

INK BLOTS

by Ryan Harbert

And this one?

asked the psychiatrist as he held up the card –
 blank sheet with a symmetrical blotch
 of sable ink dashed across its face –
 petri dish for
 cultivating
 endless realities –
 countless delusions.

The patient, now entering his fifth year
 of confinement, looked up with ash-winter eyes
 that had beheld this same doctor, this same alcohol-sterile room,
 these same barred windows “for your own protection” too many times.
 He focused on the Rorschach test with inhuman tameness,
 cold detachment created by close proximity to nails clawing tally marks
 into walls
 and enough medication
 to dull the sharpest of suicide razors.

Mannequin eyes studied the image
 until universes sprang out at him from the inky chaos.
 He saw a fox whimpering on the side of an old dirt road
 – shaking mass of matted fur – its leg clamped in a steel bear trap.
 Out of the black spatter came a metal sneer,
 the horrible smell of infection, and a bloody gnawing
 for freedom.

Thrashing – a squeal –
 only working the teeth deeper
 into its vulnerable bone.

From the dark, liquid blotches came downturned ears
 and a low-hanging tail, stained sickly by the creature’s own waste.

Well, what do you see?

asked the psychiatrist,
 holding that fox forever in its prison.

What does this look like to you?

The patient cleared his throat and leaned forward a little.

Nothing, he said.

Just a bunch of ink.