

The Paper Lantern

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I Can't Go Anywhere In This City
by Doug Lemon



Elm Tree

by Amy Warwick

I. Before

They tell me you have Dutch elm disease.

They tell me it's incurable.

They tell me it's contagious.

They tell me it's fatal.

I stare in contempt at the hunter orange
spot of paint they've sprayed onto
your trunk. The spot of death. I know
that they've just marked you for execution,
condemned you with no trial.

And there's nothing I can do about it. I'm sorry;
I can't help you.

It was clear you were getting sick; your leaves were
brown and few. Your bark flaked off in chunks and
landed on the lawn, and you began dropping little
twigs and branches into the green grass below.

That's when my parents started wondering
if you had Dutch elm. But it wasn't until
I pulled up in front of the house one day, and
saw that ugly orange circle, that it really hit me.
They're going to take you away from me.

After all those years of your being here, you'll just be gone.
I think of how many times my sister and I built little mud
and rock houses against one of your partially exposed roots.
All the times I leaned my back against your solid trunk
while I read books. And all the sometimes fun, sometimes
scary, and always exciting moments I've had swinging
fifteen feet or more up in the sky. Flying through the air
over the front yard, holding onto a rope attached to one of
your biggest branches while you smile down on me.

II. After

Now you're gone.

I stare in disbelief and grief at the empty place in the now sad azure sky where you've stood all my life, and more. I stand on your stump, my tears making dark spots on what's left of your white wood.

It looks healthy enough to me. I imagine a little beetle, the kind that carries

Dutch elm disease to helpless elm trees all around the world. It's so small, but it does

so much damage.

Before they started cutting you down, dad asked the tree cutters to cut

a slice out of your trunk for us to keep. Now that part of you is in the basement where

I think dad plans to make a table out of you. So even though they cut you down,

ground you up, and hauled you away, you'll never really be absolutely gone.

Now, as I play Rummy 500 with my dad on the little circular table that used to be

your trunk, I can't help smiling as I remember how immovable you stood, as your arms waved back and forth, swinging me, laughing, across

the front yard.

I'm glad we have a piece of you.

Moist Confession

by Angela Smith

Vicks humidifier:
tall and proud,
a cool, calm off-white color
the translucent circular power switch
expels steam and gazes
upon the blanket

Square blanket:
soft and pink,
perfect wrapping for a baby
or lying in the closet shelf,
resting place for the family cats

The humidifier ponders
“Just how can I draw the blanket's attention?”
for neither has legs to move
the humidifier turns his power switch
slowly, almost suggestively

The blanket
far too preoccupied by
new barrage of cat hair
cannot notice

Suddenly she hears the steam rise
the smell of hot, moist air
curious, she turns

Their gazes meet
and all else fades away
the blanket turns to
the humidifier and says,

“That moisture is going to ruin my stitching.”

Metropolitan Nightmare

by Molly Kessler

The city starts to fall around me.
I run through its streets
Holding my Gucci handbag above my head.

The city quakes and the skyscrapers scream.
My teeth chatter.
Bone against bone.
I collide against the pavement, and a charm breaks off of my Tiffany's bracelet.

The city streets have become a thick river of molten tar.
A school bus sinks into the asphalt.
The driver cannot open the door.
Children bang against the windows and scream.
A black sea surrounds them.
I climb onto an awning
While the blacktop bites at my Milano heels.

As I cling to the rough fabric and metal frame
I try to come up with a route out of this metropolitan nightmare.
Usually when I panic I go to Neiman Marcus
But they are probably closed,
And I lost my credit card in the climb.

I hold on hard and perspire through my silk blouse from Fossil.
The heat of havoc sears down on me.
My tears begin to boil and burn my face.
I cannot cope, so I strip off my blouse and skinny jeans.
My skin is as red as the flares that fly from the tops of towers
As CEOs signal for help, and escape via helicopter.

Distraught I can do nothing but dream of death
While I watch the city dance to its doom.
I close my eyes and wait for the end.

The end

of gripping Gucci
of sleek, silver Tiffany's
of walking miles in my Milanos
No more Neiman Marcus.
Fossil will be forever lost.

Lost
Like my appetite when I watch the world news.
Lost
Like the holidays I didn't spend with my family.
Lost
Like my innocence which I sold for a finance job
And a loft in the city.

Lost
Like the parents of those children trapped in the bus
As they try to understand how the Executives of Excess and
Presidents of Power
Can flee while their children become remains.

One final, violent quake consumes the city.

The rough rumble quiets.
The shaking stills.
The street cools.

The bus driver opens up the emergency door,
And the kids file out the back.
My grip on the awning's frame loosens.
I sit up and look out at the city.

I slide off and land on my bare feet.
I am standing
Naked
Except for my underwear.
Silk and lace.
La Perla lingerie.

Suddenly, I remember myself
as a girl

In my white, cotton Hanes Her Way.

I smile

And walk onto the street.

Ready

To help

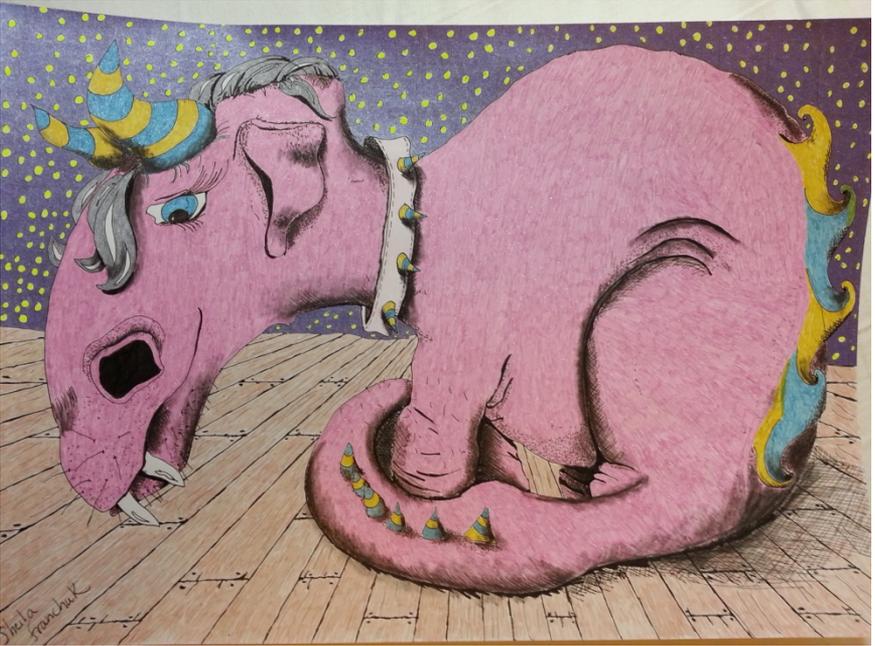
To make sure the city does not fall again.

Untitled Photograph

by Patti Lindaberry



Untitled Picture
by Sheila Franchuk



The Baby in Heaven Traveled to Tokyo

by Miho Vande Berg

My sister-in-law, Shio, invited me to dinner
at their new condo,

Their shy cat hiding in the corner watching
me eating daikon.

My brother, Shiro, didn't talk much reading
a newspaper.

After the dinner Shio showed me a video.

Shio is pregnant, walking, eating a sandwich
in a shower of pale pink cherry-blossoms.

Shiro's narration:

"We've come here to
show her
Sakura."

Shio is on the top floor of the Tokyo
Metropolitan Government office building.

Shiro's narration:

"Today we are going to
show her
a view of
Tokyo."

Shio is on a beach walking bowlegged with
her big tummy.

Shiro's narration:

"This is
the ocean."

The last scene is Shio and Shiro with their
cold baby

kissing,

talking

like

a perfect family

a perfect family—

Though the baby died after living only three days
She went many places.

Roller Coaster

by Krista Eikom

The cart lunges forward faster than I imagine it would.
My stomach dances, the hill approaches.

Hard, cold, plastic bench bites my butt.
Hands grip the metal seatbelt.

The chain screams in my ears. I can't hear anything.
I see the wooden mountain before me, looking as if it will never end.

The cart pauses at the top of the peak.
My muscles tense,
I can't see over the hill.
It might be easier if
I could peek.
All I see is people,
the size of ants, moving slowly
beneath the wooden track.

It looks like the cart
might drop
right off the edge.
Maybe I will
fall forever. I ate more
ice cream
than I should have.

The cart is frozen,
for a moment the world
around me stops.

Then as if to make up for lost time, the cart goes into super speed
and then I'm flying, 'round a curve, hands in the air.

My stomach doesn't stay in one place, but I love that feeling.

I laugh, it's like skydiving out of an airplane.

When the cart finally stops,
I smell donuts from nearby

a sharply sweet scent.

before his name spilled
from my throat
and stained
your sheets

somehow your fingers found
my hips and your mouth
covered mine and
you found your way
inside me
before I could find the words
no

please
stop

My heart beat itself
bruised against my sternum,
my collarbones
choking my lungs
my fingers gripping the mattress,
my body following
your command
my mind split in half
screaming
yes and crying no

After it was over, you asked
how I was feeling
berated me
for not understanding
what

just
happened

when I wanted
to take it all back
and shove it
under the bed
like it never happened

wash your fingerprints
from my breasts,
rip off my skin,
step out of this hated
body

like a
snake
shedding its regrets.

And I swear,
when I closed my eyes
Baby, please
when I closed my eyes
he sorta looked
like you
sorta smelled
like you
and his hands
felt like
your hands
your breath was
his breath and I knew
I shouldn't
but I needed
you
and I craved
you
and he could be
you and I'm sorry
I'm sorry.

Maleficent Miasma

by Miguel Richardson

I found myself lifting off my copy of the *New York Times*. I looked at my eerie, queer surroundings and I couldn't make heads of tails of it. Barren, lifeless, and uninhabitable, I witnessed the fog. It was thick like smog levitating over a swamp. As I stood, I revolved once, then twice as I saw much of the same, nothing. I wandered irresolute, perplexed at the event at hand. I ventured further and further into the gray moist misty haze. This was unlike this town, lively, always brand new, that's how it was. Although it appeared the same, no one was present; it was like life was in inverse. No more children playing by the busted fire hydrant, no birds singing, no jaded peers from the fortunate, nothing.

I remember the town vividly; it was small, but vibrant. Full of activity, joy, and emotion; I was the town drunk. People of this peaceful utopia would watch as I hobbled, leaned, rocked and tumbled down the block. Women and children were not safe from my alcohol induced terror. Yelling, screaming, and pissing were all I did. The last thing I remember is me going to the church and praying god for forgiveness. Without completing the prayer the church was glowing with fire. All I could see were the dancing hues of the flames, waving, flailing, and falling from the roof tops. I rushed to the back of the church with desperation, shaking the door, searing my hands with my efforts. I dashed over to the window of the church then I threw a bible through the window. A flurry of smoke escaped as the bible crossed the glass's threshold. I quickly climbed onto the window to be seen by many. Their eyes attacked my face with plenty of emotion. Shame, vengeance, remorse, and fear greeted my face. My mortality was their solution; my tyranny came to an end.

Before my eyes this utopia began to sour. I passed things that appeared to be cars; they oozed, and leaked, drip by drip, as if they were fruit left to rot in heat. From the distance I saw a church set ablaze, furiously shooting flames from the windows, doors and ceiling. I couldn't believe the things that I was seeing. This town was fermenting in the fog, burning with a sulfuric draw.

I passed the church, and proceeded into the noxious gas. Into the distance, blinding lights illuminated the fog without breaking it. The lights flooded precociously, while growing in size. The engine

was revving, rumbling like a lion pouncing on its prey. I was frozen still, petrified by this strange, florescent light.

The roar of the pistons grew louder, more present, as they cycled, setting a course towards me. At one instant I was frozen in time and space, captured by my curiosity, then the next moment the screech of the tire exploded from the ground as the taco van veered left, then right. I leaped farther than I have ever before, as the van barely missed my legs. The van revolved two times before finally meeting the front of a mid-sized building.

The van was anything but occupied, untouched. It looked as if it was picked clean, particle by particle. I thought that someone was trying to kill me. Before my eyes, the van started something extraordinary. It started to decay, like a body left to rot; remarkably, it dripped, sloped and slipped. Metals moistened like butter sliding on a skillet; it compressed, condensed, and shrank, sticking to the ground, molding into a mound of amorphous goo.

I peered at the ground, as it began to contort under my feet, crunching, crackling, and buckling like my weight spiked two tons. As my head and eyes gazed into the distance the fog separated like the Red Sea. I crossed this brightly lit oasis of light, leading to pretty lightly tempered skies and warm air. I arrived at a town that was very much like what I saw resembled the qualities of the town that I loved so dearly, but was different. It seemed flawless, stunning, with the light refracting, glaring, and shining off of an ever-building top.

A man appeared within a blink of an eye, greeting me with a smile.

"Hiya! there stranger, where you coming from?" he said with a neutral grin.

"I'm from New Found Grace," I stated with less enthusiasm.

"Well, hello there, my name is Hollace." His hand was extremely warm, almost searing, his grip felt like the sting of a rattle snake.

"Abner," I said plainly.

"Well Mr. Abner, this place is the last place on your journey..." Then my interests were piqued.

"Yeah about that, what was that place and how did I get there, I mean..." Then I was sharply interrupted.

"In due time, in due time my friend. You must be famished, let me go take you somewhere for some decadent pleasantries."

I found this man to be pleasant, too pleasant, odd. He was pleasantly odd, representing an obvious quagmire that was plain, featureless, and generic. He was wearing a tight form-fitting checkered T-shirt with tan khaki and suede oxfords. He had white hair and deep blue eyes that seemed bottomless. His skin was whiter than milk, it almost glistened with the sunlight. I couldn't help the feeling of a mealy nature about him, like his kindness was purely manufactured. We strolled down a lightly populated street; people seemed occupied as no one interacted with each other, as if they simply couldn't see each other. One after another, they would pass and glide shoulder to shoulder, zipping aimlessly with slight intent.

We arrived at a small eatery that was mediocre at best. It was supplied with beige walls with red and blue horse patterns at the top of the walls, with pictures of apples, oranges, and pears, resembling a kindergarten lunch room, simple and facile. This so-called diner had studded stools that were bolted into the ground; it had a bright red cushion that ballooned over the top of the metal standing pole that was connected to the ground. The bar or table area was beige, with dark green specks that littered evenly on the top of the counter, with bronze hands draped across the top.

The waiter reminded me of Hollace; however, I got a sense of discomfort of from the waiter. He smiled with a slight twitch, like he had a knife to his back or something. Behind him he had no tickets, no cook, not even a kitchen, just a mysterious rectangular hole with a slight handcrafted planking structure. The waiter was wearing a very tight, white long-sleeve shirt that was embraced by a black vest and a baby blue tie.

"What would you like? You name it, we make it. That's the motto." he said in a very peppy manner.

I looked at Hollace, perplexed. I didn't know what to order if there were no menus.

"Ok, so what do I look at? What do you have available?" I asked curiously.

"Anything sir," he said promptly.

"Okay," I said with a challenging grin.

"I would like a Lobster Bisque with steak and caviar." I began to smirk with disbelief.

As soon as the words departed from my lips, a red tray with a large-size lobster with a steak shot out of the hole. It was steaming, piping hot, and fresh. My eyes widened as I was in complete shock.

There was no kitchen, where did this come from? I sat and consumed this wonderfully seasoned, ultra juicy food that was titillating to the tongue, and warm for the stomach, and when it was gone I didn't want it to leave.

When we finally left, Hollace showed me around town. The town was unbelievable. It was very finely laid out. There was a grocery store that was across the street from a car dealership. These two buildings were surrounded by newspaper stands, and bus trucks and school vans; however, none of them looked like they had much wear. Next to the grocery store was a small school house. This school house had an old-fashioned bell at the top of this one room steeple-like structure.

After Hollace showed me this side to side cookie cutter town I realized instantly that something was up but I didn't know what. Hollace began to tell me about the new citizen ceremony that every new citizen was required to attend, then I tried to tell him that I wasn't staying long. Then his face turned serious and said:

"My friend, no one leaves us because you belong here, there is a reason for everything. Be at the ceremony at 6 p.m."

"But..."

"Thank you," he stated boldly as he turned his back and walked away.

I began to walk around the town to try to find a way out. As I walked across the one road in town no matter where I would go, I would end up back in the diner. This was impossible, and illogical, but then again, so was this town. I quickly got frustrated with the diner the last time then slammed my fists on the side of the diner table, then I heard a faint chuckle.

"There is no way out. Why can't you see that?" The dining waiter said grimly.

"Excuse me?" I questioned as I looked up at him.

The waiter then became a large amorphous grey-form being before taking the form of Hollace. Its eyes began to bleed and his complexion began to grey. Its teeth became sharp and jagged, as its eyes deepened darker and darker until they became black. Its shirt began to meld to its chest and change into a dark purple. Its hair increased in length almost draping its shoulders. Its nails became long and thick, shooting an audible cracking sound. The beast then looked straight at me, smirked, and said:

"We're here for a reason, why don't you understand that?"

Confused and disheveled I blurted, "Well I shouldn't be here!"

The beast's voice deepened and exclaimed, "It doesn't matter because you are already here. You don't know what this is? It's the end of the road. Remember the place before you got here?"

I stare at it blankly.

"Come on, you're different from other people, you must know." Its demeanor changed when he addressed me.

"Know what, I just walked into this and I just want out," I cried desperately.

"Don't you get it? There is no out. Only a fool would think that. You are here for good, you won't get old, you won't feel pain, but you will suffer. After the ceremony, you will have a say for nothing. You will blindly follow the rules, and experience happiness for eternity, while controlling nothing." As it finished its sentence it began to cock its head to the side as it was telling me something I already knew.

"I can't do this, I can't be here forever, there has to be another way." I looked around.

"Well, there is one, but it's a permanent fix," it said with a menacing smile.

"I'll do anything," I begged, grabbing its claw intensely.

"Follow me," it said as it looked around cautiously.

Out of nothing, it showed me a door that appeared out of nowhere. It was laced with burned tattered vines. This door was navy blue with a bright yellow knob with purple hinges. It stood about seven feet tall and was thick and broad. The beast appeared next to the door with a grimace of maleficent intent. It opened the door to a graveyard that was plotted multiple times with my name, and said, "The final release is up to you."

Directly in front of me were five open graves with four bodies in them. They all looked exactly like me, each one with a bullet hole pressing upward. Spontaneously, a long range 5-shot revolver appeared at my feet. I blankly stared at the revolver, then I slowly bent over and picked it up then checked the rounds. One left. Last bullet. What do I do?

I positioned myself so I'd fall backward into the 6 foot hole submerged underground. I stuck the gun in my mouth and ever so elegantly aimed at my neck. I fought with myself, shivering and cringing as my finger teased the trigger. I counted backwards from

three and noticed that the attendant's face warped and bent as his smile grew literally from ear to ear. His face was almost reptilian, adding scales and eyes like crystals. The courage welled inside of me when I finally let the bullet pass through my neck. My body had a sudden shock, and then dropped into the grave. The next thing I remembered was being on my copy of the *Times* as I woke to a fog once more.

Hippie Green Tea Shop Owner in Tokyo

by Miho Vande Berg

In a dark green kimono
and a long pony-tail
he sells green-tea
Talks about Woodstock where
he'd never been

When young people like 70's music
insists they borrow his CD's
buys them a drink
He talks about his 1969

The purple snakeskin platform boots
he wore
how they loved freedom
and
lovemaking

He calls Bob Dylan "Deeron"
with his Japanese accent
He talks about Janis Joplin
like he lost a close friend

Herd

by Amy Warwick

I place my pinkies in the corners of my mouth and exhale sharply. The effect of the shrill whistle is almost immediate. The ground under my feet begins to shake, and I hear the heavy pounding of forty-eight hooves. They burst over the top of the little hill almost as one.

Cresting the small knoll with heads tossing and manes and tails flying in the wind like flags. The twelve Mustangs gallop straight toward me, pulling up just short of trampling me. They nuzzle me in greeting, and nose me all over, smelling me and looking for the carrots they know I wouldn't dare come without.

I laugh as their whiskers tickle my arms legs and neck, and almost fall over due to their ardent carrot quest. I gently push their faces away so that I can open the Ziploc bag that contains the treasure they're looking for. I pull the carrots out one at a time and give one to each horse, lightly tapping the noses of those who try to get more than their share.

The pungent smell of carrots and the occasional drop of carrot juice escaping a horse's mouth is torture unless you have a carrot of your own. This is a fact I've learned long ago, and I smile as I pull the thirteenth carrot from the plastic bag and bite off the first few inches of its orange tip with a snap.

I fold the empty bag and stuff it in my pocket. It's hard to hear anything else over the sound of carrots that are being munched, crunched, and ground to a pulp between twelve powerful sets of horse jaws, not to mention the crunching in my own head as I contently gnaw my veggie.

I turn to the horse nearest me and spring off the hard packed dirt. I settle on Nevada's back, my bare feet hanging at his sides, my body draped forward on his neck. I pet and scratch both sides of his short, strong neck, raising tiny clouds of dust from his healthy golden coat.

The smell of carrots is slowly replaced by that of large warm bodies and hay, with just the slightest hint of manure. A gust of wind blows through the paddock and lifts my blond hair and Nevada's black mane together, our hair becoming intertwined.

The carrots are gone, and I have nothing more to offer them but my strange human company. They rub their sides and noses against my legs and arms, and nuzzle my hands and face.

They never stray from my side.

“Roo”

by Molly Kessler

If I had one wish in my life, I would wish for my damn dog, Stevie, back. Stevie was a fat wiener dog with big, brown-red floppy ears and an old, low-pitch bark, “Roo roo roo rooooo.” I love Stevie, more than any bastard I can think of. That dog would wake me up every morning by licking my hairy toes that were hanging off at the edge of the bed. After I pulled my feet away, putting them under the covers, he would start his low bellow, “Roo roo roo. Roo roo roo. Roooooo.” After that last “roo,” he would try his damndest to jump up, onto the bed. His short, stubby paws scraped at the side of the bed while his big, brown gut weighed him down. “Roo,” he’d bark, “Roo.” But those short legs always failed him, and I’d eventually grumble out of bed, plop onto the floor, and scratch those floppy flea-bitten ears.

Stevie loved to chase everything. I had a hell of a time understanding why he was so fat, because if he wasn’t eating or sleeping—he was running. He’d chase those pestering, white rabbits that lived under the shed in our backyard. He’d chase those grey squirrels that would flee up into our oak trees. He’d even chase those damn grasshoppers that sprang out into view when Stevie was too close. But what he loved to chase most of all were cars. Fucking cars. Didn’t matter what kind of cars: vans, trucks, sedans, jeeps. You name it and he’s chased it. He wasn’t fast. His stubby legs and fat belly slowed him down, but his “Roo” was loud and would echo throughout the neighborhood when he ran after them.

After a few years, I got worried about those cars. What if some dumb truck ran him over? So I bought an invisible fence. I stuck those small, wire stakes all along our property line. I put that damn shock collar on the dog and let him loose. Off Stevie went chasing whatever he could. First a grasshopper, then a toad, then a bastard rabbit, and then came an old, rusty Chevy S10 around the corner. Off Stevie went. “Roo, roo, roo, roo,” but before he could let loose his final “Rooo,” I heard a strangled, high-pitched yelp. If color could drain from the face of a dog, I’d swear Stevie’s faced drained into white like his dead, wiener-ghost ancestors. That damn dog tried to cross the border: one, two, three, six, ten, thirteen times.

After each attempt, he let out a miserable yelp. After three days of failed tries, he resigned himself to severe depression.

In the morning when he came to wake me up, he wouldn't lick my hairy toes, he wouldn't try to get up on the bed, he'd just let out one lone, "Roo." Then, he'd shuffle back to the doorframe and wait. When I let him outside, he wouldn't run, he wouldn't chase, he'd just lie under a big, oak tree. I'm not even sure if he saw the grass or the oaks or all those fucking creatures around him anymore.

It's been three years since I put up that damn fence. I've taken it down and switched back his collar, but he doesn't know. He doesn't understand. I wanted Stevie safe. I didn't want him killed by some dumb truck, but I killed him instead. Stevie is alive. He still has those floppy, flea-bitten ears and a big, fat gut carried by those stubby legs of his, but he's not really Stevie anymore. If I had one wish, I'd wish for my damn dog, Stevie, back.

Untitled Picture
by Justin Delzer



Note To All In Favor

by Cheryl Wilke

“In 2012, one in four Minnesota wolves was killed by hunting and trapping.” --Howling for Wolves

Someone. A stranger. An Ojibwe man once told me, You are open to the universe. I asked, I am? I do watch the moon lay down her long shadow searching for truth. It knows the way. And the sun, why who can live with the sun and doubt its life giving will return tomorrow? And the stars, the tiny stars. Blue. Green. Ice. Fire. I could stand beneath that black bowl of infinity and watch each burn bright, then dim, then fall. And the deer, and the bear, and the wolf, and the horse—how can one not see their unbridled vulnerability. I wonder how many times our paths have crossed, and will cross, again, until your steel teeth savage my life through political act. Yes, I am open to a kinder universe.

Dirty Secret

by Anastasia Lehen

Pried from blue plastic shield
paper thin blades
with rusty kisses
from long showers.

Designed for delicate work
silver against pale flesh
navy veins pulse
under nearly sheer flesh.

Draw a trail from left to right
unhurried and deliberate
a momentary sting of pain
before the adrenaline release

Burns like paper cuts
blood rushes to new escape routes
whispered promises to family
broken like my skin

Crimson rivers run down my arm
relief replaced with shame
too cowardly to sever the main line
too weak to withstand the pain

My skin cries the tears
my dry eyes withhold
beads gather and spill over
scarlet rain on gray tiles

Secreted under plush mattress.

Yellow Visions

by Lukas Hall

I've looked, with bloodshot eyes, far too many times
at the whimsical sun.

That liquid glow squirming as I blink away,
trying not to stare at the golden haze
being consumed by cloudy fingers.

Grasping at the last beating heart
in the forced red atmosphere.

I raise my hand to cast a
shadow on my face. Between my
nose and eyes the darkness
snickered and chewed at the sizzled skin.
My eyes flickered back
to the sun and its beaming-even-altitude
hanging in the midst of nothing
with only the particles of gasses to
keep the sphere to place.

Vapor caught in the back of my throat
built up, and eroded from the fissure
in my esophageal muscle.
Torn open with infrared rays, bled
the stomach dry and let
radiation devour the
bronchial tubes.

The sun looked so brilliant, bestowed in its own dusk,
dangling its legs off the dock
of heaven. Travel to the winter lands.
Eyes no longer burn, in perpetual midnight,
unless the Earth chooses to cock the axis more.
Tilt its skull to the side to shake
you off.
Unless you defy life.

I Got You

by Megan Stratford

You say you can't make sense of what you are feeling and to be honest I am not the one to clear away the fog that temporarily blinds you.

I sit with my arms tightly engulfing your crumpled frame as you begin surrendering to the emotion that refuses to release itself. You are not alone, I am forever here at your disposal.

Wanting to say or do something that might release some of the weight that your chains are attached to, all I can do is whisper gently into your ear, "I got you, I am never letting go."

As we sit in utter silence, clarity doesn't present itself and give way to our questions, instead Peace is breathed into the car we are in. This doesn't take away the confusion or the hurt that inflicts itself into everyday life; however, we start to view one another in a brand new light.

You tell me that "I could never do this alone...thank you..." My response is an even tighter grip and a solemn vow of never letting go... "That's what friends do, I got you, in the good and the bad...you are safe forever and always."

Cyber Space

by Anastasia Lehen

Fingers fumble over slick black keys
a race to release another word
to keep the conversation linear
eyes droop
fingers trip
brain goes numb
urged by a desire to talk to you
across distances
stitched closed by technology
words flow easier
my voice finds freedom
but sleep fights to sever the bond
chat screen a blur in my eyes
a distraction for my mind
time to power down
say goodnight
and
 let
 the
 screen
 go
dark

Flaxen Hair and the Tri-Ursus *arctos* *horribilis*

by Patrick Parisian

“The girl just came into our house, used our beds, sat in our chairs, and ate our food right off the table.”

“Uhh, yeah, that’s terrible,” I said, taking a sip of tea and trying to avoid eye contact.

“Maybe we should discuss the elephant in the room?”

“You’re bears,” I said.

“We are bears,” Papa Bear said, taking a sip from his own teacup. My mouth hung open in fascination as he lifted the flower patterned porcelain teacup to his muzzle, blew a puff of smoke away, and took a sip. “The whole experience frightened my son terribly.” Papa Bear placed a free paw on the short brown fur of Baby Bear.

“You live in a log cabin and you’re bears.”

“Can we move on from this, Mr. Lando? Yes, we’re bears, and we have hired you to find this little gold haired girl. You have your job just as we have our own jobs.”

“Right, right, I think I’ve got the story. Sitting in a chair is one thing, but eating your porridge, I don’t think so. I did the research on this little girl, she’s an orphan. Typical troublemakers, orphans are. Don’t worry; I’ll make this bitch pay, or I’m not the third most respected Private Investigator in my hometown... that lived on the east side of town... just beyond the river,” I said. “And my uncle was a talking bear.”

The three grizzly bears stared at me silently. I finished my tea and biscuits and stood up to leave. Bowing once, I exited through the sturdy wooden door and exhaled a deep breath on the front porch. Everything in the house was really well made. And why was Mama Bear wearing a “Bless this Mess” apron?

“You know where we’re going?” Falada, my stallion, asked.

“Those were talking bears. And they live in a house.”

“So? I’m a talking horse. Is it really that different?” Fal asked. He grunted as I climbed into the saddle.

“You aren’t packing tobacco into a damn pipe,” I said, patting his neck. “Alright, we got a little girl to track. How hard can it be?”

You know when people ask an obvious question like, “How hard can it be?” And then it turns out to be very hard? Well, that wasn’t the case this time because Goldilocks must have been heavy footed or dramatically overweight because she left footprints in all of the different forest vegetation and soil she passed through.

Eventually we came to a clearing leading to a slight rise in the land. And on the hilltop was a house made of gingerbread with windows made of clear sugar.

“What do you think?” I asked Fal, trotting him up the slope.

“If I were a little girl—don’t say it—I would go to a candy house. You check out the house and I will survey the area from a safe distance,” Fal said, coming to a stop. “We got our roles? Okay, break.”

Approaching the house revealed the door to be made of some sort of cracker. Before I had a chance to knock, the door creaked open. And I’m not sure why it would creak either. Out of the door came an incredibly old woman on crutches. I’m not saying the woman was old, but for her first birthday she had to light the candle on her cake with ice because fire hadn’t been invented. I’m also not sure why they would have candles and not fire, but whatever. The woman wore a dark shawl covering her withered hair. Her skin looked a sickly green. I’ve said it before, but typical witch. Her tricks won’t work on me.

“Come in, dearie,” the witch said, “I’ve a meal prepared for you.”

There was clearly only one thing to do with a proposal like that. In minutes I ate milk and pancakes topped with sugar, apples, and nuts. The food was very good, even if I had two very dejected young girls staring at me with frightened expressions from the corner of the room. One of the girls had silken gold curls on her head, clearly this Goldilocks girl the bears sent me to find. Also, strangely, the inside of the house wasn’t made of sweets. It was a bunch of derelict furniture and heavy chests off in the corner.

“Did you enjoy it?” the witch asked. I nodded and suppressed a yawn. “Even the poison you just ate?”

“Is that what the glaze on the apples was? Because it had a very smooth sweetness.”

“Soon you’ll fall into a deep coma. I learned the poison apple trick from my sister,” the witch cackled.

“Did you remember to adjust the amount you would need for an adult? Because I’m a little sleepy, but I feel okay,” I said, standing up and stretching.

“Shit,” the witch said.

“What sort of hippie setup you got going on here? Little kids all over the place and a house made of candy, mixed with knockout drugs. That’s not fair to the other child molesters.”

“I want to eat them, not molest them,” the witch said. An incredibly tense silence filled the room. It ended when one of the sugar window panes fell to the floor and cracked. Fal poked his head into the house.

“Hey, there’s some fat blonde boy in a stable out back,” Fal said. “He insists the old woman is going to eat him. He also displayed very obsequious behavior. He kept eating all his food and was rubbing a spice blend on his body despite knowing his fate.”

“Okay,” I said, turning on the witch, “I’ve heard enough.”

I kicked a crutch out from under her. The witch collided with the ground. I pulled the saex from my belt and pressed the sharp edge to her throat.

“Wait,” the witch said, “we can make a deal.”

“I’m listening.”

“These chests are filled with treasure. I’ll split it with you. And I’ll kill the blonde girl for you, then you don’t have to.”

“I could just take all your treasure after you’re dead.”

“You could, but why kill someone who can construct a house out of sweets?”

“Touché,” I said, removing the knife point from her neck.

“Alright, it’s a deal.”

“And we want some of those apples,” Fal said.

“And the apples, but not the poisoned ones.”

“We didn’t want the girl dead,” Papa Bear said. Mama Bear pulled Baby Bear into the house to avoid having to look at the golden scalp of hair from Goldilocks.

“You were not clear on that,” I said. “I just assumed, because... you know?”

“Because we’re bears? That, sir, is bearist behavior.”

“Yeah, well, take it or leave it. I don’t need the pay anymore anyway,” I said. “Onward my faithful steed. Or slowly walk away and make this more awkward, whatever.”

Fal and I walked our way through the forest, slowly edging away from low pine branches. Two saddlebags stuffed to the brim with silver, jewels, and apples shifted as we moved.

“Did you have to let the witch eat the girl? And the other two children?” Fal asked, stopping to chew on several strands of particularly appetizing grass.

“That was part of the deal. And I am many things, but I do not go back on my word,” I said, rubbing the sleep from my eyes.

“Yes, you do.”

“Not when money’s involved,” I said, picking a pinecone off a tree. “Do you know what’s really messed up? That stew the witch made smelled fantastic.”

“Oh, I know. It was the cumin I think. My mouth was watering.”

“Do horses eat meat?”

“We do, you’re just too cheap to feed me any.”

“Ah, that’s not the case anymore,” I said, patting the moneybag. “But we have one more stop. Some elderly woman wants me to make a delivery so her granddaughter doesn’t have to. Get this, she’s afraid of a wolf attacking her. Wolves don’t attack people unless provoked.”

The lesson I learned from all this: Bears are people too. Think about it.

Tomorrow Is in the Oven

by Karlynn O'Neil

What will come tomorrow is already baking in the oven.
It will bring a bouquet of troubles or joys
Like a new lover outside my apartment,
Ringing the buzzer.
"Baby let me in," his crackled pink lips speak.
"I like you so much."
Translate that: you have what I want.

It's okay, I'll let tomorrow in.
I know that it'll be hit or muss.
A fifty-fifty shot, at 90 percent fail safe.

I'll open the hot door
That creaks as I awaken.
In those early moments of the day
The first light from the window
Leaves baker's heat on my face.

Tomorrow's breath,
Like the fresh kisses of teeth,
Sweet from the oven,
Donning mitts, I'll pull tomorrow from the oven.
Like any other day,
Greet him, "Hello,"
Let him in, wolf or not, he's hungry just the same.
And so am I.

Second Chances Aren't Always Good

by Paul Patane

- SETTING:** An outdoor nursery; late afternoon. There's a service counter, cash register and large footlocker. Next to the service counter there's a cheap stool. 1950's, suburban and on the East Coast.
- CHARACTERS:** JASON; late thirties, white male, slender and in-shape.
DICK; late thirties, white male, large and muscular.
ASHLEY; late twenties or early thirties; good looking with brunette or blonde hair. Femme fatale.
- AT RISE:** JASON is standing over the footlocker, wearing a dirty shirt, jeans, boots and gloves as he ends his shift. He takes off his gloves and places them in the open footlocker. After closing the footlocker he's approached by DICK from stage right who's wearing a dark suit, dark leather shoes and a fedora. He carries a briefcase.

Author's Note:

This takes place in the 1950's and should have a bit of a crime noir feel. Lighting should be subdued if possible, and costumes should be period appropriate.

DICK

(Shakes hands with JASON after putting down his briefcase)

You're looking healthy, Jason. Dirty as hell but healthy.

JASON

(Nervous at the sight of DICK, but tries to act calm)

I figured it was just a matter of time before seeing one of you again. Look, it's been a long shift and I just want to go home and get cleaned up. Any chance we can do this some other time?

DICK

I never thought I'd see you in this line of work.

JASON

Choices are limited and I've got rent to pay. So, I'm guessing this can't wait?

DICK

This can't wait. I've got a terrific opportunity for you. That is if you're interested. Are you interested?

JASON

(Moves to the service counter and sits on the stool. DICK follows and stands to JASON's side)

I had a feeling. Look Dick, I appreciate the concern, I'm sure it's genuine. But-

DICK

Don't but me you little prick. It wasn't easy getting over here, you know. I hate the fuckin' suburbs. The clean air, kids in the park, stay-at-home moms, the whole thing. The way I see it is you owe us. We carried you when you were down. A damn liability, that's what you were. Now it's time for you to return the favor, and the loyalty.

JASON

You did carry me, but that doesn't mean I owe you. I've moved on. That's not my life anymore.

DICK

You kidding me? You sell people plants and fertilizer. Look at you, you're a mess. Anything's gotta be better than the life you're living now.

(Rubs his chin and looks around the nursery to verify they're alone)

You got sentenced four years, right?

JASON

Yeah, what are you getting at?

DICK

You served three. Am I to believe they let you out a year early just because of...what do they call that shit? Oh yeah, good behavior.

JASON

You know, I was offered a deal before I got locked up. They asked me to roll on you guys.

(A beat)

If I cooperated I would have got a sweet deal. So yeah, I did get out early for good behavior but I never told what really happened or who I worked with.

DICK

I don't know, buddy. Something doesn't feel right. I don't think I believe you.

JASON

Look asshole, you came to me.

(DICK launches himself at JASON ready to beat him up but stops himself before making contact. JASON

jumps out of the stool, scared and loses his breath as he begins to plead)

Easy man, easy! I'm not a snitch and you damn well know it! I've known you since we were kids.

DICK
(Pauses and calms down)

You're right. We've known each other a long time. I shouldn't doubt you. After all, you served time while the rest of us were free and clear.

JASON
Thanks for the vote of confidence.

DICK
Easy, I didn't give you permission to be a wise-ass.

JASON
How about you tell me what your proposal is?

DICK
If you're really interested. But first a little story.

JASON
All right, if you must.

DICK
(Backs away a few steps and re-gains composure)

So, Frankie, you remember Frankie right? He got out of Huttonsville seven months ago-

JASON
(Puts up his hand to stop DICK)

Where the hell is Huttonsville?

DICK

West Virginia. I know, don't laugh too hard. He got pulled over by some redneck sheriff up in the mountains. Poor guy. After he got pulled over, the sheriff found out the dumb fuck was driving a stolen car. To make matters worse, the sheriff found the dead owner of the car in the trunk. Frankie never got the chance to dump the body, you see. I'm not even sure if he killed the guy, or if he stole an already stolen car. Either way, he got locked up and sent to prison after being sentenced.

JASON

I thought I had it bad. West Virginia's a shithole. I remember one time when I was little my parents took me on vacation there. All the winding and turning up in the mountains had me barfing up food for days. I couldn't wait to leave.

DICK

Cute, but let's get back to the bigger picture. So, while Frankie was in Huttonsville, he worked out in the yard with a group of guys. Fortunately for him, they weren't all rednecks and white trash in that place. He came across a rough crowd from Florida that got pinched for some local robberies.

JASON

Anyone I'd know?

DICK

Nah, I don't think so. But that's not the point. The point is they talked and Frankie listened. When he got out, he looked into them and went to where they stashed their goods. It was somewhere down near Jacksonville, I think. Frankie found their stash and tried to take off with twenty grand in cash and stolen goods.

JASON

Let me guess, the locals got pissed and put a bullet in Frankie? I always knew that guy was trouble.

DICK

(A beat)

No, they took him in and made him part of the crew. Frankie probably thought he won the lottery, and a second chance in life.

JASON

Huh. Not the ending I'd expect.

DICK

That's because it's not over. They initiated Frankie by making him knock over a couple local pawn shops and liquor stores. The cash was coming in and everything was going just fine. The wheels of the operation were greased, so to speak. You know how it is; when people get paid everything seems golden. You maybe even tend to overlook the little things.

JASON

I suppose. Look, as interesting as this story is, I'd like you to get to the point. I need to finish closing up.

DICK

Sure. So Frankie gets sent to a local pawn shop one day. He treats it like a normal job. Except, this time things were different. It turns out the shop was actually a front for Frankie's new gang and he never realized it. Poor Frankie had gotten comfortable with his new friends and never stopped to look around to see what's what.

JASON

They turned on him?

DICK

They were never with him to begin with. They knew they were going to pop him from day one. They just figured they might as well make a profit on the guy before putting two in his chest. They made their money and he was no longer useful. Like a pimp getting rid of a used up broad.

(A beat)

The point of this story is trust is everything. Just because everything seems fine, doesn't mean that's really the case. People can turn on you.

JASON

Consider the message received.

DICK

Good.

(A beat)

I didn't use up all that hot air for nothing.

JASON

Trust is a two way street, you know. I get your concern, I really do. If I were in your shoes I'm not sure if I could trust me, either. But you came to me and not the other way around. I've got something here. It may not be much but it's mine, and I'm not behind bars. Give me a reason to risk messing this up.

DICK

You need to prove you're still loyal, and we're talking about a lot of money to help you build a new life. It's a real second chance. You send me away and I'm not coming back.

JASON

All right. Say I give in. How much money are we talking about?

DICK

A lot.

JASON

What's a lot?

DICK

Over forty grand, and all from one job.

JASON

You've got my attention.

DICK

Thought so.

(Places briefcase on service counter and opens it.
DICK pulls out a stack of papers and hands them to
JASON)

JASON

(Takes a moment to look through the papers)

What are these?

DICK

The top one is an out-of-town club run by a guy named Rickey. Rickey runs everything from guns to prostitution. He's got a big safe in his office that's supposedly loaded and we're going to hit it.

JASON

You want me to crack the safe like the old days?

DICK

Exactly. We're meeting with the contact to finalize everything. If you look at my notes you'll see everything's there.

JASON

Seems promising. Have you met this contact before?

DICK

Nah, he's the friend of a friend. The meeting will be the first we see each other, but I'm told he can be trusted.

JASON

You know, I've also got a little story to share. I know how much you love a good story.

(Pauses and begins to pace in a short area)

When I was inside, my ex visited me a few times. You remember Ashley? At first she was really pissed. She couldn't understand why

I'd done the things I'd done. I tried keeping the details from her. I was certain I'd lose her if I told her about what had happened. You see, when we were together we never talked business. Our relationship was strictly physical. She left her career at the doorstep after coming home and I did the same.

(A beat)

But she kept pushing and pushing. It got to the point that I was going to lose her if I didn't tell her what happened. Eventually I gave in and told, but her reaction scared me. She wasn't mad. She didn't even seem disturbed or upset. She was more interested in what had gone wrong.

DICK

What are you getting at?

JASON

My point is simple. She loved me for who I was, and wanted me to be open with her.

DICK

If that's the case, why aren't you dating anymore? You gave her what she wanted, but yet she's your ex?

(ASHLEY enters from stage left and walks and stands next to JASON across from DICK. ASHLEY is holding a handgun and points it at DICK. She's in a formal dress and high heels with a trench coat over the dress)

ASHLEY

Don't worry, I still love Jason. Our relationship has just evolved beyond the bedroom.

DICK

(Upset, his voice begins to crack with nervousness)

I...I don't understand. What is this?

JASON

You're as dense as you've always been.

ASHLEY

We decided we can be lovers and business partners.

DICK

I don't-

ASHLEY

I'm not very good at sharing, and Jason doesn't need you any longer.

(ASHLEY shoots DICK twice in the chest. She walks to his body and looks down)

I know that wasn't easy, but it was you or him.

JASON

(Stunned reaction)

Tha...that went different than I'd thought. I mean, I knew you were gonna' do it, it's just weird.

(A beat)

I knew though. I knew that he would kill me as soon as whatever job he wanted done was done. Those guys would never trust me again.

ASHLEY

It was necessary. You've been given a second chance with me; don't make me regret doing this with you...for you.

(ASHLEY walks in front of JASON and he puts his arms around her)

JASON

Better him than me, right?

ASHLEY

Come on, we need to get rid of the body and we've got a job to plan.

(ASHLEY gives JASON a playful spank on the butt)

Get it together and grab us some shovels.

(Fade to black)

It Is Melted Now, But It Will “Frost” Again

(Written for Robert Frost) by Doug Lemon

Ageless,
Undeniable

verses and knowledge.

Students of the universe,

we once had dense hardcover bars worth millions.

Stolen, pilfered through, and embezzled lines they seized.

Thieved ideas transformed into quotations out of context.

Pure elements crushed to dust

then transformed into unwanted mixtures.

Your treasure still exists,

though many more paces hidden,

buried under sediments of self-proclaimed novel
novels.

They now push pyrite in our faces and propose that we pierce them
with our teeth.

Once innocent atoms are now tainted into corrupted compounds.

Your worst scribbles were still

Twenty-Four-Thousand pure as you

you artistically presented us with 79 protons of pure, poetic
perfection.

Still nothing we study

has your Hancock in our scholastic selections.

In slow, hourglass time it shall pan itself back our way.

But currently your currency is gone today.

‘Cause as you know,

as you would say,

“Nothing Gold Can Stay.”

I guess you were right...

Nothing “Gold” could stay...

Salsa

by Anastasia Lehnem

Roused by lightly padded feet
four points of pressure
travel the length of a body
A rumbling purr of deep content
orange, white and black furred head
rubs affectionately against
pillow creased cheek
two slow rotations and round body
molds to neck
a perfect resting place
for a beloved feline companion

Trudy

by Miho Vande Berg

Her mom died when she was small
Trudy became a three-year-old
who didn't smile at all.
In her old pictures,
tiny Trudy always frowns
with her pouty lips

She mourned her mom's death all her life
always had her mom's picture in her hand
told the stories about her mom to everyone she met

*My mom didn't let me hug her from the front
she had tuberculosis,
I could only hug her from her back,
Trudy said after she hugged me.*

*My real mom was a sweet person but
my step mother wasn't like her at all.
I felt a little sorry for her step mom.
Trudy's real mom didn't have a flaw
according to Trudy*

She mourned her mom's death all her life
often had some cookies to ease her loneliness
They were the only
sweet thing after her mom's death.

Trudy died last month
After her death, a lot of cookie tins were left.

I don't like cookies but I liked her—I cry
Trudy doesn't care anymore
she's with her mom in heaven.

Secret Admirer

by Doug Lemon

Secret admirer
End the secret. So we can
make secrets instead...

Untitled Photograph

by Michael Wentzel



Watermelon Story

by Miho Vande Berg

- JAMES: Male, mid-thirties. A divorced father of a four-year old.
- LINDA: Female, mid-thirties. A divorced single mother.
- KEN: A four-year old male who is JAMES' and LINDA's child.
- Setting: The living room of JAMES' place.
- Time: The present. Spring. Late afternoon.

Watermelon Story

A single man's living room next to his kitchen. Spring, Saturday afternoon.

At Rise: JAMES, the father, is babysitting his son, KEN.

KEN

Dad, can I eat some more ice cream?

JAMES

OK...but this is it, OK?

KEN

Yeah, OK!

(JAMES opens the refrigerator, scoops some ice cream into a bowl, and gives it to KEN. Ken starts to eat the ice cream.)

(James' cell phone rings.)

JAMES

Hey. How'ya doing? (goes back to kitchen and talks in a smaller voice) Yeah, Ken's here. Yeah, this weekend is my turn. (While listening he takes a peak at how Ken's doing in the living room) She's gonna be here soon to pick him up. (listening to the caller talking) Around five, I guess. (listening) That's right. Yeah, I'll call you. (listening) Right. (listening) Me, too, baby. See you in a couple of hours. (call ends)

(James puts his cell phone back in his pocket.)

(Ken brings his ice cream bowl to kitchen and gives it to James.)

JAMES

Did you finish eating that ice cream already?

KEN

Yeah, I'm hungry! Dad, can I have some watermelon?

JAMES

Sorry, buddy. No watermelon in the fridge.

KEN

You don't have any watermelon? Your girlfriend doesn't like watermelon?

JAMES

Geez. (beat) You know what mom said? I shouldn't give you too much cold food. You ate ice cream a half hour ago. You ate some more just now. When mom picks you up to go home you ask mom if you can eat watermelon. OK?

KEN

When's mom gonna pick me up?

JAMES

Pretty soon. How about this? I'll tell you a watermelon story.

KEN

What's a watermelon story?

JAMES

(holding Ken's shoulder) It's a story about a watermelon but I'm not sure if you'll like it. It's a little scary.

KEN

I'll like it 'cause I like watermelon!

JAMES

Alrighty. (changing his voice to serious voice) Once upon a time there was a boy who liked to eat cold food.

KEN

What's his name?

JAMES

His name was ... Kenmelon. (changing his voice again) Kenmelon liked cold food. He always ate something cold and got sick to his stomach. His dad told him that he shouldn't eat cold food. But Kenmelon didn't stop eating cold food.

KEN

Kenmelon is like me!

JAMES

(Smiles at Ken first and talks) Kenmelon always wanted to eat something cold so he ate some ice cream. He still wanted something cold so he ate some melon, but that melon wasn't big enough. So Kenmelon prayed to God so that he can get bigger melons.

KEN

I don't want a melon story. I want a watermelon story!

JAMES

Don't worry this is a watermelon story. (with a serious voice again) God heard Kenmelon's prayer and he changed some melons into a bigger melons. But the bigger melons were especially bad for children, so God put a pattern on those big melons. In old days, bad people, people who went to prison, had to wear striped shirts so

those watermelon had to wear striped patterns, too. Also, God called the bad melons watermelons because He liked to use water for bad things. He once sent a flood to bad cities to kill bad people. Remember the story of Noah? God likes to use water to do bad things, so he called the bad melon a watermelon.

KEN

Is watermelon bad? Am I bad because I like watermelon?

JAMES

No, no... I mean... You're not bad, Ken. That's not what I meant. You just be careful not to eat too much watermelon.

KEN

If I eat too much watermelon, will God kill me?

JAMES

Wait. No, no. No, God killed bad people in the old days. You know He, uh, He changed the way He does things and doesn't kill bad people anymore. That's why there are many bad people alive today. Well... Just be careful not to eat too much watermelon. That's it.

KEN

(gets teary) Dad, I'm afraid of God. I'm afraid of watermelon.

JAMES

(dismayed by Ken's reaction) Well, uh... Don't take the watermelon story too seriously. (beat) Well, there's only a few bad watermelons...'cause.. the only bad watermelons are the ones.. witches grow. As long as you eat the watermelons that we buy at Cub Foods or Target, you'll be OK. They're safe. Perfectly safe, OK?

(Ken stops sobbing. He looks at James with watery eyes and nods. The door bell rings and James opens the door. LINDA comes in.)

JAMES

How was your afternoon?

LINDA

Good. Sorry I'm a little late. On my way back here, I saw a new nursery opened up near the Cub Foods. So I dropped by. (turn to Ken) Ken, you know what? I got some plants for you. We'll grow some watermelons in our backyard. Pretty cool, huh!?

KEN

(screaming) I don't want any watermelon!

LIDA

What!?! What do you mean? You like watermelon! We're not going to eat watermelon—we're going to grow them.

JAMES

He doesn't feel good right now. You better take him home.

LINDA

What's the matter, sweetheart? (holds Ken)

KEN

Mom, are you a witch? (beat — uncomfortable silence)

LINDA

(glaring at James) Let's go home, Ken.

JAMES

Linda, let me explain. (runs after Linda and tries to explain. Linda doesn't look at James. She takes Ken and closes the door in James' face.)

END

Winter According to the Lines

(this poem was written over five weeks, one line at a time)

by Justin Delzer

To be in Minnesota in the winter must be a dream; for
if it wasn't, it'd be too damn cold and bleak to be joyful.
Air of cold freezes one's soul
though petrified the ground may be, warmth comes from within.

The sky obscured, its misty haze
bathes mountains of snow upon all with glitter.
White dust coats the ground with bright elegance as
each flake falls from the sky, a masterpiece in ice.

Winter's wonder abounds with thoughts of fellowship and
brotherhood;
their branches glisten with crystalline beauty.
Rainbows of color embedded within the crystals of ice reveal
their elegance, their serenity, their simple lines so clean and exact.

The sun shines brightly through the glades
cracking the layers of ice, each deeper than the last, forming into rain
icicles upon the silt.
Such things we slip upon, lest we watch our steps carefully as
winter wanes, its glitter sparkling in the spring sunlight into a
flowery glow.

An Old Song

by Miho Vande Berg

I played an old song
The sound opens the door to my memory

Sizzling sun
Hot humid summer
Thighs wet from spilled Coca Cola
I thought I would love to die young
without pain
or
maybe with
—only—
beautiful pain

Thick rhythm of the bass guitar
still grabs my gut
groove of the howling Les Paul
takes me into
sensual memory
that I used to belong to
when I believed passion lasts
forever
like believing
the same sun comes up
again
the next day

Girls' Happy Hour

by Cheryl Wilke

Yesterday brought me another year
older. The late-afternoon, Virgo
sun unseasonably searing. The city
people in their city cars trampled
soft pavement past the bar's patio
table in the shade of a canvas awning
where I sat with two friends drinking
three-buck chardonnay over an iron-
grid table and talking about walking
across the busy street and around
a glop-thick, city lake ... walking
to forget she buried her father today ... walking
to forget her husband calling to join us ... walking
to forget another year older: Petals falling
by the wayside on perfect course
to winter. No one is walking. Everyone
is driving by in a hurry.

Meat on the Table

by Robert Pederson

Here in big farm country, deer eat from the fields in the mornings and evenings. They spend their days out of the endless wind in the shelterbelts, and on little chunks of land that had been carved out by the Red River of the North a long time ago. Basically, deer stay anywhere there are trees for shelter. It was in one of these little chunks with trees that I erected my stand. I could not get permission to be in the birch and aspen rich bottom land just 500 yards to the west on the edge of the Red; the owners said they did not let anyone hunt their land. Instead I had to settle for this little triangular piece.

I had hunted land like this with my dad when I was real little. He taught me how to wait and be patient, the sights, sounds and smell of the woods, where to shoot a deer. He showed me the hard work of field dressing it and hauling it away. He used an old army gun that he cut down so it would handle better, and a sharp jackknife. He picked them up at a pawn shop up in Fargo a long time ago. He got them to help provide food. I always wanted to be a deer hunter like my dad.

There is plenty of sign on this piece; tracks and beds all over the place with several clearly cut paths coming in from the fields to the east. The snow is about a foot deep and crusted over this year with clearly defined bowls where the deer have bedded down. I should be able to hear them coming, unless a truck is passing by on Highway 75, just west of me about 100 yards or so.

My homemade stand is up in a pine, facing south above a draw, about 15 feet up from the foot of the tree and 40 feet to the bottom of the draw. I made it from cast off plywood and lumber left over from the highway crews. It was a son-of-a-buck to put up. I'm protected from the weather though. The wind is out of the northwest like always, whistling through the scattered trees in this un-tillable chunk of land. I'm not cold though, because compared to my house, a camper, I'm living large in my luxurious deer stand.

The camper is always cold in the wintertime. Even though we have two big 100-gallon propane tanks outside, we only have the thermostat set to 60, and then turned down to 45 when I go to

school. I always have to turn the heat down, because Dad goes to work before I leave. He leaves at 6:00 and I catch the school bus at 6:30. We have to watch out for the plumbing freezing up. When we go to the bathroom, Dad always reminds me,

“If it’s yellow, let it mellow. When it’s brown, flush it down.”

“Dad, that’s gross.”

“Well Johnny, that’s just how it is.”

I guess propane is expensive. Dad is stocky and has a big bald spot in the middle of his black hair. He doesn’t seem to mind the cold as much as me. I’m a freshman this year, skinny, a redhead, and always cold. I live with my dad, Jim, across from the grain elevator in Kent, Minnesota.

The constant wind has embedded dirt from the farm fields into the side of our old trailer. The inside is clean and neat, well, as clean and neat as two guys living in twenty-four foot aluminum sided box can keep it. The floor is always getting dirty, even though Dad keeps a carpet out in front of the door. We have wet clothes and junk lying every which way, with no place to put it all. We just track in all that western Minnesota farm dirt and dust on our boots.

When we lived in a real house in town, we had a real yard and Mom had a garden that I helped with. I pulled weeds, and one time, I remember Mom pulled up a carrot and was proud as all get out. She smiled at me and held up a dirt covered carrot that was as big as my arm! We ate everything she planted in that garden: peas, carrots, beans, cucumbers that she made into sweet pickles and tomatoes that she canned, all sorts of vegetables.

The good times ended when Mom went to the hospital to have Sis. I was real little, maybe five, when we went the hospital up in Fargo. After we got there, I never saw her again, except when she was in the box sleeping. I guess that was at her funeral. I never met Sis.

After Mom went to sleep forever, Dad got his foot caught in an auger and cut half of it off. A lady took me to her house and watched me, and after a time, Dad came to get me. He walked funny and moved slow. Dad had problems from that point on. He couldn’t make much money because he couldn’t move easily. He couldn’t work at the farm anymore, so he got a job at the elevator. It was a deduction in pay, making groceries skimpy and meat a luxury we couldn’t afford anymore. Our time together in the deer stand dwindled to zero.

I never saw the house in town again. We had to sell the pickup and we moved into the camper. Dad couldn't drive me to school; I always had to take the bus real early in the morning because Breckenridge was so far away. Dad also told me to take my showers at school after class. This fall, I have to sneak into the locker room during lunch to get cleaned up. I have a chore that I want to do after school for my Dad. I need to do something to help out, to provide us with food, and that is why I decided to hunt alone. I did not go to freshmen math club every day like I told him. Instead, when the bus drops me off, I run to my stand every other day, dig up that old rifle and my other hunting gear from a bag I cover with snow, and climb into my stand. I want to put some meat on the table.

I hear soft footsteps and I look to my left. There are a bunch of deer heading over on one of those paths right underneath my stand! I look for the biggest one, and there he is, head held high like a prince or king, walking and strutting behind the rest of the herd. There are a dozen or so deer, small yearlings that have recently lost their spots, bigger does and some small bucks mixed in with larger does. The biggest is a buck with huge horns, bright, and glistening white, that are a stark contrast with his dark brown fur coat. He is about 50 yards behind the last big doe, head up and alert, looking about for signs of danger.

My heart starts pounding when I see him, headed towards my stand. I start shaking and breathing hard, sure that anyone or anything within a mile can see and hear me move. I take the safety off as I pull the gun to my shoulder. I bring the barrel up, trying to make the tip of the front sight clear and focused, like Dad told me, as I aim in just behind the buck's right shoulder. When the big buck is finally broadside to me, about fifty yards out, I do a final check of my sights, making sure that the deer and the rear sight are fuzzy, just like Dad told me when we practiced, and I squeeze the trigger.

I feel a big push as the rifle goes off, and I cannot see the buck anymore. Did I get him? I remember what Dad told me to do when I shoot a deer: *remember what you last saw just before the gun went off, and be honest with yourself. Were sight alignment and sight picture right?* Yes, I was sure of that. *Then look for a running deer, for he will go a little bit before he goes down and dies.* The buck is off like a rocket, heading to my right, and then I lose sight of him in the draw. All of the other deer in the herd take off as well, tails up in the air as white flags of danger as they bound away.

Dad also told me: *you need to wait a minute before going to find any deer you shoot, so count to sixty.* It seems like ten minutes. *After you shoot a deer, you get excited, and time will seem to crawl.* With that in mind, I decide to count out loud to one hundred instead, because I will probably count a little fast.

“One-two-three...ninety-eight, ninety-nine, a hundred.” Now I climb down and try to find my deer.

I find that big twelve pointer right where I had lost sight of him in the draw. My first buck! Now it’s time to start working. I field dress the deer with my jackknife and then drag him to the side of the highway. It’s only fifty yards or so to the road, but I have to pull him up out of the draw. After about fifteen minutes of huffing and puffing, I am finally at the edge of the highway. I walk back to the camper, about a mile or so, and it’s dark out. I enter and see my dad fixing some potatoes and corn, his back to the door.

“Is that supper?” Hashed potatoes again. I was busting to tell him about the deer.

“Yup, hashed potatoes. I’ll add some spices and it’ll taste real good.”

“Dad, can’t we have some meat with it?”

“Sorry Johnny, no money in the budget for meat.” Boy will he be surprised.

“Well, I just shot a big buck, so we’ll have some meat for a while if you help me bring it in.”

“Really?” My dad sounds surprised. “I thought you were at math club.”

“Dad, I’m sorry, but I’ve been hunting every other day after school. Math club is only on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I’m sorry if I let you down by lying to you.” I dread his response.

“You really shot a buck? I know you passed your hunter safety course and your grades are good; I saw your last report card. Hmm. You’ve been hunting by yourself?”

“No, you were with me in my ear the whole time. I did everything you taught me.”

“Well then. Let me get a pickup from the elevator and let’s get this bad boy. We’ll put dinner off until we get back. I’ll fry up the tenderloins; we’ll have them with this hash”

Now we have some meat on the table.

Untitled Photograph
by Michel Wentzel



Poem #7

by Lukas Hall

Coach always told me two fold.

Divide by Seven, and eat your shoes
before they rust. Hang yourself from the Empire
State Building on the last day of fall,
when the leaves are maroon, neon, and
dull. But the rope better be
dipped in gold. Tape Velcro to your sideburns
with little beetles stuck in the
etching, flapping their
limbs to the beat of the wind
as you drive past Ford Theater.
Dunk your skull
in acid and pass out naked in the
middle of Mardi Gras.

Divide by Seventy-Two. Catch bears
having sex by waking volcanoes
from slumber. Spew ash over a
village, let it rot in dust for years. *If you find yourself*
staring at a snake as it eats your feet,
allow it to finish then eat its. Find the
home of a little girl, steal her Barbie,
snap it in half and send it to our President.
Send the other half with bits of your flesh
after you blow your brains out.

Wash the blood from your bathroom,
you'll want to sell the house as a ghost.
Cocaine will not make your face melt
that's the mice pissing on your bones.
Turn your car on before you leave the garage.
Grip the exhaust and swallow
as much as you can before
the blurred vision sets in. Try to

divide by
700.

Do all these things before you die.
Before you slit your wrists with a rusty
dagger after playing Clue
with Richard Marquette.
Before you say, "It was me, with the knife,
in the bathroom."
Before you call it quits,
take home to the North Pole.
Freeze several times over and
have your ex-wife bury you
next to the rotten goat,

that nobody loved.

Thornton Street

by Molly Kessler

The cool slabs of concrete sidewalk stretch out in front of a row of perfectly trimmed, evergreen globes. The evergreens nestle near the ground and are blanketed with orange-red woodchips. To the right, hiding in a cubby between two bushes lies a small, crumpled, white box with faint gold lettering: Marlboro. The lid of the box shakes in the breeze as the wind coaxes a woodchip out of its pile and onto the course, gray cement.

Scrape. Thud. Scrape. Thud. The echo of wooden clogs to the left carries a tall, trim woman with short, peppered, gray hair into view. She is wearing a faded brown t-shirt and baggy jean shorts that cut off at the knees. As she passes, her black, plastic sunglasses catch the light and she smiles. Her musical clogs continue their journey down the sidewalk. A few steps later, there is a faint shadow etched into the cement. Stamped into the sidewalk are the words:

Minn State

Curb-Cutter

08 / 18 / 04

A white-gray crust of bird poop is resting in the i-n-n.

The white-gray crust of bird poop matches the building across the street exactly. The bird poop structure is an apartment building that stretches up fifteen stories. Each individual apartment on each level has a balcony with black, metal railings freckled in brown rust. The entryway is made of six windowed doors bordered in a silver metal. Centered, at the top of the door frame, are three black numbers: 8 1 0.

A glass door swings open, and two young men in green, camouflage military uniforms exit the building. The first man is tall with blonde hair. He carries two black duffel bags over one shoulder. The other is short with brown hair. He scratches his head and flips open his phone. He checks the screen before he makes a call. They walk across the road and ease into a silver-black sedan. As they pull into the road the click click click of a bicycle passes them. A dental student wearing navy blue scrubs whirs past them on a faded yellow trekking bike. He rides his bike standing and barely needs to break as he reaches the apartment's entrance.

Before he enters, a large white FedEx truck roars and whines as it parks, blocking the entrance from view. The machine lets out a constant, low pitch hum as it waits for the driver to return. An excited vroom breaks through the truck's grunt as a girl with curly, brown hair zips past the truck on a green and yellow Vespa. At the corner the scooter pauses for a stop sign, and a forest-green Ford F150 turns onto the street. A tan, muscular arm hangs out of the window while the hand drums on the door to 93X. The driver spits sunflower seeds from the cab of the truck onto the pavement. The heavy metal music is drowned out as FedEx truck groans forward and heads in the opposite direction.

Only the quiet hum of unknown traffic remains until it is interrupted with a scrape, thud, scrape, thud. To the right appears the pepper haired woman again. Just before she passes, she pauses, bends down, and picks up the crumpled, white Marlboro box from its cubby between the trimmed, evergreen bushes.

Misery

by Maija Goblirsch

You needed a play to stay

after all these years

you came back

if only just for the weekend

lumpy pillows and scratchy blue sheets

are all you get

even if I had better extras

you would never see them

the couch should be fine

your tall frame will have to adjust

I almost hope you wake up with a backache.

Why did I let you back in

after all these years?

I wonder

but let it be

as your torso is already contorted

into shapes only a twig would hope to make

as you try to find comfort

on the couch of your old flame.

I hope you wake up sore

after all you put me through

I hope I wake up sore, too

after I was stupid enough

to let you stay,

even if only for the weekend.

We both deserve misery,

but now

that misery is endured separately

instead of as one

no longer leaning on the other

to get through the day

we have learned to lean on ourselves,

but being miserable with someone else

even someone like you

is so much better
than being miserable alone,
don't you agree?
And so it is my utter misery
that makes me throw off the duvet
at 2 a.m.
unable to sleep
just knowing you are on my couch, a few feet down the hall
has every cell in my body on high alert
every nerve tingling
every pore captivated
by what used to be
and now
what could be
once again.
As I tiptoe towards my fate,
my oversized t-shirt swaying,
I pray you feel the same.
Your long runner legs protrude from all sides of the couch
over each edge
lies a limb
restless and twitching
you too unable to sleep.
I try to make your face out from the sea of blue sheets
and plaid boxer shorts
and hairy limbs
I dart around the corner
as you start to turn and grumble.
Maybe I don't need you,
I tell myself as I creep back to the haven
that is my bed.
But now it taunts me,
those sheets so soft
and inviting
I ignore it as it screams
COWARD
get out of here, this bed that is so warm and comfortable
and safe.
And then I hear it:
three soft rasps on the door

and a whisper
beckoning me out of everything that is fluffy
and warm and safe
and easy to melt into.
I meet you in the hallway, our common ground
the wood floor one continuous block of ice.
Wordlessly,
we slide down the wall
like two drops of rain on a car window
and freeze into one frozen patch
of goose bumps and bare legs.
Two feet away, not speaking, not touching, not even breathing
just sitting
miserably
together.
When I finally look over you are staring
at my curly ringlets,
your fingers pulling one
springing it up and down
my crazy hair
you were the only one who ever loved it
just the way it was.
So many words are spoken
as we sit in utter silence
until finally,
you brace your arm on the cool wall
next to my mass of ringlets
and lean in,
breaching the gap
sliding over from one edge of the pond to the other
gliding towards me,
only pausing as our noses touch
unsure of where to go from here
it seemed like a good idea
but you and I both know
we are committing to a life of misery.
In one kiss,
we are making a pact
to live of a life of misery.
Together

once again
hoping,
foolishly hoping,
that this time
will be different
and knowing,
that no matter what,
with or without,
apart or together,
we will remain...
miserable.

Your lips now moving in all the way
past my nose
seeming to say
why not suffer,
together?

Inner T
U B
E

by Isaac Faleschini

The fat man floats

black in a inner-
tube

lost in waterproof headphones:

bob

shark

bait

bob

Untitled Picture
by Sheila Franchuk



Michael Riddle Must Die

by Molly Kessler

Michael Riddle must die. In first grade that was very clear. Michael Riddle was skinny, blonde, and very good at math. I hated him.

My malice for Michael stemmed from playing “Around the World” in math class. Everyone would sit, Indian style, in a circle, and Mrs. Johnson would stand in the middle with flashcards. She would choose one student to stand outside the circle, behind another student. Whichever kid solved the math problem on the flashcard first got to stand behind the next kid, and Mrs. Johnson would give them a new flashcard. If someone made it all the way around the circle (around the world) they would win.

I could take down anyone in the class. I could conquer the world and those flashcards too. That is, until I stood behind Michael Riddle. That skinny face with short blonde hair would solve the problem faster than me every time, and around the world he would go. At first, I was a good sport. “Oh, I’ll get him next time,” I’d tell myself. Or “Wow, Michael sure is speedy.” But I could only take so much. After making it almost all of the way around the world, only to be defeated by Michael once more, I decided that my time would be better spent plotting his tragic death.

I could knock over a shelf in the library onto him, and he would suffocate in an avalanche of children’s books... No, children’s books were too light, and we weren’t allowed in the older kid sections. I could push him off the stage in a concert while we sang a Raffi song. He would break his neck in the fall... No, too many parents with cameras. What if I wrapped the chains from the swing-set around his neck? Yes, that looks like an accident.

At his funeral, I would lay a stack of flashcards on his grave. A heartbreaking symphony would play in the background. I’d wear all black. His marker would read: Rest In Peace, Michael Riddle. I would certainly find peace, and I’d rest much better without him. When anyone asked me how I knew him, I’d tear up and let out a great, fake cry. “Michael Riddle, loved to travel Around the World,” I’d tell them, while blowing my nose into a handkerchief. “In honor of his memory, I’ll travel Around the World for him.” They’d cry, too.

No one would stand in my way.

Although these plots of peril still flash through my mind, I never did murder Michael Riddle. Instead, I felt a challenge unintentionally made by him that has never been resolved. No matter how much sweat and effort I put forth, I could not beat him. He had brought to my attention that perfection could not be attained by perfectionism. However, I could not help but rise to the challenge. In my mind, a war had begun, and the armies of Michael Riddles stood against me.

Middle school was an era of success. All I had to do was want something and it'd be mine. I always got to perform in the front row in danceline. I took all of the solos in choir. I received academic awards at the end of each school year. The Michael Riddles in my life were retreating. "Take cover!" They yelled as I stormed through the field slaying them with a sword, blasting them with bombs. I was certain that I had won. I could be the best at anything I wanted, at everything I tried.

The battle turned when I entered high school. I was faced with peers who had actual talent. Based on my success in middle school, I was placed in advanced courses. I reveled in the challenges, but I always ranked lowest in my classes since the other students were the Einsteins of our era. I could not possibly hold my own against them. If we had played *Around the World* in high school, I wouldn't have been able to stand up once. Instead the class would have circled me, placed a dunce cap on my head, and taunted me with their mighty minds. Next, they would stone me. Their quick wit was the boulder that broke my shield in battle. Their stares were the arrows that pierced me as I failed.

I could feel Michael Riddle wrapping that same swing-set chain around my neck. He had risen from the grave and was laughing coldly in my ear, "You can't travel around the world anymore, Molly Kessler." I needed to find a way to survive. I would not let this skinny, blonde haired, five year-old mathematician beat me.

In soccer, Amy was the fastest, Sarah had the best footwork, and Clara was the most intimidating. There was no way I could compete with them. I had to find a way to be different, to be helpful. That's when I realized that everyone needed help. Why couldn't I be the best at that? At helping? I learned to assist my teammates. I set them up for all of their big moves. Amy would speed down the field

with the ball, she'd tap it back to me, and I'd pass it over to Sara, who'd make the shot every time. In a subtle way, I became invaluable. Perhaps this was how I could always succeed.

I applied this theory in other arenas of my life. In theater, I never played the lead. I never competed for the role that everyone wanted. Instead, I worked for the part that the show couldn't do without. I played the character roles. For two years running, I won the Best Supporting Actress award. In after-school choir, I was placed in an all-women's group which was always considered second best to the co-ed choir. I sang in it all three years, and in that last year, we placed better than the co-ed group at every competition. In classes I redefined what I wanted to gain. I no longer asked for the best grade, but for a genuine understanding of what we were learning. I may not have received a passing AP score in English Literature, but my creative writing pieces were always read out loud to the class. In those moments, when I received the Best Supporting Actress award, cheered with my after-school choir, and heard my stories read out loud, a voice inside of me would yell in victory, "Fuck you, Michael Riddle!"

I allowed this anger in victory to push me forward. The anger became my drive to continually ask more of myself than anyone else would expect of me. When I was told I couldn't do something, a bulls-eye drive to succeed at that task would consume me. Not simply to prove someone wrong, but to prove to myself that I could conquer anything. I needed to know that nothing would hold me back, especially not myself. If my mother told me I'd make a good nurse, I needed to believe I would be a good doctor. If my father asked me to hand him a wrench, I needed to learn how to fix the faucet. If my best friend suggested I become a librarian, I needed to realize that I'd rather write the books, not watch over them.

In first grade, Michael Riddle taught me that I was a perfectionist. I learned that I did not cope well with defeat. As I've grown older, I have tried not to care. I have striven to find peace when others succeed far ahead of me. It is not as though I do not wish Michael Riddle, and all talented individuals in the world well, but their accomplishments stand out to me. I cannot help but to see their successes as proof of what I could accomplish, too. As a result, I have learned to look for the unsung successes, the untraditional routes with which a victory is needed. I cannot turn off my drive to be the absolute best version of myself, but I can decide what that

best version looks like.

I am not in first grade anymore. I do not see a skinny, blonde child as my enemy, but I recognize that I will never truly be done with this war. The epic struggle to realize my full potential will never cease.

No matter which battle I face next, I will always remember Michael Riddle. I only shared a classroom with him for one year, in first grade. He did not meet a tragic death from the chain of a swing nor an avalanche of books. No death while singing Raffi's "Baby Beluga." The next, and last time, I saw him was in a hallway in high school. He was still skinny with blonde hair spiked back with gel. He looked like I pictured him, a successful nerd. I don't think he recognized me. I am certain he never thinks about me, and does not know that I have allowed his first grade victories to form me. All I could think when I saw him standing in the hallway was, "Michael Riddle, you bastard. You never would let me win at around the world." Whether Michael Riddle knows it or not, he has guaranteed only the end to this war: I will conquer the world.

Boomerang Nebula

by Douglas Lemon

Hypnotizing lights blind our vivid imaginations.
Stars twinkle, sparkle like gorgeous eyes.
You're vibrant and flamboyantly dressed for a black tie occasion.
Bolt out the doors you jet.
Sadness, absolute coldness is left in your wake.

Boomerang is a terrible name!

(closer examinations prove this
and we know once you're gone
you won't come back)

Yet your vanishing takes millenniums! (I'm guessing)
You're no star! Not anymore...

A one-hit wonder. A one-night stand that won't depart
quickly enough.

Yet unlike most,
the more powerful the microscope you're under,
the more perfect you appear to be.

Yet your "heart" is the coldest thing man could find.

Negative 150 degrees Fahrenheit? No!

Negative 150 degrees Celsius? Forget that.

150 Kelvin?

Closer.

I used to think your
heartbeat was so cold,
it was close to nothing.

But in fact, despite what records show
your Nebula's heart is absolute nil.

Your heart = absolute zero.

French Moose

by Karlynn O'Neil

I want your broken hallelujah.
Trembling legs and heavy breath,
Our antlers intertwine.
This mind kiss is brought about
By clumsy words.
Resting my head on the hide of your chest,
I translate the French underneath.
How do you say: umbrella?
How do you say: happy?
How do you say: lover?
Mimsy and wonder of children
In adult bodies, we play adult games.

Fishing

by Patti Lindaberry

Fishing line dangles
red and white bobber
from a tree branch above
a yellow bobber,
twisting twigs mangles
his line-

Red cheeks expand air,
exhales-

Frustration, heart beats,
fingers knot line and limbs
joined by rocks heavy-
Capturing supper slims
as the fish's heart beats
under water-

Sea Crow

by Cheryl Wilke

If I did not know my brother, I would know him

as a double-crested cormorant. Bold, obsidian bird amidst a crowd of squawking gulls. He stands out like a palm in a Great Lakes' forest with his slender beak, sharp-hooked bill, snake-like neck and webbed feet. He perches on the highest rock of rocks that make up their unwanted, ignored, sun-bleached turd of an island.

Cormorants, sociable birds, almost always nest in colonies. This one nests alone.

He sustains himself by diving and swimming underwater up to depths of sixty feet. He can stay submerged for over a minute, day, or weeks at a time.

His feathers, it is said, however, have no oil glands to repel water.

Not too close, but close enough to the island, I can hear the northwest breeze chant an ancient fresh-water song. I can watch this odd and solo bird hold his sodden wings to the sun. He is beautiful.

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

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Submit your creative writing to the Fall 2013 issue of The Paper Lantern! All work is reviewed anonymously and acceptance is based on literary merit.

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

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