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Oracular
Samantha Montague
mixed media
Archarios

Literary/Art Magazine
Coastal Carolina College
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second - Rushandi, or The Wise One, Devin Gordon

EDITOR'S NOTE
Of everyone who has helped me this year, I would especially like to thank Stephanie and Paul for their dedication and perseverance; we have made a wonderful revival of the magazine.

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Life's Marrow
Devin Gordon
photograph
Home Grown
Sarah Loudin

I stand on top
of the hill,
young and unafraid
of life.
The house,
    pond,
barn,
and cow-spotted fields
sit below as if they
would wait forever.
Only the sky and maybe
God stand above me.

I take a breath
and a step.
Unmown hay tickles
my thighs as I run
down the hill,
letting gravity
take control.
A basketball hoop
mounted on a discarded
telephone pole grows
with speed equal
to my own.

The house hasn't
much longer to wait
when I find
the baseball I lost
last summer
under my foot.

Trees scream
as my face finds earth.
Dirt and blood fill
my mouth making a new
kind of mudpie.

Today I remembered how good
that mudpie tasted.
Daylight Saving Time
Susan Meyers

The professor pedals a morning breeze, his tie tapping his shoulder and fems ruffling the roadside in this borrowed summer town. He knows he is lucky.

But with the blink of an eye, as they say, a motorist sneezes: a two-wheel tangle tumbles onto green and withers a world of summers.

It was his time to go, they say, the ones who know where the holy clock ticks a sabbatical of quiet, then looses its alarm.

Set the clock back two months: the tumor luxuriant in her head has choked out most of some woman's tomorrows until a miracle with a name too long for memory propagates days, weeks, and the side effect of sneezing.

The infallible clock is poised, sprung tight for the next alarm.
Abandoned
Chris Cromer
photograph
Untitled
Melissa Jenrette photograph
In The Weeds
David M. Ford
print
Perhaps I Will Do Better Later
Dana Neuen

There is a place that remains silent to words
where the thin lips of language are pursed
into a nonexistent string of tension
until eyes and brain and heart nearly burst.

And then a cloudy glimpse of nothing much
appears and lends a guttural motion
to the thing that quickens round and round life.
A thing whose sound is yet to be chosen.

Never finish never finish never
understand a tin can squashed in the street,
it's identity scraped off by shuffles.
Or the perfect sun on a leaf.

Finally. Now there is nothing to say
since I have picked words just to throw them away.
Lost Marbles
Chris Cromer
photograph
Dog Face
Steve Westlund
photograph
After the Work is Done
Andrew B. Fishburne

Pink flamingos sprout from his yard,
An American flag from his porch.
The largest motor home ever built
Looms in the shadow of his home.
It's all paid for, of course,
With enough left over
For six months vacation every year.
He fights against dandelions
Which battle his hand-picked army
Of chrysanthemums, roses, and azaleas.
He reaches down to pet his cat, Barney,
And breathes a questioning sigh.
Essence of Life
Devin Gordon
photograph
Night
Andrew B. Fishburne

I sit on the porch rail at midnight
And smoke a cigarette,
Looking up at the moon, sheathed in clouds,
Watch cars go by,
And feel the cool night air,
Drink its still mobility,
And wonder how many others are doing the same.
A Volkswagen putsters up the road
Breaking my train of thought.

Æolian harp sings a melody,
Harmonious with the song
Of breeze-dancing trees.
Strange weather;
It's January
And the air outside
Is more room temperature
Than my room.

Cricket sings,
Groggy from lack of sleep,
Angry at having been wakened so soon.
A car zooms down the highway
Breaking my train of thought.

Raindrops make strange sounds,
Eerie sounds,
As they strike the ground,
The walkway,
The porch rail,
The roof.

Beading up on my wax job,
Glistening in the comforting light
Of the security lamp.
A truck booms by
Breaking my train of thought.

Venus peeks from behind
Her winter boyfriend,
The moon.
The grass shimmers,
Almost audibly,
In the rain.

Life screams by
Breaking my train of thought.
Just Add Water
Joe Bergman
photograph
Self-Portrait
Sue Stayton
mixed media
The road cuts across the wind-swept plains like a deep scar in an ancient face. The once oiled and hard-packed road is covered in a deep layer of dust. The wind picks up the dirt and whips it across the fields. Everything is covered by it. The wheat bends from the weight of it.

A hitchhiker stops for a moment, readjusting the pack that lies against his bare back, soaked in sweat. He looks across the dusty plains at the dead stalks of an unharvested wheat field. A dust devil picks up the dirt again and sprays it in his face and eyes. He pulls a dirty handkerchief from his hip pocket and wipes it across his face. The dust is caked in the corners of his mouth and his lips are chapped and cracked. He forces some saliva onto the cloth and works at the dirt on his lips. It burns. He returns the cloth to his pocket and peels the sweaty pack's straps from his shoulders and drops it to the ground. It makes a dull thud as it falls into the heavy dust of the road. He sits. The sun beats down on the hitchhiker, the road, the insects.

A grasshopper spreads its yellow wings and rattles across the road. It falls clumsily to the earth. Ants scurry back and forth in the dust leaving tiny trails to and from their hole. Only the ants move quickly in the searing heat. The grasshopper lifts again, this time falling too close to the ants. He is surrounded, overtaken. His body is pulled into the hole to be consumed, leaving behind a yellow wing in the dust. All is quiet.

The silence is shaken by a large moving van thundering up the road. Its axles creak and loose cargo door bangs against the frame with each pothole. The hitchhiker stands with his thumb out, squinting into the sun, unable to see the driver through the dust. The van passes, trailing a cloud of dust. The hitchhiker drags his wrist across his brow. The dirt and perspiration have formed mud there. He spits the grit from his teeth and lifts the pack to his crusty shoulders. The straps grind the dirt and sweat into his sunburned skin. He draws a deep breath and continues down the road.
Doppleganger
Chris Cromer
photograph
Brookgreen Flowers
Talulah McInvaill
watercolor
Untitled
Bill McCormick
photograph
An Overcast Day Rips Petals Off
Dana Neuen

This purposed flower
and frightened sun
will be the lead bones
of a philosopher's stone.
We know it changes
and changes back, still
we swallow the gold
as if it will keep us.
Whole?

Not that in some memory
we're not
grey pebbles in a stream,
the light bent into
a drifting glaze
that makes
the cold stones blaze.

Untitled
Mary Klein
photograph
Headless
Sarah Loudin

On my ninth birthday
I asked for fried chicken.
Dollhouses, dresses,
and cakes decorated
with pink icing and candles
couldn't compete with the chicken
Dad brought squawking into the house.
Schunk!

Headless chicken
running around the yard,
leaving a trail of bright
blood, such a pretty red.
I ran after her, spotting
the bottoms of my feet.
White feathers turned pink
and I gathered the ones
that fell for my dolls to wear.

The chicken soon lost
her nerve and gave up trying
to escape without a head.
Dad caught her and my dolls
soiled their dresses
wearing still wet feathers
while the chicken
grumbled in a frying pan.

We often invited death
to our table.
Funny,
he never wore his black cloak,
or carried his scythe.

Untitled
Rodney Tisdale
ceramics
Untitled
Barbara Katzenberg
print
Into My Garden of Eden
Andrew B. Fishburne

A home for the alone,
Dead center of Hell,
And seven stories up,
I drink foamy ambrosia
And feast on salty manna,
With Holy fervor.
Marvel at how,
Christ-like,
I turn money into wine.

Into my Garden of Eden
Walk angels,
Some with swords,
Others with wings of gold.

One emerges supreme,
Wilder and floating higher
Than the rest,
Scans, 'Till eyes come to rest,
On me?
Yes, her halo gestures,
Indicates my cloud.
I launch from my padded stool,
And enter the Gates of Heaven.

Into my Garden of Eden
Scream angels,
Some with armor,
Others with swords of gold.

The neon lights are cirrus clouds,
The sun a mirror ball.
But I barely notice these things,
The dazzle is but frame
For the glare, my angel.
Without a word, we gambol
Across a burnished veneer
And sing the chants of banshees.

Into my Garden of Eden
Sing angels,
Some with hallelujahs,
Others with armor of gold.
Heaven is a fickle place,
And two hours later,
A Ritz for asses and cows,
Manger beds,
Ten bucks an hour,
Languid,
I know the merger
Of Heaven and Hell.
My angel rolls over
And demands twenty bucks.

Into my Garden of Eden
Come angels,
All with swords,
All with wings of bats.

---

Multifarious
Samantha Montague
mixed media
Warlwind
Kurt Russell
acrylic
The Stocks Are Down
Joe Bergman
photograph
Sea Goddess
Stephanie Biegner
colored pencil
Rushandi, or The Wise One
A Folktale
Devin Gordon

Rushandi was a man of simple means, but then so were most men in his village. Modern conveniences never reached this part of the world, but people in the village had heard of such things as televisions and telephones. Living as their grandfathers had, they were satisfied to live without the amenities of the "civilized" world.

Rushandi was a farmer, like his father and his father before him and his father before him. Most men in the village were hunters, but Rushandi chose to make his life among vegetables. Tomatoes, cabbage, beans, peas, carrots, beets, kale and fruit not known in the West provided all the sustenance Rushandi needed to survive. He occasionally traded for rice and other grains with traveling farmers from distant villages. Those in other worlds may have more, but none, Rushandi felt, lived a more peaceful existence than he.

Along with the vegetables, Rushandi had his friends, the animals. Rushandi, of course, did not have the animals. All existence was one, his father taught him; all things depend on others to survive. This was the way of the circle.

Rushandi lived his life according to the way of the circle, even though most of those around him had long since given up the ancient ways. It disturbed him to see his human friends live with little regard for nature, but Rushandi respected the rights of others in his village. And they respected his rights. For he was The Wise One.

As the oldest male member of the village, Rushandi had the privilege of being called The Wise One. Much honor and respect was paid The Wise One, and he was often called upon to settle disputes among the villagers. As long as he had been The Wise One, he
had helped the villagers settle every
disagreement so that all parties
involved were satisfied. Rushandi's
thoughtful, gentle manner and fairness
made him well-liked among his
neighbors. He was a man of few
words, but those he spoke carried great
meaning. The villagers respected him
not only for his position, but also for
his kindness toward others. No one
was ever heard to utter an unkind word
about him.

The villagers accepted Rushandi as
eccentric. He was most often found in
or near his garden; as he meticulously
cared for the plants that brought him
life, animals gathered round him.
Noble beasts such as chickens,
porcupines, rats and bullfrogs knew
Rushandi would share his food with
them, but this was not the only reason
they came. He understood them, it
seemed, or understood them as much
as a man can understand a cat or a
hare. No one in the village ever
seemed to hear Rushandi's
conversations with his animal friends,
but he was often seen talking to birds
or boars. It appeared that the animals
spoke in return, but everyone knew
that was impossible. It was harmless
enough, the villagers thought, if he
wished to speak to animals.

On particularly clear days, when
the still wind seemed to speak in
echoes, Rushandi would travel to the
sea, accompanied on the long walk by
several animals. There, it was said by
the few fishermen in the village, he
would spend long hours standing in the
small surf, looking to the sea as if it
would bring some great wisdom to
him. Dolphins and, occasionally,
whales would venture far closer to the
shore than usual on those days
Rushandi visited the water.

When Rushandi visited the sea he
always returned with his pockets full
of sand, carrying one stone, which he
added to a pile near his garden. The
mound, next to a similar pile created
by his father, was now nearly as tall as
him. When he was not tending his
garden, Rushandi's favorite pastime
was creating designs with sand. He
would take the sand he gathered on the
beach and stain it using dyes made
from the skins of vegetables and fruit
in his garden. Rushandi would create
intricate patterns on flat rocks or clear
pieces of ground by allowing the tinted
sand to flow through his cupped hands
in small streams. His home was filled
with these patterns, all geometric
designs of earthen colors which seemed to represent nothing.

Rushandi used other rocks, which he found while tilling his garden, to play a strange game. He would arrange three rocks into a triangle, each rock equally spaced from the next, stand ten paces away and toss leaves toward the space created by the rocks. No one in the village ever saw Rushandi land a leaf in the triangle, but this never seemed to bother him.

Rushandi’s archaic, peculiar ways had a certain fascination for the villagers. But, although no one would dare to speak such a notion, some in the village thought The Wise One to be foolish. His unyielding hold on outdated ways and unusual habits puzzled them. Why, they wondered, would he eat only vegetables and spend his days talking to animals and throwing leaves when the sea overflows with fish and the mountains abound with fresh meat for the taking? His lifestyle perplexed them.

The villagers did not understand Rushandi’s adherence to the way of the circle. They knew little of the philosophy, although they had heard Rushandi speak of it many times. Even the elders in the village had heard their grandfathers speak of the circle. But those were the olden days, and the village had come far since then.

Many years age traders from the East had brought guns, and the villagers had found themselves with an easier life. No longer were they forced to subsist on fish and the occasional hare or deer they were able to catch in a trap; the gun expanded opportunities. Hares, deer, goats, coyotes and other creatures common to the area became easy prey. The gun, the villagers thought, had brought new life to the village. Even though it was a modern thing, it changed life, for the better, and forever. But Rushandi continued with the ways of the circle, like his father and his father before him and his father before him.

As the men of the village returned home in the late afternoon glow of the sun, arms loaded with fresh meat for their families, they would watch Rushandi tending his garden and talking to the animals. He always paused to speak kindly to the hunters, inquiring as to their health and good fortune, before he returned to caring for his garden and talking with a squirrel.

Over the years Rushandi neared
the age of the sturdy trees which surrounded the village. His body slowly began to fade; The Wise One's mind, however, remained as clear as ever. His walks to the sea became less and less frequent. He was still able to tend his garden, but it was no longer maintained like it was in his youth. Weeds, always cleared by Rushandi the moment they appeared, now seemed to be a common feature in his garden. The rich green color of his plants remained the same hue but seemed less brilliant than they had been in the past.

On a morning in late spring when no wind blew but the leaves of trees rustled, Rushandi made a final trip to the sea. His walk was made more difficult by his ailing legs, but a coyote and a wolf allowed him to rest his hands on their backs as he journeyed to the water. Accompanied by hares, goats, a wild turkey, a cat, a boar and other creatures, Rushandi reached the beach by midafternoon and, as he had a thousand times before, stood in the small surf gazing at the water. He stayed many hours; the animals searched for food, fluttered or played nearby. Families of dolphins, whales and manatees joined the group near the shore. As the sun sank into the ocean, Rushandi took three steps backward, sat on the beach and leaned against a tree. There he said goodbye to the animals.

The fishermen returned The Wise One's body to his home. The next morning the villagers honored him in the glorious style reserved for those of his station. At a funeral full of pageantry, the people dressed in white, customary for the occasion, and buried him in his garden. The animals who had accompanied him on his last journey to the sea, joined by others from the forest, stood serenely nearby. As the elders encircled his grave with stones, children threw rocks to scatter the animals.
Untitled
Nora Speight
photograph
At five she spent hours memorizing marbles. She learned the weight of circles, how to click with porcelain ease.

The big milky one drooped a red country she wanted to live in forever when marbles quit rolling across her floor.

She knew red and she knew younger colors that washed like waves into swirls she couldn't name,

and she knew cool marbles each held a moon she could always touch again.
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