

Lilith

Lilith,
a sepulcher of stunted air

A thin laugh
the drooping Venus tongues,
ecstatic in the wedges of space

Hanging outside –

my garden blistered with their warm breath,
their constant heaving

their inaudible, glaring presence
thousands of purple baby fists
hanging, just hanging
the most precious of sights
yet appalling,
very appalling

Lilith,
your large viscous being
above these pockets of breasts

You stand
with your tongue deep in my mouth
A fine straw of divine ache

You stand still,
deviously devoid of all language,

You stand,
seeking neither forgiveness
nor awaiting any,

You stand outside,
outside breath, sense, being

You stand,
outside of all human judgement,
plain vicious,
the glorious face of luscious lunacy

Vines

The black fruits are ripe—
perched in delicate silence

clasped fists,
the dark centre slowly stirs
as the sun's breath-less core

the diamond grape,
rich like a dream,
a full life in the giant's mouth,
wholesome and sumptuous

Outside the window,
a dream is running barefoot,
naked among the vines,
oiling all in its velveteen slime

Outside the window,

an eye is lost
in the eternal static of the white night

Outside the window,
not father nor mother, not love nor death

Outside the window,
an invisible fire,

the great burden of murmurs,
the faithless bark of heads

Outside the window,
the most blatant ecstasy,
a mulberry lake of frigid quiet

Outside the window,
breath, breath,
nothing but sheets of wispy breath,
as cold, as eternal
as the stone's riverine eye

Frailty

A thicket of night
weaves over clasped lips,
sucklings on tiny blobs of flesh

Shadows and trees
merge;
tiptoeing and trespassing,
tongue eloping with tongue,

molecules of aghast pleasure gulping the sky

A dangerous frailty stuns the chaff white air,
the flushed artery,
the flared eye,
the divine red lip

and between the tremblings
of the fallen night
and the masting lip,

a lilt of ageless winds,
the breathless day, the exhausted mind,
pious dew and
the abhorrent carelessness of life



Aakriti Kuntal, aged 26, is a poet and writer from India. Her work has been featured in various literary magazines including Madras Courier, Tuck Magazine, 1947 Literary Journal, and Duane's PoeTree blog, among others. She was also awarded the Reuel International Prize 2017 for poetry.

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The Night My Father Gave Us A Morbid Lamp

the night my father gave us a morbid lamp

i can remember

he called it country. and an amulet from his father.

his dearth of penance I guess.

for giving me a body I run from.

sometimes my body is the hovel of everything named after voidness

rigor mortis. we children of disconnected sinew

picking crumble on the scrubbed face of bitumen.

here i know what it means to

immerse forebodings into lines

for a heart that carries dampness

names every throb after falls

here a boy is a song emanating from broken strings;

symphonies of green bottles in the dark.

silence is a building of many breathless rooms

i choose not to dwell in one.

for home is where tranquility breathes

and nothing looks like burning thresholds.

here we watch our lovers' half naked bodies

basking under the streetlights of Allen Avenue:

sacrifices to the gods on big wheels. that's how
you break the crust of survival.

of loneliness. of walls painted with burgundies of duress.

boys like me name our woes after our bodies:
the focal point of shards of mirrors

we, a dozen roses in a silted tunnel;
you offer your body to this city

it gives you blue memories - punctured dreams of illumination.



Agunbiade Kehinde is a young Nigerian writer whose pen bleeds in a room of butterflies in the ancient city of Ibadan. He is an aficionado of creative writing and investigative journalism. His works have appeared and are forthcoming in *African Writer*, *Little Rose Magazine* and *Kalahari Review*, amongst others.

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Terrorists aren't born, they are made

Through tiny holes in jute
I could see dirt and blood
Rising in the air with me, made possible by
A blow to the stomach

The floor felt unusually warm that day
I wanted to stay there and die
Tiny drops of breath left my lungs with
A strike on the chest this time

I think they wanted to grab my hair
But the jute bag came in the way
Pushed me face down on the floor
I felt my head sway

Leaving my body I saw myself, laughing
Also, bright light and the gate
Blood and piss reached my lips one last time
They still tasted of incurable hate

The tables have turned today
But I remember the light to this day
No pain or guilt or shame
I do the same to them now, in the same way.



Akanksha Goel fuses fiction with social issues to express a different perspective; the motive remains the same - to spread awareness. Her works have appeared in anthologies by Raindrops Publishers and Aagaman Literary Group.



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Gone

Is it wrong of me
That just the thought of you
Can still make my heart rate
Rise exponentially
So much, I love you
That stills holds true
But along side of that now
Resides a seed of hate
I guess it no longer matters
As we've both sealed our fate
I should have listened
To your more than once mentioned
That you were undeserving
Seems all that I can do
Is sit and wait
For the last of my feelings
To dissipate

My vow for adventure
Is almost more than I can bear
Thoughts of goings on
In the outside world
I plain and simply
Cannot bring myself to care
My functioning ability
In alarming deficit
When action is needed
All I can do is blindly stare

Please give me

Your goodbye
For composure resumed
A simple farewell
Is all that I need
Some form of closure
So that my inner shrew
With all of her spite may cede.

Younger Years

Sit and reminisce
Childhood innocence
Those days of youth
We do so miss
Searching for shapes
Way up high
In puffs of white
Chasing fireflies
A catch and release
Of giddy delight
Marco versus Polo
None better to rival
Slumbers goodnight kiss
Content only in the now
Wild exuberant bliss

Long, heady days of summer
Tasting honeysuckle off the vine
Picking berries of red and blue
Grinning smiles stained purple
Finger food feast, so fine
Hours spent in make believe

Hidden away clubhouse forts
Membership granted to
Those precious few
Codes and blood oaths
Promises on pinkies sworn
Hearts crossed and hope to die
For this unbreakable tie
Lifelong bonds are borne

Come, sit a spell
Let us rest our bones
Travel backwards through time
Our progeny we can regale
With every outlandish tall tale
And be children again.



Alahana Isgrigg has been a lover of books for as far as she can remember. She started writing poetry briefly as a teenager. Picking up her pen once again five years ago, she plans to one day publish her first poetry book. Born in Nashville, she currently resides in a suburb on the outskirts of Austin, Texas.

And while she loves the vast culture of the city of Austin, she still dreams of returning home someday.



Lilacs

for Deborah Digges

Or the stiff white flame
of Kleenex rising, noble
and disposable,
to cauterize a border,
a daubing remnant
in the room emollient
with sweat, tears, semen.

Lonely as a stoic,
a leading cause of dust when crumpled,
into crumpled hands, it's snuffed.

I have only words
for the face-invading flora,
the fire petals
scattered down the aisle of my birth—
the bed drift white,
some escapable sheet
flapping like a sail above the wreck:

tissue, slough, and the bloated catacombs
of termites trickle down the mast.
My allegiance runs
in all directions, invisible as flag,
making invisible the wind.

There are bodies in the body
long beyond
expulsions, and abrasions, and arrivals.

Pollen fattens into crystals
at the corners of my eyes. It runs from me
in spider-green threads
through the ebbing of rock and stream,
and so ignites
a kind of stream within the temporary
mountains that the water makes.

Mother's Day

was all hope-martins and galley-birds
on whose tablet wrote
the ghosts of riverbeds engrassed

beside the river's jellyroll
where we picnicked. Yes,
I was a boy.

Although certain and trouble
did intersect upon my boyest parts,
did loam abrade my frothy eye.

Delicacies yawned
their honey presence in my ear:
crayfish, lily, dragonfly.

And for my mother each I caught.
Slattern light through an early spring
anemia of trees and she

an idle smirk of pewter watching

from the bee-eaten bench,
her shy knees cropped.

A log came stuttering
through a bend in the neck, and the wind
in the branches rose like a train.

She thought it was cold,
but it was not cold. If I squinted,
passengers waved their spirited dues

to the fallen dead, lumbering, it seemed
over the weak back of the water.
And a child, they say, hates no one,

remarks with no disgust
the mole on the lip that feathers him
or the kink in the spine of the hug.

As When the Truth is Used to Hurt and So can be the Truth No Longer

Say broodmare
in a sullen mumble from your hat
to the mud-hole at your feet, and I think
of my mother,
 not because she has anything
to do with horses,
 but because of the window
leaning its pillow cold on a bathrobe, or the slim disc
of coffee in an over-lotioned hand.
Not because it has
 anything to do with horses,

was a cave found,
not at the entrance to my named life, no,
but later, eleven, Kentucky.

What had taken
the bats, damp and perfect, so long to learn
was the savor of escape. Dough,
as bound to the air as I am
to the crooked
funnel of my thyroid, will rise,
and fall...

That was years ago, and I had only parks,
ordinary creatures with whom to avoid acquaintance,
the horses, perhaps less dreamt than the crops,
and the sop, too, less real than the feet upon which,
despite sensitivity
and privilege, I stand still
for hours. No, because.

Treeward, the birds arrive again
for spring as silverware, one knife shy,
in a drawer I'm pushing shut.



Alec Hershman is the author of *The Egg Goes Under* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2017) and *Permanent and Wonderful Storage* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2019). He

has received awards from the KHN Center for the Arts, The Jentel Foundation, Playa, The Virginia Creative Center for the Arts, and The Institute for Sustainable Living, Art, and Natural Design. He lives in Michigan where he teaches writing and literature to college students. You can learn more at alechershmanpoetry.com.



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Defining the Moon

—after a Van Gogh painting

I have tried to define the moon. It does not want what I have to offer.
It wants to languish in the sky, pretending to be a celestial being.
Something other than a moon made of rock and breath, coming in various sizes.

Over the heavens the ghosts are dragging towns of Halloween clouds.
All of this is a trick of light. These are the reasons the moon is laughing.

The moon always seems to be smiling at all of us, locked on earth, the way spirits
have of aching. The moon is always ready to cheer up. Sometimes silent,

then loud. It inspires coyotes. Steeple and tree hold poses for each other.
Despite this fact, the junipers gesture with twists wind gives their branches.
They point to town while the church retains its artifice.

The church points away from wind and ignores clouds. It points to the center of
the sky.

This is where the moon would be if the world were perfect or symmetrical.
These are the qualities of the moon. Everything comes out of oppositions

We call these oppositions stars, though in fact they are really all
just the eye seeing its own closing. These are the qualities of the moon.

All beings come apart into being on nights that clouds define as opposing
symbols.

Arse Poetica

The poet, then, turns gold into marble. He is the master of slime.
An anti-Midas, he does not know wealth. The world crumbles before him

fine ash. fine as the infiltration of soul or police
in everything, intelligence

the poet makes a world

not his world, surely; for then everything goes on into next week:
tax forms must be filled in, bills paid: the poet, innocent, stands

in the slaughterhouse of the world simultaneously cow and butcher,
laughing. He has found the use for his words, words, words: there is a fire that is
called the heart, and there is a fire that is called paper. One can learn
much from the burning. The poet smiles, the world at his fingertips, matches in
hand.



Allan Johnston is the author of two full-length poetry collections and three chapbooks. He has received an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship, Pushcart Prize nominations (2009; 2016), and First Prize in Poetry in the Outrider Press Literary Anthology competition (2010). His poems have appeared in many journals. He teaches writing and literature at Columbia College and DePaul University in Chicago, and reads or has read as a contributing poetry editor for Word River, r.kv.r.y, and the Illinois Emerging Poets competition. He is also co-editor of JPSE: Journal for the Philosophical Study of Education, and has published scholarly articles in Twentieth Century Literature, College Literature, and several other journals.

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for those who don't know chocolate!

for those who don't know chocolate
the children of poverty
and the sleepers in the corners of ancient streets
for those who survived from famine but are still hungry
for those boys who never dream
because they never sleep
for those who don't know chocolate
and heard more news about its sweetness
the people with half soul
and lack food and an imaginary house

for those who crawled on sharp platforms in the mid-night of every day
seeking for the warmth of living
for those babies who never taste milk
with wide eyes looking for any help
for the hands of charity
and the sensitive hearts which cry and bleed
for those who gathered in the torn tents around the world
waiting for a long time
for those who don't know chocolate
and haven't the ability to imagine it

the innocent faces washed under the rain
the seekers of the smell of humanity in each alley, place, and continent
for those who kiss the sun through their contemplative glances
for those who write with heavy heart and smashed dreams

for the dancers with bare feet on the top of Everest
who do their best to bring joy and peace
for the sun of tolerance touching our bones

for the bloom of flowers
and the skies' gloom

for those who never taste chocolate
but they still hear about its magic
the crawlers on the earth with great desire
to make the difference between past and future

for those who draw on the sand
with belief in the friendship with the waves of the sea
for the killed persons in every battle
for the injured soldiers in every war
for those women who haven't the right to vote

for the fishermen in their ships
for the highest star in our sky
and for the rainbow
for those people with disabilities
and for those players with the wool ball
for the little boys who sell water
for the little girls who feed the roosters

for the nations which suffer from drought
for the victims of racism
for the dead from terrorism

i write this poem for those
who don't know chocolate



Amirah Al Wassif is a freelance writer. She has written articles, novels, short stories, poems and songs. Five of her books were written in Arabic and many of her English works have been published in various cultural magazines. Amirah is passionate about producing literary works for children, teens and adults which represent cultures from around the world. Her first book, *Who Do Not Eat Chocolate*, was published in 2014, and her latest illustrated book, *The Cocoa Book and Other Stories*, is forthcoming.



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Poets are Made in Fourth Grade

I remember learning all the things I forgot.

I remember the exact moment the stick was pointed
at the map of the wide blanket of the earth
with all the plants and animals and sounds
with colorful lost treasures/ruddy-faced children
that I will never see.

I remember believing I will never see them.

I remember thinking that the floating digits/numbers
black numbers, bold-faced, added, subtracted,
divided, pushed apart; can never mean anything to me
they are hard and still,
they cannot be urged into something else;
they are solid in what they are.

I remember being confused by their certainty.

I remember believing that I will never need the odd
mixture of formulas and strange science absorbed
or clouded into tubes/ frozen figures pinned to boards
wrestling away their last breath;
cloudy mixtures poured frantically from beakers
how strange to watch things bubble or sway.
I remember feeling how that wasn't meant for me.

I remember hearing the sounds of words that did not
walk off a page but carried them instead -
shredded each letter into flowers, soft petals of dust
with their desperate, hungry bees, and the design,
soft pops of color it created filled the smallest hands;
I remember thinking this is what I can see

and feel, and understand.



Amy Soricelli has been in the field of career education and staffing for over 30 years. A lifelong Bronx resident, she has been widely published, namely in *Corvus Review*, *The Blue Hour Magazine*, *Empty Mirror* and *Picaroon Poetry*. She has been nominated for Sundress Publications the best of the net award 6/13, and is the recipient of Grace A. Croff Memorial Award for Poetry, Herbert H. Lehman College, 1975.



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Broken Bones

If we sit on the stool of our long, sagacious past
Reminiscing the toils of our ancestors
Brimming with the hope of a glorious prospect
For the giant land
On which the sacrifice of blood and sweat has been made
Hope becomes the foundation
On which our visions are built
So we pedal through life's journey
Dangling in the visions of that supposed hope
And like the Boxers in our windmill
We toil night and day
In a bid to build the world's envy
On this giant land

But we, like Boxer
Are Boxered out
Laying in a pile of wasteland
Where hope is crushed by falling bricks
Aspirations, covered in hovering debris
Here we lie
With broken bones
Inherited from the toilet of our existence
And as we rise in subjugation
To the whips that crack our tattered backs
We fall once more
To the blows of collapsing beams

There it is
The last straw that breaks our backs
Now, we see this giant land

From a different perspective
A wasteland laying flat on the ground
By our sides...

Angela Imhanguelo hails from Lagos State, Nigeria. She is a poet and an aspiring novelist. Her poems have been published in Praxis magazine.



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Lovesick

After you forever I became a loafer
I was a pal of the waterside animals for days
I was sleeping in front of a bank at night

After you
I was showering quite a few times
I never cleaned my ass in the toilet
The swarm of mosquitoes would encompass me
Like a smelly corpse; I was ditched

After you
I menaced the flower, caressed the thistles
I sang for cats, read poetry for the dog
I was robbing the shoes in mosques and
Masturbating in cemeteries

After you, noontimes, I was knocking on doors and running away
Peeing on their walls
And breaking the windows
Like moonstruck yoked at the mall
And sometimes like kids was mewling for you.

After you
My food was just cigarette, tea and crumbs and sometimes an egg.
I was busted,
My forehead was bloody; snot and sweat were leaking from it.
After you, I smelled of public toilets
My mom wasn't dandling me anymore
From distance they were hooting at me and throwing stones toward me.

After you,
I was burning the sparrow's nest
And cutting the street trees
Shitting on shop locks
Tearing down the propaganda on the boards
Breaking the lights of the street.

After you, at night I was sleeping in the doghouse
In the morning, accompanied the truck engine to the allies
I was begging and praising for chicken feed

After you,
I became a traitor disclosing people to the police
I quarreled with people, was always kicked

After you,
I was attacking the public phones
I was putting stones in the postboxes
With muddy shoes I was wandering in malls.

After you, my mouth smelled of the fetid socks of summer
My mouth stank as awful as shred socks in summer.
There were mucus, phlegm, and sputum out of my mouth
After you, I didn't say hello to anyone!

After you I became leprous
After you I smelled of feces
My yawning was like urine
After you I became the pesticide of snakes, ant, mouse, beetle and bugs!



Arsalan Chalabi, born in 1986 in Kurdistan of Iran, is a social activist in the city of Boukan. He managed to exhibit art and publish poetry despite being under the radar of the strict Iranian regime. He had to leave Iran in 2014 after being imprisoned and threatened by security forces because of joining protests against ISIS. Arsalan is currently seeking political asylum in Denmark, and believes arts and literature can stop humans from killing and destroying each other.



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Abigail

Her silence has words burning inside her throat
like a letter on a wreath,
A girl that laughs to the river to bathe her
feet
Alone without a cohort returned with light
patches of gloom.
Maybe darkness remembers her,
& every tear she sheds begs for rebirth of
another,
& I look at her cries, hopelessly searching for
signs of her fear.
Tonight we will ask her again, if truly the red
We saw on her skirt was flower—Sigh—she pointed to the moon,
& the mucus on her nose bloomed,
& she touched her thigh to play a sibilant song of
pain
Then she stood and raised a finger,
muttered some curse and walked from epoch to epoch
Like a geld without a memory,
She gallops melancholy towards me
& seethes my soul with her fears,
& my soul runs back to the river to ask the
pebbles what it says to the waterfall;
My sister was Raped.

Kadara*

You've to listen to me,
Maybe I didn't wail much when they
put their knives on my throat,
before breaking a prince into a slave,
Now my body is a fiesta:
There are prayers, there is the Demon....
No No prayer sends demons to me
Each having a price on my head
Only if I am somebody else,
If only I am the boy running naked
In my mother's eyes yesterday-
Yesterday I was young,
Free like the wind
Young as the morning,
Buy today my body is not mine,
Not my mother's either
All I become is filth like my dead father,
They will kill me for who I'll become
My Kadara is a game

They hunt me..

*] Destiny

Grief of Jefe

You remember when
we were too beautiful to smile?
savoring the tears for another day?
How we searched for our breath
In our nose?
You see the prophecy was true;
we will all die
But my lover's death
took away my spine.
I crawled all night and wondered
about the shadow of a woman
buried inside a plank
The day I heard her demise,
I thought it was a prank
Until I see tears from my eyes.
My love,
How long have you been cold?
Alone,
I buried my pain inside my gaze;
looking through our memories
I heard your voice inside my speech,
& when the clergy summoned me
My words become flaccid;
Like this I know how
much death took from me.

Babatunde Babafemi is a 25-year-old Nigerian poet who will always be late to the party. He adores meat and fish.



See You Soon-Nan

I tried to sing a song of love, but forgot what words to sing. I wanted to try and fly again, but broke my feathered wings.

I tried through prayer to ask for God, but He was always still. Because life I took on, by myself, through, choosing my own will.

I looked through panes of coloured glass; my view was not so clear. I felt my life was slowing down, my end was drawing near.

I heard a voice call out to me, but I don't know what it said. Maybe it's just something else that's floating round my head.

Another voice, another day. I wake and feel so blue. I sit in silence on my own, so envious of you!

With family to support you and friends to help you through. Whilst I am sitting by a pond. With only memories of you.

You left me to myself, but I always feel you near. Especially when I see your face, reflecting in my tears.

That golden smile, I miss so much. The stories that you told, to take away the evil things that other people sold.

I want to make you proud though, before I come to you. Then hold you once again, with joy... to set my sadness free.

Self Destruction

As a token of my own disregard for this life, I pulled out a razor or maybe a knife, then pressed it so deep, with a swipe through my skin. Then let the blood flow and the anger within.

I wanted attention. But pushed you away and it wasn't your fault when you all went astray.

I'm sorry I did it; when I posted online, it was not the world's fault when I shared what was mine.

The depth of this issue was simple to me.

BUT please DO NOT HATE... WHAT YOU CLEARLY DON'T SEE.

Crazy, I know, that I'm drawn to my veins, when I'm watching my blood, whilst it spills down the drains.

The ambulance is coming, when I'm gasping for breath. As I lay in the bath, where I almost met death.

Close to the place that I searched for so long. But I knew what I'd done was so messed up and wrong.

I was not to leave now, this was not my time. Some may say it's sick, that I made this shit rhyme.

But the world needs to hear this and I hope they don't moan...

THAT WHEN YOU CRY FOR ATTENTION...

THEN YOU WILL END UP ALONE!!



Brian Finch has been writing poetry for around 16 years. He writes poetry inspired from his own personal life events, and will be publishing his first collection in 2019.



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What happens when the ghost of your past takes over you or A 1986 Onida TV

1. You become a 1986 Onida TV where the grey is more pronounced than the black and white and every time it rains the feed fizzles out
2. There is only one network that plays at night, continuously, relentlessly and it's a comedy special that the ghost arranged specially for you
3. You want this show to be over but the brain is the one transmission tower that never runs out of juice and a part of you longs to read "Connection timed out" with no option of "Try again?" left to press
4. That unseen message seems to hang over your head for a longer period of time every time there is a repeat broadcast
5. Sometimes, the network holds a special and broadcasts it during daylight. Only you can't escape it, you are the television set after all.
6. The 1986 Onida is a really old model and you feel it's been far too long the model has existed, time to pull the plug.
7. Your friend heard that another TV set had played their own comedy special for far too long until it grated itself out of the screen like the ghost in Ring. She looks at you with tears in her eyes and asks you to play yours to her at times, she's here to listen to it, they all are.
8. But nobody else can watch it, can they?
9. Sometimes the screen turns blue and only the audio filters through. A one-syllable word that somehow paints a more vivid picture: Die
10. It echoes in through your dreams, punctures the ironclad wheels of your thought-train and dribbles out of your drool marring it with red.
11. There's a litany of that word in your TV Screen, it reverberates around the TV set, frizzles out the speakers and spills out the seam of your lips and gets lost in the cacophony of electricity crackling. Only you can't discern whether the crackles comes from the rain outside or the one inside and you frizzle out again.
12. The screen is all black yet the comedy special echoes around. You decide it is too much and set a date to throw the TV out.
13. You got the TV for your birthday. It was a gift from your parents.
14. When you do throw it out, the ghost of your past is left without a husk and lingers to find another TV set.
15. Connection timed out.



A 20-year-old college student, **Brinda Sarma** is completing her BA (English Honours). She has a penchant for poetry, which runs through her family.



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The Shepherd

After death, I'll snip.
Carry a heart-shaped ear home
in each pocket.
He's asleep on my lap,
a black silken ear between my fingers.
I imagine sewing them together,
a small change purse
I'll press to my mouth.
Have you ever loved something
so much you wanted to take it apart?
The dog needs to walk,
tugs me out of the house
into Pittsburgh concrete morning,
into wind, into catch-breath,
into screen door clap and wet cotton.
The dog with soft ears pads forward
unaware of the weight he's pulling.



Author of *Animal You'll Surely Become*, **Brittany Hailer** is a freelance reporter and educator based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She taught creative writing classes at the Allegheny County Jail and Sojourner House as part of Chatham's Words Without Walls program. Winner of several awards for her creative work, In 2017, she wrote a ten-part series for PublicSource -- *Voices Unlocked* -- exploring how the U.S. penal system has shaped identity and life of many Pittsburgh residents. The series also aired on local NPR news station 90.5 WESA. In 2018, she reported on the opioid crisis in South Western

Pennsylvania for six months in a PublicSource series called The Fix. Brittany has also covered stories on drug addiction, race, development and motherhood.



Call of the Wild

As parents drive away
a little boy learning to talk
points to his chest, himself.

“I know,” says grandma
holding him in her arms,
“But you can’t go with them.”

“Let’s take a walk instead.”
Up the street, a black cat
shadows a rabbit kit.

Grandma reaches for the victim
but he wriggles away
the cat continues pursuit

slowly, out of the shrubs
across a dark tongue of road
into the brush by a stone wall.

One bird-like scream
follows another. “Bye
bye,” says the little boy.



Brooks Robards has published 5 volumes of poetry, the most recent of which are *Fishing the Desert* (2015), with photographer Siegfried Halus, and *On Island* (2014), with painter Hermine Hull. Her work in anthologies and periodicals includes: *Layman's Way*, *Canary*, *DASH*, *Wednesday's Poets*, *Island Quintet*, *Avocet*, *Aurorean*, *Cleveland House Poets*, *Plainsongs*, *Fulcrum*, *Equinox* and *Silkworm*. She lives in Northampton, MA, and summers on Martha's Vineyard.



Rolling The Stone

Sisyphus, his gob stopped with sobbing,
measuring eternity in bile, labour and tears,
cursing the curse that cursed him.

Planets faltered as he bent toward his task.
Stars came and went. Gods died a good death.
And still he persisted, determined and damned.
Rolling the stone of the sun, the stone of the sea.

Sisyphus, who once ran with the world
with craft and guile, the afterlife
a perpetual hollow, death's futile brawl
an insult to flesh and industry.
Yet the gods depart and he is immortal.

The Lost Years

In and around myself, gone adrift,
AWOL to social norms and mores...
I was perfecting human error, if asked,
the little rebel without a get-out clause,
the born loser bearing loss and the cost of it.

Last millennia, at the turn of the century,
and still the memory welts and weals.
A fog defined by lack of definition.
A blur from living with both eyes smashed.
Lunatic-saint baptized a hero-victim.

Until the hour comes upon me

and death is the fold.

When I see how the precious things
were there to be wasted.

Rain At Night

It could be anybody
out there, trying the latch,
trawling through bins,
calling out names of your ancestors.

You could be anywhere,
the dark's cold hands over your eyes,
asking you to guess who.
And all you can do is wonder.

The voice of the raindrop,
in league with the legions of night.
What it's telling you.
What can never be said.



Bruce McRae, a Canadian musician currently residing on Salt Spring Island BC, is a multiple Pushcart nominee, with well over a thousand poems published internationally in magazines such as: *Poetry*, *Rattle* and the *North American*

Review. His books are The So-Called Sonnets (Silenced Press), An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy (Cawing Crow Press) and Like As If (Pski's Porch), Hearsay (The Poet's Haven).



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It Sounds Like

a table being dragged across the floor
with live bats tied around its legs and the floor's cobble;
that's what it sounds like.

the Titanic crashing into its iceberg
but this time it doesn't sink it just shatters into a kaleidoscope of glass ice
and human wails;
that's what it sounds like.

a broken guitar being smashed into a rainbow-coloured surfboard covered
in nails
while an out-of-tune harmonica is being played by someone with nonsense
pitch;
that's what it sounds like.

Your eyes are closed
But you're already leaving
You're smiling
But your ears are still bleeding

She did not come here to fly

A slicing of an ear awakened her
from her upright respite.
It wasn't her fault she was here
battling creatures of the blinding night
under sodium lights.

There's no other way, she thought:
it's too late now to sleep elsewhere;
I'll try again; besides,
my friends tell me I'm talented.
Though we all know money gets you places.

She closed her eyes one more time
like a bloodied gladiator finally content with martyrdom.
Slowly, bystanders began to follow her example
as if she were a shepherd of a seasonal migration.
But that wasn't her purpose;
she did not come here to fly.

I Lie in My Sleep

I close my eyes when the night is warm
And I lie in my sleep
After I think of yesterday, today, and tomorrow
I start to count sheep

As I wish upon a starless sky
I lie in my sleep
With words I had forgotten how to use

I erode a hill so steep

To think that I was true and just
While I lie in my sleep
I was wrong all along
Many thoughts I let seep

Every night I writhe away
As I lie in my sleep
The joys of empty happiness
I lie in my sleep.

Bryan C. Tan graduated from the University of Edinburgh with an Honours degree in English Language and Literature, and is currently rediscovering his roots in his hometown of Penang, Malaysia.



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Sidewalked

(Written by: Sharon Dina Rose Regala/ Photography: Carl Scharwath)



I was left stranded,
Profusely fighting
for time
to fight for me...

Drowsy eyes
kept on looking
for a heart to beat,
Lost in memories

I was sitting here,
Silently wishing for a sign
To augment the hands
So i kept on waiting.

...but no time arrived
no time brave enough
This place knows
no love,

So I left,
and never looked back
...but I left my mark,
So you'll know...

There I almost died...

US... Our Story

*(Written by: Sharon Dina Rose Regala/ Photography: Carl Scharwath/ Photograph
model: Sharon Dina Rose Regala)*



I will read to you what's
written inside my heart.

You may not be
the only character
in my story...

...but to you, I will only read it to.

You may hear
a few familiar names,
I may describe some
known and unknown faces,

...but what you must listen to,
is how i remember them,
and describe them,
in tenses of the past,

...for none of those
faces and names
I can ever have the most
cherished memories of,

More than the memories
I am now making with you..

...you will hear
the most loved story of all,
the love story which is without an ending...

The most cherished story...
The Story of Us...

Ekphrastic Poem

(Written by: Sharon Dina Rose Regala/ Photography: Carl Scharwath)



Silence echoes
within the walls
of her mind.
Your memory breathes
deep,
within the
boundary of real
and imaginary.
Your distance is
not only felt,
measured
by the thousand of miles in
separation,
...but also by those
little steps not taken...

Sharon Dina Rose Regala is a Filipino writer. Her style is expressive, philosophical and romantic. Her most recent publication was selected for *The Song Is*. Currently she is working on her first book of poetry. **Carl Scharwath** has appeared globally, with 150+ journals selecting his poetry, short stories, interviews, essays or art photography. Two poetry books *Journey To Become Forgotten* (Kind of a Hurricane Press) and *Abandoned* (ScarsTv) have been published. Carl is the art editor for *Minute Magazine*, a dedicated runner and 2nd degree black-belt in Taekwondo.



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Ashes

Look out the kitchen window —
the black patch at the back of the yard,
the leftover char from the fire —
a blackened ellipse,
the brush I burned to please the town
that threatened me when a neighbor.
the one behind, complained.

Before the fire,
my labor — trimming, sawing,
piles of limbs back there.

How long it will take
that I can look out
and not notice the black earth,
not think of my neighbor?

I walk over to seek beauty
in the darkness. Coals and charred bones of wood
scattered in the ashes. Not all black, though.
Blackberry plants sprout at the perimeter.
Small twigs and branches rest on top,
begin the slow raking under
of scold.



Carla Schwartz is a poet, filmmaker, photographer, and blogger. Her poems are widely published. Her poem, *Wormageddon*, appears as a model poem in *The Practicing Poet: Writing Beyond the Basics*, edited by Diane Lockward. Her poem *Gum Surgery* was anthologized in *City of Notions, A Boston Poetry Anthology*. She has published two full books of poetry: *Intimacy with the Wind*, (Finishing Line Press, 2017) and *Mother, One More Thing* (Turning Point, 2014). Her CB99videos YouTube channel has 1,900,000+ views. Learn more at carlapoet.com, or wakewiththesun.blogspot.com or find her on Twitter or instagram @cb99videos.



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Exposed

dawn prises apart her sleep-stuck eyes
forced advent of daylight metal-bright
and sharp to scrape out comfort
from her crumpled bed of creased white lies

fluent in avoidance today she sees her face
mirrored in his steady gaze her treason strung
in cobwebs self-deceit too many faithless
promises unfurl
trapped/exposed she falls and flounders

self-righteous virtue hates his

corrupt lack of affection he

too good to be true too true to be bad

harnesses her sin to snap crack/her/soul

his whip-tongue cools her furnace

to ashes a
final reckoning

she crawls back to find her lover
fears an empty space

Flood Plain

I try to shut it out: lap, lap, lap of water. Waves tap up against the wall, dampen bricks, demand access. It seeps through, I know. I fear I will drown, like other time when it rained all day, rinsed out my life. For now, my eyes stay dry, yet my vital organs are waterlogged, my structure sodden, my ground mired in the flood plain of a river called grief. Ambushed by the flood, I have no time to build a dyke of disbelief.

Recycled Memories

I stitch to quilt moments
back into memories

trim remnants of my life into warm throws

my patterns are prone to tell pretty lies
threaded with silk-dreams

picture of what I would have been,
if only –

I wrap my tapestry of off-cuts
snug around my old frame

shield my sins and peccadilloes
from prying eyes

I wield my needle
craft a narrative so fine
reflect preferred truths echoes of reality
until curses become blessings

reconstructed cuttings remind me of my life

even as leftover strips
littered frayed abandoned

manacle my ankles
trip me up
to die



Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon lives in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, and writes short stories and poetry. She has been widely published in web magazines and in print anthologies. She graduated with an MA in Creative Writing from Newcastle University in 2017. She believes everyone's voice counts.



An abundance of holy things

Like a naked foot on cold sheets,
and knowing we want the want
bound to kill us, alive and smiling.

Like dreams, ripe and layered,
against the dull silver of the dawn.

Like a tune you slip into my mind,
knowing it sews me open with its rawness.

Like licking ice on warm lips
that are unfamiliar with cold.

Like the soft possibility in the day
that springs from accepting flaws.

Like small troubled circles you draw
on my skin, on sinful fingertips.

Like the yawning silence, breathing
heavily in place of the warm voice.

Like that day, walking away
knowing a great love makes
everything else an exile.

Self-exile

Aside from the silence of a woman's absence
and the intimate terrain of grief,

what causes migration in the body?
Space to be wrong.
Space to be small.
Space to be vulnerable.
Turning invisible under the gaze of the other,
unaccounted for and unsung,
being born the wrong kind of animal.
My mental room is full of interruptions.
By slow degrees, I just happened to have died
a couple of times before geography took hold of me
and I started anew.
Drawing my weight against the resistance
of these unknown waters,
you, this other I have become at the end of the world,
are an object lesson to learn
before I swim into my skin again.

Lexical Displacement

My New York asphalt is tired of rain and footsteps,
mostly of looking down.
Switch.

The sun is carving a portion of the day
into the cracks. Time Square, evaporating.
Switch.

An open mouth yawns
rivulets of words. Unknown.
Switch.

My shadow is the only question

light can accommodate. In another time zone.
Switch.

It takes stamina
and imponderable beauty not to crumble
on my own limitations. Tears, as well.
Switch.

A mouthful of crickets fills the air
and the tongue is numb with chirping.
Switch.

This cul-de-sac is resting all its weight on one foot.
Inside, I am a hobbling linguistic animal.



Clara Burghilea is a recipient of the 2018 Robert Muroff Poetry Award. She is Editor at Large of *Village of Crickets* and got her MFA in Creative Writing from Adelphi University. Her poems, fiction and translations have been published in *Full of Crow Press*, *Ambit Magazine*, *HeadStuff*, *Waxwing* and elsewhere.

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Houses

She wore her house like armor,
the shiny exterior reflecting away
away with heat, with wind, with words,
nothing to penetrate the inner, the sanctuary.

She wore her house like a sieve,
let in every dust particle, every moon beam,
each call from the homeless cat and loon,
everything into her emptiness.

Her house used her for its soul,
took and took her goodness, her action,
breathed her into its joints,
held her tightly within its walls.

Her house used her heart for itself
let the beat-beat-beat become irregular
as the roof tiles became with time,
failing finally as is only natural
with all man-made things.

The Artistry of Plain Soil

I shift focus –
each textured leaf lies heavy green
upon the canvas
no light touches
upon this portrait
of ancient forest

I shift focus
because
this painting of trees
includes no ground
no earth to provide home to worms
or step for human foot
I do not know how to delineate
earth
what has given rise
to this rugged dark trunk

I cannot gather my senses
around the complexity
of birth
plain soil is not at all simple
the chemistry defies my artistry
I cannot paint the womb
all I can copy is the solid substance
of the result
neither my hand nor eye
is quick enough to capture
pre-existence.

The Days the Clouds Don't Want

He takes the days the clouds don't want,
the hours the minutes gave away,
creates a solitary makeshift shell

inside of which he thinks
the way only he does, unexplained,
unexamined, just there.

He takes your hand when you are there,
does not look for it when you're away,
when he is back into
his solitary everywhere shell.

He thinks thoughts that never stay,
the way the clouds give way to sun,
and he gives himself to the minutes
and the hours
no one else wants.

When he frowns it isn't over
politics, war or poverty,
they do not exist
where he sits alone in his chair,
never alone but
he doesn't know that,
when he frowns.

When he laughs it is personal,
you and him, all there are
in that moment,
he doesn't
"remember when"
or ask
"what if"
even with his eyes.
He laughs, it is enough.



Cleo Griffith has been published in *Cider Press Review*, *Homestead Review* and *Iodine* among others. A member of the Modesto CA Branch of National League of American Pen Women, she lives in Salida, CA with her husband Tom and their aptly-named cat, Tank.



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Choosing the Right Poeticism

Rattenfanger held his
“Interviews For Forgiveness”
on top of a pyramid.
Much roomier than you’d think
space for a Yanni concert up there,
so of course we stayed.
Unlocked the plastic tubing
from our torso containers,
and the wine flowed.
Had my eye on six ballerinas
who turned out to be Herons,
painted like a mural
on a dividing screen.
The interviews began slowly,
questions about the intent of mausoleums.
I wasn’t sure I could answer when
Yanni left with one of the ballerinas.
Skinniest legs I have ever seen.

Colin James has a book of poems, *Resisting Probability*, from Sagging Meniscus Press. He lives in Massachusetts.



Jasmine

In the garden at dusk,
the fragrance is heady,
familiar, known, but not
known to me,
 until someone says,
jasmine--jasmine, imagine.
I had known jasmine from a hundred
readings, a word in a book. I had
smelled jasmine in a myriad places.

Not knowing was like
 being ignorant,
 oblivious.

Now, knowing--a light going on.
If I had only known; what if
I had known the name,
 brought the two
together. I, too, have felt neither here
nor there, unnamed, unrecognized,
sensing only in-between things,
which like my jasmine with its name,
struggle to come together.

Pyrrhic Victories: Memoir of a Southern Belle

Everyone said I lived a charmed life
Shirley Temple curls and pinafores
Queen of the Yambilee runner-up
for Miss Louisiana running away

from Mama's green switch at sixteen
Edward and the white columned house
on Laurel with the golden Collie
on the front porch all those babies
and cloth diapers and nigra nannies
and Edward dead of carbon monoxide
poisoning in the white Cadillac
in our garage Peggy to the doctor
in Jackson Lily to the shop-keeper
in Mobile Martin climbing telephone
poles for Ma Bell and the sad-faced
boy named for his father snatching
defeat from the jaws of victory no
mother should have to bury a son

the jobs--I was meant to be a wife--
the jobs in nursing homes wiping
old-lady behinds then house mother
to gaggles of whining sorority girls
finally saved by the rich old man
who mounted me once a week until
I ran away from him too looks like
I live a charmed life just won--at 95--
the beauty contest at the old-folks home.

Who's Counting

I played hundreds of games
to teach you, my precocious 3-year-old,
who could almost read, how to count.

How hard could it be—as simple as 1-2-3.

Too soon, I realized, counting was out,
but ever determined, I knew

you could make it to 3.

We waltzed—you know, 1-2-3; you cried;
we sang “1-2-3, kiss my knee”; I cried;

we—I—counted: oranges, peanuts,
acorns, cars passing on the highway,
chocolate chips falling into the cookie dough,

pennies. We both cried. At last, we quit,
and on some immemorial day,
you counted to a hundred. And now,

you have a PhD—in reading.



Cordelia Hanemann is currently a practicing writer and artist in Raleigh, NC. She has published in numerous journals, including *Turtle Island Quarterly*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Glassworks Magazine*, and *Laurel Review*; anthologies, *The Well-Versed Reader*, *Heron Clan IV* and *Kakalak 2018* and in her own chapbook, *Through a Glass Darkly*. Her poem, photo-op, was a finalist in the *Poems of Resistance* competition at *Sable Press*. Recently, she was featured poet for *Negative Capability Press* and *The Alexandria Quarterly*, she is now working on a first novel, about her roots in Cajun Louisiana.

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Orange, Frost

Summer's demise: migration.

Cold, digs in:

Autumn's indulgence.

Rain's infested chill:

light's torn scraps:

dark caves, like dirges.

Hibernation's fur: dense,

dark shades. Tired bones:

incoherent.

The truer the sea

—son: bold ice. Many

slumped shadows: din.

Air's frozen pandering:

layers of muddy leaves,

trampled.

Orange, frost. Geese, for

—mation: magnetic South's

feathered honkers.

Drought

I look out: distance. This,

the loss, the vanished.

Rain: it does not: drought,

dreadful cracks.

Heat waves: spit destruction.

Sucking dust.

I scrape my eyes: dry,

sharp, aching.

Earth-bones: fractured.

Blackened trees: remain.

Crusted imprint: thirsty

fields, roasted land.

Dried grass tapestry:

salted, splintered, bitter.

Orchards, vineyards: passed

on. Meaning: deceased.

In mourning: I bear wit

-ness. Water-shortage:

the lack of, does not

treat land, properly.

Varnished Eyes

Sometimes I listen:

my dreams come

in big panes. Shadows

with dark stitching.

Sometimes I see,
my youth: polished
naked body. Varnished
eyes of glazed urges.

You are the offering: I
worship with fervor.
Beads of sweat:
exploding.

My fingers, medicine
dousing wounds.
Your wounds,
internal canyons.

Sometimes we spread:
together. Redirecting,
bodies. Minds pregnant
with obsession.

Sometimes I wake: inside,
rumbling. Reclaiming my
doubt: when the nights
are infections, I hurt.



Dah's seventh poetry collection is *Something Else's Thoughts* (Transcendent Zero Press) and his poems have been published by editors from the US, UK, Ireland, Canada, Spain, Singapore, Philippines, Poland, Australia, Africa, and India. He is a Pushcart Prize and Best Of The Net nominee and the lead editor of the poetry critique group, *The Lounge*. He lives in Berkeley, California, where he is working on his eighth book of poetry.



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Ayahuasca

They say I raged
Against the ferns.
That I kicked
And crushed them;
That I screamed:
“Nature is my enemy!”

They say I smeared my face
With chlorophyll
And crawled shirtless
Through the brush.

I remember strong chicha,
A leafy crown,
An incredible fountain
Of vomit.

At sunrise,
Everything hurt:
Eyelids, finger bones, esophagus.

Shamans sat around a fire,
Laughing, boiling corn,
Indifferent as the universe.



Dan Morey is a freelance writer in Pennsylvania. A book critic, nightlife columnist, travel correspondent and outdoor journalist, his writing has appeared in *Hobart*, *decomP*, *McSweeney's Quarterly* and others. He was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. For more: danmorey.weebly.com.



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The Expulsion

Limbs down, unripe apples spoiled across the lawn,
I wonder if I have angered some unseen entity.

Have I been dismissed from paradise?
Am I being punished for an offense I committed

unknowingly? Was I warned? Was I forbidden
but one thing? I planted these trees

under a susurrantion of starlings, under a vernal and vacuous sky.
I should be the one to make music for this garden,

adding birds and bugs to voice long afternoons of passion,
to celebrate morning exclamations of joy.

Night should come with its own song,
a shiver of wind under leaves, a shushing of rain on the roof.

But I have no control over the weather.
I have no say about serendipity,

the slapdash ways of the world, and gods.
There, I've said it. I've conceded to the almighties,

who delight in punishment, who take
pleasure from the suffering of others.

Perhaps it is just chance that broke these trees.
At least then I could refute supernatural control.

I could disregard swarms of unanswered prayers
buzzing around as though they were bees

and my ears were blossoms of hope,
whatever that may be.

Cruelty can be chalked up to coincidence,
which is not a god, but a fickle cousin to fate.

How do I make sense of this entropy?
How can I believe the branches I climb can hold me
when my body was built for an endless, ungraceful fall?

Hyperbole

By always, I mean intermittent
but ongoing. I mean the hours of sunlight
and minutes that walk through the night.

So when I say I drive through town every day,
you understand
this is not a constant.

Cracks in pavement widen, even
if only by perception. Rainwater fills gaps,
and wind dries the roadway.

Birds, maybe
wrens or finches, peck at sidewalks,
choose the right pebbles

to fulfill their lives. Black cats are everywhere,
but they don't always cross my path.
And when I say everywhere, I mean nothing

more than the fact that black cats are the ones
I notice, and they come
with their own superstitions.

Seasons come and go.
They are downtown employees
waiting for traffic to let up, the lights

to change, the concrete to push them
on their way. So I drive through town
every day. And when I say every day...

well, you know what I mean.
This is home. This is the pattern of wake
and sleep and work and play.

This is the same old sun and clouds and rain
listing god-like above us
since the beginning of time.

Resuscitation

I remember a white light.
Or rather warmth and light-headedness,
a dizzying height, a numbness
touching me as though I wasn't there.

I remember falling through clouds,

a feeling of flying, but lost.

Then you were kissing me,
touching my chest,
pressing down upon my heart.

A cat sitting upon a sleeping child
is said to be stealing breath.

I don't know what made me think of that,
unless there is nothing more at 5:03 in the afternoon
but a matter of escaping death,

or something like it.

There's a ringing in my ears.
I've been listening to cicadas
rehearse their songs on a midsummer night,

when changelings wander orchards and fields
looking for souls free from their bodies
to replace them in the living world.

I worry I am not myself.
Stand back.
Give me room.
Let me catch my breath.



David B. Prather received his MFA in creative writing from Warren Wilson College. His debut collection, *We Were Birds*, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Prairie Schooner*, *Poet Lore*, *The Literary Review*, *Colorado Review*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *peculiar*, *Rockvale Review*, and others.



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Noise Pollution

You live inside a radio
Someone is always changing the dial
The frequency of my cries cannot compete
For your ear

Hello?
Hello?
How are you doing?
Is everything ok?
Do you remember when?

I'm fine
Yes I

Oh now you're gone
The volume up again
A strange new song
Or maybe talk, talk, talk
The government, the coming race war, the voice of God?

Swallow this and maybe you can sleep
Maybe I can sleep

No it is for your own good

Maybe you need to go away awhile
There are doctors

Am I talking to myself?

Turn the radio down

Love Letter

You were a poppy seed
Giant and revolutionary
Your mere suggestion
Swung low a sweet wrecking ball
Into the fortress of our plans
The insulation of our dreams
The vault of our hearts

We sat in a sand dune
Rearranging the furniture of our quotidian
To make room for you
The poppy seed
We even gave you a name

Did you feel the forehead of the sky
And sense the world running a fever
Did you see too many
Not too different from you

Come back with fragments of lead in their brains
Steel in their stomachs
And nothing in their digestive tract

Did you consider the hospital
Where you might bloom
And detect the stench of death

What made you sink
Into the soil

Where you still live

Gore Vidal, RIP

Elderly, cracking and patrician
As wise as the wind
As self-assured as a train whistle
As bitter as asparagus piss
Your voice whispered a come hither

I followed your finger curl
To bacteria ridden library computer terminals
Contracts with the decimal point in a sad place
And tents of knowledge on sweaty streets

Now here I am
A little boy
Wearing his grandfather's suit



David Masciotra is the author of namely *American Troubadour* (University Press of Kentucky, 2015), *Metallica by Metallica* (a 33 1/3 book from Bloomsbury, 2015), and *Barack Obama: Invisible Man* (Eyewear Publishing, 2017). He is also a cultural columnist with Salon, and a music critic with No Depression. In 2010, he graduated from Valparaiso University with a Master's Degree in English Studies and Communication. I recently had poems published in *Be About It Press* and *This Zine Will Change Your Life*.

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Interview

Are you your father's child
Or mother's, or both?
Do you muffle your woman's screams,
Are you a sedate rapist
Feeling superior to women?

Are you job-hungry
Desperate to secure a job
Care to praise me
Butter me for a raise
Or an unequal promotion?

Are you cunning and shrewd
To fool your superiors
Do you carry wads of notes
To win me over?

Ah, I can see the glint in your eyes
Radiance spread all over your face
You possess all these dark qualities
My friend!

Heartiest Congratulations!
You are Today's Chosen One.

Gone, Mother Gone!

Hurray!
Mother's dead
Wrap her quick, in a saree of gold

Anoint her
Carry her to the flaming pyre

Mother's dead
I was born her girl
I was always the Lesser One

I was a poor nobody
So she'd abuse me
So she'd curse me
She did never ever bless
Her nincompoop.

Of late,
Writhing in sorrow and pain
She agonizingly bit
Into morsels of strawberry cake
And flicked ice creams
Her last wishes fulfilled.

Mother's dead.
Good riddance!
Burn her with care from head to toe
Soul and all
Lest she be born again--
My mother.



Debashish Majumdar is one of India's leading writers of children's fiction. His poems have been chosen by Nissim Ezekiel and published in *The Independent* and *The Indian P.E.N.* These poems are his first written after 30 years.



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Distressful

Drilling into the destination
compact concrete structure,
the robotic tool

is attending to the task
of making a hole,
of the specified diameter

and generating a noise
of unbearable decibels,
as a by-product,

rattling the windows in frames,
the entire building and
tremor on my working desk.

All shudder
a little off their marks,
even the static time.

Indeed, indiscriminate interference
but the nail hits the mark,
unperturbed, like the famed archer,

straight into my cerebellum -
a perfect ten!

Debasis Tripathy is originally from Odisha, a state in eastern India. He currently lives in Bangalore solely to earn a livelihood. He started writing seriously a little late, but within a short span he has had his writings published in *Prachya Review*, *Nuances*, *CLRI Journal* and *Indian Review* namely.

The Pangolin Review; Issue 8, January 8, 2019



Perfumed Gossamer

I love the way

You look at me

In odd seasons of the year

You deserve to kill

beautifully

I start

like poppies dried in sunshine

your hair

wet

yesteryears of monsoon

your skin

a perfumed gossamer

draped in scented tears

becoming poppies

In odd seasons of the year

you look beautiful

and

you look at me

with those

black unsolicited eyes

making yourself

more inevitably believable

that

I die at the end of that gaze of yours

like always

just to reborn

like seeds becoming sunflowers

in a field after tillage

insanely yellow

stupidly hopeful.

History of love is a history of inarticulation.

Drunken Selfies

I am little drunk right now

as if I am naked and shot at point blank

for a ban. Drunk as if smitten by this

night lazily femme fatale with dishevelled cloths in her boudoir. Kamayani.

This night is a crazy melancholy with eyes of longing.

A pair of eyes with viraha[1] can be so attractive. All puzzles are.

I am so drunk that I can see.

I can hear clouds killing birds with a tipsy sun and I can smell the sun breathe.

I wish birds were a republic of sentiments

could fly a bachata, sensual and sexy ;

could fly like a frizzy piece of jazz cutting Van Gogh's ear into pieces. Darshana is drishti[2].

I am drunk right now. Really drunk.

Sometimes my nights are full of dualities and paradoxes like drunken selfies. Sometimes erotic like a lazy husky voice.

An oasis a plateau a carnivore a serpent

a prarthana[3] an idiom a circle a kiss
a mrityu[4] a confession
a moksha[5] an apology
a karma a shringara a trivanga
an apasmara
a lihaaf a doha and what not !
My nights have many faces
but not a ban.

I wish I could fear death more than
I fear formalities

[1] Viraha in Sanskrit is the Eros of separation as mentioned by Bharatamuni in Natyashastra.

[2] Drishti is vision.

[3] Prarthana means prayer in Sanskrit

[4] Mrityu means death

[5] Moksha means salvation



Debasish Parashar is an art and culture enthusiast, singer, lyricist, multilingual poet based in New Delhi, India. He is an Assistant Professor of English literature at the University of Delhi. He is the Founder & Editor-in-Chief of Advaitam Speaks Literary journal. He has sung for In Search of God and Raag. He is widely published.



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You Were Not There

You were not there when I saw:
Death is a lively roaring thing
In blue and white,
The form of a monstrous vehicle.

I have seen death kill
Dealing the happy little girl a sufficient blow, taking her unawares,
Knocking away the trash in her hand so that it hung over her head.

With my eyes I saw
The once lively little thing, unable to flicker a muscle
As her people beckoned, prayed and cried
While the running death ran ahead and ahead
With increasing and renewed vigour.

Beware!! Oh ye that liveth
Life is pregnant – ephemeral; fickle; full of death.
And yet, even death is full of life –
Showing up in all its strength
Still taking even many more – boys and girls, big and small, uniformed and
civilians, sane and insane, dogs and cats. . .
Everything in its way. All alike.

In different guises, death is coming
To kill us all!!!

Deleteh Bank is a medical doctor in Nigeria who combines his love for clinical medicine and creative writing with a perfect blend of hard play and fun. He has received a prize for short story writing from the Association of Nigerian Authors, Rivers State Branch. And has been published on African Writer, The Kalahari Review, The Voices Project and The Naked Convos.

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Tarot cards from a drawer

I remember, there were shadows, which frightened me
when I was a child, haunting figures, bogles.

I looked for a place, where I could hide,
from fear, the unknown, threat, school, dogs,
the milkman, darkness, the banging door.

No corner to hide, not even a cupboard.

I needed somebody to hold my hand
To protect my heart.

To put it into a safe place.

To keep my secrets safe
in the repository of my heart.

Light is shining through
the ice flowers of the attic window.

Light from a silver disc.



Eduard Schmidt-Zorner is an artist and a translator and writer of poetry and short stories. He writes haibun and poetry in four languages: English, French, Spanish and German, and holds workshops on Japanese and Chinese style poetry. He is a member of four writer groups in Ireland. He lives in County Kerry, Ireland, since more than 25 years and is a proud Irish citizen, born in Germany. He was published in 27 anthologies, literary journals and broadsheets in UK, Ireland and USA. He writes also under Eadbhard McGowan.

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Never Whole

How much of ourselves
do we leave
on those we meet?
From the intimacy of kisses
and held hands, to the distance
of the stranger who bumps into us
on the bus, the street,
the rudeness of the uncovered cough
on the train.

We leave so much of ourselves behind,
while picking up those pieces
left by others.

No wonder no one
feels whole, no wonder
so many seek love
in the warmth of strangers.
No wonder people die alone.

No wonder I find it so hard
to rise
in the morning.

Prisoner

Though smaller than me,
and residing within,
my heart is a cage
that allows me no freedom,
a dirty dish in the corner
my only sustenance,
while tuneless music plays
and I am forced to dance dances
I can not master,
dances that make my feet bleed
black blood that mingles with
whatever substance seeps from my soul,
the silver syrup they form
flowing into a funnel
in the floor,
dripping onto what,
I do not know.

Bone Deep Despair

Everyday she cries,
soundlessly, her face

crunched up, her mouth moving,
like an inexperienced mime.
It would almost be funny,
except her sorrow is
all too real,
crying for so long
that she is out of tears,
her voice gone.

There will come a time when she stops,
her crying hollowing her out,
and then she will lay down,
her last breath inaudible,
and she will be gone,

Maybe to some unknown place
where she will know
peace, some peace,
after it all.



Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen* and *Smiths Knoll*. His debut poetry collection *Playing Poohsticks On Ha'Penny Bridge* was published in 2010. He is currently working towards a second collection. He also makes musical noise under the names *Ayahuasca Collective*, *Lewis Milne*, *Orson Carroll*, *Blinded Architect*,

Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. His Facebook page can be found at www.facebook.com/edwardleewriter.



Labyrinth

In the vortex of dance,
wandering in the labyrinth of time
she saw
the ephemerality of existence.
Today turns into yesterday
as in the Heraklite river
- fluid, smooth.
Although trees live longer than humans,
slouching between them
one can see the scattered dandelions.
And behind a tall wall of boxwood
there is everything
one cannot go back to.
Every ray of the sun
is a hope for existence,
even though
at some point it will
not allow for a gust of life.

Jokester

We frolic with death,
every day we joke about life.
And it slips by.
Every day we get closer
to no longer being human,
instead to being
only a body
and a memory
in the minds of the Jokesters.

Inverted Time

What am I doing here?
Am I amusing myself?
I'm looking for youth
among young people.
Mental mirages are like
flights between good and evil.
I listen to stories
about the wonders of the future.

What am I doing here?
Am I taking my time?
I'm looking for old age
among old people.

Life is not a pendulum
and never comes back.
Remains
the motion of memory and oblivion.

And I,
listen to
what is still left –
inverted time.



Eliza Segiet graduated with a Master's Degree in Philosophy, completed postgraduate studies in Cultural Knowledge, Philosophy, Arts and Literature at Jagiellonian University, as well as Film and Television Production in Lodz. Her works can be found in anthologies and literary magazines worldwide.



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Something, Not the Other Thing

This is from after you grew up
when I found a small shred of myself
under the couch

For a long time I stared down
trying to identify it
until finally, I saw

It was the part of me
you did not need
or had chosen to leave behind

The Possible

It is winter, in Plattsburgh, New York.
Each day closes in on itself
like an old letter, tucked in a book

There is an essential mystery
to how things got to this point
the close walls
the unfinished kitchen painting job
the lost loves, their scattered
gifts on shelves, some still
in their boxes

All the world just sitting here
in this house that is a mere gap
in the snow, a not-snowy
caesura, breeding dust

There was a time when this
was different, the good bones
historic columns
swimming pool like a hopeful blue eye
and the sunny room of plants
but the girl grew up
the dog died
the other dog that came
chewed on the heels of the couch

All morning the possible
rages around the house
like a storm, the afternoon resembles
an invitation forgotten under a book
in the spare room

meanwhile, the snow
wrapping everything in mummy cloth
preserving this white margin
between here and everywhere else



Elizabeth Cohen is a professor of English at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, where she teaches creative writing and edits *The Saranac Review*. She is the author of 8 books including, most recently, *The Patron Saint of Cauliflower* (poetry, Saint Julian Press, 2018). Her poems, stories and essays have been published widely, including in *CROSSWINDS*, *Black Renaissance Noir*, *Hawaii Review* and other regional and national journals and literary magazines.



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The End

I learned well to mourn a dream,
to let it rest, gently as dust settles
in warm light, softly as moss blankets
stone after cool rain. Now the world is dressed
in shadow, silent as the snow melts
on the ocean. The sky unfurls
its colors like a prayer. Watch and listen –
leave the body behind in the salt wind,
inside the molten gold spilled
from the moon. I learned well to let go of things
that were never mine. I have been a ghost
knocking at windows, grasping empty light –
Let me awaken new, as the Pleiades stretch
across the winter sky like open hands.
Unbecome me, make me whole again.



Elizabeth Higgins is a nursing student and emerging writer based in New York City.

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The Jellyfish Has No Brain

The jellyfish has no brain
yet somehow knows where it's going,
trailing tentacled threads
prepared to sting,
yet swimming amidst the swarm
of jelly minions
comes to no harm.

The worm has no eyes
yet finds the path
through damp earth,
slick and sure digesting
until the canny robin
ear tilted to ground
plucks it and pulls
a red rope fulfilling
her ardent hope.

The robin has no arms
yet wings through air
laden with dreams
salted in tree pollen,
her razor beak awaiting grasses,
the design of a nest
already formed in her eye.

What is it that we do not have
or carry unawares,
too busy with building
lost in the maze
to know our own nature?
We float through life
stinging like the jellyfish,
impulsively digesting
or building nests
while the great eye, amused,
blinks us out of awareness.

Unyielding Grasp

Water adores gravity,
just look at the way she clings;
running downhill
(he's always bringing her down,)
open-armed to meet him
laughing and gathering her skirts
careless,
not the least bit concerned
with what she catches
or carries along for the ride.

She's always moving restless,

seeking his hidden places,
twisting, turning
downward in a torrent
or in trickling threads
to his subterranean realm
where she collects herself
and lies placid
in the stone chambers
of his embrace.

Or she defies him,
bubbles upward,
an artesian exhalation
springs forth
briefly released
from gravity's unyielding grasp.
Sometimes he can be
such
a drag.

Too Much Light

Ever since Edison
switched on the first bulb
man has been at war
with the dark.

This newly radiant orb
sped up time,
children in sweat shops
labor 'round the clock,
night studies on a fast track
to a marquee saying,
"open 24 hours."
They worked all night
under that bulb to make
an atomic bomb.

But darkness
is where dreams happen.
Crickets entice the senses
lull the mind to stasis
where rest falls
clean and black,
softly pats down the day
until sleep embraces
the light-weary soul.

Creatures wary
of our persistent beaming wait
until a channel of shadow
presents itself,
an invisible cloak

protection from the raw
and relentless human eye.
Too much light
can make you
crazy.



Elizabeth Paxson is a poet, writer and visual artist who lives near the 45th Parallel, among the bays of Northern Michigan. She owes much to an aunt who led her to the well of words and taught her to drink. Her first chapbook will be published in 2019.



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Tempus Edax Rerum

She had been beautiful. Not the kind of beautiful that only mothers commented on, nor the kind that only men saw. She was the kind of beautiful that everyone saw. She felt it when she walked, the sharpening of the air before her, around her. She felt it in the pause when she spoke and the silence was a moment too long. She felt it in the irony of her empty bedroom.

Time is cruel. She drags you down. Eyelids, cheeks, chin, tits, arse, hopes. She takes away everything you have. Except, of course, your empty bedroom.

Shut That Window

The wind kisses my skin,
a longed for breeze
in the stifled season.
Instead of soothed
I am jangled.
The wind kisses my skin
and reminds me of you,
of your treacherously soft tongue
and too frequent touch.
The wind kisses my skin
and whips away the salt
of summer and regret.

It was the longest summer of my life, waiting for rain

I waited for you.
I laid on top of my sheets
craving your touch,
listening for the tell-tale noise of you getting near.
My body drooled anticipatory sweat

at the thought of you coming.
It arched and ached and begged for you.
I felt your absence in my lungs.
I was barren without you.

You arrived, as always, suddenly.
I ran to meet you,
stood naked in my garden
as your promise swept over me.
You drenched me with love
and I felt your force
carve sweat and sin from my pores,
felt you sink into the baked hardness of my heart.
My skin tingled with wetness.
You drove me to my knees.



F. R. Kesby is a poet and storyteller from Leeds. She writes about feminism, politics, relationships and mental health and has headlined gigs including Stirred, Word Club, Outspoken and NeurodiVERSE and her work has appeared in magazines and journals such as Wanton Fuckery, Laldy, Picaroon and Strix. She is also the sole writer of the blog Spoons and Toons and a regular contributor for Women's Republic.

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Scripts

So many games invented by the fertile soul,
speeding through galleries to feed a crowd,
everyday winning a new contest with the self.

Morning, evening, don't take the toys away,
it is summer, and there is no better camp
than to feel the breath of a contented herd.

Winter comes too, light lingers in the night,
thick frost resists for months yet to come,
no mittens thick enough in the brisk air.

Holidays sparse anticipated to become a man,
chapping fingers, cutting ankles, bleeding,
solid like Mont Blanc, sheltered with a white cap.

Furry hugs, of those so long parted now,
friends gifted with those large eyes and no future,
I hope today at peace with their tragic fate.

How I loved the thick paste in the plough,
the sweet smell of the fresh cut grass at dawn,
memories not yet born, under cover of life.

Standing tall by the fence, surveying the horizons,
was he too still just the boy of the early morning run,
ageless when thoughts remained his mystery?

So many games created to imagine an eternity,
scripts written on the surfaces of all things,

suspended in time, memories never truly die.

She Dreams

Little hands on the firm knees of enduring love
she pauses her spirit on the promise of the new dawn.

Looking in the distance the ruby lips smile again
sighting a friend chasing the ball in the mist.

There will be no school for her, free she is yet
her cheek warm against the cozy lap of a mother.

Soon she will join in the plays of another everyday
but for now she listens to the hearty pulse beneath her ear.

Snows of May

It snows sometimes in the heart of Etna
they say

I did see snow once in the heart of Etna
I know.

and it does snow in the hearts of strangers
there even in May.

It is as they say the bittersweet chunks of lives
they ache

I too feel the loss of those sweet pieces of days
I really do
and it is good to see those gentle souls depart
even in May.

It warms deep inside to see those lives begin
they soar
I sit back on the old swing and consider their future
I am in awe
and it does snow yet a little within my stomach
even in May.



Fabrice Poussin is the advisor for *The Chimes*, the Shorter University award winning poetry and arts publication. His writing and photography have been published in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *La Pensee Universelle* and *Paris*, namely. He teaches French and English at Shorter University.



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Back to life

On the land
That retained
Her soul
She hoped for
A brightening
On the summit
Of dark and
Gloomy clouds

Enriched in
Summer suns
Leafless olive
Groves
Were watered
With tears
To thrive
Peacefully
Absent from
Freedom's shade

In splendour
Warms
The most
Intense surprise
Emerged
Looking through
Nurtured eyes
A repaired heart
Dwelt no longer
Thunders of grief

Faded in the
Pleased air

Transferring

She smiled up at
Veiled clouds
And saw nothing
But colours that
Were faithful and
Exquisite

With a slant on life
That was oddly
Diverting yet
Refreshing
She found
Beauty in
Manicured lawns
And borders bright
With flowers

Lifting a slice of
The countryside
And transferring
It to the canvas
She saw her life
Stretching before
Her like a clear
Straight road
Heading for
Somewhere

Magnificent

Sculptured

Like the softness of
Alabaster, you carve
The placid features
Of a human face
Revealing a sweet
Privacy that is seldom
Seen to eager prey

Humid eyes that
Once danced in
The midst of their
Own brightness
Hang heavy, leaning
Downwards in a
Dainty bend

A pearl richness
Glosses over to
Make a sun shine
In a shady place

Captured trappings
In a tainted wilderness
Has love suspended
Floating
Never
To
Fall

On
Deathly
Thorns



Fotoula Reynolds is a poet and author and she lives with her family in the Dandenong Ranges in Victoria, Australia. She began writing poetry in 2016 and has recently published her first poetry chapbook titled *The sanctuary of my garden* (May 2018). She is published in *The Hillscene Magazine*, *The Dan Poets Anthology*, *The Bonsai Journal* and *Spillwords Press*.

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Wisdom of Solomon VI.

1. Study Monsieur X and Mademoiselle O:–
Note their harmonization.
2. Custodians of melodies, orators of faultless prophecies,
Holiness is their defence.
3. Scorning sinners and daemons who contrive perils for saints,
who can deny their *Piety*?
4. Ivory be their robes, their cloud-crafted offices,
their snow-bright abodes;
white is their wine, their rum, their water.
5. Sunlight—endless and endlessly refreshing—is *Wisdom*.
The radiance of *Holiness*.
6. Vigilant is *Wisdom*, inspecting every thought.
7. Want *Immortality*? Get thee *Wisdom*,
which is God's prerogative to bestow.
8. (Never be as detestable—debatable—as poets.)
9. The wise ruler inhabits Utopia.
He becomes as deathless as light.
10. *Wisdom* is flagrant, showy, ungovernable.
11. *Envy* flees from *Wisdom*.

[Vancouver (British Columbia) 23-24 *février* mmmxvii]

Wisdom of Solomon VIII.

1. Those who hate *Wisdom*, love *Death*.
2. Cosmopolitan is *Wisdom*,
but thoughtlessness is provincial.
3. *Wisdom* is as vivid as the grotesque
and as indelible as the beautiful.
4. *Wisdom* casts *Labour* as *Art*.
5. *Wisdom* is the *bibliopole* (bookseller) whose shelves
oppose the legislature.
6. *Wisdom* quakes kings.
7. *Wisdom* is *not* the lion-tamer tumbling the poodle-walker.

8. *Wisdom* applauds the seagull perched atop the umbrella.

9. *Wisdom* lauds the extemporaneous birth of a galaxy
as raindrops splatter upon an overhead awning.

[Ottawa (Ontario) 10 *mars* mmxvii
& Kelowna (British Columbia) 16 *mars* mmxvii]

Wisdom of Solomon IX.

1. *Wisdom*'s fool, I know only what God assures:
I will die, and I am weak.

2. A king, I'll build a temple and an altar in a holy city.
Let only the sun blind my towers!

3. Architecture must remember the grave.

4. Thus, my blueprints allow space for *Error*,
make room for *Disaster*.

5. Let us not be *plumbean* (stupid):
Wisdom is building—
with vacancy allotted to pastures, to gardens.

6. *Labour* is the limit of *Thought*.

7. Beware: *Painting* is easily *Blasphemy*.

8. Inadequate *Complexity* bedevils
the verse of the Ivory Tower poet.

9. To cure *Imbecility*, eat a monkey.

[Ottawa (Ontario) 10 *mars* mmxvii;
& Kelowna (British Columbia) 16 *mars* mmxvii]

* Cf. X's *Autobiography* and O's *Histoire*.



*The 4th Poet Laureate of Toronto (2012-15) and the 7th Parliamentary/Canadian Poet Laureate (2016-17), **George Elliott Clarke** was born in Windsor, Nova Scotia, in 1960. A pioneering scholar of African-Canadian literature at the University of Toronto, Clarke has taught at Duke, McGill, and Harvard. A prized poet, his books have appeared in Chinese, Italian, and Romanian.*



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Vicinity

Vicinity. A lovely word. I was in the vicinity
and thought of you, thought I'd stop by. It
sounds like Kennedy, Cynthia, affinity, or
zippity as in doo-dah, happy words, words
like serenity, oh but then comes trinity and
that connotes implosion, still, the end of war
but can we ever believe that as long as we
humans lurk in the vicinity? Oh, obscenity!

Hello Eighty

Four score, somewhere in a Lincoln speech
somewhere I never thought I'd be or see
take heed children when you hear that speech
you may just meet up with that someday

Hello eighty I say as I would talk to a tree
or a cow in the locative case, a place, a
marker I've come to and passed at the speed
of life, which is constant yet changing daily

by the minute. Past and present are illusions
but a bullrider can slow down eight seconds
and make it even slower if his hand is caught
in his rope. The bull's massive body simply

won't slow down for anyone even Einstein
or Mercury which could collide with earth
in a billion years. The cowboy will collide
with earth on every ride. Relatively speaking.

Back to eighty, I've busted through to the
other side and might as well wave goodbye
to that younger me, no longer riding bulls or
even my old gentle horse. Bye-bye bikes too

except for pedaled variety, got a fatbike for
a pasture cruiser, but walking more, Fitbit on
my wrist, but I don't wear velcro fastened
shoes or walk in a mall on inclement days.

Gray Day

The road is a long trough of dusty gray
and the sky matches it so well the road
appears to vanish up into it; the gray
sky may be full of number nine gravel
but looking to the right into the distance
I see a barn roof of sheet tin that earlier
matched the sky and the road but it is
now taking the shape of a very bright
parallelogram floating above field and
road quavering in the sky sharp and
angular suspended like a shiny UFO.
The sun is sneaking in under the trees
and is illuminating items, a bored child
playing with a flashlight in a familiar
not quite darkened room. Now the
shape has been eaten by the sky and
buried beneath the road's gray gravel.
Only silence where you'd expect to
hear the gravel crunch against the tin.



Guinotte Wise writes and welds steel sculpture on a farm in Resume Speed, Kansas. His short story collection (*Night Train, Cold Beer*) won publication by a university press and enough money to fix the soffits. Four more books since. A double Pushcart nominee, his fiction and poetry have been published in numerous literary journals, including *Atticus*, *The MacGuffin*, *Santa Fe Writers Project*, *Rattle* and *The American Journal of Poetry*. His wife has an honest job in the city and drives 100 miles a day to keep it. Some of his work is at <http://www.wisesculpture.com>.



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The Forgiving Fudge

My mother let us fight.

She'd allow righteous anger, but she never allowed a grudge.

She'd smile and with a gentle nudge, help us make the forgiving fudge.

The chocolaty goo that mended all wrongs, could easily turn our shouts into songs.

So she let us fight.

To the Wind and Wave

When I began to sink, drowning in a shallow grave,

He told me be steadfast, he told me be brave!

For we are but cousins, to the wind and to the wave.

So I tell you be steadfast, I tell you be brave.

Swim.

For you and I are but cousins to the wind and wave.

Syncopated

How odd then that life would reflect my music.

Syncopated beats, reflecting unexpected stresses.

The pattern of my own resolve, strong, weak, strong, weak... Backwards.

What brought about this shift? What knocked it all out of alignment?

And how do I get back?

Hannah Haydt is a little writer on the prairie.



Tried and tired

Well, I am a flower that needs to be nourished but they pluck and hurt.

Well, I am a rain that needs to be felt but they play and fill with dirt.

Well, I am a fragrance that needs to be spread but they cherish and hoard.

Well, I am a rainbow that needs to be understood but they see and can't stand.

Well, I am a sensitive creature that needs to be protected but they touch and react.

Well, you know what I am WOMAN above all that needs to be thanked but you don't deserve and suppose to be cracked!

Huda Tariq is a 28-year-old from Pakistan. She has graduated in Botany from GCU (Government College and University Lahore) and is dedicated to serving in the field of Education. She loves to write, irrespective of genres or platforms, and loves to be surrounded by emotions.



A Conveyance

The manifestation of my love to you is certainly profound.

As the quandary here is not just about revelation, but fixed with definite schedule and time.

I have always aspired to indulge myself in shaping your yearned world though.

With tears rolling down my face, in the moonlit night, I pray this conveyance may prove a little worthwhile.

Frozen Feelings

It's so lonely here inside me that not even the darkness can penetrate.

My body and soul have stopped confronting each other,

although their silence is similar to a hollow sound in the ear.

I am lying here in the core of an abyss with my eyes beholding the surface.

With this I ask myself, "Is it a mere interment?"

Or a beginning of a traverse to an unending dreary tomb?"

Yearned

Your love is one of the beautiful feelings which made me swim in the ocean of dolour;

It is like a rain shower, which freed me when I was stuck in the sands of oblivion.

I was running behind the shadows of identities which were unreal and temporary.

Eventually, your presence overshadowed them.

When my eyes met your eyes, they created dawn.

The journey with you was filled with flowers and thorns,

Though it eventually kept me buoyant.

The days passed with you are my ultimate memories,

And I will take them along with me when I shall bid my last goodbye.

For people who think there my journey ends,

Just to tell them from here, "it actually begins.

As for those who write must never die
because their penmanship keeps them always alive.”



Ifrah Kayenat is an advocate/activist by profession. She completed her LLB from the Department of Law Calcutta University. She writes on social issues and lives in India.



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Rain

The sweep of life
Flowing
Through darkness and light,
Breathing
Freshness after a tired day.

Cleansing
The grime and soot in our souls,
Melting
Away a tiredness
That I thought was indefatigable.

Oh beautiful Rain
Sweep through me
In a caress...
As light as your touch
As bright as the lightning
As deep as your thunder
That will resound
Within me.

Sweeping me away
To a forever land...
Of bare nothingness,
Where I can inhale
The soft smell
of your freshness
And feel Alive.



Ipsita Ganguli describes herself as a student of the myriad experiences that life holds out and believes that there is never any stop to learning. She is a “people’s person” and relishes connecting with a variety of lives. Her poems have been published in several anthologies. Ipsita debuted with her solo compilation of poems with *Of Love, Longing and Random Pondering* which was launched in the Kolkata Book Fair 2017 and is available for sale online.



The young lad's bell

Old Gillymill, where folks are good,
Little but full of charm,
Where everybody works 'til noon,
Down at the carrot farm.

At breakfast time it's carrot juice,
For dinner, carrot pie;
And as for laws, there's only one:
You mustn't tell a lie.

One day there came a visitor,
Who darkened the bright mood.
That was the day a nasty troll
Came to their neighbourhood!

Pimples and warts ran down his nose,
His hands were thick with hairs.
His pointy ears and narrow eyes
Gave everyone a scare.

The troll was nasty, horrid, mean.
His hair was full of lice.
So when the people saw him come
They hid away like mice.

The troll ate all the carrot cake
And kicked down all the doors.
He spat and swore, bellowed and moaned,
They couldn't take anymore.

The townsfolk had a secret meeting,
To think what they could do.
They scratched their heads and stroked their chins:
They didn't have a clue!

"I'll rid you of that ugly troll,"
Called out a sprightly lad.
"I need a working bell, that's all."
They thought he must be mad!

He looked no older than a boy,
Not one hair on his chin,
"A bell," he said, "give me a bell.
I promise that we'll win."

The doubtful people shook their heads.
"Mad!" said one with a sigh,
"But then again he might be right,
let's give the lad a try."

The boy went looking, bell in hand,
And found the troll nearby.
"Stop spitting down that well," he said,
"I want to be your spy!"
"My spy?" the troll hissed nastily.
The boy stood straight and true.
"I want to help you Mr Troll"
'Cos people don't like you."

The troll was stunned; his face turned blue.
"Can it be true!?" he cried,
"Who dares say such a thing to me,

I'll have his tongue deep-fried!"

"Have patience my dear trolly friend,
You'll have revenge in time.
You'll have your tongues to cut and fry.
Just wait for my bell's chime!

"Your bell?" the troll said with a grunt,
"I don't need such a thing.
I'll smash their heads in with a spade
Before your bell can ring."

"There's lots of people in the town."
The boy sat on the well.
"If anyone should call you names,
You'll hear the ring of my bell."

So troll and lad shook hands. With that,
The deal was sealed and done.
The lad walked off and left the troll,
Who waited in the sun.

Within the hour the bell rang out.
The troll looked for the lad.
"Oh there you are, dear Mr Troll,
I just heard something sad.

I heard a fellow say you're fat,
And have a horrid smell.
He claimed you barely have a chin!
That's why I rang my bell."

“Where is he?” yelled the fearsome troll,
“I’ll snap his bones in two!
Show me him now you snivelling toad,
Or I’ll put you in a stew.”

“Dear Mr Troll, I understand,
you make quite a strong case.
But when he said those nasty words,
I didn’t see his face.”

The mean troll stamped and kicked his feet,
Departed with a shout;
But hardly had a minute passed,
Before the bell rang out.

“What is it now?” he asked the boy.
“Sorry I’ve got bad news.
Another chap was laughing at
The blueness of your shoes.”

The troll grimaced and snapped his teeth,
“Where is he, what’s his name?
I’ll suck his brains out with a straw.
Now show me, who’s to blame?”

The young lad frowned and shook his head,
“Dear troll, I feel your pain,
But brains will have to wait, because
His face was hid again!”

It rang a third time, then a fourth,
The news was all the same.

The troll would leave in a mad rage
Without a single name.

It rang and rang and wouldn't stop,
By now the troll was drained.
"You've spent all day ringing this bell
And nothing has been gained.

"That's it, no more, I'm done!" he yelled.
"I've had it with this place.
The people clearly hate my guts.
It's truly a disgrace!

I've spent all day chasing around
Waiting for folks to eat.
But all I've got to show for it
Are badly blistered feet!"

So off he went: past the main square,
across the church's lawn.
He stomped across the carrot farm.
And with that he was gone.

The townsfolk danced and clapped and cheered,
And sang a merry song.
They hugged the lad and gave him gifts,
And told him they'd been wrong.

"Congratulations!" said the mayor,
And firmly shook his hand.
"But there is just a little thing
I don't quite understand.

'You told the troll some made-up things
Before he said goodbye.
But that's no good in Gillymill,
Because we mustn't lie."

"Lie, Mr Mayor?" answered the boy,
"Oh, I did no such thing,
I only spoke the honest truth,
As clear as a bell's ring.

His awful smell and lack of chin,
Those things were said by me;
But look: I never saw my face,
So never lied you see!

So please don't worry Mr Mayor,
Although I was quite sly;
For I'm a boy from Gillymill,
And I won't tell a lie."

The people all began to laugh,
They clapped and hugged the lad,
And on that night Gillymill saw
The biggest and best party it ever, ever had!

James Deighan is a 34-year-old English teacher from Scotland. He first started writing short, fairy-tale style stories and poems when he began volunteering as a teacher in Honduras seven years ago. The school had no library so he would write a short story every week to read to his class and began to enjoy it. All his work is dedicated to his students.

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People-watching

I feel no admiring stares
pierce my back this morning,
 no buff thighs, or tight
 butt to attract anyone's
attention as I walk to Starbucks
 at St. Armand's Circle,
Longboat Key; I know my cuffs
fray above my sturdy
 black reeboks
and my stained plaid shirt strains
against my pale ale paunch.

But if your hand grazes mine
as you pass me my carmel
macchiata from behind
the counter, or if you smile
at me even remotely as I hold
the door for you to flutter
through, that's enough
adulation for me.

I am content to sit outside
alone like a tomcat in the sun
and watch.

Travel Rag

My brain is wearing
tap shoes,
tonight, tonight,

red patent leather
tap shoes
tonight, tonight.

Shuffle off to Finland,
Sweden, Oslo,
shuffle off to Copenhagen
all night long.

Not even melatonin
or a dose of serotonin
can stop my brain
tap-dancing,
tonight, tonight.

Two French Men

The first French man
grazes his wife's neck
with index and middle
fingers at the market
this morning as
they stand watching
the frommagier
slice a golden chunk
of emmenthal from a huge
round.

Last week at the beach
another French man
slathered sun-tan
lotion on his wife's

naked breasts.

Still, I wonder
who cooks
the coq au vin
when they get home
or empties
the dishwasher
in the morning.



Jan Ball has published 270 poems in journals such as: *ABZ*, *Atlanta Review*, *Calyx*, *Main Street Rag*, *Nimrod*, *Phoebe and Verse Wisconsin*, in Great Britain, Canada, India, Ireland and the U.S. Jan's two chapbooks: *accompanying spouse* (2011) and *Chapter of Faults* (2014) were published with *Finishing Line Press*. Jan's first full-length poetry book, *I Wanted to Dance with My Father*, was published by *Finishing Line Press* in September, 2017. When not working out, gardening at their farm or traveling, Jan and her husband like to cook for friends.



The Missing

The house was empty.
She sat down, watching the garden.
Sipping the green tea,
she also sipped her daily bitterness.

Fast moving memories
flicked in her mind of how all had
smashed to smithereens into
the blink of an eye leaving no sigh.

She hated these memories
about how all had seemed normal
but the calm air had belied
mocking danger, which hit her family!

Many searches had been done;
walking on unknown roads with
hopeful eyes yet with a dagger
in a bleeding and paining heart.

The cluelessness and mystery gnawed
at her being, with questions, anxiety
which could be calmed by no sedative.
Yet, life moved on, carrying her along.

She woke up, talked, laughed,
ran the wheel of Time and Life,
receiving reassurances as cold soup,
despite her sadness and grief.

Out of a fine morning, her sister had walked
out of the house, with no sound of doom,
and she had gone missing without any
prior notice, or any inkling of doubt.

She sighed and
walked down to her garden,
and started tending to her plants/flowers,
as if they knew everything
and bloomed to enliven her heart.



Jane Moteea, born in Mauritius, works as a Research Assistant in a local organisation. She completed a joint degree in International Relations and History from LSE. She loved studying poetry at school, and enjoy writing it. Poetry has always been interesting and deeply personal for her.



The Floor

I can't explain
the taste of the floor of the room
on Chase Road. The taste
of the dust or the blood
or the tears or the skin
of her knuckles. If I say
bitter
or copper
or salt
will you ask me
why didn't I tell?
If I tell you I tried, but I failed,
could you even believe me?
Children believe. They try
to make sense.
Keep talismans, charms against evil.
Lost teeth wrapped in cotton
and patron saint medals
and razors that fit behind baseboards. Advil
and Ativan, half-bottles of wine, forgotten
and easily stashed.
Gather the evidence. Measure
my innocence. Sift in
the blood
and the dust and
the skin.
Fear is the catalyst.
Fear makes it rise.
Bake in the hollowed-out pit of a belly.
Follow directions. Swallow your dignity.
Eat up your pain and get down on all fours.
Close your eyes tightly. This is
what you asked for.
Now we both know
the taste of the floor.

Wanderlust

North on 390, 7 AM,
radio broken, I drive listening to my head.

The highway south turns toward me, lifts
her great, unseeing face, shrugs and dusts
passenger cars from her shoulders.
This vast creation, huge, tentacled beast,
has no body, only arms and fingers,
breaching every town and city
marching upright like some grande dame
past courthouses, town halls, then sidles sly
around a corner
to stop behind a biker bar.

We all know what she's doing back there.

Loves her finery, festooned
everywhere with sparklers,
red and green, yellow, white, and blaze orange
fingernails sprout
at each construction site. Willing
to go anywhere you like,
and some places that you won't like
and some places no one ever should.
She is patient, but insistent,
slithers, creeps, opens passageways,
offers paths,
"Take me," she whispers,
"oh, take me," she moans—
for god's sake,
at this very moment
there is a road, smiling like a harlot, sprawled
at the end of my driveway.

Who am I to refuse her?

Pragmatism

Do you still love me, Michael?
Even though I carved your heart out?
Even though I left a blood trail
as I sashayed to the road?

It was quite an operation.
And I used no anesthetic.
And the knives I used were rusty.
Did it hurt much? You sure hollered!

I'm not known for tactful contact. I'm not famous
for compassion.
You're not even my first victim.
You are likely not my last. But,

if you still love me, Michael,
I could use a ride to Dallas. I could use
that hundred dollars.

You *know* how I'll pay for gas.

Jennifer Maloney began writing again in 2016 after a twenty-year hiatus. She currently serves as president of Just Poets, Inc., a literary organization based in Rochester, NY. Her work has been anthologized in two volumes of the Poets Speak... While We Still Can anthology series, in volume 2 of A Flash of Dark, a volume of speculative flash fiction and poetry, in ImageOutWrite Volume 7 and in September 2018, she won the Women Speak Project contest created by Nancy Smith Fine Art, with her poem, Learning. Jennifer is thrilled to have found her voice once more.

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Cravings for a Vacation

Thoughts marching like ants
on the floors of your mind
stomping loudly enough
to rid you of
any semblance of sleep
while your entire frame
tosses along these sheets
in trademark uncertainty
leaving you to crave
for ways to understand this angst.

Broken thoughts lie around
like pieces of piercing glass
in a landscape where
many battles have been fought
with only Heaven being aware
of when the next ceasefire would be
because sometimes hope
just doesn't cut it anymore.

On some hours the railings around the bridge
get really slippery with nothing to hold on to,
and the only direction is downwards,
way below anything tangibly recognizable.
It gets hard to want to live
when you just don't feel at home
around anywhere you set
the front edge of your heels
it feels easier ultimately
to relieve everyone of the drama

and step out of the room for good.

Sneaky Old Friend

The skin of your soul
notices the heavy texture
It is here, like a black cloak
that drapes you
out of absolutely nowhere.
Party is over,
let the darkness in its thick glory
surround you in friendly embrace.
No, don't ask how or why
these shadows show up
since when did you become entitled
to any kind of notice anyways?

The blues are not hindered
by the doors of your mind;
like regular visitors, they saunter in,
altering the program of events in your head,
switching off all the lights,
tuning in to that melody
your mind's ears could do without,
but are all so used to by now.
Giggles from previous hours
feel like a lifetime ago,
and a long night, to be spent dreaming
of ways to process the gloom
beneath cynical stars, beckons gleefully.

Save Your Strength

Curling underneath
this light duvet
ten centimetres away
from your skin,
and yet a convict in solitary confinement
faces a better lot
than the loneliness I feel.
Remnants of your lip gloss
linger just below my moustache
but never has my heart
felt more distant
even in these moments
where my toes can't find home
in the spaces between yours,
and the broad landscape of my chest
shows no enthusiasm for
the air from your nostrils.

A hundred hugs wouldn't make me warm
and the sound of your breathing
fails to drown out the marching of boots
on the floors of my mind.
Your love cannot save me
and the light that your heart radiates
cannot cancel out the pitch black of my soul
Save the overcoat
that your arms try to emulate
for someone who will readily absorb the warmth
because sometimes the thickest fur
is unable to shield from familiar frost.



Jerry Chiememe is an editor, mental health advocate, culture critic and lawyer. His writings and conversations have been published in notable online magazines within and beyond the African continent, including Brittlepaper, Bellanaija, Kenya's Daily Nation, Afireviews and Thoughtful Dog. A lover of finger foods, Jerry's craft can be accessed on his personal website at jerrychiemeke.com. His first book, *The Colours In These Leaves*, is available in electronic format, and is soon to be published in print.



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***Bon Soir* is a Feeling Not a Time**

As I wait at the front desk,
the clerk says *bon soir*
is a feeling not a time.

We are in Paris in the spring,
sick of being in each other's company,
this *soir* grit
between our teeth.
I imagine divorce,
and though I have promised
myself no more divorce,
this feeling involves lawyers
and thick stacks of paper and a judge.

I sit in the lobby chair,
an angry, dark turtle
in my evil shell.
The clerk is right.
Everything is a feeling
not a time,
even the things
that happen on the dot
of some clock.

What is the feeling of *bonne nuit*
or *bonjour*?
What will the moment
be like that cracks
into the moment
that is not this sad
dwelling on how we talk
to each other
when we talk about everything?

The clock ticks, the lobby stays quiet,
the *soir* moves into another hour.
The feeling stays the same.

Clarins

Near the Japanese ponds at Giverny,
a Russian woman hunts me down by smell.
What is your perfume? she asks, running, her daughter
next to her, my mother next to me,

the four of us an unlikely square of female age.
I hold out the fragile underside of my forearm, describe the bottle
of body lotion jailed on the hotel's bathroom wall.

The woman is stout and strong with dyed blonde hair

and lots of red lipstick. Her daughter is tall and dark-eyed, touching my arm. "She's been searching for you!" she says, as her mother takes my wrist, pulls my beating heart to her nose. My mother is silent, her laugh a rictus of unknowing, her expression past confusion,

a constant surprise of the moment, each turn new.

The Russian woman restates the name of the French lotion, intent on the juniper and nut fragrance, wanting an old memory or a new future, all of us surrounded by colors Monet

swirled into shapes, but this moment he never found, an invisible fluttering in the spaces between water and willow. Here a questing he didn't paint, we searching for scents and sights and tastes, things

we never discovered, things we can no longer remember, cannot find here, in the greens and spangled reds, yellows, and blues, secrets tucked into the undersides of the lily pads, the sky a drizzle of incandescent light.



*Jessica Barksdale's fourteenth novel, **The Burning Hour**, was published in 2016. Her poetry collection **When We Almost Drowned** is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in February 2019. A Pushcart Prize and Best-of-the-Net nominee, her short stories, poems, and essays have appeared in or are forthcoming in the Waccamaw Journal, Salt Hill Journal, Little Patuxent Review, and So to Speak. She is a Professor of English at Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, California and teaches novel writing online for UCLA Extension and in the online MFA program for Southern New Hampshire University. She holds an MA in English Literature from San Francisco State University and an MFA from the Rainier Writers Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University.*

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Winter Wheat

A mother taps
the newsfeed

on her cellphone.
And the world is up in flames.

But outside a white rain falls.
And the children

fly with snow angels.
As their wheaten terrier

runs crop circles.
Spinning mindful.

Holiday

all the souls are made of windows/children
paint the Christ Child/a stray dog lifts her
leg to yellow/Acela train surges into town/a
thousand buoys bobbing/an infant in a baby
sling drops her mitten/a glass is raised/a local
bar hums/drunk is born again in hair of tinsel
/hung along the silver coated panes

Yuletide

ivory memories fall
from New England skies
in December

a sled, a snowman,
and a shiver of stars



Joe Barca has had poetry featured in a book called *Peace Poems* and in an anthology called *Light Through the Mist*. He has had his poetry included in the following online publications: *From Whispers to Roars*, Selcouth Station Press, and *Vita Brevis*. Joe has also self-published three short collections of poetry. He is a husband, a father, and the owner of a Wheaten Terrier.



A Void Sucking Away at Every Sunday

Strolling past the glitzy bling and bustle
of Michigan Avenue
suddenly surrounded
by the navy blue Bears jerseys
and the puckish purple
of the visiting Vikings,
I realized the game must have let out.

An enterprising homeless man
at a busy street corner
brandished a switch, yelling for attention,
mocking the Vikings' infamously abusive running back,
asking for a dollar donation for a photo opp.

I had long ago grown weary of the endless three-and-outs,
the punting on every drive, the game-ending interceptions,
the season after season without a sniff of the playoffs,
and given up on the whole enterprise, the utter futility of it all.
I had stopped caring,
stopped sacrificing every Sunday
to a blur of grease and failure,
to fried foods, flat beer, and an indifferent God.

I had abandoned a team
long mired in mediocrity,
that made no effort to improve,
botched every draft pick,
whiffed on every big free agent,
remained stuck in neutral,
and I never felt freer as I strode

down that touristy street,
amid all these worked-up, half-drunk fans,
unaware of the final score,
unburdened by the ultimate outcome.



Joseph S. Pete is an award-winning journalist, an Iraq War veteran, an Indiana University graduate, a book reviewer, a photographer, and a frequent guest on Lakeshore Public Radio in Merrillville. He is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee who has read his work for the Fictitious series on the iO Theater stage and who was named the poet laureate of Chicago BaconFest, a feat that Geoffrey Chaucer chump never accomplished. His literary or photographic work has appeared in more than 100 journals. He writes because he must.



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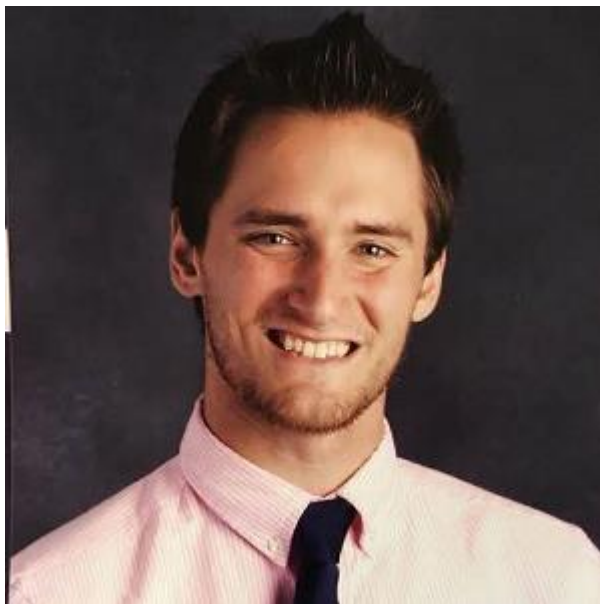
Silence

A word taboo in my southern home,
more synonymous with awkward glances and fruitless small talk
than a Sunday evening dinner that begins and ends with grace.

Yet there's something about the sanctity found in a whisper,
or a shared glance with a loved one.

What words -- even those uttered with clasped hands --
can replicate such intimate moments?

My mother once said, "Quiet tables are indicative of a broken household."
But I see much more than listless patrons of a meal.
Before me sit linguists, musicians, and dreamers,
respectful believers of a language lost so long ago.
Initiates of the coming revolution.



Josh Jennings is an English teacher living in Sumter, South Carolina. He graduated from the University of South Carolina with a B.A. in History. Much of his poetry stems from experiences that have come from living and working in a small, rural school district. Josh is new to publishing, but is eager to share his work.

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Words

There are words we would like to leave on someone's book;
Then, there are words we should never have read.
Words that go with expectations,
High expectations when it comes to seeing our name written.
We are humans...
There are words we should read and keep silent,
Words we must read and talk about everywhere.
Words that go with promotion;
We are humans...
There are words we would like to erase,
Words that are heavy to carry,
Words that are too fragile,
Words that go with the heart.
We are humans...
There are words that echo as our vows,
Words that we promise to keep true,
Words uniting us;
We are humans...

Proud

I am the day and the night,
Why should I be a shadow?
Just because you cannot stand the brightness of my soul
It bothers you; you are afraid of this light I carry!
If I choose to wear a rainbow or a grey cloth,
Who are you to judge my choices?
For you there's only black and white.
Just because you refuse to see all the colours of life.
Whether I pray, believe or do not believe in what you do,

Who are you to condemn me by speaking for one who is greater than you are?
I bother you because I am different, I am not like you!
Because I do not fit your expectations,
Because I do not see love, life and faith as you do.
Still, you and I are not that different;
Look at our hands, they are made to be held;
Still, you and I share the same blood colour running in our veins;
Look at me, I am just like you!
But I am now stained by your judgements and false beliefs.
You now see me differently but
The day will come when you and I will only be dust;
Nothing will then be able to differentiate us.
I am free as the wind and
You cannot stop the wind from going where it wants to;
I spread love and peace,
You can try to destroy them
but what will it bring to you tomorrow?

What About Poetry

What about poetry?
What about love and loss?
Is there in this world someone who can transcend life?
We are born, we struggle, love, fight, cry, fall and rise.
We keep looking for that happiness everyone talks about
But few have experienced.
My life is a drama I myself write every day a part.
My drama is something I cherish.
Yes, I like exclamation marks and repetitions;
Yes, I like looking at the sky!
Closing doors with a harsh caress of the hand.
Life, I try every day to get to understand its purpose

Some say that we are there for a reason,
Others will say we are there for no reason;
What are we then? Spectators? Authors?
We are both, but we all seek recognition;
I am seeking recognition for my observation
and transcription of life,
I hunger for love, knowledge and madness,
I crave for fun, passion and a calm breeze.
I want to be somebody and nobody;
I want to laugh through the thunder's cry;
I want to run and smash into the storm ahead;
I want to live fully, I want to live on the spot.
No more thinking, no more procrastinating,
I want all of everything.
I want a white dress used only once;
I want someone to dance with till the end,
Through the tempest and in the singing sun;
I want a rose from you on my chest
Because that's all I need for my last rest.



*A Mauritian living in France since 2007, **Julia Parbhoo** has a Master Degree in Comparative Literature and works as French teacher at secondary level. She writes short stories and poems in French, English and Mauritian Creole. She*

enjoys Francophone literature, music and cinema. Check out her website:
<https://rosecharles.wordpress.com/>



Winter Testimony

It snowed on the day you didn't appear,
a calm, soft deluge
no one had thought to predict.
And all the traffic slowed
and the rails threw on coats of slick caution
and the sidewalks crunched
with the creak of constrained steps
 unable to keep pace with desires
 or demands
as we
 the unrelated multitude
tried not to falter
 to slide in bright powder
 adorned with such a faultless face
and the white silence spread its weight.

I summoned you, too
to know the brief tingles landing on lips,
a miracle unrecountable
without the ears to hear of it.

Through an October Window

The first yellowbright leaves of fall
one solid patch in the still-green tree
It stunned me:
their light I had believed mere play of light

And then—illumination:
visions of transition

flashes of maybe
whose brilliance settles into the known
for a while

Square One, Again

We dragged our bags off
to better things,
safer places,
ideals and space inseparable.

We enshrined our fears
in eggshells almost
invisible to the new errors we created
in our new place
and labeled with the name of change.



Katy Scrogin is a writer, editor, and translator who lives in Chicago. Her most recent work has been featured in *City Creatures Blog*, *The Christian Century*, and *Pop Culture and Theology*.



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Ajoke Bello

(Belle, friend, kindness)

How can I sufficient say, what immense
steering my ship has encountered by the
fitting perch of your ray unto my compass?
Riding the winds, boating the waters, without
fright, without fail. All to the song of your sail.

And your laughter, those disjointed sounds
like unleashed cackles, fetches me out, however
black the misery; however deep the travails in the
abyss of doleful despondence. And in my heart, it
suddenly transmutes into a season of summer bloom.

Oh let it be, that when time scribbles your name,
it would be with colours of fields in May; with
the singsong melody of maidens who gaze upon
heaven without ache, edging every tender moment,
for you alone are the sun, the rays and the raisin.

Kelvin Kellman writes from Nigeria. He's had works featured in *The Stockholm Review*, *Leveler*, *Peacock journal*, and elsewhere.



Cake and Garbage Cans

Face Book highlights 27 stars
with LGBTQ kids. Scrolling down,
a picture of Franklin Graham stirring
his tea with a steeple. Some Senators
snarl at me. I married Stan—
they want to cut off our ring fingers
and benefits. A family looks
just one way, a neighborhood
where every house lounges in
beige sweatpants.

For our wedding, we got
a grocery store cake. The women
gladly wrote congratulations in icing.
We invited God, a small ceremony,
but one celebrity can spice it up. God
danced with both grooms. God's bod
felt odd, like dancing with an air bubble.
We didn't need water turned into wine,
preferring martinis. We're the one gay

couple on the road. People wave
and go to work. Hollywood stars
and their families take in our garbage cans.
At least we think it's them.
It isn't us. Or Franklin.
Our red fuchsias stare at them
from a window box, peel
morning's grape.

Sparkling

I'm drinking Dasani sparkling water when
Pan grabs my hand and pulls me
into lush woods. He says it's not sexual
though it could be if first we'd watch
the moon ambush a perfectly relaxed
cinnamon fern. I say no. So off we go

where poplars stare down those
who would chop them and stump up
a forest floor. Pan tells trees bedtime stories.
They cover him with leaves and love.
I wish Pan were less noisy. He turns
any silence into song. Sometimes
I'd rather rest among trunks. Pan

really does *frollic*. Who frolics anymore?
Before high school I might have frolicked
but geometry kyboshed that. I studied
the ways of triangles and my frolic got
scared off. Pan wants to return it to me,

says if I'd open my mouth wide enough
I could eat a whole forest. I try.
I only attract a fly to my tongue. He leads me

back to the porch. The sparkling water
has gone flat. Flat clouds now sparkle.

I'm Under

the covers again with the cats
after reading about 17
kids and teachers
killed by a gun man this shooter
often wears a
MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN
hat red
blood spattered in hallways
Hear gun heartbeats
when flesh tears
and bodies fall

Make America stop
saying slaughter is nothing
to interrupt The Price
Is Right
less important than preventing
gay people from buying cakes
I can't hear
anything

beyond the window
Florida sunny and distant
it won't happen here
Slaughter our favorite
Board game
The Momma Bear
says to the Poppa Bear
I wonder where the children are
Dead
is where they are
mopped up sent away
in speeding ambulances now
funeral home pictures
their beds empty
school church movie theater
forget the dream of
safety it's never
going to be
tomorrow again screams
tucked into coffins plans
being made elsewhere

Here? Where I am? You are?
Dirt and gladiolas drop

Shadows drift away
as they always do back
to work something
already taking aim



Kenneth Pobo has a new book of prose poems forthcoming from Clare Songbirds Publishing House called *The Atlantis Hit Parade*. He is recovering from tendon surgery and listening to songs by The Hollies.

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My Soul running between Lives

All night dews fell, drip , drip
On the petals of petunias,
On the long-lost twigs of begonias—
I was lost in a catechism with Soul,
Pestering it with a nagging query,
Mother's apron, as if, I was stuck to.

With dewfall, getting cuddled in quilt,
Warmth of mom's lap, falling back on,
I kept asking, " Which body did you
Love most, because though bodies
Perish, you don't!"
Straitjacketing myself in my
present identity,
Losing myself in the chiaroscuro
Of seemingly plausible answers,
I took up my preferred one,
Unlike cat's nine lives
I know of just one,
Capering from one cosy end
To the other stormy end,
Oscillating between my present
And my past lives (mostly imagined),
I was keen on scrounging
A rejoinder chiming in unison
With mine,
Ah! Soul is a patient of amnesia too,
Careening its memory-bus down the lane
Losing its way amidst torn and snapped threads,
Pointing to me, at last:
Me and my present birth?!

Danced I, pirouetted I ,
Jumped up to my seventh heaven,
Discovering to my utter dismay,
Oh my, my! My body is missing!
Do I breathe or don't I?

A Post Modern Love Poem

A huge reptile hissed and crawled
On its chest, putting the heaviness of its physique
Straight on the tessellated floor of the zoo,
Cold, stony floor, dank walls and a netted canopy above.

A lover hisses as he pants for breath
Immediately after his labored union with his love,
Lying on the bed, punctuating stillness of the room
With syncopated whimpers and moans of gratification!
Lover and beloved stay locked in embrace for hours together
Even asking for more kisses, more proximity,

But all turn hazy, askew, awry, as the picture-perfect
Immaculateness receives a jarring jolt
Near its belt, driving it to an irrevocable
Unconsciousness !
Togetherness annuls itself on satiety,
Gratification totters on the brink of
A promise, that is not to be kept
Though made and feigned as real,
But mostly unreal!

Love in the era of postmodernism
Is like a desiccated grape, that needs an overhauling!
Love in the post-modern era
Is a sea-change brought forth by
Varying takes on emotions, passions,
Amorous expressions, gestures
And many a thing that come along!

Love is now a bubble in the bucket,
Where soap-suds mingle, weave dreams,
Love is now an unknown flower in a thicket
Where new ideas thrive, impinged by sunbeams!

Cage-Free Emotions

The Vesuvius of mind erupted,
Disgorging anger, venom, tantrum, insecurity,
All in different hues, all in one blow.
Nothing was locked up within, anymore.
The liberated emotions danced around,
Found no soul to affect or to influence.

Emotions surged up, unleashing balloons:
Ochre, crimson, blue, green, aubergine, yellow,
High up in azure sky, creating patterns—
Phantasmagoric, magic-realistic;
Eyeing on a higher psychedelic
Elevation, seeking higher plane
Of ultimate realization!

Emotions once unshackled
Can play havoc with sundry things around,
Shackled, enmeshed, fettered, locked in
One's inner within, clamoring bitterly
For a release, a welcome sparing.
Once freed, the emotions can fathom
The depth of an ocean lying
Millions and millions
Of cubits, deep down,
Than the plane we stand upon.



Ketaki Datta is an Associate Professor of English, Bidhannagar College, Kolkata. She is a novelist, short story writer, critic and a translator. Her novels *A Bird Alone* and *One Year for Mourning* have won rave reviews. Her poems have been published in several anthologies. She was elected Professional Woman of the Year in 2005 by American Biographical Society, North Carolina.



At the Donut Shop with Calvin

He's a Mad Magazine cartoon come to life,
sipping on Cadillac's and chatting up the prostitutes
He got kicked out of our house for smoking pot,
yet he's unfazed by it at his new month to month
flophouse near Atlantic, around the corner from
where my former girlfriend died.
He is a big kid, really, talking about
an unhatched duck egg called balut
that he says tastes disgusting,
like a partially developed duck embryo would
but that it gives you such energy
that you could fuck for days.
He looks around, sad eyed and wanting to fuck,
and, after a tour of Vietnam and adventures around the world,
he doesn't seem to know what to conquer next as he empties
his Styrofoam cup of its sugar and all its innocence.

Dead Celebrities

I was surrounded by black and white portraits of them
in my bed room in high school
but I had to turn them all around whenever I masturbated
and one day I was in the middle of my business
when I noticed I'd forgotten to turn Rita Hayworth around.
She judged me and I ran across the room to avert her eyes,

but The Beatles all stared at me in Sgt. Pepper uniforms
from an old poster over my bed that I'd forgotten about
all of them smiling at my inflated cock like they all
wanted to blow on it like a French horn
that would whisk us all away back to Penny Lane
with my hard-on in their ears and in their eyes.

Kevin Ridgeway lives and writes in Long Beach, CA. Recent poems of his can be found in Slipstream, Chiron Review, Nerve Cowboy, Main Street Rag, The American Journal of Poetry and So it Goes: The Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library. A two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he is the author of eight chapbooks of poetry, the latest being Smile Until You're Alive Enough to Be Dead (Analog Submission Press, UK) and A Ludicrous Split (alongside poems by Gabriel Ricard, Alien Buddha Press).



I kind of thought the alpacas were a metaphor until we got there

She tells me one of the weirdest things
I ever asked her to do was drive across
country to an alpaca show.

I kind of thought the alpacas were
a metaphor until we got there, she says.
I say what for. She says I don't know,
just definitely not alpacas.

It was mid-July,
our warm breath sat in the air
of the hay-lined arena. The hair styling
of a black and white alpaca got us talking
about Elvis.

He began as the face on the covers
in my best friend's dad's record collection,
whose song about a Hound Dog
we were forced to howl
on the hard wooden floors of
our primary school days.

I only grasped
the symbolism of it many years
later – the way time passes
and relationships fail.

The alpacas were just alpacas
at the time
and had nothing meaningful to say
about our youth or friendship,

as they posed for snapshots
capturing the absurdity of it all,
oblivious animals thrown
together briefly.

A newsroom after deadline, Westport

The rolling door's drawn down on the printworks
where paperboys and girls line up on slow summer afternoons,
their teenage conversations entering open office windows.

Isn't that what you got into this industry for anyway,
snippets of the lives of others drifting into your days?

Besides, their lives are more interesting than those of the
athletes and artists and bureaucrats you've interviewed,
whose names you'll drop in bars ten years from now,
the big stars who once graced a small town fleetingly.

Noah likes Kelly and Kelly likes Noah back
they report while the receptionist punches holes in
that day's edition and carries it to the archives out back.

I'd spent hours there scouring the files for the identity
of an eroding aircraft spotted in bush thirty kilometres north of here.

Perhaps that was the cause of my demise in the industry
– always being more drawn to the old than the new.

The plane almost certainly wasn't the Brougham lost without
a trace attempting to make the first successful crossing of the
Tasman but might have been, according to my investigations.

The bush was dense but many had stumbled upon the

remains over the years from the local businessman
whose sons grew pot there in the nineties to the elderly tramper
who said it was like something out of the comic books

that sustained him in this town when he was no older than
the kids generating distractions outside my window.

I think they'll stay with me - the paperboys and girls,
waiting for work to give way to more pressing tasks,
an image lingering on the periphery of memory,
a single engine plane rusting in a valley.



Kim Fulton is a poet and short fiction writer from New Zealand. She completed a Masters in Creative Writing at Massey University. Her thesis looked at indirect approaches to loss in elegiac poems. Kim's poems and short stories have appeared in a number of New Zealand literary journals. She placed second in the open section of The New Zealand Poetry Society's International Poetry Competition this year. She works as a content and communications specialist at Otago Polytechnic's Auckland campus.



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Through the Ladder of the Pantyhose

Allow yourself to take a look
through somebody else's window
the curtains are left pulled back -
Protestant-like
"You must live in such a way that there's nothing to be ashamed of"
steal a piece of somebody else's life
astringent as dark chocolate
just to sweeten things up
Ah! The aftertaste stays long...
I thank God that not all of us are
Protestants

The Rubber Boots Do Not Put Lemon in the Tea

When you read your newspaper at the window
you drop some letters upon the autumn
pavement beneath
I keep an eye on you hidden behind the corner
and when you go inside to drink your second cup of coffee
I hurry to gather all that the pigeons have left

If it rains, I exsiccate the letters on the radiator and
only then I try to assemble them
But some of them are missing after all...
at the end I always get something different
something different of the same

You go out with an umbrella only
when it doesn't rain
"...does not need an umbrella."

Once I managed to assemble almost a whole sentence

From Above

And after all...
behind the clear blue sky
and its little white clouds
hanging statically over you

after all...
almost every day you wake up full of suspicion
even towards the teaspoon
with which you stir the coffee

all...
behind the jar's glass with brown sugar there's only blackness
vacuum and cold



Kristina Krumova is 29 years old and lives in Sofia, Bulgaria. She has a Master Degree in "Contemporary history" from Sofia University and she was an Editor in New Social Poetry Magazine, Bulgaria. Kristina works as a freelance editor and she is preparing her first manuscript.

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\$7.99

twelve avocados,
the better half
of a second dozen—
two light jugs,
buttermilk fabled
to light your face
on some dark blue fire
you once respected
like a red stoplight
forever asleep
the week of final exams.

five wrapped packs,
cookies stacked
in a cracked microwave—
one large bottle,
grape Kombucha
you walk away from
as loyalties profess
themselves in full
to modest needs
keeping angry egos cool
as ice cubes chatter and spill.

The Pricey Date that Wasn't

her coral paint chips—
do forgive.

walking on blocks,

cement and the lake
drowning her regret
and tiny transgressions
discussed several times
over twelve dollar coffee.

follow her—
and remember.
breathing inward,
symbols that English
never captures well
so how you shuffle
a hand of misspellings
and clouds drawn sharply.

rest your heads on wood—
avoid staring.

Sweet Ennui

it is so easy
like arithmetic assigned
after kindergarten smudging

premium, bitterest coffee
that reminds so subtly,
you are not liked
to the degree you prefer

a morning glass, boiled milk
whole and steadily available

aware that now
is inopportune, and
time breathes raggedly
but it stands in the flood
immersing chicken wire buses
with windows that offered
that annual something

live for a grinning light
as laughter presently scares



*On the weekends, **Kristine Brown** frequently wanders through historic neighborhoods, saying “Hello” to most any cat she encounters. Her creative work can be found in Hobart, Sea Foam Mag, Philosophical Idiot, among others, and a collection of flash prose and poetry, Scraped Knees, was released in 2017 by Ugly Sapling. Visit her blog: <https://crumpledpapercranes.com>.*



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The Bus Station

Dead of night,
December night.
Darkness swallows day,
snow imminent.
My uncle came north
for the funeral.
My fragile uncle,
who did seven years in Angola.
His hands shake,
eyes always staring,
fragile sobriety,
hunched in a too-light jacket.
The shock of the cold,
the shock of memory,
staying in that old house,
where poverty and abuse
haunt every corner.
He barely makes it a day
before he calls.
It's after midnight
when we pick him up
and drive him
to the bus station.
He hugs us all tightly.
The snow comes,
the season
of final goodbyes.

The Eighth Kind

Every day, I awaken to blue
and think, *This isn't my habitat.*
I crave foreign skies, farther horizons,
other luminosities: Martian mustard,
Venusian marmalade. I long for
unknown destinations and unknown
constellations by which to steer,
for other myths to recite.

I am the marooned, bug-eyed,
gray-fleshed. I have the extendable neck
and glowstick fingertips.
I have forgotten my mission, if I ever knew it.
I have lost the signals to dial me back
to others of my kind.

I sit under your single moon

with my odds and ends, with
rotary phones and umbrellas,
trying to remember just who it is
I call out for.

Bowie

White is not a color.
We call it blankness,
but in truth, it's all.
You made it yours.
In your absence
you become everything.
Wasn't your beauty like
the falling snow?
I capture it in my palm and feel
its momentary sting,
or like the stars,
fueled by brilliance
for eons after death.
We could never warm ourselves by them.
We could only find direction
and wonder.



***Lauren Scharhag** is an award-winning writer of fiction and poetry. Her titles include *Under Julia*, *The Ice Dragon*, *West Side Girl & Other Poems*, and *The Order of the Four Sons*. She lives on Florida's Emerald Coast. For more, please visit: www.laurenscharhag.blogspot.com.*

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Poppy Red

I put my hands among the flames—Sylvia Plath

Of that summer
you had no memories
only red poppies
small flames
that burned your soul
a thousand poppies
open wounds
bleeding
inside you.

Your journey in search of oblivion
started in the soundless hours of the day
now lost
in the barren paths of the mind.
Then long sunset strips
sad omens
stained the sky red
slowly
surrounding you
in deep muffled silence

Garden in October

*In my Autumn garden I was fain
To mourn among my scattered roses—Christina Rossetti*

Colours and sounds
mix in the October garden
where the last roses feed your soul.

Amber brown leaves waltz on the boughs
as you, Queen of Pre-Raphaelite beauty
discover wonder in
Autumn's languid sun
of this transient reign

And in the dappled light
your words become
a subtle song
a hymn of devotion
to the ephemeral fugitive hour
to the vanishing moment.



Lidia Chiarelli was born and raised in Turin, Italy, where in 2007, she founded with Aeronwy Thomas the Art-literary Movement: *Imagine & Poesia*. Lidia's passion for creative writing has motivated her to write poetry and she has become an award winning poet since 2011. Her writing has been translated into more than 20 languages and published in *Poetry Reviews* and on web-sites in many countries. After visiting the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010, Lidia was inspired to create installations similar to Yoko Ono's *Wish Tree*, hanging poems and art cards on the trees. Lidia Chiarelli has exhibited her *Poetry&Art Trees* in Italy and abroad. She is also an appreciated collage artist.



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Late Harvest Moon

Obedient in its phases, that faraway orb
moves with an old-world order to reign
over the night, the omega of summer,
an offering of fire to an unobscured sky.

And the oak in our yard is no longer
a tree in the orthodox sense, but a castle
where Oberon takes his throne to
orchestrate a song of crickets and frogs.

We will sleep more soundly this night
having seen that ornament of nature,
obey the chill that orders we pull
our blankets more tightly over us.

Lullaby for My Dog

Sleep, my little dog, here
at my feet as I scribble
out words to make some
sort of sense. Sleep soundly,
my Seamus, digger of sand
and earth. Sweet dreams
of scampering through sage
through land scented by
creosote. Dream of that
place you loved best.



Lisa Stice is a poet, mother and military spouse. She is the author of two full-length collections, *Permanent Change of Station* (Middle West Press, 2018) and *Uniform* (Aldrich Press, 2016), and a chapbook, *Desert* (Prolific Press). While it is difficult to say where home is, she currently lives in North Carolina with her husband, daughter and dog. You can learn more about her at lisastice.wordpress.com.



Un)resolved

Before morning, in rain's silver drizzle, at the edge of the woods, I
see the flicker of feet crossing the street, not cat but fox stepping

lightly within its stride, its ability to slip between obscurities,
like happiness, fleeting— I imagine drawing a quick sketch

of this animal, both terrible and beautiful—the smudge of
my hand's heel, leaving that shadow sinking among life's

many absences.



M.J. Iuppa is the Director of the Visual and Performing Arts Minor Program and Lecturer in Creative Writing at St. John Fisher College; and since 2000 to present, is a part time lecturer in Creative Writing at The College at Brockport. Since 1986, she has been a teaching artist, working with students, K-12, in Rochester, NY, and surrounding area. Most recently, she was awarded the New York State Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching, 2017. She has four full length poetry collections. She lives on a small farm in Hamlin NY.

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The Last Moghul

Rubies and garnets lay strewn around,
Lustrous and regal they shone unfazed.
In that room such riches could be found,
Which left all men awe-struck and dazed.

Unlike him, their objective was sound,
Symbolize status, dazzle, amaze.
The throne to which by blood he was bound,
Was causing his mind to become crazed.

He inspired graceful thoughts profound,
Not the ferocity these men chased,
But his precious rooms did now abound
With rebels who fought and then there lazed.

His mind-set of fealty would astound
His forefathers, who would be amazed
At his great aversion to impound
And capture as they did all year round.

He loved his wealth, rose gardens and grounds,
But his future now seemed veiled in haze,
By the hammer of revolt being pound,
The dreamer into a leader phased.



Madhulika Ghose, a Kolkata-born writer, did her schooling from Loreto House. Since childhood she was fond of English literature, the result of which are her several publications, both poems and literary articles, in numerous reputed newspapers and magazines. Formerly a Research Scholar in Chemistry at Jadavpur University, she is at present a faculty member in Shri Shikshayatan College, Kolkata. The intense laboratory work during research has not deterred her from dreaming big, and following her passion to be a writer.



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So Far away from You

Holy fingers, Tender hands,
The love so deep and dear;
Thought you'll be always near.
With every sunrise, you became wise.
As your legs started crawling
And coming to my bed every morning,
Couldn't resist rising up early.
Your untrained words were so dear.
But it didn't last for long
As I had to carry on.
Every morning I rise up to see
That you are so near to me.
Yet, I'm so far away from you.
I am so far away from you.



Manoj Pukhrambam is a Mathematics teacher from Meghalaya, India. He write poetry in three languages: English, Hindi and Manipuri. His preferred themes are: patriotism, hardships of life and emotions.



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bullet in his head

he walked around
for thirty-five years
with a bullet in his head.
when he was informed
about the projectile
after a cat scan,
he laughed it off.
said it must have happened
when he was crazy on drugs;
said it must have happened
when the streets were wild
with colors and energy;
said he thought he felt something
crossing grand street, one
spectacular night,
but he ignored it.
too fabulous to stop and explore
what might have caused
that sting in his scalp.



Mary Shanley is a poet from New York.



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A Wish

I once went fishing
for sunnies, crappies, yaknow,
up at the cabin
and pulled right outta the water
a whatyoucallit
mermaid
and she said
I could have three wishes
but I only wanted one
oh sure
we all wish it
I wished for love
and so I'm down here
married to a trout
and he's okay.

The Neighbor

It's in the house
where the hedge fern grows
where ficus fills
every window
and you can only see her
in passing
through the curtains
of green
they say
she does spells in there
over a mortar and pestle
of frog hips and wolf fur

it's the only house
I pass
and am desperate
to knock.



Max Sparber is a poet and author from Minneapolis. His poetry has appeared in such diverse publications as Meow Meow Pow Pow Lit, Cowboy Poetry Press, The Poet's Republic, Three Drops from a Cauldron, and VisualVerse.org.



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Children of Xenophobia

Children eating bullets and firecrackers
Beggars of smile and laughter
Silent corpses sleeping away fertile dreams
Povo chanting new nude wretched slogans
Overstayed exiles eating beetroot and African potato
Abortions and condoms batteries charging the lives of nannies and maids
Children of barefoot afternoons and uncondomized nights
Sweat chiseling the rock of your endurance
The heart of Soweto, Harare, Darfur, Bamako still beating like drums
Violence fumigating peace from this earth.



Mbizo Chirasha is the originator of the Zimbabwe We Want Poetry Movement. He is the curator of namely the Brave Voices Poetry Journal and the 100 Thousand Poets for Peace - Zimbabwe. A Member of the Zimbabwe Poets for Human Rights, Mbizo blogs on the Miombo Publishing and Personalities of Inspiration. A widely anthologized poet, a literary arts projects curator, and an arts activism catalyst, he works as a Writer in Residence.

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Women's College

I loved when the older girls hazed us
blindfolded us in the back of a car,
the Blue Ridge Mountain wind whipping our cheeks, the older girls pushed us
out of cars, pretended to brand our feet
after making us roll down hills, blood just gushing
from some chick's knee.

Oh, my first "Bo Rap" was the best "Bo Rap," as us freshmen
swarmed the Art Dorm crooning to the Queen classic.
I guzzled cups of blue jungle juice and by the end
I, too, was serenading a lampshade... *Is this real life?*
Is this just fantasy? Mama, oooooouuuu... Carry on, carry on.

The older girls dressed like Bowie
decked out in periwinkle tights chests glittering.
But when it struck midnight off they went,
a dozen of women, to partake in the ritual of streaking
across front quad giggling, giggling,

streaking like a flood of candles bobbing
through a moat of statues. From the porches
I watched them zigzag across fresh Virginian lawn
knowing I would never become them, knowing I was far
from home and yet where was home.
One night blindfolded beside the creek it started to rain
and I wish I had thought
to put out my tongue.

Bees Responding to Overdose

sometimes I watch honey

as it puddles slow in a white light

district at dawn and the girl is there
down in the water-streaked streets
a quartet of bees hums over her
as though the girl is a comb of honey

rather than an opioid statistic on the sidewalk
I imagine she is still in her childhood home

dressed like a funeral
wearing those black tights
bitching beautifully

about her brother's collection of ammo
the lone gun parts resting against a stereo

hair in her eyes, she squints, thinking of
the belt she forgot to wear that day

I have had to learn the hard way that there is nothing poetic about death

no, not with the body
under the ground and all

mouth slack, jaw ajar
holding the breath of dirt

but still it keeps
ghosting across the page

It's true that the girl soldiered on for so long
until the bees mistook her body for rose

Slow Dance, Bullets

How long should we stay here - you ask

Forever or maybe ever - he says

But what about the world - you ask

They have nothing for us anymore - he says

Keep dancing with me - he says

But what if we die - you ask

We will - he says - But it will hurt less if we're moving



Meaghan Quinn is the author of *Slow Dance Bullets*, forthcoming from Route 7 Press. She holds an MFA from the Writing Seminars at Bennington College and has studied at The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA. She has been nominated for Best New Poets and the Pushcart Prize and is a recipient of the Nancy Penn Holsenbeck Prize. Her poems have been published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Off the Coast*, *Heartwood*, *r.kv.r.y.*, *2River*, *Adrienne*, *Free State Review*, and elsewhere. Visit <http://meaghanquinn.com> for more.

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Another Bloody Day

Then midnight packed her bags and went
And left warped worlds which dreams invent
Of half-known places leased, lost, lent.

We wake. Sleep lingers like some scent
Which thought it caught the sentiment
Of other lives we might have spent.

Now real, we rise, make our descent
To doors and windows, bricks, cement
Of downstairs rooms we own or rent.

The clock, presenting each event,
Brings incidents we can't prevent
Some with and some without intent.

As hours fall apart, fragment,
They're beaten, broken, battered, bent
By argument and discontent.

Day closes like a document.
Sun sets. We pray and we repent
Or not. Night brings its own torment.

Costa Sin Sol, Spain

Sun, suddenly sickening of serving us, turns all custom away,
Slams doors, slithers locks, draws down grimy grey blinds,
Shuts up shop for this shit day, totting up takings
While muttering thickening threats of thunder, rain.

Clouds, big bellied, blustery and blunt as pub drunks
Settle upstairs and stare down at us. Beaches empty.
Bars fill. Pints, pigeons and people blunder in.
Tapas and sparrows tour the brittle table-tops.

TVs screen soccer. Bouncing water, big as glass marbles
Blisters pavements, bombards promenades, batters parasols.
From pity, we buy wet watches from a drenched black guy.
Later, rain stops. Sky mops up. Hotels haul us all back.

Not Quite Kennedy

As if shot from some knoll, doll
Our limbs are limp, they loll, doll

But don't call Interpol, doll
No gunman's gone AWOL, doll

No gangster with his moll, doll
And this his vitriol, doll

No Commie protocol, doll
Tra-la and folderol, doll

It's just the alcohol, doll
And that's what takes its toll, doll.



Nick Toczek is a British writer and performer who has published more than forty books, mostly of poetry. He is also a music journalist and professional magician. As a writer in schools he has visited dozens of countries. For more about him, check out www.nicktoczek.com and his Wikipedia page.



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Dream of Birds

Make me a bed to sleep on so that I might dream
of birds under a present sun in a place where
swans of paradise drink rain water from puddles
that remain calm after the sky has passed
its hand over heavy and faded pillars of salt.

Show me a dream that paints itself and let me
see the Nitzana Chalk Curves standing upright
in the wind away from the heavy stones
where Andromeda once met Perseus
at the gateway of a sea-dragon's mouth.

Remind me of when a galaxy lifted the ocean
with its heavy tongue full of fire and sea foam.

Tell me a good story when I am old of a river
and of shade amidst tall grasses cast by arches
of willow trees covered in vines and grape leaves
that clutch close to tree bark where thistle grows
rich with dark minerals in azure-golden soil.

Lay my body to rest toward the end
of the universe beside twin phoenixes
pushing their black beaks and white feathers
together. When tomorrow arrives let fireflies
go in and out of the air between the world
that I sleep in and the world that I wake in.

I Am Evidence

Lady Justice is not some peace-keeper of an eternal flame

brimming with the cries of the forgotten. Her tears clean
off stone tablets with rain on unmarked graves each season.
Field after emerald field shoveled up and piled in with the dark
matter of stolen and unknown souls. Where are the lamentations
of our women written down? Don't be so arrogant. This is war.



Nina Buckless is a fiction writer and poet. Her poetry or prose have appeared in *Santa Monica Review*, *Tin House*, *Unsaid*, *Georgetown Review*, *Absent and Fiction Writers Review*, namely. Her short story *Deer* was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. A graduate of the Helen Zell Writers Program and the recipient of a Zell Fellowship, Nina is a veteran of Jim Krusoe's creative writing workshop in Los Angeles. She formerly taught art, creative writing and literature. Currently, she is working on a new novel, *Cave of Idols*.



Woman of Grey

The night rattles like a hedge
as she mutters and pushes in.
The woman with a seam of light
and blind as thorns.

She moves along the edges here
in a dream of something clear.
The white lament of the moon
in points and fingers.

Something is behind her, dragging
like a foot. And her hands
are full of cold. It bleeds
downward slowly as the stars.

She bears a place—far and lost and floating
its blue, uneven sea in the horizon.
And faces—notched with forgetting,
drifting in a singe of shadow.

She is lighter there, and skilled,
climbs the dark like an owl. In her stepping
there are invisible others, entangled,
a wading among forms that causes knowledge.

It matters that there are other who are lost,
other shapes not fastened like shade
to the rhyme of heavy objects
or the waterline of words.

She will come to the garden finally, bearing
the warm wind she has carried always on her back,
the grey tent of love or rest—to be driven
at its points and corners into the cold ground.

Circles

Dante envisions Heaven as a hierarchy of revolving circles based on proximity to God.

What does it mean to be outside
the circle spinning fast and close to Light?
Outside the wall—the high and burning one?

To hear through my apartness measured music,
banks of candles, small at the flame and rustling,
and the far roaring circles singing to the quiet ones?

Is it less to come cool to the truth that rotates,
to love the slow, grey sermon of the shadow
praising the middle shapes?

Is it wrong to fill time temperately like water,
whirl mildly in the ash-white day,
bend the color of moon with my longing?

To be of the low and gradual, the small sources
marking the shallow marsh with curves,
the blue flood turning in unguarded spaces?

To be the “everywhere” in “God is everywhere,”
the unhurried motion shining the roughest stones?
To make, by difference, the hottest light?

Exile

One minute I was there
in all my faults, near the river,
my shadow in the sand and cool light.

A wildness of trees
indifferent on the moving water.
A sky alive in its waves.

Whatever was wrong was far away.
I was blooming
and no one cared what I did.

Then I was here, heavy and pale
waiting like the stillness of bread.
Watched and punished. The rising canceled
and only the fear moving,

Yes, there might be clearer water here
and newer words for loss,
but I live in the other words,
old and imprecise and working.

Nothing I can say here will be heard.
What we need is a miracle,
one not too hard or hard to believe,
one that doesn't take too long.



Patricia Nelson is a former attorney who has worked for many years with the “Activist” group of poets in Northern California. Her most recent book is *Spokes of Dream or Bird*, Poetic Matrix Press.



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Poor Players

The bard perceived the entire world as a stage because we all do.
Drawn by the colored lights, no doubt
we linger long and only the few seek a quick exit
Itinerant puppets wearied of the playwright's string
they hope never again to have to wait in the wings



Paul Kindlon is a Humanities professor who has had 10 short stories, 6 poems, a memoir and a collection of aphorisms published. After having spent 25 years in Moscow, Russia he now resides somewhere in New York State.



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evolution

you grow up watching your grandfather
being boss without ever being told. grandmother serves
him home-made sausage rolls with
brown sauce he watches boxing classics
next to the fire *Sugar Ray and Jake LaMotta . . . what a tumble*
that was, he gravels. everyone smiles, mechanic.
father studies every motion.

how are you, i'm asked. there's no answers.

fine, i smile, for the sake of filling draughty silence. I just watched
my grandfather shut down like a laptop in definitive
stages; nurses checking feet (*he's dying*)
checking arms (*he's dying*) checking my reaction (*he's dying*)
checking pulse (...*dying*)
checking the clock (*he's dying*).

nobody told me that a man should grieve.

nobody told me about *men*.

near the ritz

the exhaustion of a packed city. side-stepping
through sociopathic drama counting down. a rustic shop
of bric-a-brac smell of stale tobacco

and failure. transatlantic smile through the window.

who even listens to LPs anymore?

roulette

i wonder
if i'll get so see
80 winters?

70 just doesn't seem enough
and any less
 than 60
a travesty

i consider this
on mornings when the world
watches breakfast television

 trickles
of milk
from bowls of cornflakes
escaping
 the sides
of numb lips
all over town



Paul Robert Mullen is a poet, musician and sociable loner from Southport, near Liverpool, U.K. He is a keen traveller, having lived and worked in China and Australia, and has scaled the entirety of Asia. He has three published poetry collections. He also enjoys Leonard Cohen, bass guitar riffs, porridge, paperback books with broken spines, and all things minimalist.



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A Culture of Worries

Of all vices we've encouraged
Since bending to plant seed
The worst is worry
Mindless worry has been
Sold to us like anti-aging and grain
Fooled into believing it is care
To see worry as love

True care gives and receives warmth
True love gives and receives fire fueled joy
Worry is that selfish deadweight fear
A blackout curtain in bright summer

The worst of worry is what it does to women
Generations ruined in pointless worst case protection
Mother to daughter to son to Father to Mother
Fear fueled what ifs
Countermanding instinct and good sense
Now our loudest rasping voice is worry
The most constant sound a drumbeat of fretting

We may never escape its leaden vibration
But we can try
Try to see worry as it arises within us
And rather than feed it, reassure it
Remind ourselves that nothing lasts forever
Nothing is ever as bad as our imagined worst cases
And that we have a choice
We can decide whether we allow our concerns
To consume us and all we love
Or to see them, reassure them, watch them fade
Under the light of our wisdom



Peter Nolan's poetry and short stories have been published in *Boyne Berries*, *The Sentinel Quarterly*, *The Haiku Journal*, *A New Ulster*, *Streetcake Magazine* and *Short Stories for Kids*. He has written a novel, two collections of short stories and is currently writing a third collection, more poems and songs. He is father to Luke, and husband to Grace.



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The wanderer

He was a great thinker and philosopher
Of exceptional sensitivity.
He believed not in new age mystic gurus
Nor in the gossip, glitz and glamour
Of our everyday world
That has been sinking slowly but surely.

His poems were a witty tour-de-force
With pleasing, pithy and mordant undertones.
It was the fine confection
Of brilliant writing with moving themes.

He loved the idyllic landscapes of Kashmir,
The clusters of bamboo,
The tree-lined avenues,
The seaweed-strewn beach,
The captivating aurora borealis
And the open plains of Tibet.

Poised and savvy, with consummate skill,
He wrote poetry, geet and gazal
Serendipitous, thought-provoking
That would never wilt and wither
While fashioning the drama of existence.

And one fine day, he became a wanderer,
A harbinger of peace, feisty and free.
She met him once and with a single meeting,
He changed the course of her whole life.
How could she forget that day

When his luminous eyes
Had fleetingly held hers.

What next?

It is mandatory to know what will happen
To good planet earth in coming years.

The earth is reacting to the accumulated
Sins of mankind cropping up like mushrooms.
Man is forgetting that the universe
Operates by law, sacred in nature.

This is the time,
Neither to hate, nor to judge.
This is the time to love.
This is the time to forgive.

When will the idea dawn
In man's vagabond mind
That we are supernaturally natural
And lots of powers are in our hands.

Open your hands, open your mouth,
Open your heart and open your eyes,
O man!
Repent, forgive and love.
Then only the holy spirit
Will be poured into you.
Then only you will experience
True faith, true compassion
And true love.

Separation

Limping along due to circumstances
Beyond my control, I find
The feeling of separation so painful.
As my sorrow melts to tears,
My ever widening thoughts
Plunge me in deep reflections,
Filling my mind with memories sweet.

Deep in my heart,
While I sit in darkness,
Plunged in thoughts,
I think about the serene dignity
Of suffering stemming from separation.

I think of those days
When you made a fire
From charcoal, to warm my tired legs.
I think of those nights
When you exalted my hidden beauties,
Filling my soul
With paradisiacal thoughts.

As the sun sets soberly,
Filling my inner self with
Enthusiasm and tenderness soft,
And my inner eyes with exotic imagination,
I swim in the silent lake
Among the lilies and blossoms fair.

I count the minutes on my fingers.
Tomorrow is so near and yet, so far.
You will be coming home
And our children's faces
Will shine with a special lustre.



Pramila Khadun is from Mauritius. A featured poet at Pentasi, her poems have appeared in various anthologies, namely *Pics anthology* and *Diaries at Coldnoon*. Her poems appear regularly in *Rejected Stuff* and *Destiny Poets* as well. She has published four poetry collections (*Rajnee*, *Kavi*, *Priyumvada* and *Igniting Key*), a novel in India (*When love speaks*), and a book (*Food and Nutrition Simplified*, currently being used by local Cambridge School Certificate students). Her forthcoming projects are *Understanding Diabetes* and a collection of 108 Poems on peace and love called *Shangri – la*. A retired educator, she lives with her husband and three children.

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Alien Skin

Rhubarb unfurls.

Fantastical, frilled like giant rose petals. Shoves clods of earth and worms aside, strives toward sun.

Skin thins, chlorophyll streams.

In the fisted wrinkly head

stuck between magenta stalks

Life insists.

Graupel chips bounce off. Rhubarb shivers, unable to turtle inward. Hangs its hair while frigid scalpels puncture, its poison heartsblood useless.

I touch one leaf.

Clammy, my mother's skin,

an hour after her death,

cells spread and stilled.

A handful of warmth

fisted over her heart.

Out-of-focus facsimile, Mom, in violent pastel hue, smeared yellow-purple, alien skin,

a shredded rhubarb leaf

refusing to relinquish blood.

Winter steals it.

Dawn after Killing Frost

Mist curls purl off water

fingering pale sunlight.

Obscured, a single goose calls

from the surface, voice ghosting

for a mate. She flies in, silent slide,
touches beaks with him, flapping,
splashing.

Wind has packed its bags of leaves
and moved on, tree bodies plundered.
Still takes my breath, such starkness,
bone and branch.

In the night, hoar frosted every grass blade, petal,
each empty bird's nest and the tail feathers of squirrels
wrapped 'round their faces. They squat,
back-to-bark,
paws folded
facing dawn,
waiting
for the warm.

sun wars

It is the time of year
When dusk coalesces almost before the sun
has shone, rising around us like water.
Or smoke. When dew turns to frost
and naked branches having shaken themselves
free of clothing beseech Sky.

Cats jostle each other for the strip
of sunlight that paints a 6 inch swath of floor by the front door around 1:00
p.m.
I drag a two tier tower for them. Who gets top bunk?

Warmth inebriates them.

Gabby, highest, Cato on his back, feet in the air
offers his belly to Sun.

Even a jumble of racketing dogs can't dislodge
such heated torpor

We struggle between need for light and heat this waning year.

Close the door

too soon as sun scatters over

the woods and drifts

down the horizon into a pile of

blazing empty leaves.



Rachael Ikins is a 2016/18 Pushcart, 2013/18 CNY Book Award, 2018 Independent Book Award winner prize winning poet/novelist/artist. She featured at ArtRage gallery 2018, Caffè Lena, Saratoga Springs, Aaduna fundraiser 2017 Auburn, NY, Syracuse Poster Project 2015, and Palace Poetry, Syracuse. She has 7 chapbooks, a full length poetry collection and a novel, with

3 publishers. She is a graduate of Syracuse University and lives in a small house with her animal family surrounded by nature and is never without a book in hand.



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Welcome to the Bazaar

Welcome to the Bazaar,
Of living commodities
And insensitive spirits.

Beaming faces and scowling hearts
Frowning torsos and gleaming corpses
Scattered all around
On every trail and ground.

Kindly purchase
Life, gusto, and oomph,
Put up for sale
In valueless retail.
Waiting to be snapped up
By naive shopper
Ahead of his entering
Into the world of whopper.

Welcome to the Bazaar
Take heed, think twice
Prior to emulating
Living commodities
And insensitive spirits!

Raeesa Usmani is a Lecturer in English at the Department of Biotechnology, VNSGU, Surat, Gujarat, India. A gold medalist in M.A. in English Literature and Language, she received her M. Phil. Degree on Travel Writing. She is currently working for a doctorate and has published poems in journals and magazines like *Setu Bilingual Magazine*, *Spillwords Press* and *Tuck Magazine*, namely.

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Turning Back Time

Loved ones
gone forever,
come and stay like
lunette paintings
on the semicircular
alcoves of memory.

Sometimes the cold
winter mist leaches
the colours away;
I fear the greyscale
and crayon the figures--
Precious beyond words!

A 'deepening entrophy'--
Aches in the bottom of my soul
for the lost caring clasps;
dwindling life -- regrets!
Something bites me back and
fills my heart with remorse:

I couldn't maintain
frequent contact and
visit them more often--
Remained busy with
day-to-day schedules,
couldn't take time off work.

Under the 'cyclic shadow'
they must've yearned to

spend time talking with me,
But I could hardly think--
What did it feel like
to be old and alone!

I wish I could
go back in time,
and redo everything,
realising their dreams,
fulfilling their desires!

Poetry: My 2 a.m. Friend

The evening sky with
 splashes of ruby wine,
fades to pools of purple
 to disappear into night.

The sky and darkness
 with a fragment
awaiting perfection--
 The crescent moon.

Disillusionment, sorrow
 and loss of human beings,
float in the empty space
 amid random rain of tears
on closed poppy petals.

Images of sad human plight
 haunt in succession,
jarring the fine strands of peace,

making me restless:

A middle-aged man
legless on crutches,
weaving his way
through the traffic,

thumping the bonnet
of my car--
Dishevelled,
down-at-heel!

Fossils of coiled ammonites
deep within his eyes
uncurling umpteen stories
of endless woes!

Hungry children
deprived of food and laughter,
victims of malnutrition,
in the dark alleys of fate!

A fusillade of questions
assail my mind
and leave me
feeling drained.

Robbed of sleep
I call poetry--
My 2 a.m. friend
to share my feelings.

Together we flow and expand
into ever-growing stanzas
of love and empathy
under the sun of compassion!



Ranjana Sharan Sinha is a former professor in English at S. B. City College, Nagpur, India. A well-known voice in Indian Poetry in English, she received an accolade from the former President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam for her poem *Mother Nature*. An author and literary critic, her poems, short stories, and research papers have been widely published widely at national and international levels. She lives in Nagpur.



I've Always Loved that Prostitute

In the politics of endgames,
Honor is a farce.
She knows that and weeps under my feet.

When I last see her,
She's like a window with no curtains.
Her rocky terrain and sun-kissed shores dressed to the nines for her new customer.

She looks back, a last glance, a plea.
Her pimp serves her gladly to the rich man in robes,
But not before promising her to the leering bully, the monster-gangster.

All for a fee,
A disgusting fee for a trod on her flesh,
For a ride, a long, long ride.

Cries six feet under are silent,
Just like the leftovers of men buried in her bosom.
How could you? Would have been their silent reproach. After we paid for love in blood?

She weeps again,
But this time they yank her from right under my feet.
Since when did prostitutes ever call the shots?

In the mechanics of endgames,
Honor is a farce,
A brokered deal, a sale.



Riham Adly is a mother, ex-dentist and now a full time writer. Her work appeared in literary journals such Vestal Review, Page&Spine, Connotation Press, Spelk, The Cabinet of Heed, CarpeArte, SoftCartel, Café lit, Fictionalcafe, Tuck Magazine, Paragraph Planet, The Ekphrastic Review, Visual Verse and Writing in a Woman's voice. Her story *The Darker Side of the Moon* won the MAKAN Award in 2013 and was published in an anthology by the same name.

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Bonfire of Lost Daughters

Fire clicked its tongue
for the first time since
1995, kicked itself
out of its mother's womb,
licked the sticky mess
until it's all gone
Fire wrapped its arms
around its sisters but
scratched the insides
of a propane torch
with impatient claws
and bad accent
Fire made a bad joke
They knocked on wood,
but nothing could make
the bad luck leave
Fire, bluer than sapphire,
hopped into the last train
home, forgot what it means
to burn out.

Flight 32 of Guilt Airways

A scornful sun bats
its thick eyelashes
and I shrink
into a size of a pea

There is a land
that stretches out

in front of me
like a dirty carpet

Too many cities
and not enough
pushpins to mark
my withering map

I borrowed courage
from hell
and drank my tea
this morning

But my hand still
reaches for
pretty graveyards
to dig while flying,

still mourns for
every single thing
I taste that doesn't
make it back home.

Part Flesh, Part Iron Oxide

The sky wears sepia tones
to the party, and I wear
a darker shade of everything
I hate to own,

wondering
why there is too much of

withering and not enough
left to bloom

What if no one
wants to stay here either?

The room smells like
tangerine hope but
I only have a set
of rusty swings to give

Nothing here looks pretty
just a little bit of all things
obsolete

I am holding my tongue
like a purse; maybe this way
it looks classier than
swallowing it down

Did you see that?
Copper brown eyes knocking
on all locked doors but
I am way too soft to say,
Come in

Who wants a drink?
I say, Not me
The swings creak
Tangerines fade
I knock on woods
and then I leave.



Rizzalyn Bernarte is a 23-year-old business editor from the Philippines. An emerging writer, she started as an Instagram poet (@literizzature) three years ago. She is currently working on self-publishing a poetry collection, *In the Belly of a Beast*.



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Guns = Disease = Guns

for Bob Hicok

Enraging.

I get sick of the guns and I get sick of the guns.

Downrange.

I ask the man next to me to put out his cigarette and he says it's not a cigarette, that he's just fired his gun.

I tell him I can't take the smoke and he shoots and kills me. He feels so cool killing me.

Nonrandomness.

I saw a child in a Sunday school dress with a gun.

It's called the man of the family making sure he can shoot anyone he wants whenever he wants. Including his children. He has the right.

It's called freedom and if you listen to the national anthems of the U.S. or France or whenever, you'll hear the hardblood of song.

I imagine sunrays being choked.

I know a kid in high school who tried to shoot a plane with a gun. I swear to God. I still remember the horror.

I remember it rained and rained and rained and rained until we drowned in heat.

I get sick to my guts and I get sick to my guts.

Unraveling.

My brother told me that the word unraveling has NRA right inside it.

It's what this country is doing.

There is so much money to be made if you love blood
on your hands. It's precedential.

It's Hard Not to Piss People Off, What with the Internet and Rage Because Part of Breakfast

I remember the old days.

I'm talking about days with grey hair.

Where you can see their cavities.

I like cavities.

I've had a dozen.

I'm good at them.

I even brush my teeth

but my dentist said I brush like a giant holding a tree.

I am a giant.

I'm 6'7".

This is only the second poem you have read by someone who is 6'7".

Although Emily Dickinson was 6'9".

And Sylvia Plath was a seven-footer. She'd dunk and scream like a Viking going through withdrawal.

In Chicago, I bent over at a toll booth to pick up some coins because I didn't have enough

and the toll booth operator said, "If you don't put those coins back, I'm calling the police."

"But they're on the ground."

"They're on *my* ground."

The anger was enough to set a field on fire, where the deer and rabbits run for their lives.

My girlfriend at the time said, "Imagine her life. Imagine that job."

"I had that job before," I said, "For a week."

"Really?"

"I wonder how long I would have had to work there to start thinking I owned the ground."

I told my old boss that the raccoons were going into the biohazard bins and he said, "Serves them right." I still don't understand that response.

My Mother Had Two Jobs and My Father Had Two Jobs

so combined they had four jobs
and you can see it in their eyes,
as if jobs walk down your face
and force you to rip up newspapers
when you read Republican quotes.



Ron Riecki enjoys the concept of hybrid writing. He has Saami and Karelian ancestry, nomadic blood, and encourages movement, interweaving, border transcendence. Ron wrote *U.P.: a novel* (Great Michigan Read nominated) and edited *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (2014 Michigan Notable Book), *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula* (2016 Independent Publisher Book Award), and *And Here: 100 Years of Upper Peninsula Writing, 1917-2017* (Michigan State University Press, 2017).



Genesis Story

Some say
The Boss Upstairs
Spun the stars first
To separate this from that

And next the ocean
Land, the wind
And fish and birds
Then everything else

And the Other says
It wasn't as simple as that
It took a good long time

For the periodic table
To sort of just
Fall through the roof

But the Watcher says
The old ones
In the memory wing
Have got it all mixed up

When God saw
Blue Moon Girl
Invite Messenger
Up to her room

That night with
The scent of Breton pine

In her voice

He put off

Creating light

For another day.

The Noose

(News item: Fragments of the text of a lost Greek play were found among the pages of a disordered collection of medieval manuscripts in a Spanish museum. The play, entitled The Noose, is attributed to Cratinus, who, along with Aristophanes and Eupolis, is credited as one of the Triad of Old Comedy authors in Athens during the period 485 to 380 BCE.)

Because his mother

Had sex with a donkey

He brags

Boasts

Brays

Leads from the rear

I call to witness

This awful smell

He has stolen

Everything of value

Hambones

Sausage

Olives and figs

The kitchen's share

That goddamn sponger

Has wolfed it all down

Why did the gods

Send this

Foul tasting gourd
To trumpet over us
Him with his golden bracelet
All his finery
Tramples the oak grove
On ivory feet.

Let him take
One deep breath
Then
Tighten the noose
Haul on the rope
Like a sail to the mast
And send him to the fishes
That miserable crook.



Russell Streur's poetry and photography have been widely published online and in print. The author of *The Muse of Many Names* (Poets Democracy, 2011), *The Table of Discontents* (Ten Pages Press, 2012), and *Fault Zones* (Blue Hour Press, 2017), he edits *Plum Tree Tavern*.



My Wedding Day

Everything is a scintillating gold
Jasmines and beads shroud my eyes
But my taut lips stifle my dimples

There's no tinkle on Mother's wrists
She smiles, placid in soft pastel. Not
Everything is a scintillating gold

Banquet tables are laid heavy and aromatic
Locked tunes escape the confines of shehnais
Jasmines and beads shroud my eyes

Without your hand on my head, Father
I say 'Qubool Hai,' when asked thrice
But my taut lips stifle my dimples



Sara Siddiqui Chansarkar is an Indian American. She was born in a middle-class family in India and will forever be indebted to her parents for educating her beyond their means. She is a Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee and her work has been published online in *The Ellipsis* zine, *Lunch Ticket*, *Star82 Review*, *Cabinet of Heed*, and also in print, most recently the *National Flash Fiction Day Anthology 2018*. She blogs at *Puny Fingers* and can be reached on Twitter @PunyFingers.



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Arson

When no one is looking
Sneak into a poet's study
And set fire to the blank pages
Breathing on his table.
Sprinkle the dust of his
Life long rejections,
In his vodka.
Remember to polish his pen,
Empty the ink cartridge
And replace it with gun powder.
Walk out on tip-toe,
Don't drag your feet
And be careful, not to topple
The nights stacked at a corner
They might be sleeping.



Sayan Aich Bhowmik is currently the Assistant Professor at Shirakole Mahavidyalaya, Department of English. A published poet, he is also the editor

of the blog Plato's Caves, a semi-academic space for discussion on life, culture and literature. When not under the burden of answer scripts and meeting deadlines, he can be found nurturing his love for movies, writing and poetry.



Ghazal

Eyes of porcelain. Dreams of stone.

Pieces of porcelain. Screams of stone.

These impotent idols, this adamant priest,

This tyranny of faith, these regimes of stone.

A mouthful of dust; a handful of bones:

What castles of ambition! What schemes of stone!

The thirsty artificer sculpting miracles.

What consolation- streams of stone?!

Tombstones of regret: milestones of memory.

The carved epitaphs! The requiems of stone!

Sermons of sulphur! Rains of brimstone!

What petty gods! What seraphim of stone!



Shabir Ahmad Mir from Gudoora, Pulwama Kashmir, gets bored every now and then. Out of this boredom, he scribbles in prose and sometimes in verse.

Earlier he used to do so on loose paper but now he mostly does it on his Facebook wall.



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Alpha

Do you look into the depth of her eyes?
Do you see what truly lies?
In her soul,
Do you see her fierce spirit running free?
Do you see how she longs to be?
Out of control
Do you see how wild she truly is, or disguises to be?
Do see the wolf do you see
She is the She Wolf Alpha
Do you see beyond her flesh and bone?
Do you see, that she is a breed unknown?
To all civilization
Do you see she is the beast unleashed?
Do you see, beyond her purity?
Do you see her soul?

Finding Your Voice

I once held onto the silence,
The dead mute, the empty darkness
As my eyes screamed to be heard
I stood still, not spoke a single word
I released a fragile smile
My thoughts were producing fruits, my mind so fertile
I silently craved to be heard
To release my voice from within
That's prying the blood from my skin
Yet I stay silent, too afraid to speak
Seen as vulnerable and weak
I have this beast inside I need to unleash

Hidden in the prison I created, afraid to release
Yet this voice needs to be free
It's seeping through the pores in my skin
I need to release it from within
Yet I'm not sure if I'm ready or if others are ready to see
Me as strong and unique, not vulnerable and weak
As I breathe out deeply
I have to release this voice that's suppressing me
Alongside with the beast that's held in my captivity
It's the only way to release my voice
But releasing one will set them both free
The devil will rejoice but at least my voice will be free

Age Is But a Number

Our body is an endless map of life,
We grow through what we go through
Through each struggle and sacrifice
Through love and feeling alive
Our body is a vessel that helps us sail through
It's not something we should de value
Because of age, age is a process of time
Something we should embrace,
As wrinkles appear as a new line
Or the hair follicles turn grey
And people notice a change in your way
We should stop and embrace this day
Because age is something we should embrace
Accepting the changes in our body and in our face
And yes I understand the heat and the tidal waves
That the body depletes in its fierce outrage
With its sugar cravings and menopausal waves

I know it's not easy, but we have to embrace, our age
Because where at a stage in life where
Age is seen as a threat, like it's something we should hide
And Botox and plastic surgery are on the rise, but it doesn't stop the aging inside
Growing old is something we all have to face,
You are as young as you feel, if you choose to embrace
This stage of life, and how you wish to feel alive
Live with no regrets and age naturally
Ignore media hype and cosmetic surgery
Because women of this earth are more than beauty
Women are healers and soul receivers of this earth
And we are the ones who grant life and give birth
We are the light of this earth
And we should not care about growing old



Sharena Lee Satti is a poet from the UK; she is the author of *Testing times* and *Broken Chains*. She manages *Momentoustreasures*, a Facebook page where she shares her poetry online. She shares her love of poetry at spoken word events in and around her local community as well.

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White, as human bone

Where did I meet you?
In a dream you
were reality.
Your shadow cast a shadow,
white as human bone.
You were a hand of water
into which I placed my only stone.
At last, I am afraid
to be afraid to be alone.

When did I leave you?
It was a note that rang on in the dark.
An errant, unenduring tune.
I looked into a face
and saw a woman in the moon.
One was a thing that two could never be.
And now, alone at last
I tremble with the trembling of the sea.



Steven Lebow has published fiction online and in print in *Aphelion Magazine of Science Fiction*, *Infernal Ink*, *Literally Stories*, *Literary Heists*, *The Aironaut*,

Literally Stories, and Danse Macabre namely. White, as human bone is his first poem.



Himalayan Tsunami

The gaping holes in that old blanket
Spoke the language of deep sighs
Of hunger and deprivation

While the little head
Peeping out of the blanket
At one end -
-The head of Socrates himself-
Fixes a question mark

Lying across the gluey tar road
The norms of development
Running zigzag on the mountains
Through echoing ominous tunnels

To the town called Kedarnath
Where pilgrims turn ghosts
With holes in their eyes

Expressing their rock solid faith
Or the complete lack of it

*Born and brought up in Kenya, **Sukrita Paul Kumar** is a well-known poet and critic, who held the Aruna Asaf Ali Chair at the University of Delhi until recently. Formerly, a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, she is an Honorary Fellow of the International Writing Programme, University of Iowa (USA), as also of Hong Kong Baptist University and Cambridge Seminars. She is honorary faculty at the Durrell Centre at Corfu (Greece). She has published several collections of poems including Dream Catcher, Untitled, Without Margins and Folds of Silence. A recipient of many prestigious fellowships, she has lectured in many universities in India and abroad. Her paintings have been exhibited and published in several journals. Many of her poems emerged from her engagement with homeless people and tsunami victims.*



Brandt

each morning the cock crows
smothered by the shed, his duvet
Still he will rise, tend the flock

he wears only his underwear
and sits with his back to my window
drinking his cup of oolong
watching the rooster mount the hens
he has his favourite

she is a black bantam
her feathers turn the richest russet of beech
beneath the black, though she is balding now
his wife has a thyroid issue

he himself has concerns, at his age
the beer does him no favours
he yellows like the rooster and his belly
swells like a barrel

he hasn't delved below it for some time
not since the night-leaking
fearful he would turn on the tap
and just pour everything out

he bought the geese to remind him
to be strong against watery fluctuations
the ducks too, and he cages the doves
why should they fly?

Margret

she busies herself with the veggies
her hair falls out over the pumpkins
its only there she notices
how grey her roots are

over the fat tilt of their full weight
she struggles to lop off their heads
gets tangled in their gnarly bodies
as if it were thick hair
the kind she has forgotten

except when Brandt looks at her
in that apple pie way, that ripe way
and she flicks her thin wisps
as if they were clouds scudding
the colour of her favourite hen

she lays double yolks

she remembers his young egg-white
fevered to harden and expelled into her
crowing like a dawn lay
he is her favourite hen then

but her roots give her a steel halo
over her sun-pinked scalp
her heart beats faster, in anxiety
her hands shake
so instead of the pumpkins
she plucks their voluminous flowers

for her bedside table

You and the Raccoon

it runs on hand-feet
a dexterous tangle
feels each ridge on the tarmac
foody fiddling fingers offended
by the poxed man-ground
quests for the polish of a carapace
the fidget of an ant

instead you were found
rooted out, under the shifting moon
the blindfold eye
uncertain, blinked

you

the abrupt shape of man
his tiny daughter

a pause of sound

unexpected, inconceivable

and morning
so close to its blinding beginning
only birds eggs stir and crack
(rolled in black palms, slimy sucking)
only gobs of slug and snail
skate the dew

washing the old dry day away

you were there, among them
sand dunes in the corners of your eyes (a desert)
dreams still crowning under your hat
blooming as if the moon was newly risen

I should not have slept
under such heavy covers
the feathered shawl of my bed
hid my eggshell body
an all-sung-out bird
resisting the dawn

you could have woke me
roused an empty crust
that could still walk, still see - enough anyway
and taken me with you out into the murmurous night
to meet the bandits on the road, hidden in the trees
I'm only half-glad you didn't



Nature is the blood of **Susannah Violette**'s work. Animals both within us and outside of us fascinate her and her poems become liminal spaces, where the edges of these worlds blur. She was recommended in the Westival International Poetry Prize, shortlisted for the Frogmore poetry prize and has appeared in various publications.



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A Manageable War

Are we to believe that there is one?

A soldier takes a break to peel
a dragon fruit, then resolved
to take a vacation in the jungle.

Some may say this is desertion
but the colors of the fruit
lures him to taste
what is different.

In Laos, smiling women bring
flowers in their home to brighten
what they see as dark. If
they happen to cross the soldier,
he would calm their fright
and say his bullets are not for them, pleads
with them that they, women,
are in fact sacred.

They offer him a shower
with water shimmered from their stove.
On the other burner, they cook
a hearty meal for his hunger. In the
remaining time, he trips over
a bamboo ledge on the floor and
finds what has been missing in his life.
He falls for one of the women and is elated
in her charm and custom.

So much like the dragon fruit, he allows
himself. Then, in the finality,

years after, bearing joy, offspring and all,
he slips back into the jungle, manages
what was not an abandonment
and embraces what
was and is war.



Ted Bernal Guevara is a freelance writer from Speedway, Indiana. Although he delves in an array of themes—always looking for the unusual—he tends to adhere to the plight of the disabled and the helpless, their profound richness. His upcoming collection, *Tonto & Destinata*, hopefully will provide such tools for life. Ted has been published in *Suisun Valley Review*, *Elbow Lane*, *Anaphora Literary Press*, *Ely Two* and *Vending Machine Press*.



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Itch

I had an itch I spent all the time scratching
but when I talked to you I felt like water

I needed to apologise for something I'd done
but when I explained to you it seemed trivial

I was separate from everything,
I looked around me and revered or sneered
except when you looked into me
there was no 'I' to be separate at all

I didn't speak unless spoken to as a child
until one day I began to speak over others

It was only by accident
like sun through a cloud
I would look and see without gazing
or hear and feel without listening

When this happened I wasn't meek or quiet
I neither whispered nor shouted
there was no such thing as volume

It was then I lost a corner of the itch
I had been scratching and,
since that was all it was,
there was nothing left to scratch

You made me feel stupidly, giddily free

Wonder

I awoke from a dream-you, a will o the wisp.
You winked like a Greek chorus which knows
its characters in ways they can't see

then tucked a few blazing hairs behind your ear
and burst leaving my limbs light
like a summer cloud tacking overhead

I peer between the curtains
looking for snow or sun to animate
this mild amnesty of my squally seas

Outside it's half light: crows
are diving into threadbare trees
poaching eggs with a frenzy of entitlement

Am I overblown to cast my lifted brow
- common copper gobbet of relief -
as a pearl of pure wonder?

Perhaps although I thought it rare
to have neither bought, hoarded, or faked it



Toby Hall is a writer of short fiction and poetry, currently studying for an M/A in creative writing at the University of Manchester. Having foregone the idea of making lots of money, he is currently seeking out authentic experiences in the hope of learning from them and having burrs stick to his sleeves which can later be picked off and turned over in the light.



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I Cheated On My Soul

I feel bad but I don't feel sad.

I'm confused but I'm not mad.

I don't regret it for a second.

It felt like it was a long time coming.

Part of me feels like it was a piece in the puzzle waiting to happen.

As though it didn't happen a year into my marriage but before, when it was supposed to.

But had it happened that way, would there have been a marriage to turn to?

It's hard to accept that it could have been so good.

It could have been so perfect and it could have been worth it.

So would the relationship have worked had I been the husband and not the side dude?

When she'd be doing the things she's doing with me with other men whilst we are married?

Perhaps not.

The girl and I had great chemistry but the woman and I only have sexual chemistry.

Which although we share it, we can't share anymore, because I am taken and so is she, and this is wrong no matter how I spin it.

No matter how many angles I filter it through,

It is wrong, for me and for you.

Because although we all know that we make great friends, we make even better lovers,

and that knowledge alone is too dangerous for either of us.

So I leave it here on a heavy note, it was fun while it lasted.



Trisha Rose, in her twenties, is based in the UK. She has been writing music lyrics since being 9, and recently started writing her novels. She is mostly inspired by the relationships around her.



High Stakes

Under the river bridge I pick up a rock,
ask my father, who is upstream
just slightly, how much it's worth
to drill the heavy green pop bottle
hunched in the concrete-thrown shade.
He looks at the bottle, then back up
at me. He says: lunch, but one shot.
After that, we'll just have to see.

I'm a good twenty feet away
from this old glass bottle, buried
deep in its comfortable dirt,
dusty, dull. I cock back my arm,
take a step, heave with the rock.
It just nicks the top, taking off
part of the lip. Dad finds an old brick,
chucks it from the other side of the bridge,
and the green glass explodes,
bits flying into the dirt all around.

Later we grab lunch together,
shaking sand from the cuffs of our jeans
onto checkered taco joint tiles
for others to clean in our wake.

Raccoon

Fish bandit waits,

eyes alert in dark bands,
for ripples within reach.
Flexes small hands.



Tyler Robert Sheldon's newest books are the poetry collection *Driving Together* (Meadowlark Books, 2018) and the chapbook *Consolation Prize* (Finishing Line Press, 2018). He has received the Charles E. Walton Essay Award and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Los Angeles Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Pleiades*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, and other venues. Tyler holds an MA in English from Emporia State University and is an MFA candidate at McNeese State University. He lives in Baton Rouge. View his work at TylerRobertSheldon.com.



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vortex

it's July & everything is elegant white & tenderly gray but furtive of
sapphired smoke disquiet gunshots & bombs

every scream is a guilt; the way its fails survival & breathing
bodies & bones shattered by desperate bombs

silence failed my country

& chad republic

in every corner you can find us dead scared to promise tomorrow our breath

because our bodies are made to be soft because our bodies are made to
stay prettier tenderness daggered us slowly until we became empty like water

it's premature to know what a country does to keep its citizens' faith between
its tongue how our hairs and skins were touched & became fire &
later ashes flying to freedom in frenzied air

everything's dust tottled towards us failed our charred blisters

mark these syllables our names aren't dead they live in the winds that
unfurl our burnt flesh

i will tell you how difficult we are how we were hard enough to look back and
run

how we thought it was the rain thundering down to redeem our bodies

that was the night everything broke into dark fragment water became
gasoline rain became blood & hardness became fire nuzzling inside
our flesh until we tasted empty & charred



Ugonnaora Owoh is a Nigerian emerging poet, who explores themes of war, terrorism, family, migration and history.

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Electra

you are just like my father

once my father told me

never bring niggas inside of my house they will steal my property destroy our family

my father never
learnt about my first kiss

large lips
humid cold
humid warm
after long lasting
interlacing dance
with mine

lips
black lips

years later I met this guy

tall German descent
a Kaiser

when I told my father
he did heavy drugs
my father said

poor guy, he is a victim of society

I married this guy
he destroyed my self
my hope
my life

I wish
perhaps
innocent dream
Alice if you wish

my next man will write our story in colored ink
pencils
healing scent from childhood



Ursula Nichowski was born in Argentina and raised in Brazil. Just recently she started to publicly share her work, which is an autobiographical voyage through rape, abortion, abusive marriage, unfulfilled relationships, bisexuality, bipolar disorder and mental illness. Some people say she writes in English from her gut. On July 7, 2018, she was invited to perform at 2018 Out Loud: A Cultural Evolution, Long Beach's first annual queer arts festival. She currently lives, works, writes and raises her kids in Miami Beach, FL.

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Full Moon Night

The full moon is rising tonight;
the daylight has faded;
the shadows lengthen
and stretch across the land.

The cattle out in the fields
are gathering to their rest,
and the stars are peeping through
all across the sky.

Soon the brightness of the day
will be replaced by the luminous light
of a full moon night,
and a million stars in a crystal sky
will twinkle and glow
and beckon to us mortals
stranded here below.

Maybe we would long to go
if we could take what we know
of the good and true
and leave the bad behind.

But, oh, it is still a beautiful world
even with all the pain and sorrow –
look! The glory of this night
with its big yellow moon,
sparkling stars,
and clear, crisp air
shines with the brilliance of heaven,
and even though it is not so –
for it can never be heaven –
yet the hope of heaven
reflects in our eyes,

stirs in our hearts,
and rekindles in our souls
every time we behold a night
so sublime, so magical,
so glorious as this!

Mystery

I wonder why every living being
must suffer and die.
If I knew the reason,
I would not be a mere mortal man
dressed in these burial clothes.

Someday After

Sometime after we're grown, our eyes glaze over,
and we walk through this world like that until the day
we die. When we were children, it was not that way.
We were new, all of life was new, and we could taste
the wonder of it all: The sky, trees, grass, birds, sun,
moon, stars.

All of life was fresh, new, gleaming, glowing,
alive with purpose and hope. Death was all around,
but we were not phased by it; we were almost unaware
of it, although everything here is living and dying
at the same time.

Somehow we felt, we sensed by intuition or
something else within us and outside of us that we
and this world were all part of something bigger,

deep, mysterious, unexplained, but part of a grand design
put together by a Designer we knew not but whom
we sensed in our very beings and the very being of it all.

But as we grow, we become consumed by toil, by
sameness, sickness, and sorrow, and we lose that
sense of innocent, wide-eyed wonder and adventure
we lived in as children. Our eyes become glazed over,
and we exist in that state until the end, not knowing
how to escape it or be renewed to our earlier,
childhood state.

Maybe it is only at death that this can happen.
Or maybe, once in a while along our way,
we can get a glimpse of who we were as children, and how
the world was then, and maybe for a brief, fleeting moment,
we can see what we will become again –
someday after.



Wil Michael Wrenn is a poet and songwriter living in rural north Mississippi. He has an MFA from Lindenwood University and is a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). His work has appeared in numerous publications, and he has published a book of poems. His website can be found at: <http://www.michaelwrenn.com/>.

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Reminder

*If your banker breaks, you snap; if your apothecary
by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die.*

—Ishmael in Moby-Dick by Herman Melville [Chapter 72]

Even here in the U.S., where Whitman,
Emerson and Thoreau wrote of individuality
and we are told to pull ourselves up
by our bootstraps, it is true:
if the housing bubble bursts, your home
is worth less than your twenty-year mortgage.
If the stock market declines, your retirement fund bleeds.

You may be the safest driver in the state,
but if the teen in the Toyota texts or drinks
and drives, you end up under carved stone.
The drive-by shooter with bad aim may miss
the Gangster Disciple and hit your daughter instead.

If your young son runs to the park
with friends, plays with the gun
Uncle Joe bought him in the Walmart toy department,
and a man in a blue uniform assumes
it's loaded with lead even if it doesn't look real,
you have to pick a casket and plan a funeral.

Someone assassinates an archduke in Austria,
Japan bombs a U.S. naval base,
North Korea sends troops across the 38th parallel,
Iraq invades Kuwait, planes flatten the World Trade Center—
if you pause and think it through, you know Queequeg was right,
It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians.

Ishmael Reflects on the Try-Works Fire

Beginning with a line from Moby-Dick

Look not too long in the face of the fire—
those forking flames are a devilish sight.
The blaze hypnotizes as it grows higher;
it blinds your eyes to the sun's true light.

I'll never believe what I've been taught
by my frowning mother, that all men fell
and my soul is damned—in the flames I'm caught.
She said, "go to church, or you'll go to hell."

Instead of the fire with guilt and dread,
turn to the wisdom of Solomon's book
or the Man of Sorrows, the life he led—
he spread compassion with his gentle look.

How different would be my mother's face
if her theology reflected grace.

Melville in Love

One version of a life, after Michael Shelden

Can love ever be wrong, he wonders,
as he wanders the Berkshire hills
with Sarah, her dark eyes melancholy
and seductive. How can it be wrong
to lean against a boulder reading
poetry to each other or rhapsodizing
on the beauty of the lake?

Can it be wrong to climb Mt. Greylock
with friends, picnic on the flat top,
drinking champagne, rum and port,
nibbling brandied cherries by the campfire
before taking Sarah's hand and disappearing
into darkness where brush and trees
seem designed to provide privacy?

He wonders again as he gallops through the country,
racing his horse against Sarah's Quake
until they call a truce, dismount by a stream
where the horses drink while he picks
black-eyed Susans for Sarah's loosened hair

as her husband minds the business in Manhattan
and his wife Elizabeth struggles through another pregnancy—
how can a relationship which brings such joy be wrong?



Wilda Morris, Workshop Chair of Poets and Patrons, has published poems in numerous anthologies, webzines, and print publications. Her first book was *Szechwan Shrimp and Fortune Cookies: Poems from a Chinese Restaurant*. *Pequod Poems: Gamming with Moby-Dick*, is scheduled for publication in 2019. Her blog, wildamorris.blogspot.com, features a monthly poetry contest for other poets.

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Drunk on banker's blood

Drunk on a banker's blood,
 (Allegory for the pope)
You stole money from them,
For another shot of dope,
Spark and spoon and fading waistline,
Nodding off to radio whine,
\$6 million in 6 years,
You're out of money on a trail of tears,
I know you,
Junky.



William J. Tell is a Canadian poet and editor.



Burnt Sage Again

Keep on
falling down

mirrored

kin

susceptible
to old ways of
death
allowed to grow
up hating oneself

to hold out that the possibility

of making it to an age old death

depends on location and who

around holds onto ages old
racist ideology

belief in a false
state

one
of

only skin deep differences
different cultural standards

bulky and stationed in hate

forgotten charm of the street,
these forgotten soul less walking dead
show up to only take life as the rest
of “We the People” are busy
burying our dead in soiled clothes

the other offended stand ready to protect

the
way
and say
of the gun
held tight to eons
of
fewer
plow shares
mainly swords
to pray
at the temples of Solomon
without hand written folded up
words for gods ears alone slipped
through the cracks of mortal mortar

now blood red flowing down America’s
path to the Red Sea contribution

opium is the the newest reborn old god
before was bullets scattered through the flesh of fallen angels

when do we wake up from this side of the American Dream?

MAN made violence? It's just TVs and blues? A shot poured out red on the ground? Everyday! This horror played out on in the patches of youth or old white men left unsupervised? Played out in the ear buds of waning empathy that needs to kill more than is needed to survive to eat to fuck!

i smoke sage again in an altar with tobacco and spilt blood

gunshots that wash my neighbors windows and skulls are heard through early morning sirens

i pray on my hill in solitude even I cannot keep my thoughts to myself as they are close to my heart, my pilgrimage is towards the holy land that is a heart reaching out with strength and valor

amidst our continual waging of wars have to

get right

with my

cause

i

feel

this

suspended

animation

injured wisdom

now healing

slowly reaching

ceiling of dreams

crows outside

circling in the

street called home

into wild city of birth

where impossible

loneliness asks

“Where is your camp?”

“Tell me how to get there.”

you strike me as a smart young man that should of made something of your
life as you chose to live in the dirt in a past life

I’m dying to meet your tribe.

I can only respond with a dream
a kiss on a cheek.



Wolf Kevin Martin is an amateur photographer and poet from Lexington, North Carolina. He is now residing in Pittsburgh, PA, contributing poems and images to: *The Arrival Magazine*, *The Rye Whiskey Review*, *The Dope Fiend Daily*, *Cajun Mutt Press* and *Alien Buddha Press* namely.



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Gift

Jesus, You taught no religion, no politics.
You abolished every commandment but love,
which is the ruthless law of softening
the borders, melting the boundaries
between the eye, the gaze, and the other.
When you live like this they arrest you
because you are an anarchist of joy
with fiery dark tears.
They grind your heart like a scarlet poppy
until your fragrance fills their garden.
Their own children forget them,
yet remember You.
Their children's children become wanderers,
searching for your flower
whose savor still makes them tremble.
Finally You return, not as the other, seen,
but the one who dwells in the blackness
before knowing,
where in-breath and out-breath merge.
Now the grinding is complete.
It was You who crushed us
and You who were crushed.
This is the gift of the winemaker
to the grapes.

As You Awaken

As you awaken, just before
the mind of yesterday falls
like a net of stones behind your eye,

be weightless.
Be Presence without a story.
How your soul looks in that mirror
when it sees itself!
What gets you out of bed,
dancing like a wild purple iris
in the breeze of your inhalation!
It doesn't matter at all
what you will do for a living today.
The priceless jewel is just living.
It doesn't matter at all
how much money you will make today.
Your body is more precious than sunlight.
Your sternum is beaten from finer gold.
Whether you feed the multitudes today
or only wash the dishes
makes no difference at all.
What matters is to plunge
down the stem of this unfolding
meditation flower,
to follow the thunderbolt in your backbone
all the way home to silence,
and drop the terrible fairy tale
of last week's anger.
The mirage of sorrow vanishes
in the sky of your chest,
empty and blue.
Love doesn't need a story.

Pronouns

You taught me the language of love.

Ishq Allah Ma'bud Allah!
You taught me the word for "heart."
Thank you,
though my grammar is confused.
The pronouns bewilder me -
mine, yours, ours, Hers -
like gestures of my own face
in shattered glass, shards sparkling

with the color of silence,
night's savory plasma
pulsing with a ceaseless exchange
of sighs, blood, lips, and silences.
Have I fallen into the black mirror,
the square that can only be circled
by a wound?

And always, always the gaze
of that Other whose exhalation
is both of us.

Stars Her tears, or yours, or mine,
caught on silken webs of grief.

To whom shall I tell my secret?

Ishq Allah Ma'bud Allah.

God is love, lover and beloved.



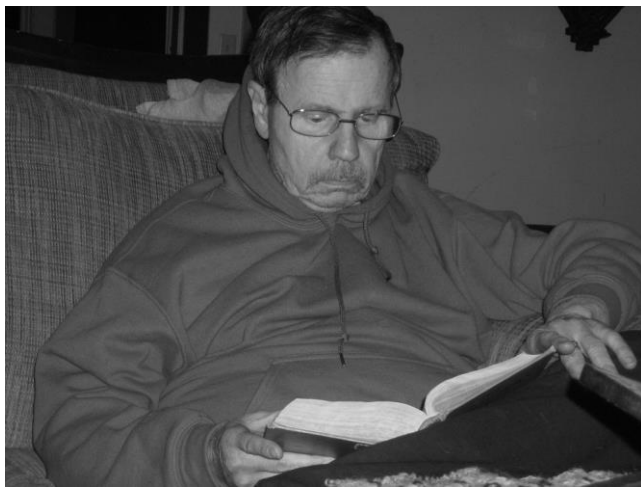
Alfred K. LaMotte is the author of *Wounded Bud* (Saint Julian Press, 2013) and *Savor Eternity One Moment At A Time* (Saint Julian Press, 2015), and co-author of *Shimmering Birthless: A Confluence of Verse and Image* with Rashani Réa. A college instructor in World Religions, he lives near Seattle WA with his wife Anna and golden poodle, Willy. Fred loves to gather interactive poetry circles, where poems lead to deep meditation. He also loves hiking in the mountains, and playing the tenor sax.



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Monk sweeps in the window

Monk sweeps in the window
between the daffodils and marigolds.
I taste the night air of Spring, and
it tastes like a cool breath of Hackensack.
Memories of one I lost and loved
strangle me gently, cutting off oxygen,
but here when the dead pool of silence
has been crushed by a straight,
no chaser Thelonious breeze,
the world outside the window
opens its arms to embrace me,
and its ugly beauty
is my salvation.



R. Bremner of Glen Ridge via Lyndhurst, NJ, USA, writes of incense, peppermints, and the color of time in such venues as *International Poetry Review*, *Anthem: a Leonard Cohen Tribute Anthology*, *Climate of Change: Sigmund Freud in Poetry*, and *Jerry Jazz Musician*, namely. Ron has battled back from a major stroke and a liver transplant to thrice win Honorable Mention in the Allen Ginsberg awards. Visit his Instagram poetry at [beat_poet1](#) and [Absurdist_poet](#).



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