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Amaranth

a journal of food writing and art

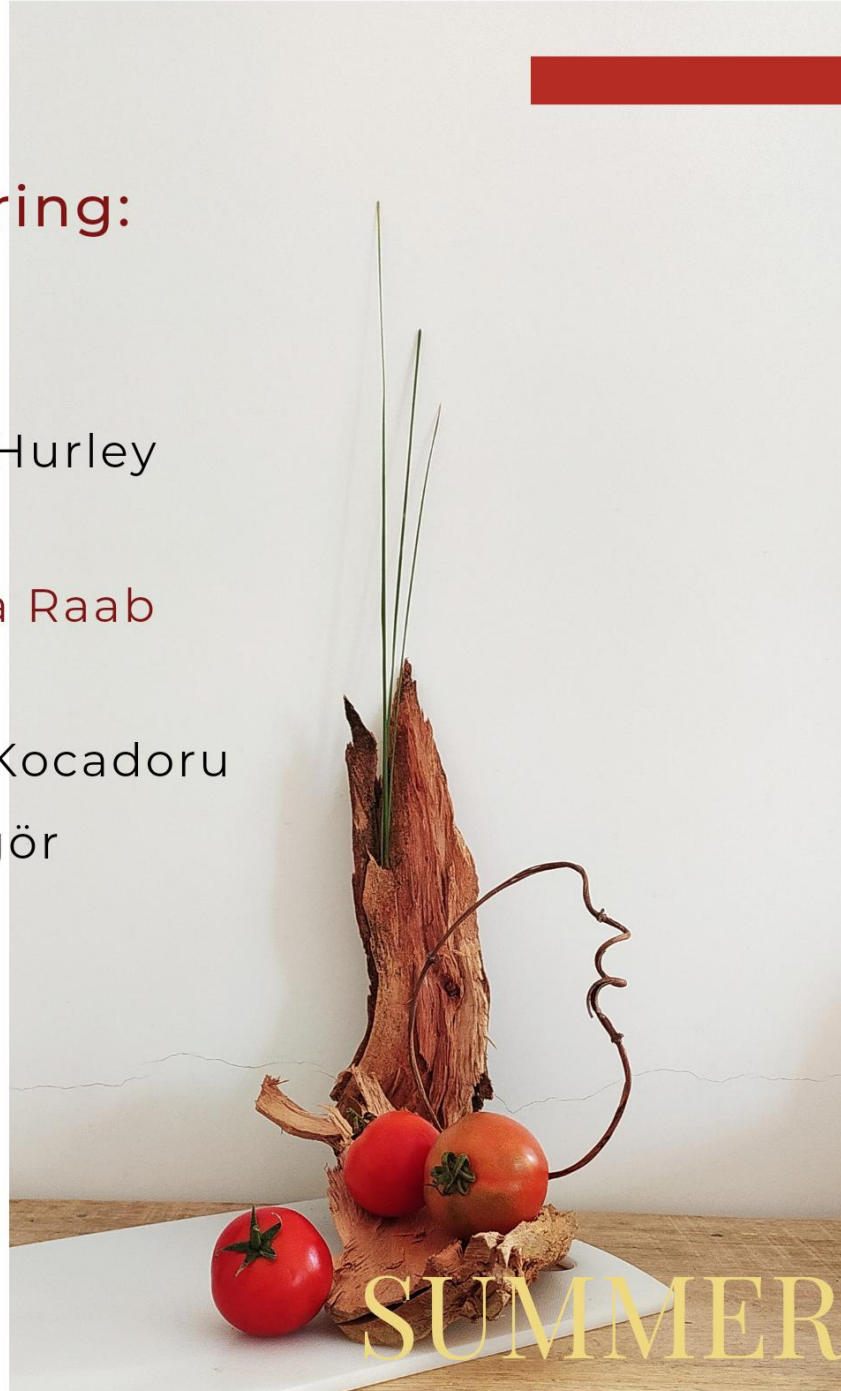
featuring:

Amanda Hurley

Diana Raab

Fergana Kocadoru
Özgör

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SUMMER

2023

Description

Amaranth Journal of Food Writing and Art is a digital journal that aims to connect a global community of food writers, artists, design thinkers, and culinary storytellers through sensitive storytelling. It publishes a wide range of creative endeavors and assemblages on food such as food stories, memoirs, vignettes, poems, photo essays, drawings, and other illustrative arts.

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Letter from the Editor

Summer, 2023 [Volume 2, Issue 1]

Dear readers,

Welcome to the Summer Issue of **Amaranth Journal of Food Writing and Art!**

This issue brings together a wide range of creative endeavors that celebrate food and – above everything else – life.

On its pages, a slice of cake transfigures into an affirmation of humanness; a Manga-based TV series centering around a rookie cook inspires new beginnings; a garden vegetable stirs up memories of years gone by; the bitter-sweet aftertaste of chocolate confounds and comforts; in tender reminiscence, a milkman returns as a loving father; the long and bumpy ride between takeaways and Michelin starred meals holds up its precious rewards; memories of a family dinner leave a dark, perennial stain; and love tiptoes back into grieving hearts on a day like today.

Summer is not just about ice creams. It's also about that almost empty carton sitting in the freezer. Stories live in empty boxes. And in everyday epiphanies that curl over poached eggs, shiny apples, and burnt biscuits. A cup of tea morphs into a time machine; the morning's first meal reaches back to Babushka's sunny kitchen and her prized gold-rimmed chinas; and the cornucopia of the blighted polis melts away into a gladdening dreamscape. A wealth of stories lives and thrives in the tiny cumin seed; gatherings of fruits and vegetables surprise with their subtle eloquence; and a trio of fallen fruits catches up for a heart-to-heart chat.

From this toothsome assemblage, we have chosen three compositions (one from each section: Prose, Poetry, and Art) for having uncovered, with palpable artistic sensitivity and ethical depth, the different ways in which food shapes our identity and consciousness.

It is not easy to love and, sometimes, it's even harder to let go. In Amanda Hurley's flash fiction "The Baker," food and the memory of lost love come together to weave a soulful tapestry.

Food, as it turns out, is not just a source of nourishment for the body and the soul; it also revives and restores. Diana Raab's poem "Chicken Soup" bears testimony to the restorative powers of food. "Bread," a watercolor painting by Fergana Kocadoru Özgör, raises serious ethical questions on our evolving relationship with food and the dangers of unbridled consumption.

There is much to savor and mull over in this issue and we do hope that you enjoy reading all that it offers.

Bon Appétit!

Satarupa

Prose



The Baker

Amanda Hurley

There has always been pie, this he is sure. Freshly-picked blackberries baked with apple, topped lovingly with his grandmother's flaky pastry, the still-warm-from-the-oven mass melting on his tongue. Nectarine and peach, steeped in vanilla and lemon zest. And to start, feta and spinach, textured with allspice or chicken soaked in gravy, studded with peas.

Thirty minutes in a hot oven. Longer for savoury. He thinks of the fragrant clouds that filled his grandmother's kitchen, the muffled aromas that emerged steadily from a cooling pie, draped under a fresh tea-towel. Of the last time he baked like this at home, the hands of his lover touching his back as hot slices slid into warm mouths. The contrast of the closing apartment door last week and the empty chair left behind.

Tonight he sweats shards of leek in butter and olive oil, adding paprika and herbed salt, cracked black pepper before lining the base with bacon. A dozen eggs, cautiously tipped from their shells. In a pan nearby, he softens gooseberries with brown sugar and port, thickening the nectar with cornflour before adding it to a second pastry-lined base.

Butter hardened in icy water – he's mastered the recipe now – rubbed gently into a well of flour, crumbs catching in fingers until the dough softened into a smooth ball. He takes a sprinkling of flour, lets it fall through his hands until it coats the surface of the table. With a rolling pin, he stretches the dough into a thin rectangle then drapes it onto the ragged-edged tin, cutting away the excess with a sharp knife.

Even now, the faint smell of his grandmother's baking still hangs in the kitchen of his memory. Like her, he adds flourishes, using the remaining scraps of pastry to create rosettes, leaves, the tendrils of a creeping vine.

As he works, he thinks of the delicate pastries, slipped into his lover's mouth. His skilled fingers, agile and articulate in seasons of love. Of the words *sustenance* and *sustain*, *nourish* and *nurture* and how none have been enough. Of the harsher words that he never meant to say and the volley of taunts uttered in return.

It's to the pies of his youth that he returns tonight in the silent apartment, calculating weights of flour, salt, a sprinkling of sugar. As if childhood were a preserve that could be bottled and kept, stored airtight in a musty corner of the pantry.

His belly roars as if his tongue were already burned from chunks of pie devoured straight from the pan. He bakes and creates – one dish after another piling up on the overcrowded table. In the morning, the used bowls and clammy utensils will resemble the dregs of a party in the cold pre-dawn light. But for now, his movements are fluid, unplanned; he is a whirl of measuring, slicing, and stirring – as if this final bacchanalia could return a sweet semblance of normality where only loneliness remains.



Amanda Hurley, a New Zealander, lives in Germany. She writes short fiction and poetry, and is an editor on the literary journals *Uncharted*, *Headland* and *Intrepidus Ink*. Her work has been published by *Cloud Ink*, *Flash Frontier*, *Spillwords*, and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. To learn more about Amanda, please visit www.amandahurley.net or follow her on Twitter @AmandaHurleyNet.

Cake is Criminal

Val Roberts

The café was full. A warm, pleasant atmosphere was scented with the smell of coffee and cakes. Lisa knew that eating cake would not help her slimming regime but the smell was irresistible. Which one should she choose? She was undecided; lemon drizzle cake was less fattening, sharp and piquant, one of her 5 A Day, but the chocolate fudge cake was calling to her. Indeed, if it could speak it would call to her in a rich, actorly voice, she mused. Smiling, she pointed to the chocolate fudge cake and also asked for a cappuccino, whose frothy chocolatey topping, she thought, would complement the cake.

Her friend, Joanne, who was the waitress, nodded and lifted the cover to take out a huge slice of cake.

“OK, my love, you go and sit down and I’ll bring it over to you.”

As Lisa turned from the counter to go and sit down, she realised with horror that the only unoccupied seat was next to Sara, her leader at Slimzudown. She reluctantly eased herself into the seat. Sara did not look pleased to see her. She put down the menu which she had been studying and no doubt criticising. Sara held her classes in the church hall and each session was infused with a messianic zeal. When someone from the group timidly enquired what treats were allowed, Sara responded with, “Treats! Treats! Repeat after me, treats are toxic! What are treats?”

Somewhat embarrassed they all muttered, “Treats are toxic!” Sara’s approach was hardcore and quite a few people had dropped out, but Lisa had to admit that Sara definitely got results. One or two of her disciples had lost a considerable amount of weight.

“Good morning, Lisa. I hope you are not about to consume anything fattening,” she said, frostily.

Lisa thought about the chocolate fudge cake, its rich chocolate filling oozing out of the light sponge and replied, “No, of course not. I just dropped in for a BLACK COFFEE!”

At the counter Joanne gave an imperceptible nod and Lisa knew that she had understood.

Sara smiled approvingly.

“Good. You know what our motto is. You remember, don’t you?”

Lisa sighed, remembering the ridiculous mantra they all had to learn. “Cake is criminal, biscuits are barred, chocolate is for children and fruit is our friend.” It might be good for you but a crisp apple or a squidgy banana simply did not have the mouthfeel of chocolate. She could feel her mouth water at the very thought of it.

“Have you been exercising?” was the next question. Lisa thought about her exercise gear. Where was it? It was probably at the bottom of the washing basket. She had been to the gym once, but being unfamiliar with the controls on the treadmill, she had fallen face first on to the belt much to the amusement of the regulars.

To be fair, the trainer had helped her to her feet and he had already explained the controls but she had pressed the wrong button and the darned machine simply took off till she was running like an Olympic runner for about thirty seconds and then she fell.

She had tried some of the weights but her arms ached and it had definitely put her off exercising. She tried to inject sincerity into her voice as she replied, “Yes, I have been to the gym three times every week and I have walked regularly.” This last comment was true if you counted walking round the local supermarket and past the gym.

“Very good,” said Sara, and she smoothed her immaculate pencil skirt. I wonder if she has ever had to diet in her life thought Lisa, moodily, as she gazed at her own large jeans. Sara also enjoyed going to the gym and running marathons. It’s not surprising she’s so slim. She had one perfect child, where Lisa had a brood of four. Cooking for them was challenging as Chloe would only eat chips, Lee would only eat pizza, Keira, her eldest was on a health kick and would only eat steamed fish and vegetables; fortunately, Josh, her youngest at nine would happily eat anything.

With the stress of cooking so many different meals after a long day at work, it was no wonder that Lisa ended up eating chips or pizza when she should be joining Keira on her health kick.

“What do we say about exercise, Lisa?” enquired Sara, smugly.

Lisa repeated mechanically, “Exercise is energising, pushups are our pals, and weights are wonderful.”

Why am I paying to listen to this rubbish? Lisa looked at Sara. Her shiny hair was drawn back into a chignon. Her dark jacket was a wool and cashmere mix, beautifully cut. Her hands sported a

huge diamond ring on one hand and an emerald ring on the other. Her nails were manicured and flawless; her makeup enhanced her pretty features. She is obviously making money out of mugs like me thought Lisa. It would be easier if there was some flaw, just a little human weakness which would make her more real, more likeable.

Just at that moment, a smiling Joanne came over carrying a tray. For some reason, Sara seemed to be agitated. "I haven't ordered anything yet!" she exclaimed.

"A black coffee for you, Lisa, and your usual, Sara," said Joanne, smoothly.

Lisa looked on in disbelief as Joanne placed a cappuccino and a huge slice of chocolate fudge cake in front of Sara who at least had the grace to look embarrassed.

"What's this?" asked Lisa. "Fraternising with the enemy?"

"Um, eh, I was thinking of ordering this cake for Sebastian's birthday, so I thought I'd better sample this first."

"Really and how many times have you sampled it?"

Sara gave a weak smile and Lisa returned it, pleased that she could see a glimmer of human weakness.

"Joanne, cappuccino and chocolate fudge cake for me too."

Joanne smiled knowingly and went to cut another slice of the chocolate fudge cake.



Val Roberts is a retired English teacher and, latterly, a civil servant. She has always written for pleasure and belongs to Globe Soup, an online writing group. She has had stories published in *Woman's Way*, *Yours* annual, *Daily Express Saturday* magazine, and other online publications. She enjoys the challenge of writing short stories and although she has written some stories on serious themes, she prefers to write more light-hearted and humorous stories.

The Art of Fine Dining

Louise Slyth

Fine dining is an art. Not just the production of culinary delicacies, but the partaking of them. There is a level of expertise in knowing proper table manners, in knowing that waiters serve from the left, in being comfortable with cutlery, properly understanding a menu, and knowing how to order. There is a flair in knowing the difference between a consommé and a velouté. It's not just a lack of economic capital, but cultural capital that can make you uncomfortable in high-end establishments.

I say this with a certain level of experience. When I was 16, I was lucky enough to be one of a handful of students in my Scottish region to earn a place to gain work experience in Paris. We lived half-board in university dorms, so unfortunately my first taste of Paris was not cordon bleu. I worked in a travel agency in one of the less salubrious arrondissements, but I took every opportunity I could to wander around the streets of the Latin quarter, soaking up the atmosphere and imagining myself as a sophisticated woman sipping a glass of crisp white wine on a pavement cafe.

My first foray into a real restaurant was on my return to Scotland, where all the students who had been selected got together for a farewell dinner. Presented with the menu, I asked the waiter what French fries were. "Chips" he smirked. I should have known; they were a regular feature at home. The small balloon of confidence I had gained in Paris was immediately popped.

Knowledge is power, and you only gain knowledge through exposure. If you grow up without being exposed to the dining scene, then you have no opportunity to learn. My family wasn't well off, so restaurants were an unnecessary expense that I didn't get to experience.

As children, my brother and I had lots of affection, but food wasn't our family's love language. With two busy working parents on a tight budget, weeknight dinner was often a ready meal on a tray in front of the TV. I have lots of happy food memories of my childhood – family BBQs, picnics on the beach, and drinking lemonade from our Easter eggs – but those memories are rustic rather than refined.

I was envious of friends whose parents would take them out to dinner and show them another world. Restaurants have always held a deep fascination for me...perhaps, that fascination grew from my longing for a taste of the life I dreamed of.

My maternal grandmother was a great cook, but I never put in any effort to learn from her. I was terrified to try on the apron of domesticity in case I couldn't take it off. I wanted a life outside the home, a glamorous, adventure-filled life. I knew early on that the best way to do that was to focus on my studies. My grades were going to be my ticket to the places I wanted to go, and the restaurants I wanted to eat in. Plus, I had two jobs to put myself through university, so there wasn't much free time to dabble with recipes.

It was meeting my husband at 21 that transformed my relationship with food. Like me, he didn't grow up in a wealthy family, but he worked in a variety of restaurants as a teenager, which gave him some exposure to fine dining. I worked in shops (that store discount was too alluring) so I didn't even have that back of house experience to draw upon.

Since then, we have been on a culinary journey together – it's fair to say that food *is* our love language and dining out has been one of the pillars of our relationship. Much of our free time and free money is spent in pursuit of gastronomic happiness.

We have been fortunate enough to have had an array of high-end dining adventures, yet for me it has been as much about memorable experiences as chasing Michelin stars; one of our best meals was a shared bag of fish and chips on the beach.

Romance aside, it hasn't always been easy. We moved in together at the tender age of 22. With entry level jobs and no credit cards, making ends meet was a weekly challenge. I vividly remember buying groceries on a Friday and hoping the payment wouldn't process until I was paid on Monday. Ready meals were more expensive, but still I didn't relent and learn to cook. We worked hard, and saved harder, but those fancy dinners remained just out of reach.

A year later we moved to Sydney with working visas, seeking sunshine and better job prospects. I beat off lots of eager hopefuls to secure a marketing job at a top financial firm, in a huge

skyscraper reminiscent of *Working Girl*. Corporate dinners were common, and I became accustomed to dining out in the kind of restaurants I had formerly only dreamed of. Still, it was bittersweet; just like Melanie Griffiths, I discovered that it's not just about paying the check, it's fitting the bill. I had no idea what to wear or how to act. Ordering wine would bring me out in a cold sweat. I didn't know that Shiraz and Syrah were the same grape – how could I? Thankfully, I was a fast learner, and as my dining experience grew, my confidence picked up.

Our year in Australia was one of the highlights of my life, but our adventure and our visas had an expiry date. Our time there gave our careers a kick-start, and back in Edinburgh, we forged ahead with our studies and professions, bought a home and built a life together. We threw all our spare cash into making our culinary dreams come true; dinner at the New York Plaza, a 6-course tasting menu in Paris, and Daquiris in La Floridita, Havana. I was finally living my dream, but with hindsight I didn't truly appreciate it.

Aged 36, we moved to Barcelona, only for my husband's company to fold a couple of months after arriving. We had rented out our apartment and I had left my job, so we were committed to making a go of it and eking out a life with our savings. Once again, I was living on a modest budget. Fancy dinners were a thing of the past, but thankfully, Spain has a long history of *Menú del día* (menu of the day). Offered by most restaurants, it's generally a 3-course lunch, sometimes with a glass of wine, ranging from 10 to 15 euro. As lunch is one of the principal meals of the day in Spain, you tend to get a lot for your money. We lived simply but well enough – supplemented with fresh, cheap products at local markets.

The year spent in Barcelona was truly humbling, but it gave me the confidence to become a freelancer. After all, if I could find an apartment, learn a reasonable amount of Spanish and make a life for myself in just a year, then I could do anything. Plus, I had rekindled my skill for budgeting.

Now in my 40s, I live in Ireland, and I finally learned to cook during lockdown. Ireland had one of the strictest lockdowns in Europe, with restaurants closed for months at a time. My standard quip to “what can you make?” being “great reservations” was no longer going to cut it. A few ruined pans and cross words paved the way to a collection of recipes I can now cook without

breaking out into a panicked sweat. I regret leaving it so long – I realise now that cooking is a life-skill and (depending on the complexity of the recipe) a great way to practice mindfulness.

I have returned to Paris several times since my first trip. I fully recognise the privileged position I've been in to visit some amazing restaurants and to sip a Kir Royale at a café overlooking Notre Dame. I like to think it's my way of paying back my younger self for all her studying and sacrifices. I wish I could go back in time and tell that skinny, shy teenager that she was good enough, that she belonged, and that her dreams would come true.

Looking back, I realise that challenges, hard work, and grit were my own ingredients; they made me the woman I am now. That desire to experience fine dining was my own recipe for success. You can only really appreciate the highs in life when you have experienced some lows. Likewise, you can only truly appreciate a Michelin starred meal when you've consumed an awful lot of French fries.



Louise Slyth is a communications consultant and freelance writer, whose work has been featured in publications around the world. She holds an honours degree in Communication Studies and postgraduate diplomas in both strategic and digital marketing. Having lived in Edinburgh, Sydney, and Barcelona, she now resides in Dublin with her husband.

Cutting Carrots like a Makanai

Gabriella Brand

Perhaps all you need is a really sharp knife. And a grandmother back in Aomori. I like to think that if I possessed both those things, I could be a cook like Kiyo, the exuberant and competent young woman at the heart of Kore-eda's beautiful Netflix series, *The Makanai: Cooking for the Maiko House*. As I watch the show's intro, I'm filled with a sort of awe and jealousy. I wanna cut carrots like that! Tidy, perfect matchstick carrots, sliced with a gentle bend of the wrist.

Kiyo doesn't set out to be a cook. She leaves her hometown at sixteen and comes down to Kyoto with her best friend, Sumire, in hopes of becoming an apprentice geisha. She flunks out as a maiko, but she blossoms as a makanai, or maiko house cook. Of course, thanks to her grandmother's example, she knows how to cook before she leaves home.

I didn't set out to be a cook either. Cooking is not my profession. It's just something that I do every day, at least once a day. No one ever taught me to cook. Certainly, neither of my grandmothers. I learned the little I know through trial and error and reading cookbooks. But even though I devoured Julia Child, and the Silver Palate duo, and the Barefoot Contessa, I never took any of those writers or food performers as role models. They were technical instructors. They gave me tips and recipes – sometimes, great recipe but they didn't speak to me on a soul level. Now, thanks to *The Makanai*, I have Kiyo.

Kiyo's character does for me what no Rachel Ray every can. She makes me want to pay attention...to everything. The shapes and sizes and colors of vegetables, the moods and needs and wants of my household, the texture of pudding, the magic of old frying pans.

Kiyo can arrange fruits and whipped cream on layered slices of bread and get away with calling it Christmas cake. She can serve a ho-hum daily soup and ordinary rice balls, but she makes everything beautiful, elegant and visually enticing. The bland surface of her white stew will be punctuated with two notes of the most verdant broccoli ever seen. The common *onigiri* will have nothing rough about it, it will have been caressed into a perfectly smooth shape, like a newborn baby's tush.

As you watch Kiyo going about her prepping and cooking, you realize that there is something beatific about her. Whether she is talking to her drying plums or serving *amazake* to Sumire in the middle of the night, she radiates peace. Not sacrifice, not the drudgery of Christian sainthood, but some kind of inner equilibrium. Kore-eda gives us a personage who is content with her lot, consistently cheerful, untarnished by jealousy, and blessed with an infectious smile. As the show unfolds, we learn that Kiyo is a born nurturer. She is constantly nourishing others. Her generosity seems to be part of a quiet spiritual eco system. In place of prayer, there's pudding.

I wanna be a cook like *that*. Even just a little bit.

It's not only Kiyo's gentle attitude which attracts me. It's also the humble quality of the Saku House kitchen. A kitchen I can relate to. Kiyo is no food diva. She's not producing dinner in a state of the art arena, with an eight burner stove, copper pots, multiple ovens, and those trendy under the counter refrigerators. The Saku House fridge looks like mine, modest and probably cramped, although we never see the inside. On the outside, a few magnets here and there holding up odd scraps of paper, tickets, or postcards. On the other hand, Kiyo's stove is way less fancy than my ceramic top. And her counter space is nil. Yet she patiently turns out meals for a small crowd using two gas rings and a rice cooker.

It's not about equipment, it's about attention.

So I should be able to do it too, right?

I'm a frequent traveler to Japan and an ardent Nipponophile. I'm a sucker for anything *Made in Japan*, from anime to lacquerware, from notebooks at the Muji store to old nineties era J-Pop. I keep learning the language, but I've never attempted the cuisine. Nor have I wanted to. I'd rather go to a great sushi bar than learn to cut sashimi on my own. But Kiyo's *pain quotidien* is a different matter. I don't want to master the art of Japanese cooking, I want to extract the essence of Kiyo's kitchen and apply to my own Italo-French-California-Swiss-New England repertoire.

I want to worry less about outcome – will the family or guests like this?...and concentrate more on joy...maybe, decorating the plainest soup with a little sprig of something whimsical or

beautiful. When was the last time I even made time for parsley? (so much trouble to chop!) I want to stop thinking I should learn to produce Danish *Æbleskiver* or Middle Eastern shawarma or some other international dish for my sophisticated daughter-in-law, and just serve her an egg salad sandwich – a beautiful egg salad sandwich, cut with precision as if it were a diamond.

I want to think about others and food in a way that I rarely do. Most of the time, I see my family as a set of stomachs that need to be filled. The meat-and-potatoes cavity of my husband. The brownie pit of visiting children. And I resent so many of my friends' food "requirements." I secretly groan when I think of the guests who only drink decaf, the ones who need black tea, those who require Stevia, those who grimace when there is no honey.

Saku House is made up of a motley group of women from different social classes, different ages, and different tastes. But Kiyo doesn't become a slave to the whims of others. She seems to have a sixth sense about people's real appetites. In each episode, we see her serving foods that fill unspoken needs and that go beyond the physiological. Who needs something warm? Who needs comfort? Who could benefit from a bit of sweetness?

I haven't heard her worrying about too much sodium in the *dashi*.

Intellectually, I know that food is a gift. It's the most important of gifts, from its origins in the dark, wormy earth to its appearance on our dinner plates. But somewhere along the way, I've lost track of its gift-ness. It has become a commodity.

I marvel at the way the character of Kiyo holds onto the sacredness of everyday food. The most humble daikon deserves attention. The tempura merits praise. *Tsukemono* are small treasures.

I want to be part of that celebration too.

Sometimes, when I turn off the television after watching *The Makanai*, I vow to splurge on a really good knife. I have to start somewhere.



Gabriella Brand's essays, poetry, and short stories have appeared in over fifty literary publications. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and a town Poet Laureate. A world traveler, Gabriella frequently falls in love with new foods, new languages, and new vistas, but she makes her home near New Haven, USA. She teaches writing in the OLLI program at the University of Connecticut. Her website is: gabriellabrand.net.

The Sea Hand

Chiara Vascotto

I remember the stillness of the sea; the deafening song of the cicadas, morphing into white noise. The high sun, blurring the horizon; the deserted beach.

I remember the invitation, the task rather, to amuse myself, sitting on a stone in shallow water, whilst my parents sunbathed.

I can still see my little hands diving in for pebbles, and re-emerging with their loot. I would muse on the stories and magical powers of my sea gems. The occasional tiny fish would swim by, only to dart away when it got too close.

I remember sensing an arrival, a disturbing presence, before I saw the blob floating nearby. It did not look like anything I had known in my five years of life. It would not sway. It kept coming closer.

“Mummy, Daddy, there is an animal in the sea.”

“Of course. There are many animals in the sea.”

I tried to return to the peace and the pebbles and to everything else I knew. But the thing was still there, edging closer.

“There is a *beast* in the sea!”

“Just shoo it away, love.”

I remember its pulsating motion towards me. It had a shiny, milky body and its many strands were brushed in livid purple. It kept changing shape.

Then, its pale fingers wrapped themselves around my calf, slowly, one by one.

The sensation was one of uninvited pressure, a squeezing and a tugging that would not ease off. I remember wanting it to go away, and not knowing what to do. Time slowed down, as its fingers gripped me tighter and I struggled to find words.

“The beast is EATING me!”

Then, the commotion. Time speeding up, and the beast being yanked off me. I saw it fly and land on a sandy patch with a splat. I saw my father's fist, clenching a Swiss knife, rising and falling, rising and falling, stabbing the beast. I heard the hiss and the thud each time. The Sea Hand was swishing, convulsing, one way, then another, covering itself in sand, until it became one tangled mess of white strands and dirt.

I sensed the pressure easing off my leg and I saw a string of dark dots appearing on my skin, just like the ones on its fingers. My heart was still pounding and for the rest of the day I did not say another word.

At dinner that evening, I was ceremoniously presented with a platter, amongst clamour and applause from my parents and their raucous friends.

"See? The oc-to-pus wanted to eat you, but you are eating *it* instead. Ha!" More applause, more cheering, more roaring laughter.

The Beast had been shattered into a sinister, lifeless mosaic. I remember staring, perplexed, at the scattered composition of purple tubes, round dots, shiny white wedges. The more familiar lemon slices, the golden pools of olive oil, and the pale potatoes did nothing to ease my disquiet. Parsley sprigs had carefully been arranged around the plate's edges, like solemn wreaths. I remember finding no solace, or appetite, in that offering.

My parents re-told the octopus story time and time again, over dinners and drinks, generating hilarity amongst the grown-ups. No one asked me what it had been like to collide with a Sea Hand.

To me, the Beast remained but a vivid memory, until I began to wonder why, even back then, my parents would not protect me from preying hands.



Chiara Vascotto is an anthropologist working in consumer insights and branding. She is building her writing portfolio across fiction and creative non-fiction, especially memoir. Her work seeks to extrapolate meaning and beauty from lived experience. She has been published in *The Dillydown Review* and *Litro Magazine* and featured on YouTube as part of Story Fridays.

Chiara also writes for the stage and has recently performed some of her material in *The Way Home*, a musical by and about Italians in the UK. She is a life-long student of dance and is thrilled to have performed in works by Michael Clark and Akram Khan. She comes from Trieste, Italy, and lives in London.

Die Grüne Fee: Ein imaginäres Gespräch

Carl B. Meier

Dieses Prosafragment ist inspiriert von einem klassischen Ölgemälde („l’Absinthe“/ „Dans un Café“, 1876), gemalt von dem französischen impressionistischen Maler Edgar Degas (1834-1917).

Die Frau auf dem Gemälde ist **Ellen André**, eine Schauspielerin, und der Mann ist **Marcellin Desboutin**, ein Maler. Sie waren beide Freunde von Degas.

Ein starkes, grünes alkoholisches Getränk, Absinth erhielt auf Französisch den Spitznamen „La Fee Verte“ oder „Die grüne Fee“.

E: Möchtest du einen Schluck?

M: Von was?

E: Die grüne Fee.

M: Warum trinkst du das? Es ist wie nichts, zu dem man zurückkehren möchte. Der, den ich trinke, ist immer noch beruhigend.

E: Überhaupt nicht! Es ist das Einzige, was der Trockenheit entspricht, die mich erfüllt – trocken auf trocken – es ist, als würde man mit einem Freund zusammensitzen. Es ist so beruhigend.

Erinnerst du dich an den Sommer, den wir zusammen am Gardasee verbracht haben? Da haben wir stundenlang gegessen. Wir waren so jung! So voller Hoffnung!

M: Ja, ich erinnere mich.

E: Der Absinth hier erinnert mich an jenen Sommer, obwohl wir damals keinen Absinth getrunken haben. Möchtest du einen Schluck?

Mann: Warum glaubst du das?

E: Ich weiß nicht. Aber es ist... es ist gut, das einzig Gute an dieser Zeit, an diesem Abend, an diesem...

M: Wirklich?

E: Oh, ja... Es ist wie diese Szene, meine denkwürdigste auf der Bühne... ah!

M: Das war vor vielen Jahren. Wer erinnert sich?

E: Ja, vor langer Zeit. Du erinnerst dich, nicht wahr?

M: Nein. Das nicht.

E: Nein? Welche dann?

M: Ein Märchen...

E: Ach so!

M: Ich habe die Geschichte vergessen. Leider...!

E: Was ist dann der Sinn?

M: Das kleine Mädchen, ich erinnere mich, mit den grünen Feenflügeln – Dritte von links, letzte Reihe.

E: Ne, oder? Versteckt im Schatten ... so leicht zu übersehen!

M: Ah, nicht ganz.

E: Aber es war. Es ist immer so!

M: Ich erinnere mich. Daran habe ich mich immer erinnert.

E: Du warst nur ein Junge...

M: Ja...fünf oder sechs Jahre alt, glaube ich. Du, auch!

E: Es ist das Getränk...

M: Nein auf keinen Fall...ich erinnere mich wirklich... Du warst gut. Du bist immer immer noch.

E: Du warst nur ein Junge...ein dummer kleiner Junge...

M: Lass uns gehen...

E: Wohin?

M: Warum fragst du?

E: Ich weiß nicht.

M: Lass uns einfach gehen und nicht länger verweilen...

E: Verweilen? Wo? Hier?... und über die wackeligen Stühle stolpern?

M: Oder trotzdem stolpern!

E: Aber...aber lass es uns einfach halten. Bleiben wir noch ein wenig an diesem langweiligen Ort. Lasst uns einfach albern spielen, der grünen Fee zu all den schönen Nirgendwo folgen – das Theater, das von Applaus erklingt, der jubelnde Gang, der von lächelnden Gesichtern gesäumt ist, die fröhliche Krippe neben einem großen Bett in einem hellen, sonnendurchfluteten Raum... Lasst uns einfach stolpern über Worte, mein lieber Markell, ich wäre froh, wenn wir die Worte zwischen uns kommen und gehen lassen könnten ... Ich wäre dankbar, auch nur für ein paar Worte. Komm, setz dich.

M: Also...

E: Lass uns einfach so tun, als hätten wir alles, was wir nicht haben: Ruhm, Glück, Lebenslust...

Lass uns einfach für eine Weile so tun, lieber Markell...

M: Müssen wir? Vorgeben? Ist es nicht zu spät, Eli?

E: Ist es?

M: Vielleicht nicht, ich glaube. Wir können es noch gut machen. Vielleicht sogar besser.

Lass uns jetzt nach Zuhause gehen.



Carl B. Meier kommt aus Salzburg. Er ist ein aufstrebender Kurzgeschichtenautor, Portratmaler und Flaneur.

A Walk through the Sugar Cane Fields

Julie Dron

The chocolate bar lay on the coffee table, slim and rectangular, fragile and delicate. Its cover was an unobtrusive brown, but of course, the well known Japanese brand she loved required nothing more than its name to promote itself. Su-Chen sat next to the coffee table, turning the bar over, slipping her now shaky finger slowly under the flap, as if it were an important envelope; a love letter perhaps.

After opening the chocolate wrapper and folding it back neatly, she gently ripped the delicate foil, *almost like gold leaf* she thought to herself, and at once the wonderful aroma drifted unbound. An aroma that was both milky and caramel. Carefully, she broke a square, soft between her fingers, yet remaining firm in the Taiwan summer heat. She placed it onto her tongue, where it lay for a few seconds, the texture of silk, before it began to melt.

This was more than mere chocolate to Su-Chen; it was fields of sugar cane, a walk with her father down a dusty road between the cane that was tall and firm yet yielded to the wind. Years ago, decades ago, before the world war even, yet strangely so vivid. She could still feel the gritty dust from the road, uncomfortable in her smart sandals, small grains scratching her soles. The damp earthy smell of the humid air rose from the farmland soil following the midday torrential downpour. The sound of distant cicadas with their strange chorusing, singing to attract mates. The buzzing of mosquitoes. Her hand in her father's, sticky and sweaty in the late afternoon heat.

Her father had taken her that day to Taichu station, and bought two tickets to Shoka, these days known as Taichung and Changhwa. He had wanted to walk, to show her the sugar cane fields, he said, and she had walked beside him with quick steps to keep up with his long legs. Her wonderful, handsome and clever father, with his western style clothes; the sleeves on his white shirt carefully rolled up to his elbows, a smart straw boater, his jacket folded meticulously over his leather briefcase. His small round glasses that glinted in the sunshine. His calm firmness, his courage. She was proud of her father. *A famous lawyer!* She had boasted to friends at school.

Su-Chen leaned over the coffee table and broke another square of chocolate, the memories were bitter sweet, like the sugar cane itself, but both painful memories and happy memories were a part

of her being, her human-ness, and now aged nearly ninety, they were all she had. She placed the square of chocolate into her mouth, slowly sucking the sweet milkiness.

“The sugar cane is ready, look at the height!” her father had pointed out, as he stood before the tall cane, leaning forward, touching it almost with reverence. She felt little interest, although sensed he was trying to teach her something. Further along they saw a field full of workers, mostly women, hacking at the cane, backs bent as they moved forward. They were wearing high rubber boots to prevent snake bites, long sleeves, wide brimmed bamboo hats, scarves wrapped around their faces to protect from mosquitoes and other insects that were disturbed as they moved slowly but surely through the sea of cane.

“They must be so hot, in those big boots!” Su-Chen had said to her father, looking up at him. She was sure she could never do that, in the heat. He hadn’t answered, only nodded and smiled with a faraway look in his eyes. She had been tired, and relieved to see they were nearing the old farm buildings in the distance. “Two hundred years old!” he had told Su-Chen, and she had gasped, yet unsure if he was pulling her leg, as he sometimes did.

Mr Zhang, the owner of the farm, came out to greet them, when he spotted them walking down the road between the cane. A small wizened man with a friendly face.

“Li Ho!” they called to each other warmly in their native Taiwanese.

“Mr Lai! You've walked all the way from the station, in this weather! Come inside, have some tea and snacks, and let me introduce you to the other farmers.”

Her father smiled, shaking hands, then looked down at Su-Chen.

“We need to discuss business; you can sit with Mr Zhang's daughter, Jia-Li.”

Jia-Li appeared from one of the buildings when her father called her name, taller and older than Su-Chen, dark skinned from the outdoor work, hands rough and calloused. “Come over here.” She beckoned, not unkindly, and Su-Chen followed her inside one of the old farm buildings. “Here. Sit here.” She pulled out a small stool, and Su-Chen sat, primly, watching Jia-Li with amazement as she hacked expertly at some of the tall sugar cane with a heavy sharp knife, preparing a small amount that would be sold at Shoka and Taichu stations. She handed Su-Chen a piece of sugar cane and continued to work. Su-Chen sucked on the cane – sweet yet bitter – shy, before this capable girl.

“So...” Jia- Li spoke in her sing song voice, pausing for a few minutes to take a drink of water. “Do you think your father will be able to help my father and the other farmers?” She noted Su-Chen's blank look. “You know, that’s why he’s here, don’t you?” she laughed at Su-Chen’s ignorance. “Your father’s a lawyer, isn’t he! He is representing my father and the other farmers in court, to make the Imperial Sugar Company pay more for our sugar cane. At the moment, we are working for a pittance!”

Su-Chen didn’t know that that was why they had walked along the dusty road together, but now she remembered conversations her parents had had, in their big house in Taichu, that she had overheard.

“They just want a fair price!” Su-Chen had been surprised to hear her father’s voice, unusually loud and angry, when discussing the Imperial Sugar Company with her mother. She had hesitated, shocked, as she passed the open door, not intending to eavesdrop. “You must remain calm!” her mother encouraged, her voice soothing. “You are doing your best for the farmers, it will take time.”

Su-Chen broke a third square of chocolate, remembering how in awe of her father she had been. To think he had taken on such a case, to fight a large Japanese company! Later that day, when they returned home from the sugar cane fields in Shoka, her father had called her into his study. Before him, on his desk, was a bar of chocolate, the Japanese brand, produced by the Imperial Sugar Company. He turned the bar over, sliding his finger along the flap, pulling it open, and gently tearing the foil.

“Always remember, Su-Chen, when you eat this chocolate, think of the sugar cane, the workers slaving in the fields, the farmer who needs to feed his family. Always think of that, when you eat your favourite chocolate, savour every moment, and remember how lucky we are. How lucky you are.”

He had taken a square of chocolate, placing it slowly into his mouth, then smiling kindly, had pushed the rest of the bar towards her.

It was so long ago now, yet the memories of her dear father were still so sharp. “We weren’t lucky, you weren’t lucky, ba ba!” Su-Chen cried aloud into the emptiness of her apartment, feeling

more and more lately, that her father, her wonderful ba ba, was nearby, unable to stop the tears trickling down her cheeks. The chocolate awoke memories within her, but also pain. The pain of the memory, like jagged broken glass, when they heard the news, her mother screaming, collapsing to the floor. Things were never the same after that and life was hard. It was perhaps ironic, that at the end of the war, her precious father had been visiting Mr. Zhang at the sugar refinery at Shoka when it had been destroyed by American bombers. ‘A legitimate target,’ she had later heard them argue. Ironic, that her father, who had fought throughout his life against the powerful Japanese company, was one of the people who lost their lives that day.

Su-Chen placed the fourth square of chocolate into her mouth, weeping. She imagined her father's voice. *Su-Chen, don't be greedy! That's enough for now!*

She nodded to herself, wrapping the remaining half of the chocolate bar and pushing it to one side of the table. She savoured the sweetness that lingered on her tongue – the taste of the sugar cane and the memory of that day, walking with her father on the dusty road, hand in hand.



Julie Dron lives in Taiwan and began writing in her sixties. She was shortlisted with commendation by the Scottish Arts Trust Flash Fiction Awards 2022 and published in their anthology *Beached*. Her work has been published in *Blink-Ink* (Issue 50), *Secret Attic* (Vol. 2), Wicked Shadow Press anthology *Abominable*, and CultureCult anthology *Cosmic Encounter*. Her work has also been published in online magazines, such as *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Syncopation Literary Journal* (Vol. 2, Issue 1), *The Wild Word* (Issue 73), *Shorts Magazine* (Vol. 4), and *Wordrunner e-Chapbooks* (Issue 48). Her work was shortlisted in Periscope “Imposter”

competition and longlisted in Oxford Flash Fiction Summer 2022.

She believes you are never too old to follow your dream.

A Milkman and His Wife

Ann Iverson

At lunch, I asked my mother how much she could see: nothing in one eye except a circular light that floated above the retina. “The shape used to be oblong,” she’d laugh. The vision of the other was dark. I wrote the check out, and she signed her name way above the line. While shopping from another aisle, I watched her use a magnifying glass to read the inch-high prices at the secondhand store. She bought warmup outfits to keep her warm at night, all in bright magenta hues; she must have had twenty or thirty. “I just can’t keep warm at night,” she’d explain. I suggested an electric blanket. She’d laugh again and say that she heard on talk radio that they can cause cancer. She asked me to check over another sweatsuit for rips and worn spots, and then proudly told me that the nurse who gives her radiation always comments on her pretty jogging suits.

It all goes back to that fudge, those huge plates of homemade fudge. It never hardened, so we’d stand around the kitchen counter and spoon it into our mouths. She’d say, “That’s why I have diabetes now, from that and the bridge mix from Woolworths.” Sugar costs one dearly; my mother was cold and going blind. I remember sucking on a piece of that fudge while I watched *That Girl*, my mother calling up from the basement, where she worked the wringer washer, “Get busy on the housework and don’t run that vacuum just around in circles; get into the corners good.” So, I’d turn the vacuum on and sit back down on the couch, thinking she would never know the difference. I remember that bridge mix, too, in its white waxed bag tucked away in my mother’s purse. I’d bite into several pieces until I found a malted milk ball, the only kind I liked.

My father had a sweet tooth, too. He used to try his hand at baking from time to time. Once he made a peach pie but never peeled the peaches. We ate the furry thing anyway and said that it was good. He was proud and forced us to have seconds. We were disgusted by it, whispered under our breaths, “Gross, Daddy left the fur on.” What a funny thing to stay with me all these years, but I’m so much like my father now, always in a hurry to get things done, rarely peeling back the skin of each day. In his retirement he cooked noodle hot dishes, and my mother would tell me, “In amounts enough for an army!” He used to stop by with bags of groceries and clipped coupons for tuna at nineteen cents a can or oranges for thirty cents a dozen. “Mama and I

don't eat oranges too much, so you go ahead and take these, Baby, it's a good deal." He would take his grandsons to the park or drive his granddaughter to ballet lessons, and may even wait out in the car and drink coffee for an hour while she danced. He would revel over simple Christmas gifts like stretch gloves and a new ice-scraper, and would pass the word on to my mother to tell me how much he liked those handy gloves he could just roll up in a ball and stick in his pocket. He had mellowed, ripened – closer to a fruit that I could pick and shine on my sleeve.

During my separation, I stayed with my parents for a week. In the middle of the night, I could hear him banging and clanging around in the kitchen, pacing the hallway with stomping feet. I could never figure out what he was doing. My mother explained that he would boil his coffee in the wee hours of the morning, his internal alarm still set for a milkman's hours.

In the morning he would sternly insist, "You better eat something; you're too damn skinny. I don't think I've seen you eat a thing," as he handed me a plate of eggs. He would sip his coffee and watch me eat and tell me that I looked tired and that, maybe, I should just "eat crow" and go back to my husband. As a child, I was frightened by his gruffness. I clearly recall the days when he limped frantically about with huge, bulging purple cramps from the years of his hauling heavy glass bottles of milk through snow, sleet and heat. With his hands, he'd lean against the walls moaning and swearing. I remember wanting to help but I didn't know how. I always thought he was mad at me. But he wasn't. I know that now. He was just tired after 30 years of rising way before the sun so the world could break open with dairy. And what did I know, what did I know of the austere agencies of love?

It's easy to remember the times that he would bring home crates filled with chocolate milk, ice cream, and cottage cheese. In the odd hours of the night, very much unplanned – he, home from a night shift; I, home from a late date – we'd meet there in the kitchen; he, sitting by the window taking long drags from his cigarette, drinking coffee, and sighing big, lonely sighs. He would motion to the fridge, and I would stand with the refrigerator door wide open and guzzle chocolate milk and eat ice-cream straight from the carton. "Shut that door now; that uses up energy, you know," shaking his head in disgust. Our conversations were quiet and distant. "Jesus, I'm exhausted, Baby." I would nod my head as if I understood. "That's pretty good stuff, ain't it? There's some cottage cheese in there too. I hate to see that go to waste down on the dock, so I like to bring it home for you and Mama. Well, I'm gonna hit the hay. Say, stick around, now,

tomorrow. I'm gonna be needing your help in the garden." But I already have plans, I thought. Then I'd listen to him crawl slowly up the stairs to his bedroom.

I wish those times back for the chance to redo my part, to say my lines with more clarity, to remember his gentleness more than anything else. It's like that recurring dream I had as a child. I would float up and hover like a hummingbird over my bed, float down the stairs, through the basement, and hover again in the deepest, darkest corner of the cellar. Mostly, I dreamt that I floated safely and softly back to bed. But there were those nights that I would dream I awoke in the basement, unable to move, paralyzed from head to toe in that dungeon of dungeons, where centipedes and water bugs lurked, home of the wringer washer, where my father whitewashed only half the stone. Then, suddenly, movement would be retrieved, and in my dream, I would fly up the stairs in total horror as though some snarling monster clawed at my heels. The dream would fade, and I would keep wondering if I ever made it back to bed.

It's so hard to forget the harshness of that dream, yet so easy for me to remember only the good: my father bringing my mother bismarcks and coffee, overly protecting her in her illness, making sure someone always held her arm. It would be easiest to remember them sleeping in separate bedrooms, the fighting. But when I would call my mother on the phone, she would say "I am listening to the radio pretending to dance," and then she'd tell me of the night they met at the Prom Ballroom. "Daddy was pretty light on his feet; you marry a man who likes to dance." So that's what I'll do; I will. I will remember them dancing.



Ann Iverson is a writer and artist. She is the author of five poetry collections: *Come Now to the Window* by the Laurel Poetry Collective, *Definite Space*, and *Art Lessons* by Holy Cow! Press; *Mouth of Summer* and *No Feeling is Final* by Kelsay Books. She is a graduate of both the MALS and the MFA programs at Hamline University. Her poems have appeared in a wide variety of journals and venues including six features in *The Writer's Almanac*. Her poem "Plenitude" was set to a choral arrangement by composer Kurt Knecht. She is also the author and illustrator of two children's books. As a visual artist, she enjoys the integrated relationship between the visual image and the written image. Her art has been featured in several art exhibits as well as in a permanent installation at the University of Minnesota Children's Hospital. She is currently working on her sixth collection of poetry, a book of children's verse, and a collection of personal essays entitled *Then Eat My Love*, forthcoming from Southern Arizona Press.

Spears

Nancy L. Glass

Spears as weapons: 1958, the kitchen at 210-23rd Avenue N, my feet kicking the wood base underneath the bar table, not even touching the floor from my perch on the tall stool. My sister and I are on one side of the Formica bar, facing off against our parents on the other side. There is no way five-year-old me is going to eat the pale, cold, limp spears of canned asparagus in front of me. No way. Somehow, stubborn me knows I must win this battle, or all future conflicts about lifeless green vegetables on my plate will also be lost. My mother the dietician: how *can* she serve this to me? I object to the texture, both flaccid and fibrous. I object to the color, halfway between green and dead. In truth, I object to being told what to do, as already, my willfulness and determination are firmly entrenched. There is no way I am going to eat these. Sit at the table until I eat them? Fine. And sit I do – for hours – obstinate, but with an aggrieved heart, my face on the countertop, long curls hiding my eyes, my legs dangling – until my father picks me up and carries me to my bed.

Spears as aphrodisiacs: 1972, late May, Spargelzeit – asparagus season – at a nice restaurant in Germany’s Black Forest area. Perhaps it’s something about how the handsome, dark-haired waiter announces the special treat for the night: white asparagus, only available for two weeks during the spring. Perhaps, I get caught up in the story of how the asparagus shoots are cultivated in the dark, under a thick layer of soil, to prevent photosynthesis from turning them green. Perhaps it is because I have a crush on my tablemate: a young, single professor of chemistry and a bassoonist, hoping he will see me as more “adult” than student, as I, too, emerge from the darkness of my naiveté. On a European tour with my college orchestra, composed of faculty members and students, I am both the youngest member of the ensemble as well as the principal oboist. I want to appear sophisticated, educated, desirable. And so, I swoon over the delicacy placed before me: fat spears of white asparagus, sautéed in fragrant butter, covered in an herbed cream sauce. I want to believe in the magic of this treat, and so – to my memory – the white spears impress me with their elegance, even if their taste is sadly bland.

Spears as Bounty and Remembrance: 2021, March, on Zimmerscheidt Road in New Ulm, Texas, named by German immigrants in the mid-1850’s. There, at our weekend retreat in a forest of

oaks, in a clearing close to the house, is a large fenced vegetable garden, designed and built by our recently deceased friend Betsy. We can't help but think of Betsy when we notice that the asparagus crowns she planted "just for fun" for us in 2018 are finally producing a cluster of spears. No other vegetables have exposed their pale green tendrils this early. Sunshine, enriched soil, and water have proven to be a magic combination. I watch in amazement as the asparagus spears grow nearly two feet in 48 hours; and at least on these plants, the stems are just as tasty as the tips, not the least bit woody. I could have eaten them raw while standing in the garden – they are *that* tender – but, instead, we grill them briefly before sprinkling them with lemon zest and freshly-ground pepper. The word 'delicious' is inadequate (or insufficient, perhaps) to describe the vividness of the green, the redolence of the mushroom compost, or the satisfying crunch when I bite into them.

Homegrown asparagus has now become my favorite spring vegetable.



Nancy L. Glass has been published in *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine* and in *The Journal of Narrative Visions*. She was the winner of the 2022 Writer's League of Texas Manuscript Contest in General Nonfiction. She earned a BA in German literature, an MBA, and a Master's of Liberal Studies from Rice University. She also earned an MD from Baylor College of Medicine and completed her MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts in January 2023. She spent nearly three decades practicing pediatric anesthesiology, retiring as Professor of Anesthesiology and Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital. For ten years, she also practiced pediatric hospice medicine. Currently, she is engaged in teaching about end-of-life topics and narrative medicine and has written a collection of pediatric hospice stories.

Poetry



Chicken Soup

Diana Raab

As a child, I loved visiting Aunt Silva's
66th Street apartment on New York City's West Side
and how the fragrance of chicken soup permeated
that corridor leading to apartment 1C.

It's as if love poured under her metal door
all the way down the hallway:
that aroma of chicken and vegetables
simmering in a large pot on her small kitchen stove
in front of a yellow-tiled backdrop,
as I watched her skim fat off its top
and teach me to use white pepper,
not black because it ruins
the look of the soup.

I loved the steam coming from her soup
and how it warmed me on cold winter days.
On inhalation, I felt instantly healed
as I watched her put soup through the strainer
into her biggest metal mixing bowl
and then the ingredients became the main meal,
with a cup of soup poured over.

For generations, this soup has been called
Jewish penicillin because one cannot help
but feel better with all its goodness
and love poured into a porcelain soup
bowl with golden rim.

Science has even told us
that the tryptophan in chicken
produces serotonin – comforting
and hydrating during sick times,
as the steam from the bowl clears sinuses
that we had no idea were stuffed.

It's no surprise that my children's freezers
have jars of my chicken soup
moved from one home
to the next, because like a first aid kit
it can cure anything
from colds to a broken heart.



Diana Raab, MFA, Ph.D., is a poet, memoirist, blogger, speaker, and award-winning author of thirteen books of poetry and nonfiction. Her writings have been published and anthologized world-wide. She blogs for *Psychology Today*, *The Wisdom Daily* and *Thrive Global* and is a guest blogger for many others. She frequently speaks on writing for healing and transformation based on her book: *Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Program for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life*. Her latest

poetry collection is *An Imaginary Affair: Poems Whispered to Neruda*.

To know more about Diana, please visit dianaraab.com.

Ice Cream Thoughts

Duane Anderson

Inside the downstairs freezer an empty ice cream
carton sits, the container my wife emptied,
and for whatever reason, did not throw away.

Maybe she saved it as a reminder
of how wonderful the ice cream tasted,
cold, sweet with flavors of peanut butter and fudge.

Maybe she forgot, and thought it was still partially full,
looking forward to another scoop or two
of the cold treat.

Maybe the container is like a picture,
the first of many to be placed in a photo album,
a treasure for memory lane years from now.

Maybe she will tear the carton apart for another
late night snack waiting for that moment
to lick the insides of the container

still coated with the last of the remains
sticking to its sides,
making sure no portion goes to waste,

but I am just guessing.
I will just have to ask my wife
as to what is going on,

though it's not like the space
it is taking is needed to make
additional room for some other item.



After graduating from Augustana College, located in Rock Island, IL, and working at Union Pacific Railroad for 37 years, **Duane Anderson** retired in 2013. He currently lives in La Vista, NE. After his retirement, he started writing poetry again after a long time. He has had poems published in *Fine Lines*, *Cholla Needles*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *W-Poesis*, *Wink: Writers in the Know*, and several other publications. He is the author of *Yes, I Must Admit We Are Neighbors*,

On the Corner of Walk and Don't Walk, *The Blood Drives: One Pint Down*, and *Conquer the Mountains*.

Hockey Pucks for Breakfast

Becky Parker

Residing in the university's married student housing
as a newlywed, I was grateful for the concrete walls
that softened the cacophony of equal parts ardor
and arguments that frequently erupted from each
apartment, including mine.

The first meal Romeo and I cooked together
was Ramen curled around wieners,
smothered in shredded cheese, served in matching bowls,
gifts from well wishers.

Sometimes on the weekends, we could be found swaddled
In blankets in our marital bed with its rickety bookcase headboard,
laden with academic titles including French 101, Finance 3010,
and Abnormal Psychology, and a Harlequin Romance novel –
feasting on Shipley's donuts, and watching lurid soap operas
on a rented TV.

One stormy morning, while Romeo was toiling at a night shift job,
I decided to make breakfast to surprise him when he returned.
Turns out bacon grease can really get HOT and flames
CAN reach the cabinets. Being a novice cook and an idiot,
I ran out of that apartment, so fast I could have been
a track star, to bang on doors and get help.

Romeo was surprised when he came home, but not happily so.
Being a finance major, he wisely invested in a fire extinguisher
and a family health insurance plan.

In the 36 years that would follow, there would be several cooking fires,
one incident of an emergency room visit for a serious steam burn
(from cooking spaghetti of all things); multiple kitchen smoke
alarms chiming to my daughters that supper was ready,
many biscuits used as hockey pucks in the back yard,
and an enormous bouquet of grace given
to the hapless cook (moi).

A well-cooked meal IS a good thing. But love given
on a burnt biscuit smothered in lumpy gravy is
trés magnifique!

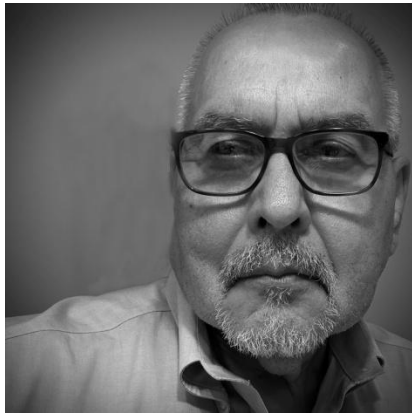


Becky Parker resides in Tennessee. She enjoys DIY projects, glamping, traveling, spending time with family, and listening to a tall tale. Her works have been published in *Spirit Fire Review*, *Agape Review*, *Sweet Cat Press*, *Yellow Mama*, *Appalachia Bare*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *The Rye Whiskey Review*, and *The Green Shoe Sanctuary*. Her work will also be included in the upcoming issue of *North Dakota Quarterly*. She was also nominated for the Pushcart prize by Sequoyah Cherokee *River Journal*.

Blessed Seed

Juan R. Palomo

Cumin arrived in the Americas from the Middle East by way of Spain. In Mexico and in the American Southwest, it's called comino (not to be confused with Comino, a tiny island in the Mediterranean with only two inhabitants). Whole or ground, comino is used in kitchens to lend a warm earthy aroma to dishes. With garlic and oregano, it comprises la Santa Trinidad of Mexican cooking. Mexicans are particularly fond of comino, as are Mexican descendants and immigrants in the United States. It is the ingredient that gives life to the food millions of Americans cannot do without – no comino, no Chipotle and no Taco Bell. The source of the spice's dusky fragrance is the oil found in tiny canals in ridges near the surface of the torpedo-shaped semillas, which are dried and crushed to produce the greenish brown comino powder found at H-E-B, Safeway or Kroger's. We should note that real cooks never use powder – not when they can roast the seeds on their comales, then crush them in their molcajetes to extract the exotic potency of the comino. This seed is what draws out the sensual zests in our salsas: red, green and every shade in between. Without cominos there is no barbacoa, no fajitas and other taco fillings. Frijoles refritos would be wishy-washy mashed beans and Mexican rice would be Spanish rice. Worse, you would not have calabacita, that savory casserole dish rich in color and mysterious flavors and texture. It is made with corn and yellow or green squash – or both – and cooked with or without meat until the calabazas lose their crispiness (or as the TV chef Pati Jinich says, they turn mooshy) calabaza is Spanish for squash or pumpkin. The diminutive ending “ita” has nothing to do with size or volume. Rather, it's a term of endearment, a denotation of our love for this holy concoction – the first dish I learned from mi mamacita and the one I still most love to cook. It is the cominos that bring out the splendor of the dish's flavors and it is the cominos that add the “ita” to calabacita.



Juan R. Palomo was born in North Dakota into a migrant farmworker family. He grew up in South Texas and various Midwestern states, working in the fields with his family. He wrote news and opinion for *The Houston Post*, *Austin American-Statesman* and *USA TODAY*. His poems have appeared in *Acentos Review*; *New Mexico Review*; *The Account Magazine*; *Bayou Review*; *Sonora Review*; *Hinchas de Poesía*; *ReVista: the Harvard Review of Latin America*; *Crosswinds Journal*; *Voices de la Luna*; *Fifth Wednesday Journal*'s anthology of Mexican American writers; and *Cutthroat Journal*'s anthology, *Puro Chicanx Writers of the 21st Century*. He has been a featured poet at the Rothko Chapel and on *The Beat* poetry podcast. His 2021 chapbook, *Al Norte*, was published by Alabrava Press.

Poaching Eggs

Robin Dake

Today, for the first time
I poached an egg.
Two, in fact.

Following the instructions offered
by the nice lady online,
I get the water simmering.
Then gently slip the raw egg into the tiny bubbles,
where it floats and cooks,
the flotsam of egg white
surrounding the yellow prize.

When I see the yolk protected
by the thinnest of skin
I use the slotted spoon to
ease the egg from its bath,
taking care to not harm the fragile center.

I watch myself be so careful with just breakfast
and remind myself:
That I, too, have a yellow yolk inside
That should be treated gently
so it doesn't break open.



Robin is a mother, daughter, friend, writer, and photographer. She has spent her career working as a journalist or non-profit manager while writing essays and poems on the side. Her work has appeared in the *Snapdragon Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, *This I Believe* radio program, and *Trailway News* magazine. She lives in N.E. Georgia with two hoodlum cats and one patient dog.

Locked in the Casino of Hunger

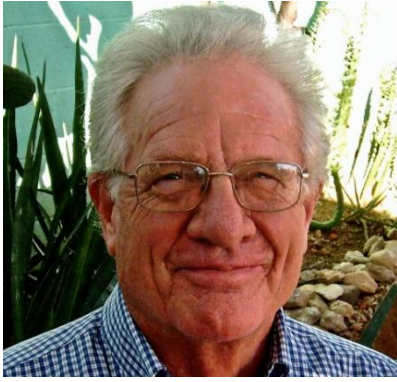
Joseph Stefani

You claim, my dear, that our sense of the normal
is here somewhere. But where?
Curled up under a bush in the garden?
Hiding under the bed with the dust bunnies?
Hanging in the closet among your blouses or my shirts?
What can it matter? Do either of us need to know?
Besides, I'm running out of questions
So, let's move on to more pertinent remarks –

Once again the weather was fine today.
Once again, we've overbought while food shopping:
BUT those pears, persimmons, and grapefruit,
that head of lettuce as spectacular as the head of a lion,
the cute little red onions and especially
those yellow onions that radiated
a pearlescent glow as if they'd just rolled
off the table of a god and descended
through clouds of blessing to land in that vegetable bin.
We were helpless.

Today I'm not betting on anything
happening out of the usual
like deep fried eel
or salmon still warm from the smoker
or . . . dream on.

I do, and when I *really* let my dreaming
cut loose, it always finds its way down to a beach
far from here where at low tide I'm looking
for dimples in the damp sand
that give the clams away.



Joseph Stefani lives in Tucson Arizona. His work has appeared in the *Portland Review*, *The Poeming Pigeon*, *Pinhole Poetry*, and *Plainsongs*.

Constant Comment Tea is a Time Machine

Catharine Clark-Sayles

Orange, cloves, and cinnamon; spirals in a curl of steam,
time machine – I'm six again and GG in her kitchen leads me
through the art of sugar cookies, fine lines of royal icing:
pink, white, green – for carousel horses riding poles
of peppermint sticks – a prance of vanilla sweetness.
Table laid with lace and silver for ladies coming to tea,
wearing their summer dresses, hats, and cotton gloves.
Me, in a dress of dotted swiss, starched and crackling when I sit,
trusted to pass the polished bowl stacked with sugar cubes,
dainty tongs rubbed to a shine and thin-sliced lemon rounds.
The ladies sipped and nibbled, talked of Sputnik, Mamie's bangs,
the new TV, and the single doctor who might marry soon.
The horses galloped past painted red lips scented with orange-
spice tea and now, half a century later, the ladies still smile at me.



Catharine Clark-Sayles is a retired physician living north of San Francisco. She closed her geriatric medicine practice of forty years and completed an MFA in poetry and narrative medicine at Dominican University of California in 2019. She has published two books of poetry, *One Breath* and *Lifeboat*, with Tebot Bach Press and a chapbook, *Brats*, with Finishing Line Press. Her recent work has appeared in *Naugatuck River Review*, her poem “Reconstruction” was awarded third place in their narrative poem prize and a Pushcart nomination in 2020. Another poem was a finalist in this year’s narrative poetry prize and will be published in February. Cutthroat published a finalist poem in the Joy Harjo Prize in 2022. She has had several poems included in anthologies: *Moving Pictures: Poems Inspired by Film*, *Poets With Masks On*, and *Mother Mary Comes To Me: Pop Culture Poems*.

Shame on Me

Pam Davenport

Two crisp apples, one for each of us in my cart.
In the Whole Foods parking lot a woman
asks for money and I shrug my shoulders
so she points to her mouth – I think of the fruit
but shrug again, say I'm sorry, and load bags
into the back of my SUV.

But the cash in my purse, I remember that, and drive
up another lane, where they look from left to right,
she and her little one in stained dresses and dusty shoes,
I roll down the window to hand over my twenty.
The girl smiles sweetly while her mother
kisses the bill, points at the storefront and says, *food*.

Later telling my husband, I cry, as I unpack
four bags I paid eight times that much for,
as I stuff our already full refrigerator.
That mother, I want to picture her biting
into a tomato, sharing slices of bell pepper
with her daughter, slathering cream cheese
on a bagel, then a layer of smoked salmon on top.
But all I can see is her kissing the bill,
the dirt and germs entering her mouth.



Pam Davenport lives and writes in the low desert and the mountains of Arizona. She earned an MFA at Pacific University in Oregon, and her chapbook, *A Midwest Girl Thanks Patti Smith* (2019), was chosen as the winner of the Slipstream Chapbook Competition. Pam has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and was also a recipient of the Arizona Authors' Association Annual Award for Poetry. Her poems have been published in various journals and anthologies, including *Thrush*, *Nimrod*,

Tinderbox, *Slippery Elm*, *Poetry of the American Southwest*, and *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*.

Art



Bread

A Watercolor Painting by

Fergana Kocadoru Özgör



Artist's Note: "When I was making my painting titled "**Bread**," I especially wanted it to be moldy. While billions of tons of bread are wasted every year in developed countries around the world, most people in underdeveloped countries remain deprived of bread – the most basic food. That's why I painted a moldy loaf of bread as a critical response to the mindless consumer culture of our own time. This painting therefore critiques the culture of thoughtless consumption where food is – often, inadvertently – transformed into garbage in the name of powering a more sustainable world."



Fergana was born in 1990 in Eskişehir, Turkey. She spent her childhood in various cities of Germany due to her father's job. She completed her undergraduate education from Anadolu University, Department of Painting, in 2012. She earned her Master's degree from the Kütahya Dumlupınar University, Department of Painting. Her Master's thesis ("German Romance and the Solitude of Genius") was published as a book.

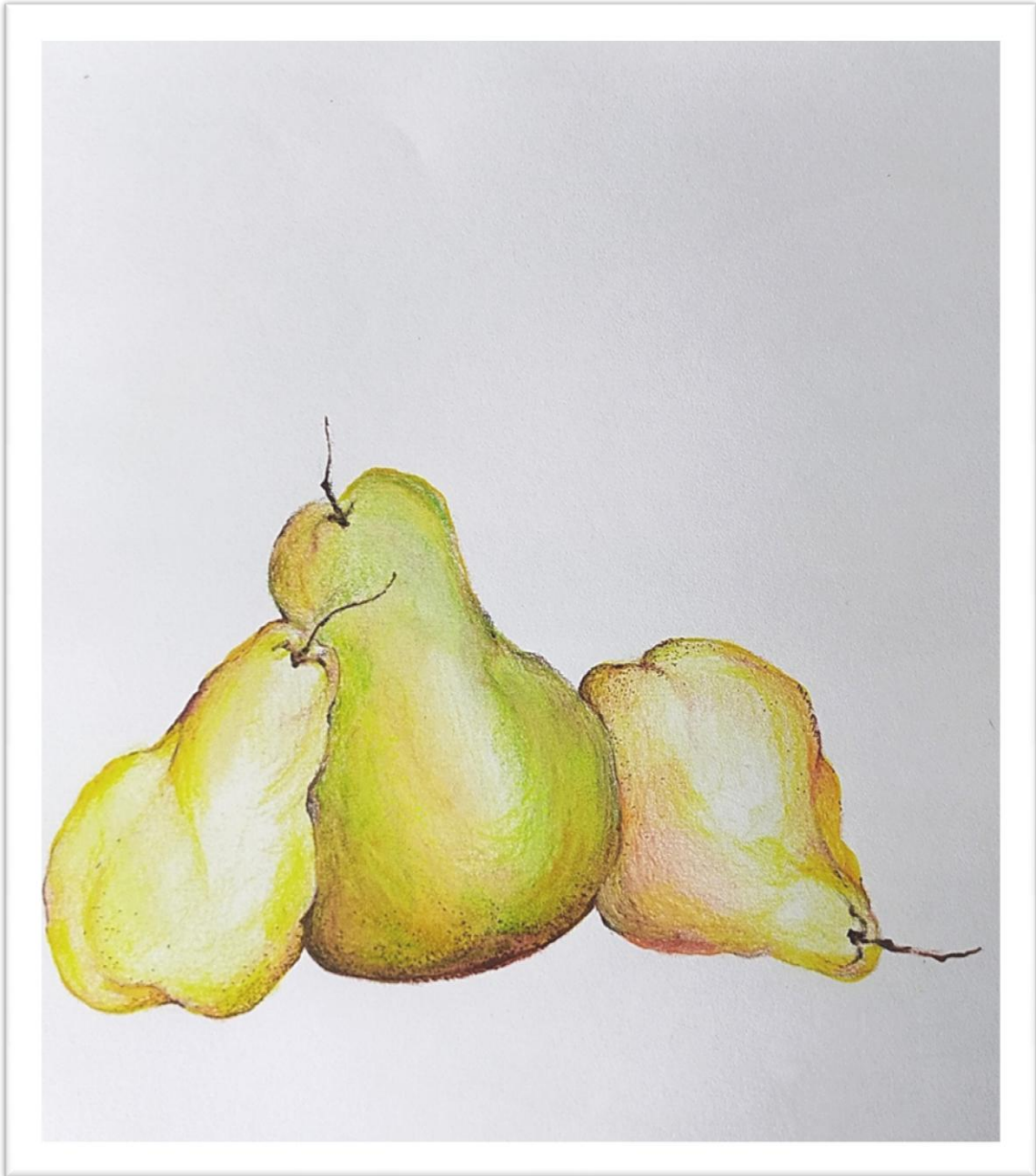
In 2013, she started working as a research assistant at Hacettepe University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Painting. In 2015, she started her art proficiency training at the same institution. In 2019, she finished her art proficiency training, her doctoral thesis being titled "Urban Melancholia." She has lived in Berlin and Vienna for her studies and writings.

Fergana questions the image of the city through the female figure in her work. Gray and blue tones are frequently used in her artworks.

Fallen

A Still Life Illustration by

Amit Das





Amit Das hails from the state of Assam in India. A trained visual artist, he has always believed in making soulful art. As a young boy, he was captivated by the beauty of nature and, to this day, nature remains as his greatest inspiration.

Amit is also an amateur flautist and a tea enthusiast.

Three Morimono Arrangements

by

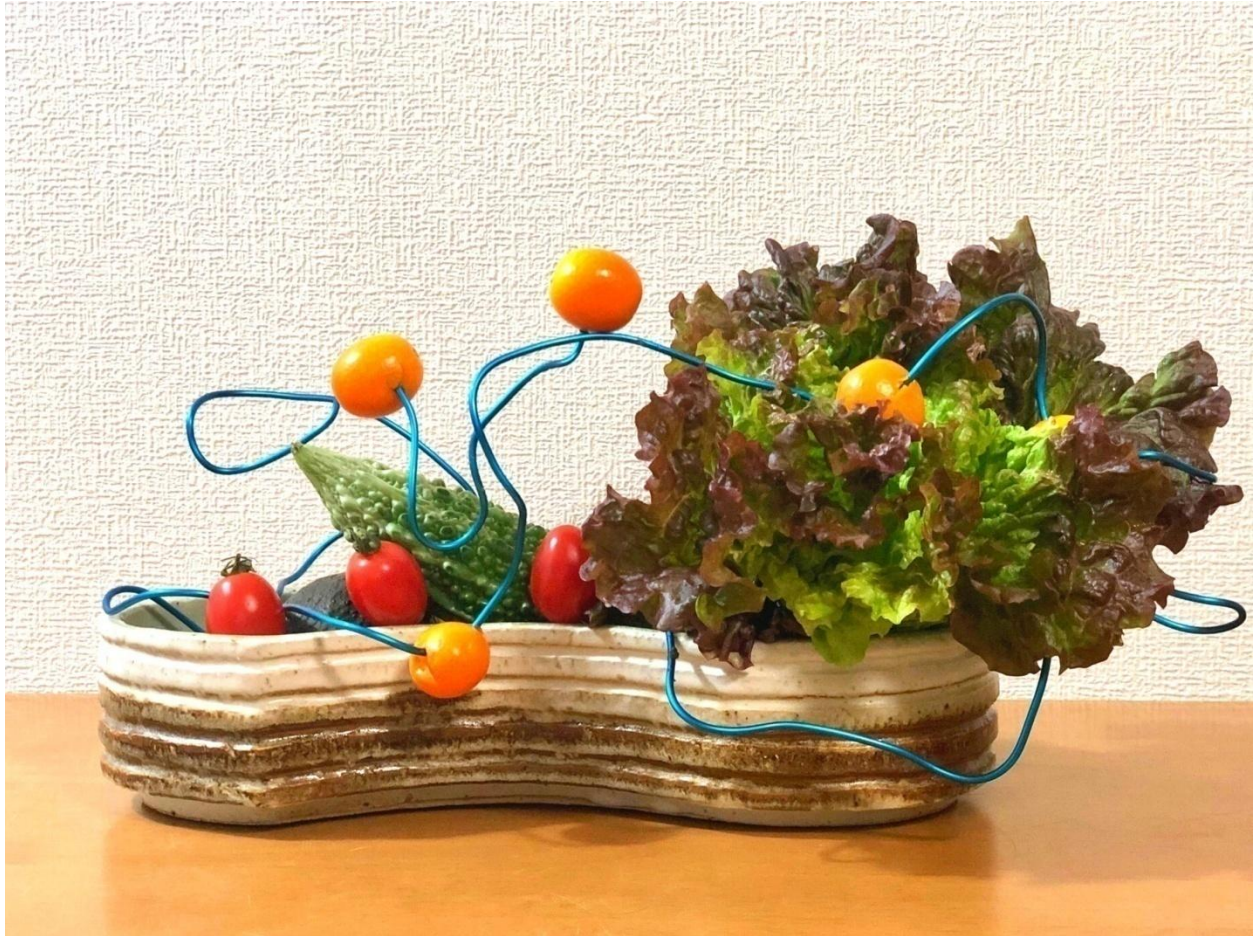
Anna Budich



Grillin' and Chillin'



Mediterranean Summer



Sun Kissed



Anna started learning Ikebana in 2012 in Tokyo following the Sogetsu School curriculum. Before that, she had been arranging flowers for weddings and events for more than 10 years. This is part of her family's cakes and flower business, in addition to her job as an urban planner.

In 2017, she received her Third Level Teacher's Certificate (Sankyu

Shihan). Since 2013, Anna has been participating in exhibitions and contests in Japan, Italy, Ecuador, Singapore, and Australia. She has also had her own exhibitions together with a pottery artist – *Okaeri!* (Welcome Home) in Tokyo in 2016 and *Voyage* (An Ikebana and Pottery Exhibition) in Yokohama in 2017.

Some of her works have received awards and recognitions from florist organizations based in Europe and Australia.

Breakfast at Babushka's

A Collage by

Nikhat Jahan



Artist's Note: “This collage is an attempt to relive a childhood memory most precious. One day, a quiet little girl came to live in our neighborhood with her grandmother. She lived there for just a few months. She – her name was Nina – and I became good friends. On Sundays, we’d play ludo for hours in her house and her grandmother – she called her *Babushka* – would feed us fried eggs and pickled tomatoes, arranged neatly on white gold-rimmed plates. Over just a few days, Nina’s Babushka also became *my* Babushka in a way. To this day, I remember her kind, smiling face. I still remember the large, sunny kitchen, wrapped in the aroma of fried eggs. I was heartbroken when they left. My little friend had come to say goodbye. But in our childish sorrow we had forgotten to exchange addresses.”



Nikhat grew up in Calcutta. She is a graphic designer with a special interest in experimental imagemaking and food design.

She enjoys reading, going for long walks, and travelling to non-touristy destinations.

Nikhat dreams of opening her own restaurant someday – complete, with a well-stocked library.