

The Paper Lantern

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The Time It Takes to Love

by Shelby Lengyel

There's something about that dead weight.
About holding someone somewhere between
asleep and not there yet.

Their two feet dangling while you find
that balance, make your way. And you know
you couldn't but you would, you'd hardly make it

through the door but you'd carry that weight.
All of it. All of them forever or at the very least
the rest of the way regardless of how your arms felt.

Like they'd been above your head for days,
that numbness. That blood going down
feels better than the moment of regain.

When the odd life beneath your skin prickles,
like a pin art board asking around, unable
to translate the sudden absence.

And though I lay beside you now and share stories
into your sleeping palm, admire the way it folds in
on itself, there could never be enough time.

There could never be enough time between
you and me, between those walls of your palm
and I know this when I hold you. I'm most certain

when I set you down. As I count your breaths
that reach me I wonder how your face will change
because right now it looks just like your father's

and I want so badly to keep you this way.
Unknowing. My dead weight next to yours
unknowing, having just carried you in from the car.

Till We Meet Again

by Alissa Ulep

Photo booth from the carnival,
Summer in front of the Eiffel Tower,
Trips to New York.
No longer will blue be your companion,
I will always be there.

Pink Peonies sprout on our first date,
Sunflower's roots that make our love eternal,
Red Carnations displayed my deep love,
No longer will sadness fill the lungs,
I will breathe comforting words.

The white itchy fabric you wore the day of our vows,
The grey shirt with the big orange cat that our grandchildren gave,
The jacket I lent to you the day we met,
No longer will you wear a heavy heart,
I will use my strength to lift you.

The popcorn we strung on and ate during Christmas
The countless amounts of ice cream eaten for nine months
Late night orders of Chinese food we ate on our drives to nowhere,
No longer will you taste the salty tears on your tongue,
My fingers will wipe them away.

Sounds coming from outside your window,
Loud claps of thunder as everything came down,
The peace and melody of our first dance till forever,
No longer will you tune out the sound of our love,
I will make it heard through the rest of time.

Behind the Glass

by Teri Joyce



TAKEN

by Teri Joyce

I don't see
the white male
fully clothed
anonymous behind a camera
but he is there

I see
a photographic subject
clothes taken
stripped even of her pronoun
akin to a "free" couch out on the curb
an object
(no introduction needed)

placed in the desired light
positioned
turned arranged
did he touch "it"? (no permission asked)
adjust the neck or shoulder?

he made a "scientific profile" of this living soul

captured the slope of forehead to chin
the length of ear to jaw the fullness of the lips

the roundness of the skull beneath short wooly hair
hooded eye
looking downward and straight right

did he even notice
the sadness of her face?
expression dead as a taxidermic specimen

young enough, bare breasts would flush her face

thin enough to show an edge of rib cage
a hint of definition at the shoulder

he took her picture, her image, her choice
he took the right to say who looks
 he took an inventory, measurements
 “evidence” to support a racist theory

he took away her story

 he took and took and took

One hundred-thirty-five years later
 an artist found her nameless in a museum archive

saw the woman’s story
 taken
 from home and family, used, enslaved

the artist blew up the image
 drenched it red
 in blood, in rage

hung it in a gallery with thirty-three others for everyone to see
 to grasp what had been taken

I looked and saw what happened
 behind that camera lens

 the white man
 invisible
 but there

Inspired by “You Became a Scientific Profile” in *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995-1996), a photographic exhibition by Carrie Mae Weems

Nepenthe

by Ashley Malecha

(ne•pen•the) *noun*

1. Asleep in a field of poppies, drunk from a drop of potion, and dead. Always drifting between one state of consciousness and the next. Lost and forgotten in the unknown.
2. Sunken faces cloaked in darkness's secrecy sent chills down the backs and across arms of those who passed by, she is *suffering*.
3. *One sniff, spritz, sip all it takes to forget your pain and sorrow, they say. Lethe drowned herself in the river of her tears. She gazes at the Ancients. The darkness in her eyes is like violet flowers. Please, she begs, taking the small fragile flacon, tipping her head back and swallows a single drop of the strong, sweet, and yet potent potion.*

Immigrant Blues

by Alla Boulos

Every year the United States naturalizes between 620,000 to 780,000 people. Naturalizing is a process of transformation from a resident of a country into its citizen. This process, which requires the applicant to be a lawful permanent resident of good moral character with the knowledge of English language and an attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution is completed at a naturalization ceremony. There are roughly 160 naturalization ceremonies performed each year. The key component of this ceremony is the Oath of Allegiance.

I hereby declare, on oath that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen;

I took this Oath on March 25, 2012. In the eight years that have elapsed since then, I have not thought about it in depth, I just remember the overwhelming melancholy that flooded my chest before and during the ceremony. Most people rightfully consider American citizenship a privilege and an honor, and so do I, however, I am concurrently also a citizen of Russia – the country I grew up in. I am a dual citizen. So, how do I reconcile this oath for myself? “Renounce any foreign state?” How can I renounce my motherland? How can anyone?

I should, however, count my blessings as some countries don’t even allow dual citizenship. Notably, India and China can make you renounce their citizenship if accepting another, but not Russia, or Greece, or Egypt. My father-in-law was a dual citizen of Egypt and the U.S. My mother-in-law, on the other hand, was a Palestinian refugee, whose country’s name and citizenship were eradicated from the records altogether. My brother lives in Switzerland and dreams of becoming a dual citizen, so he can get the benefit of not worrying about being deported if he loses his job. And what of all the undocumented immigrants who are being hunted down, deported, and separated from their children? They surely wouldn’t give this blessing a second thought.

The United States allows dual citizenship only by virtue of ignoring its existence. Dual citizenship is not mentioned in the Constitution or addressed in the Immigration and Nationality Act. The U.S. does not care what other countries you might happen to be a citizen

of and does not encourage or discourage the practice. In the eyes of the U.S., you are first and foremost an American citizen. So, when I travel to Russia and back, I show my Russian passport to the Russians at the border and my American passport to U.S. customs officials.

For many the naturalization ceremony is an occasion for celebration. It's a relief from stress, a promise of better economic opportunities, and a ray of hope at the end of the long journey. People bring their entire families to this event. They smile, cry tears of alleviation, and hug their relatives. I went alone. My husband wanted to bring our four children along with his parents, but I didn't want anyone to see how I "renounce and abjure all allegiance" to Russia. On that cold dreary March morning I felt like a traitor and I did not want any witnesses to my disgrace. I did not want any pictures taken or lunches eaten in honor of my abandoning my heritage.

A thoughtful representative of U.S.CIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) with years of experience gave a speech about how we are not rejecting our cultures and backgrounds and how here in America we value the diversity of everyone present. And indeed, the diversity of the hundreds of attendees was astounding. Somali women in colorful dresses, Hispanic families with little children, Asian elderly couples, a few Russians, Italians, and Scandinavians were taking pictures with their newly minted certificates while I pondered the propaganda of my Soviet childhood of undying patriotism and everlasting loyalty. We were not abandoning our pasts, we were taking a step in a new direction, the speaker said, and our presence was valuable.

For the longest time I did not file for citizenship. I had lived with a green card in the U.S. for 15 years before my brother convinced me to apply describing the benefits of visa-free travel, inviting relatives, taking out school loans, Social Security, and voting. He even helped me with the thousand-dollar fee required for the application. "You won't regret it," he said, but to this day I am confused about my dual status. Of course, no one can legally force me to renounce one or the other citizenship, but what kind of promise am I making with the Oath?

American common law through the body of the Supreme Court in *Kawasita v United States*, 343 U.S. 717, 753(1952) states that dual citizenship is "a status long recognized in the law...the concept of dual citizenship recognizes that a person may have and exercise rights of nationality in two countries and be subject to the responsibilities of both. The mere fact that he asserts the rights of one citizenship does not, without more, mean that he renounces the other... when one has a dual

citizenship, it is not necessarily inconsistent with his citizenship in one nation to use a passport proclaiming his citizenship in the other..." Thus, it's the thought that counts, not the actual denunciation of your previous affiliations when you take the oath, but I take my oaths and promises seriously. I do not throw words to the wind and always consider the consequences and this oath left me in limbo.

That I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;

I believe deeply and truly in the value of the American laws and democratic system. I have witnessed it work its magic and heard notable figures like Noam Chomsky say that despite all the criticisms of the US as a vicious empire, there is nowhere else he'd rather live. I have read Solzhenitsyn's accounts of the Russian GULAGs and heard stories of my grandmother sitting at work till midnight until released by the radio announcement of Stalin's dismissal. So, I support the Constitution and the freedoms it ensures, but who are the enemies?

I am devoted to the founding principles outlined in U.S. law. America has given me a home, a family, a better life, more opportunities for my children, but at what cost and with whose blood? I owe a debt to the annihilated Native Americans, the enslaved Africans, and the conquered Mexicans, all of whom paved the way for the existence of the melting pot to which I pledge allegiance.

That I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law;

When reading these words, I question myself, "Would I really?" Should there be a conflict between Russia and the U.S whose side would I be on? Whose side am I legally obliged to be on? What would be ethically and morally correct? Do I mean what I say? Is it illegal for me to even write this? How many people take their oaths seriously? How many people even remember taking an oath of one kind or another? The Pledge of Allegiance? Being a Christian and a woman, would I even attempt to bear arms?

The Oath originated in the Naturalization Act of 1790 and was later enhanced and modified in the consequent Naturalization Acts of 1795 and 1906. The current text finalized in 1929 and with the addition of the requirement to bear arms made its way in its present form into the Immigration Act of 1950. The Oath has proclaimed citizens for 230 years.

In 1929 the Supreme Court denied the application for citizenship to the Hungarian feminist and pacifist Rosika Schwimmer who verbally refused to take up arms. Similarly, in 1953 the request of Aldous Huxley, the author of *Brave New World* was stalled by a judge to whom Huxley explained that he had philosophical beliefs about war. In 1968 Brenda Weitzman, a South African mother explained to the court her aversion to killing and was denied citizenship.

In this regard, Tim O'Brien's story "On the Rainy River" from *The Things They Carried* collection comes to mind where the character attempts to evade the draft by defecting to Canada but doesn't go through with it because he cannot handle the shame of being a coward. So, where does it leave me? I declared that I would bear arms and so I must, but in whose favor?

That I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law;

Surprisingly, The US Army does not require one to be a citizen in order to enlist and in my younger days I entertained fantasies of joining. But then again, if asked to spy against Russia, would I do that? This line must be for women working on the home front during war. It is not bearing arms, but still supporting the cause.

Being a dual citizen is a bit like being a child of divorced parents. Who do you love? Who do you serve? Whom do you owe more? Who do you perform "noncombatant service" for? Whom do you swear allegiance to? The choice is impossible.

That I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law;

Most of my adult life in the US I dedicated to raising our four children. I taught them two languages, two cultures, I homeschooled them, and read them bedtime stories for a decade. They too are dual citizens but probably with none of the same quandaries. If asked to choose, they wouldn't think twice about swearing loyalty to the US, where they grew up. We feel the pull of the land that sprung us to life and that is why I feel the pangs of nostalgia every time I hear Russian spoken at a store, or when I travel home, or speak to long-forgotten grade school classmates.

At this point, I have lived more of my life in the US than I did in Russia, but I still have not found balance. I feel awkward around Russian immigrants, I am out of place with Russians back home, and I am not exactly native in America. I belong to two countries but in the end, I belong to neither anymore. I am a citizen of Earth.

I graduated from a university in Russia with a law degree, but I could not practice law in the US because the legal systems are radically different. I worked as a paralegal and tested the waters in New York but could not handle the cutthroat atmosphere of corporate law, so years later, in my forties, I decided to get a degree in teaching English. My Russian family laughs at me. They say that I could not teach Americans their literature being a non-native speaker myself. I laugh back and hide my secret fear that it's true.

So, what is “work of national importance?” It surely is not parenting, or being a paralegal, or teaching English. Of course, this is not what the Oath refers to. Who am I kidding?

And that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

So help me God.

She's the Cat's Meow

by Amanda Judd

Every woman
should have
the self-confidence
of my cat, Eleanor.
She struts
across the kitchen
as if she's a Jaguar
on the catwalk.
She drops
her 25 pounds of catness
to the floor,
where she sprawls out
belly up
and looks back
over her shoulder
as if to say,
"You wish."

The Lament of Hearth and Home

by Jessica Castrello

At the foot of your grave
rests a symphony of broken melodies.
Like a needle pulled from the record,
interrupted art stains the margins of my books;
the pages beg for recourse,
but they don't know you're gone.

Our home fell like a mountain to time;
The house refuses to speak in your absence.
Theories of a music mind halts the silence
leaving me to turn reason over—
like a page in a book you'll never read.

In this chorus of a frenetic reverie,
I see the world through your fingertips
and taste the lemon that paints your cup.
I am serving the last call of the lunatic.

My regret descends upon the hearthstone.
The crackling wood punctuates each skipped note.
The fire is hungry and the furnace sighs memories of you
into this breathing wound.
I catch a glimpse of your smile in the dust.

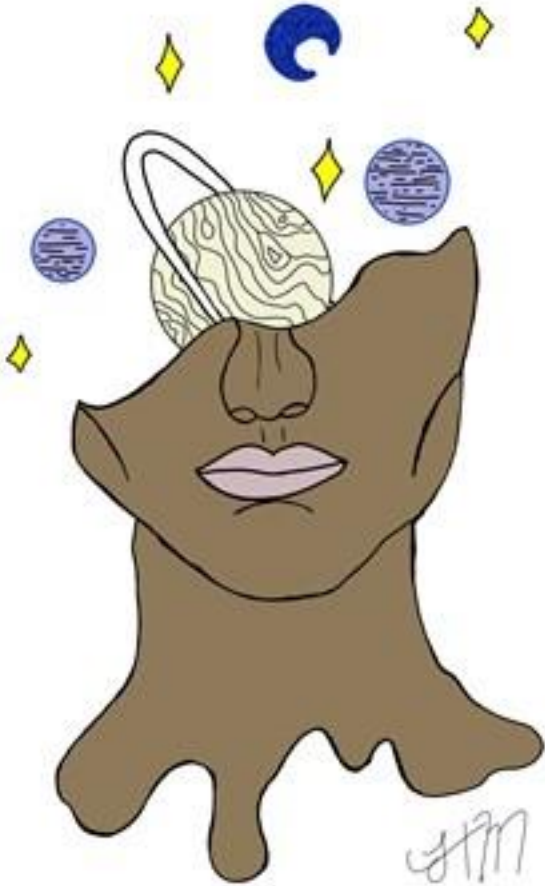
I stand where you left—at the precipice,
between the trenches and watchtowers,
in the eyes of the hurricane with a million things left to do.
In solidarity where words turn to ash in my mouth.

At the foot of your grave
rests the lament that births diseased air,
insuperable, like hunger eating away at my stomach.
A feast of songs left unsung,
and a ballad of unrealized dreams.

At the foot of your grave, you left me singing
and now I can taste the stars.

Thinking Out Loud

by Hannah Merdan



In the Morning When I Wake

by Lisa Dominique Ronan

How lovely to hear love
when you say my name, while I wake with warm
sunlight a-glow in horizontal lines on the wall opposite my bed,
entering empty spaces between tilted wooden window blinds.

Instead,

you called me, “vile and squalid,”

voice rank, wilting with indifference.

I never listened to a word you said.

I just moved

on.

The Worst Job I Never Had

by Teri Joyce

A visit to the Ladies' Room
after a five-course gourmet meal
in glitzy Las Vegas:

young woman stands
silent, still, expressionless
while I wash my hands.
She then presents to me
a paper towel.

Don't think, don't feel.
You are a mere dispenser.
Nothing more.
Invisible.

My mouth opens, then closes,
face burns scarlet with shame
of my culture,
of my privilege.

But,
I see you
and wonder what dreams
you are holding to present

to the world,
what veins inside you
carry currents of gold or ruby
waiting to be excavated

if only you had some tools.

Grief's Cat

by Teri Joyce

Roams the city at will,
a marauder, sword drawn,
teeth and claws needle sharp.
Feral, fast, and silent making the rounds.

It's that cat you can't outrun.
It's that pounce of anguish in the middle of your sleep.
It's the yowl, howl, meow of the scrappy sack of bones
on your doorstep harmonizing with your own wail.

You know he will be a regular visitor for years.

You may as well befriend him.
Set out a dish of milk.
Leave the door cracked open.
Let him wander through your rooms,
climb on your kitchen table, walk across your bed.

Sometimes he will bring a mouse, recently dispatched.

You serve a crystal dish of Fancy Feast Seared Salmon.

Then, rock with him warm on your lap,
quiet memories trickling through like a midsummer creek,
a cup of tea and box of Kleenex beside you.
As you begin to nod off, he will creep away.

Inspired by "Desire's Dog" by Joy Harjo

Leaving Home

by Christine Horner

Leaving home is not like “flying the nest”—
it is like diving head-first into a shallow public pool,
chlorinated water flooding your sinuses
as your skull *thumps* the slick concrete at the bottom.
You float to the surface, blood spilling
out of your nostrils, staining the water red.
Bubbles rise from the bottom half of your bathing suit
as you struggle to reach the ladder, eyes shut tight
from your head pain and the bright sunlight
that litters your face with freckles
and dyes your skin hot pink. You had hoped
that the pool would cool your burn, but
the pool was heated, and it stung
almost as much as your crush’s laughter
at you, at your pain, at your embarrassment.
He looks like a younger Orlando Bloom,
raising his finger to point at you,
finally getting out of the pool
only to trip over a plastic chair.
Tears cloud your round, blushing face
and bloody snot oozes from your nose into your mouth
while you cry for your mother to take you home.

Sometimes

by Teri Joyce

the world
rips me up,
knowing of
the hate and torture,
the nightly news -
a crown of thorns
piercing my mind
with horror.

Sometimes, the world
tears me open,
like when I ran to see
the bumpy, red fish
with bulging eyes and gaping mouth,
yanked out of the ocean,
then watched it writhe and thrash,
dying for no reason.

Sometimes, the world
strips me bare, unadorned,
like Eve, after the apple
scrambling for cover.
Sometimes the pain
of this terrible communion,
of mingling with the broken,
leaves my soul in tatters.

Sometimes...

Time Unfolding

by Lisa Dominique Ronan

Isla left. It was simple. The water lapping in the river had told her to go – the house halting her quietly.

It was time. Isla was pulled against her will, in both directions - a boat tossing, perilous, listing.

The city was sullen, saluting with empty streets, flashing yellow stoplights. There was no excitement, like she remembered, in the traffic or the flow of agitated shoppers - restaurants chilled, theatres mute.

It was time. Isla waited for music, motion – to carry her.

The seasons were obstinately off. It had been summer in November, now May, a bleak winter. She closed the door after months of preparation, plotting.

It was time. Isla was flustered and wary.

The air was taciturn, reticent. Isla waited – wishing. A prism of thoughts pulsed near the surface.

It had smelled like jasmine in June. Wisteria, amethyst above the doorways, lined the road that, curving around the villas, unraveled out of sight. She peered to see unfurling distance.

She excused herself for her confusion. Isla wanted to go back to the river to calm her thoughts. She had planned but never expected for time to come at her with both fists raised.

It was time, but she wanted to put time back in its bottle, throw it out to sea. The waves would suck it away or push it back to shore, bobbing in the white crescents. She could decide later, if ever it came back to her.

The sky was silver-grey then bright and benign. It was like Isla to feel she had to go two places at once – stay and leave, run and hide.

Time receded. Isla stood still – listening. Then, shifting her feet, a geological era unfolded unceremoniously.

How to Stand Up

by Teri Joyce

Lie down in your grave,
let the swamp-leeches suck dry your lifeblood,
let the worms of the muck reclaim your body,
let your cells degrade, your DNA unzip.

Then out of dormant ooze and goo,
morph into Badger,
rise relentless with razor teeth and claws.

Now, enter the forest
where root tangles form unreadable maps,
where missionaries salute with patriotic anthems,
where nothing illuminates the night sky,
where nonteachers spew forth unknowledge,
where non-leaders point where to aim,
and foxes abandon their dens in frantic search of an exit,

Here you will hunt the Hate-Lie Chimera,
spreader of poison with its fiery tongue,
stomper of earth and goodness and life.

Here is where you will make your stand.

La Niña y El Profesor

by Jessica Castrello

My name is Marlena Rosalie Juana del Portillo Epifania Hernandez Amador. Everyone calls me Mar. At the astute age of 9, I announced my ambition to become an author. I would be the first in my family to graduate college. I swore I would make it big and lift my family out of poverty. A bulb of a notion that would die before petals, stems, or leaves. At 11:50 p.m. on a fucking Monday, no less, I let my family down. I hate Mondays. I sit at my desk staring at my novella. The piece was a mess. The words were stitched together carelessly onto the pages with no direction like macaroni art. The lack of subplot was nothing short of horrific, and my character development was as tactful as George W. Bush in a political debate. It's hard for me to come up with a reason my reader should care about my story because I sure don't. It's a web with no weaver, but it will have to do. I have my one-on-one in... ¡carajo, four minutes! I gather up my pathetic excuse for a manuscript, light a fire under my ass, and dart out the front door.

Though the enclave of Bear River College is hugged by starlit black, it pulses with life. Legless drunks—primitive reflections of students drowning themselves in the fool's anesthetic—meander through the streets like Neanderthals from one arbitrary party to the next. Belted by the communities of Galesburg, Illinois, over 180 years old and spanning 82 acres, Bear River is an impressive establishment. My building, Casa Esperanza, is at the southernmost point of the campus. I'm to meet Dr. Loomings, my creative writing professor and mentor, for my one-on-one review at the Reticence Library. I thought it was strange he would request to meet at midnight, but I didn't question it. It's an honor to review with an established author like himself and a chance I am not willing to pass up. "*Don't waste my time,*" he had instructed, "*don't be late.*" It's about a 6-minute stroll to the library from Casa Esperanza—I am not strolling. I ran my cursed writer's run up Heritage Street toward the library on Manor Row. If there is a God, I will make it.

I was so lost in constructing scenarios for this meeting, I hardly notice when I came up on the old library doors. Bursting like a rogue wave on the Indian Ocean across the bow of a ship, I enter. I glance at a clock on the wall: 12:03 a.m. My heart capsizes like the SS Edmund Fitzgerald on the icy waters of Lake Superior.

“Maybe I can still catch Dr. Loomings.”

As far as I can tell, there is no one at the library. I’m sure I’ve missed it. I convince myself to continue to the meeting place anyway—out of breath, out of hope, and out of time. We were to meet in the Red Room, on the second floor near Special Collections and Archives. I always thought that name was funny since the whole room was draped in white. The library is as stunning as one would expect. Three stories tall with books lining every wall. It had velvet carpets and mullioned windows like something out of a Disney movie. Intricate and vast—with so many nooks and crannies, one could lose themselves between the pages. Luckily, I spent countless hours here. This labyrinthine world couldn’t trap me. Making my way through the various rooms, I noticed the library was oddly quiet. The air hung, still yet full like a pregnant pause. People say spirits haunt the library... that the books have eyes. Well, I’m not one for such superstitious surmisings, though I still found an eagerness in my step and a chill in my spine.

The absence of life takes its toll. Fear begins to tap at my heart like a faucet that drips into a sink. The shelves gnarl as the walls grow in the darkness. The books have eyes. My walk has stiffened and with every step, I’m sure my heart will rip through my chest. *There’s nothing to be afraid of*, I assure myself. To fear, to be fearful, that’s just a natural response to the world. It’s as ubiquitous as sunlight on cracked pavement. Skirting the shadows, I approach the dappled glow of the Red Room and can feel the dissipation of delirium.

“Checkpoint!”

I gleam as the walls shrink, and the books go back to being books. A shadow glides across the floor like ripples from a pebble that’s tossed into a stream. I leap for joy—Dr. Loomings is still here! I almost cry out, but the words catch in my throat. I hear not the pacing or ramblings of my elder mentor but an unnatural gurgling, slurping sound. Hesitation guides me around the corner, right up to the very last moment of innocent ignorance and passed the point of no return—where contentment dissolves back into the shackles of fear. Amongst the backdrop of blood-spattered books, Dr. Loomings crouches over a youthful woman, limp like an old rag doll in his grasp. Staring down into a pool of crimson, she hangs lifeless as he gulps at her nape. I back away in terror. Maybe I was delirious. Sweat coats my forehead like beads of condensation on a glass. He hadn’t noticed me. As I turn to run, I slam my foot against the leg of an imperfectly placed table, dropping my manuscript along with any hope of escape. I sigh—what a time to make a

cartoon mistake. I hear a heavy thud—la niña—and a peal of sick laughter; el Profesor. I knew I had no choice. Slowly, as if risking to catch the eyes of Medusa, I turn. The jaw unhinged, creating a horrible gaping hole where the mouth should have been. A long, thin tube riddled with veins exposed beneath a transparent membrane slowly retracts back into its mouth. Loomings' eyes are grotesquely sunken. I could see his matted hair descending to his back through the torn bloodied shirt. The creature straightens itself on its knotted haunches and glares in my direction.

“D-Dr. Loomings?” The words balloon from my lips. The creature tilts its head slightly to the side as if to get a clearer view. I can barely make out the words it says through my revulsion and terror.

“You're late.” Its bones crack as it moves closer, “I didn't think you would come. I had to improvise.” The creature motions to the girl lying face down on the floor. What I can only assume was a cocktail of ichor and spinal fluid oozing from the creature's mark. My eyes drift from the body, a glimpse at my future, to the creature crawling its way toward me. My hands search for salvation, grasping at the table behind me. They fall upon the base of a lamp. The creature lunges—I close my eyes and swing. Another thud and a piercing howl release my feet to run. I will not be his feast of flesh. Down the winding steps, through the walls of books, and out into the night. I could hear the cracking behind me. I could feel its breath on my neck—its weight on my back. My name is Marlana. Everyone calls me Mar and if there's a God, I will make it.

I hate Mondays.

The Phenomenon of Spring

by Jessica Castrello

I heard a sparrow softly singing
on a wavelength far above my own.
It seemed to be the sound of pleasure
for the phenomenon of spring.

The hyacinths are Nature's children
waking with the honeyed breeze;
they twist in the joy of new life
in the phenomenon of spring.

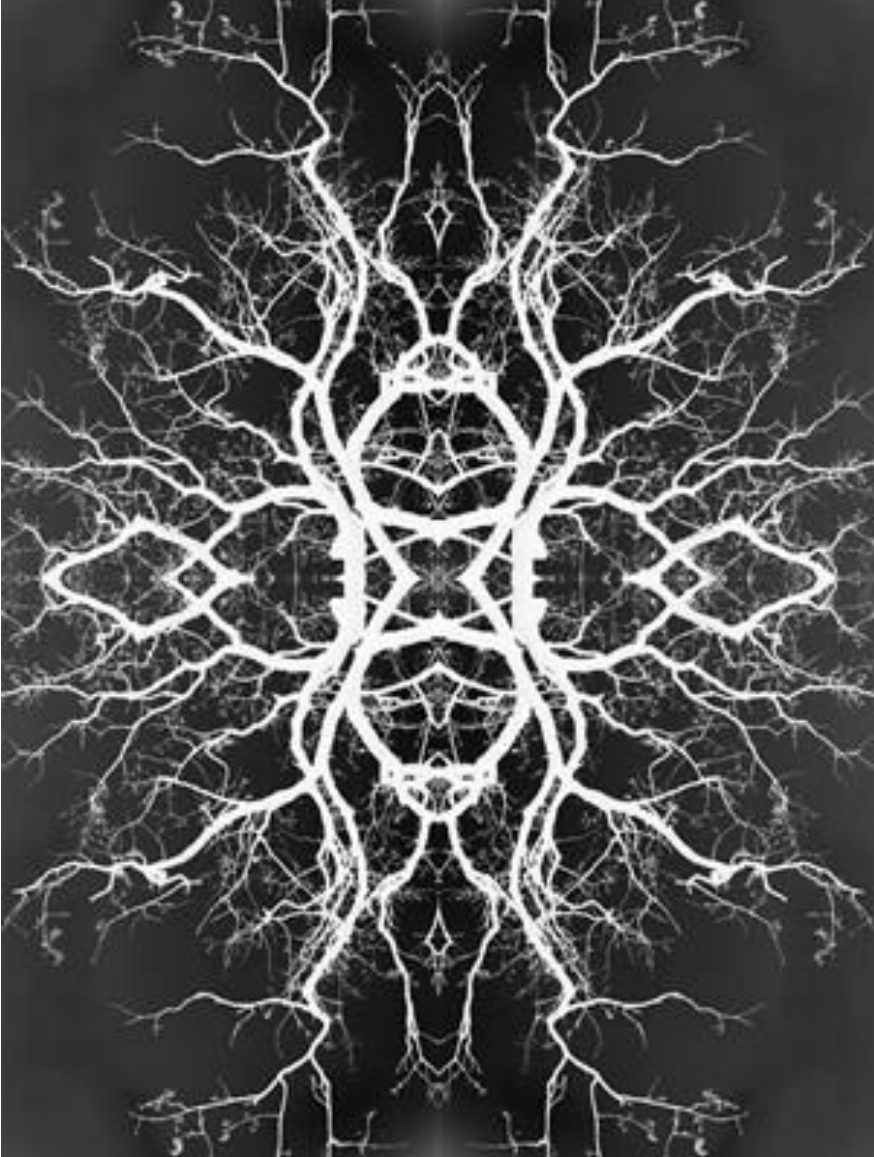
In this vernal dimension,
the vestiges of Winter promise warmer days;
a celestial blue sky descends to kiss the fringe
of the phenomenon of spring.

And like the gravitational constant
a taste of green abounds;
The trees light up like cosmic rays
in the phenomenon of spring.

The flowers nod in this quantum paradise
and electric leaves dance with the clouds;
the alighted lark sings with blushing creeks
for the phenomenon of spring.

Symme-tree 6

by Teri Joyce



Summer

by Amanda Judd

She was summer.
Hot and humid, with only
the slightest of breezes and relief;
Caramel corn skin;
Moving slowly and sultry...
ignoring fall,
trying to sneak behind her;
sweat, honeysuckles, and lemonade --
the sun itself her hair;
her eyes two swimming pools,
with no lifeguard on duty;
and when she spoke
it held all the joy and laughter of a country fair.
She was summer

I Need a Book

by MJ Yarusso

I need a book. I need an armful of books. I pick out all of the best ones I have and I bring them to Mommy. She always reads me books, and the more I bring her, the longer she will read to me. I love it when Mommy reads to me. I like books about love the most! My Mommy loves me sooo much! I can tell because she always smiles when she sees me and gives me big, big hugs, just like in the book *Guess How Much I Love You* by Sam McBratney. Mommy reads to me in soft voices and when she gets tired, she sets the last book down. I don't want her to leave, I want Mommy to read to me in her gentle voice forever. "Don't leave," I beg. I hate being alone in the dark. But Mommy kisses me on the forehead and tells me not to be afraid, then she wraps me in one of her big, big hugs and tucks me into bed real tight and I dream of bunnies with long, outstretched arms.

I don't need books. I need paper. I need lots and lots of paper. I make my own books now. My world is filled with crayons and markers and bare feet running to get the stapler so I can patch my papers together and make them look just like the real thing! Mommy gives me an endless supply of paper. I wonder where all of this paper comes from but mostly I am just glad we have a lot. I like the legal kind that's extra long so I can fold them over and make my books look extra professional. I don't read my books; my books don't have words. I can write real good but I just want to draw pictures and use whatever color I want. Maybe someday I will make books for real!

I need books. I need chapter books. Miss Colburn says I am a fast reader and boy will I prove it! Sometimes the people who work at the school take me out into the hallway and they time me while I read. They don't know that I am skimming over words as fast as I can and not really reading what it says. Boy do I have them fooled. Maybe they will give me an award for being the fastest reader! Miss Colburn sets high expectations for my summer reading list and I am determined to fill in all the blank lines on the sheet. I go home and tell Mom I will be very busy reading this summer and to please not disturb me. I go to our dining room wall and look over knotted maple shelves of books that span all the way from my black uniform flats to the top of our vaulted ceiling. I pick the ones I can reach, aiming for series so I can get in as much as possible.

I pretend to read all the *Little House on the Prairie* books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. I like the art on the covers and they are just the right size. I add them to my list before I even open them, among a dozen others I have already marked down. Surely the intention to read is equally as valuable as reading them for real. Mom looks at my list in a puzzled way, I think she is on to me. “Did you really read all these?” she asks. “Of course!” I say, nervous of her investigation. But Mom knows I am competitive and that I want a long list. She has read *Little House on the Prairie* many times and so she decides to quiz me on them. She writes out questions like a real teacher and everything, then she sits me down at the table to answer them. I accept her challenge and I guess on every question she asks me. And wouldn’t you know, I answer a lot of them right! She gives me a stern look and signs my sheet reluctantly. When the time comes, I turn that list in proud as a peacock. Boy do I have these people fooled!

I need books for my Birthday. I like the *Katie Kazoo, Switcheroo* series by Nancy E. Krulik the most right now. There are so many stories in that series and I can’t get enough of them! The main character Katie is always turning into someone new and I want to read who she becomes next. My Dad asks me on the phone what I want for my birthday, but I am nervous to ask him for things. Mom gives me an encouraging nudge and I slowly tell him exactly what books to get, but I know he won’t remember. When my birthday comes, Mom brings me a big, unwrapped cardboard box and says it is from Dad. I open the box and navigate through a sea of tissue paper. Nestled inside is an entirely brand-new set of *Katie Kazoo, Switcheroo* with all the stories I haven’t read yet! I touch their glossy covers and gently pull my thumb past the bright white pages. They smell new, like fresh ink and pressed cotton. Suddenly that smell makes me feel sad, because I know it means he spent a lot of money on these books, and that is not something he would usually do. I hold them in my hands like precious treasures. This is the only birthday present my Dad will give me for a very long time. I read my new books right away and I get lost in the beautiful messy shapeshifting chaos that is Katie Kazoo’s life. Sometimes I wish I could turn into other people like Katie does, then maybe I could be someone with married parents and I could have a Dad for a day.

I need a book from the high school library. That’s where I eat lunch because I hate everybody. Being around books makes me feel safe and the library is quiet except for the occasional tapping of keyboards. It is the perfect place to disappear. The library has the most sunlight in the

entire school because half of the room is made of thick glass windows. I have never looked for a book in the library, I just stare out the massive sun-filled windows and I wonder what it would feel like to jump out of one of them. Sometimes I sit with the librarian while she collects returns and I quietly scan the ones she hasn't gotten to yet. I don't know how to find books in a library because it is organized by a system I do not understand and I don't like to ask for help, so I just look through this pre-read ensemble. I see a small yellow binding peeking out from the hoard and reach for it. The cover has a peculiar image of a boy with a box on his head, it is called "Running with Scissors". I decide I want to read this book, and it becomes my favorite. I have never read anything like it; it is vulgar and strange and hilarious! When I am finished, I look at the author, his name is Augusten Burroughs. I use the school's library computer to search his complicated name and I find out he has written a lot of books. I read all of them. Augusten is a messed-up person and I love that about him. His life is definitely worse than mine and soon I am more invested in his stories than staring out windows and breaking the glass with my imagination. When I have read all of his books, I find out his writing style is a type of genre called *memoir*, and I find other authors who write like he does. I love having access to people's inner dialogue and I like experiencing their chaotic lives from the quiet bedroom of my suburban home. But most of all, I adore how the authors rise from their own ashes to become victorious storytellers. They give me the courage to rise from my own downward spiral and become a victorious storyteller too. I get my hands on every memoir I see for the next six years.

I need a book. The book I need is called "East of Eden" by John Steinbeck. The handsome man I met at the bar told me it is his favorite and I decide that if he likes it, then I want to like it too. I leave my shift at the coffee house the next day, paycheck in hand, and I walk to the bank where I deposit an even number, taking the odds and ends in cash. When I leave the bank, I get in my trusty Kia which breaks down everywhere I go and I hike it a couple miles up the road to Half-Priced Books. I always go to the bookstore on payday. It is my favorite place to go. The shelves there are tightly overflowing with colorful covers of all ages and it is organized by a system that I understand. Used books have an even more enchanting smell than the fluorescent kind at Barnes & Noble; used books have brittle, coffee-and-cream-colored pages with notes in the margins and handwritten dates in the covers and they smell of old linens and aged wood. I could smell that smell forever. So I do. I stay for hours and I walk through all of my favorite sections: memoirs,

ornithology, Christianity, herbal medicine, and of course, the clearance section. But John Steinbeck's "East of Eden" is considered a "Classic" and I have not been to that section before. It is filled with boring books they used to make us read in school like "Grapes of Wrath" and "The great Gatsby", which never caught my interest. I reach this foreign section of the bookstore and notice that these books are even older and more used than the others and I fall victim to their timeless charm. I bring my paperback classic home and I devour every word until I decide that classics are wonderful and precious, and I fill my bedroom shelves with them.

Now, I need a book to teach me something. I reach for my tattered leather Bible, thin and fragile and beloved. I absorb "The Prophet" by Kahlil Gibran and "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho. I reach for "Mere Christianity" by C.S. Lewis and "The Three Treasures" by Daniel Reed. I breathe them in and they bring me peace and they make me curious. I search my heart and my mind, and I find that I am good. Humanity is good. I feel lighter, and I want to love more. I take what I learn, and I go out and I practice love. I practice forgiveness. I practice peace and harmony. I feel whole.

I need a book. I need a book because I need to study, I need to be inspired, I need to be challenged. I need new ideas, I need to learn, and I need to experience something epic through someone who is more bold than myself. I need the words of a thousand strangers tucked tightly within the battered covers of a book read by someone's Mother, someone's Brother, and I want them to tell me all the things they are thinking and what they went through, so that I can understand my world a little better. I want my shelves of books to be my fortress, protecting me from ignorance and boredom. I want to wear my books like a heavy cloak, carrying secrets of knowledge and wisdom with me wherever I go. I want to use my language, their language, our language, to keep telling stories so that I never run out of things to read. I need books like I need my faith; each one creating a new stepping-stone for me to stand on until I am ready to take my next step forward. Books are my collection of who I was and who I am becoming. They introduce me to versions of myself who I long to be or will never be; wrapping around me like identities made of paper, until the last page unfolds to reveal the real me.

Frisky Foals

by Teri Joyce



I Was Never Taught How to Use a Lawnmower Because My Parents Didn't Want Me to Lose a Foot

by Christine Horner

If you could see how clumsy I am, you would understand.
When God churned me into this world in his heavenly cauldron, he
forgot
the pinch of hand-eye coordination and he left out
the tablespoon of social grace, but he added
a few heaping pounds of childhood obesity
as well as a handful of major depressive disorder—just for good
measure.
I was formed into a messy, buttery compound and thrust
into this world to be spread on burnt toast, then dropped on the floor
face-down.

Sunset Skim

by Ethan Reistad



Wildfire

by Nora Huberty

I start at the rocks' bottom,
Damaged and misused,
Searching for a land untouched by man.
Untouched and untainted by my pain.

I fill my pack with grit and graphs,
Hoping the fire within will burn the path into my memories.
I clamber uphill,
Carrying my baggage up the mountain.

I scramble up boulders,
Hurdling rock after rock.
The fire within me pushes me forward,
Embers hot with rage and pain.

Where scars and burns
Are created by the backwoods and flares
Not by broken memories.
I continue my attempt uphill.

I burn like a wildfire,
Beautiful yet unstable in so many ways.
Footprints of cracks and snaps
Burning my way skyward.

I burst through the trees
disheveled hair and scraped face,
But eyes more radiant
Than any battle ever won.

I crumble to my knees and cry,
I simmer the fire within me with my tears.
It was never about conquering the mountain,
It was about conquering the pyre of madness and blight

I pull myself together, savoring the view of my battle.
The mountain warning reads “Elevation 14,700, End of trail.”
Yet my own trail blaze reads
“Day one of recovery, Trail starts here.”

Creating “Art”

by Amanda Judd

Standing on a lifetime
of words . . . of poems,
or perhaps balancing on a heap of trash;
I seek wisdom . . . guidance.
the “published,” all-knowing
Professor says,
that I don’t know
how to create “art.”
“You need to leave blood on the page,”
he says, talking with his hands.
Ah, I see,
blood it must be.
It is not enough
to withdraw the heart itself
from its cage
and leave it beating
between the lines.

For Me

by Erin Holland

euphoria is existing in a space
where people see you as you feel.
It can be a baggy T-shirt
that falls just right over the chest.
It can be the tattered sneakers
held together by a single stitch.

It's grease covered hands.
It's facial hair,
and sweat on my brow.

It's the word partner.
the word lover.
The pronouns they/them/theirs.

It's the disruption of a room.
It's heads turning in a far too familiar place
where I once showed myself the way I was expected.

It's my partner calling me handsome,
calling me beautiful,
calling me.

It's the way I feel when I'm alone in a space with no expectations of
presentation or participation in a place it's hard to call home.

Something I Love

by Nina Woerheide

Thyme. basil. oregano. black pepper.

Brilliantly red paprika.

A warm and smoky smell, the smell of sizzling chicken wings

Drifting from our tiny box kitchen.

Rhythmic beats from the speaker:

Music notes wrapping around the smoky aroma.

Our arms around each other,

Dancing.

The Cougar – A Play in One Act

by Amanda Judd

ACT 1

Scene 1

SETTING: We are in the local college football stadium at the end of Commencement, with visitors leaving the bleachers and walking down to find their graduate. The crowd has already thinned quite a lot.

AT RISE: Older woman is walking very slowly down the bleachers, while a slightly younger woman is walking down the bleachers further up from her, at a much swifter pace.

MELISSA: (Loudly, but not too loud, waving her hand, trying to catch up with the older lady.) Excuse me! Hello! Excuse me!

MARGARET: (Turns around as she navigates the last step.) Me?

MELISSA: Yes. At least, I think so. You are Bishop Meger's mother, right?

MARGARET: Yes? Oh, yes, he said his new girlfriend would be here today. Is she a graduate too?

MELISSA: (Thoroughly confused.) What? Who?

MARGARET: The young lady.

MELISSA: Who?

MARGARET: Well, your daughter, of course!

MELISSA: What? I don't have a daughter. I'm . . .

BISHOP: (Running up to greet them. Hugs and kisses his mom.) Hey, you two! I see you've somehow found each other. Dang it, I wanted to be the one to introduce you.

MARGARET: Well, yes, but you can still do introductions since I haven't yet met her daughter.

BISHOP: (He asks his question distractedly, as he leans past his mother to kiss Melissa.) Her what?

MARGARET: (Admonishing him.) Bishop! It is more than a little inappropriate to kiss your girlfriend's mother on the lips.

BISHOP: (He looks at his girlfriend, then his mother, smiles and laughs.) Oh, I get it now. (Clears throat.) Mom, meet Melissa, my girlfriend. Melissa, meet . . . (he's interrupted by his mother)

MARGARET: (Gasps, and says incredulously) "Wh-wh-what? But she's . . . she's . . ."

BISHOP: She is wonderful woman, mom.

MARGARET: That's just it – she is a *woman*, not a young college girl! You need someone your own age.

BISHOP: (Putting an arm around Melissa's waist.) Her age doesn't matter. Just wait until you get to know her, you'll love her like I do.

MARGARET: Love?! Bishop, have you lost your mind? She doesn't love you! She's using you – using your, your, your . . . body. She's one of those panthers, for Heaven's sake! You know, like Madonna or J-Glo!

MELISSA: (Leans in, conspiringly, in a low voice) I think you mean “cougar.” And there are worse things to be compared to than *J-Lo* (over-emphasizing the correct pronunciation).

MARGARET: Yes, well, whatever her name may be, even she finally stopped dating children and got a real man.

MELISSA: Excuse me, did you just insinuate that your son isn’t a real man?

MARGARET: You know what I mean! He’s young, MUCH younger than you! You are practically a pedophile!

BISHOP: MOM! Please, stop! I am not a child! And you’re insulting the woman I love.

MELISSA: (Angrily) I’m not putting up with this shit. Happy graduation, Bishop. I’ll talk to you later. (Starts walking away)

BISHOP: Jesus, mom! Are you insane? (Starts to go after Melissa.)

MARGARET: Bishop, what are you doing? You can’t go after her! I’m your mother.

BISHOP: (Stops and looks back at his mother.) Exactly. I know where to find you when you’re mad at me. (Starts running to catch up to girlfriend.)

BISHOP: Hey! Hey, Melissa! Melissa! Hey! Hey, J-Lo! (At this, Melissa stops walking and lets him catch up to her, but she does not turn around.) (Moves to stand in front of her and takes her hands in his.) Hey, I’m sorry. She was way out of line. I had no idea she would react like that.

MELISSA: (Looks at him questioningly) Really? Because I had some idea. (Chews on her lip, looks at the ground nervously) I really care about you, Bishop, but I’ve worked too hard to get where I’m at in life, to feel good about myself, to let her talk to me that way. I just can’t do it.

BISHOP: (Wraps his hands around her waist.) I get it. No, I really do. I will talk to her. I will make sure she knows that she is not allowed to speak to you or treat you like that.

MELISSA: And I don't like her putting you down. You are a great man. A *grown* man. (Kisses him lightly.)

BISHOP: (Kisses her back - kisses her more ardently – starts to make out.)

MELISSA: Hey, cool it. We are in the parking lot at graduation.

BISHOP: We could duck behind those bleachers over there.

MELISSA: No, we can't.

BISHOP: Why not?

MELISSA: (Pointing) Look.

BISHOP: Damn teenagers! Beat us to it. That's ok, we need to get to my mom's house for dinner anyway.

MELISSA: (Pouting) Do we have to?

BISHOP: Maybe not - you look good enough to eat.

MELISSA: Oh, yeah? Well, according to your mother you're not man enough to handle me. (Laughs, smacks his ass, and starts to playfully run away, he catches her and kisses her again.)

(Fade Out)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

SETTING: We are in the dining room of Bishop's childhood home.

AT RISE: Bishop, his siblings, his mother and Melissa are all seated at the dinner table.

MELISSA: (Everyone eating, not speaking, looking only at their plate, except for Bishop, who is looking around the table at each person one by one, willing them to make eye contact. It isn't working.) What a lovely home you have, Mrs. Meger.

MARGARET: (Only looking up from her plate for a second.) Thank you.

DOUG: (Excitedly looking up now that the silence had been broken.) We moved here right after dad died. Mom couldn't afford to keep the old place on her own.

MARGARET: Douglas! Please do not air our family's personal business with strangers.

DOUG: But mom, she isn't a stranger. She's Bishop's girlfriend. We were all just introduced to her when they arrived from graduation.

MARGARET: Douglas, do not argue with me young man. Simply because you know the woman's name does not mean she isn't a stranger. She most certainly is, and she most certainly will continue to be one in this house.

BISHOP: (Admonishingly) Mom. I specifically asked you to be nice. I won't have you mistreating my girlfriend.

MARGARET: (Feigning shock) What did I say that wasn't nice? I merely said that just because we know her name doesn't mean she isn't a stranger. It's true. I mean, other than her name we know nothing at all about her.

MELISSA: (Sets down her fork, looks Margaret directly in the eye.) Well, what would you like to know? I'm an open book.

MARGARET: (Under her breath.) I'm sure that's not the only thing that's open.

BISHOP/MELISSA: (Speaking at the same time.) Mom! I'm sorry, what was that? I couldn't quite hear you.

MARGARET: (Sighs heavily.) Fine. I'll play nice. So, tell me a bit about yourself, Melissa.

MELISSA: Well, I am currently attending Hamline University to attain my BFA in Creative Writing.

MARGARET: Good lord, whatever for? You don't honestly think you can make a living out of writing, do you?

BISHOP: (Reaches for Melissa's hand across the table.) No, mom, Melissa is going to be a teacher. She wants to teach creative writing.

MARGARET: Perfect! That will be a fertile soil in which to find another young man to prey on!

BISHOP: Mom, I meant it! Be nice, or we will leave. BOTH of us. And you'll be celebrating my graduation without me.

MARGARET: (Feigning remorse.) Forgive me. You were saying, Melissa?

MELISSA: Well, Bishop was saying that I want to be a teacher. It's actually what I've always wanted to do, but life took some twists and turns and I'm getting here a little late.

TRACY: (Believing it might be safe to actually converse with Melissa and not upset her mother.) What sorts of twists and turns?

MELISSA: Well, for starters, I got married straight out of high school. And then, . . .

MARGARET: (Interrupting Melissa) Oh my God, you're a divorcée? (Turns to Bishop.) Bishop, did you know this?

BISHOP: Yes, mom, I knew. It isn't a big deal. This isn't the 50's anymore. Lots of people are divorced.

MARGARET: (Gasping.) Bishop, we are Catholic! Divorce is very much a "big deal." If someone is divorced, they can't be married in the church!

DOUG: (Talking excitedly to Melissa.) Wow, are you and Bishop getting married? Cool!

MARGARET: Douglas! Bite your tongue! That is NOT what I meant. I just meant, I see no point in Bishop dating someone that he can't possibly get . . . I mean, why get serious with someone . . . I don't mean serious, I mean . . .

MELISSA: (Sarcastically) Margaret, may I call you Margaret? Please stop, before you hurt yourself. I've only been divorced two years, I'm 45 years old, Bishop and I have only been dating 9 months, it's a little early to be talking marriage, don't you think?

MARGARET: (Gasps again.) Oh, my Heavens, she's 45 years old! She is only 7 years younger than me. Dear Lord, what did I ever do to deserve this?

BISHOP: (Exasperated.) Oh, for Heaven's sake, stop acting so melodramatic! What did you do to deserve what, mother? To deserve having a son who appreciates people for who they are? Who sees them for what's inside and not just how they look? A son who doesn't judge someone based on their age, or religion, or race? Is that really so bad? (Margaret looks stricken. He doesn't wait for an answer.) And no, Melissa and I have not talked about getting married, but I've thought about it (looks tenderly at Melissa). She's a hell of a woman – I'd be lucky to have her as a wife. (Melissa is beaming at him.)

MARGARET: (Fanning herself, reaching for her daughter.) Tracy. Tracy, help me. I feel faint.

MELISSA: Oh, come on “mom,” it wouldn’t be so bad to have me for a daughter-in-law, would it? I mean, we are soooo close in age, we probably have a ton of things in common! We could trade recipes, laundry tips, and discuss which wrinkle creams we think are the best. Heck, we could even wear each other’s clothes! It would be great – we’d be best friends. (Melissa beams at Margaret.)

MARGARET: (Lets out a weak little gasp and slumps over in her chair.)

TRACY: (Trying to support her mother’s dead weight, lest she fall out of the chair.) Mom, oh my God! (Shoots Melissa a pointed look.) Doug, Bishop, help me! Help me get her over to the sofa.

(While all the kids rush to aid their mother, Melissa sits alone at the table slowly sipping her drink.)

DOUG: (While looking at his mother as Tracy holds her mother’s head in her lap and while Bishop fans his mother.) Hey! Hey, look! Her eyelids are fluttering. I think she might be coming around.

(Melissa gets up from the table and walks to stand next to Bishop directly over his mother, in his mother’s line of sight, when she opens her eyes. Bishop takes Melissa’s hand while looking at his mother with love and concern.)

TRACY: (As her mother slowly opens her eyes.) Hey, there is she is! Are you feeling ok? You scared us there for a minute.

MARGARET: (Doesn’t respond, just slowly looks from face to face, as if she can’t really remember where she is or what is going on.)

MELISSA: (When her eyes land on Melissa, Melissa sees the flash of recognition and disgust. Melissa kisses Bishop hard on the mouth, and says excitedly) Oh, Bishop! Yes! Yes, yes – of course, I’ll marry you.

DOUG: (Looking at Melissa and Bishop) Cool! (Hears a faint whimper. Looks down at his mother.) Oh no, looks like mom fainted again.

BISHOP: (Breaking the kiss and looking at Melissa) What got into you? What would make you say that? She was just coming to after you made her faint the first time!

MELISSA: (Nonchalantly looking at her nails.) Sorry. I just couldn't help myself. (Turns and looks at the audience and winks.)

(BLACKOUT)

End

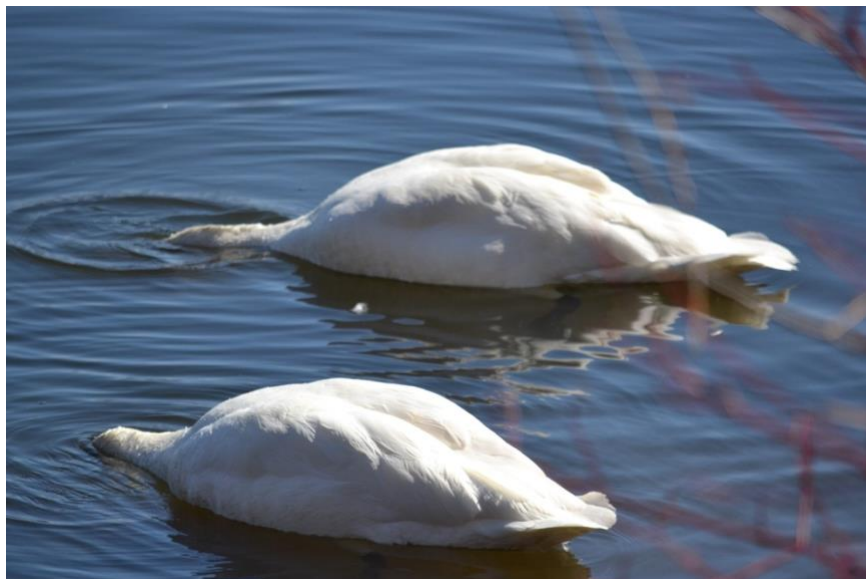
Your Stereotypes

by Alissa Ulep

You look at a brown-pigmented, almond-eyed person.
Uneducated? Lazy? Alcoholic? Or gang member?
People I know love drinking Captain Morgan, Heineken, and Grey
Goose
every day of the week
and have no need for an AA meeting.
PhD Pacific Islanders are changing the game of history
more than the phones you text on day to day.
People are afraid of my resting bitch face
more than the association of my last name.
Lazy? I can agree with that.
I mean sure. I'd rather lie in bed 24 hours a day than plan on passing my
finals.
But this should apply to your race as well. Dropping out of college for
being "too hard."
Quitting day jobs to lose Netflix subscriptions the next month.
Do not confine me in your box.
Do not associate my race and color of my skin
to my past and future.

The Lovers

by Erin Holland



Undone

by Alissa Ulep

She moves throughout the shadows, making sure her human does not see her. Leaping from one end to another. Grandmother's precious mirror from 1845, all across the floor. She remarks on their torture as ominous shards are assembled in this looking glass. Hung over the counter of strange shapes and this translucent bottle with grains inside. *It should not be here. I want to taste it.* All over the floor next to the reflections of myself. The taste too unpleasant now as the garbage. Strut to the tall structure against the wall, from the opening to another top. Slinking up this arrangement at the sound of stomps, to go back into the shadows. Yet, at the bang of the 13th hour. All came undone.

A Simple Love Poem

by Sam Pfau

As I walked through the valley of shadow
I knew not fear
For I was nourished by that saucy dough

I was blind, but then I saw
That sublime golden-brown glow
Of cold, 3-day old pizza

Give me not a piping hot pie,
Nor a slightly cooled slice
For I would rather die!

No, give me pizza that is old
I do not care the cost
On this I will never fold

The chewy, rubbery texture of the bite
Like a stretchy red dodgeball
Is a true delight

The soggy crust beneath is a lovely treat
Spongy and flexible from absorbed sauce
In it all my anxieties and fear the 'za doth yeet

For the simulacrum of life is a mere phoney
Without the salvationing taste
Of stale pepperoni

And what forsooth is that odd taste wrought?
An earthy fuzziness spice?
Is it mold? Hope not.

I'm sure the pain in my stomach
Is something completely unrelated
For in 3-day old pizza I could never sick.

As my soul crosses through Charon's ferry.
Those left behind will find solace
'Cuz at the funeral we're serving Dairy.

Though the parting tastes so bitter-sweetish
I moved to a better place past those pearly gates
Where St. Peter's snacking on some old deep-dish

It seems the Catholic church forgot an important point
Not in body nor blood,
But in Stuffed crust and Garlic sauce we anoint

For when Ezekiel saw that blessed wheel
It was in fact a swiss veggie supreme
A really "holey" meal

For God is a three-day old Pizza.

Extra Shot? A Tragedy:

by Sam Pfau

The temperature had plummeted this season, it was nearly 15 degrees by mid-April, a shocking occurrence, but you know, Global Warming. On freezing nights like these, it's best to cozy up beneath a warm fuzzy blanket with a steaming mug of cocoa, a steamy romance book, an even steamier boyfriend, and a cat, which is unrelated to steam. This dream floated through Steven's mind like a cloud of well, steam. Oh what Steven wouldn't give to go home and do that, but Mocharlie's coffee house didn't close till ten-fifteen on the dot. And with an hour left until that promised time, Steven was forced to stand behind the counter and wait, seriously? Who comes in for coffee in the evening? Psychopaths, that's who.

Steven sighed and glanced at his phone. No new messages, as he turned it off he was startled to see his own face. God, he looked sad. Droopy, sagging eyes with bags the size and color of ripe plums. An Appalachian mountain range of pimples crossing his forehead. Frizzy red hair that looked like a freshy licked lollipop had been dropped in a vat of dog fur. Steven sighed and cleaned his thick horn-rimmed glasses on his apron, though by the end of the night the apron looked like less of a uniform and more like a Jackson Pollock painting. With his eyesight restored, he blinked and looked out over the cramped, simple cozy atmosphere of Mocharlie's.

Someone, not gonna name any names, *cough* Mocharlie *cough* had obviously been to a Starbucks before and had been inspired. Simple faux wood designed to be evocative of a cabin surrounded a small collection of simple black chairs and chalkboard tables. The idea being to let guests write and draw on the tables, a novel idea until you remember that when given the opportunity to draw on something inevitably most people will just draw a dick. Now the tables had on a thick layer of plastic instead.

Keeping Steven company were two of Mocharlie's regulars, Martha Blackwell and Timothy O'Laughlin. Both retirees who spent their days traveling between the same four stores, arguing and playing chess, Timothy was dressed in a simple puke-green tweed jacket over his sandpapery white skin, while Martha was dressed in a floppy blue hat whose brim hid the milky cataracts over her eyes, and a lime green

cardigan with khaki pants. Forget the police, someone needed to call the Fashion FBI.

Timothy sipped his Iced Mocharlie while eyeing the newspaper. Suddenly his eyes bulged out like a squeezed grape.

“Oh my word!”

Steven looked up from washing the same spot for the eighteenth time. “You okay Tim?”

“Did you read the paper today boy?”

“Not yet, no.”

Timothy leaned forward.

“Ten dead bodies found in a shallow grave in the woods, Police suspect a serial killer is on the loose!”

“Wow” Steven said with the panache and performance of a particularly uncharismatic broomstick.

“Horrible, isn’t it? What is our world coming to?”

Martha sipped her caramel Iced Mocharlatte. “Terrible indeed.”

Timothy scoffed.

“You see Martha? This was exactly what I was telling you about. First we elect a democrat to office, and now there are bodies in the woods! These events are obviously correlated!”

Timothy continued his rant undeterred until a soft ring from the door chimed. Stepping through was a giant of a man dressed in thick brown overalls that were caked with dirt. His arms were tree trunks of muscles, crisscrossed with hundreds of small scars. His face was a grim mask of twisted and deformed flesh top with a mop of bristling black hair that looked like a tomato that had been stepped on and left to grow mold underneath a rock. In one hand he hefted a long, viciously sharp fire ax dripped with an ominous red liquid.

The tomato man walked towards the counter with deliberate steps, each step from his dirty brown boots leaving a small trail of grime and musk, and the scent, my god, the scent. Like a slice of Swiss cheese had fallen in love with a bottle of perfume and the resulting baby had died and festered in a rotting garbage can for three weeks. Steven shrank behind the counter. Dear god, it couldn’t be?

“No! No! Please don’t hurt me! I don’t wanna die!”

The tomato man’s face was a stonewall of emotion; unperturbed, he moved towards the counter and spoke.

“I’ll have a coffee, dark roast, two cream, two sugar.”

Steven looked horrified. He desperately tried to make himself look smaller by crouching beneath the counter.

“Excuse me?”

“Oh sorry, Is this place still open? I saw the sign and thought...”

Steven looked confused

“Oh, uh yes, we’re open till ten-fifteen.”

“Oh, wonderful. Then a coffee, dark roast, two sugar, two cream.”

“Do you want an extra shot with that?”

“Hmm.. No thank you, do you have any bakery items left?”

“Um... yes? Most of them at least.”

“Hm...” Tomato man hefted his axe onto the counter and began looking through his pockets. “Stupid wallet where are you? Oh sorry, sorry, um, what would you recommend?”

“I personally like the Mocharliegg sandwich.”

“Hmm, sounds good. I’ll try that as well.”

“That’ll be \$6.46.”

The tomato man handed Steven a handful of bills.

“Wow, I’m surprised this place is so empty. It’s like a... cemetery in here.”

Timothy finished gulping his coffee and said, “Oh, yes, I forgot I have to go to the auto parts store for... auto parts. Terribly sorry, Martha, but I’ll see you later.”

Martha sipped her iced caramel Mocharlatte and nodded as Timothy wobbled out of the store on his cane.

The tomato man watched him go. “That man should be more careful, he could trip and... crack his head right open.”

Steven shuddered, this wasn’t happening, just his shitty luck, a freaking serial killer shows up during his shift, why was this always happening to him. And to be clear I don’t mean serial killers in general it’s more bad stuff like spilling coffee or dropping something on his foot usually not something this egregious, but you get the idea. He started to pour the sugar and cream into the cup but his hands were shaking so much he spilled the coffee all over his hand with a yelp.

“Yowch!”

The tomato man turned his head.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, just spilled some coffee on my hand.”

“Ouch, you should get some ice on it, you don’t want it to get infected and then they’d have to... cut your hand right off.”

Steven gulped and chose to ignore the pain, maybe he could jump out the window? But that would leave poor defenseless blind old Martha to this obvious murderer's wishes.

"Just stay calm Steve, keep him talking," he muttered under his breath.

"So... what do you do for a living?"

Tomato man eyed Steve with a bemused smile, like a cat gleefully looking down on a mouse that it just caught.

"Oh I work with animals; I make quite the skilled... butcher."

Steve's heart could barely take these innuendos any longer.

"B-b-butcher?"

"Yes, the work's dangerous and messy, but you make quite a... killing."

Steve began to sweat profusely; he handed the coffee to the tomato butcher man and said, "Oh, excuse me I think my shoes untied" and threw himself onto the floor in a fetal position.

The tomato man shrugged and sipped his coffee.

"Mmmm, this roast is to... die for."

Steven wished he could scream, but the fear had taken the air from his lungs. He just lay prostrate on the ground desperately gasping for air like a fish.

The tomato butcher man walked over to where Martha was sitting. "Pardon me, may I sit here?"

"Oh, go right ahead," Martha crooned, completely oblivious to the danger she was in.

Tomato butcher man lowered himself onto the chair, the chair replying with a menacing squeak back at him.

"What's your name, young man?"

"Bill," Tomato butcher man said.

"Oh, that's a fine name."

"Thanks, my mom made it."

"Lovely, tell me Bill, have you heard the news about the woods?"

"Yes, I found out this morning, it seems to be quite the... grave situation.

Listening to that broke Steven. How cruel could this Bill be? Taunting them so like a cruel child pulling the wings off an insect to watch it suffer. Finding courage he didn't know he had, Steven rose from the floor and bravely shouted at Bill, "Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to leave!"

Bill turned with a look of confusion on his face.

“What seems to be the matter, sir?”

“I won’t let you hurt Ms. Martha. If you don’t leave, I’ll.. I’ll make you leave!”

Bill lifted his eyebrows

“What do you mean? I would never hurt a fly.”

“Oh, stop lying, you’re obviously the serial killer!”

“Whoa whoa, what are you saying? I’m no killer!”

“Oh yeah? What about the outfit? That’s definitely a serial killer outfit!”

Bill looked shocked.

“I, I was just helping build some houses for habitat for humanity, I haven’t had a chance to go home and change yet!”

“Oh yeah, what about the axe!”

Bill started to frown

“I was in charge of making lunch, and I was making spaghetti but I forgot to pack a knife so to cut the tomatoes I used an axe!”

“Whu, what! Okay, well, all the death jokes!”

Tears began to well in Bill’s eyes

“I’m sorry I was just trying to make a joke or two, I don’t have a lot of friends, so I was just trying to be friendly.”

“Bu- But your face!”

Tears openly streaming down Bill’s face he cried, “Okay, that’s not okay, I was born this way! I don’t just go up to a person in a wheelchair and go ‘Oh why do your legs not work, huh?’ I just wanted a nice cup of coffee after a long day’s work, but if this is how I’m gonna be treated I might as well just go home!”

And between the sobs Bill thundered out of the building. Martha looked in the direction of Steven coldly.

“Now Steven why did you do that! He seemed like a real nice man.”

Steven tried to speak up, to say something witty or to defend his case, but seeing the tears in Bill’s eyes and the anger in Martha’s made his stomach feel like he had swallowed a boulder.

“I- I just thought- ”

“You shouldn’t judge people like that Steven. You had no right to be so cruel to that man.”

“I-I- I’m sorry, I should have been nicer.”

“See? You should never judge someone by their appearance Steven, understand?”

“Yeah, I understand.” Steven sighed.

“Good, I’m glad you learned your lesson.” Martha smiled, and raised a large revolver to Steven’s head and fired. Steven crumpled to the ground, instantly dead.

“Great, where am I supposed to hide the bodies now?” Martha muttered to herself.

Banya

By Alla Boulos

I bet you have heard of the Finnish, Roman, or Turkish saunas but never gave a second thought to the Russian banyas. It is surprising because Finland with its population of 5.5 million people and a territory of 338,145 square kilometers is about 5000% smaller than Russia, or 51 times smaller, to be exact, making a worldwide ruckus about their bathing habits. But guess what? Banyas – the word used to indicate saunas, steam baths, and bath houses – are an essential part of Russian daily life and culture to this day. True, they are similar to the Finnish variety, perhaps even descended from them, but they still outnumber and outperform their Finnish relatives.

Banyas are everywhere in Russia: the country, the city, the village, the hobby farming plots called dachas, the downtown, near train stations, in the address book, on vacation resorts, corporate headquarters, military stations, camping grounds, gymnasiums, and riverbanks. Heck, they even put one in Antarctica, so they would not miss out on the rituals. I am surprised I have not heard reports of banyas on the Soyuz space station or better yet the Moon – what a way that would be to mark the territory and stake a claim!

Banyas are not only used for the obvious purposes of cleansing, but also for socializing, business (yes, people make business deals in there, ever seen Putin shirtless?), health improvement, recreation, procreation (I need to do an etymological analysis on the similarity of these last two words), and a number of other occasions. They are a popular destination for a party, a reunion, or a simple drinking get together. Obviously, intoxication mixed with drastic temperature changes is extremely dangerous, but no one pays attention to these warnings.

Historically, banyas predated baths and showers and served as the only means of cleansing. In the harsh Siberian climate, they offered a relief from the bitter cold and a place for relief and relaxation. A banya's architecture depends on location. The bathing habits, real estate, and needs of urbanites are very different from those of country folk. In the country a banya is a dire necessity, especially if there is no running water. So, people try to build a banya if at all possible. In the city most banyas are public and can be multi-storied, expensive, and

elaborate. There are historically significant banyas in Moscow and St. Petersburg that are under the protection of the state.

Born in Soviet Russia in the 1970s I did not escape the glory of the banya. A city dweller from birth, my family nevertheless owned a farming plot outside city limits where we built a banya. Having a banya of one's own was a symbol of status and my parents did not want to seem behind. I helped my father build the structure and seal the logs with tow fibers. I was really good at it and that's how I learned to be a tomboy – by building things in silence with my father.

The common design is of a small log cabin sectioned off into 3 rooms: the room where you take off and leave your clothes, the room where you wash yourself, and the actual sauna where you overheat and sweat. These personal, family banyas are kept small for maximization of heat utility and are generally square with each side being around 20 feet. The number of windows in the structure is minimized, so that the heat would not escape, so these structures are small and dark. Electricity can only be safely used in the anteroom, but even there most people prefer to go without for fear of electrocution.

Bathing is usually done in groups to conserve fuel and give multiple people a chance to wash themselves, thus families, neighbors, and friends bathe together separated into gender groups. To accommodate public hygiene, every town has a public banya as well where people who have no personal banyas, plumbing, or running water can come to bathe.

Painfully shy and introverted in my younger days, I was never a fan of this communal endeavor. Thankfully, the apartment I grew up in had running cold and hot water and I enjoyed my baths, but in summers when the system would get corroded, hot water was shut off they for a couple of months for repairs, so there was no other way of getting clean but going to the family banya.

I tried to delay my washing by weeks, but after working on the family plot for a few days and acquiring a solid layer of dirt under my fingernails I was herded by my mother into the banya along with our dacha neighbors. If I had it my way, I would have rather washed in a puddle than a banya with all its spectacular socializing.

The most essential banya accessory is a *venik*. It is a broom-looking bunch of birch branches with leaves still attached tied together into a bundle, dried, and used for convection of heat and massage of the skin. A lot of people make their own veniks in early summer when the birch leaves are soft, but you can also buy them at markets or stores.

Another useful utensil is a wool hat. With temperatures ranging from 150F to 230F the head can get a bit overheated and the solution is, as it is to everything in Russia, is to wear a hat. The hat will protect you from extreme heat and allow you to linger in the swelter until you not only run of toxins but also sweat itself. Less important accessories include buckets of water, basins, ladles, towels, and soap.

The ritual is to dip the birch broom (venik) in the water and hit each other with it inside the banya when you are nice and hot to get the bejesus out of your skin and lungs. I personally never enjoyed this anguish, but most people look forward to and treasure the banya experience.

The bathing is done in complete nudity, of course, with members of your gender and it so happened that I was the youngest and only girl in my surroundings, so I was always stuck in small quarters with naked aging women.

One day Auntie Masha and my mother were heating our banya all day to make it toasty and be able to last a few hours in the evening. They anticipated their prospective relaxation with zeal while I hid in the nearby forest pretending to gather wood. They were positively giddy to have the banya to themselves and spend some quality girl time discussing the affairs of the dacha neighbors. When the sun went down, they screamed my name and fished me out of the woods. I was indignant and refused to understand the appeal of sitting naked together in a small dark overheated space. They laughed at me and shoved me in the banya anyway where I took solace in the smell of the forest coming from the melting birch leaves, the foot-wide window overlooking the garden, and the complementary black tea at the end of the procedure. I wrapped myself in a towel, sat on the wooden bench, and brooded demonstratively averting my gaze from my companions and plotting ways to avenge myself.

In winter banya enthusiasts experiment with temperature extremes by running out of the banya and jumping into snowbanks, ice holes in rivers or lakes, or special pools, fonts, or tubs made specifically for that purpose. The sudden temperature change shocks the system and spikes the heart rate. This exercise is not for the feeble.

Banyas pervade Russian culture. Banya scenes appear in folk tales, famous works of art, movies, and comedy skits. One of the most famous Russian movies shown religiously on New Year's (Russia's biggest holiday) since 1976 is literally translated as "The Irony of Fate, or With a Light Steam" interpreted as "The Irony of Fate or Enjoy Your

Bath.” In this movie 3 old friends have a tradition of going to the public banya on New Year’s and this time they get so drunk that one of them takes another’s flight to a different city where he falls in love with a beautiful woman.

In summers my parents also shipped me off to my grandmother who lived in a small town and had no running water. I spent up to three months there and inevitably, at some point Baba Tanya would take me to the communal banya. She was a no-nonsense kind of woman who believed in the value of relentless labor and hiding from her or disobeying was never in the cards. So, I dutifully persevered through days of cleansing, which started in the morning with Grandma assembling the ammunition: veniks, basins, and household soap, which smelled like dead animals. Of course, it was made of dead animals, well, the fat of dead animals, but none of it helped the aroma. We stood in line (yes, there were lines to get into these spaces), then entered with a cohort of old women. I would undress reluctantly and cover my pre-pubescent body with the steel basin. The vicious swoops and slurps of wet skin smothered me with disgust. Thank God for the steam as it covered up some of the sagging breasts and wrinkled stomachs. I did not care to inspect any genitalia of the bending women either, so maybe the darkness of the private banyas was a blessing.

People go on about the health benefits of the banyas – detoxification, weight loss, improved skin, heightened immunity, and social interaction, but no one ever mentions any detrimental psychological effects on young souls. Emotional trauma? Banyas are not all that, they can be used with malicious intent too. Princess Olga, for example, in 945 AD burned the murderers of her husband in a banya as revenge for their evil deed by pretending to be hospitable and inviting her guests to refresh themselves.

Banyas and alcohol consumption have long gone hand in hand. A visit to the banya without a beer does not deserve a mention. Often people attend the banya for the alcohol rather than the fresh water. Add food, vodka, and a few people, and a visit to the banya might take all evening and all night.

Banyas even have their own mythological creature attached to them called Bannik. This little old man with a scraggly beard lives behind the stove and grumbles at hapless visitors plotting revenge in case anything goes wrong in his habitat. He can predict the future, and he likes to spy on undressed women. What a creep, if you think about it.

In Soviet days people went to the banyas on Sundays instead of church – a cleansing experience. Start the week over. In some ways they replaced the centuries-long tradition of religious rebirth and rejuvenation with this new baptism. People poured buckets or ladles of water on top of their heads and sighed with relief when the water reached the floor. Amen. And moved on with their lives absolved.

I finally dodged the banyas at 14 when I left my small Siberian hometown of Tyumen to pursue my education. I can't say I ever missed them. I came back to visit my family every now and again and witnessed the slow deterioration of the log banya hut on our dacha. As my parents got older, the maintenance became burdensome and slowly the walls cracked and shrank, the roof leaned, and finally the floors caved into the dirt. My mother started using it as a shed in the end and stored all the gardening equipment in there.

That is not to say that the general popularity of the banyas has diminished over the years in Russia, not at all. They are as widespread and in demand as ever. My brother while building his new house near Moscow designed a separate two-story banya structure on the lot complete with guest bedrooms, bathrooms, billiards hall, kitchenette, bar, TV/socializing space, and even an indoor plunge pool and massage room adjacent to the banya quarters. He dazzled and entertained his friends in this complex and offered it to me to stay in during my visits to Moscow.

To my brother's astonishment, I gratefully declined his enthusiastic suggestions to get the banya going every time I visited. His wife enticed me with wool hats, slippers, fluffy bath robes, and wine, but nothing worked. No amount of cajoling was going to make me step inside the wretched place despite it being equipped with the best modern technology, aromatic oils, temperature control, cooling shower, bucket plunge, and a resting mat.

“As you wish,” my brother said, visibly disappointed.

My children enjoyed it, though, so the aversion must not be genetic.

So, what was it about the banyas that repelled me? A child who took her indoctrination seriously I could not fathom the waste of time. Joy, laughter, playing, and frolicking of any kind appeared careless and irresponsible to me. How could they be so unproductive? Wasn't the world in need saving? As a person who did not engage in any entertainment, I could not allow for this frivolity in my mind. But then where did I get this teaching from if not from my family who engaged

freely with excessive bathing? And I myself did not mind spending an hour or two in a warm bath thinking about life. So, this wasn't it.

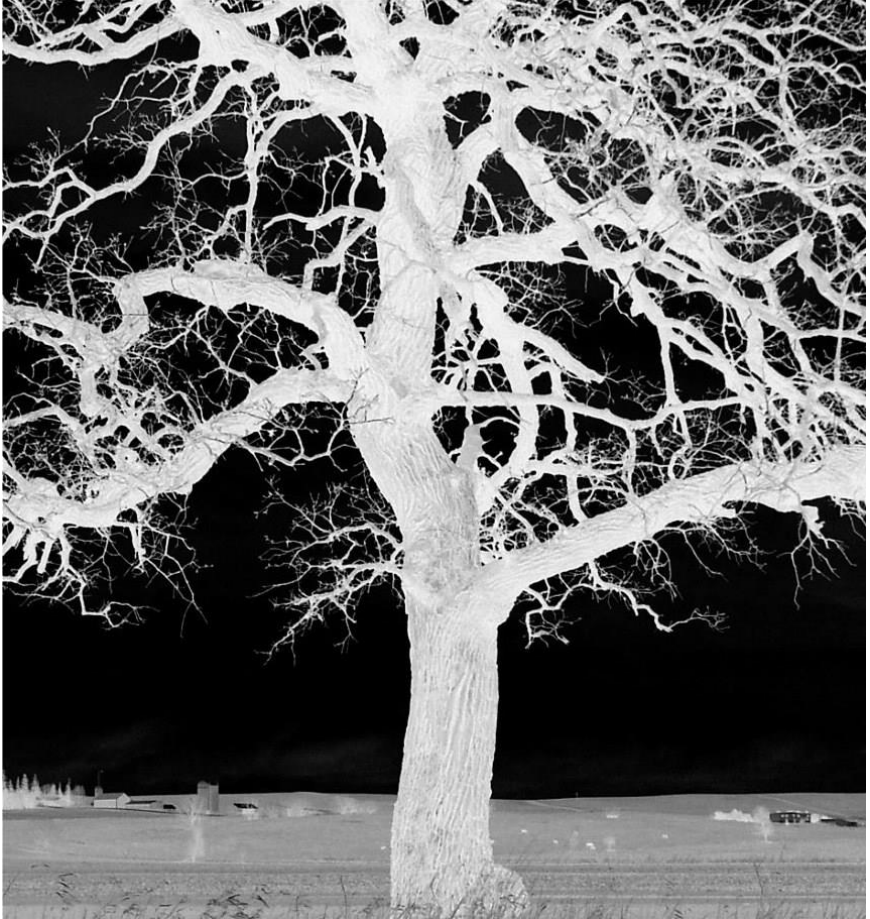
Perhaps it was the alcohol. The women never drank but the men were always around ceasing to make sense with their first shot. A dangerous game. You never know what to expect from drunk people. Alcohol affects everyone differently. But then my father became a better, kinder person when drunk, so this isn't it either.

Then it must be the mild indirect association of banyas with the folk tale character of Baba Yaga – an old unpredictable witch who lives in a small log house on chicken legs, which looks suspiciously like a banya. She flies around in a mortar, wields a pestle and dwells deep in the forest. Her decisions are random and ambiguous as in some tales she is merciful and helps the protagonist but in others enslaves young women and steals and eats children for breakfast. She is ferocious, short-tempered, and deformed bringing a gust of wind with her and stretching long gnarly fingers toward one's offspring. Maybe seeing aging women in log huts reminded me of her and threatened me subconsciously of some attack I encountered in my bedtime stories. But now I am just making stuff up.

The real reason, I believe, lies in the original purpose of the banyas to be places of bonding. I never learned to be vulnerable in front of people, to open up, to appear naked in body or soul. I never poured my heart out, never learned to make and maintain friends. I hide, I refrain, I conceal, I abstain, I pretend, I bottle up and leave things unsaid because then no one can hurt me or help me, and I can remain invincible all by myself. Or vincible, who knows? So, maybe next time I go to Russia I should "sweat it" and give the banya a chance.

Before the Leaves

By Teri Joyce



Classification: Equivocal

by Jessica Castrello

My voice renders a cadence of half-forgotten dreams:
performers glistening beneath a moonlit canopy,
a snow-capped mountain—great castle in the sky.
Skipping rocks upon cobblestone roads,
unpaved paths of pine to cabins in the woods.
A palette of color where the paint has dried and begun to flake.
My mind ripples from the pebbles I toss into a stream.
Each dream rises and falls at the breast—
my frosted breath in each desire.
A blurry face exhaling indecision
and drawing faults in the fogged mirror.

I am Halley's dust tail.
Or a simple satellite
orbiting life to serve others.
Ephemeral, like promises drawn in sand
where salt coats toasted skin.
Afflicted with that ride-into-the-sunset syndrome.

And dancing in the colors of my stroked breeze
a lust for wander, like falling for gravity.
I am a glass half-full of pixie dust and battle scars.
I am the Pan that Peter left behind;
a bohemian born, post-midnight cabaret.

Guitar Strings

by Sam Pfau

Yellow timbered melancholy resonates
From rose-tinted marbles I write this memoir
With the steady vibrations of strings separates
The memory of my father's guitar

He was an elm tree when he played
Commanding silence and strength in those precious songs
Emotion and hope from his voice aggraded
Like mere music could right all the world's wrongs

The contrapasso of his music's persona
To the failing strength of his frame
Like the twinge of winter's kiss in Arizona
Ashes of the man who once was, who remains only in name

He grows weaker by the day, cancer's cruel degradation
His smile and warmth losing its sanguine embrace
His fingers stiff and atrophied with stagnation
Those beautiful songs all but erased.

Those his melodies have been lost to the zephyr
I will carry his strength with me forever.

A Face in Time

by Jessica Castrello

Do I have something on my face?
People always glance in my direction
then fade like the glow of a lamp caught in the bushes.

I am the warden—drenched in the amber twilight of age.
Time hangs heavy in my arms pulling them around.
If I took a break, would they care?

Kindness is a seed that needs to be tended.
Don't they know?
If left to time it'll die before petals, stems, and leaves.

There they go again staring in my direction
as if I have something important to say—
I must have something on my face.

A Spring Morning

by Vicky Erickson



Baba Yaga

by Pavel Kifyak

A witch in a chicken legged house
Talons claw scratch into earth
House bopping back and forth
Like a giant chicken head placed
On a steam powered engine with all
The smoke billowing out its eyes
All the meat gone from the bones

Creaking legs chase down prey
And a white-haired crone bends
From a smoky window netting
A little lost child

Baba Yaga is a witch in a house plastered on chicken legs
Bent double over cauldrons bubbling boiled blood
Stirs with splintered spoons adds a little child
Baba Yaga is a witch in a chicken house
Smelling of smoked sweat from raging cooking fire

Acrid smoke stings—she slivers her eyes shut
Up nostrils it billows
Making mucus move
All her sniffs run down
Flavoring eaten meat

nose crooks upwards as a hook
Wires sprouting a moustache
grease steaming into narrowed eyes
Her eyes glint like charcoals beneath
Tissue thin lids shivering as
Veins crack the surface

Baba Yaga enjoys the toes of children sauced
Dripping bloody
She cracks them off like grapes from the vine

bakes the bones into dipping bread
Her borscht is blood—cabbage—bicep—chicken

She licks her lips with a tongue as dry as sandpaper
Grinding paper skin down a layer
Digging up the veins like
Tree roots

Baba Yaga likes to chow children like chicken

Artwork

by Madaline Green



Smile

by Pavel Kifyak

I do not believe in your smile, it is a pagan smile,
call me the inquisition, I call it a heretic.

Burn it at the pyre, let me see what lies beneath
in ecclesiastical terminology:

I believe your smile is possessed by the spirit
of someone who actually does not like me nor
is amused by my stupid jokes.

Do you smell rotten bread?

Or does your nose cringe—above a row of robed priests—
because you've seen a foul unsightly thing?

It is understandable, I am hideous.

Have you seen my mangy hair?

A nose which juts down into a pyramid;

An innate ability to wrap my wrist in my own fingers;

short enough to never need to crouch;

you might have caught a whiff of me.

I do smell like an unwashed rag I'm sure.

I do not believe in your smile,

even if that is how every person I see,

smiles that same way—

as fake as dentures, stretching out

your lips into a cracked grimace,

though I'm happy enough to believe for a moment—

fall into heresy:

in pagan reality.

Holes

by Teri Joyce



A Broken Heart

by Jessica Izabel Ferreira

Break my heart, why did you?
Choose her over me, why did you?
Leave me with no point of reference, why did you?

All words have roots here
words that left wounds
wounds that smell like death
death of a pure heart
A heart that will never be the same.

I hope someday
someone lifts me up
cures all the pieces
of the pure broken heart
that you left.

by Lisa Dominique Ronan

Little Servant Girl



Lips in adolescent pout, blush on childish cheek,
Warily hidden are the reddened, swollen hands,
clasped uneasy in your lap.

Fingers fret but cannot belie the head tilted in regal poise,
plinthlike neck, ponderance, gravitas and royal bearing –
poverty no less inspiring of reverence, dignity no less for burden of labor.

Surveying alien eyes; piercing, uneven eyes.
Clear, blue, hurt child eyes. Embarrassed, scrutinized,
plain blue dress, uniform of humility, awaiting ridicule.

Your vulnerability surpasses melancholy women in broad strokes of red
gouache, recumbent,
nude and idle. Lofty, languid, flamboyant women lazing,
fade and pale in your sympathetic glow. His loving eye gave you dignity.

An ekphrastic poem inspired by Amedeo Modigliani's *Little Servant Girl*.

Ode to County Road 47

by Ashley Malecha

After your rambler got plowed down,
I drove by the land; I saw the changes.
There used to be just a house
with a willow tree and horse barn.

Back in the 2000s, when I dwelled on your land,
I went sledding down the two hills and in the
Little pasture my mother taught my sister and I
How to ride three horses:
Goldie, the stubborn pony, Dazzle,
the one-eyed horse, and
Elaine, my grand-aunt's show horse
In the hand-me-down western saddles, bareback -
Just as she had grown up in a little farm town,
At horse shows and county fairs.

A few times, from the fence, I watched "Titan." Wanted
To imagine him racing around the tracks
Galloping ahead of the other horses.

Too bad I didn't. But in the long run, what did it matter.
My family was lucky to board him.
The huge, muscular thoroughbred, one of Secretariat's descendants.

Oh, how I miss your hills!
Each time I go by, I look for the trail
That may be hidden. On the new
Paths, rows of homes form a neighborhood.

I squint and see the road once more:
A car that arrived with two dogs, a family of three, and another one
On the way. A trailer with two horses and enough to raise a family.
Settling into
A place of new beginnings. Most continued. Some
Ended.

Contributor's notes

Alla Boulos was born and raised in Russia. She is a woman of many trades and interests. She is an advocate for education who loves writing, literature, languages, photography, humanities, and the arts. She is a newly minted language arts teacher who writes in the fiction and nonfiction genres. She lives in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota with her husband, an Orthodox priest, and their four children. In her spare time, she collects academic degrees – anything from law to theology.

Jessica Castrello is a first-generation college student from Miami, FL. She loves a good romance and watches *Pride and Prejudice* on repeat. Her husband doesn't seem to complain, though. When she isn't reading or writing, she's probably singing, playing games like chess (and losing), playing with her son, or daydreaming about Captain Picard. She's also a proud member of Phi Theta Kappa though she doesn't do much with the organization except maybe use it as material for her bio.

Vicky Erickson is a mix media artist. Even with the variety of things that have been happening in today's world she still finds nature's beauty interesting and calming. She has been traveling to a variety of different parks throughout the state to gather a grand collection of nature photography.

Jessica Izabel Ferreira has discovered one of her passions writing poetry. Poetry is an art where she expresses her feelings and processes all the highs and lows of her life. She wants to continue developing her writing skills and critical thinking in the poetry world. She hopes the readers enjoy her poems and discover pieces of her in them.

Madaline Green is a student at Normandale Community College.

Emma Hinson loves painting and creating stills of moments she sees in the world. She called her cover piece "A Woman's Beautiful Power" after seeing a woman advocate for herself. She was a beautiful sight, and Emma will never forget her. She was both delicate as the rose, but she had strength and power as the rose had thorns.

Erin Holland is a student at Normandale Community College.

Christine Horner writes poetry and fiction. She is the president of the creative writing club, and she is also a Normandale Writing Center tutor. When she is not writing or working, she enjoys knitting, reading, and playing video games.

Nora Huberty has always hated the idea of life being like a rollercoaster, never stopping and always going up. She has never been on a rollercoaster so she cannot truly imagine that. In her poem “Wildfire” she wanted to show what life has been like for someone suffering from an eating disorder. Recovery can be even harder when you use your light to burn yourself out. She thinks of herself as a fire, burning her way through a mountain.

Teri Joyce is exploring creative writing, especially poetry, in her retirement. She also plays in photography and process painting. As a student, she is excited to be in a community where she can cultivate her wild things.

Amanda Judd will graduate with her AFA in Creative Writing from Normandale in May 2021. She plans to pursue her Bachelor’s degree in Creative Writing at an as yet undetermined school that will most definitely be located somewhere warm. She was the winner of the Patsy Lea Core Prize for Poetry in 2020. Her poetry has also been published in New American Poetry Anthology (1987), Her Children Speak – Words & Art for Our Mother Earth (1994), The Poet Bond V (2015), and The Best of the Virginia Writers’ Club Centennial Anthology 1918 – 2018 (2018).

Pavel Kifyak is a student writing poems and fiction for classes and fun, hoping for a bit of enjoyment for the reader.

Shelby Lengyel will be graduating from Normandale Community College with her AFA in Creative Writing in the spring of 2021. She looks forward to pursuing her BFA in Creative Writing at Hamline University in the fall of 2021.

Ashley Malecha studies at Normandale Community College for the AFA major in Creative Writing. Normandale’s literary magazine, Paper Lantern, has featured her poem. When not studying, she is stuffing her face in as many books as she can and the occasional indulgence of sweets, along with writing whatever story occupies her thoughts. She lives in the Minnesota countryside with her black cat and two dogs.

Ashley is a daydreamer, night-thinker, and a proud Hufflepuff, even though her Hogwarts letter never came.

Hannah Merdan is a PSEO student from Lakeville North.

Sam Pfau Samuel Pfau (born circa 1997- died circa 1200) loves to write, why the only thing he loves more than writing is to left.

Ethan Reistad is a half hobbyist, half professional photographer. Anywhere he goes, on a longboard, or on a plane, you will find a camera in his backpack. His friends make jokes at him about it. He is a competitive wake surfer here in Minnesota and he loves skimboarding down south as frequently as possible.

Lisa Dominique Ronan is pursuing an AA in Creative Writing at Normandale. She loves writing fiction and now poetry is a favorite. She enjoys riding her bike around the lakes in the summer, watching the leaves change in the fall and traveling anywhere.

Sarah Stuyvenberg's piece "Masking" is about bottling up feelings inside of you. The longer you put off resolution, the more the emotions fester and intensify, until eventually, the mask is ruined.

Alissa Ulep is a Creative Writing major who writes in different genres. This is her last year at Normandale, after which she is planning on transferring to a 4-year university to continue her Creative Writing degree.

Nina Woerheide is a young poet and creative writer. Focusing primarily on short story and novel, a lifetime of writing has directed her to the focal point of poetic expression. All of her work is based on real-life experiences.

MJ Yarusso is a Fine Arts, Communications, and Philosophy major at Normandale CC. She enjoys combining the elements of art and literature to tell stories of humanity which challenge and inspire. She will be graduating from Normandale in the Spring of 2021 and continuing on to Concordia, St. Paul where she plans to pursue a career in Publishing.

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 Spring 2021 AFA Capstone produced this issue:

Alla Boulos, Travis Hendershot, Amanda Judd,
Shelby Lengyel, Leannys Lopez Leyva, Ashley Malecha,
Codie Olson, Autumn Peterson, Alissa Ulep

Lynette Reini-Grandell and Alicia Conroy,
Faculty Advisors
Contact: Lynette.Reini-Grandell@normandale.edu
Alicia.Conroy@normandale.edu

Front Cover: “A Woman’s Beautiful Power” by Emma Hinson

Back Cover: “Masking” by Sarah Stuyvenberg

Submit your creative writing to the Fall 2021 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously, and acceptance is based on literary merit. Submission links and more information can be found at www.thepaperlantern.org.

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

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

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