

# **The Paper Lantern**

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# Night at the Gallery

by Miles Rivera

I was standing outside of a large building made of some kind of reflective glass. I'm waiting for a date, well more of a blind date. I reluctantly agreed to meet a girl my friend Ryan works with. Her name is Elizabeth and she's looking to meet someone interesting, as Ryan told me. He told me she enjoyed art so I got two tickets to a gallery I read was in town tonight.

I lean against the wall and notice that people going into the gallery are very dressed up, much more so than myself. I'm wearing shorts, sandals, and a T-shirt with a cartoon monkey drinking from a bottle of alcohol.

I notice a very attractive blond in a black dress looking around for someone. It must be her. "Elizabeth?" I call out.

A wave of disappointment overtakes her face. "Oh," she finally lets out. "Yeah that's me, you must be Roger?"

"Yeah, Ryan told me you like art so I got us tickets for this place. Shall we?" She gives a half smile before walking along with me.

We enter the building; I was immediately blinded by what seemed to be a spotlight trained on the entrance. A gimmick of sorts I suppose to make the guests feel a bit of importance. The place is a series of pristine white walls covered in paintings separated by walking space. The waxed wood floors reflect the entire room as expensive shoes clack on top of them. The patrons stand tall with perfect posture. Old men with black and white suits with perfectly aligned bowties; women with multi-thousand dollar dresses with long extinct animal fur around their necks. The patrons radiate the "up your own ass" attitude. We walk a little further in and that's where I notice it. The smell. A suffocating stench of expensive colognes and perfumes mix together to form a miasma of smug that makes me hesitate.

We join a tour group who is standing in front of what appears to be a pair of prosthetic testicles stapled to a wall.

“You sir,” the tour guide points to me, “what do you think the artist was trying to express with this piece?” I think he’s intentionally messing with me.

I stare at the testicles uncomfortably, “Umm, well, I dunno. It was probably by some woman who’s extraordinarily pissed off at men.” The tour group look at one another confused.

Embarrassed, Elizabeth says, “I’m going to look around a bit, I just spotted an interesting piece I’d love to look at.”

“Sure.” I wave to her as she quickly makes her way farther and farther away from me. I walk around for a while, giving brief glances to paintings that don’t grab my attention.

I move to a familiar painting that I could appreciate. A clown holding a flower while crying. Ah, a classic image showing how something that appears so happy and joyful could really be filled with sorrow and... Wait, never mind. Upon closer examination the flower the clown is holding is actually made entirely of penises. “Oh for fuck sake,” I mumble before moving away.

It dawns on me how very “abstract”, I suppose you could say, the entire place is. Many of the paintings are really just comprised of genitalia in various situations. I’ll never understand why someone would paint two penises fighting in gladiatorial combat. What I thought was originally going to be a simplistic gallery of art is really just an exhibition of dicks. I let out a sigh as I look around for Elizabeth. I spot her talking to a tall man in a suit with slicked back blond hair and that perfect stubble you only see on television. Well the night was over, but before I leave surely a place like this has some food or drinks to keep the guests happy.

Like an answer to my wish, I spot a small table with what appears to be a small tray holding perhaps hors d’oeuvres or some other tasty treat with a sign saying ‘Eat Me’ neatly displayed on top. With a spring in my step, I walk my way over to the small sparkle of hope that lay before me.

Crackers. A delicacy they are not, but food they are indeed. They are topped with some sort of meat, a little too pinkish and not looking like any kind of meat I had ever seen. Nevertheless, down the hatch they went. They tasted very strange, very stringy and not like anything I had eaten before. I notice a small piece of paper,

perhaps telling me what it is I'm eating and begin to read as a tour group makes its way over.

“Over here is an interesting exhibit by an artist by the name of Alexandre Bazzille.”

A group of people, including Elizabeth and her new date, begin crowding around the table I stand by as a dawning horror fills my soul.

“What appears to be a normal tray of crackers,” The posh tour guide begins, “is in fact topped with a very special ingredient.” “You see, the artist wished to show that those who give in to their primal desires without first examining the situation are indeed less human and more animal.”

The overwhelming amount of stares intensifies the wrenching feeling in my stomach as I finish reading the article near the table.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the artist recently received liposuction and put the removed fat onto the crackers you see before you. You see, if we all turn into animals, we shall all inevitably eat and destroy each other.”

I felt dizzy. I stumble my way passed gasping patrons who view me as some sort of circus freak. I tripped in front of a plump older woman who screamed in fright as though I were some sort of rabid beast. The smell of her all too fragrant perfume brought tears to my eyes as I scrambled to my feet and pushed my way through the front doors like a man possessed.

I ran. I ran as far as my legs would take me and then some. My heart ready to burst, I ran with the night wind, never again wanting to see the horrors I had just witnessed.

# Profoundly

by Thomas Shumate

There was once a young cat named Tim  
Who hated the way that the world looked at him.  
He tossed and he turned, and often he learned  
How this brightly shining world thought that he had burned much  
too dim.

He lived in a home, with his mom  
One morning when the sun's glistening glowed, she was gone  
He was saddened when his mom abandoned him  
Leaving him dreaming of singing her soulful sombering songs

He searched and he searched, all through the house  
And his thirst grew to worse, and it hurt his mouth  
He cried and he moaned, each time that it showed  
How his mother and brother left him alone as a child.

He wandered through the streets, he talked to twos and threes  
And never stopped, exclusion seemed  
The only end of any outcome; they are not my friends, I stand  
without one  
Lies became honesty; and honestly, truth became deceit

Night became the day, frightening away  
Any suitors he would say were so suitable to stay  
Dark became the tunnel, "spark" he came to mumble  
And heartless trains befuddled, paved the way

One train stopped, along a ditch which contained  
Some sun stained rocks and out walked  
A cat, trapped in singularity,  
She was a girl and she stepped as though she said "the world was  
to carry me."

She maybe sat at quarter posture

Bathing, licking all the water off her  
Alone and still yet the home where she slept  
Was not as cold or as wet as the moments she kept to offer

That night he scavenged the forest asking for porridge  
Searching for fire, a burning desire to capture the hopeless  
In a bottle of fireflies, the ensemble inside his eyes  
When he saw her was impossible to underline or even focus on

And so immortals walk along the crossroads, like  
A sonnet drawn through potholes in the cosmos sky.  
Two kittens sit and count the stars of Milky Way until they say it's  
infinite  
Giving into natural assumptions they thought benign.

They each pondered near the diluted ember  
And each house cat that tried to remember  
About the past was a mouse, in that  
They kept on hiding in the walls to shine through the center

Before finding little paws and siding with the cinder blocks  
He listened, walked her to her home and only gained  
Her vocal distributions and astronomical illusions  
And truly there, their nuclear fusion perpetuated rolling trains.



# I Wish

by Gina LoPresto

A large pointy rock  
The color of a storm cloud  
Whizzes towards me  
Like a cannon ball  
Towards my face.  
I leap away  
Just in time.  
The rock flies  
Harmlessly.  
Away from me.

The boys snigger  
Their taunts pierce my  
Ears.  
Like swords.  
I wish I was  
Deaf.

I feel the tears  
Sting my cheeks  
As they rain down  
From my eyes.  
My heart aches  
With a dull pain  
That is not from heart burn.  
I wish I was  
Numb.

The inside of my mouth  
Breathes in the toxic  
Atmosphere  
Of those words  
As well as the tears

That run down  
My cheeks  
And enter  
Into the dark  
Caverns of my  
Mouth.  
My tongue  
Sits in my  
Mouth cave  
Like a rug.  
Soaking up  
The tears'  
Salty taste  
Into its fibers.  
I wish I had  
No taste.

I cannot stop the onslaught  
Of pain  
That infects my senses.  
The cruel  
Harsh  
Words  
Fill my body with poison  
That I can't escape.  
Though I run from the boys  
They're words follow me.  
They never leave me.  
They ring inside my mind  
As they repeat themselves  
Over and over.  
I am forever imprisoned  
By cruel words.

# The Cycle Path

by Thomas Shumate

The scenery, he could barely remember. They stood above the barrier between life and death, before and after. Beneath the soil he could hear the raven's crow, as eternal darkness beckoned below them. He felt cold not being among its presence if only for a moment, but in this world, she made him feel something different. She was a young girl named Alice, no older than eighteen, although he couldn't tell, and he didn't care to ask. Age didn't mean the same thing as it did where he came from.

They spent the previous month talking about shallow things which meant nothing to him, only once in a while would she come to him with something other than instinctual desire for companionship. Otherwise, he would speak to the Raven that appeared near a bike road he grew up on or busy himself with work. These days, however, it seemed she was the only thing could occupy his mind. When he closed his eyes, she was the only image. When he felt the utter bitterness of the world, he felt that she could remedy it, even though he knew she could not.

He was raised in what most people call Hell, and just as some people in Earth are raised to one day make the transition from one world to the other, he was raised to be an agent of the afterlife and walk the Earth as they did. He was a reaper. The Raven was his guide, it told him where to go, what to do, who to reap. His job was a simple one, the world he was sentenced to thrived and needed change, and he was the supplier of death which brought that change. He was criminal in their law, their rules, and he felt isolation outcast him from a society deemed as "lesser" by his home below the people.

"Home." He mumbled; then searched for the Raven, as if he were under constant watch by a being wired to confine his every thought to nothing more than reaping souls. The closer he grew to her, the more he felt he had become useless in some fundamental way and human life was worth more than he learned. What could he change? He remained a weapon of the most infamous creature

ever created. He only knew that he would rebel, in some way against the Raven; against his home and the people who raised him to be this way.

He continued balancing reaping and the relationship with her as to keep them from discovering each other. He couldn't imagine explaining such an existence to her although he feared the day would come that he would be compelled to. He couldn't know which he would choose if it came to be a choice, so he never chose, but the idea was now implanted into his mind and he would not be able to stop thinking about it until he awoke the following morning.

He looked outside his window; it was dark, in the morning, before the sun arose. He felt that the world seemed ominous on this day, and he thought something would go wrong if he went on with his daily reaping. He decided there in his home he would schedule this entire day with her.

He stepped out the door to find her, among other things and realized she was all he could think about anymore. Was it dangerous for her to have such an influence on his thoughts, the ideas he was taught, his emotions? He believed she was everything, the past he never had and the future he always wished for; the solution to his problems, a decision he could never regret.

He arrived at her home to ask her when she could come out to be with him, and that he would be waiting patiently near the bike road for her when she was ready. She seemed excited and eager to leave and told him to wait twenty minutes. He accepted the short sentence of loneliness in his book of life and waited for her to close the door before he departed. He would enter the park and wait on a bench near the bike road they both knew so well, just as he explained.

When he arrived at the park a few blocks down the street from her home, he saw the sky was clouded and the night was approaching sooner than he expected. He felt the beauty of the evening could only be matched by the person he would be spending it with. The bench sat in a park surrounded by a bike road, paved with dirt and etched with his memories. Sometimes if he sat at the bench for a long time, he felt that he was trapped inside of the road, and the only way out would be to sacrifice a part

of his original self to leave behind, to always be there at the bench waiting for him to return. “What are you doing here?” whispered a dark entity hiding in a tall, lifeless tree that should’ve fallen months ago. It was the Raven; he knew it because this was the only place where he encountered the Raven, since he arrived from Hell.

“I’m just taking a day off,” he said, trying not to acknowledge the Raven’s presence among the trees. The park was empty; no people were here to witness their conversation, just as the Raven planned. The Raven glided down to the overhead of the bench to intimidate him for his insubordination, and succeeded. The man grew more unstable and uncomfortable toward the upcoming discussion.

“Your family was expecting you to reap today.” The Raven chirped at him, as if it were an actual bird. He knew it wasn’t a bird, and he knew that he had no family, not since they exiled him from their home to do the people’s work.

“They call it murder here, and it is illegal for any soul to take another,” he said with full intentions to dispel the Raven from the situation, but knowing this task was impossible until she arrived at the bench, as the Raven would flee at the risk of being seen by a person other than himself.

The Raven took offense to this, the last time the Raven visited he was eager to do his job, and it gave him meaning, an idea, a higher justice he could believe in. What changed? “If we don’t kill these people, then what will?”

“People die on their own.” He became louder with conviction, “I don’t need to kill them for anything to change.”

The Raven never heard such blasphemy, such challenging ideas about everything it learned. “You were given the power to change the outcome of this world, these “people” are merely pawns in your game and you may dispose of them in whichever way you wish” The Raven said as the words became increasingly toxic to his ears, for what the Raven said was true, people did not kill other people. Any single one that could was clearly a product of Hell and did not deserve to be sentenced to years in prison. They went through Hell; they grew up in the worst conditions known to any creature on the Earth, they were being condemned to lifetimes of confinement and in the public’s eyes would finally be

exiled back to Hell where they would spend the rest of a suffering eternity, because the person's own conscience would never be enough for the Devil to torment their souls.

"I was tortured in Hell, and I was only given a reason to be powerful." He looked away from the Raven to the blackness beneath "nothing else."

"Nothing!" the Raven screamed at him because it knew that he was trying everything in his power to ignore it. "We gave you a meaning, a target, a way to seek justice for injustice, we gave you everything you have, everything you will ever have, everything that you will ever see you will remember the days when you were a child in our care."

"Justice means nothing, it is revenge onto people who have never wronged me and their family who find some form of happiness in the life of someone that they love, have loved and will love forever."

"You should learn what love and happiness are before you stand behind something that has given up on you." And just as it finished the sentence, she was walking over the hill towards them, and the Raven vanished.

He didn't want to talk to her, he didn't want to do anything so he disappeared in the darkness of the trees before she could recognize that he was ever there in the first place. "David?" she started calling for the fake name he gave her to feel accepted. "David?" the name came out again like a helpless plea. He knew the Raven would catch on to what she was doing, who she was and why she was here, and he knew that if it found out that his soul would be trapped in the underworld for the rest of his life. She needed to leave.

"Kill her!" the Raven said to him. He stood in awe as she surely heard the Raven's screech, but showed no reaction. "Kill her!" The Raven spoke again. "Kill her!" it said again, and again. "Kill her!" He felt his eyes falling, his body becoming as light as air, but there was no light. "Kill her!" There was no happiness. "KILL HER!" It screamed as his body ached in agony. "Kill her!" He searched for the Raven, but it was gone! He could see among the trees, he could feel no presence of it.

"Kill her." He thought it this time. He knew it in his mind

that she must die for his life to go on. She stood still alone in the darkness, searching for him where he promised he would be. He found the knife he used for his regular reaping and held it close to his face breathing slow and steady as he read the inscription his parents scribed onto the blade: “As darkness beckons below, as light from the moon shines upon an invisible assassin, you hold one weapon that separates life and death, The Final Barrier.” He crept up as he was taught so many times, so many years ago. “Kill her!” he whispered and thrust the blade into her chest and held his left hand over her mouth so that people could not hear her scream for life, or maybe just for breath. He held his opposite hand over her mouth so she could never breath again as he twisted the knife deeper into her chest.

He heard nothing, saw nothing, but found that he could feel her screaming into his being, he could feel her dying in his arms, and in one act of either mercy or deep internal guilt, he retreated the knife from her chest as to not condemn her to Hell and the life that he lived, and to what he had become. Instead, he could only look away from her as she descended to the outer edge of the bike road they spent so much time watching, and unknown to her, destroying, one piece at a time until only one small block remained, and she lie adjacent to, resting above the Barrier between life and death.

She was the only person to accept him as human, to see him as a man, with a soul and a future that could be changed. He did not close her eyes as she descended, because in her eyes would always be human and he would always have the capacity for love. She looked up in one final grasp of life and saw what he was, but still accepted him and what her final fate became, and it was deep in her eyes that she showed from her dying soul that she cared for him, and just as light from the moon shines on an invisible assassin, the same light shined on her.

The Raven, witnessing the whole event, stared into her eyes to see them change from life to lifeless and realized the truth of the entire situation, a person staring back instead of an assassin! How he was falling in love with her, how he preferred being with her than to reaping and in one motion, the Raven swooped from its perch in the tall dead tree and flew into and through his body to

retrieve his heart, which contained his tainted soul. He screamed in disbelief as he lunged forward to attack the Raven which had already broken the barrier between the two worlds.

He awoke in the morning before the sun rose having no recollection of the events preceding. It was a cold day and he noticed one small patch of dirt which stood apart from all others for one reason or another, as if it were originally a piece of road, and one word etched into his subconscious: Barrier. "Barrier," he said to himself, when he searched the grounds for more clues of his arrival to this strange but familiar place. He immediately noticed when he turned his head around that a young woman had been stabbed and was lying lifelessly on the ground. "Bury her," he repeated when he realized what he must do. He could not find a shovel so he decided to use his hands and dig a grave large enough for her to rest peacefully. He searched for an easy place to displace the soil, when he remembered the patch of dirt that originally caught his attention. He began to dig while he watched the sunrise, not knowing who she was or where she came from.

He inhaled a deep breath and replied, "I haven't the slightest idea." As if he were talking to himself the whole time, but this time he could not see the Raven; he could only hear it dying. He left the scene the way she saw him, as a person eager to change his path, trapped in an endless cycle.



Beware of Falling Rocks  
by Bekah Zimmerman



# Sunflower

by Karlynn O'Neil

I like your  
No fuss glamour.  
Single blade simple leaf,  
Climb up to a head  
Made of thousands of tiny flowers  
mathematically aligned.  
You are the golden proportion  
to be interrupted by picking birds.

You are a deliberate accident.  
Along the freeway, carrying many faces  
breaking the monotony of commute ditches.

From the mouths of bird  
A seed was dropped and there you stand.  
It must be painfully liberating to bust  
through the untilled topsoil  
and build yourself.

Tall and thick like bark  
Standing in a straight row parallel the side of a barn.  
Arranged in perfect columns  
solidarity sings in choir  
Your field family turning in unison to serenade the sun.

You are at home here, wherever you are planted.

# Glacier National Park

by Bekah Zimmerman



# Tied Up

by Allicia Kollar

I dream about walking through the woods behind the townhome with my mother. We search for morel mushrooms, in hopes we can sauté them with butter and onions for on top of our steaks tonight. This all feels so real. A cool breeze tangles my hair. I look up to the sky, but can see only a green light gleaming down on me. My mom is lost, but I know these woods better than anyone. I lead us out into a clearing of abandoned farm land. My mom has grown tired of looking for the delicate mushroom and has decided to pick wild chamomile instead. I lay out on the tall grass, my eyes squinting, trying to find shapes in the clouds. I would be at peace if it wasn't so cold. I begin to realize that I am no longer with my mother; I am now sitting atop a mountain looking down. I dangle my feet off the edge and play with my toes. My back is killing me from being hunched over, but I don't want to move. Reality is not safe. If I wake up now, I may never have a peaceful sleep again. A door slams shut directly above me.

I gasp for breath and begin flailing my head in different directions, searching for any sign of light. My arms are locked behind me, and my legs are pinned to small steel posts. The air is sterile, like a hospital, but the room is like a refrigerator. Am I in the morgue? My heart tries to beat straight through my chest, while I try to break through these ropes. Another door slams shut, this one closer and behind me. I think I hear footsteps. My breath stops. My heart is now trying to climb up my throat. A different escape plan, that's what I need. I start throwing my body from left to right. I am going to break free and earn a tiny glimmer of hope inside total madness. Or I am going to hit a hard floor and crack my skull open. Still, if I hit it hard enough, a temporary state of euphoric dreams will follow. Maybe I'll dream about Hawaii. If I get out of this, I *am* going to Hawaii!

I am in my favorite diner; my mother sits in front of me. The air fills my nostrils with fresh coffee and pancakes. I stack creamer cups, trying to avoid that look a concerned mother gives to her child. She knows what I am thinking about, but I still won't

talk to her about it. By letting her in I would have to face my biggest regret, and I don't think I will ever be ready for that.

"I was thinking, you should come to the salon with me, later this afternoon. I need to get a couple greys touched up and I wouldn't mind a little girly time with my madre." I look up from my dairy pyramid and smile, hoping this will distract her from the real situation.

"And I was thinking that we should talk about the real situation at hand." My mother folds her hands across the table; her stare is locked right into mine; we both know what my situation is. There's no need to mention it, nothing will change from talking about what happened so many years ago. I look back down at my pyramid.

"I remember when you were a child and you were the happiest little girl anyone had ever seen. You didn't even cry at your baptism!"

I roll my eyes, they stick focus on the ceiling a little too long. "You've told this story before."

My mom just smiles at me, her silver hair glows under the light. I focus on her neatly kept curls and wonder why my hair will never do that. I still refuse to respond the way she wants me to. These are my problems, I don't need help fixing them.

"Margie, just listen to me! The only way you can ever be happy again is if you face your demon head on. You know what you have to do, so find him!"

I look away to see our server standing at our table, singing *Itsy Bitsy Spider*. Crap. I'm waking up.

I am laying down this time. My hands are still tied up behind me, and I can still hear a man singing, but my legs are free. There is now a light shining through my eyelids. He took the blindfold off. He wants me to look. I keep my eyes shut and pretend I am asleep. My heart wants to escape its prison again, so I hold my breath. Maybe he will just go away, give me a chance to escape.

He stops singing. I stir around a little bit, giving myself an excuse to gasp. I hear his feet hit the floor like an elephant, stomping closer. The elephant steps stop. I concentrate on my other five senses trying to decipher how close he is. I imagine he is

standing right over me, looking down, and planning sick twisted games. I hear a door creak open, this time right next to me. Now would be the time for my escape. I could bolt up right now, and make a run for it. He could also kill me if I tried. I count to thirty, three times before the door finally shuts.

I spring to my feet before I even allow my eyes to fully open. My head starts spinning, a sharp pain shoots from my skull, and down my spine. I sit back down. One step at a time. I squint my eyes, trying to adjust to the light, figures of other people standing in the room emerge.

“Hello? Who is in here? Can you help me?” My voice is dry and weak. Nobody responds.

I slowly stand back up and force my eyes to adjust. The room is all white, including every object staged inside. There is a small kitchen with basic appliances and a small breakfast table with two chairs. I stand in the center of my room, facing the kitchen. Behind me is my cot, a toilet, and the only way out, a steel vault door. Mannequins on stands and carefully placed throughout my room. Two of them stand in front of me. One is a woman in a blue polka dot dress. A string of pearls, draped around her neck, give her a distinguished look. She stands over the stove holding a wooden spoon placed inside a pot. The next woman stands next to the breakfast table. She’s wearing a fire engine red pencil skirt, with a long sleeve black shirt tucked in. A silver platter with a cover is carefully balanced in her left hand. The final Mannequin stands at the foot of the cot, she wears a soft pink muumuu, and holds a children’s book.

I walk up to the mannequin standing next to my cot to investigate. A slight smile is crept across her face, but her eyes are filled with surprise and fear. Something is wrong; I reach out to touch her arm. The soft, leathery feel takes me by surprise, this is not a mannequin. I scream at the top of my lungs and jump backwards, tripping into my cot.

I have to find a way out of this room. This is all too much. I lie back down and roll over to face the wall. If I can’t see it, maybe it isn’t there. I think about my friends, my work my accomplishments, but most of all, my regrets. My mother was right; I should have faced my demons. I can’t die knowing he is

still out there unaware of the truth. A refusal to end up like one of these women fuels my survival instincts. I begin to loosen the knots around my wrists as I scan the room for a potential weapon. I could take one of the chairs, and wait by the door until he comes back and whack him with it. But what if I miss? No, the weapon of choice needs to be small, something I can hide, and wait for the right moment to strike. I scan the kitchen and recall the woman holding the wooden spoon. I can snap off the handle and use it for a shank.

I spend what feels like an eternity freeing myself. My fingers are raw and my wrists are bleeding, but my hands are finally free. I walk up to the woman in the kitchen and take a deep breath. As I pull for the spoon, the woman begins to fall over the top of me. I use what little strength I have left to stand her back up. My only possible weapon is glued to a victim.

I whisper, "I am so sorry that I must do this."

I take one last breath and grab her wrist and pull at the wooden spoon taking some of her flesh with me. The sound alone causes me to gag. I lean over the sink and let out my breakfast. Tears of grief and sorrow begin to fill my eyes, but only for a moment. I can't stop now. I have to escape, not only for myself but for these other victims. I snap the spoon in half and go back to my cot; loosely wrapping the rope around my wrists and tucking the shank under my sleeve. Now I wait.

It's not long before he returns. This time I am fully alert, and I want him to know it. The door opens; I gasp at his appearance. His tall stance and broad shoulders make me begin to worry about all of the potential holes in my plan. His face is soft and familiar, not something I would expect from a serial killer. He carries a tray with two sandwiches and two glasses of water. He stops to look at me, then glides over to the table and sits down, never taking his eyes off of me. I sit patiently and wait.

"I have never showed anyone my work before; you should feel honored to be the first." He might as well be talking to the sandwich; I don't want to hear this. "You will be my last kill. You are the one."

I look down from him, blinking back the tears' what kind of monster would do this? Does he have any form of emotions at

all? I think I read somewhere that people like him, don't. I can't imagine what dark past has made his heart so cold. I begin to pity him. But not enough to let him live

He stands up from the table and walks over to me. I let my shank slide down from my sleeve and clench it as tight as I can. He is right in front of me now; my heart is trying to escape again. The man reaches out to touch me, maybe to feel my hair, or my face, I will never know. He will not get that chance again. I thrust my shank as fast and as hard as I can into his torso. My captor falls backwards onto the ground and wheezes. I don't look at the wound, I won't get sick again. I straddle him, holding my wooden shank inside his body, feeling the soft insides, to make sure he pays for what he has done.

"I have just one question for you." I look deep into his bright green eyes when I say this. "Why me? What makes me your last kill?"

The man smiles and starts to laugh weakly. Is won't be much longer now. "Because you created me, I am the way I am because of you. I end you; I end the need to kill others like you."

I can't believe what I am hearing. I haven't seen him since birth, and thought that I would never see him again. I wanted to find him, but he found me first. Now it's too late. I stare deep into my son's eyes and watch him take his last breath.



# Suburban Necromancy

by Ryan Crippa

We are your friendly neighborhood cabal.  
We meet under the moon's pale eye,  
And circled around a table,  
We practice the arts of Necromancy.

The desiccated corpses of good cheer  
Left around town by the sinking of the sun  
Become the tools of our magics;  
We bring cheer to the unliving specters.

In their decaying frames we breathe,  
If not new life, then the semblance.  
The past experiences of others we've seen  
Become players in our own game.

We turn memory into present joy;  
And thief is such a harsh word for us.  
We only recycle what others are done with,  
And leave your good will untouched.

Morning in Glacier National Park  
by Bekah Zimmerman



# The Creek

by Zachary Hockett

The cattails rose  
above our heads  
transporting us to a new world  
a more interesting world

We followed paths  
and forged our own  
fearless, we mocked teens  
“hanging out” in our world  
then ran like natives through  
the forest they grew up in

Rules were meant to be broken  
well, bent at least  
when streetlights turned on  
we dragged our feet  
and started the roundabout way home

streams were rivers  
cattails, alien trees  
ripples, rapids  
our banal lives,  
extraordinary

# Bowstring

by Ryan Crippa

My mind was carved in elder days  
Of maple, yew and supple wood.  
It bent the stock, but bouncing, tried  
To strike a course from where I stood.

But I am born a thing of doubt,  
By nature ruled, and all my fear  
And thoughts of time, and life and death  
Will petrify, and keep me here.

But arrow nocked, with life beyond  
Now in my eye, my aim is true,  
And I will seek the proper path  
Amid these muddled shoots of you.

The Rubble of Ruble, IA  
by Kayla Gray



# The Orphan

by Zachary Hockett

Jack sat outside Anthony's office. The waiting room was cliché, it made Jack feel almost uneasy. He could feel the warm light shed by the lamps. He ran his hand over the armchairs that were scattered around the outside of the room; the cheap pleather seats gave a false sense of quality. In the center of the room stood a wooden coffee table covered in magazines championing the latest weight loss fads and promising to reveal the hidden secrets of the most popular celebrities. Jack looked at the magazines and tried to figure out what he'd be less interested in reading. He scoffed and thought to himself "An eight year-old's twitter feed might be less interesting."

Jack jumped to his feet as Anthony walked out of his office. Anthony had a trustworthy face. His fair complexion and slightly above average height was unthreatening yet commanded a certain amount of respect. Any time Jack had seen Anthony he was sharply dressed. His shirt always had a collar and more often than not, his shoes were leather. More than his appearance, his demeanor instantly placed him in a position of authority. Jack had seen him leverage people's expectations of normal social interaction to get what he needed. Jack was fond of Anthony's brand of control. They had grown to be good friends as Anthony worked to find Jack's parents. Anthony turned to Jack and said in an almost comically dramatic voice, "It's time." Jack could barely speak over the lump in his throat. He took a few breaths to recover before it got out of hand and then said.

"How do they seem?"

"That's the thing Jack," Anthony paused for a moment.

"Your mom isn't here." Jack was puzzled.

"What do you mean she's not here?"

"I'm sure he'll explain." Anthony was being cryptic but Jack decided not to press him for more information. Anthony led Jack down a narrow hallway and stopped at the second door.

"Whenever you're ready you can go in. I'll be in my office if you need me."

The door swung open to reveal a well-lit, carpeted room. A single large window overlooked the sunny harbor where the wealthy stored their yachts. In the center of the room, there stood a wooden table with chairs on either side. At the table sat Jack's father, a burly man with a round face in his fifties. His hair was faded red and pulled back into a ponytail and he sported a thick beard of the same color on his face. His flannel shirt looked completely out of place and instantly pegged him as someone from out of state. The man shifted in his chair when he saw Jack. Jack froze in the doorway and the two remained silent. After a moment, Jack slowly walked into the room and pulled out a chair, keeping his eyes fixed on his father. Finally, Jack broke the silence. "Thanks for meeting me here."

"Oh of course, I was surprised to hear you were looking for me. It's been a long time." Jack nodded and there was an awkward pause. "I suppose you don't even know my name. It's Seamus." Jack's father's voice was deep and Irish just like Jack's but it also rumbled in his chest, likely due to his age.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you Seamus. So, how was your trip down here?"

"You're not really interested in how my trip was, are you?" Seamus stood up from the table and walked to the window talking over his shoulder to Jack. "At least I would hope that's not why you invited me here, because it was quite a long trip."

"No, that's not why. I was expecting you to bring your wife though." Seamus was quiet for a moment then spoke up staring out the window.

"Your mother will have passed away 28 years ago in exactly a week." Jack could feel the color drain from his face. The lump in his throat grew so tight that for a moment he believed he might never draw another breath. His 28<sup>th</sup> birthday was in exactly a week. "I'm sorry my boy, so sorry." Jack vainly attempted to keep his composure. He'd never met the woman but emotions are a fickle thing and Jack tried to fight them as they attempted to betray him.

"You didn't tell Anthony before you came?"

"I did, but I asked him not to tell you. I thought you might not want to meet me if you knew." Seamus turned around from the

window. “I’m sorry you had to find out this way, son.” Jack didn’t like being called son by Seamus.

“Alright, we’ll skip the small talk. Why did you leave me? Were you broke, or scared?” Jack felt what was initially sorrow begin to boil into anger.

“Listen, you don’t know what it’s like to lose your wife. You can’t understand what a man goes through. I wanted to die. I still do sometimes. She was my world.”

Jack stood up from the table. He felt his palms slip on the table as he pushed up. His throat began to tighten up again and he started to hyperventilate. His heart pounded in his chest like a Taiko drum. Everything around him felt unreal and he collapsed back into his chair as his mind drifted.

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Jack had walked up the path leading of his new foster parent’s house with a hopeful look on his young boyish face. The house, rather, the mansion, had seemed gigantic and sprawling to Jack. As he walked up the steps alongside his social worker, he imagined all the fun he would have exploring rooms. The social worker straightened her suit and made sure her hair was pulled back as tight as it could be before she knocked on the door. An old man in a pinstripe suit opened the door almost immediately. He smiled an innocent grin that revealed yellowed teeth and invited them inside.

Jack started taking deep breaths as his symptoms subsided. Jack noticed his father was now back in his chair reclining. “You gonna be all right? I can leave you be if you need to rest.”

Jack stood up and stepped away from the table. “I’m fine. Sometimes I lose control for a little bit. How could you leave me? How could you walk away without a second thought? You left me to bounce in and out of home after home, family after family, only to end up in a group home doing hard labor for dirt pay. How do you justify that?”

“I cannot, nor would I try. You think I don’t know what I did was inexcusable? I know it now and I knew it then but your face.” Seamus’ face was clearly fighting tears. “Oh my boy, every time I looked into your face I saw her and I just couldn’t bear it. I



didn't have any money at the time, I could barely even hold a job. It's a wonder your mother ever had anything to do with scum like me."

Jack paced around the room. "So what am I supposed to do? Forgive you for the years of heartache and abandonment because you blamed me for my mother's death? Where were you all these years? Did you never find the courage to come and find me when you'd finished your grieving?"

"I never finished grieving." Suddenly Jack felt the symptoms of his panic attack coming back. He lowered himself to the ground and looked up to the ceiling as his body went on full alert. Sweat beaded all over his body and his mind raced.

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The old man had led Jack up a flight of stairs and down a hallway to what would be his room. The mansion had accosted Jack's nostrils, smelling strongly of mothballs and urine. The front room where his social worker met the old man was polished and clean. However, the deeper into the house they went, the more unkempt it became. The old man stopped at a door. Jack noticed there were several locks on the door. "Here's where you'll be staying. I already moved a bed in for you," the old man said. He opened the door and led Jack inside. The room was messy. The old man kicked some newspapers away as he entered the room. Jack set his suitcase on the mattress that lay on the floor. "I've got a dinner party tonight so you'll be staying up here until we're done. I don't want you making any noise and disturbing my guests either. You can occupy yourself by cleaning this room." Without another word, the old man walked out of the room and shut the door behind him. Jack heard a series of clicks from outside the door.

As Jack's mind slowed and his heart steadied, he turned his head and saw Seamus sitting on the floor next to him. "How long have you been having attacks?" Seamus grabbed Jack by the arm and helped him sit up against the wall.

"I don't remember exactly when they started, probably around nineteen."

“Yeah that’s about when mine started.” Seamus scooted against the wall to sit next to Jack. “Every once in a while it takes me right back to the nights when my father would come home drunk.” Seamus let his head fall back against the wall. “I remember when I first found out your mother was pregnant with you. I was so terrified that I’d fail you like my father failed me. Your mother was about the only thing keeping me on the straight and narrow and when she died, I just figured you were better off without me. I’m sorry I’m not the man you imagined.” Seamus sat back and breathed deeply. “Will you smoke with me?” he said, pulling out two cheap cigars. Jack reached over, grabbed the cigar, and rolled it in his fingers. Seamus smiled. “You may not have grown up in an Irish household but some things are just genetic.” Jack unwrapped the cigar and pulled it across his upper lip underneath his nose. The smell of tobacco excited his senses and made his face tingle.

“Actually, I spent a good deal of my younger years living with an old Irish man.”

Seamus sat back puffing his lit cigar. “Aye? Did he smoke?”

“Yeah,” Jack paused for a moment. “He liked to use me as an ash tray and a maid.”

Seamus opened his mouth but was at a loss for words.

Jack lit his cigar. “He really messed me up but the bastard isn’t around anymore and I’m sure as hell not gonna let him stop me from enjoying a smoke.”

# To Be Important

by Gina LoPresto

“I’ll bet I can outrace you and your horse,” Princess Hanna challenged.

“I’m sure you can, milady,” I patted my horse Greystreak gently on the nose. We were in an open field near the castle

Princess Hanna sighed. “Look, Sarah, you don’t have to call me ‘milady’ all the time. Just call me by my real name, Hanna. We’re friends, remember?”

I nodded. Ever since I had been appointed as Princess Hanna’s lady-in-waiting, we had become very close. Nevertheless, I was unconvinced. “But what if I got caught by the head housekeeper by calling you by your first name? She would make me go into that horrible root cellar where the rats run around.”

Princess Hanna looked thoughtful for a moment, then grinned. “Well, if they do catch you, just call me over and I’ll explain to them that my name is not ‘milady;’ it’s Hanna.”

We chuckled, and then I quickly mounted Greystreak. “All right then, Hanna, if we’re going to be informal, there’s one thing you’ve got to know.”

“What’s that?”

I kicked Greystreak into a full fledge gallop. “There’s no way you can beat Greystreak and me!”

“Hey, no head starts!” Hanna called out playfully.

I grinned, pretending I couldn’t hear her. Soon I could pick out the clip-clop of her horse, Brownbite, from behind.

We rode through the forest, the leaves from the overhanging trees casting green shadows over us as Greystreak and I raced well ahead of Hanna and Brownbite. I laughed aloud, feeling the freedom that I only felt while riding. My hair flowed gracefully behind me, and the sun shone down on its light brown color.

I looked behind me, and smiled again. Hanna and Brownbite were far behind. I stopped Greystreak’s gallop, and watched as Hanna rode towards us.

My thoughts drifted as I waited. As lady-in-waiting to the princess, I often had to follow her about while she did various activities, such as greeting ambassadors or attending banquets. Sometimes I felt like a shadow. No, less than that. It was more like I was an invisible person who no one ever saw nor cared much about. Everyone constantly praised Hanna about all her wondrous achievements, and I was left in the background. As much as I liked Hanna, I wanted to be something more than just a lady-in-waiting. I wanted to be important, like her.

“There she is! Get her, boys!”

I froze as four men dressed all in black leaped out of the undergrowth and stood in Hanna and Brownbite’s path.

Hanna managed to stop Brownbite. Then, she turned to the men. “What is going on here? I’m Princess Hanna of the Western Meadow, and I command you to get out of my way.”

Another man jumped out of the foliage. He was taller than the others, and was armed with a long sliver spear. His black hair matched his dark clothing, and his back was to me.

“Will you listen to her? ‘I’m Princess Hanna of the Western Meadow,’” He spoke the last seven words in a high-pitched voice. Then he sniggered. “You’ve got no ruling power here, missy. No one bosses Haden the Cold around, except for my older brother, and he’s not here now.”

My breath caught in my throat. We had heard stories of Haden the Cold from our childhood, and simply assumed them to be legends of an evil outlaw who stopped and killed travelers. Now we knew they were all true.

I spotted more men in black clothing behind Hanna, and I could hear the deep breathing of several others behind me.

Hanna’s face was white with terror.

Haden turned around, and I saw his eel green eyes glitter with jubilation. He looked towards the men. “Come on; let’s have some fun with this princess of ours.”

The men ran towards Hanna and Brownbite, and that’s when I realized that they weren’t interested in me. They only wanted Hanna. At first I was disappointed at not being important enough to be considered a prize, but then I realized that I was free. I could ride away, and maybe get help for Hanna.

I turned Greystreak around. There was no way that we could go back to the castle, since the way was blocked by the villains, Hanna and Brownbite. We would have to find aid somewhere else.

Soon I had Greystreak riding at a full gallop, whispering in his ear, “Ride faster than you ever have before! I know you can do it, old friend, I’ve seen you run fast enough to beat any horse. Do it now, please, do it now!”

It must have worked, for I truly believe that Greystreak rode at his fastest that morning, and soon we were miles away from the men in black and their captives.

My thoughts were running at a speed similar to Greystreak’s. Where could we find help? Could there be any nobles in an area this far from the palace? Not likely, for most dukes and counts preferred staying near the king for added protection. Was there any hope then?

I shook off this despairing thought, and decided that we should keep going until we spotted someone.

Just when I thought that I couldn’t ride anymore, I saw a man in a sky blue uniform standing in front of us. He held out his hand to stop us.

I reined in Greystreak, and was about to speak when the man cried out in surprise, “Hey, you’re from the West Meadow! You’d better come with me; Lord Brian will surely want to take a look at you.”

He grabbed the reins.

“Wait a minute.” My eyes popped open in alarm. “There must be some mistake. I’m Sarah, lady-in-waiting to Princess Hanna, who is in dire need. You must help me, you—”

“Quiet! I don’t take orders from you.” The soldier pulled hard on the reins and led us away.

The soldier took us out of the forest to a castle made of grey stone. I was forced to dismount. Then the soldier kicked Greystreak roughly until he rode back into the forest.

I whispered a good-bye to my faithful horse, and then was led into the castle.

The castle interior was similar to the outside. The only difference was that there were more guards inside than out, and there were a few pieces of furniture here and there.

We entered what appeared to be a throne room. The throne was nothing but a chair painted black, and seated on the throne was a man no more than thirty, with black hair and a red cape that was attached to his shoulders. He also wore a black mail shirt.

“Did you find someone from the west, Camby?”

“Yes, Lord Brian, what should I do with her?”

“Just add her to my collection in the dungeon.” He smiled. “She won’t be there for very long, because I’ve got plans for this one.”

“Yes, milord.”

I was led into a dark, cold underground dungeon. There were several wooden doors with barred windows, and as we passed, I was shocked to see some very familiar faces. Counts, dukes, and ladies from the West Meadow were all locked up in this very dungeon. I shuddered. Lord Brian’s collection was full of West Meadow’s nobles!

I was shoved into a dungeon cell at the very end and locked in. I sat against the stone wall, staring at the sunshine pouring through a barred window to my left.

I sat there for a while, feeling sad about my fate until I heard voices from above.

“Did you bring her?” Lord Brian’s voice.

The throne room must be over me, I thought.

“Yes, my dear brother, I have brought your beautiful princess.”

That was Haden!

“Good. I found that friend of hers, so now we can each get our revenge. I want to pay back that King Michel for taking away my precious things. I don’t care if I forgot to pay my debts or not, I want to see him weeping over the death of his daughter.”

“And I want him to see that we don’t care who dies, royal or commoner, we want back! Back into the Western Meadows, where we can lay around all day drinking sweet wine and chasing pretty girls.....”

“Stop your dreaming, fool! Go into the dungeon and get that young girl! Bring both of them outside into the woods, and make sure your spear is sharpened.”

I looked about desperately for a way to get out. Then I spotted the window in the wall. It was high, but I managed to leap high enough to get to it. The bars were loosened, so I was able to move one to make a small opening.

I could hear Haden’s footsteps coming towards my cell. I could hear my heart beat as fast as his running. I had to get out!

Just as I pulled myself through the opening, I heard the door to my cell open. I barely missed Haden’s spear.

I ran across the green grass, spotting the familiar woods. Maybe I could lose Haden in there.

“Get back here, you!”

My eyes widened in horror. He had gotten through the window!

I continued my dash to the woods, and then I heard a familiar whinny.

“Greystreak!” I threw myself onto his back, and we galloped through the forest, leaving Haden miles behind.

We rode until we finally made it to the palace. I leapt off Greystreak’s back and ran to the palace gate, where two guards were stationed.

“You’ve got to hurry! Princess Hanna is in a castle at the far end of the woods. They’re going to kill her!”

The guards quickly left their posts, assembled several men on horseback, and rode off.

I paced the palace green worriedly. Did I arrive too late? Had Lord Brian decided that since I had gotten away he should have Hanna killed? Had my actions actually caused more harm than good?

Two hours later, they returned with Hanna, the light blue uniformed guards, the black clothed men, and the once imprisoned nobles. Hanna embraced me fondly. “Well done, Sarah! The guards killed Haden and Lord Brian, and their men are being taken as prisoners. Oh, and the nobles of the Western Meadow are all freed. You really did something great today.”

My eyes widened. She was right. I had done something important that day by escaping and telling the guards what was going on. As we all went into the castle for a celebration, I began to think that maybe everyone could do important things, even a lady-in-waiting.



North Dakota through the Eyes of a  
Photographer  
by Bekah Zimmerman



# In the Dairy Section

by Ryan Crippa

You open the boxes of  
Pre-Crumbled Blue Cheese  
Two cases- one regular, one light-  
And place half on the shelf  
Behind the older ones, to ensure  
They sell first.

Then, you see it- the Low-Fat  
Pre-Crumbled Blue Cheese  
Is light-  
A lighter blue color package  
Signifying its lower fat content-  
And everything stops.

Stars shine in your eyes  
And sparks flare across your brain  
You think you see the universe-  
Galaxy-eyed, smiling,  
Laid out before you like a lover,  
A map, and an invitation, all at once.

As you stare, blinded by sight,  
She beckons, whispering in your ear  
Where do you want to go?  
And you feel her breath on your neck,  
Anticipating the only answer you could ever give.  
Smiling, trembling, shining, you whisper back  
Everywhere.

And you place the cheese on the shelf.

# The Royal Should

by Brandon Hull

I should smoke a bowl. I should loosen up and find a joint to roll. I should take a shot, party a lot, sleep through the day and complain later on about the hangover I got. I should remember when I blacked out, how poorly I packed the last slot, I should take the last spot, put off the task and stop asking a lot. But I should be a better student, stop betting what I got and save in the bank take a bus and avoid topping the tank off. In fact, I should ride my bike, I should eat local, I should look neater, junk the beater, find a welfare queen and feed her and her seventeen illegitimate children.

I should stop speaking my mind, stop being an ass, I should stop sneaking in line so I don't have to be last. I should make more money, flirt with less honey, but I shouldn't be single so go on a nice date, and I shouldn't complain about the food I ate, about this girl being late because why can't she be on time? That's really annoying. I should read the Word. I should stop playing games and go flip someone the bird. I should stop bottling up and speak my mind. Which is funny because people get angry when I speak my mind. So I should bottle up. And I should bottoms up and bottle out and battle it out with someone I should care about.

I should sit straighter, stop staying up later, I should stop hitting on that girl because I guess I'm trying to bait her and I should wait it out and play the field because the right one's out there but I shouldn't be a player. I should conform to expectations, and inform the congregations that I should be somewhere else but I'm not because you should give me your money and my jokes should be funny so you should laugh while I sit and tell myself that I should be happy.

# Amidst the Moonlit Twilight

by Thomas Shumate

A din rang out as a shot pierced through my best friend's once sugary coating, revealing a crimson flow of succulent virtue. "Strawberry!" Our variety boxes' incredulous reaction shook the very foundation of Kellogg's originally intricate design. We lay adjacent to one another confined in a four corner, cubical box with the vague epigram "Crazy Good!" printed in colorless letters on the largest of three potential sides of rectangular prism. The proprietors who transported us here trapped us in a disconcerting sea of subterfuge, leaving us extinguished in a vortex of oblivion.

The sporadic appetites such creatures contain only serve to fluctuate the transcendent generalities created by a generation of pastries previously obstinate to their sinister complacency. We were once thriving beyond any other early morning captive in the proprietor's "Breakfast" cabinet. Our supercilious ignorance to the neglected treatment of the other captives provided a bittersweet reaction to the tumultuous mutiny and dilatory flow of scarlet ectoplasm. Strawberry would be deceased before her expiration date.

"No!" Cherry's anguish echoed throughout the cabinet, Brown Sugar desperately urged her away. Strawberry's hand lifted to her chest in discovery of the incessant bleeding then fell to my arms as I held her in a somber state of remorse for what I will forever associate with this night: an incurably eternal absence of my vigil, a solitary evening any other I would be tempted to dismiss as simply singular. Now I lay inside a self-inherited sarcophagus still alive in a detrimental singularity.

I guided her still innocent eyes toward the proprietor's misplaced nametag and whispered: "Freddy never knew you like I did; he will never understand you were sweeter than Mrs. Butterworth herself." The method by which her eyes flooded with an exhilarating happiness was as devastating to me as the very soul

I once adored, leaving those eyes afterwards. I turned toward my remaining life-long companions: Brown Sugar Cinnamon and Cherry, then to the dark abyss where I'd heard the shot, then to the sky to plead a merciful ending to the all-powerful Kellogg. "Leave." I spoke now to my companions. "If this is a war, let them take the cabinet."

"You fool! How can you say that? How can we leave?" Cherry argued. I assumed by our positioning Brown Sugar shared my opinion as we faced the opening of our variety box closest to the exit and salvation from this cabinet.

"This isn't a war, Cherry. It's a revolution and we're all going to die if you don't let us through this door." Brown Sugar spoke vehemently. "I mean; is this what Strawberry would've wanted?"

"You didn't know Strawberry! You didn't know her." Cherry retreated from the exit and knelt by Strawberry's side just as I did, ignoring the circumstantial sunflower seed which resulted in her fatal wound, the shrewd seed drowning in a pungent puddle of strawberry frosting. "Get out of here, I won't go with you."

We abandoned Cherry, the desolate queen of a king-sized variety pack, never stopping to mourn, not speaking a word to each other. We knew her impending but bizarre demise and biblical horseman was soon along the sunset's horizon.

"We have to go." The words exited my awkwardly animated mouth like two untoasted pastries escaping from a suburban family's breakfast cabinet. Brown Sugar and I discreetly escaped the wrath of every discontent breakfast captive and boisterously landed on the ebony floor four feet below.

We sprinted, with no coherence other than two cast away stallions galloping and the melodious songs of freedom as our chauffeur. We arrived at our proprietor's doggy door and at this point our safety became irrelevant. The outside world was beyond both the beauty of a blueberry pop-tart with *extra* frosting and a factory created in a glorious act of divine intervention.

"Hoo-hoo!" An intriguing gesture triggered our feet to swivel and face our previous residence: the cabinet. I immediately recognized the Pillsbury Doughboy as he held the pathetic severed

head of Cherry while frosting constantly oozed through her neck and painted his haughty all white tuxedo.

“May Kellogg save their souls.” Brown Sugar uttered and I turned to elevate myself to the doggy door. I slowly pushed it through and with bona fide sincerity aided his escalation to our serene podium as we languidly and simultaneously fell to the pavement of the sidewalk.

“We’re free to live out our expiration dates.”

“Who knows? Maybe even more.”

It was dark, and the crescent moon could only illuminate the sky. The roads stretched on for miles. With no fractiousness we sat down and watched the night sky, the mesmerizing stars. One star started from the edge of the Earth with which we lay parallel, shooting straight up and separating into two. One crimson, which reminded me of Cherry, one scarlet, which reminded me of Strawberry. Upon explosion we barely found time to panic before a murder of a dozen crows began flying from their perch upon a nearby poplar tree toward our recently compromised position.

# Colors

by Brandon Hull

On the horizon of a foreign place,  
in a region that reeked of an empty space,  
on the surface of a dry and barren face,  
the wind rushed overhead.

Around this edge was a broken ground,  
a senseless mess lacking life or sound.  
Amidst bones piled up like a burial mound,  
I saw a spot of red.

Long I sat and dwelt on this,  
the spot of red that seemed amiss.  
Why would it breathe in this abyss,  
when no other color could be seen?  
When at last I thought it figured out,  
this spot of red in a lifeless drought  
I looked beyond and with a shout,  
saw the shaft of green.

So now I sat with a second shade,  
scratching my head at the puzzle laid.  
The green had formed a single blade,  
while wind came barreling through.

The blades continued to multiply,  
the strength of the wind they did defy.  
I'd not yet grasped the how or why,  
when I saw a pulse of blue.

Still the red sat patiently so,  
seemingly waiting for the green to grow.

As the blue breathed life and began to glow,  
the wind it did refine.

The ground before me now whispered sweet,  
filled with green that caressed my feet  
I craned my neck and took a seat,  
and my soul began to pine.

For what I longed I was unaware,  
as the blue continued to change the air  
I began to weep, my soul laid bare,  
as the red began to rise.

I longed for the edge where the red seemed bright,  
it changed to orange and then to white.  
No longer bound, my soul took flight  
and I reached up towards the skies.



# December 20th

by Thomas Shumate

How I wish to hold you in my arms  
And watch the world end  
Through your thoughts  
My dearest friend I can only recollect  
The days I praised her beauty,  
Beauty you can usually detect.  
With an open mind I ask you  
Have you ever had regrets  
Would you be trapped inside your hindsight  
Or would you find light in the end?

The world may not end tomorrow  
But the days are growing near  
When I fear that I will lose you  
Although you choose to be so dear  
I may have had you for a moment  
And that moment seems too clear  
For each moment I pass with you  
In a flash, begets a year.  
I think that we can live forever  
If you never leave from here.

They say the world could never end  
On any day that ends in "y"  
But the world ends tomorrow  
So let us spend all day and night  
Admiring what the coming fire brings to light  
A world worth our presence  
In the essence of its right  
So before we leave the earth  
I would like to write this dirge  
That we all just might rehearse  
While the end is but an unsightly curse

I had a vision I would die  
After you listened to this verse  
As if it were my mission  
To give in, then disperse  
That I would be abused until  
Too useless to be hurt  
I could not see you as my friend  
Because I was fleeing from the Earth  
I may not have known it then,  
But I lay dreaming in reverse.

# A Tree

by Zachary Hockett

What if I was as patient as a tree?  
standing with arms outstretched  
gripping the earth with my roots  
almost as tight as I hold onto life  
surviving brutal winters  
scorching summers.  
facing a storm as fearless as  
a samurai faces his death

guarding the home of the boy who planted me.  
long enough to watch him pass from this life  
so patient that I grow not attached to an individual  
but to a family.  
watching the generations pass by  
like a scrapbook of life

If I were as patient as a tree  
I could stand with my weeping arms  
drooping down just far enough to  
break the cool surface of the water.

I could watch the generations of Koi  
developing their unique patterns  
that could only be found  
in my pond.  
a speckled red and black  
a creamy white and gold

# Some Tastes

by Karlynn O'Neil

Some tastes,  
when I'm with you,  
are the most important  
flavor that could be happening  
right now.

There is no cherry or tomato.  
There are no previous courses served.  
Only the paper thin mint  
of you  
on my tongue.

This breath strip  
is all that is.  
And to look at your smile  
would give my eye a cavity.

# Self Destructive

by Thomas Shumate

You are like... The feeling I get when I hear someone else's  
argumentative poetry  
Because I've never been able to make an argument  
And I just won't make you mine while you're ignoring me  
Let me just say; for me, that today will be tomorrow's mission

And by that I mean... /Scratch that, I wanna remove everything  
I've written: No  
Scratch that, I wanna remove my brain and just write... what feels  
right  
Scratch that, I just want you to see who I can be and not who I  
have been  
And I'm scratching it, but my skull is so adept at... bleeding and  
not needing

Bandages; when you ask me a question and I tell you that the  
answer is:  
"It wasn't the cat that jumped from the roof, I just had pussy on my  
mind"  
I am giving you both the lie, and the joke: which I am so  
encanvassed in  
Because I know that I, could not explain to you that scratching was  
one night's way to find

Why I'm enslaved by time, so I tell you to stay the night  
Because I know it's so outrageous, that you laugh  
And the next time that I'm trapped I will instead find  
That the cages are much larger than just my father's past

I could say: "speaking of my father's pest,"  
And then tell you how I'm feeling  
But being dealt a bad hand is not my only consequence  
And if I had just knelt, then by definition I would still be kneeling

...Then I would not have held the stars, or felt your arms  
Become the drums and ammunition of my ceiling  
Sometimes I hallucinate and use the way I feel  
To steal a night of healing.

I bite my nails because I'm so afraid  
That at night when I am sleeping I will claw so deeply into my  
bleeding chest,  
That my soul escapes  
Though you could so easily be the keeper of my heart, you could  
not keep an open cage

I promise you cannot do what is impossible  
I promise to be honest when you want me to  
But you don't want me to  
I know, Maddie, trust me I know, you don't want me to

I can tell you why I put all of their names somewhere in my poetry  
But I cannot tell you why "I'm enslaved by time"  
Is NOT a satirical... mirror pulled from the back of a... track star  
seeing gold  
Who thinks she's all alone

But is really still the five year old me, who's the reason why I  
don't see anything  
-He's the keeper of my strings who tells me "help me" silently  
But I don't want for you to be tangled in my web  
You say that I'm an angel, but I'm Chris Angel in a magic trick  
'cause I don't get my halo wet

Drowning in a lake that takes me years to say: reminds me of your  
eyes  
And that's not a metaphor because I tried to kill myself when I was  
five  
When I realized that life, life is no place for people as fragile as me  
And I still hate myself for thinking it and I still think it when I hate  
myself

Which is to say: "I'm always thinking the world hates me when  
I'm surrounded by my thoughts of it"

I was so afraid of drinking, and then telling you all of this

I was so afraid of the taste... of misplaced confidence

I'm afraid if you were next to me I would whisper: "Miss, have sex  
with me," "I love you"

Under my alcoholic... breathlessly like my mother when she tested  
me

I called police and had her arrested thinking she would die if I did  
nothing

I'm supposed to get much smarter but my mind it keeps on rusting;

Which sounds too much like resting so I close my eyes and fall  
asleep:

Where I'm scared of nearly everything

Where I'm falling and I'm swallowed in the mezzanine

Even dreaming I cannot tolerate the little things

I've been called a sadist, watching Satan stalk my paper in my  
dreams

I go on random walks at night where I must sabotage my mind,

Because a dead women hanging from the branches answers  
questions

I simply have not asked her, and I've met her but I cannot tell you  
why

Because I cannot remember.

You say bro, like I'm your brother

But I know I would be the greatest... Ex-Lover

Because I will always be a bird with wings

Who only flies where you think I deserve to be

They have always told me just to be myself

But myself is the five year old who tied the rope of heavy thoughts

To his neck and dreamed of density as he leaped into the lake

And just said "Leave me naked, take my everything"

# Dreams

by Zachary Hockett

I woke up one evening  
my dreams surrounded me  
dressed in dark robes  
faceless, their palms  
turned up like someone  
begging for alms

my bed stood in blackness  
smoke or fog rolled like  
water blown by some unknown,  
unfelt force

a small one caught my eye  
a little girl,  
like a thought out of print  
a forgotten relic of naïve ambition  
forcing her way to  
the front of the crowd

she held out her palms like  
the others, black and red beads  
rested in her hands,  
I reached out,  
but my wrists were bound  
by ropes of coarse twine  
that dug into my flesh

a second dream  
a man, larger than the rest,  
reached out grabbing the girl  
her robes dropped to the floor empty,  
beads clattered to the ground



I woke up one evening  
my dreams surrounded me  
bright, colorful dreams,  
as dead as a fallen leaf in autumn

# Send It to Your Mother, Pretend You Miss Her for Only \$19.99

by Ryan Crippa

Ahead, a shelf  
Flaunt, and flutter,  
Baubling, trinketing, useless  
Lacking meaning,  
Full, bursting with nothing

Were I to August,  
To smolder and burn,  
I would exert meaning;  
I would symbol all over that shelf,  
And it would be bursting with shatter.

But I cannot August,  
Cannot find the wherewithal  
To Summer my soul,  
So instead, I December.  
How much for this little clear one? I ask.

# A Day Worth Waiting For

by Gina LoPresto

On December 8, 2004, my Dad, digital camera in hand, raced to the pew where my class and I were sitting and excitedly said, “Your sister has been born!” Then he showed a picture he took of her to me and my eager fourth grade class.

It had been a typical day at St. Michael’s school, and to finish the day off we had school Mass. My brother Luke’s eighth grade class was doing the Mass parts.

When Mass was over, we were just about to leave when my Dad made his announcement. My fourth grade class and I huddled around the camera like bugs attracted to a light, looking at the little screen which revealed my tiny sister.

“Wow, that’s great!” one student said.

“Aw, she’s so cute!” another said.

After a while, my Dad turned the camera off. “I have to go now and show it to Luke!” Then he left.

Oh wow! I thought. This is great! I’ve been waiting so long for this day to come, and now it’s finally here!

As soon as school was over, my Dad picked up Luke and I from school. Then he drove us to the hospital where my Mom and my newest sibling were waiting.

“What’s her name? Can I hold her? Will I be able to play with her?” I asked enthusiastically, feeling as though the car couldn’t drive fast enough.

My Dad chuckled. “Her name is Maria, and you can hold her when we get to the hospital. You won’t be able play with her yet, though, she’s too little right now.”

We finally arrived at the hospital and quickly found Mom’s room. She was sitting on her hospital bed, nursing Maria. Her room had white walls, and to the right of the bed was a whiteboard with Maria’s name, her weight, when she was born, and what gender she was. To the left there was a big window and some chairs for visitors. It was just like the kind of hospital room you’d see in the movies.

When I first saw Maria on the camera, I thought she looked like a chick that had just been hatched out of an egg, all wet with egg yoke. But now she looked completely dry, as though someone had blown a hair-dryer on her.

The most memorable thing about baby Maria was her hair. It wasn't a bunch of little hairs scattered around the top of her head that most babies have. Her hair was all over her head in such a way that you couldn't see any of her head underneath. It was a rich brown, with a little pink bow in it, like a little present.

I got to hold her first. I sat in a chair on the right next to the bed where my Mom was sitting. Maria was all wrapped up in white blanket, and was so small I was afraid I would break her. It was a moment I would remember for the rest of my life.

Luke got to hold Maria next. At this point, Dad got out the camera and started to video-tape.

“Well, how are you, Mom?” Dad asked with a laugh.

“Oh, I'm fine,” Mom responded. “I'm very happy to be with my family, all four of them.”

Today, Maria is seven years old and attends St. Michael's school. She is very active and enjoys being outside. Every now and then I think back to when Maria was a little baby, and while I enjoy the fact that Maria is growing up, I wish I could hold that itty bitty bundle again. I wish I could relive that day when she was born. I wish that the day Maria was born could always stay with me, because it was a day worth waiting for.

# The Sea's Lament

by Charles Shaw

I sit at the hearth, in some rat filled tavern. I drown my sorrows in the vinegar that the man behind the bar dares to call wine. I am numb to the world. The tides sing in my veins but I ignore it. Another night passes and I have not moved from my seat. People in the room stare furtively through the hearth smoke, and whisper that I am not of this world. The barman keeps them from me for the moment, for he is well paid in forgotten coins. My reverie is interrupted by a sailor, the wine heavy on his breath. He suggests obscenity and I ignore him. He reaches for my arm and I flee the tavern, his face a picture of shock at my dissolution. I seek a place of deeper solitude, far from all sailors.

I find myself growing fond of being incarnate, the simplicity of finite vision. I settle in a port that hadn't felt my steps before. I know the language without speaking it before. A room which faces the land lets me forget. I wander the streets, the bustle soothing. The market I learn has its own tides just as regular as my own. For the challenge of it, I start trading with the merchants. I do not listen to what the waves tell me of the ships on the sea and so I must fetch more gold from the deep. But soon I learn enough, and invest in the cargos crossing my former realms. A share becomes a ship, and the ship a fleet.

And so I find myself once again watching the horizons, my hands beneath the waves relaxed. The tides still sing in my bones, but the waves have long fallen silent. I talk to sailors and merchants and nobles, and find their brief concerns have come to concern me. Many find me odd, but a few come to know me and I feel completed. Others may sense and fear the Sea in me, but my friends understand me. I do not even hint at my heritage. They would ask for favors, and then my favor would be assumed, even when I cannot give it.

I still remember him, the brush of his beard on my cheek, his arms around me. My arms around his frame. My arms pulling

him down again and again. I still remember him and I leave the tides to their own counsel.

Sky calls to me, his voice unheard by ears. “Sister, why have you abandoned us?”

I speak, and my other voice is strange to me. “Because I had no taste for company.”

He sighs though whether he means it or not I cannot say. “But you surround yourself with humans, and leave me to dance above silent seas.”

“Because the humans let me be other than Sea, singer of waves.”

Sky is puzzled, I can feel it in the breeze. “You are Sea, no matter what dust you hide in. Come back to us, please.”

I look down at my hands and their hard won callouses and think of myself, once again a part of every shore and storm. I think of the depth where no eye can see, and the shallows where you may walk across the shoals without wetting your feet. I realize I think in human terms now, my perspectives winnowed down to five.

“You are welcome in my house, but you must wear dust and obey the laws of man under my roof.”

“Brother Stone is your house, I dance through your open windows. There is no in, no out. Why must you stay here and never wander a step.”

“My steps are made with sandals now. If you will not walk as I do then go.”

“I shall not stay where my sister does not want me to. We will await your return to yourself.”

A week passes and I stand on the promontory and call to my cousins. “Brothers and sisters I would speak with you.”

I sense their attention, in the breeze and in the grasses. Storm rumbles his interest from the clear blue sky. “I have come to a decision.”

Forest interrupts, “Then shuck your dust and join us in our dances once more.”

I shake my head and realize they wouldn't understand the gesture. "I will stay as I am. I had always been Sea until I took on this dust I call a body."

Forest interrupts, the spring time making him boisterous. "You are Se-" Storm cuts across him. "Let her speak, I would hear her reasons."

I nod gratefully at the sky and continue. "I doubt that I am Sea any longer. In my absence the tides still turn, and I have found I want more than rote existence. I will stay as I am and that is my final word. You'll always be welcome where I make my home, as long as you come gently."

And I walk down the hill as breezes whip through the grass and towering waves crash on the shore. The argument will go on for days and then they will accept my decision. I hope that they won't try and force me back. Regardless, I will make the best of this life until I grow too old, say my goodbyes and then who knows? There's always another port.

# Expectations and Disappointment

by Korryn Downey

There was a bus. It was hurtling down a highway. Each mile bringing me closer to hell; also known as Augusta Maine.

*I really wish I was alone right now; it was not good for me to be in such a crowded place when I am mad.* I used to get in trouble in school for fighting, and a bus is not the most ideal place for a fight. I sighed heavily. No one wanted to be on this bus. Each passenger had a distasteful frown on their face. Although that could be due to the fact that it was a much too hot July day. The sun had turned the bus into a greenhouse filled with the heavy smell of BO and cheap perfume.

“Are you going to talk to me?” Sean asked. I was too mad to respond to him. I hadn’t seen my brother, Sean, since Christmas. He went to college at Ohio State, and the drive from there to our home in Chicago was too long to make often. Yet he came home when my father told him that we were in trouble.

“Christine,” he said sternly.

“What,” I sighed still looking out the window.

“Look at me,” he demanded. I turned, and looked into his hazel eyes. They mirrored my color perfectly. Part of his right eye was covered by his caramel hair; it was much longer than last time I had seen him. He had shaven before he came to retrieve me; he always looked so much younger when he shaved.

“I’m sorry. Taking you to Maine is the best thing right now. Trust Dad and me to keep you safe,” he said. His eyes gleamed with the fear behind his words. My lazy summer was abruptly halted, and my brother summoned, when my dad was mugged. He had lost almost a thousand dollars that was supposed to be brought to the man he distributes drugs for. They gave him two weeks to come up with the money, but he could only gather three hundred dollars. His work as a marijuana dealer was all that brought money into our house, and as it is, we were barely making rent. I had begged my dad plenty of times to get a real job, but it didn’t matter. The real jobs never lasted.



The dealer's thugs broke into our house one night, and trashed it. They left us a note saying if my dad didn't get their money soon they were going to kill me.

Out of desperation my erratic father called Sean home; they fought for three days straight. When they finally called it quits my dad announced that he had an idea. The plan was to put me on house arrest; just not in our house. He had a friend in Maine who said he would take Sean and me in. And so we embarked on an agonizing two day bus ride.

"I know you think so, but you don't understand how it's been since you left." I shook my head.

"You are only eighteen; you're still a child," Sean insisted.

"I'm grown up enough not to need you," I snapped harshly. I shuffled back around, and rested my head against the window.

"What happened to us?" he asked under his breath. With that said, I dug into the book bag at my feet, and retrieved my MP3 player. Putting the ear buds in, I turned on Avenged Sevenfold, and listened to the lead singer wail about being buried alive.

I knew Sean was right to ask what happened to us. When we were younger it was him and me against the world. When my mom and I got into the car accident that took her life my dad became depressed. Sean stepped up, and took care of me. He gave me my pain medication for my broken arm, and cooked meals every day. He was only nine years old, and I seven. We continued to be that close even after my dad recovered. I don't know why, but when Sean left for college I changed.

I was rudely shaken awake from one of the best sleeps I had gotten in two days. With partly unconscious confusion I pulled out my ear buds, and looked over at Sean. The bus was dark; lit scarcely by a few lights near the ceiling.

"We are here," Sean informed me. I looked back out the window. The sun was barely peeking over the trees that now lined the road in thin rows. *Shit do they have a lot of trees around here! This was supposed to be one of the bigger cities in Maine; yet I felt like I should see wolves or Big Foot chasing the bus.* Just as I was about to say something to Sean we turned left, and broke past the trees.

The bus pulled into a large roundabout. A marble woman looked down at me from a fifty foot tall pedestal in the grassy tree lined center. We pulled away, and headed into town. Maybe “into town” was the wrong way to explain it. Even in the heart of Augusta there were so many god damn trees. It was so unlike Chicago. I hated it. I scowled at the blurred trees.

The bus pulled into the parking lot of a high school and came to a too abrupt halt. With groans of relief everyone rose to their feet. Sean seemed pleased, and I don’t know why. I mean we were practically in the middle of a forest!

“Let’s go,” Sean ordered. I looked over at him in wide eyed fear; would we be able to survive this trip? Numbly I fumbled with my bag, throwing it over my shoulder, and then followed Sean off the bus. Just before we exited, I ran my hands through my long dark brown hair; it had knotted from sleeping against the window. I repositioned my camisole, and the black sweatshirt that was over it. I hated to admit it, but I was kind of nervous.

I stepped off the bus, and into the virgin Maine air. No hint of smog or natural gas lingered above us. The air was crisp, and filled with the scent of freshly cut grass. I have only been out of Chicago a handful of occasions, but never have I ever breathed such clean air before.

Sean and I watched as the parade of sleep deprived travelers met up with their families, and friends. Everyone was hugging, and emotional. I looked impassively between the small groups of waiting people until I found two strangers holding a sign. With messy squiggled lines it said ‘Christine and Sean.’ I looked up at Sean, he had spotted them too, and with a knowing nod we went to confront our prison guards.

“Welcome to Maine,” the older of the two men cheered as we approached them. The man was short. His pale blue eyes shined with promise. With a pleasant smile, and noticeable beer belly he seemed very comforting.

“Hi, I’m Sean. This is my sister Christine,” Sean said, motioning to me.

“It’s very nice to meet you both! I’m Dan and this is my youngest son, Mason.” The older man nodded next to him. Mason was an interesting character, and I found myself taking ample time

to assess him. He looked like the kind of person that I would get along with. He wore a faded ACDC shirt, and black jeans. His hair was, obviously, died raven black. It was an interesting contrast against his pale blue eyes; which matched his father's. I looked up at him; he was tall. I almost had to lean back to look at his face.

"I'll go get our bags from the bus; just wait a minute," Sean said, leaving my side.

"How was your ride?" Dan asked kindly.

"Long," I groaned in exasperation.

"Well, we are happy that you two are finally here," he said.

"Speak for yourself," Mason scoffed. Dan scowled at his disingenuous son.

"These two weeks will just fly by, I'm sure. You'll be heading back to your father before you know it," Dan gushed. A small pang of hope unfurled in my heart. *I had to stop listening to this guy, or I might actually get hopeful.*

"Not fast enough," Mason said looking everywhere, but at his dad.

"Well it's great to meet you, too," I said, looking Mason. His eyes got big in with surprise, and he stared down at me with angry disbelief.

"Here you go," Sean said, returning with our two rolling suit cases.

"Mason, grab Christine's suitcase for her," Dan ordered.

"Over my dead body," Mason scoffed.

"Don't worry, I'm strong. I can carry my suitcase, and your son's dead body," I said cheerfully smiled at Dan. Everybody fell silent, and Sean looked at me with wide eyed horror. Mason frowned at me, but I could see humor in his eyes. I knew he thought it was funny, but there was no way he was going to laugh at *my* joke.

"Well, on that note shall we get going?" Sean said with an awkward laugh.

"Ah yes, this way please," Dan nodded. He led us to a rundown Jeep Cherokee. We discarded our luggage in the trunk. Sean opened the back driver side door, and allowed me to climb in first. He followed, and we settled into the noisy fake-leather seats.

With a disheartening clang, and a weak roar, the car was eased alive. Leaving the bus behind, we headed down State Street; which stretched along the entire town. Each building stood with regal beauty. Everything was brick with large pillars. A large tan building caught my eye in the distance; it was easily the biggest building I had seen so far. As we passed I read the matching stone sign that said Kennebec Country Correctional Facility. *Yeah, that makes me feel safe*, I laughed inwardly.

We took a left onto Winthrop Street, and arrived at our destination. While the surrounding houses were large and gleamed with lavish Victorian pride, this house was small. The dark blue siding was chipped, and the white shutters discolored.

“Home sweet home,” Dan mused as he parked the car in the driveway. After retrieving all of our belongings Sean and I were led into our dilapidated prison cell.

Once inside, I surveyed the main floor skeptically. The painting on the inside was a hundred times better than the outside. The house had a very open floor plan. The large main room functioned as a full scale kitchen, dining room, and semi spacious living room. The couch was sunk in, and had a stain on the left arm rest. There were childhood pictures on the refrigerator, and a chip taken out of the floor next to the front door. It wasn't perfect, but that's what gave it a comforting homey feel.

“You two will be sleeping upstairs. I have two older sons, but they are long since moved out. So we have two extra bedrooms,” Dan explained. Kicking off our shoes Sean and I followed Dan up a flight of stairs, and into the cramped hallway of the upper level. There were four doors.

“The bathroom is the first door to your left. Sean, you will be staying in the first room on your right, and Christine in the second,” Dan said motioning to the right side of the hallway.

Forcefully Mason pushed past us. He went to the last room on the right. Quickly he swung the door open, stepping inside, and then slammed it shut. Seconds ticked by, and an angry yet strangely familiar sound came from his room. He was listening to *Cherub Rock* by Smashing Pumpkins! So he has a good taste in music, interesting.

“My room is down at the bottom of the stairs. Let me know if you need anything,” Dan nodded. Wait, there was a door at the bottom of the stairs?

“I’m going to go put my stuff away,” I said walking to my new bedroom. It was directly across from Mason’s. I shut my door quietly, and scowled at it. I could just barely make out the song being played across the hall. The singing voice slipped away, and the guitar solo started. I closed my eyes. It was a comforting song. The singing started again; the singer wailed the words “let me out” over and over. I chuckled inwardly, and turned to face my new room.

It was exceedingly small, and was extremely scarce as far as furniture goes. A small single bed stood against the back wall, and a rather large armchair sat in the corner nearest me. That was it. The rest of the room was empty. There were no posters on the mint green walls, no desk, or anything else that would make me believe that someone lived here once.

I set down my suitcase on the pale wood floor, which matched the flooring in the hallway, and yet again retrieved my MP3 player from my bag. I knew I had the song the Mason was listening to. I put in my ear buds, and sprawled out upside down on the bed. This way my head rested at the very foot of the bed. I found the song, and put it out repeat.

Exhausted from my trip, I gazed out the small window; all I could see was a large tree. *Some idiot had planted it just outside the window. Wasn’t the point of a window so that you could see outside? I liked the way I could look out onto my neighborhood from my bedroom window. This room was nothing like my bedroom back home.* It was going to be a long two weeks...

# Born

by Carolyn Thornton

Out I came. Out of the darkness into  
bright lights.  
Where am I? Who are these people?  
I feel connected to the person I was in  
but they are taking me away.  
Why? Where am I?

Ouch, they hit me on the butt.  
They cut something off me.  
They stick me and probe me.  
They weigh me and wash me.  
They dress me,  
Where am I? Who are they?

Finally, they hand me to someone.  
I feel connected to this person.  
Who is he? He hands me to someone.  
I feel connected to this person.  
Who is she? She kisses me.  
Where am I?

She swaddles me.  
She sings to me.  
He smiles at me.  
He rubs my head.

More people come.  
They seem cool.  
They hold me.  
They kiss me.  
Who are they?

There are smaller people.  
They look strange,  
faces uncertain.  
They get hugs and kisses.

I am aware.  
Four senses are working.  
Fingers and toes.  
I feel the coolness of the birthing room.  
I feel the warmth of the blankets  
I smell the alcohol and cleanliness of the room.  
I hear the oohs and ahs.

Who am I?

# Sara, Sara, Dressed in White

by Kayla Gray

Standing by my closet, dressed in white, with a long veil and the bottom of the gown swishing at her feet. Tattered with filth and ruin, like her life had become—her eyes were black. She had a pearl necklace she ran through one hand and a knife clenched in the other; a carving knife dripping red as she walked. She had a large smile on her face, but her thin veil hid its fullness. She was barefoot and her dress encouraged more dirt as she continued on. Her hair was falling around her in matted tendrils. The dress had red stains all over, long dried and crusted with age.

The slap of her dirt-crusted feet against the floor must have woken me. I was in the realm of dreaming but not asleep. I looked up and she smiled down at me. The fear rose like I was being thrown from a ledge. She put the bloody knife behind her back and nuzzled her face against mine. I felt no sensation from the touch, but the smell of dust and something venomous hit my nose, like being in a sterile hospital. I didn't know what she had done, but it was something terrible. I didn't move, didn't dare make a sound, in fear I would be next. Her breath hot on my face, in the now chilled room, she began to ramble.

“Will was a mad man. Will was a mean man. Will was a cruel man. Will was an evil man.” She stopped and lifted her knife. One hand clutched around the hilt and the other spinning the knife on her index finger. Turning it over and over again, like her mind was turning as well. The motion soothed her I think, and then tears flowed down her eyes in black rain. Her make-up smudged, and her dress a mess from whatever she had done. I finally opened my eyes and she met mine and smiled a knowing smile at me.

*What did you do?* It was a question lingering on my lips, but she didn't need to hear it. Somehow she knew. The tears had stopped and she stared blankly at me.

“I had to kill Will.” Images of her and her now dead husband flooded into my mind. How happy they were on their wedding day. The elation she felt as she walked down the aisle,



going to be Mrs. Will Prescott. Their mutual love of Jazz bringing them together at a night club that no longer existed.

I shuddered and wanted to hide my face under the covers. Then her eyes glazed over and she repeated it again. “Will was a mad man. Will was a mean man. Will was a cruel man. Will was an evil man. I MUST KILL WILL!” It was her justification.

A small whimper came from me and she once again had eyes full of darkness. She was in the center of the room and then as soon as I blinked my eyes she was right next to me again. Face to face.

“Shhhhhh,” she tried to soothe me. She lifted her veil and I began to scream. The skeleton and pieces of flesh that clung to it was all I saw, while the other half of her face was still normal. “I just had to kill will.”

I blinked again, willing the nightmare to end and she was gone. I fell back asleep.

I never saw her again... Sara, the bride that never made it past her wedding day, but many more came to me. Las Fantomas. Ghosts. They feared going to hell and paying penance for what they had done, so they lingered in the hereafter. I listened to them when I was in the realm of dreaming but not asleep. Ghosts of people that once were shared their stories with me, consuming me, making me feel as they had in life.

*Sara, Sara, Dressed in white. Gave her husband a terrible fright. She took a knife and carved his back. We all knew her mind was cracked.*

Small Life  
by Mark Daniels



# I Run

by Gina LoPresto

My shoes thump on the big rocks  
As my legs frantically move back and forth  
I run  
I often crash into trees, scraping my knees  
But soon I am wallowing, the unknown following  
I run  
Sometimes I will stop and ask myself, "What am I running from?  
Is it some type of monster? Is it something I cannot stop?"  
But then I think of the unknown following, and I am off again.  
I run!

# Heartbreak

by Thomas Shumate

You have no clue, how often I smile when I walk for a while  
Thinking of you  
You're the opposite, I know, but I still hop into the lava pit  
Really... It's true

I would lose my mind if you were to decide  
That I am not your dream  
But does that mean that you are hiding  
Or that I cannot find a way to see?

Because of what you say to me I've lost it  
I thought I was your story,  
You were only my whole composite  
Could I have been too boring?

The roaring of my heart, wearing,  
Folding it's just tearing me apart  
You've only known what I have shown you from the start  
You were neither too cold nor too warm,

And I had Goldilocks' heart  
But I was just a carry on you couldn't keep  
I would've run your marathon to make you see  
The sunrise with me again

Some nights I just need a friend  
Sometimes they hate me for making you leave again  
But I don't know and I'm not sure and I don't need this  
When I read this I just think of you

And how you: is not how I describe the one I loved  
The way your eyes just glimmered, it is not enough  
To be the winner but to trust

That there was nothing bigger than just us, when we're together

And that I never lost the feeling of it  
I have before, yet still I love it  
How do you not?  
The truth is what I'm asking for

Are you happy more alone?  
Or with another, or with me?  
You see, I often wonder  
If the thunder still makes you think of us

I'm on the brink of what I call insanity  
I'd never felt a Hell like this  
Until I split your welded fallacy  
You cannot simply hide the side of you I cannot see

It may be soon but sometimes I want to try  
Others I just want to cauterize the wounds  
And use the sounds of life to soothe  
The sounds of missing you

Sometimes the thought of you leaves just silence  
But it doesn't soothe me it's just haunting  
And it makes me want to scream  
How I can't believe that this is all you are to me.

After all of this  
In the end, none of it means a thing  
I am just a memory, and you are just pain  
For what I had: a broken heart was for you a broken chain

# Noise

by Carolyn Thornton

Everywhere I go. Everything I do. Everywhere I be.  
It is everywhere. It is inescapable.  
I go to the park to relax and meditate. It's there.  
Birds are singing beautifully.

I go for a drive to relax. There is soul music on the radio.  
The sounds of ambulances, fire engines and police cars.  
Loud mufflers or no mufflers. I cannot escape.

Where can I find quiet?  
I know, the library.  
I settle into the library.  
I can hear the sounds of the computer keys clicking.  
Children whispering loudly.  
People asking for help.  
The pages of books turning.

I'll go to the cemetery.  
Squirrels running around through tree branches.

Death. Is there noise after death?  
I need to find a dead person to ask.  
Oh, is that possible?

# Letting Go

by Gina LoPresto

“Gina!” Mom called out from the downstairs entryway. “We’re going to the information session for Minnesota Virtual Academy today!”

“Okay,” I shrugged. It was a typical Friday morning at my house; I was sitting at the dining room table. My English notebook lay open on the smooth fabric of the maroon table cloth as I moved my yellow number 2 pencil back and forth in between the light blue horizontal lines on the paper. My eighth grade English textbook lay next to my open notebook as I worked on the exercises in the book. Normally my mom would be teaching me during the daytime with subjects like Spelling, English, History and Math, while my dad would teach me Science, in the evenings. But I could sometimes work on things alone, like right then. The only thing that was different about that day was that my dad was home from work.

Prior to being homeschooled, I had attended Five Hawks Elementary 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and St. Michael’s Catholic School 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade, but my parents thought that I could do better with my schoolwork if I was homeschooled. It turned out they were right; I could work much better I could work at my own speed. Plus I had made plenty of friends through two homeschool groups. Yep, homeschooling was the life for me, and nothing would ever change it. Or so I thought.

My mom rushed up the two steps that led to the downstairs family room, her short, chocolate brown hair gently bobbing up and down as she ran. She was in her early forties, with eyes the color of cocoa beans. She sat down in one of our wooden dining room chairs and began to type on our computer. After taking a look at the Waterpark of America’s website for awhile, she jumped out of the chair and ran up our grey carpeted steps, calling behind her as she ran. “We’re leaving right now!”

“Now?” I looked up in surprise. I wasn’t ready to go; for one thing, I knew I hadn’t finished my school work yet, and I

really wanted to finish it so I could go to my homeschool group's gym time at Lakefront Park that afternoon.

The group was called SCHE (Scott County Home Educators), and was consisted of homeschooling kids and teens from pre- kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Every Friday the group would have a gym time where kids would play team sports. The sports changed from month to month, with games like volleyball and dodge ball being in the winter months at Friendship Church, while sports like soccer and lacrosse would be held during the warmer months when it was nicer outside.

Mom ran back down the stairs, now wearing a dark magenta colored fleece sweater over her white shirt. "Yes, now!"

"Okay," I called back. Even though I didn't really want to go, I knew I had to.

As soon as we were ready to go, we said goodbye to my dad, then we headed off to the waterpark.

"What about gym time?" I glanced over at Mom, who sat in the gray cushioned driver's seat in our van.

"I think we'll have to skip it," my mom replied as we drove.

"Couldn't we go afterwards?" I asked.

"We'll see," Mom replied. "But I don't think so."

I felt somewhat conflicted; on the one hand, I wanted to go to the Waterpark of America, because, well, it wasn't every day I got to go to a waterpark! Plus I was curious to see what the session would be like; online schooling was a completely new concept to me. It sounded really high tech, even futuristic. What would it be like to go to a school like that?

On the other hand, I also wanted to go to my homeschool group gym time, which would start at 3:00 pm. Looking back, I believe that there were at least three reasons why I liked to go to gym every week. For one thing, it was a chance to hang out with my friends, who I didn't see very often. This was because of homeschooling, because as cool as it was, there were some setbacks to it. One of these included not having classmates around me while I worked school. Although even this had its advantages (no classmates = less distractions from school work), this made me feel somewhat lonely, which made hanging out with my



homeschool friends an even more special event. The second reason was that, because I was homeschooled, I hardly got to go to many places. I also enjoyed playing the sports we did in gym (the only exception being volleyball).

Because of those reasons, I always felt largely disappointed when we did not attend gym time, and I was pretty sure on that particular day that if I were to miss gym I would feel that way. But of course, there was no need to worry yet. After all, Mom hadn't completely condemned the idea that I could go to gym; at least, not yet. There was still hope that I could go. But there wasn't any reason to worry away the whole waterpark event; I would do that later.

Finally, we arrived at the waterpark. After finding a place to park, we headed towards the huge tan building of the waterpark. The building had turquoise colored windows all around it, and part of a light green curvy tube slide that wound outside before attaching itself to the building again at its other end.

After walking through a hallway and following some large white signs that had black arrows under words that read something like "Minnesota Virtual Academy sessions this way" we found a long table that was crowded with people who stood in line in front of it. Sitting behind the table were two ladies and two men of varying ages. They were handing out white stickered nametags as well as waterpark wristbands to the patient but noisy crowd.

After standing in line for a while, we were soon in the front of the line, right in front of a young lady with short, bright blond hair. She asked for our names (my mom had registered for the session earlier), and then gave us the appropriate name tags.

"Do you want wristbands?" She spoke in an excited, cheery voice. Looking back, I am pretty sure that if MNVA had ever had a football team, this woman could have been the head cheerleader. She had short, thin blond hair that came to about her chin, and I bet that anyone could see the enthusiasm in her blue-green eyes for about a mile.

My mom replied yes, and we received our wristbands. I also got a light green, see-through, squishy plastic ball with water inside it. The ball also had a handle with a small open circle in it that allowed me to slip my finger through and shake it up and

down. Underneath the handle was a yellow circle that had k12 (that was the name of MNVA's curriculum) written on it in black ink. It also had long, skinny green spike-like things sticking out of the ball, making the ball look like an alien blob. I really liked this toy, and I bounced it up and down by its handle. This session was beginning to seem like a lot of fun.

We found a room that was meant for potential new students. The room was about the size of small aquarium filled with students and parents instead of fish and other underwater animals. There was a projector screen at the far end of the room in front of a large array of chairs.

After my mom and I sat in two chairs to the far left for a while, the session began. Leading the session was the very same blond haired lady who had check Mom and I.

"Hello everyone!" She clapped her hands together. "My name is Jennifer Houghton. My job at MNVA is to let all of the students know about the important events that MNVA puts together. Today I'm going to tell you about Minnesota Virtual Academy."

She then proceeded to talk about (as well as show on the projector via power point) many of the features MNVA provided. I can only remember bits and pieces of what she said, but I do remember her showing us the My Info student page. This was the page that students first got to after logging into the school. It contained links to the student's courses, had an email system called kmail that students could use to email back and forth with their teachers, and the overall grade percentage the student has for any particular course.

MNVA also provided class lectures called Class Connects. These lectures were all online in a chat room, and there would be a link for them usually in the teacher's Class Connect link in the course. These lectures were not mandatory, but recommended, and all of these online lectures would be recorded so that if a student didn't make it to the Class Connect, they could watch it at a later time. To me that was good news; it meant I could go to places like gym time without having to worry about missing a class.

After Jennifer finished talking about MNVA, she invited a current student to show us via his small black laptop (which was

already connected to the projector) how he did his online school on a typical day. He was a sophomore with smooth black hair that rested on his head like a welcome mat. Unfortunately, the boy mumbled through his whole presentation, making it very difficult to hear him as well as follow along on the screen. To this day, I can't recall one word that that boy spoke, which is a shame; because I'm sure what he was talking about was very interesting. His answers to the questions some people asked were equally unintelligible.

After the student was done, Jennifer introduced Justin Treptow, the assistant Dean. Mr. Treptow said that he would be available after the session for questions. After that, I'm not entirely sure, but I think the session ended.

My mom took that opportunity to ask Mr. Treptow some questions. I stood off to one side as my mom asked the questions. I don't exactly remember what those questions were, though I do remember him mentioning something about having MNVA having flexibility.

While my mom asked the questions, I had to really lift up my head in order to see Mr. Treptow, for although I was used to being smaller than most people, this assistant Dean seemed especially tall. I truly believe that if he had wanted to, he could have easily have become a professional basketball player for the Timberwolves, with Jennifer Houghton cheering for him, of course. He also had jet black hair that stuck out from the top of his head like porcupine quills. He also wore a black suit, a black tie with yellow dots on it and dress pants, with a white shirt underneath. He also stood behind a small metal table that was painted gray.

I had become very interested in the school. I think what drew me to it was the fact that I didn't have to take a course or go to class connects at any certain time. Plus it seemed exciting and new

Of course, I if I attended the online school, I would have to give up homeschooling, which was a problem for me. I enjoyed homeschooling, and plus, I didn't like change. Maybe this reason was also why I wanted to go the homeschool gym time that day; I didn't want the routine to change. For some reason I didn't think

much about this at first but I think that if I had I might not have been as enthusiastic about the online school as I was then.

After the session, my mom called my dad at home and told him we'd be staying at the waterpark for lunch, we ate at the restaurant, and then I went to the waterpark and swam mostly in the lazy river and the wave pool.

I realize now how important it was for me to let go of homeschooling so I could attend that online school. Life is full of changes; when we are toddlers we stay home with our mothers and play, but when we grow up we have to attend kindergarten. That's a change, and for some children, it is a very hard change. But it's one that must be made.

Sometimes we need to learn to let go of past things in order to make room for something new. Some change is necessary for human beings in order for them to learn, grow and thrive.

I didn't attend homeschool gym time that day, but I truly think it was for the best. Had I not attended that session and instead stayed home, finished my work and went to gym time, I would've missed out not only what turned out to be fun outing, but also discovering the school that helped me to manage my academic career and discover my dream to become a writer.

All this happened because I let go.

## Contributor's Notes

**Ryan Crippa** has never had to write a bio about himself before. Attempting this is causing him great existential angst. This should tell you a lot about him.

**Korryn Downey** is an undergrad English student in her last year at Normandale. This piece started as a project for a writing class she is taking, but soon turned into one of her favorite writing projects ever.

**Brandon Hull** is a student at Normandale and member of the Creative Writing Club.

**Zachary Hockett** is a tutor and student with eclectic tastes who enjoys crafting fiction and poetry and hopes to create pieces that engage the reader with a memorable experience.

**Gina LoPresto** is a sophomore at Normandale Community College. She hopes to become a professional writer someday.

**Karlynn O'Neil** is a communications major at Normandale. When she's not studying, she's baking or hosting karaoke.

**Thomas Shumate** is a student at Normandale and a member of the Creative Writing Club.

**Miles Rivera** is sailing the seas of cheese. Oh, and studying Computer Science.

**Mark Daniels** is a student at Normandale and editor of *The Lion's Roar*. He is also the Treasurer of the Creative Writing Club.

**Kayla Gray** is a writer. She focuses mainly on genre fiction, but also likes seeing the world in different ways, whether that be a through a camera or a story.

"To be an artist means to never advert your eyes."

-Akira Kurosawa (Director)

**Charles Shaw** has always been a story teller and for the longest time refused to learn to write my stories down because he could remember them perfectly. He finally started writing them down, and found he had made room for new stories.

**Allicia Kollar** is 22 and is working on her liberal arts degree for now, and considering a mortuary science degree. This is her first time being published.

**Carolyn Thornton** is a sixty-one year old retiree. She is back in school to finish a degree started back in 1971. She am married with children and grandchildren and loves being a student. Writing is a new genre for her.

**Bekah Zimmerman** is studying Japanese at Normandale and plan to go the University of Minnesota to studying Japanese as well as Korean. She loves photography, and her favorite season is the fall because of all the pretty colors.

The Paper Lantern is the student literary journal of Normandale Community College, 9700 France Ave. So., 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 2014 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

Karlynn O'Neil, President      Tristan Jenkins, Secretary  
Mark Daniels, Treasurer

Matthew Fundaun, Gina LoPresto  
Mark Honetschlager, Brandon Hull, Tommy Shumate,  
Kayla Gray, Felicia Tripodi, Kevin Nelson, Mark Anderson,  
Mitchell Swanson

Front Cover: "Of Life and Death," by Kayla Gray

Back Cover: "Normandale in Fall" by Mark Daniels

Submit your creative writing to the Spring 2015 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.

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.

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