

The Paper Lantern

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Poise

by Amy Lee



The Identity of a Knife

by Jessie Situ

Sharpness, dullness, the blade that can cut
But who or what is cutting with this edge?
The knife by itself cannot cut. It cannot move itself.
Something else must use it, and make it cut.

The image of danger, the blade of malicious harm
But who or what can see it so?
The knife by itself is not dangerous, nor sinister, nor "bad."
Something else must label it as so.

Pretty colors and various decorations adorn the handle and the
blade

Shaped and sized at whatever form they're given
Made with whatever materials can be made and given a name
Or at least a purpose. They're like humans.

Give a knife a purpose: to slice like a chef's knife,
to chop like a machete,
to pierce like a boxcutter,
to cut like a scalpel,
to crush like a Chinese cleaver,
to harvest like a sickle,
to skin like a hunting knife,
to carve like a wood carving knife,
endless, endless, end.

Unless a knife is used, it is harmless.
It is just a knife. Unmoving, stable.

The sturdiness and frailty of a knife is almost like a human's
fragile life, polished and shining,
look, its existence is, it is *there*.

In This Room

by Theresa Gaupp

I sit here today “In This Room” that once felt warm, now just feels cold and empty. The room used to be filled with so much love and laughter, now it’s quiet and lonely. Ever since my wife passed it’s hard for me to leave my house. Instead I sit in this room filled with so many memories. I carry the weight of guilt on my shoulders each day from our last day together. We had an argument, without saying goodbye I left the house and went to work. Not knowing that when I returned my sweet Amelia would be lying there dead on the kitchen floor with a strainer of pasta scattered everywhere. She died of a brain aneurism that day, something so unexpected. Now I sit here today with regret.

After the funeral, I distanced myself from the rest of the world. I finally retired, only to sit here alone and grovel with grief. Once I found the strength to go through her belongings, I ran across a box stashed in the corner of our bedroom closet filled with letters addressed to Amelia, handwritten in a man’s handwriting that was not my own. After reading through the letters I’ve been lost and confused. I ponder on what I had done so wrong for her to find a new companion. I sit here “In This Room,” no longer feeling like I’m living, more like I’m dying. When looking back, I can recall when the two of them would disappear from the party, the parties that happened in this same room. I was too distracted by the conversations that flowed through the room with family and friends, while tipping back my glass of scotch. Oblivious, I didn’t realize what was happening right in front of me. Could it have been that I trusted them both, my wife and best friend?

I’m left with no answers of course. From this I will never have closure. With that being said, instead I will sit here and reminisce on memories of her and me before her death, not about what I know now.

I can see her long silky hair blowing in the breeze looking back at me with the most beautiful smile. This was the best day of my life. I still love her now as much as I loved her then. As I sit “In This

Room," I stare into this photo that I hold in my hand, I hear her voice say, "I do."

The Drummer Boys

by Rachel Lindo

Battlefields.

Warzones.

That's what we respond with

When we're poked and prodded

About what's ringing in our heads.

But a single word does not define it.

We walk in the halls,

Sirens wailing

With each step taken.

Walls crumbling

We're standing in the trenches

Bodies covered in dirt

Swallowing tabs

Labeled depression.

There's fear in our eyes

Awaiting to be screamed at

How we're lying.

Yeah, we're lying.

Lying in flashes of

Memories passed

Filled with regrets

Acrid like smoke.

Take that pill.

Swallow.

Hopefully we'll feel less hollow

When we stare out windows

Wondering when we lost our own light

When we stumbled over bricks fallen

From a force we can't recall

Crumbling our stability.

Light we have now
Is shining bright from fluorescent bulbs
Stinging
Our sight with truths that
All light isn't held by Heaven.

We wonder how air
Stale and still
Can be churned by
Sweat shed from
Failures
Gripping tight to hazy reminders
We're mental.

We have not yet
Owned
Said
The title carved in
Dog tags dangling at our wrists
When told we're survivors.

Star-Burned: A Faerie Tale for a Cold Night

by Katherine Ichinose

A phoenix ought never to look down. He ought never to hesitate, never to wonder about anything but his journey to the sun. A phoenix treads on a tightrope on which his life depends. If he falters in his quest to reach the sun even for a moment, the fire that gives him his life will die within him and he will fall.

The firebird with the blue-tipped wings reminded himself of all these things as he flew to the sun to be reborn in its all-consuming fire yet again. He had done it more times than he could count. The fire in his veins was weakening and if he tarried for an instant, he would not arrive at the sun in time, and the thought of the horrible descent that would follow made the fire in his veins run cold. It was always colder now, though. It had lost warmth over time, and even the sun's fire didn't completely refresh it. And he knew why. Over his lives, his attention had begun to wander from the sun and the stars and had begun to contemplate the most dangerous thing of all: the world below. He could not stop himself from wondering about where he would fall to if he failed to reach the sun. When he fell, where would he land? Would he tumble through the heavens and reel past the stars until he struck hard rock in a flightless world? Would he find himself grounded among those who stared up at the stars but had no wings to fly?

And indeed, far below, the faerie who lived under the tree had been grounded for her whole life. She had been born with uncommonly frail wings, too weak to support her weight. But her eyes were wide enough with wonder to carry her imagination higher than was deemed safe for a faerie. All other faeries considered the stars dangerous. They whispered the story about the faerie who had tried to chase the stars, but had fallen from the heavens and been crippled forever. The faerie who lived under the tree would sit with her back to the tree, staring up through the leaves into the night sky, scattered with shimmering stars.

One particularly cold night, the faerie's gaze found that firebird in the sky, though she did not know what it was. To her it was just a

small streak of twinkling fire. Whatever it was, it was a wonder that made her eyes grow wide. She climbed up through her tree, jumping from branch to branch, until she was peeking up through the leaves, the night breeze brushing at her soft brown hair.

The firebird struggled to keep his resolve focused on the sun, but with every passing instant he grew wearier of his life among the stars. His wings were tired of burning, day after day, night after night. He had seen all of the stars he cared to see, and the sun that burned into his eyes seemed to be more a threat of imprisonment than a promise of life. The longer the sun burned into his vision, the more of a burden it seemed, until the firebird felt that he was supporting a great weight that he could not hold up much longer. So at long last, he let his gaze drop.

As if drawn by a magnet, his eyes fell on the faerie with the frail wings standing on top of a tree, staring at the stars. Those wings... so horribly fragile and delicate. He could set them on fire with the softest touch of his wings. The stars were reflected in her eyes, and he realized with horror that with wings were too frail and weak to carry her to the stars. But that did not dim her eyes. The pull of those wonder-filled eyes was a thousand times stronger than the pull of the sun had on him now, and he turned his back to the sun. As he dove toward earth and toward the faerie, he felt the fire drain from his veins. The fire of the sun that had burned in his eyes still stung, a painful afterimage of what he had just abandoned. He squeezed his eyes shut and the fire of the sun gathered in a teardrop, slipping down his face and leeching his life from him. It quivered on his feathers for a moment, then plummeted away from him towards the faerie.

The faerie was enraptured. A drop of fire was falling from the sky; she imagined that it was a star, burning with life. The long-subdued desire to fly awakened so fiercely in her at the sight of a falling star that she could not resist it. She jumped from the top branch of the tree, and pushed against the air with her wings. With each wingbeat her wings felt like they would be torn from her back, but she was climbing higher into the air. The drop of fire sped towards her, and she held out her hands to catch it. It struck her palms with tremendous force. The drop of fire shattered into a thousand pieces

that splashed over the faerie like water. Each one struck her like a shard of glass, then melted into her skin. She screamed as the fire crashed over her wings. A searing pain ate up her wings; then, they went limp and she hurtled toward the ground. Her eyes grew wide in fear as she fell. She screamed as she saw the ground grow closer. But -- with a flashing realization that she wasn't going to die -- she saw that she was going to land in a pool. She crashed through the water, and the water closed over her, blocking out the stars.

As he fell after her, the firebird watched in horror as the faerie fell into the water, her wings burning with *his* fire. He had only wanted to help her fly. He had wanted to show her the stars, but he had thrown her from her tree and hurled her on the ground. He convulsed in shudders, both from cold and from fear. His blood was so cold it stung his bones. His fiery blue-tipped feathers turned a dusty grey, and his eyes, once bright with fire, dulled. The whole world, which he had once seen in vibrant color, went black and white. He crashed through the branches of the faerie's tree, then hit the ground hard.

The water crushed the faerie, pushing her down like a weighted blanket. Then her toes touched the ground, and loose pebbles gave way to solid ground. The ground felt harsh and cold, and as her feet settled against the rock, she pushed away from it. The water squeezed her and her lungs burned for air. She resisted the urge to close her eyelids as the water stung her eyes, keeping them fastened on the distant surface of the water, through which she could see the stars shimmering.

As she crawled out of the water, the pressing coolness of the water vanished and she bit her lip to hold back the scream that ripped through her throat. Everything inside of her was burning. It was the broiling, churning burning of living fire -- not the harsh, dead burning of ash. The firebird was standing close to the pool, and for an instant their frightened eyes met before the faerie turned away.

The faerie folded her arms and pressed them against her chest, rocking back and forth on her heels. She looked up at the stars, but her eyes were empty of wonder, and were now filled with anguish. Her wings were ash-covered thin translucent membranes clinging to

the charred skeleton. The soot covered them and they drooped from the weight of the water, but the firebird was relieved that they were not so horribly maimed as he had feared.

The ice on the firebird's feathers crackled as he walked over to her. Each feather was crusted with a pale blue frost. Whenever he tried to move his wings in the slightest, the pain of a thousand icicles seemed to pierce his bones. He came to stand next to the faerie and stiffly lowered himself on the ground beside her. He found it odd that he was more devastated by the faerie's fall than his own lack of flight. And yet, it was for her that he was here, wasn't it? He had flown his time. He had seen all the stars he could imagine to see. Now, it was her turn. The fire that had carried him to the stars was in her now. She was the purpose of all this.

He did not say anything for a long time, and when he finally spoke, his voice was rasping and harsh. "Falling is frightening, isn't it?"

The faerie clutched herself more tightly as if she was trying to shrink inside of herself. "I thought the stars would be cold, but they burn." She held out her hands and looked down at them. They were still dripping, and the raw burns from where she had tried to catch the drop of fire glistened with water.

"I've lived among the stars my whole life," the firebird said, "and they have kept me warm in a cold world."

"If you were up there," the faerie nodded to the heavens, "with the stars, why did you come here?"

"I fell," the firebird said. "I wondered if there was a world that needed me more than I needed the sun, so I turned my back to the sun, and I fell. My wings are frozen and my eyes are dimmed, but I think I found what I was looking for."

The faerie was silent. She looked back up at the stars and started trembling.

"I found a world that needs me more than I needed the sun," the firebird persisted. "I found a soul that needs my wings more than I

ever did. Now my wings are frozen and too stiff to fly, but my fire is inside you. You have to fly for me."

"My wings are burned, and your wings are frozen. We have both fallen. Both of us have failed at flying. To fly again would be to embrace death." The faerie sank onto the ground, her shoulders shaking.

"No..." the firebird said gently. "No. To fly and to fall both are to live. To fold your wings by your side is to accept death. You were given wings, just as I was, and it would be a crime not to use them."

The faerie huddled closer into herself, drawing her knees to her chest and continued to shake.

"I was afraid of falling," the firebird went on. "But you cannot fly but you will fall eventually. And for me... Well I think I was flying so that I might fall. You have fallen so now you may fly."

The faerie stopped shaking. "You... fell... for me?" It hadn't been a mistake, she realized. He hadn't been struck down by the stars or fallen victim to the dangers of flight. He had fallen so that she could fly.

The faerie stood up and walked closer to the firebird. She laid a hand on his side, and the frost around her hand melted. The cold felt so good against her hand, and the throbbing of the fire inside her stilled. The firebird sighed and his muscles relaxed. He leaned closer to her and she snuggled into his feathers. At first they were sharp, but then the ice that encased them melted and they brushed against her skin softly. She remembered how the other faeries said that phoenixes were birds that had flown too close to the stars and burst into flames. She smiled at how the truth was the exact opposite.

"Thank you," the firebird said. "I'm not so cold anymore."

The faerie and the firebird climbed to the top of the tree. Most of the ash had fallen away from the faerie's wings, and though they were

still thin, but they seemed to throb with the fire that was inside of them -- they were pulsing with life. The firebird nestled himself down among the branches and the smiled at the faerie's eyes, wide again with wonder. His world was still black and white, but he could see her drinking in the world's color. He watched her jump from the branch and spin through the air, higher and higher into the night sky.

The faerie's wings were always burned, but they were never dead. The air was colder the higher she flew, but the fire that coursed in her veins kept her warm, as did the stars. And every night, she would return to the phoenix, trailing stardust behind her to warm him. The faerie and the firebird sat on top of the tree, staring up into the heavens, the stars reflected in their eyes, and so they will always do, until the stars cease to shine.

A Lady's Look
by River Henry



Coffee

by Jane O'Shea

My ambrosia, my umber cupful,

spoon me as you sweep the cobwebs of the night
from my pillow-creased thoughts.

Wake me like a dark-skinned covert lover,
watch the sun awaken with me,

tickle me as I freestyle in your
frothy ripples,
let me dive into your steamy depths.

My Java, my Joe
press my French, Bialetti my Italian,
hand-picked from deepest Africa
caliente Central American,

I am your morning harlot.
Fill me with your exotic heat,
warm my tongue, quicken my heartbeat,
swirl away the rough edges of daybreak.

I will add sweet cream,
my sugar twirling with your bitter
Ecstasy

The Tell-Tale Heart

By Kate Larsen

No one noticed Mr. Hart was missing. No one except me. The dark black and blue marks on what was once porcelain skin told the story. After years of his abuse and tired of hiding it, I had had enough. I have been everything to this man-- his wife, his maid, his babysitter, and his punching bag. He wasn't always like this, but it didn't take long before his aggressions started being directed towards me. We never had children. I am thankful for that. We were just a couple in a quiet neighborhood who kept to themselves. I am your typical housewife. As cliché as this story seems, it is my life. Nearly fifteen years of this and finally, the courage had been conjured. How did I do it? Easy. Chester enjoyed a regular nightcap, this time just with a dash of leftover painkillers and his cheap whiskey that reeked like gasoline. As of three nights ago, that scent has evaded me forever.

Once he finally knocked off, he felt eerily cold, something so strange as opposed to his hot, sweaty, usual self. Everything they describe in the movies was true. He felt so rigidly stiff, "like a board." None of this was easy, let me tell you. I am not a very big woman, all 102 pounds of me. However, the electric carving knife he so generously got me for his turkey dinners he demanded every Sunday sure came in handy. I must assure you, I am not crazy. I have never sought nor needed any sort of psychiatric help, and I did not have any inclination as to how to dismember a body. I have though caught a few juicy episodes of that CSI program. This is completely out of my character, you could ask anyone. I am not crazy.

After I rid of the mess that was splattered on my quaint, pastel, Laura Ashley floral wallpaper, I began to rip up the floorboards in our den with a crowbar. The shell of a house was silent; this was the first night in years I didn't hear the wretched sound of his snoring. It took hours of tedious work while most of Chester waited for his final resting place in the blue Igloo cooler he used to bring his lunch in to work (usually, leftover turkey sandwiches, what else?) The rest of him-- Glad drawstrings that had the scent of fresh linen, of course. By now his employer should have

noticed he wasn't there, but no one called. In the midst of my construction, noises that sounded similar to a bass drum echoed throughout my excavation site. I assumed it was nothing, just my imagination and continued on. Until about an hour later, it started up again: "ba-boom.... ba-boom...ba-boom..."

What is that? It's after 4 A.M. It's definitely too late for people to be playing music, and it sounds as if it's coming from inside. It sounded like a heartbeat. No, it couldn't be, I pondered. His livelihood had been in my pink latex covered hands. There was no throbbing, or beating whatsoever. There was no choice but to proceed with laying Chester to what we'll call "rest"; there was a job to be done. Suddenly, a loud rapping came from the front door. Gasping, as if surfacing from underwater for an unnatural amount of time, I began to fill with an overwhelming panic.

"Who could possibly be knocking at nearly 5 in the morning?" I asked out loud as if someone would respond. Then I threw the plush mauve colored rug back down to cover up Chester beneath the floor. Some would think it odd, but I even began to smile to myself. *There is no way anyone would possibly miss this man, or know what I have done. Silly me, everything will be just fine.* As I began to tidy myself up, I heard it again: "ba-boom... ba-boom... ba-boom..." Quickly, I closed the door and scurried to the front door.

"Good Morning, Ma'am. Sorry to disturb you at this hour, but we got a call a while ago from some neighbors who claim they saw some suspicious activity here around 4, could we have a peek inside?" one of two officers standing in my doorway asked. *How could I hesitate? They would know. Damn the Andersons! Ruth always was sticking her nose in where it didn't belong and had to be doing her Zumba at the crack of dawn in their exercise room. For someone as nosey as her, she sure didn't catch what was truly happening inside these walls. I wonder if this means "the jig is up."* I tried to remain as calm as possible, all the while holding back fear and yet, even feeling a bit of relief in my accomplishments at the same time. Stepping aside, I let the two officers inside. Maybe it was the state of shock I was in or just the confidence inside me, but I even offered them a piece of the Entenmann's coffee cake all while still trying not to lose my composure.

“Ma’am, is Mr. Hart home? Or anyone else perhaps?”

“No, my husband already left for work, blue collar, ya know... those real early mornings.”

I couldn’t believe it: “ba-boom.... ba-boom...ba-boom...” *They have to be hearing it too, they’re going to ask me. I’m not crazy, it’s not just me hearing it, they must hear it. I’ll say we have a mole beneath the house. Just tell them Chester’s been on the hunt for that mole, and that’s why there’s a shotgun leaning up against the wall in the foyer. That’s my story-- a mole. Got it.*

“Ba-boom... ba-boom.... ba-boom... BA-BOOM... BA-BOOM... BA-BOOM...” *It’s getting louder! That can’t possibly be mistaken for a rodent. These two haven’t even looked the least bit concerned by the noise.* We reached the den. The sound intensified as if I were turning the volume up on a radio. One of them opened the door. Time seemed to move in slow motion, while I began to feel even more anxious now. *Why have they not asked me about this terrible noise?* I thought to myself.

“BA-BOOM.... BA-BOOM... BA-BOOM....BA-BOOM.....”

Chester’s new residence underneath that cheap laminate flooring he had insisted on, was in view, now with a clearer perspective for me-- it was obvious. I had missed some drops of blood, the rug was disheveled, and there were wood chips from the crowbar scraping the flooring. I was that stereotypical child with chocolate frosting all over my face trying to deny touching the birthday cake.

“BA-BOOM...BA-BOOM..BA-.....”

“OKAY! I did it! Yeah, I killed him! I don’t regret a thing, the bastard had it coming! Entenmann’s, anyone?”

The Dishes

By Katherine Ichinose

Dinner waited on the table
while she washed the dishes,
watching for her father.

By the time the garage door ground open,
she had washed every dish twice over.
A business suit walked inside.

She watched the door,
wondering if the father she knew
would follow to fill the shell of black cashmere.
He ate his fill, digesting the fact
that the casserole had grown
very cold.

The drum of his fingers on his laptop
was louder than the water
dripping from the faucet like tears.

When she put the dishes away,
the door remained closed,
so she left the cupboards cracked open.

Painted Rooster

by Bridget Thomas



The Spear of Hashaam

by Gavin Druxman

In the east, past the mountain ranges in between deserts and forests there was a city known as Benatava. There in that city lived a man named Kamash, who fashioned spears and swords for the local militia. He would work tirelessly from sun's early light to the latest of its sets. To each man he came by who wanted a spear or sword of his own, he charged two kecils--most of them could only afford to pay him ten meks, which only bought them a specialized dagger. Hard work of farming or drudgery for the King to the South wasted on such a small item that most likely wouldn't help them at all, left to only be a letter opener on their stands.

This was irrelevant for Kamash, who enjoyed the flow of meks and occasional kecils that came his way (usually from the militia), storing them in a small jar under a desk in his shopkeep. When given opportunities presented to him he spent them on more luxurious items--gold for more spending, food for more dining, and once and a great while a book for his shelf.

One week he decided to grab into his jar for some kecils, and he travelled several miles or so to the town of Beth, one place that was known for its many profound scholars and philosophers--where he would buy his books. He entered a shaded shopkeep in which incense leapt about the air, filling the nose and heart with a sense of wonderment at the stories that laid about the shelves in the room. Shelf after shelf were neatly bound books, each different, and authored by a man he would never meet. He browsed for an hour or so to make his pick and eventually came upon a book entitled, "Eos."

It struck him as odd--such a simplistic title, yet it intrigued his inner heart and he opened it. Within lay not words but diagrams and sketches--men with wings made of lines sprouting from their backs, arrows pointing to them, descriptions in languages he did not know. Near the end he came upon a page that contained the image of a spear. Not of any ordinary spear though--it had two blades facing in the same direction, though more than that they were curved in and outwards of one in other in such a way that they looked exotic, and foreign.

He bought the book with the seven kecils he brought with him, and even after returning to his shopkeep, he studied the image

for long hours into the night. Eventually he decided that it had troubled his mind for too long--he would forge the spear.

From the silver in the secret basement of the shopkeep he derived the base of the spear, and its blade. He forged with the hot metal day and night. Seven days before he had completed the project, he excitedly went to the town square and began telling people of the spear, showing them of the diagram within *Eos*. Many were intrigued, some put off by his over enthusiasm, though must shrugged it off and went about their business.

Though an old man in a maroon-colored cloak emerged from the crowd as he proclaimed his excitement, and said to him, "That is the Spear of Hashaam."

Confused, Kamash asked of him what it was, though in his mind he didn't much care for the answer.

The man answered, "The want for the Spear has consumed your judgement--forge it any more, and Hashaam himself will descend and claim what is his."

Kamash laughed, and said, "If 'Hashaam' had his spear, why does he need mine?"

The man answered again, "He has spoken to me, friend. He longs for his spear--though he is a god, he cannot find it. If you recreate his spear, I am afraid he will slay you for it if you attempt to keep it for yourself."

Kamash, again, laughed at this statement. Hashaam was such an old legend--the god that had originally created this world along with his brothers and sisters. If such a god existed, why should he care for a spear? As he thought this, he spoke it to the man.

The man answered, once and a last, "It is done, then." Suddenly the man's eyes alighted in fire, and he erupted into a cruel laugh. From nowhere, his body bubbled and fell into a magma that melted and fell into the Earth. Kamash was disturbed, feeling the heart inside his body peeling away and alone.

He went back to his shopkeep, took the materials he had made of the spear thus far, and crossed into the desert lands that night. Eventually he came to a ledge, where he tossed it over, falling into the darkness of the night. It was the last he hoped to have heard of it, though he was wrong.

A report came in from the township of Gen some three miles away some weeks later. A forger of spears had apparently found some silver that resembled a spear, and had attempted to finish it.

He had been found dead within his shopkeep, stabbed with, based upon his injuries, the very spear he had forged. The spear itself was gone, and though the townsfolk searched, it was not to be seen again.

Errand Envisage

by Gabriel Mianulli

Crestfallen high horse jockey
hopscotch to the crop spot in a westbound jalopy
bored cops, job opps, heart throbs, none stop me.
Is that dumb luck, or a fortunate folly?

Hitch rope at the corner store
for more oral chores from cashiers in need of moral support.
Neither of us wanted to be there anymore,
but couldn't muster guts enough to quit and explore.

Trot back to home base
tires chase desires to keep driving, out of state
inevitably they end up losing pace
but the wish goes on,
decidedly straight.

Central Park

by Jane O'Shea

Today in Central Park, a Pharaoh Hound shimmered,

flowers smiled and babies cried.

Today in Central Park, the zephyr carried notes of Spanish and Hindi,
Arabic and Hebrew.

A Moroccan wore a crocheted fez,
and a Sikh wrapped his hair in fuchsia.

A woman wore a paisley hijab.

Today in Central Park, an old black man with a pure white beard
played in a bongo cacophony,

and a Chinese couple slept on a bench.

Today in Central Park, a Guatemalan family rode a carousel,
and a pair of men held hands and danced on rollerskates
and nobody cared.

Today in Central Park, chocolate and vanilla parents cuddled their
caramel children.

A boy on the verge of manhood embraced a brindled mutt named
Navajo.

Today, Central Park was a salad of differences,
dressed with the oil of tolerance,
and the vinegar of diversity.

People were kind.

Today I wished Central Park was a jar of peanut butter,
and I could scoop a great knifeful
and spread it over the whole world.

Squeaky Car

by Amy Lee

My car squeaks
when it rains.

And I don't mean the wipers
(though those squeak too.)

I mean on the inside, deep
down. It complains
about the rain

like my long-gone grouchy great-grandmother.

"This humidity is making my knees ache."

But the car's not even old.

How old is that car? Well, I got it when I was twenty-three.

How long ago was that?

Time seems to flow so smoothly

these days, I'm barely aware that it's passing.

A gentle undercurrent

tugging me along, but it's so pointless,

so painstakingly

slow, that I don't even notice it.

How old is that car? Well, I got it when I was twenty-three.

I didn't even remember my last birthday.

The day just slipped

past, and I didn't even realize

it'd gone until a week had passed

and a card arrived in the mail from my childless aunt.

But how old had I turned then?

I do some math in my head.

I'm thirty-four. Hmm.

So how old is that car?

It's eleven.

I suppose the undercurrent

has been tugging it along too.

I suppose it's okay that it squeaks

in the rain.

I suppose, eventually,

we all do.

Hostess Gifts

By Beth Spencer

I brought you
nervous fingers pinching at a hem
a body poised to bolt
and red faced stammers

She brought you lilies
long-throated, open mouthed
their huge white petals like six soft teeth
furled outward
and sepal tongues that sniffed the air
for gracelessness

Avalanche

by Katherine Ichinose

Since a quarter after midnight,
the boy with one black eye,
bags under both eyes,
and eyelids as heavy as
his conscience,
has sat under the spotlights
of the gas station,
staring.

His vintage Harley
(borrowed)
gurgles and gags
under the weight
of all he carries
on his slumped shoulders.
He has left the bike running,
trying to convince himself
that he is going somewhere.

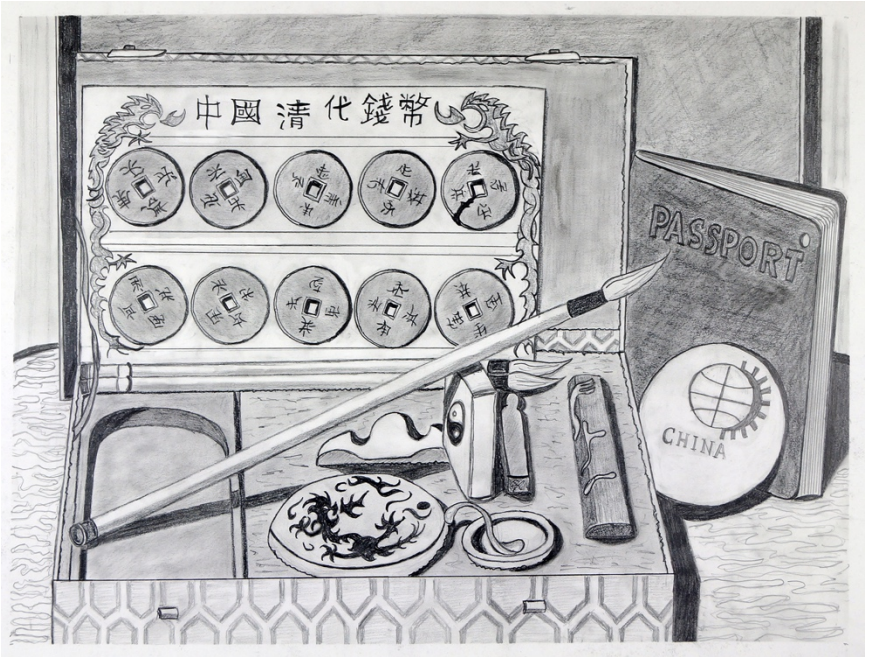
He stares down the road
that carried him away
from everything,
his eyes groping through the darkness
for memories of:
 a pair of floral converse in step beside his army boots
 long nights of Call of Duty with the nerd from school
 and a spring night he spent alone at the bus stop
 to avoid the broken beer bottles at home.

It won't be long till dawn now.
Missed calls have collected on his phone
like snow on the mountainside.
He is waiting for

the avalanche.

Chinese Junk

by Jerry Carrier



Origins

by Cadence Fingerholz

I don't remember. As an adopted child of the 80s, those three words sum up my origin story. I 'know' things, though. Stories told to me and retold by me to friends, curious about 'what it's like' to be adopted. It's like telling a story now. Like telling a story about someone else, because it's just too strange and fantastical to be my own life. I've gathered stories about my first year like shards of sea glass, and like sea glass they're so worn that they couldn't possibly ever fit together. In this way JaeRam Kim and I share a common bond – our origin stories were taken from us as children, never to be recovered.

Tears of recognition fell down my face reading JaeRan's words in her essay *The Good Kind of Immigrants*: "I don't remember the first year of my life... I don't remember how it felt to lose... my orphanage caregiver and the other children in my room..." (Kim, 2016, pp. 121-122). It hit me in a visceral way. I too was adopted around a year old. I know from my parents' stories that I was a shy, quiet girl with a bushy halo of blond curls. They called me their shadow because I followed them everywhere on silent feet, hardly saying a word. My mother told me too, when I was older, that she had to wrestle with me to get me to make eye contact when they first got me. She told me that it took months before I could look her in the eye. I'll never know why.

My parents have recounted the first time they saw me often – sitting backwards on a rocking horse watching TV at the foster home I'd been temporarily placed in. In my head I'm wearing a powder blue sweat suit, sitting there watching Sesame Street with a pacifier in my 14 month old mouth. But then, I'm not certain whether these are things I actually remember, or whether these are creative additions I've just painted over the verbal snapshot my parents gave me. Kim reflects that "There are the barest of fragments, more sensory than anything... I was stoic, trying to survive..." (Kim, 2016, p. 121). I feel the same looking back on a memory fragment of being in an apartment standing in a pack and play crying because no one is there. My parents hesitantly divulged that there was neglect in my

first year, but did I make that memory up? I don't know, and I'll never be able to find out.

There are real pictures, though. Things I know are real with certainty. On the mantle at my parents' house is my first picture, a sad eyed cherub in a pale lemon-colored party dress. There are no pictures of me during my first year. The woman who took care of me at the foster care house took me to Sears and had my portrait taken on my first birthday. It was because of this portrait that I was able to compare pictures of my son and myself and, for the first time in my life, be able to say that someone in my family looked like me. It struck me even harder when my daughter, a tiny carbon copy of me, had her first birthday. Looking at her curls and her round baby cheeks I was looking at the face that someone had given up, for a reason that I still don't really know or understand.

When I was 19 I paid the adoption agency to find and contact the woman who gave me up at 12 months old. It turns out she lived within 10 miles of my parents' house my entire life. She wrote me four pages in response, telling me a little about her life, but very little about my own. She wrote that I was the product of a 'double rape' as she called it, and that she had been young – only in her second year of college. She also told me that she had terminated her own parental rights to protect me from a father whose name she wouldn't give me because she said he was a sex offender. She also mentioned that I was the eldest of 12 half siblings, and one of two children she had given up for adoption. Like JaeRan, I "lost a heritage... a sense of identity." (Kim, 2016, p. 134). Though I retained the culture I was born into, the letter made it explicit how different my life would have been if I would have stayed with my birth mother, but at 31 I still struggle to know who I *really* am. Knowing from my parents that my birth mother had terminated her own rights before the state could terminate them, I finished that letter with more questions than I started with, and no real way to get answers.

Occasionally we have driven by the children's home where I stayed between my surrender and my placement with the kind foster lady. I have pointed it out to my children and done my best to explain it, but they don't understand, not really. "My children, raised on Disney films about orphans with dead mothers, cannot reconcile the mother

they know with the one who lived here” (Kim, 2016, p. 134), and sometimes neither can I. I am not motherless or fatherless. I was raised by parents who love and care deeply for me. And yet I grieve the loss of a bloodline that I will never know the origin of. So who am I? Where do I come from? I don’t know. Probably I never will know, not the way other people do. I struggle with making a cohesive picture from the jumble of ‘facts’ I’ve been given, some of which contradict one another or don’t make sense – a handful of glass so distorted by the years that they don’t fit, little individual oddities to turn over and over again in my mind. Like JaeRan Kim I struggle for a sense of identity, for a connection that allows me to root myself somewhere. As an adoptee I am, like JaeRan, a graft point on my family tree – an unknown variety that has, none the less, thrived and borne fruit.

Works Cited

Kim, J. (2016). The Good Kind of Immigrants. In S. Y. Shin, & S. Y. Shin (Ed.), *A Good Time For The Truth* (pp. 121-135). Saint Paul, MN, USA: Minnesota Historical Society Press.

Shadow Dream

by Jane O'Shea

Long past dusk, after another jagged week,
I head west on that dark rubber band of a highway,
foraging an artery of the sacred Crow river,

The sky is blacker than blindness,
with millions of bloodshot eyes peeping out the pinholes.

A voice chants out of the throbbing heartbeat
of one pulsing red supernova.
My own ticking heart syncopating as
my hands shiver on the wheel.

The fiery stars shimmy like
backup dancers to the crimson diva in a sequined gown,
whose message skips, a broken record.
"Heal me!" The alpha star croons
into the midnight microphone.

"Heal who?" I lip-synch,
my song is a hostage in my chest.
I long for a circle and a feather,
a translation, a clarification.

My aging Volkswagen is doing sixty-five
while standing frozen still.

Pastel sedans surround me
violet, aqua, baby blue
but not one can interpret
the message that thrums through my giddy head.

"Heal me," commands the mute bleeding star,
as clear as midnight fog

I gel in my insignificance
as the planet flings itself in an ellipse.
Red star repeats that brace of words

that two-step across the hot summer night,

Leaving me as motionless as pulpy roadkill
in her wake.

Purple Springtime
by Amy Lee



Golden Quiet

by Irene Masek

After a goodbye, I went home
I had a good cry, all alone-quietly
I wanted to fly out of there
Before the dark skies would grow near

I thought quietly,
*Don't trust the butterflies inside your chest,
They have a tendency to turn your beauty into glass
Pieces, ashes, or foolishness.*
Like string of moths attracted to light so much that they cover it

On my way home,
I sang quietly.
I got some lockets in pockets
Full of photographs
Feeling like rockets
And now they're burning
Picture frames inside my jacket

Scared I might lose
Some of my memories
In case something gives out

The next day I woke up
Looked where mountains sat
Saw and felt His light
Unwavering and golden.
I smiled; loudly.

Pirates Today

by Katherine Ichinose

If Peter Pan took my hand
and led me to Neverland,
I'd fly to the summit of the sky, and then,
swoop down onto the pirates.

If I found my way to Narnia,
I'd be a king, and wear my golden crown
as evidence that I was worthy
of a pulse, a heart, a breath, a soul.

In my backyard,
I would made my own magic
with a branch for a sword
and a cardboard box for a throne.

I wore a paper crown and a tablecloth cape.
And I could almost convince myself
that I was a hero –
but there were no pirates to fight.

No one told me
that in time, you find pirates in unexpected places:
clocks, memoires, equations, to-do lists, sarcasm, and
yourself.

You can't win against numbers
like that.
So just run and run and run.
And if you run fast enough

you'll survive.
But let me tell you,
you can't expect a crown to stay on your head
while you run.

Rotting Wagon

by Stephen Dodds



Second Chance

by Gabriel Mianulli

Walking disaster, wishing to run faster
Falling into line as a blank page attacker,
advocating relaxed statures and backpacking raptures.
Motivating slacker chaps, overstating casual facts,
annotating actual acts, encasing them in fanciful craft.
Mastering the craft of procrastinating waiting matters
Chasing after escaping laughter, shaping it back to pattern
With scattered bits gathered behaving as a lather.
Agile, adept, fragile, complex—
dialed back for the mercantile masque,
grammatically correct for the reconciled past.

The House of the Good Shepherd

by Cadence Fingerholz

She'd forgotten her pinafore again. She stopped short in the hallway, her shiny black boots skidding on the highly polished wood floor. She could go back and get it, but then she would be late. Again. Sister Mary Francis would certainly beat her if she was late a second time in one week. Virginia bit at her lip and worried her small fingers around each other, considering. Better to be timely and hope that the Sisters didn't notice her missing pinafore, she decided, especially this close to Christmas.

Having made up her mind, the small dark haired girl went careening through the hall to catch up to the rest of the girls who lived at the House of the Good Shepherd. Virginia never remembered having lived anywhere else. It was here that she had learned to walk, to talk. It was, even now, where she was learning to read and write her own name. The other girls were her sisters in Christ, the nuns told her. She didn't know what it meant, but the idea of sisters made her less afraid at night.

"Virginia, where on earth is your pinafore?" A drab woman in a simple white robe and habit, Sister Mary Agnes had noticed her. "Didn't Rebecca tell you that we're to have our picture taken?" The older woman sighed gustily then crouched down, setting her hands on her knees so she could look into the girl's face. "You just stay by me today, alright? We both know Mary Francis would be terribly displeased that you're not presentable."

The other nun, Mary Francis, was already standing behind the hulking eye of the camera, moving it this way and that in front of a bare limbed conifer with an equally sparse smattering of gifts beneath it. Virginia had been at the House of the Good Shepherd long enough to know that this was a relatively bountiful Christmas, and that though they would each offer an item for the picture, the gifts were in common for all the residents, and would stay in the playroom. That thought cheered her when she was handed a book while Pearl was handed a beautiful porcelain doll.

"Coveting is a sin." She murmured under her breath. She would have to confess to Father Joshua. She didn't like him. He always smelled

strange, like sick, and his fingers were thick and papery when he touched her.

“What was that?” The kindly nun asked, pressing the little girl’s unkempt hair down with a cupped hand. But then Sister Mary Frances was ready for the picture and they all had to hold still like stone statues. She was good at being still. She pretended to be one of the carved angels in the churchyard. She played that game with herself when she was put in the cupboard at night for being naughty – after all, she had told herself, a stone angel can’t cry. Angel’s didn’t feel pain or terror. That was what she told herself, whispering softly in the way of small children, in the stifling darkness of that cupboard. It was right behind her, she knew. She dared not look back at it and spoil the picture though. She couldn’t bring herself to smile, but she stayed still.

“Alright, I’ve gotten it.” The gravelly voice of the older woman made her jump, dumping the book out of her lap and onto the floor. Hawk like eyes darted in her direction, taking in the scene before her.

“Victoria,” her voice had a façade of warmth, but it sounded sticky like honey to Virginia’s ears. “What are we going to do with you? Come here.”

“Wrath is a sin, too.” She murmured as she picked up the fallen paperback, taking her time placing it back in front of the tree. But angels don’t feel angry, she reminded herself sternly. Angels don’t feel anything.

Indigenous Casanova at the Farmer's Market

by Jane O'Shea

Indigenous Casanova is holding court
leaning against a post like a tall slim cedar

with one perfect foot cocked
a simple black braid slithering down his back,

his red T-shirt and ripped Levis worshipping his easy, lean angles
his palms raised like the Christ himself at the Last Supper.

His fan club gathers round like eager saplings
girls are doe-eyed, boys stand straighter

awaiting a loaves and fishes miracle.

Every word that falls from his perfect mouth, they devour

like the finest berries for sale today
at the Mill City Farmer's Market.

Women in thin lace skullcaps
hawk Amish heritage tomatoes in tones of jewels,

sweet corn and sage aromas bless the summer morning air

the cheese guy proffers a knife smeared with milky chevre
that creams across the tongue, smack of dill lingers

an old jazz quartet caterwauls,
a young mother waltzes with her cherub to her bosom.

Indigenous Casanova preaches to his disciples,
oblivious to the hawkers, the cheesemakers, and the waltzers

His carnelian eyes flicker and fade
How are you?" I ask, sashaying by

The burrito I just ate salsas in my stomach,

I wonder if there is cilantro in my teeth.

He drones on about his new wife, his new place,
every lame detail of his goddamn blessed life.
He leans in, and whispers softly,
carelessly,

“What was your name again?”

Ghosts

by Stephen Dodds

I pulled out a box of love letters yesterday.
I read them over and over again,
and I learned: that my life is full of ghosts.
Ghosts of my past dreams,
ghosts of my past relationships,
ghosts of hopes and aspirations
of college and university life,
of a good career.
The careers I tried but failed at
the one I have yet to start.

I have to ask - have *you* too, seen my ghosts,
do you know how I can dilute the suffering?
or even why I feel like my life
is like a skeleton of a large fish,
lying in the middle of a parking lot-
bare-boned, exposed and wondering:
how I came to be,
where I came to be.
Like the skeleton's body
I feel like I am a fish out of water.
Can I exorcise these ghosts,
or do I just exercise them.

Deadly Nightshade

by Jessica Letran

Let my hair down, all nice and flowy
My mind begins to wander, my name is wanderlust

All that I do is write poems about you
I have no shame

We were at your house, all shy and quiet
Your parents were at work, they didn't know that I was there

We were so innocent
Played and laughed to your video games
We were rivals because we had completely different consoles
I rested my head on your lap
The controller resting in your hands over my chest
I'd resist the urge to stare into your pretty blue eyes
That was the day of our second kiss

Your essence was calming, like lavender
Your smell was intense like a rose
I picked away the thorns and I blossomed when it came to you
"I can die right here," I remember thinking

He was that never ending possibility that ate at my very existence
I was never the one for him, he never loved me
I threw away the world for him
He threw away his effort for me

But I still love him
I'll always love him
But it's that unique love
The love that is hidden
The love that only bubbles up once every full moon
Yet he's my sun
He made me grow
Into deadly nightshade

Where I am From

by Haley Sargent

Only the good stuff...

I am from the smell of dogs and the sound of purring,
from fetch with slobbery tennis balls,
from fish tanks and a hamster named Cuddles.

I am from Christmas Eves of sandbakkels and lefse,
from long-driven Thanksgivings,
ping pong and pool and the smell of cigarettes.

I am from drum beats and guitar strums,
from piano keys and flute music,
and old rock n roll.

I am from Star Wars and Spongebob and TMNT,
on VHS tapes in VCRs,
with rabbit ears on top.

I am from the Latin names of butterflies,
Shel Silverstein and Dr. Seuss,
from Princess Patty to Edgar Allen Poe.

I am from a log cabin on a rocky shore,
from lake water and seagulls and hand-picked raspberries,
from trading posts and hiking trails and World's Best Doughnuts.

I am from squirrel chasing and mac-n-cheese,
Oreo-Os and chewy Sweet-Tarts,
and a sandbox on the deck.

I am from after-school cookies and parts in school plays,
from Transformers games and Nerf gun wars and eating Pop-tarts,
from sledding in the dark.

I am from first best friends,
playing with Barbies and Polly Pockets,

and trading Pokemon cards.

I am from Xbox and Nintendo playing Tetris and Super Mario,
from baby dolls and princesses and playing dress-up,
from Legos and Winnie the Pooh.

I am from barefoot summers,
with backyard barbeques and football,
bonfires and s'mores.

I am from tire swings on playgrounds and afternoons at the beach,
bike riding and a trampoline,
from garden planting and fireworks and tree frogs called Sticky Toes.

I am from all these things and many more,
I've come full circle now,
yet still have far to go.

Cognitive Dissonance

by Jessie Situ

Never assume.

I'm just a bystander in all that can be happening in this world. I am witness to the monotony of life, the stories whispered between huddled lips, the seemingly random movement of the earth's creatures. I watch, amidst all the insanities of the world, the illusions of security and safety, of the insane idea of sanity. I'm pulled along for the ride, the long ride of time.

Just a witness to all that happens in this small world. Something happens, I watch. I won't move, I won't do anything but look. The inability to move myself, coupled with the fact that my mind urges to me, urging "why? Why aren't you going? Go already, leave! Hurry!" But where am I to go? Away? Away from where? Away from this place of madness, to yet another place of madness? What I think doesn't match what I do, and the disparity continues. ...I've learned to be helpless by default.

Call me a coward. I don't mind. It'll hurt, and I'll hold a grudge. That's the way it goes. It's all fine.

It's only when I imagine hurting someone intentionally, the knowledge that I'm causing destruction... it's only then do I reel back and question it all, ask myself "what the hell am I thinking?" There, it'll be a spiral of mental breakdowns and non-existential wishful thinking. "If only I wasn't thinking like this..." All this internal instability could make everything feel empty at the end. The noise will eventually quieten down, and it'll feel empty, just like my soul. It's an effective way for me to turn all these destructive thoughts onto myself. It's a prison specifically made for self-destruction. It's a stable plan, perfect for the bystander witnessing all the madness that is happening in this world.

Never assume.

My Husband's Hands

by Beth Spencer

Heavy knuckled hurt-me hands
I watch you pour that beer
How your gold ring shines
through the amber glass.
Quick as a hummingbird
your hands have flicked
my head
small thunk of metal on my scalp.
Ducking away
the pain above my ear is nothing
to the one
that burns my face.

Immolator

By Cadence Fingerholz

Feeding fire his words and hours
A debt of flame he must repay
Light burns his eyes and heat then scours
The sin, and takes the pain away

Steadfast he offers page by page
His soul's sweet work, an artist's horde
It traps him here, a scroll-work cage
His joys, his hurts, his heart out-poured

Hands empty, but not finished yet
One last work there is to raze
Arms high, feet move, intention set
He too must go into the blaze

Waterfall

by Haley Sargent

cascading whispers
like misty morning dew drops
together thunder

Oops, Sorry Wrong Meeting

by Stephen Dodds

It was my first visit,
to The Cracked Walnut
and the open door invited me in.
Faces unknown made room
for me at the table, where
introductions in the round
tried to say what had brought us here-
before I answered that
I enquired what this meeting was.
We are about Transitions.
Enough said... then silence.
Clearly wrong time right place.
Perhaps, I should have stayed and said
“Hello, I am Stephen, I have two failed marriages
and a recently broken engagement,
so what am I transitioning to?”
I came to read some poetry,
but instead I wrote some.

Maybe Something Could Be

by Gabrielle Schulz

His laugh lights up my life.
His eyes make my heart melt.
Deep down I know it will never be.
But still I plan to wait and see.
Maybe something could be...

Over time I feel myself growing closer.
Growing fonder.
My heart breaking.
My heart aching.
As he still rejects me.

His smile warms me.
His jokes make me laugh.
Still he doesn't think he could be with me.
I'm still holding hope when I know I shouldn't.
But maybe something could be...

More time is passing.
My heart still breaking.
My heart still aching.
The hope I had is beginning to fade,
As he still rejects me.

His arms around me.
His head next to mine.
This is just my dreams.
They're tricking me.
This will never be.

My hope is fading faster.
Now all I can see,
Is him rejecting me.
Him tearing me down.
Him telling me no, again.

I'm forgetting that his laugh lights my life.

I'm forgetting that his eyes melt my heart.
I'm forgetting that his smile warms me.
I'm forgetting that his jokes make me laugh.
All because I'm falling apart.

I'm wishing that his arms are around me.
I'm wishing that his head is next to mine.
These are things that never will be.
These are the things that kill me.
The reasons I'm leaving.
The reasons I'm dying.

My heart is missing.
There's a hole in my chest.
My facade is cracking.
Someone put me at rest.
There's no point in me staying.
Not when I'm already dead.
Inside.

His laugh lit up my life.
His eyes made my heart melt.
His smile warmed me.
His jokes made me laugh.
Yet now I'm broken.

But maybe something could be...
I see the way he looks at me.
Worry in his eyes, as I wither away.
Slowly dying because of things we both said.
Slowly crumbling like ash.
But maybe something could be...

I'm healing because of his laugh.
I'm healing because of his eyes.
I'm healing because of his smile.
I'm healing because of his jokes.
Now I'm getting better because of him.

He lights up my life.

He makes my heart melt.
He warms me.
He makes me laugh.
Now I know definitely something will be.
Because deep down he loves me.

To J.

by Haley Sargent

Dearest J.,
So little time and so much to say,
I love you, let's start there,
It's true,
I do,
Perhaps it's pity,
Perhaps it's passion,
Perhaps it's something else.

I've seen you,
Waiting, longing, reaching for her,
Your green iridescent flower,
Your arms wish to wrap around her,
As mine do you,
And your hands,
Do they long to hold hers too?

She is naught but an illusion,
An ever disappearing dream,
Her beauty descends no farther than her skin,
You deserve so much better,
But you're so blind,
An innocent heart,
Crushed and left to die in a corrupt and poisonous world.

My time grows short,
I cannot stay,
Is there no way you'll listen to me?
If nothing else, you take away,
Then pay attention now,
And heed my warning,
Let her go and she'll stay perfect,
But continue to pursue,
And she will be the death of you.

Far more separates the two of you than mere water,

But I fear my efforts may be futile,
You're already gone,
Now I'm the one caught in an endless struggle,
And it's my turn to let you go,
You can never be mine,
Of that I am sure,
Oh, how I wish you could be,
But unlike you,
I leave my past behind upon your shore.

Dark Crimson and Ochre

by Jane O'Shea

My first attempt at bricolage. Lines from Flour Water Salt Yeast, a breadbaking book. Lines from Native American death rites at TraditionsCustoms.com.

Skin of Caucasian female, Midwestern, pre-spring:
unbleached flour that has a creamy color

Artisan white bread marries well
with a cardamom crust.

Mill soft white winter wheat into pastry.
Crush to powder, add water and lashings of fat.

A thing of beauty leavens from the dust.
Bite in, for a tart feels nothing

Wallow in the dalliance. Pretend,
taking care not to let the gluten strands tear.

Feather, not dot: red, not brown.
Cut his hair and make a small doll from it.

The loaf, once baked, develops dark crimson and ochre colors
Taste the heat on his sienna skin

No footprints should be left in or around the grave.
Soften the copper with baby powder

Stay mute and he may not stray
Twist the long braid like a baguette

Don't call for scoring the loaves with a razor.
Slashing is unattractive. Avoid it.

Take his belongings and bury them in the swamp,
bury the body and kill the horse

Take the skull and some long bones,
tuck them under your pillow.

Toss them to the floor with the soiled sheets
and the very last crumbs.

Lost

by Theresa Gaupp

Desperately wanting to feel at peace, you suck in the oxygen that surrounds you, feeling it flow through the bloodstream, releasing all the toxins you begin to relax, reaching out into the darkness you twirl around and around.

Wanting nothing more than a companion to join you, instead you stand alone lost in the wilderness with scrambled thoughts.

Trapped inside your mind, an explosion of voices against you erupts loudly, your body tenses with jumbled nerves on the fritz.

You spark a bowl, inhaling deeply, holding the fog in your lungs as long as you can, exhaling you hope this miracle bud will vanish your pain and sorrow.

Looking up at the power lines full of electricity, mesmerized by the tree tops swaying in the restless breeze of the midnight sky, lit up by stars shining so bright, with everything in slow-motion, you feel free again.

Sunset

by Irene Masek

Don't write anything
Unless it's true
I won't bother wasting your time
Unless it's to hear from you

Call my name out
Against the rain
The copper sunset dripping
Remedies all of my regrets

But Hope keeps my shoulders moving
And the strength of my bones grooving, the way they're supposed to
Righteous one, you're all my heart will ever need, I'm loved
OH, You
I can hear you by your sunset
Yeah, I run back and it's gone
But I know that I'm never lonely
Honestly, honestly, no theatrics needed here.

I'm standing, feeling everything all at once
And even when I don't hear a word
I can hear you by your sunset
Yeah, I run back and its gone
But I know that I'm never lonely

Because the Hope keeps my shoulders moving
And the strength of my bones grooving
Righteous one, you're all my heart will ever need
I can see clearly that
Everything I'm asking for, and everything I need
Are two entirely different things
Honestly, honestly, no theatrics needed here.

Mount Endeavor

by Gabriel Mianulli

I found myself at the foot of a junkyard mountain of spent fuel
receptacles
Dumpster diving down trying to find something edible
To nourish and enable an agenda that was never full.
I've got a complex of problems and not enough ways to solve 'em
It's a teetering heap, I guess I'll start from the bottom,
If I get to the peak, it means I'm freaking awesome.
I try to complete what was started last week,
inching ever closer to the summit I seek.
If I plummet down it might be cuz my stomach is weak
But If I succeed I'll have done it with my trumpeted techniques.
From on top of the world, I inhale victory.
With an echo I bellow what I was once whispering—
I am not man, I am beast with teeth glistening!
And I shall roar for whoever is listening.
But now the next step of expedition must commence,
but before I depart on my well deserved descent
I will catalog my style for others to attempt.
Maybe another mountaineer will hike my trail and lay cement,
and immortalize my route around the mound of malcontent.

What is Going on Inside?

by Amy Lee

I sit still at a stoplight.
There are so many
blinkers blinking,
lights flashing,
tires screeching.
So many distractions
to keep me from thinking
about what's going on inside.
What is going on inside?
In my dream
last night
my best friend asked me,
"When was the last time
we were happy?"

Overexaggeration

by Julia Baier

Two summers ago, my friend and I held a huge garage sale at her house to raise money for my new service dog. This sale lasted several days, and I stayed over for a couple of nights. Although MaryGrace and I can usually chatter on for hours, we had to get a bit creative to keep up conversation for this span of time. Eventually, our conversations got rather amusing.

MaryGrace and I are almost always in agreement. Name your subject, and the two of us will probably hold a similar, if not identical, view of it. However, during this garage sale, we had one of our most serious and long-lasting disagreements over a particular word.

Overexaggerate.

To this day, I still hold the firm opinion that *overexaggerate* is not, never has been, never should be, and, by the grace of God, never will be a proper word in the English language. MaryGrace begged to differ, as she was a frequent user of said word.

“*Overexaggerate* should totally be a word!”

“No! It’s completely redundant. To exaggerate something is to overstate it, so to overexaggerate would be to overoverstate it. It just doesn’t make sense!”

“But it’s just so much more descriptive! My brothers overexaggerate all the time, because they go above and beyond mere exaggeration!” This went on for quite some time, with other similar defenses strewn about our verbal battlefield. Eventually, we came to a pause, realizing the silliness of the situation.

“Why are we fighting about this?” I asked.

“To entertain me!” a cheerful voice responded.

MaryGrace and I looked around. We hadn’t realized that there had been a customer browsing our garage sale for the past few minutes. She was extremely amused by our debate. We offered to continue it for her, if she liked, and she laughed. “You certainly made me think. I’d never thought about whether *overexaggerate* is a word or not before.”

Eventually, the woman purchased a few items, and returning to her car, she called out, "I'm going home to look up *overexaggerate!*" I have yet to hear back from her as to her findings. Until I do, I shall fight to defend the dignity of the English language with full fury.

For Harley

by Gabrielle Schulz

Puddles.

We said goodbye in the harshest of ways.

No chance to be positive about it.

We were torn apart.

Shredded.

Puddles of.

The news was abrupt.

So sudden.

So swift.

But you knew long before I did.

Puddles of tears.

We had one last day.

A day that caused your pain to stay.

It was too short to say what needed to be said.

Not enough to live.

Puddles of tears in.

You knew of your pain.

Yet you stayed by my side.

Always my protector.

Always my watcher.

Puddles of tears in your.

Down to minutes.

Just minutes left together.

Small measurements of time.

Too few.

Puddles of tears in your fur...

You're gone.

Mere seconds is what it took.

For days I cried without you.

Remembering my last words.

"Wait for me, Old Man."

Me, a Pressed Flower

by Katherine Ichinose

To press a flower,
you must be very sorry for it,
as you lay it between two blocks of wood
and squeeze.

To take the flower from the press,
you must hold your breath
as you wait and see
if it still holds its old color.

To hold a pressed flower,
you must be very gentle.
A pressed flower may crumble
at a well-intentioned touch.

To a pressed flower,
you must be very kind.
Everything it knew
died in the spring.

To the pressed flower
that was born in spring
and should have died
before autumn,

To the pressed flower
that is now the same brown
as the grass
suffocated by snow,

To the pressed flower
that you saved from summer's decay,
you must know...
well, that I miss the fresh dew on my petals.

Contributor's Notes

Julia Baier I am a PSEO student in my third semester at Normandale. I have previously self-published a children's book.

Jerry Carrier is a Normandale Art and Creative Writing student.

Stephen Dodds I am a final year student at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minnesota. I am a member of the AFA program in Creative Writing and anticipate graduation next fall. I have studied communications in the past and aspire to become a proofreader in the publishing industry. Some of my work has previously been published in the Normandale Community College Literary Journal, The Paper Lantern.

Gavin Druxman I am a writer who lives within St. Louis Park, though have lived an extended amount of time living near Green Bay. I write science fiction and fantasy.

Cadence Fingerholz Cadence is a writer, photographer and fiber artist living in the Frogtown neighborhood of Saint Paul with her husband and two kids. She has been writing fiction since the late 90s, and is a vocal proponent of National Novel Writing Month, spending two years as the Twin Cities Co-Municipal Liaison. Currently she's going back to school to work toward her dream of attending the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Theresa Gaupp I grew up in rural Minnesota where I still reside with my three adorable boys and a wonderful husband. I have always enjoyed reading and poetry.

River Henry This is my first semester at Normandale, and I am going to school for my associates in science for Biology. I am considering taking some photography classes next semester, as I still don't know how all the knobs and cabobs work on my camera. I've been doing photography since I was 14 years old. I am 25 now.

Katherine Ichinose I am a 16 year old PSEO student here at Normandale, currently pursuing an AFA in Creative Writing. When I'm

not studying, I enjoy watching movies with my family, discussing Shakespeare with my friends, and jamming out to Hamilton by myself. I write a variety of fiction (from speculative to fantasy to contemporary), and have recently immersed myself in the wonders of the world of poetry

Kate Larsen is a Minnesota native currently in the AFA program at Normandale Community College. In her spare time, she enjoys trying new vegetarian recipes, walks around Saint Paul and practicing satire on the unsuspected.

Amy Lee I have had a passion photography and writing from a young age. I love being able to stir up emotion and thought.

Jessica Letran Jessica Letran has studied at Normandale for two years and is working towards getting into the dental hygiene program. Jessica has had an interest in creative writing and poetry since the eighth grade. Passionate about the many events that could lead up to romance, she focused most of her writing in that genre. She believes that writing could bring individuals together and aid in understanding the struggles of life and love.

Rachel Lindo is an AFA Creative Writing major here at Normandale. She often enjoys writing at her grandparent's cabin with the company of her knitting-obsessed mom and her two cats. This is her first publication.

Irene Masek Not officially a writing major but writing has always been a useful, comforting, challenging, and desirable outlet for me—especially in the last five years or so.

Gabriel Mianulli is in the AFA Creative Writing program at Normandale. He enjoys writing all of the four genres and is excited to see where his writing will take him in the future.

Jane O'Shea is a non-traditional Normandale student, and working on her AFA in Creative Writing on the slow but steady plan. She lives in a yurt in the woods, milks goats, forages, and keeps a vegetable garden.

Haley Sargent is a 20-year-old, second year Normandale student currently completing her general education requirements. Her interests include creative writing, art, theatre, and biology.

Gabrielle Schulz I'm an only child raised by a single parent. Which means I've seen some of the darkness life can harbor. But this has allowed me to glimpse at the beauty of the paintings that can be hidden in between the words inked onto paper. They say a picture's worth a thousand words, but I believe that a thousand words are worth more than a hundred pictures. This is why I love to write what I feel deepest about.

Jessica Situ I am a hobbyist artist and gardener. This is my first year here. I hope that what I write isn't too deviant from the norm. Words are one way to help me express myself.

Beth Spencer is a recent émigré to Minnesota stalking grandchildren in the Minneapolis area. She was formally a teacher and counselor in the Neenah, WI schools. Beth has published a chapbook, "Mill Door" and published her first poetry book, "C- in Conduct." last year. She has been published in Wisconsin Review, Rag Mag, Wisconsin Poets' Calendar among others.

Bridget Thomas While visiting a farm I was inspired to take pictures. I started taking pictures three years ago.

Katie Varvel Run with bunnies not with scissors.

The Paper Lantern is the student literary journal of Normandale Community College, 9700 France Ave. So., Bloomington, MN 55431. It is edited by members of the Creative Writing Club. The project is made possible by the Normandale Student Life Activity Fee.

Officers and the following members of the Fall 2016 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

Daniel Gustafson and Shannon Soreson, Presidents
Conner Dolezal and Malenie Ven, Secretaries

Jerry Carrier, Gavin Druxman, Mackenzie Forstner, Emily Hayden, Beki Huffman, Debi Huffman, Amy Lee, Kate Larsen, Jessica Letran, Katherine, Menning, Gabriel Mianulli, Christian Minnie, Jane O'Shea, Isaiah Porter, Haley Sargent, Clarissa Schmieg, Katie Thompson, Paul Van Dyke

Front Cover: "Figure Drawing Model," by Katie Varvel

Back Cover: "Luminous Moss" by Haley Sargent

Submit your creative writing to the Spring 2017 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously and acceptance is based on literary merit. Submission links and more information can be found at www.thepaperlantern.org.

Works in all genres of creative writing (poetry, fiction, memoir, short plays, etc.) are considered, with a limit of 1000 words for poetry and 2500 words for prose and drama. Multiple submissions accepted. Submission is open to registered NCC students only.

Submissions are received via the online service, Submittable. Submittable is a free and easy way for writers to submit work to a variety of publications.

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