

MINNOW LITERARY MAGAZINE



EDITION 4 : SUMMER 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 4 countries on 3 continents: England, India, Russia, and the United States (9 different states represented).

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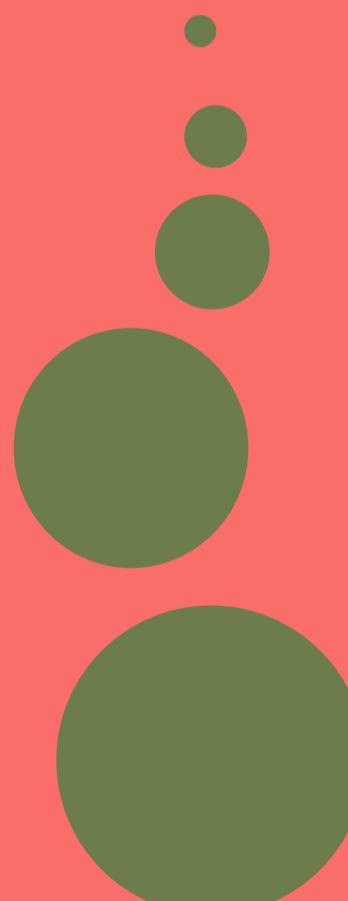
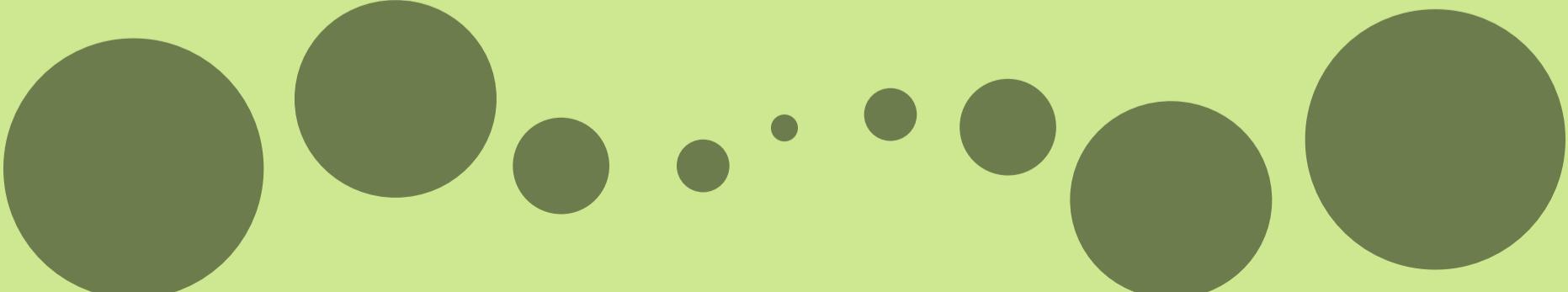


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A Summer Hour

James G. Piatt

As I strolled along ancient paths in the woodlands, my thoughts wandered through rhythms of silence, as sycamore and pine trees swayed to the pulse of nature's waking moments. Sweet fragrances wafted into my senses from meadow wildflowers, and spoke to me in perfumed voices, weaving dreams. I felt the soft touch of the summer breeze caressing my body, and the warmth curved around the edge of the summer hour, filling it with serenity.

Untitled
Aeryk Pierson

Cicadas singing
a summer's lament. Cement
sears the slow black slug.

Untitled
Aeryk Pierson

Here where the road parts,
dandelions carry breath
on gossamer wings.

Garden Chores III

K. L. Johnston

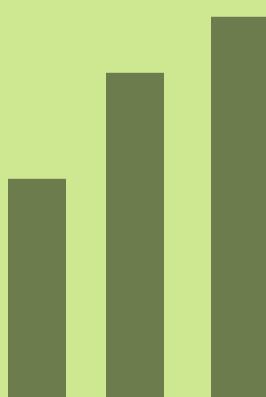
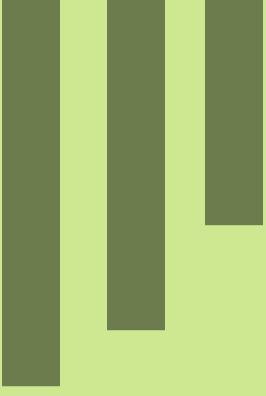
It may take a year to see
if the Spanish snapdragons
remain evergreen, and twelve
months to know if the vixen
will den again under the
old tool shed.

Some of us move
slowly, our natural pace.
Learning the basic needs of
oregano and basil's
love for tomatoes, both in
the earth and on the palate,
does not call for tech jargon
or expertise.

The jungle
of the information swamp,
its growth more rampant but less
nurturing than zucchinis,
requires wisdom. What defines
a weed? There's a fine layer
of compost spread out, feeding
those things I never wanted
to know, but still nourishing
the useful and beautiful.



Brian Michael, *Untitled*, Photography



Glimmer of Hope

Swati Moheet Agrawal

I left the window open last night to let in a gentle zephyr.
Noiselessly a firefly flew in,
twinkling at me, illuminating my pitch black room.
An unspoken camaraderie
dispelling the gloom of a melancholy day.

Nature Therapy

Swati Moheet Agrawal

Feasting my eyes upon the dew on antirrhinums,
taking in the scent of the honeysuckle,
the playful banter between the wind and the maple -
there are few comforts greater than nature
when all hopes are squashed.

Bee Grief

Edie Meade

I killed a honeybee today, caught it
in my sandal where it died
stinging my foot, as a bee must.
It was my first honeybee sting
since I was small, springing
through clover fields,
remorseless and valiant,
and stings ached less.

I flicked it out in a hurry, bee
guts dragged as embroidery thread
on the too-small needle of a stinger,
hardly defense so much
as a separation,
and I felt it dying, powdering
its last pollen in a fuzzy
panic against my fingertip.

By evening the pain has dulled
but down in the ridges,
in the whorl of my fingerprint
where the bee last nuzzled,
that soft vibration lingers.



Inna Malostovker, *Center Piece*, 6/1/2021, Digital photography, Morristown, NJ.

Cleaning Fish

ST Chapman

She sat in the dirt and counted out loud.

“One, two, three...” When she got to 11, she smiled because it was the same number as her age. Pulling the knife from her belt, she leaned forward. Her dirty fingers, crusted with grime and seaweed and other substances from the bay, wielded the sharp, metal blade with precision. And just like reciting the alphabet or counting to 100, she didn’t need to remember the lesson. She just liked to.

“Cut the fins off first,” he had said. “Lots of folks skip this step, but it makes things easier.” He told her this when she was only five. When she could barely hold the knife.

“Now, scale the thing. Then rinse it in the bucket.” He would show her, then sit back and watch, patiently.

“Next, tilt him and cut.” She cut herself once. That was all it took to never cut herself again.

“Now, gut him. Just like I showed you. I know it’s a little gross, but if you wanna eat, you gotta gut.” She threw up that first time. But he didn’t laugh. He simply smiled at her and moved the fish to a cleaner spot where she could try again.

“And there you have it. A bucket full of clean fish.”

Clean, she thought, running the blade in the dirt before putting it back in her belt and picking up the bucket. Eleven clean fish. As she walked home, she tried to remember the last time *he* was clean. And could not.

The Jungle

Bazil Frueh

He loved a boy
who played him
like a windpipe,
filling his throat
with air and spit—

enough to
cultivate a jungle,
roots and branches
piercing through
his ribs.

They frolic
in flesh eating basins,
snarling their teeth,
and baring
their breasts.

They wager life,
tempting the mamba
who spews venom
into their
flaccid backs.

They drink
the rubbery sap
flowing from
the evergreen,
stumbling through ferns and ivy.

To clear the fog
they burn sage,
but haze
lurks back
to haunt overgrown promises.

Tied together,
they embrace
on wobbling ground
as darkness shades their bodies
under enveloping canopies.

There they stand
and wonder:

*How can we preserve a jungle
without sunlight?*



Shagufta Mulla, DVM, *Eye To Eye*, 2011, digital photography,
Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, AZ.

Sunflower
Kirsty Jones

Heavy headed,
weary – yet
still putting on a show.

Adorned with gold,
a doorway to a land of
heat and honey.

Tomorrow, drape your costume
upon the cooling ground – but now

turn and face
the season's dying rays

and blaze, my sweet love,
blaze.

A Yellow Flower

Liliya Gazizova

I am a closed yellow flower,
maybe not even a rose.
Maybe a dandelion
that hides its yellowness, its heart,
after dark.

Darkness doesn't inspire nudity.
One should strip naked in the daytime.
The details of the chest
will be more visible
while breathing.
One should breathe with
the scraps of words and dreams,
interjections of looks
and the slush of the unconscious.

It's true, the closed yellow flower
has nothing to lose
except its life – short and yellow.

Translated by Olga Karasik

Her Bones
Natalie Timmerman

Her bones rest in soil
with grime and overgrown moss,
naked amidst ferns.

Brushed by gleaming worms,
she hides with sun-blessed clovers.
Creeping vines sheathe toes.

Pallid arm sprawled out,
marrow carved by termite wrath:
etchings left behind.

Calderas for eyes,
her aged skull a hollow dome
where bog waters slosh.

Spores collect on ribs.
Mushrooms replace all gashes.
Her ridges flourish.

Silver ring hugs hand,
tarnished from thundering rain.
Crows peck nonetheless.

Her bones rest in soil,
a cadaver feeding new life
where she now returns.



Dave J. Sula, *Keepng Watch*, Photography.

The Slow Pace of a World at Rest

Lakshmi Krishnakumar

On March 24th 2020, the Prime Minister of India announced a nationwide lockdown starting at midnight. Though initially slated for three weeks, it was extended, running up to months, and it still hasn't completely been lifted in most parts of the country. Due to the suddenness of the announcement and the complete ban on inter-state travel, I found myself facing weeks of solitude in the city where I work, separated from my family.

The initial days passed in a frenzy of panic: *Did I have enough supplies to last me through the week before I go out on a grocery trip?* Were all the people I loved and cared about doing well? The pictures of thousands of my fellow countrymen and women walking miles to their hometowns under the sweltering sun broke my heart. Images of disease and death from around the world flooded my mental space, and it seemed that there indeed was no beauty or hope in this world. At least, not in the foreseeable future.

Soon, there were reports of the natural world claiming the spaces that humans had abandoned in their quest for a refuge from sickness. From Chandigarh in the plains of North India, one could see the mountain ranges of the Dauladhars because the skies and the air, usually smoggy, had cleared up. Images of swans in Venetian canals, a fox on London streets, and bird sightings in otherwise bird-deprived spaces took the internet by storm. Graphs showed how since the beginning of an almost universal lockdown, carbon emissions fell. On social media, people posted images of beautiful sunsets and pristine landscapes, with captions like "Humans are the real viruses."

Perhaps it was the boredom, or the need to look for something that reminded me of 'normalcy,' or perhaps it was the crushing sense of being alone for months on end with no social life; I started looking for nature's revival closer to home. I live in an arid part of the country, and compared with the lushness of my hometown, what I saw around me was meagre greenery struggling to grow under the harsh summer sun. There were promising signs, nevertheless.

Across the boundary wall of my apartment complex, two *gulmohar* trees stood, throwing their shadows on the now empty houses. As April rolled into June, the dense green of the trees gave way to budding oranges, and by the middle of the month, the trees were aflame with their bright rust-coloured flowers. Boughs hung heavy with the blooms, and in the night, when there was no light save for the ones in the common areas, the shadows of the branches danced silent dances on the walls. A crow built its nest on one of the trees; a kingfisher would alight in the evenings on the other, perhaps a little rest before going on its way home.

In the afternoons, in the absence of the noise of any construction or TVs, the sounds of the *gulmohars* swaying in the hot breeze made their way through open windows into my bedroom. In the evenings, I walked in the yard and looked for insect larvae and pupae under the milkweed bushes. Everywhere, an abundance of a life I had not bothered to look for now came knocking.

This was also a period of an encounter with elements of nature which I was not too thrilled to meet. One evening, the guard of my apartment building warned me against walking in the uncut grass because they caught a cobra there the previous day. Undisturbed by footfalls, snakes, frogs, and rats ventured more and more onto the paved pathways. Mice made their way inside my flat, reminding me that living with nature wasn't all about butterflies on shoulders and birdsongs. Sometimes nature takes the form of an intruder in our houses; the walls we build to moderate the amount of nature we interact with aren't sufficient to keep it out.

Towards the middle of July, when the two *gulmohar* trees were almost fully orange, with hardly any green, I could travel to my family. During the two weeks of mandatory quarantining, my only recourse to the outside world was through the windows, into a plot of land owned by a neighbour. The monsoons were setting in, and the dark purplish-brown of moss turned bright green after a night of showers. The days darkened with heavy clouds, and at night, the chorus of frogs kept croaking their mating songs. For the first time in my life, I noticed how ferns sprouted where there had been no signs of life before, plants growing on other plants. Everywhere, life took root and unfurled itself with the patience of slow movements. In an unhurried fashion, the world re-greened itself: a constant reminder that humans aren't the end-all in this world. I thought of apartment complexes, once full of human life, now abandoned, now full of foliage and fauna, crumbling under its reclamation by the wild.

It's been almost ten months since my money plants were first brought into the flat. During the second-wave of the pandemic in the months of April and May of 2021, my plants were left unattended and they died. But the mice were alive, and owing to their unsolicited visits, I moved to an apartment on the first floor. I now have a balcony from where on mornings and evenings I watch birds start and end their days. Guava trees brush my bedroom windows, and I wonder if I can pluck a ripening fruit. The fear of mice making their way into this apartment still gives me restless nights, but the occasional yellow bird on my windowsill brings me joy too. I do not get to choose the manner in which I am vulnerable to nature.

One evening after work, I sit on the balcony and look down at a patch of untended land within my apartment compound. Familiar foliage grows there: milkweed, coatbuttons, and wild grass. The lavender flowers on the milkweed are heavy on the ashy leaves of the bush. I count the bushes: seven of them in that little piece of land, hosting insect and animal life. In the dusk, children cycle, and their bells ring out. Women gossip with their neighbours. I spy two crows flying with twigs in their beaks. The milkweed plants are at rest, but thriving nevertheless, anchoring lives in the quiet, sturdy way of the plant and the tree.



Aeryk Pierson, *While Waiting*, 3/2017, Photo shot with iPhone 7+, Katy, TX.

Spring, the South Side
Daniel McGee

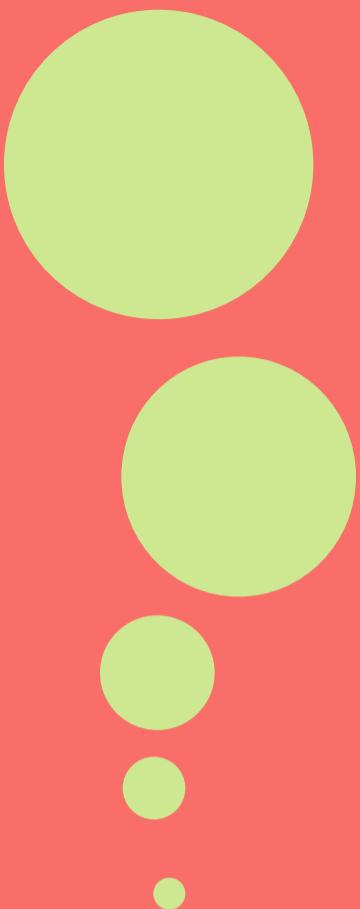
Chicago roofs have darkened tiles—
a vertical fade from lake-borne storms.
Here the air knows only rain and more rain
sprayed from the sky like coats of paint.

Under foot, the usual mosaic: leaves
like burnt out embers and cherry pits.
They lay, scattered on concrete, once
hopeful to spend the summer growing

on city branches, but in climes like these
abscission strikes far too quickly.

Untitled
Dana Brown

The sun has no knowledge
of my troubles,
yet it warms me just the same.



be more than a drop in the ocean

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