



The Rubicon

Troy University Department of English
Student Literary Journal: Issue 5, Fall 2011

The Rubicon

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Caleb Humphreys, editor-in-chief. Candace Turlington and Nathaniel Westfall, editorial staff. Dr. Ben Robertson, faculty advisor. Wendy Broyles, publication support. If you have any questions or need any assistance, please contact the editorial staff at litjournal@troy.edu.

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1

Poetry

Longing From Dover

by Eric Stokes

The soulful sky,
Drifts over the deep, wizened sea
On the shore, looking out, is me.

The roar of the waves,
Crashing on the surrounding white rock
My thoughts, seem to boldly mock.

The images in my mind,
Swiftly play through our history
Still – you remain a mystery.

The memory of you,
A black-cloaked figure steeped in shadow
Waves its hand, dismissing the thoughts we both know will follow.

My eyes close,
Blocking out the beauty before my sight
Leaving only the smell of the sweet salt air and the memory of you for light.

My thoughts rewind,
Showing scenes that I have viewed before
Your smile, shining like that of the Helen of lore.

My eyes flutter open,
And in the blue-white head of a wave
I see your eyes gazing back at me.

The wave crashes back into the sea,
I snap out of my trance
And watch the shadows of the clouds-over the full moon dance.

My mind comes back 'round to the truth,
I know somewhere beyond this vast expanse you lie
Looking at the same moon that now pierces my eye.

Another truth surfaces,
While I stand here-dreaming of you
I can only hope that you are dreaming of me too.

A mast arises,
I become lost from sight through the haze
Still all that comes to mind is that phase-
That phase that consumes all rational thought
And has foiled many a brilliant plot.

The horizon brightens,
The sky turns that color your cheeks do when you're embarrassed
I find myself in a brand new day.
Still dreaming, thinking, wishing for you,
The one who makes even the white cliffs of Dover seem hideous,
And a new sunrise only a candle in the wind.

Love Letter

by Ashley Johnson

Bed rocks,
Lamp shakes,
Wall thuds,
Screaming at the top of your lungs,
Like there's no tomorrow,
Only there isn't,
Because once I'm done with you there'll only be sorrow.

But it's all your fault
No one told you to make me mad,
I thought you would've known better
Since you,
Ran into the wall last week,
And busted your lip open;
Or fell down those stairs in January,
And broke your arm.
I guess not,
So I guess I'll handle you myself
And dare you to tell a soul
What happens with us is to be kept in our home
Because no one will believe you,
And if they do,
I'll only beat you more.
Baby girl I love you,
That's the only reason why.

You know that saying 'pain is pleasure'
Well baby you're orgasmic
Because pain is all you see
I'm grooming you into my perfect lady
Strong but still weak to my touch,
I own you so you'll never leave
And if you try
Everyone around you will wonder 'what if'
You had a second chance
To do it all over again,
because you won't be here anymore.
Love you baby girl.

Styx

by Nathaniel Westfall

All but solitude is gone –
Drifting on the River,
Where the deed is fin'ly done –
Home of the Forgiver.
Sweet impassioned, joyful life
was at one time mine.
No regrets or even strife
Looking back I find.
My debt by life is in full paid –
The boatman will deliver
Me to where I shall be laid –
Lying by the River.
The land is dark that once was bright;
My resting place is near.
Mem'ries fade as the sight
Of the banks appear.
As I step from boat to shore,
The land gives me a shiver,
For now I wander Nevermore
To rest beside the River.

-

an untitled poem by Sara Freeman, in memory of her sister, Kristen Lee Osborne

My tears can't bring you back, and my broken heart won't heal.
That day replays inside my head, and it still doesn't seem real.
To me you seemed invincible. Now, I know that wasn't true.
It's the kind of situation that would never happen to you.
I'd give up everything I own to hold you in my arms.
To hear your voice, to smell your hair, to laugh with you once more.
I need you more than ever; now, this void is here to stay.
Your memory lives inside my heart but it's nowhere near the same.
If I had known that day would be my last to see your face,
Could I have saved you from your death,
Could I have changed your fate?

When They Fall

by Mark W. Phelan

They change, like the summer rain into winter chill.
From green to red then yellow, never so still.
They all band together, like birds of a flock.
Conducting their orchestra, like feathers they drop.

But not just dropping, it is more of a dance.
The way they sway and spin to the music they chant.
As they glide through the air, absent from sound.
Coming closer, falling faster, and then hitting the ground.

They don't stop there, not just with a tap.
Their sounds continue with a rustle and crack.
Every rustle is an awe for the flight being made,
Every crack is a clap for the song being played.

They roll and slide into piles around.
Looking up at their friends playing their sound.
The orchestra will play until the season is done.
Then the snowy curtains will close ending the fun.

2

Prose

Cogito Ergo Sum

by Nathaniel Westfall

As I sit in the black ichor of creation, my mind wanders, ever more since my sight has been robbed by the flowing blackness. I think of the music I hear from the idiot playing its blind notes – how its randomness begets the spontaneity of the universe. I think to how it came to this, but nothing can be remembered.

With my only view being the inky void and my only sound being the terrifying flute, I sometimes question my existence. I have not eaten. I have not drunk. My existence, then, is through my thought, my dim sight, and my dim hearing.

What of touch? I suddenly realize that I am sitting cross-legged, rocking forwards and back, with an object in my hands. I clumsily move my fingers. It is a long slim tube made of bone, with holes on either side and at either end.

A terrible realization creeps into my being – I am the player, the chaos, the blind idiot whose music creates the random happenings in the universe. I try to throw away my curse, but I cannot. My fingers continue to play. I know now that the blackness I see is my blindness caused by the shroud of eternity. The terrible music is my child – chaos.

I know who I am.

I am...Hey! What was that strange feeling? And where is that awful music coming from?

Garden of the Gods

by Bryan Koyle

I was nine years old when my best friend's older brother died. He fell from these cliffs just outside of town known as the Garden of the Gods. The Indians who originally lived in the area and thought of this as a holy place believed that the Gods lived there, because the rocks were so massive, and they were often shaped in odd ways. There were thrones for them to sit in, horses for them to ride on, and tables for them to eat at. I remember seeing them for the first time, after hearing everyone call them red. I was expecting a Coke can red, but it was really more of an orange color, sort of like the burnt orange in my crown box. Everything was this shade of red, the rocks, the sand, the sun, the buildings. The Indians would bury their dead in the Garden. I guess it's fitting that he died there then. The Colorado River ran through it, and when he fell, the river washed him away. The current pulled him downstream, and our lives flooded the headlines. He was only sixteen years old and had gone rock climbing with his friends. He wasn't even climbing when he fell though. He was watching his friend climb, walked backwards to see how high they had climbed, and stepped right off the side of the trail. I remember the police coming to our school and taking my friend out of the class. One of the officers came back in to the room after a minute and took my teacher off to the side. She called me over and said my friend had asked for me to go to his house with him. I didn't want to, I said. I wasn't supposed to ride with strangers, and even if he was a cop, I didn't know him. She took me out of the class and told me what had happened. I still didn't want to go, but she said that I needed to be there for my friend, and that she would call my mom and tell her where I was, and that I should go with the policeman. So I went. My friend was already in the cop car, crying his eyes out. When he saw me coming, he tried to wipe his eyes off, but it didn't matter. The cop opened the door and let me in. I hugged him, he said he was scared, and we both bawled. Neither of us had experienced a loss like this before. Our grandparents were alive and well, our parents were happily married, we hadn't even had a dog run away. The second cop sat in the backseat with us and said some stuff, but neither of us was listening. I think he was trying to distract us, asked us whether we played video games or something like that, but we didn't talk back to him. He was still a stranger, and we weren't allowed to talk to strangers. My friend only lived about two blocks away from the school, so it was a short drive. When we got to his house, his mom and dad were outside. My friend ran to his parents and asked if this was pretend. They just hugged him. I sat in the car, unsure of what to do. But before they even stopped hugging, his mom called me over, and I joined them. We stood there together, hugging and crying, wishing this would go away. After maybe ten minutes, a news van showed up. It started extending the big satellite dish it had on the roof when the cop that sat in the back seat with us ran over there. The satellite quickly dropped, and the van drove away. This happened with two other vans before my mom showed up. By this time, we had gone into the house, into the brother's room, and were sitting there in silence. She came in and sat there in silence with us. After maybe thirty minutes she grabbed my hand, and we left. That night, my friend's family parked their car in the garage, and listened to the lullaby of carbon monoxide.

She'll Never Know

by Candace Turlington

It started some time last semester.

One day I realized I was paying more attention to the emphasis in her arms and hands than the words she was saying. It wasn't long before fifty minutes every other day was no longer enough. I found myself wanting to spend more and more time in her presence, even if we weren't actually interacting. I just wanted to watch her.

This semester it's worse; alarmingly so. I'm taking a superfluous class just to see her, and I signed up for another one next semester for the same reason. I try to find reasons to walk by her office, praying that the door will be open and she will be casually sitting behind her desk. I feel like a silly little schoolgirl for constantly bothering her with my questions, but, honest to God, I can't help it.

The other day I did something that frightened me.

She was sitting alone in the courtyard, smoking and texting. I stopped just out of her sight and lingered for a few moments to watch her. I pined over the way she lifted the cigarette to her lips, wishing it were me instead, or that she'd let her fingers play all over me the way they did her iPhone. I watched the wind tangle her hair, and longed to brush it for her.

I wish there were a way for me to tell her these things. Some small part of me knows it's inappropriate; the same part that wants to make these feelings go away. But how? How do you stop longing to hold someone? How do you stop sitting as close as possible to them just so you can smell them? How do you stop trying to impress them with your less than stellar essays?

The heart wants what the heart wants, and mine is a stubborn, selfish creature.

I wrote a letter, with no intention of letting a single soul ever read it. It was an arduous task, writing things I have trouble admitting to myself, but afterwards I felt better. I figured maybe it meant that because I had worked so hard to put my feelings into words, it would be easier to let them go. I thought I had finally started to transform them into strictly respect and friendship. Until I saw her today. She walked into the room, and my breath actually caught in my lungs. I didn't think that happened in real life, but apparently it does. Almost instantly I was in a full-blown panic attack, and I couldn't even look her in the eyes for fear she would somehow know what I was thinking. I wanted to cry every time our eyes accidentally met. Putting my feelings into words only made them stronger, and now I can barely stand to look at her.

I know she'll never feel the same. Her heart will never skip a beat when she looks at me; her palms will never sweat when she asks me a question. But this knowledge does nothing to counter the way I feel. I would like to think that time and distance will erase these feelings, but it will be a long time before I can actually find out if that works. In the meantime, how do I cope?

The Pecan

by Caleb Humphreys

The tree stretched towards the gray sky, almost touching it. The trees' whitish-brown bark and brown-and-red leaves blended together to create an image of fall. A lone crow perched on a drooping, pecan-laden limb. The bird's dark blue eyes studied the man who was tromping across the lawn. The crow cawed when the man positioned himself below the pecan tree.

The man did not notice the bird. He was focused on something else. He remained still for a while, his eyes staring at the ground. The crow cawed again as a woman approached. The man saw something among the leaves that littered the ground. He bent over and brushed away the wet leaves and revealed a blackened husk.

"It's no good. It was never any good." His wife's voice came from behind him, but he did not turn to look at her. Instead, he started to pick at the husk with his fingers. It was wet and mushy. He scraped and chipped away at the black crust. Dirt and grime caught under his fingernails and stained his calloused hands. He felt a drop of cold rain land on his arm. A chilling wind gusted through the yard, dislodging dead leaves from the trees. The leaves floated over the yard, the wind pulling them one way and then another.

The husk was gone, and the man held a tan pecan in his dirty hand. He started to tell her that it was good, that everything was okay, but he didn't. The swishing sound of wet leaves and the crunch of pecans being stepped on made him stop. His wife was walking away.

He waited beneath the tree for a while as the rain picked up. He absently rolled the pecan between his fingers. He could hear the rain drops falling on the leaves that covered the ground.

He looked at the pecan as if he were seeing it for the first time. The shell was light brown with black jagged streaks running along it lengthwise. It really was extraordinary how such a small, simple thing could grow into something as complex and beautiful like the pecan tree.

Suddenly, the man put the shell in his mouth and bit down violently. There was a satisfying crack as the shell broke. He pulled the shell from his mouth. It left behind a bitter taste.

It was raining heavily now. The man took a look at the pecan, stared at it for a second. Then, he dropped the broken shell to the ground.

The crow watched the man as he walked after his wife. The crow glided to the ground and pecked at the shell that the man had dropped. Its head tilted to the side, and it cawed.

Inside the shell, the pecan was black and dead.

Under the Sun

by Cody Muzio

“Sol is dead.”

The words echoed through the television speakers with the silent, felt thunder of inevitable news that can suddenly be avoided no longer.

Cole’s flat was modeled in a vintage style. He’d been long fascinated by the lifestyles of the people who lived in America’s early twenty-teens, and it showed in his décor. The “flatscreen” television, the desktop computer, the bookshelf lined with novels and magazines from the period. Considering it the best compilation of the culture of the day, he especially loved his museum-quality ancient *TIME Magazine* collection. The ones he’d flipped through most recently sat scattered on his reading table by his leather recliner: perfectly preserved copies labeled Nov. 1, 2010; July 25, 2011; April 25, 2011 and his favorite, the issue from 2011’s Feb. 21 with a cover that ran simply, “2045, The Year Man Becomes Immortal.”

His mind was elsewhere and nowhere, but he caught the words “eight minutes,” “approximately thirty hours” and “more details at five” before the screen turned to commercials peddling humor and images of food, entertainment, new teleporters, appliances and other items he’d forget when the next ad rolled around. He left it on and walked out his door into the quiet neighborhood that neither matched his apartment’s interior nor the news that was force fed to the uplinked consciousnesses of his fellow citizens. Admittedly, the day had been a long time coming. Sol’s expansion had been obvious for more than a millennium and Terrarian scientists had predicted this day to be her demise some 550 years ago. Still, he almost expected more panic from those around him, something in the realm of rioting, debauchery and panic. But there was nothing. Cole noticed the morning air was static (as it was always kept) but he supposed this wouldn’t last for long and very soon he may experience wind, heat and cold. It was a chilling excitement.

The streets were lined with solid, shining buildings as tall as the sky and separated by lifeless expanses where a couple hundred years ago vehicles would have roamed. His city was quaint in that way, something he appreciated. The city which in the magazines he collected was once known as Chicago, was not the urban center it was then. Now, when most cities are a comprised of rooms in a building, his, NW4187, still vaguely resembled the cities he studied.

“Cole, how are you?”

The greeting interrupted his thoughts. Sara must have opened her door to him before he could knock.

“I’m fine. Yourself?”

“Great. It still cracks me up the way you do this.”

“What?”

“Stand in front of me to talk. Walk across the street. Knock on doors instead of

using the scanner. Who does that?"

"Well, excuse me, Sara. I just prefer the traditional way of doing things."

"Antiquated way," she replied with a suppressed giggle. Cole ignored her teasing.

"You get the PSA?"

"Cole. No one uses a television like you do," she laughed. "Of course I got the PSA; it's pushed straight to my consciousness just like it is for everyone but you," she added, her eyes playfully rolling at her friend who was obviously meant for a different time than his own.

Cole had ignored the earth-wide mental information uplink that had been made mandatory 260 years ago.

"So it's finally happening, huh?"

"Well, technically, it's already happened. We should actually start feeling it any minute now."

"So, here's the question, will they teleport Terra or everyone on it?"

She didn't have to ponder the thought.

"They'll probably send Terra off somewhere... but if I had my pick, I'd rather just be 'ported to Gliese."

"Why? I've only ever heard awful things about the people there. Strange culture from what I've read."

"Yeah, that's true, but there's also fewer rules in their system. I hear the parties are out of this world. And let's be real, Cole. You may be only 53 years older than me, but you're an old soul. I'm only 234 years old. I've got a need for adventure. This old place is exactly that: some old place."

Cole ignored the awful pun that she had said knowingly as a friendly knock on his usual humor. He wasn't in the mood for wordplay.

"Maybe I am old..."

His voice trailed off. He loved Sara. She was a good friend despite her merciless teasing. And she was right. They both were still young and had long lives left to live. But he didn't know if he wanted to tell her what he was really thinking.

"Anyway, I'll see you later, I guess," he added.

Cole turned, acknowledging Sara's reply with a wave. He ignored the concern in her voice, knowing it would quickly fade into a smirk and a headshake at his confusingly lovable quirkiness, as she had once described it to him.

He left the steps to her door as it closed with the same mechanical solidity he'd grown used to. He stopped. He had nowhere to go but felt the need for a walk. Looking down the narrow street in either direction, he realized for the first time how tightly the buildings were set. Staring down the line, the endless rows of doors, windows and walls became a crevice in a metal earth, a foreboding fissure flanked by thousands of inescapable solid cells. He moved slowly down the outdoor hallway as

with immovable blinders looming over the edges of his vision, his thoughts filled only with a halfhearted, “why?”

His claustrophobic march didn't take him far, however, before feeling the onset of Terra's last night. Cole's eyes were drawn to the sky, but despite his best efforts to watch, he could not hold open his eyes. A sudden flash of blistering brilliance took him by surprise, knocking him a half-step backwards in an attempt to regain balance. The light was all he could see behind his closed eyelids for moments after the brightness had passed. When he opened his eyes, he found his sense of sight no better. All that remained to see, a glowing darkness.

After a few moments, he could begin to make out stars among the satellite-crowded sky, something he had not seen in years. The beauty did not strike him, though, as did the instant and heavy loneliness. He could see ships sailing into the night sky. He remained still. He could hear faint electronic flashes from the teleporters in nearby homes. He remained motionless. He felt the wind begin, another phenomenon he hadn't experienced since childhood. He remained calm. “All this power,” he whispered, his next words formed only by his lips. “And all this power.” He breathed long and let his thoughts take over for his failing tongue. “But no matter.” He laughed shortly to himself at his inadvertent joke, realizing it betrayed an even more twisted joke beneath the thought.

He thought he could taste and smell the inevitable change. Still he remained, standing as he had been face to the empty daytime sky. He felt the air warm quickly and fall into cold. He had only now to wait and so he remained.

3

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Patricia Waters received her Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee. She is in charge of TROY's ELA (English Language Arts) program. She is also involved with TROY's NCTE club (National Council of Teachers of English). Dr. Waters has published a book of poetry called 'The Ordinary Sublime.

Craft

by Dr. Patricia Waters

I climb the steps to the long building, white clapboard, behind the house.

In my mind I am always four or five or six, the years my mother needed help, the years of my father's illness. The building is my grandfather's shop. Here he has his workbench running the width of the shop, his massive tool chest standing on sawhorses he made himself. The chest has beautiful sliding trays within holding his treasure, in the far corner a cast iron stove for winter, in the center his saw, the powerful evil blade we must never go near, its dangers always illustrated by a reference to our neighbor Mr. Tanksley's missing thumb and forefinger. Even the rafters above have purpose, holding lengths of lumber, planed on one side of the shop, unplaned on the other, that my grandfather will fashion into what is useful or beautiful or both and in the windowsills are blue jars, large ones, with *Ball* in slanting script across them and below *Perfect Mason* mysterious words and they hold nails and screws and nuts and bolts all according to some occult order of size or purpose or composition and the shop smells of sawdust, pine resin, machine oil, lumber, Prince Albert tobacco, both because of his pipe and that he re-uses the tins. Freestanding ones hold pencils, small straight edges, chisels, some, nailed to the wall, hold scraps of papers, receipts. Soft as butter to the touch are the old khaki pants he wears, stained but clean, his shirt, a fresh one each morning, pressed and starched, always a handkerchief, his pocket watch and fob the only ornaments, even his eyeglasses rimless. He is a quiet man, tells stories when asked and he has built a set of little steps and a stool just for me so that when I come into the shop, I have a place to settle myself, a place for me to be just as everything in the shop has its place so that I can watch what emerges from his hands, that it comes into being not through magic, some hidden power but is evolved through working knowledge, from thought to penciled paper, to selection, to marks on wood, to arranging, to ordering, to finishing in a clear process of order, of cause and effect. It was some years later I discovered the alchemical power of the kitchen, but here in the shop, I witness creation as a process, rational and real, of the head, of the hands. I witness his attention to making, his bending of intent to what is coming into being. Someday I too will know that solace.

Professor James Davis is from the small town of Greensboro, in west Alabama. He attended the University of Alabama, where he received a B.A. in English and an M.F.A. in fiction writing. As a professor at TROY, he specializes in teaching English and creative writing. TROY's football coach, Larry Blakeney, was Prof. Davis' high school coach in 1970 and 1971. Since it was a very small school, Blakeney coached P.E. and all of the sports. Professor Davis started for him in football, basketball, and baseball.

Willows is an excerpt from Professor Davis' forthcoming novel.

Willows

by Prof. James Davis

When lightning flashed behind the pines on the far shore of the lake and sparkled in the water rippling in the first storm winds, he could not, just could not remain where he was. And when the thunder finally wrapped him like a dark gray blanket he was gone, back to a place nothing like this, but it felt the same. So he opened the door to the wind that smelled like rain and walked to the edge of the lake. The strip of fine sand smelled and felt like fresh lake mud—hauled-in sand couldn't fool the lake. But the clean smell of the rain, however temporary, easily overpowered the sweeter lake musk. He was careful not to crush the fat tadpoles against the sand as he stepped over the threshold and sat slowly in shallow water, watching the gray-silver curtain of rain and wind begin to hide the far shore, headed his way. Small waves slapped his legs. *I wish I drank more*, he thought. *This seems like a good time for whiskey.*

For a moment he was on his parents' porch, watching the storm approach with darkness and lightning and wind. But the colors of now drew him forward. He sat in the bothered water watching the wind stir the willow limbs hanging like leafed whips over the lake's edge, smelling and feeling the wind, warm as always, until a cool gust spread his collar and lifted his chin. The first raindrops, huge and few, plumped into the water around him, slapping the leaves of a sassafras bush near the shore. By the time the real rain soaked him, the willows were out of control, hectic, tangled, graceless.

When the next lightning hit the water only a second ahead of the thunder, he jumped up and hurried stooping toward the house, but stopped on the porch at the top of the steps and turned to watch, water pooling around his feet. White sheets of rain blew toward him across the lake, stirring broad frothlines on the surface as they came. The gusts slung spray that cooled his lower legs. The willows, like women with their heads bowed, hair hanging forward past their faces toward the water, swung side to side, sensuous and stately, lighter green than everything else except the lake. He had seen young willow trunks snapped like cornstalks by winds such as this, but these trees, no longer young, had survived years of storms. Their several broken limbs were hidden by the cascade of slender leaves on fluid whips, gushing over the crown and flowing down toward the water. *We've seen these same storms, such willows and I, for all my life.* When, after a quarter-hour, the storm settled into steady windless rain, he went inside and shut the door, damp but no longer dripping. He exhaled and smiled.

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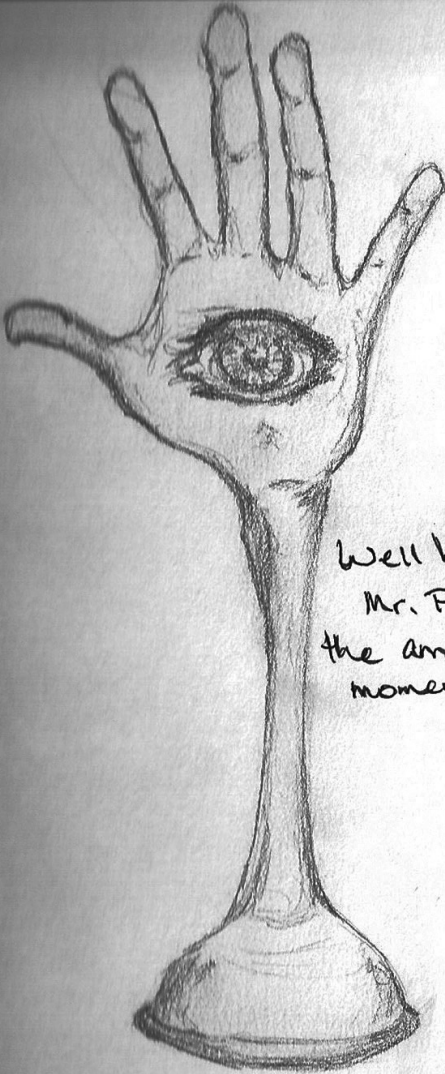
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Printed name: _____

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Well here we are,
Mr. Pilgrim, trapped in
the amber of this
moment. There is no
'why'.

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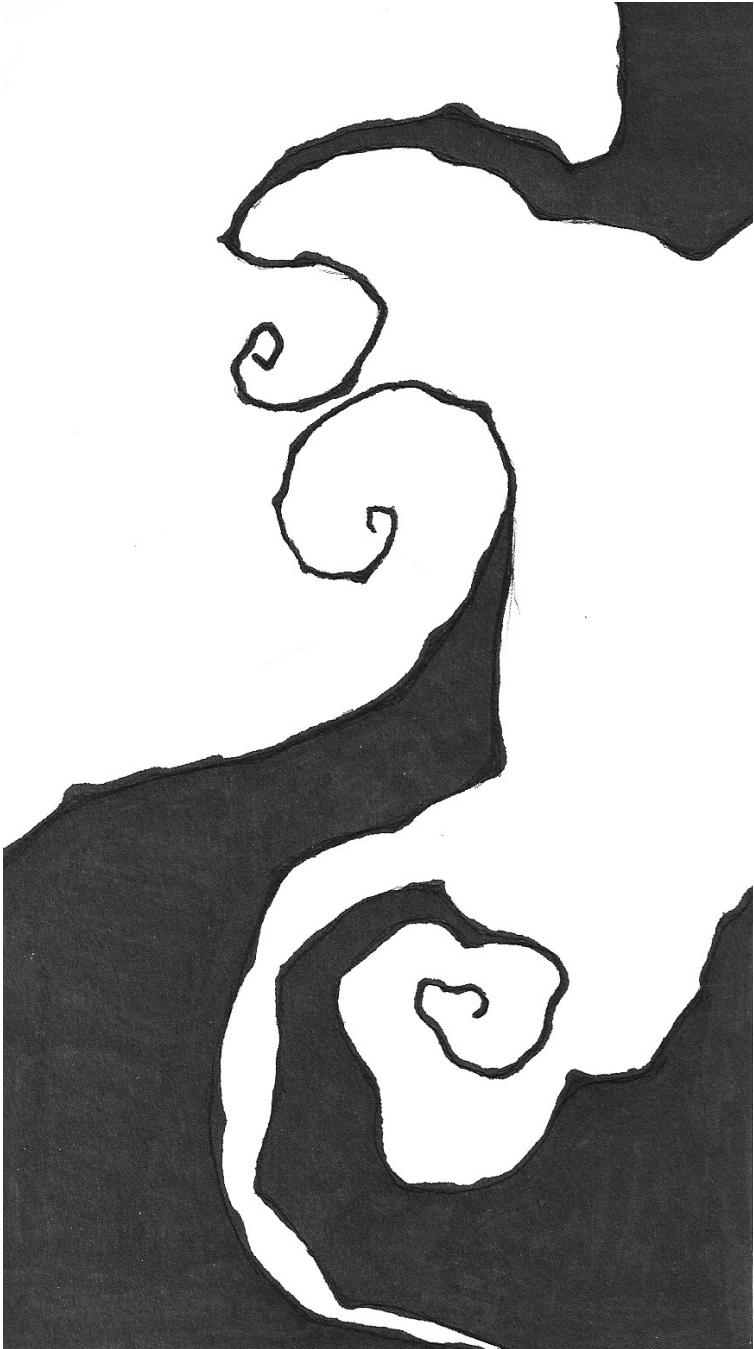
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