked for in return.

Lois Perch Villemaire of Annapolis, MD is the author of *My Eight Greats and Eyes at the Edge of the Woods*. Her poetry has appeared in *Spillwords Press*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Third Street Review*, and elsewhere. Her flash memoir has been included in anthologies including, *I Am My Father's Daughter*. She is a contributing writer to AARP The Ethel. Lois, a Pushcart nominee researches genealogy, works at the library, and propagates African violets.

In a Cage

BY: LYNN WHITE

Sometimes the caged bird will sing,
a male in a futile search for a mate,
but a caged woman will never sing
however much she thinks about it
the caged woman will never sing,
she must be free to sing her song,
but ducks caged in a small pond
will never sing even when freed.
She ponders this and wonders if
she will find her voice out there.





There's a journey to be conducted within the pieces and within the layers of mechanical parts and organic elements, weaving an intricate and fantastical visual narrative. The interplay between biological and mechanical components is a kind of dreamscape.

"round Midnight" By: Simon Berson

"Sanctum Of Stillness" By: Anyanwu David

David Anyanwu, a visual and experimental creative, creates art using his internal struggles, environments and also the african culture as a basis.



Hidden In The Darkness

By: Lynn White

It seems the light always seeks to hide the dark,
the darkness which enfolds me like a cloak,
matching it's shape to mine
but allowing my secret side to sneak out
from inside it's folds
and uneasily cast a shadow.

And,
just maybe
shine a light
into the depths
of my darkness.
Not revealing
everything,
but some things
that were hidden
there
in the light.

Enough.

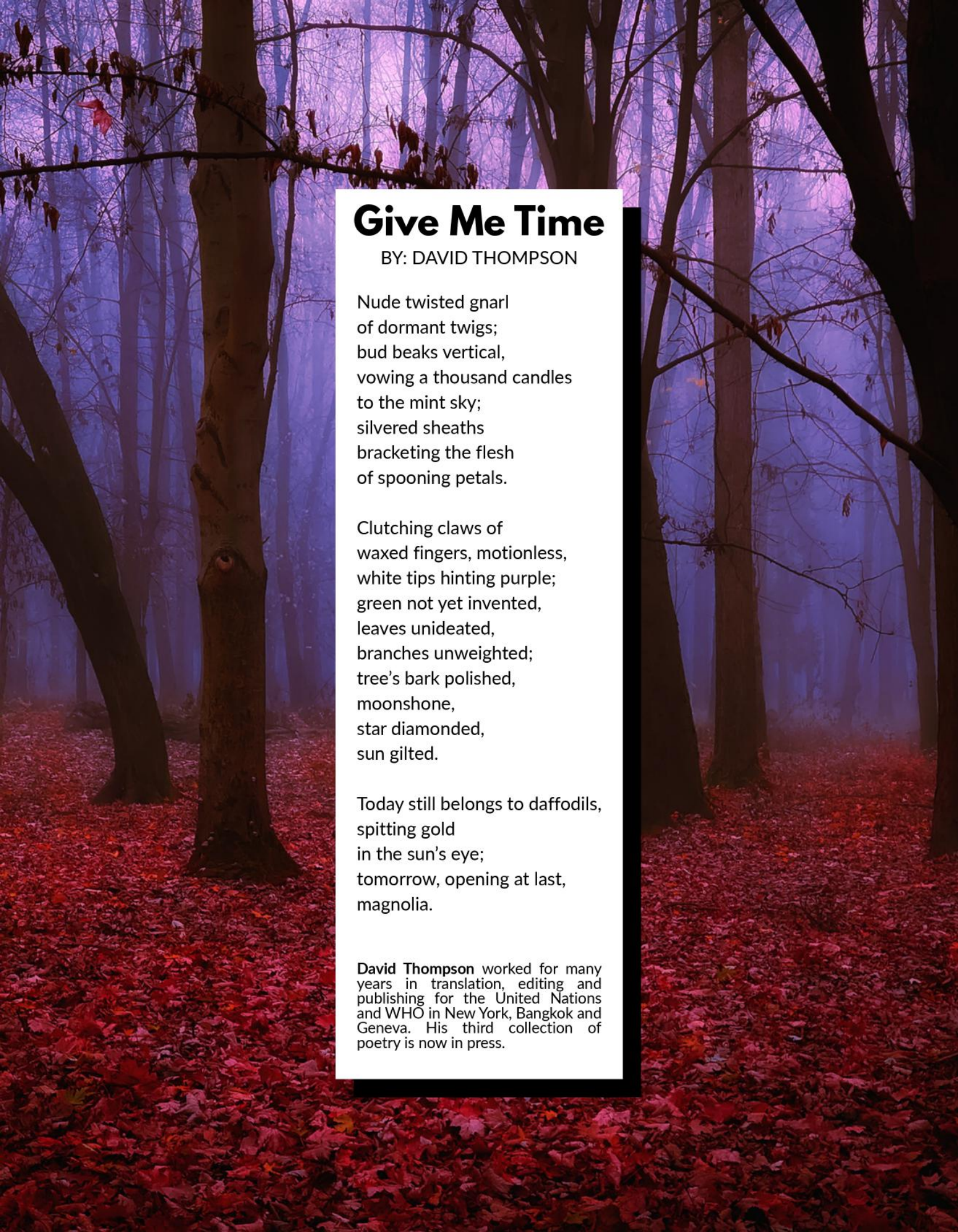
Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality.





"Bondage" By: Nina Schönian-Söllig

Nina Schönian-Söllig, born in 1980 in Germany, paints primarily in oil on canvas, preferring figurative painting with elements of symbolism and surrealism. Her paintings exhibit a delicate vulnerability, her protagonists a play between worlds.



Give Me Time

BY: DAVID THOMPSON

Nude twisted gnarl
of dormant twigs;
bud beaks vertical,
vowing a thousand candles
to the mint sky;
silvered sheaths
bracketing the flesh
of spooning petals.

Clutching claws of
waxed fingers, motionless,
white tips hinting purple;
green not yet invented,
leaves unideated,
branches unweighted;
tree's bark polished,
moonshone,
star diamonded,
sun gilted.

Today still belongs to daffodils,
spitting gold
in the sun's eye;
tomorrow, opening at last,
magnolia.

David Thompson worked for many years in translation, editing and publishing for the United Nations and WHO in New York, Bangkok and Geneva. His third collection of poetry is now in press.



"Make Love Not War" By: Nina Schönian-Söllig



Songs of Orpheus — Stone Tears

By: John A. deSouza

John A. deSouza has published *'Hidden'*, a chapbook, with Bottlecap Press, was short-listed for the Letter Review Prize (books), has appeared in the *Writing Disorder*, *engine(idling)*, *WayWords*, *Apricity Press*, *The Orchards*, *All Existing*, and others.

Devoid of the charmed music of sunlight sung swaying through the breezes, they set on me, as I would set blurred eyes through grief, begging that one who also was stolen. I would forget myself to marble, if not for those stone tears, forever falling, clamped hands pressed cruelly into her waist and thy. She knew my same lament at death's jealous theft, as if love's impulsive goddess, seized with his same need again repeated, that my Euridice was also taken—In that once bright forest, alive with varied bird calls, nearby sharp, or soft whistling, in loud boasts breaking through layered trees from a distance, animals scurrying, chipmunks paused, grey squirrels rustling. Or in a clearing, peering back at me with like gentle eyes in my mind's endless stream of making—I, sobbing in my loss, a doe, unfrightened, I thought saddened at my suffering.



"The Beginning" By: Nina Schönian-Söllig



Her Strength

BY: IVANA TURUDIC

There was a time when I lost my impetus. My life broke in two; before and after the occurrence. I kept being thrown to the ground by life over and over, and it later took me a decade to learn to hope. I fought with no hope, I fought because I had to; and I saw people passing by, running me over because I was crooked.

I didn't know about strength. I was getting it from Her. In my later days, my love said She was a natural force. He never read Faulkner, but I did, and it fit the description of Eula Warner. She was nothing like Warner's girl, but she was still a natural force.

I never gave birth to a child, so technically, I could never become a Stabat Mater. I never did many things, some of which I wanted to do and some of which I should have done, according to some people.

I was busy surviving. I used my Mother's strength, hope, and resilience because I didn't find it in myself. We were connected, and when I had panic attacks, I would come to her bed, where she held me protected as before in the womb. It felt like Nature nursing me.

A decade ago, I found a place to stand to move the universe—as the saying goes—it was a light touch of feeling grounded, not just through Her. Compared to where I've been, it deserves the supposed pathos of Archimedes' Lever. I found a place; I found the strength I feel in my limbs and mind today. How did it happen? When did I start growing in power? All I know is that my Mother was a catalyst. She has one child, but she gave me life two times.

She kept saying that nobody could take my place under the sun. Even soon after dividing my life into two phases, I decided to earn that place. I didn't have a map, just a compass.

When I look back to the years of struggle and evil I endured from people who didn't know that fundamental wisdom of the "place", I am here to own my slow growth and the strength that germinated in me while I was building my resilience. I can feel it grow every instant, even in hardships. It is called meaning. She taught me to tailor meaning or ikigai or many meanings for myself. I healed the gap in my life with Her words. And did the struggle last!

I know it won't end; I rose to the occasion, slowly but surely, on time.

Ivana Turudic is a writer and teacher with a background in human rights. She lives on the island Hvar.

Red-Letter Days

BY: KENNETH BOYD

During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days
Hand-in-hand to the tea-colored river we walked
For the sake of disguising our whitewashed stains

Grandpa Roy was a tall man, a man of means and taste
Thrown together like okra and tomatoes, I thought
During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days

He was handsome in a Stetson hat for the day
His thin moustache neatly trimmed and cropped
During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days

He dressed elegantly in the style of the age
Always ready to nod at a passerby, ready to talk
For the sake of disguising our whitewashed stains

Grandpa smoked a pipe with sighs of sweet grace
With a fragrant suggestion I could not balk
During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days

Grandpa Roy always gave more than he saved
And I watched his kind expression, passing down his lot
During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days
For the sake of disguising our whitewashed stains

Kenneth Boyd, winner of the Royal Palm Literary Award (RPLA) and judge for the 2025 awards, is a poet and former jazz musician. His poetry appears in *Wayfarer Magazine*, *Flora Fiction*, and is featured on live events. His collection, *Grasshopper Dreams*, was published in 2023. Kenneth is a graduate of the UCLA Extension Creative Writing Program and an Assistant Editor of Poetry at *Southland Alibi* magazine. He enjoys life in Northeast Florida with his wife and dog, Stella.



Greendom - By: Jonathan Brooks

jewel in the enigma

BY: MICHAEL SINDLER

streets painted chartreuse with pollens' passion
air reverberates with life' vibration
nature adorns earth with velvet fashion
wheel revolves from denouement to creation
infinite spiral of inspiration
airswept promise of continuity
cosmic dancers of perpetuity
dervishes twirl from anther to stigma
pursuing with blind ingenuity
the jewel wrapped inside the enigma

Farewell to Earth

BY: MICHAEL SINDLER

With every mile I miss you more
This face I will not see again
You contain all that I adore
Your liquid face, your molten core
With every mile I miss you more
Within my heart I feel you spin
With every mile I miss you more
This face I will not see again

Michael Sindler is a Denver resident and current Colorado Beat Poet Laureate, Michael Sindler's compositions appear in print and web publications, anthologies, media-bridging projects, and performances worldwide, and also facilitates workshops and open mics.



"Pure Bloom" By: Bridget Schmid



"Unfurling" By: Katie Cohan



"Saving for Camp" Ellen Pliskin





Spring Planning

BY: DUANE ANDERSON

God decorated the tree for spring,
populating it with thousands of pink blossoms,
covering each and every branch.
It is something we talked about
each year before the spring season began,
and at each meeting, he was happy to do it,
bringing joy to everyone's eyes.
Come join us for a visit,
as we share this beauty with you.

The First Snow of Spring

BY: DUANE ANDERSON

They asked
who do you think you are
dressing up in the barb of a sorcerer
believing you hold the key of all powers,
but the sorcerer, he knew
that what they doubted,
so he cast spells of black magic
and bewildered them by the thousands,
by changing warm into cold
and rain into snow
with just three words,
Treat or Treat?

Duane Anderson currently lives in La Vista, NE. He is the author of 'On the Corner of Walk and Don't Walk' and 'The Life of an Ordinary Man.'

THERE ARE TIMES

BY: LOUIS FABER

There are times when I wish
I would have come across you somewhere,
that I would have recognized you even though
you would have no idea who I was
or why I stopped to talk to you.
You would probably have been in uniform
for it was your life, I know
and family was something that joined you
or didn't, it mattered little to you
either way, you went where the Air Force
sent you without ever asking a question.
You were a good soldier, your rank
tells me that, achieving the pinnacle rank
for the enlisted soldier, Chief Master Sergeant.
But if I had come across you what would I say
what would I ask of a man who fathered me
but never knew of my existence, just another
child left in your wake like the girl in Italy.
I would probably say nothing for I have all
I needed of you bound up tightly in my genes.

Louis Faber is a poet and writer living in Florida with his wife (a fellow poet). His work has appeared widely in the U.S., Europe and Asia, and has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

"New Day" By: Sara Caporaletti

Sara Caporaletti is a mixed media artist based in Maryland. Her work focuses on identity, faith, anatomy, and capturing ordinary moments.





"Dream girl" By: Nasta Martyn

Nasta Martyn is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.



"Dream girl" By: Nasta Martyn

The title "The Magic of Butterflies" is written in a large, bold, black serif font. Several blue and white butterflies are scattered around the title, some appearing to fly across it. The butterflies have detailed wing patterns and are in various positions, some above and some below the text.

The Magic of Butterflies

BY: JIM BATES

In the instant before Annie passed away, her Fairy God Mother came to her and held her hand.

In the instant after she breathed her final breath, her Fairy God Mother held her to her bosom and said, "Welcome, my dear. Welcome home."

Annie looked at the kindly lady and wept tears of joy. She was finally pain free. She had never felt so good.

Her Fairy God Mother said, "Now, Annie dear, here's comes the fun part. If you want to go back, you can. Do you want to?"

"Oh, I'd love to go back! Would it be possible to see Andy?" She clapped her hands with joy. "I'd like that so much."

"Yes, you can. You can go see your husband but there's a catch. You can't return as a human. You have to pick something else. Can you do that?"

Janie didn't have to think. "Yes. I know exactly what I want to go back as."

"Then it is done," her Fairy God Mother replied, waving her wand and dusting Annie with shimmering golden glitter. "You are free to return."

Oh, how the butterflies danced that morning on the summer breeze, drifting through the garden, keeping Andy company as he bent to his tasks. He smiled remembering how Annie loved them, even talked to them, whispering in their own ethereal language. Before she died, they would relax on their garden bench, butterflies fluttering about, a poetic dance of daintiness, those colorful swallowtails, painted ladies, red admirals and monarchs fluttering among the flowers, alighting sometimes on Annie's outstretched hand.

Suddenly his memories were interrupted by a caramel colored butterfly landing daintily on his shoulder. It stretched open its wings wide catching the warm rays of the early morning sun. Then it turned to him.

"Hello, darling," the lovely painted lady said. "Beautiful day, isn't it?"

Andy's heart quickened. For the past two years she had returned, and now this third time he finally realized it wasn't a dream. Annie really would re-appear every year.

"It is my dear," he smiled and reached out to stroke her wings. "It's a beautiful day."

She giggled, "Oh, no you don't. No touching. It's not good for my wings." Then she laughed, "You know that you silly man."

He turned serious for a moment, "I know, but sometimes I forget." Then he grinned, "Oh, Annie, it's so good to see you again. It's been so long."

"I know. A year. You understand, though, that I can't stay with you. I have to leave, right? I have to go through my change." She sighed, "But it's always good to see you and be with you if even for a short while. It makes my year."

"Mine too," he said, dripping some sweetened ice tea into the palm of his hand. "Here you go sweetheart. This is for you."

She alighted on his wrist and eagerly sipped up the sweet liquid. "My goodness Andy, that tastes wonderful."

"It's sun tea with herbs from the garden. I made it thinking of you."

Annie flew up on a soft breeze. "You're so thoughtful." She brushed closed to his face. Butterfly kisses. "Come. Walk with me."

They strolled casually among the daylilies, geraniums, cosmos and sunflowers.

"Do you like how the garden is looking this year?"

She flew to his shoulder and alighted. "It looks wonderful, my dear. As always."

They shared the rest of the day and he was never so happy as he was now, when they were together. But, alas, all good things had to come to an end and toward sunset she flew close and said, "Okay, dear, I'm getting tired. I've got to go and get ready for next year so I can come back and see you again."

"I'll be here I hope," he said, smiling, making a little joke.

Then he waved good-bye, watching as she floated away on the warm summer breeze. A tear formed. He'd miss her so.

He was taking a step to go inside when suddenly a stabbing pain shot through his upper body. He clutched at his chest, the world spinning away as he staggered forward, one step, two steps. Then all went black and he dropped to the ground. He died instantly. Heart attack, is what people said

The next year the neighbors would remark on the two butterflies that could be seen in the area. A painted lady and a red admiral, flying close like they knew each other, never far from the other's side, like they were meant to be together.

And they are too, because forever and for all time they will be found on one day every year, the two of them floating from flower to flower, sipping sweet nectar and dancing their own ballet together on those soft summer breezes, winging their way to eternity.

Such is the magic of butterflies.

Jim Bates loves to write. He takes his inspiration from people and nature. "Life is a gift." He loves every minute of it.





"Afternoon Morning Glory" By: KJ Hannah Greenberg

KJ Hannah Greenberg uses her trusty point-and-shoot camera to capture the order of G-d's universe. Sometimes, it's insufficient for her to sate herself by applying verbal whimsy to pastures where fey hedgehogs play.

"Greenlight" By: Katie Cohan



"Golden" By: Sara Caporaletti.



Battlehall Place, Rome, Georgia

BY: LYNDA WEBB

Five ponds, shed, decaying woodpile, earthworm mound and a fence that leans with overgrown blackberries, sways in the wind, dips with the burden of wasted fruit.

Marth Wansley took the old fishing sign down, gently eased the square-tipped nails from the faded letters. Her daughter clings to her knees; it's her home too.

Grasshoppers settle; the chatter silenced as the rusted pegs creak loose one-by-one. A quiet end.

The sign rests in the tufted-hair grass, wood of fifty hard years looks like the features of a weathered man; gray, cracked, still.

The Cherokee chiefs, Major Ridge and John Ross left in a trail of tears from here, their last spot of freedom. What did the Cherokee children

think, when they left this spring—snatched from their mountain homes, marched, removed and forgotten? The Coosa, Cherokees, Creeks all gone.

Battlehall's fish farm is closed, arrowheads buried, tire tracks from rusted trucks that spun in the soft red earth, are not yet covered

by false brome. The springs seep beneath our shoes, we stand where silt and air surges up. rushes through a twenty-inch pipe, gushes into the trout run

alive with frogs, cattails and snails, hugging the stalks like Martha's child to her thigh.

The wind rustles floating foxtail, duckweed, bladderwort, frogbit drop their store-buds, root-locked to the springs' downward flow.

One hundred yards north, in the shade of two hollowed white oaks, pillars for yellowing Virginia creeper, rests the darkness of the catfish pond.

Stillness, a flicker, then whiskers ruffle the surface momentarily. We are three strangers who watch countless bleary eyes

sink with twenty-pound weight to the bottom blackness. Their eyes see through the willow's roots, past our sweat-soaked boots

into our hands. We feed them like our children, their plump white bellies flash at dusk, hungrily mouth the brown water, wait for more pellets of food.

They know we don't have nets, lines or hooks to tear them from their pond. Still, they are wary of our casted shadows, or perhaps the pressing flow of the water, whose origin is still unknown.

Lynda Gerdin Webb has a MA from the University of Texas at El Paso where she studied fiction with Raymond Carver. Her fiction has been published in *About Place Journal*, *Flora Fiction*, *Persimmon Tree*, *SouthShore Review*, *Big Bend Literary Magazine*, and *Beach Chair*. Her poems have been aired on Texas Standard Radio.

"Constraint" By: Massimiliano Bruno Calabresi

Massimiliano Bruno Calabresi is an artist who depicts his own perception of life and society through his artworks. His imaginary is fulfilled by insects and animals in human roles, as a form of satirical critic.





"Mask Gleaners" By: Donald Patten

Donald Patten is an artist and cartoonist from Belfast, Maine. He creates oil paintings, illustrations, ceramics and graphic novels. His art has been exhibited in galleries throughout Maine.



"Study no.33" By: Zoe Nikolopoulou
Zoe Nikolopoulou is an artist from Athens, Greece. She is also a poet and translator. Currently she studies Botanical Illustration at Cornell University.



"Study no.33" By: Zoe Nikolopoulou



"My Grandmother's Rosary 3" By: Najwa Abukhater

Najwa Abukhater is a Berlin-based, visual artist, writer, curator and filmmaker. Their artistic practice tackles themes of queer politics, belonging, displacement, identity and gender, using diverse artistic mediums. Their curatorial work is motivated by their belief in our collective memory and the need to platform our own narratives.

The Hand of God

BY: LYNN WEBB

For Emilia Strutinska my great grandmother

Tree lines are only a memory because
the dead rise in April 1919.

Eastern Galicia gone-- siege and war
claimed our humanity. Only sticks guard
Lviv, the ruins of the High Castle
watch as we trudge toward Warsaw. Rails blocked,
rockets explode, no water, our longhouse
burnt, flesh melts, forgotten friendships vanished
because all the dead see are the blurred clouds
dotted with crows as bones rise heavenward.

Because war creates broken roads and lies
we search to find who sings to these dark clouds
as we cross the Baltic Sea. Our blisters
fresh on our knees, we pray the rosary,
wait for the ship to carry us abroad,
across the dark Atlantic. We listened
to the foreign hand of God calling us,
za chlebem, for bread, and we fled our home—
nine souls in a third-class dank, dark cabin,
missing home, wanting what we did not know.

Because, like a worm, we crawled into this
foreign land to find hope, jobs, za chlebem,
--our humanity. The Great War still looms,
as eight souls sleep, dreaming of a new life.

Emilia understands nothing--she
sings the rosary—sways--this harsh language,
bitter on her tongue. Through caged windows
on Ellis Island, the Milky Way crests,
the skyline dotted with crows as if stuck,
waiting to rise into the hand of God.

Lynda Gerdin Webb has a MA from the University of Texas at El Paso where she studied fiction with Raymond Carver. Her fiction has been published in *About Place Journal*, *Flora Fiction*, *Persimmon Tree*, *SouthShore Review*, and *Big Bend Literary Magazine*, and *Beach Chair*. Her poems have been aired on Texas Standard Radio.



PHOTOGRAPHY

"Holding Hands" By: Ashley Wilson





DOUBLE DAVE

WRITER:
PATRICK
MCVOY

ARTIST:
RODOLFO
BUSCAGLIA

THIS IS A BUSY
SATURDAY NIGHT
AT THE FINE
ESTABLISHMENT
CALLED WARBA.

COUPLES
MINGLE OVER
THE REPUTABLE
ORGANIC DELIGHTS,
CROWDS Huddle
AMIDST THE
VINTAGE WINES.

VOICES REVERBERATE AROUND
THE WOOD PANELS, HOVERING
LIKE THE ROAR OF A JET
TAKING PEOPLE ELSEWHERE.

AT THIS TABLE
IS A COUPLE DOUBLE
DATING FOR THE
FIRST TIME. ON THE
LEFT SIDE IS WALLY
AND DIORDAN. ON
THE RIGHT IS RICKY
AND DIANE.

BOTH COUPLES HAVE BEEN WRAPPED IN THEIR OWN
WORLDS FOR A LITTLE WHILE NOW BUT AFTER
RUNNING INTO EACH OTHER AT A CONFERENCE AND
HITTING IT OFF THEY DECIDED TO DO A DOUBLE DATE.

IT'S SO NICE
HANGING
WITH YOU
GUYS

AND TALKING
ABOUT SUCH
SIMILAR INTERESTS
- WE'RE RATHER
AMAZED TO FIND
PEOPLE SO
WELL-VERSED IN
PRACTICALLY
EVERYTHING
GOING ON IN
OUR SMALL
LITTLE CITY.

WE LIKE TO
VENTURE FORTH
INTO MANY
DIFFERENT
AREAS.

IN FACT, I
DON'T KNOW IF
I SHOULD TELL
YOU THIS, BUT
WALLY AND
MYSELF...

... WE'RE
IN AN S+M
RELATIONSHIP.

WHY'D YOU
SAY THAT?

WELL,
WE
ARE







STOP!

BUT WALLY HERE
REINS ME IN WHEN
I FEEL A LITTLE ...
DESTRUCTIVE.



SO
TO ANSWER
YOUR QUESTION,
WE'RE ACTUALLY
A SWITCH
COUPLE.

MMM-HM,
DIORDAN ACTUALLY
PULLS ME BACK FROM
SOME OF MY MORE,
UM, AMBITIOUS -

I PREFER
THE WORD
"MESSIANIC"
...

"RIGHT"
WELL, SHE PULLS ME
BACK FROM SOME
OF MY ENDEAVORS.



I'M
SORRY, BUT
DIORDAN CAN BE A
LITTLE ENTHUSIASTIC
WHEN SHE
DRINKS.

BETTER
THAN SINGING
BAD KARAOKE,
RIGHT?

NO,
THAT'S
FINE ...

JUST -
WOW, THAT'S
SOMETHING
ELSE ...



AND
DIORDAN
ACTUALLY
SAVED LIVES
FROM WITHIN
THE SOUND-
WAVES.

REMEMBER THAT
HONKING CREATURE?
BUT TURN AROUND
AND LOOK AT ALL
THE MOTION AND
THE CLATTER THAT
ENSUES ...

I FEEL
LIKE I'M BACK IN MY
COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY
COURSE, BUT WOW,
WITH A WILD CHILD.

ANYONE
WANT ANOTHER
DRINK? I MEAN
EVEN FOR US,
IT'S KINDA
BIZARRE.



A DRINK
WOULD BE NICE.
DON'T LET THE
ALCOHOL NUMB YOU,
THOUGH. PAY ATTENTION
TO THE WALLS AROUND
US, THAT ENCASE US,
WHICH SOUND IS
BUT ONE.

WELL,
I KNOW FOR
ONE I FEEL LIKE
SHATTERING
THOSE WALLS
AT TIMES.

THE
RUCKUS CAN
MAKE ONE MOVE
A BIT, SHAKE
THINGS UP --



YET IT'S WHEN IT'S QUIET
ENOUGH TO HEAR A PIN
DROP, WHEN THAT LITTLE
PING JOINS WHAT WAS A
LOUD ROAR TO BECOME
AN AUDIO GHOST ...



PING

THAT'S WHEN THE
SECRETS FROM WITHIN
CAN SPRING FORTH ...

WHO KNOWS WHAT
MIGHT BE REVEALED
THAT?

THE END

FLORA FICTION

**A LITERARY MAGAZINE
VOLUME 6 • ISSUES 1 & 2
SPRING & SUMMER 2025**

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