sparked by inspiration

Through poetry and stories, photographs and drawings, Spark showcases the talent and spirit of students at North Shore Community College. This third issue of Spark is dedicated to the persistence of vision, forward movement, and the knowledge that creativity is its own reward. Enjoy.
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music video:
Kluesive - “I´m on One” Remix | Adamo Pulzone

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9dvubulvcE

Or click the link on our Spark page:
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on the cover:
Topsy Turvy | Jonathan Cwiok
Advice
by Wendy Walker-Casal

The devil is a Libra. It’s his aim to bait you with the promise of a honeyed cottony quiet of peace, then mendaciously howl as he hands you the jangling mind of the micromanaging boss.

The devil is a Libra. He moves with stealth. No dark. No light. Just shades of opal. Frowning grizzled scholars attempt to study the epistemology of his dance, but it’s all so simple, really. The snake was never evil; the mother goddess was never purely good. Don’t rack your brain or jump to the safety of poles.

The devil is a Libra. Remember his trip: worry them with letters in the margins, powder streaks of color outside the lines, always leave the headlines behind the sports, one plus one could certainly add up to zero.

The devil is a Libra. Remember balance is not his forte. It’s we who cannot bear the yawn of this reality’s chasm. Suffer the end of simple logic. It’s the peculiar service he renders before we surrender to sleep.

Aluminum-bitten Roof
by Nicholas Lovasco

Twisted up a cocktail napkin, Turned it into a hopeful rose, White with a blue stencil letter, Words blooming out to her nose.

Soothing sounds of a Sunday belle, Like the notes ringing in a depression era tenor Hanging over from the night before, we awoke Desire for a bite, hungry together.

She spent a year in an attic, Withering away but retaining her shame. Three children had died following birth. Each one was given the same name

I was a wandering carpenter. From west to east, a bar-room gardener. Trying to speak easy to anyone who would listen.

She was empty except for a free glass of water. I came along and offered a flower for her stomach vase, but all I gave was paper and said, "Chew, ’cause everything beautiful is as bad as it tastes."
A Song for the Sacco’s Shivers
by Nicholas Lovasco

Cover up your breasts, they make me angry.
Her flesh is only a missed opportunity.
When we met we shook hands then took it upon ourselves
To put logs on the fire while all the others retired to bed.
A clash of wit mixing like dust with water,
Sinking and sitting until stirred in the summer
By kicking feet from kids like us.

We talked until it was time to take a walk
Up to the porch where at the base of the steps
She started writing in the earth with her fingernails,
"I was raped years ago."

A hug felt cheap, but I was broke and the gesture would be kind.

Her mouth went to my neck, then mine to hers.
But our restlessness began to shake like autumn morning pines.
Eyes closed, lips wide, I knew in the morning she would forget
What it had meant to me to feel trusted and loving.
Walking back, the stomps erased her silent dirty words.
And in the White Mountains, every morning still shivers,
Like she did years ago.
clockwise

Elements Reflecting Rock Pool | Kristy McGarr
Carriages Boston | Colleen Bertolino
Bakasyon 09 | Martin Sison
AND SO HE SAT IN THE COCKPIT OF HIS SINGLE-STORY SOUTHIE
by Jonathan Cwiok

It’s not clear why Phil Tobin wanted to kill himself even when you consider the state of his wealth. He was unemployed, but frankly that made him want to live a little less, and he was otherwise in no dire state of distress. No repressed memories of Uncle Steve at the family pool party coming to light. It wasn’t even a particularly bad Simpson’s episode that night.

In fact it had little to do with depression or misery. Phil had merely been struck with a sense of apathy. If every life story ends with a meeting with the lord, why should he have to wait until he’s old and bored? Instead, he would take a shortcut at his own pace and beat everyone around him in the human race.

Of course a man in this position is much more concerned with the how than the why. So Phil got out a list and wrote all the ways a man could die. Shot to the head? Too much racket. Slit wrists? Not on this new carpet. Hung with a noose? He could barely tie his shoes. Going out in a blaze of glory isn’t for me, he thought. I just want to sleep, no theatrics. That’s when he found the answer in his medicine cabinet.

And so he sat in the cockpit of his single-story Southie, ready for liftoff with pills in hand and a bottle of brandy, when Phil was treated to yet another sparkling revelation. How much is my mom going to have to pay for this situation?

He needed to know the cost of a good funeral. So he aborted the launch and consulted the almighty Google. Phil sat there staring at the five-digit wrench thrown into his plans. The casket alone could set him back three grand. $20,000 wasn’t the kind of money he could make on the fly. If it was, he’d probably be a lot less inclined to die.

He knew he would have to raise the money on his own. Nobody in their right mind would give him a loan. Then it hit him, the answer was right in front of his nose. The internet! Where a jackass that nobody knows can become the focus of an anonymous world’s adoration. All it needs is a little persuasion.

So he set up a blog to gather attention where he declared proudly, his intention to kill himself at the tender age of thirty unless the world showed him some monetary sympathy. He shared it on Facebook, Twitter, even eHarmony and signed off that night with a sense of victory. By tomorrow he’d have thousands of good Samaritans weeping and begging for the life of Phil Tobin. They would donate just to prove life gets better after this drought. Then he’d spend their charity on a nice funeral plot.

Phil went to bed that night like a kid before Christmas counting off the items on his morbid wish list. He wondered if he could still get a free casket. If he could hide in a store coffin and take some arsenic. Then they’d have to let him stay. I mean, they can’t sell a used casket, can they?

First thing in the morning Phil booted up his Dell to discover with great cheer how his PayPal account swelled. Just for the hell of it, he’d give the blog a quick look but what he saw made it feel like the earth shook.
No pleas for his life, no praising his potential. Instead people were telling him to go to hell for his benefactors saw right through his little scheme and made him into another internet meme.

“Do it, stupid! Take like fifty Ambien!”
“Here’s some money, now stop wasting my oxygen!”
“Hey you fat lard, go jump in front of a bus!”
“If you do yourself in on cam, I’ll pay five hundred bucks!”
They got worse and worse as they went along taunting poor Phil, seeing nothing wrong with urging on a stranger with a foot in the grave.
He had never heard anything so depraved!
Determination replaced depression. Anger replaced apathy. Phil slammed his computer shut. “They think they’re better than me?”
And in all his thoughts of finding those punks and skinning their hides he completely forgot he was trying to commit suicide.
Instead, his mind turned toward grander goals, ways to prove he could win over those worthless souls.
He could use their money, go back to college, get a degree then he could die with some sense of dignity.

No, if they want me to die, then I’ll live!
I’ll live and watch those punks beg me to forgive as I spend my life making mine matter while they fill the internet with their senseless banter!
And so Phil Tobin began the rest of his life as long and as proudly as anybody ever tried.
And on the day he feels death knocking at his door. He’ll still try that thing with the casket store.
Don't know what's at stake
I think they're right beside me
I gotta stay awake
They only come out at night!
They only come out at night!
They only come out at night!
They only come out at night!
They only come out at night!
They only come out at night!
They only come out at night!
Brazilian Trickster
by Wendy Walker-Casal

Pomba-Gira’s reproachful glance
reminds you of her agency;
she’s built her altar out of keys,
prefume bottles and black lace fans.

Sanctifier, vilifying
all that is saintly, dead and white –
her eyelid, heavy with midnight
blesses dancers, bone-defying.

Would you change the world you have?
Turn the ladders upside down.
Sprinkle anisette on the ground
for the Queen of crossroads, sea and grave.

Her worshippers are well-acquainted
with her trident, swathed in shells –
Good and Bad and Something Else
are cased in the tines, triple-pointed.

While theologians try to guess:
Is God complicit in evil?
Pomba-Gira’s holy revel
will answer no and sometimes yes.

Cavalier
by Adam Arsenault

“Come along,” entreats thy Cavalier.
I will take you far from here.
“Dis-moi, m’aimez-vous?”
Tell me just as I’ve told you.
Still thy reply leaves only want,
Ever so casual and nonchalant.
With a nod thy Cavalier bows his head,
Only to watch as his heart doth bled.
Thy Cavalier whispers, “I understand,”
As he grasps your solemn hand.
Tipping his hat, thy Cavalier must depart
To meet again, though only in heart.
BULLDOG
by Mary Ann Honaker

On the cliff’s edge between exhaustion and sleep,
I found my wound mind insisting time
is a bulldog.

Fine, then. Time is stout, tine-nailed,
scratching over vinyl floor.
Time huffs along measuredly, and if

she loves you she will heave a squashed nose under your bare arm hoping for a touch, besmirching you with unknown damp, mucus or drool.

If this happens you should stretch out your hand.
Time is short. So lean down, lean out of yourself, touch the stiff bristles of fur, breathe in the warm stinking musk of living beast.

Time may walk with you down the street. If so, do not hurry her; she likes to nose the earth and air for scent-secrets.

Let her stop and snuffle by the lamppost.

When you take time and let time this way, you have time to awaken your eyes to this ant navigating the valleys and hills of tree bark, the separate digits of each maple leaf.

You will see squares of sun on your neighbor’s stoop, sliced like bread and bread-pure, clean.

Then you will be thankful time is so squat and slow. Your heart and time’s heart will meet in sweet morning, leashed or unleashed, if you but let time stop.

Sunrise on Revere Beach | Ilene Bloom
Every morning I...

by Robin Myers

Every morning...
I get up,
And out of my comfy cozy bed.
I get myself ready
To seize the day!

Every morning...
I sniff the air
To see if my breakfast is ready.

Every morning...
I go to the bathroom.
I am not allowed to do this alone,
I have to wait for my mother
To watch me.
Sometimes,
A little pee squirts out
If she makes me wait too long.

Every morning...
After my pee time,
I get to eat my breakfast.
It is so yummy!
Sometimes it is crunchy,
Sometimes it is smooth and creamy.
Some mornings,
It is crunchy, smooth and creamy.

Every morning...
After breakfast,
I have my teeth brushed.
My mother opens my mouth and looks at my teeth.
I am not sure what she is looking for,
Or what she sees.
She has this special brush,
Like the one she uses.
She puts it in my mouth, and I get all foamy.
The foam makes me spit and sneeze
And my mother laughs
At the spittle all over her face.
Some times,
My tongue gets scrubbed too. Yuck!

Every morning...
I have my hair brushed.
My mother says,
If it is not brushed every morning,
My hair falls out
All over the couch, the car, my bed.
This clogs up the vacuum cleaner.
My mother growls
If the vacuum cleaner clogs.
So,
I sit quietly, so she can brush my hair.
Well, I do squirm a bit!

Now comes my favorite part of the morning!

Every morning...
We go for a walk.
My mother says
That exercise keeps us young and beautiful.
So we walk briskly,
And sometimes we trot.
I am much faster than my mother.
She really needs to keep up.

Every morning...
After I have taken my mother for a walk,
We head back home.
We are very slow.
Slowly, we climb the stairs,
Slowly, we open the front door.
We go into the house, slowly.
We look at each other
And yawn.
My mother yawns with her big mouth

Every Morning I...

by Robin Myers
And then I yawn,
With my little mouth.

... 

Every morning...
After our walk,
We take a little nap.
She lies down on top of her bed
And looks at me and says,
"We will close our eyes for 7 minutes."
I agree with a WOOF!
And with the thump of my tail.

I circle my comfy cozy bed
On the floor
Of my mother’s bedroom.
I curl into a tight ball.
We both close our eyes
And float off into our
'7 minute nap.

... 

Every morning...
Is a brilliant morning
To be a dog!

...
Day Dreams
by Madeline Troncoso

Sometimes I want to kill you
I dream of a life where you
don’t exist
A parallel universe where I am
free of your demons
Where I can worry about me
Where I come first

Sometimes I want to run from
you
From all your sorrow and pain
It doesn’t belong to me,
And yet I hold on to you
I keep you in my life

Sometimes I want to fix you
I want to make it all go away
I want to kill the man who
hurt you
Destroy his life
Murder him in cold blood

Sometimes I want to kill you
I dream of a life where you
don’t exist
My friend who was raped says
the D.A. won’t take the case.
We’re in church; the lights are dim;
the men sit in a circle to discuss
our world made by and through Him.

She is wearing a blue dress,
light and watery, loose-laced,
sitting under muted beige
Celtic cross painted high
on the wall, symbols from
some other age: chalice,
crown. I’ve nothing to say.
I look at my sandaled feet
and frown. Later when I wake
from numbness, after
sudden summer storm, I walk
by the sea. The tide is out;
under bruised sky gulls stand
in yellow-shimmered shallows.

I pray for justice for a few
footsteps and my mind falters.
Without Him nothing was made
that was made. He’s the crease where
Love becomes path, rock, water, duck.

Unpainted shutters. As if to her
he’d said, your body is a water jug.
There’s no worth to what’s inside.

No, I won’t cry. A terrier
regards me mournfully, sulking
on leash’s end. When I reach the road

I find the thick screen of weeds
mown clean. Crickets sing
from beneath drying husks
of their homes, wilted leaves,
little yellow flowers
curled in on their cores.
Laura de la Torre Bueno, M.D.
by Wendy Walker-Casal

Blonde girls with perfect pigtail names
like Joy Ash
copied square manila oaktag;
eternity finished before I crossed the T.
My name stretched across my desk like a
Montana sunset.

Blue-eyed girls named Jane Carr
ran through Chinese jump rope;
the teacher tripped through my endless syllables.
Laura de la Torre Bueno
spun down on Rapunzel’s dark curls.

Taller than the tower of Santa Barbara
in the kitchen I slouched
wearing my cousin’s too-short
lavender prom dress – waiting.
My mother prattled
all evening – stories of Papa Luis
fighting Trujillo, grandmother’s hands
shaping arepas and beans.
Then she fed me milhojas at midnight,
leaves for my thousand letters.

Once in Norfolk, Nebraska,
I was exotic azucena perfume
and wild. Big sky and highway kissed.
Blond man on a Harley chanted
Laura de la Torre Bueno:
wave upon amber wave of grain
matched our ecstatic rhythm.

Precise anatomy professors
enunciated my vowels with care
tenderly as scalpels and specula.
My father cried at graduation.
I fell in love with his tears, his rebel heroes,
plantains, arepas and beans
in an eastern ivory tower.

Now my stethoscope equals my name
in length, at last. I examine
aerobics instructors named Jan Jones
dressed in impossible paper gowns,
who nervously await – the length of my name.
“I’d give you a rock, but flowers are much more pretty, even though they won’t last as long.”

“Rocks can wither as well,” Emily quickly replied, blushing like a peach.

Whipping water through desert canyons.
Carved away at minerals and sediment.
Balls will chip away at the insides of cannons.

“I suppose,” J.W Fosdick says.

“I’d give you a gift, but I have nothing to bare. An empty womb resides in the bottom of my body. I’m not sure it is something I could share.”
Learning of Colours
by Wendy Walker-Casal

Red with orange clashes, so Mother said.
Will red clash very much with yellow bruises?
The softest mustard rings, concentric lichen,
on a toddler’s arms, pale thighs - more the shade
and feel of clotted fabric, stitched and broken.
The corner chair knows a family’s hidden vices.

What best agrees with rising granite welts?
Will this violet-speckled dress augment or cover
the welts that mottle kindergarten flesh?
Purple disaccords with cracked leather belts
and walnut disagreement rankles Mother.
There mustn't be disharmony in family ashes.

This daughter looks far better in a hops field,
or torn in grassy mires in southern heathlands.
Tormentil and heather match contusions.
The bogs absorb unpleasant stripes and squeals.
What tint best sweetens bloody lines of handprints?
No unsightly discord in family fission.

Mother’s handiwork is grim, completed.
Two mysteries remain: What is the pigment
of the blisters and the wheals on a darkened psyche?
What do I choose to wear to celebrate
the collapse of her infernal firmament,
to harmonize - just so - with a family break? ■
Military Wife

by Catherine Alvord

The bed we bought together,
I sleep in alone.
The dog we adopted together,
only sees my face.
I miss the mornings when there
are two coffee cups to wash.
And I miss the dirty clothes you
habitually leave on the floor.
Our neighbors think you don’t exist,
and sometimes neither do I.
It’s sad that they know our dog
better than they know you.
But one day this will all be over.
One day we will eat together every
night.
Until then I’m just a military wife.
NEVER FORGET TDOR
by Jessica Tower

This afternoon a man looks out past the church and remembers the day when a group of his people held candles burning bright like the sunlight giving life and hope to those surrounding him through the paradox of the readings of names of the dead. That day, the man was a woman. That day, the man had been afraid to tell people that he was not as he seemed. That night, when someone asked where he’d been, he said tee door. Not even emphasizing the individual letters. Not even explaining that the acronym meant everything to him. He spent the year building up his bravery, learning about his people. His tribe. The ones like him. And so today, one year later, the man was back in the church. When someone asked where he was going, he said TDOR. When someone asked what that meant, he said: the Transgender Day of Remembrance, a day for people with courage. ■

Moon
by Christina Siebertz

He referenced the moon. How hazy it was tonight, Smothered by clouds. But somehow he still noticed Its light, Burning bright in the black sky. No stars. Only him. He referenced how only God Could create such a thing; A moon and all its brilliance, Still able to be seen Through the thicket.

I thought of his brilliance. Hazy; not so evident. But I noticed it anyway, Shining into me. ■

As Nature’s Few
by Nicholas Lovasco

just past the ferns and decaying branches, sat a clearing nestled by the water dancing.

and the path to the rustling ripples led like weariness does to a fresh made bed.

there i watched algae on rooted rocks grow, so simply and slow as a huntsman’s bow.

i thought of reproducing microscopic pieces as the luckiest of all creation’s many teases.

it happens without knowledge of any other; human begging to make an animal a mother. ■
Sundays With Elvis
by Shannon Krisko

It’s Sunday and Marie is getting ready for her weekly date. The coffee is brewing and she looks anxiously at the clock. The time seems to pass at pack-a-day joggers pace. Her coffee steams her glasses as she fidgets on the couch. She tries to avoid the acidic odor seeping from the litter box that she needs to clean, but she has to wait for an old friend to show up. The clock on the cable box reads eight and she knows its time. He never knocks. It is strange but he only shows up when she turns the radio on. Marie’s back aches as she reaches for the dial and finds the familiar local Oldie’s station. It’s time and HE is here.

Elvis has entered the building. Like a school girl, Marie’s face glows, her body lightens and her energy is renewed. He doesn’t mind the mess because it is part of their agreement. She will bring him back to life for three hours every Sunday and he will hold the dust pan. Sometimes Elvis gets cross at Marie when the cat’s fur invades his rhinestone jacket but the coffee and conversation is worth it. He sings to her as she dusts and she always has to remind him to quiet down because her daughter is sleeping.

Occasionally their conversations turn dark as they share their struggles with self-loathing and addiction. Marie will often bring up the death of her mother and how hard 1977 was. Elvis hates when she brings up Lillian’s death because it reminds him of his own mortality. But too soon, time’s up, the house is clean and the little girl is awake. Good-bye Elvis. See you next Sunday.

Small Voice | Karen Spear
The rain sounds like a faucet this year.
Do you remember when there were no sounds at all
in the mornings at the table overshadowed
by the mountains? Only wings
of toucans and green parrots by the bay.

Love, honor and obey -
We promised, at least, to love. How many years
young were we? How quickly green tender emotions give way to all
gray soaking pots, bills, soiled diapers, wings
of transgressions crumpled in shadows.

I sometimes see your shadow
while I’m crushing bay laurel leaves, like angel wings
in dinner tomato sauce, and twelve years melt away like April snow, and all
I feel are two eyes, willow green,
open, soft, forgiving. Shards of green anger flash now in the parlor shadows.
Fierce spars and jabs are all we know to keep loneliness at bay,
stave off silence for a year.
Decisions perch on swings.

Do you remember the chuparosa wings?
Humming vibrato, splash of tropical green against the hibiscus. Our first year
was swathed in buttery shadows of tremulous forbidden embraces, obeying only the cry of Now! Always.

All that remains is the swing
of melancholy. Marooned on the bay, we look back on the wild green passion and lament the shadows, daily dishes that mock twelve years.

Still you are all that is untamed, precious and green,
a quilt of soothing shadow against the beating wings
of humdrum days, a tourmaline bay that could last another year.

Parting Ways in Santa Rosa
by Wendy Walker-Casal

Meet You at the Top | Adam Arsenault
Sister Joan had been helping out at the halfway house for her lay sisters of the bottle for over a year now. There was much to be done every day including Monday, St. Joan’s least favorite day, her day for yard work. St. Joan was sweating, but not from the work or the habit. It was the children again, the children who yelled “A witch, a witch, a witch,” and then fled in a panic before a long distance witch slap aside their heads would foul them with a long streak of bad luck or suck the breath right out of them. Lord, she wished it was winter and not fall. In the winter she would be in a coat; she would be shoveling clean white snow from the walkway with a shiny shovel, not sweeping dry leaves off of it with a tired broom. St. Joan hated brooms. Not-quite holy water dripped off the tip of her nose.

It was not the children’s fault that they believed the fairy tales told to them by parents who had not converted, had not ensured their children’s entrance into heaven via the Holy Father, the church. No, not the children’s fault that they thought her a witch. And it was certainly not Sister Joan’s fault that she was baked in black, head to toe, north to south, east to west. Jesus had called her to color the world with His love, her love. Black was a color best suited for women who frequented cocktail parties, not servants of the Servant.

She looked at her heresy and started the Act again, imagining her Priest alone hearing her confession. For a while now, she had hoped her quiet eyes and gentle smile would dissuade the children from their taunts, but no child ever stayed long enough to look into her eyes or notice her smile. Curses. Sister Joan wanted color. Her avocation and color. And for the children to stop, and to visit with her.

It was Monday again and the same children ran by, yelling “A witch, a witch, a witch.” St. Joan tucked her broom between her legs and laughed out loud, her eyes aglow. Putting aside her old habits, she ran about the yard chasing the wee black kitten. One child stopped to watch, confused, astonished, engaged.
SEA SONG
by Mary Ann Honaker

Sometimes sun shines upon the waves
as soft as fingers over silk,
softest still, as soft as shadows
in silken folds.

When sea slips over shattered shells
each as white as teeth
or blue as noon sky,
it chimes, it tinkles
like tiny bells.

A white boat sails
close by and the sea swells,
it lifts its glistening black
back like a cat
that yawns and turns
its moon face away.

The moon is a secret pearl
half hidden as if in sand,
turned shyly aside
from setting sun.

The sea is a sleeping beast.
I lay beside her on the brittle dock
of sun-bleached wood,
sere from salt, where footsteps fall hollow;

I listen to her small white hands
smooth the cut-stone pier,
erasing years. Sleep,
she says, this is all a dream.
WORSHIP, WITH CHOCOLATES
by Mary Ann Honaker

I met a gay man at the gallery: a roundish man, stout, who wore his silken shirt half undone to show tight-sprung chest curls; jolly as sunlight in the Commons brooding through the thick-trunked trees. He sat knees-splayed hand on meaty thigh and entertained my friend and I for hours. He sang opera and recited the poem he wrote for his love in the days when they first met, laughed ringingly and kissed my hand when I recited the only thing I remembered of my own poor verse. He recalled the Sistine Chapel, where left alone as a child he sang aloud for hours under the sacred dome, told us he liked to buy a box of chocolates and stroll down the center of the street eating. Shameless.

He declared everything delicious while I, close to tears, realized, for perhaps the first time, how bitter my life, what pain, what struggle.

Now the sun sets over the inlet in the green-bedecked summer. Dark blue clouds, satin soft and sapphire deep lay asleep in a saffron blaze of sky, crowned now by lavender clouds and above them, the fresh deep well of night, draught of coming cool, and, like chocolates eaten on the sidewalk outside the store, an extravagance more-

the whole palette in reverse below on the receding tide. God did not make this for me to bow my head and return to sudsing the dishes; what sense are the pink roses unfolding in creamy layers of subtlest shade, and their precious yet-to-open buds and the gifts of their faces strewn over the mud, but to say this is not a grim test, pass or fail, sorrows only in this life, our dark vale, so why do I expect it so? Why trudging, struggling, travail?

Love the one who brings the verses and the songs in painted vaults. Step close to the painting. Eat the chocolates while standing in the street, right out of the box! Forget the funny way people look at you. Take him up and kiss him, the one you love—there won’t be another Sunday such as this one, and this is worship true.
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