Poetry Anthology

2026-2027

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War Widow

By Chris Abani

The telephone never rings. Still
you pick it up, smile into the static,
the breath of those you've loved; long dead.

The leaf you pick from the fall
rises and dips away with every ridge.
Fingers stiff from time, you trace.

Staring off into a distance limned
by cataracts and other collected debris,
you have forgotten none of the long-ago joy
of an ice-cream truck and its summer song.

Between the paving stones;
between tea, a cup, and the sound
of you pouring;
between the time you woke that morning
and the time when the letter came,
a tired sorrow: like an old flagellant
able only to tease with a weak sting.

Riding the elevator all day,
floor after floor after floor,
each stop some small victory whittled
from the hard stone of death, you smile.
They used to write epics about moments like this.

Chris Abani, "War Widow" from *Hands Washing Water.* Copyright © 2006 by Chris Abani. Used with the permission of Copper Canyon Press.

Never Enough of Living

By Léonie Adams

Never, my heart, is there enough of living,
Since only in thee is loveliness so sweet pain;
Only for thee the willows will be giving
Their quiet fringes to the dreaming river;
Only for thee so the light grasses ever
Are hollowed by the print of windy feet,
And breathe hill weather on the misty plain;
And were no rapture of them in thy beat,
For every hour of sky
Stillborn in gladness would the waters wear
Colors of air translucently,
And the stars sleep there.

Gently, my heart, nor let one moment ever
Be spilled from the brief fullness of thine urn.
Plunge in its exultation star and star,
Sea and plumed sea in turn.
O still, my heart, nor spill this moment ever.

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The Days to Come

By Medora C. Addison

Now shall I store my soul with silent beauty,
    Beauty of drifting clouds and mountain heights,
Beauty of sun-splashed hills and shadowed forests,
    Beauty of dawn and dusk and star-swept nights.
Now shall I fill my heart with quiet music,
   Song of the wind across the pine-clad hill,
Song of the rain and, fairer than all music,
   Call of the thrush when twilight woods are still.
So shall the days to come be filled with beauty,
    Bright with the promise caught from eastern skies;
So shall I see the stars when night is darkest,
    Still hear the thrush’s song when music dies.

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Snake Oil, Snake Bite

By Dilruba Ahmed

They staunched the wound with a stone.
They drew blue venom from his blood
until there was none
When his veins ran true his face remained
lifeless and all the mothers of the village
wept and pounded their chests until the sky
had little choice
but to grant their supplications. God made
the boy breathe again.

God breathes life into us, it is said,
only once. But this case was an exception.
God drew back in a giant gust and blew life into the boy
and like a stranded fish, he shuddered, oceanless.

It was true: the boy lived.
He lived for a very long time. The toxins
were an oil slick: contaminated, cleaned.
But just as soon as the women
kissed redness back into his cheeks
the boy began to die again.
He continued to die for the rest of his life.
The dying took place slowly, sweetly.
The dying took a very long time.

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Truth is I would like to escape myself

By Nour Al Ghraowi

Truth is I would like to escape myself.
Detach my body from my skin,
peel it layer by layer to uncover
beneath the surface of petals
and thorns piled up year after year,
who I am and who I want to be.
I want to be the flower that grows
in dirt, the feather that flies free between
the cracks of fences. A wise woman
once told me, *don't worry about you,*
worry about who you could be.
I want to be the woman who sits
on a desk and writes pieces of oceans,
rivers on a white space in a place
where imagination has no border.

Nour Al Ghraowi, "Truth is I would like to escape myself" from from *Poetry* (March 2021). Used with the permission of the author.

In a Neighborhood in Los Angeles

By Francisco X. Alarcón

translated from the Spanish by Francisco Aragón

I learned
Spanish
from my grandma

mijito
don't cry
she'd tell me

on the mornings
my parents
would leave

to work
at the fish
canneries

my grandma
would chat
with chairs

sing them
old
songs

dance
waltzes with them
in the kitchen

when she'd say
niño barrigón
she'd laugh

with my grandma
I learned
to count clouds

to recognize
mint leaves
in flowerpots

my grandma
wore moons
on her dress

Mexico's mountains
deserts
ocean

in her eyes
I'd see them
in her braids

I'd touch them
in her voice
smell them

one day
I was told:
she went far away

but still
I feel her
with me

whispering
in my ear:
mijito

Francisco X. Alarcón, "In a Neighborhood in Los Angeles" from *From the Other Side of Night/del otro lado de la noche: New and Selected Poems*. Copyright © 2002 by Francisco X. Alarcón. Used by permission of The University of Arizona Press.

Africa

By Lewis Grandison Alexander

Thou art not dead, although the spoiler’s hand
Lies heavy as death upon thee; though the wrath
Of its accursed might is in thy path
And has usurped thy children of their land;
Though yet the scourges of a monstrous band
Roam on thy ruined fields, thy trampled lanes,
Thy ravaged homes and desolated fanes;
Thou art not dead, but sleeping,—Motherland.

A mighty country, valorous and free,
Thou shalt outlive this terror and this pain;
Shall call thy scattered children back to thee,
Strong with the memory of their brothers slain;
And rise from out thy charnel house to be
Thine own immortal, brilliant self again!

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“I Don’t Think for a Second That We Won’t Survive This”

By Abdul Ali

She starts running. I call cheater as she
gains on me, wobbling uncontrollably.
That bloody fruit in my chest sags low.

I want to tell her. My palm sweats through
a manilla envelope holding court papers;
I blow an invisible donut hole.

My chest is a flat worn-out mattress. Her eyes,
A blurry river— promises to cry for me when I’m gone
But I remind her I ain’t going nowhere!

Time loses seconds; I make a silly face to break the gravity.
I pick her up and we’re flying. Her arms stretch across the sky
With crayola lines of fleshy pinks and browns.

Her body grows small, reversing time as she runs down the hall,
A little rocket, shooting towards light where karate, jump rope,
The sound of her feet beating the swollen ground,

Her learning ancient colored girl chants
Let’s get the rhythm of the hot dog

The air thins, my thoughts lift me to outer space,
I don’t worry
I mouth something to the gods

And I don’t think for a second that we won’t survive this.

Copyright Credit: Abdul Ali, “I Don’t Think for a Second That We Won’t Survive This.”
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The Jogger on Riverside Drive, 5:00 A.M.

By Agha Shahid Ali

The dark scissors of his legs
cut the moon’s

raw silk, highways of wind
torn into lanes, his feet

pushing down the shadow
whose patterns he becomes

while trucks, one by one,
pass him by,

headlights pouring
from his pace, his eyes

cracked as the Hudson
wraps street lamps

in its rippled blue shells,
the summer’s thin, thin veins

bursting with dawn,
he, now suddenly free,

from the air, from himself,
his heart beating far, far

behind him

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Rain

By Kazim Ali

With thick strokes of ink the sky fills with rain.
Pretending to run for cover but secretly praying for more rain.

Over the echo of the water, I hear a voice saying my name.
No one in the city moves under the quick sightless rain.

The pages of my notebook soak, then curl. I've written:
"Yogis opened their mouths for hours to drink the rain."

The sky is a bowl of dark water, rinsing your face.
The window trembles; liquid glass could shatter into rain.

I am a dark bowl, waiting to be filled.
If I open my mouth now, I could drown in the rain.

I hurry home as though someone is there waiting for me.
The night collapses into your skin. I am the rain.

Copyright Credit: Kazim Ali, "Rain" from *The Far Mosque*. Reprinted by permission of Alice James Books.

Ramadan

By Kazim Ali

You wanted to be so hungry, you would break into branches,
and have to choose between the starving month's

nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-third evenings.
The liturgy begins to echo itself and why does it matter?

If the ground-water is too scarce one can stretch nets
into the air and harvest the fog.

Hunger opens you to illiteracy,
thirst makes clear the starving pattern,

the thick night is so quiet, the spinning spider pauses,
the angel stops whispering for a moment—

The secret night could already be over,
you will have to listen very carefully—

You are never going to know which night's mouth is sacredly reciting
and which night's recitation is secretly mere wind—

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Meeting at an Airport

By Taha Muhammad Ali

translated from the Arabic by Peter Cole,
Yahya Hijazi, and Gabriel Levin

You asked me once,
on our way back
from the midmorning
trip to the spring:
“What do you hate,
and *who* do you love?”

And I answered,
from behind the eyelashes
of my surprise,
my blood rushing
like the shadow
cast by a cloud of starlings:
“I hate departure . . .
I love the spring
and the path to the spring,
and I worship the middle
hours of morning.”
And you laughed . . .
and the almond tree blossomed
and the thicket grew loud with nightingales.

. . . A question
now four decades old:
I salute that question’s answer;
and an answer
as old as your departure;
I salute that answer’s question . . .

And today,
it’s preposterous,
here we are at a friendly airport
by the slimmest of chances,
and we meet.
Ah, Lord!

we meet.
And here you are
asking—again,
it's absolutely preposterous—
I recognized you
but you didn't recognize me.
"Is it you?!"
But you wouldn't believe it.
And suddenly
you burst out and asked:
"If you're really you,
What do you hate
and *who* do you love?!"

And I answered—
my blood
fleeing the hall,
rushing in me
like the shadow
cast by a cloud of starlings:
"I hate departure,
and I love the spring,
and the path to the spring,
and I worship the middle
hours of morning."

And you wept,
and flowers bowed their heads,
and doves in the silk of their sorrow stumbled.

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To Melody

By George Leonard Allen

I think that man hath made no beauteous thing
More lovely than a glorious melody
That soars aloft in splendor, full and free,
And graceful as a swallow on the wing!
A melody that seems to move, and sing,
And quiver, in its radiant ecstasy,
That bends and rises like a slender tree
Which sways before the gentle winds of Spring!

Ah, men will ever love thee, holy art!
For thou, of all the blessings God hath given,
Canst best revive and cheer the wounded heart
And nearest bring the weary soul to Heaven!
Of all God’s precious gifts, it seems to me,
The choicest is the gift of melody.

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Self-Portrait as Kendrick Lamar, Laughing to the Bank

By Ashanti Anderson

This, what God feels like: laughing
alone in an empty room of tiny doors,
behind every door a metal box, inside each
a man's red heart, lying. I don't write
of the cartoonish thing split and jagged
at its insides. Instead, of how I break
even across the same backs spindled by hate.
I tell God I understand and what I mean is
I've noticed good people must die to let
there be light in my house. We share a likeness,
God and I, both laughing like something
green folded in our throats. Laughing mean-
while somebody's auntie asks for Anything
Helps. Laughing when people say they don't
want to read about the bad stuff. Crying
laughing as we pass our pain off as an offering
plate. Sometimes I nervous chuckle, knowing
trauma pays, but the only time I really laugh
is when I'm laughing to the bank like *a-ha.*

Copyright Credit: Ashanti Anderson, "Self-Portrait as Kendrick Lamar, Laughing to the Bank" from *Poetry* (June 2020). Reprinted by permission of the author.

Our Nature

By Rae Armantrout

The very flatness
of portraits
makes for nostalgia
in the connoisseur.

Here's the latest
little lip of wave
to flatten
and spread thin.

Let's say
it shows our recklessness,

our fast gun,

our self-consciousness
which was really

our infatuation
with our own fame,

our escapes,

the easy way
we'd blend in

with the peasantry,

our loyalty
to our old gang

from among whom
it was our nature

to be singled out

Copyright Credit: Rae Armantrout, "Our Nature" from *Veil*. Reprinted by permission of Wesleyan University Press.

Pinocchio

By Rae Armantrout

Strand. String.
In this dream,

the paths cross
and cross again.

They are spelling
a real boy

out of repetition.

•

Each one
is the one

real boy.

Each knows
he must be

wrong
about this, but

he can’t feel
how.

•

The fish
and the fisherman,

the pilot,
the princess,

the fireman and
the ones on fire.

Copyright Credit: Rae Armantrout, “Pinocchio” from *Conjure*. Reprinted by permission of Wesleyan University Press.

Meditation on a Grapefruit

By Craig Arnold

To wake when all is possible
before the agitations of the day
have gripped you
To come to the kitchen
and peel a little basketball
for breakfast
To tear the husk
like cotton padding a cloud of oil
misting out of its pinprick pores
clean and sharp as pepper
To ease
each pale pink section out of its case
so carefully without breaking
a single pearly cell
To slide each piece
into a cold blue china bowl
the juice pooling until the whole
fruit is divided from its skin
and only then to eat
so sweet
a discipline
precisely pointless a devout
involvement of the hands and senses
a pause a little emptiness

each year harder to live within

each year harder to live without

Copyright Credit: Craig Arnold, “Meditations on a Grapefruit” from *Poetry* (October 2009). Reprinted by permission of the Estate of Craig Arnold.

Very Large Moth

By Craig Arnold

After D.H.L.

Your first thought when the light snaps on and the black wings
clatter about the kitchen is a bat

the clear part of your mind considers rabies the other part
does not consider knows only to startle

and cower away from the slap of its wings though it is soon
clearly not a bat but a moth and harmless

still you are shy of it it clings to the hood of the stove
not black but brown its orange eyes sparkle

like televisions its leg joints are large enough to count
how could you kill it where would you hide the body

a creature so solid must have room for a soul
and if this is so why not in a creature

half its size or half its size again and so on
down to the ants clearly it must be saved

caught in a shopping bag and rushed to the front door

afraid to crush it feeling the plastic rattle

loosened into the night air it batters the porch light
throwing fitful shadows around the landing

That was a really big moth is all you can say to the doorman
who has watched your whole performance with a smile

the half-compassion and half-horror we feel for the creatures
we want not to hurt and prefer not to touch

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Anasazi

By Tacey M. Atsitty

How can we die when we're already
prone to leaving the table mid-meal
like Ancient Ones gone to breathe
elsewhere. Salt sits still, but pepper's gone
rolled off in a rush. We've practiced dying
for a long time: when we skip dance or town,
when we chew. We've rounded out
like dining room walls in a canyon, eaten
through by wind—Sorry we rushed off;
the food wasn't ours. Sorry the grease sits
white on our plates, and the jam that didn't set—
use it as syrup to cover every theory of us.

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I Know It Will Be Quiet When You Come

By Joseph Auslander

I know it will be quiet when you come:
No wind; the water breathing steadily;
A light like ghost of silver on the sea;
And the surf dreamily fingering his drum.
Twilight will drift in large and leave me numb
With nearness to the last tranquility;
And then the slow and languorous tyranny
Of orange moon, pale night, and cricket hum.

And suddenly there will be twist of tide,
A rustling as of thin silk on the sand,
The tremor of a presence at my side,
The tremble of a hand upon my hand:
And pulses sharp with pain, and fires fanned,
And words that stumble into stars and hide.

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Call of the Night

By Djuna Barnes

Dark, and the wind-blurred pines,
With a glimmer of light between.
Then I, entombed for an hourless night
With the world of things unseen.

Mist, the dust of flowers,
Leagues, heavy with promise of snow,
And a beckoning road ‘twixt vale and hill,
With the lure that all must know.

A light, my window’s gleam,
Soft, flaring its squares of red—
I loose the ache of the wilderness
And long for the fire instead.

You too know, old fellow?
Then, lift your head and bark.
It’s just the call of the lonesome place,
The winds and the housing dark.

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Napalm

By Quan Barry

I have come to realize the body is its own pyre, that degree
rises from within, the fatty acids a kind of kindling.
Like a scientist in a lab, this much I have established, blood jelled
like gasoline, the years spread before me like a map
pinned with targets, where I'm raging even now.
It works both ways. Clear the forests to see your enemies
and your enemies see you clearly. Like all effective incendiaries,
I won't only bloom where I'm planted.

Copyright Credit: Quan Barry, "Napalm" from *Asylum.* Reprinted by permission of University of Pittsburgh Press.

Catch

By Samiya Bashir

if this is a game then we have made it, unknowing,
to the final four. unlikely underdogs. spectators turned
to suspect sport. anti-athletes. out of shape beyond reason.

at season's height we fight for a limited audience. few dancers.
fewer cheers. down by 30 and our coach m.i.a. we, foolish, dribble.
each bounce-back brings a stranger. can't call us for traveling because

we ain't going nowhere. instead, we trade terrified looks. search
for the pass but no one stays open for long. even if we knew what to do
to pull this through we've got two other teams waiting, impatient, to take us
out.

Samiya Bashir, "Catch" from *Gospel* (RedBone Press, 2009). Copyright © 2009 by Samiya Bashir. Used with the permission of the author.

The Cricket and the Grasshopper

By Dan Beachy-Quick

The senseless leaf in the fevered hand
Grows hot, near blood-heat, but never grows
Green. Weeks ago the dove's last cooing strain
Settled silent in the nest to brood slow
Absence from song. The dropped leaf cools
On the uncut grass, supple still, still green,
Twining still these fingers as they listless pull
The tangle straight until the tangle tightens
And the hand is caught, another fallen leaf.
The poetry of the earth never ceases
Ceasing — one blade of grass denies belief
Until its mere thread bears the grasshopper's
Whole weight, and the black cricket sings unseen,
Desire living in a hole beneath the tangle's green.

Dan Beachy-Quick, untitled sonnet in "Romanticisms" from *gentlessness*. Originally published (as "The Cricket and the Grasshopper") in *Poetry* (February 2013). Copyright © 2013, 2015 by Dan Beachy- Quick. Used with the permission of Tupelo Press, tupelopress.org.

The Uniform

By Marvin Bell

Of the sleeves, I remember their weight, like wet wool,
on my arms, and the empty ends which hung past my hands.
Of the body of the shirt, I remember the large buttons
and larger buttonholes, which made a rack of wheels
down my chest and could not be quickly unbuttoned.
Of the collar, I remember its thickness without starch,
by which it lay against my clavicle without moving.
Of my trousers, the same—heavy, bulky, slow to give
for a leg, a crowded feeling, a molasses to walk in.
Of my boots, I remember the brittle soles, of a material
that had not been made love to by any natural substance,
and the laces: ropes to make prisoners of my feet.
Of the helmet, I remember the webbed, inner liner,
a brittle plastic underwear on which wobbled
the crushing steel pot then strapped at the chin.
Of the mortar, I remember the mortar plate,
heavy enough to kill by weight, which I carried by rope.
Of the machine gun, I remember the way it fit
behind my head and across my shoulder blades
as I carried it, or, to be precise, as it rode me.
Of tactics, I remember the likelihood of shooting
the wrong man, the weight of the rifle bolt, the difficulty
of loading while prone, the shock of noise.
For earplugs, some used cigarette filters or toilet paper.
I don't hear well now, for a man of my age,
and the doctor says my ears were damaged and asks
if I was in the Army, and of course I was but then
a wounded eardrum wasn't much in the scheme.

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Somewhere Thuban Is Fading

By Rosebud Ben-Oni

For Carolina Ebeid

We enrolled at barbizon
Knowing full well
We'd never look like
What was promised
Cue carol of the bells
Cue a demo on the casio
And the security of two-way
Escalators setting the speed
Those early mornings
In our mall school
The store's silver grills
Some mannequins left
Half-clothed
We'd taunt them
With our imagined summers
In london paris rome
We weren't please and thank you
Walking with books on our heads
No we were going to devastate
Greek shipping heirs
At every port of call

Yet when our bus broke down

And we trudged the shoulder

Of highways

Single file

Dodging cigarette butt and horn

We shook off those mornings

Studied

Their defenseless

Indifference

The blinding surface

The quality of electric

Without being alive

We knew that there

In only hot pants

The ideal form

Plastic

Most would take a bullet for

While at 16

We were already trash-talking

Our prayers never went beyond

The second floor

Light-years away

From the last word

That distant somewhere

Where a boat loses course

The north star forsaking

Its name to another

Rosebud Ben-Oni, “Somewhere Thuban is Fading” from *Poetry* (March 2015). Copyright © 2015 by Rosebud Ben-Oni. Used with the permission of the author.

Sad Boy’s Sad Boy

By Charles Bernstein

I ruin my hats and all the mat slides glad
I hop my girls and all is skip again
I jump I run you up inside my truck

The car goes looping out in dark and light
And yellow hat slides in
I run my mats and all the girl slides glad

I hoped you skipped me into luck
And jump me black, ruin me glad
I jump I run you up inside my truck

I jump my slopes and all the dopes slide glad
I glide my luck and all is slip again
I jump my hopes and all the rope glides sad

I skip you jump the way you said
But I run old and sigh your name
I ruin my mats and all the girl slides glad

At least when luck hops it skips back again
A rune my mats and all the girls slide glad
I jump I run you up inside my truck

After "Mad Girl's Love Song" by Sylvia Plath

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The New Decalogue

By Ambrose Bierce

Have but one God: thy knees were sore
If bent in prayer to three or four.

Adore no images save those
The coinage of thy country shows.

Take not the Name in vain. Direct
Thy swearing unto some effect.

Thy hand from Sunday work be held—
Work not at all unless compelled.

Honor thy parents, and perchance
Their wills thy fortunes may advance.

Kill not—death liberates thy foe
From persecution's constant woe.

Kiss not thy neighbor's wife. Of course
There's no objection to divorce.

To steal were folly, for 'tis plain
In cheating there is greater gain.

Bear not false witness. Shake your head
And say that you have "heard it said."

Who stays to covet ne'er will catch
An opportunity to snatch.

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The Statesmen

By Ambrose Bierce

How blest the land that counts among
Her sons so many good and wise,
To execute great feats of tongue
When troubles rise.

Behold them mounting every stump,
By speech our liberty to guard.
Observe their courage—see them jump,
And come down hard!

“Walk up, walk up!” each cries aloud,
“And learn from me what you must do
To turn aside the thunder cloud,
The earthquake too.

“Beware the wiles of yonder quack
Who stuffs the ears of all that pass.
I—I alone can show that black
Is white as grass.”

They shout through all the day and break
The silence of the night as well.
They’d make—I wish they’d *go* and make—
Of Heaven a Hell.

A advocates free silver, B
Free trade and C free banking laws.
Free board, clothes, lodging would from me
Win warm applause.

Lo, D lifts up his voice: “You see
The single tax on land would fall
On all alike.” More evenly
No tax at all.

“With paper money,” bellows E,
“We’ll all be rich as lords.” No doubt—
And richest of the lot will be
The chap without.

As many “cures” as addle-wits
Who know not what the ailment is!
Meanwhile the patient foams and spits
Like a gin fizz.

Alas, poor Body Politic,
Your fate is all too clearly read:
To be not altogether quick,
Nor very dead.

You take your exercise in squirms,
Your rest in fainting fits between.
‘Tis plain that your disorder’s worms—
Worms fat and lean.

Worm Capital, Worm Labor dwell
Within your maw and muscle’s scope.
Their quarrels make your life a Hell,
Your death a hope.

God send you find not such an end
To ills however sharp and huge!
God send you convalesce! God send
You vermifuge.

Public domain

Behind Stowe

By Elizabeth Bishop

I heard an elf go whistling by,
A whistle sleek as moonlit grass,
That drew me like a silver string
To where the dusty, pale moths fly,
And make a magic as they pass;
And there I heard a cricket sing.

His singing echoed through and through
The dark under a windy tree
Where glinted little insects' wings.
His singing split the sky in two.
The halves fell either side of me,
And I stood straight, bright with moon-rings.

Public domain

On Mindfulness

By CooXooEii Black

Home is a sound.

I can hear it

in the western meadowlark, the inlaid rocks in my driveway,

in the accent and slang

of my mom's voice.

It's engrained

in her stretched vowels,

in her smashed-together words, in her

hard Rs,

and in the word rez.

I grew up hearing this rez accent, but I didn't know my mom had one

until I spent a year

in the south, where you can't escape the heat

in the shade

because the humidity still clings to you.

I could smell

a Wyoming lake

and a budding Russian olive tree in her voice,

matted river moss melting in my hands.

The mental image I had of my mom had fallen

out of date.

And all my friends from the rez feel the same way. Sometimes we can still taste

a Maverick 99-cent refill from the location

that got shut down

because my late grandpa

kept robbing it, can still taste the water

from our old swimming spot in the drying river,

can still taste

milkweed sap.

Like burnt brass from a plug

separated from a socket,

sometimes there's a trace when things detach.

CooXooEii Black, "On Mindfulness" from *Poetry* (March 2023). Used with the permission of the author.

Istanbul 1983

By Sheila Black

In the frozen square, the student asks me if I will
sell him the books from my backpack. He hides them
under his winter coat. Steam rises from the whole
wheat rolls we break open at the breakfast table.
We drink hot apple tea and pronounce the skyline
“charming.” In a jail a man counts the visible bones,
and recounts them in the blaze of morning. To turn
a self to light proves painful — each piece must
be dissected in turn; you pass through every feeling
imaginable, so many you might make a dictionary —
dread to disgust, delight to degradation. The prisoner
remembers wanting only to read as if in a fever —
running fingers over pyramids of words as if he might
translate himself from this life to a more vivid existence
in which he cuts open the pages with a knife in
plain sight of everyone like a man eating meat and
potatoes at the dinner table. Not that world; this one
where blue light and sharpened files, where identikit
and stamps on passports, where the book in his back-
pack is a crime, and I have sold him down the river
for ideas I barely value — the volumes flung carelessly
across my hotel room, while he picks mushrooms on
the edge of dread, pallid ghosts of what won’t speak
or be spoken. Or where I remember what it is to
be present in the world, and I turn away, unable to
bear it — so much light and dread, so much in the darkness
growing or simply how hard to ever remain in place.

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About Standing (in Kinship)

By Kimberly Blaeser

We all have the same little bones in our foot
twenty-six with funny names like *navicular*.
Together they build something strong—
our foot arch a pyramid holding us up.
The bones don't get casts when they break.
We tape them—one *phalange* to its neighbor for support.
(Other things like sorrow work that way, too—
find healing in the leaning, the closeness.)
Our feet have one quarter of all the bones in our body.
Maybe we should give more honor to feet
and to all those tiny but blessed cogs in the world—
communities, the forgotten architecture of friendship.

Kimberly Blaeser, "About Standing (in Kinship)" from *Ancient Rain*. Copyright © 2024 by Kimberly Blaeser. Used by permission of The University of Arizona Press.

Burning in the Rain

By Richard Blanco

Someday compassion would demand
I set myself free of my desire to recreate
my father, indulge in my mother's losses,
strangle lovers with words, forcing them
to confess for me and take the blame.
Today was that day: I tossed them, sheet
by sheet on the patio and gathered them
into a pyre. I wanted to let them go
in a blaze, tiny white dwarfs imploding
beside the azaleas and ficus bushes,
let them crackle, burst like winged seeds,
let them smolder into gossamer embers—
a thousand gray butterflies in the wind.
Today was that day, but it rained, kept
raining. Instead of fire, water—drops
knocking on doors, wetting windows
into mirrors reflecting me in the oaks.
The garden walls and stones swelling
into ghostlier shades of themselves,
the wind chimes giggling in the storm,
a coffee cup left overflowing with rain.
Instead of burning, my pages turned
into water lilies floating over puddles,
then tiny white cliffs as the sun set,
finally drying all night under the moon
into papier-mâché souvenirs. Today
the rain would not let their lives burn.

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Waking From Sleep

By Robert Bly

Inside the veins there are navies setting forth,
Tiny explosions at the waterlines,
And seagulls weaving in the wind of the salty blood.

It is the morning. The country has slept the whole
winter.
Window seats are covered with fur skins, the yard is
full.
Of stiff dogs, and hands that clumsily hold heavy
books.

Now we wake, and rise from bed, and eat
breakfast!—
Shouts rise from the harbor of the blood,
Mist, and masts rising, the knocks of wooden tackle in
the sunlight.

Now we sing, and do tiny dances on the kitchen floor.
Our whole body is like a harbor at dawn;
We know that our master has left us for the day.

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A Tale

By Louise Bogan

This youth too long has heard the break
Of waters in a land of change.
He goes to see what suns can make
From soil more indurate and strange.

He cuts what holds his days together
And shuts him in, as lock on lock:
The arrowed vane announcing weather,
The tripping racket of a clock;

Seeking, I think, a light that waits
Still as a lamp upon a shelf,—
A land with hills like rocky gates
Where no sea leaps upon itself.

But he will find that nothing dares
To be enduring, save where, south
Of hidden deserts, torn fire glares
On beauty with a rusted mouth,—

Where something dreadful and another
Look quietly upon each other.

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Medusa

By Louise Bogan

I had come to the house, in a cave of trees,
Facing a sheer sky.
Everything moved,—a bell hung ready to strike,
Sun and reflection wheeled by.

When the bare eyes were before me
And the hissing hair,
Held up at a window, seen through a door.
The stiff bald eyes, the serpents on the forehead
Formed in the air.

This is a dead scene forever now.
Nothing will ever stir.
The end will never brighten it more than this,
Nor the rain blur.

The water will always fall, and will not fall,
And the tipped bell make no sound.
The grass will always be growing for hay
Deep on the ground.

And I shall stand here like a shadow
Under the great balanced day,
My eyes on the yellow dust, that was lifting in the wind,
And does not drift away.

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The Alchemist

By Louise Bogan

I burned my life, that I might find
A passion wholly of the mind,
Thought divorced from eye and bone,
Ecstasy come to breath alone.
I broke my life, to seek relief
From the flawed light of love and grief.

With mounting beat the utter fire
Charred existence and desire.
It died low, ceased its sudden thresh.
I found unmysterious flesh—
Not the mind’s avid substance—still
Passionate beyond the will.

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Lately

By Laure-Anne Bosselaar

when a branch pulls at my sleeve
like a child's tug, or the fog, reticent & thick,
lifts – & strands of it hang like spun sugar
in branches & twigs, or when a phoebe
trills from the hackberry,
I believe such luck
is meant for me. Does this happen to you?
Do you believe at times that a moment
chooses you to remember it & tell about it—
so that it may live again?

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Sign for My Father, Who Stressed the Bunt

By David Bottoms

On the rough diamond,
the hand-cut field below the dog lot and barn,
we rehearsed the strict technique
of bunting. I watched from the infield,
the mound, the backstop
as your left hand climbed the bat, your legs
and shoulders squared toward the pitcher.
You could drop it like a seed
down either base line. I admired your style,
but not enough to take my eyes off the bank
that served as our center-field fence.

Years passed, three leagues of organized ball,
no few lives. I could homer
into the left-field lot of Carmichael Motors,
and still you stressed the same technique,
the crouch and spring, the lead arm absorbing
just enough impact. That whole tiresome pitch
about basics never changing,
and I never learned what you were laying down.

Like a hand brushed across the bill of a cap,
let this be the sign
I'm getting a grip on the sacrifice.

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Under the Vulture-Tree

By David Bottoms

We have all seen them circling pastures,
have looked up from the mouth of a barn, a pine clearing,
the fences of our own backyards, and have stood
amazed by the one slow wing beat, the endless dihedral drift.
But I had never seen so many so close, hundreds,
every limb of the dead oak feathered black,

and I cut the engine, let the river grab the jon boat
and pull it toward the tree.
The black leaves shined, the pink fruit blossomed
red, ugly as a human heart.
Then, as I passed under their dream, I saw for the first time
its soft countenance, the raw fleshy jowls
wrinkled and generous, like the faces of the very old
who have grown to empathize with everything.

And I drifted away from them, slow, on the pull of the river,
reluctant, looking back at their roost,
calling them what I'd never called them, what they are,
those dwarfed transfiguring angels,
who flock to the side of the poisoned fox, the mud turtle
crushed on the shoulder of the road,
who pray over the leaf-graves of the anonymous lost,
with mercy enough to consume us all and give us wings.

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Louis Armstrong Plays for His Wife in Giza, 1961

By Jennifer Bartell Boykin

The sphinx is not drowsy.
Its ear heavy with brass
that echoes off its half-broken face.
The sphinx thinks this is its coronation
that this must be the final blast
written in the books of old.
It now wishes to rise
from this stony couch,
but Louis said he'd play for her anywhere.
He played for her in front of the sphinx
in the shadow of a pyramid, sweat
trickling down his bow-tied body.
This is what the poet says:
Forget the sphinx and its riddles
this is what love sounds like in Giza.
this is what man will do to please her.

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Before the Birth of One of Her Children

By Anne Bradstreet

All things within this fading world hath end,
Adversity doth still our joyes attend;
No ties so strong, no friends so dear and sweet,
But with death's parting blow is sure to meet.
The sentence past is most irrevocable,
A common thing, yet oh inevitable.
How soon, my Dear, death may my steps attend,
How soon't may be thy Lot to lose thy friend,
We are both ignorant, yet love bids me
These farewell lines to recommend to thee,
That when that knot's untied that made us one,
I may seem thine, who in effect am none.
And if I see not half my dayes that's due,
What nature would, God grant to yours and you;
The many faults that well you know I have
Let be interr'd in my oblivious grave;
If any worth or virtue were in me,
Let that live freshly in thy memory
And when thou feel'st no grief, as I no harms,
Yet love thy dead, who long lay in thine arms.
And when thy loss shall be repaid with gains
Look to my little babes, my dear remains.
And if thou love thyself, or loved'st me,
These o protect from step Dames injury.
And if chance to thine eyes shall bring this verse,
With some sad sighs honour my absent Herse;
And kiss this paper for thy loves dear sake,
Who with salt tears this last Farewel did take.

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The Author to Her Book

By Anne Bradstreet

Thou ill-form’d offspring of my feeble brain,
Who after birth didst by my side remain,
Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,
Who thee abroad, expos’d to publick view,
Made thee in raggs, halting to th’ press to trudge,
Where errors were not lessened (all may judg).
At thy return my blushing was not small,
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,
Thy Visage was so irksome in my sight;
Yet being mine own, at length affection would
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:
I wash’d thy face, but more defects I saw,
And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.
I stretched thy joynts to make thee even feet,
Yet still thou run’st more hobling then is meet;
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,
But nought save home-spun Cloth, i’ th’ house I find.
In this array ’mongst Vulgars mayst thou roam.
In Criticks hands, beware thou dost not come;
And take thy way where yet thou art not known,
If for thy Father askt, say, thou hadst none:
And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,
Which caus’d her thus to send thee out of door.

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To My Dear and Loving Husband

By Anne Bradstreet

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me ye women if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay;
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live, in love let’s so persever,
That when we live no more we may live ever.

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Longings

By Nellie Rathbone Bright

I want to slay all the things just things

That they tell me I must do.

I would drown them all in the tears I weep

When each breathless day is through.

I want to flee to a cool sand dune

On a wind-swept beach where the humming tune

Of the wind, and the waves, and the heart of me

Drams in my ears, and my lips are wet with the tang of the sea.

I want to feel the rain on my cheek,

The thrill that comes from a lark’s long note,

I want to see the sky at dawn thru the lacy green of a willow tree.

I want to look deep in a pool at night, and see the stars

Flash flame like the fire in black opals.

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Will

By Trevino L. Brings Plenty

Small red tin box sealed in shrink-wrap, cut open
with pocketknife, pried apart, its goods aerate the
office. I pluck white sliced chalky cylinders; let them
simmer in my mouth. I exhale peppermint scent
through my nose. Cut open the official letter. A map
in letters on a white page. My teeth grind mints.
Photocopies slightly off alignment, I blur lines.
Equations disperse family through land documents,
position each generation. I am only fourth in line.
Some plots are gumbo after winter thaw. Sections
stitched together with extended relatives. This ritual,
personal death papers drafted. I am partial to this
grassland; the place of deer marks and porcupine
quills, ledger extrapolates history. I refold estate
document, place it back into its envelope.

Trevino L. Brings Plenty, “Will” from *Poetry* (June 2018). Reprinted by permission of the author.

Goodbye

By Geoffrey Brock

—after Akhmadulina

Some things you don’t come back from.
The body carries on. Of late
it even travels, basks in light.
But knock and there’s no one home.

(How did I love you? *With the taste*
of iron on my tongue. Try again.
How did I love you? *Like a man*
destroying what he tries to save.)

The head still does light labor.
But often both the hands fall slack,
and all five senses, in a flock,
go south to weather winter.

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The Beautiful Animal

By Geoffrey Brock

By the time I recalled that it is also
terrifying, we had gone too far into
the charmed woods to return. It was then

the beautiful animal appeared in our path:
ribs jutting, moon-fed eyes moving
from me to you and back. If we show

none of the fear, it may tire of waiting
for the triggering flight, it may ask only
to lie between us and sleep, fur warm

on our skin, breath sweet on our necks
as it dreams of slaughter, as we dream
alternately of feeding and taming it

and of being the first to run. The woods
close tight around us, lying nested here
like spoons in a drawer of knives, to see

who wakes first, and from which dream.

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The Day

By Geoffrey Brock

It hangs on its
stem like a plum
at the edge of a
darkening thicket.

It's swelling and
blushing and ripe
and I reach out a
hand to pick it

but flesh moves
slow through time
and evening
comes on fast

and just when I
think my fingers
might seize that
sweetness at last

the gentlest of
breezes rises
and the plum lets
go of the stem.

And now it’s my

fingers ripening

and evening that’s

reaching for them.

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The Hunter’s Wooing

By Ruth Muskrat Bronson

Come roam the wild hills, my Cherokee Rose,

Come roam the wild hills with me.

We’ll follow the path where the Spavinaw flows,

Dashing wild on its way to the sea,

On its wearisome way to the sea.

We’ll chase the fleet deer from its lair in the woods;

We’ll follow the wolf to his den.

When the sun hides his face, we’ll rest in the woods;

Hid away from the worry of men.

Hid away from the bother of men.

And then we’ll go home, my Cherokee Rose,

Where the Senecas live in the heart of the hills

By the rippling Cowskin, where the Saulchana grows,

We’ll go home to the Coyauga hills,

To the sheltering Coyauga hills.

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As a Human Being

By Jericho Brown

There is the happiness you have
And the happiness you deserve.
They sit apart from one another
The way you and your mother
Sat on opposite ends of the sofa
After an ambulance came to take
Your father away. Some good
Doctor will stitch him up, and
Soon an aunt will arrive to drive
Your mother to the hospital
Where she will settle next to him
Forever, as promised. She holds
The arm of her seat as if she could
Fall, as if it is the only sturdy thing,
And it is since you've done what
You always wanted. You fought
Your father and won, marred him.
He'll have a scar he can see all
Because of you. And your mother,
The only woman you ever cried for,
Must tend to it as a bride tends
To her vows, forsaking all others
No matter how sore the injury.
No matter how sore the injury
Has left you, you sit understanding
Yourself as a human being finally
Free now that nobody's got to love you.

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Crossing

By Jericho Brown

The water is one thing, and one thing for miles.
The water is one thing, making this bridge
Built over the water another. Walk it
Early, walk it back when the day goes dim, everyone
Rising just to find a way toward rest again.
We work, start on one side of the day
Like a planet's only sun, our eyes straight
Until the flame sinks. The flame sinks. Thank God
I'm different. I've figured and counted. I'm not crossing
To cross back. I'm set
On something vast. It reaches
Long as the sea. I'm more than a conqueror, bigger
Than bravery. I don't march. I'm the one who leaps.

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‘N’em

By Jericho Brown

They said to say goodnight
And not goodbye, unplugged
The TV when it rained. They hid
Money in mattresses
So to sleep on decisions.
Some of their children
Were not their children. Some
Of their parents had no birthdates.
They could sweat a cold out
Of you. They’d wake without
An alarm telling them to.
Even the short ones reached
Certain shelves. Even the skinny
Cooked animals too quick
To get caught. And I don’t care
How ugly one of them arrived,
That one got married
To somebody fine. They fed
Families with change and wiped
Their kitchens clean.
Then another century came.
People like me forgot their names.

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To a Waterfowl

By William Cullen Bryant

Whither, ‘midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler’s eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As, darkly painted on the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

Seek’st thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean side?

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,–
The desert and illimitable air,–
Lone wandering, but not lost.

All day thy wings have fanned,
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere,
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night is near.

And soon that toil shall end;
Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest,
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend,
Soon, o’er thy sheltered nest.

Thou’rt gone, the abyss of heaven
Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart
Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given,
And shall not soon depart.

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

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The Heart of the Tree

By Henry Cuyler Bunner

What does he plant who plants a tree?
  He plants a friend of sun and sky;
He plants the flag of breezes free;
  The shaft of beauty, towering high;
  He plants a home to heaven anigh;
    For song and mother-croon of bird
    In hushed and happy twilight heard—
The treble of heaven's harmony—
These things he plants who plants a tree.

What does he plant who plants a tree?
  He plants cool shade and tender rain,
And seed and bud of days to be,
  And years that fade and flush again;
    He plants the glory of the plain;
    He plants the forest's heritage;
    The harvest of a coming age;
The joy that unborn eyes shall see—
These things he plants who plants a tree.

What does he plant who plants a tree?
  He plants, in sap and leaf and wood,
In love of home and loyalty
  And far-cast thought of civic good—
  His blessings on the neighborhood,
    Who in the hollow of His hand
    Holds all the growth of all our land—
A nation's growth from sea to sea
Stirs in his heart who plants a tree.

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A Covered Bridge in Littleton, New Hampshire

By Stephanie Burt

I can remember when I wanted X
more than anything ever—for X fill in
from your own childhood

[balloon, pencil lead, trading card, shoelaces, a bow
or not to have to wear a bow]

and now I am moved to action, when I am moved,
principally by a memory of what to want.

The point is to be, in your own eyes, what you are,

or to keep your own tools, so that you can pretend.

And so it was no surprise,
to me at least, when Cooper, who is two,
collapsed in *fortissimo* fits when he could not have
a $20, three-foot-long stuffed frog
in the image of Frog from *Frog and Toad,* since he is Toad.

That morning, needing a nap,
he had thrown, from the third-story balcony
of Miller's Cafe and Bakery, into the whistling
rapids and shallows
of the Ammonoosuc River, with its arrowheads and caravans of stones,
his Red Sox cap. His hair was shining like
another planet's second sun,
as he explained, looking up, "I threw my hat in the river.
I would like my hat back now."

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Advice from the Lights

By Stephanie Burt

If you don’t get too close to people you can’t disappoint them,
which would be so much worse
than letting them disappoint you.

To the extent that you gain
a perch that means other people look up to you,
to just that extent you can never
tell them how you feel.

You can warble, or
follow a siren, or a Shenandoah
vireo, into the shade, or take
advice from the lights: be
a child, or be like a child.
You will want for nothing, and you will never be heard.

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The Plains of Peace

By Olivia Ward Bush-Banks

Again my fancy takes its flight,
And soars away on thoughtful wing,
Again my soul thrills with delight,
And this the fancied theme, I sing,
From Earthly scenes awhile, I find release,
And dwell upon the restful Plains of Peace.

The Plains of Peace are passing fair,
Where naught disturbs and naught can harm,
I find no sorrow, woe or care,
These all are lost in perfect calm,
Bright are the joys, and pleasures never cease,
For those who dwell on the Plains of Peace.

No scorching sun or blighting storm,
No burning sand or desert drear,
No fell disease or wasting form,
To mar the glowing beauty here.
Decay and ruin ever must decrease,
Here on the fertile, healthful Plains of Peace.

What rare companionship I find,
What hours of social joy I spend,
What restfulness pervades my mind,
Communing with congenial friend.
True happiness seems ever to increase,
While dwelling here upon the Plains of Peace.

Ambitions too, are realized,
And that which I have sought on earth,
I find at last idealized,
My longings ripen into worth,
My fondest hopes no longer fear decease,
But bloom forth brightly on the Plains of Peace.

‘Tis by my fancy, yet ’tis true,
That somewhere having done with Earth,
We shall another course pursue,

According to our aim or worth,
Our souls from mortal things must find release,
And dwell immortal on the Plains of Peace.

Public domain

The Swimmer

By Witter Bynner

The reach of peace, the sky, the pines,
Leave me no more perplexed,
In which a memory divines
That bodies, buried, yet arise
Across the reach of all the skies,
Unburied and unvexed.
As arisen are the grass, the pines.
In upward-grown, delighted lines —
As a swimmer with one wave declines
And rises with the next.

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The Wild Star

By Witter Bynner

There is a star whose bite is certain death
While the moon but makes you mad —
So run from stars till you are out of breath
On a spring night, my lad,
Or slip among the shadows of a pine
And hide face down from the sky
And never stir and never make a sign,
Till the wild star goes by.

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Miss you. Would like to grab that chilled tofu we love.

By Gabrielle Calvocoressi

Do not care if you bring only your light body.
Would just be so happy to sit at the table
and talk about the menu. Miss you.
Wish we could bet which chilis they'll put
on the cubes of tofu. Our favorite.
Sometimes green. Sometimes red. Roasted
we always thought. But so cold and fresh.
How did they do it? Wish you could be here
to talk about it like it was so important.
Wish you could. Watched you on the screens
as I was walking, as I was cooking. Wished you
could get out of the hospital. Can't
bring myself to order our dish and eat it
in the car. Miss you laughing. Miss
you coming in from the cold or one
too many meetings. Laughing. I'll order
already. I'll order seven helpings, some
dumplings, those cold yam noodles that you
like. You can come in your light
body or skeleton or be invisible I don't even
care. Know you have a long way to travel.
Know I don't even know if it's long
at all. Wish you could tell me. What
you're reading. If you're reading.
Miss you. I'm at the table in the back.

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Song

By Brenda Cárdenas

You shout my name
from beyond my dreams,
beyond the picture window
of this Rosarito beach house.
Rushing from bed to shore
I glimpse their backs—
volcanoes rising out of the sea.
Your back, a blue-black silhouette,
feet wet with the wash of morning waves.
Fountains spring from mammal minds,
my hands lifting a splash of sand.
I'm on my knees,
toes finding a cool prayer
beneath them, fingers pressing
sea foam to my temples,
while you open arms wide as a generation,
raise them to a compass point,
dive.
If you could reach them,
you would ride their fins
under the horizon,
then surf the crash of waves
left in their wake.
And if I could grasp
my own fear,
I'd drown it,
leave it breathless and blue
as this ocean,
as the brilliant backs
of whales
surfacing
for air.

Brenda Cárdenas, “Song” from *The Wind Shifts: New Latino Poetry*, edited by Francisco Aragon (University of Arizona Press, 2007). Copyright © 2007 by Brenda Cárdenas. Used with the permission of the author.

I Know, I Remember, But How Can I Help You

By Hayden Carruth

The northern lights. I wouldn't have noticed them
if the deer hadn't told me
a doe her coat of pearls her glowing hoofs
proud and inquisitive
eager for my appraisal
and I went out into the night with electrical steps
but with my head held also proud
to share the animal's fear
and see what I had seen before
a sky flaring and spectral
greenish waves and ribbons
and the snow under strange light tossing in the pasture
like a storming ocean caught
by a flaring beacon.
The deer stands away from me not far
there among bare black apple trees
a presence I no longer see.
We are proud to be afraid
proud to share
the silent magnetic storm that destroys the stars
and flickers around our heads
like the saints' cold spiritual agonies
of old.
I remember but without the sense other light-storms
cold memories discursive and philosophical
in my mind's burden
and the deer remembers nothing.
We move our feet crunching bitter snow while the storm
crashes like god-wars down the east
we shake the sparks from our eyes
we quiver inside our shocked fur
we search for each other
in the apple thicket—
a glimpse, an acknowledgment
it is enough and never enough—

we toss our heads and say good night
moving away on bitter bitter snow.

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To Solitude

By Alice Cary

I am weary of the working,
  Weary of the long day's heat;
To thy comfortable bosom,
  Wilt thou take me, spirit sweet?

Weary of the long, blind struggle
  For a pathway bright and high,—
Weary of the dimly dying
  Hopes that never quite all die.

Weary searching a bad cipher
  For a good that must be meant;
Discontent with being weary,—
  Weary with my discontent.

I am weary of the trusting
  Where my trusts but torments prove;
Wilt thou keep faith with me? wilt thou
  Be my true and tender love?

I am weary drifting, driving
  Like a helmless bark at sea;
Kindly, comfortable spirit,
  Wilt thou give thyself to me?

Give thy birds to sing me sonnets?
  Give thy winds my cheeks to kiss?
And thy mossy rocks to stand for
  The memorials of our bliss?

I in reverence will hold thee,
  Never vexed with jealous ills,
Though thy wild and wimpling waters
  Wind about a thousand hills.

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Jacob

By Phoebe Cary

He dwelt among “apartments let,”
    About five stories high;
A man I thought that none would get,
    And very few would try.

A boulder, by a larger stone
    Half hidden in the mud,
Fair as a man when only one
    Is in the neighborhood.

He lived unknown, and few could tell
    When Jacob was not free;
But he has got a wife,—and O!
    The difference to me!

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Suppose

By Phoebe Cary

Suppose, my little lady,
Your doll should break her head,
Could you make it whole by crying
Till your eyes and nose are red?
And would n't it be pleasanter
To treat it as a joke;
And say you 're glad "'T was Dolly's
And not your head that broke?"

Suppose you 're dressed for walking,
And the rain comes pouring down,
Will it clear off any sooner
Because you scold and frown?
And would n't it be nicer
For you to smile than pout,
And so make sunshine in the house
When there is none without?

Suppose your task, my little man,
Is very hard to get,
Will it make it any easier
For you to sit and fret?
And would n't it be wiser
Than waiting like a dunce,
To go to work in earnest
And learn the thing at once?

Suppose that some boys have a horse,
And some a coach and pair,
Will it tire you less while walking
To say, "It is n't fair?"
And would n't it be nobler
To keep your temper sweet,
And in your heart be thankful
You can walk upon your feet?

And suppose the world don't please you,
Nor the way some people do,

Do you think the whole creation
    Will be altered just for you?
And is n’t it, my boy or girl,
    The wisest, bravest plan,
Whatever comes, or does n’t come,
    To do the best you can?

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Evening Song

By Willa Cather

Dear love, what thing of all the things that be

Is ever worth one thought from you or me,

Save only Love,

Save only Love?

The days so short, the nights so quick to flee,

The world so wide, so deep and dark the sea,

So dark the sea;

So far the suns and every listless star,

Beyond their light—Ah! dear, who knows how far,

Who knows how far?

One thing of all dim things I know is true,

The heart within me knows, and tells it you,

And tells it you.

So blind is life, so long at last is sleep,

And none but Love to bid us laugh or weep,

And none but Love,

And none but Love.

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I Sought the Wood in Winter

By Willa Cather

I sought the wood in summer
When every twig was green;
The rudest boughs were tender,
And buds were pink between.
Light-fingered aspens trembled
In fitful sun and shade,
And daffodils were golden
In every starry glade.
The brook sang like a robin—
My hand could check him where
The lissome maiden willows
Shook out their yellow hair.

“How frail a thing is Beauty,”
I said, “when every breath
She gives the vagrant summer
But swifter woos her death.
For this the star dust troubles,
For this have ages rolled:
To deck the wood for bridal
And slay her with the cold.”

I sought the wood in winter
When every leaf was dead;
Behind the wind-whipped branches
The winter sun set red.
The coldest star was rising
To greet that bitter air,
The oaks were writhen giants;
Nor bud nor bloom was there.
The birches, white and slender,
In deathless marble stood,
The brook, a white immortal,
Slept silent in the wood.

“How sure a thing is Beauty,”
I cried. “No bolt can slay,

No wave nor shock despoil her,
        No ravishers dismay.
Her warriors are the angels
        That cherish from afar,
Her warders people Heaven
        And watch from every star.
The granite hills are slighter,
        The sea more like to fail;
Behind the rose the planet,
        The Law behind the veil.”

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Prairie Spring

By Willa Cather

Evening and the flat land,
Rich and sombre and always silent;
The miles of fresh-plowed soil,
Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;
The growing wheat, the growing weeds,
The toiling horses, the tired men;
The long empty roads,
Sullen fires of sunset, fading,
The eternal, unresponsive sky.
Against all this, Youth,
Flaming like the wild roses,
Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,
Flashing like a star out of the twilight;
Youth with its insupportable sweetness,
Its fierce necessity,
Its sharp desire,
Singing and singing,
Out of the lips of silence,
Out of the earthy dusk.

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To My Brother

By Lorna Dee Cervantes

and for the lumpen bourgeoisie

We were so poor.
The air was a quiver
of thoughts we drew from

to poise, unsaid
in the ineffable
world we lived in.

Sun, scarcely a penny
in that dreary setting,
every night gave up

to a smog-strewn avalanche
of searchlights, crossing
the heavens, a bicker

to buy a new used car,
a four-door sedan, a six
month guarantee. I worked

the years through, thought
I could work my mind's way
out of there, out of needing

a dime bag of uppers for the next
buzzing shift. We paid our bills.
We were brilliant at wishing.

Our dreams wafted over the sullen skyline
like crazy meteors of flying embers:
a glow in the heart all night.

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A Horse Named Never

By Jennifer Chang

At the stables, each stall was labeled with a name.

Biscuit stood aloof — I faced, always, invariably, his clockwork tail.

Crab knew the salt lick too well.

Trapezoid mastered stillness: a midnight mare, she was sternest and tallest,
her chest stretched against the edges of her stall.

I was not afraid of Never, the chestnut gelding, so rode his iron haunches as
far as Panther Gap.

Never and I lived in Virginia then.

We could neither flee nor be kept.

Seldom did I reach the little mountain without him, the easy crests making
valleys of indifferent grasses.

What was that low sound I heard, alone with Never?

A lone horse, a lodestar, a habit of fear.

We think of a horse less as the history of one man and his sorrows than as the

history of a whole evil time.

Why I chose Never I'll never know.

I fed him odd lettuce, abundant bitterness.

Who wore the bit and harness, who was the ready steed.

Never took the carrot, words by my own reckoning, an account of creeks and oystercatchers.

Our hoof-house rested at the foot of the mountain, on which rested another house more brazen than statuary.

Let it be known: I first mistook gelding for gilding.

I am the fool that has faith in Never.

Somewhere, a gold door burdened with apology refuses all mint from the yard.

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Dear P.

By Victoria Chang

Someone will love you many will love
you many will brother you some of these
loves will bother you some will leave you
one might haunt you hunt you in your
sleep make you weep the tearless kind of
weep the kind of weep that drowns your
organs slowly there are little oars in your body
little boats grab onto them and row and row
someone will tell you *no* but you won't know
he is right until you have already wrung your
own heart dry your hands dripping knives until
you have already reached your hands into his
body and put them through his heart love is
the only thing that is not an argument

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I Went Out to Hear

By Leila Chatti

The sound of quiet. The sky
indigo, steeping
deeper from the top, like tea.
In the absence
of anything else, my own
breathing became obscene.
I heard the beating
of bats' wings before
the air troubled above
my head, turned to look
and saw them gone.
On the surface of the black
lake, a swan and the moon
stayed perfectly
still. I knew this was
a perfect moment.
Which would only hurt me
to remember and never
live again. My God. How lucky to have lived
a life I would die for.

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In the Hospital

By Chen Chen

My mother was in the hospital & everyone wanted to be my friend.
But I was busy making a list: good dog, bad citizen, short
skeleton, tall mocha. Typical Tuesday.
My mother was in the hospital & no one wanted to be her friend.
Everyone wanted to be soft cooing sympathies. Very reasonable
pigeons. No one had the time & our solution to it
was to buy shinier watches. We were enamored with
what our wrists could declare. My mother was in the hospital
& I didn't want to be her friend. Typical son. Tall latte, short tale,
bad plot, great wifi in the atypical café. My mother was in the hospital
& she didn't want to be her friend. She wanted to be the family
grocery list. Low-fat yogurt, firm tofu. She didn't trust my father
to be it. *You always forget something,* she said, *even when
I do the list for you. Even then.*

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Self-Portrait as So Much Potential

By Chen Chen

Dreaming of one day being as fearless as a mango.

As friendly as a tomato. Merciless to chin & shirtfront.

Realizing I hate the word “sip.”

But that’s all I do.

I drink. So slowly.

& say I’m tasting it. When I’m just bad at taking in liquid.

I’m no mango or tomato. I’m a rusty yawn in a rumored year. I’m an arctic attic.

Come amble & ampersand in the slippery polar clutter.

I am not the heterosexual neat freak my mother raised me to be.

I am a gay sipper, & my mother has placed what’s left of her hope on my brothers.

She wants them to gulp up the world, spit out solid degrees, responsible grandchildren ready to gobble.

They will be better than mangoes, my brothers.

Though I have trouble imagining what that could be.

Flying mangoes, perhaps. Flying mango-tomato hybrids. Beautiful sons.

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Autumn Leaves

By Marilyn Chin

The dead piled up, thick, fragrant, on the fire escape.
My mother ordered me again, and again, to sweep it clean.
All that blooms must fall. I learned this not from the Dao,
  but from high school biology.

Oh, the contradictions of having a broom and not a dustpan!
I swept the leaves down, down through the iron grille
and let the dead rain over the Wong family's patio.

And it was Achilles Wong who completed the task.
   We called her:
The one-who-cleared-away-another-family's-autumn.
She blossomed, tall, benevolent, notwithstanding.

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The Survivor

By Marilyn Chin

Don’t tap your chopsticks against your bowl.
Don’t throw your teacup against the wall in anger.
Don’t suck on your long black braid and weep.
Don’t tarry around the big red sign that says “danger!”

All the tempests will render still; seas will calm,
horses will retreat, voices to surrender.

*

That you have bloomed this way and not that,
that your skin is yellow, not white, not black,
that you were born now a boychild but a girl,
that this world will be forever puce-pink are just as well.

Remember, the survivor is not the strongest or most clever;
merely, the survivor is almost always the youngest.
And you shall have to relinquish that title before long.

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The Bait

By Eric Chock

Saturday mornings, before
my weekly chores,
I used to sneak out of the house
and across the street,
grabbing the first grasshopper
walking in the damp California grass
along the stream.
Carefully hiding a silver hook
beneath its green wings,
I'd float it out
across the gentle ripples
towards the end of its life.
Just like that.
I'd give it the hook
and let it ride.
All I ever expected for it
was that big-mouth bass
awaiting its arrival.
I didn't think
that I was giving up one life
to get another,
that even childhood
was full of sacrifice.
I'd just take the bright green thing,
pluck it off its only stalk,
and give it away as if
it were mine to give.
I knew someone out there
would be fooled,
that someone would accept
the precious gift.
So I just sent it along
with a plea of a prayer,
hoping it would spread its wings this time
and fly across that wet glass sky,
no concern for what inspired

its life, or mine,
only instinct guiding pain
towards the other side.

Eric Chock, “The Bait” from *Last Days Here*. Copyright © 1990 by Eric Chock. Used with the permission of Bamboo Ridge Press.

blessing the boats

By Lucille Clifton

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

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won’t you celebrate with me

By Lucille Clifton

won’t you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

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An Adieu

By Florence Earle Coates

Sorrow, quit me for a while!
Wintry days are over;
Hope again, with April smile,
Violets sows and clover.

Pleasure follows in her path,
Love itself flies after,
And the brook a music hath
Sweet as childhood’s laughter.

Not a bird upon the bough
Can repress its rapture,
Not a bud that blossoms now
But doth beauty capture.

Sorrow, thou art Winter’s mate,
Spring cannot regret thee;
Yet, ah, yet—my friend of late—
I shall not forget thee!

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America, I Sing You Back

By Allison Adelle Hedge Coke

for Phil Young and my father Robert Hedge Coke;
for Whitman and Hughes

America, I sing back. Sing back what sung you in.
Sing back the moment you cherished breath.
Sing you home into yourself and back to reason.

Before America began to sing, I sung her to sleep,
held her cradleboard, wept her into day.
My song gave her creation, prepared her delivery,
held her severed cord beautifully beaded.

My song helped her stand, held her hand for first steps,
nourished her very being, fed her, placed her three sisters strong.
My song comforted her as she battled my reason
broke my long-held footing sure, as any child might do.

As she pushed herself away, forced me to remove myself,
as I cried this country, my song grew roses in each tear's fall.

My blood-veined rivers, painted pipestone quarries
circled canyons, while she made herself maiden fine.

But here I am, here I am, here I remain high on each and every peak,
carefully rumbling her great underbelly, prepared to pour forth singing—

and sing again I will, as I have always done.
Never silenced unless in the company of strangers, singing
the stoic face, polite repose, polite while dancing deep inside, polite
Mother of her world. Sister of myself.

When my song sings aloud again. When I call her back to cradle.
Call her to peer into waters, to behold herself in dark and light,
day and night, call her to sing along, call her to mature, to envision—
then, she will quake herself over. My song will make it so.

When she grows far past her self-considered purpose,
I will sing her back, sing her back. I will sing. Oh I will—I do.
America, I sing back. Sing back what sung you in.

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A Talk with My Grandson, Age Six

By Wanda Coleman

there's a cosmic storm whenever he's in my orbit
five races at war outside time, trapped

in one spindly high-toned body, knobby elbows and knees

the rigorously loving teachings of mom and dad take
root despite media engineering and peer pressures.
the snippy cuttings, mouthy snipings, and cheeky wit
that will soon attend his adolescent defenses have yet
to materialize. right now he knows not to prevaricate

and so, that fall morning when i call him
to me for an ancestral chat, to take him into my lap

he hesitates.

don't be afraid, i say. he takes a few eager skips
that turn into squirms when i grab him and hold him tight

situated in my softness, he relaxes some
but stares at my hands in consternation

this is what happens, i think, when the eyes go against the heart

You're all mixed up, aren't you?

Yes.

Your mother belongs to me. What's my name?
What do you call me?

Grandma.

You don't want to like me,
do you?

Yes.

Because I'm brown.

He's silent.

Is it because I’m brown?

Yes.

Well, that’s okay. I’m going
to be brown forever. Is it
okay if I like you?

Yes.

then I hug him and let go, wondering
if that’s enough to set him free.

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The ISM

By Wanda Coleman

tired i count the ways in which it determines my life
permeates everything. it's in the air
lives next door to me in stares of neighbors
meets me each day in the office. its music comes out the radio
drives beside me in my car. strolls along with me
down supermarket aisles
it's on television
and in the streets even when my walk is casual/undefined
it's overhead flashing lights
i find it in my mouth
when i would speak of other things

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Kissing The Opelu

By Donovan Kūhiō Colleps

For my grandmother

I am water, only because you are the ocean.

We are here, only
because old leaves have been falling.

A mulching of memories folding
into buried hands.

The cliffs we learn to edge.
The tree trunk hollowed, humming.

I am a tongue, only because
you are the body planting stories with thumb.

Soil crumbs cling to your knees.
Small stacks of empty clay pots dreaming.

I am an air plant suspended, only
because you are the trunk I cling to.

I am the milky fish eye, only
because it’s your favorite.

Even the sound you make
when your lips kiss the opelu
socket is a moʻolelo.

A slipper is lost in the yard.
A haku lei is chilling in the icebox.

I am a cup for feathers, only
because you want to fill the hours.

I am a turning wrist, only
because you left the hose on.

Heliconias are singing underwater.
Beetles are floating across the yard.

Donovan Kūhiō Colleps, “Kissing the Opelu” from *Poetry* (July/August 2016). Copyright © 2016 by Donovan Kūhiō Colleps. Used with the permission of the author.

Fishing on the Susquehanna in July

By Billy Collins

I have never been fishing on the Susquehanna
or on any river for that matter
to be perfectly honest.

Not in July or any month
have I had the pleasure—if it is a pleasure—
of fishing on the Susquehanna.

I am more likely to be found
in a quiet room like this one—
a painting of a woman on the wall,

a bowl of tangerines on the table—
trying to manufacture the sensation
of fishing on the Susquehanna.

There is little doubt
that others have been fishing
on the Susquehanna,

rowing upstream in a wooden boat,
sliding the oars under the water
then raising them to drip in the light.

But the nearest I have ever come to
fishing on the Susquehanna
was one afternoon in a museum in Philadelphia

when I balanced a little egg of time
in front of a painting
in which that river curled around a bend

under a blue cloud-ruffled sky,
dense trees along the banks,
and a fellow with a red bandanna

sitting in a small, green
flat-bottom boat
|holding the thin whip of a pole.

That is something I am unlikely
ever to do, I remember
saying to myself and the person next to me.

Then I blinked and moved on
to other American scenes
of haystacks, water whitening over rocks,

even one of a brown hare
who seemed so wired with alertness
I imagined him springing right out of the frame.

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Introduction to Poetry

By Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

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Ecology

By Jack Collom

Surrounded by bone, surrounded by cells,
by rings, by rings of hell, by hair, surrounded by
air-is-a-thing, surrounded by silhouette, by honey-wet bees, yet
by skeletons of trees, surrounded by actual, yes, for practical
purposes, people, surrounded by surreal
popcorn, surrounded by the reborn: Surrender in the center
to surroundings. O surrender forever, never
end her, let her blend around, surrender to the surroundings that
surround the tender endo-surrender, that
tumble through the tumbling to that blue that
curls around the crumbling, to that, the blue that
rumbles under the sun bounding the pearl that
we walk on, talk on; we can chalk that
up to experience, sensing the brown here that's
blue now, a drop of water surrounding a cow that's
black & white, the warbling Blackburnian twitter that's
machining midnight orange in the light that's
glittering in the light green visible wind. That's
the ticket to the tunnel through the thicket that's
a cricket's funnel of music to correct & pick it out
from under the wing that whirls up over & out.

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A Prayer

By Joseph Seamon Cotter Jr.

As I lie in bed,
Flat on my back;
There passes across my ceiling
An endless panorama of things—
Quick steps of gay-voiced children,
Adolescence in its wondering silences,
Maid and man on moonlit summer's eve,
Women in the holy glow of Motherhood,
Old men gazing silently thru the twilight
Into the beyond.
O God, give me words to make my dream-children live.

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The Band of Gideon

By Joseph Seamon Cotter Jr.

The band of Gideon roam the sky,
The howling wind is their war-cry,
The thunder's roll is their trump's peal,
And the lightning's flash their vengeful steel.
Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
"The sword of the Lord and Gideon."

And men below rear temples high
And mock their God with reasons why,
And live in arrogance, sin and shame,
And rape their souls for the world's good name.
Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
"The sword of the Lord and Gideon."

The band of Gideon roam the sky
And view the earth with baleful eye;
In holy wrath they scourge the land
With earthquake, storm and burning brand.
Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
"The sword of the Lord and Gideon."

The lightnings flash and the thunders roll,
And "Lord have mercy on my soul,"
Cry men as they fall on the stricken sod,
In agony searching for their God.
Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud

With each strong deed,
“The sword of the Lord and Gideon.”

And men repent and then forget
That heavenly wrath they ever met,
The band of Gideon yet will come
And strike their tongues of blasphemy dumb.
Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
“The sword of the Lord and Gideon.”

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Dr. Booker T. Washington To The National Negro Business League

By Joseph Seamon Cotter Sr.

’Tis strange indeed to hear us plead
  For selling and for buying
When yesterday we said: “Away
  With all good things but dying.”

The world’s ago, and we’re agog
  To have our first brief inning;
So let’s away through surge and fog
  However slight the winning.

What deeds have sprung from plow and pick!
  What bank-rolls from tomatoes!
No dainty crop of rhetoric
  Can match one of potatoes.

Ye orators of point and pith,
  Who force the world to heed you,
What skeletons you’ll journey with
  Ere it is forced to feed you.

A little gold won’t mar our grace,
  A little ease our glory.
This world’s a better biding place
  When money clinks its story.

Public domain

My Song

By Joseph Seamon Cotter Sr.

I sang me a song, a tiny song,
  A song that was sweet to my soul,
And set it a-float on the sea of chance
  In search of a happy goal.

I said to my song: “Go on, go on
  And lodge in a tender spot
Of some human soul where the fires of hate
  And selfishness are not.”

My song went on but a little space
  And hied it back to me;
And fell at my feet in a sorry plight—
  The victim of cruelty.

I gazed a moment and quickly saw
  Just how it had come about,
A cruel critic had caught my song
  And probed the soul of it out.

O, poor indeed is the human mind
  (And why was it ever wrought?)
That can thrive on husk in the form of words,
  And not on a sturdy thought.

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At Melville’s Tomb

By Hart Crane

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
The dice of drowned men’s bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

And wrecks passed without sound of bells,
The calyx of death’s bounty giving back
A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,
The portent wound in corridors of shells.

Then in the circuit calm of one vast coil,
Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled,
Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars;
And silent answers crept across the stars.

Compass, quadrant and sextant contrive
No farther tides…High in the azure steeps,
Monody shall not wake the mariner.
This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.

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My Grandmother’s Love Letters

By Hart Crane

There are no stars tonight
But those of memory.
Yet how much room for memory there is
In the loose girdle of soft rain.

There is even room enough
For the letters of my mother’s mother,
Elizabeth,
That have been pressed so long
Into a corner of the roof
That they are brown and soft,
And liable to melt as snow.

Over the greatness of such space
Steps must be gentle.
It is all hung by an invisible white hair.
It trembles as birch limbs webbing the air.

And I ask myself:

“Are your fingers long enough to play
Old keys that are but echoes:
Is the silence strong enough
To carry back the music to its source
And back to you again
As though to her?”

Yet I would lead my grandmother by the hand
Through much of what she would not understand;
And so I stumble. And the rain continues on the roof
With such a sound of gently pitying laughter.

Public domain

In Heaven

By Stephen Crane

XVIII

In Heaven,
Some little blades of grass
Stood before God.
“What did you do?”
Then all save one of the little blades
Began eagerly to relate
The merits of their lives.
This one stayed a small way behind
Ashamed.
Presently God said:
“And what did you do?”
The little blade answered: “Oh, my lord,
“Memory is bitter to me
“For if I did good deeds
“I know not of them.”
Then God in all His splendor
Arose from His throne.
“Oh, best little blade of grass,” He said.

Public domain

In The Desert

By Stephen Crane

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.
I said, “Is it good, friend?”
“It is bitter—bitter,” he answered;

“But I like it
“Because it is bitter,
“And because it is my heart.”

Public domain

The Rain

By Robert Creeley

All night the sound had
come back again,
and again falls
this quiet, persistent rain.

What am I to myself
that must be remembered,
insisted upon
so often? Is it

that never the ease,
even the hardness,
of rain falling
will have for me

something other than this,
something not so insistent—
am I to be locked in this
final uneasiness.

Love, if you love me,
lie next to me.
Be for me, like rain,
the getting out

of the tiredness, the fatuousness, the semi-
lust of intentional indifference.
Be wet
with a decent happiness.

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Two Guitars

By Victor Hernández Cruz

Two guitars were left in a room all alone
They sat on different corners of the parlor
In this solitude they started talking to each other
My strings are tight and full of tears
The man who plays me has no heart
I have seen it leave out of his mouth
I have seen it melt out of his eyes
It dives into the pores of the earth
When they squeeze me tight I bring
Down the angels who live off the chorus
The trios singing loosen organs
With melodious screwdrivers
Sentiment comes off the hinges
Because a song is a mountain put into
Words and landscape is the feeling that
Enters something so big in the harmony
We are always in danger of blowing up
With passion
The other guitar:
In 1944 New York
When the Trio Los Panchos started
With Mexican & Puerto Rican birds
I am the one that one of them held
Tight like a woman
Their throats gardenia gardens
An airport for dreams
I've been in theaters and cabarets
I played in an apartment on 102nd street
After a baptism pregnant with women
The men flirted and were offered
Chicken soup
Echoes came out of hallways as if from caves
Someone is opening the door now
The two guitars hushed and there was a
Resonance in the air like what is left by
The last chord of a bolero.

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Fruit of the Flower

By Countee Cullen

My father is a quiet man
    With sober, steady ways;
For simile, a folded fan;
    His nights are like his days.

My mother's life is puritan,
    No hint of cavalier,
A pool so calm you're sure it can
    Have little depth to fear.

And yet my father's eyes can boast
    How full his life has been;
There haunts them yet the languid ghost
    Of some still sacred sin.

And though my mother chants of God,
    And of the mystic river,
I've seen a bit of checkered sod
    Set all her flesh aquiver.

Why should he deem it pure mischance
    A son of his is fain
To do a naked tribal dance
    Each time he hears the rain?

Why should she think it devil's art
    That all my songs should be
Of love and lovers, broken heart,
    And wild sweet agony?

Who plants a seed begets a bud,
    Extract of that same root;
Why marvel at the hectic blood
    That flushes this wild fruit?

Public domain

Saturday's Child

By Countee Cullen

Some are teethed on a silver spoon,
    With the stars strung for a rattle;
I cut my teeth as the black raccoon—
    For implements of battle.

Some are swaddled in silk and down,
    And heralded by a star;
They swathed my limbs in a sackcloth gown
    On a night that was black as tar.

For some, godfather and goddame
    The opulent fairies be;
Dame Poverty gave me my name,
    And Pain godfathered me.

For I was born on Saturday—
    "Bad time for planting a seed,"
Was all my father had to say,
    And, "One mouth more to feed."

Death cut the strings that gave me life,
    And handed me to Sorrow,
The only kind of middle wife
    My folks could beg or borrow.

Public domain

She of the Dancing Feet Sings

By Countee Cullen

And what would I do in heaven, pray,
  Me with my dancing feet,
And limbs like apple boughs that sway
  When the gusty rain winds beat?

And how would I thrive in a perfect place
  Where dancing would be sin,
With not a man to love my face,
  Nor an arm to hold me in?

The seraphs and the cherubim
  Would be too proud to bend
To sing the feary tunes that brim
  My heart from end to end.

The wistful angels down in hell
  Will smile to see my face,
And understand, because they fell
  From that all-perfect place.

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To John Keats, Poet. At Spring Time*

By Countee Cullen

(For Carl Van Vechten)

I cannot hold my peace, John Keats;
There never was a spring like this;
It is an echo, that repeats
My last year's song and next year's bliss.
I know, in spite of all men say
Of Beauty, you have felt her most.
Yea, even in your grave her way
Is laid. Poor, troubled, lyric ghost,
Spring never was so fair and dear
As Beauty makes her seem this year.

I cannot hold my peace, John Keats,
I am as helpless in the toil
Of Spring as any lamb that bleats
To feel the solid earth recoil
Beneath his puny legs. Spring beats
Her tocsin call to those who love her,
And lo! the dogwood petals cover

Her breast with drifts of snow, and sleek
White gulls fly screaming to her, and hover
About her shoulders, and kiss her cheek,
While white and purple lilacs muster
A strength that bears them to a cluster
Of color and odor; for her sake
All things that slept are now awake.

And you and I, shall we lie still,
John Keats, while Beauty summons us?
Somehow I feel your sensitive will
Is pulsing up some tremulous
Sap road of a maple tree, whose leaves
Grow music as they grow, since your
Wild voice is in them, a harp that grieves
For life that opens death's dark door.
Though dust, your fingers still can push

The Vision Splendid to a birth,
Though now they work as grass in the hush
Of the night on the broad sweet page of the earth.

“John Keats is dead,” they say, but I
Who hear your full insistent cry
In bud and blossom, leaf and tree,
Know John Keats still writes poetry.

And while my head is earthward bowed
To read new life sprung from your shroud,
Folks seeing me must think it strange
That merely spring should so derange
My mind. They do not know that you,
John Keats, keep revel with me, too.

*Spring, 1924

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Two Who Crossed a Line

By Countee Cullen

(He Crosses)

He rode across like a cavalier,
    Spurs clicking hard and loud;
And where he tarried dropped his tear
    On heads he left low-bowed.

But, “Even Stephen,” he cried, and struck
    His steed an urgent blow;
He swore by youth he was a buck
    With savage oats to sow.

To even up some standing scores,
    From every flower bed
He passed, he plucked by threes and fours
    Till wheels whirled in his head.

But long before the drug could tell,
    He took his anodyne;
With scornful grace, he bowed farewell
    And retraversed the line.

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Yet Do I Marvel

By Countee Cullen

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind,
And did He stoop to quibble could tell why
The little buried mole continues blind,
Why flesh that mirrors Him must some day die,
Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus
Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare
If merely brute caprice dooms Sisyphus
To struggle up a never-ending stair.
Inscrutable His ways are, and immune
To catechism by a mind too strewn
With petty cares to slightly understand
What awful brain compels His awful hand.
Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:
To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

Public domain

Songs (IV)

By E. E. Cummings

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the merry deer ran before.

Fleeter be they than dappled dreams
the swift sweet deer
the red rare deer.

Four red roebuck at a white water
the cruel bugle sang before.

Horn at hip went my love riding
riding the echo down
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the level meadows ran before.

Softer be they than slippered sleep
the lean lithe deer
the fleet flown deer.

Four fleet does at a gold valley
the famished arrow sang before.

Bow at belt went my love riding
riding the mountain down
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the sheer peaks ran before.

Paler be they than daunting death
the sleek slim deer
the tall tense deer.

Four tall stags at a green mountain
the lucky hunter sang before.

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
my heart fell dead before.

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Songs (VIII)

By E. E. Cummings

in the rain- darkness, the sunset being sheathed i sit and think of you the holy city which is your face your little cheeks the streets of smiles your eyes half- thrush half-angel and your drowsy lips where float flowers of kiss and there is the sweet shy pirouette your hair and then your dancesong soul. rarely-beloved a single star is uttered,and i think of you

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Sunset

By E. E. Cummings

Great carnal mountains crouching in the cloud
That marrieth the young earth with a ring,
Yet still its thoughts builds heavenward, whence spring
Wee villages of vapor, sunset-proud.—
And to the meanest door hastes one pure-browed
White-fingered star, a little, childish thing,
The busy needle of her light to bring,
And stitch, and stitch, upon the dead day's shroud.
Poises the sun upon his west, a spark
Superlative,—and dives beneath the world;
From the day's fillets Night shakes out her locks;
List! One pure trembling drop of cadence purled—
"Summer!"—a meek thrush whispers to the dark.
Hark! the cold ripple sneering on the rocks!

Public domain

A Triviality

By Waring Cuney

Not to dance with her
Was such a trivial thing

There were girls more fair than she,—

To-day
Ten girls dressed in white.
Each had a white rose wreath.

They made a dead man’s arch
And ten strong men
Carried a body through.

Not to dance with her
Was a trivial thing.

Public domain

For My Contemporaries

By J.V. Cunningham

How time reverses
The proud in heart!
I now make verses
Who aimed at art.

But I sleep well.
Ambitious boys
Whose big lines swell
With spiritual noise,

Despise me not!
And be not queasy
To praise somewhat:
Verse is not easy.

But rage who will.
Time that procured me
Good sense and skill
Of madness cured me.

J. V. Cunningham, “For My Contemporaries” from *The Exclusions of a Rhyme: Poems and Epigrams*. Used with the permission of Wiseblood Books.

Florida Snow

By P. Scott Cunningham

The Everglades are burning. I'm fifteen.
I open the window, knock out the screen

and crawl up the tiles to the apex of the roof.
Overhead the black clouds march on hooves

from the sunset to the ocean. It's rare for the wind
to carry the sugar burns in my direction.

I assume the purpose of the fires is to make
the sugar sweeter, but besides covering the state

in smoke, all they do is make the harvest cheaper.
Some men spent a fortune to drain the river

but the cost was all up front. The stalks get so dry some-
times a piece of lightning starts the fire for them

and what's left behind can't help becoming tinder.
I think the land will tire of not being water soon.

Tonight the air is cold and smells like winter.
Ashes fall around me like pieces of the moon.

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Passive Voice

By Laura Da’

I use a trick to teach students
how to avoid passive voice.

Circle the verbs.
Imagine inserting “by zombies”
after each one.

Have the words been claimed
by the flesh-hungry undead?
If so, passive voice.

I wonder if these
sixth graders will recollect,
on summer vacation,
as they stretch their legs
on the way home
from Yellowstone or Yosemite
and the byway’s historical marker
beckons them to the
site of an Indian village—

Where *trouble was brewing.*
Where, *after further hostilities, the army was directed to enter.*
Where *the village was razed after the skirmish occurred.*
Where *most were women and children.*

Riveted bramble of passive verbs
etched in wood—
stripped hands
breaking up from the dry ground
to pinch the meat
of their young red tongues.

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Cosmos

By Krystyna Dąbrowska

Translated by Karen Kovacik

Until recently the universe was expanding
with new suns, nebulas, constellations,
vibrating waves, the breath of galaxies.
Now it’s contracting to satellite
images depicting Earth:
not even the whole planet, just one country,
not even each region, just one city,
a single street, gray pavement. On it are strewn
“dark objects of similar size
to human bodies,” writes the New York Times.
Not buried for weeks,
their grave the satellite’s synthetic eye
and the black holes of our pupils,
surrounded by life.

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Inheritance

By Tyree Daye

My mother will leave me her mother's deep-black
cast-iron skillet someday,
I will fry okra in it,
weigh my whole life on its black handle,
lift it up to feel a people in my hand.
I will cook dinner
for my mother on her rusting, bleached stove
with this oiled star.
My mother made her body crooked
all her life to afford this little wooden blue house.
I want her green thumbs

wound around a squash’s neck

to be wound around my wrist

telling me to stay longer. O what she grew with the dust

dancing in blue hours. What will happen to her body

left in the ground, to the bodies in the street,

the uncles turned to ash on the fireplace mantles

the cousins we’ve misplaced?

How many people make up this wound?

No one taught my mother how to bring us back to life,

so no one taught me.

O what we gather and O Lord

bless what we pass on.

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How I Learned Bliss

By Oliver de la Paz

I spied everything. The North Dakota license,
the “Baby on Board” signs, dead raccoons, and deer carcasses.
The Garfields clinging to car windows—the musky traces of old coffee.
I was single-minded in the buzz saw tour I took through
the flatlands of the country to get home. I just wanted to get there.
Never mind the antecedent. I had lost stations miles ago
and was living on cassettes and caffeine. Ahead, brushstrokes
of smoke from annual fires. Only ahead to the last days of summer
and to the dying theme of youth. How pitch-perfect
the tire-on-shoulder sound was to mask the hiss of the tape deck ribbons.
Everything. Perfect. As Wyoming collapses over the car
like a wave. And then another mile marker. Another.
How can I say this more clearly? It was like opening a heavy book,
letting the pages feather themselves and finding a dried flower.

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In Defense of Small Towns

By Oliver de la Paz

When I look at it, it's simple, really. I hated life there. September,
once filled with animal deaths and toughened hay. And the smells

of fall were boiled-down beets and potatoes
or the farmhands' breeches smeared with oil and diesel

as they rode into town, dusty and pissed. The radio station
split time between metal and Tejano, and the only action

happened on Friday nights where the high school football team
gave everyone a chance at forgiveness. The town left no room

for novelty or change. The sheriff knew everyone's son and despite that,
we'd cruise up and down the avenues, switching between

brake and gearshift. We'd fight and spit chew into Big Gulp cups
and have our hearts broken nightly. In that town I learned

to fire a shotgun at nine and wring a chicken's neck
with one hand by twirling the bird and whipping it straight like a towel.

But I loved the place once. Everything was blonde and cracked
and the irrigation ditches stretched to the end of the earth. You could

ride on a bicycle and see clearly the outline of every leaf
or catch on the streets each word of a neighbor's argument.

Nothing could happen there and if I willed it, the place would have me
slipping over its rocks into the river with the sugar plant's steam

or signing papers at a storefront army desk, buttoned up
with medallions and a crew cut, eyeing the next recruits.

If I've learned anything, it's that I could be anywhere,
staring at a hunk of asphalt or listening to the clap of billiard balls

against each other in a bar and hear my name. Indifference now?
Some. I shook loose, but that isn't the whole story. The fact is

I'm still in love. And when I wake up, I watch my son yawn,
and my mind turns his upswept hair into cornstalks

at the edge of a field. Stillness is an acre, and his body
idles, deep like heavy machinery. I want to take him back there,

to the small town of my youth and hold the book of wildflowers
open for him, and look. I want him to know the colors of horses,

to run with a cattail in his hand and watch as its seeds
fly weightless as though nothing mattered, as though

the little things we tell ourselves about our pasts stay there,
rising slightly and just out of reach.

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To Edison

By Domingo de Vivero

translated from the Spanish by Agnes Blake Poor

In thee, the spirit of thy native soil
  Draws breath and stirs with potent fruitful life.
Thou, from the field of elemental strife,
  Seizest the guerdon of thy noble toil.

Franklin before, along the slender coil
  Called down the fiery sparks in heaven rife.
Traced the quick ray, like sharp dividing knife;
  And to the earth brought down the lightning's spoil.

And thou, the living glory of thy race,
  Preservest for all time the spoken word;
Defying ignorance's numbing trace;
  Despising falsehood's deadly withering breath.
The immortal tree of life thy hand conferred,
  Even on the edge of the abyss of death.

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Enough

By Andru Defeye

You are enough

Divinity flows in your fingertips
with light so radiant
every beat of your heart
a victory march
made of whole universes
stitched by the hands of creation
with flawless design
a prophecy You fulfill perfectly with every breath

You

The sun wouldn't shine the same without it
Creation is only waiting for You
to smile back at it

Do you see it yet?

You are enough
For the birds to sing about
For the seeds to sprout about
For the stars to shoot about

Do you see it yet?

Gardens in your speech
Fields of wildflowers in your prayers
Lighthouses in your eyes
No one else can see it for you

You have always been enough
You will always be enough

Your simple act of being is enough

Do you see it yet?

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Black Boys Play the Classics

By Toi Derricotte

The most popular “act” in
Penn Station
is the three black kids in ratty
sneakers & T-shirts playing
two violins and a cello—Brahms.
White men in business suits
have already dug into their pockets
as they pass and they toss in
a dollar or two without stopping.
Brown men in work-soiled khakis
stand with their mouths open,
arms crossed on their bellies
as if they themselves have always
wanted to attempt those bars.
One white boy, three, sits
cross-legged in front of his
idols—in ecstasy—
their slick, dark faces,
their thin, wiry arms,
who must begin to look
like angels!
Why does this trembling
pull us?
A: *Beneath the surface we are one.*
B: *Amazing! I did not think that they could speak this tongue.*

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Cherry Blossoms

By Toi Derricotte

I went down to
mingle my breath
with the breath
of the cherry blossoms.

There were photographers:
Mothers arranging their
children against
gnarled old trees;
a couple, hugging,
asks a passerby
to snap them
like that,
so that their love
will always be caught
between two friendships:
ours & the friendship
of the cherry trees.

Oh Cherry,
why can't my poems
be as beautiful?

A young woman in a fur-trimmed
coat sets a card table
with linens, candles,
a picnic basket & wine.
A father tips
a boy's wheelchair back
so he can gaze
up at a branched
heaven.
All around us
the blossoms
flurry down
whispering,

Be patient
you have an ancient beauty.

Be patient,
you have an ancient beauty.

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The Weakness

By Toi Derricotte

That time my grandmother dragged me
through the perfume aisles at Saks, she held me up
by my arm, hissing, “Stand up,”
through clenched teeth, her eyes
bright as a dog’s
cornered in the light.
She said it over and over,
as if she were Jesus,
and I were dead. She had been
solid as a tree,
a fur around her neck, a
light-skinned matron whose car was parked, who walked on swirling
marble and passed through
brass openings—in 1945.
There was not even a black
elevator operator at Saks.
The saleswoman had brought velvet
leggings to lace me in, and cooed,
as if in the service of all grandmothers.
My grandmother had smiled, but not
hungrily, not like my mother
who hated them, but wanted to please,
and they had smiled back, as if
they were wearing wooden collars.
When my legs gave out, my grandmother
dragged me up and held me like God
holds saints by the
roots of the hair. I begged her
to believe I couldn’t help it. Stumbling,
her face white
with sweat, she pushed me through the crowd, rushing
away from those eyes
that saw through
her clothes, under
her skin, all the way down

to the transparent
genes confessing.

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The Rubinstein Staccato Etude

By R. Nathaniel Dett

Staccato! Staccato!
Leggier agitato!
  In and out does the melody twist—
Unique proposition
Is this composition.
  (Alas! for the player who hasn't the wrist!)
Now in the dominant
Theme ringing prominent,
  Bass still repeating its one monotone,
Double notes crying,
Up keyboard go flying,
  The change to the minor comes in like a groan.
Without a cessation
A chaste modulation
  Hastens adown to subdominant key,
Where melody mellow-like
Singing so 'cello-like
  Rises and falls in a wild ecstasy.
Scarce is this finished
When chords all diminished
  Break loose in a patter that comes down like rain;
A pedal-point wonder
Rivaling thunder,
  Now all is mad agitation again.
Like laughter jolly
Begins the finale;
  Again does the 'cello its tones seem to lend
Diminuendo ad molto crescendo.
  Ah! Rubinstein only could make such an end!

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After the Disaster

By Abigail Deutsch

New York City, 2001

One night, not long after the disaster,
as our train was passing Astor,
the car door opened with a shudder
and a girl came flying down the aisle,
hair that looked to be all feathers
and a half-moon smile
making open air of our small car.

The crowd ignored her or they muttered
“Hey, excuse me” as they passed her
when the train had paused at Rector.
The specter crowed “Excuse me,” swiftly
turned, and ran back up the corridor,
then stopped for me.
We dove under the river.

She took my head between her fingers,
squeezing till the birds began to stir.
And then from out my eyes and ears
a flock came forth — I couldn’t think or hear
or breathe or see within that feather-world
so silently I thanked her.

Such things were common after the disaster.

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Hibernal

By Babette Deutsch

The park is winter-plucked. The sky
and the grey pavement show a sheeted face:
the covered stare of one who had to die.
Now, when men sweat,
shoveling muddy snow or heaving ice,
they know the helpless sweat that will not wet them twice,
they know the staggering heart, the smothered breath
that stand between this knowing and the end.
Though they must drag a net of heavy hours
about their straining limbs,
though they behold
love like a pillar of cloud, a pillar of fire—
this net will break before they tire,
this cloud, this flame will vanish and be cold.
Men think of this who limp against the wind
that freezes hate and sucks at their desire.
Winter is on us now, and will return:
soiled snows will choke the city streets again,
bleak twilights dull the windows as before,
dark hurrying crowds push towards lit rooms in vain.
One day we shall not kiss or quarrel any more.

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On Learning that the Reservoir is to be Obliterated

By Babette Deutsch

(with apologies to Elia)

I knew a city once, I knew Manhattan,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful schooldays—
All, all are gone, the old familiar landmarks.

I have been laughing, I have been coquetting,
Primping late, preening late, in Peacock Alley—
All, all are gone, the old familiar landmarks.

I knew a square once, jolliest of plazas:
Rapt is its glory hence, the Garden brick-dust;
All, all are gone, the old familiar landmarks.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no one:
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly;
Left him, to muse on the old familiar landmarks.

Ghostlike I paced round the haunts of my childhood,
Paused at the reservoir, soon to be earth-choked,
Soon to be lost with the old familiar landmarks.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than brother,
Why wert not thou born in my old Manhattan?
So might we talk of the old familiar landmarks—

How some have changed, some been erased forever,
Some been disfigured; all are departed—
All, all are gone, the old familiar landmarks.

Public domain

Silence

By Babette Deutsch

Silence with you is like the faint delicious
Smile of a child asleep, in dreams unguessed:
Only the hinted wonder of its dreaming,
The soft, slow-breathing miracle of rest.
Silence with you is like a kind departure
From iron clangor and the engulfing crowd
Into a wide and greenly barren meadow,
Under the bloom of some blue-bosomed cloud;
Or like one held upon the sands at evening,
When the drawn tide rolls out, and the mixed light
Of sea and sky enshrouds the far, wind-bellowed
Sails that move darkly on the edge of night.

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From “Substitute Heart”

By Tsering Wangmo Dhompa

A single human life migrates through many lifetimes,
according to the books she read to me.

The word migrant is cousin to nomad which is what her ancestors were.

When she turned refugee, she was told not to confuse herself with migrant.

There is no uniform legal definition of migrant. Blurring the terms generates confusion, aid workers explained.

We are often asked who we are and where we come from. We tell the story we’ve memorized by heart, we know when to insert facts and what emotions are better left in our bodies.

Practice compassion, the teacher says when we ask him to make decisions for us.

Good thoughts generate good thoughts without asking for an exchange.

Just the thought of wanting to help others is worth thinking on, he says.

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The Hospital Window

By James Dickey

I have just come down from my father.
Higher and higher he lies
Above me in a blue light
Shed by a tinted window.
I drop through six white floors
And then step out onto pavement.

Still feeling my father ascend,
I start to cross the firm street,
My shoulder blades shining with all
The glass the huge building can raise.
Now I must turn round and face it,
And know his one pane from the others.

Each window possesses the sun
As though it burned there on a wick.
I wave, like a man catching fire.
All the deep-dyed windowpanes flash,
And, behind them, all the white rooms
They turn to the color of Heaven.

Ceremoniously, gravely, and weakly,
Dozens of pale hands are waving
Back, from inside their flames.
Yet one pure pane among these
Is the bright, erased blankness of nothing.
I know that my father is there,

In the shape of his death still living.
The traffic increases around me
Like a madness called down on my head.
The horns blast at me like shotguns,
And drivers lean out, driven crazy—
But now my propped-up father

Lifts his arm out of stillness at last.
The light from the window strikes me
And I turn as blue as a soul,

As the moment when I was born.
I am not afraid for my father—
Look! He is grinning; he is not

Afraid for my life, either,
As the wild engines stand at my knees
Shredding their gears and roaring,
And I hold each car in its place
For miles, inciting its horn
To blow down the walls of the world

That the dying may float without fear
In the bold blue gaze of my father.
Slowly I move to the sidewalk
With my pin-tingling hand half dead
At the end of my bloodless arm.
I carry it off in amazement,

High, still higher, still waving,
My recognized face fully mortal,
Yet not; not at all, in the pale,
Drained, otherworldly, stricken,
Created hue of stained glass.
I have just come down from my father.

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“Hope” is the thing with feathers

By Emily Dickinson

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –

And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –

I’ve heard it in the chillest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet – never – in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of me.

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Rickshaw Boy

By Duy Doan

The man I pulled tonight
carried a load of books.

When I felt him watching
me uphill, I grimaced.

He gave me lunar
cakes the size

of two camel humps.
When I answered him,

I smiled to his face.
He wore the moonlight

in his specs. Pant
seams clean as the embroidery

work of his book covers.
One cannot grow rich

without a bit of cleverness.
Should I have shown

him the secret of my deft
touch? The Circling Moon,

the Graceful Swan? How East
Wind beats West Wind

if other two winds say so?
Snow falls on cedars.

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Mi Historia

By David Dominguez

My red pickup choked on burnt oil
as I drove down Highway 99.
In wind-tattered garbage bags
I had packed my whole life:
two pairs of jeans, a few T-shirts,
an a pair of work boots.
My truck needed work, and through
the blue smoke rising from under the hood,
I saw almond orchards, plums,
and raisins spread out on paper trays,
and acres of Mendota cotton my mother picked as a child.

My mother crawled through the furrows
and plucked cotton balls that filled
the burlap sack she dragged,
shoulder-slung, through dried-up bolls,
husks, weevils, dirt clods,
and dust that filled the air with thirst.
But when she grew tired,
she slept on her mother's burlap,
stuffed thick as a mattress,
and Grandma dragged her over the land
where time was told by the setting sun. . . .

History cried out to me from the earth,
in the scream of starling flight,
and pounded at the hulls of seeds to be set free.
History licked the asphalt with rubber,
sighed in the windows of abandoned barns,
slumped in the wind-blasted palms,
groaned in the heat, and whispered its soft curses.
I wanted my own history—not the earth's,
nor the history of blood, nor of memory,
and not the job founded for me at Galdini Sausage.
I sought my own—a new bruise to throb hard
as the asphalt that pounded the chassis of my truck.

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The Song of the Smoke

By W. E. B. Du Bois

I am the Smoke King
I am black!
I am swinging in the sky,
I am wringing worlds awry;
I am the thought of the throbbing mills,
I am the soul of the soul-toil kills,
Wraith of the ripple of trading rills;
Up I'm curling from the sod,
I am whirling home to God;
I am the Smoke King
I am black.

I am the Smoke King,
I am black!
I am wreathing broken hearts,
I am sheathing love's light darts;
Inspiration of iron times
Wedding the toil of toiling climes,
Shedding the blood of bloodless crimes—
Lurid lowering 'mid the blue,
Torrid towering toward the true,
I am the Smoke King,
I am black.

I am the Smoke King,
I am black!
I am darkening with song,
I am hearkening to wrong!
I will be black as blackness can—
The blacker the mantle, the mightier the man!
For blackness was ancient ere whiteness began.
I am daubing God in night,
I am swabbing Hell in white:
I am the Smoke King
I am black.

I am the Smoke King
I am black!
I am cursing ruddy morn,
I am hearsing hearts unborn:
Souls unto me are as stars in a night,
I whiten my black men—I blacken my white!
What’s the hue of a hide to a man in his might?
Hail! great, gritty, grimy hands—
Sweet Christ, pity toiling lands!
I am the Smoke King
I am black.

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The Long Deployment

By Jehanne Dubrow

For weeks, I breathe his body in the sheet
and pillow. I lift a blanket to my face.
There's bitter incense paired with something sweet,
like sandalwood left sitting in the heat
or cardamom rubbed on a piece of lace.
For weeks, I breathe his body. In the sheet
I smell anise, the musk that we secrete
with longing, leather and moss. I find a trace
of bitter incense paired with something sweet.
Am I imagining the wet scent of peat
and cedar, oud, impossible to erase?
For weeks, I breathe his body in the sheet—
crushed pepper—although perhaps discreet,
difficult for someone else to place.
There's bitter incense paired with something sweet.
With each deployment I become an aesthete
of smoke and oak. Patchouli fills the space
for weeks. I breathe his body in the sheet
until he starts to fade, made incomplete,
a bottle almost empty in its case.
There's bitter incense paired with something sweet.
And then he's gone. Not even the conceit
of him remains, not the resinous base.
For weeks, I breathed his body in the sheet.
He was bitter incense paired with something sweet.

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Life’s Tragedy

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

It may be misery not to sing at all,
And to go silent through the brimming day;
It may be misery never to be loved,
But deeper griefs than these beset the way.

To sing the perfect song,
And by a half-tone lost the key,
There the potent sorrow, there the grief,
The pale, sad staring of Life’s Tragedy.

To have come near to the perfect love,
Not the hot passion of untempered youth,
But that which lies aside its vanity,
And gives, for thy trusting worship, truth.

This, this indeed is to be accursed,
For if we mortals love, or if we sing,
We count our joys not by what we have,
But by what kept us from that perfect thing.

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Ode for Memorial Day

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

Done are the toils and the wearisome marches,
    Done is the summons of bugle and drum.
Softly and sweetly the sky overarches,
    Shelt'ring a land where Rebellion is dumb.
Dark were the days of the country's derangement,
    Sad were the hours when the conflict was on,
But through the gloom of fraternal estrangement
    God sent his light, and we welcome the dawn.
O'er the expanse of our mighty dominions,
    Sweeping away to the uttermost parts,
Peace, the wide-flying, on untiring pinions,
    Bringeth her message of joy to our hearts.

Ah, but this joy which our minds cannot measure,
    What did it cost for our fathers to gain!
Bought at the price of the heart's dearest treasure,
    Born out of travail and sorrow and pain;
Born in the battle where fleet Death was flying,
    Slaying with sabre-stroke bloody and fell;
Born where the heroes and martyrs were dying,
    Torn by the fury of bullet and shell.
Ah, but the day is past: silent the rattle,
    And the confusion that followed the fight.
Peace to the heroes who died in the battle,
    Martyrs to truth and the crowning of Right!

Out of the blood of a conflict fraternal,
    Out of the dust and the dimness of death,
Burst into blossoms of glory eternal
    Flowers that sweeten the world with their breath.
Flowers of charity, peace, and devotion
    Bloom in the hearts that are empty of strife;
Love that is boundless and broad as the ocean
    Leaps into beauty and fullness of life.
So, with the singing of paeans and chorals,
    And with the flag flashing high in the sun,

Place on the graves of our heroes the laurels
    Which their unfaltering valor has won!

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Ships That Pass in the Night

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

Out in the sky the great dark clouds are massing;
I look far out into the pregnant night,
Where I can hear a solemn booming gun
And catch the gleaming of a random light,
That tells me that the ship I seek is passing, passing.

My tearful eyes my soul's deep hurt are glassing;
For I would hail and check that ship of ships.
I stretch my hands imploring, cry aloud,
My voice falls dead a foot from mine own lips,
And but its ghost doth reach that vessel, passing, passing.

O Earth, O Sky, O Ocean, both surpassing,
O heart of mine, O soul that dreads the dark!
Is there no hope for me? Is there no way
That I may sight and check that speeding bark
Which out of sight and sound is passing, passing?

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Sympathy

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart’s deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

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Thou Art My Lute

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

Thou art my lute, by thee I sing,—
    My being is attuned to thee.
Thou settest all my words a-wing,
    And meltest me to melody.

Thou art my life, by thee I live,
    From thee proceed the joys I know;
Sweetheart, thy hand has power to give
    The meed of love—the cup of woe.

Thou art my love, by thee I lead
    My soul the paths of light along,
From vale to vale, from mead to mead,
    And home it in the hills of song.

My song, my soul, my life, my all,
    Why need I pray or make my plea,
Since my petition cannot fall;
    For I’m already one with thee!

Public domain

We Wear the Mask

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
    We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
    We wear the mask!

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I Sit and Sew

By Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson

I sit and sew—a useless task it seems,
My hands grown tired, my head weighed down with dreams—
The panoply of war, the martial tred of men,
Grim-faced, stern-eyed, gazing beyond the ken
Of lesser souls, whose eyes have not seen Death,
Nor learned to hold their lives but as a breath—
But—I must sit and sew.

I sit and sew—my heart aches with desire—
That pageant terrible, that fiercely pouring fire
On wasted fields, and writhing grotesque things
Once men. My soul in pity flings
Appealing cries, yearning only to go
There in that holocaust of hell, those fields of woe—
But—I must sit and sew.

The little useless seam, the idle patch;
Why dream I here beneath my homely thatch,
When there they lie in sodden mud and rain,
Pitifully calling me, the quick ones and the slain?
You need me, Christ! It is no roseate dream
That beckons me—this pretty futile seam,
It stifles me—God, must I sit and sew?

Public domain

If I Had Known

By Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson

If I had known
Two years ago how drear this life should be,
And crowd upon itself allstrangely sad,
Mayhap another song would burst from out my lips,
Overflowing with the happiness of future hopes;
Mayhap another throb than that of joy.
Have stirred my soul into its inmost depths,
If I had known.

If I had known,
Two years ago the impotence of love,
The vainness of a kiss, how barren a caress,
Mayhap my soul to higher things have soarn,
Nor clung to earthly loves and tender dreams,
But ever up aloft into the blue empyrean,
And there to master all the world of mind,
If I had known.

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The Idler

By Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson

An idle lingerer on the wayside's road,
He gathers up his work and yawns away;
A little longer, ere the tiresome load
Shall be reduced to ashes or to clay.

No matter if the world has marched along,
And scorned his slowness as it quickly passed;
No matter, if amid the busy throng,
He greets some face, infantile at the last.

His mission? Well, there is but one,
And if it is a mission he knows it, nay,
To be a happy idler, to lounge and sun,
And dreaming, pass his long-drawn days away.

So dreams he on, his happy life to pass
Content, without ambitions painful sighs,
Until the sands run down into the glass;
He smiles—content—unmoved and dies.

And yet, with all the pity that you feel
For this poor mothling of that flame, the world;
Are you the better for your desperate deal,
When you, like him, into infinitude are hurled?

Public domain

To Madame Curie

By Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson

Oft have I thrilled at deeds of high emprise,
And yearned to venture into realms unknown,
Thrice blessed she, I deemed, whom God had shown
How to achieve great deeds in woman’s guise.
Yet what discov’ry by expectant eyes
Of foreign shores, could vision half the throne
Full gained by her, whose power fully grown
Exceeds the conquerors of th’ uncharted skies?
So would I be this woman whom the world
Avows its benefactor; nobler far,
Than Sybil, Joan, Sappho, or Egypt’s queen.
In the alembic forged her shafts and hurled
At pain, diseases, waging a humane war;
Greater than this achievement, none, I ween.

Public domain

To the Negro Farmers of the United States

By Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson

God washes clean the souls and hearts of you,
His favored ones, whose backs bend o’er the soil,
Which grudging gives to them requite for toil
In sober graces and in vision true.
God places in your hands the pow’r to do
A service sweet. Your gift supreme to foil
The bare-fanged wolves of hunger in the moil
Of Life’s activities. Yet all too few
Your glorious band, clean sprung from Nature’s heart;
The hope of hungry thousands, in whose breast
Dwells fear that you should fail. God placed no dart
Of war within your hands, but pow’r to start
Tears, praise, love, joy, enwoven in a crest
To crown you glorious, brave ones of the soil.

Public domain

Sweet Tooth

By Russell Edson

A little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice was eaten by someone with a sweet tooth the size of an elephant's tusk.

Ah, he said, this darn tooth, it's driving me nuts.

Then another voice is heard. It's the little girl's father who says, have you seen a little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice?– Incidentally, what's that thing sticking out of your mouth like an elephant's tusk?

My sweet tooth, and it's really driving me nuts.

You ought to see a dentist.

But he might want to pull it, and I don't like people pulling at me. If they want to pull they should pull at their own pullables.

So true, said the little girl's father, people should pull at their own pullables and let other people's pullables alone. But still, he asked again, I wonder if you've seen a little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice?

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Beautiful Wreckage

By W.D. Ehrhart

What if I didn't shoot the old lady
running away from our patrol,
or the old man in the back of the head,
or the boy in the marketplace?

Or what if the boy—but he didn't
have a grenade, and the woman in Hue
didn't lie in the rain in a mortar pit
with seven Marines just for food,

Gaffney didn't get hit in the knee,
Ames didn't die in the river, Ski
didn't die in a medevac chopper
between Con Thien and Da Nang.

In Vietnamese, Con Thien means
place of angels. What if it really was
instead of the place of rotting sandbags,
incoming heavy artillery, rats and mud.

What if the angels were Ames and Ski,
or the lady, the man, and the boy,
and they lifted Gaffney out of the mud
and healed his shattered knee?

What if none of it happened the way I said?
Would it all be a lie?
Would the wreckage be suddenly beautiful?
Would the dead rise up and walk?

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The Farmer

By W.D. Ehrhart

Each day I go into the fields
to see what is growing
and what remains to be done.
It is always the same thing: nothing
is growing, everything needs to be done.
Plow, harrow, disc, water, pray
till my bones ache and hands rub
blood-raw with honest labor—
all that grows is the slow
intransigent intensity of need.
I have sown my seed on soil
guaranteed by poverty to fail.
But I don't complain—except
to passersby who ask me why
I work such barren earth.
They would not understand me
if I stooped to lift a rock
and hold it like a child, or laughed,
or told them it is their poverty
I labor to relieve. For them,
I complain. A farmer of dreams
knows how to pretend. A farmer of dreams
knows what it means to be patient.
Each day I go into the fields.

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La Figlia Che Piange

By T. S. Eliot

O quam te memorem virgo ...

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—
Lean on a garden urn—
Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
Fling them to the ground and turn
With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So he would have left
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
As the mind deserts the body it has used.
I should find
Some way incomparably light and deft,
Some way we both should understand,
Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather
Compelled my imagination many days,
Many days and many hours:
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.
And I wonder how they should have been together!
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze
The troubled midnight and the noon’s repose.

Public domain

Brahma

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

If the red slayer think he slays,
    Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
    I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
    Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
    And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
    When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt;
    And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
    And pine in vain the sacred Seven,
But thou, meek lover of the good!
    Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

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Concord Hymn

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sung at the Completion of the Battle Monument, July 4, 1837

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
  Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
  And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
  Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
  Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
  We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
  When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare
  To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
  The shaft we raise to them and thee.

Public domain

Experience

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

The lords of life, the lords of life,—
I saw them pass,
In their own guise,
Like and unlike,
Portly and grim,—
Use and Surprise,
Surface and Dream,
Succession swift and spectral Wrong,
Temperament without a tongue,
And the inventor of the game
Omnipresent without name;—
Some to see, some to be guessed,
They marched from east to west:
Little man, least of all,
Among the legs of his guardians tall,
Walked about with puzzled look.
Him by the hand dear Nature took,
Dearest Nature, strong and kind,
Whispered, ‘Darling, never mind!
To-morrow they will wear another face,
The founder thou; these are thy race!’

Public domain

Fable

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

The mountain and the squirrel
Had a quarrel;
And the former called the latter ‘Little Prig.’
Bun replied,
‘You are doubtless very big;
But all sorts of things and weather
Must be taken in together,
To make up a year
And a sphere.
And I think it no disgrace
To occupy my place.
If I’m not so large as you,
You are not so small as I,
And not half so spry.
I’ll not deny you make
A very pretty squirrel track;
Talents differ; all is well and wisely put;
If I cannot carry forests on my back,
Neither can you crack a nut.’

Public domain

Give All To Love

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

Give all to love;
Obey thy heart;
Friends, kindred, days,
Estate, good-fame,
Plans, credit and the Muse,—
Nothing refuse.

’T is a brave master;
Let it have scope:
Follow it utterly,
Hope beyond hope:
High and more high
It dives into noon,
With wing unspent,
Untold intent:
But it is a god,
Knows its own path
And the outlets of the sky.

It was never for the mean;
It requireth courage stout.
Souls above doubt,
Valor unbending,
It will reward,—
They shall return
More than they were,
And ever ascending.

Leave all for love;
Yet, hear me, yet,
One word more thy heart behoved,
One pulse more of firm endeavor,—
Keep thee to-day,
To-morrow, forever,
Free as an Arab
Of thy beloved.

Cling with life to the maid;
But when the surprise,
First vague shadow of surmise
Flits across her bosom young,
Of a joy apart from thee,
Free be she, fancy-free;
Nor thou detain her vesture’s hem,
Nor the palest rose she flung
From her summer diadem.

Though thou loved her as thyself,
As a self of purer clay,
Though her parting dims the day,
Stealing grace from all alive;
Heartily know,
When half-gods go,
The gods arrive.

Public domain

The Snow-Storm

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
Arrives the snow, and, driving o’er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
And veils the farm-house at the garden’s end.
The sled and traveller stopped, the courier’s feet
Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

Come see the north wind’s masonry.
Out of an unseen quarry evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Curves his white bastions with projected roof
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he
For number or proportion. Mockingly,
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;
Fills up the farmer’s lane from wall to wall,
Maugre the farmer’s sighs; and, at the gate,
A tapering turret overtops the work.
And when his hours are numbered, and the world
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,
Built in an age, the mad wind’s night-work,
The frolic architecture of the snow.

Public domain

A Nation’s Strength

By William Ralph Emerson

What makes a nation’s pillars high
And its foundations strong?
What makes it mighty to defy
The foes that round it throng?

It is not gold. Its kingdoms grand
Go down in battle shock;
Its shafts are laid on sinking sand,
Not on abiding rock.

Is it the sword? Ask the red dust
Of empires passed away;
The blood has turned their stones to rust,
Their glory to decay.

And is it pride? Ah, that bright crown
Has seemed to nations sweet;
But God has struck its luster down
In ashes at his feet.

Not gold but only men can make
A people great and strong;
Men who for truth and honor’s sake
Stand fast and suffer long.

Brave men who work while others sleep,
Who dare while others fly…
They build a nation’s pillars deep
And lift them to the sky.

Public domain

A Quiet Poem

By Elaine Equi

My father screamed whenever the phone rang.

My aunt often screamed when she opened the door.

Out back, the willows caterwauled,

In the kitchen, the faucet screamed
a drop at a time.

At school, they called screaming “recess”
or sometimes “music.”

Our neighbors’ daughter had a scream
more melodious than my own.

At first, Col. Parker had to pay girls
to get them to scream for Elvis.

I didn’t want to scream when I saw The Beatles,
but I did. After that, I screamed for even
mediocre bands.

Late in his career, John Lennon
got into Primal Scream.

Many people find it relaxing to scream.

Just as crawling precedes walking, so screaming
precedes speech.

The roller coaster is just one of many
scream-inducing devices.

The ambulance tries, in its clumsy way, to emulate
the human scream, which in turn tries to emulate nature.

Wind is often said to shriek, but Sylvia Plath
also speaks of “the parched scream of the sun.”

Jim Morrison wanted to hear the scream of the butterfly.

With ultra-sensitive equipment, scientists measure
the screams of plants they’ve tortured.

It’s proven that if you scream at a person
for years, then suddenly stop, he will hear even
the tenderest words of love as violent curses.

And to anyone who speaks above a whisper, he will say:
“Don’t you dare. Don’t you dare raise your voice to me.”

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The Machinist, Teaching His Daughter to Play the Piano

By B.H. Fairchild

The brown wrist and hand with its raw knuckles and blue nails
Packed with dirt and oil, pauses in mid-air,
the fingers arched delicately,

and she mimics him, hand held just so, the wrist loose,
then swooping down to the wrong chord.
She lifts her hand and tries again.

Drill collars rumble, hammering the nubbin-posts.
The helper lifts one, turning it slowly,
then lugs it into the lathe's chuck.

The bit shears the dull iron into new metal, falling,
into the steady chant of lathe work,
and the machinist lights a cigarette, holding

in his upturned palms the polonaise he learned at ten,
then later the easiest waltzes,
etudes, impossible counterpoint

like the voice of his daughter he overhears one night
standing in the backyard. She is speaking
to herself but not herself, as in prayer,

the listener is some version of herself,
and the names are pronounced carefully,
self-consciously; Chopin, Mozart,

Scarlatti, … these gestures of voice and hands
suspended over the keyboard
that move like the lathe in its turning

toward music, the wind dragging the hoist chain, the ring
of iron on iron in the holding rack.
His daughter speaks to him one night,

but not to him, rather someone created between them,
a listener, there and not there,
a master of lathes, a student of music.

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The Poem You've Been Waiting For

By Tarfia Faizullah

I saw then the white-eyed man
leaning in to see if I was ready

yet to go where he has been waiting
to take me. I saw then the gnawing

sounds my faith has been making
and I saw too that the shape it sings

in is the color of cast-iron mountains
I drove so long to find I forgot I had

been looking for them, for the you
I once knew and the you that was born

waiting for me to find you. I have been
twisting and turning across these lifetimes

where forgetting me is what you do
so you don't have to look at yourself. I saw

that I would drown in a creek carved out
of a field our incarnations forged the first path

through to those mountains. I invited you to stroll
with me there again for the first time, to pause

and sprawl in the grass while I read to you
the poem you hadn't known you'd been waiting

to hear. I read until you finally slept
and all your jagged syntaxes softened into rest.

You're always driving so far from me towards
the me I worry, without you, is eternity. I lay there,

awake, keeping watch while you snored.
I waited, as I always seem to, for you

to wake up and come back to me.

Tarfia Faizullah, “The Poem You’ve Been Waiting For” from *Poetry* (April 2016).
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A Wing and a Prayer

By Beth Ann Fennelly

We thought the birds were singing louder. We were almost certain they were. We spoke of this, when we spoke, if we spoke, on our zoom screens or in the backyard with our podfolk. Dang, you hear those birds? Don't they sound loud? We shouted to the neighbor, and from behind her mask she agreed. The birds are louder this spring. This summer. I've never heard such loud birds. Listen to 'em sing. But the birds aren't singing louder. In fact, the opposite. Ornithologists have recorded lowered decibel levels of bird song. In the absence of noise pollution—our planes overhead, our cars rushing past with their motors and horns, our bars leaking music onto the street corners—the birds don't need to shout. So why are we hearing birdsong now, when it is quieter? Because we need it more. Poetry in the pandemic: birdsong that was there all along.

Beth Ann Fennelly, Beth Ann Fennelly, "A Wing and a Prayer" from *Poetry* (July/August 2021). Copyright © 2021 by Beth Ann Fennerlly. Used with the permission of the author.

Militants to Certain Other Women

By Katharine Rolston Fisher

You who pass coldly by when the police rush upon us,
When they wrench away our banners,
(Beautiful banners whose colors cry a demand for liberty)
You who criticize or condemn
(Declaring you “believe in suffrage,
Worked for it in your state, and your mother
knew Susan B. Anthony”)
Can you think in terms of a nation?
Could you die, (or face ridicule) for your belief?
For the freedom of women, for your freedom,
we are fighting;
For your safety we face danger, bear torture;
For your honor endure untellable insult.
To win democracy for you we defend the banners of democracy
Till our banners and our bodies
Are flung together on the pavement,
Waiting at the gates of government,
We have made of our weariness a symbol
Of women’s long wait for justice.
We have borne the hunger and hardship of prison,
To open people’s eyes
To men’s determination to imprison the power of women.
You women who pass coldly by,
Do you imagine your freedom is coming

As a summer wind blows over fields?

Slowly it has advanced by a sixty-years' war,

(Those who have fought in it have not forgotten)

And that war is not won.

Strongly entrenched, the foe sits plotting.

Close to his lines our banners fly,

Signalling where to direct the fire,

Greater forces are needed, reserves and recruits.

Are you for winning or for waiting,

Women who watch the banners go down?

Women who say, "Suffrage is coming,"

While suffrage goes by you into Prussia?

Cease to be content with applauding speeches, and praising politicians.

Patience is shameful.

Awake, rise, and act.

Public domain

Susan B. Anthony

By Katharine Rolston Fisher

Her life is a luminous banner borne ever ahead of her era, in
lead of the forces of freedom,
Where wrongs for justice call.
High-hearted, far-sighted, she pressed with noble intrepid impatience,
one race and the half of another
To liberate from thrall.
If now in its freedom her spirit mingle with ours and find us
toiling at dusk to finish
The task of her long day,
On ground hard held to the last, gaining her goal for women,
if for her word we hearken,
May we not hear her say:
“Comrades and daughters exultant, let my goal for you be a mile-
stone. Too late have you won it to linger.
Victory flies ahead.
Though women march millions abreast on a widening way to free-
dom, trails there are still for women
Fearless to break and tread.
“Keep watch on power as it passes, on liberty’s torch as it
travels, lest woman be left with a symbol,
No flame in her lamp alive.
In the mine, the mill and the mart where is bartered the bread of
your children, is forged the power you strove for,
For which you still must strive.”

Her spirit like southern starlight at once is afar and around us;
her message an inward singing
Through all our life to run:
“Forward together, my daughters, till born of your faith with
each other and of brotherhood all the world over,
For all is freedom won.”

Public domain

The Empty Cup

By Katharine Rolston Fisher

Evening at Occoquan. Rain pelts the workhouse roof.
The prison matrons are sewing together for the Red Cross
The women prisoners are going to bed in two long rows.
Some of the suffrage pickets lie reading in the dim light.
Through the dark, above the rain, rings out a cry.
We listen at the windows. (Oh, those cries from punishment cells!)
A voice calls one of us by name.
“Miss Burns! Miss Burns! Will you see that I have a drink of water?”
Lucy Burns arises; slips on the course blue prison gown.
Over it her swinging hair, red-gold, throws a regal mantle.
She begs the night-watch to give the girl water.
One of the matrons leaves her war-bandages; we see her hasten to the cell.
The light in it goes out.
The voice despairing cries:
“She has taken away the cup and she will not bring me water.”
Rain pours on the roof. The suffragists lie awake.
The matrons work busily for the Red Cross.

Public domain

Thoughts in Jail

By Katharine Rolston Fisher

Prisoners are we,
American citizens imprisoned
For daring in the name of Democracy
To protest against the continued denial
Of the right of self-government
To twenty millions of the American people.
We lie in a dungeon
Long ago abandoned and condemned,
Just as politically we are held
Imprisoned in a subjection
Abandoned and condemned
By every other nation of English speech and spirit.
Painfully raising my head,
I look down the long row
Of gray-blanketed heaps.
Under every heap a woman,
Weak, sick, but determined,
Twenty gray fortresses of determination.

Public domain

Come Let Us Be Friends

By Sarah Lee Brown Fleming

Come, let us be friends, you and I,
    E’en though the world doth hate at this hour;
Let’s bask in the sunlight of a love so high
    That war cannot dim it with all its armed power.

Come, let us be friends, you and I,
    The world hath her surplus of hatred today;
She needeth more love, see, she droops with a sigh,
    Where her axis doth slant in the sky far away.

Come, let us be friends, you and I,
    And love each other so deep and so well,
That the world may grow steady and forward fly,
    Lest she wander towards chaos and drop into hell.

Public domain

A Distant Song

By John Gould Fletcher

Whether awake or sleeping,
  I cannot rest for long:
By my casement comes creeping
  A distant song.

A song like the chiming of silver
  Bells which the breezes play,
Seeming to float for ever
  Towards an unseen day:

A song that is weary with sorrow,
  Yet knows not any defeat:
Through the past, through to-day, through to-morrow,
  It echoes on life's long street.

Could I but make words of its power,
  Bring it from the future here,
Men's souls would be waking, that hour,
  To the victory against fear.

But the vague sweet stanza befools me
  With its calm joy, time after time,
And no failure here ever schools me
  To cease from an idle rhyme.

That music afar, unspoken,
    'Tis I have done it wrong:
I caught, and I have broken,
    A distant song.

Public domain

Cartoon Physics, part 1

By Nick Flynn

Children under, say, *ten*, shouldn't know
that the universe is ever-expanding,
inexorably pushing into the vacuum, galaxies

swallowed by galaxies, whole

solar systems collapsing, all of it
acted out in silence. At ten we are still learning

the rules of cartoon animation,

that if a man draws a door on a rock
only he can pass through it.
Anyone else who tries

will crash into the rock. Ten-year-olds
should stick with burning houses, car wrecks,
ships going down—earthbound, tangible

disasters, arenas

where they can be heroes. You can run
back into a burning house, sinking ships

have lifeboats, the trucks will come
with their ladders, if you jump

you will be saved. A child

places her hand on the roof of a schoolbus,
& drives across a city of sand. She knows

the exact spot it will skid, at which point
the bridge will give, who will swim to safety
& who will be pulled under by sharks. She will learn

that if a man runs off the edge of a cliff
he will not fall

until he notices his mistake.

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Cathedral Of Salt

By Nick Flynn

Beneath all this I'm carving a cathedral
of salt. I keep

the entrance hidden, no one seems to notice
the hours I'm missing … I'll

bring you one night, it's where
I go when I

hang up the phone …

Neither you
nor your soul is waiting for me at

the end of this, I know that, the salt
nearly clear after I

chisel out the pews, the see-through
altar, the opaque

panes of glass that depict the stations of
our cross — *Here is the day*

*we met, here is the day we remember we
met …* The air down here

will kill us, some say, some wear paper
masks, some still imagine the air above the green

trees, thick with bees

building solitary nests out of petals. What's
the name for this? *Ineffable?* The endless

white will blind you, some say,
but what is there to see we haven't already

seen? Some say it's
like poking a stick into a river — you might as well

simply write about the stick.

Or the river.

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For Who?

By Mary Weston Fordham

When the heavens with stars are gleaming
Like a diadem of light,
And the moon's pale rays are streaming,
Decking earth with radiance bright;
When the autumn's winds are sighing,
O'er the hill and o'er the lea,
When the summer time is dying,
Wanderer, wilt thou think of me?
When thy life is crowned with gladness,
And thy home with love is blest,
Not one brow o'ercast with sadness,
Not one bosom of unrest—
When at eventide reclining,
At thy hearthstone gay and free,
Think of one whose life is pining,
Breathe thou, love, a prayer for me.
Should dark sorrows make thee languish,
Cause thy cheek to lose its hue,
In the hour of deepest anguish,
Darling, then I'll grieve with you.
Though the night be dark and dreary,
And it seemeth long to thee,
I would whisper, "be not weary;"
I would pray love, then, for thee.

Well I know that in the future,
I may cherish naught of earth;
Well I know that love needs nurture,
And it is of heavenly birth.
But though ocean waves may sever
I from thee, and thee from me,
Still this constant heart will never,
Never cease to think of thee.

Public domain

Serenade

By Mary Weston Fordham

Sleep, love sleep,
The night winds sigh,
In soft lullaby.
The Lark is at rest
With the dew on her breast.
So close those dear eyes,
That borrowed their hue
From the heavens so blue,
Sleep, love sleep.

Sleep, love sleep,
The pale moon looks down
On the valleys around,
The Glow Moth is flying,
The South wind is sighing,
And I am low lying,
With lute deftly strung,
To pour out my song,
Sleep, love sleep.

Public domain

The Coming Woman

By Mary Weston Fordham

Just look, 'tis quarter past six, love—
  And not even the fires are caught;
Well, you know I must be at the office—
  But, as usual, the breakfast 'll be late.

Now hurry and wake up the children;
  And dress them as fast as you can;
'Poor dearies,' I know they'll be tardy,
  Dear me, 'what a slow, poky man!'

Have the tenderloin broiled nice and juicy—
  Have the toast browned and buttered all right;
And be sure you settle the coffee:
  Be sure that the silver is bright.

When ready, just run up and call me—
  At eight, to the office I go,
Lest poverty, grim, should o'ertake us—
  ''Tis bread and butter,' you know.

The bottom from stocks may fall out,
  My bonds may get below par;
Then surely, I seldom could spare you
  A nickel, to buy a cigar.

All ready? Now, while I am eating,
  Just bring up my wheel to the door;
Then wash up the dishes; and, mind now,
  Have dinner promptly at four;

For tonight is our Woman's Convention,
  And I am to speak first, you know—
The men veto us in private,
  But in public they shout, 'That's so.'

So 'by-by' – In case of a rap, love,
  Before opening the door, you must look;
O! how could a civilized woman
  Exist, without a man cook.

Public domain

Edgar Allan Poe

By Timothy Thomas Fortune

I know not why, but it is true—it may,
In some way, be because he was a child
Of the fierce sun where I first wept and smiled—
I love the dark-browed Poe. His feverish day
Was spent in dreams inspired, that him beguiled,
When not along his path shone forth one ray
Of light, of hope, to guide him on the way,
That to earth's cares he might be reconciled.
Not one of all Columbia's tuneful choir
Has pitched his notes to such a matchless key
As Poe—the wizard of the Orphic lyre!
Not one has dreamed, has sung, such songs as he,
  Who, like an echo came, an echo went,
  Singing, back to his mother element.

Public domain

Sweet Singer

By James T. Franklin

Reign did silence o’er the stage
As night passed on
And destiny fraught with laurels sat,
Sweet laurels never won,
Till was read aloud her name
And forth the sweet voiced singer came.
While grim old night worn out with age,
Listening to the vibrating stage,
Wept because he must pass on.

But hark! they do applaud her so:
She bows, she smiles and then looks round,
She opens her lips and lo!
Bursts forth a trembling sea of sound:
A sea voluptuous in its swell.
The waves rose high and then they fell;
While beat the etherial shores, the tide,
And ebbing then the waves subside
To music’s gentler flow.

O’er the vast and blue expanse
Leaped the merry music on:
Around the universe, the flow
Of that angelic tone;
Till heaven’s shores, the tidelets lashed
And wavelets o’er the portals dashed.
The billowy waves break forth the sounds
Reach the great white throne and rebound
Echoing the song of home.

Public domain

The Heart Shows No Signs

By Ru Freeman

The heart, the surgeon says, does not reveal
the small rifts, the hairline cracks which

split the hairline cracks they conceal cops
and robbers in a stretch of skin flaunting

star-scars with show of blood bone
the ledges of what it holds tight in checkmate

moves: bend this and break
fight first and bleed to earn

needle finger wrap caress balm
the salvation of sight Behold what beauty

lasts, what outlasts itself The curtain
calls the ovation Seize the beginning

that ends this way: off center stage above
fractured ribs the heart succumbs in silence

All is dark. Listen a *kommos* sung solo
It is too late to repair anything.

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Jeffery, or, the Soldier's Progress

By Philip Freneau

Lur'd by some Captain's smooth address,
His scarlet coat and roguish face,
One Half-A-Joe on drum-head laid,
A tavern-treat—and reckoning paid;
See yonder simple lad consign'd
To slavery of the basest kind.
With only skill to drive a plough
a musquet he must handle now;
Must twirl there and twirl it there
Now on the ground, no in the air:
Its every motion by some rule
Of practice, taught in *Frederick's* school, *
Must be directed—nicely true—
Or he be beaten black—and blue.
A sergeant, rais'd from cleaning shoes
May now this country lad abuse:—
On meager fare grown poor and lean,
He treats him like a mere machine,
Directs his look, directs his step,
And kicks him into decent shape,
From aukward habit frees the clown,
Erects his head—or knocks him down,
Last Friday week to *Battery-Green*
The sergeant came with this Machine—

One motion of the firelock miss’d—

The Tutor thump’d him with his fist:

I saw him lift his hickory cane,

I heard poor *Jeffery’s* head complain!—

Yet this—and more—’s forc’d to bear;

And this goes on from year to year,

’Till desperate grown at such a lot,

He drinks—deserts—and so is shot!

°The Prussian manual exercise.

Public domain

On the Death of Captain Nicholas Biddle

By Philip Freneau

Commander of the Randolph Frigate, Blown up near Barbadoes, 1776

What distant thunders rend the skies,
What clouds of smoke in columns rise,
  What means this dreadful roar?
Is from his base Vesuvius thrown,
Is sky-topt Atlas tumbled down,
  Or Etna's self no more!
Shock after shock torments my ear;
And lo!—two hostile ships appear,
  Red lightnings round them glow:
The *Yarmouth* boasts of sixty-four,
The *Randolph* thirty-two—no more—
  And will she fight this foe!
The *Randolph* soon on Stygian streams
Shall coast along the land of dreams,
  The islands of the dead!
But Fate, that parts them on the deep,
May save the Briton yet to weep
  His days of victory fled.
Say, who commands that dismal blaze,
Where yonder starry streamer plays?
  Does Mars with Jove engage!
'Tis Biddle wings those angry fires,

Biddle, whose bosom Jove inspires,
With more than mortal rage.
Tremendous flash!—and hark, the ball
Drives through old *Yarmouth,* flames and all;
Her bravest sons expire;
Did Mars himself approach so nigh,
Even Mars, without disgrace, might fly
The *Randolph's* fiercer fire.
The Briton views his mangled crew,
"And shall we strike to thirty-two?—
(Said Hector, stained with gore)
"Shall Britain's flag to these descend—
"Rise, and the glorious conflict end,
"Britons, I ask no more!"
He spoke—they charged their cannon round,
Again the vaulted heavens resound,
The *Randolph* bore it all,
Then fixed her pointed cannons true—
Away the unwieldy vengeance flew;
Britain, thy warriors fall.
The *Yarmouth* saw, with dire dismay,
Her wounded hull, shrouds shot away,
Her boldest heroes dead—
She saw amidst her floating slain
The conquering *Randolph* stem the main—
She saw, she turned—and fled!
That hour, blest chief, had she been thine,

Dear Biddle, had the powers divine
    Been kind as thou wert brave;
But Fate, who doomed thee to expire,
Prepared an arrow, tipt with fire,
    And marked a watery grave.
And in that hour, when conquest came,
Winged at his ship a pointed flame,
    That not even he could shun—
The battle ceased, the *Yarmouth* fled,
The bursting *Randolph* ruin spread,
    And left her task undone!

Public domain

On The Death Of Dr. Benjamin Franklin

By Philip Freneau

Thus, some tall tree that long hath stood
The glory of its native wood,
By storms destroyed, or length of years,
Demands the tribute of our tears.
The pile, that took long time to raise,
To dust returns by slow decays:
But, when its destined years are o’er,
We must regret the loss the more.
So long accustomed to your aid,
The world laments your exit made;
So long befriended by your art,
Philosopher, ’tis hard to part!—
When monarchs tumble to the ground,
Successors easily are found:
But, matchless Franklin! what a few
Can hope to rival such as you,
Who seized from kings their sceptred pride,
And turned the lightning’s darts aside!

Public domain

The American Soldier

By Philip Freneau

A Picture from the Life
To serve with love,
And shed your blood,
Approved may be above,
But here below
(Example shew,)
'Tis dangerous to be good.

–Lord Oxford

Deep in a vale, a stranger now to arms,

Too poor to shine in courts, too proud to beg,

He, who once warred on *Saratoga's* plains,

Sits musing o'er his scars, and wooden leg.

Remembering still the toil of former days,

To *other* hands he sees his earnings paid;—

They share the due reward—*he* feeds on praise.

Lost in the abyss of want, misfortune's shade.

Far, far from domes where splendid tapers glare,

'Tis his from dear bought *peace* no wealth to win,

Removed alike from courtly cringing 'squires,

The great-man's *Levee*, and the proud man's grin.

Sold are those arms which once on Britons blaz'd,

When, flushed with conquest, to the charge they came;

That power repell’d, and *Freedom’s* fabrick rais’d,

She leaves her soldier—*famine* and a *name!*

Public domain

To Lord Cornwallis

By Philip Freneau

At York, Virginia

Hail, great destroyer (equalled yet by none)
Of countries not your master's, nor your own;
Hatched by some demon on a stormy day,
Satan's best substitute to burn and slay;
Confined at last, hemmed in by land and sea,
Burgoyne himself was but a type of thee!
Like his, to freedom was your deadly hate,
Like his your baseness, and be his your fate:
To you, like him, no prospect Nature yields,
But ruined wastes and desolated fields
In vain you raise the interposing wall,
And hoist those standards that, like you, must fall,
In you conclude the glories of your race,
Complete your monarch's and your own disgrace.
What has your lordship's pilfering arms attained?—
Vast stores of plunder, but no State regained—
That may return, though you perhaps may groan,
Restore it, Charley, for 'tis not your own—
Then, lord and soldier, headlong to the brine
Rush down at once—the devil and the swine.
Wouldst thou at last with Washington engage,
Sad object of his pity, not his rage?

See, round thy posts how terribly advance
The chiefs, the armies, and the fleets of France;
Fight while you can, for warlike Rochambeau
Aims at your head his last decisive blow,
Unnumbered ghosts from earth untimely sped,
Can take no rest till you, like them, are dead—
Then die, my Lord; that only chance remains
To wipe away dishonourable stains,
For small advantage would your capture bring,
The plundering servant of a bankrupt king.

Public domain

To The Memory Of The Brave Americans

By Philip Freneau

Under General Greene, in South Carolina, who fell in the action of September 8, 1781

At Eutaw Springs the valiant died;
  Their limbs with dust are covered o’er—
    Weep on, ye springs, your tearful tide;
      How many heroes are no more!
If in this wreck of ruin, they
  Can yet be thought to claim a tear,
    O smite your gentle breast, and say
      The friends of freedom slumber here!
Thou, who shalt trace this bloody plain,
  If goodness rules thy generous breast,
    Sigh for the wasted rural reign;
      Sigh for the shepherds, sunk to rest!
Stranger, their humble graves adorn;
  You too may fall, and ask a tear;
    ‘Tis not the beauty of the morn
      That proves the evening shall be clear.—
They saw their injured country’s woe;
  The flaming town, the wasted field;
    Then rushed to meet the insulting foe;
      They took the spear—but left the shield.

Led by thy conquering genius, Greene,
The Britons they compelled to fly;
None distant viewed the fatal plain,
None grieved, in such a cause to die—
But, like the Parthian, famed of old.
Who, flying, still their arrows threw,
These routed Britons, full as bold,
Retreated, and retreating slew.
Now rest in peace, our patriot band;
Though far from nature’s limits thrown,
We trust they find a happier land,
A brighter sunshine of their own.

Public domain

After Apple-Picking

By Robert Frost

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.

One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it’s like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Public domain

A Line-Storm Song

By Robert Frost

The line-storm clouds fly tattered and swift,
  The road is forlorn all day,
Where a myriad snowy quartz stones lift,
  And the hoof-prints vanish away.
The roadside flowers, too wet for the bee,
  Expend their bloom in vain.
Come over the hills and far with me,
  And be my love in the rain.

The birds have less to say for themselves
  In the wood-world's torn despair
Than now these numberless years the elves,
  Although they are no less there:
All song of the woods is crushed like some
  Wild, easily shattered rose.
Come, be my love in the wet woods; come,
  Where the boughs rain when it blows.

There is the gale to urge behind
  And bruit our singing down,
And the shallow waters aflutter with wind
  From which to gather your gown.
What matter if we go clear to the west,
  And come not through dry-shod?
For wilding brooch shall wet your breast
  The rain-fresh goldenrod.

Oh, never this whelming east wind swells
  But it seems like the sea's return
To the ancient lands where it left the shells
  Before the age of the fern;
And it seems like the time when after doubt
  Our love came back amain.
Oh, come forth into the storm and rout
  And be my love in the rain.

Public domain

A Time to Talk

By Robert Frost

When a friend calls to me from the road
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,
I don’t stand still and look around
On all the hills I haven’t hoed,
And shout from where I am, What is it?
No, not as there is a time to talk.
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,
Blade-end up and five feet tall,
And plod: I go up to the stone wall
For a friendly visit.

Public domain

Fire And Ice

By Robert Frost

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To know that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Public domain

In Equal Sacrifice

By Robert Frost

Thus of old the Douglas did:
He left his land as he was bid
With the royal heart of Robert the Bruce
In a golden case with a golden lid,

To carry the same to the Holy Land;
By which we see and understand
That that was the place to carry a heart
At loyalty and love's command,

And that was the case to carry it in.
The Douglas had not far to win
Before he came to the land of Spain,
Where long a holy war had been

Against the too-victorious Moor;
And there his courage could not endure
Not to strike a blow for God
Before he made his errand sure.

And ever it was intended so,
That a man for God should strike a blow,
No matter the heart he has in charge
For the Holy Land where hearts should go.

But when in battle the foe were met,
The Douglas found him sore beset,
With only strength of the fighting arm
For one more battle passage yet—

And that as vain to save the day
As bring his body safe away—
Only a signal deed to do
And a last sounding word to say.

The heart he wore in a golden chain
He swung and flung forth into the plain,
And followed it crying 'Heart or death!'
And fighting over it perished fain.

So may another do of right,
Give a heart to the hopeless fight,
The more of right the more he loves;
So may another redouble might

For a few swift gleams of the angry brand,
Scorning greatly not to demand
In equal sacrifice with his
The heart he bore to the Holy Land.

Public domain

Pan With Us

By Robert Frost

Pan came out of the woods one day,—
His skin and his hair and his eyes were gray,
The gray of the moss of walls were they,—
    And stood in the sun and looked his fill
    At wooded valley and wooded hill.

He stood in the zephyr, pipes in hand,
On a height of naked pasture land;
In all the country he did command
    He saw no smoke and he saw no roof.
    That was well! And he stamped a hoof.

He heart knew peace, for none came here
To this lean feeding save once a year
Someone to salt the half-wild steer,
    Or homespun children with clicking pails
    Who see so little they tell no tales.

He tossed his pipes, too hard to teach
A new-world song, far out of reach,
For a sylvan sign that the blue jay’s screech
    And the whimper of hawks beside the sun
    Were music enough for him, for one.

Times were changed from what they were:
Such pipes kept less of power to stir
The fruited bough of the juniper
    And the fragile bluets clustered there
    Than the merest aimless breath of air.

They were pipes of pagan mirth,
And the world had found new terms of worth.
He laid him down on the sun-burned earth
    And ravelled a flower and looked away—
    Play? Play?—What should he play?

Public domain

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

By Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound’s the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Public domain

The Aim Was Song

By Robert Frost

Before man came to blow it right
    The wind once blew itself untaught,
And did its loudest day and night
    In any rough place where it caught.

Man came to tell it what was wrong:
    It hadn’t found the place to blow;
It blew too hard—the aim was song.
    And listen—how it ought to go!

He took a little in his mouth,
    And held it long enough for north
To be converted into south,
    And then by measure blew it forth.

By measure. It was word and note,
    The wind the wind had meant to be—
A little through the lips and throat.
    The aim was song—the wind could see.

Public domain

The Road Not Taken

By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Public domain

Flaxman

By Margaret Fuller

We deemed the secret lost, the spirit gone,
Which spake in Greek simplicity of thought,
And in the forms of gods and heroes wrought
Eternal beauty from the sculptured stone,—
A higher charm than modern culture won
With all the wealth of metaphysic lore,
Gifted to analyze, dissect, explore.
A many-colored light flows from one sun;
Art, ’neath its beams, a motley thread has spun;
The prism modifies the perfect day;
But thou hast known such mediums to shun,
And cast once more on life a pure, white ray.
Absorbed in the creations of thy mind,
Forgetting daily self, my truest self I find.

Public domain

Black Silk

By Tess Gallagher

She was cleaning—there is always
that to do—when she found,
at the top of the closet, his old
silk vest. She called me
to look at it, unrolling it carefully
like something live
might fall out. Then we spread it
on the kitchen table and smoothed
the wrinkles down, making our hands
heavy until its shape against Formica
came back and the little tips
that would have pointed to his pockets
lay flat. The buttons were all there.
I held my arms out and she
looped the wide armholes over
them. “That’s one thing I never
wanted to be,” she said, “a man.”
I went into the bathroom to see
how I looked in the sheen and
sadness. Wind chimes
off-key in the alcove. Then her
crying so I stood back in the sink-light
where the porcelain had been staring. Time
to go to her, I thought, with that
other mind, and stood still.

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Refusing Silence

By Tess Gallagher

Heartbeat trembling
your kingdom
of leaves
near the ceremony
of water, I never
insisted on you. I admit
I delayed. I was the Empress
of Delay. But it can't be
put off now. On the sacred branch
of my only voice – I insist.
Insist for us all,
which is the job
of the voice, and especially
of the poet. Else
what am I for, what use
am I if I don't
insist?
There are messages to send.
Gatherings and songs.
Because we need
to insist. Else what are we
for? What use
are we?

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On the Mississippi

By Hamlin Garland

Through wild and tangled forests
  The broad, unhasting river flows--
  Spotted with rain-drops, gray with night;
    Upon its curving breast there goes
A lonely steamboat's larboard light,
    A blood-red star against the shadowy oaks;
Noiseless as a ghost, through greenish gleam
Of fire-flies, before the boat's wild scream--
      A heron flaps away
      Like silence taking flight.

Public domain

Becoming a Horse

By Ross Gay

It was dragging my hands along its belly,
loosing the bit and wiping the spit
from its mouth that made me
a snatch of grass in the thing's maw,
a fly tasting its ear. It was
touching my nose to his that made me know
the clover's bloom, my wet eye to his that
made me know the long field's secrets.
But it was putting my heart to the horse's that made me know
the sorrow of horses. Made me
forsake my thumbs for the sheen of unshod hooves.
And in this way drop my torches.
And in this way drop my knives.
Feel the small song in my chest
swell and my coat glisten and twitch.
And my face grow long.
And these words cast off, at last,
for the slow honest tongue of horses.

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Sorrow Is Not My Name

By Ross Gay

—after Gwendolyn Brooks

No matter the pull toward brink. No
matter the florid, deep sleep awaits.
There is a time for everything. Look,
just this morning a vulture
nodded his red, grizzled head at me,
and I looked at him, admiring
the sickle of his beak.
Then the wind kicked up, and,
after arranging that good suit of feathers
he up and took off.
Just like that. And to boot,
there are, on this planet alone, something like two
million naturally occurring sweet things,
some with names so generous as to kick
the steel from my knees: agave, persimmon,
stick ball, the purple okra I bought for two bucks
at the market. Think of that. The long night,
the skeleton in the mirror, the man behind me
on the bus taking notes, yeah, yeah.
But look; my niece is running through a field
calling my name. My neighbor sings like an angel
and at the end of my block is a basketball court.
I remember. My color's green. I'm spring.

—for Walter Aikens

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Summer

By Ross Gay

And the sun readies himself for sleep, drowses
backward toward the horizon, and the woods
whisper while the wind massages
the sprawling arms of leaf-thick maples,
heavy shadows cast like dark angels
breast-stroking through the courtyard's grass,
and a man yells to an 8th grade black
kid not to walk around with
white girls, and a sleeveless light blue
shirt flails around his pink chest and pot gut,
and behind him, on the apartment's wall, three
shotguns, and three buildings away the boy's white
mother stirs tomato soup into ground beef
for sloppy joes, and the white girl with the black boy
kicks at the furry clumps of new-mown grass,
stares at her feet, and neighbors whisk the boy
back to his building while the man screams
at the boy, calling him what he does, and kids
play stickball in the tennis courts, and the boy makes
fists in his pockets, and the ice cream truck
slows, passes, and without a word the boy
sits to dinner and lifts the sandwich
to his mouth.

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Wedding Poem

By Ross Gay

for Keith and Jen

Friends I am here to modestly report
seeing in an orchard
in my town
a goldfinch kissing
a sunflower
again and again
dangling upside down
by its tiny claws
steadying itself by snapping open
like an old-timey fan
its wings
again and again,
until, swooning, it tumbled off
and swooped back to the very same perch,
where the sunflower curled its giant
swirling of seeds
around the bird and leaned back
to admire the soft wind
nudging the bird's plumage,
and friends I could see
the points on the flower's stately crown
soften and curl inward
as it almost indiscernibly lifted
the food of its body
to the bird's nuzzling mouth
whose fervor
I could hear from
oh 20 or 30 feet away
and see from the tiny hulls
that sailed from their
good racket,
which good racket, I have to say
was making me blush,

and rock up on my tippy-toes,
and just barely purse my lips
with what I realize now
was being, simply, glad,
which such love,
if we let it,
makes us feel.

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Defeat

By Kahlil Gibran

Defeat, my Defeat, my solitude and my aloofness;
You are dearer to me than a thousand triumphs,
And sweeter to my heart than all world-glory.

Defeat, my Defeat, my self-knowledge and my defiance,
Through you I know that I am yet young and swift of foot
And not to be trapped by withering laurels.
And in you I have found aloneness
And the joy of being shunned and scorned.

Defeat, my Defeat, my shining sword and shield,
In your eyes I have read
That to be enthroned is to be enslaved,
And to be understood is to be leveled down,
And to be grasped is but to reach one’s fullness
And like a ripe fruit to fall and be consumed.

Defeat, my Defeat, my bold companion,
You shall hear my songs and my cries and my silences,
And none but you shall speak to me of the beating of wings,
And urging of seas,
And of mountains that burn in the night,
And you alone shall climb my steep and rocky soul.

Defeat, my Defeat, my deathless courage,
You and I shall laugh together with the storm,
And together we shall dig graves for all that die in us,
And we shall stand in the sun with a will,
And we shall be dangerous.

Public domain

On Children

By Kahlil Gibran

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, Speak to us of Children.

And he said:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer’s hand be for gladness;

For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

Public domain

On Houses

By Kahlil Gibran

Then a mason came forth and said, Speak to us of Houses.

And he answered and said:

Build of your imaginings a bower in the wilderness ere you build a house within the city walls.

For even as you have home-comings in your twilight, so has the wanderer in you, the ever distant and alone.

Your house is your larger body.

It grows in the sun and sleeps in the stillness of the night; and it is not dreamless. Does not your house dream? and dreaming,

leave the city for a grove or hill-top?

Would that I could gather your houses into my hand, and like a sower scatter them in forest and meadow.

Would the valleys were your streets, and the green paths your alleys, that you might seek one another through vineyards, and

come with the fragrance of the earth in your garments.

But these things are not yet to be.

In their fear your forefathers gathered you too near together. And that fear shall endure a little longer. A little longer shall your

city walls separate your hearths from your fields.

And tell me, people of Orphalese, what have you in these houses? And what is it you guard with fastened doors?

Have you peace, the quiet urge that reveals your power?

Have you rememberances, the glimmering arches that span the summits of the mind?

Have you beauty, that leads the heart from things fashioned of wood and stone to the holy mountain?

Tell me, have you these in your houses?

Or have you only comfort, and the lust for comfort, that stealthy thing that enters the house a guest, and then becomes a host,

and then a master?

Ay, and it becomes a tamer, and with hook and scourge makes puppets of your larger desires.

Though its hands are silken, its heart is of iron.

It lulls you to sleep only to stand by your bed and jeer at the dignity of the flesh.

It makes mock of your sound senses, and lays them in thistledown like fragile vessels.

Verily the lust for comfort murders the passion of the soul, and then walks grinning in the funeral.

But you, children of space, you restless in rest, you shall not be trapped nor tamed.

Your house shall be not an anchor but a mast.

It shall not be a glistening film that covers a wound, but an eyelid that guards the eye.

You shall not fold your wings that you may pass through doors, nor bend your heads that they strike not against a ceiling, nor

fear to breathe lest walls should crack and fall down.

You shall not dwell in tombs made by the dead for the living.

And though of magnificence and splendour, your house shall not hold your secret nor shelter your longing.

For that which is boundless in you abides in the mansion of the sky, whose door is the morning mist, and whose windows are

the songs and the silences of night.

Public domain

On Pain

By Kahlil Gibran

And a woman spoke, saying, Tell us of Pain.

And he said:

Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.

Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain.

And could you keep your heart in wonder at the daily miracles of your life your pain would not seem less wondrous than your joy;

And you would accept the seasons of your heart, even as you have always accepted the seasons that pass over your fields.

And you would watch with serenity through the winters of your grief.

Much of your pain is self-chosen.

It is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self.

Therefore trust the physician, and drink his remedy in silence and tranquility:

For his hand, though heavy and hard, is guided by the tender hand of the Unseen,

And the cup he brings, though it burn your lips, has been fashioned of the clay which the Potter has moistened with His own sacred tears.

Public domain

On Prayer

By Kahlil Gibran

Then the priestess said, Speak to us of Prayer.

And he answered, saying:

You pray in your distress and in your need; would that you might pray also in the fullness of your joy and in your days of abundance.

For what is prayer but the expansion of yourself into the living ether?

And if it is for your comfort to pour your darkness into space, it is also for your delight to pour forth the dawning of your heart.

And if you cannot but weep when your soul summons you to prayer, she should spur you again and yet again, though weeping, until you shall come laughing.

When you pray you rise to meet in the air those who are praying at that very hour, and whom save in prayer you may not meet.

Therefore let your visit to that temple invisible be for naught but ecstasy and sweet communion.

For if you should enter the temple for no other purpose than asking you shall not receive:

And if you should enter into it to humble yourself you shall not be lifted:

Or even if you should enter into it to beg for the good of others you shall not be heard.

It is enough that you enter the temple invisible.

I cannot teach you how to pray in words.

God listens not to your words save when He Himself utters them through your lips.

And I cannot teach you the prayer of the seas and the forests and the mountains.

But you who are born of the mountains and the forests and the seas can find their prayer in your heart,

And if you but listen in the stillness of the night your shall hear them saying in silence,

“Our God, who are our winged self, it is thy will in us that willeth.

It is thy desire in us that desireth.

It is thy urge in us that would turn our nights, which are thine, into days which are thine also.

We cannot ask thee for aught, for thou knowest our needs before they are born in

us:

Thou art our need; and in giving us more of thyself thou givest us all.”

Public domain

On Religion

By Kahlil Gibran

And an old priest said, Speak to us of Religion.

And he said:

Have I spoken this day of aught else?

Is not religion all deeds and all reflection,

And that which is neither deed nor reflection, but a wonder and a surprise ever springing in the soul, even while the hand hew the stone or tend the loom?

Who can separate his faith from his actions, or his belief from his occupations?

Who can spread his hours before him, saying, “This for God and this for myself’ This for my soul, and this other for my body?”

All your hours are wings that beat through space from self to self.

He who wears his morality but as his best garment were better naked.

The wind and the sun will tear no holes in his skin.

And he who defines his conduct by ethics imprisons his song-bird in a cage.

The freest song comes not through bars and wires.

And he to whom worshipping is a window, to open but also to shut, has not yet visited the house of his soul whose windows are from dawn to dawn.

Your daily life is your temple and your religion.

Whenever you enter into it take with you your all.

Take the plough and the forge and the mallet and the lute,

The things you have fashioned in necessity or for delight.

For in revery you cannot rise above your achievements nor fall lower than your failures.

And take with you all men:

For in adoration you cannot fly higher than their hopes nor humble yourself lower than their despair.

And if you would know God be not therefore a solver of riddles.

Rather look about you and you shall see Him playing with your children.

And look into space; you shall see Him walking in the cloud, outstretching His arms in the lightning and descending in rain.

You shall see Him smiling in flowers, then rising and waving His hands in trees.

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To a Young Dancing Girl

By Elsa Gidlow

Golden-eyed girl, do you see what I see?
Do you see behind the veil that Life
laughs through?
Golden-eyed girl, I would like to laugh
with you.
But my veil is torn, and I see things pass
Like shadows in the depths of a crystal glass.

Golden-eyed girl, you are young as springtime,
Your great eyes are dreamful, your rare
lips sweet.
Shadows matter little to youth with dancing feet
All of Life’s skeletons wear gay dresses
And youth is deceived by even Death’s caresses.

Golden-eyed girl, you have years to dance and
wonder
Before your Life’s curtain will wear into holes
And let you see the hopelessness hidden in souls.
You have many moons of laughter, many
years to go
Before you’ll learn how heavy dancing feet
can grow.

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She Walketh Veiled and Sleeping

By Charlotte Perkins Gilman

She walketh veiled and sleeping,
For she knoweth not her power;
She obeyeth but the pleading
Of her heart, and the high leading
Of her soul, unto this hour.
Slow advancing, halting, creeping,
Comes the Woman to the hour!—
She walketh veiled and sleeping,
For she knoweth not her power.

Public domain

Becoming a Redwood

By Dana Gioia

Stand in a field long enough, and the sounds
start up again. The crickets, the invisible
toad who claims that change is possible,

And all the other life too small to name.
First one, then another, until innumerable
they merge into the single voice of a summer hill.

Yes, it's hard to stand still, hour after hour,
fixed as a fencepost, hearing the steers
snort in the dark pasture, smelling the manure.

And paralyzed by the mystery of how a stone
can bear to be a stone, the pain
the grass endures breaking through the earth's crust.

Unimaginable the redwoods on the far hill,
rooted for centuries, the living wood grown tall
and thickened with a hundred thousand days of light.

The old windmill creaks in perfect time
to the wind shaking the miles of pasture grass,
and the last farmhouse light goes off.

Something moves nearby. Coyotes hunt
these hills and packs of feral dogs.
But standing here at night accepts all that.

You are your own pale shadow in the quarter moon,
moving more slowly than the crippled stars,
part of the moonlight as the moonlight falls,

Part of the grass that answers the wind,
part of the midnight's watchfulness that knows
there is no silence but when danger comes.

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Insomnia

By Dana Gioia

Now you hear what the house has to say.
Pipes clanking, water running in the dark,
the mortgaged walls shifting in discomfort,
and voices mounting in an endless drone
of small complaints like the sounds of a family
that year by year you've learned how to ignore.

But now you must listen to the things you own,
all that you've worked for these past years,
the murmur of property, of things in disrepair,
the moving parts about to come undone,
and twisting in the sheets remember all
the faces you could not bring yourself to love.

How many voices have escaped you until now,
the venting furnace, the floorboards underfoot,
the steady accusations of the clock
numbering the minutes no one will mark.
The terrible clarity this moment brings,
the useless insight, the unbroken dark.

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The End of the World

By Dana Gioia

“We’re going,” they said, “to the end of the world.”
So they stopped the car where the river curled,
And we scrambled down beneath the bridge
On the gravel track of a narrow ridge.

We tramped for miles on a wooded walk
Where dog-hobble grew on its twisted stalk.
Then we stopped to rest on the pine-needle floor
While two ospreys watched from an oak by the shore.

We came to a bend, where the river grew wide
And green mountains rose on the opposite side.
My guides moved back. I stood alone,
As the current streaked over smooth flat stone.

Shelf by stone shelf the river fell.
The white water goosetailed with eddying swell.
Faster and louder the current dropped
Till it reached a cliff, and the trail stopped.

I stood at the edge where the mist ascended,
My journey done where the world ended.
I looked downstream. There was nothing but sky,
The sound of the water, and the water’s reply.

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Second Estrangement

By Aracelis Girmay

Please raise your hand,
whomever else of you
has been a child,
lost, in a market
or a mall, without
knowing it at first, following
a stranger, accidentally
thinking he is yours,
your family or parent, even
grabbing for his hands,
even calling the word
you said then for “Father,”
only to see the face
look strangely down, utterly
foreign, utterly not the one
who loves you, you
who are a bird suddenly
stunned by the glass partitions
of rooms.

How far

the world you knew, & tall,
& filled, finally, with strangers.

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Poem

By Jorie Graham

The earth said
remember me.
The earth said
don’t let go,

said it one day
when I was
accidentally
listening, I

heard it, I felt it
like temperature,
all said in a
whisper—build to-

morrow, make right be-
fall, you are not
free, other scenes
are not taking

place, time is not filled,
time is not late, there is
a thing the emptiness
needs as you need

emptiness, it
shrinks from light again &
again, although all things
are present, a

fact a day a
bird that warps the
arithmetic of per-
fection with its

arc, passing again &
again in the evening

air, in the pre-
vailing wind, making no

mistake—yr in-
difference is yr
principal beauty
the mind says all the

time—I hear it—I
hear it every-
where. The earth
said remember

me. I am the
earth it said. Re-
member me.

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Ex Machina

By Linda Gregerson

When love was a question, the message arrived
in the beak of a wire and plaster bird. The coloratura
was hardly to be believed. For flight,

it took three stagehands: two
on the pulleys and one on the flute. And you
thought fancy rained like grace.

Our fog machine lost in the Parcel Post, we improvised
with smoke. The heroine dies of tuberculosis after all.
Remorse and the raw night air: any plausible tenor

might cough. The passions, I take my clues
from an obvious source, may be less like climatic events
than we conventionalize, though I've heard

of tornadoes that break the second-best glassware
and leave everything else untouched.
There's a finer conviction than seamlessness

elicits: the Greeks knew a god
by the clanking behind his descent.
The heart, poor pump, protests till you'd think

it's rusted past redemption, but
there's tuning in these counterweights,
celebration's assembled voice.

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Charles Sumner

By Charlotte L. Forten Grimké

On seeing some pictures of the interior of his house, Washington, D.C.

Only the casket left, the jewel gone
Whose noble presence filled these stately rooms,
And made this spot a shrine where pilgrims came—
Stranger and friend—to bend in reverence
Before the great, pure soul that knew no guile;
To listen to the wise and gracious words
That fell from lips whose rare, exquisite smile
Gave tender beauty to the grand, grave face.

Upon these pictured walls we see thy peers,—
Poet, and saint, and sage, painter, and king,—
A glorious band;—they shine upon us still;
Still gleam in marble the enchanting forms
Whereupon thy artist eye delighted dwelt;
Thy favorite Psyche droops her matchless face,
Listening, methinks, for the beloved voice
Which nevermore on earth shall sound her praise.

All these remain,—the beautiful, the brave,
The gifted, silent ones; but thou art gone!
Fair is the world that smiles upon us now;
Blue are the skies of June, balmy the air
That soothes with touches soft the weary brow;
And perfect days glide into perfect nights,—
Moonlit and calm; but still our grateful hearts
Are sad, and faint with fear,— for thou art gone!

Oh friend beloved, with longing, tear-filled eyes
We look up, up to the unclouded blue,
And seek in vain some answering sign from thee.
Look down upon us, guide and cheer us still
From the serene height where thou dwellest now;
Dark is the way without the beacon light
Which long and steadfastly thy hand upheld.

Oh, nerve with courage new the stricken hearts
Whose dearest hopes seem lost in losing thee.

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Aislado

By Cynthia Guardado

Abuelo holds the end of a broom halfway bent
over the pila, tries to scrub clean places in the walls
he can no longer reach. I climb into the water-basin,
in the pila's dark corners hides an algae-eating fish,
in order to begin I must catch it. With a bucket I make waves
in shallow water, search for what is tucked away from sight.
Abuelo says, *Me siento solo*. His days lonely, long
like the movie marathons he watches on TV.
The fish circles in a bowl; already, I know I won't visit
again tomorrow, know I don't love him anymore—
the magic of childhood gone like his clamorous
laugh, murky like the chaparro he still drinks. Abuelo
stares at the faucet. He tells me to guard the fish,
says if it hears water running from the tap it will jump.
Its gills will be defenseless on the empty basin's
concrete floor, its fins will shudder in air.

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It Couldn’t Be Done

By Edgar Albert Guest

Somebody said that it couldn’t be done
    But he with a chuckle replied
That “maybe it couldn’t,” but he would be one
    Who wouldn’t say so till he’d tried.
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
    On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
    That couldn’t be done, and he did it!

Somebody scoffed: “Oh, you’ll never do that;
    At least no one ever has done it;”
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat
    And the first thing we knew he’d begun it.
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
    Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
    That couldn’t be done, and he did it.

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
    There are thousands to prophesy failure,
There are thousands to point out to you one by one,
    The dangers that wait to assail you.
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
    Just take off your coat and go to it;

Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing

That “cannot be done,” and you’ll do it.

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Flute Song

By H.D.

Little scavenger away,
touch not the door,
beat not the portal down,
cross not the sill,
silent until
my song, bright and shrill,
breathes out its lay.
Little scavenger avaunt,
tempt me with jeer and taunt,
yet you will wait to-day;
for it were surely ill
to mock and shout and revel;
it were more fit to tell
with flutes and calathes,
your mother’s praise.

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Garden

By H.D.

I

You are clear
O rose, cut in rock,
hard as the descent of hail.

I could scrape the colour
from the petals
like spilt dye from a rock.

If I could break you
I could break a tree.

If I could stir
I could break a tree—
I could break you.

II

O wind, rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop
through this thick air—
fruit cannot fall into heat
that presses up and blunts
the points of pears
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat—
plough through it,
turning it on either side
of your path.

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Sea Poppies

By H.D.

Amber husk
fluted with gold,
fruit on the sand
marked with a rich grain,

treasure
spilled near the shrub-pines
to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root
among wet pebbles
and drift flung by the sea
and grated shells
and split conch-shells.

Beautiful, wide-spread,
fire upon leaf,
what meadow yields
so fragrant a leaf
as your bright leaf?

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Sea Rose

By H.D.

Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petals,
meagre flower, thin,
sparse of leaf,

more precious
than a wet rose
single on a stem—
you are caught in the drift.

Stunted, with small leaf,
you are flung on the sand,
you are lifted
in the crisp sand
that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose
drip such acrid fragrance
hardened in a leaf?

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Don’t Bother the Earth Spirit

By Joy Harjo

Don’t bother the earth spirit who lives here. She is working on a story. It is the oldest story in the world and it is delicate, changing. If she sees you watching she will invite you in for coffee, give you warm bread, and you will be obligated to stay and listen. But this is no ordinary story. You will have to endure earthquakes, lightning, the deaths of all those you love, the most blinding beauty. It’s a story so compelling you may never want to leave; this is how she traps you. See that stone finger over there? That is the only one who ever escaped.

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My House is the Red Earth

By Joy Harjo

My house is the red earth; it could be the center of the world. I've heard New York, Paris, or Tokyo called the center of the world, but I say it is magnificently humble. You could drive by and miss it. Radio waves can obscure it. Words cannot construct it, for there are some sounds left to sacred wordless form. For instance, that fool crow, picking through trash near the corral, understands the center of the world as greasy strips of fat. Just ask him. He doesn't have to say that the earth has turned scarlet through fierce belief, after centuries of heartbreak and laughter—he perches on the blue bowl of the sky, and laughs.

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“That Blessed Hope”

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Oh touch it not that hope so blest
Which cheers the fainting heart,
And points it to the coming rest
Where sorrow has no part.
Tear from heart each worldly prop,
Unbind each earthly string;
But to this blest and glorious hope,
Oh let my spirit cling.
It cheer’d amid the days of old
Each holy patriarch’s breast,
It was an anchor to their souls,
Upon it let me rest.
When wand’ring in the dens and caves,
In goat and sheep skins drest,
Apeel’d and scatter’d people learn’d
To know this hope was blest.
Help me to love this blessed hope;
My heart’s a fragile thing;
Will you not nerve and bear it up
Around this hope to cling.
Help amid this world of strife
To long for Christ to reign,
That when he brings the crown of life
I may that crown obtain.

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Home, Sweet Home

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Sharers of a common country,
They had met in deadly strife;
Men who should have been as brothers
Madly sought each other's life.
In the silence of the even,
When the cannon's lips were dumb,
Thoughts of home and all its loved ones
To the soldier's heart would come.
On the margin of a river,
'Mid the evening's dews and damps,
Could be heard the sounds of music
Rising from two hostile camps.
One was singing of its section
Down in Dixie, Dixie's land,
And the other of the banner
Waved too long from strand to strand.
In the lawn where Dixie's ensign
Floated o'er the hopeful slave,
Rose the song that freedom's banner,
Starry-lighted, long might wave.
From the fields of strife and carnage,
Gentle thoughts began to roam,
And a tender strain of music
Rose with words of "Home, Sweet Home."

Then the hearts of strong men melted,
For amid our grief and sin
Still remains that “touch of nature,”
Telling us we all are kin.
In one grand but gentle chorus,
Floating to the starry dome,
Came the words that brought them nearer,
Words that told of “Home, Sweet Home.”
For awhile, all strife forgotten,
They were only brothers then,
Joining in the sweet old chorus,
Not as soldiers, but as men.
Men whose hearts would flow together,
Though apart their feet might roam,
Found a tie they could not sever,
In the mem’ry of each home.
Never may the steps of carnage
Shake our land from shore to shore,
But may mother, home and Heaven,
Be our watchwords evermore.

Public domain

Learning to Read

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Very soon the Yankee teachers
  Came down and set up school;
But, oh! how the Rebs did hate it,—
  It was agin' their rule.

Our masters always tried to hide
  Book learning from our eyes;
Knowledge did'nt agree with slavery—
  'Twould make us all too wise.

But some of us would try to steal
  A little from the book.
And put the words together,
  And learn by hook or crook.

I remember Uncle Caldwell,
  Who took pot liquor fat
And greased the pages of his book,
  And hid it in his hat.

And had his master ever seen
  The leaves upon his head,
He'd have thought them greasy papers,
  But nothing to be read.

And there was Mr. Turner’s Ben,
Who heard the children spell,
And picked the words right up by heart,
And learned to read ’em well.

Well, the Northern folks kept sending
The Yankee teachers down;
And they stood right up and helped us,
Though Rebs did sneer and frown.

And I longed to read my Bible,
For precious words it said;
But when I begun to learn it,
Folks just shook their heads,

And said there is no use trying,
Oh! Chloe, you’re too late;
But as I was rising sixty,
I had no time to wait.

So I got a pair of glasses,
And straight to work I went,
And never stopped till I could read
The hymns and Testament.

Then I got a little cabin

A place to call my own—

And I felt independent

As the queen upon her throne.

Public domain

Let the Light Enter

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

The Dying Words of Goethe

“Light! more light! the shadows deepen,
And my life is ebbing low,
Throw the windows widely open:
Light! more light! before I go.

“Softly let the balmy sunshine
Play around my dying bed,
E’er the dimly lighted valley
I with lonely feet must tread.

“Light! more light! for Death is weaving
Shadows ‘round my waning sight,
And I fain would gaze upon him
Through a stream of earthly light.”

Not for greater gifts of genius;
Not for thoughts more grandly bright,
All the dying poet whispers
Is a prayer for light, more light.

Heeds he not the gathered laurels,
Fading slowly from his sight;
All the poet’s aspirations
Centre in that prayer for light.

Gracious Saviour, when life’s day-dreams
Melt and vanish from the sight,
May our dim and longing vision
Then be blessed with light, more light.

Public domain

Renewal of Strength

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

The prison-house in which I live
Is falling to decay,
But God renews my spirit's strength
Within these walls of clay.
For me a dimness slowly creeps
Around earth's fairest light,
But heaven grows clearer to my view,
And fairer to my sight.
It may be earth's sweet harmonies
Are duller to my ear,
But music from my Father's house
Begins to float more near.
Then let the pillars of my home
Crumble and fall away;
Lo, God's dear love within my soul
Renews it day by day.

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Songs for the People

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Let me make the songs for the people,
  Songs for the old and young;
Songs to stir like a battle-cry
  Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,
  For carnage nor for strife;
But songs to thrill the hearts of men
  With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,
  Amid life’s fever and fret,
Till hearts shall relax their tension,
  And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,
  Before their footsteps stray,
Sweet anthems of love and duty,
  To float o’er life’s highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,
  When shadows dim their sight;
Of the bright and restful mansions,
  Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,
  Needs music, pure and strong,
To hush the jangle and discords
  Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,
  Till war and crime shall cease;
And the hearts of men grown tender
  Girdle the world with peace.

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The Contrast

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

They scorned her for her sinning,
  Spoke harshly of her fall,
Nor lent the hand of mercy
  To break her hated thrall.

The dews of meek repentance
  Stood in her downcast eye:
Would no one heed her anguish?
  All pass her coldly by?

From the cold, averted glances
  Of each reproachful eye,
She turned aside, heart-broken,
  And laid her down to die.

And where was he, who sullied
  Her once unspotted name;
Who lured her from life's brightness
  To agony and shame?

Who left her on life's billows,
  A wrecked and ruined thing;
Who brought the winter of despair
  Upon Hope's blooming spring?

Through the halls of wealth and fashion
  In gaiety and pride,
He was leading to the altar
  A fair and lovely bride!

None scorned him for his sinning,
  Few saw it through his gold;
His crimes were only foibles,
  And those were gently told.

* * * * * *

Before him rose a vision,
  A maid of beauty rare;

Then a pale, heart-broken woman,
  The image of despair.

Next came a sad procession,
  With many a sob and tear;
A widow’d, childless mother
  Totter’d by an humble bier.

The vision quickly faded,
  The sad, unwelcome sight;
But his lip forgot its laughter,
  And his eye its careless light.

A moment, and the flood-gates
  Of memory opened wide;
And remorseful recollection
  Flowed like a lava tide.

That widow’s wail of anguish
  Seemed strangely blending there,
And mid the soft lights floated
  That image of despair.

* * * * * *

Public domain

Yearnings For Home

By Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Oh let me go I'm weary here
And fevers scorch my brain,
I long to feel my native air
Breathe o'er each burning vein.

I long once more to see
My home among the distant hills,
To breathe amid the melody
Of murmering brooks and rills.

My home is where eternal snow
Round threat'ning craters sleep,
Where streamlets murmer soft and low
And playful cascades leap.

Tis where glad scenes shall meet
My weary, longing eye;
Where rocks and Alpine forests greet
The bright cerulean sky.

Your scenes are bright I know,
But there my mother pray'd,
Her cot is lowly, but I go
To die beneath its shade.

For, Oh I know she’ll cling
‘Round me her treasur’d long,
My sisters too will sing
Each lov’d familiar song.

They’ll soothe my fever’d brow,
As in departed hours,
And spread around my dying couch
The brightest, fairest flowers.

Then let me go I’m weary here
And fevers scorch my brain,
I long to feel my native air,
Breathe o’er each burning vein.

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gravity furnace

by francine j. harris

She wants to set the house on fire,
gas in both hands, gas on the wall.

It'd be like the sea torched from its floor. She'd run like light

from basement windows. or maybe
|suck all arms to room ablaze, so housed

in gut piping. the copper hollowed, reaching to a
heated black rot at bottom. Like ants; maybe she crawl in the dark.

low on the belly maybe she thug out late, lay low
and ink eight walls. lay low like cold, she might

strip bare, black glass. sometimes strut, sometimes
hide late. she runs from house to ember,

a sum of sink. She breathes through flame
a room of spoons. one

bar brick, one black-eyed room splatter, one torch
spent for each arm, from coal to alley, she heaves

hue of concrete into each limb. A house of blue-ring flames
to mimic; someone better run.

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Dawn-Flowers

By Sadakichi Hartmann

to Maurice Maeterlinck

Weird phantoms rise in the dawn-winds blow,
In the land of shadows the dawn-flowers grow;
The night-worn moon yields her weary glow
To the morn-rays that over the dream-waste flow.

Oh, to know what the dawn-wind murmurs
In chapels of pines to the ashen moons;
What the forest-well whispers to dale and dell
With her singular, reticent runes;
To know the plaint of each falling leaf
As it whirls across the autumnal plain;
To know the dreams of the desolate shore
As sails, like ghosts, pass o'er the dawnlit main!
To know, oh, to know
Why all life's strains have the same refrain
As of rain,
Beating sadly against the window pane.

We do not know and we can not know,
And all that is left for us here below
(Since "songs and singers are out of date")
And the muses have met with a similar fate)
Is to flee to the land of shadows and dreams,
Where the dawn-flowers grow
And the dawn-winds blow,
As morn-rays over life's dream-waste of flow
To drown the moon in their ambient glow.

Envoy

Oh, gray dawn-poet of Flanders,
Though in this life we ne'er may meet,
I'll linger where thy dream-maids wander
To strew these dawn-flowers at their feet.

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Sweet Are The Dreams on The Breeze-Blown Strand

By Sadakichi Hartmann

Sestine Enchainée

When autumn cloudlets fleck the sky
Straying southward like birds o'er the sea,
When the flickering sunlight on the dunes
Is pale, as seagrasses kissed by the spray,
Seagrasses that knew the summer of yesterday–
Sweet are the dreams on the breeze-blown strand!

Sweet are the dreams on the breeze-blown strand!
When cloud skiffs skim athwart the sky
And like a phantom of yesterday
The light house shimmers out to sea
Pale as the sand and the sea-worn spray
And the straggling sunlight on the dunes.

Like straggling sunlight on the dunes,
Like opal surges that wash the strand
With briny fragrance, adoom with the spray,
Like wander-birds that career the sky
To flowerlit isles of some Southern sea-
Such are the dreams of yesterday!

Alas, our dreams of yesterday,
Frail as the fragrance of the dunes,
Vain as dark jewels of the sea
Cast up on some glimmering strand,
They vanish like cloud sails on the sky,
Pale as seagrasses frowsed by the spray.

Pale as seagrasses kissed by the spray,
Is all this life of yesterday,
All our longings for clear blue skies
For the low cool plash on autumn dunes,
All our musings on tide-left strands
While birds wing southward o'er the sea.

Like birds winging southward o’er the sea
  Scattered in air-like wasteful spray,
    Sea-fancies fading on lonesome strands
      Weary of storm drifts of yesterday,
        Thus our thoughts on the sea-scooped dunes
          When autumn cloudlets fleck the sky.

Oh, autumn-sea under a cloud-flecked sky
  As caressed are thy dunes with opal spray
    So shimmer in dreams on the breeze-blown strand
      Sweet long-lost summers of yesterday.

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Using a Hula Hoop Can Get You Abducted By Aliens

By Matthea Harvey

We've never taken anyone
buttoned up and trotting from point A
to point B—subway to office, office to
lunch, fretting over the credit crunch.
Not the ones carefully maneuvering their
watchamacalits alongside broken white lines,
not the Leash-holders who take their Furries
to the park three point five times per day.
If you're an integer in that kind of
equation, you belong with your Far-bits
on the ground. We're seven Staryears
past calculus, so it's the dreamy ones
who want to go somewhere they don't know
how to get to that interest us, the ones
who will stare all day at a blank piece of paper
or square of canvas, then peer searchingly into
their herbal tea. It's true that hula hoops
resemble the rings around Firsthome, and that
when you spin, we chime softly, remembering
Oursummer, Ourspring and our twelve Otherseasons.
but that's not the only reason (Do we like rhyme?
Yes we do. Also your snow, your moss, your tofu—
our sticky hands make it hard for us to put
things down). Don't fret, dreamy spinning ones
with water falling from your faces.
It's us you're waiting for and we're coming.

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The Emerald Mosque on the Hill

By Raza Ali Hasan

In the lull, the afternoon sun warms
the linseed field. The flowers are quiet,

their bright subdued in the green
while the mind wanders

to the emerald mosque upon the hill,
built around a flowing spring,

the easy absolutions and ablutions
in that mosque where the spring water

has been let loose to meander
over marble courtyards and inner chambers,

across the geometric, green-tiled floor that
cools the heels of the faithful.

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Song

By Robert Hass

Afternoon cooking in the fall sun—
who is more naked
than the man
yelling, “Hey, I’m home!”
to an empty house?
thinking because the bay is clear,
the hills in yellow heat,
& scrub oak red in gullies
that great crowds of family
should tumble from the rooms
to throw their bodies on the Papa-body,
I-am-loved.

Cat sleeps in the windowgleam,
dust motes.
On the oak table
filet of sole
stewing in the juice of tangerines,
slices of green pepper
on a bone-white dish.

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“Oh could I raise the darken’d veil”

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

Oh could I raise the darken’d veil,
Which hides my future life from me,
Could unborn ages slowly sail,
Before my view—and could I see
My every action painted there,
To cast one look I would not dare.
There poverty and grief might stand,
And dark Despair’s corroding hand,
Would make me seek the lonely tomb
To slumber in its endless gloom.
Then let me never cast a look,
Within Fate’s fix’d mysterious book.

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The Ocean

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Ocean has its silent caves,
Deep, quiet, and alone;
Though there be fury on the waves,
Beneath them there is none.

The awful spirits of the deep
Hold their communion there;
And there are those for whom we weep,
The young, the bright, the fair.

Calmly the wearied seamen rest
Beneath their own blue sea.
The ocean solitudes are blest,
For there is purity.

The earth has guilt, the earth has care,
Unquiet are its graves;
But peaceful sleep is ever there,
Beneath the dark blue waves.

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The Good in the Evil World

By Rebecca Hazelton

Before the war leaned in and blew out
the candles, there were many long days
where lovers called themselves lovers
and a house was a dream but also
four walls, a roof. A father called
to his daughter to see the monarch butterflies,
pausing in their migration to fan the goldenrod,
a tiger in each coy disclosure.
A young man reached for a blackberry
and found draped on a branch a green snake
the color of matcha. A snake the color of matcha
sighed in the sun. People drove in cars.
There were jobs and someone had to work
every morning. A man quit his job
but it was no tragedy. He didn't like the work.
Another man slid in and found it comfortable
enough, and just as easily slid in beside
the man's wife and into the everyday rhythms
of his life and that was no tragedy either.
After rains, a ring of mushrooms would delicately
crack the earth. Spanish moss harbored red mites.
The sky wasn't interesting. No one looked up.

Rebecca Hazelton, "The Good in the Evil World" from *Poetry* (March 2016). Copyright © 2016 by Rebecca Hazelton. Used with the permission of the author.

Thine Own

By Josephine Delphine Henderson Heard

To live and not be Thine Own,
Like Springtime is when birds are flown;
Or liberty in prison bars,
Or evening skies without the stars;
Like diamonds that are lusterless,
Or rest when there’s no weariness;
Like lovely flower that have no scent,
Or music when the sound is spent.

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Let Me Tell You What a Poem Brings

By Juan Felipe Herrera

for Charles Fishman

Before you go further,
let me tell you what a poem brings,
first, you must know the secret, there is no poem
to speak of, it is a way to attain a life without boundaries,
yes, it is that easy, a poem, imagine me telling you this,
instead of going day by day against the razors, well,
the judgments, all the tick-tock bronze, a leather jacket
sizing you up, the fashion mall, for example, from
the outside you think you are being entertained,
when you enter, things change, you get caught by surprise,
your mouth goes sour, you get thirsty, your legs grow cold
standing still in the middle of a storm, a poem, of course,
is always open for business too, except, as you can see,
it isn't exactly business that pulls your spirit into
the alarming waters, there you can bathe, you can play,
you can even join in on the gossip—the mist, that is,
the mist becomes central to your existence.

Juan Felipe Herrera, "Let Me Tell You What a Poem Brings" from *Half the World in Light: New and Selected Poems*. Copyright © 2008 by Juan Felipe Herrera. Used by permission of The University of Arizona Press.

This Is My Last Report

By Juan Felipe Herrera

This is my last report:
I wanted to speak of existence, the ants most of all,
dressed up in their naughty flame-trousers, the exact jaws,
their unknowable kindnesses, their abyss of hungers,
and science, their mercilessness, their prophetic military
devotions, their geometry of scent, their cocoons
for the Nomenclature,

I wanted to speak of the Glue Sniffers
and Glue Smoothers who despise all forms
unbound, loose in their amber nectars, I wanted
to point to their noses, hoses and cables and networks,
their tools, if I can use that word now—and scales and
scanners and Glue Rectories.

I wanted you to meet my broom mother
who carved a hole into her womb
so that I could live—

At every sunset she stands
under the shadow of the watchtowers
elongating and denying her breath.

I wanted to look under the rubble fields
for once, for you (if you approved), flee
into the bullet-riddled openness and fall flat,
arched, askew, under the rubble sheets
and let the rubble fill me

with its sharp plates and ripped dust—
alphabets incomplete and humid. You,
listen,

a little closer
to the chalk dust—this child swinging her left arm,
a ribbon, agitated by unnamed forces, devoured.

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How To Write a Poem

By Laura Hershey

Don’t be brilliant.
Don’t use words for their own sake, or to show
how clever you are,
how thoroughly you have subjugated them
to your will, the words.

Don’t try to write a poem
as good as your favorite poet.
Don’t even try to write
a good poem.

Just peel back the folds over your heart
and shine into it
the strongest light that streams
from your eyes, or somewhere else.

Whatever begins bubbling forth from there,
whatever sound or smell or color
swells up, makes your throat
fill with unsaid tears,

whatever threatens to ignite your hair, your eyelashes,
if you get too close—

write that.
Suck it in and quickly
shape it with your tongue
before you grow too afraid of it
and it gets away.

Don’t think about
writing a good poem, or a great poem,
or the poem to end all poems.

Write the poem,
you need to hear;
write the poem you need.

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The Gamble

By Laura Hershey

We are taught not
to gamble.
Perhaps it is thought we have lost
enough already—legs, vision, speech,
the typical use
of our bodies.
Others' fears would teach us
to cringe at any thought
of any risk.
Disability and risk
don't mix.
Risk is something
we are supposed to be protected from—
by agencies, by professionals—
by parents, by doctors—
by invisibility,
by shame—
by confinement if necessary.
We must be kept safe: This is one of the lies
which fills the beds
of the so-called "homes."

So we embrace the risks
to fight the lies.

This is our gamble:

Minute by minute, city after city—
from the tense beginning to the jubilant or
scattered end
of every protest—
with every rhythmic word of every chant—
at each blocked entrance, each barricade—

with every defiant inch forward—
every move toward
freedom for our people—
any time we raise a fist

or a song
to mean
We're never going away—
in every confrontation, up and down the length
of the stand-off—
each and every time, we are
testing the humanity
of people who wear a badge,
carry a gun—
and fear our incomprehensible strength.

We know this is
a dangerous test—for some fail as extraordinarily
as others pass.
It is a gamble, risky and promising.
It may pay off
in unmet eyes or a curious stare,
surly dismissals or a question,
dialogue
or bruises.

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Dawn

By Ella Higginson

The soft-toned clock upon the stair chimed three—
  Too sweet for sleep, too early yet to rise.
  In restful peace I lay with half-closed eyes,
Watching the tender hours go dreamily;
The tide was flowing in; I heard the sea
  Shivering along the sands; while yet the skies
  Were dim, uncertain, as the light that lies
Beneath the fretwork of some wild-rose tree
Within the thicket gray. The chanticleer
  Sent drowsy calls across the slumbrous air;
  In solemn silence sweet it was to hear
My own heart beat . . . Then broad and deep and fair—
  Trembling in its new birth from heaven’s womb—
  One crimson shaft of dawn sank thro’ my room.

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A Far Country

By Leslie Pinckney Hill

Beyond the cities I have seen,
Beyond the wrack and din,
There is a wide and fair demesne
Where I have never been.
Away from desert wastes of greed,
Over the peaks of pride,
Across the seas of mortal need
Its citizens abide.
And through the distance though I see
How stern must be the fare,
My feet are ever fain to be
Upon the journey there.
In that far land the only school
The dwellers all attend
Is built upon the Golden Rule,
And man to man is friend.
No war is there nor war’s distress,
But truth and love increase—
It is a realm of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.

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Girl Sleuth

By Brenda Hillman

A brenda is missing—where is she?
Summon the seeds & weeds, the desert whooshes. Phone the finch
with the crowded beak; a little pretenda
is learning to read
in the afternoon near the cactus caves. Near oleander & pulpy
caves with the click-click of the wren & the shkrrrr of the thrasher,
a skinny pretenda is learning
to read till the missing brenda
is found. Drip of syllables like olives near the saguaro.
Nancy Drew will find the secret in raincoats & wednesdays
& sticks. Nancy whose spine is yellow
or blue will find the brenda in 1962,
Nancy who has no mother,
who takes suggestions from her father & ignores them.

Gleam goes the wren ignoring the thorn. They cannot tell the difference.
Click of the smart dog's nails on linoleum.
Nancy bends over the clues,
of brenda's locket & dress. Word by word
between syllables a clue. Where has the summer gone, the autumn
—
are they missing too? Maybe Nancy
will parse the secret & read the book report on Nancy Drew:
"neat pretty sly cute." Syllable by syllable

& still no brenda! Nancy

puts her hand to her forehead; is the missing

girl in the iron bird? is the clue to the girl in the locket?

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There Is No Word

By Tony Hoagland

There isn’t a word for walking out of the grocery store
with a gallon jug of milk in a plastic sack
that should have been bagged in double layers

—so that before you are even out the door
you feel the weight of the jug dragging
the bag down, stretching the thin

plastic handles longer and longer
and you know it’s only a matter of time until
bottom suddenly splits.

There is no single, unimpeachable word
for that vague sensation of something
moving away from you

as it exceeds its elastic capacity
—which is too bad, because that is the word
I would like to use to describe standing on the street

chatting with an old friend
as the awareness grows in me that he is
no longer a friend, but only an acquaintance,

a person with whom I never made the effort—
until this moment, when as we say goodbye
I think we share a feeling of relief,

a recognition that we have reached
the end of a pretense,
though to tell the truth

what I already am thinking about
is my gratitude for language—
how it will stretch just so much and no farther;

how there are some holes it will not cover up;
how it will move, if not inside, then
around the circumference of almost anything—

how, over the years, it has given me
back all the hours and days, all the
plodding love and faith, all the

misunderstandings and secrets
I have willingly poured into it.

Copyright Credit: Tony Hoagland, “There Is No Word” from *Application for Release from the Dream*. Reprinted by permission of Graywolf Press.

Home in the Woods

By Linda Hogan

Oh home in the woods,
I am here as one hungry to eat,
one with no bread
in the garden of trees
in a place where the stone wishes to blossom.
Bullets have gone to sleep
and with effort the water
flows the way it once did.
Here, in winter, there is enough
dry wood for heat
and I enter smiling, forgetting our history.
Can you bring me to the place
where pollen is now the light
and we remember the original song?
Can you keep me
here? Can you unharm me?

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Tear

By Linda Hogan

It was the time before
I was born.
I was thin.
I was hungry. I was
only a restlessness inside a woman's body.

Above us, lightning split open the sky.
Below us, wagon wheels cut land in two.
Around us were the soldiers,
young and afraid,
who did not trust us
with scissors or knives
but with needles.

Tear dresses they were called
because settler cotton was torn
in straight lines
like the roads we had to follow
to Oklahoma.

But when the cloth was torn,
it was like tears,
impossible to hold back,
and so they were called
by this other name,
for our weeping.

I remember the women.
Tonight they walk
out from the shadows
with black dogs,
children, the dark heavy horses,
and worn-out men.

They walk inside me. This blood
is a map of the road between us.
I am why they survived.
The world behind them did not close.

The world before them is still open.
All around me are my ancestors,
my unborn children.
I am the tear between them
and both sides live.

Copyright Credit: Linda Hogan, “Tear” from *The Book of Medicines*. Reprinted by permission of Coffee House Press.

Departed Days

By Oliver Wendell Holmes

Yes, dear departed, cherished days,
  Could Memory’s hand restore
Your morning light, your evening rays
  From Time’s gray urn once more,—
Then might this restless heart be still,
  This straining eye might close,
And Hope her fainting pinions fold,
  While the fair phantoms rose.

But, like a child in ocean’s arms,
  We strive against the stream,
Each moment farther from the shore
  Where life’s young fountains gleam;—
Each moment fainter wave the fields,
  And wider rolls the sea;
The mist grows dark,—the sun goes down,—
Day breaks,—and where are we?

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Old Ironsides

By Oliver Wendell Holmes

Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!
  Long has it waved on high,
And many an eye has danced to see
  That banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle shout,
  And burst the cannon’s roar;—
The meteor of the ocean air
  Shall sweep the clouds no more.

Her deck, once red with heroes’ blood,
  Where knelt the vanquished foe,
When winds were hurrying o’er the flood,
  And waves were white below,
No more shall feel the victor’s tread,
  Or know the conquered knee;—
The harpies of the shore shall pluck
  The eagle of the sea!

Oh, better that her shattered hulk
  Should sink beneath the wave;
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,
  And there should be her grave;
Nail to the mast her holy flag,
  Set every threadbare sail,

And give her to the god of storms,

The lightning and the gale!

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Early Affection

By George Moses Horton

I lov’d thee from the earliest dawn,
    When first I saw thy beauty’s ray,
And will, until life’s eve comes on,
    And beauty’s blossom fades away;
And when all things go well with thee,
With smiles and tears remember me.

I’ll love thee when thy morn is past,
    And wheedling gallantry is o’er,
When youth is lost in age’s blast,
    And beauty can ascend no more,
And when life’s journey ends with thee,
O, then look back and think of me.

I’ll love thee with a smile or frown,
    ’Mid sorrow’s gloom or pleasure’s light,
And when the chain of life runs down,
    Pursue thy last eternal flight,
When thou hast spread thy wing to flee,
Still, still, a moment wait for me.

I’ll love thee for those sparkling eyes,
    To which my fondness was betray’d,
Bearing the tincture of the skies,
    To glow when other beauties fade,
And when they sink too low to see,
Reflect an azure beam on me.

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George Moses Horton, Myself

By George Moses Horton

I feel myself in need
  Of the inspiring strains of ancient lore,
My heart to lift, my empty mind to feed,
  And all the world explore.

I know that I am old
  And never can recover what is past,
But for the future may some light unfold
  And soar from ages blast.

I feel resolved to try,
  My wish to prove, my calling to pursue,
Or mount up from the earth into the sky,
  To show what Heaven can do.

My genius from a boy,
  Has fluttered like a bird within my heart;
But could not thus confined her powers employ,
  Impatient to depart.

She like a restless bird,
  Would spread her wing, her power to be unfurl’d,
And let her songs be loudly heard,
  And dart from world to world.

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On Liberty and Slavery

By George Moses Horton

Alas! and am I born for this,
To wear this slavish chain?
Deprived of all created bliss,
Through hardship, toil and pain!

How long have I in bondage lain,
And languished to be free!
Alas! and must I still complain—
Deprived of liberty.

Oh, Heaven! and is there no relief
This side the silent grave—
To soothe the pain—to quell the grief
And anguish of a slave?

Come Liberty, thou cheerful sound,
Roll through my ravished ears!
Come, let my grief in joys be drowned,
And drive away my fears.

Say unto foul oppression, Cease:
Ye tyrants rage no more,
And let the joyful trump of peace,
Now bid the vassal soar.

Soar on the pinions of that dove
Which long has cooed for thee,
And breathed her notes from Afric's grove,
The sound of Liberty.

Oh, Liberty! thou golden prize,
So often sought by blood—
We crave thy sacred sun to rise,
The gift of nature's God!

Bid Slavery hide her haggard face,
And barbarism fly:
I scorn to see the sad disgrace
In which enslaved I lie.

Dear Liberty! upon thy breast,
I languish to respire;
And like the Swan unto her nest,
I’d like to thy smiles retire.

Oh, blest asylum—heavenly balm!
Unto thy boughs I flee—
And in thy shades the storm shall calm,
With songs of Liberty!

Public domain

On Summer

By George Moses Horton

Esteville begins to burn;
  The auburn fields of harvest rise;
The torrid flames again return,
  And thunders roll along the skies.

Perspiring Cancer lifts his head,
  And roars terrific from on high;
Whose voice the timid creatures dread;
  From which they strive with awe to fly.

The night-hawk ventures from his cell,
  And starts his note in evening air;
He feels the heat his bosom swell,
  Which drives away the gloom of fear.

Thou noisy insect, start thy drum;
  Rise lamp-like bugs to light the train;
And bid sweet Philomela come,
  And sound in front the nightly strain.

The bee begins her ceaseless hum,
  And doth with sweet exertions rise;
And with delight she stores her comb,
  And well her rising stock supplies.

Let sportive children well beware,
  While sprightly frisking o’er the green;
And carefully avoid the snare,
  Which lurks beneath the smiling scene.

The mistress bird assumes her nest,
  And broods in silence on the tree,
Her note to cease, her wings at rest,
  She patient waits her young to see.

The farmer hastens from the heat;

  The weary plough-horse droops his head;

The cattle all at noon retreat,

And ruminate beneath the shade.

The burdened ox with dauntless rage,
Flies heedless to the liquid flood,
From which he quaffs, devoid of gauge,
Regardless of his driver's rod.

Pomacious orchards now expand
Their laden branches o’er the lea;
And with their bounty fill the land,
While plenty smiles on every tree.

On fertile borders, near the stream,
Now gaze with pleasure and delight;
See loaded vines with melons teem—
’Tis paradise to human sight.

With rapture view the smiling fields,
Adorn the mountain and the plain,
Each, on the eve of Autumn, yields
A large supply of golden grain.

Public domain

The Graduate Leaving College

By George Moses Horton

What summons do I hear?
The morning peal, departure’s knell;
My eyes let fall a friendly tear,
And bid this place farewell.

Attending servants come,
The carriage wheels like thunders roar,
To bear the pensive seniors home,
Here to be seen no more.

Pass one more transient night,
The morning sweeps the college clean;
The graduate takes his last long flight,
No more in college seen.

The bee, which courts the flower,
Must with some pain itself employ,
And then fly, at the day’s last hour,
Home to its hive with joy.

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An Apology

By Julia Ward Howe

For A Warm Word Spoken
I spake, perhaps, too sharp a word
For one bred up in modesty,
But base injustice, trivial scorn
On honor heaped, had angered me.
The smile of courtesy forsook
These lips, so timid even for good,
While o’er the paleness of my brow
Flashed crimson, the indignant blood.
Nor could I to the contest bring
The trainèd weapon of the mind,
Snatching from Reason’s armory
Such shafts as grief had left behind.
Grief for the faltering of the Age,
Grief for my country and my race,
Grief to sit here with Christian men,
That boast their want of Christian grace.
I say not that the man I praise
By that poor tribute stands more high,
I say not that the man I blame
Be not of purer worth than I;
But when I move reluctant lips
For holy Justice, human Right,
The sacred cause I strive to plead

Lends me its favor and its might.

And I must argue from the faith

Which gave the fervor of my youth,

Or keep such silence as yon stars,

That only look and live God’s truth.

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Battle-Hymn of the Republic

By Julia Ward Howe

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fatal lightning of his terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps.
His Day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnished rows of steel:
“As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on.”

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment-seat:
Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

Public domain

Our Country

By Julia Ward Howe

On primal rocks she wrote her name,
Her towers were reared on holy graves,
The golden seed that bore her came
Swift-winged with prayer o’er ocean waves.
The Forest bowed his solemn crest,
And open flung his sylvan doors;
Meek Rivers led the appointed Guest
To clasp the wide-embracing shores;
Till, fold by fold, the broidered Land
To swell her virgin vestments grew,
While Sages, strong in heart and hand,
Her virtue’s fiery girdle drew.
O Exile of the wrath of Kings!
O Pilgrim Ark of Liberty!
The refuge of divinest things,
Their record must abide in thee.
First in the glories of thy front
Let the crown jewel Truth be found;
The right hand fling with generous wont
Love’s happy chain to furthest bound.
Let Justice with the faultless scales
Hold fast the worship of thy sons,
Thy commerce spread her shining sails
Where no dark tide of rapine runs.

So link thy ways to those of God,

So follow firm the heavenly laws,

That stars may greet thee, warrior-browed,

And storm-sped angels hail thy cause.

O Land, the measure of our prayers,

Hope of the world, in grief and wrong!

Be thine the blessing of the years,

The gift of faith, the crown of song.

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Sybil

By Julia Ward Howe

Your head is wild with books, Sybil,
    But your heart is good and kind—
I feel a new contentment near you,
    A pleasure of the mind.
Glad should I be to sit beside you,
    And let long hours glide by,
Reading, through all your sweet narrations,
    The language of your eye.
Since the maternal saint I worshipped
    Did look and love her last,
No woman o’er my wayward spirit
    Such gentle spell has cast.
Oh! tell me of your varied fortunes,
    For you know not, from your face
Looks out strange sadness, lit with rapture,
    And melancholy grace.
You are a gem, whose native brilliance
    Could never wholly reign,
An opal, whose prismatic fire
    A white cloud doth restrain.
And thus, the mood to which you move me
    Is never perfect, quite,
‘Tis pity, wonderment, and pleasure,
    Opacity and light.

Bear me then in your presence, Sybil,
    And leave your hand in mine,
For, though human be my nature,
    You’ve made it half divine.

Public domain

The Heart's Astronomy

By Julia Ward Howe

This evening, as the twilight fell,
My younger children watched for me;
Like cherubs in the window framed,
I saw the smiling group of three.
While round and round the house I trudged,
Intent to walk a weary mile,
Oft as I passed within their range,
The little things would beck and smile.
They watched me, as Astronomers
Whose business lies in heaven afar,
Await, beside the slanting glass,
The re-appearance of a star.
Not so, not so, my pretty ones,
Seek stars in yonder cloudless sky;
But mark no steadfast path for me,
A comet dire and strange am I.
Now to the inmost spheres of light
Lifted, my wondering soul dilates,
Now dropped in endless depth of night,
My hope God's slow recall awaits.
Among the shining I have shone,
Among the blessing, have been blest,
Then wearying years have held me bound
Where darkness deadness gives, not rest.

Between extremes distraught and rent,
I question not the way I go;
Who made me, gave it me, I deem,
Thus to aspire, to languish so.
But Comets too have holy laws,
Their fiery sinews to restrain,
And from their outmost wanderings
Are drawn to heaven’s dear heart again.
And ye, beloved ones, when ye know
What wild, erratic natures are,
Pray that the laws of heavenly force
Would hold and guide the Mother star.

Public domain

Aunt Sue’s Stories

By Langston Hughes

Aunt Sue has a head full of stories.
Aunt Sue has a whole heart full of stories.
Summer nights on the front porch
Aunt Sue cuddles a brown-faced child to her bosom
And tells him stories.

Black slaves
Working in the hot sun,
And black slaves
Walking in the dewy night,
And black slaves
Singing sorrow songs on the banks of a mighty river
Mingle themselves softly
In the flow of old Aunt Sue’s voice,
Mingle themselves softly
In the dark shadows that cross and recross
Aunt Sue’s stories.

And the dark-faced child, listening,
Knows that Aunt Sue’s stories are real stories.
He knows that Aunt Sue
Never got her stories out of any book at all,
But that they came
Right out of her own life.

And the dark-faced child is quiet
Of a summer night
Listening to Aunt Sue’s stories.

Public domain

Blues Fantasy

By Langston Hughes

Hey! Hey!
That's what the
Blues singers say.
Singing minor melodies
They laugh,
Hey! Hey!

My man's done left me,
Chile, he's gone away.
My good man's left me,
Babe, he's gone away.
Now the cryin' blues
Haunts me night and day.

Hey! . . . Hey!

Weary,
Weary,
Trouble, pain.
Sun's gonna shine
Somewhere
Again.

I got a railroad ticket,
Pack my trunk and ride.

Sing 'em, sister!

Got a railroad ticket,
Pack my trunk and ride.
And when I get on the train
I'll cast my blues aside.

Laughing,
Hey! . . . Hey!
Laugh a loud,
Hey! Hey!

Public domain

Cross

By Langston Hughes

My old man’s a white old man
And my old mother’s black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I’m sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.

My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I’m gonna die,
Being neither white nor black?

Public domain

I, Too

By Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

Public domain

Minstrel Man

By Langston Hughes

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long.

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear
My inner cry,
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die.

Public domain

Mother to Son

By Langston Hughes

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare;
But all the time
I'se been a'climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark,
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back;
Don't you sit down on the steps,
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard;
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Public domain

Song for a Banjo Dance

By Langston Hughes

Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake your brown feet, chile,
Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake ’em swift and wil’–
    Get way back, honey,
    Do that low-down step.
    Walk on over, darling,
        Now! Come out
        With your left.
Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake ’em, honey chile.

Sun’s going down this evening–
Might never rise no mo’.
The sun’s going down this very night–
Might never rise no mo’–
So dance with swift feet, honey,
    (The banjo’s sobbing low)
Dance with swift feet, honey–
    Might never dance no mo’.

Shake your brown feet, Liza,
Shake ’em, Liza, chile,
Shake your brown feet, Liza,
    (The music’s soft and wil’)
Shake your brown feet, Liza,
    (The banjo’s sobbing low)
The sun’s going down this very night–
Might never rise no mo’.

Public domain

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

By Langston Hughes

I’ve known rivers:

I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human

blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New

Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Public domain

The Weary Blues

By Langston Hughes

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
I heard a Negro play.
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
He did a lazy sway. . . .
He did a lazy sway. . . .
To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
With his ebony hands on each ivory key
He made that poor piano moan with melody.
O Blues!
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.
Sweet Blues!
Coming from a black man's soul.
O Blues!
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—
"Ain't got nobody in all this world,
Ain't got nobody but ma self.
I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
He played a few chords then he sang some more—
"I got the Weary Blues
And I can't be satisfied.
Got the Weary Blues
And can't be satisfied—
I ain't happy no mo'
And I wish that I had died."
And far into the night he crooned that tune.
The stars went out and so did the moon.
The singer stopped playing and went to bed
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

Public domain

The Wheelchairs

By Anne Hussey

in the sun they glint they spin
until the spokes blur like twin batons
they race downhill against their shadows
and uphill against the drag of the land
they circle or pivot around one still wheel
their tracks thin ropes or chains
we follow these indentations like the
lines and montes of the hand
as they cross paths and roll through
the wet grass we think we are coming to
know their hesitations and their obstacles
we think we are coming to know their routines
whether they will assemble at the slow fountain
where brown furred leaves have settled
on the bottom under the resin-colored water
or behind the big rock where an oak tree
has grown up like a whale’s spout
or on the bluff overlooking the sea
we follow them only to have them disappear
in the grape arbor or the tan grass
only to have them disappear within the house
where their wheels having picked up tiny white pebbles
and held them in their treads now
deposit them on the green rug
like ants’ eggs only to have them
sneak up behind us and roll away
empty and silent until the
next time when they may come at us
in an unexpected place where not even
god as a fat-cheeked cloud
or the waves marching toward the shore
in policemen’s uniforms
can stop them

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Cancer

By Su Hwang

Feet on dashboard, god-awful music blaring from mixed
cassettes, my father let me have my way as he played

chauffeur, never easing his grip on the wheel down straightaways.
Four hours to my college dorm across New Jersey and the Poconos,

up through Scranton to the gulch of Broome County in upstate
New York, not a word passed between us, mile after

mile markers on fence posts, yellow dashes, streaks of trees—
blurred liturgy of autumn, spring. Summer into winter into

summer, ticking off hours that measured the distance as he drove
and I watched the road that held nothing but our widening gulf.

My father taught me willful reticence, folding desire
into cellular spaces. Perhaps one day I will enter this dusty

warehouse filled with neglected boxes, find the one labeled
For My Daughter, and unpack its long-held secrets. For now, I let

him seal their seams with tape, stuff them into corners. Recently
when I visited, he sat across the dinner table as Mom prepared

our holiday meal, both of them aging exponentially like radioactive
particles. Wisp of his former self, barely recognizable, recited

the Lord's Prayer: *Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

They had just taken out his kidney: the half. *Life of
failure.* Suddenly he opened his eyes, looked straight into me,

and said, *I know you, you have a frontier spirit.* Where did he even
get that word: *frontier.* We nodded in agreement, then ate in

silence like we always do, losing our nerve. All I've ever wanted
him to say is: Tell me something. Tell me—everything.

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The Grand Silos of the Sacramento

By Lawson Fusao Inada

From a distance, at night, they seem to be
industries—all lit up but not on the map;
or, in this scientific age, they could be
installations for launching rocket ships—
so solid, and with such security, are they. . .
Ah, but up close, by the light of day,
we see, not “pads” but actual paddies—
for these are simply silos in ricefields,
structures to hold the harvested grain.
Still, they’re the tallest things around,
and, by night or day, you’d have to say
they’re ample for what they do: storage.
And, if you amble around from your car,
you can lean up against one in the sun,
feeling warmth on your cheek as you spread
out your arms, holding on to the whole world
around you, to the shores of other lands
where the laborers launched their lives
to arrive and plant and harvest this grain
of history—as you hold and look, look
up, up, up, and whisper: “*Grandfather*!”

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Two

By Helen Hunt Jackson

I. Apart

One place—one roof—one name—their daily bread
In daily sacrament they break
Together, and together take
Perpetual counsel, such as use has fed
The habit of, in words which make
No lie. For courtesy's sweet sake
And pity's, one brave heart whose joy is dead,
Smiles ever, answering words which wake
But weariness; hides all its ache,—
Its hopeless ache, its longing and its dread;
Strong as a martyr at the stake
Renouncing self; striving to slake
The pangs of thirst on bitter hyssop red
With vinegar! O brave, strong heart!
God sets all days, all hours apart,
Joy cometh at his hour appointed.

II. Together

No touch—no sight—no sound—wide continents
And seas clasp hands to separate
Them from each other now. Too late!
Triumphant Love has leagued the elements
To do their will. Hath light a mate
For swiftness? Can it overweight
The air? Or doth the sun know accidents?
The light, the air, the sun, inviolate
For them, do constant keep and state
Message of their ineffable contents
And raptures, each in each. So great
Their bliss of loving, even fate
In parting them, hath found no instruments
Whose bitter pain insatiate
Doth kill it, or their faith abate
In presence of Love's hourly sacraments.

Public domain

Mountain Pines

By Robinson Jeffers

In scornful upright loneliness they stand,
    Counting themselves no kin of anything
    Whether of earth or sky. Their gnarled roots cling
Like wasted fingers of a clutching hand
In the grim rock. A silent spectral band
    They watch the old sky, but hold no communing
    With aught. Only, when some lone eagle's wing
Flaps past above their grey and desolate land,
Or when the wind pants up a rough-hewn glen,
    Bending them down as with an age of thought,
    Or when, 'mid flying clouds that can not dull
Her constant light, the moon shines silver, then
    They find a soul, and their dim moan is wrought
    Into a singing sad and beautiful.

Public domain

Football

By Louis Jenkins

I take the snap from the center, fake to the right, fade back…
I've got protection. I've got a receiver open downfield…
What the hell is this? This isn't a football, it's a shoe, a man's
brown leather oxford. A cousin to a football maybe, the same
skin, but not the same, a thing made for the earth, not the air.
I realize that this is a world where anything is possible and I
understand, also, that one often has to make do with what one
has. I have eaten pancakes, for instance, with that clear corn
syrup on them because there was no maple syrup and they
weren't very good. Well, anyway, this is different. (My man
downfield is waving his arms.) One has certain responsibilities,
one has to make choices. This isn't right and I'm not going
to throw it.

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A Prayer in Signs

By Alice Cornelia Jennings

No uttered word is ours—no solemn tone
  The reverent air bears upward to the sky:
No eloquence of meaning, borne along
  Of voice and accent, meet the God on high.

But dare ye tell us that we do not pray—
  We who so truly “lift up hands of prayer,”
And by the speaking gesture mark the way,
  Our heart’s desire would take to reach Him there?

“Our Father!” that appealing gesture lifts.
  With force more potent than the spoken word,
Desire, petition for the precious gift
  Held in the hand of One All-Seeing Lord.

“In Heaven!” we picture in the circling sweep
  Of arm and hand, the glorious dome above;
“Holy Thy Name!” with reverent movement keep
  The sacred thought of purity and love.

“Thy Kingdom!” with imperial touch we show.
  The badge of royalty—the sceptre’s sway;
And that Thy glorious Will may work and grow
  Potent and perfect, this and every day.

Our opened hands with daily bread to fill
  The Lord we ask, “Forgive as we forgive”:
O hearing brothers! We are like you still—
  The hardest this to pray, and this to live.

From tempter’s touch, whene’er beside he stands—
  We pray Thee still our weakness to defend:
And by the symbol strong of broken bands
  We crave deliverance, succor, to the end.

Once more the royal sign—“Thy Kingdom Thine!”
  “The Power,” that sign is vital, living, strong:
“The Glory”: rays of brightness seem to shine
  And scintillate around us, sweet and long.

“Forever and forever!” round and round
  The finger sweeps, and who shall tell us then
Expression for the prayer we have not found,
  Nor join us in our glad and grand “Amen”?

Public domain

A Country Boy in Winter

By Sarah Orne Jewett

The wind may blow the snow about,
For all I care, says Jack,
And I don't mind how cold it grows,
For then the ice won't crack.
Old folks may shiver all day long,
But I shall never freeze;
What cares a jolly boy like me
For winter days like these?

Far down the long snow-covered hills
It is such fun to coast,
So clear the road! the fastest sled
There is in school I boast.
The paint is pretty well worn off,
But then I take the lead;
A dandy sled's a loiterer,
And I go in for speed.

When I go home at supper-time,
Ki! but my cheeks are red!
They burn and sting like anything;
I'm cross until I'm fed.
You ought to see the biscuit go,
I am so hungry then;

And old Aunt Polly says that boys
Eat twice as much as men.

There's always something I can do
To pass the time away;
The dark comes quick in winter-time—
A short and stormy day
And when I give my mind to it,
It's just as father says,
I almost do a man's work now,
And help him many ways.

I shall be glad when I grow up
And get all through with school,
I'll show them by-and-by that I
Was not meant for a fool.
I'll take the crops off this old farm,
I'll do the best I can.
A jolly boy like me won't be
A dolt when he's a man.

I like to hear the old horse neigh
Just as I come in sight,
The oxen poke me with their horns
To get their hay at night.
Somehow the creatures seem like friends,
And like to see me come.

Some fellows talk about New York,

But I shall stay at home.

Public domain

Separation

By Sophie Jewett

Along the Eastern shore the low waves creep,
  Making a ceaseless music on the sand,
  A song that gulls and curlews understand,
  The lullaby that sings the day to sleep.
A thousand miles afar, the grim pines keep
  Unending watch upon a shoreless land,
  Yet through their tops, swept by some wizard hand,
  The sound of surf comes singing up the steep.
Sweet, thou canst hear the tidal litany;
  I, mid the pines land-wearied, may but dream
  Of the far shore; but though the distance seem
Between us fixed, impassable, to me
  Cometh thy soul's voice, chanting love's old theme,
  And mine doth answer, as the pines the sea.

1885

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Rulers

By Fenton Johnson

It is said that many a king in troubled Europe would sell his crown for a day of happiness.

I have seen a monarch who held tightly the jewel of happiness.

On Lombard street in Philadelphia, as evening dropped to earth, I gazed upon a laborer duskier than a sky devoid of moon. He was seated on a throne of flour bags, waving his hand imperiously as two small boys played on their guitars the ragtime tunes of the day.

God’s blessing on the monarch who rules on Lombard Street in Philadelphia.

Public domain

The New Day

By Fenton Johnson

From a vision red with war I awoke and saw the Prince of
Peace hovering over No Man's Land.
Loud the whistles blew and the thunder of cannon was
drowned by the happy shouting of the people.
From the Sinai that faces Armageddon I heard this chant
from the throats of white-robed angels:

Blow your trumpets, little children!
From the East and from the West,
From the cities in the valley,
From God's dwelling on the mountain,
Blow your blast that Peace might know
She is Queen of God's great army.
With the crying blood of millions
We have written deep her name
In the Book of all the Ages;
With the lilies in the valley,
With the roses by the Mersey,
With the golden flower of Jersey
We have crowned her smooth young temples.
Where her footsteps cease to falter
Golden grain will greet the morning,
Where her chariot descends
Shall be broken down the altars
Of the gods of dark disturbance.
Nevermore shall men know suffering,
Nevermore shall women wailing
Shake to grief the God of Heaven.
From the East and from the West,
From the cities in the valley,
From God's dwelling on the mountain,
Little children, blow your trumpets!

From Ethiopia, groaning 'neath her heavy burdens, I heard
the music of the old slave songs.
I heard the wail of warriors, dusk brown, who grimly
fought the fight of others in the trenches of Mars.

I heard the plea of blood-stained men of dusk and the
crimson in my veins leapt furiously.

Forget not, O my brothers, how we fought
In No Man’s Land that peace might come again!
Forget not, O my brothers, how we gave
Red blood to save the freedom of the world!
We were not free, our tawny hands were tied;
But Belgium’s plight and Serbia’s woes we shared
Each rise of sun or setting of the moon.
So when the bugle blast had called us forth
We went not like the surly brute of yore
But, as the Spartan, proud to give the world
The freedom that we never knew nor shared.
These chains, O brothers mine, have weighed us down
As Samson in the temple of the gods;
Unloosen them and let us breathe the air
That makes the goldenrod the flower of Christ.
For we have been with thee in No Man’s Land,
Through lake of fire and down to Hell itself;
And now we ask of thee our liberty,
Our freedom in the land of Stars and Stripes.

I am glad that the Prince of Peace is hovering over No Man’s Land.

Public domain

Brotherhood

By Georgia Douglas Johnson

Come, brothers all!
Shall we not wend
The blind-way of our prison-world
By sympathy entwined?
Shall we not make
The bleak way for each other’s sake
Less rugged and unkind?
O let each throbbing heart repeat
The faint note of another’s beat
To lift a chanson for the feet
That stumble down life’s checkered street.

Public domain

Common Dust

By Georgia Douglas Johnson

And who shall separate the dust
What later we shall be:
Whose keen discerning eye will scan
And solve the mystery?

The high, the low, the rich, the poor,
The black, the white, the red,
And all the chromatique between,
Of whom shall it be said:

Here lies the dust of Africa;
Here are the sons of Rome;
Here lies the one unlabelled,
The world at large his home!

Can one then separate the dust?
Will mankind lie apart,
When life has settled back again
The same as from the start?

Public domain

The Heart of a Woman

By Georgia Douglas Johnson

The heart of a woman goes forth with the dawn,
As a lone bird, soft winging, so restlessly on,
Afar o’er life’s turrets and vales does it roam
In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home.

The heart of a woman falls back with the night,
And enters some alien cage in its plight,
And tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars
While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering bars.

Public domain

A Southern Road

By Helene Johnson

Yolk-colored tongue
Parched beneath a burning sky,
A lazy little tune
Hummed up the crest of some
Soft sloping hill.
One streaming line of beauty
Flowing by a forest
Pregnant with tears.
A hidden nest for beauty
Idly flung by God
In one lonely lingering hour
Before the Sabbath.
A blue-fruited black gum,
Like a tall predella,
Bears a dangling figure,—
Sacrificial dower to the raff,
Swinging alone,
A solemn, tortured shadow in the air.

Public domain

Before a Painting

By James Weldon Johnson

I knew not who had wrought with skill so fine
    What I beheld; nor by what laws of art
    He had created life and love and heart
On canvas, from mere color, curve and line.
Silent I stood and made no move or sign;
    Not with the crowd, but reverently apart;
    Nor felt the power my rooted limbs to start,
But mutely gazed upon that face divine.

And over me the sense of beauty fell,
    As music over a raptured listener to
        The deep-voiced organ breathing out a hymn;
Or as on one who kneels, his beads to tell,
    There falls the aureate glory filtered through
        The windows in some old cathedral dim.

Public domain

Lift Every Voice and Sing

By James Weldon Johnson

A group of young men in Jacksonville, Florida, arranged to celebrate Lincoln's birthday in 1900. My brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, and I decided to write a song to be sung at the exercises. I wrote the words and he wrote the music. Our New York publisher, Edward B. Marks, made mimeographed copies for us, and the song was taught to and sung by a chorus of five hundred colored school children.

Shortly afterwards my brother and I moved away from Jacksonville to New York, and the song passed out of our minds. But the school children of Jacksonville kept singing it; they went off to other schools and sang it; they became teachers and taught it to other children. Within twenty years it was being sung over the South and in some other parts of the country. Today the song, popularly known as the Negro National Hymn, is quite generally used.

The lines of this song repay me in an elation, almost of exquisite anguish, whenever I hear them sung by Negro children.

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,

We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our God,
True to our native land.

Public domain

Poet of Our Race

By Maggie Pogue Johnson

Dedicated to the memory of Paul Laurence Dunbar

Oh, Poet of our Race,
We reverence thy name
As thy hist'ry we retrace,
Which enfolds thy widespread fame.
We loved thee, yea, too well,
But He dids't love thee more
And called thee up with Him to dwell
On that Celestial shore.
Thy sorrows here on earth,
Yea, more than thou coulds't bear,
Burdened thee from birth
E'en in their visions fair.
And thou, adored of men,
Whose bed might been of flowers,
With mighty stroke of pen
Expressed thy sad, sad hours.

Thou hast been called above,
Where all is peace and rest,
To dwell in boundless love,
Eternally and blest.
And, yet, thou still dost linger near,
For thy words, as sweetest flowers,
Do grow in beauty 'round us here
To cheer us in saddest hours.
Thy thoughts in rapture seem to soar
So far, yea, far above,
And shower a heavy downpour
Of sparkling, glittering love.
Thou, with stroke of mighty pen,
Hast told of joy and mirth,
And read the hearts and souls of men
As cradled from their birth.

The language of the flowers,
Thou hast read them all,
And e’en the little brook
Responded to thy call.
All Nature hast communed
And lingered, yea, with thee,
Their secrets were entombed
But thou hast made them free.
Oh, Poet of our Race,
Thou dost soar above;
No paths wilt thou retrace
But those of peace and love.
Thy pilgrimage is done,
Thy toils on earth are o’er,
Thy victor’s crown is won,
Thou’lt rest forever more.

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A Song of Thanks

By Edward Smyth Jones

For the sun that shone at the dawn of spring,
For the flowers which bloom and the birds that sing,
For the verdant robe of the gray old earth,
For her coffers filled with their countless worth,
For the flocks which feed on a thousand hills,
For the rippling streams which turn the mills,
For the lowing herds in the lovely vale,
For the songs of gladness on the gale,—
From the Gulf and the Lakes to the Oceans' banks,—
Lord God of Hosts, we give Thee thanks!

For the farmer reaping his whitened fields,
For the bounty which the rich soil yields,
For the cooling dews and refreshing rains,
For the sun which ripens the golden grains,
For the bearded wheat and the fattened swine,
For the stalléd ox and the fruitful vine,
For the tubers large and cotton white,
For the kid and the lambkin frisk and blithe,
For the swan which floats near the river-banks,—
Lord God of Hosts, we give Thee thanks!

For the pumpkin sweet and the yellow yam,
For the corn and beans and the sugared ham,
For the plum and the peach and the apple red,
For the dear old press where the wine is tread,
For the cock which crows at the breaking dawn,
And the proud old "turk" at the farmer's barn,
For the fish which swim in the babbling brooks,
For the game which hide in the shady nooks,—
From the Gulf and the Lakes to the Oceans' banks —
Lord God of Hosts, we give Thee thanks!

For the sturdy oaks and the stately pines,
For the lead and the coal from the deep, dark mines,
For the silver ores of a thousand fold,
For the diamond bright and the yellow gold,

For the river boat and the flying train,
For the fleecy sail of the rolling main,
For the velvet sponge and the glossy pearl,
For the flag of peace which we now unfurl—
From the Gulf and the Lakes to the Oceans' banks—
Lord God of Hosts, we give Thee thanks!

For the lowly cot and the mansion fair,
For the peace and plenty together share,
For the Hand which guides us from above,
For Thy tender mercies, abiding love,
For the blessed home with its children gay,
For returnings of Thanksgiving Day,
For the bearing toils and the sharing cares,
We lift up our hearts in our songs and our prayers—
From the Gulf and the Lakes to the Oceans' banks—
Lord God of Hosts, we give Thee thanks!

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The Blue Dress

By Saeed Jones

Her blue dress is a silk train is a river
is water seeps into the cobblestone streets of my sleep, is still raining
is monsoon brocade, is winter stars stitched into puddles
is good-bye in a flooded, antique room, is good-bye in a room of crystal bowls
and crystal cups, is the ring-ting-ring of water dripping from the mouths
of crystal bowls and crystal cups, is the Mississippi River is a hallway, is leaks
like tears from windowsills of a drowned house, is windows open to waterfalls
is a bed is a small boat is a ship, is a current come to carry me in its arms
through the streets, is me floating in her dress through the streets
is only the moon sees me floating through the streets, is me in a blue dress
out to sea, is my mother is a moon out to sea.

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Mimesis

By Fady Joudah

My daughter
wouldn’t hurt a spider
That had nested
Between her bicycle handles
For two weeks
She waited
Until it left of its own accord

If you tear down the web I said
It will simply know
This isn’t a place to call home
And you’d get to go biking

She said that’s how others
Become refugees isn’t it?

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Author's Prayer

By Ilya Kaminsky

If I speak for the dead, I must leave
this animal of my body,

I must write the same poem over and over,
for an empty page is the white flag of their surrender.

If I speak for them, I must walk on the edge
of myself, I must live as a blind man

who runs through rooms without
touching the furniture.

Yes, I live. I can cross the streets asking "What year is it?"
I can dance in my sleep and laugh

in front of the mirror.
Even sleep is a prayer, Lord,

I will praise your madness, and
in a language not mine, speak

of music that wakes us, music
in which we move. For whatever I say

is a kind of petition, and the darkest
days must I praise.

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We Lived Happily During the War

By Ilya Kaminsky

And when they bombed other people's houses, we

protested
but not enough, we opposed them but not

enough. I was
in my bed, around my bed America

was falling: invisible house by invisible house by invisible house.

I took a chair outside and watched the sun.

In the sixth month
of a disastrous reign in the house of money

in the street of money in the city of money in the country of money,
our great country of money, we (forgive us)

lived happily during the war.

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Turning Back

By Joan Naviyuk Kane

I wished to be closer to my mother
to think of displacement in a different way.

To part the bright green new growth
of a plant she has asked me to gather.

We never imagined so many years apart.
I have no way to make amends.

Set adrift, I wanted to stay near the shore
of something familiar but instead I trace

the shape of *tuqaayuk*, sea lovage, wild
celery, with something other than my tongue.

I wish for my family to be its own refuge,
for the sorrow to become something islandic.

Someplace we can travel back to together
if we have to, if we make it through these days.

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Mountain Storm

By Younghill Kang

Black clouds, lion-shaped,
White clouds, elephant-like, yonder.
Crash! Crash! Thundering as if breaking the sky into two pieces.
Slash! Slash! Lightening to cut the mountain top off.
The Storm extends from sky to earth,
Youth’s vigour, love’s passion, beauty’s rapture.
Then Pearl-drops of hail – hundreds of jade-pieces,
Tok-tok-tok-tok-tok, monastery jingling bell.
Again soft slender rain.
Sh! Sh! Sh! Sh! Sh! whispering to the lover’s ear alone:
“I love you, I love you, ever, ever, ever, ever.”

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Robinson

By Weldon Kees

The dog stops barking after Robinson has gone.
His act is over. The world is a gray world,
Not without violence, and he kicks under the grand piano,
The nightmare chase well under way.

The mirror from Mexico, stuck to the wall,
Reflects nothing at all. The glass is black.
Robinson alone provides the image Robinsonian.

Which is all of the room—walls, curtains,
Shelves, bed, the tinted photograph of Robinson's first wife,
Rugs, vases, panatellas in a humidor.
They would fill the room if Robinson came in.

The pages in the books are blank,
The books that Robinson has read. That is his favorite chair,
Or where the chair would be if Robinson were here.

All day the phone rings. It could be Robinson
Calling. It never rings when he is here.

Outside, white buildings yellow in the sun.
Outside, the birds circle continuously
Where trees are actual and take no holiday.

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The Coming Of The Plague

By Weldon Kees

September was when it began.
Locusts dying in the fields; our dogs
Silent, moving like shadows on a wall;
And strange worms crawling; flies of a kind
We had never seen before; huge vineyard moths;
Badgers and snakes, abandoning
Their holes in the field; the fruit gone rotten;
Queer fungi sprouting; the fields and woods
Covered with spiderwebs; black vapors
Rising from the earth—all these,
And more began that fall. Ravens flew round
The hospital in pairs. Where there was water,
We could hear the sound of beating clothes
All through the night. We could not count
All the miscarriages, the quarrels, the jealousies.
And one day in a field I saw
A swarm of frogs, swollen and hideous,
Hundreds upon hundreds, sitting on each other,
Huddled together, silent, ominous,
And heard the sound of rushing wind.

This poem is not pre-1930 but is in the public domain.

Imagining Their Own Hymns

By Brigit Pegeen Kelly

What fools they are to believe the angels
in the window are in ecstasy. They
do not smile. Their eyes are rolled back in annoyance
not in bliss, as my mother's eyes roll back
when she finds us in the dirt with the cider—
flies and juice blackening our faces and hands.
When the sun comes up behind the angels
then even in their dun robes they are beautiful,
with their girlish hair and their mean lit faces,
but they do not love the light. As I
do not love it when I am made clean
for the ladies who bring my family money.
They stroke my face and smooth my hair. So sweet,
they say, so good, but I am not sweet or good.
I would take one of the possums we kill
in the dump by the woods where the rats slide
like dark boats into the dark stream and leave it
on the heavy woman's porch just to think
of her on her knees scrubbing and scrubbing
at the stain that will never come out.
And these angels that the women turn to
are not good either. They are sick of Jesus,
who never stops dying, hanging there white
and large, his shadow blue as pitch, and blue
the bruise on his chest, with spread petals,
like the hydrangea blooms I tear from
Mrs. Macht's bush and smash on the sidewalk.
One night they will get out of here. One night
when the weather is turning cold and a few
candles burn, they will leave St. Blasé standing
under his canopy of glass lettuce
and together, as in a wedding march,
their pockets full of money from the boxes
for the sick poor, they will walk down the aisle,
imagining their own hymns, past the pews
and the water fonts in which small things float,

down the streets of our narrow town, while
the bells ring and the birds fly up the fields
beyond—and they will never come back.

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Sonnet

By Frances Anne Kemble

Cover me with your everlasting arms,
  Ye guardian giants of this solitude!
  From the ill-sight of men, and from the rude,
Tumultuous din of yon wild world’s alarms!
Oh, knit your mighty limbs around, above,
  And close me in for ever! let me dwell
  With the wood spirits, in the darkest cell
That ever with your verdant locks ye wove.
  The air is full of countless voices, joined
In one eternal hymn; the whispering wind,
The shuddering leaves, the hidden water springs,
The work-song of the bees, whose honeyed wings
Hang in the golden tresses of the lime,
Or buried lie in purple beds of thyme.

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Happiness

By Jane Kenyon

There’s just no accounting for happiness,
or the way it turns up like a prodigal
who comes back to the dust at your feet
having squandered a fortune far away.

And how can you not forgive?
You make a feast in honor of what
was lost, and take from its place the finest
garment, which you saved for an occasion
you could not imagine, and you weep night and day
to know that you were not abandoned,
that happiness saved its most extreme form
for you alone.

No, happiness is the uncle you never
knew about, who flies a single-engine plane
onto the grassy landing strip, hitchhikes
into town, and inquires at every door
until he finds you asleep midafternoon
as you so often are during the unmerciful
hours of your despair.

It comes to the monk in his cell.
It comes to the woman sweeping the street
with a birch broom, to the child
whose mother has passed out from drink.
It comes to the lover, to the dog chewing
a sock, to the pusher, to the basketmaker,
and to the clerk stacking cans of carrots
in the night.
It even comes to the boulder
in the perpetual shade of pine barrens,
to rain falling on the open sea,
to the wineglass, weary of holding wine.

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As Winds That Blow Against A Star

By Joyce Kilmer

(For Aline)

Now by what whim of wanton chance
Do radiant eyes know sombre days?
And feet that shod in light should dance
Walk weary and laborious ways?

But rays from Heaven, white and whole,
May penetrate the gloom of earth;
And tears but nourish, in your soul,
The glory of celestial mirth.

The darts of toil and sorrow, sent
Against your peaceful beauty, are
As foolish and as impotent
As winds that blow against a star.

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Trees

By Joyce Kilmer

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth’s sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

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Through A Glass Eye, Lightly

By Carolyn Kizer

In the laboratory waiting room
containing
one television actor with a teary face
trying a contact lens;
two muscular victims of industrial accidents;
several vain women—I was one of them—
came Deborah, four, to pick up her glass eye.

It was a long day:
Deborah waiting for the blood vessels
painted
on her iris to dry.
Her mother said that, holding Deborah
when she was born,
“First I inspected her, from toes to navel,
then stopped at her head …”
We wondered why
the inspection hadn’t gone the other way.
“Looking into her eye
was like looking into a volcano:

“Her vacant pupil
went whirling down, down to the foundation
of the world …
When she was three months old they took it out.
She giggled when she went under
the anaesthetic.
Forty-five minutes later she came back
happy! …
The gas wore off, she found the hole in her face
(you know, it never bled?),
stayed happy, even when I went to pieces.
She’s five, in June.

“Deborah, you get right down
from there, or I’ll have to slap!”
Laughing, Deborah climbed into the lap

of one vain lady, who
had been discontented with her own beauty.
Now she held on to Deborah, looked her steadily
in the empty eye.

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Facing It

By Yusef Komunyakaa

My black face fades,
hiding inside the black granite.
I said I wouldn't
dammit: No tears.
I'm stone. I'm flesh.
My clouded reflection eyes me
like a bird of prey, the profile of night
slanted against morning. I turn
this way—the stone lets me go.
I turn that way—I'm inside
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
again, depending on the light
to make a difference.
I go down the 58,022 names,
half-expecting to find
my own in letters like smoke.
I touch the name Andrew Johnson;
I see the booby trap's white flash.
Names shimmer on a woman's blouse
but when she walks away
the names stay on the wall.
Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's
wings cutting across my stare.
The sky. A plane in the sky.
A white vet's image floats
closer to me, then his pale eyes
look through mine. I'm a window.
He's lost his right arm
inside the stone. In the black mirror
a woman's trying to erase names:
No, she's brushing a boy's hair.

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Glory

By Yusef Komunyakaa

Most were married teenagers
Working knockout shifts daybreak
To sunset six days a week–
Already old men playing ball
In a field between a row of shotgun houses
& the Magazine Lumber Company.
They were all Jackie Robinson
& Willie Mays, a touch of
Josh Gibson & Satchell Paige
In each stance and swing, a promise
Like a hesitation pitch always
At the edge of their lives,
Arms sharp as rifles.
The Sunday afternoon heat
Flared like thin flowered skirts
As children and wives cheered.
The men were like cats
Running backwards to snag
Pop-ups & high-flies off
Fences, stealing each others's glory.
The old deacons & raconteurs
Who umpired made an Out or Safe
Into a song & dance routine.
Runners hit the dirt
& slid into homeplate,
Cleats catching light,
As they conjured escapes, outfoxing
Double plays. In the few seconds
It took a man to eye a woman
Upon the makeshift bleachers,
A stolen base or homerun
Would help another man
Survive the new week.

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Slam, Dunk, & Hook

By Yusef Komunyakaa

Fast breaks. Lay ups. With Mercury's
Insignia on our sneakers,
We outmaneuvered the footwork
Of bad angels. Nothing but a hot
Swish of strings like silk
Ten feet out. In the roundhouse
Labyrinth our bodies
Created, we could almost
Last forever, poised in midair
Like storybook sea monsters.
A high note hung there
A long second. Off
The rim. We'd corkscrew
Up & dunk balls that exploded
The skullcap of hope & good
Intention. Lanky, all hands
& feet…sprung rhythm.
We were metaphysical when girls
Cheered on the sidelines.
Tangled up in a falling,
Muscles were a bright motor
Double-flashing to the metal hoop
Nailed to our oak.
When Sonny Boy's mama died
He played nonstop all day, so hard
Our backboard splintered.
Glistening with sweat,
We rolled the ball off
Our fingertips. Trouble
Was there slapping a blackjack
Against an open palm.
Dribble, drive to the inside,
& glide like a sparrow hawk.
Lay ups. Fast breaks.
We had moves we didn't know
We had. Our bodies spun

On swivels of bone & faith,
Through a lyric slipknot
Of joy, & we knew we were
Beautiful & dangerous.

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Thanks

By Yusef Komunyakaa

Thanks for the tree
between me & a sniper's bullet.
I don't know what made the grass
sway seconds before the Viet Cong
raised his soundless rifle.
Some voice always followed,
telling me which foot
to put down first.
Thanks for deflecting the ricochet
against that anarchy of dusk.
I was back in San Francisco
wrapped up in a woman's wild colors,
causing some dark bird's love call
to be shattered by daylight
when my hands reached up
& pulled a branch away
from my face. Thanks
for the vague white flower
that pointed to the gleaming metal
reflecting how it is to be broken
like mist over the grass,
as we played some deadly
game for blind gods.
What made me spot the monarch
writhing on a single thread
tied to a farmer's gate,
holding the day together
like an unfingered guitar string,
is beyond me. Maybe the hills
grew weary & leaned a little in the heat.
Again, thanks for the dud
hand grenade tossed at my feet
outside Chu Lai. I'm still
falling through its silence.
I don't know why the intrepid
sun touched the bayonet,

but I know that something
stood among those lost trees
& moved only when I moved.

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Abandoned Farmhouse

By Ted Kooser

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;
a tall man too, says the length of the bed
in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,
says the Bible with a broken back
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;
but not a man for farming, say the fields
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

A woman lived with him, says the bedroom wall
papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves
covered with oilcloth, and they had a child,
says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.
Money was scarce, say the jars of plum preserves
and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar hole.
And the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.
It was lonely here, says the narrow country road.

Something went wrong, says the empty house
in the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields
say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars
in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.
And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard
like branches after a storm—a rubber cow,
a rusty tractor with a broken plow,
a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

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So This Is Nebraska

By Ted Kooser

The gravel road rides with a slow gallop
over the fields, the telephone lines
streaming behind, its billow of dust
full of the sparks of redwing blackbirds.

On either side, those dear old ladies,
the loosening barns, their little windows
dulled by cataracts of hay and cobwebs
hide broken tractors under their skirts.

So this is Nebraska. A Sunday
afternoon; July. Driving along
with your hand out squeezing the air,
a meadowlark waiting on every post.

Behind a shelterbelt of cedars,
top-deep in hollyhocks, pollen and bees,
a pickup kicks its fenders off
and settles back to read the clouds.

You feel like that; you feel like letting
your tires go flat, like letting the mice
build a nest in your muffler, like being
no more than a truck in the weeds,

clucking with chickens or sticky with honey
or holding a skinny old man in your lap
while he watches the road, waiting
for someone to wave to. You feel like

waving. You feel like stopping the car
and dancing around on the road. You wave
instead and leave your hand out gliding
larklike over the wheat, over the houses.

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Grasses

By Alfred Kreymborg

Who
would decry
instruments—
when grasses
ever so fragile,
provide strings
stout enough for
insect moods
to glide up and down
in glissandos
of toes along wires
or finger-tips on zithers—
  though
  the mere sounds
  be theirs, not ours—
  theirs, not ours,
  the first inspiration—
  discord
  without resolution—
who
would cry
being loved,
when even such tinkling
comes of the loving?

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Summer at North Farm

By Stephen Kuusisto

Finnish rural life, ca. 1910

Fires, always fires after midnight,
the sun depending in the purple birches

and gleaming like a copper kettle.
By the solstice they'd burned everything,

the bad-luck sleigh, a twisted rocker,
things "possessed" and not-quite-right.

The bonfire coils and lurches,
big as a house, and then it settles.

The dancers come, dressed like rainbows
(if rainbows could be spun),

and linking hands they turn
to the melancholy fiddles.

A red bird spreads its wings now
and in the darker days to come.

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You’ve Got to Start Somewhere

By Deborah Landau

I had the idea of sitting still
while others rushed by.
I had the thought of a shop
that still sells records.
A letter in the mailbox.
The way that book felt in my hands.
I was always elsewhere.
How is it to have a body today,
to walk in this city, to run?
I wanted to eat an apple so precisely
the tree would make another
exactly like it, then lie
down uninterrupted
in the gadgetless grass.
I kept texting the precipice,
which kept not answering,
my phone auto-making
everything incorrect.
I had the idea. Put down the phone.
Earth, leaves, storm, water, vine.
The gorgeous art of breathing.
I had the idea — the hope
of friending you without electricity.
Of what could be made among the lampposts
with only our voices and hands.

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Dust

By Dorianne Laux

Someone spoke to me last night,
told me the truth. Just a few words,
but I recognized it.
I knew I should make myself get up,
write it down, but it was late,
and I was exhausted from working
all day in the garden, moving rocks.
Now, I remember only the flavor —
not like food, sweet or sharp.
More like a fine powder, like dust.
And I wasn't elated or frightened,
but simply rapt, aware.
That's how it is sometimes —
God comes to your window,
all bright light and black wings,
and you're just too tired to open it.

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The Student

By Dorianne Laux

She never spoke, which made her obvious,
the way death makes the air obvious
in an empty chair, the way sky compressed

between bare branches is more gray or blue,
the way a window is more apparent than a wall.
She held her silence to her breast like a worn coat,
smoke, an armful of roses. Her silence
colored the smaller silences that came and went,
that other students stood up and filled in.

I leaned near the window in my office. She sat
on the edge of a chair. Hips rigid, fidgeting
while I made my little speech. February

light pressed its cold back against the glass,
|sealing us in. She focused on my lips
as I spoke, as if to study how it's done,
the sheer mechanics of it: orchestration
of jaw and tongue, teeth shifting in tandem,
shaping the air. So I stopped, let her silence

drift over us, let it sift in like smoke or snow,
let its petals settle on my shoulders.
I looked outside to the branches

of a stripped tree, winter starlings
folded in their speckled wings, chilled flames
shuddering at the tips. Students wandered
across campus as if under water, hands and hair
unfurling, their soundless mouths churning—
irate or ecstatic, I couldn't tell—ready to burn

it all down or break into song. When I looked back
her eyes had found the window: tree, students,
birds swimming by, mute in their element.

It was painful to hear the papery rasp
of her folding and unfolding hands, to watch

color smudging her neck and temple, branching
to mist the delicate rim of one ear. I listened
to the air sunder between us, the feverish hush
collapse. I could hear her breath—smoke

rising from ice. I could see what it cost her
to make that leap. What heat it takes
for the body to blossom into speech.

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Long Island Sound

By Emma Lazarus

I see it as it looked one afternoon
In August,— by a fresh soft breeze o’erblown.
The swiftness of the tide, the light thereon,
A far-off sail, white as a crescent moon.
The shining waters with pale currents strewn,
The quiet fishing-smacks, the Eastern cove,
The semi-circle of its dark, green grove.
The luminous grasses, and the merry sun
In the grave sky; the sparkle far and wide,
Laughter of unseen children, cheerful chirp
Of crickets, and low lisp of rippling tide,
Light summer clouds fantastical as sleep
Changing unnoted while I gazed thereon.
All these fair sounds and sights I made my own.

Public domain

The New Colossus

By Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Public domain

The New Year

By Emma Lazarus

Rosh-Hashanah, 5643

Not while the snow-shroud round dead earth is rolled,
And naked branches point to frozen skies.—
When orchards burn their lamps of fiery gold,
The grape glows like a jewel, and the corn
A sea of beauty and abundance lies,
Then the new year is born.

Look where the mother of the months uplifts
In the green clearness of the unsunned West,
Her ivory horn of plenty, dropping gifts,
Cool, harvest-feeding dews, fine-winnowed light;
Tired labor with fruition, joy and rest
Profusely to requite.

Blow, Israel, the sacred cornet! Call
Back to thy courts whatever faint heart throb
With thine ancestral blood, thy need craves all.
The red, dark year is dead, the year just born
Leads on from anguish wrought by priest and mob,
To what undreamed-of morn?

For never yet, since on the holy height,
The Temple's marble walls of white and green
Carved like the sea-waves, fell, and the world's light
Went out in darkness,—never was the year
Greater with portent and with promise seen,
Than this eve now and here.

Even as the Prophet promised, so your tent
Hath been enlarged unto earth's farthest rim.
To snow-capped Sierras from vast steppes ye went,
Through fire and blood and tempest-tossing wave,
For freedom to proclaim and worship Him,
Mighty to slay and save.

High above flood and fire ye held the scroll,
Out of the depths ye published still the Word.
No bodily pang had power to swerve your soul:
Ye, in a cynic age of crumbling faiths,
Lived to bear witness to the living Lord,
Or died a thousand deaths.

In two divided streams the exiles part,
One rolling homeward to its ancient source,
One rushing sunward with fresh will, new heart.
By each the truth is spread, the law unfurled,
Each separate soul contains the nation’s force,
And both embrace the world.

Kindle the silver candle’s seven rays,
Offer the first fruits of the clustered bowers,
The garnered spoil of bees. With prayer and praise
Rejoice that once more tried, once more we prove
How strength of supreme suffering still is ours
For Truth and Law and Love.

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Elegy for Blue

By J. T. Ledbetter

Someone must have seen an old dog
dragging its broken body through
the wet grass;
someone should have known it was lost,
drinking from the old well, then lifting
its head to the wind off the bottoms,
and someone might have wanted that dog
trailing its legs along the ground
like vines sliding up the creek
searching for sun;
but they were not there when the dog
wandered through Turley's Woods looking
for food and stopped beneath the thorn trees
and wrapped its tail around its nose
until it was covered by falling leaves
that piled up and up
until there was no lost dog at all
to hear the distant voice calling
through the timber,
only a tired heart breathing slower,
and breath, soft as mist, above the leaves.

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From Blossoms

By Li-Young Lee

From blossoms comes
this brown paper bag of peaches
we bought from the boy
at the bend in the road where we turned toward
signs painted *Peaches*.

From laden boughs, from hands,
from sweet fellowship in the bins,
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,
comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,
to carry within us an orchard, to eat
not only the skin, but the shade,
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into
the round jubilance of peach.

There are days we live
as if death were nowhere
in the background; from joy
to joy to joy, from wing to wing,
from blossom to blossom to
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

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Little Father

By Li-Young Lee

I buried my father
in the sky.
Since then, the birds
clean and comb him every morning
and pull the blanket up to his chin
every night.

I buried my father underground.
Since then, my ladders
only climb down,
and all the earth has become a house
whose rooms are the hours, whose doors
stand open at evening, receiving
guest after guest.
Sometimes I see past them
to the tables spread for a wedding feast.

I buried my father in my heart.
Now he grows in me, my strange son,
my little root who won't drink milk,
little pale foot sunk in unheard-of night,
little clock spring newly wet
in the fire, little grape, parent to the future
wine, a son the fruit of his own son,
little father I ransom with my life.

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The Gift

By Li-Young Lee

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
my father recited a story in a low voice.
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
Before the story ended, he'd removed
the iron sliver I thought I'd die from.

I can't remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well
of dark water, a prayer.
And I recall his hands,
two measures of tenderness
he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline
he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon
you would have thought you saw a man
planting something in a boy's palm,
a silver tear, a tiny flame.
Had you followed that boy
you would have arrived here,
where I bend over my wife's right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down
so carefully she feels no pain.
Watch as I lift the splinter out.
I was seven when my father
took my hand like this,
and I did not hold that shard
between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
christen it Little Assassin,
Ore Going Deep for My Heart.
And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
I did what a child does

when he’s given something to keep.
I kissed my father.

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The Oldest Living Thing in L.A.

By Larry Levis

At Wilshire & Santa Monica I saw an opossum
Trying to cross the street. It was late, the street
Was brightly lit, the opossum would take
A few steps forward, then back away from the breath
Of moving traffic. People coming out of the bars
Would approach, as if to help it somehow.
It would lift its black lips & show them
The reddened gums, the long rows of incisors,
Teeth that went all the way back beyond
The flames of Troy & Carthage, beyond sheep
Grazing rock-strewn hills, fragments of ruins
In the grass at San Vitale. It would back away
Delicately & smoothly, stepping carefully
As it always had. It could mangle someone's hand
In twenty seconds. Mangle it for good. It could
Sever it completely from the wrist in forty.
There was nothing to be done for it. Someone
Or other probably called the LAPD, who then
Called Animal Control, who woke a driver, who
Then dressed in mailed gloves, the kind of thing
Small knights once wore into battle, who gathered
Together his pole with a noose on the end,
A light steel net to snare it with, someone who hoped
The thing would have vanished by the time he got there.

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KUMULIPO, WĀ I

By Queen Lili’uokalani

WĀ‘EKAHI

O ke au i kahuli wela ka honua

O ke au i kahuli lole ka lani

O ke au i kukaiaka ka la.

E hoomalamalama i ka malama

O ke au o Makali’i ka po

O ka walewale hookumu honua ia

O ke kumu o ka lipo, i lipo ai

O ke kumu o ka Po, i po ai

O ka lipolipo, o ka lipolipo

O ka lipo o ka la, o ka lipo o ka po

Po wale hoi

Hanau ka po

At the time that turned the heat of the earth,

At the time when the heavens turned and changed,

At the time when the light of the sun was subdued

To cause light to break forth,

At the time of the night of Makalii (winter)

Then began the slime which established the earth,

The source of deepest darkness.

Of the depth of darkness, of the depth of darkness,

Of the darkness of the sun, in the depth of night,

It is night,

So was night born

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Learning to love America

By Shirley Geok-lin Lim

because it has no pure products

because the Pacific Ocean sweeps along the coastline
because the water of the ocean is cold
and because land is better than ocean

because I say we rather than they

because I live in California
I have eaten fresh artichokes
and jacaranda bloom in April and May

because my senses have caught up with my body
my breath with the air it swallows
my hunger with my mouth

because I walk barefoot in my house

because I have nursed my son at my breast
because he is a strong American boy
because I have seen his eyes redden when he is asked who he is
because he answers I don't know

because to have a son is to have a country
because my son will bury me here
because countries are in our blood and we bleed them

because it is late and too late to change my mind
because it is time.

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How to Triumph Like a Girl

By Ada Limón

I like the lady horses best,
how they make it all look easy,
like running 40 miles per hour
is as fun as taking a nap, or grass.
I like their lady horse swagger,
after winning. Ears up, girls, ears up!
But mainly, let's be honest, I like
that they're ladies. As if this big
dangerous animal is also a part of me,
that somewhere inside the delicate
skin of my body, there pumps
an 8-pound female horse heart,
giant with power, heavy with blood.
Don't you want to believe it?
Don't you want to lift my shirt and see
the huge beating genius machine
that thinks, no, it knows,
it's going to come in first.

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In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa

By Ada Limón

Arching under the night sky inky
with black expansiveness, we point
to the planets we know, we

pin quick wishes on stars. From earth,
we read the sky as if it is an unerring book
of the universe, expert and evident.

Still, there are mysteries below our sky:
the whale song, the songbird singing
its call in the bough of a wind-shaken tree.

We are creatures of constant awe,
curious at beauty, at leaf and blossom,
at grief and pleasure, sun and shadow.

And it is not darkness that unites us,
not the cold distance of space, but
the offering of water, each drop of rain,

each rivulet, each pulse, each vein.
O second moon, we, too, are made
of water, of vast and beckoning seas.

We, too, are made of wonders, of great
and ordinary loves, of small invisible worlds,
of a need to call out through the dark.

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Instructions on Not Giving Up

By Ada Limón

More than the fuchsia funnels breaking out
of the crabapple tree, more than the neighbor's
almost obscene display of cherry limbs shoving
their cotton candy-colored blossoms to the slate
sky of Spring rains, it's the greening of the trees
that really gets to me. When all the shock of white
and taffy, the world's baubles and trinkets, leave
the pavement strewn with the confetti of aftermath,
the leaves come. Patient, plodding, a green skin
growing over whatever winter did to us, a return
to the strange idea of continuous living despite
the mess of us, the hurt, the empty. Fine then,
I'll take it, the tree seems to say, a new slick leaf
unfurling like a fist to an open palm, I'll take it all.

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Joint Custody

By Ada Limón

Why did I never see it for what it was:
abundance? Two families, two different
kitchen tables, two sets of rules, two
creeks, two highways, two stepparents
with their fish tanks or eight-tracks or
cigarette smoke or expertise in recipes or
reading skills. I cannot reverse it, the record
scratched and stopping to that original
chaotic track. But let me say, I was taken
back and forth on Sundays and it was not easy
but I was loved each place. And so I have
two brains now. Two entirely different brains.
The one that always misses where I'm not,
and the one that is so relieved to finally be home.

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The End of Poetry

By Ada Limón

Enough of osseous and chickadee and sunflower
and snowshoes, maple and seeds, samara and shoot,
enough chiaroscuro, enough of thus and prophecy
and the stoic farmer and faith and our father and ’tis
of thee, enough of bosom and bud, skin and god
not forgetting and star bodies and frozen birds,
enough of the will to go on and not go on or how
a certain light does a certain thing, enough
of the kneeling and the rising and the looking
inward and the looking up, enough of the gun,
the drama, and the acquaintance’s suicide, the long-lost
letter on the dresser, enough of the longing and
the ego and the obliteration of ego, enough
of the mother and the child and the father and the child
and enough of the pointing to the world, weary
and desperate, enough of the brutal and the border,
enough of can you see me, can you hear me, enough
I am human, enough I am alone and I am desperate,
enough of the animal saving me, enough of the high
water, enough sorrow, enough of the air and its ease,
I am asking you to touch me.

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The Raincoat

By Ada Limón

When the doctor suggested surgery
and a brace for all my youngest years,
my parents scrambled to take me
to massage therapy, deep tissue work,
osteopathy, and soon my crooked spine
unspooled a bit, I could breathe again,
and move more in a body unclouded
by pain. My mom would tell me to sing
songs to her the whole forty-five minute
drive to Middle Two Rock Road and forty-
five minutes back from physical therapy.
She'd say, even my voice sounded unfettered
by my spine afterward. So I sang and sang,
because I thought she liked it. I never
asked her what she gave up to drive me,
or how her day was before this chore. Today,
at her age, I was driving myself home from yet
another spine appointment, singing along
to some maudlin but solid song on the radio,
and I saw a mom take her raincoat off
and give it to her young daughter when
a storm took over the afternoon. My god,
I thought, my whole life I've been under her
raincoat thinking it was somehow a marvel
that I never got wet.

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Carnival

By Rebecca Lindenberg

The mask that burns like a violin, the mask
that sings only dead languages, that loves
the destruction of being put on. The mask
that sighs like a woman even though
a woman wears it. The mask beaded with
freshwater pearls, with seeds. The plumed mask,
the mask with a sutured mouth, a moonface,
with a healed gash that means harvest. A glower
that hides *wanting*. A grotesque pucker. Here's
a beaked mask, a braided mask, here's a mask
without eyes, a mask that looks like a mask
but isn't—please don't try to unribbon it.
The mask that snows coins, the mask full of wasps.
Lace mask to net escaping thoughts. Pass me
the rouged mask, the one made of sheet music.
Or the jackal mask, the hide-bound mask
that renders lovers identical with night.

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Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight

By Vachel Lindsay

(In Springfield, Illinois)

It is portentous, and a thing of state
That here at midnight, in our little town
A mourning figure walks, and will not rest,
Near the old court-house pacing up and down.

Or by his homestead, or in shadowed yards
He lingers where his children used to play,
Or through the market, on the well-worn stones
He stalks until the dawn-stars burn away.

A bronzed, lank man! His suit of ancient black,
A famous high top-hat and plain worn shawl
Make him the quaint great figure that men love,
The prairie-lawyer, master of us all.

He cannot sleep upon his hillside now.
He is among us:—as in times before!
And we who toss and lie awake for long
Breathe deep, and start, to see him pass the door.

His head is bowed. He thinks on men and kings.
Yea, when the sick world cries, how can he sleep?
Too many peasants fight, they know not why,
Too many homesteads in black terror weep.

The sins of all the war-lords burn his heart.
He sees the dreadnaughts scouring every main.
He carries on his shawl-wrapped shoulders now
The bitterness, the folly and the pain.

He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn
Shall come;—the shining hope of Europe free;
The league of sober folk, the Workers' Earth,
Bringing long peace to Cornland, Alp and Sea.

It breaks his heart that kings must murder still,
That all his hours of travail here for men

Seem yet in vain. And who will bring white peace
That he may sleep upon his hill again?

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Lincoln

By Vachel Lindsay

Would I might rouse the Lincoln in you all,
That which is gendered in the wilderness
From lonely prairies and God’s tenderness.
Imperial soul, star of a weedy stream,
Born where the ghosts of buffaloes still dream,
Whose spirit hoof-beats storm above his grave,
Above that breast of earth and prairie-fire—
Fire that freed the slave.

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Meeting Ourselves

By Vachel Lindsay

We met ourselves as we came back
As we hiked the trail from the north.
Our foot-prints mixed in the rainy path
Coming back and going forth.
The prints of my comrade’s hob-nailed shoes
And my tramp shoes mixed in the rain.
We had climbed for days and days to the North
And this was the sum of our gain:
We met ourselves as we came back,
And were happy in mist and rain.
Our old souls and our new souls
Met to salute and explain—
That a day shall be as a thousand years,
And a thousand years as a day.
The powers of a thousand dreaming skies
As we shouted along the trail of surprise
Were gathered in our play:
The purple skies of the South and the North,
The crimson skies of the South and the North,
Of tomorrow and yesterday.

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The Amaranth

By Vachel Lindsay

Ah, in the night, all music haunts me here. . . .
Is it for naught high Heaven cracks and yawns
And the tremendous Amaranth descends
Sweet with the glory of ten thousand dawns?

Does it not mean my God would have me say: —
“Whether you will or no, O city young,
Heaven will bloom like one great flower for you,
Flash and loom greatly all your marts among?”

Friends, I will not cease hoping though you weep.
Such things I see, and some of them shall come
Though now our streets are harsh and ashen-gray,
Though our strong youths are strident now, or dumb.
Friends, that sweet torn, that wonder-town, shall rise.
Naught can delay it. Though it may not be
Just as I dream, it comes at last I know
With streets like channels of an incense-sea.

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The Dandelion

By Vachel Lindsay

O dandelion, rich and haughty,
King of village flowers!
Each day is coronation time,
You have no humble hours.
I like to see you bring a troop
To beat the blue-grass spears,
To scorn the lawn-mower that would be
Like fate’s triumphant shears.
Your yellow heads are cut away,
It seems your reign is o’er.
By noon you raise a sea of stars
More golden than before.

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To Miss Vic

By John Gunter Lipe

I stand at the portal and knock,
And tearfully, prayerfully wait.
O! who will unfasten the lock,
And open the beautiful gate?

Forever and ever and ever,
Must I linger and suffer alone?
Are there none that are able to sever,
The fetters that keep me from home?

My spirit is lonely and weary,
I long for the beautiful streets.
The world is so chilly and dreary,
And bleeding and torn are my feet.

Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation.

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Bolivar

By Luis Lloréns Torres

translated from the Spanish by Muna Lee

Poet, soldier, statesman, hero, he stands—
Great, like the countries whose freedom he won;
He whom no country can claim as her son,
Though as his daughters were born many lands.

His was the valor of who bears a sword;
His was the courtesy of who wears a flower:
Entering salons, he laid by the sword;
Plunging in battles, he tossed away the flower.

The peaks of the Andes to him seemed to be
But exclamation points after his stride:
Soldier-poet he was; poet-soldier was he!

Each land that he freed
Was a soldier’s poem and a poet’s deed:
And he was crucified.

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Talent

By Layli Long Soldier

my first try I made a hit it dropped from morning gray the smallest shadow both wings slipped inward mid-

flight the man barked *Now* I shot again and again a third time with each arrow through the target I thought

was it luck or was it skill luck or skill as the last one fell

its awkward shape made me run there pulsing on the ground I was astounded by its size a gangly white goose

throbbed heaved its head my eyes dropped blood flowers opened in the snow of its neck behind my shoulder

stepping down from a yellow bus

children made their way across the field I shot once more to end it quickly close range its death did I do this to

spare the bird from suffering or to spare the children the sight my motives in humid cold yes my knuckles in

the cold steamed bright red

because on my stomach in grass in rubber boots pockets and vest I slid along with that hunter I did as he

directed from quiver my draw my black lashes in steely eyed release it felt good there it felt strong my breath in

autumn was an animal there I thought did I really do this did *I* really yet what difference is muscle is an

arrow powered upward or any flight to center when I did not hear it though I clearly mouthed poor thing poor

thing poor thing

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Haunted Houses

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

All houses wherein men have lived and died
Are haunted houses. Through the open doors
The harmless phantoms on their errands glide,
With feet that make no sound upon the floors.

We meet them at the door-way, on the stair,
Along the passages they come and go,
Impalpable impressions on the air,
A sense of something moving to and fro.

There are more guests at table than the hosts
Invited; the illuminated hall
Is thronged with quiet, inoffensive ghosts,
As silent as the pictures on the wall.

The stranger at my fireside cannot see
The forms I see, nor hear the sounds I hear;
He but perceives what is; while unto me
All that has been is visible and clear.

We have no title-deeds to house or lands;
Owners and occupants of earlier dates
From graves forgotten stretch their dusty hands,
And hold in mortmain still their old estates.

The spirit-world around this world of sense
Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere
Wafts through these earthly mists and vapours dense
A vital breath of more ethereal air.

Our little lives are kept in equipoise
By opposite attractions and desires;
The struggle of the instinct that enjoys,
And the more noble instinct that aspires.

These perturbations, this perpetual jar
Of earthly wants and aspirations high,
Come from the influence of an unseen star
An undiscovered planet in our sky.

And as the moon from some dark gate of cloud
Throws o’er the sea a floating bridge of light,
Across whose trembling planks our fancies crowd
Into the realm of mystery and night,—

So from the world of spirits there descends
A bridge of light, connecting it with this,
O’er whose unsteady floor, that sways and bends,
Wander our thoughts above the dark abyss.

Public domain

Hymn to the Night

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Aspasie, trillistos.

I heard the trailing garments of the Night
Sweep through her marble halls!
I saw her sable skirts all fringed with light
From the celestial walls!

I felt her presence, by its spell of might,
Stoop o’er me from above;
The calm, majestic presence of the Night,
As of the one I love.

I heard the sounds of sorrow and delight,
The manifold, soft chimes,
That fill the haunted chambers of the Night,
Like some old poet’s rhymes.

From the cool cisterns of the midnight air
My spirit drank repose;
The fountain of perpetual peace flows there,—
From those deep cisterns flows.

O holy Night! from thee I learn to bear
What man has borne before!

Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care
And they complain no more.

Peace! Peace! Orestes-like I breathe this prayer!
Descend with broad-winged flight,
The welcome, the thrice-prayed for, the most fair,
The best-beloved Night!

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Mezzo Cammin

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Half of my life is gone, and I have let
  The years slip from me and have not fulfilled
  The aspiration of my youth, to build
  Some tower of song with lofty parapet.
Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret
  Of restless passions that would not be stilled,
  But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,
  Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past
  Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,—
  A city in the twilight dim and vast,
With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,—
  And hear above me on the autumnal blast
  The cataract of Death far thundering from the heights.

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Snow-flakes

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Out of the bosom of the Air,
    Out of the cloud-folds of her garments shaken,
Over the woodlands brown and bare,
    Over the harvest-fields forsaken,
        Silent, and soft, and slow
        Descends the snow.

Even as our cloudy fancies take
Suddenly shape in some divine expression,
Even as the troubled heart doth make
In the white countenance confession,
The troubled sky reveals
The grief it feels.

This is the poem of the air,
Slowly in silent syllables recorded;
This is the secret of despair,
Long in its cloudy bosom hoarded,
Now whispered and revealed
To wood and field.

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Song

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Stay, stay at home, my heart, and rest;
Home-keeping hearts are happiest,
For those that wander they know not where
Are full of trouble and full of care;
    To stay at home is best.

Weary and homesick and distressed,
They wander east, they wander west,
And are baffled and beaten and blown about
By the winds of the wilderness of doubt;
    To stay at home is best.

Then stay at home, my heart, and rest;
The bird is safest in its nest;
O’er all that flutter their wings and fly
A hawk is hovering in the sky;
    To stay at home is best.

Public domain

The Arrow and the Song

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong,
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.

Public domain

The Children's Hour

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Between the dark and the daylight,
    When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,
    That is known as the Children's Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me
    The patter of little feet,
The sound of a door that is opened,
    And voices soft and sweet.

From my study I see in the lamplight,
    Descending the broad hall stair,
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,
    And Edith with golden hair.

A whisper, and then a silence:
    Yet I know by their merry eyes
They are plotting and planning together
    To take me by surprise.

A sudden rush from the stairway,
    A sudden raid from the hall!
By three doors left unguarded
    They enter my castle wall!

They climb up into my turret
    O'er the arms and back of my chair;
If I try to escape, they surround me;
    They seem to be everywhere.

They almost devour me with kisses,
    Their arms about me entwine,
Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen
    In his Mouse-Tower on the Rhine!

Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,
    Because you have scaled the wall,
Such an old mustache as I am
    Is not a match for you all!

I have you fast in my fortress,
And will not let you depart,
But put you down into the dungeon
In the round-tower of my heart.

And there will I keep you forever,
Yes, forever and a day,
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,
And moulder in dust away!

Public domain

The Cross of Snow

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

In the long, sleepless watches of the night,
  A gentle face — the face of one long dead —
  Looks at me from the wall, where round its head
  The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.
Here in this room she died; and soul more white
  Never through martyrdom of fire was led
  To its repose; nor can in books be read
  The legend of a life more benedight.
There is a mountain in the distant West
  That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines
  Displays a cross of snow upon its side.
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast
  These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes
  And seasons, changeless since the day she died.

Public domain

The Light of Stars

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The night is come, but not too soon;
  And sinking silently,
All silently, the little moon
  Drops down behind the sky.

There is no light in earth or heaven
  But the cold light of stars;
And the first watch of night is given
  To the red planet Mars.

Is it the tender star of love?
  The star of love and dreams?
O no! from that blue tent above,
  A hero’s armor gleams.

And earnest thoughts within me rise,
  When I behold afar,
Suspended in the evening skies,
  The shield of that red star.

O star of strength! I see thee stand
  And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailèd hand,
  And I am strong again.

Within my breast there is no light
  But the cold light of stars;
I give the first watch of the night
  To the red planet Mars.

The star of the unconquered will,
  He rises in my breast,
Serene, and resolute, and still,
  And calm, and self-possessed.

And thou, too, whosoe’er thou art,
  That readest this brief psalm,
As one by one thy hopes depart,
  Be resolute and calm.

O fear not in a world like this,
  And thou shalt know erelong,
Know how sublime a thing it is
  To suffer and be strong.

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The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The tide rises, the tide falls,
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;
Along the sea-sands damp and brown
The traveller hastens toward the town,
    And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
But the sea, the sea in the darkness calls;
The little waves, with their soft, white hands,
Efface the footprints in the sands,
    And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls
Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;
The day returns, but nevermore
Returns the traveller to the shore,
    And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Public domain

The Village Blacksmith

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Under a spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands,
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long;
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice
Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more,

How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling,—rejoicing,—sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night’s repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou hast taught!
Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought.

Public domain

Two Gates

By Denise Low

I look through glass and see a young woman

of twenty, washing dishes, and the window
turns into a painting. She is myself thirty years ago.
She holds the same blue bowls and brass teapot
I still own. I see her outline against lamplight;
she knows only her side of the pane. The porch
where I stand is empty. Sunlight fades. I hear
water run in the sink as she lowers her head,
blind to the future. She does not imagine I exist.

I step forward for a better look and she dissolves

into lumber and paint. A gate I passed through
to the next life loses shape. Once more I stand
squared into the present, among maple trees
and scissor-tailed birds, in a garden, almost
a mother to that faint, distant woman.

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Walking with My Delaware Grandfather

By Denise Low

Walking home I feel a presence following
and realize he is always there

that Native man with coal-black-hair who is
my grandfather. In my first memories

he is present, mostly wordless,
resident in the house where I was born.

My mother shows him the cleft in my chin
identical to his. I am swaddled

and blinking in the kitchen light. So
we are introduced. We never part.

Sometimes I forget he lodges in my house still
the bone-house where my heart beats.

I carry his mother's framework
a sturdy structure. I learn his birthright.

I hear his mother's teachings through
what my mother said of her:

She kept a pot of stew on the stove
all day for anyone to eat.

She never went to church but said
you could be a good person anyway.

She fed hoboes during the ‘30s,
her back porch a regular stop-over.

Every person has rights no matter
what color. Be respectful.

This son of hers, my grandfather,
still walks the streets with me.

Some twist of blood and heat still spark
across the time bridge. Here, listen:

Air draws through these lungs made from his.
His blood still pulses through this hand.

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A Lady

By Amy Lowell

You are beautiful and faded,
Like an old opera tune
Played upon a harpsichord;
Or like the sun-flooded silks
Of an eighteenth-century boudoir. In your eyes
Smoulder the fallen roses of outlived minutes,
And the perfume of your soul
Is vague and suffusing,
With the pungence of sealed spice-jars.
Your half-tones delight me,
And I grow mad with gazing
At your blent colors.

My vigor is a new-minted penny,
Which I cast at your feet.
Gather it up from the dust
That its sparkle may amuse you.

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From One Who Stays

By Amy Lowell

How empty seems the town now you are gone!
A wilderness of sad streets, where gaunt walls
Hide nothing to desire; sunshine falls
Eery, distorted, as it long had shone
On white, dead faces tombed in halls of stone.
The whir of motors, stricken through with calls
Of playing boys, floats up at intervals;
But all these noises blur to one long moan.
What quest is worth pursuing? And how strange
That other men still go accustomed ways!
I hate their interest in the things they do.
A spectre-horde repeating without change
An old routine. Alone I know the days
Are still-born, and the world stopped, lacking you.

Public domain

Interlude

By Amy Lowell

When I have baked white cakes
And grated green almonds to spread upon them;
When I have picked the green crowns from the strawberries
And piled them, cone-pointed, in a blue and yellow platter;
When I have smoothed the seam of the linen I have been working;
What then?
To-morrow it will be the same:
Cakes and strawberries,
And needles in and out of cloth.
If the sun is beautiful on bricks and pewter,
How much more beautiful is the moon,
Slanting down the gauffered branches of a plum-tree;
The moon,
Wavering across a bed of tulips;
The moon,
Still,
Upon your face.
You shine, Beloved,
You and the moon.
But which is the reflection?
The clock is striking eleven.
I think, when we have shut and barred the door,
The night will be dark
Outside.

Public domain

September, 1918

By Amy Lowell

This afternoon was the colour of water falling through sunlight;
The trees glittered with the tumbling of leaves;
The sidewalks shone like alleys of dropped maple leaves,
And the houses ran along them laughing out of square, open windows.
Under a tree in the park,
Two little boys, lying flat on their faces,
Were carefully gathering red berries
To put in a pasteboard box.
Some day there will be no war,
Then I shall take out this afternoon
And turn it in my fingers,
And remark the sweet taste of it upon my palate,
And note the crisp variety of its flights of leaves.
To-day I can only gather it
And put it into my lunch-box,
For I have time for nothing
But the endeavour to balance myself
Upon a broken world.

Public domain

The Little Garden

By Amy Lowell

A little garden on a bleak hillside
 Where deep the heavy, dazzling mountain snow
 Lies far into the spring. The sun's pale glow
Is scarcely able to melt patches wide
About the single rose bush. All denied
 Of nature's tender ministries. But no, —
 For wonder-working faith has made it blow
With flowers many hued and starry-eyed.
 Here sleeps the sun long, idle summer hours;
Here butterflies and bees fare far to rove
 Amid the crumpled leaves of poppy flowers;
Here four o'clocks, to the passionate night above
 Fling whiffs of perfume, like pale incense showers.
A little garden, loved with a great love!

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Rouen, Place de la Pucelle

By Maria White Lowell

Here blooms the legend, fed by Time and Chance,
  Fresh as the morning, though with centuries old,
The whitest lily on the shield of France,
    With heart of virgin gold.

Along the square she moved, sweet Joan of Arc,
  With face more pallid than a daylit star,
Half-seen, half-doubted, while before her dark
    Stretched the array of war.

Swift passed the battle-smoke of lying breath
  From off her path, as if a wind had blown,
Showing no faithless King, but righteous Death
    On the low wooden throne.

He would reward her: she who meekly wore
  Alike the gilded mail and peasant gown,
As meekly now received one honor more,
    The formless, fiery crown.

A white dove trembled up the heated air,
  And in the opening zenith found its goal;
Soft as a downward feather, dropped a prayer
    For each repentant soul.

Public domain

It’s the Little Towns I Like

By Thomas Lux

It’s the little towns I like
with their little mills making ratchets
and stanchions, elastic web,
spindles, you
name it. I like them in New England,
America, particularly-providing
bad jobs good enough to live on, to live in
families even: kindergarten,
church suppers, beach umbrellas … The towns
are real, so fragile in their loneliness
a flood could come along
(and floods have) and cut them in two,
in half. There is no mayor,
the town council’s not prepared
for this, three of the four policemen
are stranded on their roofs … and it doesn’t stop
raining. The mountain
is so thick with water parts of it just slide
down on the heifers—soggy, suicidal—
in the pastures below. It rains, it rains
in these towns and, because
there’s no other way, your father gets in a rowboat
so he can go to work.

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Tarantulas on the Lifebuoy

By Thomas Lux

For some semitropical reason
when the rains fall
relentlessly they fall

into swimming pools, these otherwise
bright and scary
arachnids. They can swim
a little, but not for long

and they can't climb the ladder out.
They usually drown—but
if you want their favor,
if you believe there is justice,
a reward for not loving

the death of ugly
and even dangerous (the eel, hog snake,
rats) creatures, if

you believe these things, then
you would leave a lifebuoy
or two in your swimming pool at night.

And in the morning
you would haul ashore
the huddled, hairy survivors

and escort them
back to the bush, and know,
be assured that at least these saved,
as individuals, would not turn up

again someday
in your hat, drawer,
or the tangled underworld

of your socks, and that even—
when your belief in justice
merges with your belief in dreams—
they may tell the others

in a sign language
four times as subtle
and complicated as man's

that you are good,
that you love them,
that you would save them again.

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The People of the Other Village

By Thomas Lux

hate the people of this village
and would nail our hats
to our heads for refusing in their presence to remove them
or staple our hands to our foreheads
for refusing to salute them
if we did not hurt them first: mail them packages of rats,
mix their flour at night with broken glass.
We do this, they do that.
They peel the larynx from one of our brothers' throats.
We devein one of their sisters.
The quicksand pits they built were good.
Our amputation teams were better.
We trained some birds to steal their wheat.
They sent to us exploding ambassadors of peace.
They do this, we do that.
We canceled our sheep imports.
They no longer bought our blankets.
We mocked their greatest poet
and when that had no effect
we parodied the way they dance
which did cause pain, so they, in turn, said our God
was leprous, hairless.
We do this, they do that.
Ten thousand (10,000) years, ten thousand
(10,000) brutal, beautiful years.

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The Larger

By Joanie Mackowski

I don't know how it happened, but I fell—
and I was immense, one dislocated arm
wedged between two buildings. I felt some ribs
had broken, perhaps a broken neck, too;
I couldn't speak. My dress caught bunched
about my thighs, and where my glasses shattered
there'd spread something like a seacoast, or maybe
it was a port. Where my hair tangled with power lines
I felt a hot puddle of blood.
I must have passed out,
but when I woke, a crew of about fifty
was building a winding stairway beside my breast
and buttressing a platform on my sternum.
I heard, as through cotton, the noise of hammers,
circular saws, laughter, and some radio
droning songs about love. Out the corner
of one eye (I could open one eye a bit) I saw
my pocketbook, its contents scattered, my lipstick's
toppled silo glinting out of reach.
And then, waving a tiny flashlight, a man
entered my ear. I felt his boots sloshing
the blood trickling there. He never came out.
So some went looking, with flares, dogs, dynamite
even: they burst my middle ear and found
my skull, its cavern crammed with dark matter
like a cross between a fungus and a cloud.
They never found his body, though. And they never
found or tried to find an explanation,
I think, for me; they didn't seem to need one.
Even now my legs subdue that dangerous
sea, the water bright enough to cut
the skin, where a lighthouse, perched on the tip
of my great toe, each eight seconds rolls
another flawless pearl across the waves.
It keeps most ships from wrecking against my feet.
On clear days, people stand beside the light;

they watch the waves' blue heads slip up and down
and scan for landmarks on the facing shore.

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Ars Poetica

By Archibald MacLeish

A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit,

Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless
As the flight of birds.

*

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs.

*

A poem should be equal to:
Not true.

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean
But be.

Public domain

The Only Mexican

By David Tomas Martinez

The only Mexican that ever was Mexican, fought in the revolution
and drank nightly, and like all machos, crawled into work crudo,

letting his breath twirl, then clap and sing before sandpaper
juiced the metal. The only Mexican to never sit in a Catholic pew

was born on Halloween, and ate his lunch wrapped in foil against
the fence with the other Mexicans. They fixed old Fords where my

grandfather worked for years, him and the welder Juan wagered
each year on who would return first to the Yucatan. Neither did.

When my aunts leave, my dad paces the living room and then rests,
like a jaguar who once drank rain off the leaves of Cecropia trees,

but now caged, bends his paw on a speaker to watch crowds pass.
He asks me to watch grandpa, which means, for the day; in town

for two weeks, I have tried my best to avoid this. Many times he will swear,
and many times grandpa will ask to get in and out of bed, want a sweater,

he will ask the time, he will use the toilet, frequently ask for beer,
about dinner, when the Padres play, por que no novelas, about bed.

He will ask about his house, grandma, to sit outside, he will question
while answering, he will smirk, he will invent languages while tucked in bed.

He will bump the table, tap the couch, he will lose his slipper, wedging it in
the wheel of his chair, like a small child trapped in a well, everyone will care.

He will cry without tears—a broken carburetor of sobs. When I speak
Spanish, he shakes his head, and reminds me, he is the only Mexican.

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Fiddler Jones

By Edgar Lee Masters

The earth keeps some vibration going
There in your heart, and that is you.
And if the people find you can fiddle,
Why, fiddle you must, for all your life.
What do you see, a harvest of clover?
Or a meadow to walk through to the river?
The wind's in the corn; you rub your hands
For beeves hereafter ready for market;
Or else you hear the rustle of skirts
Like the girls when dancing at Little Grove.
To Cooney Potter a pillar of dust
Or whirling leaves meant ruinous drouth;
They looked to me like Red-Head Sammy
Stepping it off, to "Toor-a-Loor."
How could I till my forty acres
Not to speak of getting more,
With a medley of horns, bassoons and piccolos
Stirred in my brain by crows and robins
And the creak of a wind-mill—only these?
And I never started to plow in my life
That some one did not stop in the road
And take me away to a dance or picnic.
I ended up with forty acres;
I ended up with a broken fiddle—
And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories,
And not a single regret.

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Lucinda Matlock

By Edgar Lee Masters

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.
We were married and lived together for seventy years,
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,
Eight of whom we lost
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,
I made the garden, and for holiday
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,
And many a flower and medicinal weed —
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.
At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,
And passed to a sweet repose.
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you —
It takes life to love Life.

Public domain

Mrs. Kessler

By Edgar Lee Masters

Mr. Kessler, you know, was in the army,
And he drew six dollars a month as a pension,
And stood on the corner talking politics,
Or sat at home reading Grant's *Memoirs*;
And I supported the family by washing,
Learning the secrets of all the people
From their curtains, counterpanes, shirts and skirts.
For things that are new grow old at length,
They're replaced with better or none at all:
People are prospering or falling back.
And rents and patches widen with time;
No thread or needle can pace decay,
And there are stains that baffle soap,
And there are colors that run in spite of you,
Blamed though you are for spoiling a dress.
Handkerchiefs, napery, have their secrets
The laundress, Life, knows all about it.
And I, who went to all the funerals
Held in Spoon River, swear I never
Saw a dead face without thinking it looked
Like something washed and ironed.

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Respiration

By Jamaal May

A lot of it lives in the trachea, you know.
But not so much that you won't need more muscle:
the diaphragm, a fist clenching at the bottom.
Inhale. So many of us are breathless,
you know, like me
kneeling to collect the pottery shards
of a house plant my elbow has nudged
into oblivion. What if I sigh,
and the black earth beneath me scatters
like insects running from my breath?
Am I a god then? Am I insane
because I worry about the disassembling of earth
regularly? I walk more softly now

into gardens or up the steps of old houses
with impatiens stuffed in their window boxes.
When it's you standing there with a letter
or voice or face full of solemn news,
will you hold your breath before you knock?

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There Are Birds Here

By Jamaal May

For Detroit

There are birds here,
so many birds here
is what I was trying to say
when they said those birds were metaphors
for what is trapped
between buildings
and buildings. No.
The birds are here
to root around for bread
the girl's hands tear
and toss like confetti. No,
I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,
I said confetti, and no
not the confetti
a tank can make of a building.
I mean the confetti
a boy can't stop smiling about
and no his smile isn't much
like a skeleton at all. And no
his neighborhood is not like a war zone.
I am trying to say
his neighborhood
is as tattered and feathered
as anything else,
as shadow pierced by sun
and light parted
by shadow-dance as anything else,
but they won't stop saying
how lovely the ruins,
how ruined the lovely
children must be in that birdless city.

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The Art Room

By Shara McCallum

for my sisters

Because we did not have threads
of turquoise, silver, and gold,
we could not sew a sun nor sky.
And our hands became balls of fire.
And our arms spread open like wings.

Because we had no chalk or pastels,
no toad, forest, or morning-grass slats
of paper, we had no colour
for creatures. So we squatted
and sprang, squatted and sprang.

Four young girls, plaits heavy
on our backs, our feet were beating
drums, drawing rhythms from the floor;
our mouths became woodwinds;
our tongues touched teeth and were reeds.

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What the Oracle Said

By Shara McCallum

You will leave your home:
nothing will hold you.
You will wear dresses of gold; skins
of silver, copper, and bronze.
The sky above you will shift in meaning
each time you think you understand.
You will spend a lifetime chipping away layers
of flesh. The shadow of your scales
will always remain. You will be marked
by sulphur and salt.
You will bathe endlessly in clear streams and fail
to rid yourself of that scent.
Your feet will never be your own.
Stone will be your path.
Storms will follow in your wake,
destroying all those who take you in.
You will desert your children
kill your lovers and devour their flesh.
You will love no one
but the wind and ache of your bones.
Neither will love you in return.
With age, your hair will grow matted and dull,
your skin will gape and hang in long folds,
your eyes will cease to shine.
But nothing will be enough.
The sea will never take you back.

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A January Dandelion

By George Marion McClellan

All Nashville is a chill. And everywhere
Like desert sand, when the winds blow,
There is each moment sifted through the air,
A powdered blast of January snow.
O! thoughtless Dandelion, to be misled
By a few warm days to leave thy natural bed,
Was folly growth and blooming over soon.
And yet, thou blasted yellow-coated gem,
Full many a heart has but a common boon
With thee, now freezing on thy slender stem.
When the heart has bloomed by the touch of love’s warm breath
Then left and chilling snow is sifted in,
It still may beat but there is blast and death
To all that blooming life that might have been.

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The Feet of Judas

By George Marion McClellan

Christ washed the feet of Judas!
The dark and evil passions of his soul,
His secret plot, and sordidness complete,
His hate, his purposing, Christ knew the whole.
And still in love he stooped and washed his feet.

Christ washed the feet of Judas!
Yet all his lurking sin was bare to him,
His bargain with the priest, and more than this,
In Olivet, beneath the moonlight dim,
Aforehand knew and felt his treacherous kiss.

Christ washed the feet of Judas!
And so ineffable his love ’twas meet,
That pity fill his great forgiving heart,
And tenderly to wash the traitor’s feet,
Who in his Lord had basely sold his part.

Christ washed the feet of Judas!
And thus a girded servant, self-abased,
Taught that no wrong this side the gate of heaven
Was ever too great to wholly be effaced,
And though unasked, in spirit be forgiven.

And so if we have ever felt the wrong
Of Trampled rights, of caste, it matters not,
What e’er the soul has felt or suffered long,
Oh, heart! this one thing should not be forgot:
Christ washed the feet of Judas.

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We're Human Beings

By Jill McDonough

That's why we're here, said Julio Lugo
to the *Globe*. Sox fans booed
poor Lugo, booed his at-bat after
he dropped the ball in the pivotal fifth.

That ball, I got to it, I just
couldn't come up with it.

Lugo wants you to know
he is fast: a slower player
wouldn't even get close
enough to get booed. Lugo
wants you to know he's only
human: *We're human beings.*
That's why we're here. If not,

I would have wings.
I'd be beside God right now.
I'd be an angel.

But I'm not an angel.
I'm a human being that lives right here.

Next day, all
is forgiven. Lugo's home run, Lugo's
sweet comment to the press.

I wanted to make a poster like the ones that say
It's my birthday! or First Time at Fenway! or, pathetic, *ESPN.*
Posterboard, permanent marker to say *Lugo: me, too.*
I'm a human being that lives right here, decided
it's too esoteric, too ephemeral a reference, but it's true:
Oh, Lugo, Julio Lugo, I'm here with you.

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Nothing to Do

By James Ephraim McGirt

The fields are white,
    The laborers are few;
Yet say the idle,
    There’s nothing to do.

Jails are crowded,
    In Sunday Schools few;
We still complain
    There’s nothing to do.

Drunkards are dying,
    Your sons, it is true;
Mothers’ arms folded,
    With nothing to do.

Heathens are dying,
    Their blood falls on you;
How can you people
    Find nothing to do?

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After the Winter

By Claude McKay

Some day, when trees have shed their leaves
    And against the morning's white
The shivering birds beneath the eaves
    Have sheltered for the night,
We'll turn our faces southward, love,
    Toward the summer isle
Where bamboos spire the shafted grove
    And wide-mouthed orchids smile.

And we will seek the quiet hill
    Where towers the cotton tree,
And leaps the laughing crystal rill,
    And works the droning bee.
And we will build a cottage there
    Beside an open glade,
With black-ribbed blue-bells blowing near,
    And ferns that never fade.

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I Shall Return

By Claude McKay

I shall return again; I shall return
To laugh and love and watch with wonder-eyes
At golden noon the forest fires burn,
Wafting their blue-black smoke to sapphire skies.
I shall return to loiter by the streams
That bathe the brown blades of the bending grasses,
And realize once more my thousand dreams
Of waters rushing down the mountain passes.
I shall return to hear the fiddle and fife
Of village dances, dear delicious tunes
That stir the hidden depths of native life,
Stray melodies of dim remembered runes.
I shall return, I shall return again,
To ease my mind of long, long years of pain.

Public domain

If We Must Die

By Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Public domain

My House

By Claude McKay

For this peculiar tint that paints my house
Peculiar in an alien atmosphere
Where other houses wear a kindred hue,
I have a stirring always very rare
And romance-making in my ardent blood,
That channels through my body like a flood.

I know the dark delight of being strange,
The penalty of difference in the crowd,
The loneliness of wisdom among fools,
Yet never have I felt but very proud,
Though I have suffered agonies of hell,
Of living in my own peculiar cell.

There is an exaltation of man's life,
His hidden life, that he alone can feel.
The blended fires that heat his veins within,
Shaping his metals into finest steel,
Are elements from his own native earth,
That the wise gods bestowed on him at birth.

Oh each man's mind contains an unknown realm
Walled in from other men however near,
An unimagined in their highest flights
Of comprehension or of vision clear;
A realm where he withdraws to contemplate
Infinity and his own finite state.

Thence he may sometimes catch a god-like glimpse
Of mysteries that seems beyond life's bar;
Thence he may hurt his little shaft at heaven
And bring down accidentally a star,
And drink its foamy dust like sparkling wine
And echo accents of the laugh divine.

Then he may fall into a drunken sleep
And wake up in his same house painted blue
Or white or green or red or brown or black—

His house, his own, whatever be the hue.
But things for him will not be what they seem
To average men since he has dreamt his dream!

Public domain

To One Coming North

By Claude McKay

At first you'll joy to see the playful snow,
  Like white moths trembling on the tropic air,
Or waters of the hills that softly flow
  Gracefully falling down a shining stair.

And when the fields and streets are covered white
  And the wind-worried void is chilly, raw,
Or underneath a spell of heat and light
  The cheerless frozen spots begin to thaw,

Like me you'll long for home, where birds' glad song
  Means flowering lanes and leas and spaces dry,
And tender thoughts and feelings fine and strong,
  Beneath a vivid silver-flecked blue sky.

But oh! more than the changeless southern isles,
  When Spring has shed upon the earth her charm,
You'll love the Northland wreathed in golden smiles
  By the miraculous sun turned glad and warm.

Public domain

When I Have Passed Away

By Claude McKay

When I have passed away and am forgotten,
And no one living can recall my face,
When under alien sod my bones lie rotten
With not a tree or stone to mark the place;
Perchance a pensive youth, with passion burning,
For olden verse that smacks of love and wine,
The musty pages of old volumes turning,
May light upon a little song of mine,
And he may softly hum the tune and wonder
Who wrote the verses in the long ago;
Or he may sit him down awhile to ponder
Upon the simple words that touch him so.

Public domain

When I Stutter

By Elizabeth Meade

Sometimes, m's elongate,
grow long tongues to taste the last bit
of breath my body has to offer.

Sometimes, i's echo
like the harsh cries of a seagull,
try to fly far away from the nest of my mouth
only to circle the ocean of my uncompleted sentence.

Sometimes, my breath becomes caught
in the chamber of my throat, my head cocked back
until the word —at last— launches out of my mouth like a bullet.
or a punch.

(Sometimes, my soft, raspy voice
provides no balm to soothe the ear.)

Sometimes, I remember Daddy said my voice
sounds like Mommy's. I rejoice then, as syllables
trip over one another like eager children
rushing toward the playground
with all the freedom her voice no longer has.

All that remains is the deep ache in my throat,
vocal cords like mud stomped flat
under the feet of my rowdy utterances.

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Ball’s Bluff

By Herman Melville

A Reverie.
(October, 1861.)

One noonday, at my window in the town,
I saw a sight—saddest that eyes can see—
Young soldiers marching lustily
Unto the wars,
With fifes, and flags in mottoed pageantry;
While all the porches, walks, and doors
Were rich with ladies cheering royally.

They moved like Juny morning on the wave,
Their hearts were fresh as clover in its prime
(It was the breezy summer time),
Life throbbed so strong,
How should they dream that Death in a rosy clime
Would come to thin their shining throng?
Youth feels immortal, like the gods sublime.

Weeks passed; and at my window, leaving bed,
By night I mused, of easeful sleep bereft,
On those brave boys (Ah War! thy theft);
Some marching feet
Found pause at last by cliffs Potomac cleft;
Wakeful I mused, while in the street
Far footfalls died away till none were left.

Public domain

Dupont’s Round Fight

By Herman Melville

(November, 1861.)

In time and measure perfect moves
All Art whose aim is sure;
Evolving rhyme and stars divine
Have rules, and they endure.

Nor less the Fleet that warred for Right,
And, warring so, prevailed,
In geometric beauty curved,
And in an orbit sailed.

The rebel at Port Royal felt
The Unity overawe,
And rued the spell. A type was here,
And victory of Law.

Public domain

Inscription

By Herman Melville

For Marye’s Heights, Fredericksburg

To them who crossed the flood
And climbed the hill, with eyes
    Upon the heavenly flag intent,
    And through the deathful tumult went
Even unto death: to them this Stone—
Erect, where they were overthrown—
    Of more than victory the monument.

Public domain

Shiloh: A Requiem (April, 1862)

By Herman Melville

Skimming lightly, wheeling still,
The swallows fly low
Over the field in clouded days,
The forest-field of Shiloh—
Over the field where April rain
Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain
Through the pause of night
That followed the Sunday fight
Around the church of Shiloh—
The church so lone, the log-built one,
That echoed to many a parting groan
And natural prayer
Of dying foemen mingled there—
Foemen at morn, but friends at eve—
Fame or country least their care:
(What like a bullet can undeceive!)
But now they lie low,
While over them the swallows skim,
And all is hushed at Shiloh.

Public domain

The Maldive Shark

By Herman Melville

About the Shark, phlegmatical one,
Pale sot of the Maldive sea,
The sleek little pilot-fish, azure and slim,
How alert in attendance be.
From his saw-pit of mouth, from his charnel of maw
They have nothing of harm to dread,
But liquidly glide on his ghastly flank
Or before his Gorgonian head;
Or lurk in the port of serrated teeth
In white triple tiers of glittering gates,
And there find a haven when peril’s abroad,
An asylum in jaws of the Fates!
They are friends; and friendly they guide him to prey,
Yet never partake of the treat—
Eyes and brains to the dotard lethargic and dull,
Pale ravener of horrible meat.

Public domain

The March into Virginia

By Herman Melville

Ending in the First Manassas

(July, 1861)

Did all the lets and bars appear
To every just or larger end,
Whence should come the trust and cheer?
Youth must its ignorant impulse lend—
Age finds place in the rear.
All wars are boyish, and are fought by boys,
The champions and enthusiasts of the state:
Turbid ardors and vain joys
Not barrenly abate—
Stimulants to the power mature,
Preparatives of fate.
Who here forecasteth the event?
What heart but spurns at precedent
And warnings of the wise,
Contemned foreclosures of surprise?
The banners play, the bugles call,
The air is blue and prodigal.
No berrying party, pleasure-wooed,
No picnic party in the May,
Ever went less loth than they
Into that leafy neighborhood.

In Bacchic glee they file toward Fate,
Moloch’s uninitiate;
Expectancy, and glad surmise
Of battle’s unknown mysteries.
All they feel is this: ’tis glory,
A rapture sharp, though transitory,
Yet lasting in belaureled story.
So they gayly go to fight,
Chatting left and laughing right.
But some who this blithe mood present,
As on in lightsome files they fare,
Shall die experienced ere three days are spent—
Perish, enlightened by the vollied glare;
Or shame survive, and, like to adamant,
The throe of Second Manassas share.

Public domain

The Stone Fleet

By Herman Melville

An Old Sailor's Lament.

(December, 1861.)

I have a feeling for those ships,
Each worn and ancient one,
With great bluff bows, and broad in the beam;
Ay, it was unkindly done.
But so they serve the Obsolete—
Even so, Stone Fleet!

You'll say I'm doting; do but think
I scudded round the Horn in one—
The Tenedos, a glorious
Good old craft as ever run—
Sunk (how all unmeet!)
With the Old Stone Fleet.

An India ship of fame was she,
Spices and shawls and fans she bore;
A whaler when her wrinkles came—
Turned off! till, spent and poor,
Her bones were sold (escheat)!
Ah! Stone Fleet.

Four were erst patrician keels
(Names attest what families be),
The Kensington, and Richmond too,

Leonidas, and Lee:

But now they have their seat

With the Old Stone Fleet.

To scuttle them—a pirate deed—

Sack them, and dismast;

They sunk so slow, they died so hard,

But gurgling dropped at last.

Their ghosts in gales repeat

Woe's us, Stone Fleet!

And all for naught. The waters pass—

Currents will have their way;

Nature is nobody's ally; 'tis well;

The harbor is bettered—will stay.

A failure, and complete,

Was your Old Stone Fleet.

Public domain

Grace

By Orlando Ricardo Menes

We cannot buy it in bulk at Trader Joe's,
Swap it for gold, or hoard shares of Grace, Inc.,
To hedge against bad luck. We acquire it
Without contract, promissory notes, or IOUs,
Neither codicils nor fine print. We gather
Grace safe from litigation or severance,
And though we might breach the strictures of creed,
It cannot be forfeited or suspended. Rather,
Grace is asymmetric, parabolic, skewed to love,
Immanent and absolute, but also unpredictable
As quantum particles, both here and there,
Both full *and* empty, so it might arrive
Inopportunely and thus slip under hope,
Upsetting the earnest prayer, teasing our faith,
Like some rain bands, copious cumuli,
That appear astray, unbidden, in stagnant skies
To drench at last the drought-scourged earth.

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Infelix

By Adah Isaacs Menken

Where is the promise of my years;
    Once written on my brow?
Ere errors, agonies and fears
Brought with them all that speaks in tears,
Ere I had sunk beneath my peers;
    Where sleeps that promise now?

Naught lingers to redeem those hours,
    Still, still to memory sweet!
The flowers that bloomed in sunny bowers
Are withered all; and Evil towers
Supreme above her sister powers
    Of Sorrow and Deceit.

I look along the columned years,
    And see Life's riven fane,
Just where it fell, amid the jeers
Of scornful lips, whose mocking sneers,
For ever hiss within mine ears
    To break the sleep of pain.

I can but own my life is vain
    A desert void of peace;
I missed the goal I sought to gain,
I missed the measure of the strain
That lulls Fame's fever in the brain,
    And bids Earth's tumult cease.

Myself! alas for theme so poor
    A theme but rich in Fear;
I stand a wreck on Error's shore,
A spectre not within the door,
A houseless shadow evermore,
    An exile lingering here.

Public domain

A Boy Juggling a Soccer Ball

By Christopher Merrill

after practice: right foot
to left foot, stepping forward and back,
to right foot and left foot,
and left foot up to his thigh, holding
it on his thigh as he twists
around in a circle, until it rolls
down the inside of his leg,
like a tickle of sweat, not catching
and tapping on the soft
side of his foot, and juggling
once, twice, three times,
hopping on one foot like a jump-roper
in the gym, now trapping
and holding the ball in midair,
balancing it on the instep
of his weak left foot, stepping forward
and forward and back, then
lifting it overhead until it hangs there;
and squaring off his body,
he keeps the ball aloft with a nudge
of his neck, heading it
from side to side, softer and softer,
like a dying refrain,
until the ball, slowing, balances
itself on his hairline,
the hot sun and sweat filling his eyes
as he jiggles this way
and that, then flicking it up gently,
hunching his shoulders
and tilting his head back, he traps it
in the hollow of his neck,
and bending at the waist, sees his shadow,
his dangling T-shirt, the bent
blades of brown grass in summer heat;
and relaxing, the ball slipping

down his back . . . and missing his foot.

   He wheels around, he marches
over the ball, as if it were a rock
   he stumbled into, and pressing
his left foot against it, he pushes it
   against the inside of his right
until it pops into the air, is heeled
   over his head—the rainbow!—
and settles on his extended thigh before
   rolling over his knee and down
his shin, so he can juggle it again
   from his left foot to his right foot
—and right foot to left foot to thigh—
   as he wanders, on the last day
of summer, around the empty field.

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Mansplaining

By Jennifer Militello

Dear sir, your air of authority
leaves me lost. Eases me from
a place of ease. Contracts with
my contradictions to take from me
a place. Autopilots my autobiography.
Frightens my fright. Sighs with
my breath. Wins at my race.
Your certainty has me curtained.
Your nerve has me nervous. Your
childhood has me childlike and
your nastiness nests in my belfry
like a hawk. You are beyond
and above my slice of sky, peach
as a pie, bourbon as its pit. You are
spit and vinegar while I sour
in my bowl. You bowl me over
while I tread lightly on
my feet. You walk on water
while I sink. You witness me,
fisherman, boat on the lake,
while I struggle and burble and brittle
and drop. You wink at me and
I must relate. I close my eyes
to erase you and you are written
in my lids. A litmus test. A form
of lair. God with three days
of facial growth and an old bouquet
for a face. Soap and water for
a brain. I have no handsome
answer. I have no pillar of salt
or shoulder to look over. I have
no feather to weigh. I have no
bubble to burst. I am less
to myself, a character in a drama,
a drumbeat, a benevolence, a
blight. All parts of me say shoot

on sight. Aim for an artery
or organ. Good night.

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Afternoon on a Hill

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

I will be the gladdest thing
    Under the sun!
I will touch a hundred flowers
    And not pick one.

I will look at cliffs and clouds
    With quiet eyes,
Watch the wind bow down the grass,
    And the grass rise.

And when lights begin to show
    Up from the town,
I will mark which must be mine,
    And then start down!

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Dirge Without Music

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.
So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
A formula, a phrase remains,—but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,—
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

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Elegy Before Death

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

There will be rose and rhododendron
  When you are dead and under ground;
Still will be heard from white syringas
  Heavy with bees, a sunny sound;

Still will the tamaracks be raining
  After the rain has ceased, and still
Will there be robins in the stubble,
  Brown sheep upon the warm green hill.

Spring will not ail nor autumn falter;
  Nothing will know that you are gone,
Saving alone some sullen plough-land
  None but yourself sets foot upon;

Saving the may-weed and the pig-weed
  Nothing will know that you are dead,—
These, and perhaps a useless wagon
  Standing beside some tumbled shed.

Oh, there will pass with your great passing
  Little of beauty not your own,—
Only the light from common water,
  Only the grace from simple stone!

Public domain

I shall forget you presently, my dear (Sonnet IV)

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

I shall forget you presently, my dear,
So make the most of this, your little day,
Your little month, your little half a year
Ere I forget, or die, or move away,
And we are done forever; by and by
I shall forget you, as I said, but now,
If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
I will protest you with my favorite vow.
I would indeed that love were longer-lived,
And vows were not so brittle as they are,
But so it is, and nature has contrived
To struggle on without a break thus far,—
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking.

Public domain

Low-Tide

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

These wet rocks where the tide has been,
  Barnacled white and weeded brown
And slimed beneath to a beautiful green,
  These wet rocks where the tide went down
Will show again when the tide is high
  Faint and perilous, far from shore,
No place to dream, but a place to die,—
  The bottom of the sea once more.
There was a child that wandered through
  A giant's empty house all day,—
House full of wonderful things and new,
  But no fit place for a child to play.

Public domain

Never May the Fruit Be Picked

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

Never, never may the fruit be plucked from the bough
And gathered into barrels.
He that would eat of love must eat it where it hangs.
Though the branches bend like reeds,
Though the ripe fruit splash in the grass or wrinkle on the tree,
He that would eat of love may bear away with him
Only what his belly can hold,
Nothing in the apron,
Nothing in the pockets.
Never, never may the fruit be gathered from the bough
And harvested in barrels.
The winter of love is a cellar of empty bins,
In an orchard soft with rot.

Public domain

Recuerdo

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
We hailed, “Good morrow, mother!” to a shawl-covered head,
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
And she wept, “God bless you!” for the apples and pears,
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

Public domain

Souvenir

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

Just a rainy day or two

In a windy tower,

That was all I had of you—

Saving half an hour.

Marred by greeting passing groups

In a cinder walk,

Near some naked blackberry hoops

Dim with purple chalk.

I remember three or four

Things you said in spite,

And an ugly coat you wore,

Plaided black and white.

Just a rainy day or two

And a bitter word.

Why do I remember you

As a singing bird?

Public domain

Why We Oppose Pockets for Women

By Alice Duer Miller

1. Because pockets are not a natural right.

2. Because the great majority of women do not want pockets. If they did they would have them.

3. Because whenever women have had pockets they have not used them.

4. Because women are required to carry enough things as it is, without the additional burden of pockets.

5. Because it would make dissension between husband and wife as to whose pockets were to be filled.

6. Because it would destroy man’s chivalry toward woman, if he did not have to carry all her things in his pockets.

7. Because men are men, and women are women. We must not fly in the face of nature.

8. Because pockets have been used by men to carry tobacco, pipes, whiskey flasks, chewing gum and compromising letters. We see no reason to suppose that women would use them more wisely.

Public domain

Advice from La Llorona

By Deborah A. Miranda

—a found poem

Each grief has its unique side.
Choose the one that appeals to you.
Go gently.
Your body needs energy to repair the amputation.
Humor phantom pain.

Your brain cells are soaked with salt;
connections fail unexpectedly and often.
Ask for help.
Accept help.

Read your grief like the daily newspaper:
headlines may have information you need.
Scream. Drop-kick the garbage can across the street.

Don’t feel guilty if you have a good time.
Don’t act as if you haven’t been hit by a Mack Truck.
Do things a little differently
but don’t make a lot of changes.
Revel in contradiction.

Talk to the person who died.
Give her a piece of your mind.

Try to touch someone at least once a day.
Approach grief with determination.
Pretend the finish line doesn’t keep receding.
Lean into the pain.
You can’t outrun it.

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The Bear

By Susan Mitchell

Tonight the bear
comes to the orchard and, balancing
on her hind legs, dances under the apple trees,
hanging onto their boughs,
dragging their branches down to earth.
Look again. It is not the bear
but some afterimage of her
like the car I once saw in the driveway
after the last guest had gone.
Snow pulls the apple boughs to the ground.
Whatever moves in the orchard—
heavy, lumbering—is clear as wind.

The bear is long gone.
Drunk on apples,
she banged over the trash cans that fall night,
then skidded downstream. By now
she must be logged in for the winter.
Unless she is choosy.
I imagine her as very choosy,
sniffing at the huge logs, pawing them, trying
each one on for size,
but always coming out again.

Until tonight.
Tonight sap freezes under her skin.
Her breath leaves white apples in the air.
As she walks she dozes,
listening to the sound of axes chopping wood.
Somewhere she can never catch up to
trees are falling. Chips pile up like snow.
When she does find it finally,
the log draws her in as easily as a forest,
and for a while she continues to see,
just ahead of her, the moon
trapped like a salmon in the ice.

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The Delight Song of Tsoai-talee

By N. Scott Momaday

I am a feather on the bright sky
I am the blue horse that runs in the plain
I am the fish that rolls, shining, in the water
I am the shadow that follows a child
I am the evening light, the lustre of meadows
I am an eagle playing with the wind
I am a cluster of bright beads
I am the farthest star
I am the cold of dawn
I am the roaring of the rain
I am the glitter on the crust of the snow
I am the long track of the moon in a lake
I am a flame of four colors
I am a deer standing away in the dusk
I am a field of sumac and the pomme blanche
I am an angle of geese in the winter sky
I am the hunger of a young wolf
I am the whole dream of these things

You see, I am alive, I am alive
I stand in good relation to the earth
I stand in good relation to the gods
I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful
I stand in good relation to the daughter of Tsen-tainte
You see, I am alive, I am alive

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In the Yellowstone

By Harriet Monroe

Little pin-prick geysers, spitting and sputtering;
Little foaming geysers, that spatter and cough;
Bubbling geysers, that gurgle out of the calyx of morning glory pools;
Laughing geysers, that dance in the sun, and spread their robes like lace over the rocks;
Raging geysers, that rush out of hell with a great noise, and blurt out vast dragon-gulps of steam, and,
finishing, sink back wearily into darkness;
Glad geysers, nymphs of the sun, that rise, slim and nude, out of the hot dark earth, and stand poised in
beauty a moment, veiling their brows and breasts in mist;
Winged geysers, spirits of fire, that rise tall and straight like a sequoia, and plume the sky with foam:
O wild choral fountains, forever singing and seething, forever boiling in deep places and leaping forth for
bright moments into the air,
How do you like it up here? Why must you go back to the spirits of darkness? What do you tell them
down there about your little glorious life in the sun?

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Against Distance

By Trey Moody

I don’t know who needs to hear this
other than me, but the moon will never leave
you, you are good enough for the moon
and the moon is good enough for you,
because you are here and the moon is there
every time the moon is supposed to be
there, and isn’t it interesting when we want
to show up for each other we say we are
counting on it and what else but numbers
teach us we are each one, and what else
but the moon teaches us we are each many,
so when you try counting your remaining
moments with the moon, the moon
that will never, ever leave you, give up.
Even the moon inches a little more distant
every year. I’ve heard grief is only love
with nowhere to go. But then you look up.

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Poetry

By Marianne Moore

I too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers that there is in

it after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes

that can dilate, hair that can rise

if it must, these things are important not because a
high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are

useful; when they become so derivative as to become unintelligible, the

same thing may be said for all of us—that we

do not admire what

we cannot understand. The bat,

holding on upside down or in quest of something to
eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under

a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the base—

ball fan, the statistician—case after case

could be cited did

one wish it; nor is it valid

to discriminate against “business documents and

school-books”; all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry,
nor till the autocrats among us can be
“literalists of
the imagination”—above
insolence and triviality and can present
for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand, in defiance of their opinion—
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness, and
that which is on the other hand,
genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

Public domain

The Fish

By Marianne Moore

wade
through black jade.
    Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
    adjusting the ash-heaps;
        opening and shutting itself like

an
injured fan.
    The barnacles which encrust the side
    of the wave, cannot hide
        there for the submerged shafts of the

sun,
split like spun
    glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness
    into the crevices—
        in and out, illuminating

the
turquoise sea
    of bodies. The water drives a wedge
    of iron through the iron edge
        of the cliff; whereupon the stars,

pink
rice-grains, ink-
    bespattered jelly fish, crabs like green
    lilies, and submarine
        toadstools, slide each on the other.

All
external
    marks of abuse are present on this
    defiant edifice—
        all the physical features of

ac-
cident—lack
    of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and

hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm-side is

dead.
Repeated
evidence has proved that it can live
on what can not revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it.

Public domain

The Paper Nautilus

By Marianne Moore

For authorities whose hopes
are shaped by mercenaries?
Writers entrapped by
teatime fame and by
commuters' comforts? Not for these
the paper nautilus
constructs her thin glass shell.

Giving her perishable
souvenir of hope, a dull
white outside and smooth-
edged inner surface
glossy as the sea, the watchful
maker of it guards it
day and night; she scarcely

eats until the eggs are hatched.
Buried eight-fold in her eight
arms, for she is in
a sense a devil-
fish, her glass ramshorn-cradled freight
is hid but is not crushed.
As Hercules, bitten

by a crab loyal to the hydra,
was hindered to succeed,
the intensively
watched eggs coming from
the shell free it when they are freed,—
leaving its wasp-nest flaws
of white on white, and close-

laid Ionic chiton-folds
like the lines in the mane of
A Parthenon horse,
round which the arms had
wound themselves as if they knew love

is the only fortress
strong enough to trust to.

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The Past is the Present

By Marianne Moore

Revived bitterness
is unnecessary unless
    One is ignorant.

To-morrow will be
Yesterday unless you say the
    Days of the week back-

Ward. Last weeks' circus
Overflow frames an old grudge. Thus:
    When you attempt to

Force the doors and come
At the cause of the shouts, you thumb
    A brass nailed echo.

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It Was Not Fate

By William H. A. Moore

It was not fate which overtook me,
Rather a wayward, wilful wind
That blew hot for awhile
And then, as the even shadows came, blew cold.
What pity it is that a man grown old in life's dreaming
Should stop, e'en for a moment, to look into a woman's eyes.
And I forgot!
Forgot that one's heart must be steeled against the east wind.
Life and death alike come out of the East:
Life as tender as young grass,
Death as dreadful as the sight of clotted blood.
I shall go back into the darkness,
Not to dream but to seek the light again.
I shall go by paths, mayhap,
On roads that wind around the foothills
Where the plains are bare and wild
And the passers-by come few and far between.
I want the night to be long, the moon blind.
The hills thick with moving memories,
And my heart beating a breathless requiem
For all the dead days I have lived.
When the Dawn comes—Dawn, deathless, dreaming—
I shall will that my soul must be cleansed of hate,
I shall pray for strength to hold children close to my heart,
I shall desire to build houses where the poor will know
shelter, comfort, beauty.
And then may I look into a woman's eyes
And find holiness, love and the peace which passeth understanding.

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Life Cycle of Common Man

By Howard Nemerov

Roughly figured, this man of moderate habits,
This average consumer of the middle class,
Consumed in the course of his average life span
Just under half a million cigarettes,
Four thousand fifths of gin and about
A quarter as much vermouth; he drank
Maybe a hundred thousand cups of coffee,
And counting his parents' share it cost
Something like half a million dollars
To put him through life. How many beasts
Died to provide him with meat, belt and shoes
Cannot be certainly said.
But anyhow,
It is in this way that a man travels through time,
Leaving behind him a lengthening trail
Of empty bottles and bones, of broken shoes,
Frayed collars and worn out or outgrown
Diapers and dinnerjackets, silk ties and slickers.

Given the energy and security thus achieved,
He did . . . ? What? The usual things, of course,
The eating, dreaming, drinking and begetting,
And he worked for the money which was to pay
For the eating, et cetera, which were necessary
If he were to go on working for the money, et cetera,
But chiefly he talked. As the bottles and bones
Accumulated behind him, the words proceeded
Steadily from the front of his face as he
Advanced into the silence and made it verbal.
Who can tally the tale of his words? A lifetime
Would barely suffice for their repetition;
If you merely printed all his commas the result
Would be a very large volume, and the number of times
He said "thank you" or "very little sugar, please,"
Would stagger the imagination. There were also
Witticisms, platitudes, and statements beginning

“It seems to me” or “As I always say.”
Consider the courage in all that, and behold the man
Walking into deep silence, with the ectoplastic
Cartoon’s balloon of speech proceeding
Steadily out of the front of his face, the words
Borne along on the breath which is his spirit
Telling the numberless tale of his untold Word
Which makes the world his apple, and forces him to eat.

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Wolves in the Zoo

By Howard Nemerov

They look like shaggy dogs, but wrongly drawn,
And a legend on their cage tells us there is
No evidence that any of their kind
Has ever attacked man, woman, or child.

Now it turns out there were no babies dropped
In sacrifice, delaying tactics, from
Siberian sleds; now it turns out, so late,
That Little Red Ridinghood and her Gran

Were the aggressors with the slavering fangs
And telltale tails; now it turns out, at last,
That gray wolf and timber wolf are nearly gone,
Done out of being by the tales we tell

Told us by Nanny in the nursery—
Young sparks we were, to set such forest fires
As blazed from story into history,
And put such bounty on their wolfish heads

As brought the few survivors to our terms,
Surrendered in happy Babylon among
The peacock dusting off the path of dust,
The tiger pacing in the striped shade.

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Writing

By Howard Nemerov

The cursive crawl, the squared-off characters
these by themselves delight, even without
a meaning, in a foreign language, in
Chinese, for instance, or when skaters curve
all day across the lake, scoring their white
records in ice. Being intelligible,
these winding ways with their audacities
and delicate hesitations, they become
miraculous, so intimately, out there
at the pen's point or brush's tip, do world
and spirit wed. The small bones of the wrist
balance against great skeletons of stars
exactly; the blind bat surveys his way
by echo alone. Still, the point of style
is character. The universe induces
a different tremor in every hand, from the
check-forger's to that of the Emperor
Hui Tsung, who called his own calligraphy
the 'Slender Gold.' A nervous man
writes nervously of a nervous world, and so on.

Miraculous. It is as though the world
were a great writing. Having said so much,
let us allow there is more to the world
than writing: continental faults are not
bare convoluted fissures in the brain.
Not only must the skaters soon go home;
also the hard inscription of their skates
is scored across the open water, which long
remembers nothing, neither wind nor wake.

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Finale

By Pablo Neruda

translated from the Spanish by
William O'Daly

Matilde, years or days
sleeping, feverish,
here or there,
gazing off,
twisting my spine,
bleeding true blood,
perhaps I awaken
or am lost, sleeping:
hospital beds, foreign windows,
white uniforms of the silent walkers,
the clumsiness of feet.

And then, these journeys
and my sea of renewal:
your head on the pillow,
your hands floating
in the light, in my light,
over my earth.

It was beautiful to live
when you lived!

The world is bluer and of the earth
at night, when I sleep
enormous, within your small hands.

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O Sea, That Knowest Thy Strength

By Effie Lee Newsom

Hast thou been known to sing,
O sea, that knowest thy strength?
Hast thou been known to sing?
Thy voice, can it rejoice?
Naught save great sorrowing,
To me, thy sounds incessant
Do express, naught save great sorrowing.
Thy lips, they daily kiss the sand,
In wanton mockery.
Deep in thine awful heart
Thou dost not love the land.
Thou dost not love the land.
O sea, that knowest thy strength.

“These sands, these listless, helpless,
Sun-gold sands, I’ll play with these,
Or crush them in my white-fanged hands
For leagues, to please
The thing in me that is the Sea,
Intangible, untamed,
Untamed and wild,
And wild and weird and strong!”

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On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance

By Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Breathe deep even if it means you wrinkle
your nose from the fake-lemon antiseptic

of the mopped floors and wiped-down
doorknobs. The freshly soaped necks

and armpits. Your teacher means well,
even if he butchers your name like

he has a bloody sausage casing stuck
between his teeth, handprints

on his white, sloppy apron. And when
everyone turns around to check out

your face, no need to flush red and warm.
Just picture all the eyes as if your classroom

is one big scallop with its dozens of icy blues
and you will remember that winter your family

took you to the China Sea and you sank
your face in it to gaze at baby clams and sea stars

the size of your outstretched hand. And when

all those necks start to crane, try not to forget

someone once lathered their bodies, once patted them

dry with a fluffy towel after a bath, set out their clothes

for the first day of school. Think of their pencil cases

from third grade, full of sharp pencils, a pink pearl eraser.

Think of their handheld pencil sharpener and its tiny blade.

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What I Learned From the Incredible Hulk

By Aimee Nezhukumatathil

When it comes to clothes, make
an allowance for the unexpected.
Be sure the spare in the trunk
of your station wagon with wood paneling

isn't in need of repair. A simple jean jacket
says *Hey, if you aren't trying to smuggle*
rare Incan coins through this peaceful
little town and kidnap the local orphan,

I can be one heck of a mellow kinda guy.
But no matter how angry a man gets, a smile
and a soft stroke on his bicep can work
wonders. I learned that male chests

also have nipples, warm and established—
green doesn't always mean envy.
It's the meadows full of clover
and chicory the Hulk seeks for rest, a return

to normal. And sometimes, a woman
gets to go with him, her tiny hands
correcting his rumpled hair, the cuts
in his hand. Green is the space between

water and sun, cover for a quiet man,
each rib shuttling drops of liquid light.

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When I Am Six

By Aimee Nezhukumatathil

CHICAGO

My mother waters the tomato & pepper plants. I steal drinks from the penny-taste of the garden hose. It is my favorite drink. I am six & think to cross the street by myself from time to time, but never do. I am six, my sister is five & we hide inside clothing racks at the store just to feel the black-sick fill our round bellies when we get lost, lost, lost from our mother. I am six & I am laughing with a mouthful of cashews. I think nuts is the funniest word I have ever heard. I am six & I break all of my mother's lipsticks & glue them together & put them back in her bathroom drawer. She'll never notice. Sometimes I find sad envelopes, the ones with red and blue stripes, meaning these envelopes fly, meaning thin feathers, meaning bird with a little worm in the beak. Envelopes from her father, I think—she snatches them from my hand & says, No, no where did you get these? Now put them back.

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Snowy Owl Near Ocean Shores

By Duane Niatum

A castaway blown south from the arctic tundra
sits on a stump in an abandoned farmer's field.
Beyond the dunes cattails toss and bend as snappy
as the surf, rushing and crashing down the jetty.

His head a swivel of round glances,
his eyes a deeper yellow than the winter sun,
he wonders if the spot two hundred feet away
is a mouse on the crawl from mud hole
to deer-grass patch.

An hour of wind and sleet whips the air,
nothing darts or passes but the river underground.
A North Pole creature shows us how to last.
The wind ruffles his feathers from crown to claw

while he gazes into zeroes the salt-slick rain.
As a double-rainbow before us arcs
sky and owl, we leave him surrendering
to the echo of his white refrain.

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At Night

By Yone Noguchi

At night the Universe grows lean, sober-
faced, of intoxication,
The shadow of the half-sphere curtains
down closely against my world, like a
doorless cage, and the stillness chained by
wrinkled darkness strains throughout the Uni-
verse to be free.
Listen, frogs in the pond, (the world is a pond itself)
    cry out for the light, for the truth!
The curtains rattle ghostlily along, bloodily biting
    my soul, the winds knocking on my cabin door
    with their shadowy hands.

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How Near to Fairyland

By Yone Noguchi

The spring warmth steals into me, drying up all the tears of my soul,
And gives me a flight into the vastness,—into a floorless, unroofed reverie-hall.

Lo, such greenness, such velvety greenness, such a heaven without heaven above!
Lo, again, such grayness, such velvety grayness, such an earth without earth below!
My soul sails through the waveless mirror-seas.

Oh, how near to Fairyland!
Blow, blow, gust of wind!
Sweep away my soul-boat against that very shore!

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I Am Like a Leaf

By Yone Noguchi

The silence is broken: into the nature
  My soul sails out,
Carrying the song of life on his brow,
  To meet the flowers and birds.
When my heart returns in the solitude,
  She is very sad,
Looking back on the dead passions
  Lying on Love’s ruin.
I am like a leaf
  Hanging over hope and despair,
Which trembles and joins
  The world’s imagination and ghost.

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The Poet

By Yone Noguchi

Out of the deep and the dark,
A sparkling mystery, a shape,
Something perfect,
Comes like the stir of the day:
One whose breath is an odor,
Whose eyes show the road to stars,
The breeze in his face,
The glory of heaven on his back.
He steps like a vision hung in air,
Diffusing the passion of eternity;
His abode is the sunlight of morn,
The music of eve his speech:
In his sight,
One shall turn from the dust of the grave,
And move upward to the woodland.

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Arabic

By Naomi Shihab Nye

The man with laughing eyes stopped smiling
to say, “Until you speak Arabic,
you will not understand pain.”

Something to do with the back of the head,
an Arab carries sorrow in the back of the head,
that only language cracks, the thrum of stones

weeping, grating hinge on an old metal gate.
“Once you know,” he whispered, “you can
    enter the room
whenever you need to. Music you heard
    from a distance,

the slapped drum of a stranger’s wedding,
well up inside your skin, inside rain, a thousand
pulsing tongues. You are changed.”

Outside, the snow has finally stopped.
In a land where snow rarely falls,
we had felt our days grow white and still.

I thought pain had no tongue. Or every tongue
at once, supreme translator, sieve. I admit my
shame. To live on the brink of Arabic, tugging

its rich threads without understanding
how to weave the rug…I have no gift.
The sound, but not the sense.

I kept looking over his shoulder for someone else
to talk to, recalling my dying friend
    who only scrawled
I can’t write. What good would any grammar
    have been

to her then? I touched his arm, held it hard,
which sometimes you don't do in the Middle East,
and said, *I'll work on it,* feeling sad

for his good strict heart, but later in the slick street
hailed a taxi by shouting *Pain!* and it stopped
in every language and opened its doors.

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So Much Happiness

By Naomi Shihab Nye

It is difficult to know what to do with so much happiness.
With sadness there is something to rub against,
a wound to tend with lotion and cloth.
When the world falls in around you, you have pieces to pick up,
something to hold in your hands, like ticket stubs or change.

But happiness floats.
It doesn't need you to hold it down.
It doesn't need anything.
Happiness lands on the roof of the next house, singing,
and disappears when it wants to.
You are happy either way.
Even the fact that you once lived in a peaceful tree house
and now live over a quarry of noise and dust
cannot make you unhappy.
Everything has a life of its own,
it too could wake up filled with possibilities
of coffee cake and ripe peaches,
and love even the floor which needs to be swept,
the soiled linens and scratched records . . .

Since there is no place large enough
to contain so much happiness,
you shrug, you raise your hands, and it flows out of you
into everything you touch. You are not responsible.
You take no credit, as the night sky takes no credit
for the moon, but continues to hold it, and share it,
and in that way, be known.

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Wedding Cake

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Once on a plane
a woman asked me to hold her baby
and disappeared.
I figured it was safe,
our being on a plane and all.
How far could she go?
She returned one hour later,
having changed her clothes
and washed her hair.
I didn't recognize her.
By this time the baby
and I had examined
each other's necks.
We had cried a little.
I had a silver bracelet
and a watch.
Gold studs glittered
in the baby's ears.
She wore a tiny white dress
leafed with layers
like a wedding cake.
I did not want
to give her back.
The baby's curls coiled tightly
against her scalp,
another alphabet.
I read new new new.
My mother gets tired.
I'll chew your hand.
The baby left my skirt crumpled,
my lap aching.
Now I'm her secret guardian,
the little nub of dream
that rises slightly
but won't come clear.
As she grows,

as she feels ill at ease,
I'll bob my knee.
What will she forget?
Whom will she marry?
He'd better check with me.
I'll say once she flew
dressed like a cake
between two doilies of cloud.
She could slip the card into a pocket,
pull it out.
Already she knew the small finger
was funnier than the whole arm.

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The Rookie

By January Gill O'Neil

America under the lights
at Harry Ball Field. A fog rolls in
as the flag crinkles and drapes

around a metal pole.
My son reaches into the sky
to pull down a game-ender,

a bomb caught in his leather mitt.
He gives the ball a flat squeeze
then tosses it in from the outfield,

tugs his cap over a tussle of hair
before joining the team—
all high-fives and handshakes

as the Major boys line up
at home plate. They are learning
how to be good sports,

their dugout cheers interrupted only
by sunflower seed shells spat
along the first base line.

The coach prattles on
about the importance of stealing
bases and productive outs

while a teammate cracks a joke
about my son's 'fro, then says,
But you're not really black…

to which there's laughter,
to which he smiles but says nothing,
which says something about

what goes unsaid, what starts
with a harmless joke, routine
as a can of corn.

But this is little league.
This is where he learns
how to field a position,

how to play a bloop in the gap—
that impossible space where
he'll always play defense.

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Build, Now, a Monument

By Matthew Olzmann

No longer satisfied by the way time slips
through his life's work, the maker
of hourglasses yearns for a change.

He elects to construct a staircase instead.
Rather than grains of sand,
he'll manufacture one stair after another
to lament every transient second.

Look at it now! It rockets upward, almost vertical,
beginning in his backyard, puncturing
the cloud cover, and everyone speculates
where it will end. It will end
where all ambitions end: in the ether,
where the body ceases, and a story continues.

But for now, it's a monument.
For now: a defiance, misoneism.
A bridge between
Earth and what Earth cannot touch.

What does he think as he builds?
Mostly he contemplates the work:
the sawdust, the anger, the hammer.
But sometimes he dreams of cars, highways,
of crashes and sequestered wreckage.
Old pain. He had a friend, out there.
There was a highway, a vehicle overturned.

If his friend was here today,
she'd understand this monument.
She liked the sky, country music and caterpillars.

There are four thousand muscles in a caterpillar.
It uses every one of them
to become something other than itself.
Is the body a cocoon? the man wonders.

From the top of the staircase, the life
he left below is almost unrecognizable.
Look at the beagle, yelping in the neighbor's yard.
The rooftops of the shrinking houses. Everything
getting smaller as his view of the world

expands. The roads marked by petite yellow lines.
Graceland and Grant's Tomb and whatever's left
of the Parthenon. All of it is down there.
Things end. But what he can't comprehend
is how, around those endings, everything else
continues.

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Letter to the Person Who Carved His Initials into the Oldest Living Longleaf Pine in North America

By Matthew Olzmann

Tell me what it's like to live without
curiosity, without awe. To sail
on clear water, rolling your eyes
at the kelp reefs swaying
beneath you, ignoring the flicker
of mermaid scales in the mist,
looking at the world and feeling
only boredom. To stand
on the precipice of some wild valley,
the eagles circling, a herd of caribou
booming below, and to yawn
with indifference. To discover
something primordial and holy.
To have the smell of the earth
welcome you to everywhere.
To take it all in, and then,
to reach for your knife.

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Blind Curse

By Simon J. Ortiz

You could drive blind
for those two seconds
and they would be forever.
I think that as a diesel truck
passes us eight miles east of Mission.
Churning through the storm, heedless
of the hill sliding away.
There isn't much use to curse but I do.
Words fly away, tumbling invisibly
toward the unseen point where
the prairie and sky meet.
The road is like that in those seconds,
nothing but the blind white side
of creation.

You're there somewhere,
a tiny struggling cell.
You just might be significant
but you might not be anything.
Forever is a space of split time
from which to recover after the mass passes.
My curse flies out there somewhere,
and then I send my prayer into the wake
of the diesel truck headed for Sioux Falls

one hundred and eighty miles through the storm.

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Incurable

By Dorothy Parker

And if my heart be scarred and burned,
The safer, I, for all I learned;
The calmer, I, to see it true
That ways of love are never new—
The love that sets you daft and dazed
Is every love that ever blazed;
The happier, I, to fathom this:
A kiss is every other kiss.
The reckless vow, the lovely name,
When Helen walked, were spoke the same;
The weighted breast, the grinding woe,
When Phaon fled, were ever so.
Oh, it is sure as it is sad
That any lad is every lad,
And what's a girl, to dare implore
Her dear be hers forevermore?
Though he be tried and he be bold,
And swearing death should he be cold,
He'll run the path the others went.…
But you, my sweet, are different.

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Love Song

By Dorothy Parker

My own dear love, he is strong and bold
And he cares not what comes after.
His words ring sweet as a chime of gold,
And his eyes are lit with laughter.
He is jubilant as a flag unfurled—
Oh, a girl, she'd not forget him.
My own dear love, he is all my world,—
And I wish I'd never met him.

My love, he's mad, and my love, he's fleet,
And a wild young wood-thing bore him!
The ways are fair to his roaming feet,
And the skies are sunlit for him.
As sharply sweet to my heart he seems
As the fragrance of acacia.
My own dear love, he is all my dreams,—
And I wish he were in Asia.

My love runs by like a day in June,
And he makes no friends of sorrows.
He'll tread his galloping rigadoon
In the pathway of the morrows.
He'll live his days where the sunbeams start,
Nor could storm or wind uproot him.

My own dear love, he is all my heart,—

And I wish somebody’d shoot him.

Public domain

One Perfect Rose

By Dorothy Parker

A single flow’r he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet—
One perfect rose.

I knew the language of the floweret;
“My fragile leaves,” it said, “his heart enclose.”
Love long has taken for his amulet
One perfect rose.

Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?
Ah no, it’s always just my luck to get
One perfect rose.

Public domain

Recurrence

By Dorothy Parker

We shall have our little day.
Take my hand and travel still
Round and round the little way,
Up and down the little hill.

It is good to love again;
Scan the renovated skies,
Dip and drive the idling pen,
Sweetly tint the paling lies.

Trace the dripping, piercèd heart,
Speak the fair, insistent verse,
Vow to God, and slip apart,
Little better, little worse.

Would we need not know before
How shall end this prettiness;
One of us must love the more,
One of us shall love the less.

Thus it is, and so it goes;
We shall have our day, my dear.
Where, unwilling, dies the rose
Buds the new, another year.

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Song in a Minor Key

By Dorothy Parker

There's a place I know where the birds swing low,
And wayward vines go roaming,
Where the lilacs nod, and a marble god
Is pale, in scented gloaming.
And at sunset there comes a lady fair
Whose eyes are deep with yearning.
By an old, old gate does the lady wait
Her own true love's returning.

But the days go by, and the lilacs die,
And trembling birds seek cover;
Yet the lady stands, with her long white hands
Held out to greet her lover.
And it's there she'll stay till the shadowy day
A monument they grave her.
She will always wait by the same old gate, —
The gate her true love gave her.

Public domain

To a Bride

By Mary Toles Peet

Thou askest, O my friend, a song to-day;
But what soft note, what subtle melody
Can thy young heart's delicious joy convey?

In Life's enchanted lyre, one chord alone
Can thrill thee with a music all its own,
And fill thine heart with one most perfect tone.

What need, then, hast thou that I sing to thee?
June roses for thy bridal, fair to see,
Are sweeter music than my notes can be;

And song-birds flitting thro' the fragrant air,
And stars that gleam, like living eyes, from where
Thine own turn softly in thy troth-plight prayer.

Then silence, sweeter than all varied sound,
Shall fold thee soft, like loving arms around,
For life's most perfect gift thy heart hath found.

Public domain

Luna Moth

By Carl Phillips

No eye that sees could fail to remark you:
like any leaf the rain leaves fixed to and
flat against the barn's gray shingle. But

what leaf, this time of year, is so pale,
the pale of leaves when they've lost just
enough green to become the green that *means*

loss and more loss, approaching? Give up
the flesh enough times, and whatever is lost
gets forgotten: that was the thought that I

woke to, those words in my head. I rose,
I did not dress, I left no particular body
sleeping and, stepping into the hour, I saw

you, strange sign, at once transparent and
impossible to entirely see through. and how
still: the still of being unmoved, and then

the still of no longer being able to be
moved. If I think of a heart, his, as I've
found it…. If I think of, increasingly, my

own…. If I look at you now, as from above,
and see the diva when she is caught in mid-
triumph, arms half-raised, the body as if

set at last free of the green sheath that has—
how many nights?—held her, it is not
without remembering another I once saw:

like you, except that something, a bird, some
wild and necessary hunger, had gotten to it;
and like the diva, but now broken, splayed

and torn, the green torn piecemeal from her.
I remember the hands, and—how small they
seemed, bringing the small ripped thing to me.

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Song of the Choctaw Girl

By Peter Perkins Pitchlynn

I’m looking on the mountain,
I’m gazing o’er the plain;
I love the friends around me,
But wish for home again!

I hear their tones of kindness,
They soothe my every pain;
I know they love me truly—
I wish for that home again!

My mother’s grave is yonder,
And there it must remain;
My father’s care is tender,
I wish for home again!

My sisters and my brothers—
Alas! it may be vain,
This longing for beloved ones—
I wish for home again.

O, take me to my Nation,
And let me there remain;
This other world is strange, strange—
I wish for home again

Give me the western forest—
the mountain, stream and plain,
The shaded lawns of childhood—
Give me my home again!

The free breeze of the prairie
The wild bird’s joyous strain,
The three my father planted –
O, take me home again!

The sunshine and the flowers,
My mother’s grave again,
Give me my race and kindred—
O, take me home again!

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A Dream Within a Dream

By Edgar Allan Poe

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow:
You are not wrong who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand–
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep–while I weep!
O God! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is *all* that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

Public domain

Annabel Lee

By Edgar Allan Poe

It was many and many a year ago,
  In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
  By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
  Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and *she* was a child,
  In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love—
  I and my Annabel Lee—
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven
  Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
  In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
  My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
  And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
  In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,

Went envying her and me—
Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we—
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in Heaven above
Nor the demons down under the sea
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

Public domain

Lenore

By Edgar Allan Poe

Ah broken is the golden bowl! the spirit flown forever!
Let the bell toll!–a saintly soul floats on the Stygian river;
And, Guy De Vere, hast *thou* no tear?–weep now or never more!
See! on yon drear and rigid bier low lies thy love, Lenore!
Come! let the burial rite be read–the funeral song be sung!–
An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so young–
A dirge for her the doubly dead in that she died so young.

“Wretches! ye loved her for her wealth and hated her for her pride,
“And when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed her–that she died!
“How *shall* the ritual, then, be read?–the requiem how be sung
“By you–by yours, the evil eye,–by yours, the slanderous tongue
“That did to death the innocent that died, and died so young?”

Peccavimus; but rave not thus! and let a Sabbath song
Go up to God so solemnly the dead may feel so wrong!
The sweet Lenore hath “gone before,” with Hope, that flew beside
Leaving thee wild for the dear child that should have been thy bride–
For her, the fair and *debonair*, that now so lowly lies,
The life upon her yellow hair but not within her eyes–
The life still there, upon her hair–the death upon her eyes.

“Avaunt! to-night my heart is light. No dirge will I upraise,
“But waft the angel on her flight with a Pæan of old days!
“Let *no* bell toll!–lest her sweet soul, amid its hallowed mirth,
“Should catch the note, as it doth float up from the damnéd Earth.
“To friends above, from fiends below, the indignant ghost is riven–
“From Hell unto a high estate far up within the Heaven–
“From grief and groan, to a golden throne, beside the King of Heaven.”

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The Conqueror Worm

By Edgar Allan Poe

Lo! ’t is a gala night
  Within the lonesome latter years!
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
  In veils, and drowned in tears,
Sit in a theatre, to see
  A play of hopes and fears,
While the orchestra breathes fitfully
  The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
  Mutter and mumble low,
And hither and thither fly—
  Mere puppets they, who come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
  That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their Condor wings
  Invisible Wo!

That motley drama—oh, be sure
  It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased for evermore
  By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
  To the self-same spot,
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
  And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout,
  A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
  The scenic solitude!
It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And seraphs sob at vermin fangs
  In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
  And, over each quivering form,

The curtain, a funeral pall,
  Comes down with the rush of a storm,
While the angels, all pallid and wan,
  Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, “Man,”
  And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

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To Helen

By Edgar Allan Poe

Helen, thy beauty is to me
  Like those Nicéan barks of yore,
That gently, o’er a perfumed sea,
  The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
  To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
  Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
  To the glory that was Greece,
  And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
  How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
  Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
  Are Holy-Land!

Public domain

Coyote

By Alexander Posey

A few days more, and then

There’ll be no secret glen,

Or hollow, deep and dim,

To hide or shelter him.

And on the prairie far,

Beneath the beacon star

On evening’s dark’ning shore,

I’ll hear him nevermore.

For where the tepee smoke

Curled up of yore, the stroke

Of hammers rings all day,

And grim Doom shouts, “Make way!”

The immemorial hush

Is broken by the rush

Of armed enemies

Unto the utmost seas.

Public domain

The Dew and the Bird

By Alexander Posey

There is more glory in a drop of dew,
That shineth only for an hour,
Than there is in the pomp of earth's great Kings
Within the noonday of their power.

There is more sweetness in a single strain
That falleth from a wild bird's throat,
At random in the lonely forest's depths,
Than there's in all the songs that bards e'er wrote.

Yet men, for aye, rememb'ring Caesar's name,
Forget the glory in the dew,
And, praising Homer's epic, let the lark's
Song fall unheeded from the blue.

Public domain

Tulledega

By Alexander Posey

My choice of all choice spots in Indian lands!
Hedged in, shut up by walls of purple hills,
That swell clear cut against our sunset sky,
Hedged in, shut up and hidden from the world.
As through it said, “I have no words for you;
I’m not part of you; your ways aren’t mine.”
Hedged in, shut up with low log cabins built—
How snugly!—in the quaint old fashioned way;
With fields of yellow maize, so small that you
Might hide them with your palm while gazing on
Them from the hills around them, high and blue.
Hedged in, shut up with long forgotten ways,
And stories handed down from sire to son.
Hedged in, shut up with broad Oktaha, like
A flash of glory curled among the hills!
How it sweeps away toward the morning,
Deepened here and younger by the beetling
Crag, the music of its dashings mingling
With the screams of eagles whirling over,
With its splendid tribute to the ocean!
And this spot, this nook is Tulledega;
Hedged in, shut up, I say by walls of hills,
Like tents stretched on the borders of the day,
As blue as yonder op’ning in the clouds!

Public domain

A Pact

By Ezra Pound

I make truce with you, Walt Whitman—
I have detested you long enough.
I come to you as a grown child
Who has had a pig-headed father;
I am old enough now to make friends.
It was you that broke the new wood,
Now is a time for carving.
We have one sap and one root—
Let there be commerce between us.

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The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter

By Ezra Pound

After Li Po

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chōkan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.
At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever, and forever.
Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed
You went into far Ku-tō-en, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me.
I grow older.
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Chō-fū-Sa.

Public domain

Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark

By D.A. Powell

I play the egg
and I play the triangle
I play the reed
and I play each angle
I play the lyre
and I play the lute
I play the snare
and I play the flute
I play the licorice stick
and I play the juke
I play the kettle
and I play the uke
who ever thought of the triangle
who ever thought of the clarinet
the castanets the cornet the
discotheque the harmonium
the euphonium marimbas and
maracas harmonicas
tom-toms and tatas
I play the fiddle
and I play the jug
I play the washboard
and the washtub
I play kalimba
and I play the koto
I play the organ
and I play the banjo
I play the fool I play it cool
I play hot and I play pranks
I played your mixtape
forgot to say thanks

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Memorial Wreath

By Dudley Randall

(It is a little-known fact that 200,000 Negroes fought for freedom in the Union Army during the Civil War.)

In this green month when resurrected flowers,
Like laughing children ignorant of death,
Brighten the couch of those who wake no more,
Love and remembrance blossom in our hearts
For you who bore the extreme sharp pang for us,
And bought our freedom with your lives.

And now,
Honoring your memory, with love we bring
These fiery roses, white-hot cotton flowers
And violets bluer than cool northern skies
You dreamed of stooped in burning prison fields
When liberty was only a faint north star,
Not a bright flower planted by your hands
Reaching up hardy nourished with your blood.

Fit gravefellows you are for Douglass, Brown,
Turner and Truth and Tubman . . . whose rapt eyes
Fashioned a new world in this wilderness.

American earth is richer for your bones:
Our hearts beat prouder for the blood we inherit.

Public domain

History

By Camille Rankine

Our stone wall was built by slaves and my bones, my bones
are paid for. We have two

of everything, twice heavy
in our pockets, warming
our two big hands.

This is the story, as I know it. One morning:
the ships came, as foretold, and death
pearl-handled, almost

and completely.
How cheap a date I turned out to be.

Each finger weak with the memory:
lost teeth, regret. Our ghosts
walk the shoulders of the road at night.
I get the feeling you've been lying to me.

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Symptoms of Prophecy

By Camille Rankine

In the new century,
we lose the art of many things.

For example, at the beep, I communicate
using the wrong machine.

I called to say we have two lives
and only one of them is real.

When the phone rings: you could be anybody.
In the evening: you are homeless

and hunting for good light, as safe a place
as any to make a bed for the night.

In both my lives, my nerves go bust.
I'm certain that I'm not

as I appear, that I'm a figment and
you're not really here.

The struggle
is authenticity.

I have a message.
You must believe me.

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Don’t Let Me Be Lonely: “At the airport-security checkpoint…”

By Claudia Rankine

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked to drink from my water bottle.

This water bottle? That's right.

Open it and drink from it.

/

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked to take off my shoes.

Take off my shoes?

Yes. Both Please.

/

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked if I have a fever.

A fever? Really?

Yes. Really.

/

My grandmother is in a nursing home. It’s not bad. It doesn’t smell like pee. It doesn’t smell like anything. When I go to see her, as I walk through the hall past the common room and the nurses’ station, old person after old person puts out his or her hand to me. Steven, one says. Ann, another calls.

It’s like being in a third-world country, but instead of food or money you are what is wanted, your company. In third-world countries I have felt overwhelmingly American, calcium-rich, privileged, and white. Here, I feel young, lucky, and sad. Sad is one of those words that has given up its life for our country, it’s been a martyr for the American dream, it’s been neutralized, co-opted by our culture to suggest a tinge of discomfort that lasts the time it takes for this and then for that to happen, the time it takes to change a channel. But sadness is real because once it meant something real. It meant dignified, grave; it meant trustworthy; it meant exceptionally bad, deplorable, shameful; it meant massive, weighty, forming a compact body; it meant falling heavily; and it meant of a color: dark. It meant dark in color, to darken. It meant me. I felt sad.

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My Father’s First Night in the National Defense Academy

By Natasha Rao

In these barracks, night speaks another dialect.
No longer does he fall asleep to the smell
of boiling milk or his brother breathing
cigarettes in the dark. He doesn’t yet know
the ways his body will change for a war
that doesn’t happen in this country
he will soon leave. From now on he will grow
like sharpening. Tonight he is too eager and
cannot sleep, this last moment before they strip him
of childhood, have him believe the true war
is inside him. Tonight, he is still a boy of sixteen
who dreams of being a pilot, not to flight
but to soar, titanium wings fluttering
through the blameless air. He brushes the blanket,
this fleshy creature with no edges, not yet bruised
into the solemn duty of manhood.

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Limitations

By Henrietta Cordelia Ray

The subtlest strain a great musician weaves,
Cannot attain in rhythmic harmony
To music in his soul. May it not be
Celestial lyres send hints to him? He grieves
That half the sweetness of the song, he leaves
Unheard in the transition. Thus do we
Yearn to translate the wondrous majesty
Of some rare mood, when the rapt soul receives
A vision exquisite. Yet who can match
The sunset's iridescent hues? Who sing
The skylark's ecstasy so seraph-fine?
We struggle vainly, still we fain would catch
Such rifts amid life's shadows, for they bring
Glimpses ineffable of things divine.

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My Easter Dove

By Henrietta Cordelia Ray

There came a dove, an Easter dove,
When morning stars grew dim;
It fluttered round my lattice bars,
To chant a matin hymn.

It brought a lily in its beak,
Aglow with dewy sheen;
I caught the strain, the incense breathed,
And uttered praise between.

It brought a shrine of holy thoughts
To calm my soul that day;
I caught the meaning of the note,
Why did it fly away?

Come peaceful dove, sweet Easter dove!
Above earth’s storm and strife,
Sing of the joy of Easter-tide,
Of light and hope and life.

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All Thirst Quenched

By Lois Red Elk

for my granddaughter, Wahcawin

I didn’t want to scold the sky that year, but
Grandma’s words taunted my senses. If there
is a thirst, then you need to pity the flowers

in a loud voice. Ask the frogs why they are
being punished, stomp on the ground and talk
to the dried clay about cracking open the earth.

I know challenging the storm is risky. “Last
but not least, burn cedar and pray the lightning
doesn’t strike your town.” That night, the stars

disappeared, so did the birds. Perhaps it was
the season for rain or the dance. In the western
distance, we thought we heard cannon blasts,

looking over we watched the horizon fill with
lightning strikes. Rain couldn’t pour hard enough
over the thirsty plain. Accompanying clouds,

called to thunder’s voice in extreme decimals
requesting all the water heaven could send forth,
to come. Rain and more rain filled empty stream

bottoms. Rivers who had pulled their dry banks
farther and farther from their center begged for
a drink to startle dusty beds with a flooding roar.

Lives in dormant places begin to stir and awaken.
The lives of water beings, those that swim, the
ones that hop, and the ones that fly, begin to stir.

That year all thirst was quenched.

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Rhythms (Section I)

By Charles Reznikoff

The stars are hidden,
the lights are out;
the tall black houses
are ranked about.

I beat my fists
on the stout doors,
no answering steps
come down the floors.

I have walked until
I am faint and numb;
from one dark street
to another I come.

The comforting
winds are still.

This is a chaos
through which I stumble,
till I reach the void
and down I tumble.

The stars will then
be out forever;
the fists unclenched,
the feet walk never,

and all I say
blown by the wind
away.

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Allah Wa Ana

By Ameen Rihani

Though I'm God, thou art man, we are one,
    We are all and we shall ever be;
Though the light of my sky thou didst shun,
Thou shalt love me ere thy course is run,
    As forever I live loving thee.

Thou art mine, I am thine and the fire
    Of my breath all thy regions shall warm,
Ere the life in thy soil shall expire,
Ere the seeds of thy basest desire
    From their prison break out and take form.

Thou wilt doubt and deny me forsooth
    And rejoice in thy vanity's power;
Thou wilt die on the breast of my truth,
In the end thou wilt laugh at thy youth,
    And its wine although old will be sour.

I was with thee when thou didst deny,
    As I am with thy mother at prayer;
I was with thee when thou didst defy
My hell and my earth and my sky,
    And I love non the less those that dare.

In the yogi's pagoda I am;
    In the fire of the magi I was;
To the sons of Abraheem and Sham
And their foes and to thee I undam
    All the banks of my veins on the cross.

Through the spheres and the primitive throngs
    I came down and I struggled with thee;
Through the ages I sing in thy songs,
But I leave thee to rise on thy wrongs;—
    Thou shalt rise and thou shalt live in me.

Public domain

Fardi Wa Nafli

By Ameen Rihani

This was written in the hospital where Mr. Rihani's sister suffered for more than two years. She was taken sick not long before the day appointed for her wedding.

I

"Here she is: O take her not away so soon!
  Spare her youth—the fatal cup from her withhold!
Let her groan within my arms in life's forenoon;
  Let me still my soul within her eyes unfold."
God of Love! my faith in thee is not yet gray:
  Grant that she may walk again,
  Free from suffering and pain—
Give her life to see the altar's light one day.

II

In the night, before the day that never came,
  On the way with poppies and gardenias strewn,
With her music and her torch's holy flame,
  She was struck and never since saw sun or moon.
God of Light! refuse her not another ray:
  Her bridal garment joins with me
  In beseeching, begging thee—
Give her life to see the altar's light one day.

III

All the sorrow earth contains I can support,
  All the agony and pain I can endure;
Years of misery will seem surprising short,
  If to me thou leav'st her, though without a cure.
All my dreams before thy throne, O God, I slay;
  These my offerings let be,

These my sacrifice to thee—
Give her life to see the altar’s light one day.

IV

“Hurry here! O get the doctors—call the nurse—
Call the priest—be quick—some more digitaline—
He is here, alas! before you all—a hearse.”
Death has passed us by; take up the violin!
To Thy heart my music fain would find its way;
Every sound Thy grace would earn;
Let it not as sad return—
Give her life to see the altar’s light one day.

V

Every wound and every sigh and groan and tear,
Every drop of Saada’s melting flesh and hope
Now ascend, wrapt in this music, pale and blear—
Around Thy throne, in gyves of pain, they blindly grope.
What remains, what’s gone of her before Thee lay:
Faith and Doubt are at Thy door—
Mother, brother, pray, implore—
Give her life to see the altar’s light one day.

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Saada

By Ameen Rihani

Long hast thou suffered, sister of my heart,
Still thou art
Fair to see ;
Thy pains thou entertainest with thy song,
But how long
Will this be?

The seasons all have come and gone, my dear,
But thy cheer
Still abides.
I ask which of thy moan or song is best
And thou sayst :
“God decides.”

I feel the ebbing of the undertone
Of thy moan
In thy song ;
How long will tears and irony compete
For thee, Sweet,
O, how long?

When wilt thou, Baby dear, with nimble feet,
Run to greet
Me at the door?
When wilt thou, Saada, walk again with me
Near the sea,
As before?

O sister, how I wish to see thee run,
In the sun,
On the sands !
The singing breakers and the smiling beach
To thee reach
Out their hands.

The light of day is longing for thy face
And the grace
Of thy form ;

O how I wish to see thee, Noor-ul-Ain
Caught again
In the storm !

Public domain

The Wanderer

By Ameen Rihani

I wander among the hills of alien lands
  Where Nature her prerogative resigns
To Man; where Comfort in her shack reclines
  And all the arts and sciences commands.
    But in my soul
    The eastern billows roll—
I hear the voices of my native strands.

My lingering eyes, a lonely hemlock fills
  With grace and splendor rising manifold;
Beneath her boughs the maples spread their gold
  And at her feet, the silver of rills.
    But in my heart
    A peasant void of art
Echoes the voices of my native hills.

On every height a studied art confines
  All human joy in social pulchritude;
The boxwood frowns where beckoning birches stood,
  And where the thrushes caroled Fashion dines.
    But through the spreading cheer
    The shepherd's reed I hear
Beneath my Lebanon terebinths and pines.

And though no voices here are heard of toil,
  Nor accents least of sorrow, nor the din
Of multitudes, nor even at the Inn
  The City is permitted aught to spoil,
    Yet in my breast,
     A shack at best,
Laments the mother of my native soil.

Even where the sumptuous solitudes deny
  A shelter to a bird or butterfly,
As in the humblest dwelling of the dale
  A gracious welcome's shown the passer-by;
     But evermore clear

Allwhere I hear
The calling of my native hut and sky.

Land of my birth! a handful of thy sod
Resuscitates the flower of my faith;
For whatsoever the seer of science sayth,
Thou art the cradle and the tomb of God;
And forever I behold
A vision old
Of Beauty weeping where He once hath trod.

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The Days Gone By

By James Whitcomb Riley

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!
The apples in the orchard, and the pathway through the rye;
The chirrup of the robin, and the whistle of the quail
As he piped across the meadows sweet as any nightingale;
When the bloom was on the clover, and the blue was in the sky,
And my happy heart brimmed over in the days gone by.

In the days gone by, when my naked feet were tripped
By the honey-suckle's tangles where the water-lilies dipped,
And the ripples of the river lipped the moss along the brink
Where the placid-eyed and lazy-footed cattle came to drink,
And the tilting snipe stood fearless of the truant's wayward cry
And the splashing of the swimmer, in the days gone by.

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!
The music of the laughing lip, the luster of the eye;
The childish faith in fairies, and Aladdin's magic ring—
The simple, soul-reposing, glad belief in everything,—
When life was like a story, holding neither sob nor sigh,
In the golden olden glory of the days gone by.

Public domain

Rabbits and Fire

By Alberto Rios

Everything's been said
But one last thing about the desert,
And it's awful: During brush fires in the Sonoran desert,
Brush fires that happen before the monsoon and in the great,
Deep, wide, and smothering heat of the hottest months,
The longest months,
The hypnotic, immeasurable lulls of August and July—
During these summer fires, jackrabbits—
Jackrabbits and everything else
That lives in the brush of the rolling hills,
But jackrabbits especially—
Jackrabbits can get caught in the flames,
No matter how fast and big and strong and sleek they are.
And when they're caught,
Cornered in and against the thick
Trunks and thin spines of the cactus,
When they can't back up any more,
When they can't move, the flame—
It touches them,
And their fur catches fire.
Of course, they run away from the flame,
Finding movement even when there is none to be found,
Jumping big and high over the wave of fire, or backing
Even harder through the impenetrable
Tangle of hardened saguaro
And prickly pear and cholla and barrel,
But whichever way they find,
What happens is what happens: They catch fire
And then bring the fire with them when they run.
They don't know they're on fire at first,
Running so fast as to make the fire
Shoot like rocket engines and smoke behind them,
But then the rabbits tire
And the fire catches up,
Stuck onto them like the needles of the cactus,
Which at first must be what they think they feel on their skins.

They’ve felt this before, every rabbit.
But this time the feeling keeps on.
And of course, they ignite the brush and dried weeds
All over again, making more fire, all around them.
I’m sorry for the rabbits.
And I’m sorry for us
To know this.

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We Are of a Tribe

By Alberto Rios

We plant seeds in the ground
And dreams in the sky,

Hoping that, someday, the roots of one
Will meet the upstretched limbs of the other.

It has not happened yet.
We share the sky, all of us, the whole world:

Together, we are a tribe of eyes that look upward,
Even as we stand on uncertain ground.

The earth beneath us moves, quiet and wild,
Its boundaries shifting, its muscles wavering.

The dream of sky is indifferent to all this,
Impervious to borders, fences, reservations.

The sky is our common home, the place we all live.
There we are in the world together.

The dream of sky requires no passport.
Blue will not be fenced. Blue will not be a crime.

Look up. Stay awhile. Let your breathing slow.
Know that you always have a home here.

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When Giving Is All We Have

By Alberto Rios

One river gives
Its journey to the next.

We give because someone gave to us.
We give because nobody gave to us.

We give because giving has changed us.
We give because giving could have changed us.

We have been better for it,
We have been wounded by it—

Giving has many faces: It is loud and quiet,
Big, though small, diamond in wood-nails.

Its story is old, the plot worn and the pages too,
But we read this book, anyway, over and again:

Giving is, first and every time, hand to hand,
Mine to yours, yours to mine.

You gave me blue and I gave you yellow.
Together we are simple green. You gave me

What you did not have, and I gave you
What I had to give—together, we made

Something greater from the difference.

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Not Guilty

By David Rivard

The days are dog-eared, the edges torn,
ragged—like those pages
I ripped once out of library books,

for their photos
of Vallejo and bootless Robert Johnson.
A fine needs paying now

it's true, but
not by me.
I am no more guilty

than that thrush is
who sits there stripping moss
off the wet bark of a tree.

A red fleck, like his, glows
at the back of my head—a beauty mark,
left by the brain's after-jets.

I would not wish for the three brains
Robert required
to double-clutch his guitar

and chase those sounds he had to know
led down
and into a troubled dusky river, always.

Three brains did Johnson no earthly good,
neither his nor Vallejo's 4 & 1/2
worked right exactly—O bunglers,

O banged-up pans of disaster!
Crying for days, said Cesar, & singing for months.
How can I be so strong some times,

at others weak? I wish to be free,
but free to do what? To leave myself behind?
To switch channels remotely?

Better to sing.
Not like the bird, but as they sang,
Cesar & Robert—

with the shocked & seeded
sweetness of an apple
split open by a meat cleaver.

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Luke Havergal

By Edwin Arlington Robinson

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,
And in the twilight wait for what will come.
The leaves will whisper there of her, and some,
Like flying words, will strike you as they fall;
But go, and if you listen she will call.
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;
But there, where western glooms are gathering,
The dark will end the dark, if anything:
God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,
And hell is more than half of paradise.
No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies—
In eastern skies.

Out of a grave I come to tell you this,
Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss
That flames upon your forehead with a glow
That blinds you to the way that you must go.
Yes, there is yet one way to where she is,
Bitter, but one that faith may never miss.
Out of a grave I come to tell you this—
To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.
Go, for the winds are tearing them away,—
Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,
Nor any more to feel them as they fall;
But go, and if you trust her she will call.
There is the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

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The House on the Hill

By Edwin Arlington Robinson

They are all gone away,
  The House is shut and still,
There is nothing more to say.

Through broken walls and gray
  The winds blow bleak and shrill:
They are all gone away.

Nor is there one to-day
  To speak them good or ill:
There is nothing more to say.

Why is it then we stray
  Around the sunken sill?
They are all gone away,

And our poor fancy-play
  For them is wasted skill:
There is nothing more to say.

There is ruin and decay
  In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say.

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Mist

By Lola Rodríguez de Tió

translated from the Spanish by Roderick Gill

O faint remembrances of vanished days
  That stole away on such a velvet wing
O'er meads and groves, o'er plains and mountain ways,
  What grief and sorrow to my heart you bring!

Come back without the shadow of your care,
  Come back in silence and without a moan,
As the birds cross the unregarding air
  Till none may tell the whence or whither flown.

Come back amid the pallor of the moon
  That silvers all the azure rifts at sea,
Or in the deadly mist that in a swoon
  Engulfs afar the green palm's royal tree.

Bring back the murmur of the doves that made
  Their little nests so neighborly to mine;
The vibrant airs—the fragrances that played
  Around the peaks that saw my cradle shine.

Sing in my ear the melodies of old,
  So sweet and joyous to my inmost heart;
O faint remembrances two breasts should hold,
  Two breasts that Destiny was loath to part!

What matter if a sigh steals through the dream
  That shows the withered vine in flower again?—
So that remembrances in singing seem,
  O tremulous lyre, to speak my endless pain!

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On the Existence of the Soul

By Pattiann Rogers

How confident I am it is there. Don't I bring it,
As if it were enclosed in a fine leather case,
To particular places solely for its own sake?
Haven't I set it down before the variegated canyon
And the undeviating bald salt dome?
Don't I feed it on ivory calcium and ruffled
Shell bellies, shore boulders, on the sight
Of the petrel motionless over the sea, its splayed
Feet hanging? Don't I make sure it apprehends
The invisibly fine spray more than once?

I have seen that it takes in every detail
I can manage concerning the garden wall and its borders.
I have listed for it the comings and goings
Of one hundred species of insects explicitly described.
I have named the chartreuse stripe
And the fimbriated antenna, the bulbed thorax
And the multiple eye. I have sketched
The brilliant wings of the trumpet vine and invented
New vocabularies describing the interchanges between rocks
And their crevices, between the holly lip
And its concept of itself.

And if not for its sake, why would I go
Out into the night alone and stare deliberately
Straight up into 15 billion years ago and more?

I have cherished it. I have named it.
By my own solicitations
I have proof of its presence.

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The Significance of Location

By Pattiann Rogers

The cat has the chance to make the sunlight
Beautiful, to stop it and turn it immediately
Into black fur and motion, to take it
As shifting branch and brown feather
Into the back of the brain forever.

The cardinal has flown the sun in red
Through the oak forest to the lawn.
The finch has caught it in yellow
And taken it among the thorns. By the spider
It has been bound tightly and tied
In an eight-stringed knot.

The sun has been intercepted in its one
Basic state and changed to a million varieties
Of green stick and tassel. It has been broken
Into pieces by glass rings, by mist
Over the river. Its heat
Has been given the board fence for body,
The desert rock for fact. On winter hills
It has been laid down in white like a martyr.

This afternoon we could spread gold scarves
Clear across the field and say in truth,
“Sun you are silk.”

Imagine the sun totally isolated,
Its brightness shot in continuous streaks straight out
Into the black, never arrested,
Never once being made light.

Someone should take note
Of how the earth has saved the sun from oblivion.

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Happy Hour

By Lee Ann Roripaugh

I always forget the name,
delphinium,
even though it was the flower

the hummingbirds
loved best. They came in pairs—sleek,
emerald-bright

heads, the clockwork machinery
of their blurred wings
thrumming swift, menacing engines.

They slipped their beaks.
as if they were swizzle sticks, deep
into the blue

throat of delphinium and sucked
dry the nectar-
chilled hearts like goblets full of sweet,

frozen daiquiri.
I liked to sit on the back porch
in the evenings,

watching them and eating Spanish
peanuts, rolling
each nut between thumb and forefinger

to rub away
the red salty skin like brittle
tissue paper,

until the meat emerged gleaming,
yellow like old
ivory, smooth as polished bone.

And late August,
after exclamations of gold
flowers, tiny

and bitter, the caragana
trees let down their
beans to ripen, dry, and rupture—

at first there was
the soft drum of popcorn, slick with oil,
puttering some-

where in between seed, heat, and cloud.
Then sharp cracks like cap
gun or diminutive fireworks,

caragana
peas catapulting skyward like
pellet missiles.

Sometimes a meadowlark would lace
the night air with
its elaborate melody,

rippling and sleek
as a black satin ribbon. Some-
times there would be

a falling star. And because
this happened in
Wyoming, and because this was

my parents' house,
and because I'm never happy
with anything,

at any time, I always wished
that I was some-
where, anywhere else, but here.

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Women Like Me

By Wendy Rose

making promises they can’t keep.
For you, Grandmother, I said I would pull
each invading burr and thistle from your skin,
cut out the dizzy brittle eucalypt,
take from the ground the dark oily poison–
all to restore you happy and proud,
the whole of you transformed
and bursting into tomorrow.
        But where do I cut first?
Where should I begin to pull?
Should it be the Russian thistle
down the hill where backhoes
have bitten? Or African senecio
or tumbleweed bouncing
above the wind? Or the middle finger
of my right hand? Or my left eye
or the other one? Or a slice
from the small of my back, a slab of fat
from my thigh? I am broken
as much as any native ground,
my roots tap a thousand migrations.
My daughters were never born, I am
as much the invader as the native,
as much the last day of life as the first.
I presumed you to be as bitter as me,
to tremble and rage against alien weight.
Who should blossom? Who should receive pollen?
Who should be rooted, who pruned,
who watered, who picked?
Should I feed the white-faced cattle
who wait for the death train to come
or comb the wild seeds from their tails?
Who should return across the sea
or the Bering Strait or the world before this one
or the Mother Ground? Who should go screaming
to some other planet, burn up or melt

in a distant sun? Who should be healed
and who hurt? Who should dry
under summer's white sky, who should shrivel
at the first sign of drought? Who should be remembered?
Who should be the sterile chimera of earth and of another place,
alien with a native face,
native with an alien face?

Wendy Rose, "Women Like Me" from *Itch Like Crazy*. Copyright © 2002 by Wendy Rose. Used by permission of The University of Arizona Press.

At a Window

By Carl Sandburg

Give me hunger,
O you gods that sit and give
The world its orders.
Give me hunger, pain and want,
Shut me out with shame and failure
From your doors of gold and fame,
Give me your shabbiest, weariest hunger!

But leave me a little love,
A voice to speak to me in the day end,
A hand to touch me in the dark room
Breaking the long loneliness.
In the dusk of day-shapes
Blurring the sunset,
One little wandering, western star
Thrust out from the changing shores of shadow.
Let me go to the window,
Watch there the day-shapes of dusk
And wait and know the coming
Of a little love.

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Chicago

By Carl Sandburg

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's
Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness,
Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding,
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the people,
Laughing!
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

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I Am the People, the Mob

By Carl Sandburg

I am the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass.
Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?
I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.
I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns. They die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.
I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much plowing. Terrible storms pass over me. I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted. I forget. Everything but Death comes to me and makes me work and give up what I have. And I forget.
Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember. Then—I forget.
When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a fool—then there will be no speaker in all the world say the name: "The People," with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.
The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then.

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Prayers of Steel

By Carl Sandburg

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.
Let me pry loose old walls.
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.
Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into white stars.

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Still Life

By Carl Sandburg

Cool your heels on the rail of an observation car.
Let the engineer open her up for ninety miles an hour.
Take in the prairie right and left, rolling land and new hay crops,
swaths of new hay laid in the sun.
A gray village flecks by and the horses hitched in front of the
post-office never blink an eye.
A barnyard and fifteen Holstein cows, dabs of white on a black
wall map, never blink an eye.
A signalman in a tower, the outpost of Kansas City, keeps his
place at a window with the serenity of a bronze statue on a
dark night when lovers pass whispering.

Public domain

Under the Harvest Moon

By Carl Sandburg

Under the harvest moon,
When the soft silver
Drips shimmering
Over the garden nights,
Death, the gray mocker,
Comes and whispers to you
As a beautiful friend
Who remembers.

Under the summer roses
When the flagrant crimson
Lurks in the dusk
Of the wild red leaves,
Love, with little hands,
Comes and touches you
With a thousand memories,
And asks you
Beautiful, unanswerable questions.

Public domain

The Prairie Town

By Helen Santmyer

Lovers of beauty laugh at this grey town,
    Where dust lies thick on ragged curb-side trees,
And compass-needle streets lead up and down
    And lose themselves in empty prairie seas.

Here is no winding scented lane, no hill
    Crowned with a steepled church, no garden wall
Of old grey stone where lilacs bloom, and fill
    The air with fragrance when the May rains fall.

But here is the unsoftened majesty
    Of the wide earth where all the wide streets end,
And from the dusty corner one may see
    The full moon rise, and flaming sun descend.

The long main street, whence farmers' teams go forth,
Lies like an old sea road, star-pointed north.

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Lines Written at Castle Island, Lake Superior

By Jane Johnston Schoolcraft

translated from the Anishinaabemowin

Here in my native inland sea
From pain and sickness would I flee
And from its shores and island bright
Gather a store of sweet delight.
Lone island of the saltless sea!
How wide, how sweet, how fresh and free
How all transporting—is the view
Of rocks and skies and waters blue
Uniting, as a song’s sweet strains
To tell, here nature only reigns.
Ah, nature! here forever sway
Far from the haunts of men away
For here, there are no sordid fears,
No crimes, no misery, no tears
No pride of wealth; the heart to fill,
No laws to treat my people ill.

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From Brooklyn

By Evelyn Scott

Along the shore
A black net of branches
Tangles the pulpy yellow lamps.
The shell-colored sky is lustrous with the fading sun.
Across the river Manhattan floats—
Dim gardens of fire—
And rushing invisible toward me through the fog,
A hurricane of faces.

Public domain

Sonnett II

By Alan Seeger

Not that I always struck the proper mean
Of what mankind must give for what they gain,
But, when I think of those whom dull routine
And the pursuit of cheerless toil enchain,
Who from their desk-chairs seeing a summer cloud
Race through blue heaven on its joyful course
Sigh sometimes for a life less cramped and bowed,
I think I might have done a great deal worse;
For I have ever gone untied and free,
The stars and my high thoughts for company;
Wet with the salt-spray and the mountain showers,
I have had the sense of space and amplitude,
And love in many places, silver-shoed,
Has come and scattered all my path with flowers.

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Blade, Unplugged

By Tim Seibles

It’s true: I almost never
smile, but that doesn’t mean

I’m not *in love*: my heart
is that black violin
played slowly. You know that

moment late in the solo
when the voice
is so pure you feel
the blood in it: the wound

between rage
and complete surrender. That’s
where I’m smiling. You just
can’t see it—the sound

bleeding perfectly
inside me. The first time
I killed a vampire I was

sad: I mean
we were almost
family.

But that’s

so many lives

ago. I believe

in the cry that cuts

into the melody, the strings

calling back the forgotten world.

When I think of the madness

that has made me and the midnight

I walk inside—all day long:

when I think of that

one note that breaks

what’s left of what’s

human in me, man,

I love everything

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Bright Copper Kettles

By Vijay Seshadri

Dead friends coming back to life, dead family,
speaking languages living and dead, their minds retentive,
their five senses intact, their footprints like a butterfly's,
mercy shining from their comprehensive faces—
this is one of my favorite things.
I like it so much I sleep all the time.
Moon by day and sun by night find me dispersed
deep in the dreams where they appear.
In fields of goldenrod, in the city of five pyramids,
before the empress with the melting face, under
the towering plane tree, they just show up.
"It's all right," they seem to say. "It always was."
They are diffident and polite.
(Who knew the dead were so polite?)
They don't want to scare me; their heads don't spin like weather vanes.
They don't want to steal my body
and possess the earth and wreak vengeance.
They're dead, you understand, they don't exist. And, besides,
why would they care? They're subatomic, horizontal. Think about it.
One of them shyly offers me a pencil.
The eyes under the eyelids dart faster and faster.
Through the intercom of the house where for so long there was no music,
the right Reverend Al Green is singing,
"I could never see tomorrow.
I was never told about the sorrow."

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Memoir

By Vijay Seshadri

Orwell says somewhere that no one ever writes the real story of their life.
The real story of a life is the story of its humiliations.
If I wrote that story now—
radioactive to the end of time—
people, I swear, your eyes would fall out, you couldn't peel
the gloves fast enough
from your hands scorched by the firestorms of that shame.
Your poor hands. Your poor eyes
to see me weeping in my room
or boring the tall blonde to death.
Once I accused the innocent.
Once I bowed and prayed to the guilty.
I still wince at what I once said to the devastated widow.
And one October afternoon, under a locust tree
whose blackened pods were falling and making
illuminating patterns on the pathway,
I was seized by joy,
and someone saw me there,
and that was the worst of all,
lacerating and unforgettable.

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Self-Portrait with Sylvia Plath's Braid

By Diane Seuss

Some women make a pilgrimage to visit it
in the Indiana library charged to keep it safe.

I didn't drive to it; I dreamed it, the thick braid
roped over my hands, heavier than lead.

My own hair was long for years.
Then I became obsessed with chopping it off,

and I did, clear up to my ears. If hair is beauty
then I am no longer beautiful.

Sylvia was beautiful, wasn't she?
And like all of us, didn't she wield her beauty

like a weapon? And then she married,
and laid it down, and when she was betrayed

and took it up again it was a word-weapon,
a poem-sword. In the dream I fasten

her braid to my own hair, at my nape.
I walk outside with it, through the world

of men, swinging it behind me like a tail.

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Not Horses

By Natalie Shapero

What I adore is not horses, with their modern
domestic life span of 25 years. What I adore
is a bug that lives only one day, especially if
it's a terrible day, a day of train derailment or
chemical lake or cop admits to cover-up, a day
when no one thinks of anything else, least of all
that bug. I know how it feels, born as I've been
into these rotting times, as into sin. Everybody's
busy, so distraught they forget to kill me,
and even that won't keep me alive. I share
my home not with horses, but with a little dog
who sees poorly at dusk and menaces stumps,
makes her muscle known to every statue.
I wish she could have a single day of language,
so that I might reassure her *don't be afraid —*
our whole world is dead and so can do you no harm.

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on new year's eve

By Evie Shockley

we make midnight a maquette of the year:
frostlight glinting off snow to solemnize
the vows we offer to ourselves in near
silence: the competition shimmerwise

of champagne and chandeliers to attract
laughter and cheers: the glow from the fireplace
reflecting the burning intra-red pact
between beloveds: we cosset the space

of a fey hour, anxious gods molding our
hoped-for adams with this temporal clay:
each of us edacious for shining or
rash enough to think sacrifice will stay

this fugacious time: while stillness suspends
vitality in balance, as passions
struggle with passions for sway, the mind wends
towards what's to come: a callithump of fashions,

ersatz smiles, crowded days: a bloodless cut
that severs soul from bone: a long aching
quiet in which we will hear nothing but
the clean crack of our promises breaking.

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Poetry

By Lydia Huntley Sigourney

Morn on her rosy couch awoke,
  Enchantment led the hour,
And mirth and music drank the dews
  That freshen'd Beauty's flower,
Then from her bower of deep delight,
  I heard a young girl sing,
'Oh, speak no ill of poetry,
  For 'tis a holy thing.'

The Sun in noon-day heat rose high,
  And on the heaving breast,
I saw a weary pilgrim toil
  Unpitied and unblest,
Yet still in trembling measures flow'd
  Forth from a broken string,
'Oh, speak no ill of poetry,
  For 'tis a holy thing.'

'Twas night, and Death the curtains drew,
  'Mid agony severe,
While there a willing spirit went
  Home to a glorious sphere,
Yet still it sigh'd, even when was spread
  The waiting Angel's wing,
'Oh, speak no ill of poetry,
  For 'tis a holy thing.'

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Albondigas

By Richard Siken

My parents took me to Red Lobster to tell me they were getting a divorce. Parents always take you to Red Lobster when they need to tell you something awful and important, like failure. They figure if they're going to ruin a restaurant for you, it should be somewhere lame, like Red Lobster or Olive Garden. We went to Red Lobster. They couldn't bring themselves to say anything. I was confused. My brother, visiting, offered to tell me. He told me. I didn't take it well. To calm me down, he tried to read "Macavity: The Mystery Cat" to me while I was throwing things. He ruined it. We were supposed to ruin Red Lobster. I tried to break a toy school bus that he had given me but it was too well made and solid wood so I gave up. *It's not that I don't want to be your mom, it's that I don't want to be anyone's mom. You can call me Phyllis and we can work on being friends. When I get back.* My father hired a housekeeper. She wasn't a good cook but she made a lot of Mexican food, which I liked. The first time she made albondigas, my father thought it was matzo ball soup made by a crazy person. He accused her of being a crazy person. He raised his voice and gripped the edge of the table to keep his hands down, so that was ruined for me as well. She should have left but she didn't, she stuck around until my future stepmother entered the competition for the slot in the kitchen and won. They took me to Red Lobster to let me know they were getting married. I had popcorn shrimp and nodded along. My mother sent me a postcard with a picture of the Eiffel Tower, telling me how great things were. It had domestic postage.

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Meanwhile

By Richard Siken

Driving, dogs barking, how you get used to it, how you make
the new streets yours.
Trees outside the window and a big band sound that makes you feel like
everything's okay,
a feeling that lasts for one song maybe,
the parentheses all clicking shut behind you.
The way we move through time and space, or only time.
The way it's night for many miles, and then suddenly
it's not, it's breakfast
and you're standing in the shower for over an hour,
holding the bar of soap up to the light.
I will keep watch. I will water the yard.
Knot the tie and go to work. Unknot the tie and go to sleep.
I sleep. I dream. I make up things
that I would never say. I say them very quietly.
The trees in wind, the streetlights on,
the click and flash of cigarettes
being smoked on the lawn, and just a little kiss before we say goodnight.
It spins like a wheel inside you: green yellow, green blue,
green beautiful green.
It's simple: it isn't over, it's just begun. It's green. It's still green.

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Poetry

By Richard Siken

When I was in the Secret Service I would talk to my wrist. It was
part of my job and I was very good at it. I said *Breaker breaker*. I said
The Jackal is on the move. During the day, I kept everyone safe. At
night, I dreamed of standing very quietly next to doors. To work
at the White House one must be sophisticated and intense. One
must be dedicated to turning the knobs and lifting the pens that
make the laws. One must anticipate, relentlessly, the unanticipated.
Sometimes, to avoid suspicion, I would pretend to be a robot and
I would sing—like this: *Beep boop*. An impeccable camouflage.
Once, in a submarine, at the end of a long shift, in the terrible dark
beneath a terrible storm, in the blub and swell of it, sunk and fast-
stuck in a trench and far from home, cold-soaked and lost in the
plush of a velvet suit—an octopus costume, elaborately constructed,
with droopy arms spangled with buttons for suckers—I escaped
discovery several times. If I was undercover now I wouldn't say.
Until tomorrow. I tell you this because I love you. I might be doing
it all wrong.

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Sunflowers

By Charles Simic

Kings, here are the jewellers,
the crows. The blue sky is a scale.
We'll weigh each seed's dark half.

They hover. The shade of the oak
is damp and heavy. At its rim—
wick of the cricket
against the noon sun.

Farther off, the hidden brook,
meandering. Its ripples,
peas shaken from the pod,
a shy sound, barely audible…

I came to touch you.
You've fallen asleep in the grass.
You'll think it's a leaf
drifting down on your face.

The door of our house is the entrance
of a church on a day of wedding
and the glow inside is the ring
in the hand of the bridegroom.

Sunflowers,
my greed is not for gold.

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No Apology: A Poemifesto

By Carmen Gimenez Smith

Isn't there a line by Yusef Komunyakaa, "I apologize for the eyes in my head."
Maybe what I am trying to say is that I apologize for the sight in my eyes.
—Susan Briante

I would love to make a proposal, and it is out of love,
not patronizing love but true revolutionary love, and it won't
upset the orbit tomorrow. So here's where I'd like
to begin, and this might be the hardest thing you've tried to do,
or maybe you already do it and I'm grateful for you
because you've inspired me. I know it's the hardest thing
for me because I haven't done it consistently (not at all, sorry),
but I want to recommend that we stop apologizing.
Today I counted and I said I'm sorry approximately 22 times.
I apologized for my setting my stuff down on the counter at the Krogers.
I apologized for being behind someone at a copy machine.
I apologized for someone else bumping into a stranger.
I apologized for taking longer than a minute to explain an idea.
Suffice it to say I am sorry all the time.
I won't tell you what to do because that makes me
an implicit solicitor of sorry. Personally,
when the word comes into my mouth, I'm going to shape it into
a seed to plant in another woman's aura as love. I only ask
that we get started. This will be our first step in world domination.

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Hip-Hop Ghazal

By Patricia Smith

Gotta love us brown girls, munching on fat, swinging blue hips,
decked out in shells and splashes, Lawdie, bringing them woo hips.

As the jukebox teases, watch my sistas throat the heartbreak,
inhaling bassline, cracking backbone and singing thru hips.

Like something boneless, we glide silent, seeping ‘tween floorboards,
wrapping around the hims, and *ooh wee*, clinging like glue hips.

Engines grinding, rotating, smokin’, gotta pull back some.
Natural minds are lost at the mere sight of ringing true hips.

Gotta love us girls, just struttin’ down Manhattan streets
killing the menfolk with a dose of that stinging view. Hips.

Crying ’bout getting old—Patricia, you need to get up off
what God gave you. Say a prayer and start slinging. Cue hips.

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Siblings

By Patricia Smith

Hurricanes, 2005

Arlene learned to dance backwards in heels that were too high.
Bret prayed for a shaggy mustache made of mud and hair.
Cindy just couldn't keep her windy legs together.
Dennis never learned to swim.
Emily whispered her gusts into a thousand skins.
Franklin, farsighted and anxious, bumbled villages.
Gert spat her matronly name against a city's flat face.
Harvey hurled a wailing child high.
Irene, the baby girl, threw pounding tantrums.
José liked the whip sound of slapping.
Lee just craved the whip.
Maria's thunder skirts flew high when she danced.
Nate was mannered and practical. He stormed precisely.
Ophelia nibbled weirdly on the tips of depressions.
Philippe slept too late, flailing on a wronged ocean.
Rita was a vicious flirt. She woke Philippe with rumors.
Stan was born business, a gobbler of steel.
Tammy crooned country, getting the words all wrong.
Vince died before anyone could remember his name.
Wilma opened her maw wide, flashing rot.

None of them talked about Katrina.
She was their odd sister,
the blood dazzler.

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A Man's World

By Tracy K. Smith

He will surely take it out when you're alone
And let it dangle between you like a locket on a chain.
Like any world, it will flicker with lights that mean dwellings,
Traffic, a constellation of need. Tiny clouds will drag shadows
Across the plane. He'll grin watching you squint, deciphering
Rivers, borders, bridges arcing up from rock. He'll recite
Its history. How one empire swallowed another. How one
Civilization lasted 3,000 years with no word for eternity.
He'll guide your hand through the layers of atmosphere,
Teach you to tamper with the weather. Swinging it
Gently back and forth, he'll swear he's never shown it
To anyone else before.

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Sci-Fi

By Tracy K. Smith

There will be no edges, but curves.
Clean lines pointing only forward.

History, with its hard spine & dog-eared
Corners, will be replaced with nuance,

Just like the dinosaurs gave way
To mounds and mounds of ice.

Women will still be women, but
The distinction will be empty. Sex,

Having outlived every threat, will gratify
Only the mind, which is where it will exist.

For kicks, we'll dance for ourselves
Before mirrors studded with golden bulbs.

The oldest among us will recognize that glow—
But the word *sun* will have been re-assigned

To the Standard Uranium-Neutralizing device
Found in households and nursing homes.

And yes, we'll live to be much older, thanks
To popular consensus. Weightless, unhinged,

Eons from even our own moon, we'll drift
In the haze of space, which will be, once

And for all, scrutable and safe.

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The Universe as Primal Scream

By Tracy K. Smith

5pm on the nose. They open their mouths
And it rolls out: high, shrill and metallic.
First the boy, then his sister. Occasionally,
They both let loose at once, and I think
Of putting on my shoes to go up and see
Whether it is merely an experiment
Their parents have been conducting
Upon the good crystal, which must surely
Lie shattered to dust on the floor.

Maybe the mother is still proud
Of the four pink lungs she nursed
To such might. Perhaps, if they hit
The magic decibel, the whole building
Will lift-off, and we'll ride to glory
Like Elijah. If this is it—if this is what
Their cries are cocked toward—let the sky
Pass from blue, to red, to molten gold,
To black. Let the heaven we inherit approach.

Whether it is our dead in Old Testament robes,
Or a door opening onto the roiling infinity of space.
Whether it will bend down to greet us like a father,
Or swallow us like a furnace. I'm ready
To meet what refuses to let us keep anything
For long. What teases us with blessings,
Bends us with grief. Wizard, thief, the great
Wind rushing to knock our mirrors to the floor,
To sweep our short lives clean. How mean

Our racket seems beside it. My stereo on shuffle.
The neighbor chopping onions through a wall.
All of it just a hiccough against what may never
Come for us. And the kids upstairs still at it,
Screaming like the Dawn of Man, as if something
They have no name for has begun to insist
Upon being born.

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Wade in the Water

By Tracy K. Smith

for the Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters

One of the women greeted me.
I love you, she said. She didn't
Know me, but I believed her,
And a terrible new ache
Rolled over in my chest,
Like in a room where the drapes
Have been swept back. I love you,
I love you, as she continued
Down the hall past other strangers,
Each feeling pierced suddenly
By pillars of heavy light.
I love you, throughout
The performance, in every
Handclap, every stomp.
I love you in the rusted iron
Chains someone was made
To drag until love let them be
Unclasped and left empty
In the center of the ring.
I love you in the water
Where they pretended to wade,
Singing that old blood-deep song
That dragged us to those banks
And cast us in. I love you,
The angles of it scraping at
Each throat, shouldering past
The swirling dust motes
In those beams of light
That whatever we now knew
We could let ourselves feel, knew
To climb. O Woods—O Dogs—
O Tree—O Gun—O*Girl, run*—

O Miraculous Many Gone—
O Lord—O Lord—O Lord—
Is this love the trouble you promised?

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Heart Butte, Montana

By M.L. Smoker

The unsympathetic wind, how she has evaded me for years now,
leaving a guileless shell and no way to navigate. Once when I stood
on a plateau of earth just at the moment before the dangerous,
jutting peaks converged upon the lilting sway of grasslands, I almost
found a way back. There, the sky, quite possibly all the elements,
caused the rock and soil and vegetation to congregate. Their prayer
was not new and so faint I could hardly discern. Simple remembrances,
like a tiny, syncopated chorus calling everyone home: across
a thousand eastward miles, and what little wind was left at my back.
But I could not move. And then the music was gone.
All that was left were the spring time faces of mountains, gazing down,
their last patches of snow, luminous. I dreamed of becoming snow melt,
gliding down the slope and in to the valley. With the promise,
an assurance, that there is always a way to become bird, tree, water again.

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A Locked House

By W.D. Snodgrass

As we drove back, crossing the hill,
The house still
Hidden in the trees, I always thought—
A fool's fear—that it might have caught
Fire, someone could have broken in.
As if things must have been
Too good here. Still, we always found
It locked tight, safe and sound.

I mentioned that, once, as a joke;
No doubt we spoke
Of the absurdity
To fear some dour god's jealousy
Of our good fortune. From the farm
Next door, our neighbors saw no harm
Came to the things we cared for here.
What did we have to fear?

Maybe I should have thought: all
Such things rot, fall—
Barns, houses, furniture.
We two are stronger than we were
Apart; we've grown
Together. Everything we own
Can burn; we know what counts—some such
Idea. We said as much.

We'd watched friends driven to betray;
Felt that love drained away
Some self they need.
We'd said love, like a growth, can feed
On hate we turn in and disguise;
We warned ourselves. That you might despise
Me—hate all we both loved best—
None of us ever guessed.

The house still stands, locked, as it stood
Untouched a good

Two years after you went.
Some things passed in the settlement;
Some things slipped away. Enough's left
That I come back sometimes. The theft
And vandalism were our own.
Maybe we should have known.

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Riprap

By Gary Snyder

Lay down these words
Before your mind like rocks.
placed solid, by hands
In choice of place, set
Before the body of the mind
in space and time:
Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall
riprap of things:
Cobble of milky way,
straying planets,
These poems, people,
lost ponies with
Dragging saddles—
and rocky sure-foot trails.
The worlds like an endless
four-dimensional
Game of *Go*.
ants and pebbles
In the thin loam, each rock a word
a creek-washed stone
Granite: ingrained
with torment of fire and weight
Crystal and sediment linked hot
all change, in thoughts,
As well as things.

Gary Snyder, “Riprap” from *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*. Copyright © 1965 by Gary Snyder. Used with the permission of Counterpoint Press.

Ikebana

By Cathy Song

To prepare the body,
aim for the translucent perfection
you find in the sliced shavings
of a pickled turnip.
In order for this to happen,
you must avoid the sun,
protect the face
under a paper parasol
until it is bruised white
like the skin of lilies.
Use white soap
from a blue porcelain
dish for this.

Restrict yourself.
Eat the whites of things:
tender bamboo shoots,
the veins of the young iris,
the clouded eye of a fish.

Then wrap the body,
as if it were a perfumed gift,
in pieces of silk
held together with invisible threads
like a kite, weighing no more
than a handful of crushed chrysanthemums.
Light enough to float in the wind.
You want the effect
of koi moving through water.

When the light leaves
the room, twist lilacs
into the lacquered hair
piled high like a complicated shrine.
There should be tiny bells
inserted somewhere
in the web of hair

to imitate crickets
singing in a hidden grove.

Reveal the nape of the neck,
your beauty spot.
Hold the arrangement.
If your spine slacks
and you feel faint,
remember the hand-picked flower
set in the front alcove,
which, just this morning,
you so skillfully wired into place.
How poised it is!
Petal and leaf
curving like a fan,
the stem snipped and wedged
into the metal base—
to appear like a spontaneous accident.

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Enigma

By Leonora Speyer

It would be easy to forgive,
If I could but remember;
If I could hear, lost love of mine,
The music of your cruelties,
Shaking to sound the silent skies,
Could voice with them their song divine,
Red with pain’s leaping ember:
It would be easy to forgive,
If I could but remember.
It would be easy to forget,
If I could find lost Sorrow;
If I could kiss her plaintive face,
And break with her her bitter bread,
Could share again her woeful bed,
And know with tears her pale embrace.
Make yesterday, to-morrow:
It would be easy to forget,
If I could find lost Sorrow.

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Squall

By Leonora Speyer

The squall sweeps gray-winged across the obliterated hills,

And the startled lake seems to run before it;

From the wood comes a clamor of leaves,

Tugging at the twigs,

Pouring from the branches,

And suddenly the birds are still.

Thunder crumples the sky,

Lightning tears at it.

And now the rain!

The rain—thudding—implacable—

The wind, reveling in the confusion of great pines!

And a silver sifting of light,

A coolness;

A sense of summer anger passing,

Of summer gentleness creeping nearer—

Penitent, tearful,

Forgiven!

Public domain

Swallows

By Leonora Speyer

They dip their wings in the sunset,

They dash against the air

As if to break themselves upon its stillness:

In every movement, too swift to count,

Is a revelry of indecision,

A furtive delight in trees they do not desire

And in grasses that shall not know their weight.

They hover and lean toward the meadow

With little edged cries;

And then,

As if frightened at the earth’s nearness,

They seek the high austerity of evening sky

And swirl into its depth.

Public domain

The Last Morning in the Country

By Leonora Speyer

Dawn slips within my room to say good-by:
Buffeted, bruised, by autumn rain
All night,
While I lay sleeping, held to dreams, again
She comes from out the violated sky,
Dragging her tarnished light.

With dim leaves drooping, hanging all about
Her misty face, her eyes still wet,
She stands
Disconsolate beneath her veils—and yet
Bravely she spills one last bird’s note from out
Her summer-empty hands.

Public domain

Ask Me

By William E. Stafford

Some time when the river is ice ask me
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether
what I have done is my life. Others
have come in their slow way into
my thought, and some have tried to help
or to hurt: ask me what difference
their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.
You and I can turn and look
at the silent river and wait. We know
the current is there, hidden; and there
are comings and goings from miles away
that hold the stillness exactly before us.
What the river says, that is what I say.

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At the Bomb Testing Site

By William E. Stafford

At noon in the desert a panting lizard
waited for history, its elbows tense,
watching the curve of a particular road
as if something might happen.

It was looking at something farther off
than people could see, an important scene
acted in stone for little selves
at the flute end of consequences.

There was just a continent without much on it
under a sky that never cared less.
Ready for a change, the elbows waited.
The hands gripped hard on the desert.

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At the Un-National Monument Along the Canadian Border

By William E. Stafford

This is the field where the battle did not happen,
where the unknown soldier did not die.
This is the field where grass joined hands,
where no monument stands,
and the only heroic thing is the sky.

Birds fly here without any sound,
unfolding their wings across the open.
No people killed—or were killed—on this ground
hallowed by neglect and an air so tame
that people celebrate it by forgetting its name.

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The Well Rising

By William E. Stafford

The well rising without sound,
the spring on a hillside,
the plowshare brimming through deep ground
everywhere in the field—

The sharp swallows in their swerve
flaring and hesitating
hunting for the final curve
coming closer and closer—

The swallow heart from wingbeat to wingbeat
counseling decision, decision:
thunderous examples. I place my feet
with care in such a world.

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Traveling through the Dark

By William E. Stafford

Traveling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—
her side was *warm*; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all —my only swerving—,
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

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What's in My Journal

By William E. Stafford

Odd things, like a button drawer. Mean
Thing, fishhooks, barbs in your hand.
But marbles too. A genius for being agreeable.
Junkyard crucifixes, voluptuous
discards. Space for knickknacks, and for
Alaska. Evidence to hang me, or to beatify.
Clues that lead nowhere, that never connected
anyway. Deliberate obfuscation, the kind
that takes genius. Chasms in character.
Loud omissions. Mornings that yawn above
a new grave. Pages you know exist
but you can't find them. Someone's terribly
inevitable life story, maybe mine.

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The Light the Dead See

By Frank Stanford

There are many people who come back
After the doctor has smoothed the sheet
Around their body
And left the room to make his call.

They die but they live.

They are called the dead who lived through their deaths,
And among my people
They are considered wise and honest.

They float out of their bodies
And light on the ceiling like a moth,
Watching the efforts of everyone around them.

The voices and the images of the living
Fade away.

A roar sucks them under
The wheels of a darkness without pain.
Off in the distance
There is someone
Like a signalman swinging a lantern.

The light grows, a white flower.
It becomes very intense, like music.

They see the faces of those they loved,
The truly dead who speak kindly.

They see their father sitting in a field.
The harvest is over and his cane chair is mended.
There is a towel around his neck,
The odor of bay rum.
Then they see their mother
Standing behind him with a pair of shears.
The wind is blowing.
She is cutting his hair.

The dead have told these stories
To the living.

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Fable for Blackboard

By George Starbuck

Here is the grackle, people.
Here is the fox, folks.
The grackle sits in the bracken. The fox
  hopes.

Here are the fronds, friends,
that cover the fox.
The fronds get in a frenzy. The grackle
  looks.

Here are the ticks, tykes,
that live in the leaves, loves.
The fox is confounded,
and God is above.

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A Patriotic Leading

By Gertrude Stein

Verse I.
Indeed indeed
Can you see
The stars.
And regularly the precious treasure.
What do we have without measure.
We know.

Verse II.
We suspect the second man.

Verse III
We are worthy of everything that happens.
You mean weddings.
Naturally I mean weddings.

Verse IV
And then we are.
Hail to the nation.

Verse V
Do you think we believe it.

Verse VI
It is that or bust.

Verse VII
We cannot bust.

Verse VIII
Thank you.

Verse IX
Thank you so much.

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Much Later

By Gertrude Stein

Elephants and birds of beauty and a gold fish. Gold fish or a superstition. They always bring bad luck. He had
them and he was not told. Gold fish and he was not old. Gold fish and he was not to scold. Gold fish all
told. The result was that the other people never had them and he knows nothing of it.

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Tender Buttons [A Plate]

By Gertrude Stein

A PLATE.

An occasion for a plate, an occasional resource is in buying and how soon does washing enable a selection of the same thing neater. If the party is small a clever song is in order.

Plates and a dinner set of colored china. Pack together a string and enough with it to protect the centre, cause a considerable haste and gather more as it is cooling, collect more trembling and not any even trembling, cause a whole thing to be a church.

A sad size a size that is not sad is blue as every bit of blue is precocious. A kind of green a game in green and nothing flat nothing quite flat and more round, nothing a particular color strangely, nothing breaking the losing of no little piece.

A splendid address a really splendid address is not shown by giving a flower freely, it is not shown by a mark or by wetting.

Cut cut in white, cut in white so lately. Cut more than any other and show it. Show it in the stem and in starting and in evening coming complication.

A lamp is not the only sign of glass. The lamp and the cake are not the only sign of stone. The lamp and the cake and the cover are not the only necessity altogether.

A plan a hearty plan, a compressed disease and no coffee, not even a card or a change to incline each way, a plan that has that excess and that break is the one that shows filling.

Public domain

Earthly Anecdote

By Wallace Stevens

Every time the bucks went clattering
Over Oklahoma
A firecat bristled in the way.

Wherever they went,
They went clattering,
Until they swerved,
In a swift, circular line,
To the right,
Because of the firecat.

Or until they swerved,
In a swift, circular line,
To the left,
Because of the firecat.

The bucks clattered.
The firecat went leaping,
To the right, to the left,
And
Bristled in the way.

Later, the firecat closed his bright eyes
And slept.

Public domain

Sonnet

By Wallace Stevens

Lo, even as I passed beside the booth
Of roses, and beheld them brightly twine
To damask heights, taking them as a sign
Of my own self still unconcerned with truth;
Even as I held up in hands uncouth
And drained with joy the golden-bodied wine,
Deeming it half-unworthy, half divine,
From out the sweet-rimmed goblet of my youth.

Even in that pure hour I heard the tone
Of grievous music stir in memory,
Telling me of the time already flown
From my first youth. It sounded like the rise
Of distant echo from dead melody,
Soft as a song heard far in Paradise.

Public domain

Tea at the Palaz of Hoon

By Wallace Stevens

Not less because in purple I descended
The western day through what you called
The loneliest air, not less was I myself.

What was the ointment sprinkled on my beard?
What were the hymns that buzzed beside my ears?
What was the sea whose tide swept through me there?

Out of my mind the golden ointment rained,
And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.
I was myself the compass of that sea:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
And there I found myself more truly and more strange.

Public domain

The Emperor of Ice-Cream

By Wallace Stevens

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month’s newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Public domain

The Snow Man

By Wallace Stevens

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Public domain

The Land of Counterpane

By Robert Louis Stevenson

When I was sick and lay a-bed,
I had two pillows at my head,
And all my toys beside me lay
To keep me happy all the day.

And sometimes for an hour or so
I watched my leaden soldiers go,
With different uniforms and drills,
Among the bed-clothes, through the hills;

And sometimes sent my ships in fleets
All up and down among the sheets;
Or brought my trees and houses out,
And planted cities all about.

I was the giant great and still
That sits upon the pillow-hill,
And sees before him, dale and plain,
The pleasant land of counterpane.

Public domain

Mnemosyne

By Trumbull Stickney

It’s autumn in the country I remember

How warm a wind blew here about the ways!
And shadows on the hillside lay to slumber
During the long sun-sweetened summer-days.

It’s cold abroad the country I remember.

The swallows veering skimmed the golden grain
At midday with a wing aslant and limber;
And yellow cattle browsed upon the plain

It’s empty down the country I remember.

I had a sister lovely in my sight:
Her hair was dark, her eyes were very sombre;
We sang together in the woods at night.

It’s lonely in the country I remember.

The babble of our children fills my ears,
And on our hearth I stare the perished ember
To flames that show all starry thro’ my tears.

It’s dark about the country I remember.

There are the mountains where I lived.
The path Is slushed with cattle-tracks and fallen timber,
The stumps are twisted by the tempests’ wrath.

But that I knew these places are my own,
I’d ask how came such wretchedness to cumber
The earth, and I to people it alone.

It rains across the country I remember.

Public domain

Waiting for Happiness

By Nomi Stone

Dog knows when friend will come home
because each hour friend's smell pales,
air paring down the good smell
with its little diamond. It means I miss you
O I miss you, how hard it is to wait
for my happiness, and how good when
it arrives. Here we are in our bodies,
ripe as avocados, softer, brightening
with latencies like a hot, blue core
of electricity: our ankles knotted to our
calves by a thread, womb sparking
with watermelon seeds we swallowed
as children, the heart again badly hurt, trying
and failing. But it is almost five says
the dog. It is almost five.

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Always on the Train

By Ruth Stone

Writing poems about writing poems
is like rolling bales of hay in Texas.
Nothing but the horizon to stop you.

But consider the railroad's edge of metal trash;
bird perches, miles of telephone wires.
What is so innocent as grazing cattle?
If you think about it, it turns into words.

Trash is so cheerful; flying up
like grasshoppers in front of the reaper.
The dust devil whirls it aloft; bronze candy wrappers,
squares of clear plastic—windows on a house of air.

Below the weedy edge in last year's mat,
red and silver beer cans.
In bits blown equally everywhere,
the gaiety of flying paper
and the black high flung patterns of flocking birds.

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Collectors

By Marion Strobel

The barnacle of crowds—
Like a tuck
On a finished skirt, unnoticed—
He collected his material
Covertly:
A ragpicker,
A scavenger of words.

And the gleanings
Of his hearing
He would costume
In his own words,
And parade before
A listener.

So that now,
Across the tea-cup,
He was telling
Of his research,
Of his study,
Of his deep thought-out
Conclusions.

And the lady,
Connoisseur of old thoughts
Bound in new gilt bindings,
Smiled approval
At the finding
Of another curio
To place
In her long gallery.

Public domain

After the Dinner Party

By Adrienne Su

Dropping napkins, corks, and non-compostables
into the trash, I see that friends have mistaken
my everyday chopsticks for disposables,

helpfully discarding them alongside inedibles:
pork bones, shrimp shells, bitter melon.
Among napkins and corks, they do look compostable:

off-white, wooden, warped from continual
washing — no lacquer, no ornament. But anyone
who thinks these chopsticks are disposable

doesn't live with chopsticks in the comfortable
way of a favorite robe, oversized, a bit broken.
Thin paper napkins, plastic forks, and non-compostable

takeout boxes constitute the chopstick's natural
habitat to many I hold dear. With family or alone,
I'll maintain that chopsticks aren't disposable,

but if I can make peace with the loss of utensils
when breaking *bao* with guests, I'll be one of them,
not digging in the napkins and corks. Compostable
chopsticks are the answer: everyday *and* disposable.

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Analysis of Baseball

By May Swenson

It’s about
the ball,
the bat,
and the mitt.
Ball hits
bat, or it
hits mitt.
Bat doesn’t
hit ball,
bat meets it.
Ball bounces
off bat, flies
air, or thuds
ground (dud)
or it
fits mitt.

Bat waits
for ball
to mate.
Ball hates
to take bat’s
bait. Ball
flirts, bat’s

Ball fits
mitt, but
not all
the time.
Sometimes
ball gets hit
(pow) when bat
meets it,
and sails
to a place
where mitt
has to quit
in disgrace.
That’s about
the bases
loaded,
about 40,000
fans exploded.

It’s about
the ball,
the bat,
the mitt,
the bases

late, don’t and the fans.
keep the date. It’s done
Ball goes in on a diamond,
(thwack) to mitt, and for fun.
and goes out It’s about
(thwack) back home, and it’s
to mitt. about run.

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Question

By May Swenson

Body my house
my horse my hound
what will I do
when you are fallen

Where will I sleep
How will I ride
What will I hunt

Where can I go
without my mount
all eager and quick
How will I know
in thicket ahead
is danger or treasure
when Body my good
bright dog is dead

How will it be
to lie in the sky
without roof or door
and wind for an eye

With cloud for shift
how will I hide?

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At the Equinox

By Arthur Sze

The tide ebbs and reveals orange and purple sea stars.
I have no theory of radiance,

but after rain evaporates
off pine needles, the needles glisten.

In the courtyard, we spot the rising shell of a moon,
and, at the equinox, bathe in its gleam.

Using all the tides of starlight,
we find
vicissitude is our charm.

On the mud flats off Homer,
I catch the tremor when waves start to slide back in;

and, from Roanoke, you carry
the leafing jade smoke of willows.

Looping out into the world, we thread
and return. The lapping waves

cover an expanse of mussels clustered on rocks;
and, giving shape to what is unspoken,

forsythia buds and blooms in our arms.

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Cloud Hands

By Arthur Sze

A woman moves through a Cloud Hands position,
holding and rotating

an invisible globe—thud, shattering glass, moan,
horn blast—so many

worlds to this world—two men dipnet
sockeye salmon

at the mouth of a river—from a rooftop, a seagull
squawks and cries;

a woman moves through Grasp the Bird’s Tail—
someone on a stretcher

is wheeled past glass doors—a desert fivespot
rises in a wash—

and, pressing her tongue to the roof
of her mouth,

she focuses, in the near distance, on the music
of sycamore leaves.

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Spring Snow

By Arthur Sze

A spring snow coincides with plum blossoms.
In a month, you will forget, then remember
when nine ravens perched in the elm sway in wind.

I will remember when I brake to a stop,
and a hubcap rolls through the intersection.
An angry man grinds pepper onto his salad;

it is how you nail a tin amulet ear
into the lintel. If, in deep emotion, we are
possessed by the idea of possession,

we can never lose to recover what is ours.
Sounds of an abacus are amplified and condensed
to resemble sounds of hail on a tin roof,

but mind opens to the smell of lightening.
Bodies were vaporized to shadows by intense heat;
in memory people outline bodies on walls.

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Girls Overheard While Assembling a Puzzle

By Mary Szybist

Are you sure this blue is the same as the
blue over there? This wall's like the
bottom of a pool, its
color I mean. I need a
darker two-piece this summer, the kind with
elastic at the waist so it actually
fits. I can't
find her hands. Where does this gold
go? It's like the angel's giving
her a little piece of honeycomb to eat.
I don't see why God doesn't
just come down and
kiss her himself. This is the red of that
lipstick we saw at the
mall. This piece of her
neck could fit into the light part
of the sky. I think this is a
piece of water. What kind of
queen? You mean
right here? And are we supposed to believe
she can suddenly
talk angel? Who thought this stuff
up? I wish I had a
velvet bikini. That flower's the color of the
veins in my grandmother's hands. I
wish we could
walk into that garden and pick an
X-ray to float on.
Yeah. I do too. I'd say a
zillion yeses to anyone for that.

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Happy Ideas

By Mary Szybist

I had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel
to a kitchen stool and watch it turn.
—DUCHAMP

I had the happy idea to suspend some blue globes in the air

and watch them pop.

I had the happy idea to put my little copper horse on the shelf so we could
stare at each other
all evening.

I had the happy idea to create a void in myself.

Then to call it natural.

Then to call it supernatural.

I had the happy idea to wrap a blue scarf around my head and spin.

I had the happy idea that somewhere a child was being born who was
nothing like Helen or
Jesus except in the sense of changing everything.

I had the happy idea that someday I would find both pleasure and
    punishment, that I would
know them and feel them,

and that, until I did, it would be almost as good to pretend.

I had the happy idea to call myself happy.

I had the happy idea that the dog digging a hole in the yard in the twilight
    had his nose deep in
mold-life.

I had the happy idea that what I do not understand is more real than what I
    do,

and then the happier idea to buckle myself

into two blue velvet shoes.

I had the happy idea to polish the reflecting glass and say

hello to my own blue soul. *Hello, blue soul. Hello.*

It was my happiest idea.

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The Lushness of It

By Mary Szybist

It's not that the octopus wouldn't love you—
not that it wouldn't reach for you
with each of its tapering arms:

you'd be as good as anyone, I think,
to an octopus. But the creatures of the sea,
like the sea, don't think

about themselves, or you. Keep on floating there,
cradled, unable to burn. Abandon
yourself to the sway, the ruffled eddies, abandon

your heavy legs to the floating meadows
of seaweed and feel
the bloom of phytoplankton, spindrift, sea-
spray, barnacles. In the dark benthic realm, the slippery neckton
glide over
the abyssal plains and as you float you can feel
that upwelling of cold, deep water touch
the skin stretched over
your spine. You can feel
fished for and slapped. No, it's not that the octopus
wouldn't love you. If it touched,

if it tasted you, each of its three

hearts would turn red.

Will theologians of any confession refute me?

Not the bluecap salmon. Not its dotted head.

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All Hallows' Eve

By Dorothea Tanning

Be perfect, make it otherwise.
Yesterday is torn in shreds.
Lightning's thousand sulfur eyes
Rip apart the breathing beds.
Hear bones crack and pulverize.
Doom creeps in on rubber treads.
Countless overwrought housewives,
Minds unraveling like threads,
Try lipstick shades to tranquilize
Fears of age and general dreads.
Sit tight, be perfect, swat the spies,
Don't take faucets for fountainheads.
Drink tasty antidotes. Otherwise
You and the werewolf: newlyweds.

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The Lost Pilot

By James Tate

for my father, 1922-1944

Your face did not rot
like the others—the co-pilot,
for example, I saw him

yesterday. His face is corn-
mush: his wife and daughter,
the poor ignorant people, stare

as if he will compose soon.
He was more wronged than Job.
But your face did not rot

like the others—it grew dark,
and hard like ebony;
the features progressed in their

distinction. If I could cajole
you to come back for an evening,
down from your compulsive

orbiting, I would touch you,
read your face as Dallas,
your hoodlum gunner, now,

with the blistered eyes, reads
his braille editions. I would
touch your face as a disinterested

scholar touches an original page.
However frightening, I would
discover you, and I would not

turn you in; I would not make
you face your wife, or Dallas,
or the co-pilot, Jim. You

could return to your crazy
orbiting, and I would not try
to fully understand what

it means to you. All I know
is this: when I see you,
as I have seen you at least

once every year of my life,
spin across the wilds of the sky
like a tiny, African god,

I feel dead. I feel as if I were
the residue of a stranger's life,
that I should pursue you.

My head cocked toward the sky,
I cannot get off the ground,
and, you, passing over again,

fast, perfect, and unwilling
to tell me that you are doing
well, or that it was mistake

that placed you in that world,
and me in this; or that misfortune
placed these worlds in us.

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Barter

By Sara Teasdale

Life has loveliness to sell,
    All beautiful and splendid things,
Blue waves whitened on a cliff,
    Soaring fire that sways and sings,
And children's faces looking up
    Holding wonder like a cup.

Life has loveliness to sell,
    Music like a curve of gold,
Scent of pine trees in the rain,
    Eyes that love you, arms that hold,
And for your spirit's still delight,
    Holy thoughts that star the night.

Spend all you have for loveliness,
    Buy it and never count the cost;
For one white singing hour of peace
    Count many a year of strife well lost,
And for a breath of ecstasy
    Give all you have been, or could be.

Public domain

May Day

By Sara Teasdale

A delicate fabric of bird song
  Floats in the air,
The smell of wet wild earth
  Is everywhere.
Red small leaves of the maple
  Are clenched like a hand,
Like girls at their first communion
  The pear trees stand.
Oh I must pass nothing by
  Without loving it much,
The raindrop try with my lips,
  The grass with my touch;
For how can I be sure
  I shall see again
The world on the first of May
  Shining after the rain?

Public domain

Spring in War-Time

By Sara Teasdale

I feel the spring far off, far off,
    The faint, far scent of bud and leaf—
Oh, how can spring take heart to come
    To a world in grief,
    Deep grief?

The sun turns north, the days grow long,
    Later the evening star grows bright—
How can the daylight linger on
    For men to fight,
    Still fight?

The grass is waking in the ground,
    Soon it will rise and blow in waves—
How can it have the heart to sway
    Over the graves,
    New graves?

Under the boughs where lovers walked
    The apple-blooms will shed their breath—
But what of all the lovers now
    Parted by Death,
    Grey Death?

Public domain

The Answer

By Sara Teasdale

When I go back to earth
And all my joyous body
Puts off the red and white
That once had been so proud,

If men should pass above
With false and feeble pity,
My dust will find a voice
To answer them aloud:
“Be still, I am content,

Take back your poor compassion,
Joy was a flame in me
Too steady to destroy;
Lithe as a bending reed
Loving the storm that sways her—

I found more joy in sorrow
Than you could find in joy.”

Public domain

There Will Come Soft Rains

By Sara Teasdale

(War Time)

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,

Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

Public domain

I’ll Follow Thee

By Clara Ann Thompson

My Savior, let me hear Thy voice tonight,
I’ll follow Thee, I’ll follow Thee;
The clouds that overhang my way, obscure
the light,
And all is dark to me.

I’d hear Thy voice above the tempest’s shriek;
I’ll follow Thee, I’ll follow Thee;
And though my sight be dim, my spirit weak,
I’ll trust, though naught I see.

I’d feel Thy arm, supporting in the dark;
I’ll follow Thee, I’ll follow Thee;
For Thou canst fan to flame, faith’s sinking
spark,
And seal my loyalty.

I shall not sink, dear Lord, when Thou’rt my
guide,
I’ll follow Thee; I’ll follow Thee;
Though lashed by heavy waves, on ev’ry side,
I’m safe, when Thou’rt with me.

Public domain

Memorial Day

By Clara Ann Thompson

Go;—for 'tis Memorial morning—
    Go with hearts of peace and love;
Deck the graves of fallen soldiers;
    Go, your gratitude to prove.

Gather flow'rs and take them thither,
    Emblem of a nation's tears;
Grateful hearts cannot forget them,
    In the rush of passing years.

Strew the flow'rs above their couches;
    Let thy heart's affection blend,
With the dewy buds and blossoms,
    That in fragrant showers descend.

Strew the flow'rs above the heroes,
    Slain for loving friends and thee;
Canst thou find a better off'ring,
    For those sons of liberty?

While the buds and blooms are falling,
    Earnest hearts are asking,—Why—
In a tone, though low and gentle,
    Yet, as ardent as a cry,—

'Why must precious lives be given,
    That our country may be free?
Is there not a nobler pathway
    To the throne of liberty?

'Can we choose no nobler watch-word,
    Than the ringing battle-cry,
Harbinger of strife and bloodshed,
    Must we sin, that sin may die?

'Long ago, to far Judea,
    Came the blessed Prince of Peace:
Shall we ever heed His teaching,
    That these wars and feuds may cease?'

Public domain

Not Dead, but Sleeping

By Clara Ann Thompson

We say he is dead; ah, the word is too
somber;
'Tis the touch of God, on the weary
eyes,
That has caused them to close, in peace-
ful slumber,
To open with joy, in the upper skies.

We say he is gone; we have lost him for-
ever;
His face and his form we will cherish no
more;
While happy and safe, just over the river,
He is waiting for us, where partings
are o'er.

Ah, sad are our hearts, as we gaze on
him sleeping,
And bitter and sad are the tears gush-
ing down;
And yet,— but we cannot see, for the
weeping,—
He has only exchanged the cross, for
the crown.

And though the dark mists of grief may
surround us,
Obscuring the face of the Father above,
And blindly we grope, still His arms are
around us,
To guide and sustain with His pitying
love.

And he whom we love, is safe in His
keeping,
Yes, safe and secure, whatever may
come;
But ne'er will we know how sweetly he's

sleeping.
Till God, in His mercy, shall gather us
home.

Public domain

Emancipation

By Priscilla Jane Thompson

’Tis a time for much rejoicing;
Let each heart be lured away;
Let each tongue, its thanks be voicing
For Emancipation Day.
Day of victory, day of glory,
For thee, many a field was gory!

Many a time in days now ended,
Hath our fathers’ courage failed,
Patiently their tears they blended;
Ne’er they to their, Maker, railed,
Well we know their groans, He numbered,
When dominions fell, asundered.

As of old the Red Sea parted,
And oppressed passed safely through,
Back from the North, the bold South, started,
And a fissure wide she drew;
Drew a cleft of Liberty,
Through it, marched our people free.

And, in memory, ever grateful,
Of the day they reached the shore,
Meet we now, with hearts e’er faithful,
Joyous that the storm is o’er.
Storm of Torture! May grim Past,
Hurl thee down his torrents fast.

Bring your harpers, bring your sages,
Bid each one the story tell;
Waft it on to future ages,
Bid descendants learn it well.
Kept it bright in minds now tender,
Teach the young their thanks to render.

Come with hearts all firm united,
In the union of a race;
With your loyalty well plighted,

Look your brother in the face,
Stand by him, forsake him never,
God is with us now, forever.

Public domain

Conscience

By Henry David Thoreau

Conscience is instinct bred in the house,
Feeling and Thinking propagate the sin
By an unnatural breeding in and in.
I say, Turn it out doors,
Into the moors.
I love a life whose plot is simple,
And does not thicken with every pimple,
A soul so sound no sickly conscience binds it,
That makes the universe no worse than ’t finds it.
I love an earnest soul,
Whose mighty joy and sorrow
Are not drowned in a bowl,
And brought to life to-morrow
That lives one tragedy,
And not seventy;
A conscience worth keeping,
Laughing not weeping;
A conscience wise and steady,
And for ever ready;
Not changing with events,
Dealing in compliments;
A conscience exercised about

Large things, where one may doubt.

I love a soul not all of wood,

Predestinated to be good,

But true to the backbone

Unto itself alone,

And false to none;

Born to its own affairs,

Its own joys and own cares;

By whom the work which God begun

Is finished, and not undone;

Taken up where he left off,

Whether to worship or to scoff;

If not good, why then evil,

If not good god, good devil.

Goodness!—you hypocrite, come out of that,

Live your life, do your work, then take your hat.

I have no patience towards

Such conscientious cowards.

Give me simple laboring folk,

Who love their work,

Whose virtue is a song

To cheer God along.

Public domain

My Prayer

By Henry David Thoreau

Great God, I ask thee for no meaner pelf
Than that I may not disappoint myself;
That in my action I may soar as high
As I can now discern with this clear eye.
And next in value, which thy kindness lends,
That I may greatly disappoint my friends,
Howe’er they think or hope that it may be,
They may not dream how thou’st distinguished me.
That my weak hand may equal my firm faith,
And my life practise more than my tongue saith;
That my low conduct may not show,
Nor my relenting lines,
That I thy purpose did not know,
Or overrated thy designs.

Public domain

Tall Ambrosia

By Henry David Thoreau

Among the signs of autumn I perceive
The Roman wormwood (called by learned men
Ambrosia elatior, food for gods,—
For to impartial science the humblest weed
Is as immortal once as the proudest flower—)
Sprinkles its yellow dust over my shoes
As I cross the now neglected garden.
—We trample under foot the food of gods
And spill their nectar in each drop of dew—
My honest shoes, fast friends that never stray
Far from my couch, thus powdered, countryfied,
Bearing many a mile the marks of their adventure,
At the post-house disgrace the Gallic gloss
Of those well dressed ones who no morning dew
Nor Roman wormwood ever have been through,
Who never walk but are *transported* rather—
For what old crime of theirs I do not gather.

Public domain

The moon now rises to her absolute rule

By Henry David Thoreau

The moon now rises to her absolute rule,
And the husbandman and hunter
Acknowledge her for their mistress.
Asters and golden reign in the fields
And the life everlasting withers not.
The fields are reaped and shorn of their pride
But an inward verdure still crowns them;
The thistle scatters its down on the pool
And yellow leaves clothe the river—
And nought disturbs the serious life of men.
But behind the sheaves and under the sod
There lurks a ripe fruit which the reapers have not gathered,
The true harvest of the year—the boreal fruit
Which it bears forever,
With fondness annually watering and maturing it.
But man never severs the stalk
Which bears this palatable fruit.

Public domain

Beg Approval

By TC Tolbert

Because the only view we have is the one
that looks down on the knees. Praise perspective.
Praise shared disdain. Praise space made by connective
tissue; the synaptic cleft; elbowroom
at the dinner table; polite conversation;
lies you push through your teeth. Because dissecting
a dog's heart won't change the way it thinks. Praise redirected
traffic. Praise the gnarled lip that defends
the gentle bones. Because your mother was
a seahorse. And to think of her thin is
to empty all the ice from the tea glasses;
to strain the soup by driving it through your hand.
Praise tablecloths; sway-back chairs; the plastic
folds that protect slice after slice of cheese.

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November Cotton Flower

By Jean Toomer

Boll-weevil’s coming, and the winter’s cold,
Made cotton-stalks look rusty, seasons old,
And cotton, scarce as any southern snow,
Was vanishing; the branch, so pinched and slow,
Failed in its function as the autumn rake;
Drouth fighting soil had caused the soil to take
All water from the streams; dead birds were found
In wells a hundred feet below the ground—
Such was the season when the flower bloomed.
Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed
Significance. Superstition saw
Something it had never seen before:
Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,
Beauty so sudden for that time of year.

Public domain

Flounder

By Natasha Trethewey

Here, she said, *put this on your head.*
She handed me a hat.
You 'bout as white as your dad,
and you gone stay like that.

Aunt Sugar rolled her nylons down
around each bony ankle,
and I rolled down my white knee socks
letting my thin legs dangle,

circling them just above water
and silver backs of minnows
flitting here then there between
the sun spots and the shadows.

This is how you hold the pole
to cast the line out straight.
Now put that worm on your hook,
throw it out and wait.

She sat spitting tobacco juice
into a coffee cup.
Hunkered down when she felt the bite,
jerked the pole straight up

reeling and tugging hard at the fish
that wriggled and tried to fight back.
A flounder, she said, and *you can tell*
'cause one of its sides is black.

The other side is white, she said.
It landed with a thump.
I stood there watching that fish flip-flop,
switch sides with every jump.

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History Lesson

By Natasha Trethewey

I am four in this photograph, standing
on a wide strip of Mississippi beach,
my hands on the flowered hips

of a bright bikini. My toes dig in,
curl around wet sand. The sun cuts
the rippling Gulf in flashes with each

tidal rush. Minnows dart at my feet
glinting like switchblades. I am alone
except for my grandmother, other side

of the camera, telling me how to pose.
It is 1970, two years after they opened
the rest of this beach to us,

forty years since the photograph
where she stood on a narrow plot
of sand marked *colored*, smiling,

her hands on the flowered hips
of a cotton meal-sack dress.

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Hot Combs

By Natasha Trethewey

At the junk shop, I find an old pair,
black with grease, the teeth still pungent
as burning hair. One is small,
fine toothed as if for a child. Holding it,
I think of my mother's slender wrist,
the curve of her neck as she leaned
over the stove, her eyes shut as she pulled
the wooden handle and laid flat the wisps
at her temples. The heat in our kitchen
made her glow that morning I watched her
wincing, the hot comb singeing her brow,
sweat glistening above her lips,
her face made strangely beautiful
as only suffering can do.

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Here, Bullet

By Brian Turner

If a body is what you want,
then here is bone and gristle and flesh.
Here is the clavicle-snapped wish,
the aorta's opened valves, the leap
thought makes at the synaptic gap.
Here is the adrenaline rush you crave,
that inexorable flight, that insane puncture
into heat and blood. And I dare you to finish
what you've started. Because here, Bullet,
here is where I complete the word you bring
hissing through the air, here is where I moan
the barrel's cold esophagus, triggering
my tongue's explosives for the rifling I have
inside of me, each twist of the round
spun deeper, because here, Bullet,
here is where the world ends, every time.

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Phantom Noise

By Brian Turner

There is this ringing hum this
bullet-borne language ringing
shell-fall and static this late-night
ringing of threadwork and carpet ringing
hiss and steam this wing-beat
of rotors and tanks broken
bodies ringing in steel humming these
voices of dust these years ringing
rifles in Babylon rifles in Sumer
ringing these children their gravestones
and candy their limbs gone missing their
static-borne television their ringing
this eardrum this rifled symphonic this
ringing of midnight in gunpowder and oil this
brake pad gone useless this muzzle-flash singing this
threading of bullets in muscle and bone this ringing
hum this ringing hum this
ringing

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Sanctuary

By Jean Valentine

> *People pray to each other. The way I say "you" to someone else, respectfully, intimately, desperately. The way someone says "you" to me, hopefully, expectantly, intensely …*
> *—Huub Oosterhuis*

You who I don't know I don't know how to talk to you

—What is it like for you there?

Here … well, wanting solitude; and talk; friendship—
The uses of solitude. To imagine; to hear.
Learning braille. To imagine other solitudes.
But they will not be mine;
to wait, in the quiet; not to scatter the voices—

What are you afraid of?

What will happen. All this leaving. And meetings, yes. But death.
What happens when you die?

"… not scatter the voices,"

Drown out. Not make a house, out of my own words. To be quiet in another throat; other eyes; listen for what it is like there. What word. What silence. Allowing. Uncertain: to drift, in the restlessness … Repose. To run like water—

What is it like there, right now?

Listen: the crowding of the street; the room. Everyone hunches in against the crowding; holding their breath: against dread.

What do you dread?

What happens when you die?

What do you dread, in this room, now?

Not listening. Now. Not watching. Safe inside my own skin.
To die, not having listened. Not having asked … To have scattered life.

Yes I know: the thread you have to keep finding, over again, to
follow it back to life; I know. Impossible, sometimes.

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Edgar Allan Poe Is Reached at the Baltimore Harbor by the Shadows That Pursue Him

By Fernando Valverde

translated from the Spanish by Carolyn Forché

> *And the cloud that took the form*
> *(When the rest of Heaven was blue)*
> *Of a demon in my view—*
> *—Edgar Allan Poe*

They always followed you.

Disdainful dogs,
they made you lose your balance.

You had to shout
blasphemies into shadows
trying to put out the din of their barking.

Other times
it was advisable to talk and try to calm them,
whispers could be more convincing
and stop them on any corner,
so as to continue alone.

Solitude is a walk through the streets of Baltimore.

You could never free yourself,
those shadows were growing,
crows perched on the statues
with eyes fixed on the emptiness of a demon who dreams.

To you,
who were on the edge of a dismal midnight
watching specters of dying embers on the ground.

To you,
who tasted sorrow,
who drank it like an exquisite liqueur,

I come close
and I look at you trying to find you on the other side of the stone
carved by misfortune,
the same as happens with beauty.

Never again will the silver bells ring,
the ships that now arrive at the port of Baltimore
are filled with people too frightened to speak.

They bring a stone in place of the heart,
they do not sense these shadows that wander the streets,
these shadows that are neither men nor women nor beasts,
perhaps dogs or birds or words in the beaks of the birds
or in their jaws.

When they pass they are nothing more than the sea breeze
from which they come.

There is a silence now
about silence
in the shadows.

They bite like words
in place of the heart.

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To a Great Lady in My Small House

By Mark Van Doren

You were too kind to come at all.
The door closed on you, and my hall
Shivered in sudden naked shame.
I whispered it was not to blame
And followed you within, to where
You were awaited by my chair.
It was so small, and you sat down
With a so gracious smile—a frown
Would have gone better with that wall;
You were too kind to smile at all.
You stretched a hand toward the grate;
Its welcome was inadequate.
You looked about you and pretended
The carpet and the picture blended.
I looked—and all my furnishings
Had turned their heads: the sorry things!
You said you felt at home—a lie
My misery was finished by.
Even your guilelessness was gall.
You were too kind to come at all.

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Monument

By Mai Der Vang

For Pos Moua

What is the name for an antelope
who grazes inside a dream

then vanishes into the
nebula’s brush.

What is the face
for refurbishing grammar

at each comma’s lip.
Whose identity never

remembers the shape of beige.
What is the word

for how to conjure
the sigh of a line hushed

beneath the flap of a thousand
shifting plumes.

What is the body of a

garden where a crescent

despairs, drifts beneath

the melt of amber.

The season is always growing

out its hooves.

One cradlesong

of your leaving is not larger

than the forest of your arrival.

To make you a noun forever.

A loss of you

cannot be equal to the loss of you.

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The Clouded Morning

By Jones Very

The morning comes, and thickening clouds prevail,
    Hanging like curtains all the horizon round,
Or overhead in heavy stillness sail;
    So still is day, it seems like night profound;
Scarce by the city's din the air is stirred,
    And dull and deadened comes its every sound;
The cock's shrill, piercing voice subdued is heard,
    By the thick folds of muffling vapors drowned.
Dissolved in mists the hills and trees appear,
    Their outlines lost and blended with the sky;
And well-known objects, that to all are near,
    No longer seem familiar to the eye,
But with fantastic forms they mock the sight,
As when we grope amid the gloom of night.

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The Winter Bird

By Jones Very

Thou sing’st alone on the bare wintry bough,
As if Spring with its leaves were around thee now;
And its voice that was heard in the laughing rill,
And the breeze as it whispered o’er meadow and hill,
Still fell on thine ear, as it murmured along
To join the sweet tide of thine own gushing song.
Sing on—though its sweetness was lost on the blast,
And the storm has not heeded thy song as it passed,
Yet its music awoke in a heart that was near,
A thought whose remembrance will ever prove dear;
Though the brook may be frozen, though silent its voice,
And the gales through the meadows no longer rejoice,
Still I felt, as my ear caught thy glad note of glee,
That my heart in life’s winter might carol like thee.

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Deto(nation)

By Ocean Vuong

There's a joke that ends with — *huh*?
It's the bomb saying here is your father.

Now here is your father inside
your lungs. Look how lighter

the earth is — afterward.
To even write the word *father*

is to carve a portion of the day
out of a bomb-bright page.

There's enough light to drown in
but never enough to enter the bones

& stay. *Don't stay here*, he said, *my boy
broken by the names of flowers. Don't cry*

anymore. So I ran into the night.
The night: my shadow growing

toward my father.

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A Desert Memory

By Bertrand N. O. Walker

Lonely, open, vast and free,
The dark'ning desert lies;
The wind sweeps o'er it fiercely,
And the yellow sand flies.
The tortuous trail is hidden,
Ere the sand-storm has passed
With all its wild, mad shriekings,
Borne shrilly on its blast.

Are they fiends or are they demons
That wail weirdly as they go,
Those hoarse and dismal cadences,
From out their depths of woe?
Will they linger and enfold
The lone trav'ler in their spell,

Weave 'round him incantations,
Brewed and bro't forth from their hell?
Bewilder him and turn him
From the rugged, hidden trail,
Make him wander far and falter,
And trembling quail
At the desert and the loneliness
So fearful and so grim,
That to his fervid fancy,
Wraps in darkness only him?

The wind has spent its fierce wild wail,

The dark storm-pall has shifted,

Forth on his sight the stars gleam pale

In the purpling haze uplifted.

And down the steep trail, as he lists,

He hears soft music stealing;

It trembling falls through filmy mists,

From rock-walls faint echoes pealing.

Whence comes this mystic night-song
With its rhythm wild and free,
With is pleading and entreaty
Pouring forth upon the sea
Of darkness, vast and silent,
Like a tiny ray of hope
That oft-times comes to comfort
When in sorrow’s depths we grope?

‘Tis the An-gu, the Kat-ci-na,
‘Tis the Hopi’s song of prayer,

That in darkness wards off danger,
When ’tis breathed in the air;
Over desert, butte, and mesa,
It is borne out on the night,
Dispelling fear and danger,
Driving evil swift a-flight.

Public domain

A Mojave Lullaby

By Bertrand N. O. Walker

Sleep, my little man-child,

Dream-time to you has come.

In the closely matted branches

Of the mesquite tree,

The mother-bird has nestled

Her little ones; see

From the ghost-hills of your fathers,

Purpling shadows eastward crawl,

While beyond the western sky-tints pale

As twilight spreads its pall.

The eastern hills are lighted,

See their sharp peaks burn and glow,

With the colors the Great Sky-Chief

Gave your father for his bow.

Hush my man-child; be not frighted,

‘Tis the father’s step draws nigh.

O’er the trail along the river,

Where the arrow-weeds reach high

Above his dark head, see

He parts them with his strong hands,

As he steps forth into view.

He is coming home to mother,

Home to mother and to you.

Sleep my little man-child,

Daylight has gone.

There’s no twitter in the branches,

Dream-time has come.

Public domain

A Song of a Navajo Weaver

By Bertrand N. O. Walker

For ages long, my people have been
Dwellers in this land;
For ages viewed these mountains,
Loved these mesas and these sands,
That stretch afar and glisten,
Glimmering in the sun
As it lights the mighty canons
Ere the weary day is done.
Shall I, a patient dweller in this
Land of fair blue skies,
Tell something of their story while
My shuttle swiftly flies?
As I weave I'll trace their journey,
Devious, rough and wandering,
Ere they reached the silent region
Where the night stars seem to sing.
When the myriads of them glitter
Over peak and desert waste,
Crossing which the silent runner and
The gaunt of co-yo-tees haste.
Shall I weave the zig-zag pathway
Whence the sacred fire was born;
And interweave the symbol of the God
Who brought the corn—
Of the Rain-god whose fierce anger
Was appeased by sacred meal,
And the trust that my brave people
In him evermore shall feel?
All this perhaps I might weave
As the woof goes to and fro,
Wafting as my shuttle passes,
Humble hopes, and joys and care,
Weaving closely, weaving slowly,
While I watch the pattern grow;
Showing something of my life:
To the Spirit God a prayer.

Grateful that he brought my people
To the land of silence vast
Taught them arts of peace and ended
All their wanderings of the past.
Deftly now I trace the figures,
This of joy and that of woe;
And I leave an open gate-way
For the Dau to come and go.

Public domain

A Wyandot Cradle Song

By Bertrand N. O. Walker

Hush thee and sleep, little one,
The feathers on thy board sway to and fro;
The shadows reach far downward in the water
The great old owl is waking, day will go.

Rest thee and fear not, little one,
Flitting fireflies come to light you on your way
To the fair land of dreams, while in the grasses
The happy cricket chirps his merry lay.

Tsa-du-meh watches always o’er her little one,
The great owl cannot harm you, slumber on
‘Till the pale light comes shooting from the eastward,
And the twitter of the birds says night has gone.

Public domain

A Dedication

By Lucian B. Watkins

To Principal Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee Industrial School

To you who now so nobly do
    A noble deed;
Who now instill the virtues true
  To virtuous need;
Whose mission is so truly good—
So full of kindly brotherhood—
Who live the life you surely should—
    A trusty lead;

Who early saw that skillful head
    And skillful hands
Should, surely, be in union wed
  ‘Gainst life’s quicksands—
For people whose unhappy state
Was, surely, in the hands of fate,
Would make a combination great
  As iron hands.

Long may your daring presence live
    And works instill,
Long may your kingly reasons give
  A forceful will.
Long may your glowing, useful days
Shine forth their bright illuming rays,
And to gloomy lives always
  A happy thrill.

Public domain

A Memorial

By Lucian B. Watkins

In Memory of Frederick Douglass

In mem’ry of your truly noble life;
In mem’ry of the cause for which you fought;
In mem’ry of your fierce and bitter strife;
In mem’ry of the lasting good you wrought;

In mem’ry of the talents, really great,
That found a home within your massive brains
And swayed the thousands of each town and State
Who heard your forceful oratory strains;

I offer now these simple words of praise—
This chord I touch to sound your honor’s due—
The pathway of your truly useful days
Shines now a grand and brilliant light for you.

Public domain

American Income

By Afaa Michael Weaver

The survey says all groups can make more money
if they lose weight except black men…men of other colors
and women of all colors have more gold, but black men
are the summary of weight, a lead thick thing on the scales,
meters spinning until they ring off the end of the numbering
of accumulation, how things grow heavy, fish on the
ends of lines that become whales, then prehistoric sea life
beyond all memories, the billion days of human hands
working, doing all the labor one can imagine, hands
now the population of cactus leaves on a papyrus moon
waiting for the fire, the notes from all their singing gone
up into the salt breath of tears of children that dry, rise
up to be the crystalline canopy of promises, the infinite
gone fishing days with the apologies for not being able to love
anymore, gone down inside earth somewhere where
women make no demands, have fewer dreams of forever,
these feet that marched and ran and got cut off, these hearts
torn out of chests by nameless thieves, this thrashing
until the chaff is gone out and black men know the gold
of being the dead center of things, where pain is the gateway
to Jerusalems, Bodhi trees, places for meditation and howling,
keeping the weeping heads of gods in their eyes.

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An Autumn Sunset

By Edith Wharton

I

Leaguered in fire
The wild black promontories of the coast extend
Their savage silhouettes;
The sun in universal carnage sets,
And, halting higher,
The motionless storm-clouds mass their sullen threats,
Like an advancing mob in sword-points penned,
That, balked, yet stands at bay.
Mid-zenith hangs the fascinated day
In wind-lustrated hollows crystalline,
A wan Valkyrie whose wide pinions shine
Across the ensanguined ruins of the fray,
And in her hand swings high o'erhead,
Above the waster of war,
The silver torch-light of the evening star
Wherewith to search the faces of the dead.

II

Lagooned in gold,
Seem not those jetty promontories rather
The outposts of some ancient land forlorn,
Uncomforted of morn,
Where old oblivions gather,
The melancholy unconsoling fold
Of all things that go utterly to death
And mix no more, no more
With life's perpetually awakening breath?
Shall Time not ferry me to such a shore,
Over such sailless seas,
To walk with hope's slain importunities
In miserable marriage? Nay, shall not
All things be there forgot,
Save the sea's golden barrier and the black
Close-crouching promontories?

Dead to all shames, forgotten of all glories,
Shall I not wander there, a shadow’s shade,
A spectre self-destroyed,
So purged of all remembrance and sucked back
Into the primal void,
That should we on the shore phantasmal meet
I should not know the coming of your feet?

Public domain

Experience

By Edith Wharton

I

Like Crusoe with the bootless gold we stand
Upon the desert verge of death, and say:
“What shall avail the woes of yesterday
To buy to-morrow’s wisdom, in the land
Whose currency is strange unto our hand?
In life’s small market they had served to pay
Some late-found rapture, could we but delay
Till Time hath matched our means to our demand.”

But otherwise Fate wills it, for, behold,
Our gathered strength of individual pain,
When Time’s long alchemy hath made it gold,
Dies with us—hoarded all these years in vain,
Since those that might be heir to it the mould
Renew, and coin themselves new griefs again.

II

O Death, we come full-handed to thy gate,
Rich with strange burden of the mingled years,
Gains and renunciations, mirth and tears,
And love’s oblivion, and remembering hate,
Nor know we what compulsion laid such freight
Upon our souls—and shall our hopes and fears
Buy nothing of thee, Death? Behold our wares,
And sell us the one joy for which we wait.
Had we lived longer, like had such for sale,
With the last coin of sorrow purchased cheap,
But now we stand before thy shadowy pale,
And all our longings lie within thy keep—
Death, can it be the years shall naught avail?

“Not so,” Death answered, “they shall purchase sleep.”

Public domain

Life

By Edith Wharton

Life, like a marble block, is given to all,
A blank, inchoate mass of years and days,
Whence one with ardent chisel swift essays
Some shape of strength or symmetry to call;
One shatters it in bits to mend a wall;
One in a craftier hand the chisel lays,
And one, to wake the mirth in Lesbia’s gaze,
Carves it apace in toys fantastical.

But least is he who, with enchanted eyes
Filled with high visions of fair shapes to be,
Muses which god he shall immortalize
In the proud Parian’s perpetuity,
Till twilight warns him from the punctual skies
That the night cometh wherein none shall see.

Public domain

A Farewell to America

By Phillis Wheatley

I.

Adieu, New-England’s smiling meads,
  Adieu, th’ flow’ry plain:
I leave thine op’ning charms, O spring,
  And tempt the roaring main.

II.

In vain for me the flow’rets rise,
  And boast their gaudy pride,
While here beneath the northern skies
  I mourn for health deny’d.

III.

Celestial maid of rosy hue,
  Oh let me feel thy reign!
I languish till thy face I view,
  Thy vanish'd joys regain.

IV.

Susannah mourns, nor can I bear

To see the crystal shower
Or mark the tender falling tear
At sad departure's hour;

V.

Not regarding can I see
Her soul with grief opprest
But let no sighs, no groans for me
Steal from her pensive breast.

VI.

In vain the feather’d warblers sing
In vain the garden blooms
And on the bosom of the spring
Breathes out her sweet perfumes.

VII.

While for Britannia’s distant shore
We weep the liquid plain,
And with astonish’d eyes explore
The wide-extended main.

VIII.

Lo! Health appears! celestial dame!
Complacent and serene,
With Hebe's mantle oe'r her frame,
With soul-delighting mien.

IX.

To mark the vale where London lies
With misty vapors crown'd
Which cloud Aurora's thousand dyes,
And veil her charms around.

X.

Why, Phoebus, moves thy car so slow?
So slow thy rising ray?
Give us the famous town to view,
Thou glorious King of day!

XI.

For thee, Britannia, I resign
New-England's smiling fields;
To view again her charms divine,
What joy the prospect yields!

XII.

But thou! Temptation hence away,
With all thy fatal train,
Nor once seduce my soul away,
By thine enchanting strain.

XIII.

Thrice happy they, whose heavenly shield
Secures their souls from harm,
And fell Temptation on the field
Of all its pow’r disarms.

Public domain

A Hymn to the Evening

By Phillis Wheatley

Soon as the sun forsook the eastern main
The pealing thunder shook the heav’nly plain;
Majestic grandeur! From the zephyr’s wing,
Exhales the incense of the blooming spring.
Soft purl the streams, the birds renew their notes,
And through the air their mingled music floats.
Through all the heav’ns what beauteous dies are spread!
But the west glories in the deepest red:
So may our breasts with ev’ry virtue glow,
The living temples of our God below!
Fill’d with the praise of him who gives the light,
And draws the sable curtains of the night,
Let placid slumbers sooth each weary mind,
At morn to wake more heav’nly, more refin’d;
So shall the labours of the day begin
More pure, more guarded from the snares of sin.
Night’s leaden sceptre seals my drowsy eyes,
Then cease, my song, till fair *Aurora* rise.

Public domain

His Excellency General Washington

By Phillis Wheatley

Celestial choir! enthron'd in realms of light,
Columbia's scenes of glorious toils I write.
While freedom's cause her anxious breast alarms,
She flashes dreadful in refulgent arms.
See mother earth her offspring's fate bemoan,
And nations gaze at scenes before unknown!
See the bright beams of heaven's revolving light
Involved in sorrows and the veil of night!

The Goddess comes, she moves divinely fair,
Olive and laurel binds Her golden hair:
Wherever shines this native of the skies,
Unnumber'd charms and recent graces rise.

Muse! Bow propitious while my pen relates
How pour her armies through a thousand gates,
As when Eolus heaven's fair face deforms,
Enwrapp'd in tempest and a night of storms;
Astonish'd ocean feels the wild uproar,
The refluent surges beat the sounding shore;
Or think as leaves in Autumn's golden reign,
Such, and so many, moves the warrior's train.
In bright array they seek the work of war,
Where high unfurl'd the ensign waves in air.
Shall I to Washington their praise recite?
Enough thou know'st them in the fields of fight.
Thee, first in peace and honors—we demand
The grace and glory of thy martial band.
Fam'd for thy valour, for thy virtues more,
Hear every tongue thy guardian aid implore!

One century scarce perform'd its destined round,
When Gallic powers Columbia's fury found;
And so may you, whoever dares disgrace
The land of freedom's heaven-defended race!
Fix'd are the eyes of nations on the scales,
For in their hopes Columbia's arm prevails.

Anon Britannia droops the pensive head,
While round increase the rising hills of dead.
Ah! Cruel blindness to Columbia’s state!
Lament thy thirst of boundless power too late.

Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,
Thy ev’ry action let the Goddess guide.
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,
With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! Be thine.

Public domain

On Virtue

By Phillis Wheatley

O thou bright jewel in my aim I strive
To comprehend thee. Thine own words declare
Wisdom is higher than a fool can reach.
I cease to wonder, and no more attempt
Thine height t'explore, or fathom thy profound.
But, O my soul, sink not into despair,
Virtue is near thee, and with gentle hand
Would now embrace thee, hovers o'er thine head.
Fain would the heaven-born soul with her converse,
Then seek, then court her for her promised bliss.

Auspicious queen, thine heavenly pinions spread,
And lead celestial *Chastity* along;
Lo! now her sacred retinue descends,
Arrayed in glory from the orbs above.
Attend me, *Virtue*, thro' my youthful years!
O leave me not to the false joys of time!
But guide my steps to endless life and bliss.
Greatness, or *Goodness*, say what I shall call thee,
To give an higher appellation still,
Teach me a better strain, a nobler lay,
O Thou, enthroned with Cherubs in the realms of day!

Public domain

To S. M. A Young African Painter, On Seeing His Works

By Phillis Wheatley

TO show the lab’ring bosom’s deep intent,
And thought in living characters to paint,
When first thy pencil did those beauties give,
And breathing figures learnt from thee to live,
How did those prospects give my soul delight,
A new creation rushing on my sight?
Still, wond’rous youth! each noble path pursue,
On deathless glories fix thine ardent view:
Still may the painter’s and the poet’s fire
To aid thy pencil, and thy verse conspire!
And may the charms of each seraphic theme
Conduct thy footsteps to immortal fame!
High to the blissful wonders of the skies
Elate thy soul, and raise thy wishful eyes.
Thrice happy, when exalted to survey
That splendid city, crown’d with endless day,
Whose twice six gates on radiant hinges ring:
Celestial Salem blooms in endless spring.
Calm and serene thy moments glide along,
And may the muse inspire each future song!
Still, with the sweets of contemplation bless’d,
May peace with balmy wings your soul invest!
But when these shades of time are chas’d away,
And darkness ends in everlasting day,
On what seraphic pinions shall we move,
And view the landscapes in the realms above?
There shall thy tongue in heav’nly murmurs flow,
And there my muse with heav’nly transport glow:
No more to tell of Damon’s tender sighs,
Or rising radiance of Aurora’s eyes,
For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,
And purer language on th’ ethereal plain.
Cease, gentle muse! the solemn gloom of night
Now seals the fair creation from my sight.

Public domain

To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth

By Phillis Wheatley

HAIL, happy day, when, smiling like the morn,
Fair Freedom rose New-England to adorn:
The northern clime beneath her genial ray,
Dartmouth, congratulates thy blissful sway:
Elate with hope her race no longer mourns,
Each soul expands, each grateful bosom burns,
While in thine hand with pleasure we behold
The silken reins, and Freedom's charms unfold.
Long lost to realms beneath the northern skies

She shines supreme, while hated faction dies:
Soon as appear'd the Goddess long desir'd,
Sick at the view, she languish'd and expir'd;
Thus from the splendors of the morning light
The owl in sadness seeks the caves of night.
No more, America, in mournful strain
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd complain,
No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand
Had made, and with it meant t' enslave the land.

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

For favours past, great Sir, our thanks are due,
And thee we ask thy favours to renew,
Since in thy pow'r, as in thy will before,

To sooth the griefs, which thou did’st once deplore.
May heav’nly grace the sacred sanction give
To all thy works, and thou for ever live
Not only on the wings of fleeting Fame,
Though praise immortal crowns the patriot’s name,
But to conduct to heav’ns refulgent fane,
May fiery coursers sweep th’ ethereal plain,
And bear thee upwards to that blest abode,
Where, like the prophet, thou shalt find thy God.

Public domain

To –

By Sarah Helen Whitman

Vainly my heart had with thy sorceries striven:
It had no refuge from thy love,—no Heaven
But in thy fatal presence;—from afar
It owned thy power and trembled like a star
O’erfraught with light and splendor. Could I deem
How dark a shadow should obscure its beam?—
Could I believe that pain could ever dwell
Where thy bright presence cast its blissful spell?
Thou wert my proud palladium;—could I fear
The avenging Destinies when thou wert near?—
Thou wert my Destiny;—thy song, thy fame,
The wild enchantments clustering round thy name,
Were my soul’s heritage, its royal dower;
Its glory and its kingdom and its power!

Public domain

A Noiseless Patient Spider

By Walt Whitman

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark’d where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark’d how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch’d forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form’d, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

Public domain

America

By Walt Whitman

Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,
All, all alike endear’d, grown, ungrown, young or old,
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,
A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,
Chair’d in the adamant of Time.

Public domain

Election Day, November, 1884

By Walt Whitman

If I should need to name, O Western World, your powerfulest scene and show,
‘Twould not be you, Niagara—nor you, ye limitless prairies—nor your huge rifts of canyons, Colorado,
Nor you, Yosemite—nor Yellowstone, with all its spasmic geyser-loops ascending to the skies, appearing and disappearing,
Nor Oregon’s white cones—nor Huron’s belt of mighty lakes—nor Mississippi’s stream:
—This seething hemisphere’s humanity, as now, I’d name—*the still small voice* vibrating—America’s choosing day,
(The heart of it not in the chosen—the act itself the main, the quadriennial choosing,)
The stretch of North and South arous’d—sea-board and inland—Texas to Maine—the Prairie States—Vermont, Virginia, California,
The final ballot-shower from East to West—the paradox and conflict,
The countless snow-flakes falling—(a swordless conflict,
Yet more than all Rome’s wars of old, or modern Napoleon’s:) the peaceful choice of all,
Or good or ill humanity—welcoming the darker odds, the dross:
—Foams and ferments the wine? it serves to purify—while the heart pants, life glows:
These stormy gusts and winds waft precious ships,
Swell’d Washington’s, Jefferson’s, Lincoln’s sails.

Public domain

I Hear America Singing

By Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter’s song, the ploughboy’s on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

Public domain

O Captain! My Captain!

By Walt Whitman

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather’d every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up- for you the flag is flung- for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon’d wreaths- for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You’ve fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor’d safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

Public domain

O Me! O Life!

By Walt Whitman

O Me! O life! of the questions of these recurring,
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill’d with the foolish,
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean, of the struggle ever renew’d,
Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me,
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest me intertwined,
The question, O me! so sad, recurring—What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here—that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

Public domain

Rise O Days from Your Fathomless Deeps

By Walt Whitman

1

Rise O days from your fathomless deeps, till you loftier, fiercer sweep,

Long for my soul hungering gymnastic I devour'd what the earth gave me,

Long I roam'd amid the woods of the north, long I watch'd Niagara pouring,

I travel'd the prairies over and slept on their breast, I cross'd the Nevadas, I cross'd the plateaus,

I ascended the towering rocks along the Pacific, I sail'd out to sea,

I sail'd through the storm, I was refresh'd by the storm,

I watch'd with joy the threatening maws of the waves,

I mark'd the white combs where they career'd so high, curling over,

I heard the wind piping, I saw the black clouds,

Saw from below what arose and mounted, (O superb! O wild as my heart, and powerful!)

Heard the continuous thunder as it bellow'd after the lightning,

Noted the slender and jagged threads of lightning as sudden and fast amid the din they chased each other across the sky;

These, and such as these, I, elate, saw—saw with wonder, yet pensive and masterful,

All the menacing might of the globe uprisen around me,

Yet there with my soul I fed, I fed content, supercilious.

2

'Twas well, O soul—'twas a good preparation you gave me,

Now we advance our latent and ampler hunger to fill,

Now we go forth to receive what the earth and the sea never gave us,

Not through the mighty woods we go, but through the mightier cities,

Something for us is pouring now more than Niagara pouring,

Torrents of men, (sources and rills of the Northwest are you indeed inexhaustible?)

What, to pavements and homesteads here, what were those storms of the mountains and sea?

What, to passions I witness around me to-day? was the sea risen?

Was the wind piping the pipe of death under the black clouds?

Lo! from deeps more unfathomable, something more deadly and savage,

Manhattan rising, advancing with menacing front—Cincinnati, Chicago, unchain'd;

What was that swell I saw on the ocean? behold what comes here,

How it climbs with daring feet and hands—how it dashes!

How the true thunder bellows after the lightning—how bright the flashes of lightning!

How Democracy with desperate vengeful port strides on, shown through the dark by those flashes of lightning!

(Yet a mournful wall and low sob I fancied I heard through the dark,

In a lull of the deafening confusion.)

3

Thunder on! stride on, Democracy! strike with vengeful stroke!

And do you rise higher than ever yet O days, O cities!

Crash heavier, heavier yet O storms! you have done me good,

My soul prepared in the mountains absorbs your immortal strong nutriment,

Long had I walk'd my cities, my country roads through farms, only half satisfied,

One doubt nauseous undulating like a snake, crawl'd on the ground before me,

Continually preceding my steps, turning upon me oft, ironically hissing low;

The cities I loved so well I abandon'd and left, I sped to the certainties suitable to me,

Hungering, hungering, hungering, for primal energies and Nature's dauntlessness,

I refresh'd myself with it only, I could relish it only,

I waited the bursting forth of the pent fire—on the water and air waited long;

But now I no longer wait, I am fully satisfied, I am glutted,

I have witness'd the true lightning, I have witness'd my cities electric,

I have lived to behold man burst forth and warlike America rise,

Hence I will seek no more the food of the northern solitary wilds,

No more the mountains roam or sail the stormy sea.

Public domain

Song of the Open Road, 6

By Walt Whitman

Now if a thousand perfect men were to appear it would not amaze me,
Now if a thousand beautiful forms of women appear'd it would not astonish me.

Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons,
It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth.

Here a great personal deed has room,
(Such a deed seizes upon the hearts of the whole race of men,
Its effusion of strength and will overwhelms law and mocks all authority and all argument against it.)

Here is the test of wisdom,
Wisdom is not finally tested in schools,
Wisdom cannot be pass'd from one having it to another not having it,
Wisdom is of the soul, is not susceptible of proof, is its own proof,
Applies to all stages and objects and qualities and is content,
Is the certainty of the reality and immortality of things, and the excellence of things;
Something there is in the float of the sight of things that provokes it out of the soul.

Now I re-examine philosophies and religions,
They may prove well in lecture-rooms, yet not prove at all under the spacious clouds and along the landscape and flowing currents.

Here is realization,
Here is a man tallied—he realizes here what he has in him,
The past, the future, majesty, love—if they are vacant of you, you are vacant of them.

Only the kernel of every object nourishes;
Where is he who tears off the husks for you and me?
Where is he that undoes stratagems and envelopes for you and me?

Here is adhesiveness, it is not previously fashion'd, it is apropos;
Do you know what it is as you pass to be loved by strangers?
Do you know the talk of those turning eye-balls?

Public domain

That Music Always Round Me

By Walt Whitman

That music always round me, unceasing, unbeginning, yet long untaught I did not hear,
But now the chorus I hear and am elated,
A tenor, strong, ascending with power and health, with glad notes of daybreak I hear,
A soprano at intervals sailing buoyantly over the tops of immense waves,
A transparent base shuddering lusciously under and through the universe,
The triumphant tutti, the funeral wailings with sweet flutes and violins, all these I fill myself with,
I hear not the volumes of sound merely, I am moved by the exquisite meanings,
I listen to the different voices winding in and out, striving, contending with fiery vehemence to excel each other in emotion;
I do not think the performers know themselves—but now I think I begin to know them.

Public domain

To a Locomotive in Winter

By Walt Whitman

Thee for my recitative,
Thee in the driving storm even as now, the snow, the winter-day declining,
Thee in thy panoply, thy measur'd dual throbbing and thy beat convulsive,
Thy black cylindric body, golden brass, and silvery steel,
Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods, gyrating, shuttling at thy sides,
Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar, now tapering in the distance,
Thy great protruding head-light fix'd in front,
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with delicate purple,
The dense and murky clouds out-belching from thy smoke-stack,
Thy knitted frame, thy springs and valves, the tremulous twinkle of thy wheels,
Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily following,
Through gale or calm, now swift, now slack, yet steadily careering;
Type of the modern—emblem of motion and power—pulse of the continent,
For once come serve the Muse and merge in verse, even as here I see thee,
With storm and buffeting gusts of wind and falling snow,
By day thy warning ringing bell to sound its notes,
By night thy silent signal lamps to swing.

Fierce-throated beauty!
Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music, thy swinging lamps at night,
Thy madly-whistled laughter, echoing, rumbling like an earthquake, rousing all,
Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding,
(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine,)
Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,

Launch’d o’er the prairies wide, across the lakes,

To the free skies unpent and glad and strong.

Public domain

Washington’s Monument, February, 1885

By Walt Whitman

Ah, not this marble, dead and cold:

Far from its base and shaft expanding—the round zones circling, comprehending,

Thou, Washington, art all the world’s, the continents’ entire—not yours alone, America,

Europe’s as well, in every part, castle of lord or laborer’s cot,

Or frozen North, or sultry South—the African’s—the Arab’s in his tent,

Old Asia’s there with venerable smile, seated amid her ruins;

(Greets the antique the hero new? ’tis but the same—the heir legitimate, continued ever,

The indomitable heart and arm—proofs of the never-broken line,

Courage, alertness, patience, faith, the same—e’en in defeat defeated not, the same:)

Wherever sails a ship, or house is built on land, or day or night,

Through teeming cities’ streets, indoors or out, factories or farms,

Now, or to come, or past—where patriot wills existed or exist,

Wherever Freedom, pois’d by Toleration, sway’d by Law,

Stands or is rising thy true monument.

Public domain

When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer

By Walt Whitman

When I heard the learn’d astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander’d off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look’d up in perfect silence at the stars.

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With Music

By Helen Hay Whitney

Dear, did we meet in some dim yesterday?
I half remember how the birds were mute
Among green leaves and tulip-tinted fruit,
And on the grass, beside a stream, we lay
In early twilight; faintly, far away,
Came lovely sounds adrift from silver lute,
With answered echoes of an airy flute,
While Twilight waited tiptoe, fain to stay.

Her violet eyes were sweet with mystery.
You looked in mine, the music rose and fell
Like little, lisping laughter of the sea;
Our souls were barks, wind-wafted from the shore—
Gold cup, a rose, a ruby, who can tell?
Soft—music ceases—I recall no more.

Public domain

In School-days

By John Greenleaf Whittier

Still sits the school-house by the road,
  A ragged beggar sleeping;
Around it still the sumachs grow,
  And blackberry-vines are creeping.

Within, the master's desk is seen,
  Deep scarred by raps official;
The warping floor, the battered seats,
  The jack-knife's carved initial;

The charcoal frescos on its wall;
  Its door's worn sill, betraying
The feet that, creeping slow to school,
  Went storming out to playing!

Long years ago a winter sun
  Shone over it at setting;
Lit up its western window-panes,
  And low eaves' icy fretting.

It touched the tangled golden curls,
  And brown eyes full of grieving,
Of one who still her steps delayed
  When all the school were leaving.

For near her stood the little boy
  Her childish favor singled:
His cap pulled low upon a face
  Where pride and shame were mingled.

Pushing with restless feet the snow
  To right and left, he lingered;—
As restlessly her tiny hands
  The blue-checked apron fingered.

He saw her lift her eyes; he felt
  The soft hand's light caressing,
And heard the tremble of her voice,
  As if a fault confessing.

“I’m sorry that I spelt the word:
  I hate to go above you,
Because,”—the brown eyes lower fell,—
  “Because, you see, I love you!”

Still memory to a gray-haired man
  That sweet child-face is showing.
Dear girl! the grasses on her grave
  Have forty years been growing!

He lives to learn, in life’s hard school,
  How few who pass above him
Lament their triumph and his loss,
  Like her,—because they love him.

Public domain

A New Spinning Song

By Margaret Widdemer

The fillet needs another pearl, the hand another ring,
(Turn, wheels, turn, dusk in the red young sun!)
What are little hearts that beat and little lips that sing?
(Turn wheels, turn, whirl till our whim is won!)
Flesh and blood and dusky eyes, childish heart and gay,
These shall turn our wheels for us and wither through the day—
(Turn, wheels, turn, dusk in the red young sun!)
The pinnace needs a swifter sail, the fortress needs a tower,
(Turn, wheels, turn, bleak in the sultry noon!)
What if all the woods are green and all the fields in flower?
(Turn, wheels, turn, stilling the youth-time soon!)
Children's strength and children's lives are fuel that we burn,
More shall come when these are gone to make our great wheels turn—
(Turn, wheels, turn, bleak in the sultry noon!)
Leisure-time and mirth are dear, flesh and blood are cheap
(Turn, wheels, turn, black in the hopeless night!)
What if children break or die the morns we smile in sleep?
(Turn, wheels, turn, over the hearts once light!)
Spinning flesh to gold for us, spinning life for bread,
Spinning hope and strength and breath along the endless thread—
(Turn, wheels, turn black in the hopeless night!)

Public domain

The Guides

By Margaret Widdemer

Where have you been the long day through,
    Little brothers of mine?
For soon the world shall belong to you,
Yours to mar or to build anew—
Have you been to learn what the world shall do,
    Little brothers going home?
We have been to learn through the weary day
Where the great looms echo and crash and sway—
The world has willed it, and we obey,
    Elder brother.
What did you learn till set of sun,
    Little brothers of mine,
Down where the great looms wove and spun,
You who are many where we are one
(We whose day is so nearly done),
    Little brothers toiling home?
We have learned the things that the mill-folk said,
How Man is cruel and God is dead…
And how to spin with an even thread,
    Elder brother.
What did you win with the thing they taught,
    Little brothers of mine,
You whose sons shall have strength you brought,
Fashion their lives of the faith you bought,

Follow afar the ways you sought,

Little brothers stealing home?

Shattered body and stunted brain,

Hearts made hard with the need of gain,

These we won and must give again,

Elder brother.

How shall the world fare in your hand,

Little brothers of mine,

When you shall stand where now we stand?

Will you lift a light in the darkened land

Or fire its ways with a burning brand,

Little brothers creeping home?

What of the way the world shall fare?

What the world has given the world must bear…

We are tired—ah, tired—and we cannot care,

Elder brother!

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The Modern Woman to Her Lover

By Margaret Widdemer

I shall not lie to you any more,
    Flatter or fawn to attain my end—
I am what never has been before,
    Woman—and Friend.
I shall be strong as a man is strong,
    I shall be fair as a man is fair,
Hand in locked hand we shall pass along
    To a purer air:
I shall not drag at your bridle-rein,
    Knee pressed to knee shall we ride the hill;
I shall not lie to you ever again—
    Will you love me still?

Public domain

The Net

By Margaret Widdemer

The strangers’ children laugh along the street:
They know not, or forget the sweeping of the Net
Swift to ensnare such little careless feet.
And we—we smile and watch them pass along,
And those who walk beside, soft-smiling, cruel-eyed—
We guard our own—not ours to right the wrong!
We do not care—we shall not heed or mark,
Till we shall hear one day, too late to strive or pray,
Our daughters’ voices crying from the dark!

Public domain

The Old Suffragist

By Margaret Widdemer

She could have loved—her woman-passions beat
    Deeper than theirs, or else she had not known
How to have dropped her heart beneath their feet
    A living stepping-stone:
The little hands—did they not clutch her heart?
    The guarding arms—was she not very tired?
Was it an easy thing to walk apart,
    Unresting, undesired?
She gave away her crown of woman-praise,
    Her gentleness and silent girlhood grace,
To be a merriment for idle days,
    Scorn for the market-place:
She strove for an unvisioned, far-off good,
    For one far hope she knew she could not see:
These—not her daughters—crowned with motherhood
    And love and beauty—free.

Public domain

Friendship After Love

By Ella Wheeler Wilcox

After the fierce midsummer all ablaze
    Has burned itself to ashes, and expires
    In the intensity of its own fires,
There come the mellow, mild, St. Martin days
Crowned with the calm of peace, but sad with haze.
    So after Love has led us, till he tires
    Of his own throes, and torments, and desires,
Comes large-eyed friendship: with a restful gaze,
He beckons us to follow, and across
    Cool verdant vales we wander free from care.
    Is it a touch of frost lies in the air?
Why are we haunted with a sense of loss?
We do not wish the pain back, or the heat;
And yet, and yet, these days are incomplete.

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Thoughts

By Myra Viola Wilds

What kind of thoughts now, do you carry

In your travels day by day

Are they bright and lofty visions,

Or neglected, gone astray?

Matters not how great in fancy,

Or what deeds of skill you've wrought;

Man, though high may be his station,

Is no better than his thoughts.

Catch your thoughts and hold them tightly,

Let each one an honor be;

Purge them, scourge them, burnish brightly,

Then in love set each one free.

Public domain

Vision in Which the Final Blackbird Disappears

By Phillip B. Williams

A monstrosity in the alley.
A many-bodied movement grouped
for terror, their flights' brief shadows
on the kitchen curtains, on the street's
reliquaries of loose squares and hustle.
Some minds are groomed for defiance. The youngest
calls out his territory with muscular vowels
where street light spills peculiar, his hand
a chorus of heat and recoil. "Could have been
a doctor" say those who knew and did not
know him, though he never wanted to know
what gargles endlessly in a body — wet hives,
planets unspooled from their throbbing shapes.
There are many ways to look at this.
He got what he wished against. He got
wings on his shoes for a sacrifice. The postulate
that stars turn a blind eye to the cobalt corners
of rooms is incorrect. Light only helps or ruins sight.
Daylight does cruel things to a boy's face.

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Danse Russe

By William Carlos Williams

If when my wife is sleeping
and the baby and Kathleen
are sleeping
and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees,—
if I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
“I am lonely, lonely.
I was born to be lonely,
I am best so!”
If I admire my arms, my face,
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades,—

Who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?

Public domain

Peace on Earth

By William Carlos Williams

The Archer is wake!
The Swan is flying!
Gold against blue
An Arrow is lying.
There is hunting in heaven—
Sleep safe till tomorrow.

The Bears are abroad!
The Eagle is screaming!
Gold against blue
Their eyes are gleaming!
Sleep!
Sleep safe till tomorrow.

The Sisters lie
With their arms intertwining;
Gold against blue
Their hair is shining!
The Serpent writhes!
Orion is listening!
Gold against blue
His sword is glistening!
Sleep!
There is hunting in heaven—
Sleep safe till tomorrow.

Public domain

The Fool's Song

By William Carlos Williams

I tried to put a bird in a cage.
O fool that I am!
For the bird was Truth.
Sing merrily, Truth: I tried to put
Truth in a cage!

And when I had the bird in the cage,
O fool that I am!
Why, it broke my pretty cage.
Sing merrily, Truth: I tried to put
Truth in a cage!

And when the bird was flown from the cage,
O fool that I am!
Why, I had nor bird nor cage.
Sing merrily, Truth: I tried to put
Truth in a cage!
Heigh-ho! Truth in a cage.

Public domain

The Uses of Poetry

By William Carlos Williams

I’ve fond anticipation of a day
O’erfilled with pure diversion presently,
For I must read a lady poesy
The while we glide by many a leafy bay,

Hid deep in rushes, where at random play
The glossy black winged May-flies, or whence flee
Hush-throated nestlings in alarm,
Whom we have idly frighted with our boat’s long sway.

For, lest o’ersaddened by such woes as spring
To rural peace from our meek onward trend,
What else more fit? We’ll draw the latch-string

And close the door of sense; then satiate wend,
On poesy’s transforming giant wing,
To worlds afar whose fruits all anguish mend.

Public domain

The Widow’s Lament in Springtime

By William Carlos Williams

Sorrow is my own yard
where the new grass
flames as it has flamed
often before but not
with the cold fire
that closes round me this year.
Thirtyfive years
I lived with my husband.
The plumtree is white today
with masses of flowers.
Masses of flowers
load the cherry branches
and color some bushes
yellow and some red
but the grief in my heart
is stronger than they
for though they were my joy
formerly, today I notice them
and turn away forgetting.
Today my son told me
that in the meadows,
at the edge of the heavy woods
in the distance, he saw
trees of white flowers.
I feel that I would like
to go there
and fall into those flowers
and sink into the marsh near them.

Public domain

High Noon at Los Alamos

By Eleanor Wilner

To turn a stone
with its white squirming
underneath, to pry the disc
from the sun's eclipse—white heat
coiling in the blinded eye: to these malign
necessities we come
from the dim time of dinosaurs
who crawled like breathing lava
from the earth's cracked crust, and swung
their tiny heads above the lumbering tons
of flesh, brains no bigger than a fist
clenched to resist the white flash
in the sky the day the sun-flares
pared them down to relics for museums,
turned glaciers back, seared Sinai's
meadows black—the ferns withered, the swamps
were melted down to molten mud, the cells
uncoupled, recombined, and madly
multiplied, huge trees toppled to the ground,
the slow life there abandoned hope,
a caterpillar stiffened in the grass.
Two apes, caught in the act of coupling,
made a mutant child
who woke to sunlight wondering, his mother
torn by the huge new head
that forced the narrow birth canal.

As if compelled to repetition
and to unearth again
white fire at the heart of matter—fire
we sought and fire we spoke,
our thoughts, however elegant, were fire
from first to last—like sentries set to watch
at Argos for the signal fire
passed peak to peak from Troy
to Nagasaki, triumphant echo of the burning

city walls and prologue to the murders
yet to come—we scan the sky
for that bright flash,
our eyes stared white from watching
for the signal fire that ends
the epic—a cursed line
with its caesura, a pause
to signal peace, or a rehearsal
for the silence.

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Black Matters

By Keith S. Wilson

after D.H. Lawrence

shall i tell you, then, that we exist?
there came a light, blue and white careening.
the police like wailing angels
to bitter me.

and so this:
dark matter is hypothetical. know
that it cannot be seen

in the gunpowder of a flower,
in a worm that raisins on the concrete,
in a man that wills himself not to speak.

gags, oh gags.
for a shadow cannot breathe.
it deprives them of nothing. pride

is born in the black and then dies in it.
i hear our shadow, low treble
of the clasping of our hands.

dark matter is invisible.
we infer it: how light bends around a black body,
and still you do not see black halos, even here,

my having told you plainly where they are.

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And I wonder where you are

By Tanaya Winder

Sacred stars blanket a nighttime sky,
each light reminds us of the preciousness of life.
Your memory lives along the Milky Way,
each twinkle saying don't forget my name.

It's an epidemic, a sickness of the earth,
a war we enter as soon as we are birthed.
Indigenous women, girls, our two-spirit, too.
When did this world start disappearing you?

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The Darker Sooner

By Catherine Wing

Then came the darker sooner,
came the later lower.
We were no longer a sweeter-here
happily-ever-after. We were after ever.
We were farther and further.
More was the word we used for harder.
Lost was our standard-bearer.
Our gods were fallen faster,
and fallen larger.
The day was duller, duller
was disaster. Our charge was error.
Instead of leader we had louder,
instead of lover, never. And over this river
broke the winter's black weather.

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My Standard Response

By Karenne Wood

I.

The first question is always phrased this way:
"So. How much Indian are you?"

II.

We did not live in tepees.
We did not braid our hair.
We did not fringe our shirts.
We did not wear war bonnets.
We did not chase the buffalo.
We did not carry shields.
We were never Plains Indians.
We tried to ride,
but we kept falling off of our dogs.

III.

A local official came to our office to ask our help with a city event. He had a splendid idea, he said. To kick off the event and show everyone in town that our tribe was still around, we should go up to the bluff overlooking the city and make a big smoke signal. Then they would know we were here.

Who ever heard of smoke signals in the forests? I imagined us upon the bluff, lighting one of those firestarter bricks. We haven't made fire since the Boy Scouts took over. And how would the citizens know it was us? They'd probably call the fire department.

IV.

As they ask, they think, *yes,*

I can see it in her face. High cheekbones

(whatever those are) *and dark hair.*

Here's a thought: don't we all have

high cheekbones? If we didn't,

our faces would cave in.

(But I do have a colonized nose.)

I’m sick of explaining myself.

“You know,” I finally say,

“It doesn’t matter to my people.”

I ride off to my ranch-style home.

Time to weave a basket, or something.

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Why Ralph Refuses to Dance

By C.D. Wright

He would have to put out his smoke.
At this time of year the snakes are slow and sorry-acting.
His ice would melt. He'd lose his seat.
you don't take chances once in a while you still see
He does not feel the beat.
a coontail tied to an aerial, but don't look
His pocket could be picked. His trousers rip.
for signs keep your black shoes on the floor
He could break a major bone.
burn every tick you pull off your head
He remembers the last time he stepped out on the floor.
roll a set of steel balls around in your fist
Who do you think I am, she said, a broom.
looking at the moon's punched-out face
No, he mumbled, saxophone.
think about Lily coming down the staircase
At the tables they whispered about him.
her crushed velvet chairs
He would begin to smell of baby shrimp.
her pearled brown toes
The music could stop in the middle of his action.
that time with the three of them in a boat
What would he do with his hands.
and him throwing up in the river
The women his age are spoken for.
as she stood up to skim his hat into the shallows
After sitting out so long, his heart could give out.
and tomorrow would unleash another spell of spare-rib theology
People will be stepped on. A fight ensue.
aw shuddup somebody clapped a hand on his shoulder
The cats in the band will lose respect.
aw shuddup he was getting the heavy hand again
He will bring dishonor on his family name.
are you going to dance or not, just say
good-night, no thanks, hallelujah yourself, go to hell.

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Clear Night

By Charles Wright

Clear night, thumb-top of a moon, a back-lit sky.
Moon-fingers lay down their same routine
On the side deck and the threshold, the white keys and the black keys.
Bird hush and bird song. A cassia flower falls.

I want to be bruised by God.
I want to be strung up in a strong light and singled out.
I want to be stretched, like music wrung from a dropped seed.
I want to be entered and picked clean.

And the wind says “What?” to me.
And the castor beans, with their little earrings of death, say “What?” to me.
And the stars start out on their cold slide through the dark.
And the gears notch and the engines wheel.

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A Blessing

By James Wright

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

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Beginning

By James Wright

The moon drops one or two feathers into the field.
The dark wheat listens.
Be still.
Now.
There they are, the moon's young, trying
Their wings.
Between trees, a slender woman lifts up the lovely shadow
Of her face, and now she steps into the air, now she is gone
Wholly, into the air.
I stand alone by an elder tree, I do not dare breathe
Or move.
I listen.
The wheat leans back toward its own darkness,
And I lean toward mine.

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Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota

By James Wright

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year's horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.

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With the Shell of a Hermit Crab

By James Wright

This lovely little life whose toes
Touched the white sand from side to side
How delicately no one knows
Crept from his loneliness, and died.

From deep waters long miles away
He wandered, looking for his name,
And all he found was you and me,
A quick life and a candle flame.

Today, you happen to be gone.
I sit here in the raging hell,
The city of the dead, alone,
Holding a little empty shell.

I peer into his tiny face.
It looms too huge for me to bear.
Two blocks away the sea gives place
To river. Both are everywhere.

I reach out and flick out the light.
Darkly I touch his fragile scars
So far away, so delicate,
Stars in a wilderness of stars.

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The Corn Baby

By Mark Wunderlich

They brought it. It was brought
from the field, the last sheaf, the last bundle

the latest and most final armful. Up up
over the head, hold it, hold it high it held

the gazer's gaze, it held hope, did hold it.
Through the stubble of September, on shoulders

aloft, hardly anything, it weighed, like a sparrow,
it was said, something winged, hollow, though

pulsing, freed from the field
where it flailed in wind, where it waited, wanted

to be found and bound with cord. It had
limbs, it had legs. And hands. It had fingers.

Fingers and a face peering from the stalks,
shuttered in the grain, closed, though just a kernel

a shut corm. They brought him and autumn
rushed in, tossed its cape of starlings,

tattered the frost-spackled field.

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Atavism

By Elinor Wylie

I always was afraid of Somes's Pond:
Not the little pond, by which the willow stands,
Where laughing boys catch alewives in their hands
In brown, bright shallows; but the one beyond.
There, when the frost makes all the birches burn
Yellow as cow-lilies, and the pale sky shines
Like a polished shell between black spruce and pines,
Some strange thing tracks us, turning where we turn.

You'll say I dream it, being the true daughter
Of those who in old times endured this dread.
Look! Where the lily-stems are showing red
A silent paddle moves below the water,
A sliding shape has stirred them like a breath;
Tall plumes surmount a painted mask of death.

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Let No Charitable Hope

By Elinor Wylie

Now let no charitable hope
Confuse my mind with images
Of eagle and of antelope:
I am by nature none of these.

I was, being human, born alone;
I am, being woman, hard beset;
I live by squeezing from a stone
The little nourishment I get.

In masks outrageous and austere
The years go by in single file;
But none has merited my fear,
And none has quite escaped my smile.

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Metamorphosis

By Jenny Xie

Nowhere in those kerosene years
could she find a soft-headed match.

The wife crosses over an ocean, red-faced and cheerless.
Trades the flat pad of a stethoscope for a dining hall spatula.

Life is two choices, she thinks:
you hatch a life, or you pass through one.

Photographs of a child swaddled in layers arrive by post.
Money doesn't, to her embarrassment.

Over time, she grows out her hair. Then she sprouts nerves.
The wife was no fool, but neither did she wander.

She lives inside a season of thrift, which stretches on.
Her sorrow has thickness and a certain sheen.

The wife knows to hurry when she washes.
When she cooks, she licks spoons slowly.

Every night, she made a dish with ground pork.
Paired with a dish that was fibrous.

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Old Wives' Tales on Which I Was Fed

By Jenny Xie

The number of rice grains left in your supper bowl
foretells how many pockmarks will appear on your lover's face

Sleeping on your back will flatten your head's shape
but sleep on your stomach and you'll induce nightmares

Eating the fat inside the crab sharpens the mind
so too the roe extracted from the steamed fish

Never let your feet touch cold water from the bathtub or
the sea on days when you're menstruating

Pinch the nose before age six when the cartilage is pliable
so the nasal bridge will grow narrow and high

Drift asleep with your hair wet
and you'll suffer from decades of migraines

You'll wreck your eyesight poring over pages in low light
but looking at all things green from a distance can coax it back

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Rootless

By Jenny Xie

Between Hanoi and Sapa there are clean slabs of rice fields
and no two brick houses in a row.

I mean, no three—
See, counting's hard in half-sleep, and the rain pulls a sheet

over the sugar palms and their untroubled leaves.
Hours ago, I crossed a motorbike with a hog strapped to its seat,

the size of a date pit from a distance.
Can this solitude be rootless, unhooked from the ground?

No matter. The mind resides both inside and out.
It can think itself and think itself into existence.

I sponge off the eyes, no worse for wear.
My frugal mouth spends the only foreign words it owns.

At present, on this sleeper train, there's nowhere to arrive.
Me? I'm just here in my traveler's clothes, trying on each passing town for
size.

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Ill-Advised Love Poem

By John Yau

Come live with me
And we will sit

Upon the rocks
By shallow rivers

Come live with me
And we will plant acorns

In each other's mouth
It would be our way

Of greeting the earth
Before it shoves us

Back into the snow
Our interior cavities

Brimming with
Disagreeable substances

Come live with me
Before winter stops

To use the only pillow
The sky ever sleeps on

Our interior cavities
Brimming with snow

Come live with me
Before spring

Swallows the air
And birds sing

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Gizzard Song

By Dean Young

Dean, it's Harry. No birds are nesting
in my birdhouses. What could it mean?
I don't know why I answered the phone,
there's already too much going on in
Nacogdoches and not even hello. Harry,
you haven't even asked about my operation.
You sick? No, I had a heart transplant.
They do those with lasers now, right? Lapra-
dazically? No, mine was more complicated, I say,
with knives. Ouch, he deducts, but you must
be okay now. Antlers are growing out of my floors,
a snowman, an evil snowman delivers my mail
and I'm taking so many pills my tongue's purple
and hair's growing out of my forehead so no.
Well, sorry, but you're the only person I
can call. No one knows the habits and inklings
of our winged friends like you. A query about
a foundling fledgling, a moody rooster, an owl
with self-esteem issues, you're the go-to guy.
Even if you feel like a wobbly oblong peg
driven into a wedge of cheddar, you're the guy
who holds it all together not only in avian
affairs but all atmospheric matters: comets
and Martians your métier, angels, and even clouds
for crying out loud. What would we do without
you? One day: no birds then stars all falled down
then what? Nothing! The void! The dark maw
of zilch! He was working himself into a fine
fettle and I had to admit, even if he was feeding
you regurgitated worm, he could make you feel
special and all of my pains, my multitudinous pains
would shrink to a single whinge like what a word
makes when it's misspelled. Pilgrim, I say,
you need to clear out the old nests, your houses
probably jammed with others' twigs and mud and stuff.
Birds, like the rest of us, like clean starts

and as I spoke I felt my new heart roost deeper
in my chest, fluffing out its blue breast, looking
for something to peck and this is how mercy
and poetry move through the world.

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Romanticism 101

By Dean Young

Then I realized I hadn't secured the boat.
Then I realized my friend had lied to me.
Then I realized my dog was gone
no matter how much I called in the rain.
All was change.
Then I realized I was surrounded by aliens
disguised as orthodontists having a convention
at the hotel breakfast bar.
Then I could see into the life of things,
that systems seek only to reproduce
the conditions of their own reproduction.
If I had to pick between shadows
and essences, I'd pick shadows.
They're better dancers.
They always sing their telegrams.
Their old gods do not die.
Then I realized the very futility was salvation
in this greeny entanglement of breaths.
Yeah, as if.
Then I realized even when you catch the mechanism,
the trick still works.
Then I came to in Texas
and realized rockabilly would never go away.
Then I realized I'd been drugged.
We were all chasing nothing
which left no choice but to intensify the chase.
I came to handcuffed and gagged.
I came to intubated and packed in some kind of foam.
This too is how ash moves through water.
And all this time the side doors unlocked.
Then I realized repetition could be an ending.
Then I realized repetition could be an ending.

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Eddie Priest's Barbershop & Notary

By Kevin Young

Closed Mondays

is music is men
off early from work is waiting
for the chance at the chair
while the eagle claws holes
in your pockets keeping
time by the turning
of rusty fans steel flowers with
cold breezes is having nothing
better to do than guess at the years
of hair matted beneath the soiled caps
of drunks the pain of running
a fisted comb through stubborn
knots is the dark dirty low
down blues the tender heads
of sons fresh from cornrows all
wonder at losing half their height
is a mother gathering hair for good
luck for a soft wig is the round
difficulty of ears the peach
faced boys asking Eddie
to cut in parts and arrows
wanting to have their names read
for just a few days and among thin
jazz is the quick brush of a done
head the black flood around
your feet grandfathers
stopping their games of ivory
dominoes just before they reach the bone
yard is winking widowers announcing
cut it clean off I'm through courting
and hair only gets in the way is the final
spin of the chair a reflection of
a reflection that sting of wintergreen
tonic on the neck of a sleeping snow

haired man when you realize it is
your turn you are next

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Whatever You Want

By Kevin Young

This could be a good day. It starts
without you, as usual; you haven't seen
dawn in years. By noon it hits half-
boiling & the air breaks down. After lunch
even the fans turn lazy, not moving you
or wind. Is it the Negro in you that gets
in the car & just starts driving, keeps
the windows down, the music
bouncing off station wagons, power
windows? Whatever you want

to call it, it makes you feel you own
everything, even the creeping heat. Spin
the radio looking for summer, for love
songs with someone somewhere worse
off than you. Why doesn't anyone
advertise for rain? Instead the personalities
keep talking to prove they are indoors,
cool. By seven the temperature outsails
the price of gas, the movies are all sold out
& you can't get cool for the heavens.
So peel away, head for the edge
of town where the roads turn thin & alone,
speeding to prove you can summon death
like tortoises cracked open in the road
up ahead, the water stored in their shells
running free. Keep on trying to out-race
heat's red siren until radio sings out

Come home, come on home black boy
to your chimney full of birds, to this house
of flame. Evening, the heat holds you
with its aching, unavoidable fingers;
you sleep naked, dreamless to heat.
Windows thrown open as mouths, fan on,
it still feels like a ghost is baking sweet
potato pies through the night. Your favorite.

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Smoke in Our Hair

By Ofelia Zepeda

The scent of burning wood holds
the strongest memory.
Mesquite, cedar, piñon, juniper,
all are distinct.
Mesquite is dry desert air and mild winter.
Cedar and piñon are colder places.
Winter air in our hair is pulled away,
and scent of smoke settles in its place.
We walk around the rest of the day
with the aroma resting on our shoulders.
The sweet smell holds the strongest memory.
We stand around the fire.
The sound of the crackle of wood and spark
is ephemeral.
Smoke, like memories, permeates our hair,
our clothing, our layers of skin.
The smoke travels deep
to the seat of memory.
We walk away from the fire;
no matter how far we walk,
we carry this scent with us.
New York City, France, Germany—
we catch the scent of burning wood;
we are brought home.

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“They buried their son last winter”

By Serhiy Zhadan

translated from the Ukrainian by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin

They buried their son last winter.
Strange weather for winter—rain, thunder.
They buried him quietly—everybody’s busy.
Who did he fight for? I asked. We don’t know, they say.
He fought for someone, they say, but who—who knows?
Will it change anything, they say, what’s the point now?
I would have asked him myself, but now—there’s no need.
And he wouldn’t reply—he was buried without his head.

It’s the third year of war; they’re repairing the bridges.
I know so many things about you, but who’d listen?
I know, for example, the song you used to sing.
I know your sister. I always had a thing for her.
I know what you were afraid of, and why, even.
Who you met that winter, what you told him.
The sky gleams, full of ashes, every night now.
You always played for a neighboring school.
But who did you fight for?

To come here every year, to weed dry grass.
To dig the earth every year—heavy, lifeless.
To see the calm after tragedy every year.
To insist you didn’t shoot at us, at your people.
The birds disappear behind waves of rain.
To ask forgiveness for your sins.
But what do I know about your sins?
To beg the rain to finally stop.
It’s easier for birds, who know nothing of salvation, the soul.

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Iris of Life

By Zitkála-Šá

Like tiny drops of crystal rain,
In every life the moments fall,
To wear away with silent beat,
The shell of selfishness o’er all.

And every act, not one too small,
That leaps from out the heart’s pure glow,
Like ray of gold sends forth a light,
While moments into seasons flow.

Athwart the dome, Eternity,
To Iris grown resplendent, fly
Bright gleams from every noble deed,
Till colors with each other vie.

’Tis glimpses of this grand rainbow,
Where moments with good deeds unite,
That gladden many weary hearts,
Inspiring them to seek more Light.

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