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# *Anapest*

A photograph of a person's legs from the waist down, walking on a staircase. The person is wearing dark, possibly black, pants and dark sneakers with white laces and white soles. The person is walking up the stairs, with their right foot on a higher step than their left. The background is a plain, light-colored wall with a window at the top, through which bright light is streaming, creating a strong silhouette effect on the person's legs. The title 'Anapest' is written in a large, white, serif font across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the person's legs.

A JOURNAL OF POETRY EXCELLENCE



# **Anapest**

Journal of Poetry Excellence

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Text Set in Times New Roman

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# Anapest

Editor in Chief     Austin Shay

## About Anapest:

An anapest is a "metrical foot" comprising of two short/unstressed syllables followed by one long/stressed syllable. Daily Writing Tips released an article about the 36 poetry terms everyone should know, and many of them are ones that we hear on a daily basis when we are talking about poetry. We decided that we should name our poetry journal after a poetry term that is not often heard.

We do not expect the poets that submit their work to have a certain amounts of anapest in their works or follow some strict guideline. We want to showcase elegance and excellency in poetry. Thus Anapest was born. We want to bring the wonderful world of poetry to people daily.

We are accepting poetry all year around, and would love to read the work that you have for us.





# LETTER FROM

*the intern*

Dear Reader,

I am writing on behalf of The Paragon Journal, an online literary magazine dedicated to showcasing the works of both new and established authors. We are currently seeking submissions for our first chapbook contest.. All are welcome to submit, with a small entry fee of only \$20. The prize for this contest will be publication and \$100.

The Paragon Journal is looking for chapbook manuscripts that push boundaries. Entries should contain roughly 15 to 30 poems of varying lengths, the theme of which will be up to the contest entrant. Initial judgment will be overseen by our staff, while the top 5 chapbooks will be judged by poets Gabe Kahan and Marissa Higgins. Entries will be accepted until June 30<sup>th</sup> of this year.

If you know of anyone who might be interested in this opportunity, please tell them to contact [ashay@theparagonjournal.com](mailto:ashay@theparagonjournal.com) with any questions. You may also direct them to The Paragon Journal's website, [theparagonjournal.com](http://theparagonjournal.com) for more information.

Thank you very much in advance.

Sam Bixler  
Intern  
The Paragon Journal





# THEORY OF LOOPHOLES

WRITTEN  
BY **UTSAV KAUSHIK**

Surrounded by these walls  
With the window shut;  
I'm sitting enclosed  
Thinking about the theory of loopholes.

These sheltered beams  
Crossing over the walls  
Are turning my dull thoughts  
To ponder upon these loopholes.

Some trespassing through the wall,  
Among and upon the cemented bricks.  
Others, between the ribs and abdomen  
Like infinity stacked upon one another.

These holes have sucked all my intelligent and intuitive guesses.  
But I figured out that heat, intensity and surface area are its directly proportional causes.  
There's hope as 44°C still festers outside, stretching wide upon the crop fields.  
Yet most of us cannot fix these though the GDP has since increased.

Capsicum, lemon and dry fruits are a luxury here.  
When men and women work equally upon these fields  
I perspire abundantly, thinking and formulating  
A hypothesis indoors.

"It'll rain certainly in two days", he said hopelessly.  
"At least we'll have something to drink", consequently  
The rest will sink which excited my reasoning wonder:  
Whether it happened due to seepage or heat.

Our brothers and sisters are still dependent  
Upon the closed figures of Banks, Ration shops and the saintly government.  
Nobody stays down and voices break out while waiting in never-ending queues.  
As sound is inversely proportional, these institutions have holes on the outside.

There's still hope that rain will fall and reduce the heat.  
Nothing will stay quite then and our sound will break their heels.  
Eureka! Eureka! (I think I've got it all);  
Or perhaps, there is still more to know in the theory of loopholes.

# ALIEN MADMAN

WRITTEN  
BY **BEN NARDOLILLI**

I have always played with falls,  
but back when I began,  
there was a lawn with soft grass  
that others managed to mow,  
my only responsibility  
was to keep the grounds clean  
of broken sticks and bones.

When they changed the base  
and covered it in glass  
I made sure to collapse quickly,  
falling back first to avoid  
lacerations on my chest,  
saving that haphazard longitude  
for the dark side of my body

When they replaced the glass  
with fresh layers of mud,  
I fell forward, just like before,  
it was still wet so I left my mark,  
now my drops leave a legacy  
by changing the landscape,  
it only makes me fall more often.

# CLOSED HEARTH

WRITTEN  
BY **BEN NARDOLILLI**

I have shuttered the windows,  
Filled every basin with water,  
And await the invasion

Buckets by the stove  
Collect mush and malt to make  
Enough beer to last the siege

Meanwhile, I learn to juggle  
And speak only in rhyme,  
Entertainment to trespass the time

Soon, I will dig a well  
In the middle of the living room,  
This is where living waters dwell

# ANCIENT WONDER EXHAUSTED

WRITTEN  
BY **BEN NARDOLILLI**

Rules favor mules,  
That's deep  
For canyon dwellers

Lush riverbanks  
Rough and smooth  
It's hot down here

Down the river  
Of underground drainage,  
Mind the gap

# THE ANXIETY OF STARLINGS

WRITTEN  
BY **CHRIS HOPKINS**

There is the wonder,  
in the anxiety of the starlings.  
Oiled,  
and starved.  
How beauty  
can fall out of something,  
how their shiver made a whale.

A sky-dance  
of a fattening shadow.  
Round and full,  
stretching and curved.  
They are the pitch and duration,  
on a stave,  
of the supersonic candy floss,  
sitting on the coral birth.

Like a fluxing crown  
above the lines of cut slate,  
the black church dagger,  
and the empty carpark mile,  
all, still to roll over to life,  
a drowning chorus  
of a hundred thousand frightened mouths.  
The dance of ghosts,  
in their solid state.

# IODINE

WRITTEN  
BY **CHRIS HOPKINS**

After a driest day blue,

The iodine smear.

Low and seen with rolling eyes.

The long grass could be called weeds  
of hiding our sin.

Seeing the crows feet of the pumpkin

through the river trees,

my Tycho gasps,

the old man's eyes never turn away.

A roll of an engine,

as a Shepard tone approaching.

Headlights searching fingers

through the bracken line,

but we are not found.

Burning bright.

The night pulls over

loosely as our blanket.

Bodies moist before the dew.

The stars shone on our bodies.

On our lilac pale skins.

as we fell into the wells

of our eight ball eyes.

# STRAY DOGS FOR DINNER

WRITTEN  
BY **CHRIS HOPKINS**

We missed the first frosts,  
in warm unmade beds.  
That scent was us.  
The sun was low  
and in the room with us all day.  
Over the arms of chairs,  
against the walls,  
it's warmth was the shape of your back.  
Sleeked around us the afternoon,  
and walked out the door by four.  
Us, stray dogs for dinner.  
Pack animals holding hands.  
Raw checked, black lipped.  
Blood up from the run.  
The night and the day,  
and a night to come,  
alight inside the other.  
A love,  
not yet ready for housebreaking.



# FOREST RAM

WRITTEN  
BY **CHRIS HOPKINS**

Twilight,  
is a time you should always spend with your lover.  
The moments,  
when time travel is possible.  
When the frog belly gold  
gunned on the walls of the forest,  
pull your recall and complaint  
into the warmness,  
while there is still colour to the silhouettes.  
Otherwise the eyes of the forest  
will have your heart,  
and the sundown becomes your cave.

# THE EVERYTHING OF SILENCE

WRITTEN  
BY **CHRIS HOPKINS**

Even the crows are bored with today.  
The park benches never lost their damp,  
like timbers of sunken ships  
stacked against the tarmac paths.

Lunch time doesn't even break  
the everything of silence,  
a quietness of a day not paying attention.  
The day should have just stayed in bed.

Colour doesn't work today,  
cars and post boxes are not red,  
and the grass is as thin  
as the starling's chest.

Desire lines are skipped  
or the telling mud on leather.  
While our shadows  
stayed at home,

talking openly of the sun,  
to stir the wasps  
amongst the pomegranate trees.  
To wish our lives so very far away.

# PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

WRITTEN  
BY **CHRIS HOPKINS**

When the light comes  
with a winter morning,  
when even the evergreens hold their breath,  
and the sugar kicks wait  
while the young are sleeping,  
    that light,  
        pouring in,  
in stop motion ice melting,  
lowering the shadows into the earth,  
down, into kingdoms of the borders,  
line, mass and colour, trapped in lead.  
Unhiding wrappers, striped and bleached  
besides the rods of iron roses,  
are the dying frescos of a season dare,  
or a flattened coke can wreath,  
laid at the floor of the oak's grey bough,  
is an act of remembrance to young bodies  
of summer,  
fallen on the lawn's cool grasses.  
Tarmac rivers along,  
confuse the swans now and then,  
and the only way the memorial stones will move anymore  
is when the glaciers return.  
There, on the park bench uprights,  
nailed brass plaques  
flicker to life the dead names of loved ones,  
who found escape in this view.  
Who sat, and watched over their healing land.  
Or maybe it was the sun bathed limbs in June.

# COUNTENANCE OF HOLLOW SMILES

WRITTEN  
BY **CHRIS HOPKINS**

We would stand against the oak tree's lizard skin,  
away from the porch,  
weather bronze flakes on our palms.  
The grey flecks of ashen coke sky,  
matching paper print on kitchen tops,  
ironed shirts of collar with dried bubble soap suds pops.  
Out of our pregnant thoughts  
our lives became.  
Jesus trapped in stories of good.  
How every now and then, he'd like to let the bad guy in.  
The words were not honey.  
They came in the ear like bees  
and my mind filled up the holes with wax.  
See I noticed the shadows under cossacks,  
were not darker than the black of his cloth.

# YOU CAN'T SEE RED UNDER SODIUM LIGHT

WRITTEN  
BY **CHRIS HOPKINS**

Sugar cube boats  
turn to the colour of the oceans  
and rot at the bottom of their china seas,

and the sun soaks in saffron threads,  
all it touches  
going down.

Golden.

Lost;

the roof line soon invades the ache  
of the losing light, sitting here,  
circling the coffee suds,  
recording time in picks and nail marks  
in the table grain.

To spend an afternoon,  
with the invention of stars,  
all for love to pack it away,  
the house and child of incumbent dreaming.  
She leaves nothing, nothing of hers,  
less the cosmos dolour,  
there at your feet.

You will have to leave  
arm in arm, with yourself at closing.  
The dark collar grace of night,  
will hide the puffed redness  
of the shatter,  
the echo of the door swung shut.

# MEMORY IN BIBLE COUNTRY

WRITTEN  
BY **AIDAN CHAFE**

Before the one who was a simple !  
promise of mouth. After the one !  
who left you in the pastures of !  
high school. Not the one who left !  
you on the phone. The one !  
who swam in your river. The one !  
at the altar, who disappears with !  
your dream. There in the meadow, !  
do you see him? Thrushes crowd !  
you with song. Your heart spills !  
into his hands, nettles flower !  
your knees, trees confuse the light. !  
A white dress processions behind you. !  
The rest of us capture the spectacle !  
that swallows light with all its hope. !  
A storm you could not cure with calm, !  
swells inside that insatiable flood.

# COMMUNION

WRITTEN  
BY **AIDAN CHAFE**

We lock eyes  
I lift the cathedral  
from your mouth  
read the psalms  
in your breath  
praise your  
gospel lungs  
Our bodies  
stitched  
for God's  
unwanted  
patterns  
Our bodies  
full of glass  
and marble memories  
We are nothing  
but wounded histories

# IRIS OF SPRING

WRITTEN  
BY **MIKE MAGGIO**

Iris of Spring  
you sprout luxurious  
from your false bed of snow.

Enrobed in your splendid yellow and green,  
so soft, so languid,  
your willowy arms

outstretched,  
your legs, concealed in a curious tangle  
Your face, a wisp of woken wonder.

You un-  
fold  
quietly, tenderly,  
tall and tempting

invite me to gaze, to touch  
to linger  
in your faint drowsy fragrance.

How came you to be like this?  
What did you all winter  
lying nestled in your frigid muddle of soil:

the earth, your covetous lover  
the sun, feverish with want  
the frost, a wicked reminder of your cruel absence.

Iris, I spy you couched in mystery  
and yearn to seize you  
long to capture your wondrous bloom

snatch you from your bold innocence  
place you in a vase to adorn love's altar  
to watch and wonder and adore.

Come now, let us not regret the future.  
Let us revel in this brief moment.  
Let us embrace this elusive season of bliss.

For Spring shall shed its silken sheen  
Summer will rise,  
then tumble into Fall

and I left here, alone,  
as you surrender once again  
to Winter's icy grip.

I shall await your resurrection.  
Steadfast, I shall remain here,  
agonized, canonized

as my longing, like the weeping stars,  
endures the cold, bitter night.



# SIREN SONG

WRITTEN  
BY **MIKE MAGGIO**

Come, let us go now, to a place beyond dreams.

Let us arise and go now  
through the fond, murmuring streets  
through the blind, stuttering boulevards  
where siren song stills the air  
where the minute's wheels wend their way  
to that elusive rapturous bliss.

Let us rush now, you and I,  
like the honeybee to its hive  
to the merry, manic marmalade malls  
to the towering halls of swithering tongues  
to the glittering temples that mesmerize all:  
where those who seek know not what they crave,  
yet surrender to pipe and drum and sweet serenade.

There we shall find short solace.  
There, castoffs to shores of grief and joy,  
like ghosts, like waves dashed upon rock,  
we'll drift past glimmering galleons  
covet the treasures of shipwrecked men  
grope for beads, for baubles and gems  
while all the while we sink and swim,  
swim and sink and the siren song  
sweetly scuttles our unsoled souls.

Come quickly now, rise up,  
submit at once to this hasty urge:  
not greed nor grail shall accept one dram  
nor glass render reason  
nor brass surrender the season we cannot escape.

Let gold and silver release their grasp,  
and jewels their hapless, jaded clasp,  
yet snow shall not discharge these couriers  
nor rain postpone the swift completion  
of our most sacred rounds.

Hurry now:  
let desire trumpet the way.  
Let us in full fanfare not delay.  
Let serendipity draw us fast  
from these transient, abandoned alleys  
to the splendid golden valleys  
where tree and grass defy the sky,  
where silken flowers in concrete lie.

Let neither spouse nor child obstruct the way.  
The time has come to submit and pay.

# UNTITLED

WRITTEN  
BY **MIKE MAGGIO**

It went all quiet the day I died:  
the brazen buzzing of bees --  
the daily cantabile of cars and trucks --  
the rustling of people flush in their busy lives—  
not one sound could be heard.

I listened for the distant bell:  
a lone echo  
answered my call.  
I harkened for the wash of waves  
for the birdsong in my bartered garden

waited for the chitter chatter of chipmunks --  
Not a chirp emerged through that muffled hush.  
Instead, it stayed all quiet.  
Silent. Stony. Still.  
Like when the sun sings its muted song.

I lay there  
quite tranquil, quite quiescent  
my soul a-flurry  
let the lucence imbue my hazy vision  
and waited for the oppressive silence  
  
to cease its ceaseless drone.

# I JUST CAME ON AN EILEEN MYLES ANTHOLOGY

WRITTEN  
BY **GABE KAHAN**

it was a library copy  
i hope you will believe me  
when i say it was an accident  
that it taught me a great deal

like listen  
i know my bed sheets  
haven't been washed  
in a little over 3 weeks  
but these two polyester blankets  
fit right in with their history  
of colors which i will not  
recount now

temporarily and in sudden bursts  
i drink juice at 3am because the glucose  
soothes me it sweetens my escape  
my funky death in the darkness  
nihilistic and praying  
to the mold under the carpet  
and between family members  
to the hazel rings i find bathing  
in your eyes

the silence is a knee slap-  
per in fact my ears are ringing  
in fact i feel mister Grim Reaper  
drinking tea in the neighbor's apartment  
i told him (her? them?) last week like i tell  
you now  
"clean up your mess"  
but he (she? they?)  
bit me like a dog  
so i just kindly said goodnight

and the compassion swelled  
like a sexual organ  
like a massive question mark  
and flooded into the sweat  
underneath my sweatpants  
and into my high school  
memories of everything i will again  
not recount

on our elaborate battlefield  
in a wonderland of dirty  
Subarus and wait I  
don't think I really  
explained myself  
i came for you  
and landed on a book of poems  
i guess time will tell if they're mine

# THE AGELESS BUMBLEBEES

WRITTEN  
BY **GABE KAHAN**

I'd like to write a poem today  
from the comfort of my bed sheets  
with tea and a dog and all the little stars  
I've chosen for myself.

Let me begin with an amendment  
for what you think will come now  
has already passed  
I am already asleep.

The wave has eaten me up  
like a bowl of jello  
like Pavlov's parakeet  
the ambience I collect is dimming.

You won't accept me because it's your choice  
and you choose what you know.

# CHAPTER OF THE WHIRLPOOL, GODDESS OF POTENTIALITY

WRITTEN  
BY **GABE KAHAN**

goodness gracious, my eyes  
forget in a hazy evening you  
my joy,  
because the oak man  
smeared his oils across the sky  
in palms of golden ease:  
into the chair now,  
into the chair,  
declining into the rewritten  
soup of a new generation,  
sick, strong,  
and devilishly normal  
in the face of the ancient  
shake of the hands,  
a feathered gratitude  
rises to the occasion,  
laughter and ash

i cannot undo these shoelaces  
like i can jumble  
my memory  
into a thousand puzzle pieces  
with my clocks hanging  
echoing our history

i wrote a screenplay for you,  
it was easy to cry before  
i even put my pen down,  
sinking into a freshwater bath,  
scarred and adorable

# MEDITATION ON STREET CORNER

WRITTEN  
BY **GABE KAHAN**

do i have someone  
to dedicate this poem to.

i am going on  
irreverence,

silly little i  
caught in the back of bus,

tripping through dandelion fields  
ovaries and paralegals and discovering

my dictionary is shit  
and i'll need to buy a new one.

but i'm good at that because you taught me  
osmosis and calculus.

you taught me so well i had to call you  
out on it and build a million straw castles for you

to break down  
and hold me

as i held you.

the source code piles high  
with the marijuana and sleep apnea

and the flip charts to demonize and castrate  
a million villains. we were graceful patriarchy.

we were shimmering algorithms and orange juice  
flowed into our eyes. there was no reason to look  
back.

but your seed is sapling. your prayers are manifest.  
your heart is under threat of investigation.

i love you. don't you  
know it's fatal

to sometimes  
say this out loud.

# GRINDING

WRITTEN  
BY **LUCIA DAMACEL**

They become alive in the kitchen, those wheat flour particles that didn't make it into the oven as dough

for our breakfast bread, and float around with the sunlight.

Dressed in black from head to toe, Grandma walks through

the beams and dissolves the vision. She stands by a rectangular table, facing the garden, and starts grinding coffee with a heavy

Universal mill iron-clamped to the table. She turns the crank holding it from the wooden handle. With

every turn she crushes the coffee beans more and more until the crank has no more resistance coming from

inside the funnel and the beans have been all reduced to powder. As the beans break, they release their

aroma, a presence as familiar as the 7 a.m. news on the black and white TV. I want to turn the crank,

and she, as always, gives me a swift No, still turning the crank, the pot with boiling water already on the stove.

Ill for a while, Grandpa died at the hospital two days ago. He wanted to be cremated, his ashes released into the

ocean, sailor until the end. I heard Mom and Dad asking about it. Grandma gave them a swift No.

That's not the proper way. And she keeps grinding  
the portion for today's coffee, right before we go to

the funeral home. The coffee there, she says, is terrible.



# HANGING ON

WRITTEN  
BY **LUCIA DAMACEL**

The long black coat hangs in the armoire    heavy with silence  
decades of un-wornness        a lifetime stint in the tropics  
gathered in the seams  
Dead at eighty six  
she never returned  
to her woolen-some place  
Or did she?  
Bed-ridden for a year  
what if once set free  
she flew  
to the brown green mountains  
her eyes    took the color from  
saw the intact    unclouded    un-cataracted  
blue sky?  
Better than imagining grandma's  
soft stare hanging on forever  
within some colorless  
paneled walls.  
Or not.

# UNDERTONES

WRITTEN  
BY **LUCIA DAMACEL**

My texts to you accumulate  
on my screen  
one after the other,  
uninterrupted threads of silence,  
tails on an abandoned railroad.

My knocks on your door  
resonate in the empty hallway  
with the sound of cracking  
stone-like eggs  
of a mythical half-human,  
half-rock bottom creature.

At the end of your voyage  
from the deep blue,  
this surface where  
living things of your species  
go about their daily business.

Sunglasses in hand,  
count me in  
to fight the glare together.



# THE DAY I MET BORGES

WRITTEN  
BY **LUCIA DAMAGEL**

The hotel where he stayed is gone; or rather, it now goes by another name.

The book I hastily bought at a nearby bookstore and he signed with uneven letters, lost in one of my moves around the world.

He asked which book I brought. “El Informe de Brodie,” I said.

Borges seemed pleased and replied “Oh, the one with the story Guayaquil.”

The article I wrote based on my short interview of him and my impressions of the meeting, given to a magazine editor. I didn’t keep a copy. I didn’t hear back from the editor.

Two of the three persons who went with me (who allowed me to go with them, rather), both dead now, like Borges. The third person, gone from my memory.

Have no idea who he was.

María Kodama a brief presence under the sill of another room in their hotel suite.

It seems like these words are all that is left of that brief encounter in Guayaquil.

# BRIDES IN VIETNAM

WRITTEN  
BY **LUCIA DAMACEL**

Red-clad brides and white-clad brides  
outside luxury shopping centers in central Hanoi.  
The wide skirts of their Western wedding dresses  
and their photography entourage moving  
from one corner of the block to another  
following the sunset light.

At a war site along the road,  
one bride climbs to a round platform  
on top of a bunker built on a hillock.  
The whole structure resembling a wedding cake.

She loses her shoe, which the groom promptly rescues,  
holding it from the heel.  
The photographer dutifully captures the scene.

The bride turns her head to the side and looks at the horizon.

# HAVE YOU SEEN BETHEL?

WRITTEN  
BY **SARA STEVENSON**

“Have you seen Bethel?”

An empty mattress in the corner,  
stripped of blankets, pillows,  
life.

Concrete floors,  
caked with dirt,  
white tunics and wooden shoes.

“Have you seen Bethel?”

Brown shirts, whispers —  
too weak, too sick.

Useless.

Chaos. Crying. Screaming.

“Have you seen Bethel?”

Wir hassen die Juden.

We hate the Jews.

“Have you seen Bethel?”

# THE KILLER SPEAKS (A POEM FOR SON OF SAM)

WRITTEN  
BY **SARA STEVENSON**

I think people are really  
shook up;  
People won't come out at night.  
The girl was covered in blood.  
"Oh my god, we've been shot,  
we've been shot."

A lot of people died from  
the same gun.  
It's scary.  
It's frightening.  
"When you're walking,  
people just look over their shoulder."

Police say they are nowhere near  
solving the case.  
The Son of Sam wrote about a dog;  
it gave him orders to kill.  
He was going out on 30 nights a month  
looking for someone to kill.

He terrified the city.  
He says that people will never understand,  
no matter how much he tries  
to explain it.  
"They wouldn't understand that,  
what it was to walk in darkness."

# WRECKED

WRITTEN  
BY **KHALOUD AL-MUTTALIBI**

The deadly silence inside the ship provided all the indications  
of a failed warning  
The recovered rivets revealed how she had crashed  
She says she has a weird obsession, a zeal  
to steer towards what she fears most  
The cargo of empty names and faces that she  
carried with her the past years are icebound  
She couldn't shape the waves into images or sounds  
The snapped spine  
Stuck between floor and gap confirms what she knew all along  
Beneath  
Sea senses are numb



# CRUMBLLED

WRITTEN  
BY **KHALOUD AL-MUTTALIBI**

The tear of skin, the crackle of bones. She Crumbles

Her hands plunge into oblivion

Her eyes flee to the shadows of the labyrinth

Her feet are stuck in desert thistles

Her lips are thirsty despite the Thames

The river bursts with laughter

The body

The crumbs

The echo of their fall

# NAUTILUS

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHELE RIEDEL**

He rakes the sand  
with thick wooden rake  
wearing sweat stained clothes  
and sandpapered jackets  
that defy the sun.

His dark eyes disappear  
unnoticed under the shadow of hat.  
No smile but always “hola”  
while tourists move in their  
self-absorbed bubbles

Hours slide like the slow  
heavy drops of sweat  
that sting his eyes  
as he carves, sculpts  
sifts out debris,  
swirls grains  
recanvases.

The hollowed shell  
of his body bent over  
in a slow crawl  
tongue touching  
tequila and lime  
crusted lips.

With circular sweeps  
he enshrines the sand.  
moving steadily outward  
arching spirals  
toward the sea.

Drawn towards  
concentric mounds  
I see shells centrally  
placed offered  
with sanctimony.  
I witness this consecration.

He moves on  
heat waves distort  
his figure  
arms and legs become unhinged  
disconnected.  
and dissolves into the sea.

# AGAIN

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHELE RIEDEL**

Crushed  
Into fragile eggshells  
I see this other self  
looking out from here.  
It doesn't fit me  
-my arms don't fit the sleeves.  
starting strong  
The stumbling  
turns to crumbling  
as I try to slide over the bump  
but end up at a cold standstill.  
I come face to face  
with myself failing  
and pain forms a fissure  
that becomes a crack and a tear  
moving across out of control.  
Old tapes play again.  
Mistakes repeat and I become  
the yolk.  
Scattered broken  
pitifully lost  
and swallowed  
under the sidewalk.

# 2:00 BANKSIDE

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHELE RIEDEL**

Quick to his haunches he crouches low –rear up  
jerks to and fro anxiously panting ready to dive in.

The sun beats down reflecting  
back in sharp shards  
from the deep dark muddy river.

Tracing bank edge with his nose  
he backrolls into the crusty mud  
sloughing off his city coat.

Splashing in, with only the tip of tail and nose  
breaking surface, his head is low  
in the murky underworld.

Above the gentle James unfolds its veil  
as patterns of current  
sweep the geese downriver  
to some other heaven.

Suddenly he springs back to the bank  
shaking loose soaked fur,  
baptizing me with a tail thumping  
hymnal and a howlsong.

# ALEXANDRA DAVID-NEEL

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON**

She edits her life from a room made dark  
against a desert dropping summer sun.  
A daring traveling Parisian adventurer,  
ultimate princess turning toad with age--  
snow drops of white in her hair, tiny fingers  
thumb joints osteoarthritis  
she corrects proofs at 100, pours whiskey,  
pours over what she wrote  
scribbles notes directed to the future,  
applies for a new passport.  
With this amount of macular degeneration,  
near, monster of writers' approaches,  
she wears no spectacles.  
Her mind teeters between Himalayas,  
distant Gobi Desert.  
Running reason through her head for a living,  
yet dancing with the youthful world of Cinderella,  
she plunges deeper near death into Tibetan mysticism,  
trekking across snow covered mountains to Lhasa, Tibet.  
Nighttime rest, sleepy face, peeking out that window crack  
into the nest, those quiet villages below  
tasting a reality beyond her years.

# PAINTED CAT

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON**

This painted cat  
on my balcony  
hangs in this sun,  
bleaches out  
it's wooden  
survival kit,  
cut short-  
then rots  
chips  
paint  
cracks  
widen in joints,  
no infant sparrow wings  
nestled in this hole  
beneath its neck-  
then falls down.  
No longer a swinger  
in latter days, August wind.

# I'M IN THE LANDSCAPE

WRITTEN  
BY **AMY GORDON**

Sally and I walk the dogs on the road  
that runs by the potato field in Gill.  
Only a week ago there was green

as far as the eye could see.  
Now it's dusty, dry, and brown,  
strewn here and there with lumps—

small potatoes with firm, gritty skins,  
palm-sized, like the cell phone  
we bend over to peer at the image

of The Gleaners by Millet:  
bent-over women picking potatoes  
from a field, faces hidden, solitary,

stolid, not like the cluster  
of laughing Quechan women we met  
in Chinchero. They were stamping

potatoes in bare feet,  
faces unafraid of sun  
beneath impervious bowler hats.

Lays Potato Chips owns the field  
we walk in today. Machines  
with tines churn up the earth,

scoop up potatoes by the ton.  
We can't see the river. It runs  
just behind the line of trees.

Once it flooded and fertilized the field.  
Now it's not allowed to overreach its banks—  
a dam controls it. The absence of machines

in Millet's painting makes it nostalgic,  
but I am in the landscape now,  
back bent and sore. The sun is  
hot,

it burns my neck.  
Bending is rote movement,  
not romantic.

# TALK TO ME, VAN GOGH

WRITTEN  
BY **AMY GORDON**

You can tell me anything,  
like about that incident that still shocks us,  
the ear, the razor blade,  
the slice, and then the blood.  
There are theories I could share  
while I find you medication. A pair of glasses  
would make you squint less. You could learn to see  
the sun as it really is, a nearly perfect sphere;  
you could scrape off all those excess dabs of paint  
using the flat side of a dull knife. We could smooth  
out your ups and downs. Or would it be easier  
for me to travel to your time? I'd like to walk  
with you down lanes in southern France,  
nod to Madame so-and-so who hangs sheets  
to dry beneath flowering peach trees.  
Will her round face be creamy and unspoiled,  
even though she has no washing machine,  
is pregnant with her fifth child?  
Is she captive in her landscape,  
making the best of things?



# A CALL FOR 19TH C. PAINTERS

WRITTEN  
BY **AMY GORDON**

Gauguin, we need your women  
standing before palm trees  
in the aftermath of hurricanes,  
a sense of idyll on an island.

Cezanne, come back and paint a landscape  
in oranges and greens, where a mountain top  
emerges on a dry, hot afternoon,  
cicadas racketing, no cars.

Monet, come back, and paint a field  
of poppies, unlinked  
to mercenary farmers, middle men,  
a needle-strewn mattress in a room.

Cezanne, will you paint  
a vivid canvas of guardrails,  
orange and white striped traffic cones,  
a swirled sun beaming off the curves.

Come back and walk with me, Van Gogh,  
even though our meeting might be wordless.  
We could eat a sun-warmed peach,  
meet on the hopeful taste of yellow.

# CUPPA

WRITTEN  
BY **SHANA ROSS**

My son grins and says the microwave only shows hours and minutes when it's being a clock but does seconds when it's cooking so when it appears to be a clock I know it's still counting them, it just keeps them in its head until it's time to tell us. Now is a new minute. Inside, outside, it all makes sense. I am not sure about the counting but I am sure that everything has personality if not a soul, whatever that is, and I will be OK with the singularity for that reason. I reach in for the boiling water to make the tea and a pool gathers next to the mug, impossible to tell yet whether the flaw is in my pour and haste or a crack in the ceramic giving way in this moment. Now, why not now? Everything crumbles on its own schedule, not yours.

# WINTER WISHES

WRITTEN  
BY **ASHLEY TAN**

You peer through the frosted windowpane,  
index finger extending to draw  
diaphanous circles on frosty, damp glass

The once misty world comes into focus:

Blankets of white drape over stockade fences,  
ashen powder lines crumbly bark and brittle branches;  
The cold of December  
has never looked so inviting.

You wish you could leave your mark on the world,  
dotting the snowy sheet with your footprints,  
as you traverse around with your tongue stuck out between chapped lips,  
lapping up every tiny patterned popsicle that the sky has to offer.

You hear a muted squeal of joy break  
the silence of dawn through the pane  
That separates you from an infinitude of insouciance,  
Denying you the innocence and bliss you so desperately crave

You stifle a tired yawn  
Before swivelling back to the lighted screen -  
You finally understand why they say,  
"You don't know what you have until it's taken away."

# ADVICE FROM A TORTOISE

WRITTEN  
BY **ASHLEY TAN**

Poem in response to Advice from a Caterpillar by Amy Gerstler

Although fragile at the start, you will  
get stronger as your bones calcify.

Understand that you are worthy –  
this is why they yearn to hunt for  
your meat and carapace.

Crawl solitarily sometimes,  
but make attempts to find company  
when necessary.

Patience is a virtue,  
but you will learn to master it.

Guard your armour with your life  
for it will serve to  
confuse, shelter, and protect.

Let them cut the chase and  
fight for their place,

But always remember:

Slow and steady wins the race.

# OF GHOSTLY NOTHING

WRITTEN  
BY **DEBASIS MUKHOPADHYAY**

with acknowledgment to “Who” by Sylvia Plath

the ocean there is  
it feels

to despair in  
my harvest of hells  
with wings trussed up  
in remembrance  
words break off  
from the roots

the bent earth  
hangs around in the wind

stopped germanium  
stopped germanium

the glint of gas oven  
slinks up & down  
the flowerpot sky  
i'm  
this  
my  
Blood

to write

to write  
ellipses  
backwards  
knocking on  
the childhood plaster  
a bird will fly

Sylvia sleeps in a hornet's nest

# MY MOTHER'S BREAKING BODY

WRITTEN  
BY **SUSAN RICHARDSON**

I yield to the call of the kitchen, a half-eaten  
dessert and the ache to feel full again.  
The nights have grown pallid in the grip  
of bereavement, my throat hollow and defeated.  
I lean against the dirty counter, shoving  
handfuls of tear stained cake into my mouth,  
fingers crumbling under the weight of despair.  
I stumble over images of my mother's breaking body,  
frail against the grain of hospital sheets that  
carry the scars of pain, the scent of grief.  
Her pleas for death have stained my thoughts.  
The contours of the world are burned by the stench  
of cancer, laughter plucked out of the sky by  
the teeth of terminal disease.  
I fight to hold onto the echo of her fingertips, gently  
pushing back the escaping tendrils of my hair.  
Her touch dissolves into the pulse of a night that  
lives on, even though she has taken her last breath.  
Time escapes through fractures in the fabric  
of my identity and I find myself alone on the floor,  
gorging my emptiness on devil's food.

# SLEEP AND SQUALOR

WRITTEN  
BY **SUSAN RICHARDSON**

Dreams tumble from her fingertips  
as if they never existed, hands turned  
to gravel from year after year of  
mopping up hope with a ravaged rag.  
She breaks into pieces on a ramshackle bed,  
plunges into anguish, sweeping through  
caverns that erupt with echoes of  
fitful sleep and years lived in squalor.  
She burns and melts into reverie, cascading  
over memories trapped in grit and pitch.  
Struggling against the fingers of delusion,  
she explodes out of madness and flows  
gracefully into the mouth of salvation,  
pulled into the belly of sustenance and bone.

# GURU

WRITTEN  
BY **SUSAN RICHARDSON**

I delight in the darkness of 3a.m., alive in a city  
of imposters that hide under the cloaks of angels.

I creep down sidewalks that give away secrets  
of depravity, where slithering starlets thrive  
among the open-handed welcome of men clamoring  
for a cheap thrill under the glow of a marquee.

I write in the shadows of pock marked roads that ache  
with the weight of broken aspirations, crumbling  
under the gaze of billboards emblazoned  
with images of plasticine blondes.

Los Angeles is the city that witnessed my first  
sip of whiskey, the home that calls me back,  
again and again, into the temptation of her embrace.  
She is my guru, my jailer and my unsteady ground.  
She swallows my words and gives me leave  
to wear my masks in peace.



# YOUNG

WRITTEN  
BY **RYAN QUINN FLANAGAN**

Today I am young  
the spirit is back from a long  
fool's sabbatical  
I feel that excitement I once felt  
that elation at what can be done  
the eyes grow wild  
the fingers clack away at an  
old black keyboard  
with many of the symbols  
rubbed off  
the words do not write  
themselves  
they need the fingers,  
the frenzy;  
today I am undeveloped  
things are simple and pure  
and effortless  
back at the  
beginning.

# A SHARE SILENCE

WRITTEN  
BY **RYAN QUINN FLANAGAN**

I walk out into a darkened hall  
and realize there is no one here,  
everything is cold and inanimate  
like a mortuary built to code  
and the silence between my ears  
is a shared silence –  
not even a single cricket in the walls  
to sound the trumpets,  
to raise the sails of sagging spirits,  
and I can't say I am lonely, I have never  
had an affinity for most others;  
it is some strange unnameable feeling  
like kissing spiders on the fangs,  
and it is just a moment, beyond bloodlust  
or derision;  
I would only wish it upon you  
because it matters.

# MY STEPMOM WAS AT TIANANMEN SQUARE

WRITTEN  
BY **RYAN QUINN FLANAGAN**

We follow them out to this breakfast place  
at Victoria Park and Finch  
where the line is out the door

and when we are seated  
it is by the window  
and we all order the breakfast special  
and the bacon is actually crispy  
when you order it that way

and it is then  
that my father finally gets  
my stepmom to tell us about  
how she was at Tiananmen Square,  
how she was married to a Chinese man  
at the time and rode her bicycle many miles  
to get there even though the military  
had warned against it

and how there was a hunger strike,  
but no one thought things would get  
that serious

until all the student protest leaders  
were arrested  
and she lost her bike in the melee  
and had to walk back home

where her now ex-husband was at home  
asleep in bed  
having missed all the action

and then she quit the party  
and moved to the west and became  
a capitalist, my father ribs her.

She elbows him, but it is true.  
We are a party of four according  
to the waitress expecting a tip  
and nothing more.

# THIS IS WHY YOU CAN'T HAVE NICE THINGS

WRITTEN  
BY **RYAN QUINN FLANAGAN**

This man gets in this child's face at the lumber store.

Waving his finger at the kid and saying:  
this is why you can't have nice things.

The child begins to cry.

Apparently he has lost his toy  
and the situation is so grave that now he will never be  
able to have or experience anything nice  
for the remainder of his days.

Like a nice father perhaps.

Instead of this yuppie jackass in front of him.

I feel for the kid.

I once had a father too.

Similar in both mind and expression.

When the embarrassed man sees people looking,  
he lifts the crying child up by the arm  
and carries him out of the store.

Two clucky women looking at lighting fixtures  
will have something to talk about  
for the next three hours.

He has made their day.

# ODE TO THE ATHLETE

WRITTEN  
BY **DAVID MAYERHOFF**

Muscles rippling  
Feet in synchronous motion  
Bodies swimming as fish  
Boxers pulsating with energy and punch

The glory of the match  
Confirms for the athlete  
The agony of the workouts  
As meaningful and worth it all

When the contest is over  
Satisfaction reigns on the winners  
Beyond money or even fame  
That they lived out  
Their potential  
Quieting the demands  
Of their conscience  
With the performance  
Of self sacrifice and endurance

The victor senses  
His life has been redeemed  
From the limitations of nature

He has done something  
That cannot be measured  
By the results alone

Humble in victory speech  
For words can only limit  
The effort grasping  
At infinity

# DIALOGUE OF DESIRE

WRITTEN  
BY **DAVID MAYERHOFF**

The two lovers steal a moment alone  
Expressing their intimacy  
In what is left unsaid  
More than anything spoken

Soft whisperings  
Of times gone by  
Shared moments  
That lifted ocean waves and blew the winds to a howl

The ever so slight  
Turn of the cheek  
Movement of the shoulder  
Sigh of the chest

The brushing of the hair  
Shifting of the body  
The unfinished sentence  
And touching of the hands

Few are these  
Moments in time  
Elegant in importance  
Driving the rest of life  
With purpose, passion  
And the desperation of wanting more

In a flash  
The time has passed  
Gone before the blink of the eye  
Into the day's duties  
The sharing of company  
And the mundane with others

# THE ECSTASY OF ENDURANCE

WRITTEN  
BY **DAVID MAYERHOFF**

We meet the stresses of life  
With a curled tongue  
Forked words  
And labored breathing

In the moment  
Our mind is dulled  
On the strong drink of stress  
The sheer agony  
Of Life's trials  
Muffling our senses  
And good judgment just when needed

Our surround  
Dances the ballet of balancing act  
Just one wrong move  
And we succumb  
Decrepit with age  
Doomed to destruction

The pain in our teeth  
Becomes an ache in our gut  
Which morphs into  
The sore Achilles of our heel

Our heart is elsewhere  
The soul cries out for relief  
And by some miracle of our determination  
We survive, endure and move on

In reflection on this turbulence  
We chew with a sweet savor our bold determination  
That which could not be obtained  
In any other way

# FACES OF LOVE

WRITTEN  
BY **FALEEHA HASSAN**

Faces of love

Do not carry me in your hand  
Like a small bird wet with rain drops  
Love is a traumatic experience  
But I want to live it  
To keep my windows overlooking the lake of the pink dolphins  
When the evening comes  
They will start dancing for me  
And clouds will bunch across the ceiling of my kitchen  
Love is a mysterious experience  
I would like to sing to your photo  
Which I keep under my pillow  
But my voice is not suited for singing  
Even my bed sheets are still laughing  
Whenever I wash the dishes  
And I think of you  
The lather dances between my hands  
Yes, love is dangerous experience  
But I will live it  
Because I'm afraid of continuing my life  
With the furniture trembling  
From the intensity of loneliness



# I WHISPER IN MY ROOM

WRITTEN  
BY **FALEEHA HASSAN**

I whisper in my room  
Why my father  
Every time I asked you to buy a bicycle  
You argued the streets are too narrow?  
Come here please  
Look at the women from my window  
Riding horses, piloting airplanes, Skating, dancing on water sailing boats  
And they are laughing  
Laughing , laughing  
But whenever I tried to smile I got slapped by a war  
Why, my mother  
Whenever I tried to straighten my hair under the sun  
You plaited it while it was still dewy?  
Why my father, why, my mother  
Whenever I painted a butterfly on the wall you made it fly?  
Come here,  
Look at the hearts  
They have wings and they are singing

# I'M CRYING

WRITTEN  
BY **FALEEHA HASSAN**

I'm crying

Not because you squeezed my heart and threw it like a sponge into desert

Yes, I'm crying but not because you did not smile at me

but your teeth look whiter than white when you saw a woman's shadow pass you

Yes, I'm crying but not because you are completely healed and no longer need my whisper to sleep

Not because you dedicated all the poems you wrote to me

To another woman and she stupidly believed you

I'm crying but not because I threw my pillow and I will be Watchful all my life without you,

Yes, I'm crying deeply

because the Ice cream has melted before I got home and I didn't enjoy eating it

# ON THE BUS

WRITTEN  
BY **FALEEHA HASSAN**

On the bus  
On the back seat  
She sat close to him  
And he was trying to reduce the distance between them  
But her bag was there  
Made from leather  
Filled with papers with a lot of accumulated talk  
Her magazines, many different pens  
Colored pencils, eyeliner, lipsticks, and markers  
And some addresses of her friends....  
A heavy obstacle near him  
The pores of his body yearned for a simple meeting  
But for that bag  
Infusing the place with heavy worry

# MY MOTHER WAS LYING

WRITTEN  
BY **FALEEHA HASSAN**

My mother was lying  
When my father was wearing a military uniform  
And went out before sunrise  
So, no one could see him  
My mom kept smiling for the length of his absence  
So, we didn't see her choking back tears  
And when we missed him  
She told us  
He is going to return the meaning to our map  
We thought he was a cartographer  
And when my father returned without an arm  
She told us  
He gave his arm to the homeland  
And the homeland gave him a medal  
We didn't know the meaning of war  
Until we grew up  
That like plastic bottles  
The tyrants had recycled our lives during their many war  
Now I understand  
Why my mom was lying  
And why when my father returned from the war  
He didn't recognize his face in the mirror

# **SPEED**

**WRITTEN  
BY FALEEHA HASSAN**

Speed

When the first war is ended

Men proceeded to search and during

The exhumation from under moldy stacks

They found him

They said: We will return the spirit to his skeleton

But the Whistle screamed

To announce the next war

The pages of History are shaking

And because speed is required

They Sew his face of the reverse

Therefore

From that moment

My Dad walks toward the back

# SOLDIER

WRITTEN  
BY **FALEEHA HASSAN**

Soldier

Don't dance on the Danube river

It is filled with flies

Don't smile to the flowers

The flies come to them from the corpses left in the open air

Don't look to the sky

It is strangulated with smoke

Just

Take off your dream from your head

Close your eyes

And walk in the road

The war wrote your name on the list of death

# LISTEN TO ME

WRITTEN  
BY **FALEEHA HASSAN**

Listen to me

Hurry up

Go to him

Slip your name into his artery

Do that

Or

You will find yourself foolishly

sitting like an old couch next to an empty chair

it's based on curtain draped

over a silent window It has no connection of the life

# WHAT COLOUR?

WRITTEN  
BY **RAJANI RADHAKRISHNAN**

What colour is a fallen leaf in the dark? I watched him measure libations of water and sesame seeds, chanting under his

breath. It was Amavasya, the period of the dark moon, the time for sacred rituals for the dead. The silver spoon trembled in his

wrinkled hand. How many times had he sat there at the appointed hour, remembering grandpa, and great-grandpa who wasn't even a

photograph, just a pixelated memory of a twirled moustache and great coat, a man who had predicted that the British would not

last the summer. His son met my eyes from a row of framed pictures, an almost frown, disapproving of my slouched incongruence. The oil

lamp spilt its liquid fire on brass bowls of vermilion and turmeric, stark against his snow white hair. When had he aged so much? When

had the carmine and gamboge of his fleeing autumn become so cold to my touch. What colour exactly is death in the morning?



# PAIN IS A PATIENT LOVER

WRITTEN  
BY **RAJANI RADHAKRISHNAN**

No, keep that soft rain that reminisces against the window  
pane like the tinkling of wine glasses, keep that sky, sparkling

in the froth of kinetic light, that wind slipping through the trees  
in timeless laughter, keep your dazzling festivity, that universe

dancing slowly to the rhythm of your faithlessness, what can I  
say about a firmament in which even an implosion of celestial

inconsequence is a ballad of colour and sound? I will grow your  
absence in the silent darkness of my grief, you know that too is

a petri dish of amorphous life. Pain is a patient lover who begs  
celebration in solitude, long after the histrionics have paled,

when the masks hang from a silver hook, when the memories  
stain open lips and the black curtain has uncurled in a whisper.

# THROUGH THE KITCHEN WINDOW

WRITTEN  
BY **RAJANI RADHAKRISHNAN**

Then the point comes when you know you can't save  
it, it will break and crumble and drown in the milk and

that last cookie, the murky outline of that inevitability  
will forever remain the memory of the night it began to

end. You know I never liked this table, the stripes the  
morning sun paints on the teak through the blinds, it is

better, out on the steps, less interrupted, less incomplete,  
the odd crow wondering if it is welcome while you wave

a rolled newspaper over tea and biscuits, saving us from  
the flies. Alone, wrapped in your old parka, I see a half-

moon dissolve in the blackened sky bowl, somewhere your  
fingers hold the other piece, rain dripping off its uneven

edge. Silver swirls begin to fill the air as the light mixes,  
changes, till that point when you know you can't save it.

# STILL A WEED

WRITTEN  
BY **RAJANI RADHAKRISHNAN**

there she was, reading a Murakami,  
the light arranging itself carefully around her young  
shoulders, iced tea sweating, waiting for no one,  
expecting no one, no phone, no ring,  
just a fragment of consciousness filling the now,

I let the years run through my hands like grain,  
knowing I had seen too much, seen nothing,  
and somehow they were both the same,  
you see, a weed that survives the storm  
is still a weed, maybe there were warnings, little wind chimes  
that repeated requiems in every breeze, but I wasn't listening,  
not until I had heard too much, or heard nothing, and  
both began to sound the same, all this time,  
as if we have been walking too far, too much,  
always reaching a fork, always taking different paths,  
still walking together, walking apart,

I can see her, the draft from the air conditioner  
pulling her hair, shifting slightly as she turns a page,  
she reads slowly, I say to myself, trying to forget,  
a book that survives that pace is not the same book,  
as though I remember everything, remember  
nothing and somehow here, alone, reading together,  
reading apart, both feel exactly the same.

# WHERE THE TELEPHONE LIVED

WRITTEN  
BY **AMY GORDON**

We lived in a child's painting, in a red house  
perched on a hill, blue lake, yellow sun,  
and every morning my cousin and I ran  
into our grandmother's bedroom,  
kissed her chalky cheeks, then crouching,  
stirred up little suns inside the dark cave  
of her fireplace, while next to her bed,  
the great sun burned rituals into the seams  
of the house, into the cracks of carrying beams.  
Light bounced off the watery parking lot  
for human toys, while underneath smooth hulls,  
sunfish swam. Secrets shared during underwater  
tea-parties bubbled to the top. Ageless, we played,  
not suspecting we were aging. One night after  
skinny-dipping, dark lake meeting unwary skin,  
we slipped into the house wrapped only in towels  
when our grandmother's New York  
friend happened to run into us in the back room  
where the telephone lived—that tall man who brought gifts,  
told corny jokes, who everyone said was good  
with children, and as we stood there,  
my cousin's brown pudgy toes sweetly met  
the pine boards, and his burning glance, pine knots  
as witness, blistered into us.

# THE NY TIMES SAYS WORDS ARE DISAPPEARING, BEING REPLACED BY IMAGES

WRITTEN  
BY **AMY GORDON**

Where are the words going?  
Is someone burning them,  
like the trash my parents incinerated  
in a wire basket behind our house,  
giving rise to an acrid smell,  
or are they being heaped  
like the piles of leaves  
on the grassy common  
where I became a seeker,  
not wishing to hide but to hunt like Orion  
with his three-star studded belt.  
I'd count slowly  
while Lee and Bobby, Cindy and Kathy  
ran into the woods away from me.

Or do words  
like meerschaum and prodigious  
now live in caves,  
burly guards protecting them  
from the seekers? Away from the light  
do they turn pale and brittle?  
Think of it! All those words  
in the extreme quiet of a cave,  
and soon the world inside our minds  
will grow quiet, too.

When words disappear  
where do our apologies go, and our prayers?  
Cindy, I'm sorry I stole your knife.  
Please God, for Lee, keep cancer at bay.

When words disappear  
how will I write of the rustle of snake  
as we walked past asters and goldenrod  
on the way to school,  
or the man we came upon  
sitting alone on a wall  
singing a song beneath oaks and maples?

When words are gone,  
will I draw a picture  
of my friends scattering  
like stars as the universe expands,  
me counting to one hundred,  
my face against the bark  
of the Counting Tree?

Will you be able to tell  
that those of us who played  
on the grassy common  
formed a constellation?  
And will you see  
how time is always stilled between the finding  
of a secret space and being found,  
and how confident I was  
that I would find my friends,  
hiding behind boulders,  
laughing in the ferns?

When words are gone,  
how will you know  
that every night  
in my house on the hill  
I'd lie in my bed, listening  
to the tick of the radiator,  
seeking my dreams?

# PLANTING TIME

WRITTEN  
BY **AMY GORDON**

Birds flock, sow seeds  
Seeds germinate sprout  
seeds to seedlings  
spindly frail things  
She finds herself growing in the bully field  
scared of crows  
owls, hawks, pigeons  
hoot, scree, coo  
Give her a grown-up comb.  
She can't tell clock time.  
Never learned to tie school shoes.  
She keeps mind open  
to insects, paints in primary colors.  
Owls numb numbers.  
Hawks dive for the heart.  
Pigeons pick peck titter tut.  
No anger allowed stutter stutter  
Tie up that tongue  
What do you think she will bear?  
Impulsive red roses  
depression blue-bells  
ringing in sorrow sorrow sorrow  
yellow-bellied sap  
sucking dreams  
  
or  
passionate red out-of-the-box  
scent-drenched blue, sincere hyacinth  
and tall, bright yellow flowers face to the sun  
pollen laden anthers spilling seeds

# AFTER THE BLIZZARD

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHAEL BROSNAN**

Direction — an ache in the bones,  
the want of a hand on a loved one's hip.

Night. The lingering hieroglyphics  
of snuffed out candles.

The coal-glow of a spent wood fire.  
The last gust-creaks of structure —

the passing storm's sotto voce grace notes  
played to stinging perfection —

while out there  
the snow-ghosted land

holds its breath,  
mum tongue to the roof of its mouth.

All around, we feel it,  
the shaken will of bendable things

shutting down, slouching to half-shadow.  
Wind, time, the generosity of spirit,

one's ability to whisper or sigh —  
huddling now and hushed. Nothing

to do  
but wait,

and imagine the morning  
and the announcement that must come —

a blush of light, the tip of a branch  
rising against the white weight,

a cautious step at the edge of the field,  
some soft, low, wild cry  
that tells us  
it's all right to resume.



# THE SLOPE OF EVENING

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHAEL BROSNAN**

1.

My father, he's telling me  
the nurses are trying to kill him,  
with poison.

We're in his hospital in Cooperstown  
in a small room overlooking the swift,  
clear beginnings of the Susquehanna.

After a coughing fit, his eyes  
search the room until he finds mine,  
tell me in a drowning whisper to drive  
around back, wait until the nurses change shifts;  
then we are to wheel him out, hitch the bed  
to the bumper of the Country Squire  
we no longer own. He wants us  
to tow him the 150 miles home.

This is our rock speaking.  
This is the man who always made the world  
seem like a safe place, or manageable,  
if you know how to move through it with wit.

You should have seen our faces,  
later that night, when we viewed  
his still, breathless body,  
the nurse removing the last  
of the needles from his spent arms.

2.

Last year, my son got his driver's license,  
his first girlfriend, his first car accident  
and his first break up.

Can we talk about the straying angels  
and the mysterious ways of God?

When he's in a gentle mood, my son  
calls me Pa. I call him Son.  
But mostly he's gone these days,  
driving off in his rust-flaked teen truck  
at the first invitation to shape some  
crooked pathway in the anyplace  
of near-pure immediacy.

3.

My silent prayer of love:

Oh, Saints What and Whomever,  
patrons of those unhitched  
by one instinctive twitch  
after another, bend and whisper  
kind words to all children  
set adrift in your maelstrom of years.  
Let them find their moments,  
range far, but turn near.

4.

It's 1945 and my father has to take a crap so bad.  
Bogies strafe the carrier.

A passing typhoon has churned up everything.  
All the men are doing their part.

It's one of those days, if you insist on honor  
you insist on death.

In the stall, finding no toilet paper,  
my father pulls up his pants, curses the Japanese empire.

When he's three strides out the door,  
a bomb strike obliterates the head, sends him airborne.

After the battle, shattered planes awash in the sea,  
smoke curling up from damaged ships,

exhausted, still-alive men to shocked to feel,  
my father, half-concussed and bleeding, drops

his soiled pants overboard.  
They hit the water silently,

disappear  
in the ship's broad wake.

5.  
It's funny how alone one can feel  
in a room, riding the slope of evening.

The light is fading without comment or care.  
And I'm think about the sea...  
The way we ride upon it.  
The way it's rising.

I put the kettle on the stove,  
heating the water for tea.  
Toni Morrison's book, *Beloved*  
was named the best book of the past 25 years.  
Twenty-five years ago my son was born.

In those early months, I jogged with him up and down  
the stairs in the middle of the night  
trying to sooth his colic, aiming

to take away the deep pain and sadness —  
that he might know love and swim some day  
with the pure joy of being alive  
on this galactic pinprick of a planet.

Out the window this evening,  
a cardinal sings to the dying light.  
Out the window, the burning bush is still turning  
in the darkening shade of the house.  
The last of the sunlight angles in, stroking the treetops,  
before the sky shifts from gray blue to gray.  
A cat slips past, eyes the cardinal.  
The water for tea is boiling.  
I pour it into a cup.

Over the past 25 years,  
only three of the books I've read  
have made it onto the "best" books list.

It's OK. I suppose I want it that way —  
to explore the back eddies of our culture.

My son is getting married soon.  
Soon he'll own a dog and a house,  
know the long slog of daily work.

The sea is rises...

Did you know that once,  
all that was left of the hominids  
was a small band?  
We almost didn't make it.

I miss my father.  
Although he lived by the water,  
I never saw him get in a boat.

6.  
On a rare day, my son and I visit a museum,  
stare at Rothko rectangles: those signature  
abstract variations in oil, acrylic, egg.  
Rothko abandoned titles after a while.  
Said, as if speaking broadly through a brush,

“Silence is so accurate....” He never

mentioned the hints of luminosity  
in the subtly combating colors.

But surely he knew. Surely he knew  
that each piece was as much mirror as art,  
as much want as truth. Horizons of the mind  
morphing into horizons of the mind.  
Penetrable. Impenetrable. Penetrable.

Such art is easy to love and not know what one loves.

I say something about the orange rim  
in a piece titled Untitled (1953) — the way  
the orange rises, a kind of bright menace giving way  
to black-violet and black, which is, as always,  
anything. I say

I love the way each rectangle has its own kind of sheen.  
I know I mean it because I wait expectantly for response.

We get a pricy lunch in the cafeteria,  
talk about music and the funny thing his friends  
have done with all that old stuff in the barn.

7.

I know my father worked hard for his paycheck.  
I know he went to church.

I know he needed his space to think.

In his college photograph, he has  
a different middle name than the one  
I knew him by. There's a story there.  
He didn't tell me any stories.

8.

Ninety-eight percent of our thoughts are repeats.  
Eighty percent of those repeated thoughts are negative.

Our margins are drawn in charcoal.

9.

An owl speaks out  
on the subject of courage,  
deep in the woods.  
It is the only sound.

A boy and his father and his  
father's father stand close  
while all around them  
maple flowers sweep down.

Together they descend  
into the understory,  
to a tangle of wild grapevine  
toward the cocksure call.

What they want  
is to solve little mysteries  
together, with words  
as simple as gestures.

# AT CHARLIE MANN'S ALL-PRO GRILL

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHAEL BROSNAN**

It does no good to look for what you want to see.

I know. I do it, too, and too often, and too often  
I'm looking straight through

time again — and again I'm lost.

This is the story:

I'm sitting alone at the bar  
at Charlie Mann's All-Pro Grill at an airport  
in Washington, DC.

Alone with a cheeseburger and draft beer  
in this other-crowded restaurant —

And I see you walking by,  
After all these years,

And you are at peace, of course,  
And you've aged well, of course,  
And, of course, you turn my way,

After all these years,  
As if you expect to see me.

It does no good to look for what you want to see —

to see you in some passing-through place,  
where we'll talk again, as we once did.

Pick up that last conversation.  
and carry it forward in seamless stride.

With a bit of leisure and patience, two people  
can believe they have a lifetime to shape.

Until they don't.

At Charlie Mann's All-Pro Grill at the airport  
in Washington, DC,

You turn and see me  
And gather up the tangled nest  
Of intervening years  
In the phrasing of a small gesture.

Except that it's not you.

I couldn't make this true. I watch  
the not-you disappear into the crowd,  
then turn to the steady hubbub of strangers.

My neighbor at the bar is hungrily devouring his burger.

I order another beer — a stout I'll drink slowly.

# ROT IN CAMOUFLAGE

WRITTEN  
BY **JOHN CASEY**

the worst thing you can do  
is to search for happiness  
you won't ever find it that way

when you think you have  
you find out later  
it's something else  
an imposter  
all dressed up  
pretty and posing

it will avoid the light  
but eventually you will see  
sick and decay revealed  
beneath an apocryphal cloak  
your spirit wilts  
and you turn to look elsewhere  
only to discover  
the next wonderful thing  
is also just  
rot in camouflage

after a time  
you grow weary  
of searching  
and rechannel your spirit  
to embrace life as it comes  
only then does happiness sidle up behind  
and tap you on the shoulder



# REAL

WRITTEN  
BY **JOHN CASEY**

I felt cheated when you got in the car  
all the pleasantries and mandatory talk  
got in the way  
what I wanted to say had to wait  
and oh god the traffic

but at least one genuine thing  
came out of it  
when i played that song i like  
and you liked it too  
or at least you said you did  
but my friend with problems kept calling  
even after we arrived  
to meet the others  
and there were formalities  
with folks brainstorming and talking all around  
serious and businesslike

cheated again, why can't we just talk?  
and with you sitting there  
acting ten years older than you look  
all i could do was just smile

again in the car with the traffic  
you bent the pages of my book  
showing me where to read and what was best  
that was real  
that was what i wanted

# WHY

WRITTEN  
BY **JOHN CASEY**

every action has an effect  
every effect, a cause  
there is a why for everything

but then...  
is why the same as cause?  
is there a reason  
wherever there is a cause?  
does reason  
lose its validity  
when emotions run hot or high?  
when people are  
foolish or  
insane or  
stupid or  
in love?

who cares

go ahead, get all caught up in it  
see where that gets you  
better to ask yourself  
does it matter?  
if the answer is no  
Then

stop.

sometimes, there is no why

# SLUMBER

WRITTEN  
BY **ALISON O'CONNOR**

I can feel my heartbeat under the blankets  
I wish it were quiet like the rest of me

I have to do things 'one-mindfully'  
Every day and that means staying

In the moment even though I want  
To avoid all moments and all things

Sometimes I miss the hospital  
Even if the hospital had bad food

My therapist says it was a vacation  
But I don't feel like it's much vacation

When you're in a hospital  
It's not much vacation

The last vacation I took  
Was to New York City

My whole family and I  
Drove there and back

# MY FATHER MY FUTURE DAUGHTER

WRITTEN  
BY **LUC COOPER**

I can see my father's rage within me  
now I get it  
it's hard to keep calm when nobody listens

I can see how my hands shake  
its subtle now  
but like my father and my grandfather  
I can only see quivering hands in my future

how many names can I hold?  
is three too many?  
is there a legacy to uphold?  
"No" says my future daughter  
I'm ok with it  
she doesn't need to hold more weight  
just because more people existed  
before her

# SUN AND FOG

WRITTEN  
BY **LUC COOPER**

she was the setting sun  
soft and innocent in its slow decent below the horizon  
and I was the fog lingering on the flatland  
born in the cool air  
waiting until she rises again

# COUGHING

WRITTEN  
BY **LUC COOPER**

my hometown  
is made of kicked up dust  
from those that ran away

who don't care  
that they leave the ones who stay  
coughing

# DROWN

WRITTEN  
BY **LUC COOPER**

those damning complications  
that hold our heads in buckets  
of our own fears  
technicalities like tentacles  
wrap us tight as our last breath  
floats to the surface  
as seamless little bubbles

# MIDNIGHT DRIVE

WRITTEN  
BY **LUC COOPER**

light fog kissing the night air  
orange street lamps  
corpses of a long forgotten sunset  
hanging above our tortured earth  
sending beams of healing light  
cascading down  
but dissipating before it can embrace  
the cold highway.



# MAGIC HOUR

WRITTEN  
BY **NAOMI SCOVILLE**

we were a polaroid that summer—  
sun drunk smiles blurring the  
corners of the half-finished  
three-by-three mural.  
you said you loved me under  
cross-stitched stars and the tick  
of fireflies, tongue curled  
around the words like the first  
peach of summer.  
i believed you in the curve of your neck  
and the scar by your eyebrow,  
underneath the cry of the whippoorwill.  
magic hour you called it,  
flocks of cicadas spinning phrases—  
the leaving sound—  
but you stayed, wheel-spoke ankle hooked  
around mine.  
listen, you said, and we lay, quiet,  
breathing to the lonely song of mimics.

# 9636 WILSON ROAD

WRITTEN  
BY **NAOMI SCOVILLE**

The wind snapped the Sugar Maple in two the morning I left,  
silencing branches that scratched  
my bedroom window for three years, quartered close.

The first day, I wrote my name in the closet and called the place  
home, the word sticky on my tongue. It was the second  
white house, second blue bedroom with cracked

walls and someone else's scent. The third night, my sister cracked  
her knuckles and played music too loudly. Mom pushed left-  
over new-church casserole into plastic containers and second  
guessed the kitchen cupboards. Dad hunched between boxes and scratched  
out his first-Sunday sermon, Bible verses as place  
holders. I laid puzzle pieces end over end, ocean splotches and close-

knit sand grains on the yellow carpet, tucked close  
to a box marked fragile and The Holy Bible, worn spine cracked  
and peeling. Did Jesus ever feel out of place?

The fifth night, I tattooed here on my left  
wrist with a shard of broken picture frame; scratched  
my name over the radial artery, a question mark above my second

knuckle. The sixth day brought a church welcome line and second  
hand compliments, folded between pocketbooks and close  
minded hymnals. Old women who smelled of cough drops scratched  
my dress sleeve with cherry nails. I showed teeth and examined the cracked  
Virgin Mary in stained glass. She had been left  
behind too, her place

always next to the manger. The twenty-eighth night I lost my place  
on the pages of Neruda and stopped counting days. I counted ticks of the second  
hand instead, slept wrist to ear with my metronome lullaby. I left  
origami cranes in library books, cafes, the jacket pocket of a woman tucking her baby close,  
shivering against the icy day. At night I cracked  
open my bedroom window and listened to the wind sigh. I scratched

a leaving letter on the closet door with permanent marker, black. Branches scratched  
the window and I wrote apologies on post-its, hid them under place  
mat corners, smoothing them over the scarred table, lined and cracked  
from decades of dinners. I tried the front door twice. The second  
time the knob gave, and I closed  
it behind me, walked the sidewalk to the street, turned left

at the stoplight blinking Morse code. The wind snapped wires and trees the morning I left,  
shook angry branches and scratched my ears. Shutters held their houses close.

# BUY ONE GET ONE FREE

WRITTEN  
BY **NAOMI SCOVILLE**

they were playmates, first.

he negotiated with apple blossoms

and she stomped in puddles with yellow boots

and made friends with the worms

wriggling into chinks in mud walls.

on her twenty-fifth birthday he gave her diamonds

and promised a house made of glass. she lined

the windowsills with basil and coriander, tarragon and mint,

rescued garden slugs

and sang lullabies to the peach tree.

later, he drank whiskey with identical suits

who carried identical ballpoint pens in their pockets.

she wrote her name in salt on the kitchen table

and dreamed in grocery store aisles

in front of soup can sculptures and unspilled milk.

# THE IMAGE OF MY MUSE'S ROUSING

WRITTEN  
BY **JOHN ROBINSON**

I write until trying fails, each attempt begins to blur,  
these un-built words come tumbling down.  
My intuition has made another curse  
as letters then return like rotted wood to ground.  
Those fundamental moods of measure, absent in a cloud  
always insist upon that old, iambic curse;  
that cheap disagreement of all intemperate crowds.  
Standing out from language, subtle suicide in verse.  
I'll make words like climbing fire, or as butterflies ascend.  
Only in dead calm, I feel this truth within in my bones,  
such writ should penetrate the essence, defend  
life's redacted thoughts that only I have known.  
I alone correct the flaw with no ciphered meaning shown.  
Instead, imbalance balanced, as if all of thought were May,  
in one image or a word, of all these infinite knowns—  
language is the only image of my muse's rousing way.

# WHEN THE WIND WON'T STOP

WRITTEN  
BY **BELLA PORI**

Streets slick with rain and  
jacket collars pulled up  
against the driving wind.  
The frantic energy of the city  
moves like a heartbeat  
slight drum beats  
filter outside and streetlights  
illuminate pools of light  
where no one lingers too long.  
City of secrets and shadows  
and whispers in the rain  
No melody tonight  
just steady drumbeat  
pushing us all out into the unknown  
where dark streets are  
preferable to lonely apartments.

# HIGH STREET

WRITTEN  
BY **BELLA PORI**

What if everyone knew of red wine nights  
at the top of Brooklyn,  
soaked in a story that only shows up three glasses in.

It's late enough here that the borough  
only needs one train  
to take home girls who stayed out too late  
the man who sells essential oils after the sun goes down  
couples entwined in each other's arms  
and other wayward cityfolk  
who have no business being out at this hour

Breathe deep from the air that filters in from the river  
the tunnel that has seen better days  
and let the cycle of a hurricane  
rush you back to higher ground

# CHILDLESS INNOCENCE

WRITTEN  
BY **NATHAN MAYES**

I want to build my family  
by design, not by accident  
so I fear pleasure

I could be a Hutterite  
and double my population  
over six times

in a hundred years  
I could be stable enough  
to support my unborn

children are terrifying  
to think about raising  
when I can't lift myself

from my nothingness  
my fear crawls out  
like a baby slipping

on the hardwood floor  
my tears leave a stain  
until they fade away

my fear reaches up to me



# BRANDED

WRITTEN  
BY **NATHAN MAYES**

We held hands  
inside the fire,  
charred our hands  
the color of charcoal.

My ring melted  
my skin with its  
conducted heat.

My bones cracked,  
my ring held them  
together.

# PARKLAND

WRITTEN  
BY **CORY TOLLEFSON**

I was robbed of my youth. In my youth  
I was mugged while my father watched, watched  
us get shot  
out of the chapel (as it were) by a canon.

The Flocks  
(gathered on the hill) muttered sheepish prayers;  
now they say they want to arm the teachers—  
maybe pay them  
extra, give them bonuses for our salvation.

In God We Trust  
bandoliered like graffiti in Florida  
school cafeterias—a reminder to trust  
He who does not trust us.

Thoughts and prayers enjamb  
our country until another tragedy demands  
their undivided attention— history  
is a living echo (the sound of gunshot now)  
deafening our peaceful, golden prairies  
(the pen is mightier than the assault weapon,  
but blood stains  
in English classrooms  
reject our holy aphorism).

So we politely ask  
if something may be done;  
So our leaders politely ask our God  
If maybe he could, please, save our children,  
when maybe he ain't so busy  
with all His blessing of America?

# ONE NIGHT STAND

WRITTEN  
BY **CORY TOLLEFSON**

The swing set of her eyes  
were the swirling  
starless centers  
of galaxies;

an immaculate void,  
a violin  
without a violinist.

Below sat blood  
red tulips, churning  
(glib and moist),  
contemplating  
bloom,  
and sure enough,  
spread.

Where would be a neck  
stood a grumpy  
old curmudgeon,  
a walking stick,  
too many years  
wandering the foothills  
for sane conversation.

The condor  
of her collarbone  
shone a glow  
-in-the-dark pentagram,

a guiding light  
for those  
long dark, those

who so long for God  
they got lost,  
and in so losing  
came to a similar  
enough conclusion.

Likewise  
her shoulders  
were two  
opposing factions,  
ambulated  
by the same  
internal mechanisms,

given life  
by the singular  
spring of nature;  
their violence  
Evidenced

by the blades  
they always keep  
beneath them.

The small of her back  
was some poor Atlantis;  
glittered with a siren  
song so tempting  
God  
would do us  
a favor to keep her lost

to history, to let  
only insane pilgrims  
pin a Mecca  
to her beauty.

Beside lay hips  
like chubby kings,  
with woeful rule to all they see.

Her legs but minarets  
reversed, calling all  
to come bow  
before her;

the Corinthian  
capital another set  
of lips—  
churning (glib  
and moist),

contemplating bloom,  
and sure enough,  
spread, into  
an immaculate void—

Stupid conqueror  
that I am,

I went in.

# SLEIGHT OF HAND

WRITTEN  
BY **R.G. MILLER**

Fat fingers undulate  
But the show hand's out to left  
He's speaking that way, too

He has a novel way of smiling  
It stops right where it should  
But you don't notice that

If you did, you'd miss the fingers  
Now they've crossed the other hand  
And the palm conceals as it's disclosed

Now comes the pause, the wink, the flash  
Come down like lightning, up like ash  
Oh! The sceptic flaps his lips

As the right hand comes beneath his nose  
The trick surrenders what it owes  
But the palm's revealed less than it holds

# THIS INCH OF GROUND

WRITTEN  
BY **RICARDO ZEGRI**

I want to be burned  
when I go.  
Into the fire, laid on the ground  
with October leaves.  
Licked wet till the ash is drawn  
and quartered  
    like the limbs they once were.

To become the opossum  
who laid there  
rotting  
last winter; fish bones  
sunk to the bottom,  
when this was a river,  
    when this was a sea.

I want to find my brothers there,  
homogenized as a speck  
in a long line of specks  
to join the story of this inch of ground.  
No less glorious than an inch of battlefield  
an inch of heaven  
    an inch of barroom.

I am moved  
for concrete foundations.  
I am moved  
in a truck, a dozen miles  
thrown in a pile, in a bag  
thrown on the ground, in a garden  
    by a house, small and yellow, like my own.

To push at the roots  
of an heirloom  
soaked with hose water,  
where bright red clown noses grow  
full of seeds and acid.  
Until winter death comes  
    and I am blown,  
  
or dug up again to make room.  
Still,  
I am part of that garden,  
part of that forest,  
that fire.  
I am part of that concrete world  
    where words die young

# THE OLD MAN IS SNORING

WRITTEN  
BY **RICARDO ZEGRI**

*“Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!  
You cataracts and hurricanoes...”*

Lear's mind turns to water,  
a lone drop gathering courage,  
for a suicide leap  
from the edge of heaven.  
A perfect crystal screaming  
towards the patchwork,  
growing squalid with each tumble  
through the cotton ball sky.  
To crash violently on the sidewalk,  
painting a circle of darker gray.  
A mirror of clear blood,  
pores soused,  
to the heart of the stone. Desperate  
brothers and sisters jump  
after by dozens,  
then thousands,  
keeping the stairs wet until morning.  
Why flee heaven so quickly?  
Are the harps out of tune?  
Are the stories of angels so dull?  
The fool sings an answer:

*“He that has and a little tiny wit—  
With heigh-ho, the wind and the rain—  
Must make content with his fortunes fit,  
For the rain it raineth every day.”*

# A PAINTED ABSTRACT

WRITTEN  
BY **TASS HOLMES**

Age eleven I sang opera like a pro,  
fifteen, I learned guitar, a la Joan Baez, and painted abstracts,  
loved that boy from highschool.

Eighteen I quit antibiotics –  
at the kitchen table, holding my head, what could fix my chronic sinusitis?  
knowing somehow, there'd be something better.

Twenties, I studied  
art, vegetarianism, yoga, massage, kinesiology, homeopathy, herbs, nutrition,  
worked, bits and pieces, in clinic, and had babies.

Later, sole parenting,  
I bought a place in the country, using years of unpaid child support  
as down-payment.

Then stuck, I loved the bush, the snowy mountains,  
the river rockpools, struggled with distances to town, school buses, roads,  
local shops and friendships, but no work.

Years at uni, eventually a PhD,  
the middle year I would interview poor people about complementary medicine

- they couldn't afford private-sector practitioners.
- 

I'd been busy, reading, summarising, writing reports,  
so I promised to attend, for interest, my friend's new poetry/songwriting group  
in the local township.

First night, half-hour late,  
nervous, like everyone else, I sat, waited ... and one by one, carefully,  
we shared, in poems, talk, and original songs ...



One's friend died of cancer, her ex-hubby has it now;  
one's bad luck in finding love since divorce; one's house burnt down in bushfires,  
now living in a truck, draws landscapes in blue biro.

One wants support for her gender reassignment, the operation  
in one month, in Asia; one's exploring 'freedom' from the confines of defacto  
partnering, and child-rearing; another fell in love; one is afraid.

One has written the most beautiful song  
ever sung – about honey bees, but leaves early – for a disabled son; one survived  
cancer herself, and sings songs to make everyone cry.

One's husband, blind from attempted suicide, plays beautiful  
ocarina. And the paper I write tells how poor people make themselves well, how they  
express their process, in poetry, songs, community, and friendships.

# IT WAS THE HAIR

WRITTEN  
BY **TASS HOLMES**

He did look a bit like a council worker, that large 4WD, full-gloss and white, intent in expression there in the driver's seat, clipboard an imagined accessory.

I'd scoped him already, sitting, as I pulled into a squash of spilled potting mix strewn in the muddy clay beneath a silver wattle, not flowering this time of year.

The river was a cleaned-up rush of new water over sedge-grass, brief days only since the rain stopped, and I wanted the lush grass from the bank, ripped by hand,

Stuffed in bags to feed the animals. But flaying around, I couldn't get a grip, feeling a bit stupid and clumsy with the viney tough rhizomes, resistant, unwieldy, and mud

In the bag, on my hands and clothes, walking around for a better grip, maybe further over here, and what's he looking at? found myself confronted, suddenly staring

At collapsed grotesque bones of an animal carcass, with all the obvious possibilities running through my mind. A girl? No, sacrum and hips are too narrow. Large dog

Or a pig maybe, or a small cow, with all that thick hair? He's coming over to me, hunching his tallness to my diminution, stands beside me in the African grass:

'Two girls were here, before. Doing the same thing. As you.' Also getting grass? An unspoken assent. So what do I think? Do I suppose? Well no I don't

know, I have to leave actually, I'm afraid of contagion too, pondering who's spread this stuff around in the grass, I can't feed it to my animals now... 'There's more

Here'. He shows me badly decomposed bodies slumped, slimy after heavy rain, large bones without flesh, and the thick mats of hair, skieved off, shaved, not fixed

To leather. I finally settle on a Shetland pony, saddest aspect the clean saw lines through hind leg bones, not far beneath narrow hips of a four-leg standing grazer,

Just too old for the cold winter, sidestepping thoughts of a horror kill, only some lazy farmer, with nowhere to dispose of a carcass. But why a Shetland? It was the hair.

# SOMETIME BETWEEN TIME - BROZ- ANNA

WRITTEN  
BY **TASS HOLMES**

**Hand print**\_sometime between time finding in time  
no companionship beside that sudden unpredictable  
minstrel; watching people walking gently inside vision like the ebb and flow of  
some far tide and pigeons fall out of the sky patchworked on it  
instead of falling leaves.

**The city square**\_buses growling and rumbling  
somewhere a cricket; night not far distant, hidden behind pale blue  
silver-grey, a shimmer of a sky\_A man stands motionless  
contrasts this city picture perhaps placing flaking shell fragments  
from my image behind his weary glasses  
he leaves me alone, rubbing and scraping, till clear white  
is revealed beneath\_No restful darkness for this one.

**Bridge water**\_time, as if so many broken shards  
of holographic mirror, can never be separated, never joined; if I write a poem  
of my own time ... is it gone ... \_Under between a menacing black the row of shining  
motorbike wasps and this flatspace of weary grass and footsteps\_The black faded  
centre of avoid is present – right here – inside white lines, beneath  
mechanical velocities.

**Parisienne townhouse**\_a life lived half balanced, on a corner  
at the bottom of a steep hill, leafy dappled with streetlight in the night, on the rise of  
the footpath, where you can slow up after letting go of the brakes; secrets could be  
kept, tangling over philosophy, we think we understand, soaking it up, something  
to do with the age-group\_You know what it means, I don't but you can't  
tell me because I don't know what it means.

**Winding**\_this life, words appearing  
in droplets, textured like that, burnished; pain has a palpable sound\_It's  
like carbohydrate crunchiness, it's like a clock, it's like a thing dragged over  
the metal windings and back again\_A pen metallicised, special, someone else's  
unknown, that golden face and darkeyes – bunch  
of memories, imagination providing.

**Your guitar**\_clear soprano whispering and the bejewelled notes of steel,  
and afterwards, the persistentringing and hesitant voice groping at conversations  
till pure love is left only, helpless, exposed.

**The wind**\_promising shivers, smooth chapping some other, harshly cool, shapes  
being only an invention of one, perhaps not so great? who named himselfwise  
in a monkey's framework and left that treepeace behind him for some strange comfort  
that turned his lungs to ashes, turned his head to pain  
in tomorrow's dreams where the movements of the soul\_flutters and forgets\_  
the unreality of weariness ... there I must go now, and soon  
expect to forget, like so many\_But not  
you ... I don't forget you.

# FREEDOM RANGERS

WRITTEN  
BY **WENDY INSINGER**

Let's get drunk on something and shoot the gun.

Blow our troubles away

In a blanket of black snow.

Pack shots

By our hips, our groins, our hearts, our Achilles tendons.

Silver bullets and black powder,

Shouting, "Invincible",

Shouting, "Now!"

Shoot first and grow tall in the echoing silence.

Between shots.

Between rounds.

If you are white, we will shoot you.

If you are black, we will shoot you.

If you are red, or yellow, or brown,

We will shoot you.

When fears burst like falling stars,

All skin can be assigned the color of innocence.

We have the silver bullets.

We snort the black powder,

Independence quick as smack.

Silenced too long, we shout louder,

"God&Country", "God&Money", "God&Guns".

God is a twinkly, many-colored snowman.

Nobody has his back.

Sometimes we shoot him down, just for fun.

In the fallout of combusting countries, confettied currencies,

Only guns speak in all tongues.

A bullet has no innocence, only righteousness.

Defend. Attack.

Cock and fire.

Gone in a shot, a crack.

Fingers pressed into the tenderness of hurt,

Squeezed to the rim of madness.

Stuck in our own crosshairs,

We shoot ourselves again, and again.

Truth or dare.

Take a whack.

Hit and hit back.

# BLOOD PACT

WRITTEN  
BY **WENDY INSINGER**

It's as easy as falling off the roof,  
All rainbows and unicorns, charm bracelets,  
Birthday candles, and sprinkle-topped cupcakes.  
The blood comes with no message, amusement park style,  
Full-body Tilt-A-Whirls, Scramblers,  
Hormonal Roller Coaster drops and curves,  
The Fun House organs playing distorting, disorienting tricks.  
The blood is the message.  
No one else will tell you what to think, how it feels,  
One day to be free, the next day to be bound  
In a blood pact with Nature.  
Mandate, not will.  
No river gets to choose its own course,  
It just flows.  
Clouds are unintentional  
Collisions of warm and cool, binary air mass.  
Male blood brings reverence through intention.  
The intentional is heroic.  
Blood shed for causes and for thee.  
Blood so clean and cleansing,  
Heroism the apex of stainlessness.  
History's armies of intention and reverence.  
The sides are forgotten.  
Blood sacrifice is the purity.  
For warriors. For nations. For deities.  
For the future, intangible as the process of evaporation,  
Celebrated.  
But, the dirty blood of women,  
These bloodstains of humanity must be secreted away,  
Clothed in smiles, bright music, fancy clothes,  
Trapped in cotton, tossed in garbage, thrown out,  
This uninvited, cursed tide,  
This demoness moon blood -  
The blood that was shed for you,  
That you might live.





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