

The Paper Lantern

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Beginning Jon

By Birdy Kildahl

Glossary (pg. 28 of Beginning Jon: Travel Size)

car n. 1. Imaginary or abstract idea. 2. Foot or feet used in transportation within a city.

cof fee adj. Having two creams and no sugar. n. The first thing I learned about you.

ci ty n. 1. The Carnival luxury liner aboard where you live and work.

food n. 1. Specific variety of martini-type beverage. 2. Wine constricted to the shape of a rectangular prism. 3. Blackened bread dipped in poached egg. 4. Unidentifiable muffins found only in the region of A.M. Buffet.

gait adj. 1. Simultaneously lazy and loud. 2. Having a tendency to drift left.

home (see **car** def. 1) n. 1. The Caribbean Islands and Sea. 2. Microwave-sized, whitewashed cube. 3. Material which polarizes and repels organic matter.

live v. To sing, singing.

pet n. 1. Absent cat or cats. 2. Cat half or entirely made flat by wheels.

scent n. 1. Cigarettes. 2. Soap originating from or near a dollar store. 3. French fries.

shirt adj. Having a tuxedo pattern.

socks adj. 1. Intense or dark violet. 2. Having once belonged to a sleepover guest. 3. Not being owned, originally or otherwise, by wearer. 4. Having a permanent state of cleanliness.

tool n. 1. Baby grand piano. 2. Microphone which radiates beer. 3. Vase fashioned of dollars and glass fastened to piano lid into which I threw a two-dollar bill folded like a frog.

voice n. 1. Rolls-Royce automobile moving at high speeds on a straight road.

work v. 1. To sing from moonrise to two in the morning. 2. To revolve within a circular bar while attached to piano and/or other tool.

Transplant My Favorite Marbled Purple Silicone

By Birdy Kildahl

Hook into the tendons of my pretty feet
and pull, show them to the world
like an open baby grand. Unwind and restring
my legs and ankles so they'll finally be in tune
enough for a ballad. Shave down and polish
off my hips, donate my entire ass to a model.
Wedge in two or three new vertebrae
between the bullet-pocked old ones.
Bring my already abs into focus like a camera
lens, blurry tummy sharpened out. Use my extra rib
to pry open the rest, and stash my breasts
away in the extra space. Tie my arms
to two linebackers so they can stretch my shoulders
wider. Take a crab apple back from a squirrel
to plug into my throat and upload its dot-wav files.
Do this for me and I'll breathe the savory sweetness
of gasoline while I stock up for a trip
downtown so a newsprint man with ink
hair will run a number six razor
up the back of my head, shedding the last
of my snake's skin onto a tarp, where it will flutter
onto the chalky tile and wither.

Modern Gnome Poem

By Korin Anderson

The wee folks in Folly Brook
fall short of frolicking leprechauns
craving hemoglobin over gold chips.

Tip-toeing, two tufted feet in mossy, green carpet
footpaths wreak havoc on frosted leaves where
friends meet, a farewell feast with falling sun.

Drunk, no longer restricted to tunnels, they conspire
bite marks on smooth necks of women, infants in sleep,
chasing heavy footsteps, slow, easy strides in moonlight.

Pitiful, little men savoring souls before morning sun
taking extra sips from delicate veins, feathering, red,
syrupy, sweet, sparkly like horror in their victim's eyes.

Wining. Dining. Drinking their bubbly in hand-woven tunics
offering arm-stub d'oeuvres over grasshoppers to grubby fingers,
clanking skulls instead of crystal, sharing sickening stories,

grins spreading up to pointed ears covered by a teal stocking cap.
Cackles crack through their forest as graceful green goblins
give the creeps like watching "Keebler Elves Gone Cannibal."

Crazy eyes, razor-sharp fangs, splintered claws, no time for haste.
constantly searching, a hunger food can't erase, one catches scent
from across the creek. Two humans resting on dew become lawn
decoration.

Agate (The second *pantoum* ever written that isn't
deeply depressing? Maybe.)

By Amelia Warwick

Bands of bright red
all throughout you run.
Weaving, turning, stopping, swerving.
Ever elegant and captivating.

All throughout you run
shades of brown, and red, and gray.
Ever elegant and captivating.
A painter's brushstroke has colored your inside.

Shades of brown, and red, and gray.
Swirling like an old lava lamp.
A painter's brushstroke has colored your inside.
The sunset of a tiny world.

Swirling like an old lava lamp.
Colors blended in an electric mixer.
The sunset of a tiny world.
A beautiful masterpiece inside a rock.

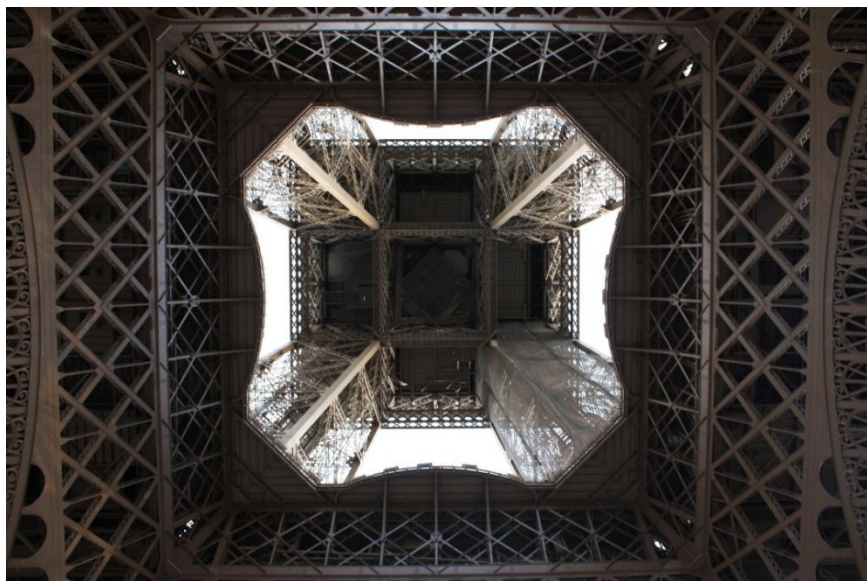
Colors blended in an electric mixer.
Sometimes small rings of red form eyes.
A beautiful masterpiece inside a rock.
The reds lick through you like brilliant flames.

Sometimes small rings of red form eyes.
Lake Superior is your homeland.
The reds lick through you like brilliant flames.
What runs through you?

Lake Superior is your homeland.
Iron gives you your crimson lines.
What runs through you?
Bands of bright red.

Under the Eiffel

By Douglas Lemon



Eye Like Van Gogh's Ear

by Andrei Lounin

I have a blind eye
It's not my third
 And it doesn't whisper

It's my right eye
And it's not too blind
 Just blind enough
To blur the distance
Enough to blur
 And fade away
The oncoming spring
And make
 The leaves
And water
Meld together
 Like The Red Vineyard

And maybe one day
It will make
 Love blind for me
And on that day
It might make me
 Give away an ear
And it just might
Let me hear
 What you finally
Have to say

In a Thick Night a Long Time Ago

By Douglas Lemon

After breaking through the thick chains
to free me from my prefrontal cortex
I became trapped in a *Starry Night*.

The brushstrokes had swirled and surrounded me
in thickness ultimately dictating what I would do.

The blackish, dark blue sky spied deeply upon me.
Abysmal faces hidden behind the darkness,
only to see one solar flare land on
the earth in the human form.

Blazing le femme increased my dopamine
with stars swarmed around her, slightly twinkling
in the deep darkness that surrounded her being.
“Parlez-vous anglais?”

Though ultimately in the end, this beautiful piercing
picture of our two shadows encounter only became a
footnote in the artist’s masterpiece... As he decided,

we were both left out of the final portrait.

Ultimately it can only be seen in my mind’s eye.
However, anytime the black-hole feeling starts
creeping towards my mind again,
this portrait will be my drug.

The fury of serotonin pushed
to my neuroreceptors from the memory of her smile
will forever be the fix my veins crave,
my body thirsts for,
my mind’s safe place.

Waiting In Vain

by Miho Vande Berg

Jingle, Jingle, Jingle...the telephone rang. My sleepy eyes saw the SEIKO alarm clock on the bedside-table gleaming 3:25. Instead of answering the call, I pulled the cord out of the outlet and went back to bed. Before I could stretch out on the sheets again, my cell phone started blinking to the melody of Bob Marley's "Waiting In Vain." I already knew who the caller was, and that song confirmed it.

Kazumi and I used to sing it together when we went to the reggae club.

I don't wanna wait in vain for your love;
I don't wanna wait in vain for your love.
From the very first time I rest my eyes on you, girl,
My heart says follow t'rough.

She'd sing it resting her hands on my shoulders. I'd smell her rose-scented hair conditioner from her swaying long straight hair. She wore expensive Dior perfume but I liked that cheap girly conditioner's smell on her better.

"Girls, are you sisters or friends? You guys look real close," someone said.

"Yeah! She's my best friend," Kazumi said, resting her cheek flush on mine. Then, she raised her orange Screwdriver glass into the glare of the dated 70's light on the ceiling. We sang out louder, "I don't wanna wait in vain...for your love!"

My phone was still pulsing to the unheard melody in the dark room. I turned it off, mumbling to myself, "I don't wanna talk in vain..." and went back to sleep.

* * *

I first met Kazumi at work, an art gallery. We were both twenty. I just dropped out of art school to be more grown up—that was my excuse, anyway—but actually I just couldn't keep up with the volume of assignments ever since I began fooling around with my punk-rocker boyfriend. On our first day at work, Kazumi and I

were scolded by our supervisor—I wore “inappropriate clothes for work” and was told to “wear something plain and appropriate for work.” Kazumi arrived twenty minutes late and missed the morning meeting. When we left the supervisor's office, our eyes met and we smiled. After work, we ate out together and made fun of the way our supervisor changed her voice in front of important clients. She told me about her three sins. One, she had a married boyfriend. Two, she drank an awful lot and ate an awful lot. Three, she purged and threw up most everything she consumed. According to her, the third one was the worst but I thought it couldn't top sleeping with a married man.

Kazumi's married boyfriend was so crazy for Kazumi that he stayed with her and stopped going home. His wife showed up on his birthday at Kazumi's apartment where Kazumi had arranged thirty-eight white roses for him. She yelled at Kazumi, sobbed to her husband, and so he went home. He whispered to Kazumi, “I'm getting divorced. I'm coming back for you,” and left. There was a Seven-Eleven next to her apartment; after a week passed without any contact from him, it became her sole destination. She bought lots of junk food, sweets, and bento boxes. She ate them, threw up, and ate again. She grew tired of going out so she stocked up on food. She ate potato chips, pastries and chocolate-chip cookies, drank beer and wine for 5 days straight, never leaving. She didn't want to do anything. Her bedroom, a spot in the living room in front of the TV, and the fridge in the kitchen—she floated between those three points. And the bathroom to do No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3—throwing-up. She finally decided not to go to the bathroom because it was unheated and cold, and peed in empty milk cartons. “That was the real reason Takashi left me,” she said. Her boyfriend visited her while she was passed out after drinking gallons of beer and hard liquor. He rang the doorbell to no avail, but heard the TV. He noticed the locks were changed. He must have imagined Kazumi sleeping with a new boyfriend or something. He was passionate enough to call a locksmith, show his identification and call himself her fiancée.

When he finally entered the house, what he saw was a drunk, snoring Kazumi with her pee in milk cartons.

I still haven't heard any sadder ending to a love story than this one. Kazumi cried, her mascara coloring her tears, as she shared the story with me. Still, she was pretty. I could say, maybe, she was pretty enough to be acceptable despite a carton full of pee. Seriously. Her darkened tears dropped on the back of her hand. There were no words to rid her of her shame. She knew it.

A couple of months after we started working together, she told me her secret. She was a member of a date-club and had a patron named Mr. Sakai. I asked her if sleeping with a man who is older than her father wasn't disgusting but she told me she liked older men anyway. Once after work, she was planning to meet her patron. I was with her at a coffee shop nearby and she asked me to take a glance at his face. His gray hair was full and combed nicely. He was wearing a nice Ralph Lauren or Brooks Brothers jacket. He was probably a good-looking man for his age but I couldn't judge since I only dated guys my age. Mr. Sakai certainly looked rich. And old. The next day, Kazumi came to work with a new one-piece-dress and a CHANEL handbag.

Kazumi told me of when Mr. Sakai stayed at her apartment for the first time. She woke up in the middle of the night and went to the bathroom. She was so thirsty that she drank some milk directly from the milk carton. She went back to bed, stood up on top of it and fell straight back. She was too drunk to remember that Mr. Sakai was there for the first time in her apartment. Mr. Sakai didn't leave when he saw her drinking milk from the carton. He was stunned to see and experience her movement in the dark, then started to laugh after his vital parts were nearly crushed. While he was laughing, drunken Kazumi started snoring. He laughed all the harder, and the next morning he told Kazumi all about it. I began to think Mr. Sakai might not be just a dirty, nasty, old man after all.

She got married to her first husband at the age of twenty-three. She was nervous at the wedding ceremony because she'd drunk too much. From the beginning, she didn't get along with her mother-in-law and one day Kazumi yelled some deadly "no-no" words at her. Her marriage ended in two years. Her husband had recorded all her conversations on the phone (he recorded my conversations with her as well), threatened to sue Kazumi for her affair with her colleague in Hawaii, and made her pay a fortune despite the fact that he'd hit her several times.

I, too, had experienced divorce a little before Kazumi, so we used to cheer each other up on the phone. We had both turned thirty. Kazumi was working as a realtor who dealt with American real estate and resort condos for rich Japanese people. Her company only hired very pretty female workers. I worked at a job agency and had a terrible boss. On the day my boss learned that I was planning to leave in a month and a half because I got another position, I was fired out of the blue.

"I'm sorry that you got fired, Miho. But it's an opportunity!" Kazumi said.

"Opportunity for what?" I mumbled. She said it would be a good chance for us to go to Las Vegas and have some fun together. That was her advice to cheer me up, so I took it.

We arrived in Vegas at night after a thirteen-hour flight from Tokyo to LA plus another hour-long flight from LA to Vegas. I was exhausted. "Miho, you take a shower first," Kazumi said. She was sweet when it wasn't about booze or men. After my shower, I looked out the window while Kazumi took her turn. I gazed at the blinking Flamingo and bold English letters in neon, a silent, throbbing come-on against the dark desert sky. It was so surreal that I felt as if I'd become a cast member in *Blade Runner*.

"Miho, you look tired. Why don't you go to bed?" Kazumi told me with a thick white towel wrapped around her long wet hair. "Thanks, I think I will," I said as I slid my tired body between the bright white sheets and fell asleep.

I woke up and looked around the room. Sunlight had already filled the room but Kazumi wasn't anywhere to be seen. Her bed was unruffled, perfectly made from the night before. After I finished putting on some make-up and polishing my black leather slip-ons, Kazumi came in. She'd been playing black jack all night.

"What about sightseeing?" I asked.

"Sorry, but I need some rest. Let me sleep for an hour. I'll be perfectly OK to go out then," Kazumi said. I knew she wouldn't but let her sleep anyway. I went to the shopping mall alone, ate an omelet and pancakes alone in a white and red diner then went back to the hotel. She was still asleep like a bone-weary sloth. I left again, and wandered around the nearby hotels' free shows that day.

The next morning I woke up at seven. I looked at Kazumi's empty bed. I sighed while dressing myself in that deadly silent room. I heard the sound of an unlocking door and glared at the doorway. Kazumi looked surprised to see me up, then she listlessly threw her body on the couch.

"Gee, what a night," she said. Her mascara had come off her lashes and she had tiny blotches under her eyes. Above her right ear her hair was tangled and messy.

"I bet and lost two thousand dollars," she said.

"What!? Why did you bet that much money?" I said.

"Because!" she yelled, "that dealer at first let me win so I'd believed he wasn't that good. That son of a bitch calculated the whole thing. He... what a bastard!" she railed in Japanese. Then she scratched her head vigorously. That's why her hair was messed up. She had a habit; when she was drunk and stressed out, she scratched her scalp.

"Why didn't you stop earlier?" I said. She didn't answer me. Instead, she walked to the mini-bar and unscrewed the cap of a mini-Jack Daniel's. "Don't gamble anymore," I said.

Kazumi drained mini Jack Daniel's with a quick, practiced motion and said, "Don't preach at me, Miho. I've come here three times before and actually won." She threw the empty mini-bottle on the floor by the bed without a thought and laid down.

“What about sightseeing?” I said.

“Wake me up in two hours. I'll be fine,” she said and closed her eyes.

I read some magazines but got bored. I wasn't hungry. I decided to keep my clothes and things in order. I opened the drawers, unpacked all the stuff in my suitcase and started putting it in.

“Be quiet! Can't sleep,” Kazumi yelled at me.

“It's eight. It's time for a tourist to get ready to go out!” I yelled back.

Kazumi got out of bed, stood up, and walked towards the mini-bar. She grabbed several mini-bottles, sat on the bed, and started to drink. She threw the empty bottles on the floor. I picked up three bottles and put them in the waste basket. Right after I picked the tiny Wild Turkey bottle on the floor, she threw a Beefeater mini that landed in front of me. I grabbed a pillow from her bed and hit her in the face. Her liquor spilled on the sheets and that was it. She grabbed my hair so I slapped her face. After that we slapped, choked, grabbed, and kicked each other. Finally, we separated and sat on opposite sides of her bed. We were still yelling at each other but no one was listening.

“You stupid, no-talented gambler!”

“Nazi-control freak! This is my vacation, too, and it's a free country!”

“You look like a whore!”

“You look like a dumb-ass Japanese tourist! Who wears black leather high school shoes in Vegas?”

“I was planning to see the half-Dianna Ross half-Marvin Gay guy's show but now I can't because I wasted my time fighting with you!”

We paused to catch our breath. I don't remember who started it, but as soon as one of us let out suppressed laugh, the other burst into laughing, too. Kazumi apologized and promised that she would wake up after having some rest, and this time she did. When I

came back at noon, she'd already taken a shower and was dressed in clean clothes, ready to go out.

Kazumi's mistakes were at times forgivable, but sometimes they made people leave her for good. I didn't recognize her as an alcoholic for a long time but I knew she was changing. Or maybe, people around her began adding distance to their relationship little by little. She began doubting everybody. She got married twice, divorced twice, and hospitalized twice for detoxification. She overdosed many times and kept reaching out in the middle of the night to someone, anyone, who'd pick up the phone.

* * *

My husband looked at me over his shoulder with his sleepy eyes.

“Are you OK with not answering?” He knew it was Kazumi.

“Yeah, I'm OK,” I said. I kept glaring at my cell phone. I'd turned off the ringer but the light was blinking. That blue light blinking in the dark, reminded me of the neon signs I saw in Vegas. I remembered Kazumi's red high heel shoes, her messed up hair over her right ear, her long lashes, and her awkward smile after our fight. I waited until the blue light went off, and then turned off the power.

The ringer on my phone in America doesn't play that song. I don't want to love in vain. Yet, I can't listen to my favorite Bob Marley song anymore because I only remember the feeling of Kazumi's soft cheek on mine.

Rings

By Birdy Kildahl



I Wonder if Venus Gets Haunted or if It's Rotating Too Slowly in the Wrong Direction

By Birdy Kildahl

Iron and nickel deep down
flying clockwise means a dynamo punch
of electromagnetism
to pull compasses the right way
except where god forgot to paint the planet;
where Bermuda swallows crafts whole.

Wind can neatly tear and set a livewire
in a street-wide puddle. Now
it's as deadly as the ocean,

but pour a cloud into my walking air,
and the ee-em-eff zaps me.
Getting electrocuted isn't supposed
to give you the prescription perfect
for seeing clearly her last footstep
or his loudest thought.

It's a forty pound car battery
bolted down on each shoulder
soldered to my temples.

I don't know how she died, but
I know this archway makes her louder.
I know sometimes we need a bridge
over running water, but it's not vampires
I'm trying to keep out.

There is a Smudge of Black

By Birdy Kildahl

There is a smudge of black
smeared on the shoulder
of 494 like a knifeful
of peanut butter. Two triangles
are on one end of the slab
with a white-tipped dart
on the other. "It's a cat,"
says the thunderstorm
that has erupted in my throat.
"It's a kitten,"
says my eyes, which
are all over my face, shirt,
windshield. It's a kitten
who is curled in sleep
next to the leftmost lane
next to the center concrete
k-rail. The road around it
is clean, is spotless, is quiet.
My screams scream
and scream
until I am home.

Contentment

By Amelia Warwick

I am sitting on the end of the dock
at my family's cabin. My sandals are resting
next to me; the legs of my pants have been rolled
up to my knees; my feet dangle off the edge
of the pine and aluminum, both
the small, solid pier and my legs dipping
into the iron-rich lake water that holds
its heat like a baked potato. The sun
is a hot hand on the back of my bare neck,
warming my whole body. Large white clouds
browse lazily over the crisp, sea-blue sky like
soft masses of slowly spinning
cotton candy. A gentle breeze
lifts my hair from where it hangs
around my face, moving it this way
and then that. Small waves calmly reach
the rocky shore and splash up on the pine
needles that cover the ground; the whispers
they make causing me to feel as drowsy
in this place as a cat napping in a smooth maple tree.

Roma Cocktails & Beer before Night
by Douglas Lemon



Cab Ride Home

By John Cunningham

I opened the door and
sat down in that foreign
seat; I've never been in
a car like this, never cared
too fancy as it drove by
countless times on the
streets of downtown,
limelighting as an invisible
ally for the losers rejected by
too many long islands
and an awaited headache
in the morning.

I watched the world
pass by, the shivs of green
and red lights followed
by blinkers of other cars
driven by people who owned them,
driven by people who didn't
spend their day drinking
into a sullied haze, drinking
into the Gold Star cab.

I'm just the dunce,
the moron who bought
so many rounds of top shelf
and made his own rounds,
befriending half the bar,
befriending the last call
and melting on the curb,
waiting for his friend
who didn't show up.

I watched people converse
in a jolly sort of way,
and I was on the other side,
I was invisible to them,

on the other side of the glass,
and before long they all left,
and it was just the cab and I.

Morning Pep Talk

By Mindy Paurus

Take back your mind
Ground it
Because it's running
Back
Back to winter

Fight
For your appetite
Reach deep
And massage out
The knots
In the pit of your stomach

Close eyes
And take a vacation
You are not on a bus
About to cry
You are surfing
Feel the water
Soak it in

You will be okay

The Itch

By David Christianson

There's an
itch on my leg that
comes and goes, a heated
pulse that patters my
window, a riding demon that
sunk in my flesh like
throaty frogs in
the morass.

I succumb
under pressurized
water, the itch made
livid from the tepid bathroom
sarcophagus. I picture not the
mummified skin, an
ancient maggot that refuses
metamorphosis.

There's a
flexing hand that
stirs the itch, like a writhe of
grass or lemon kick.
The soothing balm that
coats the flesh, and quells
frantic desire to grip
and wreck.

Alingua

By Andrei Lounin

Gabriel woke up to discover he was born without a jaw. His tongue dangled with clear spittle all over his pillow, trying to jump out before he drowned. The fall was great and he didn't anticipate that it would knock the air from his lungs, blowing away all the tables of books he had in his room, slamming them against the wall.

"Is everything okay, dearie?" Ms. Rosebottom cried downstairs.

All Gabriel was able to do was to scream in insensible muffles while dragging his tongue on the floor. Moving like a drugged tiger, he tried to reestablish his base to be as solid and as firm as Stonehenge, and as Stonehenge, nobody was able to understand neither his words nor his purpose.

"Oh dearie, what's wrong?" Ms. Rosebottom began to come up the labyrinth of stairs, with her big cheeky legs in a pink dress taking wide steps up the pink stairs, with paintings of Gabriel leading up, a transformation from a young man to younger, up to his room where the doors were oblong and all different sizes. As she was about to knock on the big oblong door, a skinny, jawless, and lawless man jumped out and hit the opposite wall, falling once more with his breath knocked out of him, blowing down the paintings and blowing Ms. Rosebottom's skirt.

"Oh Gabriel, sweetie, what's wrong?" Ms. Rosebottom reached to pick up the frantic man pointing and screaming to his jaw, his tongue now lower, cleaning the floor as the sputum glistened on the ground reflecting Ms. Rosebottom big red cheeks and curly grey hair and big blue eyes.

“Oh, my poor dearie!” She held him close. She held him as a little girl holds a small doll, waving him all over the place, his tongue dribbling everywhere. She straightened his dark hair with her hands and his sad green eyes stared back at her.

“Oh, we’ll figure this out, dearie!” she carried him down the pink stairs while his tongue dangled behind her, leaving a glossy trail. His head began to unhinge, trying to view the entire pink hallway and Ms. Rosebottom would have to rotate it back. When they got to the kitchen, she sat him down on the floor, with his head still rotating and his tongue coiled in his lap.

“Oh, you’re just hungry is all,” Ms. Rosebottom reached for a pan and put it on the stove, “You look just so hungry!”

“Oi! What’s going on?” Another cheeky lady, a spitting image of Ms. Rosebottom peeked out from another room. Wearing a blue dress instead, she peeked out to see Gabriel sitting on the floor, conquered without his jaw.

“I’m just going to fix him something to eat, is all,” Ms. Rosebottom looked at her twin, “is that okay with you, Ms. Bluebottom?” While Gabriel sat there, playing with his tongue between his lap, trying to say something to the cheeky women.

“Yeah, but give him something to chew, he’s a man! And it’s about time he started eating like one!” Ms. Bluebottom declared, “Here, I’ll show you, Rosebottom” and went to the fridge to pick up skinned parrot and proceeded to cut it up.

“Oh I don’t want to strain him,” cried Ms. Rosebottom, walking past Gabriel as he kept pointing to his jaw, sitting in his own slobber. While the two colored-bottoms were working, he saw a prize.

He saw a pantry, a straight, refined pantry, unlike anything in the house that he thought would cure him and let him speak again. He saw packages with different languages, everything from *English*, *French*, *German*, *Swahili*, to *Russian*. He barged to the pantry, barely slipping on his tongue, slamming against it like he did against the wall not too long ago. He looked up, but the world came crashing down on him. *English* slammed him in the eye, *Russian* in the forehead, and *German* to the nose. Staggered, *Italian* rolled under his foot, he held on to the pantry, screaming again in a desperate voice. *Gaelic* hit him in the fingers and he crashed harder and farther than the tower of Babylon.

Stargazed, he looked to the side and picked up a container. *Arabic*. He sprinkled the little morsels on his tongue and he heard the Bottoms' speaking in words he never heard before, but his tongue was still flaccid and tasted sourness from the floor and his tears.

He picked up *Gaelic*, and heard the Bottoms speaking in just a similarly foreign tongue, but now they had an Irish Brogue. He screamed and muffled again, sliding on his tongue to the next canister.

He sprinkled *Russian* on his tongue and heard the Bottom's talking in a firm tone with an undying declaration of emotions. With all sounding foreign, he hunched back into his defeated state and tears fell on the floor. The tears fell without touching the cheeks as if Izanagi and Izanami themselves made the drops that created Japan. He looked around. He saw English just a little farther to his right and reached over, leaning on his big fleshy tongue and used it to slide across the room, gliding, like an astronaut in space. He looked over and saw the cheeky bottoms arguing about what they can give Gabriel to consume. The Blue argued for hard meat and the red for soft food. Gabriel, trying to understand, began to see that in his jawless state, where his tongue hung like a dead man's, that nobody would be able to understand him.

He saw how without his jaw, all he would be able to do is swing his tongue around, never able to form a coherent sentence, never able to express his love, his desires, never able to sing his favorite songs, never able to tell the Bottoms that he cares, never able to say no or yes, yes or no, never able to eat his food again. Gabriel looked up at the ceiling to see if he would be able to find a deity worth praying and offering sacrifices to get his mandible back. He didn't care what kind it was. Whether it'd be an ant's jagged mandibles, a massive shark's jaw, or even a spider's hooked mandibles, he needed to talk. He needed to express. He needed to experience the final key that life would be able to unlock for him. He picked up the canister that said English, and sprinkled the contents on his tongue. He looked back at the cheeky, rosy woman.

"Oh, dearie. Why are you so upset?" Ms. Rosebottom came up to Gabriel, mixing something in her bowl. Gabriel just looked up at her solemnly with his big eyes, sitting on his tongue.

"Come, we'll eat in a second, dearie," Ms. Rosebottom picked Gabriel up by the arm and helped him stand, "There you are, dearie!"

No longer like a drugged lion, he used his large tongue to help maintain his center of gravity. He still looked at her with those big solemn eyes.

"Oi! What you standing over there for, boy?" Ms. Bluebottom looked back at him, taking a break from cutting up an exotic poultry, "Table's right there!" She pointed with the knife for him to sit down. Gabriel walked over, dragging his tongue to the spot and sat down in his little chair, leaving the big chairs for the Bottoms. He kept staring upward to his empty plate, waiting for the food to arrive, appearing that he is drowning under the behemoth table.

“Dinner’s ready!” Ms. Rosebottom sang. Gabriel kept looking up at his empty plate, up at his physical salvation, waiting for whatever he can suck up to eat.

“Oh dearie, I just noticed something,” Ms. Rosebottom said looking at Gabriel, as if for the first time, “You’re jaw, where’d it go?”

“His Jaw?” Ms. Bluebottom barked.

“Yes his jaw, his firm jaw, where’d it disappear?”

“Huh, thought something was different with him!”

Gabriel sat there, now looking a confused. He picked up his tongue and started to point at it, making muffled screaming sounds, in disbelief of how they never saw this before.

“Well you’re not going to be able to eat if you don’t chew, you won’t be big and strong if you don’t eat!” Ms. Rosebottom declared, and walked over to a cupboard on top of the pantry. There she opened it up, an entire cupboard full of jaws of all sizes sat there, taunting Gabriel. His tongue now wagging like a dog’s tail, his screams are now full of childish excitement.

“Let me see here,” Ms. Rosebottom was digging through the jaws, “Too little, too big, wrong shape, that’s not even human, well this one has tusks!” She kept sifting through the anatomical cupboard.

“Ah, here we are!” Ms. Rosebottom picked out a jaw, the same size as Gabriel’s former one. She came over to Gabriel, slopped the new jaw on his hinges, and his tongue rolled back into place. Gabriel sat there, repositioning his jaw back into place, letting his flesh slowly grow back, like a beard.

“There! Now he can stop whining!” Bluebottom barked as she went back to cutting the parrot, it’s colorful feathers flying off as she worked on it.

“All better, Dearie?,” Ms Rosebottom leaned down to stroke Gabriel’s short black hair to the side, “You’re all better now!”

Gabriel sat there, looking at the oblong kitchen, which is just as strange as the rest of the house, looking at Ms. Rosebottom’s optimistic big blue eyes, Ms. Bluebottom crafting the meal, the straight and proper pantry of languages, and back down to his lap to make sure his jaw doesn’t fall off.

“Maybe I can make you your favorite desert later!” Ms. Rosebottom cheered as she turned around to go to work to prepare food to make Gabriel big and strong.

“Dessert? Bah!” Ms. Bluebottom turned to Rosebottom, “There’s some cow tongue in the fridge, give him some o’ that, it’s better for him! It’ll keep big n’ strong!”

“Oh, maybe you’re right!” Ms. Rosebottom looked down, “Would you like some tongue this evening, dearie?”

Gabriel, understanding the delicious irony, looked back at the pantry of languages and back at Rosebottom, and with his big green eyes looked right at her and said,

“Yes, please” with his deep tender voice, and looked back at the pantry of languages one more time.

“I would very much like that.”

Ferris Wheel

By Cheryl Wilke



Little Girl on the Edge

By Bekah Zimmerman

As the world goes grey before my eyes
I find myself standing on top of a skyscraper watching
In horror
Morbid Fascination
The preadolescent girl standing innocently, naively on the edge of
the rooftop
Standing next to a man
That even in this monochrome world is
Blacker than black
Evil
Vile
Corrupt
Dressed in leather the color of oil
Greed
Handsome
Wicked
Terrible
How painful and cold-blooded life can be
He looks down as the girl glances up at him taking his hand
He smiles cruelly and I catch a gasp running forward
Before it's too late
Before the damage has been done
He jumps taking the girl with him
She has no idea how to stop this from coming-
And in an instant I find myself
As that girl
Falling a million miles per hour
Towards the ground
Alone
Older
Before I wake with a start
It had just been a dream and the little girl is safe inside me
And that little girl still has some time as a child.

Glass

By Cheryl Wilke

Birds

Fly

Free

Like curls of smoke,

I am

a reflection of the

Blue sky

Birds

Fly

into

Roach

By Karlynn O'Neil

I'm not sure what I expect
Out of this sixty-year-old building,
Out of my twenty-six-year-old life.
I know that I want more.
I know that I could live off less.

The alarm sounds
I hit snooze three times.
Roll off the mattress on the floor,
Scuttle over to the coffee maker,
Begin executing the plans of my tiny life.

Then I saw you scurry across the counter.
I'm sure that you had plans for your day too.
Probably something to eat,
Maybe a nice stroll under the fridge.
I guess that's all over now.

I wonder if your family minds.
Will they mourn?
Will they hold a tiny funeral?
I'm sorry I squashed you with a paper towel.
I just had my own plans in mind.

Homecoming

By John Cunningham

Gracie and I sat in my dad's Buick parked just past the local golf course. Down the road was the industrial park where he worked in the factories, though not lately—unless his union worked something out sometime soon. I promised him the school dance, not a girl alone in his car. She was beautiful, though, especially in my letterman jacket—smelling of her rose perfume—and her blonde hair draped in a calm spread over my shoulder. The moon protected us under its' curtain, a fitting finale to a perfect homecoming night.

She looked through my eyes. "I love you, Henry."

My lips curled and I thought about the word *love*. What did it mean? What did she mean by it? We had only been dating several weeks. Could one really fall in love with another that quickly? What was it all the adults used to say? Puppy love? I breathed again, taking in her perfume, and I had to admit I nearly felt the same.

My father used to say it to my mother every day, and she'd say it back. Some days he'd surprise her with tulips, and others she'd cook him breakfast before his shift at the factory. Then, she'd accompany me to the couch late at night, far past my bedtime, and flip through volumes of old photo albums. It was there that I witnessed the wedding through a sepia-stained lens. I had never imagined cakes so tall and illustrious. My dad didn't have a gut back then, either. Every picture yielded to his smile and his eyes were alert and cool, confident and knowing. As she flipped through the pictures, my mother's hair would fall to the side of her face, and the comfort of her lap was like the warm glow from under a lampshade, touching the walls but not bouncing off.

If love didn't work for them, then how could it work for me? My father still claims that he loves her. The timing was just off, he says. The timing and the greed of those damn industries and the wage freeze and the strikes—they were just off. Still, he doesn't try to win her back or anything. Perhaps he's just given up.

Maybe that's why he doesn't want me gallivanting around with pretty girls. Maybe it's because—as he says—they're immature at this age. My teacher, Mrs. Clemens, says that girls mature faster than guys, so if Gracie is immature, what does that make me? I'd consider my father to be mature, though. All he's ever wanted to do his whole life was support us. Even with the strikes, he manages to scrap enough money together to buy us food, not to mention the house. And after all, he did let me borrow his Buick tonight. If love failed for him, what chance would I have with this girl who is supposedly more mature than I am?

We read *The Great Gatsby* last quarter in English; not everybody liked it, and of course I never admitted it, but I was drawn. I felt bad for Gatsby. Even though he was screwed over in the end, there was something Nick Carraway said about him: some kind of sense of hope, or something. A certain naïve innocence, perhaps.

I realized now that it had been several minutes since Gracie said those three words. Caught up in my thoughts, I uttered them back and proffered a regrettable smile. The air was nearly too thick to breath and I let out an awkward, long breath as Gracie took my hand in hers. A cloud eclipsed the moon and only the dashboard lights shone now. They touched Gracie's complexion, juxtaposed against her porcelain cheeks. I checked my watch; it was far past midnight—time to drive her home.

It's Just You

By Douglas Lemon

Lips shine. Eyes burn bright.
Every feature tempts me.
What's my weakness? You...

Boy Wonder

By Noah Savoie

I can see him through the white
static of the VHS episode.
Yellow, Red, Spandex.

To everyone else in the
Lysol scented living room
you're training acrobatics,
but we both know different.

Gotham city can wait one night,
especially when the cape around
his neck is so, so tight.
Up against the vigilante lump
in his throat.
Tied to the ceiling fan
as he balances on a chair
with his tights rolled down to
his knees.

ZAP
BOOM
POW
STROKE
STROKe
STROke
STRoke
STroke
Stroke
stroke.

The onomatopoeias don't
fill your flushed palm
like they used to.
I can see the calluses
from all the skyscrapers
you've climbed.

You left Bruce the note
scribbled on a dead bat's
wing.

I inch closer to the tv with
my socks tearing from the tension held
in my toes as I beg you to not fall off
that chair.
To not let your combat boots give way
to ill-advised acrobatics.

Suddenly the Boy Wonder's fed up
and the editor wipes the screen
to the Gotham City skyline.
Gothic industry feeding Wayne,
and mythology, and action figures.

He won't show. He's a loner tonight.
But I don't want to be.

Boy Wonder ties his cape to a gargoyle
7 stories up, smoking with indifference.
He ties the neon yellow signal around
the old stone friend's neck as he coughs
up concrete.

Boy Wonder takes a drag from the gargoyle's
cigarette inhaling cancer bats into his
circus lungs beneath the sweat stained
spandex heaving up and down in a
suicidal erotic rhythm with the
ribcage strumming horrible notes
underneath the skin. The skin
that only knows the touch of a robber,
a pimp, a clown...and only briefly.

I scream at the TV hoping it will echo through
the bat cave bringing benevolent flying rats to
swoop in like a net before Boy Wonder takes
his last barefoot step off the ledge.

Woosh of feet slipping. Crack from
the birds neck as he makes the last chirps of a
Robin in ecstasy.

The cape is slowly chewed off by the gargoyle
as my lips glide down the TV screen
with the Boy Wonder's body, now a mural
on pavement.

And I sit there,
with the Boy Wonder.
My own spandex down to
my knobby preteen knees.

You weren't ignored.
Not while I had a bird in the hand.

Your cape
hung in the gothic,
the ideal
of my spandex hopes.

I need to find a ceiling fan.

The Adult Donut

By Karlynn O'Neil

He wakes up every morning and makes himself some coffee.
He reads the paper at the table while his mini-donuts eat cereal,
He prefers eggs over-easy and wheat toast.
Kisses his wife goodbye and heads off to the office
Where he sits in a cubicle at a desk with a tie on.

He participates in his company's 401K and has a stock portfolio.
It isn't very successful, but his broker has been a long time golfing
buddy,

So he doesn't mind.

He's nearly paid off his house and his two cars,
All of which, he bundles into one insurance plan.

His mother wants him to visit more often.
His dentist wants him to get his teeth capped.
His optometrist wants him to get bifocals.
His doctor wants him to get a colonoscopy,
And his wife wants him to get viagra.

Every day he comes home and walks the dog.
He strolls by his neighbor's houses and gives them a polite nod.
He then comes back and eats dinner with his family.
They finish in time for him to watch 60 minutes.
Once the minis are tucked into bed by their mother,
He lies down beside her and tries to forget
That tomorrow he will be an adult donut again.

Tomorrow there will be no sprinkles,
No colored frosting.
He'll button up his shirt and put the tie on again.
Because this donut is so adult,
You should probably buy a bagel.

St. Christopher

By Noah Savoie

I can remember a Valentine's Day
in June.

When St. Christopher
would make me laugh
in the boat.

He taught me to
pick up the syringe,
fill it with water
from the Dead Sea
and inject it into
my stigmata.

The
bird bath filled with
communion wine.

He performs DIY surgery
on my back in
the front yard.
Getting rid of any wings
he feels jealous of
with safety scissors.

Nothing can stop the progression.

From fishing to baptism.

My friend in forbidden thoughts

St. Christopher.

Chest Wounds/Urban Volcanos

By Douglas Lemon

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(A Thunderous Blast!)

A volcanic bomb alerted everyone.

Many scurried before the sudden smoke
could spread any further in the once stagnant air.

Select people stared,
silently stunned
and stationary.

Fear keeping them motionless.

Studying from afar

we witnessed

the first casualty

from the flying volcanic blocks that were shot though out the air.

What was once magma

is now surfacing slowly and spraying violently.

I run closer to help the victim trapped on the concrete island.

Temperatures rising and plasmic rivers rush relentlessly.

Channels of lava flow easily downstream in every direction
encasing the wounded soul in pools.

I climbed myself into a mountain that I began to recognize.

On my knees

I press my hands in desperation against the volcano. All in
hopes of relieving pressure

and decreasing, or slowing the streams of chuting death. It's all
in vain as its veins

promise to bleed until dry. Cascades finally slowing down, slowly
down every valley and

crevice. A delta of death encases us in an ocean of despair. Tar becomes
molten rock,

common pebbles become black and red igneous gravel. I grovel
in submission to the taker of

death. This final eruption reminded me, reminds me I never want to
be here again

when the next one explodes here, there or anywhere.

The Duel

By Miles Rivera

In another reality a scientist by the name of Fritz Asimov creates a fully automated steam-powered robot he calls ciphers. Ciphers, nicknamed tin-men, are used for numerous tasks, doing chores, community work, or even as soldiers. Asimov's work on ciphers inspires a technological revolution that changes the dynamics of society the world over. The revolution also brings with it a shift of authority. Rich men hungry for power are able to use ciphers as tools to oppress the masses and gain influence within government. There are those who wish to restore the balance of power away from the few and in favor of the many. Several have tried but failed.

A tin-man plays a fast tune on the piano in a dusty saloon. Metal fingers softly, yet precisely hit the ivories of an old piano with chipped black paint. The bartender hurriedly tries to pour drinks for the drunken mass singing and laughing in frenzy. Crude light fixtures in the ceiling flicker in and out, revealing the dust and dirt-ridden floor below. In one corner a man is cheating on a game of cards; a few days later he'll be caught trying the same trick and will be shot dead. In another, old fellows sip dark ale and recount stories of their younger days.

The saloon doors swing open; the fun doesn't end but wary eyes examine the figure that walks in. Another tin-man, though this one isn't here for entertainment. A headhunter, ciphers employed to search for and bring back targets alive or dead. The machine wears a brown leather duster and a black bowler hat atop its head. A single-action revolver sits in a leather holster tied around the machine's waist in a leather belt. A head with red lights for eyes darts back and forth, scanning for its mark. The head snaps onto a man sitting at the bar. Metal shaped into a crude silhouette of a human makes precise and exaggerated movements toward the bar before giving out a dull and defined order.

“REND, YOU ARE UNDER ARREST FOR CONSPIRACY AGAINST GOVERNOR PALACIO OF VELCA.”

The man sitting at the bar turns around slowly. He’s wearing a brown vest over a striped white and grey dress shirt rolled up to his elbows. A watch made of countless tiny moving cogs is wrapped around his wrist while a red handkerchief that’s ripped in several places is tied around his neck. He stumbles and hiccups as he swerves around and almost off the bar stool chair. He’s quite inebriated. Brown leather pointed toe boots find their way onto the ground as the man stands up. The man has short, but messy brown hair and green eyes that look spaced and unfocused.

“YOU MAY COME CALMLY AND QUIETLY OR I AM AUTHORIZED TO USE FORCE.”

A bar patron shouts out, “Hey wait a second, there’s no way this guy is Rend. He looks too... well I mean just look at him. Rend is supposed to be an ace marksman, a master thief, and a one man army.”

Another patron speaks up, “I hear he took out an entire army of both men and ciphers by himself.”

Yet another pipes in, “The ladies all love him, a man like that would appear dignified and regal. Not at all like this sodding drunk.”

The persecuted man speaks, “Yeah they’re right, there’s no way I could be Rend. I’m way too drunk to be an ace marksman and I look like hell.”

The headhunter stands still for a moment, “MY SENSORS INDICATE THAT YOU ARE INDEED REND. FINAL WARNING. FAILURE TO COMPLY MAY RESULT IN POTENTIAL LOSS OF LIFE.”

“Oh, well shit. I guess that means that I am Rend. I suppose if I were Rend I would like to go out in a blaze of glory with a duel. How about it friend?”

“A DUEL? PROCESSING. ILLOGICAL. THERE IS LESS THAN A ONE-PERCENT CHANCE A HUMAN HAS AGAINST A CIPHER. SCANNERS INDICATE HIGH ALCOHOL INTOXICATION. YOUR CHANCE OF SURVIVAL IS APPROXIMATELY 0.000001%. RECOMMENDATION: SURRENDER.”

“Nah, I think I’ll take my chances. It’s too hot and I’m far too drunk to walk all the way up to Palacio’s villa.”

“VERY WELL. WHEN YOUR HEART HAS STOPPED FUNCTIONING YOUR BODY WILL BE TRANSPORTED TO GOVERNOR PALACIO’S VILLA WHERE IT WILL BE HUNG FROM THE NECK.”

Rend and the headhunter begin to walk out of the saloon when Rend stops and turns around. In a near instant the headhunter has a revolver trained on Rend’s heart. “Whoa, slow down. I just forgot my beer.” Rend raises the steel mug in his hand, takes a hearty gulp and smiles. The headhunter holsters the revolver and walks outside as Rend follows. The bar patrons stare confused as the two exit.

The air outside is still. The town is quiet as the surrounding populace look at the strange sight of a drunk man surely going to his death. A duel is not an uncommon sight, but one so one-sided is unheard of. No human duels a cipher, especially not a headhunter. The sun is high in a blue, cloudless sky; the sunlight is harsh on eyes that peer too long. Numerous curious heads poke out of the strip of shops separated by a dirt road. Whispers travel fast like a deadly disease that a duel between human and cipher is about to begin. Commerce ceases as customers and vendors step outside alike. A large sign advertising fashionable clothing hangs above a store with a cipher waiting at the doorway ready to help any would-be customers. The tin-man pays no attention to the conflict that’s about to happen right in front of it.

“Hey here’s to a good duel, eh?” Rend gives the headhunter a slap on the arm and stumbles into a spot parallel from the headhunter. “When my handkerchief reaches the ground we will draw our revolvers and fire. The man or cipher left standing is the victor.” The headhunter stares at Rend with glowing red eyes. Rend takes off his handkerchief and tosses it into the air.

Time slows to a crawl as the handkerchief slowly makes its way toward the ground. Breathing ceases among the spectators as the anxiety of the upcoming slaughter overwhelms them. An undertaker is mentally sizing up the man going against a cipher so he

can quickly pick the right coffin to bury him in. Not a sound is heard nor produced and no movement made apparent; the strip becomes a gallery of statues.

The handkerchief touches the ground and in a split second the headhunter is bringing its revolver up to shoot. But the robotic arm stops before it can raise itself completely.

“Oh yeah, thanks for holding my mug.” The headhunter gazes down and notices a steel mug trapped between an opening in the joint of its arm. The headhunter attempts several more times moving its joint before finally reaching out for the mug. As it’s removing the object, Rend pulls out his own revolver; though calling it a simple revolver would be a bit of a stretch. Moving parts of pistons and cogs begin whirring into action when Rend clicks a switch down. The headhunter is able to remove the object and begins to bring his arm up to shoot before Rend pulls the trigger of his gun. A large thunderous roar emits from the gun as steam is released from exhausts lining the barrel. A clean shot through the neck sends the cipher’s head flying until it lands on the ground several yards away. The body of the headhunter stands like a statue with hand and revolver still aiming toward Rend.

Several townspeople stare in shock at the scene they had just watched. A man walks outside the saloon, mouth agape, as he looks back and forth between Rend and the fallen cipher. The disheveled drunk from the saloon was the real Rend.

Rend walks over to the head of the fallen cipher and talks into the red lights of eyes. “I know you can see and hear me through this. Joaquin Palacio of Velca, the one they call Rend has arrived into your town.”

Fly Butterfly, Fly

By Andrei Lounin

I can see you
Glowing in the crystal case
With a sky of blue
Surrounding your frozen face

Forced upon your pedestal
You sit high, waiting
For your chance to take a mighty fall
But I think you're still debating

If you'll ever leave
And blow in the wind
And become free?

Or will you stay?
Wrapped in a box
That won't let you fade away

But I hope you escape
And find love
In a tender land

Because a cold dark box
Has no room
To carry all your love

Pines

By Cheryl Wilke



Hen

By Amelia Warwick

Small prints in the sand are leading me on a wild-goose chase. Well, technically they're leading me on a domesticated-chicken chase. But who's keeping track.

That nasty little hen got all tangled up in my necklace when I was trying to pick her up. Squawking, flapping, and scratching, she somehow got the thin metal chain wrapped around herself, and when I lost my grip on her

and she slipped out of my arms, she took my necklace with her.

My forearms were already covered in pink lines where she pedaled her little chicken feet to try and escape, those

stained yellow claws leaving tender marks on my skin. But now, following the claw prints, my arms are opened in multiple places as I struggle through thorny bushes, and a few large drops of blood are lost to the dirt.

Finally, I have her trapped in a corner where the hen-house and barn meet. She pecks me on my raw arms as I reach for her. *Jerk*. I grab the chain in my left hand and her neck in the other, and carefully

remove the tangle of silver from her brown feathers. As I walk away, victorious, I turn back to glare at her one last time. She looks evilly at me, and turns around and struts in the opposite direction, completely unremorseful.

Lady Laughing, Smoking in Her Car

By Andrei Lounin

Exit

Store

Walking out

My hands are full

And I hear laughter

In the breeze

As if I'm lost

I look around

Left

Right

Up, Down

Left again

And I see

An old woman

Sitting in

An even older car

With a red

Cherry Ember

Lighting up

As she sucks in

And smoke spills

As she laughs

She does this once or

Twice I believe.

I want to know

Or at least

I'd like to know

What she's laughing about

But the bags are

Heavy

And my arms—

They are tired.

As I walk by again

She laughs,
Belching out more
Smoke
And her smile
Takes away
Her elderly appearance
And puts the cigarette
Back into her mouth
And she laughs again
She never looked at me
When she was laughing

It's All the Same

By Megan Smith

In the morning I awoke to the realization
That a spider swirling a web above my bed had perished
And no one had mourned
I didn't make it my job
I just observed the absence of anyone who cared
And thought it sad

That won't be how I'll go
I thought
And then realized in one hundred years
It's all the same

Day at the Zoo

By Cheryl Wilke

Which animal would I choose
to be, I asked myself among family
at the illustrious, world-famous,
zoo. Why ... I can not choose. Each
is beautiful with its leather dome,
ivory tusks, or prawn-colored wings. Stingray
skin so slippery and soft to the touch,

it feels like nothing circling
around and around. Come right down
to it, I'd really rather be none of them
in their nothingness. A pool of water
for a half-dozen killer whales trained
like monkeys to make us happy
for one-half hour, all day long, seven
days a week, year-round. All of them ...

we have stolen their sanity and made it
ours for one helium-filled afternoon. Twinkle,
twinkle little star. I've got you inside my jar. Catch
and release, catch and release, catch
and release to your iron bars. So happy.
Happy. Why ... aren't we happy now!

White Moth Frozen on the Wall

By Andrei Lounin

Standing outside

Inhaling

And

Exhaling smoke

In the corner

Of my eye

I see a moth

A big

White

Fluffy

Moth

Frozen to the wall

And its pitch black

Cold

Sorry eyes

Staring right back

And I see

My reflection

In its

Myriad of frames

But it never looks at me

But always through me

Reminding me of my own short

Mortality

And I try to

Reaffirm my existence

By moving in its eyes

By trying to jump

From frame to frame

But it doesn't work

Because I am still right here

Frozen to the spot,

Being viewed by a creator

Looking into my eyes

Possibly

And it's too cold now

So I finish breathing smoke

And I look back
At that moth

And it's big
And soft
And still on the wall
That must be it

For the big white moth
Its existence
Barely shorter than mine

Jealousy

By Amelia Warwick

I stared in horror as my only baseball went flying over the backyard fence behind the huge stone mansion-of-a-house that stood near the little community baseball field.

Dylan turned toward me with his mouth hanging open and disbelief in his eyes. He was speechless for a couple of seconds, then frustration and fear filled his face, "What'd you do that for? That was our only ball, and it's in those mean old rich people's yard; we'll never get it back."

I couldn't speak, and a lump in my throat grew bigger, refusing to be swallowed despite my best efforts.

"Now we can't play ball anymore," and his patched leather glove slipped through his fingers with defeat and fell into the dirt.

"Sorry," my voice was only a whisper, and I wasn't sure that he heard me, "I didn't mean to."

Dylan picked up the glove, carefully brushing it off like an apology for dropping his most prized possession on the ground, "That's okay, Henry. It was your ball anyway."

"Yeah," I stared accusingly at the splintered bat in my hands, inwardly blaming it for my lousy hit that sent my only baseball rocketing away forever, and scuffed my feet in the dirt next to home plate.

After a few seconds, I tore my eyes away from my baseball's grave and looked seriously at Dylan, "I'm going to get my ball back."

He looked at me like I was crazy, which I was in that moment, "What? That's like a death sentence, Henry."

"Otherwise we won't be able to play ball anymore."

There was something in his eyes that made me think he was going to stop me, but I guess his desire to have that baseball back in our hands was stronger, "Okay, but I'm not going with you; I choose life. But I'll tell your dad where to start looking for you if you're not back home soon."

I nodded solemnly and slowly shifted my gaze toward the castle-like house as I swallowed again, doing my best to will my ball back over the spotless white fence.

Dylan gave me an encouraging pat on the shoulder and began pedaling home on his beat up old bike.

I gently leaned my pre-damaged, dumpster-find bat against my battered bicycle, well aware of the fact that I might never see my two favorite things again.

Walking slowly toward the house, I wondered if anyone would ever find my body if I was to be viciously murdered inside that fancy house.

The sun was beginning to set behind the mansion, and sharp shadows cast from the daunting peaks in the roof reached out over the grass, pulling me closer to my terrible fate.

I had no trouble finding the main door when I had walked around to the front of the house; you would have to be completely blind not to know it was there, and even then I'm not sure you could've missed it.

The solid wood door was stained and shiny, and the smooth, dark grain made it look expensive. Two clay pots stood on the front step, one on either side of the door, and the orange flowers planted in them reached higher than the top of my head. A large brass doorknocker was placed squarely in the upper half of the door, the metal molded into the shape of a roaring lion's head.

I slowly reached up and took hold of the lion, my shaking fingers lifting the heavy metal and banging it three times against itself.

My arm fell weakly to my side, and I tried to steady my shaking legs by placing my hand against one of the flower pots. It tipped a little, and I quickly drew back my hand, doing my best to rebalance the pot that easily outweighed my lanky body.

Soft footsteps started far back in the house, and every second they grew louder and closer. At each footfall, I lost more moisture from my mouth until I may as well have been chewing on a piece of chalk by the time those feet were just behind the door.

The large, heavy door opened slowly, its hinges greased into utter silence.

I was surprised to see a friendly looking middle-aged lady standing there, a bit of confusion on her generally cheerful face. When I didn't speak for a few seconds, she broke the silence herself, "Can I help you?"

My mouth was still all cottony, and I had to clear my throat and swallow a little bit before I could force my vocal cords to make any sound, "Hi," my voice was as cracked as the little pane of old glass in my bedroom window, "my name's Henry," I rushed through my words as fast as possible, "I was over in the field playing ball with my friend, and I accidentally hit a ball over your fence into the backyard, and I was wondering if I could please get it back. I really hope it didn't break anything and I promise I wasn't trying to hit it over there and I'll be real careful from now on," I took a big breath, and held it, anxiously awaiting her response and my, assumed, certain doom.

She looked kindly at me, "Oh, sure. Have a seat right here on the couch and I'll go take a look in the backyard," she gestured toward a soft, gray, suede couch in the middle of the living room and walked out of the room and into the backyard.

I looked at the impossibly clean sofa, and, regarding my own filthy state, simply stood next to the couch, not daring to sit down on it.

The living room floor was covered in plush, a kind of carpet I had only seen in magazines at the hardware store in town. The floor in the main hallway, kitchen, and dining room was pure white marble, and the ticking of a clock echoed off of it and into my ears from someplace deep within the house.

I thought about how friendly the woman was, and wondered where Dylan and I had ever come up with the idea that the people who lived here were mean and scary.

There was a lot of expensive looking stuff in the living room that must've been what my art teacher kept referring to when he talked about "modern art." It all looked really weird to me, but I saw

this one pinecone that was the shiniest silver I'd ever seen. I walked over to the pinecone, looked over my shoulder nervously, and picked it up. It was heavy; an indication that it was solid sterling silver (Dylan had told me this, but I never asked how he knew it).

My mind began racing and bead of sweat broke out on the back of my neck. I thought about all the repairs that needed to be done around our house, and the way my dad had sighed and put his head in his hands when he found out we wouldn't have enough money left over this month to make those repairs; again. I felt hot and cold at the same time, and my pulse pounded loudly in my ears and blurred my vision as my shaking fingers carefully placed the silver pinecone in my dirty denim pocket.

As soon as I felt the weight of it settle into my holey pocket, I felt sick to my stomach. I had never stolen anything before, and I knew that what I was doing was wrong. *Thou shalt not steal*; I'd heard the phrase a thousand times before, in church and from my dad.

Just then, I heard the woman coming back, "I found it," she held up my cherished baseball, smiling brightly, "and it didn't hurt a thing. You don't worry yourself about it at all, and if you ever hit it into the backyard again, you can just come right on over and get it, alright?"

Her kindness was too much for my tortured conscience. And Dad wouldn't want me to take the pinecone anyway. I knew I had to put the pinecone back; but how? She was standing right there, "Thank you, ma'am. Could I please have a glass of water?"

"Oh, sure," she walked off to the kitchen, and while her back was turned, I quickly took the pinecone out of my pocket and silently placed it back on the table where I'd found it, being careful to leave it exactly how it was before.

"Here you go," when she returned, she handed me a glass of water which I drank as fast as possible. I thanked her and gave a smile which she returned.

I ran to the baseball field to pick up my bike and bat, and pedaled home as fast as I could, relieved that I had not gone through

with my evil little plan. Who knows? Maybe that would have started me on a life of crime and an extended stay in a ten-by-ten cell.

As I biked home, I promised myself that I'd never steal anything ever again and would try to help my dad out as much as I could.

Drop

By Cheryl Wilke



Ode to Bean Dip

By David Christianson

Bubbles on your surface, burst of
cayenne scent, we scoop out and scrape up your
flesh, and munch on through the night.

I remember my first
chip, powdered fingers tense. We children leered
while Gregg globbed in the refried beans,
Cheez Whiz and chunky salsa. His
concoction drew our attention. Discarded
Legos, our childhood left like our
puffed out cheeks. Suction cupped
our fingers, lips dried from salt. Bean
dip held our hands then, and held on
forevermore. Weekends, birthdays,
Christmas, or an autumn stump fire out back. Such
a familiar presence, bean dip, our
family's go-to snack.

Borlis Karloff, We Salute You

By John Cunningham

Iommi's thimble
bounced off Ozzy's
stupid grin, even an
old geezer could
dig these kids from
Birmingham;

used to choose between
cheap food and fags, but
now they cap out California Jam,
still in their dirty pajamas,
name emblazoned on the
bass drum with electric tape,
playing to flower hippies
about nuclear war
and snorting too much
blow, writ with booze and
lovers tangled in secular
deceit the night before
a tropical sunrise.

It was true,
Iommi had a chance,
an opportunity—
Jethro Tull, no joke,
but he chose a middling band—
he chose Sabbath
back before it was Sabbath,
mucking around in the dirt and grass—
he chose those Birmingham blokes with
a puff from his fag,
all for one
beautiful idea.

"Zeppelin is pretty fuckin' heavy," Ozzy said.

"We'll be heavier."

The White Board Hasn't Heard

By Birdy Kildahl

The white board hasn't heard

you're not there to call every night
so it keeps on saying
CALL DAD EVERY NIGHT
until I have to bleed from my throat
and break it to match myself
so CALL DAD EVERY NIGHT
was the only thing it ever said
despite its aspirations of being painted
like a biker queen with words
and drawings I could never keep
from spilling embarrassingly
out. Wash and wash short of laser
removal, and it still kept screeching
at me to do the impossible.

When I felt you sturdy as walls
of muscle and beard, topped
with a dome despite a bongo beatnik ponytail
I assumed like children do that you
like the Hiroshima Dome does
would at least subsist. I never
greeted the If, even practically, even after you said
Someday I won't be around anymore.
How am I still on the ground (if barely)? I never
wanted to be without your help
being. Lack of you assaults
my lungs. I storm until I rattle, until I
can't tell if I'm too cold
or too hot. Have you ever opened

presents from a dead man? Christmases
and birthdays are like Halloweens
where everyone dresses up as you.
I climb into myself to hide
from the monsters. Doppler of

hurt huRT HURT HUrt hurt
up until Christmas Day is nothing
more than a twenty-four hour
game of Don't Fucking Cry It'll be So Awkward.

People have to keep asking because
they never worked this way: Why
do you hate getting presents?
Thirteen-year-olds can still only give toys
as gifts; your *Yellow Submarine* John Lennon went to your

best friend, who is like seeing you again. He thinks the
same about me, a naïve and pretty doppelganger. Your
little sisters confirm, with their words that are a little
sad, only to me and my words, that all they comprehend
is you. Lots of things ended that almost
Christmas day.

30:2

By Amelia Warwick

“Are you ready to go yet?”

I looked up from I was reading at my sister, “Go where?”

“The mall. I have a coupon for six dollars off any purchase at *H&M*. You’re coming with me, right?” She held the car keys out to me.

“I guess so,” I stood up and grabbed my purse as I took the keys from her.

We walked out to the car and drove to the mall. My sister, Susan, picked out a sleeveless, button-up, orange shirt at *H&M* that was only two dollars after her coupon. We were just walking out of the mall when it happened.

Behind us, a woman screamed. We turned around to see her crouched beside a man lying motionless on the floor. She was shaking his shoulder and yelling hysterically, “Ben! Ben, can you hear me? Somebody help me!”

Susan was standing still with her hand covering her mouth, but my instincts took over and I grabbed her wrist and pulled her along with me, “Come on!”

We broke through the little crowd of murmuring people that was already starting to gather, “Excuse me, I’ve got to get through,” I pushed my way through the bodies that were all edging closer together, desperate to get to the man’s side to see if I could help in any way.

Closer now, I could hear the slight gasping noises the man was making and see the frantic look in the woman’s eyes. Right then, adrenaline kicked in and my brain re-accessed every pertinent thing about CPR that I knew.

I knelt down on the man’s right side across from her and began rapping my knuckles on his chest, “Hey, are you okay? Sir, can you hear me?”

“He was fine, and then all of a sudden he grabbed his chest and fell over. I don’t know...” the woman trailed off as she continued to silently whimper, tightly holding his hand in both of hers, “Ben.”

I placed my hand on his stomach and held it still there for a couple of seconds, feeling for the rise and fall of his chest to show me he was getting oxygen into his lungs. There was nothing.

“He’s not breathing,” I looked up at Susan, “Call 9-1-1 and get the AED.”

Susan looked down at me with confusion and fear, “The what?” I had rattled off the instructions just like I had done hundreds of times at my CPR class, forgetting that my sister still wouldn’t know what to do.

“Automated External Defibrillator.’ It’ll be in a white box on a wall somewhere around here and it’ll say ‘AED’ on it. When you call, tell them his sex, age, problem, and location here in the mall. Got it?”

She nodded, her face pale, and ran off, pulling her cell phone out of her pocket.

“I’m checking for a pulse,” I put my pointer and middle fingers together and placed them on his neck, feeling for the artery to the right of his trachea. I talked and counted the seconds out loud, more for my own benefit of making sure I didn’t skip a step than anything else, “One, two, three, four, five- There’s no pulse. I need to start CPR.” I tuned out the crowd’s useless whispers of concern and focused all of my attention on the task at hand.

I pulled my *Buck* knife out of my pocket and shoved my purse at the woman, “Reach in there and pull out the big, plastic, egg-shaped container and open it up.”

The blade whipped open at the flick of my wrist and I started cutting down the length of the front of Ben’s gray t-shirt.

The woman sat frozen, clutching my cloth purse. I reached across and shook her by the shoulder, “Hey, come on, snap out of it; you can do this. I need your help. *He* needs your help.”

That seemed to motivate her and she plunged her hand into the main pouch of the purse, felt around for a little bit, and pulled out the hand-sized object. She opened it and there sat my trusty CPR mask: the one that I had been carrying around with me for the past two months.

I had the man's shirt completely cut open now and I locked my fingers together and placed them in the middle of his chest.

Locking my elbows, I leaned forward so that my shoulders were directly above my hands and started the compressions.

I pushed hard and fast, just like I'd been taught, and counted out loud up to thirty.

When I had reached thirty I grabbed my mask out of the open container and leaned towards his head to open his airway. With the mask in my hand, I placed my left hand on his forehead and my right hand on the bony part of his chin, tilting his head back and his chin up.

Using part of my hand to hold his head in place, I clamped my thumbs and forefingers around the mask, pressing hard to seal it tight against his face.

Leaning down over his face I breathed twice into the mask, watching out of the corner of my eye to make sure his chest rose a bit with each breath.

After the second breath I went back to his chest and did another set of compressions followed by two breaths and thirty more compressions.

I leaned quickly back to his face, and gave him two more breaths. I was starting to feel a little tired, and the tops of my hands and wrists were beginning to ache.

Hurry, Susan, I thought as I counted up to thirty for the fourth time.

After what seemed like an eternity, Susan came pushing through the throng of people with a small bag in her hand with "AED" printed on it. She knelt down next to me and zipped open the bag.

"Turn it on," I said as I leaned forward for another two breaths.

She did so, and the automated voice began its slow instructions.

Sitting up to give more compressions, I weighed the options in my mind: *If I pause for a minute I can get him hooked up to the AED*

much faster than she can. But the machine will tell her what to do, and I really shouldn't stop giving compressions.

"His chest is really hairy, so you're going to need to dry shave him first. There's a razor in the bag," I told her a bit breathlessly.

Her face was flushed from running and her hands shook as she pulled the razor out of the bag and held it in her hand, not quite sure where to shave.

I pointed to his chest just below his right collarbone, "Right here," I finished the set of compressions and gave two more breaths as my sister quickly shaved.

"And here," I pointed around to his left side between his armpit and hipbone.

Susan ran around to the other side and shaved a second place.

As soon as she had finished I ripped the sticky pads off of the backing and pressed them firmly to the places my sister had shaved.

"Analyzing," the machine droned.

I held my hands up near my face, well away from Ben, "Clear!"

Everyone in the circle took a step back, as did Susan and the woman.

"Shock advised. No one should touch the patient," the machine said after about fifteen seconds.

"Clear!" I said it louder this time and made sure everyone was far enough away before pressing the button.

His whole body jerked as his muscles contracted. But it was short and as soon as he was still again I placed my hands back on his chest for another round of compressions.

I went back to chest compressions. This time I talked to my sister instead of counting, "I need a break. You're going to have to do this."

She was scared and I knew it, "No, Paige, I can't do it. I-"

"He doesn't have time for this. Yes, you can. Look: hold your hands together like this, lock your elbows, and lean forward so that your shoulders are above your hands."

I gave two more breaths and then grabbed her hands, which she had already linked together, placing them in the proper place on his chest, "You're going to do thirty. Push hard and keep in time with my counting."

Twice I counted off the compressions at the right tempo for her and gave him two more breaths when she was finished before taking over the compressions again.

Exactly two minutes from the time it had shocked him, the AED analyzed Ben's heart rhythm again, and after the second shock said three promising words, "*Shock not advised.*"

I went back to his neck and felt slight movement under my fingerprints. His pulse was weak, but it was there. Ditching the compressions, I knelt above his head to give him rescue breaths; one every five seconds.

After a few breaths, I heard a commanding voice behind the gathering of people, "Out of the way!"

The crowd parted and two EMTs rushed forward, "We'll take it from here."

"He has a pulse but he's not breathing," I said.

The EMTs checked his pulse and chest and then agreed with me, "Yep. But he's going to be okay."

They put a brace on his neck and swiftly but carefully loaded him onto the waiting gurney while I stood at his head continuing to give breaths.

Thanking me for my help, they wheeled him away. The woman looked over at me, "Thank you," her voice was barely a whisper and it was cracked with emotion.

I smiled at her and she turned to rush off with the EMTs.

The crowd disbanded and I looked at my sister who was still sitting on the floor, pale faced, "Are you okay?" I squatted down next to her and she nodded.

As I sat down on the floor, the rush of adrenaline I'd felt earlier quickly left me, draining my whole body of control and energy.

I started shaking, too, “Oh, boy. I think I’m going to throw up.” I’d never actually performed CPR on a real person before and the experience left me a bit of a wreck.

Susan looked at me quickly, “Really?”

“Fresh air; I think I need some fresh air and water,” I stood up and bolted to the door, which was close by.

Stepping out into the wind, I inhaled deeply, drawing the oxygen into my lungs. The air had a slight briskness about it, and I immediately started feeling better.

My sister was right behind me, “Are you okay?” She pulled a water bottle from her purse and held it out to me.

“Yeah,” I sighed, “I think I’ll be just fine.”

A Piece of Havana

By Douglas Lemon



Before the Wishes, Trevi Fountain

By Douglas Lemon



Contributor's Notes

Korin Anderson Supernatural beings continue to spark her interest so she thought it would be entertaining to bring these characters to life. Skifting through realities creates an avenue for alternating consciousness and these distinct experiences can be realized by our readers. Schoolwork, writing, and music dominate my time but the opportunity to expand on anything surreal always proves to be a worthwhile venture.

Alexander Bahr is an artist in both literary and visual arts; more practiced and experienced in the latter. This piece is particularly representative of the kind of visual artwork he usually does, using any of three mediums: graphite pencil, colored pencil, and/or acrylic paint. This piece is entirely acrylic paint.

David Christianson is a current student in the Creative Writing AFA at Normandale Community College. He lives in Bloomington, Minnesota. This is his first published work.

John Cunningham is a student currently enrolled in the AFA in Creative Writing program at Normandale Community College. He writes fiction and poetry, and enjoys many different genres and themes. He hopes to continue his education after graduating from Normandale, pursuing a career in film making.

Birdy Kildahl As someone who falls in love easily, she often expects resounding heartbeats and end up with only a cascade of not uninteresting side effects. Failed love does not have to be dark and dreary; for her it is always educational.

Douglas Lemon is in the AFA Program trying to get better!

Andrei Lounin is a student at Normandale Community College.

Karlynn O'Neil is a second year student and a poet. When she is not being a brilliant wordsmith, she bakes bread and hosts Karaoke.

Mindy Paurus Escapism is powerful enough to overcome almost any spontaneous public anxiety attack.

Miles Rivera Lives in Eden Prairie, Minnesota spending his days daydreaming.

Noah Savoie is a student at Normandale who enjoys writing plays, but who procrastinated and didn't have any finished plays to submit, so he wanted to see how some of his poetry would fare. The accepted works were written last semester for Poetry class.

Megan Smith is a Freshman at Normandale Community College who writes poems and watches Arrested Development in her free time.

Miho Vande Berg For the past five years she has been living in the US as a new immigrant. She wrote fiction stories in Japan but hadn't studied creative writing until she entered Normandale Community College. Most every day she thinks, "What am I doing in a foreign country?" but she can't stop writing; she loves it and she has images and ideas that she wants to express in English. She grew up in a dysfunctional family and has known several others, so

she often finds herself writing about them. Having learned basic psychology, she thinks writing is, in part, a therapy. Writing and reading are vital for her to live a healthy life.

Amelia Warwick is a Normandale Community College student who will graduate in the Spring of 2014 with her Associate of Arts degree with a double emphasis in Communication and Writing.

Cheryl Wilke was born and raised on the small-town prairies of central Minnesota. She has published work in *Dogwood: A Journal of Poetry and Prose*, *Plainsongs*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Penwood Review*, *Water-Stone Review*, and elsewhere. Wilke is a recipient of Grand Prize awards from the League of Minnesota Poets. Her second chapbook, *The Writer's Hour* (Finishing Line Press), was released in 2013. A lifelong resident of Minnesota, Cheryl lives with her husband, daughter, and adopted shelter dog, Mabeline, in Minneapolis.

Bekah Zimmerman has always loved writing—she first picked up a pencil around first grade to try to write stories.

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Officers and the following members of the Fall 2013 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

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Alex Bahr, Secretary

Douglas Lemon, Treasurer

Karlynn O'Neil, Publicity

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Front Cover: "Dragonflies," by Birdy Kildahl

Back Cover: "Home Ahead, Our World Behind," by Alexander Bahr

Submit your creative writing to the Spring 2014 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously and acceptance is based on literary merit.

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

Effective with the Fall 2013 issue of *The Paper Lantern*, submissions via the online service, Submittable are preferred and appreciated. Submittable is a free and easy way for writers to submit work to a variety of publications; it also helps writers keep track of the work submitted for publication.

More information is available on our website, thepaperlantern.org. *The Paper Lantern* online is made possible by a generous gift from the Kevin Downey estate.