

# The Blue Guitar



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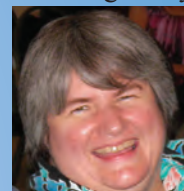
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## Co-Editor’s Note

To get us through the day this past year, it really has been all about the little things: finding my husband’s missing sock in the front bathroom, writing a line of poetry after I had been dry for days, streaming late Saturday nights the outrageously funny “The Birdcage” and the revelatory “1917” — anything to get us out of our slump, boost our morale.



Co-Editor  
Rebecca  
“Becca” Dyer

This past year, we Arizona artists, poets, and writers have found ourselves performing and writing our art through the pain, imagining a better time, a better world, our better selves. Throughout this past year, our imaginations have been a necessity for survival; no longer idle luxuries for our leisure time, our imaginations have sustained us. For that, we are truly fortunate. I shudder to think if imagination ever became unimportant in human existence.

\* \* \*

It is with great sadness that we must report longtime arts supporter Roberta Chorlton has passed. Roberta was a talented violinist and dedicated music teacher who over the many years faithfully came to all of our arts festivals and supported the efforts of both the Blue Guitar and the Arizona Consortium for the Arts. Roberta’s travels throughout Arizona with her husband, David, have inspired many of David’s poems, paintings, and photographs that have appeared in the Blue Guitar and Unstrung. Roberta, with her beautiful presence and warm smile, will be greatly missed. For all of her devoted support, she has our eternal gratitude. In her memory, this issue is lovingly dedicated.

– Co-Editor Rebecca “Becca” Dyer

## Editorial Staff

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[www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org](http://www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org)

Spring 2021

# When the Monsoons Didn't Come

By Madison Beal

© 2021

When I think back on my childhood, my mind is flooded with summertime memories. I can almost feel a sweltering heat. I can hear a symphony of cicadas. I can smell the scent of creosote wafting through the air after the first big monsoon

Every summer, my twin brother and I spent our time in the backyard of our childhood home, in the middle of a big patch of desert, in the middle of the city of Tucson. We waited there for the rains that we knew were coming as they did every year. We watched as the clouds started to stack on top of each other like volcano smoke, hiding the bright blue Arizona sky from our view.

When the rain started to fall and the lightning started to flash, we counted the number of seconds until we heard a clap of thunder. As the seconds between flashes and claps shrank and the raging wind grew stronger, we knew the storm was close. We reveled in that closeness.

When the monsoons came, the desert was transformed. What was once a brittle dust bowl morphed into a deep green oasis that filled me with wonder. How could a place so full of life be considered a desert?

In my adult life, I've spent my summers in faraway places — some more dry like the desert I call home and others so wet and dense I wondered if I would ever see the sun again. While my travels have enriched my life and captivated my mind, I still always longed for the summer rains when I was away.

It wasn't until the pandemic hit that I was finally forced to sit still in the summer heat of my hometown once again. I waited. And waited. And the skies teased me. But the rains I remember



Madison Beal

A lone saguaro stands among other desert plants at Tumamoc Hill in Tucson, Arizona, on July 3, 2020.

Continued on page 4

Madison Beal is a journalism graduate student at the University of Arizona. She has lived in Tucson, Arizona, for most of her life and has a deep love for the plants and wildlife that make the Sonoran Desert so special. She hopes to make a difference in the world through storytelling that uses the truth to inspire a sense of urgency.



**Continued from page 3**

didn't come.

It turns out Tucson experienced its second driest monsoon season in recorded history that summer — a “nonsoon.”

Without the rain, the desert starves. The Sonoran Desert — the most biodiverse desert in the world — only exists because it receives rain in the winter and the summer. Most of this rainfall is a gift from the monsoons.

In recent years, the summer monsoon seasons have been shorter, but not sweeter. The rain pounds down in extreme bursts that deliver less water to the land than they used to. The experts say these trends will only worsen as the climate of our world continues to change.

What is to come of the desert I love if the summer rains from my memory stop falling? Will it cease to exist? Will the desert dwellers suffer? I am not sure. But until then, I will sit and wait and keep my eye on the sky in the hope that the rains will come down like they used to.

# Ferlin Williams

Phoenix Artist

**“Spirit Girl”**  
Graphite on paper  
9 x 12  
February 2020



Ferlin Williams is a Navajo artist, born and raised in the Navajo Nation. He started drawing when he was 13 and has won many awards for his art. He has a great deal of experience in how the Navajo as a people communicate with nature and spirituality. For him, art is calming, peaceful, and relaxing. He loves the moment when a sketch begins to take shape and comes together.



# 4 poems by David Chorlton

## The Last Step

A coyote returned to the clouds  
just now, looked around at the world and  
decided that home  
is an updraft of wind and the promise  
of rain. He stepped lightly on the pavement  
until it was a trail, then followed  
it until rocks were all between him  
and the sky. The mountain's ridge  
vibrated like a harp string when he took  
the leap of dreams away  
from the earthbound morning below.

© 2021



“South Mountain Coyote”  
Watercolor

David Chorlton



Born in Austria in 1948, David Chorlton grew up in Manchester, close to rain and the northern English industrial zone. In his early 20s, he went to live in Vienna and stayed for seven years before moving to Phoenix with his wife, Roberta, in 1978. The years spent in Europe were a time of travel and curiosity that helped fuel his writing. His interests include music from centuries past, visual art, watching birds and conservation of the natural world. He translated poems by the Austrian Christine Lavant, which appear as “Shatter the Bell in My Ear” from The Bitter Oleander Press. His previous book “Speech Scroll,” a long poem, was published by Cholla Needles Press in California.

# Sunday Javelina

A quiet sunlight soaks into the sidewalk  
along Sacaton and warms  
the asphalt back to life.  
It is a tranquil morning.

Windows

are yawning open, and scraps  
of conversation litter the street  
where dogs are walked  
while the early hawk  
scythes through a pigeon flock.

Shrubbery

steps aside to let a shadow  
pass as it comes bristled  
and leading seven more behind it,  
one of them so small it's still a blueprint  
for the animal to be.

Away they go,  
attentive to the ground that bears them  
past civility and traffic to the wash  
that winds

in fifteen modern minutes  
from city into desert: back, back,  
and back, to a canyon in stilled time.

© 2021

# Metamorphoses

An owl's silky voice  
lines the morning darkness  
before it turns to starlings  
gathered on the power lines  
along the waking street.  
And when South Mountain  
spreads its wings  
with a rosy glow from tip  
to rocky tip, it rises  
and comes back down  
to sip from a lantana flower,  
transformed into  
a Monarch balancing  
on a tightrope of air.

© 2021



# Sleeping through the Mystery

The body surfaced  
in a murky tank around the time  
the rodents ran along the backyard wall  
and beside the remote  
the white dog shifted position  
as police arrived to analyze  
the scene. A highly anticipated episode  
promised even murder  
to be a respite from the daily news  
yet the eyes grew heavy as detectives  
combed the ground  
for evidence and coyotes  
ran in silence down the wash behind  
the house. The plot took both paths  
where the road forked, while  
rabbits bathed in moonlight  
on the lawn. In shades of evil suspects  
came on screen, and went about their  
business without creating  
a disturbance. The dishes from dinner  
were drying on the rack  
and an owl flew from  
star to star above the street  
while the investigation ran  
its course in a manner too complex  
for a mind already slipping  
into midnight to follow. The drama  
intensified, a distant howling  
sent a shiver from  
the mountain down to every door  
along the street and the planet  
turned in its sleep. With tension  
mounting and the perpetrator in  
a corner, it would have brought a rush  
to see his apprehension, while  
a talon sliced open the darkness outside  
and on waking  
all that was left to see  
was the procession of names  
in the credits.

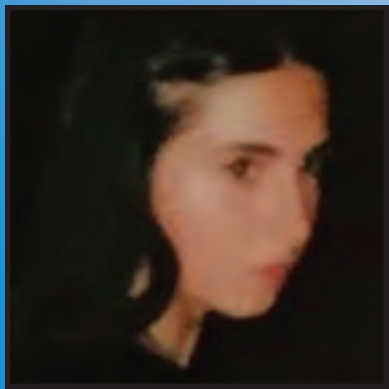
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# Gabriella Jording

Phoenix Artist



“Athena Protecting the Young Hero”  
Oil pastels and ink on paper  
5x7  
2021



According to the artist: “I am an 18-year-old artist born and raised in Phoenix, AZ. I am currently studying art history at ASU in hopes of becoming an art curator. I have done art all my life, but in the last few years I have grown very in love with art.” Go to [www.instagram.com/gabijordart](https://www.instagram.com/gabijordart). Contact the artist at [GabriellaJording@gmail.com](mailto:GabriellaJording@gmail.com).

# Gabriella Jording

Phoenix Artist



My work is inspired by what I learn in my art history classes, ranging from the ancient arts all the way through modernism. I am inspired by everything I learn, so you will see my art embody many different periods and cultures. The goal of my art is to be playful and pleasing to look at, along with transferring everything I learn and see.

- Gabriella Jording

**“Sebastian, Nymphs and the Infant Dionysos”**

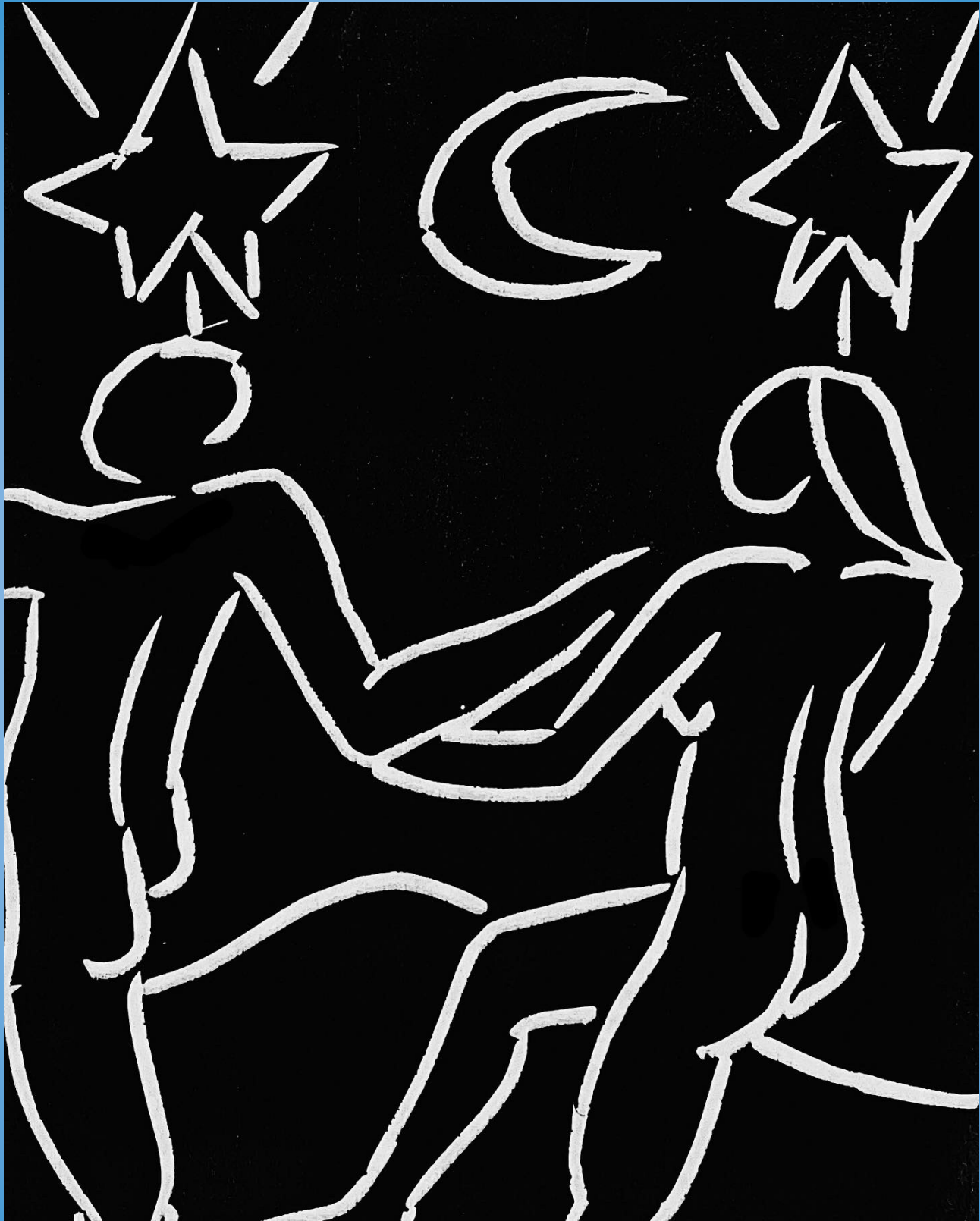
Acrylic paint and ink on bristol paper

9x12

2021

# Gabriella Jording

Phoenix Artist



**"The Dance of the Stars"**

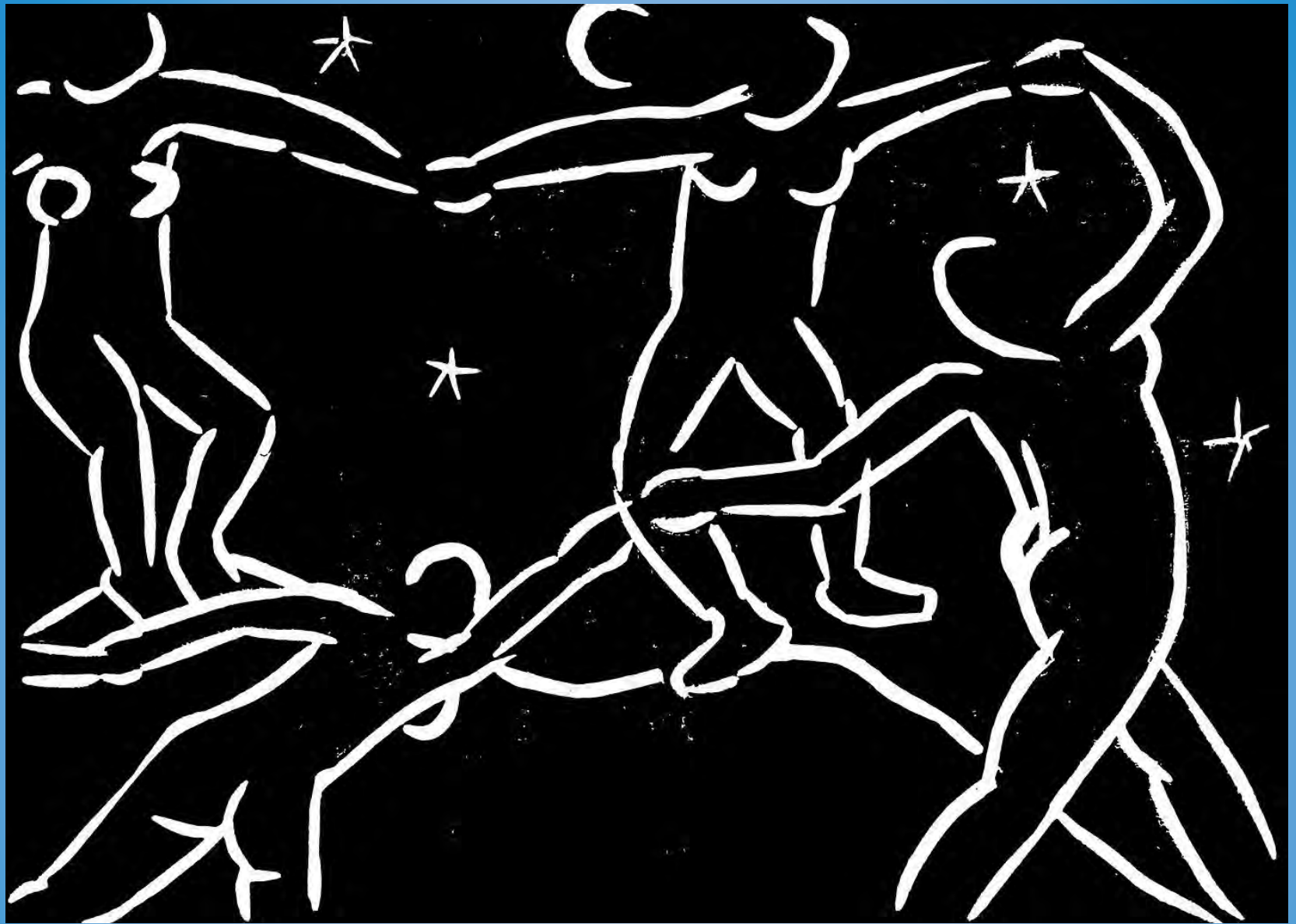
Linocut print on paper

9x12

2020

# Gabriella Jording

Phoenix Artist



**“Moon Dancers”**  
Linocut print on paper  
5x7  
2020

# Gabriella Jording

Phoenix Artist



**"Matisse's Dance I"**  
Oil pastel and ink on bristol paper  
9x12  
2020

# 5 poems by Susan Cummins Miller

## There Is More Here

Fierce winds sculpt nearby dunes, erasing  
all tracks. Hot golden sunlight burns off  
thick mists and the sweet dew  
of early morning. Shadows race  
over crashing Pacific swells  
where fresh and salt waters collide:

If we could back-trace this rivulet  
to its source—through legend, art, and ancient  
hints etched and pecked into bone relics, desert  
varnish and smoke-caked limestone walls—  
what mysteries would we witness? What origin-  
songs would tremble on air currents?

What would we know without being taught?  
There is more here. Always.  
See how one smooth pebble lies prone  
on raw, unforgiving basalt cliffs—as out of place  
and inexplicable as fleshy fears extending,  
stretching this pleated soul.

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Tucson writer Susan Cummins Miller ([www.susancumminsmiller.com](http://www.susancumminsmiller.com)), a recovering field geologist and college instructor, pens the Frankie MacFarlane, Geologist, mysteries. Her award-winning poems, short stories, and essays have appeared in, or are forthcoming in, numerous journals and anthologies, including “What We Talk About When We Talk About It: Variations on the Theme of Love I, II”; “So West: Love Kills”; and New York Quarterly’s “Without a Doubt: poems illuminating faith.” A poetry chapbook, “Making Silent Stones Sing,” will be released by Finishing Line Press in 2022.

# La Brea Woman: A Conversation

Partial skeleton, hidden  
away—twenty-something woman  
wearing dignity like a cloak despite  
fractured skull, despite burial  
in a hydrocarbon shroud for more than  
nine thousand years—

questions rise like bubbles  
in the tar pits, popping  
when they meet air: What did you taste?  
Where did you go? Whom  
did you meet? What surprised you, brought  
delight? What did your laugh sound like?

Did you have hopes? Did you  
dream? Did you watch for a lover  
who never returned? Did you have children?  
Like me, did you make promises—  
so many promises—you couldn't keep?

Did you make music? Did you wander  
the silky, salty, grace notes  
of sound? Did you ponder  
the cool earth of possibilities? Did you wonder,  
ancient woman who lived on the fringe  
and returned to the light in a megalopolis?

Were you curious? Did you ask questions?  
Did you feel the subtle shift in tenor  
when answers appeared, as if  
from the very air? Did you feel  
the ground shake and flow  
underfoot? Did you feel terror?

The air today is pregnant  
with answers, the equifinality  
of end-time mind-melding: *Yes, yes, yes,*  
the wind whispers in the fluttering  
gum trees. *Yes, yes,*  
*Yes.*

© 2021



# Writing among the Ruins

## i. Betatakin Cliff Dwellings

Kaolinite. Montmorillonite. Illite. Common clays that, when mixed with water and temper, serve to raise pottery walls enclosing nothing. Earth holding air.

But once, this simple vessel cradled and transported maize kernels, beans, bones, or water—the triumph of creativity over the struggle to endure, to feed, to leave offspring.

No signature identifies the artisan of this simple, undecorated *olla*—only a thumbprint, surviving the pit fire, surviving time.

## ii. Chaco Canyon

Bones lie under curtains of sandstone—makeshift sarcophagi—light denied the nameless essences, fleshly contents dissipated, disintegrated. On this day, no one

leaves flowers or chants prayers for naked shades in this place where trails converge—pathways engineered as straight as the walls that once marked the passing of the solstice flare.

A rare autumn raindrop, anointing oil for fragile bones, finds access between thin-bedded blocks. Do the stones remember echoed conversations—songs, the laughter

of children, the wails of mourning women? The capricious wind keens with whispers, sharing long-lost intrigues, sharing the reasons the ancients abandoned their dead.

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# Beyond Badlands

Sometimes under olive trees, behind  
the rock church, witness:  
Pork rolls, beer, Guns N' Roses.  
An unsuitable mind. "Prison's not a place  
that anybody really wants to go," he says.  
"But desperation's a curious thing."

*Turn and run.*

*Too late.*

Sometimes in vineyards, beyond  
the badlands, distress  
he can't explain: "My mind's  
getting twisted. Being watched  
messes you up, you know? What happens  
when we die?"

*Turn and run.*

*Too late.*

Sometimes on Calle sin Nombre, before  
the final dance, catalysts:  
Swirling knots on mesquite trees, massive  
graphite paths, abstract patterns. Shadows  
on pale-blue walls. Dark mysteries, absolute  
pleasure, character-killing fuel.

*Turn. Run. Too late.*

*Way too late.*

© 2021

# On Murdoch Mountain, Nevada

Crossing the Permo-Triassic boundary,  
an angular unconformity, the earth's version  
of a clean slate: a few feet of rock strata  
capture the uncertainty of animation

where only ten percent of species survive.  
On one side of the hiatus—millions of years  
of missing time—the last evidence of the slow evolution  
of creatures that once ruled the seas. Nearly all

of the lineages of trilobites, ammonites and brachiopods  
vanish—swept away, as though by Merlin's  
wand. Across the boundary, the future: new bivalves,  
gastropods and vertebrates explore and colonize

vacant niches—digging, swimming, planting wild  
new habitats, showing the pliant toughness of intrepid  
life. Nature abhors a vacuum, seeking instead:  
balance, and the mercy of the unknown.

© 2021

# The Kindest Cut

By Peggy Hendry

© 2021

July 4

Not knowing what to do next, I look around my oddly-unfamiliar kitchen. John's red tomcat, Butch, dozes on the kitchen table. He opens his topaz eyes to squint at me, then stretches his front legs and goes back to sleep. Each hair in his coat stands out in perfect relief.

How clear everything is, how...specific.

The shadows of tree branches against the ceramic Saltillo-style tile transfix me with their wind-choreographed dance. They look more real than I feel.

The smell of this morning's burned bacon fills my head like mucous.

I hesitate, swallow, and say, "I have to learn to live without John." It's the first time I've said it out loud. My lungs seem to collapse, hollowing my rib cage. I almost hope I won't inhale again, but I do.

Turning, I walk to the stairs. On the second-floor landing, I hesitate. The hallway I've been using for forty years looks strange...impersonal, like the carpeted hallways on the cruise ships we love. Loved.

In my mind, my mother's voice says, *For Heaven's sake, Anne. Pull yourself together.* This is no time for you to be weak. According to her, there was never a time for me to be weak.

She seemed to think I chose to have feelings just to inconvenience her.

Our bedroom is the first on the left at the top of the stairs. I touch the doorframe and an intimacy draws me through its emptiness into the forest green-and-white space my husband and I painted together so many times.

I lie down on the bed we shared for decades. "Come back, John. Come back and take me with you."

But he doesn't come back, even though I wait for him through the endless hours of my sleepless night.

July 5

Rise and part the drapes. The mountains are blacker shadows against the dark sky. As I watch, charcoal gray blooms in outer space and the shapes of closer things emerge.

My mind drops into an uninhabited place. When my awareness snaps on again, outdoor details show. But the world outside my room doesn't seem real. I drop the curtain and turn.

A slumped red-plastic bag dominates the chest of drawers. White block letters on its front spell out Personal Belongings. I sit at my dressing table, not caring that my bare behind touches the seat cushion. I draw a deep breath and untie the ghoulish Santa sack. It is unoccupied except for John's wallet and keys, which are tucked into his shoes. No bloody clothes. That's a relief.

I hesitate before handling the wallet. It's such a private possession that I've never looked inside it before. I caress the worn leather, remembering the feel of his butt in my hands.

Removing the cash from the wallet, I set it aside. The only other thing in the bill compartment, a photo of us, rivets me to the chair. Pisa. Right after John pretended to fall off the Leaning Tower. I laughed so hard my face ached. After a moment, I tuck the picture into the mirror over the dresser.

I pull cards out of their compartments, laying them side-by-side on the walnut surface. Credit cards, much-used library card, Medicare cards, driver's license. I kiss the face in the license picture and slip that into the mirror, too.

My husband's feline royalty struts in and delivers his list of

Continued on page 21



The author writes: " 'The Kindest Cut' was inspired by my career as a master's-level social worker, during which I worked mostly for hospice. While counseling grieving family members, I had the opportunity to hear in detail the emotional experiences they underwent during their bereavement. 'The Kindest Cut' is the story of a woman whose husband is killed unexpectedly, and the unusual solution she uses to go on living without him." Peggy Hendry's work has appeared in *The Storyteller*, the *Journal of the Society of Southwest Authors*; *DASH Literary Journal*; *The Dr. T.J. Eckleburg Literary Review*; and *Months to Years Magazine*. One of her stories won a prize in the Tucson Festival of Books Literary Awards in 2016. Before becoming a writer, Peggy was a dancer, craftsperson, and master's-level social worker. She lives in the beautiful Sonoran desert with her husband and the cat who owns them.

Continued from page 20

morning demands. “In a minute, Buster.”

The big tom sits, wraps his tail around his paws, and stares at me with narrowed eyes.

Now the billfold contains only business cards, post-its, and lint—the small detritus of an ordinary life. I put the wallet down and walk to the closet door.

“What does a person wear on a day like this, Buster?”

He yawns.

I choose a black skirt and top it with one of John’s white business shirts, which I tuck in. It still smells of my favorite men’s cologne, English Leather. The garment billows around me. I close my eyes and pretend for a moment that John is standing beside me. The sensation is both comforting and horrible.

I hang his shirt back in the closet and replace it with a charcoal gray blouse of my own. The color matches my ashen face and pewter-toned hair.

The appointment is at 2:30. Two of my friends had offered to go with me, but I’d said, “Thank you, no. It will be easier if I do it by myself.”

My mother’s voice says, *Now you wish you’d let them come, don’t you, Anne?*

Yes, Mother. You’re right, Mother.

At 2:00, I walk out the front door, lock it behind me, and climb into my five-year-old, teal-green Corolla. For a moment I sit in the driver’s seat and stare through the windshield at nothing. Then I remember I have somewhere to be and start the car.

I don’t realize until I get back home that I didn’t feed the cat.

I drive slowly, not because I don’t trust myself, but because the world is still infused with that peculiar clarity. The sky looks like someone upended a blue bowl over the world. The stoplight looks like fresh blood.

While I wait at the light, a couple strolls through the crosswalk. They hold hands. The woman looks at the man and smiles. Another man walks his dog to the corner and waits for the light to change. Drivers negotiate the intersection, some of them talking on cell phones.

My numbness shatters and I strike the steering wheel with both hands. “How can you people just go along like nothing has happened? Don’t you know the world has changed forever?” I feel the urge to run them all down, to crush the pedestrians and demolish the cars and—and be like the driver who murdered John. I shudder at the thought that I might have it in me to kill someone.

The light changes and I pull smoothly into the intersection.

It’s a fifteen-minute drive from there to the funeral parlor but I miss most of it, and come back to my surroundings only when I recognize the sign reading “Eastside Funeral Home.”

The funeral director greets me with professional solemnity. As though he really cares that my husband of forty-five years deserted me.

I opt for a simple graveside service, no viewing, closed casket, and force myself to read the paperwork over and over until I’m sure I understand it. When I’m certain I do, I write a wobbly signature I barely recognize as my own.

Back in the brutal sunlight, I walk to my car and sit in it staring at the windshield. Yesterday’s dried raindrops persist outside the sweep of the wipers. Monsoon season. I hope it doesn’t rain on the—

I put the car in drive and head for the cemetery.

The graveyard is old. There are big trees and, that ultimate indulgence in the desert, grass. It’s too green for a place of death. It offends me.

I see a sign, “Offices in Mortuary,” and shudder.

There is parking next to the building. I swing my legs out of the driver’s-side door and place my feet on the hot asphalt. One of my shoes is black and the other brown. Unmatched, like me.

“Ma’am?” a woman’s voice says near me. “Would you like to come in out of the heat?”

Startled from my reverie, I gasp. “Yes. Yes, of course.... I’m—I’m here to—”

“Make arrangements?”

“Yes...that.”

The woman is young, Hispanic, pretty. The glow of her youth surrounds her, illuminating the subdued lobby of the building that holds the offices, the chapel, and the stainless-steel place of embalming. I shiver, and tell myself it’s because the air conditioner is set too low.

I resent the girl. I picture my hands ripping vitality out of that unwrinkled bosom and stuffing it into John’s corpse. Not all of it. Just enough so we’d have time to say goodbye. Time for me to tell him I love him one last time.

In a simple office, behind a walnut desk, the woman asks, “One plot or two?”

Like she’s offering me sugar cubes for my coffee. That would make me laugh if I heard it at a party. Before. It would have made me laugh before.

I say, “Two.”

“And will we be doing the preparation of the body?”

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“No. Eastside,” and before the young woman can ask another question, “I want him under a tree. And sun—morning sun.”

The young woman pulls out a map of the cemetery. “The plots under the old trees were mostly occupied years ago, but sometimes people buy a plot and end up not using it. One of those estates might be interested in selling....” She spins the map around, points at a rectangle and says, “Let’s go look here.”

We leave the office. Thunderheads pile up behind the mountains and the air is heavy with moisture. The humidity makes it hard to breathe. We walk east, toward a neighborhood just across a street. How can they stand to live here, staring at death all the time?

*They don’t think about it, Anne. Nor should they. It would only sap their strength.*

Strength. Don’t you ever think about anything else, Mother?

The young woman gestures toward a thirty-foot-tall Aleppo pine, which shades the ground beneath it from the merciless afternoon sun but will let morning’s cheerful light shine on the grave. “It’s perfect,” I say. “Are there two?”

“Just the one, but here’s the thing. We can dig the trench twice as deep and when you go, we’ll open the plot and lower you in on top of him. A lot of people do that now.”

John always liked it with me on top. I feel the desire to laugh, followed by the impulse to drop to my knees and beat my head against the ground.

“Okay,” I say. “Let’s do that.”

July 6

It takes all day to write my husband’s obituary. Memories and their accompanying feelings overwhelm me. I cry until my head aches, take aspirin, and cry some more. My body is still breathing, but my life, my real life, is over.

July 7

After another sleepless night, I go to pick up our—my—children and grandchildren at the airport. The small grandkids are a blur of motion and primary colors. It hurts my eyes to look at them. They run to me, squealing in their shrill voices. The older grandchildren and adults follow, faces somber.

*You have to be strong for them, Anne. They need you.*

Yes, Mother.

My oldest hands me the new baby. I make my mouth do that thing where the corners turn upward. At the last second, I remember to show my teeth. I say, “How beautiful she is. I only wish her grandfather was here to see her.”

My youngest begins to sob. Her husband puts his arm around her and turns her to cry into his chest. “It’s okay,” he says.

No, it’s not.

I ask, “Who wants ice cream?” The little children cheer. The men gather the baggage and the group walks into the glare beyond the sliding doors.

July 10

The funeral is an ordeal. Not just because my one-and-only is in the ground, but also because I have to be patient with people’s condolences. They say lame things, like “He’s with Jesus now.” John would laugh his ass off. Or, “He’s in a better place.” How would you know? Or worst of all, “He’s watching over you from Heaven.” But I nod, thank them, and invite them to the house for a buffet lovingly prepared by the nearest warehouse membership store.

*A strong-minded woman would have cooked for herself.*

Yes, Mother.

July 15-30

Extended family who came for the funeral trickle away over the next week or so. My children are the last to leave.

At the airport my oldest hugs me and whispers, “Are you sure you’ll be okay, Mom?”

I’ll never be okay again. “Of course, I will.”

“I don’t know what I’d do if something happened to you. And Susie is already falling apart, from Dad.”

I pat her back. “I’ll be fine, sweetheart. And so will your sister. Susie’s stro—braver than she seems.”

She sobs a laugh. “If you say so.”

I cup her cheek with my hand. “I know so.”

We hug goodbye, and I wait until they disappear through the security gate before walking back to the car.

I pull a couple of dollar bills out of my wallet and drive to the exit. As I reach the kiosk where I’ll pay the parking fee, I say to myself, “They have their own lives to live. The question is, do I live mine?” I catch myself. “I mean, *how* do I live mine?”

“Excuse me?” says the woman who takes the money.

I shake my head. “Nothing.”

“Well, have a good night.”

“Yes, you too.”

The paperback I was reading when the policeman rang the doorbell sits on the coffee table, next to the untouched quilt the police department volunteer gave me. I try to read the book, but I can’t concentrate. After starting the page I’m looking at for the third time, I throw the annoying thing across the room.

I can’t follow stories on TV, either.

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My bank account refuses to balance.

I only do what I have to, knowing in a way I never did before just how unimportant the things I used to worry about really are.

August

Time passes with infinite slowness. I sit in John's chair, and sleep (when I can sleep) on his side of the bed. It's better than looking at the voids where he's supposed to be.

Buster spends the nights on the pillow on my side of the bed, curled into a corkscrew of orange fur. I poke him and say, "Wake up, cat. If I don't get to sleep, neither do you." The rude animal just stretches and goes back to sleep. It becomes a nightly ritual.

I take over-the-counter sleep remedies that don't work. I wonder what would happen if I took them all at once and washed them down with vodka. A lot of vodka.

I picture how I would look if I threw up and choked to death on my own vomit. I don't want my children to have that image in their minds. Especially not Susie.

September

I am less numb now that two months have passed. I miss the sensation that everything was happening to someone else. Living was easier that way.

I sit on a bench in the mall, staring at displays of clothes that are too young and too immodest for me. The world doesn't want me anymore. It doesn't even want my money.

A woman's voice says, "Excuse me."

I look up, startled. The person standing beside me is wearing a red-and-yellow muumuu, and her spiked hair is dyed orange with red tips. It looks like her head is on fire. She appears, and this leaves me speechless, to be about my age.

"I don't want to intrude," the over-bright vision says, "but... do you want to talk about it?"

"What?" Is she crazy? Should I be scared?

*Anything can be a weapon, Anne.*

I tighten my grip on my purse.

The other's smile bears an apologetic twist. "It's just that I've seen the look on your face in my own mirror." She shrugged one shoulder. "Sometimes it helps to talk to a stranger. You can say things to me that you couldn't to anyone in your normal life." Both shoulders move up and down this time. "If you want to."

I stare at her.

"My name's Vivien, by the way." She holds out her hand and, by reflex, I take it and shake. After that, it seems rude not

to invite her to sit down.

For a while, we sit looking at each other's faces in silence. Then I say, "My husband died on the fourth of July."

Vivien makes a sympathetic sound.

We talk on the bench, we talk as we walk, and later, we talk while she eats ice cream and I mash peach sorbet into slush. Vivien is a widow, too. She understands.

One day, Vivien brings me a stack of frozen dinners. She says, "Make yourself eat one of these every day."

"I have no appetite."

"Pretend you do. It worked for me. And come to grief group with me, just once. It helps to be with people who are going through the same things."

I wrinkle my nose. "Grief groups are for weak people. I don't want to listen to other people whine about their problems. I'm depressed enough already."

Vivien raises one eyebrow.

"I didn't mean you're weak, Viv. You're great. I'm just not a group person."

Vivien shrugs. "Your loss."

October

Sometimes, just to feel alive, I get in the car and drive to local landmarks. One day when the temperature drops into the high eighties, I visit San Xavier Mission, the 200-year-old "White Dove of the Desert."

Inside, the sanctuary is dim and cool, and a few people kneel in prayer. The fragrance of eternity fills my lungs. The paintings on the walls and ceiling have been restored, and gold paint winks in the semi-darkness. The statue of Virgin Mary blesses the space with extended arms.

For a moment, I consider the idea that John and I could be together again when we're both dead. It's something to look forward to, or it would be if I believed it. If I believed it, I'd be ready to go right now. Then I remember how annoying my relatives were when they were alive. I wouldn't want to be stuck with that bunch for eternity.

*I was never annoying.*

Oh, please.

*I wasn't. I'm not.*

I light a candle for my beloved, even though I'm not any kind of a Christian and neither was he.

On the drive home, a car passes me then slows down. The offending vehicle bears a bumper sticker that reads "WWJD?"

An explosion of tears floods my eyes. Every time John saw that bumper sticker, he would say, "Those people want to know what I would do," and guffaw. I got more than tired of hearing

it over the years but now—I'd give anything.

One day while parked in the lot at the grocery store, I start to wail, "John! John! Don't be dead!" A girl returning a line of shopping carts to the store sees me and comes over. I flap my arms to shoo the intruder away. She goes back into the store. I turn the key in the ignition and drive off before she can tell anyone about the crazy lady raving in her car.

One day I can't find my purse. After a frantic search of the house, I find it in the freezer beside a pint of John's favorite chocolate-on-chocolate ice cream.

I contemplate the dessert, remembering his laughing face when he coaxed me to have "just a little more," which he always did even though he knew I spent my life trying not to gain weight. I grab the container and throw it at the sink. It hits the porcelain surface just below the faucet, and the lid pops off. Forgetting my handbag, I close the freezer door and walk to the knife block on the counter. I choose the strongest knife and slash the frozen box, over and over.

"I'll fudge chunk you, you bastard."

When the frozen calories are nothing but a muddy brown lake surrounding candy islands, I sob. Neither the rage nor the tears make me feel any better.

But the experience does make me wonder about my mental health.

October 31

I go to see my doctor, a man near retirement age who has treated both me and John for decades.

"I'm sorry about John," he says, lowering himself into his desk chair. "I imagine you've been having some problems since he passed."

*Passed?* An image of my husband throwing a football angers me. I glare at the doctor and say, "Yes, I have had problems since he *died*. In fact, I came today because I think—I think I may be...."

He leans forward. "Going crazy? That's actually normal for women who are grieving. You often have hyst—strange ideas and psychosomatic symptomology."

I frown. "Just women?"

"How long's it been? Four months? By four months many men are looking for a new relationship."

"So, women grieve and men—what—buy a newer model?"

"Men get over it and move on. You should, too."

He puts his hand on my knee. My body rigidifies. Now that John's gone you think it's okay to grope me?

"You're still an attractive woman, Anne. You could love again."

With great care, I take his hand and place it on his own knee. He frowns.

Is this what I have to look forward to? Being called hysterical by grabby men? "Doctor Williams, is there a medication that can help me?"

He blows air out his nose. "Sedatives would ameliorate your emotional over-reactivity."

"No, thank you. Is there anything else?"

His nostrils flare. "An antidepressant might take your edge off."

I dredge up my best humble smile. "I'd like one of those, please, Doctor."

He reaches for his prescription pad. "It'll take about six weeks before it reaches its full effectiveness."

"Six weeks? Don't bother."

As I leave the doctor's parking lot, I see the WWJD bumper sticker again.

What would John do if he were here and I was in the ground? Would he just "get over" me, or would he miss me forever like I'll miss him? "Maybe I'm just too weak to live."

*For Heaven's sake, Anne. Pull yourself together.*

At home, I make myself a gin-and- tonic and flop onto the sofa in the dark living room. I haven't turned on the lights or opened the drapes since the reception after the funeral.

I drain my drink and make another. My thoughts turn to the knives in the kitchen. I imagine blood on the shower floor, warm and beautiful in its contrast to the cold white tile. "It could be performance art, *Suicide in Red Relief*." I laugh, and listen to harsh echoes reverberate in the shell of what once was my home.

"I can do that."

*Suicide is the coward's way out.*

Shut up for once.

I set my G-and-T, in its sweating half-full glass, on the unmarred coffee table. I don't care that it will leave a ring on the wood.

I go to the kitchen and pull the knives out of the block. None of them is sharp enough. After chewing my lip for a moment, I stride to my sewing room. I'll use Mother's old-fashioned scissors, the ones with the black handles and sharp tips.

*I didn't buy those scissors so you could cut yourself with them.*

Shut up.

*Maybe you should call Vivien.*

Fuck Vivien.

I test the blades with my thumb and they are sharp enough to scratch my skin even though I'm not pressing down. I take

Continued on page 25



the scissors into the master bath and place them on the built-in shower seat, between my safety razor and pear-scented shampoo.

My next stop is the closet. I choose the white nightgown John always said made me look like the bride he carried over the threshold of our first apartment. I leave my clothes where they fall.

Striding to John's office, I scabble in his desk until I find a yellow pad. I need to write a note. No, two notes.

The one for the front door is easy: "I have gone to be with John. Call the police. Don't try to get in yourself. I don't want anyone I care about to see me this way. Anne." I find transparent tape in the desk's central drawer, and go downstairs.

Afraid the seal might not hold or the wind might snatch the note away, I plaster multiple layers of the sticky stuff around all four edges.

"Anne, are you okay?" It's our neighbor, Mrs. Albright. "Nightgown in the afternoon, are you sick?" I grit my teeth but force a cheery smile before I turn to reply. "Just tired. I didn't sleep well last night."

"You'll call me if you need anything, won't you?"

"You'll be the first."

I close my door from the inside and turn the deadbolt.

Back upstairs, I pick up John's retirement-gift gold fountain pen, and start the second note. "My beloved daughters." I cross that out and write, "To my family," then, "To my beloved family." It's still not right but I move ahead anyway. "I'm sure you'll understand." I scribble over that, too. "I find I can't face life without your father."

*All the things I said about you being weak were for your own good.*

Shut. Up.

I write, "It's not that I don't love you all." I pause, then add, "very much. You are," I hesitate at the hated word, "strong." I stab it onto the page so hard that the paper tears. Taking a deep breath, I make myself continue. "You have each other. You'll be okay. Take care of Buster, for your father's sake.

"This isn't your fault."

The pen hovers over the paper before I write, "I'm sorry."

I think of putting the note in an envelope but can't be bothered. I leave it on the desk and hasten through the master bedroom to the bath.

Sliding the shower door closed, I sit crossed-legged on the floor with my back against the built-in seat.

I spread the scissors' blades and hold them by the screw at the hinge. This enables me to both push down on my chosen blade and control the other. I look at my left wrist, thinking I'll cut across it, but notice that veins — arteries? — run up my

forearm toward my elbow. If I cut up instead of across, I can sever those, as well. More vessels, more blood, faster death.

*John wouldn't do this, Anne. Neither would I.*

I'm not him. And I'm not you.

I rest my forearm on my knee and position my weapon. My hand quivers.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Hesitate, shaking.

Cut.

The blade hits the thumb side of my forearm, and I miss the veins altogether. The slice is shallower than I intended, but blood still rises from it.

Unlike the bright red splatter in the horror movies John liked, my blood is dark, rich, almost black where it's thickest. I'm fascinated by the changing shades of it as it flows down the side of my arm.

The cut doesn't hurt. It feels...like I've found something I didn't know I needed.

The thin stream waterfalls onto the white fabric covering my thigh, and the spasm in my brain loosens a little. As crimson spreads across my leg, the cramp in my head lets go more and more. It's as though the pain in my mind is draining out of me with the blood.

The trickle thins as it follows the texture on the shower floor, and the plaques of hardened agony around my heart crack, releasing a gush of emotional pus. Yes, oh yes.

Is this why they used to put leeches on people who were sick? Because they knew a person's emotional pain could be sucked away along with their lifeblood?

Maybe it's not either-or, live or die. Maybe I can do both. Live, and siphon off the pain of living when I need to. Be here for my family, and die in tiny increments, in secret.

I inhale and my lungs seem to take in more air than they have since John died. When I exhale, long and slow, my shoulders drop and the back of my neck relaxes.

The shallow ends of the cut begin to clot, and it occurs to me that I should be careful about how much I let myself bleed. I grab a towel from the rack, wrap my arm in it, and apply pressure to the wound with my other hand.

The first aid kit lives under the bathroom sink. I pull it out and wrap the slice in layers of gauze and elastic tape. Looking at the finished bandage, I shake my head. I should have cut myself someplace where it would be easier to hide the scar. Next time I will.

My face in the medicine cabinet mirror still looks pale. I'm still too thin to be healthy. But the look in my eyes has changed. It's no longer the expression of a person who plans to die.

It's the clear and focused gaze of a woman who has found a way to survive.

# Lilach Keren

Scottsdale Artist



**“I’m Here Above NYC”**  
Mixed media on canvas  
30 inches by 40 inches  
2021

Lilach Keren is passionate about exploring the emotional depths that come with creating different layers in a piece, building these layers both physically and digitally. Her style mostly revolves around abstract and figurative abstract, with colors being a significant focus of variation and play. She is best known for creating mixed media painting that combines many mediums and techniques, including oil painting, alcoholic ink, photography, acrylic, pencil, charcoal, polymer, gel, and even clay. She was born in Israel and now lives in Scottsdale, AZ. She has been practicing art all of her life and studied art formally and informally. Go to <https://www.artbylilac.com>. Contact the artist at [lilach@artbylilac.com](mailto:lilach@artbylilac.com).



# Lilach Keren

Scottsdale Artist



**“Journey”**  
Acrylic on canvas  
4 inches by 6 inches  
2021

My artwork comes from my deepest feelings, and each time I publish my art I reveal another layer of myself. I work in mixed media and build my pieces one layer on top of the other; each layer adds a different medium. I love colors and textures, the endless possibilities they enable and the various ways they make us feel. I enjoy the process of abstract painting, developing it with varied techniques, materials and colors while also striving to convey emotions and tell my story.

- Lilach Keren

# Lilach Keren

Scottsdale Artist



**"Inner Sight"**

**Mixed media on canvas**

**16 inches by 12 inches**

**2021**

# Lilach Keren

Scottsdale Artist



**“Vulnerability”**  
Oil on canvas  
20 inches by 16 inches  
2018

# Lilach Keren

Scottsdale Artist



**“Here Comes the Sun”**  
Mixed media on canvas  
30 inches by 40 inches  
2021

# 4 Poems by Alfred Fournier

## Heron

*After Jean Connor*

I was old before I dreamed myself  
to timelessness here  
Now a clock lies  
flattened across a pond of moments  
some might call memories

Like a heron  
at water's edge I stand  
motionless hours  
grey statue to the hurried young  
Some scoff tired phrases  
like *out to pasture* but

at times tension coils  
in my taut stance  
arches toward sudden  
quicker-than-eye  
stab into silence

Stunned fish sags  
dripping in my beak

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Alfred Fournier is a writer and community volunteer living in Phoenix, Arizona. His poetry and nonfiction have appeared in *The New Verse News*, *Plainsongs*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Third Wednesday*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Ocotillo Review* and elsewhere.

# Consent

I ache to turn a corner  
nod from a stranger  
shared dirty secret  
smile in the dark  
too-fast car ride  
curving mountain pass  
look her in the eye,  
or him, each knowing  
we are here we choose this

incense burns to twisting  
smoke skin peeled back  
red and purple organs  
placed upon the table. Oh God,  
the startling touch  
of flesh on flesh soul  
like a vine after rain  
grows calmly  
into silence

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# Parted Curtain

Mother's deathbed pillow,  
clinical and white  
on her empty bed.

A narrow strip of sun  
between drape and window frame  
reveals the muted imprint  
of her last sleep.

I wonder if, in the night, she reached  
to draw aside the curtain,  
discerning stars from Midwest dark,  
head falling back, thinking,

*here I come.*

© 2021

# First Love

enraptured bird adoring sky  
slides through air  
assured and true

swoops and glides  
darts and rides  
the currents of an endless blue

his only creed  
the blue he loves  
is boundless and immutable

he sees the blue  
reflected back  
as if it were continuous

no principle in him explains  
the way that sky  
exists in glass

© 2021

# 4 poems by German Dario

## broken cocoon

*“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s;  
and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:21)*

I wish I was a builder  
a fixer, a handyman of sorts  
to build, and maintain, little cocoons  
for little hands, little sighs,  
and little dreams  
so they would not fall  
to the tiled floor, and break

what is this world that waits?  
A world I wish  
I would not have known,  
                  sometimes,  
A world of plastic islands  
black rivers,  
and teflon men exalted for their selfishness

A little gem house, I would build  
for little lips,  
little feet, and  
little thimble toys

Away from harm of tongue and horn  
your little ears,  
and little neck,  
could take long candy dreams

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German Dario resides in Tempe, Arizona with his wife, two sons, three dogs, a guinea pig, many plants, and sometimes a fish. He recently published work in Gyroscope Review, San Pedro River Review, Into The Void, The New Verse News, The Acentos Review, and The American Journal of Poetry.

# waltz and ivory

if the sun is Romeo  
then the moon Juliet

voluminous in her silence of  
misfortune or elation

intrusive beyond her distance

they call them months  
she smiles and exhales  
seconds

before and after  
you spilled your life

a cup for first fantasies  
then wishes and last  
always last regrets

for herself

She

is sex and  
splendor

© 2021

# secret dance

She

my serial voyeur  
of one shape  
sharp

I tell her secrets  
arms firmly planted  
on the windowsill

through the mouth  
in the dark  
I spill my dark  
once milk  
turned black as night  
to frame her frame

I speak secrets  
within sighs  
sometimes  
so close  
it breaks the skin  
and tiny drops of blood  
seep out

we are alone

each other's beholder

we dance

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# man mourns mother

red silk bathrobe  
adorned with oriental motifs  
baring naked crossed legs  
he drinks coffee in  
    morning light  
entering at small angles  
breaking planes on furniture

persistent with chores  
and holidays marked for calls  
as they have always been

his thoughts   mirrors  
in a silent labyrinth

when he takes a partner  
    if he does  
        and the light touching him  
        hopes he can  
the fidgeting may come to pass

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# 2 poems by Elena Rozenblum

## A Stranger in the Crowd

*The following poem is dedicated to the immigrants who make the difficult step of moving their families to a new country with all of its challenges and unknowns.*

She is a stranger in the crowd, an alien by choice.  
A weed who lost its roots, migratory bird without a voice.

My Son! My love! This foreign land holds better life for you.  
Hang on! and it will love you back as I do.

The scars of hardship and neglect ingrained as canyons on her heart.  
But hope entwined within its rim could not be torn without a fight.

Embrace her distinct colors! I will urge.  
Since they are not of poison but of beauty.  
As wild flowers blooming through a desert-like terrain,  
keeping them safe is our duty!

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Elena's poetry was previously shared only with her closest friends and family. She believes that sharing her work with the AZ community is as expanding her circle of family and friends. Elena finds her inspiration in nature and people's hearts. She and her family live in Chandler and they love the richness and variety of Arizona's landscape and culture.



# The Secret Dell

Treading on the steps of many,  
with the mighty pines escorting me farewell,  
A whispering wind told me a tale,  
of a long forgotten dell.

Steadfast rocks preserved its secret,  
shielding it from decay's wrath,  
While the graceful birches greeted  
any stranger on its path.

I could hear men's cry and howl!  
Arrows pierce the misty air.  
Fire tongues rampage the valley,  
and the agile deer flee! Drenched in despair.

Countless tears had washed that valley,  
Pushing life through cracks of stone,  
While the moonlight as a loving mother  
sheltered it from dusk to dawn.

I was lost! That day of wander,  
parting veil of space and time.  
I was found! That day of wonder,  
woken from a slumber by nature's  
melodious chime.

© 2021



Elena Rozenblum



Elena Rozenblum

Above are birches and to the left is a dell, both near Parks, Arizona, in Coconino County.



# Enter Chains

## By Alex R. Encomienda

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### *Indifference*

Charmelon walked along the vehicles towards the aft of the ferry. He watched people throw on their raincoats and observe the scenery during the rainstorm's interval. It had been raining too hard so instead of standing in his usual spot by the railing, he sat on a bench overlooking the railway ahead.

A dark-haired woman stood closely for a moment. He saw that she was observing the scene. She didn't notice him. He examined her while she fiddled with her tongue.

"Nice day to visit Nova Scotia."

She jumped, clutching her chest. "Oh, you startled me. I thought I was alone!"

"Me too! Not too much of a crowd lover. You can sit here if you'd like."

"No, thank you. I'm just going to wander a bit. It's my first ferry ride."

"Oh, how exciting! However, you've come to a terrible fate as this is a first class ferry that leads straight to hell so we're all doomed."

The woman giggled. "Well, in that case I might be exactly where I belong."

"Ah, the same for me."

There was a moment of silence.

"I was wondering, once we get there, would you like to have a drink?" he asked.

She hesitated. "I have a husband. I'm sorry; it was my mistake for not mentioning him but he's the reason I'm going to Nova Scotia."

Charmelon gave a quick chuckle but then scrunched up his face.

"Does he satisfy you sexually?" he asked out of spite.

The woman walked away without saying a word.

Charmelon gave a short laugh. He expected the woman to react angrily as he gave her no chance to prepare for his approach.

As he stood up and approached the railing, he immediately felt refreshed. He turned to his left and saw a man standing against the railing with the edges of his coat flying with the wind.

The man briefly looked his way and Charmelon recognized him immediately.

"Ragnar! I thought you were long gone."

"Ah, I decided to stick around for a few months. It looks like we'll be traveling companions today though. What a small world."

"Why are you headed to Nova Scotia?"

"I'm visiting my sister. She moved there a few months back; and you?"

"I'm visiting my in-laws."

Ragnar turned to him excitedly. "You married Gloria?"

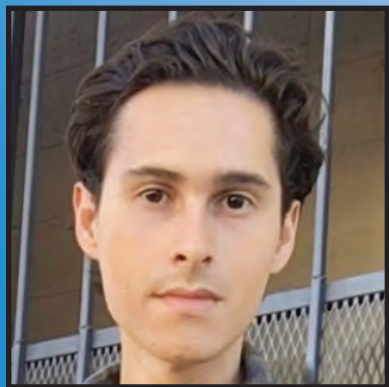
Charmelon nodded. "We were going to tell you as soon as we saw you. I mean, we had our differences, but we talked and things have been quite alright."

"Excellent, I knew you'd be the Casanova I admired in high school."

Charmelon felt like explaining things to Ragnar. The last time they spoke, he told Ragnar that he was going through a bout with Gloria. He didn't want Ragnar to think that he was in a hole. Whenever he bit his lip or fiddled with his tongue, Charmelon knew that he was keeping something from him. It was bothersome.

"So how have you been these past few months?"

**Continued from page 42**



Alex R. Encomienda is an author and editor of literary fiction, genre fiction and absurdist fiction. Alex has also been a diverse poet since the age of nine. He was born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona where he attended lecture classes and writing workshop classes in college. Alex spent two years working as an editor in chief for the online literary journal *Labyrinthine Passages*, which is now archived. Alex's current literary project, "Happiness," is active as of January 2021. He often expresses ideas of escapism, absurdism, existentialism and philosophy in his works. Alex currently lives and writes in El Mirage, AZ.

“I’ve been alright. Well, sort of chained up in something but it’s not a big deal. Ever since I left Vergennes, I’ve been feeling somewhat unprovoked or unrealized if you will.”

Charmelon turned to him. “Unrealized?”

“Well, that’s not a good word. I guess I just feel like I haven’t been keeping up with my goals these days. I’d wake up feeling motivated to keep going on certain occasion. Other times, I’d feel detached. Perhaps, I just have to get out more.”

“That’s anxiety. Be careful not to convict yourself. It’s difficult to escape once you’re chained.”

“Well, I’m just glad you can relate. As far as I know, the bout with Gloria is the closest you came to being me.”

“You don’t have to say that, Ragnar. You just have to assert yourself. The world is a giant purgatory and we are the creators. Disregard everybody else and make it a good place for you.”

“Well, considering that my life is hell right now, I don’t think God likes me very much.”

“What are you talking about, Ragnar? You’re in charge of your own life. God doesn’t make decisions for you. Hell, if God made decisions for me, I’d probably be a perpetual virgin!”

Ragnar tilted his head in disagreement. “Perhaps, we were made to suffer.”

“I can’t grasp that archaic idea. I’ve had terrible bouts of torment but hey, it all worked out in the end.”

“How would you know?”

“Come again?”

“I mean ... how would you know for certain if things work out the way you want without knowing everything?”

“That’s a specific question. Why do you ask?”

Ragnar turned to the railing again. “No reason.”

“You’re keeping something from me, aren’t you?”

“No, of course not. What would be the reason for that?”

“Perhaps, you find it amusing.”

Ragnar scoffed.

Charmelon looked closely at him and saw that he was biting the skin from his bottom lip.

“I’m nervous about a woman I’m seeing. That’s all.”

“Ah, well play your cards right. Women these days are conniving whores. They toy with your feelings and well ... you get the point.”

“No, I don’t get the point but I’d rather not think about it.”

“Look, you know all about me and Gloria. I saw your face that day when I told you that I was in a hole. You were all I had for assurance, Ragnar. Now that she and I are together, I can be honest. I’m not certain I made the right decision. Yeah, she’s good in bed. Will I grind for her though? Do I even want to live with her forever? These are questions that I ask myself in the morning. Suffice it to say, I would’ve been alright if she had left me altogether as long as I forgot soon afterwards. I didn’t

forget, Ragnar. Just in case you thought I had forgotten ... I didn’t.”

There was a short moment of quietness and the wind swiftly pushed against their faces with its unwanted howl.

“Do you really think that she was cheating on you?”

“I’m not certain but I saw it in her face. Each time I looked at her, I saw that she was having an affair. It was almost like I was unveiling some kind of myth and the more I watched her, the more obvious it was to me.”

“Perhaps, she was just upset. You can be a bit much sometimes.”

Charmelon waved his hand at him. “Stop it, Ragnar. I’m becoming physically ill.”

Ragnar gazed at the waves while Charmelon leaned against the railing with his hand against his waist to ease his nausea. However, the more quiet and peaceful it became, the more Charmelon began to think about Gloria. The nausea began to subside and he straightened his posture.

“Do you ever wonder why we want, Ragnar?”

“I suppose it’s human nature to want what we can’t have. I try to avoid desire altogether. It has led me to nothing but torment.”

“I’m talking about domestic intimacy, Ragnar. Do you think it’s natural to cheat without the desire to cheat?”

“Elaborate.”

“Well, let’s say that you want to start a family. You’re well intentioned and have empathy but somehow, you’re thirsty for something you’re not supposed to want. You deteriorate inside but you maintain your construction of a family. There’s only a matter of time until you start to fake everything because that’s not what your heart desires. I think that we are bound to give into our desires without actually wanting to. Sometimes, I think that’s the nature of humankind.”

Ragnar looked uncomfortable.

“Is that really what you want to think about right now, Charmelon?”

“Wouldn’t you?”

“She wasn’t having an affair, Charmelon.”

Charmelon began to reminisce about Gloria. “She was so afraid of me that day I confronted her, Ragnar. You should have seen her face. She apologized. That’s what confused me. Why would she apologize if she didn’t do anything?”

Ragnar shook his head. “Women are foreign to me. Perhaps, you should ask her.”

“I’ve heard it countless of times. Not just with Gloria but with other women too. Excluding Gloria, I think that women are full of shit. They obviously enjoyed having sex with their lover. Why would they apologize? To me, that is the most deceptive, conniving thing to do after the affair.”

“Being human is tough, Charmelon. We’re told throughout our lifetime that we cannot sin yet we’re made in such a unique, inescapable way that naturally drives us to sin. Our human desires outweigh our conscious decisions to follow the rules. Perhaps, she succumbed.”

Charmelon scoffed. “You’re making me anxious. I know that she is weak but it would break me to know that she did that. As for your religious views, I think you’re wrong. Hell is a place on earth.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, isn’t it obvious?”

Ragnar shook his head.

“Everybody thinks hell is what they fear the most.

Perspective, Ragnar. By the way, I studied Christianity when I was going through a bout and I found no comfort in it whatsoever. Instead, I unveiled twenty five other so called sins I didn’t even know I was guilty of!”

“Well, it doesn’t comfort you because you have no problem with sin. I at least try to be a good Christian man. I mean, I fail at times but then I move forward. I keep thinking that I’m doing the right thing but then on certain occasion, I get this feeling that it’s not enough. That’s usually when I pray.”

“That’s only a problem people like you have, my friend. The problem with God is that he promised free will and then demanded us to follow his will. Sometimes, I think that if God had ultimate control over us then we would fall into a sort of trance. There wouldn’t be anything to cause us distress. We would be like birds in the sky.”

“Well, that’s quite a vivid picture you paint, Charmelon.”

Charmelon gave a short chuckle. “Listen, I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know. Sometimes, it’s better to be chained than to be free and wanting.”

The ferry pitched forward and caused the two to jerk towards the railing. Charmelon clutched his stomach and stammered, “Goddamn water...”

Ragnar glanced at his watch. “It should only be another forty-five minutes ... so how are you and the in-laws getting along?”

“It’s as if we never left high school. They treat me like I’m a part of the family. I’m happy to know that they only heard about our struggles. Sometimes, Gloria can be weak. She gets emotional and calls her mother only for the problem to be solved twenty minutes later. I’m happy to marry into the family, Ragnar. I feel like I belong.”

“That’s good to hear, man. I knew you’d move on from past relationships. Old wounds do heal with time.”

“I was wrong about the women who I had mistaken for whores.”

Ragnar patted him on the shoulder. “You’re the man.”

Charmelon looked off into the distant horizon. “I do feel like Gloria’s mother is keeping something from me though. She implied that ... oh, never mind.”

Ragnar urged him to continue. He leaned closer to Charmelon so that he could speak more intimately.

“I lost my train of thought. I apologize.”

“No, you didn’t. I’m not going to judge you, Charmelon. Please, continue.”

“You’ll use it against me in the future.”

“I swear that I won’t do such a thing, Charmelon. Who do you think I am?”

“What if I tell you and then you begin to see me differently? What if you’ll think I’m a pushover?”

“That’s ridiculous, Charmelon.”

Charmelon hesitated as he inhaled the cool, fishy air. He gazed at the waves until he saw the island in the distance.

“Months back, before Gloria ... I slept with a woman from Vergennes. We had an ongoing relationship and I wanted to be with her even more than with Gloria. I took control of the relationship and it went where I wanted it to go. I had sex with her every night without negotiation.”

“Wait a minute. Without negotiation? What does that mean?”

“I told her that if she didn’t have sex with me, I’d leave her for Gloria. She was a Christian woman. She was naturally obedient and loyal. I valued her for that. It was wrong for me to do that but I couldn’t control myself. Sometimes, I wonder if she was a true Christian in the first place. She gave it up quickly for someone who’d call herself Godly.”

Charmelon felt blushed already. He hoped not to let it show in his skin but he could tell by Ragnar’s expression that he was blushing with embarrassment.

“Were you seeing both women at the same time?”

He hesitated. “Yes, I was. I didn’t want to lose any of them because I was afraid that I was going to end up completely alone.”

“I understand, Charmelon. You blackmailed the Christian woman because you had an advantage over her and you cheated on Gloria at the same time. Now you’re afraid that you’ll get a taste of your own medicine?”

Charmelon shook his head. “You don’t understand, Ragnar. I went to visit Greta after I paid you to follow Gloria. It was past midnight and she should have been asleep.”

“Who’s Greta?”

“The Christian woman from Vergennes. Anyway, I walked inside because I had the key and I saw the silhouettes of two people instead of one. At first, I was confused. I thought I may have been mistaken but then I saw them moving as if they were having sex. I heard her moaning as if she was in agony. It

was the kind of moaning that satisfied me during sex with her. She cheated on me, Ragnar. The prudent, God fearing whore cheated on me!”

His voice began to crack towards the end of his sentence. When Ragnar looked at his face, he saw that he was crying.

“It’s alright, I understand. Being cheated on by someone who you thought was a good person is a punch in the gut, but of course, I wouldn’t know.”

“That’s not all of it ... afterwards, I decided to stay loyal to Gloria. I needed to heal. That is why I wanted you to watch her for me. I was desperate. I couldn’t take both women cheating on me. I overheard her mother speaking to her and I’m not certain if I’m being paranoid or if my vivid imagination toyed with me but I heard her mention Greta. It was as clear as my own voice right now.”

“Are you sure she said Greta and not Gloria?”

“I’m certain of it, Ragnar. I know there is a limit to how much of it is logically true, but I cannot stop thinking that Gloria and Greta have this friendship and are getting back at me by having sex with other men. I can almost see their frightening, vengeful smiles in my head. Imagine the dread! Imagine the painful, pitiful feeling of being right about everything!”

Charmelon saw that Ragnar looked uncomfortable. He expected Ragnar to look at him differently. It was not a strange concept to grasp so he imagined that Ragnar may have been sympathetic. He knew that he would have to wait a few months in order to speak to Ragnar again after this conversation. In that amount of time, he was certain that he’d be in a better, more impressive place in his life. It helped him feel stronger knowing that Ragnar was a perpetual virgin who would probably enjoy having his sexually charged crisis.

A loud, invasive bang interrupted his thought and he jolted. It sounded otherworldly; the kind of sound that one would hear in a dream to let the dreamer know that the dream has gone awry.

“Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?” asked Ragnar.

“That loud noise. It sounded like we crashed into something.”

“I didn’t hear anything.”

Charmelon sighed and ran his hands across his coat.

“I just want you to tell me one thing, Ragnar. Are you certain that Gloria never met up with anyone but me?”

He looked into Ragnar’s bright, blue eyes awaiting his earnest response.

“I promise that I never saw her meeting anyone. She went straight home after work every day. You can think whatever you like but you have my word. She was alone while I watched her.”

“I suppose I should move on from what I believe to be true. It may have happened or it may have not happened. I don’t love Gloria yet. Perhaps, I will though. I’ll move on with the poetic

assurance that I’m only human and sometimes my ego implodes on me. I do accept that my toxic masculine aggression has given me temporary bliss throughout these years and made me a purgatory. You’re a good friend, Ragnar.”

### *Affliction*

Ragnar removed the tiny pack of cigarettes that he kept in his back pocket and offered one to Charmelon.

“I dislike menthol,” he replied.

As Ragnar slipped the cigarette in his mouth, he gazed at the island which was now much closer than before. He thought about how long the ride had been since they left Bar Harbor. Charmelon’s anxiety was beginning to affect him because he felt that his hands were sweating in his coat pockets when earlier they were cold and dry from the lousy weather.

“Can I ask you a personal question, Ragnar?”

“Of course.”

“You seem to have this ethical knowledge about human behavior but I’ve never known you to be much of a social person. Where do you get your ideas from?”

“I’m an avid reader. As a child, I used to ask my mother to buy me books instead of toys. You hit the nail on the head though. I’m inexperienced in every way possible. I’ve never even driven a car before as I fear being hit. I played it safe my whole life but I’m on the fence about whether I regret it or not. I learned all of the things necessary through books.”

Charmelon shook his head with a smirk as if he had been caught off guard by his answer.

“That surprises you?”

“Only to an extent. I know you’re a good man, Ragnar. You might not have my social qualities or aesthetics but you’re a brave, honest man.”

Ragnar turned to him and noticed there was a different characteristic about him that he did not see before. It was almost as if he was vulnerable or had been beaten into submission. It made Ragnar feel confident in sharing his own ideas with him.

“I’m not a brave man, Charmelon.”

“Are you a defeatist?”

“No, I’m a realist with an obscure future ahead of me. I’m not a defeatist. If I was, I wouldn’t be afraid at all.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“Well, I despise social situations and the norms of social etiquette. My body language should say it all. You haven’t picked up on that?”

Charmelon shook his head.

“I’m afraid of pain, Charmelon. In my lifetime, I have skipped areas that should have affected me. I skipped crucial

parts of my life due to the fear of pain and discomfort.”

“Are you speaking figuratively?”

“To an extent. Quite honestly, I’m afraid of suffering.”

“Ah, yes. We are all suffering in the world though, Ragnar. Most of us deserve it with the exception of just a few.”

“I can never shake off this feeling as if I’m damned. It started before I moved to the Northeast. I always feel as if I’ve got blood on my hands. The way a murderer feels after receiving his prison sentence and speaking to a pastor. However, I am different. The reason I feel guilty is for an embarrassing sexual habit. It is unlike your crisis, mind you.”

“Ah! I get the point, Ragnar. Is this a religious problem?”

“It has been haunting me since before I became a Christian. I frustrate myself. That’s why I brought up human nature earlier. How can we live righteously when we’re trapped in a body that demands the opposite?”

Charmelon didn’t answer him.

“Your crisis perfectly exemplifies my sentiments. We are structures of meat compiled together for the simple goal of instant gratification even with the knowledge of our written fate. How can we not fear the torment of eternal suffering?”

“Everybody has to play a part. You cannot have winners without losers. It is just a coincidence that we have consciousness. We are pawns, Ragnar. Suffering is tiny.”

“Well then, we should at least have the ability to walk out of our bodies when we’re suffering.”

The waves began to break from their pattern and the two began to hear each other more clearly.

“I envy you, Charmelon. Though, I admire you for being true to yourself. Sometimes, I feel like I am your shadow.”

“Where is this coming from?”

“Generally, people are impressive. I never knew how to speak properly to a woman. You can utilize your natural charm. I feel like sinners are at an advantage. The ones who choose to sin carelessly will eventually suffer only after their pleasure on earth whereas the ones who regress internally are doomed to suffer in both regards,” Ragnar explained.

“In your case?”

“I am internally pushing the boundaries. Ever since I was a child, I have had this curiosity for sex. Like most, I started off watching films and then fantasizing about specific scenarios that would be unnatural in reality. Now, I am a pervert. I cannot look at women without fantasizing about them.”

Charmelon grimaced at Ragnar’s confession.

“Ah, you’re a decent man. The things you mentioned are not foreign to me.”

“You wouldn’t know, Charmelon.”

“You are a virgin, Ragnar. You cannot control your natural human desire. We are a mediocre race doomed to fail. That’s

not your fault.”

“Actually, I disagree. I think our sexuality comes from childhood perversions. I would usually agree with you as humankind is not the exceptional creation I hoped to adore but in this discourse, I think that you are missing one fact. Sexuality is a learned behavior.”

Charmelon paused momentarily.

“Where did you learn your ways from then?”

“I was a cloistered child living in my head. I used to think sex was used for some kind of sophisticated principle that I didn’t understand. I was always fascinated with how people naturally fell into each other’s lives. They looked free whereas I was always trapped in this invisible bubble. My sexual habits formed this barrier between me and others. I simply feel entrapped.”

As Ragnar glared at the sea, he noticed the sudden change in the sky. It became unnaturally darker as if a giant cloud swallowed the sky or a massive object hovered over them. It reminded him of the Science Fiction films where something shifted to emphasize a repressed idea in one of the characters. He was puzzled for a moment before turning to Charmelon.

“What is it?”

“Nothing,” he replied calmly.

He began to see the island at an even closer distance.

“Now that I think about it, my situation reminds me of an old Spanish film I saw as a child. It was called Casa Del Pajaro meaning House of the Bird. In the film, somebody was punished for their crime by being placed in a barbaric chamber. They would be bound to a rack with their hands and legs wrapped in chains and left to die. That scene frightened me so much that I had recurring dreams about it as a child. They didn’t stop until I was eighteen.”

“Why is that reminiscent to your current situation?” asked Charmelon.

“I suppose it’s a preconception of what hell must be like. Some people would call that depression but I don’t agree. This feels like I’ve dug myself a hole due to my continuous sin without repentance. In fact, the more I talk about it, the more anxious I become. I won’t say anything else about my childhood.”

Charmelon observed the scenery. He looked calm as his eyes flickered underneath the smog.

“I know what it’s like to feel trapped, Ragnar. It’s important not to convict yourself though. If you keep thinking this way, it might be too late to unchain yourself. You need to let go before it’s too late.”

Ragnar didn’t respond. He examined the buildings and hills when he felt Charmelon’s heavy hand rest against his shoulder.

“What are you doing?”

“I know that you’re afraid and trapped but that feeling does go away. All of this time, I thought that Gloria was cheating on me. I realized that I was making it real. If you lied to me and she really was cheating, I would still be convicted. I can move on now, Ragnar. So can you.”

Ragnar began to feel his hands quiver. They didn’t stop even when he slipped them into his coat pockets. He began to cry as he glared at the approaching island. His teeth were rattling and he developed gooseflesh.

Charmelon began to caress his shoulder. “It’s alright, Ragnar. Don’t convict yourself.”

Ragnar began to take deep breaths to shake off the feeling of doom. He held on to the railing tightly as the ferry began to reach the dockyard.

“Are you alright, Ragnar?”

“Yes, now I am.”

“What was that?”

“I suppose I was having an anxiety attack, but I’m fine now. I cannot wait to leave this ferry. It feels like I’ve been here for years.”

### *Conviction*

As the two left the ferry, people began to hurry past them. Everyone appeared to be in a rush to get somewhere. There was a busy walkway that led to the lobby. However, the walkway was so narrow that people had to squeeze through in order to get to the other side. It looked like an outdoor shopping mall. There were rectangular windows at the top of the walls and an escalator at the end which led to the parking garage.

Charmelon turned to Ragnar as he buttoned up his jacket. “Well, good luck with your date, Ragnar. I wish the best for you.”

“I appreciate that. Take care of yourself, Charmelon.”

Charmelon gave a quick nod and began towards the walkway.

A few people left after him and then Ragnar decided to follow through the populated area. When he reached the other side, he noticed that Charmelon had stopped walking. He was standing in the middle of the lobby with his hands against his chest.

“Charmelon,” he called.

He didn’t respond. Ragnar approached him to see what was going on and realized that he was crying. There were no tears on his face this time. He was blushing and grimacing as if he had seen something mortifying.

“What’s the matter?”

“You lied. They’re here. They’re all here, Ragnar,” he cried.

“Who’s here?”

“Gloria and the man she’s having an affair with. Greta too! They’re all right there having sex like nobody is watching! What the hell! You lied to me, Ragnar. I trusted you to watch her and you lied to me! Even if you did watch her — you should have told the truth. You lied!”

As Charmelon screamed in frustration, Ragnar noticed a change in the walls. It happened quickly enough so that he didn’t see the transformation. The lobby shifted from its usual image to a much darker, older place. At first, it was unnoticeable because of the rapid shift but then he saw that the windows disappeared and the polished, tile floor turned into a dull matte colored floor. He felt his body lose weight as his stomach churned. He felt as if he was enclosed in the tiniest, darkest box just like before.

The thick, cultivating chains appeared before him. They made large loops from one end of the ceiling to the other. He was afraid to acknowledge that the lobby was turning into Casa Del Pajaro because it would be as if it was real.

He turned to Charmelon, who was as stiff as a fencepost and called aloud, “Remember the dreams that I told you about earlier?”

“Yes, I remember,” he replied.

“Well, they’re back.”

As he observed the room, he saw that the casual, quintessential soda machines and ATM machines that rested against the walls turned into the large metal racks that he remembered from his dreams.

Charmelon looked around and noticed that not only were his recent affairs displayed to him but the ones from earlier in his life were being displayed as well. They acted merely like a holographic scene but he knew that they were real because he saw women who he suspected of cheating on him having sex like they were in a pornographic film.

As he tried to understand the substantial message of what he perceived as a biblical vision, he opened his mouth as if to utter something meaningful but all he could do was whimper. He knew that it was going to be a long weekend in Nova Scotia.

# Vivian Stearns-Kohler

Mesa Artist



**“A Horse With No Name”**

**Pastel**

**2020**

The artist writes: “Born and raised in the Midwest, I ‘transplanted’ myself to the magnificent Sonoran Desert almost 20 years ago. I have not missed the Midwest’s dreary, cold interminable winters or the humid, mosquito-infested summers one bit. After retiring from a career in human resources in 2008, I was free to pursue the next chapter of my life as an artist. One of my wearable art designs (Castaway 1/Modal Scarf) was featured on the Home Shopping network ... see my studio at <http://bit.ly/2IVAVTp>. Or view [www.etoilecreations.com](http://www.etoilecreations.com) for artwork. In addition, I have published two children’s books available on Amazon and Lulu.com, ‘Bella Blue’s Big Adventures’ and ‘Princess Grumpypants.’ For over a decade, I have exhibited and sold my creations at galleries, art festivals and private showings as well as commissions. You may contact me at [vivian@etoilecreations.com](mailto:vivian@etoilecreations.com). I enjoy being a member of the Mesa Art League, where I volunteer to teach veteran art classes. I also contribute to the league as the publicity director and an administrator of social media as well as director of a local venue that showcases our league art. Recently, I was honored to have my artwork ‘Papillon’ (butterfly) chosen Artwork of the Month by our League members (see [www.mesaartleague.com](http://www.mesaartleague.com)). My art will be featured soon in a virtual art exhibit sponsored by the Greater Phoenix Economic Council entitled ‘Greater Phoenix, Greater Together.’”



# Vivian Stearns-Kohler

Mesa Artist

I am a “fearless” artist. When I initially started my art journey, I was terrified of a blank canvas or a new technique. As adults, we want everything to be perfect. Now, after putting in many hours of “sweat equity,” I “see” new possibilities everywhere. By being open to my surroundings and impressions, this allows me to try new techniques and not remain stuck in a particular style, medium or subject matter. Vibrant color, interesting shapes and new mediums/techniques are what inspire me. I am rather taken aback how I can create in one medium and translate it into another. For example, I design wearable art and home décor from my artwork (<http://bit.ly/2IVAVTp>). My creative repertoire now includes fused glass, oil and acrylic paintings, pastels, watercolor, pottery, wearable art/home décor, jewelry making and painting with paper (aka quilling). It is important to me that I express myself through my art. Creating art is as necessary to me as the air I breathe.

- Vivian Stearns-Kohler



“Enigma”  
Painting with paper aka quilling  
2020



# Vivian Stearns-Kohler

Mesa Artist



**“Japanese Nude”  
Painting with  
paper aka quilling  
2020**

# Vivian Stearns-Kohler

Mesa Artist



**“Miles and Miles”**

**Pastel**

**2020**

# Vivian Stearns-Kohler

Mesa Artist



**“Alone, But Not  
Lonely”  
Painting with paper  
aka quilling  
2020**

# 4 poems by Robert Feldman

## for the poets of North Beach

shiny smudged fingerprints and angel infused Light  
adorned the Beach Poets,  
clutching shabby black white pages  
destined to rip out this entire BayCity-  
hobbling thru swingin Fresno Street Green Tavern's Doors  
entering those salty Chesterfield malt horizons  
spilling all over Jack London cherrywood whiskey counters  
hundreds of miles from Kesey Oregon yogurt farms,  
these Beat Poets  
persisted in escaping from stagnation  
like convicts.

no, there could be no return to sanity for those Top Tobacco wanderers  
who bravely stared down horrific beatific Dreams,  
who chose to not turn their backs from sounds of climax, conflict, irony,  
who continually throttled their hip skepticism  
wherever virgin blank pages spoonfused together.

meanwhile somewhere nearby,  
the Alcatraz Sea lingered onward,  
stretching out toward the secluded Chinese Moon Ocean...  
and as Kerouac prophesized,  
a crescent wave now swallows half the earth.

still, dauntless yet mindful,  
the Beach Poets keep on spinning,  
unwinding, directionless, germane,  
oblivious and indifferent to wherever they land,  
either inside or outside moldy brick basement walls,  
above or below these clotheslined tightrope eternity backyards nearby.

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Born in Paterson, New Jersey, Robert Feldman was inspired early on by members of Paterson's literary tradition, most notably Louis and Allen Ginsberg and William Carlos Williams. Later, while living in St. Louis, he organized poetry readings, produced and hosted a community-issues news hour and a biweekly bebop jazz radio program on KDNA-FM. There, his interest and admiration for the Beat Generation flourished. After relocating to Bisbee in the early '70s, Robert was instrumental in publishing some of Arizona's most influential writers such as Drummond Hadley and Michael Gregory, and in 1980, collaborated with Lawrence Ferlinghetti on his Bisbee publication, "Mule Mountain Dreams." Currently, Robert resides in greater Phoenix, continuing to write, paint, and play tabla, besides actively publishing in several online poetry magazines. "Hinenei," a collection of 15 Hebraic photographic poetry, was published in spring 2018, and "Sunflowers, Sutras, Wheatfields, and Other ArtPoems" in summer 2019. The body of Robert Feldman's writing and painting can be accessed at [albionmoonlight.net](http://albionmoonlight.net); he can be reached at [rfeldman@gmail.com](mailto:rfeldman@gmail.com).

# Home Thru The West

another cold night shrouds Sonoran desert skies,  
where deep rounded coyote hills  
frost the silhouetted peaks  
reflecting silver naked grey in the moonlight,  
where living sounds swell like pregnant monsoon clouds

this first,  
perhaps  
last place of rest,  
hanging on to each unconditional breath,  
till these dry frozen river beds  
return me to some empyrean  
home to be

© 2021

# No Sense Contributions

alligator oak carved children's table  
set above this bunkhouse mesa,  
draped with wet clothes  
potted plants and 4 beautiful women,  
nurtured by a dry drafty wind

from out back  
under the Gulch's scorching sun,  
Bear's knife jabs, blusters, and intimidates  
with heated open air expressions:  
"I love you baby...now come clean you rah rah!"

this quirky eccentric desert casa personifies the ultimate  
storehouse  
where nothing is wasted,  
where once creative energy becomes distracted  
ridin past those open windows south  
onto further canyon scorched brown sands

but here, there is no reason for his apostles to step into the light,  
to disclose their souls,  
bestow their gifts

here, in this Brotherly Love restitched laundry,  
there is this family  
who drapes the walls with giraffes and scorpions,  
a clan who welcomes strangers stealing shelter from some  
grateful rain shower,  
a tribe of misfits and hearts with planted smiles and sketchbook  
watercolor portraits  
all dug in for another unsettling September summer drought

(if I had my way, nobody's house would ever leak)

*Zacateca's Laundry, Bisbee*

© 2021

# Poem for Salt Lake Billy

*(for Bill Roberts)*

spinnin out gypsy poems sprinkled with black olives,  
sprayin free verse audaciously doused  
red aloe and Columbian Gold,  
Courvoisier  
honey golden

(1)

-feintin hipster Billy talk:  
“excuse me, madams,  
did you happen to borrow  
my white leather boots last night?”

-trickster cryptic Billy talk:  
“yup, no spurs on this rider  
got actual azurite middle eye  
hypnotize judges with,  
(Billy laughin  
cigarette danglin)  
but absolutely ladies,  
will hang out right here  
while you change into somethin more comfortable...”

(2)

days earlier  
thereby plannin  
the great SanFrisco escape together,  
hustlin time  
howlin over morning beers,  
foam toppin tall glasses naturally

and a ripped beamin Billy  
like WC Fields from the corner of his mouth:

“party of two poets  
require a pretrip eatable Copper Queen meal!”  
as nervous waitress scribbles away on her pad

**Continued on page 56**

Continued from page 55

(3)  
early spring snapshot of there we were  
slouchin on Bisbee City Park bench,  
eastcoast rookie  
westcoast *brujo*  
singin this impromptu song that went:

“strop me fiddle,  
yeay ya yoyle,  
we croon a hymn this holy April Fool’s Day,  
cause another Salt Lake check’s in the mail”

(4)  
this sundown Billy masterpiece  
was a lonesome *bandito* desert Adonis  
hoverin somewhere along Naco Road  
grinnin straight up to heaven,  
seldom waverin,  
wontedly swayin,  
straddlin runaway faraway wooden ships,  
all the while spinnin black olive poems  
tokin Columbian Gold  
sippin Courvoisier verse,  
and to the grave  
ownin his gift,  
far more audacious  
than any honey gold

© 2021



# 4 poems by Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Vinterkaffe

“We paid good money for this thing!”—  
“We” being “I”—being my father—  
“and somebody’s got to use it!”

The thing is the pool heater  
we, for our mother’s lust for warmth,  
*just had to have* last summer.  
It was my father’s final gesture for  
“making it” in suburbia

to a man for whom making it  
was a cultural and esthetic embarrassment,  
the final insult to the music he treasured  
and abandoned silently somewhere in his Swedish  
deterministisk psyke,

regret displayed now and then in slips  
of admission quickly gulped.

A pre-dawn February,  
even here in the Sonoran Desert,  
will freeze, in its good time. In the dark,  
chill is chill on the way to the pool.

He swims a few laps to justify  
the being of the contraption,  
but mostly he stands in the shallow end,  
leans against the pool edge, Viking  
torso bare in his svenska vintern,  
steadfastly sips at the coffee in his insulated mug.

Continued on page 58



Richard Fenton Sederstrom lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona, where he was raised from age ten, and from which he received his first cactus puncture the day he arrived, one afternoon in 1954, a lesson he still appreciates. Sederstrom is the writer of six books, the most recent being “Sorgmantel.” A new book, “Icarus Rising: Misadventures in Ascension,” appeared this January.

When he climbs out of the pool he grabs the mug  
and his towel, which he does not use  
against a sudden sodden Nordic blast

and he trudges  
barefoot through some winter morning  
in his Minnesota youth, uppför to school, [uphill]  
uppför back home, farther tomorrow,  
and then farther again. We know.

In its forced-heat fugg, the house is warm  
but he loafes about in his trunks, chilling again,  
to be sure that no one is near enough  
to see that he enjoys the warmth.

Then he refills the mug,  
turns from home into the functionary  
duties of brokerage.  
We know for whom. We know  
he will not bear to hear us speak of whom.

\*

I see in the eyes I share now what I never saw  
when he walked out into another day  
in the colder world of monied dire necessity.

If I should grow up I will willingly, coldly wait  
out the long winter.  
Adjust to the weather I need to bear.

Then I will turn around  
and walk the same trail back downhill,  
stop to look at the list of majors and careers.

Then among them I will choose  
to enjoy the delicacy of need,  
avoid the pleasures of making it,

maybe except the music  
of making några dålig dikter. [some poor poems]

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# Xmax to Epiphany

Is it the twelfth day?  
On the final long, long day  
toward the hazel-colored western horizon—  
after the short rest comes the long disillusion.

The toys under the tree have lost some shine.  
The track for the electric train doesn't quite connect.  
Needles fall into broken ornaments.

One glove, of the pair that signified a step  
toward unmittened manhood  
has been lost in some closet,  
or somewhere in the snow,

some lost spot, threateningly sacred now  
dedicated to the discovery of dismay—

\*

Our relationship with the elements  
of the quantum universe  
is the adult view of our relationship with the gods,

but still ephemeral almost to the fine point  
of meaninglessness  
from atom to axiom and back to a graphite  
smear on the retina.

\*

In our institutional crusade for exactitude,  
for the purity of the Absolute,  
the reign of Corporate Capital Law,  
we have long stopped extolling beauty, even  
to render out the callous and tawdry.

Still, some struggle for beauty, or  
shadow of beauty, echo of beauty,  
cobble rubrics  
that conjure and curate the beauteous  
according to patent law and copyright.

\*

What a wonder of imagination!  
that having discovered that we can't control what is—  
the tides, the weather,  
the migration of wildebeest,  
the behavior of our children or the clan in the next forest,  
the vatic fecklessness of poets—

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Continued from page 59

we turn to a faith in our power to control  
what we know to be ephemeral,  
a hopeward *confessio fidei*,  
or a dire concatenation of narcotic lies—

canticles from the Gospel of Goebbels  
or the Tweet of Trump,  
the hateward liturgy of penance enforced.  
The perdurable deathward legacy of bondage.

We search through any bright rubble,  
explain, explicate, elucidate, elude—  
ensepulcher the ramble of discordant minds,  
write into the orthodoxy of Babel  
but only partway in,  
no farther than the orotund preambles.

We eschew the daimonic agony  
of questioning into the still-wrenching  
insights of axial thinking, the luminous  
agon, searching out some onset of awareness,  
without which we listen for beauty—  
while we record dys-chord.

\*

But for a few, if only a few for now,  
if only for the day, especially for the day,  
the horizon remains horizon,  
whatever range and color, whatever distance.

And rest is rest whenever we can get it;  
sleep comes sometime, and it is sleep,  
no matter what we may be bound to dream in it.

\*

The toys have so long gone that their color is restored  
now and then when the dream is right.

And the train,  
which I did find in one closet or another,  
sat on a window ledge for years  
until I noticed that the sun had faded it on one side.

So I keep that side to the sun  
and let another dream repair as it may,  
and the great black engine stands by, chuffing—

Continued on page 61

my dreamt soul,  
heavy-gauntleted, in control in the iron cab  
I know I must moult from when I grow up,  
steaming now at the speed of history  
from coast to eternity.

It's also my choice to declare with quiet Bartleby  
"I would prefer not to," orphaned at last  
and knowing that the sea rolls on.

\*

It's not that I have missed that glove, of course.  
But I would still miss the sense of loss  
at times when I am inclined to miss  
all the other frustrations  
and embarrassments and losses,

I would miss especially the memory  
or even the sad elation at being able to remember.  
Some joy too,  
that frisks along behind, dependably  
in the little red caboose of late and early memory.

I think of the glove  
and still regret that, even with a new pair,  
my mind was fixed,  
still mittened for a time, as it is just now,  
for a time.

The spot in the snow, grown over and over,  
the place I never did find,  
is still sacred though, to my discovery  
of the virtue of dismay,

and the pain of all such future discoveries  
and the still sad music that should remain.  
I register the notes again in my brain's second ear.

\*

Mendelssohn's Sixth String Quartet, his last,  
someday maybe my last too,  
in its pain of unspeakable grief,  
of rage at the loss of love and of self-hope,

Continued on page 62

and a daimonic need to resist reconciliation  
and accept in the beauty of the quartet  
what one death forecasts to another,  
the composer's, who died at just half my age.  
The old poet too, perhaps.

We, but how many are we?,  
in willful thrall to the music, struggle our way  
not to peace, but toward tomorrow,  
the thirteenth day.

But now the sun is back out.

The late-day sun shines out the adagio  
of branch-latticed snow, chanced light  
for a motif to introduce the physics,  
the gravity of theme  
in the place we need revealed to us  
for no longer than the hours

when the music and the silence swell  
to become a return to the first moments of sharing—  
the composer, the poet, the gift of  
the music, the words, a concerto  
of distant figures in time:

mouths, ears, wood, sinew, pen and ink—  
hands working in the clays of notation.  
Tools to create the fulfilled hours,  
the newborn rhythms of every mortal day.

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# Sorting the News in America

He jokes.

He asks, "Have we made any lately?"

He means "news."

She reminds him that news is made by people  
in position to make news,  
whether they want to or not.  
And a few minutes later, she adds

"and if they don't want, someone else might,  
in spite of themselves or their desire for privacy.  
Like our desire for privacy, your desire and mine.

Like people from those cold and barren places—  
OK, even places that are warm and crowded—  
where in their yearly winter starvation

they sent word out to lure each other  
as the prime entrees in the wet red ink  
on the carnal menu.

Well, other animals, of course.  
Not people, I mean. No, not people.

We may want to make news or not, you and I,  
but we're the sort who like to keep it to ourselves."

\*

They are modest by nature and desire.

They are growing old.  
So maybe it doesn't matter what private news  
they may make before they forget it anyway.

Tweetless, real news stays somewhere maybe,  
but as driven motes in a gale,  
and as mutely shared as dreamt and undreamt myth,  
ours to share or not to share to no ear in hearing.

After all, it may be a poem  
and it may be written as a poem, unless  
it is whispered, as some things can only be whispered.

**Continued on page 64**

The poem,  
uttered as stammers of breath or coded chthonic echoes,  
lies somewhere in what we can't hear  
from the people outside  
when we choose to escape from who can't hear or won't.

And then they speak loud, those people,  
whether they utter real words or not.

\*

“And you look at what my fingers say  
when they touch, caress your lips.”

*“The police?”*  
is what the silent fingers ask  
in soul-remembered fragments  
of ancient, righteous primate fear,  
through which we become the other animals.

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# Nimrod Stands By

One of these days  
Rod will throw this broken Adirondack chair away.  
Just drive it to the dump  
where it will be shopped off into some new use:  
a chair again maybe.  
Or maybe only the honest junk  
it has worn to be.

But for now he thinks he can't  
because all that remains of it to his possessive eye  
is the shotgunned gap in the chairback  
that he blasted  
when he only grazed the red squirrel.

He didn't much want to hit the squirrel anyway.  
Much. Only scare him  
from this neighborhood of nests  
full of songbird eggs and baby birds.

The squirrel jumped to the cabin roof,  
nursed his stinging leg  
and laughed at Rod  
for turning this chair that neither wanted  
into a shrine to the squirrel's memory  
and Rod's embarrassment.

A chair he can't sit in anymore—  
won't, nor get rid of  
for its sinister image of inept wanton humanity.

An American abashed,  
Rod will stand back  
and Rod will stand by  
to practice his failing aim  
and savor the palate of his rage.

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# **Coming in autumn 2021!**

## **The Annual Fall Festival of the Arts!**

**Join us for an amazing showcase of the arts, with music, dance, cultural presentations, art activities for children and literary readings!**

## **Free admission!**

**For more details, go to The Arizona Consortium for the Arts website, [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org).**

# Join us for Open Mic: A celebration of the arts!

## **Open Mic — Arts, Music and Spoken Word!**

**Please note:** New location! All are invited. Free to attend.

Creative Drill Sergeants and the Arizona Consortium for the Arts Charity present monthly open mics on the first Saturday of each month. Join us in our new spacious community room at 2:30 p.m. for a 3 p.m. start. Social distancing and safety measures will be in place. Please bring your mask!

This is a great chance for artists, writers, and performers in all genres, spanning all artistic disciplines and cultural representations, to get together, meet one another, read, present, share, learn, celebrate and enjoy! Bring your art, poetry, music, dance, songs and stories to share.

**Where:** 4480 W. Peoria Ave., Suite 201, Glendale, AZ 85302.

For more information, contact Elena Thornton at [info@artizona.org](mailto:info@artizona.org).

# Who we are

## All about The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a nonprofit organization approved by the Arizona Corporation Commission in February 2008. We hold a 501c3 tax-exempt status.

We are all-volunteer. We are educators, artists, performers, writers and supporters of all artistic endeavors, and are proponents and supporters of the rich, vibrant and diverse community of the Greater Phoenix area as well as the entire state.

The Arizona Consortium seeks to create a multicultural, multidisciplinary arts center that will provide a home for our activities and foster artistic growth for people of



all ages in conjunction with exhibiting artists, writers, actors, dancers and musicians who will share their expertise in a gallery, theater setting.

Please visit [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org) or [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) for more information about

becoming a member, networking, donating, advertising, volunteering or submitting work to The Blue Guitar arts and literary magazine, Unstrung poetry magazine and The Blue Guitar Jr. literary and arts magazine for youth.

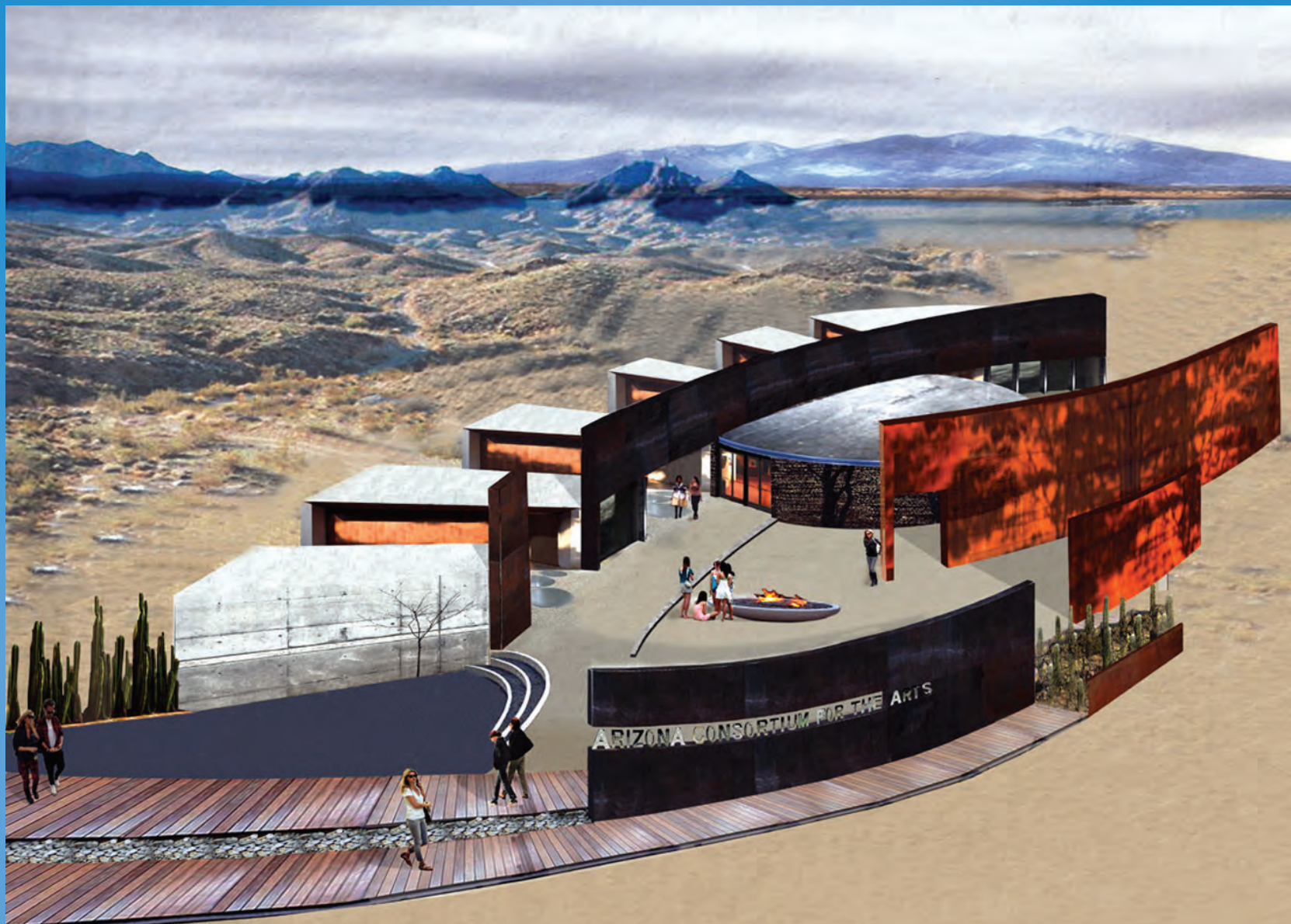
You can become a part of the Arizona Consortium and make a difference. There are countless ways to contribute, and the consortium is grateful for any donation in any form.

For us to grow as an organization, provide various services to artists, and support inspiring projects, your financial support is needed.

Every dollar received will support our website, the publication of our magazines, and the establishment of our future center.

Please visit our donations page, <http://www.artizona.org/donate.html>, and donate today!

Thank you for your support!



A rendering of the consortium's dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, building designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

# The consortium's vision for a multicultural arts center

The rendering of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts' dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, Building Designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

The Center will be a source and a destination for creativity and inspiration. It will be a home for many wonderful community organizations, creative and innovative multicultural and multidisciplinary activities, classes and projects representing and celebrating our diverse community.

The Center will be a cultural icon in the Phoenix area.

The Center will be an inimitable foundation for a unique experience, one that you'll want to share with family, friends and community.

Designed by Effie Bouras, the Center will feature numerous spaces for the arts in all genres, performances and presentations. A flexible and variable seating performance theater for rehearsals, concerts, theatrical presentations, video art and films, lectures, meetings and recordings will be available free-of-charge or at a minimum cost.

# Meet the staff of The Blue Guitar magazine



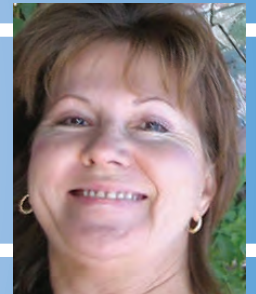
**Elena Thornton, publisher:** Founder and president of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, Elena is an educator, artist and poet and lives in Phoenix. Reach her at [info@artizona.org](mailto:info@artizona.org).

**Rebecca Dyer, co-editor:** A Tucson native, Rebecca is a poet, journalist and teacher residing in Mesa with her husband, Rick, her Blue Guitar co-editor. Reach her at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org).

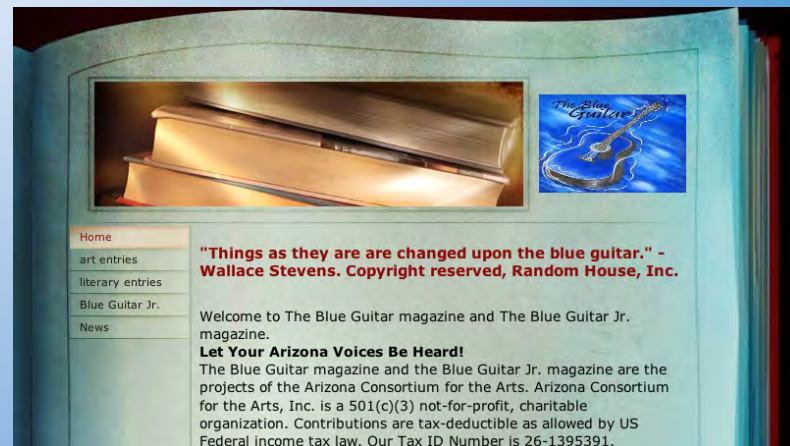


**Richard H. Dyer Jr., co-editor:** Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the news editor of two monthly newspapers and two websites in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor. Reach him at [richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org).

**Marjory Boyer, cover design artist for The Blue Guitar:** Marjory, of Scottsdale, is an award-winning artist, muralist and an acrylic-painting instructor. Her biography and contact information are available at [mboyerart.com](http://mboyerart.com).



## Check our websites for news on the arts



The Blue Guitar Magazine's website is [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).  
Like us on Facebook.  
Follow @BlueGuitarMagAZ on Twitter.

Check out The Arizona Consortium for the Arts website, [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org). There, you can sign up for an e-mailed newsletter. Also follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

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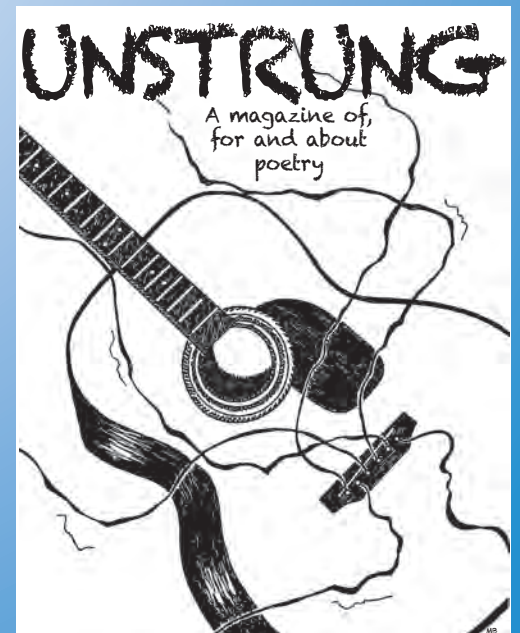
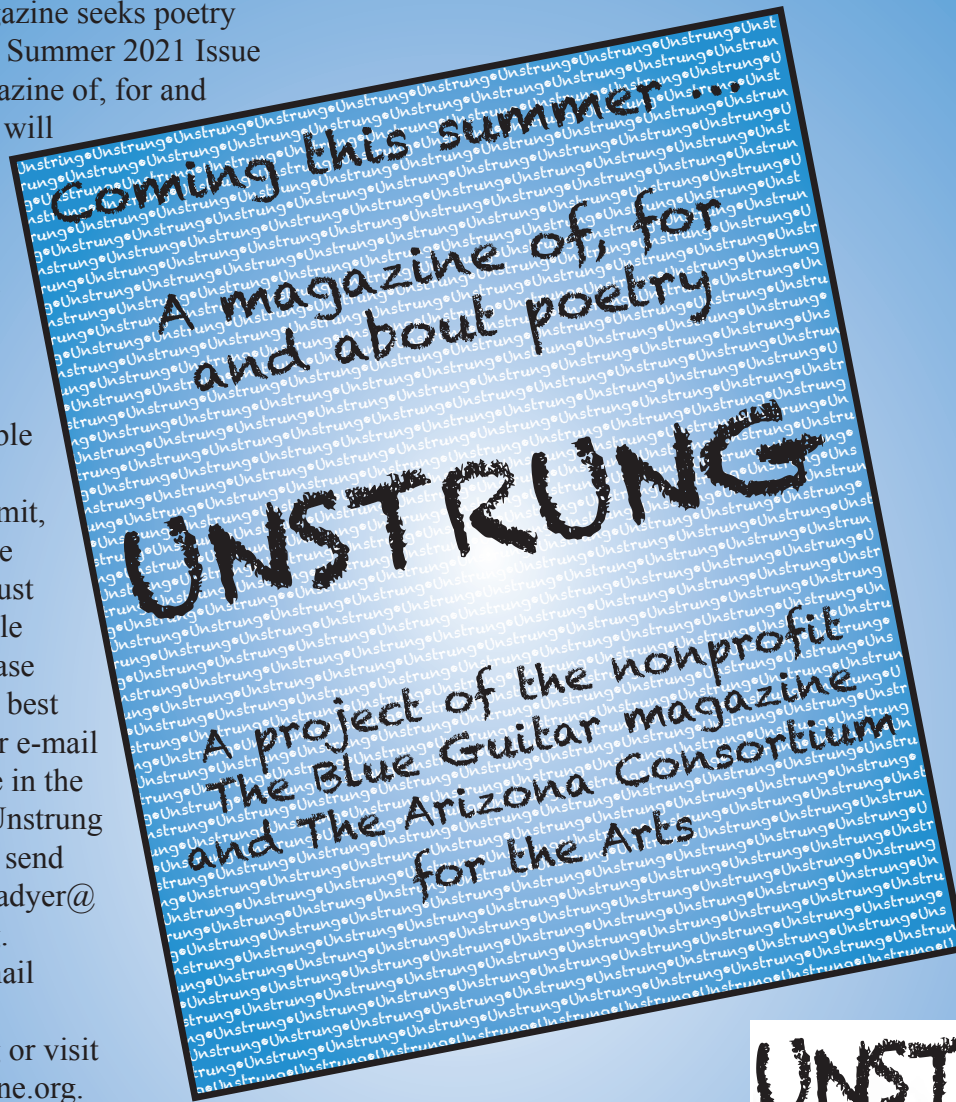
Spring 2021

# A Call to Poets for the 2021 Issue of Unstrung

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks poetry submissions for the Summer 2021 Issue of Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry. Submissions will

be accepted from June 1 through July 4. Poets must submit original work and must have a tie to Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the poet must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and multiple poems may be submitted. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, e-mail Rebecca at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org) or visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, is a nonprofit project of The Blue Guitar magazine and the nonprofit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about Unstrung magazine, The Blue Guitar magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites: [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org).





# A Call to Writers for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who write  
and to adults who write  
for children and teens

**T**he Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks literary submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who write for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2021, in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction — all geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Writers must submit original work and must live in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For additional information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine is a project of the nonprofit The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. magazines and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:  
[www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org).

# A Call to Artists for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who create art  
and to adults who create art  
for children and teens

**T**he Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks art submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who create art for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2021, in all media geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Artists must submit original work and must live in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the artist must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple mediums; up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name, contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Please include your name and the best way to contact you. To submit or for more information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at [richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For additional information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

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[www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org).

# A Call to Writers for Fall 2021



The Blue Guitar magazine seeks literary submissions for the Fall 2021 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

# A Call to Artists for Fall 2021

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks art submissions in all mediums for the Fall 2021 Edition from Sept. 1 through Oct. 4. Any artists who work in any visual art media, are 18 years or older and are part- or full-time Arizona residents can submit. It is free to submit and up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name and contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at [richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).



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“Things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar.”  
— Excerpt from Wallace Stevens’ 1937 poem “The Man With the Blue Guitar.”  
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Volume 13,  
Number 1  
Spring Issue  
**FREE!**

*“Things  
as they are  
are  
changed  
upon  
the  
blue guitar.”*