



# OpenDoor magazine

YOUR WORDS MATTER.

**LINGERING  
ON RITA**

**YOUNG POET**

**FEATURE**

**NEW  
BOOKS**

THE  
*flower*  
GARDEN

**ADORATION**



**WELCOME TO THE**  
*opendoor magazine*  
**FEBRUARY ISSUE!**

**Adoration! Love by another name  
It can be the love of a parent... of a child...  
of a spouse... even a pet. We adore love (pun  
intended) and we hope that you do to in the words  
to come in the following pages.**

**If you are looking for ways to continue to support  
OpenDoor Magazine – please consider becoming a Patron  
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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*

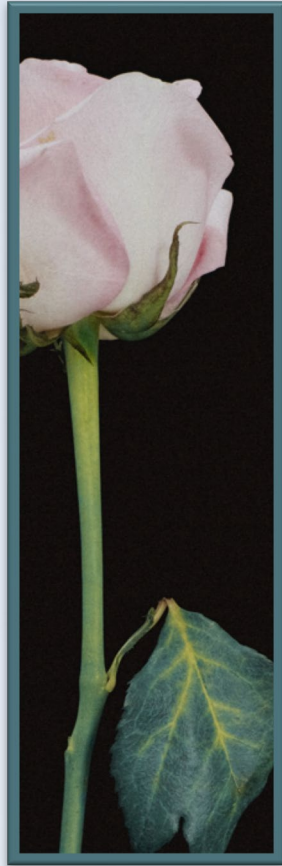
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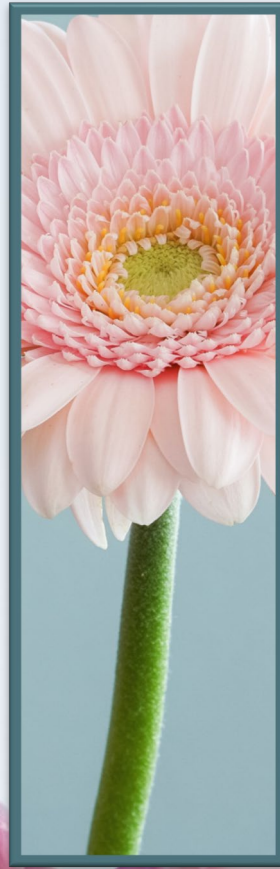
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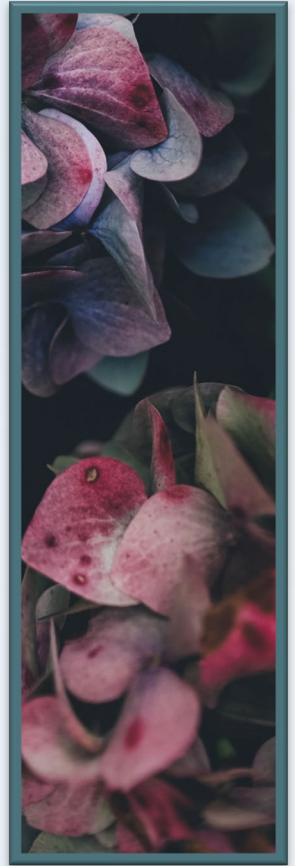
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WHAT ARE  
*Our co-owners*  
UP TO?



# KASSIE J RUNYAN

Co-Creator



**Watching:**

Awkwafina is Nora From Queens – her grandma gets me every time

Murderville – funny new Netflix “who done it”

All of Us Are Dead – like Zombies? This one is for you!

**Listening:**

Something Was Wrong podcast. I’m binging it during my long walks.

<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](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvSEcLEfE196OE_Ya2LNNN3kjFp82Ktt2)



## KASSIE J RUNYAN – CO-CREATOR

### LOVE

Kassie Runyan

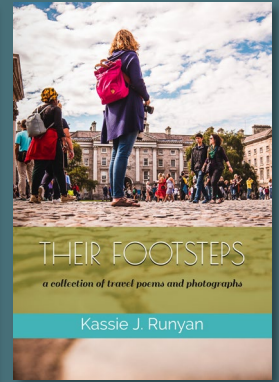
United States

<https://www.kassiejrunyan.com>

“how do i get him to love me?”  
asked the little girl  
to her mother.  
her mother,  
who looked just like her...  
but all grown up,  
sat on the chair as she did each morn’  
to put shimmer on her eyes.  
the girl liked to watch the morning makeup  
before clambering up the lap  
and waiting for her hair to be brushed  
and to ask the latest question  
that came to her mind.  
last night, the little girl read  
a book talking about love  
and so she asked.  
“how do i get him to love me?”  
the mother smiled  
not missing a beat in her  
rhythmic brushing  
of the tangled hair  
on the little head in front of her.  
“oh dear. the question is not  
‘how do i get him to love me?’  
but rather,  
how do i find one who loves me  
for who i really am.  
once you find that, you will know love.”  
their eyes met in the mirror.  
one pair wise and shimmered  
one pair full of dreams.  
and they both sighed  
with their own contentment.



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



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



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



## KASSIE J RUNYAN – CO-CREATOR

**Walking out the door soon!**

**Pre-Order now!**

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

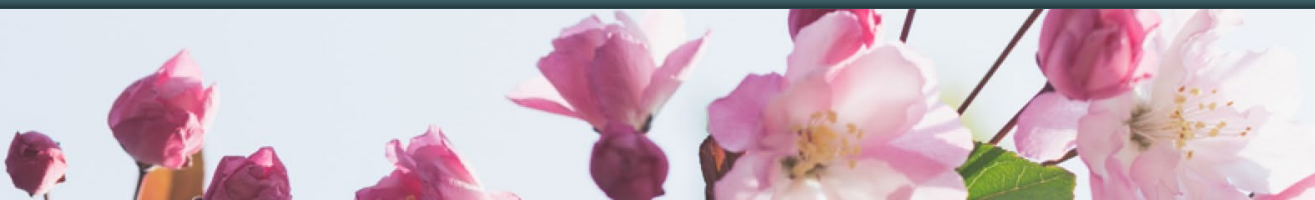
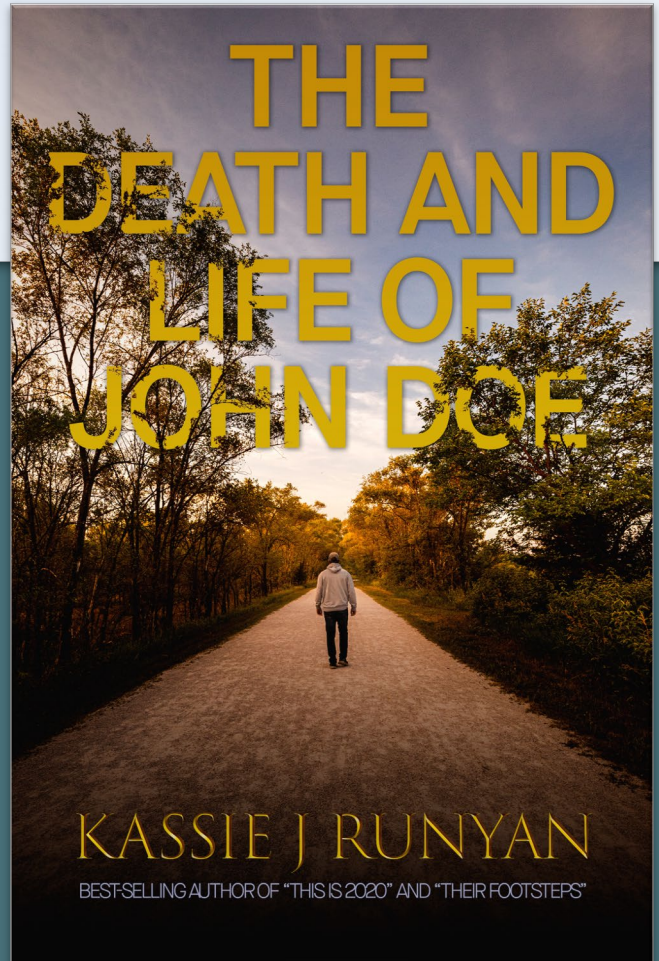
From best-selling poet of “This is 2020” and “Their Footsteps,” Kassie J Runyan, comes her debut novel, “The Death and Life of John Doe,” which takes a deep look into trauma, the human psyche, and the struggle of living on the street.

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."***

***- Joni Rachell, Author***



# MEL HAAGMAN

Co-Creator

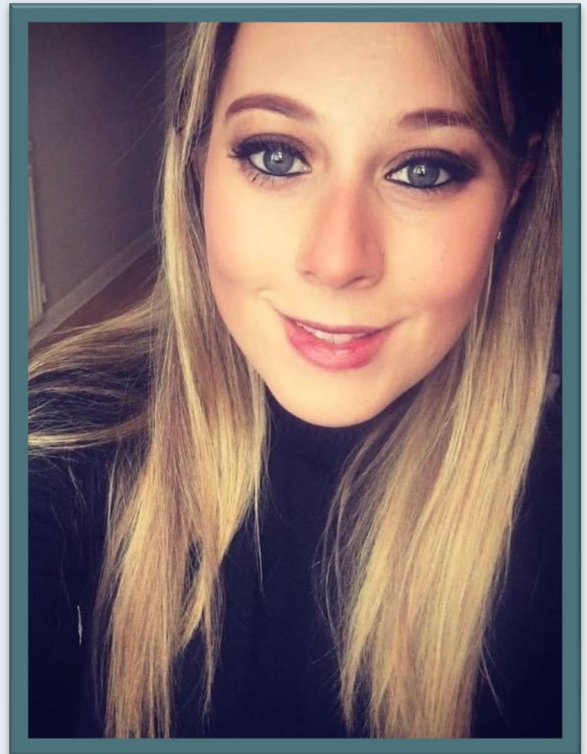
## Watching:

As we see it - This show features actors who are on the autistic spectrum, the show focuses on three young adults with ASC sharing an apartment, overseen by Mandy. It zooms in on their day-to-day struggles of living with a sensory processing disorder.

Mandy their aide, deeply cares about them, but at the same time is contemplating whether to move on in pursuit of another opportunity.

## Reading:

Atlas of the Heart by Brene Brown - This beautiful and powerful book explores eighty-seven of the emotions and experiences that define what it means to be human. These include stress, overwhelm, anxiety, worry, avoidance, excitement, dread, fear, and vulnerability. As a person who wants to continuously develop emotionally and form deeper connects and relationships with others, this book is full of lessons. She also advises us how the practice of compassion can lead to higher levels of empathy: "Compassion is the daily practice of recognizing and accepting our shared humanity so that we treat ourselves and others with loving-kindness, and we take action in the face of suffering." A subject I include a lot about in my writing. I feel this should be on everyone's bookshelves!



[https://www.Facebook.com/girlonthee\\_dge90](https://www.Facebook.com/girlonthee_dge90)

[https://www.Instagram.com/girlonthee\\_dge90](https://www.Instagram.com/girlonthee_dge90)

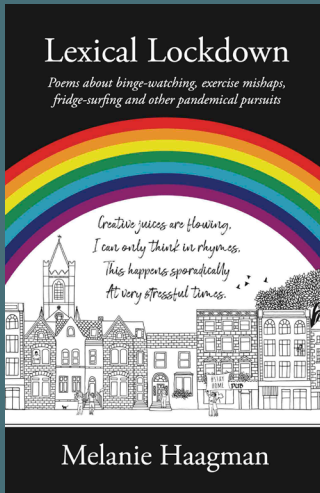
[https://www.Twitter.com/girlontheedg\\_e1](https://www.Twitter.com/girlontheedg_e1)

<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!](#)

**Mel Haagman**  
**United Kingdom**

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

One day we'll look back with regret,  
The expectations that were set.  
That age and progress had a link,  
So, every year group worked in sync.

And those who had 'fallen behind,'  
Must have a problem with their mind.  
But some excel at faster rates,  
And other's we just need to wait.

Not pile on pressure and stress,  
To ensure that they make such progress.  
But give them the time they need to bloom,  
Let belief and love fill the room.

We'll build resilience, patience and more,  
And have the time for strong rapport.  
Because it's not just what they know,  
It's how they act that makes them grow.

Plants have different conditions to survive,  
And so do children to allow them to thrive.  
Let's hope that change is increasingly near,  
So to damaging goals we don't have to adhere.



MEL HAAGMAN – CO-CREATOR

Available on Amazon and available to purchase from Mel directly right now! Head over to FB to find out how:  
<https://www.facebook.com/Girlontheedge90/>

Lost in Mind; Found at Heart really did write itself. Every time I feel a strong emotion, whether it be a negative or a positive one, I find nothing more therapeutic and satisfying than writing a poem about it and of course they have always got to rhyme!

Poetry for me is an innate coping mechanism to deal with whatever life throws at me. I do my best to try and write honestly and always aim to end with an uplifting line. This book reflects that no matter how hard things get, when we are truthful and transparent with our emotions, we can make meaningful connections with others who will in turn help us to get through. As well as learning how to get back up when we fall and realising that this is how we learn, develop, and grow.

It has never been more important to speak out about mental health and the similar struggles that we are facing. I hope that these poems can help others to know that they aren't alone with their feelings. This book is divided into subsections to quickly help you find the perfect poem to get you through the day. Whether you need advice, a little injection of humour, a poem about feelings, down-days, or even friendship! I hope that you can laugh, cry, smile, relate to and most importantly enjoy this book.





YOUNG  
*poet*  
FEATURE

# Blue Bush (they/them)

United States - AGE 15

I am a fifteen-year-old high school student in Keene NH, and an activist in my community. I am currently trying to help bring light to LGBTQ+ youth issues within my school. I have also been writing and practicing visual arts for quite some time. I do truly hope I am able to show the world how I feel. For in my world, I only have the sour taste on my tongue, but with eyes that are sugary. I hope that my works find you in some comfort in this beautiful raging world we live in.

## BLUE BUSH (THEY/THEM) – YOUNG AUTHOR FEATURE

### CON NHỚ MẸ KHÔNG

As the sky melts over the horizon  
I search for you  
The one more missed than remembered  
I can't make you up  
In any physical sense  
See, I've tried  
Not only with you

This unfounded heartbreak  
I dally with daily  
The drug of connection  
Seen as a crush  
Ah yes

If it isn't the constant misunderstanding of the fluttering adolescent mind

It's interesting  
Most see it as some burden,  
A joke  
I feel you see it as I  
A soft butterfly floating on wings aimlessly;  
A journey for meaning that looks like a dead end

I search for you,  
As little black needles crawl up my legs and back  
I look for you,  
Through the words you've passed on to me  
Pages folded on something that interested you  
Possibly years ago  
I picture you,

That is to say the being without having form  
Folding pages and taking notes,  
Impressed by those before you  
'New and selected poems'

Nearly written and published fourteen years before I was born Yet, here I sit  
As the sky folds gently into itself  
Trying to create understanding  
For the kind soul, that will once be left.

## BLUE BUSH (THEY/THEM) – YOUNG AUTHOR FEATURE

---

### EMPTY COMPANY

Loneliness- only makes the cold feel colder  
I'd tell you I'm cold  
In hopes you'd give me your sweatshirt

Please- walk with me  
down Wyman, and past the Frog Belly Farm Past  
the covered jeep-crystaled with morning frost

Keep walking

past the plot of land for sale,  
down to the field  
Let's talk about nothing  
as the sun courses  
the valley over the dark pines  
Just sit here,  
with me

Tell me about your weekend  
I want to get to know you better  
To make this morning  
a little less cold



ADORATION

# FEBRUARY: ADORATION

BY MULTIPLE AUTHORS

## WALKING IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

Alwyn Gornall  
United Kingdom

<https://www.facebook.com/alwyn.gornall/>  
<https://twitter.com/alwyngornall>

Walk through the entrance  
and wherever you go you  
will walk in his footsteps.

Look at a plant, shrub, or tree  
and he will have planted it,  
staked it, pruned it, and nurtured it.

Talk to a garden volunteer and  
he will have recruited them,  
encouraged them and supported them.

Admire the garden's features  
and he will have created a project  
for them and raised money for them.

In this place you will find peace,  
relaxation and refreshment. Walk  
in his footsteps and enjoy his legacy.

## ENDLESS IMAGINATION

James Croal Jackson  
Pennsylvania, United States

<https://jamescroaljackson.com/>

The bowtie light switch has a mustache.  
What does that say about me? I've spent  
too much time seeing whatever I want  
in office objects. Tape gun forklift.  
Soap giraffe. All I want is to love  
what I have however diminutive  
the love, however diminutive  
the day stretches out in consuming  
all other days. My endless  
imagination boards me  
on its paper airplane,  
the rock slungshot the first  
time I read a book and never  
arrived at my destination.





## MOZART AND THE RAVENS

Bonnie Demerjian  
Alaska, United States

My radio played *Ave Verum Corpus* as I  
hiked. Then, darting through the trees, two  
ravens in pursuit, their true, their massive  
bodies driven by those stern and feathered  
blades. All bodies – the birds, the forest,  
mine – fused. It was over in a flash, of  
course, that charged vision – cosmos above  
my head, under my feet – electrifying the  
forest, and gone, a foretaste, say the  
yearning lyrics, of the coming banquet. But  
this was feast enough.

## THE FIRST KISS

Shampa Saha  
India

the trembling warmth  
that shivered my heart from beneath  
the lips like rose petals  
that touched my untouched lips  
the sign that was kept on my eyes  
indelible immortal eternal forever  
that was in favour of all the lovers  
who bade their partner goodbye  
and never came to touch  
and loiter the whole world to search  
for him or her  
my first kiss that was the last one  
i lost everything and you everly won.

## Woman In Red With Head

*(A poem about the painting The Feast Of Herod by Rubens)*

Adele Evershed  
Connecticut, United States  
<https://www.thelithag.com/>

She danced and was adored

tiny touches make all the difference white highlights horror while yellow draws the eye down  
and under the table a shadowy afterthought drawn by the blood  
a little finger cocked as she pierces the tongue a subtle sort of violence seen in the burning  
reflections of lobsters and bread  
and little volcanoes erupt in shame or anger or just curiosity and always in the margins on the  
edge of the canvas a black servant carrying a brimming bowl

there is a strange fascination—a test of sorts—in an unreliable man

so you look

but you must choose to see



## GROWING OLD

Judge Santiago Burdon

Costa Rica

I'm sitting here thinking about my folks  
It feels like years since I've been home  
I've got a feeling like I'm homesick  
But it's something more  
My thoughts are running wild  
In this warm desert air  
Imagining that I'm there  
I hear those old dogs barking  
As I walk up the road  
It's sad because I never seem to find the time  
To even write them a couple of lines  
It's always phone calls home  
For the Holidays  
When I was young, they found time for me  
They worked so hard to raise a family  
Now all the kids have grown  
And they've grown old  
Nothing more to show except for growing old

Somehow it doesn't seem right  
My parents raised me then almost overnight  
I heard the wind call my name  
I was gone  
Now I wonder what they get in return  
For all the years of love and concern  
I guess the person I've become is their only reward  
Whenever I was down on my luck  
My ole man he'd slip me a couple of bucks  
And never made me feel like any less of a man  
Now I've found it's not money or gifts they give  
I've been a taker all these years I've lived  
I never realized the true worth of their lives  
The gift they give comes from their souls deep inside  
That's something you can't buy

I've put so many miles between me and them  
It's gotten so easy to pretend  
There's no debt owed  
I've got a life of my own  
After all these years I hope it's not too late  
To let them know I'm proud of my name  
And a chance to thank them  
For everything they've done  
Now I'm haunted by memories  
Of the way things used to be  
I can hear them both calling me home  
Please take me back to my younger days  
I was cheated by yesterday  
I was never told  
I'd have to watch them grow old  
I didn't know they'd get so old  
When did they grow so old  
Growing old

I'm sitting here thinking about my folks



# DOXOLOGY TO MY MOTHER'S MANNERS

Ann Chinnis

United States

<http://www.matrixexecutivecoaching.com/>

My Mother's manners are an apology for her Ozark roots; thank you notes nibbed  
on monogrammed cards, swift and gift specific, serious as a Vanderbilt gilding

her audience, but home-spun too, penning barefoot as she yarns you about her  
one room school, windows rattling from the train to St Louie, the kids waving

like crazy to a hazy face, counting boxcars. Her manners are a ruse. She never says  
stupid unless delivered as a catechism; *Stupid is as stupid does*, each time

you back into the same mailbox. My mother's manners are as steadfast as her  
Aqua-Net hair, more resolute than her starched sheets. Even when you're

grown, move from home, she will lay your coat on her bed with the guests', after  
sherry send you off with the rest saying, *Don't be a stranger*. They are a lasso

of truth; how she hands you punch in a crystal cup, lulls you into spilling  
your guts. *What do you think of your father's new wife?* My Mother's manners

are a bribe; a German Chocolate cake baked from scratch, coconut and fingertip  
grated into icing, delivered in my Pinto to Lenten Luncheons when she

campaigns for Senior Warden. Her manners are a Trojan horse sporting  
a periwinkle beret down K Street to Vestry meeting, me in red Keds,

us scheming to upend the church's creeds on ordaining women  
priests. They are a sucker punch in black leather gloves from October

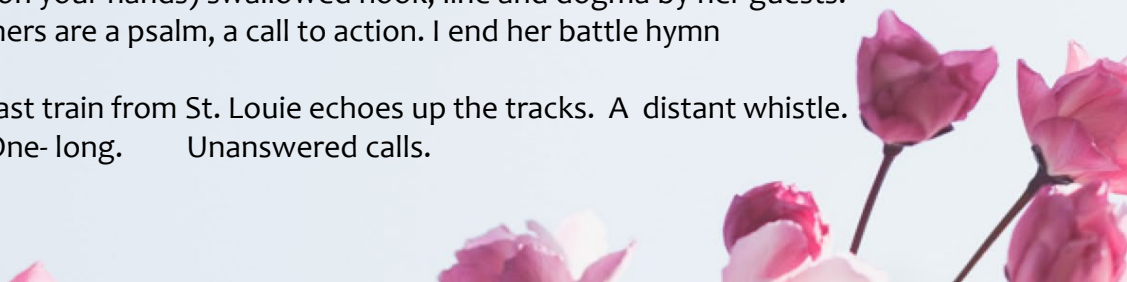
through March, not one day later, pinching my arm when I half-kneel in church. Before  
she takes the takes the dais she puts herself down *Good-Old-Wishy-Washy-Mom*

and you think she's eating from the palm of everyone's hand. She's a battering ram, clears  
her throat, raps her gavel: *the Distinguished Deputy from Delaware*

*is Out of Order. Please sit down*. Her manners are trotlines set for the vote with silver  
butter press on the left, salt cellar, right: her bait, pounds of shrimp Thermador (lemon

removes the stench on your hands) swallowed hook, line and dogma by her guests.  
My mother's manners are a psalm, a call to action. I end her battle hymn

in benediction. The last train from St. Louie echoes up the tracks. A distant whistle.  
Three-short. One- long. Unanswered calls.



## THE WORLD LOOKS SMALL FROM HERE

Helen Cox

United Kingdom

<https://twitter.com/Helenography>

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

<https://www.instagram.com/helenography/?hl=en>

<https://helencoxbooks.com/authors/>

Let them whisper  
that you're too old for me  
and that I'm just a supple mid-life crisis.  
They don't know how long you've thirsted  
to taste the ocean between my thighs  
or how unapologetically we fill each other's negative space.  
They don't know that I fetishize your hands:  
two firm miracles, the hands of Eros sculpting me  
into an intrepid comet, hurtling  
through your most obscene darkness. They don't know  
how tenderly you reached inside my chest  
when we first met, pulling out a mottled blue  
song thrush egg. Or how many eons you waited for my heart  
to peck  
    peck  
        peck its way out, hatching  
the indecently virtuous woman who featured in all the centrefolds  
you hid from your wife. They don't know you have the stamina to fly me to Jupiter  
but instead taught me to spread my own wings so I could soar on my terms.  
So darling, let them whisper. I promise we'll never hear them  
from this high up.



# I LOOK AT YOU AND I LOVE DREAMY EYES

Maid Čorbić

Bosnia and Herzegovina

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

The river of love for me is an inexhaustible paradise  
you are the source of my life and sincere happiness  
I can't be the same man without you  
because every day I dream that we are still together  
although perhaps worship is not a one-way street  
because I believe I may have become a sinful man  
because of what I said to you a long time ago

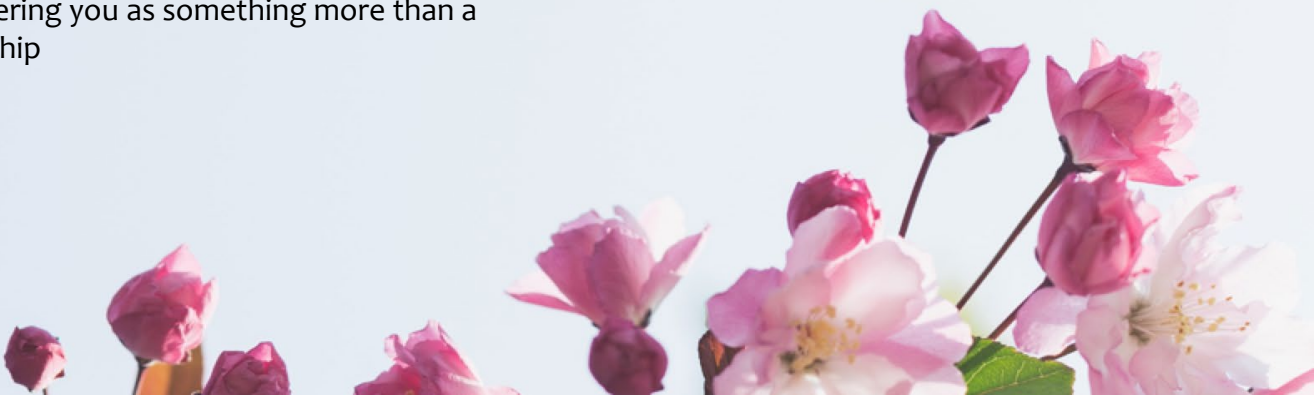
and I know that maybe time is not on my side  
but I believe that behind every impartial trouble  
he must find a source of continuous happiness  
to realize that we may be compact  
but still inconsistent as in the old days  
where that little attention was sincerely loved and  
appreciated

I really gave my best  
you never wanted to see it with those eyes of love  
which are an impartial walk on slippery ground  
the strength of my soul in the cold winter days  
it made me always push myself  
because who cares how I feel today  
and I just want you to be a happy person

i know i'm not the perfect guy in the world  
but I also believe there is some miracle  
which can save me from all trouble  
which I set for myself in the time of indicators  
and it is understandable that perhaps worshipping  
you is a sin  
but I can't do it any other way  
love makes me be what I am not  
considering you as something more than a  
friendship

and how to get on with my life  
because without you I do not see the meaning  
of my existence  
you are an angel and a devil at the same time  
when I look away; my matter is dying out  
the brain cell no longer exists  
she is dead because of the terrible terror over  
my emotions  
adoration is just synonymous with my  
concealment of the condition  
where the mind wants to play with me so  
skillfully

what a life I deserve after all again  
because love made me do something bad  
while dreaming, I still imagine you in all this  
what a period of my life I would be without  
you if I didn't know  
and I am grateful no matter the sad moments  
that I always have you whenever needed  
for that is the meaning of sincere love  
to have someone for everyone, to love  
carefree  
while I observe worship in all directions!



## I AM IN LOVE WITH YOU

Liz Thompson

Colorado, United States

<https://www.instagram.com/l.t.poet/>

Yet I know my name is not the  
last on your mind when you  
drift into a land unexplored

My eyes are not the ones you  
think of when you are alone,  
my hands you are not  
itching to grasp or longing to touch

Yet I know you would rather  
be lonely than be alone with me  
You would rather hate everything  
than to love the piece of my heart  
I gave you and asked you to watch

Yet I know mine is a brokenness  
you never try to understand  
Your hands are strong enough to hold  
a thousand hurts, but you do not listen  
to the simple cry of my breaking heart  
asking you to hold me close

Yet I know I am not loved

## OUR MEMORIES

Keabetswe Qobolo

at least we made memories  
at least our friendship wasn't dark and dull  
at least we smiled at each other for once,  
and got a chance to hold hands  
we enjoyed each other's company  
it was like we were made for each other from the  
sands

we got a chance to tell each other we're pretty  
got a chance to see each others' eyes  
but now we're cold as ice  
smell each other's scent from miles  
but now all i can smell is sadness and tears  
your voice running through my head

at least we made memories  
we told each other stories  
you opened your chest to me  
because you had trust in me  
but now...  
i don't think it still exists anymore  
you can't even stand in front of me,  
for even a minute

it's more like our love is fading away  
wait no! it is fading away  
but at least we made memories...



# CHASING THE BLUES

Karuna Mistry  
United Kingdom

Blue is the colour  
The colour I am chasing

Blue is the beauty  
The hue of tranquility

Blue is the ocean, into the depths  
Blue is the sky, into the night

Blue is the planet, enriched with life  
Blue is the sea, rivers, rain and sky

But blue is the colour  
Of non-imitation

Natural world seldom maketh  
A true incarnation

Peacock feather and butterfly wing  
Their blues just tricks of reflection

Yes, blue is the colour  
The colour I am searching

History of man steeped  
In pursuit of blue

Azure, its exotic name  
Captured to paint the sky

Blue light enters in short wavelength  
Rayleigh Scattering from solar radiation

True blue lies beyond  
In the expanse of creation

Looking further is blue  
To the Earth and heavens

Blue is the question  
Blue is the answer

Indeed, blue is the clue  
The colour I am searching for is You

*Purport: This poem describes the search for blueness, which is rare in the biological and natural world – a peacock feather and the famous blue butterflies do not actually have blue pigment but instead rely on trickery of the light. This search for blue is ultimately observed in distant areas of creation (namely the sea, sky and stars).*





# THE FLOWER GARDEN

BY EVAN MOGLEY – UNITED STATES

INSTAGRAM: @EVANMOGLEY / TWITTER:  
@EVANINFEBRUARY

I dream of love in quiet places in my head. It's of blooming lilies and fields of lush grasses. The sky, dotted with clouds of white made from impressionist detail and thick brush strokes. Pristine waters crisscross the land as it adjoins the gardens next to us. Sharp summer violins harmonize in the air. Lulling pianos drift in to vacate any doubts inside as birdsong dots the soundscape. Our flowing shirts of blinding yellows and pinks, unbuttoned in the warmth of the air. Sunlight highlights your chest as we dance. The white trim that travels along the border of your shirt invites my wandering eyes. Our lips smell of clementine and cherry. I look at you, with hair swimming in the sky. Strikingly blonde as it moves along the cerulean color behind it. I can feel that twisted knot, strung together in my stomach begin to tighten. I take a step inward and inhale your favorite cologne. Draped across your chest like an accent piece, it reminds me of the day we first met.



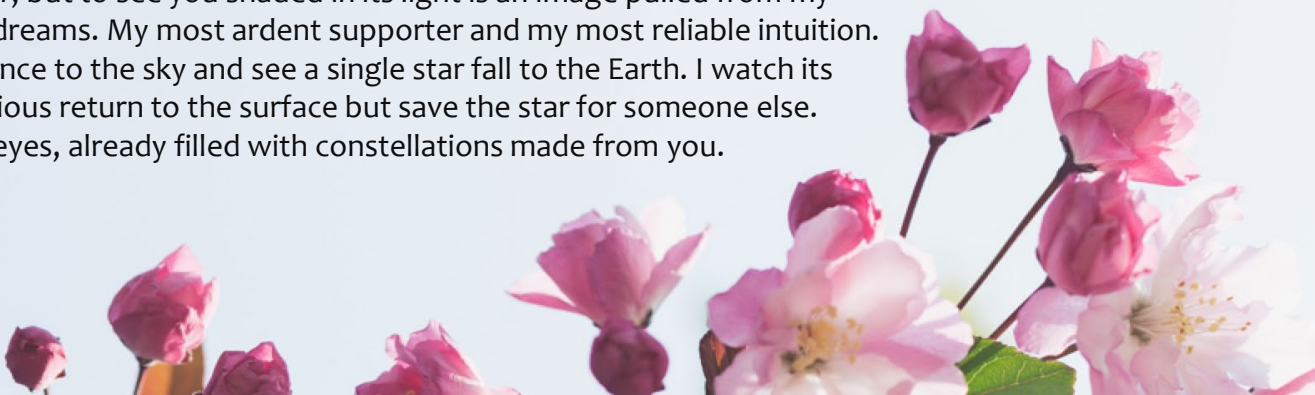
## THE FLOWER GARDEN – EVAN MOGLEY

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You told me back then, it's reserved for special occasions. As we bumped into each other at a gallery, and shared polite conversation. Notes of cedar and smoke, I blended into the future with your quadrature like properties. I saw you for who you would become and within that moment felt you tighten the first knot within me. You take hold of my shaking hand and squeeze it just a bit tighter. Fingers intertwined like cords of a blind. My breathing finds a rhythm to match the sea. I can't help but laugh as you begin to spin me into the sky.

In love with you to the point that I remain nostalgic for moments alone that I could have shared with you. A symphony uninterrupted begins to slow in rhythm. Left with but a single cherry red viola, the strings pluck to the pulse that travels through my body. We've entered our second act. It's the seductive pull that brings us together as we dance among the clouds. This instance of encompassing attraction. A warm, subtle blush spreads across your cheekbones in the daylight. I can't imagine what you must be thinking. It's the most frustrating thing about you. The thing that keeps me up at night and has me replaying our conversations over and over and over. Yet, you always seem to know what to say. You say something to me at that moment, but I can't make it out. Your lips repeat the same motion again, but I hear nothing other than my own heartbeat in my ears. Your smile, profound and encouraging as you help to stabilize me in the air. We dance through shades of blue and then pink, with not a single eye on us as we monopolize the skyline. If there were an audience, they would be awe-struck with our presence. A star-crossed couple, fallen to Earth, born with chemistry for one another. You remind me of no one that I've met before.

I romanticize this version of us and the details of our lives for years. The way you drape your plaid suit coat over the extra chair to your left, reserving it just for me. How you curl the phone cord around your fingers when you call home, your jeans slightly loose against your waist. Your calloused hands as they lay over mine in the morning, still stained with paint in the creases of your fingernails from the day before. I am at ease in the presence of you. It's those lingering thoughts at night that help me drift to sleep. We're nearing the end of our dance together. I take it all in as expressionism frozen in time. The colors, vibrant and dripping with saturation. Every stroke of the brush is deliberate, to bring me to this moment. You stare at me with welcoming eyes of hazel, and I've mastered the secrets of the universe. The sky begins to turn the dial and shifts to a violent shade of violet as we make our descent. Purple has always been my favorite color, but to see you shaded in its light is an image pulled from my daydreams. My most ardent supporter and my most reliable intuition. I glance to the sky and see a single star fall to the Earth. I watch its glorious return to the surface but save the star for someone else. My eyes, already filled with constellations made from you.



## WHEN A WIFE FLIES HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD

Nolo Segundo  
United States

When my wife flew halfway round the world  
to see her father in Asia,  
I thought, well, only for two weeks --  
piece of cake.  
Then something strange happened--  
the house got twice as big,  
and felt empty, oh, so empty,  
as though abandoned by life...

Then time itself slowed, sooo slow  
that days passed leaden, like  
boring speeches that went on and on,  
sooo slow I could hear  
old man Time dragging his feet  
and I wanted to scream....

I hadn't realized-- after 40 years  
she is a part of me, not, repeat,  
not figuratively, not a metaphor,  
but a part of me, if not body,  
then certainly soul....

And when she returned,  
after 15 hours in the belly of a big bird,  
my house shrunk back to its normal size,  
and old man Time began  
marching briskly, and my soul?  
My soul was whole once again....

100

Judy DeCroce

New York, United States

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

a night ago...  
half real-but not

a sip into a life  
felt right to my right

a friendship stitched across  
this dream settling into my life

a woman  
older on the other side of living

she in late autumn me nearer spring  
her habits familiar her face not

there was nourishment of spirit  
a persistence of compassion that

closes down dying  
making me stronger going on.

she a mother, a grandmother,  
treasured mentor for one dream

This morning, I miss her -really miss her.  
I told her I loved her 100.



## WERE IT TO AMUSE YOU

Mike Ball

United States

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

<https://twitter.com/whirred>

If you need or if it were to amuse you  
to hear paeans of your glories, just nod  
Nod to me and I can and shall sing  
praises of your beauty, of your wit,  
of your softest kiss, heaven's breath  
of the orange blossom cent of your skin...

We have both worked with your once  
and inexplicably former, lovers.  
I adore you and would quickly say so.  
Were it not for lives before we met,  
I would pull you in with my tractor beam  
and never release you.

I cannot understand how one or any one  
of your lovers let you get away.  
In beauty and wit, in logic and  
kindness, no other woman compares.  
Did they imagine a better offering?

Square pacing with you around the base  
of Kitson's The Hiker, ever closer  
yet never quite pressed together,  
while the bronze soldier guards us.

You love being loved yet stand back  
I would rush forward yet I dare not  
What a pair we are and how I am left  
singing of you and to you, untouching.

## FROM YOUR WINDOW

Genevieve Ray

England

<https://linktr.ee/GenevieveRayPoet>

Set to an angle,  
a worldwide awning,  
something small,  
you are sharing,  
a world into your window.

Not sure which of us,  
is meant to be Rapunzel.  
Steady the contact cables,  
a way to climb into,  
something else entirely.

Quietly talking,  
in between wall cracks.  
Sighing behind curtain rails.  
Borne of a digital age,  
Something so much older than that.

In the morning haze,  
we might be falling,  
into some sort of adoration.  
Started by a windowpane.  
The reflection of a possible history.



## IN CHURCH

Peter Mladinic

United States

<https://petermladinic.com/>

R.S. Thomas thought television was from the devil. I can see him at a lectern in a clapboard church in Wales, railing at a small congregation not to trifle with automatic washers and machine-driven plows. They're from the devil! Yet R.S. Thomas' poems were questions. In "In Church" he asks Is this where God hides from my seeking? In church.

I look at the tiers of stone steps, wide and light. Behind thick wood doors the vestibule with a baptismal font. I enter the church proper. Right above me, the choir loft, and to my right a fount of holy water. A vast sea of wood pews. Up front, on both sides' confessionals with purple velour curtains. Stained glass depictions of lambs, men in robes, halos.

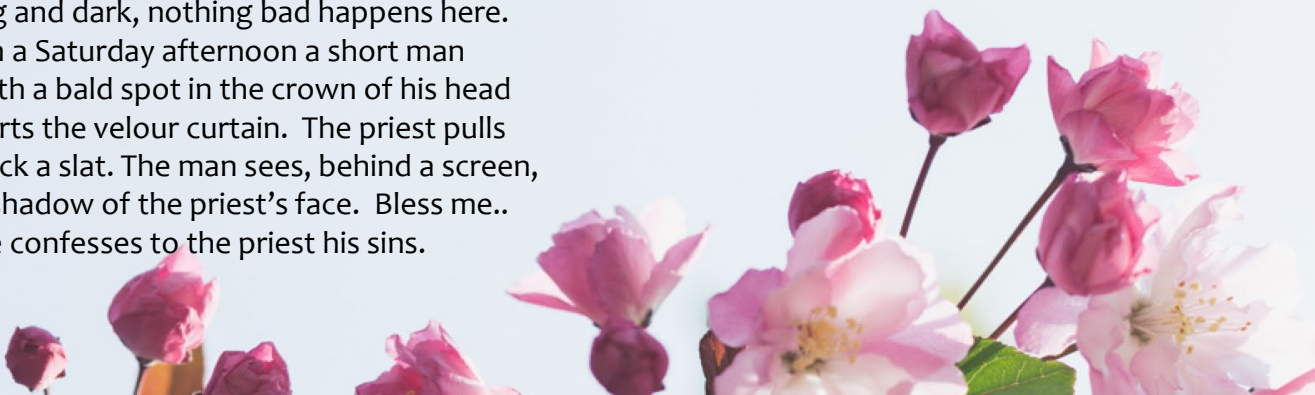
To the left and right shrines of the Blessed Virgin. Rows of candles. An altar rail, more steps, an altar and above it the thick wood crucifix, Christ crowned in thorns, a swaddling cloth covers his nakedness. his palms bloodstained; his eyes look up toward heaven, I suppose. I liked the smell of incense from the chalice the priest used for funerals and mass on holy days.

Isn't everyday holy, every virgin blessed? Two little children kneel in a pew, the church big and dark, nothing bad happens here. On a Saturday afternoon a short man with a bald spot in the crown of his head parts the velour curtain. The priest pulls back a slat. The man sees, behind a screen, a shadow of the priest's face. Bless me.. He confesses to the priest his sins.

An early Wednesday morning two Sisters of Charity, in long black gowns, their faces framed in white squared borders, so not even one strand of hair is showing, kneel in a pew. Sister John, whose face is long and thin, with a Roman nose, puts her hand over Sister Gerard's. Both are young. Sister Gerard, her chin stubbled with acne, kisses Sister John's long smooth hand.

They are the only ones there, hanging from the waists of both nuns, long strings of black beads, with small silver crosses, Christ on the Cross, who, like the Christ above the altar, sees everything. Is this the place where God hides? Is He there behind the confessional's screen. What are your sins? Or around a vestibule corner, or in the halo of the bearded brown robe,

St. Francis with a lamb on his shoulder? His eyes look upward. Is this the place where I hide from God? In church. One of those two children, the boy Clifford, sobbed when Sister Margaret asked him Where is your father? My father's dead. That wasn't in church. Church is where God hides, maybe up in the choir loft. I wish I were like R.S. Thomas, pure poetry.



# LINGERING ON RITA

BY BARBARA STRAUSS

I'm haunted. Every night when I get up to use the bathroom, I float through the blackness of my apartment with my arms out, and before sitting down, with a flourish draw back the shower curtain. My mother's best friend Rita is lurking. She died short of her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, twenty years ago this month. Every year around this time, I feel her following me.

I realize the self-absorption of my fantasy. Were she to hover, wouldn't it be over her own daughter or son?

Maybe she'll stop by her grandchildren's birthday parties, watch them make a mess of the cake, flash her wry smile and depart. With me, though, she lingers, and she's probably pissed off. I must have done something she didn't approve of. I'm having a hard time remembering what it was.

Barbara Strauss' work has appeared in *The Ilanot Review*, *Rock & Sling*, *The Courtship of Winds*, *The Charles Carter Working Anthology* at UNC Chapel Hill (forthcoming), and *bioStories*, among other publications. She lives outside Boston.

## LINGERING ON RITA – BARBARA STRAUSS

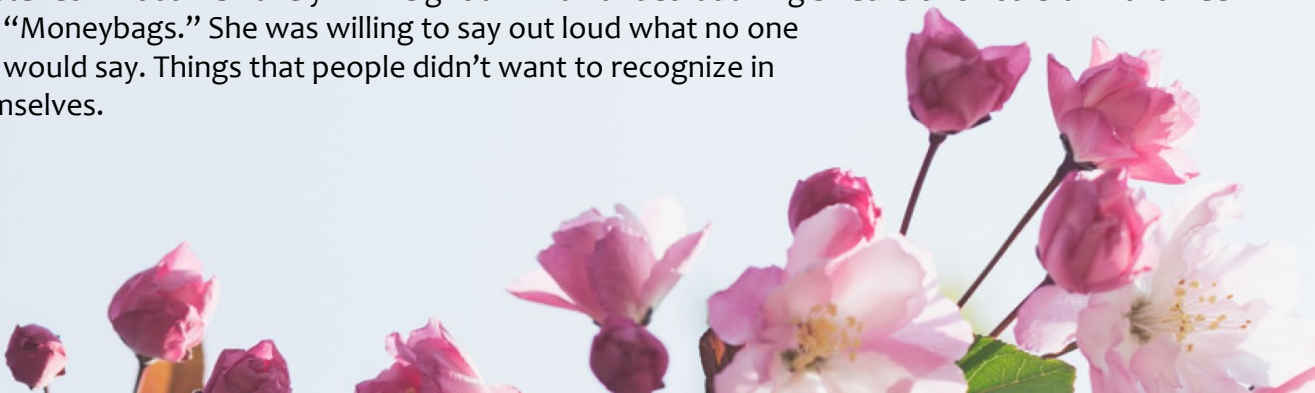
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I mean, it wasn't hard to get on the bad side of any of the moms in their friend group. All of them were sarcastic, bored, slouched in patio chairs as we kids splashed in the town pool. We'd approach for towels and snacks, and they'd sigh. Rita, their leader, the one who picked out their seats every day, close enough to the water that she could get our attention by whistling over two fingers and yelling to us to quit horsing around, seemed particularly stretched to her limit, her eyes rimmed by dark circles. She always wore the same brown bathing suit, and you could see it pooch out at her low belly, you could spot an accidental stretch of pubic hair peeking out on one side. My own mother wore a floral coverup to hide her stockier frame. Her heels were cracked and required bag balm, but she always had her toenails painted pink or red. People thought she was the nice one. She'd listen with a fixed smile to everybody's stories. She was only four foot ten. People thought that was cute and patted her on the head. When she and Rita stood side by side on the steps in the shallow end, cooling off and watching us stand on our hands, Rita called her a shrimp.

They drank cans of Tab. They were too smart to be housewives, Rita especially, my mother said after she died. She had a master's degree in English but left the workforce when her son Kevin, my classmate, was born. "She had nothing to do with herself," my mother says, when I bring up the phone calls.

My sister or I would hand over the receiver, and for the next several hours the line would be tied up. My mother would peel potatoes with the phone pinned between her ear and shoulder. Eventually my father bought her a rubber headrest, which he glued on for better neck support. She'd grow tired of talking after an hour and try to get off, but Rita would plow right through.

"She talked about everything, anything. Mostly she complained." About the principal, Dr. Dimpson, for failing to prevent Kevin from being taunted for his disheveled state, his desk in our third-grade classroom overflowing with papers and open bottles of glue. "Dr. Dimwit," she dubbed him, even to his secretary's face. The PTA, the school administration, the fire department, came to know her as the town nag. She called the police department about a light at a cross street that paused too long on red. "She had a name for everybody," my mother recalls. One of our classmate's mothers, who showed up to parents' night in leopard print and a wide plastic belt and defended the teachers when Rita questioned the curriculum, was christened "Madame Lovely." A neighbor who handed out king-sized Crunch bars on Halloween was "Moneybags." She was willing to say out loud what no one else would say. Things that people didn't want to recognize in themselves.



## LINGERING ON RITA – BARBARA STRAUSS

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“Marty?” our mother shouted, tipping the receiver away from her ear. My sister and I watched her from our counter stools, where we did our homework. “What did you say, Marty? You need me?” She was calling to our father knowing he wasn’t home. To escape the sound of our giggling, she stretched the cord around the corner into the dining room, where, when Rita continued, she picked up a duster and worked at the chandelier.

This is what I mean about all of them having attitudes, not only Rita: when finally, our mother was set free, she would stomp across the kitchen tile in her cracked bare feet and flop onto the living room sofa. When our father did come home, she’d roll her eyes at his kiss. All night she’d snap at everyone.

How come we never asked why she was so ineffectual that she couldn’t stand up for herself, raise her voice over Rita’s or simply hang up? We were afraid of her. She did plenty of laughing – it’s not like those phone calls were devoid of pleasure. She must have gotten something from her friend that the rest of us couldn’t offer. An enticing edginess. Ugly truth.

\*

By high school, Kevin had climbed out of his hole. Despite Rita’s disregard for the upkeep of the home – her habit of screwing the top off a tuna fish can and dumping it on a plate for her family’s dinners – Kevin learned to bathe and dress and slap on cologne, and he made friends, while I sunk lower in the social rankings.

I set my mind on getting good grades. Each year I finished in the top ten percent, and my family was invited to the academic dinner in the function room at the Radisson on Route 17. Kevin never made the cut, and that was when Rita began to say that I “walked on water.”

“That was a dig at me,” my mother assures me now, when I alert her to Rita’s irate midnight appearances. My mother has become even shorter in her old age. She’s short-term forgetful, and it’s harder to stay angry with her. “She’d say something like, ‘Mrs. Lapidus has it out for Kevin, she gave him a C,’ and I’d say that you had no problem with Mrs. Lapidus.”

I remember the competition growing fiercer. The phone wouldn’t ring for days. Or after an abbreviated call my mother would hang up and mutter, “She’s such an asshole,” and then flip through her TV Guide.

But that was generally how their friend group talked. Even the men got in on it. At their annual New Year’s Eve party, where my parents served cold cuts and littered the den with tiaras and plastic horns, they’d all get into pissing contests.



## LINGERING ON RITA – BARBARA STRAUSS

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“Where have you been, Mitch?” my father asked Rita’s husband. “Working late, or found someone who makes something better than tuna?”

“Hardy har.”

“Hey, Rita!” shouted Mark, the bespectacled father of my sister’s best friend. “Slow down on the potato salad, wouldya? Your ass is about as wide as my shed.”

“Yeah?” Rita threw her arm out to stop Mitch from lunging. “You insecure about something? What’s happening in that shed of yours, anyway, Arvid?” I recognized the name from the sitcom *Head of the Class*. Arvid was the ugly nerd.

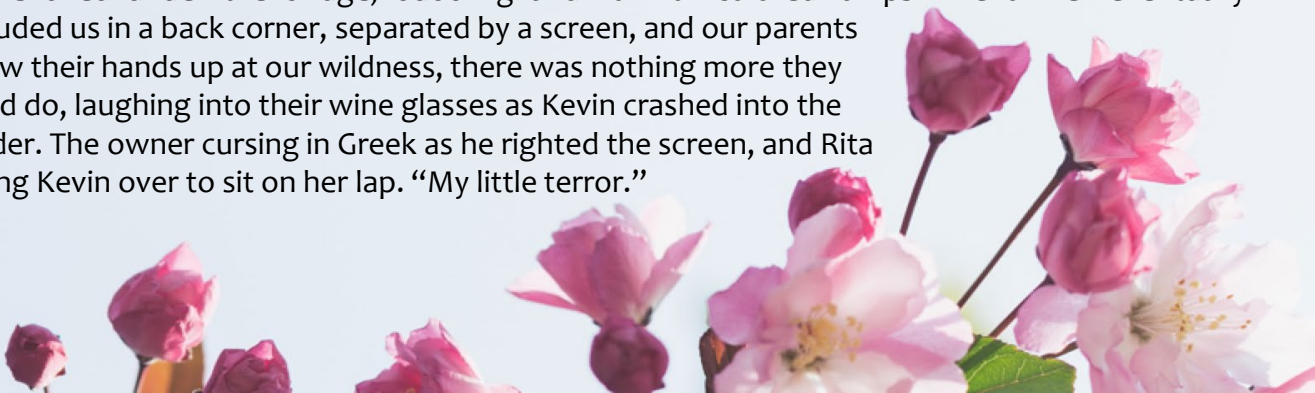
We kids steered clear of the frenzy. By my junior year the number of us had dwindled. Kevin was at a party where I knew they were serving beer. Rita asked me as I took her coat why I wasn’t someplace else.

“I thought I’d help out here.”

“Oh, she walks on water!” she gibed, and my mother didn’t stick up for me.

I took my sister and her friends and Rita’s eighth grade daughter Sam up to my room to play board games. I heard Rita quip, “Look, we’re disturbing the children.” All our parents had grown up in the Bronx, had it rough, moved out to the suburbs for our sakes. We were disappointing them, it seemed, with our softness.

There were good times, too, times when they enjoyed us. We were younger then. Mitch and Rita, Kevin and Sam, and us, at July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks shows, spread on a pair of beach blankets on the crowded lawn of the community college. Rita leaning back on her hands, my mother saying “Woo!” at each starburst. And meals at the Blauvelt Diner, where we ordered off the kids’ menu until we were twelve, the elephant burger, the crocodile chicken fingers, the monkey spaghetti. We took over the place, running wild across the carpeted bridge between the smoking section and the non, stealing quarters from our mothers’ purses for making wishes in the shallow pool that snaked under the bridge, bubbling and lit with colored lamps. The owner eventually secluded us in a back corner, separated by a screen, and our parents threw their hands up at our wildness, there was nothing more they could do, laughing into their wine glasses as Kevin crashed into the divider. The owner cursing in Greek as he righted the screen, and Rita calling Kevin over to sit on her lap. “My little terror.”





## LINGERING ON RITA – BARBARA STRAUSS

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The last time I spoke to Rita was the summer after my freshman year at Brandeis. Kevin had applied there, too – Rita and Mitch were hoping he'd get in, his math SATs were amazing, and they wanted him to settle down, join Hillel – but he wasn't accepted. He ended up at Syracuse. I figured Rita's anxiety about all of this had to have ended by now. I'd heard on Instant Messenger from high school acquaintances also at Syracuse that Kevin was doing great. Pledging and whatever.

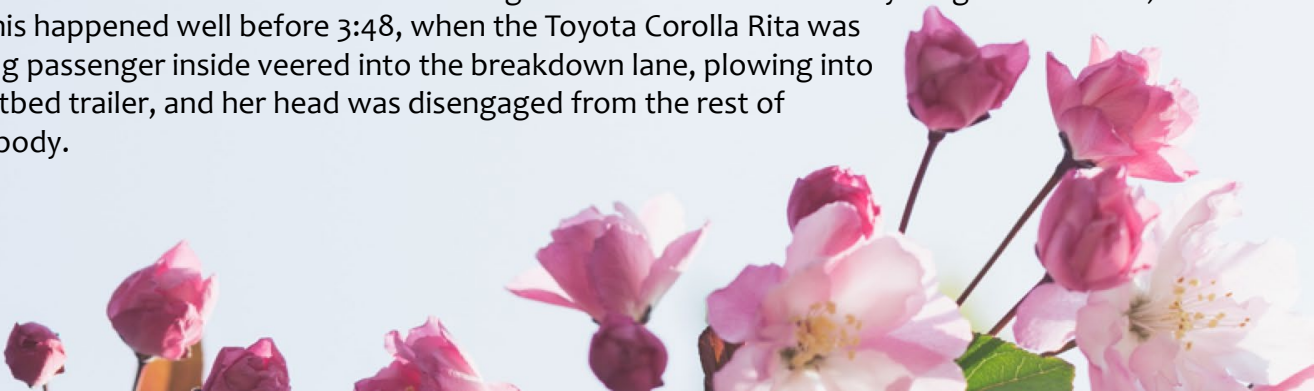
And I'd loosened up a bit in my first year away. Took up intramural fencing on a whim. Went with my roommate to a cappella shows on Saturday nights. I felt confident ringing Rita's bell one morning in July. I'd called in sick for my unpaid internship at the local library. Stood in Rita's entryway and asked her to secretly hand over the directions to my sister's sleepaway camp, where Sam went, too. I was going to borrow my mom's car without telling her, drive two hours up to the Catskills and surprise my sister with a bucket of junk food. "Do not tell my parents," I begged as she drew me a map, leaning on her outdated kitchen counter. "They still don't like me on highways, and especially not for this long a trip." I peered into her baggy eyes, my heart racing to be forming this co-conspiracy.

"Don't get into an accident, or I'll murder you," she said, handing over the scrap of paper. Then she crossed her arms over her small saggy breasts and pursed her lips and shook her head at me. It was a good sign. The way she looked at me? It was like those exasperated but adoring mothers in the paper towel commercials, after their kids have a spill. It was important to me to be liked by Rita, and I'd finally found a way to make it happen. It was important to be esteemed by the one who barreled through, if I couldn't get what I needed from the one who was trodden over.

\*

My sister and I both remember feeling "off" the day of the accident. She was a sophomore in high school, working with a Bunsen burner in chemistry lab, when a vision came to her of our mother with her head on fire.

My premonition was subtler. I was fencing. It was late morning and rays of winter sun shot through the studio's blinds, casting lines across the paste. A tremor ran through me as I pulled on a mask and breathed in the smell of sweat from a previous user. I shrugged off the feeling and waited for the club leader to call "On guard." I like to believe everything is connected, but all of this happened well before 3:48, when the Toyota Corolla Rita was riding passenger inside veered into the breakdown lane, plowing into a flatbed trailer, and her head was disengaged from the rest of her body.



## LINGERING ON RITA – BARBARA STRAUSS

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I didn't get the news until dinnertime. I was up in my sophomore suite, eating from a takeout box and chatting on AIM when a message popped up from a high school classmate I hadn't spoken to since graduation. She was at Syracuse.

“Did you hear about Kevin Katz's mom?” she wrote.

These powerful brains of ours, how they go to work when we're in need of protection. I twirled cold lo mein around my plastic fork, asking casually, “No, what?”

“She was in a car accident.”

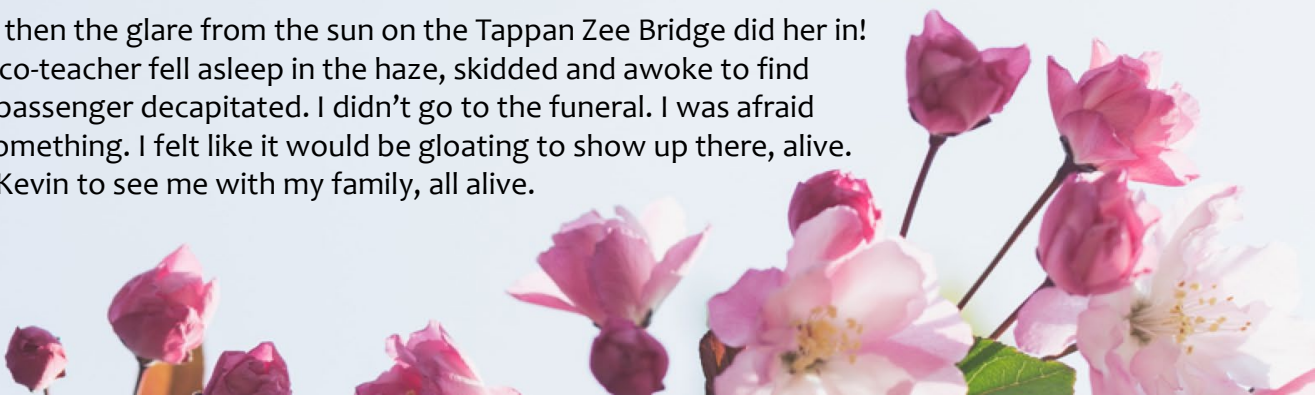
“Okay. Is she alright?” I remembered the fender bender Rita had gotten into when Kevin and I were in junior high. She'd talked my mother into oblivion, pondering whether to sue.

“No. I'm sorry. She passed away.”

My god, these brains! I don't have a single memory of what happened next, my sister has to narrate for me. She says I called, and she put our father on while she listened from another phone. I asked him if it was true. My father said yes, and then I screamed. I screamed like a girl in a horror flick, and I didn't stop until my suitemates returned from the cafeteria and pulled me out to the common room. I remember coming to on the drink-stained carpet. Our mother, I found out later, had been the one to meet Sam as she came off the school bus, and in the company of the state troopers, gave her the news. My sister and I joked cattily behind our mother's back at the time about what a comfort she must have been. I also found later, frozen on my computer screen, several panicked lines from my acquaintance. “Are you okay?????????”

And here's the funny part. After all those years rotting on a lounge chair and wasting the day chatting on the phone, Rita had just that fall gone back to work. She'd gotten a job teaching English in a dangerous middle school in the Bronx, not far from where she'd grown up. I imagine her students appreciated her rough edges. Her husband and my parents and the rest of their friend group told her with sincere concern that she was going to be shot one of these days, she should get out of there. But the suburban schools didn't want her.

And then the glare from the sun on the Tappan Zee Bridge did her in! Her co-teacher fell asleep in the haze, skidded and awoke to find her passenger decapitated. I didn't go to the funeral. I was afraid of something. I felt like it would be gloating to show up there, alive. For Kevin to see me with my family, all alive.



## LINGERING ON RITA – BARBARA STRAUSS

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Also, I didn't want to miss class.

I should have gone. If not to pay my respects like a decent human, then at least for my own peace of mind. It would have been good, I suppose, to see her laid to rest. The casket would have been closed – that's the custom at Jewish funerals, anyway, but I heard her face was so mutilated, Mitch refused to ID her at the morgue.

My not showing up isn't why she haunts me, though. I don't think the dead put much stock in human ceremony, and she must be past all those petty gripes.

Then what is she angry about? What did I do to make her hang around all these years? Why does her anniversary send her back to me?

"I don't get it," my psychologist sister says. "Does she knock things off tables or move things around?"

"No. She sends shivers up my spine. She whispers at me."

"You're a psychopath. What does she whisper?"

I can't make out her words, that's the problem.

Maybe I want her to stay.



## FOR ANNA

John Muro

Connecticut, United States

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

Years removed from when you first entered my life and wanting to somehow make things stop, what I remember are the many times your embrace served as a source of comfort, fevered with mercy and grace and a willingness to always give without restraint, and how, later on, I came to recognize how much of you took hold in my wife – the surprise being it remained unalloyed and endless, and wanting such tender bearing to live on, we gave our only daughter your name.

## MEMORIES OF MY CHILD

Richa Sharma

Singapore

No memory from that far has come this far  
just the one, of touching you first time,  
of feeling that tender, downy scalp,  
your translucent petal skin  
flushed bright at birth  
lit angry, rosy pink

Little do I carry from that forgettable past  
just snippets of your roundish face,  
despite my listless fugue,  
the weak whimpering,  
gurgling sounds,  
asking for me

As your limbs grew firm and held the earth  
I held you inside my frightened heart,  
every day, I wish you knew  
what insane fear it was  
a little funny as well  
looking back

And now you are a somewhat taller than me  
I hold your face and pull it down to me  
As you leave for school mornings  
Teenaged, teathy, smile  
once again etched, baby,  
a forever memory



# GLADYS LOVE PRESLEY TAKES HER BOY TO HEAR BROTHER CLAUDE ELY

Melanie Reitzel  
California, United States

Flies trapped in the tent  
and Gladys Love's got a certain dampness about her face and neck  
waiting for what that bullhorn out the window promised:

7:30 Please  
she liked that: Please  
Come for the Fire and the Holy Ghost  
It's late enough for crickets  
her daddy'd told her long ago that was the sound of stars twinkling.  
She's almost sorry for the truth. But no quiet here, she's heard.

Me and my boy, she turns to say — we drove all the way from—  
Here he come ma'am here he come, Look: Brother Claude, here he come

Whoooowheeeeeee he's a big man.  
She wonders if she was heard—hopes imagining's not a sin.  
Swatting away the flies, she remembers she was told:  
Twelve, he was twelve when he began.

Standing up there before them all—white suit, hat pushed back.  
Tooth, is that gold? Hard to see. Yes, I caught that glint: I bet real gold  
Reitzel / Gladys / 2

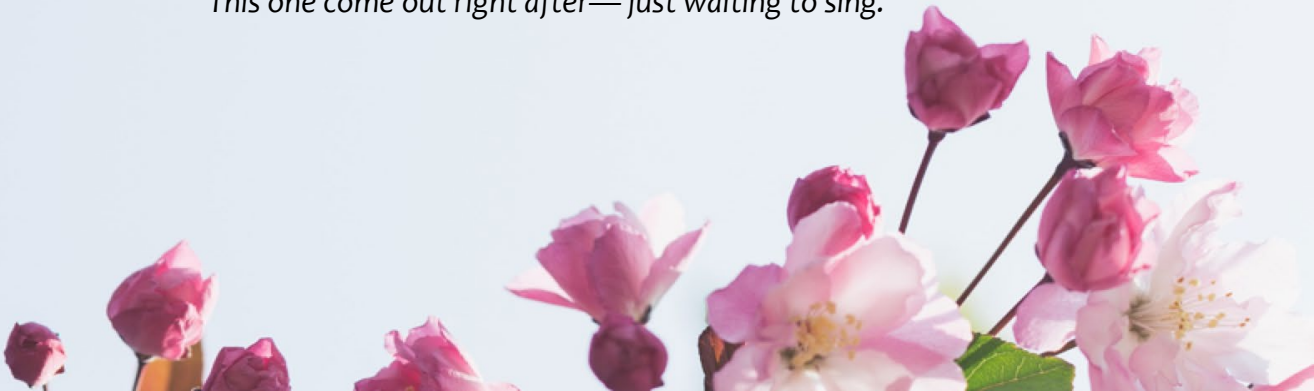
Let's have a good time Brother Claude shouts,  
a preacher like he means it. Praise God we're alive

And here come the moon despite the scrim of canvas between them.  
The moon as if a blessing, and she brings up her fan, listens to the preacher fevering up his pitch on  
Moses wanting greener pastures for his sheep.

Who doesn't want that for loved ones—her hand on her shy boy's shoulder

Now Moses got to look around him  
and kinda got scared

been scared— that first twin boy coming out all still,  
and staying still with nary a breath  
and then this one. She fingers his hair but he's just listening—  
This one come out right after— just waiting to sing.



GLADYS LOVE PRESLEY TAKES HER BOY TO HEAR BROTHER CLAUDE ELY (cont.)

Thank the Lord. Moses he's sees there was a fire  
speak

and he hear the Lord begin to

Nothing to be done for it, Claude's doctor said Tuberculosis in that child.  
He's going to die.

But the family gathered 'round and prayed

*I am not going to die*  
that boy sat up and declared  
*I am not going to die*

Now that boy all grown. Listen to him

Take your shoes off Moses why this is holy ground

You take that sky blue devil he

hated Salvation—

Something the world couldn't give to me and the  
take it

world can't

*I am a man without sin today and the Lord to thank*  
Praise Jesus Children come gather come gather

for it  
once more

*Let's sing*

*Make this old house shake*

*Let's sing*

Strumming the guitar as if he needed it to breathe.  
His voice a holy rasp against the wood of sin

I'm crying holy unto the Lord. Holy, Holy unto the Lord

Clapping, everybody clapping  
Off the beat—we Pentecostals like it off the beat

*Ain't no grave*  
*Ain't no grave can hold my body down*

*In the spaces, between the beat*  
*where no one expects the heat*

They say when he picked up his guitar and hit a key  
it was like the heavens would just open up

And Gladys Love and her boy  
soon forget the earth.



## GIOVANNINA

Antoni Ooto

New York, United States

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

<http://www.ooto.org/blog/>

Oh, how this boy would run.  
The smell of Grandma's kitchen—

her Italian cooking always tracked  
an invitation and a welcome.

I knew which house was mine.

~

One afternoon, mid-week  
rushing in,  
grandpa said she was dead.

*How could that be?  
She was Grandma!  
She was always here.*

For me, at 10, death was unreal,  
where every room still held her sound.

And over time, nothing was the same;  
as her spirit moved on.

*For Giovannina Bellucci DeCroce*

## TENDER SILKEN STRANDS

Sangita Kalarickal

United States

<http://skaypisms.blogspot.com>

Amidst bejeweled brilliance  
A glance may lead to love  
And seen through fairy dust  
a moment may just lead to life

Yet the vines, sunbeams, flowers  
Are mere fragrant, gilded cages  
stretching into eternity built  
by sly, bewitching mages.

As, in love's bosom dwells  
the depth of beauty  
and compassion that I seek.

In blankets of stars  
and not in sheafs of books  
much wisdom I see.

In my heart, I finally find  
the meaning I roamed  
here and thither for.

And with a jolt I  
remember  
all that's in my heart  
is you.



## AND SO...

Marion Price  
United Kingdom

Summer shall marry her children  
To the fine Autumn King  
And adored they shall be  
By the fine blowing winds  
Dressed in magic land colours  
In couplettes of free  
All these jewelery gifts  
That now rain down on me  
So that I too now feel  
So desired to sing  
And rejoice evermore  
Summer ere married Spring

## A VESSEL HEART

Sarfraz Ahmed  
United Kingdom

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

Clustered hearts,  
Bound by time,  
Hold hands,  
Touch the sublime,  
Touch the void,  
Memorable moments,

Blossoms that resonate in full bloom,  
Each tender moment fills the room,  
Like tulips in spring,  
Clustered hearts full of emotion,  
A vessel heart full of devotion.

## RAWNESS OF FLUIDITY

LaVan Robinson  
United States

There is a powerful connection between our existence and the spiritual awakening of the soul. In its rawness of fluidity, love like a river into our countenance flows. The abundance of stimulating and riveting imagery of our validity is a great poetic expression of love in its infancy. With proper care and detail to attention to its success, maturity and fullness of its strength and purpose. Daily, together, we will jointly find ways to express our devotion.







Claudette Martinez  
Canada

#claudettemartinezartist

## TO FEEL HOPE

Claudette Martinez

Canada

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

<https://www.instagram.com/claudette.martinez.92/?hl=en>

#claudettemartinezartist

What must it feel like,  
comforted by a never-ending slumber,  
safe.

What thoughts float though your head,  
imagination without a leash,  
no limit to wander and explore.

Free hopes,  
images of love,  
dreams of a better reality,  
seeking, praying to remain endlessly asleep.

Your unconscious self,  
a self that allows you to run, jump,  
skip along the infinite paths of your brain.

Tip toeing across joy,  
dancing along happy,  
twirling, twirling on love,  
careful not to disturb what lies closely beneath.

Delicately exploring each curve, each twist, turn and bend,  
of your glossy wet glorious globe.

What must it feel like,  
to never come back,  
stay, please stay,  
let me run,  
skip, tippy toe, dance and twirl.  
Rest in peace,  
forever asleep.



# THE GREATEST TEACHER IN THE WORLD!

BY PHYLISS MERION SHANKEN

Phyliss Merion Shanken is a retired psychologist, playwright, and creative writing teacher, who has been published in psychological journals, literary publications, and newspaper and magazine columns. In addition to her literary and poetry awards, she is author of *SILHOUETTES OF WOMAN*, *PEANUT BUTTER SANDWICH: The Joys and Frustrations of Parenting*, as well as a number of stage and screenplays. She has two novels, *EYE OF IRENE*, and *THE HEART OF BOYNTON BEACH CLUB*. *CONVERSATIONS WITH PERFECT STRANGERS: Memoirs of a Psychologist* is the culmination of her life's work.

Phyliss Merion Shanken has been published in *Dreamers Creative Writing*; *The Write Launch*, *Abstract Contemporary Expressions*, *Non-Conformist*, *Beyond Words*, *Scarlett Leaf*, *Sad Girls Club*, *Catchwater*, *Fahmidan*, *Pure Slush*, *Quillkeepers*, *Open Door*, *The Poet*, *Fragmented Voices*, *Sweetie Cat Press*, among others. "Eternal Elixir" was nominated for Best of the Net, 2021. Produced play include: *The Comeback Kid* (SPQR Stage Company), *Tiberius* (AC Safari Theater), *Wise Old Owls: A Trilogy*, (Equity Library Theater of NY), *Mister Peanut Rides Again!* (South Jersey Players, Inc), and *Love N' Zoom*, (TTS World Wide Virtual Fringe Festival). [FB@phylyss.shanken](https://www.facebook.com/phylyss.shanken)



## THE GREATEST TEACHER IN THE WORLD! – PHYLISS MERION SHANKEN

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No one would have predicted that my father, despite his minimal education, turned out to be the world's best teacher. When he was a kid, his father enrolled him in vocational school because he was “good with his hands,” which meant, not so good with his brain. He was dubbed a “slow learner.” Yes, he took longer than most to respond, but this was because his internal wheels were constantly turning as he dissected every conveyor-belt thought that entered his mind.

Eventually Dad became a master bridge teacher, and for years, he served as mayor of a southern town. Because he understood and had been ridiculed for his own methodical learning style, he afforded his students and constituents the leeway required to absorb information without characterizing them as “slow”. He encouraged us kids to be patient learners, and often recited his favorite fable, *The Tortoise and The Hare...*

Dad taught us how to swim, ride a bike, swing a bat, use power tools, create a filing system, and more. Most treasured, though, was the unique way he taught us how to drive a car.

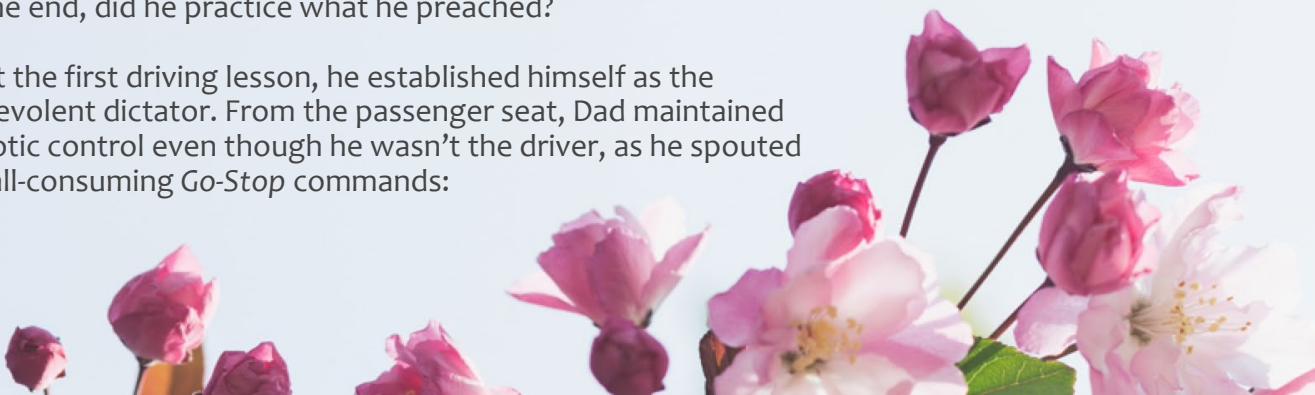
Throughout my life, even though I adored my father, I sometimes clashed with him over his controlling style of imparting life plans for me. We shared some all-nighters where we debated over my academic pursuits, my boyfriends, my breaking of curfews and the like. He and I matched wits, since I was just as stubborn as he. Yet, I also possessed the same learning style as he did, the difference being, he rewarded me for my thorough problem-solving capacity. When I asked questions of my teachers and others, they might often have considered me “slow”: *Why doesn't she understand?*

But , in reality, I delved below the surface and took nothing for granted, eventually getting to the bottom of things, going way deeper than most people could manage, just like my newly formed hero: my dad. Whereas he had been ridiculed for his cognitive processing, my loving father had rewarded me for possessing these “gifts”. Because of his high regard, in my life, I wasn't embarrassed or in conflict over my abilities, consequently, others eventually valued my contributions, and I succeeded in most every endeavor I pursued.

When it came to my driving lessons, we could have had similar conflicts, but I was the unquestioning student. I appreciated his wish for me to remain safe. After those times, having developed mutual respect, I stopped arguing with my father. It was only later, when the roles were reversed that I needed to readjust my insight about his unwavering viewpoints.

In the end, did he practice what he preached?

... At the first driving lesson, he established himself as the benevolent dictator. From the passenger seat, Dad maintained robotic control even though he wasn't the driver, as he spouted his all-consuming Go-Stop commands:



## THE GREATEST TEACHER IN THE WORLD! – PHYLISS MERION SHANKEN

---

Go! Foot on the gas.

Stop! Foot on the brake.

According to his plan, we would develop instinctive muscle memory, assuring that in the real world, we wouldn't panic and "go" when we should "stop" or "stop" when we should "go".

At a turtle's pace, he finally included more instructions: *Always keep your foot hovered over the brake. When the taillights in front of you turn red or brighten, immediately press your foot lightly on the brake; then gradually push down harder as you get closer. Gently depress the gas and avoid jerking the car. After you achieve a safe speed, return your foot above the brake....*

Soon after Dad's eighty-eighth birthday, he moved back from Florida to my neighborhood. With our roles reversed, I was to teach him easy shortcuts and landmarks to help him find his way.

The first day, in bumper-to-bumper traffic, I sat in his familiar spot — the passenger seat. Repetitively, he pressed his foot on the gas and accelerated toward the car in front of us, which had already shown bright red taillights.

I held my breath each time he lurched the car forward, always within inches of the one in front. I had no guarantee he would hit the brake in time.

I vacillated but finally blurted out, "Dad, I'm just wondering: Why do you drive so close to the cars in front of you, and why do you keep your foot on the gas pedal and not over the brake?"

With certainty, reminiscent of our earlier days, he declared, "I keep moving so I can save money on gas."

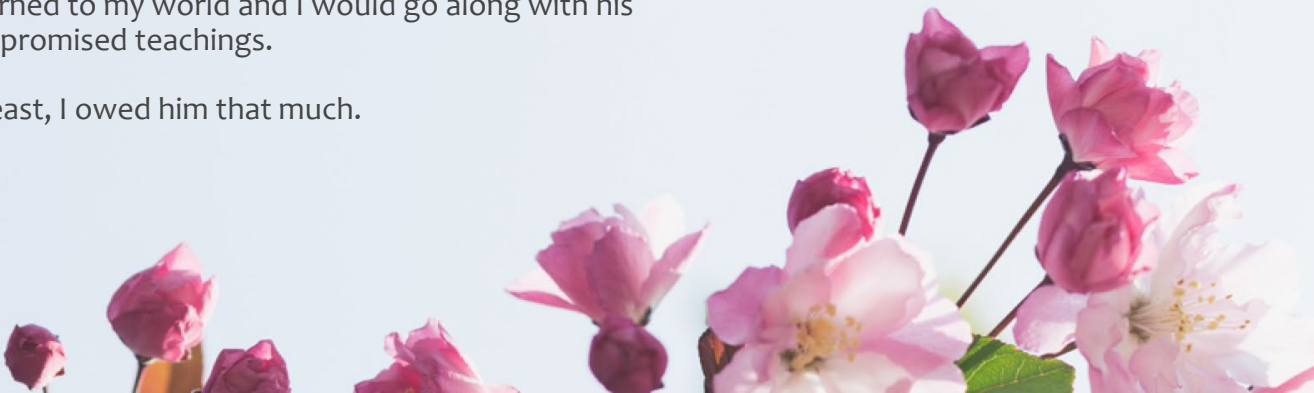
"So, you bend the rules to save money?"

"Of course."

"Huh?"

I didn't pressure him further. The tables had turned. Since he wouldn't be with me much longer, I figured I would be the one to let go of my obstinance — this time. My dad, my hero, had returned to my world and I would go along with his compromised teachings.

At least, I owed him that much.



## MY LOVE FOR YOU IS...

Pratibha Savani  
United Kingdom

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

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

### My love for you is....

Endless  
Without limits  
Boundless  
Without thoughts  
Eternal

### My love for you is....

Real  
So pure  
Selfless  
So powerful  
It's extraordinary

### My love for you is....

Effortless  
Everlasting  
So generous  
It's spectacular  
Flawless

### My love for you....

Brings laughter  
Unconditionally  
Joy  
Infinitely  
So natural  
Lovingly  
So complete  
It's perfect  
My beautiful baby.....

## NO CUPID'S ARROW

Julie A. Dickson  
New Hampshire, United States

So many heart and flowers,  
enough candy to make a person sick;  
reading sappy cards by the hour  
until I decided to write my own quip.

How might I say that I love you,  
in a tasteful, yet loving way,  
sans *Pepto-Bismol* pink in view  
that tends to cover the day?

No cupid's arrow shot in the air,  
a dozen roses? I could go broke!  
Recite mushy verses until I despair,  
another chocolate, I might choke!

I'm left with a simple I love you;  
in my eyes you'll always my mine.  
The love we share always feels so new  
and you're my favorite Valentine.



**MAK,  
Peuo Tuy  
United States**

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

From sunrise to sunset  
you breast fed me in the rice field

Under our bamboo-stilt home,  
laying nested in your arms in our handmade hammock  
you lulled me to sleep singing songs of beauty

You sat under our tamarind tree in your lotus sarong  
on your hands and knees  
making porridge soup

## **ADORATION WITHOUT THE BULL**

**Ken Gosse  
United States**

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

*Definition: Aleatory refers to an agreement where profit or loss depend upon uncertain events, such as with an insurance contract. It is also used to describe luck, particularly bad luck.*

A famous bullfighter of yore  
took a chance on a local amor,  
but Carmen, though charmin',  
was always alarmin'  
her aleatoryadore.



## LET ME TELL YOU A STORY ABOUT HOW I ADORE YOU

(after the Rolling Stones, *Standing in the Shadows*)

to Elaine, a double fibonacci\*

Neal Whitman

United States

Who  
is  
better  
to share joys  
and even sorrows?  
We live in both light and shadows.

She  
fills  
the room.  
Soothing sounds  
from her silver flute  
bring peace and make our space sacred.

*\* A fibonacci poem is based on the numerical sequence computed by Italian mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci in which the first two numbers are 0 and 1. Each subsequent number is the sum of the previous two. This form uses those numbers for syllable count per line; ergo, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, ad infinitum. Think of the 0 as the pause before starting to read the poem.*

## A GUERDON IN WORDS

Lakshman Bulusu

United States

[https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/127227.Bulusu\\_Lakshman](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/127227.Bulusu_Lakshman)

If love were words, I would ink them here  
A guerdon in words for your love, my dear  
Faithful and candid in its content manifold  
As classic as that for ages has been told

Love, the four letters glow on the white  
Encompass your love in all its height  
Sometimes golden, sometime a bolder hue  
Unfold the color of the beauty that is you

As I look at them blinking each time  
It is as if your winks in their prime  
Beckoning me to their looks, to behold--  
Those eyes of yours and reach your fold

Your song, a melody it rings in my heart  
sublime

As timeless and full as an ageless rhyme  
The song immortal, your love the same  
I shall woo thee to ever-enduring fame





A close-up photograph of several pink roses. The petals are covered in numerous clear water droplets, which catch the light and create a sparkling effect. The background is a soft, out-of-focus pink, matching the color of the roses. The overall mood is fresh and delicate.

OUR  
*February*  
FEATURED  
*authors*

# MALAK KALMONI CHEHAB

After having witnessed two civil wars in developing countries, Malak Kalmoni moved to Canada to provide safety and prosperity for her family. For an introvert, her experience as a university and college teacher opened her eyes to the inequality that was considered 'taboo' in the Middle East, at the time, where different religious and cultural affiliations were hidden in order to escape any biased or racial discrimination. She is also a veteran's wife, which introduced her to varied backgrounds of soldiers, officers, politicians, and foreign dignitaries.

She has always felt the need to stand up for the underdog, and in her own way she has through her poetry....

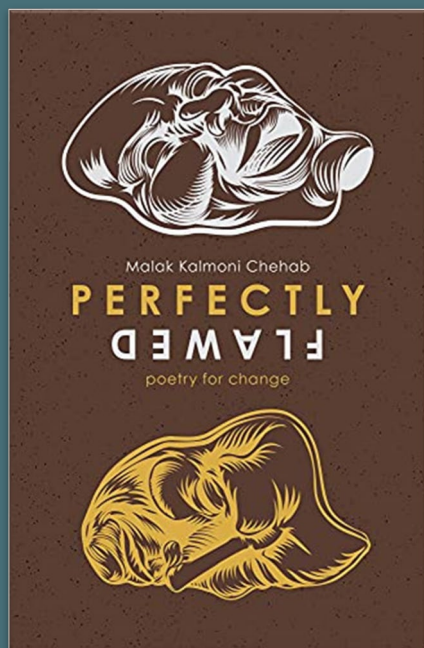


<https://malakkcwriting.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/malak.k.c.chehab>

<https://twitter.com/KalmoniMalak>





[https://www.amazon.com/Perfectly-Flawed-poetry-Malak-Kalmoni-ebook/dp/B092YT6QX6/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?crid=2TQEDHPZII81I&keywords=malak+kalmoni+chehab&qid=1641949259&srefix=malak+kalmoni+chehab%2Caps%2C316&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.com/Perfectly-Flawed-poetry-Malak-Kalmoni-ebook/dp/B092YT6QX6/ref=sr_1_2?crid=2TQEDHPZII81I&keywords=malak+kalmoni+chehab&qid=1641949259&srefix=malak+kalmoni+chehab%2Caps%2C316&sr=8-2)

### BLIND MEMORY

I swing around  
My gazes abound  
And stall. Frozen on the ground  
By the footsteps that are never found.

Each step was an adventure, gone  
And never seen, but remembered as one  
Whose stature is alone In memory and stone.  
Adoration of all that's long gone is futile,

For your recall is colored by a grapevine  
Of emotions that are supple  
And unmanageable.

Let it go!  
Move on, throw  
Caution to the wind, and blow  
Away boundaries that limit your flow!



### CUPID'S VALENTINE

The month of love and adoration  
Is the shortest of all!  
Not all happiness can be packed into  
its summation,  
Short, though it is, its effects are a  
ball.

In its center, couples celebrate their  
love,  
As if, you only praise your unity then  
...  
And every other day falls short of its  
possessive  
Hold on your cheery life, filled only  
with a pen.

The one you use to organize your life,  
Strategize your next goal, perfect  
compassion  
That leads to compromise and less  
strife,  
While dissent and enmity lead to  
envy's fashion.

Duty and love are two sides of a coin,  
Where duty can choke the life out of  
veneration  
As it stomps out the cheer from your  
conjoin.

### LONGING

The coddiwomple journey of life  
Varies in destination and objective.

As a child you wish for speed and growth,  
To be able to do all you can to become both

Fun, outgoing, refreshing, academic, physical  
Even, so you can impress parents and all who's amical.

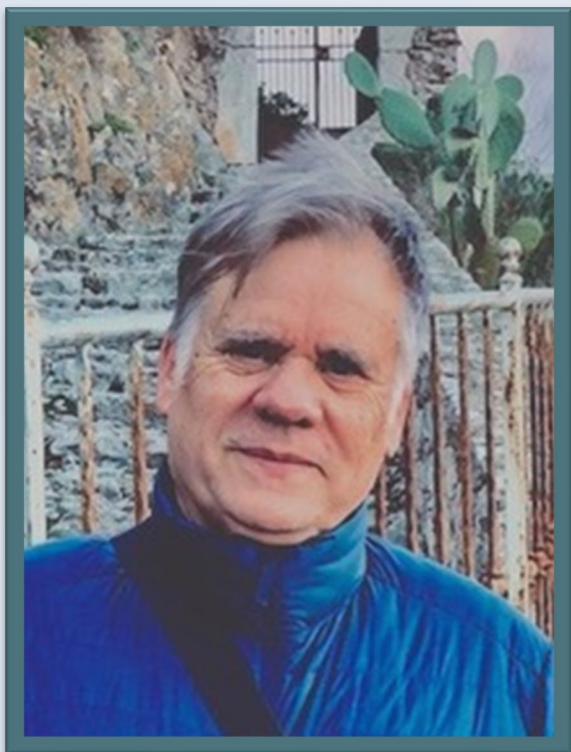
As you grow, your need for acceptances  
Flourishes as your entourage pullulates.

As your self-confidence and awareness are ingrained  
Within you, the need for adoration is decreased.

The depth of the divine comedy of the journey  
Is only as haloed as you stay true to you and what's holy



# MARTIN PEDERSEN



E. Martin Pedersen, originally from San Francisco, has lived for over 40 years in eastern Sicily, where he taught English at the local university. His poetry appeared most recently in *Ginosko*, *Metaworker*, *Triggerfish*, *Unlikely Stories Mark V*, and *Grey Sparrow Review* among others. Martin is an alumnus of the Community of Writers. He has published two collections of haiku, *Bitter Pills* and *Smart Pills*, and a chapbook, *Exile's Choice*, just out from Kelsay Books. A full collection, *Method & Madness*, is forthcoming from Odyssey Press. Martin blogs at:

<https://emartinpedersenwriter.blogspot.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/martin.pedersen.7106>

<https://twitter.com/emartinpedersen>

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



## MARTIN PEDERSEN – AUTHOR FEATURE

### FRIENDLY GREETINGS

Every morning on my solo walk  
I meet a man coming the opposite direction in the same spot  
with a dog pulled in front we smile and nod except today  
this colder breathy morning he isn't here, maybe late  
or he could be ill or dying, perhaps on a trip to visit his  
daughter or son  
for the long weekend I know nothing of  
this missing bearded man with friendly greetings  
I hope after all our many meetings  
he's well  
and real.

If he's a prophet, what's his message from God/Allah?  
If he's a ghost, why bring a dog?  
If he's the Wandering Jew, why not say something pithy?  
He always smiles and walks by briskly.  
if I were called to take his place  
I'd have to grow a long scratchy beard face  
and find a dog -- I don't like dogs  
or maybe the dog comes with the job.  
come here, boy  
come near.



[https://www.amazon.com/Exiles-Choice-Martin-Pedersen/dp/1954353200/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=14FMCDEY8AoNZ&keyword=s=e.+martin+pedersen&qid=1643395359&srefix=e.+martin+pedersen,aps,152&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Exiles-Choice-Martin-Pedersen/dp/1954353200/ref=sr_1_1?crid=14FMCDEY8AoNZ&keyword=s=e.+martin+pedersen&qid=1643395359&srefix=e.+martin+pedersen,aps,152&sr=8-1)



### ICE LAKE

It's a fact, the ice will not hold  
But the only way is across  
A lone hut on the other side  
Where a smoking chimney awaits  
The first step you fall to one knee  
Walking on ice tests balance.

Always thinner in the middle I'm told  
Stress test your faculties on frost  
To choose footfalls ginger-like  
Where the cracks ain't  
Where presumed thickness will carry  
Your weight to get over perchance.

Each move, however, is towards the cold  
Attractive as a panic tossed,  
You scoot down for a better slide  
Till you too become iced bait  
You'll never make it across or free  
And no one else can help you dance.

### WALKING ON ALLIGATORS

Swear I'd seen the other shore  
That must be why I set off  
I'm pretty sure it looked inviting  
Prancing limberly across  
On stepping stones of alligator heads  
I know  
They'd love to snap off a leg below the knee  
And after one goes ...  
As I focus on my steps  
How tired and out of breath  
Only a rapid run will do  
Raise my eyes a sec  
There is no shore showing  
Dante yells to keep going.



### HITCHHIKING

Near Manteca, California  
On highway 99  
I stopped to rest my engine  
Beyond the solid line.

Water all boiled over  
The engine block was cracked  
I stuck out my thumb there  
Wearing my backpack.

Summer in the Great Valley  
110 in the shade  
The cars whizzing by me  
It must have been my face.

I dreamed of being picked up  
By Ms. Andie McDowell  
But nobody stopped at all  
Then the sun went down.

Hitchhikings illegal  
On freeways in this state  
It's also nearly useless  
That's the part I hate.

I tried to sleep in my dead car  
A patrol cop woke me up  
He took me in for booking  
But then he let me off.

I needed to get to Bakersfield  
To see a woman there  
But the season's nearly over  
So I'll wait another year.

I walked on back to Byron  
About twenty-five miles  
A lady stopped so I rode  
The last six blocks in style.

It's dirty near Manteca  
On 99 it's hot  
Hitchhikings an adventure  
Or sometimes, it's not.

### MARCH!

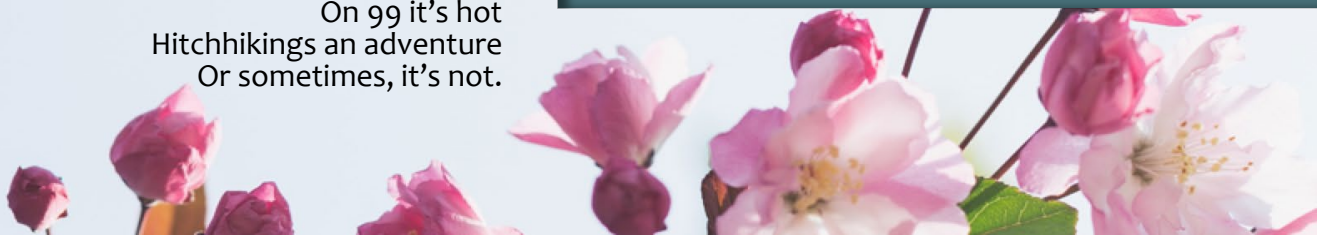
Left right, day or night  
Rain or shine, draft card time

It's important to learn discipline  
lots of middle-aged white men  
would love to teach it to you  
how to follow orders so the machine runs  
the chain (of command) works like on a bike  
driving it home.

I got a stingray with a sparkly blue banana seat  
the same year I started Boy Scouts, 1968  
I'd been looking forward to camping trips  
cook-outs, merit badges, rising through the ranks  
but first we had to learn to march ...

No, I would not do that. I, rebel, at thirteen.

Anyway, that's enough nostalgia, today  
I have to go  
to the courthouse square  
to protest again  
a silent procession  
against the War  
here and over there.





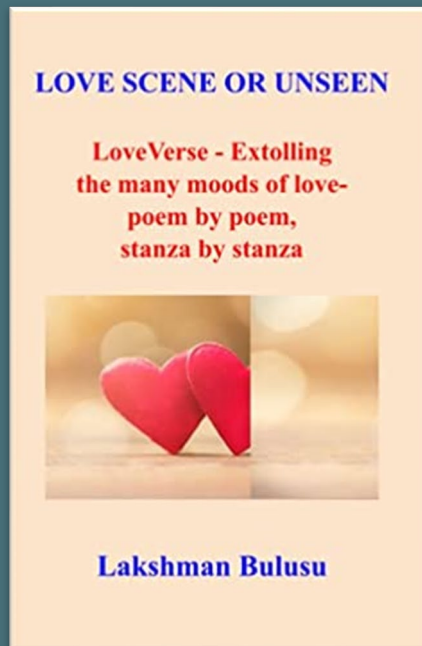
# LAKSHMAN BULUSU

Lakshman Bulusu is a Princeton NJ, USA based poet, author, and educator. He has penned four thousand plus poems, haiku, and small poems to date. He has been writing poetry since the last four decades. He is published in various literary journals and anthologies in the US, UK, Taiwan, and India. He invented the STAR poem genre in 2016 and the MIRACLE STAR poem genre in 2021. He has/been participated/featured in national and international readings in US, UK, Australia, and India. He has authored six collections of poetry. He is the recipient of **Certificate of Appreciation** from Barnes and Noble as a Barnes and Noble Educator and is listed as a poet in *An American Directory of Poets and Fiction Writers*. He has been conferred with the **Best Poet of the Year Award in 2003** for lifetime contribution to poetry by POETS INTERNATIONAL and **Best Haiku Poet in 2015** by POETS INTERNATIONAL.



[https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/127227.Bulusu\\_Lakshman](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/127227.Bulusu_Lakshman)





<https://www.amazon.com/dp/o963427199>

### A MOONLIT NIGHT

The peeping stars steal  
the winning smiles of the moon  
at the earth draped in its gilt,  
like a pen takes control of heavy minds.  
Midnight hours stroll  
in the murmuring silence of the crickets,  
like faint leaves in autumn end  
strewn on shriveled pathways; or atoms of  
unused talent in the bare furrows of mind.  
Fireflies like vagabonds spark  
the chillness of the night, like fond memories  
to the cerise of dreams.  
And the intangible shadows of invested flora,  
in their night sheen, stare like addresses  
on letters.

The clouds--all that remained of the day--  
with their hues camouflaged by silver--  
idle in the yonder skies. And the gentle rays  
pierce their recesses fitting them to  
mellow the whiteness.  
The hills trod by lions and their friends  
in drowsy yawns closing in nature's shelters,  
echo the *tlots* of hurrying feet of those  
settling in afar mud homes.  
Betwixt the hills run streams glazed by  
cooling flakiness of snowy air  
melting the night's silence into a delicate glee,  
like mercy flowing thru stark reality melts  
the latter and its hard core deeds.

This panorama spread out so grand  
evokes a lyrical poem—  
a poem of morrow to celebrate any night.

*Originally published in Local Honey – Midwest, Dec  
18<sup>th</sup>, 2020; and Annual National Poetry Month  
Celebration Anthology,  
Raritan Valley  
Federation of Libraries,  
New Jersey, April 2021*



### LOVE SCENE OR UNSEEN

1

My love for you, akin to that between flower  
and bee  
Each flower it alights on, each day we'll  
together be  
No "Hello's", "Welcome's" or "Thank You's"  
No "I Love You's"

2

It all happening as if preordained to be  
Doused in our love we start to see  
The sun, moon, and stars serenaded around us  
With rays that become beacon-ways

3

With twinkles that dazzle as sparkles  
And an openness like that of marvels  
No language barriers or tangle  
Only contextual sign language

4

Each and every tilt of us breaking the silence  
That hints us of a new angle  
Like the position of stars changing radians  
With the unnoticeable moves of the earth

### THE CERISE OF MY DREAMS

If I can see a crescent of love in your eyes  
that glows into a full moon--  
If our love is so rare  
no need to invite me  
to love you a second time--  
So deep no other word deeper--

So strong it won't break like glass,  
So soft like white light falling--  
If we can delight in our love,  
inviting jealous winks, common and  
extraordinary,  
If our smiles can make the Mona Lisa smile,  
I think this love would be  
the cerise of my dreams

*originally published in Annual National  
Poetry Month Celebration  
Anthology, Raritan Valley Federation of  
Libraries, New Jersey, April 2021*



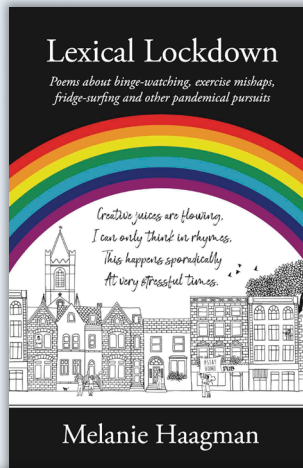
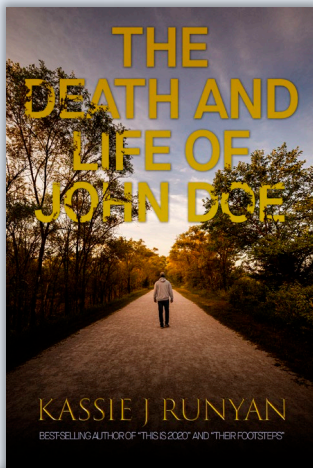


# BOOKS

# FILL YOUR SHELVES 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

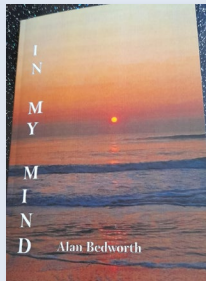
## IN MY MIND

Poetry book from Alan Bedworth

I heard you sobbing,  
when you thought no-one was there.  
I know the pain and sorrow,  
you're going through again.

Hold on to your faith in mankind.  
There's good to be found all around.  
I understand your hearts breaking,  
but believe me you're not alone.

<https://www.facebook.com/alan.bedworth>

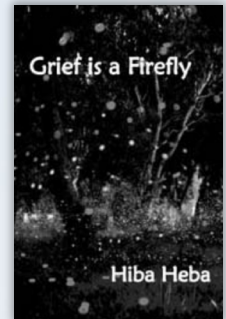


## GRIEF IS A FIREFLY

Poetry book from Hiba Heba

a wall is gnarled,  
and rain-blotched outside  
my window, I refuse  
to vandalize it with binaries:  
it displaces my reveries,  
the way poetry does  
and the tawdry absence of it,  
I'm blue and rinsed by the  
psithurism of a mulberry tree.

<https://www.origamipoems.com/poets/468-hiba-heba>



## LOVE SCENE OR UNSEEN

Poetry book from Lakshman Bulusu

The poem LOVE SCENE OR UNSEEN is a stunning revelation of the many moods of love portrayed in one hundred and fifty four-line stanzas that open up its poignant and evocative sense from its very beginning to end. In this context, it is not a long poem or a narrative but in a fair share it acknowledges the many expressions of what love lays bare.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0963427199>

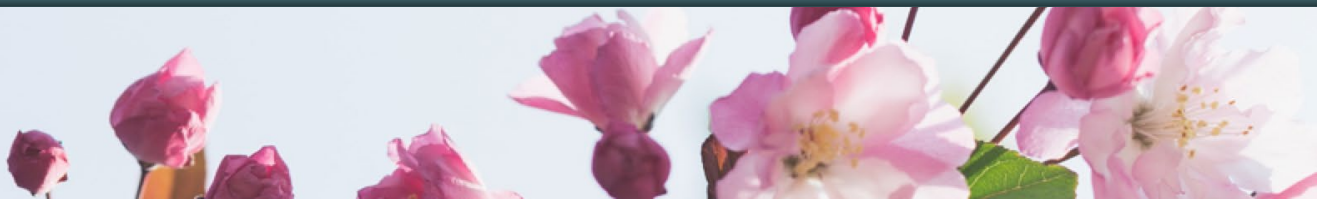
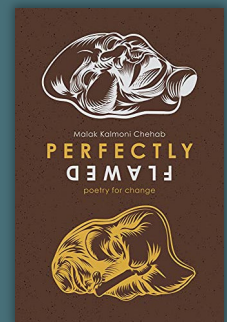


## PERFECTLY FLAWED

Poetry book from Malak Kalmoni

“Perfection, however perfect,  
can annoy,  
Rendering you unattainable,  
remote, coy,  
When in reality, you are just  
as humanely what  
Flawed as all the others who refute their faulty  
perfection.”

[https://www.amazon.com/Perfectly-Flawed-poetry-Malak-Kalmoni-ebook/dp/B092YT6QX6/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?crid=2TQEDHPZII81I&keywords=malak+kalmoni+chehab&qid=1641949259&prefix=malak+kalmoni+chehab%2Caps%2C316&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.com/Perfectly-Flawed-poetry-Malak-Kalmoni-ebook/dp/B092YT6QX6/ref=sr_1_2?crid=2TQEDHPZII81I&keywords=malak+kalmoni+chehab&qid=1641949259&prefix=malak+kalmoni+chehab%2Caps%2C316&sr=8-2)

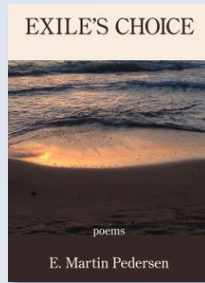


# RECOMMENDED BOOKS

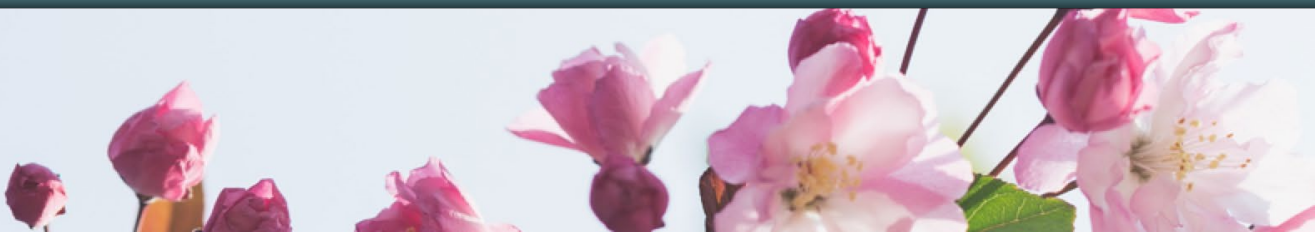
## EXILE'S CHOICE

Poetry book from E. Martin Pedersen

Pedersen's choice speaks to us essentially of a common experience, a state of exile that manifests itself in many ways, from one place to another, from one age to another, from one human encounter to another, even from one self to another self.



[https://www.amazon.com/Exiles-Choice-Martin-Pedersen/dp/1954353200/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=14FMCDEY8AoNZ&keywords=e.+martin+pedersen&qid=1643395359&prefix=e.+martin+pedersen,aps,152&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Exiles-Choice-Martin-Pedersen/dp/1954353200/ref=sr_1_1?crid=14FMCDEY8AoNZ&keywords=e.+martin+pedersen&qid=1643395359&prefix=e.+martin+pedersen,aps,152&sr=8-1)





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