

The Paper Lantern

Vol. VIII, Issue 1

Fall 2012

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Double Dare

By Anastasia Lehen

Voice a dare to bring me out.
Watch me follow through as
tequila shots become
a burning incentive
to be brave.

My pen, an ice cube
from the last drink,
sketches a wet line
from your navel to hips
salt marks my path
to the shot clenched
between your thighs

Let my mouth trace that trail back
from jean line to belly button
tangy taste of salt and
your skin on my tongue
hold my hair back
see what I am about to do.

Grasp your hips I travel south
to that full glass
and toss it back
no hands baby
just my mouth

Now your turn,
Stay still as
I straddle your lap
empty glass in one hand,
my other on your shoulder
to claim that lime between your lips.

Dipping my head so that my fiery flesh
touches the cool sourness of that fruit
your lips, a sweet chaser

Toxic Spice Rack

By Anastasia Lehen

Woody smell of eggnog spice
a dirty secret beneath a holiday smell
Soft brown powder, a lethal substance.
A culinary treat.

Chew it up, choke it down
and you are Alice
 tumbling
 down the rabbit hole.

A world turned feverish
cotton mouth begs for water
Hallucinations will take you for a ride.
Cheshire cat grins in the night
Kaleidoscopic eyes.

Turn your stomach inside out
heave vomit
until you are nothing more than a dry
shriveled shell.

Boil it with water, stir it
round and round.
Draw it up through slender needle
bare your arm and bright blue veins
shoot it up.

racks your body
shakes your bones
and leaves you bent
and broken.

Purple Coneflower

By Miho Vande Berg

I'm an immigrant, likely to die
here in "the fridge of America"
without my Japanese friends and family
without talking or joking like I used to
in a land where my tongue doesn't work
where sushi contains mayonaise.

I'm an immigrant who can't distinguish R from L.
"I eat a rot of lice because I'm Japanese."
collection—I'm sorry,
correction, needed.

Then, a flower I had never seen before
Mesmerized
 me
 with its
 Pinkish purple carpet.

I looked and found out her name: Purple Coneflower.
A picture book in the Saint Paul library said,
"It is hardy. Suitable for Minnesota."

I bought three pots of purple coneflowers—
still tiny green bushes
without blooms.

Purple flowers will be opening,
Someday.
Their petals don't fall.
They just fade in color little
by little,
and they bloom for
a long time.
Never wilt,
Never droop.

I decided to be one of them so when
someone looks up my name,
it will say...
"She is hardy. Suitable for Minnesota."

The 8th Street Seal

By Noah Savoie

A dirty brick window is all Woody needed. It was the reason he moved into the loft. A dirt ridden, cracked window with duct tape keeping the 42 degrees weather from seeping into his home, his skin pores drying and receding as he thought of it.

Woody sat at the window and admired how the brick embraced the glass in an arch with the view of the St. Francis Cathedral that always made him feel like an 11th century monk whenever he sat in the arch's embrace. Looking below he could see the protestors, doubled in number from the "two hundred-ish to the four hundred-ish" he calculated in his head. The police were in a line with their riot gear and a solid line of smudgy plastic shields. Abandoned batons littered the street and stoops as if Woody's street had become a timber company's dump site while on the other side of the batons was the conglomeration of would be activists, college students....all the clichés, and maybe their parents too.

Woody took a sip of his coffee smelling the oil from the beans while the drink itself burnt his tongue, numbing the aftertaste of the five sugar packets he'd dumped into it. He proceeded finishing packing the rest of his back pack; a second bottle of water, a can of mace, extra pair of homemade fingerless gloves, surgical mask, and a disposable camera. Woody held the plastic in his hands, playing with the flash button making the red light go on and off while the small electrical whine resounded from its frame. He slapped it against his hand like he learned when he was a kid causing it to flash taking a glimpse of the pictures of his friend Dian. She'd taken them, mostly at the Irish pub around the corner, mostly at night. They peeled at the edges pulling away the tape that held them to the inside of the arch as some finally dropped to the small mound of melted wax from the candles he always had lit there. Now there was just one lit. One lone candle to let the people below know where this one dirty apartment stands.

Before he left Woody checked his image in the mirror on the way out the door. Old army jacket, hood poking over the neck, good work boots with the life saving inserts Dian had given him before she went out with her boyfriend the night before. Sniffing his armpits to make sure he'd gotten enough deodorant on he exited the loft and as soon as he locked the door his deodorant started to wear off as sweat started its process in his spine where the goosebumps were

finally subsiding. He stopped for one moment and fingered around his jean pocket, past his cellphone finding the beads and the familiar feeling of the cross strung together in a harmony that Woody would never admit to enjoying in front of Dian.

Every step Woody made on the concrete outside made the blood in his heart run faster. His inserts cushioned his heel as he made a few practice kicks against a nearby wall. There was going to be no picketing for him, only dedication. The crowd was bigger than it looked from his window, but Woody started to struggle through into the mass of people huddled together like a Roman legion. At least that's how Dian described it to Woody. As he pushed past people he could not find a single centurion among them. One guy was fresh out of work and the deep-fried oil that coated the tee shirt underneath his windbreaker assaulted Woody's nose and taste buds simultaneously while the chants of "THE PEOPLE UNITED. WE'LL NEVER BE DIVIDED" already caused his hearing to become fuzzy, but if there was one thing Woody didn't have to deal with, it was cold. He started chanting along with them, bumping shoulder to shoulder with a middle aged hippy who looked like a woman and a pea coat clad librarian in her mid twenties.

Woody's vocal cords grew tired but he pushed himself with all the rage he had with retailers and any opponent the modern day leftist had on their blog. Woody had been building himself up to this moment for weeks. He'd seen the news reports of the crackdown in Oakland and was witness to the baton's symphonies against the helpless' skulls turned percussion instruments that gave a subtle sound that was not dignified in Woody's eyes.

As he was about to chant for the twentieth time Woody felt a tap on his rib cage and turned around to find Dian. Her Doc Martins were black and militant along with her cargo pants holding an extra roll of film for her high quality camera that was attached to the black painted metal tri-pod she held in her hands.

"Are you ready?" she muffled through her grey scarf that went up to her eyes lined with black mascara.

"Yeah." Woody mumbled.

"I asked ARE YOU READY?" Dian yelled stomping her boot next to Woody's right foot.

"YES!"

“Good. Just like we planned last week. Follow me around the cathedral.” She started making her way towards through the crowd before quickly stopping and turning back on her boot heel to face Woody. “WAIT! Did you bring the mask?”

“Yes.” Woody fumbled through his backpack as the crowd started to push themselves around pushing towards the other side of the baton field. After the thirty second struggle Woody managed to find the mask and presented it to Dian. “Here.”

Her brow fell in an arch for a second. “It’ll have to do, c’mon.”

Woody grabbed on to her hand as she jerked him through the crowd. Lips screamed obscenities into Woody’s already tender ear drums which he pictured bleeding and drying bloody clots into his ear that were his imaginary diagnosis. Dian gripped his palmed glove like a vise and never once did she lose her grip as they found the grey stone stairs to the cathedral. They had a vantage point on top of the stairs where they could see the police and the crowd getting closer to each other. Woody got his mace into his hand and shook it a few times for good measure while thumbing the cross in his pocket.

“So where are you thinking of setting up the sho-” Woody was cut off by Dian raising a finger to his face as she cradled a flip phone to her scarfed face. Woody couldn’t understand what she was saying as the crowd intensified, cold air from their breaths all coalescing up into the air like smokestacks in an industrial nirvana. His gaze followed up past their breath to the view of his one candle. At this he noticed that his deodorant was wearing off and did made another cursory sniff smelling the all too familiar salty odor that perfumed everyone else in the street that day.

“They’re here.” Dian yelled snapping Woody out of is momentary trance as he noticed three guys wearing black bandannas over their faces matching their black jeans, black coats over their black tee shirts, and their obvious militancy.

“I thought we were just going to take some pictures,” Woody said as he pulled the disposable camera out of his back pack.

“And with Derrick and his friends we’ll have some pictures to take.” Dian said as she began setting up her tripod, pulling out each leg with a speed that pushed the plastic locking piece to its limits. “You’re not going to tell me you brought that and thought we were just going to take some pictures? I mean I thought we’ve been over this already Woody. I already had to give Derrick this fucking speech a thousand times, I thought you’d be different. At least that’s

what you convinced me of anyways.” Derrick and the other black masks, now five strong, began pulling out clear glass bottles with the brand stickers ripped off and replaced with smiley faces done in marker. All the bottles had rags stuffed down them with little tails tapering off at the top.

“Hey, I’m as dedicated as you....but, I’m...we’re not going to go outta our way to hurt anybody here, I mean that’s their job.” Woody pointed his finger towards the plastic wall that seemed to be closer every time he turned back around.

“We need action in these shots. I can’t change anything with another placid picture of picketers and relics from the sixties. You want people to care you gotta give ‘em a show.”

All Woody could think about while she continued her speech was them having a beer back in his loft. He could see sitting himself next to Dian at the window like they used to.

“Are we good now?” Dian’s speech finished and broke Woody out of his blank stare looking indirectly at her ponytail hanging off to the side of her head while he imagined being elsewhere. Woody shook himself back into focus, ready to try and reason with her.

“Listen I can’t speak for Derrick here but I just don’t think this isn’t going to end well.”

Dian moved right in front of Woody. “Why are you here? It’s pretty obvious you’d rather be somewhere else. If you don’t really care about helping me with this then you may as well head back across the street.”

Woody felt the nerves in his face seize at this and then fall numb as the corners of his eyes started to water. “It’s not that I don’t wanna help but-”

“But nothing. Either agree to do all that you can right now or get the fuck out of here!”

Suddenly there was the distinct sound of glass hitting pavement. Woody looked over his shoulder to see a group of others in black masks and some just in ragged coats colliding with the plastic shields with all their collar bones as a small flame decorated an officer’s vest. Woody wondered what this would look like from his window with all Dian’s pictures curling onto the wax.

“I just want you to be safe.” Woody stuttered gripping onto the cross with his one hand.

“And be like you? All you have to do is throw one bottle that’s all we ask.” Screams started echoing all over the street as she said this. Woody looked at the chapel then back at Dian and moved his pupils between the two over fifty times until Dian screamed again.

“Some friend. Fine we don’t need you, just go back to your fucking hovel.”

Woody was paralyzed. He couldn’t form words and the smell of his own sweat was starting to become the only scent he could register. The blood in his ears ran hot obscuring the ensuing melee to a dull roar. He pulled out his rosary and looked up at the cathedral then back at Dian. Every muscle in his arm became stiff. The sculpture of St. Francis had a capital “A” graffitied onto the back of his robes. Woody had never noticed this. Francis was vandalized, and with this thought Woody threw his rosary to the ground, pulling his muscles as tense as he could to the point where he thought they might rip. Dian watched with wide eyes that Woody could only interpret as confused.

Embarrassed, with a tear running down his face he yelled, “I’ll do it!” Dian registered the rosary on the ground and Woody’s declaration and hugged Woody around slapping him on the back yet releasing before her could hug her in return.

“Good. Here.” Dian took a bottle from Derrick and handed it to Woody. “Make me proud.”

“Come back to my place when this is over.” But she had already gone back to her tripod and motioned Derrick to walk over and fill Woody in on what was about to happen. It was simple really. The police were about to back up for a momentary reprieve and then he and the rest of the militant, righteous, self appointed crusaders were supposed to light their bottles with a Bic lighter supplied to them.

Everything went by in slow motion for Woody. He positioned himself behind the crowd, looking back towards his apartment feeling his stomach groan with nervous energy threatening to be expelled at any moment. He moved into the second line of protesters and put on the mask. The rubber band snapping into position on his bare neck felt like an odd premonition to Woody. He stared at the police, gas masks on, totally alien to the ones he met when he was a kid. There were two people detained behind the yellow chalk lines and cheap metal barricades they had put up. Derrick stood next to Woody, his jelled mohawk leading Woody’s gaze back to Dian one last time where she sat on top of the stairs. Time stopped for a moment as a gust of wind blew away her scarf

revealing her grinning face underneath, her sheer focus on the spectacle at hand as her scarlet lipstick coated lips parted for her coffee stained teeth, stretching her face into something that wasn't Dian.

Woody's shoulder was tapped and he knew that the moment had come. His arm locked up as one flaming bottle after another crashed against the polished shields sending shock waves of cheer and panic throughout the supposed solidarity of the legion. It was his turn, Woody could feel Derrick's shoulder hit his as he banked his old Stolichnaya bottle right onto the manhole cover in front of the plastic wall. Suddenly people pushed past Woody as he just ignited the tip of the cloth. He didn't have long, he thought. Just as a the second brawl of the day ensued with its methodical opening act Woody threw his flaming note off cue, upsetting the whole piece.

The bottle barely made it halfway before breaking in front of a middle aged woman with silver hair and an old vest with a hand embroidered on the back given the peace fingers. The flames lit up her coat and she stopped and dropped and broke her glasses against the pavement as the masks, inhaling and exhaling, made their way past her cracking their batons on the collar bones that had been pushing on them since early morning. Woody made a motion to run but couldn't see Dian's face in the burning woman, screaming for her vest to be vindicated, but she was not Dian.

Woody started pushing past people duking it out with police in an attempt to try and find Dian. He stepped over the old hippy, his right eye bleeding over his teeth and lips as he rocked back and forth. Derrick managed to push one of the officers to the ground before the tear gas canisters swelled around him and the only thing Woody could hear was two hundred pounds hitting the pavement. The cathedral was the goal, he just had to keep running. Another police officer was on the ground, the college girl beating him over the head with a baton while another man held him down. One of the rubber pellets being fired through the clouds of spray struck Woody in the ball of his ankle causing him to trip to the pavement, scarping his fingers on impact. He landed at the foot of the steps of the cathedral.

Two officers emerged from the cloud, they wore masks too. Their re-breathers stuck out in front of their faces like an insect and they ran right up to Woody. He tried to get to his feet but a baton struck him on the back setting all his nerves on fire. He lost the wind in him for a moment and when he exhaled one of the officers ripped his back pack away from him while another baton came right across Woody's cheek bone. His vision blanked for a moment, hot urine trickled all over his crotch and his ass sticking to his clothes and his skin in a ammonia scented glaze. He felt blood trickle steadily out of his nostril as the throbbing pain reverberated around his eyeballs weighing his forehead to the

pavement. A boot came right across Wood's left eye and blood filled the delicate white jelly tinting half his vision pink as he sporadically tried to mix together every hymn his mother ever sang with him at mass. He could barely breath and felt his hand jerked behind his back, plastic industrial hand binding forcefully dragging against his cuts ripping and expanding the skin down to some of his barely exposed muscle. Woody hoarsely croaked a note of agony, no endorphins helping, just pain making all his fluids exit as snot and blood dried all over his coat.

He couldn't see the flaming woman anymore, he couldn't find Derrick, the hippy, the librarian, none of them. All of them were lost to Woody's one good eye. He looked up coughing phlegm and blood from his hoarse and swelled throat that tasted of copper. He looked up to see Dian still smiling, still taking pictures. Woody half vomited when she turned her lens on him, still smiling.

It isn't me anyways, Woody told himself. The police officers left him to try and control sounds of gun fire further down the street. Perhaps at the pub, Woody couldn't say for certain. Dian was still there smiling. She smiled as she finally recognized Woody and got some people to help carry him back up to the top of the stairs next to St. Francis.

"I can't believe the shots I've gotten, Dian screamed, but Woody couldn't look at her. He could only see his pink tinted window. His glowing candle slowly fading, Dian not looking, but suddenly screaming, "Doctor!" Woody looked as the candle stopped glowing and the window remained as dusty as ever, up there, beyond the screams where support was only a match and a wick away.

Throttled Apologies

By Sandra Youngs

Throw back a shot glass of envy
flood the esophagus
with nettles
feel it burn
like a whiskey spike
to the belly.

Catch your narrow face
reflected in the cracked mirror
aqua eyes
laughter-lit
by your busty companion.
Nails impale skin
raw half-moons
tattooed across my palms.

Beyond the bar
cut-glass voices
produce tipped drinks
and accusatory darts;
give rise to scarlet welts
mapped against a throat
choked on pride.

Rolling

By Anastasia Lehen

I take the day
and replay it.

My mind is the director
Turning twenty-four hours
into a film of what could have been.

I dictate,
push the player to their marks
 Cut!
 Take two,
you and I; get it right.

Tripping over steps,
stuttering over lines,
 Line!!

No creased paper sheets,
inked with words
to tell us what to say.
 Freeze the frame.

 Edit.
Here, we are not

lost.

Silence

By Anastasia Lehnen

Silence grasps at a frantic tongue
an epic battle to be proclaimed
twist and writhe
a wrestling match
not just idle gossip amongst the hens.

Winds of meaning,
azure in fading light,
blow through clenched jaws
like a child screaming
let silence find its sheath

I Once Was Her Best Friend

By Miho Vande Berg

She ordered an oolong tea for me, saying
“She can't drink but she's my best friend”
to the bartender

She laughed like a crazy sunflower when she
drank.
Lied a lot like a hamster running a wheel when she
drank.
She slept with a lot
of men lined up like kernels on a cob.
They popped, she swallowed.
After that she slept a lot,
alone—
a forgotten doormat

She started going to AA,
boasted like she had climbed Everest.
She got new friends there.
Her new “best friend” understood her 'cause she too was an alcoholic.
Her new lies bloomed like a petunia in August
No one knew but me that she was
still drinking
Like a pitbull barking away at a stray mutt, she threatened me
Not to tell her AA friends

She laughed like a crazy sunflower
Watching the sun disappear



Untitled Picture
by Douglas Lemon

My Husband Is Vande Berg

by Miho Vande Berg

His family name made me imagine tulip fields and windmills in
my small apartment in Tokyo
I was in love with a Dutch American who has that
foreign name

I wish he were Brown
I wish he were Smith but
He is Vande Berg

When I was single I
didn't notice
When I kept my maiden name Sakashita, I
didn't notice
When I changed my name for immigrating I
realized...

I can't pronounce my name
I can't make myself understood
My husband is Vande Berg
I'm Bande Behg

He said it means down the hill
My Japanese maiden name meant down the slope
Was it a sign of fate or what?

Mirror

By Sandra Youngs

Flecked with stormy
foam, ocean eyes
close to slits
beneath burning hair
short and spiked with sweat;
tongue taps a tempo
against the silver ring in your lip

mouth molds to
your clavicle
salty skin squeezed
between blunt teeth
leave love notes—
a song on your collarbone

fingers hike
across sloped hips
I peel back your husk
reveal soft flesh,
sensitive muscle;
strip you to your bones and
reveal your image-stained heart.

anxiety

By Sandra Youngs

anxiety

thrums

spreads

spirals of unease

in your belly

uncurls

catches your feet

as if swamped by snow

lost

in a whirl

of

white wind

small spasms

build

quivering fingers

clench and release

clench

release

jackhammer heart

beats

rapid fire

within your chest

like a bike

with

out

brakes

careening

down

hill

close your eyes

and

wait

for the

crash

Harm My Brothers

By Lukas Hall

I stood with bone-chilled fingertips
pressed against the sullied machine.
The home-wrecked marriage could not even be a dream
when the papers began stacking on top of each other
like bricks on a crumbling pyramid.
Grab the pen. Two letters, nothing more.
I released the ink on the page, let it squirm to point.
The clock above, right above, ticked slow, ticked fast, ticked in
reverse.

My hand trembled as I chopped the tree of my family.
Roots were torn up from my father's grave, mild
mannered mother's tears. Even if she claims enlightenment,
I know the difference between storm clouds and sun rays.
Even the darkness had a day. Why can't abnormal have *its day*?
Love thy brother who loves thy brother who makes love, my brother.
My mouth stumbled over those words throughout the night,
ever twilight and the day came to close with the sirens twirling in the streets.

The cold permeated in the room, reached for the phone and heard the news. I
could
taste the salt drip from my eyes, with brother's banner ripped from the dirt.
Freezing steel against my fingers, triggered by the creeping black and
as cheers of victory rang through my ears, I pulled back and fell.
Twitching hand on the ground, and diluted blood in the cracks.
I fell.

The Farm

By Danielle Harjo

The windmill cries fiercely
For one to come here
The barn moans
Its wood creaks
Calling for one to fix it
The fields of tall grass murmur
For one to tend to it
The lights of the farmhouse dim
Knowing that no one will come
Each part of the farm shouts
Each part of the farm whispers
Wishing, wanting, woefully crying
To no longer, be lonely
Each midnight on the farm

If Only To Lay

By Douglas Lemon

You're like a feathered angel massaging
my exhausted smile while I sleep.

Your silken skin and the
touch of it against my
tired cheeks makes me
exhale deeply.

As my head and heavy eye-lids
fall onto your Egyptian flesh
I know I could embrace your curvy body all night.

Sometimes you are soft
like a cotton cloud, or
light like a flock
of feathers.

Other days your memory
recollects every arc I press
against you, and you even
comfort me when you're down.

As I wake up happy and leave in the dim
morning light, I don't even turn back to
look at you. I'm sorry pillow, I don't love
you. I just wanted to sleep with you.



Fluffy Milkweed

By Patti Lindaberry

Turning Corners

By Kevin Nelson

Outside, in the distance, the sounds of trick-or-treaters could be heard. The neighborhood children, dressed as ghosts and skeletons, celebrated the images of death, while my parents and I sat, silent, around the weathered kitchen table. The house was quiet, except for the old wall clock, whose tick-tock cadence pushed us. We were focused on death too.

The antique chandelier that hung over the table, bathed the room in dim yellow light. The chandelier, like the weathered table, had been salvaged by my father, years earlier. The youngest son of a poor farming family, his thriftiness was borne out of necessity. Now, it seemed, he was ahead of his time, recycling and repurposing anything he could salvage. Only when he was absolutely sure an item had no more to give, could he bring himself to throw it away. It was the part of him that made signing a “Do Not Resuscitate Order” even harder. It was against his nature to give up on anything.

He had asked for the order two days earlier when we left the clinic. He attempted to get it without my knowledge, so I didn’t discuss it on the way home. We shared unspoken understandings of things, and we both understood the reality of this situation. The cancer filled him now. It was just a matter of time before decisions would have to be made. Now the document lay on the table between us, like a death warrant, waiting to be signed.

I rubbed my fingers over a deep triangular burn scar in the table; the charred reminder of an unattended iron, a memory that now seemed like a lifetime ago. The conversation hadn't been going well, and now I could feel his eyes on me from across the room. I was the only son of four children. He wouldn't expect the girls to deal with this issue, so he made me an ally in an undertaking I wanted no part of; convincing my mother to accept the beginning of the end.

As he waited for my next volley, the clock continued its rhythm, tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.

It was the quiet before the storm.

The diagnosis had come four months earlier. It had started with a headache, and minor nose bleed. Then, four days before Independence Day, an uncontrollable nosebleed landed him in the hospital where they tested, scanned, and prodded him for two days. On July 4th, the family gathered around a picnic table while my mother delivered the news: small cell Carcinoma - Lung cancer. She tried to sound positive, telling us that Dad may have as long as two years, if treatments were successful. At 53 years old, 5-7 and 170 pounds, my father became a cancer patient. But he was strong, and vowed to fight.

By mid-August, he'd lost 40 pounds, and nearly an inch. It had moved into the liver. As I helped him from the chemo chair to the wheel chair, it occurred to me that someone hadn't been honest. Either they had lied to my

father, or he had lied to us, but someone was lying. The chemotherapy was accelerating his demise, not saving him from it.

Nearing the end of September it had taken the bladder. On the way to the clinic, I finally confronted him with my suspicions. He admitted knowing everything from the beginning. The doctors had told him it was inoperable, and unstoppable, but he couldn't bring himself to tell my mother. The tears welled up in his eyes as he confessed. The truth was like a glowing ember he'd been forced to carry for two months. Now he'd handed it off to me.

The following day, in the middle of a chemo treatment, I surveyed the room. A dozen patients lay in their recliners, accepting their fate, but plugged into their bag of chemicals, waiting for a miracle. I looked back to my father. "Let's go!" I said.

He looked at me, puzzled.

"To Canada!" I said, almost laughing. "Let's go to Canada!"

He smiled mischievously.

"I'm serious. Let's stop this craziness, and go find a monster Northern. I'll treat!"

It was his lifelong dream, and I thought it might lure him away. And, for just a second, I thought I had him. Then it was gone. He hung his head and rubbed his hands together. "Your mother would never forgive me." He said quietly. "She would always wonder if we could have turned the corner."

I could feel the air leave me. It was beyond my comprehension. I had become a spectator in a drama I would never understand.

Continued treatments, through September and October, devastated his body. He bounced in and out of the hospital, each time they pulled him from the edge of death. He'd survived four times in October alone, but the battles were taking their toll, he was now 5'2, 105 pounds.

He'd fought a battle whose outcome had already been decided. Now, he made the decision to end one battle, and move on to another: keeping others from saving him.

I took a slug of beer from the bottle I'd been nursing since we sat down, the tepid liquid coated my mouth like bitter syrup; the aftertaste, as unpleasant as the conversation. My father picked up the papers and began reading them again. I watched him as he read. He was an old man now. His eyeglasses, pulling down on his face like a weight, seemed three sizes too large, almost clown-like. I thought about how little time had passed since they fit his face perfectly. It had only been four months, yet it seemed to have aged him by thirty years. Physically, he was a shell of what he once was.

My mother, a heavy woman with dark brown hair and matching eyes, was strong and capable. She had always been the decision maker in the family, but she had another side. Growing up, she'd been spoiled, and used to getting her own way. My father only reinforced that during their marriage. This time

though, it would be different; she wouldn't get her way, and she knew it. She had been arguing her case, but now sat silent, turned away from me, and staring into the darkness of the kitchen. I was the enemy now.

"They will only consider this thing, if it gets really bad Patty" My father said, breaking the silence. "It's not like they would just let me die if something accidental happened; right Kevin?"

"Right" I heard myself answer. "I mean, sure. It would only be used if Dad were better off..." I stopped myself. "I mean, I'm sure we would have the power to decide when the time comes." As I spoke I placed my hand on her back.

Tick-tock, tick-tock: The clock was pushing again. It was getting late.

She began to cry. "You're telling me you'd be able to do that?" She asked, turning to look directly at me. "How could you do that?"

"I don't know what I'm saying Mom. I guess I'm saying, if that's what Dad wants, someone has to do it."

She turned away again. "I can't even believe you're saying that. You're telling me that you could tell somebody to let your own father die?"

"He's dying now, Mom!" I shot back. "I know that sounds horrible, but he's dying right now. He's been dying since July, and not admitting it isn't going to make it go away."

The truth landed in the middle of the room with a thud.

"Well, I've talked to your sisters; none of them will do it." She said as she stood and steadied herself. "I can't talk about this anymore, it makes me ill." She turned and walked away, disappearing into the darkness of the hall, as my father and I sat looking at one another.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.

He signed the form and slid it into the manila envelope.

The rising sun cast beams of white light through the corridors of the hospital, ushering in a sense of renewal. The light, made brighter by the refraction of the snow covered ground outside, transformed the shiny tile floor into a sheet of ice. It smelled like hospital; a combination of carpet glue and formaldehyde, that reminded me of sickness, and death. It was December 4th, exactly six months since his diagnosis. My father had suffered another setback and entered the hospital three days earlier. This time, no corners would be turned.

As I entered the foyer of his room, my mother stood and intercepted me. She pushed me back into the hallway where she hugged me and began to cry. It was the day after their Thirtieth wedding anniversary, and he'd made it through the night. She dried her eyes and began apologizing. "I couldn't do it. How can I do that? When he needs help I have to let them help."

She searched my face for a sign of atonement. I held her and fought back the tears. She was right; the burden was too heavy for a wife. “You did the right thing Mom. “Dad loves you more than you’ll ever know.”

She pulled away, sobbing, her hand over her face to hide her pain. She walked down the hallway and out of sight.

It had begun, I thought as I entered the foyer again. The heavy smell of death and dust filled the room. Now, five foot tall and scarcely ninety pounds, my father’s tiny frame could barely be traced beneath the thin white hospital blankets. The full face oxygen mask covering all but his eyes. As I pushed back the curtain, he saw me and turned his head slightly towards me. Our eyes met and his gaze stopped me in my tracks. It was someone I’d never seen before. His expression spoke to me in a language I’d never heard from him before. The dark language of helplessness and despair, and something else he’d never shared; fear.

I moved around the foot of the bed, and his eyes followed me. They were signaling me, as if we shared a secret, like a prisoner about to escape, intermittently looking to make sure no one’s caught on. His eyes, fixed and unblinking, cried out for comfort, like a frightened child, just out of reach from its mother. As I drew nearer, his chest heaved, and his eyes began to water. I felt my own chest tighten as I began to sense what was happening.

“Another anniversary under your belt” I choked out, trying to play off my feelings.

His response was lost in the face mask, but his eyes were unchanged. As I reached his bedside, I took his hand. It felt as rough and cold as a wintering oak. He squeezed tightly, and pulled me toward him. As I bent down his gaze suddenly shifted through me, past me, to another place. I cupped the side of his head with my hand and kissed his forehead. “We’re all here now.” I whispered. “It’s okay.”

My tears came as his grasp diminished. My father had turned the corner.

I held his hand and began to pray, as the monitor alarms began to sound. A nurse rushed in and began pulling back the curtains. “You’ll have to leave now.” She said hastily as she began checking instruments.

I ignored her request. “He has a DNR” I said softly. Then I continued praying.

“You need to leave now!” She insisted. “We need to do our work!”

“He has a DNR!” I said. I stood up and faced her; challenging her.

“I need you to leave.” I said. “He’s gone.”

She stopped, stared at me with contempt, then turned off the machines and left.

In the stillness of the room, I held my father’s hand.

A Beautiful Bird

by Lukas Hall

Beautiful golden flowers stained my teeth. Little bits of foliage hung to the plaque. I thought how much but how could I? My bits of birdie chirped like a crow, but cried like my sister's suffocated words. The breeze tingled my spine, left an odor and asked if it could brace me?

The old man that lives down the street, with prickly gray whiskers and pearly eyes, chased the night. Big globes of water, off-set like street lamps caught in the adverse teasing of our family. We whisper when he touches, his hand caressing the lil birdie's mold. We watch, but say nothing as God laughs. I told the old man, how much but not how could I? He mumbled, took another drink and passed out. His face to the flowery garden.

The next day, morning came, the sun daft as my deploration. The old man naked in her bed. He mentions the flowers in my teeth, their sheen making it hard for him to sleep. He asks me when, but I stop him. My finger pressed to his lips, the saliva building up under my rings. He spat, pulled back and chuckled. Still drunken, God sighed. I told him to stop, please stop, I could not carry on. But I go on. My little birdie of a sister walked too soon, saw me with the old man. Her beautiful golden eyes dropped to the floor, and the naked old man stood. He reveled in the moment, his pinched skin tightened, and his solace erupted. I saw it apt to leave. So I did.

My eyes were stained with golden flowers outside my window. I peeked out. They had not budded, their leaves broken and crooked. I still could smell the loving odor, but did not ask questions. No words from my mouth, not even a grumble. Outside my window, a segmented birdie came, it's leg was torn off, head cracked, skull bleeding, wings flapped desperately. I noticed prints on its back.

Still drunken, I closed the frame. The glass echoed, and I walked past the room.

I did not look twice, not twice...not twice.

Not once did I look, even with the stained flowers in my stomach.
They churned, swirling in the acid. My hand rushed to my forehead,
stressed. I threw up, and stumbled down the stairs.

At the bottom I saw the old man leaving. His feet making eights,
paper slipping from his pockets, and no more did the birdie
ask why? We both knew.

Beautiful little birdie no more.

I'll Find You In The Smell Of Fragrant Olive

By Miho Vande Berg

“Here comes a hearse! Miho, hide your thumbs!” Tomofumi would say.

We would hide both our thumbs with our other fingers every time we saw it. Seeing a hearse was bad luck. I don't know if children still do it today but we would make a fuss about it and hide our thumbs every time the black car with all the religious decorations on top ran past. The hearse looked like a Shinto shrine had married a luxury car. Tomofumi and I would keep watching the golden dragon on top of the shiny black body until the car disappeared, our thumbs safely tucked away in our tiny fists.

When I was in first grade, my family moved from the busy streets of central Tokyo to the suburbs. We lived in a “new bedtown.” Imperial Japan had an airport there during World War II, and the American Air Force took possession of the area after the war. When the US returned some of the area to Japan, part of it was zoned for residential use, and my parents, who wanted a home in a quiet residential area, bought a site and built a house. When we moved there, ours was only the fourth house in the area. Five thousand would follow, but in the beginning there were only a few houses and not many children to play with. There were only four first graders, two boys and two girls,

including me. The other girl was Ritsuko, a serious girl. I didn't get along with her, so most of the time I played with one of the boys, Tomofumi. His situation was similar to mine; he didn't like to play with the other boy, Yoji, who was a notorious bully.

Children usually played in a small park in front of my parents' house. I played in that small park with Tomofumi everyday after school. Sometimes with Yoji, sometimes with Ritsuko, but most of the time Tomofumi and I played alone.

We would climb on top of a wisteria arbor. Every May its light purple flowers made a flower roof, and we climbed up in the twisted bunches until our bodies cleared the top. I liked climbing there because both of us were able to stay there together. One arrived on top first and stayed while the other climbed up. Then we both sat there, Tomofumi and I, together in a carpet of light purple flowers, enjoying the privileged view. It was as if we were on a cloud. We talked and joked there for a long time.

We also liked climbing trees. I used to sit on the branch of a tree and smell the air. Different flowers bloomed every season and I liked smelling them up there. I especially liked the smell of fragrant olive. When the hot humid days of summer began to yield to cooler autumn breezes, the smell of fragrant olive occupied our town. Tiny sherbet-orange flowers bloomed everywhere. I looked at the red roof of my parent's house, smelling fragrant olive from my perch in the tree. I still remember the feeling of talking to Tomofumi, carefree in the

trees.

“Isn't it a good smell?” I'd yell to Tomofumi sitting in the tree next to mine.

“Yeah, it's a good smell. Makes me hungry!” he'd yell back. Tomofumi often sat in a higher place than me. I'd look up at him and laugh. I didn't know the word yet, but what I felt on the tree and with Tomofumi was a sense of freedom.

We often walked on top of the fence at the park. Balancing our arms leaning down towards the inside of the park then towards the road, we each walked on the four centimeters wide steel fence top. We had to walk about a hundred meters without falling. If one fell toward the road, there was even more height because the park site was built on a half-meter high foundation. If one fell inside the park, there were azalea's bushes. Tomofumi and I were used to walking on the fence, so if we lost balance, we usually could hang on till we found somewhere we could land safely. However, Ritsuko didn't know that. She lost balance in the middle of the most bushy place and fell on an azalea bush. Its branches scratched her legs. After that, every time she saw me walking the fence, she warned me, “Miho, you'll hurt yourself!” She annoyed me since I never felt I was in danger. Every time she found me doing 'dangerous' things with Tomofumi, she'd pester me.

When we entered a house under construction and played there—we

climbed the ladder and went up to the second floor. It still didn't have a floor or stairs—, Ritsuko told us “You shouldn't do such things. Stop it or I'll tell my mother!” And she did tell her mother. Ritsuko's mother called our mothers and Tomofumi and I got scolded afterward. However, my parents never told me to stop playing with Tomofumi. My parents liked him, too. He was the kind of mischievous boy who makes adults smile. He never had bad intentions whatever he did; he was always curious about every detail of the world. Adults, including my parents and our teachers, could see he was a smart boy.

One day, Tomofumi said, “Miho, I wanna pee.” We were playing in front of my house and his house was only a block away, but he didn't go to my house or his. He didn't want to be bothered to take time to pee. He unzipped his shorts and pulled out his tiny penis and started peeing in front of me. His pee drew an ark and dropped on the granite wall sounding like a sudden shower. I'd probably seen someone else peeing like that before, but I had never paid attention like that time. While watching Tomofumi peeing, I felt like trying to do the same since it looked so...convenient. I pulled down my pants and underwear, stood still and peed as strong as possible. I wet my clothes and had to go home. I didn't understand why I couldn't pee as the same way as Tomofumi did.

When we entered second grade, Tomofumi and I were in different classes. Suddenly boys played with boys and girls played with girls. I had trouble for a while because I hated dolls and girls liked to play with them. Most Japanese girls had a doll named Rika—a sort of Japanese Barbie doll—and

some also had Rika's house. My girl friends would open their small red cases, pull out their Rika dolls and make conversation in the same tone as their mothers. I would go to them and shout, "Here comes the earthquake!" shake their Rika houses and ruin their fun. Second grade was difficult for me because I needed to commit myself to a girls' world. I had to adjust myself to an environment without Tomofumi.

We still secretly played after school. If we were caught together, children would have teased us, so Tomofumi and I met on the sly. We completely ignored each other at school. A half an hour later, we were headed into the woods on our bikes. There were woods here and there in an area that contained small hills with holes in their sides. They were designed to hide airplanes from US pilots. The hills were covered with dirt and there were a lot of bushes and trees on top of them. A small airplane was undetectable from above. We paused in front of the big holes, handlebars in hand, and offered each other our thoughts on the inscrutable monuments.

"Isn't it too small for an airplane?" I asked.

"Combat planes are small," Tomofumi answered.

After the war, some were left as is and some were used by local farmers to store vegetables. We often saw the place filled with dead leaves or *daikon*, but never saw any hole with an airplane inside. We went inside one hole. It was made of cement, like my father's garage, and the surface was smooth.

I had expected something more spooky like where a ghost might appear, but inside was pretty plain and clean. We even looked behind the potato cases to see if there was any evidence of the war—something like a fragment of an airplane, propellers, or even a human bone—but we didn't see anything else other than unwashed *daikon*, potatoes and *hakusai*. We were a little disappointed and relieved at the same time.

We also went to the woods to catch beetles. Early in the morning we would smear some sugar water on the trees and head back home. A few hours later we would return to catch one or two beetles. If we only caught one, Tomofumi would always offer it to me so I could put it in a cage and play with it.

By the time Tomofumi and I entered fourth grade, we didn't play any more. We naturally parted ways. I remember when we were both at fifth grade, we played with two other friends, one his friend and one mine. We played like we used to—the four of us just hanging around, picking wild plants or observing anthills. We would sit on the grass and talk while feeling the wooly touch of white clover flowers on our fingers and palms. I found a lot of four-leaf clovers; it was good luck. I gave one each to everyone. The four of us would sit until our pants became damp from the grass. I felt as if I had gone back to when we were six.

In our first year of junior high, Tomofumi and I became classmates again. That year, a marionette show on TV became very popular. The show

intrigued me and I even bought the original three-volume set of books. One day during lunch time at school, Tomofumi started to talk about the show. He explained that he was doing something else and had completely forgotten to watch the show. I offered to lend my book to him. He said he would come to borrow my book after his tennis club practice. When Tomofumi rang the door bell, my family had just started eating dinner. I knew it was Tomofumi but I acted as if I had forgotten that he was coming.

“We haven't seen you for long time, Tomofumi. You've become such a handsome young man!” My mother looked excited. She asked him if he would like to come in and talk. I watched my mother talking to him as I chewed the slightly bitter eggplant.

“Thank you, but I have tons of home work.” He gently refused my mother's offer.

I went to my room and grabbed volume one of the series. When I went downstairs, my father was talking to Tomofumi at the doorway. My parents knew him since he was six, so they were glad to see him. His voice had changed from a boy's to a man's. I handed the book to Tomofumi and he went home.

He liked the book I had loaned him and wanted to read the second book in the series, so I loaned it to him when he returned volume one. The next year, when we were in our second year of junior high, Tomofumi was hit by a car when he was riding his bike. He had a cast on his leg for a while. He never had

luck with cars. When Tomofumi graduated from junior high he entered a boys' high school, and I entered a girls'. He didn't return the book and I didn't ask him to. The marionette show was over and my interests had changed.

My high school years were difficult. Although I made some new friends, I always felt as if I were lost in a desert looking for water. Most of my classmates lived in the center of Tokyo, so their lives differed from mine. They didn't know how flowers bloomed. They didn't know the joy of running around in a clover field. They liked to share information about beauty salons where they had their hair done like popular Japanese celebrities. They knew all the trendy clothes brands but they didn't know any of the fragrances of the flowers I was familiar with. I didn't see Tomofumi at all during my high school years but I often remembered when I was a child and the days I spent with him in the fields. I looked back at those days, already treasuring them in my memory. When I graduated from high school, I entered a coed university. I became a college student, and heard that Tomofumi did, too.

It was soon after the cherry blossom had fallen and all the trees' fresh green began to brighten the landscape. One morning, my mother called me to come down to the kitchen. It was still early in the morning.

“Tomofumi died.” Her eyes were teary. “He died in a car accident.” She had a newspaper in her hand. It said Tomofumi and another boy drove to a mountain area and his car fell off a cliff. Both boys died.

The day of the funeral, the home where he had grown up became a funeral parlor. The gathering looked like a reunion, except everyone was in black and faces were sad. A Buddhist monk lead the funeral and a large portrait of Tomofumi was adorned with lots of white and yellow chrysanthemums. In front of the brown coffin was an incense-burner stand and several thin wisps of smokes silently streamed into the air. It had nothing to do with Tomofumi. He would say “Incense stinks.” He would hate the chrysanthemums. He would giggle and make a joke about the monk's endless chanting. Something inside of me wanted to cry out because there was no sense of Tomofumi's presence there—nothing except his picture, his family, and the house where I used to come and call his name. I wanted to run away from that place but had to get in line to offer incense for him.

I saw Tomofumi's father wiping his eyes with his white handkerchief. His mother wasn't crying; she looked into the eyes of each visitor and bowed deeply. Her long face and rounded dark eyes reminded me of Tomofumi. Both his sisters were looking down and crying. Now, in an instant, he was gone. I felt pain inside my chest. When my turn came, I bowed and looked up to the family. Tomofumi's mother recognized me, then she crouched and started to weep. I couldn't look at her. I couldn't look at Tomofumi's picture in the black frame.

When his coffin was put in the hearse and the doors were closed, I felt like all my memories of him would burn with him and disappear. The hearse started to move slowly. Then, I remembered when Tomofumi used to tell me to

hide my thumbs. I didn't have him to tell me to hide my thumbs anymore.

Every time I see my two books of that TV series, volume one and volume three, on my book shelf, I remember Tomofumi. Between the two books, I still have a place for him. I can hear him calling out to me, “Miho, here comes the hearse!” When I see that wisteria arbor, my mind climbs up to the purple flower floor where we reached freedom. In the smell of fragrant olive, I always meet him and myself. On that day. In freedom.

Ken Wears An Ironed Shirt

By Miho Vande Berg

I first learned about Ken from my childhood friend, Naoko. She melted the moment she saw him in the cafeteria during our first week at the art university. I didn't believe in "love at first sight" but he convinced me that some people are beautiful enough to attract others before knowing a thing about them. Naoko wanted to know everything about him. It wouldn't be that difficult—everyone recognized him. His name was Nakamura Ken, major: sculpture, grade level: junior. Instead of stalking him herself, Naoko asked me to do the research because oil painting, my major, and the sculpture department shared some sketch classes. I observed him like a secret agent. Ken's eyes were wide but not round. He had a wide mouth with thin lips. He was good looking—but that's not the point. He had an air about him like no one else. Like he didn't have real life.

I couldn't really imagine Ken carving a big stump or striking red-hot iron with an iron mallet—until I saw him doing it. He didn't look like a sculpture major; he didn't look like an art major in the first place. He looked like an actor playing the role of a famous sculptor when he was a student or something, somewhere in Europe, not Japan. Europe because Ken wore clothes like a European. He always wore only white cotton dress shirts, unbuttoned down to the second button, and khaki pants. He tucked in his white shirt and wore a leather belt, not like a Japanese or American man, but a European man. He wore

a pair of Ray-Ban sunglasses. I'd never seen a Japanese man who looked good in Ray-Bans—no matter how expensive or rare they are, they just ridicule their flat faces, making them look like insects. But Ken stood out among all the other sculpture students wearing T-shirts and sweats. Only he wore white cotton dress shirts to sculpture class. He'd take the black apron from his locker, put it on, roll up his sleeves, and get to work.

On Friday afternoon, I washed all my paintbrushes with more care than usual so that they wouldn't become hard over the weekend. Naoko went out with her classmates, and I went out drinking with four friends from my oil painting class. Naoko dropped by my classroom before she took off, and we made plans to meet on Saturday afternoon.

My friends that I drank with were all prototypical oil painting majors and looked the part, specks of paint here and there on their hands, arms, hair and their t-shirts and jeans. We drank hot *shochu* and began to relax. We talked about our paintings, offering softer critiques than we usually received from other classmates and our professors. We talked about Andy Warhol, the Velvet Underground and Nico, Basquiat, Francis Bacon, Marc Bolan, Miles Davis, Jean Cocteau. And, of course, Mishima, the ultimate Japanese nationalist and brilliant novelist who killed himself by *seppuku*. He was the art students' super icon. We liked anyone who killed themselves, but among all self-offed artists, Mishima and Sid Vicious excelled.

Finally we got drunk enough to talk about our upbringings. I liked

those friends. They never made me feel miserable. Everyone had some sort of trouble in his or her family. My family dimmed after my big sis died. She didn't kill herself, but died in a car accident at the age of nineteen. People who decide to spend a lot of time with a blank canvas usually have plenty of reasons to want to do that I guess.

We decided to call it a day. We split the bill and stepped out onto the busy, humid street. It was before ten. The others went to see a late movie but I wasn't in the mood for a horror film.

I waved goodbye and headed to the nearby station alone. I heard a voice from behind me.

“Are you a freshman, in oil painting?” It was Ken.

He came up beside me. I had been observing him for Naoko, but I'd never talked with him. I felt like a secret agent being exposed by her mark.

“Yes, I am a freshman. You're a sculpture major, right?” What else could I say?

“Yeah, I am. I had a few drinks at the same place you and your friends were drinking. I'm sorry, but I listened some of your conversation.” he said.

My role was to observe him, but he had been watching me.

“Did you? We are always like that. You should have joined us.”

“Thank you, next time I will. I liked what you said about your friends'

paintings, Yuka. Your name is Yuka, isn't it? ”

I nodded, not knowing how he knew my name.

“I was wondering if I could ask you to give me a critique of my work,” he said.

I didn't really know what to say. He sounded sincere for someone who was supposed to be a player.

There were a few rumors about Ken. He had quite a reputation as a ladies man. When I asked if they knew Ken, I'd sometimes get a wry smile. One girl said, “Stay away from that guy.” Another said, “Ken's not as bad as people think. He has a sweet side, too, it's just that few people know who he really is.” Some claimed he was bi-sexual but no one was sure. About one in five said something nice about him. They either had a crush on him or they admired him for his work. The sculpture majors showed some respect. “He's talented. No one can touch his work—it's great.” I could tell he was a natural, gifted.

After I heard some good and bad rumors about Ken, Naoko and I sat in the depressing 1960's vintage school cafeteria to make some rumors of our own. Naoko's eyes sparkled as only woman in love's do. I shared what I heard from others. I thought Naoko would be disappointed but she looked even more interested in Ken.

The subject of all these rumors was standing in front of me, asking me to give him a critique of his work.

“But...” my voice cracked, “I don't know anything about sculpture.”

“It's an oil painting, and that's why I'd like your opinion.”

“But, you don't know me.” I resisted.

I found myself just looking at Ken, unable to blink. He probably sensed my nervousness, and he explained that he saw my painting and liked it. So he knew me. He had seen my work, a free motif oil painting all freshmen had to submit. Some of them were chosen to be displayed on a wall in the oil-painting department. Some professors liked my work—I painted an image of my sister's death.

“You liked my painting?”

“Yes, I did. I thought it was beautiful. Every year I look forward to seeing the freshmen's first work. Yours was the best so far.”

“Where is your oil painting?”

“It's in my apartment.”

I wondered if this was his tactic for getting to know new girls. At the same time, I thought someone like me wouldn't attract someone like him. “If he thinks I'm a good painter, it would be an honor, because he is a good sculptor”—at least that's what I told myself. I agreed to go to his apartment to see his oil painting. Someone from school recognizing someone else by her work and falling quickly into a deep conversation—this kind of thing wasn't unusual for

us, art students. We had our own way of communicating and connecting with each other. We had no walls between men and women. Gays and lesbians were accepted, too. We didn't see them as weird because all of us were weird in some way. Weirdness was what we sold, anyway.

Surprisingly, Ken's home was next to the town in which Naoko and I lived. We'd never met on the train because his station was on a different train line. His town, Sanya, was notorious for its seedy underworld. There were lots of homeless people around the station. When they saw me, some drunken men yelled dirty words and laughed. It scared me, but Ken signaled with his eyes that I should ignore them. He lived in the center of that notorious area. His apartment didn't even have its own door. It shared a doorway so we had to take off our shoes and carry them to his room. "I'm sorry that I made you come to such a dump," he whispered as we walked the narrow creaking corridor. That creaking made me regret that I came. Maybe it was the alcohol which made me come to his place. He unlocked the door to his room. The lock was something like a bicycle lock. Who would imagine that Ken, star of the sculpture department, lived in a place like this? "Here we go," he said, as he opened the wooden sliding door to his room.

Inside his room was another world. It was filled with sculptures: his self-portrait—alabaster, a naked old man—metal, a crying little girl holding a flower bouquet—steel, an abstract piece—wood, an abstract piece—stone. Beside the stone abstract piece, there was an ironing board with an iron. Next to

the ironing board stood an easel and a canvas covered with a white cloth.

“Would you like something to drink?”

“Yes, some water would be nice.”

Ken gave me a glass of water. He made some coffee and put the coffee pot and two cups on a little table. The rich, bitter aroma of coffee drifted up between us.

“Can I show you my painting?” he asked. I nodded.

He stood up and removed the white cloth from the easel. Immediately I knew why Ken liked my painting. His painting was mostly dark navy and partly glazed, but fluorescent colors appeared under the scratches made by a painting-knife. It was loneliness I saw. A loneliness that doesn't exit. It dwells in your body until you find a way to let it go. That's why we grab a brush and throw colors on a white canvas. That's why we carve wood at two o'clock in the morning. We rescue ourselves from it. It is a kind of loneliness that you can't talk about, you can't share. You just own it and have to find a way to let it go. I understood that Ken wasn't lying about my painting. He really liked my painting because he had something similar in him, some sort of black hole.

“What do you think?” Ken looked me in the eyes as he asked.

“I think I know you now.”

“Do you? I'm glad to hear that. I believe you do. Actually I felt the

same when I saw your painting.”

We were the same species. We both were—living in solitude. I wanted to know where his loneliness was coming from.

“Why do you paint paintings like this?”

“Do you mean this kind of inner shit?” Ken said and laughed. I laughed, too.

“No, your painting is beautiful. I mean it. But... you have some unbearable loneliness, don't you?”

Ken continued to smile, but didn't answer. He asked me a question instead.

“Where does your unbearable loneliness come from?”

I paused for a while. I imagined my dead sister's face, smiling.

“From my sister up there.” I pointed up and I explained about my dead sister. I wondered if Ken had a similar loss. I didn't ask.

“Were you surprised at this place? You didn't imagine coming to Sanya tonight when you left your house, did you?”

“I was a bit surprised, but I like your apartment.” I answered honestly.

He was right. I didn't imagine I would be in Sanya with Ken in his apartment. And I didn't imagine that he would also share with me the story of how he had grown up.

Ken's mother decided to live in Sanya when Ken's father left them. His father was a painter himself and never had any decent jobs. Like many other artists, he didn't have any clue how to earn money or how to be a husband or a father. His mother always somehow made ends meet. She didn't want to leave Tokyo although the rent in Tokyo was high. So she decided to live in Sanya, a ghetto in Tokyo where the rent was relatively cheap. Ken's mother didn't like to be looked down on, so she always made Ken wear decent clothes—nothing sloppy was allowed. Every day, she ironed everything her son wore.

“I still iron all my shirts because I feel as if my mom will come and yell at me if I wear a wrinkled shirt. Isn't that funny? I live in the worst area in Tokyo, but people think I'm from a rich family or something because of my ironed dress shirts. You know what? I kind of enjoy deceiving the world.” He winked at me.

“Does your mother live in this apartment, too?” I asked.

“She lives 10 minutes from here by bike.”

“Where is your father now?”

“I heard he's in Spain.”

“Is he painting in Spain?”

“I don't know, but I'm sure he's drinking.”

I woke up on Saturday morning, 11:23 already, wondering if it was a

dream that I met Ken last night and went to his apartment. I spent a night with him, not sexually, but a whole night with him until the sun came up. I knew where he lived. I knew his apartment. I knew he had to take off his shoes and have them in his hand before he opened that wooden sliding door to enter his room. Was it all a dream?

I wondered how I could explain everything to Naoko. —*It might hurt her. But why? It's not like Ken and I are in love. We just became friends. But I feel I could lose my heart to him someday...then I'd become just another of Ken's many rumors. Naoko wouldn't be there for me...but why? He and I just became friends.*

My mind was here and there. Yet, I made up my mind I wouldn't lie to Naoko or myself, although my feelings toward Ken scared me. I felt alive even though all kinds of worry gnawed at me. Ken's alabaster self-portrait—the one he gave me for my painting—stood on my dresser, looking into the confusion dwelling in my room. I decided to start a new painting. I had to.

Self-Discovery

By Rosemary Bell

The people we once were
changed by paths taken
Each step down the winding road
new adventure, journey, choice unfold
Unsure of what I will become
only knowing what seems best now
down wooded trails I trek.

Be it mountain peaks
or deepest valleys,
Through hell fire storms
and warm placid waters,
Forging on I march
quest still undone
dare not look back to whence I come.

New people met
lessons freshly learned
I continue down my route
Seasons come and fly away
as life brings phoenix moments
Metamorphosed I emerge
to travel on forever more
'til walkway ends.

On this voyage I will find
whom is meant to come
From the shell of who I was
and trot in her place from then on.
Knowing not when we shall meet
and then part ways once more
this odyssey to find myself
is one I must endure.

Long, Cold Wait

By Douglas Lemon

Ipad in lukewarm hands, temporary amusement,
its effect is wearing thinly on her now.
Sitting inside on the dirty, used-to-be white steps in her
black fur-lined coat she's positive eventually
her mother will arrive in a piece of salted steel.

The bitter frozen day, still shoots winds inside
Every time another kid swings those doors to go home.
The arctic air outside reminds her the aching deep down
inside the trenches of her belly is just as cold. With each
minute her mother does not drive up to that front door
both temperatures plummet.

Time goes by slowly and she no longer knows
or cares what her fingers are touching on the oily screen.
Each minute climbs higher
in the corner of the monitor she now construes how
her mother really doesn't seem to care about her.

Finally the old beat up,
once-silver Chevy Nova arrives;
brief smiles erect,
she is finally remembered.

The smile dissipates like the snowflakes
melting on her face as she walks to
the passenger door realizing the ride
now means she has to go home.

Could You Hear Our Ghost Last Night?

By Lukas Hall

Could you hear the ghost last night?
Miss Marie tapped at the pearly windows
while it breathed in settled dust. Expanded it's lung
to blistering and coughed out the seared blood.
Distinct like Grover winning first twice in one life.
Ah, the memories filled the streets of the raging elephants,
flipped over angry trash cans with little rats
scurrying in their holes to hide. We all hide.

Miss Marie said don't leave, even translucent lips could not
kiss the air that night. Broadway looked so grand with the
jumping Mormon over head. Sit back, and listen for the wallowing
cries of the ghost. In the antic, I've heard it twice. Whispering of Lincoln
slumped
over, gnawing his legs to the point of rawness.
He tells stories, Miss Marie, he sure does.
Ah, the memories of the drowning moon, a vigil brought on by Leale
and the crowded pants of my family. What's left to do? We all squeeze in and
bottle up.

The shambling Goliath down in the sewers gazes at us too.
See him watch between the bars, listening to the ghost,
peeling away his flesh, waiting to chomp at us.
Miss Marie, check your sling and pull a David.
Kennedy needs help with his skull, it's splattered.
Pick up the pieces and glue them together before
the convoy drives away.
Ah, the memories of the nation torn apart, black and white,
in the freezing chambers of your civil heart. The ghost squirms
at his fragmented podium. We all hear the silence in his voice and shout.

The gates are there, waiting till dawn to spread their legs
and consume what's left of us. Miss Marie recite as I've told you.
Open your ears to the winds. Could you hear the ghost if you just knew?
It took time but Anarchists tore McKinley down too, our poor Garfield
ate himself to death because of the infection disputing his soul.
Don't run towards the blistering light. You're blinded by it's
majesty, but we both know you're not ready.

The ghost is keeping our hope secret. He ain't ready to share just yet.
What if the hope is too good for us? We don't deserve it.
Ah, the memories of lonely hurricanes dancing on the coasts and sweeping
up colors, green leaves and stolen branches. The ghost stands lofty on the edge
and tosses his coins at the abandoned well. They bounce off and roll
to his feet. What are we to do? We all just bite the bullet and fire.

Five

By Patti Lindaberry



Let There Be Fertilizer

By Noah Savoie

I'm afraid of metallic freckles.
If they appear I cry.
To be metal in bone,
to be an automaton,
this is my worst fear.

I take the razor
and sliced through
my natural bark.
Red lines branch
into roots across my arm.

Don't let there be silver!
I would cry to find a metal
claw and 3 inch screws.

I stand in front of the mirror
hoping my neck doesn't
stretch like a car jack.
That I don't hear a metal
scrape as I prod my pupils.

Let me be fertilizer.

Joyous proof of white bone
at the end of the razor.

Broken veins instead of screws

A broken neck instead of
an efficient work of gears.

Partially empty sockets filled
with the broken whites steaming
and spilling over the edge
like a waterfall.

Let me be fertilizer

I want roots to pierce through me, open slits,
revealing exposed muscle covered in moss.

Let tulips replace the gelatin in the vacancy of
my face.

Let my bone be turned to oak branches.

Let bamboo push past my teeth.

Let me fall with all of this into a lake of grass
enveloping me as a voluntary servant. Because
in her embrace is something that Tungsten can never
give....

Hope

Race Track

By Amy Warwick

The dull thudding sound of forty-eight hooves repeatedly pounding into the dirt track, as the twelve horses raced around the bend was one of only two sounds that Rick Kraemer was aware of. The other sound was his mount, Aspen, breathing heavily as she increased her speed; pulling away from the other horses.

Now there was just her breathing, and the four beat rhythm of her feet hammering the ground. After the horse and rider had been speeding ahead for a little while, Rick looked under his arm, at the track that lay behind them. Following them were the eleven other horses, at a comfortable enough distance that Rick could slow his horse a bit from her breakneck galloping speed.

He leaned slightly forward in the saddle, bringing his ear close to the horse's ear, and said in a low voice, "Easy Aspen."

An ear flicked back in his direction, listening to his calm voice, "Whoa, girl, we don't want to burn up all of your energy now, do we?" he soothed while gently applying an increasing amount of pressure on the reins.

Aspen tossed her head once in objection to the slow in pace, then settled down to a steady speed.

“We’re almost there,” Rick muttered, more to himself than to Aspen, as he stared between her ears at the finish wire.

Rick felt a sudden uneasiness, and quickly turned his head to the right to look over his shoulder behind him.

There, its muzzle just at Aspen’s off side flank was a gray horse that had seemingly come out of nowhere, and was now fighting Aspen for the lead.

And in a matter of seconds, everything changed.

The gray shot forward and snorted just as it came into Aspen’s view, unblocked by her blinders. Aspen squealed in surprise and shied violently to the left, crashing into the inside track-rail. She stumbled a little, and Rick braced himself for the fall he thought was coming. But Aspen struggled wildly to regain her footing; and, veering right in her unsteadiness, rammed into the gray’s left flank.

The gray neighed and stumbled, as he too tried not to fall.

But bumping into something else was the last thing that Aspen needed. She stretched out her left front leg as she wobbled left again, and came down on the side of her hoof.

Rick felt a crack shiver up through her leg, and heard a sharp snapping sound as Aspen squealed in pain.

The leg gave way under her weight, and she began falling forward and left.

Rick glanced down at the dirt they were falling into, prepared to reach out his arms to roll. His heart flip-flopped inside him as he saw the rail fence getting closer and closer.

Before he could think, Rick felt the impact of Aspen hitting the ground, and suddenly, he was out of the saddle flying headlong into the dirt.

He instinctively put his hands out in front of him, and he hit the ground hard. This time, the snap Rick heard was accompanied by a sharp pain in his left wrist that shot up his arm.

He rolled over one time on his side, and felt something solid strike his back and realized he had hit a fence post.

Rick looked up to see that Aspen had hit the ground, and was rolling through the dirt toward him. Her legs were flailing through the air and saw one of her hooves coming closer and closer to his head, like it was in slow motion. Too dazed to move, all he could do was watch helplessly as the brown hoof and steel shoe grew larger as it neared him. Then he heard a sickening crack, and everything went black.

Darkness. Everything was dark. And silent. And still. Rick was content, and had the strangest sensation of floating. It was like nothing in the world mattered.

Beep..... Beep..... Beep.....

Each beep was like a sharp needle pricking Rick's body; prodding him awake.

He slowly opened his eyes and for a minute, everything was just a white blur. As things began to come into focus, he realized that he was in a hospital room.

Rick felt warmth in his right hand and slowly, painfully turned his throbbing head to look at it. He saw his young wife, Wendy, sitting in a chair next to his bed. Her head was laid down on the mattress next to his leg, and she was holding his hand lightly between both of hers. Though her head was turned away from him, Rick could tell by the slow methodical rising and falling of her back, that she was asleep.

Rick turned his head to the left, taking stock of his injured body and observing the places where pain emanated most strongly from his person; left wrist, rib cage, and a terrible throbbing all through his head.

I can obviously move my head and neck; that's a really good sign, he thought.

As he started wiggling his stiff fingers and moving his sluggish arms, Wendy began to stir. Rick gave her hand a gentle squeeze and she snapped to a sitting position, looking into his tired blue eyes with her hopeful green ones.

“Rick?” She leaned forward questioningly.

“Hey, Wendy,” he managed a weak smile.

She leaned back down, kissed his hand, and then Rick saw her shoulders begin to heave as she quietly sobbed.

“Hey now; it’s okay. I’m alright, honey,” he lifted his left arm at great protestation from his wrist, brought his hand to the right side of his body, and began gently stroking Wendy’s brown hair.

She slowly sat up and wiped her eyes. “Rick, I was so scared. The doctors were trying to prepare me for the worst. I asked them to be honest with me. The possibilities they told me about; coma, amnesia, brain damage, paralyzation -,” she stopped talking with a tiny gasp. “Can you move your legs?”

Rick’s stomach flip-flopped like it had the first time he was thrown from a horse. He glanced down at his legs and realized that in locating his injuries, he hadn’t felt pain in his legs.

How can there be no pain at all? Surely there has to be some cuts and bruises. Why can’t I feel them? He thought, his heart despairing at the question to which he already knew the answer.

Rick’s pulse thumped wildly through his body in anticipation of what he was about to do. “I’m so scared; what if I can’t move them?”

Wendy drew in a breath and squeezed his hand. “Then we’ll just have to get through it. Just try; then we’ll know for sure.”

Rick held his breath and sent out the signal from his head to move his legs.

Nothing happened.

Three hours later, Rick and Wendy sat together in Rick's hospital room, holding hands, waiting for the doctor's news.

"Well, we have the results back from our little 'photo-shoot'," Dr. Cornwallis smiled encouragingly as he opened a yellow manila folder and pulled out the X-ray of Rick's back.

"And?" Rick swallowed hard.

Cornwallis shoved the blue-gray tinted negative into the viewing panel on the wall and flipped a switch. Fluorescent light bulbs illuminated the X-ray from behind, showing the vertebrae of Rick's lower back.

"As you can see," Cornwallis pointed to different areas on the X-ray as he spoke, "the spine is completely intact. However, the horse stepped on you in such a way that the edge of one of your vertebrae twisted slightly, putting pressure on your spinal cord. Often times, such pressure will cause paralysis in the body below the injury. But here's the good news: Your spinal cord has not been severed or broken. I know it may not seem like it right now, but you are one very lucky man. Typically in cases involving spinal cord injury, the cord sustains much worse damage. Now, there *is* a surgery we can perform that has brought back mobility in some cases."

Rick leaned forward in his bed, "Really? What is it?"

"Well, all we would be doing is moving things around back there, ever so slightly, in a way that would remove the pressure from the spinal cord.

Success is not guaranteed; in the end, it may not help at all. But it's a shot. What do you say?"

Rick and Wendy looked at each other, then back to Dr. Cornwallis.

"Let's do it," they both said at the same time.

Rick lowered himself into the wheelchair from the front seat of the steel gray pickup truck in the dim light of the early morning.

After grabbing a small duffle bag from the back seat of the crew cab, Wendy came around from the driver's side of the truck and started walking toward the house with Rick in front of her. The wheels of the chair rolled smoothly along the concrete driveway, but at Rick's touch, stopped at the front step of the house.

"Well, this should be interesting," he said, staring at the three wooden steps that kept him away from his home.

Wendy walked up onto the porch and set the duffle bag down on the wicker table. "I can try to pull you up the steps in the chair," she offered.

"No, I'm too heavy. But if I grab the railings, and push myself up out of the chair a little bit, we might be able to do it work."

"Okay, let's give it a shot," Wendy grabbed the handles on the back of the wheelchair, and on Rick's count of three, pulled. With a deal of grunting and straining, they heaved the chair up the steps and onto the level wooden deck.

Wendy pulled her keys from her pocket, and Rick put the duffle bag on his lap and moved slowly towards the door behind Wendy.

Getting the wheels across the threshold of the front door was a slight problem, but with a small maneuver, Rick navigated the chair into the house with relatively little difficulty.

Wendy took the duffle bag from Rick's lap and walked down the hallway, "I'm just going to unpack this," she said, gesturing to the bag that Rick had been living out of for his two week stay at the hospital.

Rick stayed in the hallway, listening to Wendy's footsteps go through the kitchen, and down the steps into the basement.

He sat in the chair looking around his house, and thinking of all the things he would never be able to do again if the surgery hadn't worked.

Suddenly, the phone rang in the kitchen, and Rick started.

"I'll get it," he yelled to Wendy, and wheeled himself toward the kitchen.

He reached up and grabbed the phone off its base on the Formica counter next to the dishwasher.

"Hello? Hey, Mom, I'm okay. No, I'm fine. Look, it could have been a lot worse. All the doctors keep telling me that I'm really lucky. Well, it's not guaranteed that I'll walk again, but if the surgery took care of the problem, it'll still be awhile before we know. The spinal cord was kind of swelled up because of the pressure on it, but the surgery took the pressure off of it. So now we just have to wait for the swelling to go down. And if it worked, I'll probably start to get some feeling back later on. Oh, I don't know; it could be weeks or months."

For the next couple of minutes, Rick was silent, listening to his mother sob and talk on the other end of the line.

Wendy walked upstairs just in time to hear Rick say, “Okay. Yeah, I love you, too. Give Dad a hug for me. Bye.”

“Was that your mom?” Wendy asked, as she got out two glasses and a carton of orange juice from the fridge.

“Yeah; she said that she and Dad took the camper up North somewhere where there’s no reception for a week of camping. Then when they went into town to get some groceries,-“

“-Their phones came within range of a cell tower, and they got your voicemail,” Wendy guessed as she sat down on one of the stools at the bar next to him.

Rick nodded, “They both feel really bad for not being more available, but I told them not to worry about it. They went on a spontaneous mini-vacation; that’s great. It’s not like they knew that I was about to fall off a horse and be turned into a paralytic.”

“Temporary paralytic,” Wendy corrected.

“There’s no guarantee,” Rick looked sadly up into her eyes.

For a moment, they both just sat there drinking their orange juice in silence, each one lost in their own thoughts.

Wendy gulped the last of her juice and got up to put the glass in the dishwasher.

Rick stared at the small amount of orange juice left in the bottom of his glass, and said quietly, "I want to know what happened."

Wendy looked up, and Rick met her eyes, "I know I said that I didn't want to talk about the accident at all, but now I'm ready," he set the glass on the counter and folded his hands nervously in his lap.

Wendy took a deep breath and sat back down next to him, "How much do you remember?"

"I remember everything that happened up to when Aspen kicked me in the head; remember it very clearly. After that, nothing."

Wendy cleared her throat, "Well, when her hoof hit you, you were kind of flung out into the dirt. Ten horses were bearing down on you. Some of them were so close when Aspen and the gray, Pittsburgh, collided that they didn't have time to slow down or swerve to the side."

She stopped to wipe away a tear that was accumulating at the corner of her eye, "The third place horse stepped right on your back, but he picked his foot up off of you so fast, he must've known something bad was happening. Anyway, the next horse jumped clear over you, and after that, they all just went around you."

Rick unclenched his jaw, "Was anyone else hurt?"

"Pittsburgh's rider bruised his leg a little bit but he's fine. Other than that, no; no other people were hurt."

"Who won the race?" Rick asked, avoiding the question he didn't want to ask.

“The number three horse that jumped over you. Her name’s Hand Over Hoof.”

“And Aspen?” Rick looked hopefully into Wendy’s eyes, even though he was almost certain that he already knew the answer to the question.

Wendy looked down at the floor, and then back up at Rick, “She didn’t make it. They put her down on the track. I’m sorry, Rick. I know how much you loved that horse.”

Rick’s eyes filled with tears, not just for Aspen, but for himself as well, “Why? Why did this have to happen? We were such a great team. Aspen was on her way to the Kentucky Derby, and I- I was-” He broke down sobbing and put his face in his hands.

Tears began rolling down Wendy’s cheeks, and she kneeled down next to Rick’s wheelchair and put her arms around him in an embrace.

Par-a-dox

By Sandra Youngs

Sticky summer nights
a pair of ducks visits.
Long lamp-light
spills out the porch door
across prickly grass
crushed beneath calloused heels.

I peer between laddered branches
and endure scratchy kisses of pines
dotted with amber sap.
The duo waddles past, he with
shimmering green splendor
choked by a tight white ring at the neck;
she, drab and homely
in burlap sack brown.

Bright black eyes
reflect glinted light.
The mallard watches shadows,
his mate dips her bill and
lifts kernels of dried corn
soaked with rain.

God Buys Another Round

By Douglas Lemon

Nervousness precedes my final breath,
Flashes of memories like strobe lights.
reignite past flares
as I ascend surfing the skies.

Short flickering films
of every genre
seem to star me in
every single flick.

A wise-guy smirk
takes over
smiling from triumphs
and defeats alike.

“Scenes” that once made me cry
now show their purpose
as I float though a fogginess
that envelops me
like a mist in San Francisco.

The cotton-like cumulus clouds connecting
the heavens to earth eradicate my uneasiness.
Anticipation fills the...
I don't know...

Everybody's excited
yet patiently in line to see if they will walk
through this pearly,
slow growing, gated community.

Not me.
I'm just here to ask,
“Can I go again?”

Oh, Child

By Lukas Hall

I have to say this one time.

For the child in the ballroom needs to hear this.

Think not of the fluttering leaves, maroon and toasted, falling
from charred ledges,

but of the caterpillars, now homeless and dying with their
silk protecting them from the shadows.

Sweet little insects with their legs torn from the abdomen
of the cruiser docked in the cascade of jellyfish that have over-thrown
the globe. We cap-sized at the turn, saw the plains of nomad warriors
fight back the barrel, gun-powdered sleeves and bloodied swords
dangle from our ancestors, both.

Our child fears not for his life, with the baseball and toys at his feet, but of not
knowing

the ground scattered with metal and plastic once held souvenirs of calamity.

Darling, now is not the time, not even a sliver of dawn has clipped the hill
and yet you run as the roots were placed in front of you, waiting
for the spear to be driven into your heart, but darling. I am here.

I have to say this one time, I have not
lost conviction. I still have time to face myself.

Our garbage slips from the mountain to the coastal waves
overseen by your brother, knighthood cast over his shoulder
and stains in each of his hands. I did not set flames to the branches
that our relatives swings from.

My hands though, are clean, see for yourself, thick lines down the middle,
twisted at the banter and not a speck of dirt between the cracks.

Darling, I have to say this one time before the child wakes and figures out.

I am sorry.

I got what I wanted. Let us be honest.

Even the water-walker couldn't made it out of this world.

Though he could tip-toe to the clearing past the marsh but he still drowned in the
reeds.

Those lilies floated past his violet cheeks and covered his long hair while
our people carried on.

I'm sorry, but I know you two shall vanish, eaten by the insects, with their fiber
cocoon chocking you

and shriveled legs clawing at your pupils.

I have to say this one time, my darling.
For the child is still in the ball-room,
and our toxin has yet to seep in.

Pea Pods

By Sandra Youngs

Bedsheets bunch beneath our toes
twist and tangle
like knotted rope
We sprawl
side by side
stare at the speckled ceiling
conjure stars and poke at shadows
with slender fingers.

Your rough palm
cups my cheek
What are we?
silence pushed aside
like insecurities—
I giggle.
Peas:
green, plump, firm.

We soar past stars and
seek galaxies.
Look
I point at a constellation
created for us.
You sigh
relent
You are ripe and I am ready.
Peas in a pod.

1967

By Amy Warwick

Look at you.

You're perfect.

A metallic sky blue, you've been washed, waxed, and buffed, 'til you shine like the summer sun on a lake.

It's a hot day, but you don't care. Your light colored paint, and cotton white interior keep you a lot cooler than even me in my blue denim cutoffs and gray cotton t-shirt. Your black brand-name Goodyear tires have an inch thick tread. Are they new? They must be; the oily surface and strong rubbery smell gives them away. They look quite stunning on you. Your two long doors don't have a single dent or speck of rust. Great care has been taken to make sure you are in gorgeous condition, and it shows. Your interior is something else. I search for a stain or a crumb of dirt and come up empty. The floor mats are all black except for the gray logo in the center of a galloping horse that graces your grill and gas cap too. These also are impossibly clean. I grin at the three pedals on the floor, and the shifter wand that juts out from your center.

Hatchback cars aren't bad, but I like fastbacks better. And that's what you are. The hood pins have been removed, and you hold up your hood, proud to show everyone your amazing engine. You're a V8, a rare quality in those around you of similar age and body type. Then the hood goes down, and hood pins are replaced and there's a jingle of keys as the correct one is inserted in the ignition. Your engine turns over and starts immediately. A, deep, rich, and gloriously loud rumbling ensues, and I close my eyes. I can smell the fumes coming from your exhaust pipe, and hear your wonderful purr, and I don't want you to leave. As I stand on the grass, watching you drive away, there's only one thing I wish was different about you:

I wish it was my signature on the Title folded in your glove box.

For Three Days

By Miho Vande Berg

All the love and sorrow
in the hospital room, I witnessed.

Like the bloom of a tiny flower,
the baby girl was born.
A thinker's forehead—her father's
Cheering lips—her mother's
Like a flower of a coffee tree, her life was short.
The baby girl didn't have lungs.

Her parents named her Miwako. It means
Beautiful peaceful child
Three of them,
a new father and mother and Miwako, together as a family
for the first and last time.
I, the fluffy bunny, beside my little master
watching the three.

Her father gave her a bath for the first and last time
He soaked her in their prayers,
baptizing her with water of hope.
Tried to hide them, but
his tears dropped on her.

Her mother sang a lullaby
like a dove cooing to her chick.
While she was singing,
Miwako's lips moved. I saw she
smiled a little,
lips the same shape as her mother's.

I, the fluffy bunny, witnessed.

The beautiful peaceful child was
loved and
completed
For those three days

Reblog

By Tara Marmon

How to read the world:
Flipping through pages
 of another person's life,
I dreamed I saw myself,
 a reflection on the screen.
The diaries of Hollywood heroes
torn up into pages
and scattered to the winds...

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

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

Patti Lindaberry, President; Noah Savoie, Secretary/Treasurer

Laray Hilson Jodi Johnson Tara Marmon Matt Swenson

Jodi Lackie Andy Schiffman Travis Brust Karlynn O'Neil

Linh Luu Molly Kessler Alex Bahr Jami Kellington Carlson

Front cover art by Linh Luu. Back cover art by Douglas Lemon

Submit your creative writing to the Spring 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. Artwork in jpeg format is also considered. 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.