

# The Paper Lantern

Vol. V, Issue 2  
Spring 2010

Copyright 2010 Normandale Community College. *The Paper Lantern* has been copyrighted as a compilation, and no reproductions can be made without the permission of the original authors.

The Paper Lantern considers for publication original creative writing submitted by current students of Normandale Community College. Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the college administration, faculty, student body, or the Creative Writing Club.

# The Works

America's Asshole, <i>by Christopher J. Kinniburgh</i> .....	4
Creek, <i>by Sean Horsley</i> .....	6
Calling All Prophets! <i>by Kyle Adamson</i> .....	8
Heroin Jane & The Seven Camel Spiders, <i>by Kyle Adamson</i> .....	9
Nightlife, <i>by Kyle Adamson</i> .....	10
The Plagiarist, <i>by Christopher J. Kinniburgh</i> .....	12
Self-Immolation, <i>by Sean Horsley</i> .....	15
Ghosts' Stories, <i>by Sean Horsley</i> .....	16
Grotta Azzurra, <i>by Sean Horsley</i> .....	18
Fallen, <i>by Isela Pena</i> .....	20
Opa! <i>by Christopher J. Kinniburgh</i> .....	28
The Arabian Laugh, <i>by Faisal Alahmad</i> .....	29
Where were you the day football stopped? <i>by Kyle Adamson</i> .....	30
Nothing's Wrong, <i>by Patti Lindaberry</i> .....	32
Decisions and Dilemmas, <i>by Emily Klehr</i> .....	34
How Much for the Brooklyn Bridge? <i>by Kyle Adamson</i> .....	35

The Bird Rising, by <i>Faisal Alahmad</i> .....	36
An Aged Man, by <i>Christopher J. Kinniburgh</i> .....	38
Crying Teacher, by <i>Christopher J. Kinniburgh</i> .....	45
Guardian of the Christmas Tree, by <i>Laura Thomas</i> .....	46
Conversations with God, by <i>Faisal Alahmad</i> .....	59
Inside my Tree House, by <i>Emily Klehr</i> .....	60
Words About Paul	
Part One, by <i>Karin Nobre</i> .....	62
Tinos, by <i>Christopher J. Kinniburgh</i> .....	64
Being Baudelaire, by <i>Sean Horsley</i> .....	65
Is The Climate Change	
Movement Splintering? by <i>Patti Lindaberry</i> .....	66
The Baby, by <i>T. A. Brown</i> .....	67
That Warm Winter Afternoon, by <i>Faisal Alahmad</i> .....	70
Watery Crypt, by <i>Kelli Lindaberry</i> .....	72
Babbleric, by <i>Patti Lindaberry</i> .....	74
October, 2008, by <i>Rosemary Bell</i> .....	76
God’s Chair, by <i>Emily Klehr</i> .....	78

# America's Asshole

*Christopher J. Kinniburgh*

America is going to start to wipe his ass  
with baby wipes –  
after the usual toilet paper.

Once his asshole is good and clean,  
America is going to start to bleach  
his sphincter – in an attempt to clean up  
his public image – with an over the counter product  
made in the USA.

When we heard, we all went out  
and talked at the water coolers  
about the benefits of anal hygiene,  
and how we wished our husbands  
and wives would take more care,  
though when they asked  
we told them:

*America has gone insane.*

America was the talk of the town:  
America was seen with Silvio  
Berlusconi – Italian PM – and Shimon  
Peres – Israeli President – at an L.A. club  
with Megan Fox.

America negotiated a peace treaty  
between Palestine and Israel.  
The Dow Jones Industrial hit record  
highs.

America signed a three season deal  
to co-host American Idle.

On the debut of the new season of Idle,  
Ryan Seacrest stood on stage with  
America, and America began itching his colon  
in front of the world. His face contorted like a  
soldier in war, biting on a bullet while  
his leg is amputated.

America made a speech, where he told us about  
the burning,  
the itching,  
the swelling,  
the stinging,  
and the thickening of skin around his anus.

America went on Oprah, and he cried over the  
thick brown globs of pork that had fallen  
from wrinkles and from between the hairs  
of his skin.

America told the world how dirty the  
cave between his cheeks had been,  
and he realized,  
while being recorded by  
nine-point-six million DVRs  
that sometimes you need to keep  
the things you do  
to your asshole  
to yourself.

# Creek

*Sean Horsley*

Between two cities' noises  
    is where water runs  
                    thru grey stones & reeds.

Under drone of lightrail bells,  
    under traffic lights  
                    & roundabouts,

the creek witnesses  
    & gathers a city's identity;  
                    thru plastic cups, wrappers,

(refuse et. all) & sometimes  
    even a single flower  
                    caught among currents.

Thru paths sunken into the earth,  
    thru paths overrun by roots,  
                    thru paths under beams—

I, w/out name, w/out history walk:  
    sometimes in fog, sometimes  
                    in wilted orange sun.

Must I, w/out company of love, walk  
    by a creek embedded w/ bottles?  
                    Am I Sappho under these trees?

Or am I the flower caught in the currents?  
red petals among the eddies  
I, that am neither fallen nor safe.

# Calling All Prophets!

*Kyle Adamson*

“Attention! Attention!  
Calling all Prophets!”

The beggar wailed words funneled  
through his wrinkled leather face,  
and stringed greased rat hair.

“You, the anti-Christ in the hat,  
calling all Prophets!”

His words bouncing off the DMV  
and the quaint Greek diner,  
he perched by the streetlights,  
chirping his Revelations.

“You, the pantyhose with the shopping bag,  
calling all Prophets!”

He pushed a shopping cart of  
newspaper clippings and beer cans.

He said something about a journey to a promised land.

“Don’t give up on me now--  
I need all the Prophets I can get.”

His words streaked like comets  
bombarding pedestrians

“Where’s my Prophets?”

He grappled a young banker,

“I know the meaning of life!

Find me a Prophet! there’s a  
burning bush in my mustache.”

# Heroin Jane & The Seven Camel Spiders

*Kyle Adamson*

Her veins are an atlas  
one could play connect the dots with.  
She trampled through Fourth Ave,  
leaving sour words like bread crumbs.

Her poison apples lay in the pocket of her blouse.  
She nestles in the den, the house  
on Freemont, the one with boarded windows  
& human teeth on the floor.

She lays, a sprawl, legs spread between  
her Cashmere dress. She sleeps until the  
camel spiders come home. They burrow  
in her belly and make nests of her toxic doll hair.

They impregnate her while she sleeps,  
laying their mothball eggs, her fair skin a womb.  
At sunset they return to the streets.  
*Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go!*

Her breakfast cooked on a spoon & open flame.  
Poison apple injected, another day to dread  
evil step mother, until the camel spiders  
come home to visit their burrow & womb.

And they lived happily ever after.

# Nightlife

*Kyle Adamson*

I don't want to go out tonight.  
I would rather tear off my finger nails,  
than play another game of Beatles Rock Band.  
In my friends' bleak, chain smoking apartment.

I don't want to stare into drunken blood shot eyes  
and argue like Hebrews & Palestinians  
until the twilight hours of the morning.  
Just to say *I told you so*.

I don't want to small talk.  
I don't want to say things like, "Hey,"  
"I like your shirt." "Are you a Sagittarius?"  
More like, "You should go swimming  
with cement shoes."

I don't want to peel beer bottles  
in a claustrophobic bar downtown.  
While I ignore Scandinavian floozies,  
pretending I didn't see them  
seductively lick their finger tips  
like a by-the-hour hussy.

I would rather stuff my ears with roaches  
than listen to another pulsating pop song,  
another night subjected to predictable  
la la la choruses & upbeat melodies  
that make you wrap your lips around a 45.

I think I'll stay in tonight.  
Maybe I'll catch the James Bond marathon  
or better yet the Swine Flu.

# The Plagiarist

*Christopher J. Kinniburgh*

She's locked in her office every Monday: eight AM until nine PM. They only let her out to teach classes – she hates teaching her classes. When she teaches her night class she always inquires into the weather outside. *I haven't been out since I my first class at eight!* she exclaims. She's always disappointed in the monotony which ensues after a meteorological question is raised.

When she tells us, on a rainy night after we've begun to wonder if the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights applies to her working conditions – she is, after all, being held prisoner without access to sunlight for thirteen hour days – she startles us with a revelation: *I'm allowed to go outside; I just don't.*

I stare blankly at her, slowly turning my head, making sure the girl to my left and the boy to my right have had the same reaction, the same reaction we had when we found out Bruce Willis was dead all along. She is Haley Joel Osment. Nobody speaks.

I begin to wonder, as she rambles on about the harsh treatment of minorities within the United States – *The blacks are so poor, the Indians are so drunk* – I wonder what she does during those long hours between classes and office hours. She must be guarding her

locked filing cabinets.

She has a gun duct-taped to the bottom of her desk, a rusty civil-war era rifle with bayonet propped up behind her door for fear that an intruder might attempt to gain access to her locked filing cabinets. There's a grenade hidden inside her stress ball; if someone does manage to get into her office and steal from her she'll blow the whole room!

She keeps seismic sensors – the kind used to measure earthquakes – along her floors and ceilings. They send her an email if there's any activity, so she can come and check her cabinets in the middle of the night, ensuring no one's managed to burrow their way through the ceilings or walls.

She stores our old tests in those old filing cabinets after they're graded. We're not allowed to keep a personal copy. She talks a lot about how secure those tests are, and sometimes I wonder why she cares. What are the chances that a student will keep his test and share it with a friend who happens to be taking the same class the next semester? And even if that does happen, isn't cheating and not doing work kind of the point of community college?

She plans on saving all our tests on Milton and Marginalized Authors for years and years, until she's collected so many that she can cut words, sentences, and ideas out of the best fifty or hundred. Then she'll weave them into a beautiful quilt of an essay, granting her a spot among the greatest scholars of the world (or at least she'll get published).

She does talk an awful lot about plagiarism. [One in six minutes is spent on the subject. We've done the research.] Don't they say that criminals are most afraid of crimes being committed constantly?

# Self-Immolation

*Sean Horsley*

*Thích Quảng Đức, Buddhist Priest who set  
himself on fire: 11th of June, 1963*

An apparition of lotus flowers;  
plant myself in concrete,  
water myself with gasoline.

I do not mind flames  
which bloom from flesh,  
nor nectar of black ash.

I do not mind pollen  
of smoke which trails  
from orange petals.

Thistles of me,  
carried by wind,  
singe your flesh—

I bloom upwards,  
my radiance  
now your radiance.

# Ghosts' Stories

*Sean Horsley*

1

It's between the ideas of rain  
& rainstorms; when the boulevard is  
dark & the silverfish moon is  
hidden behind black clouds You'll

find me unabashed when the  
boulevard is empty, & we are w/out  
prostitutes & late night drunks, when  
billiard halls are closed. Find

me under hazy orange  
of streetlamp, under  
lotus raindrops; you'll hear two  
sounds: rain hammering on yr back

& my trumpet ringing out into  
the air, free of noise violations. Stay  
awhile, listen to my songs,  
each brazen note that

drifts thru the rainstorm.  
Then clouds part, moon  
white, sky lavender, notes  
vanish

& so

do I.

I'm not alive, I'm just  
an idea. You can see me, sure,  
but it's just an idea. You

can see the hair  
pooling around the base  
of my throat, you

can see my skin  
(which is pale & dusty) you  
could swear you could touch it, you'd

only get cold air  
& silver threads of cobwebs  
on yr arms & thru yr pores. You

could try & talk to me, try  
to brush against my shoulder,  
(visible thru my white dress) You

could try to kiss me, try  
& rub yr hand up my inner thigh, you  
could try to fuck me, you

could try to say you love me, that  
I am real, that  
I am here in front of you  
but I'm not,

just  
an idea.

# Grotta Azzurra

*Sean Horsley*

*The Emperor Tiberius in the Grotta Azzurra  
on the Isle of Capri*

here  
the sun must enter through water  
& bow, like a lowly peasant, to waves  
barely throbbing.  
he must pay tribute to water,  
which is still and quiet(ly laughing).  
he must strip naked like these boys  
& girls, whose limbs are taut bowstrings  
& whose middles are thin cypress saplings.  
he (who is now naked, shivering & ashamed)  
must give over his light, his radiance,  
his essence,  
to water, who observes it, eats it,  
digests it,  
& becomes it, but not it.

here  
stone-faced Poseidon and Tritons watch  
&  
smirk, unseen  
at the sun naked & shivering  
like the young boys  
& young girls who break  
the blue surface of the water.  
& here

I float, naked, old,  
my body is the stone walls  
who agelessly watch  
sun pay tribute  
to water.

I float among (& naked as)  
young boys  
& girls;  
& I have given  
my robes,  
purple flowing setting sun,  
& laurel crown to be  
here.

# Fallen

*Isela Pena*

The way Hell manifests itself is in the form of what an individual most fears. To some, it may be lying helpless in a pit of feral, poisonous snakes. To others, it may be being eternally dunked in steaming chocolate fondue or having to listen to an audio of Kelly Osbourne squawking the lyrics to “Shut Up” with absolutely no pause. To the angel, it was falling, and this was precisely the form of punishment he received. Into a perpetual chasm he had been tossed, and he was not alone. Not really.

From out of the darkness, tortured faces materialized like unfurling shapes of smoke, howling their woes and misery in an anguished cacophony. These faces belonged to souls who were fortunate enough not to be dispensed into one of the dark leader’s various and inventive torture chambers. These souls carried off their punishment trapped in darkness.

The chasm in which the angel fell had a sense of timelessness and eternal profundity, an emptiness that pressed dreadfully up his back, which he realized felt oddly bare. That’s right. They had been seared off at his banishment. This to him was almost as bad as falling eternally in Hell. Compare this to castrating a man’s manhood. A part of him had been stripped off. He was incomplete.

There was, however, something that kept hope alighted in his heart. From far above, at the highest

point of the chasm, a narrow break of light was filtering through. The angel was reaching for this as if there were a possibility that he'd be forgiven and saved, perhaps lifted back home. As the break of light became increasingly narrower, the angel's hope slipped further away. When it seemed that his last glimpse of light would close and forever seal him in darkness, the break widened. Golden light poured in, and from it a pair of arms descended. They grabbed hold of his wrist and pulled him upwards, the strength behind them solid and able. He allowed himself to be lifted, let himself be guided towards the light until he passed the bridge of consciousness.

He came back spewing water from his mouth. He sputtered and coughed and took long, sharp intakes of breath. His throat felt raw. His chest stung. His head throbbed with pain. Hell, he felt like hell. A feminine voice was speaking to him. Slowly, he lifted himself onto resting his upper weight on an arm.

He blinked and realized there was a pair of breasts in his line of vision, bound in snug, pink fabric. A tank top is what they called it. Not without some level of unease and apprehension, he lifted his gaze.

In Heaven, all is as perfect in structure as it could be. The angels themselves are impeccable in all their physical bearings, with eyes like gemstones and skin that glows as if light is trapped under their skin.

The girl in front of him was not perfect.

There was a blemish on her chin which she had

been clearly picking at, and her lips were slightly dry. Her ponytail was wet and out of place, several wayward strands sticking to her neck and forehead like seaweed. Her eyes were as blue as skies, and skies he liked very much.

She was as human as they come, and she was breathtaking. She was speaking to him in the mundane world's most ubiquitous language.

“Are you okay? Do you need an ambulance?” She asked. There was concern and uneasiness in her tone. He noted that she was not looking directly in his eyes but rather his forehead.

He responded to her in her language and said, “I’m fine, thank you.” With effort, he rose to stand up. Her face then turned a brilliant red. She shot her palms out as if to block something offensive or something that could possibly pelt her on the face. With some difficulty in speech, she pointed out that he was naked.

Looking down at his genitals, it did not take him long to understand her discomfort. The progeny of Adam and Eve have a sense of timidity towards nudity. For some reason, this made him self-conscious. He cupped his groin with his hands and apologized humbly.

“I am very sorry. I meant no offense. I-” He was in obvious distress and with no clue what to do. A pang of guilt hit Raya.

It had been a primary and immediate reaction on her part. With visible danger over and his life intact, it was not incomprehensible that she would falter at the sight of a stranger's private bits- any girl with a sense

of modesty would- and this stranger in particular easily hit the perfect ten mark. Still, she felt silly. There was of course the question as to WHY he was naked in the first place, which she had to force to the back of her mind. Right now, she had to help him somehow.

Jeers and laughter came from somewhere above them. Two younger men were passing by the bridge, evidently amused by the situation. She did not know exactly what they were thinking, but she knew whatever it was they were thinking had to resemble a bad porno flick scene. As miffed and embarrassed as she was, an idea clicked in her brain.

“Hey!” She waved at the pair of fine citizens, “could you come down here for a sec?”

They looked at each other with a mixture of surprise and sleazy amusement. They walked down the slope to the riverbank in which they stood, plastered with lecherous grins. She sent the handsome stranger to sit under the bridge where he would be less conspicuous.

“What’s goin’ on here?” One of them said, this one burly and with a few days’ growth of facial hair. His eyes impishly switched from her to the handsome stranger parked innocently under the bridge, as far away from the water as possible.

“What’d you do to the poor guy?” The second one said, laughing. He was fairly good-looking, clean-shaven and with a military-style crew cut. He seemed like the Marine type.

The girl responded before the stranger could, “Some guys played a cruel joke on him. We’re gonna

have to borrow your pants, if you'd be so kind."

Laughter from the guys. How she wanted to sock them each on the jaw. The story she'd just created seemed like the kind of thing they would do and probably had done. And come to think of it, that might explain why he had nearly drowned without his underpants.

"Oh shit, that's jacked up." The burly one said, still laughing.

Raya's hand twitched a little. "The man nearly died, you blokes."

"Sorry, my bad, my bad."

"Whatever, dude." She looked at the Marine guy. "I'll give you 20 and throw in a free meal at the sushi bar I work in in exchange for your pants. My cousin runs the place. And it's high quality. Deal?"

The Marine guy cocked a grin. "Well, can I also get your number?"

Raya did not consider herself to be a good flirt, which is why she rarely tried it, but her options were limited and she did not want the handsome stranger to continue to suffer his indignity.

"Sure," she said through a blossoming smile. Said smile was more mischievous than flirtatious, but no one seemed to notice. He handed her his phone and she punched in random numbers.

The Marine guy grinned lecherously as he worked on his belt. Raya rolled her eyes and looked away.

"Done." When she turned, she saw that the Marine guy was wearing boxers branded with the UFC logo. He

at least had good taste in sports.

She took them from the Marine guy and walked to where the handsome stranger still sat, staring at the water gloomily.

“Here,” she said, handing him the pants and turning away, “Put these on.”

From behind her she heard, “Thank you.”

She smiled and went to make the transaction, giving the Marine guy 20 bills, her aunt’s number, and a made up number that was supposed to be her own.

Meanwhile, under the bridge, the handsome stranger stared at the pants as if they were an oddity. He knew what they were and knew how to wear them, but he had never worn anything of the sort before. In fact, he’d never worn anything before. He slipped one leg and then another and zipped and buttoned up his pants. They felt unnatural and stiff. He walked up to her when he saw that the two rude men had left.

“Thank you,” he told her, voice as soft and thick as a bear’s coat, “for saving me.”

She turned to him, her face softened into a pretty and shy smile. “You’re welcome. You’re lucky I saw you in time. Someone up there was watchin’ you.”

A slow, almost wistful smile curved up his lips. “Perhaps. I’d like to think so.”

“What happened?” She asked, hoping she wasn’t being intrusive.

A pained expression crossed his lovely face. “I’m sorry, I have to go. You have been very good to me.

Thank you again.” He turned and walked hastily the other direction.

A gust of wind blew then, drifting his long, scarlet hair to one side. What she saw nearly made her heart nearly leap out of her throat.

On either side of his back two raw and angry wounds ran down near his spine. They looked in the process of healing, and would undoubtedly leave ugly scars. She caught him at the wrist. The angel recognized the strength behind this grip.

“What happened to you? Who did this to you?” Her voice just slightly cracked at the last words. Her eyes were round with shock, leveled directly with his.

For a while, he said nothing, and then said something she did not expect. “There are still some good people left on this earth.”

“Let me take you home,” she practically blurted, and it caught her by surprise. She didn’t even know the guy. For all she knew he could be a very dangerous and mentally unstable man. He looked more vulnerable though, standing and looking damn good and wearing only jeans.

He looked like he was about to take the offer but said, “I’m sorry, but I have no home.”

“Do you have a place to stay?”

He shook his head.

“Is there anyone you can call? Friend or family or someone you can stay with?”

Again, he said no. “I have nobody. I am new to

this... place. “

This man is either very dangerous, or very vulnerable, the girl thought. In any case, she made a decision. And if anything were to happen, she knew how to defend of herself. She didn't practice jujutsu for nothing. Still, it took her some courage to spill out the next words.

“Come with me. My house isn't too far away. I was on my way when I uh, spotted you.”

How to explain the inkling she had had while walking the same bridge the Marine guy and the burly guy had just walked. It had been like a mental whisper that brushed alongside her consciousness, a wordless voice that directed her to look down at the water. When she had looked and seen that there was a hand jutting from the water, she had dove in to save whoever it was that was drowning. Even now, that same feeling was tapping at her mind. It said that he needed help, that she needed to give him that help, and it was slightly distressing. Perhaps she was the one with the mental instability.

His brows lifted, looking both chocked and uncertain.

“Are you,” he paused, “certain?”

She considered this for a while. Yes, she was certain. Mostly.

He had nothing to lose, and admittedly, he also did not want to leave her. He followed her to the bridge, taking a glimpse at the sky.

**Opa!**

*Christopher J. Kinniburgh*

I keep hazel stained glass ash trays company  
when οι ειδήσεις, *the news* I can't understand  
slams on TV. The caramel loose leaf tobacco, dry after  
a week in the sun, broils my bronchial tubes  
until I'm out of cigarettes and cloudy ouzo  
spurs cirrhosis until I sleep.

Awake, frozen, without fags,  
I am a rat scurrying down cobblestone  
streets searching for blue and white cafés, shredded pig  
ταβέρνας  
with bowls filled to the brim with ash  
and butts. I claw through soot for that dirty  
cigarette with an inch unsmoked, sneaking  
unseen, to find my left over cheese,  
until the owners shout:  
*βγες έξω! Get out!*

I run back to my hole, where  
I am alone; I smoke my salvaged cigarettes,  
drink my opaque ouzo, and shout:  
*Opa!*

# The Arabian Laugh

*Faisal Alahamad*

Asleep, my Arabian laugh lingers,  
the slow grind of its teeth, a sawing  
screech as it wonders if *they*, the western  
others, are deaf.

“*Do you know what this is?*” No, I mumble Arably,  
as I struggle against the rim of the melting pot.

“*We call this a car!*” I nod, enthused—by *Allah!*

I am enthralled; show me more, my thumbless  
hands urge, their color shifting from brown to white,  
then wheat as I stick my fingers into my bottomless,  
oily pockets.

The laugh rumbles inside like a Hyena’s raging  
crescendo as it sees them wince, *their* eyes  
wide as frightened bullies, skits of Hezbollah  
and exploding teenagers flashing  
at my rummaging fingers—

yet, too polite, they merely wiggle their perfect nostrils,  
the stink of third world terrorism ignored.

Then, like a mother to her neighbor’s grimy child,  
“*and this is called a shower!*” I smile my thanks.

Oh, but they know what I need,  
before the thought nudges out  
my Bedouin tent, my dusty mind,  
like the desert that bore me.

# Where were you the day football stopped?

*Kyle Adamson*

A quiet Tuesday morning,  
I peered into the TV screen  
as buildings exploded like  
Napalm riddled jungles  
& collapsed like Babylon.

Reflections of horror projected on my face,  
as accountants leapt, flowering in flames  
& satanic smoke devours the New York sky.

My stomach ties overhand bowlines  
as I tremble with disbelief.  
What about football?  
Is this the pigskin apocalypse?  
Will I never see Ben Roethlisberger?  
Rocket passes on a gleaming Sunday stage?

Is this how it ends? Steel hulks consumed by flames?  
No more afternoons devouring seven layer nachos  
with extra refried beans, piled atop gelatinous  
globes of coveted guacamole?

Must I attend funerals instead  
of end zone boogies?  
Is this end of tail gates  
& giant foam hands?

I stare at Network News.

The voice booms. “The Commissioner of the NFL announces that games will be suspended for the next two weeks.”

I melt, embrace my ears & mutter.

*This means war, I tell ya, this means war.*

# Nothing's Wrong

*Patti Lindaberry*

I feel like slapping the ass of a random, tight jean, young man.

It's my duty to tell that older gentleman, with the young pink lipped woman,

her picture's on a milk carton.

My boss lets the guys scratch their balls,

but I can't.

I can't find my keys,

years of bowing to the wrong "God".

My life is a jumbled-up ball of twine  
kicked around by steel-toe shoes.

I stand next to a man I may have a crush on.

I want to giggle like an adolescent school girl.

I dance when I hear loud, bouncy music.

I feel the urge to skip across the food court and embarrass my daughter as she talks to a boy with purple hair.

My brain doesn't stop my mouth  
from barfing opinions into the air.

# Decisions and Dilemmas

*Emily Klehr*

Between the devil and the deep  
blue sky, I hung like a  
blackberry in the clouds, careening  
down the cliffs of indecision, cold  
mountain air pressing  
like needles into my skin, as  
the wind whirred past I heard  
my mothers voice again  
saying, look before  
you let go

# How Much for the Brooklyn Bridge?

*Kyle Adamson*

Jerry said he had a proposition for me,  
& it would only take five minutes.  
The scammer exhaled with angel tattoos  
like stain glass windows. The desperation  
smeared around his nostrils, Snow White.  
He told me about his business—the one  
I've never heard of—the one that buys  
& sells commodities from Nigerian  
Royal families. & he needs a hard working,  
computer savvy, be-my-own-boss person like me.  
He looked me over, squinting. *Are you in?*  
A number scribbled on a stained, coffee ringed napkin.

Now let's pretend I'm Jerry for a minute,  
& I'm bothering this existential, loner  
in a greasy spoon diner on the edge of town.  
& I have to pretend like selling you the rights to this  
fictional website is a good investment,  
so I can buy an eight ball of coke,  
& snort it on the dash board of my 88'  
Silverado while White Snake hums  
in the speakers. As I think to myself—gotcha!

I looked back at Jerry as he tapped his heels,  
& flicked the packages of jelly around the table.  
*How much for the Brooklyn Bridge?* I asked.

# The Bird Rising

*Faisal Alahmad*

*“..Hope is a thing with feathers...”*

*—Emily Dickinson*

It rises like an acoustic note,  
higher than the breath in your throat,  
up till it flies above your scalp,  
and you feel its liquid energy;  
the tap of its feet; the itch of its fingers,  
inside of you, aching to burst, and fill  
the sky—  
like a grown bird that has never flown,  
restless wings flutter and yearn  
for you to open the cage door.  
But you hold on to it  
like you have no spare—  
and you squeeze it—your body will not release.  
For, when born, in that small chamber of  
your center, nothing crushes you more  
than to have it slip thru your pores,  
and into the vortex.  
And you watch, then, as it flies  
away—you watch as the beat  
of its wings slows, like a dream haze,  
and you smell a nauseous breeze  
like the one before an apology,  
as the winged angel in your chest  
morphs into a winged beast

that grins into your being,  
then howls you down the deathly ravine,  
as it happily sings: *I will never let you go.*

# **An Aged Man**

*Christopher J. Kinniburgh*

I am a sick man, I am a bitter man, I am a lonely man, and soon I will die. These are the thoughts I wake up to each morning. Today will be the same as any other day. Today is Tuesday. On Tuesdays, I travel to the pharmacy. I will exert my energy on minute tasks. I will sleep. I will smoke. I will read.

On the last Thursday of every month, they take us to a mall where they have a tobacconist. The man, ten years my younger, forces a smile upon his face each month as I enter his store. I smile back, and buy quality cigars out of his humidor. This is our ritual.

Every second Monday I see a doctor who bitterly confides in me the details of his hellish marriage. He enjoys articulating his pain. My ears are his mouth's punching bags. He likes to say "If I could do it again, I'd be a bachelor like you." Ha! My doctor who I see with terminal frequency wishes he were I! I take pleasure in this man's pain. I envy his pain.

Any other day I do as I please, walking to the harbor, or the strip mall, or just staying inside reading novels, watching the idiot box, and wondering how I ended up here. This is my world.

I sit up in bed and cough mucus until my throat collapses and I am out of breath. After regaining my composure I grab the cane on the ground next to my bed and inch towards the dimly lit bathroom where I wash the mucus off my hand and begin to shave. Shaving

becomes the final slice of dignity in the life an elderly man. My tools include a straight razor I purchased at Harrods during my time in the war, a badger hairbrush, and glycerin soap. The act of shaving is a tradition lost on today's unkempt youth. I take my time sliding the sharp silver blade down my coarse neck. The old leather faced women who pass me at the entrance as I smoke cigars and read the newspaper always complement my rugged looks, and I will not disappoint. I am no longer able to shower myself. A negro woman comes in twice a week before I sleep to wash me. She is a descent woman, though I am aware that I disgust her. So let her be disgusted! I will not change. Last week the negro woman told me that soon she would have to dress me, and change my diaper. The nerve! I know that someone will come along and finish the task before I am forced into a diaper. I will make them if I have to. They will have no choice. I'm not afraid.

I have read in a scholarly book, which I'm sure the majority of men do not know of, that certain chemical reactions occur just before death. In my research I learned that there is a psychoactive chemical which is released into the brain just before one dies. This chemical, the name escapes me, will allow the dying man to feel nothing. Instead of pain, the man is transported to a secondary plane of existence. This is what we call heaven or hell. This second state of being is some culmination of the man's life. A good man has beautiful dreams and the other man's trip to the beyond is a nightmare. According to my research this is death, and I am not afraid.

I dress myself. A sharp pain like a bullet tearing through my lower back grows worse each day as I put on my socks. I do not complain. I will savor the pain to spite the negro woman. Each day I wear a white collared shirt with a beige sports jacket, and a pair of khaki slacks. I waddle into my kitchen, only three steps for a youth, though it takes ten for me to make the journey. The apartment consists of three rooms. The door to the apartment enters into a living room and kitchen that are combined to make one main room. There is a tiny bathroom and a bedroom that hardly fits my bed, both of which connect to the main living room. In the kitchen I drink a Boost for sustenance. Next, I make the trek out the door of my apartment, which only opens half way due to the stack of books piled behind the door. There are books everywhere in the apartment. I try to fill my head with knowledge in my final years. A competent analyst may suspect that I am searching through these books for some last salvation, though I do not believe in this world of therapy, or the work of therapists. These shysters are paid to make the simple seem more complex. I read because I am trying to amuse myself before I die.

Outside the apartment complex I pay my dollar for the newspaper. Unlock the shopping cart I keep chained to a fence behind the apartments. I use the wobbly cart with its broken wheel to help me walk. I stole the cart from the grocery store down the road before they knocked it down. Everyone seems to be knocking something down these days. The world is getting smaller. Sitting on the bench, I smoke half a cigar. I crawl behind my cart to the pharmacy, stopping every hundred paces to smoke and catch my breath. I

walk through every isle of the store and inspect each new item on the shelves, deciding to purchase one 24-pack of Boost, which is half off, and a bar of shaving soap. The young lady who rings me up looks like a girl from my past, this is the girl some sap might refer to as “the love of my life.”

I walk home, the case of Boost making the cart heavier and my legs burn with each step. I wonder what the girl at the register thinks of me, a wrinkled old man with clothes that reek of tobacco. I wonder who loves her, and how they would react if she died. I wonder if he would become me in his own future. Sweat starts to drip from my forehead as I push the cart up the street. I wonder if they will live happier lives than ours. I consider the girl from my past, the one I loved and lost, and I wish she were with me now. I feel dizzy. I wonder where I am going, and why I am so insistent on buying this Boost. Do I really need to spend my money on this garbage keeping me alive? Why do I keep up this charade of reading, if I know all I’m waiting for is my own death? Why do I care at all? My world has become so small in these last years. I wish I could forget everything, sit here for the rest of my life and die. I wish I were dead.

I am light headed. I sit down on the curb. Beads of sweat drop onto my glasses, and I wipe them off with my handkerchief. Why do I bother talking to the girls who flirt with me as they walk in and out of the home? I am spoken for, and though she is gone, I will not break my promise. The girls who flirt, they know by now. They laugh at me for it, I’m sure! I take the cigar out

of my breast pocket. I smoke. Inhaling the smoke, I wonder if these are new thoughts. No. I started smoking after she went away. I didn't care anymore. I wanted to die. Smoking always made me sick, that is why I had not started before the war, wasn't it? I chose a slow death, and a painful death, but I chose death. This is why I read wordy books. This is why I spend hours shaving. This is why I drink gritty nutrients. This is why I am sitting on a corner, smoking a cigar, eighty-nine years old, wishing my wife would return to me. I am dizzy. I am confused.

I shiver. My body is numb from the cold. My bottom is sore from the pavement. I wish that I had someone to help me stand. My jaw trembles. My feet tingle. My cigar drops from my hand, and I am a captain without a compass on a sinking ship. My eyes dart from side to side in search of a way to survive. I am a canoe that has lost its oars. I float down the river without direction. I shiver on the side of the road. I curl up into the fetal position. I always knew it would end like this.

## §

When I open my eyes the only woman I ever loved is standing in front of me, and I ask her if I am dead. She puts out her hand and we walk home, leaving my shopping cart behind. When we arrive at the courtyard outside of the building, I ask her if she would like to come inside for something to drink, and she nods yes.

As I fumble through my keys to open my door I apologize in advance for the shape of the apartment. She

leans back, as if to say ‘you tell that to all the girls.’ These are the coy questions she would ask when we were still innocent. I do not. I tell her this, and manage to get the door open. Inside the apartment, there are no books. My apartment is clean, and smells of air freshener.

I offer her coffee or tea, and her rosy lips arch into a smile at the tea. As I make us two cups of Earl Gray, she stands next to me and holds my hand. We sit down on two chairs in front of my television and I ask her about the people whom she has loved in her life, and she shakes her head horizontally wishing nothing had come between us. Her glistening eyes tell me that she wishes she could have seen me when I came home from the war, and they apologize for leaving me. She places her left hand on my thigh and continues to hold my hand with her right.

As we sit, I tell her I always loved her, and that I think about her constantly. I tell her how life was when my world extended beyond the oceans. I tell her that I had never considered starting again with another woman. I explain how I ended up in this small city, alone. I tell her that I am glad to see her, and I place my hand on her thigh.

I stop talking, and I look into her eyes for the first time in half a century. Her eyes are the same deep, penetrating, azure green that I remember. I slide my hand slowly up her leg as I lean my entire body towards her. She does the same. Our mouths collide. Her hand rests above my groin. We kiss, and we look back into one another’s arms.

She stands up, and takes my hand. She guides me

from the living area into my bedroom, where she stands straight ahead of me, still looking into my eyes. She takes her clothes off, and with just a brief flicker of her eyes asks me to do the same. I oblige her. She lays down in the bed, under the covers, and I follow her. We hold hands, and stare into each other's eyes. We make love.

For the first time since I left for the war, I let all the air out of my lungs slowly. I allow my mind to go blank. There is complete silence. I am in a trance, and when I wake up I look at her smiling mouth with ruby red lips on smooth pale skin, and I whisper "I'm glad I waited for you" and look into her eyes until I fall asleep.

# Crying Teacher

*Christopher J. Kinniburgh*

You're standing there, your mouth opening slowly like an awning.

I'm growling obscenities with my white canines showing.

The depth of field is shallow; we only see each other.

Your eyes tighten like a child squeezing a garden hose, building pressure before, inevitably, water sprays everyone.

My chest moves in and out. You stand still.

I turn to walk away, and you're still the child, unable to turn off the faucet in time.

I think: *how sad, little baby.*

I say nothing.

I think: *little baby, I'm sorry for what I said.*

I say nothing.

I turn my shoulders towards the door.

# Guardian of the Christmas Tree

*Laura Thomas*

The window in the sitting room was the perfect place to lay to bask in the sunshine. To be honest, that's all that I really felt like doing anymore. My mind is as spry as it was when I was a pup but my hind legs seemed to lag behind so that I almost wanted to nip them to keep up. I'd been feeling the old age rear its head all throughout that past year. The pups in this family weren't pups anymore for me to herd. Two had moved away while I stayed behind. I squinted my eyes open when the not-pups returned but the sun was so soothing on my old bones that I could no longer get up to greet them the way I always would.

I must've fallen asleep for the next thing I felt was Big Sister laying by my side: the best pillow in the house.

I gave a content sigh and fell back asleep. I found myself snoozing by that inviting window for so long that the days blurred together until I felt a small tap at my side. I grumbled and wiggled my nose as if sniffing out more sunshine to make up for the irritation.

"Hey!" a young called out. "Hey! Hey! Hey!"

It took a moment for my spaced out mind to process that that hadn't been the masters' language. I wearily lifted my great, fluffy head. It sounded more like...

A tiny sheepdog puppy bounced up and down, side to side, like he'd dunked his little pink nose into a bag of

sugar and hadn't stopped until he'd reached the bottom. His markings were almost just like mine: gray up to the shoulders (or in his case, black that would turn gray), no patches, and big, brown eyes. In fact, the only way I could tell that I wasn't looking at a me of the past was that he had one black ear instead of two.

The puppy didn't seem too bothered that I stared. He continued inciting me to play, laying low to the ground and sticking his fluffy bum up high in the air, ready to bolt at my slightest movement.

"Umm..." I tried, "Hi?" And I predicted it. The little guy was off like a bolt all across the room as if expecting me, the big giant, to be right on his tail, ready to nip off that tiny stub that still remained. He ran at dizzying speeds that would have left me winded by the end but he rounded back to me when he saw I hadn't moved.

"Hey, hey, mister?" he said and he wasn't out of breath. He poked his little paw at me again, did it a few times, and used his untrained nose to sniff me. "You – you have so much fur it's like it eats you all up! Are you really tiny like me under all of it or are you big like Mommy? Am I going to have fur like that when I get big, huh?"

By now the masters have done whatever they do with all of those brown bags they bring in sometimes. Those brown bags are supposed to mean there's a pig's ear somewhere in there for me but there isn't one today. They only seem too occupied with playing with the new puppy in front of me, trying to coax me up to join along. I won't have it so they leave me alone as I stare.

I hear my name Indy but a new one as well among all the other gibberish: Quigley.

Quigley. I watched Quigley play with the hairless littermates of mine I had herded and watched grow up for thirteen years. They were mine, not his. My brother and sisters seemed to speed up while I only slowed down and only the new puppy could match their speed.

The same breed, the same markings...I was being replaced for the newer model even before I died. My family was waiting for me to die, expecting it just like I was. I felt a knot forming in my stomach at the thought and turned away. I couldn't see them but I could still hear them and all the joyous sounds they made without me.

Don't you all know that if I could still keep up to you that I would? Don't you know that you only need to take a few steps from the front door to come to me by the window after all of the times I'd rushed to the door to greet you? You gave him my toys to play with and you rolled him around the carpeting. His head fur isn't even long enough to get in his eyes and yet you tie in up in a ponytail...just like mine.

Though the carpeting had come to form a groove, it wasn't quite the same place of comfort. I gazed lazily outside the window where the scenery hadn't changed all day. I thought I saw a rabbit across the snow but I thought of my littermates, how they would try to rile me up over it and let me loose, and I gave a lax woof that didn't leave my mouth.

I heard the half-mad barking babble of Quigley

as he raced after the masters. They made him sit at the front door. The new puppy only seemed to have brains for playing and using the world as his chew toy. Surely, if I tucked my legs and head in, I could pass off as a great fluffy pillow he hadn't discovered yet in the new world of the house. Didn't polar bears use camouflage like that in the wild?

But I spent too much time thinking and not enough doing. Man, I forgot how speedy those little buggers were.

Quigley bounded over and tried to jump over me but, for all his energy, he was still a clumsy puppy and he instead tripped over my belly. He squirmed and slid back off. He poked his pink nose into my face and whined, "Mr. Indy, Mr. Indy, the nice people are leaving! Where are they going? Why aren't they bringing me with them?"

That's right, I thought with a little bitterness. Call them "the nice people." That's all my family will ever be to you.

"Then – then you can play with me! Hang on!"

I rolled onto my side knowing I'd never get any sleep now that I was literally the only other living thing in the house. Quigley came back dragging my rope toy along the ground, almost tripping up over himself.

"Okay, so the game goes that you take one end and I—" he grinded his baby teeth into one end "take the other. And we yank it all arrround and—" but before he could finish, I grabbed up my toy with force and sent the little pup rolling across the carpeting. I proved my remaining worth in strength, if only to myself, but Quigley didn't

seem to take the hint. The five hours that day alone seemed to stretch into fifty when Quigley played fetch and brought me near everything in the house that wasn't heavier than him or nailed to the ground.

I suppose even a puppy has to run out of energy sometime. He took a nap near me when I didn't respond to him at all.

The first night was hard on him, the way I expect it is on all puppies. He cried all night. He stared out the window and clawed at the door when he realized that this wasn't like a trip to the vet or the pet store. Quigley had never been away from his siblings and mother for this long, and as I looked at him from across the house, he looked more like a lost little baby than the ball of spunk he'd been earlier.

I was still upset at his presence alone, but I couldn't just get back to sleep to the sounds of a crying pup. Some part of me resented it, but I gave a huff in his direction. It was all the invitation Quigley needed. I'd really only intended it to last until he'd gotten over his homesickness, but Quigley wanted a bedmate every night.

Oh well, at least I wouldn't be conscious for all his nauseating sugar.

The weeks wore on and I found it actually took less energy to engage with the puppy rather than ignore him. I had more reasons to get away from my groove in the floor. Quigley barked at my lagging hind legs as if to scare them into obeying and we were off, off to those excellent smells coming from the kitchen that were

making the pup antsy.

“Oh-ho! This!” I said, my excitement betraying me, “This is steak night! Okay if you want what’s on the table just tilt your head...a little more; big, sad eyes and trembling lip, good.” But I told him off when he yipped. That was too much. I waltzed in on the family. “Please feed me! I’ve been starving myself just to look like those supermodel dogs in the magazines! Just for you! All for you!”

“Y-yeah,” Quigley said, still practicing. “And that kibble wasn’t that filling!”

“If you don’t feed me I’ll starve!” I begged and pleaded though they couldn’t speak Dog. “I’ll shrivel up into a little raisin and decompose at your feet and it’ll be all your fault and-!”

But Dad waved his hand for us to go away. Quigley thought he was waving in the direction of food but I knew better. I had us walk away defeated...and then circle back. I’m a genius that way. Mom, Big Sister, and Little Sister gave us good table scraps that night.

After dinner I lost my favorite nap place but it was replaced with something I looked forward to all year.

“Ooo!” Quigley howled lowly at the great green tree and we sat at its base as the family switched on the music they played every year: songs about snow, presents, and good will. I watched as they all lovingly placed the ornaments they had collected over the years: delicate gold ones, homemade ones before my time, and trinkets from when each of us pups had our first Christmases, with a new one for Quigley. They also

decorated Quigley and me with mistletoe wreaths. Even Brother was there with a Santa hat over the laptop screen.

When the soundtrack was through singing about the New Year I ruffed at Quigley to finally stop dogging everyone's ankles and wait for the final touch to the tree. Lights flashed but not so brightly as the star on top and he started barking as if it was alive. Mom wouldn't be Mom without her camera. She positioned us all the way she would arrange the presents and snapped picture after picture until my eyes burned. I told Quigley he would get used to it. Standard of the breed, he and I practically had permanent smiles etched into our faces. It was Big Sister that needed work on being photogenic.

When everyone had gone to sleep that night Quigley hissed to me, "Hey, what's with that thing? That's no normal tree."

"That thing," I said proudly, "is my thing to guard and so are all those colorful boxes."

"You're a guard dog too, Mr. Indy?" Quigley asked in wonder.

"Sure am." I puffed my fluffy chest out a bit. "I mean, they've got my pedigrees saying I'm a purebred sheepdog and all but come on, I think there's got to be some Doberman in there somewhere. You don't get between me and my presents."

"But what's inside?" And Quigley gnawed at the corner of one.

"No, no, not now," I said, batting it away. "We'll get in trouble. We have to wait until they say it's okay."

“And then?”

“And then...” I said in a dire tone, hunching my shoulders low, “You rip apart until its shredded remains litter the entire floor in red and green! No mercy! Destroy them all to crack open the sweet, sweet treasures that lay inside!”

There was hardly a weekend spent at home and soon enough we found ourselves waiting in the trunk of the backseat. Young and old, both of us had to be lifted out and set onto the powdery snow of the old farm road. I’d thought the pup was right behind me but I saw nothing until he suddenly hopped out of the two feet of snow he’d wandered into off-road.

The way he was leap-frogging like that I’d get to the porch sooner.

“I’m not your mama, pup,” I ruffed, picking him up by the scruff of his neck, setting him back on the driveway. “Okay, so while you’re here on the farm watch out for burrs and-”

“What are burrs?”

“They’re these little things that stick to-”

“Are they prickly and brown?”

“I...well yeah, why?” But though I asked I didn’t really need him to tell me. Somehow some force of nature was always working against me in that I always seemed to find on me the last living burr plant that the frost hadn’t killed off. “Ugh, well they sting getting off but it’s quick and-”

But, like I had found the only burr plant left,

Quigley had found some way of spotting the one patch of iced-over mud in the snowy white world. I was old and I couldn't stop him, couldn't stop him from changing from a two-tone dog to a brown one. It was a lesson I'd had to learn long ago that meant sleeping outside that whole weekend. Quigley jumped from window to window on the family enjoying their Thanksgiving meal, and me when I lapped up Grandpa's hard but loving pats on the head and comforted Little Sister over a bad breakup with her boyfriend by just being there and letting her hug me through her tears. The family all pulled away every time but I gave her a lick just for the gesture of it. I took up the living room as the resident rug and let the children pet me even when I got sick of the strokes.

I had done what I was supposed to do and not get dirty, I didn't even respond to Quigley's whines when he had done wrong, so I didn't see how it was at all fair when I had to take a share in his punishment when we got home. Mom wanted me bathed once every two weeks whether I needed it or not.

Poor Quigley, he was actually excited to be carried up the stairs he couldn't hope to scale himself without assistance. It was the one place he hadn't gotten to fully explore. But I'd learned to dread seeing those tattered blue towels Big Sister held.

I walked low like a prisoner walking a death march and stepped into the tub while Big Sister placed Quigley in beside me and hummed cheerily that tonight we would smell like coconuts and kiwi.

"Just deal," I said when Quigley yelped when she turned the faucet on.

“Settle down,” I repeated when he scrambled around the tub like he was so sweet he’d melt on contact. The sides were slippery and he couldn’t escape but he did all that he could to panic and almost tripped my feet out from under me.

“I hate it too,” I said and we shivered together in the foamy tub as Big Sister cleaned us and modeled our wet fur into wicked spikes.

Not my best moment, I got the crazies once I was free of that watery torture. I tore off through the house, shook all over everything until I was herded into the laundry room, and I was too wired to notice that Quigley copies me frame by frame. When we were dry the next day Big Sister brushed us until our fur glows like wavy cotton. With his baby fur, Quigley was finished faster and he spread out on his belly.

“Hee, I feel pretty,” he cooed and that wasn’t something I needed to say first. I had always felt pretty too.

But then came the night that Quigley shrieked and came darting out from the Christmas tree base. He struggled to scale the stairs, howling all the way, howling for me. It was like nothing I’d ever felt before. The tree and the presents blurred like they were melting and I couldn’t tell what was up and down. I cocked my head left to the point of locking it and my eyes flickered madly. The family only spared time to dress before we were all in the car. I couldn’t tell where Quigley was until I felt him huddle at my side in fear.

I was separated from them; I must’ve been for their

voices were replaced with unfamiliar ones dressed in white. They poked me and prodded me and said so many things I couldn't understand that I closed my eyes just to get away from it all.

When I heard my family again there was strain and sadness in their voices. They came to pet me. One pet my severely tilted head, Mom, by the smell, and I tried to nuzzle into where I thought her palm was. I was the dog, the one that was supposed to ease sadness away, not bring it.

They tried to get me to stand. I did shakily for a few seconds before they had to ease me back to the ground.

I could hear Quigley bark for me but he must have been held back by Big Sister as Dad talked to the unfamiliar voices about the simple ear infection that had worried them all so. But I couldn't stand, couldn't do anything for myself when I was brought back home. I saw the lengths my family was willing to go to for an old dog without much life in him left. Two carried me outside twice a day to take care of business. Mom boiled me a hamburger-rice mixture in place of dog food to build my strength. So much more often than usual they came down to pet me, give me words of support to please just get better and stay with them a little longer.

And it did do something for me. After a week I could walk shakily, slowly, for a few feet before I had to lie back down again from the dizziness. I was feeling a little better but some deep biological feeling told me that this was the last my old bones could take.

I felt too sick to eat the hamburger-rice that Mom had specially prepared or even the chicken that came after that was only ever a privilege before. I choked down a few bites but only when Big Sister insisted so very much. Those pity bites of chicken to appease her were just about all that I could stomach for days. It showed through the fur only when they held me and felt my hips jutting out from my skin. I snapped at Dad when he patted a tender spot. I didn't lift my head when Quigley poked me with the rope toy so I could make him look like a weakling again and bump me up a few notches on the family preference scale.

There were no words in that early morning car ride; no words until they wheeled me back into the vet's office I had only just left. My family talked of "plans" and read passages aloud on the room walls of old dogs becoming young again to play in meadows where the sun always shone bright. They talked of honoring me with a place on the farm beside Mom's old horse Coco.

Honoring...?

Hearing that word drew me a little out of the great fatigue slowly swallowing me up. Not since they had gotten Quigley had the whole family blatantly not realized his presence at all. Not one face was dry, nor was one set of hands unstressed, and all for me.

I sighed, not for them but for me. I had gotten it wrong back then when I'd first seen the new dog and only saw it now. True, Quigley would live on with them as I died but not as a replacement: his one white ear would clear any doubt of which dog was which in photos. The family could never keep me for as long as they

lived so they did the only thing they could to keep some small part of me still alive. As I looked over to Quigley's worried face I saw that I'd been doing my family's wishes all along. I'd taught him how to be a good boy for them, things he would remember tomorrow and for years after.

His little face became drowned out by all of them: Dad, Mom, Brother, Big Sister, and Little Sister. My heavily-lidded eyes became too much to keep open as they all talked to me and the pats from their hands all blurred together.

The family erected a shrine to me on the mantle above the fireplace: a tuft of my fur in a plastic bag, my old handkerchiefs, and my old brown collar. Quigley laid into our spot at the base of the tree and it was not so warm when he was now alone. He never recognized the tiny urn placed up there a few days later as me. The shining tree was a very great and looming presence for such a small puppy to take guardianship over but he wasn't the baby he'd been on his first night. Quigley stayed in our spot every night, not crying for me now in place of his former furry family when he knew I would not come.

Quigley slept on under the twinkling tree, never knowing which winter morning that the glorious, present-ravaging day I spoke of would come. His legs twitched in dreams of his first Christmas with his new family.

# Conversations with God

*Faisal Alahmad*

“God, are you real?”

I ask, expecting the pen to move,

“can you hear me?” I despair,

“Or is the line busy?”

My journal stares at me, uncomfortable  
that such a crazy would jot on its flesh. *What  
does he expect?* It wonders—like a secretary  
who must record a lunatic’s consciousness, with its own  
thoughts  
rambling.

“I can only imagine what you might say to me.”

The leathery angel moves my wrist,

tests my fingers, and writes

*You will not be great.*

“You are not God,” I seethe at my hand.

Then I soften; but what if it was?

# Inside my Tree House

*Emily Klehr*

Dark, damp grass covered in dew, my bare feet flatten each blade leaving a cold mark of water. More droplets cover my arms as I tread tenderly into the forest. Plunged into darkness under the boughs of

the trees scared, but safe from prying eyes. A comforting cloud of silence settles on me and the trees. An occasional crunch or snap of a branch, the chitter of a squirrel follow me the deeper I go. The mist hugs the

trees and my skin, coloring the brush and shadows with the deep blues and greens of morning twilight. Pine needles infuse the air with it's heavy fragrance enveloping entirety as light begins to cut through

the mist like scissors. Eternity whispers from the earth into every pebble. Bliss flutters under the wings of the birds that fly above. Peace runs through the stream, slipping down rocks. My secret woodland laughs as rays of light shine

through the branches. Hidden within  
the white walls of my mind. Hidden like  
a tree house in the arms of its timber. I am  
home. Content, never to leave the curing  
embrace of this place, my placating paradise.

# Words About Paul

## Part One

*Karin Nobre*

Surely in  
Slowly out  
His body soaks and swings  
Like a wave about to crash  
Crisp mist on my flesh

At this moment  
Reluctant minutes insist on not passing by  
Time undoes itself  
It travels leisurely until it's stopped, suspended

Now we are the ones who conduct the time  
We pause the world and, unhurriedly,  
We turn hours into our motions  
Minutes into our sounds

Disassemble, we pretend not to know  
About the love once sprinkled upon us  
Lying I look up and see a drop  
Sliding down his chest  
When it falls on me, it'll drown us in joy

This room is an ocean  
Where we jump avid and fearless  
Into the depths of each other

He, in a bold second, dives in

And pushes towards me a current of love  
As we plunge, the silence deepens  
We reach for each other's hands  
And seal them together

I open my eyes  
You're still in me, so close to me  
I see my pleasure in your eyes  
And they see yours reflected in mine

I can't stop wanting your lips  
More and more your lips  
They are the ones that always tell me in kisses  
What I have the most diverse in me

I take turns with each and every one of the man  
That lies within you  
With no rush  
I want them all

Lying I think  
In this man I find everything I want  
Peaceful heaven  
Sinful hell

And still submerged  
Surely in  
Slowly out  
His body soaks and swings  
Like a wave about to crash  
Crisp mist on my flesh

## Tinos

*Christopher J. Kinniburgh*

You lay on a pebble beach, smoke small sweet cigars,  
your left nipple much darker than your right,  
your left breast brown and leathery from the fire.

You crawl on your hands and knees from a ferry  
next to old women on their own knees, shouting prayers.  
Their tendons tear as they climb up the mountain,  
through musty men and vivacious women who shout:  
*Buy an image of the Madonna to cure your pain.*

Your knees are bloody  
at the top of the stone road.  
You look at the blue cement dome atop  
the white stone church in front of you.

You pray for your  
mother – first degree burns – and  
you pray for your  
father – asphyxiation.

# Being Baudelaire

*Sean Horsley*

Last night I had a dream that I was, in fact, Charles  
Baudelaire.

I was in some dingy, grey flat in Paris wearing ragged  
clothing.

I looked into a cracked mirror and saw myself and I was  
aware

of the massive forehead, receding hairline in thin greasy  
roving

strands. I felt syphilitic pain radiating from my pale  
crotch, saw

the tattered stockings of a Jewish whore passed out (and  
snoring)

on the mattress stained with cum, reeking of opium. I  
was in awe

that I was Baudelaire my angst-ridden hero, poetic spirit  
soaring,

an awkward winged albatross above the sea, the black-  
billed swan

wings covered with mud, in a wicker cage in the Parisian  
streets.

Baudelaire the rock star, frowning on hashish, swimming  
in wine,

spitting on dandies, worshipping frigid Creole toes under  
sheets.

I looked at my (or his) hands and saw them riddled with  
excess:

whores, liquor, opium: flowers of evil plucked without  
success.

# Is The Climate Change Movement Splintering?

*Patti Lindaberry*

I have a dream, to sit on my balcony,  
on a hot summer day,  
tucked beneath the vibrant blue white sky like a sleepy  
child under his security blanket.

A plastic pink chair, on my balcony, is where I lounge.  
Sun's out  
No, it's pouring.

I don't know about, "the privatization of the air."

I just breathe.

Does a woman stand in a street in Copenhagen, shake  
her fist and march in a circle with a sign that asks, "Is  
The Climate Change Movement Splintering?"

Would she stand next to a mother,  
dirty children, ragged clothes with no home and ask, "Is  
The Movement of the Government and the Compassion  
of Society Splintering?"

Sun's out.  
No, it's pouring.

I don't know about the "status quo".

I just breathe.

# The Baby

*T. A. Brown*

He was born two days ago. Two days old and he felt scared and alone. His first instinct is to find the woman who brought him into this world, and when she is not within view, his second instinct is to cry. He cried until a nurse picked him up. “Are you my mommy?” He asks.

“No, I’m not your mommy.”

Then he opened his eyes and was now in the neighborhood where he was conceived. His third instinct was to learn his environment. Nothing escaped his observant brown eyes. A dilapidated house was off in the distance and he walked inside. An older woman was in the living room rocking back and forth, “Are you my mommy?” He asked.

“No, you have some stuff?”

He nodded his head no and said, “Will you be my mommy?”

“If you get me some stuff. Then I’ll be your mommy.” He walked outside with a smile.

A man wearing a wife beater and a blue bandana stopped as the baby approached him. His entire front row of gold tooth shined as he smiled.

“You need some stuff?”

“I need some stuff, so I can give to the lady, so she will be my mommy.”

“Do you have some money?”

“No, I don’t have money. I was just born.”

“When you get money, I can give you some stuff, so you can give it to the lady, so she will be your mommy.”

The baby continued walking and approached a store with a “Now Hiring” sign. He walked inside, and asked, “Can I work here?”

The foreign owner said “You’re too young, where is your mommy.”

“Well, I need some money, to buy some stuff, to give to the lady, so she will be my mommy.”

The foreign man shook his head and said, “Sorry, I can’t help you.”

The baby frowned and said, “Thanks you anyway.”

As he walked out, two men ran in with black masks on their face. One of them had a sawed off shot gun. “This is a robbery. Put the money in the bag.” One demanded as the foreign man replied. As they ran out the story, they bumped into the baby and all of their cash fell out. They continued to run off.

The baby picked up the bag of money and handed to the foreign man, “Here you go, sir.”

“Why didn’t you take the money and run off?”

“I’m not a thief; I just want someone to be my mommy.”

“Well, I still can’t help you, but here is \$100 get a place to stay.

“Don’t buy any stuff because you will get hurt.”

“Thank you sir,” The baby said as he walked outside. His instincts to have a mommy caused him to disregard the foreign man’s warning. He found went to the man who sold the stuff and asked him, “How much stuff can I get for \$100 dollars.”

“\$100 can get you 5 for you to give to the lady, so she will be your mommy.”

He ran back to the house and gave the stuff to the lady, “Here is the stuff. Will you be my mommy?”

She snatched the stuff away from the baby and said, “No, get away from me you little bastard.”

“But you promise, if I would get you some stuff you would be my mommy.”

“I lied; now get out of here before I cut you to pieces.”

The baby cried and walked out the house. He cried so much that his tears blurred his vision. Then a lady wearing a blue gown said, “What are you doing out here. I was looking for you.”

He opened his eyes and said, “Are you my mommy?”

“Yes I am your mommy.” She said. The baby smiled and rested his head on his mommy bosoms.

# **That Warm Winter Afternoon**

*Faisal Alahmad*

*Remember:* that warm winter afternoon  
when we reclined our awkward chairs together and sang  
mutely,  
while pretty, sad Johnny Cash, Ben Harper, and Pearl  
Jam  
had strung an acoustic chorus just for us.

*Remember:* how the music sifted through the sun fingers  
that groped our cozy cruiser's lazy windows.  
How we didn't mind (we didn't mind) we smiled and  
I nuzzled my twitched neck on your quirky lap,  
while outside it was January, Minnesota,  
schizophrenia and her delusional partner—  
winter and its slaved seasons,  
but we thank them (all the same) for this warm winter  
afternoon.

*Remember:* I grinned and stared like a baby born to his  
first wonder,  
to his first worship, purring as you trailed lily fingertips  
along my matted mane.  
Then I blinked,  
chest stuffy,  
and I didn't mind  
that Johnny and Ben and Pearl Jam were quiet.  
I whispered my secrets,  
as I moved my lips,  
and kissed your fingertips.

*Remember:* my uncomforted limbs—but I didn't mind  
that, I didn't mind that tomorrow be subzero or  
that it would be the last time I see you, I didn't mind  
any—I just wanted this warm winter afternoon  
to still its restless wings,  
to let us lie uncomfortable  
and hot till we wake up, the dream  
over.

# Watery Crypt

*Kelli Lindaberry*

Sadness moves in like a cloud  
Covers the sun that lights the ocean.  
Sit down on the orange hot sand.  
Water calls to me through a salty breeze  
Walk into me and sink away your pain  
Step after step my feet leave their prints  
Crunch the shells yell

As the sound of the waves grow further away,  
my hands run through waves.  
Coolness of an invisible force caresses my fingers.  
Look back, the beach shaded.  
Light feels the earth bound sky.

Deeper into the water, striped markers  
say “*no point of return*”.  
No longer walking, only sinking  
Don’t fight to tread, just silence  
Looking at the fishes, they kiss me goodbye

Darkness moves closer  
Deeper and deeper into the water depths  
To the right a coral reef  
Hello to the creatures who live within  
Come out say hello, swim through my hair  
Tickle my naked skin, one last laugh

On the left a wrecked ship

Pirate skeletons in their ship, guard their treasure  
Quick visit with never ending friendship

A hand reaches in, I only sink  
Hello darkness, goodbye light  
Finally I am at the bottom  
Sit here without light, no need to close my eyes  
I can now look up from the bottom, and see the life that  
is being lived above  
At peace with the earth bound night  
I am the new coral reef  
Come my fishy friends, swim and live within me  
Let my body be your playground

# **Babbleric**

*Patti Lindaberry*

Gorgeous green pickles,  
puffy,  
pretentious,  
succulent.

Organic.

Bombastic  
buff Canadians  
articulate on mountains,  
fantasy radio waves  
from a fluffy sofa.

Fragile,  
fussy snowman,  
grumpy blizzard bed.  
Frigid.

Babbleric

Luscious lefse,  
whispers obsequious,  
scandalous prose,  
to agitate  
a whimsical moose,  
concentrating  
on telepathic messages.

Magnificent,  
    meticulous cabin embraces  
penguins  
    precious tuxedo toes.

Fabulous fireplace crackles.

Sassy  
    Brassy  
Babblerific.

**October, 2008**

*Rosemary Bell*

I am tired of finding a speck of hope  
Only to watch it die young.  
Sick of living this way;  
In this dark and frozen place,  
Never being able to change who I am!  
The only thing I truly want in this world.  
I am a Failure!  
I want to be numb.  
I Want to Die!

Dark room with the roll-out out,  
No one will find me here.  
Herberger's bag in the closet,  
That will do nicely.  
Desperately need notebook paper.  
Loose leaf flies out as I open a drawer.  
Grabbing a piece and a pen from the desk  
I write good-bye to the one person who seems to care:  
Papa.  
I tell him "I'm sorry."  
I tell him everything!

The white plastic bag covers my head,  
Edges clamped tightly by fists at my neck.  
With a calm, deep breath  
I lie, waiting for death.  
Salty water burns my eyes, begging for escape;  
I refuse to let the brine fall.  
Can't breathe.

Panic swells.

Tears escape angry eyes.

Try to calm, reminding myself of the point.

You can't die here!

Take that bag off!

Take my hand, I'll help you!

NO!

I can't! I will be a

Failure if I do.

I don't want to be a failure!

I want to change!

You cannot change if you die!

Failures do what you are doing: They give up!

You have so much more to do,

Such a Life to Live!

Don't you dare give that up!

Think! Take that bag off your head!

LIVE!

I tear the offending plastic from my cap.

I Want to LIVE!

Deep, shaking intakes of life giving oxygen

Fill my starved lungs.

I sob past when there are no tears.

How could I have been so stupid!

How could I make that mistake!

I grab the note to Papa,

Shredding the pressed tree pulp into bite sized pieces.

No one can know.

No one must know!

# God's Chair

*Emily Klehr*

A broken stump,  
surrounded by the forest beyond.  
No sense of place,  
lost in the brown of leaves,  
lost within the trees.  
This tiny chair,  
not big enough for a child.  
Worn, weak and unable to hold weight  
and yet I sit and the chair stands  
sturdy, strong, serious,  
awaiting like a gallant throne.  
I wonder what it expects,  
rooted back off the trail, hidden  
behind all the branches and tall  
trees. Green moss covers the seat  
and trickles down the base and back,  
but the rest is just a mess.  
A leaning back rest,  
though pure and untouched  
in the middle of this forest  
as though sitting on a secret.  
For the sun shines upon the pew,  
God's chair.  
A hidden delicacy.  
A wonder for all to see.  
And I wonder when I will,  
because I can't wait to,  
see it again.



*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 Spring 2010 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

Marina Kuksenko, *President*  
Faisal Alahmad, *Secretary*  
Tuyet Do, *Treasurer*  
Kyle Adamson  
Isela Pena  
Chris Schneider  
Christopher J. Kinniburgh  
Rosemary Bell

Cover Art and Layout by Christopher J. Kinniburgh.

Submit your creative writing to the Fall 2010 issue of *The Paper Lantern*! All work is reviewed anonymously and acceptance is based on literary merit.

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

Send your submission as an e-mail attachment to club advisor Lynette Reini-Grandell at:

Lynette.Reini-Grandell@normandale.edu