

The Paper Lantern

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Spring 2023

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Special thanks to the Normandale Creative Writing Club who helped review submissions, and to our instructor, Steve Woodward, who helped us to format and edit this volume.

Lastly, we are delighted to highlight a few of the 2023 Patsy Lea Core Award Winners whose Poetry and Fiction can be found throughout this collection: Lisa Brodsky, Saff Drayton, Malaya Guerrier, and Dhoha Qasem.

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The Paper Lantern

INTRODUCTION

In this *Paper Lantern* volume, we, the AFA Capstone Class, are pleased to feature the amazing works of Normandale's Spring 2023 best artists and writers. As always, the *Paper Lantern* features the finest literary and art pieces by Normandale Community College students, whether that be in prose, poetry, painting, sculpture, or etc.

Beyond this though, the *Paper Lantern* highlights aspects of the NCC community through stunning work and diverse voices. For this reason, we are delighted that the contributors presented in this collection come from such a wide range of ages, races, nationalities, genders, sexualities, and backgrounds.

We also know, however, that diversity goes beyond demographics. Real diversity is found and expressed through heart, soul, experience, voice, and style, too. Individually and collectively, the chosen pieces in this volume reflect upon this—upon the power of art to transcend and honor our differences. As you read, you will find poems of hardship and those of playfulness. You will find stories as you know and love them, and those that twist and twirl into new shapes. There will be art that makes you cry, and that which makes you smile. From the magic of the mundane to the macabre, the work in this volume radiates multifariousness. And in this way, it provides not only a little portrait of the NCC community, but life itself. For this (and others), we would like to acknowledge that the work presented here is not merely a collection of student work—it is the work of brilliant artists, authors, and poets.

We hope that you will enjoy reading this collection as much as we enjoyed compiling it. And whatever you take from it, we are certain that it will delight you in some way or another.

Sincerely,
The Capstone Class

Poetry

CAFETERIA BOMBSHELL

Saff Drayton

She loves you.
Passes you forms in
the lunchroom,
likes to watch you do
pull-ups, chase
Karkov with orange
juice, smolder in
tangerine street light,
cast long, still-
blood shadows with
blurred gold rims.
She wants to
fold you in her flag,
knit stars and
strip-search stripes of
your youth,
brunette artillery,
candy-coaxing cafeteria
bombshells to
come fight her dark wars.
In the end
her someday-separation
will run to
cleave you back to red
and bruised.

MIDWESTERN GORE

Saff Drayton

Love lives in the gut
entrails on the entrance ramp
four pulped bodies pressed flat
a doe, a daughter, her sister, her mother
wounds that yawn into potholes
broken bottles made sea-glass
a favorite dog's gold collar
morning breath across the asphalt
birch white bones sprouting
a place to rest my tires
your house—lemon yellow, interred
I'll cast light on all your puddles
press them to pool brighter
cradle worms off the pavement
smother the chill in your pinkies, I promise
I'll build you a home, crawling
grow shoots through spruce tile
wrap you in wool and linen
hide you from worldly wounds, I promise
we'll decompose with grace
unspool our bodies on withered sheets
live on dimmed headlights and drooling radio
let the whole world know, I promise

To decompose with grace
unspool me on withered sheets
live on dimmed headlights and drooling radio
build me a home, crawling
dig shoots through spruce tile
wrap me in wool and linen
hide me from worldly wounds
cast light on all my puddles
press them to pool brighter
cradle worms off the pavement
smother me, you promised
birch white bones sprouting
the place I'm laid to rest
morning breath across the asphalt
a favorite dog's gold collar
broken bottles made sea-glass
wounds that yawn into potholes
a doe, a daughter, her sister, her mother
four pulped bodies pressed flat
entrails on the entrance ramp, I promise
love lives in the gut

UNTITLED DOCUMENT

Saff Drayton

I was eaten alive on Thursday,
back when you played nice.
Taste that blood-metal,
crushed pennies between our teeth
Empty socket, suck me down
Pick tennis ball-lint grass out
of your mouth and
lean in closer to me
take off steel plate-
let armor
thrash
spit
split guitar string hands
on mine, on everything
Duct tape shoe gauze discarded,
ash-tray arms all mine
Give me that look, your looks
sucker succor me in and feel
shimmer water you promised
we'd be mole to mole,
midnight silk-skin swim
rough on rough water
The plucked twang of your prose,
my final listen lesson
Write something pretty after and
Keep it to yourself

I PREFER TO BE THE MAN

Tesuon Gilliam

One time I slept and I dreamed.
There was a vixen inside this dream.
Tattoos depicting a single brown tree living in solitary within a
forest, coat her skin like the red paint of a barn.
Pale scars in the shape of a serrated blade tied their destiny, like the
woven brown strands of rope.

I could see myself in her blue eyes.
The reflections amount to gazes dipped in honey.
Memories become as burned, as the cigarette buds to her lips.
She is a soft-spoken and light-tongued woman.
Yet She flicks endless lies.

Delicious to me at that very moment.
I wanted her, no. I desiderated her words.

Why?

A man who has nothing is just as dangerous as a man who has everything.
I prefer to be the man.

With an illusion.

THE DOWNPOUR

Malaya Guerrier

When the downpour comes and you're all alone
it never seems to stop.

The *ping, ping, ping*

and

drip, drip, drip

and

splat-daddly-dat

constantly strafe you.

You don't know why, though

you learned at some point,

something like:

storm clouds gather, condensation grows,

too great to hold it in any longer.

Then it *pings*,

drips,

and *splat-daddles*

you in a barrage,

melting the wicked witch inside you

or just dissolving whatever is in you,

so you come out cleansed or

rejuvenated or

gone.

And though you've released and dissolved,

let go and be gone,

sometimes,

sometimes

you still stand there

without an umbrella

without puddle boots
without a boat
without a lighthouse
possibly lost, or simply
 waiting to be found
to be given shelter,
to have the *pings*,
drips,
and *splat-daddles*
 wiped off your face.

THE LIFE OF OLIVIA SPRUCE

Malaya Guerrier

Olivia Spruce, world's greatest faux conifer,
stuck in a box
trapped
claustrophobic
not breathing
waiting for that time of year when
snowflakes fall and
hot chocolate mustaches form and
decorations spring up everywhere,
including her.

Finally released to breathe again,
branches unkinked and relaxed,
a few needles dropped in the scuffle,
the family bedazzles her in
sparkly earrings and
multicolor frills with a plaid
red and green skirt.

They top her with a shining crown,
the queen of the neighborhood, the symbol
of the season's dreams with the boxes on her skirt.
Boxes,
perfectly wrapped
with smooth, festive paper with a
bow, or curled ribbons.

But then the boxes are gone.
Olivia cries at her loss, at what was
coming.
Then it came.
The family strips her of
 her earrings,
 her frills,
 her skirt,
 her crown,
and shove them into bins to be placed in their cave of
exile until the next year.
They take Olivia herself, shove her back into her
cardboard cage,
 her body box,
 her sarcophagus.
They shove her in like a
Jane Doe but carry her to her tomb,
her burial chamber,
like a queen.

Olivia Spruce,
 stuck in a box,
 trapped,
 unable to breathe
until next year
when the plows roll through and the
marshmallows melt.

LAST SUNSET I SEE ON THIS ISLAND

Malaya Guerrier

Last light passing through the eclipse of a closing eye,
last sunset I see on this island,
 where the palm fronds wave
 and the coconuts drop like lead weights,
 where the boas incarcerate
 and the crocodiles guillotine,
 where the river and ocean constantly try to suffocate me,
 and where the sand, dirt, and foliage try to drown me.

Last sunset I see on this island,
last light passing beneath my heavy lids,
for tomorrow I leave this island,
 where the clicking dolphins play
 and the sun is my sauna,
 where the dolphins ram the sharks that come too close
 and the sun incinerates me,
 where the jellyfish and eel electrocute,
 the lionfish lethally inject,
 the monkeys mock me,
 and the birds are only bystanders.

Scorpions scorn and sneer at me
while tarantulas tickle me.

Last light I see on this island,
tomorrow's first sunrise I see on the water,
 where the sharks wait to devour me
 and the salt
 dehydrates
 me
 to
 death.

WHEN MY BROTHER TEXTED
ME AND ACTUALLY REPLIED IN A
TIMELY MANNER

Malaya Guerrier

Fri, Jul 8, 2022:
*Hi, Brennen! This is Malaya.
Happy birthday!*
[Read Mon, Jul 11, 2022]

Wed, Sep. 28:

Thank you

["Playing With the Big Boys" by Caleb Hyles, Jonathan Young, and Lee Albrecht]

Should give this song a listen

It's a metal remake from the prince of Egypt

It was a good song, if you wanted to know.

You, of course, knew,

how could you not know?

Yet again, how could you not know to reply, by which I mean

to reply in a timely manner to my simple text

that was so easy to reply to?

By which I mean

I live over here,

you live over there,

I'm your little sister,

you're my big brother . . .

Am I that annoying?

[Shrug emoji]

Wed, Sep 28:
I like it! Thanks for sharing.

Fri, Sep. 30:
Sure thing

What is so sure about this thing about not replying?

I get it:

you work,

you're not addicted to your phone,

you're not going to read my text right away.

And if you're not going to read it right away,

I'm sure you won't reply right away.

Deal with it.

But

it was almost three months.

Fri, Jan 27, 2023 at 6:25 am:

[Meathook by Andrew Baena and Cooper Lagace]

It's from the game doom, known for their awesome sound track

Also how are ya?

How am I?

How am I?

Twelve days after my birthday, and you say *how are ya?* instead of
happy belated birthday!

I felt elated,

or maybe inflated, or

maybe what I feel like after too little sleep and too much sugar.

If I wasn't afraid of heights, I'd be the eagle in the sky screeching

my ecstasy to all who can hear,
happily ruining your eardrums.
Or just smiling widely.
Seriously,
you asked me how I was!

Fri, Jan 27 at 8:51 am:
Pretty good . . .
purple prom dress and black leather jacket . . .
financial aid for college . . .
I got my license!
Disciple's new song "The Executioner"
How are things with you?

Fri, Jan 27 at 10:08 am:
Congrats on all that!
Who are you going to prom with?
I guess now you got your license, you can whip my truck.
Things are going well now . . .
You have a car yet or are you saving?

One hour and seventeen minutes later,
a new world record,
congrats on that!
Did I mention the short time frame already?
And to "whip" your truck?
The last time we spoke
(I still had my permit)
you wouldn't let me drive your truck and I
hadn't even asked.
And now? When is the next time I get to see you
(and your truck)?

It's loud, if not a bit too loud,
it has good bass,
and it took me two tries to jump into it—
what's not to like?

Fri, Jan 27 at 8:37 pm:
I don't have a car yet but I'm saving.

Sat, Jan 28 at 7:13 am:
What kind you want? . . .

Sat, Jan 28 at 9:32 am:
I'm not sure.

Sat, Jan 28 at 3:49 pm:
*Find yourself a Subaru wagon, all wheel drive and they scoot . . .
The early wagon models from 1995–2003
Preferably a five speed manual
And you can lift them*

Still going.
I didn't realize texting was
pickleball, at least not with you.
Like I said,

you're there,
I'm here,
you're busy,
I'm busy . . .

Are you that bored?
Or was it just since your trailer was getting fixed?
Or were you bored and listening to Doom, feeling
doomed for ignoring your sister?

Whatever the cause, I still felt like a
Cinderella-obsessed five-year-old who got to meet Cinderella.

Sat, Jan 28 at 4:57 pm:

I don't know how to drive a manual . . .

I don't really want to learn.

Sat, Jan 28 at 5:56 pm:

But the knowledge of driving a manual would be mint

I suppose, but

I'm lazy and don't want to put in the effort.

Is that why you didn't reply the first time, by which I mean
reply in a timely manner?

You didn't want to put in the effort
to play a game of pickleball with me?

But what now?

AMIDST THE PEAKS

Tenzin Gyaldatsang

Amidst the peaks and valleys,
Where the snow forever lies,
Is the heart of my ancestry,
That I'll never know with my eyes.

My blood belongs to a people,
Whose history runs deep,
Whose struggles and sacrifices,
In my soul forever seep.

My ancestors fought for freedom,
Against an oppressor's might,
Their culture and religion threatened,
Their lives lost in the fight.

The sound of Tibetan chants,
Echo through the wind so clear,
A reminder of my heritage,
A sorrow that's always near.

The prayers of my forefathers,
Like incense, rise above,
Their spirits in the breeze,
Their power in my soul.

Tears roll down my cheeks,
For a home I've never seen,
For the family and friends,
Whose faces are but a dream.

The stories of their bravery,
Woven into my soul,
Their love for their people,
Their fight to remain whole.

Prayer flags flap in the wind,
Carrying their hopes and dreams,
Tales untold and memories,
Forever entwined it seems.

Oh, how I yearn to wander,
On the land of my ancestry,
To breathe the air they breathed,
To see the mountains and valleys.

But for now, I carry their legacy,
Their pain and their delight,
And I pray for a future,
Where Tibet's spirit forever shines bright.

For I am a child of Tibet,
A warrior in my own right,
And I will keep their legacy,
Glowing forever in my sight.

THE LITTLE THINGS

Lilly Hewitt

She was a whisper in the wind
A cool summer breeze on a sweltering afternoon
One that brings a smile to your suntanned face
A gust that wasn't long, yet refreshing and almost whimsical
A part of the joyous moments that hold onto your soul

She was a monarch butterfly at the cusp of spring
The first one you'd see in the mist of black Minnesota sludge
The prettiest one you'd point out and say "Mommy, look!"
She just has flown down south to skip May's first breath
It's not a goodbye, just a "See you later"

She was your favorite pair of socks on a dreary January evening
The times between 4 and 6 where the world seems to dreadfully stop
Even in the midst of a polar vortex, she threw snowballs
As kids, the favorite on the playground for playing pretend
And even older, someone who was always one call away

She was all the little things, she was the roses you stopped to smell
A moment you laugh about when retelling epic stories
A tear of bittersweetness shed in the middle of the night
When pondering how she didn't see herself the way we saw her
Especially smiles of luck, how fortunate I was to have known her

Though we didn't talk everyday, she was someone I looked up to
As a girl who was so unapologetically herself in the midst of a storm
As others hid behind selfish umbrellas, she danced in the puddles
And she didn't just march to the beat of her own drum
She was the whole band getting us to clap along

Of course we don't want to have to miss you
Sometimes it doesn't even seem comprehensible
That your grin isn't there to light up a room anymore
That instead it takes residence on my lockscreen
In an effort to share your glow with the world for years to come

Nevertheless, we all polish your memory like a favorite snowglobe
on the shelves of our minds
And I know you'd say that this isn't "the end", but an "until next time."

AS BAIT, AS OCEAN

Lara Hodgens

Another history blooming the water red.
The carmine warmth of its freshness seeps
into the ancient blues of the sea,
swirling, dancing until they are one.
Alas, it is too late.
The sharks' noses are keen and
their fins swift.
Sleek gray bodies cut clean lines through the water.
 Is this what it means to fly?
Uninhibited motion. Freedom found in the
twist and flick of a spine.
Even here I am heavy,
dragged to the floors of kelp forests.
Taunted by rays of sunlight and
jellyfish who live without feeling
 anything at all.
My muscles flex and shift. I know
I should run—swim—fly
far away from here. But I do
not move. I declare myself a
 treasure chest.
Planted for a lucky voyager to discover.
And wonder how much blood
I would have to give
to change these waters
 eternally.

THE LAST TIME I LET MYSELF BE
TAKEN AWAY

Lara Hodgens

Acid burns in my mouth.
Traces lines of fire up my nose.
My lips part, widening,
jaw aches.
Out forth spews months
of wandering, lost
in crowded jungles and barren
fields alike.
Till I found the path
that led me
Here.

Acid stings my eyes,
pools in the crevices of my ears.
Skin jumps, nails grate.
I surrender myself to
yet another
retelling of the same
worn chapter.
I hold vigil for
my wasted opportunity.
And my arm waits passively
for the familiar sting
of the IV port.

my arm. that is my arm. mine.

My eyelids fall,
lashes twining together.
A week slides by.
When they lift—
gritty and tired—
it is to a cupboard
labeled “trauma”
and the rumbled
complaints of an
ambulance engine.

To be taken away
is a privilege
that feels like a
weakness.
A longing interrupted
by reality.
Here I am a veteran.
A cautionary tale,
sweetened with
street credit.

They may be chipped or
cracked. (fixable)
But I am an anomaly.
A machine running with
no gears or petrol.
My underbelly is a map
of miles flown
over oceans and mountains.
Searching.
 Searching.
Searching.

I curl on the windowsill
of my
borrowed room.

I feel the cold of the glass
against my
flushed cheek.

I stack my fingerprints
on the
shadows of thousands
before me.

And I look out over a suburbia,
not unlike
my own.

I go home.
Held together by
stitches, and stuffed with
gasoline-soaked rags.

Sobered by the
knowledge that
I will never
go back. That I
will never be quite
that whole

Again.

MINIMALISM

C. B. James

It eats at warm wood like worms,
tears down stained glass,
and rots away works of art,
replacing them with angles and concrete.

It lives on the skeletons of its victims,
receives praise for the worthless nothing it leaves behind
as it seeks out prey to continue its crusade of consumption.

Its hunger knows no bounds,
living color eaten like apples
leaving behind the color of death,
pale, sterile white.

It is a mold, a toxic fungus,
Or a virulent, deadly disease.
Felling the masonry,
replacing history with fake, heartless
ugly “new” ness.

HAVE THE DAY YOU DESERVE

C. B. James

I hope that you have the day you deserve.

I hope that you step into a puddle of melted ice,
wearing socks and no slippers,
and that a new puddle appears
under your foot with each pair of new socks you change into
and no matter how many times you wipe the last puddle up.

If you have a dog, I hope one of the puddles is warm.

Please have the day you deserve.

I hope that you step outside on your deck,
and get a big old sliver in your little toe.
That no matter what you do
you can't get it out,
and you push it deeper when you try.

Kindly have the day you deserve.

I pray that every stop light on your way to and from work is red,
and broken,
and stay that way until your hair turns gray.
And that a cop car is right there
every time you start to think of just going,
so you can't without getting pulled over.

I beg you. Have the day you deserve.

RESTLESS NIGHTS

Kaitlyn Johnson

ascending daylight yet can't sleep
hands ticking toward your birthday
feeding reassurance to a friend
scribbling urgent thoughts into poetry
excitement and ideas fizzing over
overloaded with piles of stress
laughter, friends, and hushed whispers
in an unfamiliar, faraway bed
falling into the beloved pages
tangled up in raw pain
shifting restlessly as dawn emerges
begging sleep to grab you

I AM FROM CLAY

Mumtaz Mohamed

I am from clay
From a woven praying mat and colourful *diracs*.
From a beautiful brick house
Comfortable, homely, and always smelled of *oud*.
I am from the camels,
I am from hold your head high and be humble.
I am from the kindness of my mother and the toughness of my father
I am from the religion of peace, represented as terror
I am from the land of poets
Canjero and Hilib.
From the you are your greatest competition
The look at what your agemates are achieving
From pictures stored away in a drawer
Brought out on occasion to appreciate the far we have come.

CLOWNIN' 'N' DROWNIN'

Jessica DeLapp



LOON CALL

Sam Pfau

The Loon trills a melancholic vibrato
scraping through the blackberry bushes
echoing across a city of trees
and resounding down a river highway
buzzing into the bones of squirrels
A droning message to the arboreal citizens

THIS IS A TEST. FOR THE NEXT SIXTY SECONDS, THIS LOON WILL CONDUCT A TEST OF THE EMERGENCY BROADCAST SYSTEM. THIS IS ONLY A TEST. THE BIRDS IN THIS AREA IN VOLUNTARY COOPERATION WITH THE USFS AND OTHER AUTHORITES HAVE DEVELOPED THIS SYSTEM TO KEEP YOU INFORMED IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY. IF THIS HAD BEEN AN ACTUAL EMERGENCY, YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO TUNE TO ONE OF THE LAKES IN YOUR AREA. THIS CONCLUDES THIS TEST OF THE EMERGENCY BROADCAST SYSTEM.

(IN)ORGANIC

Kianna Phillips

You are my personal window
into an undiscovered galaxy filled with
strange green milky ways and planets of
mysterious white bubbles.

Are you covered in sea foam?
Bubbly creamy foam bursting
from the vast ocean with
streaks of chartreuse and teal.

Is it algae?
Are you a slice of life
with thousands of bright cells
running around within the turquoise
of water multiplying faster
than the speed of
light?

Or are you chemicals?
Are the bubbles a chemical reaction
of vicious gases bursting
forth threatening anyone that goes near you?

Are you not living?
Is everything that makes up your being
a combination of inorganic materials
and chemicals that create those
brilliant colors of tortoise
and cobalt blue?

You answer to no one while
the square portal that has been cut
into your being
hangs precariously on a wall.

HOPING WITH FISTS OF THUNDER

Dhoha Qasem

*We will bloom forever.
I will never forget that.*

My nine-year-old ears capture,
eyes flickered and unhindered.
Watching the red flares occurring on TV,
tearing through all the yells of—

*Allahu Akhbar!*¹

Like fangs burying across our territory.
Fought with wrists and rocks held high
as the world orbited the wrong direction

Kids like me suffer salted wounds.
Distant and yet,
my eyes rained with a thawed heart
for the bloodied war on screen.

My peaceful living room
Sun peeking through the windows.
Hate crept into my shallow mind
Fists clenched as if I was there
There for my people and relatives
*al shaab wa al shuhada*²

¹ (ربكأ هللأ) Allahu Akhbar: God is the greatest!

² (ءادهشلأو بعشلأ) *al shaab wa al shuhada*: The youth that fights and the martyr/witness.

but most importantly
*la balady*³ Palestine.

As my people on screen
wave the radiant flag—
Yelling for Palestine's cries to be heard
The shouts land upon deaf ears of the world

The battle rages on . . .
Before the sun decides to shine past
Those darkened slaughtered windows.

³ (دالاب ال) *la balady*: My country.

JORDAN

Dhoha Qasem

Undone heat
of sandy deserts that
reaved through all
knits and knots
into skin and bones.

Home-ly homelessness
was repented continuously
from the undone graves
that walked along sidewalks
of wilted roses.

My loved ones
stretched their arms out
as I ran faster towards
their lonely yet quiet—
Embrace

However, I came too late.
The two empty chairs
one supposedly for Seedo,
the other for my cousin
had already been removed.

I was young when the sky
opened for their souls to rise.
Looking back, and even now
the dry scrubs and trees weep
yet another year

Winds of change come,
but the house remains constant.
The undone greenish paints
on the tiles are not as opaque
with dust falling off them

Feared roaches and critters
still climbed from hairs,
and the stray cats
continue running around
in search of supper.

Jordan once more
leaves without a yawn.
From a welcoming heart
nostalgia grasps the gate.

BLACK-AND-WHITE PAINTING

Sarah Sells

The room beams with color.
Paintings sprawl across the floor,
soaking into the walls, splattering on the doors, the mattress,
on us.
Caramel-scented light spills
in through the windowsill, reflecting
off the emerald coast, crashing into coral.
An azure oasis.
Cotton candy clouds sing to the sky, an orchestra of feathers fall
 across the sand, flying
up to the orange sun.
Up, your chest rises.
Vines of fingers wrapped into mine, a calm breeze blows
salt through my nose.
Down.

The room is a black-and-white canvas.
Moonbeams crawl through the doorway, clutching tight
against the sliver of ceiling, an intoxicating sea,
a drunken sleep.
Empty bottle of tequila; full room of street lights.
Polluted, white lights infiltrate the sky, choking the stars.
Artificial sun,
an open flame boiling my skin. Hanging
in the stale air.
Ink bleeds through the canvas, crying in a puddle of smoke that fills
 the room. Lungs black

with tar.

The oil seeps into my skin, bubbling
in my veins.

Your skin sinks under my tears,
fingers turned to prunes, saltwater through your bloodstream.

I want to be good, your words sound
through the radiator, echoing across the floorboards.

Wind knocks on windows, clawing
through the earth, ripping
a hole between the bed.

I want to be good.

Oil flows over canvases, clogging the vents, leaking
through the floor. It floods

out of my mouth, my pores. Molasses catching in my throat, oozing
out of my stomach It empties

in the sea, rocking me to sleep.

I want to be good.

DOLL

Sarah Sells

Pick the daisy petals,
drawing blood across the lawn.
Drops of dew, hidden beneath the grass, collecting
on the feet of the children, shoes stained gray.
Picking petals, bleeding pollen.
Laughter echoes
throughout the yard, bells ringing in their cheeks.
I love her, I love her not.

Pink sheets stretched out
across the sky, curtains drawn on crying birds.
A teddy bear
bandaged and bruised, stitches running across its mouth,
its stomach, as it yearns for a hug, for warmth,
for love.
A dying doll.
I love her not, I love her.

Pluck the butterfly wings,
pulled from the lifeless body.
Smooth-peeled skin dipped in honey. Beeswax pouring
from her open mouth,
Her lips stained
by my blood, her body laid across the lawn.
Oh baby, you can't be my doll forever.

A thirsty sunflower crying for my water
that I promised. So pitiful.
She sputters and coughs up the butterfly wings, splattering
oil across the floor.
She did not bleed pink.
I wait for the birds to pluck the seeds
from her eyes. Pull the stuffing from the teddy bear,
stuff it in her mouth.
I love her,

I love her not.

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Sarah Sells

Her frozen face against the dirt, pale body
dropped into the casket.
limbs twisted around her body in a nauseating web, still twitching
and convulsing. I pushed her deeper
in the wet earth. A young face, hidden under the dust and bugs.
Decomposing,
returning to where she belonged. Soil of the grave
sinking into my skin, grass
planting in my clothes, roots clutching
at my feet to hold me there.

Pulled the roots from my shoes, washed down
the smell of decay, a mess of grass-stained clothes
left in the trash.
I promised to never speak,
afraid the bugs would come crawling out of my lips.
Promised to never move,
afraid the grass would grow under my feet.
I taught my lungs to breathe the air, my heart to beat blood
through my veins.

The doctor inspects my body.
Needle draws my drying blood, stethoscope plays the heart that I
beat. My pulse
beating against the fabric that strangles
my skin. Eyes
make out each letter on the screen, squinting
between the weeds
that fill my vision.

Needle clogs my nose, running with the smell of bleach.
Scratching pen on sand. Humming sun
glares at me.
Skin ripping across the chair. Molasses collecting in my pores.

Knock on the door. Screams down the hall.
The doctor's words creep through the door:
"everything is normal." The screams pile into the hole in my stomach,
smile drawn across my face.

Even though I must force the sticky syrup of words from my mouth,
my vocal cords can still vibrate. My heart is clogged
with seeds
as I struggle to pump it, but my skin isn't rotting or peeling. My
brain is filling
with mold,
but I can still read the words on this page.

My body crumbles with each step as vines
sprout from my knees. Flowers
grow from pores, worms nest in my hair. I claw
at the dirt, digging through the grave until my hands
disintegrate to soil.
My stomach rumbles. A vomit of screams pour
from my mouth, maggots feast on the food.
Grime falls from my limbs,
from my mouth. My stomach
lined in spider webs.
The large hole stares at me from the dirt.
There is no body left.

EVERY WOMAN'S BIRTHDAY IS A FUNERAL

Sarah Sells

The apple bloomed from the buds of the tree.
A newly ripened body; full and sweet, breath full of roses.
Dipped in wax, coating every crevice in a smooth honey.
Skin softer than a daisy, smooth as calm water.
The petals untouched, untainted, full of pure nectar,
yet to carry the scent of the honeybee pollen.

Songbirds danced around the trees, chirping
the songs of Venus. Men watched the sky,
lured to the blossoming apples. Red as the lips
that stained the walls, frozen in a smile,
haunted by the soft glow of barren skin.

Held in his hand, fondled in his fingers,
he took a bite,
the apple writhed in warmth.
His gaze beating down as the sun to the sea floor,
a golden light scattered across the waves, crashing with the sound
of the birds.
His fingers grew cold
as they grasped the body, sending ice through its seeds.
He spit it out, apple rolling across the grass,
its insides filled with dirt.

The tree stands tall, mother to the yard,
Full of new buds, new children.
Their laughs
latching onto leaves, ablaze with birds, who sing
the tune of “Happy Birthday.”

Worms burrow deep
inside of the apple, flies make homes
in the pile of mush, stealing what remains of the fruit. Growing mold
with each bite.
Spiderwebs of fuzz weave their way through the skin, gnawing
at the rotting, wrinkled flesh,
eating it alive. Flakes of wax peel, hair grows
through the follicles, covered in gray
ashes of nectar.
A living corpse.

Prose

BUGSBY AND BARDROCK

Erin Anderson

A cold, dreary chill had settled on a secluded cottage, a cottage that usually exuded warmth and joy, often filled with boisterous laughter. A three-foot-tall mechanical creature was pathologically sweeping at nonexistent dust by an open door, staring out into the dark. Waiting very expectantly. Forgotten by something.

It had been ninety-two days, twenty-three hours, and fifty-four minutes since Bugsby had last seen his creator, Bardrock. Bugsby knew this for certain, as his torso held an old silver square clock that Bardrock no longer had use for, fused into the center of an otherwise rather round belly; yes, he occasionally had to poke the hands along when the gears made a grinding noise, but it was usually quite accurate. Much more accurate than his wheels, of which one was a little smaller and often caused him to veer left when he wasn't paying attention, or the antennas atop his head that spat out steam if Bardrock was being particularly infuriating. His creator had also made the mistake of giving Bugsby an extra set of arms, which Bugsby often utilized against his creator. Bardrock used to like to say Bugsby had quirks, just like Bardrock himself.

Bardrock had left Bugsby with the promise of returning before the end of the third month. By Bugsby's count, he only had five minutes left. Bardrock was many things, punctual was one of them. To be late for a deadline he had set himself was concerning.

Almost three months ago now Bugsby had stood mere inches away as he watched his creator throw clothes and armor haphazardly into a sack. Raised by wolves that one, he would surely be dead without Bugsby. *He might be dead already*, Bugsby thought, feeling the unsettling coldness of the cottage seep into his gears.

Bugsby stared resolutely at the last spot he had seen Bardrock, deciding that was a far better use of time than dwelling on *could bes*.

“Bug, be good. Keep the house in order, won’t you?”

Bugsby, whom Bardrock had neglected to give the power of speech to (quite an oversight if you were to ask him) whirred angrily in response.

Bardrock gave a hearty chortle, *“Not happy with me, eh? I know I—we,”* he amended, placatingly when small bits of steam had begin to release from the top of Bugsby’s head. *“We said I’d retire after—well, after the incident.”* Bug and Bardrock both glanced at Bardrock’s leg, which was the host to another one of Bardrock’s strange inventions—a peg leg which sometimes caused bursts of steam, seemingly on a whim of its own. There was a clatter outside and a stream of curses, reminding both Bug and Bardrock of the current situation.

“They need me, Bug. I don’t think they can do this without me.” Bardrock, to his credit, sounded worried. Bug, however, was unmoved. He wasn’t sure who “they” were but he was quite sure they could do anything without him—Bardrock was very old, you see—and he attempted to communicate this to Bardrock. He says attempted because Bardrock was soon laughing at him—something Bardrock did often, which Bugsby found a quite rude habit.

“Look after this place, won’t you? I’ll be back before you know it. Won’t take longer than three months.” Bardrock picked up his sack and halberd, steadfastly headed to the door. He paused, his hand on the handle, and looked at Bug somberly. Bugsby was almost positive there was something Bardrock wasn’t letting on. Somewhere on the long list of things Bardrock was bad at was communication. As was packing, Bugsby noted as Bardrock threw three cans of beans into his sack, neglecting to grab a can opener. *Geniuses. They always forget the basics.*

“I’ll be back in time to help you pick your favorite flower, yeah? The one that only blooms on the first full moon of each month.” A soft smile stretched across his scarred face, no doubt remembering the time Bugsby accidentally fell down the hill in excitement; Bugsby had long ago decided

that Bardrock was an evil man with no mercy when it came to humiliating Bug. Nonetheless, Bugsby gave a soft, sad chirp back as Bardrock walked out the door and into the night.

As Bardrock walked out, Bugsby rolled over to the window and watched Bardrock and his compatriots head out onto their journey. A woman with red hair stared at Bugsby through the window. “What have you got there, old man?”

Bardrock followed her gaze, and the soft smile returned to his face “That is my oldest friend.”

“Wow, okay, hurtful,” another of his companions piped up. “A tin can is better company than alla us.” With one final glance at the cottage, Bardrock was gone with his companions.

The quiet crackling of embers brought Bugsby back to the present. The moon was high, and the clock in his midsection whirred clanking to twelve. Midnight, officially the fourth month. Bardrock was late, possibly never coming back. Bugsby stayed by the window, watching the stillness of the night, waiting. The grass swayed softly. There was no lumbering figure coming towards the cottage, no haggard figure stumbling in, apologizing for his tardiness. Only Bug and the crickets.

Bugsby gave an annoyed hrumph of steam, before rolling over to the kitchen, throwing a couple of blackberries—Bardrock’s favorite snack, the weirdo—and a can opener into a cloth, swiftly turning it into a knapsack. He threw it over his shoulder, grabbed a map of the mantle, and made his way past the threshold of the old oak door, resolutely venturing out into the night to find his lost friend. If he paused slightly at the doorway, that’s a secret that dies with him and the crickets.

GRANNY

Jessica DeLapp



SCOPE CREEP

Lisa Brodsky

As a working mom of four boys, I tried hard to compartmentalize my work life from my home life. I felt this was the key to maintaining my sanity. However, I had a list of several things that brought me joy under my mouse pad that I could peek at during the day when work got too stressful. This included “Top ten things you shouldn’t say in a job interview,” “Stupid things my boss said today,” and my all-time favorite, “Things you don’t want to hear at work or from people you know through work.” As the years went on, these lists, especially the last one, grew longer and longer. And though the children are now adults, I still have the occasion to add to it.

Names have not been changed because none of them are innocent!

1

One warm sunny afternoon, a call was transferred to my desk. I usually didn’t receive calls that way, so it made me pause for just a moment before answering. It felt like the call you get in the middle of the night—never good news.

“Hi, this is Lisa,” I said with trepidation.

“Hey Lisa, it’s Nancy from the circle. Your kids are on the roof, should I wake up the babysitter?”

“Please do,” I responded, chuckling while thinking she was kidding. I held my breath for a few moments anticipating something else probably not so awful. But I was horrified to learn that it wasn’t a joke.

The nanny, Margie, was the sweetest elderly woman who came Monday to Friday to care for my youngest while the older three boys

were in school. Each day, she would make them mac and cheese or peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches for their after-school snack as that is all she knew how to make. She was a lovely woman and was “cheap like borscht”, as my grandmother from the old country would say. And she showed up every day.

Apparently, Margie had put out a lounge chair in the front yard while watching the two older boys play. Like a cat, she curled up in the warm summer sun and fell asleep. The boys took the opportunity to climb the tree next to the house, traverse across a large branch and pull themselves on to the roof of our two-story home. The neighbor just happened to look outside and saw my two oldest boys, around eight and ten years old at the time, walking around on the roof of our house. Luckily, she realized that something just didn't seem right. After our call, she walked over and woke up the babysitter to let her know.

By the time I raced home, from only 2.3 miles away, the children were already off the roof and took great pride and pleasure in showing me how they made it up there. I stood quietly just nodding and shuddering thinking about how badly this could have ended.

The tree was cut down the next day.

2

“Officer Brodsky, phone call for you in the front office.”

Well, that can't be good. Everyone knew not to call me at the jail unless it was an emergency. And no one had exercised that right to date. Of course, I was in the furthest unit in the jail from the front office. It felt like a mile-long walk.

Clank, jingle, clank, jingle. My heavy flashlight and giant ring of keys took turns hitting my legs with each step. This-is-what-you-get-for-trying-to-have-a-career, they seemed to say with each

slap against me. The faster I walked the harder they hit.

When I finally got to the office, I could see the expression on the front desk officer. He watched me through his side eye, not making direct eye contact but watching my every move and monitoring my reaction.

I took a deep breath prior to answering the phone. My hand was shaking as I reached for the receiver. “Hello”? I asked immediately after pressing the blinking light that was mocking me.

“Can you meet me at the hospital?” My husband asked in a small, quavering voice.

I knew immediately what happened. Tears rolled down my face as I asked, “You left the baby alone in his walker, didn’t you?”

“Just for a minute,” he responded. “He’s okay though. They are transporting him to the hospital by ambulance just in case.”

Sigh. The last thing I remember saying as I walked out the door for work was, “Don’t leave the baby in his walker in the living room.” Famous last words. “Which hospital?” After getting all the details, I punched out, jumped on my white horse, and sped there to save the day.

“He rolled down the stairs,” my husband said when he made his first eye contact. “I went to get the other two out of the tub.” I glared. “He was having fun until the ride came to a sudden stop,” he said with a cautious smirk and a hopeful look in his eyes.

I glared again.

“Too soon?” he asked.

3

The ominous woo-woo coming from my cell phone at two in the morning reminded me of a police siren. That felt ironic to me when I saw “Bloomington Police Department” glowing in the dark on the caller ID. That couldn’t be good.

“Hello?”

“This is Officer Morden. Is this Sean’s mom?” The deep voice rang out in the darkness shaking off the last of my hope that this was just a bad dream.

“Ya, John. It is,” I sighed.

“Sorry to wake you up, Lisa. But I have Sean in the back of my police car. He said I don’t need to call his mother but as soon as I saw his name, I knew I had too. I told him you would kill me if I didn’t! He was a bit surprised that I had your number already on my phone,” he said, with just a bit too much amusement in his voice. He proceeded to tell me why he picked him up and apologized again.

It was a minor statutory offense committed by a juvenile and not terribly serious. But still, once the anger passed, the mortification set in. How do I look at this colleague in the future knowing what my son did? Thankfully, I was semi-calm and collected by the time Sean slunk home. I was waiting ominously for him in the dark. A trick I learned from my stepfather years ago.

“What did we learn here today, Sean?” I asked.

“Umm,” was all he could muster out.

“How about don’t commit crimes in the city where your mom does Police training? Or, how about one where your brother hasn’t been a Police Explorer for years and they all know us? Or better yet, how about don’t commit crimes at all?”

A few years later, my youngest child went for his interview for the Police Explorer program. He fidgeted in his chair when two burly police officers sat down in front of him to begin the final selection process.

Officer Morden looked him straight in the eye and asked, “How’s Sean?”

4

“I was just wondering . . . is that statue on the fireplace expensive?” Dylan asked.

Okay I'll bite, I thought. "Why do you ask?"

"I was just wondering because it looks really expensive."

My favorite statue. The one I fought for repeatedly with my siblings. The one that had a sticker on the bottom with my sister's name. The sticker I replaced with one with my name on something lame I didn't want.

"Yes, it is very expensive. It is a family heirloom and one of the only things I have from Grandpa Bob. It reminds me of him and is very special to me."

The crickets on the other end of the receiver screamed that he did something bad. Although he couldn't see through the phone, I narrowed my eyes in my best I-can-see-right-through-you look.

"Okay, thanks," he said and ended the call before I could verbalize my disdain.

When I got home after holding my breath for what seemed like several hours, I was surprised and relieved to see that the statute of the three men still sat on the fireplace mantle. I guessed he was just curious about its value.

It wasn't until many years later that I decided to move that statue to a different location and took a good look at it. Unfortunately, the three men looked like a Picasso art piece up close. It had shattered into multiple pieces and was glued back together. Apparently, a rambunctious indoor hockey game led to a puck smashing it to smithereens that day Dylan called. And all the children worked together as a team to try to fix it and held that secret for many years. I decided not to punish them.

I chuckled when I turned it over and saw that my name was still on the bottom. It probably would have survived if it was at my sister's house. For some weird reason, that brought a smile to my face. I felt like this was another win.

5

In the middle of a work strategic planning session, my phone rang. Since they decided to ignore the don't-call-me-at-work-unless-it-is-an-emergency rule more and more over the years, I let it go to voicemail. Three minutes later it rang again. Never a good sign. I quietly picked up the phone and said "Yes?" in a slow, drawn-out speech.

"Will you be home from work soon?" his voice quavered on the other end of the phone.

"Why?" I asked as I braced myself for impact.

"I think I broke my brain."

I packed up my stuff and headed home to find a shaking child waiting for me by the door.

"We were playing Olympics. And I hit my head. Hard," he said.

"Let's go," I said, and we drove to urgent care. He briefly explained that he was doing back flips off the picnic bench in the park and the back of his head caught the corner on the way down.

"Do you think I have brain damage?" he asked as tears streaked down his face.

As I was trying to explain the injury to the triage nurse, there was a sudden revelation from my son. "Do you want to see the video?"

As we watched the fuzzy video, I could make out my son standing backwards on the edge of a picnic table readying himself for his daring feat of an Olympian-worthy back flip. What happened next was difficult to see, but the loud "thwack" of his head contacting the table was clear. I winced and tears streamed down my face as the gravity of the situation took hold. I thought he maybe had indeed broken his brain.

The horrified look on the nurse's face matched my own. "Come with me," she said as she rose quickly from her chair and led us to a room right away. That never happens at urgent care. "You have a concussion. We have called an ambulance," she said in a matter-of-fact tone.

When the ambulance arrived, I recognized one of the drivers through my work contacts.

“Hey,” he said with a head nod. “I hear you have a video.” We played the video for him as we waited for the doctor. It wasn’t any easier for me the second time.

When the urgent care doctor arrived, the first thing he said to us was, “Can I see the video?” before he even examined my son. Following this third viewing he said, “Yup. You have a concussion. You need to go to the hospital.”

The same pattern repeated at the hospital. It apparently was a slow night as the video was shown to multiple nurses in the emergency room, numerous doctors, a couple orderlies and the radiologist. He was the talk of the ER town that night. Eventually, he did get examined and did indeed have a concussion.

To this day, the infamous video lives on YouTube.

6

Often, a working mom’s day feels like walking on hot coals hoping to get to the finish line without getting burned. If done correctly I could make it through a day unscathed. Or at least the ability to make it through the entire day without having to rush home to put out fires. Sometimes literally. Key to this success was to ensure that the remainder of the family was on board with doing their chores and their homework.

In recent years, caller ID has provided me a window of a few seconds to brace myself prior to answering my work phone. Prior to that, the rotating cage of the bingo balls meant that occasionally, I would be caught off guard. Before the invention of cell phones, the home phone was the only means of communication for kids to call home to ask parents for permission to deviate from their intended path.

I would often see one of my children's names of the caller ID display and beat my husband to the phone. The kids would often ask if they could go over to a friend's house, go to play hockey, go to the mall . . . basically anything aside from coming home to do what needed to be done. After receiving the third degree regarding about the cleanliness of their room and the status of their homework every time, they started asking, "Can you please put Dad on the phone?" whenever I answered.

7

Every two or so years for a while, the Oak Grove Middle School teachers were blessed with a Brodsky in their class. Unfortunately, the eldest of the boys set the bar so high, he was remembered for years to come. Each Brodsky that took Tech Ed was always asked on the first day of class, "Are you related to Ryan Brodsky?" By the time we reached Zach, the fourth Brodsky, he knew enough to simply answer "no."

Years later, after all the Brodsky boys had long left middle school, I had the opportunity to set up a mass dispensing clinic to provide H1N1 shots to the community. As I was walking down the hall one day, the band teacher walked by me, stopped in his tracks, turned around and asked, "Ryan Brodsky's mom, right?" Ugh. I rolled my eyes and nodded my head. Apparently, Ryan had a penchant for deliberately playing the wrong notes as loud as possible during a band concert. He was hard to forget. Another proud mom moment.



Four boys and thirty years later, I think back to the wild ride of being a working mom. So many phone calls that gave me heart palpitations. But so many good ones too. I still wait for the day when the caller says, "It's a girl" or "It's a boy," but that is yet to come. But when it does, I will not miss the opportunity to say, "I hope they grow up to be just like you."

THE SPECTER OF HALFMOON SHOAL

Jessica DeLapp

You stand below a weeping awning, wet palm closed tight. The Miami rain rattles the rooftops like a thousand tiny fists. Dirt and debris wash into the gutters and eventually make their way out to Halfmoon Shoal at the tip of the great reef. You have wandered the shoreline for countless days without food or rest. Opening your palm, you inspect the jagged crescent, its edges sharp as a blade. Its surface is pocked with tiny craters, like the surface of the celestial body it mimics. It gleams in the faint light, as if it were a pearl plucked from the depths of the ocean and hidden in the dirt. Then you see her.

The woman does not care about the rain. She walks the port docks and stares out to sea, muttering to herself. Some say she repeats the same thing over and over; others say she's escaped from the asylum down the road. Nobody really knows what she is saying. Nobody really knows how long she's been there. No one cares.

She wears a long, flowing dress with intricate lace detailing that speaks of a bygone era, the cloth heavy from the rain clinging to her skin like a baby at the breast. Her salted hair is swept up in a bun, and a few stray tendrils escape, framing her sunken face. Her black eyes fix out to sea, and she walks, unflinching, toward the water.

The rain lashes at the earth with a ferocity that borders on madness. You take refuge from the tempest outside a sailboat rental shop. The streets are empty. Someone would have to be crazy to be out right now, you think. Everyone is home with their families, staying dry. You should be too, though you can't remember why

you're here. You look out toward the water but can't see anything past the curtain of rain.

"My son wanted to be a sailor," the woman says to the rain.

You don't know how to reply. You watch her, in conversation with the ocean, and quickly discover yourself straining to listen over the roar of rain.

"My son wanted to be a sailor," she repeats. "I told him not to go. *I'm your mother*, I said. *The sea is a beast, and she won't love you like I do.*

"It'll be fine," he said. *I need to see the world. I want to see the caravans of Andalusia and the lights that dance in the Arctic sky. I will make my way, and then I will come back to you and build you a house, and we will dance—oh, how we will dance!*

I begged him not to go. Lights are just lights. The world is a nasty place; the ocean is a beast. I begged him not to go, but on May 19, four men set sail from these docks in a small yacht. They were tasked with delivering the new vessel to its owner in Australia."

The waves crash against the docks, jolting you back from her lullaby. You take a step back as the salt water threatens your clothes. And yet, she persists, unyielding like a marble sculpture in a garden of shifting blues and grays. Somehow, she now seems tangible and fixed, as if she has been here since the beginning of time, waiting for something or someone that will never come, like a whisper of a memory that refuses to fade away.

The sea surges again, its frothy waves crashing against the docks, mocking her with its relentless power. She stands there, a silhouette against Armageddon, watching the sea take and take and take.

"Did you know that when he was six, my boy would run down to the docks, and he'd watch as they renewed ships of ill omen after each disaster, giving them a fresh lick of paint, a new name, the whole lot. *We need a new name!* he'd shout. He told me that we would not be a bad ship run aground by its captain. I'd laugh at the nonsense. Sailors have always been superstitious."

Again, the sea licks the docks. The woman takes a step forward. You think for a moment she is going to fall in.

“On the 5th of July, you sank their yacht a thousand miles passed Halfmoon, but they all made it, they did, out on that little dinghy. But you wouldn’t let them home, would you? You take and take and take. They had no water, and for food, they had only one-pound tins of turnips—my boy was quick. Was that why you wouldn’t let him come home? Twelve days is all they had. Twelve days of precise, tiny portions of turnip and raindrops whenever a squall blew up or urine—for as long as they could before you took that too. Six more days after that, and my poor boy could not help but gulp down some sea water. I wager that this was an attempt to allay his thirst. I can’t figure out if it was the turnips or if it was me. Have I angered you? Or do you simply take and take and take—God forbid you give. God forbid.

“It was the custom of the sea, they said. He had become violently ill and weak, they said. He was smaller than them. After three weeks adrift in the boat, they were so hungry, and he was smaller than them. He was the smallest one in the skiff. You watched. You watched, and you took.”

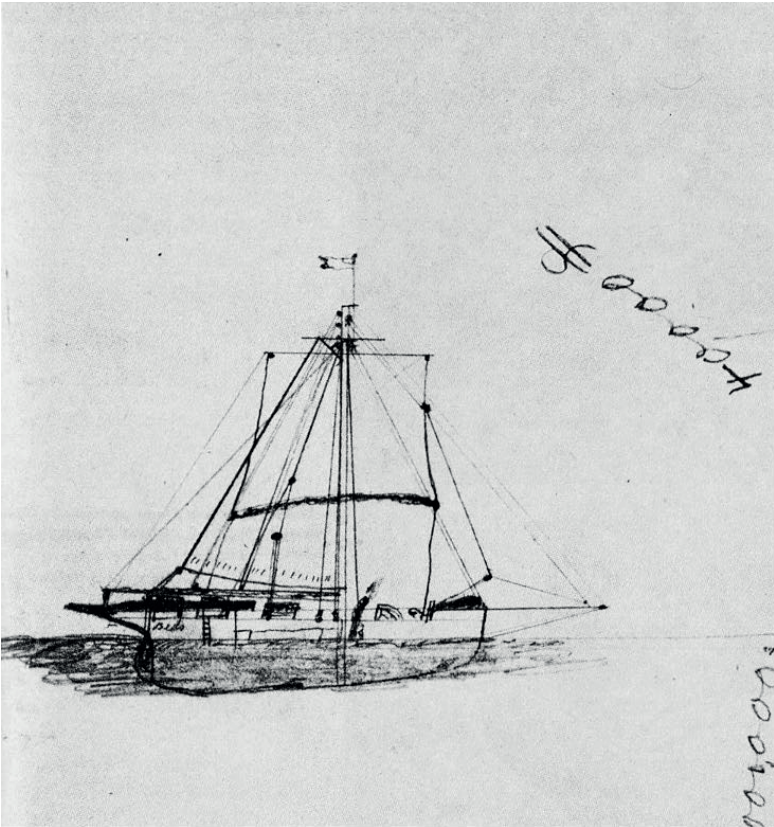
The woman takes another step forward as the sea rages against her.

“I wish they had not told me the truth. I wish they had lied. I wish I didn’t know about the strips of flesh they rationed. I wish they didn’t grow fat on this diet before Parker began to rot. Rescued after twenty-four days at sea . . . you had your prize. All of them swore Parker was lost in the storm that sank their ship. But Tom, be it guilt or gall, came in the night, and he told me the truth of it. They gave my boy’s bones to you, but Tom saved one for me. I hear you crashing and tumbling onto the sand in search of your missing piece. You take and take and take.”

The rain is slowing, and you think the worst of it is over, but now, for the first time, she turns and looks at you. She reaches toward you, hands outstretched.

“I would like to hold him . . .”

Opening your palm, you gaze at the small bone fragment nestled there, its ivory hue hauntingly beautiful against your skin. Its surface is etched with the marks of time and neglect. The weight of it feels heavy in your hands, almost unbearable. You want to toss it into the sea to be swallowed up by its churning waves. But instead, you stumble out from under the awning, hands outstretched, and the sky cries alongside you, a poignant echo of the rawness of grief laid bare.



BATHING CHICKENS

Malaya Guerrier

Chickens bathe themselves. Maybe that's too expected, so let me rephrase that: Chickens bathe themselves in dirt. I've never seen one bathe itself in dirt, but that could just be because I haven't seen very many live chickens and definitely haven't spent much quality time with them. But if you look it up, chickens really do use dirt to bathe themselves.



My experience comes from dead chickens. Grocery stores have a lot of them. Dead chickens are cold. Their skin is a whitish, peachy color and is bumpy from where their feathers had been attached. They have a hole down through their middle that I can stick my hand inside and feel their vertebrae. It also tends to still be a little red in there. Their wings are tiny compared to the rest of their body, especially without their feathers. It's really fun to hold a dead chicken up by its wings and make it dance.

When I was younger, however, I wouldn't even touch a dead chicken. I liked watching my dad prepare the chicken for a meal, and I liked helping him, but I would not touch it. To me, that was just gross. I would touch it and eat it when it was cooked. So my helping was limited to grabbing the spices from the nearby cupboard and grabbing ranch or vegetables from the fridge. The chicken, meanwhile, sat in the sink pining for my attention.



A dirt bath sounds, well, dirty. Why would a chicken go through the trouble of bathing itself just to be dirty? Water isn't a chicken's

first choice because it very easily dries out its skin. Dry skin isn't all that pleasant for me, since I often get itchy, so I'd imagine a chicken would feel the same. Since dry skin is such a pain for a chicken, there must be another means for getting clean, and apparently it's dirt.



Growing up, my dad always cooked the main chicken dishes. If my mom was cooking roast chicken, she liked to make salt and pepper chicken, which has, quite surprisingly, salt and pepper—that's it. She loved it that way because that was how her mom, my nana, had made it when she was a kid. I have no idea how my nana got that recipe, if it was influenced by her Mennonite background, if it was a Canadian thing, if she just found it somewhere, or if she came up with it. No matter how it came about, my nana made it that way so my mom made it that way. To my dad, however, especially when they first got married, salt and pepper only was almost sacrilegious. In his Haitian culture, the chicken can't still look white when it's done cooking; there has to be spices on it, and salt and pepper alone don't count. The only way my mom would cook anything like that was if my dad had written down his recipe. But my dad usually doesn't write down his recipes, claiming that "If you were in the kitchen, you'd know." Even if he does write down his recipe, he usually changes it anyway. Thus, my dad is often the one cooking the main chicken dishes.

The thing is, my dad cannot just marinate and cook the chicken; he has to clean it first. But he doesn't just rinse it with water and call it good. That's a no-no. He gives the dead chicken a full-fledged bath. It's always been a thing in my house to wash the chicken before cooking it, like washing a vegetable before eating it. But while my mom used to just rinse it with water (until my dad convinced her otherwise), my dad uses a lime as soap. He'll cut the lime in half, turn it inside out, and scrub the chicken with it. The entire chicken

gets limed—outside and inside. When he’s done, he’ll rinse it off with water before proceeding to marinate it.

My sister and I were our dad’s helpers growing up. Being five years older than me, my sister helped our dad first while I watched. I remember she didn’t want to touch the inside of the chicken at first while giving it a lime bath but eventually came around to it. I always liked watching my dad or my sister bathe a chicken because when they would be scrubbing under its wings, my dad would say they were washing its armpits. When I first started being his helper, I didn’t want to touch a dead, cold chicken, so I just grabbed the ingredients he needed for his marinade. But washing the armpits did look fun, so I finally touched the chicken to clean it and its armpits. It was cold and the skin was weirdly soft and squishy and fun to play with. That’s when I first lifted a dead chicken up by its wings and made it dance. Of course, that was just the outside. Like my sister, it took me longer to get over the red-tinged lime half that always came out of the inside of the chicken while cleaning it. But I did finally stick my hand (with the lime) inside the chicken.



Chickens, usually just the hens, will roll in fine dirt (hence it’s actually called a dust bath) until it gets all over their feathers and reaches their skin. Then they stand up and shake themselves off. And somehow they are clean. The dirt clogs the pores of parasites such as lice and mites, so dust baths keep the chickens parasite-free. Sometimes they will bathe themselves in dirt and then preen themselves to make themselves extra clean.



When it comes to the marinade, my dad is a magician. He knows what he wants to put in it and he knows the proper amount of each. Since he rarely makes the same thing twice, my dad is also an expert

experimenter whose experiments are always successes. The only thing he almost always, if not always, adds to every marinade is lime juice. Before using the lime to bathe the chicken, he squeezes out the excess juice into a bowl and uses that. According to him, it gives the cooked chicken better flavor. He also claims he can taste the difference between a chicken cleaned and marinated with lime and a chicken cleaned and marinated without lime. Other ingredients can include salt, black pepper, cayenne pepper, seasoning salt, cinnamon, minced garlic, white onions, green onions, carrots, ranch dressing, or whatever else my dad comes up with.

Once the marinade is made, he spreads it over the chicken. Everywhere. He rubs it into every part on the outside and puts some inside the chicken as well. It could be thought of as putting on lotion after a bath. Then the chicken sits like that in the fridge for however long my dad decides, usually around twenty minutes to an hour to overnight. My dad always roasts whole chickens in the oven; he doesn't want to try to grill it since it's too much of a hassle to try and tie its legs. Once the chicken has completed its marinating time in the fridge, my dad roasts it for a few hours.

When the chicken is almost done, and the smell of the different spices waft through the air, my dad will focus on the co-main dish. Most of the time, my family has rice with chicken. My dad will tell you that growing up in Haiti, even if supper is rice every day, there are different kinds. At home this also plays out. We have white rice, rice with peas, rice with lima beans, rice with "red" beans (pinto beans, since my dad didn't grow up with kidney beans), rice with kidney beans, and "dirty" rice, or rice cooked with black beans so it gets colored (although pinto and kidney beans also color the rice, so my dad calls those types dirty rice as well). Sometimes we'll also have white rice with black beans on the side, but we usually mix it together on our plates anyway.

When the rice is done and taken out of the pot into a serving dish, and the chicken is done, my mom, my dad, and myself (the last child at home) will sit at the table together and pray, thanking God for the food we get to eat. It seems like every other time we do this, my dad has to reexplain to my mom about the different kinds of rice even though we always use white Jasmine rice. I usually feel like rolling my eyes (or I do) because I've heard it so many times. Yet I like hearing it and learning about my dad's experiences in a country I've never been to and whose language I cannot speak. All the different kinds of rice and the chicken with all the different spices is probably the closest I will get to Haitian culture. And bathing that chicken is one of my favorite memories with my dad.

I can't say I appreciate the way chickens clean themselves; I think a lime bath is much better. But chicken is a way for me to hang out with my dad and listen to him claim he would *Beat Bobby Flay* in the show of that name or tell me about the food he ate growing up. Bathing chickens is one of my favorite experiences in life and I doubt that will ever change.

GUARIAGUA (WA-RI-AWA)

Jessica DeLapp



STOLEN SONG

Sarah Huderle

I never should've talked to that woman. But as I hiked through maple and basswood on a muddy path, singing about the great outdoors, I focused only on the fog around me, the toads trilling nearby, and my smooth caramel voice. Fog obscured much of the broadleaf forest, immersing me in hazy branches above, thick moss below, and light gray voids ahead. Chorus frogs and spring peepers echoed between tall trunks. Up and to the left, a large rock emerged. By the time I saw the woman's idle shape sitting on that lichen-coated boulder, she'd snapped her head my way. When she materialized in the fog, yellow eyes fixated on me with her neck twisted in an odd swivel, I first trailed off, then continued my song in a slow, hesitant tempo. Slow and precise, she raised a finger to her lips in a hush. To avoid both bothering her and stopping my song, I sped up to pass her faster.

And then I heard the sounds.

In a perfect act of mimicry, the woman opened her mouth and, with slight bobs of the head, imitated a chorus frog's croaks. Her movements mesmerized me. First, she drew a wide breath, shoulders rising, then her shiny hair, long, black, and sleek, swayed back and forth with her head's gentle bobs as her Adam's apple, which protruded at an angle, rose and fell in a tall wobble. Now, my mother always said, "son, starin' is rude," but here, that's all I could do, and hell, she'd stared first. Yellow eyes pierced through me, and I froze, half expecting my backpack strap to snap under her stabbing stare. I waved a slow hello.

"Hey there, madam. Say, how'd you do that?"

"Hey." She spoke in a soft, strained voice, but I swore it sounded familiar. Masculine, almost. She didn't answer my question. I tilted my head.

“Uh . . . is your voice all right? I got a cough drop somewhere. Do you want a cough drop? Y’know, I always have ‘em in case my voice goes out, so—”

“Yes.” Her deep voice sounded stronger, and I wondered where I’d heard it.

As I dug through my pocket, humming a tune, a dry sting crept into my throat, and I coughed. My fingers found the wrapper, and I held it out, still coughing, but a wide grin spread over her face, oozing into her cheeks like thick mud down a barren hill. Her straight white teeth glistened, and nearby, the pond silenced. Strong, unwavering, she spoke. Chills gripped my spine as I finally placed her voice. It was my own.

“Is your voice all right?”

I wheezed. “It’s . . . no, it’s . . . how are you . . .” Talking burned my throat.

“I think it’s all right. Your voice wears like a warm sweater.”

Now, at that moment, I swear I’d opened my mouth to speak, to ask her how the hell she did that, but as air flowed through my stinging vocal cords, I spoke not in any human language, but in high rattling trills, as though several slimy frogs had slipped into my throat and nestled there. I dropped the cough drop. It plopped into the mud. She spoke.

“I lost my voice. My own voice, rather. I don’t remember it.”

Again, I tried to speak, but only peeps came out, enough for me to wonder if I’d blacked out and slurped up a whole pond. She must’ve read my eyes that said, “what the hell, woman,” because, in a smooth, gliding movement, she rose to her feet, still holding that devilish grin.

“Will you help me find it?”

I raised my arms in a broad, panicked shrug, then mouthed, “What?”

“Will you help me find my voice? If you do, I’ll return yours.”

Silence. I processed her request. No toads trilled in the pond. Find her voice? No wind rustled the leaves. How was that possible? Only her slow breath met my ears, and strangely, I felt relief. At least she was a living thing like me, a living thing that drew oxygen in and blew carbon out. For sure, she was living, and she wanted an answer. With wide eyes, I maintained eye contact, heart pounding. I considered jostling her shoulders, wondering if my voice would leap out and land with a plop in my hand. Maybe I'd swallow it, driving those freeloading frogs out as my voice nestled into its home. Her yellow eyes narrowed. Her wide smile closed. In my smooth, whiskey-brown rasp, she spoke.

“You want to sing again, yes?”

My shoulders sagged, and I groaned.

The smile returned. “You’ll help?”

I nodded, then mouthed, “how?”

“Just follow.” Her hand shot out and grabbed my wrist. I tried to ignore the talons that pricked my skin.

As she took off and pulled me through the woods, I pondered my situation. Why'd I let this strange woman sweep me to lord knows where? What if she lied and wanted to slaughter me? I pictured those talons, those black claws jutting from her fingernails, slashing first through my chest, ripping my green jacket open, then through my gut, splattering me all over the cleavers and buckthorn around us. Maybe she'd gnaw my bones clean, my muscle popping and tearing under her teeth, then toss them aside to succumb to moss. I pictured my skull laying silent in the dirt, moss creeping up the cranium as a stray mushroom fruited from my empty eye socket, dropping fine spores from the brown gills. Roly-polies and centipedes would scuttle through my teeth, startled by an occasional mouse, and birds would perch on my chewed ribcage. Imagining this, I shuddered and dug my heel into the loose soil. The woman jerked to a stop, her talons scraping my forearm and leaving a trickle of blood.

“What?”

Wheezing, I mouthed, “where are we going?”

That grin again. “Just follow.”

My heel dug deeper. “Where?”

“Home.”

If I wanted to protest, I had no time, because right away, she turned and yanked my arm again, sending me careening after her as we rushed down a root-ridden hill packed with fiddleheads and morels. As I yelped and leaped over a fallen log, I barely had time to register a red sign posted on a tree: *Private Property. Keep Out.* I tried to yell, to tell her to stop, but a trill peeped from my throat instead. I sighed and kept stumbling after her as, beneath our feet, violets crumpled and smashed into a fine purple paste, coating our boots in fragrant death. A dandelion head popped from the stem as I tripped over it, rocketing through the air and exploding into a nearby maple, and as my eyes traced its path, they snapped ahead to a small cabin under a cluster of gnarled red oak. When my eyes traced the small A-frame, the brown log walls, and the cobweb-coated windows, the woman halted and I chirped in surprise, slamming my boots against the soil, but spring melt had rendered the ground slippery, sending me into a dirty, tumbling pile with a wet squelch as I skidded into the mud. She released her sharp grip.

“In there,” she said, “is a recording of my voice.”

“Where in there?” I mouthed.

“Not sure. Also, don’t tell the homeowner about me.”

“The homeowner?”

Her grinning teeth glistened. Were they . . . dry? I had no time to ponder, because she hoisted me out of the mud, plucked a dandelion leaf from my brown hair, and shoved me toward the house. I lurched into the yard and caught myself on an oak trunk, observing my surroundings and brushing dirt from my stubble as my burning lungs steadied. On the gravel driveway, oak leaves

piled, their lobed, pointed edges decaying into the soil in a slimy, scattered mess. An ancient red pickup sat in the driveway, rust creeping up the fenders and into the hood, and I couldn't help but wonder whether the damn thing ran and if I could hijack it to escape the woman, but inside, I knew I couldn't abandon my voice. I just couldn't. And so, I approached the cabin door and knocked. Leaves, many of which had fallen into thick cobwebs and stuck to the door, rattled with each heavy thump. Moments passed.

Nothing. I knocked again, not sure if I wanted an answer, but still, nobody responded, so I shrugged, reached for the doorknob, and turned it; as I did, however, the door opened, and I, who'd neither pushed nor pulled, recoiled, uncertain what to expect. As the door swung open, a small, hunched man stepped into view. Short, stout, and squinting, he adjusted a pair of large glasses on his round nose, tucked a wisp of white hair behind his tall ear, and peered up at me. Wearing red buffalo plaid and denim overalls, he resembled a small, elderly lumberjack. My eyes flew to the shotgun in his arms.

"Hey there," the man rasped. "Can I help ya?"

I tried talking, but a ribbit escaped instead. I tensed.

"Wait." He studied me. "Yer . . ."

I didn't respond.

"Hmm . . . Yep!"

I inhaled, trembling.

"Yer a lost hiker, ain't ya? Ya musta missed my signs."

I nodded on instinct. Lowering the gun, he grabbed my arm and yanked me inside, dunking me into the pale scent of wood, cigarettes, and mold. Rectangular, the log cabin interior contained two rooms, one of which held a cracked toilet and a moldy bathtub, and the second of which held everything else. The kitchen, living room, and bedroom had been merged, with one counter next to the front door containing a microwave, stove, and sink, while in

the center of the room, four stained leather couches surrounded a round oak table. Scrapes covered the hardwood floor. A bare mattress sat in the corner with a single matted quilt draped over it. On the table sat a picture frame displaying two figures, one of the old man, and the other scratched out, though I could make out a tuft of black hair, and as I squinted, the old man whipped around, slammed a piece of paper onto the counter, and thrust a pencil into my hand.

“Alrighty son,” he said, “my hearing ain’t what it used to be. You’ll have to write so I can understand ya better.”

I gripped the pencil, thinking. I began to write, “strange woman,” but after writing the first letter, I glanced at the shotgun, remembered the woman’s warning, and hesitated.

“Spring melt,” I wrote. “Path blocked. Terrain changed. Lost.”

The man read. “Ah! Yer real lost, huh? Here.” He approached the door and raised his shotgun. “Lemme dig through ol’ Darlin’ out there. I got a map!”

I tilted my head, brows furrowing harder, and wrote, “Why bring the gun?”

The man laughed. “Ya don’t wanna know what’s out there, son!” With that, he hobbled outside and slammed the door. Alone, I stood still. Then, realizing my opportunity, I lurched forward, crouching and throwing a cupboard under the counter open in search of that woman’s voice. How well could that man hide a voice recorder, anyway? The doors slammed against the wall, and I froze, listening for the man outside, before realizing that, if I were to tear this place apart, he’d hear nothing. With this revelation, I thrust my hands into the cupboard, digging through chipped plates, mineral-stained cups, and rusted silverware. Outside, I heard a squeaky swing, and I knew the man had opened the truck door to begin his search. I had time. My hands dug through cabinet after cabinet of worn board games, yellowed paper towels, and expired cleaning

supplies, whipping object after useless object aside, and soon, I'd torn through every cabinet in seconds, so I closed them, turned, and rushed toward the couches. Outside, I heard grumbling, and I knew the man would find the map soon. Did I have time? My hands flew into the space between each couch cushion, picking up crumbs as dust packed under my nails, and although quarters, cigarettes, and old crackers fell out of the gaps, I found no recorder, no object, no device that'd hold the woman's voice. Breath, ragged and wheezing, hissed between my teeth, and still, I found nothing. Outside, I heard an exclamation, and in that instant, I knew he'd found the map. I had no time. Within moments, he'd reenter the house, see me crouched by a couch, see my frantic state, see his torn-up house, and question me. Hell, maybe he'd shoot. He seemed reasonable, though. Maybe I'd explain. How would I explain? Maybe I had dropped something. Maybe I had seen a mouse. Maybe . . .

Tap.

While reaching under the farthest couch, I touched something rectangular. My fingers closed around it. Pulling it out, I studied the device, and as I observed the black surface, silver buttons, and small screen, its name popped into my head: a *voice recorder*. Her voice. I hopped to my feet and sprinted toward the back window, seizing and pushing it up. The window slid open. I hooked one foot over the frame.

Then, the front door opened.

My head whipped toward the door as the old man entered, and as he stepped inside, our eyes met and, slack-jawed, he dropped a wrinkled map. His voice wavered.

"I had my suspicions when ya barely spoke, but . . ."

I stood still.

"I gave ya the benefit of the doubt, son."

My heart thundered. He glanced at the scratched-out photograph.

"That creature. Yer workin' with her, ain't ya?"

I tilted my head, looked at him, then looked at the photo. The man sighed and nodded.

“If you’re askin’, yes. I know her. I know her too damn well.”

Then, he raised the gun. I let out a creaking yelp as the wall next to me exploded in a pop of wooden shrapnel that sprayed over my body, tearing over my right arm in a screaming crack, and at that moment, as I reeled back, I fell, throwing my whole weight out the window and into the mud outside. Blood soaked through my sleeve as I scrambled to my feet and ran, boots pounding over the forest floor as behind me, the man aimed once again, exploding a maple tree and sending a sharp wooden shard across my cheekbone. In a flowing trickle, blood dribbled down my stubble, pooled under my chin, and dripped across my jacket. I wiped my cheek with shaky hands as I tore through the forest, smearing dirt over my face and blood over my palm. With high warbling trills, I sprinted away from the cabin as another shot crashed through the fog, but the metal missed me altogether, and soon, the cabin’s hunched silhouette dissolved into the mist.

I didn’t stop. I ran, dashing over fiddleheads and morels and dodging fallen logs until my quads trembled, my calves hissed, and my knees clicked, and as I ran, minutes passed, each second shoving me away from the cabin. Maple and basswood blurred around me, becoming a misty mess of bark, branches, and twigs, and on I ran. Mud packed under my boots, leaving a sloshing trail in the underbrush.

Ahead, that same lichen-covered boulder materialized from the fog, but I failed to dodge, slamming into it with a grunt, tumbling over it, and collapsing into the moss. My ears rang. My sore throat stung. I drew rapid, shallow breaths, groaning as I stared into the misty canopy. On a distant branch, a mushroom fruited, and I imagined fine spores dropping from the light pores, scattering over my sore body. I half expected fungus to sprout from my wounded cheekbone. Much to my relief, it didn’t. Overhead, sunlight began

filtering through the fog, and, with a deep diaphragm breath, I tried to relax my screaming muscles.

My arm ached, so I pushed myself up and leaned against the rock, trying to ignore the cold static sprouting in my chest and winding into my limbs. With slow, shaky movements, I removed my soaked jacket sleeve, wincing as wooden chips scraped my skin, and observed my arm. Under the pooling blood, gashes and patches of skin throbbed pink and raw, while, toward my elbow, massive splinters had lodged under the skin. I began to tremble, not out of fear or adrenaline, but out of rage. All of this for that damn woman. All because she stole my voice. All because she blackmailed me. To my relief, at least, I saw no small holes in my arm. Despite the close range, the man had missed. A feeling lingered, though. I had to wonder.

Had he meant to?

“Hey there, singer.” I jumped as my voice sounded from the mist, but I failed to discern its location. Then, I looked up, making contact with the woman’s yellow eyes as she leaned over the rock, palms placed on the stone. She opened her mouth to speak, but I raised a bloodied arm, thrusting the voice recorder into her face. I looked away as she grabbed it. I didn’t need to see that damn grin again.

“He talked to you,” she said. “You saw the photo.”

I nodded.

“It’s true. I know him well. Listen.” She pressed a button on the recorder, and a soft, female voice spoke.

“Dad,” it said. The woman repeated it in a flat, even tone, halting on each letter as though she’d never spoken before. “Dad.” I rolled my head back, starting up into the fog, the maples, and the peering sunlight. So they were related. Cool. I didn’t give a damn. When I turned her way, she’d fixated those yellow eyes on me, but I glared right back. I didn’t need words to convey my message: *give me my damn voice back*.

“Okay, fine,” she said, her voice shifting back to mine. “Message

received.” Then, her eyes flicked down the muddy path, and her pale skin grew paler. She slipped back into her own voice, louder this time. “Dad!”

I turned. Red plaid with denim overalls. Round glasses. Shotgun. In front of me, the man stood, gun raised and eyes narrowed. My mouth opened, then closed, then opened again, much like a skewered minnow, and as I wondered how he’d found us, he pointed the gun first at my muddy boots, then at my footprints trailing away. I understood.

He raised the gun straight toward the woman. Trembling, trilling, enraged, I rose with wobbling legs, hoping to snatch the weapon away, but my vision turned white, and, knees buckling, I collapsed into the spongy moss. The man stared with soft eyes.

“Yer voice. I know, son.”

The woman spoke, stepping back. “Dad.” She repeated the word, looping it like a recording. Same tone. Same volume. Same inflection. “Dad. Dad. Dad.”

“You poor damn thing,” the man said, still staring at me.

Then, he pulled the trigger.

THE HONEST SELLER

Matthew Nauth

For Sale by Owner: Childhood Legos

Description: Twelve Lego sets with original instruction booklets that any child (ages 4+) may assemble and enjoy. Building their own custom Lego creations can also help inspire your child, develop their imagination, and give them dreams of fantastic people and places—they could become a pirate captain, a race car driver, or an astronaut. Creativity is the only limit!

Condition: Some pieces may be missing, dented, or warped due to assembled Legos being hurled against hard surfaces.

Disclaimer(s): Your child's creativity is limited. They may compare their creations to those found in the instructions, written by adults, and see that their own ideas are lacking by contrast. This may be a source of great distress for your child. They may become further disillusioned as they grow up to realize they can't actually become a pirate captain, race car driver, or astronaut.

Price: I'll accept \$20, or your best offer. They're just a pile of plastic parts, after all.



For Sale by Owner: High School Football Pads

Description: A complete set of one-size-fits-all football pads, perfect for protecting any young, aspiring athlete. With the right

equipment, hard work, and dedication, you too can become a football superstar—the next Brett Favre or Randy Moss!

Condition: Like new, only worn to practices and tryouts for four months, slightly smells of sweat.

Disclaimer(s): When you fail to make the team after giving it your all, you may learn that nepotism instead plays the most important role in your success. Conversely, you may find that hard work and dedication really are the key requirements, and that yours were simply insufficient. You may subtly hold both of these contradictory beliefs simultaneously, as they slowly eat away at your self-confidence. These pads cannot protect you from such revelations.

Price: You can have them for nothing if it gets that subtle stench out of my closet.



For Sale by Owner: College Student Journal

Description: This fine leather-bound journal with academic calendar provides students with an opportunity to record their educational journey and engage in daily self-reflection. The top margin of each page contains an inspirational motivational quote to get your day started right!

Condition: Almost complete. Only the first three pages were written on and torn out during three separate attempts to begin journaling.

Disclaimer(s): Your efforts at introspection through this journal may be crushed by the combined time pressures of student work

and trying to maintain old relationships that are slowly slipping away. Even if you manage to put them to paper, your worries will not disappear, nor will your aimless, meandering thoughts miraculously transform to give your life a clear direction. The motivational quotes include such insipid gems as “Live, Laugh, Love.”

Price: Do you know of any jobs that will hire someone with half of a liberal arts degree? I need some advice on how to start earning six figures immediately, and a plan to retire early.



For Sale by Owner: Bachelor Knife Set

Description: This premium-quality, five-piece professional chef's knife set lets you stop eating out and create your own delicious, healthy meals at home! Durable enough to cook nightly feasts for the whole family.

Condition: Near-mint, only used for home cooking twice, frequently used to puncture the plastic film of microwave dinner trays.

Disclaimer(s): Owning this knife set will not grant you the energy to stop and shop for ingredients after work. You may never have the time to learn new recipes, and frozen meals will always fit your schedule better. Your too-short weekends at home, spent on chores and feeble attempts at recovering from your exhaustion, may offer no opportunities to start a family for whom you might cook.

Price: I could really use someone to sit down and talk with for a few hours—no, just an hour. I'll even throw in a home-cooked salmon fillet. . . . Please pretend the edges aren't burnt.



For Sale by Owner: Middle-Aged Motorcycle

Description: This exciting Honda motorcycle will get your heart racing at incredible speeds! Feel the wind in your hair and the freedom coursing through your veins as you begin a new adventure.

Condition: Excellent condition, no mechanical issues, under 2,000 miles on the odometer.

Disclaimer(s): Your racing heart may be a symptom of forgetting to take your medication, the feeling of wind in your hair may lessen as you continue to bald. Your desperate attempt at adventure will not restore your fading youth, nor allow you to redo your past choices. When your paid time off runs out, your freedom also ends, and the reality you were running from will be waiting patiently for you.

Price: If you're younger, could you pretend to be my son or daughter? Tell me about how great your life is going—it doesn't have to be true. If you're older, could you call me "Little Man" and rant about how much the world has changed, the way my parents used to? Just call me once a year to check in, until the day I stop answering.



For Barter or Trade: Tired Man's Worldly Possessions**

Description: Everything that I own: home, car, furniture, electronics, clothes, tools, and luxuries.

Condition: Various, mostly neglected, unused and unloved.

Disclaimer(s): You, too, may one day wish to be rid of these things. Not for grand, pious, virtuous reasons, but because you've come to

dread the reminder of unfulfilled aspirations that dwell in them.

Price: I don't know what they're worth, but I would trade them all for a quiet place, and time to think.

***This listing has been flagged as inappropriate/spam and may be deleted following review by our moderators.*

BLUE

Megan Ocel

On a trip to Alaska in May of 2022 I saw my first glaciers. Yes, even in the heat of approaching June (heat wouldn't even be the right word, actually), there's still plenty of ice and snow present in our northernmost state of the United States. My sister and I took a small Cessna 172 up through the Alaskan Mountain Range and I was fortunate enough to be able to sit in the front seat with the pilot. We took off, flying over the flat tundra as we approached the mountains, and nothing could have prepared me for the massive stone walls coated in ice surrounding us like gates to a mighty kingdom. It was a humbling feeling, and the feeling remained even as we landed in the middle of the mountain range on a glacier. A white blanket of snow greeted my feet as I hopped out of the plane, the sun hitting my body warming me more than it did back at the airport. Not only was the sheer size of the collection of flat ice covered in snow impressive, but I was also taken aback by the sides of the mountain around us. I remember staring at the turquoise-colored slicks of ice and being in awe over how blue the ice was. It turns out that as snow falls on a glacier, it will compress and compress until all the ice crystals are enlarged. The reason we see bright blue colors in glacial ice is that longer wavelengths, seen as red in the visible spectrum of light, are absorbed by the ice while the short wavelengths of light, seen as blue in the visible spectrum of light, are scattered. The further the waves travel through the ice and are reflected on the enlarged ice crystals, the bluer it appears.



Less than ten percent of the human population has blue eyes. This is still larger than the percentage of those who have green eyes (two

percent) but a lot smaller than the population that has brown eyes (between seventy and eighty percent). Humans have always found beauty in rarity, which may be why blue eyes are so special. Blue eyes hit the sun in different ways, creating the illusion the eye changes colors from icy blue, to gray, to royal blue. Here's a fact to ruin the mood: blue eyes have been speculated to be a result of incest down the human ancestry tree—a mutation somewhere that ended up being spread down and down lineages. I always figured that fact was made up by people who were upset they didn't have blue eyes, but more research is showing it to be a likely cause. Scientifically, blue eyes lack melanin compared to other eye colors. The epithelium, the top layer of the iris, also known as the colored part of your eye, is where that melanin is stored. Blue eyes are blue due to light reflecting on the water in the eye and through the epithelium layer. When my dog Cody was a puppy, he had the most striking blue eyes I'd ever seen. It was one of the reasons my family found him so cute. Later, as he grew up, the universe traded (or I suppose the melanin in his epithelium helped exchange) his blue eyes for beautiful gold. Still, I remember the blue like it was yesterday.



Years ago at my grandpa's old house in Minneapolis there used to be a Concord grape vine along one of the fences in his backyard. The grapes were tart, not very sweet, and they reminded me of Airheads sour candy. The bunches on the vines were always plentiful though, and I'd always dream about making jelly from the grapes (we tried once, but never got much out of it because we quickly realized jelly-making takes a lot more work than a nine-year-old could handle). I'd pick off a blue ball from the vine, pop it in my mouth and crunch down on the soft skin before gnawing on the seed inside, imagining if the jelly would be tart, too.



The eighth and farthest planet in our solar system is a hellish one with temperatures as low as -353 degrees Fahrenheit and winds that push clouds around so fast they break the sound barrier. It also happens to be my favorite planet, and not just because the name reminds me of all the King Neptune references in Spongebob (yes, I know the planet was named after a Roman God. I was trying to be funny.) This planet gets its cobalt blue, atmospheric tint from the gas present in its atmosphere. The atmosphere of Neptune is largely hydrogen and helium, but methane is also present in small amounts. Methane will absorb red light which is part of the reason we see this big, gaseous giant as blue, but other unknown compounds are also the cause for its blue color. It's not surprising then that Neptune was named after the god of the sea in Roman mythology. The sea is a valiant blue, and what better name a planet after its god?



Growing up, my family loved going to the Duluth Air Show. Any air show, actually, but the one held in Duluth, Minnesota was one we always took pleasure in making a small trip out of. My household of four would go, then my aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandfather would come along as well. The motel stays were always a blast with the cousins, I remember, but as a “Grandpa’s girl,” the fun might have come from the extra time spent with him. My grandfather loved airplanes. He wouldn’t have gotten in one to fly if you offered him a million bucks, but he loved them, and it was he who instilled an interest in airplanes in the rest of his family. He knew them all, too. He could identify them from a distance by the number of engines they had, how many tails they had, and the overall shape of the aircraft. He was the same way when birdwatching, though now I wonder if maybe he just had a love for things that could fly. I personally loved watching the Blue Angels fly over the crowd at the airshows. Those planes are F18 Hornets, a royal blue color

with yellow accenting the wings that fly in groups. My grandfather would always ask me, “*why don’t you become a pilot?*” while I would simply smile and shake my head, not giving much thought to it. I know he’d be extremely proud of me if he could see me now.



When my family went on vacation to St. Johns in the United States Virgin Islands, I saw an iguana and a chicken sharing a Chipotle bowl on the sidewalk, swept out of the overflowing trash can nearby from the wind. It was a sight I never would have imagined seeing, but *boy* am I glad I did. Iguanas, a creature with blue tones on their dark green head or body, are native to the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America. Iguanas are herbivores, so I’m not quite sure exactly what it was eating from the Chipotle bowl that it found so good, but then again, it’s Chipotle and everyone likes Chipotle.



When sitting outside in my backyard around a campfire in the crisp evening air, getting ready to roast marshmallows or sit content wrapped in a blanket, I remember being fascinated with seeing flames that would burn blue rather than orange. I always thought of it as some sort of mirage, but fire, a bright orange and yellow image so clear in our brain we don’t need to think twice about it, it turns out, can be blue (so ha, think again). Flames occur due to oxygen combining with any given fuel source, such as wood or coal. The higher the amount of oxygen being burned, the hotter the flame will be. In these circumstances, oxygen can burn hotter than coal or wood. Even volcanoes have been seen with blue fire in their caldera. A fairly uncommon sight, it’s due to sulfur in the magma reacting with the oxygen in the air. When sulfur burns, the flame it creates is an electric blue color.



Blue sky is important, especially for pilots. Blue sky, I've always thought, means no rain in sight and beautiful weather ahead. I've come to learn that though blue sky doesn't always assure peaceful weather, it gives pilots an obvious visual reference in the sky. Vision is important for flying, and a blue sky allows that. Blue makes clouds stand out and makes it easier to spot other planes in the sky, which is ironic considering how most collisions occur on the bluest of days. At the time of writing this, and not having to worry about head-on collisions due to my instructor's handy iPad equipped with a registered airplane tracking app, I'd recently flown a plane with no visual reference to the blue sky at all. Although completely possible and necessary to know how to do to get my pilot's license, it's safe to say my anxiety went through the roof of the small Cessna 172 I was in.



Earth is covered by 70 percent water. In all of human history, we've only explored 5 percent of that. We've gone out to space, away from what we call home, but we've only explored a fraction of what lies in the depths of the oceans bordering our continents. The unexplored deep blue depths hold secrets and findings we may never uncover. Humans create stories from the unknown, and most of them aren't pleasant. Sea monsters, enormous sharks, hidden cities concealing ancient, cephalopod-like creatures . . . I know when I'm in the ocean and get to a point where I can't see the bottom, just murky blue water fading away to black, to nothing, a part of me longs for the sandy shoreline.



About a month or so into my flight lessons we began to cover more serious topics in flying. No longer was I practicing turning to and

from various headings or working on the relationship between pitching for speed and adding power for altitude, I was practicing how to induce a stall and recover from it. A stall occurs when there is insufficient lift being created for the wings to glide through efficiently, the effect being a free-falling motion. This is to simulate a rather deadly consequence if you were to pitch the airplane too high up during a takeoff or when coming in for a landing. This was also the moment in my flying lessons that made me rethink everything. Imagine being on a roller coaster: you're at the top of the hill, ready to go over it and speed down the track once more. Now take away the track, add about 3,500 feet of air below you, and there is no roller coaster in general and you're in a tiny four-seater airplane. Inducing the stall, which is essentially pulling the nose of the plane up, up, up towards the great blue beyond above until the loud STALL WARNING alarm goes off, feeling the plane shudder and fall forward was a terrifying feeling. I was heartbroken after realizing how scared I was.



There is a one-in-two million chance of a lobster being born blue due to a genetic mutation. Imagine being a fisherman and pulling one of those up in one of your nets.



My bedroom walls are blue. They've been turquoise, bright purple, but I've settled on Sailor's Bay blue. It's a dark blue, as if a sailor out in the middle of the ocean on a boat were to look down and capture the color he sees. It's a comforting color. A quiet color. Darker colors make a small space feel smaller because they absorb more light. My room is small. I like my space, my bedroom, to be small, meaning it's just the right amount of space for me. Considering how many things I have in my room, a smaller space inside my

walls isn't exactly what I need. My blue walls enclose my stage for my guitars and piano I love to practice on. They hold my large, two-person dresser not even close to being filled with clothes. Then there's my bed, with my blue comforter, securing me further inside my blue bedroom walls.



Most children are assigned a color as an infant. For gender, yes, because as we all know blue is the universal color for boys and pink for girls, but it's also something I've noticed done with siblings. Parents like to color-code their children. Blue, pink, red, green, or purple, once a color is taken it's theirs for life. As a twin myself, I was assigned the color blue since my older sister, the firstborn, was assigned the color pink. As I grew up, the color transferred over to other aspects of childhood as well. Cinderella was my favorite Disney princess, and she always wore blue. Aurora, or Sleeping Beauty, always wore pink so she quickly became my sister's favorite princess. A girl's color was always pink, but since mine was blue, I thought I was special.



Since the beginning of my pilot journey this past summer, I've realized I enjoy flying in the afternoon when the sun starts to go past its peak. The world starts to become less busy, same with the sky, as the sun starts its journey under the horizon. The bright blue sky isn't so blue anymore as it begins to glow in the afternoon setting sun. The warmth of it seeps into the plane, heating my cheeks and making my hands on the yoke even sweatier. Something is comforting about the glow. A glow like a blue flame in fire or the reflection of light off of glacier ice. Simply put, it's beautiful.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW
WHO I AM ANYMORE

Elza Solefack



CURLS AND COMING OF AGE

Elza Solefack

For years, I thought I was undesirable. Unworthy of praise, admiration. It wasn't until I turned eighteen that I realized . . . this was not true. Growing up being from an African background, I thought of myself differently than my peers. My clothing, hairstyles, quirks . . . they all made me feel as though I was joining their reality for a split moment only to return to my African decor filled home. One thing that affected how I saw myself in relation to my classmates was my hair.

Everyone can relate to this . . . having a messy hair day, maybe it's a little greasy this Tuesday? Maybe it's frizzed up from Saturday night. How deeply I wished to have a messy hair day. Or to wake up and brush my hair, somehow I thought it would make me feel more... human. Why would I not feel human in my braids? In my afro? Television, stories, friends . . . They never told it to me, but they demonstrated that as long as my hair wasn't bone straight and silky, I could never have my prince charming or my perfect fairy tale ending. I remember one day, my mother had done my hair up in a very beautiful style. The week prior, I had worn my hair out naturally and attempted to part my hair in the middle with bangs. It looked fine as I looked in the mirror before leaving, I felt good . . . A little Dora inspired look, yea. I looked good. Apparently, moisture, time and stuffy third grade classrooms do not bode well with coiled hair. By the time I got into Mademoiselle Defields' room my hair had shrunk down to twice its original volume. I hadn't realized, but one of my classmates, Diego, made it a point to not only tell me, but make me the butt of the joke and get the whole classroom laughing. I may have clapped back at that moment, I always do . . . But it hurt. It hurt real bad.

Going forward, wearing my hair out didn't feel liberating, it felt like punishment. As if I was being told to clean, or do my homework. I've wanted to dismantle the shame I have in wearing it out, so I force myself from time to time to wear it naturally. Till this day, when I wear my hair out I feel bare. Vulnerable to another Diego taking a jab at me. I find it extremely ironic that I get more praise, attention and admiration when I do wear more "natural styles." I don't understand why . . . It still feels like a risk. Do people find me bold? Brave? For simply existing in something they've only seen on BLM graphic tees? I have a hard time accepting that. Because *you* told me not to be this . . . and yet, you want me to be *it* for your own entertainment. To make yourself feel in support of something, like you're empowering me. Well, I don't feel empowered. I feel patronized.

Doing my hair today feels like a rebellious act. But also, a way of reclaiming power. Black-girl-magic-esque styles, or standard styles of culturally black hair honestly bore me . . . Even though it inherently stands out, it feels like conformity to me. Like I'm being a "good black girl." I feel as though I lack character, like I'm vulnerable again. Left waste to your interpretation of what a black person is . . . left waste to the stereotypes and seemingly positive microaggressions. My identity and expression is perfectly intertwined with how my hair looks. It's actually become like art to me, the process of doing it that it is . . . I can spend days, or even weeks doing my hair. I say it's to save me money, but no . . . I enjoy having a reason to be by myself, watch films . . . listen to music. To just stay in my room, constantly occupied in my own company, it makes me feel safe. My hair becomes a shield in some way, a staple of not only my individuality, but hard work. My hair is my armor now.

My mother understood the importance of having nice hair and its effect on a young woman's confidence. She did well to learn how to braid . . . even though she wasn't the best, and at some points

when she lacked the time or energy, she also made large efforts to find good salons or possible family members who could braid. The amount of apartments, basements, and hidden small salons I have been to are almost impressive. Not one braider's work was done to my mother's satisfaction. Chair after chair, hour after hour . . . each time, I would come home with "too much breakage" around my edges. Sore spots around my scalp. There was always something my mother had to pick at for the sake of her perfect little girl's appearance. Perfect little *girl* . . . No one ever stuck, "no one knew how to braid my hair," she would say. My mom took care of my hair all of my life. It wasn't till I turned fourteen that I thought about learning to take care of it on my own. It was truly rough at the beginning. Looking back, I felt extremely proud then... But I feel dissatisfied looking at what I have done now. But I guess that's a good thing, it means I've gotten better.

Sometime into my junior year of high school, I started frequently hanging out with a girl I liked. Her name was Isabelle. A bit into our relationship, they transitioned and started going by Izzy. With them being non-binary, the gender role dynamics of our relationship were very . . . amorphous. I mean, we're already both two women, now throw in our race difference, our height difference, or cultural differences. It's almost like we just went completely against the grain in one fell swoop. Gave the world a big fuck-you. I guess that makes sense for me though. Nonetheless, there was no blueprint for us. We flowed like water, naturally gliding into whatever made way for us. But, nature must always balance itself, and so the masculine and the feminine must exist unanimously within any close relationship. So yes, we were not tied to gender roles, but I naturally began to move into my masculine side with them being smaller than me, and I larger than them. Back. To. My. Hair. I grew very frustrated with it in this period of time. It felt like it harbored too much pain, anger, mistrust. I was quite literally

going off the deep end. So, I cut it all off. Straight to the bone. I had been thinking about it for weeks prior, so it felt amazing to just do it. In a way, it liberated me from being mommy's "perfect little girl." I felt suffocated in that. And now I have a partner who is so liberated in their gender expression? Oh yea, shit was about to change. I, with this new bald cut, began dressing like a boy. No more tomboy outfits. Straight up, I looked. Like. A. Boy. The weird thing is, I loved it, more than anything. I didn't give a fuck what people thought anymore. I could still wear a wig here and there and do my makeup, get prettied up . . . Yeah, that was fun. But waking up, brushing my hair, no makeup, baggy clothes. Wow. It was a newfound euphoria. All this, prompted by a hair cut. And so, going forward, I held no attachment to femininity. Scared the hell out of my family, they kept asking me if I was gay, I would say no. I wasn't lying, technically . . . I wasn't fully gay, I still liked boys. Boys . . . boys boys boys. A whole other realm that fucked up my comfort in myself and hair.

Fast forward to this year, I met a boy. Anything that ever starts with that always ends terribly for me. But this . . . wasn't, isn't the worst thing in the world. His name is August. He, too, is someone who doesn't conform to gender norms. Queer if you will. I guess I have a type . . . I think he appreciated me for my rebellious nature, for my strength and lack of submission. We had a wonderful conversation, wonderful conversations about gender conformity. The first time he ever told me how much he appreciated me was over a facetime call. He said to me . . .

"I love how you don't need to like . . . You understand yourself, you take things that are like masculine and find your beauty in that. Its really cool."

There were so many talks surrounding that. When we first slept together, he had no idea what my body looked like. He found himself curious as we sat in a comfortable silence.

“Do you know why you don’t wear revealing clothing?”

I had thought about this question before he asked it . . . So I stood up next to his bed, putting my clothing back on and glancing upwards as if I was mentally searching for the correct words to say.

“I think growing up, I always got weird looks from older men . . .” I chuckled.

“Like, my mom would always get mad when we’d go out to stores because she’d notice grown men looking at me.”

He took a hit of his vape, nodding his head, still scanning my feminine physique in admiration as it returned to hibernate under my baggy skull printed graphic T-shirt and my worn out, muddy gray loose cargo pants.

“But, I also just like baggy clothes. I feel more myself in them.”

“Well, you look fire.”

“Thanks.”

When he and I first hung out at the Minnesota Zoo, I had just done my hair for an entire consecutive day, no sleep . . . I convinced myself it was because I wanted to, but If I’m being honest, it was mostly for him. At least who I thought he was. I didn’t know him then, not really. I thought I needed to look pretty and feminine with my long hair, but it turns out . . . He would’ve liked me regardless. Long hair, short hair . . . Who knows. Meeting Augie is probably one of the best things that could’ve happened for me, because now I know . . . I am worthy of praise, of being pursued. And I don’t have to be perfectly feminine to be so. It brought me the answer to my fear. “Will boys like me if I don’t present feminine in my hair or clothing?” I guess now I know, the answer can be “yes.” If anything . . . maybe even a little more.



Getting my hair done was once suffocating and tedious, but now it’s become an act of expression and liberation from my racial and

gender identity. My hair is still a mystery to me. Much like it is to everyone else. I never know what it's going to look like, or what's going to prompt it to change, but what I do know now is that it's a super power. I can become whoever I want, whenever I want. And nobody will bat an eye. I enjoy existing somewhere in limbo. Completely undefined. But subject me to your confinements if it makes you feel more comfortable. I'm eighteen now, and I've got a long life ahead of me with many faces, many more places and many more hairstyles.

Contributor's Notes

Erin Anderson is an AFA in Theatre Production and Design student here at Normandale Community College. Since transferring here, they've made it a priority to enjoy stories of all kinds. It's unclear what exactly the future holds, but they plan to continue writing for the foreseeable future (provided they find the time).

Lisa Brodsky holds a Master of Public Health degree from the U of M and works in public health. She is completing her AFA in Creative Writing at Normandale and was the 2nd place winner in the 2022 Patsy Lea Core Awards for poetry. Lisa has numerous published poems that appear in several literary journals including *Otherwise Engaged* Vol 9, 2022 and the *MockingOwl Roost*. She also has published creative nonfiction stories including "Legacies" in the *Tower* 2023.

Jessica DeLapp, a Miami girl and first-gen college student, loves a good romance and watches *Pride and Prejudice* on repeat. Her husband doesn't seem to mind though. When she's not lost in a creative project, you might find her singing, playing chess (and losing), hanging with her sons, or daydreaming about Captain Picard. Oh, and she's a member of Phi Theta Kappa, but mostly just brags about it in her bio.

Saff Drayton is a writing student at Normandale. Saff is a grass-fed doberman by day, 100 percent nautical by night. A retail warrior. Has thirteen years of juice-based surfboarding experience. And a sentient chia pet.

Tesuon Gilliam is the greatest storyteller in all of human history.

Malaya Guerrier is a PSEO student who is in her last semester for

her AFA in Creative Writing and who plans to get her BA in English. Besides writing, she enjoys reading, drumming, and watching football. She hopes to become a published novelist one day.

Tenzin Gyaldatsang, a twenty-year-old History major at Normandale, is a fervent supporter of Free Tibet. With a keen interest in history, he aims to inspire others to learn about Tibet's independence struggle through his writing. Tenzin wishes to encourage discussions and generate support for the cause of Free Tibet.

Lilly Hewitt is currently attending Shakopee High School and takes classes at Normandale through the PSEO program. She is very involved in Shakopee Drama Club and Youth in Government. She has had a passion for creative writing at a young age, but recently started writing poetry a couple years ago.

Lara Hodgens is an avid lover of poetry, chemistry, and animals.

Sarah Huderle is an LGBTQ+ artist and writer from the heart of Minnesota. She enjoys long hikes through the woods, playing D&D with friends, and writing about and drawing the great outdoors. At Normandale, they aspire to complete their AFA, pursue English, and embrace the world of writing.

C. B. James (Cody Boller) is an author who enjoys writing about anything that comes to mind. Outside of poetry and creative nonfiction, his strongest passion in writing is writing about fantasy settings.

Kaitlyn Johnson is in her last semester in the AFA Creative Writing program. When not writing, Kaitlyn loves to read, spend time with loved ones, and her dog, Ruby.

Mumtaz Mohamed is a Somali Muslim girl who is trying to navigate the world with kindness and humility.

Matthew Nauth is a returning Normandale student working on a computer science degree after ten years away, who also does a little bit of writing on the side. If you see his work published anywhere, it's due to relentless encouragement of Normandale's own Professor Anna Meek.

Megan Ocel is a third-year student at Normandale finishing up her AFA in creative writing. She enjoys writing fiction, reading, playing her guitar, and flying airplanes.

Sam Pfau is an AFA student who loves fishing, snowboarding, interior design, and lying in his author bios.

Kianna Phillips is currently studying at Normandale Community College to earn an AFA in Creative Writing. She writes poetry and fiction inspired by nature and art. Her goal is to become a published author with her books selling in stores, and to one day, travel to Japan to visit the Studio Ghibli museum.

Dhoha Qasem has been writing since 4th grade and enjoyed reading, as well as, creating rhyming poetry. Later, she discovered unrhyming poetry and found a different way that poetry can be portrayed so beautifully. These poems are her first attempts at non-rhyming poetry, which she plans on improving and will continue writing as a hobby. Fun fact, she loves to draw for fun as another method of expressing herself!

Sarah Sells is a student at Normandale who resides in Minneapolis. She spends her time writing fiction, poetry, and music, interests

she has been passionate about for most of her life. She is currently pursuing a major in creative writing.

Elza Solefack is an eighteen-year-old multidisciplinary artist from South St. Paul, MN. They were raised by two Congolese and Cameroonian African immigrant parents. In her early years, she found comfort and expression in the arts, including fashion, music and drawing. She prides herself on authenticity and vulnerability.

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

The Creative Writing AFA Capstone class edited and produced this issue. They are: Cody Boller, Jerry Carrier, Vivian Clark, Jessica DeLapp, Tesuon Gilliam, Malaya Guerrier, KeliAnn Gutierrez, Kaitlyn Johnson, Ciera Keyes, Megan Ocel, Lunetta Osterhaus, Samuel Pfau, and Sarah Sells.

Interested in joining the amazing list of *Paper Lantern* contributors? *The Paper Lantern* accepts submissions bianually: Spring and Fall semesters, respectively. Fall issues are produced by the Creative Writing Club, and spring issues by the AFA Capstone class.

All work is reviewed anonymously, and acceptance is based solely on literary and artistic merit. Work in all genres of creative writing (poetry, fiction, memoir, short plays, etc.) as well as visual art are considered. Multiple submissions are accepted. Submissions are open only to registered Normandale Community College students.

More information, as well as the archive of previous *Paper Lantern* issues, can be found at www.thepaperlantern.org.

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