



# FLORA FICTION

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# EDITORIAL STAFF

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Flash fiction, poetry, illustration, and review submissions for website content are accepted on a rolling basis.

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

To desire is a state of mind in which you want and wish for something. As humans, we all have desires. We desire what we want, who we want to be with, and who we want to be. Our desires are what fuels us forward, igniting the fire within to go after the things that we want.

Desire isn't a singular emotion. It comes along with happiness, sadness, pain, and more. It makes us feel shame when we feel we don't deserve the things we desire. More than that, it makes us feel fulfilled when we obtain our desires. To desire is an experience that can lead to more.

As people, we desire to be understood, respected, and loved from the world around us. We want to be impact on others we wish to see. What is your desire for the summer? We asked artists and readers like you to show us and this collection is a complication of just that. Please read and enjoy.

*xoxo*  
*Flora Ashe*



BY: JANA KACAR

**Jana Kacar** is about drawings, book pages, spaces and storms. And collecting art experiences. She is an architect among other things.







"Stranger, What's on your Mind?"

BY: TREVOR COOPERSMITH



**Trevor Coopersmith** is the founder of the Urban Art Scholarship Foundation and holds a BA from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He's based in Los Angeles and attends Otis College, pursuing an MFA.

# SIGH OF DESIRE

BY: ASIA KNIGHT

Jack stood on his balcony, looking out at the sunrise. Holding his cup of morning tea, he breathed in the sea breeze and listened to the seagulls swooping around for breakfast. "Just what I need," he thought. "Something calm and natural." He smiled at the waves breaking on the beach.

From the corner of his eye, he saw something move. Then, he heard laughter—light, airy, happy. Turning in the direction of the sound, he saw a girl. She seemed to be dancing in the sand with her dog who was running back and forth, barking and pretending to be nipping at her bare heels.

Her dark hair seemed to float on the breeze along with her peach-colored dress. The full skirt had a well-placed slit that revealed a shapely bronze leg as she twirled and made small leaps. She briefly stopped to pick up a seashell and show it to the pup at her feet.

Jack was spellbound. He had been there for a couple of weeks, and she was the first person he had seen on the beach this early.

Laughing again, she took off down the beach, her dog racing alongside.

Jack silently decided to find out who she was as he watched her disappear down the beach.

It was days before he saw her again. This time she wore a wide-brimmed hat, low-slung jeans, and a bright red crop top. Barefoot as she was before, but this time no dog. She took more time looking for seashells, using a small sifter she carried in her straw bag.

He watched her so intently that she looked up. Instead of screaming or running away, she waved.

"Good morning!" She raised her voice so her voice wouldn't get carried away in the morning breeze.

"Good morning!" he said loudly for the same reason.

"Beautiful day, isn't it?" She said, coming closer to the balcony.

Now that he could see her close up, Jack was stunned by her beauty. A face that should have been in a fashion magazine and a lush and inviting body. He felt a strong pull toward her. He hadn't a girlfriend or even a date for quite a while. He hardly heard a word she said until she asked, "Are you renting, or do you live here with your wife?"

Snapping out of his daydream, "I bought this place a while ago. First time I've gotten to be here longer than a weekend." He responded. She nodded and smiled wide.

"And your wife didn't come with you?" She side-eyed him with a sly smile on her face.

Jack smiled back and leaned on the balcony railing toward her, "Don't have a wife. Or anything close to it." She arched her eyebrow and smiled again.

"If I may be so bold, good!" she laughed and danced away from the balcony. "See you tomorrow morning," she tossed over her shoulder as she continued down the beach.

Jack was shocked to say the least. It had been so long that he wasn't sure if it was a blatant come-on, or if she was being overly friendly. He smiled to himself, then broke into a full-scale laugh.

Shaking his head, he headed back inside. His belly laughs startled the seagulls.

Upon waking the next morning, Jack suddenly realized that he didn't know her name. They had had a conversation, and he never asked her name. But to be honest, she hadn't asked him either. He had seen her come and go on the beach but had no idea where she actually lived. He thought that he should know more about her before inviting her inside his home and into his bed. What the hell was that thought? He shook himself. Then he remembered. His dream came back to him. Her soft body writhing under him, then taking her from behind, both moaning and her whimpering his name until it was a scream.

The knock on the sliding glass door roused him from his memory. Turning, he saw a bright smile. "Good morning, um... what is your name?" she cocked her head to one side, her long dark hair tousled by the early morning breeze.

"Jack." Her eyes widened a little as she had that sly smile on her face again. "Jack," she repeated softly, then, "Good Morning, Jack." She swung the medium-sized picnic basket ahead as she slid past him and went to the kitchen table as if she lived there.

"And your name is...?" Jack watched as she emptied the basket of all his favorite breakfast foods. Another sly smile slid across her gorgeous face. They both got distracted by scratching at the door. Jack turned to see a black and white border collie sitting in front of the door.

"Oh, Maxie!" she said, going to the door and letting the dog in. Jack leaned back against the kitchen counter. For some reason, it all seemed right: a beautiful woman, a cute dog, and delicious food in his kitchen. Moving from the door to where he stood, she slipped her arms around his waist.

He kissed the top of her head and she looked up at him and smiled. "Name's Rio," she breathed. Wrapping his arms around her, he pulled her close, then pressed his lips to hers. She responded with her entire body melting into his. She could feel how hard he was getting and pulled away.

Stripping off her tank top, Rio shimmied away and held out her hand. "I don't think we played enough... how about a replay of last night?" Jack laughed and grabbed her hand, pulling her toward him.

"You little minx, this was a good idea." He said, picking her up and heading toward the bedroom as if she weighed nothing. "Don't you just love role play?"

**Asia Knight** writes romance novellas. She currently lives in Arizona with her cat Bently. In her free time, she enjoys dancing, cooking, and anything creative. She now has two novellas published on Amazon Kindle Unlimited.

# Desire and the Beach

BY MARY ANNE ZAMMETT

On the beach.  
There are reflections of the Sun.  
Beautiful colours giving life.  
Everything changes and takes life.  
Burning heat, only quenched by the waves.

On the beach.  
There is me, embracing the sun.  
Dancing with it and letting it scatter all over my body ,  
Healing my scars.

But on the beach,  
There is also my heart, remembering and longing for some moments.  
Inside my heart.  
There is a burning desire to see you again.  
To be with you,  
And go back to our times together.  
Where we dream again and drown in our hearts.  
Touched by magic, by passion.  
Inside me.  
A burning desire.  
To be loved only by you.  
Under the Summer sun.  
In my heart.  
On the beach.  
And I want nothing else.

**Mary Anne Zammett** is an artist, writer, and author of four novels. Her poems and art have been featured in International Anthologies.









# Mermaid CROSSING

BY: LYNDA WEBB

The fishermen on the bridge are not casual or professional; they take from the sea for their families; to feed them when federal supplements run out. Buckets, cast nets, and multiple poles dangle from the rails. The smells of decaying shrimp, sand fleas, and rotten chicken hang in the humidity. I walk the bridge without speaking to anyone, only nodding occasionally to a few faces I've grown to expect in the late afternoon. I slow my steps when I see a man leaning far over the bridge—no bait bucket at his feet or cast lines visible—the bridge holding his belly. I question myself before I speak, but my conscience cannot take another loss, another silence.

The water below breathes, "You're okay,"

I whisper, "Hold on."

On his tiptoes, his hands shining with sweat, he said, "Looking." His blue eyes tear, "Looking for my mermaid."

I lean, look down into the darkest green of the bay, and watch the penny he drops far over into the water.

"This is for her thoughts," he breathes. He spins a slim silver ring, places it back on his finger, turns to me, and says, "This is forever."

I look deep down into the sea and wonder if I know what he means. Words on my lips remain as he walks to the end of the bridge, into the fading sun. Maybe, we should wish for mermaids and casting nets and toss a penny into the Gulf just for the satisfaction of knowing forever.

**Lynda Gerdin Webb** earn a MA from the University of Texas , El Paso. There, she studied fiction with Raymond Carver. She built a shelter for trafficked women in West Texas, and provided educational opportunities for marginalized adults as Dean of Adult Education. Her fiction has been published in *About Place Journal* and *Southshore Review*.

# One Night on the Coast Forever

BY: JEFF BARKER

**T**here is a place on the coast where you can ride horses on the beach. They are well trained. There is a sunset and twilight, then stars and wine. You are afraid to look away from his smile. Perhaps his lips will change, and he will no longer be without fault, so you lean into him like a flower to the sun.

You are well acquainted with this sun since it warmed your skin all day; the constant breeze pushing the waves hid its sharpness. No matter, all things have worked together for good.

Where is that music coming from? You find it distributed from a seaside bar, with its hanging lights and sandy floor. He pulls you, twisting you about past sweaty bodies, educating you on what it means to move and feel his rhythm. It is an easy destination and you are confident you can steer your way back when the time is right.

Then, if we look past the smoke and exuberant laughter, we can always find you.

We find you minutes later, sitting on shingles, perched atop a house. The stars belong to both of you, your amphitheater. This is your cue to hold hands, shoulder to shoulder, speaking of love, of which there is an abundance, and of time, the most finite of all resources.





The fever turns into a fire and then burns blue. He is in you, and you are in him; he is you, and you are him.

We find you after your fire for him has been quenched. Exhausted, you both curl into yourselves on separate sides of a vast mattress to do the work of dreaming, mining through a flip-book of worries, plodding through a field of inadequacies. In the morning, you trudge back to consciousness and realize each other again.

We find you years later, looking at a picture in a frame. It once told a true story; this we can agree. Things are collected: dust, years, perspective. Now, the picture speaks of a lie; this we can nearly agree.

We find you decades later. Your memory of the coast and all that came after is a cloud. It's wispy and absent of color. You close your eyes and try to sketch his face, but it is elusive. How high were his ears, how sharp his brow? You have lost him to time. But his lips; you will never forget his lips.

**Jeff Barker** has many short stories published in literary journals and anthologies including *Hobart*, *The Broadkill Review*, *Crack the Spine*, *Clover Leaf Quarterly*, *Literally Stories*, *HelloHorror Magazine*, Jolly Horror Press, and Quartermarch Press.

# Have you ever?

BY: TONYA LAILEY

You wrote, asking  
if I'd slept with a woman.  
Those days I found you  
at the farmer's market  
behind your stall, vending  
sourdough boules  
a French baker taught you  
how to shape in San Francisco.  
I loved the full offering of your levain,  
star anise and fig especially,  
for the fruit-spice rise  
above the sour and salty.

Your note ended in Je t'aime.  
We only ever kissed.  
We spoke French too,  
usually over drinks  
after a Saturday market.  
Thursdays you needed back  
to your brick oven to keep  
a heat in its dome.

You told me about your rural  
home, your horse, how you angled  
across farms in winter days  
on Nordic skis. I pictured you  
within Jean Paul Lemieux's *Paysage  
d'Hiver*, a far blur in a solemn field,  
slender lines carved by you  
into the pewter flat the painter  
meant as snow. Between tilted  
telephone poles, a slouched  
rectangle became your bakehouse.

I tracked you down, once  
found you west, in love  
with your husband,  
your life, your son. You wore  
turquoise and silver  
earrings shaped as feathers,  
reflecting a light that held  
no place in the painting.

**Tonya Lailey** is a recent graduate of the University of British Columbia's MFA program. Her poems have appeared in *FreeFall Magazine*, *Rattle*, *IceFloe Press*, *Crowstep Journal* and *Bindweed Magazine's Midsummer Madness* issue among other publications.







"Timeless Drench" Series By: Emily Karasick

# We Were the Only Two Who Wrote About Each Other

BY KATHERINE VAN EDDY

first day of winter writing class  
first time living somewhere with winter  
the snow clumped on tree branches  
felt like a new nostalgia

choose a stranger in the room  
five minutes to compose a poem  
he wore navy blue turtleneck khaki pants  
legs crossed staring across the room  
at me curly blonde with glasses  
a watch too big that kept sliding up my arm  
we shared glances between lines

unfamiliar terrain outside and in  
freshly fallen snow on the ground  
more to come, dark sky weighted  
with moisture cold enough to crystallize  
all the words we had yet to speak

after class he crossed the room  
to talk to me, first flakes  
perfect conditions to fall  
keep falling

if only I could rewrite the rest of the mess  
the way it melted so fast revealing  
dirt that had always been there

I could not have known how that cold  
would hunker down, hibernate in my body  
follow me back to the west coast  
where years later I'd awaken one spring  
a married mother to find the cold still there  
still burned all the parts of me I'd left exposed.

**Katherine (Kat) Van Eddy** is a middle school English teacher and poet living in Sumner, Washington. Her poems have appeared in *Creative Colloquy*, *Cirque*, *Gold Man Review* and *Clover*.



"Timeless Drench" Series By: Emily Karasick

**Emily Karasick** is a visual artist from New Jersey currently completing their undergraduate degree in California. They shoot primarily on film because of the beautiful hands-on process.





"Timeless Drench" Series By: Emily Karasick





"Timeless Drench" Series By: Emily Karasick

# BARGAIN

BY: MIA AMORE DEL BANDO

Phone tag with an old ex  
Loneliness led me to a new disaster  
Cleaning supplies hidden in the cupboard  
Situation too contaminated to fix up with bleach  
Pixelated images  
Fresh shower photos, slipping the edge of my areola  
Full library of  
My backside, wet, beads of water drip down slowly  
Like honey  
Quick video exchanged  
His hands on himself, pretending it's my body  
Imaginations merge  
Miles away, connected by screens  
He's on top of me, conquering  
Lips on my neck, then torso  
Biting my sides  
Drifting south as his hands trace my bruises  
Inhaling and taking him in  
Invited guest  
Reeling me into Heaven  
Alarm rings  
Waking me from the dream  
My hands are soft and wrinkled  
Slowly sliding them out of me  
Popped a white pill into my mouth  
Hesitate to continue  
The mess is everywhere  
Too late to clean  
Bargained healing for attention  
Lifted the veil to see again  
After pleasure peaks  
He'll be gone in the morning  
Until late night  
Like an addiction high  
This one exception  
Loneliness stops bleeding  
Just one more time, please

**Mia Amore Del Bando** was born and raised in Long Beach, California. She is a faithful friend, difficult daughter, and selfish lover.



# 1968

## DC DIAMONDPOLOUS

**K**neeling on his bookcase, Johnny wiggled the screen out of its frame and let it slide onto the bush outside his bedroom window. Just as he raised his leg over the ledge, he remembered his retainer and yanked it out of his mouth, tossed it onto the dresser, and climbed out. Sneaking around the side of the house, he unlatched the gate, inched through, then locked it. He glanced west toward the Brewers' house and east to the Fillmores'. By ten-thirty p.m., the neighborhood had tucked itself into bed. His old man's station wagon parked in the driveway was a real daddy's car but it had wheels, and that's what Johnny needed to take him to his first gay bar.

Johnny pulled his dad's key from his crushed velvet pants pocket, unlocked the car, and slipped behind the wheel, leaving the door ajar. He put the gear in neutral and let the Buick roll back into the street, pushed the car past the Wilsons' house, shut the door, started the engine, and took off for the Harbor Freeway and Santa Monica Boulevard.

When he had read in the local paper that his science teacher was arrested in a raid at The Rusty Nail and lost his job because he was a homosexual, Johnny felt bad for Mr. Gilroy, but was excited that he wasn't the only queer in the universe. The Rusty Nail reopened as a bar for men and women, *gay* men and women, Johnny learned through the back pages of the underground press.

Johnny pounded his fist against the wheel, feeling the victory of freedom. He had the fake ID his sister's boyfriend made for him, thinking Johnny wanted to meet some fox at the Blue Turtle, but with a constellation of zits on his chin, his voice still swinging between the Little and Big Dipper, Johnny's chances of making it through the doors of The Rusty Nail were still slim.

Three days before he got his driver's license, Johnny rehearsed punching and fluffing his pillows like he'd seen prison escapees do in the movies, then he pulled the cover over them to look like a body underneath. He practiced climbing out the window so he wouldn't mess up his clothes by falling into the bush that grew outside his bedroom. He committed the perfect getaway until he realized he'd left the Free Press with a big red circle around The Rusty Nail lying on his desk. No sweat. He'd be back before his parents woke up.

Johnny rolled down the window just enough so that it didn't disturb his long hair that he brushed and groomed until his arm felt tired. When he had missed several hair cuts, his father told him he didn't want his son looking like a queer. Johnny told his dad not to worry, he hated fags, but long hair was in. His dark mop covered his ears, and he grew really cool sideburns.

If his old man saw him now in his bitchin' yellow striped and red polka-dot shirt and Nehru jacket, driving his car, he would flip.

Johnny drove up the onramp. Too bad he wasn't in a boss-looking Mustang instead of an old fogey's car. He'd park a block away from the bar so no one would see it, but what if he met someone? It was his uncle's car, he'd tell them, his Mustang was in the shop. Lies. That's what his life was about, dating girls, football, acting tough, all to please his dad and everyone else. He even put up a poster of Raquel Welch when he wanted to tack up Steve McQueen.

Johnny's secret gave him headaches. It was a monster that gobbled him up until he felt like he'd become the thing that consumed him. Something dirty. Something that made guys pick fights with him. He hoped to replace loneliness with friendships and meet a cute guy at the bar.

He relaxed into the flow of the cars, turned on the radio, and switched the dial to KRLA and Dave Hull, the Hullabalooer.

"*Mony Mony*," blasted through the speakers. Johnny thought he would explode with pleasure. The sexy beat sparked his fantasies into a rocket-fueled ascension where dancing led to kissing and kissing led to hot sex that never ended.

His loud singing drowned out Tommy James'. He took his hands off the steering wheel and clapped along with the Shondells laughing and hollering, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!"

Johnny zoomed past downtown and veered into the lane for the Hollywood Freeway. He slouched down in the seat, his left hand hanging over the wheel, real cool like he'd done it millions of times. He glanced left, then right, just to see if anyone was lucky enough to see how groovy he looked.

He reached into the glove compartment and took out his dad's cigarettes. Shaking one free, he stuck it between his lips then lit the cigarette. He took a drag and coughed. His eyes watered. He puffed without inhaling.

Someone pulled in front of him.

"Asshole!"

Johnny stepped on the gas and swerved into the fast lane.

"Wanna drag? I can make this mother move."

He stubbed out the cigarette and caught up with the guy who almost creamed him. The jerk wasn't even paying attention to him, probably didn't even know he almost caused an accident. Johnny blared the horn. The guy gave him the finger. Johnny laughed. He had to be at least eighty, older than his grandparents.

He passed the Melrose exit. The Western offramp would be next, and he'd take it to Santa Monica Boulevard.

He flattened the gas pedal all the way to the floor. Street lamps flickered by, the air lifted his hair, he smelled the damp night and asphalt. Johnny glanced in the rearview mirror. Red lights flashed. A siren screamed.





# less tar

BY CARL PALMER

us in the bus  
carpool lane  
riding past her  
with cell phone  
and cigarette  
red BMW convertible  
lane-locked in traffic  
our eyes meet  
reveal to each our dream  
she the desire to move swiftly  
me wanting to taste the nicotine  
from her lips

**Carl "Papa" Palmer** of Old Mill Road in Ridgeway, Virginia, lives in University Place, Washington, president of Puget Sound Poetry Connection in Tacoma.



"Mamma Said Knock You Out" By: Robert Matejcek

**Robert Matejcek** is originally from North Dakota, and obtained his BA in Art, Magna Cum Laude, from Fontbonne University in St. Louis, Missouri. Robert's work combines traditional and new media and has been exhibited nationally and internationally.



"Smoke and Mirrors" By: Robert Matejcek



# Kindling Desire

BY: DON NOEL

**T**he maintenance crew took down that dead sycamore today and bucked it up into fireplace-length logs. They would probably be back tomorrow to split and stack it. There was plenty of time tonight, though, Caleb thought as he sat on the hard wooden bench. Slanting sunlight washed his chest with late-day warmth; it wasn't even suppertime yet, and the July sky wouldn't darken for hours. A tree of this size shouldn't need more than a few hours for a man who knew how to do it.

Caleb tried to visualize the basement storeroom allotted to them when they came to Harmony Acres. There was a lot of stuff down there that Mabel had yammered at him not to bother bringing. You live in the same three-story house for four decades, raise a bunch of kids and marry them off from it, and the accumulation is awesome. You sell some, offer some to Goodwill or others that will get stuff into hands that need it, and just throw some away.

But you kept some things that might prove useful, even though the retirement community salespeople assured you that all your needs would be met. Did he keep the ax?

Early in their marriage, he'd bought a splitting maul, like a sledgehammer but with one face tapered into a fat wedge. He'd given that one up—a tool of brute force, demanding no art—and surely hadn't brought it. But his splitting ax might be down in the basement, an oversized head whose broad edge he'd kept sharp, the instrument of a craftsman. It would feel good to have that in his hands again.

Some men are big and heavy enough to bring an ax down hard without much effort. He'd been a skinny wretch when Mabel married him, and despite her culinary talent, he'd gained only a few pounds until retirement and not much since. Lacking heft, he'd learned to bring the ax up behind his head and shoulder and then back over, his whole body applied to the task. The skill lay in bringing the sharp edge down on the vulnerable seam of a log, despite the long arc. It felt good, just thinking he might do that again this evening.

Mabel would complain, of course, calling him a silly old man more likely to split his foot than one of those logs. She'd been skeptical when he began splitting wood while in his twenties. But as he learned his craft and got better at it, she'd turned into an admiring, loving wife who knew when her husband needed the reward of solace – and learned how to deliver it.

Once he found the ax, he would invite her to watch him turn the giant, round sycamore logs into halves and quarters and some into kindling. When he'd finished, she would escort him up for a hot shower and then massage a healing ointment into his aching limbs as she did long ago.

After a time, the massaging would turn mutual, and at last, as desire became irresistible to both, she would guide him deeper into oblivion. At last, they would drift off to sleep, curled up like kittens, the pang of rarely-used muscles fading into unbroken slumber. Perhaps rousing at first light, still hip-to-groin, Mabel wakening to turn toward him and make love again.

Caleb closed his eyes, savoring memory, almost dozing in contentment.

•••

The sun must be setting; the warmth was off his chest. Reality struck him like an epiphany: Mabel had been gone three years now, and he knew that ax was long gone, too.

Never mind. Let some workman split those logs tomorrow; they'd served their purpose this evening.

**Don Noel** is retired from four decades of prizewinning print and broadcast journalism in Hartford CT. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from Fairfield University in 2013 and has since published more than five dozen short stories.





By: Jana Kacar

# For the Love of Medusa

BY: CLAUDINE GRIGGS

I expected a rugged hike from the harbor docks to Medusa's realm as my path included a mountain passage, thick forests, and at least one water crossing. Thus, I packed a four-day ration supply with rain gear, a small tent, maps, and a compass.

At mid-morning on the third day, I came to a cleverly disguised ascending pathway that led one hundred yards or so to a sheer cliff. The climb appeared treacherous, so I left my overstuffed backpack suspended from a tree near the base of the pathway to protect it from ravaging animals.

The air was about sixty degrees, but the path seemed unnaturally cold, and my breath condensed as frost on the side-mountain granite. Curiously, the rising sun did not seem to warm the bluff itself, convincing me that this peculiarity marked the boundary into a new world—her world—which need not obey the physics of Earthly climates. I climbed, pausing twice to rest, toward the Land of Gorgons.

At the top of the steep pathway, I found ancient stone ruins that extended to the horizon, and the air noticeably warmed as I moved inland. Scattered across the distant landscape were human-shaped stalagmites—monuments to those who had threatened Medusa—worn so badly from weathered centuries that they more closely resembled pillars than men. I knew, logically, that the Lady was her own defense, but anger swelled in my breast as I wished that humanity would leave her in peace.

After traveling miles inland, I took refuge in a covered enclave that looked like the remnants of an ancient monument—or maybe it was simply a resting place for travelers in centuries past. Here, I planned to wait until the pitch black of the moonless night; then, I would approach the Lady. I didn't want to see her just yet.

\*\*\*

At midnight, I tapped blindly with my hiking stick into the heart of darkness, often striking the leftovers of would-be murderers. Again, I felt rage. Why do men hate what they don't understand?

Every ten to twenty paces, I would call out gently, "Medusa, dear lady, I come to speak with you, and I mean no harm."

I walked, stumbling more than once, and intermittently repeated my words. After another thirty minutes, a hissing voice called out, "If you mean no harm, reverse your path. All who see me must die, and it brings me no pleasure."

I felt the ground with my hands, located a smooth, slightly elevated stone, and sat down. "Please, my lady," I said, "don't send me away. I have cherished your image since I was fifteen, and after years of longing, I finally found the courage to travel here. Now, I would rather die than abandon you."

She laughed with a hint of charm and sorrow. "Athena recast me into a creature that none can love and, worse, a creature who can't accept love. The consequential solitude is more devastating than my demonized body."

"But that is why I came in darkness," I said. "To avoid this stone-cold alchemy. To talk without seeing. To listen without judging. Frankly, however, I expect to judge you as beautiful, for even a malevolent goddess cannot hide an exquisite soul with exterior vagary."

"Then why do so many men seek to kill me in this guise against so few when I was handsome? I should be vengeful."

"But you're not?"

"I am too weary. Once, trying to end myself, I gazed into a reflective pool, but Athena dictates I can't even commit suicide."

"That's good!" I said. "Otherwise, I would never have met you."

"We are speaking through darkness," she said, "so we haven't met precisely, and we never can."

"Tell me," I asked, "might true love offer protection from the curse?"

"Any living creature who looks upon me will perish... whether I want it or not."

"I will bear that risk to stroke your hair, to touch your cheek, to caress your body. My affections run deep."

Medusa laughed. "If you play with cobras, any mistake will be your last." She paused briefly and said, "You are a grand fool, my friend, though I believe you mean no harm! Unfortunately, I can't help but harm you. And while I would welcome an embrace, it's not possible." She sighed. "I don't even remember what touch feels like."

I heard the woman's kindness; a saint prepared to endure solitude rather than injure me. "I did not travel this far to leave you suffering at the hands of a jealous goddess. I have devoted my life to finding true love, and I swear that you are that love."

Medusa let out a pained breath.

"My Lady," I said, "please allow me to secure a blindfold and approach! Let me whisper secrets in your ear. Then, if we both agree, I'll show you our path to union," I choked a little but added, "If you will have me."

There were long seconds of silence.

The eastern sky revealed the faintest glimmer of light, so feeble it would have been undetectable except that I had been sitting for hours under the moonless heavens. I must soon don a blindfold, retreat, or look upon Medusa.

She, too, noticed the approaching dawn and said hastily, "Quick! Shield your eyes. I fear for your life!"

My resolve turned igneous. "If I survive our encounter, dear lady, I shall become your fiercest protector."

She giggled. Yes, the Gorgon giggled like a school girl and said, "Sir, I am a creature who needs no protection."

"You do!" I said. "Protection from hatred, abandonment, and loneliness. Mostly from an absence of love. Now, Sweet Lady of Sarpedon, I have bound my eyes. May I approach?"

\*\*\*

That happened two years ago.

At our first kiss, she trembled under my embrace. Her serpentine locks hissed and gently coiled as I stroked each strand of living hair. Her body was warm and inviting, and we made glorious love. After this, as we lay together in the early sun, I revealed my plan for a lasting partnership, declaring that she would never again feel neglected. Medusa cried softly at my words, and I felt the infused pride of a man who could bring tears of joy to such a woman.

I held to the plan. My sight was a threat to Medusa because it threatened our marriage. So on the day we met, the day we bonded emotionally and physically, I burned my eyes into gentle darkness on the Island of Sarpedon. In this place, with this wondrous lady, love must be blind.

**Claudine Griggs** earned an MA in English at Cal Poly, Pomona, and has published three books about trans issues. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in many journals. Her work, "Helping Hand," was the basis for an episode in Netflix's *Love, Death & Robots*. Read her novel *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* was released on June 1, 2020.





BY: NANDA KLEIN

**Nanda Klein** is an entrepreneur, model, and creative nonfiction writer based in Miami.

# MONSTERS

BY: SOROUGH TORFEHNEJAD

Many monsters crawl our accursed, appalling, detestable world  
Beasts who crave pleasure but uncover pain, suffering, futility

Mutants who yearn for connection without ever experiencing absence  
Devils who long for love with no understanding of the human heart

Demons who despair, no conviction in hope  
Savages who eat without feeling hungry

As I secretly shadow vile creatures  
I see myself: beast, devil, savage

Because I too  
desired

**Soroush Torfehnejad** is a writer situated in Vancouver BC who coaches diving works with children in a community centre using his second and third official languages.



"Soaring" By Lynn Friedman



Space Kid  
By: Shannon Gardner

**Shannon Gardner** appreciates the spontaneous process of nature and strives to explore Earth's unfound beauty and imitate its natural imperfections. She creates art depicting paranormal elements and iconography.



"Desire me in the garden"

By: H.H. Paulsen

**H.H. Paulsen** is a freelance journalist, author and art photographer whose a member of Museum for Photography Braunschweig, and volunteers for "The Festival of Philosophy" in Hanover.



By: H.H. Paulsen



By: H.H. Paulsen

# It's An Insectivorous Affection

BY: JADEN FONG

I am outside of your door,  
bouquet of flowers in hand,

plucking porcelain petals.  
She loves me, she loves me

not. My fingers are bleeding  
nectar, cherry juice racing

down the ceramic stamen,  
along the terracotta stem.

I am a gnat flying too close  
to a puddle of sweet red wine;

I am a moth slowly dangling  
from cobweb galls.

I am content with being  
fossilized in that drink,

with being laid to rest  
in that scarlet tar. I am joyous

at the thought of hanging  
onto you, onto every word

that carefully escapes from  
your hungry mouth.

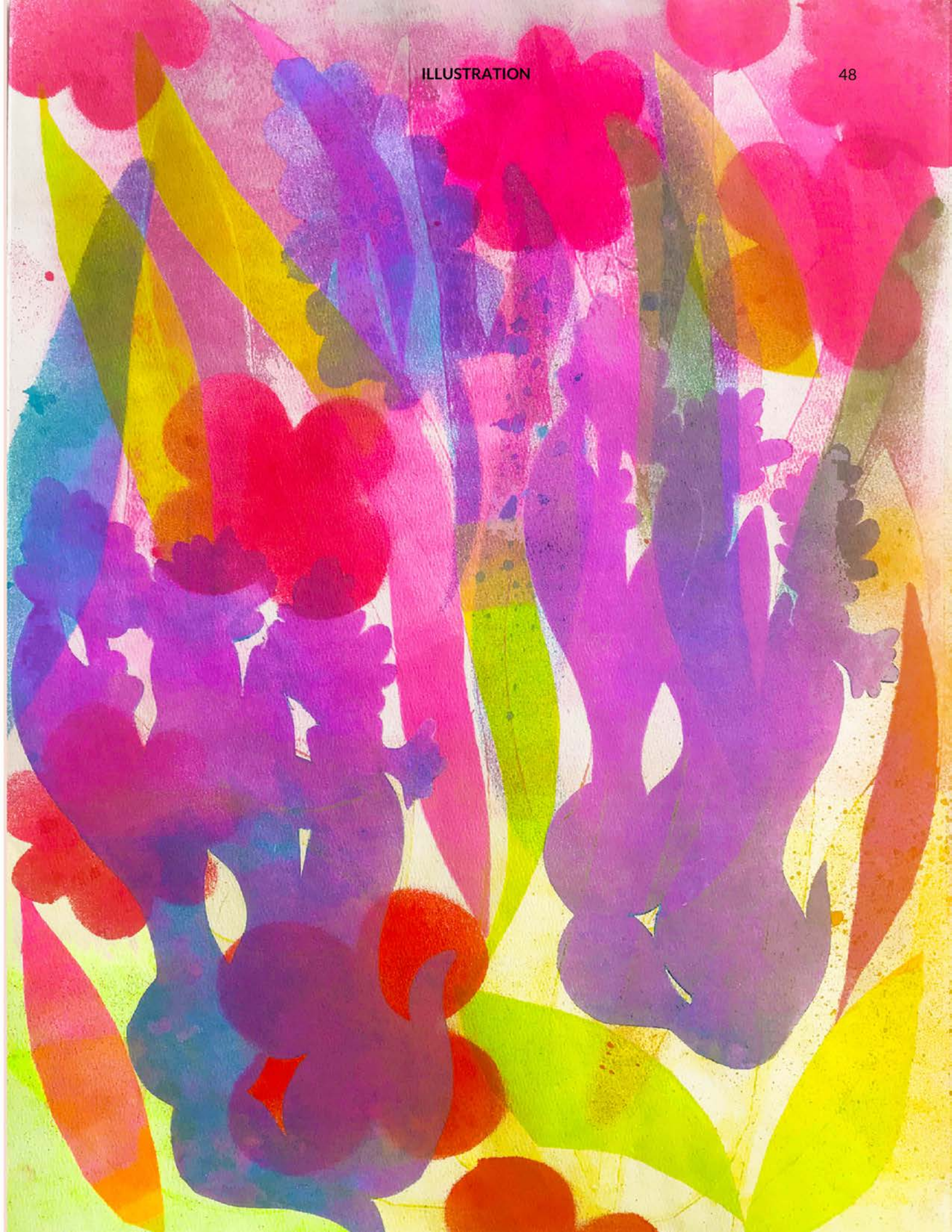
**Jaden Fong** is a writer with a sweet tooth and a soft spot for the whimsical and the peculiar. A two time nominee for the *Aliki Perroti* and *Seth Frank Most Promising Young Poet Award*, his writing is most often inspired by the natural world, and in his free time, he likes to spend time in nature, where he frequently and confidently misidentifies every flower he comes across.





Flowers as My Muse  
By: Lois Bender







# Matters of the Dark

BY: MAGGIE SWOFFORD

The Milky Way is small,  
you see? When I see  
her, I swallow  
ink. My lungs  
harden and burn  
like meteorites.  
I'm unprepared  
for her—her radiation  
hits my core  
like the sun's  
piercing gaze  
through the vacuum.

I hope she sees: neither  
of us can survive out there.  
But I can't hold my breath  
much longer. I want her  
to give it to me: ice flecks,

oxygen, methane—all  
elements making life  
and swirling around  
Saturn like a crown.  
They spin around  
her like I imagine  
her arms do when she  
dances in the rain.

"Pouring rain,"  
she said,  
"is the best kind."

She wouldn't waste  
her energy in inch-  
deep puddles or misty  
drops, no, she wants  
to be soaked. And I am  
too—in the idea  
of her, anyways.

After the matter darkens, or  
before, I hope she knows  
that I'll willingly crush myself  
into her—like Cassini dying  
for the preservation of love.

Maybe she'll see me  
as gravity pulls me  
closer to her—pulls  
me apart. As I fall,  
I'm sparkling, everything  
I'm made of crashing  
together like it's supposed to.

She and I are supposed to  
crash. That's why Newton  
dreamt of gravity, and why  
I dream of her, wishing to  
float just above her lips.

I can already feel her  
microbe grit and stardust  
on my tongue.

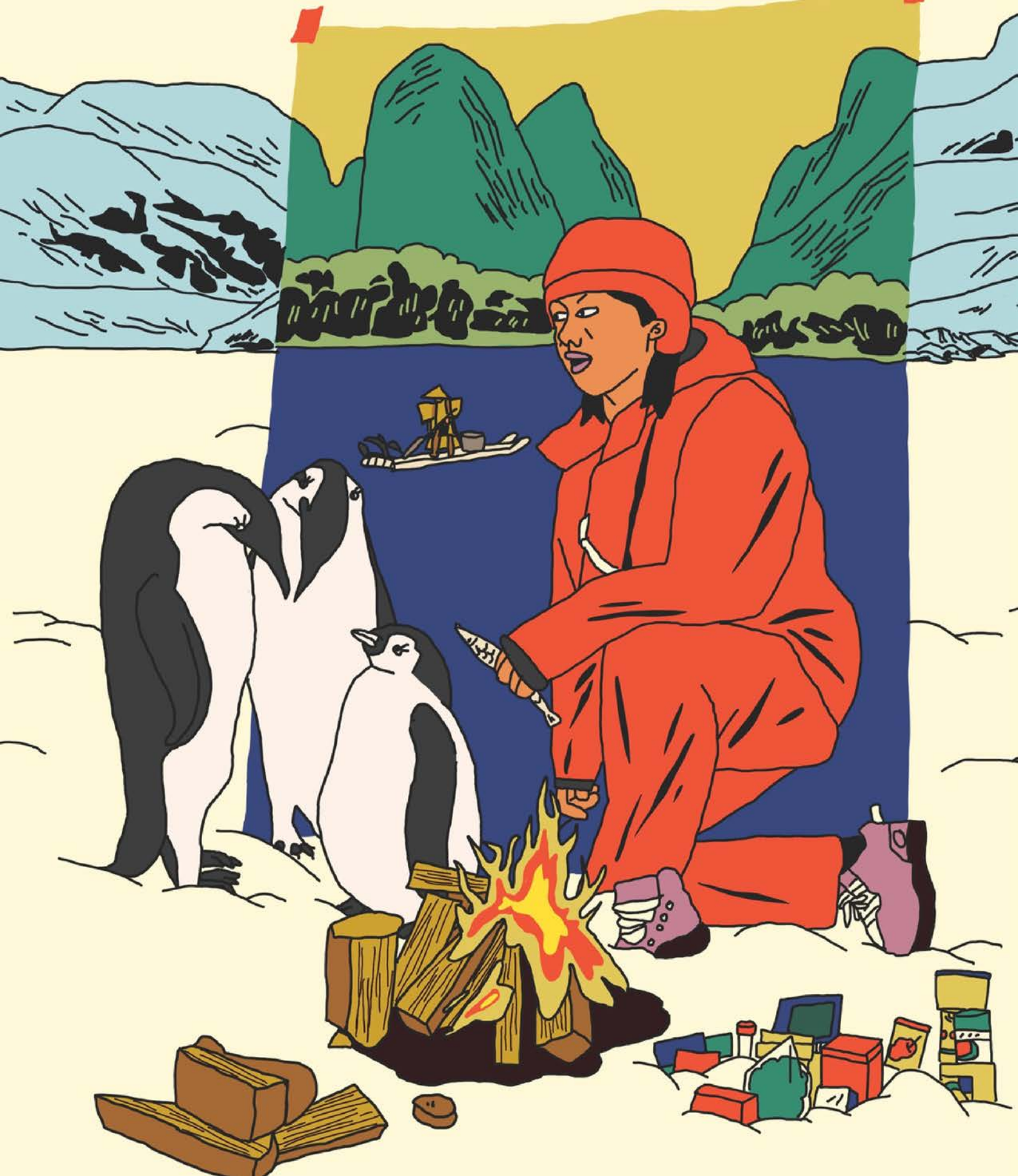
Think about it: no one will  
ever see Saturn with bare  
eyes, and no one will ever  
see her the way I do

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

ILLUSTRATION

All About Food by: Morain An

Morain An is an illustrator, image-maker, and self-publisher from China currently based in New York, NY.





All About Food  
By: Morain An



# Catching Up

BY: EDWARD AHERN

**S**he was halfway into her seat before he looked up from his phone. "Hello, Frank. They've changed the name of the restaurant. Antoine's now." She talked too quickly. "Hello Rebecca, you look great."

She picked up her menu, reddening slightly. "Sorry, I'm late. Have you been waiting long?"

"No, just got here. Something to drink? It's okay, it won't bother me."

"No, just Pellegrino, thanks."

Frank got to the hotel restaurant fifteen minutes early. Three years ago, he would have used the time to check into a room for them, on this occasion he simply waited for her.

Once seated, he looked around and nodded slightly. Carpeting and heavy drapes kept the conversations from other diners muted. Cloth table cover and napkins, red and white wine glasses, but only four pieces of flatware. This restaurant incarnation was rated as good but not superlative. He hadn't eaten there since she'd told him it was over.

Their server, a middle-aged woman wearing only hints of makeup, looked down at them impassively. "Can I get you something to drink?"

"Pellegrino."

"Iced tea."

Frank looked at Rebecca from over the top of his menu. Gray pants suit, cut loose, no jewelry, just a watch and wedding ring. Rebecca's dark brown hair was pulled back in a bun. Frank noticed a strand of gray that almost matched her suit.

"You haven't aged a day."

She half-smiled, then her lips firmed. "Flattery will no longer get you anywhere."

He half-smiled back. "I... I'm really glad you texted about meeting for lunch. It's hard staring at you across PTA meetings."

Frank's eyes went down to his menu. From behind it, in a low voice, he asked, "Was what we had so bad?"

"Real, Frank, but not right. So yes, bad."

"Looking at you, I envy Jonas. Is he still the ace salesman?"

She gave him a guarded stare. "He's okay."

He put the menu down. "Tell me what you've been up to. I can at least share in that."

"I was promoted again a year ago, to a job with a lot more pressure and conflict. I can handle it, but it's a strain."

"Comfort level or ability?"

Rebecca laughed loudly enough that those at the next table turned their heads. "I do miss your upfront candor. Both, probably."

Frank hesitated, then spread his hands apart. "What can I say or do to try and—"

"No. Stop there. We'll just hurt each other again."

The Cobb salad and soft-shelled crab arrived. They talked politics, which they agreed on, and raising children, which they sometimes did not. They laughed often. They always laughed when together.

## SHORT STORY

Dishes were cleared and coffee was ordered and provided. They discussed serious things over coffee.

Frank started in. "I'd accept any chance to be with you, but you didn't tell me why we're having lunch."

"It's Jonas. I need your help."

"Is he sick? Did he lose his job?"

"I only wish. He's got your disease, Frank. Got it bad."

"Oh." Frank unfocused slightly, seeming to think through possibilities. "You've already tried the obvious stuff like AA meetings and rehabs?"

Rebecca's eyes reddened. "He's relapsed a half dozen times already, each time worse than the last. He's cross-addicted now, liquor and coke. Jonas is probably going to get fired the next time he crashes. When he's active he says vicious things to me and the kids. If he's at home at all. I need you to talk with him. You've been through this."

Frank's expression saddened. "I also know what you're going through, and how hard it must be for you to ask me. I have no cure, Rebecca, just example."

"We've spent three years' worth of ivy league tuitions on rehabs and analysts. He's one DUI away from maybe some jail time. AA, ministers, meditation, intervention, I wouldn't be here if I knew of anything else to do."

His right hand moved forward on the table toward her, but stopped short of touching hers. "Rebecca, you've already tried intervention and I'm guessing he's already had sponsors. I don't think I can provide any better help."

"You know him, Frank, better than any of those shrinks. He doesn't know about us but does know you got sober. Talk to him please, maybe go on a trip together. Something, anything." She was crying now, silently.

Frank's tone went neutral. "Is he dry or wet now?"

"If you mean 'is he drinking', no, he just got back from another resort rehab."

"If I do talk with him, he's apt to just ignore me and resent you for bringing me into it." He paused. "I shouldn't tell you this. A nasty part of me says don't do it, if he stays active on booze and cocaine it might circle you back to me. An even nastier part says, do it badly and make sure he tanks."

The corners of her mouth curled up into damp cheeks. "I know. What I'm asking is unfair. Maybe for all of us. But I want him whole, back to who he is. You did it. Show him how."

"You're right, that's not fair."

The stoic waitress had noticed Rebecca crying and was staring at them. While he had her attention, Frank signaled for the check. He breathed heavily.

"Hell. All right, I'll call him and say I'd heard from a guy in his office about his troubles. That I'd like to get together for breakfast somewhere. That I've been where he is. We share a serious attachment, so maybe something sticks. If he does listen to me, we'll see where it goes. No promises."

Rebecca reached out and touched his still extended hand. "Thank you."

His smile was wrinkled. "I got sober partly because of you. It's just unwelcome payback."

**Ed Ahern** has published six books and nearly four hundred stories and poems. Ed works on the other side of writing as an editor/board member at *Bewildering Stories* and as lead editor at *The Scribes Micro Fiction* magazine.





# Acadia National Park

BY: EILEEN SATERIALE

The murmurs of the wind  
rustling in the pine trees of Acadia.  
The sunbeams dance like lovers  
on the bay of Cadillac Mountain.  
It is a dream to climb on the  
ragged down-east rocks  
on a peaceful summer day  
and sing to the heavens.  
At the top, I sing over the bay.  
I take on many personas.  
I am the sister, daughter, mother.  
I sing in voices that have different tones.  
We want the park to be preserved  
for future sisters, daughters and mothers.  
The sister in me sings in friendly tones.  
The daughter pleadingly longs for guidance.  
The nurturing mother wants what's best.  
Altogether, we sing for the future.

**Eileen Sateriale** is a freelance writer living in Massachusetts. She retired from her position as a Government Analyst and has had poetry, short stories and non-fiction articles published in on-line and print media.





# Let's Fall in Love

BY GENEVIEVE RAY

I have felt,  
the inches,  
between our hands.

The electric charge,  
as we move in unison.  
Fingers caressing the air.

Prickling heat waves.  
Temperature rising,  
as a word, died on our lips.

Galaxies emerge,  
in the depth of a pupil.  
Charting each other's star maps.

Our auras are melding.  
The colours intensify,  
as we give birth to something else.

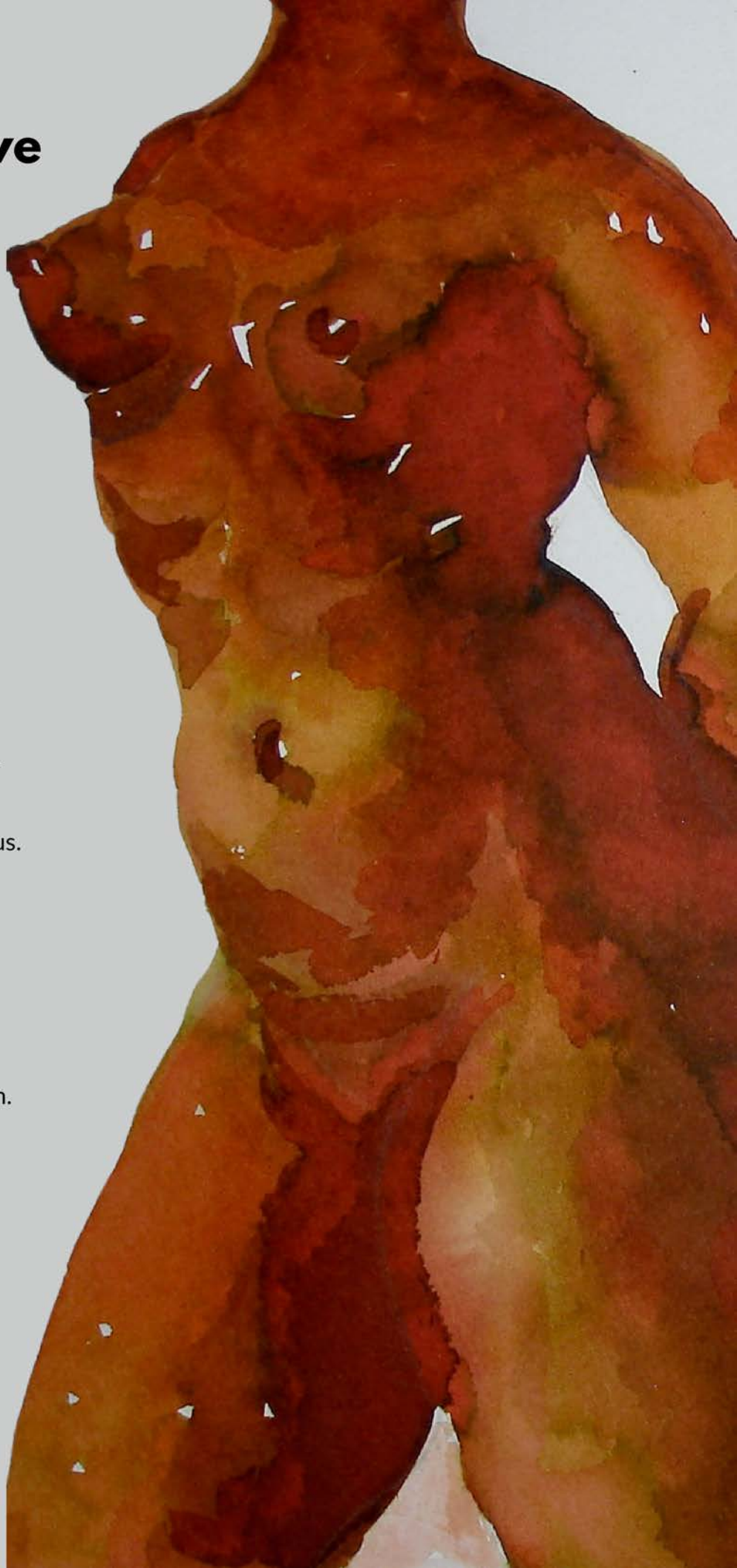
Sunlight turning amber,  
synchronised to the morning chorus.  
Raindrops tap out your name.

Harmonising gently,  
at the end of a breath.  
Joined in a forgotten lyric.

The delicate table tennis,  
made of half-caught glances.  
Reflecting our growing anticipation.

Let's fall in love,  
we have been descending,  
for just under a decade.

To gain stability,  
as we fall ever forward.  
Accepting our emotional reality.





"Desire" By: Lynne Friedman



"Ivana" by John Hampshire

**John Hampshire** is an artist who lives and works in a former church in Troy, NY as a Professor of Art at SUNY Adirondack.

# THE SONG OF ANITA

BY: CHRISTINA BAGNI

Sing, O Muse

of the one who makes vocal fry sound like violins  
who grew old, but never grew up  
a Lost Boy, a girl with a sword  
a never-ending smile, a peach blush, strong arms—

Sing, O Muse

of the girl at the end of a tether  
still stuck in small talk, wishing for depth.

Sing of a moment, a single moment

when she surpassed several levels  
of niceties and thank-you cards  
to kiss me, half-drunk and starving  
at three in the morning.

Sing of missed windows and jumped invitations

of forgettings and misinterpretations  
of unread group chats, of parties left early

Sing of festivals, but no shoulders to cry on,

of group hangouts but no time alone

and sing of the risks in a question

when I ask her if she remembers that kiss, too.

**Christina Bagni** has been published in Asterism, Lit202, and DivotLit. She's the Chief Editor at WanderingWordsMedia, a writer on the Captain Bitcoin comic books, and her first novel is forthcoming with Deep Hearts YA (2023).



"Under the Sun" by Tamriko Mwlikishvili

**Tamriko Melikishvili**, a painter born in 1967, in a house full of paper, paints, plaster, and plasticine clay, with these materials, before my eyes, images were created, which transformed day by day and were brought to life.

# Devoted

BY: CRAIG PROFFITT

*"I vowed until death do us part."*

The words tumbled at him from the dark: "Then keep your promise."

**Craig Proffitt** has graduated from Pratt Institute (BFA) and Loyola University College of Law (JD). He published his first novel, *The Opulent Life Option*, in 2021.





# Me and the Mouse

ZARY FEKETE

**T**here is a mouse in my kitchen. For a few days, I had hoped it might not be true... then I heard scratchings. I thought it might be the upstairs neighbor's cat, but the little black droppings in the kitchen cabinets are unmistakable. I'll need to get some traps.

A few months ago, this would have been something that my husband would have taken care of. In fact, I had plenty of leeway to prepare for the inevitable time when I would be doing everything myself. The staff at hospice care had plenty of suggestions for getting finances in order and securing all of the necessary caretaker business. The way they all made it sound was like, you never know... your first weeks home alone there might be an earthquake or some other catastrophe to upend your normal routine. Instead, it was a mouse.

As I swept up the black droppings I couldn't help feeling guilty. I have not spent much time at all keeping the apartment clean. I haven't had the energy for it. I barely have the energy to get dressed some mornings.

...

The traps are in place now. I bought them at the corner store. The owner is also a widow. Her husband died 20 years ago, but I didn't know that until last month when she greeted me and gave me her sympathies. I hadn't told her. She must have heard about it from one of my neighbors. I never would have guessed. She seems so normal. She put one hand on my arm when I was fishing out my change that day. She kept her hand there until I stopped fumbling around and looked at her. She said it gets easier. Today when I bought the trap, I told her about the mouse. She said that she's had mice too and that peanut butter works better than cheese.

When I got home I put one trap in the upper cabinet. I also put some down below the sink area. I stuffed some tin foil around the hole where the stove vent enters the wall. The internet said to do that. This apartment building is so old that I shouldn't be surprised about the possibility of mice. There's a new apartment building going up one block over.

I read somewhere that large excavation activity can make ground mice nervous, so sometimes they look for new places to nest. During the past few weeks, I have considered finding another place myself. But after 25 years spent somewhere, it can be hard to move on.

•••

The super said that he talked with the rest of the residents; apparently, no one else has found any mice. I thought that this might not be true, the rest of the folks who live here are pretty private and I don't think they would admit to having mice. It makes one feel dirty and careless. The super seemed to laugh off my concern. I don't think he's used to talking to me alone. He told me that if I had any trouble with the traps to let him know.

•••

I had just finished cleaning up after dinner. I was going to switch off the kitchen light when suddenly I saw a flash of movement on top of the cabinet. She was so tiny. The moment I caught sight of her she froze. I froze too.

Her eyes were fixed on me. Mine on her.

I could hear the clock ticking in the bedroom. We looked steadily into each other's eyes.

She was light brown. Her eyes were black. Her whiskers twitched lightly, as though she was evaluating me through the air. I became acutely aware of my breathing. I tried to slow it down, so as not to frighten her away. At that moment, it seemed we were alone in all the world.

Then, she turned her head slightly, crept back, and was gone.

•••

I usually read a book before bed, but I didn't tonight. Instead, I stared up at the ceiling. Tomorrow I will go back to the corner store and ask the owner if she has any non-lethal traps. Perhaps I can catch the mouse safely.

If I manage that, I would like to bring her outside; perhaps down the street to an empty lot. I imagine what it would be like to let her go. I think she will scurry off in a hurry, but then stop and look back at me. We will stare at each other again for a moment. And then she will be gone in the grass.

Perhaps, then, I will move on too.







SPECIALS



# Desire: Patient Love

BY GENEVIEVE RAY

The questions,  
from desert island dating sites,  
to barren wasteland cafe meet-ups.  
Reducing a heart to two-line philosophy.

I always lie.  
The truth is too complicated.  
The depths of emotional wanting.  
The hidden need behind a grey keyboard.

I desire,  
a love of expansive patience.  
The careful reassurance,  
delivered between neck kisses.

I desire,  
patient, curious lovers.  
Lying beside me with starry eyes,  
as my hands unfold bedtime stories.

The questions,  
by dater investigators.  
Always exacting a growing amount of pressure.  
They become the force in the crime of romance.

I always lie,  
seemingly too ready to appeal.  
Performance was a necessary study,  
in non-neurotypical understanding.

I desire,  
the secure feeling to demolish my walls.  
Romance that accepts no acceleration,  
the following kinetic passion is insatiable.

I desire,  
The one who kisses,  
unnecessary apologies from my lips.  
Replacing the words with love songs.

I desire,  
A patient constant love.  
Studying each other's souls.  
Becoming a professor of your heart.

**Genevieve Ray** is a poet/spoken word artist from Cambridgeshire. She has been published in four online magazines and four publications. She co-hosts *The Verse Murals Show*.







# SeaFood

BY: GRACE DANQUAH

I don't know which one is better;  
constantly checking my phone,  
with a cracking smile on my face,  
in search of your cheeky messages—  
Or fighting failingly to report a funny event  
I have chanced upon in the middle of nowhere.

Maybe I am getting better--  
If wellness can be counted as controlling twitching fingers  
and plugging in earpieces -  
So, I can regulate auditory frequencies  
peaked at picking your signals.

**Grace Danquah** is a writer living and working in Accra Ghana. She enjoys writing about people and their emotions. Some of her works have appeared in online journals like *The Mamba*, *ActiveMuse* and *Crater Library & Publishers* among others.



Drawing Botanicals II by: Lois Bender

**Lois Bender**, a NY artist with a focus on nature and garden themes, brings her background in graphic design to her personal aesthetics, creating a fresh expressive synthesis in watercolor, photography, and printmaking mediums. She runs a design brand, GardenSpiritsNY., influencing her role as a product designer at the New York Botanical Garden. She was born as the daughters of garden aesthetics by her mother, Flora Bloom.



*Handwritten text in cursive script, possibly a signature or artist's name, located in the bottom right corner of the page.*

The background of the page is white, decorated with several purple flowers and green leaves scattered around. The flowers have five petals and a yellow center. The leaves are small and pointed. There are also some green, spiky, air-like structures scattered throughout.

POETRY

## **Tender is Your Name**

*for Helena Qi Hong*

BY: YUAN CHANGMING

I call, I chew, and I cherish your name  
Each time my heart pumps blood with it  
Throughout my body. This is the melody  
Of the symphony of my daily activities  
As my love runs bubbling along my inner  
Stream  
But with my lips closed tight  
Not a single sound could be heard. Each  
Day, I call out your name a hundred times  
Though no other humans can hear me, as all its  
Echoes are absorbed into my own heart.





"Amour" By Lynn Friedman  
Lynn Friedman lives and paints in the Hudson Valley, creating work through intuition and observations of nature.

# I Desire; Therefore I Am

*for Helena Qi Hong*

BY: YUAN CHANGMING

1/ Your Smiles: Seeing Is  
Lighter than the light music of moonlight  
Your smiles shine through the darkest moment  
Of last night  
While your gaze, softer  
Than the soft power of raindrops  
Penetrates the hardest stone

Within my feel

2/ Your Expressions: Being  
Between my two dark pupils  
Exists an unseen black hole, where  
I hide my entire inner being, which  
Sucks all the rays  
Emitted from your body as I keep  
Gazing at your face  
With an enlightened heart

**Yuan Changming** hails with Allen Yuan from poetrypacific.blogspot.ca. Credits include 12 Pushcart nominations & chapbooks besides appearances in *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry* (2008-17), *BestNewPoemsOnline* & *Poetry Daily*, among 1929 others. Yuan both served on the jury and was nominated for *Canada's National Magazine* (poetry category).



# A Different Kind of Game

BY: LOREN MEZA

**R**ight now, I'm sitting alone in my favorite bistro. A cocktail or two, some delicious comfort food, and possibilities lie in wait. Nights like this call for red lipstick. Nights where no one you already know can make up for the crappy day you've had.

The ones where existential crises dictate the order of your mind and everything your mother ever reprimanded you for sounds like a good idea. So I watch the room, how it evolves, how the air shifts with each coming and going. Notice how each waiter follows the flow of energy. The lighting is dim, almost enough to make me feel somewhere distant. My mind begins to wander and I think, what are you waiting for?

Just then, a hazy recollection of a foreign film I saw once begins playing in my head:

*(An apartment in the city. A rainy September night. A couple, in the throes of a quarrel.)*

*Crash! A vase with orange tulips shatters as it hits the wall.*

*A woman, with dark hair and a supercilious smile, is refusing to listen to anything more. She combs her hair away from her face with her fingers and heads toward the bedroom. She is packing a bag determinedly.*

*Boom! In the other room, a man, cool and irrational, scatters the books from a shelf all over the floor. He makes his way to the bedroom only to find she is readying to leave. He stands frozen, his expression suggesting heightened emotions, but to which end of the spectrum she cannot tell.*

*She takes a moment and analyzes his face hesitantly before she pushes past him.*

*Slam! Paralyzed, the man stares, first at the door, then at the disastrous apartment.*

*(End scene.)*

Suddenly, I break from the tangential thought. Like being conscious in a dream, I realize, "I've never seen such a movie!" However, I recall an awful version of myself storming out of my apartment with vigor. Then, confidently wandering to somewhere, anywhere that would place me in neither the hero nor the villain's role. Frustrated and intoxicated, I now recognize that I have been playing an egotistical game of who is right and who is hopelessly wrong. It has escalated sufficiently. I find myself comforted by the thought of bowing out of the game, and yes, tonight will be the night. I have never been any good at this, but I have the upper hand, which holds a glass of whiskey, and I make a decision. What a waste it would be to quit when I have the king in check. So now I'll wait, expectantly, for my opponent to make his move.

After all, a falling out is only half the fun.



**Loren Meza** is a journalist at Seoul Journal in Southern California. She is passionate about romanticism and her favorite city is Paris, France.





# The Couple Fighting in 324

BY: AARON SANDBERG

The murmured noise down halls  
    not sex sighs but anger songs  
behind beams and rooms beyond  
as I press a single ear and sigh to be  
    on this side of quiet—  
    my apartment, next to nothing,  
    for next to nothing—

and listen like the dog  
who understands

    little  
    but  
    something

about these sounds  
    and tip-toe stretch to a height  
so not to creak a floor but  
    just to catch a word here  
of the couple down doors

who slit the neck of silence on my side  
of the wall

where I would welcome a fight where  
    there was something still  
    to fight for.

**Aaron Sandberg** is a Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee with over one hundred publications.





# ENTROPY

BY JAIME SPEED

She rolls her clocks in reverse,  
speaking in the pattern of rain. Puzzling  
over pieces of ship & mast  
he moves the impossible  
through the opening of a bottle, a small  
flag waving, hands straining  
to hear once more  
those hurricanes.

Surprise visits from her younger self  
arrive by dream, in the mornings he finds her  
suitcase packed & filled  
with old travelling scarves.  
She'll be in the kitchen shuffling  
a fresh pack of cards into heaps, arranging  
them in perfect order for solitaire, a game  
she still remembers as well as polio  
still shatters like ice in her spine, pulling  
at the tide of her mouth  
on days she thinks she lives  
in glass, perched on a shelf among all the other  
small griefs, bottled oceans  
composed in chronological order  
of forgotten futures.

**Jaime Speed** (she/her) lives, works, and plays in Saskatchewan, Canada. A fan of reading, gardening, throwing weights, and dancing badly, she has recently been published in *The Rat's Ass Review*, *Hobo Camp Review*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *OyeDrum Magazine*, *Global Poemic*, *Psaltery & Lyre*, *Channel*, and many more. Her prose poetry was selected for *Best Small Fictions 2021* by Sonder Press.

# I don't know what to do

BY: STEPHANIE RUSSELL

I know you're dying babe  
I saw it in your eyes the day you shot through  
caught the long haul with a bag and the old rag doll  
and I tried not to notice it was the last train from platform nine  
and I don't know  
I don't know what to do  
I think of you now in the white bed with your head shaved  
your hair gone  
the hair I lusted after that first time  
when I lost myself  
before falling  
falling further than I ever had a right to fall  
loved you more deeply than the last page of recorded time  
and we lost our way in the caverns of innocence  
fumbled in the darkness that seeped through the open pores of our neglect  
and we drifted listless while the wind creaked in the joists and beams  
of the home we manufactured from the confetti of our marriage vows  
and all my lust and care and cravings and the pure blue-water love  
which dried and cracked on the beach of the tumid river in a pile of bleached bones  
meant nothing when the whistle blew from platform nine  
and I don't know  
I don't know what to do.

**Stephanie Russell** has been writing poetry for just a few years now, and she finds it is a direct channel to the soul. It stirs her inner-most emotions, and widens her appreciation of life.

# Separation

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

It slithers  
And slides  
Between us  
Like a virus  
We can't cure.

What do I do  
So far from you?  
What do I say  
To make you happy?

It's only temporary.  
Just a little longer.  
Time is changing  
Both of us.

But, we took vows  
Under the law  
And in  
The eyes of God.

We are hypothetically,  
Theoretically,  
Technically,  
One person.

I feel all the things  
You feel when  
We're not together.  
I miss you, more.

Away from home  
Away from my heart.  
I'm always missing  
Something: you.

But I'm not going  
Anywhere. We're in it  
Together. We chose  
Our future.

I won't give up on you or us.  
You are the part that makes me whole.



# A desire to be different.

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

It's still a shameful feeling to have an incarcerated parent. It's a feeling I think that you wouldn't understand. Don't get me wrong, he deserves it, and I understand that his actions aren't mine.

But, there is this sliver of truth that creeps into the back of my mind. I'm his daughter. I have half of his DNA. We are connected by blood, and that's the part I'm finding it hard to sever that the most. Why?

Perhaps, I fear there is some part of me that's just as corrupt as him. Some part of me wonders, was it all in my head? A little voice answers and says nasty things like, he is who I am. And I'm just as abusive, manipulative, psychotic, depressed, and lonely as he is.

**Ashley Wilson** is a 28-year-old writer living in St. Augustine, Florida. She graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor's in English and currently attends Stetson University College of Law.











# A MUSE

BY: ALLAN LAKE

She does her faux furrowed brow routine,  
complains I don't spend enough time  
sitting with her on the daybed,  
watching amusing movies or sitcoms.  
Knowing my weak point, she offers to  
touch my shoulders, my neck. Barely  
looking up from my desk, where I  
tickle a tricky line, I intone: *You, my  
treasure, are the poem prompt I shall  
come to later, on the ocean bed.* She  
smiles and rolls her pretty eyes.  
Non-crisis averted plus image inserted.

**Allan Lake** is a poet from Allover, Canada who now lives and writes in Allover, Australia. Some coincidence! His latest chapbook of poems, 'My Photos of Sicily', was published by Ginninderra Press (Aus) in 2020.









# Boston Ivy

BY: FRANK WILLIAM FINNEY

Close to the common  
yet so uncommon:

Ivy's place  
on Beacon Hill:

A three-lobed haunt  
in a league of its own

where I climbed  
brownstone walls

till I reached her  
rooftop room

and covered myself  
with Ivy.

Frank William Finney is the author of *The Folding of the Wings*, as well as *Songs of Insomnia*. Born and raised in Massachusetts, he taught at Thammasat University in Thailand from 1995 until 2022.





## in the name of love

by: anonymous

how do you tell someone who loves you  
that you're dying inside?

how do you say it's not because of them  
it's because of you?

how do you get past the pain  
and see the light?

how do you tell people that your smile  
is a mask you wear.

it's eating me up and i don't know how to escape it.

there is a sickness lying inside me.  
you can spare me your sympathy.

i truly thought  
everyone fantasized about dying.





BY: ASHLEY WILSON

"Bloom" By: Ashley Wilson





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