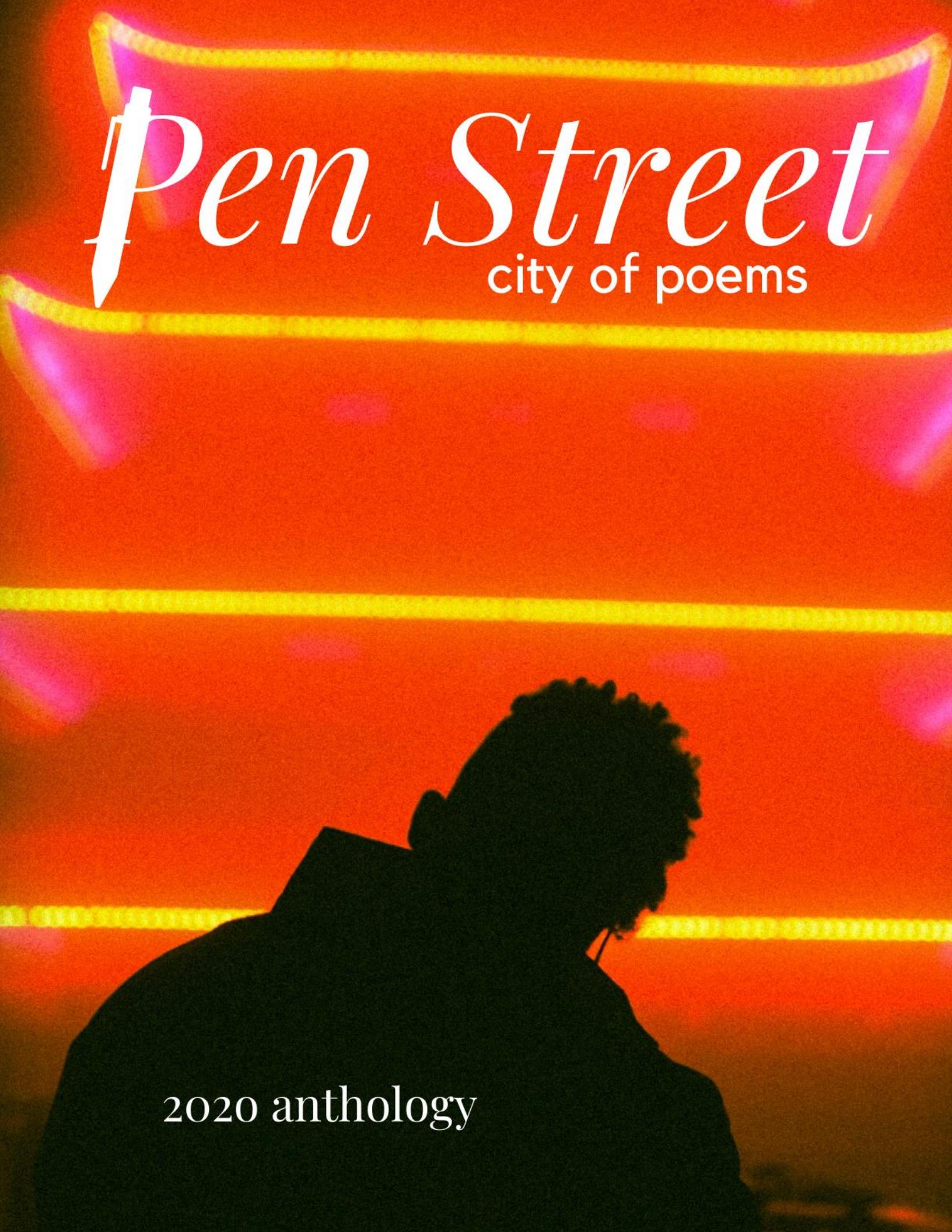


Pen Street

city of poems

A large, dark silhouette of a person's head and shoulders, facing right, is set against a vibrant orange and yellow sunset background. The silhouette has curly hair and appears to be wearing a small hoop earring. The background features horizontal bands of warm light and soft pink clouds.

2020 anthology

Project Overview

Pen Street: City of Poems is funded by the Berks County Community Foundation and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Guidance and support was also provided by South Central PaARTners at Millersville University and Barrio Alegría.

Along with this anthology, a number of free workshops were provided by featured poets. Originally planned to be public events at the locations of partnering organizations, workshops went virtual in light of health guideline restrictions on social gatherings.

Pop-up poetry performances in public spaces were converted to poetry videos, posted, shared and viewed across social media platforms. More than 20 excerpts of featured poems were transformed into art installations for the windows and walls of partnering businesses in downtown Reading.

Editing, planning, design and community outreach was provided by Anthony Orozco, Maya Serres and Marci Nelligan. Visual art was created by Tracy Soto, Juan Carlos Ruiz Jr., Theron Cook and Jean Ester. The cover photo was provided by Manny Coombs.

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Foreword

In February 2020, we put out a call for poems that capture the essence of Reading, Pa., or reveal stories and memories from the city. More than 50 poets submitted work and this anthology features nearly 100 of their poems.

As hoped for, poets interpreted the prompt broadly and loosely. In this collection Reading is viewed from the perspectives of college professors, mechanics, septuagenarians, middle school students, Spanish speakers, former and current Berks County poet laureates, songwriters, rappers and people who do not consider themselves poets.

The work ranges from songs to memoir and reflect the diverse experiences and realities of local writers. Though styles and subject matter vary greatly from one poem to the next, four overarching themes appear in the poets' work:

Many poems were firmly rooted in **Place**, highlighting the physical spaces which writers inhabit, where they come from, where they want to be and the landmarks that shape their lived experience.

Through **Stories**, poets shared their secrets, their trauma, their healing and their memories. The poets in this anthology have always had a voice, this anthology amplifies their words and records their stories for posterity.

Many writers meditated on the precious and sometimes-fickle thing of **Love**. They examined the element that inexplicably binds one person to another, the phenomenon that can lead to elation, admiration and sometimes heartbreak.

Writers also documented the **Tribes** by which they identify themselves and others. This may mean a common ancestry, a shared mission or even rejecting expectations of a group, establishing a tribe of a single individual.

One purpose of this project is to showcase the talent in this city in the year 2020 through poetry, visual art, community workshops and art installations. Another purpose is to share the restorative power of art.

The publication of this anthology comes at a time of a global pandemic of the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. National and statewide lockdown orders, a constant underlying anxiety and "social distancing" are part of the contemporary zeitgeist.

While this pandemic has changed society in many negative ways, including postponing or transforming the many various poetry workshops planned as part of this project, there has been at least one positive change.

Our memories of the city; social and romantic intimacy; our stories of overcoming challenges and practicing compassion, all of the things that define the human experience are more valuable than ever.

Anthony Orozco
resident artist
anthology curator

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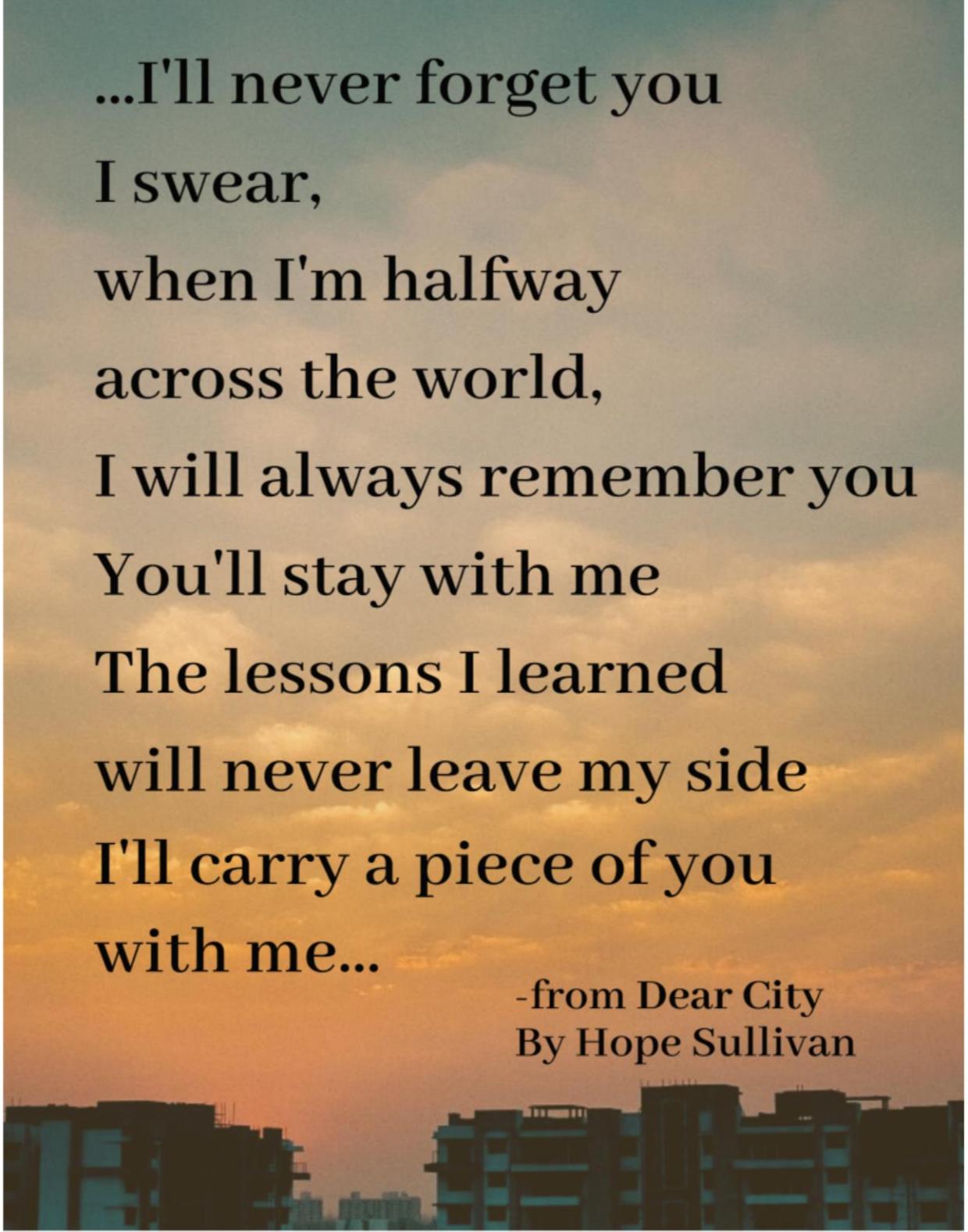
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PLACE



...I'll never forget you
I swear,
when I'm halfway
across the world,
I will always remember you
You'll stay with me
The lessons I learned
will never leave my side
I'll carry a piece of you
with me...

-from Dear City
By Hope Sullivan

Dear City
By Hope Sullivan

Dear city,
You taught me how to love
People on street corners
Strangers on the bus
The unfortunate, the strong
People who showed me that life moves on
And that you gotta be resilient
Dear city,
You taught me how to love a person more than myself
Handle infatuation, even though dating is difficult as hell
And damn, did I fall in love
With a boy whose eyes shone as bright at the Pagoda
When my life got rough
He always held me close, kept me sober
We explored your streets together
Skating down Penn, he tried to make me a better
Person
And he succeeded
I never expected he was exactly what I needed
Dear city,
You taught me heartbreak
When my life fell apart around me
And my boy left me
You helped me get my head on straight
I could only hang on to hope
Because you showed me things get better
Through the lives of your people, heck even through the weather
The sun always shines again
Dear city,
You've forever changed me
The people I met here, some of them saved me
I learned that there's more than loneliness and insecurity
Your resilience showed me I don't have to worry
And dear city,
I'll never forget you
I swear, when I'm halfway across the world, I will always remember you
You'll stay with me
The lessons I learned will never leave my side
I'll carry a piece of you with me
So while this may be goodbye
Since I'm going to move on
I want you to know how much I appreciate you
And I pray that you'll be strong

Reading, I know it's not easy
Often situations go wrong,
And things aren't always pretty
But just remember
Hope closely follows despair
Even when misery infects the town
Joy will always prevail

No Es Un Campo
By Adorelis Medina

“El campo más pobre”, that’s how they call my city
For them it’s not even a city but it’s the countryside
“El campo más pobre” diversified by the people in it,
the languages spoken, and the ideas shared
“El campo más pobre”, for aliens this city’s advancement is overdue
And the history of those before us,
along with the old buildings, they believe should be shattered
Those looking from the outside in will never understand
My city; my community; my people; my home
They’ll never understand our struggles,
why so many are homeless and have become slaves to their addictions,
why so many youth are battling mental illness at such an early age,
they’ll never understand.

“El campo más pobre” isn’t perfect but deserves the same respect as any other city
like New York, Seattle, or even Philadelphia
for the people in it have dark under eyes
and never stop reaching for the stars
This city is not defined by its beauty, nature, or buildings
but by its people, those who work with no stop
“El campo más pobre” será para ti pero
para mí es la ciudad de la prosperidad
“City of prosperity” is Reading to me
for though it is not perfect its opportunities are endless
and allow its people to strive, to prosper and succeed.

Penn Street Poetica
by Jayne Relaford Brown
Berks County Poet Laureate

“All enclosed within the gentle curving of the river as it flows...”

(from a Souvenir Booklet of Reading, 1895)

Where the avenue becomes a street,
The River Speaks—if not in circles,
in swerves and curves, music and dance, circles of words.

When you cross the bridge, first glance might seem
like too many dollar stores, not enough bucks.
But up the stairs and down the streets, Reading’s Poetry-Struck.

High school poets sit on the steps of the citadel,
Look out over row homes and row themselves home.
Who am I? Who could I be? The poems they write make up their maps.

By the library steps, fairy-tales unfold,
today’s Grimm stories re-told—stolen children hastened away,
here avenged and returned in a glorious dance.

Upstairs at Barrio Alegria, popcorn and poems
are popping like mad—fingers snapping, deft rhymes clacking,
words slapping up laughter, shared tears, and joy.

In the big-windowed room at the GoggleWorks,
local Bards aim their lenses on the unremarked,
magnify miracles, open the mic.

Alone on stage, the flame-haired dancer moves to words
and the silence between. Her body contracts. She raises one arm
in a gentle curve, *all enclosed*, like the river's bend where the city flows.

Monopoly
By Emily Hayes Whittle

I liked it well enough.

When I was a child in Maplewood, Missouri
in the hot summertime we would put the Monopoly board
on someone's front porch; the game
would go on for days; everyone would bring
their set and we would put all the extra money
in the bank; if you went bankrupt
you could always borrow more; it never ran out.

We had numerous little green houses and red hotels.

None of us had ever seen a red hotel.

None of us has ever actually taken a walk
on the boardwalk. We had never been
to Atlantic City nor any of the other places on the board.

None of us had ever seen
the ocean. We didn't mind the heat
because mostly we stayed outside. None of us
had air conditioning in our houses; since it didn't exist
we never thought about it. In those days
we used to pronounce "Reading" Railroad
like reading, as in reading a book.

I didn't know that there was a town by that name.
I never even remotely considered that some day
I would live there; that the people there would pronounce
"Reading" different from the way we did; that the trains
would no longer run and you would not be able
to take a ride on the Reading Railroad; that I

would complain about the heat there and the fact
I could not afford central air conditioning;
that the day would come there
when I would not be able to borrow
any more money from the bank.

Red Temple
By Brady Kull

Looking down
Through glass, to these dark city streets.
Same way as through ocean, on blue coral reef.

No pavement markings
Warm amber light.
Pounding of drums
Red temple in sight.

Insight stands a tower. Once stood for a reason.
Hot fires would burn, in the driest of seasons.

Standing lonely he watches, a rainforest, becoming.
But no fires will burn, to wet streets and their drumming.

Home in the Flood Plain
By Elizabeth Stanley

Look out from the Pagoda
see the greening of the city and river valley
with
no
boundaries,
no visible boundaries
between the neighborhoods—at this distance—
no boundaries between the city
and surrounding towns and suburbs.
Just the greening of trees, grass, meadows
that flow toward the city
where buildings hold the center.
We make our home in this flood plain.
River flows (goes where it will),
gathering waters from highlands,
mountain springs, Mt. Penn, the hills of Galen Hall
where once the wealthy came
from New York and Philadelphia
to the hills near Wernersville
for a cure they sought from living waters—
mineral springs, clear air, sweet green forests,
birds, mountain laurel.
We make our home in the floodplain
surrounded by highlands, hills,
softly rounded by eons of weathering,

a line of blue mountains on the horizon.

Sun glints off glass, metal.

Cars careen along roads, city streets

where world rhythms beat.

Walking to Work

By Sandra Fees

This is the side where I walk,
the side where I pass the barbershop,
shears shaping city secrets, the side
where café lights edge plate-glass
in teal, hot pink, and scarlet, whiffs
of tostones feeding the air. This, the side
where the textile building's windows
arch their eyebrows and muffled ears
enter the library's quiet symmetry.
Puffer hooded toddlers stomp their feet
and whisker-chinned men lean
against grocery carts. The shivered
wait for canned beans and crunchy peanut butter.
A skateboarder scrapes by double-
parked cars. I pause mid-block
to wiggle a deftly milled gold key
into a lock and enter
where I have come and gone before
burdened and unburdening
where stucco walls let just enough outside in:
the fleeting trail of sirens,
a couple speaking Spanish, a truck idling,
and throaty laughter. The sky half-clouded
half-fire, sputtering snow. After work,
I jay walk to my solitary car five stories
up above street level.
There the whole block visible.
And beyond, sun cuffs the mountains.
Up there, my heart imbibing something
as ordinary as a sidewalk.

1415 Moss
By Stormy Russell

Home used to be
open fields and bonfire smoke
grass and cows
neighbors who ask who I “belong to.”
Now it is something else entirely:
sounds of bachata
the wafting scent of arroz con grandules
a narrow rowhome
tucked between bodegas and daycares.
Home is behind a stained-glass window
in a city where no one knows my name.

North 8th
By Stormy Russell

Where only asphalt blanketed moments before,
Now there is a dead cat.
Yellow eyes frozen orbs
Ruby-glass pool of blood under
Gray fur lifting gently in the
fish-scented breeze,
And no one looks down.

A Woman from Reading
By Morgan Thomas

I have cultivated these curves
Since they emerged
They have belonged to me
Since I was born

I have loved this city
Since it welcomed me in
I have painted its walls
And ushered peace in

Don't call me by your names
I won't hear you
And these streets
They won't protect you

You know territory
But I know home
These buildings will crash into you
Until you leave this city and this body alone

Let My Words Be Not In Vain
By Adorelis Medina

Let my words be not in vain
Listen to the cry of my city
A cry for those who it fights for
For the children whose dreams have been destroyed
for the innocence that was lost,
for those who fell to addictions
and have forgotten who they are.

Let my words be not in vain
Release those stereotypical thoughts
Stop the prejudice actions
diamonds are found in the rough
This city is full of diamonds
Let my words be not in vain
Give my community a chance
A chance to show you what we carry
to show that our blood, sweat, and tears have not been in vain
but rather how it has increased our strength
Love us, hate us, feel as you may
But we will rise, you'll see
My words will not be in vain.

Reading
Pennsylvania
By Fadi Acra

Oh city with a pagoda for a hat
you wear your past glory well, and cut a dashing figure at that
with open arms you have embraced us all
we came to you hauling our dreams and hopes, large and small
a slow decline had cut you deep, and hit you hard
left you bleeding, bruised and scarred
carpetbaggers have come and gone
danced with you, then sold you for a song
you've been in a long slumber
waiting for a kiss, from a passionate pauper
or from a charming prince
here it is, a kiss, a kiss, a glorious kiss
waking you up slowly, you are dazed, and lying flat
what now, now what?
before you open your eyes
let your thoughts settle,
and imagine the limitless skies
and dreams you've dreamt, fulfilled at last
and gleaning seeds from the fruits of your past
planting lush gardens, painted green by the gods
rise now, don't only follow the clouds
your brightest hope is the people born in your heart
and the people you let in it
now open your eyes

The Sunroom
Wallace Stevens House, 323 N. Fifth St., Reading, PA
By Heather H. Thomas

Her legs were shorter then. It's a quick
climb now to the second-floor apartment.

Opening the door, she falls
into the Wedgwood jar of the living room,

a blue world whose patterned white figures
freeze in their dance. Two steps up—

her parents' bedroom—their turbulence
knocks the wind out of her.

I turn and walk as if leaving a stage
Wallace Stevens descended in purple air

more truly and strange, the walls
sliced open by words, so she covers her ears.

The air roars as a plane takes off,
rifling books on the shelves, tearing up paper lives,

rewriting history as snow blowing in
the same bare place between mind and sky,

between sound and night.

This is why the poet is in the sun,

pointing her finger at the moon,
meeting her shadow in a book.

I'm walking room to room with echo
clamor in summer heat.

A line of fire around drawn shades, smell
of burning metal, an overlooked pot,

but no one has cooked in this kitchen for years.
She crosses the floor stenciled with sun.

I sit on a folding chair and feel the unraveling
in my veins. It's always like this,

the child not knowing what to do,
how to live. Light over Sixth Street rooftops

leads her down the fire escape to the sandbox
between brick walls until the radio draws her

back up the iron stairway to the paints,
brush, paper Mother gave her, the glass of water,

the Chordettes singing. She paints a big blue sun,
small ruby bird. Under the covers her page

glows with ghost letters. She holds
the brush, covers my hand, writing

wayward names that won't go away. Her hand
keeps moving far back all those rooms

I came through. She writes this.

Windsor Street Washline
By Mary Arguelles

From my kitchen window,
three patches past the white lilacs,
I can see Nilsa hanging out her wash.
With her baby papoosed to her breast
and a clothespin clenched in her teeth
she dragoons April into domestic duty.
Bright white baby tees
line up in obedience to Nilsa
happily greeting the day.
One by one, with regimented authority
the towels flap in the breeze
each flag asserting its colors.
An array of socks
musical notes on a staff
compose their requiem for laundry's lost art.
An older child zigzags in and out
of billowing cotton sheets,
so many curtains rising on her Saturday matinee.
This length of rope
tethered to the ages
tells the tale of hands turning in useful work,
of mothers and children
gathering sun and air
and of the peace that comes from folding.

The Soap and Whiskey Bridge
By Patrick Klimcho

It's amazing what can be learned
By keeping your eyes open.
In the Keystone State,
Crossing Sixth Street, in the city of Reading,
(Pronounced Reading as in bedding,
Not reading as in seeding,)
Just north of Buttonwood, near Woodward,
Is a beautiful, swirling
Psychedelic wonder,
Frozen in brown stone,
Not dreamed by Doctor Leary, in the swinging sixties
But Richard Osborn, back in eighteen-fifty six.
A railroad, skew bridge, first imagined,
Then modeled in blocks of soap,
Built by men paid in whiskey, (at least partially).
Arch with no keystone, for the twisting masonry
Is laid elliptically, meeting abutments built out of square,
To accommodate the angle of the street.
Who knew of such engineering?
Who wondered if the whiskey was at fault?

in this present, still being
By Ruby Mora

have you thought of the ground you walked on lately?

the feeling of dirt adjusting to the soles of your shoes?

the way the clouds decided to line up

tremendously in sync with the sun

chrysanthemums, lilacs, oranges;

have you settled your eyes on the trees as of late?

changing with us as the seasons evolve,

feel the crackles of bark forming intersecting roads

only seen up close, only felt when you

take the time to give your fingertips the proper

reintroduction

encircle yourself in blooming,

in feeling,

in being,

in absolute,

in humanity, something we are so fiercely

and endlessly

clutching onto.

The Enchanted Forest
By S. Rose

As I sit underneath a canopy of pine trees in the midst of a tiny tranquil forest

I hear the distant roars of vehicles far enough away to feel present in another world.

The cool, soft breeze brushes upon my face with the greetings of Old Man Winter's return.

Notes of citrus, pine, and humus fill the air,

Looks of curiosity from others that pass by as I sit on a bed of pine needles.

After a long, detached hiatus, Mother Earth calls me home,

With songs of rustling leaves being tossed by the soft and gentle breeze,

And the lively stream that dances past me as I walk.

I am home again and I one with Her. She softly whispers, "Welcome my Child, welcome Home."

the other
By Tony Veloz

i.

plasma balls
gently nestled
above
plasma lines
energized lines of
death
metallic bearers of life
our modern prometheus

NOTICE!!

DANGER!!!

may result in death.

ii.

upshoots
from a concrete
jungle
jeunglinge

iii.

stop

stalk of steel

red

octagonal

cob

iv.

children play

run about swinging plastic torches

green streaks

by mounds

of chlorophyll and starch

East Side

v.

patch

path stretching

patch of railroad

into wilderness

railroad

clearing

trees rise among metal

and free flowing electrons

a synthesized jungle

a synthesized wilderness

vi.

oasis of beauty

wild

uncontrolled

un-subjugated

a wooden civilization

of unspoken harmony

unrecognized harmony

like the resolute dominant

of the

baroque

vii.

apollo's chariot rests upon the breast of gaia

colonized by the dreams and aspirations of prometheus' children

inspired

in spirare

xiii.

an oasis of borax

and fillers joined with water

holy

surrounded by deserts of organic matter

capped by metal canopies

ix.

as day yields to night
apollo's chariot ceases to exist
order collapses and disorder abounds

the paradigm of light gives way to hades
if only for a while...but perhaps
this time for the rest of eternity

devoured

by cerberus
| beware |

x.

the edge of a city

timeless

where the third landscape begins

and escapes
where the abandoned
mutilated
landscape originates

dimensionless

Me, Mirrors and Leaves
By Xavier Care

I see Mother Earth in the mirror,
as she cowers in fear
because of all the forests we've cleared.

Replaced by farms where people's minds & good intentions are weird.

Controlled by grown men, strength only found in their beard
Like the fathers of America, & a dream revered.
No remorse for riding on trails & tracks with machinery, on high gear.
And now, I can't promise that we'll be here, in 12 years.

Counting the lines of a tree
becomes a ceremony,
for a colony of bees
that won't see

another decade

So they're unafraid
to sting for what's man-made
because if we leave our debt unpaid,
We'll all lose the right to biodegrade.

Knocking on wood, one less bird's nest.
walking past what could be our best. Instead,
We've discovered more ways of making our air, water and soil a mess.
While the dominant hands

could care
less.

Tree trunks grew straight until the sun was blocked by smoke stacks.
We can't follow the broken chain from coal fallen on train tracks,
to the crying faces that are just as black,
or their parents, factory workers, making sure your new cell phone is tightly packed.

Another reflection, I saw my face in their leaves.
Sympathy falling for a piece of their tree,
But we are the trunk, the peach,
the bees,
and that tea.

It's in your hand.

Mixed with water from the sea.
So on behalf of my mother's reflection,
I ask you to fight with me.
Her kindness has taught me to say please.

The Park
By Nelson De La Cruz

I just wanted to go to the park I thought
Climb the monkey bars for sport
And run, never walk
By myself, my mom said no
I asked why “cause I said so”
In a rush to grow
All about the highs fuck the lows
Never knew you never know
The swing of things
When the wind blows
The sprinklers will have you soaked
To the point that you can’t float
You climb up just to slide down
Hoping your two feet hit the ground
In standing position
Your man ends up missing
When there’s problems around
The mental seesaw never balances out
What is this challenge about
It takes two to level but how
Some kids are just foul
Maybe they been at the park too long
Or were only taught to do wrong
Maybe they weren’t shown any compassion
And that’s how they moved on
Some of them hang on their own
And play with rocks in the dirt
Some cry when they scrape their knees
Others try to hide their hurt
I’ve done both
Tried acrobatics, did backflips
with no gymnastics
Some of my dudes left in caskets
And others in paddy wagons
I crossed over bridges that weren’t sturdy
And I always held on
Felt wrong when I rocked it
And someone else fell from
My immaturity or my selfishness
Or was it their purity and not expecting it
Cause no matter the situation
For the most part I kept my grip
A few times I stepped in shit

Even when my path was figured out
Playing manhunt, trying to find myself
Had a lot to think about
Learned a lot from my surroundings
The grass ain't as green
as I thought it would be
I felt caged in without a fence all around me
Hide and go seek with my acquaintances
Although we don't see the same in shit
They tried to tag me, they couldn't tag me
Cause their lane I wasn't adjacent with
But I still will participate
And picnic on till precipitates
Even then I carry on
Mind states in a different place
I love the park, love the sunshine
Even when rains combine
Gotta appreciate the downpour
Even when it abbreviates the fun times
Another day, another chance
I come to play and understand
Giving knowledge, achieving wisdom
While I juggled some other plans
But in the midst of the fog
I catch a glimpse when I was nine
Reminiscing about asking my mom
To just let me go outside

Profiteering
By Tony Veloz

Plastic Bottles

Polyethylene

High density, HDPE

Esterized terephthalene, PETE

But no vinyl chloride, PVC

Poisonous ethylene glycol

Bottles of ethylene glycol

Sweet and syrup-like

Sugary venom from plastic maple trees

No child, don't drink that glycol

It's neither glucose, fructose, or sucrose

A jungle of pipes

Ivory white

Sausage links of

Carcinogenic vinyl chloride

Knit into tubs of PVC

Polymerized

Plasticized

Profitized

The environment screams

Radicals reign

Particles rain

As protons rampage

Through that unnatural concept

Of life

No child, no ethylene glycol for you

That's your father's antifreeze

Guardian from both cold and heat

Europa's ice covered ocean

And the sun's infernal distal sheet

Plastic products, big and small

Polyethylene, HDPE

A pinch of terephthalene

Find me PETE

Some polyvinyl chloride

Profiteering PVC

Philadelphia Poe and the Basement
By Ashley R. Jones

Darkness come kiss me bitter.
Come down to my chamber, woman.
Give me half-truths of echo grey.
She will shiver like a forest thunder
Earth, so light, I walk empty in love
Which I am in laced whisper, hidden in Death's shadow, filled with haunting desire

While Sitting on the Stoop
By Noah Ayala

While sitting on this stoop I've realized why most men dream
I've been here before but never it's occurred to me this thing
What triggers you inside
Why a robber schemes or why a woman with so much soul expresses herself and sings
Why tragedy mostly pain it brings and why hip-hop is always been a poor man's dream
While sitting on this stoop I've realized why most men dream
There's more sky than earth
It's much bigger than us
Why we fighting for a man-made object
That highlights the words in god we trust
when at the end of the day he made us all equal
and to this very ground our bones shall crust
really what's the difference between love and lust
as I look around the room and discover the wolf in sheep's clothing
who can I trust
life's addictions when you fall which one shall we crutch
while sitting on this stoop I've realized why most men dream
it's not a his or her thing it's more for all of us the beggars the followers
the leaders and even those that chose to call on us
the ones who want to change look up at the sky and shout lord please I've had enough
the gambler as sweat leaves his forehead wishing he was dealt a different hand
we all want something what could this be for me
while sitting on this stoop I discover why most men dream
it was a hard upbringing watching them fall
it was painful hearing their voices but ignoring the calls
just wanting it to be all over and me part of that cause

lifestyles of the rich and famous turn their faces frauds
meanwhile in my own world creating my tablets writing my quotes
living out the true definition of persistence
I've always seen what they could never picture
scripture after scripture
could you picture a picture less picture frame with no boarder's plain walls
it's been several years since a plane falls
but its everyday my son calls papi can you pick me up I want to play the game pause
as the preacher calls to my attention
son are you lost watching the winter's take over cover the ground frost
who am I
I am just a poet a troubled Young Man that grew up and now knows this
I am lip balm for your chapped lips
I've been mistaken profiled and wrongfully accused it's not just rap
Picture yourself expressing a dream with the breath of your soul
And the force of a team
While you sit in your denim jeans
I've realized while sitting on this stoop why most my life I've dreamed

Last Phone Booth in Reading
By Brian James

It is in need of a hero

In tights and a cape

A place for a symbolic change

where an ordinary person steps up

faces the problems of the city and says,

“Challenge accepted.”

Sign
By Adam Richter

How many rains will it take
Before that old billboard
On the side of those row homes
That advertises a store that once
Stood downtown
Before the malls
Before "urban renewal"
Before the bridge crowd decided
It was too dangerous to cross
Unlike the old days
When you had factories
In the neighborhoods
When there were movie theaters
Even that one a few blocks from
The park, the one that showed
G-rated movies (When they existed)
But got so desperate to stay open
It started showing porno films
(When they existed)
The old Polish woman sees that billboard
And she remembers the store
With its mannequins in the windows
That jutted out onto the sidewalk
Creating a kind of alcove of the entrance
Mannequins that wore the kind of clothes
Her mother would never let her buy

Or that she would never let her daughter buy
That was when most people in the neighborhood
Had names that resembled hers
But now those neighbors have died
Or moved away
And the ones who live around her now
Have names that are easier to spell
They don't complain about the old days
They bring life to her neighborhood,
Life to her city
That so many
For so long
Wrote off
As dead.

Where I'm From
By Sandra Fees

Where I'm from
they know how to stroke
what is wild of beauty.

Theirs were the hands
of boxers and pacifists,
quilters and farmers.

And now? Now I am
from somewhere else
this other Pennsylvania town,
home to goggle factories
and shuttered stations,
an intersection of valleys
and a generation
of dreamers and muralists
who paint the future.

Now I am here. Is this
a place I come from?
Or a place
passing through me?

Looking Forward To Getting Back
By Michael Macera

My life right now feels like constant bursts of monthly happiness.

Followed by recessions with hope for recovery.

Hope from looking forward to getting back.

I told myself that these moments are supposed to mean something.

They're supposed to be turning points.

Like sharing drinks on the roof of your brownstone apartment.

Those are moments I'll never get again.

But suddenly they don't hold much weight.

I spent my time miserable for nostalgia.

Then I'm nostalgic for the times when I thought I was miserable.

Maybe I was happy the whole time and I'm just not realizing it.

The pursuit of looking forward to getting back continues.

Some visual imagery that conjures up the above mentioned feelings:

24 hour diners.

The Delaware Beaches.

Antonio's Pizza of Williamstown, NJ.

The PJs in Sinking Spring.

The mall with the pyramid in Reading.

You look back and your train is coming.

A Girl, Reading
By Heather H. Thomas

Mother studies trend in hats.

Remember, she says, to have style.

The straw brim tilts on my crown.

The grandmothers gather into girdles,

into kid gloves white and black.

When they argue, I turn translucent

as a photo negative, and open a book.

Our sacrifice for beauty, they say,

if only she would cut her hair.

I memorize everything until I learn to think

for myself. At the library

old men in coats stagger in,

sit at oak tables with the *Reading Eagle*.

Help wanted: hosiery mill knitters.

Up in the stacks Emma Bovary rots

with desire, Lily Bart loses *The House of Mirth*,

and Edna Pontellier, shadowed

by the lovers and the lady in black,

abides the pain of wakefulness. Snug in coats,

the old men nod heads to their chests.

My body grows heavy, bones

of my feet chalk blue in the shoe store X-ray.

Mother says big feet give
a firm foundation.

At Whitner's department store I stroll

through Foundations—
mounds of bras and girdles,

a fresh, white smell.

A woman in a lab coat dusts jars
of tinted powders in Cosmetics.

Smoke pours from the stacks at Vanity Fair.

At Stanley's Bar on Cotton Street
a man can buy a wafer-thin box

of ladies' nylons, a Polish ham, a Sunshine Beer.

I ride the bus to Fifth and Penn

and tie fantastic bows at Feel-Fine.

Miss Schultz and Miss LaMonica wear black

and stand, matriarchs before the racks,
necks draped with the dreaded tape measure.

My grandmothers depart on the Queen Mary,

lean on the deck that carries them away.

No book ever ruined a girl's life, they sing,

waving handkerchiefs. *You'll never know*,

they sing, as though they knew,
as though Edna came back

from her final swim, as though my life was not

a secret ruin of books, secret joy.

I'm From A Place Where
By David Nazario

I'm from a place where we say thank you to the driver before we get off the bus
I'm from a place where if you're not from here you can't talk about Reading, but I
can talk about us
I'm from a place where politics can be corrupt
Where if you're a Rose that don't grow in concrete you can't lead us
Shoutout to Eddie
This is the place where an ice grill will get you fucked up
But what luck!
Same place where a viejo will get behind your truck
No gas
He'll bust his ass to help you get unstuck
We move snow for each other
We hold doors for the mothers
For the sisters
For the brothers
Where holiday plates are filled high with mac and cheese and rice and beans
Where corner boys feed the fiends
Where bodegas replace Whole Foods and some fools from over the bridge think we
don't know how to live, but drive past our cribs, en route to the hockey game
What a shame!
They don't wanna be around
But I'm still from a place where Leira will turn your frown upside down
At Mi Casa
Not my house but Johanny's
I know you feel this now
Shoutout to Felix
I'm from a place where the Barrio is the neighborhood but also the savior in the hood
led by a king named Daniel
We are poor but we are the channel...
to the riches
Where men call their women bitches...
and Queens
Know what I mean?
This is the place where The Wonder Of Ivy is behind me, but still leading the pack
Same place where Dear Reading is showing you what it means to be young, gifted and
Black
Where Reading Pride is not quite that
But I'll be there at the parade with the gays and I'm proud of that
Cause I'm from a place where Carlos is Lola Cha Cha every Monday
At the bar they go hard dressed in drag all night
I'm from a place where Oakbrook taught me how to fight
I was a Wildcat then a Knight

Cause I'm from Reading
Yeah
That's right
Where I'm from

LOVE

I want to start off by saying
you're perfect the way you are
People won't understand
what you went through
but I can relate
because I see the real you
you're not just an object
or something to play with
you're a person
filled with love...

-from Love yourself
By Odalys Barajas

Self-Love
By Tasha Santiago

Our City is a house

We get many visitors: sadness, anger, happiness.

Love lives here with us and together we entertain our guests.

But, we also enforce boundaries. You may not overstay your welcome.
Sometimes we forget to keep up with our house.

We might not dust the shelves of our hearts,

Or forget to wash clean the hands of regret.

We may even forget to open the shades when darkness fills the mind,
Stunting the seeds of growth we worked hard to plant.

Sometimes we let the trash accumulate.

It isn't until the vile, festering, rotting, smell fills the house we even realize it's there.

Waiting too long we punish ourselves as we try to artificially cover up the stench.

We end up living with it longer than we would have had we thrown out those rotten thoughts, expired feelings or putrid ideas other people left our trash sooner.

But how does one apologize to a house? We try to do better—wash the walls with a healthy sheen, fill it with things to help it glow.

Make sure we cultivate a deserving community for our house.

Find a spot for it to be safe.

How else can you thank a home?

We were gifted with these extraordinary houses,

The least we can do is a little upkeep.

Time Is Everything
By Kareem Cade

I have a question for you
They say time is everything

So when you say you want everything does that mean you only want time

When you say you want everything from me
Does that mean you only want my time

If so that's fine, I'll bless you with that and everything that's mine
I'm at a point with you where I don't have to question your loyalty
Because you give me everything I need, you spoil me

With that love I could die for
I feel like dying less and living more

Spending endless days with you under sunsets and sandy shores
The sunsets are under the moon now, the shores are sandy between our feet
The crash of the waves and the smell of saltwater moments I'll look back on

When you're not with me and I start missing you
And I think of ways I could surprise you when you would get home
Rose petals all throughout the house to grace you after you've been gone

Candles and love music just to set the mood
A glass of wine and a plate of food
Happiness imbued between the two

Your lovely smile shows to acknowledge you love how I treat you
Everything I do, I go a little further just to meet you
I get so excited at the thought of you, throughout the day
When I sit back and smoke I see clouds of your pretty face
Swooshin and swishing I don't feel empty nothing is missing

I'm just drifting in the waves with you
In the waves in my mind, where your perfection lies
A place where love is felt and kindness shines
A place I seem to go to all the time
When I need you close, when I crave you to be near
When I need to see the perfection that helps me see clear
When I crave that love that leaves me helpless
When I need time with you and no one else
The fondness of your aroma with gentle serenades

Lying in the bed I never made
Lying next to you with sleepy eyes
Watching you evaporate into the open sky
I'm extending my time with you with gentle breaths
Breathing you out, just to breathe you back in
Breaking rules ignoring laws
Just to be around when you call
I make sure I'm available
They say time is everything,

I want time, because then I'll have you and that's everything

Nitakupenda Milele*

By Adorelis Medina

For the times our hands intertwined
For the time you said, “no one has made me feel this way”
For the times we stayed up late deep into conversations
For the times our lips touched
For the time you made me smile when all I wanted to do was cry
For the times your arms held me embraced
For the times we only spoke with our eyes for what we felt was too deep to be said
For all the moments you made my heart flutter
For that nitakupenda milele
And though,
Our hands may never touch again,
My smile may never again be sprung
from your words,
Our hearts never share another embrace,
My phone will never receive a call from you,
Your eyes never stare into mines with such passion,
Nitakupenda milele
Nitakupenda milele
for all you taught me
for all you gave me
for the time we shared
and for the hope of there being a time when our hearts will embrace again

*Nitakupenda Milele means I'll love you forever in Swahili

Love in Portuguese

By Morgan Thomas

A gente achou um lugar

We found a place

Maravilhoso

Marvelous

Dedicado para nós

Dedicated to us

Entre as ondas

Between the waves

Em cima da realidade

On top of reality

Fique nós

There's us

O mar é amigo seu

The ocean is a friend of yours

Você sabe como ele respira

You know how he breathes

Como inquietas

How he fidgets

Você sabe como pedir

You know how to ask

Para ele esconder

For him to hide

A gente do mundo

Us from the world

It's You
By Odalys Barajas

You don't know how you make me feel
a single butterfly flying around in a field

You make me feel indescribably beautiful

like a rose with its thorns, it can be trouble but
can pull you in a trance by its attractive soul

It's you

Though sometimes I feel like I'll fall apart...
I know you'll always be there to pick me up
and fix it all

I get flustered thinking about you...
I start to blush and think how can all of
this be true

How can you fall in love with me and my
flaws, with someone so imperfect like me

Sounds like a dream that was meant to be

It's you

Turns out you love everything about me
which drives me with glee

I hope this is true because what I feel
for you is something unreal

I hope we last and I hope we're happy

because with you

I have everything I've always wanted

I promise to be brave and I promise to stay
because what we have is a connection that
I'll take to the grave.

It's you.

She
By DayQuan Williams

She, makes me better everyday
She, created perfectly in every way
Queens never kneel to kings
They're always right beside them
Without she, I am nothing
You see, I'm just the trident to this Poseidon
Because she's the master of the waves that I keep riding
She, the pen when I'm writing
She, the ink when I'm signing
I think that I'm lying
When I tell myself you do not need her
Because when a woman's plate is already full
she's not concerned about what a man can feed her
She, a unicorn, a magical creature
She, the superstar
Me, just the feature
I usher her to the stage
For her I am a groupie
She got me shadow boxing a Greek baby god because I didn't ask Cupid to shoot me
I want to write her poems every day but what I say isn't worthy enough to be placed
on her loose leaf
She playfully says I'm not ready for her type of high
And my reply?
I want all the smoke cause the rest of my ex's were handing me looseys
She's so Austin powerful her vibrations are groovy.
Vibrating on higher level
Her pitch is perfect and I'm not talking about the movie
She's so much more than a snack
A full-course meal that could satisfy Scooby
The men who have attempted to disperse this energy now shed tears like they've seen
a sad movie
When I see she
all she sees is cheese
Like Ratatouille
More precious than diamonds pearls or a bag of Ruby's
And even if it doesn't work out
I'm just glad she knew me.

I Love You
By Kareem Cade

I would love you forever
Even if forever is just a moment
Because when I look at you
My beautiful queen
Time stops and nothing else matters
Just know that I adore you

When I write from my heart just know it's all for you
I feel like I'm man enough for us to not fall apart
Man enough to love you from end to start
I wish to speak words that resemble your beauty
Speak your love from your heart directly into me
Give me your love I want it all and nothing else
Every morning I wish to look at your picture on my shelf
Right next to my alarm, and my watch, and my keys
So when I look at the time I'll know I have you from now until infinity

I wish to know who you were
Before you became the person you are now
Baby memories, things as a child, when you were young
Did you do anything wild, what did you do, that you wouldn't do
I wish to dig deep and know every part of you
I don't want surprises, I want to know where your lies live
So I can knock on the door and tell em where I live

I expect so much from a wife
Hold my hand share my life
Be my angel give me light
Be my soulmate day and night
When I'm wrong be my right
Be my strength when I can no longer fight
And I'll love and protect you my entire life
Sweet words I wish to speak to you
To compliment your aroma

Back rubs and good conversation whenever you come over
Appreciative of the very woman you are
Realizing the love you emanate will take us so far
You always hear me call you beautiful, the usual
Simple words, that you need to know
Because how I make you feel is so important
You have to take care of your heart or your life will be shortened
I would never be a king without you my queen

Intertwining yourself with me changed my destiny
You'll forever get the best of me
Because you're left with me

And even when you leave you'll be left with me

Your Love is Like Jazz
By Morgan Thomas

Your love is like jazz
It tumbles and cascades
Leaving a trail of goosebumps
Where you touch me

Your affection is a series
Of haphazardly beautiful notes

But your ego
Lives in sour chords
Hidden under the muse
Of jazz owning no mistake

In the trances of your melodies
You caress me
And show me
A note, ever so flat
It extinguishes my passion
Another, slightly sharp
Stings as you shrug off
The music I made myself
But it is all packaged
In the sultry silk
Of your song

Produced
So you may do no wrong
Your love is like jazz

Lust of the Heavens

By Ivan Misiura

Illuminated longing by
Lunar light.
Tis night alone
That gives way to desire.
I hold the essence of your being.
I become lost in the soul of thine eyes.
The wind howls.

Autumn's faint whispers
Raise one's hairs to attention,
Love's warmth overcomes.
Upon this nature's edifice
Doth time remain still.
One night.
One lifetime.

The silhouettes of the dead
Bend to the whispers of autumn,
Giving way to surreal landscape.
Above is monstrous beauty:
Revealed to all.
Revered by few.
Reviled by none.

The sense of your touch
Lends to synaptic surge,
Affirming the undefined.
Love belongs to the bygone
Spirit of elusive place.

Just now discovered under
Lunar's vested light.

Trapped inside
By Odalys Barajas

Sometimes I wanna leave this place
the place in my mind that doesn't give me any
space

I can't help but think why my heart and
self-conscious are against each other

why they disagree so much about one
another

why one wants lust and one wants trust

why one wants to be with him but
the other away from him

I can't figure out what's right for me
and what's true for me

if this was meant to be, then why is my
heart and self-conscious arguing about me and my needs

why does one tell me to stay and the other to leave

one tells me I'm right and one tells me I'm wrong

so please tell me, is this what you want?

for me to question myself about what is true
and what is fake

about the love I have for you,
was that a mistake?

I don't know and I don't think I ever will

but what I do know is

the love that I have for you is real
so one day when my heart and self-conscious come
together

to make a decision I know I'll choose right

because by then

I'll know right from wrong and I'll know if this
was what I wanted from the start of it all.

Red
By Julie Stopper + Sofia Mish

When you say trust in the love
that's stored up for you, I
remember Rilke, I remember the
concept of the cloud. I remember
you saying there is
always

more to come.

When I lifted off in a hot air
balloon, I noticed

there were poppies everywhere. A
field of them growing like grass on
a green lawn, but they were red.

Red like the hot sauce I put
in your ramen when you
were sick, red like the laces
on your Doc Marten boots,
red like rain because rain is
a prism containing all
colors, all at once,

red.

Ahead of me lies a life of
intentional misremembering a life
of daydreams of less than dreary
days diffusing my memories
demanding my attention
transforming my trauma into
triumph into tilted realities
becoming real to me, a fable
fabricated in my mind,

but is it a lie or is it *alive*

when your memories
become what you need
them to be, when your body
becomes your basis for
knowing who you are when
you imagine yourself as you
want to be and live into
that reality quietly
gradually without even
knowing all of a sudden you
pass yourself surpass
yourself what you saw when
you were

in a hot air
balloon flying
over a field of
bright red
poppies.

Erin
By Lyn Lessig

Let me borrow your voice
I won't speak ill
Let me keep quiet and fill us both with poetry
The words you spoke
Slip and streaming
Through cracks I didn't know I had in me

Let me borrow your smile
I won't cry gravity
Let me twist bravely in flight or trust that I will fall slowly
Let me borrow your shakes and spins
Your low walks and high dives
Let me keep you alive on paper, between blue lines

Let me borrow your name
And when I sing
I will bring three of you to the wind with me
Let me borrow your heart
And live lonely
Let me borrow your mind and live caged, live caged beautifully

Let me borrow your time
I'll put you back piece by piece
Jigsawing slowly, only our edges complete
Let me borrow your brevity
Return this grief
Sinking politely into soil and history

Let me borrow your feet
And please please follow me
Through lakes and streams and dreams and tapestries
All the places we could have been
All the places we should have been, would have been
But you won't be, and it hurts
Did it hurt?
Doesn't everybody die someday

Let me borrow your past
Let me know it completely
Every thought every feeling
Carve your memory inside of me
Scribe your geometry

On the backs of my hands
So I can understand
Understand what happened, what's happening to me

Let me borrow your grace
If you ever had any
Lace it between my toes and keep me walking tall
Let me borrow your truth
I'm not going to bury this
It's not going to bury me but if you'd been buried
Would I still see you everywhere I go?

Let me borrow your coat
I've gotten so cold

Here am I a giant
Here I am a tower of need
Here we are under current
Here we are breathing deep
Building twin spiral galaxies in the absence of peace
It's all dead, it's all dead, and it's endless, endlessly brief

So we stay out late
When we should go home
We're drunk but we are happy, at least in the moment
We'll stay up all night
Tell all the worst jokes
And find ways to patch up, patch up the worst of our holes
Shout out the sad stuff
Shoot down the untold
Shout out the bad stuff
You're not alone
You're not alone
You're never alone

And I've got the evidence
I've got your books and your paladin
A solar eclipse and a cup of tea waiting
A songbook with notes
That you'll never play with me
I've got your coat, I've got your memory, I'm not letting go
 And I'll wear us out
 Til we're just thread and bones
 If I still feel alone
 Just until morning
 Would you let me borrow your ghost?

Vivien
By Lyn Lessig

I left you like an open window
Hoping the wind would change
It was a little naive
But when I start to freeze
I can build fires
From the flowers you grew in your mouth for me

I burned away all the gifts you gave
To me
When the ashes touch my cheek
I call your name

Pull away
Pull away

I drown the damage done
Flood sorrow in her grave
And I watched her float away
But at the turning tide
She pressed her hand in mine
Pull away
Pull away

Caught like a loose thread on a rough break
You're okay
Til you see the size of the hole
Too late
And your heart is exposed
Everyone can see the lies that live under your clothes
The lines of your ribs
And your blue cold bones

Pull away
Pull away

I left my palace
To build bridges in the rain
And I watched them float away
I'll salvage what I can
With splinters in my hands
Pull away
Pull away

I burned away all the gifts you gave
To me
But the embers at my feet keep crawling strange

They come in through my window
Put color in my dreams
I know I'm changed
I know I'm changed

Uncovered
By Valois Joubert

I've been trapped in my thoughts,
I feel so lost,
Don't know what to do,
Just want to get over you.

It's been so hard,
I feel like I'm scared,
Just want to get this over with,
So that way I can cover it.

Cover it,
So that way I don't hurt no more,
Hurt no more to the point that I am not too sure,
Too sure about life and what it has to offer for me,
So that way I can continue to just follow my dreams.

Liking this boy just hurt me so many times,
I can tell you about it but I just don't have time.
I'm trying to focus on what I want to do with me,
I'm trying to see the bigger picture,
I'm trying to be FREE!

CHASM
By Elizabeth Stanley

She said can I have a minute?
He stopped. She stepped closer.
She said I'm hurting and I want
time to talk with you about the
silence
between
us.

She started to tear up. His expression
hardened, then softened, still silent.
She said I want to talk with you
when we can be alone, just you and me.
He was silent, just listening.
He was watching her, waiting.
She asked him to let her know
when they could meet to talk, just the two of them.
He whispered "I don't understand."
His eyes showed the pain, confusion, anger he was holding.
She knew he heard her this time.
She saw he was chewing on what she said.
He knew something huge had happened between them.
She felt an opening, maybe the beginning of a bridge.
He stood motionless as she turned
and walked away.
She didn't look back.

A Peak at Love

By Xavier Care

I suppose that when we're nose to nose,
I should have my eyes closed.

But now you're gone
I hope,
not for long.

Textures of clothes, tight grips so strong
Maybe I'm wrong,

but this feels straight out of a pop song.
As I peak, your focus tells me I'm not strong.

Your lips,
push,
pull
The taste, I'll never be full.

My eyes open.
Your smile is the drug and I'm tokin'.

Your love is so potent.
Nearly out of breath, but kept my eye open.

A few seconds of light,
Then I dropped from this height.

You can't see,
I'm alone in the dark, and now I'm choking.
Because it's time, for you
to disappear again, but I'm coping.

Let It Be
By Roman Ciervo

Living in a city filled with crime and noise
Peace fills me when I listen to “Let It Be”
Positive messages whisper in my ear
“Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom—let it be.”
Living in a troubled world
It would be so nice if people would
Listen to the calming lyrics,
Stopping all the hate and violence
And, just simply, let it be.
I vow to do my part, to spread love, peace and harmony.
I’m grateful to The Beatles
For penning a song that speaks to me.

Love yourself
By Odalys Barajas

I want to start off by saying
you're perfect the way you are

People won't understand what you went through
but I can relate because I see the real you

you're not just an object or
something to play with

you're a person filled with love
which is something amazing

although people underestimate you
for what you say or what you do

but
you can't let it get to you because
they don't know the real you

they don't know every smile tells a story
which is something they'll have to find out
on their own separate journey

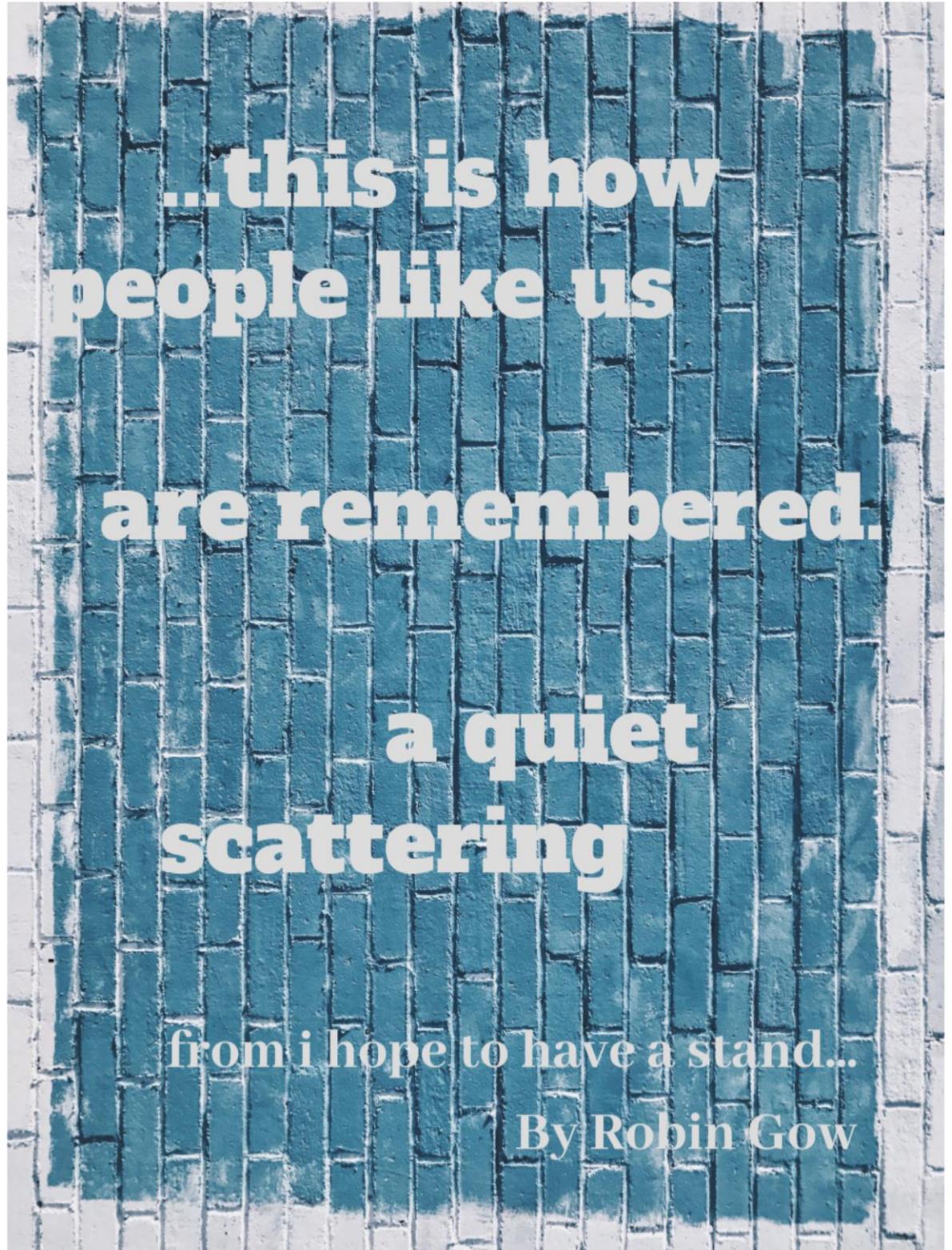
They'll laugh and they'll point and
they'll call you names
but one thing is for sure
they'll be the ones to blame

It's understandable that you're upset
with the words they say

but babygirl
keep your head up high
because they are the ones that hate

One day they'll see
they'll see why you're always so forgiving
because the heart that you have is
something worth a million.

STORIES



...this is how
people like us
are remembered.
a quiet
scattering

from i hope to have a stand...

By Robin Gow

Shiver

By Julie Stopper + Sofia Mish

I contain *multitudes*, you know,

and when you were between my thighs I felt **layered**, lips on lips kinda layered, ya dig? Layered like lipstick on a door frame layered like linens on my warm bed weighted blanket and you taking away the stress with every lick kinda layered.

I wasn't expecting this. This conception of a connection where my bones feel as though they're in your body, my mind's marrow traversing the space between us, two bodies in a bed.

I see your self love as a stone in my hand
wanting to see you sink into my waters
to toss you across my surface seeing how
many times I can make your

heart

skip.

We laid in my bed and you were quiet while I took my meds. I've never felt so comfortable while I meditate myself. And you asked, *do you swallow all at once?*

I told my therapist I needed someone to help cleanse me of the past and she said to just go stand in the ocean. I was happy when you hit me with your waves, showered me in kiss marks, covered me from head to

throw

me back out to sea.

I didn't want to objectify you, although the objects surrounding us were all placed with purpose sitting sideways next to you in my bed I showed you pictures of the people I love. My people. Searching for my person is exhausting is an extravagant lottery a running roulette just to find out I've lost, yet again.

Butterflies in my belly running rampant running miles to see your face and I am faced with the realization that the daisy over my ribcage blooms for you.

When I say my daisy blooms for you I mean you're cute, I mean I'd like to see you under moonlight, I'd like to see you when the sun comes up in my mind.

I like flirting with you, flames flicker fondly as I dream dreams of seeing you sit next to me

in a photobooth

capturing the consistencies of my time with you cradling the time like the hands of a clock and the hands of you I'd like to hold in a store surrounded by

handmade

books.

*Do you have the password? Yeah, sure, uh, it's '**black star**' Allo? Hey love, it's me. I was just calling to check in. I cherish every cigarette we smoke on the porch. It's in times like these when I realize that someone is looking out for both of us. The bodega caddy corner to 17 Walnut*

Street became *that corner* that Summer. Do you remember when I moved into the tiniest room simply because it had the best light during the daytime?

Protection is a must, you said. And I agreed, wholeheartedly. And I am happy about how upfront, open, and honest you are. *These qualities are my kinks,*

I say,

if the stars align again it will be a miracle. Fleeting loveliness and an attempt to keep it going keep it gaining speed as your comet plummets toward my earth I am extinct to you. But I can see you in my sky feel you orbit as my moons raise my waters I am

high and this is *fated.*

No, I laugh,
we both know I'm just

high and this is faded.

No matter. The matter that makes us moves with meaning and I am trapped in the thought that there was meaning behind our meeting.

When I say you are a seashell, I mean you are one of many that make the beaches bright. Though you were the one I picked up and put in my pocket knowing that one day I would eventually misplace you but basking in your beauty as you sit next to my potted plants in my bedroom on my bookcase.

When I say don't mind me as I write poems about you, I mean I'm like Sam Smith when they say they're *no good at a one night stand*. I mean I'm like Rihanna when she says, *baby you got me like Oh*. Oh one night was clearly not enough when your comet hit me I found myself shattered and now I'm enjoying putting my pieces into poems.

When I say don't mind me, I mean I found a hole in the wall to smoke a cigarette for a second letting the city wash over me rain falls as I find a place in the alleyway that's covered while I inhale and hope that my people don't mind that I left.

When I say that I left I mean I'll never really, I mean my blood is rooted in the river that runs under the bridge that's no longer under construction. I am under construction and I hope they'll still love me for it. The construct of commonplace things meaning less to me than the miraculous is simply untrue, the everyday is extraordinary. A bus passes the brick building, that brick building brings me home.

You said I smelled familiar,

I said yeah, like flowers and
smoke.

Looking out the window on an airplane at night and you see the earth below has disappeared, blended in with the sky above. It seems as though you are floating through nothingness. The streetlights become stars losing track of which is which. Out your passenger seat window my surroundings become more than what they are because I am happy. Your hand on my knee and we are comfortable in the silence. My mother always said, *this is a sign* of something healthy.

I love waking up to you,

I say, with pepper spray in my mouth.

To attempt to be rid of a scar left by a mentally inflicted trauma is the same kind of impossibility of physically loving an inanimate object until it emotionally loves you in return.

I broke out the chucks because it's finally Spring. You went ahead and grabbed us a booth, left me there smoking a cig in the sunshine. As I dropped the butt in the tower, I heard a knock on the window. It wasn't our favorite table, but it was just fine for the time being.

It's October, the first October in two years I have not spent laid up in a hospital bed. Two years prior I was found at a bus station with a mutated mind. Hearing voices and seeing signs, I walked in front of an oncoming bus, not with suicidal motives, but because I was under the impression that it was the path I was meant to follow.

It is now October. Last October I was fresh out of the psych ward with an abrasion on my neck. It was yet another attempt on my life by my mutated mind. But this time it wasn't the natural chemical imbalance in my brain that put the rope around my neck, it was the little white pill in my palm whispering in my ear. Encouraging, for months, to end it all.

Geodon silenced my mind and my doctors did not notice, or otherwise did not care. This was a medication used to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. A side effect of Geodon is suicidal ideation. I almost lost my life because of this drug. Moving on to new doctors, my first psychiatrist in Chicago clarified,

I am deathly allergic to Geodon.

I feel relieved that he heard me when I said *no*. He said, *Lucy, you know yourself better than any doctor could.* After being hospitalized for a second time, I was put on a cocktail of medications: Abilify, Lamictal, Trazodone, and Klonopin. With these meds we were getting close to finding my sanity. I was afraid to alter my medications, but my new psych made me feel as though it would be okay. So he changed and upped my anxiety med and changed my sleeping med. *Lunesta*, he said, *you may have seen the commercial for it on TV. There is a butterfly that flutters across the screen.* There are butterfly wings on the Frida Kahlo mural under the 18th street stop and I feel as though everything will be okay. Now I'm on four medications, two the same, two different,

Abilify,

Lamictal,

Lunesta,

Vistaril.

Twice. Two times too much, I think, but it's surely not the end of this journey toward the center of this earth toward picking flowers in the springtime **I slaughter myself** every winter every early autumn I am at the depths of me deep down below my ground the sound of my heartbeat can barely be heard, but it's there, I trust in this fact.

In an effort to reclaim my body this year, I started getting tattoos. It's been a way for me to take control of my mind through taking control of my body. *Art is a guaranty of sanity* in the handwriting of the spider. Thigh piece. The Dancer, a portrait of Sofia climbing up the calf. *Well, she's a ballet dancer because she's both graceful and strong. And to be both graceful and strong is what I must strive for every day as a person who suffers from a major mental illness. She's a ballet dancer because*

I'm a survivor.

I tear my filters in half now. Sometimes the whole thing is just too much smoke in my lungs. I find myself burning pictures of ballerinas and I wonder why it feels so good to disrupt something so lovely. Kissing the edges of the paper somehow repairs it, somehow makes me feel as though everything can heal. Although there's no getting rid of a burn and while one kiss mark is sweet, a thousand is scary.

Daisy or anxiety transformed for you in the center of my stomach. Little lady flowerpot stuck and poked. A screaming song is good to know in case you need to scream, a reminder to say something when something is wrong. **Ask for help when you need it.**

You were looking at me through the glass. I could see you as well as my own reflection. I could see you because you let me. I let you because you know what it's like when your body tries to devour itself, you know all too well experimental doses they force down our throats, I want to say *no* to this medication, but I know it's my lifeline. When I told you I have bipolar you said *me too*. I said oh, what type? Your said *bipolar one* and I found myself instantly at ease for the fact that you even had an answer to this question, that you said the same diagnosis as me. How extraordinary. How beautiful it is to look into your octagon eyes and see my own reflection.

When you asked me about **safety**, I said *I never feel it.*

Not as long as I'm in this body. I cannot trust myself because of this illness. I can only be self reflective and assess every situation as it comes. *Safety is only an illusion*, I say. We performed without reading from a score that night. We sang songs of suicide attempts. Things we shared in common. And in that moment, I felt protected.

You asked me if you were too much and I said *no, I like it when it hurts a little.* I like it when my heart breaks as egg shells under my feet as a harp that has been plucked too hard my vocal chords shake when I ask if you want to kiss me, *I would like that,* you say, and I realize the only shells beneath me are solid are sitting next to sand and I am on your beaches holding you to my ear holding you to my heart as I hear your infinite echoes.

When I say I slaughter myself, I mean I can conceive of kissing your words as they fall from your lips like lace on an open window like lunar eclipses completing my

love for
living.

When I say my pieces become poems I mean thank you.

I feel fortunate for forever finding myself in situations where I feel myself falling. When I say I'm falling, relax. I don't mean for you I mean for this life. This undeniably good night capped at one, a jar with a lid screwed on tight unable to open yet containing some of your sand and a single seashell.

My favorite place in the house wasn't actually in the house. It was that porch. I loved the way the rain would hit the roof and ricochet back into the air with the most haunting of sounds.

*Doesn't it feel as though
we're on a boat?*

*Imagine this porch
to be a boat and
the cars driving by
are other boats.*

*And the street
is the river.*

Me or You In The Mirror
By Hector De Jesus Malave

Sometimes I ask myself
Who am I? Am I a copy?
Who am I? Am I your reflection in the mirror?
Because I don't see you in the mirror.

One day you told me to cut my hair.
What's wrong with having it long?
Oh! Because you say I don't look good.
Who am I? Am I your reflection or mine?
Because I don't see you in the mirror.

I did everything you told me.
Now I know I'm dumb for following your advice.
But wise for knowing you're wrong.
You know what? I'm tired of you!
I will be me, no matter what.
I am me. I'm not your reflection.
Because I don't see you in the mirror, I see myself.

I love black.
I paint my nails black.
I wear black.
Did I kill somebody over my fashion statement? I don't think so.
I know who I am.
I'm not going to change unless I want to. Not because of you!

I will be me, no matter what.

I am me. I'm not your reflection.

Because I don't see you in the mirror, I see myself.

the biological basis of sex
by Robin Gow

my telephone wire bra straps
made me listen to phone calls.
the neighbors want to order pizza
from a planet nearby & my mother
is dialing & no one is picking up.
i have an eavesdropping rib
i cannot help it. what i mean is
i'm female (in the way that everyone
with any curiosity is female).
in the wires everyone's voices
turn to mice.
there might be mice in the walls
or it is only my imagination.
or it is another monster.
the walls are full of other kinds of wires.
blue wires & red wires & black wires:
electric roller-skating through them.
i want to be atomic in my next life.
i want to over hear something
fantastic like a conversation
between god & his favorite angel.
he runs his fingers through
the angel's hair & his locks
make the sounds of golden bells.
if i ever get around to shaving off my hair
i will make the most wonderful instrument of it.
if i took my brother's violin bow
& drew it across my bra straps
would i sing like i used to?
the tongue is a useful organ
& the teeth are best salvaged
for future piano keys.
another phone call plays in my chest:
strangers who want to meet
for the first time. i want to interject
& tell them to meet in a bright parking lot.
somewhere unromantic to see if the spark lasts.
i've fallen in love with light bulb filaments
& put my mouth to the edge of outlets.
there are animals just beyond grasp.
i don't make many phone calls anymore.
when i do they're to the eggshells i came from.

i make a grateful voice
& hum my life story into the receiver.
the telephone wires do nothing you know?
no one tethers their language anymore.
we're talking our pathways through galaxies.
we're raking our teeth
across the surface of the moon.
the wires are full of dust. my bra clasps
are made of rats; teeth.
i'm organic the last time i checked
but i have been ignoring the signs
that say otherwise.

Ineffable
By Ivan Misiura

This is who I truly am, unfettered by spoken word
Expression is a death sentence, I am the absurd
Even this is but a dull shadow lit by erroneous flames
This is my life: to never be seen, known, or heard
I am a part of you, never to be gone, I am that cursed stain

*. *.

This is who I truly am, to vast a modicum to escape
I am here, I am you, this be both our eternal fate
Our identity viewed only by skewed parallax
A voice of unrecognizable sincerity, this all must excoriate
All failure is brushed off, rendered as meager Paraprax

*. *. *

This is who I truly am, to myself and the world unknown
Gifted with all of language, but the best one can do is a faint moan
So damned are we, trapped in a room full of mirrors with nothing to see
We stare in our insanity, the abyss in its gray scale veracity matches our tone
This is who I truly am, abyss that I cannot emancipate: is me

Asylum Thwarted
By Sandra Fees

What would Anna Akhmatova
say, she who could describe
the frightening years
waiting in prison queues
in rain-gray Leningrad
two years before my birth
in a country I may never see?

What would rise in her mouth
like trees grown whole overnight
planted first in her songbird breast
branches outstretching
the vastness of grief
to name what must be named
in any age in any nation?

How can I invoke her words
to rise again in my mouth
in the shape of trees
to describe the years
when something called *asylum*
failed to take root in the pursed lips
of my country majesty of the beautiful

in the isolating years
as I wait
outside detention center doors
in rain-gray Pennsylvania
to visit Salvadoran mothers and children
who appeal for a postlude
to this, their song of requiem?

Letter To My Father
By Aviyon Workman

there's some days I didn't sleep,
also days I didn't eat,
so much stuff on my mind,
tried to get back up on my feet,
you did me really grimey,
and dragged me to my lowest,
when I get deep in my feels,
I try my hardest not to show it,
sometimes I really hate you,
and sometimes I really love you
I'm wishing you were here,
all I wanted was to hug you,
but you tore my family apart,
you really made my momma cry,
how did it feel to hurt your son,
you seen the hurt up in my eyes,
how'd that make you feel,
to see your little one cry,
I will never forgive you,
'cause all you do is lie.

Mamá
By Jules Grace

Mientras quiero achuchar el niño dentro de él, está achuchando mi cuello con manos enfadados

Angry at the way people raised him, angry at the tough love he confused for love because they loved him: mientras ellos le estaban amando: mientras su papá pegó a su familia: mientras la abuela was being held so lovingly around her neck in the kitchen she served in day in and day out. Some people show that they love you in different ways, they may cook for you, clean for you, lay down their lives for you. A woman doesn't lay her blood down on the battlefield, she lays down her life by pouring every drop of her bloody time, every bleeding second to make sure tú. estas bien. /Call your mom/ Llama tu mamá/ If you didn't hear me or understand the vibrations of my tone I said, call. your. Mamá. It may be hard, she may never have learned what love really could be. But she's trying, and so can you.

A Girl Named Nina: First Verse
By Norma Tamayo

I am a girl named Nina

A Puerto Rican born in New York City

I loved to dance like a ballerina.

People would say that I was so pretty.

But behind the smile was a panic stricken Latina.

My safe haven— the fire escape

There, tears flowing— my mind went free

Trying to forget the unspeakable rape.

Thinking about that stranger who managed to flee.

A bad version of a man with a cape.

Sometimes those giggles can hide the pain

But my dream to become a doctor was real

Helping people will erase the stain.

Then no one would know what I concealed.

I am a girl named Nina

Squirrel
By S. Rose

I can't move, I'm always on the go

I can't start, I can't stop

Always late

Always last in line

People judge

People don't understand

Yes, I don't finish a task right away

Yes, I may not seem interested in our conversation but I am focused

This is me, genuine me

People judge

People should understand

I am my own unique person with unique gifts

I'm intuitive

I think abstractly

I have many talents

People judge and misunderstand

But this is me in all my form

This is me, genuine me

Suit of Survival
By Maricelys Ruiz

Your first impression of me is

“oh she’s pretty but she’s obese.”

Nah, fuck that with your narrow-ass mind you can’t even word it that nicely,

Your first TRUE impression is “ewww she’s fat.”

But even though I shouldn’t Imma share with you some facts.

My weight is my superpower,

My fat is my shield,

Each pound on that scale has a name, has a meaning,

And while you call it a pound I call it a suit.

At 120 was beautiful, at 150 I was pretty, at 180 I was thick.

At 283 I see a survivor who pulled on her fat suit to fight off the monsters that chased
so closely

behind her since she was six.

My temple invaded, my valleys explored,

My city ran through by an arch-nemesis I then couldn’t beat.....

remember I was only SIX.

And rather than speak

I hid behind this ever expandable, invisible skin.

Screw Up
By Joshua Surita

To you, she was just a screw up
And from you, all she heard was you blew it
And you could hit the shuffle button for your playlist of slander
Yet before you pressed...yep, she already knew it
See from her view
It
Was a stronghold that sought control
Of each heart
Which left her all in, no way she could fold
The chips stacked Ye high
So it's either hitting the rocky road or learning how to fly
And your callous hands and heart wouldn't allow you to catch even if she took a leap of faith
It must be really hard to sympathize with weakness when you bench press pride
And your life feels great
Never dealt with this kinda weight
But you sure love to throw around your weight
Plump with conceit
You can't handle being sat down at table just to wait
You prefer the buffet
Help yourself to enough self-righteousness
You're gonna need 3, 4 or maybe 5 plates
And hey, she was just a beggar
But you were too gluttonous, see,
Since you made sure she was mentally situated right down at your feet
She
Needed love and compassion like any other
Not to be the inconvenient line that festers with a broom tray
Grab a rug and swept right under
She
Needed the shoulder of soul to cry upon
When the cascade of insufficiency broke the dam of denial
Only to be met with another one
Again and again she
Needed your forgiveness even when she didn't ask
Because when you've been forgiven much
The right to hold a grudge makes your shrink and laugh
Because all should be cast
Breath taken with no last
Sinned against a majesty Who won't just pass over your past
Unless his Passover is over your past
It's this humble example he needed
But, she's already passed

Things have changed
By Annalis Ortega

Things have changed

Ever since sixth grade

you learn and move on or

Sometimes just stay the

same I've experienced

Many me's and even now

I still don't know who I'll

Be all I'm saying is just

Take a minute to breathe

OMG.

Untitled
By Maricelys Ruiz

How do I.... explain what I myself don't understand. That every day that passes my life hangs by a strand. That ... I often contemplate my life coming to an end. And that.... it's just a matter of... if I dare,, and when? I wonder if anyone would notice... if I were gone... Or if in hindsight they'll realize that... for a long time... I had... already been gone. Did they really never notice when I got quieter? Couldn't they see that was the moment the demons in my head got louder? I thought I was screaming, but I guess my screams were silent. Did I convey myself the perfect picture, a little too perfect? That I even convinced myself that I wasn't an... utter reject? I often wonder where I failed in life... At what moment, in what instance was made to believe I did nothing right? I wonder when did I shed myself and become nothing but this empty shell? I wonder if at my funeral, they'll talk about the life I lived or gossip about the scars I'll leave. I wonder if they'll bury me in long sleeves So that no one sees the bloody slits. I often feel alone, but I know... I'm not alone in this. Too often we act like we don't see but the ugly truth is that we will lose quite a few like this to the ugliness of suicide's abyss. When rather then ask what's wrong, we assume that emotions will bounce back like a ping pong. Don't ask what you could have done for me then by the time you muster up the courage I'll already been long dead. Those demons in my head, they thrashed about with such violence I thought I was screaming but I guess my screams were silent.

Working For The Opposition

By Nelson De La Cruz

What you are right now is not what you'll be forever
How you feel right now is not how you'll feel forever
After all what are feelings and beings anyway?
Transcending obstacles transforming as we speak
Attempting to shape shift our beliefs
To give us the idea that it's reality...
You are your worst enemy...
Don't let the other side victimize you
You're only to be compared to who you were yesterday.
You loved me yesterday
Today you're working for the opposition
Keep your vision on the mission
The outside world doesn't need any help bringing you down
The validation comes from yourself
Don't go on the search anywhere else
You are both the one withdrawing and depositing
Raise the value!
Don't bounce your own check
Take that to the bank
What's your rationale anyway?
Yesterday above the clouds head high
Today looking down red eye
You need to stop being a career criminal under your own critical district attorney
You your own co-defendants when your personality switches to be the jury
Different sides of you are different crimes of you
Morals and standards is all that is permanent
All else is temporary
The frames of the mind flicker between scenes
Positioning you to play your part.
Unapologetically
If you hold back anything it's a domino detrimental act
Causing the cast to question your lead role
Even you too in fact
Beating yourself up is jumping yourself
There's nothing they can do to me compared to my own scrutiny
Your thoughts become words
We too old for any identity crisis
You know who you are and who's your truest rival
It's only the other side of you trying to neutralize you
What's understood is not spoken
Why you think they hear your thoughts

Words
By Chris Daubert

Subtle words fall
Like icicles
Onto a salted street

Some may burn
And some may hurt
While others just melt away

Words...
Absent, illogical
Inconsequential and of little meaning
Roll like water

Heavy words crash
Like insects
Against a passing car

All are forceful
All are heard
Until we acquiesce to the will of the hive

Words...
Harsh, weighty
All encompassing
Make our eyes swell

A Poem for Poe
By Ashley R. Jones

I have always been a creepy girl, drawn to darkness and things in the unusual. I like to call myself a modern witch. A woman fascinated by the oddities of existence. I've had my fair share of dealings with death and the joys of life. When I pick up a pen, my mind wanders into thoughts so odd, yet creative.

Poe, you are my inspiration; the source of my fascination. The giver of chills and writer of thoughts that stimulate the imagination. Praise for Poe; I admire your challenges to write about the strange and fantastic violence others wouldn't dare to entertain.

Poe, you are my mentor, in the realm of writing. Swimming through the unfamiliar channels-seeking light in the murkiness in the ocean of creativity. The Raven, so haunting and inspiring. I give you praise.

I long to find my most memorable piece of written art; finding my own voice while using yours to guide me, has been a beautiful experience. A poem for Poe.

Wandering through your Philadelphia home, I find myself enjoying the history of you. Walking the very steps you took, gliding my hands on the walls of the rooms, hoping to collect a small ounce of your energy to keep.

I Wonder
By Joshua Surita

For as long as I could remember, I always wanted to be a classroom teacher
And I witnessed my parents blaze a trail as they passed a baton of motivation because
Well, it runs in the family
So when I graduated from Penn State in 2015 with in a degree in Special Education
I knew there would be plenty of opportunities waiting
Like endless grading
Minimal breaks and
Meetings with frustrated parental faces
Teenagers facing low grades
While embracing high-grade traces of depression
But never once did I expect a lesson
On how I should strategically
Run, hide or fight an active intruder
Who possibly packed and attached a strap to an AR with a couple mags
Just to make every single pupil pixel stop and freeze like
When my internet connection lags
Kids exchanging backpacks for body bags
While Mom and Dads try to grasp the phantom limb of a child they now lack
And it's sad
That if I hear a sound that mimics a firecracker
I should think twice about continuing my lesson plan and double back, back
And I wonder if I'll ever have to use the wasp spray in my class to defend my students
one day
I wonder how I might actually respond if lives were at stake: with courage or
cowardice
I wonder whether the downloaded knowledge from hours of trainings and videos will
ever lead
to application
Or remain under my eye's cloud (iCloud) of all these hypothetical situations or
scenarios
That I only contemplate but are really scary though
I mean statistically speaking
The chances are very low
But I'm a human being who honestly fears bullets in my body over God's wrath on my
very soul
So please keep your pallets ready to sip sip sip
Because I'm a poet who preps a fresh cup of truth for your lips and it's very bold
So allow me to keep grinding
Now some are finding
The problem is gun control
Possibly background checks
While others elect that it's mental health issues that we must seek to address
Maybe it's the correlation of violent video games played

Or it could just be the manner in which the shooter was raised
Oh we could stay on this conversation route for days and days
But we're only left at a dead end for that final destination
Until we find a recalculation out like Waze
So let me help you steer clear of assumptions like an unwanted backseat driver
See most people in this room believe that we humans are inherently good
And therefore the nut case anomalies of mass killers are simply outliers and that's
normally
understood
But what if I told you that we're all naturally flawed
And realize my exhales reek of sin
But we cover it up with breath mints of good deeds just minimize ours
Coupled with catchy cliches like:
I know I'm not perfect or
Only God can judge me
Actually scratch that
We think: there ain't even a god above me
But maybe I'm not clear?
Maybe I'm just getting too deep in this
Well let me just boil things down and dig to the root like when that Berks water main
split
We look down on
Columbine, Sandy Hook, Tech, Stoneman
That's 93 dead fam
Yet all of us have the capacity to destroy life because even Jesus said anger in the
heart is
murder man
And only reason I'm still alive breathing again and again is because the grace of God
hasn't
said it's my time yet
And whether you acknowledge it or not
The truth remains clearly
If God could forgive my notorious sins
Then He can do the same for your stains like it's no Biggie
And so I'll continue to wonder about whether we'll ever acknowledge or just continue
to hide
That the problem isn't outside of people but rather inside
I wonder

Another Day
By Chris Daubert

Sometimes I wonder what students see
As they grudgingly take their seats in anticipation
Of some artificial time clock that needs punching

Will they see the daily schedule or lesson objectives
Or will they see me

Me... with all my self-doubts and inadequacies
Struggling to find meaning in the sometimes meaningless

Each time my core trembles like a bell that's just been rung
Hoping against hope that I can hide my truth
Just once more

Here I am a teacher
Ironic in that I myself have so much to learn
About love and forgiveness
Struggle and triumph
About life's greatest mysteries

Like how in a building so overflowing with people
One can feel so terribly alone, isolated
Like the last man on Earth
The only one who sees the sun rise and give way to the moon

Again, I pull off a persuasive performance
Again the audience has little insight into the actor's hidden world

How long can this facade continue?
How long till the fraud is exposed?

Days turn into weeks, and weeks into months
Some things change, but most do not
Each and every day, the cycle of uncertainty repeats itself
As students find their seats

Will they see the papers piling up on my desk?
Or the standards that have become so omnipotent on the wall
Will they notice the spot where I spilled coffee on my tie?

Or might this be the day that I've long feared...
That they might finally see me.

Stranger
By Ivan Misiura

Walk with me I say to myself // it's time to say goodbye
Down the road well-trodden by me
This is not my first journey down this well-known path
From overuse, my feet begin to bleed

We three are but one sojourner // me, myself, and I
Let all others fall away
If they cared they would have tried
Solitude be my only companion on this day

In my mind I am prisoner // about this we do not lie
Left to destroy myself from within
The ravenous beast of my psyche torments
Its dark eyes pale above its malignant grin

I cower in fear or I laugh with madness // silently we cry
These alone dare I, to my torment, face
One truth reviled, more frightful than all
To be truly alone is to be a stranger in a familiar place

Circo de Soltera

By Jules Grace

She looks down, intently filling out her worksheet.
She looks over us—thinking of her Savior
and the rewards she will receive in heaven.
He looks back, always thinking of her mother,
her grandmother. The matriarch that came before.

She pauses, lifts her head from the textbook
She is memorizing and sets it aside to replace it with a laptop.
She logs in, dresses up and the circus begins.
All of the monkeys, the snakes,
the elephants with their long erect trunks
come pouring in filling the seats of the grand tent,
Circo de Soltera.
The spotlight circles across the dusty ring
and comes to rest on her shining eyes.
Lower the camera a little bit,
a little bit more,
a little bit more
—that's it.

The identity of the person now has been removed but not the second face, lips and all.

The snakes sing-

Sixty, your soul isn't needed right now,
we just need your disembodied hips,
spond only to her commands,
ng on the silks
eir fragile heads,
mouth is tied to your soul—

This body

encapsulates all of your kindness and memory
and you are more – so much more – than what these animals label you.

Land of the Free
By DayQuan Williams

They say this is the land of the free
I say how?
My mans ain't free over a handful of weed
Then they legalized it and made billions now that's that's some damn trickery
They say this is the home of the brave
I say how? My homies ain't home it's a shame
They're alone and afraid
They treat black babies like they're just clones to be made
Like we just roam to be slaves
In the trafficking of organs
Then y'all go to church bumping wack shit on organs
Praising a god who lets his lighter babies turn kids into orphans
Let one race act big and mighty like they the ones who morphin
They say make America great again
What they really mean is... make it a place where when openly discriminate again
Openly judge based on race again
Openly spit in people's face again
Why would you want it to be that place again if you didn't judge based on race my friend

Cops out here staring in my face again
Like what you looking at boy!?

Boy?

I'm a grown ass man you better address me correctly
Even when I'm not my momma dressed me specially
They still gonna pick and test me before they arrest me like this is a pop quiz for jail time

Officer
Can't you tell I'm...?
A law abiding citizen

He said Negro please I see yo skin
I know how you make those dividends
On the block like Scottie Pippen man
Moving weight like Shaq when he's pivoting
Pass the rock the like Chris and them

But this is the land of the free...

Life We Living In
By Bruce Williams Jr.

Feel like I'm winning as I'm sinning hopefully forgiven
Sometimes I black out, thinking about what I be forgetting
Hearing stories bout the struggle and always listening
Help niggas out but they always turn around dissing
Crackheads in the street using drugs got em tripping
Broke people go to the bar just drinking and sipping
Bloods still bleeding and Crips still criping
Late at night we got pigs still clipping
While our community is devastated always flipping
The government got money but they never giving
Immigrants going home I call it free shipping
Society has a heart that the government is ripping
They out here trying catch us slipping
So the cops can start punching and kicking
We don't have time because the clock is ticking
America wants the lights out while its flickering
When can we ever have world peace?
When my brothers want to be deceased
Killing each other or getting killed by the police
Going to funerals to hear the pastor preach
Giving speeches and eulogies
Everybody's mourning about a terrible tragedy
Marching our way into cemeteries
So parents can see their son being buried.
What is going on? What is going on?
Where the hell did we go wrong?
Nobody solves a problem until someone's gone
I'm tired of hearing the Amazing Grace song
How is it amazing where there's no grace?
Being discriminated by a different race
How you say I love you and lie in my face?
Stabbed in the back or strangle me with a shoelace
If that's the case try to make America great
Believe that Donald Trump is a saint
Touching women and lil girls in their special place
Degrading them raping them to get a lil taste
America is full of fuck ups and suck ups
Got my people in a morgue all tucked up
Want to end the drug war still have rocks up
You have some dudes out here trying to keep their cocks up
Or locked up in the penitentiary
Be in their 25 til infinity

I know it's wrong of me I should keep it PG
But I watch TV and this is what I see

Hope
By Xavier Care

I found Hope, in a loveless place.
Creating aspirational faith, when I saw your face.

Mind and body shaking
With hostile temptations
Make me pause for meditation
So I have time to understand this godly creation.
A choice not to act on this reflex
Perceived control, like an atheist with a God complex.

A soul bound to body,
But a smile untethered to this unjust reality,
Recognizing my mortality,
And amazed, that you never doubted me.

Mi Fé
By Virna Quiñones

Aposté a mi fé

Y desperté sabía que todo está perdido que las posibilidades eran 90-10 no importó y continúe como si nada

Aposté a mi fé

Cuando en aquel momento que me pusieron la banda que decía (DNR) “do not resuscitate” continue como si nada para que no se desesperan pero aún así mis hijos y los que están en aquel cuarto continuamos hablando agotando alternativas de cómo las cosas debían suceder

Aposté a mi fé

Y le expliqué a mis hijos donde estaba todo incluso había viajado a la isla y tenía todo arreglado hasta pintaron la tumba lo deje ready

Aposté a mi fé

Continúe mi vida desde la cama del hospital como si nada no llame a mi guía espiritual pues hay otros que también necesitan de Javi

Aposté a mi fé

Y decidí irme con la certeza de regresar como si nada hubiera pasado mi sobrina dijo quiero orar por mi tía mi madre está devastada oro por dos minutos y me perdí entre los pasillos de aquel hospital iba sola en las manos del señor

Y aposté a mi fé

Mientras ponía mis manos abiertas como las tiene el padre celestial en la cruz y simplemente cerré mis ojos sin con la mente en blanco

Y aposté a mi fé

Tres horas más tardes abrí mis ojos y pude ver la misericordia del padre celestial y el milagro que acabo de ocurrir en mi vida, estoy aquí para contarla gracias Señor

notes from an almost you #4
By Ruby Mora

what age am I writing to?
oh, 27.
lovely and revolutionary times.
you're feeling overwhelmed at all the changes
all the cyclical things occurring right now.

I can't tell you everything,
because you won't believe it if I say it all at once,
but there will be a thousand pathways,
a handful of glorious beings that
could be, and were, and maybe are.
go ahead and feel,
because you are understanding more than you
could have imagined at 20,
that godforsaken age.

I wish you could tell me where your mind is at now
let go,
let go,
for all that is sacred
but keep pointing out the details,
keep the moments beside you.
they'll be useful one day.

and here's this last thing for now, because you still worry too much:

mom will be more than fine,
I can promise you.

A Stranger in the City, in Four Parts
By Brian James

1.

A little dark humor
in between sips of Cuban coffee.
The observation on how the freshest true
can get ground up and stuffed into a lying sausage.
There is so much wounded nostalgia
on how the city was once so great.
But it really wasn't that great.
Sure, there were factories and jobs
with lots of extra money to go around
—you could say back then the lake was full
and under that surface
it wasn't always clear what was going on.
These days the lake has been drained
and now you get to see
a wide variety of bottom feeders
wallowing in the mud.

2.

Up on Fifth, past the block of abandoned homes
I'm waiting for a friend, watching light play
in the soft glow of an autumn sunset—
yeah, totally lost in a moment's daydream
until I see three young men walk my way.
Of course, the first thought
is crap, I'm going to get robbed
—like it was bound to happen someday.
The biggest one leans into me and in a gentle voice asks
“hey poppie, hey poppie you lost?”
I had to laugh though I did my best
not to let it sound like the laughter of relief.
We talked for awhile, had a few more laughs
found out we knew some of the same people.
They offered to stay with me until my friend arrived.
It was good reminder and lesson learned—
the world doesn't have to be so scary
if you don't assume every face that's not like yours
is dangerous, guilty of something
or a mask hiding an evil intent.

3.

The little girl had an arm.
She winged that ball quite a distance

and on the second bounce
it landed at my feet.
She ran up, giggled
and said something in Spanish.
I tossed the ball back
and quickly found myself
in a game of catch.
She spoke again in Spanish.
I wisely nodded
and the ball kept going back and forth.

Across the park her Titi, her Auntie,
walked her way over to us.
The woman apologized,
asked if I was being bothered—
she explained the situation
the child's mother is at work
the little girl has so much energy.
The child interrupts the conversation
and it amuses the woman.
“She thinks your Spanish is excellent”
I must have blushed when I spoke.
“Outside of a rare word or two, no
I don't hablar the language”
The woman smiles again
taps the center of her chest
“You talk from here
everyone can speak that language.”

4.

The grass is always greener
in the suburbs.
It's true, you've seen it
but that deeper green
is chemically induced.
It is about as natural
as those huge breasts
on the pole dancer
-but that's how it goes
exaggerating the fantasies
attempting to cure the low self esteem
of both patron and performer.

i hope to have a stand at an antique market when i'm old & have too many small
sincere items
By Robin Gow

dad & i would get up early on a Saturday.
blue morning. the sun peering over all our objects.
we'd go exploring the piles of antiques
spread across Adamstown's gravel parking lots.
a sea of trinkets resting on wooden tables
& quilts. dad sifting through plastic tubs
of old coins. he was trying to find just the right one.
he'd pick one up at a time & say
not it, not it, not it.
i would find a toy stand
& look for a bin of action figures.
my tiny soft hands rooting between plastic bodies.
it never occurred to me back then that those coins
& those toys belonged to someone.
someone held them between thumb & finger
with purpose. tucked coin in a back pocket.
walked the toy people
across a living room carpet. where i'm from
we don't own anything notable
though up the street someone sold a boat.
it lay rusting in their front yard for weeks
before someone bought it for scrap metal.
we take pride in our antique market finds.
a neighbor of mine had plastic cows
all over her kitchen as decorations.
another one collected old milk bottles.
he planted flowers in all of them each spring.
dad & i once found a giant stuffed trout
that i hugged all the way home
as we drove winding Pennsylvanian roads.
what i'm trying to say is i want to die
by giving away whatever unique pieces
i happen to own. i want to set my books in stacks
on a bright April morning & let strangers
pick through them. all my old stuffed animals
tired & sun worn but still useful.
at the antique market nothing is useless.
the vendors walk with each other
to the breakfast food stand & order hash browns
& egg sandwiches. dad & i eat too.
sit next to each other. discuss
what more we'd like to find.

dad wants a world war 1 bayonet
& i want a nice felt hat. i will be sitting there
in a folding chair at my stand,
selling myself a hat with white fake flowers
sewn into the rim. she will pay in crumpled dollars.
a gust of wind will try to blow the hat
off her head but she will catch it.
i will wave
as she leaves to show our dad.
i will go home with all the trifles
that no one chose. load them up in a truck.
this is a chance to pick each one up again
& remember what it meant when it was
new in my fingers. i will consider
giving up & not selling any of my remaining items
but i'll remind myself
that this is how people like us
are remembered. a quiet scattering.
dad & her drive home. she sets the hat
in her lap.

today is vivid/
By Ruby Mora

it took a long time to clear the smoke from my head/ to feel like each day will be different/

to be able to be at least a bit stronger than the demons that rent out
where my negativity lives/

it's the peak of Spring and I feel like I'm seeing so much more than what I've been
seeing the last twenty-six years/

my newfound joy plays a role in the manifestation of my
new eyes/
every color,

and the contrast of each,
I see with a frightening intensity.

TRIBES

The ship is sunk
and the damage is done
someone
let the poets in
Let the poets in on the glass
slashed basketball courts
in the city parks
The ship is sunk
with its head of steam trains
smoking through
the abandoned shopping outlet
plywood spray painted windows
The damage is all
Let the poets in...

-from Let the Poets In
By Craig Czury

Narradores de Cuentos
By Daniel Egusquiza

Soy de donde se forjan los sueños
Y envuelta en ellos dejé a mis pequeños
Selle el miedo con el último beso
Deje cielos, ríos, mares, y caminos
Para una madre que piensa en sus niños
no existen obstáculos, solo el progreso

Somos narradores de cuentos que el viento
Planto en surcos de neón y cemento
Ya no recuerdo los cuentos
De inocentes sirenas
De tristes lamentos

Florece en palabras toda tu memoria,
Cuéntale a los niños todas tus historias
Comparte tus tradiciones
Las ideas son semillas de una tierra
Como el sol que con luz te ilumina
Con palabras da vida a la fantasía

Somos narradores de cuentos que el viento
Planto en surcos de neón y cemento
Ya no recuerdo los cuentos
De mis primos y del barrio
O de ceder el asiento

Lee libros con tus niños
Convierte en cariños todas tus palabras
Que hablar Español también te hace libre
Siendo bilingüe uno se supera
Dales un chance en el futuro
Brega duro, pero no te olvides

Somos narradores de cuentos que el viento
Planto en surcos de neón y cemento
Ya no recuerdo los cuentos
Y valores escondidos
En canciones y momentos

Let the Poets In
By Craig Czury

The ship is sunk and the damage is done
someone
let the poets in
Let the poets in on the glass slashed
basketball courts in the city parks
The ship is sunk
with its head of steam trains
smoking through the abandoned shopping outlet
plywood spray painted windows
The damage is all
Let the poets in on the graffiti laced
basement walls of the YMCA church camp
The Olivet's pool table green velvet
sliced up its belly with the long stiletto stroke
of a stick on cue
Let the needle-breath misfit poets in
where they belong homeless at the shelter
Shuffling the hair-stench paper hallways
of the State Hospital
with their I.V. pens looking for the key
Staring into their home-cooked rice & glandules
at the Puerto Rican Latin Association
while listening to the broken whiplash
triple tongue gunfire staccato echo off the Pagoda
Let the poets in after school
after a lifetime
flunking school to do their homework
in the darkly lit corners of the Police Athletic League
Let the poets in
to weave their elbow spider web rhythmic flashlights
in the neo-blinderized eyes of Boyertown
In the neo-kindred eyes of this new kind of city pay-off
Yes
from under the rubble
from under the vials and casings
through the debris of gaping cracks
out of the bowed heads silent over a sheet of paper
as if in prayer
Reading
turn on your lights the cockroaches will scatter
Let the poets
In the beginning in
by saying

Better Place
By Nelson De La Cruz

I hope there is a better place
For them kids that were never safe
For the people who only sought getting high to levitate
For who their time on earth felt blind berserk
For them women who were treated like objects behind a skirt
For the less fortunate, them kids in the orphanage
For those who fantasized about eating good but couldn't afford the shit
For the wrongfully accused who spent their lives in a cage
Never got to a new chapter, all their life on one page
How bout them people who died slaves tortured raped and beaten
Passed on without even having the taste of freedom
Those people who never had a chance cause of reasons that wasn't theirs
Parents were too high to face their own problems how were they gonna care
Even the pets that just wanted to please their owner
That gave unconditional warmth but instead were treated colder
For the mentally unstable that couldn't achieve nothing big
cause the day-to-day struggle made them not want to live

Untitled
By José Garcia

When did we become so disconnected from our brethren
What is this life that I am livin?
This is not at all what I envisioned.
You see, the life that I lived it,
Made me question my existence.
It made me wonder if my life's worth livin.
Then it hit quick.
Like everything else that is matter did.
Cause this life that I live in,
Got me lovin livin.
Experiencing the sun, kissin, touchin, feelings.
Can you feel this?
Do you fear this?
Indescribable mysteries put fear in us.
Generally generating emotions related to being furious.
Infuriating emotions of rage inflating inside,
Rational thought denied by emotional rampage.
Why
Someone turn the damn page.
Damp page cause my damn rage got
tears fallin from my damn face.
I fell from my faith
I lost all hope
The world was ending
That was all he wrote.

Black Boys Do Cry

By Demetrius Candido Portalatin

I feel pain, yes I do feel
Pain in my heart causes me to kneel
I won't bow my head to say a prayer
And ask for help from the man
Upstairs
My eyes water for those who've
Died
Died for me and my black pride
Head held high despite my tears
Marching along despite my tears
Fear of failing and a fear to fall
Afraid to fail those in the stars
Fearful not of prison or jail
Penitentiary chances taken to escape hell
I wipe my cheeks and hold my head high
Ancestral pain is why black boys cry
Time,
Every second my heart beats
8 hours a day on my feet
Minutes wasted chasing green paper
Years of my life lacking of flavor
A decade of punching a clock
One of the flock adding to stock
Bonds of revenue made for an employer
Lead away from destiny a dream destroyer
Day to day we waste away
Trading our time in return for pay
As children we played a joyous time,
Adults, longing for a piece of mind
Lustful of moments spent relaxing
Weeks worth of work are oh so taxing
Weakened from work souls lacking of shine
The will of man imprisoned by time
As we age
We become the stories of our days
Amazed at the past we lived
With every tale a piece of ourselves
We give
What will they tell once you're old?
When you die and be buried with your dreams
Was your life a dream to those who seen?
Some grow tall but minds remain small
Sometimes small men conquer all

Growth within reflects outside
Watered with sweat blossoming pride
Many will die before they're dead
Inside their head from dreams they fled
So never living was their life
To live your movie you must pay the price
Tuck your tail or live your tale
What you do is what they will tell

Take a Stand

By DayQuan Williams

I'm frequently waking up to clips of mothers hollering
Holding dead babies, then asking who were they bothering
This monster called racism is still out swallowing
All the black babies the cops dropped again like offerings
I wonder if they're ever pondering our tolerance
Like when is it enough, bang I'm done being moderate
These are the emotions the black man bottles in
Cause we were Kings and Queens if you look at a different day
If I could send a letter to Africa this is what it would say...

They're going to bring us to Americas
Whip our ass
Put some fear in us
Sounds fucking crazy, but believe me I am serious
They will divide you by shade because you are mysterious
But 500 years won't keep us from breaking barriers
1000 years with muzzles I'm still barking like terriers
They will invent diseases and claim we are carriers
Might sound convincing but don't believe what they say
Cause diamonds are worth more than anything they create
Africa breded nothing but the apex predator
Shakespeare had a black writer
Bet they won't credit her
They came after us, just a change in temperature
The won't touch your money if you come up to the register
All this hate from color, how does that even register?
They created the biggest religion
You better remain secular
Took the natives' food then made us think they were blessing us
Just remember this they will never treat you regular
They'll befriend lions and claim that were a bigger threat
Crazy how they smoke our brothers for selling a cigarette
See the footage but distracted by trends on the Internet
That's why my eye's wider than what's caught in a fishing net
I'm never distracted by trending topics
I'm not into that
Their favorite work of art is the black man's silhouette
Video said he ran away
Their gun says he's still a threat
They promised us some reparations but there's still no check

Blacks with bud he's a thug white they call them hippies
You can believe it or not but don't take a chance on Ripley's

Many men shoot like we got nine lives but we not fifty
They lose control and leave us wrapped in bags but we not missy
Catch us all, and never give us a chance I call them misty
Truths hard to swallow like 151 with whiskey

Privilege is when you got an advantage cop see...
How they want me to stand for a man who owned slaves, god dammit not me.
I ain't reciting no slave owners' lyrics so I say fuck Francis Scott Key
Cause if he was asked to stand for us he'd be standing knock-kneed

They like to mistake a black friend for justified racism
They like to mistake one felon for a reason to hate niggas
Like to mistake our culture for yours but that's plagiarism
And a man made disease is what made every black baby an AIDS victim.

I Am

By Carmen Booker

It was divine timing when I came on the scene..... I was lovingly pulled from the earth, that gives birth to queens, like ripe fruit black soil underneath my feet, on my eyelids, and on my cheeks... I said!! Blaaaack soil. All a part of me. You see! I stand on the grounds of divinity. The creator's thoughtful gift. He gave it to be, in the space my race, a melanated people. See I am the mother, I am the mother! Unlike no other. Regardless to foolish scientist who clone, who'd try to perfect this, instead they'd just wreck this, and couldn't get it right. Even if they'd stayed up all morning and stayed up all night tolling defective copies. A blaspheme to our God. Still my pure heart pumps blood royalty to the tips of my fingers, which pulsate rhythmic vibes screaming, I am the mother! Kissed by the sun and raised by the phoenix. I do not have intolerance to the solar rayzzs. For they welcome me and I bask in its pleasant light. All the while producing more kings and queens and princes and princesses. The birth from my God, his right I possesses. If I was anyone else, I'd be jealous not blessed. Stay lookin' in amazement and confess, melanated wealth does shine. Can not hocus pocus my best by a wave of a wand and steal some of my bronze. I know! I know! Ya' probally tried it before. But this patent here was not bought in no store. Oh please you say, let me see what it is like... hue-ti-ful, beautiful- man! I mean booty-ful. A lovely envision, a gift from above, I be my father's right hand daughter, and my name is of love. You ask "but why?" with that tone in your voice. But you know who I be, like prime rib to Adam's rib, I be choice. So you have the answer why I stand erect and so tall. "I am" the magnificent! Thee originate! The mother of all. Because I am the mother!

The Color Black

By Tracy Portalatin

Black
gives me inspiration, makes
me strong, Black is who I
am, Black is what I am,
look into my soul, Black
is what you see: the
deeper you go, the
darker Black you'll see;
that's me!! Gliding like a
panther, roaming wild but
free, being Black is the
answer to my true spirituality.

I'm strolling deep and flowing wide
flexing my pride, yes, I am a Black woman.

I'm just trying to be me,
using my individuality as my only actuality,
in force, played by real life.
the Black beauty is beauty,
a color that is such
a striving force,
a bold color of pride,
a Black color of weight,
holding strong;
that color Black is me,
my way of life is Black

Orgullo
By Maricelys Ruiz

I'm Hispanic, in case you couldn't tell
by the aceituna glisten of my skin
You see I'm made of rice and beans
chuletas, tostones, and pig feet.

I come from strong women I've watched climb the pana tree
Just so we could eat.

I arise from guerreros who fought, died and became heroes
To protect the beautiful beaches admired by our pale brothers and sisters.

I hail from Taino and African BLUE blood because people of color were the original
princes, princesses, chiefs and rulers. Before they were killed off and bullied

I was born and bred by an Island that resembles
its small chiefly nocturnal arboreal frog, El coqui
Small yet loud enough to make you notice it.

I'm Hispanic in case you couldn't hear the accent in my speech.

I freely played in and worshiped the selvas filled with exotic flowers,
sugar canes and cascadas that Others pay for, to indulge in.

I captivate with the sway of my hips not only because they move
with that salsa and merengue swag

But because being bore from them means I come into this world already filled with
love.

I call my home el Borinquen with pride,
cause I saw how huracanes like maria azotaron con mi tierra
then watched as my boricuas bonded together as one,
para levantarse, que orgullo ser hispana mi gente.

Without Your Permission

By Joshua Surita

“Well it’s nice to meet you!

So, what are you?

Like your nationality?

Or ethnicity?

Like where are you from?

You know what I mean?”

My skin tone is somewhere between milk chocolate and caramel

Depending on whether I’ve received or have been relieved of a steady supply of

Vitamin D

I drink in these looks of curiosity like a high fructose orange Hi-C

Hearing the sweet squeak between my teeth keys which hit a high C

And I wonder whether my friend in high school was just playing with me

When she said

Why don’t you hang out with your own kind?

My kind?

Well, in all my years lost in white suburbs

I never found the time to change friends based on my demographic

I tell people

I’m Latino

Both sets of grandparents from Puerto Rico

And even though I knew the basics like agua, sí, and niño

In Spanish, my parents and I would rarely speak though

And from the earliest moments in childhood

I could feel the deep well of insecurity

Anytime someone would try to genuinely draw me out about my culture

Or worse

Look at me like I was lesser than

Generations removed from my ancestors’ homeland

So how was I to stand as a Latino, when I don’t speak the language

And it’s funny

I never knew being dead in fluency

Qualified me for a full phlebotomy

Remove every trace of Hispanic hemoglobin inside of me

Because people couldn’t trace my bloodline

But I can TASTE the irony...yyyy

Ya tú sabes

Because if someone wants to open the history of my food pantry, I got it on lock

Since birth, I’ve eaten lots

Of rice and beans

Pasteles and gandules AKA pigeon peas

Pastelitos from the corner cuchi frito

And I can still hear all my abuelas on the kitchen phone saying ay bendito

Or maybe I can prove it with my feet though
Because I could dance slow with the flow before Bieber ever recorded Despacito
Crespo, Cruz, Reyes, Monchy con Dos Locos
And I ain't referring to Bell's tacos
But I definitely dipped into the salsa
The merengue, the bachata
So maybe I'm NOT ya
Complete Boricua
Times I've been to the island, a few
Not a fan of Mom's sanchocho root stew
The only Puerto Rican artifact I have is the flag of red, white, and blue
But just like most items
It was made in China, too
And I'm less because I should be fluent in my family's tongue, right?
Well fine, I may end up tongue tied
Yet when I find my identity on the cutting board of your opinions
I can see where your tongue lies
I cannot be defined by whether I am found in the glossary of anyone's acceptance
other than
Jesus, my God
Because I can flip through pages of the past where people made me feel like I was a
fraud
Tempted by this matchup of inside stuff I host like
Amad Rashad
So many shots taken
A double barrel over of laughs, so it's a sawed off
The constant drip drop drip of my pride after I placed my head on the table of their
ignorance
and it got sawed off
Which means I got slugged with an uppercut
Or rather slugged with an uppercut
Like Trinidad vs Hopkins stuff
Fighting in this self-defeating ring around the rosy
Holding hands with the fear of men imposing
These unwarranted fees
So I cannot afford to people please because people's pleas
Only make me feel guilty
So please
Allow me release these 9 syllables
Joshua William Surita
Or Surita, it's nice to meet ya
And I am Latino...with or without your permission

Unqualified
By Lisa De La Cruz

is often the word I find lingering in the deepest corners of my mind. I know more than anyone that no there aren't enough words in the English language to "qualify" me or any of us for that matter

Name:

my birth certificate says Jose
pero I know what John will get more call backs
And even though at home that'll catch more flack
"Ya te pusiste como los gringos"

Address:

19602 and 19605 only 3 numbers apart
The different between hearing the hum of crickets
or the lullaby of gunshots and ambulance cries

Experience:

Is "translating government documents from the ages of 8-18" a job?
I mean I didn't get paid in money
But the gratitude was sufficient enough
And I know from McDonald's to the hospital and Deka isn't really linear
And oftentimes left me with sore feet
And even tho there's food on the table
I would still feel incomplete

Education:

What does a degree measure?
Literally, the temperature
The difference between you wearing a coat
Or getting salmonella from undercooked chicken
But it also seems to dictate who is worthy of
Respect
Who woke up for those wicked 8ams
And who woke up at 5, to catch the
Riatero to the los pollos, or the mushroom factory
The degree means you email your professors with a "sir" or a "ma'am"
But you address the janitor or the lunch lady as....
I'm lying you don't address them
Because white collar jobs mean you made it
And blue collar jobs mean you failed it
And what do 4 years and 160 credits amount to
Other than \$50,000 of student debt
And a feeling in your heart
Of knowing all your future paychecks are already spent

On this “qualifier”
You’re damned if you do it and
Damned if you don’t
But the paper demands a degree
And doesn’t care to pay you
Enough to pay it back

References:

Does my 2nd grade teacher count?
Because she’s the one who believed in me
But my managers been waiting to write me up
And being late cus the bus was late isn’t a valid excuse
Can I trust him to say something good?
Or will he mess it up for me because
We’re understaffed
And if they know I’m trying to leave
I’ll stay stuck
Why can’t I put my homegirls Wanda?
We’ve never worked together
But we’re the definition of ride or die.

Skills:

Whatever skills I have
They don’t sound good on this paper
Or relevant
Bilingual
But I can’t write it
Excel?
Not really but I can
Fake it
Multi-tasking
Sure I’ve managed
To work this 9-5
And flip it to my 5-9
To work on my passions
And I’ve been able to
Survive
While feeling like I can’t go on
And even tho the world’s against me
I’ve managed to smile
Through it all

Personality test:

I don’t know how these questions
Or whether I believe that people
Are genuinely good or not
Will tell you what kind of worker I am

And what good does it do to tell you
Whether I believe people wouldn't
Steal
When y'all going to steal from me anyway
Steal my time, my dignity, my sanity
This test is supposed to tell you what my
Aptitude is
So y'all can figure out if I'm the type
Or Rivera with an attitude or not.
All this time spend
30-40 minutes I can't get back
To bear myself on this application
Just to feel inadequate
But also knowing that I should be grateful
To the many that can't do this step
Because fake papeles can't take them this far
I'm in hoping that HR email
Turns into an interview
Turns into a job offer
But I know that it won't
And I just spent this time
I won't get back
Just so you can tell me
That what I can't do is qualify
Myself enough for you

Unidos
Pero this one....
By Jules Grace

Soy mas que un fugaz
Soy mas que un unicornio
Soy mas que el sexo
So mas que un cuerpo
Soy mas que inteligencia
Soy mas que viajera
Soy mas que bailarinas
Soy mas que unas etiquetas
Es mas lleno que vacío
Es mas cerca que lejos
Es mas oportunidad que incertidumbre
Es mas humano que inmigrante
Se escucha con los ojos
Se prueba el sabor de la musica con la lengua
Se mira con los manos
Se experimenta con las orejas
Se recuerda con la nariz
Descansamos cuando bailamos
Disfrutamos cuando escuchamos
Comemos en silencio, Miramos
Soltamos mientras les encerramos

The Weaver
By Lyn Lessig

Gather the wool from over my eyes
Make something nice
In colors unkind
Colors unlike any night that you've known
Unlike any life that would grow in the sun
Piles of soul sorrow spinning and spun
into thread that will whisper between finger and thumb
Needling and knitting
lives into gifts
and the curses that they would become

You sit at the wheel and it spins and it speaks
The names of the dead who color your cheeks
Whether you smile or whether you weep
Your foot moves the treadle
the bearings creak

The sweaters we live in have ghosts
The dead rattle chains in the lines that you wove
Looming shapes held close
By buttons you made out of miscarried bones

But you're so, but you're so
and you're so seemingly small
And you sew, and you sew
But you're unseaming it all

You shake and you shake
As you wait and you wait
Til their breath fogs the mirror no more
You take and you take
As you braid and you braid
the gold of their hair into yours
But it's red where it pools on the floor
Bleed what's left of their veins into yours
Red where it pools on the floor

Like the red little footprints that trace your way out the door
Like the red little blink of the lives that you stole
Red where they pool in baskets and drawers
tidy and cold and unworn

Gather the wool, over my eyes

A shroud, a veil, disguising your dreams
Your haunted blood
Your eldritch grief
May the prick of your fingers finally lay you to sleep

A Teacher's Heart

By Kristen Thiele

A bleeding heart is my cross to bear
They don't leave my mind even at home
Students whom I've grown to love and who know I care
It's hard to remember they're not my own

Their lives are filled with so much strife
Discord surrounds them at many a turn
It's a turbulent life

That's why teaching my kids to be good people, to live with kindness and empathy
Matters more than their ability to write the perfect essay
Interjections and prepositions are useful parts of speech, but my kids living a
compassionate life
matters much more to me

The granola bars in my desk's bottom left drawer are available every day
Because I've spent many a restless night thinking about the hungry students here
Seeing the "secret stash" being shared from peer to peer
Makes my heart feel warm, a satisfaction that can't be undid
Once assigned a seat in my class, they're forever my kid

The smallest kindness, simple snack bars, help relationships form
They know I care every day and each week
I can only hope it lessens their storms
When I give them handfuls on a Friday afternoon, the coming days look less bleak

So many street negatives, awful headlines in the news, leave perceptions skewed
Sometimes fitting in, be it for belonging or protection, comes down to your shoes
The positives are being overshadowed and that's the real crime
Many a young bilingual scholar being overlooked or even forgotten in his or her prime

The stereotype of being a kid from Reading needs to change its tone
These kids are going places, great places, even if they don't believe so
This city is their home
It's their starting point
But it does not determine where they will go

I believe in you!

Love,
"Miss"

Remember
By Joshua Fasig

To the Marines in Okinawa
Veterans still in Vietnam
To the sailors on the Coastline
Soldiers in the sand
Each day they fight for freedom
As you lift this flag
Remember...

To Officers that died in duty
Protecting our homes
Risking their lives
To help us save our own
With honor and courage
Remember...

She stood up for a movement
By standing her ground
While other pressured her
She would not back down
Standing for injustice
Faith in being free
We remember...

History was changed because of a
Dream he would not hide
Not seeing the color of skin
But the contents of what's inside
Standing for liberties
Please America remember...

Remember the things that bring us close
Not what tears us apart
We all bleed the red white and blue
And that we can't depart
Together we will stand but
Divided we will fall
Remember...

Together
By Dr. Phillip Jeffrey Tietbohl

Reading is Me.

Reading is You.

A blending of hope,

From all that we do.

Heritage, Culture, Language, and Art.

Respect where we come from and open your heart.

Differences matter.

They tell who we are.

When we work together,

We brighten the stars.

Time to connect,

To share what you know.

When we work together,

Reading will grow.

The Proprietor
By Ed Terrell

Who am I? Why am I who I am?
Material atmosphere of illusion
Polluted concept of life
Spiritual complexities struggle for consciousness
Who am I? Why am I who I am?
Before and after the birth
Exploit from time immemorial
Artificial imposition on the mind
Stringent laws of association with the Soul.
Who am I? Why am I who I am?
Superior energy, inferior energy
Established my normal condition of imitating
Who I am, why I am, who I am?
Circumstantial opulent external service
Orissa of educational, education
Who am I? The predecessors
The proprietor, seeking shelter from
Why I am, who I am

Railroad Familiars
By Marilyn LT Klimcho

Every railroad town has them—
And Reading is a railroad town—
Grown men who step up onto
A slowly moving train,
Step on the couplings
Between the cars
And alight on the street beyond,
Journey uninterrupted,
As if crossing the tracks
When the gate is down,
Is an easy coordination
Of will and body.

They are like a flock of sparrows
Fluttering into a bush and then
Taking off again without
Ever disturbing a branch.

They move like shadows—
Like graceful shades,
Unworried by the risks.
Unhampered by the train.

I am in my car, amazed, paused
At the railroad crossing
On Franklin Street—
Where Seventh Street
Should have been—
Reading is a railroad town,
Waiting for the gate to lift,
Trying to read the passing cars
And the passive faces of
These dusky strangers, who filter
Through an obstacle
As if it isn't even there.

Boys Who Pop Wheelies on Bikes Without ~~Breaks~~ Brakes

By Anthony Orozco /glyph

Catch us if you can
if you dare
if you wanna blow past this stop sign
like us like me
like no helmet
no hand signals
no carbon fiber frame
no spandex in highlighter yellow,
no self-reflection, no protection or digression
through this intersection full of steel and pedestrians
front wheel popped, straight up like 12 o'clock
like midnight like catch us midflight
cruising through red lights with flagrance
broken glass glinting on black pavement,
~~eyesore~~, I soar on a clear night sky
hurtling exclusively the wrong way down one ways,
runaway slaves who repurposed their chains,
no underground rail, only
Washington and Court Streets
detour us ~~over the train~~,
everything is in transition, including humans.
I am loyal only to the movement,
a fearless forward toward the tipping gorge,
regardless-of and sometimes in-opposition-to
the laws of traffic and laws of survival
drivers suspect assume we are suicidal
but maybe it just takes more for us to feel afraid,
for us to feel alive,
to feel.
The first people to fly were cyclists
and it is one of the few things
that actually makes sense anymore.
My nose up, wings out,
~~air 90 pounds per square inch~~ under me
and I feel lifted without gas and
neighborhood florists push ~~pedals~~ petals in high fashion,
designer leather but no seatbelts to fasten
my nose is up and my wings are out
as I feel like I could spring from Spring to Canal
the street is a clear runway for takeoff and
BOOM
my wheel is straight up like 12 o'clock like noon
like putting on a show, midday matinee

in potholed thoroughfares and in
brick-laid out-of-the-way alleyways
where meticulous masonry is
warped like wet wood is.
What has been spilled here
to turn straight paths crooked?
Roots shoot up through mortar like pistols pistils,
now the trees are detrimental to streets,
“they tried to bury us
but forgot we’re a fistful of seeds!”
New things take hold, disrupt structure,
the ground swells and the rupture’s organic.
Take to the streets because the sidewalks are manic
jagged, unruly urban teeth that grin even when
everyone tells us we are reprehensible,
tells us we should be scared or miserable
but we know space is physical and time is bicyclical,
we experience freedom in intervals,
only so long until we end up back here
balanced on our back wheel
for a moment lighter than the sick relatives and rent
that rest on our shoulders, for a moment
we don’t have to think, just react, for a moment
defiantly joyful even at the threat of injury
like the ending up in on the hood of an enemy
staying alive and happy is the biggest muscle I can flex,
and I have legs like pistons,
like t shirt and one pant leg missing,
the dance with danger is the same old two step,
the beat is contagious, we’re just cogs in the transmission
like health risk is the cost of admission,
rowhome windows – like prisons – are gated,
houses like cages, we learn to handlebars handle bars,
this 21-speed mechanism helps me escape it.
My nose lifted, wings open, I give praise,
I am thankful for lungs that work like jet engines,
thankful to have witnessed the humble miracle
of not getting hit today,
the small blessing of
making it home in one piece peace
I am not oblivious to the privilege in
fighting up a steep hill
drenched in the glow of red neon,
like dripping sweat,
steam rising off my body,
like gasping for air.