

The Paper Lantern

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The Paper Lantern publishes original creative writing submitted by current students of Normandale Community College. Opinions expressed therein are not necessarily those of the college administration, faculty, student body, or the Creative Writing Club.

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Back cover: “Abuela Charcoal” by Abby Sunde

Fibromyalgia Warrior

by Kara Stevens

I awaken, unslept
Eyes gritty and dry
Like I stood in a sandstorm
And stared at the sun

Legs stiff, rigor mortis
The living undead
I crawl out of bed
Stand up, Rotate wrists and ankles
joints pop as they open up

The stiffness stays,
Pain radiates in waves
Nerves afire
Tendons tight, Mobility limited,
I penguin walk to the hallway

Climb the stairs, stop halfway up
Muscles spasm in my leg
I Sit to stretch
Lengthen each muscle,
hold for 30 seconds,
and repeat

Take my gabapentin,
drink a gallon of water.
Focus on my full bladder
Breathe deeply as I let it go

Baby Feet

by Elizabeth Rivera Soto



Who Needs Three Wishes?

by Amanda Judd

Small, black, limp,
hungry, dehydrated, and lost –
the pup appeared at our door.

Now fed, bathed and fast asleep
in my husband's arms, as my son
watches wistfully from a short distance.

I wonder what he's thinking –
suddenly he turns to me and says,
“Mom, I wished for a puppy, and I got one!”

Smiling, I ask, “Can you wish for a million dollars?”
to which he replied, somewhat puzzled,
“Why would I? I already have a puppy.”

Labor of Love

by Amanda Judd

Every day I watch him.
as he passes by my office window
on his daily walk.

It is akin to watching a turtle.
He moves so slowly, carefully placing each foot
as he takes each step.

It is laborious for him, that much is obvious.
I wonder if he does it for them –
they seem so happy on this little jaunt around the block.

They are up ahead, talking and laughing,
while he walks slowly, dutifully, behind them,
keeping watch.

They only walk the one block,
I don't think his old feet & body could go much further,
but his tail wags the whole way.

Manifesting You

by Izzzy Cruz

In quiet tufts of sound,
Came a tender breath,
A calming whisper,
Exhaled reassurance.

Brushed against the necks,
Of tired and brittle souls,
Whose work has run them dry,
Evaporating the thin water of life.

Too many hours wrestling with fate,
Too many attempts at getting straight.
Clouding the past,
Reigns on the future,
Missing the now.

Calloused lines
Engraved on the palms,
The weary world of arduous effort,
Is numb to the touch.

Trinity escorted,
It sought the need,
Raised the hair,
Hope, faith compounded,
by graces a heavenly net.
Heavenly graces,
I'm grateful we met.

Seasonal

by Safiyo Mohammad

I've been meaning to find peace of mind.
Only to lose green hope as the weather becomes
brutal
blue.
Nearing a blackberry winter.
Bright sting of cold air in my nose. I feel
tired.
I
shouldn't.
Sunshine without
warmth.
As my perception
shortens with these
days.
I'm less spring
like.
Happiness can't be the same height as a man.
I'm less spring
like.

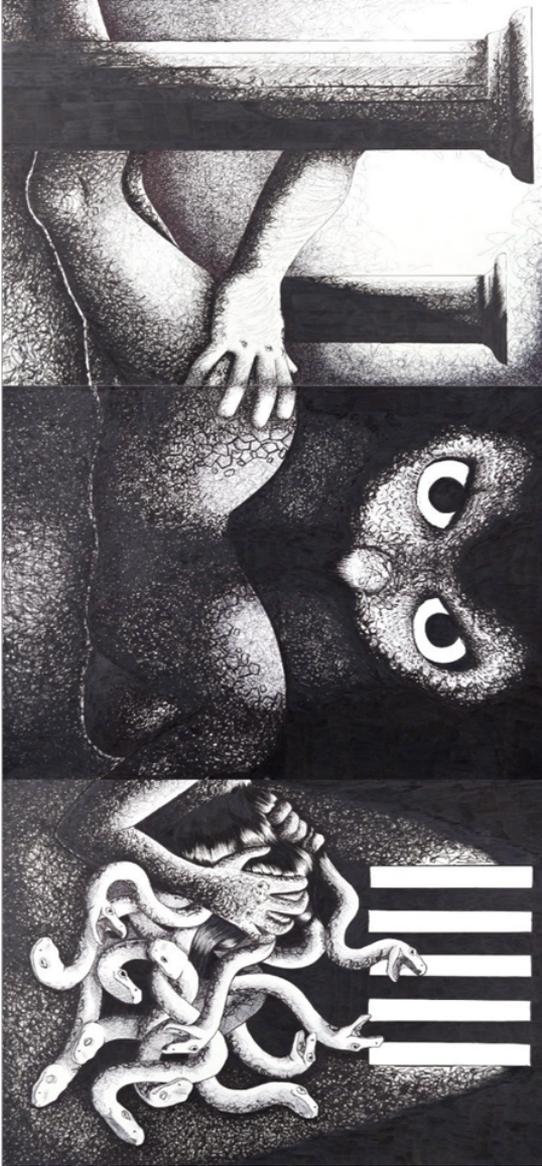
Bloom

by Kaitlyn Johnson

A lush pale pink blossom breathed in the stormy skies that shook its core
Crisp hardcovers that crackle and paperbacks as flexible as the head of an owl
compete for the diminutive capacity of the dressed shelves
Brick by brick I'm dragged under to the depths of the turbulent sea until I'm
unable to breathe
The ant rides the train of perseverance hidden amongst the starlit shadows
An arrow of sunshine pierces through my full heart and lifts it up like a hot air
balloon
My wings cling to my back as though they're a warm hug as I flutter across the
crest ridden cerulean tinged with sunset sky
The ballad of serenity washes the delicate soul that's enkindled clean as a
monarch butterfly
Anticipation and shuffling fill the humid room as the trumpets blare their
brazen, glorious melody at the awaited gathering
A coating golden as a medal wears a crown of green spikes that stands tall
The birch trees whisper at the edge of the midnight lake that gleams
shamelessly
Lively grass dances with the array of iridescent petals overflowed by vines of
ripe tomatoes and racing cucumbers
The cross is my shield slung over my shoulder as I venture under the crescent
moon
A warm hug shelters me from the tornado, a smile cracks my face, a listening
ear smooths away the wrinkles, and jubilant laughter envelops me
The daylight lit up the ocean with a breath as crackling as fireworks
***As the winter flees, robins sing, and cherry blossoms bloom showered in gentle
raindrops***

Medusa

by Lily Levin



De-Flaming

by Darren Almgren

“I wish we could do this earlier,” he thought as he double checked the anesthetic a final time. The label read: CARFENTANYL. The drug was basically elephant tranquilizers laced into heroin. The stuff was as expensive as it was lethal, and one full gram of it cost him half his life savings. But it lasted so long that he was told the whole amount would last an entire life of breeding. The water it was diluted in wasn’t even cloudy. This dose, .0001mg, would be lethal to any human system. But for a dragon’s, it was just enough to keep the beast down for the two or three hours it took to do the procedure. These things weren’t much bigger than Labradors at their largest, but they still took a lot to take down.

Dragons. On days like this, Iken wished they had never crossed paths with humans. He learned all about them in the 5 additional years at veterinarian school to become a certified specialist for the beasts. In America, there are only two dozen dragon vets in the whole continental states. One for each state that it’s legal to own them, and two for the larger states like California and Minnesota. They’re pretty much outlawed in Utah, and most of the south except Florida for religious demonization by law makers. Iken grew up only hearing stories about dragons, and when he got to school, he went straight in line for the dragon certification. Nearly ten years of schooling later, he was stationed in Rhode Island.

There was a commotion of shouts, chain rattling, and the sound of scales and claws scratching against the floor. Then they burst in. Michael was hauling the brown dragon by a chain around its long neck. It’s rear claws and wings scraped everything as it struggled to get away.

“Come on, motherfucker,” Michael barked at the dragon. “Move! You dumb fucking monster.” He yanked on the chain and the choke collar he insisted on using to handle the dragons tightened around the animal’s neck. It whined through its iron cage muzzle and its voice broke like a truck’s screeching brakes. The dragon kept struggling, not wanting to get closer to whatever Michael was pulling it towards.

“MICHAEL,” Iken snapped and the ginger bearded man stopped. Iken strode over, pushing the standing tray out of the way, and knelt down. The dragon saw Iken and immediately calmed down. Its dark amber eyes were wide and their slitted pupils widened like a cat’s. He put a hand on its head, the small crown horns and spikes on head still partially dull to the touch, and he stroked its neck. The dragon crawled forward and nuzzled its head into his chest. Iken loosened the chain collar, ignoring Michael’s protests, and threw it at him. He smiled down at the dragon and lead it to the table in the center of the room. He patted the metal table and the dragon jumped up. It laid flat on its stomach,

letting its bat like wings drape down over the sides. Its tail, a long snake like thing with spines of decreasing size towards the end swung back and forth.

Iken scratched the scales beneath its chin, the dragon purred with a low grumble, its eyes closing with delight. He slid his hand under the dragon's neck and the dragon, thinking it was getting a belly rub, rolled over. As Iken scratched the animal, he nodded at Michael and Patrick who stood off to the side. While the animal's eyes were closed and relaxed, they took the inch thick leather straps and tied it down. The brown leather went around the neck, back legs, and body just below the wings, and another strap was quickly tightened around the tail, bracing it to a leg of the table. This, of course, startled the dragon. The swift clamping of one's body would startle anyone, and the dragon started to struggle again. Its wings flapped in protest, and the motion of it rocking against the straps caused the metal table to rock and slide. Iken hurriedly stamped on the wheel brakes and the table jolted but didn't keep rolling around. He quickly tried to subdue the dragon again by stroking its body. He kept his mind in a comforting attitude, hoping the beast would relax. After a few minutes, the dragon relaxed again. Its heart beat was fast in its chest though.

Iken snapped his fingers, not taking his eyes off the dragon's, and his assistant Patrick handed him the long hypodermic needle. Careful to keep the needle out of the dragon's view, Iken lifted it to the animal's ear. Dragons have rather small ear holes. The opening is no bigger than a scale or two and beside its mouth and eyes, it's the only naturally exposed flesh on a dragon. The needles made for dragons were made of hardened steel as their skin was still thick and leathery. "It's like a game of operation," Iken was told back in school. "Don't touch the walls and be quick when you inject and pull out." He stabbed the needle in hard.

The dragon's cried out in pain, its jaws clamped in an iron muzzle. Its wings flapped and it rocked against its restraints, but Iken held him needle steady and his other hand held the dragon's head down. If the needle slipped or the dragon's head moved too much, he could rip open the ear canal and have another host of problems. The plunger hit the bottom and Iken pulled the needle out fast. The dragon's movements got more sluggish until the sedative kicked in and it went limp. As soon as the dragon's eyes closed, Iken and Patrick got to work.

The each grabbed a pair of pliers and stood on either side of the dragon below the wings. Patrick took a small toothbrush like object and brushed a small row of scales below the ribcage. The small shards of obsidian the thing had instead of bristles scraped the scales and created a rough patch out of the smooth light brown scales. Iken and Patrick then took their pliers and began prying up each of the scales up. Their pliers gripped the scuffed scales well so the men could yank with one good pull and the quarter sized scales would come out with little hesitation. The flesh that the ripped-up scales exposed

oozed black blood from the holes left by the tooth like roots of the scales. After a few minutes of removal, the men had exposed a foot long line of soft flesh just below the ribcage. A metal bedpan on the standing tray next to them was filled with the scales, some had little black and pink bits of torn flesh hooked on the roots.

Iken wiped the exposed flesh on the dragon's belly and nodded. Patrick brought over a hanging bag of the carfentanyl solution on a metal coat rack with a drip line. Iken took the syringe at the end of the drip and inserted it under one of the scales at the end of the exposed area. He clicked the stopper and a slow, consistent drip of solution began to flow down the tube to the dragon. They had about three hours of sedation in that bag, Iken knew. And he didn't want the dragon to wake up at any point of the procedure. He had had one dragon wake up during the surgery back when he had just started breeding them. If the cries from the ear canal were sickening to hear, the shrieks of pain, confusion, and fear when a dragon is opened and awake are unbearably horrifying. They had to shoot the creature as it wouldn't have survived the shock, let alone the blood loss as it's thrashing about caused the incision to open and a scalpel to slip into one of its veins. Never again, Iken had vowed. And he eyed the second bag of sedative on the other hook. Hopefully they wouldn't need it.

Iken took a scalpel and pressed it into the leathery flesh. The blade sunk in and he carefully cut a straight line from one end of the area to the other. It bloomed open and dark colored organs caught the light it let in. Patrick grabbed a set of forceps and weighted pliers and stuck them around the cut. The flesh curled open they held it in place. Iken took his gloved hands and plunged them into the open cut, feeling around. The fluorescent work light above them shone bright and the wet black blood reflected the light into his eyes. Iken didn't care. He rooted around until he found the organ he needed.

It was a flame bladder. For their fire breathing capabilities. The organ grew attached to the lungs just above the diaphragm, almost flat against them, until the dragon was about 2 years old. At that age, the bladder detached from the lung wall and becomes larger and more independent of an organ. It was about twice the size of a human kidney at this point. If the dragon was fully grown it would be almost the size of the creature's lung. This is what Iken was due to remove. If the flame bladder was removed from the dragon around the age of detachment, then the tubule system between it and the lungs and throat are less developed and there is less to cut and cauterize. Any earlier than 2 years and the bladder still hasn't detached and the removal is more dangerous as the lung wall can be fatally damaged. Any later and the surgery becomes more invasive and the post-op pain is increased 100-fold. "De-flaming" as it is called, is required for some states to allow dragons to be kept as pets. It removed the dragon's fire abilities and the dangers that incurs. Other states do not require it, but it is strongly recommended for a smoother ownership process. The rest of

the states, and much of the world, bans the pet-ship of dragons as the de-flaming surgery is considered inhumane and is outlawed most everywhere.

Iken took one hand out, keeping a firm hold on the flame bladder, and took the capped scalpel Patrick held out. He then reached back in and back to the organ. Blindly, he found the connective tubes to the lungs. The tube to the throat was still part of the lung wall. He uncapped the scalpel and carefully cut the tubes as close to the bladder as possible. When both were cut, he stabbed the blade of the scalpel into the bladder as to keep the blade from wandering as he pulled his hands out, carrying the scalpel and the bladder with them. Patrick held out an empty bedpan and Iken plopped the organ in it. He then put his hands back in the dragon and tied the tubes up like an umbilical cord. The tubes were slimy with black blood, but he was able to get them tightly knotted. He pulled his hands out and nodded at Patrick. His assistant then took a thick leather working needle and began stitching the incision back up. It was the longest part of the procedure after the descaling and he got it done just as the last of the solution was draining into the drip tube.

His hands were clean from the wrists down where his gloves were, but a portion of his forearms were covered in the black blood of the dragon. He went to the wash basin as Patrick was working and washed his arms thoroughly. As he washed, a race of thoughts and memories went through his head, as they always did with these procedures. He had been placed in Rhode Island a decade before the legislation banning new dragon ownership passed. When the writing was on the wall for it, he was approached by a dragon breeder that had him do the man's de-flaming procedures. They discussed the bill and the potential side effects of it passing.

"Yeah," Iken had said, "these surgeries are honestly the majority of my salary these days. The post-op care and checkups are huge on their own. I don't know how we can stay afloat otherwise. We can't really open the clinic up to other animals and there's not enough in-state owners to maintain a healthy income."

"Have you considered breeding yourself?" the man had asked. "Good money, and you don't have to clock hours. Pretty much printing your own money." The man was casual in his words but held the air of knowing his business well. They talked for several days afterwards, and by the weekend Iken was convinced and signing his life savings in half a dozen checks for supplies and his first breeding pair of dragons and their nest of eggs.

And that's where everything went wrong. The following week his wife confronted him about their lack of a savings account. He assured her that he hadn't touched any of her money, but only his own. She screamed at him that all of their money was both of theirs. She tiraded at him about the loss and stupidity of his actions. She condemned his practice and future and threatened to report him to the authorities. Eventually, he was able to calm her down from that at least. But that came at the cost of a pile of divorce papers the next day.

She agreed to keep silent, but demanded alimony and all her living expenses paid.

And then the bill passed. His practice closed and the pressure to push dragons out of his breeding pair loomed. He found the man who had talked him into this and asked for advice.

“Man,” he’d said, “this takes years to get set up. You didn’t have anything extra lined up man? Shit, sorry. But there’s not much to do now but wait.”

Iken wiped his hands off as the echoes of that man’s too-late advice repeated in his head. He turned around and went back to the dragon on the table. He checked the animal’s vitals, noting the breath was steady but shallow. Then he checked the stitching. It was neat, tight, and Patrick had wiped it clean. He nodded approvingly and dismissed his assistant with a thanks. Michael walked forward, the chain collar in hand.

“Fuck off, Michael,” Iken said. The ginger man stopped. “But the beast needs to be controlled. If it wakes up —.” “It needs to be cared for, you dim shithead,” Iken growled. “Get off before I kick you out for good.” They both knew he wouldn’t. It was clear from the beginning that Michael’s loyalty was to the person who tolerated him. And Iken tolerated him, as cruel as he was, and feared the man’s sour mood after a firing becoming a police investigation. Michael glowered at him then stomped out of the room, the chain clinking on the floor behind him. Iken stroked the dragon’s neck and belly. He double checked the stitch, as perfect as it could be. Then he stomped on the wheel brakes and rolled the table out.

The hallway was covered in scratches and scuffs. Iken didn’t bother to paint the walls or repair the laminate wood floors. Especially as each trip Michael took with a dragon would mar it again. He rolled the trolley like table with the dragon on it down and stopped at the door on the right. He hesitated for a moment. This was the worst part of whole thing, The recovery room. It wasn’t really a room, but a stairwell of the converted duplex that he had make into a nursing hall for the dragons. He tried to make up for the pain he caused them. Sure, he could just not allow another nesting with his breeding pair, but then what’d he be stuck with? A 10-year degree for dragon care and having to settle with Starbucks Barista manager at the most optimistic? No. His alimony alone bleeds him dry on his worst months of breeding. If he gave up the dragons, he’d be on the streets within six months. He pulled a set of foam earplugs from his pocket and twisted them into his ears. The already silent hallway went even quieter in his head. He could barely hear the door open and the table wheels turn as he went into the stairwell. But he could hear the dragons.

As he walked in, the light of the hallway shone into the dimly lit stairwell and the dragons woke up. They shuffled and shrieked at his entrance. Their voices were like what his grandmother from Ireland had described banshee calls to be like. Shrill, piercing, mournful, painful. Their cages covered the

stairwell walls, one on top of the other, built into the walls. Eyes shining with the color of rubies, emeralds, opals, and bright gold stared out at him. The earplugs did their job to the barest minimum. Their cries were only deadened enough that his eardrums didn't rupture. He grimaced in pain as he walked past them on the slope of the ramp that had replaced the steps. The dragons bashed against their cages at him, they screamed for release. Claws curled around the bars and the ends of snouts snapped out at him. He had been the last sight before their procedures, and the first after they woke up in this dark chamber. And the dragons that once trusted him, once loved him and obeyed him, hated him. The youngest, the freshest de-flamed, tried to breathe fire at him. But their attempts ended in more pain. It was like a deflating balloon going through a paper shredder. They cried and coughed. The ones that kept trying it stopped as their mouths began to dribble black blood. They shrank back and sat wheezing in pain. Their eyes glowed from the shadows.

Iken tried not to look as he wheeled the brown unconscious dragon to the last empty cage at the bottom of the stairwell. He stared straight ahead, trying not to give them any heed. But he walked with his sight clouded with tears. When he got to the cage, he wiped his eyes and took a deep breathe. He unlocked the cage door with a thick iron key, and positioned himself. He wheeled the dragon as close to the cage opening as he could, and undid the leather restraints. Then, he slid his arms under the dragon and lifted it as much as he could and slid it towards the cage. It was halfway in when it stopped. "Fuck," he whispered, and bent to undo the tail strap. As he was loosening it, the tail started to lazily curls and bend. "Fuck fuck fuck," he said, finishing the strap and standing up. The brown dragon was beginning to move, the sedative wearing off. Quickly, he shoved the animal into the cage. His sleeves tore and were shredded by the steel hard scales and his skin bled underneath. The dragon's eyes shot open when it realized it was in a dark place, and in pain. Iken just slammed the door just as the dragon snapped around, trying to get out and get at its captor. He locked the door and jumped back. His arms rang with every pain signal they could transmit and fresh tears of pain fell from his eyes. He stood there, trying to regain balance and his senses as blood dripped and pooled on the floor.

At the smell of the blood, the dragons all began to shriek and cry and roar for it. They were fed regularly, and their food was good, but caged animals what blood when they smell it. He eventually got the blood to stop by hugging himself and letting his shirt and pressure hold the wounds. He staggered out the bottom door of the stairwell and into the bathroom nearby. His clothes were soaked in sweat and blood and he turned on turned on the tub faucet, stripped, and laid down. When the tub was filled, the water was a diluted pink. But the warmth of the water felt nice on his cut arms and hands, and he shut the water off and sat there. He couldn't relax though. He laid there, the bloody water steaming. He took out the earplugs. Thanking his own past wisdom, he

was grateful for the soundproofing job he'd done on the stairwell. Only the faintest bangs and low notes of bellows could be heard through the walls. His stomach was in knots, and bile filled his throat as he sat in the tub. It always happened after these procedures. He took it as some solace that he cared about the animals to feel this guilty. He wouldn't be able to eat anything more than dry toast and water for a week.

A jail house diet, he thought as he fell asleep in the tub. A jailhouse diet for the jailor.

Heart Like a Stopwatch

by Amanda Judd

My heart ticking
like a stopwatch

tick, tick, tick
Keeping time 'til you notice me,
tick, tick, tick
Counting seconds 'til you kiss me,
tick, tick, tick
you walk right by
tick, tick, tick
don't even notice I'm alive
tick, tick, tick
I turn to watch you leave
tick, tick, tick
and find you staring back at me

You start to speak
but all I hear is . . .
“tock,”
as the watch stops.

Summer

by Lisa Ronan



When You're Eighteen

by Kaitlyn Johnson

- a.) The thoughts that adamantly echo in your brain matter,
- b.) And so the lies that coil around your conscience are not true
- c.) That wrinkle in the paper, that fraying comment, that step you that tripped you up like a tangle of yarn, and your bandaged heart do not squeeze out your self-worth. It is okay to
- d.) Grab onto the boat's lifeline when the waves are thrashing viciously and engulfing you
- e.) Letting others attentively unlock your treasures is as freeing as a flying kite in the agile wind,
- f.) And I would rather lift you safely to the hot-air balloon and then check for my scars for
- g.) Your baggage may make you feel like the capacity of an elephant, but you are as buoyant as the autumn leaf
- h.) The greatest thing to do is to find your way to fluttering arms like a zealous dove
- i.) Criticism that knocks you down and stings in your ear does not mean you are not good at something,
- j.) If you cannot glue the pieces back together there is no reason to battle it
- k.) You, one of seven billion, are the sprinkle on the cupcake that is the polishing touch! But did you know...
- l.) Compliments mean as little as a speck of dust under your bed if they dart through your ears without acceptance
- m.) The barren washcloth will not endure sodden surges for infinity

- n.) It is okay for your eyes to produce a rainstorm once in a while to evade a drought
- o.) The pasture seemed desolately naked, but once your eyes focus you can see the steady presence of your flock
- p.) Taking care of yourself allows your body to glow and your mind to grin blissfully although,
- q.) It is not the spikes of a pineapple that are a sweet melody, but its core, and
- r.) Always lend a smile of a daffodil and candle-lit words because you do not know what mountains others are scaling.

On Being Cauc(asian)

by Rachel Krans

a branch of a cherry blossom
splintering like the shaft of a feather
it divides into two sovereign realities;

<p>swaddled in clothing seen in catalogues decorated with faces the same color of my school-mates, past boyfriends, and parents, who are not blood-related or even countrymen. rather, they are golden ornaments sold with forged evergreen trees seen on Black Friday.</p> <p>maybe I'm called friend or even gook when my back is turned.</p> <p>i duck behind tanned skin, waist as slim as a throat & plucked eyebrows, skinny lines like a signature. belly button rings, braces like glimmering diamonds across bone thin wrists</p> <p>mistaken for fantasies of fornicating ladies amongst inviting girls, with silk hair & hooded eyes, censor blocked.</p> <p>alternatively, i wear organic cotton, with large letters, collegiate & flapping bald eagles, its talons consuming an American flag, like the one they gave me</p>	<p>waddled in blankets hospital blue and sterile standard and smooth the same balance as her biological mother a transparent phantom right outside peripheral vision, repeatedly coursing through rivers & bloodlines spilling into deep seaways on a clear spring day.</p> <p>perhaps she is called chingu or maybe jamae amongst her imaginary family</p> <p>she is draped with enameled skin, waist as slim as a wrist, unblemished complexion & virgin pores, rosebud lips like cumulus clouds, crooked teeth stained & jaggedly brown like Mount Halla</p> <p>mistaken for every woman or the girl who lives in the apartment down the hall sharing the same frame or hairstyle</p> <p>as everyone else.</p> <p>she wears street clothes, graceful bottom hem nestling against a snow white stomach modern hanbocks made of</p>
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when naturalized, so long ago - a christmas gift.	Chinese silk, like the ones her mother made while working in a factory
--	--

startled birds, released on opposite coasts
living in the same time & space
who is the fortunate one
after all?

Dahlia Charcoal

by Abby Sunde



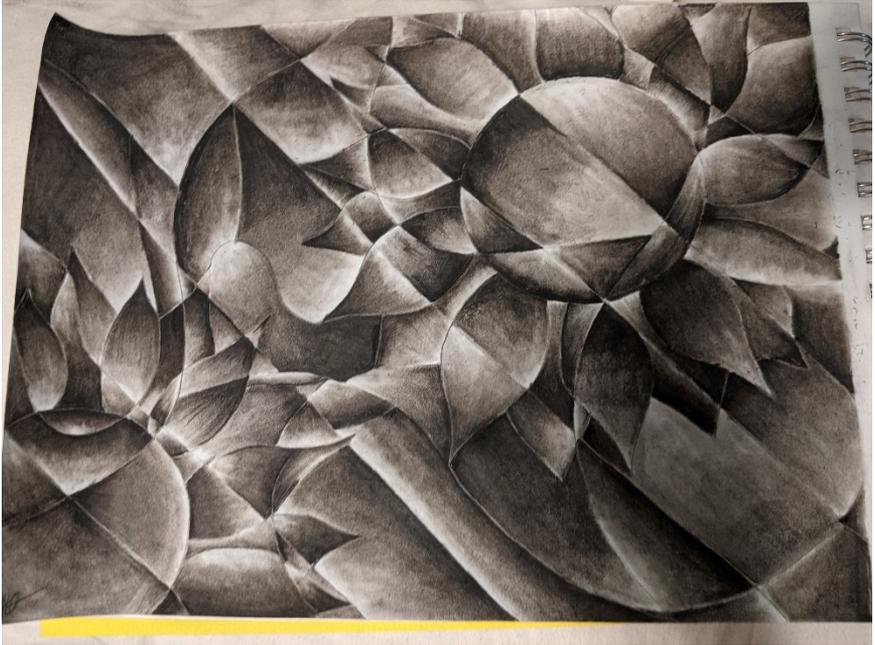
Lion's Hunger

by Dhoha Qasem

The king of the jungle has come for his meat
Running fast down at his feet.
You notice his teeth
And you just know the lion's hunger underneath
Guess the lions the winner
And don't even think about messing with his dinner.
The bloody bones beneath his feet
Now he wanders and looks for another thing to eat.
He sees a zebra running
The lion believes he's cunning
So, he chases.
Passes a lot of different faces
But he ignores
He only looks at his delicious galore.
The zebra still has a chance
The zebra thinks it can enhance.
But the zebra turns out to be wrong.
Guess the zebras' life is gone.
The lion eats the zebra's skin,
But hunger is still within.

Fractured Shapes Charcoal Piece

by Rylie Owen



Soteriophobia

by Marissa McClure

I hated the girls who said
'I'm so attached to him'
How can you?
Can't you feel the thorns
Slowly tearing into your flesh
Threading
Weaving
Tethering
Yourself to that person?

I've grown ill at the idea
Microneedles
Stab through my skin
Snapping along as I try
Pulling them out
I get queasy
Numbness spreads
Getting the shakes and chills
At the mere thought
Now.

I didn't before
To say
'My soul is your soul now'
Was romantic cliché
Made for the idyllic folks
They never told
It can be like an addiction
Craving that inhalation of narcotics
Soon to be craving
The will to breathe on your own...

On Dreams: Ruminations, Reminiscences, and Otherwise

a group abecedarius by a Fall 2021 Introduction to Creative Writing class

Abstract

Dreams are broken in thought. Time is twisted and pictures distorted, like oil on water. Gray faces block your way to an important interview, or a cartoon dog helps you get the band back together to play at the Harvest Jamboree. You walk in place until you wake up three times in a row, sitting up and then the moment is lost.

Believe

To accomplish your hopes and dreams you're always taught to believe in yourself. But what does this really mean? I personally practice this in two ways. One, fake it to you make it. If you act like you know or are actually good at something, you eventually will be. Two, communicate with yourself and listen to your body. I speak to myself, "you got this" or "it's fine, it's fine" repetitively out loud and eventually gain confidence.

Cut

Aspirations, shot down by the ones close to you. Such unrealistic desires are not permitted in this environment. If something is not guaranteed, then no risk is worth the sacrifice. So grab those scissors and cut the unnecessary strings. Unattachment to oneself is the only way to live.

Daydream

Let's daydream. This world can be bent, foretold, relived, reimagined; no limits. There is no shame in letting go. There are no limits, envision fame. Or maybe you prefer solitude. A little house in the woods, tall pine trees, a bubbling brook, a loyal hound, and a good book. Time! You can have that too! All the time in the world. For you to do what you love, be who you want to be, live how you want to live, love who you want to love—triumph! But I've got a secret. Lean in close... these can be yours. Daydreams; a seed just waiting to sprout.

Everyone

Some people say they don't dream. Some have reoccurring dreams that appear every night for years. Some never have the same dream twice. But we all dream whether we remember it or not. Even my dog dreams. The occasional half bark she lets out while twitching in a way that makes me imagine the poor rabbits as they run from her. There is almost something comforting because everyone and everything has at least this one thing in common.

Falling

I think, at some point, everyone has had a dream where they were falling—whether above an endless sky, abyss, or with the ground rushing up to meet them—and awakened with a jolt. Sometimes, it's easy enough to get back to sleep. The tension recedes. You settle back onto your pillow, eyelids already heavy. Sleep takes you. But often, it feels to me like the sensation of falling never actually stops. I lay there in my bed, stationary, but that endlessness beneath me goes nowhere. Then after some time of lying in bed, I get up and go about my morning routine; the feeling leaves me. I always wonder if one day I'll get up and the feeling *won't* fade. I'll just be standing there, feet beneath me but elsewhere, on the ground but in the clouds. Just...falling, forever.

Graduation

I'm sure that if you ask any college student about their dreams, aspirations, and not what they do at night, that would be to graduate. But what does graduation mean? To a student, graduation is the culmination of all the hard work, time, and effort that goes into themselves and the ending of a chapter in their life. With the conclusion of this chapter comes the beginnings of the next and all the opportunities to finally get to apply all the knowledge collected throughout one's academic career.

Heartache

Have you ever dreamt of someone that you had a feeling that you knew at some point? Like you see them, and all your stress melts away. Your heart races as you gaze into them, you know them, but you can't place them. Just as an inkling of memory starts to appear, everything is suddenly ripped away from you, and you are left with the black abyss of your bedroom wall. A cavernous hole left behind, unable to be filled.

Insomnia

I was prescribed Ambien by my doctor to assist with my ongoing war with insomnia. Besides making me slightly nutty, it also made me constantly dreamy vividly of my mother. I decided I would rather rarely sleep at all than constantly wake up and remember she's dead.

Jealousy

Jealousy can occur in your dreams in many ways. In your dream, You may be jealous of a coworker, family member or even dream of someone being jealous of you, but this doesn't always mean that is actually the case. Each situation has a different meaning, but in most cases it's a significant other's ex or past lover - someone you're insecure about. Your subconscious mind creates ridiculous, unreasonable scenarios. Unfortunately your response to jealousy in your dreams isn't always fulfilling. In my case, I find myself attempting to release my anger towards these situations or people. But, no matter how hard I try, my punches and ability to fight fall right through the air, completely missing the translucent person standing before me. Followed by my awakening consisting of frustration and the feeling of jealousy still fresh in my mind.

Kids

Kids are young, happy souls. Sometimes you dream about being a kid again. When times were stress free, when you were pure, when you never had any worries. Going to sleep is an escape. It's almost like stepping into a time portal and if you get lucky enough you get to dream of your young life. Reborn once again, embodying the kid you were.

Love

Heart burning, sweat breaking, eyes awakening. Family, friends, coworkers, and more. Hands reaching out toward that warmth. Ideas, concepts, aspirations, motivations. The desire to be, to want, to need. A clenched fist and face scrunched, an emotion so intense that our hearts become entwined with fate. The only path from dream to reality is to fuel the flame.

Money

Something you have to work hard for. You break yourself mentally and physically trying to chase your dreams and achieve something that your parents didn't have the option for when they first moved here. You keep telling yourself, 'You're doing this for yourself. YOUR future. You have to work to

keep your father proud. He put his everything into making a life for us.' Money isn't easy to earn or make. And that is what most of us teens realize when we get our first job. My father came to this country. With nothing but a family to raise. He then started chasing his dreams. He started his own painting company shortly after. It was like gambling. You don't know if you're going to land the jackpot, or if you're going to leave even more broke than before. But he did it. Now, he's built a good comfortable life for himself, his wife, and his four daughters. Now, I have to take advantage of the things that are given to me, that wasn't given to my father. Even if it means growing up faster than I should. To have a good life for my future family and me.

Night

Night. Where all dreams take place, the shadows and quiet bring comfort, escorting us to a world of peaceful imagination. A place where anything and everything can happen. A world that is constantly warping and changing. A music track of life replaying the events of the previous day perhaps, or an adventure being written as we sleep. In dreams, we let go of the steering wheel as we are now simply along for the ride as the dream takes us where it wants us to go.

Obstruction

The state of being obstructed, especially: a condition of being clogged or blocked. Even if I wanted to do something, the road forward isn't always straight. There will always be complications and stoppages. Things that must be attended to, before a dream. Sometimes, it will feel insurmountable, as if the way forward is impassable. But never give up, and especially never forget your dreams. The best part of an obstruction is overcoming it.

Pickles

Two years ago, I thought, I'll grow this stupendous number of cucumbers in my garden. My house had a special room for storing jars of preserved food. I envisioned jars and jars of gleaming emerald behind clear glass lining the shelves of that room.

I spent hours and hours separating and smashing heads of garlic, slicing jalapeños, handling dill. I boiled the jars over fountains of steam that turned my kitchen from Minnesota humid into a Florida swamp. My hands stunk for days. I noticed people sniffing the air when I was close by. My fingers stung like bees when I touched my lips, no matter how long I washed them.

By the end of the summer, I'd canned sixty-two vessels of dill pickles. A few weeks into fall, I popped the lid on the first jar. A corrupted stench filled

the air. All those jars are still down there, two years later, lurking like a bad dream.

Quinceañera

A Cinderella pink dress, rhinestone jewelry, a mariachi band, a Mexican feast, and my huge family, would have collided in one spectacular night. I was supposed to have had one when I turned fifteen. In my Mexican culture it meant stepping into womanhood. But as my birthday was approaching, we all knew it wouldn't happen. My parents were going through a rough time in their marriage. I do not blame my mother for her paralyzed state. The high cost of the whole circus was more than she could give. In the days leading up to my birthday the house was even more quiet than usual. The air felt stale with tension. I would step outside, and even there, could not seem to catch my breath. But the truth was, "I do not want to THE DRESS. The mariachi and dancing—it's not my thing, Mom.." I said this to her in Spanish and it was true. I tried to make her laugh. My mother's puffy eyes fluttered rapidly, wondered if I meant it. I did.. She bought me a used acoustic Washburn guitar the next week; one I had been eyeing. I've loved it for twenty plus years. She will randomly mention that I didn't have my quinceañera with a solemn face. But I have to remind her, "that wasn't my dream, it was someone else's."

Rocket

Most kids growing up had the dream of going to outer space, becoming an astronaut and riding a rocket. I was one of those kids only because of my last name, "Roquette" which literally means Rocket in French and of course I also happen to be French. My kindergarten class decided to create the nickname Rocket for me and although my dream has changed, the name has stuck ever since.

Sleep-talking

I couldn't tell you how many times I've been told that I'm too quiet and that I should talk more. But I have a secret. I do talk; I'm actually very talkative. I just happen to speak most as I dream. My sleep talking can be heard all night long. Can you imagine that - the quiet kid talking for eight hours straight? The freedom in dreams is so great that my voice gets carried away.

Time

It's infinite. Whether it be hours, days, weeks, or even months, all of which are in our heads over a single night. A separate life is created in our subconscious. A world that we come to love seemingly slips through our fingers like ink. The thick liquid that leaves a stain on ourselves, longing to return to that world. Sometimes it can haunt us, hiding just in the back of our minds like a foggy memory. Yes, the time we had there was precious, but sooner or later, you need to wake up.

Umbrella

Droplets fall from the sky. Tiny pools of liquid fall from your palm to the ground. The sensation of wetness as the air starts to freeze. The lovely soft sprinkling of taps on the dampened concrete. A canopy of fabric drapes above like a strong shield. The arched dome protects the warmth within as the downpour begins. *CRACK*. As eyes fly open, the flash of light dims as sleep takes over once more.

Vague

Vivid, vast view of the universe. Vapor fills your eyes viewing Venus vaporize. Vague, inverted vertices of a vanishing view. Viewing videos of villainous vampires vanquishing from vaccines. Vivid, yet vague imaginative scenery.

Wishes

Circular flat copper feels as light as a feather in a palm. Eyes shut tightly as wisps of colored images fill the mind. The desire, the hope, the feeling of a dream. Warmth spreads to each corner of the body as the yearning grows. Small but equally special as the reddish-brown piece is placed on a thumb and flies. Spinning high into the sky, shining as it reaches the stars and then deep into the depths of the liquid below. Lips lifting into a smile, a secret that cannot be told, the impossible possibilities of an endless dream hoping to come true.

XOXO, me

...the 24 count Crayola box, I mean, really? At least 64, at least. Kids a freaking artist!

...piano lessons were too expensive, "she's only four," your Dad said. Boo!

...Kenny would NOT end up inviting you to the middle school dance, c'mon Kenny!

...press-on nails you snuck-bought, then shared with everyone who's hand you shook at church
...the Ferris wheel on Santa Monica Pier, the lemonade you snuck on and spilled on everyone below
...the crooked bangs you gave yourself senior year
...the amazing opportunity you swore to your Mom was not a pyramid scheme. It was.
...the soup contest you were gonna slay, your liberal use of ghost peppers, the glares afterwards
...your next opportunity to win.

You

To you, reading this right now—hello. It's funny, isn't it? That I'm writing this in my room right now, in the past, and you're reading it in the future. It almost feels like a form of time travel. Are we traveling through time or is time simply traveling?

Time travel. Traveling time.

Time to travel to your side of the exchange—where are you right now? Are you reading this in a shop, or cafe of some sort? Maybe you're just reading it at home; I'd respect that too. Take this message wherever you feel like taking it. Just make sure to tell me where you went, when you end up writing back. You'll write back, won't you? Then I'll be you, and you'll be me. Maybe if we really could time travel, we could be each other at the same time.

Think about it: you as me, and me as you. Talking to each other, to ourselves. Addressing one another with 'me,' or 'you,' not particularly caring which one—because, after all, what's the difference?

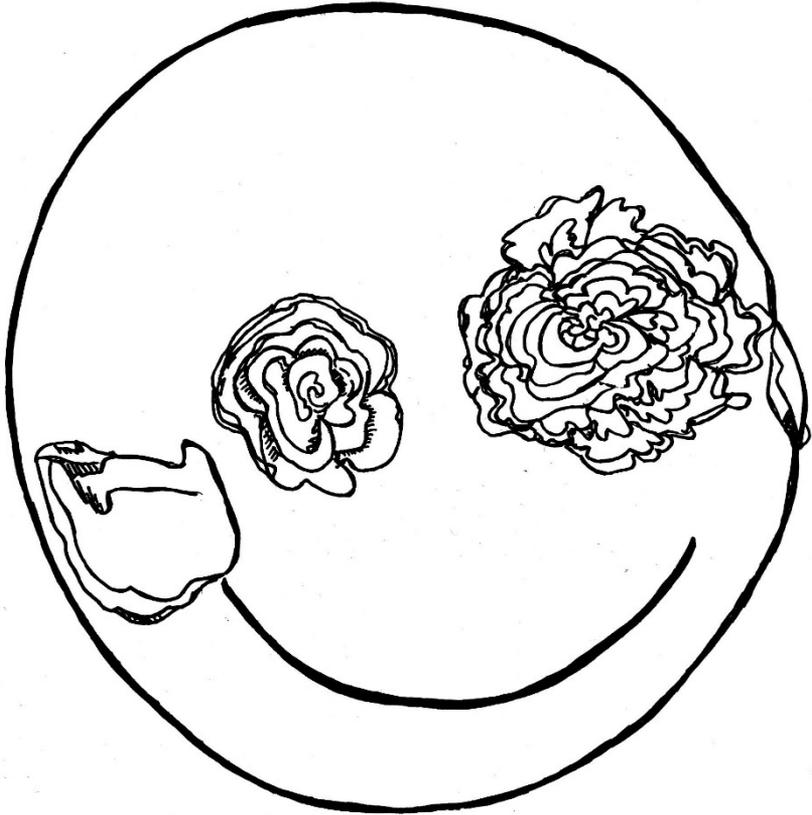
I hope you write me back. And you hope I do the same.

ZZZ

When you close your eyes at night, lying in bed, curled up on your side. Or perhaps lying on your back. If you lie long enough you may sense your mind transport your body to another place. This state we call sleep, but it also may be referred to as, 'catching some Z's'. Another common expression is 'ZZZ'. Maybe this is because we sleep at the end of the day, and Z is the last letter in the alphabet. Or maybe the ZZZ represents the way our full mind becomes mindless as we enter sleep, similar to the mindless activity of pressing the same button on a keyboard or on paper.

What Do You Think?

by Izzy Cruz



The Missing Pieces

by Kaitlyn Johnson

It was books that made me feel that perhaps I was not completely alone, they could be honest with me, and I with them

Slipping into the alluring forest with the echo of singing pages following my footsteps

When I have a million problems my mind is a damsel in distress

My thoughts that once were trampled by the venom of yellow-orange begonias dissolve like the sweet nectar of honey

The world fades away as I feel as though I am gliding across a velvety ice-covered pond with the imaginative taste of cake dancing around my mouth
My heart is clothed in armor of shining ivory and bundled gingerly while the murmured hush of sailing floats like a dove that guides my ears through the silent night

It's as though I put on glasses made of the softest peaches, the silkiest lilacs, and the most coastal clear blues

Each ravishing word is a kiss ablaze my lips, sinking into my brain

I am sprinkled in the flaming stripes of a tiger that climb the rose-tinted mountains

The spine binding reminisces the scent of melted butterscotch

To dive into a book is as glowing and golden as the midday sun

To trace the path one journeyed is to be struck by their sparkling stars, absorb their bleeding hyacinths, walk on the sidelines of their hardships, and to live rent free in the tangle of their mind

For it was books through which I found the blissful richness of sunlight bathing budding bulbs and plucked the scars and thorns off the opening circle that made up the missing pieces buried within myself

Dark November 1st

by Marissa McClure

The night for monsters and spirits to roam
among the people has now passed
They slink back to their caves and estates to wait another year
As the sun shines on the fire trees and golden fields

Not all beasts howl at the harvest moon
Or feed off the swan necks of sleeping girls
Some can look like you and me, undetected

Ghosts are the souls who cannot pass on
But can the ghost of humankind's past
Appear in the physical?

I saw three ghosts that November afternoon
Two sheet-white ghosts with burning
Swastika eyes from their black sockets

A shadow man stood between the hooded figures
Though his neck was pale from his flesh
Nylon rope looped around his throat

A dark and chilling November first
Halloween may have come and gone
But the terror for me still lingers

Mother Nature's Moods

by Doha Qasem

A thunderstorm can shout,
While a sunny day walks the opposite route.
A rainy day can cry,
But the rainbow plays hide and seek in the sky.
A windy day can make flowers dance,
While the sun gets the chance to take a little glance.
A snowy day can be cold,
While the summer can unfold.
Mother Nature always has mood swings,
But sometimes they change into better things.

Portrait of Lines

by Izzy Cruz



Fight

by Rylie Owen

A devil came to see me,
On a cold Monday evening,
He whispered in my ear,
Held me tight and stoked my fears

A devil came to see me,
On a warm April afternoon
She curled her hair around her finger,
And began to croon

A devil came to see me,
On a cold December night,
They kissed my cheek,
And called their friends to see me attempt flight

I fell as I was flying,
Tumbling through the air,
I crashed against the ground,
The pain too much to bear

An angel came to see me,
As I slept that night,
She pulled me close and wiped my tears,
And told me her name was 'Fight'

Fight pulled me up,
And onto my own two feet
She kissed my cheek,
But it was gentler than what my devils did to me

Fight told me a story,
Of what it meant to live
She asked if I then knew,
What is was I wanted to give

I told her I'd give anything,
To feel like she made me feel
To not worry about my devils,
To not worry about my heels

Fight said I had but one thing,
One thing to give for that
She told me to drop the pills
And to not make her come back

She told me to keep on going,
To not give up my will to live
She told me to fight my devils
To keep them from hurting me

Fight kissed my cheek
And flew away,
I watch her as she leaves

That morning my devil came again,
Bringing Him and Them,
She whispered in my ear,
Claws digging into my head

She told me to try again,
Because if I fly I will be free,
I looked her in the eye
And I told her to leave

I raced out of my bedroom,
And down the dim-lit hall,
To where my mother lay sleeping,
Just beyond a wall

I pushed open the door,
As my devils clawed my back
I struggled and fought,
But I managed enough just to push them back

My mother awoke to me talking,
Telling her what I had done,
We left to see a healer
Who bandaged my wounds and scrapes

I never saw Fight again,
And I don't plan to until I die,
But I know inside me,

She still stands at my side

Fight is always with me,
Even if she doesn't appear,
Because she is my angel,
And I her child of fear

Fight stands to protect me,
Guard me from all that I fear,
At night she holds me tightly,
As silent as my tears

I know that when I die,
I will see her again,
Standing on a marble floor,
Holding a silver pen

And with that pen she will
Make a mark upon my soul,
A silver scrawl that marks me,
As one of my own control

The marking will not hurt me,
For I have no pain left to give,
But for a brief, long second,
I will let her in

She'll see into my hallway,
Where I let the devils win,
She'll see into my closet,
Where I tore away my skin

She'll see all I have to give,
But she'll take nothing away,
For all I have is nothing,
When she saved my life that day.

A Hearse

by Lunetta Osterhaus

And though I was happy
I felt something so heavy and sad
That when they laid me down on the leather seats —
And the car idled —
I felt more like a coffin than a girl.
As the car sped on
I knew it was a hearse
All along.

So stupid of me to get in
So foolish of me
To carry a body,
Rotting and
Gone

Fairy Godmother's Regrets

by Kara Stevens

Eager to escape her stepmother, Cinderella accepted Prince Charming's proposal. Hair piled atop her golden head, she kissed him, now his wife. The next day, he locked her in the dark, fetid dungeon, beside thieves and murderers, or so he said. Days on end he starved her, she slept in soiled clothes. Weeks passed; she heard no words of her fate or her crimes. One day, he approached, smiled with twinkling eyes. "I shall let you out if you do what I say. Ask questions, back here you shall return." She lowered her head. Tears fell as she agreed. He led her to a bathhouse and sneered at her disgrace. The servants scrubbed her 'til she bled, cut her hair, and dressed her. Tight clothing squeezed her lungs as her breasts tried to break free. She spent her days beneath hairy men, who paid her husband, penetrated every orifice. Longing for escape, she remained where he told her. *Death, please take me*, she whispered in her head.

I hear you, Cinderella. Soon you shall be free.

Don't Fall

by Amber Lough



A Rose By Any Other Name

by Margaret Klingberg

You gave me life so early last spring
when you doused my muddy grave
and pulled my limbs into the sky,
turning from seed to bush.
“My rose,” you called me
each morning our faces met,
the sun peeking behind,
our cheeks flushed and red.

But,
you never touched me.

Not even to rub my petals,
velvet between your two fingers,
and savor the sweet scent
of a summer yet to come.
How would you even feel me?
My thorns sharper than a garden blade,
the one you use to prune and snip
my sickly and dying extremities.

I would destroy you,
rip your skin from your bones,
all shredded and torn,
the muscle and sinew thinner than paper
at the mercy of a barbed stem
bleeding redder than my buds,
you too a flower,
so delicate and fragile.

Would you touch me maybe,
if I were another?
Perhaps a daisy or orchid,
Something much nicer,
less dangerous,
less prickly,
more flower than thorn,
more beauty than pain.
Would you touch me then?

You Don't Know That I Can

by Izzy Cruz

Stuck inside the last place I've been,
You don't know where I am.
Swimming up towards the surface,
Finding way to your land.

You know I've been searching,
all of these places,
You say I can't face it,
all these changes.

But
you don't know that that I can.

The tunnel that I used for vision,
Is getting dark and grey.
Complaining lack of connection,
But you don't know my way,

The way to find out,
The location,
You say I can't face it,
All these changes—

You don't know that I can

Michigan Avenue Chicago

by Lisa Ronan



A Chamber of Secrets

by Safiyo Mohammad

Thoughtless,
Oblivious,
Selfish,
Careless,
She's all that
And more.
Everything that I worry,
she made.
Locking the bathroom door,
Feet pale red as I push the door back with my head in horror.
She's garlic stinging in my eyes.
She was affectionate through the memorization of Allah's words.
She's the rejection of my tiny begs at the door with fire ants crowding corners.
Triggers.
She's yelling and
She hurts us.
Rarely thought about what leaving me with that man would do.
Oblivious to what went on when she was gone.
Selfish to leave her three alone; not her worry but the eldest about their
unprotected
innocence.
She's left cold as we grabbed winter clothing from the center's free rack.
She's snowless winter.
She broke us.
As she's broken.
And again,
She
Thoughtless,
Oblivious,
Selfish,
Careless,
How could I blame her when she's all we have?

Bookshelves

by Isaac Ruff

My bookshelves are lined with portals.
Gateways,
stacked from floor to ceiling.
Sirens,
enchanting me with honeyed tongues.
Weaving spellbinding fantasies that ferry me away to worlds unknown.

One second I sail through a sea of clouds,
staring down at miniature cities
streets lined with rows of dominoes waiting to collapse.

The next I land on the desolate husk of a world
torn apart piece by piece over millennia.
Its bones picked clean by patchwork bands of scavengers.

I dine with the Lord of Dreams,
who stands sentry over the infinite facets of his mercurial domain.

I discover a City built of Spirals,
warping the hearts and minds of the myriad souls trapped in its web.

I immerse myself in a sea of stories,
floating through endless adventures
as I flip through the pages of my imaginary realm.

When I Die

by Isaac Ruff

Fuzzy black creeps into my eyes,
spreading through the edges of my vision
like droplets of ink blossoming in water.
The world around me slows to a tranquil crawl
as a rolling blackout
cascades across my brain.
Extinguishing glowing synapses
one after another,
while darkened curtains ease down my eyes.
Neurons plunge headfirst
into the death spiral during their last few nanoseconds of life.
A torrent of electrical ecstasy flows
through every nerve buried beneath wilting skin
as they unburden themselves of consciousness.
Billions of relationships and emotions and experiences,
every atom that makes up the colossal tower of "I"
collapsing in on itself like a house of cards.
Rendered into a bubbling mass
of memories and neurotransmitters,
a sliver of God
in my grey matter.
My eyes open for the first time
and I behold divinity.
The universe and each of the infinite threads connecting everything within
reveal themselves to me.
And for the briefest instant
I comprehend eternity,
I know the mystery.

And then I am gone.

Yet my body remains.
An abandoned shell,
host to an infinite biosphere teeming with life
that persists long after my mind departs.
My body deflates as the wheel turns,
every molecule consecrated and imbibed by something new.
I live on through the trees and the soil,
spreading through the vibrant life that dances across the earth.
A glorious rebirth fueled by decay.

I rejoin the whole,
a single droplet of water
returning to an infinite ocean of thought.
My mind is rent into countless tiny fragments and dispersed throughout the
sea,
each one mingling with the great expanse of primordial life.
Transforming into something pure, innocent, and new
before their return.
Products of a ghastly cycle
churning out endless beauty.

Hyundai

by Safiyo Mohammad

Probably just a rough start to the day

I, deeply hidden within the sky.

Squinting brown eyes, trying to see clearly through my dusted windshield.

The dark clouds are mirroring the height of pyramids tonight. I needed to drive around to clear my panicked head and jittery muscles.

But instead I picked up my light blue light, I found under the fragrant ashes of yesterday.

Left in a light park, with amber leaves falling not too far.

Suddenly, all was well.

My head is filled with a giggly film and I head back to the staggering warm heat of my car and head home without my mind.

Time Marches On

by Isaac Ruff

Jackboots trudging along the shifting earth,

soles reduced to tatters over the
course of an endless advance.

With eyes like solar flares and a voice like a dying man's final, rattling wheeze it
walks,

faceless and devoted.

Time marches on.

It passes through a city of mortar and metal, monolithic walls

looming over the
countryside,

standing
tall and
arrogant
for
centurie
s.

The click,

click,

click of jackboots on stone echoes throughout the city

streets.

Leaving tendrils of rust spreading like broken capillaries in their wake,

malignant
cobwebs
gnawing through
steel.

The proud old walls sink to their knees as waves of time lap around their
ankles,

piece by piece the city is dragged beneath the sea
and forgotten.

When at last nothing remains,

Time marches on.

Its immutable patrol of the cosmos continues,

the familiar click reverberating through an ocean of black, bouncing off of dead
stars

click rolls over the polished stone

like
countless peals of
thunder,

each one carving lush emerald scars into the planet's skin.

As Time treks across the desolate ground,

trees are born in every
footprint,

their elegant branches twisting upwards to dance

beneath a shattered
sky.

With every breath it exhales swaths of flowers blooming vibrant neon petals,

until the land is pockmarked with millions of

tiny colorful suns,
each one oozing brilliant light.

But now the cycle must begin anew,
and so Time's march continues.

Powerhouse Ruins

by Abby Sunde



An Incurable Illness

by Sarah Sells

His blood was touching everything,
seeping into my walls through small crevices
of skin, sheets splattered with the color
of my lips. Knuckles stained white with nausea
from the ringing that haunted his ears.

It was an infected cut, a wound
that kept reopening.
I watched the knife pierce deeper into his swollen flesh
searching for something, anything that could cure
his aching body.

But there was no antidote
for a sickness of the brain. He held a gun
to his mouth and forced it
down his throat until his lungs filled
with water, but he wouldn't let himself drown. In the
morning, I found him washed up on the shore.

How do you heal a chronic wound? A body
drenched in smoke and sweat that begs
for isolation but cries
when I must leave. I tell him cover the scar with a band-aid, but
his blood has already touched me.

Cordial Corruption

by Nic Weber

Madness.
Some call it love.
Most call it madness.
Tunnel Terrors.
Nightmares inspired by your former reality
Routine.
Rituals.
Acts done religiously.
Things that can no longer be done without
Lingering Loneliness.
An inescapable inception of conversations grown cold and calloused.
Chemical Romance.
Chemical Combustion.
Ecstasy Explosion.
Madness.
You love it.
You get drunk on the taste of its lips.
Lust laced with Lucifer's Light.
No lines between what's wrong or right.
Tonight,
Silence sweeps the sheets your tears usually stain with
Simmering screams of sadness.
A new chapter is being written.
Tonight's Terror:
Passion.

Do You Still Love Me?

by Rachel Kraus

act i.

he is the pulsation
vibrato in fleshy throats

Arete daimona smiles

"Just proceed"

starlight dancing,
waltz again,
an apprehensive curtsy, and the night
just begins to wane

i press my memories
into glass like miniscule violets
and lilies of the valley

he surveys me, throbbingly
counting my field of bowing snowdrops

i'll put on that dress, overlay
lipstick on the fertilized fields of my mouth
meet him in streetlights

a storybook nailed to the wall
and they gather like beasts
whipping at the bindings
a glimpse inside my window

I wonder, is this love?

act ii.

or is this a requirement?
the vacant street lights misting
gnats, drizzling disquiet thoughts
opening your closed door;

Arete daimona scrutinizing

"Just proceed"

so put on those slacks, that tie,
button up your shirt and
shut the door once more.
wait for her in the next town over

a costly production
where you get what you want
after violation of vows,
and devastation of meadows
she gets that kiss after all

they strangle with puffs of bated air
and telephoned feedback, burning
in impatience, drowning

in sopping palms, contaminated expectations
and maybe they want me to be happy but

i am the pulsation
screaming in the hollow stomach,
empty legs/infertile lap

act iii.

do i want to be with him?
or is it just flourish in desperation,
impressing a bewildered audience,
holding hands, flustered

faces, seeing a flash
of lighting, extra production

exposed backdrops
the people wearing black
scurrying like subway rats

ignorantly I do so.

a graze; are you here?
and is it love? you bow in return

and ask me to dance under
filmy streetlights, nightfall
filled with peaky pastures.

it's wreckage amongst gardens
of green sprouts and spring daisies

Arete daimona succumbing
she is muted.

i stay; waiting, displayed

finding myself in glass
pressed upon hard pieces of
practicality, and elemental sturdiness

an imminent fate, waiting in the night

fin.

Peanut Butter Pumpkin Pie

by Codie Olson

When is a mother's love not enough?
Is it wrong for me to itch for more?

Friends and family, if you're reading,
You mean the world.
However, there's a whole universe out there
Filled with Peanut butter pumpkin pie.

I can visualize, fantasize, and contextualize
Endlessly.
However, nothing can restrain my mind from thinking of a life
With Peanut butter pumpkin pie.

I've had it before but was too ignorant
To savor its taste.

So a Dream May Die

by Lunetta Osterhaus

It's funny that the thing that keeps us going

Breaks so quick.

It looks us in the eye as it steps back.

You hold its fingers

But it just keeps stepping, till the arm goes stiff,

And in the distance you see your dreams.

It looks you in the eyes as it pulls —

It doesn't even need a knife

(That's how fickle a dream is) —

And the arm pops off, with the fingers clawing at your hand.

It doesn't wave goodbye.

It doesn't smile.

But it makes sure you're watching as it walks away.

A Song About You

by Rachel Kraus

A sweet sound comes to my ears. It reminds me of blossoming wildflowers, leafy and balmy. Or catching a firefly in my hand, where it flickers then dims. The falling sparkling ash through dusky wind. Earthly wonders, bodily miracles, our nights are of fires, fireworks, fresh cut grass. I wonder if you get the same creeping rotten sensation, when hearing you're beautiful. The supple melody it carries. The throat of a guitar, the peculiar juxtapose of what we used to be. Imprisoned, keeping me. Longing for you to appear, lingering fingertips away. That song brings back memories of sand, tepid water, fish, and logs. Never did we assume the years would ever catch on and exhaust these everlasting nights. The misery of producing a blue-faced baby. Or the continuous yet queer innervation of skeletons, secrets we cannot reverse. Still I hungrily go back to night of sitting with you, you're beautiful, treasuring the moans of thundering puffs in the sky, moldy with heat and ubiquitous to feelings of separation. Once we were verdant, so youthful. Listening with pricked ears to waves sloshing on tall grasses, the grace of xyloid branches whipping shadows in the clouds. It was your favorite song. You're Beautiful. Manically zealous and rashly feverous. We once were. I now listen alone.

Motherless Country

by Rachel Krans

A flight of aimless doves;
we crash land into Motherless
Country.

The night is a dumpster
a catch-all for bits, parts, pieces
of prosthetic eyes and mangled
elbows, pretend babies with
warm padded fingertips,
breadlike yet stone hard.
We mewl as darkness folds
into itself, a fish tail
matted after rolling on hard surfaces;

(Now you see me)

We are the unknown
parading down Main Street
USA, snakes slither from
swollen wrists
instead of/curly worm fingers,
blackened with a honeycomb stripe
tonguing the dusky air
wanton and tentative;

(Now you don't)

We are chanting to
windowless panes, jagged
glass like sallow edged
hip bones, captivating/shadowing
strangers with widemouth pockets.

We call out into alleyways
seeking/warm hospital beds
a tired bone to suckle and spit;

(Say the magic word)

My mother's hands were
filled with polyester, satin
and delicate. I tore them

at the seams, painstakingly
singular; threaded stitch. I watched
the black string pulled by my finger's
pressure, gleaming eyelash
tugged from its foundation;

a stray cub.

The Neighborhood

by Lisa Brodsky

A summer barbeque approaches next week.
Better go to the store to grab something to share.
COVID-19 is no more so I see no masks.
Did you hear Ted is banging Gary's wife Marge?

Evade chit chatting about Trump with the radical right.
Feed your faces all night until you explode.
Good fences make good neighbors someone once said.
Have you seen how the Minnesota Twins are doing?

I baked a tasty Minnesota Hot Dish
just like As Seen on TV, while my own
kids ate Mac and Cheese again for dinner and I
listen to complaints about property tax.

Marge brings her famous pecan blueberry pie to the
Neighborhood Watch Night to Unite August 3rd.
Obligatory after-COVID high fives can commence!
Perhaps you can mow your lawn this weekend?

Quenching my summer thirst with wine on my porch I
read the neighborhood newsletter's latest news.
See you again soon I lie to all.
Ted and Marge are moving in together I hear.

United we stand, divided we fall, we read as we
validate out loud we are keeping up with the Joneses.
Watching them through curtains with binoculars.
Xenophobia incites riots and verbal abuse.

Yet Marge can bring her piquant pie next year, so I
zone out, close my eyes, smile sweetly and nod.

Working Moms

by Lisa Brodsky

Another mom appeared at my job today to
balance work, life, and changing stinky diapers.
Clearly distraught with her head on her desk as salty tears
drip down her face and into her mouth.
Emotions are for working from home, but I am
forced to bite back tears while
grasping at straws as another office mom
hands in her milk-stained letter of resignation.
I share cool stories with the millennial moms,
just to make me look like a Kardashian, but the
kids ate cereal again for dinner last night.

Looking haggard as I walk in late to work,
my gen-x boss insists I need to do better, but he
never tried to get ready for work while shoving
oatmeal into four screaming mouths.
Picking out oatmeal from my hair one piece at a time, I
quench my summer thirst with a daiquiri over lunch, while
reporting important facts to the Boys' Club members,
satisfying my need to look like I matter.

Technically, Dad, it isn't called babysitting,
unless you are not the father.

Valuable input presented at the lunch meeting,
when the baby boomer neighbor calls me and
X'plains she saw the children on the roof today,
yet asks if she should wake the babysitter. I
zone out, take another sip, smile, and nod.

Zeroing in on a conference table blankly.
Yawning and trying to recall if I signed
Xavier's field trip permission form,
when I realize it was my turn to bring school snack.
Vacating the boardroom, they once again nod in
understanding, as I pick up gas station cookies.

Teachers hibernate like the bears over the
summer, but when is it my turn I wonder? I

run to the school to bring the kids' lunch
quickly to make sure I have time to pick up my
Prozac on my way back to work. Today I'll try not to
offend the stay-at-home mom with the
natural homemade cupcakes and the perfect hair.

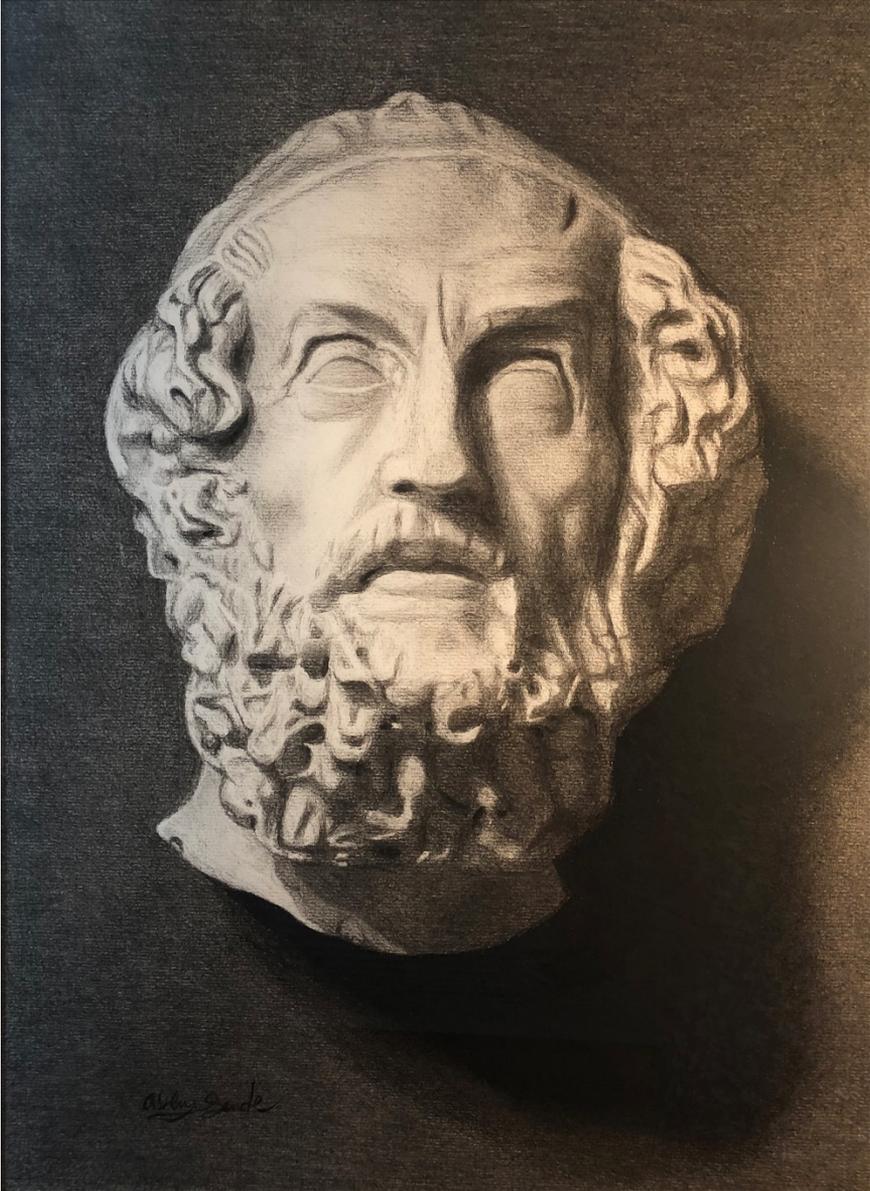
Maybe you'll think twice the next time you wake me to
let me know the baby's crying.

Kids up all night with foreheads of fire, but I
just dose them up and send them off to school.
I have eyelids like magnets that I can't peel apart,
however, the show must go on they say.
Got at least six hours before they expire.
Feeling like chum to the sharks when I
enter the parent-teacher courtroom.

Don't judge my choices from your glasshouse.
Can't say I have achieved work-life-balance.
But the kids still get to school and I show up for work like
all the other working lemmings diving off the cliff.

Homer Charcoal

by Abby Sunde



Impatiently Chill

by Berenice Flores

White swirls around our heads like pesky flies.
I can see my breath,
ah, perfectly romantic
That cold fireball passed us overhead yet again
so gleefully lying to us

mere paupers

After four taunting moons—
what's the use in praying?
for blades of emerald grass and singing, skipping Robins,
for melted lakes and sugary, dripping ice cream.
HALT, This daydreaming

is so masochistic.

Look! Icicles glisten...oooh dreamy
Their twinkle greets us at our doors
Go on, dare to step out.
But dontcha forget your layers...
Pull on those heavy, clunky black boots
Pound pound pound
a Snowy ground.
those ghastly crunchy squeaks, screeching angry critters
Oh, just—shut up, trudge on!
you know this drill well
Every morning, approach your Cold Cruiser and
Surprise...a windshield
with its own adorable glaciers, Hahaha—
Ha...how cute. Oh how lucky we are
some manual labor to start our days. Keeps us young?!
Shoot... am I not so seasoned on the Seasons?
Another year,
let us grin together, my comrades of the North.

Why Do Black Women Scare You?

by Marissa McClure

We are the work of your God
Our lips, raw and organic
Natural berry juices and sticky sweet
Our hair, so versatile
Spiral rings, pom-pom afros, narrative braids
Our bodies, plump and defined
The peaches and cherries cannot compare to us
Our skin, a thousand and one shades
And we adore every cell

You hate on us, calling us unpolished, ratchet
Aggressive big-mouthed sirens
But you construct your form to copy us
What a counterfeit!
Hours under sun lamps to imitate our melanin
You want those Kylie Jenner lips
Kim Kardashian ass and thighs
You want to take our stories
You twist our blueprints
To be more bleached
You twist our words
To seem more savior-like
Yet never give credit to God's perfect creation
I must know the real reason,
Why do black women scare you?

With Friends Like These

by Lisa Ronan

Bluster and a lonely, reverberating half-conviction,
*(never let on – it is like giving them hammer and nail to
seal the coffin)* when, finally, it is enough.

Cough it up, cough it up.
What if I say it out loud?
Let's be honest – I labor to get the words out.

Too dangerous to expose dream or desire;
delicate beating butterfly wings
that hover vulnerable in my chest.

I long to take the words out of my mouth,
smear them on the table,
black, sleek, and shiny.

Quiet and swelling, snake venom; toxic,
cleaving, rises like geyser steam waiting to eject,
turbulent, exquisite.

An extraordinary, rare phenomenon of
groundwater movement in Earth's crust, rocks, and soil,
that exists in few places,

only if I let it come to the surface.

Like Chocolate Melting

by Lisa Ronan

I would like to put everything
 into compartments, like you do.
I wish, like you, I would say, 'no,'
 because I know there are not enough hours in a day to do everything.

If I were going to be indifferent
 to everyone and everything around me,
 for my own convenience –
I could not do it better than you.

I wish I could sit down,
 watch t.v. – never contemplating dinner, conversation,
 the laundry, helping with homework.
And how convenient your certainty that a child will 'figure it out on his
own.'

When your mother died,
 you shed a single tear, standing at the cemetery.
 You said it was not for her, she was dead already,
 but for others who would be dead sooner rather than later. How
rational of
you.

It has been a drifting year since
 separating. I no longer think of those things,
I rarely think of you. It has been a long road,
as envy and comparison dwindle and die.

I am good enough when you are not here
 to throw your morals and conquests in my face.
I am enough. I am more than enough, when I do not have to hover
in your atmosphere.

Strange how easy it has been to turn away from you,
 doubt, tedious, painful insecurities.
 Fear melts in my stomach, like small, smooth chocolates in a box,
left out in the sun.

It oozes out and runs in the corners, pooling with a burning,

until it eats away at the paper box, bleeds out in a dark, slippery stain.

Chocolate deformed but still sweet - I could eat it, if I could
gather it

into one shape,

put it in my mouth - savor the taste of me,
of being enough,

more than enough,
more than you wanted me to be.

Shines

by Jordan Johnson

The bird sat perched, its talons digging into the decaying wood underneath them. The sheen of its ebony feathers was set aglow under the waning sunlight cast from above. Its beady gaze fixated upon the girl below, unmoving save for the faint rise and fall of her chest. She had been there for days, as the bird had first noted her presence while searching for food to feed its recent hatchlings. Sometimes her eyes were open, though mostly they remained clenched shut.

It was about two evenings past that the bird could tell how hungry she was. The sound of her stomach groaning for sustenance drowned out any of the other noises the forest had to offer, and so the bird began bringing her food. It could not carry much, but it would bring her berries and insects from around the forest. It seemed to be enough to sustain her, as when the bird would return, the berries and insects would be gone, and the girl's fingers stained a verdant red. Though the bird had never seen her awake, it started to view her as a hatchling of its own, and so it provided for her in the same way it would provide for its young.

That went on until today when something struck the bird as odd. Normally, the girl would have moved at least a little since the last time it saw her, but her position seems to be the same, and the food the bird brought her remained in the same spot it had been left. Though she seemed to be breathing still, there was no other sign that life still pulsed through her. Her alabaster skin was more sickly than usual, and the evening sun bounced off of her face as though it was a mirror. Then, the noise came again.

Many angry men came to the birds' forest a few days prior. Shouting and stomping, breaking leaves and sticks beneath their feet. They shouted words and shined lights through the trees, waking the denizens of the forest and leaving nothing but noise in their wake. The bird had tried to appeal to them, and get them to leave, many times. It would drop acorns from above to deter them from going farther, but they didn't seem to mind. The next day it resorted to attempting to make an offering, perhaps they wanted something. The bird left the small shiny cylinders it would find on the forest floor in their way, to appeal to their wanton sensibilities, but upon finding them the men would only get more upset and furious. Perhaps they received the wrong shines, and there were other shines they valued, the bird had thought. It will find better shines the next time they came into the forest, the bird told itself.

That time, it would seem, had come, and the bird had no new shines to appease them. The girl had a shine, though. A very pretty one, around her neck. It looked like a flower, but with sparkles and shines that always dazzled in the sun. The bird knew it was probably special to her so it had been left alone, but

perhaps something special would drive away the loud men. The bird pecked at the loose rope the shine hung from on the girl's neck until it broke. It grabbed the shine and flew off to the angry men. Surely the girl would understand the need to appease the angry men, so that they stop disrupting the forest.

The men stomped, with their handheld lights and their intrusive voices ringing through the forest. After this, the bird will go back to check on the girl more closely, it thought. She did not seem hungry, but perhaps she will be then.

The bird approached, unafraid, as it knew these men did not seem to want to hurt the animals in the forest, but rather just the forest itself. Their heavy footfalls crushed the underbrush as they shouted their words and whistled their songs. The bird flew in front of the man leading his pack and laid the shine on the ground in front of him. It hopped back a few feet and remained on the ground, to ensure the man knew it was an offering of peace.

The man approached, his light blinding the bird for a moment before settling on the shine, causing the light to reflect on the trees in a pattern the bird had never before seen. The man didn't seem to appreciate the gift, however, and instead water began flowing from his eyes, and the yelling just got louder. The man pointed at the bird and yelled even louder, and other men began to circle in on the bird. They seemed very upset for the shine, though the man was still holding on to it. The bird quickly took to the sky before the men could catch it and made haste back to the girl.

That wasn't the end, though. The men started chasing the bird as it weaved in and out of the trees surrounding them. Their shouts got louder and louder, and their feet fell more and more frantically as the bird flew desperately to get back to the girl and make sure she was safe. Who knows what these men want in the forest, but the bird needed to protect his hatchlings before all else. Why didn't the shine work? The bird was sure the shine would get rid of these outside aggressors, but it only seemed to spur them on.

It wasn't long before the bird made it back to the girl, who it seemed still hadn't eaten. It perched on her chest and pecked at her head. It must ensure her safety, but she didn't seem to rouse. The men descended on them fast and ruthless, but the bird remained. It had to protect its hatchlings, there was no alternative. The men seemed more interested in the girl, than anything, as their yelling stopped abruptly when they reached this ditch under the shade of the old oak. The bird did not move. The alpha placed two fingers on the girls' neck. The bird did not move. The man spoke, and the other men seemed to smile a bit. The bird did not move. The alpha slipped one arm under the girl's neck, and one in the crook of her knees, lifting her from the ground. The bird did not move. The men began to move quickly back the way they had come, and still, the bird did not move. Only when they began to get closer to the edge of the forest did the bird know that its endeavor was fruitless. It had four other hatchlings in its nest it still needed to feed and protect. It seemed that this one may be lost to the angry humans that so ceaselessly tormented the forest for

such a long time. The bird took to the sky, flying back to its hatchlings at home without looking back. It knew that to fly, hatchlings needed to be pushed from the nest, but it hoped that this hatchling would be encouraged to fly, wherever the men took her.

Ode'imini-Giizis Oil

by Abby Sunde



Today I am Latina

by Lisa Brodsky

today I am Latina listening	hoy eres blanco pero tu no estas escuchando
work harder you don't belong here how dare you dream	tus hombros son pesados tu eres el mundo y el maestro de los sueños
you're bringing drugs you're bringing crime you're rapists some are good people	no importa que haces porque tus bolsillos están llenos tienes inmunidad
you are a minority you should build the wall and then get deported	puedos ser la mayoria hoy pero mañana tal vez podamos igualarse
go back where you came from (I was born in Arizona)	recordar no fuiste el primero (yo tambien naci aqui)
and lately I've begun wondering if you are trying to tell me something	en caso de que te estes pregutando si estoy tratando decirte algo
today I am Latina but tomorrow maybe I will wear my red pumps for you and try to be whiter	hoy eres blanca y mañana todavía extenderé mi mano y cultivo una rosa blanca

Plant Room Diorama

by Elisabeth Erler



Contributor's notes

Darren Almgren is a life-long writer and storyteller. He is studying and focusing on his writing, including a novel. He currently lives with his dog, Bruce, and his fiancé.

Lisa Brodsky holds a Master of Public Health degree from the University of Minnesota and works as a County Public Health Director. She was born and raised in Canada and is a mom of four boys. She is currently working on her AFA in Creative Writing. She places a great emphasis on lived experiences in her work. In her spare time, Lisa enjoys writing, raising and showing her Shetland Sheepdogs, and reading.

Izzy Cruz is a longtime musician, songwriter and performer who enjoys diving deeply into hard-to-reach emotions and topics. She believes that art, especially poetry, can create new perspectives for both the writer and the reader. An entire world can be created by just a few carefully chosen words.

Fall 2021 Introduction to Creative Writing includes Alexis Becker, Tristin Chin, Noah Dieng, Joshua Dismuke, Fatima Dzaferovic, Berenice Flores, Jack Gempler, Sarah Janes, Rachel Janson, Johan Luce, Elanna Meadows, Kristin Ninneman, Lyra Rapp, Nicholas Roquette, McKenna Rupp, Julia Schmidt, and Karn Tu.

Elisabeth Erler is a PSEO student and will be graduating high school in 2022. Elisabeth practices a variety of art forms. She mainly expresses herself through dioramas, embroidery, painting, sketching, and playing guitar.

Berenice Flores was born and raised in Los Angeles, makes Minneapolis her home now, and is finishing up for AFA in Creative Writing in the spring of 2022. She's worn many hats, from stand-up comedian, real estate agent, and a small business owner, all of which she uses as inspiration for her writing.

Jordan Johnson is in his third semester at Normandale. He is majoring in Creative Writing and hopes to one day be a published novelist.

Kaitlyn Johnson is in her third semester at Normandale Community College in the AFA Creative Writing program. Her love of reading inspired her to find her voice and start writing pieces of her own. When not reading or writing, Kaitlyn enjoys being outside, spending time with her family and friends, and being with animals (particularly her dog Ruby).

Amber Valerie Judd has been writing poetry since she was seven years old. At 50, she finally decided to pursue writing as a career. Her work has appeared in *Trounville Review*, *Prospectus*, *Talking Stick 30*, and *NoVA Bards 2021*.

Margaret Klingberg is a student at Normandale. Her poem "A Rose by Any Other Name" appears in this issue.

Rachel Kraus is a suburban mom who plans to complete her AFA in Creative Writing in 2022. After that, she hopes to obtain her BA in Creative Writing or English, while juggling hockey and soccer practice with her three children.

Lily Levin's goal in art is to make work that pushes the boundaries between the imaginative and unimaginable. She enjoys creating images that make people ask questions and come up with their own answers in the same breath.

Amber Lough is a senior in high school, currently pursuing a degree in English with the hopes of publishing her own book. Along with writing, some of her hobbies are painting/drawing, gaming, and creating content online.

Marissa McClure An inspiring writer currently writing her first novel and poetry book, her writing talks about experiences or emotions in her life and political things happening in the world. She is a biracial writer, hoping to get her voice out there for the world to hear.

Safiyo Mohamud is very grateful to be among beautiful pieces and for the *Paper Lantern* editors. I hope that my pieces bring about a connection and lightness I felt when writing them. I appreciate the opportunity to share what I kept hidden.

Codie Olson is a student of life and likes to experiment with his writing. He encourages people to embrace adversity and to use the emotions from it in a creative fashion.

Lunetta Osterhaus is a PSEO student at Normandale. She aspires to become a novelist one day.

Riley Owen is a PSEO student at Normandale Community College. She enjoys reading and crocheting in her free time and wants to pursue a career in history.

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. Although she cannot write unrhyming poetry yet, she plans to improve and will continue writing as a hobby. Fun fact, she loves to draw for fun as another method of expressing herself!

Elizabeth Rivera Soto is a student at Normandale. Her piece "Baby Feet" appears in this issue.

Lisa Ronan is pursuing an AFA with a focus in Creative Writing at Normandale. She writes poetry and short fiction. She is interested in theater, loves to travel, ride bikes around the lakes in the summer, and watch the leaves change in the fall.

Isaac Ruff is a Normandale student who has been an avid reader his whole life, and recently fell in love with writing poetry and fiction. He plans to transfer to the University of Minnesota in the fall to pursue a bachelor's in creative writing. You can usually find him lost in a story during his free time (most likely something sci-fi or horror related).

Sarah Sells is a student at Normandale and Washburn High School who currently resides in Minneapolis. She spends her time writing both fiction and poetry and is pursuing a major in creative writing.

Kara Stevens copes with military service-connected PTSD by writing dark fantasies. In 2021, she self-published her first novel, *The Scarring of the Roshanra*. By the end of 2022, she plans to release her second book and graduate with an AFA in Creative Writing.

Abby Sunde is a Minneapolis/St. Paul-area art student who was born and raised in the woods of North Central Wisconsin. Primarily working in oil and charcoal, she enjoys exploring a variety of media. She currently studies art at Normandale Community College, with plans of attending an MFA program for studio art in the future.

Nic Weber is a twenty-six-year-old social media influencer and aspiring writer majoring in Creative Writing to assist in the process of editing his first in-progress book called "Alone in the Wilderness." His hope is to utilize his writing to spread hope from my platforms, reminding people who are struggling that they're not alone.

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 Humanities Department.

The following members of the Fall 2021 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

Kara Stevens, Vivian Clark, Christine Horner, Izzy Cruz, and
Lunetta Osterhaus

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Front Cover: “Umbrella Girl” by Lily Levin

Back Cover: “Abuela” by Abby Sunde

Submit your creative writing to the Spring 2022 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously, and acceptance is based on literary merit.

Submission links and more information can be found at

www.thepaperlantern.org.

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

Submissions are received through D2L. Students wishing to submit can self-enroll in the “Paper Lantern” course and drop their work in the appropriate folder in the “Assignments” area.

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