

### Part 1: The Cratered Hills

### **Ghosting in the Curves**

What a sky it is, an incandescent ceiling. And the stretch beneath is a haunting, emerald green. The spaces between? Dark matter, merely. It holds the place together.

Funny, things were not this way before. I seem to have fallen asleep and awakened in this dreary, demi-world. One circular scan, one pinch on the wrist, and I'm left staring at the sky.

It's some kind of spell, a harsh confusion, breathless underwater. My brain can't digest it, but my lungs absorb. So I walk, with a head full of cotton, with a lagging kind of feel.

So I walk, through The Cratered Hills, ghosting in the curves.

### When Craters Open

When craters open, a silty spring. Never drink the waters. The cratered children know this.

When craters open, embers glow, and the air is cotton-swabbed.

It's a murky radiance, cloudy ethylene.

It parts for nothing.

When craters open, the dunes tremble, shift their paths, shed their crowns.

I think I've caught ahold, clinging to the ribs.

My fists fit through the gaps.

When craters open, we are born anew, our daytime counterparts brushed aside.

Our senses shift, break composure, turbo-lock in place.

When craters open, the colors bleed, and energy distributes. See it spread above the hunchbacked crests, bringing promise home.

#### Stars Above

And the moon drips like candlewax into dark, concaved basins. Its magic works hardest at night: sloshing, rolling, slowing. Loving in the holes.

Wade through the standing pools, feel it icy on your feet: an insane chill you'll come to love. And once you retract, they'll be dry as bone.

Here the clouds take on every shape, backlit shadow-puppets. Crane your neck, but not too long. They'll suck your soul right out your eyes.

Stars above, the exclamation, stars above. I always think of shaving cream, hacked and patched, traces of the razor. It leaves me gazing cleanly at the face, partially obscured.

### Ugly in the Center

Dirt blackens, warping minds.

All the blasted sands, the clotted thoughts, the impact detonations.

Some know that vacant scarceness.

The kind that gobbled up the cities.

Dirt blackens, tiny castles, rolling hills. It sinks into my shoes and drags against my ankles. It clogs my nose, layers my insides, colors in my lines.

Dirt blackens, bellies growl.

Tangled growth, darkened berries, swelled and drooping.

They drop into a hand; they gush within a mouth,

spurting ash.

Dirt blackens, terrain changes. The sun is blocked, no time for reason. I see its cooler spectrum sneak.

Dirt blackens, pulverized, and it's all so empty devoid of youth.

Skirting streets, asphalt broken, old material disconnect.

Dirt blackens, step by step, deeper in the crater. Deadened shells, frames collapsed, ugly in the center.

### One More Valley

Walk the slope, a gentle glide, pushing the way up. Grab and burn, the simple edge, easy challenge at the top.

Now down again and scrambling, stumbling down the side, the side that's always dark. Caught within the shadowplay, the strange and angled bends.

A hundred more, it seems, lumping up the distance. One another, a twilight walk, in-and-out of night. One more valley, laying low, within the grainy brush.

Between the twigs, parting leaves, the smushed and sopping turf. Now up again, a larger boil, it stretches out the earth.

One more valley, bottomed out, pulled between two points. And the silk-black flashes, wingèd devils, lines upon my face.

### Rising with the Rock

It draws attention, seeping slowly, a tiny trickle, and what a flow. Then it clears, draining tubes, and the water pools again.

A signal to depart, and the times streak by, rate illusive. One long blur and then I shake, reverie at rest.

It persists, over and done, bell and clapper, morning clatter. It draws me in, with cantering wind, and then it's all behind.

Here is banishment, attention now, pressing dumb distractions. Now it twists, a buried knife, putting me off track.

Silence touches, the deathless mud, and I know my way around. This land alters, turns up jagged, raises up the rock.

## Part 2: Raging Mountain

#### Ascent

That rage crushes the slopes, rolling the boulders. I cast my wary eyes around, and it strengthens as the elevation gains, stacking up with every step. Better acclimate, better handle the pressure.

Something's there, lounging at the point.

Its beacon draws me in. So I tilt my head and smile, glaring from the corners, brains all tossed and scrambled. It travels through the canvas.

Firm desire, grant me strength.

The climbing kind. The type to do your will, the steel to push, sleepless in the years. When I meet you face-to-face, my arms will encircle your waist.

Hope is automatic.

The same old tired reel, propaganda stuffed, motivational rot. I hear it click inside my head, and it's all so automatic. It's the gauze of self-hypnosis.

### Far Greater

A swarm of plant life, many hues to fill a vision. Some lick slyly at my skin, trailing poison daggers. Some pus venom resins, causing hives. They

puncture and erupt, biting from beneath.

A choice to make.

Cleave through the brush and risk the toxins, or face the crag, the ripping rock? Either way I'll be raging: raging against the face, raging against the roots.

And the blood may boil.

Dosing through my veins, it may burst the seams. And maybe it'll stutter, swallowed out then crashing back. Or maybe just the silent, seeping droplets.

#### Snow on the Park Side

Snow on the dark side,

Vast layers of it, stretched across the crag. It's brittle, and it glitters like diamonds: the cutting kind. Not a bootprint in the place.

Snow on the dark side,

But I'm pulling through. I knew what it was, a powdery remembrance. Now it looks like cream, but I know it's hard as granite. I've hammered in the nails.

Snow on the dark side,

Beautiful at first, one blue dream. I've lost my head, stuck in the middle, I wish I had some shelter. Say it clicking teeth.

Snow on the dark side.

Under cover of shadow. Tighten up the boots, open up the sack, dispense those pent-up angers. They're larger than some snow, hotter than some freeze.

#### Rabid Creatures

They're drawing out,

Sneaking with the evening, a moving blanket. They cover the earth, guttural reports: snorting, snarling, scoffing. Sounds abound when the night is thickest.

A vast morass veers my way.

The scented winds, my foreign glow. I brace myself against the rusty sandstone, clambering panic, scraping chunks. Upside down, through blood-red vision.

I can taste their hunger.

It is gray and grizzled, brown and bulky, starch and lime and castor. Claw and scramble, ram into it, shake it all apart. It leaves me hanging, hanging from the cracks.

Hanging through the night, threatened in the moon.

Let them rage it out and sleep it off. I know how long it lasts.

### **Passing**

See how the landscape forms, how it growls with glee. It shivers at my touch, the first of many.

Passing closely, progress daunted, wary and unwanted. Not a trail, not a path, not a human here.

Passing safely, elevation gained, and the peak is a deceptive lure: always close, always far, never at my feet.

Passing and grazing, the goal is in my dream.

Keep on moving, rolling gravel, the same unbending track, at slower and slower speeds. I cannot keep it steady.

Stop and glance behind.

Behind, the painted landscape. Behind, freezer-burned. Behind, the stuff of sweat. Behind, pain-diminished. Behind, the thrill of conquest.

Behind, a purpose passed.

### Sayyd

Blistering high, the wise man, Sayyd. A storm of smoke surrounds him. His beard's a mass of twigs and brambles: a dirty, frozen, unwashed mat. His eyes are blank, but I know they see. They focus on something low.

The wise man, Sayyd. He reacts to gifts; he never speaks. He loans his powers to the unwary, command of space and time. Just remember to rewind.

His powers are lent. They are lent because Sayyd wills it. And they'll light you up, and they'll feed within you.

His powers will feed while he savors your gift.

They will feed on the linear in you, cratering remembrance.

They will feed from left to right, completely automatic.

Remember that.

It's all so automatic.

## Part 3: The Cerebral Caverns

### The Space

You think you know silence. You think you know it then you're underneath it, crushed within its ghastly hollows, churning at its center. It's a one-of-a-kind distortion, heaving in the witless dark.

My thoughts twist and shift and flop, rambunctious in the eye. Soon I don't know what's what. Is that a face before me? Ever receding, it rides the distance but keeps its orbit.

Figures fold and memory fades, residue-caked. The lonesome dark saps the positives, all my likes and loves. And what a space it leaves, flooding through the caverns.

### Footsteps Ponder My Blocked State

Footsteps ponder my blocked state. Footsteps on the stuttered granite, blasting detonations. Footsteps out for blood.

Simple mutterings, abstract truths, help me out the gate.

Footsteps ponder my blocked state, as I halt before a knock or hide away and shiver. When I twist and writhe and moan.

Footsteps on the stuttered granite, cutting through the night, the dim-lit lamps, the force-fed stairs. I know it's me, I know it's them, I'm clinging with my nails.

Footsteps ponder my blocked state, pointing out the exits, the mindful saboteurs, there and back again. Stop and shoot, freeze the scene, sell it for a dime.

Adobe walls, a stertorous report, a figure walks behind.

Footsteps ponder my blocked state. Lost is the word as intellect strays, setting blocks in place. And the footsteps merely thud.

### One Light

One light glowers, wavers, burns. One light in the black beyond, like an angel in the dark, an unexpected whelp: white-blue-yellow. It has the answers I seek.

One light's shadows, a detailed stretch, black on black. One light running, and I smell the sulfur, the cannibalized wick, ashes to ashes. Don't let it die.

One light's dance, footsteps tap, moving deep inside. Cower at its core, in a moment's peace. Such a silence, such a center. Such a way of moving.

One light lives, tiny heart, pinprick mine. I cut my hand upon its flame; it echoes softly in the lifeless den. It flickers out, one light gone, and the smoke no longer gives off hope, no longer ejects incense.

One light laughs through perfect silence, some consuming thing. Ears at reach, cartilage cut, minute birth and bark. Snuff it with a pinch.

### Just Roaming Now

Sleep has left, or has it come? I can no longer tell. I close my eyes, I open them up. It's brighter when they're closed, my hot and heated lids. Or is that something tangible?

I'm just roaming now, no drive or direction, no will to stop. Desire has left, though need is great. This pulsing darkness clusters in, a terrific non-existence, or maybe that's my shade.

It's acting up, a weary protest, unwilling to continue. I gotta learn, I gotta function. I can't sit still for long. There's nothing left but movement, an aging, present lesson.

Time progresses all the same, that's what I keep on saying. It regards me with contempt, and so my life is nothing. But I know this waking death could offer something sacred.

### Something Sacred

I hear it dripping, whispering, the telling pitterpatter. It's a thin report, a twice-born speech, spearing through the caverns, ripped apart on impact.

Some unlucky droplets, they spike within the earth. The waters eat on through, and the cave looks like an empty jar...or a curving, pulpless crust of bread.

I hear it drip, a hollow call, a diamond flash, then dark again. It's gonna break my brain; it's gonna pound with force. It's working on its own.

I pick my way, ginger footsteps on the rocky floor, tip-toe, tip-toe. I mustn't disturb the silence, the woven spell, active still.

Something new is deftly hidden, and one wrong move will spook it. Then the drips will cease, and I'll be roaming soundless, nothing sacred.

#### Lost is Just a Word

Lost is just a word, but its tremors inflate. I can't stand cessation. Or peace. The worst pollutions go together. I'm referring to myself.

I have to make it out, or I'll be lost forever. But lost is just a word, and I was previously labeled.

Fingertips feel, antennae quiver, bodies shuffle and drag. Sniff the air and process change. Follow the currents, senses outstretched, a wandering substance. And the strangest whispers fill the holes.

Slanted words are too alive, buoyant and floating. They alternate, they shift, they sing with rhythm. They bubble up unchecked, roots unknown, absolutely mesmerized, absolutely lost.

But lost is just a word, that complicates the ink.

# Part 4: Sleepless Settlement

### This Sleepless Peace

Robed figures glide, pinching my sleeves, coaxing me away. They recognize my madness, my complex disarrangement. They've felt it in themselves, the very same ordeal, a cringing reflex.

It's all flash and stop, a glittering exhaustion, but there is some comfort here, in these dank surroundings. The dark sprouts break through the cavern floor, alive in spite of odds, on a couple scraps of sun.

Robed figures open, my disbelieving eyes, because everything else is vacuum-sealed. And now I'm in for it, in danger of melting, of splashing darkly in the pool, into this sleepless peace.

I can't describe it my way, though remembrance drops its silky lines, silkworms weaving deftly. The good reflection leads me in.

### **Uproot**

Plucking straws from the subconscious, in between worlds. My head's still in the caverns, though stems nail through the turf. I'd like to move right by them, but my hands claw out and pull.

They pull and meet resistance, stubborn and unbudging. The roots have grown into the rock, wedging in and clinging, as if they had the right. Then dawn gleams into the fields, and I'm caught within the sunlight, pecking in the rows.

Robed figures stare, but they treat me like a vision, solely self-acknowledging. They are stricken with the malady, a black insomnia, a poetic ailment. It comes from wandering, shuffling through caves.

Now the exit's just behind me, and I'm confronted by the fields. Those roots, those brittle straws, those signs of life. They poke my throat and gums, canker-sores tomorrow.

### Sleepless Garden

Long walkways on the cushioned earth, poppies line the rows, winds fluffing, reeds singing. Silent motion, seconds purging, porous sponging. And the ground's no longer hard.

Moving in the gardens; moving with a purpose. That relentless voice, the images that keep me up. Fatigue affects the innocent, the little things that sleep. My sins are pride, envy, and wrath.

Long walkways, contemplative and full. Nothing interrupts; my steps don't even clatter. We are alone in our solitude, half-awake together, on the fringes of a troubled cult. I'm still young, I remind myself, but time remains a foe.

One more lap to think things through, revisiting lost regrets, laying ghosts to rest. They must slumber first, the howling, rattled horde.

### **Insanity Slows**

Insanity slows amongst the foliage, no longer running rampant, no longer gushing whitely. It's a sluggish, steady drip, a relentless dampness.

Insanity slows and clarity comes, though I catch myself cackling, a toothless monster. It all bears down, but the supports are well in place. Like Atlas and the world.

Insanity slows, a deadened vision, and it's less colorful, but more meaningful. Tough to process, but it stays the same. It is unchanging in progression, in its rate of growth.

Insanity slows, without rebound, I cannot venture far from here. There is a center in the garden, a giving balm, a song of praise. I orbit around it, the common point.

Insanity slows, but I sense it there, water at the dam. I feel its pressure, its tremendous weight. Pressing in, a constant force.

#### Wakeful

Wakeful but drooping, some unending slouch. Here the days have weight: back-breaking, sweat-purging. No rest while the hammers ring. The planted acres engulf; I knew it from the first.

Wakeful but drooping, disastrous fatigue.

Tunnel vision, seashell voices, silver worms in the periphery. Sometimes fluid, dripping, eased. Sometimes jagged, jouncing, rattled.

Wakeful but drooping, erratic heart.

What a pain, pounding hard, rest-rate high. The face is pale, sunk, toil-shriveled, joyless with labor. The whip is coiled, but hangs at ready, sleepless as this wretch.

Wakeful but drooping, blackout brain.

Midnight blocks and footsteps ponder, disturbing even still. Eyes can close, but mind the rest. It lifts me from the legs. It feels me weigh it down.

### One Big Dream

One big dream, and I'm ready to leave. I feel the peace, and it has a pulse. I need to go before it dies, before it stagnates, before it wilts and dreams again.

They say it will not last, that I'll be coming back. But I don't want to spend my life inside asylum. I was meant for the front lines, for battle in the trenches.

When I look behind, I'll remember those cowled faces, remember my tightly wrapped, mono-vision. I'll remember the pitched nirvana, know it for detachment.

One big dream, and I'm ready to leave. It was pleasant while it lasted, but something's cutting through, crying for attention. I'd be a fool to ignore it, to bury it, trembling at its message.

I want to grow beyond this place, make some clearcut tracks. Off the trail and onto the road, an unfiltered place they'll never go, dreaming in their robes.

## Part 5: The Singing Willows

#### Lost Within the Trees

Strings of laughter, flowing outward, beams and things. A tugging smile, contrived at first, but then it burns so well. And I'm casting them, far and wide, until they hook, until they tighten.

Let them pull me. No need to turn the reel, just set the lock in place. Gentle visions, dreary and repeated, a slurring blend. Pulled along by strings of laughter, and I forgot to smile.

I guess I get sidetracked, inflamed, but that quiet voice just calls too often. Listening is the hardest part; there are divers others on the road. I'm looking for a thrill; I'm looking for enchantment.

Strings of laughter, thin and fake, but then they were all slack, like weary creatures out of breath. But then I'm downed, addled, lost within the trees.

#### Force in Life

Willows sing with many voices, voices that hum or drawl, gusting through the grove, the kind that entice, power evident. I wonder what their faces looked like. Were they full and fleshy or gaunt and haggard?

It's not about choice; let us make that clear. Some voices work like bait. Escape is futile; they have their own agendas. There's always one or two advancing, chilling, hooking. But my brain's too callous, too hard-wired. I'm talking about the willows.

Willows sing with many voices, so stop all things and welcome. No need to bring up heaven.

Breathe unsteadily, shut out the rest, live with the ones you get. They have a use; they groan with delight. They don't invite stagnation. They cherish the confident, the proud, the surging, the force in life.

### Sweetly in the Breeze

Leaves and bark, killers of pain, their numbness washes. Sentence short, speak it hard, intertwine the roots. I've seen them many times, exuding salicin, a bitter price.

How far down, killers of pain, how far deep? Something digs into my side, sliding through and sticking. A living barrier, parted sheets, the barbed and jagged tip. I will see it dead again.

Fearful blossoms, why do you bloom? Out of season, out of touch. Fearful blossoms, cascading white, you'll feel a sting real soon. It could come at any moment; I'll tell you when it's now.

Fuel the touch, swell the surface, endure it all in me. The change is quick; it explodes neatly. The branches dangle and cascade, singing sweetly in the breeze, killers of the pain.

### **Pead to Speech**

Now in tune, numb in tune. Some winsome music for you, sisters and brothers. Stand up straight and tall. No happy, killing formation. Let the bark just do its thing.

Stand here long, sprout some roots. I dislike the sneaky slivers, but still I let them dig. Let them dive and hook, seeking firmness, finding only space. I watch it all with humor, with unresponsive nerves.

No belonging, but such loquacity, the dialogues we've had. I cannot think of a greater time, or a more illumining one. I've never gotten giddy with knowledge, with grace, with emotion.

I've never been dead to speech, but alive with rhythm. I've never let myself transform, never pulled out the stops.

#### Out Where the Forest Thins

Sensation unlocked, sunk and puffy. Maybe it sat on half-shelves, gathering dust, a headless stump. I wanted feeling not logic; I wanted to complain.

Spidery remembrances, desirous years. My remaining time has hit the peak; I've wrapped the leaves around my head.

Funny now I'm at my height, funny how I think of death. Maybe death stalks completeness. I thought it was perfection, or perhaps nirvana.

What's that? Ahh...death and perfection are different animals, different species. I'm more like the willows' mournful leaves, their frowning droop, their skinny living. I belong on a branch, stuffed with wind.

It's that careless face again, unmoved and unmotivated, the silent, feathered fog. It looms out greyly, waits with patience, out where the forest thins. Now cringe in close, sisters and brothers, and we'll sing the ends away.

#### The Choice

Our fingertips dangle with every wave, graceful in despair, blowing in the stream. Some would say we stretch, others think we lean. The truth is we do neither.

It is deceptive, but our truest parts are immovable, are unaffected. Let the wind take all the rest: we keep all the core, all the lovely rings. And then count them when it's over.

The terrible trees, said didactic mothers, the terrible, ghostly tees. And they *do* have shrouds: draping, flowing, cascading. Some dive in and don't return. Some people.

It's not that our lives are snuffed. We made the choice ourselves. There is a mute romanticism, a listening sensation, that appeals to a patient few. But let's not drape it all in velvet.

Scream-Cloud Island thrives on blood, and I came with a will to spill. That's the bone-dry truth.

Brian Looney lives in Albuquerque, NM. He has published one poetry book and one chapbook. Check out his website at <a href="http://www.reclusewritings.com">http://www.reclusewritings.com</a> to see new pieces, readings, and publication history.

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## Scream-Cloud Island Brian Looney

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