

The Paper Lantern

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The Works

A Trolley Problem , by Jennifer Meinhardt.....	5
Leeches , by Paul Van Dyke.....	8
Ode to a Difficult Semester , by Gabriel Mianulli.....	13
Letters to an Imagined Father , by Haley Sargent.....	14
Unbinding , by Jennifer Meinhardt.....	15
How I Know I'm Fucked , by Rachel Lindo.....	16
Hobbes in Space , by Feith Sanchez.....	18
Ruth and Politics , by Geoffrey Ayers.....	19
A Damaged Hand , by Vicky Erickson.....	20
Julia the Defeater , by Natasha Miller.....	21
RIP'd , by Rachel Lindo.....	26
Julian's Workshop , by Petra Asani.....	28
Alphabet Soup , by Jennifer Meinhardt.....	34
Dreamscape , by Haley Sargent.....	36
The Fire from One's Soul , by Vicky Erickson.....	37
Somehow , by Katharine Johnson.....	38
Drop the 'G' , by Rachel Lindo.....	39
Jettenbach , by Isaac Nidzgorski.....	41
CHASER , by Rachel Lindo.....	43
Downtown River Reflections , by Jerry Carrier.....	45
The Last Hunt , by Jennan Kellogg.....	46
Dead Body Moving , by Jennifer Meinhardt.....	51
Zimmer(MN) , by Haley Sargent.....	53
Imogen and Twinka at Yosemite , by Autumn Cooper.....	54
The Taste and Odor of Colors , by Jerry Carrier.....	55
Obsession is (him) , by Sarah Jensen.....	56
Definition Collection: TENUOUS , by Samantha Hendrickson.....	57
Rigid (The Meaning of Life) , by Zachary Ethington.....	58
Contributors' notes	62
Publication information	64

A Trolley Problem

by Jennifer Meinhardt

The green line goes by in time
and a father tells his son that this is not their ride.
It's not mine either, but I can't help but think to myself
it could be, with some adjustment.
It leaves again and they see a train go by, but I see
a missed opportunity
to test my theory on reincarnation.

It's a thing everybody experiences, supposedly. But
I say there's no way this carnivorous cloud that fills
my sinuses is something that everyone suffers.
It's not a universalist, humanist experience. Our
realities don't align within their realities. Maybe
that train that passed was the blue train and
the green train was the wrong color all along, that
and my kindergarten teacher lied to me.
I hold a solo cup up to my friend and ask,
"What color do you see?"

Our brains are made of gray matter, a silver car travelling
on stream-lined tracks. Not pink like a salmon swimming through
red
rivers of bloody consciousness, affected by the cells
trapped in our skulls. I took a flashlight and shined it up
my reflected nostrils and they were dark. If my sinuses are dark,
and my cranium is dark, how can I even guess what pink
is? It must be empty so I say that I am brainless. Don't
laugh, I am not kidding.

I lay awake last night counting the clicks of the distant clock
and composed a poem that made no sense. I wanted it to go left and
across the bridge, but it went onto the bridge, then right and into the

river before it
flipped back onto Hennepin again. How can my thoughts
travel in four-dimensions when I, my physical form, is stuck
in two following a single line, forever, backwards and forwards
again and again?

This train of thought stops, abrupt. Vibrating and
in a fashion both dramatic and fantastic I turn,
out of control and off the tracks, side rail. Screaming,
twisted metal and shattering glass.
All I feel is dead, inside! Sometimes!

On the outside too, on occasion. It hurts to acknowledge the disaster.
Stumbling and moaning in a cacophonous and discordant
jumble of sounds like the trumpet in a big band who goes
Loud and Out of Tune when all others go silent.
The Walking I-wish-I-was-Dead. Auto-pilot,
the conductor exits out the nose and I wave hello
at someone who looks like a friend. It turns out just to be
their doppelganger,
Again. I scratch my ear to not make it awkward.

I left my hand in my coffee this morning.
Occasionally, the shroud that covers my being
in its unmeasured lengths of mysterious hues
is whipped away and suddenly! There are textures
on the trees! The grass moves, waving in the wind
like cheering sports fans moving in unison
around the field. They don't care about waiting for
a train in green or blue in any city because there's also
red if you're in London. In this moment I find I don't
mind either. My heart beats steady and strong,
dancing to the rhythm in the lit club of my rib cage,
and it's joyous even though I've always hated clubs.

I turn to my friend and tell him,
"David, did you know we're all alive?"
and he replies,
"Duh, stupid."

Leeches

by Paul Van Dyke

From 20,000 feet in the air, the world looks rather peaceful. The rolling hills, the sparkling water, the contours of mountains. From up here, one can hardly tell there is a plague killing off humans by the millions, or that bands of survivors are warring over dwindling resources. Up here, in my climate-controlled cabin, the world looks like a place where I might like to live one day, perhaps even rule. It has been nearly six months since the Ark took to the air, floating like a cloud over the dying world. Some holed themselves up in vaults to wait out the plague, but I would have none of that. I am a man, a Captain of Industry! Do you think I am going to live underground like some rat, some mole? Hardly! I roam the skies like the hawk, the eagle, and the falcon, looking down on my prey.

Life on the airship isn't perfect though. In fact, it is terribly cramped. A 5 room suite is to be suitable for a single inhabitant? What an insult. Sure, there are the common areas—the gym, the spa, the tennis court, the ballroom—but why in god's name would I share that with 200 other tenants? It must be unbearable in the 8x6 4-person pods on the Lower Deck, but surely those poor souls are used to it by now. It is likely even preferable to whatever trailer parks or rambler homes they lived in before the plague. To try to alleviate some of the cramping issues in the Upper Deck, I offered to buy all 200 spaces and live up here by myself, but the CEO of Arktec said that was *inhumane!* "Please, explain to me how that is inhumane," I begged him. "Every space is a human life," he said. "The Ark exists to save lives."

Human lives? Has he met these people? *Leeches*, more like it.

So I had to settle for a single suite. Fortunately, he was reasonable enough to sell me a family suite. I am not your average tenant, mind you. I was also able to bring my personal butcher, my personal gardener, my personal chef, my personal physician, and my manservant, Benjamin. I may be trapped in this god forsaken Ark, but at least I have fresh meat and vegetables, prepared to my liking, and thanks to Dr. Greuber, I also have the Super-Blood. Without the

Super-Blood, I would physically be no better than the dregs in the Lower Deck! Is that not the height of absurdity?

Before the plague, I was a very successful man, a Captain of Industry! The men in my family have always been Captains of Industry. As Mother explained it, we are simply bred of a better stock. I had 30,000 employees under my rule. 30,000 mouths, fed by me. Even Jesus only fed 5,000 before the leeches took all of his blood. Then again, Jesus wasn't Phillip Vanderbilt the Third. These employees...*Leeches*, all of them. I paid them a full and fair wage (at least the ones in countries where I had to) and how did they repay my generosity? *Theft!* "It is not theft," my lawyers told me, "It's worker's benefits." I saw right through that racket. Taking full days off for holidays, illnesses, and *personal reasons*. Even taking weeks off at a time to birth the next generation of *leeches!* And who paid for these disruptions in productivity? Me! And that lawyer had the nerve to tell me that wasn't theft. Now he is down there, with the rest of the *leeches*. Most likely, the plague has already taken him. I hear it ravaged the cities first.

There is a pounding at my door. If Benjamin were here, I would tell him to shoo away whomever saw fit to disturb me. I would do it myself, but after my latest blood treatment, I can hardly walk. "Is anyone in there!" some woman is yelling. "Go away, you *leech!* You're not getting any!" I shout back. She started to say something else, but I turned off my intercom. If that isn't the height of *rudeness!*

Where was I? Oh yes, the leeches. With only 5 leeches under my employ, I had hoped my experience as a Captain of Industry would be better. They may not have been appreciative of the wages I paid them before, but I had secured them a spot on the Ark! Surely that would warrant some gratitude. Of course it didn't, though. With *leeches*, it is always the same.

They don't know I am watching them.

They think me a fool. Why, just yesterday, I watched my gardener pick a fresh tomato and eat the whole thing, right there in the garden. I was very clear with my instructions. He brings me the food, and I will divide out his share. And my butcher, that *leech!* Does he not think a man with my advanced palate would discern the

difference between flank steak and skirt steak? Does he think me a dullard? I wish I could believe that it was simply greed which drove the butcher's deception, but I know better. He is testing me. Seeing what he can slip past me. It may be a skirt steak this week, but I have no doubt he would take everything from me if he could. Of course, it isn't just the butcher. My chef prepared the beef, and laid it upon my plate as though he was doing me a service! I suppose he wants a wage and benefits too. By now, Benjamin has most likely disposed of those leeches. Besides his normal duties of keeping my chambers tidy, shaving me in the morning, keeping my schedule, and whatever other mundane tasks I assign him, he has proven quite proficient at murder. I'll admit, I have used these services more than once back on Earth. Whenever a leech sucked too long or too hard, Benjamin would make that leech disappear. He's so discreet too! No unnecessary questions, and never a peep about his less savory tasks. Benjamin is a loyal employee in every sense, perhaps *too* loyal. It will be a sad day indeed when I am forced to dispose of him. Good help can be so hard to come by.

Right now, he is probably hard at work scrubbing the butcher's blood out of his quarters, or burying the gardener under the tomato plants. Never before have I seen a man more adept at the removal of bloodstains. A true artist.

While Benjamin is simply an employee, I think of him almost as a friend. I do not use this word lightly. I have never had what one would consider a friend in my life. Every time Mother set up a playdate, it was only a matter of time before my guest's true intentions were revealed. *Another leech!* Always wanting something, to ride one of my bikes, to play with my gun collection, to eat my sweets. After the first couple messes I made, Mother stopped bringing playdates over. She said the hush money alone would drive our good family to ruin. My inability to bond with humans has lent credence to my belief that I am of a different species, clearly a more evolved form of homo sapien. When I was a boy, Mother's manservant would take me deer hunting, and the rush I felt when I trapped the animal in the pen and shot it is the same rush I get when I discover another leech. A predator who has outsmarted his nimble prey. I have also been blessed with an immunity to the baser desires of men. I had seen too many times the irrationality women can invoke becoming the downfall of an otherwise powerful man. I have

never seen the appeal of mating, as it seems rather unclean and compromising.

Being of a separate species can be lonely though. Sometimes I dream of the day when my Eve will emerge. She will come from a mountaintop, or perhaps out of the wild. She will look just like me, with a thin blond moustache and piercing green eyes. She will say, "My name is Phillip Vanderbilt the Third, and I have dreamed about you my whole life." And I will say, "My name is also Phillip Vanderbilt the Third." And I will lay her down and run my fingers through her wispy chest hair, and we will give birth to countless sons and daughters who look just like us, and we will name them Phillip Vanderbilt the Third. They will rule over the leeches down below, and the diseased planet I am looking down upon through my window will belong to them. It will be glorious.

And they will have the Super-Blood. While my body is weak from the constant transfusions and blood treatments, I can already feel my power growing. Dr. Greuber is 50 times the doctor that leech Dr. Simmons was. The poison he fed me made me feel half asleep at all times, like my mind was a camera attached to my body, watching passively as it took me from place to place. "It's for your own protection," he said. "You have no idea how dangerous you are!" The *nerve* of some people! It is *leeches* like him who show me how necessary people with Benjamin's skill-set can be. Dr. Greuber understands what I truly am, and with every pint he borrows from my veins and enhances, I am closer to realizing my true form. My instincts have become so strong as of late, I can sense a leech just from their smell.

Now there is a siren blaring in my cabin. For the price I paid to be on this Ark, this level of inconvenience is unacceptable! I looked out my window to see what all the ruckus was about, but as I presumed, we are peacefully flying over the mountains. You can bet Arktec customer service will be hearing an earful from Benjamin.

The first time I actually *smelled* a leech was upon meeting the pilot of this god forsaken Ark. Herb Grainer, is his name. Or rather, *was* his name. I knew something was off about him the moment I boarded the Ark. His arrogant smile. His thick mustache. The way he said, "Howdy, Mr. Vanderbilt," like I was some sort of ranch hand. He

even looked offended when I told him, “That’s Phillip Vanderbilt the Third to you.”

So I’ve been watching Herb, and what I’ve found is fascinating. Despite the wedding ring he wears on his finger, Herb seems to share a lot of smiles with the flight attendants. You may say what Herb does in his personal life is Herb’s business, but not in the Ark. Philandering leads to pregnancy, which leads to another mouth to feed. Not that our fair pilot cares about food rations. Just yesterday, as I watched him from the back of the cafeteria, he confirmed everything I believed about him. Herb is a *leech*. After he received his pre-portioned lunch, he used that disarming smile to convince the serving girl to give him a second helping. I wanted to stand up and yell, “I don’t believe that belongs to you, Herb,” but I didn’t wish to show my hand too soon.

Instead, Herb received a very special gift this morning, from my own personal kitchen. “For your fine and honest job,” read the note. Seared filet mignon, buttered asparagus and steamed oysters seemed suitable for Herb. Because I know he has such a hearty appetite, I made sure to give him twice what a normal man would require to be satisfied. With, of course, double the cyanide. It was the last dish my chef prepared before Benjamin relieved him of his duties.

That is probably what all of these disturbances are about. Somebody, probably the co-pilot, found our dear Herb dead over his food. While this may seem like calamity, I can assure you it is not. It only takes one man to fly this vessel, and the co-pilot is just as capable as Herb to keep the Ark on its path. In the end, all I did was promote the co-pilot. We do seem to be flying closer than usual to the mountains though. I suppose if Benjamin were here, I would ask him if he specified that the meal was *only* for Herb. My senses are so strong right now that I can see exactly which peak the Ark is going to collide with. While this will prove fatal for the *leeches*, it will be a mere inconvenience for me. The super blood will keep me alive.

Maybe some fresh air is just what I need.

Ode to a Difficult Semester

by Gabriel Mianulli

O, laborious, arduous semester,
Brandish thy weapons, we shall finish this fight!
Show me thy best might, restrain nothing!
Let me measure my worth by clashing with thine sturdiest armors
and most sinister siege weapons.
May no vehicular complications or lack of parking territories
prevent me from this quest to slay thee.
Do not fear my army's reluctance to engage in battle.
We are fighting wars of our own on many fronts,
in less-than temperate climates, under collapsing leadership.
We shall not bend the knee to thine tenacity,
we believe in thine causes. We stand here week through week
concealing weaknesses,
accepting thine challenges and stacking them onto our own.
To us, thou art just another potato in the sack we sling
over our shoulders and up the hill;
a heavy weight and a hard climb.
O semester, we pardon and plea
Get steeper! Give us everything thy got!
The strongest of us shall prevail and conquer,
hardened by thine trials and errors.
We seek to spank thine hind quarters into shape
If it be not the other way around.
Harken to our grievances, if they be presented to thee.
Brandish thy sharpest weapons, dearest semester of determination;
the battle will be bloody, but the victors will emerge in splendor.

Letters to an Imagined Father

by Haley Sargent

I dreamt of you recently. You and I and my mother and brother were on my mother's bed, but in my room – don't ask me why. You were lying back. I examined the bruise around your left knee. It was the sickly yellow-green of a wound almost healed. At your request, I massaged your leg, gently searching for the source of your pain. I left momentarily to get you a heating pad, and when I came back, I could not return. I was lost and tangled in a forest of hanging clothes. Tumbling and falling and making a mess – you all laughed at me as I desperately tried to clean them up. Not a cruel, mocking laugh, but one of a shared experience of ridiculousness. Bruises. It's your bruise I most remember, standing out against your pale, hairy shin. Bruised body, bruised heart, bruised mind, bruised ego. My biological father – or should I say the man that fathered me – ran off to Wisconsin. He picks out little pieces of his brain and rolls them up into joints. It's as if he lives in a parallel dimension – half here, half there. Sometimes I imagine you so strongly it's as though I can feel you. How? How can one feel something they've never felt? I can feel your whiskers on my cheek. I can feel your warmth as I imagine being snuggled up against you, like a child, watching mindless TV. I imagine laughing at the stories of your youth. Your bear-hug embrace is like the fancy soap I once found at the bottom of a dusty box, whose fragrance I knew by heart but whose origin I couldn't place. I wonder at times if my mom and brother want you here as much as I do. I'll probably never know though since my mother is a tree and my brother is a rock.

Unbinding

by Jennifer Meinhardt

Dark as shit sitting on snow. A pasture blurring beneath
the onslaught of rain. Dripping rivulets
run round, front to back, tracking each individual phalanx.
I dig my nails deeper, attempting to drag the filth that's
wedged into the soil of my skin.

The grime remains, imprinted in the thread
of my jeans, and the genes that make up
the code of my DNA. The legacy left from
generations of farmers leaving their marks for
less reward on the unpaved land of their lineage.

My shoulders, stitched from genetics and
undeveloped muscle, sore from hoofing and hauling.
A compounding ache, straining to pull the reins to
keep control of an animal larger than the cars that cut
repeating paths across the contours of the city.

The day remains imprinted on my body, a
wagon wheel turning in rotation like the Moon around the
Earth, the Earth around the Sun, and the earth still stuck to my skin.
The galaxy, unraveling around us as stardust reinvents itself
continuously, even inside of me.

Trapped, in the cracks and creases of my fingers
like the rows of a field fresh from plowing. They cross
the landscape that makes my palms. I look down, seeing them
as though from amongst the clouds. Dirt, dust,
I wash it away and it circles, swirling, down the drain.

How I Know I'm Fucked

by Rachel Lindo

I find it funny how a month ago I wanted these feelings to burn in
Hell.

For them to strike a match against themselves while I watched
with an anxious glee.

But now I want these feelings back,
I crave their ashes. My heart is
push-pull when it comes to him.
A child and a wise woman.

Both want to dive deep into the Underworld,
dance with the flames so they, too,
can be with the feeling of—

love.

Shit, I wanna burn bad with love.
I wanna taste brimstone as I claim the word on my tongue.
I wanna singe the tips of my fingertips as I reach out
for *him*.

I know I said I wouldn't set myself on fire
to keep others warm but, baby,
I'm owning this box of matches
and they're trapped in my hands.
My thumb grazes each wooden match
like it's his cheek. When the match head
strikes, the room smelling of sulfur,
I can't help but close my eyes.

There's a smile on my lips when I do it—

When I act on my impulse to leap into love's
hot, hot embrace.

Yes, I'm setting myself on fire with disaster.
I'm burning myself down. But I
don't care—no, I do care. Care too much.
I say I've lit the match, but I haven't yet.

At the same time, I've already done it
months ago, without noticing it.

What's that fact about how houses blow up?
How carbon monoxide with its silent scentless self
can creep under our noses just to
kiss the slightest spark we created when we
plugged in our phones so we could send out:

Hey, it's been awhile. How are you?

Hobbes in Space

by Feith Sanchez



Ruth and Politics

By Geoffrey Ayers

I remember when I saw Ruth and Naomi
stepping off the plane at MSP.
They weren't here on vacation.
On the TV there was a protest,
white christians against immigration.
Forgetting their sisters here in the airport.
Losing their culture.

Israel at the McDonalds.
He makes the burgers,
he pulls the fries out of
the burning oil.
He's a father of nations,
but he's wage slaved to Laban.
Seven years he's gotta work,
then he'll get lucky and get outta there
not a moment to soon.

When did my people decide that Jesus
was a hipster?
When did my people decide that exiles
should stay lost where they stand?

We like to burn Luke 4:18 on wood
and hang it on our mantelpiece.
We really love kitschy shit like that.
But at the base of our spine we still have a reflex
that strikes out the poor, the oppressed, the captive.

I don't know man, where did we get it wrong?

For a nation of exiles we sure
are a welcoming bunch.

A Damaged Hand

By Vicky Erickson



Julia the Defeater

By Natasha Miller

Today we were going to be lions. As usual, I was chosen to be the father lion. I told Kristina many times that just because I was four months older, didn't mean I needed to be the dad for our play-pretends. I told her once that my mom was actually older than my dad (which wasn't true) to prove to her that a man isn't automatically the older parent. She responded by shoving me to the ground and I haven't brought it up since, because it would be a waste of time. So, of course, I was a little upset about being the stupid father again. But in my mind I decided that the other girls couldn't play a convincing pretend dad like I could. So, I was okay with making it work.

"Julia can be the mom," Kristina said, pursing her lips.

"No way, my sister is not going to be my wife," I remarked. My nose crinkled up and I crossed my arms over my chest, "you can be the mom and Julia can be the cub. Now let's start."

"No. I'm the decider, Jasmine. This is my backyard and I came up with the game," she got closer to my face. Her blue eyes were mean and her chocolate-stained mouth meaner. I just glared back at her. Kristina could scare any of the other neighborhood kids but she couldn't get to me. My younger sister, Julia, glued to my side, resembled an antsy puppy. I knew she didn't care what character she played, she just wanted to belong in the group. She tugged endlessly at my T-shirt.

"I'll be the mom and Julia can be the cub," Kristina spoke, giving Julia a nasty stare. She skipped away to her trampoline, her jean skirt flowing delicately. She continued, "this will be our family's den. Now let's start playing."

Her backyard was a massive, green field; a vegetable garden was organized on the right, a swimming pool to the left, a playground surrounded by a mini forest (really there were five trees in an awkward circle, but we just considered it a forest for our play-pretends) was located in the very back, and a giant trampoline

nestled in the center of the yard. Everything was protected by a metal fence that kept us locked in as prey for Kristina Ross.

Julia followed me to the mini forest. She was prancing around while showing off her missing front tooth with a big grin. Her soft auburn curls matched my own, and they bounced to the beat of her steps. I hollered back to Kristina, in my character voice, "I'm going to teach our cub how to hunt."

She responded sweetly, "okay, darling. Don't be too long!"

Julia and I started to crawl on our hands and knees, and then I crawled onto the tower of the playground. Julia reciprocated my steps.

"Why is she so mean?" Julia whispered, taking a seat next to me. Our legs dangled off the balcony, kicking steadily like the cool, summer breeze.

"She can't hear you from all the way over here, you don't have to whisper," I giggled. I pulled a neon pink hair-tie from my wrist and pushed back the loose hairs from Julia's face. "Kristina just likes to be in charge, that's all," I started to tie the band around her locks.

Julia huffed, "not fair."

I nodded in agreement.

Kristina chased all the neighbor girls like it was a chore. She would put on a show by gripping their braids and spitting on their brand new sneakers. She was loud, annoying, and aggressive. Her favorite move was a sudden, harsh push to the shoulders. She never disappointed with that. Two months ago, when I had first started to play with Kristina, I remembered being fixated at the end of her fluffy bed, calmly waiting for something to do. Her bedroom was huge; it screamed purple and ponies, everything a ten year old girl could dream of. She dwelled in the biggest house of the neighborhood, so it seemed fitting that her parents could afford to give her room a royal makeover (and everything else about her too, matter of fact). My bedroom was small and plain compared to this, but I didn't care too much because I liked my room the way it was.

I picked up one of her many teddy bears to observe.

"Don't touch anything," she had hissed, yanking the bear from my fingers. But that didn't stop me.

My feet carried me to the other side of the room, and I twitched my head to the side to see if she was watching me. She was, like an animal. I halted in front of her piggy bank, gave it a good look, then robotically picked it up. I was giggling to myself, until I felt two grubby paws clip onto my shoulders. We wrestled on the ground, screaming and hollering. Luckily, I had longer finger nails so I was able to defeat my psychotic opponent by scratching at her eyes. I learned two things that day; to never test Kristina Ross, and that I had the power to defeat her. She stomped upstairs and cried to her mom. I quietly slipped out the front door and back to my house without getting caught. I was no longer afraid of Kristina. Of course, she still made the effort to hurt me every once in a while.

“What are we gonna hunt for today, Papa?” Julia chirped. I had already forgotten we were pretending to be lions. I looked up for a second to think.

“We’re hunting for some zebra, which is my favorite,” I said and hopped off the tower, landing crookedly on my feet. Julia slipped and fell to her knees, but it didn’t seem to bother her. “Daughter, remember to be quiet, so you don’t scare away the food.”

Kristina’s grass had been neglected proper care, so the strands were long and perfect for hiding from a zebra. A toy car that belonged to Ken and Barbie was laying upside down a few feet ahead; a perfect meal.

“Do you see that, cub?” I pulled Julia closer to me and pointed to the car, “that’s a full-grown zebra.”

Julia’s eyes widened in awe. “Are we gonna catch it?”

“By surprise,” I added with a wink.

Our shoulders were hunched forward, and our legs were ready to pounce. “Ready...” I breathed, “set...GO!” The both of us leaped onto the toy car, giggling as we accidentally smacked heads.

“We caught a zebra, we caught a zebra!” The cub sang.

“Now,” I said, “we have to bring this back to-”

“Hey!” An angry voice interrupted, “What’s going on? I’ve been waiting to play!”

Kristina had her arms crossed, her eyebrows knit together, and her foot tapping on the ground. I knew she was waiting for me to come up with a clever answer before trying to beat me up.

I simply stated, “I was showing our cub how to hunt.”

“I didn’t forget, dummy. But we’re all supposed to play lions *together*,” she grabbed the collar of my T-shirt and yanked me up to stand in front of her. I pushed her hand away.

“Stop it, Kristina, we were gonna include you.”

“Then do it now before I kick you both out of my yard,” she huffed.

I stood there with my hands on my hips. Kristina was getting out of control, and I didn’t want to play her games anymore. I knew she was just trying to show little Julia who was boss, so she was acting extra mean. I decided that Julia and I could play lions with the other neighborhood kids. Even by ourselves would be better than this.

“You don’t need to kick us out, we’re leaving,” I spat on her grass and took Julia’s wrist. But she doesn’t budge from her spot on the ground. “Julia, come on,” I said between my teeth. Any minute now Kristina was going to build enough strength to swing at me, and that’s not something I wanted Julia to watch. I started to drag her across the yard, and she doesn’t hold back her unpleasant wailing. But I don’t care because I’m too focused on the lovely brown house across the street, patiently waiting for Julia and I’s return.

Suddenly, I’m pushed from the back and I felt my hand separate from my sister’s. My nose banged onto the ground. Blood dripped down to the tip of my tongue. My upper body slowly rose up, and I realized then that I’m spread on the graveled street. I immediately locked eyes with Julia, who’s standing a good distance behind me. Just what I thought, she’s horrified and tears pooled down her cheeks.

“Say you’re sorry, Jasmine,” Kristina taunted, digging her sneaker into my back so I couldn’t fully stand up.

“I’m not sorry for anything.”

I felt two paws clipping onto my shoulders, and I knew what was coming next. Suddenly they aren’t there anymore. I heard a freakish scream and a loud thud. I whipped around and to my amazement, Julia is sitting on top of Kristina Ross, flailing her little arms as punches to her back, preventing her from pouncing on me. Kristina’s blue eyes are wild, desperately clawing at the gravel to escape. Her nose is bleeding as well. I can’t help but smile and giggle. Before things got too messy, I took Julia’s small hand once more, and we run the rest of the way to home-sweet-home. I don’t expect Kristina to stand up anytime soon though. She’ll be down for a while.

“Thanks for saving me,” I giggled and hugged Julia as we trudged inside the house. She grabbed me tightly.

“I don’t ever want to play with her ever again,” she said.

“Never again,” I reassured my little sister.

I had learned something new today; my sister also had the miraculous power to defeat Kristina Ross.

RIP'd

by Rachel Lindo

You came to me six years ago,
so rich in blue hues darker than ink.

I wore you around my thighs,
where fat had spread and stretched
you out until you were forced to
chafe yourself.

When I found you I thought:
Wow, what a great deal.
It wasn't often people found you
at such an affordable price.

Your brand had odd origins,
going back to an archaic time
when boats were our only means
of travel across oceans.

You were reliable—always
an option when I couldn't decide
what to wear.

But wearing you wore you down.

A tear ripped seams in an unfortunate place.
Now I wonder how to decipher this.
Was it your shot at revenge
for our three months break when being
with you got too hot for us?

I've grown attached to you; grown in you

and there's no way to deny that truth.
You had been my new layer of skin, hugging
my calves, shaping my curves, and
caressing my hips.

But now a visible hole exposes
my thigh, making it possible for the
elements to weather me down
just like what I had done to you.

Now I realize you're a batshit crazy ex
holding a grudge—Too bad
my sympathy for you is
going along on your ride
down the trash chute.

Julian's Workshop

by Petra Asani

I love the way the breeze blows through my hair when I sit outside on the porch. The bright natural light warms me from head to toe like a hot, chocolate drink. The melodies of nature, those of birds calling to one another and wind chimes whistling softly in the cool Minnesota autumn, string together to form symphonies even Mozart could not put down on paper. Perhaps it is this combination of the perfect music, weather, and a soft, cushioned patio chair that leads me to wander from my original plan to do homework. As my scan the cookie cutter houses blindly, I spot an old man reclined on a faded, baby blue sofa two houses down. He appears to be sleeping peacefully, but without warning he rapidly slaps what I assume is an insect on his face before relaxing soundlessly back into his dream world. I assume he is the new neighbor who moved last week, but I have been so busy with school and homework that I haven't seen him before.

I observe him for a while and can't make up my mind as to who he is. He wears big blue overalls and large brown boots over his worn, old grey jeans. His shortly cropped, snow white hair barely covers the crown of his head, which he rests on his chest. After a couple minutes of silent observation, I am rewarded with some movement as I watch him slowly stand up and stretch his arms above his head. I know what's coming next, but neglect to turn my head and am caught red handed. He begins walking toward me, so I quickly make myself look occupied with homework. I glance up, hoping he altered his course, but he continues to haltingly shuffle toward my house. I start gathering my homework and shut down my laptop to convey my intention to retreat to the safety of my own room, but am too slow to avoid a confrontation with the old man.

"Why were you staring at me?" he inquires, tilting his head slightly to one side with his hands on his hips.

"I'm sorry, my eyes just wandered. I was just considering how to solve a problem in my homework," I stammer, unsure how to explain my curiosity and my flaming red cheeks.

“Well, I hope you don’t do that to all your neighbors. Not everyone is as nice as I am.” He winks mischievously, lowering his arms to his sides. I get the feeling he knows more than he is letting on. “I’m Julian by the way. My wife Syracuse is visiting our grandbaby, otherwise she would have introduced herself right away.” He stands expectantly, waiting for me to introduce myself.

“Nice to meet you. I’m, umm, Ysera. My parents are inside if you want to talk to them,” I direct, pointing to the door, hopeful that he will do as I suggest and leave me alone to wallow over my unfortunate timing.

He cocks his head to the right and almost mockingly answers my query, but I see a slight twinkle in his eyes that begs me to differ on that assumption. “If I had wanted to talk to your parents, I would have walked past you and rang the doorbell, or asked you right away if they were home. I’m actually here to see you.”

“Me?! Why me?” I can feel the sweat starting to collect in my armpits and stifle the urge to run inside before getting a response.

“I don’t mean to sound creepy, as it might seem, but I’ve seen you out before and I think you are a unique girl. It’s time for you to understand your true capabilities.”

Yep. He sounds creepy. But at the same time, I am intrigued. It’s not so much the “unique” part that interests me. Everyone tells me that at school and my parents never stop telling me I’m “special”, but they say that to everyone. The only unique thing about me is my name. Other than that, I look like every other girl in my high school, with shoulder length brown hair, brown eyes, and dark tanned skin from swimming outdoors all summer. No, I am more compelled by the honesty of his grey eyes and his straightforwardness.

“And how exactly am I ‘unique’?” I demand, intrigued by his random revelation and annoyed by the clear falsity of the statement.

“Come with me and I will show you,” he nods toward his house, the corners of his mouth shifting quickly up into a smile.

He turns around and walks sprightly back to his house, but slow enough that I can catch up if I decide to do so. I stare at his

retreating figure, turn to glance back at my house quickly, and take a deep breath before speed walking toward him. He continues to ignore me as the door hinges creak softly upon his entry. I stop just outside the door, wondering why I even decided to do this, and then step over the threshold.

I did not expect this at all. Not even close to this. I feel like I'm walking through a portal into an 18th century palace. The ceiling and wallpaper are of a shiny, bright gold, creating a luxe atmosphere completely contrasting the baby blue sofa on Julian's white, wooden porch. Glass tables line the hallway and a red felt carpet stretches across the floor. Beautiful black and white portraits of Julian and his family line the walls in carved, lustrous black frames. I dawdle in the hallway much too long and realize I have lost Julian among the corridor of rooms. I quickly peek into each room, impressed by the increasing grandiosity of it all. I pass through a living room at the end of the corridor, if it can even be called that, with a white faux sectional and shiny gold and white fireplace. Before entering the last room, I knock softly on the door three times and turn the gilded door handle when no one responds, unsure what other millionaire worthy display I would gaze upon and where in the world Julian disappeared to.

This room is unlike any of the others. It lacks the gorgeous gold wallpaper of the other rooms and looks almost like a shed in its disarray. A musty, dank odor rises from one corner of the room stacked high with cardboard boxes. Papers are strewn all over the floor and a variety of musical instruments hang on the walls or have been carefully placed in clear, glass cases. I identify an old violin, a black, wooden flute, and a dull, brass trumpet, but the other instruments look completely foreign to me. In the back corner of the room, Julian sits at a large oak desk, working on what looks to be a panpipe.

"You can come a little closer," he quietly beckons, startling me in my reverie. "I love this panpipe because it sounds like a light breeze blowing through the willows by a quiet creek. Beautiful songs like this can normally only be found in nature, but I believe I have found a way to capture them through various instruments." He puts down his chisel, turning to face me, and brings the panpipe carefully to his lips. The melody I hear is exactly what he says it should be, but

to me it's sounds like so much more. My wonder, however, quickly turns to contemplation of my perplexing purpose in all of this.

"That was incredible, but why are you showing me all of this?" I request of Julian. I feel out of place in this masterpiece of music, like a leaf that accidentally blew into a room when the window was left open.

"You have a love for music, do you not? I have seen you when you return home and relax outside, simply listening to the sounds around you. Many do not understand the beauty revealed to them, but you do." He pauses, maintaining the strictest eye contact with me. "More importantly, you understand the song of the birds."

"The what?" I respond, my forehead creasing in confusion.

"The song of the birds. It is the combined melody of each bird's unique song. It's something I can lack the energy to devote myself to, so I offer you my workshop to develop an instrument that imitates true bird sounds, an unachievable task until now."

He steps carefully over the papers on the floor and reaches for a small, golden box hidden in a worn, Oak chest I previously hadn't noticed. The box is small enough to hold at most a small necklace. Inside, a gold, stone shaped instrument sits in the handmade velvet lining of the case. It has nine tiny holes lined around the circumference of the instrument and Julian's signature etched in tiny cursive on top. Julian carefully lifts it out of the case as I lean closer in, and places it gently into my hands.

"This is the Avesophone. It's meant to mimic bird sounds, but I can't quite figure out how to blow into it at the correct angles to match the exact bird calls. I want you to have it because I think you have the potential to unlock its secret."

He nods for me to try it and explains that I must blow into one hole to make various bird calls resonate from the remaining eight holes. He claims that each hole creates a different symphony of bird calls. I slowly bring the Avesophone to my lips and blow into the hole closest to Julian's signature just as I would a flute. I jolt in shock at the screeching noise emanating from the instrument.

“What’s the purpose of this?” I almost throw the instrument, frustrated by the ugliness of the sound I made, before Julian catches my arm and gently realigns the instrument in my hands.

Julian calmly instructs me to be patient and try again, but to force less air into the instrument. “Imagine a fan turned on low that’s streaming cool air on your face. Be that fan.”

I attempt again, this time concentrating on the bird calls I heard earlier whilst reclining on the porch. Julian watches me intently, but I don’t pay him much attention as my focus is drawn toward the instrument and the beautiful song I wish to hear from it. I draw in a deep breath and slowly let out the air in a soft, concentrated stream.

A foreign, bird sound emerges from the instrument sounding like a traditional wooden flute solo. Julian nods for me to keep playing as he points to a chart indicating a Malabar Whistling Thrush. As the air slowly moves from hole to hole, an incredible variety of bird sounds begin to rush out of the instrument to add to their melody to the piece. As each call emerges from the Avesophone, Julian points to their respective bird and his face shines with wonder as the last of the holes emits the sound of a Eurasian Skylark.

I run out of air much too fast and gaze in amazement at the precious, delicate instrument in my hands. Julian looks on the verge of crying and slowly sits back down at the desk.

“That was the most beautiful thing I have heard since my daughter and I first crafted a pan flute.” Julian wipes his eyes and shakes his head to step out of his reverie. “Would you like to work with me on creating more Avesophones to incorporate more bird calls and share this beautiful music with the world?” He waits hopefully and I can’t deny him this one request, especially since I see the beauty of his work and the joy it brings to his soul.

He walks me back home as dusk begins to settle over us, but before I enter the house, I realize I still have one question left.

“How did you know I could do that?” I wait expectantly as he slowly grins and his eyes sparkle with mischief.

“Oh, I just talked with your parents when we moved in and they told me all about their teenage daughter, a flautist who can never concentrate on her homework because she is too busy watching the animals in her yard.” He smiles broadly before turning around and walking back to his house, leaving me on my porch, slightly upset with parents’ description of me, but grateful and excited by the possibilities Julian’s workshop and that tiny instrument afford me.

Alphabet Soup

by Jennifer Meinhardt

A leaf drifts gently to the ground,
swirling in the air like little girls at a wedding,
testing to see if their tulle will float quite like the brides
they may one day become. The chill I feel isn't only
from the breeze. Where are my sweaters? Grateful,
we aren't in the rain getting soaked like the leaves,
incense burns to cover the miasma of rotting mulch.
I stop for a latte on the way home, pumpkin spice is all
the rage, and I shield my eyes as I step out into the sun.
Is it so bright because it remembers the snow will come?
Magnifying intensity, people burn more thoroughly in winter.
I shut the window, it was getting cold. I still develop the cough. 'Tis
the season.

Brothers in sport take to their knees, fans roaring in anger. A
newscaster declares another man dead. My newsfeed is almost
entirely about football. A neighbor yells to shoot the bastards. I
shut the window, it was getting cold. Questions need to be asked
when a gun cracks. Killing civilians by non-civilians, this is a
problem we pretend is not. The protest ends as the anthem
concludes and
the players kick off, the fans now cheer. Now it's a game. They kneel
again,
and I cheer. Violence will come and go, but for now it seems to be
staying in
town. Xenophobia, checked in at the hotel on 5th Street. Don't you
know it lives here?
The change of a season, a young man's warm body turns cold.
Zipping about the players run, scandal in their midst.

Clear but for boxes, this bare bedroom is not mine for long. For a month we've lived out of suitcases, they crowd the wall.

Harmonics,

Billy Joel helps us feel at home. How silly it is to not have coffee cups.

I

shut the window, it was getting cold. Pushing boxes aside, Rachell and I

make a wall and wave through it. This is the foyer, I say aloud. Toni claims the den is full of wolves. We unpack the books, but with no shelves Rachell piles them in an even line, like hard backed soldiers preparing to march. Almost uniform, she puts her mattress on top of them to

move it off the floor. Outside children run, unaware how loud they are in their bliss.

Dreamscape

by Haley Sargent

We dance through life's mosaic pieces like

A mural on my ceiling of

dandelion seeds on the wind in

the daydreams of summer under

the clear, cold air of winter twilight,

the crystal light of stars,

over alien ground.

containing spongy beds of fungus.

Stale, fairground cotton candy is

An old romance, like

a gentlemanly goodnight at my door, and

being carried home because

my backyard childhood caused

your feet are swollen from dancing.

beehive buzzing.

Bare feet:

My chest –

tough and cracked from summer asphalt –

cannot contain my love.

while the orchestra is warming up,

Our friendship bubbles.

and my heart doesn't fit right in my rib cage as

Seedlings burst through the soil.

The Fire from One's Soul

by Vicky Erickson



Somehow

By Katharine Johnson

The dirty dishes piling high on the counter
The family is here
Been here for days.
Toys scattered on the floor
For the toddler to play
So innocent and unaware
Just learning how to live.
Countless pill containers on the table top
I know that some won't even be opened.
He's sick. He's dying.
He knows it.
We're all here for him
Because we love him
He knows it.
A sad sight, but a happy one
Full of community
Five generations crammed in one small apartment
Somehow everyone fits perfectly
The present, past, and future.
Hope and no hope at the same time
Somehow it's possible
Somehow death is beautiful
But I'm still not sure how.

Drop the 'G'

by Rachel Lindo

I've come to that point of night when you've read too much
of one thing and in your head, while you read, there's that weird
beat

that drags each word. Then stops abruptly.
For no reason but to be the reason to carry some last minute
jab at a purposefully offbeat kinda bullshit rhyme.

Maybe that's my brain fidgeting while college
is jabbing IVs straight into it—That'll flood my body;
my cells with knowledge that's undefined
but defined by some bald old man smoking a pipe
and drinking scotch.

The knowledge is enough for me to bat my cat away.
To ignore her sweet, rumbling purr while she shows
me her affection by stretching out her pink-padded paws,
yearning

for me to pay attention. But after signing up for a cult-like
academia league, she's just a nuisance getting in my way.
She jumps off my bed, feeling betrayed while I
take a half minute to send out:

my brain is dyin

to a friend who's from out of state. The message sent twice.
I blame my hand that's been trapped in a cramp
since I've read and annotated the first chapter of a textbook
three hours ago.

Maybe that's why I've dropped the 'g'. My brain's OD'ing

from the never-ending flow of I-just-have-to-read-one-more
prestigious way
of saying:

Yes, I took a shit.

Written in last year's poetry anthology.

Jettenbach

by Isaac Nidzgorski

It was perhaps our smallest kitchen,
Though it had more floor space than most rooms.
Tiny stove, tiny oven
Tiny sink, tiny fridge.
But we were in love.

The back windows, a mural
To nature's finest art:
The rolling hills and fields of green,
Old homes and horses sprinkled about.

The pantry hid under the stairway.
It held our favorite drinks.
It, too, had its own view,
Facing the delicious figs growing on their trees.

Our precious dog,
So soft, so golden
Would sit by the doors to watch the farmer,
To watch his horses and dog run around the hills.

The birds would sing.
Some flew into the room.
Some patiently waited for us
To fill their bird seed.

I'd walk home from the hills,
Having explored nearby villages.
I'd cross the streets and fields.
I'd step over the bridge, over the lazy German creek
To my mother with her well prepared meal.

Our neighbor would stop by.
"Guten Morgen," he'd say.
"Ich habe Äpfel für dich."

And he'd hand us a basket.

"Danke," my mom would say.

"Tschüss," as he walked back.

And she'd make us a pie or perhaps even cobbler

As the fresh sun rose over those conifer coated hills.

CHASER

by Rachel Lindo

They only speak amid
brewing storms.

Lips parting with each thunderclap;
tongues curving to from vowels when

lighting strikes. Boom then crash,
the gods clap.

Their ethereal palms collided when
his words pattered with rain.

His words so smooth; so warm from
summer's storms

meet hers. Her words cold and biting
like fall's foreboding frost.

A laugh
jolts from his throat, cracking

a tree's trunk wide open. It's like
his thumbs dug into a pomegranate's

bleeding flesh, ripping it in half,
just to show her what's inside.

A gasp,
smelling of electricity, fizzes through her teeth.

Rumbling the sky are her secrets formed into hail;
heavy and spherical; a perfect weight. A perfect form.

Each one trapped in an inch-deep layer of dust,
impatient to drop.

A silence
claims the air in between them. It's

humid and thick, signaling a new
storm is just 'bout ready to begin.

He speaks fluidly like the stream
flowing fast from rooftops down into grass.

She listens but is distracted when
the clouds shake like a bathed dog.

Ice scatters and falls,
bringing winter to August.

He tenses and cranes his neck up towards the sky.
They run, dodging

this storm's bountiful gifts like a dance.
She wraps her fingers around his wrist and

whispers: *Stay.*

Downtown River Reflections

by Jerry Carrier

Yellow and white city lights devil-dance upon the water.
Towered silhouettes elongate upon the surface.
A violet-blue-black horizon lay against a curtain of solid black.

Is reason at twilight an illusion?
Am I at a stoplight at an intersection to nowhere?
Rain puddles on concrete look like windows to hell.

The night air smells acrid and tired,
the result of congestion on its way home.
The cars shuttle the apathetic to nowhere.

The colored lights from the bars, cafés and theatres
scream that the city at night is joy.
The drunken homeless man lying in his urine says otherwise.

The Last Hunt

By Jennan Kellogg

The last time I saw my father was on the hunt that nearly killed me. My mother, sister, and I lived deep in the forest bordering Eledharnad; the creatures that lived alongside us were said to be twisted and evil, corrupted by the shadows. The forest was so dark and thick that no sunlight reached the forest floor, only adding to the stories that were told. Father, as a lord and cousin of the princes could not travel into enemy territory to be with us. As mother was the assassin who'd once tried to kill him, I was not surprised that by the time I was an adolescent, he'd seen us no more a dozen times. An elven lord and a human assassin had no right raising half-breed children.

That day mother was away on a mission and my sister `Rona was occupied with the wolf dens deep in one of the forest glades. This was my chance—maybe my only chance—to see the sunlight! We were barely fifteen and our mother was strictly training us to follow in her footsteps. Thus, we were expressly forbidden from leaving the safety of the woods, but how I *ached* to see the sunlight.

I'd woken to the dim grey light of morning, waited until `Rona left our shack, and then I snuck away. Every footstep mattered, every breath was taken with care. I knew mother had eyes in the forest, watching us. I couldn't risk being detected. Oh, I knew what would happen if she knew I'd set foot beyond our borders.

I ducked and wove my way through the thick undergrowth, following the strengthening shafts of light. When the trees began to thin, I crept to the edge of the forest. My eyes burned and watered from the strengthening light. I blinked sharply, looking up through the branches overhead. Blue. I could see *blue*.

I took a shuddering breath, centered myself, and stepped forward. The trees simply stopped. Before me, as far as the eye could see, was nothing but *grass*, waist high and golden. The prairie stretched out beneath the expanse of blue sky, like nothing I'd ever seen before.

I took a pace forward and froze.

“*Never* rush out onto the meadow.” I remembered mother’s sharp voice and the admonitory cuff she’d given me the first time she’d led us to the edge of the forest. We’d never gone out onto the prairie before, but she’d shown us through the screen of trees. “There’s danger there. Hunters. Never, ever go there alone.”

Cautiously, I looked up and down the tree line. Nothing. I looked across the fields and saw—nothing. Nothing but deer dotting the landscape as they grazed. I took a step forward, then another, and another. I stopped every few paces to look around, but nothing changed. The black trees stood behind me, the prairie lay out before me, and the sky loomed overhead. I felt a wave of dizziness looking up, but a laugh bubbled up in my chest. Standing there in the golden grass, arms outstretched, I felt the kiss of the sun for the first time against my skin. I could have cried.

I don’t know how long I stood there, soaking up the rays of sunlight. Finally, I set out. I didn’t know where I was going, but I knew I wanted to put distance between myself and the forest that was my entire world. As I walked, I realized the land wasn’t as flat as it had first appeared. Hills rose and sank into dales. I was used to the rough terrain of the forest floor, the twisted roots and gullies, the uneven ground, but I quickly found my legs aching from climbing up and down the knolls.

The deer blinked at me as I walked past, but few reacted to my presence. I couldn’t believe my eyes as I went. Among the grasses were tansy, ragweed, mullein, speedwell, knapweed, thyme, and yarrow. There were also many, many plants I didn’t recognize. How could mother have never brought me out here before? I could use all the plants in conjunction with my healing. That’s what I was for, after all. I’d used them dried before, when mother brought them to me, but never fresh.

I stopped, using my belt knife to cut the plants that I knew and carefully added them to the pouches. The sun rose and fell past its zenith as I worked. I bound my hair back after it repeatedly fell in my face, as I did so, I noticed it was the same gold as the swaying

grasses around me. How odd that I'd never noticed such a thing before.

A stag came over to investigate what I was doing. He stood beside me, watching me with large, dark eyes. I recognized him by the scars on his flank and leg as a deer I'd healed after I found it being attacked by the wolves. I'd never understood `Rona's fascination with the night beasts, but that was why she was mother's prodigy and I wasn't.

The stag grazed while I worked. The sunlight was warm on my back and the air was sweet with the herbs.

The stag tensed and froze. I looked up. His muscles rippled beneath his brown pelt. His ears swiveled forward, eyes alert. I stilled, watching the stag watch the horizon. The stag snorted and stamped. The other deer's heads all came up and turned to the west. He did it again and again. My heart leaped clenched. He gave a throaty cry and that's when I heard it. The baying of the hounds.

Barks and howls filled the air. The ground trembled with thundering of hooves. Oh, gods, no.

A dozen riders crested the hill. The horses reared and neighed. Light flashed off their helms and armor. Everything was still for a single moment. It all happened at once. The hounds surged down the hill, the deer leaped, exploding in every direction, the stag screamed and charged. I flew to my feet, turned tail, and ran as fast as I could.

I scrambled up the nearest hill, ran down the other side, and up next. I stumbled up the uneven ground, my hands slammed into the dirt, and I clambered up, fighting through the tangle of weeds. Up and down I scabbled, my breath tearing in my lungs.

I didn't remember the hills being so steep or the forest being so far away. Panting, I looked over my shoulder and screamed. A massive hound lunged at me, teeth bared and snarling. It slammed into my chest, carried me off my feet, and we crashed down into the gully. Screaming and thrashing, I punched and kicked. I clawed for my belt knife, only to find it gone! The beast's foul breath rolled across my face. Its full weight pinned me to the ground.

I couldn't breathe!

I closed my eyes and turned my head away, sobbing for air. My heart pounded in my chest, fighting to escape. Teeth sank into my shoulder, the hound snarled, and shook its head. It was suddenly torn off me; the force rolled me over and my eyes flew open. I saw the hound caught on the stag's antlers and get thrown clean into the air.

The stag stood over me, ears flattened, and eyes wild. I climbed to my feet just in time to see a horseman galloping toward us. The stag wheeled in front of me and snorted violently. Not waiting a second, I hauled myself onto its back. It spun around and we flew across the meadow.

I heard the shouts of the riders, but I didn't look back. I squeezed my eyes shut, feeling sick. With each jarring bound of the stag, I clung on tighter. I heard a bark and felt the snap of jaws just miss my leg. I looked down and three beasts closed in behind us. The stag's hind legs flew out and it kicked one of them.

To get away from the hounds, we swerved up a ridge and nearly collided with a horseman. His flame red hair hung about his face in braids; his green eyes widen with shock. Father! The stag lowered his head and charged. The horse neighed, reared, and nearly threw off its rider. The stag pivoted and we raced away. Cresting the next hill, I saw it! The forest! The black trees that were our only haven!

"Go!" I cried. My hands pressed against the stag's withers, with a bust of healing magic, he ran forward. I staved off his exhaustion, feeding energy to his weary muscles.

Closer and closer we raced! Two horses came up behind us from either direction.

"Don't! He's just a child!" I heard my father cry out.

With one last leap, we surged into the forest. The two horses veered sharply away, barely avoiding the trees.

The stag charged through the dense trees, leaping felled logs, and twisting through the undergrowth. Darkness swallowed us and the sunlight disappeared. Panting, I cut the flow of magic and the stag slowed to a stop. He panted and I hung my head, shaking. As my pounding heart began to slow, the stag picked his way through the undergrowth, ghosting through the gathering mist. I listened to the stifling silence of the thickening forest and trembled.

We came to a spring and I dropped off the stag's back. I pressed my own back against one of the tick trees, sank to the ground, closed my eyes, and wrapped my arms around my knees. I knew they'd never find me here, deep in the forest, hidden away, with tendrils of mist curling around me. I raised my head to look at the pool of water. I knew it was beautiful here, but it was nothing compared to the open meadow beneath the sky. However, I also knew what would happen when mother found out—there was no way she wouldn't.

And I was right. She returned that night with unbridled rage. We fled our forest sanctuary, leaving our very home, and travelled north to a village where her human kinsmen dwelled.

"Never go back there!" Mother cautioned fiercely before she took Rona away, leaving me in the shadow of my uncle. I didn't see my mother again until shortly before she passed on nor did I see my father again for a hundred years until I stood in the court before his King, the prince who had led the hunt. I never did go out onto the meadow again, nor did my own children.

Dead Body Moving

by Jennifer Meinhardt

The 3rd Street Bridge is over a river
and the waters rush hurriedly below.
Gravity pulls it down along the curvature
of the Earth and over the many tiered cakes
of Saint Anthony falls. I stood and looked
upon the water.
It wore the look of a lover,
sweet and coy
and beckoned me onto the flooded ballroom.
The waves, pushed by the current
moved up and down, capping themselves
with white foamy hats which seemed friendly at first.
The facade fades and it sheds its skin. A coiled snake,
the open palm turns to deadly claws.
Like a fever dream passing,
I recoil.
I move on, danger diverted. David told me
there's no point second guessing things,
not when we're so small and broken.
Weeds have already broken
through my neglected foundation,
and my toe trips on the broken stairs.
Rain, in an equation that combines time and
inevitability equals erosion.
A sandstone sense of self,
absorbing the waters which
flow from the opinions of others,
absorbing, crumbling.
I collapse,
yet before I fall too far a familiar face appears.
Catching my arm

they shore the holes and patch the cracks
to repel the weeds and wetness so they cannot get in.
The box, too heavy in my undeveloped arms
is partially lifted,
the weight of an existence with too many passions.
The divots imprinted in pliable flesh
regain color and blood flow,
a sign of returning life.
The last few years have been slow going,
a fat kid huffing up a too high hill,
pulling a bright red wagon.
Little Radio Flyer, fly me away.
This is what progress looks like.
The clouds which appeared when the storm came clear,
and the sun breaks in waves of gold upon my arms.
I bathe in it,
glowing like gods in medieval paintings, sainted.
The sun shifts and Rachell shifts, pulling me back into its light.
We press together and are comfortable for a change.
Muffled through the panes of my
snazzy red cruiser the Beatles play their refrain
"With a Little Help from My Friends."
It's less lonely here where we laugh
like the children through the adjacent walls,
loud and boisterous until their parents come to scold us.
Hypocrites, but we don't complain.
The joke survives this way.
Toni is convinced the tiny toy truck,
with its lopsided smile like melting waxed plastic
will begin killing soon.
It seems to travel about on its own.
"That's okay," she says as we sidestep it again,
"we'll have moved on by then. "

Zimmer(MN)

by Haley Sargent

I had to remove myself one broken strand at a time. I found solitude and refuge from the July sun within the shell of my room. Empty echoes as I sat alone. Everything was up and gone before I had the chance to ask: "Is this real?" We drifted back and forth through Frosties, collecting the last remnants of our lives. That first night, we huddled together in a cave. We floated away on *Up* balloons. I go back there in my mind sometimes – home. I know the way. I bike up and down the streets of memory. Ask me for directions. Let's go to the DQ by the highway, feel the breeze as the cars pass by. One stoplight or two? We'll take the route our school band marched in the parade. I wonder who still lives there. I'll go back one day – soon – just to look around. See if I still do remember.

Imogen and Twinka at Yosemite

by Autumn Cooper

Maybe by eating pomegranate seeds
that filled her breast she had timidly agreed to stay.

But like all food in hell
it made her hungrier.

Yet her body blossomed, it

exploded:
was made gelatinous
so that she had to disrobe for

silver-stop baths
in front of silent viewers.

And what of her only *visitor*?

Her mother made into
flesh then linseed oil that men
use to keep their elbows soft and eyes blithe.

Even though, her mother knows
that the longer she stays,
the less fruitful she seems and

the more fruit she refuses to the earth.

The Taste and Odor of Colors

by Jerry Carrier

Blue tastes like raspberries in brandy.

Red smells like Vietnamese cinnamon.

Orange tastes like a Dreamsicle to children.

Purple smells like a spring lilac hedge in bloom.

Green tastes like arugula.

White smells like fresh laundry freeze dried on a clothesline under the winter sun.

Brown tastes like freshly brewed tea.

Turquoise smells like pine trees in winter.

Black tastes like fennel and anise seeds.

Gray smells like wet wool.

Yellow tastes like honeyed yogurt.

Translucent smells like time.

Definition Collection: TENUOUS

by Samantha Hendrickson

Definition: Us

Definition: Wait...

Definition: Us?

Something changed

I saw the tightrope in your lips
Instead of the safety net

Balance is our new game
And unsteadiness our new constant

Our arms, once curved around each other,
Now project like wings at broken angles

We can't afford to fall anymore

Rigid (The Meaning of Life)

by Zachary Ethington

Adults are formed from children in much the same way rocks are
formed from lava
Born in the right time and place, and a diamond will appear
The wrong and peat, or a substance used in concrete
But both rocks have a trait in the same
They can't go back to that from which they came
It was chance that made them what they are
Through wide eyes Children soak the world into their neurons
Depending on their point of view
It will be solidified and overnight they'll have closed their eyes
And joined the masses of the blind
Who think their is a light within their mind
Reality is not the sum of 7 billion eyes
If it is than why isn't everybody right

II

The midnight scholar sees it all
From Math to physics
Music and the arts
From the whole
Down to the parts
He processes things with mental agility
Only trumped by his eidetic memory
He composes a sonata in the night
And writes a play in the morning
But when it comes to people
He finds them boring
Dead geniuses speak his language
The kids at school laugh and joke
With each other
But he has no time for such frivolous things
To him
They amount to fantasies
As for women he might as well be widowed and retired
Shroedinger, newton and mozart
Replace his sexual desires!

III

The all star athlete, only 16
And he's the undisputed king
Football in the fall
Basketball in the summer
And soccer in the spring
To his ankle, backwards he can bend
And ta boot he's 6'10
But in school he's dumb as a rock
The girls love him
But call him a typical jock
You see he lives for the squat
That shatters a lung
And makes him feel
like he's been blown away
by a shotgun
5 mile runs before 2 mile sprints
Beers after class on the bed of his truck
His mind isn't somewhere else
Like the honors students
It's in the here and now
In the gym
The friday night lights
And the drunken fights
His grey matter never shimmers
Passed his line of sight
The only thing he can imagine is what girl
he's taking out that night

IIII

Hippie girl rock my world
Take that paintbrush
And give my soul a whirl
Talk poetry
With me
Drunk and on the lam
Running through the park
Dodging lights that flash red and blue
Confused in the dark
Talk shit about uncle sam
And the IRS, his band of merry thugs

Arguments followed by wet hugs
Don't be Mad
It's not
all that bad
I wear many hats
One to Mom and Dad
One to my buddies
And one to you
Because
When you're around
I'm an eccentric hippie dude.

Contributor's Notes

Petra Asani is a PSEO student at Normandale in her senior year of high school. She plans on double majoring in Spanish and Information Systems, but enjoys reading, writing short stories, painting, swimming, and eating chocolate in her free time. She is currently President of the NCC Spanish Club and Minn-Kota Regional VP of South District for the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. She moved from India to the United States in 2007 and currently lives in Apple Valley, MN.

Geoffrey Ayers is student at Normandale currently working towards an AFA in Creative Writing. He intends to continue on to get a BA in English after graduation.

Jerry Carrier is a Normandale Creative Writing student and published author.

Autumn Cooper I am currently working towards my AFA in creative writing, and I am an assistant editor at the Twin Cities based journal Poetry City, USA., where I have had multiple reviews of poetry books published.

Vicky Erickson is a student at Normandale Community College and says this about "The Time Keeper": "This piece is done with pen, and just pen. It is a dragon's eye and it really only took me four hours to complete. This was an interesting piece to me because it was such an odd form and odd color mix."

Zachary Ethington I have been writing poetry and prose since highschool. I am twenty three and aspire to be employed writing for television and movies

Samantha Hendrickson has been in love with the art of storytelling since she can remember, and has been writing since she could pick up a pencil. She began in fiction, but has recently expanded to journalistic writing and poetry to help capture the essence of what she finds most fascinating: raw humanity.

Sarah Jensen I'm Sarah Jensen and I am a student at Normandale Community College. I'm currently just focusing on getting my associates. I placed 2nd in Prose for the Patsy Lea Core Award. I love to write and hope to publish a novel at some point in my life.

Katharine Johnson I am a PSEO student at Normandale Community College. I hope to major in psychology with either a double major or minor in creative writing.

Jennan Kellogg I'm a student at Normandale. I've been doing creative writing since I was sixteen. I hope to become a published author and my goal is to publish a novel before I graduate college.

Rachel Lindo is an AFA Creative Writing major here at Normandale. She often enjoys writing at her grandparent's cabin with the company of her knitting-obsessed mom and her two cats. Her poem, "The Drummer Boys" has been published in the Fall 2016 issue of The Paper Lantern.

Jennifer Meinhardt is AFA Creative Writing Major at Normandale. She likes spending evenings at home with her dog, Watson. In her free time, she paints, reads, and pretends to practice her guitar.

Gabriel Mianulli is 25 year old writer in his final 2 semesters in the AFA creative writing program at Normandale. He likes nature, sushi, having time to read, and coffee strong enough to kill a horse. He dislikes politics but will talk about them if he has too. He has high hopes for humanity.

Natasha Miller I have loved writing ever since I was a little girl; my giant imagination had to be contained in some way. Paper was ideal.

Isaac Nidzgorski I am an undergraduate student at Normandale Community College, working towards my Associate in Science. I work in retail as a manager, and I strive to write more every day.

Feith Sanchez is a student at Normandale Community College.

Haley Sargent is currently working on her AFA in Creative Writing and is hoping to graduate this spring before moving on to the

University of Northwestern to continue her education. When she is not writing, she enjoys reading, art, theatre, and the outdoors.
Philippians 4:13

Christine Somers is President of the Creative Writing Club and says this about her artwork, "Galaxy": "Galaxies are my favorite things to draw. It lets me focus on something apart from my current problems. It's chaotic, massive, without pattern, wild. It's alive. Painting galaxies feels like I'm connecting with a force or being that understands the depth of my pain, the depth of my emotions."

Paul Van Dyke likes to test the limit of human boundaries by eating 63 chicken nuggets in one sitting.

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

Officers and the following members of the Fall 2017 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

Christine Somers, President
Malenie Ven, Secretary
Paul Van Dyke, Treasurer

Bonita Anderson, Petra Asani, Jerry Carrier, Gavin Druyman,
Zachary Etherington, Cadence Fingerholz, Laray Hillson, Leo
Kellogg, Rachel Lindo, Johnny Maes, Harold Sandahl, Beth
Spencer, William Torres, Trevor Zimmerman

Front Cover: "The Time Keeper," by Vicky Erickson

Back Cover: "Galaxy" by Christine Somers

Submit your creative writing to the Spring 2018 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously and acceptance is based on literary merit. Submission links and more information can be found at **www.thepaperlantern.org**.

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

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

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