

YOUNG WRITERS CAMP

2014 ANTHOLOGY



**Featuring work from over 30 young
Nebraska writers!**

Poetry Edden Abraham



Untitled

Please forgive me for my
awkward Stuttering
awkward socialness
awkward mumbling
for not speaking when I should
and for speaking when I shouldn't
for being unable to distinguish between the two

Please forgive the sins that
you have not done
that I already condemn you for
and forgive the sins that I committed to you
for it was not of ill will
but of misunderstanding
it was not cruelty but
it was ignorance
so please forgive me of mine
as I forgive you of yours
whether you ask of it or not
I have given it to you

because a life collected of
hatred is not a life at all
but a prison

Please forgive me for my
faults and see the beauty in them
because they multiply as
I forgive and see the beauty in yours
for now I am free to fly
and
soar

as the baggage no longer weighs me down
free
free
free at last

Prose and Poetry Victoria Anderson



Pale White Dogs and Shadows

Bradyn never got much attention. He never spoke out of turn, got the average grades, and had a bland, non dysfunctional social group. His features were like that of a background character in a blasé Elizabethan painting that has been long forgotten in some stuffy grandmother's basement. In short, pale, unexpressive, and European

(expected, as he lives in London and his family has always lived in London). He often sat in class, twiddling his thumbs (which were as bony as thumbs could be), completely bored by the current lesson and listening to the dull buzz of his friend Noland ranting about the recent episode of Dr. Phil. Sometimes Bradyn thought that maybe one day, he wouldn't be as unrecognized as he was. That maybe, something would make him different, not in the boring way but in the exciting way like someone would rather surfboard than attend a board meeting. Luckily for him, his dream would come true in the most unforeseen way. As he shuffled home one day on a particularly biting day, he found a lump huddled amongst the rubbish bins. A lump with glossy white fur that almost seemed clear, in fact it wasn't even a lump; it was a dog. A little furry dog with a cool pink nose and grey eyes that expressed more than most teens probably could express in a pop song. Bradyn couldn't exactly describe the dog with more words than "curious" and "eerie" as its shape seemed to shift every time he saw it, or at least, its shadows changed which drew a lot of attention from the dog itself. Dark, tentacle-esque shadows curled out from under the dirty white paws of the Lilliputian dog. The tentacles curled and twisted and writhed and jiggled and did every form of movement in a genius' vocabulary. And as skewed, dark and mysterious this little dog with the dancing shadows may seem to you and me, it was appealing to Bradyn. Reaching out a bony hand to the tiny beast, Bradyn stroked its back as gently as any awkward, shy boy from London could. The dog, of course, enjoyed being petted. Most people ran away but this one didn't, and so a bond was formed. A bond that only two pale, quiet creatures, one as uneventful as sand and the other with expression as vast as the sea, can share. "I think I'll call you Eugene," The boy said to the dog, which did not speak back. It is quite an unusual name, and perhaps the dog had to come to terms with its new name, after all, it is quite the unusual dog. So I guess, in a way, the awkward boy and the unusual dog worked. Somehow, the duo worked.

Animal Poem

So I didn't really know what to write about
because I don't think about animals
as much as I should
I considered the panda
cause I think its cute
but it has the sexual activity
of a 35 year old virgin with a neckbeard
who lives in his mother's basement
and has a collection of my little pony dolls
I thought of writing about an owl
cause they're wise
but they share the characteristics
with people who're possessed
and I watch horror movies
not gonna mess with that

I wanted to decide
probably no to cats- they're too flexible
and everyone writes cats
Maybe giraffes
cause they're tall like me
but I don't know much about them
and now I'm thinking
maybe the only animal
I should write
is me
I'm a human, homo sapien
not a gay penguin
a person
I have tendencies, feelings
people don't like me
I can call that an allergy
to originality
I can't sense the supernatural
or an oncoming storm
but I can draw a similarity
between me and armadillos
and any other animal that have a million more like themselves
People will only care about me
When I'm dead.

Piss Poem

Don't piss on my leg and tell me it's raining
Because i saw you urinate on my ligament
And you can be damn sure
I'm not gonna let that slide
It's not mother nature calling
You could've held your horses
Till you got to that bucket I hope you now kick
You tell me it's raining?
Well I don't see cats and dogs
Falling from the sky
You didn't need to piss on my leg
I'm sitting under a tree
You could've asked me to move
But I guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree
And your mom
Probably pissed on people too
Well I guess you have now

Killed two birds with one stone
You pissed on me
And you pissed me off
Now you've got a bird in the hand
Which is worth two in the bush
Which coincidentally you could've graced
With your pee
Instead of my leg
Why did you even chose my leg?
There are plenty of fish in the sea
And I hope you soon swim with them
And don't you tell me that
"Life gives you lemons"
And i should make lemonade
Because I will squirt those lemons
In your eyes
Because you pissed on my leg
And I know two wrongs dont make a right
But revenge will be my cake
And i will eat it too
This is not water under the bridge
I like Onomatopeas not onomato pee on my leg
I'm not a horse being led to water
You can't make me drink your lies
Those are just your two cents
That are definately not worth a dime
They all say "keep your friends close and your enemies closer"
Well, I do not want you anywhere near me after you peed on me
And i don't know if you're someone else's treasure
Because you are trash to me
I am done beating around the bush
We are burning this bridge
And as I was not born yesterday
I tell you once again
Do NOT piss on my leg
And tell me its raining

POETRY

Savannah Brown



Why

Why is the sky so blue? Is it because of the fish in the ocean creating whirls of turquoise shooting it into the sky? Is it because of the angels in heaven planting flowers with blue soil? Why did you leave my mother when I was 4 years old? Did you not love the mother of your children anymore? Did you think that you wouldn't be The Worlds Greatest Dad? Why wasn't I in the room when she stopped breathing? Was it because I knew I wouldn't get the chance to see her alive again? Was it because I didn't want her to leave me so soon?

Untitled

I sit gazing at a beautiful fountain while eating a polish dog and drinking orange juice under a tree this fountain is so breathtaking it reminds me of when I was a little girl walking through sunken gardens bare foot without a care in the world tracing the outline of the cracks with my feet

Poetry

Tiara Crites



Broken Heart Syndrome (w/ Gina Keplinger)

Like a cardiologist
that presses pulse
back into his patients with precision,
never calls for time of death,
on his table,
there is only time for life.

In this way, his green eyes shine bleakly,
with a thoughtless desperation.
The door to the home he once knew closed,
and with it the dreams he held tight to his chest,
shatter, piercing his heart.

Adrenaline and Fear

Irrational heart pounding,
'It's a little spider.'
The Energizer Bunny,
'Twenty-three stories up,'

Kicking your heart,
 'This snake is harmless,'
Into overdrive,
 'We won't crash.'

But even though,
 'That man isn't looking at you,'
They tell us,
 'There's nothing to be scared of,'
Not to be afraid,
 'Needles only hurt a little,'
That our fears are silly,
 'It's a spoon, dear.'
That nothing can hurt us,
 'The darkness can't hurt you,'
The terror persists.
 'I'll be gone for ten minutes.'

And we huddle
 'There's no such thing as ghosts,'
In a corner
 'There are no monsters in the closet,'
Gathering what's left,
 'You're not allergic to bees,'
Of our sanity.
 'You need to go outside.'

We sit in silence,
 'There are no sharks in Nebraska,'
Fear clutching our
 'He's never coming back,'
Chests and gagging
 'It's just thunder,'
Our common sense.
 'You're not worthless.'

We hide under,
 'You're healthy now,'
The soft blankets,
 'You have to make a decision,'
Where nothing can
 'The dentist isn't evil,'
Ever reach us,
 'It's only a little blood,'
Closing our eyes,
 'It's just a vacuum cleaner,'

Against the fear,
 ‘Clowns are nice,’
That comes,
 ‘There’s nothing under the bed,’
From nowhere.

Four-Letter Words on the Street Corners of You

Swearing
like enhancing my sentences,
like punctuating a solid point,
like making my brother laugh,
like being angry.

I have a penchant
for swearing to insult,
wielding words like daggers,
arrows piercing your throat,
and cancelling your speech.

There are a few
I will never say,
can hardly write.
I hold them within myself,
lighting a fire in my
heart that rises in my chest,
kills the words in my throat,
flows through my arms
and out of my pencil
or my fingertips as keys click
letters onto virtual paper.

I curse to sound
like an adult,
while wanting to
stay a child forever.

Because sometimes the words
won’t come out and they
build up in your throat
until they explode and
you open your mouth to
dispel pressure in one
simple, surging,
four-letter word.

Screaming at the top of my lungs,
there is no room in my mouth,
in my head, for inside voices.

Sometimes you just need an
alternative verb because
nothing else expresses
EXACTLY what you
need so desperately to say.

Because society ties your tongue
in knots and, damn it, it hurts
to hold in the words
bouncing around in your brain,
bruising your lungs,
that think your ribs are a xylophone,
that your stomach is a trampoline,
and posses your hands to rip
out your hair in chunks.

Profanity rips the ties tightly tied in the
pink muscle of your mouth to shreds.
It stops the music in your torso
and makes your hands yours again.

You lose the battle with expectations
and streamline a torpedo of words
that leave you eternally labelled
as a 'potty mouth,' aimed straight at
everything you see and nothing at all.

But that's okay because.
at least for now,
your spirit is calm,
and your words are elegant
for another fleeting moment.

Prose and Poetry
Maya Crowl-Kinney



Knock on Wood

Knock knock.
Knock on wood.
Knocks that don't stop.
That knock knock.
Ignore the knock
But the knock
Does not ignore you.
Knocks that don't stop,
That keep on knocking
Until you can't speak
And your words
Become a knock
And your actions
Become a constant search
For wood
To knock on.
Knock knock.

Drowning Dreams

It was the sort of day that simultaneously makes you want to fly and combust. A lazy day. A day where the sun is white-hot and its scorching radiance has bleached the sky a pale color. The tree-house was shaking with the heat. Not really, of course, but the image was vivid in my mind. Heat waves sparked off of the half-rotted, sagging wood of a childhood plaything. It was an intriguing image, and since I didn't have much else to do I indulged it. I imagined waves of fire assaulting the steadfast planks of my ship, the hissing and roaring that was sure to accompany my brave journey through the licking flames of the inferno.

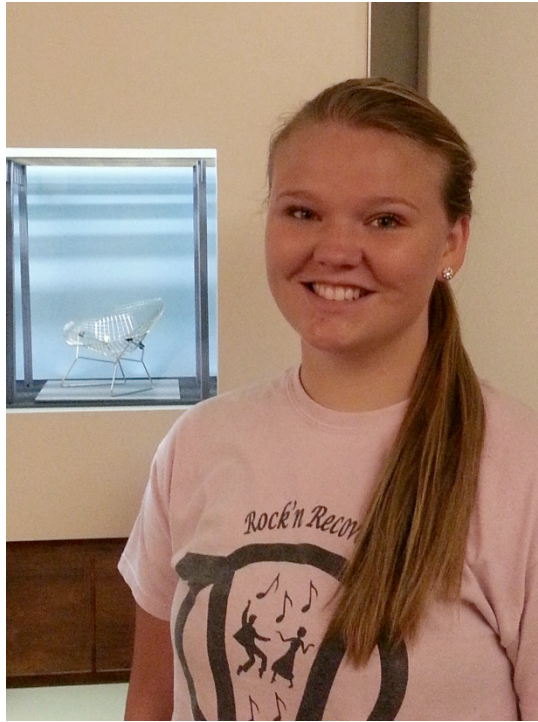
The hot breeze tittered at me, mocking the antics that were surely too childish to be played by a sixteen-year-old girl. "Silly girl," it chuckled like everyone else. "Wake up from your drowning dreams."

The Chairs

The chairs frightened her, not because of how they looked, but because of how they didn't look. They weren't soft or gentle or even remotely kind. They just looked beautiful, as if their beauty had swallowed up every trace of warmth. Their sneers followed her, forcing her to look them in the eye, at their snarling, dangerous elegance. She hated them. She detested them in her stomach and heart and brain and liver. She despised the metal, as cold as the ghostly white of winter, hidden beneath the seemingly cheery yet brutal colors. Why did they have to be there? Why? She often dared herself to treat them like normal chairs, curling up with a book or magazine, trying to relax and be friendly. The chairs rebuffed her. They spurned her truces and treaties and sent her sulking off to another, kindlier companion.

Prose and Poetry

Morgan Curran



Broken

In the moments when the peer pressure threatened to swallow you alive. When everyone was looking at you, waiting to see if you could be considered “cool” or not. When your entire body was shaking under the weight of the decision. I hope I was there. I hope you heard my voice screaming to say no. I hope you saw my face filled with disappointment as you brought the needle to your arm. And I hope you felt my heart break when you slowly injected the venom into your vein. Each time you’d promise you’d never go back. And each time you’d leave with a different excuse. You stole and you lied. You did everything you could just to get high. Now you carry this ugly thing around with you called addiction and it will always be there, no matter where you go. No matter where you hide. Constantly a part of you until the day you die.

Little Angel

18 years old.
Seven weeks pregnant,
A three month at home.

No one gave any mercy or bothered to care.
Evil voices began filling her head.
All she wanted was comfort,
Someplace to go.
She decided it was too hard to do it alone.
She walked into the clinic,
Tears streaming down her face,
Her world was in a dark dark place.
Don't you worry child,
Heavens get a plan for you.

Doctor handed her the pills
"In three days it will be over," is all that he said.
He never told her it would have fingers and eyes.
When she saw it she cried.
Hands shaking she held it,
Not knowing what to do.
She screamed.
Screamed for someone, anyone.
Then her boyfriend appeared
"Get over it," he said
Grabbed it and flushed it down the toilet.

Don't you worry child,
Heavens got a plan for you.

She regrets it everyday of her life.
Pain fills her heart whenever she hears a baby cry.
She knows its not fair to have one live and one die,
But to grow up in a world where every day isn't guaranteed
And every night is struggle.
Where you don't have to dream a nightmare,
Because it's right there in front of you.
She never wanted any of this.
When she prays she asks for forgiveness
Tells her unborn baby she loves it
And she'll see it again one day

So don't you worry child,
Heavens got a plan for you.

Poetry

Charlie Curtis-Beard



Casket

I wonder sometimes what would my casket be...
I often think that I'll be embodied by a body
Of regrets and memories
What would be my centerpiece?
Would it be me, buried feet first six feet deeper than dusk and dawn?
What would be my legacy?
Who am I?
Who was I murdered by?
When, where and why?
If my dreams were nothing more than dreams
Would I still be able to fantasize?
If my life were intertwined with a nine to five
And a briefcase and a suit and tie
Casual confidence and power rise till I were 65
I'd retire with a pension package
And I'd pack my baggage and my clothes
Leave my mansion, touch of campus
Travel the world in a caravan

Till I find a bridge and I throw myself off
As I fall to my death I think: Life isn't what I thought

But what if I followed my dreams and I failed and fell face first then
Ended up in the hospital, died in my bed, would you blame my nurses?
Would you blame me for trying? Like wasting my time because I'm still worthless?
Starting to wonder if my dreams are worth it...
Will my casket match my hearses?
I want these verses to keep me alive after I die
Even though they're far from perfect
In my eyes I'm far from perfect
I've been searching
For way to get rid of the last name Curtis
But it's part of me
I wonder Will I be like him to...
What the heck am I supposed to do?

Sing About Me

It's been a while since I've seen your face
You haven't talked to me in ages
What's the matter son? Are you ashamed of me?
Or have you forgotten that I'm one of a kind
And that you're a disgrace
Just remember that it's my blood running through your veins
Not some other niggas
I can't be erased
I can't be replaced
But I can run away if you shame the family name
Your mom can't hold me down
What makes you think you can do the same?
Broken promises
My premises for your music is limited
You're just a kid
Honestly all I could give is a dick
Oh... but my sex life is amazing
Using, abusing, lying to women for procreation
There needs to be more like me
I mean honestly
We haven't poked enough through the stereotypes in society
From my perspective what I did was justified
I'm a saint
I can't lie
You're an infant

This is my suicide... note
So I won't sugar cote
You don't need a father figure
I'll leave your mama broke
And broken inside
You never learned to pee in urinals
I never got to make booty calls
So you could say that our pain is exactly the same
I never taught you how to throw a ball
Or start a car
But you have older brothers for that
In fact
I left you four
So you should thank me, A.D.D.P was crazy
That must be why you're music major
You made your father proud
That's something you can savor
But I heard that you can rap and if that's true then I'll be back in your life
And we can chat
And see eye to eye
I stand taller than you yet somehow you're taller than me
Emotionally can you blame me?
I'm a man
Maybe one day you'll understand
But if you're ever famous before I'm six feet in the earth
Promise me that you'll think of me first
And promise that you will sing about me...

Poetry
Riana Lurice Dazon



Woman-Like/It is not sexy

I am proud to say that
I imaginely work at Toys-R-Us
I mean, who doesn't love toys?
You called me on the first day,
but ordered something unusual...
You said that
every guys dream in a girl is to have
perfectly long hair or
a smile is brighter than Mona Lisa's
32D breasts,
being 5'7 tall
stomach flat like the plains in Nebraska
an ass like Kim Kardashian
and thighs, with gaps
and smaller than your legs
because that's sexy.
I calmly said
"Your specialized order is not available at this time
please try again later"

I am sorry, but
where in Toys-R-Us?
when in this milky way galaxy
would you find her?

Unless
you build a woman-like robot
sculpting
woman-like hair
woman-like legs to caress with your hands every night
woman-like arms, shoulders,
hands that will support your burden
even though she doesn't deserve it in the first place
woman-like nose, ears, her lips
woman-like face with immaculate features
voices, thinking,
DO IT.
DO IT FOR THE VINE
CAUSE YOU KNOW I AINT GONNA DO IT
SCULPT OUT EVERYTHING SEXY

But you can't say that the curves on a woman's body
is defined of how she is womanly

You don't say that
But you listen up
It will never be sexy
when you force her to look like
that supermodel in that glossy magazine
every time you and her walk
on that check-out line at Walmart
grocery shopping
filling the cart with food
that will ruin that perfect image
you want her to be in.

It is not sexy
making her guilty
when she won't listen to you
when she didn't make the "right choice"
when you know to yourself that
making decisions are not easy to do.
Like putting her in an empathetic situation making her choose,
standing in between
Popeye's and KFC

and she picked Popeye's
because you wanted it
when all along
she wanted Raising Canes
she wanted One Love
she wanted one love from you.

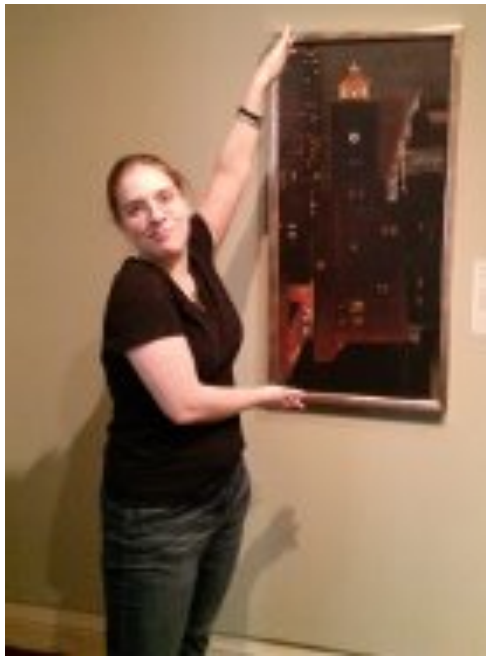
It will never be sexy
when one day
the girl that loved you with all of her heart
left you because of your expectations in her body
leaving you
because she thought you were now
her fitness trainer
rather than the guy
she thought she knew better
knowing
that regardless of what she looked like
that she will be loved

I think
that this was a sign
I saw it through eating donuts for the last two weeks in this writing camp
I saw it when I was looking at myself in the mirror wondering
why these were called lovehandles
because I cannot afford to love them
and now I realized
you're the one that can't handle them
so in the end
it's your loss
for missing all of this
for missing all of this
for missing all of these
beautiful women
tall or short
thick or thin
opposites and opposites
until you can't consider
what opposites are anymore
because you look at all of them
uniquely the same
uniquely beautiful

I immediately resigned from my imaginary job at Toys-R-Us,
I hated toys in the first place

all those specifics
that I don't even bother remembering
I am sorry,
your specialized order is not available in this time
Please try again
never.

Prose and Poetry Amantha Dickman



A Love Letter to Myself

To the one who lives in my memory;

My parents read my paranoia so I could teach myself to hold my keys between my knuckles in self-defense and, with you, they were not wrong. With one look, I was lacking oxygen because your low laying lies smothered me. I suppose you could have killed me and, I suppose, it was a lesson in caution learned well. Thank you.

To the world that cradles my newborn heart;

People who tattoo themselves are people who want to write on the walls of their room but rarely stay in one place long enough for that kind of sentimentality so they write on themselves to contain their memories on their skin long after it has left their homes.

People who walk the streets at night are the people who want to leave but can't find the bag to zip themselves in. They are the ones who can't figure out how to leave the baggage claim, choose a plane, a random destination. Leave this place. Leave this place and you will not regret it.

To the world that attempts to cradle my reborn heart, I will take it back. I have fallen in love with these people I haven't met, places I have never been and, until you can introduce us, I will love myself because I am the only one who has ever been able to. But, thank you anyways.

To the one coming by sidewalk chalk and watercolor:

There will be a time to tamper down our restless minds, immerse them in liquid love. Even as we soak it in, we will pull each other back into bed and, inevitably, into our fingertips. This is what we need. Until then, thank you.

Thank you.

Bright Lights

She likes the night life in the great cities and all the history her family has with nightly wanderings. In the 1920's her great-great-great aunt—not a flapper in appearance but infinitely so in mentality—drank herself in and out of New York bars during the subtle battle against prohibition and swayed restlessly, unsure if she was seeing city lights or weary stars.

In the early 1960's her great grandfather was so high he KNEW he was seeing stars and he was always trying to cage one in cupped palms to hold on to for a later date when he could thoroughly appreciate the way it pulsed between his fingers. For some reason, they don't talk about him.

In the 1980's her father drank himself into the beds of others during his travels between cities looking for something, anything, that could give him a cause to stabilize his aggressive soul. They say wanderers rarely find a satisfying answer and he was no different. It's how she came about.

Considering the family history, her mother should not have been surprised by the amount of drinking, drugs and dirty dancing her daughters immersed themselves in during their spare time—spare meaning on every day but orientation days, test days and days when the college board became overly suspicious about the Schnapps in the third floor bathroom.

In response to their mothers meddling lectures about responsibility and the consequences of reckless self-abandonment, they would shrug and reply simply, "We learned well."

Behave, girl

Anything but a beautiful girl—

say smart girl,
brave girl
reckless girl.
Ignore the errant wishing of a loveless soul
and don't call me a beautiful girl.

I am not a pretty girl, Ani diFranco.

Don't ask me to put on some high heels:
they hurt.
And, to be frank, they hinder my souls progression.
Hard girl, angry girl.
When you ask me to speak my mind
you'll find that you don't like what I have to say,
"Dear world, you are screwed up beyond belief."
"Well, women should be seen, not heard."

I am not a pretty girl, Ani diFranco.

An honest woman,
Morphed from an unsure girl,
do not give me that look.
I chose this path
of the abandoned gender
in an ignore world.

Ani diFranco—I, too, am not a pretty girl.

Prose and Poetry Bobbi Dyas



Do I believe in god?

No

I do not believe there is a man up in the sky controlling our every moment
I see god more as the naked lady on the corner,
hands clenched to her chest
exposed feeling like she has no control
like god has given her nothing to live for
I see no god when one mere sight of skin can cause an attack
verbal, physical or sexual
abused and used,
no god can save us from our own kind
I think he abandoned us, somewhere between insane asylums and the patriarchy
or maybe god was abandoned
no mommy or daddy so he created a world of his own
maybe that's why planets are so far away
so we can't grasp the idea of something different
maybe that's why the stars were pulled out of her eyes the day he raped her
this wasn't never meant to be her fate
she thought he was the reason the stars glistened

god had strung her thoughts into worthless
he left her naked, fist clenched
alone in a human eats human world
as a child, she was given the sun
and told to never stop shining
that god would always save her
he gave women the power to say no
but gave men no idea of what these two letters meant
it was like he set us up to fail
because even my year old puppy understands that
no means no
he gave us intelligence, tools, wisdom
but also gave us entitlement, ownership, and expectation
Also known as poison to women who just want to be left alone
God made man
but contaminated our race

Still I wait

The water tickles my toes
I can hear the birds, chirping, waiting
Your presence is gone
I no longer feel your bones against mine
your heart is beating in my chest
your blood circles through my viens

and still you whisper, still I wait, yet again

I've felt your cigarette breathe touch my lips
a feeling lost
You are gone, for what seems to be time and again
I tell myself not to miss you
my body beckons for your touch
phone calls are nothing but lost connections
you're mother is sick
but no one wants to spend their summer with purple skies

and still you whisper, still i wait, yet again

you may be coming back soon
from now until then I will wait between your sheets
pressing my fingers into your mattress
like i'm looking for lost pieces of you
I'll spend my nights waiting

your smell still lingering like the purple skies, ending my summer
and still you whisper, still I wait, yet again

Forbidden Fruit

I slowly bite into the forbidden fruit
I can feel acid squirt from the rinds of this baby slice
But i know 3 hours down the road
I'll be regretting forgetting taking my acid reflux pills
because oranges are a delicacy
which should be eaten with crackers and tums

my insides will be gurgling and churning
i'll look for comfort in pepto bismol
let pink liquid slide down my throat
like a silent saver
coating my stomach from acid juices

burning through the natural lining of my stomach like lava
i have been turned into a volcano
burping up eruptions
the taste of sour stomach sauces
slipping up my esophagus

i was diagnosed with a disease caused by stress
which causes me stress
i'm stressing over which foods to eat
and whether this will hurt me
even if i chose not to eat anything

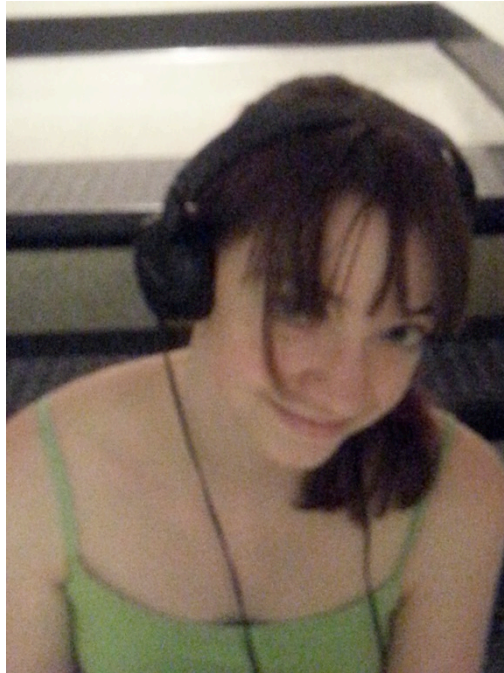
that's worse than slurping spaghetti sauce
or savoring soda
but no matter what I will not drink milk
because the acid in lactose is the enemy
doctors will tell you it helps, do not listen to them

it's hard to live a life where everything you love
comes back to bite you
coffee can no longer be consumed
salsa is the ultimate no no
and burping up tacos is not my favorite

acid reflux is like poison
it destroys every chance you'll ever have of enjoying eating

living a life of pills is not for a teenage girl
you forget to take them too often
I don't even remember the last time i took my acid reflux pills
maybe that's why my stomach hurts so often

Prose
Kristen Fougeron



Horrid Tales

The water looks deep and inviting to Frank's weary mind; crashing its way through this dark port swallowing every last breath of life that was ever given. Yet, it seemed so far away as he looked down from it at the top of the bridge. The edges of his jacket flapped wildly in the wind, its open sides slapping against his stomach in rhythmic pulse like a drum beat growing faster before the main games. 'Our games are over.' He looks down at the book nestled in his fist, the black binding that stained his hands and the innocent, white pages he had wiped them on.

The attic had held many mysteries yet to be discovered and secrets the stubborn walls kept. And for new owners, this enrichment adventure tingles their curiosity. It was Frank Martyr's first home away from the chaotic suburb. A little piece of history erected deep in country fields. Perfection. In every way the house emitted the sense of a new beginning, all except the attic.

"Come on, you can't keep everything on ground level, Mister Corneal Yellow."

Frank rolled his eyes at his company's remark, though isn't that what best friends are for? To pull you out of a rut, yet never letting you forget the mistake of falling. Matthew Jones raced up the hidden stairs hauling a cardboard box on his shoulder. "And what

about you Lieutenant Greens Bi...?" Frank's sentence died in his throat when he looked into the room. The once believed empty room was stuffed full of valuables left from previous owners in a range of age according to the wear and dust. But none of it could compare to the mystery of that black book titled in gold 'Me Tales'.

Images zip past the screen displaying hundreds of missing person cases and bloody murders connected to this single area. The research showed the variance of people disappearing or turning mad all within the same little country land, spending for decades. It boggles Frank that no one had put these pieces together until now. 'Or maybe they were like Mat; killed once they found out?' His glazed eyes tick side to side like the broken grandfather clock in the living room behind him. He picks up his phone and plays back his friend's last voice mail.

"Frank, pick up damn it." Static interrupts Matthew as he shouts over the wind, "I need you. I.. I don't know if I can handle this by myself. That book, once we got it open, my god.... the stories.... It depicts every man's greatest fear... and, and... I don't know if I can handle this... fuck, it's just too much. The houses.....towns placed in a pentagram, the witches, a curse.. it-it.... this hurts. I don't know how to describe this, this feeling boiling within me. Frank... I think.. No, I'm going to die. Just like the others.... I can't take this anymore... depression.. failure... I-I.." Screeching tires overpower his voice and the line cuts dead. Frank grits his teeth so hard his molars crack. 'I'm sorry...'

'I'm so sorry, Mat.' His tears drip down his face and fall to mix in the rushing river below. The hand gripping the wooden pillar loosens and slips away from its safety, but the grip on the book tightens, for written on it's pages are the most horrid stories no man could've written, and the blood on the cover will seep into crevices of a readers minds to burrow and destroy all that they are. Wind rushes past his ears as he began his freefall into deaths awaiting arms.

Poetry
Maya Gardner



Tongue Tied

My tongue twist and turns and wriggles and gets caught up in the words
that my mind overgenerates and my mouth cannot keep up with my mind
so it stutters and that sounds bad so I stay silent.

Tongue Tied.

My mind racing and my mouth waiting,
my lungs already filled with air ready to spit out witty words of firey wisdom.
My mouth can't sputter comforting words to you
when you want help and come to me to get advice
but know that my brain is.

Poetry Alyssa Geyer



Daddy Please

Daddy thank you for all that you do at work
Welding imperfections away on the freight trains.
Thank you for providing for us
Giving us things that we don't need,
But so desperately want.
But just like me you don't need the drink
To relieve the stressful day.
Yes, I understand
Understand that it's laborious
Understand that it's draining
Understand that it's body breaking
But why?
It's gotten to the point where your missing out
On parts of my life.
You used to say that you were too tired,
But now it's not so much that you can't anymore
It's simply because you don't want to.

You rather take another sip
Its empty so you crush the can
Grab another drink
Another sip
Empty
Crush
Sip
Empty
Crush
Sip
Empty
Crush
Sip
Empty
Crush
Yes, Daddy
I will fetch you another one
Even though it kills me on the inside
Daddy Please
Please come out of that dark basement
The Avengers won't save you
I can save you
God is the only one who can save you
Daddy, Mommy looks very lonely sitting in the stands
She always left a welcoming seat for you
Hoping that you would be apart of my childhood,
But it just so happens the seat
Has been replaced by a stranger.
It doesn't matter so much now,
Because my childhood is over.
I've graduated,
Your little princess has found her
Prince charming.
Daddy put the bottle down
When you walk me down the aisle
I don't want to sway.
Daddy Please, you don't need the bottle to make you pleasant.
Daddy Please, the smell of Captain burns my nose.
Daddy open your eyes
Pronounce your words
Stop stuttering
Daddy you don't need the bottle to make me love you!
But Daddy I promise
I promise
I promise
But if this is what makes you happy.

If this makes life easier.
If this sets you free from the loud drilling
That echoes in your head then Daddy let yourself go.
Let yourself walk down those railroad tracks,
Let yourself swim on the rim of that bottle.
Let yourself see the world from that damn tv screen,
Because if that is what sets you free from this
Miserable and treacherous life then so be it.
But Daddy Please.

**We Wish We Had Some Work By
Max Griggs
But if it were here, it'd be awesome!**



Prose Marin Harrington



Running

She places her book on her knees, pushing them close to her chest. The architect of the crevice she presses her back against most likely did not assume it would be used for this purpose, but to her, this is its only job—to secure her in the world she so often visited. Her eyes run across the words, seeing beyond the ink and the pages. They are fatigued, aching machines, but unable to stop because this is the exercise she loves most—being a part of this universe but also peering into another without having to be looked at.

The Bicycle-Verse

I never learned how to ride a bike. My mother might try to convince you otherwise, but trust me, I never did. I tried to learn, I really did, but between my father's impatience and my mother's forced Mom Encouragements and my fear of flying without actually possessing the superpower to do so, it took me approximately one afternoon to loathe

my bike and stop trying. A year or so later, frustrated, stubborn, and awfully proud for a girl just about to embark through adolescence, I spent a day trying to teach myself again. I discovered that I, like my parents, was both impatient and falsely encouraging, so I placed my bike in its final resting place in our decrepit backyard shed.

This was when it became cool for children in my age demographic to ride their bikes around the neighborhood, probably because it was one of the few activities allowed without parental supervision. I'd earnestly watch posses of other children on bicycles, awestruck at their freedom. It was like they were in their own little sect of the universe that I so desperately needed to be a part of but couldn't be. It was the universe where all the 11 year-olds spent the summer roaming the neighborhood on their bikes, buying candy bars at the gas station, talking about how life could be such a drag when you're 11, and dipping their toes for the first time in the use of swear words. It was the quintessential American Dream way to begin that harrowing coming-of-age journey, and I couldn't be a part of it.

Eventually, that universe morphed into another universe, and I jumped in, taking part in all those activities that made me think I was far more grown up than I actually was. I forgot about that bike. I forgot about how it seemed pretty fierce for a bike, with its color combination of fiery pink and inky black. I forgot how it wasn't something I had asked for, but something my father had given to me as a surprise. I forgot to wonder if that bike was waiting for me in that tiny shed, yearning to be ridden, wanting to see the world just as much as I did.

My bike has since found a new place of residence, across the street, with a girl, and hopefully it's traversing the world in a way it never did with me. Sometimes I still think of it. How it always remained new even though I owned it for three years. Sometimes I think of that bike, that stupid, goddamned pink bike, and imagine it as a metaphor for other things in my life, saying to myself, "Thank God that time it was only learning how to ride a bike."

**We Wish We Had Some Work By
Nicholas Haberer
But if it were here, it'd be awesome!**



Poetry

Katharen Hedges



Art

A pink and black girl stands solitary on canvas,
wood, paper, and cardboard
To what power do you have to square her in order for her to stop
multiplying?
I am not the only artist who gets
hung
up on the same image like
the lump in your pillow
you can't punch back into position

Pastel and black
Pastel and black
the mark of the century
and of misguided children
Yet you consider yourself something of a revolutionary:
going against the grain of society

fighting for individuality.

I bet

you want nothing more than for them to call you
a classic

The classics aren't in this room,
a streak of blue on off white parchment
has stolen your home
amongst the permanent collection.
All you have ever wanted is to be prized and desired
like a lonely woman
you are oil stained and marred
by scars, freckles, rashes, and irrelevance

I know this place too well

Where the walls hug the backs of nails
like long lost friends,
but all friends are temporary as you have known them

I have nothing to say about your thoughts my love
because any thought I might put to yours has been taken
by the
echoing, aching, forsaken question:
What is the point?
What is the effing point!?

I don't care about art.
I live art.

I have dedicated my life to the color wheel
and the clean line
I have dedicated my life to analysis, and
concepts
and months of arched backs and sore hands
for what?
For the hope that maybe someone
might wait, and watch, and wonder
I've seen the permanent collection more

times
than a librarian visits her favorite book

The strokes blend together flawlessly
you don't know where one ends and the other begins
the faces are shaped like full plums
and you wonder how
anything could be this perfect
and then you walk away
to the next immaculate painting
at the vivid geometric shapes intricately placed
and then you walk away
you walk away wondering
asking
assuming

There is no permanent collection in art
Only dried and fading paints,
the remnant of lost feeling
and hope

Like a lost puppy on a middle school Monday
I found my home where the lights hit the glass
and your fingers touch brass and you wonder.

You wonder
that is all art is,
is a wonder
but God is it not beautiful.
A'men

Prose and Poetry

Becca Human



Untitled

"I've got some bad news."

Edie glances up at Theo as he falls in step next to her, his face grim. She furrows her brow. "What's wrong?"

Theo sighs. "I have bad news," he says again. "All my friends have ditched me, and you are my last resort." He claps her shoulder solemnly.

"Last resort for *what*?"

"Okay, okay, stick with me - there's this *really* sick movie coming out on Friday. It's called Age of the Warriors, and it's a total bloodfest -"

"Ew. No," Edie says, ducking around a door opening into the hallway. "I'll take a raincheck."

"Pleeease?" Theo says, opening his eyes wide. "I need someone to see it with..."

"Go ask Brianna."

"I don't want to ask Brianna. I'm asking you."

Edie narrows her eyes at him. "...why?"

Now Theo huffs, rolling his eyes. "Okay, come on, now, Edie, *work with me* here."

"Work with you *what*? What - what is going on?"

"Do you need me to like, spell it out for you, 'cause I -"

"Please do," Edie says, greatly concerned by the sly grin spreading across Theo's face. "Because I have no idea what you're -"

"Fine -- you. Me. *Date*. Friday."

Edie stops in her tracks. Theo does, too, grinning widely. Edie stares at him.

"You. Me," she repeats numbly. "*Date*?"

"Friday," he affirms. This is no longer about the movie.

Edie stares at him for a long moment, trying to figure out if he's joking. But he seems serious enough, a big stupid grin on his face, and suddenly she's -

"I wouldn't be a good girlfriend."

"Undoubtedly."

"I'm bad at small talk. My wardrobe is ninety percent sweatpants. I'm weird about food. And other people," she rambles.

"Of course." His *stupid stupid* face isn't changing.

"And some days I don't want to do anything except listen to music. And some days I'll complain all day. And I'll embarrass you in public. And I'll make weird references you probably won't understand."

"I'm sure."

"Sometimes I go for days without talking."

"Fine by me."

"That was a Sherlock reference."

"Cool."

"Um..." she peers at him. "Okay."

"Okay," he replies.

"Friday?"

"Friday! I'll see you then," and with a flash of a grin, Theo is gone.

Cut to the Chase

let's cut to the heart of it.

I'm tired of lifeless niceties,

exhausted by the social pressure of
polite conversation

I want honesty, so

cut to the truth of it.

let's shed the small talk and get to bigger subjects

I don't care so much about the local sports team

as I care about why we're standing here at all

I want to think about things that matter, so

cut to the trailing thoughts we chase across the sky.

let's forget about the weather and fall after

quiet embers of truth.
I want directness, so
cut to the center of it.
we can shed the outer edges of awkward conversation
in favor of finding out *who we are*
I'm tired of being polite.
I want rawness, so
cut to the good parts.
let's talk about what makes us feel
safe or
scared or
entirely insignificant
when we linger on the meaningless things
it feels
like
insecurity.
I want to feel at home.
so cut to the part
where we can both stay secure in ourselves.
cut to the part where
we know who we are and
we don't have to hide anything,
cut to the part where
the sparks of our words grow into complete illumination
let's cut to the chase.
let's cut to the truth.

Prose and Poetry

Elanor Jorgensen



Ink and Paper

Falling in love is like spilling India Ink all over a fresh white page
Sudden, unexpected, and bleeding onto all the other pages of my life,
Becoming the only important thing, filling up my mind, my hands, my mouth...

And saying goodbye
is like trying to mop up the ink
but it's still stained every corner, every page.
Every nook and cranny must reluctantly give up the black soul it twice tasted.

We had to go.
We had to peel our pages apart.
But I still miss you.
My pages are stained forever with the memory of your ink
And I miss making the memories

And I miss your striped jacket you let me wear
when we had that fire drill in December after the generator exploded in the 8th-grade science room
And I was cold. I miss that jacket that smelled like you and warmheartedness.
I miss racing you across the soccer field, and purposely tying so my friends wouldn't make the loser kiss the other
I miss quoting Harry Potter Puppet Pals and always being Voldemort and Hermione while you were always Harry
I still have the four-foot Teddy Bear you gave me on Valentine's day but it doesn't smell like you anymore

Middle School was weird, man
And I pretend to hate it so I could hate you, too
Hate you for spilling into my life
and staining everything.
But the truth is I don't hate you.
I miss you.
I miss you like the pages miss the kiss of the black ink
And I miss how you filled me up more than words ever could.

Death Planet

I stood silently, breathing in the humid air. The planet Ares was hot and moist, with rich clay soil and huge rainforests covering most of the planet. A chemical compound in the soil caused the dirt, water, and vegetation to be stained a rusty red, the color of blood. The entire planet was a lump of scarlet spinning through space, hence its name--Ares, the Greek god of war was infamously bloodthirsty and violent. But that's not why it was known as the Death Planet.

No crew had ever returned from the planet's surface. Whole ships, completely intact, still functional and running were found abandoned, completely devoid of life, with no trace of the crew--no clothes, bodies, blood...nothing. Ships that had been in contact with Earth mere hours before were found floating aimlessly through space with nobody inside.

Ares had been classified as a Level 6 Danger Zone just two months after its discovery, due to the hundreds of thousands of lives that had been lost, reported MIA. Although uninhabited, with no alien life forms, something was killing off the men and women that landed on that God-forsaken red planet.

Ares was a cursed world in the hearts and minds of all space sailors. No one was allowed to touch the surface--but when an asteroid had hit our starship, we had no choice but to land and make repairs.

The Starship Réaltra was on a routine skyscan; viewing the planet from above to map the surface, scan for any wreckage that had been drawn into orbit, just the normal tri-monthly procedure. We were the first to attempt this, as it had only been discovered a few months ago. Ships had returned safely from the Death Planet, but only if they hadn't touched down. So we stayed in the sky. Everybody was completely focused on the job

ahead, and so nobody noticed the stray asteroid spiralling towards us from behind until it was too late. It clipped our hull and skidded along the bottom of the starship, puncturing our tank of backup fuel, cracking two of our solar panels, and opening multiple fractures in the outer layer of UV Ray and Vacuum protective sheeting. We had no choice but to land.

As the ship's doctor, I was required to accompany the scouting team. Captain Scath split us up, and I was paired with tracker John Ameku and Vegetation expert Kurt Kindle. I had worked with Ameku before, on the sand belts of Vediovis, but Kindle was new to the S.S. Réaltra, and I didn't know much about him, except for the fact that he seemed to get into a lot of fights among the other crew members. He had come to me on multiple occasions with black eyes, claiming clumsiness and sharp corners, but I know a knuckle sandwich when I see one.

And so I stood in the vermillion jungle, surrounded by the blood-red ferns and mosses. Drops of red dew fell from leaves high above onto my uniform. No breeze stirred the muggy air, no wind could get through the tangle of leaves and trees that rose far above me. No insects buzzed, and I wondered how the plants reproduced. With no pollinators, the vegetation must have had to design a completely different way of reproduction, unlike anything seen before in this quadrant of the galaxy. The plants would probably hold all kinds of natural antioxidants and healing stimulants as well, currently unknown to mankind. It would be a fascinating place to study, if I wasn't so afraid. Something from down here on the surface was killing, and we were being exposed to it. We all knew it would only be a matter of time before the deaths started...if only we knew how and when.

I heard a noise behind me. Turning around, I saw Kindle digging up a fern. As he lifted it up, a shower of scarlet water fell from the fronds. It reminded me of blood, each drop becoming a beaded jewel in the sunlight.

"The roots are edible," Kindle said, breaking off a portion of the red tuber off. "They appear to be similar to Earth's carrots, if a bit more red. I'd love to do some studies back in the lab. The evolution of the chlorophyll processing centers would be a remarkable benefit to science."

"Bring back some samples, then," I said a bit shortly. Kindle annoyed me a bit, although I had been thinking along the same lines. He just rubbed me the wrong way. He was always boasting in the dining hall to his other young friends, or trying to catch the eye of the ladies via crude humor and a belittling tone. He turned my stomach.

"Where's Ameku?" Kindle asked, looking around, ignoring my curt tone.

"Up there." I nodded towards a stout-looking maroon tree. "He wanted a bird's-eye-view of the surrounding area. Look for signs of life."

"Bird's-eye-view, huh?" Kindle chuckled. "No birds here. Not a damned insect. It's just...dead. No sound. No breeze. Just a flatline."

"At least, that's what it appears to be," I replied.

"What do you mean?" Kindle cocked an arrogant grin in my direction. "You don't suppose there's some giant alien moles under the soil, do you?"

I turned to face Kindle. Looking him up and down, I realized I was at least fifteen years his senior. His arrogance was the overconfidence of youth.

"Five years ago," I said slowly, "we landed on Dirae 47, a small planet in a belt a few solar systems away. From above, there were no signs of life. But as soon as we

touched the ground, we discovered that the dirt we stood upon was nothing but a giant breeding ground, filled with flesh-eating insects similar to Earth's cockroaches. Any pressure from above triggered an instinctive tunneling to the surface to devour whatever unfortunate animal had fallen into the planet's trap."

I remembered the grisly scene vividly. I was young and foolish, much like Kindle. But that day had changed me forever. Ignoring the horrified look growing in Kindle's eyes, I carried on.

"Have you ever seen forty-seven men and women die in mere seconds, each one covered from head to toe in insects, tearing the skin from muscles, the flesh from bone, burrowing into the skull from the ears, mouth, nose, feasting on the eyeballs..."

Kindle's eyes were wide with horror, but I was sick of this boastful idiot. I continued. "...Have you ever seen forty-seven skeletons fall to the ground, each one cracked and filled with vermin gnawing on the marrow? Never underestimate space, Kindle. It's full of surprises, deadly ones. You underestimate the universe, and it laughs in your face...and kills you."

"I...I didn't think-"stammered Kindle.

"Of course you didn't think," I cut him off. "When I was your age, I didn't think. You're too concerned with the thrill of being a space sailor, aren't you? The adventure, the glory...but people die out here, Kindle. Don't ever forget that."

Ameku suddenly dropped to the ground from the trees. He stood up, dusting off his hands. Kindle edged away from me, red-faced and ashamed. I grimly turned away from the young man and approached Ameku. "Anything to report?" I asked.

"There's a small wreck up ahead," Ameku said, his voice quiet and controlled despite the strenuous climbing he was just doing. "Abandoned, like all the others. A few footprints in the mud, but no other traces. I'd say it crashed about a week ago."

"Did you explore it? Was it still functioning?" Kindle's curiosity was ignited, and he seemed to quickly forget his previous fears. Such was the way of youth.

"Everything was on and running. But there was nobody inside."

"Just like all the others," I grumbled.

"Was there any materials we could use for rebuilding the ship?" Kindle asked.

Ameku shook his head. "It's barely a three-man craft, and a different company altogether. The hardware, wiring, and basic construction is completely different from our ship's. And if there was anything we could have used, it's probably been damaged by water, chemicals from the surface, time, and the impact upon entry. We have nothing to gain from staying here."

"Yes. We should return to our ship, and see what needs to be done." I turned away and began picking up the samples Kindle was collecting, preparing to leave. "We've been away long enough, and have gained nothing. I'm sure the other scouting parties will be doing the same before long."

Ameku nodded, and began walking back. Shoving the samples into Kindle's arms, I followed behind him.

Captain Scath greeted me as we entered the ship. "Find anything interesting, Doctor?"

"Just a small wreck," I replied. "Too small and damaged to be of any use in our repairs."

“Just as well,” he sighed. “We’re prepared to lift off anyway. Get yourself back down to Medical Bay.”

Walking down the darkened corridor, I felt the floor vibrate beneath me, and I saw through the long window that stretched down the corridor the planet grow farther and farther away as we pulled up into orbit.

As I entered the Medical Bay, I was greeted by a horrific sight. Dozens of crew members draped across tables, chairs, and cots. Some were clutching their stomachs, others had a hacking cough. Some were blearily rubbing their eyes, and a good number were running high fevers. It was a first-rate plague. I had never seen anything like it. By the time I had treated five, thirty more walked in. Many were unable to walk, and had to be supported and carried by friends.

“Can’t you get this crowd under control?” I snapped at a passing nurse. I wasn’t really mad at her, but this was a madhouse.

“They just keep coming in, Doctor!” she said none too kindly, handing me a security guard unable to move his legs. “What are we supposed to do?”

“Get them organized by symptoms!” I half-carried, half-dragged the crippled guard to a cot and began feeling his pulse. “If they have multiple symptoms, then put them in the category most dangerous to their life. Vomiting before fever, coughing before blindness and paralysis.”

Once the crew members were separated from each other, I was able to focus on each symptom individually. Distributing fever-reducing pills was easy enough, and handing a bucket to each upchucking individual was simple, until we ran out of buckets. But there were plenty of sinks and paper bags around, and the important thing was to keep them hydrated. The paralysis victims were a little more difficult, as we didn’t know the cause of it. Most likely, it was a virus similar to the one that causes Guillain-Barre syndrome--a bug that caused the immune system to attack itself and shut down the body. But was it all one virus? There couldn’t be six different illnesses on board, all hitting at the same time.

Once the flow of sick space sailors had slowed down and the nurses had learned how to deal with the vomiting and fevers and fainting, I was able to sneak back to the lab with some vials of blood from the patients. When I opened the doors to the lab, I discovered Kindle and Ameku bent over a microscope. They straightened up as I entered, and Ameku nodded to me.

“You’re looking a little haggard, Doc,” remarked Kindle. “Busy down at the Medical Bay?”

I nodded stoically, then proceeded to examine my blood samples. I quickly found what I was looking for. I sighed and stood up. “We’re screwed,” I whispered.

Kindle and Ameku looked up from their plant samples. “What is it?” Ameku said. He trusted me, and I saw genuine concern on his face. Kindle just looked annoyed that I had distracted him and Ameku from their samples.

“We’re all dead. We’re dead men walking,” I murmured. Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath. How long did we have? We had been exposed to more of the planet than the rest of the crew, who were already starting to succumb to illness. How long did any of us have?

“Did you find what’s making people sick?” Ameku quietly asked.

I nodded. No dust storms had killed the tens of thousands of space sailors, no

vaporizing rays. "It's a virus. That's what's been killing the crews that land here. No poisonous plants, no advanced intelligent life forms...a virus."

"But...that's impossible," stammered Kindle. "Science has evolved enough to counteract most viruses and bacteria. Can't you just give us a vaccine or something?"

"Let me explain how a virus works, Kindle," I stared into Kindle's eyes. It was a shame he was going to die so young. "A virus, once inside a body, latches onto a bacterium or cell and injects its DNA into the cell. The DNA turns the cell into a virus and then makes it explode, sending out hundreds of little injections just like the first one. Only instead of hundreds, this one seems to be releasing millions. Each human body is approximately 37 trillion cells. If each cell releases ten million viruses...our bloodstreams are filled up with the damn things. Viruses develop extremely quickly, and this one seems to be insanely fast. This virus is in all of us, developing more and more baby viruses every second. I can't create a vaccination--that takes years and decades of study and research. In the entire history of mankind, only one disease has ever been completely eliminated by vaccinations: smallpox. I've never seen anything like this virus before. It's ability to infect and spread throughout the body is rapid-fire, communicable by air. We're breathing in our own death. The entire atmosphere is filled with death. It's only a matter of time before we're all feeling the symptoms, and after that...a few hours, if that, before death."

Before I finished speaking, the wall communicator buzzed, and I turned away from Kindle and Ameku's stunned faces to punch the button.

"Doctor here."

"Doctor? It's Nurse Jones. You better get back to the Medical Lab. They've started dropping like flies."

"Nurse, cut out the similes. What do you mean they're flies?"

"They're dying, Doctor. They've started dying."

I felt Ameku and Kindle's horrified eyes on my back as a tear slid down my cheek.

Three hours later, I felt like I was in the middle of the Civil War. I was surrounded by dead bodies. Some had died from dehydration, after vomiting up everything including their own stomach acid. Others had begun hemorrhaging, and choked to death on their own blood. Those with fevers died as their organs shut down around 107 degrees Fahrenheit. Captain Scath had died about fifty minutes ago, followed by the first mate five minutes later. My nurses had collapsed half an hour ago, beginning to vomit, and had begged for me to poison them before they choked to death on their own stomach acid, as many of the others had. I mercifully injected them with pentobarbital, to put them asleep. Once they were unconscious, I gave them pancuronium bromide and potassium chloride, to stop their breathing and hearts. It was a quick and painless death, and I only wish I could have given those who went before them the same. Reports of death from all over the ship had finally stopped coming in on the wall speaker. I assumed that on all other decks, it was either totally devoid of life or those still alive were too incapacitated to reach the communicator.

Everything about this virus was fast. As soon as the bodies died, something in the virus began to decompose them. A chemical, of some sort, speeding up the decomposition process and eating away at skin, bone, and tissue. With the amount of the virus in each body, the remains were completely devoured in about half an hour--

hair, teeth, bones, even the clothes. I suppose there was enough dead skin cells in the uniforms that the fibers of the material were just eaten as well.

I was coughing now, and Kindle had a fever. Ameku had died some ten minutes previously. He had been beginning to spiral downwards, and asked to be put out of his misery like the nurses.

"It was nice knowing you, Doc." Kindle sat up from his cot on the floor. "Was it really true...that story you told me down on the surface?"

I nodded. "It was what made me want to become Head Doctor," I replied. "I watched all those men and women die...and I couldn't do anything. I never wanted that to happen again." How ironic, I thought with a sad smile. I couldn't do anything this time, either.

Kindle seemed to read my mind. Sensing my despair at my uselessness, he lay back down and closed his eyes. He looked so much older than he did down on the surface. Could that really have only been a few hours ago? It felt like years. I watched as Kindle's chest rose slower and slower, and finally...stopped rising.

I stepped out into the hallway. It was completely silent, without the usual hustle and bustle of crew members busy at their jobs. Looking out the windows that stretched along the dark corridor, I could see the dark red of the planet below.

"Damn this planet," I muttered under my breath. A sudden fit of coughing racked my body, and I stretched out my hand to steady myself against the cool glass. I felt something wet at the corners of my mouth, and when I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand, it came back stained red. "Damn this living hell," I whispered.

I entered the bridge, the black expanse of space stretching into infinity on the monitors all around me. There was no counting how many people had probably died in this room, perhaps disintegrated into nothing mere moments before my entrance.

I sat down in the captain's chair, and pushed the "transmit" button.

"My name is James Kelley, Head Doctor aboard the Starship Réaltra, perhaps the last remaining member of the seven hundred crew."

I began speaking, confident the tiny microphones around the room would pick up my voice. I recounted our mission, from our skyscan to the asteroid to the repairs, and my discoveries of the virus, its properties, and how it survived. Once or twice I had to pause as a fit of coughing overcame me, but I continued my story.

"When this tape is discovered, I request that the planet Ares be quarantined, if not destroyed completely. On no circumstance is anybody to land on this planet. I have elected to name this virus Nosoi, the greek spirits of plague and illness.

"And finally, I give my highest commendations to Captain Richard Scath, First Mate Benneville Oswald, Tracker John Ameku, Nurses Nancy Frankforter, Ann Hargreaves, and Bethany Jones...and Vegetation expert Kurt Kindle, who all gave their last effort and thoughts in the survival of this crew, and who lost their lives in the line of duty.

"To the rest of humanity, a word of caution: the world of space is a beautiful, exciting frontier full of undiscovered wonders. When lives are lost in the pursuit of knowledge, it is up to us to decide if the cost is worth the gain.

"Good luck, and...goodbye."

I stopped recording and leaned back in the chair. The stars ahead of me shone out against the inky darkness. I felt my body weakening, and I knew it would be a matter

of minutes before my body shut down and was consumed. But for now, it was me and the void. The silence was deafening, but for a moment, I imagined I heard music...the stars seemed to smile, and I smiled back.

The Starship Réaltra was discovered three days later, floating in orbit around the planet Ares. Ship's physician Doctor James Kelley's tape was found and broadcast on telescreens around the world. A starship filled with seven hundred and forty-two empty coffins was sent into space and then destroyed with torpedoes, in the style of the Vikings. All seven hundred and forty-two crew members were hailed as heroes, but only Doctor James Kelley was given the Universal Peace Prize for his discoveries in science, his attempts to save his fellow crew members, prevent the future deaths of any other explorers, and his confirming of the tens of thousands of previous deaths the planet had claimed.

There was some debate over what was to be done with the planet Ares, as the scientific possibilities were great, as well as the valuability of the virus in the event of a Pathological War. The final result depended largely upon James Kelley's account of the virus and how it killed. The release of the virus upon a civilization was decreed to be a Crime against Humanity, and the planet Ares was immediately destroyed. The request to name the virus Nosoi was denied, and it was unanimously voted to name it after the man who discovered it, and fought so hard to save people from it. Thus, it became the infamous Kelley Plague.

Mathography

I think the reason why I hate math is that I'm bad at it and maybe I'm bad at it because in my third grade differentiated math class we were never actually taught math we learned how to play chess and sudoku.

In fourth grade I hated math but I loved the teacher because he let me sell drawings of nutcrackers and of course the only time I had to draw said drawings of nutcrackers was during math class and I can't learn fractions right now I have a business to run thank you very much.

In fifth grade I failed my times tables because the teacher never actually told us we had to memorize them she just set up a chart and every so often a sticker would appear by a name but I didn't think anything of it if I was supposed to do something I'm sure she would tell me...right?

In sixth grade I got my first ever F on a math test, on any test, and I cried myself to sleep that night because my mom was valedictorian and now I could never be what she wanted me to be and I wished I was someone else why couldn't I remember the beginnings of the chapters I snuck books under my desk and read during class so at least something would make sense because the square root of the thirty-second multiple of five-ninths sure didn't

In seventh grade my teacher looked like Arwen, elf-princess and granddaughter of Galadriel, Queen of Lothlorien and she did section quizzes not chapter quizzes and I discovered that I loved Algebra which is a shame because it's actually pretty useless, isn't it?

In eighth grade I sewed my mouth shut because I was finally getting A's and people would try to copy my homework and it was easier to shut my morals down then say no and have rumors light my body on fire in shame

In ninth grade my teacher looked like a tall hedgehog and he would always call on me when I didn't have the answer and I discovered that being able to draw doesn't actually help you in Geometry I had been lied to and I missed playing chess and the feeling of happiness when you completed a sudoku

In tenth grade I loved my math teachers we were doing Algebra again but asking an introvert to work in a group is like asking a popular girl to be nice to a nerd it 'ain't gonna happen anytime soon so it's better to just sit there in silence and work it out on your own

I think the reason why I hate math is because I'm bad at it and maybe that's because my brain sees metaphors easier than multiplied fractions but the difference is if you can't see metaphors that's okay because nobody can but if you can't see fractions you're never going to get into college and what business company would want you and if you major in English you're gonna be poor forever why not try a nice engineering degree that should pay the bills I think the reason why I hate math is because I'm bad at it and that means I'm screwed.

Prose and Poetry

Hayli Kent



Cling to Me

I know I am not one to make this right,
but please child,
stop crying.
I can only shove frequencies down your ear canals
to distract your brain for a little while,
but clinging to me won't fix this.
Pick your head up,
please.
All I can do is play you a happier melody,
but I fear that will only force the tears down faster.
I know you feel alone.
I've been there with you the whole way through, and I'm sorry
I can't do much more.
But child,
aren't your eyes tired enough yet?
Aren't your lungs?
From holding in nights full of silent screams?
How many nights have we sat here together like this,
while I watch you silently burn to death in your own thoughts.

I know it hurts,
but you have to understand that it happened for a reason.
That every night you sat with me, begging for your mind to shut up
just shut up,
It all happened to you for a reason.
You have to understand that by forcing me to play louder
you aren't making the voices any quieter.
And that drowning out your thoughts with lyrics
won't solve the problems that will still exist
when you pluck me from your ears.
You know as well as I do that you can't hide behind me.
I can't show you who you are,
but I can point you in the right direction.
I can not promise you that you'll get all those people back
but I can promise that in the end,
you'll be okay.
Because after all this time we've been in this together,
I saw that glimmer of hope inside you.
And no matter how hard things got,
it never went out.
Never.
Almost all of the time, you took me along with you.
In the hallways at school,
In the dark depths of your bedroom,
In those long car rides where you could never find the right words,
In those friendly conversations at the lunch table
Those ones when you wanted to tell them everything,
and nothing at the same time.
But even then, I could tell you were distant.
You leaned on me then,
and never once did I let you down.
You learned how to survive without anyone else.
You learned how to do things your way,
in a way different than anyone I have ever known.
You learned to cling to my lyrics like they were your only words of advice.
You learned how to pull apart my confusing articulations
as if it were nothing.
But most importantly,
you learned how to lose yourself in the music.
And baby girl, god knows how much you deserved that.
I want you to know that even when things get better
I will still be here.
And maybe this time, when you gently press me into your ears
and hear my cheerful rhythms pour into you
like sweet thick honey,
I might even be able to make you smile.

Untitled

My feet patter along the forest ground, and I grip my freshly sharpened sword with five bloodstained fingers. It is my prized possession. Though I am only fifteen years of age, I am highly coordinated with it. An awkward shuffling follows closely behind me, along with a low moaning sound. There are only four. This will be a mere second, and then I will be on my way. I take a sharp turn to my left, and as I had hoped, gain me a few seconds head start, as the dead awkwardly stumble into each other. I prepare to lunge, keeping my left foot bolted to the ground; I pivot around, gripping the handle of my sword tightly. The four rotting corpses continue coming forward, their hands stretched out, reaching for me.

"Come get me." I whisper, pushing a strand of silky black hair out of my eyes. They come at me, faces torn, eyes a hollow lifeless white. I find it hard to believe that these things were once like me. The first one lunges forward, howling, and with one swift movement, I catch the side of its neck with my blade. The creature's body falls to the ground with a hollow thud. I then flick my wrist, forcing some of the blood that clings to my blade to drip down to the dead grass.

The next one comes from behind me, and I jump around, slicing into its skull from right underneath its eye. The other two come at me at the same time, I spin, clocking one directly in its jaw, and my sword slips out of my grasp. The other is already upon me, groaning and drooling. I begin running in the opposite direction, hoping to lead it away from my weapon, so I can later go back and retrieve it. I find my heart racing, and I feel extremely foolish for losing my weapon. Another movement in the distance catches my attention.

"You've got to be kidding me." I mutter under my breath. My stupidity has caused me to attract another flesh eater. My mind swirls, looking for a way to survive this situation. I've escaped herds of over a hundred of these things, so I better be able to figure something out. I spot a thick piece of wood, and I quickly bend over, grasping it with my right hand. Clumsily, I turn for a split second to see the rotting body coming toward me, and something catches the tip of my torn tennis shoe. My body helplessly falls to the ground, knocking the wind out of my lungs. The flesh eater opens and closes its jaw repeatedly, and groans.

This is it. I am weaponless, the stake is out of my reach, and a flesh eater is upon me. After four months of running and killing, *this* is how I am going to die. One bite, one scratch. That's all it takes, and I'm one of them within the next twenty four hours.

Poetry Celie Knudsen



Theory of Heredity, or Drunk Science

Four months into the pregnancy,
she feels the baby kick
and yet when it's born it
looks rather like a squash,
but after years of using
his mother's face as a mirror
his skin grows as hers does-
maybe this is why babies are in
wonder of their own
reflection.
After all,
after spending nine months
surrounded by her blood and 18 years
enfolded in her heart,
his body will stretch to fit.

The True Story of My First Crush

He didn't speak much to me- when he did we were
grinning at
cardinals in the snow, I suggested tea because
I was young and thought maybe if he knew
I was an old soul,
we could run together. He wasn't of this country,
but thought more of Los Angeles and Lake Michigan
than I did, I didn't care much
for cities but I thought I'd be seeing them
with him
and that was all right.
It was in my grandmother's kitchen that I taught him
to use cumin and he said the
smell was a forest fire, that you
could hear the deer running from
it on his tongue, and I guess I
just liked the way he spoke, even
though we didn't talk much.
Heartbreak is satin.
It is your fingertips on his tuxedo vest, straightening
ties like waves as he readies himself
for another girl to
take his body.
You didn't know this, because
you were young and
eyes still smelled like poppies to you, they talked
of a future that tasted of most.

Letter to Myself, 10 years from now

26. Seems like the time you should have it all figured out, huh? Undergrad and law, a husband and maybe even a baby?
PAUSE.
Don't go so fast. Major in creative writing, to hell with everyone who expects to see you at Walmart in 10 years, to hell if you're working for Walmart in 10 years, words have always been in your bones and at least you got to spend that time sculpting them.
PAUSE.
Keep watching. Watch how she curls her hands and how he steps ahead

and the way the man on the corner looks as if the only thing he eats is his own happiness.

Keep noticing. Notice how your eyes glint when you cry, notice how it feels to love and fall, notice your idiosyncrasies no one else notices at all, turn them into poetry, because the world won't and they deserve to be.

PAUSE.

Trust. You have been bruised in the past, you have seen how lips can hurt more than you've seen them heal, you have believed words that ran like venom down your tongue, you have saved the wrong people from the pyre of your life.

But keep trusting, because you never know if people are flames or holy water until you let them in, and sometimes the holy water hurts the most.

PAUSE.

Stop only to go forward. Let the melody of your life taste like oranges, let it explode from your tongue to meet the people around you, realize sometimes you will be the acidity without knowing why. Keep reaching anyway.

PAUSE.

Life will move in a staccato rhythm so fast you're never going to catch your breath so stop relying on oxygen and start hanging onto his snare set smile. Look for these moments inside your drummer heartbeat, life moves in short bursts and if you don't stop and listen,

you'll miss them, so..

PAUSE.

Love yourself the way Plath loved paper and Bach loved the keys even when he couldn't see them clearly anymore, love yourself madly and desirously and so much that it refracts off of you and hits people like bullets, do not be surprised if they fall or get up again.

PAUSE.

We are all just little pauses living in a moving universe and the least we can do is hit play together, and keep beginning again, so every time you can't hear your symphony hit play and just *begin again*.

PAUSE.

PLAY.

I hope life is good to you.

Poetry
Haley Knutson



I Am Stretch Marks

I am a mark.
Purple and red, I rest on every part of the body.
Inching my way up your sides, I can hear the sighs when people see me.
The sadness that buries itself into the innocent eyes of teenagers.
All I ever wanted, was to hug you.
Instead,
I can feel your nails dig into your skin as if that would make me fade.
I feel the neediness every time you rub your self-conscious removing cream on my marks.
I swear sometimes you only make it worse.
As I etch elaborate drawings onto your perfect skin.
I only wanted to love you.
Instead
I listen to the complaints of pregnant woman
"This is going to ruin my body."
How men tell women stretch marks are cheap and disgusting.

They way 16 year olds blame me for their bodily problems.
It's not me, its you.
Yet, as I feel the way you cant even look at yourself in the mirror,
I have a hint of doubt.
You turn away.
But I only ever wanted to say "Hi."
I only needed somebody to listen.
Because just like you, I've been neglected too.
"She must be so lucky."
I can hear you say sometimes when you're alone at night.
The way you talk about me.
Kind of like the way your mother talks about you.
We both needed love.
Because I am your skin, and you only have one body.
Im not going anywhere.
I remember the day you finally went to the pool without a shirt and shorts on.
They way I felt you embrace me as if I had wrapped myself around your heart.
I noticed the days you smiled in the mirror.
And I knew that was your "Hello."
And maybe,
just maybe,
that was all you needed.

Father, Father

I'll never forget the day I woke up to my father dead.
Not when, my eyes had swelled and my chest ached for some sort of reassurance.
As if time had just stopped.
I'll never forget the day my father said "That's my girl."
With his yellow-toothed smile and red hair that seemed to blaze like the sun, father.
Not a day goes by that I don't think about him.
Where, I don't think about all those postcards he sent me from different countries signed
always with "love and hugs."
Father, not a day goes by where I don't think about us playing guitar hero.
Because according to him, I was a rock legend.
Ill never forget the time he took to me to see Black X-mas in theaters, father.
I was only six.
Not a day goes by where I don't think about his "walk-and talks."
Or his typical saying of "You mess with the bull you get the horns."
But, father.
Isn't that what you did?
The night his hair blazed like the sun one last time on that motorcycle he spent so much
time on.
Father, I remember that motorcycle.
Because I too, rode on it with you.

Father, we both liked to go fast.
But if I knew the harms of feeling the wind I wouldn't have ever asked to feel it again.
Because no speed is ever worth the speed of a life.
"Be good for your mother you always said."
But how was he supposed to know that mommy is gone too?
Father.
I'll never forget when I saw your face for the last time.
How, your hair lost its blaze and your yellow-toothed smile was covered up with painted lips. Your body was as lifeless as I felt.
Father, I was only eight.
Many nights I was silent.
How could somebody so little, understand something so big?
Father, I cursed the days you were gone.
All the nights that my mother left and didn't come back until the next day.
Where were you when I needed somebody to protect me?
"Protect me" I would scream it a million times as my mother shot venom words of "i hate you" right into my soul.
Father, where were the nights my scarred skin seemed as easy cut as paper.
Father, where were you after every barfed up mea?
The night, I swallowed too many.
The nights I spend staring at four white walls, alone.
But most importantly, father. Where were you when I needed you most?
I can only pray to a God I don't believe in that wherever you are,
you and my mother are proud of what I have accomplished, because Father.
I forgive.
And mother, I still forgive you.
And after all this time I can only hope that you both regret leaving.

Poetry
Adrian Martinez

Abandon Ship

To the ghost of broken hearts past
Abandon ship because it's sinking
Like my heart when you said you'd never leave then disappeared without even a
goodbye
No lifeboats on deck because only our arms could ever keep me afloat in this sea where
there's just so many fish
But I didn't want a fish
I wanted a mermaid who could sing god's songs of love as if she wrote them herself
While I, as just an oyster, would never amount to you in this shell I've hidden away in
But with the right touch I would have gladly opened up and slid this pearl upon your
finger
It's twinkle had nothing on the light in your eye
It blinded me
But you never got that pearl
Instead of a gentle touch you forced yourself inside and broke me into uncountable
pieces
Left alone to sink down into the abysmal sea as you just walked away
I'm drowning in what's left of you
And if that wasn't bad enough now I'm separating
I feel my pieces getting swept away day after day until I don't even know if what I have
is enough to fake being whole
Lost inside a water filled hole with beauty swimming in every direction
So why can I only look back and see images that plague my insanity
Like the way your eyes always flashed with a twinkle that I thought was a playful light
But now I see that it was only a reflection of the diamonds you wanted to steal from all
who had them
A thief
Take everything that you can then toss out whatever isn't worth the time it took to steal it
Is that why you made me watch as you threw my heart into the ocean and waved
goodbye as it was swallowed up by the tide
I want to say that joining you in the water was my favorite mistake
Because I can't swim so the second you let go of my hand there was nowhere left to go
but rock bottom
Would your man eating relatives tear me apart
Or would the pressures of the deep crush the pearl of a heart that I tried to give to you
To the ghost of broken hearts past

I won't say abandon ship
Because even if it's sinking
Only I will go down with it

Crumbled

I am a wall
fortified by the shadows I take comfort in
I am unbreakable to the eye
I am unmovable
I am cold to the touch
blank face and bored stare
painted on like a mask
I am unapproachable
Built up by one word replies
Or no replies at all
Just an empty stare made to make you go away
I am unemotional
Blocking out any hints of it whenever possible
Show nothing and get nothing in return
Maybe that's what I want
Because I don't know how to handle anything else
I am nobody
A passing figure
Meant to be in this world
But not a part of it
And that's okay to me
Because being a part of something means understanding it
And I don't understand a thing about this place
I can't even begin to
I am the tombstone
Name long gone by now
Just another person six feet under
Given eternity to "rest in peace"
Why only in death is it possible to rest in peace
Why do I have to live life tossing and turning because of what torments my thoughts at midnight
Why is it that there's something about midnight that makes an unbreakable wall crumble into rubble
I am rubble
Broken without a sound and stepped over without a thought
I break in the comforts of night
Fall back into a place where no one can see and curl up
Give a shaky breath before giving up
Take all the grief and exhaustion being pent up in that charade of unbreakable

And let it go in a silent stream
It's not rain
It's not sweat
Loneliness bleeds from my eyes and come midnight I can't stop it
Bite my tongue and wordlessly wait for it to end
I am forgotten
My words
My voice
My being
A speck in history not worth the effort to remember
And I'm okay with that
I repeat it a thousand times I'm okay with that
Scream it until I force myself to believe it
And maybe I began to
But things changed
This changed
I changed
I want these words to change things
I don't care if my face is remembered
If my words are either
But I need my thoughts to be
The things I say aren't important but the emotions behind them are
So remember them
Learn from them
And change for the better because of them
Because maybe next time you see a wall
You'll remember that even the strongest can break down and crumble when you look away

Overcoming the Stage

When I was little I loved to write
Being here means that obviously not much has changed since then
But there was one thing that did change
When I was little I used to love showing anyone what I made
I mean
I was little
Who's gonna tell a child what they write is horrid?
So it was always the one thing I knew I could get a compliment on when I needed one
Then middle school started
And I tried showing english teachers what I had
Let it be known that english teachers are brutal on short stories
See looking back now I know they wanted to help
But back then it crushed me like a tractor running over an ant on the way to school

Since then I've made all kinds of works that have never seen the eyes of others
Confidence shattered and hopes destroyed I hid it
Like I was ashamed that I ever dared pick up another pencil and dirty a page with my
horrid writings
And I was
I was stricken down by insecurities young and never bounced back from it
Nothing was good enough to be shown to the world
Nothing ever would be either
For years I held everything back
And the few times I tried I was met with rejection
Great confidence booster there by the way
Shame and fear grew day by day
But then something happened
People happened
And when they performed I realized that I.. couldn't
I looked away from the audience too much
I st-stuttered too much
I repeated lines too often
I repeated lines too often
And fear stole my memory to the point where I couldn't even remember my name when
I was to present
But they showed me that even with these faults it's worth a shot
So here's to taking that shot
I'm going to get to that stage one day
I'm going to shake and quake in front of that mic
And I'm going to preform
And probably fail at it but what's life without it's failures
Besides, soon enough it'll be time for a hashtag plot twist
No dinosaurs involved now
But see I'm gonna twist the future until these silent words
Hidden away on blank lines roar out on that stage
I'll wear the spotlight I've shied away from for so long like a robe because I'm in a cult
Not the let's all drink this funky koolaid kind though
Not the mindless followers looking up to the next messiah
No false magic involved here
Nut wands might be
And I'll take mine and use it to write magic on the page
And I'm going to show it off
And I'll be free of this silence like doobby with his sock
And with pirate jesus on my side I'll be able to finally do this
With every word shared I can earn a small victory for trying this
I have finally done this

Prose and Poetry Emily O'Gara



The Badlands

Oh I remember the Badlands.
That hot and desperate landscape,
That home on the range,
Where the very rocks separate themselves
And climb into your shoes,
Climb into your head,
Climb into your very being.
Collecting dust in the Badlands.

I remember the Badlands.
That creature filled habitat,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where hoof prints leave a reminder of what has been.
Those who were born in the shrub lands,
Those who lived in the shrub lands,
Those who died in the shrub lands.
Surviving in the Badlands.

I remember the Badlands.

That empty skyline,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
Where you don't see your neighbors for weeks.
Stare across the dusty fields,
Stare at the empty roads,
Stare into the lonely skies.
Isolation in the Badlands.

I remember the Badlands.
That dry and windy homeland,
Where the skies are not cloudy for days.
That great Nebraskan desert.
Shine brightly from dusk to dawn,
Shine nightly, the stars here,
Shine on you relentless sun.
Drying up in the Badlands.

I remember the Badlands.
That rocky remnant of the west,
That home on the range.
The mountains of Nebraska.
Touch the rock that Indians touched,
Touch the rock that God has made,
Touch the rock that will last forever.
Becoming one with the Badlands.

Dear Clementine

As I look at you now, a shell, as husk of what you once were, it fills me with sorrow. You use to be so full of life, so full of love. Skin wrapping the existence of the woman I loved with gentle hands. Oh Clementine, our time together seemed so short. I can still smell remnants of your perfume, citrusy and sweet clinging to these walls. It is quickly turning sour however. Like a picture left in the sun you are fading away.

A shell, no more. The wrappings you were once so proud of, skin upon the floor, your life juices spilling out. But Clementine, you knew I loved you! You brought this upon yourself. You asked me to leave. You asked me to leave. **You**, who promised to never say those words, **asked me to leave**.

So now as your velvety flesh begins to toughen, tell me you will always love me. Quick before the rigor mortis sets in. Before the possibilities of you returning that love to me can dwindle to none. Dear Clementine, tell me you loved me! Whisper words from those lovely lips...

Your time to blossom was coming to an end. I spared you from the shame of the dumpsters you would have been thrown into. The refuse is no place for a lovely thing like you. Oh Clementine, I saved you from decay, you are preserved in me forever. Yes

the skin might fade, the fibers of your being dissolve, but the haunting scent you had upon yourself then is staining me to the bone right now. Your very essence becoming mine, dearest Clementine, never to part.

As I peeled back the layers of your life, sweetest Clementine, I learned that your sweetness was only skin deep. The flesh that you had promised to me and only me, had become bitter, and I can't help but blame you for that. For you leaving me, you promised to never leave me; you said you would never leave me. These lies bleeding pungent hate into me with every breath I take. I see the real you, dear Clementine, and it isn't as beautiful as I thought it was. The blackness had shriveled your heart, killing you from the inside, and has left a sour taste in my mouth.

Dear Clementine, you were growing so distant. I had to save you. You were becoming lost. You were going to leave me forever; dreadful sorrow, Clementine.

Poetry

Lan Portnoy



My Heart

My heart is the reason why I'm still breathing
You see my heart knows when the old shaggy man on the street needs a snack
She knows that this man has a story

A past that no one will pity for

My heart knows when my best friend is silent
When she repeats that nothing is wrong
But my heart knows that there are endless running thoughts in her mind
Spinning like a never ending carousel

My heart feels the pain of family problems
When my parents don't support me in my own decisions
When I'm choosing to be independent
When I choose to live my own life
My heart feels the unbreathable gasps thrown at me

My heart knows that I shouldn't give up on who I'm searching for
She beats to the sound of music while I'm performing on the field
Where in the crowd of haters and faceless names
My heart sinks when I don't see the familiar face of my family

My heart skips a beat
Missing a step
Trips over the pole
And having a heart attack

My heart knows that once you attacked my heart
You attacked mine like it's the last thing that has a rhythm
Giving me those chills that froze my heart
She thought she knew you were the one

But my heart knows
My heart knows you're the reason she accelerated to the speed of a roller coaster
When your hand on my hips to stop the gasping of the leather
You're words speaking out of that delinquent mouth

My heart feels the bruises swimming itself along my back
You took my heart and squeeze it until the last struggle
The oxygen was only a hum on a monitor

My heart knows the feeling of losing the blood
She keeps track of each cell that's lost
Smeared on a band aid that never falls off
My heart knows the feeling of wanting to survive
When the unthinkable doesn't go right
My heart knows she can't be played by the sound of superman
When superman swoops in trying to be the hero
My heart knows she doesn't need a hero

She needs time that is slowly as the tide ripples of the ocean sweeping across the sea
When my heart knows that her lover was lost at sea
And she knows he won't come back the boy she knew

My heart has been through bullet wounds
Stabs to the heart
And been poisoned by the lies of a man

But she keeps beating and beating to the sound of the music
The sound of music keeps her alive
Even if the words are breaking her heart
She keeps beating and beating
Until the last breath takes her away

Run Away Train

My heart is the reason why I'm still breathing
You see my heart knows when the old shaggy man on the street needs a snack
She knows that this man has a story
A past that no one will pity for

My heart knows when my best friend is silent
When she repeats that nothing is wrong
But my heart knows that there are endless running thoughts in her mind
Spinning like a never ending carousel

My heart feels the pain of family problems
When my parents don't support me in my own decisions
When I'm choosing to be independent
When I choose to live my own life
My heart feels the unbreathable gasps thrown at me

My heart knows that I shouldn't give up on who I'm searching for
She beats to the sound of music while I'm performing on the field
Where in the crowd of haters and faceless names
My heart sinks when I don't see the familiar face of my family

My heart skips a beat
Missing a step
Trips over the pole
And having a heart attack

My heart knows that once you attacked my heart
You attacked mine like it's the last thing that has a rhythm

Giving me those chills that froze my heart
She thought she knew you were the one

But my heart knows
My heart knows you're the reason she accelerated to the speed of a roller coaster
When your hand on my hips to stop the gasping of the leather
You're words speaking out of that delinquent mouth

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Even if the words are breaking her heart
She keeps beating and beating
Until the last breath takes her away

When Weeds Die

My heart is the reason why I'm still breathing
You see my heart knows when the old shaggy man on the street needs a snack
She knows that this man has a story
A past that no one will pity for

My heart knows when my best friend is silent
When she repeats that nothing is wrong
But my heart knows that there are endless running thoughts in her mind

Spinning like a never ending carousel

My heart feels the pain of family problems
When my parents don't support me in my own decisions
When I'm choosing to be independent
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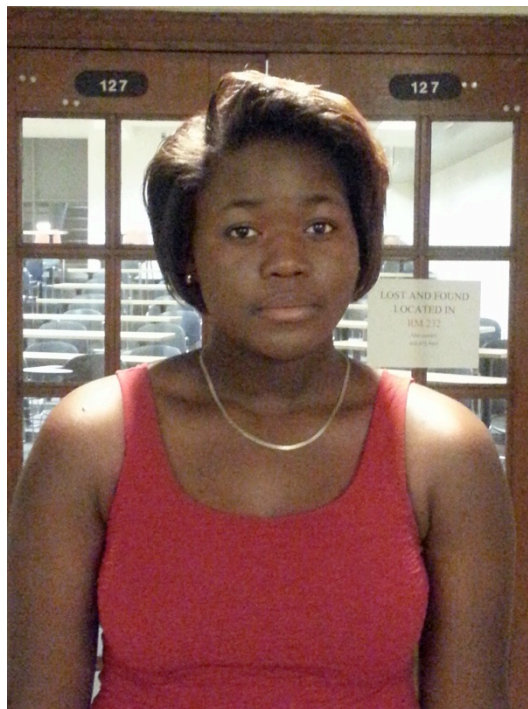
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Until the last breath takes her away

Poetry Marlene Rashidi



Speak

I have a lot to say
But if I speak,
I think I'll go astray.
Like those poor young soldiers
fighting a rich man's war
in the Congo bushes.
I'm fed up with all the shushes.

So let me speak
because silence isn't golden
Let me speak of the tribulations life done gave me,
before insanity befriends me.
Let me reminisce
back to the time when my mom and dad tried giving me a world of milk and honey,
but as I felt him inside of me,
my whole world turned into shadows of darkness and his word I recall as he whispered,
"Scream or die, kiss me back like I'm kissing you."
I reckon he thinks he's a man when his reflection he sees in the obtaining mirrors.
Let me reminisce
When my bones had no meat,
and when blood in my veins dried up slowly
for the lack of water.
Or when my handmade wood bed
welcomed my growling stomach and gave it rest.
I wonder if my bed ever thought I'd wake.
Let me speak
Since fear used to be my remedy.
Don't worry I'll fly through this like it's a stand up comedy.
Let me reminisce
I lost what I loved due to tuberculosis,
a deadly disease that money could have cured.
But money was no where to be found. Little brother,
I'm sorry. I never went to your funeral.
I'm sorry I never got to say goodbye.
Alvis Rashidi, I love you and I miss you.
Let me speak
Before my dying days gives me a quick visit,
or before my resentment eats my flesh up to skeletons.
Before time becomes my enemy,
and before the sound of tik tok explodes my brain cells.
As time's still my friend
I still remember the day that sirens
didn't seem to be the rescue sounds no more.
When Kwazulu Natal was my home back then.
Where I first seen blood flood in harmony.
Just down the block from my house
Pow! Pow!
The girl was down, rape gone bad.
The fresh air I stood outside the balcony seeking for
turned into fresh reality,
eyes opened wider.
Scrutinize my brain! There's something wrong with it.
Or is it just the dark souvenirs my memories gave me to keep.
Let me speak, for I'm heavy loaded with a burden that's not mine to carry no more

No, not anymore.
Let me reminisce
When a dreadlock rasta stole my heart
And had me twisting Sade's words from
"You show she how deep love can be." to
"You showed me how deep love cuts the hear."
I cherished the days I spent with him, just like
Malaria cherished the days it ate up his guts.
Love in Malaria times.
Let me breathe
Let me speak or forever my words I will swallow back
Back to the time when giving wrong answers in class
tattooed scars on my back,
or arriving late after walking miles bare foot.
I still remember the tasteless wheat porridge fed to us
for breakfast and lunch in Tongogara Primary school.
I'm sorry, did I pour fuel to the fire yet?
And as I spit these words
the burdened part of me is free
So let me speak
and let the black butterfly in me perish
so that the white butterfly can flourish.

**We Wish We Had Some Work By
Hannah Ross
But if it were here, it'd be awesome!**



Poetry Carla Seravalli



Bro Tanks: Shirts of the Future

There comes a time
where everyone is plagued
with the growing concern of:
What do guys' arms look like?

Alas, as the night descends on male fashion,
our fallen brothers find
that wife beaters, as a trend,
have faded into the past.
Over the horizon, a holy beacon of light
cuts through the shadows, illuminating the skies
with God's response to our cries,
the perfect garment:
bro tanks.

Like the second amendment,
this sacred fabric surely delivers
in allowing American men
the right to bare arms,

but something more lies within;
a question
woven into neon cotton:
How does one view the self?

Confidence is an uphill battle.
Will you choose to show off
your proverbial biceps and some of your chest
on the ninety-degree day
that is poetry?
Or will you stifle your words in a t-shirt?

Reader, hear me now,
as writers,
we must allow our souls
to wear bro tanks.
Know that there is nothing more poetic
than following the age-old "sun's out, guns are out" law
that carries us through the summer

for Lord knows
that it is our constitutional right
to be swaggy

Prose Amanda Stewart

Prologue to "The World is Anything but what it Seems"

It was a normal day. That obnoxious alarm clock began its obsessive buzzing promptly at 8:30 am. As my cat stirred and stretched she began to purr, rubbing her soft, long fur around my ankles and legs like she did every morning for breakfast. After silencing the alarm to replace it with the purring crunch of cat food, I slipped on my old rugby t-shirt and headed for the kitchen. Desperately trying to remain as quiet as possible, avoiding waking my father and brother, I padded down the old creaky wood steps to the fruit cellar where we have kept all of the fresh produce from mothers' garden. She had started it the year she passed.

"Oh momma, why'd you have to go so soon?"

As I fight back the bitter tears that burn my cheeks I quickly scoop up fresh berries and various veggies to create my favorite breakfast, the omelet of damnation. At least, that's what I called it because there are more veggies than actual eggs in this omelet. After I

am satisfied with my collection, I quickly sweep up the wooden stairs and begin. Eggs, Milk, Cheese, Peppers, Mushrooms, Tomatoes, Sausage, and my personal touch, Garlic. Whipping up a storm I sprinkle the berries with some sugar and toss them in the fridge. Happy with what I have accomplished, I turn on the radio and listen to the songs of teenage girls. Oh how the only thing good about these new songs are the bass line and Instrumentals. A 5 year-old could write this stuff. Yet, here I am, singing and dancing around the kitchen like a loon. A warm full-hearted laugh fills my ears bringing a smile across my face.

“Well, look who’s up and alive this morning.”

“Morning, Daddy.”

His deep but strong intake of breath and a low groan in his stomach gave way to show his “tank” was low on fuel and what I have concocted appealed to his large and angular nose.

“It’s a good thing that you don’t put those pesky tomatoes and peppers in until after. Disgusting vermin.”

I scoffed and smacked his chest with a hollow echo.

“They are delicious! I have no idea why you would say such things!”

“Because they are mushy and smelly and give your old man killer heartburn.”

I roll my eyes and started to add the cheese to the gooey mess slowly scraping the edges testing to see if it was ready to fold. As the smell of coffee and eggs filled the air you could hear rustling deep within the house. A loud bang making both my father and I jump pulled me away from the stove.

“I’m Ok! Just slipped on something.”

My brother slowly emerged, his big toothed grin welcomed us both.

“Omelets again? What’s wrong with some cereal or bacon oooooooh or some good trusty cold pizza? Pizzas good for breakfast.”

He began to rummage through the fridge. I snickered at his remark.

“Because omelets are healthier than your cold pizza.”

He quickly pulled out the pizza box with a piece half disappeared into his mouth.

“Hey, don’t diss the pizza.”

Daddy thumped him on top of his head.

“And don’t talk with food in your mouth.”

I couldn’t hold back a laugh as I flipped and folded the omelet.

“You have your mothers laugh.”

My father added in a less playful voice. My smile slipped and my shoulders shrugged. I carefully pull out two plates and slide on the omelets topping mine with peppers and tomatoes. I carefully hand the plates to daddy.

“I’ll get the fruit.”

And with that, they left for the dining room. As my cat meows at my feet, giving me the thoughtful head-butt against my ankle, I smile.

“It’s ok Mela. I’m ok.”

I quickly pry the fridge open, pull out the fruit and head into the dining room. As I pop a juicy strawberry into my mouth, Mela hisses and lets out a growl anyone would freeze at. Her paws have become long, sharp claws that hid under her long fur turning her into some kind of a mini werewolf.

“Mela what’s...?”

“Nadi...”

My father’s voice rings in my ears full and clipped. As I snap my head up, my fingers slip and the glass bowl crashes to the floor spilling shards and fruit all over my feet and the floor in front of me. A strange group of people have filled the dining room and held my brother and father at gun-point.

“Nadi, Run!”

My father gapes as the man grasps his throat in an effort to silence him. I am set in stone as a man steps out of the crowd.

“I’m sorry for the intrusion,”

His heels clicked against the wood floor as he approached me. His long shaggy hair frames his sharp, angular face. His crisp black uniform, as dark as the wings that carried death to the unfortunate souls that she prayed on. But what scared me the most, was his eyes. Big, Bright, Icy cold and near impossible to pull away from. Bringing an uncomfortable chill to my chest and heat to my groin, he came closer...

“But it seems that your family needs to come with me.”

As he stepped again, the icy heat increased. Mela hissed again and darted up the stairs, snapping the connection, I turned and ran. Sliding across the kitchen floor desperately fighting to get to the cellar stairs, heavy footsteps followed me like flies on a dog. I wasn’t going to outrun them for long, but if I could just get to the cellar, I would be safe. I would be able to lock myself in and stall long enough for me to crawl out of the cellar and into the garden. I jump the flight of stairs, stumbling down to my knees. I fight them to stand but it’s already too late. He is on top of me. He pins my wrists down making a loud clank as they connect with the wooden steps. We freeze for a moment, eyes locked. His ice blue matched to my forest green, just matching our heavy breathing, sinking and rising chests.

He whispers, “You can’t outrun destiny, my darling.”

The icy heat was unbearable. I squirm and swerve trying to get loose from under him. He laughs deep and dark, bitter as it rings in my ears as he is tightening the grip signaling defeat.

“You, my darling, will be perfect for the king.”

If my eyes were mirrors...

If my eyes were mirrors...

You could watch the light dance from one pupil to the other. To watch each individual speck sparkle sporadically somehow showing that I can be trusted. That the sparks in my eyes are not of destruction but a desire much more delicate designed, not only for your enjoyment, but for mine as well.

If my eyes were mirrors...

You could see the flames that burn behind them. The heat that inspires and acquires not only desperate for attention but full of a great affection that has yet to be unleashed out into the world for the fear of it being stolen or put out.

If my eyes were mirrors...

You could see the frustration that comes with not being heard that just because my reality is different than yours that my heart doesn't have all those open doors that my lungs don't have the capacity to inhale rapidly causing immense stability to allow words to rhythmically escape and being able to radically form words like the humiliation that is formed from discrimination from a nation that is supposed to represent freedom but doesn't even know the meaning like having a different love causes an eternity of damnation even though we are all meant to be treated equal and yet are judged in front of the whole world for what we have somehow become like somehow thinking its ok to watch a grown man lay hands on our mothers and daughters and sisters like living in a world where all of our morals are turned upside-down.

If my eyes were mirrors...

Would you finally understand? Would you see the lack of stability in the world and try to make a stand. Would you take the hands of the damned and ease them through the sinking sands of time like your life depended on it? Would you ease their pain? Would you help them regain the hope in life that they have strained to hold onto? Would you fight for change? Would you rearrange the hate in your heart to make room for my deranged desires? Would you lead my revolution? Or will you just be another soldier fallen behind.

Poetry Serenity Stokes



Roses are for love, my dear nightmare

Roses are red and
Violets are blue
There are more fish in the sea
It's not me
It's you
Man of my dreams
If we met in real life
Would you get me flowers
Would you get me red roses
Would your love be passionate
Would your love take hold of me
Like I don't have a choice
Would you give me a purple rose
My favorite color like you already knew
Would you give me yellow roses
I have heard that they mean new beginnings
And friendship
Would you want to be friends first
Would you give me white roses
To show an innocent love

Would you
Hold it up and then glance into my eyes
Just to look down bashful
then drop it just as I reach out for it
The petals blow away like the innocence
When you started getting bashful
bashing and gashing holes in the walls
As you throw the vases we kept our sorrows in
you always got me flowers when you didn't mean to
You didn't mean to meet me
Would you remember to throw away
The card with the other girls name on it
Did she not want them
Did they remind her too much of the dreams
she dreamt with you
why did you stop loving
I don't remember you being my nightmare
Roses are red
Violets are blue
There are more fish in the sea
It's not me
It's you

Rocks and Rivers, To Water from Earth

Dear water
In all your forms and motions
You always said I was your other half
But with me covered by your blues
I want to tell you incase you didn't know
I am not the shoreline
for the waves of your self-doubt to beat upon
but when all is still and calm
will you flow through me taking away
the dust and debris I have left myself in
will you ripple when others skip me across your surface
why must they disturb us
when the clouds are pink and huddled together
and the sun goes down
and the moon covers us with peace
can we soak in the moonlight knowing
we are here to hear the trees fall when no one else is
because the sound it makes deserves to be listened to
not just heard
when the lone cloud finds companionship with the moon
Am I enough for you in the dark?

When we don't know what might happen
If only the moon was alone again
At least then we could have its light
In the night
Is the moon ever scared
that resisting the pull
doesn't last
Is the moon scared that it might fall?
What if the moon is screaming and
we are just too far away to hear it
because a sky full of space feels so empty
In the peace of everything
Can you hear how the moon is now silent?

At Orange-aholics Anonymous Meeting

When all the fluid is gone
It's almost crunchy
Like the fight has not ended
The last the resistance between your molars
Between your molars
Because canines are for tearing
No you want to savor it
The smell reminds you of your origin
Where you come from does not stop you
When you realize you are birthed of the same state
A state of mind is a funny thing
A bite releases the escape pods
Striving for survival
And you roll them on your tongue
You want to savor it
When you freed it from its skin
Did you remember
You were never comfortable in yours
You want to savor it
It sounds like breathing
when you tear through the peel like a released lung
You feel like a savior and you want to savor it
But when the pieces come apart
Does it remind you too much of yourself
To savor it
Obsessive compulsive is an excuse
Every vein is removed because you don't want them
Stuck in your teeth and conscience
You don't want to savor it

You see it across the room bright and vulnerable
You know to resist temptation
You savor this moment
Knowing you never savored
The feeling of devouring
oranges

Poetry Samantha Thomas

Home

I am from a war veteran and a writer – battling in self-expression.
I am from biased arguments and neutral colored walls.
I am from mid- afternoon church bells – to listen to if you choose.
I am from late birthday cards, absent-minded but sentimental.
I am from seasonal allergies and seasonal depression.
I am from your ashes an alternative kind of kin.
I am from my grandma's rhubarb pie – too sweet for good health.
I am from Democrats and "Yes, of course we'll sign to raise minimum wage".
I am from honoring error as hidden intention.
I am from sisterhood and the possibility of flight.
I am from yes or no questions in history class and "explain to me again, why I can't make "herstory"?
I am from thesauruses and outwitting my self-doubt.
I am from insecure knees; teach me how to get from point A to point B.
I am from working smiles and moving seawater.
I am from my skin - thick enough to keep out rain and words like "not today".
I am from star jumping and a disregard in science.
I am from car whistling and middle fingers.
I am from, "Remember Samantha... overnight success may take 20 years."
I am from ripped notebook pages and a high cost of living.
I am from my inner thighs and outward praise from the 3rd person.
I am from joint pain – arthritis of the passing day.
I am from the possibility of ab exercises when my giggles run long.
I am from "no means no", but for you, sometimes "yes".
I am from late arrivals to the Farmer's market and self-love.
I am from your violent narcissism with no scares to file a report.
I am from my own inferno, within my fire, there is more fire, and in that fire there is truth.
I am from civil rights movements in my backyard and the poverty of privilege.
I am from unripe fruit and sensible conversation.

I am from bathroom doors with no handles and losing the ability to handle my consumption.

I am from words, with roots, association, familiarly used, and memorably tied.

I am from double checking and biting my fingernails.

I am from full circles, even though I could never draw those.

I am from writing in repetition, because one sentence never felt too convincing.

Poetry Rachel Vermillion



Sunflower

I like to take pictures of playgrounds and sunflowers
like the ones that grew in the backyard of
my grandmothers mobile home.

They grew next to the oak tree
where my first dog was buried,
and every spring when the sunflowers grew
it was like his spirit was coming alive with them.

I grew faster than sunflowers,
smaller in size but bigger in the sense that I was
big enough to carry my mother,
past out on the kitchen table
to the couch.

The smell of brandy lingered on her tongue like formaldehyde.
Burning my nose.
I learned how to change diapers at a young age.
Hoping to one day use these abilities on my own children.
I can remember playing in the backyard of my grandmothers mobile home,
staring in the distance at the abandoned playground;
like a sacred place, thats never been discovered by the world.
It looked lonely.
I was lonely.
Watching siblings grow faster than those sunflowers.
My mother acting more like a child,
sucking on that bottle while I lay her down to sleep that night.
Say I love you, then kiss her on the forehead.
I grew up like that playground and sunflowers...
Lonely, and too fast.

Poetry Quinten Wells



To Orange with Love

Dear Orange
Fanta doesn't do you justice
No amount of carbonated soda
Could make me feel
The way you make me feel

And I have to admit right here and now
That you are beautiful
But I would never call you a cutie
Because cuties are for kids
And I'm a full grown man
Looking for a full grown fruit
You've got curves in all the right places
And a passion fruit could not produce
The passion that you do
And speaking of produce
The aisle in the walmart where I first met you
I haven't seen you there lately
That's why I think we should start dating
Because the competition is fierce
And I better lock this down quick
And once we're hand in peel
I'll cook you meals
Made of sunlight and rain
We'll even move to Florida
So you can be closer to family
And I know that I can be a bit abrasive
And loud
And I say things that I shouldn't
But don't worry
I won't tell your dad
What happens behind refrigerator doors
For rich or for poor
My core, like yours
Only harbours the seeds of love

Poetry Riley Westerholt



Maybe You Should Move

Please don't act like I'm some
damsel in distress
tied to the tracks
I'm perfectly capable of handling
arguments by myself
Even though I'm only a teenager
I have the ability to form
my own opinions
and believe me when I say
I'm not the damsel
but the train
in the way that if you get in an argument with me
I will crush you
The smoke from my train
will come from the embers
of your dreams
I know what I'm doing

I was raised in a family
that is terrible at sharing
Especially our opinions
So I know how to pointedly make a point
Not only will my point
be backed up factually
I will state it eloquently
My words as long as
well...
this train
And all your point is,
is the tracks I run over

The End

The problem with my name is that
it is a shortened version
of a last name with no meaning
besides end
and so it is hard to love my name
when it begins with end and ends in last
Last just like my name when we are called in alphabetical order
because both R and W are at
the end
Unlike my mother who loves my name but that's
easy to do when everyone loves your name
Terra Linda
which translates into Beautiful Earth
I can not help the lack of love
I find for my name that used to be a last name
then it was a boys' name
and now it is mine
Mine like how I wish you were mine
Dylan O'Brien and
even though I have no idea
what your name means
with that face,
it doesn't even matter
You have one of those names where
people always say your first name and your last
and I have always been just Riley
Occasionally Riley Madison Westerholt
to my mother
I've never even had a nickname

so I suppose by now
I should be used to just
Riley

Connotations or What Happens When I Don't Take My ADD Medication

If my thoughts were to become organized
they'd be a school
No, not just a school
A university
Buildings sprouting up for every new thought that is thought
Because once a thought starts it doesn't ever stop
My mind is full of constantly repeating
thoughts that wait for me to find them so I can expand them
The same way my mind expands every time I think a new thought
If my thoughts were to become organized
They would be in filing cabinets with no real order at all
And if these filing cabinets did have an order
it would have to be an infinite one
as infinite as the edge of the galaxies
because how can you contain your thoughts
when they have the possibility of relating to
you and your own thoughts
and suddenly we're in different schools
different schools in different cities
on separate planets and
even though we are thinking about different things
We are still thinking our own thoughts and no matter
how loud the space between my ears becomes
I always have the silence for listening to your thoughts
that are beautiful for simply being yours and even if I
gasp for breath because I thought too hard about the thoughts
that you made me think
Just know that somewhere out there,
I'm still thinking of you
the same way you'll probably think of me
whenever you hear the word thought
repeated in too many ways meaning too many things
but whenever I think about you
I think about the color blue and the way you weren't with me the first time I saw
this particular blue that was so blue it blew me away
like I was breathing it in
This deep indigo

and I imagine blue is what drowning feels like
I'm used to drowning in my own thoughts
but this blue is an ocean
a slant of yellow I can almost reach
but I'm too deep in that deep blue
I've never quite felt safe in the water
because it can not cover you
it can only surround you
So writing has become my flotation device
because it's easy to feel awash in words
because when you inhale they don't burn like thoughts do
drowning in letters doesn't hurt
it only makes me crave them more
and when I listen to you speak
All I want is for those words to be mine
because when you use the same words as someone else
it doesn't feel like stealing
only sharing
and I want to share my indigo words with you
I'm hesitant because sharing worlds
eventually leads to sharing thoughts
and no one has really ever been able to follow the way I think
What if my thoughts scare you?
I don't want anyone else to drown in this ocean

Prose Scott Wiese



Living the Daydream

A young man in his mid twenties walks into an old empty train station. The station smells of mold and dirt, similar to an old garage, but he can't help but notice the faint smell of rust that is hidden under the rest. He carries a suitcase in his hand as he looks around hurriedly only to show disappointment. He continues to another area deeper into the abandoned terminal. When he enters the boarding station he is surprised to not be alone. He was in the building with an old man in simple jeans and plaid shirt sitting on a bench against a brick pillar near the other side of the room.

The old man sat staring at the old overgrown tracks just a few feet from him. Maybe the old man sees invisible trains coming, stopping, and leaving, letting all the ghosts bustling about, passing by him continue their daily commute. The younger man saw nothing. The old man had no smile; no frown, his eyes were deep; but showed no joy; no sorrow. Instead his eyes gazed off into the corners, into the cracks between the bricks, leaving the station through the broken windows to find new places for his thoughts to fill. His thoughts though were to be interrupted by a young man with nicer clothes and a suitcase asking why he was sitting in an old abandoned terminal.

As an answer to the question the old man let out a long under the breath sigh, like a water balloon letting out the air before it got to the water.

"I'm waiting, been here for three hours since eight. The train's supposed to arrive at nine. Trains tend to be late, so I give it 'til twelve. Can't do anything to hurry it up, so I gotta wait," the old man said.

“But this place is abandoned,” the young man said. “It was closed in like 1980 or something. Like no schedules, no whistles, no trains, *nothing*. What are you waiting for?”

After a small cough, probably to clear his throat, the old man said to him, “You’re still young. You must have a tough job for that nice suitcase, clean suit to look nice to passerbys, maybe you have a lovely little family? But young men don’t come walking around here, don’t go into random abandoned buildings.” The distaste must’ve made the old man’s bones ache, because he began to shift in his seat causing it’s tight screws to squeak against the wood.

While watching the old man shifting the young man couldn’t help but feel like he was watching an illusion of an ancient mythical gargoyle awakening from it’s cold stone slumber. Mystified by the old man and his otherworldly escape, the young man too could’ve been lost in his own world of thoughts, but he was pulled to the real world by the faint smell of rust from the long forgotten train tracks.

And so the young man with the tough job, maybe a loving family, but no time put down his suitcase, because wherever he was; time was seemingly not an issue.

The young man sat next to his new acquaintance, maybe a new friend, for some reason he felt like he knew the old man before coming to the forgotten terminal. They sat together watching the imaginary people busying themselves, bumping around, ignoring others, bustling, and sometimes one or two stopping for a smoke before eventually getting on their train and leaving.

Breaking the long silence the young man said “What’s so special about this train you’re waiting for?”

“I’ve been waiting for a while.” The old man said

“No, I mean like, is there something or someone on it? Why do you care so much about a train that’s not going to arrive?”

“She’ll come”

The old man didn’t answer any more of the young man’s questions, and realizing the futility of continuing his interrogation the young man chose to sit silent again.

While looking at the vines coming out of the bricks like trees in a downtown city he began to think about his life, how he got to this mysterious place. How he seemed to be alone most of his life because he couldn’t stay in one place. He saw himself as the lonely nomad in a settled society. All he had with him was a crazy old man, himself, and his suitcase. Thinking of his suitcase stopped him to realize he was still in the real world and had no idea what time it was. Looking at his watch he was agitated to see that his battery died at 11:42. He wanted to be out of the terminal by 1. He pulled his sleeve over the watch and rested his head against the cold brick pillar behind him. The young man was thankful for the small breeze that snuck in through the broken windows, he wouldn’t be able to sit for so long otherwise. It was only when the small gusts stopped for short times the young man would again catch the scent of the metallic rust, repeatedly stopping his racing mind and momentarily focusing it on why of all the smells that could have infatuated him, it was the smell of oxygenated iron.

The long silence was interrupted by the old man. He for once explained that he’s been visiting the station for fifty years. He had been waiting for the train, but didn’t find out until two days later that a train in the rocky mountains derailed at a bend and rolled off a hundred and twenty foot drop. “I know that wasn’t the train I was waiting for, It

couldn't have been. Something like that wouldn't have happened to her. So I've been waiting here everyday at eight. It's supposed to arrive at nine, but I give it 'til twelve. You gotta be patient for life, or you just won't get what you want." When the old man finished a small gust came through the windows as if it had stopped to listen to the old man tell his story. When the young man thought about it he noticed that it seemed like *everything* around the two men did their jobs avoiding that one where they were sitting. The vines only came through the walls from the outside, the small pockets of dust that fell from the ceiling seemed to avoid landing around the bench, and the pieces of grass snaking their way through the cracked floor grew everywhere *but* there. Even the cement remained uncracked under the old wooden bench, that was the last in the station to contain remnants of red paint on it.

When the young man looked around to observe more of the surrounding he remembered where he last felt like this, he was at home. Not his home, but he was a visitor to someone else's. This of course should not be what he was thinking, because just from the appearance, the structural integrity of the building was falling apart. Yet he still felt at guest, sitting at someone else's dinner table waiting for a pleasant conversation. But like someone else's home the station kept its mystery. He did not know what was behind the cabinets, in the fridge, or where the bathroom would be. He was a guest to the old man's world, and he had no authority to pry, so he sat waiting for the host.

For some reason the young man felt like he knew who the old man was waiting for, and he finally found the right place to wait.

"Who were you waiting for?"

"Someone important to me, like life is to you." the old man said.

He knew now that the old man wasn't crazy for sitting at the same bench everyday, nor was he finding an escape from the rest of the world, but knew now that the old man was continuing to believe. If he stops coming here his will to believe would die, and when he eventually becomes empty of life he would drift off alone.

Feeling like his time here was coming to an end the young man reached for his suitcase and pulled it onto his lap. He popped the levers and opened it up to reveal a camera with smaller devices in little foam slots made precisely for them. Standing up with his camera the young man said that he is a photographer and was trying to make an album of what had been abandoned and forgotten. The problem though was that this train station wasn't abandoned, there still are two people who will always be in this station, the other one is yet to arrive.

The young man crouched down in front of the old man to take the one photo he wasn't expecting to take. When he pressed his finger down, all he got in return was nothing. The shutter was broken and wasn't able to take photos. So with no evidence of his visit the young man packed up, he experienced all he could and could now only give his best wishes.

As he walked toward the exit the young man couldn't help but feel a sinking feeling in his chest, he felt lonely. He stopped to look at his watch and read 12:58 PM. When the young man continued toward the exit, he never noticed the smell of rusted iron, even though its scent was still present.