

# MINNOW

# LITERARY MAGAZINE



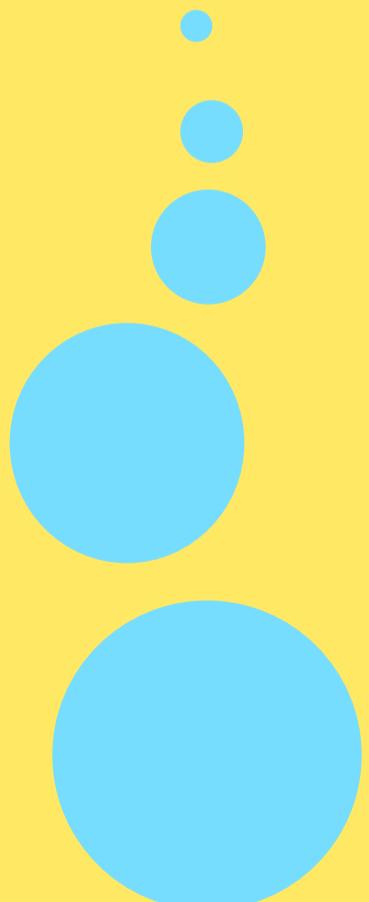
EDITION 3 : SPRING 2021

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 7 countries on 4 continents: Australia, England, India, New Zealand, Romania, Scotland, and the United States (14 different states represented).

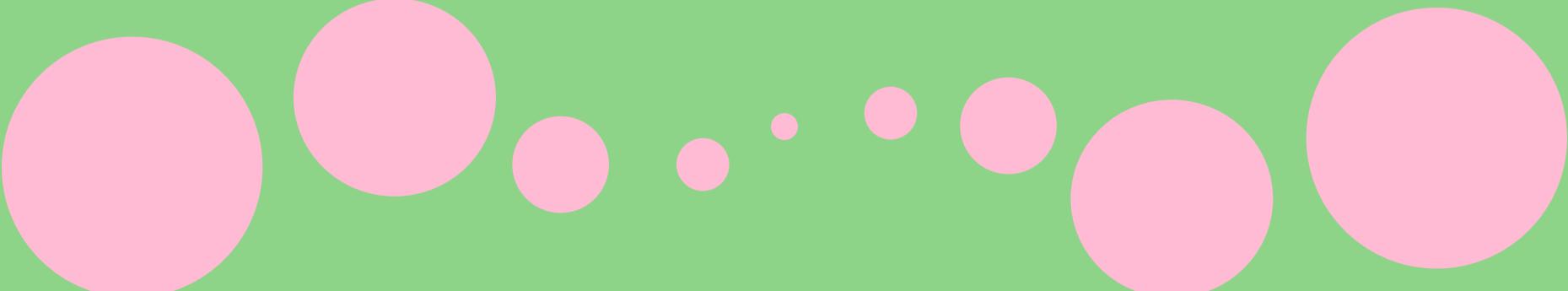
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Haiku  
DJ Tyrer

Spring sky winter-like  
Sun shines with chill light  
Rebirth put on hold

## The Magpie

LJ Ireton

The rain had sunk into the pavement,  
dark grey and shining silver  
under a watchful magpie's eye.  
The Sun was relieved.  
It could finally soothe  
the landscape after the storm—  
it projected a rose gold hue  
over all the white houses in response.  
Ever the entrepreneur,  
the wily magpie flew  
directly through the Sun's setting fire,  
colouring his white feathers pink  
and blushing  
under his sleek black wings.  
I have seen magpies  
take many things—  
but a shade of sunset  
is a select achievement.

## Still Life with a Crow

### Janet Marugg

It was snowing as she sat on her garden bench; white flakes fell and blended into her hair. In her hand, a shock of yellow. A crow on the bench beside her was iridescent, blue-black on white. It felt like a long, beautiful moment to take her last breath.

This is how she knew her end. She had always dreamed exactly what would be: late but easy births, serendipitous encounters, objects found, and lives lost. Even her daydreams inserted themselves into the softest moments of an ordinary day. They were sharp with the crystalline quality of prophecy.

But it was March, that month when leaves greened the world overnight, when light turned from soft pink to rich gold, when the earth gave off its own warmth for an optimist's seeds. She had time before the winter of her dream, three whole seasons of hope.

Gardeners, by definition, were hopeful people. Nobody planted a seed, tucked tender roots into the soil, or even removed a weed from its unfortunate hold without hope for an intended result, something beautiful or fruitful. For decades she hoped through her aching backs, dirt-split fingernails, and inevitable sun damage. Her hope had coaxed tender Ranunculus and Gloxinia into dividable masses and tamed annual invasions of Himalayan blackberry and Rugosa rose brambles. Her efforts were welcomed by returning February jonquils and appreciated by autumn Crocus.

Ignoring the pancreatic pain, she began to dig up dandelions in the farthest corner of her lawn. She tired after only a handful, surprised by the thought that somehow, by destroying these yellow demons, she was also destroying her brightest angels.

She rested on the bench from her dream and listened to the offkey notes of songbirds. Eyes closed, she sensed the stampede of clouds overhead, the shadow preceded the gust that freed the petals from the flowering pear overhead. They fell like white feathers. She opened her eyes, squeezed the dandelions in her fingers and greeted the crow like her oldest friend.

Spring  
E.R. Paget

Somewhere,  
between the sheets  
of wind and rain,  
the sun's rays blaze,  
and as March strides on  
green shoots rise  
and choirs of birdsong  
fill the skies.

Shy buds unfurl blossoms  
of delicate white and pink,  
and the low hum of bees  
drifts over a sweet  
and gently heated breeze.  
Under the leisurely  
lengthening sun,  
spring has slowly,  
gracefully sprung.



Chris Biles, *Need Some Nectar*, 2020, Photography; Washington, DC.

Entanglements  
Jeffrey G. Moss

Spider webs span  
sidewalks from shrub  
to stop sign pole,  
bold like suspension  
bridges, anchor  
cables thick  
as yarn, sticky  
spirals laden with last-  
gasp moths,  
blood-fat  
mosquitos,  
diamonds of dew.

On our dusk  
and dawn  
dog walks,  
their collars jingle  
as if to ward off evil.  
We dodge

the inevitable  
entanglements  
of autumn.

## Golden Gate Park

Chris A. Smith

Forgot my earbuds  
so I'm stuck with myself  
and the wild wind blowing off the Pacific  
as it slaloms through the trees  
the wet huff of runners and nylon whoosh of bikers  
the clamor of socially distanced play dates  
masked moms chatting, to-go cups in hand  
old Russians in puff jackets, slow as bears,  
their words murmured and twisty.  
But mostly I hear the birds,  
the bright tattoo of woodpeckers  
the chitter of chickadees and sparrows  
overlapping songs like a sacred round  
rough music riding the wind.



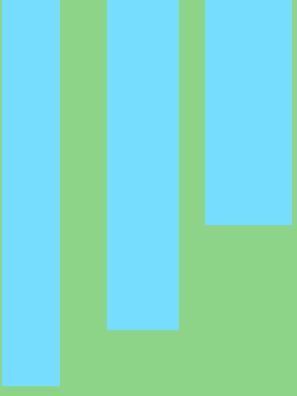
Inna Malostovker, *One Cloudy Morning*, 2/19/2021, Digital photography, Sanibel, FL.



## Captivity

Jennifer Shneiderman

I'm scooping up Bahamian sand dollars in warm shallow water, my snorkel bobbing and dipping. Two marine biology classmates run towards me, each holding the end of a bucket. The girls have caught a gray-green baby octopus. It lays motionless, submerged in seawater, clinging to a corner of the plastic basin. The creature remains still and seems sad and frightened. An instructor tells us if we don't let it go, it will die. We plunge the container into the ocean and wait until the creature frees itself, arms undulating. I release the sand dollars back to the ocean and watch as they slowly sink toward home.



There is More Microplastic in the Ocean than there are  
Stars in the Milky Way  
Michele Powles

Imagine yourself a fish:  
thick, cool roil of current on your hot-day skin.

Already heavy with the bloom of eggs,  
you're ripe.

You'd smile to your lover if  
you could find him through the shafts of dancing light.

When night comes, stars fall from the sky;  
you gulp up their glittering, laughing beauty.

Life is good;  
except,

inside,  
your belly bulges with indignation.  
The weight and the light and the manmade milky way  
have swallowed you, whole.



Michael Anthony, *The Gorge*, 2016, Watkins Glen, NY.



**Warm like liquid gold  
Cascades in a waterfall  
Down the sides of slopes  
Each grain  
Chasing the one in front  
Faster and faster  
Gritty silky crystals  
Tiny and tough  
Tossed in the wind  
From one dune to the next  
And yet never ending  
Liquid gold**

©SABIHAWRITESPOETRY

Liquid Gold  
Sabiha Musa



Steve Barichko, *Lake*, 2020, Galaxy S10e Camera, White Memorial Conservation

## Stillness

C.T. Holte

When you are on water  
assaulted by speedboats and jet-skis,  
there is little point in hoping for tranquility,  
for a quiet afternoon, awake with no wakes.

On our little pond, however,  
stillness is the norm,  
though our new kayak—  
loud lime-green molded plastic—  
affronts the blue of the lake  
each time I launch it.

I bring a pencil and a scrap of paper,  
paddle slowly out of the cove,  
then listen carefully while I drift  
silent as a fallen branch or curious turtle  
until the dictation begins  
and I am blessed with the job  
of recording secretary  
for the ageless wisdom  
wafted across the water by the breeze.

Message in a Bottle  
Ela Topan

I write myself  
into my poems,  
my message in a bottle.

With fear and a prayer,  
I give the bottle to the sea,  
and gently help the water set it free.



Sarah Thomas, *Frozen Driftwood*, April 2021, Mentor, OH.

## Seven Things You May Want to Know About Banyans

Diane Gottlieb

1. Banyan trees, or *Ficus benghalensis*, if you want to get technical, are remarkable beings of grace. They're the largest of the ficus genus and native to India, where they hold the honor of national tree. They can also be found in South Florida.

I live in southern Florida. I may or may not be a remarkable being, and I'm not very large, but I have been known to carry myself with some grace. I pass several Banyans on my daily walk around the loop surrounding my 55+ community, where I also see a variety of ducks and lizards and people with gray hair.

2. The Banyan tree has deep, long roots that also spread wide above ground. Aerial roots, too, hang down from its branches. Some appear to be thick ropes, others extra trunks.

I stop to observe those roots, broad and strong, reaching below, across, and above. I feel honored, witnessing the tree's connection to the earth, awed that rich soil and sunlight are what feed this massive beauty. The Banyan: it's so confident, so firmly grounded. I'm jealous. It asks no questions, while I hold so many. I look at its powerful limbs, its aerial roots and wonder what it might be like to sprout roots into the air. My own family lineage grew in the dark underground, fed from so many secrets, most of which have never seen the light of day.

3. Older, huge individual trees have been known to extend themselves out and cover as much as an acre.

A small forest alive in one tree.

4. Ficus is a genus of about 850 species of woody trees, shrubs, and vines. The word "ficus" is Latin and means "fig." Benghalensis hails from Bangladesh. The tree's common name, Banyan, resembles "banians," the name given to Hindu traders who set up their stalls in the shade of these glorious trees. Banyans are sacred symbols of fertility and life.

My name, Diane, comes from Latin too, meaning one or all of these: "to shine, sky, heaven, god." One must not forget Diana, the ancient Roman goddess of childbirth, the hunt, and the forests. I've always suspected there was some goddess in me, and, on my best days, I might reflect the divine. Fertility. Forests. I like that. Maybe there's some Banyan in me too.

5. Banyan trees, according to Hindu traditions, are thought to have the power to fulfill people's wishes.

Maybe tomorrow, I'll wish on a tree.

6. The Banyan has practical uses as well. In addition to providing shade, twigs are sold as toothpicks in India and Pakistan.

Toothpicks!

7. And after the British colonized India, they used Banyans as gallows\*. On one day in 1857, during India's first war of independence, the British hanged 257 rebels from the branches of a single Banyan tree. Legend holds that it took seven attempts to execute the Indian rebel Amar Shahid Bandhu Singh from a sacred Banyan tree. When he finally died, the story goes, the tree began to bleed.

I wonder if you could hear the tree cry.

\*<https://underthebanyan.blog/2018/04/12/the-trees-of-life-that-became-agents-of-death/>

Nature Vs.  
Jason Melvin

The dandelion  
cleaves through  
a crack in the sidewalk

Crab grass and clovers  
speak up in spots  
along the driveway

Evergreen shrubs  
left to mature without trimming  
now brush the roof's gutters

Resilient grass blades  
among the landscape stones  
find their way through plastic mesh

It taunts me  
lets me know  
I am temporary

just squatting  
a renter  
at best



Michael Anthony, *Central Park Rock*, 2010, New York, NY.

## Heart-Shaped Rock

Kim Horner

Walking along  
a trail in the park,  
I found a heart-shaped  
rock, lying in the dirt,  
a little grey stone  
not much bigger than  
a quarter, rough  
around the edges,  
scratched, uneven,  
chipped and a bit  
dusty, like my own,  
like all of ours,  
but there it was.

Since then I have  
spotted others,  
these hearts that  
have been trampled  
but could not  
be broken.

## Forced March

### Tom Long

Fog clung to the ground like stage smoke. It was cold, damp, and claustrophobic, like walking through a cloud.

The gravel road corkscrewed into the forest as if it were trying to avoid a dead end. A stand of pine trees towered over the leafless maples that lined the road edged with melting snow. Dogs barked in the distance, their calls muffled, mysterious. His heart thumped out a backbeat as he double-timed ahead.

*Crunch...crunch...crunch.* His hiking boots scratched out the rhythm.

The dawn excursion followed a sleepless night spent rolling between sweat-stained sheets, remembering things he couldn't forget: running in the woods when they were kids, swinging over table rock on the "Tarzan" rope swing, cooking hotdogs over a sputtering campfire, swimming in the muddy river, drinking their first warm beers. The memories flashed by like images in a powerpoint presentation.

He had known the guitar player since childhood. They reconnected recently and revived the garage band of their youth. On weekends they escaped the complications of work and parenthood to forge a few riffs onto an EP they hoped to distribute to family and friends.

The guitar player's wife called the night before. She said she hadn't seen him for a couple of days. He left for work on Monday and never returned. His truck was found at the end of the dead-end road in the woods where they had played as kids. He left his cell phone behind.

Had he seen him? Her voice trailed off.

The missing person story in the paper this morning said he took his handgun with him. The guy who wouldn't eat meat and refused to swat a mosquito because all living things that had a right to life had a handgun?

In retrospect, there were hints. Dark mentions of bullying in the woods by the older kids when they were young as well as intimations of something much, much worse. But he only intimated, never explained, and he changed the subject just as soon as it was broached. It was like the guitar player wanted to talk but couldn't. Was there something he could, or should, have done?

He couldn't just go to work, could he? He had to do something. He decided to go to the woods where the guitar player left his truck and look around. When he arrived at the end of the road there were half a dozen SUVs and a few cop cars parked at the turnaround. A couple of dogs barked and strained at their handlers' leads. The crunchy backbeat stopped as he froze in his hiking boots, unsure whether to proceed or retreat. But he was quickly relieved of the decision. A uniformed policeman came out to meet him and turned him away. "Sorry, you'll have to leave. Police business," he said. "There's nothing you can do."

The obituary was in the paper the next day.

Rafflesia  
Halin Roche

Deep in the jungle,  
a flower takes a form.  
Nine months to gain shape  
but only a week to deform.

Yet it lives a life of majesty,  
its grandeur, a meter-wide.  
Blood-red petals soon to be dried.  
Queen of the forest:  
curse of the walking corpse,  
a wide mouth open to swallow the rain drops.

I, Rafflesia.  
stand proud and single,  
in the hearth of the jungle.  
No fear in me;  
my life is far beyond the kingdom.  
My petals outreach every giant oak's roots.  
My quest lasts longer than the stream's course.  
What secret is my death to resolve?  
Other than to live, grow, and evolve.



Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad, *Gumtree Gale*, Mixed-Media and Collage with Gouache, Acrylics, Distress Inks, Paper, Cloth Bits, and Pens, January 2021-March 2021, Sydney, Australia.

### Mistress of Night

gracefully swoops into town  
gently sweeping colors away.  
turning trees black,  
making lights bright,  
enticing crickets to awaken

kindly giving the stars  
a chance to shine,  
urging fireflies to find each other,  
dance just above the grass,  
between the branches of trees,  
flashing on and off,  
on and off,  
against her  
soft, black dress.

Shelly Lyons

[everything I don't want to think about is buried in the fields of an old, abandoned] FARM  
Risa Mykland

There are layers of mud  
beneath the meadow.  
I love digging,  
but only until I get tired.

Everything still buried can  
rot until it  
decomposes & ferments.

I will do whatever I can  
with my gentle trowel  
to avoid anything deeply entombed.

When my digging gets close,  
I carefully count down to midnight  
and light a candle  
at first church bell.

I am not my trauma.  
I am everything I hide it with.

Give me water & dirt.  
I will whisper secrets that no longer hurt me.  
I learned in nursery rhymes to give  
only to the growing crop,  
not the mud underneath.  
Nectarines grow  
in the field  
just for me  
to swallow whole  
and spit back the pit.

Juice drips into my shirt and the soil.  
It can hurt to be known.

## The Eternal Experience

### Ashley Rubin

Her shovel slides smoothly into the soil. Out here, the ground is soft and sweet smelling. The canopy of trees is thick, muffling any noise, keeping secrets so old and rare it makes the forest feel magical.

She's been digging since dawn. The hole is six feet long but not nearly as deep. It's hard work digging a grave.

Next to the slowly emerging chasm is a body wrapped in tarp and draped in a thick rug.

He made her promise, as the cancer ate away at his insides, that she would bury him out here in the vastness of the forest. Trade in a casket and suit for dirt and his wedding ring. No clothes, no flowers, no sentimental speeches. Just him and the earth.

She continues to dig. She remembers laughing at him as they lay on their marital bed, when he first suggested that this is how he wanted to be buried in his old age. They both had a grand time that night, sipping Tzarina champagne on silk sheets and making plans for a future heavy with potential, ripe for two thirty-somethings ready to eat the world. They had money to blow, nowhere to be, and they were madly in love. What a life.

That was 20 years ago. Now she digs. Her manicure is ruined. Her cashmere sweater is cozy in the moss. She took it off earlier and tossed it behind her, not caring where it landed.

She digs some more. The hole is bigger, definitely ready to receive its precious gift. She stops a moment, admiring her work.

She had doubted herself. Looking at his body as it lay in the hospital bed, the machines turned off, the nurses and doctors gone, she had wondered how she would do it. If she had had sons, this would have been easier. Her own personal guard, digging as she watched from on high.

But there was no one else. Just her.

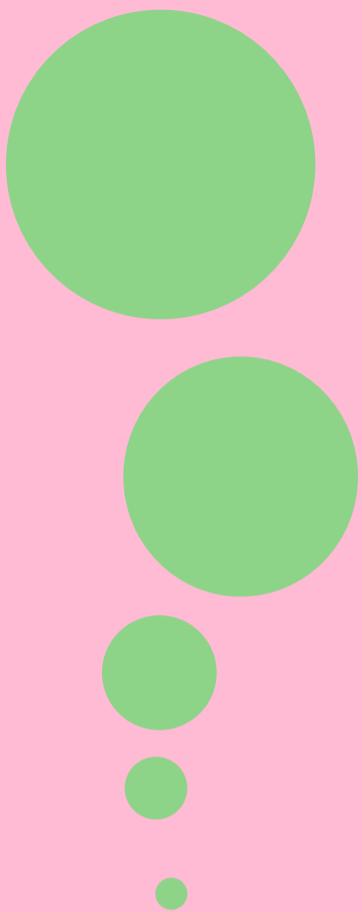
None of that matters now. She's done it on her own. In the end, his devastated body weighed next to nothing, and everyone avoided looking the new widow in the eye, so it was rather easy to become invisible. Made it easier for her to move him quietly and undetected.

She stakes the shovel into the ground. She walks over to the body, standing over it until her vision starts to blur. Then rather quickly, she rolls the mass into the grave. There's no pine box, but she finds her sweater and manages to cradle it underneath her husband's head.

Suddenly, she feels alone and doesn't want to be out in the woods another moment. She begins the process of replacing the soil. When that is done, she packs up her belongings and leaves. She refuses to look back, purposefully ignoring any markers that would help her find his grave should she want to visit him.

She never returns to his resting place.

She lets the forest keep him, swallow him in.



be more than a drop in the ocean