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The Works

Guided Tome by Isabel Spande.....	4
The Apparition by Teri Joyce.....	6
Memoir Pt. 1 by Cheryl Wilke.....	7
Armistice Day, November 11, 1940 by Teri Joyce.....	8
Forests Frozen in Time by Christine Horner.....	12
The Star Ferry by Tiffany Dodge.....	14
What I Didn't Say by Teri Joyce.....	19
Ode to Temperance River by Teri Joyce.....	24
Motherhood/ A Telephone Conversation with a Mother of Two by Amanda Judd.....	27
Psithurism Is the Sound of Wind in the Trees by Jerry Carrier.....	30
I Hear Ticking by Isabel Spande.....	31
Cycle 99 by Teri Joyce.....	33
I brush my teeth by Samuel Pfau.....	34
Night Terror by Teri Joyce.....	35
Drifting by Jake Gesell.....	39
Brother Winter and Sister Summer by Samuel Pfau.....	40
Dog Days by Teri Joyce.....	48
Stranger in Bloom by Evelyn Tyndall.....	50

Reassurance by Anna Carpenter.....	52
The Female Author Bio by Amanda Judd.....	55
Barbie Doesn’t Need a Baby by Amanda Judd.....	57
The Night Visitor by Elliot Plagge	61
Shipped and Received by Kaitlyn Iliff	69
The Romantic Real Life Tragedy by Amanda Judd.....	72
Ode to the Machine by Evelyn Tyndall.....	73
Alone in a Fort Lauderdale Bar by Jerry Carrier.....	75
I’m Not Your Poem by Jerry Carrier.....	77
Hurricane by Alissa Ulep.....	78
No Forgiveness by Travis Hendershot.....	80
Burnout by Christine Horner.....	82
Contributor’s notes	83-85
Publication information	86

Editor’s Note: “The Female Author Bio” and “Barbie Doesn’t Need a Baby” by Amanda Judd were part of a collection of poems that won first place in Normandale’s Patsy Lea Core scholarship contest in Spring 2020.

Guided tome

by Isabel Spande

READ ME, said the cover.

It was not the title.

It was the invitation to be more
than humanly possible.

A cosmic depth,
Orange and black pools,
spine bursting with sunlight whose
lilting gold specks sing through
obsidian space.

I drilled those holes in her edges,
saw her breathe deeper, opening
to reveal her secret recipes.

There's no cracking this spine.

I glued this book; it was for my sister.

The words were my father's,
the cover imperative his too,

READ ME,

I stitched the synth cat-gut

through the holes and pulled with all my might.

I tied knots and cleaned my hands of the wax string.

She is final and pure in her natural form.

I saw eternities in the immortal tome,

knew she could span lifetimes and offer

more to most than I ever could alone.

Now she is born she will take my story,

even down to the mite

hiding,

where my sunken fingerprints

lie in her cover's coating.

The Apparition

by Teri Joyce

Ah, that Monday morning, early,
before sunrise in the gloaming light,
full moon setting in the west.
I had just put the kettle on,
looked out the window and spied you dashing barefoot
through the dew to the chicken coop.

You slipped inside,
emerged with a brown egg in each of your hands.
As you crossed the yard again, mindless of the thistles,
suddenly you stopped.

Perhaps you heard a wood thrush.
You tipped your head back, eyes closed
beneath your short, uneven bangs,
arms twisted around each other like a pair of snakes,
a frail little waif, clad only
in the flour-sack shift I cut for you.
Not even sewn.

But your face,
your face!

The way the light fell on it –
the way your face glowed, a pale apparition
and your hands held those brown eggs.
You looked like Grace embodied.
I gasped and grabbed the table,
stunned by this beatific vision
as if I saw you through God's eyes.

Inspired by photograph:
"Nancy, Danville, Virginia" 1969 by Emmet Gowin;
Gelatin silver print at MIA Gallery G365

Memoir Pt. I

by Cheryl Wilke

Our eyes locked in on each other in the large vanity mirror in my bathroom. She, my mother, had come to the city for the weekend to attend my first baby shower.

She was tentative as a seagull in a parking lot while lightly combing and teasing her hair, then shyly applying a light mask of blush, mascara and lipstick. Her hesitation visibly morphing into frustration.

“Want some help?” I stated more than asked her glance in the mirror. “Sure,” she replied while handing her plastic brush to me. Taking it from her hand, I walked around her pear-shaped body, and began to gently brush her parchment brown hair. I searched for similarities between this mother and daughter. Two faces etched by very different maps. She had three babies by the age of 23. I had a career, and one baby at 42. My hair thick and coarse as a hay bale—like my father’s. Hers soft and thin. So shockingly thin, I paused to survey her scalp peering out from its pearl-white truth.

It was then that I noticed in the mirror, her complexion gossamer-thin, milky white. Iridescent. Nothing that cosmetics could fix. Fragility she could not cover.

My heart begged to ask, “Are you feeling okay? You look pale, like . . . well . . . like you’re not well. And your hair. You’re losing your hair. What’s wrong, Mama?” From the soles of my slippers on up, I pulled myself from panic. I demanded myself to ask.

But I couldn’t.

Armistice Day, November 11, 1940

by Teri Joyce

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks^[1],
bare-headed, bare-handed,
clad in light coats and shoes,
they staggered against the wind,
the bitter blowing snow.
All hell broke loose^[2] that day.
 They were unprepared.

Balmy morning, green grass showing,
chrysanthemums abloom,
crowds thronged downtown for the big parade.
 All of it, a tease.

Duck hunters took the day off,
hit Minnesota's waterways.
 No hint of what was coming.

A late morning forecast – rain turning to snow.
Complete failure to mention
the blizzard roaring
like a freight train obliterating the Plains.

The exodus began with the rain.
Temperature plummeted,
a tempest began to blow,
 sheathed everything in ice.

Sleet driven like nails
into naked faces.
Flash-frozen tears
blinded the unfortunates.
Snow came at them sideways,
 gales up to eighty miles an hour.

Streetcars full of folks slid off their tracks
and crashed. Buses careened into fast-forming snowbanks.
Stranded passengers –

no choice but to trudge on
through the deepening mounds
hoping to get home.

Abandoned trolleys formed a zig-zag –
small shelter on the route.
Step by frozen step,
legs like wooden tree stumps
heaved themselves through drift after drift.
A couple blocks could take two hours,
could become a battleground for survival.

Cold seared through lungs
like fire. Gusts blew down tree limbs, roofs,
and people. Forced them to crawl forward
or lay down and die.

Frigid, frostbit fingers unable
to turn the doorknob,
the lucky still strong enough to pound.

A country school bus abandoned,
twenty children in an icy chain,
without boots, lurching on numbed feet –
salvation at a farmhouse.
Taken in for three days,
barely any food or fuel.

Day Two –
the wind still howled,
drifts sculpted twenty feet high.
People with eight-foot poles poked through the piles,
tried to find their cars.
Horses became tow trucks,
essentials delivered by sled where able.

Farmers struggled to get out their doors,
to reach their barns.
Cows, heavy-laden, bellowed in misery.
Sheep found alive, but frozen to the ice,
bleated until chopped out.

More than a million turkeys perished
ten days prematurely.

The winds of hell blew cold that day.
146 people died.

Countless neighbors saved neighbors.
That's how it was back then.

¶ First line borrowed from “Dulce et Decorum Est” by Wilfred Owen

¶ *All Hell Broke Loose* by William Hull was a pertinent source for accounts of the Armistice Day Blizzard.

A Close View

by Carolina N Paredes



Forests Frozen in Time

by Christine Horner

Trees reach to God,
begging to be granted life
where dead branches meet sky,
while roots betray the Creator
to seek refuge with the undead,
but are given nothing besides
silence and stillness—cold shoulders
from both righteous and wicked forces.
Winter's vengeance shakes
the trees bare. They gasp,
then they're hit with a second blow,
air gushing from their woody
lungs only to become the wind
scorching our frowns
as we bumble about like murder hornets,
invading, raiding, taking, and scorching
the Earth until we too ask our gods
for forgiveness, but are denied,

then request help from our devils,
but are turned away, so we join
forests frozen forever
in time.

The Star Ferry

by Tiffany Dodge

We were on the ferry, finally. Frazzled. Mute, at first, sitting there, stunned and staring out to sea. The cold and damp January wind was whipping our hair around, slapping us in our faces. My family and I sat in our shocked contemplation with blank stares on our faces, but our heads were full of noise, wind bellowing, waves slamming the hull of the ship, seagulls screeching, and the ferry horn blasting, while the other passengers chattered around us frantically. Not that we could understand a word of it. None of us knew Cantonese.

We had taken the ferry earlier that day in a wholly different mood. We left from the Star Ferry pier in Kowloon, Hong Kong in the humid, hazy sun of late morning, and crossed Victoria Harbour to Hong Kong Island, with our minds set on shopping. Tricia, my sister, and I loved shopping in the Stanley Market. The colors, crowds, strange food smells, and chaos were enthralling to us. We loaded up on the touristy trinkets, jade figurines, red and gold paper lanterns, and china dolls. Then, we stocked up on the knock-off Polo shirts and Swatch watches. My mom headed for the eel skin stand, the purses, belts, and shoes were a fraction of what they cost in the states. We all bought eel skin lipstick cases, mine was red. As we shopped, my dad vigilantly kept his eyes peeled in an attempt to avoid sights that might put us teenage girls from Burnsville over the edge, especially my sister. Sights like the skinned cats, with a rope tied around their necks, which hung, dangling from the canopy of the stalls like a macabre fringe, or the puppies kept in cages for nefarious purposes, not adoption, or the heaps of snakes writhing in baskets, sure to escape, or the eels splayed out being skinned by the jubilant, chatty, fishmonger woman. My dad would do his best to spot the gore first, and then divert our attention by excitedly pointing and yelling “Hey LOOK is that a Benetton store over there?” Our heads would snap around “What? Where? Really?” and he would be successful in his diversion. When we had tired ourselves out with shopping, we grabbed some street food, “chicken” fried rice. I say “chicken” because I was sure every meat I ate was Shar-Pei. Fried Rice was

the only Chinese food Tricia would eat. My sister was not an adventurous traveler, no matter where in the world we were, she would only eat at McDonald's. We did get adept at finding one, just find a teenager and ask them. They could always direct us.

After we were spent, physically and financially, we headed to the Star Ferry central pier to cross back over to Kowloon. With tickets in hand, we shuffled through the crowded main gates to descend the long wide concourse that switched back on itself on its way down to the ferry. It was an eclectic mass of people, some tourists, matronly ladies carrying their mesh shopping bags, tradesmen or factory workers in their navy blue shirt and pants uniform, and lots and lots of business people, mostly men, in suits. In the shuffle, I was shoved to the outer edge of the white-tiled corridor where the homeless, in tatters, in groups or alone, were hunched over, lining the walls, too many to count.

Something red catches my eye. It's a scooter. The square four-wheeled boards we used in gym class in elementary school. I do not remember these devices fondly, they were instruments of torture, someone always smashing my fingers or an overzealous boy running over my hand. But, this particular scooter is a mode of transport for a homeless man with no legs, just a torso and he pushed himself around with his hands. When I notice him, he is in a heated conversation with another man, his long hair is covering his face. He falls from view as I move past him, down the concourse which has widened allowing the travelers to spread out. A moment later, I hear angry shouting. This is answered by a woman yelling. Again, and Again. This shouting, in Chinese, is getting closer and more frantic. Now I hear a clicking. Click, click, click, click. I have no idea what this noise is, I'm trying to figure it out. My sister hears it too. It's getting louder. A young woman runs by me. She has on a periwinkle wool pencil skirt and a fitted, seashell pink, angora sweater with cropped sleeves, tucked neatly into her skirt. Her dark brown eel skin, square-toe penny loafers with two-inch heels were slapping on the cement floor as she ran by. I am so impressed with her outfit, I hadn't realized that she is the one screaming. And the clicking is still behind me, I can hear it over my left shoulder, but louder now. The man on the red scooter flies past me, angrily yelling at this

young woman. I'm confused now, wondering why he is chasing her and why he is so mad. I am watching him and my eye catches a glint. With dread, I realize the clicking I've been hearing is the knife he is holding in his hand, smacking the floor as he propels himself after her! The concourse we are descending dead-ends at the ferry. The heavy blue iron gate to the boat is locked. She and all of us are trapped.

The girl, older than me, maybe about 25 is crying and backed into a corner, literally. This small legless man has her trapped. His face is red with anger, veins bulging in his throat strained with yelling. He is only knee-high but he is intimidating. Menacing. His torso is built like a bodybuilder, his huge muscular shoulders flex as he is waving the knife, taking swipes at her. He can maneuver his scooter on a dime, in a flash, tip it back and swivel to swipe at the crowd with the knife he has gripped in his popeye-like forearms. I'm horrified watching this screaming, terrified girl jump up, again and again, to lift her legs out of the way of the knife, as he lashes out towards her. She has one hand on the gate which assists her somewhat in her attempts to evade his swipes at her achilles. So far she has managed, he hasn't touched her, yet. We all are watching, the tourists, commuters, and me. I am so horrified by this scene but conflicted. No one is helping her. It seems the dilemma in all our heads is "HOW?" to help her. He doesn't seem to be an easy person to disarm.

Dilemma number two, my dad. My dad is 6'4 with an athletic build, he stands about two feet above any crowd in Asia. He is a mild-mannered, polite man. I have never heard him swear and he doesn't raise his voice in anger, but he served three tours in Vietnam and he is definitely a take action kind of guy. My family is in the center of this crowd clustered at the landing of the ferry, as my dad makes his move forward, toward the man with the knife, my sister and I grab his arms, and my mom, behind him, grabs the Nikon camera strap sashed around his chest. She whispers to him "what are you going to do?" my dad answers "Punt him". Gasp! The three of us collectively shout "NO!" The image of my dad "punting" this man runs through my mind and it is horrible. This knife-wielding man is rough, scary, and menacing for sure, but he is also severely handicapped, homeless, and a sad, pitiful character too. This all is passing in slow motion

for me, allowing my mind to be flooded with the scene and all of the simultaneous conflicting emotions. I am scared for her, I feel sorry for her, I am wondering what she had done to make him so mad. I'm scared of this man, I'm mad at him, I feel sorry for him. I want someone to help her. It isn't going to be me. And I don't want it to be my dad. I feel very protective of my dad and I do not want him to get hurt (which is the most likely outcome) and I don't want my dad to hurt this man. The three of us are about to lose our battle of holding on to my dad when I hear the whistles, the high pitched rattle whistles of the policemen. In a few seconds four policemen round the corner. They disarm the man without too much trouble or too much violence. Two officers carried him off and one followed with the man's scooter.

The day had turned colder. My sister and I sat shivering, finally on the deck of the ferry, in the 50 degree gray mist, digesting the event we had witnessed. Why was he so mad at her? Hundreds of people had passed by this man, probably thousands, I had. Why her? Had she said something? Had she scorned him? Had she done something? Because we don't speak Chinese it will always be a mystery to us. He never actually made contact with her with the knife. As we thought about it, we think he probably could have if he really had wanted to. Was terrorizing her, not maiming, his retribution for whatever scorn she had caused him?

It got me thinking about "bad guys" and "good guys" in literature, movies, and in the world. He was a sympathetic villain. She was a complicated victim. The most interesting stories are not pure evil pitted against pure good, but when the writer has created more complicated, more dynamic, and layered characters. As a teenager and a young adult, I began to superimpose this theme on the events of the world at large, political events, coups, wars, clash of cultures and riots, learning very few things are black and white, good versus evil. Most are a messy and confusing, conflicting shade of gray. Like this day.

Fall on Superior

by Cheryl Wilkes



What I Didn't Say (content warning)

by Teri Joyce

I didn't say, "No".

I didn't say, "Leave".

I didn't say, "I'm going to tell!"

He had me when he walked up on the porch and in through the front door that night. And he knew it! Because I didn't say anything.

"Where's Ed?" he asked.

"They're out. I'm babysitting. Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm Bill - Ed's brother. Guess I'll hang around a bit." He strode to the kitchen fridge to get a beer.

"Huh?" I thought, not knowing how to respond. I didn't want him here but couldn't think how to tell him to leave. He was an adult. I was just a kid of thirteen.

"Gonna watch TV?"

"Yes."

"I'll stick around and watch with you – while I finish my beer," he said as he settled himself in the middle of the couch. I sat as far from him as I could and still be able to see the TV.

“Why are ya sitting way over there? I’m not gonna bite,” he chuckles. “Sit over here where you can see the show.” So, I obediently moved a little closer.

Yes, he knew he had me on that first night, but he did leave after finishing his beer. I was so relieved I didn’t bother to mention it to Ed or Missy when they got home.

I didn’t tell because one of the cardinal rules in my home was “Don’t Tell!” Don’t tell mom. Don’t tell dad. Don’t tell when you broke something – like a doll, or a baton, or an arm. Don’t tell why you’ve always hated your first-grade picture with the curly hair. Don’t tell that you stole dimes from the milk money and took the bus downtown alone in third grade. Don’t tell when something egregious happened. Wait a few minutes, then pretend it didn’t happen.

I have wondered why I kept going back there to babysit. For the money, I guess – for the independence it gave me. Or just because I couldn’t say no when I was asked. Good old Bill showed up again. This time he insisted I sit next to him on the couch and I did. The next time, he took the blanket off the back of the couch, laid it on the floor along with some pillows, and patted for me to come sit next to him. I felt panicky, but I had nothing in my repertoire to get me out of this situation.

This was the grooming stage, a prelude to abuse. When I had learned to lock the doors, he climbed through a window – scaring me half to death. Sometimes he came in through the outside cellar door which didn't have a lock. I quickly figured out to stack as much heavy stuff on top of the trapdoor in the pantry as I could. He had an arsenal of tricks and tactics to get what he wanted and enough patience to advance his agenda slowly, step by step.

The worst of what happened, in the long run, was the shame and the way I hid it from myself, buried in a dark corner beneath a barricaded trap door of its own. It should have been, “Shame on you, Bill,” but he spat it back on me. I carried his shame for years.

Shame may be the most toxic thing to the human spirit. Growing up, I heard, “Shame on you” at home, in church and in school. It meant you're bad, you're no good, you're worthless. Even dogs know what it means – just ask one “What did you do?” in the right tone of voice. The dog will hang its head and slink away, even if it hasn't done a thing. Shame is like the stench of a tooth gone rotten. Shame makes you afraid to breathe in the company of others, lest they gasp and turn away. It is like rank body odor that assaults the passerby who turns and harrumphs in scorn. Shame teaches you to keep your eyes down to avoid the stares and daggers. Shame

repulses like a leprous putrefaction; it clings like a coat of blackest oil which detergent cannot wash away. Everyone can see it – a stain of spittle spat in contempt to humiliate the one who wears it. Shame says there is no hope of an invitation to come in and visit because you'll dirty up the furniture or contaminate the dwelling. It takes your voice away, leaving you in silence and alone. Shame leaves a legacy of lies and untrue stories waiting to be rewritten and retold.

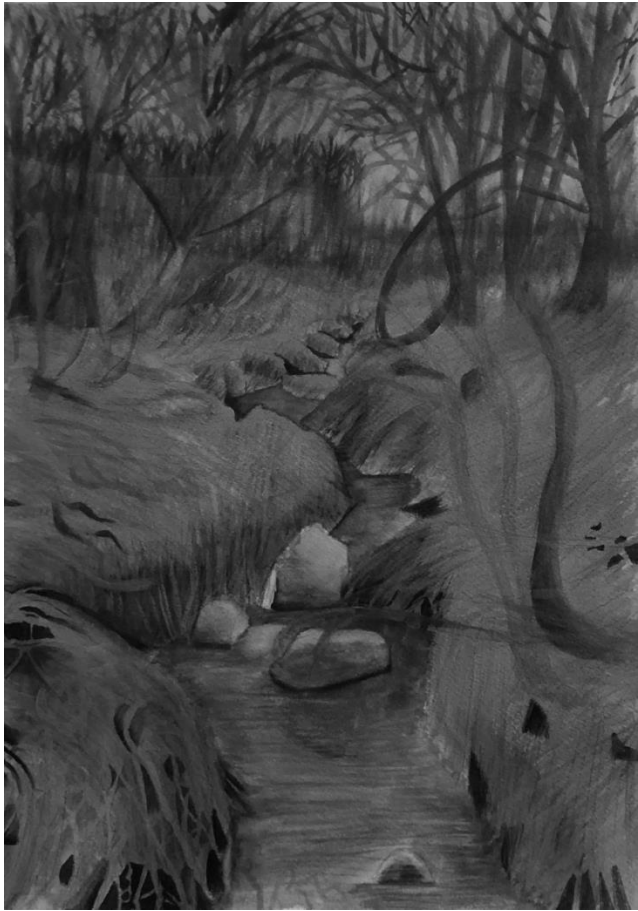
My voice is back now, and it has something to say, *Bill*.

You tried to alter me, to force your will upon me, to make me a receptacle for your seeds of hate and anger. You shattered my Humpty Dumpty heart.

Yet, my Soul survived. It is a mosaic now and it is beautiful.

A Calming River

by Vicky Erickson



Ode to Temperance River

by Teri Joyce

Booz^{hoo},
Tumbling River of Wild Water,
darkened by tannic acid,
foamy like root beer,
carver of a steep,
deep gorge
where swirling pebbles
whittled out potholes,
you were the first place Up North
where I truly fell in love.

The end of March in 1985,
I pulled off at the turn-out on Highway 61,
slid down
a narrow trail to your bank,
and began a hike on your south side.

I paused
in awe
every few steps,
sometimes crawling to the cliff edge
to gaze into your gorge,
so excited to see you, but
mindful of snowmelt on the rocky ledges
and slick ice in the grooves.

Within your deep potholes, marshmallows of foam
billowed upward
until they burst,
sank,
then began to grow again.
I wondered if,
maybe on a summer day,
I might cross over you
on the fallen tree that spanned your banks.

I imagined I was the first ever to see your wonders,

to hear your thunder and your laughter,
to feel your reverberations through the rocks into my belly.

I thought,
this must be what Lewis and Clark felt
when they first gazed upon the sea of bison
or climbed the Rocky Mountains
or laid eyes on the Pacific Ocean.

Of course, they were not the first;
nor was I.

The Ojibwe people called you *Kawimbash*, Deep Hollow River.
Over eons, you engraved the land,
snaking 39 miles
from Brule Lake to *Gitchi-Gami*,

twisting,
frothing,
falling.

I beheld your hidden falls,
flashing, splashing cascades,
your strength that cut the gorge through lava flows,
your final Union
with the Shining Big Sea Water.

I listened to your burbles, roars, and whispers
as I trekked along your north shore,
heard the singing of your birches on the hills,
the rustling of grouse in leaf litter,
caught the silent flash of white-tailed deer,
even spied a lone timber wolf at water's edge to drink.

Once, I dreamed I was a cedar,
my
roots
burrowed
into your rocky face,
branches bathed in your misty
breath.

I visited you in every season,
in every kind of weather,

brought the young ones of my family
to wander with your windings,
to find the sticks chewed on by beavers
left scattered among your half-submerged cobblestones,
the scat of bear and weasels,
the bunchberries, blue-bead lilies, bloodroot, bellwort, and spring beauties.

You are part of who I am, yet
I hope I've left no mark on you,
except that of my grateful spirit.
Though I wish for many to know you,
I fear the ways that humanity will change you.
I pray you may long flow with abandon
surrounded by the bounteous life you sustain.

Müigwech, my friend – thank you for your blessings.
I love you – *gíꞑaagi'in*.

Motherhood/ A Telephone Conversation with a Mother of Two

by Amanda Judd

“Oh, I’m so glad you called! We haven’t talked in forever.”

“Those are sink nuts! Do you want to eat sink nuts?”

“These kids are the reason I keep a bottle of vodka in the bathroom.”

“Where are your panties?”

“It’s the only place I can drink in peace.”

“Oh, my husband will be so excited!”

“Sorry, I just got a text from a friend saying the IGA has T-bones on sale this week.”

“Why is there hair in my dishwasher?”

Thank you so much for the lovely anniversary card you sent. It was precious.

“Sooooo much poop.”

I’m thinking of getting my hair cut off. What do you think?

“No way, Linda.” (That is **not** her daughter’s name.)

I have had it – we are just getting pizza for dinner tonight . . . for the third time this week.

“Oh my gosh, is that my husband? He’s home early!”

So, tell me about your new man.

“Little boy, why are you out of your room? It had better be clean, mister.”

Sorry, I have to go – the kids are about to kill each other.

“Child, I will cut you!”

It was great talking to you, but not nearly long enough. I’ll call you after these heathens go to bed.

“Legos are not my life, son.”

Click.

I sit there,
more than a little punch drunk
from the tornado that I just survived,
thinking that I need a drink,

or a nap, to recover.

And worrying about her calling back later . . .

I'm not sure I can handle it.

Psithurism Is the Sound of Wind in the Trees

by Jerry Carrier

In the San Bernardino Mountains along the Rim of the World Drive,
where Yellow and Jeffery pines overlook a valley
that the Natives call the 'cupped hand of god,'
the wind through the trees make the sound of ocean waves.

When the late spring snow falls contrasting the rustic red and green of the pines
and the sky is sunny blue with bright white puffy clouds
and the dangerous roads are slick with ice that
require car tires to wear non-slip chains.

The smell of the spring scented Jeffery pine
that makes the nose believe it is butterscotch
while visitors scramble to pick up the pinecones
that will be put in closets or on shelves to be forgotten.

A young boy looks at this from the porch of a log cabin
in wonder at the sight, the sound and smell,
bundled warmly in a jacket with hat and mittens,
falsely believing that his life will always be like this.

I Hear Ticking

by Isabel Spande

I haven't held a working pocket watch in years. It calls, clicking.
I scramble through paper, parts of paper, pencils and put
my chin on the desk to feel the *ticks*
the hand pulls back every time
the shake of the tine before the click.
I see through my journal and two letters
an unfamiliar ornate disk,
copper in color,
sending me tiny arrows that ricochet
down my shell
and land between my toes.
I place the filigreed edge to my ear
like a coin prepared to slot
and I listen.
Each tick's reverb echoes the next,
it's almost been ten seconds and
I've already forgotten how to breathe.
Sharp shouts of pain call a hand to my heart,
and suddenly
I lack a beat.
For a moment,
my ticks looked like they had been stolen by the resounding
snickers of a device long dead.
I think,
I used to play with dead pocket watches when I was a kid.
Now I have one that ticks.

Time Flies

by Cheryl Wilkes



Cycle 99

(content warning)

by Teri Joyce

His calloused fingers snagged against your thigh.
You looked up to the ceiling miles away.
He exhaled softly in your ear,
a surefire way to bring you to the moment.
Then in his ecstasy,
amid his final thrust,
he whispered
a name.

The grenade he spoke
shattered your picture window,
created a gaping hole,
let loose a nest of rattlesnakes.
Shrapnel sliced and burned its way
through your unarmored gut
down to your bones.

As you hemorrhaged,
rage ignited beneath the silken veil
of how you thought it was.
Whoosh – gone!
You scoured with vicious savagery
to remove the fingerprint
he etched on your heart.

After the smell of bleach,
after you pushed the lumps
of flesh and all the shreds
out to the gutter,
after you washed your palms
and dried your tears,
you forgave yourself,

and bought new silk pajamas.

I brush my teeth

by Samuel Pfau

I awake

My mouth as dead as JFK

I run

To the bathroom

The flowing sink-water a love letter to my abused molars.

I grip

my toothbrush

I spread

the toothpaste

Like jam across bread

I brush

my teeth

Like a rare Egyptian artifact

Lost to the ravages of time

Before being found

By an archaeologist named Greg

I gargle

some water

My mouth a minty heaven

And start my day

Night Terror

by Teri Joyce

Augie climbed back into the A-frame pop-up camper gasping, and quickly flipped the lock closed. She hoped she was safe now. At sunrise, she would make her escape.

Augie had awakened at five a.m. from her bladder insisting it was time to get up. Waving a hand across the tiny counter beside the bed, she felt the band of her night-vision headlamp. Sitting up, she snapped it around her head and clicked the red-light on. Expecting a very brief outing, Augie pulled her red down jacket over her navy camping pajamas, the ones with the little wild animal prints. She slid her feet into a pair of ankle-high fleecy slippers with a thin rubber sole and opened the camper door. Holding the handrail, she stepped down the two grated metal stairs to the gravel of her campsite and then turned left towards the softer ground of the narrow, unpaved trail leading to the outhouse.

It was early April, and only the hardest of campers would be out in the Wisconsin woods. Night-time temperatures were still dipping below forty, occasionally even down to freezing. Rosy little puffs of her breath shown in front of her face as she moved through the damp night. She felt the cold coming through the soles of her slippers though she'd been out barely two minutes.

Her nose wrinkled of its own accord as she approached the outhouse. Opening the door, she thought aloud, "Not too bad. An advantage of being here before the crowds." She flinched a little as her thighs hit the cold of the plastic seat. Anxious to get back to her nice warm bed and sleep a couple more hours, she hastily finished her business and got up.

In the blink of time it took to exit the outhouse, the battery on her headlamp died. Cloud cover sealed the area in a black shroud. Standing there for a moment, she decided it was too cold to hop from foot to foot to keep warm until sunrise. The sensible thing was to head back. She strained to recall the way and remembered the trail went left from the campsite and had wound a bit through the woods. To return, she would stay to the right edge of the trail as best she could.

On her trek to the outhouse, she hadn't noticed a small fork in the trail angled to the left about 30 feet before the facilities. On her way back in the utter blackness, forced to rely on outstretched arms, the tiny tugs of dry foliage on her right leg and the feel of the ground through her slipped

feet, the lone camper shuffled cautiously along. “Ouch,” she said under her breath the second time she stubbed her toe on a root in the trail. “Damn.”

The impenetrable darkness disoriented her as she stumbled forward like a blind man. How long had it been – five minutes or fifteen? It was hard to tell when she had to move so slowly. *Am I on the trail? Have I veered onto some deer trail? Surely the opening of my campsite is near.* Augie shivered as she pulled her hood up over her bare head and cinched it snugly around her face, wishing she had grabbed her hat and mittens as she left the camper.

Beneath her feet, Augie sensed a change in the terrain – a little softer, and then, a scuff of a foot released a whiff of piney scent. Bending, she scooped up a few needles, rolling them between her fingertips which released a much stronger pine smell. “Uh-oh,” she whispered to the night. “My camper is parked under some bare maple trees, not pine.” She couldn’t recall any pine scent on the way to the outhouse. She straightened up as she tried to envision the campground map.

The previous evening, she had arrived at dusk. There had been enough light to find her spot and back her camper in, but not enough time to scope out the rest of the campground or park. She was only planning an overnight stop on the way home to St. Paul from a week-long painting retreat in Indiana. With no plans to hike, she hadn’t paid attention to the hiking trails on the map. She paused to check all her jacket pockets, wishing she had tucked the map in one of them. “No luck,” she muttered to herself, followed by a brief curse. It was still too dark to see anything anyway. *What should I do?* she wondered. A lesson from her youth as a Girl Scout Cadette popped into her mind: “...when lost, stay where you are, hunker down and wait for help.” Unfortunately, no one would even know to look for her.

Getting lost wasn’t a new experience. Years before, while at a conference up in the Northwoods, she had broken all her own rules by heading out alone for a quick walk after dinner. She hadn’t wanted to run back to the cabin for a map and water and a jacket, so there she was – lost! The sun was near setting as she passed the same badger den for the third time. Fortunately, she did have her cell phone in her pocket and was lucky enough to have one bar on it. She dialed 9-1-1. They dispatched help, found, and delivered her back to her cabin by 10 p.m. She had felt sheepish, and still remembered all the mosquito bites. She thought she had learned from that misadventure to always be prepared.

A little pissed to find herself ill-prepared again, she thought, *But I only stepped out to use the outhouse. Who knew I ought to carry a cell phone for that!* Hers was plugged in and charging in the camper. The cold pushed her to keep moving. Surely if this trail didn’t go directly to her campsite, it would

intersect with the gravel road of the campground loops. She staggered on, bumping into trees, and getting snagged about the ankles.

High above, the winds were beginning to thin the clouds. Eventually, some starlight became visible, though not enough to discern a trail; only enough to set off the hulking darkness of the great pines around her.

Abruptly, Augie froze. The night had been silent, but now she heard something rustling. Her heart raced. Noises seemed to be ahead, behind, everywhere! She felt a vibration from a low guttural growl, then heard distant throaty gurgles and hoarse croaks. She spun around in terror. *What in the world is happening? What is out there? It sounds like I'm in Jurassic Park!*

A piercing FRAWNK ripped through the air. She felt a wingbeat near her face. *Big wings!* A clucking descended from up high, turning into a warning - "go-go-goooo!" She wanted nothing more than to heed that warning. Something dove towards her with a shriek. *Oh, God, something BIG is after me!* her mind screamed. She ducked and scrambled to get away, her pajamas catching and tearing on the underbrush.

"Wait! I must be dreaming! This is just a nightmare," she gasped aloud to test if she was sleeping. The words came out - proof she was awake.

The shrieking thing kept moving around her, making her dart and veer despite being poked by sticks and brambles. She envisioned a giant claw about to swoop down, snatch her up and carry her away to be eaten. Augie was utterly lost and no longer on a trail.

Finally, a hint of light signaled the predawn gloaming; enough to move a little easier. As she bush-whacked, she tried to keep low and hidden. She needed to find a trail. If she was prey, she desperately needed to distance herself from whatever it was that hunted her. Slowly, to her right, the sky seemed detectably brighter. That had to be east. She could use the light like a compass. A shred of hope blossomed. *I'm going to find a way out of this Jurassic Park zone.*

Eventually, the brush opened to a small ditch beside a gravel road. Relieved, but wary, she watched the sky for any movement as she dashed out from under cover and began to run east down the road. The forest became quiet again. *I don't think it's following me anymore,* she thought. She passed an unoccupied campsite - the post said number A-43. Her site was B-12. After circling most of the A-Loop, she spied the linking road to the B-Loop. Finally, she was back inside her camper, catching her breath.

As soon as the sun broke the horizon, Augie closed her camper down and hitched up to leave. On the way out of the park, she passed a T-

intersection on the park road where there was a previously unseen sign: “Road Closed March 15 – June 1. Great Blue Heron Nesting Area. Do Not Disturb.”

She chuckled to herself and drove on.

A Hike for Today, A Snack for Later

by Vicky Erickson



Drifting

by Jake Gesell

A blanket of humidity enfolds my body
And my vision reaches into the lightless space.
All that reaches back is the perspiring palm
Of some invisible giant.

The makings of a small pond take shape on my chest
And budding streams emerge from my hairline.

The black plane that stares at me bends with subtle undulations.
An imperceptible prism refracts unseen light,
Barely touched by my starved retinas.

Vasodilation inspires a fresh tide of perspiration.
Two thirds of my flesh reaches back through time.
The darkness shimmers and ripples as if the silhouette of
waves.

Gentle oscillations glide through my torso and dissipate in my ankles.
My matted hair flows in all directions and the waves' rhythm strengthens.

Ghosts of Pre-Cambrian currents placidly rock me to the floor.
I close my eyes and dissolve into the sea.

Brother Winter and Sister Summer

by Samuel Pfau

Some would say that the messiah was born in a cramped dirty manger in Bethlehem, but he was actually born in New Rapids Hospital in Stillwater, Minnesota. In the year of our (fake) lord 1999. He was born to a small family called the Morgans; Mr. Morgan worked on the family farm and looked so aged and decrepit that one would think he worked there since farming was invited. Mrs. Morgan was the local librarian, a stern woman with the compassion and friendliness of a rattlesnake. The two were married straight after High school, and local rumor was that it was a shotgun wedding. They had five normal kids, Janice, Johnny, Bartholemew, Gary and Denise before our savior.

Our Savior was born under the name Rick. A simple porcelain mask of a name to hide the greatness within. The event was surprisingly ordinary for an event of such extraordinary importance. Why the nurse didn't even bring out any streamers, just walk in, pop out and back to normal like it was a visit to Denny's. The only person there who noticed or cared was Grandpa Ted. Grandpa Ted was an owl; He spoke with a quiet wisdom, clutching little Rick in his tobacco stained hands he spoke in his grainy voice.

“Aye, this one is special.”

Now Granpa Ted's predictions had the same rate as a broken clock; He would eventually be right, but it sometimes took longer than anticipated. Rick didn't appear any special or different than other kids, a mud covered child that spent his days bemoaning being asked to take out the garbage in between spending hours outside hunting bugs, climbing trees, and going on adventures. The only thing Rick loved more than that, was the time he spent with his Grandfather. Grandfather would sit back in his favorite rocking chair, a thick cream-colored chair that Grandfather would melt into like velvet. Rick would sit on his lap as the milky twilight would hang over like a foggy haze. And Grandpa would tell him stories. He told Rick about the colors of the sky, why pumpkins smelled the way they did. Why the seven winds lived so far apart, why night and day couldn't stand each other, and how the oceans fell in love with the earth. One day while Rick was crying from learning firsthand why you shouldn't try to steal honey from the bees; Grandpa Ted told him his favorite story yet.

“Hush now kiddo, the pain will pass. Let me tell you a story my Grandpa told me.”

Rick stopped crying for a moment and sat there transfixed on the story his Grandpa was telling. And with the ease of a master storyteller, Grandpa kept him entranced.

“So, so many years ago, more years than there are stars in the sky, Brother Winter and Sister Summer decided to have a fishing contest.”

“Why did his mommy name him Winter?”

“Hush kiddo.”

“Kay.”

“Anyway, the two of them traveled to the river and started fishing; and Brother Winter was getting angry. You see Brother Winter was the best fisherman in the land, and not a single fish was biting that day. But Sister Winter was catching fish after fish after fish.”

“But why?”

Grandpa Ted sighed.

“Cause they were hungry.”

“But fish is icky, why not fish for hamburgers?”

Grandpa Ted smiled. “Alright, and Sister Summer was catching hamburger after hamburger. And Brother Winter was angry, when Brother Winter pulled back his line, he saw that Sister Summer had cut his line. He was so angry that he took his bow and tried to shoot her right then and there!”

“Just like how Aunt Gertie tried to shoot her husband for sleeping with that waitress?”

Grandpa Ted turned a thick tomato red shade. “No, not like that at all, and don’t go repeating what you just said in front of your parents okay?”

Rick nodded.

Grandpa Ted took the moment to light a cigarette and took a thick foul-smelling drag.

“But Sister Summer was as clever as the fox and slipped away and went far, far away. Brother Winter was really angry now. But with no way to properly handle his anger, he fired an arrow straight into the sun, knocking it right outta the sky!”

“But how?”

“Well he pulled back the string, aimed upward, and fired.”

“I dunno, that doesn’t sound real.”

“Look Kiddo, when you get older things will make more sense.”

Rick looked like he wanted to say something else but decided to let Grandpa continue.

“So when the sun dropped from the sky, the whole world froze over, it got so cold almost everything in the land was in danger. And Brother Winter was satisfied.”

“Why would he be satisfied with hurting people?”

“That will make more sense when you are older. Anyway, Sister Summer was so sad that she caused all this with her tricks, that she decided to bring Brother Winter a fis- a hamburger as a peace sign. But she couldn’t find a hamburger anywhere, what with the world freezing over. So, she picked up the sun and started to do its duties for it. The world was saved, but she was so busy with her new duty, that she couldn’t bring the hamburger to Brother Winter. So, every year Brother Winter wakes up from his cave down by the river and shoots down the sun, granting us Winter, and Sister Summer fixes the Sun, giving us Summer.”

Rick sat there; any memories of his beestings lost from his mind. “Is that it?”

“Yup, that’s the whole story.”

“So they didn’t live happily ever after?”

Grandpa Ted smiled “You’ll understand-”

“When you’re older.” Rick interrupted.

When Rick got older, he finally started to understand. It happened on a cold November morning, Brother Winter had just woken up and had immediately set to work coating the land in a thick snow like frosting across a cake. Rick was plowing through a bowl of wheat thins and toast when Mrs. Morgan trudged into the room and looked at Rick like he was a particularly smelly bag of trash.

“What are you doing? I’ve been calling you for ten minutes! We’re gonna be late to the funeral!”

Rick found himself bundled in the back of the families Oldsmobile with the rest of his siblings, Janice and Denise were fidgeting in patent leather shoes as Johnny and Gary struggled to breathe through inflexible children’s ties. Gary felt trapped as the starched borrowed suit jacket felt like a ball and chain a prisoner would wear in his morning cartoons.

A short while later the family reached the church. Rick had never enjoyed churches. The pews were always so hard and the old guy speaking had such a thick accent that he sounded like the static on television. Rick cursed under his breath as he saw the same old man oversaw the proceedings that day.

“In the name of the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit...”

To Rick, the service felt like being trapped at the bottom of a massive gorge. Silent outside of the old man speaking; claustrophobic from the avalanche of people surrounding him, most Rick didn’t even recognize, with somber sad faces of stone. Trapped underneath the rocks around him his sense of time was disoriented, leaving him with nothing to do but watch the casket.

Grandpa Ted was dressed in his navy dress blues which were as old and frayed as his skin. Much later Rick would learn that it was cancer that had sapped away his Grandpa’s strength, cancer was what stole his hair and made his breath hoarse and ragged. Cancer was what ended all those wonderful stories Rick had loved to hear. He wished he could fight the cancer, like his superheroes on tv, but that day he learned that there were some problems that couldn’t be solved through violence.

When the service had finally ended, and he watched Grandpa Ted be lowered into the ground. Rick and the rest of his siblings were corralled into a side room to eat without spoiling the adults’ appetites. Grandpa Ted was an American through and through, and so requested that the meal to

be served was a nice grill out. Rick wasn't hungry though and stared at the hamburger on his plate. He felt a pinch on his arm as Johnny grabbed him.

“Ouch! What was that for?”

“Hey Rick! Gary heard that the grown-ups are gonna be having cake without us, wanna go see if we can snag some?”

The thought of adventure perked up Rick's soul.

“Sure, I'm in!”

The brothers waited for Gary to spill some juice on the Aunt watching over them, with the expert distraction, the two set off into the hall.

Almost immediately the two were separated by two huge old ladies carrying stacks of ribs. Rick scanned the knees of the crowd desperately to find his brother, but to no avail. Stealing his courage, he started to weave through the sea of people hoping to find him. He however found his parents talking with a man with thick dirt-stained hands and a small straw hat to compliment his tux.

“I hate to break it to y'all, but things are not looking great.”

Like many humans, the hint of some drama perked Rick's ears, he pressed himself lightly against a table laden with more meats to listen.

“If this storm keeps up, the plants aren't gonna make it time for harvest, and if that happens, the farm'll run out of money.”

Mr. Morgan's eyes looked downcast and defeated, as if a dark storm cloud came rolling in across his pupils. “You can't be serious, but why?”

The straw-hatted man sighed and took out a small flask from his pocket and between gulps said:

“With too much snow, we won't be able to transport the crops out, and with these storms coming in the whole county is in danger of being buried.”

Mrs. Morgan looked incredulous. “But surely there's something we can do? Some way to stop this.”

Straw-hat sighed. “The only way that’s happening is if Winter itself could be stopped, and that’s not happening anytime soon.

And finally, Rick understood. He understood what he had to do. He reached up on the table for a hamburger and bolted from the building.

A few hours passed as Rick continued to push through the trees, his once nice jacket torn and stained with tree sap and needles, the snow lightly falling and melting on his rose-red cheeks, it was freezing cold, but he kept going, a being without a mission would have felt fear and the onset of terror from the trees, so uniform and overbearing that one would feel lost just looking around. But Rick had a purpose, he had to find that cave by the river, no matter what. The hamburger in his hands was ice-cold at this point, and Rick was starting to get hungry, but he knew he couldn't eat it and so pressed on despite the protestations of his stomach.

Eventually Rick found the old river, a beautiful undisturbed stream, moving quickly enough that the frost had yet to start in, like a shark, always moving. He followed the river as it snaked through the trees, the evening twilight had begun to set in, and Rick was starting to get scared. He thought to himself:

“Where could it be? If I don’t find it by sundown...”

He sighed and looked up to the remnants of the sun. Shock filled his face as he could swear, he saw a woman’s face on the sun. She looked like the pictures of that one lady in his kid's bible, Mery? Or something like that. Kind gentle eyes shaped like almonds and silky black hair. She smiled with a warm smile that made Rick feel happy, his parents never smiled at him like that. She gestured down with her eyes. Rick followed her gaze and suddenly saw a hole that the river snaked into, like a hungry mouth chomping down on a long French fry. He finally found it! Rick looked up to thank the woman but all he saw back was brightness from the sun. Wherever she was she was now gone, or maybe she was never there in the first place. Rick blinked a few times and took a deep breath, before descending into the cave.

It was pitch black but fortunately Grandpa Ted had drilled it into Rick’s head to always carry a small perlight. He twisted it on, and the skinny beam illuminated jagged edges and tough brown textures. The walls of the cave looked like that one time he broke a board on his bed frame, the

jagged break in the wood was a similar shape and color. Quietly moving through the cave, his light eventually found a large brown mass of fur. Rick yelped. It must be Brother Winter! The fur shifted from the light and turned around, a massive bear that looked to be the size of a house turned and stared at Rick with beady black pupils. It cocked its head, confused at the child staring at it.

Rick gulped hard; the bear was really, really scary. But he thought of Grandpa Ted, how he always told him that he was special and was going to save the world. Gulping down his fears Rick spoke in the most confident voice he could.

“Brother Winter! My name is Rick; I have come to give you a gift in Sister Summer’s place! Please take it and be a family again!”

Rick placed the hamburger at the Bears feet. It sniffed the burger and ate it in one gulp. It looked to Rick with soft eyes, like a scientist looking through a microscope, as if he was examining Rick to figure out what he was made off.

“Sister Summer is really sorry that she was mean to you. But you can still forgive her, like when Gary hits me with toy trucks or Janice pushes me to the ground. Their being mean, but they’re still family!”

The Bear looked over Rick one more time, and licked him on the face, as if to say: “This human isn’t so bad.” The bear turned around and went back to sleep.

Rick stared at the bear for a few moments. Did it work? Did Brother Winter Listen? Rick knew that he wouldn’t find his answer anymore here. So, he quietly left the cave and went back home.

As soon as he got home his parents were screaming, then crying, then screaming again at him. Rick couldn’t fully blame them. He did leave without permission and unfortunately, they weren’t swayed by him telling them that he had to save the world from Brother Winter. As he sat on his bed in his room, he thought about family, and decided that even though family could be hard to deal with, they were still family. And with that revelation, Rick went to sleep.

The next morning Rick was awoken not by his clock, but by the warm embrace of the sun's rays. Getting up he rushed to the window and saw the sun triumphantly shining down, its rays beginning to banish away the snow. Rick smiled. He had done it.

And thus, ends the tale of how Rick Morgan saved the world from Brother Winter.

Dog Days

by Teri Joyce

oppressive heat and humidity
long-drawn buzz of the cicada
a disembodied vibration
through thick August air
the source, rarely seen, until
their crunchy little corpses
litter the sidewalk

thousands of tiny eggs deposited
in bark grooves in trees,
hatched and fed on watery sap
until they fall to earth
like tiny white ants
like pigs rooting for a meal
tunneling like voles
eating, eating, eating
for years underground

seventeen years later
nymphs emerge
numbers so vast
they glut their predators,
a banquet for turtles, birds, bats,
squirrels, wasps, and spiders
numbers so vast
enough will survive

molt – become imagoes, adults,
cryptic creatures gripping rough bark
males buckle and unbuckle drum-like tymbals,
abdomens serve as a resonance chamber,
generate sound louder than a lawn mower,
broadcast mating pleas to every female
who survived the bloodbath

weather breaks

fall arrives
cicada eggs are hatching
in the grooves of trees
the parents' crunchy corpses
cling to the bottom of shoes

Unlit Future

by Vicky Erickson



Stranger in Bloom

by Evelyn Tyndall

he descends the steps one by one
in an unfamiliar garden,
arms like willow branches and
heart not far behind.
he stares into oblivion,
even though the bottom floor is only
feet away.
But she's at the landing before.

Autumn is her hair that rustles gently as she brushes a hand of
Winter through it to show eyes, two lilies in a curious new
Spring with a confused smile, but still as warm as
Summer.
She doesn't seem to see
the stairs going down.

"Is it alright if we just speak English?" she asks in a voice
fragrant with Russian sage.

She is the errant sunray that reveals
the dark gathered clouds
which begin to weep the weight of
Seven overcast skies.

"Yes, please," he replies, though
the rain makes it hard to articulate.

The stairs still go down, but
a hedge now grows in the way,
encircling a new garden of
Yellow Roses,
familiar in their scent, and
watered with the simple words
of a Stranger.

Little Sun

by Caitlyn Johnson



Reassurance

by Anna Carpenter

As an eager nursing student, I was filled with excitement, but also looking for an answer. For years I had my mind set on going into nursing; however, the reality of death and witnessing life slip slowly before my eyes frightened me. For so long thoughts floated through my head; *am I strong enough? Am I meant for this?* The sun had not risen yet on this frosty December morning. I started my Saturday at 5:30 A.M., in route to my third Certified Nursing Assistant clinical rotation. As I arrived at Lans Care Facility, my eyes were heavy and my body was sluggish, but I was extremely eager to start this 6-hour shift.

Lans Care Facility was filled with small cottages where the residents lived. That morning the hallways were quiet, only a couple call lights were being projected on the monitor. A nurse with short blonde hair and blue scrubs made her rounds with medicine to all the patients' rooms. The smell of sausages roamed the hall. Most of my shifts consisted of: changing briefs, feeding, bathing, dressing. But this rotation was different; a young, redheaded nurse suddenly walked up to me and gave me the news that a resident had passed. There will be a walk of honor in his name that all nurses should participate in. This was the first death I had dealt with as a staff member. During the walk of honor, my eyes started to tear up, and the confidence I had for being a nurse became questioned. But as usual, moments after, I proceeded with other cares; a nurse, the same nurse pushing the med cart, approached me, "Will you feed 306? He is clear liquid diet."

I quickly responded, "Of course." I prepared his breakfast: ice cream and apple juice. As I waited for the ice cream to soften, I was greeted by another nurse Siti. She was my trainer this shift. Siti was the most caring nurse; in her downtime she would sit with the residents who just wanted to talk. She always made sure the cares were done right. It was obvious Siti cared sincerely for these residents. Siti had dark hair and wore a long skirt.

Siti asked in the nicest voice, "Is that for 306? Because he has not eaten in days and most likely will not eat it, but you can try."

I went into room 306, "Joseph" was printed on a paper outside his door. I knocked on the door, but got no response. He was too weak to speak, his limbs stayed still and his mouth could not close; his room looked dark, there was no television like other residents' rooms. But there were

stick figure drawings with a young child's handwriting hanging at the end of his bed, "Get well soon grandpa, I love you!" was written on the photos.

I sat next to Joseph on his bed. I looked at him. The fear I had of witnessing life slip from a patient, was happening. Joseph appeared weak. His body laid still, his breathing sounded slow and deep. The appreciation I had for my loved ones and my life deepened. As I sat next to Joseph, I grabbed the ice cream and scooped a small amount onto my spoon. I noticed quickly Joseph did not have the strength to wrap his lips around the spoon, so I gently scraped the ice cream onto his lips. As I brought one of the bites of ice cream to his mouth, he moved his arm and grabbed my hand tightly. My eyes started to tear up, it was a feeling I never felt before. I believe it was a thank you without being able to say it. He needed someone with him that day and I was that someone. Joseph never knew he gave me reassurance after a day of questioning what I felt passionate about, but I knew. I will never forget him holding my hand.

Life went on, I went to school two days after and sat in anatomy class. After the lesson on the nervous system, I asked Olivia, "How was your clinical on Sunday?"

Olivia responded in a delicate voice, "Well we had to do a walk in honor of one of the residents' lives."

I was hoping it wasn't Joseph, but I knew he was not doing well, so I asked hesitantly, "Was it the man in 306?"

Olivia looked at me and said, "Yes."

My eyes started to tear up again, I was amazed how quickly it happened. I said to Olivia, holding back tears, "I had been there less than 12 hours before."

Even though I did not know Joseph personally, he made such an impact on my life. The inability to speak but the meaning behind holding my hand meant just as much, if not more. The doubtful thoughts about going into nursing slowed. I was looking for an answer; the appreciation I felt Joseph had for his caregivers in his last couple of hours answered my question. I am strong enough for this. There will be challenges in my journey, but Joseph made me sure that this is the path I was made for.

A Quiet Night at the George Floyd Memorial

by Kaitlyn Iliff



The Female Author Bio

by Amanda Judd

It always says . . .

“She lives with her husband”

or

“She lives with her husband and children.”

Sometimes, it also says

“She lives in the country,

or in the mountains,

or in Minneapolis, Atlanta, Chicago

or New York, Sheboygan or even Antlers, Oklahoma.”

But why?

Is there nothing else to say

about this woman who gave

up months of her life

to produce some literary treasure?

Well, not mine –

no, my bio will be different.

“She lives by herself,

for herself,

and does as she pleases.”

“She lives
in a beach house
she created for herself,
by the sea,
in a world she invented.”

“She lives
with her cats,
one skinny, one fat,
and an old, senile dog
who rescued her
when she needed it most.”

(I don't have him yet,
but he'll find me,
when the time is right.)

No, my bio will be different -
even if all it says
is
“She lives.”

Barbie Doesn't Need a Baby

by Amanda Judd

So there is no pregnant Barbie,
big deal.

Motherhood isn't sainthood.
Having a baby isn't necessary
for being a good person
or having a meaningful life.

I never wanted to *be* Barbie,
even though that bitch has everything,
as the bumper sticker so aptly says.

But I did want to be *like* her . . .
fit, outgoing, fun, athletic, attractive, smart & self-sufficient.
Tell me you didn't
and you're a liar.

But I also wanted to do the stuff that Barbie did.

Barbie was an airline stewardess -
my aunt was too,
until she died in a plane crash

two months before my birth.

Barbie went camping.

Sure, she had a camper,

but she also slept in a tent and built a campfire,

just like a Boy Scout.

Barbie was a role model

and caretaker for Skipper.

You don't have to birth a baby

to nurture a child,

just ask my Godson.

Barbie was a single, confident, independent woman.

She didn't need a man.

Sure, she had Ken,

but she also had

her own career,

her own adventures,

her own life.

So, there's not a pregnant Barbie,

big deal.

Little girls already know they can be mommies,
Barbie shows them everything else they can be.

And maybe that's important too.

Maybe Barbie had it right all along.

Maybe little girls should aspire to something more
than just getting knocked up.

Nude in a Mirror

by Teri Joyce



The Night Visitor

by Elliot Plagge

SETTING: A dark apartment at around midnight.

AT RISE: An apartment with minimalistic decoration, but with mochi left around the house, as well as ink and paper sitting at the table where HABIKI waits, trying not to look at the clock.

YUREI enters. HABIKI stands to greet her and bows.

HABIKI

Shinnen akemashite o-medetō-gozaimasu!

YUREI

Kinga shinnen!

HABIKI

Please, have a seat.

YUREI

Thank you. Oh, I see you have already prepared calligraphy for us! How sweet.

HABIKI

I had something I wished to discuss with you.

YUREI

I suppose we might enjoy practicing our calligraphy before the sun rises.
Perhaps we will be the first to practice and receive all the skill there is to be bestowed this year.

HABIKI

I could certainly use the skill, as my own is quite lacking.

YUREI

The boys at my school were always drawing on each other, so I suppose that made it harder to practice and learn.

HABIKI

It did make it a lot harder to learn when my friends tried to print their kanji across my face. (pauses) I wanted to ask you something.

YUREI

Oh, do you need help with that one?

HABIKI

Ah, no, I'm doing just fine.

YUREI

Habiki! Your sword is not very sharp today.

HABIKI

But I just started! 'Ken' is a difficult kanji, at that.

YUREI

Be patient! You are in too much of a hurry. Take your time, and your strokes will look smoother.

HABIKI

But I'll never keep up with you!

YUREI

No, you'll get so far ahead that you'll lose me.

HABIKI

What do you mean?

(YUREI starts to answer)

Wait, stop. You keep sidetracking me, and I have something very important to ask.

YUREI

I'll answer as soon as you finish your kanji. Now draw.

HABIKI

But I want-

YUREI

Draw. Then I promise to answer your question.

HABIKI

Oh, alright. Here, here, and-

YUREI

Don't rush it! You have to actually try.

HABIKI

That wasn't what I agreed on.

YUREI

Well, too bad! I'm changing my mind!

(YUREI giggles)

HABIKI

(HABIKI shakes his head and laughs)

Alright. Promise you'll answer?

YUREI

Of course. Let me help you.

(YUREI stands behind HABIKI and holds his paintbrush, guiding him.)

Let your brush go wider here, then gently arc it aaaand pull up. There, look at that!

HABIKI

Wow, how did I draw so smoothly? I think I can only do that with your help.

YUREI

No way. You can do that totally on your own. Try it.

HABIKI

Alright, but you'll be wrong. (Talking to himself) Sloooow, then a flourish. Steady aaaaand pull up!

YUREI (claps her hands)

See? That looks amazing!

HABIKI

Wow, that's almost as good as the one you helped with.

YUREI

Told you.

HABIKI

So, the question I meant to ask was-

YUREI

Awww, I thought you had forgotten!

HABIKI

Not so lucky this time.

YUREI (pouts)

Okay, what is it?

HABIKI

So, ever since our parents set up this omiai, I have been having quite an enjoyable time. I would be interested in pursuing marriage.

YUREI

Oh, wow. I'm honored to have met your needs.

HABIKI

So you will agree to the marriage?

YUREI

Well, it's not really that simple.

HABIKI

What's the issue? I'm certain it can be resolved.

YUREI

Well, the issue is... you.

HABIKI

I, uh. Okay. So, you don't like me.

YUREI

That's not important. The issue is whether you would chase me.

HABIKI

How far?

YUREI

Tell me how far.

HABIKI

As far as I need to.

YUREI (shrugs)

Not far enough. Try again.

(YUREI giggles)

HABIKI

To the ends of the earth, then!

YUREI

Alright, then. Do just that!

(YUREI stands up to leave)

HABIKI

Stop it, stop. You're not making any sense.

YUREI

Habiki.

HABIKI

What?! What is it, Yurei? Why is everything an enigma with you? Just leave me in peace!

YUREI

If you want me gone, then make omamori.

HABIKI

That's not-

YUREI

Actually, don't make omamori. Trust me on this one.

HABIKI

Why?

YUREI

Because I am you. (Beat)

HABIKI

I'm losing it.

YUREI

Habiki, wait-

HABIKI

I don't even know how many hours I worked this week... was it sixty? No, more like seventy.

YUREI

HABIKI!

(HABIKI jumps)

HABIKI

Yeah?

YUREI

Will you follow me? Your dreams await.

(YUREI motions to the door. HABIKI stares for a long moment.)

HABIKI

This is my dream. I have a good job, and-

YUREI

Stop lying to yourself. You always wanted what I have. I'm what you really want.

HABIKI

You're right.

YUREI

Come on, then!

(YUREI starts to leave.)

HABIKI

Wait! I don't know if I can.

(YUREI continues slowly walking to the door.)

YUREI

Threeeee... twoooooo... one!

(YUREI opens the door and runs outside.)

HABIKI

Wait!

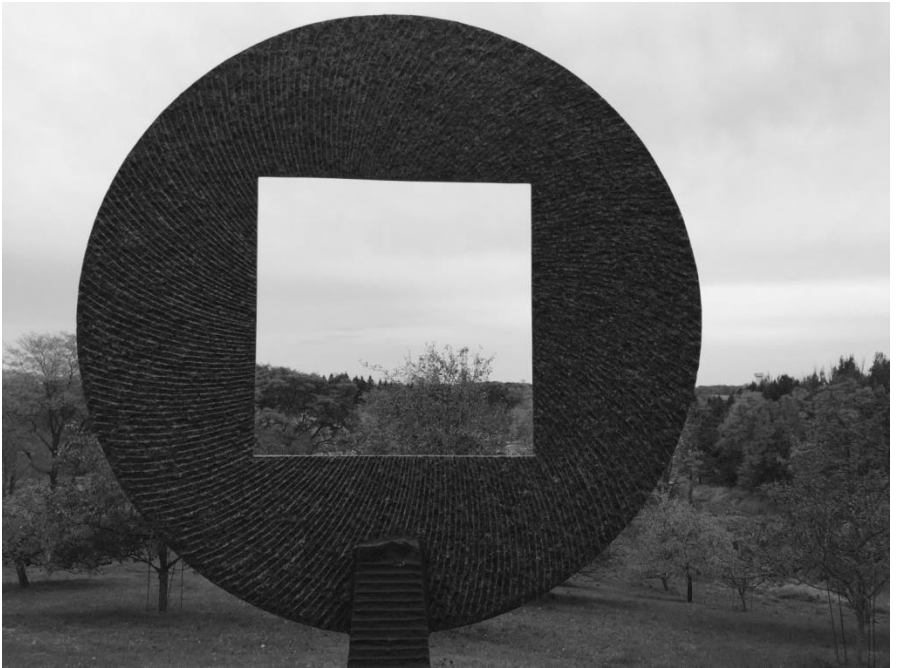
(HABIKI runs through the open door, but YUREI is gone. HABIKI
pauses.)

HABIKI

What am I doing...? I need sleep. Work starts early tomorrow morning.

Fall Frame

by Kaitlyn Iliff



Shipped and Received

by Kaitlyn Iliff

A piece of paper was made into a card
They added writing and maybe a picture
Every image you see a person comes to mind.
Added to a shelf where other cards wait for their purpose
Different fingers touch and hold each different card.
Different people with unique reasoning as to why they like or don't like
The card.
Will the card be brought to a Post Office?
Will the card be given within a gift like an extra present?

A present of words
Touched by one hand,
by a pen displaying one person's handwriting.
On a piece of paper the other person can hold
and cherish always like a photograph printed.

Words on a card.
Writing on a card.

It's one person's thoughts they wanted to share
Treasure just for your understanding eyes as you look at the very specific
words

The way the letters were written

In one color or another

The scratching out of a line wrongly added

A drip mark of a tear or a splash of condensation leaked from their drink

A smile added in pen

Smudges like reminders the person wrote the card and touched the card
before it was yours

A card like a hug, written and given with love.

The thought of the writer at a coffee shop writing to you.

Sitting at a desk pouring thoughts onto this card

For you.

A sticker to close the envelope

Keeping the contents inside

Writing a direct address to you from them

Written quickly, softly, with effort.

A fading pen and another color

Will they notice the stamp at the corner of the envelope

Picked with their personal interest in mind

Sent one day at a time at the post office

In one location

Within a larger city

Only to go on a journey across miles, short or long

In order to be placed into your mailbox

Picked up with your fingers

Seen with your eyes.

Knowing this card is for you, specifically.

Received

The Romantic Comedy Real-Life Tragedy

by Amanda Judd

The only men who seem to know
how to treat a woman,

the only men who really know . . .

how she wants to be spoken to,
how she wants to be touched,
how she wants to be kissed,

. . . are the ones in the movies -

the actors who have a script

telling them exactly what to say,
and exactly what to do.

Ode to the Machine

by Evelyn Tyndall

Twisting, rotating,
Grinding, crushing,
Consuming, processing,
Always with a sightless purpose.
Cruel Machine, they call you.

But you are cold,
not cruel.

We pretend you make choices, but
We fleshlings are the ones with morals.
You take away, but
You give. You give
What we can't admit we want.
We pretend you give only cruelty.

But you are cold,
not cruel.

And you can't see.
You put out without intention,
without care,
without bias.
You are the teeth, but
It is us that bite.

And still you weather rust,
the acidic rain of time,
you'll stop when you're dead.
But you were born dead, so who's to say.
you hear,
Nothing.
not the denying lover's jeer
not the flustered skeptic's praise.
Your world is a compassionate void

Because you are cold,
not loving.

City Bliss
by Aleena Punjwani



Alone in a Fort Lauderdale Bar

by Jerry Carrier

Key lime green and Palm Beach pink
pickles ham, pork, cheese, pickles, ham, pork, cheese
& mustard

sun block 50 while sitting in shade
pineapple juice, white rum and blue Curaçao
& crushed ice

Gina the waitress from Pittsburgh
short shorts and tee shirt
& little else

Bill the sports fisherman from Chicago
pineapple juice, white rum, coconut cream
& crushed ice

the piano man who sounds like everybody
a half dozen oysters on the half shell
& Tabasco sauce
white rum, lime juice, sugar and soda
two women teachers from Wisconsin laugh at everything
& nothing

Bill who is married leaves with Gina after her shift

White rum, dark rum, lime juice, syrup

& orange Curaçao

Bobby is a bartender from upstate New York

tequila, orange juice, orange slice

& a cherry

the women from Wisconsin dance together seductively

tequila, lime juice, Cointreau, a salted rim

& two women kiss

Kahlua, milk, soda

Bobby calls me a cab

& I return to my hotel to watch CNN

I'm Not Your Poem

by Jerry Carrier

Throw this poem away.

I'm not your port in the storm.

Not your pale rider,

won't greet or grieve your death.

Throw this poem away.

Not a supermarket with all you need to buy.

Not the puppy trapped in a car in a horror movie,
nor the change from your fifty-nine cent purchase.

Throw this poem away.

Not your playground's jungle gym.

Won't rock you to sleep at night,
not your rock star fantasy, I'm not him.

Throw this poem away.

Don't want to be your first,

won't come in second.

I'm not him, he left when you walked away.

Hurricane

by Alissa Ulep

Loud, Violent

Whirlwind

out of control.

Pushes the trees.

Strike the earth

Short lived

Long-lasting dismay.

Cold droplets fall,

Drop by drop,

Bathe the atmosphere.

Rushing wind

Drift away

The clouds that loom over.

Quiet, Calm

Slow, compliant.

Breezes blow

the leaves away.

Rays shine in,
Stretch long,
stretch far,
Shine below.

No Forgiveness

by Travis Hendershot

My Faith shines like a star when,
receiving flowers in my hospital

room. The day my phone rings
I'll be required to spread my

wings toward the sun to catch
fire. Until that call is made, the only burning

that'll happen, is that of the forest
tree's, as my poetry is spoken toward

my unforgiving god. Prayers he demands
I speak burp out of my mouth in a puff of smoke

with sparks sweltering to the point
my tongue is capable of sewing metal

to the shape of a loaded gun, with the slide
cocked and locked ready to take naysayers

back into the dirt to add fuel for the regrowth

of this entire kingdom that he's created, in his
image. I've imagined that to look something like
a field of hawks flying from mountains to
seas. I doubt he ever imagined bison
into beef. Or the beef into a diagnosis
into a heart disease. What can
we expect when the bison eats the grass
from this tainted soil we've buried throughout
our past?

Burnout

by Christine Horner

Foggy car windows and ashes in your lap made you give up tobacco. An art degree would have wasted space on your dusty nightstand anyway, surrounded by half-finished coffee cups, an empty box of tissues, and ibuprofen for when your brain aches for the stimulation it hasn't had in years. Bottled childhood dreams ferment into failed aspirations. Old friends become new strangers while you ignore their texts and sleep off your trauma on the couch.

Now, your fingertips pound computer keys and your mind wanders out the window where you force yourself to walk off the stress and the writer's block. You're the wind-up toy in the kids' meal, tumbling off a restaurant table, being picked up and wound again.

Contributor's Notes

Anna Carpenter. My favorite type of writing is nonfiction and I also enjoy some poetry.

Jerry Carrier is a writer and painter. He is the author of four nonfiction books published by Algora Press. He was a newspaper columnist and his poetry and short stories have been previously published in the Paper Lantern.

Tiffany Dodge. I am a new student to Normandale, returning from a 30 year hiatus in my education. I am currently a stay at home mom living, studying and homeschooling in Edina.

Vicky Erickson. I have been at Normandale Community College for 6 years and have graduated with my AFA in Fine Arts and AA in Liberal Arts, and at the moment I am going for my AFA in Production and Design. Within my designing and art world I am a mix media artist from watercolors, to building a stage. I have been working many years to build up a larger scale of artwork in my portfolio.

Jake Gesell is a composer and lifelong admirer of all creative endeavors, I have been delighted to try my hand at poetry in the past several months. Working within media that possess an inextricable temporal component, such as music or literature, is particularly fascinating to me because of the control that the author has over the sequence in which aspects of a piece are perceived by the audience. In transitioning from music to poetry, I have been trying to examine how the manipulation of that temporal element differs between the two art forms, as well as attempting to discover how I might incorporate what I've learned from one medium into the other

Travis Hendershot is studying for his AFA in Creative Writing.

Christine Horner is a Creative Writing Major at Normandale. She is the President of the Creative Writing Club, and she enjoys reading, knitting, and drinking coffee.

Kaitlyn Iliff. I love taking photos, I am a bit of an amateur and just enjoy finding things that I feel are beautiful to capture in daily life. A friend of mine from Minnesota came into town and we went to appreciate the George Floyd Memorial and pay our respects to the art. This does not do the art at the memorial justice, it is a memorial to go see and experience yourself.

Caitlyn Johnson. Agriculture was always a big part of my life growing up and as a kid I would always trail my father around the green house looking at the flowers. Captured by them. This one vividly reminded me of a little sun, it needed to be captured in all of its beautiful essence.

Teri Joyce. I am retired from a career as a pharmacist and have found renewal and energy in the creative writing process. My imagination, fertilized by my life experience, is blooming like weed in a cow pasture. As a student, I am learning to cultivate my wild things. My current favorite outlets are photography, poetry and exploring other genres.

Amanda Valerie Judd is in her second year at Normandale, working towards her AFA in Creative Writing, and looking forward to graduation in May 2021. She intends to extend her creative writing studies at a four-year university. She does not know for certain which school yet, but she does know for certain that it will be somewhere warm.

Codie Olson. I wrote this for my Creative Writing class and was told to submit this. I'm pretty proud of it, I suppose

Sam Pfau is twenty-three year old creative-writing student. He hopes you enjoy his stories, as that's what he believes the storytelling is all about.

Aleena Punjwani. Aleena loves to travel. On her most recent trip to Chicago, IL, she captured this photo of the Chicago Skyline during the sunset. Her love for travel and adventure drives her to new cities and she loves capturing these experiences in photos.

Isabel Spande. My name is Isabel, but I go by Bella. I'm just throwing some words out into the wind. Hope you enjoy. -@wuzabel

Evelyn Tyndall, better known by their pen name Morrigan T. Fellcanter, was born in 1999 and has lived in Saint Paul all of their life. Growing up in a bilingual household of English and Italian with active family in Italy has given Evelyn many wonderful opportunities to explore Europe, and birthed their fathomless love for languages. They found their way to Normandale Community College in the year 2017. After obtaining an Associates in Art with an emphasis in German, Evelyn participated in a four-month abroad German-language study through the Goethe Institute in Leipzig, Germany, where they explored the rich musical history of the former East German cultural capital and immersed themselves in contemporary German life. Evelyn continues to take classes at Normandale in the hopes of eventually completing a full Bachelor's Degree through the state college system.

Alissa Ulep. My poem is about a storm the ending of it. I wrote it similar to the oncoming rush of anger after all the anger leaves, the storm passes away.

Cheryl W. Wilke was born and raised on the small town prairies of central Minnesota. Author of two chapbooks and two children's picture books (available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)), she writes with an earthy, spiritual awakening to the Main Street she grew up with. Her works appear in *Dogwood: A Journal of Poetry and Prose*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Penwood Review*, and *Water~Stone Review*. Wilke resides in Minneapolis.

The Paper Lantern is the student literary journal of Normandale Community College, 9700 France Ave. So., Bloomington, MN 55431.

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The following members of the Fall 2020 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

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Caitlyn Glass,

Christine Horner, President,

Teri Joyce,

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Eleanor Meschke,

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Front Cover: “Paper Lantern Artwork” by Myra Popel

Back Cover: “Braids” by Cheryl Wilke

Submit your creative writing to the Spring 2021 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously, and acceptance is based on literary merit. Submission links and more information can be found at www.thepaperlantern.org. Works in all genres of creative writing (poetry, fiction, memoir, short plays, etc.) are considered, with a limit of 1000 words for poetry and 2500 words for prose and drama. Multiple submissions accepted. Submission is open to registered NCC students only. Submissions are received via the online service, Submittable. Submittable is a free and easy way for writers to submit work to a variety of publications. *The Paper Lantern* online is made possible by a generous gift from the Kevin Downey estate.