

2022

*in-del-ible*

/in'del<sup>ə</sup>b(ə)l/

*adjective*

1. (of ink or a pen) making marks that cannot be removed
2. not able to be forgotten or removed



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## **The Bench**

*Dylan Hurley | 7th-9th Grade*

~For Nature~

I sit alone,  
And I watch the beautiful trees flourish,  
And the plants nourish, under the sun,  
The succulents, the lilies, and the other listless beauties.  
But the people walking by don't pay attention to these wondrous rubies.  
The people just walk by,  
Don't they notice what is in front of their eyes?  
Does no one notice the huge evergreens, or the cherry blossom  
Nature is beautiful... it isn't loathsome!  
The geese in the pond and the lotus,  
Can't they see the wonders below us?  
It's a shame that the world is caught up in material and greed,  
If everyone loved and surrounded themselves with nature we would be forever  
free...

~For The Beauties that are overlooked~

## Hiraeth

Josie Hillegass | 7th–9th Grade

*Hiraeth: noun; A nostalgic longing for a home, a place, or a feeling that no longer exists or never existed, or one that you cannot return to*

There is something lit inside of me  
Burning only to provide a light strong enough for **IMAGINARY** to find me  
I forgot **reality** a long time ago  
I have left it behind me  
I stand now  
With baited breath and shut eyes  
As the world I live in *fades*  
To be replaced by a new one  
I am subconsciously writing *elegies* for this world  
I do not notice that I am mourning the *undead*  
Plummeting through a life that isn't mine  
*Dancing* on ink that is spread on carpets of paper  
Carpets of paper that are stuck between two worlds  
They are my *time machine*  
I thank them as they give me up  
As they hand me over  
My hands graze something of a joke  
Before I make it a family  
***You're taking this too personally***  
***It's just a book***  
***It isn't real***  
***Grow up***  
***Open your eyes and look around***  
***You live in a world unlike the one you are obsessed over***

### **Correction.**

I live in a world that I sometimes need to **escape** from.  
My patience is withering  
The burning sensation drifts to my hands  
It eats away at my insides to make them **hollow**  
When I realize that I cannot go back  
There are types of hurt in this world that people do not speak of

But there is a new **universe**  
Inside these unread, promising pages  
A universe in which a heartbeat pounds  
And a busy, breathing, breaking, braving being  
Who leaves an impression on people like a stamp on the corner of an envelope  
Who develops in the pages of their world  
Like I grow in the **corners of their universe**

This is me

f

a

l

l

i

n

g

Through a life I cannot claim as mine

But I can call it home

My hiraeth



## **Always You**

*Madison Ulanowski | 7th–9th Grade*

It comes to mind every so often

Your name

I'd write it in the walls of my heart

To make it permanent

Though it is already in so many other places

It's everywhere I don't expect it

But when I see it I smile

Searching again,

Maybe you're already permanent in my heart

The brain and heart are connected after all

And I was lying about every so often.

## **Advice for Friendships**

*Siena Adducci | 7th-9th Grade*

There will be many friends  
That will come and go  
Groups and cliques  
That will constantly show  
But the ones who are real  
Will stick by your side  
Love you for who you are  
And always confide  
Don't worry about groups  
Just let it be  
We are better together  
Close friends and me  
Lose some in kindergarten  
Through high school too  
But the absolute ones will stay with you  
Call them in the middle of the night  
And they will help you without a fight  
So don't worry if you lose a friend  
Because you will be ok  
That shows to tell you  
That they were not worth it anyway  
True ones will stay till the end of the line  
Just like the stem that makes up a vine

## **A Former Wish Upon Love**

*Nevaeh Kundinger | 7th–9th Grade*

I formerly desired to be invisible,  
unnoticed,  
gone  
unspoken of.

hardly noticing every admirations all souls have specified  
except the beings that have given the wish on oneself to be bottled up

there was once one to set one's heart on ambition  
and go off of whims  
expectations  
moreover stupidity

it set oneself into blindness for love  
until it was awoken from the nightmare it chose to take on  
it was shaken awake by a true body  
to alive itself from its brain

my body took the veins, blood, and bruises to take on the continuance  
so I couldn't feel the pain no more

my body cared far more than any living being ever has  
In spite of that, I never took care of it.  
thinking the attraction was all because of itself

the staring,  
the comments  
and the hatred  
made one hate themselves.

made them hurt mentally to the extent of something much more dreadful  
a mental illness no one wants to take on  
a carefree thing that only wants to beat you until your breath is not accompanied to the air no more

but the love to one's heart belongs to is still yet to be found  
still yet to be spoken to, and how will one get that if all i feel is judgement  
but we must find out for ourselves, and our will

for me and you, who needs help, yet are ones who are to blame  
however, thy love is who i shall live for

## **[Am I real?]**

Lilly Polnaszek | 7th–9th Grade

Am I real?

*What do you mean of course I'm real*

But what if I'm not?

*But you're living right now...*

There are so many people in this world, how am I real

I try to put myself in other people's shoes

I will always end up believing other people don't...

Think

How could over 7 billion people all have feelings

*Just look at two people in an argument, they have emotions. They all fight for what they believe*

I mean I guess...

*See, other people do have feelings*

Sure.

I just imagine I am in a vast space

In the stars

No one else is real

I am the only one

Everything in the future is already planned for me

Whatever makes the rules knows my future

They know my fate

Maybe I am real

Maybe I do exist

I'll just find that out someday...

*You will.*

## **Imagine**

*Carly Johnson | 7th–9th Grade*

Imagine a world where you aren't the spotlight or the front and center.

Imagine being the lonely extra, the one not needed to succeed.

Imagine a life where you are rejected and cast aside from a person's way.

Imagine a world where your intelligence is taken for granted and used for others to win instead of you.

Imagine being the one who is always physically there, but not remembered to be.

Imagine being that person you forgot existed.

Imagine a life where you are always trying to help and fix other people's lives, but yours is the one needing repair.

Imagine a world where your opinion doesn't matter to make someone's decision.

Imagine listening without being talked to or heard.

Imagine having your feelings tossed around like someone didn't care.

In life, you will find someone who does care. Hold on to that person and never let them go. You are a special person and your life matters. Remember that the way you act or something you simply say can impact someone's life for a long time.

## **The Secret to Climbing a Mountain**

*Morgan Brown | 10th–12th Grade*

The price of a warm belly is coin;  
Material wealth, a luxury laced with thorns  
And frosted with an unforgiving lacquer  
Warding out the cold, the poor  
From ever reaching the peak of that mountain,  
But it isn't an impossible climb

One only needs to equip the right tools  
To make a successful accession—  
And I should know,  
Because I made that trek myself  
Through the opposing noble winds and  
The cruel bites of temperature, whose teeth are  
Sharp enough, to impede all progress

Some words to the wise, if you venture up this mountain:  
Bring plenty of supplies, backups for your backups  
Because you never know when tragedy can strike  
In forms of economic avalanches and pouch-draining blizzards  
And never become dissuaded or move backwards;  
You must steel and bolt yourself if you want to go  
Anywhere in life

That's more important than coin on the journey  
Self determination, self belief that you can make it  
If you don't have that basic necessity,  
Then what's the point of going up that mountain?  
No one can run only on fumes, on an empty stomach  
You need something else to hold you over, until you feel  
Warmth—a healthy weight in your wallet and your belly

## **Sweet Sacrifice**

*Julie Arias | 10th–12th Grade*

You crushed the wildflowers I picked for you  
Their softened bodies escaping your grip as an unrecognizable mess  
Now a colorful blur in the grass  
Within your eyes, I searched for disguised explanations,  
fearing that along our walk, I misspoke

Yet, you held my hand  
and shared the sweet aroma that coated yours  
The enhanced scent washed away my thoughts  
and encapsulated us in our own universe  
The gift those petals sacrificed themselves for

## Sweet Tooth

Nuria Kim | 10th–12th Grade

The moment my little brother was born

Was the first time

*Responsibility*

was forced

down my throat.

It shredded and tore apart the roof of my mouth before clawing its way through my esophagus.

Like gum, it stayed in the pit of my stomach

rotting for 7 years.

But it wasn't until another brother was born

3 years later that I realized

This wasn't a childish myth.

Another 7 years.

2 years later, my little sister,

Another 7 years.

The accumulating time lay next to each other

like tight slots at the casino.

The blinding spotlight stung the back of my eyes on my pedestal of expectations

Pleas and wants bubble in my intestines but I pushed it down

I've never let them surface since.

Acid stings my eyes, fervor threaten to slip between my lips

But God forbid I ever taste

*sadness,*

Or any emotion for that matter.

I thrived off of my parents' approval, devouring it like it was my last meal

Because it very well may have been.

At the ripe old age of 8, I had become a parent myself

And I swallowed big words that couldn't even fit my chocolate-stained mouth:

Selflessness,

Dependability,

A role model,

Perfection.



So when people offer me  
compassion,  
reassurance,  
forgiveness,  
grace,  
I recoil with distaste.  
Because I've been fed these  
obligations that satisfied my sweet tooth for  
validation for so long,  
I can hear it disintegrating like  
the crumbling ashes of these burning words.

But maybe one day  
I can rinse my mouth  
Give it some time  
Before I allow myself to indulge in what people call

Love.

## **Waltz with Death**

*Maura McInerney | 10th–12th Grade*

Her mother placed her on the marble floor that was cool to the touch as she pushed herself up to get a glance at the vast ballroom laid out in front of her new eyes.

Her father gave her a bow and as she could barely walk to meet him halfway, he glided over to her in two long, graceful strides.

She placed her hand in the palm of her teacher's hand as they led her to the center of the room and started off the dance as simple as the addition they taught her moments ago.

Right foot back with her violin tutor who led with the confidence that they've always held when teaching her nine year old self.

Bringing her left foot behind she rejoiced in the laughter shared with her best friend in their happiest moments.

Her right foot floats to join her left as her grandmother holds her with a strength that she didn't quite expect.

Left foot forward with her hands clasped to her professors who held her as delicately as when they gifted her her diploma.

With a step to her right under a gown, her husband gazes at her with only love in his eyes and a soft smile.

Her left foot joins back with her right, she teaches her beautiful child the pace of a waltz that been danced for a lifetime.

This time her partner did not hand her off to the next, instead she turned in her billowy dress brushing the floor and was met with the sight of death.

She smiled softly and bowed for she was in the presence of royalty, for the highest honor of them all is to be escorted by death himself.

Although everyone met death in the end, whether it was a graceful handshake or a fast embrace it eventually came. It held everyone in the end.

## Deeper Desires

Grace Praxmarer | 10th–12th Grade

Every morning I watch from my window  
Down onto the little river that intersects the city  
The condos and apartment buildings on one side  
And the skyscrapers on the other  
Which shadowed the entire city,  
The entire river  
And hid the sun  
So no nature, no life could grow beside the river.

In the creek there was a girl  
Everyday.  
She sat among the rocks  
Bathing among all the city folk  
Brushing her hands through her hair  
As if washing away all the dirt it had collected  
And attempting to untangle the dreads it had formed  
She cleaned herself too as if her clothes would be  
renewed  
But they were just scraps  
Torn and shredded at the ribs  
The sleeves hanging from her shoulder.

She washed herself  
As if to wash away the homelessness  
As if to imagine herself in a real shower  
As if all her problems disappeared  
And all the eyes stopped staring.

She washed herself with dreams of becoming a  
normal person  
Someone with comfortable living  
Who has food whenever they desire  
Or a shower after a long day at work  
She dreamed of laying her head on a cloud-like pillow  
Absorbed into the memory foam layer that lay atop  
the bed  
And snuggled into the warmth of a blanket  
Where there were no worries of becoming cold  
Uncomfortable  
Unhappy.  
She was imagining a life where she was in my position  
Safe in the walls of my own condo  
In a beautiful city with everything I needed.

## **My Inheritance**

*Ella Gershon | 10th–12th Grade*

dust coats my tongue  
as i walk and walk and walk toward the burning

they knew  
they knew because how could they not  
when smoke clogs the sky  
when rings and shoes are piled high  
when skin hangs off bones and words fall silent from lips

she knew  
she knew because how could she not  
when he left with an eagle on his chest  
when he crushed stars beneath his feet  
when champagne filled every crevice where humanity once lived

i know we will never meet  
yet she crushes me into myself  
together or alone  
do we not bleed?

## **New Piano**

*Sofia Calafos | 10th–12th Grade*

An object treated as one's child  
Their siblings taking care of it as if it was their younger sister  
Cleaned every Saturday morning along with the rest of the house  
But taken extra good care of to ensure its used to its full potential

The instrument gets a check up every month  
Strings and springs oiled, tuned, and loved  
So the therapy the keys provide never fades

A simple structure holds its parts  
Glazed wood creates a home for its organs  
The top holds memories and a metronome  
The ivory, a bright white with a yellow tinge

Holidays come and go with melodious tunes  
coming from the other room  
Families gather to listen to the children playing together  
all in perfect harmony  
A new tradition that never gets old

Time passes and people grow up  
It shows in their faces and keys  
White hair and grooves  
Wrinkles and stains

Still no dust covers the surface  
Children move away but it is still played often by parents  
Longing for the same sound they would hear at the same time of day  
No more teachers to pay or hear discipline a wrong note  
Silence has slowly grown over the years

Accidents happen and funerals proceed  
People move out and memories are forgotten  
But some things never change, or move  
An abandoned house along with an abandoned child

A piano that once held fingers now holds only dust  
Broken glass shattered ontop  
And a missing metronome to match it  
Never tuned again or repaired

So it sits  
Every saturday no one checks up on it  
Every holiday it sits in silence, a tradition broken  
Or maybe the tradition found new keys

In another home  
A new family, a new life  
with the same routine but this time  
With a new Piano

## Apology

Amairany Ramirez | 10th–12th Grade

You left all of a sudden  
 No warning,  
 Not even a whisper  
 I was offended that you could be so cruel  
 What did I do to deserve this version of you

The best of friends.  
 Maybe not ever  
 What a joke I must have been  
 For you to make me the villain  
 Loved you and your flaws  
 Despite everything that you uttered

And I was so confused as to why you renounced me  
 Blaming myself and the way people saw me  
 But then I came to a realization  
 It was you and that messed up way of healing  
 Your brain isn't working properly,  
 Kinda feel sorry

Back then we had a bond  
 But then you grew up  
 Became a person  
 I didn't know how to love

Polar opposite we are  
 For I was more than one person  
 But you were barely half of one  
 Barely matched  
 More disagreements than attached

Being young isn't pretty  
 Mental breakdowns were unappealing  
 But society told us  
 It's simply the life of a teenager

Now I'm left clinging  
 To the ghost of the past  
 He's quite cruel  
 Kinda reminds me of you

I honestly just wish  
 I could forget it all  
 Remember a time where  
 You weren't all that there was

You didn't wish me a happy birthday  
 I don't even think you remembered  
 We made eye contact 3 times that day  
 And then pretended as if this bond of friendship  
 Just never existed

Maybe to you it didn't  
 Maybe my love meant nothing  
 Because you threw it away so casually  
 But the worst part of it all  
 Was you never said sorry

I don't know what hurt the most  
 The way you avoided me  
 Or those words you whispered painfully  
 When I finally cornered you  
 I hate the way you blamed me and my faults  
 I blame my poor judgment

OR  
 Could it be those words you whispered  
 When you finally answered  
 I'll never forget what you said  
 It unraveled who I am  
 But either way  
 It was all your doing

I knew it from that moment  
When you looked in my brown boring eyes  
And said being gay  
*Epecially with my age*  
Wasn't something i should put pride in

I'm dramatic, that's for sure  
But at least back then  
I was dramatic  
And you weren't a bore

I was sad at first  
Now I'm mad  
That I cared for you  
When you clearly never cared back

I was the gay friend.  
The short girl.  
Who followed you around  
But you *never* called a friend

Why is it that I cannot simply exist  
I have to be nothing more than average  
Just to be your friend  
Or at least be normal  
You said  
As if being eccentric was a crime  
Then I guess I was a felon  
Serving years at a time  
Don't think I forgot  
All those words you said  
So casually  
As if they weren't pure                      cruelty

I was used  
For advice and comfort  
When the world was cruel  
I was there to shield you  
Took the punches  
Gave you my ear  
Energy and time both wasted  
On a man not worth any motivation

Best friend      my ass  
Thought we were close  
But you weren't even a friend  
Although you're definitely the worst

So yes I kinda hate you  
But I refuse  
To let my opinion of you  
Keep me from living true

I held on  
Thinking you would pull me in  
Instead you pushed back  
Now I'm free falling to my death

You always ran to me  
When you needed love  
When you needed a bench  
I was unwavering and strong

But you're such a hypocrite  
Always telling me lies  
About what my friendship meant to you  
Now you can't even look me in the eye



My love is simple  
But it is always there  
Unlike you  
Who left the moment I needed something similar

And to think  
I trusted you with my identity  
You drifted away  
Taking a piece of me  
For a dangerous ride

The confusion took hold  
Kept me up at night  
I was already mentally unwell  
but you made all of that  
Just a thousand times worse

You're such an ass

Spent too much time  
Worrying if my black shirt  
Made you feel bad

I don't care anymore  
Although I shouldn't have cared at first  
I love my black shirt  
And I love those beautiful girls

I scream it from the rooftops  
I'll shout on this stage  
And I'll write on paper and quill  
Because I am who I am  
And I make **no** apologies

## Avalanche

Allie Petraitis | 10th–12th Grade

Here I sit:

Atop of these valleys of grass and blooms.  
The water from my belly feeds the animals,  
and my peak pierces the sky,  
telling the land, water, air, and sun that  
I am a Mountain.

As a mountain, I must provide for my growing family.

I give my children the fuel that helps them grow:  
water, my terrain, and my might.

Without my graces, I feel that they will die.

But I can't help but feel like I am filling them with  
my tears, my body, and my soul.

I may be mighty, but I am tired.

Am I too big for the grounds that I stand on?

Maybe if I were the beautiful roaring springs,

Or if I were the clear sky,

Or if I were the growing valley,

Maybe then I wouldn't take up so much space.

I begin to wonder if I am killing my children.

Could they be better off without me?

After all,

their aunts and uncles seem to be doing a good job  
taking care of them.

I begin to feel a shake inside my core.

An avalanche of emotion.

I spill my wounds onto the ground below.

The flowers are wilted.

The grass is less green.

My core is now exposed,

Face flat against the plains.

The yellow stain reminds me of the spill,

and how I: The Mountain,

am the cause of all this.

Now through my remains

I must watch my family grow again,  
stronger than before,

but never the same as I left it.

My brain and body regrows, but I am still scarred.

I pray that the cracks will fill,

but these cracks on my body will stay with me forever.

Reminding me of the avalanche.

## **By the Time I am 25**

*Venus Tapang | 10th–12th Grade*

What I will do by the time I am twenty-five:

I will build a piece of furniture by myself.  
Real furniture, not an IKEA roly chair,  
something grand like a stained wooden cabinet  
to neatly arrange my junk on,  
or a rickety bed frame that creaks as I  
roll and talk in my sleep.

I will get as many tattoos and piercings  
as my paycheck will allow.  
I'll have all the things  
my grandparents wag their fingers at  
permanently inked on my body,  
just for the hell of it,  
have so much metal in my face,  
that a blacksmith could  
melt it all down into a battle ax.

I will fill out all the paperwork and  
pay the necessary fees  
so everyone, even the snooty ladies  
sitting at the front desk in a doctor's office,  
will know that my name is Venus.  
It will be printed on every single  
ID and transcript,  
typed out in the subject line of  
every spam email in my inbox,  
sitting on the tip of my mother's tongue  
when she wishes to address me.

By the time I am twenty-five,  
I will be proud of myself for sticking it out  
and fighting the good fight for nearly  
another decade from now  
because I know how hard it can be.

## **A Letter to My Future Child**

*Diana Hernandez Gomez | 10th–12th Grade*

Querida, I want to explain to you that it's not your fault. I'm sorry mi hija if I am maybe not the most stable and controlled human being.

I'm sorry if the chemical imbalances have ever scared you. And I'm sorry that the only inheritance you will ever get is an interesting soundtrack to follow you along and a warning list of possible diagnosis explaining your self destructing DNA

See I was the product of puppy love and hormones.

The consequence of two idiots in love

Too broken to be loved but too loved to get rid of

baptized by life as a sin, a symbol of when things started to change

Everything spiraled downhill the second my heart started to beat

The reason that Mami had to leave her career and my Papa never finished school.

I am a shotgun wedding and a two bedroom apartment

I am 3 different jobs and overflowing time stamps

Overtime and empty stomachs

Tired feet and scarred hands

I am 3AM emergency room visits and panic attacks coated in sugar

I am the sacrifice my parents made in order to push us forward

The guinea pig a science experiment of a first child

I am weekends at abuelitas and my mother's tears

I live knowing that I was the unexpected valentine's day gift wrapped with a ribbon and shame

But I am not a mistake

How could I ever be a mistake if I come from two of the most loving and complex human beings

I am a chemical reaction

I am my dad's messy but hardworking hija

I am my mother's stubborn but creativa daughter

I am loved

I am singing in the car with Mami, as we blast her sunday cleaning music "musica de Sra.

Dolida", she says

I am syrup and whipped cream drowned pancakes at the dinner downtown where mi and papa would get lunch on wednesdays in the summer

I am an older sister playing house

But you, oh you mi vida, you are magia  
You are a potion, a mix of the best parts of every woman before you  
You are abuelitas patience and Tatas humor  
You are positively sarcastic and a handful  
You are generations of women slowly breaking down in order to give you a little piece  
You are the reason I keep going everyday  
The reason I didn't die before eighteen  
You are a masterpiece, you make everyday worth living  
You are my light  
You are my future and the reason I will keep trying because I can't wait till the day I am ready to  
meet you

## **Slow**

*Isabella Vogley | 10th–12th Grade*

Slow,

Like a bug trapped in amber

The honey glazed fatigue

I feel in my tired mind.

Slow,

My fingers are formed of granite,

My feet of weathered lead

They ache, heavy against the dirt.

Slow,

My soul is a rumbling storm,

The smell of rain in the grass.

The stumbling clouds,

Encase my spirit,

Move me along the plains and valleys.

Slow,

Like molasses the drops fall

Warm and sweet

Against the grass,

I yearn for home.

## Unspoken

Logan Chin | 10th–12th Grade

Solid carbon makes my body  
My skin rough, in constant crumble  
And itch from a dry touch brining dull colored fungi  
My feet, many feet below the ground  
Keeping me in place  
Un moving, under earth,

I admire the Sun  
Slowly walking across her sky  
I've always been infatuated  
I reach up and out  
With still growing arms  
My fingertips caress against her light  
Giving me warmth and strength

Something new came to the grove  
They are not like the deer or rabbits  
They stand tall, on unrooted roots  
They wear the barks of many residents  
Their wind was poisonous but not much  
So I breath in their poison, purifying the air  
Exhaling life, only for them to breath more poison  
Do these new creatures wish to die?

Sun and Moon pass, and stride  
My family now gone  
I'm next to stone and crust  
Not far are caves  
Made from corpses of old friends  
Their skin striped, their arms cut  
Their feet no longer keeping them to the ground  
Bodies held together with metal pikes  
And covered with ugly pastes

The creature's saplings  
Climb my body to my arms  
Only to be yelled at to cease  
They cleave my arms,  
To hinder the sapling's climb,  
As well as my own,  
to Sun

When the cold days come  
I let go of my finger tips  
But the creatures take them  
They may not know  
That those will feed the dirt  
Who will keep me standing  
But still they take them  
Robbing this smidge of earth  
Of feed I want it to dine

One day a creature dwells inside a metal behemoth  
They move these things, I don't know how  
But these metal boulders,  
These monsters emanate more poison  
Than the creatures  
It's made faster and more  
Than I or the ones left  
Can breath the tainted air  
To make it pure

The deer and rabbits are gone  
I see one every so often but they never stay  
As the creatures scare them, or worse  
And for I alone can not bring a Grove  
To hide them in  
In this flat field of stone  
With only my little drop of earth  
That keeps me alive, and standing  
Just barely

A creature comes to me wielding  
Something made from a Brother's arm  
Strapped with an undoing steelhead  
Of a stunted scythe  
I know what will happen  
I saw these creatures do the same to my Grove  
I know this day, under Sun, is my last

The blade digging me away  
Pain strumming from my side  
After half of Suns walk  
I lie down for the first time  
On Indurate black rock

I look up towards Sun, her smile now a little sad  
I too am a little sad that I could never reach her  
Like she reached me  
with a closing breath  
I pray, Goodbye, Sun



## **One for You or One for That Which Fits the Titles of Malcontent and Weary and a Few Other Things: An Introduction**

*Nepeta Porter | 10th–12th Grade*

dry hands. late night phone calls.

soft hands. texts from five different places.

long green hair. septum piercings as earrings.

soft hair. cold walks in the city.

A mental and behavioral disorder in which an individual has intrusive thoughts and/or feels the need to perform certain routines repeatedly to the extent where it induces distress or impairs general function.

she taught his friends sign language

so he wouldn't have to talk to strangers.

But so full of love,

she cooks

to keep everyone around him alive

## **What It's Like to Be a Mexican-American Daughter**

*Mariel Herrera | 10th–12th Grade*

When you are a Mexican-American daughter,  
it's a little bit of a lot of things,  
and a lot of the little things.  
It's things like  
flipping tortillas over on the comal without burning your fingers,  
it's stepping outside for a few minutes and  
getting a glowing tan the color of sun-kissed bronze.  
It's a love for chiles, ajo, tajin, goya and more  
a palate for only the most flavorful and hearty food.  
It's dark eyes the color of Abuelita's hot chocolate,  
thick, unruly, neverending hair  
and a bumpy nose: a reminder of your Azteca heritage  
stark against colonized features.  
It's feeling more Mexican when you're in America  
and feeling more American when you're in Mexico  
and feeling more misplaced inside and out than ever before.  
  
It's being a translator at the ripe age of 7  
and learning nonsensical English grammar  
  
by yourself  
  
at the same time.  
  
It's listening to Bachata and Cumbias all day long  
and it's not knowing the names of all your extended family.  
It's greeting each and every relative with a warm hug  
and it's having 6 cousins named Juan  
and giving them all nicknames.  
It's being told to serve your dad and brothers  
before you can sit down yourself  
and it's loving your father,  
but wishing you never marry a man like him  
who doesn't know how to do his own laundry  
or serve his own food  
because as a daughter  
that's your job  
and not his.

It's scratching your head in confusion  
when you don't see Hispanic as an option on forms,  
do I want to be included in a bubble  
or do I want a bubble of my own?  
and it's the consequent inner turmoil  
and the evershifting scale

and

What and who am I?  
if my skin is pale in the winter  
and if I get dirty looks for speaking anything but English  
by the little old sheltered ladies in the grocery stores.  
If I finished elementary school  
and got further than my grandparents ever did,  
and if I didn't know English when I first started school.  
If I pass perfectly as a white girl  
and if I had to claw my way to where I am now,  
because unfortunately my parents did their best  
but were late to the race  
and my starting line was years behind the white girl's line.  
If you ask yourself all of this and more,  
then you might know  
what it's like to be a Mexican American daughter.

## **Let Me Help You**

*Madolyn Greenwood | 10th–12th Grade*

Dancing around our family room  
Nothing but a pajama shirt and striped underwear  
One foot replacing the other to the beat  
Her curly brown hair bouncing in all different directions  
One by one, each of us get up to dance with her  
There is so much love here  
Laughing so hard our stomachs hurt and tears stream down the sides of our rosy cheeks  
Overwhelmed with the feeling of being safe and connected  
It wraps around you like an unexpected hug from behind  
You wouldn't know what she has going on behind her beautiful brown eyes  
This is who we know she is  
Not someone who struggles

A family who loves and cares for each other  
My mother is more than her family  
Putting everyone before herself  
As if her problems are miniscule to ours  
We complain of a scratch on the knee or a bully  
She puts bandages on us, while she keeps her wounds covered  
But she is happy with a family who loves and cares for each other  
Why doesn't she tell us what's going on?  
Why doesn't she show us how she feels?  
Because she is happy with a family who loves and cares for each other  
You wouldn't know what she has going on behind her beautiful brown eyes  
A mother, a cancer patient, a person affected by mental health, a human.

I want you to be healthy and happy  
But what I really want is you to open up  
You take on the weight of everyone else's issues  
The guilt you hold onto because you have problems and feelings of your own  
It is okay to not be okay  
You are more than the people around you  
You have a family who loves and cares for each other  
No one would know what she has going on behind her beautiful brown eyes  
This is who we know she is  
Someone who struggles like the rest of us.

## **When I Was Young**

*Jumana Alaridh | 10th–12th Grade*

When I was young,  
You'd take me anywhere I would dream of.  
From West Virginia to South Carolina to Iowa and Indiana,  
As I slept in the back, you smiled through it all.  
From swimming to parasailing  
You always got me to do  
Something new.

And everytime I called  
You'd never hesitate to say okay,  
Whether you were at work or at home or happy.  
You'd tell me to never worry  
No matter the time or day or night or place.

And there's not a day that goes by  
That I don't think of the times  
That you'd watch *Mamma Mia* with me for the hundredth time  
To keep me happy.

And now that I'm older  
I now know I didn't say I love you enough.  
I now know I was so spoiled I didn't feel the need to say thank you more.  
And now I feel stupid and spoiled and not worth it all.

## **[How do you do it?]**

*Katie Clark | 10th–12th Grade*

How do you do it?

You stand your ground and let people's hateful comments brush right over

Your shoulder is like a cold breeze

But the cold breeze suddenly freezes in your soul like an ice chunk in your gut

And when it melts it comes out of your eyes as a forever fountain

Please don't go you're all I've ever known.

Your thinking about giving it all up

Your melting, the forever fountain won't stop

It hurts me to see you this way

It cuts me like a butcher knife to a stick of butter

How do you do it

You got through it

The fountain ran out

Oh no what happened to that vibrant girl i know

The emotional, sensitive girl

The expression is now expressionless

Oh how your opinion has changed

Nothing matters

## The Field

*Sarah Wierschem | 10th–12th Grade*

The crow ran through the field,  
rows of sunflowers passing it by  
as it pounced into the cracked dirt.  
The sun gleamed off its glazed  
eye, level with the ground to keep cool  
in the summer air.

Roots burst through the ground,  
beetles and worms wrapped and weaved around  
like a dull, metallic rope.  
Poking its head through the gaps,  
twisting its twitching beak  
underneath the lime canopies.

It flapped its wings,  
stomping claws of straw  
into the impressionable spots of mud  
beneath the golden petals of the  
thousands of other stars blending with the sky.  
The sky where palm-sized  
feathered chestnuts fluttered and chirped  
at the shadow tucked under  
the undergrowth.

It called too, a shrill cough  
piercing through the brilliant  
stalks. It dulled the colored filter  
and drove the tiny bodies into  
the only tree for miles.

An ink blot on a blank page,  
the pupil of an eye.  
A crow can't belong among  
the oversaturated rows.

Not within the cool breeze  
nor the earth from which exoskeletons sprout.  
Not even on the ground or  
perched atop the radiant horizon.

Only the graveyard, locked behind  
mold and rot, may be the only place  
where it cannot trespass.  
Because crows don't belong among the sunflowers.

## **Gorge?**

*Liam Knap | 10th–12th Grade*

So much to eat,  
Without any time to enjoy  
We're told time ain't still,  
we need to gorge  
To take our fill before paying the bill  
Crammed to brim wanting less,  
Maybe some time for rest,  
To find a place where time doesn't repress  
Instead we're restrained to our tables,  
Watching as the others take their fill,  
Watching as their taste buds die before they can flower  
Forgetting the sweet taste of what was,  
As it's replaced with the beige nourishment of their next plate.  
Yet time continues to flow,  
With it they have nothing to show  
Except for the sickly remnants of their once saccharine plates.



## God Knows Me as the Girl Who Prays in Poems

Maya Ventura | 10th–12th Grade

I pray to God every night before I go to bed  
I pray to my God  
I don't know if they're a boy or a girl or an entity  
And that doesn't matter because regardless they want the best for me  
God has books titled in my name written in the font of destiny  
I start my prayer with a thank you  
Even if it's something cliché  
I don't need to introduce my name when I pray  
God knows me as the girl who prays in poems  
I say to God:  
Thank you for the roof over my head and the bed I lay on now  
Thank you for my family and my health  
Please preserve and let prosper the wealth of love that surrounds me  
Continue to keep everyone I know healthy  
And my dancing stealthy  
Give me the strength and tools to have success in school  
Please give me a dream to distract from everything  
A sweet one  
A nice one  
One of mindless things that will get my mind thinking  
Or give me one of hope and sturdy rope  
And before I realize my eyes are shut  
I am in a world that I have asked of  
But then I reawake and apologize for not staying awake  
God knows me as the girl who prays in poems  
In my nighttime prayers God knows it's hard for me to focus  
So God tucks me back in  
With a finished or unfinished or botched pray  
But God knows every poem and prayer in my head  
so there is no need for me to tell  
But I do  
because prayers are manifestations  
And if I put my prayers out into the universe that God created than hopefully they will come true  
So until then  
I sleep and dream a sweet sweet dream that God gifted to me  
And hopefully one day I'll wake up and all I'll see is the highlights of my wildest dreams  
That my dreams will melt into my reality

## **Death**

*Kaleena Vose | 10th–12th Grade*

Most people are scared of it,  
Others embrace it,  
Some even loathe or hate it,

It's your reflection in the bus window  
That fogs up when you take a breath.  
It's your shadow on a sunny day  
That waits patiently by your side,  
Wandering but never straying too far,  
Like a loyal dog.

It helps the elderly crossing the street,  
Covers up the sick with a warm blanket,  
And keeps the kids away from moving cars.

It's selfish as it always stays,  
And never learns to let go,  
Instead it holds on tighter to show its love,  
Heart squeezing  
Drifting to the warmth because it shivers in its own skin.  
It only wants to comfort,  
But it's hugs are breathtaking.

It's calm and peaceful when the nurses rush in.  
Its body feeds off the pigment in the person's skin,  
While its skin gets bright the body now has a blue-ish tint.

The time of death is record-breaking.  
It knows it should've stayed alone.  
It only wanted to comfort,  
But good intentions don't equal good consequences.

## **Organic Connections**

*Bridget Nagle | 10th–12th Grade*

Nature is expansive,  
mountainous and foreboding  
from a paned-in window.

It is not until  
grass tangles between your toes,  
rain drips down the back of your neck.  
Not until you cup the tiniest pinecone in your hand,  
that you can understand  
our intimacy.  
But if you were only to step out,  
to smell the Earth,  
wave back,  
To the leaves that rustle softly in welcome.  
Come humbly as you are,  
as you would to any other mother,  
you too could understand  
our intimacy.

## **bird brain**

*Samuel Summers | Adult*

baggy sweatshirt, I stand,  
my back to the wind.  
the atmospheric pressure  
descending upon me,  
I spread my arms,  
mimicking the trees,  
sturdier than I, yet,  
still affected.

my limbs  
whisper a prayer  
that baggy sleeves  
might become like wings.  
my limbs  
whisper a prayer  
as the wind whips  
around my blossoming treefellows,  
plucking petals and flower heads  
right off of stamens and stems.  
detached, they retreat to air,  
swirling, spinning, surrounding me.

my limbs  
whisper a prayer  
that I may become  
like one of them,  
and take flight upon spring.  
my limbs  
whisper a prayer  
that despite having not been  
created with feathers  
coating hollow bones,  
I may be granted  
this one small indulgence.

the strongest gust I've felt  
in minutes I've stood like this  
wraps me up in its  
chaotic embrace,  
and for a moment,  
I feel my body begin to lift.  
and for a moment,  
it feels like my prayer,  
may well have been answered.

perhaps it will be later,  
when spring's storm swims in,  
when the heavens weep,  
and make all their frustrations known.  
perhaps I shall go out  
in my baggy sweatshirt,  
in the fifty-five mile an hour gusts,  
and ride off on their coattails.

## **The Sneeze**

*Jeanne Sullivan | Adult*

We sit outside on the patio. We have watched the sun bashfully hide its smile from the Earth for another day. We enjoy a cocktail and sit together staring into the sparkling sky above us. All is quiet except for a few crickets performing their final serenades. My love turns to me and says, “I don’t want to say ‘bless you’ anymore.”

“Do you mean to me, or to anyone?”

“Anybody. It really is silly. Why are we all still saying it to each other? To strangers, to anybody. Frankly, it’s ridiculous.”

“I guess it’s just a nice thing we do for each other. A habit, I guess. Why do you think it’s ridiculous?”

“Well, we have all witnessed a sneeze, and the devil has never entered someone as they were sneezing. It’s never happened. If I don’t say ‘bless you,’ no one is suddenly overtaken by an evil spirit.”

“I suppose you’re right. I’ll tell what, you don’t have to say it to me anymore. I know you don’t want anything bad to happen to me, so it will just be understood. And I will stop saying it to you as well. But if an evil spirit does get in, you can’t blame me.”

“It’s a deal. I will not hold you responsible for any evil sneezes.”

Minutes pass as we sip the last of our drinks and enjoy the last moments of the weekend together. We hold hands for a moment, as we watch the lightning bugs shine on to their warm homes.

“AH-CHOO!”

“Bless You.”

“Thank you.”

## **New Mexico: The Fragile Meld**

*Ginny Veerman | Adult*

Hidden darkness that promises light,  
Circles of life.  
Caves of warmth, hope,  
The tuff of centuries past...  
Indian and creature  
Living together in need of existence.

Hidden gardens of color,  
Choosing location...  
Balking at insistence  
Of human hand.  
Penstemon and cactus,  
Living together in natural beauty.

Ruddy complexions of work and sun,  
Furrowed brows.  
Now white, black, yellow—  
Newly searching for the universal dance.  
Human nature,  
Living together in chosen harmony.

Hidden pieces of broken art?  
Manhattan Project—  
Reaching for answers,  
Finding potsherds of destruction at every dig.  
Bravery and fear,  
Startled, that solutions create death.

The mesa crumbles and gives its secrets,  
Unwillingly flattened.  
Ravens look up.  
Progress: fingers broken with machinery...  
Earth and Sky,  
Meeting at opposite spheres.

Hidden desires of earthly nature.  
Broken spirits  
Crying for justice,  
Forgetting that the scales are weighted.  
Past and present  
Still looking for that One True Spirit...

## **A Change of Home**

*Terry Nolan | Adult*

My son has gone home...  
To his  
Not mine.  
He told me many times  
But I did not hear  
Initially  
The significance of  
“When I get home...”  
He’d say—  
Not meaning here,  
But someplace  
Foreign to me,  
More familiar  
Obviously  
To him.  
He’s twenty-two.  
It’s time.  
Inevitable,  
Healthy,  
To be expected.  
Yet I greet the  
Realization first  
With surprise—  
Slow sadness.  
Some would say  
I haven’t lost a son  
But gained  
A TV room.  
I’d take the son,  
But won’t tell him.  
Soon,  
Twenty years or so,  
With a son or daughter,  
He’ll hear  
And know what’s  
In my heart.

## **House Plants**

*Erica Graham | Adult*

What on earth is the matter?

Hear the radiators clatter...

An abnormal feeling grew upon her as she went through the old house

Sitting on the windowsill, the plants began to sprout

All of a sudden here comes the falling rain...

Things had not been the same

Putting new soil in the pot

Then the sun came out, it was hot

Colored flowers, vegetables, and herbs

She was mentally disturbed

The roots grew firmly

At times, it was very lonely

Preparing for dinner

Bring the yellow potatoes to a simmer

Love of nature was outside

Deep inside, there were some things she could not hide

Having a state of anxiety and depression

There was no need to question

The problem mushroomed

So, she assumed...

Buds are in full bloom



## **I Am Poetry**

*Traci Neal | Adult*

I am Poetry. Poetry is me.  
My heart shapes my identity.  
My heartbeat is poetry.  
The rhythm rocking the insides is liberty.  
Movement and motion make memories in the mind's tree.  
Now, breathe in the very essence of equality.  
That is poetry. Poetry is me.  
Hear the healing herds of words waiting. It's windy.  
Poetry washes worries into prosperity.  
Let love surround light to fill your friends and family.  
That is poetry. Poetry is me.  
Give time to taking turns to learn of others' totality.  
May I share clarity?  
The gift of poetry is beauty and creativity.  
Poetry deserves charity and not disparity.  
That is poetry. Poetry is me.  
I am Poetry. Poetry is me.  
My heart shapes my identity.  
My heartbeat is Poetry.

## Lessons From Cedar

*Kelli Lage | Adult*

When my dog digs without ceasing,  
I wonder what she knows that I don't;  
what she sees that I don't.  
I muddy my feet to match her paws.  
She shows me how birds twist their necks  
to see past cherry stems  
and that lovers live in all forms.  
I watch for when tangerines  
drip from the sunset  
and open my drooling mouth in time  
to catch one.  
I learn what time of day angels dance  
in the prairie.  
You can raise a song as your own,  
if you can catch its voice in the wind.  
Magic lives in the tree's hiccups  
and dies when walking legs  
get lost in brambles.  
Beetles bite to find the holy grail  
of sugar cane.  
If you claw into earth and barrel  
toward cornflower patches,  
you can make it rotate beneath you.  
  
We use the sun to thank each other.  
She soaks its tresses into her fur,  
warming my palm as it meets her head.  
I douse my brush in its lap  
to decorate her trail.

## **The Mystery**

*Marcia Horan | Adult*

There once was One who lived to be  
The presenter of a mystery.  
His weathered hands they gave no clue  
Of his heavenly home and royal venue.  
The Truth He offered just caused Him much pain;  
The treatment inappropriate and so inhumane.  
They killed Him with vengeance, yet He had the time  
To speak the last chapter forgiving the crime.  
He shouted so loud as His strength diminished,  
Looked up to His Father and said "It is finished."  
And others wrote down what had all taken place;  
Eyewitnesses of this mystery case.  
They said He's God's Son, who came from above  
Whose purpose to come was to show us His love.  
He came to serve and to set all men free  
Then His hands were held back and nailed to a tree.  
It was there that we watched as he suffered and bled;  
Yet the mystery exposed is that He is not dead.  
They say He's alive in a book that was written,  
Still some critics throw jabs and consider Him stricken.  
It is up to us to discern what is true,  
Or does the mystery lie and make us a fool?  
Do we know the One who wrote a book for our life?  
The One who forgave our causing His strife.  
His life was given for sins He'd erase.  
A mystery so amazing and we call it grace.  
The mystery understood by all who believe.  
The eternity He offered is there to receive.

## **Web of Lies**

*Adam Woodworth | Adult*

Like a spider, you spin your web  
A trap to catch your prey.  
Always inviting  
Simply delighting  
An invitation to play.

But once inside, I see your lies  
A web you've spun real tight.  
Always blaming  
Victim shaming  
Convincing others that you're right.

Through arrogance, you spread untruths  
About me to the others.  
Demoralized  
And ostracized  
But they start seeing your true colors.

Your stories you can't keep them straight  
Things just aren't adding up.  
The questioning  
The reckoning  
They start believing you're corrupt.

They call you out. You double down,  
But by now it's all too late.  
The guilt they feel  
Is all too real

And you have sealed your fate.  
The others work to set me free  
From your bonds and from your ties.  
Start the healing  
While revealing  
Your dreadful web of lies.

## **I am an oak**

*Rebecca Barker | Adult*

I want to be a willow tree,  
all wild, flowing and free;  
softly growing to the heavens,  
and swaying haphazardly.

But I am an oak tree,  
tall, stable and true;  
standing always in the same way,  
watching over you.

I want to be a palm tree,  
bending this way and that;  
tropical and exotic,  
with a frilly palm frond hat.

But I am an oak tree  
classic, dependable and high;  
I break in the wind,  
as my branches reach the sky.

I want to be a magnolia tree,  
flowery and fun;  
blooming in the springtime,  
the envy of everyone.

But I stand alone an oak tree,  
steadfastly growing up and out;  
my leaves are green and simple,  
my trunk sturdy, round and stout.

I think I am so simple,  
and that my stature doesn't change;  
then along comes a new season,  
to make my color rearrange.

Each season will reshape me,  
but I will always stand up tall;  
for I am still an oak tree,  
beautiful through it all.

## **Ukraine Stands United**

*Linda Morrison | Adult*

Like crimson blood—raining in a shower,  
Putin wants to control all of the power.  
Has Putin's mind been misplaced!  
He needs to rethink, rewind, erase.  
Ukraine's freedom the people had,  
it's now in question—it makes them sad.  
They want to be like you and me,  
to want in life—to be living free.  
Zelenskyy and Ukraine are standing united,  
even standing when they are very frightened.  
Let us hold forth a helping hand,  
so they don't lose their life or precious land...

**always dancing***Kathryn Sadakierski | Adult*

rhinestone drops of sun  
flicker on the water,  
contorting like a candle flame,  
like shapes that seem to waver  
in a glass,  
always dancing  
like the ground could never  
hold your feet quite steady,  
like digging deep, flying free  
is what you were meant to be,  
in motion like the creek  
which bubbles effervescently  
as champagne,  
rippling like a slippery fish  
swimming upstream.

it's easy to forget  
in the warmth of summer  
that the rocks alongside the creek  
were once snow-packed,  
on the rim of frost,  
trees still filtering sun  
creating shadow puppets  
swirling across the ice,  
masquerading, as figure skaters  
with their lutzes and twists,  
salchows and snow-crested bliss,  
rhinestone drops of sun  
flickering on the pink-edged lace,  
always dancing.

now it's easy to remember  
the beauty your heart holds dear,  
in the cup that overflows  
with the happiness you've known  
in all the seasons of life,  
reflected here,  
ending and beginning  
with the creek.

## **The Day You Died**

*Jameyrae Valdivia | Adult*

There was a slight tinge of tobacco in the air.  
Cigarettes were scattered widely throughout the room.  
There never was any such person as captivating as you.  
Whether God does glow with glory or not,  
whether the weathered steeple of the church had deceived me  
or the eyes of Angels behind the delicate stained glass were real  
my faith was always an uneducated guess like a child trying their best.

Then you died.

Those singed cigarette butts ended in murder  
they snuffed out your life.  
I tried to keep it together but I started to unravel like loose yarn on a spool.  
I searched, I begged, I pleaded on my knees.  
“Lord!” I said, “What is your reason?”  
But I knew the reason why.  
Why you were reaped while I was left to weep  
an unhealthy habit turned addiction turned cancer.

Then I started to pray.

I hoped it would ease the pain  
“Light a candle and say a prayer for your loved ones”  
No. Lord, I’m weary. My energy has sagged  
and my motivation is lagged  
this doesn’t help in fact it never has.  
In Psalm 9 verse 8 whatever  
it doesn’t matter, I am still forsaken.  
For a long long time things went dark and I filled  
with the unshapely sharp feeling of nothing at all.  
Which, I will admit, was quite un-captivating of me.  
I have loved you since the first day you held me in your arms,  
coated in sweet tobacco ash my caregiver, a giver of everything.  
As I sat there on the green dull grass that climbed  
over your grave I promised to make up for how I behaved.

Then I started to heal.



## The Unfinished Ode

*Dawn Plestina | Adult*

Musician-Naperville, my eyes pop  
 Sending questions hoping not for a flop  
 Answers returned, communication starts  
 From not one but two searching hearts

Moving from online to telephone  
 Extreme deepness of a voice I've never known  
 Sharing our individual experiences  
 Growing closer—within inches

But safety first  
 With an Internet search  
 That leads me to find  
 Your statements aligned

So on to meet face-to-face  
 Cooper's Hawk to be the place  
 But to wait in line to eat at ten  
 Changed to Outback Steakhouse then

**I**

Sitting across from one another  
 I didn't feel that you wanted to be with some other  
 But you looked like a deer in headlights  
 Perhaps dating just gave you stagefright

As we talked, you laughed and smiled  
 How I became enchanted and beguiled!  
 I complimented you when you grinned  
 Then sadly it vanished with the wind

Excited for our next date  
 To hear you play, I couldn't wait  
 Warned you not to greet me while there  
 Because my kiddos were still unaware

Elaine, John, and I hopped in the car  
 Fortunately the gig wasn't too far  
 Finally entered Ed & Joe's  
 A crowd of people I did not know

**2**

Pizza ordered, music starts  
 Music is one of my favorite arts!  
 Hearing the range that the singer could belt  
 And watching your nimble fingers made me melt

Pizza arrived, Canary Blue breaks  
 Avoiding eye contact, giving all it takes  
 Hoping you respect my privacy wishes  
 Enjoying the pizza- most delicious!

The second set flew faster than the first  
 Time to leave in a manner reversed  
 Through the exit with no eye contact  
 Feeling my privacy kept intact

The kids and I returned to the car  
 John found a quarter for the tip jar  
 No amount of dissuading would work  
 And so he left us with a smirk

**3**

Returning to the car with a big, fat smile  
 Feeling his gesture was well worthwhile  
 He proudly beamed, "I gave it to the man."  
 Thinking he showed he was your biggest fan

Without another word I started our vehicle  
 Wondering if you would now be unreachable  
 Would my son's action be seen as deplorable  
 Or rather—just plain adorable?

The next time we spoke  
 You took his gesture as a joke  
 When he was younger, he admitted,  
 From being a stinker, he benefited

Our relationship like the spring buds, would blossom  
 But soon would come the first test and one  
 most solemn.

Less than a month since being matched  
I worried we would become detached  
I phoned and began driving  
You answered not realizing

**4**

“I’m on my way to Big John’s.”  
You replied, “What’s going on?”  
“I need plausible deniability  
So I can speak to the kids with validity.

“What can I do?”

“Just talk me through.”

We talked about the mundane  
Until I turned on Big John’s lane.

Afterwards I called you one more time  
“How will I tell them?” with a bit of a whine.  
You listened as if you were a psychiatrist  
Every word and sound you uttered, I cherished.

I hadn’t scared you off, yet  
Summer arrived and the band played set after set  
I really was living the dream, my dream  
Music and my man, ahead full steam

**5**

Having someone to talk to  
And the trivialities to work through  
For quite awhile I had this want  
Someone to call my confidant

Moving into the next year  
More and more I would hear  
“So how long have you two been together?”  
“Oh, I don’t know,” shutting them down altogether

They weren’t trying to intrude  
I wasn’t trying to be rude  
My superstitious mind thinks  
This relationship I do not want to jinx

Like the softest, warmest sweater we became  
Comfortable with one another we could proclaim

At one gig a fan offered to take a pic of us  
I knew you hated pictures and didn’t want a fuss  
But before I said a word, you replied “sure”  
A pic of we two—actually quite obscure

**6**

For another year happiness abounds  
With continual musical sounds  
Unfortunately, with the winter frost  
We would also hurdle loss.

With the death of your dad  
I lost my closest comrade  
Leaving many messages of caring support  
Never hearing back, were you about to abort?

Silent winter weeks depressed me even more with  
no return call  
Hearing “It is better to have loved and lost than to  
never have loved at all”  
Is not what you want to hear when you are in the  
middle of grief  
My soul ripped out by the bare hands of an unseen  
thief

More weeks painfully pass and my cell phone  
finally chimes  
“I am sorry. You don’t deserve this. I need time.”  
Part of me was thankful to know  
And part of me felt another swift blow

**7**

I respected your need  
Even though painful as a slow bleed  
That respect is something I wish another had  
afforded me  
Many years prior when I asked the same of a  
different he

Eventually, once again we connected  
But I ensured I would be protected  
We spoke in my living room  
Both feeling a sense of doom

As we continued talking while relaxing a bit  
Chatting up your new condo, inviting me to see it  
The next weekend our talks resumed at your place  
Setting down ground rules, face-to-face

Both wanting things that were not identical  
Offers back and forth, would we be bendable?  
Would we manage to reach a healthy compromise  
Or would this negotiation lead to our relationship's  
demise?

**8**

By the end of the night with much give and take  
We reached a compromise that did not ache  
With a long hug and a sweet kiss  
Both of us felt ultimate bliss

Over hurdle one successfully  
And moving on zestfully  
While you played your guitar,  
I watched my favorite rock star

For months to come we walked on egg shells  
Potential disagreements you or I would quell  
Never wanting to inflict harm  
It seemed to work like a charm

Until one day it did not  
And I became a bit hot  
My motto: think before speaking  
To avoid an episode of shrieking

**9**

You told me to let it out  
My face turned into a pout

Coaxing me again with "Let it out."  
I did—in just under a shout.

After that disagreement  
I was vehement  
To not hold anger in  
Because it felt like sin

Sharing my concern in a timely manner  
And keeping it real, with nothing but candor  
Refusing to be incommunicado  
Became my brand new motto

You don't take things personally  
So we don't fight eternally  
Instead we choose to vocalize  
And make the good-faith compromise

**10**

Now here we are eight years later  
Working toward master communicator  
Because we know, even though we haven't just  
begun,  
Expressing our gratefulness for each other is far  
from done

I always say "I'm no girl and you're no boy"  
But I don't say that to sound coy  
You ask about my life and listen to what I want  
Boyfriend is too generic so I call you my confidant

\*\*\*

I am fortunate to share this crazy life with you  
And I believe there is nothing we can't work  
through  
Who knows how many more years we have  
together  
But I hope we continue, with love as our tether

## **Chemistry Mnemonic**

*Mary Lee Gustafson | Adult*

The Father of the Halogens was Flourine (Yellow Gas);  
His Wife, Clarisse, was Chlorine (Very Active – Lots of Class)!  
Little Sister, Iodine, (Unstable and Steel Gray),  
Looked Up to Brother Bromine (Though Not Stable, So They Say).  
Their New Arrival, Astatine, Formed Salt (Like All the Rest);  
And, Since He was the Baby, Well, I Guess They Liked Him Best!

## **Shift in Light (for my baby sister Sheri)**

*Linda Montano | Adult*

A shift in light brought you to us

A tiny bundle—the last of the brew

You transformed us—you were the last of 8 of the family that grew

We gathered, we nurtured, and watched as you shined

You were the baby of the family, our lives forever intertwined

Navigating through life we shared darkness, sadness, and pain

But together as confidants, we were able to move on from the rain

Adulting brought many challenges, laughter and fear

But it was always tolerable, knowing you were always there

And now, in an unbelievably short blink of an eye

I lost your shared light and was forced to say goodbye

As my soul aches to hear you laugh and see your face once again

I remain grateful to have had you as both my sister and my friend

Although my heart was not ready for your sun to shift

I will walk in your light always and treasure your gift

## **[O come with me into the wilds and the weirs]**

*Susan Rublaitus | Adult*

*Some time ago I mentioned to a friend that I have 1,000 antifactual warehouses in my mind.  
She texted back that it'd be a blast to see what's in them. I wrote this poem in return.*

O come with me into the wilds and the weirs  
To places I've fathomed for decades of years;  
Through hithers and yons that impossible be,  
Remote beyond where light of reason can see.

**[Sometimes I wish I was a bird]**

*Wayne Hemmings | Adult*

Sometimes I wish I was a bird  
Soaring free above the troubles of man  
Below the future and above the past  
To spread my wings at full mast  
Sometimes I wish I was a bird  
Singing high to herald dawn  
A new day breaks before the world  
Before the stirrings of women and of men  
I pretend.  
Sometimes I wish I was a bird  
Taking glory in my wings  
As I conquer air anew  
My eyes transfixed on earth  
Bringing destruction, ultimate birth  
My troubles far below, and my dreams ever higher  
If I could have one wish, that would be my desire  
Sometimes I wish I was a bird  
Sometimes I wish.

## **The Pains of History**

*Angelica Del Pilar* | *Adult*

The words I am reading  
fade as my eyes stumble on  
the next page.

The book grabs me by  
the throat

And

Leaves me breathless

3 little boys,  
2 of them smiling at

The camera.

The oldest brother

Somber

Almost as if—

Well never mind

What are they like?

The youngest, Eddie,

Is active and spunky;

He often run around with his friends,

Only stopping for dinner.

The middle child, Thomas,

loved to read.

Any other circumstances,

He would have a book or two in his hand.

The oldest is stoic.

He had to grow up

Or risk being crushed.

They all would have been great men.

3 little boys

Leap off the page

Names unknown

They tell a story

Without saying anything.

Their lives cut short

As they walk into the

Gas chamber...



## **A doctor's visit**

*Gabby Zaczek | Adult*

It isn't busy at 8am  
No screaming kids or crying babies  
A lack of whatever the latest kid show is, blaring loudly from an iPad  
It's not silent, no  
But it's peaceful

I can see the receptionist, typing away  
She answers the phone  
A problem came up  
She seems perplexed by what she hears  
Someone is tapping their foot  
Unsure of who, maybe the nurse around the corner  
Or maybe the receptionist, frustrated with her problem

A mom and her child appears  
She's young, maybe 3  
Scared, clutching her mom's hand  
She knows where she is, I've been there before

The nurse appears, calling my name  
I remove my shoes  
Empty my pockets  
She notices I'm here alone,  
It's unusual for a childrens' hospital  
But I'm grandfathered in,  
Seeing this doctor, over a decade now  
We chuckle about how adulthood sucks,  
It really does sometimes  
Back to the room, activities covered because of covid  
It's a room, filled with expensive equipment and a computer  
The usual style, the usual check-in, and the usual experience  
It isn't him who opens the door, it's the PA  
I know her vaguely but after today, I know her more  
More conversing about adulthood and college,

There is a vacuum in my ear, it's loud  
One hearing aid in, want to be able to hear her talk  
She moves the neck of the machine to the otherside,  
Complaining of functionality, I agree  
Once again, there is a vacuum in my ear, the right one  
It's loud again, but it's over soon  
All done

She leaves, unsure whether I can leave too  
I can't, she comes back with the doctor  
He checks, everything is good  
But then he shocks me  
Mentioning surgery, that's never really been an option for this  
I tell him I'm not sure with the risk that it's worth it,  
When I'm doing well with my hearing aids  
Maybe one day  
When technology is better, when the risk is lower  
Surgery is no stranger to me  
Having 30+ does something to a person  
The visit is over, back home I go

## Tale of Twelve Spirits

Rachael Bargo | Adult

Way down beneath the fallen world, where hissing steam began,  
Curling upwards through the bedrocks toward the lofty worlds of man,  
Resting there, in curled form, lay a dragon known as Light,  
And though he slept, dark forces crept from beneath the cavern bright.

A wooden box, so innocent seemed, was clutched in claws of gold.  
Dancing flames rose 'round his form, though the flames themselves were cold.  
The sleeping beast, snoring on and on, unperturbed by days and nights,  
Through watchful glare, a dark creature stared, and tainted the peace with fright.

A silent step, a shadow moved, across the dancing flames,  
Reaching hands removed the sleepy claws aside and read the box's name.  
"Spirits of the World" sprang up, as though alive, upon the demon viewer's eye.  
And with a flash, the creature dashed, up the bedrock with his prize.

"I am in control," the great Thief did yell, into the sparkling starry night.  
"I own you all, and I am Dark!" He dared them all to fight.  
But close behind he heard the hiss where Earth's great steam was kept.  
To run, he started, but the bedrock parted, and up faithful Light then leapt.

Into the air the box then flew, a rainbow of glass and light and wood.  
They both dove high for the possession of each, but catch them, neither could.  
Their possession took wings, as if by force, and they blended with the steam  
With force from below, upward they go, and none can ere be redeemed.

*With a flash of teal, the spirit of Peacesent light sparkling bright 'cross the sky.  
Tis the calm one feels when standing in a valley or on the peak of a great mountain high.  
Brilliant green spirit of Luck came next, etched clover of white on the glass.  
Closely followed it was by the spirit of Mystery, a lemony green like the grass.  
The spirit of Wealth was not far behind them, Midas's touch in its power.  
The spirit of Love was equally shining, its color rose red like the flower.  
The spirit of the Phoenix was next to go flying, its fiery amber wings on display,  
It is the strength of the try-er, the live-r, the die-r, that never is conquered or fades.  
With a crown on its top, the auburn spirit of Kingdoms, was tossed up too, with a flash.  
Its miniature prince was soaring beside it, then they were both gone in a crash.  
Small amber butterflies followed the bottle as the spirit of Springtime flew aloft.  
Its essence the source of the unfolding leaves as the curse of the Winter was lost.  
Next came the brilliant violet bottle that belonged to the spirit of Magic and Dreams*

*That one especially was coveted – adored! - as it brought unicorns and knights and kings.  
Next came the dusty flask known all over as Time, a royal purple inside hourglass.  
Floating around in it the grains of the future, the present, the maybe, the past.  
The final two bottles left the case with a fling, one deep purple with lightning-like streams  
It was the spirit of Energy that brings things to life, its color as blue as the sea.  
The very last bottle was tossed in the air, and in the sun a vague mermaid was seen.  
It was the Spirit of Fairytales, things that shouldn't be, things that could never have been.*

The spirits of the World, as such, are scattered, in our sphere so wide and so far,  
And the glass, it is shattered, so they cannot begin to put them back into their jars.  
They float in the minutes, the moments, the days, all mixed up and winding through time,  
And as dreamers dream, and kings will be kings, which spirit is yours, and mine?

## **PANIC!**

*Lisa Conte | Adult*

YOU is everybody

ME is everywhere

PLACE is hard to find

TIME is hard to share

SILENCE is a crime

STARES are all around

EYES are all watching

HEART begins to pound.

## **on parenting**

*Anne Styx | Adult*

when you got here  
i understood what  
to do  
but not  
how to do it  
this has been an  
assembly  
of  
867,254 pieces

i'm on  
piece 73  
and maybe  
piece 34  
is  
upside  
down  
and  
piece 8  
is  
definitely  
on  
backwards

## **SOARING**

*Lisa Gaier | Adult*

Porch, you call to me  
Swing, let my spirit go free  
Breathe new life of Spring

**[Fates red string intertwined our pinkies and]**

*Maura Fennessy | Adult*

Fates red string intertwined our pinkies and

continued to grow like a hungry vine.

Weaving between my fingers,  
and creeping up my arm.

It tangled around my heart.

A string once so gentle and promising,  
Bleeding hope,  
is now suffocating me.

Fate knew just the right amount of pressure  
to carve her lines into my glass heart.  
My cracks are in the shape of every string that has wrapped  
its hands around me.  
I have become the byproduct  
of scars I did nothing to earn

Fate and her red string,  
why did she choose me.



## **Keep the Faith**

*Linda Wagner | Adult*

“Can’t we all just get along?”  
it has often been said,  
why are some folks happy  
and others filled with dread?

Wouldn’t it be a joy  
just to stroll down the street  
and not need to worry  
about the people we meet?

The teenager approaching  
could be a good lad  
and the guy in the hoodie  
might not really be bad.

Our elderly neighbor,  
may not truly be mean,  
we don’t know their story  
or hardships they’ve seen.

Your friends might be having  
a time of stress and strain,  
be there for them,  
in the sunshine and the rain.

Maybe families should gather  
and let old conflicts mend  
it’s time to clean the slate  
and greet a “new-old” friend.

God made us a beautiful world  
in which to live, love and play,  
if, as one, we lived in peace,  
wouldn’t that just make God’s day?

We all have had problems  
and darkness along the road  
but eventually there is light  
and help to lighten our load.

So, dear friends, remember,  
when our lives go “round the bend”,  
there are better days coming  
on that we can depend.

If we can only just believe  
and keep faith as our guide  
through the good and the bad  
Christ is continually by our side.

## **A Memo**

*Britt Nagy | Adult*

To whom this may concern:  
I think that it is time you learn  
There are no monsters under my bed,  
Or scary waries in my head.  
So if you could just stop  
Scaling up, up on top  
Of my house, behind the door,  
Out in the tree or someplace more.  
I have this spray here, you see?  
Bottom line: You can't scare me.  
So if you circle back to scare  
I will spray you everywhere  
And make you turn into air  
So moving forward, please play fair.  
And would you please be so kind  
And stay away from in my mind?  
Yours fondly, very truly,  
A kid just playing it very coolly.

## **EVERY**

*Dee Philip | Adult*

Every morsel of food that we eat,  
Affects us from our head to our feet.  
Every drop of liquid that we drink,  
Every thought that we think,  
Every word that we tweet and say,  
Every action that we display,  
Has an effect on us each & every day.  
If we could do all of these with gratitude & love,  
We would be blessed by the Great Spirit above.  
We take so much for granted & forget who we really are,  
Because we are really a bright light, that shine like a star.  
For that Spiritual Being, who resides up above,  
Also makes up our beings,  
Which comes from eternal love.  
So, if we can remember this every moment of every day,  
The lives that we live will be easier in every way.  
So my wish for you each and every day,  
Is to be your true self and not to dismay.  
Breathe your breath of life with gratitude & love every day.  
Doing this, you won't go astray.  
For the Divine Spirit that shines from above,  
Only knows that we are like it encompassed in love.

## **I Don't Know**

*Paula Morris Thomas | Adult*

I don't know anything about any of the many sperms and eggs that danced together and then led life to me.

I don't know if any had a mind for mathematics able to be proficient problem solvers.

Did any invent inventions that were able to stem the tide of troublesome labor?

Were any good with their hands in the arts of paint to canvas... in transforming mere cloth to clothing...  
converting wood and brick to abodes?

Are any names written anywhere logging the accomplishments of any who were successful contributors in  
governmental matters?

I don't know where my mind gets the permission to know what it knows.

I don't know who passed this writing and oration gift on to me.

Whose shoulders am I standing on?

Whose eyes in the heavens look down at me with the most pride?

Who were we denied to be openly... and what did we take to the grave secretly?

Am I the known origin of our family's now recognized legacy?

Will it begin AND end with me?

I don't know.

## **Bliss**

*Anna Sarsfield | Adult*

Of all the people I have been, and all the places I said I'd be  
The taste of the raspberry sun and the touch of snow on the mountain peak  
Seemingly keeping me alive in times of need  
An entwined being full of mental catastrophe  
To lookout and fully breathe  
In the moment I was  
In search of: me.

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