

Haute Dish publishes two issues per year (Spring and Fall), and is dedicated to showcasing the literary and artistic talents of students, faculty, and alumni of Metro State University.

Categories for publication include: poetry, short fiction, creative non-fiction, memoir, personal essay, and visual arts (photography, drawing/painting, mixed media, and so on).

Who may submit? Current students, staff, faculty, and alumni are all welcome to submit their work for both Spring and Fall issues.

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HAUTE DISH

The Arts and Literary Magazine of Metro State University

Editor’s Letter

“The purpose of a writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself.” – Albert Camus

Welcome to the Spring 2025 Issue of Haute Dish! Last fall, we took on the role of managing editors with pride, eager to improve the accessibility and excitement of Haute Dish for our incredible team of student editors and the Metro State community.

After months of brainstorming, planning, and connecting with students, faculty, alumni, and creative communities in the Twin Cities, we’re thrilled to share that Haute Dish is thriving! We received over 120 submissions in Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry, and Visual Arts, showcasing the immense talent within the Metro State student body.

Our team of student editors has been nothing short of incredible. These dedicated individuals poured countless hours into reviewing submissions, offering thoughtful feedback, and ensuring each piece was given the attention it deserved. Their commitment to excellence, creativity, and collaboration made this issue possible. Beyond their editorial skills, it’s their passion and care for the arts and their fellow students that truly makes them stand out. Each editor brings a unique perspective to the table, fostering an environment that is both welcoming and inspiring. Haute Dish wouldn’t be the vibrant and diverse journal it is today without their hard work and dedication.

As many of our editors graduate this Spring, we welcome new faces and perspectives to join us in continuing this amazing publication. No experience required! Please contact us if you’re interested.

Thank you to everyone who contributed, and to you, the reader, for supporting this space where all voices can be heard and celebrated.

With gratitude,
~Isaac Sonquist and Stephanie Major
~Managing Editors



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The Market of Lost Stories – What Will You Find? — Challenge Piece Winner

by Tasbiha Hasan

*Here lies the tale of self-discovery in the market of lost stories – what will you find.
Inspired by the following quotes*

- “Not all those who wander are lost.” – J.R.R. Tolkien
- “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” – Maya Angelou
- “We are all stories in the end. Just make it a good one.” – Doctor Who

The farmers’ market was different today. Tucked between the fresh produce and honey stalls was a wooden cart I had never seen before. A sign hung crookedly above it; its faded gold letters barely legible. I hesitated. My basket was already filled with fresh blueberries, local honey, and a loaf of rosemary bread. But something about this cart unsettled me, pulling me in like an unfinished sentence waiting to be completed.

Behind it, an old woman sat on a stool, her silver-threaded hair piled high like a woven crown. Her deep-set eyes studied me knowingly.

“Looking for something?” she asked, her voice smooth as parchment pages turning.

I stepped closer. Instead of fruits or crafts, the cart held rows of glass jars, each containing something strange: wisps of ink swirling like captured smoke, tiny paper boats floating in invisible currents, golden keys resting on aged parchment. Some jars pulsed faintly, others remained still, forgotten.

“What... are these?” I asked.

The old woman smiled. “Unfinished ideas. Forgotten plots. Stories never told. Writers leave them here when they abandon them, unsure where to go next.”

I reached out and picked up a jar. Inside, flickering images formed—a boy standing at the edge of a storm, lightning crackling in his palms. Another jar held a woman with a compass tattoo**, searching for a city that did not exist.

My breath hitched. These stories felt familiar.

“These are mine,” I whispered.

The old woman nodded. “You left them here, unsure if they were good enough.”

A lump formed in my throat. I had abandoned so many stories, leaving them unfinished, convinced they weren’t worth writing. I clutched the jar with the boy in the storm to my chest. His story had been left stranded, unresolved.

“Can I take them back?” I asked.

The old woman’s eyes twinkled. “Only if you promise to finish them this time.”

I hesitated, feeling the weight of the promise. But as I looked down at the jars, I realized they were still waiting—not forgotten, just waiting for me to be brave enough to pick up the pen again.

I nodded. “I promise.”

The old woman smiled and handed me a small cloth-wrapped bundle. “A gift,” she said. “For the journey ahead.”.

I unwrapped it carefully, revealing an old fountain pen with a deep blue body. It felt solid in my grip, like an anchor—something that could take my stories and make them whole.

“Thank you,” I murmured, placing the jars into my basket alongside the blueberries and honey. As I turned to leave, I looked back at the endless rows of jars. “What happens to the stories no one comes back for?”

The old woman sighed; her smile tinged with sadness. “They fade,” she said simply. “And the world is a little emptier without them.”

I walked away then, my steps lighter than before. The market hummed with life around me, the chatter of vendors, the laughter of children, the distant notes of a violinist. But inside me, something new stirred. Or maybe something old I had lost but found again in the Market of Lost Stories. My trip started with blueberries and honey. It ended with a basket full of stories waiting to be told.

Resentment

by Solaris Verdell

I recognize Resentment
as Anger’s offspring-

a weight in the depths of my chest
where my heartbeat lies
replaced with a broiling,

writhing little creature-
digging into my muscle,

eating its way through my chest and
expelling its waste through my mouth.

It calls me Mother and says
I gave it a body
built it a home
with words unsaid and
emotions suppressed

bitterness left unchecked
running amok through my mind
made space for Resentment
to take up residence where
my heart used to be-

now tangled up in my intestines,
where my heart beats as
a heavy throbbing in my gut
urging me to Cough It Up,

say what needs to be said and
remember what Love is
or else
my heartbeat can never return home
and Resentment will lead me
to ruin.

Memory Dump

Sam Vo
digital animation



What Every Youngest Child of Immigrant Parents Should Know

by Ximena Castillo

Every youngest child should know that once you arrive in this new country, your parents will expect you to learn the language of your new home in less than a month so that you can start communicating with your new world. You are the youngest and the language will stick with you the easiest. Your siblings will eventually learn too, but they are older and defiant, and would not be as compliant as to do what is asked of them as easily as you.

As the youngest child, you will become the official translator of the family regarding every important matter involving the family, and would answer phone calls from your father's phone about work, or read your mothers financial statements for her to be able to understand. The youngest will have to figure out how to send professional email from vague information said to you and not be rewarded with a thank you as it will be expected of you.

Every youngest child of an immigrant parent should know that, you will be the one with more free time in your hands, and will be expected of them to keep the house clean and tidy. The food should already be hot on the stove for the time that your parents arrive from work. They would say "Muy bueno" at the end, but not say "Thank you for feeding us," because it's your *job* to do so, since they work to feed *you*.

As the youngest child, you should know that before 18 you should have a job and start helping your family financially, choosing a bill to take over. Your money will be *our money*, and any that goes unjustified will be seen as a waste and selfish. You will be expected to keep good grades and go to college, because you have it better than your parents did in their time and there is no hardship that should keep you from achieving greatness.

And as the youngest child of immigrant parents, you will eventually reach your boiling point. The bottom will be reached and you will either end yourself or start going against everything that you have ever known and put yourself first, because as the youngest child this pressure should have not been put on your shoulders so soon. Your money will be yours again and chores will be done accordingly and not left only to you. The courage to do things that were "prohibited" will be found and your skin will start to get filled with that tattoo that you wanted since you were fourteen. You will get that game console and spend some of your free time finally relaxing instead of stressing that the house is overly clean and without mistakes in fear of getting scolded.

Life will feel like freedom again, and you will be allowed to be the youngest child again.

- After Brian Turner.

Works Cited

Turner, Brian. "What Every Soldier Should Know." *The Practice of Creative Writing*, edited by Heather Sellers, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2021, pp. 213-214

Firefly’s Fate

by Lisa Tinucci

Is it fire or is it a fly?
I guess it’s both, I spy
Its butt is a flame
That shines bright, even in rain

But lately there are fewer
I fear a shrinking future
There’s so much light
In the sky at night

The firefly doesn’t know
When it’s time to go
To seek a date
To find a mate

We light the streets
And the alley behind Pete’s
We light the park
That used to be dark

Our government doesn’t believe
They willingly aggrieve
And turn their heads
To the light pollution that spreads

Across our great city
That is glitzy and ritzy
I wish the city would fight
To extinguish the light

So the firefly can thrive and shine bright at night

Imperfecta

by Lizzy Adams

My sister is a perennial goddess.
Gabrielle. The coveted beauty with honey-colored hair blooming from the roots. She’s got the curves of a bellflower and the mindset of a gazelle. Walnut eyes feature the night sky at their heart. She is my star. Her warm skin is as fragile as a butterfly cocoon. Brittle bones and blue sclera. Softly she endures and sprouts like a tree.
At the hospital, Pamidronate infuses into her—a little more human now. *drip drip drip*
Gabrielle is like the trees we climbed in childhood. When she laughs, I can hear the rustling leaves. So strong and tall. Unlike humans, trees can’t complain when a storm breaks them. When their branches crack off, big and small, they stand tall and keep growing.
“You are making me so tired,” she says. She’s wearing a black Irish dance shirt.
I once dreamed bees swarmed her head like a crown. And her arms and legs were covered in butterflies. They kissed every fracture. Fluttered on her fingertips. Bundled her in honeysuckle vines. Loved her. It was because there was a goddess hiding in my sister’s body and nature would do anything to repair her.
At her next dance competition, she wonders what it’ll be: blue ribbon or broken ankle?
In a maroon dress among the trees, Gabrielle stands on her toes in leather hard shoes. The street is empty, and the trees are bowing to her. Leaning their heads down to get a closer look. Her smile is so radiant, they want it more than the sun.



El Matate De Mama

Yulitza Nava Gonzalez
acrylic paint, embroidery

Birth of Lilah Noelle

by Jada Bauman

One week of contractions picking up and then slowing down. No real progression. I just wanted to hold my second born child, my baby girl.

On Thursday November 17, 2022, at about 8pm I had a stomachache, which in turn caused the bowels to start flowing. I was hoping this meant it was time soon and my baby would come! After the beloved time in the bathroom, contractions picked up again but were not very consistent yet. So, I watched “The Voice” with my husband and got ready for bed. At about 11:30pm, we decided to try and go to sleep. So, I gave him a kiss and turned around to go to sleep. It was as if the kiss pulled the trigger.

Instantly, the contractions became so intense and very frequent. Anywhere from one to five minutes apart. I decided to get up and try to take a bath, knowing that if this was not actual labor, a bath tended to make them go away. I did not last more than twenty minutes in the bath. I knew this was real.

My husband had gotten to sleep for thirty minutes before I came in, threw myself onto the bed, and said “Get up! It is time to go! This is the real thing!” The man laid there and feel back asleep. I screamed “Get up! This is the real thing Layne, I am not kidding, GET UP!” He knows now, I am serious. He scrambled up to grab all our things.

Even though it was only mid-November, there was at least a foot of snow, and it was freezing outside. We took a short drive through our neighborhood to reach the hospital. I remember looking out the window at all the snow. I hated snow. I hate the cold. Focusing on how much I do not like the snow helped distract me and find something else to be mad at instead of the pain. Once we walked into the emergency room, they said that I needed to wait for a nurse to come down and get us, being that I was clearly in labor. I started leaning against the wall wincing in pain as each wave of pain came over me. When the nurse arrived, we slowly made our way up to the birth center. As we approached the elevator, it hit me that this had to be the real thing, and I started to cry. With my first baby, I was induced so I had not experienced a labor quite like this before.

When I got into my room, the nurse checked my cervix and said that I was only three centimeters dilated. I was a two at my appointment two days prior. I could not believe that with all that pain I only progressed one centimeter. The nurse spoke with the doctor, and they decided to admit me because it was clear that this was the real thing, and I was set to be induced in two days anyway. I was thirty-eight weeks and five days pregnant.

They started taking my blood for testing and put an IV in my hand for fluids. If any woman wants an epidural during labor, you have to get fluids pumped into you for an hour before you get it so that you are not dehydrated. So, that meant I could not get it until 3:15am.

With my first baby, I wanted to try and do it naturally with no epidural. I made it to five centimeters before settling for the epidural. So, with this baby I did not even try to prepare myself or my husband for a natural birth. But Lilah was coming quick and was not stopping for anyone. Although my husband and mother-in-law were there with me, they honestly were not much help at all this time, and I was frustrated. I turned my worship music on and when I breathed through the contractions and focused my mind on Jesus, it really did not hurt so bad. But when a painful one came and I became angry, screaming “FUCKKKKK THIS HURTS SO BAD,” holding my breath, it only made the pain worse.

As I work myself through each contraction, I hear my husband say, “Oh I am so hungry and tired.” I told him to shut the hell up, honestly. I thought, really? You think YOU are tired and hungry right now? He went to the vending machine and bought a Snickers bar. I could smell it; I could taste it. So, I told him to go in the bathroom and get away from me with it. I was honestly surprised he was acting this way during this labor. I know he was tired, and it was the middle of the night. But I was in labor, about to push his child out of my vagina. He does not even know what tired and hungry is at that moment. He had no business telling me these things while I suffered. Nevertheless, I love him. And I know he loves me.

When 3:15am started to come around, I sat up on the bed with my foot folded underneath my bottom. I knew what this meant. But WHERE IS MY EPIDURAL? 3:30am came around and she still had not come. I was fuming with rage! Why was she late? Every rational and nice thought left my body, and I just cried. I bounced from screaming rage, saying things like “Where is she? AWWWW this hurts! “Someone go get her!” to a cry of surrender, weakness, and pain.

Eventually I realized I had been sitting up with my foot under my bottom for about forty-five minutes waiting for the anesthesiologist to bring me my epidural. I could tell this position was causing things to change. I felt so much pressure, I could literally feel my body opening up to let my baby out. I knew I needed the epidural now otherwise it could be too late by the time she came.

I had my first child just fifteen months before this day, so the epidural did not work the same. It is like my spinal fluid built a tolerance to the medicine in an epidural. Because I had an epidural in that spot not too long ago, it did not work the same. I still felt the pain, but I felt numb at the same time, so it took the edge off at least. Since I was feeling so much pressure, they immediately checked me once the anesthesiologist left around 4:15am. I jumped to an eight. Immediately the nurse called the doctor to come into the hospital and said that the baby would be here sooner than they thought! I was so excited, but exhausted. I was hoping to be able to take a nap once I got the epidural before it was time to push, like I did with my first daughter. But Lilah had other plans.

My water wasn’t breaking on its own, so they decided to break it. It seemed like nothing really came out.... until a contraction came. With each contraction, little gushes of the fluid that kept my baby alive came gushing out. It was one of the most uncomfortable things I have ever experienced. It triggered the push shakes. When my cervix comes close to ten centimeters, my brain releases a bunch of adrenelines. Gearing me up for the big moment. Thank God for that. I needed that boost of energy to give me the strength to push forward and finish strong.

I lay there shaking uncontrollably, thinking about how I did not want to do this. But I had no choice. My body was ripping, gapping open, and it was not stopping for anything. It was like that feeling you get when you have to do something you really do not want to do, but you just know you have to. Like a good job interview, a big exam, making an important phone call, or cleaning up the baby poop that is seeping up your baby’s back, and has made its way all over their crib. I know this is one of the moments, I must just push through it.

Now I REALLY have to poop. I knew I did not really have to poop though; it was just my body telling me it is time for me to push this baby out. The doctor came in and said, “This baby really wants to come quickly and isn’t going to wait for no one!” and introduced herself. Now it is down to business. The nurses and doctor got the hospital bed ready for pushing.

With each contraction, they want me to push three times for ten seconds at a time and then take a break until the next contraction. So, with the first two contractions, I was testing how much I could feel and understand how to use my body to effectively push. By the third contraction I could tell how I needed to be pushing to get the baby out. She was crowning. By the fourth, her perfect head was out, and with the fifth my beautiful baby girl was born and laid on my chest. A total of seventeen minutes of pushing, just like my first daughter. Lilah was born on November 18th, at 5:02am.

Tears of joy mixed with depletion. That moment is like nothing I have ever felt. Labor is so painful and exhausting, sometimes you forget for a split second that the reward is so fulfilling. This reward changes your heart and soul. It changes everything. Every painful, selfish, stupid, angry thought I had was gone. My heart was filled with so much gratitude. All I could say was “Oh hi baby,” followed by a repetitive “Thank you Jesus.”

I prayed for my sweet girl’s way before I ever saw their beautiful faces. I am so thankful that my body made two healthy babies. I am honored that the good Lord would partner with me and my husband to handcraft these perfect bundles of joy in my womb. I pray that I never forget the joy they have brought me inside and outside of my body. Even during the painful road of bringing them into this world. Joy wouldn’t feel so good if it was not for the pain.

untaint my soul

by Jewels Leepalao

I feel as if my soul
has been wandering this earth for years
in search of you.
It’s sometimes overwhelming
to even be on the receiving end
of your affections.
Because the things that you say,
the way that you think,
it all touches this buried part of me
that I knew existed
but didn’t ever believe could be reached.
Not until you held out your hand
and swore to find every tainted part
to love back to its whole.
Not until you held me in your arms
and promised you’d do anything,
anything at all,
to gently untaint my soul.

We’ll Meet Again Soon

by Dodi Vessels

You sit in the recesses of the dark
waiting for your rotation in life
your dark sole gives me comfort
even though it remains quiet

when it is your turn, my turn
I will be ready for your slight caress
we will walk together in step
no matter what the day will bring

at the end when we are both weary
those last few steps we’ll suffer
“it was worth it” I’ll whisper
As I slip you from my life once again

back to our dark corners we’ll return
another occasion, another day
we’ll meet again soon,
until then, rest well

my favorite pair of dress shoes

FREEDOM

by Never Hall

– a Monologue –

[Begin Play; Act 1; Scene 1]

{for effect; the audience will be asked to remain standing until told to sit}

(a mature man enters the stage. looks ove the audience, sternly, as if studying a stubborn child. Then, never taking his eyes off that stubborn child. He takes a seat, and says firmly..)

GRANDFATHER

Sit down. - Sit. Down.

(he merely stares sternly at the audience, a look of mild impatience on his face, until they sit.)

{the audience sits}

Now, you’re gonna listen, cause I’m only gonna say this once;

Freedom - is the Right - and the Ability - of Every Individual - to Continuously DEFINE , EVOLVE -
And EXPERIENCE Life - Without unnatural consequence, - EVER.

Freedom is the One and Only Prerequisite to Life.

Now, of course, your simpleminded ass might think that this means -you can run around - doing whatever
dumbass thing your ignorance can come up with, - to whomever you want, - when ever you want.

Understand me when I say this;
That thought is, without question, the dumbest thought to ever enter your mind.

Because just as Life has but One Prerequisite, so Freedom has but One Prerequisite. And it is the very simple
understanding that - EVERYONE - has the same Right to Freedom that you do.

And if Freedom MEANS - that Everyone - has the Right to Live, and Choose for themselves, Without unnatural
consequence; then No One has Any Right to Harm, or Coerce, Anyone, EVER.

It’s that simple.

(takes a deep breath, and a moment to contemplate, then...)

But, then again, - if you understood Simplicity, - your ignorant ass wouldn’t be sitting Here with Me.

So, let me break it down for you like this;

The moment You hurt someone else...

The moment you TAKE someone else's Freedom, is the very same moment that You - become a Slave to the Consequences - and the Repercussions - of Your Misdeed.

Because, now, you are forced to live in a Constant state of Fear and Paranoia; impatiently awaiting the Moment when the Person that You Hurt -will find You, and hurt You.

And We, all of us, KNOW - that hurt-people Hurt people.

And, the person you hurt, will, Rightfully... Righteously, want, possibly even need, to hurt You.

And you got that coming, because you hurt them.

(with passion) And you can forget all that non-sense about *'turning the other cheek'*.

Passivism is a concept designed to keep slaves in line!

Ain't no damn slaves here!

Now, (deep breath) - there are some very stupid people out there. And I KNOW -that You are Not one of Them.

(thoughtfully, under his breath) But, trust, they do exist.

(in his normal tone) Those stupid people will think to themselves, *"Well, if I just kill whoever I hurt, then I don't have to worry about Consequences and Repercussions. Then I am free to live my life."*

Now, let me tell you why They are Wrong.

They are Wrong, because no one is an island, unto themselves.

Everyone, on This planet, was born of a man and a woman.

Everyone on This planet has Parents and Family, whether they know them, or not.

And Everyone who has lived beyond Childhood has Friends, because Anyone who has Ever experienced Happiness has made Some-One-Else Happy, because That is what Happiness is.

And Mutual Happiness...well, that is what Friendship is.

So, when a Stupid-Person kills someone, they're not only killing that One Person; they kill Dozens of people. Hell, depending on the murdered person, they may have killed Thousands.

So, that Stupid-Person is not just -looking over their shoulder for that One Ghost. They may be looking over their shoulder for Thousands. And Rightfully... Righteously so.

So, when ignorant children, like yourself, Argue that Freedom means Chaos. YOU must understand that - THAT TRAIN OF THOUGHT - probably originated in the mind of a person who has taken someone else's freedom from them. And That Misdeed has Tainted their mind...

Their mind is Tainted by its own Oppression; waiting for the Day when the Wrong that They have done - is revisited upon them. And - THESE - are, very likely, the Same People who came up with, and now, Desperately, Cling To, the Concept of Passivism.

Now, - you sit there, - and you think a good, long while - about everything I just said. And, if there's any Questions -about any of it... Well, you just remember, Freedom can only be HAD when the Freedom of Other's is RESPECTED.

(he takes a book/magazine from his back pocket, and begins to read.)

[End Act, End Scene, End Play]

***Dedication:**

**In respect, and admiration, for the lessons my Father gave me; the lessons his Father gave him.
'I still remember, and miss, you both.'**

Observer

Kim Reedich
acrylic paint on
gessoed cradle board



My Pal Robbie

by Owen Saarinen

I woke to a strange sound and immediately remembered I was lying on the dusty, streaked concrete beneath the Mary Sails Bridge. It was the flicking sound of a lighter in my ear. Someone was trying to set me on fire. In one animalistic heave and a terrified cry I rolled out of my thin blanket and rose up like a rabbit—fists outstretched. There before me a toothy-grinned old man—lighter—empty it seemed—flicking again and again.

“What the fuck!”

The man grinned wider.

“No worries, would have poured kerosine on you if I’d wanted to toast you.”

The strange introduction of one bum to another would quickly lead to a five-and-half year friendship until Robbie would die of a “shingles infection” and “liver failure” complications, even though he had chosen to quit drinking one year prior. It least that’s what I told his next of kin niece, Haleigh.

I remember once we were talking about sluts we saw on T.V. as kids but mostly about how to most people the word “slut” was going out of fashion. It hurt us both personally because we didn’t like to use it to describe just women. The camp stove was being a “little slut” in the harsh winter air if it couldn’t get the water to a proper boil. Or, the beer was “sluttish” if left open in a can in the rain. (Despite the threat of a stowaway wasp or beetle, we still drank that slutty, leaf-specked beer) OR. On a positive note, the social worker was a wonderful slut scoring Robbie and I a subsidized apartment on the east part of town notorious for suicide jumpers sailing off the tops of the old gristmill silos that stretched upward like big, dumb, gothic pillars.

I thought one day I might climb up there myself and see what all the drama was about. The only problem was that it didn’t appear there was any way for me to get up. So I walked around and around the giant, vacant building with my neck craned up, but couldn’t seem to spot any footholds or ladders leading all two-hundred-and-forty feet up. I figured, then, and with some letdown of the balloon of ripe conspiracy that these stories of parachute-less base jumpers had been made up. Until, of course, I spotted the familiar red flannel and beard of none other than Robbie, himself. Instantly, my heart rose—the stories were true! But then it sunk. That was Robbie—and not some other asshole—and he was wasted as fuck by the way he kept spinning in and out of view along the edge. Maybe he was playing a game of death, with hands life pushing him inward so that he didn’t fall.

He came down. But not by falling. Suddenly so around the corner after I thought maybe he took a nap on the top. And I didn’t ask him how he got up, mostly because I was afraid I might smoke a J and go up one fall evening and do a little twirling myself. We did smoke weed—and more for him—after that and he let me know he had found it, this “earthy stuff,” in none other than a children’s treasure chest in the basement of a home voided for demolition in favor of a new bank. I considered the finding and its relation to the future enterprise and then asked him: what was it like up there? He pulled his lips away from the joint before he had a chance to pull a third inhale and he said that the stars were glowing. It was the middle of the day so they must have been his imagination or that he was spinning so hard, his mind had turned to soup and ejected stars into his vision like some migraines do. Whichever one, we both laughed like thieves and decided to go look for some sluts with baby strollers to gawk at.

I am not sure what was in that weed because I do not remember anything up until the moment I was being

dragged from a high school musical stage in handcuffs. I remember scooting on the polished floor on my bum and then the two men forcing me to stand. If I remember correctly, the God-damn spotlight runner followed me the entire debacle while I crashed over a wooden painted car cutout the suited-up cast members—a guy and some hot gal in blush—had been driving. Funnily, the music had continued to blast and I caught a glimpse of the band director with his arms waving, sort of getting into it, watching me, unsure of the new plot twist. Maybe he was just preserving the old notion of “the show must go on” while the rest of the cast either leapt the stage into the aisles or peeked from between the curtains and from the wings.

Six months later Robbie would be found dead in a stolen canoe deep out on seven-mile-wide Lake Marbego in Wisconsin, his ball cap pulled over his eyes, body melted in a permanent heroin bliss he never woke up from. I’d like to think I started shaving after that. Went and bought a brush and toothpaste, but maybe memory alludes me... Instead, I kept trying the same drugs that Robbie had been using—the whole range of nicknames.

In all its glory one day my usage caught up to me. Being gay and on meth in a trashy alley looking for sex on a Sunday night where the bikers’ rally raged in the very same downtown area left me, to say the very least, vulnerable. As grotesquely follows, six or seven men I could not hide from after I idiotically cat-called them then stripped me naked, bound my hands-up above my head against a downspout (so my armpit hair peeked out), and lashed me with their belts—metal side proud—across my face, ribcage, and back. No mercy. Not a conscience shining from their black leather-huffing jackets. Then they gave me back my clothes, almost like gentlemen, watched me dress and laughed when I got them full of blood. One big guy with two bloodshot eyes scruffled my hair and passed my waving body around once more for kicks to the other guys who beat me before someone shoved me down. A gun was drawn and brandished in my face. I bit my tongue but didn’t move. Then they slunk off like hyenas, leaving me with the enlarged sense of jittering, inverted-ecstasy—if ecstasy could be negatively construed. I guess they knew because I had a band on my wrist with all the colors.

It’s hard to say if I ever really recovered after that. I did not buy that toothpaste and brush, but at the very least I ditched my “bag of fun” in the Penunkanungk River. I can still recall how sharp the shoreline rocks felt beneath my feet. But I still feel the sting of that leather, and the crack of that buckle. On my face, arms, and, yes, my penis and scrotum. Especially there...

One piece of wisdom for you is kill the Robbie that comes your way. Don’t listen to him spout his vest-and-chest antics. He will be your end. He will destroy you.

I have a little money saved today and a somewhat stable shot at apartment living. I have contributed close to nothing in social security so I will likely have to work until I drop dead filling eclairs with vanilla custard piping. So be it. They, the customers (at least the regulars, do) enjoy my face down there at the Servos Bakery and Café while I extract an almond butter croissant from the case with a pair silver tongs. Vocational rehab—I’m autistic—from one very interesting and human-oriented employer, Rocco Redeeni. He keeps me off the streets with his remarkably strange way of seeing everyone with the same joy in his face and lending something real to his conversation. It’s worth noting I am nearing sixty-five and he is somewhere in his late forties.

We punch out at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays together and usually hit the lake for a swim. And even though he’s shirtless I’m still not really into him. At least, not very much so... I just like being... close. To someone. Anyone warm I can tentatively, and with great trepidation, call “home.”

Grandpas Flannels

by Dodi Vessels

They are worn and soft. Not too big. Not too small. Grandpa was a working man. Always gardening, canning or cooking in those flannels. So many flannels. There are even new flannels still in their crinkly bags, ready for Grandpa to grab when the others wear out. That’s just how Grandpa was. He saw value in everything. Appreciated everything. Never replaced a flannel until it had lived its full life and even then, I’m sure he recycled it somehow. Time always wins.

With Grandpa no longer around to wear those flannels, they got passed down to his Grandson. My son. He wore those flannels with pride. Those dark colored, patterned, flannels weren’t just flannels. They were hard work and commitment. They were belly laughs and big hugs. They were hot toddies on Christmas and reeling in the big one in the Boundary Waters. Grandpa was always there. Grandpa is always here.

My son outgrew those flannels as boys often do after bootcamp, so my daughter started to wear them. Now they aren’t just Grandpa, they are also Brother. Hard work. Commitment. Belly laughs and big fish. Love for his family. Quick humor. “Burrito mode”, if you know, you know.

My daughter outgrew them as well. So many flannels. So many stories they could tell. They are Grandpa, they are Son, they are Daughter. They are still there. As I wonder if they always will be. Hanging in the laundry room like soldiers waiting for their next orders. Their next family. Their next story.

apricot

by Jessie Vue

your once tender hands have now grown old
the veins run deep like valleys
they carve into your skin to let the rain flow through
yet your nails remain dirty

are you not tired, mother?
of days that stretch like endless fields
and nights that whisper of aching bones?

the seeds you sow flow through your hands
like the tears you wished never to reap
the essence of salt and dirt is everlasting
forever stained on your cheek

offering many flavors to the tongue
apricot heart, too big to fit
sweet and golden
flesh so tender
yet tough against my lips



Roy the Goblinoid

Jessikah Holmes

coiled buff stoneware clay

Niño Araña: A Tale of the American Spider-Boy

by Tehya Sorell

Julian Castañeda ate his breakfast while watching his favorite hero on the television, Spiderman. His mamá and papá rushed around the apartment looking for clothes and fighting for space at the bathroom sink. Their apartment was modest, at least that’s what mamá likes to say. Julian lived in many apartments before his 8th birthday, but this one was his favorite. Just around the corner from their building was la vilita, the little village. Julian’s papá often took him to this Mexican neighborhood to grocery shop and eat the freshest pan dulces in Chicago.

Papá was born and raised in Morelos, Mexico. He crossed the Frontera almost fifteen years ago to live in Chicago, working odd jobs to send money home to his parents. Papá met mamá at a panadería in la vilita. He said she was the most beautiful gringa in the world. Unfortunately, Papá only knew a little bit of English but mamá took extra Spanish classes at her university so she could communicate with him. Papá and mamá married and promptly welcomed a baby boy into their growing family. They tried to change papá’s immigration status, but they would need a very good lawyer and risked the possibility of papá having to return to Morelos and facing the three-to-ten-year ban.

Julian didn’t exactly understand the concepts of citizenship or how aliens could be illegal. He had been hearing a lot of these words on the television. Donald Trump just became president again and almost everyone in Julian’s community including his parents seemed angry, sad or worried. Some nights Julian could hear his mother crying. She was scared that Papá wasn’t going to come home one day. She kept talking about la migra and President Trump. Papá would comfort her, promising to always be here and if he did get deported, he would return after paying the coyote. Julian did not understand how a coyote would help him come back to Chicago.

“There are rumors about immigration raids happening soon in Chicago,” mamá whispered in Spanish to Papa while they brushed their teeth.

Julian turned down the volume on the television to eavesdrop on their conversation.

“I have to work amor. We won’t be able to afford the rent and Julian’s birthday party if I stay home,” Papa said.

Julian wished more than anything that Spiderman was real, and he would come to Chicago to keep Papá and other undocumented people safe. He finished breakfast and left with mamá to go to school. They waited at the crowded city bus stop. In the corner of his eye, Julian saw something large crawling on the wall of the apartment building. Julian slipped away to investigate. He saw a huge spider with a red and swollen mouth, brown head and a yellow abdomen. It looked like the picture of the Sierra Cacachilas spider from Baja California. Julian remembered this spider from an arachnid encyclopedia he got at the library.

What was it doing in Chicago? This wasn’t the right climate for a tarantula to live in Julian thought. Impulsively he reached his hand out to touch the creature, just to make sure it was real. As soon as his finger brushed the

small hairs on the Sierra Cacahilas, the spider turned suddenly and bit him with lightening speed. It didn’t hurt but Julian jumped back in fear. When the bus arrived, he hid his hand in his pocket. His finger tingled and the sensation traveled up his arm. By the time the bus stopped in front of his elementary school Julian’s whole body felt like it was vibrating. Julian reached his hand out quickly to take his lunch money from mamá but something silky and sticky shot out of his wrist and landed on her sleeve, she didn’t notice. Eyes wide and his mouth hanging open in shock Julian grabbed her arm to inspect her sleeve.

“I must have bumped into a spider’s web,” she said trying to brush it off but with no luck. The web had melted into her blouse.

“Hurry up and get to school,” She shoved the dollar bills into his hand and went back to her seat to continue the ride to her workplace.

Julian was still in shock and disbelief. He just shot a web out of his wrist, just like Spiderman. This was the coolest thing to ever happen in his entire life. Before he could run inside and tell his friends about his powers, Julian felt a sharp tingle in his chest. Something was wrong. This happened to Peter Parker every time danger was lurking. A block away he spotted Aurora’s parents talking to two officers. Aurora was another student in his class and her family came to Chicago from Venezuela a couple months ago. Julian crept closer to the group to evaluate the situation.

“Please don’t do this,” Aurora’s mother said with tears streaming down her face.

The officer’s vest displayed in large letters the word “POLICE ICE” which meant immigration and customs enforcement. Julian knew this was the exact situation his mamá was worried about. La Migra was taking people away, people just like Papá. The officers placed the couple in handcuffs and ushered them into the back seat of the unmarked van. Both officers had their backs turned to Julian and he used his advantage to run as fast as he could towards them. The beating of his heart pounded in his ears and the wind hit his face at a higher speed. He was running faster than he was ever capable of, and didn’t make a single sound as his shoes hit the pavement. He extended his right arm and with perfection he made Spiderman’s signature hand gesture.

A thick stream of webs shot out of his wrist and encapsulated the officers in a tight cocoon. The officers were unable to move and before they could scream Julian shot webbing over their mouths then pushed them into the nearby bushes. He picked up the keychain that was dropped and opened the car door. Aurora’s parents starred at Julian in shock and amazement. Julian unlocked their handcuffs, releasing them.

“Gracias Dios,” The women cried out and hugged Julian tightly.

“How did you do that niño? You shot webs like a spider... like hombre araña,” The man said.

Julian beamed with pride. Aurora was going to come home from school today and her parents would be there. Julian knew what this new power meant. Peter Parker wasn’t coming to Chicago to help his community, but Julian would. He swore to protect immigrants like Aurora’s parents and his papá. He was now Niño Araña, the Mexican American Spider-boy.



Blacky: A Cargo Ship

Éowyn Prusak
photography

Possibility Song

by Mickey Mahoney

On the pink gold lip of a not yet morning

I will wade in soft waters of mind

Not quite sleeping but dreaming still

Driver and passenger combined

Between two days, not yet here or leaving

Like a knife on the neck of time

Between all that is real and imaginary

My body an impossible line

And when I wake, in certain morning

To a world afraid of these things

To the ones who see this fear as truth

And defend the destruction it brings

I will arrive in perfect anger

As the air beneath liberation’s wings

I will arrive as possibility does

I will sing I will sing I will sing

The Tiger Within

by Jewels Leepalao

According to my professor, the tiger in front of us was the last one in the world, confined to a man-made prison and exploited for human enjoyment. Beautiful as she was, a sword of sorrow had stabbed me through the heart and all the joy had bled out of me, leaving me standing there to dry.

“Consider the way she exists,” my professor said in that scratchy voice of his, the one that knew exactly how to bond with the static in my head, and therefore made it easy to block out. “Don’t be fooled by her beauty; while she may be a sight to behold, she’s nothing but dangerous.”

Even I knew that was all wrong, and I had nothing but the feeling in my heart to tell me so, which might’ve been foolish, but... why have hearts if not to feel?

For a brief, terrifying moment, I was the tiger—cursed with a lifetime of loneliness, which might’ve been someone’s dream, but it wasn’t mine, and I knew it couldn’t have been hers either.

“Get a good look at her, folks, because this could be the last you see of her considering—wait, look! Her tail just moved. Isn’t she fascinating?!”

Just listening to him go on about this divine creature he knew nothing about made the throb in my head grow. Knowledge wasn’t the problem though (or lack thereof, perhaps), but it was the regard in which he held her, as if she were nothing but an alien.

Looking back, there are snippets of my memory where I remember feeling the same. Memories are clouded in my head, but I’d walk through my crowded campus feeling like everyone was looking at me because I was different.

Nobody knew I was different. On some nights, I didn’t think so either; maybe I was just convincing myself differently, but there were signs that I wasn’t the same as everyone else.

Perhaps it was in the way I listened to Daisy yap about her bodacious love life, bragging to me about her new boyfriend, Finneas, to which I felt nothing but indifference, and maybe a little distaste.

“Questions?”

Right then, I had one question in mind, one thought, and it was that conversation with Daisy, and how I wished I could feel envious of her amazing love life, but I wasn’t; I wondered what was wrong with me, why I wasn’t into love like everyone else; why I had never thought to picture the perfect “meet-cute,” as Daisy called it.

Strangely, romance was nothing to me in a sea of people who worshiped the very act.

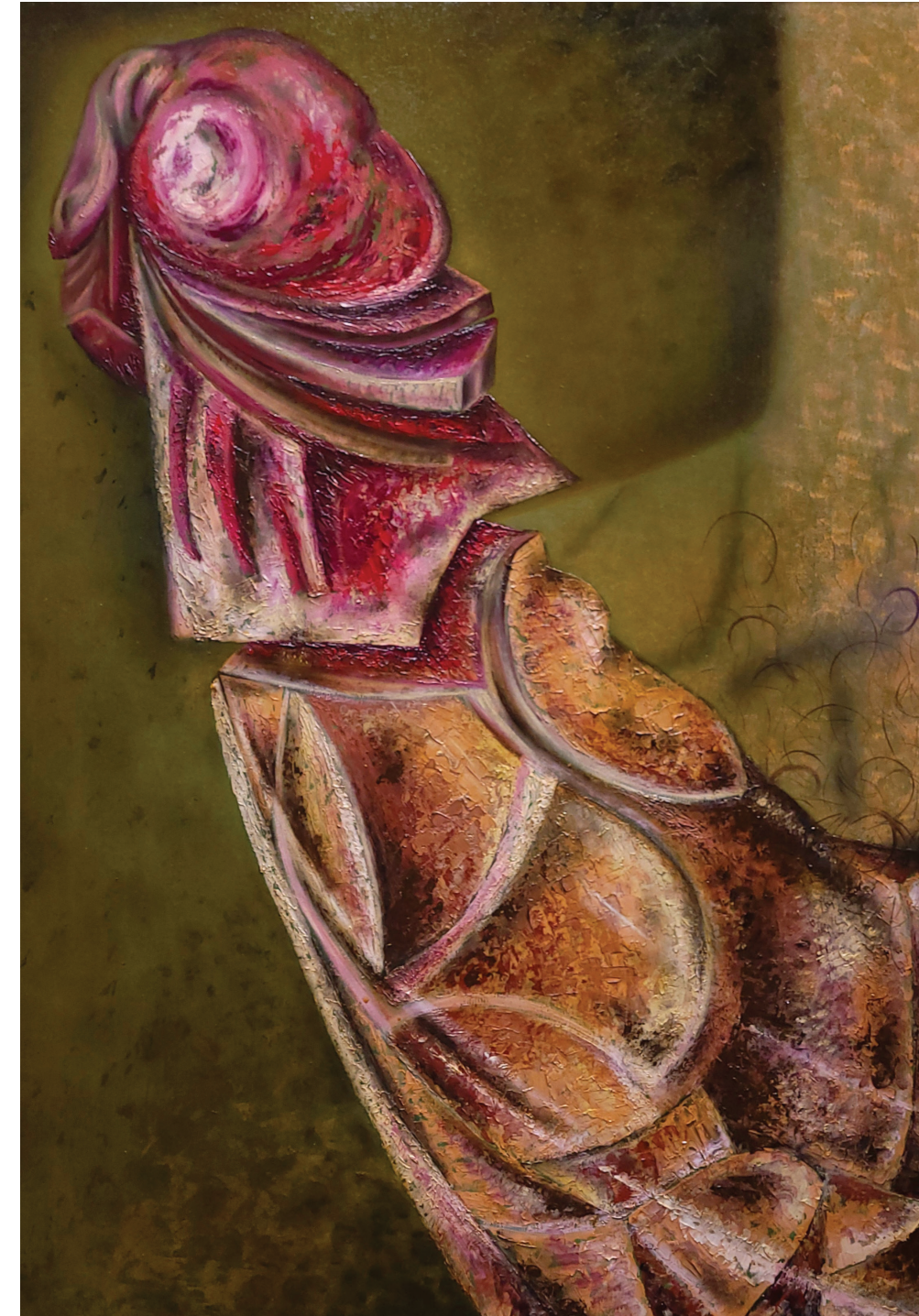
The tiger and I were alone in our own devastating ways.

Usually I was fine with that, but seeing loneliness in her, I had wondered if that was what it looked like on me: almost pitiful, like a wince, like catching a glimpse of her and having to look away. Voicing it aloud wasn’t an option, which might’ve been my shame speaking, but I didn’t want to look like her—like there was no hope left for me.

What a shameful revelation.

“Xander, yes, a question—oh, I thought you raised your hand.”

Zoning in on her, laying there in a pile of her own sorrowful beauty, I frowned—sad, of course—knowing that buried beneath the sadness was a strong sense of loathing, and that loathing came from the fact that when I looked at her, I saw me.



Tension in the Artifact

A “*Cutting Edge Cubism; Rituals of the Body*” project.

Duskin Wayne (Dustin Lindell)
oil paint

Χέρια (Hands)

by Matthew Christenson

I squeeze
egg yolks, flour, sugar, orange, baking powder, and soda
press between my fingers
the texture softens with each knead
slowly melding
unsticking from my hands into a ball
Koulourakia dough

My Yiayia and my love observe me
execute the family recipe
roll a thick worm
make a U, slightly uneven
the long end placed over the other
twist the loop, gently to avoid cracks
the legs of the U weave together
ready to bake

Proud Aunt Sophie
each Christmas, a mountain of mini easter cookies
arrived
we marveled then at their bite sized charm
now we reminisce in awe of her craftswomanship

I aim mine to be three bites
with three pairs of hands the oven fills
we smell the warmth and sweetness

Yiayia taught me to roll, place, and twist
now she says I have surpassed her technique

I am honored to share my handiwork with my love
my hands walk hers through each step once
because feeling, folding, rolling, and twisting the dough
yourself is the best teacher

After 15 minutes or so
you see gold around the cookie’s edge
take them out
soft and stretchy became crisp and crumbly
they are perfect

**Power of
Yesterday**
Katrina Barnett
digital art (Photoshop)



Darkness and Damnation

by Never Hall

Before I leave the opalescence of this quiet little hotel room, I spend three hours preparing for this. Lavender, Hyacinth and Honey bath oils... carefully shaved... beard and mustache neatly trimmed. Usually, I would wear my hair back for this. But my client said that “the mark is feral... wild at heart.” The rule is, kind for kind... like for like. The curl of my dreads hang just below my shoulders. If the client is correct, she’ll draw like a banker to politicians. Beige pants and jacket, white pull-over crew neck, worn, brown, leather shoes and belt. No watch. No jewels. Gauged earrings. Perfect.

At the bar of a local jazz club, I recognize her, instantly, from her photos, as she drifts through the door. The portraits don’t do her justice. Half Human, half Djinn; she’s exquisite. A different time... another place, she might have been a Queen...a Goddess. Here... Now... Proof positive of the corruption of our times and the erosion of the culture of Man, she’s just a whore, a courtesan; though, a good one. Why anybody would want her dead is beyond me. Chocolate brown skin...five foot four inches tall...one-twenty-five to a hundred and thirty pounds. Prettiest thing in the room. My silent observations of her flirtatious encounters are only disturbed by the erratic behaviors of those who enter her space. But her gracious negation of these disruptions of fluidity cause an unexpected admiration in me. I twist from the bar, to cross this eclectic space, just in time to cause her to stop, so I won’t spill the drink I’m holding. “Excuse me.” At first, she looks angry. Then she smiles, “Its ok. You new?” “Sorry?” “New... around here?” I watch her look me over... notice my scent, my clothes, my hair. “I spend a lot of time in this club. Never seen you before”, she slyly touches the collar of her blouse. Her style is classic. Black pencil skirt, split on one side. Diaphanous, tan, button front, blouse, with the sleeves rolled neatly above her elbows. Flesh tone stockings and black pumps. Her hair is a hypnotic tangled twist of light brown curls held by what appear to be chopsticks. Hair pins, I think they call them. Beautiful. “First time”, I respond. “I like jazz.” “Not much for conversation, though, are you?” she laughs. I smile, “I guess not.” “You’re too pretty to be shy...” she ponders a moment. “Buy me a drink.” “What do you like?”

“A Rum Runner...sweet and strong”, she flirts. A little obvious for a professional, but I like her style. And this will probably be her last drink. So, I place the order. She follows me to my table, makes herself comfortable. “Guys like you are usually political activists, radicals or just dangerous.” “Which am I?” She sips her drink, “Dangerous.” “Why?” “An activist would try too hard to be mysterious. A guy, like you, tries not to be.” “Interesting.” I take the bait. “And how does a woman, like you, know the difference?” She hesitates. Then, as if to herself, “We’re all adults here?” I nod my agreement. “I’m experienced”, she teases. “Have you ever been experienced?” Hendrix is one of my favorites. “Not yet.” Her laughter is like when children play on snow-covered playgrounds... rich, chilled, sincere. The band plays a rendition of Billie Holiday’s ‘My Man’ and she forgets I exist. I watch the music drift over her...around her...though her. And thank the creator for woman like her. But why anyone would want her dead is still beyond me. Perhaps he fell in love with a woman no one man will ever possess. Perhaps, in her arms, he spoke of secrets he should have kept. Mine is not to judge. They bring me money, a photo and a few details. In return, I bring darkness and eternal damnation. I watch her sway and think, a different time, a different place, a different life, I might...

Reality twists the knife. I am here...now. And this is the good ol’ U.S. of A. Here, I’m a broker, she’s a commodity and there’s work to be done. I finish my drink and refuse another. She knows the game, but waits for the next song to end before she finishes hers. She stands and holds her hand out to take mine, as if we’d done this a thousand times, and guides me out of the club. There’s a small park across the street, where the river flows through downtown Minneapolis. It’s dark, quiet, inviting. “Do you mind a walk?” “Not at all”, she takes my arm and we stroll beside the water. It’s quiet while we walk. She hums the tune of the last song, as if she were born to sing. And I feel a piece of myself begin to feel...to care...for her.

My blade slips easily...silently from my sleeve.
 She moves sweetly into my arms.
 Her lips are sweet and strong, like rum.
 The blade glides gently between her fourth and fifth ribs...
 into her heart. - I feel it in mine.
 She moans, as if in pleasure, her lips still pressed to me.
 She leans back in my arms, but there is no shock, nor anger, in her expression, "I told you...dangerous."
 She goes limp in my arms.
 "Be gentle with me", she had said.
 I lift her into my arms as gently as I know how.
 Carry her into the flow of the river, and let the current take her...gently.
 Why anyone would want her dead is still beyond me.
 Perhaps to silence her.
 Perhaps to hurt someone who loved her.
 Mine is not to judge.
 They bring money, a photo and a few details.
 In return, I bring darkness and eternal damnation.



Standing Weaving Loom

Mu Hser
 watercolor paint,
 colored pencils

“Where were we?”

by Holly Bot

It’s impossible to forget where we are.

T H U N K . . . H U U U M . . .
“Attention!
H A N D S h a n d s
must be
V I S I B L E v i s i b l e
at all
T I M E S t i m e s !

I repeat,
C R A C K L E . . . B Z Z Z Z . . .
be visible at
A L L a l l
times or we will
E N D e n d
your visit.

T H A N K Y O U t h a n k y o u .”
C L U N K .

I stare at my husband’s hands, hands I’ve never held. We are celebrating our 6th anniversary, and we’ve never kissed (except on the cheek), never held hands (ever), never really touched (except for a brief hug at the beginning and end of each visit). My eyes do a lazy saunter over his body; slide up to meet his gaze.

The vacuum of stillness explodes back into conversations around me. Silent, I absorb the heat in his eyes – an unspoken message sent with a flash of dimples and a grin. Warmth erupts behind my butterflies.

Suddenly a guard appears behind me. Capturing my husband’s attention, he flashes a V of fingers. My husband nods. The guard spins back towards his desk. “Two minutes left,” my husband tells me. I glance around the bomb shelter called a prison visiting room. Concrete floor, concrete walls, hard plastic chairs, windows hidden by cold metal blinds. The clock ticks on a far wall behind me. I ignore it.

I’ve spent a thousand hours here. More. I used to believe touch was the gateway to intimacy. Back then I never felt loved, never loved another well. I lean back in my plastic chair, comfortable in our silence. That’s something else I used to run from.

“Our time is up,” my husband tells me. He makes no move to rise. He considers my face, my hands, my body, memorizing me for the thousandth time. He nods, and we stand.

The noisy room has slowly emptied of people and now we are nearly alone, stragglers at last call. We make our way to the ‘hug rug,’ the designated space in front of the guard desk for hellos and goodbyes. Another couple waits at the desk, riveting the attention of the only other person in the room, the guard.

I’m usually a good girl, a rule follower, but now I’m quickly calculating. I raise my eyes to the cameras sprouted across the ceiling, vacant eyes sans mind, as I place my back to the guard and step onto the rug. My husband joins me, ready to deliver a chaste, prison approved kiss on my cheek. Instead, I turn my face to his and meet his lips with my own. Smiling triumphantly, I bury my face in his neck as I hug him goodbye.

An inner voice tells us it’s time. I drop my arms, turn to go, and watch my husband over my shoulder. Dazed, with a delicious smile under his moustache, he forgets his ID badge laying on the guard desk and floats to his exit. Someday we won’t need to forget where we are, where he is.



River Art
Lisa Tinucci
photography

Forget Me Not

by Kendra Stellmach

Snow crunches under my feet as I walk up the short sidewalk to the large building, a sand-colored brick structure with multiple floors. Signs encouraging visitors to mask up are plastered across the glass of the double-front doors. I'm immediately blasted by heat once I step inside the entryway, careful to wipe my shoes on the commercial black floor mat.

"How can I help you?" A middle-aged woman with too-white teeth beams at me from the front desk. Her nametag reads MaryAnn.

"Here to see Nancy Feek," I tell her. She clicks a few things on her screen to confirm my check-in.

"You're all set. A staff member will walk you to her room."

I offer her a tight-lipped smile before following the young man in muted-blue scrubs who waves me over. He briefly confirms again who I am here for before taking me down the hall to her room. Blessedly he offers no small talk. My quiet demeanor ripples off me in waves, an invisible barrier that signals everyone around to leave me alone.

We stop in front of door number 112. He knocks briefly before sticking his head in and announcing my arrival. I hear a soft voice acknowledge our presence as the orderly gestures for me to step into her room.

"Thank you," I tell him, and he nods, shutting the door behind him with a firm click.

"Honey, honey, come sit. Jeopardy is on. I've gotten the last two questions right!" Nancy Feek pats the spot next to her on the brown loveseat. I oblige, adjusting my slacks as I sit down.

"Hi, Mom," I say, smiling warmly at her. The motion is forced, but like many things, it's unlikely she'll notice.

"Mom? We haven't had any kids yet, Danny," she says, patting my knee before returning her attention to the TV. The episode is an obvious re-run; an image of the host, the late Alex Trebek, flashes across the screen, then pans back to the three contestants standing behind their podiums.

"Are they still treating you okay? Have you had lunch?" I ask. These days, I choose to redirect rather than correct. It puts less pressure on her fragile mind and requires less futile explanations from me. But that doesn't stop me from repeating them again and again in my head. I'm your son, Daniel Jr. Daniel Sr. is dead.

"Yes, yes. Oh, that reminds me! We made brownies today," Mom rises from her spot, presumably to grab the brownies from her kitchenette. I watch her shuffle from the loveseat to grab a large plate covered with plastic wrap. She holds it out to me, an affectionate smile tugging the laugh lines around her mouth. I take the plate and remove the plastic wrap, plucking a sizable brownie from the top of the pile. I set the plate on the coffee table and take a bite, the rich fudge of Mom's family recipe dancing on my taste buds.

Mom had always been a great baker. Long before her diagnosis, she filled my childhood home with the scents of apple, cinnamon, chocolate, and maple syrup every Sunday morning when she'd whip on her apron and wreak flour-covered havoc in the kitchen. Daniel Sr. often joined her later, in charge of the bacon and sausage link prep. My siblings and I would bound down the stairs as soon as we heard his bellowed call, eager to scarf down as many pastries, pancakes, and other assorted sweets Mom made that morning.

These memories float across my mind as I chew, bringing with them a wave of sadness. Mom's aide, Laura, a college-age girl with bright pink hair, likely did most if not all the baking today, in the facility's large commercial kitchen. Alzheimer's and access to an oven don't often pair well.

"Well, what do you think?" Mom asks me, an eager twinkle in her soft green eyes.

"Incredible as always, Ma," I tell her, brushing crumbs of chocolate off my jacket.

"Now there you go with that 'Mom' stuff again, Daniel. Do you know something I don't?" she chides, returning the plate to the kitchenette counter.

I frown and clasp my hands together in my lap. It's only been six months since I made the decision to put Mom in long-term memory care, and even less since she started to forget who I am. Or rather, mistake me for my father. I indeed look like him, though I have my mother's eyes. That detail seems to evade her diseased mind, and I can't decide if it's a blessing or a curse.

"I can't stay for long," I tell her, and she nods, returning to her spot beside me. She reaches for my hand and squeezes it.

"Watch one more episode with me, Danny. Then you can go." Her expression is one meant for my father, love and adoration filling her face with the youth it once contained. She moves to kiss my cheek, and I flinch.

The rejection stings her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I say, covering our joined hands with my free one. "Let's just watch the show."

"Alright," my mother says, but her mouth is still downturned, and a crease sits in her brows.

Within a few minutes, all is forgotten. Mom points excitedly at the T.V. when she guesses another answer correctly, and we ruminate over the category choices. When I stand up to leave, she wraps me in her warm, comforting embrace, and I'm immediately transported back to a time when I was her son. My throat is thick with emotion as I mumble "I love you" and all but sprint out the door.

I hold it together until I'm inside my truck, and then I release everything. Everything I've been holding in since she's forgotten who I am. The sobs rip me apart and then double back again, taking their time to squeeze out every last drop of my anguish. I lay my head back against the headrest and stare at the suede liner, a headache forming in my browbone.

Lights in the parking lot flick on and illuminate the cab. I turn my head slightly to the right and catch sight of the picture pinned to my passenger visor. Instead of grief, or anger, a sense of resolve washes over me. I reach forward and pull the image down to set it inside my dash. My eyes are glued to it as I start my truck and head for Acacia Park Cemetery.

Contributor Bios

Lizzy Adams is a speculative fiction writer, and an editor for Whistling Shade here in the Twin Cities. This Spring she graduates from Metro State with a degree in Creative Writing and Game Studies. She has set her trajectory for an MFA with plans to teach and further build and encourage the literary community.

Katrina Barnett (BA, Metro State: Expected May 2025), is a visual artist who blends printmaking, paper making, sculpture, metalwork, and film. She has worked as a jeweler and metalsmith for over twenty-five years.

Jada Bauman is the holder of an associate’s degree in business management from Central Lakes College. She was published in the schools “Bent Pine Journal” in their 2021 edition, the essay was called “Does fear control your life?”, She is a stay-at-home mother with aspirations to homeschool her children and become an author.

Holly Bot’s story is one of redemption and renewed purpose. Once an award-winning blogger, her life took an unexpected turn with an eight-year prison sentence beginning in 2011. During this time, she encountered Jesus in a profound way, transforming her heart and igniting a passion to share her testimony.

From short stories and cringe fanfiction, writing has always been something that has come naturally to **Ximena Castillo**. Ximena struggles to engage in oral conversation and finds writing easier and gives them more time to think about what they want to say.

Matthew Christenson is an aspiring language arts teacher in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He works as a substitute teacher, using prep periods to write poems or attempt to complete the New York Times crossword.

Kai Fleming (BA, Metro State) is a Minneapolis-based artist focused on digital landscape paintings. He will be exhibiting in the 2025 Student Salon, Gordon Parks Gallery at Metro State, Saint Paul, MN.

Yulitza Nava Gonzalez is majoring in studio arts at Metro State. As an artist Yulitza wants to display her culture through her perspective and to express admiration for her heritage. She hopes to create a connection with anyone who can reciprocate cultural memory and nostalgia.

Never Hall is an Undergrad, graduating at the end of Fall 2025, Interdisciplinary Studies, College of Individualized Studies at Metro State University, who studies Socio-Economic Rhetoric in Creative Writing.

Tasbiha Fatima Hasan is a senior at Metro State, majoring in Environmental Science. Her writing explores themes of college life, resilience, and environmental issues, often blending personal experiences with reflections on sustainability and human connection.

Jessikah Holmes is your friendly neighborhood ceramic sculptor. She grew up watching Jim Henson films which are rich in lore, characters, and creatures. She loves the fantastical in all forms and has been finding her voice in the versatile medium of ceramics.

Mu Ku Hser (BA, Metro State) is a Saint Paul visual artist who focuses on watercolor painting. The subjects of her paintings are scenes from traditional K’Nyaw textiles and how traditional clothes and tools are made. Hser is a graduate of Metro State.

Jewels Leepalao is a third year psychology major and creative writing minor who is passionate about the things she loves. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, and listening to music. She loves writing pieces that make others feel something, whether that is pain or love or yearning.

Mickey Mahoney is a poet, writer and musician. They are currently studying Creative Writing at Metro State with dreams to publish books of their own someday. Outside of school they play bass full-time in over thirteen bands; touring, recording, and teaching regularly.

Éowyn Prusak is a student at Metro State pursuing a degree in English with a minor in Studio Art. She works as a pianist at Faith Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. In her spare time, she loves to draw, paint, watch movies, spend time with family, and read.

Kim Reedich has worked as a graphic designer and art director since 1992. In 2023, Reedich began pursuing her BA degree in Studio Arts at Metro State, where she focused her work on still life painting.

Owen Saarinen is an aspiring novelist who is in school at Metro State for creative writing. He divides his free time between songwriting, Magic: The Gathering, walking, and bettering himself as a person.

Teyha Sorell is a full-time student, double majoring in health communications and ethnic studies. Writing has been her passion since childhood. She often dreamt of being an author, living in a secluded cottage somewhere in Montana with her own personal library.

Kendra Stellmach is a senior studying Creative Writing at Metro State in Saint Paul, MN. Kendra is an avid book collector, reader and writer who enjoys hanging out at home with her husband and their two cats.

Lisa Tinucci is a middle-aged woman who is just now finding her voice in writing. She has dreamt of achieving a college degree since high school, and 41 years later her dream will finally come to fruition. Lisa enjoys camping, baking and frequently has friends over for gimjang (김장) parties.

Solaris Verdell is a Two-Spirit solo mother to a small human, two old lady cats, and a young bearded dragon. Born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, Solaris faced many instances of loss and hardship–finding solace in creativity through illustration, storytelling, and world weaving.

Dodi Vessels is a full-time graphic design instructor attending Metro State to complete her bachelor’s degree in individualized studies. Her degree focuses on the Study of the Creative Process in Writing and the Arts with a mix of psychology and writing classes.

Sam Van Vo (BA, Metro State) is a Laotian and Vietnamese American artist based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Originally an illustrator and graphic designer, he has transitioned into new media, sculpture, and video.

Jessie Vue is a proud first-generation Hmong student at Metro State, pursuing a degree in Management Information Systems. Passionate about learning and discovery, she spends her free time immersed in books, planning future travel adventures, and binging video essays on YouTube.

Duskin Wayne (Dustin Lindell) is an award-winning artist from Minnesota, celebrated for his vibrant, bold paintings and unique fashion, often featuring colorful top hats and glasses. Drawing from a diverse background in various creative fields, he is passionate about encouraging others to embrace their authentic selves and prioritize exploration over perfection.