

July 2021

Issue 4.5

# Phoenix

A watercolor illustration of a landscape. A path leads from the bottom left towards a tree with autumn foliage in the center. The background is a mix of purple, pink, and green washes.

**The Creative Writing Zine**

# Word of the Board



**Bram van Beerendonk**  
**Commissioner of**  
**External Affairs**

Hey there!

In this final word of the board of this year, I'm not completely sure what to tell you exactly. I think that if we look back a year or so when this was all still new, no one would have expected us to still be in this mess. No one would have expected a year without drinks at de Stadsgenoot, a year without the Christmas prom and a year without the big trip.

I think Albion, as an association, has always attracted open-minded and amazingly creative people. To me, this special zine, and the Phoenix magazine in general, are celebrations of that creativity. Personally, I've always had a love-hate relationship with creativity.

As some of you may know, I write poetry at times. It's always been a tool to help me through the complications of my all too angsty teenage years. For that, I love my poems. On the other hand, reading back my own work has always felt like late-night recounting that one time when you said 'you too' to a waiter who told you to enjoy your dinner. After I was convinced to speak at last year's poetry reading, I spent hours (and I mean literal hours) rehearsing my 50 stupid lines of rhyme. The idea of sharing something grounded in such personal matters frightened me, but, of course, everything turned out just fine. It even felt nice to share without having to share directly (if that makes any sense?). In any case, keep being creative and I'll see you next year!

Bram

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## PHOENIX

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*Marijn van de Visser*

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# An introduction to the Zine

Written by Cecilie Balemans-Højberg and Julia Schuurmans

Dear readers,

Thank you for supporting another year of Phoenix. Despite the not too ideal circumstances, this year flew by. Together with our team, we were able to create four different issues for you all, and we are very proud of that. Our team has worked hard to make this happen. We hope you like them as much as we do.

In this final issue of the year, we aspired to involve other writers from both in- and outside Phoenix. The Zine became a space for all who were interested to share their creative writing. Thanks to all these writers, our Zine became filled up with many stories and poems. All different and all beautiful. This Zine shows how creative people in our studies are and we are so impressed by all of these stories and poems.

As you can expect, creativity is something we value a lot at Phoenix. We hope you enjoy all these different pieces of creative writing, and maybe find some inspiration to write something yourself.

We can't thank you enough for supporting Phoenix, we hope you continue to do so in the upcoming year. Phoenix 2020-2021 is signing off, have an amazing summer!

Love,

Julia Schuurmans, *Editor-in-Chief 2020-2021* &  
Cecilie Balemans-Højberg, *Creative Director 2020-2021*

# Where the Dogwoods Grow

Written by Tomas Pollard

Maybe it seems nostalgic to speak of where the dogwoods grow,  
but wild dogwoods grow almost anywhere fallow and moist,

even in hard-to-reach sunless nooks in thick bushes.

On the highway between lanes, in-between rails, in rain gulleys,

littered with lady bugs, in burrow they and seem to want to greet you  
coming and going, breaking down and standing in traffic—

green rascals with ears like a puppy,  
weeds with fluted green tassels of flowerets.

Up creep stems thin as a cocktail straw but angular as a  
rattooth; where rabbits rush through to better cover is

where the dogwoods grow, where pass the children  
on the way to a hideout made of windfall.

Where the dogwoods grow is a dead-end street where the neighbor-  
hood ends,  
where the mowers turn around as no one pays to keep that part.

Where the dogwoods grow is a city limit, an unkept cove,  
an overgrown path, a spot where ticks breed distant from crowds.

# Fuzzy

Written by Julia Schuurmans

The world is a little fuzzy, though it might just be me. I'm part of a large crowd of people, it's hot and we're all dancing. On the stage in front of us, DJs are giving a performance. Music is blazing through the speakers, the lights are mesmerising, but it is the bass that amazes me. I feel it drumming in my bones as my heart is matching its beat. My mind is in the clouds and I start to lose awareness of everything surrounding me. The world becomes a dreamland that I've never seen before.

Even though I am sure the movement of my hips still synchronizes with the speed of the beat, my mind – my inner self – seems to have slowed down. I feel the drugs slowly taking control of my body. They blur the edges of the world and release an ecstatic feeling that I've never felt before. I feel utterly content at this moment, with myself, my life. I've lost my worries in the course of the night, I've become one with myself. It's a kind of freedom that I'm sure will stay with me forever.

I'm enjoying the music that is playing, but it is the bass that steadies me and guides me through the night. Time starts to be a weird concept when the drugs kick in. An entire night can feel like an hour and suddenly it's over. During the night, I'm dancing alone and with my friends, we laugh, we smoke. But I'm experiencing the world at a different pace. Movements have become blurry, but intense colours draw me to them, they've become a kaleidoscope. I know I'm losing myself, but I don't care. I want to get lost. I give myself over to the blissfulness of the moment. I let the music become part of me as I become part of the music. I keep dancing.

Time has frozen, even though my body is moving. There's a silence in my head even though the bass is buzzing inside of me. I stray away in the dancing lights. I feel like I'm floating in the air, I look at my feet to make sure they're still touching the ground. Suddenly, the world gets dark and I become part of a sea of flashlights. I want to hold on, but they take me away as I drift off.

# Eric

It's been two months,  
I still feel numb,  
a mind full of worry  
*How is this ever going to settle?*

But the journey's only just begun  
An awful journey,  
This time though the end is *bleak*

## ***Oh no not again***

First your liver,  
Now your lungs,  
Even your bones  
                  aren't safe

## ***That stupid eye of yours***

I wish I could help you  
Yet helpless is what you are  
*But no-one can do a thing*

## ***FUCK!***

Water has not stopped streaming,  
despite my efforts to build a dam.

It's hard.  
but not as hard as it is for you  
*If only there was something to do...*

You want to live,  
and I hope you do,  
*You always said you wanted to get to 102*

59 is too young to leave  
and 22 is TOO SOON to leave  
me

## ***Please don't leave me***

We live in the moment,  
day by day,  
It's alright for now  
but the future seems gloomy

## ***Too dark for me***

Uncertainty is scary  
It kills me inside  
*But sadly for you it's in the literal sense*

You are my best friend  
Don't you ever forget,  
I'll love you always.

And don't you worry,  
***You were the perfect dad.***

Written by Cecilie Bailemans-Højberg

# A Warm Summer Night Realisation

Written by Eva Biesheuvel

One of the best realisations I've ever had, came to me on that hot summer night when I was only sixteen years old, and I couldn't sleep because of the heat. I had been staring at the ceiling for too long, and I decided that I'd have to find a cooler place for a little bit. Our hallway had marble tiles, so I decided to walk a few steps, open my door and sit down on the cold hallway floor. The coldness of the tiles felt amazing, so I sat there for a while, staring out of the window, looking at the starry night. I'd assumed that my parents would be asleep already, so I hadn't made any noise when I'd walked out of my room, but as I sat there I could hear them whisper to each other. I couldn't help but listen in.

"I'm so happy that he is finding his way in life so easily", I heard my mom say.

"Me too, love", my father answered kindly.

"You know, for us, it wasn't always easy. When I was his age, I struggled a lot with my mental health."

"I know, dear, and I wish that I would've been in your life back then. I know I couldn't have helped you to overcome your demons, you had to do that yourself, but I wish that I had been there to hold your hand on the way."

My mother sighed, a good kind of sigh, one out of love and connection.

She answered: "You're the sweetest, and I know that I wasn't the only one, I know that you felt lonely around that age and I, too, wish that I had been in your life back then."

"At least we've got each other now, and I couldn't be happier", my father whispered softly.

They stayed silent for a while, and I tried to comprehend what I'd just heard. They had been talking about me, about how easily I was navigating myself through life so far. I knew that they'd been strug-



ling around my age, but it touched me that they were so happy for me. Their words made me realise that they'd been worried about me having to go through the same. This conversation wasn't meant for my ears, though, and I knew that I shouldn't stay any longer, but I couldn't move myself. I'd like to say that this was because of the cold tiles, but I would be lying, because at that moment I wasn't aware of the temperature anymore. I could only listen for more.

My dad started talking again: "I will always remember the day we first met, it was one of the best days of my life."

"For me as well", my mother whispered lovingly, and she let out a puberal sounding giggle that I had never heard from her before. She was silent for a little bit, and then went on: "Sometimes, I'm glad that I was feeling well again when we first met, because you probably wouldn't have liked me at my worst."

My dad sounded somewhat offended when he answered: "Jane, when I married you I said: 'for better and for worse', and I was dead serious. It wouldn't have been different back in the day, because you were and you still are the most amazing woman I've ever met. You will always be. You're funny, smart, empathic, creative and kind. You're more than I would've ever dared to wish for, you should know that."

"You don't know if you would've liked me back then, you can't say that with certainty."

"I can."

It was silent again, and I could feel tears in my eyes. I felt lucky to be their son.

After a little while my mom said: "I love you so much."

My dad sighed, out of love and compassion, and answered: "I love you too, my dear, very, very much."

One of the best realisations I've ever had, came to me on that hot summer night, because when I overheard my parents' conversation, I knew that if I'd never find true love myself, I at least had been lucky enough to witness it.

# Space Criminals

Written by Marit Vogels

'May I ask why you have several knives in your purse?' I feel Atlas panting on my shoulder.

'Actually, they're daggers.' Slowly and silently, the crew and I tiptoe between all the spaceships that are stalled. 'And no, you may not ask.'

Suddenly, Atlas turns. 'Knives are not exactly what I would bring on a mission to hijack a spaceship to find the nearest wormhole to escape into.' He chuckles and so does Rory. He might be right, but I have to be prepared right. Suddenly, Atlas' eyes are wide open. The panic in his pupils is quite easy to read and it triggers a shiver that runs through my body.

'What is it?' I whisper. The whole crew remains silent until Atlas gives a sign the coast is clear. But, that sign does not come. Instead, he motions that we all need to lower to the ground. We follow his lead and within a few seconds, we all lie on the cold hard ground. It is surprising how often these inconvenient things happen when we are outside and it is winter. But you know, that might be the consequence when trying to be a space criminal.

Suddenly, we all hear the thumping of boots on the cobblestones. Only shortly after that, a dozen soldiers come marching around the corner. We are doomed.

'This isn't good at all. We need to go!' Atlas panics.

'Well damn, Atlas. How could you tell?' I say ironically. I shouldn't be this way right now, but it is just who I am. I cope with sarcasm.

'See how they're slowly surrounding us, Venus? And they all have space guns and sharper than ever knives, I even think one of them has a space machete. Those things are pretty awesome, but not right now and this is just not good.' I didn't expect him to actually answer me, it is kind of cute that he did. For a fifteen-year-old, he is actually not

too bad.

One of the soldiers starts shouting: 'Hand over Venus and the rest of you won't get hurt!' His powerful voice demands attention and every one of us looks dazed. They mean me. They want me. 'I repeat: give us the girl and the rest of you will not get hurt!' He presses his urgency on every word.

Atlas stares at me and so do Rory, Stella and Quinn. Little Quinn, I can't just give up. We will not go down without a fight. Atlas thinks the same as me because he straightens his back and yells back. 'No! Not happening!' The guards behind the door don't answer.

The room feels smaller and smaller every second. We don't know what is going to happen next. I can't help but feel like we totally lost. All of a sudden, Rory runs to me, while panting she looks me in the eyes and before I truly realise what is happening she kisses me. Lips on lips. The kiss feels hungry, passionate and warm. Different than I ever experienced. Way earlier than I wanted to, she ended the kiss. We were silly for thinking we were really going to get away with all this. To get to murder people, ruin the world and then leave off in a wormhole. It was silly thinking and an even crazier plan, but it was a dream and dreams are always worth chasing, right?

'Guys, I am so sorry for getting you all into this mess,' I yell. The soldiers are gradually coming closer and their thumping becomes unbearable to my ears. I look at my feet, I just can't look at their faces now. Little Quinn with her injury, Stella with her disapproving looks all the time, my dear Rory that I want a future with so much and Atlas, my little man, he helped us when he didn't have to.

'I am so sorry,' I sob. 'I want you guys to know I love you all. You are my family, my only family.' I hold Rory's hand and that is when the shots get fired. From my crew's side and from the soldiers' side. But, before I realise, my breath gets punched out of me and I fall back against the rock hard wall. That is when I feel the hot blood oozing from my chest. The last I see are the stars, my home, I am finally going home.

# Red and Silver

Written by Helenie Demir

The heels of her boots echoed like the bells of doom in his ears. With his arms tight above his head, barely able to stand on his feet anymore, and his head hung low, he winced every time she took another step, and another, and another.

It felt like waiting for death.

*And what a place to die*, he thought. A cheap cottage with only the flames in the small hearth to witness his final moments.

"Did you know that with only the flick of my wrist this little knife could be in your throat?"

He lifted his head just a little to see her throw the silver-shining dagger with a black leather hilt in the air and catch it with ease, amusement glinting in her dark eyes under the shadow of that pirate-like hat. He lowered his gaze, recognizing streaks and drops of blood on her white linen shirt.

*My blood.*

"Amazing how something so tiny can cause such damage..." she mused.

"Are you?" he asked hoarsely.

She looked up from the blade in her hand. "Am I what?"

Not a hint of morality was to be heard in her. Fear crept in on him, the thought of her skinning him alive and not even batting an eye.

"Going to kill me or not?" he said a bit louder, angrier.

She clicked her tongue and began patiently pacing the floor again. "This dagger of mine is too pretty to be used for such gore, but... I feel like your blood might be somewhat clean."

"I can guarantee you," he said almost laughingly, "I'm not that clean."

She slowly walked towards him, her lips almost touching his ear, and said, softly, "None of us are, darling. That's what makes killing so easy." When she looked him in the eye, there was a wicked grin on her face.

She didn't bulge and he didn't want to seem any weaker than he actually was, so he willed himself to inch his face closer to hers. "Is that

what you tell yourself every night before you go to sleep?" he tried to say with equal calm.

Her smile grew wider. "Among other things." She turned around. "You won't get away with this."

She laughed. "And what will you and your merry band of greedy street rats do to me? Hmm? Kill me?"

"Slowly," he said in a low tone. "Very slowly."

She stared at him for some seconds with squinted eyes and then spoke in a hissed tone. "You fail to see, you wasted piece of air, that death does not scare me. We all die, general. Death isn't special, it happens all around us, it does not discriminate. Even someone as clean as you will die." She scoffed. "The reason it scares you is because you think you deserve to live."

"I never said that. I never claimed to be a good person."

"No, you're even worse," she retorted quickly. "You are pretending to be a wronged version of a self-righteous idiot. That lie feeds your consciousness with even more lies, excusing yourself in the name of ignorance, incapability, and most of all, shame."

Something in those words made him square his shoulders—or at least, he tried to—and lift his chin. His face made the expression of a snarl.

"Oh, don't look at me like that." She waved her hand, the dagger still in it. "You're not all that scary. All I see is a pup, following orders, barking..." She tilted her head and looked at him challengingly. "But too much of a bitch to bite."

"I'm a general." He leaned forward. "I don't follow orders."

"Maybe not." She straightened herself. "But all leaders wish to be followers from time to time so they don't get the blame for when things go wrong, and you," she said, taking a step forward, close enough to put the dagger to his throat, sending a shiver down his spine with the cold touch of steel. "You made the mistake of listening to a very stupid and incredibly arrogant bastard." He saw the fire flicker weakly in the corner of his eye. "You got my father killed."

For a moment, he thought he could hear real vulnerability in her voice. He thought he detected regret, pain, mourning. But all of it was gone in a second when she spoke again.

"And for that, you will pay."

## OLD WOUNDS

Dark moonlight,  
illuminates a meandering pathway through these woods.  
Haunting whispers tell me I'm close.  
There is no life left  
In this thing that remains.  
A skeleton of branches keeping me covered  
Locking me in, like the jaws of something old.  
Something wicked.  
I lost my senses, in this search of yours.  
All that I'm left with  
Is cold dusty memory  
Of a life long lost.

## BIRTH

My first vision –  
A sound beyond human eyes.  
Colour and sound were overlapping, creating a dance of their own  
Both have no names yet  
They just are.  
Filled my being to the brim -  
Until I tumbled.  
My skin washed away into the body of youth.  
My hands, no longer my own,  
Hold a new tenderness,  
With every touch being beautifully strange.  
Light to skin and skin to light  
Shadows I cannot decipher.  
I try to blend into the sea of bodies around me, savouring my newness.  
Moving around, a blur, my heartbeat picks up a rhythm of footsteps.  
Loud  
Steady  
Is this what it means, that living?

*Written by Mohana Zwaga*

## don't dare

i wanna wrap you in cashmere  
and make you feel cozily warm  
you smile from the inside and I do too  
maybe this time it's a charm  
my glance is brief  
my knowledge patchy  
but you sorta make me  
(happy)

come closer  
even more i'll rinse  
you off that doubt  
crooked souls  
go together  
see each other  
mean well  
but not right

do not  
dare  
doing  
me dirty

*Written by Anna Preindl*

## Nothing of Everything

I wish your skin could be softer  
but I know I can help it  
let me luffa-scrub you from head  
to toe  
let me lather on  
my healing oils  
let me soften that leather of yours  
to match the softness of your be-  
ing  
because you are so, so soft.

Ignite the spark  
or just feed your hunger  
feel the connection  
or just feel our nothingness

life throws uncertainties  
life throws rocks, summons waves  
and then, you are my tower  
to keep you grounded, above  
water,  
engulfed in warmth, sheltered

you can only do so much

*Written by Anna Preindl*

# The River Ran

Written by Mijntje du Pont

a way a lone a lost a last a loved a long the long river strolled a flowery flowing dress-wearing woman carrying a basket filled with fruits and cookies and chocolate and books as she was going for a long walk all alone hoping it would not be interrupted by rain as an afternoon strolling alone along the river was exactly what she was looking for as she strolled along the river that flowed towards the east and then the west

and then to the north and the south and the west again as she walked along the river carrying a basket as she was going out for a walk while wearing a flowery flowing dress as she had known the river for years as she used to walk along with them every single day for all of her life and as she was walking along the river she realised that she never asked the river for their name and she never inquired whether the river had had a good day but as she strolled along the long river wearing a flowery flowing dress carrying a basket filled with goods she sat down at the river bank and dipped her toes into the cool sand looking at the pebbles the water gently touching her toes and taking her with them into the stream and then the river flowed towards the



east and then to the west

and to the north and the south and to the west again as she tried to swim against the stream returning to the bridge where she once was alone and happy and at peace as her life was not on a roll as she was living her life day by day and routine was not nibbling all her life away but then routine flowed in again her flowery flowing dress replaced by a suit again the water covering her face filling her nostrils and then and then and then the river flowed towards the east and then to the west

and to the north and the south and to the west again as she floated along the flowing water wearing a flowery flowing dress the content of her bag floated alongside her and her books sunk to the bottom of the river waiting for a fish to swim by who happened to be in a particularly eager book reading mood but the woman was already drifting far away looking at the pink purple-blue sky and in the cold water her hair still flowing freely fish intrigued by the golden river that streamed through their sky as the river flowed to the west and the south

and then to the north and the west and then to the east again As

# Swearing

Written by Siya Sithamparanathan

*Eruma madu*. The word itself makes me chuckle. It was something my mum used to call me a lot. Being the oldest and not getting along with my younger sister too often meant that I got into trouble a lot. Hence, the nickname *eruma madu*. For my mum to whip out a fairly inoffensive slur, which quite literally translates into *buffalo*, seemed only fitting for such a polite and rarely foul-mouthed woman like her. Of course she would let out the occasional "for helvede", and in extreme cases she'd let "kælling" slip out of her mouth. I like to think that while she appears to be this harmless little woman, she has been corrupted slightly over the years, and now there must be a crude little Danish viking living inside of her. In any case, *eruma madu* was her preferred choice for verbal beatings. *Pasu madu* if she was feeling particularly creative with her word choice. And so in times of utter frustration at me causing trouble, my mum referred to me as either buffalo or cow - whichever one she felt was the most appropriate. My sister would later be at the receiving end of my mum's ungulate name calling as well. And nowadays, especially now that we are all grown up, we have come to find out that these nicknames are the easiest way to get out of trouble. How times have changed. Although some things never change. The immediate feeling of dread that washed over us, if we accidentally broke something at mum's house - *that* never changes. Yet, nowadays, if we call ourselves an *eruma madu* before she can, she won't even bat an eye. She will simply start giggling and there is really nothing more wonderful than to see this tiny woman trying to hold back her laughter only to erupt seconds later. We certainly haven't forgotten that we used to be her little buffalos and cows, so now we remind her at every opportunity we get.

# Letter to my real first love

Written by Victoria Bluriot Puebla

Dear old self,

You were wonderful. Everyone's ray of sunshine, and your own, too. You shone your light, an overflow of joy you happily shared with others. You shone brightly, the amazing girl, nice, caring and ready to take on the world. People often called you innocent and even naïve, but you, you knew better. They were the naïve ones. You, on the other hand, you had in your hands, in your heart, the key to happiness, and you were so eager to share this key with others. But, my love, each person has their own lock. We've had to learn that the hard way. You tried, so hard and for so long. You tried with some lost friends, but you tried with him, mostly.

He was the biggest event of your era, and he will always be an important step in mine. You were so eager to teach him how to love. We have that in common, you know. Like you, I am still not able to do things halfway; we always get carried away by the intensity of our emotions. And when it is with the right person, it is beautiful. But you fell for the wrong person. You tried, over and over again, to the point of physical and mental exhaustion. You poured your heart, your body, your soul, all of your energy into this toxic relationship. But what about you? You had nothing left for yourself, feeding on empty words and broken promises. Your life was slowly drained out of you, until you were nothing but the shell of the happy girl you once were.

You have been beautiful. So brave, and stubborn like our father, for keeping on without ever giving up for good. But you were broken, my love. Shattered in a million pieces. Turned to dust. The fall was too great for you to get up again. So I did. I rose, and here I stand today, grateful for you. Thank you for having existed. Thank you for leaving me the memory of the best summer of your life, and most of all, thank you for your wonderful energy, so happy and radiant. I promise you, this time, I will take care of it.

Rest in peace, my love.

Forever yours,  
V.

# Time Wasted

Written by Aylya Rafet

“Boobs! Boobies!”

What the hell? I turn around and I see that a tiny, very much annoying creature has made its way into my room.

“I can see your boobies!” Delilah screamed, whilst pointing at my breasts.

“Moom! Get your pet out of my room pleaseee!”

Don’t get me wrong – I adore my baby sister; however, I am now of the age that allows me to demand some privacy. I mean, I already have to deal with my so-called ‘boobies’ growing, as well as hair that is appearing basically everywhere. The last thing I need is for a six-year-old little troll to point it out.

“Wait until you have to deal with this, Delilah,” I whispered underneath my breath.

“Imogen, be kinder to you sister,” my mother shouted from the kitchen. “And hurry up, the school bus should be here in about 10 minutes!”

“Coming, mom!” I closed the door behind my sister’s back and carried on getting dressed.

Summer is already here. The sun is shining, and its warmth can be felt by all who do not own an air conditioner. It is hot as balls.

“A crop top it is,” I said to myself. I grabbed the first one I saw and went to put it on.

My reflection stopped me like it always does. “You are fat,” she said. “Fat and ugly.”

One glance at my body and the thoughts came rushing back. The scar above my lip, the golden lining carrying the memory of a tragic fall. My decidedly Romanesque nose that I wish I could shrink. My eyes. My big brown bug eyes – always looking for the worst parts of my being. Those same eyes are now following the fiery marks across my thighs. It feels like forever once they start roaming around, putting me down, not daring to look up to the bright sun. The sun is warm. I wish my heart was too. Each time my reflection glances back at me my heart freezes a little. The world stops and all that exists are the voices – my demons. They grasp onto my belly with no intention to let go until I am no more. They hold onto the pieces of me until I no longer wish for my soul to inhabit them. Until tears run down my cheeks and wash away the last memory of a smile, a laugh. A laugh revealing my pearly white teeth. Crooked. Teeth crooked, like the vision of myself. My mind indulges in hazardous games at the cost of my life. A price I am often willing to pay. A ‘Game Over’ is approaching and my legs are tired of running.

“Imogen, honey,” my mother burst into my room, bringing me back to reality. Loosening the invisible tie around my neck, put there by my reflection, for only just a moment. A moment that felt like forever. “You don’t have much time left! The bus will be here soon.”

Indeed, my time is counted. The golden clock hanging on the wall behind me can confirm.

# Defying Gravity

Written by Julia Herni

Clear, sparkling water washes over heavy grey stones like it washes over my past. On the top of the mountain, time flows as eternally and boundless as glacier water; it is frightening, but also healing. The sun hits the water sharply while the transparent blues, whites and greens send it off, back into the infinite sky. I see the water carrying a golden branch, the arm of a tree. New water pushes the branch towards the edge of the ground I am standing on. Just before the fall, the river accelerates uncontrollably and it determines the fate of the branch. The water turns into a mat, cloudy white as it tumbles down the mountain, swallowing everything that comes down with it. The water is no longer able to reflect the sunlight; sun and water become one. Everything inevitably becomes one in the speed of the fall; I will never see that branch in its original state again. Gravity hits me with a familiar, nauseating dizziness. I will *never* see my friend again.

I suddenly notice the ear-deafening sound. Up until now, it had served as a white noise, but the rumbling has slowly intruded my thoughts as I remembered what happened last year. It sounds like the waterfall continuously has to fight the rough stone wall in order to survive and maintain its position. Sadly, my friend came between the two forces and was caught right in the heat of the fight when the smooth granite underneath the

thick water surface was able to take the upper hand. I take a step back.

Someone's children carelessly step into shallow water; they scream playfully. They are not too far away from where the strong current is. The water looks as refreshing as last year. Nevertheless, at the heart of that refreshment lies the cold; that harsh coldness can paralyse you in a matter of minutes. I didn't have the chance to see it happen to my friend, but I know he must have felt it as he was submerged in ice-water. There's nothing I can do for the children; nature is either against them or not. Nature independently fights its fight. I guess their parents merely think it is a pretty sight to see their children play in the magical river with high peaks in the background. And I don't blame them. I thought the same once.

Fog enters the valleys which intensifies the scent of the brisk forest air. The misty air is putting a damp cloth on my forehead to calm my nerves and refocus. My feet are still safely grounded in the gravel path. The soft wind makes the Austrian pines that stand close to the river bend towards me to form a shelter. My friend knew the risk, but he wasn't afraid. He got all he ever wanted, which was to be part of an ever-growing, independent natural environment. Nature was not against him; it wanted to unite with him. Finally, the fog has silently merged with the breezy mist of the waterfall, blurring the once bright and sunny view and mixing it with reality.

# An Accidental Burial

Written by Janna de Graaf

We escaped via the backdoor, believing our flight to have gone unnoticed. The playing field was a mere sprint away. We took cover beneath the slide, our feet pressing into the muddy grass. Huddled close together, we peered at the familiar white building; the pond populated with leaches, the slits posing as windows and the round, yellow-brown roof that gave it the appearance of a poisonous toad.

I tried to level my breath. Afraid that my panting might alert our pursuer.

"Let's head for that tree," Remy said, inclining her pointy chin towards the willow that towered over the fence separating our playing field from the cemetery. "C'mon Ally, you know he'll never get us there." She nudged me.

I froze at the notion of advancing those crumbling headstones. My mind was transfixed by images of closed boxes. Boxes being lowered into the clammy depths of the earth where their occupants could not be heard by anyone.

Remy did not wait for my response. She launched herself forward, nearly slipping on the grey substance that covered the ground and sucked at her warm feet.

I squared my shoulders. "Such an accident should never have happened," my mother had told a smaller, crying version of me, many years ago when grandmother lay buried all alone. "Let's get you safely home." Sadly, that day was the first thing popping up whenever mum mentioned grandma. That and the overwhelming aroma of aloe vera that accompanied every hug of hers. Somehow I inhaled it every time, along with her greasy white hairs.

I ran for the tree. Hitting the bark beside Remy.

Then our alarm sounded. A branch snapped.

We stiffened. I was pressed against the tree, cheeks reddening. Remy, on the other hand, was gazing up.

"Let's go up," she hissed. "He won't come for us there." The stranger in black danced around in my mind, his face coming uncomfortably close. Close enough for me to hear his grinding teeth and smell his minty breath, which entered my nostrils and pressed the air from my lungs, setting my insides aflame.

I followed Remy, climbing higher and higher. A surprised laugh sound-



ed from below.

"Faster!" Remy urged, pulling at my wrist. Her nails dug long trenches into my skin.

I quickly drew in my legs. The stranger was craning his long neck, shrugging off his overcoat. Then, to our surprise, he grabbed one of the bulkier branches and started to climb after us.

My breath hitched. Looking at Remy, I noticed that she had her eyes on a large branch, drooping over the fence.

"Don't," I implored.

She paid me no heed.

With the agility of an acrobat, she tiptoed over the bough, wobbling slightly, sliding off the edge... Dropping softly to the ground and landing on both feet. She whirled around and waited for me.

The bough quaked dangerously when I put my foot on it. The soles of my shoes were slippery. I reminded myself how the strange man would take hold of me, pushing me down, making me stare into his hollow eyes. I lunged forward.

I hit the ground beside Remy, my stomach twisting as I remembered that it had been a cemetery just like this one. I had been wandering, rubbing my eyes, entering places where I was not supposed to be. An elegant coffin entered my view, perched upon a table. Its velvety softness had reminded me of my own bed at home. I plunged into its hollow depth, which felt surprisingly comfortable. There I closed my eyes.

"What's the matter? You ill or somethin'? C'mon and hide!" Remy yanked at my arm, drawing me deeper into the stillness of the yard. Tiny flowers tore their way up through the cracks in the stones. Poppies screamed in their bright colour.

I wanted out.

I recalled my eyes flying open on that bygone day; the air being pressed out of my lungs; a large lump sagging down on top of me, reeking of something akin to an onion. Greasy strands entered my mouth. My hand scratched a leathery slab dangling by my side. There was no air in the box.

My mother had thrown a fit at grandmother's funeral. "How could you not have seen her?! How could you have let this happen!?"

I had been screaming then and I was screaming now. The stranger and Remy were both rendered silent. My voice was the only sound saving me from the silence of the dead.

# Over the Edge of the Ashtray

Written by Tessa van Nes

"She had one o' them big smiles; her smile was very broad. Not in a bad way." He paused for a moment and carefully hit the otherwise clean, turquoise ashtray with his cigarette so that the ash fell neatly into it. Before taking another drag the lines in his forehead scrunched up and he sighed. He moved his free hand to his head to where once his hair grew and rubbed it. "Actually, it was in a bad way. It's the type of smile that will only get you bad news if you stand in the way of it, ya know? Like, for instance, when she'd walk, she would move her hips from side to side, but like, in a purposeful way, like she knew what she was doing, ya know? Men was always lookin' at her, but they knew they could never... ya know? Now, I'm not saying- I don't mean to say that she had it comin' or some shit like that. She didn't. I'm not. She was different." He thought for a second. His fingers started tracing the carved letters on the table carefully. J. F., it said. Suddenly he felt eyes on him and he looked down at the lettering. Quickly he put his hand flat on the table and returned his gaze to the window. He continued.

"It's hard here, ya know? Being who you are. She made it feel... easier, ya know? Her eyes were filled with compassion, empathy, stubbornness, and too many

dreams for this small town. It didn't scare me none, but others were intimidated, I suppose." His fingers were back dancing over the letters.

"She was Godsend, bless her heart." His voice cracked and tears were threatening to lose their balance in his eyes. His Southern accent became more apparent than it already was. "I don't know- She took a lot 'pon herself. More than she could carry perhaps. Maybe I was part o' that, and, ya know, I'm sorry. I don't know-" The tears could no longer hold on to his lashes and started falling down his eyes. The carved J. F. was covered by his hand as he grabbed the side of the table to steady himself. He dumped his cigarette in the ashtray, and some of the ash spilled over the edge. Immediately, he wiped it off the table and into his hands.

"A moment please." He disappeared into his kitchen and came back with some paper towel and a wet cleaning cloth. With the cloth, he first cleaned the outside of the ashtray and put it on his chair while he cleaned the table. Then he took the paper towel, dried both the table and the ashtray and put everything in place again. When he sat down again, he looked somewhat recomposed.

# Tantalus Lateralus Amor Fati

Written by Daan Reins

It was more like I was pulling the ground towards me than that I was hurdling towards it. I had made choices in this sad excuse for a life, but none had given me the sense of autonomy that was washing over me in this euphoric instance. I had finally done something for me. It was deeply sad, obviously, that it had had to come to this, and that my only true stroke of individuality was also my undoing, but at least there was this one glorious moment. This vindication. It was almost good enough. One moment, as I fell from my apartment window on the fifth floor right until the moment I passed the second floor and saw a flash of my downstairs neighbour.

She was playing with her baby. I thought about parenthood, about how everything always seemed so possible when I was a kid. I thought about forgone aspirations of fatherhood, of my father, about how although he never quite developed the vocabulary for it- or the body language, for that matter- we knew that we loved each other. It hadn't been enough, obviously. Obviously. Not for me. No. No, me, being the sad sap that I am, in an incredibly uncharacteristic moment of personal demarcation and passion I had decided to do away with it all. Sod it. I had walked home from my bus stop, only restraining myself from sprinting because I somehow still cared about appearances, I had trotted up the stairs, nodded to my roommate and flung myself out the window. I almost died happy too. In the end it was one of those things I couldn't quite get right. I couldn't have just closed my eyes and instead I caught a glimpse of what I was exiting from. Just a moment ago I had been so certain that all possible potential had seeped from my existence and that all that remained was a painful, insidious drought: not enough for me to shrivel up and die from, just enough to keep me clamouring for just a puddle, just a drop of hope, never quite getting

there.

And here I had gotten it. My drop. A little taste of the divinity that is just as much a part of all this as is the usual gunk. At first I was angry again. It was too perfect: it suited me too well to die in a fit of irony. All this time I had tried to make amends with the tender indifference of the universe and now it was feeding me some sort of poetic justice. God I was angry. It was like a spike, or a hot flash. A split second of a stinging emotion. The whole fall mustn't have taken more than a few seconds anyway, but it felt long enough. It was long enough for this burst of anger to feel really short. Falling the final story, melancholy washed over me once more. I didn't kid myself: I had had a terrible run of it, and had truly despised most of my time there, but even my supposed salvation didn't seem like it fit properly. I had known joy, sporadically, sure, but joy nonetheless, and I had turned my back on it. The thing that had always stopped me before was the belief that maybe even the tiniest bit of simple enjoyment was enough to justify an otherwise bleak existence. In my spur of determination, I had finally repudiated this. When I jumped I was sure that the end was the upside. And yet I died regrettably.

I met the ground head-first. The undoubtedly gory details of my death were none of my concern, luckily. For me it was as if I had very quickly and very forcibly pushed my face to the cement and had simply covered my eyes. Perhaps the black was a bit deeper. Then there was no more black. For a moment there was no sight. Then black again. White. Red. Yellow. I come up and gasp for air. My vision is distorted and blurred. I haven't used my eyes before. I am lifted as I squeal in confusion. My lungs take to air, and they won't empty fully again until after my untimely death. Squinting, I make out the visage of the person holding me. She is my mother, younger than I have ever seen her. I weep.

# Escaping North Korea

Written by Cecilie Balemans-Højberg

## Even the birds and mice can hear you whisper

Even the birds and mice can hear you whisper  
When I was young my mom would always tell me,  
Never speak your thoughts for your safety won't be a guarantee.  
Even the birds and mice can hear you whisper.

I did not dare watch a movie,  
Afraid that anyone would see me.  
Even the birds and mice can hear you whisper.

My friend once walked past the photos in the hall,  
But she did not bow down at all.  
Even the birds and mice can hear you whisper.

My neighbour got caught for selling rope from the mines,  
Little did he know it would cost his family their lives.  
Even the birds and mice can hear you whisper.

Every night I think about the lights on the other side,  
Perhaps there I could find myself a bowl of rice?

## The Other Side of Darkness

silent through the winter night  
not a single soul in sight  
the river cold and thick with ice  
here's my escape to paradise  
shouting starts tells me to stop  
I run until my lungs give up  
shots fired don't know where  
bullets falling from the air  
halfway there feet so cold  
run towards the lights of gold  
through the trees safe for now  
they will find me anyhow  
now I'm stuck in this mess  
the other side of darkness

## Last Resort

Crossed the border away from hell,  
It all seems to be going too well.

Been living in the shadows for quite a while,  
It's been three years since I got to smile.

The journey is not over yet,  
The most difficult part lies far ahead.

Away from the busy streets with all its cars,  
Towards the desert led by stars.

Through hot and cold I fought my way,  
Still I'm afraid to get caught every day.

Now years have gone it's not that far,  
I have finally reached Ulaanbaatar.

The embassy's my last resort,  
Perhaps there I'll find my support.

## Haunted

Incheon airport, I've now reached my goal.  
A lady comes closer trying to help me,  
I enter the bus and make my way to Seoul.  
My country fired missiles says the woman on TV.  
My dear leader, someone I used to adore.  
Even in freedom, his face, still a disturbance.

Now I'm on the busy streets of Myeongdong,  
Oh, what a sight, all this food in abundance!  
My people are starving but I'm not anymore,  
Rice everywhere, it just seems so wrong.

Enter my new home, door shuts with a bang.  
I stare out the window, Seoul looks stunning today.  
Distant Namsan Tower, the image gets crisper,  
Somewhat resembles Ryugyong tow'ring over Pyongyang.  
Wherever I go, my country won't go away.  
I wonder, can they still hear me whisper?

# sentences are symphonies;

Written by Thijs Biezen

the throat an instrument

I tune it at the start  
a jumble comes out

diminuendo follows

the audience crescendos  
this is not a stand-up!

the curtains close  
pianissimo in the seats  
whispers as they open

there is a piano now  
hung from up high  
I try to play it

the rope snaps  
the tempo picks up

a tangle of notes  
lands on me with the piano  
crushing me

slapstick:  
just like the cartoons

fortissimo!  
an uproar in the gallery

I bow  
but I haven't played a thing

an encore! encore!  
what can I do but comply

again and again and again