

Drift

Jordan Zachary Ellis

On nine islands, my blood takes form
and I hear unspoken truths that call
from this place that my people once left.
Whispers in the whiskers I left long;
one mother's tongue amongst many more,
my spectres lecture each memory
that carry my sneakers while I walk,
toe sifted sand fed the sprouts they set
destined to fall from my chin to pen

Stellar explosions sigh upon my
star chart like ancestral distress calls
lost upon the collective conscience:
shackled by seaweed, tied around rocks
left lying around to trip me up
and tell of how long I took to stand.
Somewhere down the line those stones were used
to spark survival like flint to fire,
the same flame that dries this ink tonight.

Those islands were mostly unbothered,
almost left without that human touch
until a few hundred years ago.
The wind knew which way to blow that boat
so that a bunch of mainlanders could
dream of their planted seeds taking root
with the scent of sea salt on the air
like a pad of paper soaked with ink,
Rorschach reminders tied to the rocks.

I cannot let their memory fade,
washed like sand symbols beneath high tides.
I can let them flow through my blood like
the melody of a song that stuck
to your ear unfamiliar and
calling out like the waves falling in
go back to that beach with your mother,
hearing the pacific through sea shells
empty with the sounds of an ocean.

Having drifted from their mainland home,
my family pushed even further;
seed holding transplants in need of roots,
some spores that soared for greener grasses
landed in someone else's backyard
and set in the soiled shady corner
so their sun famished seeds would be cool
while growing in the shadow of home,
dreaming with photosynthetic hopes.

they speak in my sleep more than I do
dead eyed nameless faces all amidst
crimson cried glass bottles cracked open
where their smiles met the blue waved shoreline
mollusked voices in sandy dreamshells
double helixed vibrations calling
but I'm just a sapling who is stuck
between the sand, soil, and shadows. I
listen to the sounds of their paving.

Sometimes, when I squint my mind just right,
I can see what they say while conscious.
Walking through the redwood sea salt breeze,
stepping over the mushrooms that look
out over the Pacific Ocean,
spore speaking spectres shoulder sitting,
I often wonder how this all works.
Do messages carved into tree trunks
go as far back as they do forward?

Shouting over salt crusted cocktails
during last call on a cloudless night,
I got to glimpse why they spoke softly
about the horizon hiding light;
the Sun's shine reflected by the Moon
like the waning gibbous in my cup,
and my ancestors whisper water —
the high tides of their lunar cycle.

From this place that my people once left
with the scent of sea salt on the air
calling out like the waves falling in,
stellar explosions sigh upon my
crimson cried glass bottles cracked open
and set in the soiled shady corner
out over the Pacific Ocean.
And my ancestors whisper water
with every breath that I swallow.