

The Paper Lantern

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**Front cover:** “Cursed” by Kiarra Moore

**Back cover:** “Crooked sheriff” by Kiarra Moore



# *What my mother taught me*

*by Sydney Moser*

There are no monsters in my closet  
Or underneath my bed.  
Instead they lurk in stairwells  
And sometimes in my head.

But most aren't in the hall at night  
Or perched upon a shelf.  
They live in my back pocket  
And I picked them out myself.

This one speaks another language,  
This one plays the drums.  
All of this I glance at  
As they pass under my thumbs.

This one called me pretty,  
This one really likes his truck.  
The first thing this one asked me was  
If I was down to...anyways.

Some of them are rude and crass  
But there's not much to fear  
None of them can hurt me  
If they never get too near.

And even if we do meet  
Mothers don't raise girls as fools.  
All I have to do then  
Is remember Mama's rules:

Always drive your own car  
When you two are meeting up.  
Stay in public places.  
Keep a close eye on your cup.

Be aware of your surroundings.  
Know at least on escape route.  
If things start going badly  
Have a plan for getting out.

Let your friends know where you're going.  
Rohypnol tastes like salt.  
Until you're certain you can trust him  
Keep your feelings in a vault.

Know what liquor you can handle.  
Don't go drinking with a frat.  
(My mama didn't say it  
but Brock Turner taught me that.)

If you slip for half a second  
The police won't too do much.  
They'll think that *you're* the guilty one  
And treat your case as such.

Own a can of pepper spray.  
Learn how to make a fist.  
Scream and scream and don't stop screaming  
If he grabs you by the wrist.

It's okay to break his fingers  
If his hand slides up your knee.  
No, I didn't want him to  
Your Honor, can't you see?

My Mama tells me all these things  
'Cause there's no way to tell  
The difference between monsters  
And the people who mean well.

Of all the things she's told me  
In my head one message sunk.  
It's better to be paranoid  
Than dead in someone's trunk.

And even as she gives me  
All these rules to keep me safe  
She can't protect me from the monsters  
already in place.

There are monsters on the street  
And in alleyways at night  
But the worst of them will get you  
When you're not prepared to fight.

You can guard yourself with all these rules  
Until a night out ends,  
But rules for monsters can't protect you  
From your lovers and your friends.

# *Our bodies are doors that lead to queer places*

*by Jessica Zick*

Jesus sways his hips,  
puts on his low-cut party dress, and smothers his lips  
in crushed roses and bubblegum glitter gloss.

Tomorrow is Easter, and he's ready for a resurrection.

He drinks of himself, a vampiric messiah, until he's drunk  
on his own blood.

He tells his friends he loves them too many times to count  
before he vomits up his necrotic, spongey body,  
all the bread  
he ate at dinner  
gone, the

“You have to eat, son. You have to eat something,”  
gone  
down the toilet.

It's Saturday night and a second  
coming for this boy is a second  
round at the bar, a piña coloda  
flavored puff off some guy's half broken vape-pen,

“You gotta hit the button hard, so it makes an imprint in the  
sweet pulp of your thumb,”  
a line of coke snorted off the hastily dried faux marble bathroom  
countertop,  
the powder lumps into puddles of pectin,

“The trick is to scrape it up and rub it onto your gums,”  
and, when the mood takes, and someone offers him a point or three,  
Jesus will take into his mouth any assortment of home pressed pills.  
The little Superman logos the artist took care to add give him a grin.

He will do this without asking any questions.

Tonight, his hair is long and ebony,



his skin a rich mahogany.  
Jesus kisses that boy made of palpitating shadows  
and tries to save himself  
in his crisp lips, purposefully putting the effort in  
to try,

to pry his neurons out of Jello-shot molds,  
“Shoot those bitches back, honey!”

Jesus finds himself in another,  
and another, and then too many to count,

until he has passed around the gospel truth  
to all who will listen. His laden lips whisper promises  
that he will never be able to fulfil  
when tomorrow’s sun  
tries to break down his door and extort the sins from his crusty eyes.  
More than the truth, intoxicated irrationality demands to be heard.

Jesus cries out  
“Open me!”  
to all the boys made up of all the empty closets and all the scattered  
parts  
of all the monsters that used to live inside them.

Jesus wants to think that this is the moment he will remember  
when he is too old to remember anything else;  
that this is the moment that he will transcend this dirty body and  
evolve

into all the noble gasses that whirl against time  
inside the neon open sign  
that hangs above the bar.

# *Woman before a mirror*

by Sonja Bimberg

Ana\* sits at the booth, hunched over a fresh copy of *People* magazine. The lights overhead flicker once, twice, and then hold steady. All around us are the sounds of fellow patrons eating and laughing, but it sounds distant and distorted like we are separated by glass. Though she has been inside for hours now, she still wears her ratty, purple winter coat. Little pools of water collect at her feet; all the snow has long since melted. Pursing her lips, she flips a page. “More bullshit about Meghan Markle,” she tells me, wrinkling her nose. “You know, in my past life, I was a duchess. In another, I was a barmaid.” Chuckling wryly, she spreads her wrinkled, cracked hands. “In this one, I’m a vagrant.”

We are in a McDonald’s in downtown Minneapolis. I did not enter it with the intention of interviewing her. Instead, I was trying to satisfy a craving for chicken tenders. Ana overheard me telling the cashier about my assignment and offered herself as a subject, which is how I found myself tucked away in the corner booth not visible from the counter. It is Ana’s favorite spot to haunt, and she has been sitting here for years. The faded, cracked leather booth has molded to her body. A few wispy strands of soft gray hair float loose from her bun, and she does not bother to work them back in. There are lines in her face that hint at a life of both fun memories and rough spots. Her eyes are pale blue and burn with intensity. In her own words, she is “still ready to take on the world”. Though she lives in Minnesota now, Ana grew up on the East Coast, where she took jobs that paid just enough to keep her in an apartment while she partied with her friends. Despite being 70, she has yet to retire. She does not have any savings.

“I used to burn bras,” she tells me, lighting another cigarette. Her favorite brand is Camel, but in the past few hours I have watched her start and finish a box of Fortuna Menthol a friend gave her as a present. The copy of *People* magazine, her clothing, and this booth all reek of smoke. It sticks in my nostrils and clings to my skin. I asked her if she ever worries about cancer; she told me she does not because she can’t afford a doctor.

Her comment sticks with me as well. “In a past life?”

“No.” She tucks the cigarette underneath the table, wary of the employees’ watchful gazes. The last thing she wants is to get booted. “In

this one.” Between drags on her cigarette, she describes the Miss America protest in New Jersey in 1968. She was only nineteen then, young and angry and ready to change the world. With 200 or so other women, she marched and yelled about the racism and inequality the program represented to them. Though she joked about it earlier, she insists that nobody actually burned their bras. “I threw mine in the Freedom Trash Can, and so did other women, but there was never a fire, no matter what the press said. All the journalists, they made it up. They were tainting our movement. Trivializing it.”

The Miss America protest was not the last rally Ana marched in. In 1993, along with a million others, she protested against nationwide LGBTQ discrimination in Washington, D.C., and most recently she participated in the 2018 Women’s March, this time protesting right here in Minnesota. Though she enjoyed being back on her feet, the fact that women and others today are still fighting for some of the same things she fought for in her youth depresses her. “People matter. Me, I’m homeless, but that doesn’t mean I’m just part of the scenery. I deserve to be respected and listened to, and as long as I have a voice, I’m going to use it to fight.”

Ana has been homeless for around ten years now. In 2006, she met a man through the dating site Match. The two of them had an online relationship for a little longer than a year. He told her that his name was George, that he had two dogs and a nice house in Bloomington, and that he loved her. Then, in late 2007, they decided to move in together. She deposited all of her savings into his bank account, packed her life into one bursting suitcase, discarded what she didn’t think she would need, and hopped on a flight to Minneapolis. Instead of her beloved George meeting her at the airport, however, she found herself suddenly unable to access his bank account. When she showed a taxi driver the address George had given her, the driver laughed. It didn’t exist.

“I never got back on my feet after that. All my money was gone, and nobody needed a secretary. At least, not one my age.” Again she chuckles, gazing over my shoulder at a picture of the first McDonald’s. I wonder if she sees it, or if she is instead watching herself ten years ago. “Part of it is my fault, I suppose.”

From a young age, Ana knew she was not a family woman. While other little girls played with dolls and squealed over baby siblings, she drew pictures and chased the neighborhood strays, sometimes to feed them and others just for kicks. However, unlike other non-maternal women, she did not want to be a career woman, either. In defiance of her

mother's wishes, Ana never went to college, and she took small temp roles that paid rent and put food on the table, but most of her money she spent traveling, partying, and smoking. "I didn't despise working. Money just wasn't important to me. If I had a house, it still wouldn't be."

Ana does not believe she will ever live in a house again.

However, she stresses that everything that has ever happened to her is a direct result of her actions. Despite pressure from all sides to marry a nice guy and have kids, to work an acceptable career, to not deviate from the norm, Ana carved out a life she was comfortable living. Even now, as she sits here smoking her cigarette, she has created her own routine. Smirking, she blows smoke towards me. "Yeah, I'm a bum. But I'm me, so what of it?"

\*Name has been changed.

# *Love letter*

*by Katie Frias*

I fell in love with a blank white page.  
Its edges uncurled;  
Crisp  
Like communion wafers.

I would write it a sonnet,  
Or a villanelle -  
With words arranged like a sunflower field.

I've seen such love written in blue veined margins,  
Sunset colored post-its,  
On the flaps of envelopes that fly over the Pacific.

For every thought,  
Dot and scribble,  
Spotch and spill of ink -  
Are tattoos of things written and unsaid.

In every white corner I would write  
Limericks and haikus.  
Soaked to the skin  
In cursive honeymoon.

I fell in love with a blank white page.  
Now immersed in a sea  
Of calligraphy.

Its edges curled;  
Stained  
With coffee-colored rings.

# *First fruits*

by *Samantha Hendrickson*

She borrowed the lip balm from Aphrodite  
“pomegranate kisses” painted an invitation  
Tinting, tainting, the smirk of a virgin mouth,  
“I *always* had a thing for older guys.”

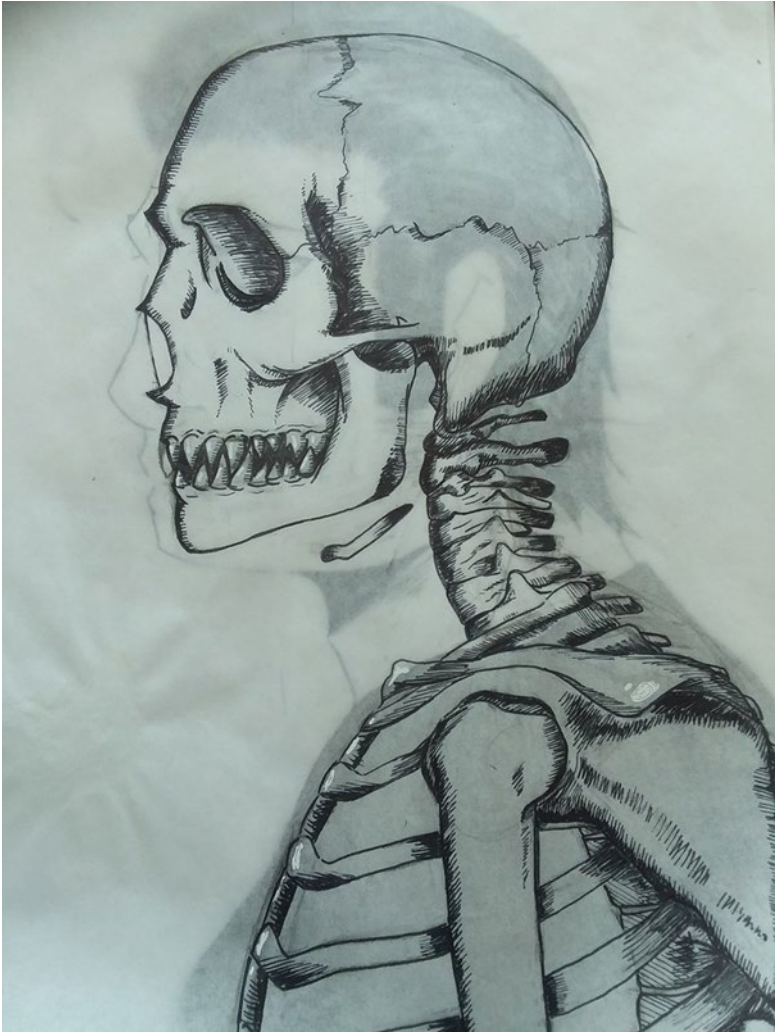
Wriggling hips help budge the bedroom window,  
Her chest is its own catapult, threatens to  
send her descending before the time is right  
“Calliope, he has the *cutest* dog.”

Those bad boys, those goth boys, those dark boys with  
a hidden glow, such a pretty moth in the headlights  
She told him to wait for her, park by the river,  
“Clio, he has a *car*.”

Those hips don't fill the mini skirt, but her  
pomegranate kisses will taste just like home  
in the back of a black Cadillac on Styx Ave.  
“Momma will *never* know.”

# *Something's off*

*by Kiarra Moore*



# *Things I know about you*

*by Jessica Zick*

1. When you fight away fumbling midnight thoughts your teeth ache the next morning
2. Your teeth are oily, and so is your back. You want someone to bite down on the blemishes that grow there, suck up the puss and blood, inhale the aroma of your delicate deformities
3. Photographs of horses make you feel pain
4. Your house is full of secret ashtrays stashed inside clocks, VCRs, and poorly stuffed owls with no eyes
5. This knife is for you
6. You think your bathtub is too big for one person, you want that copper tub's clawed feet to pull you towards a better home
7. Your husband should be home by now
8. When you pray, you don't think anyone is listening



# Tempest

by Leannys Lopez Leyva

*I was four when I first experienced a hurricane. At the time I lived on the small island of Grand Cayman, the largest of three British-owned Caribbean islands. It was just my luck that the first hurricane I lived through was the one that no one anticipated. Hurricane Ivan when it hit the Cayman island on September 12 had transformed from a measly category 3 hurricane to a daunting category 5. During the time people in Cayman had no clue as to how bad thing could get. The majority of the island severely underestimated hurricane Ivan, we were no different. My family had decided to brace for hurricane Ivan in our home.*

I watch from a chair in my bedroom as Daddy board up the window; the sound of the drill is almost deafening in the silence of my room. I sit on my little wooden rocking chair as my usually bright room now becomes dark. Afraid of the darkness that has shroud my room, I flee to the outdoors where I begin searching for Betty so that we can play.

The longer I spent outside, the less I want to; the sky is an angry gray, and I don't hear any of the pretty colorful birds that roam around my house. The only sound I can listen to is that of the wind passing through the leaves on the trees high above my head. The noise is scary, like a monster's moan, but I'm a big girl, and I need to find Betty, so I trudge on.

I finally find her hiding in her wooden dog house which is right beside the spooky shed were Daddy keeps all his tools. I try to get Betty out so she could play with me, but I think she doesn't feel good, so I decide to crawl in and begin petting her to get her to feel better.

Mamá found me there a little while later, curl up with Betty in her house. She kneels in front of the small wooden dog house and says that it is time to come inside. When I held onto Betty tighter and ask why she tells me that there is a storm coming and we couldn't be outside.

That made sense, that is why all the birds were gone and why Betty didn't want to leave her house, but still, I worry; Betty's house is tiny. I loosen my grip, and I ask Mamá if we could take Betty inside. She says yes and that Daddy is coming to get her. With that affirmation, I

give Betty one last pat and wriggle out of the small structure, grab the hand Mamá offers and walk inside the house.

~

*At the time of the hurricane, I lived in the three-bedroom teal-colored house that my father had built years before, with my mother, father, and my black Labrador, Betty. The residence was elevated from the ground and located as far from any beach as possible on an island; there were two, steep steps to reach the patio and another level to enter the actual house. The house, located on the corner of its street and another, was also surrounded by trees on one side.*

~

Stepping into the house is weird; the house was usually bright with all its windows, but the large hunks of wood don't let any light pass through making our warm home look gloomy and scary. There are big jugs of water on top of the kitchen counter, and when I look towards the dining room, I see that the table and chairs were moved to make space for Betty. Once everyone is inside Daddy put up the last of the wooden planks.

I don't understand why my neighbor Tatiana said she wished she could stay home, staying stuck at home is boring. At first, it wasn't boring because I could watch TV, but after a while, the cartoons start becoming hard to watch, the pictures keep freezing, so I decide to go color in the lovely coloring book Mamá got me, making sure I stay in the lines like Mamá. The house is quiet now that the TV is off, but now I could hear that the moans of the monster are louder.

Suddenly there is a loud sound, the kind that happens when you break a stick just much, much louder; then it is dark. I can barely see the outline of my hands, and it is so dark. I look for Betty, but she's dark, and I can't see her. I feel tears come to my eyes, but I won't cry, I'm a big girl. I feel Betty press against my side, and I almost sob, but I don't I'm a big girl; still, I hold Betty close to me as I wait for Mamá and Daddy to come for me. The sound of my parent shuffling around, Betty's panting, and the ever-present wind is the only sounds I can hear. By the time I saw Daddy make his way towards me, lantern in hand, my eyes are brimmed with unshed tears, and I knew I was shaking.

After I manage to calm myself, Daddy sits me on the step of the porch and tells me to hold the lantern for him. Luckily, we have a generator. I sit where Daddy placed me for what feels like hours, the light clutch tightly in my hands, Betty lying next to me as I watch Daddy

fight with the machine that sounds like a lion's roar every time he pulls the string.

That night, Mamá and Daddy pull the mattress out from their room and get all our blankets and pillows and place them out in the hallway of our home. Mamá tells that we are going to have a slumber party here tonight, I try to get Betty to join but daddy that meanie says no. The night is hot and humid, and I couldn't sleep, time pass terrifyingly slow and fast that night.

~

*The same year as Ivan, Cayman had dodged a bullet as a month before Ivan the Caymans prepared to receive Charley, a category 4 hurricane was thought to hit the islands directly but ended up veering off course. Because of this Cayman only experienced some winds and rain during Charley. This gave people the impression that hurricane Ivan when it was announced, was going to do the same thing.*

~

The following day the first thing I notice is that the sounds from outside are louder than the day before. I spent the day sitting down on the sofa with Mamá playing hand games and telling stories. Then without warning a great crash reverberates throughout the house and the wind which I have thought was loud only moments before is now howling through our living room, bringing with its strong gusts of debris-filled air and torrent rains.

As this happens, I hear Mamá scream over the sound of the roaring winds as she tucks me into her side, Daddy is suddenly in front of us, he too is yelling. I'm not, I'm too scared, he picks me up, and races away from the monster that is the storm. At some point I manage to regain myself after having something smash through our living room window, that is when I begin wailing "Daddy! Daddy! Betty, get Betty!" I squirm in his arms, trying to get to Betty. Daddy says a naughty word and hands me off to Mamá then races out of the closet. When he comes back moments later, he has a slightly wet Betty by the scruff of her neck. As soon as she comes into view, I bent as far from Mamá as she would allow and clutch the big, black Lab between my tiny arms. From Mamá lap, I watch as Daddy ran back and forth with supplies, the room has become increasingly cramped.

Once the previously spacious walk-in closet is brimmed with blankets, pillows, and other things I don't know the name of, Daddy closes the bedroom door, then proceeds to barricade us first in the room using one of the mattresses, then again inside the small space of the

closet. I don't know how long we stayed inside the small area; time passes strangely while in that closet, it feels like we spent years and minutes in there simultaneously. Time passes with me being covered in a thin blanket, hugging Betty as Mamá attempts to keep me calm as I stare at the rattling closet door, trying not to cry because I am a big girl.

~

*It took the hurricane three days to finally released us from its clutches and, people began slowly leaving their shelters, and what was found was horrifying, entire blocks along the south coast were decimated. The roads had become sand dunes filled with debris, boats were found miles inland, cars were wrecked and waterlogged. There was no clean water or food because the storm has scattered everything, there was no communications or electricity.*

~

When we finally leave the closet, there is water all over the floor, going up to my ankles in some parts of the house. The entire living room is destroyed, debris is everywhere I look, and the once white walls are stained in various places. The window that at first only has a hole in it is completely gone, the storm has left nothing but the frame. The ceiling has what appears to be large bumps that, when Daddy pokes them with a knife, releases dirty, sludgy water.

That isn't even the worst of it. When Daddy pries the waterlogged wood from the door; I get my first look of the outside since the hurricane hit. The first thing I notice is the water; everywhere I look there is dirty, yucky water that if I go into would reach my chin. There are all kinds of thing in that water too, from tree branches to car doors to toys, to clothes and furniture. The next thing that struck out is the building across the street; it is missing a portion of its roof, and an entire wall has become nothing but rubble. It looks like a giant has stepped on it. There are several electrical poles snapped in half, a light post is missing, and cars I don't recognize are piled near each other on the other block like a stack of Legos.

~

*The damages to my childhood home were extensive, but nowhere near as bad as some other places on the Island. The living room; destroyed beyond salvation, and the lawn had all manner of trash. One day, while walking around my family's property, I found an electric toy car on top of a cluster of banana trees. Even worst when the water finally receded, we were able to see that a few trees were completely uprooted*

*and moved to block the entrance to our property. My father had to cut a hole into our miraculously still intact fence to get out.*

~

Everywhere I look things are different from what they were, both inside and outside the house, it is scary, like looking at an alien world. Mama tells me that we have to start cleaning up, I think she's crazy, there is too much stuff everywhere, there is no way that we could clean it up. I tell her this, but she just laughs and hugs me tightly. She says that we could, that it will take us a lot of time, but that is ok because we are still here, and we have time.

~

*It took months but slowly thing when back to normal. In the first week, the primary efforts were focused on the airports, once they were cleared, charter planes were sent with supplies such as water, food, and clothes and took the tourist back to their homes. These planes also brought workers to help clear roads, repair homes and businesses, and reinstall the electricity. It took nearly a month for the power to make it back to our neighborhood. Three months after the nightmare that was hurricane Ivan people were back to work, schools were open, and development was well underway to ensure that devastation like Ivan wouldn't affect Cayman again.*

# *Kinnickinnic*

*by Fran O'Brien*

somedays I need my dose of St. Croix  
not the flavored gas water you drink from a can  
the type that flows through the Mesozoic era made border  
between  
the land of lakes and the land of cheese  
one tributary was lucky enough to have plaques thrown up around it that  
say  
“state park” as well as have its hallowed ground protected  
by a ten-dollar entry fee  
which I found isn't very widely enforced in autumn  
I trekked its moss-covered trails down to the water  
where the trees seemed to grow from  
a long and perilous way down the almost vertical cliffs  
felt like climbing an acute angle on the way up  
hiking through its yellow prairies with grass high above my head  
I had unsettling urges I couldn't satisfy of the fun I could have with a  
match  
which made me worry about the next guy to think this  
who has less self-control  
and thinks he'll prove he's more powerful than nature  
last trail in the direction of water flowing down and over rocks  
my vantage point was barred from the gulch so I had to improvise  
and trudge down the leaf-ridden ravine to sit  
my phone's last bar disappeared  
not truly alone  
but surely at ease  
as I looked on over the deep trench  
from a bench that perhaps the beavers made  
almost as if they knew I was coming  
I got up to leave and thanked them for letting me into their home  
the happy sounds the finches made had me feeling like I was welcome  
back anytime  
or maybe it was good riddance  
I don't speak finch

# Cyst

*by Celina Blanco-Ramirez*

Who invited you in? My mouth usually warm like rain has turned into a theater of war. You disguised yourself as a canker sore. I found you out as a sizzling cyst that persists. A sac, vesicle or bladder. A hollow organ or cavity containing a villainous secretion. The abnormal character in a play trying to steal the lead role. I cannot smile because when I do you light tiny angry fires. My lip caught in the crossfire has born a zit. You have overstayed your welcome 3 days and 3 nights. My mouth is not a motel free of charge. You will pay. Throbbing thorn of pain demon on the path to Spain. Invasive, burning, red, and hot. I see you nestled like a baby between my gum and bone. A bitter taste against my tongue followed by the copper taste of blood. You burst like a grape pinched between a thumb and a pointer finger. Guttled and squished.

Sincerely yours

# *Fast friends*

*by Katie Frias*

I met my best friend at the grocery store,  
in the ethnic food aisle.

Combing through cans of Goya beans.  
(The dented ones are half price!)  
After grocery store pick-ups....

We'd take vacations in July,  
dance to old banda tapes,  
our heartbeats in time with the bass.

We'd walk through department stores  
sampling perfumes too expensive to buy,  
giggling in clouds of jasmine and vanilla.

We'd watch crappy telenovelas,  
throwing hot-sauce soaked popcorn at the TV.  
Pedro's wife is his 2nd cousin! (obviously)

We'd listen in on hair salon gossip,  
tapping our fingertips to Morse code  
as our painted nails dried.

She would be my maid of honor.  
I'd be the godmother to her son.

I met my best friend at the grocery store.  
I watched her push her cart past me,  
and turn into the cereal aisle.



*Fire stone*

*by Vicky Erickson*



# *Cigarettes: Canonized in three parts*

*by Jessica Zick*

1. His breath tastes like Marlboro Lights. He didn't smoke as much when we first dated, but as we grew older, I guess he got a sharper taste for it. He is breathtaking when he smokes. His slow drags; I stay envious of the time his lips spend lingering on the paper filter. I reach my hand out and he passes it to me, the cherry a silvery ruby ablaze in the indigo darkness of a summer's witching-hour walk. Now my breath tastes like Marlboro Lights. We exhale so that the smoke lingers in the still summer air in front of our faces so we can walk through the clouds. Later, outside my house, pressed into the hard, uneven cement of my driveway, he licks my lips. His breath and mine tangle, our hands too eager to push up under clothes and feel their way in the lightless murk. Flesh and breath become one. We taste the stale cigarette smoke and the July heat on each other's skin and pretend we are in love.
2. When I sit next to or pass by a man whose clothes and breath hold the choking sent of stale cigarette smoke, I always breathe deeply. The slightly sour smell comforts me, before I become slightly repulsed. Every man I've ever loved has smoked cigarettes at one point in their life, my father included. I wonder sometimes if my preternatural affection for the smell is a survival tactic. I was a baby when my father gave them up, my mother tells me. But did he do it a few months too late? Did my all-absorbing brain still register that smell as him, as protection? As if the clouds of smoke would envelop me, keeping me from harm? Did I become classically conditioned to this smell long before I ever tasted a fresh cigarette or the taste of a stale one on a friend's tongue?
3. The first time I try a cigarette it is my mother's birthday. It's late fall. Me and my best friend, she's been smoking for years, stand behind a restaurant dumpster. She instructs me with vigor, understanding how grave it is that I learn all the customs. As she packs the fresh pack of Red 100s against her palm, we stay

silent. When she's hit them hard enough and for long enough, she rips open the cellophane and flips her lucky. She then withdraws a single beautiful, gleamingly white cigarette. She tells me to hold it between my index and pointer fingers, where the middle meets the distal, so I do. She demonstrates how to light it next, first by putting the long smoke lightly but firmly between her pressed lips. She speaks around the cigarette and tells me that I must breathe in when I light it. She brings the lighter up and flicks the Bic with one hand while covering the flame with other. I follow her instructions exactly with my own prize, but I can't get it to glow like hers. She takes pity on me and hands me her half-smoked stick, lighting up the other for herself. I take my first deep inhale. The taste fills my mouth like dry gristle-gum. It's like I'm breathing in the smoke from charbroiled steak-fat. I gag, and my friend laughs. I finish the short with dedication. We laugh together this time, I feel queasy, and we head back to the restaurant, our clothes wreaking; the stale cigarette smoke and cheap, stolen drugstore perfume clinging to us with gnarled hands.

# *Starbucks*

*by Fran O'Brien*

i am tired of opening my legs  
there is nothing there any of *you*  
deserve to see

*you*, the bearded hipster  
you don't drive to my stores  
you ride to them  
on your surfboards with wheels on the bottom  
with your military grade backpack  
filled with pages of shitty prose  
that you call art  
and an aluminum laptop  
with re-hashed Nietzsche quotes  
"facts don't exist, only interpretations"  
i interpret that it is a fact you are a loser  
and places like LA or NYC  
you think you have a special connection to  
more than the millions that actually live there  
sticking to the back of it  
while you look forward to the lake every summer  
that orange and brown pattern  
doesn't look good on you by the way  
neither do those clusters of zippers on your legs  
that serve no functional purpose

*you*, basic white girl  
i promise you don't have a "caffeine addiction"  
and no, getting coffee is not a valid excuse  
to be late for class or work  
you can tell your professor  
i said so which goes double  
if he falls into the category above  
you people are like bacteria  
i can't tell maddie from ally  
jenny from becky

or crabbie from blabbie  
if i have seen one of you  
i have seen them all  
and you make me sick  
saying “what is life” is not deep  
neither is that quote you are about to retweet  
no one wants to hear about jimmy either  
i don't care how many times he didn't snap you back  
stop calling him a fuckboy

and *you*, the baristas, might be the worst of all  
the majority of you fall into one of the above  
but for both of you  
coffee is your most interesting personality trait  
you don't need to spit in someone's drink  
just because they offended your mantra  
they attacked your chakra  
or whatever ridiculous thing  
you think they are offending  
by giving you a snide microaggression  
“i come here regularly and i do not recognize you  
here is how everyone else makes my coffee”  
working here apparently made you lose  
your ability to spell  
writing names like chane or saruh or franc  
on cups you make your point with saliva inside  
just unionize  
start a strike  
punch them in the face  
or get a new job  
those would be the mature things to do

i am done spreading my legs for all of you  
get your coffee somewhere else

# *El Niño (travieso)*

*by Celina Blanco-Ramirez*

How to know when the wind is talking to you  
Go to bed,  
listen.  
Leave your window open (optional.)  
He will be heard even if the window is shut,  
listen again.

*Mama?*  
A hushed ache cries.

When the wind falls silent,  
he is listening.  
You may now speak,  
always whisper.

Somedays,  
his touch will be as soft as a silkworm.  
Other days,  
he will make window-dressers  
and doorbells violently rattle  
like snapdragons trapped in a snare's drumbeat.

Rambunctious in nature  
with no one to play with.  
Seeking a playmate.  
Leaves will flit and whirl around you,  
watch as he sways.

He is most commonly known as,  
the hot breath of summer  
the first warm wind of spring  
the frigid shrieking winds of winter  
and the crisp whisper of the autumn breeze.

Little one who

has heard and  
seen all.

You have nothing to hide,  
don't lie.  
Be careful his caregivers are listening.

Often, he will slip away unnoticed,  
when he is talking  
to lightning and thunder  
leave him be.

They don't want you to hear  
about the riotous orchestra  
they are about to perform.

When he tickles your ear listen closely,  
he trusts you  
enough to keep his secrets.

He has a volatile spirit,  
he becomes violent easily.  
Be kind to him,  
you don't want to get on his bad side.

Love him,  
even when he is cruel.  
Especially when he throws a tantrum  
across the desolate wilderness.  
All he really wants is a friend.



# *Artificial*

*by Kiarra Moore*





# *Seasoning makes a difference, in my experience*

*by Jessica Zick*

A man came into my restaurant for the very first time today, and he told me that he beat cancer. He told me that three years ago the doctors had told him that he had a year to live.

I wanted to tell that man that I think he's beautiful. Not beautiful, exquisite. Not exquisite. He was the just waking up sunshine in late May that manages to seep into your porous bones and forces you to breath in more deeply, because is the only way to capture the warmth and store it in your treasure box soul. I wanted to fit my fingers into the holes in his ears and pull myself upwards, upwards toward the unknown of his mouth and skin and thoughts and dreams. He was the drifting smell of lilac and honeysuckle that rises early and lingers longingly from the flowering bushes that line my backyard. His molasses chuckle was made of aged fear-flavored sugar and it topped an adrenaline sundae, it swept me away with summer wind and a half lifted liltng smile. He was chasing the sunset. He was a drive through the familiar backroads, just before the sun fades, not long before last light. With the windows down and the music up way too loud, so loud you can't feel your ear drums, so loud you can feel the vibrations through the seats, pulsing and churning, hardening your hands on the steering wheel, the kind of music that makes everything hum around you like you've been submerged in a crashing wave of freshly birthed, writhing cicadas. He was the ringing you embrace, because it means you're here, and you can feel everything else. The creases in his face told me what he didn't. Understanding slid down my throat like hot, salted butter. He was the crimson streak that blazes across the dusky pale periwinkle clouds of twilight, he was my best friend in the seat beside me, and he was the bowl we shared, and the flame from the BIC lighter with the taco sticker on it that we used to light it. He was an essence, a manifestation, he was living truth that something akin to a god must have existed, if only to have made him.

He was alive. He had beaten cancer. He fought his own body, cells that turned against him, and won.

He was a spirit, gifted back to the earth, coated in soot scars and piercing holes; his meat and his bones called out to me. We are holy! They told me. I wanted to devour him and his strength with keen, gnashing teeth. I wondered how his gold-leafed flesh would feel inside my brimming stomach. My tongue ached in my mouth, pulsed with my quickening pace, desire to trace each sinew with my lips burned. I wondered if Lucifer would taste different than a man. After all, what does earth do to angels if not consume them?

# [1961-2019]

by *Samantha Hendrickson*

My father is a “baby boomer”. My father is “the way things used to be” and “a different world back then.” My father is born 1961. Lubbock, Texas. He throws rocks into backwoods oil pits on Sundays for fun, watches them hit and rest in the waxy top layer, then sink down slowly into the black gold (back when Texas had enough to feed the world). Sometimes, he says, if you were lucky, you hit a bubble. The pit spits back, spatters drops in protest, into black Cherokee curls, and hisses as the rock go *down, down, down* anyway. Sometimes, he says, if you are unlucky, the pit has its revenge on Easter Sunday dress shirts, with a satisfied hiss to harmonize with a mother’s chastising.

My father is the oldest of three children, always in flux. Home is many different things. My father is 1970. Burnsville, Minnesota. There are no more oil pits, but there are creeks crawling with slimy things: worms and snails, puppy dog tails, all what little boys are made of. Little boys are made of paper routes, too, the kind that, he says, take you past the little black girl’s house on purpose, even if it meant climbing the hill to the cemetery. My father knew before the rest of the block and Burnsville, 1971, that you can see color and beauty at the same time.

Baby boomer. Part of speech: noun. Proper noun? Nix proper. My father is not proper in essence, only in action. My father is 1974. Tehran, Iran. My father is a mechanic’s son, with airplane oil in his veins and in the desert. There is magic to be found in being barefoot, running across sand dunes after sunset, with skin so used to snow drifts. Be purposefully barefoot, he says, in another country as often as you can. But the shoes come back on in the apartment, and the desk chair fits a makeshift barricade under the front door knob. The Egyptian men come knocking for my grandmother at midnight, for her foreign body and her red hair. The barricade holds. The thirteen-year-old has been a man for years.

Baby Boomer. Definition: a child of homecoming. My father is the not-so-prodigious son of the southern red clay and weighs a buck ten, soaking wet. My father is summer of ‘75. Owasso, Oklahoma. He knows the land, but it does not know him. The Mississippi runs muddy here, and memory is lost to the current. There is no welcome feast, no sacrifice, and my grandfather still favors the crack of a leather belt to the sound of

his son's voice. High school is hell. EMT training is hard. He doesn't say that he loses a part of himself, in the after-school brawls and car crashes he drags bodies from. I am old enough now to say it for him

My mother is a 4.0 student who does not study for one midterm that fall. My father is Texas-Cowboy smooth, with a honey drawl. My father is 1991. Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The snow is almost familiar, and worth the woman he takes out every night for two weeks. He is the reason my mother does not study. *I'm not going to say I'm in love with you*, he says, on the airport curb, *but I'm going to say I could be in love with you*. My father has not jumped into anything without both feet since Iran; the dunes' lessons are not forgotten ones.

My mother is my father's greatest joy. My father is a horseback ride proposal at sunset, six months after they meet. My father is 1992. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. My father stays with the red earth, the oil pits, and the woman he brought from the snow stays with him. Your mother had a root canal and no insurance, he says, so we had a courthouse wedding and no honeymoon money. "I to thee enfold" echoes against dark wood and high ceilings and six other couples that share their wedding day, but my father sees only beauty and the green of my mother's eyes.

I am prayed for. My father is a deer in the headlights, like he forgot he prayed for me. My father is 1997, and I will be the only southern baby of the three. My father is afraid for the first time in his life. He lays me on the bed, bundle of nerves and work-calloused, shaking hands and "now what?" written on a furrowed brow. I bought a humidifier, he says, because an article told me to. But then I took it back because another article said it could kill you. I'm not a baby anymore. I laugh because I can, because I survived a humidifier and my father laughs, too, because that is the only thing he ever wanted me to have to survive. Leather will not crack in his house.

I am twenty-two years of Mark Hendrickson's daughter. My father is fifty-seven of Queen songs and southern sayings, "eat a live toad for breakfast and your day can only go up", American work ethic and storyteller. My father is 2019, and the north is his home again. The snow stays white in his beard and once black curls. He is "God, Family, Boxing", "keep the mission" and "like a mouse on a Cheeto". He is still not practiced in the art of letting go, despite the fact that he is the one that gives his daughter wings: to Italy, to Spain, to back to the snow of Minnesota. He is the one who fills the oil pit with rocks, so I will never

fear sinking. My father would never say, but is:

*“Look. Look at the different world I made for you.”*

# *Empty arms*

*by Jane O'Shea*

She: swaddled in lace  
blinking peacock eyes  
velvet skin and rigatoni ringlets;  
I ached to encircle her  
but my cherub diffused  
leaving a pink gingerbread girl  
sprinkled with sugar crystals.

The apparition hovered,  
my hand stretched to stroke  
her apple cheek  
she morphed into a vinyl doll  
in a gingham frock  
wearing prim buckled Mary Janes  
and crumbled  
into peachy dust.

I loved my daughter and gave her  
a sensible pair of wings.  
She painted them paisley purple  
and fluttered away to the big city  
in glittery stilettos.

I tried to gift her my chromosomes  
but she abandoned them in a cardboard box  
bound for the Salvation Army  
tangled with pastel ribbons she unbraided  
from her gypsy pony's mane,  
a scaly mermaid tail,  
and her battered  
ruby  
slippers.

# *Five sister requiem*

*by Jane O'Shea*

Just this side of twenty you buried your mother, watched  
her swollen, battered, hole-punched body slip, a  
stiff key into a bottomless lock, slapped hard by a vile October wind as  
your grief storms keened, howling like wind-driven snow, you  
quintet of daughters, instant women scribbling sympathy card thank-yous  
phantom silhouettes ring the doorbell, pumpkin brains smashed in  
the driveway  
casseroles and kindnesses  
cease.

Death is bare as birches after the fall, but your babies still wail for the  
breast, your  
dishes still crust in battered porcelain sinks in fallow suburban  
ramblers, you

five sisters marry in shoulder pads, fried-egg chests cupcaked in  
Chantilly lace and romantic  
propaganda, Duluth honeymoons your funereal omen, you vomit and  
swell with his seed your

episiotomy stitches knot and burn, bandaidded with Sitz baths and witch  
hazel,  
babies tug at cracked nipples; your deflated bellies pool beside  
you, polite, you dress

newborns and crooked Christmas trees, stuffing Thanksgiving turkeys  
and Angt your  
husbands stray like randy coyotes, the arsenic hour repeats, a  
scratched vinyl record melting

into midnight quarrels, daylight stalemates, unwiped crumbs on the  
kitchen island your

marriages dissolve, flesh in acid, run down the laundry sink, you  
the dreamer incarcerated by a narcissist, making love to a tattered  
thesaurus lit by one  
sputtering candle wick, congealed, creamed coffee, dust bunnies  
choking, you

the beauty frozen in lake ice, solaced by bacon, carbohydrates, and  
Labradors your  
nuptial jailer a beardy jackpine savage, you

the basketball star alone in a cardboard rambler, litterbox-strewn  
basement, empty larder your  
St. Francis heart void of lady love, replaced with tabby-striped  
kittens, you

the diva rocking rose-colored spectacles and cellulite, discarded for a  
bisexual coquette you  
devour Master Card, and Chick-Fil-A to fill the vacuum, you

the genius actuary snuffed out by a quintet of offspring, drowning in a  
diaper pail, kowtowed  
by Catholicism and sleep deprivation, your spunky, bright,  
gifted daughters miring in your scuffed spiraling bootprints, abandoning  
college degrees and  
feminism, they shed their souls and abandon them, wrinkled, on the  
sticky floor.



# *The reality of the mind*

*by Norhan Qasem*



# *Tell me it's okay*

*by Jamie Sampson*

“You know, of course, we’d still love Jackson if he was gay,” my mom assured me one time when I was twelve years old. We had always secretly speculated the issue. After all, my brother was quiet, reserved, and sometimes a little awkward. He was only a few years older than me yet had never had a girlfriend. Years passed and Jackson remained all of those things, but eventually he scored himself a girlfriend, and the rumors were put to rest. Turns out he really was straight, he just also happened to be a little awkward, too. Looking back, I wonder why we thought that meant he had to be gay.

More years passed, and I went through middle school boyfriendless. My dad had absolutely no problems with this and everyone assumed it was because of my maturity. More years passed, and suddenly I was almost done with high school, still completely boyfriendless. I never even tried dating. Everything else, though, I couldn’t stay away from. I was never reserved like my brother was. I was outgoing, loud, even, and unafraid of what others thought. But alas, no boyfriends of any kind. Although I didn’t have any significant partners in my life, I often had close friendships with many guys. Bringing them around the house was always difficult. My parents would stalk us around the house, and when my unfortunate pal would finally leave, they would pounce on me with an overload of questions. Sometimes, though, they waited for when I didn’t expect it.

“So,” my dad blurted from the driver’s seat, hands gripping the wheel, “is this Noah kid your boyfriend?”

I cringed at the question.

“No, he’s just my friend,” I replied, “plus, he has a girlfriend.”

My dad twitched his mustache and I could sense that he was unsatisfied with my answer.

“How come you never date anybody?” he asked bluntly.

I looked out the car window, chewing my lip.

“I’m just not interested in that,” I stated.

“Not interested?”

“Yep.”

I still wonder if he caught what I was trying to say. Ever since I was 12, I had been testing the waters like this. A good friend once

advised me that instead of testing the waters, I should just start stirring the whole goddamn pot. So I did. On a Valentine's day several years ago, I watched, perplexed, as my mom methodically cut and pruned the roses that my dad had given her. One day, I hoped to love someone the same way that my parents loved each other. I wondered if they would let me. I sat up straight, feeling defiant.

"Mom, do you support gay marriage?"

I thought the question was harmless enough. She stopped messing with the flowers and looked down at me, and I hunched back over in my chair.

"Well, sure, if it's done for the right reasons."

I looked up at her and tilted my head, urging her to elaborate.

"I just think that all these gays asking for marriage rights are wrongly motivated. It's not really about marriage or love, it's about political tactics."

A political scheme. Gay people, she said, were sneaky, conniving individuals who just wanted personal gain. It really stung when I learned that my mom voted against gay marriage. I kept to myself for years because of this. As high school was coming to a close, household tension and stress was at its peak. I was struggling to apply for college. I got busted for drinking. I suddenly realized that I had gone throughout all of high school without telling my parents a single truthful thing about me. I grieved that part of my life before it was even over.

Then the pot boiled over. It was silent and humid in our house, and I managed to catch my mom before she disappeared into her room for the night. I led her into the dining room and I sat on the ground while she cleared a stack of papers from her chair. The overhead light above us blared unnaturally bright against the night outside. The dog flopped down beside me on the floor and started panting heavily.

"Mom," I started, "I want to tell you something."

Her brow creased and everything I had mentally prepared in the past few months went out the window in an instant. My hands were already trembling, and my mouth was dry.

"I don't... like boys."

She raised an eyebrow at me. She didn't say anything for too long, and it made me tear up. I looked down the hallway so she wouldn't see my face.

"Is that okay?" I asked her.

"What are you trying to say?" she asked quietly.

“I’m a lesbian,” I sputtered out. I already regretted saying it. Her eyes widened for a moment before she looked down at me pitifully.

“I’m sorry,” I practically whimpered. I really was sorry. I sucked in another breath before asking shakily,

“Do you still love me?”

It felt stupid to ask, but necessary. I constantly worried if my parent’s love was unconditional or not, but I had never told her anything this controversial before. I hid my face behind my knees and cried. I was sorry for breaking her heart. I was sorry for being gay. She chuckled softly,

“Honey, of course I still love you. Nothing could ever change that.”

I breathed out a sigh of relief. I was a little reassured, but I still noted that she didn’t say it was okay. As much as I appreciated her kind words, I could tell that the air around us had changed. She stood up stiffly and smiled sadly, then turned and walked away into the dim hallway. I stayed there in the dining room for some time before eventually deciding I should just give up and go to bed.

The next morning, I woke up half an hour before my alarm and couldn’t get back to sleep. I got ready for my day while Mom slept peacefully her room, and when I was done, I left without saying goodbye. I stalled throughout my day so I would get home later. I felt ashamed to see her that evening, and I slunk away into my bedroom and hid behind my closed door quickly. Another round of bedtime rituals passed and I grabbed her from the hallway again, pulling her into the security of my room and shutting the door before the dog could follow. I needed to push the issue.

“Is it okay?” I repeated. I wonder if she could feel my desperation. Please, still love me.

“Are you okay with this?” I pressed.

She sat on the edge of my bed and eyed me gloomily. I held my knees close to my chest again and fisted my blankets. The dog whined from the other side of my door and we both stilled for a moment, then she answered concernedly,

“Are you sure you’re not just bisexual?”

My previously rehearsed lines went away again. I tried to reply bluntly, but I half-answered her instead. I’ve learned since then that it’s really common for people to mess up their rehearsed statements when coming out. Oftentimes, they can’t bring themselves to state what they mean clearly. We say just a quarter of what we mean to, twice as

uncomfortably. But we aren't guilty, I know this now. It's helped me a lot to keep this in mind. However, in that moment, all I cared about was their approval. I had even already inquired about my dad's stance on "gays," but never got any proper responses from either of them on the matter.

"Should I tell Dad?" I asked her. She pondered this for a moment, staring out into the hallway. I followed her gaze to where the light from Dad's TV was glowing dimly from the other room. His snoring rumbled throughout the house, and although he was in a different room, we still whispered as though we were worried that we might wake him. She looked back at me and shook her head.

"It's best to not stir that pot."

Like a punch to the gut, I realized what she was saying. Don't do anything to make him think you're not normal.

"Okay," I breathed. I'm sure she must've sensed my disappointment. After that, we promptly gave up on trying to communicate again and she went away into the house. She went away from my room, and away from me. I felt bad for upsetting her. I still do. In her defense, I'm sure the whole thing must have come as a surprise. After all, I wasn't quiet, wasn't reserved, wasn't awkward. How could I be gay? Maybe I had just used this as another excuse to stir the pot. Maybe I thought I had to cause trouble because I needed some kind of sense of control in my life. Or maybe it wasn't a scheme, not even a slightly motivated plan. Maybe I just wanted to be out and honest with my mom.

How wild to believe that my parents' love could be unconditional.

# *Collecting stardust*

*by Celina Blanco-Ramirez*

Earth, earth this is goodbye  
your time has come to climb to the moon.  
First,  
find the midnight train,  
huffing and puffing through the night.

They run more often  
than you might think.  
Greet the train  
often times the efforts  
of the train go unrecognized.

Say hello?  
and it'll bat its lashes  
in a mischievous wink at you.  
Specters, goblins, fairies, poltergeists, and you  
all aboard the train.

The train will spit you out  
preceding a curious door.  
Be brave  
trust in the unmarked door.

Behind the door will be a meadow.  
Sprinkled with celestial bodies  
unknown to living astronomers.  
This is the place the moon  
feels safe enough to weep.

The scent of crisp raw grass  
will fill your mind  
with a vibrant firework show.

Floating in the rhythmic  
waves of grass like a buoy.

Caressing your legs  
as you wade  
your way through  
its delicate tendrils.

There will be a stairway  
at the center of the meadow.  
Once you get high enough  
you will realize the moon  
isn't the moon at all?  
It's a creature.

Farther and farther away the field looks  
more like the nighttime sky  
than the planet earth.

She spots you  
winding your way up the stairway  
and greets you  
with a wave of indifference.

The higher you climb the clearer she becomes  
she is made of stars.  
Her figure glimmers,  
her wings freckled with meteors,  
her eye the moon.  
She is an astral one-eyed owl.

# *At a loss for words*

*by Damian Wojtowicz*

What do you do when you can't find the right words?  
When you experience the feeling of the words being on the tip of your  
tongue,  
but they're too stubborn to leave your mouth.  
I look around and all the faces staring at me,  
they are nothing more than a blur.  
I tell myself that I need to keep it together.  
As I feel cold sweat surround me I realize that,  
filler words are all I can think of right now.  
Um  
You see  
Well  
The words just won't appear when I need them.  
Maybe the words are scared?  
Maybe they're self-conscious like me?  
Maybe the words will be judged once they are heard?  
What if words can get nervous, sweat and lose composure just like  
humans do?  
All eyes are on me.  
The audience is waiting and watching, but the words refuse.  
I stand frozen and motionless,  
the pressure really starting to weigh me down.  
No that's not it.  
I just have nothing to say.



# *El- maqsaf*

*by Norhan Qasem*

BANG!

Slamming doors—  
Shuffling feet—  
Heading outside.

No cafeteria to sit and eat.

Recess time.

No slides to glide down.  
No swings to fly up.  
No monkey bars to hang over.

*So where Fun?*

Coins are bumping one another  
Inside the pocket of this running  
Tiger rushing to the front of the line.

The window rises,  
and out comes a woman,  
Her hair hidden in the head scarf.

“What would you like?”  
“Asab3 dukhan el-mali7!” the tiger exclaims.  
“Abu e’Shilin”. *5 cents*.  
Slams down one of the coins,  
And runs off with the salty-cigarette fingers.  
What you would call  
*Pretzel sticks*.

The line gets smaller.  
And smaller,  
and smaller.

Soon, the window closes,  
And the kids head back to class  
To discuss what they got  
From the *School Store*.

# ***“Ducks and geese?”***

*by Samantha Hendrickson*

The photo is stamped red: May of ‘98  
on the bottom right, breaking up a corner  
of green grass seeming to shift  
in sunlit patches, *light, dark, light, dark*.  
Geese fly north for the summer,  
like Daddy did for Momma all those  
summers ago, and green branches stretch  
to shade my baby skin, and whisper with  
a brown river in the background.  
Daddy helps me feed them,  
one arm around me and the other  
on the contraband, and we are  
surrounded on all sides  
by flighty creatures with carb cravings  
and brave black beaks, the geese,  
have as little fear as I do;  
for a toddler in her father’s hold,  
the world is hers, and Momma  
holds the camera like a prayer,  
fragile as crushed bread crusts in  
my chubby child hands.  
The prayer is me, fully developed  
at a Walgreens off Mayfair Road  
Sent to God through a lens  
And replied with a color print,  
On the back written, “Daddy?  
“Time for ducks and geese?”

# *Goldenrod bees*

*by Katie Frías*



# *Ladybird*

*by Celina Blanco-Ramirez*

Ruthless ward of weeds,  
wrapped in crimson armor.  
Guardian smaller than a grape.

Bright like a sundae cherry,  
no bigger than a sunflower seed.  
Vibrant like a broach.  
Carrot oranges, cardinal reds, sunny yellows  
a splendor of spring.

If tied to a string I am like a bright orange kite.  
When you see me say hello?  
My wings work like wishbones,  
I will make your whims come true.

# *A mother's strength*

*by Tahlia Thomas*

The sound of bullets planting themselves into the Earth, twisting and forever changing the world. The screams and shouts from both sides, those trying to escape, others trying to oppress. She shuffles her children hurriedly into the thick forest with trees reaching to the sky, almost like they were also trying to escape the tight hold of gravity that keeps them from being free. A war-ridden widow begins her quest to safety with her four children from her late husband as war lays in the peripheral of her vision. Hardships and devastation follow her as she makes her way to the place where freedom is promised for all, The United States of America. Nothing can cast a shadow on her mission to deliver her family away from harm to provide them the best life that she can. Her strength is only bested by her love, followed closely by her fear of failure

She lived in a small town in Cambodia, well off, married to the man she loved. They had met through mutual friends. She had no idea how close they would become in such a short amount of time. The "perfect way to meet" as her mother once told her, her friends all envied them. "How did you find such a great man?" her friends would ask. She would smile happily, "I didn't." She would say, "He found me." She was showered in affection and gifts. Raising her three children, and preparing for a fourth. They were happy, content. Peaceful. She had no idea how fast her pleasant life would change. The heartbreak, and the ruin that soon awaited her and her life. She, of course, had no time to prepare for the shouts in the square. The forceful hand that came down and shook the life that she had felt safe in. Clutching her belly, she held her three young children to her, as her ears filled with the static of chaos around her. The people around her were angry, rightfully so. Some of them were shouting so loudly, her heart rate began to quicken. The crowd of people grew tighter, pushing her family closer to each other. Her forehead was slick with sweat under the sun that bore down on her and everyone around her. She looks to her husband who looks on with a set face. He places a hand on her reassuring her that he is there.

"We will be alright," he assures her. She smiles a tight smile that reflects the growing pit inside her stomach, threatening to fill the rest of her up with this seed of doubt. She feels the tug of her skirt and looks down at her eldest son. "Momma, what's going on?" he asks her. She

didn't know how to answer her young son. She always had an answer, never failing her first born son. She wiped his damp cheeks with the hem of her shirt. His deep, innocent brown eyes. How she wished she could keep him that way for just a bit longer. She looks up to her husband whose face is contorted with worry as well. She tucked her hair behind her ears and knelt down on front of her children. She grasped their small hands in hers. She saw her hands have become pale with fear. "We are going away for a while." She offered. Her eldest, her first daughter tilted her head in confusion. "Why are they carrying guns?" She asks. She swallowed hard and patted her on the head. "To protect us." She lied. She stood back up and faced forward as hundreds of people are being forced to leave their homes, as she did. She stood tall beside her husband. No matter what came their way, they could take it. They could take the world as long as they stood side by side. A spike of fear filled her head. What if he wasn't there? She banished the thought away as quickly as it had formed and prayed the worst wouldn't come true. And as she thought of the worst, the best came to mind. The way they felt dancing on the night of their wedding, the feeling of content when having their firstborn. Armed men, their faces stern, ushered them into a rural area "You are responsible for your way of life," the man said. She looked around and watched as other families began to build their own homes as the children whined as their bellies grumbled from the lack of food. "Come on," her husband says to his children. They stand up and brush the dirt from their bottoms, blissfully following after him. She clasped her hands over her belly again and smiled sadly. She then looks to the sky, watching as the trees reached to what seemed like forever.

The next few months were nearly unbearable. The cold nights and her children's cries of hunger. The situation felt helpless and she often sat in silence as her children began to play outside. "Hey," her husband said as he placed a hand over hers. They no longer wore their wedding bands, stolen from them like so much of their life before. She looked up. They were both tired. "It's going to be okay." She held onto those words. Days passed, and they watched as their neighbors were being escorted away by armed soldiers. They were to transfer to a different camp, but the sick feeling in her stomach reminded her otherwise. Weeks passed and she looked around to see who remained, mostly children and women. She ran back inside, terrified that her husband would be next. "Let's run, like we said." she begged him. He smiled at her, brushing his hand against her cheek, an all too familiar gesture that brought back memories of their old life. The life she still longed for. "Not yet. Be patient. Everything will be

okay.” he said. She grew angry, resentful as she watched her husband being escorted away, tears streaming down her cheeks as she now held her newborn child in her arms. Her children crying, not truly understanding why this was all happening. He smiled at them one last time and she felt her heart breaking. The soldiers didn’t say which camp he was going to, but she knew. This was the last she saw of her husband. The next day came without warning. She was cooking the little food they had over the open fire. Shadows crawled closer to her on the floor. She looked up and the soldiers on their stoop, demanding her eldest son. Something inside her broke at the thought of losing anymore. That night, before her son was supposed to leave with a group of other children, she fled. Running through the woods, clutching her children to her. “Stay close to me,” she warned them. Her breath was short, but she refused to stop. She couldn’t, or they would all die. Branches and dead leaves snapped and crunched under their feet as they ran, she felt the small cuts on her bare feet bleeding and prayed that they would make it. When they finally stopped to rest, she stayed awake to make sure it was safe. She watched as her children slept soundly, their chests rising and falling under the night sky, illuminated only by the glow of the stars and the moon. She counted the days that had passed since her husband was taken, she went back and forth until she finally couldn’t. That night she wept. She finally understood what she had to do as warm tears streamed down her cheeks under the bright moonlight. She always knew he was gone, but now she realized he wouldn’t come back and it broke her heart. She had to leave the life she loved behind.

She watched as her children ran around, playing with the other children at the refugee camp. Her eldest looked up at her. “Momma, where are we going?” she asks. She smiled cheerfully, daring to hope. “We’re going to the land where we don’t have to be afraid.” She said. Her eldest went back to helping her. Holding her baby sister in her hands, anything to help her mother. Her smile turned sad, if only her husband could see what she saw. If only her husband could see how happy their children would be, she thought. They were finally away, and she was determined to never go back. She walked up to the board, hoping her family had found a sponsor. With a sponsor from the United States, her family would be granted safe passage out of their current situation. Everything she worked, and all she had to do was be patient. Three years passed with no word, but she held on tightly, never losing sight of her end goal. She met a man that helped her keep busy, she didn’t love him. She couldn’t, and she didn’t think she ever could after. She became



pregnant yet again. Her family was hungry, but they learned to ignore the pains in their bellies as the years passed. When she gave birth to her fourth daughter, she cried as she saw that her hair wasn't black and thick. It was blonde due to the lack of nutrition she was receiving. She held her baby to her and promised her quietly that they would survive. It was when she started to lose hope, clinging to it by mere threads that she came to realize that her family was finally sponsored and would be going to America. She laughed and danced with her children, thanking God that they had finally been saved. They could rest that night knowing they had finally made it. She could rest.

She lays on her bed, coming to an end of her time with her family around her. She had succeeded and bringing them to freedom. She looked at her children now and smiled, it's been over twenty years since they came to America. She looked at her children that had found their own families and wept. The atmosphere of the room was dark, and sad. She didn't want to leave them, not yet. She didn't want to say goodbye. She turned to eldest who had aged so much, she saw flashes of her as a child and smiled. "My chest feels heavy." She said. Everyone was crying as they were watching her leave. "It's okay mom. We love you." Her eldest said. She held her now grown daughter's hand as tightly as she could. She thought back on her life, she regrets not being able to say the things she wanted to say to them, that she can't now.

"We love you."

# Coins

- a response to *Other Small Thundering* by Natalie Diaz

by Fran O'Brien

we are born with spinning coins in place of eyes  
when they no longer spin  
we can no longer see past them  
all we can adhere to is our 5 cents

i try to think that money doesn't really exist  
it is just greed dressed up in a fancy linen suit  
and that there aren't enough green dollar bills in the world to buy a smile  
but i won't deny the right amount can make me frown a little less

on a hot summer highway with my foot to the floor  
but never seeing the orange line pass fifty  
while my temperature gauge is higher than my gas gauge  
red "CHECK ENGINE" light screaming at me  
as the cigarettes under my hood seep through the ac  
until i cough up the seventeen hundred dollars to fix it

when my tires and ice below them get in a fight  
my tires tend to surrender easily while the ice  
sends me straight into a snow-covered median  
i must hold my wheel at 3 and 7 o'clock to go straight  
and turn my music up loud to drown out the metallic grinding  
thirteen hundred dollars later i make it stop

cash is made of matter so it can only fix things made of matter  
but it cannot fix things that really matter  
it can fix my car but it cannot fix bridges  
between the hearts of myself and those i push off of them

when i get that last text from her  
the "i don't want you in my life anymore" text  
i can't see the world past my phone  
green become my least favorite color  
as it holds the words in a bubble on my screen

until i remember a different shade of green  
i can use to talk about why i am sad

# *Crabapple blossoms*

*by Katie Frias*



# *Wings and anchors*

*by Molli Zupancich*

You told me  
I am the wings that  
Showed you the world  
And the freedom that came with it  
And I told you  
You were the anchor  
But you did not keep me grounded in reality  
You weighed me downed  
Pulled my soul from the clouds  
Sent me plummeting to earth  
In a ball of flames  
And put me out  
By drowning me in your raging ocean  
You were no anchor  
But a cage to keep me in  
A knife to clip my wings  
A glutton for a freedom you could never have

# *The maiden*

*by Marietherez Glime*

Howling winds consume anyone  
Foolish enough to wander out.  
The blizzard snow cascades and  
Whacks on the old wooden doors.  
Threatening to enter and freeze  
The people within.  
The smell of coffee and spiced tea  
Mixes with the clinking of glass.  
A war fire is reflected on  
The frosted window overlooking  
The street where amblers slowly tread.  
Woods stand visible and ominous in the distance.  
The snow casting an eerie calm about them.  
As sudden as a flame,  
With hair dancing in ribbons behind,  
A splotch of crimson enters the white canvas.  
The woman in red marches,  
Looking like blood on the innocent fluff  
Of the powdery, winter's kiss.  
Snowflakes like sprinkled sugar dust her figure,  
Smoke billows out of a cup she holds,  
The only warmth around her.  
The frigid woods domineering as she edges closer.  
"She always goes into the woods whenever it snows"  
A patron whispers in a hushed breath.  
"Not sure what she does there though."  
Another patron snaps up to look out the icy panes.  
Eyes scanning the landscape for the frosted rose,  
But they were too slow.  
The pines had already swallowed her whole.

# *Wanderlust*

*by Jane O'Shea*

*wan der lust n. 1. a very strong or irresistible impulse to travel {German: wandern, to wander + lust, desire (from Middle High German)} In Spanish, pasion de viajar. Thesaurus: unsettledness, restlessness.*

Freckled Chiang Mai pachyderm, bristly leather ears tickling, knees blushing charcoal mahout eyes flirt

Bearded Bedouin, stoic camel, sleepy ginger-cat dune shadow belly dancer undulates, jingles

Stranded, a water buffalo jam, blood sun slides into jade jungle twilight heat slicks sunburnt skin

Community pee on the Great Wall, mirth over Mao's hideous mole dumplings bursting with oily broth

Sunbaked Down Under monolith, star-flecked sky a ghostly continent drumming aboriginals gyrate

Babies snug in iridescent slings, mothers arced like coconut palms crushed jasmine teases the nostrils

Lemongrass, chili, ginger, garlic; fish eye goggles from laksa pool intoxicated tongue tingles

Mumbai beggar's crooked fingers fork rice in fetid alley, harrowed feet snake man's flute trills

Bouquets of saris, headscarves flutter, wet laundry humidity seethes frangipani fragrance titillates

Lust to wander, pasion de viajar, curiosity never sated

# *Home*

*by Yuliya Shveykina*

Mama, I'm alright.  
I'll still be home.  
Either to the one on earth  
Or to the one above.



*by Molli Zupancich*

Oh Frigid Night  
Take me into your embrace!  
Allow my head to rest against your chest  
Cool these fiery thoughts  
Freezing winds  
Envelope me  
Gnaw on my flesh  
Sink your teeth  
Into my veins  
Let your ice  
Course through me  
Let it reach my heart  
Numb it  
Make it cold  
Softly tuck me in  
A blanket of snow  
And keep me your best kept secret

# *Currents*

*by Katie Frias*



# Snowstorm

*by Jane O'Shea*

Knobby tree fingers curl to cup the driving flakes, the woods  
a spider of dark veins against the chalky skin of rising snow.  
The vole dives under the feathery coverlet, the chickadee  
chickadee dee-dee-dees, seeking sunflower seeds to warm his puff,  
scrapping with a cheeky nuthatch and a somber junco.  
Deer curl like apostrophes in an ivory gully, fat pigeons  
mourn from the battered concrete silo.  
Safe in the womb of the old barn woolly ovines  
and bearded caprines cocoon in straw beds.  
Humans peer out windows like toddlers beholding albino swans or  
their first blizzard and grunt as they fumble with straps and  
Wellingtons and too thick mittens, pick up the shovel, push out the drift  
with a complaining door and lean into the driving,  
record breaking, road slicking, sideways flying, school closing, sound  
hushing,  
white as goat milk  
snowfall.

# *Value*

*by Svea Nelson*

Make your own fortune, girl

I can't hand you  
a new shiny pink sedan,

I'm unable to buy you  
the newest model of iPhone.

I barely afford enough  
in providing our family

a small cozy townhouse  
in suburbia Minneapolis,

home-cooked meals  
with our food stamps.

I won't let you  
become a spoiled brat

I can't watch you  
turn into a cold, hard, plastic Barbie doll

I won't let that  
happen to you.

My parents whipped  
discipline into my head

not taking precious  
things for granted

spend time with are important  
as you get older.

Materials are replaceable.

You are not.

# *Peaceful*

*by Naima Badri*

Peaceful adj. 1) The early morning sky was colorful and the birds were chirping away 2) A non-violent protest in front of city hall, signs waving in space: the calmness in her voice when she speaks about love/ the restful fawns follows their mother into the forest/ noiseless buildings and clear skies / the sound of the rain hitting the ground/ where I find myself between your arms/ sunday morning, sun shining and soft pancakes touching on my lips / my mind when writing/ a hot shower, steaming up the mirror/ the late night stars twinkling in the sky/ the smell of the bubble bath hitting the water/undisturbed sleep of the mind

# *"Now and then"*

*by Vicky Erickson*



# *A glimpse of spring*

*by Nahum Yelizarov*





# *Spring wonder cherry trees in winter*

*by Jason Hertz*

Snow covered the ground. Frozen crab apples hung from gnarled boughs before the Square Shelter. Burlap skirts wrapped the “Hokkaido Normandale” cherry trees, protecting the hardy transplants from frost. Aerating jets kept a slow sphere of water in the pond’s middle from freezing. Koi fish circled like hour hands somewhere in the depths.

I walked in the garden seeking peace before another test began.

The gardener was trimming maple trees along the fence, clipping a thousand tender shoots from off the branches with thick, gray bark. He had climbed an aluminum ladder with a hand saw and was sitting on a branch working. His breath froze in the air.

Another student entered at the gate between the Square Shelter and Pagoda Lantern. He went counter-clockwise to the Zig Zag Bridge, while I walked clockwise. We were strolling with backpacks full of books and calculators through the crunchy snow.

The gardener hummed along to the tunes playing on his radio.

I passed the other student at the red Flat Bridge with copper finials and nodded for a greeting. He nodded too and said nothing.

Snowflakes fell by the fives and dozens on the paths around the pond.

# *This one comes to an end*

*by Yuliya Shveykina*

It was like a fairytale.  
When I close my eyes  
I can still see the children playing in the gentle fields  
I can see how the soft, mystical snow fell on their little heads  
as they would bury their hands to make a snowball.  
But Honey,  
day by day  
it all came to an end  
That I didn't expect.

## *Ekphrastic writing contest*

*This semester, the Creative Writing Club put on an Ekphrastic writing contest, where students were able to submit their pieces on this piece of artwork:*

### *Three Horses Zappasized*

*by Kelly Bort*



*1<sup>st</sup> place winner*

*Untitled*

*by Katie Frías*

If I have a daughter,  
I'll take her to see the wild horses  
that live in the night sky -

we'll watch them graze  
from the milky way,  
and chase after shooting stars -

we'll watch them bathe  
in moonlight and shake the droplets  
off their shimmering coats -

she'll stand on my shoulders,  
and wave goodbye,  
as they hide behind the moon  
to escape the morning light.

## *2<sup>nd</sup> place winner*

### *Untitled*

*by Abraham Olivares*

I had this dream the other night. Three horses, all different colors. Leading them was a red horse and trailing was the blue then yellow horse. The red horse had an arrow on it signifying one direction. They also had a little bit of each other. They shared some colors, as if they each had a little bit of each other in them. It was as if they were in space and the stars in background shining upon them. I woke up startled and confused. I began to think if this dream had a purpose or meaning to it. The horses were offbeat like all humans but the same. In this dream it was unsimilar horses however, they were still horses. It is how I wish the world was today. Different on the outside, but identical in the inside all moving together in the same direction to one goal. I try to be the best role model to my siblings but in a time where racism is normal. The constant fights I get into at school isn't something I want my brothers and sisters to learn. The amount of racism I must deal with being Mexican is ridiculous. Every day I come to school I have this rage to punch anyone who says anything to me. Unfortunately, I can't fight anymore because if I do, I get expelled from my third school. It is as if the horses were all going in opposite directions, not moving as one to achieve a goal. The dream reminded me of a time where you could say, the horses were moving together. It was during a state tournament for soccer. My teammates and I trained hard every day to achieve the goal, state champions. We were all unlike, different backgrounds, but same at heart and desire to get that trophy. I had the dream again and maybe it's time I start taking it into consideration. Maybe that it's time I get more involved in this movement because something I pray about each night before going to bed is that like the horses, different colors, shapes, patterns, they are moving together in one direction. I pray us people can set aside our differences no matter the color or shape we are and move together to achieve equality. It is time for a change, and it is time we fight.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> place winner*

## *I am unique but I am beautiful*

*by Shunlian Quan*

What do those normal horses look like? You will probably say that a horse can only have one single color, but horses are strong and tall, and they run fast. I am strong and tall, and I run fast too, but I have a different outlook. I've got a symbol on my body. It is not a tattoo, because I was born with this. The totem looks like a lightning to me, but maybe you do not think so. It all depends on how you imagine. I've got a different hair color. I swear that I have not dyed my hair, because I was born with this. The interesting thing is that my hair color is one of my brothers' body color, my brother's hair color is another of my brothers' body color, and my other brother's hair color is my color. It is amazing, Don't you think so? I am not odd because my brothers are in the same situation as well. They all have totems on their bodies, and different hair colors. If you say I am the same with my brothers, our totems and hair colors are different. I like myself very much. To be honest, I used to hope that I look like those normal horses, because I do not like to be regarded as an alien. I wanted to have fun with them. After few years later, I grow up and I feel like I am not enjoying my life anymore. Then I realized that I do not need to care too much about others. I have my brothers, so I am not alone. We are running and having fun together; we are singing, dancing, from day to night. I do not need to change myself because of others' opinions. My dear friends, please trust me, it is very good to be yourself and love yourself. Focus on yourself, listen to the voice from your heart, and tell yourself that you are special, and you are beautiful.

## Contributor's notes

**Naima Badri** has been a student at Normandale for three years. This spring they enrolled in the Poetry Writing class and this is the second time that they have ever submitted their poems. They have been writing for over a decade and it is a passion of theirs. In the future, they hope to publish a poem and to show their work more publicly.

**Sonja Bimberg** is an author who self identifies as a nerd. They are also very uncomfortable writing personal statements like this.

**Celina Blanco-Ramirez** is a student at Normandale Community College (obviously) who is pursuing a degree in both English as a Second Language and Communication Arts and Literature. In the future, they hope to be as impactful as the educators that have helped pave their way into teaching.

**Kelly Bort** is a student at Normandale Community College.

**Vicky Erickson** is a mixed media artist that loves to use a variety of media to create something. They are always in the midst of creating new artwork, and they are currently preparing for the AFA exhibit.

**Katie Frías** is a sophomore at Normandale. They are pursuing a major in English Literature and a minor in Chicano Studies.

**Marietherez Glime** is finishing their last year at Normandale with an Associate's in Liberal Education. They then plan to transfer to a four-year university to continue their education. Marie's interest in creative writing began at a young age and they've been writing ever since. When Marie is not filling up journals with their ideas, they are either going on walks with their husband, beating up bad guys in video games, or spending too much time on Twitter.

**Samantha Hendrickson** is a student, a sister, a poet, and an aspiring journalist. Storytelling in all forms is their passion, and they hope to bring that love of story to the world of news and give voices to those who feel voiceless. They write to process and to give.

**Jason Hertz** is a chemistry student working on transfer credits for the University of Minnesota. They have always enjoyed writing stories about local places, and they hope to continue doing so for a good, long while.

**Leannys Lopez Leyva** is originally from Cuba. They enjoy reading, writing, softball, and sailing.

**Kiarra Moore** is a traditional artist and their work mainly consists of strange pieces, from anything like horrible blood thirsty monsters to cute pop art. They feel the only way to become a better artist is to branch off and always try new things.

**Sydney Moser** is currently in their second, and hopefully last, year at Normandale. After this semester ends, they are hoping to transfer to the University of Minnesota to pursue a major in journalism.

**Svea Nelson** is a student who has been enrolled in Normandale since the Fall of 2015. They plan on getting their Creative Writing AFA degree in the Spring of 2020.

**Fran O'Brien** is a capstone student in the Creative Writing AFA program at Normandale.

**Abraham Olivares** is 18 and is a student at Normandale.

**Jane O'Shea** will be graduating with an AFA in Creative Writing in June. They will retire to their yurt to milk ewes, make cheese, and forage in the forest.

**Norhan Qasem** is majoring in both Psychology and Creative Writing. They like to use abstract thinking as a way to inspire their art.

**Shunlian Quan** is a student at Normandale Community College .

**Jamie Sampson's** piece "Tell Me It's Okay" is their honest depiction of their attempt at coming out. They are a student at Normandale.

**Yuliya Shveykina** is truly honored to express themselves through poetry. It is their tranquility. They write little poems to communicate the most important feelings that they have at that current moment. Sometimes, they have more words. But usually, they do not.

**Tahlia Thomas** was born and raised in Minnesota. Though they are currently a junior in high school, they attend Normandale through the PSEO program. They hope to continue to attend Normandale in the fall.

**Damian Wojtowicz** is an outgoing guy who works hard and loves to make people laugh. Some of their passions include video games, Hip-



Hop, boxing, Star Wars, and writing. They are thankful for the opportunity to have their work published in *The Paper Lantern*.

**Nahum Yelizarov** is studying Civil Engineering. This is their third year at Normandale. They are planning to continue their education at a four-year university. They enjoy photography in their spare time.

**Jessica Zick** has been a student at Normandale for three years and is graduating with their AFA in Creative Writing this spring. Poetry has ensnared them, but they also enjoy writing CNF, and they are interested in studying how these two genres coinhabit the same spaces to form new and invigorating pieces. Jessica spends half of their time at Normandale working in the Tutoring Center, where they are privileged to be a part of and contribute to the Normandale community. They are transferring to Hamline University for the upcoming fall 2019 semester.

**Molli Zupancich** is a private poem writer and thought they might share some of their poetry with others for once. Until this point, they have never considered showing their poetry to anyone else.

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

The following members of the Spring 2019 AFA Capstone produced this issue:

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Front Cover: "Cursed" by Kiarra Moore

Back Cover: "Crooked sheriff" by Kiarra Moore

Submit your creative writing to the Fall 2019 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously, and acceptance is based on literary merit. Submission links and more information can be found at [www.thepaperlantern.org](http://www.thepaperlantern.org).

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

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

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