

dwelling
literary



DWELLING 2:
DREAM HOUSE
JANUARY 2021

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Table of Contents

STILL WAITING BY CHRISTINE M. ESTEL.....	4
HARD LESSONS OF WINTER BY PAUL BLUESTEIN.....	6
DREAM BUNGALOW BY MIKE HICKMAN.....	7
THE PEACH BY SAMUEL STRATHMAN.....	11
HOUSE OF DREAMY MEMORIES BY ANISHA KAUL.....	12
STAIRCASE OF STARS BY MAKAILA AARIN.....	13
CRYOGENIC DREAMS BY JASON DE KOFF.....	14
LIMINAL BY JULIA RETKOVA.....	15
I HAVE ANOTHER DREAM ABOUT US WINNING A DUNDIE FOR THE WORLD'S HOTTEST COUPLE BY SHAWN BERMAN.....	16
I REMEMBER WHO I WAS, AND WHO I BECAME BY CHIARA SITUMORANG.....	17
16 BY LOGAN ROBERTS.....	18
THE WINTER SUN BY PRIYANKA SRIVASTAVA.....	19
CATCHING LIGHT BY WILLIAM FALO.....	20
SOFT PIDE BY HELEN BOWIE.....	24
WHEN THE ZOO CAME TO OUR HOUSE BY MATTHEW MILLER.....	25
DREAM HOUSE BY JOHN GREY.....	26
LITTLE GIRL, BIG DREAMS BY KELLY ESPARZA.....	27
WHEN RESCUE DOGS SLEEP BY SHON MAPP.....	29
SECOND HALF OF NIGHT BY MARISSA GLOVER.....	30
THE SHOP OF DREAMS BY ANN DOE.....	31
A SMALL HOUSE BY DOREEN STOCK.....	34
ARCHITEUTHIS BY MICHAEL J SACCO.....	35
THE DREAM PALACE BY SANJANA RAJAGOPAL.....	36
SKYGAZING BY JOWELL TAN.....	38
BARBIE'S DREAM HOUSE BY JESSICA MCHENRY.....	39
ON WEIGHTED BLANKETS AND FALSE REALITIES BY SYDNEY LEIBFRITZ.....	40
JULIET, CRYING OUT BY JULIE MCCLEMENT.....	42

WINTER FISH BY MONIQUE QUINTANA.....44
MY FUTURE HUSBAND BY KRISTINA SACCONI.....45
A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF DREAMS BY ASYA STEPNOVA.....47
FANTASY BY ROSALIE BEITH.....49

Still Waiting

By **Christine M. Estel**

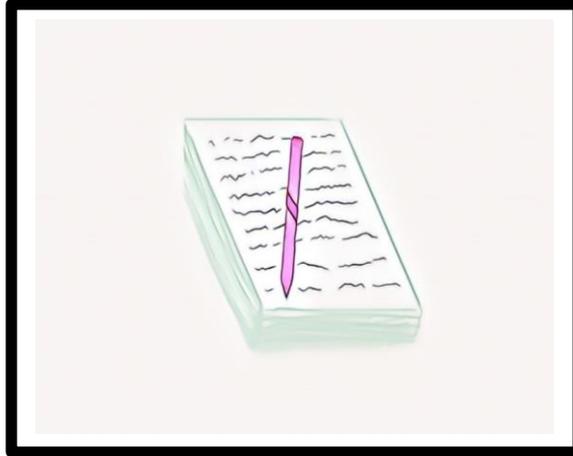
Christine M. Estel lives and writes in the Philadelphia area. She tweets from [@EstellingAStory](https://twitter.com/EstellingAStory).

I'll never know if Rudy was onto something that day when he turned to me in the faculty workroom, smacking his ball of Dentyne Ice rolled

"You know our dead dreams, only when we're

We'd been discussing our The Cars during our "tangential" was a

I blinked. "What?"



lips together as the white around his tongue.

loved ones come to us in ready, right?"

musical appreciation for common prep period, so misnomer.

"Yeah," he said through a sideways grin, still chewing, "they, like, wait until you're ready or need them, and they'll come when you least expect it."

I rolled my eyes and gave the "Oh, Ruuddyyyy" response as I turned my attention back to the stack of essays taking priority over the turkey sandwich to my right.

My head dropped, and a fly landed next to my student's last name, its little legs scurrying across the top of the page, down to the center, and returning again. I swatted. It bounced but dropped again, its blackness merging with the ocean of white space near the essay's heading, creating a foggy gray that sucked me in like a tornado's curlicue.

Fixated and twisting, I went back to five or six, the day I rode an elephant at the zoo, Pop watching from a distance, proud I'd been brave, which he rewarded by slipping a white, plastic elephant ring on my right ring finger after my dismount.

I stepped out momentarily, annoyed I hadn't kept the thing, even though it cracked down the middle a few years later under the pressure of the junk on top of it in my closet. I conceded that it was cute but unneeded.

I dropped back in, to age nine, the night after a day at the beach. I looked out my passenger window, waiting outside the tavern, my cheek brushed with the silver shimmer coming from the crescent peeking out from the tall building in the distance, the salt still lingering in my hair. The passers-by came and went, and eventually he emerged, smiling in his Pop way, as he always did when we locked eyes. He was holding an unmarked brown takeout bag, my requested hamburger and fries inside.

My pink pen slid off the stack on my lap, falling to the floor in slow motion in my haze, and, though muffled, I heard feet shuffling and scraping on the linoleum as students moved between classes. Their conversations and laughter turned indistinguishable as I jumped ahead a few years to our car rides home after play practice during high school; how we'd pass the farm on that one back road bend, and he'd ponder, again, "I'm still not sure about them. Could be llamas, but look like guanacos."

I started working my way through the next several years, stopping momentarily on the ones that, to an outsider, were inconsequential, but, to me, meaningful, when Rudy interjected.

"You okay?"

I looked up. "Yeah, just thinking about some memories with my grandfather. He died several years ago but he hasn't visited me yet."

"Just wait. He will."

Hard Lessons of Winter

By **paul Bluestein**

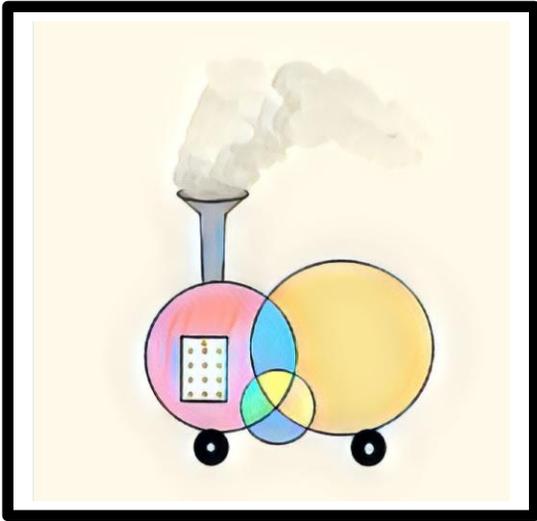
The wrens living in the red barn birdhouse
moved south at the end of summer,
leaving me to clean up after them,
(but it's just like wrens to be so inconsiderate).
When I had finished, the house looked neat
and tidy, and though it was visited
from time to time by prospective tenants,
it remained empty until an October frost
had whitewashed its walls
and polished the roof with ice.
Then a black-capped chickadee arrived,
crossed the threshold and emerged
with a chirping claim to her new home.
From safely distant perches, grackles, juncos
and a wary cardinal eyed the newcomer,
twittering "Who invited you, who invited you?"
November was beset with tree-branch drama
about territory and pecking order
accompanied by anxious hopping,
fluttering of wings and curiosity among the onlookers..
But when the wind and snow of December arrived,
bringing the need to simply survive, they put aside
petty arguments and misunderstandings, and
sheltered in their winter homes, dreaming of spring.

paul Bluestein is an obstetrician, blues guitar player and writer living in Connecticut with his wife and the two dogs who rescued him. His work has appeared in The Linden Avenue Literary Review, Heron Tree, and Third Wednesday among others. His first book of poetry, **Time Passages**, was published in 2020 by Silver Bow Publishing and is available on Amazon.



Dream Bunnings By Mike Hickman

Mike Hickman (@MikeHicWriter) is a writer from York, England. He has written for Off the Rock Productions (stage and audio), including 2018's "Not So Funny Now" about Groucho Marx and Erin Fleming. He has recently been published in EllipsisZine, Dwelling Literary, Bandit Fiction, Nymphs, Flash Fiction Magazine, Brown Bag, and Safe and Sound Press. His co-written, completed six-part BBC radio sit com remains unproduced but available to interested producers!



The machine, Forrester promises, will turn the dreams inside out. He fusses over the headset and the wires, plugging me in, telling me that it is just a question of bringing to mind what I no longer want bought to mind.

"You're sure this will work?" I fret as I watch him twist the dials before standing back with a smile of satisfaction at his yet-to-be-proved cleverness.

Forrester tugs on the lapels of his green lab coat and chews the arm of his glasses. "You want to sleep easy?" he asks me.

"Oh, do I," I say.

He's confused for a moment, taking it for a question, and I wonder, not for the first time, at his qualifications.

"Just let it out," he says, before tapping me on the forehead and adding, "this will do the rest."

I concentrate. Bulbs flicker. Voltmeter needles quiver.

Just let it out, he says. I have to consciously bring it to mind. Get in there first before my subconscious, for once.

So I tell him.

My dream house does not have artexed walls or cardboard parcel-taped over the hole in the glass in the front door.

"Good, good, great," Forrester says. He wrenches a dial sharply to the right and tightens the band around my forehead. "Carry on, carry on."

It does not have concrete fence posts or a sagging washing line, so low in the middle it could – and did – double for a skipping rope.

“You did that?”

“My sister did that.”

“Keep them coming.”

Neither, I add, the perspiration dripping from my forehead and my glasses beginning to steam up, does it have knee-high grass hiding myriad unpleasant surprises left by the neighbours' pets.

Forrester's moustache twitches.

Presents, furthermore, that were always perfectly placed for my unwary sandalled foot. Perfect, too, for treading indoors on the bare floorboards that were perpetually on the verge of one day being carpeted again. After the woodworm treatment that, on reflection, really ought not to have carried out while we were still living there.

Really ought to have been carried out before the woodworm had devoured most of the wood.

“This is good, this is good,” Forrester says.

“I'm glad someone's enjoying it.”

I'd slept on those floorboards for weeks in 1987. Because the bed – made, I recall, largely from cardboard – had collapsed in on itself. With me in it.

And I remember these things. Not just for Forrester, but because – he knows this is why I came to him – if I don't exhaust them now, they'll be back for me again at three in the morning. It doesn't seem to matter where I've lived since – the Hammer House of Horror student digs, the tiny corner house opposite the man with the baby grave garden and the thirty foot flagpole – those places don't feature in my dreams. Not even the flat with the very friendly woman next door with the feather boas and the numerous men friends calling at all hours of day and night.

It doesn't matter that there probably were some decent places. The bungalow – that had been nice. Decent garden there, if you discounted the shed rusting to pieces in the corner. And it had had a conservatory and there had been roses – why hadn't I noticed the flowers at the time? I'd noticed the bees.

“You would notice the bees,” mutters Forrester, taking a biro from behind an ear that still somehow confidently held another two.

Yes, that had been alright, really. The conservatory and the roses. Had there been geraniums? I've never really been into horticulture.

"And your sleep back then, in the bungalow?" Forrester asks, drawing out the words as he flutters the arms of his specs back and forward and his moustache twitches like it's an independent entity. "Good, was it?"

And now I'm not thinking about artex and bare floorboards and the mouse that had got stuck in the wainscoting. I'm not thinking about the woodworm treatment and the condensation on the inside of the metal framed windows. Or paintwork with a curious toffee consistency, tacky and soft to the touch from never once being stripped before being repainted in all the years that wretched house that stood.

"I suppose," I tell Forrester, "it was good, yeah."

"Excellent," he says, clapping his hands like a small boy and pirouetting on the spot so that the tail of his lab coat brushes each one of the computers around him. All of which then switch themselves off, one after another after another.

"We're done here," Forrester tells me, removing the headband and packing it away in the box on the desk.

"Thank you, doctor," I tell him.

Forrester puts his specs on and gives me a look like I've just offered up the square root of infinity and all he'd asked for was my ID. "Doctor?"

"Well, aren't you...? Isn't this why...?" I gesture at the equipment and his lab coat and the everything around me.

"Ah," he says, smiling with studied benignity. "Yes, this sometimes happens. It's a side effect of the process."

"As long as the dreams are gone, I'm not complaining," I tell him.

Forrester nods, returns to his desk, clearing it of equipment and opening the drawer to take out what looks like a prospectus. And is.

"Not only are they gone," Forrester tells me, "but your former ones can return. Now, between us, we have identified where they live. Look here." And he passes the prospectus across the desk towards me. It falls open on a specific page, with a specific illustration, of a specific property.

A bungalow.

Hadn't I...? Didn't he...? I'm sure the eight year old me on the cardboard bed had always fancied living in such a place.

“There we are,” Forrester says, “your ideal property.” And he takes another biro from behind his other ear. “Now, if you really want to sleep easy, there’s just the small matter of a deposit to settle and it could be all yours.”

The Peach

By **Samuel Strathman**

Samuel Strathman is a poet, author, educator, and the founder/editor-in-chief of Floodlight Editions. Find him on Twitter @_strathman_.

A mild night
of threadbare trees,
scarecrow arms
frozen in place.

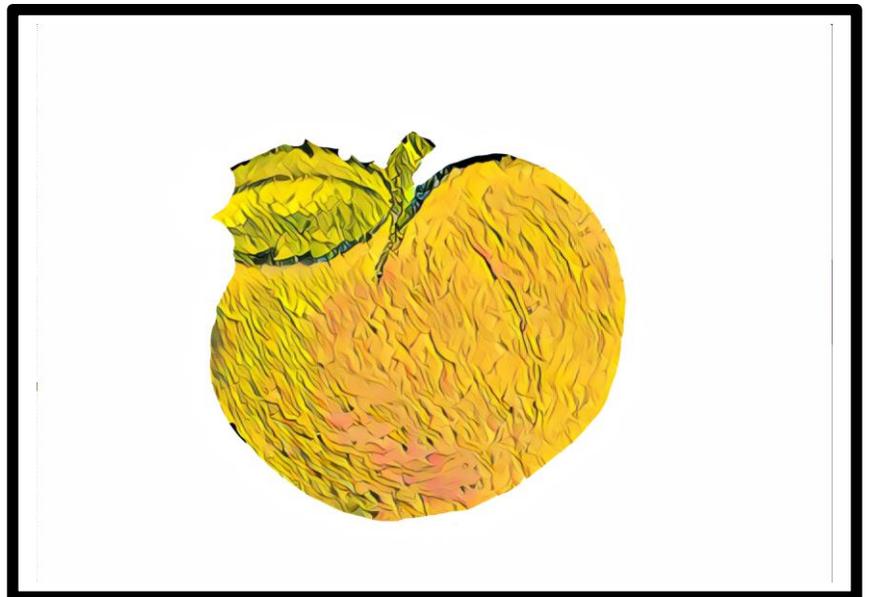
Subway trains
divert off course,
reeling through the park,
speaking volumes
without saying anything.

A black cat hisses
while operating a tractor
with giant opposable thumbs.

This is my favourite dream.

I'm the peach
rolling centerline,
a dash of colour
in summer's absence.

I'll be warm
and fuzzy by morning.

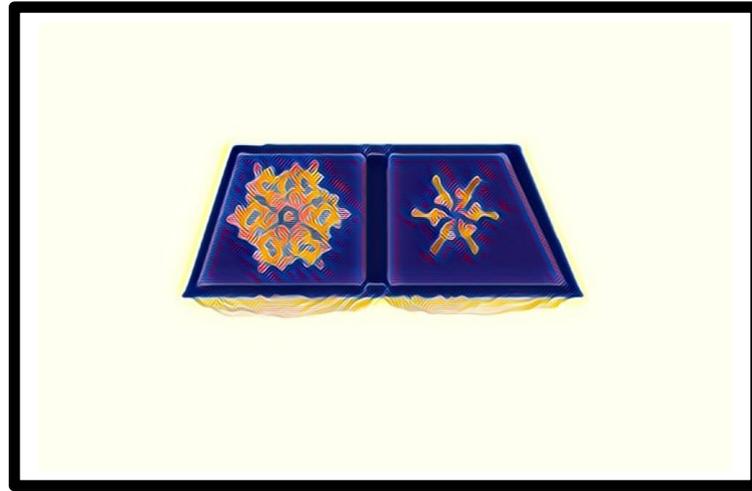


House

Of Dreamy Memories

By **Anisha Kaul**

Anisha Kaul is a poet and her work has appeared in *The Minison Project*, *Beir Bua Journal*, *Small Leaf Press*, *Analogies & Allegories Literary Magazine*, *Visual Verse*, among others. She is a budding researcher and currently working to pursue the same. You can reach out to her on twitter @anishakaul9.



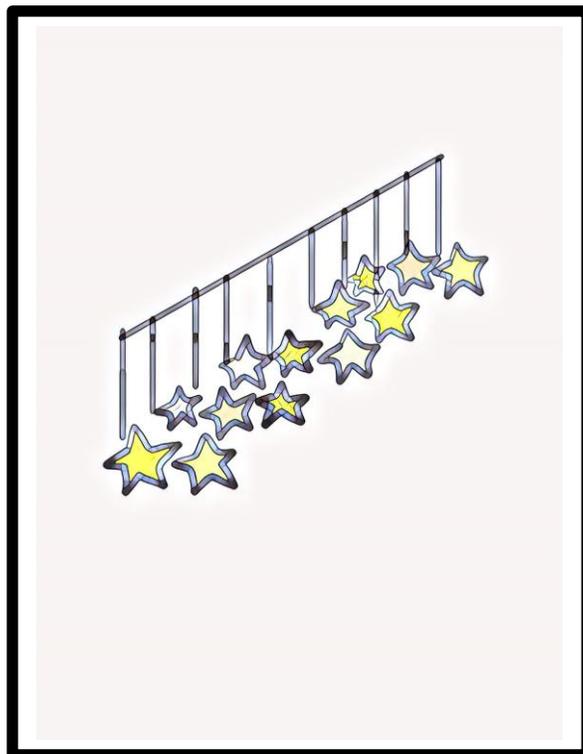
Soft imprints on linen sheets
Wrinkled under the weight of
Our stranger dreams
With a heart ready to break
She vaguely looked around
Her house of dreamy memories
Half read novels resting on the couch
Slippers flipped carelessly
Unlit candles on the nightstand
Many a lost intimacies
An Uncaged bird hops its way
Through half shut panes
Alights on the desolate hand
Gently rubs its smoky feathers
At once, a haunting palace
Of departed musings
Resurfaces in thin air

Staircase Of Stars

By **Makaila Arin**

Makaila Arin works as an academic librarian in Mississippi where she lives with her three rescue dogs. She holds a bachelor's degree in English and master's degrees in library science and education. Her poetry has appeared in *Prismatica Magazine*, *Stone of Madness*, *Glitch Words*, and other small presses. Her work is forthcoming in *The Rainbow Poems*, *Poetically Magazine*, and *Sinister Wisdom*. Find her on Twitter: @makaila_arin

My dream shows me a staircase of stars. Mesmerized,
wearing only flannel pajamas, I ascend steps
of glitter. Each provokes new notes from pianos,
violins, flutes. On the highest step, trumpets
crescendo. I gape at galaxy clusters
as the Star Factory reaches for my hand. Pausing,
my head turns, stomach churns as I envision
Mom finding a bed abandoned, night robe crumpled,
slippers ditched, twelve-year-old gone. Steps to my window
dissolve. I am free from my future as a debutante.
Nightlight still glowing. I pivot. Bare feet tiptoe over
nebula paths despite monsters or sheer darkness
that may wait. I reach a tunnel of constellations -
its splendor erasing any lingering remorse.



Cryogenic Dreams

By Jason de Koff

Rising through vacuous atmosphere,
the seeing but not seeing reality,
with seamless entrance,
into uplifted membranes.

A faceless man,
says hello in my mind,
and points across my nose,
where a verdant forest ripples.

The leaves are not blowing,
but shivering,
and dogs on branches,
pluck each, munching thoughtfully.

The bark is thin and peels,
in sheets of paper,
scribed in music,
that plays with each page.

The grassy sward forms knolls,
that wrap tightly about,
and squeeze color,
into the translucent sky.

The scene dissipates instantly,
and the faceless man beckons,
holding one blade of grass,
I place it under my tongue.

My body disperses,
at the cellular level,
my life now ubiquitous,
through both time and space.

Jason de Koff is an associate professor of agronomy and soil science at Tennessee State University. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Jaclyn, and his two daughters, Tegan and Maizie. He has published in a number of scientific journals, and has over 50 poems published or forthcoming in literary journals this year.



Lūnniūnal

By **Julia Retkova**

Julia Retkova is a King's College London graduate student with two degrees in Literature and Digital Studies: she's currently working on her dissertation while running a small literary journal. She was born in Ukraine, but grew up in the south of Spain. She loves reading books in the sun and writing when everyone's asleep. Her writing has been previously published in *Storgy*, *Literally Stories*, *Masque & Spectacle*, *Sublunary Review*, *the tide rises*, *the tide falls*, and is forthcoming in a few others.

Silver down on shoulder-blades, silver
giving breath through all expansion of space.

The night shines.

Moonlight: how it tumbles through the window as
the bedroom breathes, the bedroom sighs,
night air *hums* in the sensation of wind chimes,
of silver bells. And watch
how the space grows
to push against your fingertips.

It is a strange thing. The kiss on the neck melts into a drop of wine.
You wake up to think: I must have been bleeding.
And so it is the oldest story. The moon veils your eyes
until space shivers higher, higher.



I HAVE ANOTHER DREAM ABOUT US

WINNING

A DUNDIE

FOR THE WORLD'S HOTTEST COUPLE

By **Shawn Berman**

Shawn Berman runs The Daily Drunk. His debut chapbook, *Once Upon a Blue Shell*, is due out this Spring from Close to the Bone. Follow him on Twitter @sbb_writer.

and it's the fifth year in a row that we take home
this highly coveted award,
our names
echoing throughout the crowded chili's
as michael scott beckons me and you
to the stage to make an acceptance speech,
drunken patrons whistling and hollering
pounding on tables
to show their support for us.
when we get to the front of the room
we thank everyone in attendance
and of course
our lord and savior
baby phillip
for making this even possible,
though
we jokingly admit
that there wasn't much competition in the first place,
causing everyone to laugh
and spit out their margs.
afterwards
we celebrate our victory with a hot and romantic night
at dwight's bed and breakfast
even opting in for the bedtime story from mose,
the novelization of *the crow*
putting us to sleep, easily.
in the morning
when i wake up
from this dream,
you're still gone
and this feeling of
never ending loneliness
never gets better,
only easier...



I Remember

Who I

Was,

And Who I

Became

By **Chiara Situmorang**

Chiara Situmorang is a writer and poet currently based in Jakarta. She loves her three breed-ambiguous pups, baking, and winter, which is unfortunate considering where she lives. Her work has appeared in *Magdalene*, *Perspektif*, *Farrago*, and *Myriad*. You can find her talking to herself on Twitter @chiarastmrng.

My mother always told me
I was a child of contradictions.
I hated pink until it was the colour
of my favourite backpack. I said "I love you"
until I understood what it really meant.
I talked and talked and talked until
one day, I just – stopped.

She told me she never figured out why I grew
silent. I told her my silence was worth the things
I heard in return. I told her my voice had been drowning
out the sounds that were barely there,
sounds you only heard when you have nothing to say.

I don't tell her but I remember the sound of her
leaving. I remember the sounds her body made
as she creaked to her feet, bones aching. I remember
the capsize of roaring thunder while she weeped.
These memories, they are so loud if you just listened.

There are graveyards in front of my house,
of pets lost too early and unexpectedly.
There is a garden there now, of bluebellvine and
honeysuckle. My mother toils over it every
morning, pulling out weeds like last night's bad dreams.
Perhaps it is why the ghost of grief
smells so sweet in this place.

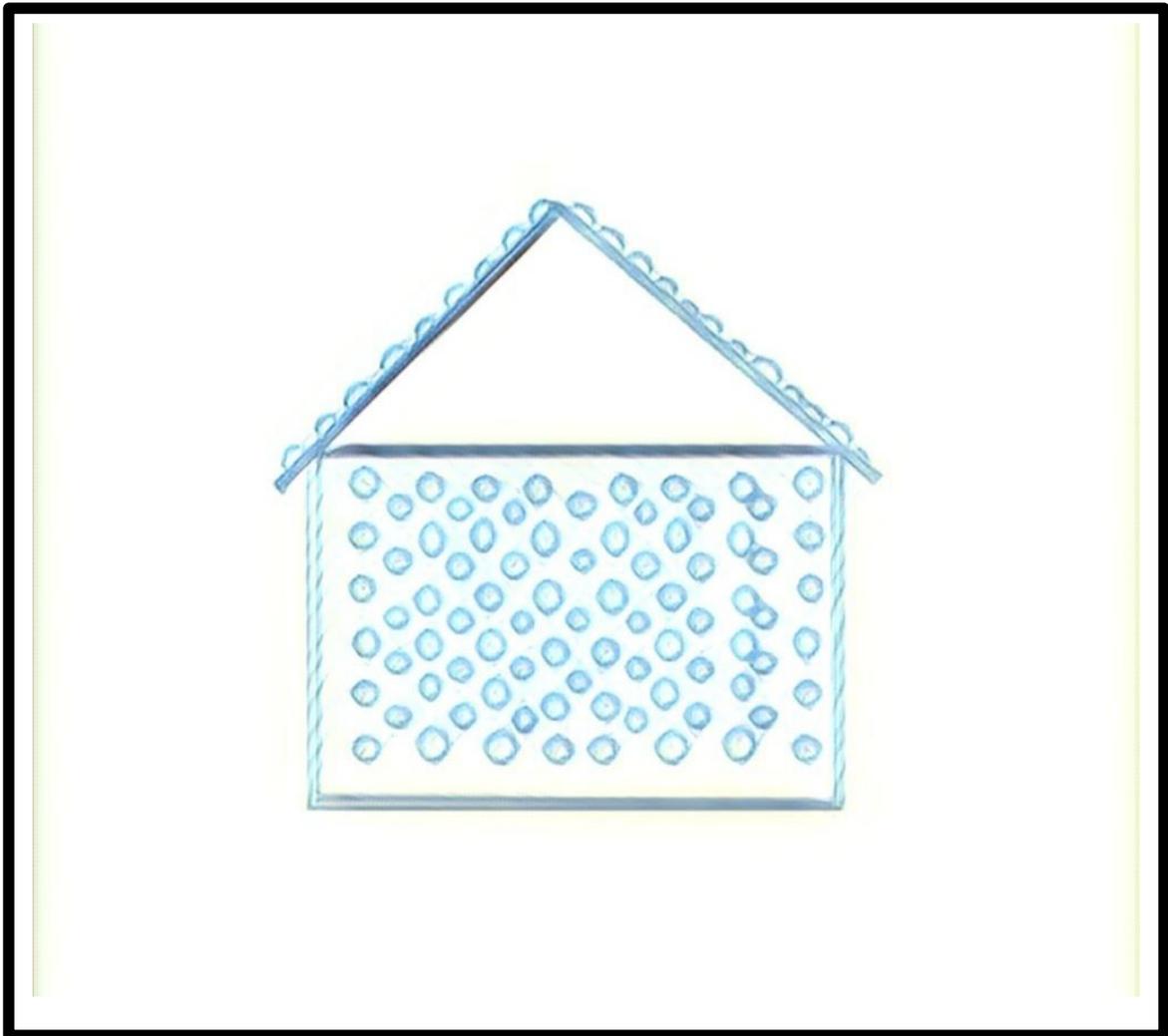


116

By **Logan Roberts**

Logan Roberts is an artist and writer in Ohio. His chapbook, *It's a Knife*, is available on Amazon. His current projects are the 50/50 blog, and *1,000 Poems*. He tweets @hello_im_logan.

There once was a boy
who loved nothing more than bubble wrap
he said to his mother
one day, I will rule the world with bubble wrap
she smiled and shortly afterwards
forgot all about her son's dream
but the boy
he did not forget
oh, he did not forget.



The Winter Sun

By **Priyanka Srivastava**

Priyanka Srivastava is a writer based in Singapore, her poems are often about her life in India and Singapore. When she is not lost in words, she loves to read specially nonfiction books. She also loves to play with colours.



my soul is painting that winter sun
the warmth of which awakens the dreamy eyes.
my pen is inking those winter tales
those stories which were hibernating somewhere.
caught between dreams and nightmare
trapped between those frigid memories
I search again for the warmth of that winter sun
that golden light which would infiltrate our soul.
the solace of which would warm our heart
that dreamy paper moon on the black paper.
I am a poet. give me a white paper and I will
turn it into a piece of art. I am a writer. I know
how to stitch a dreamcatcher in the sky above.

Catching Light

By **William Falo**

William Falo studied Environmental Science at Stockton University. His family includes a papillon named Dax. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in The UK journal Superlative, The Raconteur Review, Fragmented Voices, Train River's first fiction anthology, and other literary journals.



The sleepless nights took a toll on me and I slipped into a darkness that I might not escape. To get away from it, I walked to Strawbridge Lake. A place I loved from my childhood, but since COVID, hardly anyone came here anymore. A swing squeaked as it swung in the wind. Rust covered the monkey bars and a slide looked crooked and ready to fall over.

I noticed a man fishing. I rubbed my eyes. Nobody fished here anymore.

He pulled the rod back and reeled the line in like he caught a fish.

"No way," I yelled out. A small female stray dog that I saw around, but could never catch. It freaked out and ran away. I saw it before and searched websites, Facebook groups, and called shelters. Nobody was missing a dog.

With a few final turns, the fisherman landed the catch as I reached the lake. I put my mask on when I got closer. The fish looked dark and slimy.

"Yes." He yelled.

I looked closer at the catch and laughed. It was muffled due to the mask.

"What is it?"

"You caught a stick fish." It was a long time since I laughed so hard especially with a mask on.

"I bet it's the largest stick fish ever caught here."

"I'm sorry I laughed. It's the only thing caught here anymore."

"I keep trying. My parents used to fish here when I was a child. It was a happy memory." I imagined him smiling through the mask. "It's like catching light in the darkness."

"Same with me, but I feel like I'm just trying to stop tears before they fall." I wiped my eyes and looked at the brown water. "There's too much pollution."

"Yea. I saw some truck dumping chemicals in the water last night. They may come back tonight. I'll be waiting for them. I want to stop them. Hey, do you want to help?" He looked at me.

"I don't even know you."

"I'm Jake. Thirty-three and single. College degree, but due to the pandemic I lost my job and apartment and moved back home to live with my parents. What's your name?"

"Natalie." I didn't tell him I was the same age. I recognized him from high school, but he didn't seem to recognize me. I was invisible back then.

"Now you know me."

"I can't." I'm not an outgoing person. "Plus, I have a roommate."

"Natalie, I'm just trying to save the lake."

"Sorry." I left without looking back.

The small dog was waiting by the door. Its big ears tilted downward like they were sad.

She didn't run away and I held the door open. The dog walked in and jumped on the couch.

"Make yourself at home."

Before I even closed the door, the small dog closed its eyes and was fast asleep. Living alone was exhausting.

A gust of wind knocked a stick off an old oak. It hit the roof then bounced to the ground. I thought of the stick fish and wondered if Jake was at the lake.

"I'll be back," I said to the dog. She was sound asleep.

I walked to the lake and noticed a dark form in the water. Somebody was in trouble.

I splashed through the water and saw someone face down and turned them over. Jake. I dragged him to shore.

"Jake, are you okay?"

He coughed up water then sat up. He was shivering. I put my coat over him.

“What happened?”

“They were pumping stuff into the lake.” I snapped pictures, but the flash caught their attention. They took my phone and threw it into the water. I had to get it.”

“You’re crazy.”

“It’s an iPhone 12.”

I shook my head.

“I tripped over something and hit my head then blacked out. You saved my life.”

“Anybody else would have done the same thing.”

“No, they wouldn’t.”

“It was all for nothing since your phone is ruined.”

“No, I emailed the pictures before they took my phone.”

“That’s great.”

“Do you want to get a cup of coffee with me tomorrow?”

Old fears came back. I’ve been alone so long I feared being with somebody even though I didn’t want to be alone anymore.

My hand shook as I put my mask on. “I’m broken,” I said and walked away.

“Natalie wait, your coat.” He yelled, but I kept going.

###

The dog stayed with me. I took her to the veterinarian. There was no microchip and they set up a care schedule. I bought food, treats, and toys. My dream house always included a dog, but with another person too. I thought about Jake.

I put on my mask and walked to the lake. Jake was sitting next to a fishing rod while playing a handheld game.

“Animal Crossing. I actually can catch fish playing this game.”

“My roommate is a dog.”

"I love dogs."

The bobber sank.

"A fish," I grabbed the rod, but the line snapped.

I stared across the lake and saw a group of mallards floated in the lake. A few geese splashed into the water. Their honks filled the air. In the distance, someone walked a dog. A flash of red in the bushes may have been a fox. A raccoon looked like a bandit as it stole peanuts meant for a squirrel. I smiled. Where there is life, there is hope.

"Do you want to go to the store, I need to buy a fishing rod?" Catching light was contagious.

"Sure," he said.

"Maybe I'll try that Animal Crossing game."

"You'll love it."

He packed up his gear and game, and we left together. We stayed six feet apart, but it felt like we were closer than that, and I hoped the distance would get smaller. When I looked back, the stick sank below the surface leaving behind small ripples that spread across the water growing larger as they traveled across the lake.

Soft pide

By **Helen Bowie**

Helen Bowie is a poet, performer and podcaster based in London, UK. Her poetry has recently featured in Neuro Logical Magazine, Beir Bua Journal, and the Minison Zine among others. Helen has one cat, and several bafflingly strong opinions on extremely trivial matters.



Our foundations will be strong, supporting all that comes next
Like the cauliflower base on the keto pizza you didn't expect to enjoy
The salt and sweet will work together, and make each other all the better
The mixed bag of popcorn the darkness before the dawn

The sky will be crystal clear, the air sweet like a crisp pink lady
We will wear our convictions like the finest vinaigrette
Perfectly balanced and star of the show

At 23:38 we will laugh with our loved ones and wrap ourselves in the warm embrace
of sleep like soft pide encompassing salty olives and sweet fresh tomato, and gentle feta
We won't need to delve into the archives of the people we kept on ice, or pickled and
jarred
to revisit when the store cupboards run low

Our stomachs will be full and our hearts fuller still
And we will know when it is more of a waste to eat it than to leave it
And we will leave it, for someone who will be truly sated

Z(0)(0) When the Came to Our House By **Matthew Miller**



We'd seen flashes last night,
heard vacant thunder roll over our
barren lot like a rhinoceros.

The afternoon air hung, uneasy,
dipping its toes into mucky
marsh of this evening.

My boy's eyes skitter
the horizon, fearing a bullish storm.
What is bigger than fear but

imagination? I strap his arms
over my shoulders like a rucksack
to hike out to the front porch.

Towering like Kilimanjaro,
thunderheads peak above us.
Watch each flash, I whisper, and instantly

Matthew Miller teaches social studies, swings tennis rackets, and writes poetry - all hoping to create home. He and his wife live beside a dilapidating orchard in Indiana, where he tries to shape dead trees into playhouses for his four boys. His poetry has been featured in River Mouth Review, Club Plum Journal and Ekstasis Magazine.

elephants trumpet, monstrous
hooves press spiderous cracks
on neighborhood streets. My son laughs,

giraffes chew apples. The stormy breeze
whips worrisome wobbles in the toucan's
flight, its green bill flaring with lightning.

Below, a sturdy tortoise covers
in overgrown culverts. Rain cuts
and explodes against concrete,

splashing our feet, which we wrap up
in coils on the wicker sofa,
as a python slithers past

and curls up the porch column.
A lion's growl shakes
giant foxtail and fescue,

but my two-year old
echoes louder. Eager blue eyes
flashing like wild fangs, transfixed

to the fierce scene we have dreamed
into life, this garden of Eden.
He springs from the couch,

sprinting barefoot across the budding
lawn, waving fingers like stripes of a tiger,
spinning under a jungle waterfall.

Dream House

By **John Grey**

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Soundings East, Dalhousie Review and Connecticut River Review. Latest book, "Leaves On Pages" is available through Amazon.

So in came the carpenters, plumbers and electricians.
Their charge was to make paradise livable.
They were followed by the carpet layers. And the painting crew.
Then came tile and linoleum
and a heating system so discreet
you'd never know what was warming you.

Furniture appeared as if by magic.
Mementos found their way
to the mantle above the fireplace.
Food filled the kitchen cupboards.
Clothing did likewise with dressers and closets,
closed all drawers and doors behind them.
Books lined the shelves.
A stereo system rose up among stacks of CD's.

A flat screen TV looked longingly
at the remote that sat on a
shiny brown coffee table.
And the bed was springy,
the mattress and the pillows soft.

All was complete except for us.
I was working third shift at the bank.
You were driving back from Charlotte.
We had yet to meet.



Little Girl, Big Dreams

By **Kelly Esparza**

Kelly Esparza is a graduate from the University of Arizona with a B.A. in English and a B.A. in Creative Writing. She is the author of *The World as Seen Through My Eyes* (Kindle Direct Publishing, 2019) and the co-author of *Out of This World! (Make Way for Books, 2020)*. Her work has also appeared in *433 Magazine* and *Dwelling Literary*. Kelly strives to uplift others with her writing.



I was a little girl with big dreams. And a large heart. “Write from the heart,” I was told as a kid, and that was what I always did and still do. I’ve always loved a good story where I could lose myself in a fantasy. I pieced together fragments of my childhood memories, like this was a puzzle of who I was becoming. After I moved home from college, I took a trip to my past while cleaning my room. I rediscovered these glittery orange and pink notebooks buried underneath piles of books in my room. Filled with my six-year-old scribbles and stories. Mysteries. Tales about friendship. Stories full of love and joy. Memories flooded my mind as I flipped through the pages of my past. I remembered leaping out of bed at 7 a.m. as a kid, my bare feet padding against the tile of my house, making my way to the office to write my latest story. I remembered asking my English teacher mom how to

write dialogue at the age of seven, and I remembered writing a story for her as a gift for Christmas one year. I remembered bringing a pen and a notebook to my third grade class’s “hobby day,” though even I knew at that age that writing was never just a hobby to me. It was always more. I remembered, I remembered, I remembered it all. And here I was now, a recent graduate, having just earned my degrees in English and Creative Writing, trying to make these childhood dreams a reality.

My heart swelled with warmth and joy because it was on this day that while I was cleaning my room and rediscovering my childhood that a memory I had seemingly resurfaced in my mind. Some years ago, I was on a family vacation at Manhattan Beach in California, walking side by side my sister and my parents on the boardwalk. The seagulls squawked, and the waves crashed delicately in the distance. Several beach houses stood to the right of me.

“Okay, Kel. So, one day when you’re an author, and you need a getaway to write one of your novels, which one of these would be your dream home?” my mom asked me with a grin.

I looked closely at each house. One was tall and made entirely of glass. From where I stood, I could just barely make out an elegant spiral staircase that wrapped around the building. Then, there was a medium-sized, white and blue beach house with a little white porch out

front. There, a wooden, light blue bench swung gently back and forth, and silver windchimes hung by the door. While I loved the appearance of the glass home with the spiral staircase and wouldn't mind living in a place like that, there was something open and freeing about this little beach home. It was like I could imagine writing my latest novel on that swinging bench, hearing and watching the ocean waves meet the shore.

"There," I answered after a short pause, pointing to the beach house. For a moment, it was strange. It was almost as if I could see my future. Where would I be in my career as a writer in ten, fifteen, or twenty years from now? Perhaps I would be an established author, having published my first book or maybe even more than that.

It was then that I started dreaming about my biggest dream of all—seeing a stranger pick up my book from the shelf of a bookstore and *reading* my work. And these were the memories that brought me back to *why* I started writing in the first place. It was my passion, and it always would be.

Today, I find myself smiling because I've come so far in terms of my writing journey, and I know that with each passing day, I keep growing as a writer. And I love that. To me, the art of writing itself is my dream home, its rooms filled to the ceiling with love and its windows pouring out happiness and peace. Although I'm still far away from achieving my biggest dream, I'm on my way, making progress, and I'm determined to make all my childhood dreams come true one day.

~

"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams." -Henry David Thoreau

~

Dogs Sleep

When Rescue
By **Shon Mapp**

Shon Mapp is black queer writer with published poems in *Fourteen Poems*, *Ghost Heart*, and *Kissing Dynamite*. Her works typically explore kinship, queer intimacy, and multicultural identities.



Just after nine, the twitching begins. Dutiful paws
steady their pursuit of pigeons and prams. A visible tongue
peeks between tiny teeth for the extruded meat treats

we keep in the bottom drawer. Lightning breaths
call a rumbling response of thunderous little barks - in fight
or in flight, urgent and precious as infants' hiccups.

When she lies suddenly still and with softer breath,
I imagine, she remembers she's safe.
She remembers, she's home.

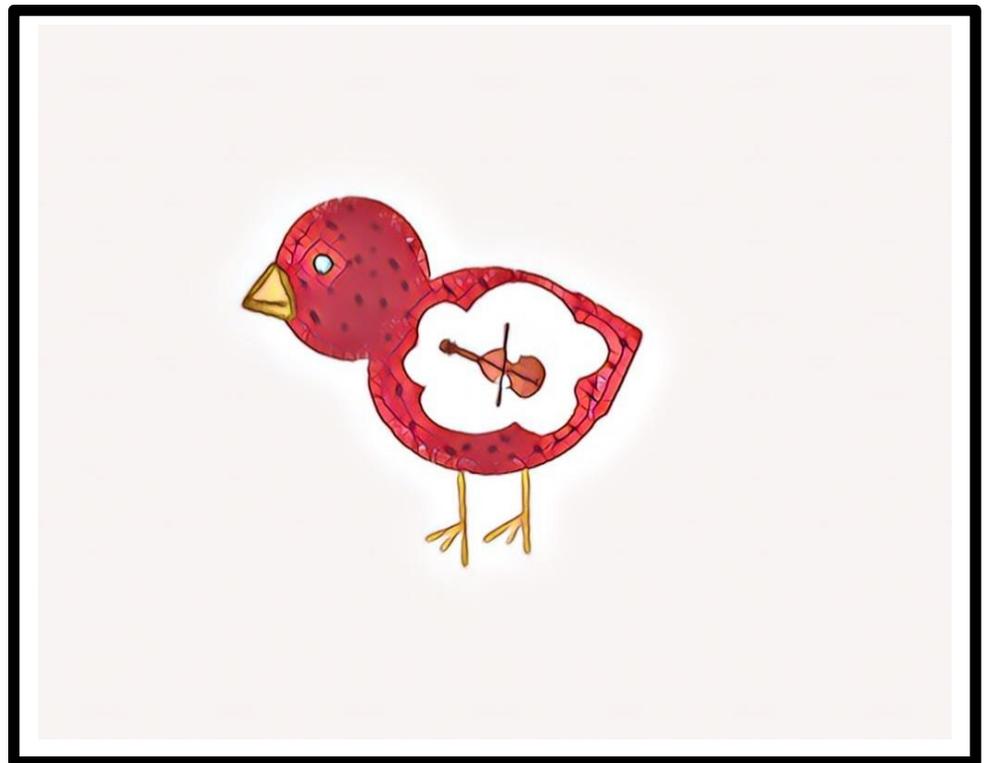
Second Half of Night

By **Marissa Glover**

Marissa Glover lives in Florida, where she teaches at Saint Leo University. Marissa is co-editor of *Orange Blossom Review* and a senior editor at *The Lascaux Review*. Her poetry most recently appears in *FEED*, *Schuykill Valley Journal*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, and *River Mouth Review*. Marissa's full-length poetry collection, *Let Go of the Hands You Hold*, will be published by Mercer University Press in 2021. You can follow her on Twitter @_MarissaGlover_.

Deep in these woods
is a tree, in this tree
is a bird, in the belly
of the bird is a violin
that only makes music
when a girl falls in love.
Just beyond the tree
is a spring too cold
for swimming but
perfect for dipping
toes on a hot day; this
is where squirrels
go to swish their tails
in water. The gentle
stirring shakes the
ground.

If you look through
the glassed surface,
past the reflection
of face and branches
and clouds—down
to gleaming stones
half buried in silt,
you will feel
the hum of wings
spill over you like
whispers; the hair
on your arms rising
in the wind as a
rosined bow glides
across your body,
carries you home.



The Shop of Dreams

By **Ann Doe**

Ann Doe studies English, History and Civics as a part of her teacher training in Munich with a year-long detour at the University of Birmingham. She used to write short stories for competitions and remembers first writing a book at the age of five. When she is not writing, she can be found travelling and wandering around museums aimlessly.



Across from a deli and a chip shop, near the border that separates the City of London and the City of Westminster, sat a shop filled with broken things that were meant to fix people. The little shop was tucked in between a nail salon and a phone shop; a perfectly good match. It had no name, but the old and golden letters on red wood still remained from the days where this shop had belonged to a hairdresser. For now, it was called Mona's Hair Club.

It had been a Tuesday afternoon filled with too much sun and too little wind. Cecily had been strolling around London, feeling sorry for herself. *But who else should she have felt sorry for?* She was the

sun in the solar system that was her life.

Those dirty windows and chipped paint had drawn her in like a moth to a flame. Normally, a state of such untidiness would have made her skin crawl, but destiny can hardly be avoided when it calls for you with such an enticing song.

She had not gone through the tedious process of a job interview. Upon entering, two broken bells had rung above her head, and she had found a name tag on the counter with her name already printed on it. The letters had been old, and the black vinyl had certainly seen better days.

That had been years ago. Cecily was no longer fifteen and full of rage about a failed friendship. However, she had been promoted to manager of this shop of dreams. Nobody had given that promotion to her, but nobody had told her that she couldn't call herself manager.

Nobody truly owned this shop. As far as she knew, she was the only person looking after it.

Each morning, she would dust the shelves with precision, careful not to sweep too much of it away. Those dusty pieces of furniture were half the appeal of this little shop, and more importantly, the homes of those broken dreams and lost thoughts.

Her favourite piece in the shop was a pair of heart-shaped glasses that had clearly once been pink, but now were only peach. There were scratches on those tinted lenses, but more

interestingly, someone had carved a tiny heart into the frame. Its crevices were filled with dirt and dust.

The broken bells announced the door opening, and the customer that came with it, before the cold winter breeze did.

"Hello, Mr. Anderson", she said. He was a regular. A painter in his youth, turned banker when his life had suddenly gotten serious, he was now the loneliest person with the saddest happy eyes she knew.

"Is there anything you are looking for in particular today?"

"A piece of childhood", he said. "I miss my parents. They left me almost fifty years ago."

"Of course", she said. It was a frequent request with teens who were trying to avoid their adulthood, but everyone was allowed to miss home, to miss the innocence that only comes with being a child.

"We have a lovely red bicycle that was someone's Christmas present once, a doll with lovely black hair – though she is missing an eye, poor thing – and a half empty bottle of soap bubbles. But you are welcome to look around."

He considered her for a moment and fumbled with some coins in his pockets.

"The bubbles please." A newer invention, and certainly after his childhood, but simple enough.

"Oh, please do forgive me, I remember that someone brought in a wooden horse yesterday. Would you like to have a look at it?"

"Gladly. I had one when I was a boy. It was blue with a yellow saddle. I named it Frederick. I brought him everywhere."

Cecily smiled. This horse was not blue. It was red, but she knew that to Mr. Anderson, it would be blue. He would see no other horse than Frederick in this faded piece of wood.

She handed it to him quickly, and he shoved it down the pockets of his orange overcoat. In return, he handed her a round object wrapped in pages from a financial periodical.

"I dreamt about that one last night." A fresh dream, those were the easiest ones to sell. While reoccurring dreams were her personal favourites, they were sticky and heavy, hard to sell.

"May I?"

"Of course."

She unwrapped it slowly, peeling back useless numbers and worries that had no place here. Cecily sometimes felt sad for anyone who wasn't her, who was not working in this shop.

From behind those grey pages, red and gold glitter shone through. It was a Christmas ornament.

"I bought it in 1975 near Covent Garden. It moved with me from a student flat, to a room above a train station, to an expensive hotel, and to my current apartment." Mr. Anderson smiled so brightly, he outshone the banana-shaped lamp in the corner.

"I dreamed that I shattered it while putting up the tree. But I broke it years ago when I didn't secure the tree as well as I thought I had."

There was indeed a hole at the side. Sharp edges lead to the golden glass insides of the ornament.

"It is perfect. I shall put it somewhere special."

The holidays were coming up. People always wanted to make amends, remember, feel, and dream around this time of year. Someone would surely come to the shop and look for something that reminded them of a Christmas that was anything but peaceful. Perhaps the ornament wouldn't be red to them, but green with silver glitter.

What would they trade for it? All dreams were special, there was no way in which she would know what someone would bring up to her shop of broken and repaired dreams.

A Small House

By **Doreen Stock**

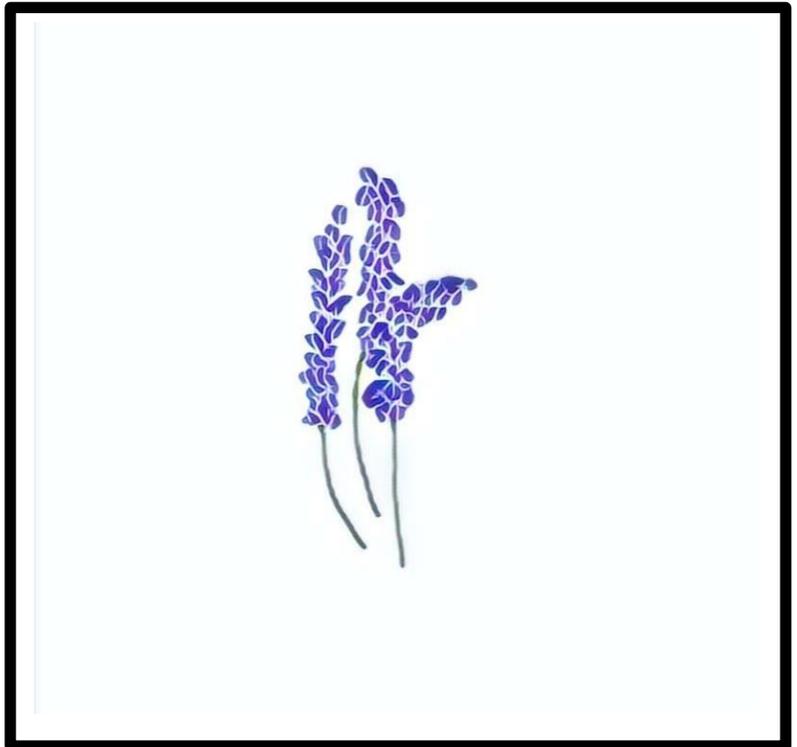
If I had a small house
I would paint it gray
with wide white stripes
around all windows
and doorways

and accents of periwinkle blue
including the balcony
and in the garden I'd plant
only lavender: French lavender,
Spanish lavender, Platinum Blue

I once saw such a house in Montpellier
Driving alone in quest of a novel

Inside would be a small love
who adored the smell of fried
eggs in the morning sunlight
with seeded toast, buttered,
and poetry, and me. The novel
already written.

Fairfax, California poet and memoir practitioner, **Doreen Stock**, recently launched *Tango Man*, a collection of love poems, Finishing Line Press, in August, 2020. Other works include: *My Name is Y*, an anti-nuclear memoir, February, 2019, Norfolk Press; *Three Tales from the Archives of Love*, Norfolk Press, 2018, a work of historical fiction; *Talking with Marcelo*, Mine Gallery Editions in 2017, a book-length interview of Argentine Journalist Marcelo Holot; *In Place of Me*, Poems edited and introduced by Jack Hirschman, Mine Gallery Editions, 2015; *The Politics of Splendor*, Alcatraz Editions, Santa Cruz, 1984, poems and translations. An interview and reading of Doreen's poetry can be viewed online at Marin Poet's Live! She is a founding member of The Marin Poetry Center. For more information: doreenstock.com

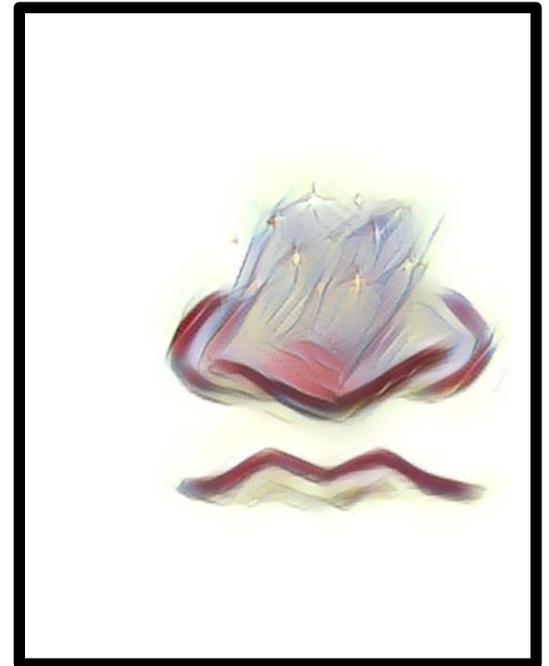


architeuthis

By Michael J Sacco

Michael J Sacco is an artist, author, and tiramisu enthusiast. He believes his words and stories belong to his readers, and he hopes his writing evokes personal meaning for them.

i trace the space between freckles, mapping stars across your sea
reflections in your skin, and i'm in – constellations for me to follow
a selfish love, a satellite love made of me crashing
a fall of wax and wing – in seeking itself it found your shore, redeemed
but now my arms are tired and there's sleep in my eyes and i'm barely treading water along
ripples and waves and i'm going under
all the way down where everything looks like stars
i shouldn't have swam after eating
i shouldn't have eaten after midnight
they say the universe resonates at a b-flat,
but i'm losing it between EKG blips
doppler shifts of sirens outside the window
i'm sinking where sonar can't follow
to depths, under pressure, drowned
swallowed whole, we're on the half-shell
just a couple of cowabunga babies – shushed
pulled by my shoulders – pushed
left jealous of the shallows
left a rhyme of what's above
did you see an angler?
bioluminescent liars in the deep
a pelican eel, too?
a shadow in the dark
there's a frilled shark swimming past the window.
and i hit the bottom
enveloped in black where i can't hear anything,
and i can't hear you
architeuthis.
there's no shower singing
no dresses in the garden
nothing for only a moment and then everything at once.



The Dream Palace

By **Sanjana Rajagopal**

Sanjana Rajagopal is a graduate student studying philosophy in New York City. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Confessionalist Zine*, *Anser Journal*, *Glitchwords Zine*, *Ayaskala Mag*, *Perhappened Mag*, and *L'Éphémère Review*. You can find her on Twitter @SanjanaWrites, and on Instagram @astrangecharm.



In November, the rain came down in sheets of lavender gray. I was twenty-two years old and lonely. In those days, I was living at the top of Fort George Hill, on the borderline between boroughs. I breathed in ballpoint and linen; clutched my heart in my fist, guarding it from dissonance and displeasure. My birthday cake, still fresh in my mind, had lost its sweetness long ago; its scent in my memory was tinged with the bitter reminiscence of blown out candles. The time for celebration had passed.

The boy, electric, came in rather amicably. Divine in demeanor, he cosseted my breath with

a string of pretty words. Every moment that passed between us was one of a kind. I dissected those moments, cherished them, outlined them in winsome stories. The seconds segmented, the stars split; there was some air of great tragedy to us, but I ignored the sentiment and progressed as if we would outlast the gods themselves. His stern eyes reflected each strand of light with brilliance. His high voltage hedonism undeniable.

How I was filled longing for that smile, or a glance thrown in my direction, in a room lush with the spell of Catholic architectural grace. How I nursed wine and wonder while pining in Brooklyn—the natural bookend for the dream palace he built deep in my heart. How a midnight rule took the place of conversation and imagination, phantom hands and lips during the witching hour. How God became a stone in the spoke of a wheel that spun wildly out of control. How my mind became a monument to our dark magnetism, to the poetics of our relation.

Time; a charged divide between us. Whole years we did not know each other. And whole years to come in which we will not know each other.

And yet, how I arranged the petals of our florid fantasy just so, how I pulled a narrative from a single spark on a bridge, fighting against the grain of evangelical consternation. How I held the mirror of him up to the light, covering over the cracks to construct a mythology for the new world.

Of course, there are things he tells me himself. Things I do not have to piece together much later. Rudimentary details. He comes from the Midwest. He talks about his parents with obvious pride, talks about his siblings as if they can change the world.

But we also speak of depression, of the office we will *not* share together, of privilege and prestige and perfectionism. We speak about standards and saviors and sovereignty.

He knows me well. Or well enough, anyways. That's what I'd like to think. It doesn't take too much effort to understand me, or maybe it does, but whatever the case, I think he's got a handle on who I am. I think he finds me endearing in a rather eccentric way. I'm fresh fruit waiting to be picked.

When I think of him, I think of a sea green elevator, of Moscato by moonlight, of the chordal veil spiraling into ivy and illusion. I think of a film of tears spilt on the black and white tile of the bath, of Florence Welch's lilting Joan of Arc tune going up in fire. I think of language and identity, of snowy serenity. A sinister rose hums blood, the edges fuzzing with dire need. I think of risk and reward all wrapped into one cherry bomb of luxe.

Sky grazing

By Jowell Tan

Jowell Tan (b. 1988) thinks in words, which is probably why he likes to write. He's had words published in various places - say hi to him on Twitter (@jwlltn) and he'll gladly show them to you. He thanks you for reading, and hopes you'll have a wonderful day.

trace out the moon with your feet

imagine it yellow hiding behind a cloud

lie on the floor with your cape (blanket) on

lets just pretend you're already in the air.

all you need is a little make-believe
(and also a dash of ingenuity)
to make your stories real.



Barbie's Dream House

By **Jessica McHenry**

Jessica McHenry is a poet, historian, and translator on the Oregon Coast. A transplant from the South, you can find them on the porch singing Dolly Parton at dawn, and on twitter: @jmch_writer

My mama was called Barbie -
Not Barbara, never Barb.
"That's what they call my mother,"
she'd say with a smile.

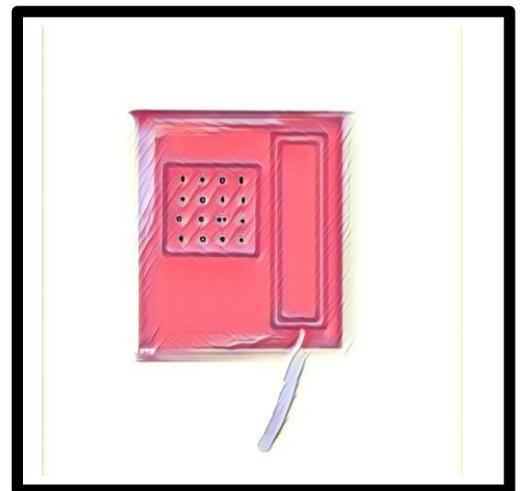
She liked the Eagles and Jim Croce;
she wasn't fond of the "Barbie Girl" song.
But when my cousin called to sing it to her,
she'd smile and sing along.

And when I was little, and we
didn't have money for things on TV,
she'd smile sadly at me and say,
"What about your life-size Barbie?"

In my sleep I built up castles,
hideaways from sleeping dragons;
Horses to ride, flowers to bloom,
A dream house with so many rooms.

I'd run up and down the hallways,
look each night in every room.
But I never found a secret key,
a wardrobe to bring my mama through.

And in my dreams I still go there,
watch the sunset by the lake.
One day I know that she'll be waiting;
She'll be proud of what I made.



on
weighted
blankets
and false realities
By **Sydney Leibfritz**

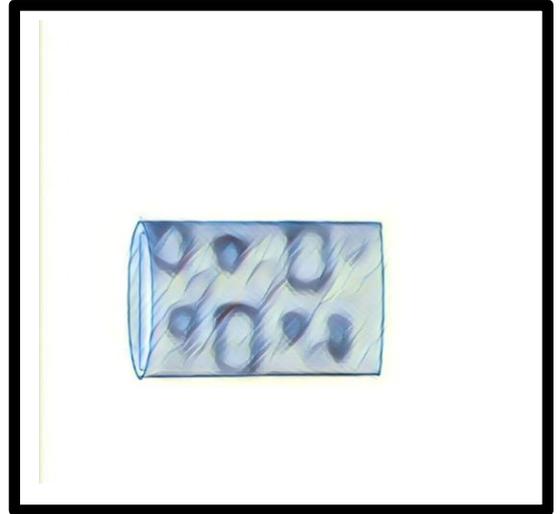
Sydney Leibfritz graduated college with degrees in English and Politics in the height of a pandemic and currently wastes away her twenties from her home in Nashville, TN. An avid Shirley Jackson fan and lover of psychological horror, she currently serves as one of the editors for Ample Remains. You can find her on Twitter @literate-sydney, where she indulges in political ravings, rants about mental health activism, B-rated movies from the '90s, and the state of young adult literature.

On the days I cannot lift my head, I imagine my cheek rests on the lap of someone who loves me. Embracing my pillow and nestled under weighted blankets, I try to mistake the warmth and pressure for another body, another person to cling to. Even in sleep, my shoulders retain their usual tension (the pain never really fades away), but if I picture fingers brushing through my hair at just the right tempo, I lose sight of reality and remember to breathe.

To hide from my thoughts a little longer, I stay piled under mountains of comforters, lingering in the one realm where I can rest at ease. I have become an expert at coaching myself through these days, whispering the things I need to hear under my breath like little prayers. I imagine I am trying to heal someone else; that way, when the words echo back, I almost believe them.

I crave the little moments, the ones anyone could overlook, the ones within reach if I only tried hard enough. We clink plastic wine glasses on apartment balconies while laughing through tears. We teasingly hoard blankets to thaw our frozen feet but wind up entangled together in the end. Some nights, we dance before the ambient glow of dashboard lights while screaming once-beautiful songs until our voices crack. When sleep evades us, we sip midnight coffee and trade philosophies until dawn.

Awake, I dissect every moment to uncover how such tiny miracles remain out of reach. Asleep, I forget how long I have sought refuge within and from my thoughts. Between, I count the lives I have conjured to escape the one I have still neglected to live. I let slumber wash over the guilt, dreaming for love-in-idleness to brush over my eyes, soothing the confusion and righting every wrong. When they open, all will be mended.



They say in dreams, you can only recognize the faces you've seen in real life; I wonder if that's why my imagined protector has no face. I wonder if I have met him yet and just do not know the contours of his cheeks well enough to shape in my hand. I wonder if the warm, golden blur where his head should be means he exists somewhere, and if eventually, we're bound to find each other.

Every morning, I drink in this second life and count down the moments until I can return. Every night, I stare at the ceiling, lost and loved in this half-reality, trying to stay sober until the morning comes.

Juliet, Crying Out

By Julie McClement

Julie McClement (@JulieMcClement) graduated from Centennial College's Children's Media program. She grew up in midwestern Ontario and works as a UX Researcher.

Mom was at the wheel as we passed through Elmdale, the podunk town Mom was raised in. Whenever my Dad's in his plenty of commentary: closed, the corner where out, the spot where he he took out Grandpa's wasn't expecting Mom to rare occasions we drive a tense line, her eyes

Today, however, she

"You know," she said. dream home."



hometown, he always has the businesses that have he and his friends hung got rear-ended the time car without permission. I offer similar stories. On the through, Mom's mouth is fixed on the horizon.

spoke.

"That used to be my

I turned my neck to follow her gesture, towards a red-brick Victorian with an incongruously-medieval looking turret. Ivy climbed up the other side, towards a balcony where lilies bloomed.

That was my mother's dream home? Mom liked everything modern. Stainless steel appliances. Modern art that was all edges and lines. Anything hypoallergenic. When I was in kindergarten, Mom refused to allow me to wear frilly dresses for my class picture, sending me off to school in a suit that made me look like a realtor. That Victorian princess castle was not something Mom ever could have liked.

"I used to fantasize about being on the balcony," Mom said. "I'd imagine I was Juliet, crying out for Romeo."

Juliet? Had Mom been replaced by an alien invader? I wondered if I should check for a fever.

"Doesn't really seem like your style," was all I managed to eke out. Mom's face firmed up again, her eyes taking on their familiar sharp quality.

"It's all in the past," she said. "I'm not that person anymore."

Not for the first time, I wondered who Mom had been when she was younger. I got occasional glimpses in odd places. There are a few old photos of Mom with anti-

gravitational hair and too-tight jeans, looking carefree. Then there's a college transcript I found, with a course in the Pre-Raphaelites that stands out among all the accounting ones. And now, apparently this: a fragile daydream, one strangely similar to some of mine.

I thought about asking follow-up questions, but we were already passing out of Elmdale, and the moment slipped through my fingers. Besides, Mom doesn't like to talk about the past. We live in a world of concrete and glass skyscrapers, one where a flower would be crushed before it could ever bloom.

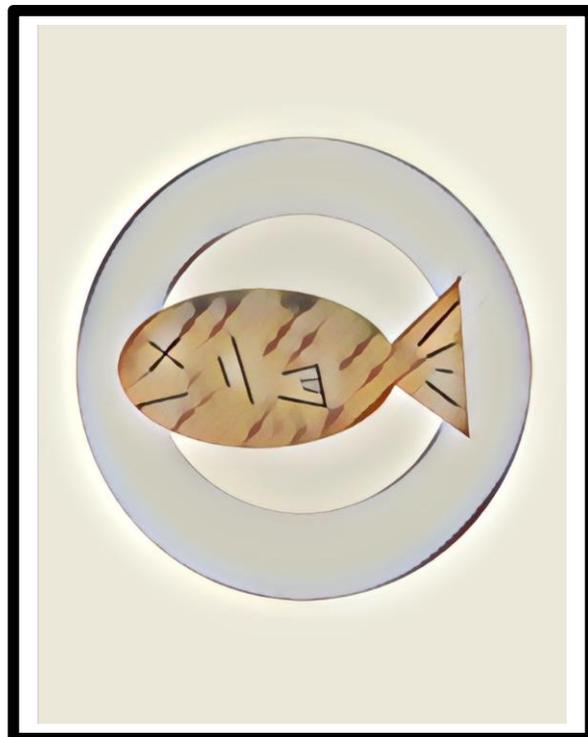
Still, I find myself thinking occasionally of Mom's daydreams, of the line connecting her past to my present, and what she gave up when she moved on to a better life.

Winter Fish

By Monique Quintana

Monique Quintana is a Xicana from Fresno, CA, and the author of the novella *Cenote City* (Clash Books, 2019). Her short works have been nominated for Best of the Net, Best Microfiction, and the Pushcart Prize. She has also been awarded artist residencies to Yaddo, The Mineral School, and Sundress Academy of the Arts. She has also received fellowships to the Community of Writers, the Open Mouth Poetry Retreat, and she was the inaugural winner of Amplify's Megaphone Fellowship for a Writer of Color. You can find her @quintanagothic and moniquequintana.com.

The clouds have frozen over as we prepare the food for your visit. My mother scolds me for not setting the table with our best fine bone china. She plays music from her old box radio, her Maja perfume floating beyond her smile. We will watch out our kitchen window for you to arrive. When you are gone, we will sweep the bits of kelp from the driveway, but parts of it will remain and grow flowers that will brush against the window that we look out now. When you arrive, we will argue about our gods and listen to the sea eggs on the gramophone that will wail for your return home.



My Future Husband

By Kristina Saccone

Kristina Saccone crafts flash fiction and creative nonfiction in the hours between logging off from work and wrangling her young son. Her work has appeared in *Dwelling Literary* and *The Minison Project*, and she has a piece forthcoming in *Unearthed*. You can find her on Twitter at @kristinasaccone or haunting small independent bookstores in the Washington, DC, area.



Not a day went by without seeing him standing next to me: Captain Jean-Luc Picard, of the Starship Enterprise, in a poster mounted next to the mirror in my teenage bedroom. He wore a sleek, red uniform with four pips on his collar and a communicator badge on his chest.

He showed up in my life because I wanted to be just like my big sister. Seven years older than me and off at college, she and her friends had a weekly date to view *Star Trek: The Next Generation* on TV. When home for the holidays, she would watch with me instead, and I got hooked. At 13 years old and still trying to figure out the point of it all, *TNG* gave me crib notes on how the world

worked. It probed everything from understanding existence through the android Data to societal, political, and cultural conflict, which so often arose on their "continuing mission to explore strange new worlds."

Also, in the prime of my adolescence, I was nothing short of boy crazy. New crushes appeared in my journal frequently. I wrote about them with a single-minded passion that I rarely feel for anything today, whether it was Daniel, John, Bart, Michael, whoever. This fixation translated to the screen too, where I obsessed over Jordan Catalano in *My So Called Life*, Dylan McKay on *Beverly Hills 90210*, and other obvious teen icons.

13-year-old me knew it was strange — inappropriate, even — to put a poster of a much older, balding man on my wall. Still, I followed Picard on the show long after my sister returned to college. I wore my feelings on my sleeve at school, telling my friends that he was "my future husband." I admired him. And I learned a lot from watching him.

For example, Picard was human but not perfect. He experienced great trauma, when the Cardassians tortured him or when the Borg turned him into a killing machine. After recovering from these tragedies, he grappled, just like a real human being, with a dark eddy of memories, guilt, and sorrow. Through all that, he remained compassionate and loyal to the Prime Directive, a clear ethos that dictated peaceful norms in Federation space.

Picard also embodied positive masculinity. Though certainly not perfect, he exhibited patience in a way that didn't often show up at my house. At the time, my parents were beginning the long spiral towards divorce. My father was verbally abusive. Alongside missives

about my crushes, my journals testify to how scared I was to live with him. Watching the steady, largely non-violent authority that Picard brought to his ship provided an example of an honorable man, the kind I'd want to marry - rather than the kind who had fathered me.

Even today, Star Trek brings me the warm comfort of nostalgia, like sitting under a blanket on a cold, wet day with a cup of tea (Earl Grey, hot). My affection for the Captain has not waned, but it has changed; now when I watch his new show *Picard*, it feels like my grandfather is up on the screen. Still, when we turn on a rerun of *The Next Generation*, and I'll joke to my partner, "There's my future husband." Also a fan, he gets it. Picard as a character has long embodied what many of us dream of when we hope for the best of humanity.

A Brief

Examination

of Dreams

By **Asya Stepnova**

I've always had intense dreams. Dreams that feel like the scene in *Alice In Wonderland* where she falls down the rabbit hole. Cliche analogy, I know. I wake up with a sense of shock and disorientation that quickly transforms into relief once I realize that I'm back in the "real world." Morning looks that much brighter once I know that none of the events I just witnessed in my brain's underbelly actually happened. Some of my

dreams relate directly to current events. As an almost lifelong New Yorker, who began 6th grade the week of 9/11, my dream on September 12th was that a plane crashed through the window of my grandparent's apartment. That one scared me enough to stay with me for the last fifteen years. I blame that for my fear of flying. Dreams are hard to remember. But sometimes, in that fog of half wakefulness, I reach for my phone and type what I can remember into the Notes app. Other times, I'll text the people I know who appear in my dream world, and tell them what they did. That makes for some hilarious replies, I'm sure I've raised a few eyebrows with my nonsense. It's interesting to think about how stress, confinement, and the current political climate can influence us in ways beyond our waking life.

DREAM # 1

I'm nannying some French kids. Their father doesn't want to pay attention to them because they're from his "old marriage." The kids go use their school bathroom. As I wait for them, I decide to run away because I'm scared of COVID19 and I'm in a school building. The bathroom pipes are making an unusual amount of noise. I realize that the father of the children is stuck in the pipes. I let him out and run away. I try to play it cool when I get outside but he chases me down.



Asya Stepnova is a Russian writer and photographer based in NYC. She holds a BFA in Dramatic Writing and is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing. Her work has been previously published in *433* and *Lovers & Other Strangers*. Her photography has been shown in galleries in New York, Bristol, and Paris. Asya uses writing and visual art as a means to connect with and make sense of the insanity and absurdity of the world. and the never-happened. You can find her on Twitter @literateasydney, where she indulges in political ravings, rants about mental health activism, B-rated movies from the '90s, and the state of young adult literature.

First of all, at the time I had this dream, I was living in Paris during the pandemic. When I first arrived, I thought I broke the toilet in the apartment I was living in. Something to know about French toilets, they are quite temperamental compared to our water-guzzling American ones. I took a strong flush for granted, I quickly realized. I became convinced I broke the toilet because it would not flush. My French is embarrassingly minimal for someone who travels to France to work at least once a year. I am nowhere near capable of speaking to a plumber. On Yelp, I find a listing for an American Handyman In Paris. This sounds like the title of a children's book about a repairman. I call them and explain my embarrassing situation in English. I try to get a price quote, and the man tells me that plumbing and electrical work are much too sophisticated to produce an easy monetary estimate. After I hang up, I realize I didn't break anything, the tank just takes much longer to fill up than I am used to. I am forced to call the handyman and explain to him that everything's fine. He texts me and asks me to leave him a good Yelp review. I compose a sterling review and store his contact info in case I do break something in the future.

DREAM # 2

I am about to make empanadas when I see that I am missing the dough and the cheese. At the supermarket, I remember that I made a therapy appointment. I go to the therapist's office and meet his twin and another sibling. After they leave, a bunch of women in bikinis enter the office and situate themselves in its hot tub. His office is basically an entire studio apartment, there is a hot tub, a bed a television, and an office area with a desk and chair. Donald Trump sits on the edge of the bed and watches the news on TV. The therapist is very good looking. While he asks me about myself, I keep interrupting him and asking him what the hell is going on. Who are these women? Why is Donald Trump watching TV on his bed? The therapist acts like everything is normal. He asks me about my day and how I wound up coming to his practice. He tells me that nothing is out of the ordinary and that I should just focus on our session. He's attractive so I want to trust him. When the therapist gets up to go to the bathroom, Donald Trump makes a creepy kissing noise at me. I am disgusted and horrified. I wake up before my therapist returns from the restroom.

Not much to say about this one except I had it right before the 2020 election. I will probably never know why there was a hot tub.

DREAM # 3

I am watching my friend's dog. He runs away from me and I go searching for him before my friend finds out. I find the dog in Tompkins Square Park hanging out with some shady buskers. They don't want to give me the dog, but I bribe them and get him back. The dog runs away again and I run through some dark woods, looking. I find him for the second time and hug him tightly. I carry him through the woods so he doesn't disappear. I wonder why my friend trusted me to watch their dog, as clearly I am terrible at it. End of dream.

I had this dream after hanging out at a dinner party where everyone had a dog but me. Google tells me that dreaming about this means that I have lost confidence in myself and my ability to protect myself emotionally. Google also says that losing a dog in dreams means that you are overwhelmed by your responsibilities and scared to lose the love you have. As someone who lost their job due to the pandemic, and has never been unemployed this long, it all makes sense.

Fantasy

By Rosalie Beith

Rosalie Beith has been writing for several years and has found a voice in poetry. She lives outside of Boston and when not writing, makes pots from clay.

A seed in a pod
enveloped
in warm soil
safe
secluded
blind and voiceless
a promise

But dream
a sacred mission
daring
chancing
the journey
the dance

A tendril begins its slow growth
seeking life
finding beauty
reaching the sublime

