**Empire Bluffs**

Sodden knees succumb and land

atop a sand dune

on a drizzly December afternoon.

Hands that are

white with cold, whose glabrous skin has been

wrinkled by the ascent through damp grains

are outstretched.

Palms face the sky,

cupped so as to catch the rainwater,

to collect the celestial liquid,

and to rinse the grittiness from their folds.

The left palm’s lifeline forms a river

which promptly floods.

Shoulders heave with the effort

of the climb

from the shore of a boundless lake

to the summit of a Sleeping mountain.

They shudder beneath the weight of the slush

and of the sand

and of the poignant whisper of Marram grass.

Mist shrouds not only the lake below

but also, the surrounding trees from view,

creating an Empire of isolation,

a waterlogged wasteland,

a nearly isotropic realm where

only the steep ledge indicates direction.

Rain drips with melancholy

down ashen cheeks,

joining salty beads of exaltation.

Precipitation saturates emotion

as wind and water continue sculpting

the glacier-borne ridge.

**Evelyn**

She was once a timeworn harbinger,

blazing across a twilight empyrean.

A charcoal blur, a streak of indigo,

her obsidian luster of volcanic pulsations

broaching potassium’s amethyst flicker.

Domestication reeks of detritus

and recycled oxygen.

She rots, the raven’s foul corollary, her ebony wings

singed from the

smoky blaze of burning plastic.

A reticent songbird that never was,

a distinct silhouette turned boundless shadow,

a vocalist asphyxiated.

Arthritic silence is pervaded by grocery-store wine and

and two more notches on the television volume.

Carrion’s gruesome sinew

drives her to cannibalism;

her ivory branch is splattered with

solitude

stained dark red.

Three more notches up again,

a crow etched on her ankle,

a willfully imprisoned Evelyn under a decrepit apple-tree,

“apple-tree of the sun,”

an effulgent title for a fading murder.

Splashed across the sky,

the tattooist’s ink instead traces earlier skin.

His needle prods at brilliant shimmers, recharting the night;

Aquila is paling,

but Corvus burns brighter.

**Lavender Summer**

Lavender summer

finds me whistling in the pole barn with

one million paper clips keeping me

company.

Peppermint-wrinkled butterflies

whose metallic wings greet

lighthouse seekers

flash and flicker.

Mesmerized by a lemongrass

carousel, bumblebees neglect

honey lavender.

Meditative inhalation

of a copper still,

bountiful recovery,

rosemary commodity!

Baking in the greenhouse

my balsam dream pillow

on which I’ll rest my head and fall

into a perennial slumber––

wake me up next lavender summer.

Upside-down in the bird bath,

right-side up in my ice cream spoon.

Five dollars if you pick it

but eleven if it’s picked by me.

Lavender summer,

lavender summer!

**Ghost Ranch**

Spindly,

cragged,

companionless:

a rock spire

juts towards the

cerulean

New Mexico sky.

Rusty siltstone walls are

speckled with

ashy remnants—

the evidence of generations past.

The fossils murmur

the name of their spectral home:

Ghost Ranch,

making known their perpetuity

(and my impermanence)

as I am buried

beneath layer

after layer

of ancestral sediments.

A broken vice, an intact geode,

a set of indistinguishable stones,

my collection.

Vinegar meets rock face sizzling anew.

Somewhere, a wooden cross

stretches towards a vaulted ceiling;

rows of polished pews

replace my unrefined wilderness.

Wrinkly old ladies wearing crisp

white blouses shake hands

and wish each other

good morning. Southwestern

sunshine

enters gracefully through a

kaleidoscopic

stained-glass window.

A faked stomachache,

a condemning glare.

Still the sun is shining;

is every Sunday like this?

Someday the pews will grow and deform

into red rock formations.

The smooth wood will crack and

bulge until chunks fall out,

crumbling.

The cross will twist itself

into a rock spire,

breaking through the ceiling as it grows,

morphing into a fossil-covered skeleton

and revealing a desert sky.

I’m swallowed by a dehydrated crack in the clay.

Towering over me: the plateaus, the sky,

everything except the unkempt thicket

which clutches the ground for protection.

But I feel the warmth of a stranger’s hand wrap around mine

and the color-soaked sunshine brushing my cheeks;

are those Yucca flowers blooming?

**All Before the Solstice**

My frosted breath on crisp November morn

and silent praise of daylight savings’ rest

yields chins zipped up in jackets grey and torn

and trembling fingers fretting winter’s test.

Some pastel paintings smearing red to blue,

my brush’s brittle bristles bend and break,

they never mind a watercolor hue

but fear acrylic touch-ups soon to take.

A cherry flavored lozenge stamps my tongue

and firmly mother’s hand meets burning skin,

a grubby rag is drenched and quickly wrung,

my painting lying in the garbage bin.

Penicillin’s cure bears itching hives;

it’s been the coldest season of our lives.