

SIDNEY STEVENS



Dead Ends

FLASH NONFICTION

A woman slumbers in the desert surrounded by hills glowing in the night. A cluster of vines winds upward from her torso.

This reverie arrived one morning during meditation, vivid and jolting, and I knew without question it contained answers to what had haunted me for months: How do you find hope down a dark dead end?

A sickening despair had come over me and wouldn't leave, sucking the life from my writing and art. Too many of my creations had failed to see the light of recognition. Everything felt dead-ended, like wasted time. It was akin to ducking into a room without color, music, radiant sunshine, or animal warmth and watching the exit door disappear. Why continue creating? Sadly, this despondency carried over into everything else. I'd lost my eagerness for life.

I repeatedly searched for a glimmer of life's old creative magic, some comfort, a tidbit of hope. But nothing surfaced. And then suddenly, here she was, shrouded in a flowing gown bearing this implicit, hopeful message: Dead ends aren't what they seem.

From the world's great deep soul to mine, I'd received an image meant to heal. It was all so clear. While each individual strand of her vine came to an end as all strands do, this tangle of curling dead ends nonetheless branched above her like an abundant bouquet, forming the design of her life. Nothing was wasted—all of it essential to the full composition.

The same for creative works, even those that fail to muster attention. Like vines, they might curl nowhere, but the very act of giving them life is what matters. The more shoots you grow—the more creative “dead ends” you pursue—the grander your bouquet and the more bountiful is the design of your artistry. Nothing is wasted.

My spirit soared. This sleeping woman and I were one. But something remained incomplete. One day I shared my vision with a friend who was experiencing a similar artistic malaise. As I sketched the woman on a piece of scrap paper and carefully delineated my thoughts on vines and dead ends, my friend's eyes clouded with confusion. Then, suddenly, a slow smile opened across her face. “But don't you see,” she exclaimed, hand on my arm like a brace to hold her steady. “They're not dead-ends at all—they're points of new growth.”

Of course! How had I missed this added layer of meaning? Just as expired vines often reawaken after winter's cold, trailing here and there with verdant new shoots, dead ends only lay dormant for a while in the ebb phase of creative cycles, waiting to revive again in the flow phase if you're open and willing to unfurl them. The design of your artistry needn't remain static, a completed bouquet. With resilience and persistence, it continues transforming and evolving, branching into mind and soul with ever more gorgeously fertile inspirations. Mastery grows and deepens. Recognition is often the happy result.

I don't fear dead-ending again. I've glimpsed the pathway around despair. I know where the cosmic creative currents flow and how to catch hold again if I lose my way. Ever-transforming and ever-evolving.

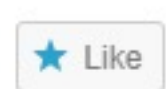


Sidney Stevens is an author with an MA in journalism from the University of Michigan. Her creative nonfiction has appeared in *Newsweek*, *New Works Review*, *Sure Woman*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, and *Nature's Healing Spirit*, an anthology from *Sowing Creek Press*. Her short stories have been published in several literary journals, including *The Woven Tale Press*, *Hedge Apple*, *The Wild Word*, *Finding the Birds Literary Journal*, *Viscaria Magazine*, *OyeDrum* and *The Centifictionist*. In addition, she's had hundreds of nonfiction articles published in print and online, and has also co-authored four books on natural health. Learn more at sidney-stevens.com.

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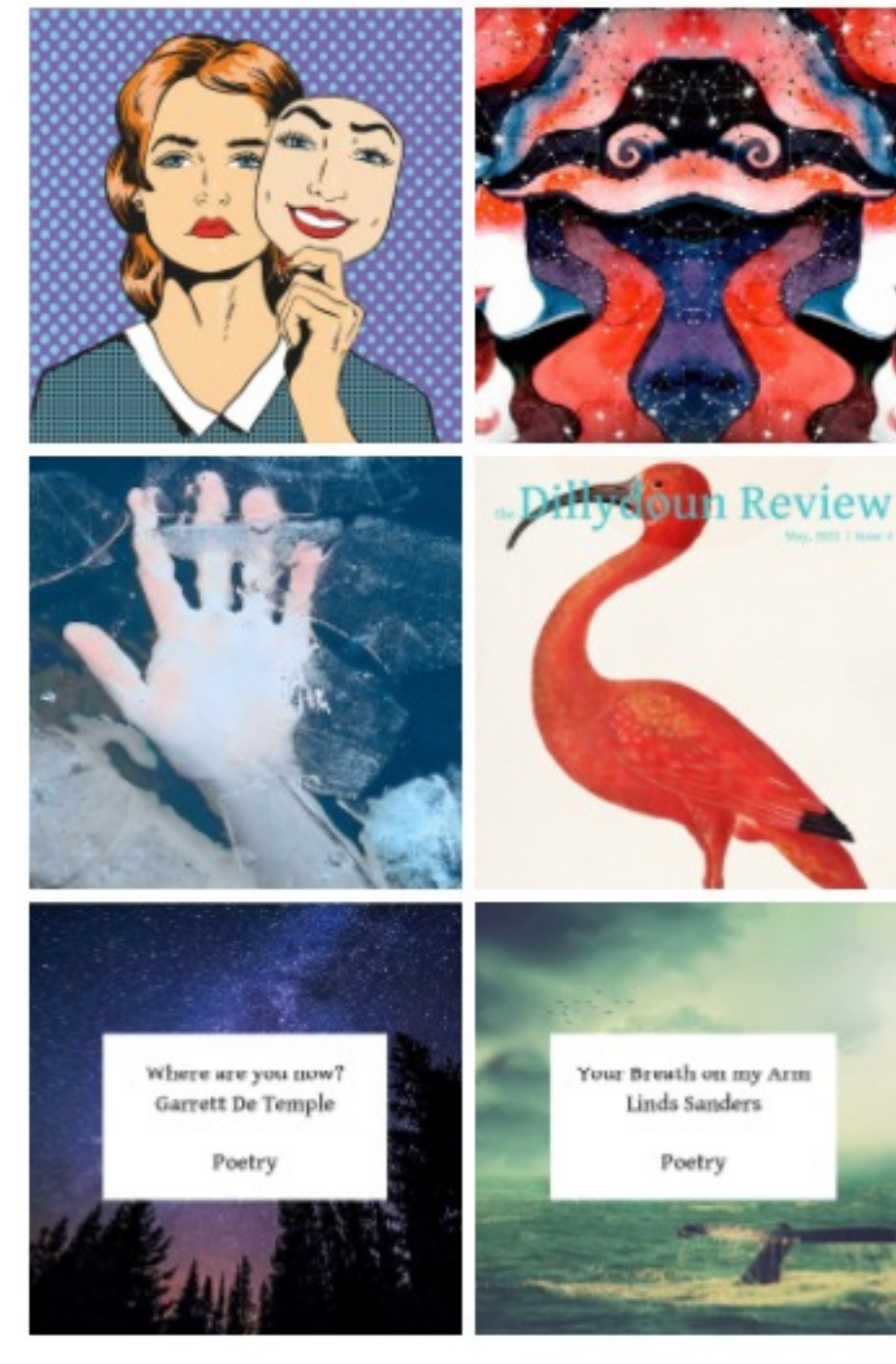
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