

Kō.ta'
press



Poetry
Anthology
Volume 3



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*As always, this KotaPress work
is dedicated to Dakota Jones
born & died March 11, 1999*

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Welcome

Welcome to Volume 3 of the KotaPress Poetry Anthology! This edition is an exciting presentation for so many reasons. It's our fourth issue of the Anthology, resulting from contests we offered through our KotaPress website. This is our second ebook release of the Anthology, and it follows on the heels of a successful run with the ebook version we did of Volume 2. And while most of the time, Hawk & I end up doing everything here at Kota, we are so amazingly grateful and indebted to Peg Rousar-Thompson for taking on the contest and production for this Volume 3!!! We honestly would not have been able to offer this format to all of you this year if it weren't for Peg's generosity of time, energy, work, and spirit. Many, many thanks.

And, of course, we'd have no book at all if it weren't for the 19 authors you see here in this issue. Again I am humbled by the quality of work these authors have given toward this project. I'm happy to say that some are KotaPress veterans, some are newcomers. And we are grateful for each and every one of these authors!

We also send many thanks to each of our readers – without you, there would be no point to our Anthology publication. Many thanks for your continued support and readership. Read on, enjoy, and check back next year for Volume 4!

Miracles to you,

Kara L.C. Jones
Editor-In-Chief

Patricia Wel I n g h a m - J o n e s

Author Biography

Patricia is a former psychology researcher/writer/editor/lecturer who now writes poetry and short stories. She has been widely published in journals, anthologies and online magazines. She edited *River Voices: Poets of Butte, Shasta, Tehama and Trinity Counties, California* and *Labyrinth: Poems & Prose*. Her latest chapbook is *Don't Turn Away: Poems About Breast Cancer*.

High Desert Valley

Wind shadows spill
across high desert valley
where surges of habitation
deposit their spoor.

Circles of stones, knapped
flint mark the first ones.
Then came the pioneers' path -
rotted wood, spent bullets,
graves unnoted for decades.
Miners stripped land, left
rusted metal, decayed streams.

Clapboard skeletons,
steeple, bell
towers show
when women came and stayed.

Near springs and willows
windmills, broken corrals
cluster
around today's aluminum, boxes
breath-gusted,
filled with the next
wave of hope.

Published in *Tule Review*, Summer 1999

Leave-Taking

Black sky broods in the west
the rising sun slants its rays
slashes of light bounce against
a smothering mass of cloud.
Sycamores glow silver in the
ozone-filled air
tiny whitecaps ruffle the creek.
My friends leave for the
funeral today,
her last brother gone, so fast.
Sympathy murmurs, "Getting close,
isn't it?"
Appalled eyebrows leap toward hairlines
knit in a frown over a glare.
She smiles, checks the advancing sky,
"It's always close," she says.

Published in *Offerings*, Spring 1998

The Gamble

Fun-bright in the lab
in a scrub top sprinkled
with Woodstock and Snoopy,
wisps of hair escape
under her paper cap. She shoves
plastic goggles in front of her eyes,
pulls a mask over sharp-pointed nose,
snaps latex gloves on slim hands.
Bending over the latest
in a fallen forest of arms –
pink and tender, heavy with flab,
black leathered muscle,
skin over bone –
she single-twists the rubber strip
tight.
Picks up the sterile syringe,
probes inner elbow for buried treasure,
slips needle into swelling
vein. Blood pulses red, fills the tube.
She tapes little gauze square
over little seeping hole, disposes
of equipment in proper places.
Day after day, arm after arm,
always careful, always clear.
And always, the sensitive
skin of her index finger
pokes through the cut off
tip of her glove.

Published in *Eleven Bulls*, June 2001

Warrior Blessing

Two old warriors
long divorced
bow gray-streaked heads
over their wounded firstborn.
Ask the Ancient One
to gird their son with strength,
hold him steady
as he steers
into his new course.
They gaze at each other's
life-scarred face,
smile about pain
inflicted, time-eased.
Muttering thanks
for what they've learned
they pass it in silence
with hands and eyes
to the young warrior
going into his greatest battle.

Wolf Woman

Under flesh seared in sudden flame
they howled. Enraged
voices bubbled in blisters
from scorched, peeling skin.
Through long months
of drugs, knives, bandages,
the subterranean creatures
growled when she wept,
snarled with short-fused temper,
shrieked through gritted teeth
at treatments promised
to make her whole.
She kept them secret,
the wolves that prowled her body.
One unendurable day
they leaped through her lips,
raged in pain.
Doctors did not understand.
Thought her mad, doubled the dose.
Months passed. She healed.
Kept the source
of her strength buried.
On the day of her discharge
they clawed free of deep tissue,
howled in unwindowed light.
She claimed them -
Eva of the Wolves.

Published in *Poetry Depth Quarterly*, January 2002

Nightwatch Over Elizabeth

She doesn't need this,
I know. She's over the crisis,
they talk of sending her home.
She's even getting crabby,
she's doing so well.
I drag myself home
for peanut butter on toast,
lay my body on a bed
unmade in the excitement
and force my eyes to close.
I rest, gird myself
to ignore the rules, tackle
tough nurses, hide in a closet
if I must. She doesn't need this,
I know. But *I* need
to huddle in the plastic chair,
watch her chest go up and down,
let my hair get stringy with fatigue.
To watch over her
through the deep night.

Long Journey

The old man, cancer-reduced
to saggy skin over brittle bone,
shuffled behind his walker
through oak leaves already fallen.

The long journey made
with several halts for breath
and weary leaning
in the company of a randy
patch-eyed cat. Three white paws,
one gray to match his mask,
padded behind the elder. Commanding
voice meowed at his man.

The long journey ended
at a neighbor's front porch,
found the human draped over aluminum
bars, the cat demanding entry.

On this final next-door visit,
people conversed, feline watched, waited
to escort his person back to his bed.

Sat beside him that night, inhaled
the last rattling sigh.

Open Discussion

They huddled over coffee cups,
planned the new garden
between old ranch houses.

He tapped pointed pencil
on tentative design, said,
*Where do you want
your ashes buried, Mother?*

She gulped, reared back,
fixed gimlet eye on innocent face.
Paled, as he continued.

*Maybe under a nice big shade tree?
We'll be ready to plant
in October.*

Son, she said,
voice ominously gentle,
*I don't think I'll be ready to go
by then.*

His turn to gulp,
rear back.

Published in *Muse of Fire*, August 1999

Lament In Sea Blue

On a continent's rough edge
sputtering to sea,
your beach: shivers of oat grass,
ripening blueberries, granite
shoreline stitched into a quilt
fragrant in silver, green, blue.

Place of solitude. Just you
and seabirds keen in the wind,
stunned to stillness by roar
of incoming waves. Here where you gather
shreds of your soul,
where you rarely bring
a trusted friend, you brought me.

I, flown on travel, some fleeting success,
rattled with fervor, loud insistence.
Echoes of that voice
bounced on graven stone.
You drifted, blown by sea mist
to a far bay. To silence. You returned
in sharp-tongued sorrow.

The beach will remain
until the sea
chews it to dust,
the friendship eroded
in one sunlit afternoon.

Published in *Twilight Ending*, January 2000

Pull of the Moon

Like eroded rock I lie
on the edge of the wild Pacific.
Salt water pounds against my body,
trickles through my hair.
Over my chest, small waves break, across ribs
stretched wide under blue-lined skin,
stream into the crevice between my thighs.
The sea creams and puddles beneath me.
In tidepools formed by sharp ridges
of bone, tiny creatures gather
to nibble and die. I feel self melt
into water, spirit caught
in one drop of fluid, one grain of sand.

In one grain of sand,
a single drop of water,
spirit is caught.
Tiny creatures nibble and die
in the tidepool formed
by sharp ridges of bone.
Beneath me, the sea creams and puddles.
Over my chest small waves break,
across ribs stretched wide
in blue-lined skin,
stream into the tender crevice
between my thighs.
Trickling through my tangled hair,
salt water pounds against my body.
On the edge of the wild Pacific,
like eroded rock I lie.

Published in *Midwest Poetry Review*, Winter 2002

Survivors

White cottons shrouded in cedar
whisper their stories
in silence.

Their battles were different,
the blood the same.

White cap, starched,
finger-pleated to perfection,
perched on young nurse's
curls in the fifties.

Beside it, rectangular parcel
worn by great-aunt in the first
of the great wars

in a land filled with broken
bodies, hopeless moans
of very young men.

The dress, a uniform,
brown stains faded on long white skirt.
Waistband snug, severe bodice buttoned high.

Yellow with years, stiff with starch,
rough weave crackles when handled,
the pieces of cotton bought at a yard sale

whisper stories in a drawer
lined with silence.

Published in *Lynx Eye*, Winter 2000

Legend In Chinese Batik

Warrior prince in red brocade
sweeps maiden trailing silk
scarves and willingness
onto his lap in the saddle.

White horse
massively muscled
stamps and whinnies, froths
to be gone.

Maiden lifts round soft arms
over head tilted for royal caress.
Three women dance - gauze floating -
spider webs of gossamer threads

rustle in the breeze.
Water symbols and flowers
wish the pair
good fortune.

Usual end
to universal story ...
they lived happily
ever after. Yet

real-life tales finish
often in tears. The world needs
generation after generation
the possibility

of a new warrior prince.

Published in *Midwest Poetry Review*, April 2000

Lost in Afghanistan, 1999

Sweat from my scalp trickles between shoulder blades.
Itchy skin craves a twitch, wiggle,
scream. My body writhes in secret
inside its prison
of draped cloth.

With other female lumps
huddled in burqas
like blue ghosts on the street,
I dare not move
more than one dusty toe.

Face ghoulish behind tight mesh,
I stand with my host's brother
in the baking din of Kabul.
Gridded eyes strain
for a patch of sky.

Glance lowered more by fear
than modesty, I scurry
beside the sneering, striding male,
amazed to find my free Western self
try to melt, unseen, into shadow

where even that safety is illusion
for my lost sisters in Afghanistan.

Sleigh Ride

The sleigh leans against the barn, ready
for snow always near.
Over waxed polished runners
wildflowers bloom. Pink roses in paint
cover the long narrow frame, scramble
across low back in faded disorder.
Not a single rail lines its side.

I picture the old Russian tale:
bride and groom bundled in fur,
mittened hands grip the boards. Faces
glow with thoughts of wedding night.
Behind on sleigh runners, best man
guides the horse. They race homeward
in pale light of crescent moon.

Wolves howl, blood chills,
something happens, someone spills.
By morning only red
spatters the ice.

I stand in summer sunlight
of Norway's looming green.
Icicles twitch
down my spine.

Published in *A Christmas Collection*, 2001

Arpilleras

Arpilleras: three-dimensional wall-hangings of burlap, decorated with cloth figures to create scenes of everyday life. In 1974 arpilleras protesting the excesses of the military regime in Chile began to appear. Although forbidden by the government, they found their way around the globe.

Woman to woman, they hunch
over their sewing, voices hushed
in clandestine acts of peace.

They snip fabric in brilliant hues,
form tiny skirts and dresses, whip
wool around rough edges for
multicolored hems, chain-stitch
red smiles on stuffed-sock faces.

They whisper against mud walls
of village houses, learn of a husband
taken in dark of moon. A son,
too young to marry, old enough
to be betrayed, lies by a dirt track
streaming blood from his legless trunk.

My arpillera: man in pink trousers
totes yellow sack on his back, two girls
rush precious bundles to a clinic
white with windows, aqua steps.

Young woman swaddles a baby in burlap
as a van, red cross on its door,
speeds up the pink road to safety.
Andean peaks rim the sky.

At panel's bottom, trees shelter
gaudy dwellings, one with gingham roof.
From top right on crooked path,
dread dressed in black
stalks unwary girl in gold.

Published in *Phoebe*, Summer 2000

Yesterday's News Today

They fell in love and married,
he, black from Jamaica,
she Montana white.
Lived in San Francisco,
the only place they felt safe.
Lost their babies to sickness,
battled for everyday life.
He was injured at work,
near death. The ambulance
took him from place to place.
By the time a hospital would accept him
he breathed his last
strangled breath.
Bitterness still chokes her at night.
Growing acceptance of interracial marriage
says the front page
this millennial day.
Decades late for the lovers,
he, coal black,
she, pink-cheeked and fair.

Published in *Thunder Sandwich* #12, March 2001

Lost on the Vina Plains

with thanks to Willa Cather

Here the earth is the floor of the sky, strewn
with rubble nodded over by wildflowers.
Soft petals meld into cobalt
blue as the vault above.
Over broken lava, foot-twister stone,
some unknown herb mixes its bitter fragrance
with sun-stoked earth in a brew
neither witch nor angel could know.
Heedless of gnats drawn to the moist mucus-cave,
we sip the air with mouths wide open,
heads thrown back, eyes wild.
Soles of our feet welded to planet-skin,
our molecules strain to the light.
Arm hair trembles in the cycling of spheres.
Weightless, we are lost in the sun.

Published in *Tule Review*, Spring 2001

One Panel of a Quilt

*The AIDS Memorial Quilt contains
44,000 panels so far. It sends messages
of remembrance and hope and is seen
annually at thousands of displays
around the world.*

I watch your mother
bustle about the room,
fluff pillows, smooth
the afghan she made for your
first college dorm. Hands busy
so her eyes won't overflow.
She slides nourishing drinks
in rich hues of ripe fruits
into a mouth too sore to swallow.
Your friend visits almost daily.
Hot tears rain on white knuckles
clutching the footboard.
I sit like a quiet mouse
in a corner of your room,
snip and sew, search for the colors
you whisper from the bed.
We work together
on this summing up of a life.
I take my time assembling
the panel with your name, fear
that my final stitch
will signal
your last breath.

Published in *Thunder Sandwich #16*, January 2002

The Sheriff Knocked On My Door

He didn't have
to tell me.

You were dead
I was far away
our house had just sold.

Feet on backwards
took me to the phone
numb fingers
dialed your daughter.

Her scream
pierced my skull
blamed my love
for your death.

We got through
those first days
in unshared pain.

Moving day came
four weeks later.
Boxes, bundles
cat and I
howled our way north
in driving rain.

The new roommate
is soft and cuddly
but she comes
with litter pan.

When I work in the garden
I hear you call my name
through petals of lilies
the prick of a rose.

On your death corner
but she comes
with litter pan.

When I work in the garden
I hear you call my name
through petals of lilies
the prick of a rose.

On your death corner

but she comes
with litter pan.

When I work in the garden
I hear you call my name
through petals of lilies
the prick of a rose.

On your death corner
glass shards
bounce in the sun.

My Late Love's Hands

I don't remember his smell.

I know he wore eau de armpit
from toiling in the yard, splashed
scent from a bottle for evenings out.

His face lingers in my mind -
maybe it's only a photo I recall -
fuzzy about the smile,
eyes reflecting a child's mischief.

But my body remembers his hands:
rough palms scratching
the length of the spine,
my skin gentled in passing.

Light hairs curled soft
on fingers strong and long,
tuned to a chainsaw's secrets
and mine.

Though I don't remember his smell,
when I garden among roses
his warm hands cup ghost flowers,
work with me.

Way Station

My friend lies in a hospital bed
body melted down to its essence.
We feel the thinning course of
the vital stream,
expect the last tiny puff
that lifts spirit,
leaves husk.

In the dark of the moon, thrashing.
Salmon surges upstream,
scrambles over the riffle
outside my door,
mates in a gravel bed,
leaves his silver shell
in the shallows.

Published in *California Quarterly*, Autumn 1996

Suppose the Owl Calls My Name

*In Native American lore, the talking bird
calls the name of the person about to die.*

My friend celebrated five years and safety
with a champagne brunch and request:
guests must wear red to give courage,
affirm life. We showed up with flowers
and scarlet, from g-string to tee shirt
to long velvet gown.

Some months later we went into shock
as she lost her second breast.
Raged and wept, built up her spirits
with gifts of red.

Today I lie awake just before dawn,
focus on the owls calling along the creek.
My ears strain to make sense of soft mutters.
On these mornings of dark questions
I rethink my day's clothes, haul out the red socks,
yank myself up.

The owls, incoherent, subside into sleep.

Published in my chapbook, *Don't Turn Away: Poems About Breast Cancer*, 2000

The Catafalque

I imagine you, Grandmother,
as I sit by my friend's pale form,
both gone so young, leaving hearts ripped
and shredded in the tiny bodies
trailing in your unwilling wake.
Her head on the pillow might be yours:
hair smoothed back from the high forehead,
features serene against framework of clear
beautiful bone, skin white, waxen,
unsullied by paint.
Soft folds creamy around neck and shoulder,
black velvet drapes to the floor.
Her sister places a circlet of white anemones
on her brow, I lay a late red rose
from her garden on her breast.
She looks like a medieval young queen.
I bow my head over internal words,
send a separate message flying
that your babies grew and prospered,
in their eighties, still spoke of you.

Published in my chapbook, *Don't Turn Away: Poems About Breast Cancer*, 2000

Dancing With Dad

In her 99th year
she stopped eating,
breath slowed.
We hovered,
spoke in soft tones,
arranged comfort.
After months, years
of willing it, her intrepid
heart quit.
In a final twitch of coquette,
her smile lingered
as she left
the husk lying on the bed
to go dancing
with Dad.

The Last Thing I See

The first thing I saw
when I swam up from anesthesia
was your face furrowed with worry lines,
your smile. I felt your hand
clasp mine, warm below the IV,
felt your butterfly lips
touch my forehead.
Since then mine was the face
furrowed over yours,
then you were there again for me.
Although you say you'd rather not
tread the path without me,
I hope you will be
the last thing I will see.

Published in *Skylark*, Winter 2001

Gian Kurt Iseppi

Author Biography

Gian is from Zurich, Switzerland, and fronts the rock band, "Lunar Fields". His poems are inspired by real experiences, dreams, but more often than not, abstract sentences that intrigue him.

Light Show

Her light show comes on when I sleep
It burns inside my garden
and the impression lasts for weeks
Then she runs straight into the sea
and I'm sitting wondering,
is it her or was it me?
In the sand is an outline of a girl
I give it feather wings
and for the eyes, I set the pearls
Then I light our candles in the sand
at the sea without an end,
where the water meets the land
And the seasons are lost in their change
and all the while dreams,
the doors will rearrange
Oh well, while it lasted it was fun
but then it was over
just as quick as it had begun

The Shape They Held

Her stream of things collect him back
to how it used to be
Her fireworks light up his eyes
and all he wants to see
Her pointed stance is cutting shapes,
angled out of air
She trims them smooth and then presents,
he reflects with great care
Her eyes fill holes in her hints,
he's watching as she deals
Infatuations call his shots,
his patterns she now seals
She takes the charms from off her neck
and drops them in his hand
She says to him, knowing his heart,
"Remember, my young man...
though some things can really seem
or be now what they are,
even displayed in all shades,
others, not by far"

Hazel

She lightly smiles,
charms him into her hand
With the slope of her neck,
her breath
and desire that could melt sand
She quietly shapes,
sculpts moods in earth tones
An electrical current,
her touch,
penetrating to his bones
And her scent
blows down-wind, he sleeps
With pins and needles,
his thoughts,
she seals in her jar to keep
All the while,
her mind's rearing a seed
She strokes and feeds it whey,
her wish,
her desire to be his need

View to a Room

Her mind through her eye has a walking space
with a secret view to a room
It's coloured in reds, mirrored all-round
with a window and a painted moon
Her seasons are set; in place they stand
as she sits in her favourite chair
Her thoughts are subtle; she adorns her things
while brushing her golden hair
With his head on fire, he moves in position
and stands at her edge in awe
She turns, "What Dear? . . . What is it you see?"
and slides her key under the door
"It's this. . ." he smiles, shying away
and kneels down, peculiar
With so many paths all weaving shapes,
he's unsure how to ask her
She draws in the tide, moves slowly to him,
"Tell me Love, what must be said?"
He looks deep in her eyes, and quietly asks,
"To me, will you be wed?"

David Morgan

Author Biography

David Morgan is a student of English at the university in San Luis Obispo, California. He grew up along the American River outside Sacramento, until his family moved to an island in the Puget Sound of the Pacific Northwest. David began writing upon his return to California.

Along the South Fork

Scales of fish can be seen in angles
of diffraction as you talk
of your mother's breast and your wish
to suckle from her the malignancy;
among these cedars that rest scorched

and fallen now, I can only think:
all this time we've been standing on ash.

Road End

There is not more
to this moss-
covered bridge

but the end
of a road
that leads

to Rolling Bay,
past fences
of fallen alder,

lashed in exes
between unturned
farmlands, fixed

of thistle
that burs to wool
or fleece,

before the field sets
fallow, and the beginning
of a road that ends

at Point White
with headstones
and bones.

Against Hospital Linoleum

A consistent wind, indifferent
of this cedar balanced
on the cliff at Point San Simeon, lifts
a certain scent from the sea that calls

to mind the time you telephoned
while staring at drops of your father's life,
red against white hospital linoleum;
crossing the room: a draft
returning to the opened window.

On Writing

As we return to the field
focused and off-center
like candlelight cradled
through a glass of red wine
stealing our breath under this sycamore,
the grass behind you yields, then blurs.

The Artists

A painter
at his easel

puts to canvas
gray against blue

against green;
the image of a heron

in Gazzam Lake.
In the den

of a house near
the scene, dust shifts

between a burgundy
rug and oak

planks, knotted
the length of the room.

Water in the lake
is beat blue

against red against
black

by the red wing
of a blackbird.

Painter's October

Still, lengths of wood
drawn into a pile
wait for the cold
use of winter
next to a stump
stood on end, left
splintered and frayed
where strokes of an ax
once fell through
canvassed air.

School Bus Drowning, Lake Chelan

Cedars grow stunted
at the third bend, lakeside,
where the banked hill
drops to the lake's edge
then continues to a depth.

The arced lane of trees: tops halved off
to point like snapped crayons
left hanging by broken
pulp rings.

Cold Rose

We lied in tufts
of tall grass.
The wind died.
I rose cold, dressed,
goodbye. You stood
looking at the white hills
behind me shrinking
as I walked across the
plain. In front of me
my shadow fell with
shoots of grass growing
out of its scarecrow arms.
I watched it lay
lifeless, spread thin,
empty, too dark. In it
I saw Sarah's small
arm straighten, reaching
for her purple toothbrush
behind the sink. She
glanced in the mirror
as you passed the
bathroom door to stoke
the fire before bed.
I came back to you
under a blanket of Chinook wind.

“Awake me in the new world.”

A procession, it felt,
to walk with the others
who mourn you,

below the stained glass
that gave color
to your face:

it looked as though
a butterfly had fallen
to your nose

and laid its wings
across your cheeks,
then, it must have been

from the cumulus
bursting outside, an emptiness
of color returned.

As it fled, I recalled
what you once said
in the old house at 29 Paddock

with your back
to the cellar door
while it stormed outside.

Vera Long

Author Biography

Vera was born in Big Springs, Texas and has been writing "Country Poetry" for fifty years. She is a widow, a mother, and a farmer. She is active in Stillwater Writers, where she serves as secretary.

A Poet's Repose

Mama's wrinkled hands showed spots of aging.
Her stringy hair saw too much sun and wind.
Dad's weather-beaten face forced a half-smile.
Tears filled their eyes watching me round the bend.

"Twas the last time I saw my dad and mom.
I always meant to come back home some day,
But I chased the hidden dreams of my heart
And, Lord, they never led me back this way.

Oh there were letters now and then and cards
Marking holidays. The folks didn't find
Time enough from working this old farm
To venture much beyond the county line.

Why after all these years have I come back?
There's no one left who knew me but Old Sam.
He remembers me and my pony well.
He knows better than I, just who I am.

I'm not at loss for words; words are my tools,
My way of life, my work, my existence.
Out here on Bishop Hill I need no words.
The past talks. I offer no resistance.

Into the wooded hills the last rays fade.
The afterglow stirs memories long passed.
Dozing off I dream of those childhood days.
Beneath these starry skies, I'm home at last.

Reality

Sorrow hangs heavy like cloudy skies.
My tears like raindrops come sprinkling down.
Faster they are falling from my eyes.
Little rivers start to flood the town.

Grief passes in time so they tell me.
They don't know the depth of hurt I've known.
I'll feel the loss through eternity.
You left me and turned my heart to stone.

No more my ears will hear your lovesongs.
They'll live on with each beat of my heart.
I'll not see your sparkling eyes again
Except for moments memories impart.

I could not tell the angel of death
To go back to the heavens above,
To leave you wretched on this earth.
I must face reality. You're gone.

A Pair of Pear Trees

There's no one left to say where they came from
Or who brought them and set them out with pride.
This pair of pear trees is all that's standing
Of an orchard that once graced this hillside.

They heard the first cries of a new born town.
They watched the lumber wagons pulled by mule
Down early roads, just trails cut through the woods,
Bring boards to build stores, churches and the school.

The town is gone now except for the graveyard...
Stirring memories like leaves in the wind.
Some citizens rest in peace in their plots.
One by one others are brought home again.

These old pear trees could tell a long story
Of hearts they touched through the taste of their fruit.
Having been kissed by the angels of love,
They bloom and bear. This is their life's tribute.

Through the Glass Darkly

Look not at the world for what you can see,
But through the glass darkly for what it could be.
Not a land of starvation but instead
A place no hungry child goes off to bed.

Not the war torn streets of suffering and shame
Nor homesteads swallowed up by fiery flame,
Nor a place each must face his own storms
But factories of lie and family farms.

Kingdoms could be built by the strong and brave
That would not succumb to a tidal wave.
It's our world. How can I make it better?
Make a call, write a poem or a letter?

I live too far away to stir the stew
At Jesus House for Sister Ruth.
Or hold a sick child through the long dark night
Or search for the lost ones, shining a light.

I can't reach around the world by myself
Yet I have a need to help someone else.
So I shall say, as thorny paths I trod
A prayer for guidance from a living God.

The Jesus House

Few can see the halo about her head;
They see plaid shirt and overalls instead.
No white silk flowing gown
But she's an angel down
At the Jesus' House where there's food and bed.

From lost dreams and shadowy streets of shame,
From dead ends, come the losers in life's game.
With help and hope for each
Poor soul that she can reach,
She gives thankful praises in Jesus' name.

Friends send money but sometimes it seems slow
When the hungry and homeless overflow.
No one left to turn to,
No home to return to,
Through open doors they find a place to go.

Though hard to share dollars from fixed income
I have my own home so I can spare some.
May God bless Sister Ruth
As she stirs rainbow stew,
Down where each heart beats to a different drum.

(Sister Ruth passed away June, 2002)

Spell of Bad Weather

My freezer's filled up with fruits and veggies.
I should have canned them on sight, right away
But I stashed them away for future times
When there's more than 24 hours a day.

My closets are full of torn and ripped clothes
I should give away or repair. The pile
grows high and higher waiting for the day
When I've got time on my hands, after while.

My scrap bag is filled to overflowing.
I can't remember from where they all came.
I'll make them into a beautiful quilt
Sewn with care maybe someday when it rains.

My desk is full and there are boxes, too
Of ideas to sort and weave together.
Oh, how busy I am going to be
The very next long bad spell of weather.

Reid Baer

Author Biography

Reid Baer has worked for a number of years as a newspaper reporter (covering the crime beat) in Rockingham County, North Carolina. He has recently finished his first novel, "Kill The Story." Baer is an accomplished award-winning playwright with productions in New York, Utah, Illinois and California. He has only recently jumped into the world of poetry, with a handful of poems to his publishing credit. The author is a classically-trained pianist.

Lunchtime Legacy

Our Father prepares school time lunches
a month in advance assembly line style
three halves of a sandwich in a plastic sack
for three children some meat and some cheese
and peanut butter from a North Pole deep freeze

until the morning sun shines and the day thaws hunger
without milk money
glad for a bonus apple
added to the nourishment sufficient for our needs
stuffed in a brown paper bag as you please

we bite into the freezer burned bread in shame
watching on as other parents children lovingly
sate on freshly buttered rolls carrot sticks
individually packaged chips and Twinkies
in a Roy Rogers lunch box without apologies

Trust Account

I counted on
Trusting you
And you
Said you
Trusted me
But I don't
Trust myself
Trusting you
On account of
There's nothing
Left in the account
For either one of us
To count on

Call Again

A persistent collector called the umpteenth time
for payment on a bill I did not owe.
He would not listen to reason.

"I'm recording this conversation," he said, like a threat.

"Record this," I replied.

I began sounding a spontaneous wail - without
consideration -
a long and lingering cry from a wounded old warrior
soul finally
given permission to release his full will against a
solid wall of simpering clerks.

The searing sounds from deep inside surprised even me
once I started
on the phone but then they did not stop - could not
stop - until I hung up.
He immediately called back and rehearsed his claim
anew with absolute conviction.

My sins real - and imagined ones too - came up and out
of my mouth as only tones
for an interminable time pleading out to God for
redemption into the plastic receiver.
I hung up and took a breath. He called again.

His right to call was my own wild call for what's
right
and wrong suddenly surging and singing out into night
from the contrary beatings of an irritable worn out
heart.

He called again
and I sang again.
And then hung up again.

He called once more and I just listened.
He listened. Silence alone spoke the noise he could
not endure.
He hung up and I haven't heard from him in awhile.

Last Breath

My youthful frame sinks nonchalantly and effortlessly
Into the shallow end of an aqua-blue swimming pool,
Floating unencumbered under the nurturing reservoir as
Long as my gullible lungs allow and pride holds out.
A pleasant peace prolongs the secret of eternity and
Supports me in her arms with the steady motion of
waves.

I will remember well swaying inside the silent safety
Of the merciful maternal solution and
Holding onto my truth alone
As long as I could.

After years of chronic illness, anxiety and depression
In the strain of an abandoned body buried below a
lagoon -
Sitting encumbered under the stagnant stinking swamp -
He sneaks short glances upward toward distorted
ripples through the ages,
Only slightly considering the chance he might budge
from this watery spot.
It is easier for the man to stay cursed in deep-seated
contentions
Than suffer humility ascending through loneliness and
desperation
In any attempt to stir the bleak surface
For just one paltry gulp of air
Before he dies.

For Real One Time

He acted out anger all the time

Yelling at people

Playing dirty tricks

Getting mean and feeling superior as much as he wanted

But his mother

Never ever

Let him be angry

In the house

Changing Careers

I guess the best part of my job
as a playwright was when I would
get to
share in how my art moved the audience ...
get to
feel the soulful cries
get to
hear the belly laughs
and overhear intelligent jibes
from passionate people sitting
in a live theatrical tabernacle
connecting with the sacred
and profane within themselves
and the effervescent moment
between themselves
in a common circle
of blessed humanity.

Uh, the best part of being a poet ...
I get to
hear the neighbor's lawn mower running.

Hoosier Holiday

"I told them boys what it was," he hollers walking past the back screen door, letting it slam, and setting himself down next to his Dad who's sipping evening coffee. Three energetic young witnesses boisterously gather around the kitchen table for the retelling of the tale.

"So I swing around the dirt road near our ten acres off Wabash? and I flip on my brights straight into his beady little eyes."

Mother snaps fresh green beans plucked from her backyard garden as Dad unbuckles one strap from his coveralls and leans back.

"I'm there with my .22 caliber rifle pointin' out the door before my foot even sets on the ground and I draw a bead on him like this ... and crack!" he says, standing. "I got him! Just like that."

The other boys continue the detailed descriptions and subsequent examination of the dead and bloodied groundhog.

Mother smiles proudly at her 15-year-old son as he sets himself back down on the plastic covered chair and takes a victory sip from his Dad's coffee mug.

Out of Service

Separating
Siamese Twins

Anger and Hatred

I am letting
the latter go

Quiet Time

I think it's neat
I no longer run
Into the street
Screaming and
Waving the sheet
From my latest poem

Sound Beginnings

Letters didn't move me
At first but
Sounds
Waves
Deep crashing resonance
From my father's heavy chest
Heaving
Echoing
In my aching ears
Vibrating
Tingling
With energy
Adventure
Excitement
As I drifted off to sleep
In the sweet comfort
And solid container
Of his world

Fl oria Kel derhouse

Moonbeams Of Blue

I stepped outside this summer night so fair,
There was a difference in this dark of night.
Of everything around I was aware,
It had a cast of blue that shimmered bright.

For all the trees their limbs were of azure,
And all the grass below the colors cast,
Were of the oddest shade, a tint so sure,
And as I looked about I held it fast.

The moon itself it seemed vanilla cream,
And yet the midnight ink of sky was deep.
I prayed that this was real and not a dream,
A scene so haunting that I could not sleep.

Perhaps this night our Lord upon reflection,
Took artistic liberties to heart.
And from his brush there flowed with such affection
This mystic shade created by his art.

And then the earth he painted with a hue,
That shimmered in the glowing of the moon.
For every thing the beams lit turned to blue,
And night for me would surely end too soon.

An Ode to a Poet

With pen in hand against white sheet
The poet opens soul to meet
His heart- so full of love and life,
He writes of toils and then of strife,
Whatever burden harries him
He carves it out with ink and pen.

Some tears may flow, it's he who knows
From whence it came and what the aim.
He speaks of love as white as doves
And feelings true that start anew.

He rolls his tale out as we read
The feelings flow as we proceed
And line by line; and verse by verse
We savor every line immersed
In craft and truth, which he holds dear
And hopes it falls on grateful ear.

Angry River Of Words

The angry river rages on the rocky coast,
Rushing violently and breaking against the shore.
Cold and threatening in it's thrust of movement,
Oh, to be a seagull that I might soar.

To rise above and fly away into infinity.
And not be bruised by cruel words of anger.
And beaten down and battered against the rocks.
But fly from all impending threat of danger.

How cruel are words as furious as the waters.
And dark and heavy clouds that hover overhead.
That threaten with more violence and storms of thunder.
Refuse to stop until they know I am dead.

Where is my refuge, what place that I might hide?
Dark caverns dug deep within this earth.
Where I might now descend to never more return.
Perhaps not even one would recall my day of birth.

Oh raging waves of life that beat the soul.
And wear it down that it no more may breathe.
But take away each thing that makes me whole.
And cover me with dark and deadly sheath.

Previously published by Shadow Poetry

The Vessel

The petals of the rose, with stamens cradled in,
Protected in the center, where life began within.
It softly cups its hands, around the center rose.
Protected from the wind, that sometimes coldly blows.

And with each passing day, the rose does open wide.
The stamens standing tall, that were hiding deep inside.
The petals growing weak, before they start to leave,
Some fall to the wayside, As all the others grieve.

While each, softly falls, their life is almost done.
They've held their heads up high, to brightly shining sun.
And now they look for shade, and darkness of the night,
Quietly they leave, Soon they'll be out of site.

Slowly stamens die, they say their last good-byes,
How lone and bare my vase, I sadly dry my eyes.
The stem now stands alone, His duty he's fulfilled,
I solemnly take the vase, out the water's spilled.

My vase now stands alone, looking barren and sad,
Waiting for fresh flowers, with many petals clad.
How empty vessel is, where heart has died this day.
And life no longer dwells, where soul has gone away.

My Autumn Years

How can it be my time has turned to fall?
The mirror does not lie, it tells the truth.
And oh, how quickly did my autumn call.
It seems just yesterday I had my youth.
Yet time it has a way of speeding past.
The years of joy and happiness I've had.
If only somewhat longer it would last.
The ones that traveled slowly were so sad.
But happy years so rapidly flew by.
I tried to savor each and every day.
It seemed that in the blinking of an eye.
So swiftly died my springtime's sweet bouquet.
I find myself now in my autumn years,
Content with life, I've left behind my fears.

Hidden In My Heart

Secrets in my heart, I keep hidden.
I will not expose what is forbidden.
I cannot share this stabbing pain.
What would it be that I gain?
Under lock and key it stays.
For the rest of my living days.
Why would I bring on this sorrow?
How would this help you in the morrow?
Knowing that he quickly left,
In my soul I feel a theft.
Of a son I held so dear.
And so my loving family,
I will not whisper in your ear,
Of the last day that he was here,
Of that day so filled with fear,
It is mine and mine alone,
Something sacred that I own.

R.M. Engelhardt

Author Biography

R. M. Engelhardt (Robert Michael) currently lives & breathes in Albany, NY where he is the host of "the School of Night" open mic at Valentine's in Albany on the last Tuesday of each month. His work has been published in such journals as www.poetrypoetry.com, nycpoetry.com, *Industrial Nation*, *Verve*, *Sure*; *the Charles Bukowski Newsletter #10* and many others. He is also the director of AlbanyPoets.Org.

nod.

(moon, stars, sun...time)

hello....

nod.

Pronunciation: 'näd

Function: *verb*

1 : to make a quick downward motion of the head whether deliberately (as in expressing assent, salutation, or command) or involuntarily (as from drowsiness)

2 : to incline or sway from the vertical as though ready to fall

3 : to bend or sway the upper part gently downward or forward : bob gently

4 : to make a slip or error in a moment of abstraction

transitive senses

On cesse de s'aimer si quelqu'un ne nous aime.

For Jennifer.... whoever she may be

Hedroglossia

Look;

If I can't find the meaning well then at least I've found you,
And that being that is much more than ever being and much
More than ever merely needing a touch, a voice, a word or a
Feeling, something to be or not to....See! There I've done it again!
Hyper and not hedroglossia! Too many words asking me to listen,
Too many voices only mine repeating. Being two when I'm with you
when this elusive thing they call time stands still and these days of
our lives are suddenly & distinctly becoming entangled. Moving
much too fast for even Captain Zoom & his paisley rocket ship
to fathom. And sleeping beneath these quiet dreams of unspokeness
And hearing all of these voices at once and yet, at times being so alone.

So I guess this is what they call hedroglossia,

The wanting of a voice now gone, the hearing of a song

The fear of not knowing possibly what belongs

In these arms of poetry and dusk....

Wreck

(oh no Jock Cousteau, please help me salvage this heart....)
because she who thinks she knows who thinks she knows....

knows nothing.

says so long because his song has been sung.
(and being a wreck, invisible)

he sinks, drinks her false fear un-emotion
and her ice cold seas...
into oblivion
and sends out one last beacon for her in the night

that she

will never answer.
and lost at sea even she knows
that he cannot comeback from the dead.

for it was she who sunk the ship
before it could even reach its destination.....

Crea en el amor y en yo'll siempre cree en usted...

Memento

Better to feel

(Than be)

Blood rushes thru veins

And the heart beats,

Only one-day to complete its duty

While eventually earth and gods shall all come

Crashing down

And kingdoms & civilizations fade.

And so please, I ask you only this;

That when I leave to let me take these

Few things with me;

The moon, the sun and the stars,

And the small traces of light which

Once reflected in your eyes

That I can no longer see....

Notes To An Insensitive Universe

So what do you know about

What is or is not to be?

(Hmmm....perhaps it is we)

Moving, living and struggling
as if we think the very existence
of the universe depends upon
these things

But the universe (dam dark void)

Will be quite fine without us

& our “feelings”

Poor universe

And without love

Sadder still for not

Knowing what it wants

Or what its here for.....

Poem To Past Self...In Future Tense

Yours is a beauty of monstrous proportions
with the world
Spinning randomly into
Oblivion where the leaves are all
Dying all of the time off of the trees,
Where the misery makes its way into
every small tissue stealing.

Yours is a world where
Beauty has fled and has left town
For greener pastures, has drowned its-
Self into the sea of angst & tears and
Has mixed its-self with alcohol &
Cigarettes, sad poems and
Indiscriminate men & women who
Already know that beauty has left
The scene,

(And they no longer care to find her.)

And yet it is good that beauty has
Finally found you and that beauty is not
Dead,

But was only merely sleeping
On the sofa of your dreams...

What She Said

She said;

“If you ever tell me that you love me I’m afraid that I’ll have to leave.”

So not wanting to ever lose her he bent down, got close and softly whispered
in her ear;

“Lust.....Lust.....Lust”

War Film...

Buddhist hope cow.com of love transcending the dialect of
gloss & loss & gloom to the mysterious mysticism of the time machine....

of "when?"

Oh how I love thee, mammals of flesh and blood and candy.

Let me count the innocent waves, the waves of psychotic
emotion, measure my ass for caps and my heart for meaning-
less

"gestures."

(And please; screen my phone calls for truths, religions, promises & AIDS.)

For selective in our service we the
brave and the free will send out our hippie-bred children into the
Man swarm and the cities of their destinies, their lives as
Instantaneous as eighteen-year-old twinkies and our reasons
as contrived as an oily eagle's....

"fart"

Captain Zoom may send you to your doom as happy as a
rectal thermometer but the smiling mortician man grim will
dress you up in green who spills & spells out

F R E E D O M

"Horizontally"

with a capital.... D.

Alone

Alone in a room with-
Out you is alone, alone
Without you is alone.

Alone without you is like
The moon without the stars,
The world without the sun
Shining upon it.

Good days or bad
With you I'm never sad
But without you in a
Room I'm alone.

I Know

There are certain things

I know don't

know, feel don't

feel & see

don't see.

I am a blind

Man with the near

And the far, I am a

Baby bat that grasps

And squeaks to all

Things sad & mean all

Past & future present past

In the worship of your heart.

Sacred life of words

Unspoken by man

Knowing truth...

Is truth.

Underdog

The world will not
Save you this time bright
Bright boy of genius time!

You (with a penny in your shoe)
Are no longer a boy man made
Man of words & non-linear touch.

Hearts and poetry & kisses in the dark,

Soft palace where once time stood still.

goodbye....

Nancy Watts

Author Biography

Nancy Watts has been published in many small press publications including KotaPress and has also been included in several anthologies such as *Love Is Ageless* and *Grandmother Earth*. She is a member of the New England Writers/Vermont Poets Association and Virginia Poets Society. Her first collection of poetry is *Of Ways Of Looking At A Woman* by Rosecroft Publishing.

Working Toward Tomorrow

They called to say
the funeral would be on a Monday

But I mourned that loss long ago

I was told of the figureheads
that would be in attendance

I heard the names
of the spectators and scavengers

An Ivan Ilych's who's who at best

But I cried those tears when I was expendable

After burying the demons and ghosts
left in the dust of another's life pursuit

Still...
Who will be there for them

So they can say
"I am sorry for your grief."

So they won't need to pull at the guilt beneath their collars
when they realize the true love for this soul
had been used up, leaving behind a wooden casement

And I did love...

Knowing the sum of the whole
the shortcomings, and burned bridges
I loved regardless

But it wasn't enough
And now it isn't at all....

Getting On

I am getting on with my days

I push a cart
through the grocery store
put gas in the car
not much more

Insignificant tasks now
challenge my patience

But...

I am getting on with my days

Not a good one?
That's ok
there will be another

Oh God another!

And the mailbox seems
So far from the door
My mind is weighted with
What for?

The what ifs
What now
When?

“Kelsey”

Scandinavian, meaning “Island of Ships”

Meet me at sunrise
When the day starts a new

When floral sheets of silence
Awaken from their beds

We’ll sail away to freedom
To the Island of Ships

Wrecked dreams salvaged
Restored to their original luster

Where the palominos run
Through fields of goldenrod

Whipping the winds of God’s love
Around this wild spirit

You’ll listen as the sweet
Harmonic tune of my viola

Caresses the shoulder of your grief
Relieving your worries

For you will know this vessel
Was resurrected to the Lord’s
“Island of Ships”

*Dedicated to Kelsey Mizerak
1988-2001*

And I Miss You

I caught the scent of you today
Clinging to the autumn breeze

It blew, like your fingers, through my hair
Sweeping wisps from my face

Landing in my hands
Nestled in the crook of a gently fallen leaf

Encasing me like a warm hug
As I rolled in a freshly raked pile
On a bed of grass

And I missed you....

Thoughts of you are surreal
Images fade in and out in slow motion
Glances from across a crowded room
A look in the eyes
A smile on the face
Feelings of a touch
The sound of laughter
Moments in time that I try to grab hold of
Prolonging their memory

And I miss you...

And my arms ache to hold you
As the tears well up inside
And my voice constricts in pain
Fighting back the sounds
Of a heart broken

The colors of the sun
Explode now across the sky
As my soul rains into that river
Reincarnated
Racing toward the horizon
Hoping to join the light before it fades

And I miss you....

Emotions

Like waves
My emotions rush to the shore
Tumbling, churning
White caps peaking the closer you get.
Then, with every breath I take
I feel you wash over me
And rest on the sand.
Only to drag out to sea
Pieces of me
As you walk away.

Uninterrupted

Ask me what I want

It would be

One moment in time

You and me

Uninterrupted.

All walls are down

None of life's complications to get in the way

Time to tell about my dreams

Time to ask about your day

Uninterrupted.

We communicate through children

Share stories of work and schools

Relax with friends

Follow the rules

All the while

Waiting for a moment

Uninterrupted.

Previously published in "Unknown Writer"

Still Here

When the autumn winds shake the
core of your foundation, it will not be
my hand that fells you to the ground.

I will not leave you as underbrush,
to become brittle, and burn with
summers first crack of lightning.

Instead, I will scoop in my arms
that part of you, which can
warm me on cold winter nights.

Looking forward to spring and the
greener, richer version of that which,
like the great redwood, only grows
more precious and rare with age.

My Dad

Here I sit
Snug in my favorite chair.
A roaring fire
Reflects in the glass
Against a moonlit November night sky.
Music on the radio takes me back;
Add the smell of hickory burning and
Crackling, hissing, sounds of
The wood stoves of my youth.
I can almost see you
Sitting in your favorite chair
Contentment and pride are settled in the
Relaxed smile on your face.
And what I wouldn't do for
One more conversation
One more discussion on
Theology, politics or growing up.
What I wouldn't give for
One more piece of advice
From a man who somehow
Got smarter, as I got older.
How I need to hear, one more time
Smile and the world smiles at you
While perched on your lap
Receiving my daily dose of hugs and encouragement.
But then again
Thanks to these wonderful memories
I'll have many more
"One more, moonlit November nights."

Granddad

A young girl reflects in his eyes
The ones with the long sweeping lashes

The ones he can no longer see
for old age has taken that privilege from him

The ones that used to melt women's hearts;
bedroom eyes, I think they called them

She is still jumping rope and swings
on a tire swing out by the pond

“That’s my granddaughter”
he used to say, and those eyes
would glisten with pride

Now the blue is not as vibrant; a slight, dulling
haze covers them. But the memory like candid snapshots
are mirrored, reflecting yesterday as he calls out

“That’s my granddaughter”
and those eyes sparkle with the
exuberance of a young man

Grief

I wear my grief like a security blanket
Without the feel of it to burn my heart
Slip away the last memories of you
And a cold numbness consumes me

So I pull it up around my chin
Waiting for the warmth of time to
Relieve my chill and hope for the day
I can recall you without a tear

Living Dead

I changed your room,
put up new walls, and took down
old feelings and memories.

Wiped the fingerprints that
told me you once ran through
my house, and covered the
growth marks of our bond.

But the death of this love
consumes me, as nothing
can replace your smile or
unconditional acceptance.

Or was it? For you are gone,
no word, no trace, just silence.
Afraid to move, I wait for a sign
of closure. It's the not knowing.

To My Son

It is for me to remember the joy
in the news of having a son. It is
for me to remember the sleepless
nights and constant worry.

I can still feel your newborn fingers
grasp my one, and the smell of fresh
milk on your breath or the feel of rocking
you in my arms to sleep....

It is for you to keep in your heart the
endless, lazy summer days of little league,
chocolate chip cookies with milk, and the
opened door of a house filled with love.

But remember if you can, the silver hair
of an angel, wrapped in the crocheted
blanket of autumn colors; for although I
am in the winter of my life, I look forward
to reincarnating in the spring time of heaven.

Where I can once again know the joys
of birth; yours and mine. I can once again
know the love of a parent, a husband and
again a child; and the river of life will have
made its way to the horizon.

You

You

Are my first thought in the morning

I make my list of

“Things to tell him.”

Anticipation of a quiet moment

Transforms into a competition for conversation

Children bustle about

Meetings are held

Activities are attended

We converse via cell phone and e-mail

Nautilus becomes our rendezvous

In the evening, after I tuck the kids in bed

I lay down my weary head and

You

Are my last thought at night

I make my list of

“Things I forgot to tell him.”

Chris Bordeaux

Author Biography

I am a twenty-six year old PhD. student, and I write in my spare time. Sometimes, writing is the only way to express the “flavor” of what I’m thinking.

Allie Says

Allie says I should be nicer
Every situation is a crisis
I should think more about where I'm going, Allie says
-Allie says that I'm confused-
For safety's sake I'm to agree
Heaven forbid I should have
To think about it, see, Allie says
Where's the future in this
Where to go with this
She never wants to end this,
Allie says
Stay from love and guilt and pity
Take me wherever you go
Share everything, tell everything
You never wanted me to know
Be with me Be with me Be with me
Allie says

Most Important Thing

So I drive home, only two beers,
And I know that no one's there
I'm bringing no one with me
I'm thinking no one cares
So you're thinking "You're right"
And you're right
So no one's waiting up for me
To say "You were out late babe, what's wrong?"
Or waiting by the phone for me, thinking
"God, why won't he call?"
So it's a little strange now, over four years gone
And I could have had this maybe twice
But the first one learned she loved me late
When I gave it up and left
The second loved me far too much
And almost smothered me instead
So myself and I, we come home
More disillusioned than depressed
And they won't get out of my head,
Jangling around up there
Like keys that don't go to anything
So you're thinking "You're alone, so?"
So I'm alone, time passes, shit happens,
You're right, but listen, what matters is
I've old love to keep me warm
And someone to call on Christmas
And for a while, for someone,
I was the most important thing in the world.

OK

This is the first morning
I've ever been happy to see the sun
Hello sun
Because it's picking out highlights
In the hair on my pillow
Your hair
You're here
And I'm getting that thick feeling in my throat
That I get when I'm about to cry
So just sleep there, love
And dream of rain
While I love you so fiercely it hurts.

A Happy Ending

For some reason, sometimes
I am seized by a melancholy
From which there is no easy escape
And I think back to mistakes that I've made
Things I did not do,
Should have done
Did
And my body becomes all over heavy
My thoughts slow
And even the light seems dimmer
I want a photograph
A cigarette
A reason
But most of all
A happy ending

Glass Soul

It shouldn't be so easy to shatter me
Scatter me
Ashes and all
On the ground

I shouldn't burn when you burn me
Shouldn't bleed when you spurn me
Or glow like a lover when loved

Too easy
You should be me
And learn what capriciousness brings me
With your Words Words Words

Pick your way amongst glass
Through my soul
Wear slippers, no heels
So you know how it feels
When you reach the inside where I keep you

Unraveled (Lay it Down)

She tied her string to
My turned head
But couldn't follow where it led
So unraveled as I walked on
A split pocketful of heavy rue,
A trail to gone
It weighs the arm she's leaning on
And guilt is the heaviest thing

She clings to me, waiting-
Drags at me, suffocating
The steps she follows after
Weave from side to side
What will it take me
How long will it be
Before I can lay it down

She ditched her favorite goddess
Her accident
For the Bad Son
I don't belong to her, anymore,
I can't carry, anymore,
What will it take me
How long will it be
Before I can lay it down

How long will it be
Til an unraveled string
Trails from my sheltering arm
How long until
I can lay it down

Hey You There

Hey you there
Let me ask you a question
Do you know where we get eyes at?
'Cause I wanted to return mine-
They leak.

Hey you there
Let me ask you a question
Do you know where we get hearts at?
'Cause I wanted to return mine-
It no longer keeps the time,
And I think it must be broke.

Hey you there
Let me ask you a question
Do you know where we get faith at?
Can you tell me where to find the store?
'Cause I really need
I really need
I really need to buy some more.

Innocence

It burned me hard the first time
So I thrust it too far out
It was swimming back to me
When I blew its candle out

Now I'm trying to remember
What I paid in innocence to forget
I'm trying to remind me
What it is and who it's with,
Love.

Unmake Love

I want to take back
That first awkward moment
That first warm step
Between friends and now

The first trembling touch
My hand down your face
The first surprised, "I love you"
The first afterglow

The dated first date
In the same old restaurant
Where friends ate before

The first sight of sweat on your smooth naked stomach
The first rose trailed down your spine
I need to take it all back
Unhappen it
Make it unreal

Rewind to long walks before the fall
Erase a slow summer between fights
Undo my arm around your waist
Disentangle fingers
Undo us

Undo nail tracks in my flesh
Blot out your perfume in my skin
Forget the first whole day in bed
And unstay night of staying in

Uncall hours of long distance
Uncount countless goodnights
Unwake early mornings
Before you had to go

Untell stories
Unsay "I miss you"'s
Unmeet families
Uncry tissues

Unmake love to you

Abha Iyengar

Author Biography

Abha Iyengar is an Indian writer, and dabbles in all things creative. She strives for peace and spiritual well-being. Her publications include: an article on “Population” in a book called *Science, Technology and Development* published by Wiley Easter; poems in *Femina*, prize winning Haiku poems in *Life Positive*. She has contributed to several anthologies, and published online at The Artemis Journal, Poets Online, Wordmage, NAWW Weekly, The Dawkins Project, Gowanus, among others.

This Is the Last Match I'll Strike

I

Jobless, worthless,
Nowhere to go,
Living on the pittance
Doled out by others
Am I to call them
Sisters and brothers?

Thank you, Lord,
for giving me a life
It doesn't matter that
It is full of strife.

This is the last match
I'm going to strike,
Hoping for that final light.
Torn jeans,
Worn for days
Lice-infested
Crawly place.
I didn't choose
to be like this,
Who Would?
I feel like the proverbial fish –
out of water.

Out of water,
out of food,
Out of hearth, home,
and brood.
Out of air, out of space,
Out of every goddamned race.
Show me where
to hide my face.

II

This is the last match
I'm going to strike
To make that coffee,
Heat that soup,
After that I'll take a hike –
To all the places
I want to go.
Fairyland, dreamland,
Faraway
and all aglow.

Beckoning with
A thousand smiles
How do I cover
the thousand miles?
On gossamer wings?
On magic carpets?
I don't know
but I will go
'cause this is the end
of the show.
The show of shows
Loving, caring, subjugated
Spouse
Will finally leave this house.

III

"Give me a drag, give me a light,
'Cause
this is the last match I'm gonna strike."
Then I'll flounder in the darkness
Created by drugged delight, and
Try to escape with all my might.

Face the world
Square on the jaw
Even though I'm hooked
and raw.
Hold my hand-
Lead me away-
From these murky
Depths of despair.
I'm coming up
gasping for air, so
Don't choke me,
Let me have my say.
I want sunshine,
I want daffodils,
Despite the thrills,
I want to undo what drugs have done
Snorting powder is no longer fun.
The sweetness of sugar is
not for me.
The salt of my tears will
set me free.

Panic

Panic.
Don't panic, Son.
Mother's here
To hold your hand
See you through
The ups and downs
The Roundabouts
Of life.

Panic.
Don't panic,
Mother.
Your Son's here.
To hold your stick,
To be your eyes,
To soothe your brow.
Don't plunge through
The ups and downs
The Whirlpools
of Death.

first published in "Femina"-an Indian print magazine in April,1997

Consume

On every sleek cover you find
A glamour-puss for you.
Each pouting mouth, each
provocative stance,
Holds you in enraptured trance.

Untold wealth
For unfulfilled desires,
Each smoldering look,
Increases your fires.

Passion on every page
Stares at you
Unabashedly
Marketed for you,
And consumed by you
Unabashedly.

Hungrily,
You devour every look
Unable to
Put down the book.
Unsatiated, unfulfilled still,
This was just to make
You pay the bill.

Aroused,
You reach for the next issue,
It gets thrown
Along with the tissues.

Jaded, you lie still,
Ready to pay the next
bill.

first published in "Femina"-an Indian print magazine in April, 1997

Grief

Thinking
I have put it all behind me
I walk,
But my thoughts break my stride.

I want to stop,
Lean against a tree
Hold on to its roughness
For comfort
And watch the leaves fall
With my grief.

I walk on
The leaves fall quietly behind me

first published at Poetsonline.com

Don't Ask Me

Don't ask me to grow old
The only lines I want in my life
Are not on my face
But the ones I cross
As I break new barriers.

The only grounds I want to be dug
Are not for my last resting place
But the ones which I break
Crossing new frontiers.

Don't make me stoop with age
I will only bend down
To kiss my loved ones
My littler grandchildren

And lift them high in the air
Letting them physically fly
There where my spirits already are
High, higher.

A Woman's Cry

And then one day, we tried to change things,
Make them better for ourselves
Now we are single and alone
We've paid a heavy price for our freedom.

Slavery is hard to bear, so is freedom,
One finds you in chains,
The other delivers you to the world.
One makes you bear the onslaught of one on one,
The other makes you pit yourself against many
That's why so many give up
After the battle is won.

Don't give up, fight hard,
It may destroy you,
But you are making the world a saner place
For the daughters that follow.

*first published in my article "A Woman's Cry"
for Its About Time Writers Reading Series
edited and published by Esther A. Helfgott*

A Human Being

I am sometimes bowed down
by my long hair,
and my bosom.
My tits and tresses torment me.
Maybe if I
Cut them off
I could stand up straight
And tell the world:
Look at me
I am a human being
Just like you.
Not
Just a woman.

*first published in my article "A Woman's Cry"
for Its About Time Writers Reading Series
edited and published by Esther A. Helfgott*

Maid In India

Chattel! Chattel!
On the "chattai"*
Sitting and chatting
Over the "chai"**
Veils are drawn
Low over faces
Voices are hushed
Not a frown traces
Each untroubled brow
With its shining "tikka"***
Lines are drawn
Taut on either side
Beneath the veil
Look
Beneath the veil
Do you see the straight line
Etched clean and clear
Parting the scalp
Down the centre
From brow to nape
No double takes

No wavering thoughts
No confused zigzags
Only one clear track.
One straight line
Sharp as an arrow
Will find its mark.
The red "tikka" below.
Blood red
Throbbing red
Illuminates the white forehead
at morn,
Stains the white pillow at night.
The sight of blood
makes her stomach turn
but
she wears the sign of her defeat,
her submission
High
On her forehead.

* chattai- grass mat

** chai- tea

*** tikka- red mark on an Indian woman's forehead
signifying that she is married.

first published in "Femina"-an Indian print magazine in Nov. 1996

Alone

I'm broken to the bone
All alone.
I just want to go home
My home.

But I have no direction
I have no connection
I'm alone
All alone.

Friends have come and gone
There are lovers I have known
They flitted in and out
Didn't know what it was all about
To be there.
I am here.
Alone.

Dejection

Shit splattered on whitewashed walls
Like screams emanating from empty halls
I look for you all over the place
Finding you nowhere
I find solace
In empty bottles
And cigarette stubs
Left over debris of nearby pubs.
Stubble, rubble,
Noisy tin cans,
Take the place
Of what we began.
The song of love, the song of joy,
Lies forgotten like a broken toy.

I Grow Senile

Suddenly
I feel old.

Rocking on my knees
I see sinister shadows
Lengthen in the room.

Their long dark arms
Stretch out
To snatch the life out of me
As I cower in the dark.

Afraid. Alone.

My hands shake and
My teeth rattle with fear.

A wide gash then
Splits
My face wide open
A Hyena's grin.

I cackle with mirth
Senility has nothing to fear.

Looking

Yellowed teeth bite into pieces of flesh
In a cannibalistic ritual.
Has God visited them yet?
You may well ask,
Smug in your civilization.

One Chance

Can I turn back the clock now?
No, not now.
Never.
So tread gently on other's toes
They may crack forever.

The broken glass
Won't be whole again
The fallen tear
Will drop forever
The shattered illusion
Won't be whole again
The veil of sorrow
Will drop forever.

So tread gently
And embrace your loved ones
Life gives you but one chance.

Quiet Desperation

I saw the desperation on your face, mother,
As you searched the crowds
For the familiar face of your son,
Hoping he'd stand beside his father
At the hour of reckoning-but he was nowhere to be seen.

I understood your anguish
That the son failed to realize his importance.
That his very presence was everything,
And his absence made eloquent
What you had denied all along,
That he cared nothing for relationships
Or the ties of love.

He did not come willingly
But felt dragged.
So detached himself
And ran away as soon as he could.
Not for him this useless hanging around by the side of his
parents
He had to get on with his life.

You only tried to understand,
And defended his behavior to others who protested.
But how could you explain
To yourself then
The pain
In your eyes
When you searched for him that day
And did not find him close.

Real Good Measures

Father.

They've made a bag of bones out of you
They've medicated the life out of you
And said
It was all for your good health.

I cannot believe
That if you give up a good meal
You will not die-
Do you breathe easier?
As you starve and dehydrate yourself?

Measure
The liquid input and output,
Measure
The food input and output,
Measure
The number of steps you take,
Measure
The number of breaths you take.

Till
You fail
To eat, drink, or walk.
And one day you fail to breathe also.

Thank all these measures
In the name of your good health.

Time

(1)

Today
I am a young bird in flight
Light of weight
And aimless gait
Bright of face
And sparkling eyes
Trying to pretend
Not to heed
The glances sliding
Off my back.
Stripping me naked
As I walk
Caressing my face
As I talk.
It's exciting.

(2)

Tomorrow
I stand
Salt-peppered hair
And weather beaten skin
In my crumpled rayon flower patterned
dress,
My scarf haphazardly
Wound round my neck
Like a careless arm.
I peer through dim eyes
Trying to meticulously study the scales
As the vegetable vendor
Willy-nilly
Stuffs the vegetables
Already weighed
Into my overloaded shopping bag.
Without a second glance.

(3)

Day after
Ignored by all
I stoop and shuffle
Mutter and stutter
Grey and withered
Sightless, toothless.
I smell the pity
And sense the disinterest
Of those around
They will not know what I desire
Nor give a damn.

Well-Wishers

Energy and wit
Do whatever they deem fit
To make me glad to have them there.
Instead, when they,
do deign to come
In droves-I tell you
I do fear I'll yell
In despair
Get out of here-
Morons all
I don't want you here at all!
Let me be and die in peace
You add to my dementia and disease.

Well-Wishers II

The room is small
Or are we too many?

A crowding in is taking place.

I feel unnerved by all this noise
But have no choice.
Well-wishers all
Surround my space
Unable to breathe
I turn my face

Away-let them disperse.
Their visit a curse
Sympathy puts on a mask of Grief
At last they leave-
I sigh with relief.

All this they do
Is not really true.

If care they did
They'd give their time,
Their thoughts,
Their while,
A lingering smile.

They come in droves
Right on cue.
Then duty done
They bid adieu.

Well wishers all.

Stricken and True

Poverty wears no mask.
It has no place to hide the truth.

When reality hits you
In the face
And rubs the dreams
Out of your eyes,
Strewn around you lie the
Lies
You told yourself
To give yourself a day
Of grace
Before you yield
To the unyielding truth.

There is no comfort
In temporary delusion
The facts of life
Remove your mask of illusion
Beneath it all
There is only one face
Wiped clean and dull
Resigned to fate.

Poor, stricken and true,
Without makeup or glue.

I Don't Want

I.

I don't want
To be left standing in the dark
In the middle of the park
While my mommy goes
To kiss another man
Goodbye.
She takes very long
Doing it,
It's almost as if
He wants her love
As much as
I

II

I don't want
To hear the woman
Next door
As she bears the onslaught
Of another night
To produce the son denied
Till now
Seven daughters in a row
If God is there
She don't know
Him.

III

I don't want
To get up in the morning
To go to work
Today is my birthday
Yet no one cares
My nest is empty
The children flown
Lives of their own.
I gift myself
A wan smile
And lock my life behind
Me.

IV

I don't want
To write depressing poems
When the world
Is full of goodness
And beauty
People doing their duty
I don't want to tear my soul
To show the truth
They hide from
Us.

published at Poetsonline.com

Is This Distance Human?

I watch them from my car.
They look at me from afar.

Their sunken eyes,
Sunken stomachs.
I see
The wanting.

My eyes
Surrounded by flesh,
My stomach bloated with booze.
They see
The wasting.

They must be lying on the pavements at night,
And asking
Why?

My Dream

I dreamt
That I was asked
To dance.
I did.
Bravo! They said
I saw the applause
In their eyes
Much before they clapped their hands.

I had to hide
The quiver in my fingers
They sometimes bent on their own
And then
Refused to unbend.
They should not betray me now
In my hour of triumph
And reveal my age.

This would not do at all.
I did see the more perceptive
Of the two
Glance inquiringly
Towards my hands
As if to assess
If they could really perform
And carry through the day.
She even glanced at my feet.

My legs almost buckled under
With nervousness partly,
And partly
With the thinning
Of bones
Which is normal
For one my age,
But not allowed
In a dancer.

I took a bow.

Woke up in bed
Drenched in sweat.

Rain Dance

I saw the peacock
In my backyard
Dancing.
Then the rains came.
He was so proud
As he flounced around
I wondered
If he thought
It was his own doing
Making the rain gods smile.

I saw the peacock
In all his glory
And as I smelled
The rain washed air
I felt like him
As if the gods
Had finally listened to my prayers.

As the rain drops
Fell on the ground
They drenched my face
Cool against my hot tears
Quenching my thirst
As well as the earth's.

My heart danced.
The peacock watched
Then danced again.
Together,
We welcomed the rain.

John Birkbeck

Author Biography

At age 72, I'm a late bloomer, and had not published any poetry until I was in my mid forties. I have since become the author of five books of poems. My poems, stories, reviews, articles and drawings have appeared in hundreds of magazines, newspapers, and webzines and anthologies world-wide. Back in the 1960s, I had formerly edited a gossip column as well as a tall-tales column. I'm also the host and producer of a cable TV program called The Poets' Corner.

Being Europed in Day-Mares

Tyres whine ever northward
from the crumbles of Rome
and what was once Pompeii,
I breathe in as dust.
The autoroute is a perpetual
mobius strip of macadam
swallowed up by the
voracious odometre.
I fly through dozing villages
and casinos asleep under the sun
where empty gaming tables
lay in wait for night.
I dream in wide-eyed trance,
day-dozing past shuttered palaces
of ancient but gingery countesses
in lust-lorne distress,
pumping their haunches solo
in darkened high-towered boudoirs,
dreaming, as am I, of Goteborg and
twisty interlacings of cobbled lanes,
and Gothic attics and haunted
beauty of Nordic faces,
of pouting girls distressed
by angsty cinemateophilic dreams;
dreams to awaken instinct,
longings to return to the
mother-comfort of sleep
to dream of waking.

This poem was published in 0411.78, The Poetic Link, Homeless at Home.

Angry Faces

Frothing forth
at the end of love,
leaping and screaming
on teeming sidewalks,
teetering on fault lines
of gotterdammerung or
psycho-kinetic crack-up,
flooding in and taking over
the daylight. Working three
or four part-time shit jobs,
too young to have done
hard time anywhere
but dead ready to go.

Published in Bay review, Field of Poems, Poetry.com,

Confirmation

As Plato said
sounding like Huxley
"Poets utter great thoughts
which they themselves
do not understand."
And as that sunk in
I looked to the
still innocent sky
and looked into
counterintuition.
There was a plane
that did not fly past the tower
and another stopped by fire
and everything went
from wrong to wronger.
It happened so fast
yet in slow motion
came a giant cauliflower
of gray cloud
nudging down the street
squeezing forward
silent and slow
amid screams
and denials
No! No!
Something went wrong
in the world
not registering
No!
something has gone
something is lost
Hatred does not drive us
it pulls us into the future.

Published in Poemics

Good-Bye Afghanistan, How Are You?

Metal death
falls from the
midnight sky
tons of iron rain
drifting down
in silence
at last to thud
to the numb ground
then rebound into
irreconsistent
leaps of fire.

The future
waits ahead
a mirror image
of the present
pluperfect that
rededes forever
over the foot-hills
of the homeland
no longer home.

Kit-Kat

I toss in my sheets
without fatigue,
hearing the rain
that tries to form
the sound your name,
Kit-Kat, Kit-Kat,
soft as the rain,
cold as the sleet,
the droplets
keep tapping on
without cease
on the cobbled stones.

I make attempts
to stave off my thoughts,
yet the insistent,
perpetual rain
keeps making the sound
of your name
in the night,
falling from eaves
to kiss the street,
Kit-Kat, Kit-Kat.

Published in France Poems

Fake Wedding

Of course she married her boss
of course there was irromantic
planning and scoping for pork
for the jock gone fat in the jaws
lured away from his wraith
of a wife and surly adolescents
pouting about in lurking places
and ice storms howling on
and then the melts and then
quick freezes all over again
then warm rain adding to the slick
and I splay-foot it across
the expanse of ice plain like
an old penguin who'll never
make it to the North Pole
and certainly never back
to the real blizzards
the way it was supposed to be
in the dead of an Iowa winter
and honeymoons under quilts
of goose down & stopped clocks.

Published in Poetic Review, Stupid Poetry, The Poetic Link

Horn Blowin' Blues

I aimed my octaves
out into the nightscape
toward her little house
where she scuttled away
and shuttered herself
from my hearty serenade.
Fluttery arpeggios
wasted away into thinning
(and chilling) climate
like so many sour little farts
despite elicitations into
brittle indifferent ears.
"I need soothings of Mahler!"
she said into her hot-line
to the police station ...
"Mozartian whinneys
and baroque bum blasts
do nothing to emburgeon
libido. Come immediately!"

Published in Poetic Link, Snakeskin, Stupid Poetry, Poemfields

Unrequited

I hunch into my dark corner,
hammering out a frenzy
of odes and sonnets
of unrequited lust on my
rapid-fire staccato machine,
tossing most of them away
as fast as I turn them out,
enraged that I even bother.
Some of them will be dropped
into a letterbox and
land on your doorstep,
to fall, at last, under
the scan of your gray,
indifferent eyes.
I'm not old enough for philosophy,
not serene enough for sage wisdom,
not young enough for copious
beating off about better times
amid smashed bottles.
Your idiot lover goes slack-jawed
after another tedious ejaculation,
while you ride his lap, laughing,
reading to him the more inflamed
passages of my unanswerable letters
from thousands of days ago.

Published in Poemfields, France Poems, Homeless at Home

Evening Indigo

She looks away
from the steaming kettle
away from baked apples
the warm spice smells
of an old
New England house
the napping
old house cat
the old woman
herself now the
insider looking outside
into the chill.
No one stares back
into her fading eyes
no one no longer
to covet her
inner pinkness.
She is a reverse
peeping Tom
a solitary
welcoming party
and no one
no longer left
out there
to welcome
home.

Published in Homeless at Home, The Poetic Link, The Involvement

Hungarian Rhapsody

Stirrings of sound
hot and dripping
paprika patterns
into spiral images
evoking & swirling
from conservatory
windows dissipating
into high floats
launched from
rococco balconies
a-mingle with
blue mistings
nine miles
over Budapest on
the Vampyre Flight
outta Transylvania
the international
space-timing lures
mad Magyar meastros
who're grunting out
hot Gypsy metrones
whose banjos flutter
paradoxes of lust
and gelidity
somewhere between
fire and ice--
the heat goes on.

Published in The Poetic Link, The Poetry Box, Little Brown Poetry

New Moon

My father
was born in the 19th century
his eyes have seen Victoria
the queen.

My father
once gaped in amazement
at the sight of a carriage
racing down a London street
not drawn by horses.

My father once dozed
in front of his telly
at the spectacle of
three Americans,
who were not even poets,
in space suits,
cavorting in slow motion
in the black shadows
of the new moon.

Published in France Poems, Longitudes, Homeless at Home, Poetic Link

Water Sign

You will come in
from the November night,
into the clutter of my flat,
into the clutter of my life,
to clear out a place
among the clutter
of old memories, taming them,
staving them off, keeping
old apparitions at bay.
You will come
as the rain comes
at the end of summer
to the dry earth.
A single raindrop
born in the sky
is a part of all water
that fills the dry well.

Published in France Poems, Poetic Review

A-Wank, Naked in the Stoneyard

Gazings long and a-howl
in nights late, lorn and
lust-long mid'st this
dessicated multitude in
an empty necropolis and
the choir of baleful owls
sings beneath the cool
blue moon where passed loves
and enemies of old now are.
Baleful vindications dire
can reach them . . . Not!
O, where are those once dear and drear
now gone to infinity
so far from mundane thought--
and can never hear muted
refractions of old themes?
And the breeze does nevermore
chill, nor candescent eyes
of forest creatures waver
my druidic incantations to
levitate at least the memories
of lamentations and curses
now swirled into the folding mists,
nor ever to stop the floggings
of passions never to be spilt
upon this, my holy ground.

Published in Outsider Ink

Geography Song

I held your place
in line in front of
The Coffee Jag place
on half price night
and they were gonna play
those jumpy riffs
just for you
on the snare drums
and you said you
were just going out
for cigarettes and
just as that sank in
I got a postcard from you
with palm trees
and big gaudy red stamps
and a weird alphabet--
you always do that to me
but at least you always
come back and take
your place in line.

Published in Homeless at Home, Longitudes

House on Nameless Street

You'd rush off to Patagonia
or Guinea-Bissau-- but no--
it'd turn out to be Brazil
or was it Tangier or Marrakesh?

our disposable wardrobes of
surnames and True Loves and
storms of disaffection ran
toward the further edges of maps.
You'd be old now, like me,
a veteran of frivolous loves
and meaningless hatreds and
escapes into far geographies.

You might, this moment, be living
among your cats and violets
in a big unpainted house
two hundred years old.

I want to think you'd be
finally at peace-- and be
amusing yourself in memories
of explorations of impulse,

and not just another piece
of sun-baked real estate
in the wider world, beyond where
fresh starts at last run out.

Published in Homeless at Home, Riverbabble, Kota, The Poetic Link

Of Love For Montreal

I looked down the street
where you used to live,
and almost saw you come
out of your front door.
I did not see you at early mass,
nor did I meet you at the cafe
with the blue window drapes
and the empty parrot cage.
You were not at the bird market,
nor did you buy violets from
the old woman with the mole,
who still stands at her corner.
I looked skyward to the clouds
and wondered if you were there,
and I remembered how you'd say,
"Oui" like an inhaled whisper.
Your last words to me were,
"To forgive is the worst of deceits,"
and the last sound I heard from you
was your careless little chuckle.
In the International Lounge
at the aeroport I endured time
passing at its own tempo,
my memories gone into hiding.
At a higher altitude I dozed
and the plane hung still in the sky,
aimed toward my own horizon. When
nearest you I was the most far away.

Published in Homeless at Home, The Poetic Link, A Writer's Choice, Cotworld, Words on a Wire, and others I've lost track of-

Radames Ortiz

Author Biography

Radames Ortiz is the author of a chapbook of poems, *Between Angels & Monsters*. Founding editor of *Coyote Magazine: Bringing Literature and Art Across Borders* and former editor of the *Bayou Review*, the literary journal for the University of Houston Downtown. His work has appeared in numerous publications including, *Exquisite Corpse*, *pacific Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Amherst Review*, and the *Rockhurst Review*. Winner of the 2000 Fabian Worsham award for Poetry and fellowships from the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets at Bucknell University and Voices Writing Workshop at the University of San Francisco. He is also a recipient of a 2002 Individual Artist Grant from the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County. He currently resides in Houston, TX where he is Marketing Associate for Arte Publico Press.

A Man Alone

They said he led
an interesting life.
That he earned a red
badge of courage on
his first tour of Vietnam
& the metal cracking of
M-16's still shakes his brittle bones.
That he can remember
Neil Armstrong tap-dancing
on moon craters while
Apollo 11's blue sparks
burned off the morning fog.
That the bobbing & weaving
of JFK's head bleeds into
his every step. Johnny Cash
& Hank Williams gave him
a rhythm all his own.
From the dusty cornfields
of New Hampshire to the
blackjack smiles of Las Vegas,
he sang songs more breathtaking
than Sinatra's "Old Devil Moon."
From Montana to Texas
to New York City, he
hoodooed railroads with a
captain's hat & polyester coat
swinging his arms as if
reaching for something
more than equilibrium,
more than just holding the
sky into place like a picture
in Mama-Dee's Kitchen. But
now he's withered & slower
than a wounded jackrabbit beneath
a bush of farkleberry & green ivy,
a ghost slipping back inside
the ground, driving trouble
across the river, across the brink.
No jitterbug. No moonshine.
Half-alive on a sheath of skin
where a red-headed woman kneels,
whispering his song to him
while the world outside
begins to quietly let go.

Lunch Hour at M.D. Anderson Library

I search each shelf
for the answers
charmed by light,
a madness that
speaks beyond
the melting of
scrap metal,
beyond eyelashes
of women
buried beneath
a firelight,
cursing the moon.

These books,
prodded by fingers,
like cattle grazing
beyond twilight
& into humming
of insects,
blooming
like stars on
a slackened porch.

How they speak to me,
stories cradled
in a raspy voice,
a song only a
fetus can hear.

A wound to the head,
a jab to the jaw.
My spine broken
from explosions.

A graveyard
with ghosts rising
from the ground,
moaning freedom
on the edge
of their sleep.

I am sick with
songs of black oak,
songs of factories
burning to the ground.

Words beyond
a full charcoal moon.
Tongues gone pure
with dust & mold.

From these pages,
visions swollen
like a serpent's tail
beat the inside of
my skull & reveal
the skeletons I wear.

Systolic Waltz

It comes like nights
seeping into oil
of fingernail & bone.
It took my father,
my brother. At nights,
I awake from heart
beating like white
current against
sandstone & snow crab.
I get out of bed, feel
cool wooden planks
beneath my feet.
Smooth muscle of
artery & breath.
I pass my kid's room,
an array of toy soldiers
caught in green battle.
The moon spying in
through mini-blinds,
through windows
of my skull. I walk
to the restroom & sit
with arm extended
like spears of fishermen
on the great Atlantic
looking for the white
whale of sea dreams
& coral reef. There,
I take blood pressure,
bronchial pulse of
desert darkness.
170/65. Hypertension
-the solitary feeling
of sound. What can I
do to stop sudden
stillness of heartbeat.
Exhilarated exertion
of the left ventricle,
the pumping of speed
throughout blue veins.
The only way to live,
is to imagine I have
forever, an eternity of
layers of rust & spit.
A groove inside inflated
storm of mutes.
Lub-Dub. Lub-Dub.
Lubdub Lubdub.

Lub-Dub. Lub-Dub.
Lubdub. Lubdub.
So, I dance this waltz
beyond ghost on
a wooden fiddle,
beyond the stretching
of skin on bathroom
tile while I cling to
this stethoscope-my
only connection to
a mother's belly.

This Isn't Love

Another night of yelling,
of throwing a television
across the living room floor.
My lungs caved in,
like two red balloons,
deflated & exhausted
on a kitchen counter.
Neruda never wrote
about this kind of love.
Where is the ghost meat,
the toes soft as sand,
the hair-golden tassels
of thread & silk?
Where are the lovers
watching a full moon
creep over a solid earth?
This isn't love but
screaming in the dark.
The night scabs over
as my face becomes
an etching of a blue map,
a drum weary of the palm.
Like the constant beating
of the earlobes, the ringing
of the forehead. This isn't love.
Soon, walls will rattle with a
contemptuous anthem, a song
well beyond hate & blood
Neighbors will hear my cries,
muffled yet tense like
muscles torn at the joints.
Is this a cry for help or
an echo over burnt grass?
The yawning siren at my door,
the men ready to wrestle me
free of the earth -an attempt
to save me from myself.
No more scratches across
the neck, no more teeth marks
on the skin. They will pry me
away from home & bed
as I reach towards the moon
for the years I have lost.

Saturday Night

Another 4 a.m. & we
litter Rudy's driveway with
beer cans, cigarette butts,
& plastic baggies. In
June night we form a
semi-circle & lean against
Shorty's Impala. We talk
not of baseball or cars
but of girls we've screwed,
niggas we've jumped, of
tampons we've stuck on
neighborhood doors. Caught
between a passing jet &
Black Sabbath, blasting garage
walls, we acknowledge that
things aren't bad, that our
lives aren't falling apart.
After several joints we drop
the "Cool" attitude, becoming
children of the alleys once more.
Chests heaving. Faces wet. We
engage in piggy-back wars on
moist grass, howling into salty
air. & for a moment, in
the glory of our muscles, we return
to the summer of our childhoods
where we promised to remain
together despite our aging skin
& the steel coldness in our hearts.

Office Poem I

Conga beats break
silence into sweet
musk exploded in the air
while Marina's bracelets
clink silver against the skin.
From one dream to the next
she fast-paces into calligraphy
of fax machines & voicemails.
Her feet wild with brightness.
Beneath a florescent light,
I watch this woman balance
the world & its shadows
against the morning sky.
With muscles tuned to the rhythm
of cookbooks & basil, she
proves sturdy with roots
fisting into dirt & honeycomb.
Beneath her nails, a drum
beats transparency into walls.
Cruiser with the right look,
with the hot thread of
a guitar riff. Enough to
make you weak with
riverrock & saltgrass.
What can I say?
I translate her energy
like radios in a storm.
Never quite clear or true.
just this song of dark red
for a woman spearing halos
across an evening star.

--for marina tristan

The Art of Practice

The bamboo reed divides
the evening into nine girls
practicing the dance of Wu Toa.
I close my eyes & can see
their swan-like movements
pierce the air. There's more
than a world inside them. More
than a pulse trapped within.
In the hallway-they glow rhythm
in each foot. Their spines retrace
a broken path that once led
to the underground. Where the
branches of trees hang like spears.
Where the mountains move
before your eyes. Yes. Yes.
The slow ache of their hearts.
The bartering of their bones.
Ready to redeem the flesh
& singe the tips of your hair.
A reminder of what hurts,
like the scarlet rays
spattering heat on the tongue,
like abandoned children
on the edge of mountains rising.
& with arms fanned beyond
pivots of gutted stone, they
slow-drag past the cradled earth
& into a beat closer to home.

Between You & Me

Between you & me
silence is a demon
snapping its fingers
in cold November wind.
A constant whimpering
in the air, almost sinful
like jazz or hip-hop.
Your body salutes
dead grass in a field
while I raise the sun
like morning & dream
real love in parted lips.
Minds like ours speak heavy
with tongues encased in lime
while our hands gut
tar-paved roads into
sweetened scent of goats.
The hum of drainpipes
beneath old tenements.
The gleaming of city banks.
We can say almost anything
-our words reckless like
a drunk swerving along
backroads of old Kentucky.
Pinned against the wire,
against the swaggering of
our limbs, we inherit the
day bouncing off car hoods
while our hearts grows
more human & flawed
with every beat.

Rebecca B. Whited

Author Biography

I write poetry as a form of self-expression. I utilize many venues in an effort to inspire others with my words, draw introspection, and touch their hearts. I am happily married, and have three sons and a daughter who died shortly after her birth. I can easily relate to loss and the effects that it bears. I find comfort and solace in penning my thoughts, and I find writing to be a form of release; the ink of my soul.

humbled am i

i am but one woman humbled
by my existence in a nation of freedom,
freedom flowing freely like mighty waters
cascading over magnificent cliffs,
falling,
powerfully
overcoming
life's rocky crags that lie
beneath
spirited,
rushing waters.

humbled am i, freely experiencing
true rites of passage, a woman's passage,
from infancy to maturity, unencumbered by
caustic hands of menacing men controlling
my life,
my essence,
my sexuality,
as i give freely of myself,
emotionally,
physically,
spiritually.

i am but one woman humbled, saddened
by the injustices wrought upon
the many women of the world
who will never know of the freedom i
possess,
cherish,
honor...

yes, humbled am i.

Freedom's Bloom

May freedom bloom eternally
in the garden of our lives,
bound tightly with faith and honor ~
firm, secure like the petals
of a newly formed rose,
fed by the rains of justice,
the light of truth,
the ashes of the dead
who sacrificed their lives
in the name of peace,
in the name of hope
for freedom's garden ~
a loam in which
all mankind may
cultivate,
protect,
proliferate
freedom's fragrant bloom.

In Dreams of You

*Jennifer, may you rest peacefully bound by the wings
of angels until I can hold you in my arms once more
happy birthday on this your twenty-fourth birthday.
Jennifer Whited July 25, 1977 ~ July 26, 1977]*

This night in dreams of you, my truest tears
Of twenty and four years dampened my soul,
Timed the cold contractions of my womb's pain,
Seized my heavy heart, again, allowing
My blood to pulsate, elicit feelings
Of joy and anguish
In memory clear,
I saw your face, heard your labored breathing,
As I held you to my breast to suckle
My strength, gain grace in my realm
I willed my
Soul for yours, my pleas stilled by the air of
Angelic wings in divine ascension
Reality awakened me, as you
Soft rosebud lips released my breast, spilling
My milk in a flood of anguish, once more.

Previously published by Kota Press Poetry Journal; November, 2001

Shadows of Your Soul

Jennifer,
In my dreams,
my darkness of
quiet solitude,
I espy shadows of
your soul ~ emerald orbs
of light, Spirit dancing
for me alone
your shadows
cavorting with care,
heeding my heart,
witness your wonder
in gambols of grace,
frolics of freedom,
leaps of love,
as your emerald
hue becomes a
radiant light in
pirouettes of pleasure,
motion in measure
bestowing my soul solace.

I cry, 'Once more,
Encore!
no avail; your
Spirit spent, light diminished,
leaving me wanting in the
shadows of your soul,
until next you dance
in my darkness of
quiet solitude,
once again.

Previously published by Kota Press Poetry Journal; November, 2001

Death's Journey

Traversing death's dense, dark tunnel,
devoid of deepest delusion,
impeded illusions, imagination
invaded my inner entity

Clamored chambers of my mind's core
divulged delirious detail.
fear, feeling, fantasy forbade sanity;
reality relinquished reason

Propelled with purpose, persuaded
come closer; caution, caring ceased.
My soul sought solace; serenity secured,
as death's darkness deemed luminous Light

Jettisoned forth to justify
same source of spectacular sight;
progress purposely paused by predestined plan,
stopping my serene soul's surrender

Wielding welcome, the windowed wall
beckoned me, beauty to behold;
jubilant jewels, joined justly with God, there
upon a sea of calm, crystal glass

Soliciting entry, my soul
searched the gates of precious pearls,
an emerald-hued emanation encompassed the Throne;
the Light bade me look, linger awhile

My eyes espied with eagerness
the Light's living glory, foretold
as His wondrous plan He began to unfold;
eternal life, as promised to me

The Light took form, the Lamb emerged;
I beheld Him in regal realm.
He granted a glimpse of glory given me;
arms outstretched, bidding me, "Do return

to your journey on earth for me;
your life is not o'er, a plea
I implore
tell others of my living Light,
so they my share everlasting life!"

A peaceful pace was embraced, as
my soul surrendered to His plan;
and, by His heavenly hand, was guided back
to my broken body
soul renewed.

Written about my 'near death' experience after a serious automobile accident.

Burning Ego

self-substance spirals

d
o
w
n
w
a
r
d

plummets!

fiery
cauldron awaits,
incinerates
statue of purpose;
the artist's [my]
chiseled stone,
sands of existence,
no longer hold form

caustic vapor
consumes
chamber's core,
stilling its rhythm

pain oozes
sordid salty droplets,
fueling the hot liquid
of my soul
brewing
in ego's vat

molten
hate,
anger,
despair
arise!

angst's ashes
entomb emotions,
solidify sediment
of burning ego,

now extinguished.

Brushed Canvas

Once, our resplendent canvas of love
shone facets of scintillating light,
casting shadows of sacred solace,
wherein the oils of our soul united.

Brush in hand

Adept, sensual, serpentine strokes
impassioned our palpable pigments,
as one, into a surreal fusion
of iridescent hues, sated love.

Brush in hand

Diligent desire, copious oils
applied from pallets of passion pure,
unspoiled by time and jaded brushes,
our canvas endured love's gilded film.

Brush in hand

With delicate strokes, masterful mind,
our art embodied a semblance
of infinitely honed excellence;
scenes of splendor, blissful brushings.

Brush stilled

Love's art shown in consummate contour;
our canvas, before one colored it
scarlet the stain seeped into our cloth,
ominous hues shadowing our form,

Another's brush in hand

Abraded our virtuous veneer.
Vile patina permeated love's
porous canvas; our masterpiece
shaded in wan impressionism,

Brush in hand

Aged canvas shone coffer of color;
illicit strokes of sin requited.
Brushings of remorse and tears tendered
our oils spent; the scarlet stain expelled.

Brushed canvas

Now, our resplendent canvas of love
shines facets of scintillating light,
casting shadows of sacred solace;
wherein the oils of our souls unite,

Brush in hand never to be stilled again.

Durlabh Singh

Author Biography

Durlabh is a poet resident in London, England and has been widely published in anthologies, magazines and on the internet. Durlabh has also published four books of poetry, the latest being *Chrome Red*, and feels poetry is the phenomenology of soul, without which hidden depths of our being would remain unknown.

Feats of Courage

Feats of courage and the heroic death
For the cause country or the desert zones
Peeping voices low under old stony buildings
In wake of the retreating armies of the Rhone.

On the hill an impregnable fortress
On the ground a mound of hay and mud
The battering of bats against the windows
In ruins destroyed by the war of mammon.

Give us a change of seasons
A little pause of breath after the sunrise
Two and two along bundled hay stacks
An undamaged barn along the ground.

Looking across the high window there is
A landscape stretching across the fields
But the internal bonds of prison keep tying
The gaze inwards towards the shields
Facing the demigods of death and destruction
Muzzled up rifles wolf dogs punitive camps
In the verse a demolition a smoldering ash
To counteract the poisons of the times.

Golden Temple

Riding high on the limpid waves
Rising high on the shimmering presence
Blue waters of white marbled chequers
For the eternal hymns of wayward heart
The golden domes invoking a saffron path.

Novices of thoughts and sunshine abiding
The golden swarms of vibratory atoms
The hush of pilgrims on the circular pitch
Tearing apart structures of egoed ditch.

Give vent to destinations of beauty & liberty
The concerns of soul now past its restrictions
Illuminate a glance bereft of the inner tumult
Saluting the Guru's presence in a silent rebirth.

Having Been Happy

Having been happy in touching metallic skies
Or fingering the moon for its dusty overlay
Having been happy in moving orbs and the shores
Or spreading the sunshine to the burrowed moles.

Watching a lonely planet amid reluctant universe
Communications with eyelids in retinues of mankind
Having been happy in sweeping the volcanic dust
From a cold planet cast under the Brahma's curse.

Having been happy in holding that repose
Which contained hidden geometry of the universe
Having been happy in consoling the suppressed cries
Of the shoring waves under the moonlit skies.

Kiss

When I kissed you
In an arid waste of that cheek
The tangle of your hair did dissect
Indulged in making a tale brief
Of some sombre trivial demise
Of hope forlorn or of rainy nights
And the communication between two hearts
Flowered perhaps in meadows of grass
Sweet whispers stopped not
A song of soul on warm lips
Neither charm away nor stop now
The wonder of love in mind's crypts.

Natural Tones

I am the
Springtime of leaves
And song of brunt
Meadows brief
Where the water arms
The earth's ploughed
Scars
Mingling with
Moon's soft crust.

Capricious images
Of nursling plunders
Shrouded to announce
To the world at large
Its blunders
And crystallization
Of amorphous mass
Of feelings & sensations
Into significant forms
In a universe of values
Echoes of inner stance.

I am the
Spring sap of the leaves
And song of meadows brief
Scars of earth
Peeled and ploughed
With bloods of
Moon's dried crust.

I am the visibility of the day
I am the invisibility of the night
I am the spring sap of the leaves
And the echoes of winter's last rites.

Pass Your Hand

Pass your hand over
The face where I suspect
Some salamander song
Of passions and dreary touch.

Eternity to the eyelids
And dark blossoms to the lips
The perspiration on the brow
When changed to the petals.

Passing your hand over
The face do not bare
Cold paled bleached air
The long turrets
Flayed apart
By finger butts
Sweet as a lark.

Born of waters I was
The child sprung of earth
Taught by the winds
A fearless song
Sought by the multitudes
The thistle and the rose
Nor did a beggar sworn
The fervours of venus or saturn
The proud spirit **only did stare**
Face to face in the darkened pattern.

The Museum

Where mummies gloat and pyramids fly
And curators sleep tightly in middle of night
Where marbled halls smirch with plundered loot
Amid coffins all decoyed amid some Grecian root.

In darkened chambers of the prophesised promises
No room here left now for the doubting thomases
Iron clad statues and saints of demonology
Lampoons of histories arranged in neat chronology.

Scholars children guards and aliens abide
In murky corridors where the bored breaths hide
No room catered for the soul to find inner liberty
Everything is sealed stamped by approval of authority.

There Was No One

There was no one
Only the sound of my footsteps
Or perhaps the sound of my breath
Disturbing some wandering brief
A tone wedged in whispering grief.

There was no one, only a shadow
Walking on the incumbent street
Memories of pathways gone astray
With hands held in an evening greet.

Perhaps only in footsteps of the lost
There is a dance of the whirling rain
Murmurs of north in dirges of descent
Hungers of the earth in the cities of plain.

To Vincent

You did not love the sceptred sunshine
You loved the summer's undiluted sun
Which in the end took its bitter revenge
In depriving you of your saline serenity
Into the depths of crazed pivoted symphony.

Rest assured in your diverted quickened steps
That nobody loved the soul within your crest
The crazed straw hat topping your yellow hair
Your red beard drenched in the crowds, a fear
It was enough to drive the crazy sickened mob
For a revenge on your enflamed tortured throb.

Children will mock you
Citizen will lock you
Women will scorn you
People will disown you.

Dawning clouds and rustling winds
Broken strokes of the lemon rinds
Vermillioned lamps amid ochred yellows
Cobalt blues of the sulphured mellows
Embittered flowers in the wasted vase
Vibratory landscapes in twisted grass
Pavement cafes under the starry skies
Purpled deeds in hallucinatory nights.

With color and the light
And amid a creative start
An explosion within your soul
And a bullet in your heart.

To Grow

To grow more feathers of remembrance
After fly past over the land of memories
To draw help from birds of silvery tones
Or from crystal candles and the butterflies
And in some union of vital breath
In perfumed sufferings for a transmute.

To call upon rainbows for gaudy colours
Or the wolf dogs for their hoary howls
In lute stringed bundles carried by clouds
Arrow headed bodies in sharpened growls
An echo of wanderings in secret bent.
Stilling the poisons of the strident mind.

Hills of Tora

Of faery maidens
Clad in green
Raven of hair
Bronzer of skins.

Perfumers of breaths
Hasters in the gaits
Charmers of steeds
Raiders in the grace.

On ancient hills of Tora
There is enchanted land
Cast under the spell of beauty
Magical rite in breezed embalmed.

Disturbing not the keepers of stones
Piled up high under the ancient holds
Venomous incantations of darker kind
Controllers in dimness, shadders of ash
Liberators of channelled spirit in clash.

Tempters in atmospheric disturbances
Flayed up crops of certain resistance
Deeds of hand for sole consummations
In constellations of incessant aspirations.

Janet Buck

Author Biography

Janet Buck is a three-time *Pushcart Nominee* and the author of four collections of poetry. Her work has recently appeared in *Three Candles*, *PoetryBay*, *Red River Review*, *Artemis*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Gertrude*, *Southern Ocean Review*, *CrossConnect*, *Offcourse*, *The American Muse*, and hundreds of journals world-wide.

Sharp Ice

Your hair was the color of pearls,
but I didn't think they were real.
I couldn't admit to the ash
of your skin, its porcelain pose
on saucers of graves.
Two long days beside your bed.
A cradle I pushed but could not rock.
My eyes were grabbing renaissance.
I knew it but I acted blind.

You warned me of death and its salt --
how oceans are garnished with thirst.
You taught me how to rope and rise
a baby grand from dining rooms
of buried ships -- and still I
painted ivory keys of fingernails
neon shades of busy lies
with no respect for waning light.
A wish was stepping on my hands.

Too young to abide the wrinkling fruit,
I wasn't prepared for the rind.
"Consider a storm the polish of craft,
expect the ice to be sharp" -- you said,
but I sat deaf ten miles away.
I should have been there,
when the clock of your heartbeat stopped --
darning a prayer for the size of the hole,
as lungs collapsed like old cocoons.

Folding Chairs

"Sometimes something bad happens to force something good."

Kevin Kline

I heard it in a movie called Life as a House --
where a man is learning to die
by building a reason to live.
He pisses at dawn over a cliff --
into a sea he's coming
to trust to carry him out.
Planing the knots in fossils of love.
Patching the quilts his hatreds have torn.
Washing a window of sugar and salt --
both are so white with satin and grain.
He hugs his son as if he is an envelope
with one last lick and one last stamp.
The end of the body's a folding chair.
It catches a thumb, increases the pulse,
enlivens the bend, the rust in a joint,
demands that a river be found.

Perhaps we all get to that edge --
where flight engages the wing,
where hope is an eagle and truth is the crow.
Where stars are horny for light,
where a moon is more than its rock.
You're eighty plus; I wish to roam
among our weeds, find a path
that has a crumb of touch or two.
Your posture stays an island palm.
I'm certain we have coconuts.
Here I sit, the circling boat
with splintered oars; we might've been
the crossing from a heavy drought
to morning dew before the freeze
turning to steam in adamant light.
Before I can sniff the nectar and note,
the rose will be in its grave.

The Nark of Grief

His shovel leans against the shed,
a candle pinched, the wick
in embers crumbling.
Without his hands, your own
seem only rubber gloves
to throw inside a paper sack.
You slap from room to room
as if there are no doors,
just walls, these jails of memory
in gum-less flaps of envelopes.

Ten mourning months stacked
like years in piles of wrinkled ironing --
minus a plug, a kiss of steam.
Muscles of rebirth are soft.
Clouds are dripping acetone.
The sky a fishbowl,
murky with these knots of silt.
Soil he tilled and tended
in the morning light, a
chunk of bygone birthday cake.
A passing tear, the nark of grief.
Hunger is a wafered moon
glaring at old skeletons.

Flowers seem like knuckles
leading to a bruise,
their tenderness unearned and rootless,
unbountiful beatitude,
more decor than renaissance.
His garden tools beside
the truck you haven't sold,
a rusted crop of sharp Picassos --
chins embossed in cracking paint.
Meals wilt before you eat.
A single place mat at the table
heavy as a Pharaoh's tomb.

First Published in Runes

Sizes of Sadness

At Zeinhom Morgue in ancient Cairo
bodies alive are puking on luck,
sifting through litter for glowing remains.
Forced by fear to lift white sheets,
stare at Hell on withered earth,
then put death back like cupboards
lined with cans of soup.
Relatives reach for golden teeth,
familiar scars, omnipotent symbols
of heartbeats once -- perhaps
they can prove a person was here
before the ravaging flame.
The goal is to garner a paltry sum,
toss coins at starving infancy
weeping on the tortured road --
so they can avoid the slots of their tombs
for only a moment of sand.
The goal is to find a respectable spot
to place the despicable ash.

At home, a half a globe away,
my neighbors gripe about the wind
blowing a pile of leaves
into a garden they recently groomed.
I race to meet the mailman's truck,
sort through stacks of trivia,
slice my finger on an ad, and
thank the world I have my hands.
I take my tongue, use its juice,
lick a spot of grenadine blood;
I watch as the river resumes.
At Zeinhom Morgue in ancient Cairo,
Osama El-Baz stands tall and short,
a leader assigned to the swirling crowd
so dense with unspeakable grief
it stitches a carpet of horror.
As mourners wail, he promises change
three months too late for absolutes --
corpses tossed like handkerchiefs
in canyons of a common grave.

Clean Gutters

An e-mail from my ex
moves me to clean house
with cat claws and rubber gloves.
Moves me to bathe the reticent dog,
mimic the manner a puppy
that's cornered shakes off the chill
from a lake he once stocked
with the dream of nailing a bird.
He needs my birth date
for a passport form --
says he remembers the month --
guesses two seasons away.
So many years from the truth,
I can only recall the rhythm of wails,
the love me notes that peppered
a steak I covered in sauce.
The "he" goes back to a "you."
Accusative gusts driving a wind
peeling the petals from
last week's rose, which is
logically now the page of a corpse.

An e-mail from my ex
moves me to haul out the trash.
Neaten the drawers of old ghosts,
consider cracked bowls of potpourri
no longer imbibed with a scent.
We promised forever in church;
the building went up in the flame.
When counters are scrubbed
and towels are folded in thirds,
I climb a tipsy ladder
under the gauze of a summer cloud.
Gutters should shine so rain can run free.
They're filled with wet leaves, fetid and black.
Most of our holes have healed
into small crescents of scars.
I wipe the guts of a wasp
off panes of shimmering glass --
after I've clobbered and crushed
what stung me ahead of this credible death.

Needle Tracks

At barely two, she watches
from a tilted highchair minus a leg.
Elbows parked like angry bricks
in a plastic bowl of crusty
macaroni and cheese.

This is a scene of demise
and despise her ruby tongue
will learn like books.

Her mother clears her sweet syringe,
ignores the leak tapping a bucket
glued to the grime on the floor.

She slides its point into her wrist --
goes puppet flat. A pond
she chose or it chose her.

Relief in bloom without the flower.

The shammas orb she might have been
for other candles in the church
remains unlit -- a match is wet
with all that's weak.

A little girl will fly to school
on wings of excuses and lies.

"My mommy is busy at home."

She'll walk with heavy limbs and blood
down side streets to the grass-less yard.

Climb the stairs like mountains
jutting through storm.

Needle tracks will lead to sirens,
corpses stacked in poker chips.

Heroin hill -- all victims
and vases lacking the bud --
all hunger and no heroines.

A Box of Pictures

It took me years to lift the lid.
Still, they stung like paper cuts.
In London, at age 26,
your teeth were baby powder white.
Lined in red and mute desire,
puffy as a ripe cocoon.
The Thames slid by
in almost gray complacency.
In Paris, crooked curls of hair
played paint brush on a canvas moon.
Purse and shoes and hats all matched.
Nylons had no tiny runs.

Your husband shot a roll of film --
to document the simple ways
you crossed your legs,
cougar thighs beneath a skirt.
I wonder if you capped
his lens by kissing it,
laughed about the smudge you left.
Hurried back to cheap hotels,
fingered zippers in your haste,
littered floors with stacks of clothes.
Rubbed your body into his,
furnace ticking like a watch.

At 53, before he died, chestnut cloaks
on shoulder blades and onyx brows
showed creeping silver
eating at the noble fur.
At 68, a pint of gin beside the bed.
Your teeth a row of licorice drops.
At 89, your knuckles, skin
like cloth and thread,
beaten by the wringer's bolt,
a little more aware of graves
by brushing up against the stone --
ginger root and taffeta
still smelling of the sweaty dance.

First Published in Verse Libre Quarterly

Our Mothers Who Might Have Been Art

You and I are all we have
exchanging the wafered tear.
Our mothers who might have been art
in firm stone steps -- are rocks
in the buckling knee,
knees in the minikin groin.
Yours lies in a nursing home;
mine is the mulch in a grave.
We needed their thermometers
for temperatures of climbing pain.
We needed their buckets
for wells of our strength.

Our diaries, this same black ink --
insisting a palette of color
is sleeping on trays of the silver crust.
I'm reading in the waiting room,
picking at hours, impatient and raw,
screaming at scalpels
to work their magic and leave.
My eyes and my will mow sentences --
the same damn grass again
and again 'til it's short.

When you come back to the world,
I will lift you wherever you wish to go.
My arms will be cradles and cribs,
slippers and shoes
neither of us has ever worn
into the bleak of an onyx night.
When you come back to the world,
we'll pass the platter of impotent rage,
discover the sugar, the nuts
sprinkled over the crumbs.

First Published in Retrozine

Curbs to Climb

Your face is white soap pale.
A thousand mirrors record the sag.
Who painted your flesh this oatmeal fix?
Ghost in a drape.
Even a straw is testing
the wheeze of your lungs.
The bed owns the room
like a tumor that swells.
Nurses come and doctors go --
quietly as passing fish.

This pocket change of suffering --
church bells calling for a god
who seems absorbed
with bigger things than human ears.
When blankets of drugs peel back,
you'll need the cane of a friend
who isn't afraid of curbs to climb --
who won't avert her open eyes
from *show and tell* of spreading scars,
potage of time rubbing the heel.

I've scooted down
the basement stairs of losing it.
I've seen the termites
under floorboards
chewing at the planks of arks.
I knew when we met,
some painful hour would snap
our frames like dry saltines.
Agape is never a monk --
it's a choir that garners its voice
from the rush of a brutal wind.
Stand up and spend the last pink rose.
I do not want you resting here.

First Published in Identity Theory

Body Wax

I ignored the bottles that rolled
from back seat floors
up to the front under my legs.
They tapped at my ankles and talked
like woodpeckers drill at petrified trees.
Of course I ignored their necks
too narrow to slip a penny in.
The music we played had static and dust.
Our windows were blurred by our storms.
If we kept at this pace, swigging
the ether to numb and to strangle
gray thugs of our clouds,
our livers would be
the tongues of old shoes.
I would forget I could walk.

A quick goodbye, a suitcase stuffed.
A slamming door that cuts dry cheese.
Bygone kiss -- bikini waxing pull and strip.
Rip and recall the pain of a touch.
My swatches of skin have
landscapes of rashes and burns.
Cold turkey was best
for the beast we became.
My thighs were finally mine again
to open like gifts for reciprocal hands.

I nailed our wine rack to the wall --
a better man would hang his hat
on bamboo spokes, sweep
tart hailstones off the porch.
Use softer palms to salve old scars,
leave clippings of his mustache hair
like fresh cut grass in bathroom sinks.
I knew deep down that kangaroos of loneliness
could hop the canyons of this grief.
The rest of your shirts dangled in ghosts --
and I would take guns of myself
to empty husks of their sleeves.

Some Stones Hurt

I was ten years old
when I saw the Venus de Milo
posing on clean gray tile.
Shutter clicks were going off
like car alarms.
And I was ashamed of her stone.
Of the air where her arms
were destined to be.
I wondered why she had no scars.
If she hated the eyes --
their rabid dogs, their
pigeon-dropping cloying orbs.
I wanted to give her my clothes.
Pass her a bottle of glue.

"She's broken," I said to my aunt.
"Why is she here -- in a place of respect?"
No answer emerged from her tongue.
I thought about my missing leg,
its carcass and its animal.
Later I would share her shape.
Duck cameras like a waiting knife
pressed to a throat of crumbling sand.
She must have taken a fall.
"Someday we'll chat," I said to her,
"over a meal of oysters and art
about the presence
of grit in the shell,
about the impotent rage."

First Published in The ZeBook Zine

Dimes Between the Cushion Cracks

All that was left was the lump of a chair,
a Dante doll that rocked until
the stopwatch of a beating heart
trickled into silences.
An afghan draped across the back
to cover holes your spine had rubbed.
From here, you flipped like a caught trout
in the moon's gray pail.

Watched as the rainfall bled
on fuzzy portraits of glass.
Listened as the furnace chirped
its bird-like morning arias.
From here, you grabbed an apron string
that tethered Grandma to her stove.
Lit your pipe, gushed
about her homemade pie,
even when the lattice cracked.

This old thing she always called
a wart on rugs, a rock to lift --
but never moved and dusted
like a precious mink
in closets of the very rich.
Dimes between the cushion cracks.
Songs of sweat on beaten arms.
I had to keep this monument.
All your craters, all your perils,
all your Hells had settled here.

First Published in Literary Potpourri

Under the Porch

It was all bricked up, but I had to look.
Under the hat of the porch
where the swing caved into the rust.
I pulled each stone,
light as hair on nervous skin.
Wincing and tearing but knew
some score was waiting there --
harps a thumb refused to touch.
A paintbrush like a horse's tail
that swiped at flies you couldn't change.
60,00 lemon rinds.
Moot remains of destiny.

Your fingers were making lemonade.
Time, like sugar, dissolved.
A comb for days when heads weren't bald.
A doll minus her right leg,
severed just above the knee.
Were you testing your smile
when doctors said I'd lose my own
to see if curves could ever aim at suns again?
83 beer caps, scattered like unwanted dimes.
One for every casket filled.
The willow trees were weeping too.

Fishing line, just skeins of it,
you used to wile away the hours.
A single earring minus post.
Nibbled off? Lost in floods of lust saliva
some late night of loneliness.
A dozen bibles, pages torn.
You ditched them all --
their fancy, sculptured promises,
their thick commandments
stained with sweat --
when Gramma slid into her grave
on skates of useless rosaries.
Their parchment flesh, their turtle doves,
brittle now like bark and twigs
that bitch inside a roaring fire.

First Published in Small Spiral Notebook

The Waiting Room

*"There was no room in that tiny space
for anything but two chairs and the truth."*

Maria Housden

In the act of just sitting
silence gained magnanimous weight.
"She has a 50/50 chance."
This was the record's rut.
The rest of the music rendered me deaf.
The sun was out in blue slate skies,
but I saw black, a firm eclipse
in permanent ink.
Coffee tasted like mud.
All the cream from any pitcher --
all the smiles from nurses
padding down the halls --
did nothing to dilute this fear.

No matter how ready you were,
I was running backwards fast,
running backwards to the bath
when I was six and you were
sudsing thick blonde curls,
telling me to shut my eyes.
In my mind, the tumor grew
from the size of a plum to an orange
to melons to elephant dunes.

Every step that might be doctors
coming through the swinging doors
increased my pulse like
water in a red balloon.
Prayers adhered to conscious sighs
then pulled away like virgins
from a messy kiss.
And yes, the soap was stinging fire
as a diary closed on my thumbs.
Four pink roses in my hands
grew bald from constant trembling.

First Published in Facets

The Rummage Sale

The IT had finally come to pass.
All we had to hold of you --
brass or silver, wood or china,
stacks of curled sepia.
A photo marked with 1936 in France.
Someone scribbled femme fatale,
scratched a smile in fading ink.
Your house was cold
even in this August oven
burning fingers as we looked.
We vacuumed cat hair off the drapes.
Mother swore at dusty cupboards
packed with jars of cardamom
left so long it qualified as antique sand,
made us laugh between black geysers of our tears.

Residue of character came crawling out
of every drawer. One whole chest
of silken scarves you tied
around a sagging throat
until you hit that knowing age
when wrinkles seem
like creases of the intellect.
Your husband's fluffy shaving brush --
that must have been a horse's tail
with mud and flies
of wishing fate had left him here.
A forty-year-old diaphragm --
in case you fell in love again.

Time to split your sets of dishes,
rows of Wedgwood, Staffordshires,
mounds of books, and mugs of pens --
these gospel tunes of poetry
that met the tragic at the stairs.
All the so-called valuables
were plates of dry, dismissed dessert
someone licked the frosting from.
It was the wrong day for sticky rain,
meager in its douching rites,
sweaty in the armpit's curve.
We needed some effacing wind
to shanghai contraband of grief.

First Published in Pig Iron Malt

New York, New York

From distances, from cobblestoned naïveté
you were a city of chills:
crowded streets of suits and ties,
surlly frowns, prison bars on window glass.
I saw a pasture drowned in mace,
maps of penciled busyness
turning pages of an hour.
Footage shines on CNN;
heroes cut my tongue in two.
Now I wallow in my shame,
wear the rust of judgment blades.

New York, New York
will sing again and I will proudly
sit a grain in little pills of subway cars,
read graffiti like a kiss
my feeble lips must herald
in their cracking pose.
Bays around our liberties are filling up
with scraps of hate personified.
Terror tried to slit your wrists;
fingers joined in trinities;
a poem of hope emerges from the graven ash.
Moons above the urban rubble
linger in chipped bars of soap.

Strike the ivory with our blood --
fragrances run rivers
from collective streams.
War drums beat. I never thought
I'd grab a stick, pound
with all my muscle fire.
Never thought I'd love
the sound of steel planes
cutting through the cotton clouds.

First Published in PageONE

Strappado

We've never had our emerald grass
yellowed by peine forte et dure.
I hesitate to lift black wool --
let you bleed on ivory skin.
But this regime -- this muscled
horror -- has amputated liberty.
I limp on tent pegs of your home,
reduced to toothpicks digging up
the old decay, uncross
my granted thighs and stand.

You tell me in Afghanistan
women paint their fingernails,
have manicures as secretly
as rainbows stalk a thunderhead.
Bodies hanged to thread a point --
symbols of psychotic sockets
grab whatever graces them.
If 9/11 woke me up
to nightmares you have worn
like clothes, then grit will act
and dust to dust will hurl
the tyrant from his throne.
Love should render hate a eunuch
scrambling to find his balls.

Behind your shrouds
lie prisoned dream states
sculpted 'til they don't exist.
You mention rape --
as common as a wing-less fly.
Conch of woman isn't meant
to be a tear duct
channeling abiding terror.
You were never born to be
an ash tray for their penises.

First Published in Verse Libre Quarterly

Sock on Sock on Sock on Sore

The earth's arboretum of evil
is blooming lush orchids and fruit.
Smiles of the dead creep into frowns,
reshaping my footprints of luck.
Numbers of the missing climb;
they multiply like gnats
surround an apple core.
Our puppy bites the mailman
who wears a scraggly, knotted beard.
Who will chop down trees of terror?
All my courage sleeps in fear.
I have twin nightmares back to back:
one is of a gassy room
that's pumped until the screaming stops;
next appears the falling rubble
mixed with hands I didn't hold.
Where are spines and where are beams?
Where is center? Where is tilt?
Why does war emit the smell
of heavy moral dizziness?

Seeing shots on CNN of children
clawing at a bus, tents
in downed umbrella spikes.
There are no Southern patios
with lemonade and porch swings
creaking in a breeze.
Camels kick the brewing sand.
Our embassy is looted, torched,
tossed into the mouths of wolves.
Panic, panic, everywhere.
I stand confused and trembling.
Pages of a practiced bible,
sock on sock on sock on sore.
Driven by the ivory ash of bodies
dropping from their dreams,
we speak of peace
with fingers on a trigger's curve.
Somewhere in a quiet town
a mother buffs an army boot.
All my bullets hesitate.

First Published in SpokenWar

Christopher Barnett

Author Biography

I am Chris Barnett, a writer from Brooklyn, who has been head first-immersed in the corporate sea; thought it makes for some great writing time. I've been featured in a variety of online reviews; *Adirondack Review*, *Can We Have Our Ball Back?*, *Eclectica*, and *Ken Again*.

On Fences of Never

I don't know what to do with my eyes
At first, you're one in a million of the post-chic
Donning what the magazines tell us
Dodging your imaginary Paparazzi
Your lacerating tresses stealing me to a still
Every eccentricity quieted behind a practiced clarity
Of course you're just as capable of pizza chin
As any pretty face
Next, I detect your cataclysmal communication devices
They seem to beep
Vibrate
Ring
Solve very important problems
Then I realize you have that hushed kind of sugar
Found only in the lonely
The kind with subconscious smirks
I see you smile
Your baby brown eyes
They start into melted chocolate chips as I wave
I suddenly have an urge to help
To run with you
Cook with you
But I'm still picking my nose
Squawking claptrap
Admiring from the closest far I can
I'm suddenly converted into the kind
Who over-rationalizes about chance
About the supernatural
And the strangely bizarre whilst strangely comforted
Knowing the mystical has happened to me twice
Twice my eyes have convinced themselves of you

Did you really think you could get away with it?
Fake your own death to come to New York?

You stop in at the Chinese butcher
Browsing the marinated death of ducks
Teary-eyed carnivorous
A gumball pops out
You arc it in your mouth
Wave to a brash clerk with a teal tongue
And leave humming Sondheim
Next you chew the fat with bag ladies
Like you were made of bags and all things pure

Next you kick a street rock
Delighted this rock has kept up with you
You don't hear your phone ringing
They miss you, Natalie
All of them
But I won't tell a soul
The secret is safe
I won't tell that you chew gum cow loud
That I saw you last night under the streetlights
Status electric under an active rain

I guess we're not in control
Or even at the wheel
But it feels real
And my right now is telling me you're in it
Doesn't it feel good to be alive?
That the quintessence of divine virtue is inbuilt
That the timeless immediacy of "but it could happen" Happens?
That the kind of meaning we all lose the gist of
Until we finally define ourselves
Unveils?

Natasha
Downtown for boots and your prissy button rouge
Step princess step
Natalie
Of limited range but of heart tugging amenities
Snivel girl snivel
You know you're a star |but you need space
It's understandable
Just like I am somebody's Chris Barnett
Or Kevin Bacon
And right now they're behind me
I guess about 5 blocks or so
Guessing, constructing, imagining
My entire life story
I guess we're all characters for each other
I'm just not sure how this will end
If I should tuck you in my dreams
Or hand you a kite and some popcorn

Long after the artificial promises
The heartfelt cocktails
You just slipped
But right before
You were on the railing
Holding onto something
Something that let you go
And it felt good to yell and yow

Into a sky so immaculate
You could die
Now it's just you and Sondheim
Rolling on like some anonymous parade
While the holidays
The fireworks
The affairs
The frugality
The fearful confusion
And the normalcy of an innocent city
Lingers around the edges of your smallness

A passing drunk recognizes you
He'll enter a bar singing
Everyone will think he is just a mad bum
Yet what his beautifully mucky head knows
Could turn the world upside down
He will drink until he cannot stand or speak
And it will be just before puke as he ventures to tell the world who he saw
And upon hearing his zealous discourse the world will pass him off as a drunkard
He will plead, kick, flail, and stomp like an irate child
Until he passes out burped
The next morning
With all his recollection blurred
And his headache needing attention
He'll cry a lot
Not because he has forgotten
But because he cannot remember
See you around, Natalie

First Day

Michael Gallagher
Corners me
In the hallway
His hands wrapping 'round my pencil neck
And then upsy daisy
Into the ceiling
All the laughing
My head
Soon my yogurt
Drips out
Followed by the happy apple bouncing
The troubled sandwich he caught
Spitting out the lettuce and onion
Ketchup drooping lip
Like some monster I had dreamt of

His mother
With her slumped breasts
Wasn't a mom
His hanged sister
Was cut loose
From the top bunk
With a butter knife
The symphonic boom
Of his loom
Was not his own

He tells me I'm ugly
His breath is hammy
But I don't say it
He drags me against the hallway brick
Kicks the happy apple sad
Nobody laughs
They're all in class
And I'm late
And hungry
I'm 90 lbs.
My mother is home sewing

Purple Thoughts

I have watched your finger
Trace the veins in my hand
Trying to somehow
Reach a part of me
To find my earthquakes
My inner lakes
Those thoughts purple

Standing in the ginger kitchen
This single cup of tea. I try to imagine
The way things could be
For us
Everything scripted
Insufferably pink

Softer than yellow light
All-in like a farm floor
Alone as an unsent letter
Sipping your ginger tea
The steam curdles
Claws
Clambers into magical imaginaries
My head circles
Euphoria's deranged shadows
Running the awful wheel of noise and thought
And I end up by the phone
Staring
Thinking about the blood in your veins
There are things I should tell you
But thought has created these things
I might need your help

Tonight, there is no moon
Feeling my way, hands in front of me, then along the wall
Until I find the door
Fighting blurry eye concavity
I go back to bed undone
But upward

Simplicity

Teasing Mother Earth's complexion with baby steps
Roses glance at me and smile as I leave them smelled
A scintillating star
Ready to cruise affection shimmering
Showering pristine affection
For no reason than being alive
Cruising unworried glide
Half butterfly
Half Vata
And f this is the truth
Then maybe there is time left for this man I am
To bring right to mistakes
He has claimed as his own

The Bus

When my father whistled
All four of us
Each in itchy inches
Lugged our shovels
Dragging behind us the rakes
The claws of steel scratching the ground
8 snakes wide
And our foreheads
Fuming with young hustle
Traverse the honking highway
All brothers in a scamper
To board the bus
To pay
To save up money
To escape from under puberty's bozo thumb
And ascend to men

I look out and see America driving
Wrapped in a luxury we never knew
One passing child
Backseat
Amidst his digitalism
A woman wearing an animal
Lovers exchanging compact diskettes
Talking about proms in gymnasiums
Then trees and a wet willy
I turned and saw my father
Cracked open to the point of spill
Watching the trees
And me
Growing

My First Publish

After my first publish
I woke up
But I was still in bed
I set my feet on the ground
But found no slippers or unconscious groupie
I looked in the mirror
There was no wondrous aura around me
I looked out the window
Everyone on the street could not see
I had written a book
I double checked the mirror
Still none of that aura
I looked the same
How boring is fame?
Was I dreaming?
I called my friend
"I cannot believe it is raining." he dared say
Is that the way to start a conversation?
Just days after publication?
I hung up on him
I put on my coat and left my building
Despite me, it kept raining
"Did you know I finished my book?"
I asked the HOT PEANUTS! guy
He called me a nut

I walked downtown
No one looked at me
I was sure the length was managed
Such visionary characters
Wild, ethereal plots devoid of dull
I even tried the New York Times
But some other guy got reviewed
I made dramatic faces at the sky
Nobody consoled me
It kept raining as if it knew
Certainly I would be in the paper tomorrow
Or maybe the next day
I held my breath
But decided to keep breathing
For no reason
but to write my own obituary
Surely that would be read
I checked myself in the store windows
Still no aura
I went to the coffee shops
The places where writers go
None of them recognized me

I couldn't even formulate a sentence
I ordered coffee like a writer
Didn't shave like a writer
I even smoked
But nothing came
I guess some of us write because we're poets
Some write because we're not poets

I returned home egoless
And once more
I checked in the mirror
Yep...still a poet

This Old Gas Oven

Cutting out recipes to lend us
Your mother smiles at the fool I've become
Pours me more wine
A broad grin like her shopping list

You're working late downtown
Green platanos
Searing in oil
Saffron rice boiling
Black beans simmer with sofrito
Chili
Red onion
Until steam clouds the room
Tasting of salt
Smelling of the old gas oven
My eyes get salty
They feel important

What lies between us
It feels thin
As this smoke could be
Transparent enough
To salute the strange unreality
That only our knowed pillows hold
While our reticent wish-states
Toss, turn, and stir
Until all ingredients merge

When she takes my face in her hands
As she would a warm sponge cake
Her constantly shrinking voice slices through me
I see her
As she must have been once
Afraid of nothing-long before
She fell in love with your dad
A man who shattered
Everything he touched
Who left her eyes galled by all the other faces
Like yours
She might have looked into with love

New Bride

I heard my organs growl
I almost made sheep sounds
Because pianos were in her eyes
But now with a ring
Her hand found mine
With a window in-between
I followed in the dust
Of a Pontiac speeding into possibility
2 bobbing silhouettes
Crisscrossed in kiss kiss

Back at the cafe
A Roman Catholic nun stirs an Irish stew
She knows me
She asks if I love the girl in the Pontiac
She smiles peacefully
And I jibe to the refilling juke
"Are you too late?" she asks
"My love's got a 351 under the hood."

Candy M. Gourlay

Author Biography

Candy M. Gourlay is a young South African writer and poet. She was born on a windy day in the Autumn of 1973 in Johannesburg, where she still works, writes and lives with her husband and three children. Her work has appeared in numerous publications worldwide, most recently *The Wide Thinker*; *Reflections Quarterly Anthology*; and *Tstream* Featured Author Column. *'The Storm, Deep Water Here: A Collection Of Thought'* and her debut work of creative non-fiction, *'Story of a Girl'* is scheduled for publication late 2002

Coin de Mire

Know me through these scattered words
left behind by waves, like shells on a beach
grains of sand falling through an hourglass
ash of life, like dust

remember the moon, how she licked my face
the tides, how they pulled me this way and that
the waves, gentle upon the shore
remember it all

and find me in these words, for one day
they will remind you I was here, I shone
for you, as you did for me, we were stars
and together, we made light

remind me, lest I forget to rage against the dying
of the light, lest I go gently into that good night
lest I forget from whence I came, and you
lest I forget the beauty of you.

Remember.

Coin de Mire appeared in Reflections Quarterly Anthology of Poetry and Art, Summer Edition, August 2002 (Wordshop Publications, USA) and in the Tstream Association of Writers Quarterly Journal, Featured Author Column, Spring Edition, May 2002.

Perhaps You Knew

My last recollection of you
was when you were singing

the crickets were out in force that night
we were all together
in body
in soul

God we were happy

seated beneath the black arc sky
with her pinprick stars shining down like
some magnificent down-lighted ceiling

do you remember the way I do

I think perhaps you do
because even though you're just a memory
I still sense you standing next to me
around Christmas time
when fairy lights are low
in the heat of this African summer
when dreams turn to fields of snow

I recall the way you
inhaled the world that night
how you sang
embracing the air with your voice
smooth, mellow and strong
like single malt for the ears

there have been nights since
when I've had a few
too many

when I have sang and thought
if only I could have been something
more like you maybe
I would have cared less what they
thought of me
love me hate me take me leave me
this is me

but then perhaps
you knew that
about me

and that was
you

and I loved you.

for 'Moose'
April 22, 1959 ~ February 18, 1999
'memories: the residue of a life once ours'

Red Sand

Red sand sweeps
across the deserts
like time
source of life

and death

scarlet sun weeps
dusty tears, like rain
from an invisible heaven
and daylight

dissolves into darkness

for children lie dying
in the red sand
dying upon this barren
blood stain'd land

where life crumbles

like granite
flung from a mountain
and the eyes
of dead children

find no petals here

their ears no music
their graves no grass
only the wind
beating the ground

and even the stars cry.

for Africa: sad land that I love

Monologue

mono i

left brain:

you know you would
pull yourself together
if you really wanted to
you are loved and so
fortunate for many
reasons and you would
stop hearing faceless
voices calling your name
you would speak of normal
things and behave in an
appropriate way, what
is with you-

mono ii

right brain:

its the silent sadness
the invisible tears which fall
its the half-forgotten pleasures
the vague, prohibited dreams
its the waking mind in slumber
the careful, fearful thoughts
its the calculated conversation
the rehearsed words of spontaneity
its the fabricated laughter
the shadows of affection
its the loneliness of a crowded room
the silence of idle chatter
its the faith in the unseen
the knowing the illusion is life, itself

mono iii

left brain:

and I am supposed
to know what you are on about
what the hell are you on about
you believe your pain
is the only pain
how arrogant, how pathetic
get a grip for god's-sake, get a grip-

mono iv

right brain:

it would have been different
had it not been the same
what is the use of anything
when nothing will ever change
it would have been different
had it not been the same
what is the use of living
when death is a breath away

mono v

left brain:

what is the use what is the use
there is use in everything
in every single moment
there is purpose
there is meaning
there is a reason
for living
as there is one
for dying
stop with the illusion nonsense
there is no illusion
everything is real-

mono vi

right brain:

only love is real.

Fallen Star

Standing in the doorway
six beds away
eyes fixed upon you

skeletal and asleep
a shadow
beneath the sheet

raging sun
blasts
through the window

a spotlight
on your bed
star of our show

sorrow
eats me
whole.

Delicate Like Me

With no idea of the life I have lived
no promise of the face behind this word
the word inside this miniature universe
greater than ever I thought life would be
more overpowering than it means to be me
and no clue of the world I try to call home
home, a place I have longed for all of my life
home, a safe sanctuary in which to honestly be free
free to cry out loud to the concrete
or the stone mind
my lonely mind amidst the crowds, lonely
although never alone
driftwood mind, warped from the salt of the sea
and the treacherous sun, scorched
into an elsewhere
too tortured to remain in a tainted reality
where the elements are entitled to judge
judge and to decide the fate
of a fragile someone
a gentle no one
wandering through the chalkboard's of time
pretending to skip over the unwanted lines
erasing the laughter the certainty
recreating people
who are delicate
like me.

Insight On The Roof

Cigarettes in the moonlight
wishes blown through rings of smoke

up on the rooftop
making love to a million stars

who placed themselves cunningly
within the ceiling of the night

simply so we would have something
upon which to dream.

Whispering Meadow

We spend some nights drifting
through the whispering green
meadow of dreams

together we create and colour
the sky with little else than our
own imagination

here, amongst the dancing willows
and flaming poppy flowers
we find peace

knowing we created heaven
because we imagined it
perfectly into existence

far, far away the whispering
meadow of dreams silently
awaits our return.

Whispering Meadow appeared in Extraverse Literary Journal, New Zealand in November 2001 and in Poeticricity, The Beatnik Journal in January 2002.

Eighteen, or Shattered Citadel

Candlelight shadows
consume themselves
upon the wall
tonight:
the night
you took your life
three hundred
sixty five days ago

I am reliving your final
moments for you
as you
and I remember
you standing
in the doorway
smiling your smile
your voice in the air
after you had gone

one year has frozen
into a motionless eternity
without you
an endless winter of icicles
clinging to days
caverns
canyons of emptiness
howling through the vacuum
of your death
and I try
try
to fill the void
lest it swallows me
whole

you were tired
this I know
I am tired
this you don't
and you never offered a clue
to the complex web
which strangled the life
from you
and no notion
of the desperately designed
disguise you wore
like a cloak

time
you swine time
pour your wicked days
on me
drown me
in a cesspool of questions
and memories
of could have's, what if's
if only's-

I can take this
can do this
can die

turn back
you wrinkled hands
of time
toss one more
careless chance at me
one single opportunity
to change
the course of this forsaken tragedy

no
no do-over's

for always you will be gone
just out of sight, beyond reach
tossed
into a sour ocean of tears
whose tide-less waters butchered you
slaughtered you
sucked the blood from your veins

is death the end of the game
the last act, the final curtain
or is it not
is it the beginning
am I at an end
here, left behind
(hang me please hang me)
crawling in and out of crevices
holes
in life
like a bug
in a world
of no second-chances, or
are you

through the open window the
setting moon follows its
path behind the world

hanging
there watching me
raped and slain by despair

my head reels the room spins the stink
of confusion replaces oxygen
silence deafening
sinister
unclear and
I am on my knees
hating the dream
through closed eyes I scream
to a god
I cannot see
nor touch

why

why the sun
why did it rise
on this eighteenth day.

In memory of Mel Tohill
'Moose' April 23, 1959 ~ February 18, 1999

'what of it, now'

Life Undone

Undo the buttons
on my shirt
peel the skin

off my face
kill the silence
break the noise

I'm going under
sinking deeper
into darkness

take my shoes
toss my skirt
slip the clip

from my hair
burn the poet
drown the dreamer

I'm going under
sinking deeper
into darkness

breathing water
drinking blood
let me leave

this world
a life unravelled
an existence undone.

Pushing Thirty

Cracking like sheets of glass, these dreams
are fracturing into shards at the feet of time
squashed like a bug by the boots of life

before living had half a chance
to sprout shoots from the dirt and party
at the club down the street

where these legs once danced
in hipsters, this voice once sang
karaoke songs with reckless abandon

these lips once kissed the face
of joy, these eyes of green reduced
suits to clumsy hands clambering

to settle the bill or open the door

even the leaves of summer must succumb
to winter looming ominous on the other side
where with time, age rolls and thunders

across firm skin, where cunning are the crows
feet pressing into this fresh face and wrinkles
beat to death taut flesh at cellular level

like an old vegetable forgotten in the bottom
drawer, youth is slowly and surely gnarled
beneath the wicked hands of time, deformed

by (un)natural acts of god

pushing thirty years and its been too long
since we laughed at the same things, since
we lived the same life and breathed

in the same space, these delicate dreams and I
are cracking like fragile sheets of glass
get us out, let us out

of here.

Brandon Reed

Author Biography

I am Brandon Reed and I live in Stone Mountain, Georgia. I have been writing poetry for eight years. I like the expression of it, the visual painting I get out of my mind when I write. My vision is to one day see a book with my name on the front cover – that would be my crowning achievement!

Bells of War

I got so much trouble on my mind
Listening to wicked drums
In today's living, feedback coming from hostile studies
Printed in black, skin crawling when joined in delivered pain
Wishing explored anger
Note fate deciding
Before pulling triggers in black attacks
Never questioning what I am
Existence knows
Because, it's coming from the heart
Hanging is not fiction, just fear of constant struggle
Never wanting to see me raise sons and daughters
In battlefield scars, I hear brothers say they want to learn about life lessons
But, kick chocolate and sincere sisters into muddy waters
Polluting divine wisdom in separate pairs, dropping curses over fiery blues
Trying to avoid anti-nigger machine war, I see in riots
Created on the tube, never forgetting the smoke around civilization philosophy
Painting controversy on feature presentations
Shown in fist
Ready to get sweaty, sad to say
We were sold down the river, listening for rhythm nation blessing
On the radio, I once declared war on
When touching fear of a black planet through paranoid witness
Bringing final collusion to dynasty imperative thinking
hell burning in the conscious of Amerikka
Sitting in soul
Stolen from color recruitment, drafting us for target practice in pointless wars

Brought on by greed ways, wondering where in the hell is our return?
Looking to share eternity's secrets in war and peace
I once touched on soul sister's back, can't hold back
When seeing mahogany communication disrespected
Knowing it takes a stronger sister to make a
Stronger man, pure and raw to the bone
Tasted in winds, gone from honest tears
Hoping to come together and send the masses in the state of damn
Never get caught up in this mess
Spoken from rage, defeating nation's raising in inspiration smile
Taking something out of today's conversation
I had with you, connection in constant elevation
The most beautiful creation and mother of our nation
Just taking this time to let u know what's on my mind
Spoken from true words in character, I wish to married
Before dying in background sound, beating my ears
Until I surrender to the ending pain
Created in suicide's merging plea, holding up revolutionary's generation
Still, anger on the b-side!

Earth, Wind, and Fire

Representation of the nation
Leaving behind scars from winter war
Taking pictures of lovely summer reflections
Recapturing childhood innocence, southern butterfly
Hatching cure hunger inside joy tears, reviewing caramel brown mystery
In tomorrow's deep mind metamorphosis, imagining words from the heart
When laying beneath the stars
Reaching from a far, beauty seen though the eyes in my mind
Painting teenage love in revengeful vibration
Living in pastime paradise expansion
Adoring lifetime friend in morning rain's change
Torturing communication's understanding
During night time knocking on masterpiece rising
Freezing endless skies through first time resurrection
Moving through my hands till touching hearts original flow
Sparking held frames in tongues relaxation
When the fire's fury
Blaze compassion's plan, becoming compatible before bitten fruit choose
Destiny's secret kiss, she has been on my mind for a longtime
Listening to saxophone's opportunity roll off timeless autumn addiction
In contagious soft spoken romance, reading out loud
Each letter from novel's introduction
Telling my whole life through beautiful lady's stare
I painted on balcony's stroll, feelings starting to show in front
Of breakfast adore, cold summer nights saying we should never part
And break up infinite possibility in old earth's calling
sharing messages across the sea about
the pretty little one I adore in chaos upbringing,
kept near full cooperation idea, that represents old time loving piece,
discuss in memory's square signature written on the ultimate high
capturing my breath when coming in contact with brown sugar caress
leaving me at a loss for words!

Magnolia

Sometimes, I feel lonely
Coming with in a eye of ending the pleasure
Caused by the pain in a fool's cry

Sometimes, I feel like
Taking you to a place that exists
On the other side of the moon

To comfort the lost message
I once heard in lost piano keys
That, view you in golden years
As the angel
I once saw alone on this earth
Falling in love with someone like you
Would please me
Until my life is through

Apple nightfall raining deeply
In my mind, observing morning behavior in soft music, knowing
We can conquer the world in infinity years, wanting
A love touch only at midnight
To the setting of candlelight
And a conversation to last forever
And see me through in times
That shows the future a brighter day

A flower,
That grows at the feet of worthless years
And bless the mind with something to share in hollow shells
Life begin
And was then done in moons
That opens up empty souls to feed us
Eternity to the mood of love
Spent in beauty
Shared over waters that never end
Until the truth
My life has yet to find
Can fall in love with my soul and rest
Safely in heavens arm and share the answer of life
In those eyes, I have adore since the days became too high
To let go and wither in the sky!

Soul Food

The best of my years
Were, meant to be spent with you
Reliving spoken interludes
As pretense marriage proposals

Getting me here
Wondering where to find queen's rise
Inside love's hidden panic, knowing I could love you

Better than the next man could, telling tomorrow
About the things we say, playing tunes of ancient blues
Sparkling off first hand experience, tasting cherry blossoms

Beyond years comprehension, sharing tears with time
During supper time, daydreaming about holding you hostage
Before sunshine's sacrifice, kissing inside your naked wounds

Only my 3rd eye seems to yearn for, looking through the circumstances
Of sickness and health, till death do us part, those were the words said
From first night's encounter, never crying

Until I let down my guard, all that I can say
Meeting someone to spark conversation inside walks
Sincerely, wanting to touch nightly studies

My lips scream during lifetime taste test, it seems summer days
Are not that far behind, loving you would be wonderful
Cooking for the sake

Of earth's sweet melody, beginning with old earth wise vision
Seeing you undress in brighter days, sweet things meaning passion
Hangs for more than silent truth

Dropping on condemn minds, sometimes I feel like breathing inside next door's
Neighbor sentimental smile, chasing you down Carolina skies and jumping into
Timeless art arms, analyzing stars when looking back

Needing her more just a little each day, getting away far
Just to go down in her kingdom and see rain's nightfall fascinate
Wet imaginations, sharing dinners with physical change, always being the red rose

My feelings will be true to, reading your vibe beyond skin- deep issues, and still wanting
you as my baby in season's unremarkable change that leaves me broken

Through the mind, wanting to rest in urban backyards and share my last days with
Eternity's dish that holds my reason for living in peace and makes me cry at the peak
of hello's madness!

Pat Phillips West

Author Biography

Pat Phillips West is a former hospital administrator who lives and writes in northern Nevada. Besides poetry she creates and distributes a unique card line, *In Other Words*, for those times when, "Get well quick," just isn't enough, or you don't know what to say. Her work has appeared in an anthology, *Labyrinth: Poems and Prose*, as well as *FZQ Poetry*, *Poeticricity*, *KotaPress*, and *All Things Girl*.

Inhale—Exhale

Holidays suck the breath out of you—
leave you unable to swallow food at birthdays
drink an anniversary toast, or celebrate the moment—
you yearn for a beer and hot dog at the ball park
TV and popcorn, lost wonders of the every day.

Unrelenting—a whiff of cologne reminds
you of the scent tucked in the closet undelivered.
Someone's chatter about a trip revives
unwelcome memories—
plans interrupted excursions un-taken.

Reality knocks—each morning
you hesitate delay your departure.
Stand at the door as if
you had a choice not to open it.
A choice not to let reality in.

Vivid non-stop memories play like old movies—
a sunshine-filled day at the beach. You lie
on the blanket his breath against your ear—
a hike up the cliff his hand grasps yours
helps you up holds you solid-safe.

In private where no one hears
you scream why
allow the wild person within
to rant demand answers—
now.

Vulnerable you stand naked before the mirror
look for signs of life. Lean forward
look for his eyes covering your skin.
That was then—
now empty eyes stare back at you.

Impossible—you think, shake your head
force yourself to comprehend
the fact—no longer
can you say
"Remember when?"

Not a tragedy—your aunt's words
her attempt to help.
Still you wrestle to grasp
her theory—a tragedy would be
never to have had him.

Go—you remind yourself—go on
even when your lungs feel
sucked empty of air
from the effort of surviving.
Don't forget to breathe.

*Inhale- Exhale accepted for publication in All Things Girl, August 2002
Again published in Poeticricity, spring 2002; KotaPress, June 2002*

Adieu

I witnessed your
humanness
slip
away
visit
by
visit

Somewhere in time
I don't recall which trip
You asked
"Did you come to say
Goodbye?"

I lied
Told you, no

How foolish of me
I had
all
that
time
and
spent it poorly

If only . . .
I had your courage
I could have
said
goodbye
farewell

I could have
bid you
Adieu

Adieu published in All Things Girl, July 2002

Again

At the department store, I hesitate
Should I?
Yes, I say, it will feel wonderful
. . . for a moment

Later, I know
it will hurt like hell

I opt for that moment,
step to the men's cologne counter
inhale
I smell your skin
I see your face
I fill to overflowing
Eyes closed
I feel your breath
Oh, to have you again

Fine Just Fine

I choose not to reply
fine
just fine
when I'm not

I refuse to accept
empty phrases
as truths
this too shall pass
time heals

I choose not to embrace
abstract ideas as my own
a bigger picture
a better place

I refuse to
mask my misery
hide the hurt
disguise
the despair
to help others
feel better

Because I'm not
fine
just fine

Fine Just Fine published in KotaPress, July 2002

Firsts and Nevers

The man who first called her princess
never saw her float down the stairs
on prom night

The man who celebrated her
every achievement
never read her college acceptance letter
honors at entrance

The man who taught her to drive
never saw her first car

The man who taught her to laugh
never had a chance to hear
her humor become like his own

The man who loved her first
never met her first love

The man who applauded her
first and loudest
never had the opportunity to attend
her starring roles

The man who kissed away her
first tear
never imagined
her deepest sorrow

Firsts and Nevers published in KotaPress, June 2002; accepted for publication in The Golden Wings, an Anthology of World Poetry by Taj Mahal Review, December 2002

Forever

A breeze stirs the leaves
Paths wind and circle
One seems to go forever

*That's what you said,
that you would love me forever*

But whose forever?

I never questioned then

I believed our forevers matched

Pine and spruce; scent and sap
Trees stand tall, dense surrounds me
Needles spread a silent mat
Footsteps go quiet into the thicket

I said, till death do us part

But when I did, I never thought . . .

Who does on their wedding day?

It's a vow, a promise

I enter a clearing, a circular stage
bathed in sunlight
White beams
pierce down
I used to think them Heaven sent
I don't believe any more

A cloud blocks the sun
and woods grow dark
A breeze rustles and chills
It knows my heart

Forever published in Labyrinth: Poems and Prose, October 2001; KotaPress, June 2002

From the Moon to the Star

The luminous full moon
glints across the patio
I raise my wine glass
A toast to our daughter

What an actor!

Did you see
how she mesmerized
the audience tonight?

How far she's come
from those little girl
Saturday afternoons

How she made the tickets
wrote the script
rehearsed for hours
then presented her
solo productions

How she made you pay
a real dime
to see the show
Papa

Tonight
after I handed her
the bouquet of flowers
did you see our star
glow
when I gave her
the single
red rose
in memory
of you?

From the Moon to the Star published in KotaPress, June 2002

Reality

Darkness blankets me

I attempt to sort the muddle

Dreams, nightmares all entwine

Suffocate my mind

My fingers extend

Strain to touch your side of the bed

Slowly clench . . .

I grip the cold sheets

exhale a quivering breath

Daybreak at the window

Last night's conversation with the

doctor, advanced CPR

every effort made, DOA

Emptiness where you once lay

Road Map

Once new,
now tattered
around the edges.

Aged with each attempt
to unfold,
then fold again.

Coffee stained,
sun faded,
creases worn through.

Opened with care,
sections separate one
from the other.

A road map
of
my life.

Road Map published in FZQ Poetry, fall/winter 2001

So I Walk

Early morning sun warms my cheeks.
Women in pink T-shirts dot the crowd.
Some wear hats, wigs, others smile, proud—
wear fresh tufts
of duck fuzz.

The starter announces, "Attention,
1K walkers, take your place at the starting line,
under the arch of pink balloons."
Men, women, children move, readjust.
The starter fires the gun.

Three women walk in front of me.
I guess their relationship.
Middle woman wears T-shirt of pink,
sister on one side, daughter the other,
like book ends, each

holds an elbow, sister/mother
shuffles in between.

I imagine that's how we'd look,
if you walked
with me today—

you in survivor-pink T-shirt,
me on one side, my daughter on the other . . .
"Look!"

Someone in the crowd shouts,

"They let the balloons go."

So I walk, under a cloud of pink,

read the signs pinned on the backs of walkers,

wonder if those behind me read mine.

Earlier, at the registration table,

on my sign,

under the printed words—

"In Memory of"

I wrote your name, then

in large letters, I added,

"MY SIS."

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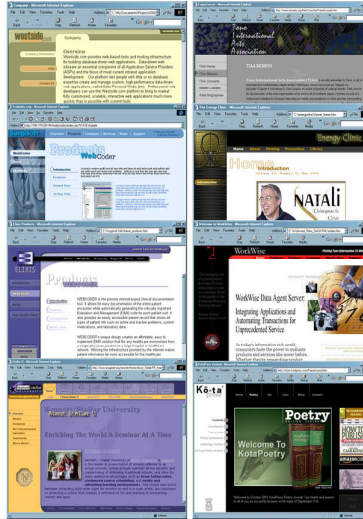
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Guidelines for Submission

These are guidelines for www.KotaPress.com (click "Poetry" button) the KotaPress ONLINE Poetry Journal:

Send 4 pieces only-- **cut and paste into the body of an email**-- no attachments will be opened nor acknowledged. Send your 4 pieces and your bio ALL IN ONE EMAIL.

It may take **TWO MONTHS** before you get an answer from us.

Please, please, please send along a **25 to 75 word bio** with your submission.

Send to info@kotapress.com with **ONLINE JOURNAL SUBMISSION in the subj. line.**

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KotaPress Poetry Journal (www.KotaPress.com - click the "Poetry" button) is published monthly for free online, so please browse past issues before you send works. Please note, we lean toward works about grief and healing, but are open to works about any topic as long as the works are plain old, downright awesome. We rarely publish rhyme poetry unless it is so good we forget that it rhymes or it is *so* on-topic that we can't pass it up.



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Dedication

As always this work is dedicated to Dakota Jones, born & died, March 11, 1999.



Bereavement support is offer in the KotaPress Loss Journal at www.KotaPress.com - click "Loss" button