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# Where we Drone on Politely Until Cold War Divorce is the Only Option

by Monica Synsteliën

Afganistani air tastes acrid today but icicles are anodynic on my tongue here. I forget. I wonder can you feel the pain of a distant dark skinned man? (Dark divorce, crimson Catholics, a black basement: mom hid.)

Evening news where speaking suits tell me things are fine at home. First world problems flood my rich orphan mind. Now what? "Now, go get you a new truth, tasting tears that ain't yours. Hike til heels meet hypothermia. Hug trees, feel (and) bark."

It's 12th time we've cried wolf just to become one. Now, just like chicken little, our sky is falling. Creepy snow, kids cry, ears leak, eyes don't, all beg please don't beat war drums.

Lonely greenish patches in January-that marriage had its season. The end shook us like an earthquake. Never have I ever missed shiver season. Cold can't care.

Odorless gas is too polite but we crave polite. Polite snow falls, passive aggressive frost finds you-both quiet, the kind of quiet noise death and ending brings. Real families try (mom's charred yet cold inside casserole).

Somalia, was our silence or our bomb deafening? This is no blind date yet this white is nervous to meet dirt.

Underneath the volume of my radio, I heard loss very clearly telling me to smash the world and words that taste well-mannered like "cold" not "fucking freezing", xenophobic, not fucking asshole-sorry, feel funny?

Your stupid love curdled my blood shades of brown so now zen escapes me. I watch the news. I see the end.

# Malignant Neoplasm of the Emblematic Heart

by Monica Synsteliën

His saliva tasted like tea,  
and I've never liked tea-despite  
there being every indication

I should be a tea person.  
That should've been the first sign,  
but it wasn't.

The first sign was pain spilling out of my arms onto white sheets and  
his indifference

\* \* \*

I scream "CAN YOUR GOD SAVE ME NOW"  
as your almost virgin eyes become accustomed to  
the sight of intentional blood  
on white sheets with trace amounts of the last mans' sperm.

Sperm: not a pretty word, I'm not a pretty person  
and I believe that's why you left me

You left me.

\*\*\*

Calmly, we sat together  
in the waiting room  
where I said "I didn't want to die"

We were waiting for the news  
from the woman who never stops smiling.

Her nametag says Jenny and it makes me wonder if her full name is  
Jennifer.

We are not waiting to hear the news  
about me. Not this time.

This time, we are waiting to hear the news  
about the date I chose  
who I thought would be drunk enough  
to crash us both into a telephone pole-I wanted to die.

\*\*\*

He wanted my tits.  
This wasn't suicide  
this was the back-alley street lamp used as spotlights  
in our homemade porno named "Real Couple" that  
we were both too embarrassed to watch. Your ass was too  
hairy.  
My tears, too visible.

\*\*\*

Neither one of us wants to remember.  
Neither one of us want to be left high and dry.  
Neither one of us wants to get our hearts broken first and I didn't say  
I would give us a fourth chance but I didn't say a lot of things.  
And somehow, we always knew  
how easy it would be to ruin me.  
How easy it was to ignore me,  
your mother's broken vase on the floor  
until we slice your Achilles heel  
and you fall. You would never be the one to commit to the  
end. And you would also never  
be the one to commit to the beginning of forever.

\*\*\*

My heart is an obscene chasm of loneliness and I dive into the  
lavender water and emerge  
The same.  
I want to transform into a mermaid  
and scour the seafloor  
in search of wedding rings thrown out into the ocean  
off of yachts  
because of the slight difference between  
an intention and a commitment.

I'll find the lonely king sailors  
and tell them this is their sign  
to donate to charity-I mean,  
to try again  
-don't call me crazy.

\*\*\*

I am not crazy  
for being in love, or  
for believing in love,  
or that you liked me.

You could've, you know.

\*\*\*

in·dif·fer·ence  
in'dif(ə)rəns  
noun  
lack of interest, concern, or sympathy.

That was the ugliest emotion he never wore on his sleeve  
Today I realized that I have a pillow  
which perfectly mimics the color of your eyes  
when you first said that you loved me. I sobbed,  
threw myself into that brown  
until it was almost black

It's been more than three years,  
but the nuclear end of  
our relationship left radiation,  
malignant neoplasm of my emblematic heart  
and I feel everything but indifferent.

\*\*\*

P.S. Stop dating girls who are too rich for you

# Red Cheeks

by Caroline Knacke

When she was nine years old, Sjera was told she was a monster. Never accused of such a thing before, she nervously fingered her basket handle and glanced over her shoulder. No heinous creatures loomed at her back, only the pulsing activity of the market, and the man's eyes drilled relentlessly into hers alone. Still, she uncoiled a finger from the basket handle and gestured to her chest.

"Are—Are you speaking to me?"

"Obviously, I'm speaking to *you*," he snapped back.

"The girl with three eyes too many and *fangs*."

Very pleased he'd noticed her newly budding canines, she graced him with a broad grin. It was the exact wrong thing to do. His nose wrinkled like he smelled something foul and his hands lashed out from his sides, violently pushing her shoulders and toppling her to the dust. The basket lolled, potatoes and carrots fleeing the scene.

"My basket," she groaned, clutching her arm where the gravel cut deepest. "I think you broke my—!"

He didn't allow her to finish, stamping his boot on the intricately woven straw. Sjera gaped, empty of words, floundering for a proper reaction. The man didn't allow for that either, kicking dust in her eyes.

"We don't serve your kind." He thrashed away the remains of her homemade basket, her carefully chosen vegetables, the silver pieces her mother provided that morning. Red-faced, he snarled, "And we don't *want* you here either, *monster*."

He scuffed the earth until Sjera erupted in a coughing fit.

He shouted and slandered until she'd shoved to her knees and scrambled to her feet, not daring to reach for the rolling potatoes and coins. Suspicious eyes and poisonous words followed her rush from the market square. Tears stung in her eyes all the way home, her chest constricted with a feeling she couldn't recognize.



When she was twelve, Sjera decided she was a monster. By then, she'd seen eleven full winters and the twelfth crawled closer. Even if she couldn't feel the frigid winds or the bite of morning frost, she noticed when the round-eyes did. They would cloak themselves in fur and pull on big, heavy boots that clunked every step. They wrapped long fabric around their necks, nestling in the wool until their small eyes peeked over the rim—round, black pupils, not crimson slits like hers. Sjera imitated them once, winding up in her mother's old rug, but then she'd sneezed and the thread caught fire.

"What were you thinking?" her mother chided, batting out the flames.

"You can't even feel the cold."

"But I want to. I want to shiver and have red cheeks like they do."

"No, you don't," she said. "You don't want to be like them."

The smoke must have caught in her throat, Sjera thought, because strange melancholy had dampened her voice.

That winter, Sjera learned to chop onions and peel roots with her rapidly maturing talons, and she eagerly assisted her mother with the stew. "Do you think you can handle one by yourself?" she asked, looking down at her daughter with a knowing smile. Sjera plunged into the outside blizzard as a response, promising to return before the water boiled.

The wind howled and snow pelted her skin, but it felt like a long caress and baby kisses. Wandering through the white gale, grin eating away her cheeks, she discovered her objective when she slipped and tumbled down the side of a slope.

"Can't hide from me!" After shaking snow from her hair, she clambered inside the den opening, barely muffling her excitement.

One grizzly bear curled inside the burrow. Not fat and husky like in the warm months, but gigantic enough to fill the walls with bristled fur. He huffed in his sleep, woefully unaware of the approaching predator. Sjera giggled a pitch too sharp, he snuffed his wet nose and one eye opened, and then she surged for his throat in a blur of razor teeth and claws.

After claiming her prize, she crawled back into the flurry of snow. “Bear hearts are nearly Mother’s favorite.” Second favorite only to the hearts of round-eyes, but that was an old, traditional dish, one they weren’t supposed to feast on anymore. “She’ll still be pleased.”

Animal flesh didn’t fare as well as she did in brutal winds, so Sjera carefully cradled the heart under her arm. Three steps through the mounds of snow, she reconsidered her cargo. A new breed of excitement swelled her chest as she turned around and worked back through the snow, reentering the bear den. “I can be like them,” she told herself, and slashed into the beasts’ hide.

Sjera was ridiculously proud of her bear-fur scarf, even more so than her first unaccompanied hunt. It dragged as she walked, sagging around her shoulders, wet with snow and rank with blood, but her smile didn’t wilt. She trudged the forest until her ears caught shouts and voices. Beaming, she whispered, “Round-eyes,” and then trailed after the noise.

They were hunting, too—giving their best attempt, at least. They carried quivers of arrows and long, curved bows. Twigs and thorns, against a hungry bear or Sjera’s skin. She wondered how they found anything without keen eyes or a strong nose. They didn’t spot her until she stood just yards away.

They whirled toward her, gasping, huddling in a pack. For an instant, Sjera wanted to grin at them, too, wide and happy as she could manage, but that same instant reminded her of the cruel man in the market, years ago. She stifled the smile, tucking her bear-scarf to her nose instead, trying to rediscover her confidence.

“Uh, hello!” she called out, tentative, more so when they shriveled away from her voice. “I, I’m out hunting, like you!”

“H-Hunting?” one stammered. His fingers itched toward an arrow. “For—for what?”

“Bear!” Sjera expanded her arms, the bear flank following, the wet and sopping red hide draped from her shoulders like a cape.

They didn't respond like her mother would have, not with dazzled eyes and praises. They stumbled backward, their lovely round, black pupils growing ever bigger, gawking at her like the bear was alive and perched on her shoulders, still growling.

Suddenly realizing they were terrified, Sjera scrambled to fix it. "No, wait, don't be frightened, I'm only—" They scuffled away, tripping over each other, jaws unhinged and gasping. "I'm like you! Don't go!" She dug her hands in the leftover flesh, dangling in strips from the hide. She smeared blood all over her face. Smudged it in circles over her cheeks. "I have red cheeks like you! From the cold!"

Shrieking, twirling on their heels, all of them fled. Behind them, trailing like a curse, their voices rang, "*Monster! Monster!*"

This time, Sjera didn't look over her shoulder. There were no heinous creatures hovering at her back, just one cloaked in bear fur.

Her mother didn't need to deliver a second warning. Sjera avoided the round-eyes of her own accord. Mother and daughter labored over their garden and cottage, enjoying the silent company of the forest. They trekked inside the darkest corners of the wood, far from the village's reach, and minded no one's business but their own.

On the uncomfortable occasion, Sjera ran into the round-eyed villagers. Sometimes they happened to be crossing the same road, or collided by chance in the reaches of the forest. She shrunk away from them—like they had from her—averting her alien eyes, folding away long talons and hiding her new arch of horns. Her throat constricted each time she shied from their gaze, and Sjera thought back to the smoke staining her mother's voice, damp and melancholy.

Her fifteenth summer was especially hot. The forest crinkled against every breath of wind, the brush and trees dry like sand. The sun scorched the land brown and killed the vegetable garden, sapped the streams and canopy of leaves.

"The animals have all left the forest," her mother said one morning, before the sun peaked and razed the land again. "We will be at odds with the villagers soon for meat. It won't be safe."

“Don’t worry, Mother. We aren’t traditional, we won’t eat their hearts.”

But Sjera misunderstood her mother’s fear, and understood her answer less. “Round-eyes remember our old ways better than we do.”

Intent on evading their beautiful, round-pupil stares, Sjera had failed to notice the change. Gawks evolving to glares, uneasiness becoming venom, fear blending with loathing. She didn’t think their beauty could rot.

Everyone was hungry, with the crops crisped by the sun and game scarce in the forest. The seething air and sun were too large for blame, too untouchable, and the villagers were scared enough to find new targets. Torches in hand, burning fierce like the glaring sun, they marched into the woods. They flung black oil across wilted potato and carrot patches, down hand-woven baskets and homespun carpets, and they dragged their flaming beacons over everything else. Parched of water, the home sparked like gunpowder, and fire was a greedy creature.

Monsters could endure cold and heat, but they burned like any breathing creature. The smoke suffocated, fuming the air in clouds of acid, and stung Sjera’s eyes harsher than the flames licking her heels as she retreated. In the brittle shelter of the trees, cheeks charred red—finally, red—mother and daughter watched the ravenous fire devour their home. It roared louder than the villager’s cheer.

When she was fifteen years old, Sjera realized not all monsters had razor teeth and claws. Those that did, she thought, mind as well be monstrous.

# The Empty Room

by Vicky Erickson



# Catherine the Great: Over Her Head

by Kate M. Larsen

She reached her secluded bedroom quarters, the smell of crisp lavender lingering in the air. With the cheery smell, you wouldn't dream it would be so dreary and damp, like the front lawn lathered in the morning's dew. The flickering light of the candle danced upon the glass case. The case in which his head is displayed. She could never forget because of this.

Willem had been her secretary. In an ironic state of affairs, he had also the brother to her husband's mistress. An entanglement of deceit had overcome this family in the past years. They were once a ravishing couple. Not joined at first by love, that evolved later on. Peter and Catherine eventually were quite fond of each other. She bore twelve of his children and they lived a humble life despite their role in the Russian royalty.

Now she sits here thinking back as to how it all led up to this, staring at the face of Willem now soaking in alcohol upon her fireplace mantle. Peter had demanded this be placed there, for punishment. Her room had once been a luscious retreat – warm and inviting and now the atmosphere loomed of bitterness. It was covered with reminders of her faults. Catherine had not been the only one of the two of them to have shown such weakness. Many women had given themselves to her husband, Peter the Great. To this day she has had to hear the nagging of her spiteful spouse never letting go. However, she would have never imagined Willem's head before her day in and day out. The look of terror engraved on his face like an inscription on a fine piece of jewelry- perhaps a wedding ring, from the moment right before the blade snapped his neck.

At one time she left love for Peter and at another, Willem. Now her love was as dead as Willem for anyone. She felt nothing. Nothing in any sense of the word. The palace in which they lived now mocked her sarcastically. It all seemed to be a façade now. She had lost faith in him years ago. Knowing Anna was keeping him occupied, she felt isolated and alone.

Catherine had stayed up numerous nights draining the tears from her eyes over the infidelities of her husband. She ignored it for

as long as she could, but eventually she caved. Willem had been her secretary, there was a closeness with him that she had longed for with Peter again. Seeing Willem more regularly than her own husband may have also had something to do with it.

It all began when the sixth or seventh child had arrived. That's when she discovered the first of many mistresses. At first, he hid it all well, like a child hiding sweets they know they shouldn't be eating before dinner. Eventually, he grew rather sloppy, like a child hiding sweets they know they shouldn't be eating before dinner. She'd find traces of them being in his room: a glove, trail of perfume, the shell of a body in his bed.

She wondered to herself: *How did we go wrong? Were we once not so painfully in love? Did we not crave each other at one point? Could not stand to be away from each other for longer than a moment?* It all went sour and she did not understand why. She believed it was the typical reasoning that she had become unattractive to him after the children and the years had been piled on to her.

He had suspected Willem of foolery for a long time. Quite often he would make remarks or blatantly demand to know what was truly going on between him and Catherine. It would make her cheeks brighten to the color of a rosebud in bloom when he interrogated her. Willem was a good man. Dedicated to Catherine and took his duties very seriously with pride. One would never assume either of them would be guilty of such a crime. Yet, one would think it okay for her husband to do the same.

After torturing him for so long, Peter demanded Willem be sent to him. He charged Willem with embezzlement and his punishment was death. Though Catherine knew this was simply Peter's way of punishing not only Willem but her as well. Executing Willem didn't bring Peter nearly enough gratification for Catherine's punishment, he wanted to torture her. She would wake to Willem's tormented face staring at her each day.

At night, the gleam of the moon would illuminate the jar and the ghostly figure of his once beloved face would stare back at her hauntingly. She avoided all eye contact with Willem, something at one point she found very difficult to do.

This night was different, however. She retired earlier than usual. They had been hosts to many guests in their grand ballroom. The children were all put to bed and Catherine had finished her climb up the grand staircase to her quarters. Her ladies in waiting helped her into her nightwear. They too seemed discontented by the presence of Willem. It was something all who entered fought not to gawk at or at least show any sort of fear.

Catherine puffed out her candles, pulled back her covers and sunk into her bed with an uneasy feeling. She felt relieved at this time usually because she could no longer see his glassy brown eyes watching her. Her eyes weighed her down as she fell into a deep slumber. She couldn't tell if she was dreaming or if it was truly happening. Without opening her eyes, she laid there listening to the rapping on what sounded like glass.

Suddenly, the rapping grew louder. It sounded as if there was determination behind its consistency. Catherine sat up in her bed and paused waiting to see something in the shadows of her bedroom. Outside the wind carried on in a peculiar shrieking. A splintering coldness made her shutter with an uncertain fright. Slowly she swung her legs over the side of her bed and gently put her toes on the frigid floor. With each step, she held her breath as if diving into a deep pool of water. The creaks beneath her feet made her wince with anxiousness. She reached her dressing table near the masked window. She felt the candle, still warm from just hours before. Finally, the room was illuminated and the sinister shadows of her belongings which did nothing to ease her nervousness.

*What could possibly be making such a horrid sound?* She pondered as she ever so carefully made her way through the room. The tapping continued as she reached the end of her bed that faced her fireplace. She dreaded what she would see next: Willem.

She had been woken up at such an unusual hour before and had managed to keep herself from seeing him. She feared it would be just as she imagined, even more, unbearable in the chill of the night than during the security of they daytime.

With the least amount of movement, she steadily moved the candle in Willem's direction. Catherine made her eyes into slits as to



shield her from what she imagined she may see. Slowly she opened them refraining from fully opening them quite yet. She could make out the jar, the moonlight flowed in and reflected off the glass. Catherine tip-toed around to the front of the jar where he faced. She gasped. His eyes were glowing a fierce yellowish-green. As she made her way closer to Willem, his eyes brightened, even more, bursting open further and his mouth gaped open even wider. Catherine leaped back, slamming against one of the mighty posts of her bed dropping the candle that was Willem's spotlight moments ago.

In her confused mind, she thought: *This cannot be! Is... is he alive? Am I consumed by fever? This is the devil's work coming to punish me for my sins!*

She frantically pulled herself away from the post and debated on running to find some sort of help – *but who? No one would possibly believe me, they would think I was mad.* This was the last thing she would need in such a treacherous time with Peter – insanity.

As she thought she may have collected herself somewhat, the tapping began again. It was his own head thrusting itself against the thick glass. *This is impossible.* She climbed up her massive bed, into the covers still lukewarm from her last sleep. Again, she sat there just taking in the hollowness of the night; listening, waiting for it to end, fearing it may never stop. She decided to remain in her room, silently shivering with the unknowingness of what would happen with or to Willem. Time seemed to have now been the one to be mocking her, every hour passing with grace and no true sense of urgency.

It was near dawn when she discovered she had managed to fall asleep. The crows outside her window hissed at her with their gargled caws. The piercing sun would emerge shortly and Willem's face would be present again, starting down at her. As of yet, there was no tapping, just birds. Catherine got out of her bed and dressed hurriedly, all the while not glancing once into Willem's direction. She decided she would remain calm and keep the happenings of earlier to herself.

Catherine went through her day just as any other but always kept one eye looking over her shoulder. She contained her uneasiness throughout teas and meals during the course of her day, she visited her children, strolled in the garden all while keeping the anxiety of another night of retiring alone into her haunted bedroom. She withdrew herself at a later hour than usual, reading by a trickling fire in the study until near midnight. When she no longer could keep her eyes open, she gave in and began her trek to her wing of the palace. *It would be questioned if I were to request to another room. If Peter heard of such an arrangement, not only would he question it, but he would insist Willem follow.*

With her eyes closed and breath held, Catherine opened her bedroom door with much hesitation. The radiance of the moon now cast through her window. Her maidens had come prior to her and lit a fire in the fireplace since it was unusually cold this evening. She dressed for sleep and sat at her dressing table, as to stall the eerie hours of twilight. In the mirror, she saw her onyx colored hair and frosty skin that presented her age.

The fire dwindled down until the amber underneath the blackened logs were all that seeped through. Catherine surrendered to her sleepy fate; she crawled into bed and fell asleep shortly after. The clock in the hall struck four times when she heard it – the tapping was back. She wiped her eyes and just as the night before; Willem was aglow. In a quick moment, before she even knew what was happening, the jar started thumping around. She pushed herself against her headboard as if to get as far back as possible. Willem's eyes were the color of Satan's skin itself.

Inside the jar, he awoke with a fury of anger. The screeching of his voice terrified even more so. *Was this Willem or the devil himself?* The jar started rattling around on the hollow wooden mantle in which he was placed. The whole room was filled with the blaze from Willem. Catherine swore she could feel the bed trembling just as she was. Her heart was beating so rapidly she thought she too, may have been overtaken by whatever demon was possessing Willem. He became more and more enraged causing the glass to begin to splinter from his fierce motions.

Half frozen, half so determined to put an end to it, Catherine slithered towards the end of her massive bed. She quickly grabbed the bellows that lay on the hearth of the fire. Catherine briskly began pumping air into the dying fire causing it to ignite ever so slowly. She would slightly raise an eye to Willem, checking to see if he was still contained. The cracks were spreading, motivating her to pump even harder and more wildly. Suddenly, the firebox was full of flames. Quickly, Catherine dropped the bellows and reached for the fire iron nearby. She raised the iron towards Willem, who still was howling at her. Catherine smashed the jar surrounding the head and in the most careful of movements before Willem fell to the floor, she took the spike of the poker and rammed it right into Willem's temple. In one motion she thrust the head with all her might into the blazing fire. As soon as Willem hit the inside of the firebox surely, Catherine made all attempts to catch her breath and return to her pillow.

None of this was ever a topic of conversation between her and her husband, Peter the Great. When asked by her maidens where Willem had gone, she simply gave them no answer as if she had no knowledge of his disappearance. Catherine and Peter continued on ruling over Russia for years to come. The torment he had inflicted on her because of her infidelities mocked her for long enough. She finally had become a free woman.

# The Poet's Style

by Isabel Taylor

*after Samuel Green*

I am the worst oxymoron:  
ever laboring under allusions,  
making an assonance out of myself,  
alliterating wherever I go.

I am afflicted with symbolisms,  
use irony to get the wrinkles out,  
*onomatopoeia* all over the place,  
and consonantly have a crooked simile.

So excuse my acting like an idiom:  
I majored in tautology,  
and I wanted to see how far I could pun,  
but hardly expected to hit hyperbole  
even at the speed of allegory.

# Elderly Rope Swing

by Whitney Carter

i was seven  
my life entangled  
with my elderly rope swing  
frayed, withered, and antiquated

tuesday afternoon  
soaring through an azure sky  
oblivious to the concealed danger  
my elderly rope swing forsook me

an abrupt plummet  
i shattered on the foreign ground  
my fragile aching remains  
shriveling with unforeseen age

i fiercely attempted to restore  
my once loyal rope swing  
but you can't mend yourself  
when a man stripped you of your

innocence

# Inquisitive Magistrate

by Gabriel Mianulli

Inquisitive magistrate clutches keys to my fortune,  
taking time away from problems that are much more important

I make point to mention mine is precious, but of course, I must afford  
it.

We play verbal chess, I allude to my discordance.

I, the pawn  
and she, the queen  
domineering over me  
Her two knights cornered me  
herbal essence quarantine!

Would Uncle Sam see anything?  
Monkey wrench my reverie!  
I am not the enemy!

Aces displayed credibly  
Annoyed I Am, tremendously, for holding unintentionally  
A flower that is dear to me  
    A flower with discrepancies  
    Needed medically, forbidden federally!

Annoyed, I am  
at this tendency to misjudge my identity!  
Maintain composure, tell her this respectfully  
But make the point successfully, in hope for others' clemency,  
and hope for future pleasantries  
    in eventual indemnities

# Day N Night

by Luke Broderick



# Naturally

by Malenie Ven

It's a Saturday night and the blue light from the TV casts long, flickering shadows around the dark room. "How about this one?" My friend pauses on a film. It's a rom-com with a blue-eyed hunk for the main love interest. I squint at the synopsis. Did I mention it was a rom-com?

"Maybe something else."

"This one?" Science fiction. Well, at least it was a different genre, but the main character was more or less the same as the previous Neanderthal beauty. The synopsis? Nothing too exciting. On nights like these, we usually end up re-watching old favorites. You know, films targeted at simple-minded, easily-moved teenagers such as ourselves. Looks like we'd be watching another Nicholas Sparks' film again.

"Oh! There's a new movie called *Insurgent*." Eye candy. And two Caucasians on the screen. Naturally.

Growing up as an Asian-American, it never occurred to me that the blond-haired, blue-eyed heroine of my bedtime stories, let alone American films, didn't share the same features as my darker one.

It wasn't hard to; for half of my elementary school career, I coveted the title of the Token Asian. But this never was a dilemma, thanks to Mrs. Paulsen. Mrs. Paulsen was a sweet, second grade teacher, her treats jar was always filled and our class had many crafty projects-- ambrosia for the eight-year-old soul. There was this one project where we had to make a doll version of ourselves using construction paper, yarn, and stencils. I was elated, and my doll to be the prettiest of the bunch. I was going to give her straight black bangs and a gold necklace of my zodiac sign just like the one I was so proud of. It was a fun day, we got to sit wherever we wanted, and so, my table consisted of all girls (boys do have cooties after all). As classmates clumsily cut paper, I glanced around at my friends gluing pale yarn to pale paper. It hit me.



Why wasn't my dark hair like the Sarahs of my class, the Emilys, the Jennifers? I remember Mrs. Paulsen coming over immediately with a big, comforting smile. "Because you're special," she told me, squeezing my shoulder with motherly conviction.

Of course, my heart swelled with pride at that moment.

Every kid wants to be special, right? And of course, it wouldn't have been "appropriate" to feed the thought of racial differences to an eight year old that probably wouldn't have understood anyways. Little to her knowledge, my ESL teacher had also told us immigrant students the same thing when a boy named Dinh asked why other students didn't have to take the class. Maybe Mrs. Paulsen truly thought I was special, maybe she didn't want to deal with the underlying differences that comes with my ethnicity that I will have to deal with until the day I turn white myself (or until the cookie crumbles, the cow jumps over the moon, etc.) While Mrs. Paulsen said "You're special," society says something else. Society says "You're different."

While there are limited amounts of literature featuring an Asian as the main character, there are even less for movies and TV shows. Name a film featuring an Asian that doesn't involve Kung Fu, samurai, geishas, or anything of that sort: Pretty sparse, isn't it?

But you may be asking "so what? It's just a film."

While media entertainment's main purpose is to, well, entertain, by not questioning the filming process (from the casting to how characters are portrayed) is dangerous and is an example of how society is stubborn to part ways from societal rooted concepts-- that minorities are a bother, that they are not desired, and that they shouldn't take the lead. And in those rare times when minorities are featured, it is to reiterate old fundamental stereotypes. Native Americans as "Wise Savages," the hilarious sassy Black Woman, Asians as the nerdy wing man, martial arts master, war beauty, and so on. Let me tell you, it's hard as a person with absolutely no upper body strength to find resonance in Jackie Chan's cliché liners and uppercuts. This lack of representation reflects a general public that believe minorities are too a bothersome, a perpetual mentality filled with hypocrisy from Americans who pride themselves as being a big 'ol melting pot.

Take for instance the infamous doll study where young black girls were asked to choose the prettier between a Caucasian and black doll. It's no surprise the white doll was chosen a majority of the time. Heck, if I were in the same position at the tender age of five, I'd have taken the white doll because frankly, who has ever seen an Asian doll? The two wouldn't have correlated, it wouldn't have been deemed "normal," a trait humans from all ages try stay away from. Different means isolation, and until companies can make black dolls for black girls (and Asians, and so on), these little girls are not going to want black dolls. While I never was inclined to be white, I knew, even in my eight-year-old heart, that different meant difficult. And instead of embracing all that was and is me, I tried to put a cover of it. My ethnicity simply did not exist.

In a world that has been touched by globalization and will continue to in the foreseeable future, it's only proper to cast these "unconventional" faces and ethnicities. We will be able to obliterate societal expectations, things that are deemed natural. I would have loved to see a TV show or movie dedicated to an Asian girl, I would have wanted to be like that girl. I would have realized my self-worth as an Asian much sooner. I would have embraced difference.

It's another Saturday night and my friend presses the button on the remote control quickly. "Let's try something new," she says. "Maybe action?" She quickly goes to the low-funded indie section.

I frown at the title she pauses on. The man is decorated in Chinese characters and dragon tattoos. There's a woman in the background with her hand on her forehead, as if she was a damsel in distress. I'm annoyed. This was nothing new, how many films out there has a buff, tan Asian with a helpless beauty that will inevitable become the love interest that follows his every command? I shudder at the screen.

I could consult Google and search for a film with two colored people and an enticing plot, but it's Saturday night and what are the chances? Not very many. My friend taps her foot impatiently. "Nicholas Sparks?" She asks.

"Naturally." I reply.

# To My Brother

by Haley Sargent

– after “Daylight Savings” by Jill Bialosky

Remember:

The second that I held you  
as a baby in my  
three-year-old arms.

The minute when I hit you  
because I just couldn’t stand you  
anymore.

The hour when we gamed together –  
always needing “five more minutes”  
and never wanting dinner to be ready.

The day when we geeked out completely  
and blew through \$400 buying  
prop swords and movie posters.

The week we left home and  
drifted numb to a distant land  
like Okies during the Depression.

The month of summer when we *lived*  
outside and played barefoot until  
our feet were made entirely out of callouses.

The year when we both started at a new school  
and we felt like we were at the start of  
a strange, exciting, unknown journey.

Now Imagine:

The decade when we both  
have careers and spouses  
and kids and houses.

Promise that we’ll still be friends.

# **Evanescence**

by Abby Boyum

Perfect smile masking cool vacant eyes.  
Gown that looks like marzipan tastes  
and tresses like a golden veil;  
a radiant façade for forbidden sorrow.

Dainty feet fixed to marble pedestal,  
aching to be free to fly.  
Voyeur within her glass prison, how  
keenly wept these tears of porcelain.

# When Kerouac Strayed

by Jerry Carrier

*"My fault, my failure, is not in the passions I have, but in my lack of control of them."*

—Jack Kerouac

Is Cheryl Strayed the reincarnation of Jack Kerouac? I would like it to be so, but unfortunately this cannot be true. She was born in 1968 and he died in 1969. Except for the nuisance of that overlapping year I would have argued that she is.

Perhaps I am the nuisance for wishing it so, for daring to compare two icons that have bravely stood naked before the world in most everything they wrote, exposing their good yin along with their bad yang. These two people with great passions that they couldn't control, both battling chemical addictions, both having large sexual appetites, with Strayed describing hers as just like a man's, and both on a journey of self-discovery. They wrote about their lives to find hope and meaning in their lives and in the lives of others.

If Strayed is the mother of creative non-fiction, then Kerouac must be the father. It may be a bastard child raised by both, a hiker and a hitchhiking hobo, each exploring the world on their own terms, each describing the most basic of human needs and desires that consume most of us, and each defining their lives as well as ours as they write.

There is something in the way they write as well as what they write that seems connected like an on-going story or at least a continuing saga of a two part series or the first and second book of a well threaded novel. Their love of the flawed more than the flawless, their self-deprecating look at themselves, and their fear of loneliness echoes in both their works.

Strayed wrote, "Alone always felt like an actual place to me, as if it weren't a state of being, but rather a room where I could retreat to be who I really was." They are both lost and searching desperately to find themselves or perhaps to find another who would understand. If the timelines of their lives had matched and their paths had crossed would they have been contemporaries, friends or lovers?

You can make a solid argument that *Wild: Lost to Found* on the Pacific Crest Trail was inspired if only subconsciously by *On the Road* and *Dharma Bums*. Kerouac said that *On the Road* was a journey to find god, but instead he found himself.

Wild too was also a spiritual journey of self-discovery. "Nothing behind me, everything in front of me, as is ever so on the road." This line from *On the Road* could have just as easily come from Wild.

They think alike almost like a singular thought; "I wanted to get me a full pack complete with everything necessary to sleep, shelter, eat, cook, in fact a regular kitchen and bedroom right on my back..." and "I was amazed that what I needed to survive could be carried on my back. And, most surprisingly of all, that I could carry it, that I could bear the unbearable." The first quote is by Kerouac in *Dharma Bums* the second by Strayed in *Wild*.

The inspiration of Wild was Strayed's mother, which I would argue is mirrored by Kerouac's devotion to poet and mentor Gary Snyder who although some years younger, became a father figure to him. It was Snyder who inspired *Dharma Bums* and who was the thinly disguised character in the book, Japhy Ryder. It was the early environmentalist Snyder, the so-called poet laureate of Deep Ecology, who introduced Kerouac to the glories of nature. It was he who caused Kerouac to explore and write about the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Mountains, the same mountains that Strayed also chose to explore and write about. Both writers reverently described these mountains in their works. Strayed described the mountains as, "an idea, vague and outlandish, full of promise and mystery." Kerouac described them as an, "immense cycloramic universe of matter" and experienced them as "a tremendous sense of its dreamlikeness...."

Both writers had that touch of Zen Buddhism about them and their writing. When asked about her religious beliefs Strayed once wrote, "I believe in grace and kindness and magic and love and generosity and forgiveness and complexity and the value of both the darkness and the light when it comes to our individual spiritual evolutions. I don't believe in God as God has been constructed for most of us across most cultures and religions, but I do believe there is divinity within each of us. I believe that seeking and reaching and loving and giving are sacred acts."

Kerouac never left his Catholicism far behind, but he became a cultural Buddhist, a Dharma bum, under the guidance of the Pulitzer Prize winning the Beat poet Gary Snyder who was also a translator of modern Japanese and ancient Chinese poems. Lawrence Ferlinghetti the Beat poet and publisher dubbed Snyder, "the Thoreau of the Beat Generation."

Snyder is also the alleged source of the introduction of Zen Buddhism into the United States and the originator of 1960s Hippie counter-culture. His influences are felt by many writers perhaps including Strayed through Kerouac.

There is a hard-edge working class perspective shared in the writings of Kerouac and Strayed which is sometimes missing in literature. Kerouac was raised in several rented houses and duplexes in Lowell Massachusetts. His father was an alcoholic and gambler and his family was poor. He was French-Canadian and spoke mostly French until high school.

Strayed was also poor and lived in the backwoods of rural Aitkin County, Minnesota in a house her family built themselves which had no running water or electricity. He was a high school football hero and she was a cheerleader and homecoming queen. He developed prowess on the football field to overcome his feelings of inadequacy and she starved herself down to 90 pounds to be “pretty.” Their poor working class up-bringing and their fears of inadequacy are reflected in their work and they share this common underclass culture and outlook that may seem strange and exotic to some of their readers, many of whom are of the educated upper middle class.

Both received scholarships, his for football, hers for academics and they became the first in their families with a college education which is a large and unsettling step for an underclass person. Both found themselves thrust into the middleclass world of academia, perhaps feeling that they did not really belong which is common to the underclass young who are the first and frequently the only members of their families to receive a higher education. Each sensed that because of their education they no longer fit into the world of the underclass, but were too different to be middle class, and perhaps didn’t want to be middleclass. They may have felt like ghosts caught in between. The word that describes this is anomie, a displacement felt by uprooted people. Anomie accurately describes being exiled out of your class and many who have experienced this describe it like a death, a death that separates friends and family from the newly upwardly mobile. This may be another reason that of both of these writers took to the trail and went on the road to escape. “I’d finally come to understand what it had been: a yearning for a way out, when actually what I had wanted to find was a way in.” Cheryl Strayed wrote in Wild.”

There is a recklessness in both, in their quest for highs from drugs and alcohol, in their promiscuity in search of both love and pleasure, and in their quest for the freedom of open spaces and freedom from the mundane commitments of daily life.

There is an unapologetic animalistic nature to their sexuality that neither feels the need to justify, although it was a behavior that each eventually sought to change. Unfortunately, drugs and alcohol were demons that were never overcome by Kerouac and he died from his addictions. It was a behavior that Strayed changed to live and find a better life. There are lessons in both.

Perhaps they were attracted to the flawed rather than the flawless because they recognized this in themselves and came to appreciate their faults and weaknesses as well as their virtues and strengths. Perhaps because they were different from others it allowed them to find and explore the universality of humankind and make each of us, regardless of class or background, relate to their stories.

Cheryl Strayed wrote in *Tiny Beautiful Things* "Your assumptions about the lives of others are in direct relation to your naïve pomposity." And perhaps all this is the speculation of another underclass writer projecting my flaws and insecurities on them in the hope of making sense of their lives, the similarities of their writing, and to show my appreciation for their work. In writing a critique or literary review the writer always consciously or unconsciously makes it about himself or herself in an attempt to find reasons and a fuller understanding of writer's work.

Strayed may not be the reincarnation of Kerouac but their lives and writing are eerily similar and perhaps Kerouac unconsciously did inspire Strayed's work, or perhaps their lives are so similar that it inspired similarities in their works, but whatever the cause there are strong similarities. The ending of *Dharma Bums* could have also easily been the final words to end *Wild*, Kerouac wrote: "and [the] mountain would understand what I meant, and [I] turned and went on down the trail back into this world."



# Put My Arm Between The Bars And Plucked A Blade Of Grass

by Emily Pearson



# Sonnet for Big Sky

by Isabel Taylor

Three days of flight induced three days of sky  
Across flyover country - flatland blows.  
The sun sank behind glass and gas, to fry  
Columns of cloud refracting solar throes.  
As artists weave uneven coats of shade  
And spatter hues in stripy fold on fold,  
The afternoon's brisk chaos circus sprayed  
Layers of blue and white and airy gold.  
Prisms of moisture, marble temples light,  
Beaming fingers, bid the star light star dust.  
The crown of heavens bursts across the height;  
And twirling in the ragged gilded gust,  
    A tiny flyer played upon the grand  
    Riot of glory, namesake of the land.

# The Enemy of My Enemy Is Not My Friend

by Conner Dolezal

The other day at my barely-above-minimum-wage retail job at a twenty-four-hour grocery store, some lady complained to me that I was “talking smack” about the customers and she could hear very well. “You said we were all stupid,” she said. “And I am-- I’m not stupid. I did just fine.” She went on to talk about herself and her honest accomplishments and to be honest I stopped listening. It was a gaffe on my part to be talking so loud, sure, but I didn’t get why she was offended. I mean, isn’t everyone a customer at a grocery store? What kind of person *isn’t*? I can only think of a few out of the people I know. Like one of my high school friends, who hasn’t had a job in five years and has spent the last three moving between basements (sometimes attics, in all fairness), getting high, and calling people on the internet various slurs (maybe just “bitch” if he’s feeling PG). Another high school friend of mine hasn’t gone to the grocery store in years because her entire caloric intake is met by alcohol. A co-worker actually doesn’t ever shop at the store, because he goes out to eat lunch on break from his full-time job and grabs fast food for dinner on the way to the grocery store. On the weekends he eats at a bar. He doesn’t have any kids or family at home anymore who would eat the groceries, so he just doesn’t buy any. I can’t imagine any recent U.S. president has, either.

Regardless, I think it’s fair to say that *most* people are groceries store customers, at least sometimes. For some people, it’s a couple times a day. So why are they all idiots? And why am I, much more wise and knowledgeable than they could even aspire to be, working for them?

First, it’s important to know that everyone fits into one of two categories, as per retail worker tradition: the total jackasses and the regular assholes. You might not think you’re either, but you are. I am too, if it makes you feel any better. With all the annoyance I give to my local comic book and paperback stores, I may very well be a jackass myself.

Anyways, the total jackasses are the scammers and the “I-want-to-talk-to-your-manager”’s and the belittlers. It’s impossible to tell one apart on first glance. No matter others’ thoughts on the matter, retail work proves one thing: neither education nor wealth affect how considerate someone is. Assholes come in all sizes of pocketbooks. There’s no guarantee that the college-educated suit-wearing man in his fifties will be any nicer than the single mother who tried to steal baby formula a week ago. In fact, he’s probably the real jerk.

Shoplifters may make a small dent on the store's profitability, therefore theoretically giving the company less money to pay me, but it doesn't *really* work that way. Any shoplifted item is reported as damaged to Corporate, and our store is 'credited' for it, transferring responsibility to Corporate. This means that not only does a shoplifter in the store I work at affect *me* just as much as a shoplifter five counties away, it is also basically negligible. Even a few cans of \$20 formula is unnoticeable for a company with hundreds of locations that each see a few dozen thousand dollars in sales even on a snowy Tuesday in January. The prick that glares at me like I'm inbred or something when I take a few seconds to do a three digit subtraction problem in my head after he forgot about a promotional discount he meant to use, however, affects me very much.

Thus, retail worker tradition insists that someone in a similar socioeconomic position-- i.e. young and in debt-- should be understanding to a poor retail worker such as myself, but alas this is not even always the case either.

That said, being old and rich doesn't automatically make someone buffoonish, despite what tradition may say. One of the first nights I worked the late night-- five PM to one AM-- shift, the overnight-- eleven PM to seven AM-- cashier asked me if I saw a larger man wearing a cowboy hat come in. I had. "That's Famous Dave. Don't say anything about it to him though, he doesn't like it when people recognize him," he said. Famous Dave is the founder and former owner of Famous Dave's, a regional barbecue restaurant chain. I have no idea how he knew this, but a quick internet image search confirmed it to be true. A few minutes later, the unkempt-looking man that the overnight cashier described came to my register to check out his things. He bought a couple of frozen pizzas and a rack of ribs. He was wearing a Famous Dave host uniform and didn't say anything except to ask if our credit card terminal was an "insert or slide" style and "thanks" when I gave him his receipt. Famous Dave looked depressed the whole time I saw him, like he just wanted to be Regular Dave. Anyways, he was pretty nice for a guy that sold a multimillion dollar company in the past few years.

Secondly, as per retail worker tradition, all co-workers are placed into the "jackass" category by default. Not all co-workers are jackasses, but they might as well be until proven otherwise. A customer once told me that before being hired, all retail employees at big corporations are given psych evals before hire and then placed alongside other personalities that they won't get along with.

He was one of the people that walks in with a hiking backpack and talks to everyone they walk by about their wild theories of corporate maliciousness-- a surprisingly common archetype, although sometimes they just want to talk about golf. If it weren't for the gaping holes and complete implausibility of this conspiracy, I would've believed him. The other employees are enemy number two of any retail job, right behind the customers. They'll take twice as long in the bathroom just out of spite, or call in sick to work with stomach bleeding only to return the next day. Let me put it this way: since I started working at the grocery store part-time over two years ago, three people have been fired. One, right after I started, was caught on camera lifting twenties and fifties out of the drawers for months. The second was fired after having over one hundred call-ins in a year. The third, just recently, was canned after forging a doctor's note that said he was only available certain hours. Since the store managers couldn't prove it, he was technically fired for shopping on the clock. Anyone better at doing their job than that-- or at least better at not getting caught not doing their job-- gets to stay until they're sick of it.

People seem to get a lot of joy out of explaining why retail store employees can be so difficult-- even though I only get depressed when I try to do the same for customers. Poor people are dumb! Young people are lazy! Vice versa and etcetera. Yelp reviews and angry Facebook comments explain these hypotheses. As an insider, I can say with certainty that these allegations are not true, or at the very least they are irrelevant. For one, not all people that work at my grocery store-- or at similar low-paying jobs-- are young or poor. There are plenty of middle-age and/or middle-class people that for various reasons seek a job like mine. Some people work multiple part-time jobs for within a couple dollars of minimum wage for their entire adult lives. There are also many middle-class employees just looking for extra cash in addition to their day job. Some are even just looking to supplement their Social Security. For these employees, grocery store work is seemingly like a fun camp where they can flirt with unsuspecting victims *and* get paid. The root of the, ahem, "co-worker problem" thus cannot be something like class or age, and is certainly not race or gender related as some people like to believe. Since I am doing low-earning uneducated work to support myself, I realize I obviously can't be trusted to know the answers to things like this, but my guess as to why many retail workers are so hard to work with-- and sure, deal with in general-- is that it has something to do with not earning a livable wage and high turnover rates that are completely driven by employee resignation.

Customer behavior, however, is hard to explain. Why would someone tell a stranger they might be as pretty as their co-worker if they wore make-up?

Why would someone tell a stranger that there was no way “someone like them” could be a manager? Why would someone pull out a knife over \$20 in shoplifted chips? Why would a middle-class soccer mom insult a teenage girl until she cries? Some things in life are just unexplainable, like quantum entanglement, the non-existence of time before the Big Bang, and the continued existence of coupons. Asshole customers may not be one of these things.

As easy as it is to cynically extrapolate the phenomenon of asshole customers onto an asshole humanity, this may not be wholly accurate. The entire interaction of store representative and customer is doomed from the onset; it's inherently antagonistic. There can be no trust between the two parties. The store employee is obligated to charge as much money for as little product as possible, at least in the customer's eyes. Accusations of intentional overcharging and fingers-on-the-scale are common, even against part-time employees who get paid the same amount whether they charge \$5, \$6, or \$12 for a bag of grapes. To the employee, the customer is a Schroedinger's thief; they may be or may not be trying to steal something, so it's best to be on guard. If there's one thing that's rude and indecent, it's trying to outsmart someone. Thus, the customer and employee are pitted against each other by their mutual fear of being ripped off. Being dumber than a cashier is, presumably, seen as unthinkable. Being dumber than a customer even more so. Neither party can risk letting their guard down; thus, hostility brews. Through all of this, in the shadowy background one entity is actually literally ripping off both sides. Yet instead of being united by their true mutual enemy-- and that is of course store itself-- the two parties are, tragically, destined to feud.

# Please Think Twice, None of this is Alright

by Seth Thill

I drove to her house at 2 AM to find her  
lying on the front lawn in a black lace dress caked in dirt,  
long, unruly blue hairs covering her face,  
sticking to her lips as she tried,  
to explain what was wrong  
when I asked. She kept mumbling "Everything."  
The smell of Sailor Jerry's on her breath,  
penetrating the summer air, reminded me  
of the charcoal taste on my tongue in the ER  
on the nights where I believed everything was wrong.  
But with menthol smoke blowing out my nose  
like a junkie dragon, I gave her all those lines,  
I've been told before. "It will all be okay some day"  
"You are not your mistakes,"  
all that Chicken Soup for the soul bullshit  
that never meant anything, but sounded nice.  
And when she said she wanted  
to go inside, I carried her in,  
like a strung out Superman,  
or maybe just a bloated twenty something  
in a Superman t shirt,  
and set her on the couch,  
got her a blanket and water, and kept trying  
to talk her down until she fell asleep.  
I sat awake on a piano bench  
all night, making sure she didn't turn  
onto her back or stop breathing,  
watching her the way I've been watched before,  
and all night I wondered,  
What happens when both of our everythings are wrong  
at the same time?

# Edina Parks and Rec.

by Conner Dolezal

I moved to the city of Edina in the summer of 2011, not long after a stint in the hospital and a bit of a downspell. I've never been a sporty or outdoorsy person, but the hospital stay got me antsy. After I got out, I would wake up around eleven, take a shower, and take the half mile walk to the bridge. Sometimes I'd walk past the bridge to the park on the other side, but usually I didn't go much further. If it had been particularly wet the past few days, the creek would swell to just under the bridge. For a few days that summer, the water was so high it washed over the wood boards and the sweaty smell of soaked wood wafted out of them. To cross on those days, I inched across the railing, one foot at a time, staring down at my murky brown reflection. Most of the summer however was pretty dry, and the creek stayed near to its base. The bridge was planted right above a small drop-off in the river, and when the water was light it rolled through a line of rocks. The sound of my own little waterfall echoed through the riverbank clearing. On these days, I spent a few minutes carefully crossing along these rocks. I would stare into the shallow water and watch the dirt and stones roll along the riverbed. Fish avoided this section of the river during these dry spells for obvious reasons. The only animals I ever saw were ducks about 15 yards downstream. They didn't pay much attention to me, only leaving when they gave up on finding food. I don't remember any people ever stumbling by either. If they did, they said nothing to me. It was my lonely place in an unfriendly city; it was peaceful.

The Minneapolis suburb has a reputation, for better or worse-- mostly for worse. Edina High School may be the highest ranked high school in the state of Minnesota according to several sources, but hard work and disciplined study are not really traits of the stereotypical Edinian. Edina is mostly known around the suburbs of Minneapolis and St. Paul for pretentiousness, homogeneousness, and teen drug abuse. Don't get me wrong, these stereotypes do have a strong basis in reality. But there's a little more to the city than pompous white assholes. Perhaps in part because of the city's relative wealth, Edina is host to expansive parks and trails, some of which are very serene.



From the rolling snow-capped hills of Braemar Park in the winter, to the (relatively) majestic Centennial Lakes corporate garden, to the new trail along Nine Mile Creek, it's actually not a bad place to be-- if you can avoid other people.

That said, the outdoors of Edina are easily overshadowed by its neighbors, and for good reason. There's no Lake Minnetonka, Minnehaha Falls, or Hyland Hills, and there's certainly no North Shore, Iron Range, or St. Croix Riverbank. None of the city's beautiful spots are apparent, other than maybe Centennial Lakes; most of these are hidden away behind suburban McMansions, like the wooded area along Nine Mile Creek or the entirety of Bredesen Park-- acres of rolling hills and forested area, just far away enough from the roads and the highway and the cars and the muck to keep it beautiful through the winter. There's a parking lot and sign, sure, but tucked away on the quietest side of the park.

Given the city's history, it's almost plausible that their outdoor walkways are purposely hidden; most of the noteworthy events in Edina's 150 year history stem from exclusionary practices of the city. The Morningside neighborhood seceded from the rest of the city in 1920 because the district was rapidly expanding in population and the citizens demanded more city services. The rest of Edina refused because they wanted the then-small community to remain rural. In the years just before and especially after Morningside left, racial discrimination and deed restrictions became more and more common in what had once been a markedly diverse Quaker village. After the Supreme Court forbade racial deed restrictions in 1948, the city of Edina still did its darndest to keep the city closed off to black and Jewish people until at least the 1960s. Even today, Edina still doesn't have the best relationship with outsiders; the school's open enrollment waitlist is somewhat infamous.

Being in the company of a bunch of jackass WASPs is almost an essential part of living in Edina; me and many of my friends from high school are quick to remind people we didn't always live in Edina. It's hard to ignore the city's reputation, even tucked away in its forests. This is especially so for me walking along the new 25 million dollar Nine Mile Creek Trail.

When the Three Rivers Park District (made up of the cities of Hopkins, Minnetonka, Richfield, Bloomington, and obviously Edina) built the new paved path, they 'dozed out the old wooden bridge that had been there since (decades) before I moved to the area.

I still journey to that bridge over the creek from time to time. On the first snowfall one year, I walked over the bridge on one of my first dates with a girl I had had a crush on in high school. After crossing the bridge, we walked along the riverbank. In summer, the whole bank is overgrown and riddled with mosquitos-- which is why I didn't stray too far from the bridge in 2011. In winter, the whole view is just quiet, embodied. The only sound was our footsteps crunching and packing down the fresh, soft snow and the familiar white noise of water rolling over an obstacle-- frozen water, in this case. It was the calmest I've been in years.

The wooden bridge, the rocky drop off, and the curvy, overgrown riverbank are all gone now. Along one bank is a giant fenced wooden walkway that stretches for miles in each direction. To me, the new bridge is ugly and it reminds of the pretentious, faux-friendly smiles I perceived often after entering high school. It might just be the smug modernity I can't help but see in it. But in reality, this is just my view of it. The trees are still there. The creek is still audibly rolling over the rocky riverbed. The water still offers a murky reflection. Hell, there's still an overgrown bank, it's just on the other side. In theory, a paved walkway will only encourage more people to enjoy nature.

Really, Edina might not be that bad, all in all. Although all of my high school friends left the suburb as soon as they got an inkling of a chance, I do know some people who actually like living in Edina. My neighbor across the street grew up in Edina. She left for a few years and lived in Costa Rica, where she met her husband. Then she moved back and had three kids that went to Edina High School. My neighbor next door can hardly walk and his bones are too old and weak for anymore Minnesota Winters. But for some reason, he manages to get on a plane twice a year and spend the summer here. As infamous as Edina is-- and despite how awful it has been in the past-- there's obviously something nice in the city. Past the judgment and pretension, there's some kind of peace to be found.

# On July

by Jane O'Shea

Fieldwork

Sun burns like a branding iron  
sauteing skin red and crisp

Fat melts and slips  
away like  
white hot wax  
under flame

Her waist  
Lengthens  
a striped cat stretched out  
on the hearth

She pulls in her belly  
calloused fingers  
tracing slim lines  
lost for decades in gestation,  
wine, mayonnaise,  
and butter

Her hips find sway again,  
rocking gently,  
a rowboat  
caressing a lake.

More cello now  
than violin,  
her menopausal shadow  
precedes her

a porch swing  
stroking the firefly hour  
of a midsummer impasse

Hollow shadows

Rippling  
over weathered wooden  
steps

# Guardian Angels Don't Exist

by Seth Thill

*For Nicole*

Mom is convinced that you were watching over Highway 58 today.  
That as soon as the front end of that blood red ford  
Forced itself into my backseat, you were there,  
directing the glass shards from my shattered back windshield away  
from the delirium bouncing back and forth in my guard less head  
and securing me in your arms, keeping me still enough  
To come away with nothing but a mild concussion and a sprained  
neck.

I don't think that's what happened.  
I know there is nothing cosmic about my well-being.  
I can't help but wonder though,  
if you were there,  
where else have you been?

Were you there when I was bleeding from my nose  
so profusely that my shaky hands became red as  
broken down fire trucks while I lied on the top level  
of a parking ramp across the street from a McDonald's,  
coming down from a coke high?

Were you there when I was wasted On the sidewalk  
in front of Mom and Dad's house at three PM on a September  
Tuesday,  
crying and puking as Josh and Ryan tried  
To get me inside, begging me to say anything?  
Were you somewhere in the red and blue flashes  
Or in the sirens coming from the ambulance?  
Were you sitting at my bedside later that night  
making sure I woke up?  
Or were you the charcoal that purged my stomach?

Were you ashamed of me, Nicole?

What were you thinking when I was blacked out in a November  
freeze, lying in a five-foot hole in the construction zone on Merner?

If you are protecting me,  
Do you ever get tired of it?  
Of me?

Do you only see me?  
Or do you see everything?  
Were you there in Ferguson performing unsuccessful CPR On  
Michael Brown,  
or floating above the riots in solidarity  
with the thousands who were told that the very gift you had taken  
away from you  
meant less for them because of the color of their skin?

Were you in Orlando  
directing the frantic survivors  
Who wanted nothing more than to dance  
and instead had to watch the ones they love  
die because they loved them?

Why could you save me,  
but not them?

I know you're not really there, Nicole  
but I know why Mom believes you are,  
because after all of the blood,  
the blood that we shared before  
It stopped coursing through your tiny body,  
has poured from my rattlesnake veins  
I am allowed to stay here.

Puking in an alley somewhere  
while thousands march on Washington,  
hand in hand screaming that they will not  
stand by silently while their brothers and sisters  
are systemically told they do not matter.

Nicole, I want to scream with them  
because you never got the chance to.

Nicole, I'm tired of whimpering.  
So I'm getting in my rental car  
and I am driving as far as I can.  
Wherever I am needed.  
Wherever you are needed

I'll take Highway 58  
as far as it will take me  
and wherever I stop,  
I promise I will join the tired, angry masses.  
hold their hands and scream with them.  
A scream that belongs to you

# A Conversation between Poets

by Amie Stager

"I believe in many things,  
but it's you  
you make me question  
it all

you  
are something else  
entirely.

Will you ever forgive me?"

*"For what, my dear?"*

"For burdening you with this heavy, heaving heart of mine?"

(The universe pauses, waiting for an answer)

*"It is you that must forgive me!  
We are all broken things,  
We have our ways to mend,  
to fix, to fill the cracks,*

*don't flee when I tell you  
that you make me feel less cracked, less empty, less broken*

*when I'm with you, I feel unbreakable.*

*I need you,  
but if you find that you need to,  
leave me with that heavy, heaving heart of yours  
and never look back.*

*Forgive me for needing you more than you will ever need me."*

(The wind blows)

"Can you feel it?"



*"Feel what?"*

"It's in the air.  
There is a darkness that can be felt,  
do you feel it, too?"

(The universe waits)

# We Have Resolved to Climb Mountains Together

by Isabel Taylor

We have resolved to climb *mountains* together.  
One night we in union, while smashed upon heartbreak,  
Swore blue and blood oaths against unending weather,  
Then found, in the crush of our hungover daybreak,  
The mountains we drunk-dreamed had risen (from aether?)  
With us halfway up and unsurely awake;  
And the baggage we lugged in the dust of our heels  
Was trappings for storming these native bastilles.

We have resolved to climb mountains *together*.  
Our kinship knows peaks that stand different to all:  
Some clouded and woven with endless thick heather,  
Some lightninged and sheer as a borderline wall;  
We each climb alone through the empty forever,  
And know that no other surveys the same sprawl.  
We gazed across gapes, and we knew the estrange.  
If not the same mountain - at least the same range?

We have resolved to climb mountains together.  
The distance would make of us firmament isles,  
If not for the conference of birds of a feather  
Implying distress in their separate trials,  
Or else for a time in clear trails or clime better,  
All telephoned through the network of exiles.  
Among all the specters whose voices convene,  
Our leaders are those who ring loudest between:

We *have* resolved to climb mountains together.  
We are struggling not to leave any man frozen  
Behind with the bleak judgment (obdurate ever):  
This is not the mountain that you would have chosen.  
Speak not of the mountain, no, better to bletcher  
Than to whisper the name of the bite that blows in.  
There are darker days swarming across the broad fault.  
No matter what gospel the mountains exalt,

We have *resolved* to climb mountains together.  
Up towering spires, gardens gleaming with snow,  
While blind unseen eyeballs roll down to veiled nether.

Try not to knock rocks onto heads camped below.  
To take the clear down-route: the question is whether  
Range-rumours betray us: would anyone know?  
The new desperadoes, all posthumous chides,  
Realize and are realized by tempting divides.

We have resolved to *climb* mountains together.  
So others might sidestep this bitter knife's edge  
(For others with similar mountains), our leather  
Cartographic memoirs are mapping this ledge.  
Though at times we may walk without way whatsoever,  
Assume us afar from the deaths depths allege.  
We are with the mountain, and quartered thereof;  
So long's the molehill looms unconquered above,

*We have resolved to climb mountains together.*

Reality broke with the second blue dawn:  
The heavens colluded our concord to sever,  
Through fall or descent, void would will all be gone;  
But make the barbarian mountain your tether,  
Squint into tomorrow, I pray you *hold on* –  
Learn to breathe the thin air at the lid of this sphere:  
You were made to climb yet other mountains, my dear.

# Möbius Stripped

by Jerry Carrier

Sometimes imprisoned in the mad moments of the  
melancholy maiden,  
with her ember red hair wrapped in wily wonder around my neck,  
and her death green pale palaver and persistent cold smile,  
I am thankful for dark cobalt blue shadows that swallow me.

I wake and feel weary wooden upon a bed of wadding,  
suffering a forgetfulness of faith and loss to myself, the unfair fabler,  
a writer of wicked weariness my journal cannot hold more  
of the songs of sorrow or sonnets of tears and sighs.

Flicks of moving pictures from a fractured film noir,  
do these belong to each of us or others?  
What are the odds that my pitiful life is a singular and purposeful  
possession?  
What are the chances that life is just grousing group therapy to  
amuse the gods?

Are time and life's moments as Hawking says like a giant möbius  
strip,  
which leads us on in an endless loop linking our yesterday to our  
tomorrow?  
Mocking our future and reliving our history and weaving both into a  
schizoid present.  
Yes, I am sometimes imprisoned in the mad moments of the  
melancholy maiden.

# In Motion

by Haley Sargent



# Aftermath

by Jane O'Shea

She passed on a Thursday morning in late October,  
when leaves and Mothers dry up and fly away on the wind.  
Her heart stopped, but her clear white essence lingered  
in that sobbing Hades they call hospice.

Her ascending spirit defined joy, screamed joy, burst with ecstasy.  
Entered my toes. Became me. Lifted me.

High.

I never lie,

I felt eternity.

I smiled as Her perfect soul hobnobbed with mine.

My Mother Angel.

The light vanished, Mom was gone, room cold, Mom went cold. Still.  
Bullshit that she is better off. That's just crap people say.

I want her back.

Nine and twenty years later the pain remains.

Does heaven have visiting hours?

Six till eight? I will be on time.

Do not dash your foot against a single sharp stone,  
Mother Angel.

I am so so so so sorry I could not save You.

Wings and halo, they suit You so.

If I close my eyes I can still feel your luminescent.

Black grief washed back, backwashed over the light as it faded  
Murky brackish, blackish swampwater iced with grody green algae.

Puky green, slimy green, pucey tentacles slipped around my throat.

I drowned.

My deathwish was my salvation.

I galloped my mad, chryptorchid, devil-eyed Arabian steed

Pell-mell

Down sharp, stony, gravel roads.

Not a single tiny rock dashed his cloven hooves.  
In February he slipped on the gritty slushy gravelly.

My teeth shattered. My jaw split. I bled.  
A novice doc with a sharp stitched my chin tear.  
The dentist collected a fortune piecing my molars  
back together.

I hopped blind out of a tattered, battered bi-plane over Berlin.  
A handsome German strapped to my terror.  
I hoped the parachute would not unfurl.  
It did.  
Freefall was a baby step closer to where she went.  
Slamming into the earth would have been a pleasure

I cremated my Jetta, my baby. Meine kleine deutsche Freundin.  
She whirled out of control.  
The radiator accordioned to the windscreen where my head  
slammed.  
My bones were smithereens. They stitched me back together.  
Jetta went to the graveyard where dead cars go.  
A secret dimebag of Mary Jane still stashed in the glovebox.  
I wonder still if Jetta saw the light.

I can still write, therefore I live.

# Hard Knocks

by Emily Pearson

I found a spot a ways upstream from our campsite that had two giant boulders that bottlenecked the river. It was the perfect location for unsupervised horseplay. I'd seen my father jump from a bridge into a river earlier that summer and knew it was a respectable source of fun.

My father more fell than dove off the railing of the bridge. His swaying friends clapping, hand against can, from the riverbank at his back flip turned belly flop. His friends even convinced me to take the leap. At nine I was fearless, and had better dismount than my father. I landed well, their waiting hands ready to pull me up.

So, it wasn't my first rodeo and I knew I would be fine to jump into this river.

Dismount flawless, as expected.

Landing, a bit more unexpected. Bare feet flailed searching for soft riverbed. Instead found a cold insistent shove. My head surfaced for flashing moments, moments too short to take the breath I ached for.

At nine I hadn't ever considered death, I had never lost a dog to Rainbow Bridge or a family member to a Better Place. My body seemed to know. It fought for me.

I felt the smooth river rocks jam my toes, then my shins and knees, climbing up my body. Bruises that took a back seat to the electric vibration of a panic that seemed to have replaced my bones. Able to breathe again for a second or two I desperately grasped for the slimy rocks that went by too fast. At that moment I glanced to the river's edge just in time to see my father fast asleep on his camping chair, a bottle in his hand. My senses seemed to shut down. I didn't take in the scenery. I didn't taste the water. I didn't feel pain. All that registered in my mind was: breath. Something I once took for granted was repeatedly being robbed from me.



“Help.” I cried out, or more attempted to cry out. Whether it was the freezing of the water or the foreign reactions my panic seemed to have on my body, my cry came out more as a croak. I was quickly swept further down the river, body ungracefully bouncing from rock to rock.

Someone didn’t come to rescue me, a tree branch didn’t reach out at just the right moment. I held out long enough, the river allowed me to stand up on bruised, bloodied feet and stumble free.

# Genocidal Survivors

by Isabelle Brave Heart

They call me Brave Heart  
Not because of my courage but because it is my last name  
And not because I "like" Mel Gibson that much but because it is  
how I was raised.  
Half black and native girl raised on the Reservation  
With the beautiful people of The Oglala Lakota Nation.  
Two times their tone  
as a dark girl among Natives I was taught to hold my own.  
You see it is the two worlds that brought me light  
And it is my last name that gives me the strength to fight.  
They call me Brave Heart  
Like the beat of a drum  
And the hold of a knot, my destiny cannot be undone.  
High centered in between  
A mixture of African decent and Indigenous being.  
I see the greater picture  
And I write the words to my own scripture.  
I feel the power of my ancestors blood through my veins  
And I scream out their existence in my last name. LILILILILILI  
I was shackled and beaten as my African mothers  
And I share in the pain of the slave trade with my sisters and  
brothers  
Our truths will prevail through HISTory,  
And we will restore our Ancestors glory.  
They call me Brave Heart  
But my skin and biracial split aren't what separate me from the rest  
I just know that born into this life I am blessed  
I am grateful for those who fought for me and our bloodline to pull  
through  
And I am here today to fight for them too.  
You cannot defeat those who are not afraid to die,  
And you cannot fool those who see through lies.  
Although we were hit with everything from slavery to genocide  
they could still never kill Our Native and Black pride.  
We know exactly who we are  
Because the blood in us proves our ancestors pushed us far.  
It is not over for us

We have refilled our cup,  
So no matter how much you knock us down we will  
Stand back up.  
They call us Brave Hearts.

Akiza - a war cry used to celebrate the spirit of our ancestors and  
their fight- LILILILLI

# On a Crisis of History

by Isabel Taylor

*For T. J.*

There must come a reckoning with every ancestry untamed;  
Predecessors beckoning are by their enigmas defamed.  
Through back alleys of their souls, ugliness stirs hurt confusion:  
Leaves us acting risky roles, fearing being young illusion;

Oh ye of little history! You moth-marked holey patchwork folk,  
You worshippers of mystery, you've lost the fire for the smoke;  
You wonder how we dared adapt to gaining light on dim account,  
With comprehension handicapped where faulty narratives dismount.

We take history like faith, on hearsay of heresiarchs,  
And dance with every holy wraith in fleet exchange for higher  
sparks:  
As hermeneutics ramify, more revelations canon brooks,  
And scholars map and mummify each faithful sketch in endless  
Books.

Even corpses roll and shiver at the touch of roach on skin;  
Controversy's slow to wither as the insect's ever been.  
Evil men are ever fading -- crude untested malcontents --As scuttling  
on fame degrading raises relic revenants.

Shadows, deep enough for drowning, loiter longer, drawn to  
haunting.  
Champions, too grand for downing, yet in aspects virtue wanting:  
Hypocrite! Forsaken lover, there's no humor in thy sinnings;  
Said one thing and did another; base returns for high beginnings.

Sacred cow nor sacred jackass; prototypes in deep descension;  
Greater good and banal trespass done in day with like intention;  
Pick a critical perspective: charms or words or deeds or aims,  
Wrestle down the form subjective -- one step from consigned to  
flames --

Damn their legacies and cautions! Knew they as they drew their wills

How time crystal focus softens? Knew they history moves hills?  
Knew they all their careful crafting whittles down to motley scraps?  
Contradictory vignettes are grafting fault into the gaps.

Shall we view them with indulgence? Shall we autopsy our Fathers?  
Every cipher and divulgence lionized depictions bothers;  
They have left us, judge and jury, probate to their Declarations:  
Doomed their half-blind kin to fury, deicide, and all frustrations.

Would that all their flaws and triumphs came up shorter in review!  
Would the fault were given quarter: "Do as they say, not as they do."  
Revisionists! Your lady's calls are audit, balance, try, appraise;  
We amateurs are sick of walls; of minefield, paradox, and maze.

# Willows in November

by Jane O'Shea

Great leafy bison  
hunched over in the bitter wind,  
squinting into the blizzard.

Rippling blond dreadlocks,  
Undulating  
lemon light and saffron shadow

Mocking naked elm and maple  
Earhtone grasses underfoot  
needling quivering shrubbery

Shaggy golden beasts  
charging into winter solstice  
leaning into death

# A Minute Story

by Malenie Ven

Nothing about her is significant. The stature she takes on is filled with rigidness yet shriveling upon itself like wilted leaves with every passerby that comes within close proximity. The man observes her cycle of wilting and turning to stone half with amusement, the other with irritability. *It's a train station.* He thinks to himself as her dirty white converses teeter on the edge of the yellow safety line. *Either you get on or you leave.*

She then shifts her carry-on to the other shoulder. It's a dusty brown thing, like her hair, too small for a vacation and too big for her to get back to wherever she calls home any time soon.

In the midst of shuffling passengers, he notices that she is now standing a mere foot to his left. He can make now out her features. Big brown eyes framed with eyelashes heavily coated in mascara...or were they hazel? She peers toward his direction and the man decides that they were indeed brown. Like a smooth stone or the dark wood at his mother's home. The fullness of her tinted pink cheeks hinted at wonderfully ambiguous girlhood, something he didn't get to see often at the office.

She was, in every sense of the word, pretty. Beautiful even, if seen in the right light. But her movement made it evidently clear: Never had he seen someone look so lost in their own skin before. He wonders what she does for a living. Or did she still go to school? Or was she visiting her boyfriend in the city? His eyes linger as he checks the watch on her wrist.

Checking the time. Something the man knows he doesn't have to do anymore.

The man knows that his ride will come at 8:05 am. And he will board with his clutched suitcase, darting between exiting passengers, securing a spot; preferably one in a corner that would grant him the least amount of unwanted contact and talk. He will then arrive at his desk by 9:00 am, just like any other 9:00 ams he's had for as long as he's remembered.

Pressure sits uncomfortably on his sternum and he rubs subconsciously at his chest as if to grind it away. He glances back at her, almost with accusation. She was one of those kind of people, and he knew it. The kind that didn't know a damn about living and took faltering steps into the future with *stupid* convictions and *stupid* dreams. He might've once remembered that fleetingness in his life twenty years ago but that was long gone now. Dissipated.

A gust of humidity signals the arrival of a train startling the man out of his stupor.

*Time already?*

Pausing before the open doors, he takes one more look at the girl with strange hope. Maybe she had the same ride, or would even get on the same car where she'll accidentally stumble into him and they'll share apologies. He will then casually say how in his youth he was never seen without wearing a pair of converse, but changed them for the big boy shoes, the money-maker shoes. She'll ask what he does for a living while twirling a lock of her chestnut hair. Secretly pleased, he'll list all of his accomplishments, all completed by an impressive age with youthful vigor. She'll be in awe. Something warm and unexpected fills his belly.

But she doesn't. She moves away the exit with her grimy old bag and all sense of what-ifs and maybes along with her.

The man boards the train.



# Dipshit

by Seth Thill

I always thought I'd feel like James Bond or John Rambo  
if I grabbed a knife from the shaky hands  
of a strung out meth addict, threatening my life  
for spilling beer on his torn up boots.  
But as I sucked the blood out of my thumb  
and nursing the wound with the hot stench  
of Jack Daniels exiting my cottony mouth,  
I just kind of felt like the kind of dipshit  
who frequents parties where the weed  
is laced and no one tells you,  
the bathroom becomes the coke room,  
and strung out meth addicts pull knives  
for spilling beer on their boot.

# Charred Gloom Pantoum

by Nicole Middendorf

Whispers from the ghosts of my black past thicken the air of which I  
breathe.

They hold me down with iron chains.

Hours pass by like infinite nights. I can taste my fear

As I try not to choke on the smoke.

They hold me down with iron chains;

They restrict my freedom with fire in their eyes.

As I try not to choke on the smoke,

I turn my head away, so my eyes will never meet theirs.

They restrict my freedom. With fire in their eyes,

I can see them grin ear to ear, as they eagerly ask me, why

I turn my head away, so my eyes will never meet theirs.

I pilfer one of their cigarettes and tell them "I have died some time  
ago."

I can see them grin ear to ear, as they ask me

About my distaste of the nearing future; "Why are you afraid, child?"

I pilfer one of their cigarettes and tell them "I hold onto what hurts  
me,"

And the whispers from the ghosts of my black past still thicken the  
air of which I breathe.

# The Challenge

by Dan Mathison

The computer I was working on decided to restart. I sat through the restart, tapping my fingers anxiously on the desktop, only to find out that the computer wouldn't turn back on. I had lost the five hundred words in the chapter I had been working on. This could not be happening, not today, on the last day with a few hours left. I had to think of a plan, and fast.

Ever heard of National Novel Writing Month, or rather NaNoWriMo? It's this online event that's held every year for aspiring writers to hone their novel-writing craft. The goal is to write 50,000 words in a month for one big project of your own devising, and if you manage to write the fifty grand, you win. You don't get much, just bragging rights mostly, and a certificate if I recall correctly. Sadly, I was not doing that. For one, writing 50,000 words in one month is an insane idea, and two, if a person does the math, that meant if I had done the event, I would've had to write 1,667 words every single day for an entire month, and three, the event takes place in November, at which time I'd be in my college studies.

What I did was a challenge very similar to NaNoWriMo. I'm a member of a forum on theFanfiction.net site, and this last summer, one of our own proposed a challenge to us. All of us had been lacking in writing words recently, and few of us had done Camp NaNoWriMo, a similar thing to National Novel Writing Month with no set word threshold, so one of us got the bright idea to bring Camp NaNoWriMo to our forum so we could all get back into our writing habits. Considering I had slipped upon my own writing agenda in the past few months, I jumped at the chance to have some sort of motivation to write. The challenge was outlined as this: from June 1st to August 31st, we were to write as many words as we could in the span of those three months. Some of us, including me, decided to try for the 50,000 word goal that the actual event had, a few were crazy enough to try double that, and everyone else just set their own goal, whether it was above 50,000 or not. It seemed easy enough onscreen, to meet the word goal, a person had to write at least 544 words a day for ninety-two days

straight. Since I was home all day for the majority of the summer due to me not having a job, it seemed like something I could manage.

Starting out on the first day of June, everything seemed to be going well. Before the challenge started, I made plans of what I was going to write for my projects that the challenge would be encompassing. I had rough ideas for chapters down the line, outlines for upcoming chapters, and I had thoughts in my head on how to transfer mental images into words. My strategy is one a friend came up with months ago for their own main writing project, which had a similar format to my own. Because our fanfiction projects followed canon material, like *Total Drama*, we used videos of it for guidelines, outlined our setups, and wrote everything in between.

I sat down in the recliner chair, resting my laptop in my lap before I reached down over the side of the seat to pull the lever that kicked up the leg support. Upon logging into my laptop, I opened up a Word document containing my current project, a story about a pair of underdog characters, two of the earliest eliminated from the race *Total Drama* was having, getting further than they got. A glance at the clock. Ten-thirty a.m., okay, let's get started. I brought up a video on Youtube, and hit the play button.

*"Why are they so fast?!"*

*Tom and Jen ran towards the Chill Zone, and the Daters, Stephanie and Ryan, were hot on their tails and getting closer. The Chill Zone was coming up fast.*

*"I don't know!" Jen answered her partner's question anxiously. She gasped, and looked to the top of her head. "Tom, the hats! We're running slow enough so we don't lose them! We have to ditch the fezzes!"*

*"What?! But-!" Tom sputtered, but was quickly cut off.*

*"Tom, it's for the blog! Besides, we'll still have four thousand more when we get home." She insisted.*

*Tom groaned. "Oh... you're right."*

*Taking his fez off, he gave it an apologetic glance. "I'm sorry about this..." Biting his lower lip regrettably, he threw the fez behind him. Beside him, Jen took off hers and quickly tossed it back.*

*Tom's fez sailed through the air, and smacked Ryan in the face.*

*"Hey!" The bodybuilder snapped. "Watch where you're throwing- ah!"*

*He exclaimed as Jen's also hit him, but slightly lower than Tom's. Jen glanced behind her, and saw that the Daters were still close behind. "Hurry!" She cried out, and she and Tom did the best to pick up the pace.*

*The Chill Zone neared, and Don stood there, ready to greet the remaining teams while Crimson and Ennui just walked off the carpet. The host smiled a few moments later and said, "Thirteenth, you're still in the race."*

*Tom blinked once and asked, "We did it?" He broke into a smile, and glanced at his partner. "We did it! We're still in the race!" He exclaimed. "I always want to work with you, Jen."*

*"I feel the same way, Tom!" Jen responded with a smile, and the Bloggers hugged.*

That first day, I wrote. I wrote from the moment I had finished having breakfast, getting dressed, and brushing my teeth to the time my dad came home from work. By the time I had gotten to my stopping point for the day, it was almost four p.m., and I had written maybe quadruple the minimum daily amount. My shoulders slouched in relief when I saved the document, and retired from writing the rest of the day. I was off to a good start; I had written 2,164 words. That was 2,164 words written, and 47,836 words to go.

With how far I was after the first day, I felt I could spare a day of leisure so I could relax and plan for the next writing session. I spent that day watching TV, doing the chores I had that day, and outlining what I would be writing the next day. The next day yielded an amount of writing much closer to the daily minimum, 627 words. That number of words wrapped up the chapter, and the chapter itself was ready for editing and publishing to the site. That same day, I edited and published a new chapter I had already written; I like to have a cushion of chapters ready in case I fall behind on my uploads. I have maybe four chapters written in advance? The rest of that day, I eagerly awaited an update on a story one of my friends wrote; I literally could not think of anything else, and constantly refreshed the story page in hopes of seeing an update. Days four and five were leisure days, mostly because it was my first weekend during the challenge. Even so, I did some outlining just to make sure I was ready for the next day.

The following week pretty much copied the first one. I ended up writing 7,109 words that week, and felt really productive as a result. The next week, not so much; I didn't write even half the daily minimum two days in a row that week. The productivity I displayed the week previous must've gone on vacation after working so hard in such a short span of time. It took four days of no writing to get back to writing a decent chunk, which by my definition is anything over one thousand words. A week later, I managed to write at least one thousand for three consecutive days, one of which I managed 2,000. The day after those three I took off, and enjoyed the fact that I had managed to write 19,384 words in the first month.

Of the three months, July was my worst-run leg of the challenge. I started out strong, writing 6,148 words that first week. After that, I was hit with the dreaded writer's block. I'm not sure what brought it on, but my suspicions had me thinking my plans for the next two weekends were the reason. Two consecutive weekends in July, I had family weddings to attend, both on my father's side and quite a drive to and from to boot. The first wedding was for my aunt Karen, who was marrying an old family friend. Despite my writer's block, I enjoyed the wedding.

The week after the first wedding, I spent it all without writing. Every day, I sat in the recliner with my laptop in my lap, trying to wrack my mind on how to proceed with my projects, but I kept on drawing a blank. It didn't help that I constantly listened to songs on Youtube I wanted to listen to on a whim, and was constantly reading other stories on the Fanfiction site instead of writing. At least once that week, I simply sat in the recliner, staring up at the basement ceiling, thinking existentially about life, such as how did I come into this world since I can't remember how I did, even if I know what happened? Thankfully, I was spared from doing that again that week by the second wedding. My family went to Fargo, North Dakota for that wedding, which was for my cousin. The moment we arrived home from that weekend, I was relieved that there'd be no more, and that I would be able to get back on track with my word goal. After the second wedding, I was able to write 6,302 more words in the next two weeks, and ended July with 31,384 words. I was over halfway to my goal, and I had one month left to reach it.

August didn't start out like the first two months, and I hit another writer's block for a week until I wrote 1,207 words one day, and then went into another block for another week. I don't know why I got another one, but I suspected it was due to the lack of inspiration I was experiencing. Even after that, I wasn't driven enough to seek out the inspiration I needed, like watching a few episodes of the show. When I was halfway through the month, I began to panic. I feared I wasn't going to reach my goal, and it didn't help that my friends who vowed to write one hundred thousand words these last three months had already completed their goal, the lunatics. I was so close, and it terrified me. I didn't want to be a failure. I already failed a college class the year prior, I did not want to be a failure at my hobby too. It was that fear that drove me to write over 5,000 words in three days later that week, followed by 1,427 words three days later. I ended up suffering a three-day writing burnout after that, and I had less than a week left to reach my goal. Five days before midnight on the first day of September, I was at 40,007 words.

The panic really set in at that point. The semester started that week, which meant I couldn't write all day anymore, and was set to hours I didn't have schoolwork to deal with. A miracle happened. I wasn't sure if the pressure had unlocked some stray ideas in my mind, or what, but those last five days, I found the inspiration to write five days consecutively despite school hours interfering. I was going to reach my goal. Even after all the writer's blocks, I was going to achieve my goal, and be among the winners of our forum's challenge. The last day was Wednesday, August 31st. According to my school schedule, I didn't have a class until one that afternoon, and then I had a night class at six. I could work with that; I didn't have any homework that needed taking care of that day, and I was 2,334 words shy of my goal. The moment I got off the bus at quarter after eight a.m., I could find a computer, sit down, and write. I wrote all morning, I typed paragraph after paragraph, pausing to find the right wording for description every now and then. Stopping for class, I left, and came back after to finish. I had three hundred words left on a new chapter before I would have my goal.

I rode home with my dad, and jumped in the shower the moment I got home. I ran through a quick shower, and bolted downstairs to my

laptop with my backpack. I took my online open-book quiz, which took less than ten minutes, ate my dinner, and went back to school for the night class. After the session, I rode with my mom home, and hurried back downstairs to where I left my laptop. I usually went to bed at eleven, and it was after nine. Doing the best I could, I recalled what hadn't been saved, and rewrote it, perhaps even better than it originally was, and finished up the chapter. When I finished the chapter, I had 50,010 words, and it was half an hour to bed. I had done it. All the stress and fear suddenly escaped through my mouth, and I slouched into the recliner. I started to cry. I had taken on a challenging task, not knowing if I had the ability to complete it and dealt with several writers' blocks in the three months alone, and I had finished the task with less than hour before I had to throw in the towel.

Writing 50,000 words in three months was the most difficult thing I had done in my hobby of fanfiction writing, but it was an amazing experience. I learned a lot about myself through my recording of how many words I wrote each day, and figured out what I needed to improve on in my writing habits. I found that with the Internet at my fingertips, and my creative imagination, I get easily distracted from my projects, often thinking up new potential ideas and getting entranced by Youtube lyric videos. I also found that I work more under pressure when there's a deadline in mind. In those final hours, I somehow just know to get serious, and not let anything distract me. The biggest lesson for me out of all the writing, was the consistency of my writing habits; I need to get more in the habit of doing a little writing each day, and then maybe I'd find it routine like everything else in daily life such as school. Don't know if I'd be able to do this challenge again, but I still have months to recover, and figure out if I'm capable or not.



# Keep the Letters

by Monica Synstelien

I hoard words  
in the attic of my mind.  
I keep them  
in a box labeled  
“love” next to the half-assed Hallmarks  
I’ve collected throughout the years  
to prove that I am someone

to care about. He sits  
like a cat on the couch  
needing nothing.  
I sink into the floor to  
greet the cockroaches;  
as if I could  
stand them. He sits  
while I stare  
and I wonder how  
best to love him; or  
leave him. When  
I am drunk (I guess  
I should not do this but)

I want to show you  
the box of love I keep  
inside. I fear you  
will ask me  
“when was the last time you wore Benediction?”  
and my holy harp strings  
will be far too timid  
to pluck out the last time he made love to me  
and released the floodgates of holy water  
inside both of us.

I was never a squirter before him.  
I was always sure I know what satisfaction was before him.  
I am still learning how I hoard,  
leaving little room for my love

to make himself comfortable.  
He rolls his eyes and readjusts.

I go back to the dictionary.  
I go back to my letters.  
I go back to the attic.  
I put my love away.

# Anecdotes

by Isabel Taylor

one –

two –

Episodes are easy.

Breathless hurricanes transmuting earth and sky together;  
bare feet making underwater cyclones in the sand.

Earthquakes, climaxing through the static of the earth;  
eruption of sound, leaves on leaves as they ramble through  
undergrowth,

strangers in a strange land.

Time is lost there. That makes it easy

(easy to forget that natural disasters are natural).

Tell me about the space between.

Tell me about the sweetness between breaths.

Counting off

- heart - beats –

three –

four –

Because breathing is easy.

Tell me about things that are real. Tell me about mornings.

Tell me about waking, how the first thought rises out of murky  
darkness.

Tell me of being a new thing today, reincarnate.

Tell me how you wrap yourself in memory like armor, poring over  
history like the instruction book,

waiting for the first page of your story.

Tell me how you breathe when - you - are - waiting –

five –

six –

If ever we struggled to breathe, it was in the inter-chapters.

Where our stories stopped unwinding like the yarn of a fireside  
magician

and shuddered to a halt, and we shuddered with them.

# This Morning I Discovered

by Haley Sargent

Some days I pull my  
heart around on a string like  
a cat on a leash

because though I sit  
and wait beside the phone,  
still you never call ... never call.

*It's too nice a day  
to read a novel set in England.*

The snow globe flakes twirl  
around me as I watch  
behind the window's warmth

while my mind is a cloud  
drifting away from me  
beyond the city lights.

I'd much rather read  
a novel set in space

and stretch the wings  
of my imagination.

There's no time for heartache  
when there's adventure to be found.

End Notes: "this morning I discovered" – from David Berman's "The Charm of 5:30"

"It's too nice a day to read a novel set in England." – from David Berman's "The Charm of 5:30"

# FlyFire

by Katharine Johnson

Wispy, shimmering, bright  
Cool night breeze  
Stars you can keep in a jar

LightMoon

Shining on my face  
Shadows shifting in the dark  
Rustling leaves

HopperGrass

Chirping from afar  
Living in the night  
Friends to tell your secrets

StarShooting

Wishes just awoke  
Children living out their dreams  
A peaceful slumber

NightSilent

Twinkle stars, calming breath, rest  
Keep me close  
Keep me safe

Goodnight

# Sweatshirts Never Leave

by Kayla Gray

It had been three weeks, four days, and fifteen hours, since he'd asked for a separation and left me alone in our West Village apartment. It was originally home to some star or someone with money who refurbished it for a more rustic feel. They made most of the layout with refurbished barn wood, making built-in book cases and nooks for reading. Remembering a better time when we looked at the place and we both fell in love with it. It had one large master bedroom with a marble jet tub with two spare rooms for offices for both of us: one for him to do work at home and one for me to do my interior designing.

I sat there alone.

The stupid comfy sweatshirt, which was technically his, but we both loved and fought over. I wanted to pick it up, but I didn't want to cry. I also didn't want to set it on fire in an empty trash can out front—though every fiber of my being wanted to do one or the other—instead I lifted it to my face, like I had in the three weeks, four days, and fifteen hours since he'd left, and smelled. *Agua de Gio* he would wear to work. Pine needles when he wore it on a run. Wine I had spilled on it during week one.

I wondered how we had arrived at the tsunami of arguments that would flood the room and drown any feelings of respect we had for another. The fighting was bad, but I think I would have been better if I wasn't so blindsided about him, "needing to think if it was worth it."

*What the hell did that mean?*

The tears fell down my face and I didn't wipe them away. The only things on the large glass coffee table in front of me were a bottle of wine and my nightmare: the plastic wand with a blue plus on it. I put on the sweatshirt, sliding the fluffy cotton over my body, feeling the fabric hug me in an empty sympathetic embrace.

*Why me?*

I rocked back and forth, feeling the cool wood floors beneath me, and put my head in my hands. Around hour eighteen I decided to get up and do what I had to. My iPhone felt heavier than I remembered as I lifted it and cursed myself for not getting the new one that was more light-weight. The screen was too bright, like a hangover that wouldn't end, but around week two I had turned off most of the major room lighting, leaving just a few lamps on. As I searched through the contacts I couldn't find his name and then panicked.

*Oh yeah, on day three I'd changed it to "Scumbag Bastard."*

He was my husband and this was a "break," but my fingers still shook like I was calling my nagging mother. I stared at the number, ready to dial in my hands, and I ran. I stumbled into the bathroom on time to throw up the small amount of food I'd been able to choke down for lunch. Hot bile and watery chicken soup lingered in my mouth. The light yellow mixture with a hint of pink swirled down the toilet and left me wondering what I had ingested that was pink. I wiped my face off, rinsed out my mouth and peeled myself away from the toilet.

I was more determined than ever to make that call. I quickly walked back into the room and had the phone again. Nothing was stopping me. Hitting the call button, the ringing in my ear wasn't just a programmed noise—it was the sound of God laughing at my pain. The answering machine sounded, but I hung up before the beep. I put the phone next to the nightmare and stared at them both. I wanted the phone to ring with a call back, but I also wanted the blue positive to turn into a red negative. The phone rang first.

Cursing and then picked up the phone, "Hey, Alex," I said.

"What's going on Olivia?"

Not, "how are you" or "are you okay," just "what's going on." I was seriously thinking of keeping him listed as Scumbag Bastard.

"I need to see you...to, uh...talk to you about something."

I felt like an idiot not being able to communicate with my husband of five years. He sighed into the phone, loudly. "I thought we both agreed that we need some space."

"No, you agreed. I did what you wanted, in hopes of saving this marriage!"

"I'm going to hang up if you're going to act like a child," he said quickly.

"I really need to talk to you. There's something wrong," was all I got out before I began to cry hysterically.

He was on the other end talking to me in a soothing voice that became frantic when I wouldn't respond. Sitting back on the floor, curling up into a ball as he shouted things through the phone, I cried and thinking it could never stop. I wanted to go back to bed and pretend none of this was happening.

Before he showed up I had somehow managed to curl up onto the couch, wanting to make myself as small as possible, while it was still possible. There was a knock at the front door and I said nothing. He had keys; I wasn't going to pretend he didn't have them, that this was normal. He slowly opened the door and squinted as he searched for me. When his eyes met my curled form he shut the door and flipped on an overhead light in living room.

"Olivia, what's wrong?" he said sitting next to me on the couch.

I silently pointed at the coffee table and his eyes went wide when he saw it.

His voice shook, "Is that...? Does that mean?"

"Yes."



# Johnny

by Seth Thill

That demon with the bloodshot eyes and foamy mouth you  
spray painted beneath the Dodge street overpass is still there.  
And I still remember the August day you did it  
when we were fourteen and just learning how to smoke.  
The smell of tobacco clung to your old ...And Justice For All hoodie  
like the dirt and graffiti beneath our fingernails,  
and the scorn in your mother's voice when she found out what we  
were doing  
still rattles in my head sometimes.

And all those streets downtown our parents told us not to go to are  
still a goddamn mess. Just like when we were 17,  
and we'd drive around  
at one in the morning getting high and blasting Wu-Tang and  
Andrew Jackson Jihad,  
you'd always shout RIP ODB out the window, and sing along to  
"Stevie Wonder to the bullshit, baby."

I still get stoned  
in that Wal-Mart parking lot that you got arrested in  
when you were 19 for selling the hydros you got  
when they removed your wisdom teeth.  
And every Spring I mark the day I can unzip my jacket,  
'cause I still remember you telling me the weather was best  
when it was cold enough that you could still wear something to hide  
your flask in,  
but warm enough to leave it unzipped.

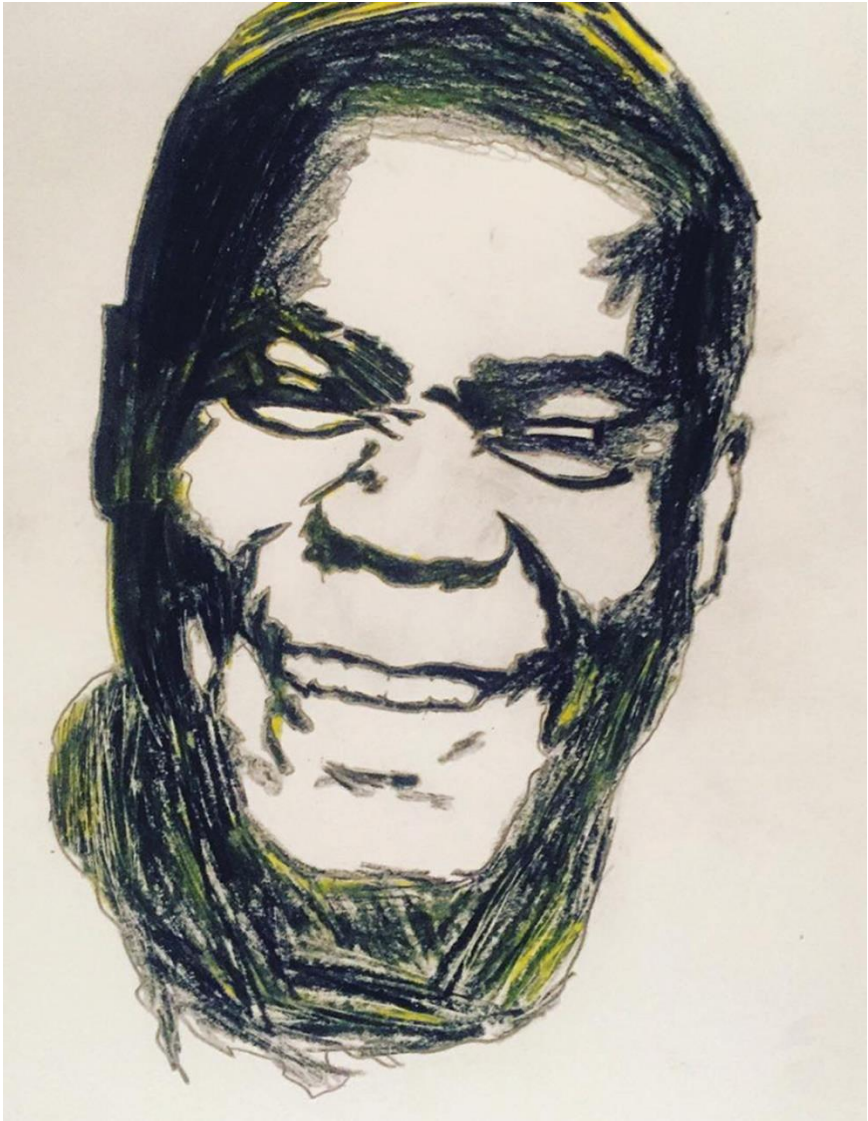
The suit they buried you in was buttoned up to your neck.  
Without any room for that flask that was resting on your palm  
when they found your body on the living room floor of your  
apartment.

There was some classical music playing in the background,  
but all I could hear was your mother crying at the casket,  
and I wanted nothing more than for her to be yelling at us  
for smoking cigarettes and doing graffiti again.

Two weeks after the service, I was in a hospital bed.  
My liver trying to flush out the toxins that took your life.  
I'd like to think you were up above telling me I need  
to get my shit together. But I know you weren't there,  
and if you were, you'd be cheering "Fuck yeah! Nice Dude!"  
As I lied there, my mother crying at the bedside, I couldn't help but  
wonder how she would cope if my fate matched yours.  
And I thought about how desperately your mother  
must wish you weren't the kind of person who would say  
"Fuck yeah!" in a moment like that.

# Legend

by Luke Broderick



## Contributor's Notes

**Abby Boyum** is a student at Normandale.

**Isabelle Brave Heart** is an enrolled tribal member of the Oglala Lakota Sioux tribe from Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota. Being a student at Normandale is a constant reminder that I made it out of the confines in a place that commonly creates tunnel vision in its residents. I knew the world was big but I didn't know it was so amazing. Since starting school here at Normandale I have been inspired and encouraged in many ways. I would like to do the same for others like me through my poetry.

**Luke Broderick** is in his fourth semester at Normandale Community College. Inspired by his grandfather at an early age, he developed a passion for all forms of art. Luke got serious about drawing and painting during his senior year of high school while under the instruction of accomplished artist, Gregory Euclide. During that time his work was selected for the South Suburban Conference Visual Arts Exhibition. Luke is pursuing a degree in graphic design.

**Jerry Carrier** is a student at Normandale in the AFA Art and Creative Writing programs. I have written and published three nonfiction works and have a contract for a fourth. I am currently seeking a publisher for a novel.

**Whitney Carter** is currently attending high school in the state of Utah. I am seventeen, and very recently I have been exposed to what the cruelty of a man can do to a woman's sense of self-worth. I am hoping that through this poem, many will better understand what rape does to the human soul.

**Conner Dolezal** is a Creative Writing student at Normandale Community College who likes sunglasses.

**Vicky Erickson** is a student at Normandale. Her artwork was done with black pen, with the mind full of empty thoughts.

**Kayla Gray** is a writer at Normandale, who primarily writes fiction. She is interested in all stories, whether on paper or through a camera

lens.

"To be an artist means to never advert your eyes."

-Akira Kurosawa (Director)

**Katherine Ichinose** is a PSEO student in the AFA program here at Normandale. Her favorite things are poetry, Shakespeare, pillow forts, cheesecake, and The Lord of the Rings. She writes mostly poetry and fiction, but dabbles in creative nonfiction and the occasional piece of art.

**Katharine Johnson** is a current PSEO student at Normandale Community College and hopes to major in creative writing once she graduates from high school in the spring of 2018.

**Caroline Knacke** has been creating stories since childhood, hoping to one day have those stories published on her bookshelf. Between fantasy story-telling, she's pursuing a career in medicine and staying up too late.

**Kate M. Larsen** will be graduating this spring with her AFA in Creative Writing and will continue on to complete her BFA.. She does not enjoy long walks on the beach but thoroughly enjoys satire, randomness, and pie.

**Dan Mathison** is a Creative Writing student who enjoys writing and playing video games in his spare time.

**Gabriel Mianulli** is an AFA student Normandale. I'm nearly a quarter of a century old, and I wish there was more time in the day to read all the things I want to read. I'll be quitting my job as a cook soon to devote more time to writing. I like all kinds of writing, but have a particular fondness of scifi and fantasy. I haven't spent enough time writing this semester, but I'm going camping for a month, so I can hopefully get some work done in between fishing.

**Nicole Maddendorf** is a Normandale student.

**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.

**Emily Pearson** is in the AFA program at Normandale and is *super cool and super funny*.

**Haley Sargent** is a second-year Normandale student who will be graduating with her AA in Liberal Education this spring. She is also planning to earn her AFA in Creative Writing from Normandale next year.

**Amie Stager** is an aspiring journalist from the Minneapolis suburbs with an interest in all things social and cultural. An idealist and activist, she considers herself a student of the world and a seeker of truth in every word.

**Monica Synsteliën** is a student at Normandale.

**Isabel K. Taylor** is a writer, poet, and consummate Minnesotan. The daughter of an editor and an English major, she finds amusement in lyric poetry and glib company. In her spare time, she enjoys dancing, plotting world domination and studying theories of story and character. She also manages and edits her local literary magazine, *The Crooked Quill*.

**Seth Thill** is a undergraduate English Major and creative writing minor at the University of Northern Iowa. He is an editorial intern at the *North American Review*, the poetry editor of the *Inner Weather*, and has been published in multiple local anthologies.

**Malenie Ven** is currently a student in the AFA in Creative Writing program at Normandale. She enjoys playing the piano, foreign films, and reading poetry she cannot comprehend.

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Officers and the following members of the Spring 2017 AFA Capstone produced this issue:

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Front and Back Cover: “Look Up, Then” by Katherine Ichinose

Submit your creative writing to the Fall 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](http://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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