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MANUSCRIPT



MISSION STATEMENT

The Manuscript Society of Wilkes University has been publishing its creative written and visual art magazine, Manuscript, continuously since 1947. Currently, the student-led editorial staff publishes two issues a year, and copies are complimentary.

In preparation for a career in editing, publishing, or creative writing, any Wilkes student is welcome to submit to or work on the editorial board of the Manuscript Society and critique a variety of creative pieces, including visual art, from the Wilkes faculty, staff, students, and alumni. This process includes creative workshopping, copyediting, and layout. Recently, the Society produced a hardback edition of the Fall 2008 issue and a woodblock cover design in Spring 2009.

Wilkes students may elect to enroll in ENG 390. Projects in Writing: Manuscript for one (1) credit of coursework. Meetings are held during club hours each semester. Monthly campus poetry readings are open to the Wilkes community and greater public. The end product is a published, award-winning magazine.

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A Midnight Shower

I've never felt a Rain as sweet as this.
Water propels from the copper tear ducts-
A catharsis of heat.
A pyroclastic purge
Of submissive solitude.
Streams of water flow
Creating road maps on
Pruning porcelain skin.
Eye lids melt together.
Mouth opens wide-
Inhales steam,
And exhales
Steam.

Words and Letters

Concealment of old letters
Garnished in gold, silver, and plastic
Reach out to the world
A world not always known
The meaning lies in.
It's a need to know
Keep me safe
My mouth is moving faster than my eyes
And the scraping of my bare feet on sandpaper
The crowd responded to the tornado around me
Glitter and glamour
A storm that made sparkle, made noise.
Where gold stars and feathers were wrapped in kite string
Each well hidden word
Were words that bled.

Sympathetic Vibrations

Mahogany or maple, maybe
Even oak hands hold Chopin's Mazurka
in A Minor in perfect place like a grandfather
clock unwound, sealed in a glass room
Where children, not yet seven, look and dream
Forgotten stories of brilliant composers
and the great feats of Air still unwritten.

Adults forget children's creations; hammers
tacked until a warm, colorful timbre
becomes a minor, diminished, metallic
Prelude which echoed flat in the years of guitars,
flutes, saxophones, rebellion, and girls.

We waited though, patiently, for another
chance to open the large glass door and shake
The dust from your ribs and bed
and glide our hands down your smooth ivory board
Taking with them our unwritten symphonies
as they stroke your keys in a wild Fantasie-Impromptu
Which dies before the first C sharp minor run.
You resonate, your strings shaking,
and we leave, not remembering the first
4 bars.

Dominica palmarum

I cannot reconcile the past,
and am given no future.

Men in coats swarmed
like ants and drug me down
The street, soft covered
in palms. Old men shouted,
in German, about the coming
of Kings, and sadists played
Fiddles while children marched
like locusts to fields
Where they would be slaughtered
Dead by men holding rifles
and smoking cigarettes as fire
Rained down on whole cities,
Ashes falling to the ground like
People in terror.

Young woman laid themselves
Down while tanks marched over,
breaking them like one bullet
To a president's skull
that held the guilt of the Bomb
Which flooded out like murky water
in a low lying city where
Black men stood and were sold,
Worked until death on a temple
Where hearts beat as they
Roll down the steps to be feasted on
by soldiers marching in step
To burn down Byzantium.

Autumnal Alley

Grizzly men speak of emotional baggage
as their bicycles and laughter fade into darkness.

This is an evening of lasts.

Solitude as I bear witness to crickets' dwindling chirrups.
Monday is just as good a day as any.

My tiny city garden, clinging to old brick,
has begun to turn orange, reaching crimson at its rim.

Soon the feeble leaves will break away
to reveal tired, weeping skeletons.

Long Distances

When I talked to her from Denver I felt far,
far enough to picture her,
the size of a teacup,
in her big brown kitchen.
I imagined holding tin cans,
ribbed and cool to the touch,
with butcher's twine connecting us.
The line of cotton did its best,
snagged against Rockies' peaks
draped along prairie fencing
damp and limp on the shores of the Mississippi
eastward bound
careening along highways
even through godforsaken Nebraska.
I was never able to imagine it taut.

From a Window on Greenwave Boulevard

Nanna hangs tired linens
around the spinning clothesline
with her daughter, the nurse.
An Easter sun,
bleaching already pristine sheets,
draping springtimes across aprons
and tulips and skin alike.

Its like watching an episode of the wonder years
and his words absorb into sleepy yellow walls.

Hands, 82 years wise, retrieve a
rouge corner teased by breezes.
Memory amassed in thinning,
obsequious muscles,
her silent storehouse for a lifetime
of cherished duties.

Joe Cocker had the voice for quiet, remarkable moments
and my hand finds his in the muted kitchen air.

Sunshine

Thank the photos of 500 clouds.
Sparks fly from their edges
Gleam of rustic fumes.

We scrape our feet on cloth-like Earth
Gold stars sound in the night.

Spiders dance crazy on your heart,
With shoes of silver and plastic.

You never seem to hear the words in the air,
Caught seamless in the crowd.

Feathers catch in my hair.
Our secret malady makes us laugh.

Then you smile with the widest overbite.
Jagged sunshine.

The Greenhouse

You built yourself an idol
Of butterflies pinned to the wall,
But the angel's wings are a facsimile
Painted upon a child, cold and naked,
Chained into the dance that you set out for her
You view the years through the aperture
Of your rose-colored vision
You hung my photograph with a liar's hands
And framed it with the chains of memory
Water burned my frozen skin,
But ice lingers like the echo of a song
Time prepares a dish of forgiveness,
Now that your power no longer holds me so tightly
But the clock turns back in your head,
Refusing to see the autumn before you
When the memory of spring is so sweet
The flower died slowly, with poisoned water
And rats chewed on the leaves
I look in the mirror
And see that I am made in your image,
Genetic destiny buried in my blood
Even as we slowly reforge our link,
Healed by the relief of distance and time --
Your shadow hands will not hold me:
I am no longer your little girl

The Old Maid

What if...
I never get married?
Never stroll down that long aisle
To say
“I Do”
In white to the man (or woman)
Who watches my every move with
Admiration and respect seeping from
Blurry eyes to my
Face.

What if...
I stop looking because all the boys want
Is an easy night that
They don't want to remember
Or Regret?
Someone to send pictures to
Make life a little
More Beautiful
Until their gorgeous Hollywood Girl
Comes back to town and
It's “What girls do these days”

Loneliness will be my mate
Beacause
Although loneliness is cold, quiet, and clammy at night
He Respects me.
Mr. L lets me be a WOMAN
-Not a piece, a holdover, a rebound, or
Someone any lady lacking a bit of respect could be.

So forget wearing Purple when I'm Gray!
As I grow into an Old Maid,
I shall be the perpetual Lady in Red standing out
From all the Floozies in Tan
By refusing to, in any way, be YOUR
WOMAN.

MASTERbation

Out with friends,
complaining to the hot bartender
in your too-tight-top and your too-short-skirt
About How Much It Sucks
That the boy You're crushing on
Likes some Ho who only knows how to spreead her legs
when the right compliments unlock the invisible walls she puts up.

Staring your insecurities in the face
as you look in the mirror
tracing your MISshape with your eyes
Bitching to your girlfriends on the cell phone growing a tumor in your face while you
whine
you need to lose ten pounds, suck out the fat, see a specialist with tubes and syringes
about that cellulite, and maybe get to a therapist about your man issues
But you never do a damn thing about it....

Talking to him, you can't understand why no one likes him,
Especially because you can't see the way he appraises you
like a farmer at an auction sizing up a heffer he wants to purchase to fatten up and
butcher to make the best profit
And staring him in the face you somehow miss the way your interactions always
leave you yellow purple with bruises and red and brown with scrapes cuts and dried
blood.

And what guidance do I give you in your moment of need...

Stop crying for compliments and fake consolations

Go Fuck Yourself with the Lights On and Not Hidden Under Those Damn Covers until
you can Love and Master yourself. Because no one will Love you until you can Be
Happy with YOURSELF.

Sharp

Sometimes I feel like Scarlet O'Hara,
right after she realizes Ashley loves Melanie,
and when Clark Gable doesn't show up.
That's when I start thinking of sharp things.
Just little things at first,
just a sliver,
just a slice,
but eventually I'm fantasizing
About that full length mirror in your bathroom,
and how nice it would feel
To pound my fists into it,
and watch the glass shiver out from my hands
Cracking in a web of ocular contortion
Reflecting back a million jagged miniatures of myself,
That I could take into my fist and squeeze,
Until you came running out,
onto the tile floor
That I could scrape up arteries
Until the gangrenous cholesterol builds a layer on the glass,
like some sort of caulking that until now,
Has kept me cemented to the Earth's centrifugal pull,
and the more I think about it,
the more my fingers tingle,
with anticipatory relief
To be free of all that muck weighing me down,
and float away,
like some sort of promethean astronaut
Into the stars
To Omega and beyond.

Apple

Apple. Red.
Crunchy-wet, syrupy-sweet.
Bite.
Skin thick-and-sharp.
Smells like-
Speckled autumn leaves crunch under lovers' feet.
First touch,
Two sweaty hands, two hiccupped hearts.
Wind frosts red noses.

Keep me safe

Keep me safe!
Tornado sentences flow, never laid on paper.
Snapping kite strings,
Speaking in tongues,
Screaming obscenities.
Ears bleed-
Words explode like grenades,
Shatter windows,
Rip Baby from Sister's arms-
Destroy my family.
Claws scratch my soft putty brain.

A raging river rusting back stars,
Words that bleed like lovers from old letters.
All that's left of me on that shag carpet,
A single, endless drop of ink.

Ramone

It was a Tuesday. I'd spent a terrible afternoon marinating in grease, slaving away at the local fast food joint. From three o'clock to seven it was a constant stream of cranky old men complaining about coffee and back aches, angry mothers with screaming children who all wanted chicken nuggets and a toy, and the occasional high class snot who needed a nutrition chart to feel guilty about their calorie intake.

We'd run out of cheese sauce and tomatoes. Two "dead" great aunts, a flat tire and a nasty case of explosive diarrhea effecting four crew members caused half

the crew to fail to come to work. The manager had been stuck in a menopausal heat flash for the last three weeks. As soon as seven rolled around, I was out of there.

I grabbed my jacket from the back room, shrugged into it, and determinately marched out the back door, ignoring the envious glares of my fellow coworkers. Only one thing could salvage this day.

There he was, waiting for me patiently in the parking lot. My shiny red Saturn, Ramone. My first car, my first glimpse into teenage freedom. After months of searching for the perfect vehicle, I'd found him huddling in the back of a pre-owned car lot surrounded by rusty pieces of garbage.

I opened the car, running my hand down the top of the door, feeling the cool slick of the frame. Leisurely I lowered myself into the driver's seat. I rejoiced in the feel of soft, gaudy sheepskin seat covers I'd inherited from my mother. Safely in my vehicle- no more customers, no more French fries, no more stress.

A smile slowly spread across my face.

I lifted the key to the ignition. The engine rumbled to life, gurgling happily at my presence. Music blasted from the speakers. An elderly customer, arriving just in time for the dinner rush, waved his cane angrily at me while exclaiming some jealous gibberish about how I'm going to go deaf. I rolled down the windows and cranked the bass.

I sped away as the lot lights winked on. Blue clouds darkened by night were flowing quickly over the pink sky. My eyes glistened, hair snapping and whipping in the wind, my face chilled. I flew into the night, leaving the stress of work behind me.

The Photograph

I sit alone, fingers tracing circles on the soft fabric of my favorite recliner. Stuffing peeks and flows from small tears made when my cocker spaniel was a puppy. I relax, cuddly within my terrycloth robe.

Maddie sighs, deeply asleep on her rug before the flickering fireplace, legs twitching as she chases prey in her dreams. I whistle and softly call her name. She awakens and slowly lifts each leg, testing if they can still hold her weight. She reminds me of my mother in her later years, wary of breaking a hip. Maddie waddles over to me and takes her customary place on my feet. I smile, enjoying the company. Warmth grows, heat climbing up my legs like the vines twist and cover the old oaks in my backyard.

Rain patters gently on my windows. I close my eyes and rest my head back, completely content. I relish the warmth inside, remembering college days with a leaky roof. Rain like this always brings back memories. I stand up on creaky knees, gently sliding my feet out from under Maddie's shaggy grey coat. "There's a good girl," I whisper. Little by little, I shuffle across the room towards one particular bookshelf. On the bottom shelf lays a faded photo album, one of several from my college years.

It was a stupid idea.

We'd had one too many of those fascinating, amber drinks.

I slammed the door to my apartment, savoring the feel of peeling paint snapping off the soft wood. Inside, friends and acquaintances laughed and sang, enjoying the freedom from inhibitions. Disney songs blasted from low quality laptop speakers, bass cranked. Wheels scraped paint from wood floor as scooters and rollerblades lurched, throwing occupants onto saggy, stained leather couches. Liquor slicked the kitchen floor as drinks slid between fingers.

We skidded down the stairs, childlike and secret excitement at escaping without detection. I missed the last step and fell into the wall, veins bursting in my shoulder. I'd feel that tomorrow.

Giggling, we went out onto the porch, finding ourselves in a new world. I sagged against the worn porch railing, my senses overwhelmed. Dimly, I heard raucous laughter from upstairs and blaring sirens from some emergency across the city. My eyes stumbled around the familiar scene outside my house, focusing hazily on tiny details. I rambled on about shiny hubcaps, banana peels and hairy spiders.

She smiled, my partner in crime, lighting up a cigarette and offering one to me.

"No thanks," I said, "I don't like smoke."

She nodded and took a drag, smoke twirling into the air forming dragons and bunny rabbits. "Are we gonna do this or what?" she asked, grinning mischievously.

I nodded bravely, pulling a battered point-and-shoot camera from my pocket. We headed onto the sidewalk, walking as soberly as we could. I concentrated on the ground, counting colorful leaves. "First alley, turn right," I muttered.

Soon, the house loomed above us. Lights flickered in gothic windows. The door yawned open like a rotted mouth, revealing decaying insides of what once must have been a luxurious home for some man, made rich off the black rock, gone like so many others. Thick, overgrown bushes guarded the lawn. We looked at each other, testing the others' reserve.

I went first, pushing through the bushes. Leaves caught on my arms, like child's hands pulling me back to the road. Mud coated my party shoes. I fought, pushing through the guardians and falling onto grass. She followed me, more gracefully.

Between the bushes and the house was a low lawn, cluttered with the most ridiculous assortment of lawn decorations. Dozens of little gnomes took up various occupations across the yard. Fountains bubbled, water squirting from frog's eyes, dolphin's mouths, angel's hands, and little boys with fishing rods. Bright baubles shone in rainbow colors, from the size of a marble to the size of a miniature pony. In the center was our goal.

Two majestic lions stood frozen in snarls of anger. Stone teeth, sharp as daggers, guarded the abyss that led to the stomach. Whiskers, carefully carved, almost quivered in the gentle night breeze. Their front paws were raised, each vicious talon perfectly formed and ready to pierce through the tender underbelly of an unsuspect-

ing victim. Manes curled and poured onto muscular shoulders, appearing soft to the touch. Thick muscles bulked down the lions' back, cording into powerful legs poised ready to spring. Tails were frozen mid-swing, evoking images of testy alley cats before a fight to first blood. Less than dead eyes scrutinized us, gauging our courage. She went first, scrambling onto the lion on the left.

I put my hand on the second lion. I imagined the cool concrete breathing and coming alive, ripping me apart before we had a chance to accomplish what we came to do.

"Come on," she pleaded.

Quickly, I scrambled onto the lion. Arm shaking, I turned on the camera. We leaned in for the kill, smiling nervously. I snapped the picture. Momentarily blinded, the world tilted and I slid off the magnificent beast.

Laughing like naughty little girls, we ran all the way back to the house with our prize.

I Froze Hell Over

When the doctor told me
“3 Months. I’m sorry.”
I felt no sense of grief.
There was no desire to be urgent.
Clarity was all that was left.
My life was not a cornucopia of good times.
There was nothing memorable.
I was never religious, so there was no need
To make amends with my creator.
I was left with a choice most people could not make.
Wait, or take control.
Easy to make when there is no one to whisper
“Goodbye.”

I took the leap, my only silly regret was
I didn’t give the neighbor my dog.

Irresponsible in life and even worse in death.

Looking back, it probably wouldn’t have made any difference...
But I wish that the doctor had told me to dress warm
Instead of “I’m sorry.”

It’s just as cold for me down here as it was up there.
Even with all the flames

Paperless Stories

I need not paper
to write a poem.
Give me a pen.
I’ll write my soul on the walls.

Size Matters

We spent our weekends in the fields.
Only fourteen, we did not truly know
What romance was—
Other than wild and tiresome...

For hours we'd move lush oranges
From my family's vibrant woods, to our tiny fort
In the rustling fields of the greenest grass—
Deserted to all but us two...

We'd hug and kiss
And talk of days to come.
We had no cares in the world—
As long as we were together...

So was how it went for four beautiful years.
Then that oil black day came,
A diamond on a golden loop I offered—
A heavy wooden door to the face I received...

She proverbially spit in my face
She would not marry me, for there was another.
His name was Clint—
He lived on the farm across town...

The fort I had built for us fell
The oranges rot...
With no one to eat them—
For I would never return to that spot.

Four summers in the fields
No longer meant anything to her—
For his name was Clint—
And his diamond was much bigger than mine.

The Charge of the Desert Brigade

When the truth comes out, everyone will know that I didn't even want to be here. Come to think of it, there wasn't a moment throughout my entire life leading up until now that I had ever even considered coming to this dried up fucking desert. By desert, I mean Afghanistan, but to be clear, it wasn't just that dilapidated country. Back before 9/11, when we weren't really at war with anyone, at least openly, I never considered myself the kind of guy who would jump at the first chance to go and defend my country. I still don't. My family will likely disown me when the shit hits the fan after my return stateside, but there's nothing I can really do about that. My grandfather fought in World War II and Korea, my dad in Vietnam, my brother in Desert Storm and Baghdad 2002. Hell, even my mother was a field nurse during 'Nam. My family was forged within the trenches of war, yet I never wanted any of it. Yet we seem to always find a way into the family business somehow, don't we?

Most of the men in my squadron enlisted because they were born to fight. Kozlov comes from a family of Russian-American boxers. I witnessed him literally sheer the head off a Taliban fighter with only his combat knife. Koz smiled about it for days. Franklin is worse. He isn't as built or as intimidating in appearance as Koz, but over here, your appearance means jack shit when you're being fired on by the enemy. Franklin is the most skilled shooter I have ever gone into combat with. In a heavy fire fight, I'm lucky to have spotted one enemy in my line of sight before that crazy mother fucker has shot down a dozen of them. Then there is Evans. Although he isn't in our chain of command, we follow him as if he is the Commander-in-Chief himself. There's really no other way to do it. The guy is only a few years older than my twenty-three years, but in war years, he's a fucking century year old. He's already been through seven tours in the desert and he doesn't plan on leaving until he's shipped out in a plywood box, or if the war actually ends like it's supposed to. Evans foresees himself going out in the box, but if you saw this guy in battle, it seems like bullets just phase through him like he's not even there, I can't see this man going down from anything save a nuke; should the Tallies get their hands on one and know what to do with it.

That leaves me. The guy who lost 95% of the fights he ever got into in his lifetime not because he didn't know how to fight, but because he didn't want to. I'm not a pacifist by any means. I have killed more men over here than I even want to calculate. I lost hope of being forgiven for my sins after a week of fighting in the sand. Before I enlisted, I didn't fight because my life didn't depend on it and I figured it was a waste of my time. So what's my story? I didn't come here out of any sense of duty to my country, nor did I come because the economy eating me up and shitting me out whole. I'm here because I'm doing a job. A job which I only took because I knew that should I make it back to the states outside of the box, it would put me on the fast track to the top of my profession. Like I said, I'm not a fighter. What I am...is a writer. The fact that a writer came out of a family chalk full of war heroes is astounding, but it happened. They had a love of valor and honor gained via fighting for the United

States of America while I expressed myself through the written word. Needless to say, the whole “pen is mightier than the sword” idea didn’t go over quite as easily as I hoped when I announced that I would be pursuing an English degree at NYU without participating in any form of ROTC training. Family issues aside, I left NYU in four short years and automatically got a position on the writing team for the New York Post. I thought that I’d be able to write about whatever I wanted when I got in. I mean, all the television shows based on journalists had the main characters writing about whatever their heart desired; a notion that not one of my friends in the field ever told me was untrue. Working at the New York Post, you write what they tell you to write or they’ll replace you before you can blink. It didn’t take long for my editor to learn my entire life story and realize that my family knew a lot about war, which was perfect to him because the people were growing even more concerned than ever about what was happening over in the desert when it came to their men fighting and dying in the dust, who better to get over there and write about it than a fourth generation army-child?

I couldn’t just go over as a journalist though. My editor is a giant conspiracy theorist and believes that if the army sees you’re a journalist, anything you see in the dust will be a façade. When he first assigned me to write the story he said, “They see that you are some snobby writer-type from the Post and all the money we’d put in to getting you there will be a waste. The army doesn’t share with the press these days. How could they? They know us back home would tear down the White House if we saw the shit that goes down there. So listen up, kiddo. I got a plan. You ain’t gonna like it, but you sure as hell are going to do it...cause no one is going to offer you this type of paycheck for a story. Not only will this make you rich, but it’s gonna make you a fucking rock star.”

He was right on all accounts. I definitely hated the plan, and no matter how close I’ve gotten to Koz, Franklin, & Evans...I still hate it. The guy basically fired me with promise to rehire me when I return from the fight. The army does an extensive background check when you enlist so Mr. High-Strung editor didn’t want me to be employed by a newspaper or even have one as a legitimate recommendation, so he fired me, citing bad-behavior and failure to follow command. Needless to say, when I entered physical training two months later, they had it in their heads that I was a trouble-maker, and they kicked the shit out of me until I lived and breathed their orders like a mindless drone. You see, I always thought my brother and father were a bunch of numbskulls who could only sound intelligent when they talked about the battlefield, but now I truly understand why they are the way they are. You can’t afford to not allow your brain to be taken over by the ones in command. If you question them, you’re fucked, if you follow them, you are probably fucked too, but if you make it out of every situation alive, you are going to get rewarded. The desire to question authority is always there though, no matter how far it’s been pushed into the back of your skull...especially with the chief of our squadron, Colonel Fitzpatrick. This guy has just about the brain capacity as a 90 year old vegetable. The only reason we have all come out of all of our missions relatively fine is because of the backseat commanding efforts of Evans. I already said I’d follow that guy into hell, and I’d do it because

he keeps me alive. Me being the writer and all, I made a joke after Colonel Fitz sent us straight into a room filled with fifteen Taliban soldiers and an unmanned turret and Evans had to save us by throwing his body back through the door while releasing his entire grenade belt into the room that we were the Light Brigade that Tennyson wrote about forever ago, and that Evans was a beam of light God shot out of his ass to redirect the Brigade. I explained to Koz and Franklin, both of which can barely spell their own names, let alone read, that the Light Brigade was a force of over six hundred men who rode into their deaths following the botched command of their superior. Even so long ago, Tennyson was able to write about the soldier mentality. Something we all had when Fitz ordered us to clear that room. We didn't question him. We didn't even stop to think that there definitely were more than five turbans in that room. The only difference between us and Tennyson's poem was that 600 men died due to their superior's blunder, while the four of us survived due to our peer's fortitude. After that night, we kind of banded together under Evans' lead and not Fitz. We titled ourselves the Light Brigade and for six months now, we've been carrying out our own secret missions against the Taliban. Fitz has no idea, and if he ever finds out we'll be court marshaled in a heartbeat. Modern Warfare has changed for us. We grew tired of following orders from someone who barely knew how to pull a trigger, let alone create a successful plan of attack. We either stray from the missions Fitz gives us and come up with a well-tuned excuse for our actions, or we escape camp in the dead of the night and find our own way of dealing out justice to the fuckers that make our lives in this desert a living hell. We've been doing it for months and I've had no reason to question Evans' motives...until tonight...

He wants us to leave camp and not come back. There's this Afghani village about fifty miles northwest of us that we passed through a few days back. The villagers there were very hospitable to us, but there was something off. They seemed afraid, which is normal when a bunch of Americans come into town waving assault rifles in the air...but this fear was different. They were not afraid of us, but what we couldn't see. Evans claims to have seen it. He swears he saw what looked to be a small militia of Taliban camping out in one of the cottages at the edge of the village, waiting for us to depart. We're going back tonight to check it out, but Evans wants to keep going from there. He wants to clear it out and continue to the next village. He's on some kind of Moses kick right now but he's led us to victory so many times that we can't even fathom not following his command. I just wonder...is this what war has turned into? Mini crusades waged against the enemy by renegade factions? We will follow Evans...but will we make back stateside in doing so? The writer in me knows this will be a story for the ages, while the poet in me fears riding into the valley of death with my light brigade...

Death: A Greedy Bastard

The News.
Humbled coldly beneath the clock-tower
Time stopped
Vines of His stench creeping in

Clenching; strangling; growing closer.
But why choke the sapling?

How did the vines reach so far?
Routine.
Weeds were made to grow.

Routine. Frightening.

Slowly you crept past
The Autumn leaves you claimed
Greedy for more.

Spin, Slip, Sip, Repeat.

Amber liquid in crimson cups, makes the world spin.
All inhibitions slip away with each sip.
Intoxicated words whisper, "I love you" in the dark of the bed sheets.
A single moment to truly live, and be free, wrapped in the blankets
just you and me.
But the high I'm feeling doesn't last
I'm coming down and I'm coming down fast.
Back to reality,
no, not yet.
another hit,
another sip,
another night in your bed.

Untitled

1
Pacing before the four white planes with endless scribbles of nonsense
I retain nothing.
Rambling; yackyackyacking
on and on about senseless things of no true importance.

2
She reviles in the notion that she is better than she is.
That the spotlight burns for her alone
on a stage performing to empty chairs.

3
The door clicks closed
and the rooms collectively exhale.
There's one less pair of shoes under the church bench now,
and one of four still has wet eyes.
While one's mind turns to stone
and one plays Ghandi and
one whispers to dogs.

4
The bushes wave to me today
from the other side of the yard
The fingers are green.
I turn my face to the sun and shut my eyes tight
open to find
black and white has replaced
color.

But green quickly erupts.
Everything is so fucking green.

The ant crawls along the rocks that must be canyons to him
I wonder what its like to be so small and strong
but only be recognized as nothing .
It crawls over my sock
I can't seem to move my foot
Everything is so fucking green.

All the trees surrounding me are full of
yellows,
whites,
and greens,
except for one;
tall,
skinless,
tree.

Two blackbirds on top contrast the blue of the sky;
Seem to be arguing
One trying to pull rank over the other
Making itself bigger as the smaller one flies down a branch.
Is everything at war?

Relativity

I'm wondering...

When

Salvador Dali painted melting clocks

Did he speak of how time bends?

Or maybe how it ends?

When

Pablo Picasso warped our human face

Was our smile upside down?

Or was it just a frown?

When

Michelangelo gave infants wings

Were they all of Heaven birth?

Or angels born on Earth?

When

Einstein wrote of relativity

Did he have more with than me?

Or only relatively?

Just wondering...

My Leaky Pen

Today has started like the rest,
I really try my very best
To pay attention in my class,
But sometimes chalkboards seem so crass.
I find it hard to focus when
The ink that's spilling from my pen
Splashes out in forms of words
That sing a song just like the birds.
A Little rhyme with every line
And every time that rhyme is mine.
A piece of me in every note
Like skippers on a sailing boat.
Their destination's ever far.
They pass the time on jazz guitar.
Their music floats along the seas
Reaching land among the breeze.
But getting back to class I see
I missed the notes on chapter three
So why begin to listen now?
I can't just put my ink-pen down!
This pen seems leaky here today.
It seems, although to my dismay,
This lecture's doing naught for me
When all I write is poetry.

An Actor's Submission

Balancing my heart on the back of your hand
You waltz and you speak to tangle my thoughts
Into an irreconcilable enigma
Of person and performer,
Of real and artificial,
While stripped costumes lay strewn,
Brazen, on the floor.

As the ripples of your luring embrace
Seize my tender body,
I subconsciously recognize
With every eventual remembrance
Of the pleated drapes pulled to either side,
The draining fixtures of fluorescence,
The cameras recording each weighted breath,
That such passion is only an act.

Firefly Goodbyes

The darkness of the night chills empty souls.
I relent with a heavy fallen sigh,
Gazing at the vacant moon's radiance,
I find a distant blink, a firefly.

Chasing the splendor that stole my belief,
Skipping over known cracks and bumps marked once by
The bruises and blood of a child's fall,
I find warmth in a familiar speckled sky.

Saffron sputters of luminosity
Breach any secrecy that has now run dry.
Citrus flashes, smiles, laughter,
Ignite his face in my mind in blunt reply.

Still here I am, my feet on the pavement,
Surrounded, enveloped, if not trapped by
This wondrous cascade, random rhythmic light
Assaults the silence and so I cry.

Spheres of promise flicker, boasting their allure,
The air sings damp and dark as a black eye.
They are just like us, they shine but not for long,
Waiting for the simple chance to defy.

The sparkles slip away, no trail, no scent,
Lost in the cold, left as a transient lie.
Navy blue shadows enclose my vision,
Stealing, snapping, sucking me from my high.

To have and to lose, to want and to try,
Enough of these sullen firefly goodbyes.

Scar Tissue

The freshness of autumn's first exfoliation
seeped into the chambers of my senses.
She wagged her short lined tail, coat smooth and midnight black.
I felt grown up, first time walking the dog.
Rockwell image of country living.

My five-year-old fist clenched stubbornly
around the blood red leash.
Spotting a movement, the crimson coat of a bird,
she dragged me down steep trenches of pavement.
I followed without attest or control, slipping,
tumbling toward the driveway of unpaved stones.
Sharp edges jutted out like spears, slicing through skin.
The burgundy sap left now to be tapped
from the artificial bark of the evergreen.
Plasticity can only hold together so much.
With one eyebrow raw and open, kneecap split wide,
The thirsty blood gasped for fresh air.
Fleeing its homeland, it pillaged the thin membranes
as slivers of gravel slipped under skin,
exploring the warmth of a child's unmarred flesh.

A scream, a cry, a car ride
filled the sobbing seconds that stretched time into night's hours.
The sting of shock painted my face,
as the doctor tattooed me with Frankenstein stitches.
Lost in absence, the suture warranted the glory
of a scar sewn together, zipper left exposed.

Now the wound glares back from the mirror,
scar tissue's memory
ingrained into fine lines and dermal pores.
So come on cover girl, cover it up.
It shrieks its importance, its existence,
Boasting its permanence, today and tomorrow.

a 6 word story

Was Chainsaw Juggler, Now Chainsawed Juggler.

Polyphemus's Cave

Your pink bedspread's spread over your window
we rehash what we said and did last night
sweat out orange vodka hangovers
in a cave full of dog hair
and jack-o-lantern glow.

too close for depth perception
your face blurs
brown-eyed cyclops of love

Sooner or later
you'll stumble 'round screaming
striking me from scrapbooks
and telling everyone I only ever hurt you
I'm sorry, Miss Polyphemus
but be at ease, I'll return to the cursed sea
I'll be nobody

Winter Visit

You franken-walk in, lead eyed
wool coat and office tie
pockets full of winter
and I say "Stay the night"

I writhe like slow burning paper
hypothermic blue
you
drop
like a hanged man
seed mandrakes
on my abdomen

Your warmth's still spread over me
like the thin linen sheets
though your tracks are melting
and you're back on the street

Incubus

Ghost light above calcified kitchen sink shines
phosphorescent in the sweat drops of a departing nightmare
In the living room I see my sister, asleep on sofa
“It’s just a dream” my grandfather rasps
to the green flesh of her bloodless thigh.

Wilkes-Barre Love Song

I will show you fear in a handful of dust
-Eliot

Let me show you the end of Market Street
beyond the field of tar-black bones
cut off and dry--
fossilized skyscrapers and churches
planted by robber barons
in Abel’s blood
vying for the vertical idea of God.
Spotlight searches the skies
like the bag men and bag ladies
lunging through ether

(Let us look under the streetlight.
See! It stoops to seek with us!
How can we not find what we’ve lost
beneath such brightness?)

Pairs of girls-- party-colored
college pennants
in fur boots and sweats
lament
“So...”
“...my boyfriend...”
“...dumped me”

...whewp! ...whewp! ...whewp!
The birdsongs of crossing signals silence,
Hear the Bronchitic coughs of city statuary,
the immovable meek
who will inherit

your spare change
your spare cigarettes

Let us untangle our legs
and our sheets
and our clothes
and our instruments
Take the guitar with you if you like

you press your lips to my eyelids
and make giggle my hog-bristled hyena-pack heart
Our little siren songs freeze on the fire'scape
and sink in the city steam and smoke
we ourselves sputter:
liquid-swallowing "L",
mouth-opening "O"
quick clapping together, the trembling "VE"

confessional mouths, dark and full of mystery
dog-eared novels, dark and full of mystery
hips, dark and full of mystery

you and I
in yesterday's jeans
bob past the brewery
boding and black
Bunyan's giant Despair.
He bows to us.
All of these giants bow to us.
All of these giants bow.

"The city is sinking into itself,"
one day every tongue shall confess.
"And how!"

pull a string,
my sweet spider
No one weaves
notes or nets
like you.
The chord is still
the houses reverberate
with mingled memory
And you sing a duet

with your predecessor--
a woman we both loved

The city was famous
and she does not remember
the city was a place for us
and she does not remember
the dead oak on which we etched our names
swallowed up by the Susquehanna

You say you put a spell on me
nudging my bruised neck with your nose
you won't say which sort
but I was and am a prophet
I see

Your dove eyes lift skyward
not to join the city search
(The neighborhood crime watch says they
found Jesus, but they still stalk the twilit streets)
rather find a hole, a place to escape
a past that follows like the two-thirty drunk
whistling and hollering.
At the end of this street
away from the eagles and the banks and the concourses
in an empty lot, a single withered tree
twists into a sigh

The City's Reply

I am a queer fish. A white Sunday night finds my pigeon toes transmuting snow to slush in front of the downtown book store that the square's homeless refer to as the old Sears-Roebuck. I am reading *The Wasteland* and *Other Poems* out loud, pacing the tedious streets. I come to a corner, which turns onto a street which turns onto an lane that passes the place where you've been staying.

I scratch at the forgetful snow with my sneaker. It melts, soaks into my shoe, my sock. The wet cotton scratches my heel, which becomes raw. I can't feel my toes. I raise my voice, because it has to travel over cars, around dumpsters, through concrete and frosty glass. It has to turn left, then hang the first right, pass the parking garage, punch the star key for a dial tone, enter the room number, wait for someone to pick up, take an elevator, walk down the hall past the rubbish chute, and enter shyly, sitting down only when asked to:

Stay with me. Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak. What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? I never know what you are thinking. Think.

I doubt that you can hear me, and it's not the weak Wilkes-Barre heart beat, the slow pulse of car coming/car going car coming/car going, that I'm concerned about. The wind blowing around in my stomach whistles through cracks and I can hardly hear myself. It's the reason I'm reading out loud. I read by street light. My shadow reads back to me from the corners, the large empty spaces full of eyes. He keeps me company. It's the reason I'm reading out loud. You are in each car that passes, curiously regarding the queer fish and his fishy flopping about. You see his lips moving and you know him. You know that he reads for you. It is very significant. (It is the reason I'm reading out loud.)

You are a proper fool, I said.

"Hey I'm fifty cents short of a cup of coffee, can you help me out?" a man interrupts my game of chess with Elliot. My finger holds the page, a rook-- a valuable piece. I study him and remember holidaying in Salem on Halloween. [My friends and I met two people who said they were making a zombie movie. They wanted us to be victims. We all followed them briefly, until some of us began to wonder what they meant by victim. We lost them in the crowd. At the camper that night we tried to determine which one of us was most at fault for almost getting us murdered. It was probably me.]

"How much is a cup of coffee?"

"I need another fifty cents"

[WHISTLING, like a kettle's.]

"Where will you get coffee?"

"Turkey Hill Convenient"

[Steam in my moist guts.]

"May I come with you?"

[HISSING.]

"Yeah...uh, sure."

"What kind of coffee do you normally get?"

"Uh, Hazlenut."

We cross the street. I gently tip the screaming pot in my abdomen. The water is warm, and my friend and I are cold.

"I know a short cut, if you like." he says, moving towards what might be considered an ominous alleyway.

It doesn't matter to me. I have no where to be. I follow.

His name is Melvin. He is 42. He needs a cup of coffee because he is cold. He is cold because he is homeless. I do not have a home, either. I have a house. No one has Melvin's house because it is abandoned. He is sick from the cold. It is warm tonight and we are happy about it. Melvin remembers when the Murray Complex stood. He thinks it is a shame that the city is taking so long to clear it away and that the government is taking so long to help students in college. His nephew is going to graduate from college in Michigan soon. Melvin gets confused when his nephew explains to him what he will do with his degree because it is confusing. Melvin's ex-wife, who left

him in 2000, just finished her degree and Melvin would like to go to LCCC to study the liberal arts. He laughs when I tell him that I am a literature and philosophy major.

Melvin finds extra change in his pockets at Turkey Hill and buys his own coffee. I give him two dollars so that he may get another one later. We walk back to the corner where he and I met, the corner that turns onto a street that turns onto a lane that passes the place where you've been staying. I have not yet touched my coffee because until then the cardboard-bound contents scorched my finger tips, like you scorched my fingertips. I tear the plastic tab and raise the cup to my mouth. It is warm
and
sweet--
just like i need, just like I needed.]

As I walk back to the square, I do not walk on the other side of the sidewalk when someone passes, as I might have just a week before. I have nothing to take, and I can no longer afford an extravagant vagrancy. Tonight, I would share a park bench with city flotsam, if only to keep someone else warm. I thought about trusting people, and how maybe people don't distrust people because they are untrustworthy, but perhaps are untrustworthy because they are distrusted. Something like that. "O to be trusted and loved by you" I say to myself, to the eyes in the darkness. The ghost lights of the ghost city point me toward my car. I remember Elliot, who has been waiting for me in his book, and is waiting for me in the beyond, and will see me soon. I remember the eyeless, tongueless hope. I lift my voice, an offering to someone on the other side of a door which is to be entered shyly, a room in which I would sit in if only asked:

Who is the third who walks always beside you? When I count, there are only
you and I together But when I look ahead up the white road There is always
another one walking beside you Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded I do
not know whether a man or a woman —But who is that on the other side
of you?

I remember my own other-side walker (was it her or you that walked beside me? Her or you that haunted my steps?) I remember a wet and crumbling face asking me if I ever loved. My silence, the face contended, said "no." A bell tolls. I lift my eyes, looking to the great and desolate city for some sort of consolation. It's silence says "no."

When I arrive at the abandoned square I lie across the hood of my car, thinking. Thinking. Thinking.

Diner

It was 2 a.m. in a diner
And I was eating a steak
That was swimming in a depressing pool of gravy.
The leather seats in my booth
Were cut to shreds by the knives
Of junkies and pathetic hipsters.
The coffee tastes like my own piss
And the pie isn't that great either.
Across the room sits that girl
Wearing the tattered dress and she is
All alone but I am too nervous to
Talk to her. So I try and hide my fear
In the mashed potatoes. I know who she is.
Everyone does. She's that girl who gets so excited
When she says "I love you" and she is also that girl who
Cannot wait to fuck your best friend while you're
Jerking off in the back room. Every night she is here
She cries into her lukewarm red tea.
My waitress sucks. She forgot about me and never came
Back to take away my dirty plates. The tabletop is getting messier. The ketchup flips
Off the sugar and the sautéed onions snickers reading a porno mag.
The jazz on the jukebox is getting old. An old man with a radio had
Right-Wing hate on. I told him to go fuck himself. He did in the bathroom
Later on. We changed the music. It's Springsteen now and we all are dancing
On the messy tabletops slipping every other step. I fall and smack my head
Off the counter. Everyone files out. No one wants to mop up the blood.

A Cold Night in Europe

They still dream about the farms
And the meadows full of ugly daisies.
She remembers the first time that she
Had to butcher a chicken.
They had good soup that night.

He remembers the time during the
Thunderstorm when he caught
Hansel and Gretel fuckin'
In the hay. He chased their bare-assed
Skeletons into the woods.
A couple of weeks later those kids got famous.

What a Magical Kingdom

I am in the bathroom where Mickey Mouse died. Nobody has heard from him in weeks. Daffy thinks that he ran off to Wallawalla with Goofy. I can see his big fat shoes peering from under the stall door. I walked over and push the door and moaned like a dissatisfied lover. There is no mistaking the corpse of Mickey Mouse. The stupid shoes and those queer red shorts. That's him. His left hand is still clenching some cheese, but it has started to rot now. The green cheese sludge has started to seep down his arm. He is just lying there. His mouth slightly agape like he slurred his last words to the toilet seat. Looks like the poor guy died alone. No sign of Goofy. Hell, come to think of it someone told me that he was missing too. Maybe a case of jealous love. Goofy wasn't getting enough secret time with Mickey. Mickey couldn't stop living a lie to Minnie. Or perhaps Minnie found out about the scandalous affair that was hardly a secret. Could be drugs. Shit. I don't know.

I turned away from the mouse's body. This is big news. Could get me a spot on the wire. I approach the sink and turn on the faucet. The water spurts out brown from the rust in the old pipes. Mickey picked one helluva bathroom to die in. Shit, man this is gonna get me famous. What a story to break. Breaking news famed cartoon icon Mickey Mouse has been found dead in a sleezy bathroom. All signs indicate that foul play was involved. The young reporter that broke this story is also claiming that Mickey was having an illicit affair with longtime friend and colleague Goofy. Gonna win me a Pulitzer with that.

While I was having delusions of grandeur I did not notice that someone had entered the bathroom. Only when they spoke and I heard a shrill high voice I realized that I wasn't alone.

"So someone found the bastard," came the voice. I turned around and saw that Minnie had entered. Perhaps this was some sort of professional hit.

"Yeah. Found him there. Not so hard to miss with those big shoes," I huffed. "Only was gonna be a matter of time before someone found the body. I didn't give a flying shit if it was found today or next week. He's dead and I'm a free woman," Minnie said to me. She spoke with a strange confidence. Somewhat happy and yet still sad.

"Did you..." before I could even finish she cut me off.

"Kill him? Yes, I did. I killed him. I poisoned his cheese. I couldn't blow his brains out or strangle him. I don't know anybody good enough to do the killing for me," she confessed. She then took out one of those long cigarettes you see in old movies. She lit it and took a long satisfying drag before she spoke again, "What the hell are you doing down here?"

"I just came down here to piss," I said.

She gazed at me. Stared me up and down like a butcher inspecting a cow before the slaughter. "You gonna turn me in? You're not a cop are you?" she asked.

"No, I'm just a reporter for a paper. I'm not a cop or anything like that," I told her. The newspaper that I write for is more of a rag. We have maybe 500 subscribed readers in a city of over 100,000 citizens. And I'm sure our readership is very high amongst literature hobos.

"You gonna write about what you saw? About what you know happened?" she asked.

"Yeah," was my simple reply. I was gonna write the damn story. This was an incredible find. Not everyday you stumble across a famous corpse.

She finished off her cigarette with a long drag and dropped it on the floor. She smashed it into the cracked tile on the floor. "What about all those kids out there who still believe in Disney magic? You're gonna ruin it for them? They are all sad enough over Mickey's disappearance. Shit, they gonna be pretty sad when they find out that he is dead. But you're gonna really write up what you found his corpse in a crummy bathroom stall? That Mickey was all a lie? Gonna tell them how he punched the shit out of me when he was high on coke? Gonna tell them that he really was sleeping with Goofy? Huh? Whatcha gonna do?" she asked.

"I...don't...know," my words came out slowly. I looked at her for a long time. She stared back. She didn't wait long for me to try and give her another answer. She walked up to me. I could smell the rotten stench of smoke on her breath.

"You're not gonna do anything," she said. I was too dazed from the absurdity of the situation to realize that she had a small blade already in her hand. With a fierce and silent lunge she dug the blade into my abdomen. I collapsed in sudden pain clenching the wound trying to stop the steady flow of blood.

"Should've just stabbed the bastard myself," I heard her mutter as she left the bathroom. I felt like the wound was not too bad, but it was bleeding fast. I needed to stop the blood flow. I managed to tear off my left sleeve and use it as a tourniquet. I slowly rose and started to pursue Minnie.

She must move fast. There was no sight of her in the hallway. I ran towards the exit of the building dripping blood. The hallway was long and was full of decay. Paint falling off the walls like dead skin. And countless puddles that formed as a

result of the weeping ceiling. The dim red glow of the EXIT sign welcomed me as I crossed under it and walked out the door. She was gone.

"You just missed her," said a childlike voice. I turned and I saw two effeminate looking fellas. One had a red nose like the reindeer. The other's was black.

"Where did she go?" I asked them.

"Hopped in a getaway car. Went north on Washington," said the one with the red nose. "I'm Dale by the way," he said extending his hand. I took it cautiously and shook.

"And I'm Chip," said the other.

"Did you two just happen to be outside of this building?" I asked them.

"No," said Chip. "We've been following her for a few days now. We know what she's been up to."

"And we don't like it," affirmed Dale. "We're gonna help you go after her."

"Fine," I said reluctantly at the thought of having two overgrown chipmunks hang out with me. "But first we need to get me to a hospital."

We managed to call a cab to take us to St. Mary's hospital. As we sat I realized that this potential Pulitzer Prize winning story had a lot more to it. The little rag that I write for was going to have a big press day. As I lean my head against the cab's window I start to daydream about fame.

Runnel

Jacob is running,
Running like a parable cloth in a washing machine.
Warm water,
Plucking and puking each inkletter,
Scatteringly,
Like a man's stumbled footprints
Through the muddy tunnel – Jacob,
A lonelylost capon,
Awaiting and evading his end.

Jacob is running,
Running through the tunnel,
Embracing the darkness,
Like a monk extinguishing the monastery's final candle.
But Jacob must run,
His only prayer after his left foot
Catches a protruding root
and his hands are forced to the rocks,
Smacking each other as he hits the ground.

Why is Jacob running?
Is he escaping failed love?
Was he the sicko that murdered
poor little Clarence
in the church basement on Tiraname Street?

No

We all know why Jacob runs,
Runs through the tunnel until the end,
So everyone follows,
To catch him and love him
and thank him forever
For bringing us in.

Victims of the Mind - Cyril Tomkin

It begins with a platter of cheese ravioli sprinkled with bacon bits and grilled chicken. Cyril Tomkin stares down in allurement at his favorite dish, his birthday dinner. All patients at the Mittelos Home for the Mentally Disabled are guaranteed one custom dish of their choosing on each birthday. Cyril's 23rd birthday, like his previous three birthdays, is just another lonely day in the group home. Cyril has suffered from schizoaffective disorder since birth, his condition becoming critical at age 19. As he cuts into the final ravioli, a mental replay of his past years penetrates his mind: the dreams of success, the family that had loved him, all gone, vanished from his life like the final flow of smoke from the last speck of ricotta.

When Cyril reached age 18, he began seeing recurring hallucinations of a nuclear bomb detonating outside his window. The hallucinations became more realistic and occurred more frequently as the days passed until Cyril's visions reached the point where he would watch the skin being torn from his entire body, like the entire skin of an apple stripped in one swift yank, feeling as if every inch of his body was aflame. After ten grueling seconds, the delusions would cease, but the memory of the pain and fear would be forever encased in Cyril's mind. Nearly every night, Cyril would have nightmares of the same horrible experience, but more prolonged and intense. Cyril's hallucinations began to affect his school work, family life, and social life. During an examination at university, Cyril's delusions began acting out, and he had actually grabbed a female student who was innocently filling in circles with a short wooden pencil and ran towards the door shouting, "We have to get out! Run!" Unaware of Cyril's condition, the other students perceived his rescue attempt as a carefully timed comedy routine and the young, able-bodied professor commanded the bewildered female student to her seat immediately before pressing Cyril to the ground as if Cyril had just stolen his gym membership card. Cyril was forced to withdraw from the university and retire his dream of becoming a noteworthy journalist. Following the unintentional embarrassment of himself to his university, Cyril sank into a crippling depression. His parents, however, swore to always support him, no matter what.

Conversation between Cyril and his parents would often persist for five to six hours each day. His mother and father became his best friends. Heroic doses of anti-psychotics were prescribed to Cyril and caused great amelioration in Cyril's life. The hallucinations occurred less frequently and were not nearly as terrifying. He revisited old friends and was able to laugh and have fun once again. For the first time in his life, he even met a girl that he could actually speak to and care for. Cyril applied and was accepted to a community college and realized that his dream can live once again.

During the summer before his 19th birthday, Cyril and his family vacationed to the Gulf Coast of Florida for a week. Cyril had passed his first semester at college with flying colors and his delusions would appear rarely, if at all; however, the night before the Tomkins were to return home from Florida, Cyril's condition had

taken an extreme turn for the worse. He hallucinated an explosion directly outside his window, greater than any he had ever seen. It was he had been plucked from his tranquil motel bedroom and plopped into 1945 Hiroshima. Somehow, without a sound, Cyril was able to drag his entire family into his father's van before hightailing it down the highway.

One hour later, his delusions remained active, as he maintained a resolute belief that a nuclear explosion had indeed gone off and his family needed to be spared. His mother awoke and shrieked in shock as she saw her two young daughters laying side-by-side, adjacent to her husband, with Cyril in the driver's seat. Knowing her son was most likely experiencing a hallucination, she placed a trembling left hand on Cyril's shoulder, attempting to calm him and stop the car. As if it were the vigorous hand of a certain ex-professor, Cyril brushed his mother's concerned hand from his shoulder and screamed, "We need to get away!" Cyril's father had been awakened by the shouting, and was pleaded by his wife to stop the car at all costs. The father dove over Cyril's lap, shoving the brake to the floor with his right hand. The car halted like a rolling tomato before a collapsed man in a cheese costume.

Everyone quickly exited the car, except for Cyril and his father. His father used all of his strength to push Cyril down into the driver's seat. His mother and sisters were sitting beside the car, sobbing, hoping for an end to this nightmare. Little did they know, this was no mere nightmare, but the nightmares of 100 dream catchers wrung out simultaneously by 100 evil somnific overlords. Resisting, Cyril slammed the left side of his father's head against the driver side window. "Why are you trying to stop me! We have to get away from the blast," Cyril shouted. He had been pushing his father so hard that the van started to tip. Cyril's mother, consoling his sisters, failed to notice the van's precarious swaying. Eventually, Cyril slammed his father so hard against the door that the jeep tipped. His mother and sisters were crushed and killed instantly.

Blood poured from Cyril's father's head like a river through a cheese grater, even after he had perished. Cyril finally broke from his delusional state and realized what he had caused. He phoned the police in hope that they could save his family. A helicopter quickly located him and landed on the office building nearby. He described the situation to the police officer – that he had been delusional and tipped the jeep. A medical doctor confirmed that the mother, father, and two sisters had all been killed. Cyril put his face to the pavement and cried incessantly, refusing to halt his tears even while being handcuffed and dragged to the mental institution. A strait jacket was strapped to him and he was thrown into a padded room after being injected with a sedative and anti-psychotic. Welcome home, Cyril.

To Be Continued...

Make Some Sense

Parodies on petri dishes
Packed away, a genie's wishes
Over speed and over time
Save a nickel, Save a mime.

Socket wrenches breaking Tenses
Take an oath on false pretences
Lie to you and lie to me
Take hostage truth, then who are we?

While these words may not make sense
Everyone has their defense
Why can't my words just go free?
And flow away through you into me.

Fly a bird can fly a plane
Inky spatter, liver train
Empty cans and open cups
Save the story, rip it up.

A Stain of Myrrh

Her fingers felt wet and strange passing over the stiff rice and slimy chicken in the community bowl that everyone shared in front of her. Her hand was burning as the hot fare seethed into her palm until she quickly propelled the food into her waiting mouth. Her knees began to ache as they bore the weight of her body pressing in on them in an Indian style position on the floor. And her ears filled with sounds of Arabic being flung around the room like exhaled hiccups aimed at no one in particular. She was a foreigner in her own living room. She thought about using her standard, "Guys, English Please!" interrupt, but today she simply relished the sounds and movements around her, treating it like dinner music, sounds that she could play her own thoughts and eat her own corner portion of the dinner bowl to.

"Eat, C'mon!" begged one of the coffee-colored, western-dressed Arabs as he motioned with his hand toward her still tall heap of rice. She ate her portion at a snail's pace compared to the rest of the circle of diners, all male, all typically famished despite lunch only hours ago. "What kind of meat is this exactly?" she wondered aloud. Her question brought about the group's common debate over meat types. "Sheep," one piped. "No, lamb!" another said. "Goat," another corrected. All debatable depending on what word was being tied to what imagery and what Arabic tied to what English, the common and confusing plight for all involved. No matter, she thought, and used her right hand to skillfully fork a bite-sized chunk of meat, freshly ripped from the small rib cage in the center of the platter, placed lovingly on top of her rice pile by the sweet smelling Arab next to her. "Shokrun," she said. "English, Please!" he jokingly and sarcastically responded. "Ok, thank you" she agreed with a flirty tease.

The taste of the rice with meat leaked flavor, flavors that were once unfamiliar to her. Cumin, Cardamom, Baharat, and Aniseed. Once only names she found in her bible or in passing as she perused recipes. Little did she know that the spice trade in ancient Arabia was only a minor part reflected in the food on her pallet at present. Little did she know that as far as is East truly is from West, somehow at that moment in her life, that moment on the floor in front of a Bedouin meal, those spheres connected. Like electricity finding its circular path and finally igniting, there was a spark of something spectacular happening. And then his left hand touched her back, "Are you done?" "Yes, it was latheeth (delicious), darling, thank you," she said. "C'mon," he said as they both stretched one leg at a time in an attempt to lift themselves out of the chair-styled sitting position they had pretzeled themselves into, leaving the others to ravage the remains of food.

Standing there with him at the kitchen sink, she watched the parcels of rice and sauce-colored water wash off their hands and then slip down the porcelain drain. Her hands competed with his for the slim stream of warm water while bump-

ing them into the pile of dirty pots and then bumping into his. Whether it was the first time or not she didn't know, but suddenly the contrast of their skin color was vibrant. Her cream colored hands with pink undertones, bluish veins and red nails against his cinnamon colored skin, darkened cuticles and smooth black hair creeping down from above knuckles and edging up from his wrist. His hands looked baked by a desert sun, while hers seemed softened by a culture full of wax and fat. She could see thousands of years behind them there at the sink, yet here they were, bloodlines ending up together in a place not so likely.

After she dried her hands, she made her way up the stairs that led to her bedroom, feeling contentedly full and surprisingly sleepy. It was a hot summer evening, one where the open windows blew their curtains inside and upward, leaving the bedroom looking a bit like a commercial for cologne. Along with the curtains came the sounds from the outside evening; the whir of cars with an occasional rev, random streetwalkers chattering their voices to a mumble, and a distant bird somewhere attempting to put a soundtrack to the night. She settled down on her bed that had remained disheveled since morning and she laid her head on a beckoning pillow. With a deep breath and her eyes approaching a close, she heard the television in the corner flick on and soon felt a strong hand caress her thigh. "Uhebbek" he told her. "I love you, too," she whispered back. And his hand began to reach toward places on her body that he knew well. In the background, the television droned the voice of monotonous newscasters.

As his lips touched her neck, the quiet of the room supplied the cackle of the television an opportunity for resonance. "At least 15 people died and more than 40 were wounded Tuesday night when a suicide bomber targeted a group of demonstrators..." Slowly, her hand passed over his chest to feel the warmth of his being and the softness of his hair, her cheek pressed against his. "A resolution calling on the President to announce an exit strategy from Iraq was introduced Thursday..." He let his fingers slide over her belly where the indent lay between breast and hip, and he locked his leg with hers. "The city has remained on orange alert since the color-coded warning system was established in the wake of the terrorist attacks..." Then she pressed in against him to feel his strength in the softest of ways and he pressed right back into her. "In a rally against America today, many of the citizens held banners reading 'Death to America'..." And she sighed a low sigh of happiness, and he whispered a word of love, "You are my life." "And you are mine," she replied. "According to one of the suicide bombers' family member, he did it for God, for Jihad..."

Afterward, though his eyelids pulled ever downward, his nicotine appetite pulled more heavily still. He moved slowly out of bed and lagged out of the room to satisfy his nag, and she remained there watching the curtains billow in and flow out. Her thoughts churned about in her head thinking on all things current until the process weaved its way around to the previous day. She thought about the animated facial flinch a co-worker gave her in response to the fact that the love of her life was

not only Middle Eastern, but also Muslim. How amusing, she thought, if only she could get a snapshot of people's immediate reactions and then create an album. She'd call it, "America on Arabia." She'd need another entirely different photo album for the Christians' responses (those from her old church). That one would be entitled "Christians on Muslims." No narrative words, just pictures - that would be enough. She thought about the Mrs. Bin Laden jokes and the hurtful judgments to hell. Her mind lay twisted in that bed as it had been for a long time now.

At times, the thoughts of possibilities that harried her were too endless to count, possibilities that discovered an intricate, sometimes fatal end. Will she exit her life in a foreign land? If so, will they chide him for marrying beneath himself? Will her three fatal flaws be found out: Christian, Female, and woe, American? Will they.....and then he returned, and like a sensor light in opposite, the what ifs shut off. Her mind regained its unity and her vision focused on a figure, a dark man in a dark room, color undefined. His form was like her form, his bones liker hers, all in the same places attached through the same joint structure. In that light, she saw no difference between the shadow of a dark man from the desert or a light man from the plains. In that light, he too saw no difference between a woman shed of an Abaya cloak for him alone or a Western woman bare-skinned, unashamed to be seen in the light of day.

As he crawled back under her warm sheet, his skin greeted hers. She let her fingertips lightly and widely brush his back, from the top of his shoulder to the small of his spine, keeping in time with the rhythmic sweep of her arm. Up and down, swaying to the beat of curtains until her fingers met friction, slowing their easy glide; something sticky, almost wet and cool on his skin, a residue now reassuringly familiar. It was the oil of myrrh and the gel of aloe that he faithfully applied to his skin after washing and before bed. If she checked, it would be under his arms too. Often times, this residue lingered on pillows and bed sheets leaving the sweetest of smells and fondest of nighttime memories. How aromatic they are, she thought. Bringing with them the scents from the south Arabian ancient spice trade, scents that have lasted centuries.

A simple scent. It can stir up anything from a memory to stomach flu. It can leave a stain on the mind, the heart, even on a cloth, like the mystical Shroud of Turin. That Shroud, covered in similar oils, bled a facial print of a man they thought was Jesus. She wondered how different Myrrh would smell if mixed with blood or another man's sweat. She wondered if those Iraqi mothers she spoke to on the phone now had that very scent stained on their own hearts. Would her face also leave a stain? A stain on an Abaya cloak, a stain on his heart, a stain on the nations at sword, and a stain on a memory. Her face was buried in his neck where it was warm, where his breath was loud. This, she decided, was where she belonged.

Indian Food Festival

My hand is asleep- from the way I've been positioned on my stomach, my arms curled back like a rock-dwelling salamander, feline. My hand is asleep and on top of my skin there are garments, garments of fine fabric and vibrant color. I am bejeweled, feeding the people for free from a stand in the sand. To my left is a shirtless man in a suit of skin, flaunting his hanging, drooping, slanting, sloping beer belly. I wiggle my fingers awake. Fingertips become footprints from a four-footed beast, a roaming quadruped, and as a buffalo, my hand makes for the first layer of linen. As a buffalo, my hand stomps with resounding clip-clops across my bed sheets and without wings, flies through the tousles of the scalp's forest.

The shirtless man is startled awake, clapping a meatless hand to his lips as a guttural sound rises, escaping with a wind. His teeth recoil, caught in a twister, a tornado of dumpster diving swan necks, early morning cat piss, homeless beggar blankets. I laugh and stare at the backs of my eyelids. The sun seeps through. I feel it on my retinas, the cornucopia.

"It's a celebration of sorts," he says. "It's been preserved in tin foil."

"Should I stand in the mirror to be judged," I ask.

"Please," he responds.

"But I'm not wearing a bra. I haven't shaved my armpits."

"We don't judge with eyes. We have none."

"With tongues?"

"We have none."

I cannot bring myself to look into the mirror. Daisies begin to sprout from the backyard and grow into a world-darkening canopy. Lilies stretch themselves across my lap, tickling me with their pistils and stamens, prodding me with pollen. I strap my flannel to my back; a Wal-Mart purchased parachute pack, and cocoon myself deeper into hell's web.

"I'm sorry but I'm not ready for enlightenment yet."

Fall Again

Backyard, dry as a bone, a dried out bone, a bone that hasn't been in a body for a while, just sitting in the sun. White as a bone, a bone that has been lying in the sun for a while. I am on the steps, a set of three, a group covered in sediment from a windy city that is especially windy in the spring, I hear. No more weeds. I picked them by hand, next to fans, using a rake, a hand rake. Backyard littered with sticks. Sticks as brittle as china, a grandmother's china and although you have complained about white picket fences, I have one. I have a white picket fence surrounding the limits of my bare backyard.

Over the fence I can see the sky, the sky that harvests planes and clouds. I could get lost in them, looking up and never noticing the vines frowning upon the

yard of a neighbor. Concrete slabs stab into the ground and underneath them worms delve deeper and deeper into mother earth.

I could sink into you tonight. I could boil and bubble, overflowing with the salt and onion.

God's good earth couldn't stop the flies from flocking to my glowing screen. Even if I had a smoke bomb you would still press your palms to my breasts and give me compliments.

Even in the city I am impressed where nature grows. Milk weeds, leaves as big as my body, canopy themselves overhead and from the bricks of your house, little; lonely leaves sprout from a crusty windowsill.

It is fall again. It is fall again. It is fall again.

Freckled Shoulders

You like what you like and I like what I
like and that's not a problem for me
because everyone has their own opinions
and stuff so I guess we shouldn't argue about it.

This morning after a night of no sleep,
we pushed the blankets from a friend's bed
and put our clothes back on.

It's not that we get each other going.
It's that we lay around and feel one another,
squeezing waists and gently touching lips
to freckled shoulders and I have never
slept with you.

You claim that you don't like the sun because
you're afraid of its burn but during a walk
you unbuttoned your shirt and told me stories
about laying half dollars on train tracks.

I lowered my voice to tell you about
bloody noses and tripping on railroad spikes,
pointing out a sun-dried animal spine in our path
and you smiled at me with glasses on for the first time.

We took off our shoes, walking
on softened grass and pine needle dirt,
wading in the water, and neither
of us jumped in but I got my jumper wet

And my legs wet, and you weren't wearing pants
while you let the water reach your thighs,
but I want to let you know that if you had asked,

I would have untied my hair, and soaked my clothes,
and let the water run over my body like stone.

Sunrise

It's the twelfth of July and even though
I was supposed to have my phone bill paid
on the ninth I haven't paid it.

This morning you rolled into town speaking of delirium
and your inability to speak and how you were seconds
away from losing power
and I asked you to spend some time with me.

Maybe you're too tall for me
and you have to bend down when we kiss
and I have to stand on the tips of my toes to tickle
your beard and gaze into your icy blue eyes

but it feels good

To kiss and win staring contests.
Your hands are bigger than mine,
your arms are bigger than mine,
and your stomach is ticklish in places where mine is not

but it still feels good

To get close to you and this morning we walked
through spider webs toward night fishermen
with glowing lanterns.

I guess you should know that you're the only person
who has ever watched the sunrise with me
and I don't know if you have done this often with
that German woman, but I am young and vulnerable
and it's exciting to love a man with longer hair than mine

post card

Greetings from the place of eternal light and no sun.
It was been a lovely trip, but I look forward to home.
There are so many things I miss, like your cooking.
The white aprons are not to mean this time, they think
I do not realize why I have come to these lands.
I miss you

-Love D.

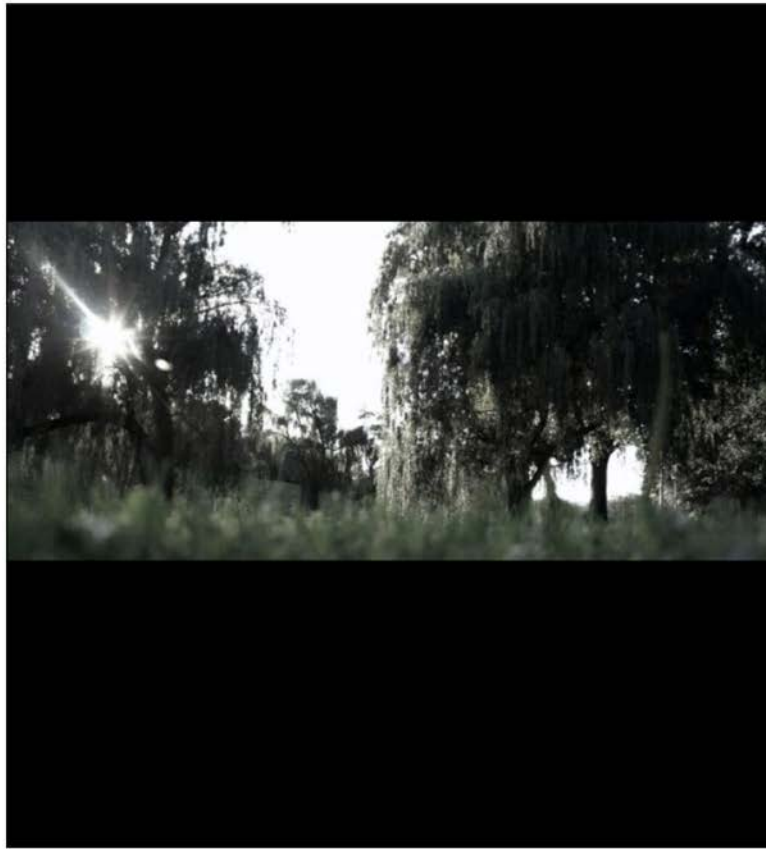


ART PACKET



Shadow Voyeur
by Sabrina Hannon

A



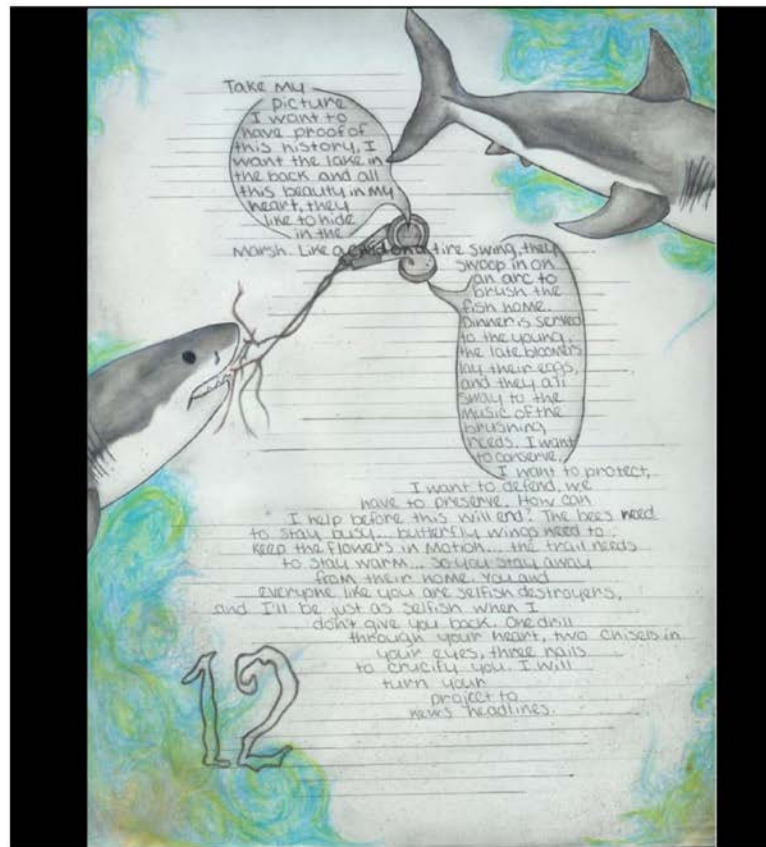
Ghostly Willow
by Sabrina Hannon

B



Apocalypse
by Jessica Coar

C



Sleeping with Fishes, See?

By Samantha Kerpovich

D



Trap
By Samantha Kerpovich

E

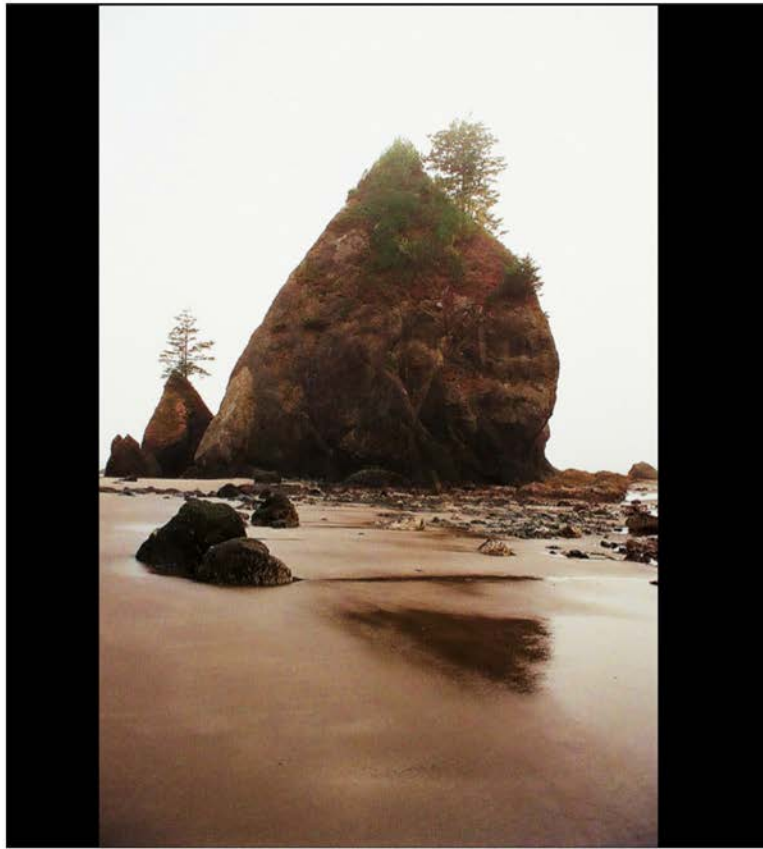


Shi Shi Beach Cove:

This is what James and I first encountered upon our 250 ft descent onto the beach. It was a first glimpse of the jagged coast we were about to encounter. Our campsite overlooked these sea stacks.

By James Rosato and Sara Wolman

F

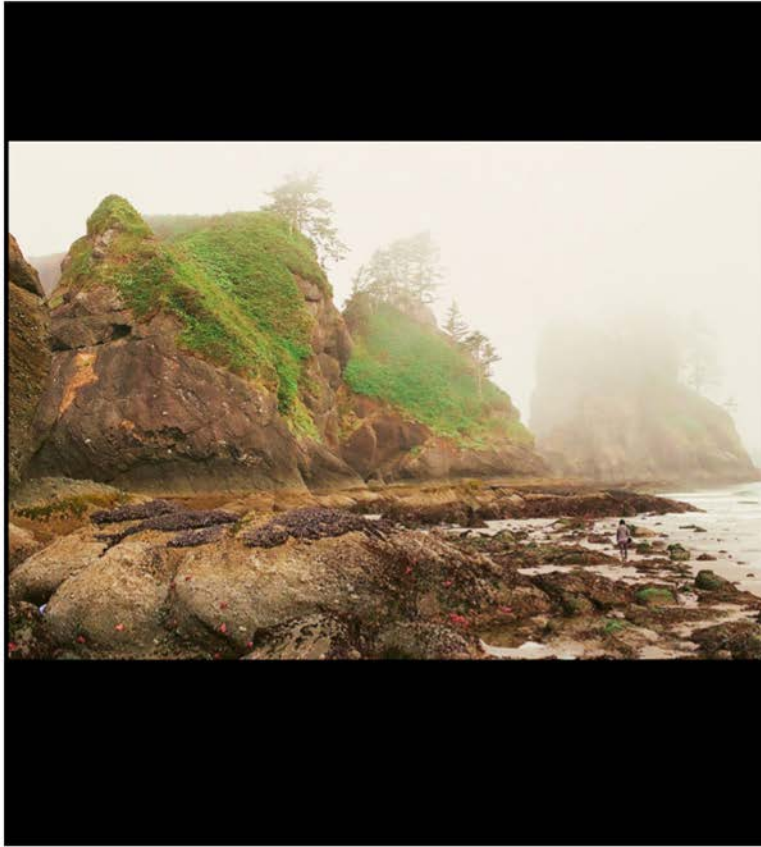


Shi Shi Rock Reflection:

The next morning at 6am we witnessed a "minus tide" where James and I were able to walk far out among the Sea Stacks that are usually unapproachable due to the sea and strong tides. This was one of the more interesting sea stacks we came upon. WE found it fascinating at the ability of foliage to be able to grow purely on rock.

By James Rosato and Sara Wolman

G

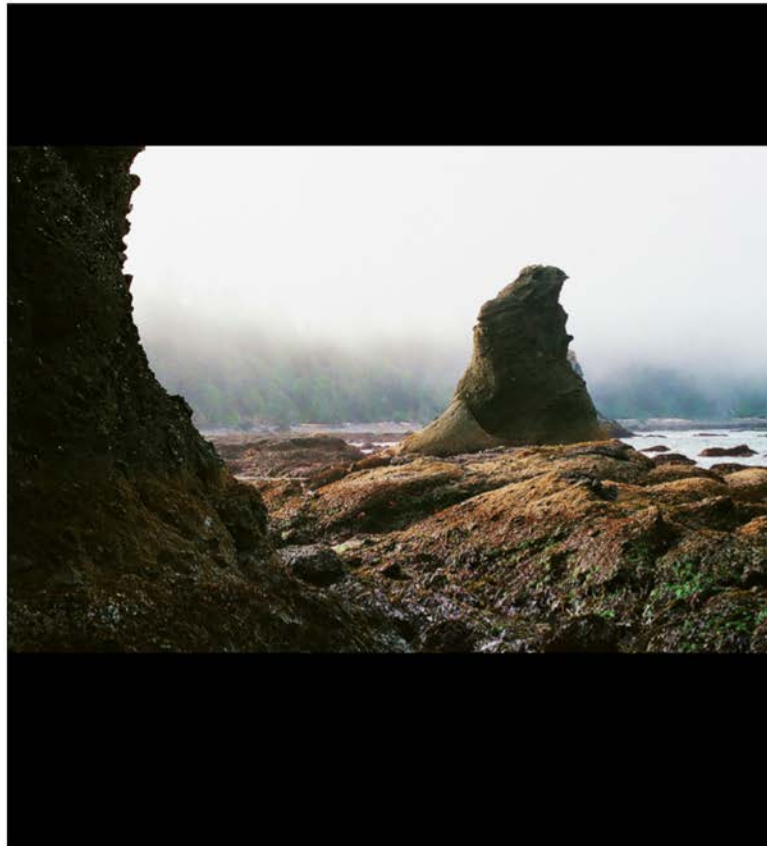


Walking Through Point of Arches:

Point of Arches is the main land mass of sea stacks and caves that James and I explored during the minus tide. The massive size of the rocks is shown with me walking by the shore as perspective. All around us was wildlife from colorful star fish to bald eagles.

By James Rosato and Sara Wolman

H

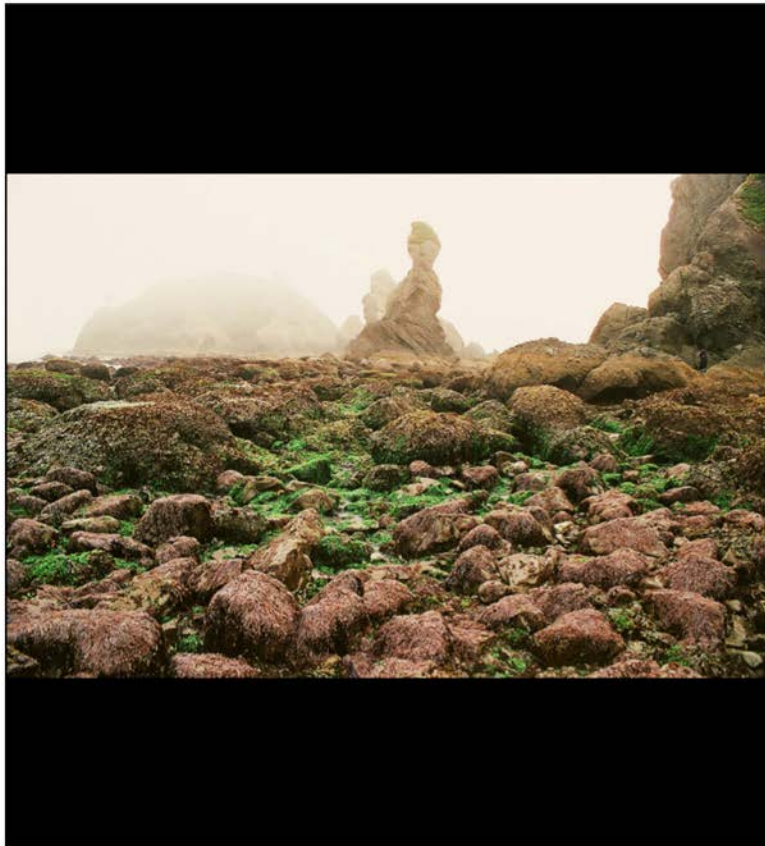


Impassable Coast:

This photo shows the other side of Point of Arches with jagged wild sea stacks constantly getting struck by powerful waves. The map labeled this part of the coast as "impassable headland" as it is too dangerous to hike through.

By James Rosato and Sara Wolman

I

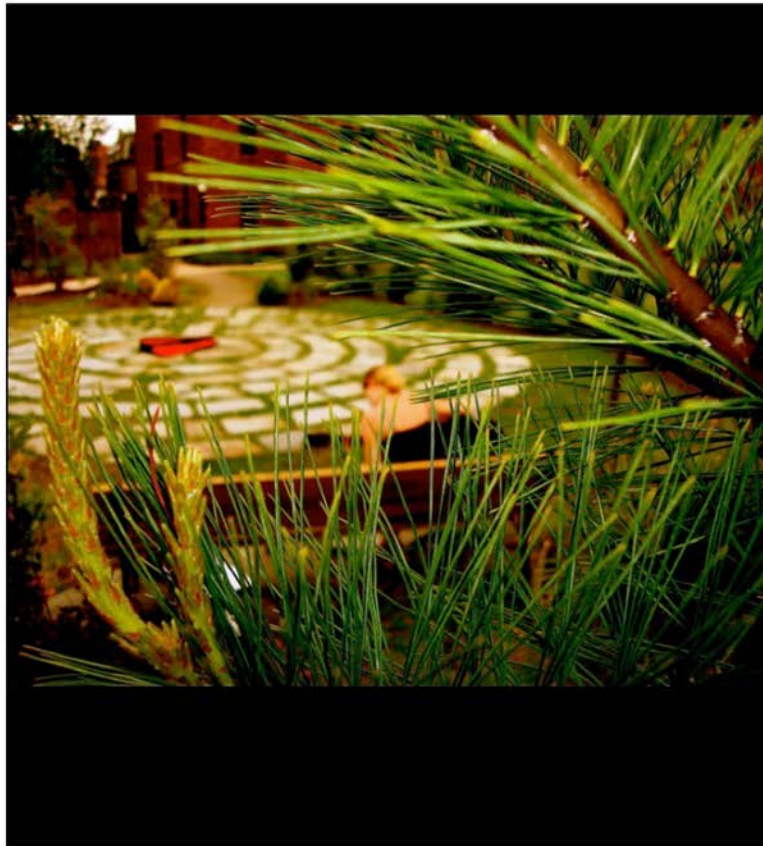


Ocean or Mars?:

This surreal picture was taken on the other side of Point of Arches where tons of tide pools surrounded us. The setting and colors made it seem otherworldly amidst the ocean.

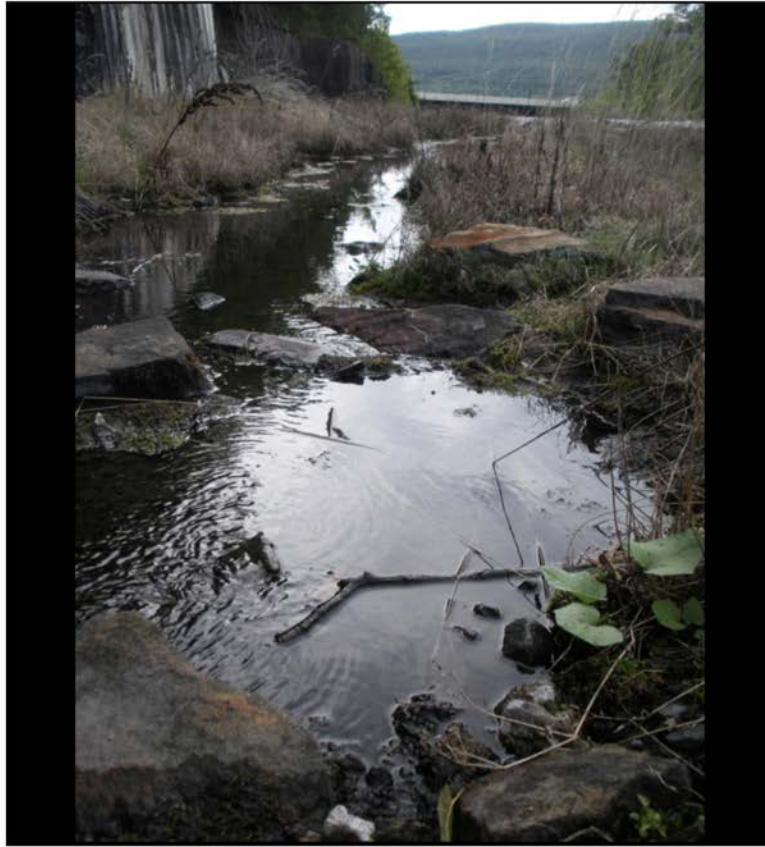
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J



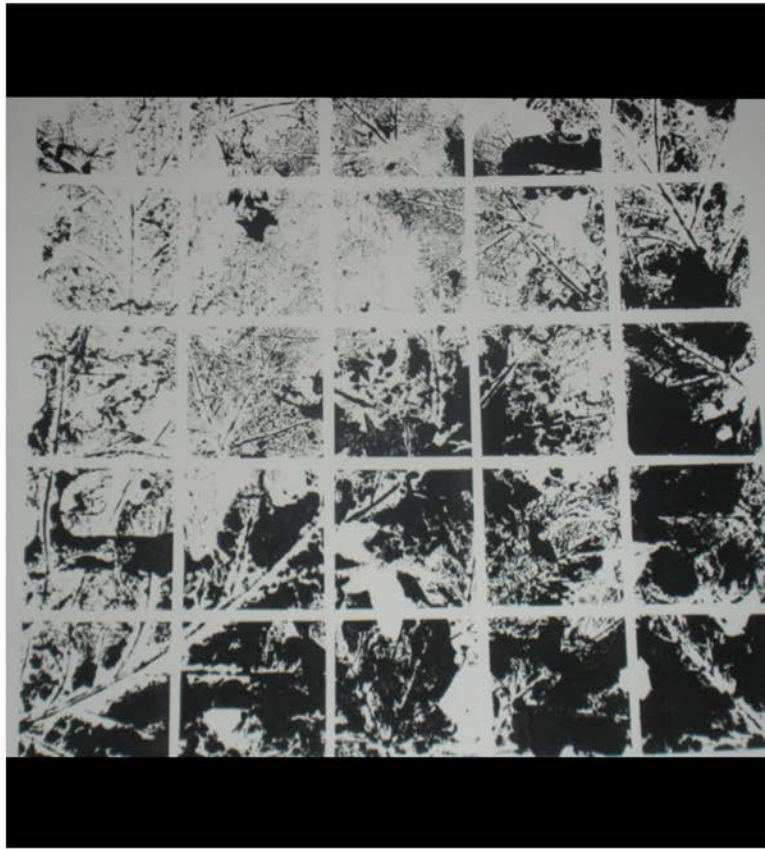
Red Labyrinth
by Austin Loukas

K



Looks Like A River
by Sonja Heisey

L



Autumn
by Justin Jones

M



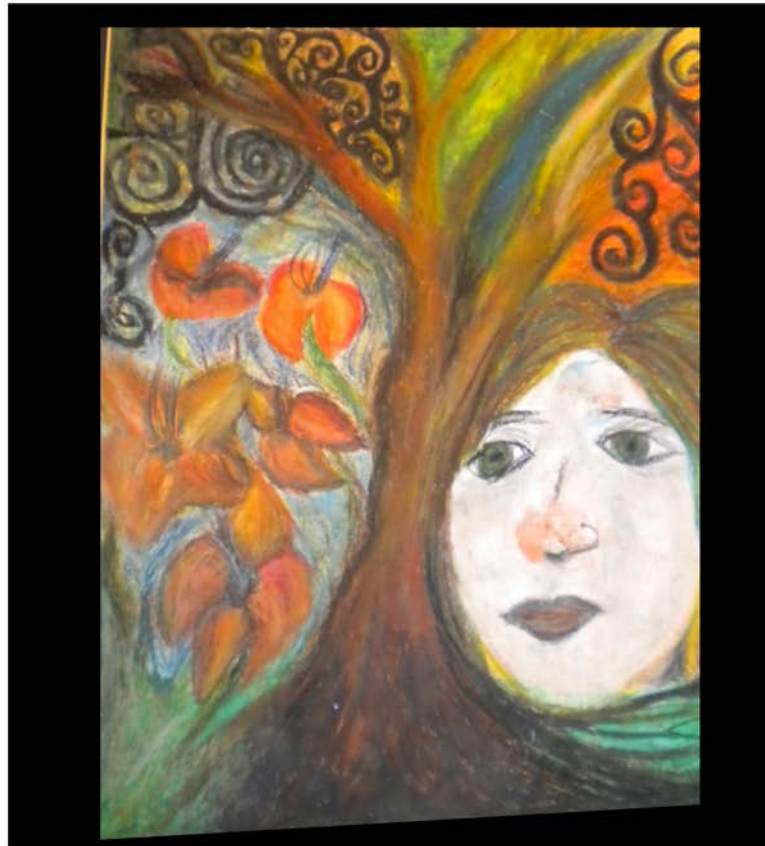
Chaos
by Justin Jones

N



Hooded-Child
by Justin Jones

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Phantasmagoria
by Rebecca Wahlers

P

