

# **The 2022 Poetry Marathon Anthology**



**Edited By  
Ofuma Agali & Cristy Watson**

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## Full Marathon Introduction

Poetry finds deliberate expression in a community that is aware it has to write – waiting yearly to do just that, to unfasten buckled words, to sink into the ocean of extempore, and to swim in the adjoining sea – fed by each poet’s river, floating in the words that emerge. And from the multiple harvests of expressions, this anthology furnishes its home with these consequent selected poems. “We will cast our nets and catch the words/...carrying with us for one whole year/the exhilaration of swimming in the poet’s river,” Anjana Sen notes in her poem.

117 poems of diverse forms now inhabit the full marathon section of this anthology. There has been a technically-imperfect but conscious effort to split these poems into nine sections with random roots in The writer’s effort, Poetic flashes of here and beyond, Pain, Faith, Elusiveness, Pleasure, Memories, Locale, and The metaphorical. From these poems, we find lines that wink, twinkle, frown, smile, ululate, and also those that drip with immense joy and biting sorrow.

“All of my oceans are waking/filling my body with currents,” Sandra Duncan writes. “The body wails, the mind antagonizes/Excruciating comfort silences all,” Renee A. Perkins laments. Joshua Factor expresses gratitude “...for being a light in a world fueled by darkness. “Where did our innocence go?” Chidi Nebo questions. Cynthia Hernandez’s line, “I sipped joy all morning,” brightens the poet’s day. David Bruce Patterson reminds of memories that live, “tasting a part of” us. Margo Wilson’s translocation of “a Garden of Eden” into her “backyard” reignites the poet’s migration deposits, all withdrawn in words. Carol Prost tells of “ruby lips” that drip “summer’s feast in the magic of moonlight.”

These lines often take flight, exporting the reader into “other” spaces and otherness; they also stay rooted, forcing the reader to erect a nest in the poet’s world. In the midst of these free and experimental forms, we also find fine efforts in gigan, sonnet, zuhitsu, villanelle, and so on. You may find that a few lines might throw you off track, but you will also find yourself landing safely in the basket of poetic license.

For good measure, this collection also reveals a community of poets who still harbor memories of the pandemic, but who are consciously moving away from the emotional trap into the worlds ahead – one filled with conflicting uncertainties with perhaps only the poet's feet taking certain steps. It has indeed been a delight to work with the organizers of this global poetry festival – Caitlin and Jacob, the community of participants, and my co-editor, Cristy, in the creation of this work. Do go ahead and feast on the words, harvested on a platter of muses.

*Ofuma Agali*

# Half Marathon Introduction

“Poetry is the lifeblood of rebellion, revolution, and the raising of consciousness.”

~Alice Walker

Because of its ability to bring people together, the Poetry Marathon has played an important role in connecting poets over the past years, and during the Pandemic, especially as we slowly emerge from our homes and make our way back into society. Along with Caitlin and Jacob Jans, poets from around the world have created a community over these past years that has had a pivotal and sustaining influence during Covid.

Maybe being sequestered for long periods of time, and more cautious these past two years, has also given us ample opportunities for reflection and quiet moments to think about recent injustices in our world and to become even more appreciative of our planet. As poets, we have always written about these things, but now, more people are listening.

After reading the 244 poems submitted to the half-marathon, similar themes emerged in our collective struggles during Covid, our strong feelings toward violations of human rights occurring across our lands, and our fierce love for Nature and one another. These brilliant poems captured the human condition, in all its glory and despair; with our words helping to challenge perspectives, and to remind us of everything that connects us to one another.

Continue to raise up your voices! For it is through poetry, that we see and know ourselves.

Half-Marathon Editor,

*Cristy Watson*





## **Full Marathon**



## **Gathering and Beating Inertia**

*“O! for a muse of fire, that would ascend the  
brightest heaven of invention.”*

*William Shakespeare*



Anjana Sen  
*Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom*  
*Hour 1*

## **The Poet's River**

And so, it starts. After being poised, quivering  
in nervous anticipation, shivering.  
Prompt on the hour, the claxon sounds.  
As one, we pinch noses, dive in, from separate grounds.

Safe. Knowing as I do, I'll be underwater with you  
for the next twenty-four hours. The day (and night), only ours,  
to gently swim together, or race.  
To frolic, glide, discover – at our own pace.

We will cast our nets and catch the words  
attached to everything everywhere like seaweed.  
We will string them together into verse,  
which we will wonder over later as we read.

I'll remain fresh, calm, joyous and still.  
And when I flag, for flag and flail I will,  
you will nudge me, not judge me. Or let me bail out.  
I'll waken from exhaustion as I hear you shout.

As will I, for you, my brethren, my tribe so dear,  
I'll say bravo as often as you want to hear.  
And together we will string the pearls of words into verses.  
And send them out bravely, into the universe.

Once the day is done, then the night, then the day again, bright,  
we will start swimming up towards the light.  
Reach up. Break water. Gasp at the shock of the glare.  
Shake off the droplets of exhaustion. Breathe in air,

carrying with us for one whole year  
the exhilaration of swimming in the poet's river.

Amanda Potter  
*Jacksonville, Florida*  
*Hour 4*

## **The Poetry Marathon**

Once a year we gather  
worldwide  
connected by the internet and Wi-Fi

Armed with our tools  
fingers that strike keys  
pens that bleed ink

we shed our words  
these thoughts and feelings  
memories reeling

exposing our seams  
through this poetic community

We hold space  
for what was, hoping  
for what comes

yearning to be seen  
longing to be read.

What we mark  
between the lines  
is what we poets love

Jessica Leanne Gershon  
*Covington, Tennessee*  
*Hour 6*

## **A Poet's Dream**

Take me back to the old days  
where my soul had just begun,  
all the way to the end of time,  
that's where my heart will run;  
I will not be contained,  
do not put me in a box.  
My body will feel the pain,  
but my soul will not.  
Sprinkle my ashes in the morning,  
watching the sun rise,  
spending no time mourning;  
my love never dies.  
The circle of life you see,  
in the golden hour of ups and downs,  
that's where I will be,  
making bird sounds.  
Listen to your heart,  
hear the music of the birds;  
our souls are true art,  
what we see are the words.



Janis Martin  
*Dorset, United Kingdom*  
*Hour 12*

## **Gathering**

In times of uncertainty  
I seek out The Others  
gathered together  
at the usual place  
easily recognizable  
by the colours they wear  
There's no ceremony  
ritual or secret passwords  
Just a place to gather  
to seek support  
and understanding from friends  
Questions carefully teased apart  
worked through and debated  
An opportunity to share  
and care about one another  
Familiar faces, welcoming embraces  
laughter or tears  
joy or mutual fears  
But that's why we gather  
To show we belong  
Each of us here  
are part of The Others

Ofuma Agali  
*Lagos, Nigeria*  
*Hour 24*

## **The Muse ii**

In that blurry kingdom of inspiration,  
muses are trapped in coloured bottles  
where grain alcohol transports them onto blank pages.

These muses dance on the slippery pages,  
making efforts to stick, to be counted, and be read.

Sometimes, the birthed words fly into the eyes of the drinker  
who then shakes off catapulted confusion by seeking the bottle once more.

Paper balls, cracked pen stems, and white spaces adorn.  
In a sane minute or two, a sensible chord is struck  
in that cloud of dust where clarity is ephemeral.

It might be great art to gamble with muses resident in a bottle;  
perhaps not the thought that they live anywhere at all, muses!

Cindy Albers  
*Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii*  
*Hour 22*

## **I Need an Idea, Not Tenderness**

I need an idea  
to reach out and grab me,  
shake me awake,  
pull me out of dreamland,  
bring me back to the almost-alive,  
an idea to pull me back from the precipice.  
I need an idea,  
something to fly with, drive with  
or at the very least cry with,  
an idea I can sink my teeth into,  
throw in some words,  
some sentence structure,  
and mix them all up.  
Just one small idea,  
something, anything at all,  
toss me a word, a generality,  
a token or a snippet maybe;  
just not the word "tenderness"  
that won't do it.  
I need something less soft,  
more word-worthy.  
I need powerful poetry.

## **Drive-Thru Poetry**

Sometimes the words come  
like the bubbles in a McDonald's Sprite,  
effervescently effortless and  
wholly unstoppable.  
But most of the time,  
the words are like a jar of jam,  
whose lid has been glued stuck  
in a saccharine crust,  
cemented in the chill  
of the fridge door.  
Hands sweaty, clenched jaw,  
gasping in outlandish shock  
that they would dare  
resist command.  
Sometimes I can find  
the things to say,  
but mostly,  
the words are like that.

Cindy Thompson  
*Lakewood, Colorado*  
*Hour 8*

## **At the Soda Shoppe**

The poem sits coyly at the counter of the Soda Shoppe,  
waiting to be discovered, slowly sipping an egg cream.  
Making it last all day, the creamy lukewarm liquid  
drips down its poetically pointed chin,  
a sticky puddle forming at its iambic feet.  
The Soda Shoppe's bell tinkles;  
a thirsty reader breathlessly arrives.  
Taking a stool next to the poem, she reaches over and lifts the creation to  
her lips.  
Tasting its invigorating words, she sucks down its essence of life, grins and  
leaves.  
Reveling in being discovered,  
the poem sits coyly at the counter of the Soda Shoppe.  
The Soda Shoppe's bell tinkles.  
In the throes of a moon-in-June love quarrel, a young couple enters.  
Sitting on the other side of the poem, they decry the sticky mess on the  
floor.  
Dripping with the dregs of saccharine philosophy, the poem chuckles,  
"It's so sad when uncultured people don't realize what delights are just  
within reach."

Ekawu Elizabeth Imaji  
*Abuja, Nigeria*  
*Hour 16*

## **By Mouthing the Memories of a Mowed Nightmare**

A poem counts everything living as a memory  
and tries on different shapes to fit into its body.  
First, she squeezes into boy;  
a boy trying the figure of a sea,  
a sea too little to hold the sins of his past as secret,  
a secret too thick, it could suffocate his own Mother.  
Then, this same boy becomes dead even before he has the opportunity to live.  
He is silent even before the lips  
finds a smooth note for speech,  
and he is choking even before plunging on a memory.  
How can a boy die before life breathes inside of him?  
Remember, this is just a poem,  
the one counting everything living  
as a memory,  
and tries on different shapes to fit into its body.

Nandiya Nyx  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*  
*Hour 2*

## **On Writing, with appreciation to Robert Frost**

Of easy wind and downy flake  
I cast a line my heart to wake  
And though it quakes with awesome fury  
The pen holds fast, most securely.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
The scratchy scrawl, as words do leap  
The truth it's hooked, as soul demands  
I reel it in, the poem here lands.

*\*First line of each stanza taken from Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"*

Sincerely BlueJay  
*Las Vegas, Nevada*  
*Hour 9*

## **Crystalized Adoration**

If you hold this on your tongue  
and let it dissolve like a fresh fallen  
snowflake two days before your birthday,  
you will engrain this taste into your memory.

The ink will flow from you freely and often,  
the story will be yours to tell any time you like,  
and the poetry will morph so flawlessly with the  
creatures and art you surround yourself with,  
that you may even begin to forget who created what.

I like to think that if you hold this idea  
on your tongue for long enough you will  
almost never be able to forget what my  
poetry and I tasted like either.



Megan Dausch  
*New York*  
*Hour 4*

## **Rain**

Raindrops tap the world.  
Hands on a keyboard. Watering;  
unfolding stories.

Abena Ntoso  
*Houston, Texas*  
*Hour 24*

## **Finish Lines**

crossing, i commence  
a commitment to carrying  
all that i have brought  
wrought thought  
it's clearly the end of the hours  
and while i haven't bought flowers  
i would not say of anyone in the world now  
that they wrote this or wrote that  
as we dozed and stumbled  
finished lines we may or may not keep  
in the revision which begins with crossing



## **Flashes from the Deep**

*“From the ashes a fire shall be woken, A light from  
the shadows shall spring.”*

*J.R.R. Tolkien*



Samantha Carroll  
*South Carolina*  
*Hour 1*

## **Into the Clouds**

Storm clouds come rolling in,  
Waiting for the downpour with bated breath, tongue tied.  
Let the rain drown out the pain.

Into the clouds now,  
don't make a sound.  
The rain lives in her veins.  
The ocean is alive in her eyes.  
The water pours from her soul.

She was born of water,  
not just someone's daughter,  
lost to the hurricane alive in her soul.  
The rain within her never leaves her alone.

Fall into the clouds now.  
Stop! Don't make a sound.  
The rain is alive inside.  
The ocean calls her home.  
The water comes from her very soul.

Lee Montgomery-Hughes  
*North Ayrshire, Scotland, UK*  
*Hour 1*

## **The Call of the Sea**

When shall I go down to the sea again,  
to the salty sea and the waves?  
When will my desire be fulfilled,  
to taste the air I crave?

When will I answer the questions  
waves ask lapping at my feet?  
What is the draw of the ocean  
and why does my heart miss a beat  
when I hear the cry  
of the gulls on high  
as I watch the water play  
and wonder at the tall ships passing by?

Will I ever go down to the sea again,  
taste the salt and smell the breeze?  
When will my life-long desire be fulfilled  
and my soul once again be at ease?

Sandra Duncan  
*Portland, Victoria, Australia*  
*Hour 8*

## **I am ocean**

All my oceans are waking,  
filling my body with currents,

replacing the blood in my veins,  
rushing through my miles  
so rapidly, I wave as I walk.

I hunger for raw fish and seaweed,  
for the smell of salty air.

The moon is my master now;  
I follow her night and day,  
I have become her wild young slave.

All my oceans are waking.  
I hunger for raw fish and seaweed.



Given Davis  
*Portland, Oregon*  
*Hour 1*

## **Amphibious**

I was a small thing  
watching the shifty line  
between ocean and sand  
a changing place  
where I could find home  
tides pulling under  
the loose earth  
of my body

Below the surface  
it was quiet  
I held my breath  
as she rocked me  
lulled by her heartbeat

Waking on my back  
a flock of nurses in white  
floated through the room

When I came out of surgery  
my first breaths were shallow

I was born in the ocean  
taking my first steps  
on land

Ashley "LuvMiFreely" Powers  
*Dayton, Ohio*  
*Hour 7*

## **Under The Surface**

This growing pressure  
that choking feeling in my throat  
I feel it all building up in my chest  
my emotions at its breaking point  
My outer appearance shows no sign of damage  
Not one crack present  
Can't allow myself to shatter  
I'm the strong one  
Ash, keep it together  
I'm ready to fold  
Expectations high and failure isn't an option  
I'm forced to carry this load  
I buckle and bend  
But somehow I don't break  
I guess I was made to handle any burden  
take on any fate  
Although I take what I'm handed and never question it  
doesn't mean it's not heavy  
and that it isn't weighing on my spirit  
I've conditioned myself to smile  
But under the surface I'm drowning

Eilidh St John  
*Albany, Western Australia*  
*Hour 21*

## **Circles**

In my arms life ebbs  
Not away but into more  
Birth and death unite

Lesley Tyson  
*Reston, Virginia*  
*Hour 8*

## **coincidence**

i never thought of this place as small  
so our meeting was a cosmic coincidence

except our erratic orbits sometimes  
circle the same planets at times  
marked in different slants of light

we teach each other different idioms  
strange modifications of a single root

we carefully clear the debris of our baggage  
of our origins to find degrees of separation

we remember echoes of a voice saying  
i never thought of this place as small

we teach each other different idioms  
to explain opposite sides of legends  
that we will not complete

that task will fall to the historians  
and the characters they create

Tracy Plath  
*Franklin, Indiana*  
*Hour 8*

## **Waning**

My adult womanly existence is flush with the full moon;  
a Super Moon when closest to my earthly focus, my love,  
a Micro Moon when distant, small and dull in the dark.

Wolves keened my loneliness in the cold Wolf Moon,  
the Snow Moon marked my February birth.

A Blood Moon's rarity radiated red, brought forth little deaths of youth,  
shed uterine linings prepared my womb for new life.

Blue Moon, you marked my sons' entrances into the world,  
and the Pink Moon of soft Spring gave both life and death to my twin girls.

Strawberry Moon, I believed I would forever be fertile, vibrant,  
my adult womanly existence flush with the full moon.

Blood on the moon radiated red, brought forth the death of first love,  
but the Buck Moon gifted a richer love in the full flush of summer,  
the Corn Moon's harvest gave me his heart.

Frost Moon, I am waning, my woman's blood drying.  
Long Nights Moon, one night soon, I will lay me down.

Viswo Varenva Samal  
*Keonjhar, Odisha, India*  
*Hour 24*

## **Denouement**

Evening of life  
waiting at the doorway  
primrose oil lamp burns  
scarlet flames rise unwittingly  
embracing the lovely evening

Deborah Lynn Dalton aka D<sup>2</sup>, @d2poetry  
*Charlotte, North Carolina*  
*Hour 17*

## **Pulled the Trigger**

### **Take up**

in casual conversation  
a  
scenario is described  
innocently  
raising alarm

### **Break**

the words stayed  
in my head  
days later  
and would swim  
in my mind  
bouncing  
without conscious purpose  
until it connected

### **Overtravel**

and then the spin  
noticeable  
and uncontrollable  
at moments  
sparking irrational behavior  
running ram shod on routines  
and plans  
goals seem so foreign

### **Reset**

once recognized  
grappling to unwind  
pull the crazy back on the spool  
and confront what was unbound

## **Beneath the Hangman's Tree**

A man stood beneath the tree,  
waiting it seemed, for me.  
His gaze was soft as diamond,  
his mood as light as iron,  
he had been waiting for me;  
but why beneath this tree?

This tree was like most around it,  
red leaves and branches.  
But unlike boughs in woods confounded,  
this one stood alone,  
the hangman's noose upon its branch,  
the grass around it dead.  
And though I felt fit as a fiddle,  
  
the tree filled me with dread.

I approached the man with care.  
He asked me for my name,  
perhaps trying to cause a scare.  
He asked my silence again;  
at last I felt my courage rise  
and deigned it wise to answer  
and he nodded, to my surprise,

he Spoke. "Born the sign of cancer"

How could he know that, I did wonder.  
Then realization dawned.  
This was no man, nor land I lived in.  
My life, indeed, was gone.  
The memory threatened to drown me  
but He then took my hand.  
I left there as Death had found me  
and guided my soul to the promised land.



River E. Styx  
*Bangor, Maine*  
*Hour 3*

## Untitled

I don't plan on having arthritic bones to dig up.  
No anthropologist will have to wonder  
if my hips belonged to a boy or a girl.  
Instead, they will be the taproot;  
My ribs opened into a tree.  
A strong oak whose branches reach for the morning sun.  
Leaves eat up every last drop  
while my canopy offers solace.  
Cellulose stronger than my collagen ever dreamed of being.  
Squirrels will forget where they buried acorns  
made of my memories.  
Birds will build their nests with the remains of my heart.  
My failures won't matter after I nourished this tree— fed this forest.  
I don't care who remembers me  
so long as the forest still whispers my name.

Fiona Ryle  
*Fort Frances, Ontario, Canada*  
*Hour 21*

## **Gumdrop Acapella**

gumdrops fall, like rain  
bouncing off my umbrella  
singing acapella

cotton candy threads fly by  
almonds glide and hop  
will they never stop?

red and black liquorice strands  
dance around the square  
like Rogers and Astaire

that sure was some dream  
think i better stay away  
from sriracha and Bublé

Sara Anderson  
*Franklin, Indiana*  
*Hour 21*

## **Soggy Shoes**

Yellow umbrella  
tugged from my hands suddenly,  
soars on storming wind.

Ermelinda Makkimane  
*Goa, India*  
*Hour 15*

**veins**

delicate veins  
that throb no more  
still calm in their  
fragility  
perfect poise  
even in death  
and dying

Torri Brown  
*Tacoma, Washington*  
*Hour 23*

## **Loves Executioner**

Around here  
I survive off very little affection  
Judgement begins in the eyes  
It brings with it the possibility of being nothing  
I choose to process life alone  
with less intrusion  
from the outside  
I desire to be personified in love  
without sacrificing my sensitivity  
to break

Jade Walker  
*Chicago, Illinois*  
*Hour 4*

## **Mathematical Thoughts**

Thoughts.

Like irrational numbers,  
endlessly whining,  
often never pausing  
to take a break;

and cannot be broken,  
like zero cannot be divided.

The only hope is  
Logic.

Silvester Phua  
*North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*  
*Hour 1*

## **Endless**

Floating on a dead sea,  
one with eternity.  
The world disappears,  
along with all fears.  
At twilight's dusk,  
peace, alone, at last.

# **Racing Against Pain**

*“The pain, it will leave once it has finished teaching you.”*

*Pavana Reddy*





Renee A. Perkins  
*Washington, District of Columbia*  
*Hour 9*

## **Woe**

Sorrow raptures;  
its delicate waves froth enticingly toward the woebegone,  
    simmering beneath the frightful waters.  
Woe, woe, it calls. Aching menace, it calls.  
    Where is our hope?  
We cling to our sorrow; we strain for the waters.  
    Lurking deep, it sings its song.  
    Woe, woe.

Waters beckon.  
Promises of lethe.  
Promises of death.  
Where is our future?  
Weakened bones crack.  
The body shrieks its defiance. It is not a willing submit.  
    But the mind, oh the mind!  
    Woe, woe.

Sorrow shatters,  
gripped in harrowing claws.  
    No hope, no future.  
The body wails, the mind antagonizes.  
Excruciating comfort silences all.  
Shuddering throes, stuttering beats,  
enveloped in sorrowed waters.  
    Woe, woe.

Ian Barkley  
*Carbondale, Illinois*  
*Hour 6*

## **The Personal is Political**

Open the blinds to let the light in for the first time in a long time.  
Apartment windows across the parking lot,  
background processes, gadgets, holy books, and dust,  
three white walls and a fan that hums  
forever, burning fuel like a living, temporary thing,  
pushing away oppressive heat or cold.  
Information overload and understimulation,  
sound and failing vision,  
everything you are  
sinks into a screen that replaces  
everything real  
as the rest of the world retreats.  
Thoughts get dark and fantasy becomes a need.  
Deprivation leads to a blind and reckless hunger.

## **Pronouncing S.O.S**

and i gazed afloat nature,  
only to find the carcass of this broken body.

who says there is hope?  
find me cure,  
for this body is hollow.

i wish to ignite a poem,  
besides this sagging body.

say, i might just pass out the pain  
by clouding my heart with strings of your hands.

look, my humanity is ablaze,  
i am drowning in doom's silence.

just breathe a sign towards  
my destination

and tell me  
i would not drown in these waters,

and I gazed afloat nature.

Natasha Vanover  
*Seattle, Washington*  
*Hour 3*

## **The State of Our Here and Now**

Guns have more rights than women's wombs.

Death is more lauded than life.

Funerals are becoming more prevalent than nuptials.

Hospice hurts while hospitals no longer heal.

A father's love cannot be valued in conventional currency.

The sky offers more hope than any book.

A simple hello or message out of the blue is more far reaching than a new declaration of love.

The smile of a child can wash all your worries almost instantaneously.

Music is more meaningful than any promise presumes to be.

The sun's energetic embrace is more uplifting than any tangible want one can imagine.

Transferring sound, thoughts, dreams, and prayer into the spoken word is as powerful as putting them to paper, if not more.

We have now entered a holy realm when we speak aloud our needs, acknowledging the chasm in between.

As diverse as the opposite ends of the color spectrum,

both call out to be acknowledged, not necessarily accepted, only heard.

They too need a voice to give way to the sacred space that everyone can enter.

Come home to the here and now that only you can liberate.

Deanna Ngai  
*Airdrie, Alberta, Canada*  
*Hour 15*

## **Ghost Leaves**

Ghost leaves stirring on the trees,  
shifting in the gentle breeze.  
A brittle reminder before the freeze  
of the winter that is to come.

Early in the year they were green,  
bright and vibrant, oh so clean,  
shimmering with a fragile sheen,  
pristine in spring.

As fall crept in, they slowly turned,  
lazily, not so concerned,  
losing the colour they had learned,  
turning into ghost leaves.

Amy Laird  
*Spencer, Iowa*  
*Hour 12*

## **Jonah**

I've left God on hold  
for far too long-  
Started to pray,

only to tell him  
that I'd be right back  
and never came back.

I wonder why  
he sticks around.  
It's not like I make him  
a priority-  
Except for the obvious,

when things go wrong,  
when I need prayer,  
when there's a death  
or simply when I feel wronged.

Why is that?

Anytime I call out,  
he's there.  
Anytime my life is in danger,  
he's there.  
Anytime I need something,  
you guessed it,  
he's there.

I'm sorry God;  
I'm a horrible human being,  
selfish,  
obnoxious,  
toxic,  
unworthy of love and respect,  
just-  
Unworthy.

I don't understand how or why  
you love me,  
how others love me,  
how they care for me,  
it annoys and angers me  
sometimes.

Do you do well to be so angry,  
my little crab?

What was that?  
I swear I hear someone  
saying I have no right to  
be angry.  
But that can't be true.

I'll pay it no mind;  
It doesn't matter  
other people's opinions-  
Of course, I do well  
to be angry.  
It is my right.

I'm just going to leave  
it here and see what happens.  
I have my comfort and my needs  
are met.  
But something's lacking.

Do you do well to be angry,  
my little crab?  
I'll ask you once more,  
answer me.

I have a RIGHT to be angry.  
I turned my back and she  
threw me out on the sidewalk.  
Who does that?





## **Tablets of Faith**

*“Faith is an oasis in the heart which will never be reached  
by the caravan of thinking.”*

*Khalil Gilbran*



## Faith

viboothi<sup>1</sup>. no believer in amulets and the kind, this plain-looking ash is my only solace

i stand under the shower allowing the water to hug me. the sprays pierce through my skin, rejuvenating weary cells. i am aware of worry dissolving, layer by layer. i soap myself vigorously so i can peel more of them

fresh clothes are always cathartic. so is fresh skin

i light the evening lamp. its glow, soft yet powerful, roots me to the moment. i take a pinch of viboothi between my forefinger and thumb, and chanting a strotra<sup>2</sup>, apply it to my forehead. no believer in amulets and the kind, this plain-looking ash is my only solace

the challenge begins. so does my journey

plod... plod...

is the journey a challenge or the challenge a journey?

surprisingly, i don't feel drained. is it because i am focused?

plod... plod...

plod... plod... and then, something magical happens. a shift. all is well again

the evening lamp shines on. no believer in amulets and the kind, this plain-looking ash is my only solace

sprinkles of stardust

viboothi

*1. sacred ash used in Hindu rituals, it is often worn on the forehead as a reminder that there is a greater energy force in the universe and so one must try to practice detachment and be less egoistical.*

*2. (in Hinduism) a hymn written in praise of the Almighty*

Joshua Factor  
*Durham, North Carolina, USA*  
*Hour 11*

## **Satellite**

Home away from home,  
perhaps a tad cliché but nothing if not accurate.  
With the most incredible architecture and an unmatched ambience,  
it's no mystery why it's the best getaway imaginable.

The alcove comes complete with delectable cuisine,  
personal pods for unique consumption as you see fit,  
and connectivity that has to be experienced to be believed.

When everything goes wrong, it's always here.  
When the world seems to be falling to pieces,  
it's a comforting refuge for the weary and indigent.  
A single point of consistency in a perpetually changing world  
with cartesian coordinates of zero zero zero zero.

Long after we're gone, it will remain for future generations to appreciate  
but our perpetual, undying love and gratitude will remain long after  
the end of time and the collapse of civilization.

Thanks for being a light in a world fueled by darkness.

Roxann Lawrence  
*Negril, Jamaica*  
*Hour 9*

## **Future Reflections**

Just a glimmer.  
The light is yet to be born,

preparing for tomorrow  
when yesterday is gone.

When will the light be present?  
When truths will be revealed,  
will there be gladness  
when those needs are healed?

Many are the questions  
future promises bring.  
When sunlight shines through darkness,  
birds begin to sing.

This future reflection,  
beaming wonder, poise and grace,  
as you smell the beauty shone,

it sends a bright smile on your face

Rarzack Olaegbe  
*Lagos, Nigeria*  
*Hour 18*

## **Pure ecstasy**

Waiting can be painful  
if you aren't sure of the reason  
you are in the prison  
for the season.

The moment you know  
and you can see,  
it is pure ecstasy,

like an unfruitful couple  
gifted with twin diamonds  
after twenty years.

Aishwarya Vedula  
*Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India*  
*Hour 15*

## **Moonchild**

On a night full of stars,  
I drink wine stirred by the flowers.

I raise my glass offering a glass to moon,  
and noticed my shadow holding the same.

The gentle sensation of seclusion down the throat,  
softening the syllables of every word uttered;

seeking the slices of the moon,  
on a table covered with upholstery planets.



Angel Rosen  
*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*  
*Hour 1*

## **Meeting Myself in the Chesapeake Bay**

I did leave something in the estuary last Friday.  
It wasn't a wrinkled dollar bill,  
miserably wet in my swimsuit pocket.  
It wasn't a soggy pizza crust, now departed.

The ugly brown water took from me,  
a section of sadness  
that it later will turn into salt.  
My tears making a transition  
into ocean, and I  
into invincible—  
imagining myself as a child  
for a single moment,  
doggy-paddling towards  
the sun tucked into the water beside me,  
resembling a breakfast hash brown.

I will get there, I think.  
The water can't take me,  
but I can take myself.

Sandra Johnson  
*Houston, Texas*  
*Hour 21*

## **Emotion Eggs**

In a clear, small caddy,  
emotion eggs they sit,  
each one makes the eater feel  
the feeling face on it.

Should I choose the first one,  
frazzled, scrambled in both ends?  
Second, worried, like I get  
when itchy rash won't mend.

Third, I like the very most  
happy, sun side up;  
next one, scared eyes wide  
maybe jalapeños inside,  
I dare not touch that pup.

The back row, I can imagine now  
sad, shocked and sick, and how  
that one's uncooked, and pallid,  
never in mouth be swallowed.

The very last emotion, angering,  
this one's blown out, yolk strings dangling,  
need this one when phone is ringing  
unknown call, confront some spamming.

I'd love to share emotion eggs,  
they may just come in handy;  
love-peace omelettes I'd give the world  
'til together we're just dandy.

Renata Pavrey  
*Mumbai, India*  
*Hour 18*

## **Happy Feet**

Ghungroos wound around ankles  
like fairy dust sprinkled on my feet  
magic swirling its way up and around  
paying homage to Mother Earth

The soft caress of a silk saree  
adorned with silver jewellery  
on my neck, waist, arms  
wearing headgear like a crown

The dance is a gift  
for dancer and audience  
more than a prayer  
or choreography

Hands and feet painted with alta  
I am a creation of color  
through my dance, I bring  
hope and happiness

Heart bursting with joy  
at doing what I love  
sharing a story through  
music, movement, rhythm

I'm happiest when I dance  
on stage and off it  
feet nestled in ghungroos  
fairy dust guiding every step

K. L. Vivian  
*Houston, Texas*  
*Hour 15*

## **After the Drought**

All gentleness is gone,  
shriveled, curled and peeling in flakes.

The air holds dust so light it becomes a color,  
stifling the landscape.  
It never falls.

We breathe it and our lungs choke with loss.  
Nothing can shine.  
Everywhere green hope lies gasping.

There is a quiet pain, always just beyond awareness  
until a sharp, angular light pierces the sullen haze  
like a fierce intensity of longing  
for the lost and unattainable.

My body lies parched like a gaping mouth  
straining for breath, unable to moisten  
its cracked lips. Choked.

Limp arms flail meaninglessly, and life  
leaks out of a heart crusted over.

You arrive like the first drops of a long, sweet rain.

Leonora Obed  
*Ewing Township, New Jersey*  
*Hour 3*

## **My Big Dipper Helmet**

I am waiting to be born.  
Squatting on the welcome mat  
of the world,  
I mimic my bullfrog totem  
animal  
and croak and burp and fart.  
But no attempt  
can match his majesty.  
My bullfrog jumps on my head and creates  
a halo of mud and slime above and around  
my eyebrows,  
a taste of what's to come.  
He starts the chorus  
and I pretend to be a coqui,  
the Caribbean crooner  
exiled to a Hawaiian luau.  
I am impatient,  
wanting so much to be born.  
I want to jump onto the sea of stars  
and fall into the Big Dipper's  
domain.  
My body's heavy.  
My head even heavier.  
Bullfrog says my parents have seen my huge head  
and  
return me to God.  
I don't know it yet,  
but  
no more of me will be born,  
ever.  
I'm a Down's Syndrome Child  
and I wear my Star-Helmet  
with Pride.

Katie Scholan  
*Bristol, United Kingdom*  
*Hour 12*

## **May Morning**

They amass to raise the sun,  
the ropes a braid of chord and song,  
the darkness folk to cheer them on  
as through the night they gather on.

In the starlight, start to weave  
a netting out of ringing feet,  
and momentarily believe  
as the shout goes up to 'heave!'

First light like a banner pale;  
a gauzy dawn, perhaps too frail?  
To lift the weight of summer's sail,  
but never do the dancers fail.

As she mounts into the air,  
unimaginable pennants flare;  
amber, gold and yet more rare,  
to celebrate this cosmic care.

They amass to raise the sun,  
their ropes a braid unfailing strong,  
of love and hope and dance and song.  
And though they laugh to move along,  
they will be back again, ere long.

Donna Meyer  
*West Virginia*  
*Hour 18*

## **Fragments**

A window shatters  
Tiny squares of glass cascade down  
mixing with the gravel in my driveway  
bright and unnatural as diamonds

For days I sift through the gravel  
my gloved hand picking out cuboids  
and prisms and oblongs and shards  
separating shiny window glass from the dusty gravel

I picture myself as Cinderella  
picking the lentils from the ashes  
What a tedious task that was

But it is not so bad  
here on my front step  
Dustpan full of gravel  
Bucket filling with glass

Like Cinderella  
I have the birds to sing to me

Mark Lucker  
*Minneapolis, Minnesota*  
*Hour 21*

## **Practicality**

“Come in, she said I’ll give ya shelter from the storm.”  
– Bob Dylan

I have never had much use  
for umbrellas  
keeping rain at bay  
as antithetical  
to a poet as  
sunscreen to a snowman  
I need no stick-canopy  
except for thoughts  
let it rain, pour  
in my words you’ll find  
shelter  
from your storm



Megan McDonald  
*Fairfax, Virginia*  
*Hour 8*

## **On the Edge**

the walkers on the edge  
balance the turns

they are the stilt walkers  
chair builders  
aerial ribbon weavers

they make joy out of chaos  
make mundane magical

the audience watches  
the impossible done daily

when the impossible flies  
the walkers on the edge

are the transition from tricks to magic  
when reality fades

magic is born  
making joy out of chaos

Angela L Pantilione  
*Scottsdale, Arizona*  
*Hour 1*

## **Hush of morning**

From the rush comes the hush of the morning  
where the birds continue to sing above the din  
as the traffic hustles and bustles  
with roaring cars going nowhere  
to places they will never remember.

The pool stands still as the planes fly over  
reflecting their flight into the unknown.  
The coolness of the morning quietly carries  
birdsong causing the pool to ripple...  
still though— undisturbed by the clamoring of man.

Mourning doves softly coo and coo, lamenting the world  
while the finches figure out ways  
to drink from the depths of the pool.  
The Kingbird trills as the traffic builds.  
And the Mockingbirds mimic all.

## **I may not be The Best**

In this world full of charms,  
I may not be the best;  
yet certainly, I'm not like the rest,  
a path wide enough  
for only two of us to walk abreast.  
The feelings the emotions,  
no real love, just the lust,  
failed to learn the maneuvers,  
mocked by the dirty trickers  
trying to kill my innocence,  
every action under a surveillance,  
trying to overcome the resentment.  
Ignored the Prophecy,  
fallen prey to Destiny,  
it's not as easy as I assumed  
to conserve the world from being doomed.  
I guess I was wrong;  
fixing the cold world,  
filling the warmth of love  
is not going to be easy as a task.  
Yet, I am happy with the suffering;  
the cost I paid for honesty is vast.  
In this world full of fallacies,  
I may not be the best,  
but at least I am not like the rest.

Joyce Bugbee  
*Higganum, Connecticut*  
*Hour 22*

## **Tenderness**

Tenderness  
a feeling  
an emotion

Tenderness  
soft  
gentle

Tenderness  
grandma's hands  
mom's kiss

Tenderness



## **Reality and the Elusive**

*“Either you deal with what is the reality, or you can be sure that the reality is going to deal with you.”*

*Alex Haley*



Gabby Gilliam  
*North Potomac, Maryland*  
*Hour 16*

## **Still Here but Buried Deep**

I was wild strawberries in a Tupperware bowl,  
taste of summer sun and sweetness on tongue.

I was bare feet running on gravel,  
thick-skinned from habit and determination.

I was warm milk in a bucket and hay-filled hair,  
practiced hands unafraid to jump from the loft.

I was pine sap and climbing to the highest branch,  
tough to wash off but appreciative of the view.

Where did that confident girl go?



Chidi Nebo  
*Lagos, Nigeria*  
*Hour 1*

## **Rain**

childhood is but a distant past,  
when we flaunted our naked innocence  
before a dying world,  
shrieking at the silvery darts  
dotting our bodies with pimples of rain.

now the rain is gone;  
the rainbow of life gradually fades  
like our innocence  
and on our dried-out lips the question hangs-  
where did our innocence go?

## **Life is Art**

Does art imitate life, or is life art?  
A sequence of exhibits to be seen  
just once in a lifetime, or through a screen  
but beauty feels superficial through glass.

Only by standing with bare feet upon the grass  
can you understand what feeling must mean  
to the birds on the branches as they preen  
...birds which were ready to fly from the start.

It is in their nature to touch the sky;  
to return, to build a home from debris,  
creating new life without intention.  
Nature is beauty; without having to try  
or be shown, birds build a nest in a tree  
making it ready for their creation.

J. Lynn Turney  
*Huntsville, Ontario, Canada*  
*Hour 1*

## **The Pleasure of Dipping Toes**

Golden, velvet, sloping sand,  
an invitation  
to a conversation ongoing as life.

Feeling it through my toes  
long before touching the fluttering, fluid edges,  
cool and damp, assuring you're there.

Crossing the line between land to sea,  
hesitant, polite and respectful,  
gentle waves tickle, tempting memories to the surface.

"I've been here before,"  
I sigh at the connection.  
Whispering with each lap, you reply,  
"Forever, so have I."

Starla Tipton  
*Mandan, North Dakota*  
*Hour 19*

## **luminescence**

a city of mushrooms  
filled to the brim with  
grazing giraffes  
and  
death-dropping drag queens

i want to live in a fantasy

i want to be surrounded by  
a fairy tale  
coupled with  
what our own world ought to be

loving  
and caring  
and inclusive  
and free

i want to see women rule  
in the forms of trolls,  
centaurs and  
supreme court justices

i want to feel power  
over myself and my life  
and i want to feel that

while dancing among fireflies

Gina Gil  
*Arlington, Virginia*  
*Hour 24*

## **Stardust**

Stardust clouds  
my mind when I contemplate  
beginnings and endings. Both seem impossible  
from where I stand,  
in the middle.  
Unable to imagine not existing  
before or after this self I know now. Will I remain  
and know who I am? Or forget everything  
and dissolve back into stardust?

Ariel Westgard  
*Fort Myers, Florida*  
*Hour 8*

## **The Colors of My Life**

I look around me and see the colors of my life.

The red cinnamon hot anger that flows through me when met with injustice.

The blue cold cascading water that flows over my body as I try to drown out my sadness.

The green zesty sour of limes as I feel jealousy spike through my blood.

These colors define me yet as I search, I realize I am missing some.

I am missing those happy colors –

The pink of sweet tarts as love fills my heart.

The yellow of a bright crayon that a toddler uses to color the sun.

The orange citrusy taste that fills my mouth as I laugh with my family and friends.

The colors of my life define me.

They create who I am and what I believe.

Yet a part of me always feels missing – like crayons have broken out from the box.

## **Brokenly Inharmonious**

Little by little  
the space spreads;  
it spreads between us  
like wasted time,  
robbing us of the many  
more instances for our fingers to intertwine.

The tick-tock,  
tick-tock of the metronome  
forces the colors to change in the leaves.  
Faster each time,  
each time the tempo picks up.  
The tempo picks up.

Where did all the spider webs come from?  
We look back to the times  
the music was lively,  
lively and joyous.  
Surely we could've kept  
the melody from turning sour?

But sometimes,  
sometimes the keys don't make the right sound  
and we're left with an out of tune piano.

Our bodies give way  
and like mannequins,  
we stiffen.  
We stiffen, letting the strings that bind us  
become brokenly inharmonious.

Perhaps the piano was fine  
and it was us who hit the wrong keys.

V.J.Calone  
*Lindenhurst, New York*  
*Hour 2*

## **The Time; it is Against Us**

The time; it is against us.  
How the hour is getting late. Wait!  
Easy, Charlie... take your time and trust us.

Tempt fate and find your mate,  
if you use what you have wisely.  
Minutes, like dog-years blindly  
erasing each hour off the clock.

“Invest your time wisely,” they say.  
Time flies when you are having fun this way.

“Into each life some rain must fall.”  
Surely, time is on my side.”

Another hour, another year,  
going in circles, have no fear.  
Another trip around the pond,  
in search of soulmate for a song.  
Never mind the one-eyed toad,  
stay in sight and off the road.  
The mighty Mayfly takes to flight,  
  
under the hosta and out of the light,  
she appeared to his delight.



Blessing Omeiza Ojo  
*Abuja, Nigeria*  
*Hour 22*

## **In Which Every Sea Quavers with Tenderness**

Ever had an uncle who would send you to buy him lunch  
after gifting you some lashes on your buttocks?  
He is not different from this home of terror  
in which every tent owner quavers with fear  
no matter how blue and calm the music playing beneath is.  
We love this home still, even though the love she professed for us  
is gone like a parrot who just got freedom from slavery.  
And some of us,  
once angelic to the bite of grief,  
new to the singing of elegy, innocent of the fact  
that the colour of our loved ones' blood poured  
on the soil as libation to the hungry gods is the same as  
that of barbarians that killed them,  
harmonize in fear  
and we are learning to be wild, to reflect our fears,  
to defend our tomorrow, stationed at the mouth of the sea.  
The memory bank says many of us have sunk into memory.  
We, still alive, will not sink into this sea which is also a memory.  
We write our grief and pain on our skin, our fears on the sky  
for God to read it out to the angels in a guttural voice.  
No matter how deep a poem is, it's not abysmal enough  
to swallow our fear. At the reception, we are watching  
the newlywed vibe to Buga\*, a bang louder than gun's calls for attention.  
We do not find the groom to say amen  
to long life, amen to blissful home, amen to the taste of moon.

*\*A music that sends every gathering into frenzy in Nigeria*

Mel Neet  
*Kansas City, Missouri*  
*Hour 15*

## **Nothingness**

Gasps of organic matter stand frail sentry  
in your doorways.

Willow wisps, meadow grass, chuffed wheat stalks, prairie blades  
in every color known to Pantone  
are referenced by your hosts.

All of your agents are thanked  
and all of your rooms explored  
no matter how similar.

These studies in skeletal flora  
occupy molten pots heavy enough to be moveable only by Hercules  
at pivot doors that reach the sky,  
and we are hushed as we enter.

Rooms that will never be inhabited are set  
as though for an episode of a late '90s dramatic series  
in which every girl wore plum brown lipstick and  
every boy ran his hands through his hair  
to indicate concern.

Still, there's no lack of effect  
in how unaffected every element in its undone-ness is.

For all its impenetrability,  
– with its home theater, its bathrooms that outnumber its bedrooms, and its  
panic room –  
the structure might as well be a dandelion.

Mandi Smith  
*Balch Springs, Dallas, Texas*  
*Hour 8*

## **A Mother's Love**

*I am* the mother of four babies.  
*I wonder* how it happened as I've never known a boy.  
*I hear* my babies squealing, seeking sustenance and safety.  
*I see* their empty eyes peering out from lifeless faces.  
*I want* to feel their tiny heartbeats vibrate through my sore and swollen body as they suckle from my chest.  
*I am* somehow broken; my babies all reject me.

*I pretend* there's not a problem.  
*I feel* my heart shatter into pieces.  
*I touch* their teeny tiny baby bodies, nudge them with my nose.  
*I worry* I have failed them. I fear all hope is lost.  
*I cry* out in despair, trying desperately to breathe life back into my babies.  
*I am* now a mother of none.

*I understand* now I was never a mother, but my body believed I was.  
*I say* these squishy, squealing squeak toys have always been my babies. *I dream* of fuzzy faces, of furry-footed foursomes that will one day call me MOTHER.

*I try* to listen closely as my master tells me we weren't all made to be mothers.  
*I hope* she's majorly mistaken. Perhaps she's confused and crazy like I was.

*I am* a childless Chiweenie, desperate to be a doggy mama.

## **The World Grinds On**

The world would grind on  
when you lose your breath;  
when, like a log, what's left  
of you is heaved into the earth,  
shovelfuls of dirt hitting  
your resting box hewn from  
any tree of the carpenter's fancy –  
udara, melina, iroko, oak, mahogany –  
who really cares?

Mourners would wipe dry eyes  
and get on a feasting match –  
God bless the dead  
whose death  
has brought us this bread.

Family would war to death  
if you were of mega means;  
some tear to shreds  
even for meagre means.

A memorial a year if they cohere,  
and, maybe, a reluctant visit to your  
resting place, with paparazzi in tow,  
just for the show.

Then, in time, everyone forgets  
even your fondest jokes.  
Now you're but a distant  
thought, a faint memory,  
for even those who remember  
near their inevitable end.

It's not for want of love  
or empathy; life burdens each  
with not just a cross that even  
the living forgets the living.



## **Interlude of the Heartbeats**

*“I have been waiting for you so long in my forever.”*

*Atticus*



Cynthia Hernandez  
*Bremerton, Washington*  
*Hour 18*

## **Sipping Joy**

You showed up at my door  
with a smile and a quick kiss.

I sipped joy all morning,  
as I tasted your name.



Amrutha Nair  
*Barcelona, Spain*  
*Hour 15*

## **Cold**

The cold creep up,  
through the skin,  
into the bones,  
into the soul.  
All I could do was  
to think about you,  
the warmth,  
the heat.  
Wonder what it did?  
Was it warmth  
or a sharp chill  
right in the heart?  
Our bodies were warm,  
but the heart,  
a bit too cold.  
It kills me,  
slowly,  
and then,  
all at once.

Gypsie-Ami Offenbacher-Ferris  
*Southport, North Carolina*  
*Hour 5*

## **The Date**

The pavement hot beneath her sandaled feet,  
walking briskly,  
leather satchel swinging at her side.

Sitting in their favorite space  
preparing the wine glass and  
cheddar cheese, her favorite.

A lovely knitting gift,  
a sunflower blanket beneath her,  
allowed her dainty sandals to slide away.

Her satchel hanging on a nail  
placed so long ago for just  
that reason, on the old oak tree.

She could barely accommodate  
her excitement and wonder,  
being with him again this day.

Reverently, longingly, lovingly,  
she pulled out her hardback novel,  
opened it, and there he was.

Jana O'Dell  
*Charleston, West Virginia*  
*Hour 18*

## **Her**

The way the orange and red shine upon her rose colored cheeks is  
something I hope to never forget  
The way the drips of rain gently flow down her skin is something I hope to  
see a thousand times  
The way the stars seem to all gather in her eyes as she looks at me is  
something I hope I never become blind to  
Yet here I am  
Taking it all for granted  
Knowing my whole galaxy lives within her  
For some reason still choosing to close my eyes

## **Distinct notes of togetherness**

We are two violinists, with distinct personalities,  
comfortable playing our own tunes,  
creating and composing songs that depict our journey.

We are now a part of an orchestra, tasked with finding a rhythm,  
to create songs together, to compose music that touches  
our hearts, the hearts of our listeners.

How compelling is the music we play together, the notes  
of high and low, in tune with life's challenges that we face  
together and alone... the give and take, the showing up,

in the music, with the music, for the music... that resonate  
with our core, that represent melody of when and where  
life entwines... and separates, for each life - every song - is unique.

Elizabeth Durusau  
*Athens, Georgia*  
*Hour 3*

## **Dance with Me**

Have this dance with me.  
Run your fingers over the wood  
and play a harmony.

Duets are forever dances,  
even when we aren't moving  
our feet to the rhythm.

And yet we are  
as the notes fill the room  
and we sway in time,

each of us shining  
in our own way  
with the music.

Stay with me  
for this one dance  
before the night is done.

Let me have  
this moment with you  
to keep forever in my heart.

DJ Delashmit  
*Covington, Tennessee*  
*Hour 6*

## **Wither**

I want to lay with you on a hand-stitched quilt on an open field full of sunflowers. My Darling Dear, like the flower, this too is our finest hour, and although we too will someday wither and fade, my Darling Dear, my love, no not today, no not today.

Simona Frosin  
*Galati, Romania*  
*Hour 17*

## **Painting rainbows**

Will you receive me  
under your umbrella  
so that I do not get soaked?  
It's easier and pleasant  
to face this rain together!

And maybe we'll share ideas,  
kisses and memories under  
your generous umbrella.  
Afterwards our heart  
will paint rainbows.

Danielle Wong  
*Pierrefonds, Quebec, Canada*  
*Hour 20*

## **Ocean Love**

Waves massage the beach  
as quietly as they can  
to carry breezes sweet  
to the lovers on the land,  
who sleep beneath the leaves  
of the palms that did fan  
the heat of passion's feet  
away from the soft sand.



Kayla Aldan  
*Boardman, Ohio*  
*Hour 6*

## **I've Never Forgotten You**

As trees lose their leaves,  
and flowers lose their petals,  
you left a piece of yourself with me  
and I pressed that piece of you  
into my heart.  
I could keep you there,  
the same way we take flowers and leaves  
and press them between the pages of books  
so we can have those reminders.

Amber L. Crabtree  
*Mesa, Arizona*  
*Hour 15*

## **In Your Eyes**

Casually looking through photographs  
I realiz your eyes remind me of  
the most exquisite Labradorite.

They whisk me to a dimension  
where my unattainable hopes and dreams  
all come to fruition.

With you by my side my life comes alive.

Your love, the epitome of  
romanticism in bloom,  
tender hands dance through my Autumn-esque hair  
during the nights we converse jubilantly.

Elegant, yet timid your heart tells me secrets  
you've never divulged to another.

In the here and now, we facilitate our own suffering  
as I wonder, do we have too much to give each other,  
or not enough to matter?

Ivan Bekaren  
*Lagos, Nigeria*  
*Hour 8*

## **Show me all the stars**

Silver speed in this bottle of unrest,  
sweet deceit upon sensuous bare skin,  
falling for this wild thing which brings us this wicked ease,  
solemn confusion.

Veiled bliss, and enchanting power in secret places.

My senses linger long,  
desire awakens strong,

and we're birthing escape bruises  
before they mark our hearts...  
birthing lust under this liquid scarlet glow.

No exit, only blinding ecstasy.  
Silver speed in this bottle of unrest,

my senses linger long,  
taking in shape, scent and pull of this bottle,  
the sin of its instigating poise.

Now kill my innocence,  
show me all the stars.

**Burning...**

I Want You Now  
like I needed you then...

Fire races between us  
when we are skin to skin.

So deep inside me  
I yearn in pain...

Only you can fill me  
make me whole again...

So far away  
So close to my heart...

How can I live  
with us so far apart?

## **Ballerina**

You smile across the table.  
Your eyes locked with her dancing frame,  
watching, observant, as she gets lost in the music.  
She glides across the room,  
each pirouette perfect,  
each glissade on point.  
She moves with grace,  
a portrait of elegance.  
She twirls in her pink tutu,  
eyes closed as the music builds.  
I see you fall deeper  
as you observe her every move,  
adoration sparkling in your eyes.  
The last chord strikes,  
her bright eyes cracking open,  
meeting your piercing gaze.  
She curtsies and smiles,  
all eyes are on her  
as she bows out,  
leaving you to dream of her  
under the city's stars.

Danielle Martin  
*Trinidad and Tobago*  
*Hour 19*

## **The City: Nightlife on the Avenue**

I can't tell what hits my senses first  
wafting musical notes or the  
twinkling lights from sky and land

Maybe it's the  
pungent rippling teasing smells  
of fried chicken  
of doubles  
of hot wings  
of mampie burgers  
of gyros and Chinese too

Maybe it's the  
sensation of skin brushing against skin  
making way to the bar  
or his gentle touch upon naked shoulders as we dance  
to our song  
for tonight every song is ours  
the DJ is doing it right

Maybe it's the  
drinks hitting my tongue playing with my thoughts  
bringing laughter into the air  
adding to the organismic vibe  
that is this city by night

Jillian Calahan  
*Seattle, Washington*  
*Hour 15*

## **Eclipsing Beauty**

How can you  
look at your body,  
soft and round,  
and talk to it  
the way that you do?  
Even the earth gets  
so jealous of the moon,  
with all her curvatures,  
that it will place itself  
between her and the sun  
just to eclipse its beauty.

Davita Joie  
*Boston, Massachusetts*  
*Hour 2*

## **Breathe**

The woods are lovely, dark and deep, a perfect place for buried secrets.  
Ghosts curl themselves around the fallen trunks and muddied stones,  
the dank, decaying, sullen leaves.

I have been holding my breath  
since I was fifteen  
when the boy I loved biked to see me.

And here, decades later,  
on the darkest evening of the year,  
my breath returns with the force of a wailing banshee.  
Under this canopy of strangled silence,  
heart shattered in vengeful fury,  
pieces drifting on the air like angry fireflies.

I have promises to keep,  
but not to you.

*Inspired by Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"*



## **Never Ending Ache**

the deep timbre of your voice  
expending a nervous sensation  
all through these sinewy veins  
the holding of our gaze creating  
a surge of blush to dimpled buccal  
restless fingers wanting and waiting to entwine  
and the magic of vacuum 'tween us  
makes for a cloudy fog of a throb  
always fearful of gesticulating, for it might  
create a ripple, disturbing and distracting us  
from the tense hypnotic air hanging dense  
tearing it apart at the seam  
reducing the magic to just a whim

so despite wanting to reduce the space between our palms  
we don't  
because who knows what may happen when the veiny hands  
make its way over across every inch of this skin  
will the cells awaken from their deep slumber?  
raging like a hungry beast, devouring everything in its way?  
or will it just be a reminder that  
you always want what you can't have  
or don't allow yourself to have  
except for this ghost of a perpetual ache

Daun Wright  
*London, Ontario, Canada*  
*Hour 15*

## **Empty Soul**

Lust snatches souls and minds, craters into an abyss of depravity.  
The inability to pull back an impossible task as one plunges deeper and deeper

into a dark bottomless hole, helplessness prevails.  
Escaping it unattainable, so one ventures deeper into a quagmire  
of images and behaviors that taints the soul.

A profound desire to acquire wealth and possessions  
and an unquenchable pull towards things left behind in departure, death!  
Does it make sense then to live in the twirl of a whirlwind that makes you  
dizzy?

For as desire is satisfied after each new toy,  
lust, a temporary feeling, bottoms out into nothingness,  
leaving in its trail empty lives and broken people.

Lust snatches souls and leaves them mangled, like twisted metal from a car  
wreck!

## **Carnivorous Carnival (Dyer-Bolique)**

Hope plays the role contrite, L'art Cullinaire served on despair,  
'You remember your place, my hold ever renewed!'  
For what is flavour is loyalty, if yours is insipid impaired.

She basks on pleasantries, humouring my air,  
Callously agreeable, contented, and shrewd.  
Hope plays the role contrite, L'art Cullinaire served on despair.

As doe eyes adore, awaiting my approvals care,  
'A pleasant idea,' a mock and impugn,  
'For what is flavour is loyalty, if yours is insipid impaired'

'My canines are trained, versed in savageries prayer,  
but fear not my heart, you they will not consume!'  
Hope plays the role contrite, L'art Cullinaire served on despair.

She dances and connives, I see her in my vacant stare,  
within my gaze, darkly dreaming visions accrue,  
for what is flavour is loyalty, if yours is insipid impaired.

I have ensnared you once, for I am the fox to your hare,  
'Tonight, we hunt, for flesh's atonement is due!'  
For what is flavour is loyalty, if yours is insipid impaired,  
hope plays the role contrite, L'art Cullinaire served on despair.

## **L'Art Cullinaire (Valkyrie)**

Crimson candles glow, meaty cutlets served,  
romanticised date, I remember you,  
first desirous date, feigning fear reserved.

'What is this sweet meat?' More than I deserved,  
passions rekindled, guilt for doubting you,  
crimson candles glow, meaty cutlets served.

Evil smirk spreads, 'Your arm I had preserved!'  
Guilt abates, once again your colours true,  
first desirous date, feigning fear reserved.

‘Raising two wolves, their hunger I observed,  
and fed them meat cutlets as one must do,’  
Crimson candles glow, meaty cutlets served.

I hide my horror, submission subserved,  
taking each mouthful, I carefully chew,  
first desirous date, feigning fear reserved.

My resolve steady, plan in place deserved,  
‘Werewolves made great horror beasts too, that slew!’  
Crimson candles glow, meaty cutlets served,  
first desirous date, feigning fear reserved.



## **Morsels of Memories**

*“Each time I think I’ve created time for myself, along comes a throwback  
to disrupt my private space.”*

*Wole Soyinka*



David Bruce Patterson  
*Bracebridge, Ontario, Canada*  
*Hour 15*

## **A Tribute to Emily Dickinson “Berries”**

I taste a concoction,  
an investment of time  
sublime. In the elegance of the heritage crystal  
of berries so rich and royal;  
such potency!

The family room  
takes on an air of inebriation,  
like the carpet is dewed  
with aged cherry;  
a merry playful mist ensues.

There are words of nectar,  
wine and fortification,  
going to fine Inns,  
to carry on this rousing.  
Shall there be but more?

This, the soup of hope,  
in nature's bowl.  
Our souls the spoon of courage  
and wonder,  
rimmed with idle curiosity.

Sweet and sour,  
the pain of what draws me  
and the joy of dawning retreat;  
the victory of my shelter,  
whether wood or a broken heart.

The little miracles  
in frantic flight;  
the sight of buzzing Bees  
in their visitation  
of fragrant passing,  
tasting  
a part of me.



Margarette Wahl  
*Long Island, New York*  
*Hour 12*

## **Sounds of His Chuckle**

*In memory of Francis Maiorino*

His son recites a script as he records  
the hilarity behind his phone,  
full of life and merriment.  
A time where he seems  
happy,  
glee in belly giggles  
recorded on his IG.  
This derision, such an  
illusion, now  
four months since he passed  
away.  
A jollity worth  
remembering,  
I watch it over and over,  
never growing tired of his  
snigger.  
His jest reminds me of his  
days  
in Junior High; caught him  
in trouble  
snickering still.

Shirley Durr  
*Minneapolis, Minnesota*  
*Hour 22*

## **Monarch Butterfly a Wing**

Did the title tap memories of feelings so right  
they moved your heart higher than a soaring kite?  
Did you imagine yourself in a meadow so bright  
the colors would bind you in endless delight  
while wandering waterbirds dance and excite  
You? Did you assume serenity would land your sight  
on a monarch butterfly caught in mid-flight  
while skimming and skipping over lakes so lightly,  
ephemeral motion, in stillness made mightily  
calm, profoundly full of meaning and insight?

You suppose wrong; the title's not a typo.

Stepping out of the church's front door —  
in a fog of solemn sorrow and ire  
after a troubling memorial service  
for a troubled sister who had left me  
hurt, angry, too soon, and unresolved —  
I glimpsed a butterfly wing on the sidewalk  
just before my next step would crush it.

I froze in thought, "Oh, Butterfly!  
Where have you gone?"  
And remembered my much-admired beloved sister.  
I spoke to the missing piece,  
"Are you still flying on one wing?"  
And remembered my enigmatic, wounded sister.

My mind's eye created instant poetry:  
"Did some jealous god capture you  
to rip your wing  
from your frail body  
then spirited you away  
and left you forsaken  
far from your wing  
to seal the separation?"  
And remembered my fiercely gifted sister.

(Oh, my sister!  
No one ever – before or since –  
so close to me  
so far apart.)

All in a fleeting moment  
I stooped to gather up the wing —  
ignoring voices speaking comfort,  
hugs seeking to console me  
with joys in their memory of her.

Rejecting those useless cares,  
while remembering them kindly.  
I tucked their memories and my wing  
between two pages of eulogy  
and took them home with me  
to wash myself in all the unshed tears  
drowning me in despair.  
They're still here – the memories and the wing —  
on the wooden box that holds her ashes.

On that otherwise empty bookshelf,  
the dust covers happy memories  
and she (oh, butterfly!) looks so forlorn;  
in my dreams she's flying.  
In her life I dreamed I could make her whole again;  
she would not land long enough to let me.

When I saw a craft vendor tossing away  
a wooden dragonfly with one wing missing,  
I offered to buy it; we bargained for two:  
one whole and the other I wanted.

I keep the dragonflies on the ashes box,  
placing the butterfly wing  
where the dragonfly's is missing.

The dragonflies stay still.  
But every now and then  
the wing  
moves —  
Is it trying to fly? —

Once the wing fell and was lost  
to me.

I recovered it  
while dusting behind the box.

Sometimes I forget the whole one;  
even when it's there, I don't see.  
I allow the sight of the wounded one —  
and the wing — to haunt me,  
knowing the butterfly will never be whole  
but hoping to one day reach  
Solace and Resolution.

Yet,  
maybe I began this wrong.  
Perhaps, after all,  
this will be  
about finding serenity  
while watching a butterfly, a wing.

## **Lady Midnight**

An unequal world served as her beckoning.  
It was an everyday battle for her every right.  
She vowed to be a queen in the tyranny of the king,  
looking for passages and tunnels for hiding.  
She moved silently in the cover of the night.  
The unequal world served as her beckoning.  
She knew when to attack and when to take a swing,  
to come back and live for another fight.  
She'd be a queen in the tyranny of the king.  
She spent her time training and waiting, biding,  
taught herself lessons from a helpful knight.  
The unequal world would surely cause her beckoning.  
She paid her dues and hellfire she did bring,  
the guards and the king froze at the sight.  
She knew she'd be a queen in the tyranny of the king.  
She christened herself Queen at her own crowning,  
with the blessing of the universe under the starlight.  
In an unequal world, which served as her beckoning,  
She was the queen in a tyranny of the king.

Cindy P. Whitaker  
*Durango, Colorado*  
*Hour 5*

## **The Sunflowers Bobbed**

He came home for the funeral; things looked much as when he had visited at Christmas.

Working overseas for a homeland security company had kept him away a lot after 911.

Hymns, sandwiches, hugs and tears during the old-fashioned church service seemed surreal.

Family, friends, and friends like family gathered and rallied. She was well loved by all.

They talked every Sunday; facetime had held no appeal although they had attempted it once or twice.

He couldn't believe his dear grandmother had passed away so suddenly. What a shock! A terrible shock!

He sat down and thought about growing up in this house; her love and care surrounded him.

Looking for keepsakes wasn't why he lingered; he had simply come to say goodbye. And thank you.

A ten-year-old best seller, a large print hardback, lie open on the threadbare lounge.

The knitting basket had tipped over and colorful balls of yarn had spilled out onto the floor.

Just outside the kitchen window, a garden of sunflowers bobbed, twisted and strained toward the sun.

The grand old oak stood as still as a sentry at the corner of the yard, nestled by crumbling pavement.

The nail holding down a corner of the carpet was rough and bent, collecting extra dirt in the space.

An empty wineglass sat unattended on the back patio; a cloth napkin had blown under the chair.

A recipe for Gma's famous au gratin potatoes hung front and center on the frig; held snug by a huge "Got Beef?" Magnet.

She had made that casserole for every church potluck; Tillamook cheese was her secret ingredient.

A stack of all the postcards and letters he had written her were buried in the bottom of her worn leather satchel.

He knew he'd find them there, along with a few smooth rocks from the Oregon coast and a tiny stuffed owl.

He walked around one more time; he bent down to grab her "helpers" and sat them next to the book.

He decided there was no need to clean up or pick up; memories like his could not be boxed up.

## **The Seashell**

I took my baby to the beach;  
I walked her to the water,  
a million seashells in our reach.  
A day for Mom and daughter;  
a moment that had harkened back  
to days spent in my youth.  
My Dad and I had quite the knack  
of finding hope and truth.

How does one find truth and hope?  
Within a simple shell,  
each one has the means to cope,  
amid each ocean swell;  
a story that one can all but guess,  
that brought it here this day.  
But one I stand here to profess  
is profound in its way.

Up against the ocean's odds,  
the shell has bounced along.  
its fate left only to the gods  
amid the currents' strong.  
Yet here it stands within our hands,  
so perfect and pristine,  
upon arrival to the lands  
on water, crystalline.

I took my daughter to the beach,  
a day of summer fun.  
Fond memories within my reach,  
beneath the summer sun;  
for not just searching for the shells  
but stopping to think too.  
Despite the many ocean swells,  
the seashell made it through.



The day became a blessing  
for my daughter to recall.  
The shell is but a lesson  
of survival for us all.  
A symbol of the will and might,  
we all hold deep inside,  
that carries us past every plight,  
to reach our shores in stride.

## **Tenderness**

I wonder who you could have been?  
That part of you trapped within.  
That little one; if only, you were treasured  
with “I believe in you’s” and love assured.

I wonder what you could have been?  
If resentment didn’t cage you in,  
sunk to “black sheep” of the family,  
always having to question your sanity.

I wonder where you could have been?  
If not that hostile place you were in.  
A disconnected, inconsistent, trap;  
any wrong move and they would snap.

I wonder how you could have been?  
If the mother you knew took you in-  
to the tenderness she threw away,  
but you always had to somehow pay.

Cut down to a shell of self-sabotage.  
Growing up disorientated in camouflage.  
Anguished and torn over the scorn,  
sewn within your own flesh and blood.

Now it’s on you to bury them in mud.  
You got lost trying to “raise” them up,  
with brokenness and an empty cup.

Searching for love and belonging,  
the motherless ache always dawning.  
One by one lovers filled your cup.  
One by one they gave you up.  
Threw you out of their lives like junk.  
Packed up in a dim, pitiful trunk.

I wonder...  
If life didn’t echo what was dragged behind?  
Trying to escape the demons of your mind.

If you could just let go and look high above,  
past the pseudo storms of filtered fake love,  
and reach for Him, a love so endless and sincere,  
slamming all the doors to pain, trauma and fear.

## History of Summer and Winter

*Inspired by Stopping by the woods on a snowy evening*

The woods are lovely, dark & deep.  
Robert Frost

i. Lovely/Summer

My parents built a nest in the woods.  
I had plucked a star from  
a boy's lips.  
Brother drew color on his chin  
and we buried our hearts inside  
a tree's skin.

ii. Dark/Winter

Ice stole Paa away from me.  
Mother lost her voice to the  
snowflakes of penury.  
Brother got raped by a rainbow  
and my identity scurried away  
as we walked home.

iii. Summer/Deep

Brother would be going for a tour  
to the sky's edge, with his lover.  
A boy is locking my heart in a chest  
made of his own flesh  
and Mother is learning to speak  
for the first time, after winter.

Presley Tieman  
*Florida*  
*Hour 7*

## **Ordinary**

One lifetime is not enough to love you  
when I couldn't wait to say "I do."  
Doing laundry and taxes are mundane,  
but no day spent with you is spent in vain.

Loving you comes with ease  
so in the next life will you find me, please.  
They say when you take care of things,  
they last. And I can't wait to see what forever brings.

David L. Wilson  
*Wailuku, Hawaii*  
*Hour 7*

## **Too Many Syllables for a Haiku**

Before I met my wife  
I was as lonely as an empty bookshelf  
denying the existence of books

Lakita Gayden  
*Chicago, Illinois*  
*Hour 16*

## **Limerick**

There once was an infant from Illinois  
who ate or dismantled her toys

Her teeth tore through tires  
Her hands gripped like steel pliers

Unscrewing chair nuts and bolts brought her joy

## **Apartment Living**

My disgruntled neighbor

lives

under

the

stairs

The noise complaining basilisk

kills with a single glare.

Or maybe

he's a sea

serpent

eager

for war

a scaly-skin

kraken

of maritime lore.

I want to be a friendly tenant

and figure we should meet.

So, I bring him a plate of papayas

not knowing what a monster might eat.



Zeenat Razzak Shaikh  
*Pune City, Maharashtra, India*  
*Hour 15*

## **In her Eyes**

Mummy sits still  
surrounded by us three  
She is the perfect narrator  
Her small smile widens and spreads across her face  
as she slowly unravels her childhood tales  
How she'd pluck guavas with her siblings  
Times when they stole money  
swimming in rivers  
eating tamarind  
Her eyes gleam with joy  
the perfect small rounds enlarged  
Her face contracts in a way  
that surges pleasure in my heart at a high rate  
Long walks for water  
Mishaps, accidents and fights  
She tells us how my grandpa chose her as my father's bride  
We have heard her tales multiple times  
Yet, every time we listen eagerly with no interruptions.  
In her eyes we see  
who she was before being our mother  
A charmer  
A beauty  
Someone who'd live their lives to fullest  
Now she is just a responsible mother.

## **One of Many**

I sometimes wonder  
If you could ever conclude  
The depth of my emotions  
The rug you pulled underneath me  
I showed you all the love I could give  
It's worrying that you do not understand love  
The way I do, "I Love You" doesn't resound  
I have felt you near me, even when you were far  
You say I anchor your fleeting thoughts  
Calm the storm inside you  
That your soul recognizes mine  
But you still don't understand my love  
My love for you that ever was  
I am tired of showing my love to you  
I now lie silent at peace  
The same peace, which you said you see in me.  
Yours lovingly  
The Poet



## **Locomotive Locales**

*“The greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places.”*

*Roald Dahl*



Margo Wilson  
*Dunnellon, Florida*  
*Hour 19*

## **Dunnellon**

Dunnellon is a place I couldn't have imagined as my dwelling when I lived in L.A.

Five stoplights. One Walmart. No bookstore. No Starbucks.

I moved here, sight unseen, for various reasons we don't have to go into.

This is not supposed to be a nature poem, but Dunnellon is a nature city, more so than Thunder Bay, home of mountainous snowbanks blown off Lake Superior,  
or Monessen, atop the green rolling hills of Pennsylvania.

Deer, ibis, armadillos, and wild boars strut near my door.

Dunnellon strides the Rainbow and Withlacoochee Rivers. The Rainbow is a well of spring water, whose bottom undulates through looking-glass ripples.

The Withlacoochee is a different matter. Alligators sun on its banks and the weeds grow deep.

Snowbirds make their homes here much of the year.  
But in the deepest part of the summer,  
when the sun bears down and the humidity clings,  
Dunnellon is my place, humming and thrumming,  
growing and raining,

a Garden of Eden in my backyard.

Anjum Wasim Dar  
*Islamabad, Pakistan*  
*Hour 12*

## **Ode to a Nigerian Piece of Art**

O thou unbeaten, unsounded circular percussion,  
I admire thee!  
Placed elegantly in bride-like silence  
in historical African time,  
your smooth silky top, classically stitched  
with legendary leather, patterns criss-crossed,  
holds to secure the haunting beats-

What romantic tales bang out,  
what messages sweet,  
what calls for secret help,  
what melodies or saddened grieves!

O thou classic beat,  
flanked by sturdy woven seats  
and a royal blue vase to complete  
the ancient kingdom's high seat.

O thou African beauty,  
I admire thee!  
Thou hast thy music and grace.  
Soon the silence will break,  
thou shalt remain forever,  
beating out love and eternal peace.

## **Kusadasi**

The way to Samos,  
the green palm trees  
stood tall.  
The blue sky,  
houses built on rocks,  
picturesque view.  
The castle in the corner,  
busy with character,  
buzzing with life.  
Love of family,  
the shops in the marina.  
The coffee shop,  
tourists arriving,  
vacationers in diversity.  
The beauty of leaving,  
the harbour front,  
the waiting coaches.  
Kebab corner shops,  
Turkish tea on offer.  
The cruise in waiting,  
the business in the city,  
such a vibrant town.  
Kusadasi inscribed on  
the mountain top.  
The friendly locals,  
one shop on to another.  
Terzi means tailor.  
The Beauty of life.



Jarrold Fouts  
*Griffin, Georgia*  
*Hour 22*

## **After Texas**

It started with solar panel smashings  
fields were littered with the black spaceware  
twinkling in shards in the sun

next, they took down the turbines  
they were felled during maintenance  
Some unaware workers were seen on top  
embracing before jumping together

from there, the hydroelectric dam  
hole blown in wall by homemade device  
thousands of gallons crashed through  
drowning what must have been thought of  
as an acceptable cost

finally, the reactors melted down  
and the demon elephant's foot  
that amassed itself in Chernobyl  
paled in comparison  
to a new creature of uranium  
we can't even name

soon the smog and choke returned  
and every anti-green warrior  
worshipped again at the oil rigs and  
returned to the mines deep below  
to be crushed in collapses and have their lungs blackened  
dying, yet feeling so free  
pulling us with them into an Earth on fire.

Aleta D. Nolan  
*Alva, Oklahoma*  
*Hour 6*

## **The Sneaky Librarian**

There is a librarian  
down on 7th street  
in a tiny town library  
with gigantic feet.

I've seen them you know,  
those gigantic feet  
in the tiny town library  
down on 7th street.

I peeked through the window  
in the library door.  
She took her shoes off  
and danced over the floor.

I laughed and I giggled  
to watch those feet  
in the tiny town library  
down on 7th street.

The librarian looked up  
I knew it was time  
to run for the hills  
or the next dance was mine.

Betty Jean Steinshouer  
*Florida*  
*Hour 9*

## **Spam**

I laugh uproariously at the amusing song  
by Cheryl Wheeler, about the cruise ship  
that got stranded out at sea, and  
all they had to eat for a couple of weeks  
was pop tarts and spam, airlifted from the mainland.  
No one, from the most accomplished chef in a French café  
to the short-order cook in the greasy spoon, could make  
a fine meal out of those ingredients. Not enough bechamel  
sauce in all of France to dress up that awful can-shaped  
substance. Yet when we were young, eleven kids starving on a  
cold-water farm in the Ozarks, spam was the great luxury.  
We all waited, stair steps from four to twenty, eager for our slice,  
browned around the edges from the skillet, and delicious.

Dexta Jean Rodriguez  
*Ozark Mountains, Russellville, Arkansas*  
*Hour 17*

## **Subbing in America through Haiku**

The first day they learn  
conveyor belt of children  
red apple for lunch

Bollimuntha Venkata Ramana Rao  
*Telangana state, India*  
*Hour 19*

## **City Lights**

When the play came to an end  
at last the lights switch off  
The curtain closes on the podium

Tonight, the city under the firmament  
folded as a black blanket  
Congregation of the stars in the sky  
Wind chants melody tunes a lullaby  
The streets lights guard like a hawk

In palm tree-like houses  
They embrace dreams  
in their azure dreams  
It that black dark night  
The silence is also frightening.

This city for me now  
peeps it as a blackboard  
the pedagogue erased characters  
for next day class

Tobe T Tomlinson  
*Essex, Vermont*  
*Hour 10*

## **Understand**

Metal door creaks open rusty mailbox  
Blaze red flame decals flaking off warns  
Do not step in front of passing cars

Though the library waits paces away  
I remain eager to grab that packaged  
book inside to read after dark

Only banned books this summer will  
teach me how to know and feel a world  
remote from my country graveled drive

Understand how it is for others beyond  
this clapboard farmhouse in need of paint  
I learn with sincere and humble intention



# **A Dip into Metaphors**

*“That the moon is the eye of the night.”*

*Han Kang*





## **The Dragon on the Branch**

High upon the tallest tree,  
on the wooden branches,  
perched a dragon,  
looking out into the sea.

Its wings all curled up  
(I wonder how big they must be);  
its scales gleaming in the rays  
of setting sun scattered through the sea.

And I looked and looked at it some more,  
while waiting – for something to happen,  
for it to move or lean or stretch or...  
Anything really!

But still it sat with wooden eyes,  
on the high branch of the tree;  
just, simply, plainly  
looking over the sea when–

The ringing classroom bell brought me back to real life,  
where maths problems were the reality,  
and dragons on branches existed only in crevices of bored minds,  
imagination fueled by lack of fantasy.

With a last look outside the window,  
I sighed as I moved on to another story,  
entirely missing the dragon on the branch,  
finally unfurling its wings and flying towards the sea.

## **DogSpeak: Employment Application**

Name

The Dog

Skills

Retriever

fetch and fill with slobber,  
shred into crosscut pieces

Landscaper

unearth anything that makes noise  
or smells bad; digger, unplanner, uprooter

Demolition Expert

any material, no job too big or small;  
no clean-up included

Bounty Hunter

animal, vegetable, mineral  
anything, anywhere, delivered dead  
unless otherwise specified

Refrigerator Janitor

clean and clean-out but no kale,  
broccoli, spinach, nothing green

Greeter

kisses and free hugs  
non-discriminatory, though cats are iffy

Education

still learning from every fire hydrant,  
tree, and bush in my neighborhood  
no degree; mutt

Race (optional)

often, especially down the stairs

Age (optional)

in dog years or human years?

Any Allergies We Should Know About  
cats

Available Shifts  
between naps and meals

Salary Desired  
bones, kibble, treats, toys  
gas money for my humans

When Can You Start  
after lunch but I have to be home for dinner  
I can't stay out after dark

References  
Chance, Pebbles, Buster, Opie, Snickers,  
Munchkin, Gumball, the man who runs  
the dog park, my humans

Preferred Contact Method  
whistle

## Chipmunk

I peered outside the bathroom window  
early this morning, while the  
house was still asleep,  
looking for the chipmunk  
whose acquaintance I first made  
upon our late afternoon arrival  
just the day before.

A little long and skinny, I thought,  
for a chipmunk, but almond brown  
with black and white stripes clearly  
racing down his narrow back.  
I expected to see him, somehow,  
though I have no knowledge  
of his usual comings and goings.

The mud-and-grass patched ground  
lay still and empty, devoid of  
chipmunks or, indeed, any living creature.  
And I was strangely disappointed,  
as though the chipmunk had become,  
in actuality, my friend, and had  
thoughtlessly ignored my invitation.

Cheryl Mitchell  
*Inglewood, Ontario, Canada*  
*Hour 24*

## **May Queen**

the forest floor is triumphant;  
a platoon of purple petals, skyward  
and trumpeting their own arrival

exuberant mosses explode like champagne foam,  
to make a home on rocks and trunks and crevices  
amongst the riotous yellow cheer of bladderwort

winged creatures dance in their lady slippers  
to an orchestra of bird song  
and through a buffet of bitter lettuce, wild mint and thistle

the whistle of wind moving the grasses to sway and swoon  
in a collective appreciation of this springtime afternoon  
the diva fern with her maiden hair watches from a distance,  
her resistance more than futile in this constant forest flurry

the scurrying of squirrels, their tails bouncing through the brush  
a busy rush, a scamper, to gather up some nuts  
a spider puts up streamers and calls the flies to play  
it is a party of plenitudes for the reigning Queen of May

Joy Miller  
*Elkton, Oregon*  
*Hour 24*

## **Stardust is Made of Cheese**

“Stardust is made of cheese  
asleep in its own shoes,”  
my mind repeats,  
hoping for a little of each.

Sleep first. That glorious time  
when movies and music play;  
and I, the star, am the hero  
hoping for a resolution.

Then cheese, and showers,  
and shoes, and tea;  
water with lime and mint  
as I play examining stardust.

Carol Prost  
*Maynard, Massachusetts*  
*Hour 17*

## **Strawberry Moon**

rising crimson orb of night, large against the starry sky  
full of herself and unafraid to bedazzle.  
the sweet red flesh of passion bends the stem  
to the soft June ground, where  
field mice and voles sink their  
pointy teeth into each berry, then  
quickly move on to the next.  
ruby lips dripping summer's feast  
in the magic of moonlight.





# **Half Marathon Poems**



## **Two Years On (And Still Counting)**

*“At the end of the day, we can endure much more than we think we can.”*

*Frida Kahlo*



Vidhi Ashar  
*Bangalore, India*  
*Hour 15*

**winter solstice**

winter solstice  
the familiar warmth of  
i s o l a t i o n

Jan Rog  
*Kansas City, Missouri*  
*Hour 12*

## **Summer Gatherings of Old and Anew**

While camping we'd scatter  
to capture golden fireflies  
dancing in an ebony sky  
or  
yellow butterflies gracing  
a blue heaven  
before we'd circle 'round, tip heads together,  
open jars, and release them to freedom.

Hazy summer days when concrete  
sizzled and steamed  
we'd splash in opened hydrants  
or  
lay blankets side by side on welcoming  
green grass while music played in parks.  
Alongside our neighbors, we'd dance or sing  
finding coolness in spontaneous community.

Bustling, bumping, jolting, and jostling  
came with all our summer rituals,  
like noisy, daily bus rides delivering us to  
ball games with hot dogs, art classes in galleries,  
mischievous adventures along crowded streets;  
we all joined and journeyed together.

Whether a child or the sage adult I grew to be,  
I looked forward to summer gatherings.  
Suddenly older and cautious,  
I cherish calm rituals with a few loved ones  
as we slowly emerge from behind our masks.  
I grow content with my smaller, deeper world,  
shyly connecting with others as I see them with softer eyes.  
Still beautiful, yet now wistful, summer gatherings have transformed me.

Kristin Cleage  
*Atlanta, Georgia*  
*Hour 12*

## **Plague Year Three or is it Four?**

Will we ever gather again like  
we used to? Maybe the younger ones  
will. They already do. Us old folks,  
not ready to die yet, we'll gather in  
dibs and dabs. A child and their children  
here, another child there. A granddaughter,  
a grandson. A visit masked. A visit after  
testing.

Thanksgiving eve was the last big  
gathering for us. After that, the covid  
meandered through the family, up one side and  
down the other, hitting some twice.

The novelty of zooming long  
gone. Plague without end. Thankful  
we're all still on  
this side.



Anwar Suleman  
*Johannesburg, South Africa*  
*Hour 12*

## **GATHERINGS POST PANDEMIC**

Lockdowns and restrictions rescinded,  
gatherings are now permitted,  
as the pandemic marches towards a decline,  
with family and friends, we can now recline.

But wait!!!!  
My mind is in anguished debate!  
Am I ready for a forward surge?  
From my cocoon to emerge?  
To shed my safety covering?  
Like a social butterfly, to now be fluttering?

I WILL venture out, once again.  
But before the worldly gatherings conspire to seduce,  
at least let me enjoy and retain,  
one more day to be a recluse!

Cristy Watson  
*Calgary, Alberta, Canada*  
*Hour 12*

## **a gathering of poets**

around a drum  
the room filled with inspiration  
we gather to share our words. the long haul  
of covid slowly behind us, some still donning masks,  
we hear the rustle of paper, the shuffle of feet,  
and a chorus of snapping fingers when  
the lines are done. nodding heads and contemplative  
murmurs at the turn of a phrase, the twist  
of a rhyme, and the toe-tapping beat of the metre. how  
we missed this sustenance over the past two years—  
the heartbeat of metaphors, the pop-off-the page  
imagery that brings us right into the poet's mind,  
and how a simple word can pull a broken world  
back together.



## **Undone (Roe Vs. Wade and the Fallout)**

*“The strongest principle of growth lies in the human choice.”*

*Mary Ann Evans, who published under the name, George Eliot.*



Tricia L. Somers  
*Los Angeles, California*  
*Hour 9*

## **Woman With A Top Hat**

Woman with a top hat  
had to dress up like a man.

Opinions of misogynists  
switched up to laws

with no argument, debate  
or basic common decency.

Cut her hair.  
Tweaked her name.

Said she would be damned  
if she was gonna be robbed.

She wasn't gonna give back  
her share of the empire

females helped to build.  
So instead, she calls herself Rob.

She gets to keep her autonomy.  
Not to mention her humanity.

Erin Lorandos  
*Phoenix, Arizona*  
*Hour 10*

**and Raven was silent**

on the day the world turned dark  
fifty years became dust under our feet  
again, we marched for freedoms we had yesterday,  
and tears flowed, through smoke and anger

she, black beauty, keen eye –  
looked the other way  
when reason lost out to returns  
and the only color the men saw, was power

the spirits of our mothers no longer  
speak to us, we are now the lost souls  
and Raven is silent

Andrew Shaughnessy  
*Toronto, Ontario*  
*Hour 1*

## **The Day After the Bomb Went Off**

The morning, silent and still,  
betrayed the overwhelming  
news that a bomb  
had gone off,  
leaving those who planned

for this ominous event for  
years, as well as those  
caught after years  
of complacency  
and self-denial, to marvel  
at its occurrence and to plot

the contours of the shadow  
that the plume from this  
destruction  
would have  
on future years and lives.

As a dinosaur must have thought  
while viewing the meteor  
hurtling to  
an innocent earth:  
'How the hell will this work out?'

How the hell indeed.



Susan Hannon  
*Palm Desert, California*  
*Hour 4*

## **Wanted and Not Wanted**

Roe vs Wade was overturned today.

I walked into the break room and found  
my coffee pot gone.

Elsewhere a teenage girl found she'll have to carry  
her father's baby to term.

I walked next door to the coffee shop,  
snuck out of work unseen but  
their coffee was weak and I needed caffeine.

She went to a neighboring state  
and found out she was too far along  
but at least she won't be accused of murder  
when she returns home.

A year ago this time,  
mass graves were found  
of indigenous children killed a hundred years ago  
at old residential schools.  
They were stolen from their parents.  
These children were wanted and they were not wanted.

Three years ago in Perris California  
thirteen children were found  
imprisoned by their parents  
tortured in their house of horrors  
allowed to eat once a day,  
shower once a year;  
kept chained to their beds.  
These children were wanted and they were not wanted.

Roe vs. Wade was overturned today.

The coffee pot was gone from my break room.

And a girl realized her only hope to not bear her father's child  
had been taken away.

Laura Daniels  
*Mt Arlington, New Jersey*  
*Hour 4*

## **Change? What Change?**

A hundred years ago in 1922  
women's suffrage was beginning.  
Weapons were pistols, rifles, and Tommy guns;  
the 19th amendment passed, but women wanted more.  
Tommy guns were reserved for gangsters and movies.

Now in 2022  
abortion is ruled illegal, dissolving a fifty-year right.  
Open carry of a firearm is the law of the land;  
states can decide what a woman can do with her body.  
Something as simple as a zip code can determine rights and safety.

A hundred years from now in 2122  
Will we still be denying women human rights or worse?  
Will we still subject women to backstreet abortions or worse?  
Will we still be allowing open carry of assault rifles or worse?  
Will innocent children and bystanders still be getting gunned down or worse?

Ashay Mathieu  
*Los Angeles, California*  
*Hour 2*

## **Darkest Night**

The darkest evening of the year was the night six people stole women's constitutional rights.

The darkest evening of the year was the silence in Uvalde, Texas where the souls of twenty-one people left this earth because of gun violence.

The deepness of these tragedies only reflect the heart of our American humanity.

Who is listening to the outcries of the families of eleven black souls gunned down in a NYC town?

Now that is the "the darkest evening of the year", Robert Frost!

Robert did not know this day would come, perhaps with the hope of our divine one's

intervention,

tomorrow night will be better? I will pray, wait and see.

Leila Tualla  
*Spring, Texas*  
*Hour 1*

**and the women cried**

the world is on fire  
and i can feel the immense heat;  
can smell the flesh of trees burning,

hear the agony and cries of the earth.

i want and need the deluge to come  
and cleanse us and give life back to these  
parched lands. but the water does not come;  
instead tears spring from within.

and all the women cried in fury –  
their tears giving hope,  
life,  
soothing the heat of their aching heart.

the world is on fire  
but the women are not the ones burning.

## Shades

I saw amber waves of grain  
in a dream it must have been  
for they stretched for miles, so far,  
coast to coast, it seemed,  
and overtook all means to stop them.  
Fruitful they were, multiplying by the thousands,  
millions even,  
standing tall,  
waving in the breeze,  
effortlessly bending,  
and thus,  
unbreakable.

And then, as one – a mirage? But no –  
the amber shifted, not gradually,  
as when the season changes  
from summer to fall,  
but all at once  
as when a sudden summer storm breaks –  
electrical currents wreaking havoc –  
and those amber fields of grain,  
burst brilliantly into pink!  
Proud and vibrant and  
unabashedly female –  
the boldness of azaleas,  
magenta and fuchsia,  
and the blush of peonies  
and tulips' petals;  
subtle hues of coral and dusty rosewood,  
terracotta, and salmon;  
the pastels of bubble gum and babies' cheeks,  
of cotton candy,  
and flamingos.  
Onward they marched,  
fierce fields of persistence,  
until all was afire in pink,  
a rosy glow enveloping the nation,  
a spark growing into a blaze  
of fury.

Natalie Croney  
*Bowling Green, Kentucky*  
*Hour 2*

## **Hollowed Spaces**

“Because if you weren’t an Aunt or a Martha, said Aunt Vidala, what earthly use were you if you didn’t have a baby?” (Margaret Atwood in *The Testaments: The Sequel to The Handmaid’s Tale*)

The word womb.

The speakers of Old English used the word for belly, bowels, heart, uterus.  
Isn’t it amazing that it uses all forms of the word carry?

It holds like a bowl  
like the barrel of a gun  
like Hermes.

My last ultrasound was quiet, hollow, void  
as it should have been.

The only thing that I would have born  
would have been parasitic and violent,

But the quiet still gutted me.  
There is something solemn about an empty womb.  
To see it hallowed like a sanctuary, or  
hollowed out like a cave  
An echoing image of what could be – for better or worse–  
another life.

Sobriety occurs when I have a sneaking suspicion  
That the gods aborted all of my babies for me.  
Do I say thank you or scream until there’s a cave-in?

Colleen Schwartz  
*Bellingham, Washington*  
*Hour 8*

## **Riptide**

Like a river after a storm  
strong, unseen currents

leave me gasping for breath  
for safety  
for some glimmer of hope

The Decision feels like a riptide  
searing the fabric of my assuredness

and my solidity feels tenuous  
along this shoreline

my strong banks may shudder  
like a river after a storm

The Decision feels like a riptide  
carrying survivors  
far away from shelter

farther still – from the breasts  
of our grandmothers and aunties

Jo Eckler  
*Austin, Texas*  
*Hour 3*

## **The Scales**

They say it's my Libra sun  
I can't escape my craving for balance  
Even now I crush gingery Biscoff cookies into the chilly vanilla ice cream  
Yearning to force fairness  
into a highly unjust time  
Crumbling (for a moment) when I can't find warmth in the cold.





## **Articulations (About our world... One another... Ourselves)**

*“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul...”*

*Emily Dickinson*



Shloka Shankar  
*Bangalore, India*  
*Hour 14*

**summer skies**

a clutch of birds

alters the composition  
summer skies

Mahima Giri  
*Houston, Texas*  
*Hour 5*

dormant chills of night  
kiss nocturnal auroras-  
glimmering fireflies

Juvairiya Sulthana  
*Barakath Nagar*  
*Hour Unknown*

## **The Strawberry Moon**

In the dark night, the strawberry moonlight shines on me, while I stand on the edge of the mountain.

The night is beautiful—with the sweet smells, the crisp air, and everything around me.

The strawberry moonlight illuminates a comet and shooting star as they cross paths over the earth.

The stars are like small diamonds—  
the sky, a mix of purple and blue.

My every pain vanished tonight.  
Now to sleep—my dreams filled with happiness.

I feel like I am standing in heaven;  
a night I will never forget, for all my life.

Aferdita Blaka  
*Tirana, Albania*  
*Hour Unknown*

## **Autumn, Coming!**

Autumn has come,  
so pretty with her graces,  
dressed in many colors,  
with wet mantle, worn!

The sun warms lightly,  
touches the leaves slowly,  
wind flows with whispers,  
one by one, taking them down.

Away heavy branches!  
Almost touching the ground,  
their arms hanging,  
like gathering babies.

Wet is this season,  
watching the steps done,  
thunder and sparks come,  
then the sun scatters its rays.

This is how the seasons flow,  
beginning with summer's blooming buds,  
warm, summer keeps them,  
while autumn gathers fruit  
for winter, with its white beard!

Eh, how am I,  
autumn, it seems to me,  
in my lap, swaddling the babies,  
yellowed leaves, with gray on my head!

I rejoice and enjoy,  
with the dancing of colors,  
I take care of the seedlings,  
as before, when in my first season!

Nancy Ann Smith  
*Amherst, Ohio*  
*Hour 1*

## **Long Awaited**

Waiting for days,  
everyone waits,  
patiently  
or impatiently  
everything is waiting –  
farmers, gardeners, workers  
crops, lawns, gardens.

Then –  
I shiver, just a bit.  
Temperature drops two degrees.  
The sun has nodded off;  
the clouds no longer white puff balls.  
Something is different . . .

Walking from the garden to the house  
there has been nothing to harvest,  
even weeds are wilting.  
Hot afternoons – how many in a row?  
The first drops are too strange to recognize.  
My mind is on a pasta salad, without  
peppers, tomatoes, green onions.

OH!  
I finally feel the distinct wet spot  
dotting my bare arm.  
Unsure, unfamiliar,  
I have to double check.  
Is that brown ground truly speckled?  
YES! Thank you, Lord!



Jan Meyer  
*Cedar Park, Texas*  
*Hour Unknown*

## **Flora Music**

Confident rose gold tree                      surveying the field around her.

Cocking her head gently to the side                      she waves to the fuchsia  
flowers                      honoring

her with their profusion                      of deep pink passion.

She's been celebrating                      the coming and going

of nature's more transient visitors                      for years.

They are full of questions                      about what will happen next...

As she knows their journey will not be long, she encourages them to  
harmonize

with her in a symphony of floral music.

The sky is filled with young blooming voices which dance forever in the  
wind.

Sangita Kalarickal Krivosik  
Minnesota  
Hour 2

## In Frost's Footsteps On A Snowy Evening

the bald eagle that rides the wind,  
the rabbit that rushes to hide,  
the fox that scurries through,  
and the tremolo of the hermit thrush.

*Whose woods these are I think I know.*

is it the song of my heart,  
or the low anguish in my mind?  
is it the mere transference  
of a gloomy solstice?

*The darkest evening of the year.*

on simple walks I maneuver,  
in wild fancies and fantasies galore.  
among bare oaks and maples  
and leafless strings of virginia vines.

*Of easy wind and downy flake.*

I would lie on the pristine snow  
no step to mark my reverie,  
with long dreams to cherish,  
tranquil moments entice.

*But I have promises to keep*

*The highly recognizable lines in italics are from Robert Frost's, 'Stopping  
By Woods on a Snowy Evening.'*

Katrina Moinet  
*Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, Wales*  
*Hour 7*

## **Solstice**

an imperceptible hum of the earth  
awakening elsewhere wakes me

pale and milky; night slides the sheen  
of a notion past my dimmed eyeline—

I prowl the hedgerows wet with wicker dew  
till my narrow pathway beckons to a clearing

and a baritone murmur stays my steps  
Derwyddon standing tall and robed in

the mystery of five thousand years  
dappled dawn breathes Alban Hefin—

featherlight cloudbursts scatter morning rays  
on gathered upturned gazes as we welcome

the new sun

## **Epiphany**

my walk into the forest  
revealed to me harmony in nature  
i didn't know that the songs birds sing  
are properly choreographed  
in unison with the trees

the birds do the vocals  
while trees take to the dance floor  
the wind is the choirmaster  
some trees do percussion  
shrubs do the catering  
they serve wild berries  
on the house

from the blooming flowers  
fragrance is awash  
it keeps the entire forest fresh and inviting  
busy bees make honey  
honey for dessert  
effortlessly they cross pollinate  
nature's processes are properly measured and precisely executed

a rocking rock, was inviting  
i took a seat  
while enjoying natural air-conditioning  
under a big shady tree  
i was marvelling at nature and its serenity  
until i was forced to take to my heels  
a big green Mamba fell next to me

i didn't regret the forest

the harmony  
the hospitality  
the tranquility  
the beauty

ooh! nature you are so wise

nurture us  
we have a lot to learn  
you have a lot to teach  
  
please! teach us.

Dan Tighe  
*Sand Point, Michigan*  
*Hour 9*

## **Elrod Opines**

Elrod, the newt, and I talk bluntly,  
through the aquarium glass,  
about life and living.

He has ideas about food, and I mine, about  
what it is like to live in water 24/7.

He loves hamburger, raw. I comment,  
“Yuk to that.”

I feel the swish of water over my skin, I tell him, as I stroke hard, right/left,  
in an aquarium, me-sized, the Australian crawl, I tell him,  
but I like to get out, too. Mostly out.

He dives hard, tail-driven,  
settles buoyantly upright on the bottom.  
He tells me he knows nothing of geography.

“Look,” he says, “food, fresh water, companionship,  
and of course,  
good conversation,” he says, “that’s all I need.”

I think about this, and wonder if he is right,  
in a narrowly global sense.

Dave Spinelli  
*Leadville, Colorado*  
*Hour 6*

A deer crossed the road  
Antlers covered in velvet  
Wiffle ball delayed

Gopalakrishnan Prakash  
*Hyderabad, India*  
*Hour 12*

### **Captain's Log (A sonnet)**

Leafing through the pages of the Captain's log;  
of meandering voyages through sea and sand  
looking for glimmering light through dense fog  
in the dusk's fading hours, relaxing inland.

Assessing the gains and losses of time  
skirmishes won and tough battles lost  
realizing in the end that life was a mime  
straggling at last through the winning post.

Agonies endless have been many a score.  
Countless times have I shed bushels of tears,  
ecstasies have been not less but more  
while haunted by numerous endless fears.

Yet, happily do I set down this song  
counting seconds ticking till the final GONG!



Elijah Kinboade  
*Nigeria*  
*Hour 5*

## **SEEK NO GLORY**

Seek no glory when you live,  
for you will surely find it when you leave.  
Trouble yourself not for fame,  
after your departure everyone will know your name.

Speak less of yourself to your fellow men,  
when you are gone your loss will be known among women.  
Death is a town crier,  
raising his voice higher.  
Seek not to be recognized by others,  
you will surely be known when you obey death's order.

Oliver McKeithan  
*Milan, Pennsylvania*  
*Hour 7*

## **The Lone Beachcomber**

evening sunset, all are gone, I am alone  
I enjoy this loneliness  
tonight, the sand is mine.

Lexanne Leonard  
*Centennial, Colorado*  
*Hour 6*

## **My Letter To You**

You are a graffitied wall  
wondrous, history-laden  
marks and words  
colors and shapes

All you

Allow more layers  
never fear  
even if you forget  
all that slumbers underneath

The sum will be there  
tendering depth, wisdom  
protecting the raw

Oh, wondrous graffitied you  
ugly and beautiful

Be you

Jill Egland  
*Bakersfield, California*  
*Hour 3*

## **Technicolor Hills**

Technicolor hills  
burst into flamingo pink flames and  
pierce a cerulean sky  
bloodless and leathery  
like my arms reaching up  
from this 1950s nightmare of hues

finding you cool and updated  
in 70s avocado and mauve.  
“Toned down,” you tell me. But  
I see the flicker of something more.  
Something incendiary

sleeping in you till one day  
the alarm will clatter and  
you’ll turn your morning the color of  
finches; your sky—  
jet blue and joyous.

Rebecca Resinski  
*Conway, Arkansas*  
*Hour 9*

**fragment from melancholy 9**

professing

our

perfect

entangle

m

e

n

t

*\*an erasure of a passage from Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy*

**You Will Always Be**

I will always  
remember you  
as a warm summer day

Suffused with  
laughter and  
bathed in sunshine

You will always be  
that way  
to me

Even if the  
rains come  
and the storms  
wreak havoc

Janice Mendonca  
*Melbourne, Australia*  
*Hour 22*

## **Strength and tenderness**

Don't let the world convince you that you are weak.  
Your tenderness is strength and courage.  
Your beauty shines through your soul.  
In a world that is constantly defining every little thing  
may your tenderness be recognised  
as inspiring and joyous  
as bold and bright  
as raw and pure  
as gentle and brave.  
May your tenderness keep your heart—  
warm and human.

Harvey Schwartz  
*Bellingham, Washington*  
*Hour 8*

## **Who I Am**

I wander through life, a tourist  
in my search for sincere, a purist.

Sometimes events are happenstance.  
There are times I want to dance  
but mostly it's a game of chance.

Be kind to strangers I try to be  
knowing it comes back to me.

Keep track of news to some extent  
but too much of it can cause torment.

I springboard from securest as  
I wander through life, a tourist.

Be kind to strangers I try to be.  
Don't come off like a bourgeoisie.  
Look in their eyes, not absentee.

And in the end what seals the deal is  
show the world my best cartwheel!



Sarah Dittmore  
*Carmelian Bay, California*  
*Hour 12*

## **Summer Nights Taste Better With You**

The juice of a ripe plum rolls down my chin  
while the citrus scent of geraniums perfumes the air

Our laughter like fireworks; we paint the sky gold  
as the fading fingers of the sun tangle our hair

A choir of crickets underscore stories  
shared over peach pie and wine

We welcome the moon as she inches skyward  
and do not mourn the loss of sunshine

For we wrap ourselves in blankets  
and memories and know that here we are free

To open our hearts, share our scars,  
and be all we've ever dreamed we could be.

Pea Flower Tomioka  
*Singer Island, Florida*  
*Hour 5*

**Cascade, a tanka**

Counting breaths like waves  
Crashing lips over my dunes  
A fluttered memory,  
Full moons like our hips breaking  
seaside to our ecstasy.

Shannon Van  
*Atlanta, Georgia*  
*Hour 11*

**the spun arms of trees**

the spun arms of trees  
remind me of yours.

the out-branching of stems  
remind me of your hands.

the wind wheezing through the leaves  
remind me of your chuckles.

how you heave so brightly,  
how the edges of each of your breaths squeak,  
how wordy those quick sighs are,  
your chest rising and falling in a rhythm.

I hear love escape from the bounds of your lungs,  
and the world now has a joy I hope to live in forever.

## Wedding Planning

We walked through Staples, my hand in yours,  
and you said *I want a whole life like this.*

The floor sticky below both of us, I asked,  
*A whole life in Staples?*

Surrounding us were towers of boxed  
printer paper, one row over there

were office chairs on shelves, forever  
out of reach. An employee walked by

gaze focused on the distant exit.  
*A life running errands with you,*

you said. At the time I dismissed it,  
walked fast into the pen aisle

but years later when a friend told me about their  
girlfriend drama I said *I'm sorry,*

*your relationship would not pass  
the Staples test,* and I meant

that everyone should be with someone they are  
happy doing mundane things with,

no concert trips, or ax-throwing  
lessons required.

For over a year we didn't shop with one another  
at all, and when we finally stepped

back into a store together, masked,  
I understood what you'd said over

a decade ago, differently. It was a  
privilege I had undervalued before.

Nishant Jain  
*Cupertino, California*  
*Hour 7*

## **Together**

For that moment,  
the entire world disappeared.  
It was just her and me,  
together in a field.

Alone,  
but not lonely.  
Silent,  
but not silenced.

Every glance was a conversation.  
A memory.  
A story.  
A lifetime.

And it was in what was not said,  
that everything was.

Nadiyah Suleiman  
*Denver, Colorado*  
*Hour 8*

## **Blueberries**

Ripe blueberries bounce into my hand  
Drops of juice spill over, dripping  
Into my mouth, open and gasping  
My appetite never quite satisfied  
Your touch so gentle and yet prying  
Searching for more than I have  
More than I am willing to give  
But I love blueberries, especially  
When they come from you

Daryl Curnow  
*Auckland, New Zealand*  
*Hour 18*

## **Joy: Then vs Now**

It's hard to describe  
my feeling of joy  
and the randomness of it.  
It was a normal day  
school holidays were in full swing  
then something took over my body  
it's often puzzling.  
I had always been quite uptight  
always wanting to know what was to come  
but at this moment  
I was in complete bliss.  
I climbed the fence  
needed to get to the stables  
where I'd often talk to the horses  
as if they needed a friend.  
As my feet hit the ground  
I felt a sense of calm and joy  
there was no rush, no plans,  
just happy to be around.  
It's a feeling I have never forgotten  
a young boy with the world in front of him.

Twenty-two years on,  
the setting has changed  
but I have constant joy  
it's not a fleeting moment  
it's permanent.  
No fences needed to be jumped  
no horses needed to be spoken to.  
Just a girl  
and her touch.

Marion Lougheed  
*Leipzig, Germany*  
*Hour 11*

## **Four on the Floor**

We lay, four kids in a square,  
one head on each belly,  
circuit closed.

“Ha!” you said, and my head bobbed.  
“Ha!” I said, and so on round the square.  
And round again until our four  
heads bobbed and bopped, each  
belly breath a pump of air,  
a mini-trampoline transmitting  
signals to the next link in the chain.

After fifteen or twenty seconds,  
message received.  
Tidy transmissions  
devolved into a bouncing, bopping  
concatenation,  
cascading vocalizations:  
hilarity ensued.



Anne Paterson  
*Calgary, Alberta*  
*Hour 5*

## **knitting circle**

ten am sharp, a knock at the door—twittering voices on the pavement outside.  
a turn of the lock, a chain removed—the squeak of the old oak door,  
old Bessie was first across the threshold—her ample body filling the space.  
Madge, Molly, and Mary, poured in behind her—satchels bursting with  
needles and wool.  
only five today—the others away—Karen, Kathy, Kendra, Kitty absent till  
Sunday.  
hardback chairs with torn leather seats sat upon the rug covered in sunflowers  
and daisies.  
well-padded bottoms settled in place—wine glasses held for fillin',  
cheese plate passed from hand to hand—an array of cheddar, mozza, and brie,  
whistles wet and bellies sated, the women set to work—instructions tacked to  
the wall by a nail,  
needles ready, wool at their feet—they began.  
knit one ladies, purl two and switch, knit two, purl two—next row.  
the knitting circle had begun.

## **Stairsteps**

Their father, James, watched.  
They came out of the shack that stood at the dip of the draw  
standing, solemn, in a line beside him.  
Albert first, though he grumbled about going to school at 15,  
then Benjamin, named for his uncle who'd died in the war,  
and Caroline, who had green eyes that strangers noticed,  
Dancing Deborah as she liked to be called, followed,  
then Edward, for James's pa who'd died at the bottom of the mine,  
and Frank, who liked to play dress up and hid an old baby doll.  
Their mother, Susan, came out last and stood at the end of the line.  
She held squirming Georgia in one arm and put  
the other hand on the swell of her belly.  
The postmistress took their picture. She would  
hang it on the wall in the store  
and the family would get a copy for Christmas.

Muhammed Ebrahim Suleman  
*Johannesburg, South Africa*  
*Hour 8*

## **A MOTHER'S LOVE**

A mother's love is  
something you should  
never forget.

A tear rolling down her  
cheek, is something that  
you should never let

happen—the first person she worries  
about is you.

She's someone that you can  
count on, even on the days  
that you're feeling blue.

She remembers you first in  
all of her prayers

and smiles, even through all  
of her broken layers.

She gives you her all and  
expects nothing in return.

When you are out and about,  
sometimes a little  
remembrance is all she  
yearns.

A mother's love, so pure  
and in my opinion, it's the  
best cure.

Sheila Sondik  
*Bellingham, Washington*  
*Hour 3*

## **40th Birthday Poem**

*---for my firstborn*

Her child-sized cello.  
How it vibrated  
in her embrace.

Her embrace  
now overflowing  
with three children.

Evelyn Elaine Smith  
*Waco, Texas*  
*Hour 3*

## **Contrary Dance**

City of stars steps out in a counterpoint dance,  
giving the night's mellow tones yet another chance,  
doubly debonair, what a pair we will make  
again, shining once more with the stars until daybreak.

Contrary moods beset us each blessed night,  
going from sprightly to methodical  
dirge, then back again—now a melodic song—  
a sad tune without words, all so deep and strong.

Contrasting moods move us at a lively pace.  
Gone is the workaday routine once embraced.  
Don't spare caresses! Fill me with your kisses.  
A new day dawns, so we don't want to miss it.

John Dutton  
*Woodbridge, Virginia*  
*Hour 5*

## **Weekend Getaway**

Our picnic blanket nestled under the old Oak tree.  
My hardback spread across my chest as I nap.  
The smell of sunflowers in the air.  
My wife is knitting with her back against the tree.  
Plates of cheddar cheese and crackers entice us.  
Our wine glasses get frequent use.  
We let our thoughts drift off into space.  
Tomorrow, back on our feet hitting the pavement  
fighting tooth and nail to claw out a living.  
My satchel bursting with documents and contracts,  
but today we rest under the old Oak tree.

Tanya LaForce West  
*Muncie, Indiana*  
*Hour 4*

**this moment**

lovely evening is upon me  
reds, blues, so many hues  
clouds rolling across the sky  
like waves of the ocean

enjoying every color and tone  
forgetting the world is in chaos  
how can I stay in this moment  
just freeze it and never leave

but no, the world keeps moving  
and I along with it

evening is upon me, lovely  
so many hues, reds, and blues  
rolling across the clouds  
waving to the ocean

## **9th Cross**

With my friends I ride my bicycle,  
A time when we all feel delightful.

My aunty is against us riding to 9th Cross,  
And warns us not to take that turn,

But once we have planned to go.  
So we can buy the yummy, yummy snacks.

While aunty is searching for us,  
There we are enjoy eating.

Worried she will find us soon,  
We quickly ride back.

Rushing back to the house,  
As we were new to it, we forgot the route.

The landmark is a giant blue gate,  
We realize that we're lost somewhere.

As I forced my monocled friend to join us,  
We had another task to drop her.

While aunty gets ready to search us.  
We return home with a prepared lie —

And always 9th Cross, will stay in our hearts.



## **Meet 'Trivandrum' – A City in India**

A prompt that couldn't be more timely  
as I stay in God's own country  
streets lively as can be  
oh of course, it's the capital city!

For me though, it's so much more  
it's my summer vacation  
my only connection to the city;  
This is where I grew up.

From finishing my handwriting homework  
to researching college's coursework  
from enrolling in drawing classes  
to enrolling in driving classes,  
This is where I grew up.

Every vacation,  
the zoo, the beach, the museum  
the temples, the malls and family friends  
oh, there are lists of places to visit.

Different kinds of trees everywhere  
coconut trees, banana trees,  
trees that are particularly pretty  
and the language, well that's just the best

A city with so much more to it  
a city whose language is just as pretty  
a city I've lived very little in  
yet, one that feels so much more like home.

But as I grew, those around me grew too  
as my grandparents turn old  
as the walls lose their strength  
my family decides it's time to let go of the house.

I must tell you before I depart  
that this city with its pretty trees,  
the people, their language and their culture,  
continue to win the hearts of every single visitor.

## **“City of Stars”**

The city beams and breathes while others sleep  
it lights up on weekends—  
the bubble spreads like a wildfire.

Alcohol exhumes wild personalities tucked in all week.  
Igbo is shared like Communion bread  
bodies seek warmth in others  
the city is alive and in a high mood.

Saturdays are for Owambe  
there’s an aunty in yellow—  
her face is beat fifty shades lighter  
her Gele stands tall  
how else do you know she has arrived—  
if her Aso-oke doesn’t speak hundreds of thousands of naira—  
that jewellery is definitely from Dubai.

She orders for Amala  
there must be Ogunfe and big fish  
those bottles of minerals and malt will find a home in her bag.

Her daughter’s waist sits snatched in a corset  
this is the hundredth wedding she is attending as an Asoebi girl  
but who is keeping count?

Sundays are holy, Sabbath should be kept  
now those wild bodies go back to God  
with gloomy faces they sit through sermons—  
prepared to tuck the wildness into work pants the next day.

While dawn stretches each morning, the city sits wide awake  
the scorching sun rises and sets on the backs of the working class—  
they sit packed in buses and cars  
some shirts billow on bikes avoiding the traffic jam.

The city plays a game of make or break  
every sojourner desires to be another star  
some give up this hope early

some do not but—  
“Eko oni baje.”

The five days of the week drag  
patiently, like fanatics, they wait to unleash their beasts  
faithful in this religion.

Dominique Russell  
*Toronto, Ontario*  
*Hour 1*

## **Landlocked**

The Mediterranean is gone  
from me  
and with it, youth,  
the unadulterated  
pleasures of bodies  
mine and strangers,  
fingertips  
on sandy sweat  
the grounding fatigue,  
waves struggled with  
and through, then  
the salt-shedding shower  
from which emerged,  
ghost and flesh  
reunited, a goddess  
in a white shirt  
and the glances  
on the rambla  
over tapas and sin  
cigarettes lit in code,  
smoke signals  
before the dancing  
—oh the dancing!

I miss it,  
the sea, the sea, the sea.

Bonnie Katzive  
Boulder, Colorado  
Hour 8

## Rocky Mountain Reflection

*“Over the place where Long’s Peak and its slightly less imposing companions stand in lofty isolation and invite the summer tourist to their cool retreats, the waves of an open sea once rolled and its tide ebbed and flowed, unhindered by rock or shoal” (NPS.gov).*

Meadows swim: yellow, periwinkle, and green  
framing curlicues of snaking streams  
washing down from the mineraled mountain.  
I touch an icy, bubbling flow and salts eroded from ancient glacial slabs  
coat my finger, connecting me to those upswept ocean floors.

The sea is now the sky,  
tides of air directing clouds like swells,  
reflections wafting through the horseshoe streams  
fastening clouds back to earth,  
mirrors interrupted rhythmically by waving grasses  
until it all feels

like an ancient weaving  
like time turned over  
like I have always walked here.

Kevin J. O'Conner  
*Bellingham, Washington*  
*Hour 12*

## **Pulse**

Ultimately  
it is the center  
around which everything revolves

slowing  
quickenings  
sometimes skipping or stuttering

but always relentless—  
from start to finish

We may fall out of step  
or go astray  
but we always come back

Because the drum is everything

Jennifer Faylor  
*Everett, Washington*  
*Hour 4*

## **Everyday Music**

There is music in any moment  
if I listen. Notes are written  
in invisible ink, spelling out  
what even my ancestors knew to be true.

The clock is a metronome for today's melody.  
I press the pedal of awareness  
to deepen the sound,  
tighten the glowing strings that stretch  
across my whole being  
and the bow of existence  
glides over me  
echoing a simple symphony  
through the caverns of time.

**Lost... and Found**  
**(Liberties, Connections, Hope, Time)**

*“The great art of life is sensation, to feel that we exist, even in pain.”*

*Lord Byron*





Nykki Norlander  
*Morgan, Minnesota*  
*Hour 2*

## **Music**

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
I whisper my secrets to the leaves.  
Time is lost and I am found.  
I'm not alone among the creatures who sleep,  
as I face the demons in my mind.  
The wind creates music within the trees.  
And we dance together long past evening.

\* *'The woods are lovely, dark and deep', Robert Frost*

Darryl Commings  
St. Louis, Missouri  
Hour 12

## I Dissent

*"When one group breaks the covenant of truth and assumes an exclusive role in defining the basis of human relationship, that group plants the seed of rebellion."*

—James H. Cone. Black Theology and Black Power (1969)

It will never be anything other than

an uneasy balancing act  
between us

That is the condition and cost

We tell stories of temptation

it slithers and sheds its skin  
it sounds reasonable to reasonable people

Or, for dramatic effect, we set the desirable thing

behind a chain link fence  
we poke our fingers between the links

We dream the dreams of petty tyrants

whose bellies and hearts are never full  
and the soul of this world is never enough

Temptation is real

This world is built on a promise

Not a statue

Our bodies require bonds that are renewed daily

The claim is a simple one...

I am a living being...

with living beings...

on a living being...

And so are you

To be is to make that claim

To be held to that claim

To be judged by that claim

We live a circular scale

or maybe a spiral

to understand this is to understand justice...

Not just a word we say

but a living template

a claim made on each other just because we are alive...

A claim I hope and expect

You will make of me

As I make of you

When you get drunk with power...

I dissent.

Christina Tang-Bernas  
*Anaheim, California*  
*Hour 10*

**kind-ness**

it is a radical thing  
for a human to be kind  
we with the genocidal genetics  
of the Homo Sapiens who wiped out  
the Neanderthals, the Denisovans  
the mammoths and giant sloths  
a million other species  
anything we did not consider  
worth our own kind  
whose ancestors fought wars  
for any kind of difference in the way  
we looked or talked or believed  
the words: not like us, not our kind  
woven through our shared history  
for to be kind is to generate empathy  
for someone not us  
to look at another  
who is not myself  
and think they deserve to be treated  
as I deserve to be treated  
to choose to look past differences  
accept they are my kind  
we are of a kind  
there is a kind-ness here between us  
and extend a hand forward

Abioye Aisha  
Abuja, Nigeria  
Hour 2

## **Listen, It's The Sound of Fury**

Call me truth.  
For I am the most elusive captive,  
a friend of sun.  
I dabble in the blood of my enemies  
& pacify my skin  
with the vanquish of my foes.  
You see, I have travelled  
through the clouds of hell –  
earth's flames have little meaning  
to this black vessel.  
My head bangs the galaxies  
and my feet are on the mountains.  
I know too well of the heavens,  
even your chi  
is my ally.

*\*Chi – God*

Chidozie Chukwubuike  
*Nigeria*  
*Hour 5*

## **In the World of the Wealthy**

In the world of the wealthy pavements are plated in gold. No one intrudes into another's space and there is time to admire sunflowers.

On the flip side of the class divide, garbage heaps adorn the streets.

Everyone bumps into everyone, and fights with stones and nails are a sacred ritual in the struggle to maintain an equilibrium of backwardness.

In that cocoon of affluence where the rich converge to dine, wine glasses are of the most exquisite and tasteful kind.

But the poor are also there, in their arena of poverty, jostling over the leftovers abandoned by the menacing dogs of the wealthy.

In the world of the rich the code is to keep raising the equilibrium point for success.

## **Guided Path**

Along the path to enlightenment,  
we encounter life's highs and lows.  
Mere survival and determination become a mantra.  
Acquiring the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental strength  
to surpass primitive understanding.

Ancestral guides try to periodically download pieces  
of a mastered blueprint into our memory.  
Thoughts clouded by the 24 hours in a day, we only hear static.  
Bound by their songs of redemption,  
we tend to rest but not sleep.

Haunted by the chains they wore in bondage.  
Through the days, months, and years with limited tears we press forward.  
Resurfacing a new breath of light within our disconnected souls.  
Embracing the balance of self-mastery  
as the fallacies of the world unfold.



Tazeen Fatma  
*Jodhpur, India*  
*Hour 12*

déjà vu  
I mind map  
reality

## Gathered for Massacre

The harvest was ripe and gold  
What a gathering to behold  
The sky was gay, and colors merry  
A romantic pink, a scarlet cherry

All gathered to celebrate  
Sweat of toil – but fickle fate  
Had something else in store  
Shrieks of pain, cries of gore

Rain showered them with grain  
Bullets fired shooting pain  
Groups of innocents huddled in fear  
To jump in wells or swallow tears  
Children sobbed and clung to breasts  
Mother's stricken, men were prest

But Dyer kept on firing  
His selfish heart, ne'er tiring  
Like a bloodbath it poured  
Silence resounding ever more  
Rivers of shame, of ghastly pain  
Would not claim such unjust gain  
Blooming blood of innocents slain  
Booming guns – horrific refrain

No matter what time, what the place  
This hardened brutal truth I face  
'twas nothing but a glaring preface

To a bloody

heartless

massacre

*\*The reference here is to the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 13th of April 1919*

Solape Adeyemi  
*Mowe, Ogun, Nigeria*  
*Hour Unknown*

## **A Folklore: Iginla the Great King**

He was fearless and brave  
known throughout the seven kingdoms  
for his prowess and skill  
he was never afraid to fight on the battlefield  
to protect the territorial integrity of his kingdom  
wise and knowledgeable  
he was sought for miles  
but, the great Iginla trusted too much and too soon  
he trusted his second in command  
a man who had proven himself faithful, time and time again  
unfortunately,  
you cannot tell the mind's construction from the face  
for his second in command after a while  
began to nurse ambitious ideas of his own  
he thought he would make a better King  
and so, treacherous thoughts flooded his heart and mind  
until eventually he made a pact with the enemies of the kingdom  
And then,  
akin to the fate of the great Julius Caesar  
who was slain by Brutus, 'his protégé', and others,  
King Iginla was slain  
one cold rainy night on his bed.  
And his second in command, Ifira, the betrayer, reigned in his stead.

Lavinia Leon  
*Calgary, Alberta, Canada*  
*Hour 3*

## **MappaMondrian**

wouldn't it be at least unsettling  
to awaken under a backbending crimson tree  
it would wonder who painted you  
maybe branch out, reach out to its friends  
debate on where you may have come from  
put you in a museum of curiosities  
curated by emissaries who transited your world  
like Mondrian

Gita Bharath  
*Chennai, India*  
*Hour 22*

## **Bird's Eye-View**

How insignificant are these things  
depending on wheels,  
or on metal wings.  
Moving along pre-set ways,  
unable to grasp, to understand  
the immensity of the sky.  
I ride an updraft, glide on high,  
spot with my stereoscopic eye  
a red car stopped beside the freeway.  
Maybe the driver has slowed his pace  
to take in the beauty of nature's grace  
of the greensward or the trees.  
I can move any which way  
in the sky, my 3D space,  
the sun on my feathers  
the wind in my face  
and so I pity

.....

the earth-bound human race.

Sue Storts  
*Tulsa, Oklahoma*  
*Hour 1*

## **Shadow of the Tower**

Tai chi in Central Park,  
shadow of Trump Tower  
near Columbus Circle.  
Congressional witnesses disclose  
White House corruption.  
Empty wine bottle on bench  
proclaims last night's debauchery,  
as rodents found refuge.  
Brazen little brown mouse  
scampers between our feet  
asking for some reciprocity,  
some quid pro quo.  
"How about I don't crawl up your leg,  
you drop me some food."  
We play in Central Park,  
home to mobster mice,  
guarded by monuments to evil men.

## **I Saw**

I saw you last year on the news;  
you were the one clothed in blue and gray, you were the one whose smile  
seemed fake,  
you were the one who had a sad eye on a happy face,  
you were the one who shed unseen tears,  
you were the one who wanted to be free, you were the one who lied and  
said you're fine.

I saw you last year on the news.

I saw you last month at the show;  
you were the one with an aching heart but no one could tell,  
when I approached you my name didn't ring a bell,  
you were the one inwardly dying and outwardly laughing,  
you were the one saying hopeful things to others — things that you really  
wanted someone to tell you.

I saw you last month at the show.

I saw you last week at the mall;  
you were the one with sunken eyes but glaring makeup on,  
you were the one carrying so many bags they became burdens,  
you were the one looking at the distorted mirror,  
you were the one moving with a crowd of fake friends.

I saw you last week at the mall.

I saw you last night;  
you were the one crying at 3am,  
you were the one that screamed aloud from a nightmare,  
you were the one walking down the street in the dead of night... feeling no  
cold as your heart was all frozen up,  
you were the one wishing it was all over, you were the one going through  
your masks — trying to decide which one to put on the next

morning.

I saw you last night.

I saw you at the bar six hours ago;  
you were the one holding a glass of champagne,  
you were the one with bloodshot eyes and a miserable smile,  
you were surrounded by cameras,  
you were the one not living life, but existing.

I saw you at the bar six hours ago.

I walked by your house just now;  
you had a stemmed glass in your hand and an open wine bottle nearby,  
you rocked your head to an R&M beat, your eyes were shut but you could  
see things through your mind's eye — things were falling apart around you  
but you didn't care,  
you just shut your eyes and drowned beneath the waves of the song.

Then you opened your eyes and saw me.



Maritza M. Mejia  
*Florida*  
*Hour 6*

## **We Are Not Strangers**

sometimes we feel we are the only ones,  
until we travel and find...  
new people and cultures.

sometimes we feel we're trapped inside ourselves  
until we realize...  
there are other doors to go out.

sometimes we stay in our comfort zones,  
until we open our eyes...  
to another way of life.

sometimes we think death is the end,  
until we learn...  
it's the beginning.

sometimes we need to stop and reflect,  
until we realize...  
we are not strangers

## **The Sunflowers Grow**

She waits beneath the old oak  
knitting as she floats in a sea of sunflowers.

They were only seeds once,  
but the sunflowers grew.

She waits.

A round table just noticeable above the green and yellow has been set  
beside her,  
just the right size for two but too large for only one.  
She waits  
and the sunflowers grow.

The wheel of once fresh cheese has turned to mold,  
and the rich liquid in the wine glass soured long ago.  
She waits  
and the sunflowers grow.

They are watered by her tears  
and undisturbed by her sorrow.

Her face has wrinkled, her eyes have dimmed,  
still, she waits  
and the sunflowers grow.

She doesn't know  
he never received her letter.  
She wonders if he forgot her  
and he wondered that too.

He will not come, though she won't believe  
he never looked for her under the great tree.  
Instead, his sorrow consumed him, and he is gone.

Still, she waits  
watching the sunflowers grow.

Adam Lipscomb  
*Austin, Texas*  
*Hour 6*

## **The cicada nymph slowly climbs**

along the branch, inch by  
laborious inch. It has taken most  
of the afternoon, and as the sun  
begins to set, it stops.

“Is it resting?” I wonder to myself,  
then I see it shiver and crack  
and slowly, painfully, it  
emerges – wings wet and  
furled, shell soft and white.

Ever so slowly, wings unroll  
carapace hardens and  
becomes glittering green

until, as the stars rise above,  
it spreads its wings and flies away.

“Godspeed, little friend,” I whisper,  
as I finish packing the last box  
of my past and prepare to rest.

Tomorrow, I begin a new life  
without you in it

Stefanie Hutcheson  
*Lenoir, North Carolina*  
*Hour 6*

Well, hey there, Stefanie! I know we've been out of touch for a while now, but I occasionally see your face pop up when some of our mutual acquaintances have tagged you. When it does, my heart bleeds.

I'm going to be honest here. It's hard, so please forgive me if my words don't come out right. Not to be honest overall, but—to be honest with you. You are the type of person who demands honesty, and, frankly, it scares me. Which is part of why I stopped being in your world. We don't see eye to eye on certain things, and—unfortunately for our once wonderful friendship—those things mean more to me than you did. How's that for honesty?

I'm not trying to be mean here. You deserve an explanation for why I bolted. You were a true friend to me, and I still think of those car rides to Charlotte when we bared our souls to each other. When I see Tom's Barbecue Chips, I remember how you bought me a bag and opened it from the bottom, telling me the best chips were always found there. You knew I had OCD and that this drove me crazy, but you risked it because you are such a funny girl.

I miss you. I see you on Facebook; see your books around the local bookstores. I look for posts from the writing group and upcoming events you all might be sponsoring or participating in. Those were some great times and I miss being a part of them. Sometimes I think about coming back...

...but how would you react? I mean, I made you a promise—a pinky promise—and I failed to keep it. Would you give me a second chance? Would you allow me the opportunity—the privilege—of loving you once more? Or would our conflicts separate us again?

Dare I find out? You really are a lovely person, Stef. Can I let go of my pride and love the whole of you without always liking those parts that made me leave to begin with? Are we worth another chance, as Barry Manilow sings that song right now about being ready? Am I ready to take a chance again? What have I to lose? What have I to gain?

Silly me. Of course you would welcome me back. Probably you'd say something cute, like, "Hey, Love! Turn around a moment." Puzzled, I would acquiesce, and then you'd say, "It's so good to see you're back."

(You do love those double-entendres, don't you, Stef?). Then you'd laugh, I'd laugh, and the air would be clear, just like that.

The chances are good that we wouldn't even speak of this prolonged break because I know you, Stefanie. I know you. I know you still love me, that you didn't stop, and that you've been hoping for this—even though I didn't return your calls or respond to your messages. I know you, Stefanie. I know your hopeful heart is waiting for one move, one gesture from me. What I don't know is if I can make it.

Oh, heart! I want to! I miss you so much! And the stories we have to tell one another are enough to involve many more trips to Charlotte, the waterfall you once took me to, or any of the places we explored on our twenty or more dates.

In closing, don't give up on me. I don't think I am ready just yet, but...I implore you: don't write me off just yet. What? You haven't? I assumed as much.

Thank you, Stefanie.

Soon...

Denise Hill  
*Bay City, Michigan*  
*Hour 4*

**what we wrought**

2122  
it's quiet again  
the machines quelled  
as night falls  
we each sit  
in silent solitude  
looking out over  
barren terrain  
hopeful  
tomorrow may rain  
regenerate something  
anything  
but the forecast  
likely disagrees  
decades gone by  
at least it hasn't ended  
not entirely  
not yet

Anna Cavouras  
*Toronto, Canada*  
*Hour 11*

## **Dragon Breath**

The Vancouver sky turned red the summer of two thousand and fifteen.  
I held my newborn and gulped precious water  
trying to clear the ash from my tongue.

The toddler in my house tested my patience.  
Over and over with this and with that  
as we stayed inside day after day.

Temperatures high, tempers short.  
Heat inside and out, the ferocity  
of a dragon building inside of me.

The collective inhale and exhale like a dragon full of fire.  
Heat on everyone's breath, air burning, ash raining,  
water elusive.

This is all summers now.

Fire season is a new season, slipped into the calendar.  
Every year longer and hotter than the last.

Is there a temperature at which it will stop?

Water evaporates long before it reaches the flame.  
Parched ground. Tinder-dry grass. Everything is thirsty.  
Climate destruction unchecked.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Gasp.

Ana Marie Dollano  
*NCR, Philippines*  
*Hour 15*

## **Empty Leaves**

empty leaves  
adrift—  
a certain sadness



Valarie Kirkwood  
*Topeka, Kansas*  
*Hour 7*

## **Invasion of the Lilies**

Five years ago frustrated and longing for beauty, I dug beneath the rocks to bury bulbs for Lilies into the fertile ground.

The rocks I had placed with a flustered pace but soon they commenced to fade.

Fragrant heads of blossoms I envisioned looming to conceal the faded pebbles at their feet.

This year Stargazer, Oriental Lilies sprang up as if overnight.

Trumpet lilies stood lanky above them in colors sublime and bright.

Golden in hue they were, pink with variegated trumpets.

Hot pink and fuchsia star shaped blooms.

They lined the front of the house like Disney Princesses on parade.

But summer is here and as it marches towards fall, their laces and sashes all

droop and fade.

Wendie Donabie  
*Bracebridge, Ontario (Muskoka Region)*  
*Hour 5*

## HOPE

In the space,  
between the pavement  
and the bomb-levelled home,  
the oak tree clung to life,  
its limbs splintered  
by shrapnel.

Beside it a solitary sunflower,  
its face bent in sorrow,  
looked down at a wine glass -  
shattered.

Nature grieves for us,  
yet hopes  
for an end to war.

Diane Carmony  
*La Quinta, California*  
*Hour 4*

### **Playing piano for the last time (Ukraine)**

Amid the chaos and cruelty of war,  
amid the bombings, the fires,  
amid the desperate attempts to flee,  
amid the broken glass, smashed pots,  
abandoned belongings,  
the woman uncovers her beloved piano,  
wipes the dark dust from the keys,  
and then,  
for the last time,  
the very last time,  
she sits down in her coat and hat and  
she plays,  
her hands floating across the keys,  
creating notes of hope and peace  
to fill the shattered home that  
she now must leave behind.

Nancy Canyon  
*Bellingham, Washington*  
*Hour 7*

## **CROWNED ROCKET BIRD**

flies for three days above the speckled salvia,  
a field of red, the queen returns home.

she is fast, thus her name Rocket Bird  
and colorful with orange wings and yellowgreen  
body. she flies on, unrelenting in her journey.

you come every day to watch for her, like the flicker  
you know her call, *chena chena peep*, soaring over the fields,  
up the silent valley, winging toward twilight.

as though she shows you the way.  
as though you seek the vanishing point as well.

Amy Joy Bostelman  
*Leander, Texas*  
*Hour 5*

## **A Question Without an Answer**

A question without an answer—  
Ivory towers

a space full of hardbacks  
fills the brim of satchels struggling  
to stay stitched together

Attempts at knitting theories  
the promise of “the Answer”,

enticing academics towards the  
trap with cheddar cheese

A thirst that won’t be quenched

no matter how much fills  
the wineglass

How can it be explained  
that Miracles still exist?

Like the sunflower growing through a crack in pavement  
and the resilience of the oak seedling striving for growth where  
it shouldn’t be.

Shrehya Taneja  
Delhi, India  
*Hour 11*

**surviving**

the twisted tree is hit by the storm  
grandma forgets me  
but remembers the young sapling  
right outside her home  
she checks on it hourly  
but walks carelessly to her bed  
getting scrapes  
she asks me questions  
gives me names that she likes

the twisted tree survives the storm  
she lavishes love and affection on the survivor

my grandma still does not remember me

the storm in our house rages on

## **Lapwings on the Moors**

the clouds settled early  
over the moors today  
reminding me  
of the frosts  
coating the late lapwing eggs  
nestled in the nest

thus I ran  
I ran to gather them  
to protect them  
to save them  
to give them  
a warm place they might shelter  
during a cold night

only to find you'd tortured them  
with your trap

a trap I now see  
your bars revealed to me  
I long to escape your hold  
thus I run  
lest I die nestled in the nest

Rhea Kumar  
*Cupertino, California*  
*Hour 1*

## **Underwater Grounding**

As I go through each day these days, I am greeted by  
a flurry of emails, To-Do lists, errands.  
I try to tackle each task but then  
I pause.

I imagine the water, all around me, clear and blue,  
weighing me down by its heaviness.  
Slowly, it blocks out the outside world  
till it's just me and the blue and the water  
and silence.

As I sit, trying my hardest to breathe,

I begin to notice:  
The blue in the water, and how it changes to light.

Its coolness enveloping my arms and face, the freshness soothing my  
tongue.

The silent whooshing sounds of the waves above.

Bubbles leaving my nose as

I breathe.

The water feels heavy no more.  
I take a deep breath in; my legs move on will.

And to the surface  
I rise.



Joy M. Winstead  
*Mogadore, Ohio*  
*Hour 4*

## **Time is Forever**

Old man waiting  
for inspiration to strike  
the keys,  
like lightning.

BOOM!

The piano turns to dust; the man to ash.  
Time is heartless, unforgiving

The spirit of man and piano,  
will forever be in the forest primeval,  
haunting those not yet born.

Allison Douglas-Tourner  
*Victoria, British Columbia, Canada*  
*Hour 8*

## **Calling**

The waves are full of blue sky and cedar –  
the tide halfway out – the stones slippery  
with kelp and fat fingered bladderwrack  
I pick my way into the cold water  
The gravel basin of the bay is half full –  
my swimming pool smaller and closer today  
To the right a low granite cliff stands between  
sun and sea – darkening the water  
Its stoic influence wraps around my body  
sedate, mysterious – and  
I am drawn into stillness  
as if by some internal tide –  
of loneliness that is not at all sad

Teresa Locascio  
*Santa Cruz, California*  
*Hour 6*

## **Love Always, Your Freshman Year Biology Teacher**

To the most disruptive girl in class  
the one who had to be separated  
from her friends to pay attention  
and then became sad and shut down

rather than bright and engaged  
I see you finally fulfilling that potential  
we spoke about so many times  
I know I was never your favorite  
and I appreciated the letter you wrote me  
long after you'd graduated and gone and  
just know that  
although I'm not sure what it would mean to you,  
you've  
made  
me  
proud.

Halle Hund  
*Eden Prairie, Minnesota*  
*Hour 11*

## **Meliae**

Drops of iron soak into the earth,  
giving you your first breath.  
Roots anchor you to your mother,  
knotted wood encases your spirit.  
From your limbs, flowers bloom,  
bringing with them companions of bees and birds.

You will never know your father,  
but one day you will learn how he died at his son's hands.

Maxine Wise  
*Ottawa, Canada*  
*Hour 8*

## **Skin Deep**

I've grown numb to beauty  
preaching its worth from the shallows.

Making a neat fist I shatter  
my vanity mirror, watching  
the shards fall into non-existence.

Perhaps I'll start a revolt against  
all the mirrors so eager

to define our worth from  
one careless reflection given.

Society's afraid of me telling girls that  
I've grown numb to beauty.

Perhaps I'll start a revolt against  
my alter ego. Will happily lock  
the box myself as I

rise to the sun where I belong,  
beautiful in my imperfect skin.

## Home

This is a little bit of a story, a little bit of a poem  
a little bit of my mom's chai that I can never get right,  
a little bit of my dad's books; those I always got right,  
but sometimes they would have rippled pages,  
because my mom threw them in the water once when he came home late—  
Just a bucket of water, that ate  
all the words  
she never said anything to us, her children,  
though I think she suspected he loved his books more?  
Someone must love us more  
except, love is tricky, and muddy,  
and dusty, and I'm allergic  
to dust.

So loving me was never easy  
and hiding that was difficult, I suspect  
and if nothing else was hidden, I hid  
under books and music, and broken container lids  
that were always too familiar but never enough.  
Like pain is when you grow old with it.  
I could never sit,  
And so I sailed myself away, as one does.

Trust  
the process – as is in baking and cooking, and sewing, and sweeping.  
None of which I ever learnt;  
I guess then my fingers were almost always burnt.  
And no other chai tasted like home,  
except 'home to me is wherever you are,'  
so home should be, where I am?  
But I remembered too late that I never liked chai  
until I left.

## **What If?**

She said, "Hold your tongue!  
Only speak when you are spoken to."  
What if I have my opinion?  
She said, "You have to be flexible. That  
which doesn't bend is broken." What if I  
refuse to break?  
She said, "Be his shadow;  
never step ahead of him."  
What if I want to have my own existence?  
She said, "Forget your past;  
start anew with no luggage from the past."  
What if I want to cling on to my childhood?  
What if I want to break this chain?  
What if I don't carry it generation after generation?  
I want my girls to be free.  
Never change for anyone.  
Find someone who accepts them as they are.

Zainab Suleiman  
*Denver, Colorado*  
*Hour 2*

## **Marshmallows**

Crackling of wood  
The embers flying  
Five sticks  
Five marshmallows  
Burning, melting  
Falling into the flames  
Unattended



Janelle Hershberger  
*Stow, Ohio*  
*Hour 1*

## **Lake**

Intense, piercing sun rays  
scorch the thick air;  
boiling through this sultry summer day.  
Sunbeams violently grab the water  
shooting back into the rich sapphire sky,  
like brilliant fireworks.  
Glassy waves wash up;  
leaving remnants of memories...  
The lake will always be his favorite.

## Memory

She looked up from her knitting  
at her daughter sprawled on the carpet  
reading a hardback copy  
of "Nail in the Oak Tree."

Taking a sip from her wine glass,  
she popped a cracker  
and a cube of extra-sharp cheddar cheese  
into her mouth.

At the window, the twilight beckoned her.  
"I'm going out to water the sunflowers.  
Wanna come? It's pretty out."

"Sure." The girl marked her page  
and slid the book into her satchel.

Outside, they stood on the driveway pavement  
discussing whether there was space  
in this flower bed for the zinnias they had bought,  
or would they be happier somewhere else?

Arms around each other,  
they spent several amiable minutes  
admiring the garden, the fireflies,  
and the moon-filled night.

Their last evening together.

Britton Gildersleeve  
*Blacksburg, Virginia*  
*Hour 8*

## **Neo-gigan for a Roc**

They might have been eggs    pebbles of sodalite or chalcedony  
nestled within wooden cups    three and four to a family

It's what they looked like: eggs lain by some prehistoric bird  
bright of wing and long of beak, legs drawn up like cranes might  
soaring over unmapped lands long since lost to me

While the fierce mother of these unhatched rocs (mythic, stifled)  
waits somewhere in another era, a timeline far removed from now.

She broods, a harpy eagle of sorts, her face not quite human  
not quite avian. She is other, mother of rocks that once were eggs

now metamorphosed into stone, pebbles that should have been eggs  
unresponsive to a soft whirring of wings.

In this fierce mother's world, there is no mythic partner to mourn with her  
only the cacophony of a forest I will never know, although her solitary  
state is familiar. I too await misfortune on my own, now.

And the small bluegreen stones that once held the possibility of light  
nestle still in wooden hollows that are all they will remember of a home.

Angela Theresa Egic  
*Astoria, New York*  
*Hour 1*

## **Watery Dream**

I dreamt of her again  
I dreamt of water again  
It was flowing over my feet.

Mom, come save me!  
Before it rises above my head.

It never did.

It only rose knee high.  
It was smooth . . .  
gentle . . .  
warm . . .  
. . . it was her.

I could still walk through the watery waves.  
But where would I go?

I'd rather drown in her warmth.

Be enveloped in it.  
Float on it . . .  
Be in it . . .  
Then to be without it.

Mom, come back, please.

Rumbi Chen  
*Australia*  
*Hour 6*

## **The One I Was**

I want to dance to this song  
with the one who wooed my heart  
who knows,  
perhaps, but my mind was blinded by folly  
reason not fully comprehending  
the illusion it could be  
dilution of the senses  
decision of one's worth  
my worth  
a battle of three worlds – of three words  
I miss you

Farzana Suleman  
*Johannesburg, South Africa*  
*Hour 2*

## **TO THE BOY**

There is a boy I had once known.  
Who was always quiet and always alone.  
He never had friends and never would talk.  
He always kept his head down when he would walk.

I never spoke to him or tried to be his friend.  
But I somehow knew he had scars to mend.  
So maybe “known” is not the word that should be used  
because “knowing” and “know of” must not be confused.

Sometimes I wonder about him even though it’s been years.  
What was the reason behind his unshed tears?  
Why was it that he always seemed down?  
What was the cause of his constant frown?

Years later I wish I had at least flashed him a smile  
or even offered him a simple “hello” once in a while.  
Too dumb and stupid I was back then;  
the naivety that comes from being in grade ten.

So to the boy who always covered his face  
know that I wish I had given you just one embrace.  
You are still thought about to this day  
and wherever you are, I hope you are okay.

## **Triad Letter: The Family**

My darling daughter,

When I left the house that New Year's Day,  
I ended up dying.  
Thought I was indestructible,  
but the highway got me in the end.

We never said goodbye.  
I can only imagine how a loss  
so abrupt made its home  
inside your developing psyche.

Your mom must have been in shock,  
then she had to give birth.

Must have been awful.  
I'm so very sorry.

Love Dad

Daughter,

He left me too, you know.  
that New Year's Day...  
alone with two children and  
a half-finished house.  
I was blinded by rage, so I nurtured  
you and took it out on your  
brother while you watched  
helpless, powerless.

Then later, I denied all.  
Years go by and I've grown  
very old.

You take me in and  
never outwardly

blame me —after  
all your brother came out

broken; I couldn't handle him.  
What was I supposed to do?

But...I had a peaceful  
end.

I'm sort of sorry.

Mom

Renae,

When I died, I was angry.  
I blamed you—you left and  
never looked back.  
They put me in the state hospital;  
made me a zombie.

You tried to visit I know but  
She controlled that too.

I'm with them now and I  
have peace—  
you should too.

There was nothing you could have done.

She was not self-aware,  
She couldn't love me.

You did. I know that now.  
And... You took away gifts from

this and now use them to help

others - keep doing that

And be at peace sister.

Love Paul



Junior Knight  
*Coos Bay, Oregon*  
*Hour 15*

## **“The Lights Are On, Despite The dark”**

It is the dead of night,

i sit in awe of the noises  
still being made.

No filters on the reverberations.  
Exhaust echoing off the now cool black top.

Tires spinning too fast as brakes pump.

The chirp of nightingales  
playing holler back.  
Even the dew seems to whistle  
as it drips from top to bottom leaf.

The spark of my lighter  
triggers tracer memories  
bonfire dances, in the moonlit dark.

Before i let myself question  
the bickering laughter of siblings  
awake long after the sun has left,  
i remind myself the neighbor is terminal.  
While i am busying myself, trying to hush my memories  
and drift to sleep...  
they are trying to squeeze as many memories as will fit within a second.

i whisper prayers from the shadows of my porch...

“If it be to your purpose Lord,  
might you grant the unspoken wishes  
hidden in the laughter coming from these wounded hearts.”

KV Adams  
*Melbourne, Victoria, Australia*  
*Hour 13*

## **THE GIFT**

The winter sun warms my lap as it inches slowly upwards to embrace me.  
The dew whimpers goodbye as it dries on faux grass, and the border plants  
wave  
in the breeze at the waning crescent moon, who in her desire for more time  
with her distant lover the sun, lingers to look longingly at him in the clear  
blue sky.

As I sit on the porch drinking chai, watching my suburban street come  
alive  
I realise I've finally arrived at a time and space I never thought would  
eventuate;  
a time where you're just a memory and the heartbreak of unrequited love  
is treasured for the profound gift it was.

Brian Hasson  
*Derry City, Northern Ireland*  
*Hour 2*

## Choices

Between the woods and frozen lake  
neither path I wish to take  
For survival I must choose one  
I'll wait for the arrival of the sun.

The sun rises, my path still not clear  
no steps taken; I'm trembling with fear  
The lake's surface covered with Ice and Snow  
however, the strength of it I do not know.

The trees in the woods whisper, "Come, this way."  
Beautiful in appearance, can I trust what I hear them say?  
I'll close my eyes; slowly breathe in  
how did I get here, how did it begin?

Between the woods and frozen lake  
which path should I take?  
Should I open my eyes and let out a scream?  
Maybe I'll awaken, hoping it was a dream

*Opening line is from 'Stopping by woods on a Snowy Evening', by  
Robert Frost*

## **Sanctuary**

sunlight sparkles in dust motes  
sent swirling by a stray wingflap  
ancient stone floors tap-tap-tap  
mutedly under layers of moss and leaf

the wooden pews have rotted soft  
chipmunks and robins their only visitors  
light enough to rest on the weakened benches  
and comprehend nothing of religion

ivies and wildflowers peek around walls  
cautiously sneaking over the floor  
exploring their discovered ruins  
with all the time in the world

a pulpit and altar stand still  
keeping stewarding watch  
over the greening sanctuary  
and the mice that nest there

all this splayed beneath a bright rainbow glow  
casting golden amber, ruby, sapphire, emerald  
between the shadows of swaying branches  
from the crumbling stained-glass window

Paul Sarvasy  
*Bellingham, Washington*  
*Hour 6*

## **A Question**

*a golden shovel after Cecilia Meireles*

How do we weigh the sounds between I  
and thou that enable us to hear  
all of the vowels and consonants the  
voices vying for our attention in this world  
are trying to keep us from sobbing  
in despair so we can ground ourselves like  
an ancient bristlecone pine rooted in a  
hostile environment that seems foreign  
and yet is embedded in our own language

Julianne Abend  
Hewlett, New York  
Hour 6

## **(Hashtag)#AnotherMomentInLife**

Hashtag – I’m awesome!

Hashtag – It’s my birthday month!

Hashtag - Photo creds of selfies: by me  
wait for it...

Hashtag - Guess what I just read on Reddit? A story about me! P.S. I may  
have written and posted that story, just now.

Hashtag, Hashtag, h-a-s-h-t-a-g – I’m bored...

or maybe come up for air, for giving a smile, for human kind, to care, to love,  
to be more than a photo, blog, blurb, bout of selfness that only feeds it’s id...  
“What ID? My passport photo is soooo bad. The lightening was off.” filters  
everywhere –

Hashtags end words now?

Juxtapose the id hashtag and the supercool - I mean - superego h-a-s-h-t-a-g.

It’s reality, my friends –  
another moment in life.

Tiffany V. Thomas  
*Cornelius, North Carolina*  
*Hour 1*

## **Carbon**

Shimmering, steely, slick  
Rain cuts the air  
In heavy sheets

Heavens determined  
To wash away the carbon pieces  
Turned terribly wrong

The element has evolved  
Into a most awful version  
Of itself

Electrons outnumbering protons  
The six and six and six  
Has become unstable

The storm will persist  
Until each particle finds its charge  
Until the carbon stabilizes

Until it learns to love again

Katelyn Dunne  
*Chicago, Illinois*  
*Hour 1*

After all

this

time

and

are

stars any

all

only

more

these

my

where

turns

know

don't

I

*\*This poem is in the shape of the Pisces Constellation*



Bella Ogwuche  
*Abuja, Nigeria*  
*Hour 12*

## **Haunted**

The wind tonight carries heavy waves                      and I wonder  
if in any way I can withstand them.                                              The water  
also  
carries a familiar face  
maybe not so familiar.  
This night we sit side by side                                              burn our incense  
throw it to God                                              hope they don't return the same way.

## Identity

I am a mathematician  
my world is made up of equations  
of how to navigate people  
not toward, but around,  
accelerating the calculus  
of a life divisible by one.

I am a survivalist  
relying on the fundamentals  
to keep me whole  
but they lack  
the additions and subtractions  
of a fulfilled existence.

I am an actor  
but not a very good one apparently  
because you, dear friend,  
who bears the weight of my well-rehearsed deception  
sees through the performance  
and I am scared to death  
that you'll walk out of the theater  
and leave me alone  
with my monologue.

I stand still  
and let the planet revolve around me  
making no attempt  
to plunge into its chaotic orbit.

If I could, like a baby,  
take that first step  
flying forward  
the pure strive, the reach  
on instinct alone  
from a primal desire  
to simply be in the world,  
would you stay and watch me soar?



## **Poetics**

### **(Poets, And the Art of Poetry)**

*“Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence, which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”*

*Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Defence of Poetry*



Linda Hallstrom  
*Sioux Falls, South Dakota*  
*Hour 12*

## **The Gathering**

We gather at our regular table  
in a used bookstore.

What a fine idea that they sell wine  
along with books  
and schedule poetry readings  
and trivia nights.

What a blessing  
that I know women  
who love wine and books and trivia.

Women who drive downtown  
once a week to find parking  
and drink wine  
and inhale the scent of books.

How lucky to know women  
who prefer cozy places  
away from the 'in crowd.'

Women who value conversation  
and laughter  
and friendship.

Women without an agenda  
or pretense—

The women who gather  
at our regular table  
in a used bookstore.

Melissa McCarter  
*Yonkers, New York*  
*Hour 2*

## **Moonflower**

I bury grief in my bones and walk  
so someday you will have a poem  
about a flower that opens  
its face at dusk—no one passes by  
to smell the heavy sweetness linger.  
Under the moon, flowers pure  
and white climb the fence  
to what shines above.  
I think they too want to hold  
the hand of God before closing.  
Only you see it now  
through me. Others lose faith  
in the flower, the moon,  
in God.

Mildred Achoch  
*Nairobi, Kenya*  
*Hour 20*

## **ECHO HUSBAND**

Come here, Poem.  
Lie with me.  
Lie to me.  
Lie in me.  
Lie that my echo husband is real.  
Lie that every lie I feel  
is water under a rickety bridge.  
Lie that ones and zeroes  
can turn an online ogre into a home-bound hero.  
Lie that this dark, dank cave  
is a palmy, balmy tropical island,  
full of flowers and flirting  
with wedding waves.  
Lie with me on this bed of roses.  
No, leave my rose-coloured glasses  
and top hat  
on.



S Afrose  
*Bangladesh*  
*Hour 7*

## **The Serene Verse**

What a beauty, this art!  
Amidst all the serene verses.  
Life goes on, losing its rhythms,  
That verse acts as a miracle.  
This is found in nature's heart,  
The most prestigious art on earth.  
What a beauty is nature!  
Helps to forget the exhausted hut.  
Let us follow the ray of hub.  
The serene verse is the prominent part.

## **Unification of the soul**

Unification of the soul,  
a sharing of a story,  
our hearts are whole,  
to connect is a glory.

A sense of belonging,  
a soul's translator,  
filled with a longing,  
to be part of something greater.

Dave Hirsh  
*Nassau County, New York*  
*Hour 8*

## **What the \_\_\_\_\_ Man? Poetry Again**

People think that poetry as an art form has died  
There is nothing left to say after you get rid of rhythm and rhyme  
Stream of consciousness writing creating structural associations

That only the writer, if anyone, truly comprehends (TS Eliot tried to crawl  
his way out of

    this conundrum or perhaps paradox)

Modernism, post-modernism, surrealism, impressionism, expressionism

    Abstract impressionism, abstract expressionism, realism, super-  
realism

    Deconstructionism

As analytic devices are fine to comment on other forms of art  
But poetry by definition

Needs structure  
As certainly maintained by anyone who as ever and only read Trees by  
Joyce Kilmer

What is poetry after all but words on a page  
People think that poetry as an art form has died

As analytic devices are fine to comment on other forms of art  
Are the words too hot to touch after prosody has been cancelled (or should  
we say eliminated,

    or should we say no longer needed once writing was  
invented)

Have you ever tried to memorize ee cummings

TS Eliot had his comings and goings, and had his women coming and  
going (was there

    a pun involved?)

Would he really have been happier living at the bottom of the sea?

Jacob Jans  
Toronto, Ontario  
Hour 7

## About that Road Not Taken

Dear Robert,

You never explained what difference it made –  
though I can't blame you, the poem

was a joke. The road imagined. You never even took  
one step on it. Yet you inspired

generations of shallow-thinking solipsists  
to navel gaze down their own fantasy roads–

I can't blame you for that, either, though  
you certainly scooted along that academia borne

focus on craft beyond meaning–leading to so  
much praise for indecipherable word-play combinations

exclusive to those who dare travel some different  
path. Though how could you predict how meaningless

it would all become? Fire and Ice is clever, I'll give you  
that. But what was the point of it, really, except

to glorify the obvious? And now, look here, you've  
brought me into the fray, folded me like a mute

pigeon into a bag, my words coiffed in the  
unbearable influence of your joke–so to those

reading this, please take a moment, ask yourself  
what road you really want to be on and why?

And sure, they say the destination is the journey, but  
that's only for ineffective drifters–those who see

nothing they want to build, nothing they care  
to change, nothing beyond themselves and a damn road.

James Featherstone  
*Spanish Fork, Utah*  
*Hour 6*

## **Perspective**

Perspective, what a thing.

A poem written  
during a dark time.

Read by most,  
a glimpse into the darkness.

Given to a child,  
darkness becomes humor.

Laughter, not sadness.

Smiles, not frowns.

Perspective, what an odd thing.

## **Come To Me Like Song**

Come to me like a song  
a half-remembered melody.  
Like promises I half forgot  
to a certain special somebody!  
Come now to me like my muse  
with a tingle and melancholy  
a song that tugs at my heartstrings  
rekindling pain from bygone follies.

Come to me like an old song  
that lifts me into a trance  
nudging me from drills of drudgery  
to new words and thoughts, perchance!  
Come now to me, like my muse.  
Save me from dry despair  
let my ink flow like tears  
my broken wings repair!

Success Koori  
*Abuja, Nigeria*  
*Hour 12*

**unseen**

in this poem,  
there is a fruit screaming onto our tongues,  
“taste me.”  
there is a flower awaiting her maker’s  
tender touch  
there’s a book itching to be opened.  
i carry my pride on my back  
still, the world has refused to cast  
even a glare.  
in this poem, i am a fading scent  
a title that hasn’t been read  
and if the world doesn’t spare  
their eyes today  
this girl might fade into the page.

Davion Moore  
*Sandusky, Ohio*  
*Hour 8*

## **The Life of a Writer**

I am a writer  
trying to find his way

Going through notebook  
after notebook  
honing my craft

Looking for inspiration  
in the smallest things

And then finding the words  
to describe them

As nerve-wracking as it can be  
I am a writer

Looking for inspiration  
And sometimes, finding it  
And sometimes, my mind is blank

But that's the beauty of the journey  
You keep going





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