

The Paper Lantern

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440 Volts

By Kyle Adamson

My hands grapple & torque
the wires of a rode-hard-&-put-away-wet
air conditioner while I steal a peek for
for nearby snipers nestling into cozy positions.

Salty-eyed Sergeants look on
as I plunge sweat soaked forearms.
Their crosshairs scan archaic backdrops, Doppler radar.

My fingers wrap around the dusty
mechanical guts, plugged into Hades.

I kneel on the rooftop, trying not to
collect a bullet from the local sharpshooter.
Reaching deep into the vintage, steel abortion—

my fingers feel the cobra's kiss.

440 volts later:

Why, Mr. Morrison, you have a splendid hot air balloon.

Turtle shell slippers?

*Somewhere between Saturn & Polaris, I
float over Ramadi.*

*Turtle shell slippers? Viewing cute scenes of insurgent
ambushes, I see baby faced Marines locate, close with, &
destroy the enemy with fire & maneuver. Oh, the possibilities,
the orifice of the world—*

Tyrannosaurs of tongue-biting smiles.

Turtle shell slippers?

*I wonder about the universe, & aliens, &
scorpions, & Nietzsche, & dinosaurs? I feel*

*my hands burning like, like acid rain
pouring on molested umbrellas. Turtle shell slippers?*

*I'm coming back—leaping gazelles— clown college
safari.*

My conduction of lunacy: severed, with a swift kick.

A disgruntled combat boot, a Sergeant's
fool hiss: "Horse Face, you fucking idiot!"

I return with the pain of child birth.

Gaspings, I clench
second degree burns, cosmic hallucinations.

Storm

By Crystal Bui

Fur rises
on the neck
of felines
they sense it
Murky sky
tinged with a
palette mixture
of red and brown
Maroon atmosphere
engulfed in
dark, ominous clouds
carrying with them
the ocean
the fishy smell
from the salty water
Blinding flashes
howling winds
A whirl of rubble
dangling in place
for no more
than a split second
Tree branches
violently trembling
tearing from
convulsing trees
limb by limb
Power lines
quietly quivering
rain pelting
droplets trickling
down dark, cold
speckled
window panes
Cars spattering

through puddles
on slick roads
reflecting the gloom
Streets strewn
with twigs and debris
A clap of thunder
rumbling, reverberating
throughout the city
Following is the
consequent boom,
an eruption
above the land
The rain ceases
the storm has passed
it has lived
its short life
a hushed calm
has settled

Nature My Religion

By Andy Rosenthal

I hike into the wooded path I enter myself as many times
before

This is my religion

Adventuring forth into the depths of the embracing brown and
outstretched hands of green

This is my religion

My legs start to blend with the soft earth and my feet mold
like roots to the surroundings feeling the living energy of all
alive organisms

This is my religion

Throwing my arms out in exuberance I branch out to the
loving sun and limitless air

This is my religion

I see the leafy lungs of my existence stretched out in this
world almost beyond comprehension

This is my religion

Yet as I emerge from the depths back into the plain path I
return to my normative state, but I'll return as I always do

To my religion

Also Known as Schizo

By Zoellen Farmer

Gotta take the pills again...

Psh, you don't even know if you need the pills.

"If I don't need the pills, then how come I'm talking to you?" Aidenn rubbed at his eyes as he walked, hearing the pills rattle in the ugly orange bottle in his pocket. "Besides, if I don't take them soon, the psychiatrist's gonna notice, and that only causes more problems for me."

He carried on his not-so-merry way, dirty black hair ruffled by the spring breeze, letting the Aripiprazole continue to clatter against the plastic. He didn't like to dry-swallow the medicine, and since he didn't have anything to drink, there wasn't—

You know, the pills don't really make them go away...

That was true. Taking his medication never made him stop seeing ghosts. There was a group of them now, floating along the crosswalk, cars running right through them as Aidenn waited for the walk symbol to light up.

He sniffed at the air, wondering what it was he smelled. Smelled like a trash can, or a sewer, or—*oh, that's me, isn't it. Huh, did I shower this morning? Or yesterday?*

"Whatever, screw it."

"Stop talking to yourself, Aidenn. People are looking at you."

He only laughed. "So what if they're looking? I mean, what do they—wait, you're new."

"Am I now?"

"Yeah, since I don't remember hearing you before." Usually the only voices he heard were his own arguing in his head, but there were just a couple other foreigners that sometimes visited. He knew all *those* voices quite well, but this new girl wasn't familiar in the least.

“Just because you haven’t heard me doesn’t mean I wasn’t here. But seriously, stop talking out loud. That chick over there looks like she’s about to call the cops on you.”

So?

“See, that’s much better.”

Shut up.

“No.” She giggled. It sounded sadistic.

Screw you. Aidenn glanced around, suddenly disoriented by the houses on either side of him. He walked to his psychiatrist’s house every other Wednesday, so he should know where he was, but somehow he couldn’t place the street he was on. *Did I miss my turn?* The street looked basically the same as every other street in the St. Paul neighborhood. As a last resort he glanced at the road sign on the corner—apparently of Laurel Ave and N Kent St, which did him no good at all; he could never remember street names anyway, and had no clue what his psychiatrist’s address was or even what street it was on.

“You went two blocks too far, Aidenn.”

You were distracting me. His answer sounded sulky.

“I know.”

Aidenn sighed and turned around to walk back the way he came, following a couple ghosts strolling along the sidewalk. He did his best to ignore the giggles echoing in his skull.

“You see that? That was a clever way for me to set the scene.”

What are you talking about?

“You got lost so I could explain to everyone what was going on.”

I didn’t hear you explain anything.

“Too bad for you, but you’re not the only one here. Stop being so selfish.”

“You’re crazy.”

“Forgive me if I don’t take that too seriously, coming from a guy who is currently talking to himself. What did I tell you about talking to me out loud?”

“Is there a reason you’re here?”

“What? Oh, yeah, I’m supposed to be getting on with the plot, aren’t I?” She giggled again. *“I just made you*

advance things. By the way, you're late for your appointment."

"What? No I'm—" Aidenn glanced at the small screen of his phone, which somehow read 4:12, which was twenty minutes later than he thought it was.

"Better get running, kiddo. Go talk to your shrink."

"Psh, he can wait." Aidenn kept walking, ducking his head to get the sunlight off his face. "I've got a two-hour appointment anyway."

"Isn't it convenient that I worked it out that way? By the way, this is your turn. Don't miss it this time."

"Whatever." He turned onto another street—Arundel, he should try to remember that—and then went back on autopilot.

"So, what are you going to talk to him about once you get there?"

"No clue, I usually just wait for him to ask about something."

"Maybe you should tell him about this morning."

"What happened this morning?"

"All through breakfast you were watching those pretty dancing shadows in the corner—which weren't really there, by the way—and then you realized your housekeeper was trying to get your attention, which she had probably been at for about five minutes. And you were talking to yourself the whole time."

"What are you talking about? That didn't happen!"

"Now it did."

Aidenn paused to think. "Oh yeah..."

"So when you get there you're going to tell him about that, then he'll ask about your pills and talk about increasing your dose, then you're going to conveniently not tell him that you haven't taken any in over a week now."

"Woah, are you Sherlock Holmes or something? I never would have guessed that, because that's *totally* not what happens at every other appointment."

"Then why are you expecting anything different?"

"Maybe he realizes I shouldn't be taking the pills after all. I mean, they hardly help even when I *do* take them—
"

"You don't hear voices or see scorpions on the wall."

"How do you know about that?"

"I know all, now please continue. No, don't, because you don't even remember what you were talking about."

Although he wasn't going to admit it, she was right.

"You're here."

"Aidenn? Aidenn!"

The voice was deep, and didn't echo in his head. That was the part that really woke Aidenn up. He blinked, his eyes focusing on the suited middle-aged man across the desk from him.

"Huh?"

"Jeez, kid, pay attention to the present."

"Shut up."

"Excuse me?"

"Not you, *her*."

Dr. Kurtz cleared his throat, looking at the teen with eyebrows furrowed. "Aidenn, care to explain what you're talking about?"

"Sorry, I was totally out of it."

Used to Aidenn's odd replies, Dr. Kurtz just sighed. "I was asking if you've been feeling like your medication doesn't help as much as it used to. We could try increasing your dose again..."

"See, what'd I tell you?"

"I said shut up! I mean, um, I don't think we need to..."

"You didn't even have to tell him about this morning."

"What happened this morning isn't important!"

Now the doctor looked confused. "What happened this morning?"

I hate you.

"I know."

"Um, I got lost on the way here." There, it didn't sound too false. Hooray for half-truths.

"Is that so?"

“Yup.” Aidenn’s eyes strayed away from the doctor, watching the ghost that had just walked through the bookcases on the left side of the room.

“You know he doesn’t believe you.”

I don’t care.

“He does.”

No he doesn’t.

“How has school been?”

“Um...”

“Concentrate, kiddo.”

I could concentrate better if you stopped talking to me.

“Then ignore me and the stupid ghost. Talk to the person who’s actually here.”

“School, right. It’s been, um... okay?”

“Have you covered anything interesting? Are your classes going well?”

“Uh...” Aidenn watched the ghost drift out the back wall, then pass behind a window. It waved at him.

“School, Aidenn. Come on, focus.”

“How has math been?”

“Math’s good, except the numbers don’t match up anymore...”

“Right, because lately they’ve been turning colors and moving around on the page, and you can’t make any sense of it.”

“Why don’t the numbers match up? You’ve always been so good at math.”

“Because they won’t stay in one place long enough for you to figure them out.”

“I mean, it’s just gotten harder. Yeah.”

“You should tell him about the pills.”

I don’t want to tell him about the pills.

“He’ll find out eventually anyway, you might as well tell him now.”

No.

“At least say something, he’s waiting for an answer.”

Uh, what was the question?

“He asked if you’ve talked to your parents lately.”

“Uh, last time my mom called was about a week ago.”

“What did you talk about?”

Why does he always want to know about this? “She said they’d be in Italy a few more weeks than they had planned because of some new deal, so Dad has a ton more meetings, then they’re scheduled to go on a two-week trip to Scotland for some other thing...”

“And you got pissed and stopped taking the pills.”

“Yeah.” He immediately wanted to smack himself for answering her, but luckily his response sounded like a lame ending to his previous sentence.

“So how long until they come home?”

“Probably about a month, maybe longer.”

“Haven’t they been gone since the last time you came to see me?”

“Something like that...”

“They left the day before that.”

Right.

“If you want, you could come see me more often until they get back. I know it must be difficult not having your parents around...”

He only wants me to come back so he can gawk at me some more.

“Are you sure about that?”

“Of course I am.”

“Of course what?”

Damn you. “I’m fine.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to come back? It doesn’t have to be an appointment, we could simply talk, if you want.”

“Isn’t that what we do anyway?”

Dr. Kurtz chuckled, but he didn’t look happy. “I suppose it is.”

“Why did you have to hurt the nice man’s feelings, Aidenn?”

Why can’t you go away so he won’t think I’m totally crazy?

"Nothing's going to make him stop thinking you're crazy. He just wants to give the crazy a name and some pills to go with it."

He can't be that screwed up.

"Weren't you just saying he didn't care?"

He doesn't, but...

"Psychiatrists are crackpots. The guy's probably crazier than you are, kiddo, and that's saying something."

"I'm only crazy because I've got you in my head!"

"Pardon?"

"Hm, I guess you've got a point there. I am the one making this happen to you, aren't I?"

"Then go away so I can stop taking the pills."

"Aidenn, you know you can't stop your medication, and—"

"Not you!"

"And how do you know the crazy will stop even if I don't talk to you? Did you think of that one, Aidenn? Maybe you do need the pills after all."

"Well, we're not gonna find out for sure until you get the hell out."

"Fat chance, kiddo. Oh, and by the way, you're saying all this out loud."

"Damn it!"

"Did it again." Aidenn was really getting sick of her giggling. "Anyway, you still aren't sure what the pills do or don't help with. You said yourself that I'm new, are you sure they'd make me go away?"

"It's worth a shot."

"What's worth a shot, Aidenn?"

"You're not going to take them. You don't want to, you don't think you have to. Besides, they don't even get rid of the ghosts. You'd ignore all that just to get rid of me?"

"Maybe."

"Aidenn, what's wrong?"

"Nothing!"

"Have you been taking your medication?"

"Why is this all about the freaking medication? All either of you care about are the freaking pills!"

“That’s because you care about the freaking pills. That’s kind of what your life revolves around, isn’t it? Take the pills and the crazy goes away. Take the pills and your parents might start spending more time at home. Take the pills and you’re not you anymore, you’re relying on some chemicals to make you what they like to call normal.”

“Shut up! This is all your fault!”

“What makes you think it’s my fault? Sit back down, Aidenn, explain it to me.”

I hate you! You’re the one making this happen!

“Of course, did you only just figure that out?”

“If you went away, all this would stop!”

“No, it wouldn’t. I’ve been here your whole life, even though you haven’t heard me before. You haven’t actually been off the pills long enough this time to hear any other voices, so I popped in to make things more interesting. And it worked, didn’t it?”

Dr. Kurtz was talking at the same time, and Aidenn could hardly concentrate on either of them. “You’re acting like—have you stopped your medication? Nothing will get better if you aren’t getting treatment!”

“Oh, like the treatment *will* help anything?”

“Calm down.”

“The guy’s right. You’re really losing it this time, kiddo.”

“I hate you! I don’t want to have to deal with you anymore!”

“Well, there’s only one way to make it stop. Do you want to resort to that?”

“Aidenn, you can’t function like this. You need to—”

“Yeah, I got it.” Aidenn pulled the little orange bottle out of his pocket, pulled the cap off, and popped the Aripiprazole into his mouth. “Take the pills, right?” Suppressing the urge to gag, he swallowed.

“Good choice, kiddo.”

Summer to Fall

By Kelly McDonough

Trees whisper in the wind
Smell of fresh cut chilled grass
fills my nose.
Birds converse through open air
Discussion of who flew south,
the town gossip
With the cooling of each breath of wind,
the pigment of summer in the leaves
slowly reincarnates
to another,
before it leaves us to find a new spirit,
a new home.
Dying leaves push Autumn
Inside my skin,
in my being.

Spaghetti Squash

By Kelly McDonogh

Without looking at the Calendar
I could tell you the time of year.
Not by the crispness of the air,
the changing colors of the leaves,
or the scent of my Earth chilling.
The stringy warm goodness,
fills my bowl with yellow.
Crunch of an apple,
delicacy of pasta.
Nutty parmesan cheese
swims through
the creamed,
and perfectly salted,
butter.
Every bud is alive
for those moments of perfection.
All is clarified
in those first few bites,
it is Autumn.

Zombie Poem

By Allison Peterson

if you were a zombie
i would make a movie about you
and let you eat my dead goldfish

if you were a zombie
i would keep you in my backyard
but you couldn't eat my neighbors

if you were a zombie
in the winter you'd be frozen
but in the summer I would let you sit in my kiddie pool

if you were a zombie
i'd let you have a goldfish as a pet
and you could walk (drag) it back and forth around the yard

if you were a zombie
i wouldn't let you walk in traffic
because you're slower than a turtle and would get hit by cars
and having a zombie in pieces is no fun

5 March 2008

By Jeremy Maddox

Dear Me, is the world soon to come to a stop,
When students can't read and write without fear of getting
shot,
When everyone is trying to be so hot,
Sell our soul for money instead of being happy with what
we've got?

From citizen to the commander in chief,
Get a title and forget what we first preached, honesty is brief,
Money and fame, our only belief,
While we're suicidal, breathing air like an underwater reef.

Can we look at is what chief in our life, Ali wouldn't fight
"My country wouldn't care if I got killed tonight."
Now can we turn a third cheek and shine our light,
Same issue 50 years ago still hasn't been made right.

And do we follow the same voice that we speak,
He got raped and his best friend watched him get beat,
Said he should have done something more than stand on his
feet,
Done something to help him, but is he much worse than we?

When we hear a sexist joke in conversational chatter,
And all we do is sit by, maybe join in the laughter,
When a person gets made fun of right in our face,
We snicker then and cry after they shoot up the school the
very next day.

No we're not much better, the same problem as him,
We see dramas every day, and do nothing to solve them,
We keep it going, either participate or just stand on the side,

And say, “Damn, that’s sad”, when they commit suicide.

Who are you and I to think that we are not even worse?
Would we save even our enemy from riding that black hearse?
Or would we see them stabbed, bleeding, and forget about the
dagger,
Cause “Blood on THIS shirt would mess up my swagger.”

We can’t stay on the move if we don’t know what to do,
Is sex and money the only thing our generation pursues?
Think back in the past, is that all life is,
Life turned to death, is that all life gives?

Can we get rid of the bull, and change our reality,
Or just die, wallow in the truth, and hope it changes me?
We start problems, girls and guys, because we hate ourselves,
Blame it on everyone else when it’s our problem we failed.

If this is all life is, then Lord take me today.
I want to be deeper than a poem about a path that few take,
Be happy and not cry, give my spirit some hope,
To tell the Jenna Six, “Don’t get mad about that rope,”

And tell the President, “Sir, you said that we would find
weapons”,
And tell the men here, she doesn’t want you for just your
money,
And tell the women here, he doesn’t want you for just sex...
Well if they really got the that string for a black boy to be
choked,
And the fact that we are the weapons is the truth of the lesson,
And half our generation’s only about bread, cheddar, and
honey,
And the other half thinks, “You please me and I please you
after”,
And someone is born every second and dies at the same time,
Then I’d rather be with God, so put me next in line.

La Llorona (the Weeping Woman)

By Isela Pena

Enter night, the village slows

A wail like a banshee's then rise

"Aye, mis hijos..."

Electric hums, children's sigh,

drown her tongue, the words (we never want to hear),

"Aye, mis hijos..."

To currents they are lost,

moved on

while you

Remain.

His betrayal was not theirs, Maria, the anger and blame were misplaced.

Too late you realized what you had done, Maria, cloaked in pallor you must

Remain, forever drifting near a river's edge, forever calling
out in vain,

“Aye, mis hijos...”

ADVICE FOR THE EVIL EMPRESS

A Comedy in One Act

By Zoellen Farmer

Cast of Characters

BRUNHILDA: an evil empress-to-be.

MELVIN: her minion, a dark cult member.

RAY: the hero, disguised as a Geek Squad member.

SCENE

Gothic-style castle

TIME

Unspecified.

BRUNHILDA's castle. A device with a large, brightly-lit console is set up at the edge of the stage. In the center of the console is a large red button. BRUNHILDA sits on a large, elaborate throne, clad in a gown with a high, flared collar. MELVIN, in black hooded robes, kneels before her.

MELVIN

So, my lady Brunhilda, when do we execute your most brilliant and evil scheme?

BRUNHILDA

Melvin, what do you mean?

MELVIN

What do you mean, what do I mean?

BRUNHILDA

I mean I have many brilliant and evil schemes, you miserable little worm. Which scheme do you mean?

MELVIN

I mean the scheme where we use your brilliantly engineered doomsday device to blow up the capitols of Europe, thus clearing the way for you to take control of the continent, and soon the world, my lady.

BRUNHILDA

Oh, that scheme.

MELVIN

What other scheme would I have been speaking of?

BRUNHILDA

You could have meant the scheme to put red socks into people's white laundry at the laundromat, or the one where we infiltrate a candy factory and replace all the sugar with salt, or the one where we take control of every Pizza Hut in the nation and feast on pepperoni pizza and breadsticks while we work on the other schemes.

MELVIN

(After a moment of thought.) I am rather hungry; do you think we could execute that plot before we continue with the doomsday device scheme?

BRUNHILDA

It would be easier to seize control of Pizza Hut after I control Europe, I think. We'll save that one for later.

MELVIN

But would having control of Pizza Hut not provide a stepping-stone for you to control Europe?

BRUNHILDA

Silence! I already built this doomsday device to blow up the capitol buildings in Europe, I can't exactly use the same tactics to take over Pizza Hut, and I'm extremely anxious to see the explosions, so we wait to take over Pizza Hut until later.

MELVIN

(Hesitantly, as if frightened.) How much later?

BRUNHILDA

I don't know, sometime after I take over Europe! Now be quiet!

SHE crosses the stage to the device.

Once I press this button—

MELVIN

What button?

BRUNHILDA

The big red one, idiot! Now where was I?

MELVIN

Once you press the button, my lady.

BRUNHILDA

Of course. Once I hit the large and obvious red button, a laser will fire at another device located in the Eiffel Tower, which will then send out radio waves that will

activate another device that will send out a transmission to a series of other devices—

MELVIN

Which will blow up the capitol buildings of major European cities?

BRUNHILDA

No, nitwit, stop interrupting me! These other devices, once they receive the transmissions, will make warning calls to major European news stations with prerecorded messages telling them that their governments are about to be plunged into utter chaos and there is nothing they can do about it. After that, the devices will let off an electric charge which will travel down hidden wires to other devices, which will then

remotely detonate the explosives I have placed underneath the capitols. And then, my dear Melvin, we sit here and watch the explosions on the news. It's foolproof!

MELVIN

Can we eat lunch first?

BRUNHILDA

I suppose. After all, explosions are always more enjoyable on a full stomach.

MELVIN

Excellent, my lady. You are most wise and gracious.

BRUNHILDA

I know.

A doorbell rings.

MELVIN

What excellent and speedy service. Did you order telepathically, my lady?

BRUNHILDA

I ordered nothing, you fool. Go get the door and see who it is.

MELVIN

Of course.

MELVIN scurries off the stage. BRUNHILDA paces.

BRUNHILDA

(Ponderously.) I shall need something to commemorate my wondrous achievements... A statue erected in my honor? No, no, that is far too commonplace... Of course! I shall have a musical produced, telling the story of how I came to power!

BRUNHILDA starts to dance badly.

(Singing.) Brunhilda, Brunhilda, our... *(Stops singing.)* Does anything rhyme with my name? Oh well, that's what professional songwriters are for.

MELVIN returns, leading RAY. RAY is dressed as a Geek Squad worker.

MELVIN

I have brought the man who is to help repair your doomsday device, my lady.

RAY crosses stage to the doomsday device and begins examining it.

BRUNHILDA

What are you doing? Don't touch that! (*SHE grabs RAY's collar and drags him away from the device.*) There is nothing wrong with my doomsday device, and even if there was, why would I call Geek Squad? They're incredibly overpriced.

RAY

I agree with you on that point.

BRUNHILDA

No one in their right mind would admit to being overpaid in front of a potential customer! Who are you?

RAY

(*HE pulls out of BRUNHILDA's grasp.*) I have come to foil your evil plot, Brunhilda!

BRUNHILDA

That doesn't exactly answer my question, now does it?

RAY

What do you mean?

MELVIN

When she asks who you are, she wants your name, not your purpose in life. No one has proper manners anymore.

RAY

Oh... that's unexpected, I had assumed you'd immediately attack me. I didn't think villains generally cared what the hero's name is.

BRUNHILDA

It is rather impolite to kill someone without even knowing who they are, I think. Now answer the question!

RAY

I am Ray, and I am here to stop you!

BRUNHILDA

Oh, in that case, we can proceed to killing you for your impudence. Melvin! Work your dark magic to kill this mongrel!

MELVIN

Right away!

MELVIN digs into pockets of his robes, pulling out a piece of pink chalk.

Ray, my good man, may I ask you to stand over there while I cast my spell?

RAY

I suppose it wouldn't hurt.

RAY crosses the stage.

MELVIN

No, no, back there. (*points to spot near throne.*)

RAY

Oh, I'm sorry, of course. (*crosses to indicated point.*)

MELVIN

Can you hold on a moment while I trace out a pentagram?

RAY

Can you try to be quick about it? I'm on a schedule here, I'm supposed to be meeting my old college roommate for lunch in half an hour...

MELVIN

My lady! We forgot about lunch!

BRUNHILDA

Wait until after you kill him!

MELVIN

Oh, right, of course. *(draws a large pentagram on the floor.)*
Now, where did I put those candles?

MELVIN searches through pockets and pulls out five candles, placing them at the edges of the star on the floor. HE digs in pockets again.

Oh drat, what did I do with my incense and matches?

BRUNHILDA

Hurry it up!

RAY

I have some here, will this work? (*holds out supplies*)

MELVIN

Oh, thank you, that will do nicely.

MELVIN takes supplies from RAY, lights candles and incense, then moves to the center of the pentagram.

(making large gestures with arms.) I call upon the dark forces beneath us and around us, to come forth and aid me in this heinous task. I call upon the evil spirits that reside in the air around us. *(turns in a circle, sweeping his arm around the edge of the pentagram.)*

RAY

(to BRUNHILDA, while MELVIN chants) There are evil spirits around us?

BRUNHILDA

(shrugs) Apparently.

RAY

I do not believe in ghosts.

BRUNHILDA

And I am sure that the ghosts are offended and will seek revenge.

MELVIN

(while BRUNHILDA and RAY talk.) I ask that they lend me strength and help to punish the one who has dared defy me and my dark lady. I call upon the power of the night (*hunches over, still with strange gestures*), and all it encompasses. (*Straightens up, gesturing.*) I call on the wind rushing through willow branches, (*starts interpretive dance of what HE 's saying*) and the water that gives us life and strength, the earth that supports us, and the fire on my candles and in my heart. (*MELVIN continues interpretive dance for another minute, humming, singing, and wailing.*)

BRUNHILDA

(watching MELVIN as the spell continues) I cannot remember why in the world I chose *him* as my minion...

RAY

Perhaps because he was the only one available?

MELVIN

Oh great gods of the earth, sky, sea, and underworld, I ask that thou lend me thy power *(raises arms to the sky)* and help me annihilate my foes! You, who have the power to send rain and storm and rip foolish mortals from their place on this earth, who also have the power to nourish and help grow, aid me so that I can vanquish all who stand against me!

BRUNHILDA

(while MELVIN continues his spell) Never mind, this is ridiculous. I'll simply finish you off myself with this—wait, where did I put my claymore?

SHE looks around the stage, turning her back toward RAY to look around the doomsday device.

RAY

You mean, *this* claymore? (*pulls large sword out from behind throne.*)

BRUNHILDA

(*Turns to see claymore pointed at her.*) Crap.

RAY

I shall defeat you now, and still make it to Perkin's in time to meet my roommate!

BRUNHILDA

Or you could join me and help me rule the world. I mean, it is a rather large place, and a lot for one person to look after.

MELVIN

(*stops interpretive dance*) Wait, I thought *I* was to help you rule the world, my lady!

BRUNHILDA

Be quiet, nitwit.

RAY

That does sound like a nice proposition... Let me make sure I understand this. I don't kill you, and you let me rule part of the world?

BRUNHILDA

Under my command, of course. Technically you'd be a minion, like poor stupid Melvin over there.

RAY

That doesn't sound half-bad.

BRUNHILDA

The only thing you have to do to prove your allegiance is press that large and obvious red button on my beautiful doomsday device, which will fire a laser at another device located in the Eiffel Tower, which will then send out radio waves to activate another device, which will—

MELVIN

Which will, in short, cause a chain reaction to bring about the fall of Europe.

BRUNHILDA

(snapping) Yes, Melvin, that's what I was about to say. *(turns to RAY)* And all you have to do is press the red button.

RAY

That doesn't sound hard at all. All right, Brunhilda, I take your deal.

RAY crosses stage, hands claymore to BRUNHILDA, and presses the large red button. Lights flash.

BRUNHILDA

Excellent! My plot is now underway.

RAY

Shall we discuss which part of the world I'll look after?

BRUNHILDA

(laughs) Fool, you shall rule nothing! Because of your obvious and horrendous lack of principle, you deserve to die on the spot!

BRUNHILDA *stabs RAY with the claymore. RAY falls.*

MELVIN

What an excellent deception, my lady!

BRUNHILDA

I quite agree! And now my doomsday device has been set off, and Europe will soon be in my grasp! In approximately seventy-eight minutes, the news will be showing the explosions of the capitol buildings!

MELVIN

But we forgot about lunch, my lady.

BRUNHILDA

Worry not, my devoted slave, if you call Pizza Hut now, they shall deliver before the show, and we can feast as we watch my victory!

RAY

(from the floor) This is rather painful...

BRUNHILDA

Be quiet and die like a man.

Curtain falls.

Gotta Go

By Andy Rosenthal

Gotta go gotta hurry gotta go somewhere with no real reason
why

Gotta race gotta place somewhere in this race that others are
racing too

No time to write gotta drive

No time to read gotta run

No time to think gotta work

No time to be is no place to be

File this under Misinformation

By Devin O'Brien

My world is the reflection in a spoon
I make marks on paper
What do they mean?
Why do I keep writing when I'm sick of the taste of
ink?
My therapist is a mirror
It tells me what I want to see

I fear the day I lose control
When my ethical reasoning hits the fan
My moral standing is sitting down
I talk to myself
It's the best way to get someone to listen
An apple a day keeps the doctor away
Unless it's from a snake

I try to read your expression,
But the words are all flop-flipped
You're a breath of fresh suffocation
I want you to feel how I feel when I am with you
Come sit with me on the sun
We can watch the earth set

Be yourself
Who is that?
What am I supposed to be?
I want to be an early bird
I'll die young and get my worm

I want to have a near life experience
I pinch myself, but never wake up
I am an insomniac
I stay up late and watch advertisements for eighties
ballads
Suicide is nine times harder for a cat

My therapist is a speaker
It tells me what I want to hear
I try to bend the truth
I'm afraid it might break

Loose lips sink ships
I've already walked the plank
And they say quitters never win
I was born with a silver knife in my mouth
The wound still hasn't healed

My feet are in the air
My head is on the ground
I must be in love
I wear it on my sleeve
It's leaving a stain
I put my five cents in
I want to say more than everyone else

You can scold a man with a gun
You cannot scold a bullet
It goes in one ear and out the other
These hands are not mine
I keep them in wool socks
What happened to my mind?

The End of War

By Kyle Adamson

Only the dead have seen the end of war—Plato

His head cast a small crescent shadow on the desolate desk. Her eyebrows converged like two hedgerows, & dark hairs protruded from her starched uniform's sleeve. From first sight one might mistake them for Darth Maul & Chewbacca. She approached with John Wayne hands on her Polish bodybuilder hips. She demanded he leave, while he threatened to slap a dyke, whatever that means. They tussled & grappled as the library erupted into tax-payer-funded chaos. The silence was broken. I worried I may see the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. I couldn't help but reflect on the moments that brought me here.

It started with the C-130 landing on a parched runway with 1990's nostalgia; then the burnt-out Staff Sergeant yelling, 'welcome to Iraq,' & not really meaning it; then the nervous convoy across a soiled Babylon, cursing your recruiter; then only having the one vice of wintergreen chewing tobacco; then the classic letter home, swearing every one you send is the last; then the body bags are brought out & this isn't as romantic as that gleaming Hollywood movie; then you're staring at brain matter blasted on the inside of economy cars; then you're stirring burning shit with a four foot piece of rebar in a fifty five gallon drum; then you're watching feral dogs eat dead Iraqi children like some sort of Discovery Channel hell; then the ambushes, & the raids, & the sniper that only

missed you by six inches to the left; then the RPG's that streaked like comets, & the F-18's that dropped bombs that echoed with every bass drum that Satan's symphony could muster; then the C-130 home to the promised land; then the free college, which planted me in this library with front row tickets to the clash of Godzilla & Mothra.

& that's when the world tilted. The fire-breathing security guard ordered to dispatch the winged, sleeping skinhead from the sight of pale-faced librarians. This suddenly became ground-zero of an epic battle of the raging ideologies: the wicked left & right wings of boneheaded logic flapped and fluttered together to make some demonic falcon of destruction. The two warriors clashed as the skinhead lashed out against the security guard & the establishment. The battle continued as chairs are over-turned & monitors are bumped by boney elbows. People even stared & shrieked with their words not matching their lips.

I stared at this war zone that interrupted my studies of the contemporary, oh, I'm not even sure. I wonder to myself, is this it? Is this the war to end all wars? I couldn't help but stand up & naively shout: "Aha! This is it! This is how it all ends!"

I embraced my heart as I witnessed this battle conclude, as the guard bellowed, returning to the sea, and the skinhead howled, circling the moon. They were one of the same, tumbling off the political spectrum like Alice into the preverbal rabbit hole. No more battles of butch Al-Qaeda or skin headed infidels. Plato was wrong: I had seen the end of war.

Wings

By Zoellen Farmer

Can you imagine?

The floating circus on silver wings
Tents made of clouds
In the clouds
Painted horses
Trapeze artists
Falling, falling—miraculous feats, miraculous flips

The distant ranch ever shrinking away
Blocked by raised dust
In the dust
Heat crippling
Horses sprinting
Faster, flying—horses like wings

Can you imagine?

The glowing, glittering garden beyond the trees
Shimmering fairies with petal wings
On the petals
Cascading currents
Dripping dew
Glinting off droplets—sunlight always glinting

Black in all directions, lit by spots of fire
Surrounded by nothing
In the nothing
Distant planet
Void below
Jumping, swimming—no wings needed here

Can you even imagine?

Salt air in the humid day, shade by the mast
Turquoise waves under sun
In the sun
Sky above
Sea below
Sails, wings—spread wide, catch the wind

Huge dark castle, solitary atop the valley
Gray skies, soaring eagles
Eagle's wings
Stained glass
Gothic windows
Look outside—no one for miles

Can you dare to imagine?

The tombstones emerging in the mist, the dark
Hands reaching from the ground
In the ground
Feathers rot
Fallen angels
Spreading wings—huge dark wings

Can you possibly imagine?

The beige walls from concrete foundations
Locked in a separate wing
No more wings
Fluorescent lights
White noise
Concentrate, focus—stifle, choke

Can you still imagine?

Famous Cheeseburger

By Karissa Plissken

My name is Juicy Lucy.
I was born in a little town known as Lions Tap,
back in a room filled with all my relatives.

The day I was created
didn't go as planned,
I had to be grilled longer than all the others.

It really hurt being different.
All the other burgers were hamburgers,
I am a cheeseburger.

I consist of two giant warm buns,
I've been told they're there to keep all my parts in.
It would be a hassle to lose a pickle.

Inside of my buns is
my stomach, in a foreign language
it is called meat.
I also come with a heart,
better known as a pickle.
For some reason many people do not like my hair,
they ask for "no onions," which I do not understand.

The one thing I hate the most about my appearance,
having cheese.
All my friends are without cheese,
but my mother says I'm different
and I need it to stick together.

I lost my mother long ago,
I was told we all have to go when we are chosen.
What I wonder,
where do we go?

I've been told in a sewage like system,
I deny such a nasty thought.
I believe I'll end up,
in a big pool floating around with my friend,
Fry.

What Makes a College?

By Andy Rosenthal

What makes a college?

The Setup? For the buildings in themselves are just another building

The Professors? For they think many and great things, but do disagree over many issues

The Books? But anyone may pick one up and devour the contents

The Students? There are a multitude of them with many attitudes, who party, or study this you will find anywhere still

The scholar? That diligently works and creates thoughts and new contributions to academia

What makes a college?

Dare I ask you.

(+) “eye”-ons

By Devin O’Brien

My spinal fluid is flowing down the tributaries,
And my kettle’s tipped and pouring out
I am now broken
Lying here in painted pieces
Waiting for a chef to boil me
Make me stronger than my shell
Let my yellow run,
Like tears from... open holes

Scoop me up out of the bucket
Drop me in your holy goblet
I am just dough for you to “need”
Feed me my addiction
Leave an aftertaste of bitter regret
Poisoned, rotten insides make me hollow
Make it rain blood,
Like tears from... open holes

Open up the hatch
Let the serpent crawl in deeper, deeper
Slithering until it hits the bottom
Upon my visage lies a veil
Until you cut the rope and let me fall
The force of g is in control
Let my fragments fall,
Like tears from... open holes

I am blinded by an absence
Some sensory perception
I am left with blackened bullet holes
They swallow everything inside them
Even light cannot escape
Magnetism from these nasty bricks of coal

In the drain of,
Me and my... open holes

Flights of Fancy

By Crystal Bui

Up in the fluff of the earth
where the sky is a luminous blue
reflecting the sapphire sea below
The golden gem above us is diffused,
lights up the world

Up there is where dreams are
where whimsy and imagination
frolic and cavort
letting the fresh breeze
flutter through their hair

Little buds that are planted
in the milky, cottony soil
to flower in the fluff of the atmosphere

A balloon chair
suspended in air?

Preposterous.

One can only dream of such inconceivable things.

The heads of dreamers soar
to swim up in the
alabaster cotton candy
that nonchalantly drifts by

Bound wings spread
shedding a flurry of feathers
falling from the heavens
Gravity and reality
pulling them back down
to the terrestrial sphere

Do not judge others by what they dream
let them float above the clouds
where fantasy leaps and prances

They will descend at their leisure.

Thank You, Chuck Norris

By Kyle Adamson

Thank you, Chuck Norris for only making
a two hour appearance at the Patrol Base—
while I was out on ambush,
then trotting off to the green zone.

Thank you, Chuck Norris for accepting an invite
to eat dinner with General Petraeus & staring at him
with your simple, made-for-TV eyes,
while he complements your valor.

Thank you, Chuck Norris for pretending
to eat our food at a photo-op, now you
know what it's like to enjoy a
non-FDA approved shit sandwich.

Thank you, Chuck Norris for deciding
to endorse the Iraq War instead of the Total Gym,
which is also not made in America
& has been cited for unsafe working conditions.

Thank you, Chuck Norris for wearing
the uniform of the mere groupies you
aim to please. You really made us feel
like one of you.

Thank you, Chuck Norris for being
the punch line of all my jokes.
But one part of me has to ask:

*How many Chuck Norris's does
it take to screw in a light bulb?*

*Another part of me says,
does the Boogey man really
check his closet for you?*

Cherry Pie

By Crystal Bui

Its light buttery scent
induces salivation

Eager to chomp
into what flakes apart with ease

Pressure from the clean fork
punctures the victim

Leaving a laceration where
crimson gushes out in a wave

Almost sucking the prey dry.

It oozes off the end of the
stained silver cutlery

Smearred entrails
all over the once clean
porcelain plate

Chunks must not be wasted
every morsel must be devoured

The kill is wolfed down
in a matter of seconds
before it loses its warmth

It continues to bleed
all over its alabaster deathbed

The predator is delighted
The tongue is dazzled
by sweetness
creamy tartness
tangy fruitiness

The hunter proceeds
to lick his mouth clean
of his scrumptious sacrifice

The Look I Will Never Forget

By Kelly McDonough

I walked down the grey carpeted stairs
as I always did when I had school.
My mom sitting on the pine green couch,
not on the left,
or the right,
but right in-between.
A look in her eyes
like a momma meerkat
when she realizes
the town lions got her babies.
My naïve eleven-year-old self
didn't think much of the look
in her eyes,
as she watched the planes fly into the buildings,
on repeat.
I looked past her look
to what was packed for lunch.
Nine years ago
I didn't know
the meaning behind the look.
As I lose some of my close friends
to the hot and violent sands out East,
worrying
about whether I said my last goodbye,
now I know,
her look meant things may never be the same.

Horse Face

By Kyle Adamson

Call me Horse Face.

I signed my life away with feeble fingers—
ignoring Elijah.

I'm the atheist in the foxhole.
I cross lances & drink to death.

I'm the asshole who lip-syncs
the Lord's Prayer & doesn't say amen either.

I'm the one the children call Ali Baba.
I'm the same reason all the young men
have black eyes & they embrace their broken ribs—
none to spare to Eve.

I'm the wolf that cries: man!
I'm the one to squeak revenge,
but not loud enough to wake
the Unknown Soldier or Queequeg.

I stare at a television faced Ahab—mirror or not—
tumbling skyscrapers in his retinas,
cleaning a harpoon M-16.

He is the one to choke on pretzels
& manifest destiny. *I was once
like you*, he always says.

His Quaker eyes fixate,
simmering blood; anything will do,
to become his martyr.

The blood is on my fingers,
or his? Is this how it feels?
Am I in this, too? Is the harpoon
bound to legs like mine?

I hear the scream-cry of children
echoed by golden trumpets sounding
from the heavens, impaled—
lifeless with a yelp or a whimper.

Precious oil, as rare as the milk of queens,
does it bleed from the ground,
or from the fat of our mammals?

*To the last grapple I grapple thee;
from Hell's heart I stab at thee.*

My Right-Hand Little Man

By Laura Thomas

The red Jeep Grand Cherokee rolled onto the dusty road that led into the campsite and didn't slow as it turned into the parking lot. There was a flurry of honks and angry words exchanged as it slid into a free parking space that another car had been waiting for. It was nothing less than I expected that the father of a cheat was a cheat himself. Father, mother, and brother flooded out of the car but my eyes panned only to him, to Rory Davis, and the trophy he clutched tightly as if he knew of his guilt and expecting at any moment for the universe to take it away.

Truth be told, I was almost surprised that Rory couldn't feel me somehow when it felt like glowing coals had forced the eyeballs out of my skull. A fish had taken my bait and tugged at the pole I gripped so tenaciously but I paid no mind. It wasn't the typical trophy I was after, mind you, but I was thirteen and all too concerned with matters of winning and losing, classifying everything as such.

This thing was meant to be mine, so said the crumpled up, unused bills in my pocket that now resembled so much wet lint, so said the many long hours of cleaning gutters and pulling weeds. And all Mr. Davis did was throw a wad of money at the situation; Mr. Olsen made a mix-up with the prints that all looked so similar and...and...I just couldn't stomach the acid that was frothing in my chest any longer when I finally ripped my eyes away from Rory, nearly peeling my corneas in the process, and looked down to that furry-faced trophy: a Border Collie puppy. That puppy was supposed to be my right-hand little man and now barking hysterically at the fish on my line.

My bare feet kicked up furious dust clouds through the dirt as I marched up to Rory. "Every penny is here, plus extra for your trouble," I said, spreading the bills out in a fan for him to see. "The only reason Olsen didn't bring up the mistake with your dad is because he's so touchy and the old

man didn't want to lose your family's business."

"Makes no difference to me." Rory shrugged. "I can't taste any difference between Olson's bee spit and the stuff we get at the store anyway. Why support him? This on the other hand," He gave his new pup a squeeze that was too hard for the little thing to take. It yelped and I almost yelped with it. "Was something I liked. It seems like I got the pick of the litter in Bruno before the rest even came on the market."

Bruno, I huffed in my mind. It was the name of a brute of a dog that would jump up on people full grown and use whatever he pleased as a teething toy. It was the life that Rory promised, the one that I had been determined to save Jaxon (as his name should have been) from.

The pick of the litter...

Tuned out the way adults tended to tune out elevator music, we boys had previously tuned out the sound of the Olsen puppies but we looked to that truck now. Seven little heads bobbed up and down in the crate like the moles in those Pop-A-Mole games. They were mindless in their pursuit for the attention of every passing person, paying no special mind to me, the boy who gave them their first human interaction.

"You heard me talking in school," I continued, getting back to Rory. "Just like I heard you, saying your heart was set on a German Sheppard. Loudly."

Again, I insisted by driving my bills up to eye level. Seventy dollars could buy a lot of things for a young boy. Images of the skateboards and video games I was giving up spiraled in my head looking at those bills, as I'm sure was happening in reverse behind Rory's conniving eyes.

But he shook his head. "That's a lot of slips of paper you're handing me. I don't see the right one though."

"The right one," I hissed through my teeth, like I'd done every other time he'd inquired, "Is in its right place with the rest of my Grandpa's collection."

The other boy gave another careless shrug and I was tempted to prove my dominance over him to the pup right there by popping him one. "Old man never takes it out of its casing. Copy, paste, click, and you've got yourself a passable double. Hell, you could probably even replace it with some

raggy, old Pokémon card. His hands are so swelled up he can't even open the-

Suddenly Rory gave a sudden squeaking inhale of air and for good reason: a flash of motion and my fist was the only thing he could see, stopped there just before it could make contact. Knowing him, he might've let his new pet take the hit for him had his reflexes been faster.

Below Rory's Bruno, my Jaxon, starting barking. His siblings perked up on recognizing the sound of their littermate; they swarmed to the side of the crate nearest to us and started barking too. Random barks were one thing but when eight little voices were going all at once people would start to look up from their grills and fishing lines to a confrontation that would only escalate from there.

I pulled my hand back with purpose, as if to make Rory wonder if I was only rearing back for another strike that would come like a viper. But I brought it to my side and shook the fist free of it.

The line had broken so I didn't have fish fry to bring back to the family that night. Though I turned my back on my pup that needed saving that day, I vowed to myself to reclaim that which I had rightfully earned.

I suppose my sister Amy might have thought that I was sulking over that incident for the rest of that day. She might've said that the sulking intensified when we were graced with another neighbor camper that seemed to be placed there just to irritate me further with the talented Pomeranian that did backflips and had dance routines to Lady Gaga songs. I wasn't sulking, oh no, I was plotting and when Amy and the rest of them wouldn't stop nagging me about it I got away by volunteering to gather firewood; not just for our family but for several of our neighbors through bartering. The pacing left me alone with my thoughts: I couldn't be sure of anything of substance that happened that week. Only one thing mattered to me and I'd put myself in auto-pilot all weekend to think of a way to get it.

As the hours passed the supplies that began to fill up my pant pockets were a whittling knife, peanut-butter covered

marshmallow fish bait, a flashlight, and soap...lots of soap. Where there were no showers or running water except in the very best campers, the women of the camp almost used the stuff like currency and couldn't hoard enough of it even for one short weekend.

With every small journey I made from the forest back to the campground it seemed that the crate of collies was shrinking. Somehow, though none were the one I wanted, it planted a sense of urgency in my mind that this weekend was my only shot.

What was that stupid soap opera Mom watched reruns of every Sunday? MacGyver? Yeah, that was it. What master device would he concoct to save the day using only the oddity of supplies that filled my pockets? Most people just stopped talking to me after a while of dealing with my staring and mumbling. That worked out fine for me and everyone else but not for my latest barter, Old Ms. Mosley, who had no reservations in smacking me over the head for it.

"Now, boy, I won't have you leaving this place without proper payment and you'd best take an interest, lest I smack you for it again." The old woman was an oversized owl in her great shawl, hunched back, and arthritic feet tensed up into claws. I was a little surprised when she led me to a bookcase full with all the tea in China.

I had no choice but to turn the auto-pilot off while she filed through rows of tea, listing every property, every geographical location, but then something she said pulled me in by the ears and I asked her to repeat it.

"I said," said Ms. Mosley, puffing herself up as if it was important, "I wouldn't want to give you a box of Chamomile if you're one of those poor souls that have the sneezy-sneffles this time of year. It might be a miracle tea but it's still an allergen and-"

"This is good! Thank you!" I cut off, snatching the tea back before it could be lost in the vast collection again. And I was out the door. This was it. I didn't need an elaborate plan or to invent anything, not when nature already had a ready-made cocktail that would wreck havoc on the sinuses of an allergy sufferer.

As if to confirm what I already knew, once I stepped out I saw Rory issue a violent sneeze from across the site. His whole family was plagued with the affliction. My feet almost twitched to partner up with the dancing lapdog to any girly song she wanted to perform. I had my plan.

There were no more bobbing puppy heads when Sunday turned to night.

It was rather funny actually, all the time and effort I invested the rest of that day in my plan how to get the dog away from Rory for a few minutes as to lather my little Jaxon in the wicked Chamomile flowers to convince Rory he had a dog allergy too. But I found myself out of excuses when the campers were set for this weekend and next from my services and in turn was forced to have some stupid fun with the stupid family...stupidly: fun which included playing all-you-can-eat blood buffet to the mosquitoes on the fishing boat with Dad and listening to Amy shriek like a banshee when I killed and gutted our scaly dinner.

It was funny because when the campfire stories ended for the final time that Sunday, when the campers turned out the lights, I found that a sleeping Rory and my leashed puppy were the only ones left on the little stretch of beach.

He was close, my Jaxon was so close that I could reach out and touch him. And he became attracted to my movement when Rory only breathed in and out.

Looking into those beetle-black eyes, I knew I couldn't afford the patience of coating him with an allergen and waiting for Rory to pinpoint his increased reaction to the dog. Anything that didn't result in me getting that dog that very instant was now too time consuming, even if Rory tossed aside his new toy the very next day.

"Here, boy," I said lowly, so Rory wouldn't wake.

"Here, Jaxon," I said when the pup was too young for any one name to stick.

Surely the litter couldn't be completely gone after only two sparse days. I could make a switch that no one would notice, least of all Rory. How would he be able to recognize Jaxon's brown jellybean-like spot above his left eye or that his

special scratch-spot was on the bridge of his nose? How would he know that Jaxon was the fastest runner when his siblings weren't there to compare?

But, just before I could pull him over, Jaxon snapped his needle-like puppy teeth at me.

I was quick to pull away. But my brain was slower to process the fact that I was unable to even touch the dog I'd claimed as my own several weeks ago.

The pup kept snapping until I backed away. As if his rejection of me hadn't been complete, he then trotted back to Rory, plopping down beside him and fronting to me, I think on purpose, his swishy little tail.

I only saw the truth when its indifferent tail was wagging in my face. The pup wasn't the special, golden one of the litter like I'd thought. Once they were lifted up out of that crate they were spoken for. That was it. There was no invisible thread connecting that pup's future to me, despite that he played with me the most during his first growing weeks. Because I hadn't claimed him soon enough he'd thrown me away along with the rest of his old life on the Olsen farm. Now I was just another face and another scent that wasn't the familiar one of his master's.

That dog's name really was Bruno now and there wasn't anything I could do to change it.

When I walked the path back to my camper I was as a boy carved out of stone. My steps were heavy and dragged for my not having the energy to lift them off the ground. I didn't care. My labor, my hope...it was all for nothing.

My senses were dulled with the rest of me so it took me longer than it should have to feel a strange sensation pass over me, one I couldn't be sure of. There was a chilly breeze that came with the night but it wasn't that. I turned around.

The only light was the moon on the lake.

I continued walking with rising suspicion but as I did my eyebrow coiled further up on my forehead. Rory had won and he had no business taunting me about it. Once he reappeared from behind the campers to jump me I wouldn't hold my punches. I may have been weighted down like a rock but, by my logic, a rocky composition should've given me a

fierce right hook too.

But when I spun finally, ready to fight, there was still no one there. No one I saw until I moved my flashlight to form a spotlight on the ground.

The crate on Mr. Olsen's truck hadn't been quite emptied out.

The pup's eyes weren't black like her brother's but a brown that were a shade of chestnut wood finish that would make an old table look years younger. The crate had been knocked over and its escapee had been following a foot behind me without ever crashing into my heels the way a clumsy dog should have.

But those hopeful eyes in the dark didn't overpower the sight of the bent tail she had and the not plump stomach that was the result of her not being assertive enough to fight for her share of milk. This pup was the only one left for good reason. She was at the end of the pack when I took them for a run. I didn't see her poke her head out for the buyers, I knew, because she was the one whose face had a cape of black fur run behind her ears. Her parents at home would know of her pitiful status too when she was the only one brought home from the weekend; Cloud and Tiffy were champion sheep herders and couldn't be bothered with a rejected puppy.

"You still have your froggie," I tried halfheartedly, pointing over to the stuffed animal that was still in the crate. "Go on now. Go home."

She seemed to observe my pointing gesture. She sat down and it made me pause. Had she taught herself to respond to humans like that? Did she pick it up from watching her parents and the performing lapdog next door?

"Backflip?" I said, it coming out more like a question than a command, but she just cocked her head to a side in confusion. I gave a grunt. "Okay good, there's a point where smart becomes creepy. But it still doesn't mean anything. Sit is an easy command. Now shoo!"

But she just kept sitting there, staring at me.

I wasn't about to be swayed by this strange calmness of hers that the other puppies didn't seem to possess. When she wouldn't go, when she would just step into my shadow

again once I turned around, I picked her up and headed back to Mr. Olsen's truck. Her heavily snorting nose was the only thing I could hear as she ran it over me and started lapping at my neck. I placed her back into the crate and set it upright.

But she popped her head out and barked at me.

This wasn't the runt I remembered. Shy as she was, she might've been intimidated by her more outgoing siblings during my trips to the Olsen farm. Having followed me just then, she may have developed a scent-memory of me that smelled of Oreos and bicycle grease that had come and gone past that camper the whole weekend. Leave it to me to get claimed by the only puppy that shied away from the disembodied hands that hovered into the crate.

I moved my hands forward and wrung them in frustration over it all but that was forced out of me like a belch when the girl pup jumped out and collided into my chest.

"Hey!" I growled when she snuggled in there like she was making a nest for the winter. "That wasn't an invitation, you stupid dog!"

Dropping her like a birthing giraffe drops its newborn smack on the ground would've served the stubborn little priss right but I found I didn't have the heart to do it when she turned those bright brown eyes on me. If ever I was going to regret something I knew it was going to be by taking pity on the runt.

Grumbling, I tucked my money beneath the crate and took the froggie with me.

"And that's how I seem to remember it, Mimi," I ended in a contented sigh as I patted my dog's caped head five years later. Her chin lay on my knee, her eyes closed with a toothy dog grin self-satisfied and criminal enough to warrant a fine. "You manipulative little minx, you were playing me right from the start, weren't you?"

I heard Vern, my soon-to-be U of M roommate, gave a last call for me. Every box and bag had been stacked up in the U-Haul and every other goodbye had been said. My little girl had thought I was going away forever every time she saw suitcases lined up at the door, despite that our family vacations

never lasted longer than a week. When several weeks passed this time her long-time fears would be confirmed.

For that, I only felt that I had owed as gentle a goodbye as I could give to Mimi when she wouldn't understand the way a person would. But once I'd moved to catch up to Vern I found my leg effectively pinned down by her chin. It was a sad thing indeed for a college student when his dog regularly outsmarted him.

Any gesture to get away would be a rude awakening so I did it quick, like pulling off a bandage. I didn't have to see her to be able to feel those clicking paws through the floor and the canine mind behind them: if she were fast enough she could slink past the open front door and park herself in the window seat of the van. If she were swift enough she would be right where she belonged alongside me, her master, where ever I went.

As long as I didn't say...

"Stay."

And like clockwork Mimi planted herself on the floor. Normally she would remain still like the tendons in her legs had been cut but now, as if sensing something terribly amiss, she pranced on her front paws and whined as if itching from any sign from me to release her from that command.

I wanted to give her that very thing when she was in obvious pain but the car's horn began to go off for me. I gave my Mimi a simple pat on the head and had that hand consumed with desperate licks forceful enough to pry skin from muscle.

"You did your job for me, little girl," I praised, ignoring the house rules this once and letting her lick away at my hand and its scent that had long since evolved from Oreos and bicycle grease into energy drinks and incense. But it was still the scent she knew better than anything else. I turned away before Mimi could convince me to wait for the bus tomorrow. "You're Amy's right-hand now."

Recycle this life

By Jeremy Maddox

The cycle of life's wheel will never end.
The broken stitch in the seam can never mend.
Death's face will forever be found.
Its eternal clock winds, unwound.
These are the conditions of Nature's true passions,
Whose ration warrants all reactions.
Loves portion too should never be forgotten,
It is beautiful and raw. It is delicate and rotten.
To experience such pain may convince a comrade,
That it is better to have loss, than never be had.
Leaving where we are may change what we see,
But will never alter our ultimate reality.
Our perception of tomorrow may depends on the vision of
tonight,
But we are bound to return and recycle this life.

When I First Met Him

By Allison Peterson

When I first met him

When I first met him

He was so pure

He was so angry

I wanted to change him

I wanted to change him

He was so accepting

He was so guarded

It was so easy to hurt him

It was so hard to love him

He was so beautiful

He was so beautiful

Even in tears

Even in anger

I wanted to break him

I wanted to heal him

It was so easy

It was so hard

but

but

When I first met him

When I first met him

I knew that I loved him

I knew that I loved him

You and Me

By Jeremy Maddox

I'm the one that writes you love poems and rhymes,
And inside feel stoic knowing their all lies.
I'm the one who signs your checks every month
And tells you your time with us is done during an early
afternoon lunch
I'm the one who tells you to dance forever,
And cut off your leg when you play in lightly drizzled
weather.
I'm the one that represents as head of state,
And is unable to protect my people in category 5 rains.
I'm the one who tells you to keep it pimpin'
And complain when you talk about promiscuous women.
I'll tell you that you need to lose weight,
And bake you cookies and cake, buy you shrimp and steak.
Im am the one you don't know, the one you see morn and eve,
I am you, and you are me.

ANDROID

By Alexander M. Birchard

Caleb aimed his pistol at the android's face. The cross hair was shaky between her—*its*— beady black eyes. With no expression, void of natural life, the machine stared— an uncaring, emotionless, artificial face prying deep into his eyes. A face he recognized; a face he came to know. Her face was one he might have loved.

A face he did love.

He was sweating, yellow blotches forming around the rim of his white T-shirt. His pink lips formed a tight line. The trigger was cold and smooth, his finger twitching around its crescent moon curve. Never would he have thought a machine—a pile of metal scraps and false flesh— could stir such a force of emotions.

Despite what he felt, he knew what needed to be done. With the last blow to his heavy heart, the final tear jerked from his eye, he pulled the trigger.

The silver bullet was propelled from the barrel of the gun, breaking through a burst of orange flame and white smoke. The small, solid tube penetrated the plastic skull of the android. Her gears, screws and artificial blood burst out like fireworks from the back of her head, littering the floor and splattering the walls. The humanoid machinery fell hard and slow to the ground, revealing an image of a face formed by the burst of synthetic blood against the white wall.

It was over. Pandora Mons was now a face he once loved.

Caleb gazed down at the contorted body of the robot, limp on the wooden floor. Bright red blood pooled around her head like a halo from Hell. Hers was such a beautiful face, such a beautiful mind. If only what he saw, what he knew of the girl wasn't a false creation...

Sadness took him and rendered him a prisoner in its

black hole. But a flood a rage took hold of him, dragged him from his imprisonment. Though, he was not yet rescued. It urged him, it inspired him, and it compelled him. Someone was going to pay for his loss, whether him or the enemy. Either way, he would take a life...

The Day is...

By Andy Rosenthal

Do not blow your nose with this tissue I call today. To just
simply throw it away

As if it were a whimsy little thing that contained no blank slate

For **THE DAY IS THE BACKBONE OF YOUR LIFE!**

The day is where the journey embarks, as well as where your
departing breath is taken

Fear not death if you know the day, for the day is your stage in
the ongoing play

Let not any hindrances halt you from starting your day for it is
endearing your potential!

PTSD

By Kyle Adamson

I. Morning

ICBMs of sweat droplets detonate in my armpits—mushroom cloud of agitation.

Sipping coffee, my pores reek of Valium as my knees shake, legs crossed.

Fidget, fidget, I zip & un-zip my jacket, like Thing—mind of its own.

ICBMs of sweat droplets detonate in my armpits—mushroom cloud of agitation.

Pacing between nervous windows, I check my watch for the umpteenth time.

Phone rings, explosion of pulse, my blood cries: Wolf! Wolf! Wolf!

ICBMs of sweat droplets detonate in my armpits—mushroom cloud of agitation.

Sipping coffee, my pores reek of Valium as my knees shake, legs crossed.

II. Afternoon

Broken glass. My nerves spin black widow's webs of braided panic.

Contact right! I reach for a non-existent M-16, apparition of security.

Door slams. Blood-borne F-18's strafe flaming endorphins. Broken glass.

My nerves spin black widow's webs of braided panic.

People say, *Stop making such a scene*, as I clench shattered cortex.

I walk on intrusive memories, crunching eggshells, crackling between parched toes.

Broken glass. My nerves spin black widow's webs of braided panic.

Contact right! I reach for a non-existent M-16, apparition of security.

III. Rush Hour

Red light, check door locks, my hands at ten & two, playing IED Frogger.

Green light, I look both ways for Saddam's ghost & the T-1000.

Fingers stitched, steering wheel, slamming on the brakes, my cerebellum misfires.

Red light, check door locks, my hands at ten & two, playing IED Frogger.

Trapped in a steel coffin, flames enveloping, 4X4, status quo with a hood ornament,

green light, *but there's got to be some other way*, detour through badgered sanity.

Red light, check door locks, my hands at ten & two, playing IED Frogger.

Green light, I look both ways for Saddam's ghost & the T-1000.

IV. Midnight

I check the window, *kaff*, for AK-wielding Hajji's—roll-over right.

I palm limbs searching, *stop*, for gunshot wounds, annoyed girlfriend.

REM cycle, I'm on the radio with the CO, reporting, pleading—roll-over left.

I check the window, *kaff*, for AK-wielding Hajji's, roll-over right

I raid smoldering mosques as I grip my pillow—roll-over left.

Only an eyelid between drive-through suburbia & war, sealed.

I check the window, *kaff*, for AK-wielding Hajji's—roll-over right.

I palm limbs searching, *stop*, for gunshot wounds, annoyed girlfriend.

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 Fall 2010 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

Kyle Adamson, President		Josh Waterman, Secretary	
Andy Rosenthal, Treasurer			
Amy Emerfoll	Misha Humphrey	Minkyu Kim	Isela Pena
Frankie Roth	Brent Ruby	Brandee Smith	
Laura Thomas	Jenna Tranum	Erik Zimmerman	

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Submit your creative writing to the Spring 2011 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.