

*Stephanie Rubright*

**Leaving Her Lighthouse**

Thin streams of smoke loft in the air  
from burning candles, the  
pungent smell of sugared cherries  
making eyes water.

With soggy, frizzed hair that rests  
along bony shoulders and settles  
past breasts, she resembles  
a disheveled mermaid. The  
apartment was a vast  
bedroom, an open window  
inviting the sound of heavy  
rain. The pitter-patter competes  
with an old record player,  
skipping with static. Below, wet  
cobblestones glow under  
orange streetlights,  
tires driving through rain  
interrupting the sight.

The stockings are a tarnished  
gold, and cool like the brass  
of a sailor's compass. The  
woman slips them up  
lotioned legs and a crimson stick  
also slides, the candelilla wax  
tainting full lips. Perfume  
lingers, masking an oily  
musk she can still feel invade  
her pores and build a house  
inside her bones. Candle  
flames swirl with tiny halos of  
dust as she pours herself a scarlet  
glass of wine; here she has a heart,  
a charm; she is not just a body  
that pays the rent. She  
lies upon a sweetheart bed of  
rich satins and silks, lipstick-stained  
cigarette butts lining a glass  
ashtray on the mattress. The music  
drowns out the slowing rain  
outside, it lifting up and mixing  
with air thick of incense and  
amber. The woman plucks  
jewelry from a pile of pearl

necklaces, scoops a handful  
of white pills on the accent table,  
takes another swallow of wine on  
the Davenport. It is near ritual.

She readies herself to leave  
the plush world of luxuriant  
pillows and polyester blankets,  
trading it for oyster earrings  
and a cold demeanor that  
envelopes her like a  
much needed jacket.

The stroll out into the dark is a  
swipe of a timecard, the break  
of a bottle against a ship.

A biting breeze nips at her nose  
and sweeps up her thick jacket.  
With the vibrant wine-red umbrella,  
she meanders down a path often  
traveled. Wet bullets hit the umbrella  
and others less fortunate fall past  
the red nylon, absorbing a potent  
scent of wine and cherries to flavor  
puddles. The dim burn of street lights  
advertising for her, a consistence  
spotlight as she walks on  
wet cobblestones.

The weather attempts a  
cleansing, but the woman tightens  
the jacket and pushes her umbrella closer.