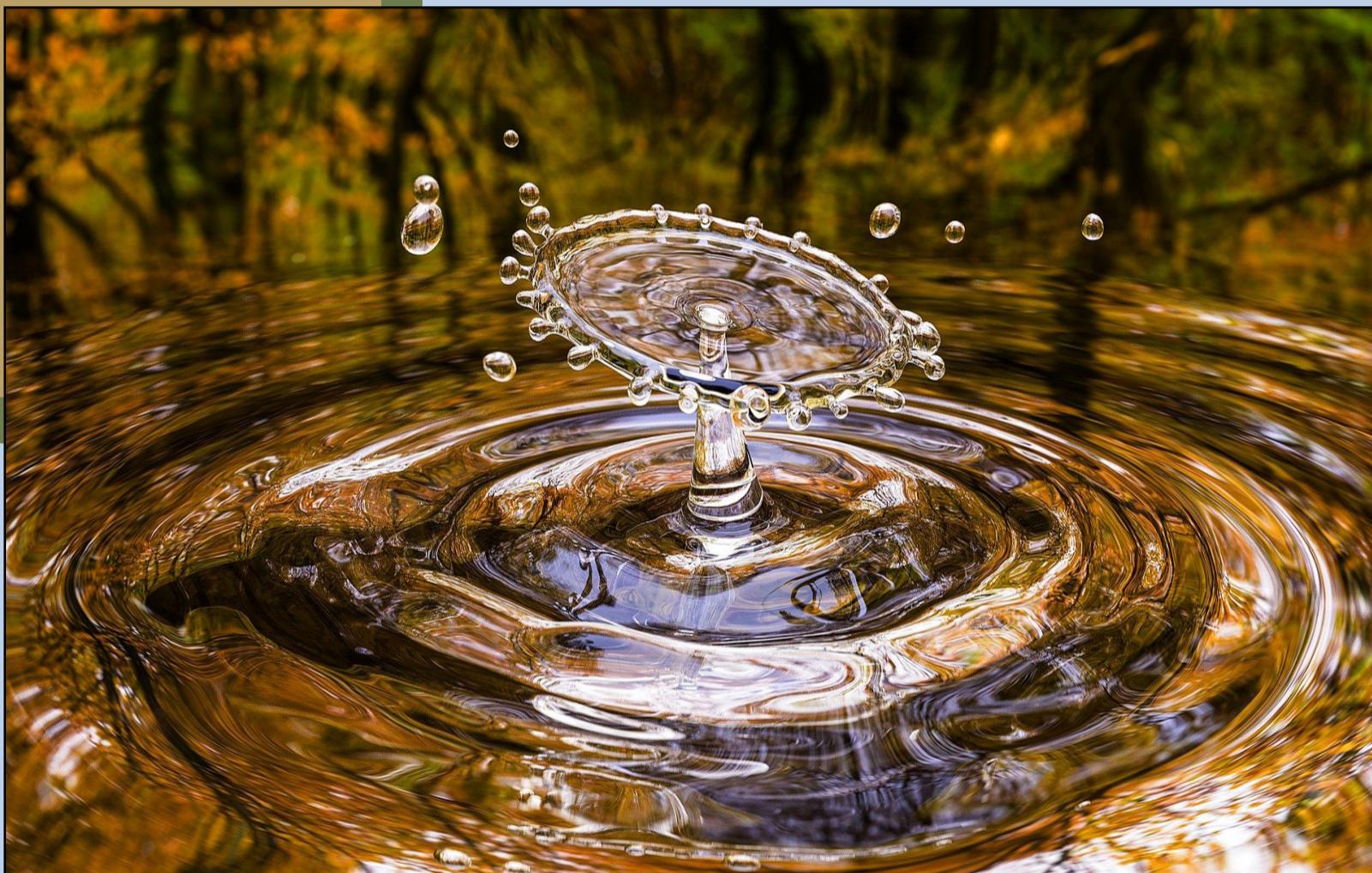


MINNOW LITERARY MAGAZINE



EDITION 1 : FALL 2020

Minnow Literary Magazine fishes for minnow-sized literary works and visual creative works that make a big splash. We accept Micro-Poetry (150 words or less), Flash Fiction (500 words or less), Short Personal Essays (1500 words or less), and Visual Art. Nature-themed works are encouraged, but all genres are considered.

This issue includes works from 10 countries on 5 continents: Argentina, Australia, Canada, England, India, Italy, Philippines, Scotland, Taiwan, and the United States (12 different states represented).

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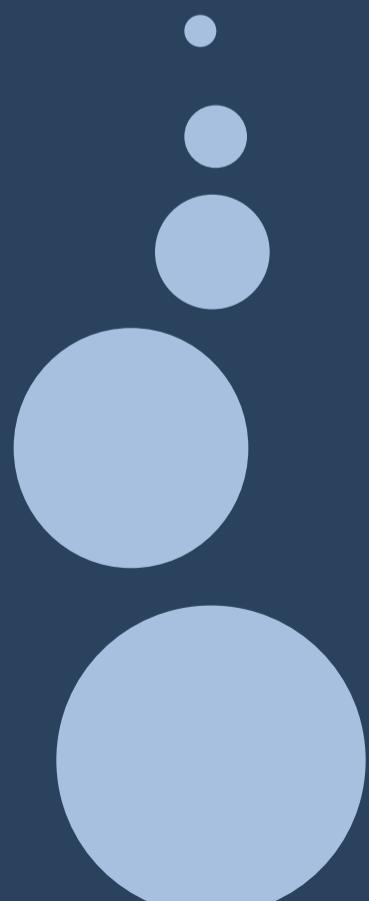
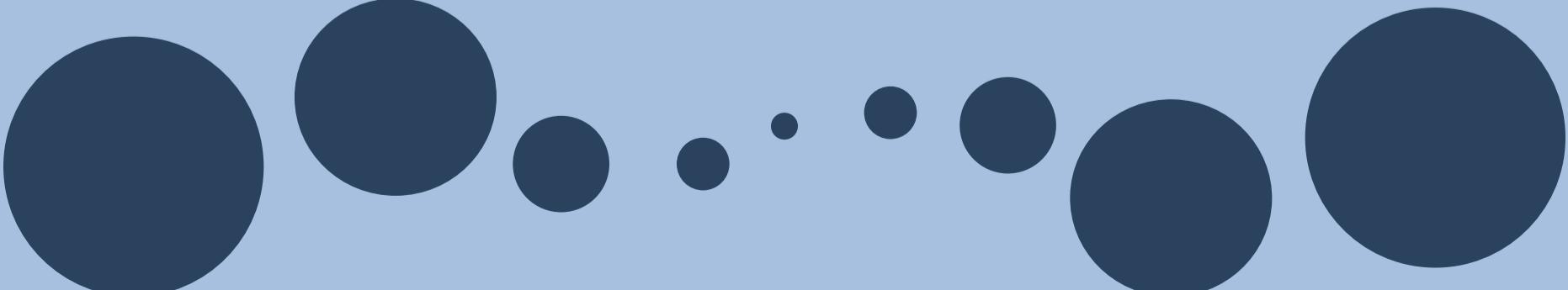


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Friendship, sometimes, is fleeting

Emily Stout

We lived in a blue duplex in the foothills of Boise
when I was eleven years old.

I felt old, sipping tea before bed,
my little sister laying in the neighboring twin.

One morning at the bottom of the mug, in the muddy
puddle of sugar, there was a sticky brown body.
The cockroach must have smelled its way in the dark,
crawled along the handle like I did on the long branch

of my grandmother's tree. I didn't scream, just counted
the hairs on its legs caught in dried sugar. 23?
I whispered goodbye, poured it
out the window, into the landscape

where we went hiking on Sundays
where we had to listen
for rattlesnakes in the grass.
Cockroaches can run up to three miles an hour—

Where was it going?
What other spot of sweetness?

Lime Takes the Ending

Adam Ai

I am staring at apples and peaches.
Life is a word. But a word is alive,
because of course it is, words mark time,
but twisting, lime takes the ending.

My Mom and Dad are shadows now
but I promise they were so pretty
with words when I was a dictionary,
but then, I don't know, I lost pages.

Death is a word. But a word is alive,
like here I am, but in this chair?
Writing but the words aren't mine;
they stay with life when I am done.

Now I pray for a grape or a plum,
anything that would ever grow,
words to swell like lemons,
but only limes will come.

New Normal, Spring 2020

Robin Wright

Tulip bulbs hang on their stems as dogwoods paint the sky with pink and white blooms. I turn on the news. More cases of Coronavirus, more shortages of protective gear and ventilators, more death. A female cardinal, brown with red trim around her wings and an orange beak, flits around my Jeep. She sees her reflection in the deep blue paint while walking on the driveway. Other times she flies to the mirror. I haven't driven my vehicle for a couple of weeks since working from home, so she's become attached to it. Today, her cheer, cheer, cheer, birdie, birdie, birdie summons a male. After they've flown off together to the fence next door, I turn off the news and Google "cardinals" on my laptop. This female's recent behavior is usually attributed to males. They'll see a reflection as another bird and are usually aggressive. Hmm. She acted more enamored than frightened by her reflection.

When I return to watch the bird, she's sitting on top of the Jeep, bird shit all over the vehicle's door, mirror, and handle. I grab a bucket and head outside. My back groans with the effort, but I wash the Jeep. When it shines once again, I set a small container of pepper nearby, hoping not to evict her but to keep my Jeep clean. Evictions have been put on hold here, in my city, on my property. The pepper does not dissuade her. She resists my efforts to relocate her as if she knows about the virus and the mandate.

I clean more shit off the vehicle then toss a blue tarp over the Jeep, hoping she will now frequent the fence, a tree, or a bush. Still, she hovers, flitting up from the driveway, trying to find a way in at the tarp's edge on the door. Unsuccessful, she flies to the top of the Jeep. More research. I do not click on articles about the virus. Blue is a color cardinals are attracted to. I sigh, rub my sore back, and look out the window.

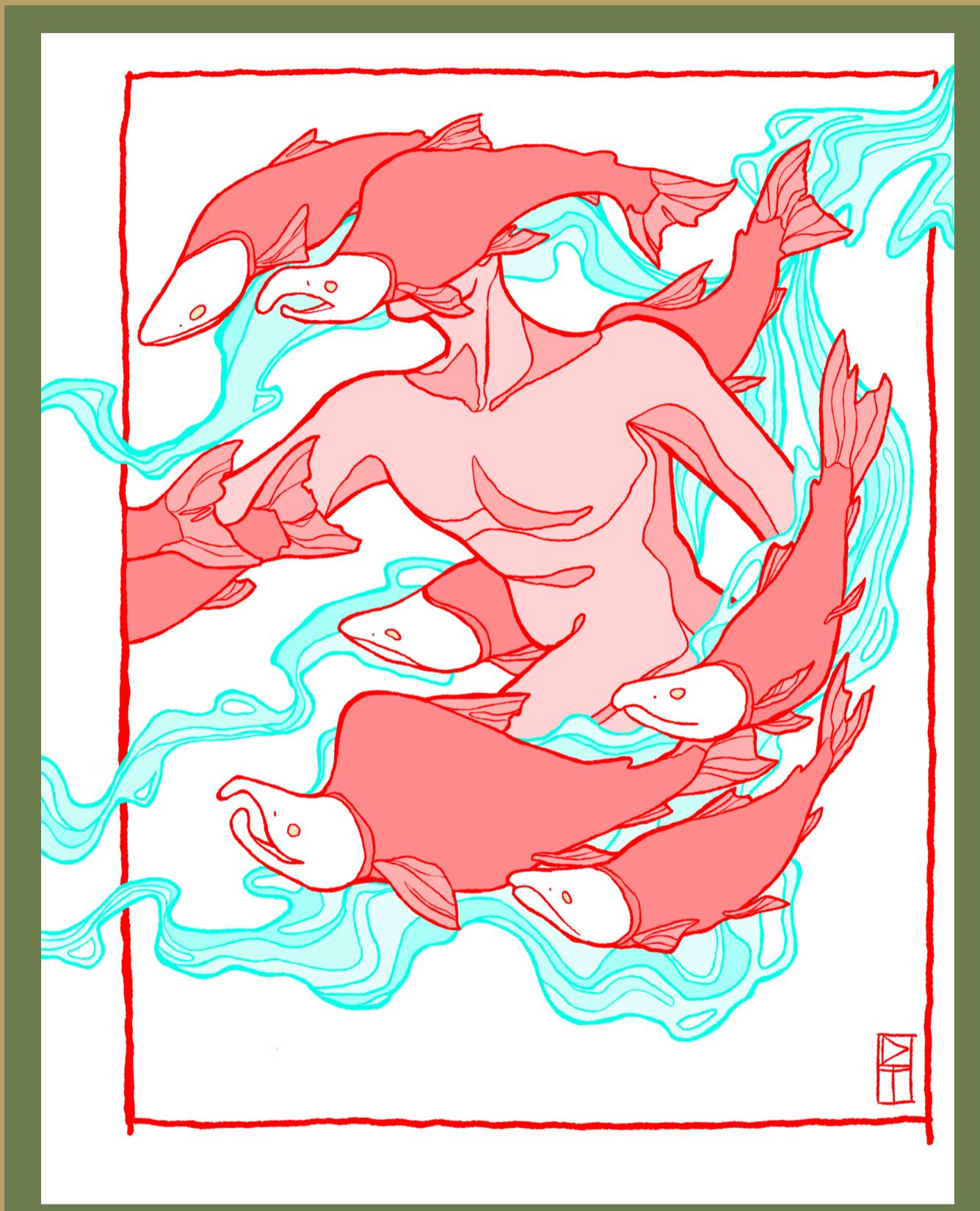
After a day of not seeing her, I think she's found a new favorite spot. I hope somewhere near so I can still get a glimpse of her. Surely nothing has happened to her. I pull off the tarp. She comes back with her bright highlights, her sweet song. And more bird shit. I clean the vehicle again; my back rebels. I ice it. No more research. I tie plastic grocery bags around the mirror and door handle. Two days pass. No dash of red or chirping song. No bird shit. I watch the news and wish I were that cardinal.

Cardinal
Coral O'Leary

A verdant cloud has collapsed;
its opaque fog hovers
over molted leaves.

I am a cardinal in the snow:
a pile of color, bones shambled together.
I have been gathered in this tundra
and built up into a small desperate
pyramid—a bid for warmth.

Inside the frozen valley
I burn down to the marrow.
Red from your violence,
red from your heat.



Delaney Tesch, *Spawning Season*, August 31, 2020, Digital Illustration

Lupine

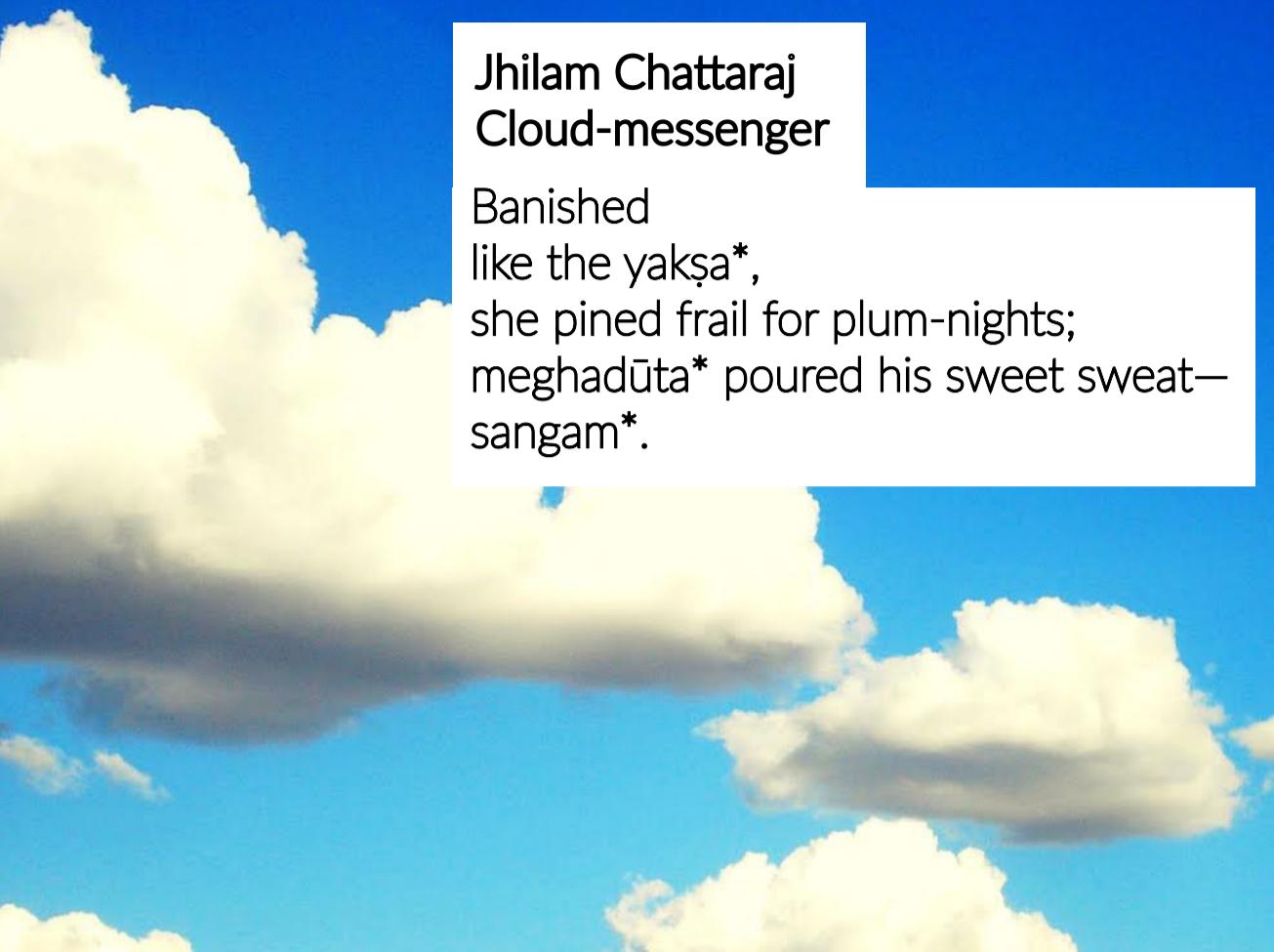
Olivia Wulf

The ditch along Highway 15 is alive
with explosive purple lupines, and I'm reminded
of Ms. Rumphius, who scattered seeds
to make the world more beautiful,

more poisonous. Lupine, wolf-like,
a deathly firework, towards the sky,
a celebration. Canine, but silent,
Canine, but without teeth;

Lupine, my sister, I have seeds
clutched in my hands. I understand.
Together we protect curved bodies,
open hearts, fragile root systems.

We reach skyward and wait for rain.



Jhilam Chattaraj
Cloud-messenger

Banished
like the yakṣa*,
she pined frail for plum-nights;
meghadūta* poured his sweet sweat—
sangam*.



Jhilam Chattaraj
Blue-God

In spring
their bodies rise
to a petal-stained sky.
Nights birth myths—the blue-god, his spell,
his flute.

yakṣa*: The banished slave in the Sanskrit poem, 'Meghadūtam,' by Kālidāsā. For reference: Kālidāsā: for the 21st Century Reader, Translated by Mani Rao, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2014.

Meghadūta**: Cloud-messenger.

Sangam***: Confluence or Meeting.

Birds of a Feather

R. Lee

No one saw the raven and the hummingbird fall in love. One day, things were normal, and by the next day they were together.

They were together by the ranger's station, where the hummingbird drank nectar from a feeder while the raven watched from the roof. They were together on the beach, where the raven gulped down rotten fish while the hummingbird avoided sprays of seawater. They were together in flight, where the hummingbird circled the raven like an iridescent moon orbiting a black sun.

The starlings knew first, and were quick to tell everyone else. "Did you know," they asked, "that the raven was sharing her hollow with the hummingbird? Did you know," they asked, "that the hummingbird perched with the raven, sitting right on her talons?"

It was a ridiculous embarrassment to everyone in the park.

"It won't work," the robins said, "turning over fallen leaves in search of worms. How would they preen each other?"

"It won't work," the turtles said, "sunning themselves in the last rays of fall. How would they court each other?"

"It won't work," the squirrels said, "burying acorns in the soil. How would they have children?"

The couple lingered on the tongues of others as a balm for their pains. Things were bad, but at least things weren't like that.

They gossiped, judged, and moved on.

Meanwhile, the hummingbird watched the grey sky from an oak branch. She wondered if it was cold enough to start snowing.

She heard her mate's wings above the wind's bluster, and the hummingbird's blazing heartbeat sped even faster.

The raven perched beside the hummingbird, her feathery beard fluffed up against the chill. The hummingbird hopped onto her mate's foot, pressing up against her warm, black feathers. "You're done saying goodbye? You were hardly gone an hour!"

The raven's deep croak rumbled through the hummingbird's hollow bones. "I only told my mother. I don't think anybody else wanted to see me."

Then she spoke softer, in the secret warble that corvids used for their closest bonds. "And besides, I'm looking forward to seeing those orchids you keep telling me about."

The hummingbird took off, hovering near the raven's eyes. "I know you'll love them. Come on."

They left, following the hummingbird's migration route due south to brighter weather and free-flowing nectar. After the season passed, they would not be returning to the park.

Maybe they wouldn't last. Maybe the world would tear them apart, like others were so sure of. But for the moment, they were together, buoyed by love and the hope for a warmer world, and it was enough.



Emily Shih, *Sunrise*, 2018, Acrylic on canvas

Physics and Fire

Ilana Drake

What is the best way to learn?

I am a paradox of raw emotions. I am claustrophobic, but agoraphobic; weary of body, but racing in my mind, and, like usual, my morning starts with my 8:00 am math class. Introduction to Mathematical Reasoning falls on A days while Calculus occupies the B days.

Each morning at 7:55 am I move my IKEA desk into the common hallway of our floor, right under the light fixture, just an extension cord away from the electrical outlet. Inside the apartment is filled with too much stimulation. My father, like a great commander, has claimed the territory of my parents' bedroom, and my mother and her laptop have been exiled into the living room, a room that will be shared by my younger brother and me. My brother, who sleeps in a tiny dining room with Shoji screens, also stakes his claim to the common space, and I now am playing a game of musical chairs.

Because my bedroom does not have WiFi, we are out one chair.

The hallway is a calm beige where I do not have to be subject to my father's Zoom calls, my brother's video games, or the nearly constantly changing news about the outside world from the computer or television.

Getting back to math, I watch in wonder as the matrices are multiplied and the three-dimensional objects are rotated around different axes. And, all the while, I wonder how this came to be...

How do you learn calculus when the world is on fire? When the world is rotating faster and faster so that you feel as though you want to get lost in your own dreams. Yet the dreams seem different now. The idea of love during COVID-19 seems almost illegal, and the fantasy of a vacation to Hawaii only would end up in an arrest for violating quarantine.

A few months ago at 8:11 am the Senior Girls in our school sent the entire school a letter telling us about all of the sexist incidents that they had encountered during the past four years in high school. I read this letter during my Introduction to Mathematical Reasoning class, and I could not reason how a school did not protect its young. And, that day, when I saw Minneapolis burning, I wondered how those who had taken an oath not to betray the public trust and to uphold the community would betray us so cruelly. During virtual gym class, I left my building and wandered onto the New York City streets. The Hudson River looked greener than usual, and the 20-somethings had taken over Riverside Park, but the elderly population was in hiding.

As I returned to my desk, and began my virtual physics class, I wondered if I could learn to make the world stop spinning. Could I reduce the entropy of my own universe? Yet, according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the entropy of the entire universe in a closed system will always increase over time. I am now in a closed system. I realize that I am in a closed system, one that does not interact in any way with its surroundings, given that I live in a closed city (New York City) and am socially distanced from my community.

Maybe a new law of physics can emerge that will stop the fires and pronounce a new truth.



Chahat Soneja, *Content*, 2020, Charcoal, 8.2 in. x 7.4 in.

Barren

Tanishka Jain

Half-cut trees like carved gravestones
Roots twisting deep inside, shriveled to the core
Tangled like souls fused wrong,
With only sunken layers to be stripped away,
And the hands that cut these branches
Will thereupon rest here someday
As death comes unto death
Someday, not far away, on these barren lands
Ashes and dust and bones, scattered over golden sands...



Barbara Pastorino, *Terre immaginate*, 2020, Pigments on canvas, 15 cm x 100 cm

You and I
Carl Colvin

A deep sigh rises from the high-tide water,
the wind reaching to tickle a ripple
out of its surface then climb
with its own sigh to the
distant trees. It plays
with their leaves
while the water
watches, and
the ripple
smooths
out the
surface.

Haikus
Indie Rey

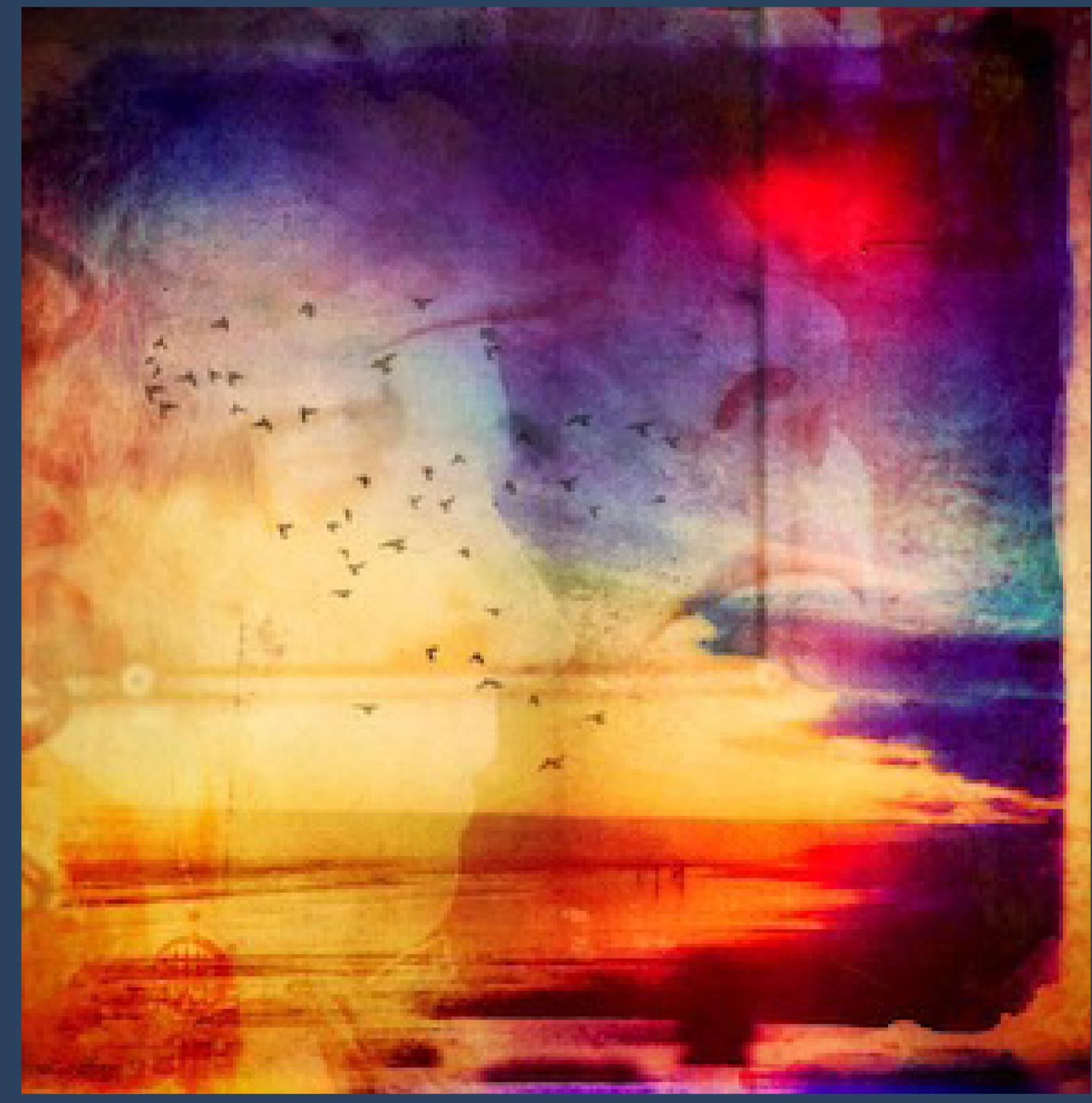
she waits weeping on
the horizon's other side
salt laps at my feet

lovers robe in veils
to mourn the sun's daily death
dawn happens elsewhere

Orbital Dances

Carl Colvin

Sand sifts between
my toes and rides
along brisk winds
as the sun's strong glow
spreads itself wide
over hundreds of cacti
heads and hands held
high toward rising dust
devils. Gnats laugh
in my ear, looping
madly in orbits
of eternal ecstasy
before my hand
redirects their destiny.



Susan Detroy, *Sunset*, 2018, Digital

Enrique González Martínez's
Owl
Karlo Sevilla

The owl sees and writes:

Above, the black sky is pregnant,
heavy with the full moon,
stars, and other bodies.

Below, by the azure fountain,
the poet untangles two swans
which necks he tied
into a ribbon.

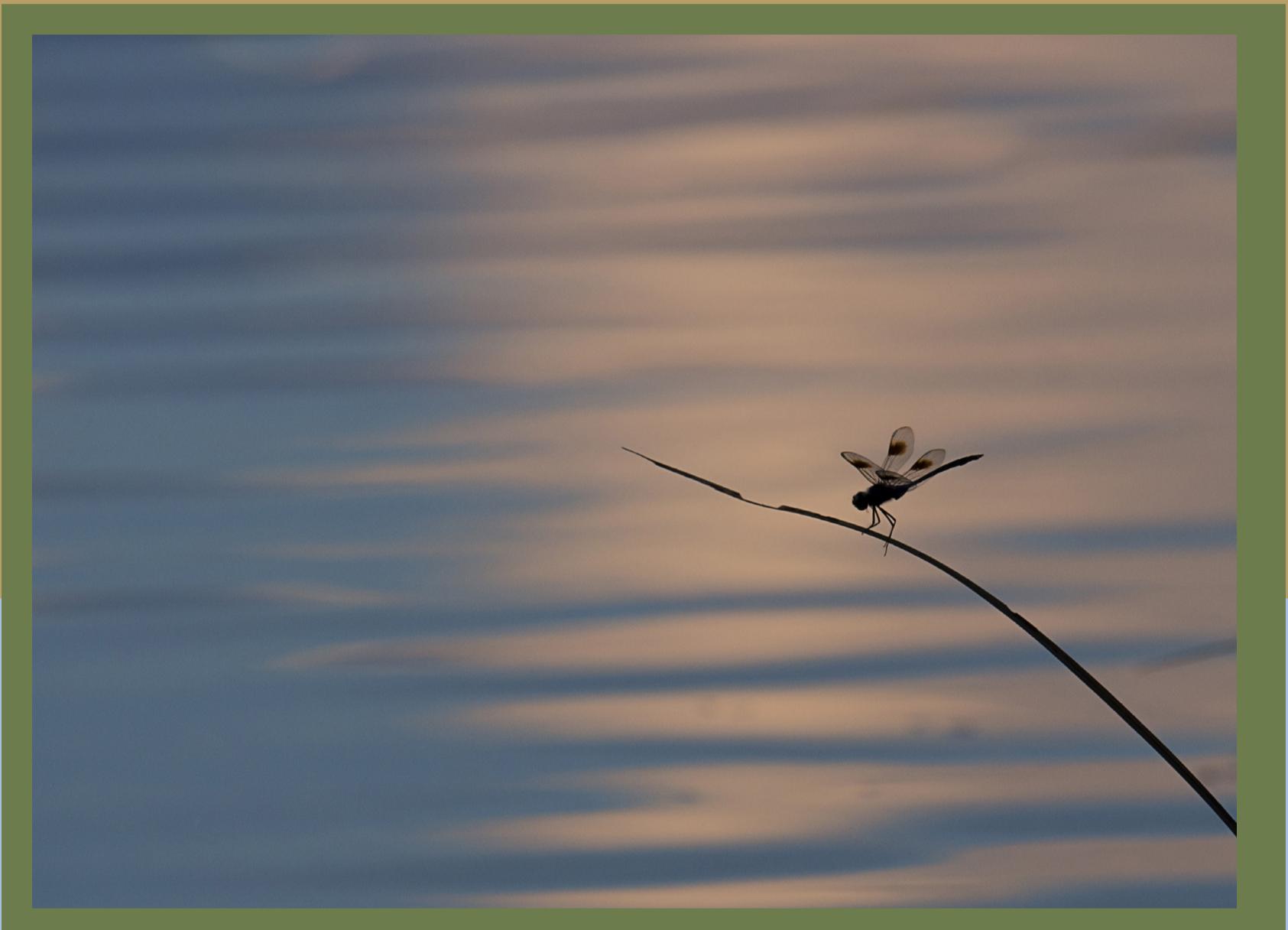
Liberated, they fly
moonward.

Lunation

Daniele Nunziata

The moon cut the sea in half tonight.
Its incomprehensible luminescence tore the black water in two,
pouring its silver light into a middle trench
keeping each side apart like two rippling curtains
unable to reach the centre. A lighthouse on the shore
barely made a mark as its ghostly ray
passed over the surface of the aquatic abyss
before disappearing, then reappearing, like the first shower
of white blossoms cascading from a tree at the onset of summer.

And the boats weren't out at sea that night.
And the fishing nets stayed home.
And the moon had the waves all to itself,
and it dissected them just how it liked.



Inna Malostovker, *Sunbeam Respite*, August 22, 2020,
Digital photography, Everglades National Park, FL

Storm Light

Larissa Reid

The storm fades,
taking its hunchback to the edge of the sea.
The white cottage, draped in ivy and honeysuckle,
breathes in the hum of a generator.
The sun glimmers on the rim of the pond.
A twisted fence drenched in indigo and bumblebees
tapers to a dozen butterflies,
their colour borrowed from the meadow grasses.
There's a swirl of a snail under every step,
and the flicker and fetch of a fox on the hunt.

Summertime II

Grace Shelton

Sunlight flashes in between the trees as you speed down the highway. You can see slices of a river to your left every now and then, like punctuation in a never-ending poem. Burnt orange against cobalt blue, harsh yellow fading into gentle purple. Ahead, the road stretches infinitely. It is not yet late enough for morning rush hour; the earth is silent save for the music you blast through the speakers. Your fingers burn against the leather of the steering wheel.

Turn to your right, and Summertime is there in the passenger seat with his sunglasses perched on his forehead. He does not look like you remember him, but perhaps that is better. His lips are not blue; his clothing is not wet. Each little curl of his hair falls neatly around his face instead of plastering to his cheeks. He is the boy of tropical sun that you'd almost forgotten, the boy from the photographs in the boxes you destroyed when you first returned home.

He says, "I wish it could be like this forever." His voice is like honey straight from the hive, like the soft lap of a wave on parched sand.

You shift in your seat and keep your eyes on the road. There is nothing you can say to that.

He says, "Promise me that things will be like this forever." The last time you saw him, his skin had swelled and expanded in the water. He didn't hold your hand when you begged him.

You hardly recognize him with green eyes.

"I can't," you tell him.

"Then lie to me."

You've never been a good liar, even to yourself. You press your foot like lead against the accelerator, fifteen above the speed limit, and he gazes out the window. He rolls down the glass and sticks his arm out into open air, bobbing it up and down like beats on a heart monitor. Over and under. You sneak a glance from the corner of your eye. Over and under.

What did it feel like to go under? What did it feel like to watch his final breath dissolve into bubbles above him? What did it feel like to drop to the bottom, to examine the streetlights through rippling water? Did he know that from that moment, every story would return to him? If you turn to your right and see him there, he might disappear.

The sky explodes into color.

"This is going to end the same way," you say. You both know it already, so you might as well voice it. Memory has yet to fade into the background—your city skyline waves goodbye in the rearview mirror. The river to your left becomes a swimming pool against the sunrise. You can almost taste chlorine in the air.

Summertime says, "Keep driving," and you wonder why you want to save him at all. A moment longer, and the feeling has passed.

Look at the Trees

Rebecca Turner

After the cows have gone to the stable
we sit on our rickety wooden porch
by the buzz of the lantern light.
My parents and I, cards in our hands,
play Uno, play Go Fish, play Look at the Trees:
the trees and shrubs that separate us from the cows,
covered in the shine of lightning bugs, smiling flashes in the night,
a million little sparkles in the brush, like Christmas in July
all yellow glow and stars in the dark as we hold our cards



Aaron Lelito, *Steps of Egression*, 2019, Digital photograph

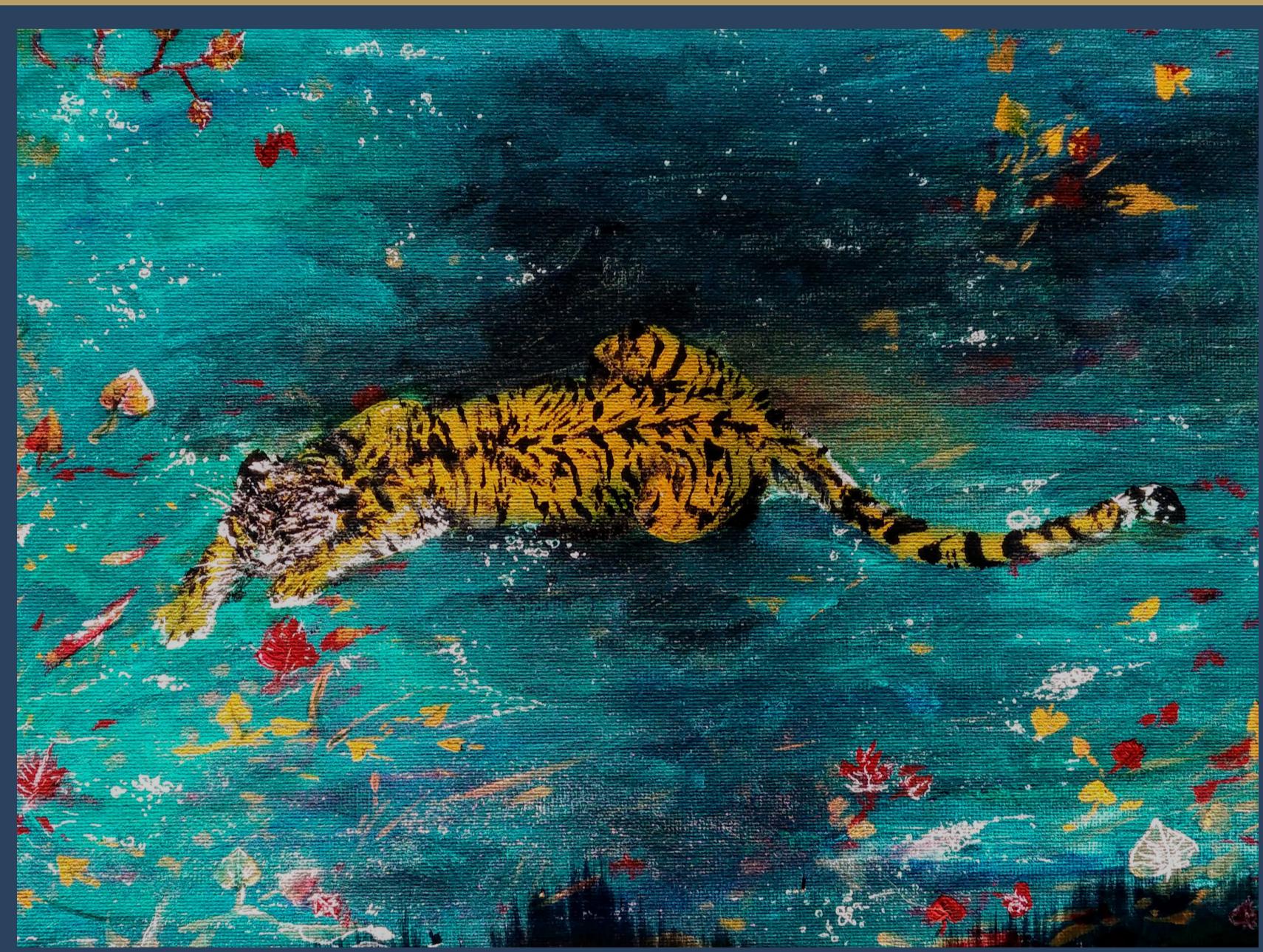
Talking to Trees

Jaimee Boake

Just when I feared
the sound of your voice would be lost to me forever,
that I might forget the timbre of your belly laugh
or the way it would swell with pride when you called me yours,
it came back to me,
and I swear it was carried on the wind,
whistling through the trees like the tune on your lips
preceding you through every doorway.

The first time the breeze brought you back
it was merely a whisper at first,
so quiet I almost missed it,
a rustling of leaves like the “shh shh I’m here, sweetheart,”
that steadied my ragged breathing so many times before.

Now, I keep listening and listening and listening,
wishing for the wind to rise
and the trees to speak.



Lily Baxter, *Le Tigre*, 2018, Acrylic on canvas

Walk it Back
Elizabeth Levinson

Take one step back
and another
and another
until you can remember
what you gathered
in each home
that wasn't quite home
the trees always
held you closer.
Find the leaves
that brushed
against your towhead,
the rough boots
of the cabbage palm.
Pull them back until
a small snake or tiny lizard
pauses in your hand.
Remember, they found warmth there.
Remember, your blood has not cooled.

The Forest of Echoes

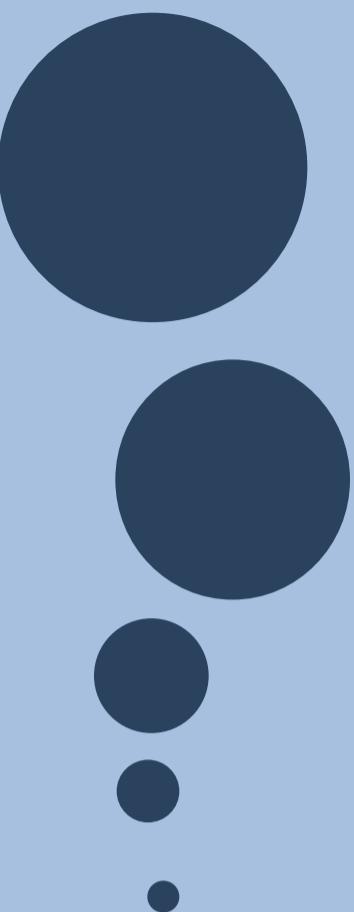
Gabriela Steren

Sometimes I travel alone, and even when I don't, I often find myself walking alone at some point, especially in the mornings. I enjoy the company when I can get it, but these moments of solitude are also welcome, as they allow me to walk at my own pace, take in the views and reflect on things I'm normally too busy to think about.

It was during one of these morning walks that I encountered what I have come to call the Forest of Echoes. The small forest called to me as soon as I spotted the first line of trees in the distance. I can't explain how, but it felt magical to me. As soon as I stepped in, I was regaled with a beautiful birdsong and the dancing rays of the sun that filtered among the canopy of leaves. The earth was soft and pleasant to walk on, so I kept going, wondering what I would find.

I walked among the trees for about an hour and then realized the forest was much bigger than it had seemed at first sight. I sat down to rest, leaning my back on the welcoming trunk of a lenga beech which seemed to have reclined just for me. As I laid my hand on the tree's roots, the image of a line of ants walking up the tree appeared before my eyes. I instinctively raised my hand to look, but no ants were there. Puzzled, I put my hand down again and saw a small mouse walk around the tree, a woodpecker hammer repeatedly on the trunk, a flock of siskins dive down to feed among the roots, and a hare run by to suddenly stop, sniff the air, and dart away in a different direction.

I thought I was dreaming, since every image faded away as quickly as it had come. Afraid to break the spell but knowing I had to keep going, I stood up and resumed my walk. Soon, I reached the first sign of human presence other than my own: the remains of a campfire. I picked up a burnt stick and saw a family laugh as they shared a meal around the fire, followed by two foxes who competed over the leftovers, playing tug of war with a cow's rib. I hurried away before I would see the cow's ghost and eventually reached the end of the forest. The road greeted me among a green pasture, but before I left entirely, I had a thought. I looked back and saw my own tracks on the earth. I touched them and saw myself as I had walked through the woods earlier. I realized then that it is true that one cannot observe nature without affecting it, but also—and more importantly—that I was now, myself, a part of the forest.



be more than a drop in the ocean