

# The Paper Lantern



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# **The Paper Lantern**

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# Blueberry Vodka

by Tascha Balsaitis

We're all just good girls and boys, waiting for  
a bad-boy joy ride. I'm just a good girl  
until that blue Mustang comes to get me.

So pick me up and take me dancing; the  
Foshay Tower and Marquee. We'll drink  
blueberry vodka, and  
sip our shots.

The daylight becomes just a painting,  
the nighttime is alive. Let me  
touch  
its cold, metallic skin,  
breathe  
its sweaty, fruity perfume.

From the 26th  
floor you can show me  
dolphins dancing through the skyline,  
and give me  
chocolate kisses.

Let's rendezvous in the land of ice and  
snow, with chilly skin and blueberry vodka.

Doorway to Forever  
by Douglas Lemon



# Boundary

by Casey Ritchie

Boundary lies just a few miles north of Seattle, though you would be excused for having never heard of it once in your life. To the world, it is little more than a blot of ink on a map, labeled simply to confirm that something is there. The population within goes about their lives, transient, breathing things numbered and named, meticulously taken down in the interest of keeping track, and yet at the same time missing everything that could possibly be important about them.

And to be true, there is nothing about Boundary to attract a casual tourist. It is, as many places are, a microcosm in its own. A place where the new migrated west with the railroad tracks and forced its way into a place reluctant to change, so even today it is a confusing mix of the new and the old: rusting chain-link fences and old electric streetlights chasing a gloom lit with the cerulean stars of iphone screens.

That is another matter entirely about Boundary: the weather. In Seattle it is famous, in vogue. Here, the perennial gray skies serve to warp domains in such a way that at times the entire city is no bigger than a sphere of fog, hands outstretched, a person can stand in the heart of it and brush the city's edges with their fingers. And then, quite suddenly, space unfolds, and this same traveler of happenstance is confronted all at once with the vastness of the universe.

Boundary is a city halfway crooked. Its northeastern face sits at a nine-degree slant, a quirk of topography mostly unnoticed and wholly underappreciated. From the ground, this oddity is impossible to perceive; it is only here in the heights that it stands starkly against the dying sun of a day.

A woman has come here, a woman as red as the blooming rose. The color drapes her body in folds of lavish fabric, sweeps about her head in lustrous waves. It paints a pair of full lips, tugged to the side by some secret satisfaction. Only her eyes are peacock blue, flashes of gold from the urban sunset sneaking under her heavy lids to make them sparkle. She has come to see the city painted in her color, as she has many times before.

It is an imperfect beauty this city has, one that many a discerning audience might file as 'unique', with that small hesitation

and lingering contempt. It's a stumble in the dance, and yet there is a rhythm to it. There are a thousand other places, more fashionable in their oddities, aesthetically pleasing to the affluent who consider themselves progressively minded. Certainly there are others who have found somewhere like this, a place their peers smile, and shake their head, and make subtle conversation about somewhere they are not likely to hear. Somewhere there are people raising their glass to this sunset, as she does now, and on their lips and in their minds is the exact same thought: let fashion do as it pleases, they and they alone know how to live!

She says nothing, but tips her glass back, lets its contents slide into her throat. When she is sated, it comes to rest on the table beside her, a table that holds a second, untouched goblet.

"You know I don't drink," It is a man's voice that speaks from the balcony's growing shadows, though the being that steps into the light is clearly not a man. It is, however, wearing a well-tailored gray suit, and the woman who does not glance back simply tips a gloved hand at the waiting chair, which it folds itself into with neatness and precision.

Between the two glasses a board has been laid out, strewn with pieces of carefully cut glass. Like many such sets, this one has been carved with a theme in mind: in this case, the humble black-and-white checkers play host to a score of angels, their stern visages rendered in painstaking detail. The being in the suit considers their arrangement with the solemn gravity of an astronomer. Its hands, folded neatly in its lap, twitch with anticipation of the game, but its voice is perfectly unaffected. "Ah, I seem to have forgotten. Your move, or was it mine?"

Her fingers curl around one of the angels, pushes it forwards two steps into the tangled heart of the board. "Yours."

Her guest nods agreement.

"So it is."

Around them, the vivid color that painted the city dulls to black, cinders of light becoming merely ashes. The sun falls into the maw of the earth and is extinguished; darkness encroaches, and in that shade the first stars are beginning to appear. But true night will not come until several hours later, far below on the streets where the engine of a rental car will sputter and die.

The car that dies is not being beheld in the greatest of lights. It is a faithful old beast, one that has lived and driven perhaps more miles than it was ever intended to bear. Like most anything else in this city it is the victim of time: the vivid paint is chipped, its fenders rusted and pocked with dents. Its engine voices complaints that a functioning machine should by principle not produce, but nonetheless it has carried its sole occupant this far before its demise, and there is something to be said in that.

He unfolds from the driver's side door— and unfolds is indeed the proper term, for he is one of those people endowed with simply too much height. As the car is a few years' weathering shy of canary yellow, his hair is several hues short of flaming red, enough brown mixed in that it is a highlight in the gloom without being a shade to sing about. His eyes are the other way, their hazel base furnished with a coppery veneer. But there's a redness to his face and a vivacity to his movements, even if right now it's mostly displayed in annoyance. He paces to the hood of the car and flings it up, studies the contents as if somehow he can make sense of them with close scrutiny. He is no mechanic, one of innumerable useful things he is not, but that is not to say he is bereft of *all* useful skills.

He closes the hood and pats it half-heartedly, as if in laying bare its innards he has offended the hapless vehicle. He reopens the driver's side door, enters on his knees and comes up triumphant with a heavy paperback. It's the yellow pages for this city, artifact of a lost era that it is, but for he whose phone serves an mediocre purpose without flourish or internet service, it will see at least another year of use. He sits sideways in the open door, flicking through the pages as a few speckles of rain find their way from the skyline.

It's very dark. The driver has happened across one of those times in which the horizons have folded up like a wallet, and there is no more of the city beyond this cracked asphalt street and the sphere of a single streetlamp. He hums at first, snatches of a tune the radio picked up on the way from the airport, but with time the darkness and the silence overtake him, and though he is not the sort to be easily alarmed, his finger stops on the pages, and he looks around.

There are 400,000 people in Boundary, and yet, in this moment, he is profoundly alone. Better than back home he tells himself, where you can scarcely breathe for fear of running into

someone, and yet he would give anything for a piece of that clamor right now.

He goes back to the phone book, pretending to be unperturbed. It's a futile game. Few humans are possessed of the particular talent of being truly alone for very long, and the driver is not one of them. But at last he comes upon a likely conclusion, and punches the number into his phone. As it rings, he chances a look again.

The sidewalks here are cobbled, not poured, and it's an oddity, but not anything he has not seen outside of Alabama. In places, strands of moss seep from the cracks, the most audacious of them covering whole paving stones. He is just as alone as he was before, but now there is a feeling as if he is not. For a moment, he thinks of unspoken things, lurking at the edges of space to poke their fingers into life as the moss on the stones does.

On the third ring, the call's picked up, and in an instant he's no longer alone, even though his guest is but a voice. It is a woman's alto, all unnecessary syllables sheared from its words. She prompts with concise questions, and he chatters his replies—the street he is on, the problem. She says she will come out to meet him shortly, and “deal with the car.” There's a finality to it that leaves him unsure, but the line is now dead, and the most he can do is wait for an unspecified someone to arrive.

Somewhere overhead, the sky opens in a deluge that narrows his surroundings even further. He tucks his legs back into the car, and closes the door. After a moment's thought, he locks it. It is a completely unwarranted course of action, but he puts the chair back and stares at the windshield as it fills with rain.

He has flown in late in the day, because he despises sleeping on airlines, but regardless his head is seeded with strange thoughts, and he is sure they have everything to do with being here right now. There is a strange period of vagrancy in leaving home, in which you no longer feel welcome where you once belonged, but have not yet found somewhere else to occupy. So he is, right now: newly minted from a four-year degree, in a rental car that smells vaguely of stale things and potato chips. The shape of the chair feels lumpy against his back, though there is nothing wrong with it; it's simply not his father's van, not somewhere saturated with the familiarity that long-held possessions broach. He, much as his belongings on the back seat, has drawn inwards, stowed himself neatly. He may leave

something behind in this car when it is gone, most likely the angle of the seat, but it will be fleeting, and easily remedied.

He leans back, waiting. Two different engines pass, and fade away. Only the sound of the rain keeps him company, drumming its long fingers on the roof of the car. A third engine. He listens for it to fade, and is surprised when it cuts out. The mechanic has arrived.

He stumbles out of the car and sees a motorcycle parked on the curb a short distance away. This bike, however, does not look like the sort of thing that would die on anyone. He is reminded of a horse: a great, black charger, strong in a way that begets elegance. There are hard metal lines that jut from its sleek outline, but they are there as a testament to its power.

He looks to the person who is now removing her helmet, and he sees that they are two of a kind, the rider and her bike. She greets him as she passes with a nod and a grunt. Hers is the voice he heard over the phone.

As she has promised, she has come to deal with the car. She sets to it almost immediately, stripping off her cyclist's jacket for the tube top underneath. The driver stands back, and watches her musculature flex under its veneer of ink and paint. She is tattooed from her neck to the waistband of her sturdy, sensible pants.

He is, as an artist, resigned to being a critic of aesthetics. He cannot simply look at a thing and acknowledge it as a tattoo, no more than he can do the same to a painting or a piece of clothing. He debates asking her who did her tattoos— they are very well done. He's so caught up in her tattoos that he misses what she is doing with the car, but whatever she's done, it stirs under her fingers, and dies again. She sits back a moment, voices a single "Hmm" and goes to her bike, coming back with a wrench. He realizes now that she has not produced a single tool before now, and he wonders what exactly she has been doing until this time. She bends again, and the sinew in her arm stands out hard, working at something deep in the vehicle's belly.

The mechanic continues at her work, and the driver realizes that his bangs have become plastered to his face by the wet. He moves off the sidewalk, into the spotty shelter of a building's alcove.

There's a rhythm to how she works, a wordless hymn of organics and machinery. She does not interrupt it for anything, save the occasional considering "Hmm" in the appropriate places in her

conversation with the car. Her unexpected words break the rhythm, jolt him from reverie.

“You’re new here?”

“Ah— yeah, just got here. Is it obvious?”

She smiles for the first time. “Suitcase, rental car, road map? A little.” A hand slides over the hood and shuts it. “It should start up fine.” She tips her head towards the car’s cab; he scurries, bangs his shoulder on the doorframe and fumbles the keys once. The engine comes to life with a rumble that, if not much improved from its original hoarseness, is far preferable to its grim silence. Over the dashboard, he can see the mechanic putting on her jacket, stowing the wrench in her bike once more.

For the third time today, he stumbles out of his car. They perform their transaction in relative silence; she doesn’t seem troubled by the rain. He mentions it. She gives him a crooked smile.

“You get used to it.” She says. “It’s not the strangest thing this city has.”

And before he can ask her what that means, her face disappears under the shell of her helmet. She mounts her bike. It roars briefly, a wild, free thing; and then it is gone, through the rain and consuming fog.

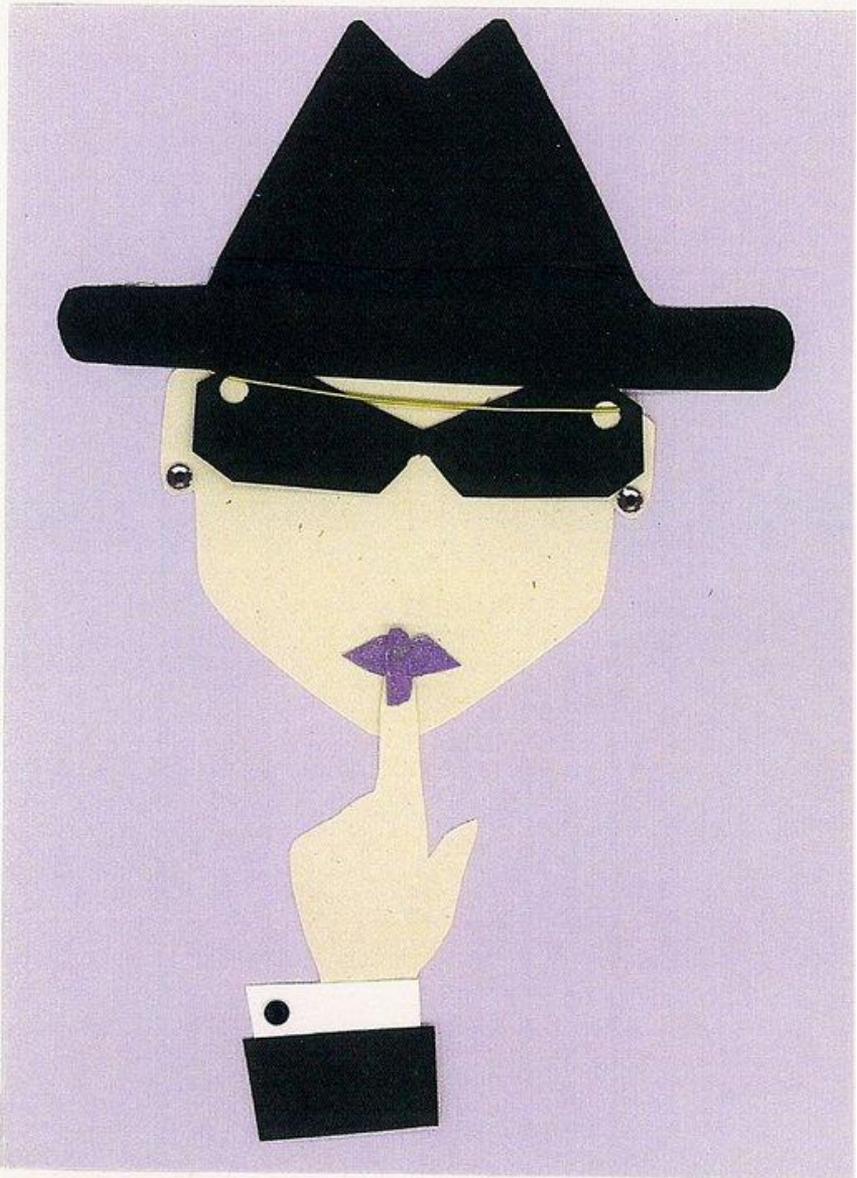
The driver is left behind, in the streetlight planetoid that the world has become.

The car is waiting for him; he sidles in past the open door. Hands to the wheel, back to the seat, his foot finds the gas and it carries him, too, into the fog.

The rain pounds on the street, speckling the dry shadow.

Something that is not quite a man kneels at that shadow, runs a white-gloved finger along the stones.

Woman in Black  
by Rachel Rose



# Book Cover

by Amelia Warwick

Give me ten sections and I'll give  
you an understanding of this canvas  
filled with watercolors and pen work;  
at least a dozen different colors,  
and nearly nonexistent blank space.

\* (1)

It's almost like a struggle.  
There's a sense of glaring  
defeat and almost  
an apocalyptic  
feel to it.

\* (2)

People must be living  
underground somewhere;  
hiding; caged; in fear;  
barely surviving. Though their world  
above ground is much different  
than it had been before they fled  
for their lives, the sky above remains  
the same; the sun shines, clouds billow  
around saying hello,  
and the world – though changed – can  
still be bright  
sometimes.

\* (3)

Now, all that's left are a handful  
of jagged stone pillars- blue,  
yellow, purple, green, and orange  
on the sides.

They used to be something  
stunning; a building, a series  
of sculptures, a mountain-

I'm not sure which.

Now, the simple remains of an unknown beauty, they jab up out of the torn earth, a sharp reminder of the pain that still exists. Like a splinter that's still stuck in a finger.

\*

I've never read *The Hobbit*, but my mother had just finished it when she created this art project forty years ago.

\* (4)

Bright and glaring,  
the flashy yellow screams  
to announce its presence  
to you as it swirls and moves  
around and around itself  
in ever-widening circles.

The complexity of it all is yelling  
yelling, yelling, showering down anxiety  
and fear. You feel your heartbeat  
quicken and your skin get clammy,  
and just when you think your quaking  
knees will give way to the dizzying  
intensity of the sunflower-yellow  
amoebas, you close your eyes.

You close your eyes and put your head  
down, shutting out the world above  
you that throbs in your brain, and shutting  
out the world you live in below that shouts  
and threatens to destroy all day long.

\* (5)

The fire-breathing dragon  
has brows, but no eyes;  
a mouth, but no teeth;  
a nose but no nostrils;

feathers on its wings  
and scales on its body,  
but no eyes and no legs.

It opens its mouth, and fire  
pours out; filling the air  
with yellow and red.  
The flames are its tongue.

\* (6)

Soft, almost fuzzy looking hills rise  
and fall behind the dragon  
and the pillars, reaching  
and stretching away into  
the distance. Blues and greens,  
they look cheery enough;  
as if they don't know what's going  
on in front of them. Except  
for the closest hill; with the help  
of depth perception, it dwarfs  
all the rest of them. But it isn't as happy-  
instead it's covered in large, brown rings.  
Shrapnel, waste, discards from a violent  
movement, or some sort of attached  
disease, the circles hang on like the unwanted  
catastrophe that surrounds them.

\*

Though fascinated and intrigued by  
everything on the canvas, I'm not  
surprised. From my mother, such amazing  
work is typical.

\* (7)

Each cloud is made up multiple  
perfectly round balls of bluish-gray  
fluff. Circles upon circles  
bump into one another,  
piling up into large,  
soft looking clusters.

Grapes of the sky.

\* (8)

The sky  
is a void. Simply  
canvas left blank  
among the myriad  
of colors. It does  
not need color.

One may expect the sky  
to be blue and the clouds  
to be white.

One would be wrong.

Cold colored  
clouds and a mute,  
colorless sky rule  
the top portion  
of what is seen.

\*

My mother's mind sees details  
upon details, and always know how  
to make it look perfect; pencils and brushes  
are comfy and relaxed in her hand.

\* (9)

I see pen, marker, paints.

Black ink  
and colored inks.

I've just  
noticed that it's three-  
dimensional. The face  
and screaming, yellow  
underworld, as one piece,  
are somehow affixed  
to the rest of the canvas;

standing up; slightly away,  
slightly separated from  
the havoc above.  
Cushioned by an  
oh-so-thin layer  
of air.

\* (10)  
Details, details,  
details.

Intricate pen work  
that must have been  
done by tiny elf hands.

The swirls of yellow,  
each scale on the dragon,  
and every line in the craggy,  
sharp rocks: they're all perfect.  
Work like this would take  
me a million years.

And it would never look this good.

\*

Many times I've felt that I got gypped;  
drew the short one from the grouping  
of artistic-abilities straws, and the rest  
of my five siblings got the long straws.

Then again, my art is severely different.

# Which Way Does My Beard Point Tonight?

by Timothy Schlee

The real reason I am growing  
my beard is to look like  
Walt Whitman. When I drink  
two pots of French roast at midnight,  
and scribble letters on discarded sheets  
of printer paper until dawn, I do so  
to commune with the ghost of Allen Ginsberg –  
for it is only then that I can  
tell which way my beard points.  
It points in the direction of  
a poetic voice stripped naked.  
No silken-blanket will veil  
the frailty of my poor human body.  
No language will be spoken  
that I myself do not feel. No  
quivering silence – only quivering  
stanzas built of cinderblock  
held together by twine  
will pierce the lips of my pen.

# Me and Amy Lee

by Douglas Lemon

“Shouldn’t it be Amy Lee and I?” she asks after I tell her I have chosen our relationship to write about. She says it with an attitude, a glare as if her purpose is to start an argument. My smile on the inside is so big it couldn’t fit in the Grand Canyon. This is the exact response I was trying to bring out of her.

“No I’m more important, so I should be first,” I answer dryly. “I’m like the main attraction and you’re just the supporting actress.” We both glare intently and try to keep straight faces. We know if either one of us smiles or laughs we’ll lose the argument. After all we’re in the break room at Best Buy and we haven’t made any of our other coworkers feel uncomfortable yet. There’s four other ‘blue shirts’ in the break room not counting my friend Prince who just walked in to get a soda as our argument started.

“Yeah but I’d win an Emmy for my role and you wouldn’t even be invited to the award show,” she quickly replies. “You’re Nicholas Cage. You got the lead role... but no one knows why.”

I quickly interject, “It sounds cooler this way though. I think it flows off the tongue smoother.” I continue by stating, “plus it being my memoir, I feel it sounds much better with my name first.” The argument starts to pick up a little steam, after all this is what we were both trying to accomplish.

“So you’re saying that being wrong,” she pauses for emphasis “sounds better to you?” Prince pops the soda open at the same time she finishes the question. It inadvertently adds emphasis to her question and helps create tension in the room. Amy clearly added attitude but the popping of the Soda and release of the CO2 helped mask the quick smirk Amy gave. In the instant the CO2 dissipates into thin air so does Amy’s smile. Finally people are starting to take notice. In two slow tense steps she gets close enough to me that it appears we have bad blood between us that had never been ironed out.

I take a half step towards her to increase any tension in the room. These other employees need to feel that I'm not only 'not gonna back down' but I'm going to push the envelope. "What would you know about being right? When have you ever been right about anything Amy?" I look her up and down to add emphasis and she responds by putting a look on her face that appears she's ready to go to blows. Our fellow coworkers are finally getting uncomfortable trying not to look at us directly. One coworker, Abby, bites down on her sandwich appearing to look down at the same table her elbows are pressed against. She faces the table yet her eyes creep up at us discreetly while we argue. A couple new employees pretend to watch the TV but are using their peripheral vision to see if she's actually going to hit me.

Prince on the other hand stares at both of us not afraid to watch. Every time one of us says something back he snaps his head towards the other person as if to say, "What you gonna say now?"

"I was right when I said you were an ass," she says with all seriousness. We both put penetrating heated faces on while we glare into each other's fiery brown eyes in a brief intense staring contest. It's easy to stare and stay serious because we're both around 5'6" and apparently both pretty decent actors. In an instant, and almost simultaneously, we both lose it. We can no longer help but smile and give a slight smirk. Seeing the other lose it only inspires us to both give out completely and laugh.

In a way of showing respect to each other from a 'good fight' we share a quick hug, smile and say "I love you," to each other as we laugh. Our "I love you's" are sincere yet sarcastic at the same time. Other times we'll follow up that same exact argument with a hug and slight laugh yet instead say, "I hate you," with some seriousness and some sarcasm and sometimes other four letter words to add to the charm. Either way we assume the other person will have meant the exact opposite. People who know us say we argue like an old married couple. I

disagree because we're almost never really mad at each other or annoyed.

We both realize we have the weirdest relationship ever. We can't exactly explain it and yet we don't feel the need to figure it out. It works. However, when we explain it to other people we characterize it as a Love-Hate relationship. If she explains it, she says that she puts up with me because she feels sorry for me. If I beat her to the explanation, I say it's a love hate relationship. I tell them I love to hate her, and she hates that she loves me.

Amy and I get along because we're very similar. We both have chosen our fair share of mistakes to date. She's dated guys that stole and wore her make-up, or guys that try to keep their whole life a secret. I date girls that have to say things like "I refuse to answer that for fear of self-incrimination," or "I do not recall the night in question Your Honor." Despite what people believe we have never dated or been close to dating. With the guys she's dated, I'd honestly be offended if she liked me too. I can go out on a limb and say she feels the same exact way.

We love to talk shit, both of us are very open and despite what we show on the outside we are softies at heart. Unfortunately, we both give people too many chances. Her problem is that she settles for people she's too awesome for and my problem is I have too many problems. Amy loves to point out my issues whenever she has the chance. At any moment I know she could bring one up, in a mean yet funny way. Though we rag on each other a lot, I think we both know which hot buttons to humorously stay away from.

Our deep conversations are as random as our arguments and our compliments. Sometimes we joke about this particular and specific weird idea. Awhile back during a conversation we both became convinced that nothing goes our way and that we will in fact die alone. We of course decided to make a pact. Not like the normal 'if we're both single when we're 40 let's marry each other,' type pact. Our pact was much stranger and more unique. We decided that we could get

married but we'd push each other's buttons too much to actually live with each other. So we decided that we'd still get married, but instead of having his and her sinks, we'd have his and her houses. That way we would technically be married and it would appear to everyone that we didn't completely fail at love, but our 'his and her houses' would still let us keep our independence.

Since everyone says we sound like an old married couple it would probably appear very believable. We'd just have to keep making up fights in front of people. A hobby me and my fake wife would both thoroughly enjoy and look forward to each day. I can picture it easily. She wouldn't mind being married to me because she's abusive and I have a lot of iron in my diet. Although I believe there would be good days as well. Days where she would break into my house, cook me breakfast and kindly wake me up by pushing the barrel of a cute little Colt M1911 into my cheek to let me know how nice she was. I can only imagine the pranks we'd pull on each other: rooms filled with foam, baby oil poured onto unsuspecting hardwood floors, smoke alarms going off in the middle of the night with smoke bombs making it seem as if the house was truly on fire. We would hate each other to the limit but would love the never ending game of revenge. Besides, I hear it's important to stay active.

Honestly, sometimes I don't even know how our battles start. It just happens and quickly escalates to perfection.

"I wanna punch you in the face," Amy says to me at work in front of our friend Prince.

"Damn!" Prince yells out loud laughing.

"She's just mad because she has mirrors," I say to Prince.

"Ok I'm so I'm really gonna punch you in the face now," Amy retorts with a look of complete seriousness. I walk over to her realizing that although she probably really does want to punch me, she probably won't. Well she is probably going to hit me, and she will hit me hard, just probably not in the face. I

walk over to her and I see her making fists with both hands. I can tell she's getting ready to hit me. Before she punches me in the stomach or the kidneys I get within her striking distance and grab both of her wrists. She struggles to get her hands loose so she can strike me. "I'll kick you in the balls," she now warns me. I then wrap my leg behind hers legs removing any possible chance of a knee strike. Realizing I now have the upper hand I push her back slowly using my leg to knock her off her feet. I slowly drop her down towards the floor as she keeps one foot on the ground and the other in the air. My hand is cupped behind her neck and I drop her head as if we're dancing. Much to my surprise she lets me drop her about 6 inches from the ground with one leg in the air to keep her balance and keep what little control she has left.

Prince then says out loud, "Aww! It's like Beauty & the Beast!"

I laugh and look into Amy's eyes and say, "Ha he called you a Beast!"

She smiles acknowledging I got a good one in, but just as quickly follows with, "whatever, you're the woman that needs to be saved then."

I wouldn't trade our friendship for anything. She's an awesome person, in small doses. I have a feeling we'll be stuck together forever. She's a friend that makes life fun and worth living, but also a friend that you must take with a grain of salt and definitely in moderation. She also, in one way or another, will probably be the end of me. Right now, I think I'm ok with that.

If when I die, Amy Lee smiles while everyone else is crying, understand that only means she is sad and she truly and deeply misses me too. Yet if she cries with everyone else, I plead to you that something is not right. Especially if I die under unique or strange circumstances... In that case, I can almost guarantee, Amy Lee had something to do with it. At that time you must not trust her. You see our emotions towards each other seem to be backwards most of the time. Therefore if she cries, that means deep down she is happy. She probably

paid for a hit or did it with her own bare hands in a crime of passion. Maybe hate, but let's say passion. But then again, she might be smiling because she knows at least now we won't have to get married and buy 'his and her houses.'

Eagle Flying in Delphi  
by Douglas Lemon



# Crescendo

by Amelia Warwick

The piano keys are jumping  
up and down quickly, fingers  
flying over them like hailstones  
hitting spongy earth and springing  
into the air again.

The song ends, and the keys  
and fingers are still. The  
s u s t a i n  
pedal holds the final notes  
of the piece of music steady  
as they fade away slowly;  
the last ripples on a pond  
after a life-giving, spring storm.

One by one, the notes vanish  
from the range of human hearing.  
But the sharps and flats aren't gone.  
They move from hearing range  
and into nearby flowers and plants,  
making them grow brighter,  
healthier, prettier.

They extract blossoms from  
the most obstinate, fussy  
orchids and Christmas cacti-  
adding life and color.

Over time, the leaves  
become greener, and their sad,  
limpness disappears. Petals  
fan out; small eagles spreading  
their slender wings for the  
first time, encouraged by  
the seldom-still, melodious ivories.

# Raindrop Race

by Rebekah Steward

Raindrops roll down the window pane.  
The children have to stay inside.  
They gather by the window,  
and watch the drops go by.

They each choose a raindrop  
and hope that theirs will win  
the race to the bottom of the window pane.

The children watch intently.  
Nothing can pull them away.  
Go little drop!  
Roll faster!  
You can make it!  
Is what they say.

Mom comes in to watch.  
A smile spreads across her face  
as she remembers her own  
raindrop race.

# The Stories Told By Songs

by Rebekah Steward

Music calms nerves,  
inspires and relaxes.  
It excites feelings,  
brings joy,  
and returns old memories.

Music expresses ideas  
tells the stories and secrets of the composer.  
It enlightens the listener, and  
pulls them into the tale being told.

Each note contains a word,  
each measure a sentence,  
and each movement a story.

The harmony and melody  
represents a dialogue between characters.  
It is up to the listener to interpret the tale.

# Superior

by Amelia Warwick

The drop-off is almost straight down. From cliff top to water, it's 130 feet. Visible through the clear blue water, huge craggy boulders jut out of the lake bottom, reaching up, hoping to break the surface of the ice cold water like an angry fist punching through a sheetrock wall. But they'll never quite make it. A few scraggly bushes can be seen protruding from the side of the sheer rock face. Their survival should not be possible. Where they get their supply of water and soil is a mystery to many, and yet they still stretch out over nothing but thin air, defying the inhospitable cliffs as they thrive on nothing but oxygen and a beautiful view. Though difficult to fathom, the gigantic body of water truly is a freshwater lake and not a saline ocean.

From left, it arcs up slightly only to fall back

down

on the right side where the shoreline blocks the round view of the oddly-shaped lake.

The lake is so large that the curvature of the earth can be seen in the great, ever-reaching expanse of hypothermic-blue gallons of 42 degree Fahrenheit water.

# Your Wound

by Amelia Warwick

Your mother never used her hands; she didn't have to. She slapped you with her words and attacked you with glares and glances.

The blows inflicted were often and many. Like tipping up a dump truck full of gravel: once the pouring started, it came faster and heavier until all the currently available gravel had been poured out.

I've seen it many times.

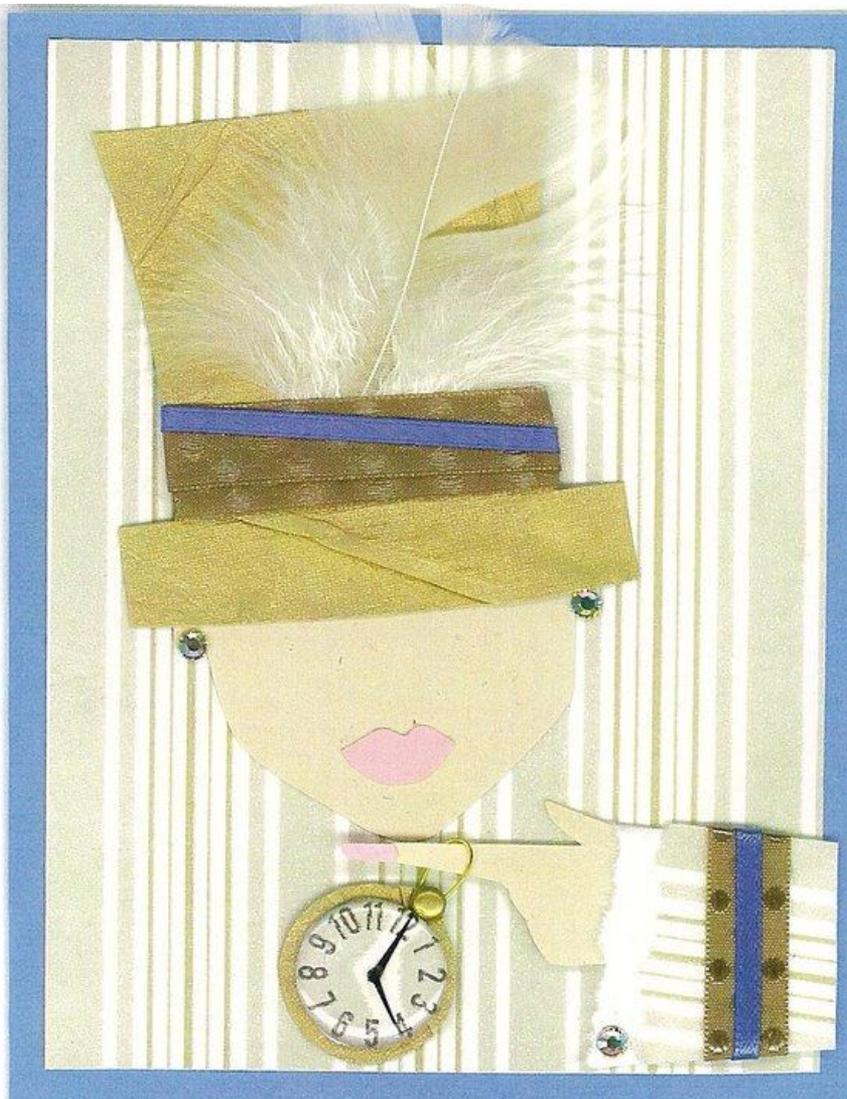
Despite all this, you grew up the gentlest person I've ever met.

And though a giant at twenty, you never retaliated when she would cut with her words and sneers. But all those years, something was building up inside of you; it swelled, deepened, became infected. At twenty-four, moved out and away, you wrote her a letter; the ink on the page slightly smeared with your tears. You told her how she had made you feel so small and worthless; ashamed and unwanted. You said you forgave her.

After that, she changed a bit, and your relationship with her, was finally something close to good, though, yes, at first it was somewhat timid.

# Gold Top Hat & Pocket Watch

by Rachel Rose



# Fight or Flight

by Amelia Warwick

While Woodlake Nature Center is a pretty safe place to be, it still probably wasn't the best idea for me to be out here past dark.

I came out here for a run a bit earlier in the day, when there was still plenty of daylight left, but halfway through my run, I got distracted: there was this nest in a tree, and it wasn't too high up. So I had climbed up into a nearby tree and could easily see down into the nest and quietly watch the three baby robins as their parent came in intervals and fed worms to their tiny offspring.

It wasn't until a couple of joggers passed below me, unaware of my presence, that I was alerted to the hour, "Look at the time. We've got to hurry or we'll be late for the movie."

A quick glance at my watch brought me back to reality, and I realized just how fast the sun was fading from the dusky sky; small stars beginning to pepper the ever-darkening east sky.

I climbed down from my perch and had to re-stretch my cramped muscles that were unhappy about how much time I'd spent crouched in that tree.

Now I'm coming around the last bend in the path, about to start through what's probably the sketchiest section of Woodlake. But it's also the fastest way out, and it's only about one hundred feet up a hill to the road, which is always heavily populated with cars; in fact, I can hear the busy traffic of people coming home from work for the night.

My breathing isn't too labored, yet, and I do my best to keep it quiet and run as silently as possible.

A twig snaps in the bushes to my left, and I instinctively swerve to the right side of the path, my heart skipping a beat as I increase my pace.

Seeing that the path ahead of me is clear, I take a quick look behind myself and what I see brings on a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach: a large man is emerging from the bushes on the left side of the path. I am clearly his target, and he begins to walk in my direction, determined but not with a great sense of urgency.

When my head turns forward again, I see that my short backward glance was too long: a second man is coming out of the bushes on my right and his hands are poised to grab me.

I almost collide with him, but jerk violently to my left at just the last second. He grabs empty air, but the quick movement has thrown me off balance and I fall into the gravelly path.

*This is very bad. Get up! You cannot be on the ground.*

Both men are probably only a couple inches taller than my five-foot-six-inch frame, but they're wearing baggy clothes that could contain any number of weapons. The first is of average build, and it's clear that the second has regularly been going to a gym for quite some time.

They're both advancing on me quickly and I can see that I don't have enough time to stand up and run. As fast as I can, I roll away from them and into the thick brush. Thorny bushes scratch my arms, legs, and face, but I keep going.

My would-be attackers are slowed by the foliage, and it gives me just enough time to stand up and break through a nearby gap in the shrubs that will lead me out onto the path again.

I sprint for it, but the two men can hear my quick footsteps on the hard-packed dirt above the sound of their own cursing. The smaller of the two reacts too fast, and he's running after me like it's an Olympic race. His speed is definitely not something that I had expected, but if I can just round the next curve then I'll be within view of the Nature Center building.

I can feel his fingers grasping for my long, blond hair that's streaming out behind and I get a small burst of adrenaline that puts me just out of his reach.

He makes a frustrated growling sound in his throat and catches up, but this time he grabs a big handful of my thick hair and pulls. My head gets jerked back and I stumble over my own feet, tipping off to the side of the path with my hair still in his hand. Upset that he had to chase me, he calls me a couple of nasty names as he kneels down to straddle my body, keeping me still as he waits for his partner to catch up to us.

My heart is pounding and I'm more scared than I've ever been before, but I remain as calm and collected as possible, knowing that if I'm going out get out of this, I'll need every bit of concentration and brain-power I have. Channeling all of the limited acting that I've done, I begin to whimper and beg in a whisper. It's all I can do not to struggle, and I purposefully let my arms go limp in his tight grasp as he pushes them into the cool leaves covering the ground.

Inside I'm filled with anxiety; will he buy my act of weak surrender? My body is tensed, ready for an opening where I can fight back and get away, but I concentrate on trying to be still, hoping that he'll relax a bit and let his guard down or loosen his grip for just a couple of seconds.

The second man is coming slowly towards us, ambling really, and he seems in no hurry whatsoever to get over to where I'm pinned against the cold ground.

"Hurry up!" the first man's loud whisper is rough.

"Take it easy," the second man walks even a little slower, his voice calm and even, "She's not going anywhere." Unlike his partner, the second man isn't speaking in a whisper, as if he doesn't care who hears. His confidence is unnerving.

If I'm going to do something, it had better be within the next half minute because there's no way that I'd be able to handle both of them at the same time, and the second man is still a couple hundred feet away.

I suddenly remember that my Buck knife sits securely in my pocket, which is incidentally pushed against the inside of my restrainer's left leg. He doesn't know that it's there, but there's no way I can get my hands on it unless my position changes.

I choke a little on my forced tears, "Please, let me move a little; there's a sharp rock digging into my back," and I squirm ever so slightly to my left.

So fast that I hardly realize it, he's suddenly holding both of my wrists tightly in one hand and has the other hand planted securely on my chest. He's pushing down hard to keep me from moving and my breaths become short, my struggling lungs unable to expand fully. "That little rock is the least of your concerns right now," his hard eyes are staring intently at me, but I avoid his gaze, remembering that eye contact is never a good idea in a situation like this.

He sighs, "Okay, fine."

He begins to move me a little bit to the side, sliding me through the rough gravel as I say a quick prayer in my head, asking for the right moment and the appropriate strength. The little movement is all that I need and energy pulses through me like an electric shock as I pull my hands apart, breaking free of his grip. There's a medium sized branch next to my shoulder and, grabbing it, I swing it as hard as I can against the side of his head.

It turns out that the branch was partially rotten, but it was still solid enough that the blow stunned him for a second. I twist out from underneath his legs, pulling my folding knife out of my pocket at the same time. Rolling onto one knee, I flip my wrist and the blade swings out and locks into place.

He rushes at me but the anger he feels from getting clubbed in the head, no doubt, slightly impairs his observation or judgment and he doesn't see the knife.

I cut him deep, the blade going straight through the sleeve of his worn, cotton shirt and into his forearm. He gives a yelp of startled pain that quickly turns into a roar of pure rage.

Jerking the knife free of his arm, I raise it for another attack, but am not fast enough. His good arm comes up and his fist crashes into the right side of my skull. The force of the blow sends me reeling and my head hurts instantly.

He comes at me again and this time I raise my right hand, curl it into a fist, and punch him squarely in the throat. Stumbling and gasping, he falls to the ground. But by now, the second man is running and he's close. I turn on my heels and launch away. Finally coming around the last bend in the path, I see a police officer standing in the parking lot in front of the Nature Center, writing someone a ticket.

An enormous sense of relief hits me and a strangled cry comes bursting forth from my mouth. The officer turns around immediately, and starts walking toward me.

Within six feet of him, my legs give out and I crumple to the pavement in a shaking, sobbing bundle of dirt, blood, and tears. Somehow I manage to tell him what happened, and he calls for backup and an ambulance as he ushers me into the backseat of his squad car for my own safety. He hands me a blanket and calms me down significantly. Within minutes, more police arrive, and soon after I see them emerge with my two attackers.

Finally feeling safe again, I look toward the western sky where the sun set not too long ago, knowing that everything will be alright.

# Night

by Gina LoPresto

You shine gently down on me,  
With your beautiful lights.  
You provide for me a bright ball  
Of yellow, that lights my way through your dark.  
You give me something to gaze upon,  
When I tire of walking through your time.  
The beautiful sound of the wind is soothing to the ears,  
Like a mother's lullaby.  
You are like a haven for animals,  
Who hide from the day's glare.  
Hoot! Hoot! Chirp! Chirp! They sing for joy,  
Happy to see you once more.  
Oh wonderful night! Lovely night!  
How you fill my life with bliss!  
How you make sure there is darkness enough for me to sleep,  
But not so much that I fear it.  
You tuck me in with your black blanket,  
And I feel your reassuring presence as I lie.  
How I wish that all could see your beauty!  
That all might feel your calm,  
Soothing them into a quiet sleep.  
Where nothing may haunt them.

# Sea of Children

by Douglas Lemon

Boundless beautiful black smiles  
seek their siblings for fun and  
sport only to be stolen  
near the African morning sea.

Ebony arms and legs are then forcefully propelled  
onto decks as profitable cargo to be  
humiliatingly stacked until the vessel finally breaks.

Obsidian physiques sculpted to beautiful excellence,  
now ponder their purpose on wood  
strong and sturdy much like their bodies.

Onyx eyes embark on two month mortal passage  
that they are not allowed to witness.  
Salt seeps between the wounds of the limbs that are  
chained and strapped as they are uprooted by the current.

Swells shake mothers and fathers away from  
their children. Thirsty waves, in lines of seven,  
ready its lips to gulp sisters after brothers.

Onyx eyes settle into darkness to view the  
decaying death their noses had already confirmed.  
Wrists and ankles once infected by human waste are finally  
uncuffed and unclasped to be swallowed by the current.

The remnant obsidian shells are now chiseled too deeply.  
They contemplate their current purpose  
on wood that has been rotted and soiled much like their bodies

Ebony arms and legs are forcefully propelled  
off of the decks like valueless cargo to be  
stacked onto breaks before the vessels stop flowing.

The bottomless sea of lost black faces  
becomes some's final destination as they

dive and search for family to resurrect in solace  
in the Caribbean mourning sea.

# I Followed You

by Kayerissa Gillette

The dream of sailing was yours,  
you were my husband  
I followed you.

I followed you,  
to a country where  
you had a job.

I followed you,  
left my farm  
animals, garden, and life.

I fell in love  
with another culture  
when I followed you.

I fell out of love  
when I followed you  
your true colors came through.

You fell out of love  
with me, when your  
libido was stronger than mine.

Cockalorum attitude  
that only you understood  
but I followed you.

Your fingers were  
frigid as steel yet  
I followed you.

Your non-beating heart  
lacking blood to give  
you any life.

Having you touch me

was like being sea sick  
green became my favorite color.

I loved your dream of  
sailing around the world  
for I followed you.

The best thing  
I did was to  
follow you.

Freedom from you  
was just a sailboat away  
when I followed you.

The Night's All Greek to Me  
by Douglas Lemon



# Colors and Smells

by Kayerissa Gillette

Cobalt carafe filled with sparkling wine  
Reflecting splashes of color like rainbows

Moon and stars gleam in the night  
Like gems across the fresh fallen snow

Snakes slipping down a tree like an ill fitted slip  
Carpet cleanser that smells like a lilac bush

Rain soaked wool with a stench  
Of mildew and urine

Geosmith of silty earth containing  
Fragrance of rotten flesh

Would the coffin we are buried in have  
A bell to ring like those buried alive during the plague?

# Armageddon of Fire and Ice

by Douglas Lemon

Plasmic magma morphs  
into livid lava.  
Gasses in deposition plummet  
their temperatures close to absolute zero.

Either way  
we will never see the finish line.  
I like to imagine you and I die in fire.  
Whether it comes from an expanding red giant  
or heat trapping sulfur within our atmosphere  
our passion shall burn together with our bodies.

Lying on beaches holding hands  
our eyes will see sunspots  
that will eventually blind us.  
If we die in fire  
I imagine a slow continuous  
rise in heat that turns to flames.  
We shall swim in the once cold oceans  
that will ultimately turn  
the toppling waves into whirlpool-like jets.

To die twice,  
This time to disintegrate in ice  
we shall keep  
our thermal energy through friction.  
In ice we shall add more clothes  
onto our shivering bodies,  
until our best option  
is to undress each other  
and share our bodies heat,  
until we eventually fuse  
and freeze together for eternity.

# You Down with O.P.P.?

by Karlynn O'Neil

I was at a friend's house and someone suggested that we watch the movie, *Meet the Fockers*. "Sure," My boyfriend said, "I'm down with O.P.P"

"Other people's property?" I asked, in reference to the popular hip hop song by Naughty By Nature.

"Other people's pain," he smirked, "other people's pain."

I'm not a fan of put-down-humor. I think it's mean and ugly. When it is directed at me, I often jump on the defense and overreact. This usually offends the person who doled out the light-hearted insult, like "JUST KIDDING, jeeze!" How dare I react honestly to their attempt to damage my self-esteem. Some play on my reaction and tease harder, keeping me fighting. When I see put-down-humor directed at someone else, I often try to take the bullet for the victim and leap in to protect them. This doesn't always work in my favor either.

My father teases me a lot. I avoided him for ten years. Along with other grievances I had towards him, there was rarely a conversation we had that he didn't use humor to hurt me, often in front of other people. He'd call me a ham, joke about me being "artsy-fartsy," or mimic me by acting prissy, or insult something I was wearing. I would react defensively and he would laugh at my angry animated expressions. Maybe he thought this was a positive interaction. He'd usually tell me that I was too sensitive. Although he seems tough, at more than six feet, burly, with a full white beard, he is not a tough guy. He's often on the verge of tears and never takes criticism well. From his insults, I would go away furious and stay that way for a week. I'd argue with him in my head, inventing ways to get him back that I would never think of in the moment.

Some people say that this teasing is affectionate, even flirtatious. I think I was playing hooky the day in kindergarten when the teacher explained that the boy who pulls your hair in recess actually has a crush on you. Although these flirtatious zingers don't make me swoon, in the past, I have chosen guys like this to spend time with. Usually ending the relationship bitter. I came to the conclusion: "You're hurting me. You're teaching me not to trust you in tiny increments all the time." Little by little, these men pushed me

over the edge until I was all out screaming at them, releasing months of repressed frustration.

Nate liked to tease me, especially in front of other guys in our social circle. Nate and I were friends for seven years and, for the final year of our friendship, roommates. One night, while he and I were chatting, I mocked one of his personality flaws. Seeing the shame on his face, I immediately recanted in the same condescending tone and hugged him. He pushed me away objecting, "Don't patronize me and then hug me!"

I shoved him gently and snapped back, "Fuck you! You do that to me ALL THE TIME!" His face dimmed with new guilt. So I added, "In front of other people."

This new understanding of our relationship should have kept us from repeating the same mistake. It didn't. He would keep publicly humiliating me, and I would try harder and harder to please him, giving him more and more power over my feelings. I fell in love with him, and then I grew to resent him. Our friendship imploded. I'm still angry about it.

Think of *The Three Stooges*, living in slapstick comedy, friends who barely seem to like each other, smacking each other, insulting each other. Maybe after absorbing so much negative attention, the characters should finally decide to stop spending time together. They never get along. Yet, they've spent so much time together. There must be something that bonds them. What if Curly finally snapped and decided to ditch the trio? But it's funny, we love it when Moe smacks Curly! "Why I oughta..."

*Schadenfreude* is the German word for the experiencing pleasure derived from observing the misfortune of another. Everyone, at one time or another, has felt it, maybe even recognize it as unethical and felt ashamed. However, some people thrive on this sensation like *The Simpsons* Nelson Muntz, they stick out one chubby finger and belt out a hearty nasal "HAW HAW." Society often uses other people's pain as a means of comedy. The cartoon duck is walking down the sidewalk. Above him, other cartoons are using a pulley and a fraying rope to hoist a piano into a window several stories high. I think you know how this tale ends: the head, crashing musically through the shiny black lid of the Baby Grand and tiny, chirping bluebirds appear circling like a halo. Insert children laughing. Warner Brothers and Disney made millions on this gimmick, "Look at the stupid duck! Didn't he know that Stevie

Wonder was moving into the penthouse today?" It's such a funny joke! Don't you hate it when people make you feel like a stupid cartoon character?

Sadism is rampant in comedy. In the movie *Meet the Fockers*, the main character tries and tries to make everybody happy and escape looking bad. At each turn, he is met with humiliating opposition. I didn't think this movie was funny at all. I almost cried, I felt so bad for him. Why would an author create a character just to tear him down and make him fail miserably? In a lot of ways, it's easy to relate to this character. The lesson is, if you try too hard, you fail. Don't be genuine about who you are, you fail. Try and cover up your mistakes, you fail. I know that I've had to learn these lessons before and will have to again. That doesn't mean I would pay to watch some poor schmuck replay them over and over and over again.

I have a coworker who is heavy-handed in this area. One day, as I was passing by, I heard him jokingly call my friend a liar. Concerned that my friend was being bullied and eager to knock him down a peg, I said, "A lie is when you intentionally say something that isn't true."

His face turned cold and his lips tightened, "Shannon does not need you to defend her, she knows I'm kidding."

I backed away, "Fair enough."

He put me in my place. My relationships with some of my coworkers and friends are awkward because I am so sternly against put-down-humor. The team doesn't bond with me in this way, but I also know that I am less popular because of it.

In a workplace setting, this kind of joking can be super disruptive. Although the employee may be trying to lighten the mood and doesn't mean to be insulting anyone, they can't anticipate how a joke will be received. Many comedians can tell you the line between offensive and funny is drawn by the audience and not the person telling the joke. At work, this can hold up productivity; for example, I once had a coworker who would intentionally withhold information or give wrong information in an attempt to be funny. I found this particularly annoying. I'd prefer not to work with people who are deliberately unhelpful. Others around us got the humor, once again, in my dramatic reaction to being fooled and annoyed, reminding me of being a kid at the mercy of my father's jeers.

Ten years of avoiding my father meant ten years of not going to holiday meals with the O'Neil family. No one ever called me to

reconcile. If my relationship with my father didn't exist, neither did my relationship with my aunt and uncle, nor my relationship with my grandmother. Grandma Wanda had a stroke two years ago and I thought it would be a good idea to try and start getting along with my father again. I went to my first Christmas dinner with the O'Neil's in ten years. This year we were meeting at the nursing home where Wanda would live out the last days of her life. I was pretty nervous to be coming back into the family social circle, not knowing how I would be received. We sat around a table in the clinical taupe and teal colored common area eating crackers and cheese, shrimp cocktails, and sugar cookies. The most appallingly intriguing thing started to happen. I watched it all unfold with fresh adult eyes, removed from the scene entirely. My father made a joke at my aunt's expense. Then my aunt made a snarky remark at my uncle. Then my uncle insulted my dad. Each time, the whole room laughed, and the sibling on the receiving end of joke would turn red with fury. None of them liked it, and soon they would be finding out who the beneficiary on the will would be. The sibling rivalry was coming to a fast climax.

I was getting ready to leave, and my dad wanted to walk me out. I stopped to ask where my aunt was so I could say goodbye. My dad told me that she was upstairs getting something.

“Okay, I can be patient.” I said.

“YOU CAN?” he gasped, mockingly.

I stopped and sternly said to him, “I want to get along with you, but this put-down-humor isn't helping.”

My father, the biker Santa, grew meek retorting, “It's not put-down-humor.” As I left, I could see my father watching me pull away from the front stoop. I could imagine his red face, eyes welling up in tears. For the first time, I felt no sympathy for him, nor did I feel angry. I was confident that I had reacted genuinely and appropriately in the moment. It wasn't my fault if he refused to accept it.

Who's to blame, me or the teaser? The answer may be both. I should learn to let these things roll off me more easily. While my father can and should learn not to tease me, he probably won't. I hope to someday learn to let this bother me less. As far as my relationship with the world, I can't tell every person I interact with, “I'm not a fan of put-down-humor.” I'll only end up continuing to alienate myself from many people who thrive on it. I love funny people, but just because someone is funny, doesn't mean that they are healthy and

interact with others in a constructive manner. Schadenfreude will continue to exist, whether I like it or not. My boyfriend was right, other people's pain is funny. Comedy will always replay the duck getting crushed by a piano and ask us, "You down with O.P.P.?"

# Suitcase

by Rebekah Steward

You want to fit all of your things into a carry-on,  
so that you do not have to pay.  
But don't you know that it is harder  
to pack that way?  
You roll your shirt,  
you stick socks in your shoes.  
You can't bring all of your sunglasses.  
Guess that you will have to choose.

You take out all your ziplocks,  
and shove outfits inside.  
Trying to make things fit smaller?  
Stick them against the sides.

You try to fit everything  
that you will need for the week.  
Make sure that shampoo lids on tight.  
You don't want it to leak.

When you think that you  
have everything you need.  
You try to zip it shut,  
but it will not budge.  
Guess that you will have to  
take something out.  
You be the judge.

# Dancing Leaves

by Rebekah Steward

As the wind blows,  
the leaves escape the trees,  
and fall  
down  
down  
down  
to the ground.

Before long, the ground is covered in an  
auburn, orange, scarlet, and yellow blanket.

The leaves dance on their way down,  
spinning and twirling,  
gliding and swaying,  
left and right,  
around and around,  
until they reach the ground.

Even once they reach the ground,  
some leaves continue to dance.  
The wind blows them east and west.  
They are carried north and south.

Whenever the wind begins,  
the leaves spin and twirl.  
When the wind ends,  
The leaves take a break,  
and find new dance partners.

# One

by Gina LoPresto

My heart was in my head, which felt like lead.  
My mouth was dry, my tongue rolling inside it.  
My feet raced my body to the parachute compartment.

One left.

I heard panting behind me, and when I looked,  
I saw it was young Jimmy, eyes wide as he too  
Stared at the life-saving object.

One left.

We stared at each other, our looks silently communicating,  
The dreaded phrase.

One left.

I was a man in my prime, and Jimmy but a boy.  
I had to act fast. I picked up the orange parachute  
With sickening slowness.  
And said, "Go, my friend, there's no time to lose!"  
And tossed it to Jimmy.

Jimmy's eyes fixed on me with gratefulness  
That made my spirits rise.

He placed the parachute on his back,  
Opened the exit door and turned to me with tears  
Flicking his gray eyes.

"Thank you, sir,"

Then he jumped.

I closed the door and stared across,  
At the completely empty passenger seats.

One left.

I sat in one of them, and thought of my life.

It had all seemed a failure from the first.

But then my thoughts turned to Jimmy,  
Who still had a whole life to live.

He could do the things that I had wanted to do,  
And possibly more.

It was all worth it, for Jimmy.

Crash! An explosion!

Then there was no more.

# Logan Lies on the Chair

by Douglas Lemon

Black leather couch cradles  
my concepts and contemplations.

The shrink diligently  
drafted data  
as he desperately  
desired to identify  
what glitch lied within my skull.

Pen in mouth,  
he probed with ink blots  
and longwinded breaths  
curiously asking,  
"Can you paint me, the  
visions your brain arranges?"

The shrink took a stab at gazing  
through the nonexistent beta waves  
inside my head.

But the brain encased  
in the interior of my cranium  
understands a gold and copper colored  
22 caliber bullet much, much better.

So I let the lead explore  
the innermost matter  
of my temporal lobe  
instead.

Dear Warden Johnston  
by Douglas Lemon

December 16, 1937

Dear Warden Johnston,

As the Fog covers  
like a mystical smoke screen,  
your brain freezes while  
mine is forced to sublimate.

I have no idea how long  
this gaseous camouflage  
will masquerade as a solid  
cotton like cover, but I  
must disappear within it,  
before it, itself, dissipates.

High Alert! In minutes  
I will hear the circling alarms.  
The Fog almost certainly  
has now retreated. As the liquid  
like canopy has escaped,  
so have we...

- In haste,  
Prisoners 285 and 260

Smiley Face in My Sink  
by Bekah Zimmerman



# Orchestra Hall

by Tascha Balsaitis

It all started at Orchestra Hall...

Strawberry champagne salad and  
honeydew alcohol, and music to  
stir our stagnant blood.

Harp and cellos and piano and  
flute and Stravinsky's Firebird.

Karaoke in the empty nightclub,  
Drinking Long Island Iced Tea,  
Playing "Never Have I Ever..."

Your phone number turns into  
chai tea and The White Stripes  
to cure the hangover and inspire  
that feeling of loose marbles in  
our stomachs that we both swore  
to ignore.

The Princess Bride and Say  
Anything and kisses on  
your bed, making Star  
Trek jokes and cliché  
catchphrases, we become  
Cinderella at the ball...

... and it all started at Orchestra Hall.

# The Color of Blood

by Bekah Zimmerman

"I'll get better," Sienna promised hopefully, and there was a live spark in her otherwise dull, tired sapphire blue eyes that used to house such a resilient beautiful spirit- an alive happy vivacious spirit.

Lucia fell silent, unable to come to terms with what her friend had just told her. She felt betrayed, scared, and most of all she hated the thing in her friend, the thing taking her friend away and sucking the life out of her. She hated the cancer. Lucia lifted her bright green eyes meeting Sienna's fragile gaze and her eyes stung and watered, but she couldn't tell if it was from the cold sea spray from the foreboding ocean below or from the emotions running through her at that moment.

Above them the stormy Washington atmosphere agreed with Lucia's mood, blowing her long and sleek ruby red hair in her slender freckled face. Luckily Sienna's golden blonde hair was short enough not to get into her girly and round face.

"You promise you'll get better?" Lucia inquired her voice shaking hardly above a whisper as a lump grew in her throat threatening to choke her. It wasn't fair that this cancer was threatening to take away her friend's meager life of fifteen years away from her. Thirteen out of those fifteen years Lucia had grown up with Sienna becoming like her sister and Sienna was the only person in the world who knew Lucia better than she did. They acted more like sisters than friends and she knew what she demanded from Sienna was impossible. All the more Lucia despised the sickness. Hated the sickness that stole her friend, her friend's future; she hated the Leukemia.

"Lucia, I'll try my hardest...."

"Please don't." Lucia cut Sienna off softly looking away and Sienna suddenly grasped Lucia's warm hands. Lucia gradually held back tightening her grip on her friend's freezing hands as if she'd never let go. And she wouldn't.

“Listen. Believe me when I say I don’t want to leave you more than you don’t want to go.”

“Do you have to leave? I’m going to miss you, I Can’t believe this is happening to you.” A tear fell from Lucia’s watery eyes and she was ready to burst. She felt like she was talking to her friend from a distance and she felt like there was a ticking time bomb on Sienna.

“Don’t worry, I’ll write when I can and I’ll visit when I get better.”

“I know,” Lucia broke down crying and Sienna grabbed her in a hug crying as well, her tears falling down onto Lucia’s back. “I just don’t want you to die.”

It felt weird hugging someone who wasn’t expected to live, had some foreign disease that had her firmly in its clutches. Weird knowing Lucia may never get her back.

“I’ll try my hardest to get better.”

“Please don’t... please don’t leave.” Lucia begged, loathing, fearing those two words, too long, too painful, and too complicated.

“There are no goodbyes, wherever we are you’ll always be in my heart.” Sienna glanced up into Lucia’s eyes and there was suddenly strength. But was it enough strength to fight this battle and retain perseverance? Hope?

Lucia closed her eyes squeezing tears out from them and she suddenly felt the coldness, the coldness of something missing, something gone forever. The coldness one leaves when letting go.

It took a week for the first letter from Sienna to arrive. When Lucia got it, she tore the envelope open and by the time Lucia devoured the contents of the letter she was feeling hopeful, reading that Sienna seemed to be getting better. Even then Lucia started formulating a plan in her head. Her friend’s medical bills would be outrageous; she would earn money to send to her. After all, Lucia felt Sienna’s journey was her very own.

Lucia worked relentlessly, but when she thought of Sienna, her pain was nothing compared to her's. In fact, the image of Sienna kept Lucia working even harder at her job in her parent's store and she saved all her money. She didn't care that it was a meager amount weighed against the medical expenses, but she put extra hours in and gave all she had.

All she could think about was Sienna and her face lighting up when she got the money she sent her. She promised when she got better she would pay Lucia back, and that was all the proof she needed that Sienna was going to live- after all she had pledged to pay Lucia back. Sienna was recovering, continuing to correspond with Lucia with updates. At last, Lucia was going to get her friend back, free from the callous grasps of illness and from the rigid talons of fate.

But Lucia was confused and hurt when her friend had stopped sending her letters and she began to worry. Maybe Sienna was dying this very moment and Lucia would never know. Lucia was a little upset to say the least and she decided a nice quiet drive in the calming pine forest countryside would be right for her so she could have time alone to think to herself.

Lucia went outside to the small blue car standing alone in the driveway and got in. She started her car and backed out of the driveway and started driving down the wide gravel road. Lucia pulled out her cell phone from her pocket speed dialing the hospital room Sienna was staying in, still paying attention to the road ahead of her.

The phone rang several times and Lucia sighed loudly. *C'mon, C'mon Sienna pick up.* Lucia said to herself begging, no demanding Sienna pick up. The answering machine picked up on the last ring and against her better judgment Lucia let a loud annoyed sigh escape as it recorded her message. Lucia was about to start ranting at her sick friend, but she noticed something. Something coming straight at her.

A while after Lucia's crash occurred, her dear friend Sienna was in bed feeling sick and weak. She heard the phone ring loudly almost as if it was urgent, right by her head on the

nightstand and she exhaled noisily staring straight up at the ceiling. A moment later the door opened and her mother stepped in. Sienna moved her head, a slight moan escaping her barely parted lips and her father gave her a small smile. He sat down on the edge of the hospital bed taking his daughter's hand tenderly and Sienna peered at him with exhausted, scared eyes that still held a glimmer of fighting spirit in them that was in danger of extinguishing.

"Good news," her father began and Sienna took a shaky breath quickly interrupting.

"I don't have Leukemia?" she laughed slightly to herself a tear forming in the corner of her eye but Sienna didn't have strength to wipe it away.

"No, even better."

"What could be better than that? Lucia's here to see me? Or to stay with me?"

"You're next on the bone marrow transplant list. Your surgery will be tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"Try not to think about it. Try to get some rest, for me okay? You'll get better I promise."

"Promise?" Sienna suddenly coughed and her father enfolded his daughter's hand in his own carefully.

"I promise."

"Then can you call Lucia? I know I haven't called her in awhile and I want to see her.

"I'll call her. Just get some rest."

"Ok, thanks dad." Sienna settled into her bed and closed her eyes immediately falling asleep as she felt her father get up hearing her pick up the phone and dial the number. It was like a sweet lullaby knowing that Lucia was going to be close by, even on the other side of the phone. Sienna must have dozed off for a few minutes before she awoke to her father's shocked voice on the phone.

"Did she make it?" he asked and Sienna closed her eyes feigning sleep while she listened as best as she could.

"Where is she? That's impossible! No! Mrs. Fair this is horrible, I'm so sorry.....yes. Okay. Goodbye." Sienna's father hung up the phone and Sienna pretended to wake up.

"Did you call Lucia?" Sienna's tongue burned to blurt out what she had heard.

"Yes...yes I did."

"Where's Lucia? What happened to her? Why were you talking to her mother?"

"Honey, Lucia...can't come. She's sick."

"Sick with what? Why did you ask if she made it?"

Sienna demanded vigorously and then started coughing and shaking.

"Sienna you need your rest-----."

"What happened? Tell me!" Sienna nearly screamed hurting her lungs to get the answer.

"Lucia.....she's dead."

"How? When?"

"Today, a few hours ago." Sienna's father took a deep breath and explained everything to his frail daughter, relating what Lucia's mother had informed him over the phone. He paused and seeing the hurt and confusion in his daughter's eyes couldn't find the will to say any more letting the nurses come in to bring Sienna down to surgery.

As Sienna was put under the blinding white lights she thought of Lucia smiling to herself amidst tears. *Wait Lucia for me, I'm coming.* She saw a plastic mask enter her view and as it was placed on her face, Sienna murmured over and over again to herself: "I want to die, please let me die."

"Take a deep breath and count back to five, "A soothing voice above her instructed as the plastic mask was placed over nose and mouth. "Don't worry you'll be fine."

Sienna took a deep breath inhaling the anesthetic, her eyelids feeling heavy as a wave of sleepiness hit her. *Please, let me be with Lucia,* Sienna begged in her mind as she fell completely unconscious. While the doctors performed the surgery on Sienna, Sienna fought back, her body and mind fought back resisting their efforts and rejecting the bone

marrow and anything that entered her body. She didn't want to continue living, she desperately wanted to see Lucia again, so her spirit fought.

"Why are you fighting?" a voice inquired right behind Sienna, as Sienna found herself standing, floating in a brilliant white light.

"Where am I?" Sienna turned herself around facing Lucia who was clasping a bouquet of red roses in her hands, a small smile on her lips. "Lucia?"

"Sienna you must stop for me."

"But I want to stay with you, Lucia. It's all my fault!" Sienna nearly yelled tears trickling down two paths on her face.

"Sienna stop beating yourself up. This isn't what I want for you."

"But it's my entire fault! I want to be with you-my life is already over."

"How is it your fault? You could have done nothing to stop that car from hitting me. I'm always going to be with you, I promise." Slowly, Lucia started vanishing as Sienna ran towards her. By the time she reached where Lucia was standing, she was completely gone her voice fading as well.

"Lucia! Wait! Lucia!" Sienna shouted feeling lightheaded. She started to vanish also and she woke up lying back in her hospital bed alive and well. Sienna blinked several times staring straight up and her father smiled.

"Good news-----."

"I'm going to die."

"No, the exact opposite. Usually the donor remains anonymous, but the parents have insisted to let you know," He sounded excited, ecstatic as if he had a reason to be. He had after all informed her of her best friend's death. "You won't believe it."

"Who is it?" Sienna asked moaning. At least she was feeling a little better, but what was that worth if her best friend was dead?"

"It's Lucia. Our Lucia, *your* Lucia."

“What!?”

“What’s in your hand?” her father inquired leaning over the bed as he spotted something crumpled in his daughter’s hand, something green and red like blood. Sienna slowly moved her head to the side, staring down as she opened her hand.

Tucked neatly inside was a small rose bud, the delicate and petite petals unfurling undamaged by Sienna’s hand. A tear slid down her face as Sienna felt the light flower in her hand murmuring to herself: “I never should have doubted you’d leave me.”

Viva Pompei  
by Douglas Lemon



# The Oldest of Three

by Peter Voelker

They both laid there in the bed they've shared for many years now. It felt like so many years that when asked how long they've been married, there was a quick pause before either could answer. Danny and Ruth Risland were a younger couple in their 30's and been married "at least 10 years, right?" one would ask the other with a smile.

Danny and Ruth had three blond sons, eight-year-old Isaiah, six-year-old Zechariah, and two-year-old Jacob who would all crawl, sometimes more than one at a time, into mom and dad's warm bed if they had a bad dream and could expect to be accepted with an embrace and a spot under the blankets. "The Big Bed" was a place of safety and comfort, where the boys could nuzzle into mom or dad and giggle at dad's grouchy face. Best of all, no bad dreams ever happened in the big bed.

But, now only one son would come in at night to sleep with his parents.

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It was an early Minnesota April and Danny, an avid outdoorsman, was taking his sons out to Clearwater lake, near Bemidji, to go sailing. "Come on, guys. Time to get up!" Danny said opening the bedroom door that the boys shared. Isaiah and Zech had the bunk bed, while Jake's twin bed was against the wall opposite of them. Danny shook his sons awake, but none of the boys would have any of it and closed their eyes with groans all around.

"Come on, guys. You remember what we're doing today, right?" Isaiah and Zech's eyes popped open. "Oh, yeah! We're going out on the boat!" They both yelled, jumping off their bed, Isaiah from the top bunk, and started pulling of their pajamas as they ran down the hallway toward the bathroom.

“What's wrong, Jake? You still want to go, right?” Danny said leaning over Jake's body, tangled in blankets and rising slowly with each subtle breath. Jake said nothing, just groaned. “Come on! You've been waiting for this all winter. Ever since I bought the boat last fall.” Jake sighed. “Okay! I'm up.”

The Risland boys couldn't be more excited for their day on the lake as they sat around the kitchen table laughing and playing with their eggs and toast. After breakfast, Danny and the boys kissed their wife and mother goodbye. Ruth had packed the four lunch and helped the boys put on their jackets and hats. The spring season came unusually early this year, but it was going to be brisk on the water.

The four left the house and piled into Danny's truck. Isaiah up front with his dad and Zech in back with Jake, who was strapped into his car seat. As they drove, Danny told the boys stories of how his father took him sailing on the same lake when he was growing up. It was a Risland tradition.

By the time they reached the lake, the wind started to pick up. The boys huddled around each other as Danny backed the boat into the water. Danny helped each boy onto the boat and assigned them a job to prepare the boat to sail. Danny took the hardest task of raising the sail while the boys put on their life vests and loaded the boat with the cooler with their lunches and other things they'd need.

The wind was perfect for sailing, if not a little too strong. It stung and reddened the faces of the boys, who took orders from their dad to keep the boat in shape. Danny steered the boat against the tide forming in the dark blue water. The sail was taking a beating and the boat was being pushed on its edge.

The boys looked at their father struggling to control the boat. They looked at each other, cold and scared. One big gust of wind finally pushed the boat over like a right hook of a prize fighter. The boys floated away from the boat and Danny. “Daddy! Help!” They screamed, teeth chattering and bodies bobbing to get closer to Danny. Danny swam after them and reached Isaiah, pulling him close while yelling help to anyone who could possibly hear him. Zech and

Jake were drifting further out and Danny knew he couldn't reach them while holding onto Isaiah. He called out to Zech and Jake, who were screaming and trying to swim to each other, that he had to swim ashore with Isaiah and find help. "Daddy! Don't go!" Zech and Jake screamed, tears rolling down their red faces into the freezing water that engulfed them.

Danny struggled swimming while holding Isaiah. His arms and lungs burned with each stride. *I'm running out of time!* He told himself. "Daddy, Hurry!" Isaiah begged, his arms draped around Danny's neck.

They reached the shore. Their clothes hardening against their bodies from the blistering wind. He and Isaiah ran from door to door knocking and yelling for help. Danny gathered a group of neighbors who got in their boats and raced out to Zech and Jake.

By the time the rescuers got out to them, the boys had been in the water for more than an hour. They were unresponsive to Danny's voice and touch. Danny and two other men pulled the bodies into the boat. They laid them down, stiff and lifeless. All Danny could do was hold Isaiah close and look upon Zechariah and Jacob.

Danny came home with the police holding Isaiah in his arms and told Ruth what happened. She broke down and took Isaiah from him. Friends and family came immediately to comfort the Risland's. It was going to be a long line of questioning from the police and Ruth changed Isaiah out of his soaked clothes and tried putting him to sleep. Isaiah didn't have any of it, so Ruth let him sit in her lap when she and Danny talked to the police. Ruth carried Isaiah when they went to the hospital to see her youngest sons one more time.

Hours had past when the Risland's came home. Isaiah had fallen asleep in Ruth's arms on the drive home. Danny asked if he could put Isaiah to sleep, but she shook her head, mouth agape and wide-eyed. She stopped as she entered the room and saw the two empty beds that would never be filled again. She laid Isaiah underneath his blankets and looked upon him a while.

Danny was sitting on the edge of his and Ruth's bed, still wearing the wet clothes he wore at the lake. Ruth came in and stared at her husband. She didn't move for a few minutes, but Danny didn't seem to notice her there. She walked over to her side of the bed and sat on the edge for another few minutes before climbing underneath the blankets, still wearing her clothes. Danny did the same, but laid on top of the bedding. Neither would sleep that night.

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Ruth was torn between blaming Danny for Zechariah and Jacob's deaths and reminding herself it was an accident. She knew it wasn't Danny's fault, but she also couldn't forgive him for what happened. She tried to make things seem normal again, especially for Isaiah who was often expressionless and withdrawn. Now, Isaiah would sneak into his parent's room and stand in the doorway before being invited into bed by Danny. At least this didn't change, Ruth thought.

Danny blamed himself for what happened. He'd walk into Isaiah's room to wake him for school and would see the empty beds of his boys that he'd never see again. The boys he last saw being pulled out a lake, rigid and lifeless. He and Ruth talked less than they ever had and looked at each other less than that. Danny didn't know what to say to her. He couldn't say "sorry I killed our sons, honey," and he could just make it up to her. This is what their marriage was going to be like from now on.

Weeks had passed since the accident. Isaiah was now an only child and Ruth and Danny were now parents of only one son. It was yet another Monday morning and Danny was making breakfast for his family. He served Isaiah and asked Ruth if she wanted any. "No, I don't want any," she said with a heavy look in her eyes. She held her mug of coffee close to her mouth and stared at Isaiah while he ate. Life for Isaiah was starting to become normal again and he began enjoying his friends, toys, and school. Danny sat down and reached across the table to take his wife's hand into his. Ruth was startled by this and took her hand away. Danny took his hand back and noticed

the time. "Go get your things, Isaiah. We've got to get you to school." He and Isaiah left without saying goodbye to Ruth.

Later that night, Ruth sat on her and Danny's bed and waited for Danny to come in after putting Isaiah to sleep. She needed to tell him she didn't blame him and that she regretted not telling him sooner. When Danny came in, Ruth ran to him and hugged him. She sobbed and poured everything out. She was sorry for the way she treated him and that it wasn't his fault. Danny wept and told his wife he loved her and that he needed her support to get him through. This had been the most they had said to each other since the accident. They went to bed and felt the warmth of the other that had been missing for quite some time. Nothing was going to bring Zechariah and Jacob back, but Danny, Ruth and Isaiah still had each other.

# August Schell's Hefeweizen

by Timothy Schlee

When I drink August  
Schell's Hefeweizen  
I am reminded of ever  
so many nights spent

retired with close friends  
both German and American,  
soldier and civilian in Stuttgart's  
Tschechen & Söhne biergarten.

Perched halfway up a bluff overlooking  
the dawdling Neckar River  
with gewürztraminer vines  
below, and the bombed out

ruins of World War II  
downtown Stuttgart above.  
Floating in the backyard  
green tree biergarten

absorbing the rays of  
the sinking sun, and  
smelling extinct ozone  
rain summer breeze.

Chewing soft Swabian  
pretzels with spicy mustard,  
and drinking  
cloudy weisse bier illuminate

lonesome for California and Peoria.  
Sniffing sweet narcissus  
saturated in the smoke  
of enumerable Cuban maduros.

Relishing eight hours of  
platonic conversation  
and granite silence.  
The long slow midnight

darkness wandering ascent  
down the pavement,  
across the cobbled  
street, over the dirt

path, up the Birkenkopf  
to the open air ruins  
in search of  
building top gargoyles.

# Satyr

by Amelia Warwick

I am a Satyr. Half-man and half-goat. At one time, I was fully man. Then I met a terrible fate that I would not wish upon my worst enemy. I became prideful in my physical self. I was obsessed with making my body as wonderful as possible. I exercised and was very careful about what kinds of food I ate. When my unwilling transformation occurred, I was at the height of feeling good about myself.

One day, as I was walking through the forest I so often hunted in, I stopped by a small pool of water to admire my reflection. All of a sudden, the reflection looked very angry and began reproaching me with fierce yells, saying that I should have spent more time with my family and friends instead of spending so much time worrying about the way I looked. It said that I was wasting my life, squandering my relationships, and had not learned to do anything useful. It was right.

Before I could even think to tell it that I would change, it told me that the only reasonable thing to do would be to take away the distraction. All at once I felt a change in the lower half of my body. When I looked down I saw the legs of a goat. I hated goats.

Having already driven away all of my family and friends by my selfishness, I was all alone. Now ostracized from all things human, I roam the forests in solitude, filled with intense regret day after day. The woods that I once loved have now become my prison and I cannot venture out into the world I once inhabited.

Forever alone and forever tormented am I. It's too late for repentance. I am a Satyr: half-man and half-goat. Learn from my mistakes.

# Do Not Read

by Amy Bihari

Do not read this or Your mind will explode.

And there will be guts and blood everywhere and that will be horrible but not for

Your enemies because they wanted You to explode but BY a bomb, not a poem.

If You are still alive, bravo but

Not for long. I am guessing Your mind is very powerful to have survived.

Or You were praying like mad to Your God or Gods.

And if You are still breathing after reading this, there is A God or Gods that likes You or

Just dumb luck, and thank Your lucky stars. And if I Was Your God, You would die

After reading this Sentence.

So Your mind did not blow up, but  
I know You are going to die...  
Soon.

# Deeply Mediocre

by Rachel Rose

a person is born.

their destiny is not the way they were raised.

it is not the genes they inherited.

money does not matter. no.

looks are immaterial. yes.

the number of friends they surround themselves with?

***bah***

their achievements?

***nah***

with every turn of the world- more people are born into it.

people seeking acceptance in a gospel...holy or not.

knowledge is...

power.

money is...

everything.

everything is...

being beautiful.

hmmmm.

***here's what I think.***

people are mediocre.

all people, not just some.

billionaires...choke to death on their filets mignon...

***buried six feet under*** like the homeless guy

...the streetwalker

...the drug addict.

that puts us all into the mediocre category.

mediocrity is apparent across the board, but...

some of us choose to live lives

that are even less than mediocre.

we choose lives that border on just plain old fucking plain and

boring.

*absolute dullness* is our group personification.

“leave us alone in our mediocrity” is the battle cry.

our logo is a big, fat zero.

our secret sign is a shrug.

(gimme a shrug)

we recognize each other when in a crowd, but we don't give a shit.

we continue quietly on our way,

oblivious to mayhem,

rudeness,

superiority,

and glamour.

we are unaffected by trivialities.

we are not about to kiss ass.

we are the unrecognizing.

we are the unrecognized.

we are the deeply mediocre.

# Vultures

by Kayerissa Gillette

The sun points to the hole that is seeping -  
scarlet liquid, rushing down the street  
stopping to form puddles  
Veins and innards of dead body parts glisten and sparkle  
on a street in Quitaque, Texas.  
Vultures spreading out their broad black and white wings,  
covering their meal like a blanket  
Razor sharp yellow beaks  
showing through a red face, land nearby --  
hissing and barking to mark the piece of flesh  
plucking out the eyes of those that are already blind.  
The snakes shimmy and slither their way -  
inside my brain, full of hatred, and sorrow  
wondering why this had to happen.  
Serpents trying to avoid  
The eclectic miscalculation of death

# Birds on My Street

by Casey Schmidt

Like dim lights flickering across a twilight sky  
They zip from space to space  
Filling the air with their wings  
Flapping in unison  
I often find myself watching them  
Locked into their beauty and grace  
As they collide momentarily  
And  
mate against the wind  
Ever astonished by their world,  
I reach to them  
Hoping they gravitate toward my hands and set me free  
Hoping they find me a place in their universe  
Where we can share our lives together  
As we lift off into thin air

# Old Folks Home

by Kayerissa Gillette

Age is only a number, so they say  
Even though that is a cliché, it can go astray.

All the old folks that live at home,  
are lucky they can live a day.

They are old, but have heart of stones.  
Everyday experiences and too many broken bones.

Activities are planned from exercise to bingo  
even though at times games can come to deathblows.

Dinners can be bought  
Saltpeter is given to prevent conception.

Wheelchairs and walkers are given names  
but they help with their pains.

Senility sets in, but not with the old;  
staff thinks that if one winks,

Gossip runs amuck, to give everyone –  
something to do to avoid taking a nap at two.

Clicque still exist, worse than in kindergarten.  
There are bullies, thinking they are head cheese.

Silent as a moonbeam, death can be found at any time,  
making all the babbling sound like a crime.

But they know that life is full and fine -- with nothing  
to regret except not knowing that they will see Father Time.

# Eye of the Storm

by Bekah Zimmerman

I am standing here on unstable ground  
Yet I am standing in the calmness  
Around me a wind of blue and green meets me  
What will happen I ask, what will happen if I just stay?  
Will I shed tears for the lost?  
I stand in awe watching as it rushes around me and lightning strikes  
above me  
Terrified I know that I am safe yet I ache to touch what is around me  
Standing there I am able to recount all those precious memories that  
will soon die with the storm  
With this I am able to grasp nothing as I stand motionless  
I will always stand here wondering and dreaming of things I will not  
be able to hold ever again

# Dripping

by Kayerissa Gillette

Eyes wide open, the ice of the cutting edge pressed next to veins  
the sensation of the drip, drip, drip,  
reality sinks in

The bathroom faucet must be running.  
it grows louder  
sound must be found.

Maybe the kitchen is the culprit,  
let me go check.  
louder and louder it grows gnawing  
at my stomach.

The silver moonlight high in the sky  
calls to me and whispers  
come, for I am silent.

The softness of the grass upon my feet  
transports me towards the unblemished lake.  
who-o-o- who-o-o echoes through the trees  
answers of not me, come from a mouse

Sweeping wings from the owl  
dive to catch the little mouse  
hurry little mouse, and be safe  
the shining blood drips, drips, drips from the mouse

Closing off the sound, and squeezing out the sight of blood –  
silence must be near  
the obsession for the silence must come soon

Eyes wide open, the ice of the cutting edge pressed next to veins  
the sensation of the drip, drip, drip,  
reality sinks in

Not the faucet, owl, or mouse  
but mysterious feelings of liberation

the drip, drip, drip has grown silence;  
until there is no more.

# Arti Poeticae Faveo

by Timothy Schlee

I am for a poetry of pictures as tangible as sand granules and grains  
running through a young boy's hand on the beach in  
Tangiers,

I am for a poetry scribbled on the dirt floor of a one-room Nigerian  
schoolhouse,

I am for a poetry of images juxtaposed on the paper of the skull a  
moss-covered cellar door and a grey pocket mouse,

I am for a poetry awake all week in a frenzied stupor contemplating  
how to describe bread by describing hunger better than  
Tadeusz Różewicz did in *Draft of a Modern Love Poem*,

I am for a poetry squandered on the description of love my love is  
like the chrysanthemum bed blooming this fiery August your  
love was like the cherry tree flowering last spring our love is  
like a powder keg yet I want you,

I am for a poetry that turns the garbage bin of the world upside  
down and shakes loose every last styrofoam McDonald's  
wrapper leaving the soil bare to only that which is natural  
colonial Quaking Aspen and old Norwegian Spruce,

I am for a poetry where rivers run through canyons of notebooks  
eroding every last bit of human consciousness leaving the  
pages bare to all but the memory of the body,

I am for a poetry without words in which the body speaks for itself  
dragging itself through the vacant cosmic hotel before being  
itself lost into the mud prison cell of the grave,

I am for a poetry plucked from late night beer showers taken in dank  
bathrooms searching for the right combination of strong  
verbs and hard nouns to create the visual image of empathy

yawning warm woolen-blanket wrapped around a beating heart,

I am for a poetry over-caffeinated and nicotine-addicted recited in log cabin coffee houses spoken in the streets of downtown Sydney whispered in dirt-covered small town alleyways and screamed from tenement roofs stanzas of cinderblock held together by twine,

I am for a poetry hallucinating grief floating in supernatural suffering dripping with the bright noise of nuclear explosions,

I am for a poetry that is the guttural cry of pure human emotion etched onto the shattered steps leading to the madman's cottage,

I am for a poetry all-consuming in which the slave's whipped back is the image of human suffering transposed onto a sour apple tree leaving naked every broken heart.

## Contributor's Notes

**Tascha Balsaitis** is part of the AFA program for Creative Writing at Normandale, with hopes of pursuing writing as she continues her education and develops a career.

**Amy Bihari** has been going to Normandale for almost a year. She enjoys writing about odd, quirky things. She wants readers to think nothing of the poem then surprise them. Her friends have enjoyed her poems. She has been published once in the *Pine Tree Collection*.

**Kayerissa Gillette** is 63 and lives in a senior living community. Double majoring in Creative Writing and Psychology, she writes on the darker side of things since most don't want to accept the darkness that is in all of us.

**Douglas Lemon** is gathering inspiration from different cultures and around the world to make up part of who he is. Trips to Jamaica, Italy, France and Cuba have inspired him as much as his life growing up in North Minneapolis.

**Gina LoPresto** is in her second semester at Normandale Community College. She is majoring in Creative Writing and hopes to become a professional writer someday.

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

**Casey Ritchie** is age nineteen, a freshman, and doesn't usually communicate in curt sentences that lack a topic sentence, nor the kind of flowery vernacular her writing tends to spout. She's somewhere in the middle, she thinks. She's a person who's been writing for the majority of her childhood and, ere she had the patience to put fingers to keys and produce something legible, she dictated her fictional ventures to her long-suffering mom.

**Rachel Rose** is a sixty-year-old college student learning the ways of psychology while practicing the fine art of poetry writing. She graduates in May of 2014 and hopes to eventually earn her Master's Degree at Adler Graduate School in Richfield.

**Timothy Schlee** is a poet of the body and a poet of the soul.

**Casey Schmidt** is a student at Normandale.

**Rebekah Steward** is a Normandale student who enjoys writing in her free time.

**Peter Voelker** is a second year student at Normandale Community College.

**Amelia Warwick** has her Associate of Art degree with an emphasis in communication from Normandale Community College. She is currently enrolled in Mankato's Communication Studies program offered on Normandale's campus, and is back at Normandale to take a music class. She has been published in *The Paper Lantern* previously.

**Bekah Zimmerman** is a first year student at Normandale getting an emphasis in Japanese and in her free time, she likes doing photography.

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

Officers and the following members of the Spring 2014 Creative Writing Club produced this issue:

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Front Cover: “Lady in Blue Floral Hat,” by Rachel Rose

Back Cover: “Classic in Cuba” by Douglas Lemon

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

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

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

More information is available on our website, [thepaperlantern.org](http://thepaperlantern.org). *The Paper Lantern* online is made possible by a generous gift from the Kevin Downey estate.



