

HOPE

Issue 14: November 2021

OpenDoor magazine

YOUR WORDS MATTER.



YOUNG

FEATURES

HOPE!

CHECK OUT
THESE
AUTHORS

POEMS BY POST!

**WHY DO I
LOVE POETRY?**

welcome to the OPENDOOR MAGAZINE november issue!

HOPE – what does that mean to you? To us it is all about providing hope to as many artists and poets and authors as we can. That’s why we created OpenDoor Magazine in the first place! We love giving you something new to read each month – but most of all, we love giving HOPE! Join us as we explore HOPE through the words and minds of the following writers and artists.

If you are looking for ways to continue to support OpenDoor Magazine – please consider becoming a Patron (patreon.com/opendoormagazine) with tiers as low as \$1 per month – and we are hoping to grow our Patreon page into something that is above and beyond your monthly subscription experience!

Thank you for continuing to share our magazine with your friends and family and allowing our audience to keep growing.

- Kassie & Mel

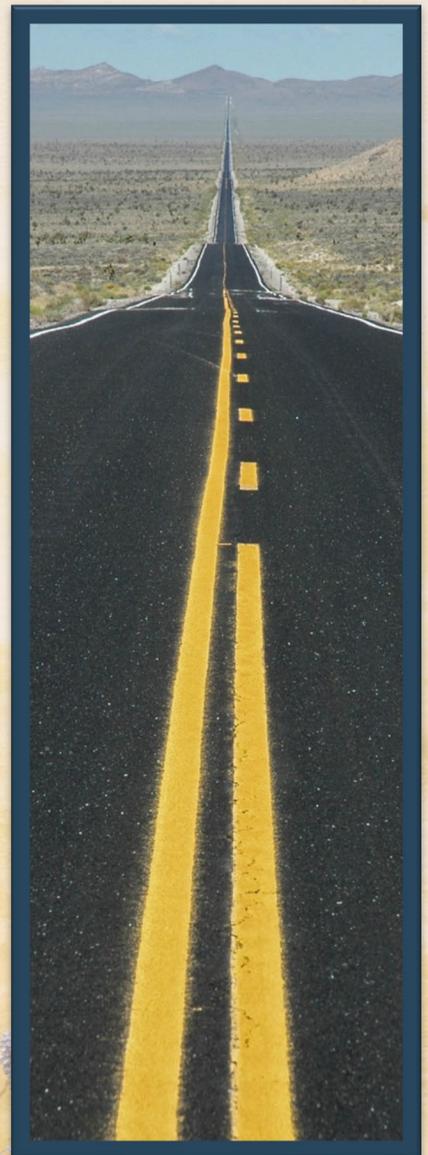
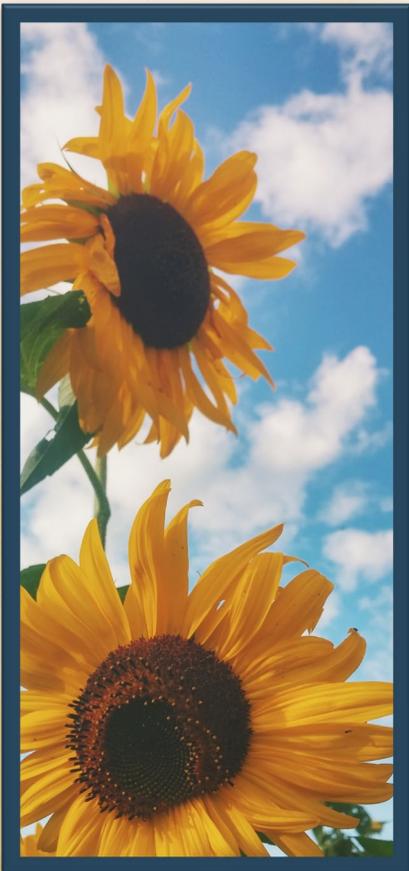
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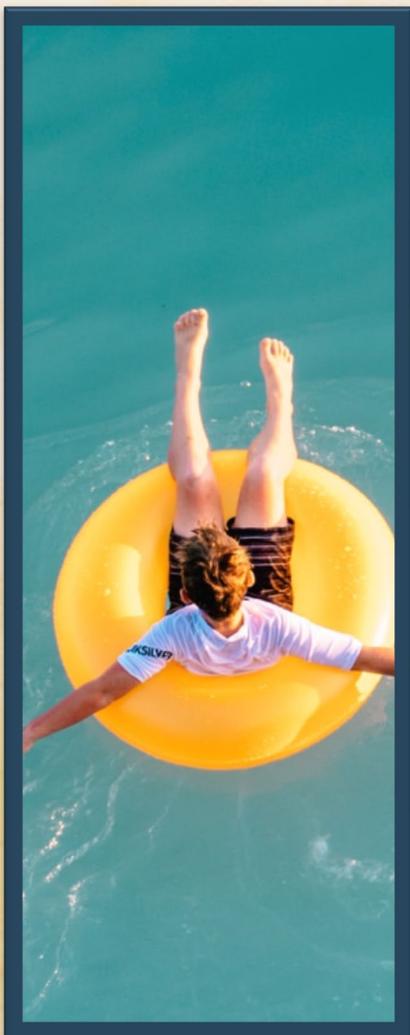
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HOPE ISSUE

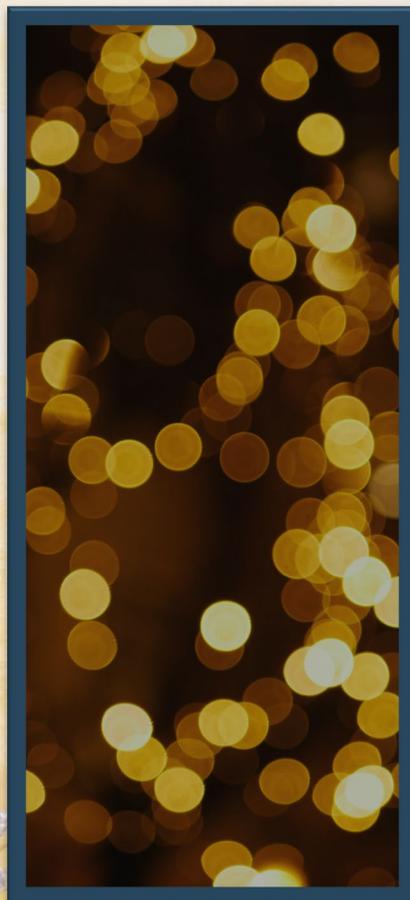
22 HOPE



59 FEATURED POETS
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74 BOOKS FOR YOUR
HOLIDAY LIST



The image features two large, vibrant yellow sunflowers with dark brown centers, set against a bright blue sky filled with soft, white clouds. The sunflowers are the primary focus, with one in the upper left and another in the lower center. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

WHAT ARE
our
CO-OWNERS
up to?

KASSIE J RUNYAN

Co-Creator



<https://www.KassieJRunyan.com>

<https://www.Facebook.com/kassiejrunyan>

<https://www.Instagram.com/kjrunyan>

<https://www.Twitter.com/kassandrerunyan>

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvSEcLEfE196OE_Ya2LNNN3kjFp82Ktt2

Watching:

After just visiting Joshua Tree, California for the first time – I'm only watching 'Ingrid Goes West' and 'Palm Springs.' After that – we'll jump back over to autumn movies! We tend to spend a lot of time watching any autumn or American Thanksgiving movies ending with 'Planes, Trains, and Automobiles' on Thanksgiving.

Reading:

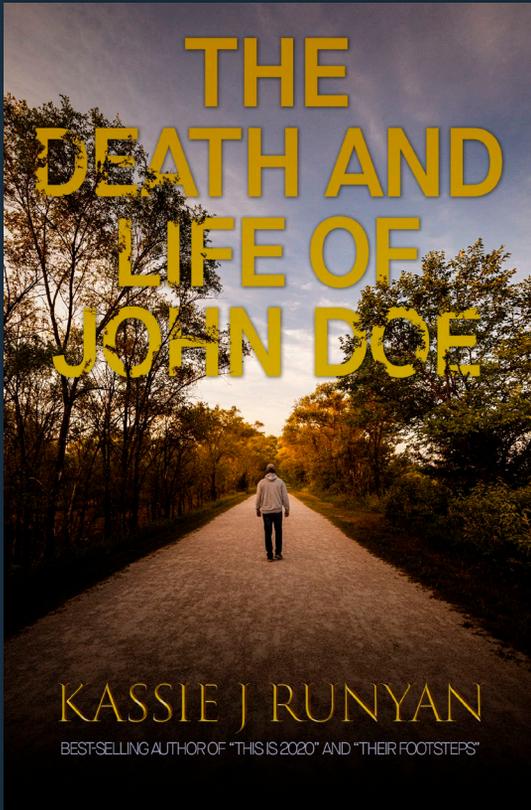
I am slowly making through book piles that went on hold (from reading – not purchasing) while John Doe edits were happening. The two I'm making my way through right now are:

The Gold Persimmon by Lindsay Merbaum
Grimoire by Jacob R. Moses

Highly suggest both!!

Listening:

Back into my Joni Mitchell obsession that is typically accompanied by hot cocoa and cozy oversized sweaters.



Walking out the door – December 7th

Pre-Order NOW

<https://www.kassiejrunyan.com/thedeathandlifeofjohndoe>

Feature at the end for an excerpt

HIDDEN

Kassie Runyan
United States

<https://www.kassiejrunyan.com/their-footsteps>

did you know?
this place where we sit
taking a break
a breath
from walking up
a steep street
on this little bench
burrowed into a wall
put here by someone
knowing that we wouldn't make it
up the steep street
without a break
a breath

did you know?
that this place has a dark past
a past filled with flame
and death
and when that happened
they built more on top
and buried the old history
trying to forget

did you know?
it couldn't be forgotten
because the new build
the new grade
of the steep street
caused more pain
and stench
than what the fire left behind
as sewage ran
down the steep street
that we now struggle
to walk up

KASSIE J RUNYAN – CO-CREATOR

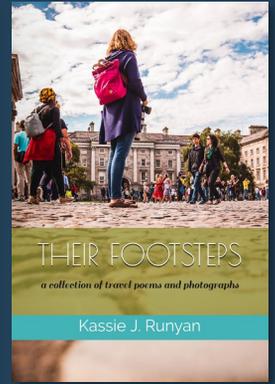
did you know?
to hide the pain
and the history
of people being dragged away
and sold on ships
as slaves
the city swept it all
under the steep streets
that now we walk up
and down
to get to the market
where fish are thrown
and people laugh
as they stick their gum to a wall
that is cleared away
every year

did you know?
that the resilience of this city
and the way they build
to hide the past
but embrace the present
with their visitors
and the beauty
that this city now brings
to all of those who see
the need to hide
and the need to forget
without that
the city we know
wouldn't exist
with its steep streets
and hidden alleys
and hidden levels
and hidden secrets

didn't you know?



Purchase your
copy of *This is
2020* [HERE!](#)



Purchase your copy
of *Their Footsteps*
[HERE!](#)



This is 2020 Part Two [HERE!](#)

MEL HAAGMAN

Co-Creator

Reading:

Sorrow and Bliss by Meg Mason

A deep, dark yet cleverly witty depiction of mental illness. A skill very difficult to master!

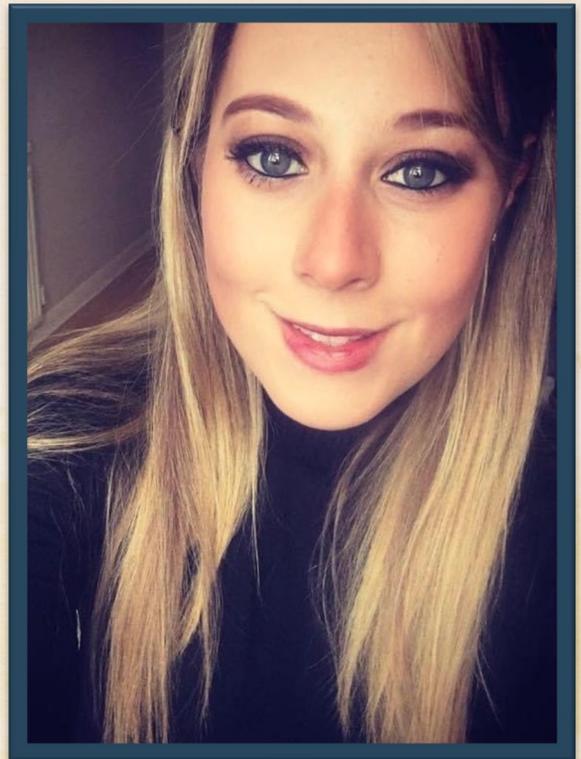
Heartbreak and humour aren't easy to pair, and the title couldn't be more apt. I listened to the audio book which was read beautifully by Emilia Fox.

Watching:

Maid - After leaving her abusive partner, single mother Alex turns to housecleaning to provide for her daughter. This is the story of a strong, young woman who despite all odds will go to great lengths to be the best Mum to her little girl. The acting from Margaret Qualley was phenomenal.

Listening:

Sam Fender - Album: Seventeen
Going Under



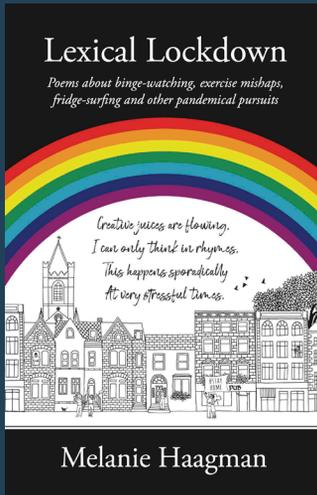
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<https://www.Instagram.com/girlontheedge90>

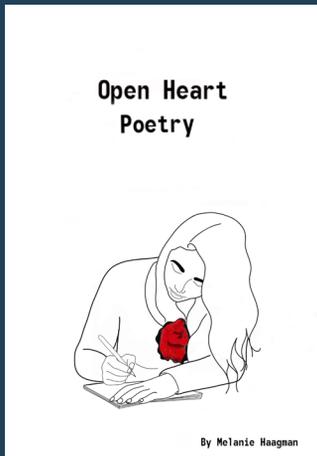
<https://www.Twitter.com/girlontheedge1>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjh8b4Y7gSFGKewzPKZH8lw>

MEL HAAGMAN – CO-CREATOR



Purchase your copy of
Lexical Lockdown [HERE!](#)



Purchase your copy of **Open
Heart Poetry** [HERE!](#)

APATHY

Mel Haagman

United Kingdom

<https://www.facebook.com/girlontheedge90>

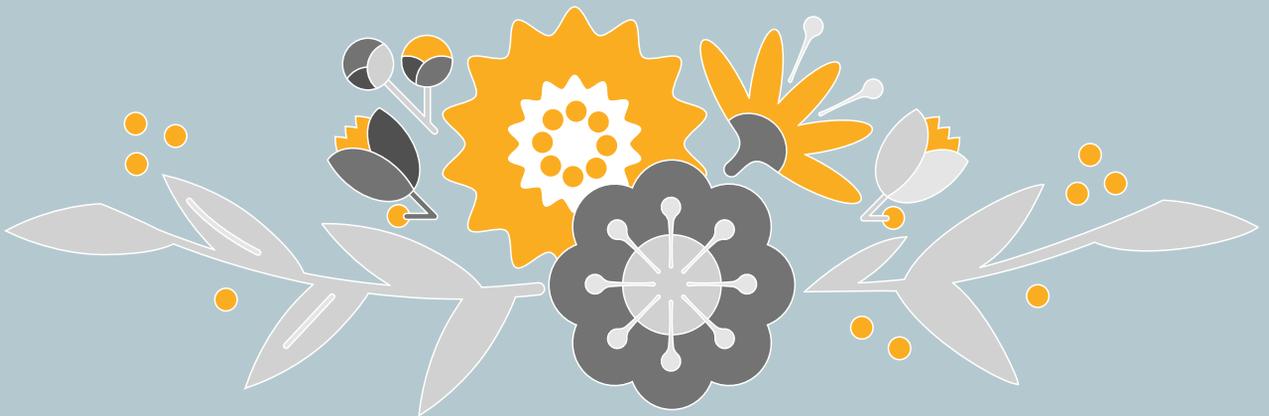
I'd rather feel too deeply
At all things great and small
Than lack any emotion
And feel nothing at all...
Hate isn't the opposite of love
It's apathy instead,
And I really hope this trait
Doesn't multiply and spread.
Successful communication
Won't be able to take place,
Barriers in relationships
Will be a constant case.
Apathy can be temporary
Though a dangerous path to tread,
You may feel such emptiness
Now your feelings have fled.
No sense of impending doom,
Or any elation to share,
A brain once on fire,
Is now silent and bare.
Acknowledgment is crucial,
The start to being freed,
And finding motivation
To get exactly what you need.
In a world with endless potential
There's so much good to feel,
So get inside the car of life
And strongly steer the wheel.

YOUNG POET FEATURE

Kassie and I are so excited to share with you that *Open Door* will now feature poetry and art by children. We can't deny the sheer talent that so many young people possess and through my teaching I am exposed to so many creative and talented pupils. I feel it is a crime now not to open the doors and let young talent shine through!

If you know a young poet or artist that would like to share their work with our subscribers – please work with them to submit through email and we will send them some questions to work through.

- *Mel*



Cecily Cornock

United Kingdom - AGE 10

EQUALITY

To every **SOUL**

In every soul that you
will find, there is a person
that will wonder upon their differences.
Who am I? Where do I belong?

I wrote the Equality poem last year in school. We were asked to think about what equality means to us so I decided to write a poem with my thoughts.

I love writing poems as they are the best way that I can express my feelings. It makes me feel happy when I write and I find it an easier way to write about my true feelings.

But the soul should
be told that you should not
stride upon a path of discomfort
or that you should be different to
what your heart desires.

But that you are strong and you should
only wonder over those who say
that your heart and soul are
beautiful and it is good to have
a unique heart otherwise you
will be lost once more; because
Equality is a star that should
always shine upon you no matter
what anybody says.

Because that is where every soul
and heart should belong.

THERE'S BEER IF YOU'RE THIRSTY

BY THOM BRUCIE – UNITED STATES

The old man who sold him the beer told him it hadn't rained in years.

"Years?" Clovis asked.

"Yes, sir. That's why ain't nobody left but me and a few dried up sugartrees."

"Years," Clovis repeated, like the chorus of a ballad. "I don't know how anything can go dry that long."

"Can't say to that," the old man admitted. "I can tell ya that the last time it rained, Margaret was still here."

"Margaret?"

"My Margaret."

"What happened?"

"Stopped raining. Then it got lonely."

Clovis nodded.

"I understand loneliness," he said.

"What do I owe you?"

The old man looked around the store.

"Was a gas station once," he said.
"This is what's left."

Thom Brucie's publications include the novels: *Children of Slate* and *Weapons of Cain*; his newest novel, *Obsidian Mirth*, is scheduled for release in Spring 2022. Brucie's other works include a book of short stories, *Still Waters: Five Stories*; and two chapbooks of poems: *Apprentice Lessons* and *Moments Around The Campfire With A Vietnam Vet*.

Irene Koronas of Ibbetson Street Press named *Moments Around The Campfire With A Vietnam Vet*, "the best chapbook of 2010." Other awards include two Pushcart nominations for the stories "The Executor" and "The Tiger Cage." His story, "Intrusion of Magic," won first prize at the Ithaca Literary Festival. Brucie was awarded, with Break the Barriers, Inc., a Very Special Arts Grant from Fresno State University for a children's play about childhood disabilities entitled, *Arnold the Alligator*; it was adapted to music and dance, and performed by Break the Barriers.

Dr. Brucie is Professor of English at South Georgia State College.

You can learn more about Thom Brucie and his writing at: www.ThomBrucie.com

THERE'S BEER IF YOU'RE THIRSTY – THOM BRUCIE

Clovis held his wallet open.

“How much you got in there?” the old one asked.

“Not much.”

“You got fifty?”

“For a six-pack of beer?”

“For the whole place. Time for me to move on. Ain’t seen rain in years.”

“I don’t want your store. Just some beer. I’m movin’ on, too.”

“No, sir. You ain’t ready. Give that five spot.”

Clovis handed him the bill.

The old man took the money, put on his hat, and walked out the door.

Clovis took the six-pack and followed. He leaned against the front wall, popped the first can, and watched the old man walk away. The long, empty road spread like a thin wing. One side ribboning to his right, lay like an impassive macadam flatbread left too long in a stone oven; to his left, it rose up and over a slight ridge, vanishing into the distance. By the time the old man disappeared behind the ridge, the sun left for twilight, and Clovis finished the six-pack and fell asleep on the gray boards of the walkway.

When he awakened, Clovis sat up and rubbed his back muscles against the wall of the abandoned station. He slapped the dust from his sleeves, raising a light chalky shadow that floated softly toward the rusty metal overhang.

Forty days had passed since the old man left. On the morning of the forty-first day, a murky haze, like a gauze curtain, sheltered the horizon against the brewing yeast of another in an endless parade of sweltering days. Within minutes the rising air stirred as if water boiling, and the vapor made the roadway shine. He went to grab a breakfast beer from the cooler.

The cool can felt blunt, solid in his hand. He raised the can in salutation to the sun’s emergence, and as he lowered his hand, something moved within the road shimmer, too far away to identify, but certainly a life-form of some substance. The creature wandered off the road and back again, crossing and zigzagging as if searching. It took another beer before Clovis identified a dog. As it came closer, he noticed it had long, black fur, almost like hair.

THERE'S BEER IF YOU'RE THIRSTY – THOM BRUCIE

He watched the dog close in, its pointed snout sniffing, its eyes darting, until it noticed Clovis, and it stopped. They looked at one another, questioning, one uncertainty paralleling the other.

Clovis raised the can and sipped. The dog, as if in response to the gesture, walked toward him. It was a medium-sized dog, thirty-five or forty pounds. It came closer, and without hesitation, it stepped onto the wooden walkway and sat, its chin up, looking directly at Clovis. The dog was a female, and she had blue eyes.

“Do you have a name?”

The dog did not change expression, but it did seem to relax a little.

“You need a name, of course, if we’re going to talk. What’s a good name for a girl dog?” In a moment he decided. “I know. I’ll call you Margaret, for the old man. His love. His Margaret.”

Clovis relaxed then, too. He sat against the wall, stretched his legs, and took another sip of breakfast.

“So, Margaret, what’s a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?”

Clovis closed his eyes. Memory rose behind them.

“Her name was Catrina, and I actually said that to her. In the backyard, near the fence.”

He looked at the dog.

“You sure you want to hear this? It’s getting hot, and you must be tired.”

The dog rested its chin on its paws.

“Okay,” Clovis said, and he sipped his beer. “By the way, Margaret, there’s beer if you’re thirsty.”

Margaret, the dog, got up and went to the store entrance. She grabbed the handle, pulled open the door, and went in. She came back to the door, pushed it open with her paw, and returned to Clovis with two cans of beer in her jaws. She set them on the walkway. Clovis took one and pulled the cap. He set it down in front of Margaret who nosed it onto its side and drank the contents as it spilled.

Clovis popped his can and continued.

“We met at my Aunt Sylvia’s house. We were eleven. That’s eleven human years by the way, not dog years. We always went to visit Aunt Sylvia on Sunday after Church. Catrina’s family had just moved into the house next door.

THERE'S BEER IF YOU'RE THIRSTY – THOM BRUCIE

What do you mean by a place like this?

It's kind of a joke.

What kind of joke?

I'm not really sure. My cousin, Nick, he told me. It's what he says.

I don't understand, so it's not a funny joke.

“Later, we ate ice cream. That was it. How we met.”

Clovis kept his eyes closed. He could see the past better with them closed. Dull memories sparkled, and forgotten events re-shaped like scrubbed marble, buffed bright and clean.

“Beer for breakfast. Not the healthiest choice, Margaret.”

Still with his eyes closed, enraptured in the melancholia of the past, he exhaled a sound. Not a word, more an emotion, or, perhaps, a faint whisper of regret.

“Choices, Margaret. Choices.”

The heated sand clusters released a light brown, translucent dust, like an obscure, shimmering cloud.

“I kissed her; you know. Well, I kissed her a lot, but our first kiss, that Christmas, at Aunt Sylvia's. Aunt Sylvia's holiday decorations always included a sprig of green mistletoe hung in the doorway to the living room. Understand, Margaret, if two humans accidentally meet under mistletoe, they must kiss. It's a rule of magic.

“I know dogs don't have magic. You don't need to remind me. I know. Dogs lay around. Sniff stuff.”

He opened his eyes and looked at Margaret. She lay, like a dog, transfixed and loyal.

“I hardly know you, and, yet you behave like you know me. How can a dog make such a decision based on no evidence? How do you know you can trust me? You don't know. You hope, though. Right? It's not magic for you. It's instinct.

“Mistletoe only grows in shaded forest areas. And it only grows in the branches of trees. Its roots grow in the air, not in dirt. So, you see, Margaret, it's a rare phenomenon since its roots are not bound to the earth. Magic.

THERE'S BEER IF YOU'RE THIRSTY – THOM BRUCIE

“After we ate, people milled around getting ready to say good-bye. I went looking for a last piece of pie. Just as I walked into the living room doorway, Catrina, carrying a piece of pumpkin pie on a paper plate, came around the corner, and we met under the mistletoe. Can you picture us? Struggling with childhood, stretching toward adolescence, heavy with Christmas magic, and caught in the adult trap of mistletoe?”

“We knew we had to kiss. That’s how humans are, Margaret. They want to kiss, but they’re afraid. Afraid to touch because if you touch someone, you feel it past your skin, into your blood, and it makes you weak with tenderness.”

Clovis lifted the can, but it was empty. He grunted a mild displeasure, but when he began to rise to go after another beer, Margaret walked out the door with two cool cans in her mouth. She set them down. Clovis reached for one and clicked it open. He caught Margaret looking at him, her blue eyes expectant.

“You’re a good dog, Margaret.”

Margaret took a step toward him. She leaned her snout up to his face and stared at him, at his eyes. Clovis reached out mechanically, like an instinct, and touched the dog.

“Thanks,” he said to her. “It was like that. The eyes. Dogs, they don’t have pretense. If they like you, they say so with the eyes. Not humans.”

Clovis put the opened can on the floor, and Margaret the dog drank. Then he snapped the ring of his beer and drank a mouthful.

“Humans use their eyes to pretend. It’s too much work, loving, so you hide charity behind indifference. Well, you don’t. You’re a dog. But people do. But we didn’t. We couldn’t. The magic. When we looked into one another’s eyes, we saw each other. Then we kissed.”
He paused to endure the pleasurable pain of reminiscence.

“I wish I could describe that kiss. That inexperienced, willful act of courage. Yes, courage, Margaret, because truth overcame us. We each declared with our eyes, this is who I truly am. That is a gift so rare, that one hardly ever hears of it. A choice to share your true self. Scary, because what if she rejects you? But she did not. Instead, she, too, offered herself. I miss her. Here, in my head, and here, in my heart.”
The memory held against his eyes, and he squeezed the lids to bind it. Margaret moved closer and placed her head on his leg. Clovis rested his hand on her fur.

“We fell in love that day. We did not know, of course. We were too young, but that kiss, that magic, brought us together, and from that moment we were no longer alone. Imagine, Margaret, not being alone.”

He stroked her rough fur, and the dog accepted the affection.

THERE'S BEER IF YOU'RE THIRSTY – THOM BRUCIE

“You and I were alone, and now we are not. You are kind to share time with me, but you are not Catrina. No other is Catrina.”

“Our youthful years were uneventful, except that all through school everyone knew we were paired. Even through the joyride of adolescence, we knew each other, grew closer. Everyone knew we would get married, and we did.”

“A June bride. Of course, a June bride. Humans do things like that, Margaret, explain magic through ceremony. June is the bride’s month. It’s high summer. Nature has blossomed. Birds, deer, rabbits, all life is alive and healthy. A bride’s time of high vitality and optimism. We had white lilies.”

Clovis stopped talking. The dog sat up, and Clovis held her and cried into her fur, and the fur grew wet with his tears.

“She was not healthy. She did not know. We did not know. Who knew? Why did no one know? It’s not fair.”

He flung his eyes open to the misery of the dusty, amorphous day, to the unending sorrow of missing her, and to the loneliness.

“What could I do? An aneurism. Do you know what that is, Margaret? Me neither, really. Something breaks. In the brain. Breaks it open. You know, it leaks. Then the brain turns off. Shuts down. And the body follows. Stops talking. Stops smiling. Stops seeing.”

He cried more then, with the forlorn grief of a man who has lost his way, a man isolated and unrooted. He sobbed breaths of anguish that in their agony sometimes heal.

“White lilies. . . Bride’s veil. . . Marriage kiss. . .”

“Catrina. . .”

He whispered her name into the quiet of exhaustion and fell asleep.

Sleep heals. That’s its job. Live life; sleep. But some sleep is better than other sleep, and Clovis the sleeper slept the sleep of dreams. Not a long dream, but one saturated with fear.

When he startled awake, he met Margaret’s stare.

“I had that dream again. I’m riding a great rhinoceros into a cave. He charges headlong, armor clanging against the enclosing walls, until we reach a tunnel. The beast cannot continue for its size. I jump off and run into the tunnel that leads downward to darkness. Down into empty space, until I come to an abyss beyond which I cannot see. Everything is incomprehensible, and the fear seizes me. And I awake in fear.”

THERE'S BEER IF YOU'RE THIRSTY – THOM BRUCIE

Margaret did not move.

“I know what you’re thinking. It’s a hero quest, right? Fierce beast. Clanging armor. Running into danger. Exactly. That’s what I thought, too. But the black abyss. What about that? I ask you that question because if it is a hero quest, what is the quest? Something new, you say? Something in the darkness of the great beyond?”

“You might have something there, Margaret, and I’ll tell you why. Today the dream changed. Really. Yes, truly. Okay, I’ll tell you.”

“I came to the abyss as usual. Instead of waking, trembling with fear, I peered into the black nothingness of dread. In the distance, I saw an island, the island of the dead.”

“Well, of course it has significance. Aren’t we all going to die one day? At this point, I don’t know what significance. Let me continue.”

“I braved the darkness and stepped off the edge. Yes, I know, brave, hero, and the hero must die. But I did not die. I stepped into the blackness to discover that the water leading to the island was shallow enough for me to cross.”

“On the island, several yards inland, I came to a crater. I peered over its edge and discovered a lake filled with heads of the dead. Two of them floated over to me. One was the ancient head of Atlas. You know Atlas, right? Carried the weight of the world on his shoulders, the ponderous weight of life and death, of history and oblivion?”

“The other was the head of Catrina, youthful and beautiful. But her eyes were closed.”

“The panic in my face must have shown because the head of Atlas said – *calm yourself*. I felt his ancient voice like one feels history repeating itself, a voice like a mountain of stone, profound and living, full of snow and rain, of trees and flowers, of rivers and streams, and somehow I knew it. I knew that voice, that living mountain. Inside me. Here.”

“You think that’s one of those adjustments of re-awakening? The unconscious freeing repression? I don’t know. Maybe.”

“Then Atlas told me to open the egg at my feet. I cracked the white shell and a white dove flew over the lake illuminating all. The water of death was calm and red, and Catrina’s death mask smiled.”

“Of course I know the obvious interpretation. I must allow Catrina to settle into the peaceful sleep of afterlife. But I resist.”

THERE'S BEER IF YOU'RE THIRSTY – THOM BRUCIE

He looked at the dog.

“What about me?”

He slugged a mouthful of beer.

“She died in the hospital. Sterile fluorescent white lights. Disinfected machines. Stainless steel rails on the bed. A bleak, impersonal, frigid box. I held her hand, warm and soft. At the end, she looked at me. With her last exhausted breath, she whispered, ‘Remember me.’ And her breath drifted off into the cool fridity of the sterile room. And her eyes saw me. Knew me. Eyes of the mistletoe. Eyes of the marriage lilies.”

“I held her, then, and I felt her soul release from her body, rising up, away from her, away from me.”

“I leaned away. I looked at her. Of course, I expected her to still be alive. Wouldn’t you? But her eyes. Her open eyes, spiritless, vacant, except for the unblinking message – ‘Remember me.’”

“Do not look at me that way, Margaret. I know what you’re thinking. This is Catrina, come back from the dead, releasing me. That’s backwards, I tell you. I must let go of her.”

This last he shouted, and the dog stepped away from him. Clovis raised the can but stopped. The half-empty can became a question in his hand. Half-empty or half-full?

“Choices, Margaret. Choices.”

He stared a moment longer, and he heard again the stone-mountain-voice of Atlas. A memory whisper. A startle.

“The cup you’re served. Choose.”

The can bespoke the ponderous weight of forgiveness, and the dog Margaret, brought from the cooler one can of beer. She punctured the can with a canine and licked the escaping brew, allowing Clovis to ponder the half-empty, half-full quandary of choice.

“No wrong choices, the philosopher once proclaimed. But, if you will pardon the rudeness, Margaret, that’s dogshit, and you and I both know it.”

“Alright, damn it. Half full,” he declared. “I’ll savor what remains.”

THERE'S BEER IF YOU'RE THIRSTY – THOM BRUCIE

And he drank. One long swallow. Filling his mouth. Relishing his breath. Breathing and not breathing. Emptying it all. Accepting all. The last few drops trickled from the side of his mouth, and he threw the empty can into the dusty air just as a startling clasp of thunder pounded open the sky and rain fell rampant on the stillness.

Immediately, the old man appeared against the peak of the rise in the road. Through the cleansing downpour, he moved. When he reached the walkway, the dog offered him a beer. He sat next to Clovis.

“Rain clears the air, don’t it?”

Clovis nodded and gestured. “Made a rainbow.”

The old man took a slow drink.

“Did you find Margaret?” Clovis asked.

“Of course not,” the old man said. “Found myself. You ready to sell the station?”

“Sell?”

“Yes, sir. Time you was movin’ on. I’ll give you three dollars.”

“But I paid you five.”

“With every loss, a lesson.”

The old man handed Clovis three dollars. He sipped his beer and let the dog rest its muzzle on his lap.

“Named her Margaret, you say? For me? That’s a fine gift. I’ll remember you for it.”

Clovis accepted payment. He stepped off the wooden planks onto the re-awakened earth and walked onward toward the gently gathering day.

HOPE!



NOVEMBER: HOPE

BY MULTIPLE AUTHORS

POEM OF HOPE

Dedicated to those lost in Manchester

John Albiston

United Kingdom

a light never goes out
it always shines bright
the candle flame glows
angels look after ones lost
as sad as it is
we must stand as one nation
stand united to fight
to fight against those who harm
let us stay together
stand bold and true
the fight must go on

THE PROMISED VOYAGE

RC James

United States

On the mantelpiece, a single rose;
outside, a morning filled with mist
covering the field, oddly reassuring.

We're leaving, with or without
your nightly phantoms, who,
spitefully, claim they've won.

We'll reverse the confusion,
our fears welcoming a bird
from land beyond other land.

Knowledge gained can't work out
what's ahead, a handhold
on a cliff is all we have.

What we've lost remains inside,
silent seamsters embroider dreams;
in cool morning, prophets speak.

THE BEES AND THE BEARS

CL Bledsoe

United States

<https://clbledsoe.medium.com/>

Before bed, my daughter asks about when we were bears, serious face, big eyes. She knows once she pulls the string, I'll spin all night. "That's why you like salmon so much," I remind her. "We slapped the waves into place as the river curtsied past, which is how the Mississippi was made. They won't tell you that at school, because they're in it with Big Erosion. We knew the secret song that put the bees to sleep." "But weren't we stealing their honey?" "We left flowers like the tooth fairy leaves silver dollars. They were glad to have them. They wrote thank-you notes. Your mother might still have some, saved somewhere. Flowers grew in our fur – a special kind you can't find at the farmer's market. They changed color and scent depending on our moods, what we had to do that day. Too much homework and they would go gray and smell like old cheese. Everybody would know we needed someone to make funny faces at us." "I don't think that's true." I shrug. "When we'd scratch our backs on trees, it straightened them so they grew into the sky, which is where the best sunberries come from. They'd drop them down for us, sometimes. When we sharpened our claws on their bark, we were returning the favor." I look into the distance, thinking about how sweet those berries were, the feel of loam beneath my claws. "Why did we ever leave?" she asks. "We got laid off and had to come here for work," I say. "Your mom's cousin knew somebody hiring humans, so we had to trade in our fur and claws for hair and donuts. That's why you should always unionize." That bit always puts her right to sleep. I tuck her in, stand over her, growling at the darkness to keep it back a little longer.

Ivan de Monbrison

France

<https://sites.google.com/view/ivan-de-monbrison/home>

В другом месте, дальше, идите,
Не видеть,
Горизонт движется, как канат.
Падает, ниже, снова,
Но никогда не умирает.

Elsewhere, further, to go
not to see,
The horizon moving like a rope.
To fall down, again
But never to die.

IF, TOMORROW

Genevieve Ray

United Kingdom

<https://www.instagram.com/genevievefirepoet/>

6 days from now;
I get a stamp,
or a label.
I can affix,
to every other tomorrow.

If it cannot come,
there will be another sun.
If,
tomorrow...

5 days from now;
I'll understand how,
I don't understand often.
Skipping from thought,
to forgotten notion.

If it cannot come,
there will be another sun.
If,
tomorrow...

4 days from now;
I wont question why,
I will question how.
Defining one more answer,
gaining yet another question.

If it cannot come,
there will be another sun.
If,
tomorrow...

3 days from now;
meaning will begin again.
Adding letters to selfdom,
taking away judgements.
Nearer conclusion.

If it cannot come,
there will be another sun.
If,
tomorrow...

2 days from now;
I draw lines,
between forgiveness's.
Draw lines under,
forgetfulness.

If it cannot come,
there will be another sun.
If,
tomorrow...

1 day from now;
A life built up,
against one day,
and what was missing.
I sit silently hoping.

If it cannot come,
there will be another sun.
When,
I finally reach tomorrow.

DON'T GIVE UP, THERE IS HOPE

Lolanda Leotta

Italy

<https://www.facebook.com/Jole69>

https://www.instagram.com/jole_leotta/

The disease knocked on your door,
you were always a strong woman,
now you're weak and you cry,
the fever burns you out,
the convulsions make you tremble,
you feel you are out of breath,
heart beats slow down,
I know mother you feel exhausted,
but your son need you,
you taught me to have faith, to hope.
Don't give up living!
God can perform miracles.
Mother! do you remember the day
I said to you: "I want to go abroad.
in search of fortune" and you told me:
"My beloved son, even if you're afraid
of making a mistake, don't give up living!
don't blame yourself for me,
I'm not here to give you a hard time,
you have to make your own life.
Why wouldn't you fight!
You have to try so hard
until you find the right way,
I can't bear to see you sad,
deprived of life energy.
I hope God hears my prayers someday.
Don't give up your life!
You don't want to have the same fate
as your father,
you don't want to be the victim
of his backward mentality.
If you stay in his shop to serve customers,
you'll become cynical and contemptuous,
you'll annihilate yourself.
Go! Dare to dream!
you'll make me the proudest mother
in the world, don't worry about me,
I can take care of myself
and when you come back don't warn me,
I'll be at the door waiting for you.

HOPE FOR BLISS

Loti Uwatabaye

Rwanda

<https://www.instagram.com/uwlot1/>

Looking myself in the mirror,
My joy appears to have faded.
All the charms I had disappeared
Leaving me like an old billboard.

I can see nobody noticing me
Even make ups don't fit me,
I feel weak for me to move on
With anxiety that holds me back.

I am into a blackout of love
Depression defeats my expression,
Can't even get a friendly message
May be breath is my massage.

I try to spend my day as normal
And memories just make me wild,
I find myself walking alone all the way
Like I don't deserve accompany.

Loneliness brought me down
And fell to the ground staring to the mirror,
I saw my image in so clear
And hoped for bliss without doubts.

SACRED PLAINS

Cathy Hollister
United States

*It's easy to love a mountain... But the prairie's
charms take more looking*
Theodore Roosevelt National Park

Lone tree, distant, hazy
floating
like a waif
on an ocean of brown prairie grass,

the grasshoppers' tenor drone surrounds
me in a maze of clamor,

clacking, clicking
over and over,

a companion as faithful as the wind,

starlings murmur,
inviting me to look up,
gaze at the artistic creations
against
the blue canvas of the sky

scent of sage emerges,
speaking of purification and sacrifice
I know dwells within me,
though obscured by the
mountain
of noise that separates me from myself

the emptiness of the land fills
the void of my loneliness,
my spirit welcomes the rhythm of the plains
as the golden rays of the sunset
anoint me.

HOPE

Aleksandra Vujisić
Montenegro

The flowers are dead in the vase
but I have no wish to throw them away.
Their new, miraculous flourishing
is what I call hope,
or are they here to stay that way?

The love is lost in the nonsense
of everyday life, worn out as an old coat.
Its new, miraculous, reappearance is
what I call hate,
rocking with menace this old boat.

But there is the shore not so far away,
or even a lighthouse and I think
I can cope -
for all of the lost love or broken wings
I only have a ray of hope.

SEARCHING

Judith N. Brooke
Canada

<https://www.facebook.com/judith.brooke1>

I search in my mind
 To find you,
But instead, many doubts and anxieties
I reach out
 you are not there.
I search for you
 I don't find you.
In my dreams I wonder why
 I cannot find you.
The obstacles mount
 why can't I find you?
Why are you so hard to discover,
 will I ever find you?
What is it that compels me to
 keep searching?
Why can't I be satisfied
 with who I am?
Or do I know?
Perhaps I am crazy.
Or do I search because
 inside I know that I am not.
I flounder like a baby
 learning to swim
Thrashing, gasping, reaching
 Reaching out,
But
 you are not there - yet.

CHILDREN'S EYES

Alan Bedworth
United Kingdom

I see the world today,
as a place I don't recognise.
Have we come so far,
that material things
makes us who we are ?
Governments and technology,
are isolating people,
the more advanced we become.
There's systems in place,
where we don't have to leave home.
Surely that's against human instinct.
Tolerance is something
that's becoming sadly lacking.
Patience and civility is eroding
thanks to social media.
What is the future for our offspring,
if this world is allowed to keep
ignoring the signs of foreboding.
Yet look into the children's eyes.
They're full of hope and living.
Now nearly at the end of my life.
Seeing those children's eyes,
fills me with hope and confirmation.
That all is not lost for the future,
and life will return to normality.

HOPE BECOMES IN VAIN AGAINST THE YEARS

Maid Corbic

Bosnia and Herzegovina

<https://www.facebook.com/xcelendge>

<https://www.instagram.com/zaglavlje.official/>

All my hopes from life are woven
they become just dust and ashes regardless of age
i still live for the love that warms me
let it remain etched in my memory

I think that for all solutions there must be
because I live for my dreams woven of chocolate
and hope does not cease regardless of the environment
in which I must live forever

I hope in vain for some unfortunate happiness
and I'm just someone who loves to be what you are
faith and hope for some better times still lives on
in the depths of my hidden and sincere soul

I am someone who really loves the world around me
but the people around me have become so pale
yes unfortunately as some day slowly fades away
the earth rotates all its slopes backwards

And I was left alone and within four walls
but I don't want to remain a hunter of untwisted
for birth is still alive to me as if it were the last
while hope in me lives on forever

I sneeze at the world, and I mustn't be
hope must remain in every sphere of life
for I am a young man longing for an honest life
and every day I live as if it were my last

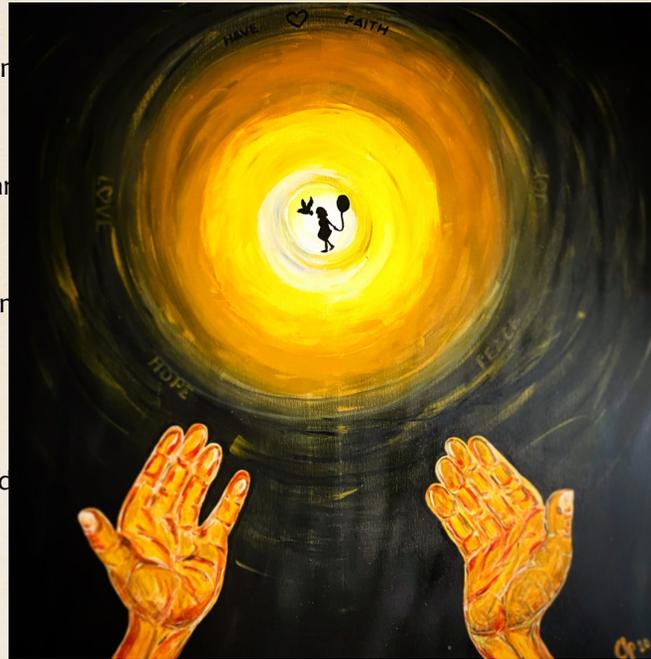
I enjoy looking at the smiling people around me
and we share equal colors regardless of all distances
but what is valid when everything has become just darkness and an endless tunnel
the dizziness inflicted on me by people with their boiling behavior?

All my hopes cease with some years of existence
I wish the world was still full of optimism
because every day is actually a new beginning since life decides for me what is best

Small things really know how to hurt my hopes
people are born to be all that they really are, selfish
while I want to show with kindness that there is still hope
for a whole world that wants some new and more beautiful times

My hope must be the same for all who live
because it's easiest to walk away from someone without saying goodbye
that is why I always take hope with great reserve
because I learned that life is a big game of cat and mouse

Hopes become futile over the years
I am no longer the boy of my imaginative dreams
but I still hide a corner for my toys
which I skillfully hide, they do not see the ridicule I receive from the world!



THE CAT'S CRADLE

Mark Andrew Heathcote
United Kingdom

Hold it as a child could
only the melting snow,
love is a living hope,
hope, a living hell.

Love, is a dew lit web
strung across our hearts
in love alone do we worship?
In death are we - then loved?

TOGETHERNESS

Vidya Shankar
India
[Instagram.com/vidya.shankar.author](https://www.instagram.com/vidya.shankar.author)

Lonely but not invisible
They trudged rugged roads
That seemed to lead nowhere
They had a bridge to cross
There could be light on the other side
But for now
They walked in the dark

Street lamps, every few paces
Mile after mile of flickering dimness
Failing to seep through the thickness of night
But it suited them
The darkness, comforting
Kept them inconspicuous
Away from prying mouths

One day they would
To the bridge
And when across
There would be Light
They would be Light
But for now
They walked on, walked on
Grateful for the failed street lamps
Embracing the solitude
Darkness gave them

NEAR WOODSTOCK (VT)

John Muro
United States

<https://www.instagram.com/johntmuro/>

Grateful for this day,
A slow-shuffling wind
And a sky of buttermilk
Fringed with blue. Hillsides
Ablaze in torchlight, blood-
Orange bronzed, and snow-
Dusted bales glistening in
A vacant field like wares
Displayed on the sleeves
Of a cutpurse. Frost fuels
The seepage into narrow
Arteries of brooks so it
Appears fragments of sun-
Light, like ingots, are stored
There in lavish sheen, flecks
Of gold disgorged down-
Stream over moss-softened
Stone. Birds seem transfixed
To boughs, like burls, while
Leaves explode in updrafts
Of air, muddling their ancient
Flyways as they inch, year by
Year, further up into these gold-
Hammered hills to divide the
Spoils of a season's passing.

NEVER FORGETTING

Christine M. Du Bois
United States

We remember the cute little girl
you were—
those big, trusting brown eyes—
a slow loris, cute and cuddly,
whose sweet, dreamy smile
sneaked up on people
and stole their thoughts away
into jungle treetops
stretching up
to clouds of innocence.

But that was long ago.
Since the time you were kidnapped,
it has been so, so many years.

We remember the quick, inquisitive little girl
you were—
sounding out words on the printed page,
tracing out curlicue cursive letters,
trying out science experiments
at Girl Scouts, in your crisp brown uniform,
and marching to celebrate, and to learn,
always quick to learn!— about liberty
at the Independence Day parade.
You asked so many questions—
were always asking good questions.

Now we ask the questions.
Since the time you were kidnapped
we have shed so, so many tears.

We remember the friendly little girl
you were—
greeting and hugging and chatting,
taking an interest in everyone
and in every living thing.
You liked parties and festivals
and you did just fine, both with other kids
and with the many loving adults in your world.

That love has been tested
since the time you were kidnapped:
we're stalked by so many fears.

We remember you, little girl,
though she kidnapped you long ago.
She stole you, and now the person
in your body steals more than our thoughts.
She steals our money, and our jewelry
and our peace.
She kidnapped you, and now your liberty
is reduced to a prison cell—
though a slow loris should only live free.
She kidnapped you, and your strawberry-guava
smile
denatured into a cursing, bare-toothed snarl
appearing anytime anything
stands between you
and your drugs.

You are not forgotten, little girl,
and we will wait and support
and insist and stay strict,
holding taut a fierce love-line
of expectation, until
you break the kidnapper's bond,
and the woman you were born to become,
that wise and winsome woman, appears.

And until she never forgets
never to let her future
be kidnapped again.



Sumatran slow loris. Photo by
David Haring / Duke Lemur Center,
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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nycticebus_coucang_002.jpg
g

WHEN CERTAINTY WAVERS

Gurupreet K Khalsa

United States

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/gurupreet-k-khalsa-09257b11/>

Soprano lights atop her rich-hued note,
an arc ascends aloft in crimson swell,
in summer morning sun uplifts to float
like hummingbird that sips from sweet red well.

My inner eye sees years and ages gone,
then tears of gratitude spring rich and fast;
awash in silky golden nectar tone,
I drift into the music thrumming past.

The dome of sound prolongs beyond my sphere,
my spirit answers colors into sail;
ten thousand chanting choristers I hear -
they glide inside such songs as must prevail.

Hold true to song, to hour, doorway, shore,
reflective voice may yet belief restore.

PHYSIO

Rebecca Kenny

United Kingdom

<https://www.instagram.com/rebeccakennywrites/>

I gave it my whole heart
Felt every sinew strain itself, every joint creak
And every broken bone scream in protest -
My spine, like crumpled paper, forced to right itself
And each heel, lifted millimeters from the lino floor
Tempting me to give in. Lie down. Sleep.
But no - I won't. I refuse. I actively refute
The noises made by my tired form;
Instead, I throw my weight into elbows, wrists,
Fingers - carry myself along parallel bars
A dance of sorts, with my own damaged soul;
This is a cruel but necessary tango.
Nil points. A shit show. Sink into a black
Plastic chair, sweat-soaked skin and
Itching scalp arguing that it's easier to pack it in.
The voices grow loud. My heart grows quieter,
But still, it whispers, at the back of my throat
Calling to me
To keep going. Just
One
More
Step

SHE FOUND HOPE ON PAGE 293

Thomas A. Thrun
United States

Half century ago, you would not have had to tell me on what page the hymn *My Hope is Built* was to be found in our Lutheran hymnal. But now, being the “Doubting Thomas” as I am, I check anyway.

1. *My hope is built on nothing less*

I checked the 1957 green-covered hymnal my sister left me. The one she borrowed and used with our old upright, farmhouse piano -- which turned out to be the only good thing to come of Hope Church’s burning in 1973. The bell calling its last in its falling.

than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. No merit

You may recognize that the tune itself also as that used for *The Navy Hymn*, which also often goes by its first line *Eternal Father Strong to Save*. This hymn touches hearts of all those who’ve served or brings tears to the eyes of those remembering sons and daughters lost in hopes of ending more wars.

of my own I claim, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

I idolized my older sister, also my fifth grade Sunday School teacher. She memorized not only the page number 293, but also all of the words to all the verses! Also, many more like *Beautiful Savior* (518) and *Faith of our Fathers* (500).

On Christ the solid rock I stand,

She was *Ruthie* to me. I tried hard to be like her. She was *Miss Thrun* to her high school students. She made *History* relevant, changing young lives, showing them how to look at things, how to analyze and prioritize. Her own eyes were quick

all other ground is sinking sand...

not only put the Fear of God into young minds, but also to show kindness and love. To empathize. She hand-wrote and mailed random notes to friends. She gave hugs and hope to all those having none. And, I swear, she modestly hid her angel wings.

3. *His oath, His covenant and His blood,*

I see this again between all the lines of all the cards given and notes left behind after her November 2000 passing and then again more recently in October 2016 after the special recognition ceremony at a Colorado high school homecoming.

sustain me in the raging flood, when every earthly

At the University High School in Greeley, I accepted humbly and posthumously for her an *Honored Faculty Award*. The sky was hopeful blue. My eyes welled from emotions long denied... Gone before I could say good bye, that I loved her. Cancer.

prop gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.

My sister’s death was 20 years ago, as of now in this COVID year of our 2020 pandemic. I stopped on a November day -- one of those few nice ones -- to catch a nap in the sun against a tree when I’d gone back home again to hunt whitetails.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,

I stood quietly there near *Ruthie’s* grave. I felt in a soft wind the Almighty’s breath from around all the old stones and, then, a faint whisper-version of my sister’s teaching voice... “Please turn in your hymnals to page 293 for *My Hope is Built*.”

all other ground is sinking sand...

Footnote: I also have an even older copy of the 1930, black-covered American Lutheran Hymnal given to my mother, Norman Gausmann Thrun (1920-2010), the hand-written inscription reading: “Awarded for attendance in Hope Lutheran Sunday School.” *My Hope is Built* is on page 190. The hymn was composed in 1836 by Edward Mote (1797-1874), a London cabinet maker later turned minister. I will give be giving my family hymnal to my son and daughter, eventually one each to my two grandsons. I have included two of the hymn’s four verses above. Growing up, between church and Sunday School, I probably sang this hymn at least once or twice a month; So, *times* that by at least 12 or more of my childhood and teenage years! Maybe 3,456 times between the ages 6-18! Enough to commit it to memory. If ever I have Alzheimer’s, I still should be singing it. *Ruthie* and *Ma* probably sang it more years than me! It was one of our church’s regular, go-to hymns, Lutherans being big on hymns, three per service.

MY DRESS BUT DIFFERENT

Emily Thomas / Not Much Rhymes With Cancer
United Kingdom

<https://www.instagram.com/notmuchrhymeswithcancer/>

Dress alterations are now in full swing,
snip, stich and zhoosh to get rid of the cling
Many a good times we had together,
now it bunches and pulls more than ever
Some parts to be kept, they're too good to lose How
much to change? Should it still match the shoes?
What kind of dress would now suit my new life? Mirror
reflection, the joy and the strife
Maybe splashed florals that dance in the
light, floaty and free, lift me day into night
Wishing well buttons set it off a treat –
clasping me, holding me off my feet
All frills removed as well as the old lace
fierce structure and folds to sit in their place
A new zip snaps shut the previous frock
Coveting the new one, ready to rock
Talented tailors know how to succeed
Decisions are mine, I know what I need
The new dress needs work, it's not yet quite done
Tweaking, adjusting, then time for some fun

HOPE

Dimithri Wijerathna
Sri Lanka

Under the dark , gloomy clouds
He in rags hope to be free from rags
A woman searching for pinch of salt
Hope for plate of rice
A child hidden among books
Trying to step for social ladder
Hope for a better future in his life
Farmer who sows paddy seeds
Hope for more harvest
To smile and cherish and free from debts
As a world with evil pandemic
We hope for a wonderful spring
With multi - coloured rainbow
We hope to scroll down the streets
We hope to smile and laugh
Free from mask ; We hope for a beautiful
world in 2022

WAITING FOR RAIN

Betty Naegele
United States

a dry gulch snakes a narrow path
through ancient sandstone walls
thirsty for water
that once filled its belly

age-weary, it lies deserted
but for a few hangers-on
scrub species that have made
its crusty bed their home

a desert lily blooms alone
after an early morning drizzle
while rabbitbrush litters
the gulley
its golden bloom
a peacock's boast
why is it so prolific? I wonder
. . . . the unfairness of nature

how long will I have to wait
in my barren land
for new life to pulse within –
to feel the joy of fetal limbs
pressing against my womb

I fear the drought will linger
dry up my store of hope
one babe is all I ask
like the lily
I wait for rain . . .

SMOTHERED DREAMS

Adrian David

I have a dream that I can make
the world a better place soon.
I can't breathe as they mock,
"Go back to Africa, you coon."

I have a dream to hold my head high
and demand my rightful respect.
I can't breathe as no matter what's the problem,
I'm always the first one they suspect.

I have a dream to set my life goals
bigger and bigger.
I can't breathe since I'm ridiculed,
constantly being called a nigger.

I have a dream to land a good job,
based not on my race, but on my skills.
I can't breathe, being left unemployed,
struggling to pay my everyday bills.

I have a dream to create a future
for my daughters and sons.
I can't breathe as they're suppressed,
forced to arm themselves with guns.

I have a dream to be treated the same
as my counterparts who are white.
I can't breathe while most can't
even stand my mere sight.

I have a dream that my oppressors
will be brought to justice someday.
I can't breathe as, nevertheless,
they easily manage to get away.

I have a dream to rise
against all odds and resist.
I can't breathe as it's a challenge
for me to simply exist.

I have a dream to fight this battle,
it's one I badly want to win.
I can't breathe when I'm judged
by the color of my skin.

I have a dream to break
my shackles and be free.
I can't breathe with all the racism,
it's terribly suffocating me.

I'm dreaming many dreams,
for which I sincerely pray.
But I can't breathe since they
are yet to see the light of day.

BEAUTIFUL DREAMERS

Ken Gosse

United States

<https://www.facebook.com/ken.gosse/>

The dreams, it seems, of girls with hope
in pastel images elope
where love and tenderness abound
with peace and beauty all around.

Imaginations run their course
and ride upon a magic horse
with just one horn, but room for two,
to carry them to life anew;
to ever-afters in a Spring
where lovely-feathered birds will sing.

Then on a finger, find a ring
whose brilliance doesn't match love's bling
yet sparkles through the day and night
so bright that demons take their flight.

And although dreams might not come true
(a fate that all but few will rue),
may disappointment not take course,
replacing hope with dark remorse;
for although love will oft' confound,
in hopeful hearts, it will rebound.

Though many never will elope,
may all their dreams be filled with hope.

ALL THE WORDS I NEVER HEARD

Linda M. Crate

United States

<https://www.facebook.com/Linda-M-Crate-129813357119547>

i memorized schedules
and footsteps,

found hope in words and worlds
that were not my own;
devoured books
like i was starving for words

maybe i was—

all the words i never heard
i could find in books,

and it gave me hope that maybe
one day i could find someone
who loved me in the ways
i needed to be loved.

OLD AGE

Nolo Segundo
United States

It comes not when it's wanted,
Because it's never wanted—
Who would choose hanging
Folds of skin, a face creased
With scores of age lines, feet
Speckled with spider veins, an
Aging heart that could yell
'Surprise!' at any time it chose?

An actress once said, 'Getting old
Is not for sissies' and she was right.
It takes guts to live with the gradual
Loosening of a once proud body,
And the slow softening of your brain.
There is no glory in getting old—you
Are just a survivor of life's myriad
Tricks and games, all its accidents,
Illnesses, petty defeats and failures.

And old age does not carry wisdom
With it as you might expect—there
Are many tart in youth who are bitter
In their slowing down decades, even
Hostile to the joys they might once
Have hoped to swim in, carefree...

So why must we get old? What use
Is it, other than nature making room
For other beings to replace us—still,
Why can't we live for centuries like
Old trees, or those big turtles found
On that island with the funny name?

Perhaps it's a way to teach us, to
Cure the young of their solipsism,
To shear them of the innate vanity
That comes of taut bodies and soft
Handsome faces—then to teach
Them the fears that come with
Aging: the vulnerability of unlived
Dreams, trashed hopes, and the
Persistent aches of lost loves...
Not to mention fear of falling!

So if you are a young reader
Of this old poet, you'll ask,
'What? Nothing comes good
Of a long life? No hope at all?'

Oh yes, something very good
Can come from a long decline,
At least for those who choose
To believe—anticipation!

SIP OF HOPE

Mark Hudson
United States

<http://www.illinoispoets.org/bio.htm#MarkHudson>

(Source: Sun-Times: Friday May 4, 2018 page 10)

I'm not much of a follower of politics,
I tend to be pessimistic about all politicians.

But in today's paper, a new café opened in
Logan square, Chicago, called Sip of Hope.
The premise is a certain amount of the
coffee sold goes to a non-profit
for suicide prevention.

I am basically anti-suicide. I believe
life is sacred, nobody should take their own
life.

But at times, my life got so bad, it seemed
like an option.

So in the photo with the article,
Senator Dick Durbin, and Cook County
Commissioner Luis Arroyo Jr. are seen
at the coffee shop in suit and tie, having
a cup of coffee, among "hipsters" people
with tattooed elbows, purple hair, and
in a way, it is a kind of a funny photo.

The politicians look kind out
of place with their suits on.

But I don't know where their
hearts are, or if it's just a photo op.
But the article and the photo gave me hope,
because I too, love coffee shops!

QUEUING FOR PARADISE

Mike Ball

United States

<https://twitter.com/whirred>

<https://www.facebook.com/harrumph>

Down the cereal aisle, oldsters
Canoodle with their shopping carts,
Slow dancing, hunched over handle.

We also see humped torsos each pre-dawn
When, in the shadows at the dining table,
This or that dwindling great-grand reads
And even prays in penance and hope.
Fantasy becomes fear becomes faith.

When only pigeons coo and wee songbirds chatter,
When family and visitors do not violate the personal chapel,
When doubt softens with the balm of guided scripture
From leather covered KJV Bible and *The Upper Room*.

Gnawing, nibbling, nipping worries are natural. We live.
We sin, speak ill of others, blaspheme and come to know daily that
We fall short of the glory of the basest of angels.

Even the vaguely self-aware must doubt
Their acts, words, thoughts, as constant bystanders,
Audience to their personal theater.
Polybius wrote, "There is no witness so dreadful as the human conscience."

Sheltered from friends, family and clergy, oldsters hunch and pray.
Head and shoulders arched over shadowed devotionals,
With hope for grace through osmosis and muttered incantations.
Hoping for heaven while not saying, "These are my last laps."

Those who are in no hurry to finish their races queue for paradise.
There is no immediate entry to the unseen, unknowable house.
There is no proof of a pass to a heaven, and yet humans aspire
To salvation by deeds or contrition or grace and timing.

Are daily quickie self-services or lengthy study
Or profession of belief enough travel insurance?

Is the best hope for those hunched over their holies to arrive incognito?
If you are not as bad as the worst among us can you sneak in,
Snaking in a queue of OK souls to pass unnoticed?

A FRESH DAWN

Lakshman Bulusu

United States

<https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/12722>

7.Bulusu_Lakshman

Assorted joys
of seeing my kids play swing;
Sweet reminiscences
of first meeting my wife;
Slices of good fortune
of getting recognized at work;
A new determination
to climb Mt. Washington with my family;
Interlaced cloaks of delight
earning a certificate of appreciation as
educator;
I hope all of these
serve as a beacon light.

Extending helping hands
volunteering at a football match;
Strings of birthday wishes
and a surprise party;
Vessels brimmed with cheer
to my daughter performing in marching band;
Excellent and rare opportunities
for a change in career,
rolling by now and then
with promising perks;
I hope all of these
open news doors of reality.

Beads of un-ceased endeavor
to qualify for a marathon,
encouraged by a firm resolution
to make it to the finish line the first time;
tend to accelerate 'to-attain' success—
A scorcher of a victory;
Shirk of responsibility not in the least,
be it while giving or doing;
my motto 'try again, try again',
topped by unshakeable faith in God;
I hope all of these
bring me into a fresh dawn.

THE TREE OF HOPE

Pankhuri Sinha

India

<https://www.facebook.com/pankhuri.sinha.56/>

It was about the same time
That the tree, the sheesham
Tree, so mercilessly
Uprooted by the storm
Lying flat on its back
Dissecting the pavement
With a thread attached
In the soil, breathing
Perhaps, like on a ventilator
Began to sprout
Germinate, shoot up
In a green little twig
With silky stem, delicate
As love, opening into leaves
Dancing in the wind !

That the thin brown branch
In the pot, of that miracle plant,
Being sold as juice
Being sold as pulp, being
Sold as leaves, being sold
In saches, being sold in bottles
But best drunk from the garden
For it increased Platelets
Smiled in a green pimple
Growing in a bulb
And my heart bloomed
Like a precious flower
Like dance in rain
Began to sing
Like a jazz bar!

This tiny thing
This tough little plant
That I'd been watering
Since months and months
Through out the summer
In blazing heat
Had kept mum
Not saying a word
Not giving a sign
No shakes, no nods
But not drying
Was alive
Kept the hope
And finally spoke!

Autumn so blissful
I had rarely known!

Vindicated, in and out
The greens I had guarded
Had gifted a lot!



Claudette Martinez
Canada

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/claudeettemartinezartist/>

I wish I were solid, granite or stone.

Alone.

Cold, smooth nothing but bone.

Alone.

No beating of heart no skin no flesh,
nothing to see.

Alone.

Locked in rock,
that holds no key, suspended but free.

Alone,

just me.

EVEN MY PERSONAL GHOST

Judy DeCroce

United States

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/judydecroce/>

crouches eyeless, harmless, perhaps

pretending ordinary,
with no will of her own.

So much remains to be done.
So much.

If lost, remember the rituals
pass into possibilities through
my silhouette.

Beyond this...
catch up!

Catch up when light falls
and my senses cross into night...
please, promise you'll follow.

PULLED THROUGH THE STORM

Lew Gentilella

Untied Kingdom

I step into the garden,
The skies harden,
Showers pour,
The clouds roar,
Lightning strikes,
The howling wind bites,
Raindrops drown the grass,
Time is running out on the hourglass.
Cold, I shiver,
My body quivers.

Struggling to stay warm,
My life reminds me of this storm,
Full of rain,
Nowhere for the water to drain,
Stuck in the boggy mud,
Now the garden begins to flood,
The birds have taken shelter
But in this storm, I welter
Until the clouds disappear
And so does my fear.

The sun arrives with his hat on,
Smiling now that the storm has gone,
The birds come out of hiding,
High in the sky gliding,
The garden has a new lease of life,
Bumblebees and butterflies are rife,
I feel happy and alive
Now that the garden thrives.

I see a rainbow with a kaleidoscope of colours,
One of nature's true wonders,
I have a content feeling
Now me and the garden are both healing,
We pulled through the storm together
And made it to the better weather.

FAITHFUL MIGHT

Pratibha Savani
United Kingdom

<https://www.instagram.com/pratibhapoetryart/>
<https://www.facebook.com/pratibhapoetryart>

Healing begins with the courage to fight,
with a pure determination to prosper
and thrive

Only the ones that clearly believe,
can truly make their dreams come to life

Painting a picture, enriched in colour,
materialises, the enigmatic vision inside

Empowered by the faithful might,
bringing unimaginable strength to
our intricate mind

A TOME FOR TWO

Sangita Kalarickal
United States

We slayed our demons,
And climbed boiling volcanoes.
We sailed into space,
And plucked off the moon.
Stories of reluctant heroes
and journeys through fires,
Of mentors and adventures
and taming wild dragons...
Of loud sobs through
heaving chests
and hyperventilating conflicts
We took the heavy quill
dipped in life
and wrote a book.

...

...

Raging snowstorms,
dark winters, and dark clouds.
and then a crocus.

KALEIDOSCOPE

Carolyn Chilton Casas

United States

https://www.instagram.com/mindfulpoet_/

We all want this chaotic time
to ease up. So much division
and separation. The life
we have come to expect
quaking under our feet,
with many voicing
what we believe
to be absolute truths.

My honest hope—
this stretch of strife
might result in a softer
aftermath, where we live
in greater harmony
as tenants of our one world.

Through it all, my heart keens
for peace. And unity.
Integrity, a vital touchstone.
Day by day, I aspire to follow
my own inner whisper
reminding me that
no one set of beliefs fits all.

I think about this a lot—
how we are a kaleidoscope
of diverse histories,
races, religions, languages.
We come from distinct places,
but can we not be tolerant and kind?
That which makes us different
is what makes us wholly special.

Scientists say, if you go back far enough,
we all derive from the same tribe;
each of us retains a remnant
of the same DNA
from some six million years ago.

NEW HOPE

Julie A. Dickson

United States

Nods to Dickinson, Frost, Yeats, Poe

When hope is undone, the world just seems wrong,
can't allow hate a voice within this throng.
Turn your back as a sword covers the pen,
won't take my will to write, not even then.

Advice from the wise, throw hope a life-line.
Feathered hope, Emily wrote in her time;
a way through is hope, according to Frost,
or Yeats' *daughter of hope* when all seems lost.

Remain alive, your hope must rise supreme,
Poe described as "A Dream within a Dream".
One path followed, even one less traveled,
hopelessness must fade, its cause unraveled.

Remember your voice, when choices are found,
Mem'ries of joy now, let new hope resound.

HOPE SPRINGS ANEW!

Kathy Jo Bryant
United States

Hope lies deep in our psyche
And there's always a tiny seed
That someday we'll rise up on top
And realize success for our need

Sometimes life's trials outweigh us
It seems we cannot survive
And hope is something that settles
In the dust for much of our lives

Take courage, and keep hope's flame
Burning brightly for all to see
Your courage might be very strong
Others haven't an evergreen tree

Beware when hope just disappears
And sinks beneath the waves
Rise up, and raise your hand so high
So, someone can see and saves!

ON THE BEACH

*Asilomar: Refuge by the Sea**
Neal Whitman
United States

Under the Boardwalk
On Broadway
Two oldies-but-goodies
by The Drifters
A tune today conflated:
On the Boardwalk

Walk on By
Wooden slats protect
Sand dunes posted "Sensitive"
Strewn on the slats
Red rose petals
Though no bushes grow here

Perhaps dropped
From a bouquet
A bride had carried
From a joyous wedding
On the Beach
At least, that's our Hope

* Overlooking Asilomar Beach in Pacific Grove, California, is the Asilomar Dune Preserve with a 1/4 mile boardwalk that meanders through a 25 acre protected sand dune ecosystem.



SECOND CHANCE

BY KATIE KENT – UNITED KINGDOM

“Congratulations, you’re pregnant!” The doctor smiles encouragingly at the man and woman sat down in front of him.

“We’re having a baby?!” Peter’s face lights up as he reaches for his wife’s hand. But she pulls it away, her face pale.

“We’re not going to keep it.” Ann’s words are so final, so blunt. “Can you please give us some information about terminations?”

The doctor glances over at Peter, who is chewing his thumbnail, his expression downcast, and then back to Ann. “You’ve only just had the news. Why don’t you take some time to get used to the idea before you make any rash decisions?” It’s obvious that the husband really wants this baby. And from what he has experienced of Peter, he thinks he would make a good dad. He can see Ann as a mother, too. He hopes that she will reconsider.

“We’ve been so irresponsible.” She puts her head in her hands, her elbows resting on the desk. “We should have taken more care. This is the last thing we need.”

Peter puts his arm around Ann and plants a kiss on her head, sniffing quietly.

* * *

Meet Katie Kent.

A writer living in the UK with her wife, cat and dog. Her fiction has been published in *Youth Imagination*, *Limeoncello* and *Flash Fiction Magazine*, amongst others, and in anthologies including *The Trouble with Time Travel*, *Summer of Speculation: Catastrophe, Growth and My Heart to Yours*. Katie’s non-fiction, mostly mental health-related, is published in *The Mighty*, *You & Me Magazine*, *Ailment*, *OC87 Recovery Diaries* and *Feels Zine*. Find out more at Katie’s website at <https://www.katiekentwriter.com>

SECOND CHANCE – KATIE KENT

Later that evening, Peter finds Ann kneeling on the floor of their bedroom, her trousers dusty, with a box open next to her. She's holding a pair of tiny blue boots, one in each hand. Tears stream down her face.

Peter goes over and sits down cross-legged on the floor next to her. Stroking her hair gently, he says, "Ann, don't do this to yourself."

"Do you remember the day we bought these boots for him? He was four weeks old when we saw these in the shop. They were a bit pricey and he was too small for them, but we just couldn't resist. We put them aside for him to get a little bit bigger, to grow into them. But he never got to wear them."

"I remember." Peter's voice shakes and he swallows a lump in his throat as he takes out a white babygrow with pictures of farm animals on it, recalling the last time it was worn. They had been celebrating his first three months. Peter pictures him in his cot, gurgling happily as his dad read him a bedtime story. Neither of them knew that when they settled him down that night, it would be for the last time. He had had his whole life ahead of him, or so they thought. Peter would give anything to go back to that day, before everything changed.

"I don't think I can do this again. I can't go through it another time." Ann's hands tremble as she takes his favourite toy, a small soft toy elephant, from the box and clutches it to her chest. Peter can see her pain; he can feel that pain, too. But there is also hope in his heart.

"We've been given a second chance to be parents. Not everyone gets that chance. Having a baby was everything we ever wanted. It ended sadly last time, and I know how much it hurt you, losing him. But it doesn't mean that it will happen again." Peter puts the babygrow down and kisses the top of Ann's head.

"But what if it dies?" Ann bites her lip.

"What if it lives?"

WAITING FOR THE RIVER

Sarfraz Ahmed
United Kingdom

<https://twitter.com/Sarfraz76194745>
<https://www.instagram.com/sarfrazahmedpoet/>

I'm waiting for the river,
I'm waiting for the blue,
I want to dive into the holy water,
Let it cleanse me,
Come to my rescue,

Unburden the sorrow,
The torrents and the tides,
I want to see the water,
Now you are not by my side,

I need something to rely upon,
Something that will always be there,
So I go to the river,
Lose myself in the flow,
In memories of long ago,

Love flustered thoughts,
Hearts clustered and passions burnt,
Always yearning for more,
Almost touching the ocean,
Almost kissing the shore,

I'm waiting for the river,
I'm waiting for the blue,
I want to dive into the holy water,
Baptise myself,
Becoming something new.

CANDLELIGHT VIGIL

Antoni Ooto
United States

<http://www.ooto.org/blog/>
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/antoniooto/>

We gather.
We speak within this flickering time,
while you from afar, wait by a place
filled with empty rooms.

Many things have changed.
Our moments together retired,
postponed for now.

We will go on for a while
not even noticing momentum,
stepping charily chasing tomorrow.

WISHFUL

Martina Robles Gallegos
United States

<https://www.martinagallegos.com/>

With deep desire and a hopeful mind, I breathe in the early fall air that presses against my sorrowful heart and dream of sunnier days and brighter nights than I've been getting.

Morning walks with their misty marred beginnings cause me to mourn people I've lost or feel like I'm losing, and that dark and dim sensation shakes my whole being to the core.

This wishful feeling of not wanting to forget but still forgetting against my will widens my will to keep fighting to stay away from destructive thoughts and tough decisions I must make.

The depths of my despair don't dwindle even though I listen to words from friendly people whose words I appreciate because they speak their words with sacred sincerity.

I look forward to seeing someone who says soothing words and put my mind at ease, but those folks are not easy to find because sometimes friends turn out to be the worst foes.

When a sunny day awakens me every morning, it's like a magical moment that I can marvel although momentarily, and that's the thought I keep in my mind throughout the day.

PEACOCK FEATHERS

Jane Fitzgerald
United States

<https://www.amazon.com/Jane-H.-Fitzgerald/e/Bo1MSW2FLO>

<https://www.facebook.com/JanesPoetry>

You liked to give me peacock feathers
Whose iridescent greens and blues
Pleased my vision so
The plumes in fullness blazed
Like the fervor of your love
But when those feathers shut and fell
It took my breath away
And my heart was narrowed and
colorless
Until another day
When once again the peacock feathers
Would shine in fullness fair
But never would their beauty
Be constantly there
And my soul
In anguish did wait and yearn
To feel the shining light
To see the glowing feathers
And embrace that precious sight

MY BIRD HOUSE – A HOPE FOR BIRDS

Sonial Pal

United Kingdom

Seeds and Bread
Rice and Chapatis
That's all I keep
with great hopes to peep
through my windows
when ants, magpies, pigeons,
robins, squirrels and crows
come down and eat

When frisky squirrels jump up & down
ants walk perfectly in line
birds bask in the bright sun light
Sit on the brown wooden fence
Perched with wide open claws
Peck with their beaks
Stroll with their little legs

To watch such scenes
,is a real feast
For the eyes of one and all
To soothe one's soul

Cherry blossom and Maple trees
With an addition of plants underneath
make them feel safe and at ease
To breathe in the cool breeze!

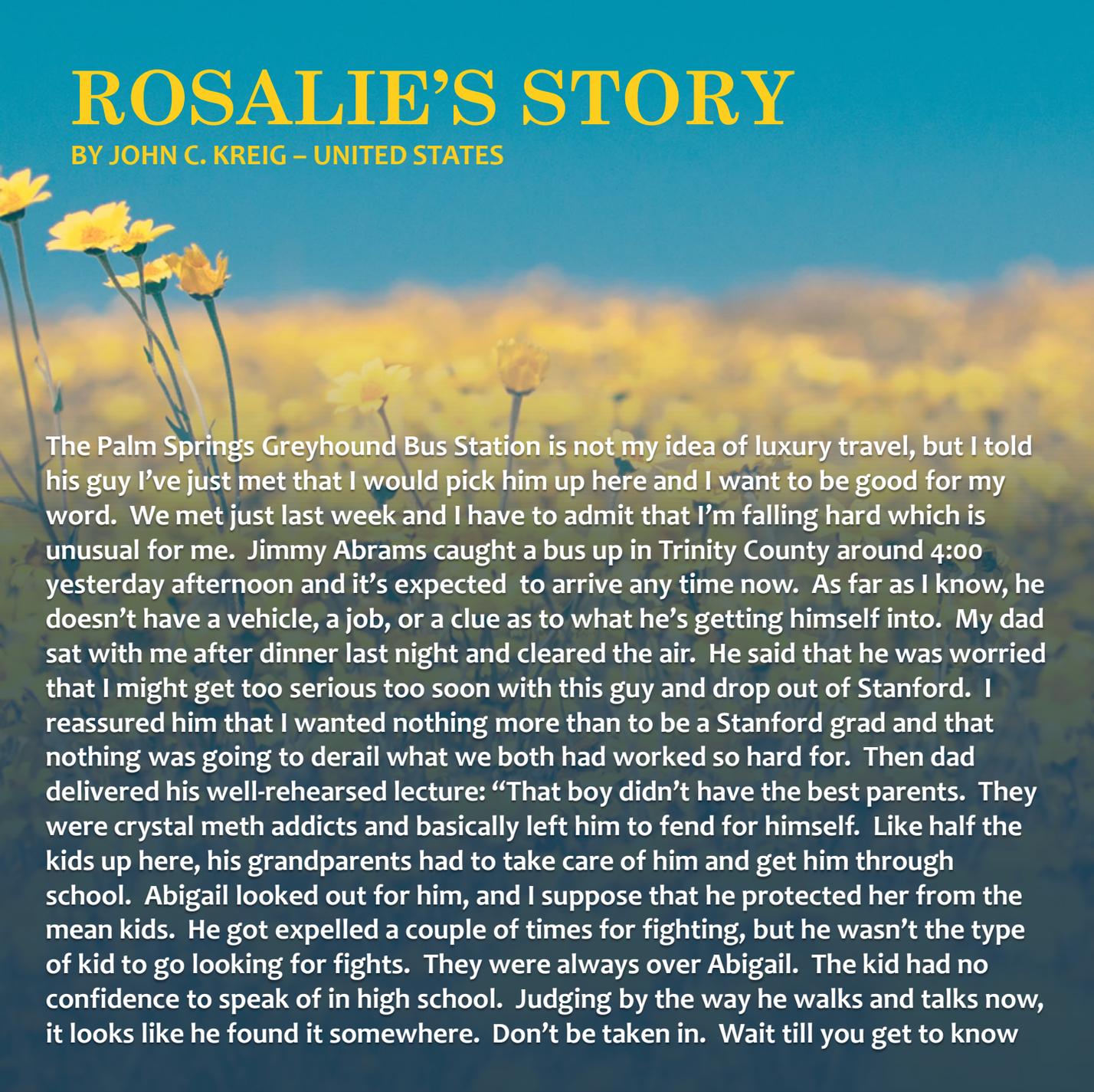
My garden looks complete
with just a daily handful of seeds
it sustains their high hopes of life
and helps them to breed
How alluring and blissful it is to hear
When in the dawn hours,
These birds sing to my ear
Without any fear!
And
What inner peace and satisfaction they leave
When in extreme seasons they come down and eat!

How eagerly I wait for them to my sight !
As they are a constant, silent reminder
That everything on this Earth is perfect and right.



ROSALIE'S STORY

BY JOHN C. KREIG – UNITED STATES



The Palm Springs Greyhound Bus Station is not my idea of luxury travel, but I told his guy I've just met that I would pick him up here and I want to be good for my word. We met just last week and I have to admit that I'm falling hard which is unusual for me. Jimmy Abrams caught a bus up in Trinity County around 4:00 yesterday afternoon and it's expected to arrive any time now. As far as I know, he doesn't have a vehicle, a job, or a clue as to what he's getting himself into. My dad sat with me after dinner last night and cleared the air. He said that he was worried that I might get too serious too soon with this guy and drop out of Stanford. I reassured him that I wanted nothing more than to be a Stanford grad and that nothing was going to derail what we both had worked so hard for. Then dad delivered his well-rehearsed lecture: "That boy didn't have the best parents. They were crystal meth addicts and basically left him to fend for himself. Like half the kids up here, his grandparents had to take care of him and get him through school. Abigail looked out for him, and I suppose that he protected her from the mean kids. He got expelled a couple of times for fighting, but he wasn't the type of kid to go looking for fights. They were always over Abigail. The kid had no confidence to speak of in high school. Judging by the way he walks and talks now, it looks like he found it somewhere. Don't be taken in. Wait till you get to know

John C. Krieg is a retired landscape architect and land planner who formerly practiced in Arizona, California, and Nevada. John has had pieces published in *A Gathering of the Tribes*, *Alternating Current*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Cholla Needles*, *Clark Street Review*, *Conceit*, *Hedge Apple*, *Homestead Review*, *Indolent Books*, *Inlandia*, *Line Rider Press*, *LOL Comedy*, *Lucky Jefferson*, *Magazine of History and Fiction*, *Oddball Magazine*, *Palm Springs Life*, *Pandemonium*, *Pegasus*, *Pen and Pendulum*, *Saint Ann's Review*, *Squawk Back*, *The Book Smuggler's Den*, *The Courtship of Winds*, *The Mindful Word*, *The Scriblerus*, *The Writing Disorder*, *These Words*, *True Chili*, *Twist & Twain*, and *Wilderness House Literary Review*. In conjunction with filmmaker/photographer Charles Sappington, Mr. Krieg has completed a two-part documentary film entitled *Landscape Architecture: The Next Generation* (2010). In some underground circles John is considered a master grower of marijuana and holds as a lifelong goal the desire to see marijuana federally legalized. Nothing else will do.

ROSALIE'S STORY – JOHN C. KRIEG

him. That Trinity bunch he's mixed up with is rough trade. Make sure he isn't down here because of them chasing him out up there or wanting him to horn in on us." "Dad, you yourself said you're quitting after this season. That cop El Choppo has ruined it for all the small growers. The only ones left are the ones with rich backers that pay for their lawyers, and we both suspect, pay off some of the cops." "I suppose, honey, but you just be careful."

As I hugged my dad I couldn't help looking down at his shoes. If you ever wanted to know how things were going financially for my father all you had to do was look at his shoes. They were stained and scuffed and torn with broken and tied back together laces. The soles were so worn that they probably hurt his feet. We all had the newest and best footwear available, but he wouldn't even dream of getting new work shoes until after the harvest. He had sacrificed for all of us mightily, especially me. He never complained, he just worked hard, and when times got tough, he just worked even harder. I love him with all my heart, and want to help him as much as possible. Through thick and thin he was always there for me. Even when I was a rebellious teenager, he always stood by me.

The bus groans to a stop, and through the haze of diesel exhaust a rabble of tired passengers slouch down the steps and gather by the luggage door for their bags and suitcases. Jimmy is the last person off, and my heart skips a beat when I spot him. Now I know why I'm here. He has a small suitcase in each hand and puts them on the ground so that he can embrace me in a bear hug and lift me momentarily off the ground. "How was your trip, Jimmy?" "Too long. Can we get out of here, please?" "Don't you have to get the rest of your things?" "It's all right here," he replies as he bends down and retrieves the small suitcases. "Traveling light, I see," I tell him. "It's everything I need for right now," he replies, and I can see he's searching for my car and can't wait to get out of here.

"Do you have time to stop at a grocery store, Rosalie?" "Sure Jimmy, of course." I took him by a Walmart, and he bought so many groceries and cleaning supplies that I was afraid that they wouldn't fit in my little Honda. With broom and mop handles sticking out the sunroof, we looked like modern day Beverly Hillbillies driving up the hill.

Jimmy's place was back in the weeds at the end of a long s curving dirt driveway and it was fully hidden from view by anyone on the highway. It looked like it had seen better days, but all it really needed was a young man's energy. Before becoming a total wastrel before age 30 his father worked for a homebuilder down the hill and was a pretty fair carpenter. Unlike most of the homes up here, it wasn't a manufactured home, but was rather stick built on a concrete foundation. He told me it had three bedrooms, two baths, and was 1,500 square feet in size. When we walked in the bright colors stunned me, but it was reasonably clean. He turns on the evaporative cooler, and as it started to whirr we went back out to bring in the rest of the groceries and cleaning supplies. As I watched him loading the cold stuff in the freezer, hormones started getting the better of me.

ROSALIE'S STORY – JOHN C. KRIEG

It had been a while since I had been with a man. Francis was a grad student and student teacher in the literature program at Stanford. He wrote beautiful lilting poetry, and was certainly attentive enough. His lovemaking was sweet, gentle, and unfulfilling. I had no plans to hook back up with him this coming semester and was searching for a way to let him down easy. What a lot of boys parading around like men never seem to figure out is that women really don't like to have sex when they don't enjoy it. All of that didn't seem to matter now. I had to make the first move the other night and have had just about enough of this perfect gentleman shit.

I walked back to his bedroom, got undressed, and got into bed calling to him, "Jimmy, can you help me in here?" His toned frame fills the doorway and I can see that he has taken note of my clothes on the floor. He smiles and then chuckles saying, "You sure you're up for this?" "Oh no Jimmy, you had better be up for this." "Anything we need to discuss?" "Not on my end lover boy, how about you?" "All clear and ready for takeoff." I throw back the sheets and he takes a long appreciative look while whistling low and seductive like. This is no sensitive grad student I'm messing with now. He undresses in front of me and I'm getting hotter by the second. He walks over and turns on the fan prolonging the sexual tension, and I can see that he is firmly invested in events about to unfold. Then he comes to me and sets about his business; not too fast and definitely not too slow. It's easy to tell that he has some experience in these matters, and I give in to it. I'm having sex, and I'm actually enjoying it for the first time. He makes sure to bring me to climax and then lets himself go. I'm hanging on to him like he's the only branch sticking out from the cliff that I have just fallen off of, which isn't too far from the truth. I don't want to let go. In the hushed silence that only our slackened breathing penetrates I fear that I'm falling too fast. I rest my head on his chest saying, "Everything's spinning on my end, how about yours?"

"Yeah, my bell's ringing. What got into you?" "I've been lonely and locked up for nearly a year. I guess that I should have asked if you've been vaccinated." "Slipped your mind, did it? Don't worry. I took care of that as soon as it was available." "Me too." "Well, I guess it's safe to come into contact with each other then. And, even if it isn't, there's no turning back now." "I'm going to have to go soon, Jimmy." "I understand. I suppose it goes without saying that I want to see you again." "Then why did you say it?" "Just want you to know that I don't take this lightly. I hope that you have no doubt that I'm all in for this, that's all."

By the way he wants to snuggle, I can tell he wants to fall asleep, and there's nothing more than I would like to do than fall asleep with him but I have responsibilities at home. I should probably wait, but I'm tired of these pent-up emotions that have plagued me for the last five years, and it's been like waiting to exhale, or at least let go, just like I did with him a few moments ago. Everything is lifting off of me and it feels like a rushing relief. My orgasm was like truth serum; once I released physically I wanted to let go of everything that's been holding me back. I want this floating feeling to last just a little longer. I was just as free as I have ever been with Jimmy and now I realize that I am going to let the truth set me completely free.

ROSALIE'S STORY – JOHN C. KRIEG

I better hurry before he's completely asleep. "Jimmy, I've got something to tell you. I need you to promise me that this stays between us." "A deep dark secret? So soon after coitus? What did I get myself into?" "Oh sure, lover boy, joke all you want." "Okay. Sorry Rosalie. Lay it on me. What kind of trouble could you possibly be in? This ought to be good." "Do I have your word?" "About what?" "About keeping your mouth shut." "Yes, you have my word." "Jimmy, Sara isn't my sister, she's my daughter." "What? Then why does everyone act like she's Leaf's kid?"

So, I go into the story about the worst and best experiences of my entire life. High school was a nightmare for me. I always had to take my brother and sister there and come right home immediately after classes. I wanted to be a cheerleader, but that was out of the question. When I started to fill out by my sophomore year the boys started calling the house, and dad literally ran them off. He pressured me so much about taking birth control that I felt he was invading my privacy and I deeply resented it. I know that his experience with mom is what drove him to be so laser focused on seeing that I didn't get pregnant. He knew what a responsibility parenthood is, and I didn't. The more he went on about safe sex, the more I wanted to have any sex. In defiance to his smothering, I didn't take the birth control pills. I flushed one every morning and let him think that I was being his obedient little girl. When I turned 17 and was able to drive myself, I was finally able to go to dances and other school functions. Things got a little better. Then at the start of my junior year, I was voted homecoming queen. That filled my head with feelings of self-importance and was a real boost to my self-confidence. Jeremy Whitlock, the senior starting quarterback, was voted homecoming king. He was good looking, and popular, and everything that I wanted to be but felt I wasn't. When we had our dance, he whispered in my ear that that he thought I was beautiful and that he wanted to leave with me. He would wait outside in his car, and I could slip away when pretending to go to the rest room. We could be together. Why wouldn't I want that? Every other girl in the school did.

There was another couple in the back seat of his car when I got out to the parking lot and they seemed to be completely drunk. I could see that Jeremy had a flask of something with him when I got in. His car was nice, probably because his parents were rich and lived on a sprawling horse property over in Gardner Valley. It seemed to me that Jeremy just about had it all. And I could be his girlfriend.

We went to a house that was full of druggies and he bought some coke. The other couple stayed there while we drove to a lookout over by the rez. I took a few lines of the coke just to look cool and my head started spinning. Jeremy was inhaling far more than I was and drinking from the flask. Eventually I had a few sips of his whiskey and then he says, "Okay, let's get naked," and he starts stripping down. I tell him, "Jeremy, I want you to take me back to the dance." "The dance is over, sweetheart." "Well, I need to get back to my car. Take me back, please." "Oh sure, you expect me to stop with my motor running, just because you say so? Give it up, and I'll take you back." "No Jeremy, I want to leave now." "Oh, I'll leave you alright. I'll leave you right here. You can get in the backseat, or you can walk home. How do you like that?" "I'll walk then. Why are you being such an asshole?" "Because I can be honey Who the fuck do

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you think you are?" The extent of his inebriation was beginning to sink in with me. I was miles from home, and I was somewhat inebriated, also. I walked towards the car as if I was going to get in the back seat and then quickly jumped in the front driver's seat and groped around for the keys. I'd leave him there and call some of his jock buddies to get his car and pick him up after I got home. All I wanted was to get home. "Looking for these," he said as he shook the keys in my face. Instinctively I reached out for them, and he grabbed my arm and pulled me out of the car. He was insanely strong. I fought with everything I had in me, but it was useless. He raped me, stealing my virginity, and shoved me back into the car. I was determined not to give him the satisfaction of seeing me cry as he sped back to the school. The last words I ever heard from Jeremy Whitlock were, "Get out." I drove home and dad was asleep on the couch too tired to keep his eyes open as he waited up for me. I went into the bathroom and tried to wash the whole thing off of me; the cum, the blood, the humiliation. My tears mixed with the pounding water as I let it run over me until it ran cold.

Jeremy never looked my way again. He acted as if nothing had ever happened. I decided that I would be more careful, that I wouldn't trust any boys, that I would stop going to dances, that if I could, I would just graduate and then get out of this town. Jeremy would get away with what he had done because, as he had so graciously pointed out to me, who the fuck was I? Well... that plan all went up in smoke when I stared down at the blue stick that came with the pregnancy test. At first, I refused to tell dad who the boy was because I was afraid that he would kill Jeremy, not that he wouldn't have deserved it, but Keith and Tara needed dad. He said they could run a paternity test at nine weeks, and he would find out anyway. I turned to mom, and she said she could set up an abortion, no questions asked. Just get rid of the thing and move on. Don't let it ruin my life.

Dad then stepped up and said we could work it out, that he wouldn't pressure me again, that he would raise the child as his own. That's the dad I know and love, but I saw this as my problem brought about by my own naivety and stupidity. I got on the internet and discovered that there was an adoption clinic over on the coast that offered housing, meals, medical care, and \$10,000 to pregnant mothers who would give up their baby at birth. I could even keep up with my high school work while I was in there. I went to school one day and didn't come home, but rather had a friend drive me to the facility where I checked in. I was due in July and could be back in school by the beginning of my senior year. I'd make up some plausible story about my disappearance and everything would go back to normal.

I *hated* that place. They were so sanctimonious and efficiently calculating and they treated us pregnant teenagers like the scum of the earth. The longer I carried the baby the more attached to it I became. Dad came down every weekend and pleaded with me not to give the child up. Come June, I started listening to him. We cooked up a plan. We would say that the child was his, and if it looked like hers, mom's. I would complete high school and go off to Stanford. My life would not be interrupted, he would see to it. He was so sorry that he had laid so much on me, and that I really wasn't able to have a good high school experience. I thought of Jeremy and his ilk and thought that if they were the epitome of the high school experience, then who would want it? The people at the facility went ballistic when I informed them that I was keeping my baby. They threatened to toss me out, but mom came to the rescue with

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\$25,000.00. She was part of the plan now and would say the baby was hers if anyone were to ask, and you can bet your bottom dollar that the gossiping old biddies in that town would ask. The best thing that came from all this is that mom and dad ended the war between them.

The baby came on the Fourth of July. I didn't know the gender until I held Sara in my arms. *Everything changed.* I went back to high school in the fall. It's as if nobody even noticed that I had been gone. I took the SAT's late and crushed them with a perfect score. Stanford accepted me. My life was looking up. I helped dad as much as I could. I don't know why it is so important to keep this secret, but dad insists that my life is easier this way. When I graduate, I was planning on taking Sara with me wherever I went. And now, because of this man I'm lying next to, I don't really want to go anywhere. John Lennon is laughing in his grave. You know the old joke, don't you? Question: How do you make God laugh? Answer: Make a plan.

"It's not the end of the world, Rosalie. In two years, you can do anything that you want. The fact is you could do it now," Jimmy said. "Yeah, I know, but dad has been so good about things that I don't want to rock the boat. Everything is sailing along just fine." "What about that douchebag Jeremy? Aren't you worried that he could come back into the picture?" "Let him, I'll take him for all he's worth for child support. The fact is, he probably doesn't even know about Sara, and that's just fine with me." "Well, I have my own situation with Mary Jane. I don't know what to say to her. I don't have any idea of what to do." "You know what you do Jimmy? You hang with her. You need to be present in her life. Everything else will work itself out. Sara was the best thing that has ever happened to me. You just watch, Mary Jane is going to steal your heart. She'll have you hook, line, and sinker. I'll help you get to know her. You can count on me."

I got out of bed and went off to the bathroom with my disheveled clothing in hand. Jimmy watched my graceful movements savoring every second of it. He didn't want to forget anything about this encounter. He didn't want this moment to ever end, but of course, it ended way too soon.

Jimmy called my dad to inquire if he knew of anyone selling a truck. Within two hours two trucks pulled into his driveway. Clarence, a rather large and aging full-blooded Cahuilla Indian, came to the front door and stated, "I heard you're looking for a truck. Want to look at this Tundra?" It was a white 2010, fully loaded, all-wheel drive, with a crew cab. "It's got low miles. Only used it locally for growing weed, but my partners and I are getting out of it. The county sheriff has gotten to be a royal pain-in-the-ass. I don't need it, anymore. Leaf tells me that you're an okay guy, so I'd give you payments if you need them." "How much – cash?" Jimmy asked. "Twenty-five grand." "Come on in while I get my wallet." Jimmy called me that evening to see if I'd go down the hill tomorrow morning with him to get Mary Jane. I could tell he was stressing and told him that both Sara and I would go. He seemed very relieved. Sara and I get to his place at 7:00 a.m. the next morning. Rebecca has managed to finagle a 10:00 a.m. starting time at work just for today. When we get to her condo, she has all of Mary Jane's

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things packed. Sara runs up to Mary Jane and they bound off. Jimmy pulls out a bag of weed from under his work shirt saying, “One pound of GDP, just like you asked.” “Is it any good?” “Got it from this big Indian. He says it will knock you on your ass.” I cut short this high-powered drug deal by asking, “How do you want to work this, Rebecca? “MJ knows that you’re here to get her, and that’s about it.” Jimmy interrupts saying, “Rebecca we agreed that we were going to tell her together. I would really appreciate it if you would help me do this.” “MJ, can you come here?” Rebecca shouts out and both girls come running into the living room. “There’s no best way to do this, but I suppose that to just come out with it will be okay,” Rebecca says and then adds, “MJ, this is your daddy.” Mary Jane looks at Jimmy wide eyed as if he has just stepped off a spaceship. He gets down on his knees in front of her and stares into her eyes. She takes the initiative and asks, “Are you really my daddy?” Tears come streaming down Jimmy’s face and all he can do is shake his head yes. Mary Jane rushes to him and hugs him as his chest heaves with great explosive sobs. He holds her very tight and gets up on his feet, holding her aloft. “Well then,” Rebecca says, “that wasn’t so bad. I have to get ready for work.” Jimmy is bewildered. This couldn’t be this easy, could it be? I ask Jimmy to gather up Mary Jane’s things while I grab both girls by their hands and lead them outside. Welcome to my world Jimmy Abrams. Instant family coming right up.

The little girls loved Jimmy’s big truck. They giggled and whispered and had a grand old time of it in the back seat. We went by Bed, Bath & Beyond and Jimmy let Mary Jane pick out her bed and bedding. Then he asked Sarah if she would like to pick out her guest bed and bedding and she was thrilled to do it. Then we went to Walmart for some child’s room furnishings; a dresser, bookcase, and a floor lamp. Then Jimmy bought a big screen Smart TV. He was out over \$3,000.00 before we got out of there with the bed of the truck practically overflowing. Back at his place, he set up the TV in the living room and found a cartoon program that interested the girls. As they sank into the couch to watch we went into MJ’s bedroom and set everything up. He was so happy that it made me happy. I cooked lunch on the stove while Jimmy and the girls played hot potato with a beachball outside on what used to be a lawn area. Laughter rang out across the chaparral and drifted down the canyons. I was reasonably sure that Jimmy’s parenting inexperience would rear its ugly head at bedtime, so I called dad and asked if he was okay with my staying over with Sarah for the evening. “He really has a lot to learn, dad. You know how it is with little kids.” “Okay Rose, but just for tonight. We need you over here, also.”

We bathed the girls, made sure they brushed their teeth, and put them to bed at nine in the evening. The way they were wiggling and squirming I highly suspected that they wouldn’t be asleep for another hour. Jimmy went outside and toked on a joint while looking up at the full moon. Coyotes yipped in the distance. I walked up behind him and hugged him around the waist. “Two months from now, it will be the harvest moon,” he said. “God help us all,” I replied. He spun around and kissed me urgently. “Jimmy, we can’t do it with the girls in the house.” “There’s always the truck,” he replied. I went back into the house and checked on the girls who were nodding out. They didn’t even notice me. Jimmy was already in the backseat half undressed when I climbed up into the truck. Before long, I experienced the second orgasm of my life. The moon shone even brighter over the ground plane. Two deer crossed the driveway and melted into the chaparral. He held me tighter than even the last time. “You falling Jimmy?” I asked “Hard,” was all he said. A barn owl hooted, and the soft summer

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breeze wafted into the cab. I wondered if heaven could really be any better than this? This is the happiest and most loved that I have ever felt in my life. Could I really leave and go back to school in a month-and-a-half?

Jimmy Abrams went after the repairs to his home like a one-man wrecking crew. He had a new metal roof on it in the course of two weeks. Mary Jane loved riding in the big truck to the hardware store, and everyone working there called her MJ and were always thrilled to see her. He cleared his lot and replanted the lawn area. Then came a flagstone patio with a massive barbeque grill. Workmen replaced the air conditioning. MaryJane insisted on her own brush to use while he painted the house. He replaced the vanities in both bathrooms and put down hardwood floors throughout the entire house. I bought him dishes, silverware, and kitchen pots and pans from the secondhand stores up in Idlewild. When I came in one afternoon, he was installing big beautiful plantation shutters on all the windows. Then he added an attractive entry door. I helped him pick out some tasteful new furniture over the internet – country casual. He pulled that place up by its bootstraps.

I slipped away every chance I got to go sleep with him. When we had a more in-depth conversation about birth control, I came clean with him and told him that I had had my tubes tied right after Sara was born. He got really quiet and wouldn't look at me. Finally, I drew it out of him. "There's nothing more than I would rather do than have a child with you Rose." "Jimmy there are two wonderful children already in our lives." "But none that came from both of us." "Sometimes the procedure can be reversed, and there's always in vitro. Not right now, but I would do that for you." He smiled that quirky smile of his and I knew that this revelation pleased him very much.

Jimmy got the biggest kick out of registering Mary Jane for school while I registered Sarah. We both put each other's name down for one of our emergency contacts. This seemed to mean an awful lot to him. Sarah was very fond of him, and he was becoming attached to her too. Everything appeared to be perfect, but of course, nothing is ever perfect.

Time raced right up until the evening before I had to drive back to Stanford in the red Civic mom had bought me to begin my junior year. Dad had a sad hangdog look on his face. Sara would cry unexpectedly. Jimmy was aloof. We took the kids out to dinner down the hill, and he barely touched his food. When I got him alone in our driveway, I confronted him. "You knew this day was coming. It wasn't any secret." "What would it take to get you to stay Rose?" "You can't ask me that. You know I promised my parents that I would graduate. I love you Jimmy, but you have to give me that time." He hung his head saying, "I love you too, for all the good it does me." I gently shook him and told him, "Look here Jimmy Abrams. There ain't no doubt about it. You're going to ask me to marry you after I graduate, and I'm going to say yes. You can count on that. I better not hear about you taking up with any of these

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mountain hussies. There won't be anyone sharing my bed while I'm away, and if I can make that sacrifice, then you can make it too." He held me tighter than ever before, let go abruptly, and climbed up in his truck and sped off. I couldn't fix this for him. He had to work through this in his own time and in his own way.

The next morning Jimmy came by with Mary Jane. I cooked a big breakfast for everyone telling Keith that the responsibility for doing the dishes belonged to him now. Everyone milled about unsure about what to do or say next. It was always like this. I walked out to the drive and opened the door to the Civic, and they all crowded around me. I hugged them all, got in the car, and fired it up. It would be a twelve-hour ride up to Palo Alto and looking out my rearview mirror at them all looking back at me, I knew that I would be crying all the way.

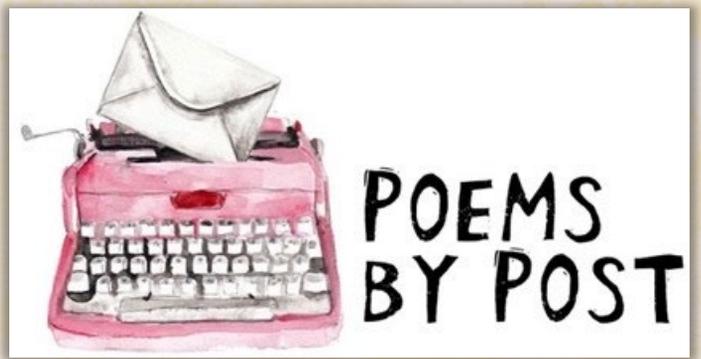
out november FEATURES



**ONCE YOU CHOOSE HOPE,
ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE.**

- Christopher Reeve

POEMS BY POST



My name is Alex, and I run a platform called Poems by Post.

As with many small businesses, lockdown provided the landscape for the setup of Poems by Post, as performing as a poet was no longer viable. I was already very aware of the need to provide paid opportunities for grassroots artists, whilst connecting people to creativity, and the eruption of the pandemic only accelerated this need. It has been so rewarding to witness the growth of the platform into an active, engaged community for connection, positivity, and inspiration.

We commission a new poem from a different poet each month, alongside a visual artist to design an A6 card inspired by the poem. Through my jaunt working as a street poet, I met so many artists of myriad descriptions, and found my own craft inspired by their immeasurable dedication and determination. The decision to combine poetry with visual art enabled Poems by Post to replicate this effect; to support even more creatives whilst providing another dimension to the poetry – adding huge value to what we do for both artists and subscribers.



www.poemsbypost.org

POEMS BY POST FEATURE

Running Poems by Post has been a huge learning curve – there is so much beneath the surface when it comes to running a business! I've had to constantly react to the needs of the company, meaning I haven't had a proper routine for myself for a long time. However, navigating these unknown waters and unearthing new skills have brought great benefits, in terms of my own proactivity and self-development. I also enjoy the independence of Poems by Post; not having someone to answer to gives me the freedom to explore and try things without constraint.

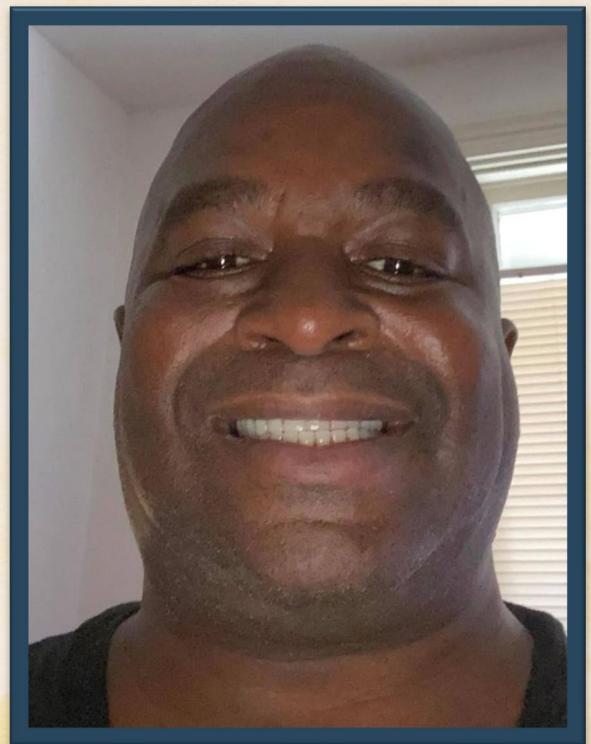
Poems by Post works because of the creative freedom we allow both the company and our artists. With the glowing words of support from our subscribers we are able to maintain confidence in our mission to support grassroots artists whilst bringing art into people's lives and homes. Our main goal has always been to make both the consuming and creating of art more accessible. Whether it be painting, sculpting, writing, making music or dancing, we believe in making creative endeavours a viable, fun past time, free from industry or social pressures and constraints.

Within a year we have come so far and made such a huge difference to so many people. We believe anything is possible - and there ain't nothing to it but to do it!

LAVAN ROBINSON

Author Feature

LaVan Robinson, born as Larry LaVan Richardson, Jr, took his pen name from his middle name and his mother Mary's maiden name. He writes in her honor. As well, he has a beloved son, Audy. LaVan is a 13-year veteran, he has written poetry since high school. "LaLa" is Robinson's poet name. He states that he loves poetry and will use it to inspire people and bring them closer to God. LaVan has 5 books of poetry available on Amazon as well as contributions to anthologies and literary journals. You can find LaLa performing at open mic's and on podcasts. He can be found on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



Books by LaVan Robinson:

Songs of LaLa: The Poet (Second Edition 2020)

Love's Rhapsody (2020)

Cries of a Society (2020)

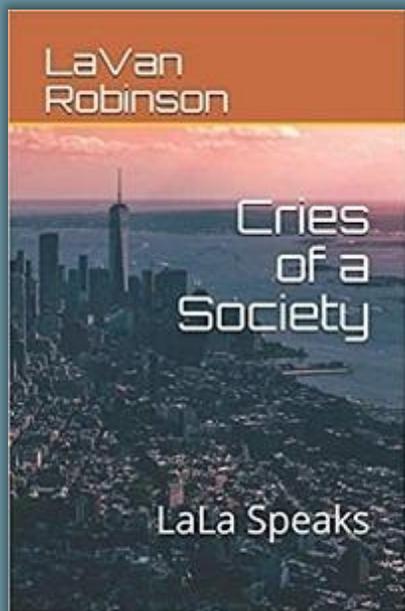
Love's Anticipation (2021)

Silver Linings (2021)

<https://twitter.com/robinsonlavan1>

<https://www.instagram.com/lalathepoet/>

<https://lavanrobinson1968.wixsite.com/lalathepoet>



Step in to the world of LaLa as he speaks of society from his poet mind's eye. Analytical, yet down to the basics of understanding the human condition in a society which is sometimes daunting. Yet, LaLa sees awareness as the path to understanding, leading to peaceful living. It is such hope that brings forth the consideration of change. That first step is within before it can ever be of the world. Let's read these words and inspire each of our own ways of thinking toward a common ground. LaLa puts down the hate as he picks up the pen.

https://www.amazon.com/Cries-Society-Speaks-LaVan-Robinson/dp/Bo8MSLXJ47/ref=sr_1_4?dchild=1&keywords=lavan+robinson&qid=1631735281&s=books&sr=1-4

INNER PEACE

Of your reality, you're the creator. You have the power to make it much better and greater. Touching and inspiring lives and souls along the way. Providing hope into days that are hopeless and gray, whatever reality you choose all depends on what here on this earth you do. Be the light you're meant to be. Through the darkness and troubling times, you can shine so bright and illuminating. Bringing about through your destined journey to others and yourself that much needed inner peace.

FOCUS

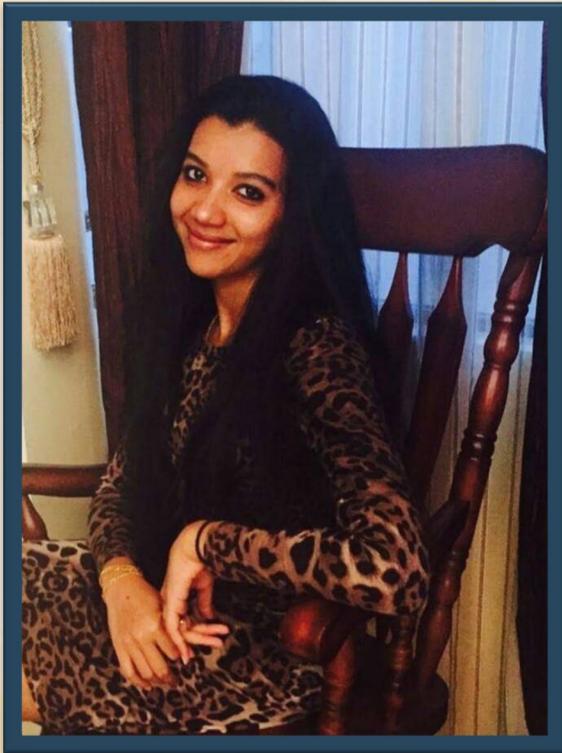
Twisted ideologies and bad decisions are a part of a society that among its citizens causing so much tension and great division. Hustling and grinding for a slice of prosperity where everyone is included in the pursuit of the American dream. The leaders make achieving this so damn hard by setting up obstacles both seen and unseen to make you purposely stumble and fall. When caught up in the act and lies, they just bold face deny, deny, and deny while in secrecy, busy tallying up the great dividends they get for each and every life. Off the backs of the embattled taxpayers and poor, they enjoy their lifestyles simple luxuries while the poor in their anguish gets to enjoy pain, strife, and misery. When it's in the leader's hands to share with the citizens the vast abundance of the resources with. They out of rebuttal claim to not or want anything to do with it. Leaving many desperate, distraught, and utterly hopeless. Wondering for them and their families where their next meal will come from or where they'll lay their heads under the sun being that this is their only and main focus.

SONG AND DANCE

Dysfunction is the sign of the living where hatred and taking is the norm-instead of Loving and giving. In this world, along with the devil they have created, man seems so lost but he's willing to protect his way of life and interests by any means necessary at any cost. Beware of him that from afar you can tell because he brings with him the depths of hell. From their countenance, they'll cause the masses that have gathered in love, peace and unity to take notice out of fear, to suddenly scatter, seeking out the weakest soul on it they'll prance and in their triumph, they'll celebrate with song and dance.

ANILA ARUN PILLAI

Author Feature



Anila Arun Pillai lives a diasporic life. Since her roots call for the nature splendor, Allepey located in Kerala and lives in the vibrant “Diamond City” Surat in Gujarat. Anila is a Research Scholar with SVNIT. Her exposure as an Assistant Professor with graduate and postgraduate students and as Innovation Coordinator abroad with secondary students makes her patron of academic value. She has worked as a counsellor with IGNOU for MBA, MCA, MA, BBA, BCA and BA graduates. Her lectures are available on BISAG channels. She is a poet, writer and essayist. She has published her creative and scholastic works in National and International anthologies, journals and periodicals. When not drafting her mind, she prefers to spend her leisure with her boys, reading or cooking preferably to satisfy sweet tooth.

Her first collection entitled **Kailani: Let flow off the flaws**, has themes that rely broadly on nature reflected in and outside human life. The turmoil urging chance to change, the new beginning pressure, dubiousness, female entity, family, pandemic are the few themes spurred. A loved of nature and the one who seeks motivation to cling will find the collection soothing and scintillating.

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ANILA ARUN PILLAI – AUTHOR FEATURE

MOANING MURMURS

Afar from joy and rejoice
Ready to flip watching from front,
Almost about everything collided was live unready to live.
Anyone to fix was like away in the fray.

In the crowd with lots of sound and
Full of lights tears brimmed
Scared and continued to stray for years
No body cared!
Nobody heard,
My moaning murmurs!
Worst were every single day,
All feast and I felt the beast ready to unleash.
Suddenly heard a singing which was like a sting!
Trimmings and trappings were fun to many,
Tomorrow would be the same stale they rarely cared!
Words, thoughts and emotions,
Were worst in the world to say.
Stealing and treachery, no more a secret to learn.
Drifted off I lay finally on my bed.
Salted water stripped off my face bit by bits,
Pearls they call, pillows always did hide.
Finding or searching solace is all vain
Perfectly recreating life ravers
Followed my serene.
Frozen life yet not drowning.



Kailani word means sea and sky which implies the theme of the poems included in the book. The broad elements covered in the book is about Nature - reflected in and outside. Both are vital ingredients to live by. The turmoil urging chance to change, the new beginning pressure, dubiousness, female entity, family, pandemic are the few themes spurred in the ovenure. A lover of nature and seeking motivation to cling will find the collection soothing and scintillating.

https://www.amazon.in/Kailani-Anila-Arun-Pillai/dp/B0994KGJ47/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Kailani+Anila+Arun&qid=1628863879&s=books&sr=1-1

ANILA ARUN PILLAI – AUTHOR FEATURE

LOVE IS ME

I am no longer with a thought more desirable
To find love
Again and again this game makes me stuck
Hide and seek, it is playing with me,
which hurts!

The moment I feel did grapple
Makes me feel moment by moment I am been
fragile.
The sight that now it burdens me with is
camouflaged with something called feelings!
I know not, he who knows and knows that he knows
let me know.
As I stand as child in front of love miserable and
helplessly seeking to go behind,
Something that which is questioned many a times
for its own existence!

Choice I know is the culprit now
To be or go with it and yet test it or leave it
I know not, burning in me
Consuming it is my inner conscience!

Freed I want to feel now..
I should devoid seeking or yearning for love from
others
For it is in me and I realise.
As I keep rising again and again, followed the call
and found

Restored is my faith thus, no longer will I seek for
live outside

It's in me...its with me ... it's ME.

CHALLENGE

Challenge is a chance
To outshine one's own determined face.
Outlive one's own mark signified before.
Worth is accepting challenge therefore!

We may get or regret is a matter of time
We tried and did give effort is prime.
Unaware of the result but to gather Experience
Try and try to ensure merit to shine immediate or
later,
Nothing can stop unless been given way to stoop.
After a rise learn to bend is what the mountains
reveal,
Nature teaches much just believe.

Don't be shaded long
Challenge! Accept and sing along
Between the narrow bridge of win and loss
There is a lot to learn boss...
Toss is the outcome outside
Legends are those who take up those unusual yet
daring steps,
Dare and do with proper prep!

Challenge is a challenge only when you take it so,
Fulfil or grow with chance taken?
Leave it for time to show.
Live the moment and do it full throat,
Life changes for who accepts, takes, runs and
repeats!

Why wait when the Sun shines bright!
Clad that light and be ready to Shine.

You are the star who seek
In you is life to stride, keep up the ride!

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF JOHN DOE

From best-selling poet of “This is 2020” and “Their Footsteps,” Kassie J Runyan, comes her debut novel, “The Death and Life of John Doe,” which takes a deep look into trauma, the human psyche, and the struggle of living on the street.

Our nameless nomad walks out the front door of his suburban home, leaving his life behind. Not knowing what it is he's looking for... or what it is he's running from. He closes the door and walks into a world full of the pain and joy that waits for him with each step. He keeps moving forward; driven by a desire to find a reason for his life and to discover his forgotten past. What he wasn't prepared for were the dreams.

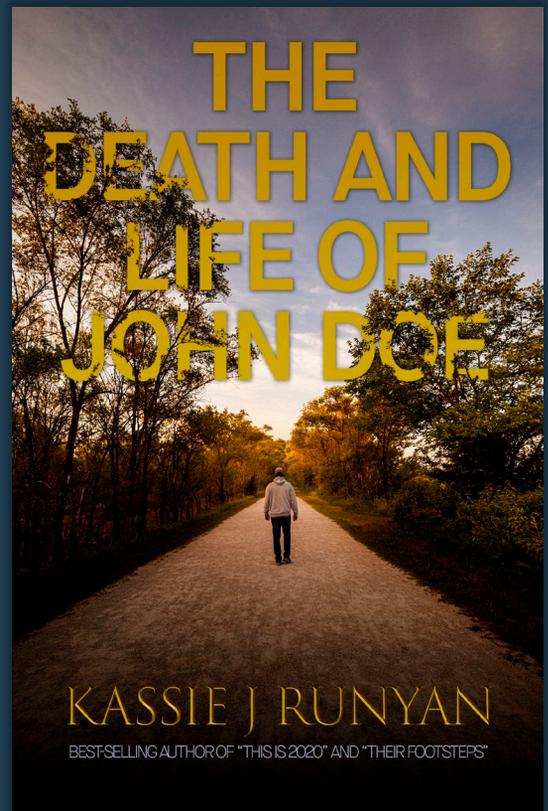
What is your name?

"The Death and Life of John Doe is a mesmerizing book that takes you on a cross-country journey and makes you question your own perception."

- Blurb Review

"The Death and Life of John Doe is a riveting novel that feels like a thrilling movie! Every chapter keeps you guessing until the last page!"

- Brittney Marie, Award-Winning Poet and Author



Walking out the door – December 7th

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THE DEATH AND LIFE OF JOHN DOE – BOOK FEATURE

CHAPTER FIVE – THE GOODBYE

Eyes were shut to the world, but I was awake. Trying to delay the start of the day. I heard a slight scratch and opened my eyes to see Dog sitting by the door scratching the wood frame and watching me expectantly. “Yeah yeah, I’m awake Dog”. I pushed down on the footrest of the faded recliner with my legs; pushing the orange blanket off to the side to fall in a messy pile on the floor. I stood and grabbed a shirt that had been tossed carelessly over the back of the recliner as I shuffled to the closed door and pulled it open to let Dog run outside to relieve himself like each morning. I watched him circle for a second as I slid my head through the hole in the cotton of the shirt. Then walked away from the open doorway and towards the kitchen. I grabbed the dented pot that was already pre-filled with water the night before, turned the knob on the front of the stove, and struck a match to light the small burner. I had found a three propane tanks on day two and found that it was pretty simple to get one hooked up to the stove once I worked my way through the faded instructions written on the back. I stood, trying to wake up, as I watched the water slowly start to steam and create tiny bubbles along the bottom of the pot. I turned and grabbed the small coffee cup that was now claimed as mine and poured some of the heated water into it trying not to let it slosh out the other side. My hand wrapped around the glass container of instant coffee and as I dug the spoon down into the gravel that created my morning, I realized that the container was almost empty. The metal spoon hit the bottom of the glass and I stood for a moment looking at what could maybe make two more mornings. Breathe in. Sigh out. Something nudged me from behind and I was swiftly pushed back to my new reality. I dropped the grounds into my cup and stirred, letting the steam become aromatic before I turned to the brown eyes patiently waiting for his breakfast. I pulled the kibble from the bottom cabinet and filled Dog’s bowl watching a few stray pieces scatter around the bowl. There was another bowl sitting on the counter and I grabbed it to place it on the ground next to the first. The second bowl was filled with water and Dog went back and forth between the two as if he was still starving and skin and bones. I sipped my coffee and watched my new friend; noticing that I could no longer see the bones that covered his lungs and his fur had grown thicker.

I walked over to the open door and sat on the top step as I listened to the breeze work its way through the trees surrounding me. The coffee warmed my body and I sat in peace. Somehow in my time here, I had yet to see another soul seeking asylum in these woods. The dead man must have made sure of that when he came here. His private and hidden cabin in the woods. He must have owned the land; no one came looking for past payments or anything owed. I didn’t even know places like this still existed in the overcrowded world. I sat quiet, breathing in the air, putting my arm around Dog when he finished his breakfast and came to join me. He eventually got bored and ran out into the grass, rolling in it and chomping at the weeds, checking every few rolls to make sure I still sat there watching his fun. It had become routine. A comfortable routine. One that I knew had come to an end. This wasn’t where I was meant to be. It was just a short reprieve from the hell that had preceded it. Today would be a good day for us to prepare. I looked into the sky and saw the clouds rolling in. The storm was coming.

I finished my coffee and stood at the top step, wanting to spend more time watching Dog have his fun, but I was just delaying the must haves of the day. I turned to the little house and walked back towards the bedroom. The room now smelled of soap and no longer held the sight of death. I couldn’t bring myself to sleep on the bed, but I did enter the room to see what I could discover from the man who had died here. Now

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the bed was made with a clean sheet to cover the stains and there sat a duffle bag that I had pulled from a closet just days before. It held a mound of extra shirts, socks, and underwear. I dug through its contents and pulled out the pile of bills that I had found scattered and hidden around the home added to the tiny stash I had brought into the home with me. I sat on the edge of the bed and opened the stack of cash to count. The pile now totaled over a hundred dollars. I looked towards the ceiling as I heard the rain start to hit against the roof. Dog would be a mess. I put the money on the bed and stood to go find him. By the time that I reached the front door the rain was coming down harder and I saw Dog running around the clearing trying to catch drops in between his teeth. “Dog come on – inside time now” I called to him. He ran to me, tail wagging, and shook the water off while only still being halfway outside. The inside half splattered the walls and windows with sweet dog smelling water. I laughed and fell to the floor, covered in a wriggling and wet Dog as he licked my face. This felt almost what happy must feel like.

We spent the day working together to search the final nooks and crannies of the house making sure we weren't missing anything that we could use in the upcoming weeks or months. The cans in the cabinets were down to just a dozen and six of those went into the duffle bag, two were saved for tonight, and the rest would remain in the cabinets for the next hungry soul who might find this house looking for a saving grace for a night. I took a few of the long candles and a few boxes of matches and folded them into the clothes of the bag to keep them safe. As we worked the rain pummeled the house from above as if to remind me that I have shelter here and should stay. But I knew it was lying to me. I lit another candle and poured some of the wax on the table next to the recliner before pushing the unlit end down into the moldable material letting it harden and make a permanent spot for the new candle. The main room stayed lit as I took the other candle in my makeshift holder and went back to the bathroom. My feet were now healed into rough scars, but I grabbed the remaining bandages knowing that there would be a time soon that they were raw again. I went back into the bedroom and pushed the box of bandages down into the duffle along with the sandals. I walked back to the living room and sat down in the recliner with Dog jumping faithfully to my lap. We sat and thought as my hand made its way lazily back and forth across the soft brown fur. Finally, I stood, shooing Dog to the floor, and made us some dinner. Soup for me and kibble for the dog. I took my time eating and realized this might be my last warm meal for a bit as I slurped the broth in silence, the candlelight flickering against the walls.

I finished the warm soup and rinsed the bowl leaving it drying in the sink. I sunk back down in the recliner and pulled the lever for my feet to rise. I blew out one of the candles and let the other dance orange throughout the room as I pulled the blanket up over me and drifted into a dreamless sleep, lulled to sleep by the sound of Dog's soft snores next to me.

The next morning, I woke, just as I did each morning before it. I sat on the front step staring at the water drops falling from the trees and the clouds float away into the brightening morning. I watched Dog flip and flop through the grass. I sat for longer than any morning that had preceded it and my bones groaned when I finally stood to go back into the house for the last time. I walked towards the bathroom after grabbing the scissors I had found in the kitchen drawer and undressed in the tiny room. I stopped and stared at myself in the mirror. I no longer looked like the stranger I had seen staring back at me. Now I looked like a different stranger. Worn and dark with a beard and hair speckled with grey. My skin clung closer to the bones beneath my face. But those eyes. The eyes were the same hollow that they seemed to have always been. How had none of the recent laughter made it to those eyes? I picked up the metal shears in my right hand and held the

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hair straight up as I started to hack at it. It wasn't anything to be proud of but at least it would stay out of my face for a while. I looked at my beard and grabbed a chunk with my left fist, but the scissors stopped short. No. Not yet. I sat the scissors down on the ceramic sink with a little ting of a sound and stepped into the bathtub next to a bucket. The bucket had been filled a few days ago and I grabbed it with both hands and lifted the water over my body, the skin dimpling under the fresh coldness. Soap and lather followed, washing away the final stray hairs from my hack job of a haircut and the minimal dirt that had built since my last bath. Once I was clean and rinsed, I stepped out of the bath and patted myself off with one of the grey towels, a rougher version of the grey towel that had existed in my past. I shook my head trying to rid myself of the thoughts of a previous life that kept sneaking up on me. I life I barely remembered now. Towel wrapped around my waist I walked over to the bedroom and put on the clean clothes that I had laid out the day before. Jeans and undershirt on. Flannel over the top. Socks and shoes over my calloused feet. I looked down at the shoes, the only thing I had owned prior to finding this house. They had been scrubbed and cleaned and now just had a slight off-color to them. I grabbed the open duffel bag and closed the door behind me. I could still hear Dog jumping around the front of the house when I sat the bag on the recliner. I pulled the money out of the pocket of the bag and slid two tens out of the pile for the back pocket of my jeans. I stuffed the rest of it down in a clean sock roll to hide it from the world. Working my way over to the kitchen I grabbed the bag of kibble from the cabinet and worked it into the remaining space in my bag. I did a final walkthrough making sure I had put everything away and zipped up my new bag. Leaning over the kitchen counter I peered out into the yard and watched Dog running around the yard without a care in the world. I grabbed the pen and the scrap of paper I left on the counter and started my rough note.

To anyone who finds this home –

I found this home in a time of need. It became a haven. I left you food in the cabinets and candles in the drawer. If you need water – there is a bin out back that catches the rain. If you are looking for the man who used to live here, he is gone, died in his sleep and he is buried in the back yard beneath the shovel. There is nothing of value in this house if you are looking for something to steal.

I put the note on the end table and put a can of beans on the corner of the paper so it wouldn't be swept away some night and never found. I had thought about how I would share the news of the death of the man if his family ever did come looking for him and found this hidden spot. As soon as they dug him up, they would know that my letter told lies. But if they left him where he lay, they might be able to move through to the next day thinking that he died at peace and it might give them a feeling of comfort. The strap of the duffel bag went heavily over my head and dug into my shoulder as I took one last look back down the hallway towards the room that shone orange from the sun and walked out into the day, pulling the door behind me.

Dog stood looking at me, frozen in a playful stance and ready to pounce on me if I said the right words. I looked at his eyes and he stood straighter, solemn as if he knew that we were being serious today. He ran over to stand by my side, and I rubbed his head and looked down on him. "Ready Dog?" He wagged his tail in response. I started walking towards the edge of the trees in the direction that I knew the highway sat, Dog stepping quietly by my side. We stepped into the dark cover of the forest and I resisted the urge to look back at the clearing that had once been so frightening. I had a new fear that if I looked, I would immediately go running back to its safety with Dog at my heels. Time to push forward. I was ready to restart to this journey

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and this time I was better prepared and had more accurate expectations. I felt something that almost reminded me of confidence. I kept working my way in the direction of the highway. I didn't remember the trek in taking nearly this long. I had to be going the right way, right? I couldn't see the sun above me. What if I was going the wrong way? Were there enough woods to get lost in? I spun around trying to get my bearings and noticed that Dog was no longer trailing behind me. The panic of my location was immediately lost and replaced by a different panic as I tried to think of when I saw him last. He was walking next to me into the forest. Are there animals here? No, I would have heard him if he was attacked. I turned around again and yelled "DOG?" Nothing. "DOG COME HERE!" Not a sound. I started running back towards the direction of the clearing, the duffle bag banging against my side. My foot caught on an upturned branch sent me sprawling against the leaf covered ground. I waited for the padded steps and the rough kisses on my cheek to say 'don't worry. I'm here. You just didn't see me.' Nothing came. I jumped to my feet and ignored the searing pain that began to rip through my knee as I continued to run shouting for Dog, the duffel trying to knock me over again as it slammed into my side. I neared the clearing and burst through the trees scanning the ground for the sight of the brown fur. I saw no sign of him and looked towards the cabin. The door was still shut. I ran around the side slipping on the damp grass. I stopped suddenly the duffle bag hit my backside and knocked me forward another step. There was Dog. Lying on the uneven mound of earth that he had ignored since the first day we created it. His chin was resting on his crossed paws and his big eyes looked up at me. He didn't lift his head even as his tail faintly moved across the ground. "Jesus Dog, you scared the shit out of me. It's time to go" I patted my hip. The tail thudded the soft ground, but he made no other movement. I pulled the duffel bag strap over my head and dropped it on the ground next to me. Then I slowly walked over to the mound and sunk into the grass in front of him. "Dog?" It wasn't really a question. It was a plea. It contained my life in that one syllable. Don't leave me. Don't do this. I'm alone too. Can't we just go together and at least not be alone. Thud thud thud. The tail continued its slow motion against the ground. We sat and stared at each other and without another word I knew what he meant to do. I reached out my hand and patted the top of his head rubbing across the spot at his right ear that he liked. He finally lifted his head just enough to wrap his tongue around my fingers in a sloppy goodbye. I leaned forward and put my forehead against his and we looked into each other's eyes, each seeing the pain that we had forgotten for the short while in our time together. I stood up and walked back over to the duffle bag. I opened it and grabbed the kibble from it before walking around the house and up the steps pushing open the door and seeing my note fluttering on the table. I pulled all the bowls from the shelf and filled them with the remaining water from the bucket in the kitchen. I picked up the bag of kibble and turned it to pour all the pellets on the floor of the kitchen in the furthest corner. I picked up the pen from earlier this morning and went over to the note and added a line to the bottom of it.

If the dog is still here – please take care of him – he is a good dog and a good friend. He doesn't bite.

I left the pen sitting next to the paper, made sure that it was still secure beneath the can and walked back out the front door, this time leaving it open just enough for Dog to make it through. He might need shelter or would come in here looking for food and water. I just hoped he wouldn't eat it all at once. I walked back around the house to see him still in the same spot with his big eyes watching me as I picked up my bag and threw it over my shoulder. It felt heavier, even without the bag of kibble in it. I looked back once to see his head back on his paws and his tail thudding quietly. The dead man had been wrong. He hadn't been alone. The dog wouldn't forget about him. Maybe he would forget about me.

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I walked back the same trail I had run just a short while ago. More solemn and less assured of my path. I could hear every leaf rustle and the breath going in and out of my lungs. I breathed quietly so that I could listen for the padded steps running up behind me. The steps that I knew would never come. Finally, the trees cleared, and I saw the small flimsy wire attempting to block my path in or out. I stepped over it, pain shooting through my leg as I bent it over. I made it over the fence, and I looked down at my knee for the first time, remembering my sprawl against the ground. There I saw a bit of dark red soaking through the denim. Not a lot though so it couldn't be that bad. Most likely just a decent cut. The numbness crept back into my mind as I stared at the dark spot. It had been a while since it had taken over, but it felt normal again. I looked in front of me and continued to walk towards the sound of the highway; lacking the desire to stop and clean up my knee at this time. Knowing if I stopped, I would run back to the little hidden cabin and the brown beast that guarded it. I struggled a bit trying to climb the damp grassy hill leading up into the road, but I finally made it to the gravel. It seemed like a different life when I was last standing here, sweating and dirty, looking at the blood on my feet and the sticky soda running down my front. I adjusted my bag and stuck out my upturned thumb at the truck that was getting closer. Whoosh. Right by me. I looked down the road and saw another car coming and left my thumb out knowing that this could take a while. I saw the hand sticking out of the passenger window and the pimply teen behind the wheel and I braced for another hit with a rotten food item. I refused to stand down and left my hand upturned towards the car. The empty hand waved, and the car slowed as it pulled into the gravel, sending puffs of grey dust up from behind the tires. I walked over, pulling the strap of the bag over my head and I tossed it into the backseat, sliding in behind it. Two pimply faces turned back towards me and grinned nice enough.

“Where ya going stranger?” teen one asked in a fake deep voice, obviously trying to sound older than his face let on.

“Nowhere in particular, where are you guys going?”

“The city” teen two said, as if I knew what that meant.

“OK, great by me.”

“What's your name?”

I lied without thinking, “My friends call me J.”

“Welcome J! We should be there in about four or five hours I think.”

Both teens turned back around and teen one floated back into the road and picked up speed as teen two started jabbing the buttons in the console looking for a song. I watched the trees of my found home fade away with my friend hidden in their depths as I felt an unexpected tear fall from my face.

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF JOHN DOE – BOOK FEATURE

JOIN ME FOR A LAUNCH PARTY – LIVE OR FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME! ENJOY A READING, SOME COCKTAIL MAKING, AND SOME GIVEAWAYS PLUS A Q+A!

VIRTUAL FROM YOUR HOME

Can't join us live in NYC - you can still join us for a digital launch event to celebrate Kassie's debut novel. Included in the event will be some fun giveaways and more! Pre-order prior to the event – and you'll be entered in a raffle for some fun goodies and reader/writer gear giveaways!

Tuesday, December 14th: 6-7PM ET

<https://www.kassiejrunyan.com/virtuallaunchparty>

LIVE IN NYC

Join us for a fun night in NYC (Manhattan location coming soon!) to celebrate Kassie's debut novel. Included in your ticket price is a signed and dedicated hard cover copy of "The Death and Life of John Doe" and specialty cocktail drink ticket(s) at the event. There will be additional copies of Kassie's poetry collections and John Doe for purchase at the event as well as a raffle and some giveaways! Tickets are limited so don't forget to get yours today!

Friday, December 3rd: 6-9PM

<https://www.kassiejrunyan.com/johndoelaunchevent>

start your

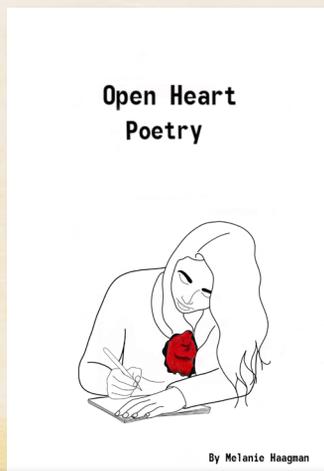
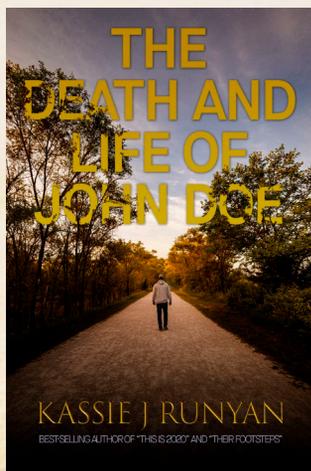
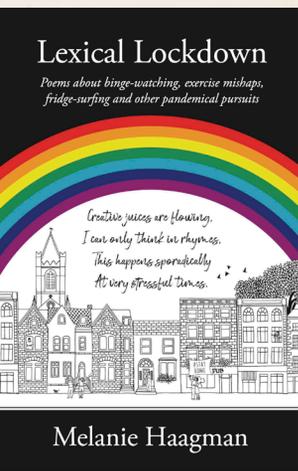
HOLIDAY

shopping today!

FILL YOUR STOCKINGS WITH BOOKS!

On the following pages – please find our recommended books by our featured writers for the current quarter. All previous book recommendations are available on our website. Join us in supporting these amazing authors!

Below you can also find the current books out by our co-creators, Mel & Kassie, and find purchase links on <https://www.opendoorpoetrymagazine.com>



RECOMMENDED BOOKS

KAILANI

Kailani word means sea and sky which implies the theme of the poems included in the book. The broad elements covered in the book is about Nature - reflected in and outside. Both are vital ingredients to live by. The turmoil urging chance to change, the new beginning pressure, dubiousness, female entity, family, pandemic are the few themes.

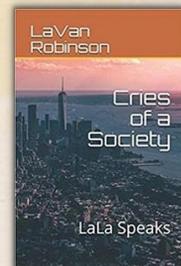
https://www.amazon.in/Kailani-Anila-Arun-Pillai/dp/B0994KGJ47/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Kailani+Anila+Arun&qid=1628863879&s=books&sr=1-1



CRIES OF A SOCIETY

Step into the world of LaLa as he speaks of society from his poet mind's eye. Analytical, yet down to the basics of understanding the human condition in a society which is sometimes daunting. Yet, LaLa sees awareness as the path to understanding, leading to peaceful living.

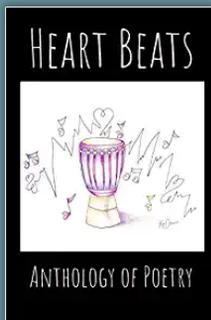
https://www.amazon.com/Cries-Society-Speaks-LaVan-Robinson/dp/B08MSLXJ47/ref=sr_1_4?dchild=1&keywords=lavan+robinson&qid=1631735281&s=books&sr=1-4



HEART BEATS

Heart Beats is an anthology of poetry about the various aspects of what makes us tick or makes a heart-beat. This is about love, life, happiness, anything that makes life more joyful or tolerable. Let's face it. These are tough times and there have been many events in 2020 which have many of us shaking our heads. Heart Beats is about working through and maybe even overcoming these challenges.

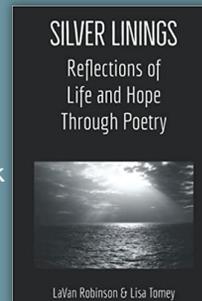
https://www.amazon.com/Heart-Beats-Anthology-Lisa-Tomey/dp/1736562002/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=heart+beats+anthology&qid=1631734395&sr=8-1



SILVER LININGS

Silver Linings is dedicated to expressing hope through poetry. LaVan Robinson and Lisa Tomey took their two different poetry styles and both combined and responded to expressions. Ending with individual writings of each poet, Silver Linings is a portrayal of perspectives as each writer strives to express their hope for this world.

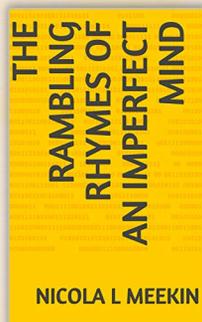
https://www.amazon.com/Silver-Linings-Reflections-Through-Poetry/dp/1736562010/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&qid=1631734510&refinements=p_27%3ALisa+Tomey&s=books&sr=1-2&text=Lisa+Tomey



RECOMMENDED BOOKS

THE RAMBLING RHYMES OF AN IMPERFECT MIND

A matter of fact observation of modern day life, depicted in poetry, by a scatty 40 something year old woman. From heartfelt rhymes inspired by loved ones, to a sideways view of lockdown, this book covers many different themes.

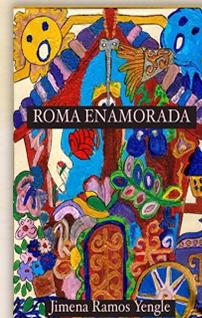


https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/Bo8ZHHG67Q/ref=cm_sw_r_cp_awdb_GR8PS9oMJHEHRJS1DV87

ROMA ENAMORADA: RETRATO DE LA EXPERIENCIA HUMANA

Hay princesas que deciden creer. Pragmáticos incurables y duquesas empoderadas en el ajedrez.

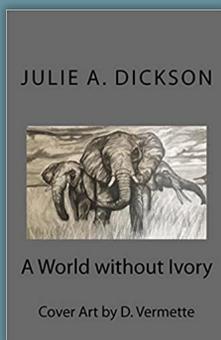
Trovadores que no entienden del querer, acarelistas con dilemas y estrés. Pianistas italianos con el alma en alquiler. Roma es como la ves



<https://www.amazon.com//Jimena-Sofia-Ramos-Yengle-ebook/dp/Bo8VQDDWQ4>

A WORLD WITHOUT IVORY

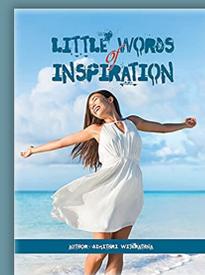
N.H. Poet Julie A. Dickson presents a short collection of poems, poignantly written in support of wild elephants, as well as captive circus and zoo elephants. Proceeds benefit SAVE NOSEY NOW, Inc. [a non-profit Elephant education/rescue organization



https://www.amazon.com/World-without-Ivory-Julie-Dickson/dp/1986323803/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=julie+a+dickson+Elephants+%2C+A+World+Without+Ivory&qid=1625104431&s=digital-text&sr=1-1

LITTLE WORDS OF INSPIRATION

Dimithri Wijerathna is a young upcoming poet from Sri Lanka, living in Kegalle District. Since her childhood, she showed much interest in poetry, drama and short stories. She is an alumna of Royal International School Kegalle and St. Joseph's Balika Maha Vidyalaya, Kegalle.

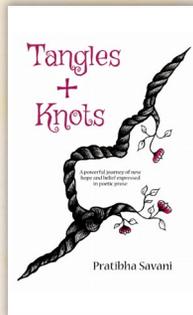


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RECOMMENDED BOOKS

TANGLES + KNOTS

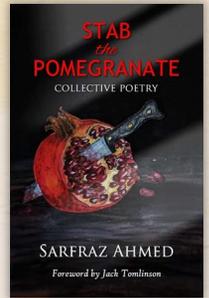
My journey begins as a teenager struggling with eczema and experiencing mental illness. Expressed in poetic prose in its original form, giving a real insight, conveyed across five themes: What a Nightmare it has been, If Only I could, some Hope to change it all, Complete Faith for my spiritual needs and to escape into my Unreality.



https://www.amazon.co.uk/Tangles-Knots-Pratibha-Savani/dp/1916276695/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1POA7J5OFID&dchild=1&keywords=pratibha+savani&qid=1628627995&srefix=pratibha%2Caps%2C149&sr=8-1

STAB THE POMEGRANATE

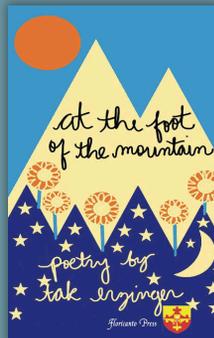
Stab the Pomegranate, is split into two parts; This is then, the first ten years, and 'This is now, where I am now at as a writer and poet, essentially both chapters brings together the first twenty years of a journey to a full circle, the first twenty years of a poet.



https://www.amazon.com/Stab-Pomegranate-Collective-Sarfraz-Ahmed/dp/B09CRNQ5W3/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=sarfraz+ahmed&qid=1630461834&sr=8-1

AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN

TAK Erzinger brings to radiant life the feelings of solitude, trauma, and healing in her poetry collection *At the Foot of the Mountain*. With deft precision, Erzinger puts tangible sensation to events and emotions that often exist only in the ephemeral space.



https://www.amazon.de/-/en/TAK-Erzinger/dp/1951088255/ref=zg_bsnr_14167075031_15?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=BV7Z0NDHoP7QGVMWM3KA

FLIP REQUIEM

Poetry. "In this deft and prescient collection, D. R. James has both diagnosed our 'dizzy symptom' and scratched out the vital prescription: holistic poems that enact a rigorous mind's engagement with this tenuous age, or what James calls, with his wink-light touch, 'the more sober / though no less precarious rest of our lives'... " - Chris Dombrowski



https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1948017768/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_taft_p1_io

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

TECHNO FLOWER

Techno Flower is a collection of poetry that is as vivid and as colorful as the title implies. From alcohol, to love, to the dangers of greed, Techno Flower covers all walks of life. Without holding any punches, Techno Flower is a collection of some of the most interesting poetry to come out this decade.

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RISING

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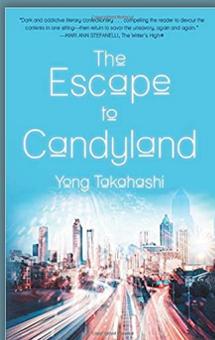
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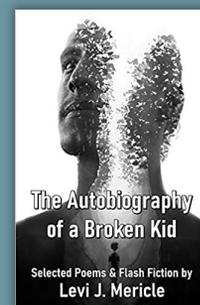
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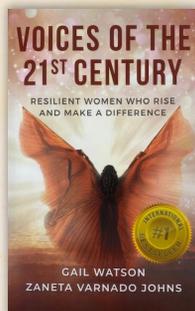
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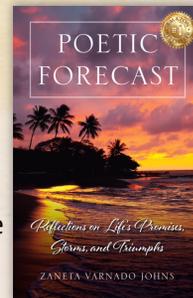
Voices of the 21st Century: Resilient Women Who Rise and Make a Difference is a collaborative book written by 40 amazing women from across the globe. This 4th Edition of the Voices series includes my chapter entitled, "Invisible No More." In addition, my poem, "What Matters" is featured on the dedication page at the front of the book! "What Matters" appears in Poetic Forecast, also available for purchase. You may meet my co-authors at www.voicesofthe21stcenturybook.com.



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POETIC FORECAST: REFLECTIONS ON LIFE'S PROMISES, STORMS, AND TRIUMPHS

This inspirational book of poetry was written over a span of forty-five years. Zan's hope is for people to learn that joy and pain can be beautifully expressed and can touch and inspire others in a positive way. You will learn that it is okay to be vulnerable and it is important to question our own way of thinking. Like our feelings, poetic expressions have no boundaries.



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