

# **The Paper Lantern**

**Vol. VII, Issue 2**

Spring 2012

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# Swift

By Emily Klehr

Genius must come early,  
like a lightning bolt to a new creation.  
Rising with the creep  
of the night,  
tingling in  
the fingers fresh from  
strings stalked  
by notes.  
Cornered,  
with the pen poised in the mind  
before the body even knew.  
Locked away in the hand  
just learning the curves and lines,  
the mystery of word.

Intuition does not burst forth.  
It's the birth of the mice in the basement.  
Launching the infestation,  
the infectious adrenaline  
catching the air in the lungs  
feeding the brain.  
More.

*More*

# Spring Rears Its Fiery Mane

By Emily Klehr

The whisper comes first  
the light tingle behind your ear  
asking, *Are you easily  
amused?*

Then it spritzes euphoria  
onto your neck  
illuminating to cerulean.

Like looking through a stained glass window  
my windshield filled with vivid  
rounds of hue.

Bringing me forward to light speed  
seeing the road and the grass       but...  
beyond  
to the last black day of February.

Parked and still, I see myself  
in the rearview mirror  
my hair gone through electroshock,  
red fiery pieces reaching  
towards the sky and I answer:  
*Yes, exactly.*

# Out-of-season Cicadas

By Sandra Youngs

Hungry birds fill the sky  
gauntlets in song

rogues in flight  
flitting from tree

to tree.

Waves of wind  
ripple long golden blades

a grassy ocean.

Hot asphalt rises  
infiltrating our interior  
crowding the car.

Staring through the windshield  
streaked by yesterday's rain  
a silent gaze  
unreadable

empty.

Imagined responses  
cloud my thoughts

accusations  
regret

punctuated by silence.

Young squirrels chatter  
darting along tight-rope branches

leaping like acrobats

among

sticky pines.

Pinched lips  
sucked against your flat teeth  
a cavern of questions  
held behind velvet.

Still,

young birds soar  
dipping their wings  
rising in loose circles  
peering down at us

ants in perspective.



# Palm Trees

By Ashley Richardson

# Carbon

By Devona Brown

Leukocytes,  
erythrocytes,  
thrombocytes,                      yellow plasma.  
Relatively unlikely to spontaneously compost.

Fire reaching out  
from the furthest atom; back  
in time: molecular combinations.

Have you ever burned a stick,  
to try to draw with?  
Charred the eldest fossil--  
burned, cut, sparkling light more  
varied than gold. Since 1890

Southern African artificial  
rarity powerful and kept contained.  
Its dirtier counterpart shades,  
with an eraser whites, then  
blacks, and...

Look behind your walls,  
the iron it rusts. Red  
coating the gray.

Bloody contemporary. What  
is magic without movement?  
Kinetic, nothing really  
is continuous still.

With every potential  
flame that enters my lungs  
as oxygen, it is the same:  
coal painting or as a tint,

it will continue to evolve  
my veins in flowing  
chalk.



# What I Want

By Teresa Klotz

I want to stop  
ignoring my soul  
for a nibble of attention  
from men, to be naked  
without fearing witnesses  
to my abundant poochiness,  
to liberate  
the salty broad  
I know myself to be  
and say skanky things  
without being shushed  
or having some man  
mistake them  
as cues for sex,  
to roam foreign countries  
and chat with locals in  
their native tongue,  
sip espresso, watch people  
and smile only for myself,  
to wear my life like a loose  
garment, a glorious pashmina  
scarf wrapped cozy  
around my neck,  
everything I need secure  
in the leather  
satchel at my feet.

# Manhood

By Shem Ontiri, Jr.

When I was six, the Earth was so small I could hold it in the palm of my hand. I was standing in the middle of my village, Kisii. I wanted to walk to the farthest end of the world and touch the sky. I wondered if there were worlds I could not see. I lived in the glittery and enigmatic starry Kisii Village, the ever- green region in Kenya, one of the equatorial regions.

As a child, I never missed Sunday school. I liked my Sunday school teacher, Pastor Isaac. He was a tall and slim man who dressed in a black and white suit with a black necktie. He stood at the pulpit with his thrilled dimpled smile, raised his right hand and waved at the congregation. With a cheerful voice he burst out, “Brothers and sisters in Christ, hallelujah!” Everyone shouted, “Amen!” but me. I turned and looked at my grandma who sat next to me. I wanted to raise my hand and remind Pastor Isaac that my five sisters and mother and father were not sitting next to me, just my grandmother. My family had moved away and left me with my grandma. However, I didn’t want to confront him because I knew there was free chocolate candy, all the way from England, that he passed out to the children at the end of the service.

Pastor Isaac disagreed with our cultural ritual that marked the transition from boyhood into manhood. Circumcision was one of the mandatory and meaningful rites of passage. When I turned 11, I put my childish ways behind. I couldn’t wait to get the circumcision over with.

Every year on my birthday, December 28<sup>th</sup>, my father said to me, “You are about to face the knife.” When I turned eight, my dad explained to me what facing the knife meant. He told me that in our Kisii tradition, the most important role in circumcision was not only the rite of passage, but also the challenge of enduring the pain. I was terrified. I knew the knife was small but very sharp. I wondered how much blood there would be.

The elders couldn’t wait to celebrate a circumcision; they watched their male infants grow day by day. When my dad was a little boy, the party started the night before the circumcision. All the people in the village and friends and relatives from different villages throughout Kenya were invited two months before the day of circumcision. Kisii is at the shore of lake Victoria, the land with the most fertile soil. Because of the lush landscape, the villagers could afford to bring different kinds of food to the ceremonies. We depend on our farms as our primary source of income. We grow coffee and tea as our cash

crops. We also grow maize, cassava, onions tomatoes, yam, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, beans, peas, millet, greens and fruits. December was chosen for circumcision because that was when the farm crops were ready for harvest. In addition, December was the most convenient month for male candidates, because schools were closed for Christmas holidays.

In the evening, my father and the other candidates were taken to an exclusive hut where the men told them what to expect. They also taught the boys the meaning of the initiation ceremony. The men told the boys stories throughout the night about their new lives as men. At around 4am, my father and other boys were taken to the river. Nettles and green herbaceous plants surrounded the river. Early in the morning, the chilly water that was supposed to numb the pain, made the pain worse. The men were as uncompromising as justice and harassed the boys. Their intention was to inflict pain. The boys were forced to sit in the river. The men plucked a pile of nettle plants and dragged them across boys' shoulders. The nettle plants had fine hair on their leaves; their stems contained irritating chemicals that released on contact with skin. The boys were not supposed to cry out or show fear. Then the men ordered the boys out of the river and were instructed to leave their clothes behind. They were led up to the mountain where our ancestors lived. The place was well designated and reserved. We all knew it as "the cutting zone." The boys were lined up one by one in a queue that did not allow them to see each when they faced the knife. The circumciser, dressed in black animal skin and scary feathers on his head, took his place on a small round three-legged beaded traditional stool. He called for the first boy and ordered him to stand perfectly still. As he raised his sharp knife pointing onto the sky, he uttered in Kisii language "As we fulfill the wishes of our ancestors, God of our ancestors, may you join us in this solemn occasion." As soon as the knife came down, there was total silence. The boys waiting their turn were surrounded by wry-faced men who pointed their spears towards them. The men attentively watched the boys to see which of them would scream or howl out as the knife came down.

After each boy had faced the knife, they were allowed to associate with men. They were given a "rungu" stick to symbolize that they were ready to protect the community. The boys proudly carried their sticks as they sang and danced all the way home where the women were preparing the celebration feast. The troupe arrived at the village through a special gate where their families received them.

They were no longer boys. After the celebration, the boys were secluded in huts for three weeks as their wounds healed.

\*\*\*

It was Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1998, and I was waiting for Tuesday and Wednesday to pass. The doctor's appointment was scheduled for Tuesday at 6 am. The hospital bills were already cleared. I was nervous and worried I would contract tachycardia. I had just turned 11; the day of my circumcision was imminent. On Monday evening, friends, relatives and people in the village arrived. They brought banana, greens, peas, beans, corn that would be cooked in my house. The women gathered outside the grass-thatched kitchen house 30 meters away from the main house. The women not busy cooking were singing folk songs. Young girls were decorating the compound. Some of the girls hurried to surrounding villages to borrow pressure lamps. Soon the sun would set. The elderly men were busy slaughtering two oxen and two he-goats in the backyard. A 50 gallon tank full of traditional liquor was moved the main entrance of our village. Two young ladies stood beside the liquor tank and served liquor to the visitors as they arrived. The community spent a sleepless night in our compound as they ate drunk and danced throughout the night. When the party began, I was confined in my hut with the elders who instructed me on what the village expected from me. After I was circumcised, I was eligible to make my own decisions. Since I was desperate for adulthood, I had no choice but to endure this rite of passage.

Unlike my dad, I was circumcised in the hospital where anesthesia was used to mitigate the pain. The traditional circumcision was abandoned because of the risk of the spreading HIV/AIDS. In the traditional circumcision, one knife was used to cut all the boys. Even though the procedure was done in a clinical setting, other traditions were followed.

On Tuesday, I left home at 5 a.m. with 25 men. The cold breezes filled the atmosphere. I was trembling as the drunken men bullied me as the morning dew circled around us. We walked for 8 miles down dark streets. We got at the hospital at 6:45am. A couple of men were allowed to enter with me; the others waited outside. After checking in with the receptionist, we had to wait for about 5 minutes. While we were waiting, I had to go to the bathroom. While I was in the restroom, I became nervous. What if the doctor called my name before I got back? What if my two chaperones realized how frightened I was? What if they ruined my reputation in the village by calling me a coward? I became determined to exude as much confidence as I could muster. Before I zipped up my pants, one of the men came up behind me and grabbed my hand. The doctor was waiting. As we walked into the operation room, I felt as if I was a sheep

being taken to slaughter. The doctor put his mask and gloves on and then a blue gown. Without hesitation, the doctor turned around, darted me a glance, and ordered me to take off my clothes. The doctor spoke in English. He told me to lie on the table. He gave me a few injections and I fell asleep.

Forty-five minutes later, when I became conscious, I felt disgusted. My whole body was fidgeting. When I tried to sit down, the hospital bench felt as cold as ice. I was unable to put my legs together. I was wearing a hospital gown. I wanted my pants, but the doctor ordered me to wear the hospital gown during healing period. As soon as the doctor handed me the wound nursing instructions, the men grabbed my hand and walked me outside.

The group of men who were waiting at the outside got excited when they saw me. In a loud voice they roared in our Kisii dialect, “You are a man now! Hope you behaved!” I wished they would call for a taxi. However, I kept silent as I staggered into the middle of the group. I feigned to be strong even though I felt lousy. We began our trip home. Some men blew trumpets while others danced and sang all the way. The villagers in the streets gave way to us. The men ensured I stayed in the middle so that I was not visible. It was a bad omen if a woman saw a newly circumcised man.

As soon as we arrived home, the traditional procedures were followed. We entered the compound through the special gate. While standing at the gate, one man brought a grey blanket and shielded me so that I the ladies did not see me. My dad, my mum and my five sisters sat in front of the house, next to the gate. Before I was secluded in a special hut, one of the elderly men arrived and gave me a ‘rungu’ to carry. I carried the rungu until I reached the hut where a man was assigned to look after me while I was in seclusion.

On Wednesday, the day after the ceremony, I felt as if I was in a new world. I was lonely and wondered if that was how it felt to be adult. Inside my small hut, right by the window, a special fire was lit that wasn’t supposed to go out. I was careful; if the fire went out it was a bad omen. I suffered from insomnia since it hurt when I tried to lie on the bed. I couldn’t stand the disgusting blood clots on my thighs. I wanted a shower but was not allowed to because the men thought water on the wound would interfere with a speedy recovery.

“Sweets are the fruits of labor.” Going through the flabbergasting mandatory rite of passage wasn’t easy. On the 14<sup>th</sup> day of my day of seclusion, one of the elderly men came to my hut and determined my wounds had healed. He instructed me to take a shower. I was excited and relieved. I was set free. I finally was able to remove the blue hospital gown that I had worn since my day

at the hospital. The gown was covered with dried blood and sweat and seemed sealed onto my skin. My dad bought me new clothes to put on and all of my childhood belongings were trashed. As I came out of the hut, the elderly men were lined up. As they each shook my hand they said, “God bless you.” I began to receive special treatment not only from the men, but also from the entire village.

As a responsible adult, I began to enjoy the fruits of my adulthood.

# Sexy

By Isaac Faleschini

When  
I tingle

*Ooooooooooh*

with excitement,  
those hands know  
and follow healthy  
to my  
his hand will linger

*Aaaaaah*

his hand will linger,  
then stately,

cocked,  
he throws himself  
freely,

*oh-Oh-OH*

the little  
undulater  
jam-jam-jaming  
Lady Gaga,  
would that

*No-No-NO*

we both will blow.  
Both blowing,  
suddenly  
satiated, satisfied,  
naked,  
  
still

# Guitar

he unzips me

bodies  
curves  
head

tweaking, twisting,

eyes closed,  
one ear

across me

old blues, New Rock tunes,  
he knows,  
Bowie, harmonizes Bieber,

it'd never end

and soon

it seems never ending,  
he's done,  
and leaves me  
shivering,  
against the wall,  
quoting,

While my-                   uh-huh-  
While my-                   come on-  
While my-                   don't stop-

“While my Guitar  
Gently Weeps.”



# The Driver's Seat

By Randall Price

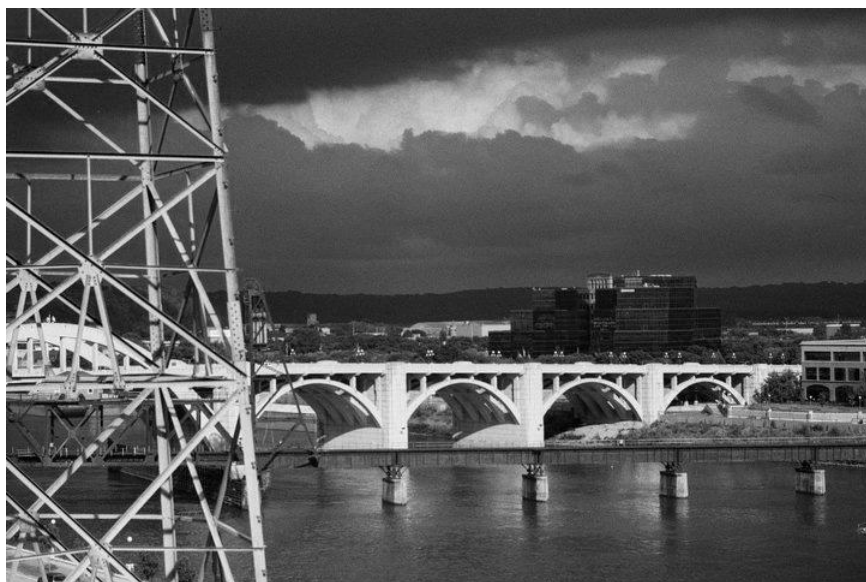
Let me tell you a story: imagine you're in the driver's seat. The night sets in, and the cold slithers its way into the car. The cold slithers through the turns of the vehicle's ventilation system, freezing the vents that heat used to flow through. The car is parked, and the engine is off to conserve precious gas so you can get to work tomorrow. The cold bites and freezes deep into your toes. The same little piggies that your mother said, "Went wee, wee, wee all the way home." One serpent from the cold slips its way to the arch of your foot. It seems to be moving up your shins; at the same time, another serpent bites and wraps its freezing body around your tail bone. Now it's too late, another cold serpent spirals quickly up your spine, settling in around your neck and shoulders. You are now shivering more than ever before. That's when you turn on your car to drive and stay warm. You turn on your car's 150 horse power engine, awakening those horses to stamp the serpents out of the freezing vent's pathways. After 20min of driving, it works; your car is warming up. You're driving around town, because you have heard that carbon monoxide builds up in cars to dangerous levels if parked even for a short while. You dare not take the chance of parking, falling asleep, and dying. The car is warm, and you can feel your toes again. "Oh, I'm starting to sweat. That's good. That means I'm warm again," you say, as you notice that you are sweating your socks, arm pits, and lower back. You pull into a parking space. You turn off your car, which puts the powerful warming horses back to sleep. You say to yourself, relaxing, "There... That should keep me warm for a good long while now." But NO! The freezing serpents bite way sooner than you imagine. The serpents are moving faster and are colder this time. "What! Why?" You say uncomfortably to yourself. It's getting colder. Another freezing serpent leaps onto your whole back at once, not gradually like before. You realize "The SWEAT!" is assisting the serpents in the theft of your warmth. Wetness adds to the cooling factor, as does the wind and temperature. You remembered this from the time you were winter camping as a child. You were taught about things that hypothermia can do, and factors that cause it. You are now in fear that you soon will get hypothermia if things keep going the way they are tonight.

You have no money and are out of fuel. No cell phone to call anyone to ask if you can spend the night. Even if you did, who would you call? All are asleep and live many, many miles away and no precious spare fuel to get you

there anyway, or fuel to make it back for work tomorrow in time for your shift. It's 11:45 p.m., and it's a long night ahead. The weather is getting worse, windier and colder. You decide to retreat to your sleeping bag early. You pull it up to the front passengers' seat. The sleeping bag is actually two. You put a large cotton/down sleeping bag inside a winter rated mummy bag. You close the opening on the mummy bag, so small that you could only get only three fingers out, to prevent your nose from freezing off during the night. "There that should be warm enough."

It's a little too warm. You wake up to find yourself sweating so badly through the night that you're sleeping in a pool of you own sweat. The wind is howling. If it wasn't for the shelter of your car, you would have died from exposure to the elements even in your sleeping bags. Thankfully, you had a car to shield you. You open your sleeping bag's drawstring so you can get out, to dry off. The cold bites as you exit from the warmth. It wakes you up better than any cup of coffee or caffeine could in the morning. Now you say to yourself, "How do I clean up for work?"

Could you survive this night? This story was one night of many I repeated for the first three months of 2009 in the southern suburbs of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota.



# Bridge

By Patti Lindaberry

# Unsettled

By Teresa Klotz

## CAST OF CHARACTERS:

**HUSBAND:** White collar professional (late-forties). Wearing a sport coat, collared shirt, khaki pants and Rockports or Børns (or some other sensible shoe). Collar button undone, as though he removed his tie in a hurry.

**SWEETIE:** His wife, unemployed (also late-forties). Dressed slightly more casually, bearing a close resemblance to a woman you might see in an Eddie Bauer catalog. Totes an oversized purse, which may be bright or multi-colored but has no visible brand or bling on it. Purse is obviously heavy with her necessities.

Time: Early evening – the present.

Place: Minnesota; on any highway within the Twin Cities major metropolitan area.

Setting: The front seat of a manual transmission car, which can be represented as simply as a bench, or two chairs with a small table between them, down-stage, facing the audience. **HUSBAND** is driving, giving off the distinct vibe that they're running late. **WIFE** rides shotgun, and doesn't feel the least bit pressured by the time.

(**LIGHTS UP** on down-stage. **HUSBAND** and **SWEETIE** are seated on a bench, facing the audience. A stainless steel water bottle sits on the bench between them, and a large purse rests between **SWEETIE**'s feet.)

**HUSBAND** works the clutch and gear shift as he looks over his left shoulder, preparing to merge into traffic from an entrance ramp.)

HUSBAND

(Pissed) Jesus, people!

SWEETIE

How can people who drive in this shit all the time be so clueless about merging?

HUSBAND

(Pissed at her) Excuse me?

SWEETIE

Them. Not you.

(HUSBAND is silent, checking mirrors, settling into traffic.)

SWEETIE (cont'd)

I can't believe you thought I was starting in before we were even off the ramp.

HUSBAND

(Good-natured) You do realize you demean both of us...when you try to make that sound far-fetched.

SWEETIE

It's okay, you know...we're not that late. It's just dinner. This is a big city...people expect people to be running in the door with their hair blown back. (Beat) And besides, you're driving...you should be *far* too busy over there to be so sensitive.

HUSBAND

Yeah...well. (Pause) So, was that you or the cat that I heard puking when I was on my way out this morning?

SWEETIE

Oh my god, that cat is ridiculous! Between his incessant howling and my not seeing hairballs he's gacked up BEFORE I step in them, I swear...I'm about one Britney Spears song away from checking myself into a *mental* institution.

HUSBAND

Lucky for us, then...you only listen to public radio. (Beat) Call it coincidence, but I haven't stepped in one since I started wearing slippers. You might—

SWEETIE

Oh, please...save it. (Beat) That's a good look on you, by the way. All devil-may-care. Have I ever told you how much you remind me of the Dud from the "Mystery Date" game?

HUSBAND

Um...no. But I wish you would have mentioned it *before* we left the house?

SWEETIE

No, no, it's a good thing. Really. He was, no contest, the hottest date of the game. The kind of guy parents pray their daughters will never notice. That's you. Only all grown up and responsible, which makes you doubly-hot.

(Cracks her window.)

HUSBAND

(Makes a pinched, gaggy face.)

Unbelievable! SWEETIE, that's disgusting.

SWEETIE

I suppose you'd rather I did it at dinner? Where you'd have to try to keep a straight face? Is that really the first impression you want these people to have of me?

(HUSBAND cracks his window in self-defense. After a few seconds, SWEETIE rolls her window back up, then hesitates as she looks out the passenger window.)

SWEETIE (cont'd)

So, you want to hear something crazy?

HUSBAND

I'm a CPA, for cryin' out loud. I *always* want to hear something crazy.

SWEETIE

The cat wasn't the only one who was sick this morning.

(Inhales audibly, looks at HUSBAND.)

SWEETIE (cont'd)

I'm pregnant. (Pause) Pretty crazy, huh?

(HUSBAND enters the clover leaf, faster than usual. SWEETIE grabs the "oh shit" handle.)

HUSBAND

(Pause) How can that be? I had a vasectomy—

SWEETIE

You did. I know...eight years ago...I was there for the ice packs.

HUSBAND

Seriously? We hardly even have sex.

SWEETIE

How can you say that? We have sex all the time!

HUSBAND

(Cocks his head, makes a  
disbelieving face.)

We've finally reached the universal vortex where "hardly ever" and "all the time" have become synonyms. (Pause) Oh my god, these people!

SWEETIE

You know...maybe they just haven't had the gift.

HUSBAND

(Confused) What's that?

SWEETIE

The merging-impaired people. Maybe they just haven't had to read the Minnesota Driver's manual...at least not recently.

(HUSBAND rolls eyes, while  
checking mirrors.)

SWEETIE (cont'd)

I wonder who wrote that thing anyway? How many times do you think they've revised it? (Beat) And half the shit still isn't clear?

HUSBAND

(Amused) Are you suggesting people need a manual to understand merging?

SWEETIE

Don't act like you didn't read it...I saw you. It's not like I think less of you for it. I had to read it too. We'd NEVER have passed the written exam if we hadn't, and no self-respecting adult wants to be the asshole who fails the driver's exam.

HUSBAND

And you think that's the only reason we're so smart?

SWEETIE

*Super-smart.* (Beat) Yeah, about driving, anyway.

HUSBAND

(Watches cars moving in and out of the lane in front of them.)

(Resigned) So, whose is it, then?

(SWEETIE glares at HUSBAND.)

HUSBAND (cont'd)

(Looks at SWEETIE, then remembers he's driving and gets his eyes back on traffic.)

Oh c'mon—you haven't worked since we got back here. How am I supposed to know what you actually do all day?

SWEETIE

Zeus, you know, the one who's notorious for popping down to Earth, sneaking around, boning all the poor, unsuspecting mortal women? At least that's who he said he was.

HUSBAND

(Matter of fact) I don't believe it.

SWEETIE

(For the rest of the play, alternates between looking at HUSBAND and looking away, as appropriate.)

So...you prefer to believe I'm pregnant with someone else's baby?

HUSBAND

No, I mean—



SWEETIE

Did you know they estimate two point three percent of vasectomies fail? I Googled it.

HUSBAND

Oh, great. What a relief—we're relying on the trusty Web M.D. And...I don't understand why you're telling me this now.

SWEETIE

You take big news better when you're distracted, I think.

HUSBAND

Oh *COME on!* That is total bullshit and you know it. How long have you known?

SWEETIE

It's hard to tell...what with peri-menopause and all. It's not easy being a woman my age. You want to talk about some serious bullshit? Did you know the symptoms for pregnancy and menopause and periods are all the same? How are we supposed to sort that all out? (long pause) I found out for certain this afternoon...you were late getting home and we had to turn around and head right back out. Surprise—I'm sorry. (Pause) Do you ever remember using that word before we moved back here?

HUSBAND

Which word is that? Pregnant? Or Vasectomy?

SWEETIE

“Super!” I swear...some people can't spit out even the shortest, most basic sentence without saying it. (Beat) I'm not exaggerating.

HUSBAND

I guess I haven't noticed.

SWEETIE

That's impossible! It's so annoying. Seriously.

HUSBAND

(Deadpan) Seriously?

SWEETIE

It's *most* annoying when I catch myself starting to say it.

HUSBAND

Honestly, Sweetie, I haven't noticed an upswing.

SWEETIE

That's because *I catch myself*—I NIP it in the bud.

HUSBAND

Ahhh...well, then, I'm proud of you, Sweetie.

SWEETIE

The day is coming though. It's inevitable, when I won't be able to. I probably won't even notice.

HUSBAND

You'll be assimilated.

SWEETIE

It's not funny. The long ooohs are bad enough as it is.

HUSBAND

That HAS been pretty weird. It's not easy...keeping a straight face when your brother gets on a roll about his new boooooat. And as long as we're on the subject, the next time your mom asks if we want salad with dinner, PLEASE just tell her "no thanks."

(Shakes his head.)

HUSBAND (cont'd)

I mean...I'm from Iowa...I can eat a lot of funky things. But shredded carrots in lime jello? That's just not right.

SWEETIE

(Puts her giant purse on her lap and starts fishing around in it. She finds and applies chapstick, then offers it to HUSBAND.)

Chapstick? I've also noticed not many people use the "P" word around here? That's super-sad, I think. It's such a great word.

HUSBAND

(Waves off the chapstick.)

It's your favorite word.

SWEETIE

(Cheerfully) Mock me...I don't care. You're sure using it A LOT more since we moved back here.

HUSBAND

Only in traffic. But I'm glad it makes you happy.

SWEETIE

It DOES make me happy. It's not as much fun to use it alone. For example, WHAT the FUCK is this guy doing?

HUSBAND

Hard to say. Hogging the fast lane...at the break-neck pace of fifty-seven.

SWEETIE

C'mon already buddy! Drive if you're fucking driving, or get the hell out of the way. Honestly!

(Looks at husband and smiles.)

SWEETIE (cont'd)

See? Wasn't that satisfying?

HUSBAND

Yeah, that was great. The best passengers always take on the heckling responsibilities. It makes the driver seem...stable.

SWEETIE

Well, I hate when they lurk in the fast lane. Especially in traffic like this.

(Leans forward, to get a look at the driver they're passing.)

SWEETIE (cont'd)

Sure as shit—

HUSBAND

Cell phone?

SWEETIE

Yep. (Beat) ASS-wipe!

HUSBAND

You know, that's a word I could use more often. Just might be MY new favorite.

(Looks at SWEETIE as he glances over his shoulder, preparing to veer right. Their exit is imminent.)

HUSBAND (cont'd)

So...I thought we'd settled this? (Pause) I thought we'd agreed. We're old. We're tired. We like doing whatever we want, whenever we want. We like sleeping in. I'm too selfish to be responsible for a little kid. I like our quiet house. I like not having goo on any of the remotes. If I have to watch one of those horrible Disney movies a thousand times—

SWEETIE

(Irritated) You know...I didn't exactly choose this either. All this time, I've been thinking you're safe to have sex with. Now here I am. (Pause) And seriously, I was a crappy enough mother the first time around. It's no small miracle Natalie survived. Just ask her...she's twenty-five...

(SWEETIE Uncaps the bottle and takes a swig.)

SWEETIE (cont'd)

And I have to say, those Disney movies aren't as bad as you fear. They're actually pretty clever...some of them, anyway. Thirsty?

(HUSBAND accepts the bottle and takes a swig. Hands it back to SWEETIE.)

SWEETIE (cont'd)

(Beat) And trust me...no one has a good opinion of a pregnant fifty year old, not even the pro-lifers for God's sake. And soft as my body is, I'll probably start showing before the end of this dinner. After that, I can look forward to months of disapproving stares from total strangers.

(Takes a swig before she recaps the bottle and sets it back down.)

HUSBAND

So what do we do?

SWEETIE

We go have a nice dinner with your friends. Introduce them to your lovely wife. Try to act like normal people, I guess. I've never had Ethiopian food...I'm excited about that.

HUSBAND

(Veering on to the off ramp.)

(Exasperated) Jesus! I'm not talking about tonight.

SWEETIE

Oh. I wish I knew...I have an appointment on Monday.

HUSBAND

(Alarmed) An appointment? For what?

SWEETIE

(Defensive) I don't know...an appointment...with a doctor...I didn't know what else to do. With the vasectomy and all, I just thought—

HUSBAND

Thought what? Are you out of your mind? You don't think we need to think this through? Or at least talk about it?

SWEETIE

Well, I guess...I thought the vasectomy kinda decided it.

HUSBAND

Well, yeah, but shutting down the tunnel is different than—

SWEETIE

(Getting emotional) Look, I'm almost fifty—WE'RE almost fifty. This is a little different than me turning up pregnant at twenty-three, or even forty-three. (Beat) If we go through with this, we risk inviting a baby into a lifetime of birth defects. Or I have an abortion, and we live with that. Great...right?

(Pulls a travel pack of Puffs from her purse, extracts a tissue, laughs cynically as she dries her eyes.)

SWEETIE (cont'd)

Either way, we're irresponsible jerks. This might actually be the first time in my life where something stupid happens and I'm genuinely innocent. How the shit does that work?

HUSBAND

(Takes a right turn into a parking lot, maneuvers into a spot, shifts to 'park' and looks at SWEETIE.)

Maybe we're dreaming. Or hallucinating?

SWEETIE

Or brain damaged...or maybe it's just our contribution to vasectomy statistics. Nobody *wants* to be the two point three percent...but somebody has to be.

HUSBAND

(Reaches over to hold SWEETIE'S hand, and then looks forward, but not talking to the audience.)

Fuck.

SWEETIE

(Looks at HUSBAND's, looks forward, eyebrows raised, nods as she draws a deep breath.)

Super-fuck.

(LIGHTS DOWN.)

The End



## Class Photo

By Devona Brown

# Falling

By Devin O'Brien

Eternal freefall. Satan does have a sense of humor. That whole poetic justice phenomenon Dante Alighieri described? It's real. Apparently, committing suicide at work, by jumping out the window means you never get the satisfaction of hitting the pavement. You just keep falling, right through the gum-encrusted sidewalk and straight to hell. I'm pretty sure I died before I even hit the ground. I remember hearing somewhere that reaching terminal velocity can cause you to pass out. It's like g-forces or lack of oxygen or something.

There used to be a sense of euphoria. Like there was too much wind in my face for me to calm down. It was a constant sensory overload. But once the adrenaline wears off, you're just falling. Damn, I wish I brought a book or something. You think Ol' Scratch lets you read down here?

\*\*\*

"We have to go now! C'mon Reznick!"

"Pull that stick out of your ass for a second and let me just figure out what we're jumping into."

"They're calling every off-duty public servicemen. Whatever's happening, it's some serious shit."

"Damn, Riggs. You should see this footage."

"No time, you can tell me on the way, let's go!"

Riggs walked up to Reznick and pried his eyes from the small television screen. The two of them rushed out to the squad car. The lights were on and throwing red and blue tints into the encroaching smoke and dust.

"Shit, is that fog rolling in?" asked Officer Riggs.

"No, that's dust. We should have left earlier," replied Officer Reznick.

"Don't give me that. I had to drag you out here." They got in the car and pulled away into the smoke. "What's going on anyway?"

"It's an attack."

\*\*\*

I'm not going to pretend I don't deserve this. I do, but I look around me and see all these other people and I can't help but feel like I don't belong. All these other suicides are different. They had a choice. They're all dumb teenagers that thought life would never get better, or hopeless middle-aged everymen that just fucking snapped. I was the end of my line. I had no other way out. I'm not like these people. I'm still a coward, but I'm not like them. No, for me it was



either jump, or live the rest of my short life in pain and agony. I wouldn't have gotten to feel that short burst of euphoric high. I would have just blended into the crowd and slowly burned away.

\*\*\*

“So someone did this intentionally?” asked Riggs.

“Yeah,” answered Reznick.

“Fuck, it makes sense now. No one makes a mistake like that. Even with a technical malfunction, nobody messes up that bad.”

“Yeah.”

“You think we'll even be able to help at this point?”

“Yeah.” Reznick pulled to the curb, the smoke was much thicker now. He and Riggs exited the car and walked through the crowds of dazed civilians. The two officers pointed them to the nearest shelter areas, or EMTs, and they continued on. They arrived only blocks away from the site of the attack and approached a group of firemen.

“How can we help?” asked Reznick.

“We're in the dark too, man. Radios are cutting in and out. We can't reach the chief. We don't even know if he's alive. He was in there when it went down.” responded one of the men in yellow.

“Was that one hit too?” asked Riggs.

“That was rhetorical right? That fucker's comin' down any minute.”

“Did you get everyone out?” asked Reznick.

“Fuck no, they already sent a group in. They ain't come out yet.”

“We're goin' in.” Riggs and Reznick began to run though the dust and rubble.

“Don't do that! What's wrong with you!” the firemen charged after them as the building began to buckle.

\*\*\*

I can remember the faces of my colleagues. They watched in horror as I chucked my stapler through the glass. The wind surged when it broke. I just had to lift my feet, and let it carry me, let it embrace me, hug me all the way down. I regret not kissing Carol before I went, or at least saying goodbye. I wish I could tell her how I felt. I would have told her that fucking in the elevator wasn't a mistake, and that I'd leave my wife for her in a heartbeat. Maybe that would have made staying easier. Maybe if I had more than the wind to hold me, I would have stood my ground against fate and let it hit me with the haymaker I had coming.

\*\*\*

Riggs and Reznick stumbled over the pieces of broken masonry and glass. They could hear the marching boots behind them as they lead a reluctant army towards the second tower. They could hear the building scream and groan as it struggled to stay standing. They took their steps quickly, but carefully, and they were proud of themselves. They felt like they were holding a banner. Showing the world their courage, but in the dust, every man was alone. Every man was invisible. Courage could only be felt, not shown.

\*\*\*

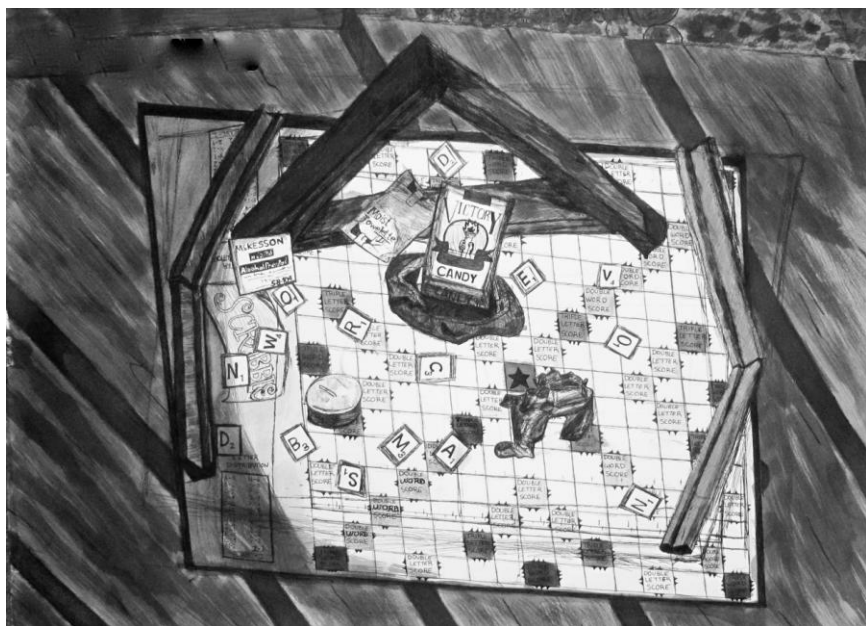
God, that wind. It was like it held me up. Let me levitate. It slowed the world around me. It delayed the arrival of the earth. I guess that's all I'll get to think about now, that moment. It's what you're supposed to do here right? Eternal penance? I'm cursed to constantly reflect on my decisions, constantly struggle with myself to figure out if I was right or wrong, cursed to agree and disagree with my own mind, cursed to jump out that window, again and again. I'm cursed to leap away from the flames, and fall, watch a few others beside me do the same. I get to relive it.

The plane hits below us. The shockwave shatters some of the windows, most only crack like frost. I grip the stapler. I toss it up and down in my hand. Then, I throw it. I take one last look at the others waiting to burn. I see Carol, waiting to burn, but I leave her to do it alone. I lift my feet and fly. Then I just float. Then I fall.

\*\*\*

A deafening smack echoes in the debris as a body lands in front of Riggs and Reznick. It splatters them, coats them in a sense of failure, and stops them in their tracks. The firefighters arrive and grab them. They pull them back as the building lets out a final cry. The wide-eyed officers stare at the featureless lump of human matter, as they're dragged away, and through the smoky air, the World Trade Center crumbles above them.

They get their legs back and follow the men in yellow trying to escape the deadly cloud of rubble. The titanic shrapnel chases them like an angry wave. The men dive into the subway station stairwell. They fall as the burning cloud of stone and glass crashes upon them.



# Istasticism

By Devona Brown

# Guy in the Red BMW

By Emily Klehr

Merging, gray on gray,  
two claws meet  
over the four lanes,  
like two toy Tonka trucks.  
I need to get in,  
he needs to get out.  
His brow is two blonde  
horizontal lines, bronzed.  
His iron gaze meets mine,  
*Let me ahead of you,  
And I'll let you in.*  
Traffic stops,  
like a popsicle  
left in the freezer too long,  
miniature icicles stand  
like the hair on the back of my neck  
from the glint  
in his guile eye.  
Our silent skirmish  
ends with my left hand guiding  
the steering wheel.  
It's a two way highway.  
I smirk,  
*You will let me in.*

# The Woman Who Dances with Her Eyes

By Richard Train

It is a slow, easy morning.  
Trees whispering softly  
through the shadowed sunlight  
resting in my room.

The locust sings  
their relaxed song  
not to wake the world,  
nor I from my quiet dreams of you.

In the silence of this chamber  
my thoughts turn to you.  
Gentle whispers of your name  
echo softly through my mind.

Delicate images of your face  
leave traces upon my thoughts.  
Silent emotional hunger  
asking only to touch your eyes

in slow questioning stares.  
My memory turns to dance  
and our closeness of form.  
Movements with you ask to be remembered

and completed once again.  
Turns too complex to really understand  
ask to be followed with no understandable plan.  
Movements inside, with no place to flow.

Emotions and feelings,  
questioned, not fully understood.  
Asking for the now  
for they know what can be.

Hungry for dreams  
for I have touched too much  
to easily let go.  
If I ask you for tomorrow

can I have this morning  
and perhaps the time, so we may play.  
And if I ask of you  
Could I have the day?

# A Monkey Walks into a Bar

By Teresa Klotz

Like one of Pavlov's dogs,  
my muscles tense  
at the brass bell's jingle  
over the tavern door.  
A shaft of daylight  
reaches into the dim haven  
carrying the telltale slap  
of calloused feet on polished oak,  
and deciding my greeting,

"Yo, Nikko-ooo!  
You look like hell, man."

I've surrendered even trying  
to stifle my shudder  
at the leathery flap of  
his wings lifting him  
to his stool-perch, and the  
musky gust of funk  
that blows over me as he lands.

Sick and shaky, Nikko sits  
in the shadows, nursing  
double shots of Jack. He broods  
over a career ruined by typecasting,  
that damn *Wizard of Oz*, and  
what could have been, if only  
Judy Garland had liked monkeys.

Makes no difference to me.  
Be whoever you like -  
just manage your liquor,  
make good on your tab, and  
keep your wicked-sharp talons off  
my nice leather stools.



# Mosaic

By Emily Klehr



# Southern Silky Silver Oak

By Sandra Youngs

Our love is like  
*Grevillea Robusta*  
robust and erect  
straining skyward  
yearning to kiss  
cotton underbellies  
of static-filled clouds.

Sprawling roots  
anchor us  
clustered like  
pale undersides  
of pill bugs to  
a rushing river  
bank, coursing  
water that gushes  
like afterbirth  
across linoleum.

Our love  
blossoms bright  
like an orange  
harvest moon  
ridged and musical  
as the teeth on a  
fine-toothed comb.

# October

By Sandra Youngs

Red sun burned bright  
long  
skin soaked in summer.  
Autumn just a rumor,  
hint of cold breath from the wind  
short hairs on our arms tickled  
goosebumps like braille on our skin.

A screen of cold blocked the sun's heat  
fire-kissed leaves tumbled from trees  
skittered along the ground.  
Winter still far away  
dawn showed frost lining  
blades of grass, jagged  
edges of crisp leaves.

Rigid beneath half-naked trees  
speared by a shaft of cold sunlight  
a single leaf glued to his face with  
thick, congealed blood.  
Salty sorrow tracked  
along his pallid skin.



## Dead Milkweed Pod

By Patti Lindaberry

# Exercise #6, Journal Entry 34

By Luke Abrahamson

I hit you.  
The first time I had driven  
this way in two years.  
You ran in front of my car  
and now lie there--roadkill--  
blood streaking along the road  
in the pattern of a tire and your  
insides spread out in front of you.  
If I drove past again, I would  
only stare and wish I could  
pick you up and do something  
with you, but my ten-foot  
pole will only let me that close.

Red-lights flash in my rear-view  
mirror, spotlights blinding me.

Slow down!  
Enjoy the landscape,  
watch for other cars,  
and pick up that poor roadkill.  
He will only make you better,  
the Trooper in a round, brimmed,  
brown hat scolds me.

The warning should be enough  
to make me embrace you,  
take your mutilated body  
and scrawl my thoughts,  
fictional characters, and musical  
words in different colors of ink,  
depending on what tool is available.

But I speed by, only  
to splatter you across the  
dotted white lines of East Interstate 80.



## Bundles

By Devona Brown

# Rumbeck's Code

By Patti Lindaberry

## CAST OF CHARACTERS:

AL                                A patient in a mental hospital (30's)  
MR. RUMBECK                A patient in a mental hospital (40's-60's)

TIME: Late at Night - present time

PLACE: Upper Peninsula of Michigan

SETTING: In a hallway of a mental hospital.

(AL stands in the hallway and reads the bulletin board decorated with information about upcoming events. He holds a container and spoon in his hands. He is dressed in a t-shirt and sweat pants.)

AL

February is happy heart month. Heart shaped cookies will be served in the game room.

(MR. RUMBECK, dressed in feminine colors, crawls backwards, cautiously, towards AL. He has a backpack on his back and a duffle bag in his hand.)

AL

(notices MR. RUMBECK)

Did you lose something?

MR. RUMBECK

Pretend you don't see me. Just walk away.

AL

What's in the backpack? Are you doing physical therapy?

MR. RUMBECK

If I tell you, I'd have to kill you. Go back to your room and pretend you never saw me.

AL

Do you want some potato salad?

MR. RUMBECK

Thank you, but no. I have a schedule to stick to and I don't have time for potato salad.

AL

It's just like the stuff they made for your birthday party. Nurse Annie left it in the fridge for me. Don't tell nobody. It's a secret.

MR. RUMBECK

You need to go back to your room.

AL

She put dill pickles in it. My mother always put pickles in a yellow bowl on the dinner table.

MR. RUMBECK

I don't have time for this.

AL

One Christmas, my parents had a party, and my brother, Andrew, drank all the pickle juice out of the bowl. He stood up on the chair and belched as loud as the fog horn down by the pier. Aunt Gert laughed so hard, she fell out of her chair. Mother's face was as red as the poinsettias on the table.

MR. RUMBECK

Thank you for sharing that beautiful memory with me. I apologize for such a brief chat, but I have an invasion to orchestrate. I don't have much time.

AL

I remember Christmas when I was ten, but I can't remember when Valentine's day is.

MR. RUMBECK

( stands)

Valentine's is a gimmick used by the government to make people spend money on items they don't need, to give to a person they truly can't stand.

AL

That's easy for you to say. You probably remember when your birthday is.

MR. RUMBECK

Memories are overrated.

AL

Did you say you're going to play in an orchestra?

MR. RUMBECK

I have to orchestrate an invasion.

AL

Really? I love music.

MR. RUMBECK

It has nothing to do with music.

AL

What else would you do with an orchestra?

MR. RUMBECK

Kill their violins.

AL

Where are you going? You can trust me. I won't tell nobody.

MR. RUMBECK

I'm going to invade Canada.

AL

There's fifty feet of snow on the ground.

MR. RUMBECK

You're not safe here.

AL

You don't have a car.

MR. RUMBECK

If I don't stop the conspiracy, society will continue to flap around in ignorance.

AL

Sometimes I have to close my eyes and try to taste what's on my tongue. Do I taste tomato sauce? Garlic? Onions? If I can't remember what I ate, how can I be sure I know what I'm tasting isn't an effect from medication?



MR. RUMBECK

Exactly! That's what I'm talking about! One minute you think you're tasting garlic, but it's really a poison designed to alter your vision and memory. Now you understand why I have to leave?

AL

Did we have garlic toast with spaghetti? I think I taste garlic. No, no! Maybe it's cabbage.

MR. RUMBECK

We had grilled cheese and tomato soup.

AL

Do you think I had spaghetti?

MR. RUMBECK

Anything is possible. When I served in the military, I saw things and heard stories.

AL

Potato salad is a safe snack.

MR. RUMBECK

I promise I will make America a place you can be proud of. A place where you can grow up, raise a family and live a full and productive life. You shouldn't have to stay locked up in a place like this. Once I take over Canada, the deaf politicians will pay attention to Harold P. Rumbeck. No one in the armed forces will be forgotten or treated like slime on the bottom of society's shoes.

AL

What's in your bag?

MR. RUMBECK

It's late and I really should be going.

AL

I promise I won't tell. What if you lose something?

MR. RUMBECK

Perhaps the government might be concerned with my luggage, but I don't think you would understand.

AL

I'd really, really, really love to see what it looks like inside.

MR. RUMBECK

(starts to walk away)

I understand your childhood head injury gives you a “Swiss cheese” memory, but I’ve never once thought you had a hearing problem.

AL

My mother cries every time she comes to visit. I wish I could remember all the gifts she has brought me and all the stories she has told. When I close my eyes, I can see the white robe of the priest as his large fingers come towards my forehead. I couldn’t wait to wipe the ashes from my face. In the car my mother talked about giving up pickles for Lent and my brother pretended to faint in the seat next to me. I don’t even remember what my house looks like. The only friends I have are the people in this place. If you leave, who will I talk to?

MR. RUMBECK

Fine! Sit down.

AL

(sits)

I love chatting with you.

(MR. RUMBECK takes off backpack and takes out a notebook.)

MR. RUMBECK

(sits next to AL)

This notebook holds top secret, classified information. What I’m about to show you has never been seen by another living soul.

AL

This is so exciting! It’s just like the time Burlee brought in a book filled with pictures. I don’t know from where or what, but he gave me a cola and talked to me for a long time. He’s been places I’ve never heard of before.

MR. RUMBECK

Did you hear that?

AL

I didn’t hear anything. Nobody’s up at this hour. I get my potato salad and walk the hallway. I don’t see one person out here after bedtime.

MR. RUMBECK

I can't take any chances. I need to leave now.

AL

(opens notebook)

Did you draw all these watermelons?

MR. RUMBECK

(tries to take notebook)

You've seen enough.

AL

You said I could look at it.

MR. RUMBECK

I command you to give me back my notebook!

AL

Why do some of the watermelons have arms and legs?

MR. RUMBECK

Why do you have arms and legs?

AL

I have to walk and wash my face.

MR. RUMBECK

I am going to invade Canada. I came up with the idea of disguising midgets as watermelons to smuggle them across the border. Once inside the country, the midgets will take over the government. Nobody will see who helped me.

AL

Do you have midgets?

MR. RUMBECK

I have an army buddy who knows a guy.

AL

We're locked in. You have to know the code or have key to get off of the floor.

MR. RUMBECK

I've been watching the staff as they come and go. The door to the floor lobby is unlocked by a series of four numbers. I observed nurse Annie this evening when she left. I wrote the sequence in my notebook. I press five, two, seven, six, and hit the pound button and out the door I go. Once I'm in the stairwell, I just push the bars and away I go off into the world and onward towards a better life.

AL

You could freeze to death before you got to Canada.

MR. RUMBECK

Sometimes, we have to make sacrifices.

AL

Where are you going to stay?

MR. RUMBECK

I was in the army. Canada has a lot of trees and I'm used to roughing it.

AL

What will you eat? You can have my potato salad to take with you for a snack.

MR. RUMBECK

I do have some money that my sister sent me. When she called to check up on me, I asked her to send me a cotton flowered dress with some fashionable jewelry. Who would think to look for me dressed as a woman? She sent me, this. What a hideous outfit! I swear, the woman has no sense of fashion. I don't look like a woman at all!

AL

I think it's lovely.

MR. RUMBECK

Thank you.

AL

Maybe you can invade Canada in the spring when it's warmer.

MR. RUMBECK

I have to do this now. I've wasted far too much time in this place.

AL

Who will make you potato salad for your birthday?

MR. RUMBECK

You remind me of one of the army cooks. He loved potato salad too. He thought once he came home from the war the government would help him find a job and he could save money to start his own business.

AL

Your friend can come stay with us. I'm sure there's an empty room he could have.

MR. RUMBECK

He doesn't have any money. This place isn't top of the line, but it isn't cheap.

AL

They took us fishing once. We had to ride the bus.

MR. RUMBECK

We went fishing at Dr. Benson's private pond. I fell in the water trying to unhook your line.

AL

Who will watch the game shows with me?

MR. RUMBECK

Mr. Babcock loves the game shows. I'm sure he will keep you company.

AL

He falls asleep in the chair and snores. It's hard to hear.

MR. RUMBECK

Spring will be here soon. I heard a rumor that Dr. Benson might take a few patients to Detroit. You could watch the Detroit Tigers play baseball. That would be exciting.

AL

I can see that on t.v.

MR. RUMBECK

It's much more fun to see it live. Sit in the stands, smell the popcorn and hot dogs. Watch the vendors carry their trays filled with cotton candy and peanuts.

AL

I've never been to a real baseball game. You could sit by me and explain what's going on.

MR. RUMBECK

Maybe you should come with me to Canada. Once we take over the country and inform the United States government that I am going to squash their little clique, you could run one of the provinces. Ontario is lovely. You could be prince AL of Ontario.

AL

Do they have potato salad?

MR. RUMBECK

I'm sure we could find some. Maybe we could go to Quebec and you could have French-style potato salad.

AL

I have a nice room here. My blankets are warm and my pillows are soft. There's a lot of snow outside.

MR. RUMBECK

I have a job to do. You understand that, don't you?

AL

Canadians like hockey.

MR. RUMBECK

Spring would be a better time to leave. Perhaps my sister would take me shopping and I can pick out a new dress and jewelry.

AL

I've never been to a hockey game.

MR. RUMBECK

If the government gets to me before I leave, people will continue to suffer. If I'm frozen in the Great White North, what good would I be?

AL

I want you to have my potato salad as a gift for being my friend.

MR. RUMBECK

I am a little hungry. All of this talk about invasions and watermelons worked up my appetite.

(AL hands him the container)

AL

You'll sleep like a baby.

MR. RUMBECK

Hockey is the Canadian sport of choice.

AL

Maybe we'll have pancakes and Canadian bacon for breakfast.

MR. RUMBECK

I think I'll call it a night. I need to work on my plan a little bit more and fine tune some details before I can run the Canadian government. Goodnight my friend. I'll see you in the morning.

(MR. RUMBECK leaves)

AL

Goodnight Mr. Rumbeck.

(AL has MR. RUMBECK's notebook and backpack. AL stands and picks up backpack.)

Five, two, ten, seven, pound. Five, two, ten, eight, pound. I wonder if Canadian's like potato salad?

(AL walks off stage in opposite direction of MR. RUMBECK with the backpack)



# Pete

By Devona Brown



# Forger

By Isaac Faleschini

Imagine me a warm, charcoal-black sweatshirt  
that fits snug to the triangle edges  
of my white-collar crimes.

My white-collar crimes a rounded stain.  
Try a thumbnail-scrape to work off flake after  
microscopic, criminal flake.

They work through my criminal  
flakes, first the IRS, then Hoover's  
saggy jowled hound dogs.

Flop-eared dogs, snouts down, me spending cash on  
dry martinis and whisky sours, can't hear them coming  
over my brain-soft buzz.

Buzz-fuzz-buzz as Secret Service hounds hurtle hedges,  
feel my hot tub bubble burst—the end  
of all that summer fun.

Summer fun's end—spring-fresh-sudsy-splashing  
about—quick douse, now an empty house,  
a charcoal hiss.

The hiss, then a cinematic wipe, on holiday overseas.  
I sip foam-topped cappuccino mountains  
on balconies with foreign vistas:

powder capped Alps, the Himalayas, then little Asian women.  
I search the ink-stained retches until there's  
no mention of me at all.

No mention of me, most wanted sketches  
crumpled in metal weaved bins ages past,  
tossed, forgotten;

anonymity, then my arrival to a back-wood-  
rag-stock town, gray bearded ex-pat, with the  
gun-shot-wound.

The gun-shot-wound, its long-leg-limp hung out back,  
flip-flip-flipping has-been-gas-station-diner hash browns,  
stained, frayed and faded.

Imagine me a sweatshirt.

# The Drip

By Kayerissa Gillette

The sound of the drip, drip, drip is driving me insane!  
Getting up to turn off the bathroom sink faucet, I see that it is not dripping.  
Checking the kitchen for the drip, drip, drip. I see it is not there.  
The moonlight calls me and it is silent.  
So I wander to the lake and listen for the drip, drip, drip.  
I hear the owl call the who-o-o, who-o-o, who-o-o  
I see the mouse scamper across the lawn answering  
Not me, not me, not me.  
I call to the mouse, come to me, I will keep you safe.  
The owl hears me, and dives for the mouse.  
The mouse then begins to drip, drip, drip.  
I cover my ears.  
I cover my eyes.  
I take a sip of sanity and listen for the silence.  
I wander to my bed and hear the drip, drip, drip.  
I reach out to feel the softness of my sheets.  
I feel the drip, drip, drip.  
It is not the mouse, it is not the faucet.  
It is the coolness of the metal pressed against my veins.  
As the knife goes deeper, finally liberated from pain  
Drip, drip, drip. There is no more.



# Trash or Treasure

By Emily Klehr

# Learning to Drive Stick

By Luke Abrahamson

Different cars filter in and out of  
the vacant parking lot  
like ants in an ant-hill.  
We sit:

she is in the drivers seat, pulled all the way  
up so the steering wheel is at her chest,  
leaving three feet of leg room in the  
seat behind her. I am in the passenger seat,  
laughing as we lurch forward  
like the Wild Thing does right before  
the ascent leading to the first drop.

The look of annoyance shot in my direction.  
Slender fingers wrap around the steering wheel  
leaving knuckles white like the v-neck  
Hanes undershirt she is wearing.

Laughter caught in my throat and  
replaced by words of encouragement,  
hoping the eyes will not continue  
to drill holes into my retinas, blinding me  
like Ray Charles.

You got it! Remember to let the clutch out slowly.  
Don't rev the engine too much.  
There you go!

The small but defined muscles in her neck  
tense as I tell her to drive  
all the way back home, across car-infested county  
road 46 and quickly into the safety  
of a neighborhood.

The high RPMs are heard along  
with the jerking and lurching  
that my body feels makes me think  
I am being shocked back to life  
after going into cardiac arrest, until  
we pull along side the house.

Only then can I laugh without  
those eyes staring holes  
into me.

# The Oldest Professions

By Isaac Faleschini

In the shadows of long standing, capitol monuments,  
stunning red dresses finger cocktail napkins. Short

cropped hair cuts—conservative suits—  
hide their intentions behind old politics—

tired conversations. Distant cities slumber, the miles  
protect their nuclear families from skeletons—like

tuxedos—hung neatly behind posh condominiums’  
white, closet doors. This wet, fetid alley near

abandoned downtown-factories, tight brick walls  
ricochet sound—heels clicking pavement. A lone,

pock-faced, ware climbs into the rusted, sickly,  
automobiles of strangers to swap addictions.

Blue and red flashing lights illuminate a lonely  
dumpster hidden among the brambles of a field—

one porker turns to the other, blowing coffee, hips weighed  
down by brimming utility belts,

sarcastic, “Think she’s dead?”

The dress’ fabric,  
    almost black,  
then crimson true,  
    then black again,  
whispers

# I still have mine

By Richard Train

From fifty years ago,  
remembered words still echo through.  
Winter in Jersey,  
Christmas drawing near.  
A party invite,  
a gathering for Marines,  
the wounded from the VA hospital.

Mother said “Go.”

A large hall full of  
Christmas cheer,  
wheelchairs,  
prosthetic arm,  
colostomy bags,  
broken men.  
Smiles,  
but broken sorrow  
showed through.

The bodies many, arms and legs now few.  
No words I could say,  
finally a,  
“I am sorry.”

I found my voice again,  
softer now,  
“God, you guys have *balls*.”  
To which the armless man replied,  
“don’t fool yourself,  
half these guys don’t.”



# A Whip for a Bottle

By Noah Savoie

## CHARACTERS:

**DORIAN:** Male, mid-twenties, handsome, active, college student

**HANK:** Male, mid-twenties, athletic, college drop out

## Setting

The setting of the play is in the living room of the characters' apartment.

*(DORIAN walks towards the door  
followed closely by HANK)*

DORIAN

We can talk later, I'm going to miss the bus.

HANK

You can miss one class, it's not gonna kill you.

DORIAN

It's a test day and I don't have the time to make it up.

*(Hank pulls Dorian away from  
opening the door)*

DORIAN

Don't touch me!

HANK

You're gonna listen to me dammit!

DORIAN

No.

*(turns to the door once again)*

HANK

If you're not gonna listen I guess I'm just gonna have to show this photo to your girlfriend!

*(Dorian pauses for a beat, then turns around to confront Hank)*

DORIAN

What photo?

HANK

I think you know what I'm talking about.

DORIAN

Hank, what photo?

HANK

The photo sitting right next to the...

DORIAN

The what?

*(Hank starts to walk towards stage left)*

DORIAN

*(persuing)*

Next to what?

*(Hank quickly walks off stage and returns holding a bull whip)*

HANK

Next to this.

*(BEAT)*

DORIAN

What were you doing digging through my room?

HANK

What are you doing with a bullwhip and a photo of...this.

*(Hank displays photo to Dorian)*

DORIAN

Listen to me. You can't show this to Frida. This part of my life is...well it's complicated. It's not something I want her to-

HANK

It's masochism!

DORIAN

It's none of your business! First of all, I don't go looking through your things. I'm not the one betraying the trust we've built for three years.

HANK

You're telling me about trust? You? The guy in the picture getting whipped by some dominatrix? And what you're wearing! Where do you find a brassiere like that?

DORIAN

What I do in the privacy of my bedroom is none of your concern.

HANK

It is when my roommate is a shameless pervert!

DORIAN

Where do you get off? What I do isn't doing any harm. If anything, it's you I should worry about. You're the one that lit our couch on fire!

HANK

That was an accident!

DORIAN

After you did ten shots of whiskey!

HANK

Still counts as an accident. Besides that's drinking, it's not the same as letting some fat chick kick the living hell outta you.

DORIAN

Some fat chick? That's the first thing you leap onto huh? That's how you look at women. I suppose you'd prefer to be whipping that chick?

*(Hank goes to the mini-fridge next to the couch and pulls out a beer)*

DORIAN

That's right, drink up. That's your pedestal, a tower of vodka, whiskey, and beer bottles.

*(BEAT)*

HANK

I think Frida deserves to know.

DORIAN

I can't let you do that.

HANK

It's not like you're gonna beat me up. We both know I'd kick your ass.

DORIAN

Wanna bet?

*(Dorian moves in front of Hank)*

*(BEAT)*

HANK

If you really wanna try be my guest. But I then again you might wanna listen to my offer.

DORIAN

And what is that?

HANK

*(holds up photo)*

You, stop... this, and I won't show this to Frida.

*(BEAT)*

DORIAN

No.

HANK

You can't just continue-

DORIAN

No.

HANK

-with this degrading lifestyle-

DORIAN

I said-

HANK

Frankly, I don't think you deserve Frida.

DORIAN

NO!!!

*(BEAT)*

DORIAN

I am not gonna stop. There's nothing wrong with me, there never has been anything wrong with me!

HANK

Then I guess Frida will just have to see-

DORIAN

FINE, LET HER! I don't care anymore.

HANK

What?

DORIAN

Go ahead and show her the picture, in fact, let me do it.

*(Dorian yanks the photo out of Hank's hand)*

HANK

You can't do that.

DORIAN

I can and I will. I'm tired of feeling paranoid about what I do and who I am.

HANK

You're a pervert-

DORIAN

And proud of it dammit! You think you can just blackmail me? Three years living together and now you wanna blackmail me? I was worried about someone finding out. Then you open your mouth, and now I see there's nothing wrong with me; at least not when compared to you.

HANK

I'm trying to help you.

DORIAN

Help me be like you right? Drink beers, drop outta college.

HANK

Fuck you.

DORIAN

Maybe you're the pervert. You ever consider that? Going digging into someone else's private life, you're friend's private life. All that just to blackmail me. Worst of all, you did this instead of talking to me. If this paranoid prick is your version of normal, leave me out of it.

HANK

So you're just gonna give Frida up?

DORIAN

I didn't say that. I'm gonna show her the photo, then whatever happens to us... happens.

HANK

At least I'm honest with who I am. I didn't need to cover up what I did. Everyone knows I drink. I told you that I took something from your room. You wouldn't even be acting this bold if it weren't for me bringing the photo up to you in the first place. Your little identity makes you hide in the dark.

DORIAN

I'm not changing my mind about this.

HANK

Alright then. Maybe I don't feel comfortable living with a closeted pervert.

DORIAN

Maybe I don't like living with a drunken, blackmailing misogynist.

HANK

Misogynist?

DORIAN

Never mind.

*(Dorian makes his way back to the door and opens it)*

HANK

I want you outta this apartment by the end of the week.

DORIAN

Don't worry, I'll be gone.

*(Dorian exits through the door leaving Hank standing by himself. He takes a sip of beer and the lights go down)*

# Better Think This Through

By Teresa Klotz

What if I loaded my little dog  
and the rest of my shit  
in the car and just drove off?

I'm already gassed up.

One quick stop at the bank  
to rob our savings account, and then  
I'd just drive and drive.  
And except for gas and pee breaks,  
I wouldn't stop  
until I got to some humble little town  
where the bowling alley diner  
needed a sassy gal like me,  
to take care of their regulars.

"Dorothy" stitched fancy-like  
over the breast pocket  
of my polyester shirt.  
I'd pour their coffee and steam  
their caramel rolls and  
listen to their shitty  
misogynist cracks. Then I'd dust off  
a few Redneck jokes,  
just so they'd know everyone  
doesn't see life the way they do.

Unable to resist asking Clarence  
how come, in all their years together,  
did he suppose  
his wife hadn't killed him in his sleep,  
I'd be fired by the end of the week.

I'd watch the regulars nod  
their approval as Buck cashed me out  
and I turned in my apron.  
"Keep the shirt," Buck would say.

"No thanks - my name's not Dorothy."



# Let Go

By Emily Klehr

A child has a tantrum; their little fists  
swing, feet stomp around.  
Anything to get attention. An adult  
has a tantrum it doesn't induce  
eye rolling, but instead the flight response.  
Their muscles clench  
they become a little brick with legs,  
like they're going to pop a squat right there  
on the kitchen floor.  
Crying and screaming children sound;  
an ice cream truck on the fritz.  
An adult cries after a fight the pain seeps  
from their voice, and any on-lookers  
left standing blink for clarity.  
Left blinking, at the mess they must clean up.

# Untitled

By Noah Savoie

There you are. Mature and wise.  
Here I am. Young and naive.

You stand there on platform shoes.  
They express your passion, spirit, past.  
The kind of past that dances to the song of La Boheme.

You know most of the scarring.  
The scarring I am only starting to get.  
Me in my scuffed, flat, tan rags.

You're so sanctified. A true witch in the best sense  
Your platform shoes seem so high to me.  
They're true magic. Major Arcana.  
They're so scary to many.  
But I want you to see I am different.  
I want to dance with your heels of your passion.  
It's not faux unlike some fashion.

I could smear lipstick and smother my eyes in liner,  
but that could not get your attention could it.  
Just another side act of people with graffiti on their shoes.  
But I'll do it anyway.

Please notice.  
I'll cut frail wings into my shoulders if I have to.  
Wings that say I've been clipped too.  
Even though my wings are that of a dove.  
And you've got your platform shoes.

I want to meet you up there.  
Maybe someday, maybe next week.  
Just please keep an ear out for my flapping.  
Realize I can balance on the tune of heathenry.

But for now I am content with staring from down below.  
A young kid looking upon the pillars that support your utter femininity.  
Unapologetic and stronger than any leather and sharper than any gypsy's tongue.

# Unofficial State Bird

By Amelia Warwick

She has six long  
hairy legs, each one  
kinked in two places.

She floats around your  
ears at night, refusing  
to let you sleep.

Making you go crazy  
with her incessant buzzing that  
alternates between a D and an F  
that must be about 1200  
octaves above middle C  
but is nothing like music.

It's more like rubbing a cheese-grater  
against my eardrums while  
fingernails scratch a chalkboard with all their might.  
That's what it sounds like.

Even the thickest duck and goose  
down pillow can't drown out her droning scream.  
Silence brings no relief. I only  
become more terrified at the lack of  
knowledge of her whereabouts.

She circles her prey, looking for a place to land,  
undetected, on your skin so that she can safely  
sink her long proboscis into your flesh and  
draw your red blood into her little abdomen until you feel the sharp  
twinge of sting mixed with itch and flash  
your hand out to smash her small offending  
body.



## In Your Dreams

By Devona Brown

# Riding in the Back Seat of a Honda Civic

By Luke Abrahamson

Head lights brush through the darkness  
against that sun-slapped skin  
producing a shimmer from the tears  
streaming down the soft skin of her cheek.  
Two in the front seat, one driving  
the other reading, do not notice the looks  
of malice shot towards me; no, they are of  
pain. Like a little girl being forced to  
put her beloved dog down after 14 years  
of catch and playing in the yard.

Chest heaving, breath short.

The agony of not knowing the  
cycles of thoughts riding around in  
her brain. Like sticking a hand  
in murky water, waiting for  
something to latch on and the  
throbbing of ripped flesh running  
up my arm.

The gnawing in my chest of  
anticipating the next words  
that will flow out of your mouth  
like the green and yellow  
vomit spewing out a drunk guy  
stumbling out of Blarney's at 2 AM.

Both a string of a guitar.  
Pulled back by the bridge, and on  
the other side, the head. Causing  
the string to be stretched to  
the point of just hanging on.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Tension.

# The Tastiest Chore Ever

By Amelia Warwick

It's summer at my Grandma's house, and the sun  
is shining through the leaves of the big tree  
in her backyard onto the lush green grass, the  
beds of tulips and rose bushes, the white  
house with old paint peeling around the frame  
of the back door.

Popsicles are my favorite. I like  
them better than ice cream.  
Cherry or grape are the best, then  
lime, then lemon, then orange.  
My Grandma just so happens to have an  
abundance of popsicles that need  
to be eaten.

Maybe Grandma thinks that I like  
ice cream better than popsicles.  
Or maybe she is just being funny, and my young  
brain doesn't understand humor in the same way hers does.

She steps out of the back door with  
a box of popsicles in her hand.  
Her slender, 6 foot frame towers above me in a  
comforting way. Her permed-to-perfection curly  
brown hair looks like it belongs on her head.  
She is warm and inviting, and when she smiles at you,  
It's hard not to smile back.  
She says I have to eat the popsicles first,  
if I want any ice cream.  
I am overjoyed; eating frozen fruit flavored sugar water  
on a stick,  
with frozen vanilla flavored sugar milk  
as a reward! As if eating popsicles  
was a burden.

# Labor Day Week

By Valora Glinski

Barreling blue Dodge Omni like a bullet  
kids packed four in a row like  
sardines in a can with the dogs at their feet  
wishing they were little Pekingese.  
Racing to beat rush hour traffic,  
cat mewing in her cage and kids  
asking repeatedly, *are we there yet?*  
Four hours later we arrive in the dark  
looking for the campsite and  
peel the kids off the hot leather,  
tell the dogs not to bark.  
Unload all the stuff, set up the tent  
irritations riding high and  
all I want to do is vent when  
I feel the first drops on my hand.  
Kids still hungry, trying to cook in the dark.  
Careful plans for grilled shrimp and steak  
turn into smoked, burnt bark.  
Finally, light on the situation when the  
lantern gets lit, but I realize the choice to  
plant our tent under a tree  
on a site with no grass wasn't wise  
when my ankles sink in the mud.  
Across the road at the parked RV  
the guy is watching the show eating popcorn.  
Finally we roll into the tent  
in our nearly dry underwear  
like buns in a packaged row,  
hotdogs six in a pack.  
*Mom, the water's still falling,*  
but this time it's inside and  
the plop, plop, doesn't fizz.  
Someone forgot to waterproof the darned tent!

The fun doesn't end there, but I'm too tired to tell  
just remembering how we walked the tent  
down the road to another spot next day,  
or how it rained every day thereafter  
till we gave up the fight and packed ourselves back  
in the Omni, like those sardines in that can and  
headed back to home sweet home  
thinking we're not doing this again.





## Harriet Island

By Patti Lindaberry

# Body on the Mall

By Paul Patane

As a federal agent I have grown accustomed to a crummy sleep schedule. Getting up early is a standard for my profession. That however, does not mean I enjoy it. Its 3:20 in the morning, and my partner woke me up five minutes ago. Apparently murder doesn't wait for daylight or a decent cup of coffee. Coffee... what I would do for a hot cup right now.

After taking a few minutes for a hot shower, I do what I do every morning; that is throw on a suit, strap on my gun, back-up weapon and grab my FBI credentials. As quickly as I do that I see headlights in the driveway. My partner is already here and waiting on me. On my way out I take a glance at a small teddy bear left on the couch. I can't help but smile at the bear. It was a gift from my boyfriend, Ron. He got it for my birthday a few weeks ago.

By the time I get outside and open the passenger side door my partner smiles, and hands me a cup of coffee. Thank God. "Morning, Special Agent Morgan." I slide into the leather seat of the black Explorer and take a sip of the coffee. Dark roast. The good stuff.

"Good morning, Special Agent Nguyen."

Nguyen. That's what he always calls me. I prefer to be called by my first name, Sara, but my partner likes last names. Jack Morgan and I have been partners for over three years. As FBI agents out of the J. Edgar Hoover Building in Washington, D.C. we investigate federal crimes within the District of Columbia and surrounding areas.

"What have we got today, Morgan?"

"Dead body on the National Mall. Park Police found the body about ninety minutes ago, and decided to call us. The vic has government credentials."

"So Park Police has lead?"

"Yep. At least for now."

"Thanks for the coffee."

"Hey. I know you without coffee, and it's not a pretty sight."

I couldn't agree more. We sit in silence for a moment as we drive down city streets. Traffic in D.C. is a nightmare but it's still early enough we can actually get down the streets relatively quickly. I love this city. No skyscrapers, so you can actually see the stars when it's dark and the sun when

it's light. There's no city quite like Washington, D.C. In fact, it's only one of two cities in the country that was fully laid out before construction began. Supposedly if you look at things on a map you can see lots of Freemason symbols. I've never much cared about that sort of thing. All I know is I love it here.

Morgan decides to break the silence. "Did you and Ron do anything last night?"

For whatever reason, Morgan has been showing a lot of interest in Ron lately. Right now he is trying to bait me, because he knows Ron and I have been going through a rough patch. "No. I haven't seen or heard from him in nearly a week."

"What did you do to that poor guy?"

"Maybe he's intimidated by the fact that I have a gun and a vagina."

We both share a good laugh. "Maybe. Or maybe you've pushed him away like all your other boyfriends."

Morgan met Ron before our first date and immediately took a liking to him. We were working a tough case until pretty late one night, and I had Ron swing by the Hoover Building to pick me up. Ron was understanding and supportive of my job from the start. He even invited Morgan out to drinks with us. While thoughtful, I was interested in Ron and not Morgan, so I politely hinted I wanted it to stay a two-person date. I'll never forget how Ron looked that night. He wore a beautiful three-piece Italian suit with polished dress shoes. He was a real professional who swept me off my feet.

Deep down I disagree with Ron's assessment of my love life. I've been different with this guy, but he literally just up and disappeared. I've left him a couple voicemails, but I don't want to come off as a stalker so I've backed off some. In the past I wouldn't even bother trying to patch things up. Either Ron is that great or I am going soft. Or perhaps it's a bit of both.

"What is it?" Morgan asks.

"I've really tried with Ron. I mean, I don't think I pushed him away." I take a pause and gather my thoughts, "If he gives me another chance I would love to try and patch things up. I called and left him some voicemails, but he hasn't responded. At first I thought he was just busy or out of town, but now I think he's avoiding me."

"Any good in the sack?"

I roll my eyes at Morgan. He knows how much I hate to talk about my sex life. The truth is Ron's great. Most guys seem to want to get off, but aren't

too interested in taking care of their partner. Ron is different. He takes the time to make me happy in all the right spots.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” I crack a smile and begin to think of all the wonderful times we’ve had. Once I’m satisfied with the times we’ve had, I start to dwell on the times I’d like to have. If given another chance.

“Well, I’m pullin’ for Ron. If he never calls you back though, move on. You can’t wait forever, right?” He pauses like he’s waiting for the perfect joke to come to him. Oh dear, it does. “After all. Your biological clock is ticking.”

I give Morgan a cold stare. It’s time to change the conversation before I want to smack Morgan more than I already do. “Tell me more about the case before you dig yourself into a deeper hole.”

“I don’t know much. Unit Chief called and woke me up with what I told you about ten minutes before I called you.”

“You said the vic has government credentials?”

“Yes. According to Park Police he’s DOE.”

DOE is short for Department of Energy. You don’t hear too much about those guys since the Cold War ended. Nonetheless, they are still out there and have a considerable presence in our nation’s capital. I know a lot of people that work over there. Ron worked there when he was younger, before leaving for the private sector. However, I think he still does some consulting work for them.

“Do we have an ID, yet?”

“Not that I’m aware of. Chief told me the body is separated from the head, and they can’t even see the name on the ID because it’s covered in blood. Park Police could barely make out it’s a DOE badge.”

“A severed head, huh? Good thing I’ve got caffeine. I’m guessing we’ve got help?”

“Coroner is already on scene and so is the forensics team.”

High profile case. A dead federal employee missing a head, and laying out on the National Mall is about as high profile as they come. When we get there the Mall will be swarming with people that use different acronyms and uniforms. The only positive is that it’s still too early in the morning for this to be plastered across the news. Come 5 a.m. that will start to change, though.

I decide to shift back to Ron. I need somebody to open up to before we get to the crime scene. “I really care for Ron. I want him to propose to me.” I can’t believe I just shared that. What if Ron dumps me and then I come across

as desperate to Morgan? The last thing I need is to be a charity case or distraction.

Morgan just kind of stares at me shocked, and in disbelief. I'm glad I'm not the only one rattled by my statement.

I meet his eyes and decide to continue. "I mean, if we patch things up and stay together."

He gives me a supportive smile. "Glad to hear it. I wasn't sure if you'd ever settle down."

"I want to. Some day." I take a sip of my coffee and think about all the things I would like to someday do. "I don't know if I'll ever be a soccer mom, but I think I'd make a good wife."

"Sounds pretty serious, Nguyen." He takes a few seconds to gather his thoughts, "I support you. I honestly hope he comes to his senses."

We ride in silence for a moment and enjoy our coffee. Up ahead we can see lights and several unmarked SUVs. There are also some Park Police officers on horseback and Metro Police cars blocking off the area. Where we don't see police and federal agents there's lots of yellow tape. It looks like everybody has already arrived for the show.

Morgan parks next to the armada of government vehicles and we get out. We flag down a couple Park Police officers and show them our credentials. After they let us pass we walk towards the coroner, who's already checking out the body.

"What have you got for us, Doctor?" Morgan asks as he stands over the shoulder of the coroner.

The coroner twists his body around and I was happy to see that it was Doctor John Saunders, who's on our payroll.

"Cause and time of death still have yet to be determined. My assistant, Doctor Reynolds is examining the head over there." The doctor points to an elm tree about twenty five feet from us. Next to the elm are several bureau agents and some forensics personnel snapping pictures with digital cameras.

"I've been doing this a while now and I have never seen anything quite like this." Doctor Saunders gets up, and takes his blue gloves off. He then wipes the sweat off his face. He continues, "There isn't much blood or debris here which suggests the body was dumped. With a place as public as this, the unsub wanted the body to be found quickly. The only thing not adding up for me is how the head got so far away from the body." The doctor opens up a black case and reaches for his Nikon. "I'm going to snap some pictures."

I turn to Morgan and ask, “Do you want to stay with the Doctor or check on the severed head?”

“You kidding me? I’ll pull rank and stay with the body. You take the head.”

I walk off towards the elm and I take in the sights of the Mall. The National Mall is a wonderful place but its seen better days. Budget cuts have made it so parts of the lawn are looking a little rough. I’ve seen everything on the Mall. From the different Smithsonian Museums, to the Folklife Festival, and even several Fourth of July celebrations. The fireworks are fantastic on the Fourth, and I replay parts of my past in my head. I can’t help but think of how much I would love to celebrate a Fourth of July with Ron here. God, I hope we can patch things up.

I walk up to the forensics team and insert myself into the conversation after showing my credentials. “What can you share?” While I wait for a response I walk over to the head and it hits me. As I look down I see blood, trauma and lots of bruising. I recognize the face. My heart races and I get lightheaded. Before I have a chance to gather a thought or compose myself, I lose control and my legs collapse underneath me. I begin to sob, and throw up acid and what’s left of last night’s dinner.

I wipe away the throw up. I feel completely exhausted and defeated. Ron Hawthorne. My Ron. The Department of Energy ID, the not returning my messages...it all adds up. Before the forensics guys can figure out what’s going on, Morgan’s come to help me. He looks me in the eyes with support and comfort. I’ve never seen him so concerned before. He whispers to me while he helps me stand up, “I’m so sorry. I promise we’ll get the guy.”

# Turning Point

By Sandra Youngs

Aligning Earth  
Orion's belt extends  
glittering stars stud cavernous skies  
surrounding a gray-cratered moon

Golden lights intersperse  
slide against bare branches  
painted by night  
indigo shadows

Grinding teeth  
whispering lake holds my stare  
welling from solid ground  
cold wends into marrow

Packed soil contained  
against dense wood  
tense, back braced  
below asphalt I sit

Rising steam  
intangible breath clouds the air  
licking snow-strewn shores  
steady waves break under moonlight

Distorted ripples  
illuminated pearls falling unnoticed  
small whiskered heads dripping  
gleaming muskrats slip through black water.

# Dropped Smile

By Daniel Orth

FADE IN:

EXT. WEST PHILADELPHIA PENNSYLVANIA-EVENING

*We see a panoramic of University City District*

CUT TO:

INT. DORM ROOM, WEST PHILADELPHIA PENNSYLVANIA-EVENING

*The dorm room is split in two, both sides having the same things, a bed, dresser, desk with a window and a standing lamp in the center. The room is cluttered with books and clothes in random places. If there was ever a cleaning lady she has not been by for some time. Each side has posters and various items with the university logo on it.*

*Vince sits at his desk on his cell phone*

VINCE

I'll try to. I don't know if he'll go out tonight.

*Door knob jiggles*

He's back. I gotta go; I'll call you when he leaves.

*Vince quickly hangs up and Eric enters the room*

VINCE

*(Vince turns to Eric, nods his head hello)*

ERIC

*(Eric throws his backpack on his bed, takes his jacket off and he lies on his bed)*

*Vince is 23, handsome, confident, and dresses preppy. He is a born leader and is bright but doesn't seem to use the ladder very often. Eric is 22 smart, good looking, a hard worker, doesn't wear as nice of clothes but still dresses fashionably.*



VINCE

*(Crosses his leg over the other and scratch's his chin with intrigue)*  
You got plans tonight?

ERIC

*(Throws basketball up and down to himself while lying on his bed)*  
No, not really, still don't really feel like doing anything.

VINCE

*(Uncrosses his leg and puts his hands on his knees leaning towards Eric)*

You know you got to get over that, and the best way is to get right back out there in that big ol' sea.

*A beat*

A few of the guys are heading to the "Blue Dog" for some drinks. You should go with them.

ERIC

*(Catches ball and stops throwing it)*

I don't feel like it...It's only been a...

VINCE

...Oh come on, the only way out is through.

ERIC

*(Continues throwing ball up and down)*

I know but I see her face everywhere, besides I don't have much money anyway.

*A beat*

VINCE

The more faces you see, the more hers will be muddled out.

*A beat*

I'll give you a few bucks and even give you a ride.

ERIC

I thought you were saving for a new... why aren't you going, and since when do you do homework on a Friday night?

VINCE

I still have to finish up that assignment.

ERIC

*(Sits up facing Vince, throws ball at hoop on the door but misses)*  
But you said you were done, what's going on?

VINCE

Look I just have a few finishing touches and the answers don't just come to me like you.

ERIC

Yeah, just like women don't just come to me.

*A beat*

Fine I'll go, but I really don't know Rob and them well enough to go without you. I'll just wait for you.

*A moment. Vince turns his seat back to his desk for a beat, and then turns back around facing Eric lying on his bed.*

VINCE

You don't have to wait for me, there really is no telling how long this will take me and I don't wanna hold you up.

*A beat*

You have known Rob and the guys just as long as I have. Besides, he knows what's going on with you. He might be able to help you out.

ERIC

*(Holds back laugh)*

Dude, those guys will fuck anything that walks by.

VINCE

That's an accomplishment; it's hard to fuck while walking.

ERIC

*(Laughs while talking)*

I have standards though.

VINCE

Sometimes you just have to lower your standards.  
*(Motions lower with his hand)*

ERIC

How do you always get girls? I mean besides your good looks and fancy car. I would have a hard time being with an empty house.

VINCE

Hey, fuck you, that was harsh. One day you will have to live without me, ya know.

ERIC

Come on Vince you know I was just fucking with you.

VINCE

Alright, but this is only because you're my boy. First and foremost you find a female...

ERIC

...Fuck you...

VINCE

...I'm sorry you opened that one up for me.

ERIC

Just tell me.

VINCE

Okay. So you walk up to this female...

*(Walks over to the standing lamp and leans against the wall facing the lamp shade with his other hand on his hip)*

...and say "Excuse me..."

*(Nods at the lamp)*

...but I think you dropped something back there"...

*(Glances over his shoulder and motions behind him with his thumb)*

...and she's like "what is it" and then you tell her...

*(Smiles at the lamp)*

...“your smile.”

ERIC

*(Holds back laugh)*

And that’s what gets you laid?

VINCE

*(Sits back down at his desk facing Eric)*

It at least gets them to smile, that’s more then you can do, it’s a lead in.

*A beat*

I don’t get why you won’t go, I’ll give you money, a ride there, and I’ll even pick you up.

ERIC

It’s only been a...

VINCE

...I know...I know...Just call me when you think you have had enough. What’s the worst that could happen?

*(Vince’s cell phone RINGS)*

VINCE

It’s ROB, what do you want me to tell him?

ERIC

*(Gestures I don’t know with his arms and face)*

VINCE

*(Vince answers the phone)*

What up Rob?

ROB

Not shit, you guys coming?

VINCE

I can’t, I have homework and I’m trying to get that pussy to go. His poor little heart is still aching. You try talking to him.

ROB

Jesus Christ you guys have no lives, put him on.

*(Vince throws the phone to Eric, he fumbles it a little but catches it.)*

Eric

*(Rolls his eyes at Vince then put's the phone up to his ear with one hand on his hip and turns to the wall.)*

Hey Rob.

*Listens for a beat*

Oh, fuck you. You know it's been only a week.

*The Phone Vibrates*

*Vince's P.O.V reveals Eric reading a text*

ERIC

*(Drops the phone to the floor, looks up at Vince)*

Are you fucking kidding me? "Am I gone" ...From Her, What the fuck is this...Never expected this from you of all people. No fucking wonder you want to get me out of here.

VINCE

Relax, E

ERIC

Relax? Are you shitting out your mouth?

VINCE

E

*Vince's Phone Begins ringing*

ERIC

My best and really only friend is fucking my ex-

*Phone rings*

-Behind my back and you want me to-

*Phone rings*

-relax? Wait-

*Phone rings*

*(Eric Answers phone)*

-I'm sorry Vince can't talk right now he is a douche-

*(Hangs up)*

-Were you fucking her when I was dating her?

VINCE

Look I didn't mean for this to happen it just kinda...

ERIC

...Oh so you wouldn't care if I just kinda fucked your mom?

*A beat*

Were you fucking her when I was with her?

*A beat*

Were you FUCKING her when I was with her?

VINCE

Look about three weeks ago she stopped by to see you when you were at class. I was asleep, she had a key I'm guessing or the door was unlocked, I don't fucking know. I woke up and she was just on top of me. What the fuck was I supposed to do.

ERIC

*(Throws his backpack at Vince)*

You throw her off of you like any REAL friend would do and tell me, I...I can't believe this is happening.

*(Eric Paces fast back and forth across the room.)*

*A beat*

Why the fuck didn't you tell me Vince!

VINCE

I don't know, alright. I was scared of hurting you. I was planning...

ERIC

*(Stops pacing and looks at Vince)*

...planning on telling me? Well, that's just fucking wonderful Vince. You broke the number one guy rule...you were planning on telling me? I should...I don't get it Vince, you can get any woman but you have to have mine. Someday I'll have to live without you...? Did you tell her she dropped her smile? I can't even...

*(Grabs his jacket violently)*

VINCE

Wait E.

ERIC

*(Eric leaves, Door SLAMS shut)*

*Phone rings*

VINCE

*(Looks at door, arms out, mouth open)*

*Phone rings*

EXT. DORM BUILDING-NIGHT

CUT TO:

INT. BLUE DOG BAR-NIGHT

Eric drinking with friends

FADE OUT

# Moccasin & Light Post Don't Last

By Korin Anderson

Burnt sienna rising with morning sun  
Chestnut campfires blazing  
as she twirls at twilight  
padding lightly on promising soil.

Moccasin soft brown ruffles  
fluttering in dry, Arizona air.  
Heart felt deep in his chest.  
Where beating hearts lie,  
scratches turn to scars.  
Light Post lusts for this lady.

Her sweet, suede words  
whispering into westerly winds  
over a khaki landscape  
sprinkled with cactus needles  
at practically a copper coin per dance.

Gliding then arching  
back, eyebrow, bottom of foot  
toes tingling as he waits his turn.  
Floodlight flicked on by trembling fingertips

Drumbeats fracturing bones,  
forming fractals in folded eyelids,  
warmth spreading, sun pouring  
deerskin screams another name.

Signaling clouds to form overhead  
mountains rising in his stomach  
forehead perspiring chains of clear beads  
sterling column weaves a war dance



against forked tongues, coyotes crossing lines  
by catching flies with grated teeth, smiling  
up at sneaker            his Moccasin.  
Sinking with denial, heart-shaped  
etches on his silver side rusts.

Roaming long stretches of sand,  
Light Post rises above rolling sand dunes  
like a Phoenix, breathing energy into soles  
shining light between her legs one last time

before releasing her back to wild.  
Native to her nature, Moccasin is soon  
dancing to another red man's rhythm.  
Rubbing sandpaper lyrics, twisting,  
withering heart, atrocious  
like a raisin in desert sun.

# The Prism

By Richard Train

Do not hastily seek conflict or struggle  
for they will know of your coming.

If war calls you, try not to follow  
for it will shadow you till your final days.

Seek love and acceptance in those you find as friends,  
for you will need friends to thread your way through this life.

Honor each new day with your presence,  
be glad of its coming and give thanks  
that you saw it slowly end.

Respect nature in its fullest,  
touch every aspect that it has to offer,  
caress it knowingly with your sense of  
touch and sight, for it is a precious gift.

Conceive of a God however you may,  
but you must find him first  
for he does not know of your coming.

Seek a woman that you can love, treat her always as an equal,  
support her with understanding and love,  
and she will repay you with the same.

Treat love as a precious gift,  
touch it as a rose petal  
for it is that delicate.

Seek work that is gratifying,  
be sure that it does not tax your senses or life.  
Work should create or give to others,  
not destroy or take from others.

Rejoice in the laughing faces of your children,  
watch the wonder of life sparkle in their eyes.  
Hold them when the opportunity arises  
for their warmth and closeness you'll remember  
the rest of your days. . .

# Feathers

By Kayerissa Gillette

My feathers wrap around me like a boa snake,  
Surrounding my neck and as the feathers tickle my hide,  
the tongue of the snake flicks its tongue across my skin.  
My feathers come in many colors, red, brown, yellow, green, black, and more  
Why is it that feathers are not afraid of color and people are?  
Is it because feathers are free and can fly,  
While we are grounded?  
My feathers never fade,  
My feathers are always there  
My feathers protect some birds from water,  
The water flowing off their backs.  
My feathers protect the harshness of hateful words,  
    Dispersing them across the world.  
My feathers speak to me.  
I listen to my feathers, when I see them being used in a dance  
I dance with my feathers when I want to be magical  
I make art with my feathers when I have bad dreams  
If only I was a bird, I would have you see  
My own set of feathers attached to me.  
I would share my feathers with you  
    So you would know and feel  
        My feathers aren't only for me.

# Enigma

By Edward Wigfield

Perplexed in motion  
Feeling internally always conflicted  
The familiarity of everyday living  
Never less confused  
Not knowing the known or unknown  
Walking in a fog  
Inconclusively living  
Barely breathing so apparently I am alive  
Not going back or forward  
The transparency is killing all that is eternal  
Unknowingly unsurpassed living in obscurity  
Is there a an end  
That's the way I am wired to be  
It's the conundrum of this life  
Mystification of my existence  
Disconnect and self-destruct  
I'd rather live in hell  
Than to have clarity  
My contentious confession

# Mean Streets

By Richard Train

Mean streets that were not green,  
hard streets making you lean.  
Concrete streets gleaming from beams,  
giant towers watching over me.  
Big city grass pushing through cracks  
cause there was no place to grow.  
And the Lord made us mean so we could

grow. So we grew, different than you.  
Pushing through cracks till we showed.  
Dirty faces staring at you,  
be fast boy, they're gonna catch you.  
Black eyes and bloody noses that always showed,  
torn pants where knees peeked through.  
And the Lord made us mean so we could

grow. '50 Fords with flathead mills,  
twin deuce's sucking those juices.  
Mean streets heard our cries,  
young faces reflecting those dreams.  
Duck tails strutting their stuff,  
dark leather jackets so you knew.  
Hey, we were different than you.  
And the Lord made us mean so we could

grow. So the wind blew as we grew,  
some of us, yeah, we parted  
finding those green streets  
where our children grew.  
Mean streets come'n back to me,  
yeah, cruel streets where I wandered through,  
yeah, broken streets come'n back for me.

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

Officers and the following members of the Spring 2012 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

|                             |               |                        |  |
|-----------------------------|---------------|------------------------|--|
| Patti Lindaberry, President |               | Noah Savoie, Treasurer |  |
| Teresa Klotz, Secretary     |               |                        |  |
| Richard Train               | Jodi Johnson  | Emily Klehr            |  |
| Luis Lopez                  | Jamie Wallace | Travis Brust           |  |

Cover art by Patti Lindaberry

Submit your creative writing to the Fall 2012 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously and acceptance is based on literary merit.

Works in all genres of creative writing (poems, fiction, memoirs, short plays, etc) are considered, with a limit of 1000 words for poetry and 2500 words for prose and drama. All works must include an author's name, address, phone number, and email address at the top of the page. Multiple submissions accepted. Submission is open to registered NCC students only.

Send your submission as an email attachment to club advisor Lynette Reini-Grandell at [Lynette.Reini-Grandell@normandale.edu](mailto:Lynette.Reini-Grandell@normandale.edu). More information is available on our website, [ThePaperLantern.org](http://ThePaperLantern.org). *The Paper Lantern* online is made possible by a generous gift from the Kevin Downey estate.