



Tanasi River Review

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Summer 2026

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foreword

Why the Tanasi River Review? Tanasi is the Cherokee word for “meeting place”. What we now call the Tennessee River begins at the confluence of the Holston and French Broad Rivers, and flows for 562 miles before reaching the Ohio River. That's as far as this geography lesson goes.

This journal is born from that meeting place of people and nature. That's a concept that's inescapable. I am writing this from our red deck here in North Alabama. We're seeing the first bats of the year, and late clouds have moved in so the only lights in the sky are fireflies.

I promised this issue on the summer solstice. It is the longest day of the year, and the shortest night. The earth is tilted closest, yet is almost at aphelion. A needle threaded between warmth and light.

Many thanks to all to have submitted and supported this journal already. To trusting your work to this corner of the universe. Thank you all for meeting me here. Welcome to the first issue of The Tanasi River Review.

Sam Calhoun
EIC/Founder

Joe Farina

spirit wheel

eastbound at dawn
on the 401
i shade my eyes,
as the sunrise anoints my journey
red tailed hawks,
cast their shadows
shimmering on the road
before me -
the land is swollen
pregnant with spring -
portents surround me-
divining them as talismans
i accede to their persuasion
submitting myself
to the spirits of earth and sky,
receiving absolution
in their revelation.

Patricia Russo

Silt

Where you're standing,
you can't hear the river,
though you know exactly where it is,
exactly how far away from it you are

breathing in the dry air
living within each second
but missing the water
the way you miss the dream

you woke from this morning
in which time had dissolved
like silt in the clear, still clear,
forever clear current.

Charlie Pettigrew

The Red Strand

For Frances

You pick the pebbles on the beach,
and are that child again.
Weighing one above the other,
listening to the sea's refrain.

You wait, expectant,
immersed in recollection-
the tide lapping your bare feet.
And then his smile envelops you
like a sunburst out of shadow.

Your father walks beside you once more,
and the stones in your hands
are passed between you,
like a chain of sea washed gems.
You smile back in winked complicity.

A moment shared in blue:
sky, waves, pebbles and felicity.

Michael Carter

Morning Walk, West River Trail, Vermont

Even the river is sluggish
this morning with its scum
of frost flowers lazing
downstream towards
the Connecticut, soon
to melt in the risen
sun like fat in soup warmed
on the stove. The water
dimples where the rivers
meet with whirlpools, conical
as the ant lion lairs
of my childhood. I
have always been lonely
but here on the riverbank
walking the dogs and watching
a cohort of mallards split
the difference between
the stillness of water
and the stillness of air,
it makes sense. The bright
hands of the earth
reach down, cast shadows,
offer a lesson just
beyond my grasp.

Taylor Hagood

Mosquito Bite

“There is an absence in my chest.
It is the shape of something I want to be haunted by.”
—Jamella F. Dallis

She presses an X into the red mound
on my arm with her strong, freshly-painted
glow-in-the-dark nails.

I think about the female who has bitten me,
drawing the proteins out of my blood
so she can give birth

while males dash about after
sugar from flowers. I gape
before her passion to build the world

despite her small size. She generates energy
in her vita with the explosiveness
of a Tai Chi master.

I know this fierce love: I feel
its trembling cling and know
no stronger force exists anywhere.

The fear too—it falls on this marsh as heavy
as the wet season itself, its gray rain
unfolding swamp lillies’ white fingers.

Awe cannot syllable its own meaning,
but that single, unconsonanted, end-fading sound
tells me its complete truth.

Roberta Beach Jacobson

Three haiku

whispering
a distant tsunami
fisherman

wilderness trip
easy to underestimate
rocky path

ocean trash . . .
mermaid no longer
a free spirit

John Grey

THE ARCTIC TERN

a female tern

is searching
but there's no male bird
to link up with

so she lays no eggs
hatches no chicks

will haunt the coast line
suffer through a celibate season

until finally
the cold sends her pointlessly south

in a silent flock
of fully fledged ghosts

from one pole
to the other

Jeremi McGee

Where Did All the Fireflies Go?

When we killed the lights
on the dark sugar sand road
to look at old stars in an older night,

we stared out over a rusty chain guarding
an abandoned lot slowly subsumed
by live oak, sabal palm, and strangler fig,

where fireflies
sparked on, off
pulse-long,
floated and fell
breath-length,
glinting and veering
before vanishing.

I couldn't remember
the last time I'd seen
fireflies in Florida.

I should've reached for your hand.

Erin Jamieson

Pores

I dance barefoot
in lilac fields
misty sunlight
painting my body
like it's ethereal,
everlasting

I feel thunder
echo in my chest
the way it used to
when I was a girl
& didn't know
time was slipping
between my fingers

When the rain comes
I keep dancing-
feet calloused
under muddy ground

someone calls my name
the way my mother
once tried to call me
but I've learned
to linger as long
as I can

Daisies

I pluck petals
under crimson rays
day is fading
& shadows echo
in my chest

I should go home but
I stay, barefoot
in endless fields
of wild daisies
honeysuckle trickling
down my chapped lips

In a few months
all these flowers
will be dead

Betty Stanton

After the Flood

Hope clings to trees, it trades
in the bite of splinters, finds
what is left of itself in the rubble

of what is left alive, afloat. When
the river moves everything it connects
cries out for hands. Every shore. This

is how we learn longing: with water
in our throats, with teeth clenched tight
to keep silt from our open, crying

mouths. This is how love becomes
a river rushing, it refuses to stay stilled.

Buckeye

My mother carried the seeds
for luck, her mother tucked them

into pockets. She did not know
they would turn body into chasm,

would hollow bones, still the heart.
They sat close to her body, thick

polished pearls, dark and warm from
her fingers. Luck could close her

throat. Was a quiet thing asking her
to trust it not to open. Not to live.

Atrophied

Fog climbs the hillside, wears the shape of someone who never returned – a body, ghost, the weight of space where someone used to stand. The grasses here tremble with something not quite like lift, they are dried and breaking, each blade thinner than their memories. Here, even the land forgets its strength. Roots loosen their grip on the dark earth, stems bow early, tree trunks that held themselves upright lean and bend without knowing why. We move without feeling the strain of atrophied muscles, motion after the purpose of the motion has gone. We work deadened fields by habit long after the harvest has failed. Nothing collapses at once, instead it all thins into air and fiber, under even the dark spaces inside our ribs must find their rest.

Taofeek Ayeyemi

Àdátán

A hunter released a noisy smoke into the air,
pulled down bats from the sky like snow, like

answered prayers: a manna that stopped by
the coal house before touching down.

The blacksmith's shop behind father's house
now gathers more cobweb than scavengers. I wonder

if he walked away with his toolbox clung
to his head,

I wonder if the farmers took a break or lost
their farm to the flood.

I wonder if the hunters now speak the wilds
into their palms and empty them of their breaths.

I wonder, and wander into the future and see
the town immersed in weeds,

houses
 snaking around
 in avoidable forests.

Sango

is where I hit the ground blooming,
a tiny seed that bursts

into a large orchard of flowers:
this land cradled us like unripe plantains, like

unripe avocado, like the unripe soursop we plucked
in the compound of Baba Mukaila.

Here, our wallet frowned into the market and returned
smiling.

Sometimes, we dribbled through the streets just to buy
assorted bones. Sometime,

to be rich isn't to have money
in abundance,

but the ability to stir your hunger
into vapour.

Here at night, the moon fed us with tales and lores, with
the smell of firecrackers on the eve of new years.

At kétére—a market that's always dark, even in the day—
we carved our dreams and they morph

into shadows of butterflies.
And in all our goings and returning,

no road was hungry
for our flesh.

Emilie Bilman

A kernel

Like a singular kernel fallen
on the field, I died to the self

and wheat-seeds within their spikes
scattered, smoothened, and rooted

along furrowed corridors. Gradually,
like rumours swaying in the breeze

the wheat-stems with their kernels
and awns, with their glumes and florets

began breathing under the sky-line
in a coordinated network.

Robert Rinehart

a single egret

she came unbidden, like
that snowy white
egret that stood four days
upon our front lawn in
summer. you can't control
passing seasons any
more than you can shift
dreams back to a more innocent
state, a time when all you
had to do was follow
your sketchy heart.

Ruth Bavetta

For the Record

Call it injury or destruction. Call it rupture.
Call it small or smaller, minuscule as a star,
minute as Mars at midnight.

Call it falling into the sky,

into the sea, into an endless cloud.
Call it a change in structure, in stricture, in the future.

Call it circumscribed as an apple.
Call it loose, call it chance,

possibility, grief, alarm.

Call it well-defined, undefined, delineated,
vagueness solidified. Call it classified or unclassified.

Call it 40% percent hurricane offshore,
60% breeze from the hills.

Call it harmless, call it without horizon.
Call it endless. Call it.

Blues On a White Guitar

The sands of the moon,
 Holmenkollen in January,

poteter and fiskeboller,
 mayonnaise on Weber's bread,

an empty notebook, the sheets
 before they were soiled. Whiter

than August. Whiter

than hope, whiter than grief,
 whiter than living alone.

Michael Paul

Red Car, Blue Ridge

We drove after breakfast,
country fried steak and eggs over medium,
toast spread thick with marmalade,
and a diet Coke,
in my beat-up old Honda,
“the red car,” my daughter calls it,
to set it apart from the black one
my wife took early to work.

Out through what used to be good horse country,
now vineyards climb up rolling hills,
and llamas, alpacas graze quietly.

Basking in a cool August morning,
unseasonably mild,
just driving,
taking in the Blue Ridge mountains
looming faintly in the distance,
trees and fields spread out brightly green
near the edge of West Virginia.

Amy Huffman

Lotus Patch

The path led to a bank that looked like a meadow.
Fragrant blossoms floated, patches of petalled white,
clouds among green expanse. I fought
the childish urge to rush forward, to frolic, to graze
my hands against the tips of tender blooms
though I allowed myself to imagine my feet, two
skipping rocks, skimming unseen water's plane,
waiting to see how far they could get before I sank.

Christina Chin

Two haiku

moonlight on the cups
I lower my gaze
to pour tea

the cranes
behind white clouds
autumn mountain

Ace Boggess

“Are You a Morning or Night Person?”

question asked by Amy Sturm

Awaken blank, emptied to receive the day—
angst of lateness & doubts erased.

Start fresh, anew, budding to bloom,
staring into a coffee moon, a rapturous dawn.

There is no god but Gratitude
to bless stillness where nerves should be

or were the night before, that swore
I failed to live up to my promise,

write the right words or enough of them.
Calm, calm like surrender, or like sediment.

Come, I say to what awaits: a mist
descending past the hellfire of first light.

Prabu Vasan

Upstate, Steady Rain after Hard Snow

Goose Pond is turning into
A plate of milk. Where the moon
Breaks through, a pair of soggy mallards
Paddle in a froth of snowmelt,
And the deer tracks dotting the bank
Soften to smears in the snow.

When the great aeon-ending fire
Engulfs the universe, will this too be
Burnt up? The monk had to be sure,
So he asked twice. Dasui said, Burnt
Up. Longji: Not burnt up.

I squat amidst the broken reeds.
Across the pond, a deer starts
At my intrusion, eyes glowing,
Delicate legs ready to leap.
The rain spatter is moon white.

Either burnt up or not, we'll all die
The same basic death. But if I could put

My lips to this milk the way the deer
Put their lips to it—the way they do
When they are alone and wild—I'd flare
With life the way the wild deer flare.

Max S. Ma

The Tree

My mother said: We have to save it.
A ten-foot tree, branches already bare,
stood in the way of everything
being torn down.

We went there with shovels.
We dug until the earth let go
of the grey roots, exposed
and useless.

My father said it was already dead.
But we carried it back,
shoulders into the wood—

We dug a hole. We put it in.

A cycle of seasons passed.
The wood stayed grey, upright, dry.
No green arrived to break the surface.

Then, something gave way,
they came apart, father and mother.

The tree is still there,
outside the window.
Mother and I look at it on a rainy day—

two reflections on the glass,
caught in its grey lines.

Louis Faber

SEASON OF OUR CONTENT

It is Spring
and the clamor of
an awakening world
loudly decries winter's silence.
I press my ear
to still barren soil
to hear the hypnotic thrum
of sap reaching slowly skyward
engine straining against gravity
earthworms beginning
their tunneling, marshaling
armies for an exodus
through ever night soil.
I listen to the bud
its velour face
unfolding before
the stillborn sky,
a robin, breast unfurled
stares at me in wonder.

Nora Rawn

From Then to Now

The path to the allotment runs just down the road,
across the zebra crossing, cars careening
down the blind slope of the curving hill,
through the unremarkable fenced gate next to the school,
blunt lock, rusting chain links and fallen leaves,
but this is by appearances only,
merely the physical distance. Life is like this—
what begins as a buried seed under the gray English sky
germinates, comes green and
twining into the world. Who knows what
distances you have traveled to be here?
What span of time, what epochs passed?
A striped rental chair in a London park,
a fallen tray in the cafeteria line.

The slugs will come later for the strawberries,
in summer, when the bees are busy in the orchard,
each plot patterned after its master, tidy or untended,
productive or decorative, fallow or fertile,
but now nothing grows,
only the early blossoms of a hedge.
Head down the bamboo tunnel,
after the blonde head of the almost fairy child,
tween in the pink jacket,
picking her way over the roots, inviting you along.

Each calendar year has its traditions,
its quiet anniversaries remarked,
and here is one, the allotment visit,
the compost delivered,
something usable from the muck;
quiet miracle of midlife.
Worms turn the soil
and another spring arrives.
A snail crawls across a leaf.

Coming Home

Gone the full cherry blossoms,
pinkly opening magnolia,
bright yellow of the daffodil and mimosa—
here on the east coast spring lags,
forgotten and left behind by the
North Atlantic Drift, though in the
near-freezing evening's late light
some crocuses assert themselves,
an early iris, gardenias with a touch of frost,
andromedas (always I forget the name),
shrub of my childhood home,
dangling tight racemes pointing earthwards
in lush, guarded constellations,
and on the forsythia bush, small yellowfurled buds
wait for their moment, ready to be forced
out into small starry blooms.

Down DeKalb, the tower stands dark against
brighter sky, unremarkable sunset:
nothing seeming likely to unfold under its watchful eye,
but that walking home, the moon
rises for me, first time in two weeks,
hazy half circle giving her aslant welcome
above the quiet brownstones,
their lit and darkened windows, homes
of lovers past and perhaps, who knows,
of future. All will change in due course,
poking green shoots creep upwards
despite rebuff. Slowly and anon.
In the tower, no one stirs.

TAK Erzinger

Fox

I can't see the trees
nor conceive a spot of green;
a hill, a blade of grass and fresh air;
paws, tracks, bodies, hidden.

A star-filled sky, alight, fireflies
twinkle; even ancient, a comfort, a constant
a map. I can't see nature
for street names – alley,
avenue, boulevard, lane

more so freedom
without the sound of birds
music filled air – or run by a building
without wondering about a safe, untouched,
expansive place where only the city stands.

Joseph Chelius

Kabocha

Disappointed in the mealy texture
of the kabocha we bought
at an Asian market,
we tossed the remains—
the wobbly bottom half—
out the back door for the squirrels to find.
And there it lay like a deflated football,
a dilapidated hut
until mid-afternoon when a chubby groundhog
appeared in the yard.
Picture him on his hind legs—
whiskered, pot-bellied, his prospector's nose
twitching as he spotted the kabocha,
then came forward to probe
along the edges, searching
as if for a knob, a handle, a solution
to a dilemma in transport, in engineering
before he speared in his teeth
and carried off past the lilac and dogwood
to his nest behind the fence
this scrap we'd discarded—
his windfall in the grass.

Kelly Facenda

Cabin Window

I look out the cabin window and see two fawns,
jumping and chasing each other like puppies,
an elegant doe nearby chewing green.
She watches me watching them
in this bright morning, a healing balm.
Briefly, they belong to me and I'm certain that I love them.

There is a ghost in the cabin too, but I think he must
be outside on the garden bench,
watching these long legs as they romp
around the pachysandra and reddish gravel,
taking note of their curious black eyes.
To be a ghost is to slip in and out of the logs,
to move in the mountain fog,
to make the ferns shift lightly with breezy
steps, to point at blue sky brilliant through the
tree canopy and hope that somehow others
notice even if the pointing finger is invisible.

The doe starts walking off, no longer interested in me,
her babies following. An etched stone in the garden
shines gray in the early light. I don't hear a sound but I
imagine him saying I'm so glad you saw this,
I was worried you'd miss it.

Contributor Bios

Taofeek Ayeyemi "Aswagaawy" is a Nigerian lawyer, writer and author of a full-length collection "Aubade at Night or Serenade in the Morning" (FlowerSong Press, 2021). A BotN and Pushcart Prize Nominee, his works have appeared in *Lucent Dreaming*, *Up-the-Staircase Quarterly*, *FERAL*, *Akitsu Quarterly*, *Banyan Review*, *Conscio*, *Agbowó*, and elsewhere. He won the 2021 Loft Books Flash Fiction Competition, and 2nd Places in 2025 Octofest poetry contest. He is @Aswagaawy on X.

Ruth Bavetta's poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, *North American Review*, *Slant*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Atlanta Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. She likes the light on November afternoons, the music of Stravinsky, the smell of the ocean. She hates pretense, prejudice, and sauerkraut.

Roberta Beach Jacobson is a woman of few words. She makes her home in Iowa, where she writes short poetry and flash fiction. She is the editor of *smols* poetry journal and *Five Fleas Itchy Poetry*.

Dr. Emily Bilman is a widely published and anthologized author of poetry, of literary and psychoanalytical essays, and non-fiction. She has a long-term training in psychoanalysis. Her PhD dissertation, *The Psychodynamics of Poetry: Poetic Virtuality and Oedipal Sublimation in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot and Paul Valéry* was published by Lambert Academic, DE in 2010. *Modern Ekphrasis* (2013) was published by Peter Lang Academic, CH. Her poetry books, *A Woman by A Well* (2015), *The Threshold of Broken Waters* (2018), *Apperception* (2020), *The Undertow* (2023), and *Resilience* (2025) were published by Troubador Books, UK. Her sonnet, "Pathfinder", landed on the moon with a time-capsule. She teaches literature, psychoanalysis, and creative writing in Geneva and New York. <http://www.emiliebilman.wix.com/emily-bilman>
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-emily-bilman-37666413>

Ace Boggess is author of eight books of poetry, most recently *Tell Us How to Live* (Fernwood Press, 2025) and *My Pandemic / Gratitude List* (Mōtus Audāx Press, 2025). His writing has appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Hanging Loose*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes, watches Criterion films, and tries to stay out of trouble. His first short-story collection, *Always One Mistake*, was recently released from Running Wild Press.

Michael J Carter is a poet and clinical social worker. A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College he holds an MFA from Vermont College and an MSW from Smith. Poems of his have appeared in such journals as *Boulevard*, *Ploughshares*, *MomEgg Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, among many others. He spends his time walking his hounds and knitting.

Joseph Chelius is the author of three full-length collections of poems, the most recent being *Playing Fields*, published by Kelsay Books in 2025. His work has appeared in *Cider Press Review*, *Commonweal*, *Poet Lore*, *Rattle*, *THINK*, and other journals.

Christina Chin is a painter and haiku poet. She is a four-time recipient of top 100 in the mDAC Summit Contests, exhibited at the Palo Alto Art Center, California. 1st prize winner of the 34th Annual Cherry Blossom Sakura Festival Haiku Contest. 1st prize winner in the 8th Setouchi Matsuyama Photo Haiku Contest. She has been published in numerous journals, multilingual journals, and anthologies, including Japan's prestigious *Haikukai Magazine*.
Grokikipedia profile: grokipedia.com/page/Christina_Chin.
YouTube: youtube.com/@christinachinhaikuart972?si=HYByM--YvBgUkifK
WordPress: christinachin99blog.wordpress.com/
Blogspot: haikuzyg.blogspot.com/

TAK Erzinger lives in the Swiss Alps in a very small village.

Louis Faber is a poet and writer. His work has appeared in several anthologies and in *The MacGuffin*, *Cantos*, *Alchemy Spoon*, *New Feathers Anthology*, *Flora Fiction*, *Dreich* (Scotland), *Prosetrics*, *Atlanta Review*, *Glimpse*, *Rattle*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Pearl*, *Midstream*, *European Judaism*, *The South Carolina Review* and *Worcester Review*, among many others, and has been twice nominated for a Best of the Web and twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Kelly Facenda is a nurse living outside of Philadelphia. After a hiatus, she is returning to writing. Her work has recently been published in *Gandy Dancer*, and is forthcoming in *Anti-Heroin Chic*. She lives with her husband and daughters, and her spicy cat Otis, in a stone and stucco house from 1927.

Joseph A Farina is a retired lawyer in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. An award winning (Sicily) poet .A PUSH CART nominee. He draws inspiration from his Sicilian and Canadian roots. Internationally published in the USA, Europe and Middle East. first prize in PREMIO CITTA' DI ARONA 2025 .He has had two books of poetry published— *The Cancer Chronicles* and *The Ghosts of Water Street* and an E-book *Sunsets in Black and White*.and his latest book,*The beach,the street and everything in between*.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Midnight Mind*, *Novus* and *Abbey*. Latest books, “Bittersweet”, “Subject Matters” and “Between Two Fires” are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the *MacGuffin*, *Touchstone* and *Willow Review*.

Taylor Hagood lives in south Florida and is the author of the recently-published chapbook, *Lepidoptora*, and poems and reviews in such magazines as *A-Minor Magazine*, *Across the Margin*, *California Quarterly*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Dodo Eraser*, *Louisiana Literature*, *New Croton Review*, *The River*, *The Rumpus*, and *Twin Bird Review*. Website: <https://taylorhagood.com/>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/taylor.hagood.3/>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/taylor.hagood.3/>

A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has published 27 collections and chapbooks of poetry. In addition, she has published her work in numerous national and international literary journals.

Erin Jamieson's (She/Her) writing has been published in over 100 literary magazines and nominated twice for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of Net. She is the author of four poetry chapbooks, including *Fairytales* (Bottle Cap Press) and a historical novel, *Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams* (Type Eighteen Books), and two forthcoming poetry collections.

Max S. Ma is a poet based in the Pittsburgh area. His work has appeared in *Lexicon* and is forthcoming in *Cherry Bomb*. This week, as Pittsburgh's winter finally loosens, he has listened to Jamie Woon's "Ghost" forty-six times.

JD McGee is a poet and high school literature teacher in Palm Beach County, Florida. A finalist for several national poetry prizes, his work has appeared in *New Ohio Review* and elsewhere. His chapbook manuscript *The Durable Gift* placed 4th in the 2026 Annual Writer's Digest Poetry Awards Chapbook Division. He will begin the MFA program at Florida Atlantic University this fall.

Michael C. Paul is a writer, illustrator, and historian living in Virginia. His work has appeared in *Satire*, *EOTU*, *The Door*, *The Amethyst Review*, and other publications. He is a four-time award winner in the Poetry Society of Virginia's 2026 annual contest

Charlie Pettigrew is Irish but lives in Barcelona. His poems have been accepted in literary magazines and journals in Ireland, the UK and the USA, most recently in the *Honest Ulsterman*, *Abridged*, *PoetryBus Mag* and the *Woodside Review*.

Nora Rawn works in subrights in publishing and lives in Brooklyn. She has pieces published or forthcoming in Dodo Eraser, Dreck Lit, Be About It Press, Hawkeye, Burial Magazine, Some Words, and Michigan City Review of Books among others. She is on twitter at @norabird.

Robert Rinehart lives in Aotearoa New Zealand. Recent work has appeared in Swamp Ape Review, Mayhem, Backchannels, Sky Island Journal, North Dakota Quarterly, Maryland Literary Review, La Piccioletta Barca, Cottonwood Journal, and Syncopation. robert-rinehart.com

Patricia Russo's work has appeared in One Art, Identity Theory, The Argyle Review, Dodo Eraser, and Crow and Cross Keys.

Betty Stanton (she/her) is a Pushcart nominated writer who lives and teaches in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She received her MFA from the University of Texas – El Paso and also holds a doctorate in educational leadership. Some of her favorite recent publications are in Sussurus, Bi Women Quarterly, and narrated on the Midwest Weird podcast. She is currently on the editorial board of Ivo Review. @fadingbetty.bsky.social

Prabhakar Vasan lives in New York State's Hudson Valley. His work has been published in 6x6, Tarpaulin Sky, Tricycle, Caesura, and the anthology, I Go to the Ruined Place: Contemporary Poems in Defense of Global Human Rights.

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