

PRISONER EXPRESS



Jason Hawkins

Poetry Anthology
Vol. 27

Note to the Reader

Dear friends,

Welcome to Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology #27! I'm Elinor and I'm a freshman at Cornell. Over the past few months, I've had the pleasure of reading all of your poems and putting together this collection, which has meant so much to me. I often find myself thinking about these poems after I go home for the day. Sometimes lines will even jump out in my head while I'm sitting in class or completing homework. I am incredibly grateful to have had the chance to read all of your works.

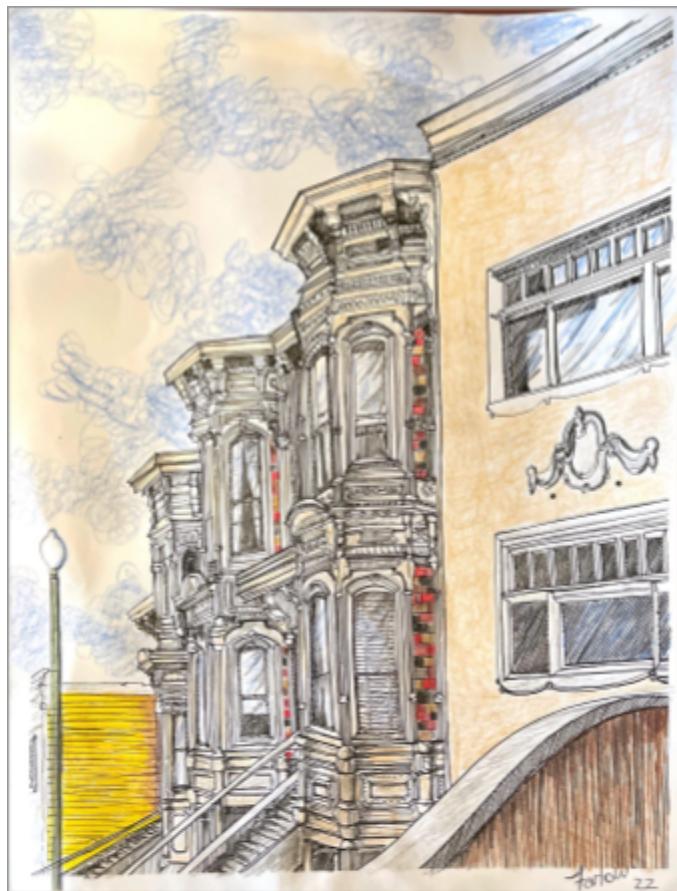
I also want to note that we receive hundreds of poems and unfortunately we have very limited space to print them. If your submission does not appear in this anthology, please do not be discouraged. Poetry is inherently subjective and many works that aren't printed here are scanned onto our website. If you've only submitted recently, it is also possible that your poem has moved on to the reading cycle for the next anthology.

I hope you enjoy these poems as much as I do and are able to find inspiration, joy, and solace within them.

Best wishes,
Elinor

Themes

Hindsight (p. 3), Life in No Man's Land (p. 5), Complex Injustice (p.12), My Pain and My Worth (p. 14), Love? (p. 19), A Leap of Faith (p. 22), Alive in Nature (p. 24), Planting Seeds (p. 25), Foresight (p. 27)



Gary Farlow

Hindsight

**"To bring back the things you have lost...
To hold someone in your arms once more"**

Hindsight by Mitchell

Womack

To tell him there's only
questions at the
bottom of the bottle, not
answers.

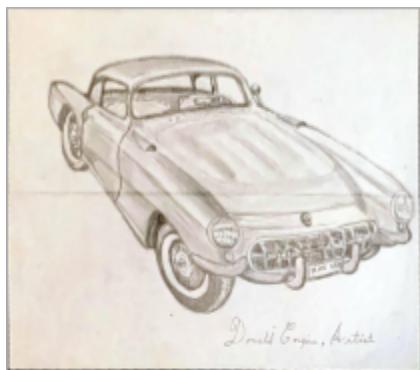
To tell him hitting the blunt will
make
the right thing to do more
obscure, not clearer.

That all those so-called
homeboys he
is hanging out with is what
makes him lonely, and
that he's gotta get out of his
own way to find love.

The home he's always gone
from is
gonna be where he wishes he
was at one day.

And the people he hurts the
most is
the people he's gonna miss the
most.

But he won't listen.
He can't hear me.
He's my past,
Living on in my regrets.



Donald Corpie

Luminaries by David

Zenquis

There is not "meant to be,"
We are all dreaming.
We keep driving
Even when our knuckles turn
white
And,
Like a deer in the headlights,
Luminaries
Shine our despairs—
We never wanted
What we couldn't bring back

In the Labyrinth by Burl Corbett

After wildflowering my father's
grave
and offering an illogical prayer
for his agnostic soul, I shortcut
through
the vast, monument-free
necropolis,
another roadside-plucked
bouquet in hand,
searching for my Granny's
hard-to-find grave.

We Romantics loathe these dull
graveyards
devoid of marble angels and
granite
saints, from whose unfurled
wings and upraised crosses
one can triangulate specific
graves.

The towering maple that once
shaded
Granny's grass-shrouded,
tarnished-brass marker

is now dead itself, its torso and
limbs

cremated in the caretaker's
woodstove,
its obituary published in
smoke.

I pause to get my bearings,
realize that I'm standing on the
grace of a former co-worker
from my wild pipelining days.
Richard Ponds ran a D-8 Cat
sideboom,
and I was his "swamper";
together we

laid untold miles of natural gas
lines,
burying the fruits of our
collusion
with the bright, earth-scoured
blade on his dozer.

Although Dick and I weren't
exactly "pals,"
and never socialized off the job,
yet I spent more time with him
in four years
than I spent in my entire life
with my
Granny, and possibly my father,
too.

Now, Dick lies beneath my
discourteous
feet, a reminder from the
universe
of life's fugitive transience. I
place
a single blossom upon his
nameplate,
silently curse the cruel
Daedalus who
designed this bland, fathomless

labyrinth
wherein lies my Granny so still
and cold,
awaiting her child Theseus,
now grown old.
The end.

Do It All Again by Chris Davidson

To be able to rewind time would be the best power ever, To fix all your past mistakes and failures, to do it all over. To bring back the things you have lost in your past, To feel loved, to hold someone in your arms once more. To not watch your dreams fade away and crumble to dust, To not relive your stumbles and falls on an endless loop. To not be reminded of all the could haves and should haves. To not have to look back and say, "why the hell did I do that?" To be able to go back with all the knowledge you have obtained To make sure that you get everything right this time around, To go back and view it all from a different perspective. To be able to hit pause right before it all went wrong. To tell yourself to stop, don't do that at all. To go back and fix the things that shattered your world. To be free of all the self-loathing and doubts. To be able to see the sunrise from in your arms.



Michael Thomas

To be safe and sound, to have kept you beside me until the end.

To see that smile on your face and the twinkle in your eyes. To be able to tell all the things I can't anymore, To tell you just how very much you meant to me, To hear you say my favorite words "I'll always be yours," To say back "Mi estes mundi" (you are my world).

Just Meat by Donald Warner

I was that man's last conversation
I cannot remember his name
Just glimpses of his face and body
Memories I cannot trust

My recollections are not of him but of me
My surroundings, images meshed together
Of then and now

The sound of

His flesh hitting the concrete
Same as a side of beef hitting
The slaughterhouse floor
Trucked in from Iowa,
Nebraska, or thereabouts

Dropped in transit
By a temporary worker
That did not want
Did not ask for this

Much like the cop that cut him down
No effort was made
To honor his integrity
Unlike the slab

That was carefully
Hoisted and hooked
That still had value
I was the last conscious interaction

I cannot remember
What was said
No subject, object, verb
None of it

What was so trite
That occupied the time
Interrupting what became inevitable
Take me back

What did I feel
Think of what played out
What happened
In that moment

Life In No Man's Land

**"They still give me spoiled food
Sometimes it's barbecue / Sometimes it's mildew"**

No Man's Land by Taj

Alexander Mahon-Haft

In the center of our tiny universe
worst job in the world
prison roundball referee
shouted down by both sides
threatened by fans and guards
gotta sleep next to everyone

Around the cracked asphalt track we stroll
Taj and Mikey, analyzing cloud forms
that relive past and future trips
calling each other Alex and Bear
even though we know we real names and hopes
in this place but not of this place

From the belly of a lightpole planted 'tween double fences casting midnight industrial shadows
even at dawn upon everyone exposed is a hole worn from decades
of jury-rigging and neglect

Out wafts the song of seven blackbirds
a clutch larger and better fed
behind the barbs and between the wires
for even in no man's land the birds can land freely

Life goes on

just not as I thought
or you planned...
... always

One Leaf of Grass by Ben Wilkins

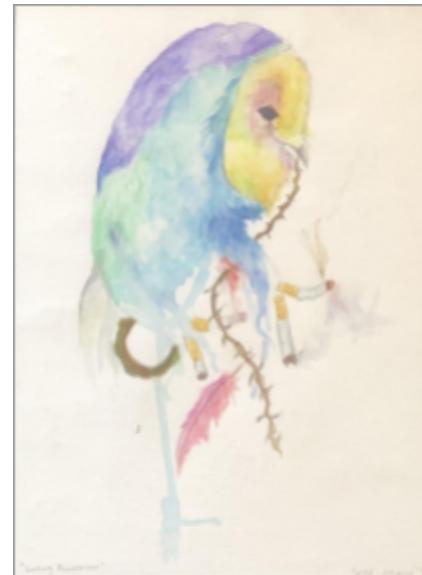
Five is the acreage of the prison yard
He surrenders to the track walking counterclockwise laps
The tall grass beckons when wind ruffles its feathers
Pay no mind, walk another reverse lap to rewind time

Infinite are the majestic mountains resting, peaceful slumber
Redemption strangles the minds of imprisoned fathers
The brisk airs contrasts the sun's warm glow
One leaf whispers

I pluck a single specimen from the patch
Press it between my thumbs and blow shrill vibrations
The call of the wild turns curious heads
One smiles recognition

Thoughts swirl like soft-serve ice cream
Is life still a blessing?
Mountains reply a firm yes
The outdoors refresh broken mental spokes

I raise the leaf and sniff its



Jesse Osmun

pleasant fibers
On impulse I munch it attentively
A plain romaine salad with hints of earth & a note bitter Celery and dirt's flavor child born of curiosity's mirth

Shadow on a Window by Douglas Gordon

Looking out the window of my cell

There is nothing but whiteness
The window is a foot wide and 4 feet tall

There is nothing but whiteness because there is a film on the window

I wonder is the film to keep me from seeing out?
Or to keep others from seeing in?

I know it is a film because there is a tiny

tear at the top of the window
Looking out the tear I see a steel mesh
fence and razor wire above that
I continue to look at the whiteness when
the sun hits the window, now I can
see the fence, it covers the window
No, a shadow of a fence covers the window
A tiny bird lands on the fence
No, a shadow of a tiny bird lands on
the shadow of the fence
I watch the bird fly away
I mean, the shadow of the tiny bird flies away
Is the film on the window to keep me from looking out?
Or to keep you from looking in?
It doesn't matter because it is all just
a shadow of freedom.

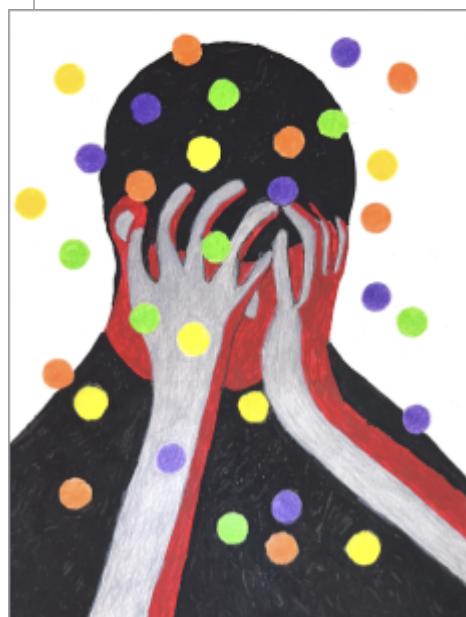
Untitled by Colin J. Broughton

Kendrick warned me...

I pulled out my best uniform, the brightest and sharpest set of oranges that tax money can buy
My t-shirt is brand new, crispy and white like a frosted honey bun
Socks and boxers come from the bottom

of the pile, the set I pull out for special occasions, a time like today
Dust lingers on the black leather boots, size 15, but nobody really pay attention to my feet
A nervous sweat bead appears upon my brow, concentrated from the aftershave of a smooth, bald head
and the lines I've rehearsed a billion times
I hope I don't tell the same stories again, but then they always save the day when an awkward silence becomes the elephant in the room
I brush my nicotine-stained teeth,
then rub cheap cocoa butter lotion on my bronze hue, praying for a familiar smell to rub off on me as we embrace
I dress slowly and distract myself as each minute passes
I hear the C.O. call a name that isn't mine
“You have a visit!”
Maybe I'll be next
Then he yells for another guy that isn't me
Thirty minutes pass, then an hour
I go to the C.O.'s desk to make

sure he hasn't skipped me
“Haven't had a call for you yet,” he says with a hint of concern
Another hour fades away, I pray nothing bad has happened
I stand by the C.O.'s desk to be sure I'm up next, but I wait in silence and rehearse my lines again
More time slips away, along with the C.O.'s bologna and cheese sandwich and potato chips washed down with a diet soda
I go to my cell and take off my clothes, putting everything in its proper place
No visit for me today, so I zone out by placing my earbuds in my ears
The irony of my let down blares through the speakers:
“We say we gone visit / we lying bout coming!”



Paul Bero

In Stereo by Taj Alexander Mahon-Haft

the song played by concertina wire
in perpetual stereo
evokes emotional extremes
even in the middle
amplified mundane and
mendacity
crows screaming
dolphins sobbing
hyenas cackling
the cacophony of precipice
organic cries with metallic
souls
round and round in its sharp
silence
coating these walls
in shredded sanity

Dear Neighbor by Keith D. Pertusio

Thank you for sharing your music through the vent.
I probably wouldn't know much about the genre of rap but your thumping tutelage is making me tense.
I'm grateful you're sparing me all the expense

of buying music I like, which you would call crap, since you blast yours next door without charging a cent.

Thank you for ensuring I don't become slothful by cranking the knob just as I'm starting my nap
And when I feel proud of my mental health progress the incessant tones tell me that it can take far less to push me over the edge by making me snap for which your "Diamonds in My Ears" song is especially thoughtful.

Thank you for letting the universe revolve around you. It needs someone on which it can be set.
If the staff truly wanted to prepare you for society They'd order you to play your racket more quietly
Your volume is stressing all the guards and get they say not a word and let you continue

I write this to the din of your thumping bass which makes my cabinet hum in the vibration
Earplugs now in, I write with my mind finally free so you turn up your noise without thinking of me.

At least I can rest in the thought that this nation will parole you years before they will consider my case.

The Answers to All My Prayers by Claude Kelley Kirk

We're sorry, all gods are busy at the moment.
Please try your prayer again later.

Your prayer is very important to god.
Please remain faithful, your prayer will be answered in the order it was received.

Your prayer is number 27,789,647,351 in queue
Please remain in prayer, God will be with you shortly.

God is experiencing unusually high prayer volume.
Please leave a prayer at the tone, God will get back with you as soon as possible.

We're sorry, the prayer mailbox is full.
Please try your prayer again later.

The god you are trying to reach is not taking prayers at this time.
Please pray back at another time.

We're sorry, the prayer you've prayed has been discontinued.



Akeem Page-Jones

Please check your premise and try your prayer again.

Prison Shoes by Lance Porter

May I empty my head upon your bed

Please do not fret there's no goop or gore no juices or slime no brain nor mind of any kind

No, those things have long withered away

Some 30 years and a day
I have bells, and whistles, and something
with bristles
I have voices, circles, curly Q's and
squiggles and oh so many sorts of
crazy laughter and giggles
See, no blood or liquids to
sodden your sheets

What do you think, is my head quite neat?

How do I think, you ask.
Oh dear no, there's none of that,
for thinking in here has no use, frankly it tends to confuse and makes one gloomy and blue, this
is the best advice I can give to you,
now that you've put on your prison shoes.

Letter to F. the Night of the Execution by Eric Bederson

here i am editing my poetry, thinking poetically, lyrically, reading e. e. cummings, learning a whole new language.
all i want to do is roll up a piece of paper for you execute a good rolling of paper. you should see me in my cell, in my daydream looking lost, looking like "what am I going to do next with all this space, this time, the freshness, the new, the floor, the desk, the door, the sink, what am i going to do with the all mine of it?"
you should see me looking lost, looking unproductive, just breathing, just moving through the space, the all mine of it i go to the window, i go to the door more often now to hear the hearing of the nothing outside within the building, to see for seeing all of nothing moving within the outside of my side.
the speaker plays more than i can say, why when one's alone the speaker plays? to play and not to read, why not to draw? the speaker on to play away with no one to listen, really listen, just to drift to sleep.
not to interfere for who but i not you to interfere when i or you do hear not my noise the speaker plays.

not my noise the speaker plays my song.
the chair is it not to drag to desk side to gently lay legs to floor to write, not to scrape the floor, to unwax, to clamp down, to whack, to startle. no chair whack startle clamp now passed a week. no stack to see, no window gazing over one's head. no toilet flush for not my pee by me to flush repeatedly. no sink on running for no reason, running for why? not me to drink having drank already, having water running for no reason not me. polished sink i'm having clean of drops of water running free. you should see me having no conversation. what a sight to see. no need to agree to roll one's eyes, to exasperate, to think "why me," to pretend to read to avoid so much more than one's needs in attention, just me to sing aloud or not, to jump up and down or not, to do or not, out loud or not all day or not, to lounge a lot. would you believe not a breakfast tray missed? not a meal not enjoyed at a desk with space and time to mess and clean or leave and pile up, with bags of bread on bunks and magazines all strewn and unfinished letters uncollected before lights out or now lights on, or sleep or not, no schedule to



Kenneth Zamarron

keep, not missing a single breakfast tray.
oh, if you could see me now, i occupy territory like a mouse on Christmas Eve. i tiptoe to and fro so as not to upset the delicate balance that is my peace and quiet. i can hear Mac in the wall writing at his desk the need to yell out the door (strangely) does not occur to me. i had no laundry. i have no trash. strangely. i thought for the briefest moment this afternoon i didn't know what to do and it scared me that i was just maybe feeling lonely until i laughed (was it out loud) and the thought went through the vent. i thought for the briefest moment that i was bored. bored with the tv, with the radio, with the reading of the Huck Finn,

with the New Yorker, and the option A, B, C, until i laughed. until i woke. it was only a dream. oh, if you could see me now, dreaming. i drift on a pillow of cloud i drift to sleep but startle awake. why does living alone make one prone to startle awake? it's just the beanhole, it's just cells unlocking or neighbors talking or c.o.'s walking and i'm just listening through my dreams. it's just the earbuds not in. it's just the not drowning out of the superfluous background noise of another day in prison. so i startle awake. funny how the habits one thinks are needs change so quickly with circumstance. adaptability i guess. compromise most likely. nonetheless, alone is my preference. certainly gives Marion a gold star in the mind. hell we're walking distance to Illinois. funny how i think now of getting robbed when before was more likely. no mistakin' my property i guess. all my responsibility, more likely.

Insanity by Lance Porter
My mind is spinning
as the confusion rebounds
about my head
I'm not sure whether
down is up, and up down,

or whether inside's out, and outside in.
I have chewed my nails to jagged stumps stinging and bleeding oh so much,
especially when the soap touches
I have ringing in my ears, oh dear,
from where?
I see no phone, no alarm, no bells of any kind
my, oh my, I must be losing my mind
This is not good
How long have I been in this box
I can see no sun, no sky, no blue
nothing to gauge what's true
Hello, I call out loud, Hello to you
echoes back to me
oh dear, oh my, will someone help me
not a singing bird or a tree
just a box and me.

Goodbye Music by Jonathan C. Holeman

I pretend that I don't care
But soon, I won't hear music
How do I say goodbye
To what kept me alive
For the last several years
I really didn't know what
If anything I could do
The hearing aides buzz
Swarm of bees in my ear
It doesn't bother me
That all the people's voices

Sound like Charlie Brown's teacher
But without the soothing music
What I am, what I can do
Read the television
Closed captions of fake news
I'll adjust, I always do
Like the nine quiet years
They kept me in a dungeon
Underneath the stairs
There wasn't any music then
Just me and my insect friends
Now I sit and play guitar
In a cell on a maximum
Security prison yard
Scribbling out the songs
Written in this broken heart
That no one will ever hear
It makes me wonder sometimes
If anyone ever read
The best poem ever written
Or the greatest novel
The most touching screenplay
Or were all those also written
By someone somewhere in a cell
Never to be published
As if they were just words
Random, haphazard on a page
Lined paper to be thrown out
When the prisoner dies
For now, I play my songs
That no one will ever hear
Then I'll say goodbye to music
And throw it all away
Just like a piece of garbage
Just like me

Untitled by Perry Ransom
For over 13 years I've been
behind this door...
forgetting, being forgotten,
heartbroken,

sad, angry, bleeding, crying,
bones broken,
jumped on, deprived,
frustrated, hungry,
dehydrated, afraid, worried,
cold, sick,
hot, ashy, writing, drawing,
watching,
listening, cleaning, organizing,
analyzing,
reflecting, remembering,
imagining,
meditating, sober, getting high,
programming
bucking, maced, restrained,
overwhelmed,
cut, beaten, tricked, learning,
destroying, connecting,
building, disconnecting,
missing out, stuck, mad,
growing, lying, sleep, restless,
awaken,
dirty, worried, cautious,
aggressive,
hurt, broken, bipolar,
disappointed,
chasing, determined,
physically training,
focused, fighting, eating,
stressed,
praying, wishing, hoping,
losing saving,
spending, investing, and so
much more,
all behind this door.
you'll have to stay tuned to see
what I do
when I no longer am...

Count My Bones by Arnold Barnes III
Lockdown
Week 1, day 1

1 corn dog and a handful of raisins
Damn, and we ain't been to store in weeks
6 prunes and some mystery meat
Least they ain't lock us down in the heat
But they used to and they still do
Still give me spoiled food
Sometimes it's barbecue
Sometimes it's mildew

Week 2, day 14
14 days and only 5 showers
Yet I bird bath, just without hot water
Though their rules state I'm supposed to
Have hot water in my cell
And they're always talking about the rules
And rarely do they follow the rules
But they're always talking about the rules
And I find my face turning blue
Not cause I'm holding my breath
But because I'm suffocating from all the B.S.
1 egg sandwich for breakfast, that's it

Week 3, day 16
Getting easier to keep the body clean
Everyone marching to showers real slow
Looking lean
What's in the johnny inmate
1 PB and J, 1 boiled egg

Oh, and a handful of frosted flakes
 15 hours later, what's in the johnny inmate
 1 hot dog, and a handful of french fries
 Eat it real slow garcon, drink 2 cups of water
 Lie down and be very, very still

Week 4, what day I don't know
 All I know is that I don't get mail no mo
 My T-Jones don't even hit me
 My bros don't even hit me
 Hell my clothes don't even fit me
 I used to weigh 185 pounds
 Now I look like a greyhound
 I look in the mirror
 And I can count all my bones
 What's in the johnny inmate
 1 PB and J and a burrito

Week something, day something
 I feel so weak
 What are these people doing to me
 An unusual form of cruelty
 Short-term memory loss,
 anxiety and confusion
 Personality disorder
 Schizophrenic, bipolar
 All this in a 6 by 9
 Where I feel like I'm losing my mind
 Why won't they feed me
 Not like the taxpayers' money won't cover the cost
 Least they could do is cut the cell lights off
 This sleep deprivation

And calorie restriction
 And truth be told I ain't even tripping
 Cause all this is just making me stronger
 Mentally and physically I'm stronger
 God body
 Spiritually I'm stronger
 And when lockdown was over and the doors rolled
 I emerged from the door like a light

Same light that was divided from darkness
 Physique, like a Michael Angelo chiseled from stone
 But only... cause I count my bones



David Stanton

Complex Injustice

"Who should you fear?"

The System by Chiquita Fizer

The system wants to keep you locked up, not caring that it's just another set up. Another inmate locked up, another dollar, another mother left childless.

The system wants to keep you locked up
not just physically but mentally,
and let's
not forget empty.

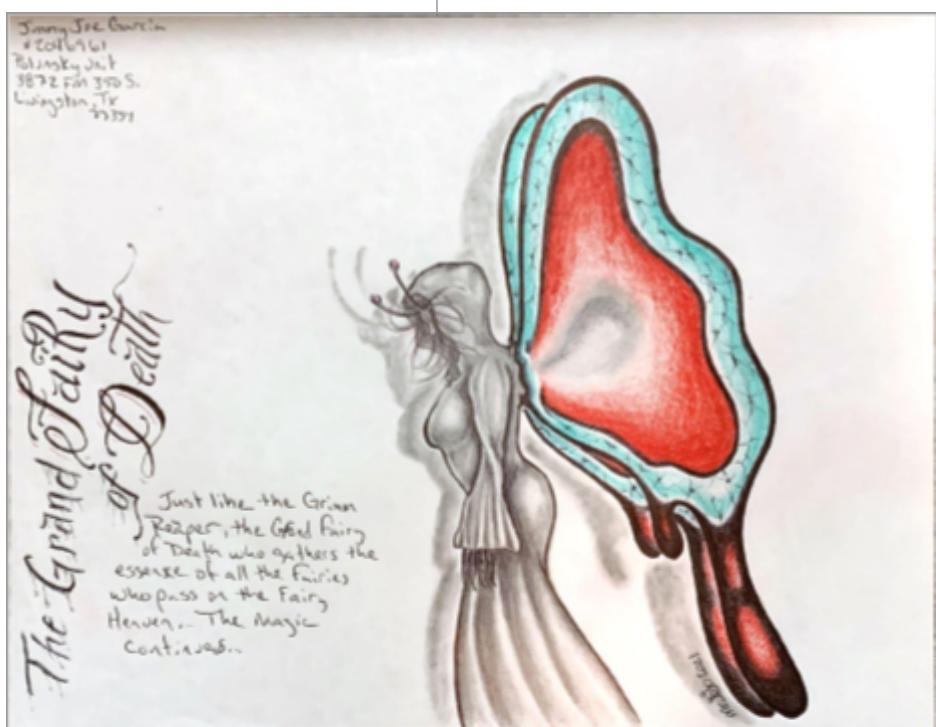
The system don't want to see you win,
it's been rigged since the beginning.
So when you walk out these gates don't
let the system keep you as a victim.
It's up to you to make the decision, not
to become just another statistic.

Stand Up and Be A Man by Greg Fonseca

He could not buy a beer
Nor a pack of cigarettes
Nor could he see the naked ladies
Dance
"You're too young," they said
"Grow up and be a man"
At 15-years old he was given a

Life sentence by these hypocrites
They treated him like a man before
Court proceedings he did not even
Understand and they called these
Proceedings "fair"? And now he is
A man?
"Enlighten me," he said, "But what
Is your rationale?" Your system is broken
Through and through
And apparently you cannot see
That the ones that you hurt are you and me
History will show how wrong you were

To take a kid and send him to a place that you yourself would loathe to be
And when the shoe is on the other foot
We all see what happens
What happened to "being a man?"
The world sees you sniveling and begging for mercy
(Mercy you never showed to anyone)
And when you are led away in handcuffs
With tears and snot running down your face
Remember what you told the 15-year-old kid:
"Stand up and be a man"



Jimmy Joe Garcia

A Forced Journey by Robert Viveiros Jr.

When I look in the mirror and see my own eyes
I guess I should be happy I'm still alive
I'm sitting here in this cell because the jury were blind covered with a face mask I couldn't see the obvious signs
I was told "don't worry at the end you will shine"
I felt both hopeful and hopeless at the same time
I was forced to go on this journey too
you have to understand what it is I'm going through lies, deceit, speculation and the truth was not sought

now this cell I'm sitting in is like dynamite in a box
the prosecutors are celebrating their success
meanwhile I struggle to fight under this distress
believing in our constitution has made me a fool
I thought when it comes to "we the people" justice for all means me too
with no money for a lawyer I feel like I'm fighting this alone that's why I spent today writing this poem

Who Should You Fear? by Marlon Olivera

Who should you fear? The man accused of a crime or the judge who gives him decades of time? Who should you fear? The man who walks around with a weapon just for protection or the prosecutor with a sharp tongue trying to get him the maximum sentence? Who should you fear? The man who just wants to be free or the corrupted system

who wants to keep him under lock and key?
Who should you fear? The man who foolishly and regretfully made some mistakes or the harsh and unfair laws that say not to give him a second chance, instead make him property of the state? Who should you fear?

It Works by Arturo Vazquez

There's hitting rock bottom and then there's hitting the bottom of a rock while being ground down buried alive under the pressure above you
Layers and layers of foundation Built atop you as you suffocate All the while as you beg for help
People scoff or better yet laugh while they tell you to keep your head up
Buried below and forgotten to time
Systems of houses and roads are built atop you and yet, even then
The people who stomp when you
Expect a miracle of your own making
and when it finally happens and you dig your way past all the barriers
Everyone rejoices
Because their system worked



Edward Rodriguez

My Pain and My Worth

***“Has my own value always been so easily judged?
Or have I kept my true value hidden?”***

Addiction by Tika English

Trial by fire
Burning rain
I'm flooded with pleasure
And running from pain
The stagnant waiting
The endless years
Of crying and trying
And falling in tears
To depths that are endless
Far reaching and wide
I'll never climb out
I'm buried alive
Sweating and kicking and
shaking
The fear
Runs out of my mouth
And screams in my ear
That I'll always be empty
I'll never find life
There's fighting and searching
and tearing
Inside
The comfortable lies
That sneakily hide
The truth to myself
That I'm dying alive

Familiar Stranger by Lawrence Smith

Familiar hands accompanied
by a stranger's motive to hover
like an eerie shadow of
darkness holding my innocence
while escorting my body to a
cold shallow grave, dug by
clammy deceitful hands.
Alerted senses are like a
vibrating spider's web.
Unwanted tickles and lingering

pats masked in playful rubs
while spirits of fear chills my
bones, my flesh vanishes under
your touch.
You took from me liberties that
weren't yours to take. You
boldly stole pieces of me that
can't be replaced. Subtle
strokes to my ego leave me
back open to your attacks. Trust
becomes a suspicious embrace.
You have the audacity to say,
“you love me” while making
me, forcing me to hide and
trust your lies. You destroyed
my mind with dark thoughts
and you smother my light while
stealing so easily my childhood
while injecting my life with
promiscuity.
What you stole was precious to
me. It meant a great deal to my
existence, so easily you erase a
replaceable value that once set
me apart.
How am I supposed to hold my
head up high with tainted
morals? Your hands hold my
flesh hostage as your thoughts
rape me, feeling no need to ask
permission. You leave no way
of bargaining, insecurity,
uncertainty becomes my
secrets, whispers my prayers
while isolation becomes my
forever nightmare. You create a
reality of selfishness that holds
my soul in a barless prison and
your touch becomes the
sinister guard. You lessen my

soul and make my desires toxic
all for the sake of your own
manipulating hunger and
seductive greed.
Your touch drains my life of its
freedom and I am a chalk
outline of my previous self all
because of a familiar stranger.

To My Father by Ted Cole

You remember that morning
When you were 12 or 13?
You know, that morning when
you woke
With the certain knowledge
that
that was the day? That it was
time to make...
“The decision”?

How long did you consider,
all the many pros and cons.
the advantage of one choice
Versus the delight of the other?
Did you contemplate the many
ways
either choice would impact
your young and vulnerable life?

Did you consider what your
older friends had chosen?
Maybe you gave careful thought
to grandpa's plans for your
future,
or grandma's religious
leanings?
Or perhaps it was the social
consequences that most
influenced you—
what your peers and classmates

would think.
I'm just curious, but I really
want to know
how you made your choice:
boys or girls, boys or girls, boys
or...
and you chose to prefer girls!
Right? You did make a
conscious choice, didn't you?
No? You didn't choose to be
"straight"?!

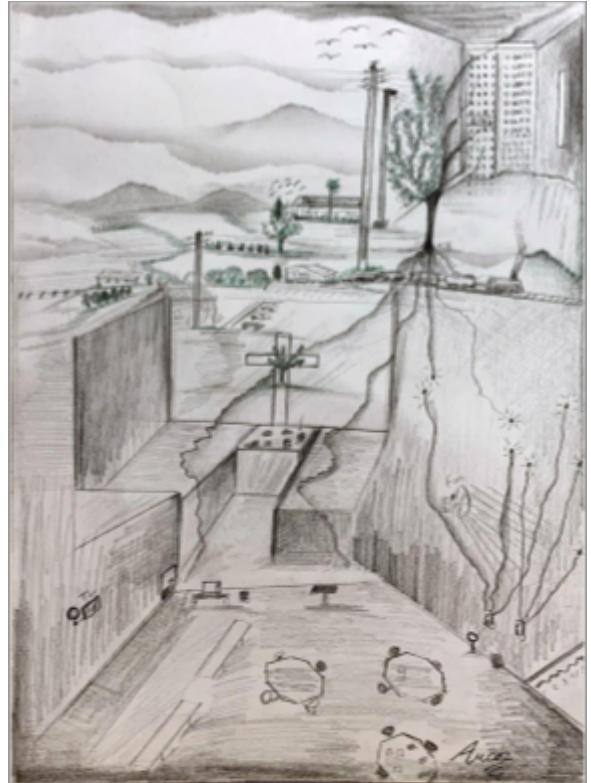
Then what the hell makes you
think
that I made the choice to be a
queer?
How can I make you
understand
I simply followed my heart. Just
like you.

The Train Ride by Colin J. Broughton

All aboard! The boom of the conductor's voice sounded like raspy thunder, almost commanding me to drop my daydreams and move, move, move. Grabbing a window seat, I took a final glance at the station. I would never return here again, even though it was a nurturing home for nine months. I took in new sights and foreign sounds, smelled freshly brewed coffee and wondered what the other children would be like at my new school. I remember the line leader.

She smiled at me every time we locked eyes. Her baby teeth shined as if they knew they would soon be replaced. My teachers welcomed me too with warm smiles of their own, but I was still uneasy. The new boy: I was called names, I was stared at, laughed at, and even called stinky by one girl. As time passed I had a few fights, kissed a couple girls, and endured my fair share of solitude in timeout. Kindergarten was tough. Children mean. The train whizzed by endless pine trees, hills, and farmland, then finally stopped.

When I got off I left a suitcase filled with Thundercats, Dr. Suess books, and my innocence. I left a bag full of shame from untold family secrets under my clean underwear. The new Luggage I took contained fear, uncertainty, puberty, and pride. It was 1997: I got stoned for the first time ever. It was juvenile. I choked. I coughed. Smoke rolled from my nostrils as I tried to look cool. It was the peak of my destruction.



Miguel Arcos

The portal to a life of crime. I smoked on weekends. I drank malt liquor with the big boys. I was introduced to B&E. My life moved with the pace of the stray bullets that took innocent lives in the city. Unexpected. Sneaky. Life changing. The night life had a cast of shady characters, and I was the breakout star. When the train stopped I left behind opportunities, good advice, sound judgment, and the real me, only to leave with confusion,

tunnel vision,
and a drug addiction. Stepping
on the
platform I was told to take off
my clothes.

The other young black men
stood in front of me
naked. We squeezed pink soap
into our hands
and jumped in the shower, only
to be kicked out
in a minute or two, covered in
residue.

I was issued a jumpsuit that
countless men
had worn. I was a son. A
brother. A nephew.
A grandson. I turned into
#337151. It was 2009.
October first. The beginning of
a new normal.

I'm Not Mad at God by Richard Beebe

I am such a contradiction
I feel informed and rational,
I don't get angry over nothing,
But my mother asked me,
"Why are you so mad at God?"
And I got mad for real-
But mad like a broken heart.
I could never be angry at
The glass of a window
Because I can see outside,
Or for the warmth in my room,
Anymore than I could hate
The sun for my shadow,
Yet how can I explain
Hate not for the player
But hate for the game
To one whose integrity
Has been stolen by the fear
Of death and growing old?

How do I watch the mother
Who taught me critical thought
Call exploitation comfort
And beloved holy names?

I'm a River by Claude Kelley Kirk

V. I:
I was born of the rain, on a
colder autumn day
The only son of consequence,
and a bitter fall from grace
I grew up like the rapids,
runnin' wild through the hills
And when the rue of winter
comes, well I'll be runnin' still

Chorus:
'cause I'm a river, without a
riverbed
Most times I just wander
around, nowhere to lay my
head
If I only had a valley, that I
could call my own
But I guess these muddy waters
must roll
Must roll - on and on

V. II:
One time I nearly dried up, and
offered you my hand
When you swam into my drift,
wrote your name in my sand
So unafraid to drown, you drew
me with every breath
You waded in my shallows, and
fathomed every depth

V. III:
But you knew the rains would
come, and someday I would
flood
'cause the waters of this river,

run faster than our blood
The only reason for a river, is to
forever run
And who am I to question what
fate, has gone and done

Blue Pens and Old Trucks by Brandon Rushing

Just a blue pen.
Rolling ball tip, spring loaded,
gel grip, with clip.
A kind of bullet shaped clear
tube
that reveals the spring and
cartridge inside.
I can monitor how little ink is
left.
Do a little math; comparing it
with what I've already done.
Figure up maybe how much
more I can do.

I set a value on it like this.
By what the pen has to offer
still.
By the amount of work that
might be accomplished
with whatever ink remains.

This is something my
stepfather beat into me,
this value system.
He would size everything up
this way.
His truck ticked over a hundred
grand on the odometer.
One day he just pulls over on
the hot shoulder
of Highway 190 West, and just
sits there,
an internal audit raging
through his mind.
The truck lost.

He pulled back onto the highway and turned at the first light.
Not taking me to school where I belonged,
but instead, to the car dealership.

He didn't haggle.
He didn't prevaricate or waste time.
The old truck was gone.
The miles of memories of flying down red dirt roads, cruising across state to a Nationals Track meet, racing to the hospital when Chris fell through our bedroom window and had to have 172 stitches across his back.
That all left with that truck.

I knew in that moment that value was important.
If you had no value you were expendable;
a tool to be traded in when the new was gone.
It pissed me off to learn this lesson,
this truth about our world.
And even though I sometimes fight that truth,
I rarely win.
Though sometimes I do.

The blue pen runs out of ink.
I knew it would.
I click the button, screw apart the tube,
and change out the cartridge.
It takes a little work.

It consumes a little time.
In the end though, the pen is just like it was before.
Valuable.

I know my stepfather could have changed the motor and transmission in that old truck. He could have put in the time and the work.
And the old truck would have been like new again.
I understand that.
Which means that he chose to let go of that truck.
The value of all those miles and memories was just too low.
He'd rather let them go, let us go,
than go through the effort it would take to keep us.

As I sit here, writing this with my blue pen, whilst serving a life sentence in prison, I can't help but wonder. Has my own value always been so easily judged?
Or have I kept my true value hidden?
Am I the blue pen - or the old truck?

Shook Up by Jason Powell
My mom and Uncle Joe went to prison. My family would fight over my

little brother and sister
I was almost as strong
As J.P. Aunt Judy made BBQ Chicken. Jordan and I cried in the morning together. Judy left
the kids with me alone by day. By hand salmon fishing the feather river. Like J.P. I kept my Promise. I found my niche. I lost my niche.
I was extra Rebellious. Ma and Uncle Joe come home to show us I never forgot. You don't like me hurting inside. I hurt people. My Aunt Judy said goodbye. Through glass I watch the chaplain walk away. I cry. I hurt. I mule kick the door



John Sigalas

till every window
in the jail
shook

Night Demons! By Rashuan Black

When my eyes shut as I lay exposed.
Assailed by virulent thoughts.
My mind explodes!
I scream!
Good times fly by in the blink of an eye.
I'm watching my soul.
I'm homesick, bad dreams, internal conflict.
My worst days are mixed with death and violence.
Past events affect my moral compass.
I dare seek peace through sleep and silence.

My nightmares!
I'm lost and don't care.
Ambiguous thoughts, my path is unclear.
I look in the mirror and see everything I fear.
My past, my future, my tears.
Sleepless nights stained pillows and a silent cry.
Night terrors!
I know what pain is, mental anguish that seems endless.
My eyes open, I try to focus,
Damn I only been asleep a few minutes!!

I, Destroyer by Bryan Petit

I long to be the planet Earth
Consistent, stable, and strong
Instead I'm hostile, not fit for life
Everything I do is wrong

I am the blazing yellow sun
Nurturing those under my glare
Then destroying all I'm close to
With harmful solar flares

I am a stalwart and unwavering
Heavy atmosphere
Protecting what I hold inside by scorching any who dare come near

I am the moon with a smiling face
On one of my duplicitous sides

The other shrouded in mystery
Where all of my secrets reside
I am an interstellar asteroid
Strange and sinister and long
Drifting under your vigilant eye
In a place I do not belong

I am a comet, brilliant and beautiful
Cold as ice to the core
Briefly brightening the night for some
Only to disappear once more

I am a black hole, eraser of light
Ominous and dark and unseen
Distorting, devouring everything I love
Until there's no one left but me

I am manning a distant station
The lonely astronaut
Banished to the outer reaches of space
Nothing but an afterthought

I am the universe, full of potential
Vast and brimming with stars
Yet barely able to sustain life
I'm too tumultuous, silent, and harsh
But I long to be the planet, Earth
So dependable, resilient, and tough
Instead I'm destined to always fail
I am never quite enough



Kristopher Storey

Love?

"My love, my first / I will never forget"

At a Relic Shop by David Zenquis

I bought an illusion of love,
It pumps no blood,
For it's not a beating heart,
Just a heart-shaped apparatus
at fault-
A makebelieve
Makeshift chemistry
Equipment, emitting
pretentious bliss

Secretly by Shanon Williams

I keep my head held low as I walk on by
I don't try to say hello. I don't look her in the eye
I won't even slow down, I just keep on going
So she can pretend like she don't know me
Because when she's with her friends she don't want them to see
That she's been hanging around with somebody like me
She's got a look to keep and I don't fit that mold
My image contrary to the one that she upholds
I don't rock the latest fashions or talk the coolest lingo
The only things we have in common are things only we know

And no one else can know it, I have to play it right
If I ever want to see her we can never come to light

So secretly is how we always meet
I would love her openly but she wants to be discreet
The skeleton in her closet always at her beck and call
I take a little of her, it beats nothing at all

It doesn't matter if I need her if she's not by herself
Convenience only matters my love sits on a shelf
Until the day is over and she's all alone
We meet up after hours for a walk in the park
The stars twinkle in our eyes making sparks in the dark
And she might love me too with a funny way of showing
Then the birds start chirping, the sun is on the rise
We see each other clear, she looks me deep into my eyes
And says, "if you want to keep me you have to let me go
So, if you see me in the daytime..." I already know
I'll keep my head held low as I walk on by
I won't try to say hello, I won't look you in the eye
I won't even slow down, I'll just keep on going
So you can pretend like you don't know me

So secretly is how we always meet
I would love her openly but she wants to be discreet
I'm the skeleton in her closet always at her beck and call
I take a little of her instead of nothing at all

Lack by Carnell Wingfield Jr

Everything I lack makes me appreciate what I have.
I would love you down, you would drown between the sheets,
make eye contact but cannot speak,
I would make it hard to speak to me.
You will blush when I smile,



Wade Garrett

you will emulate my style,
we will reflect each other,
I will drive you wild.
You will be my sweet tea in the
summer,
Hot tea in the winter,
Just don't spill the tea, while
you are my dinner.
Love over love when I am your
lover,
Never an ending,
Only a turning over.
All in all, top to bottom, over
and over,
Always, forever, never a part
time lover.

Poetry for Hot Dogs by **James W. B. Jackson**

I used to lie about the quality
Relationships I had
My favorite lie is about a
ladyfriend and I camping out
Writing poetry from the
entryway of separate tents
Sharing them, and then
chucking them into the fire
To fuel heat for the hot dogs
It's a Don Henley thing, "When
we're hungry,
Love will keep us alive"
But in this hollow reality it was
a lie
Grievous in my now need for
that brand of Love
I stopped telling that lie long
ago
As it revealed a desperation far
deeper than what
Fulfilled desire could fill
Emptiness like a chasm
If there's a why question
somewhere

Then it remains
unanswered, and
whatever deep
Seated issues unresolved.
So now I just fall in Love
with anything. Names,
Faces, ideas (usually my
own), dreams (almost
always
My own),
By the time something
real comes along I'm
gonna
Be spent.
Ha, ha, haaa....
Something real... Shit!....
What's that?

I block off desire now
with my ire in the
Fight for freedom.
Now I need something to eat,
paper to write on, and
Stamps and envelopes to mail
real shit to reality
From the address of a
nightmare more than I need
Phone kisses, partially nude
pictures, or I Love Yous
On pages best used to chuck in
to roast
Hot dogs in the campfire
between our tents

Claressa by Kareem Carter
Ask how I'm doing,
And I'll lie.
Ain't no sunshine,
I'm not fine.
They stomped my heart,
To make wine.
How do you cope,
When you realize,
You've lost the love of a



Jonathan Holeman

lifetime?
Should you stay here,
Or should you just die?
Every day I awake,
To a torturous death.
I have no air,
So I pant for breath.
Just look in my eyes,
You'll see a million tears.
I've lost Claresa,
That was my only fear.
The only one in this world,
Who really cared.
She was my titan, my
tranquility,
Now I'm really scared.
In a world of forgiveness,
Some forgiven twice,
How could one
misunderstanding,
Cost me my life?
You're the dream that never
dies,
The reason I survive,

The raven in my eyes,
The sun that brightened my
sky.
Ress, you are my everything,
Unequivocally, you are the best.
I've swallowed the pill of losing
you,
But I will never allow it to
digest.

First Love by Al Newberry

My love,
My first,
I could never forget.

Your lovely body,
Your lovely face.
The soft caress,
The tender embrace.

Both of us
Too young,
Too naive
To know the import.
Your smooth, fair skin,
Your deep blue eyes,
Your lips on mine
To mesmerize.

So many years have passed,
Still you I think of.
Wherever you are,
I wish you love.

My love, my first,
I will never forget.

Sweet Love by Mandilo

Ruffin

I'd rather love you
Than hurt you
Because loving you is what I'd
rather do

So no, I'm not going to with you

I know you've been hurt
But that was him and not me
And I see you for the beauty
you are
What he was way to blind to see

I know you want to be loved,
Appreciated, and adored
And all that he could not give
you
I will give you that, plus much
more

So please, I beg you
To give us a chance to be
That song of Sweet Love
That is meant to be sung for
both you and me

Two Tears by Richard Smith

It happened on a starry night
The moon was new or out of
sight
I looked and listened all around
And all was silent, not a sound
A smell of Jasmine on the wind
I grab the hand of my girlfriend
I kiss her lips and bend a knee
To ask her, "will you marry
me?"
Her smile is glowing with her
eyes
And very quickly, "Yes," she
cries
A tear cascades down her cheek
I try to stand my knees gone
weak
This is the best I've ever been
Her love is what I yearned to
win
Because we ought to celebrate

I run to the store, she says she'll
wait
Some sparkling cider and the
ice
Along with fruit, that should be
nice
I'll tell you where this tale is
set:
The public garden where we
met
I hurry back, the party's on
The fountain stands alone, she's
gone
I worry she has fled, she's not,
She moved atop a grassy plot
My lover's body's on the ground
Two bullet holes that I have
found
One in the head and one below
The gorgeous eyes have lost
their glow
Her pretty lips no longer smile
Her fragrance lingers for a
while
And all her hair is tossed and
wild
Her belly swollen with my child
The second shot has killed my
son
I'm broken, demon spawn have
won
I'm sorry Jasmine, sorry kid
For what evil humans do and
did
A tear collected in my eye
And that is all, that's how I cry
I hate to hate, but I'm irate
What is a life for? Is this fate?
And should I run, or kill, or
yell,
Or end my life, escape this hell?

A Leap of Faith

If I could, I surely would / put the world on my back”

Leap of Faith by Lance

Porter

I took her hand
and there we stood
upon the ledge
She asked if I was
ready.
I told her I was afraid
Her reply was “it's okay
to be afraid, it only means
there is uncertainty before you”
“This is where true faith is
born.”
I took a moment to steady
my nerves. I looked at
her and said, “I was ready.”
We leapt together. She
disappeared and I crashed
upon the rocks and debris
broken bones and a bloody
me washed gradually out
to sea.

The Volunteer by Bradley

Martin

The call comes in the middle of
the night
Via a radio signal faster than
the speed of light
To the little black box posted
like a sentry at my bedside
Monitor III it's labeled in white
And it orders me to charge like
a medieval knight
The tones go off screaming in
my ear
As I awake wide eyed and alert
with fear
Adrenaline instantly begins to
course through my veins

My feet hit the floor as I
frantically get dressed
What is it this time?
A smoky fire or a mangled and
twisted car wreck
An elderly man with a heart
attack or best case scenario
simply a case of acid reflex
I glance at the clock its quarter
till four
As I find that ever elusive sock
in the bottom of my dresser
drawer
I whisper three little words in
my wife and child's ear
The three little words that we
all hold so dear
It is not clear if these words
might be my last
If they are, may they forever
hold fast.
I grab my keys and head for the
door
My truck starts with a mighty
roar
Frost covered glass
Makes it impossible to drive
real fast
I reach the station
Proud to serve my nation
I'm the first to arrive
So I turn on the lights and open
the doors
The smell of diesel drifts
through the air as I start the
engine
I love the smell of diesel in the
morning
It sends my cold body a
warning
The chief arrives next

Followed by a few others
Scrambling to put on all their
heavy gear
We all pile in the truck as I opt
for the rear
The final moment arrives
where the big red truck is put
into drive
The blue and red lights come
on as we pull across the pad
The siren screams as we go
careening into the night
Our emergency lights
Reflecting off the neighboring
sights.
We arrive at the scene
The chaos ensues
And adrenaline goes into
overdrive
Risking our lives pushing our
deepest worries and fears aside
As we battle the odds
Sometimes it's the heat and the
smoke
Blacker than coal and so thick it
chokes
Not to mention the heat from
the searing flame
Sometimes we wrestle against
mangled steel
Remnants of a car mangled like
a crushed can of coke
Occupants trapped, barely alive
Floorboards puddled deep with
crimson ooze
O, God I hope they survive
We call for the jaws and pry off
the door
Like the incredible hulk
As we wrestle the victim out of
the mangled bulk

We load them onto the stretcher
Just as the wrecker pulls onto the scene
Safely in the back of the ambulance our patient now resides
As it instantly takes off with a screech of the si-reen

My First Poem by Bernardo Rodriguez

Has a butterfly landed on your hand,
I've never written a poem before,
So what's the word for first time?
Have I just un-virginized myself by poem
It can't be plural, poems, it's one.
This poem as a butterfly, fly, fly.

Brave! By Kareem Carter

The windchill factor
When it's twenty below
The shivering cold,
The arctic snow.
Withstanding those conditions,
No house, no cave.
To some, that may serve
As the definition of brave.
To be hurt, I mean pierced
To the core of your soul.
To feel a crease in your chest
As if your heart unfolds
To then stand before others,
And let that story be told
With the intentions of saving many,

That's the definition of bold!
You share your story,
And I'll share mine.
And in succession with humankind
The world will align.
Despite our many differences,
We all feel pain
And, in those moments of despair,
We're all one and the same.
We deal with hurt differently,
But that's the beauty of life.
Individuality, free-will,
free-choice, free-voice
Strength is measured
By our will to survive
The measures we take
En route to stay alive.
A hero is a woman,
Who's been through it all
And uses her darkest moments
To cushion one's fall.
I understand your situation,
I feel your pain.

I empathize, I sympathize,
I'll umbrella your rain.
I will see you through,
Navigate exponential terrain.
I will ease your load,
Alleviate the masses of strain.
If I could, I surely would,
Put the world on my back.
And I'd carry you to the top,
And we'd never look back.
Since I can't, I'll lift your spirits,
With nouns and verbs.
Motivate and empower you,
With pounds of words.
I'll stand up for certain things,
And for those things I'll die.
And, before I explode again,
I'll break down and cry.
Please understand what I'm about to say:
Those enslaved were the ultimate definition of Brave!



Ariel Martinez

Alive in Nature

“Remember in spring, the ice always cracks”

Rochester Dreams by Glenn Thomas

Oh how I remember, the way it once used to be
Those carefree days of youth, I still vividly see.
Along the flowery banks of the Genesee.
I would sit, I would walk, sometimes I'd even run,
But mostly I'd just bask in the warmth of the sun.
In youth, my salad days had scarcely begun.

With the long snowy winters now over and done,
I frolicked and played, how I had so much fun,
Often with friends, sometimes just an audience of one.
Among the colorful blossoms, the sun always beams,
Its golden rays shine on forever, or so it seems,
When I lay me down to sleep, in my Rochester dreams.

Yes, I fondly recall all the sights, all the sounds, When I explored that far northern town in great leaps and bounds,
From its bustling core to its quiet burbs, I sauntered all ‘rounds,
From a busy downtown, where the church bells tung,
To Cranberry Pond, where the birds all foraged and sung,
I climbed oaks and maples,

whereupon thick limbs I hung.

On the waves I would surf, the blissful heights I could reach,
But alas it turned cold on the shores of Ontario Beach.
Sadly, winter was nigh—
“Summer, please stay,” I’d beseech,
But no one can alter the seasons God deems,
Remember in spring, the ice always cracks at its seams,
And summer lives on forever, in my Rochester dreams.

Haiku by Arabella Fairchild

White moon shines brightly behind ominous black clouds picture perfect night

White blossoms on trees signal the coming of spring
love waits in shadows

Raindrops beating time music of a thunderstorm pools of water dance

I Am Alive by Gary Farlow

I Am
evening shadows on the grass
dew on a morning glory
crust on a snowfall
the red sun of a harvest dusk
rustle of Autumn leaves
crunch of a first frost
glow of a full moon on a lake
hazy heat of a Carolina August
wind preceding a gentle rain
fog on a late summer morning

I Am
Alive.

Untitled by AD8824¹

I watch the clouds with envy of their peace, how sweet the travel of skies –

So gracefully they move with the wind, as if submitting their will and I wonder,

if I too inside this cage can give in to the ways of nature,

Conscious of obstructions I face both in and out, and so it seems nature works against me, But a folly to believe for the wise one knows, Nothing is ever as it seems...



Miguel Arcos

¹ This author prefers to use their prisoner ID for publications

Planting Seeds

**"We are seeds hidden in darkness
We are surrounded by richness / potential"**

Reaping by Lawrence Smith

Lying on a prison bed,
Fateful vision fills my head:
Man knelt down
On fallow ground
Tiny seeds in hand.

Solemnly he plants the earth,
Prays to God with all he's worth
Sows for years
Waters with tears
Humble garden sprouts.

Smile dares show upon his face,
At new life in this small space.
Upon the blooms
Great shadow looms
Blotting out all light.

Tree colossus! Blackened Tower!
Grown of past sings that he gave power.
Fills the skies
His garden dies
Broken man in dust.

Scene fades away, and I return
To this cold cell my choices earned
Claw and scrape
Still no escape
What you sow you reap.

Going Home by Bob H. Cook

With winter slowly fading from the mountains of my childhood,
The river's calling to me and

the fish are going wild.
The fields of lespedeza wave to me from the meadow
And welcome home forever its lost and wandering child.
Oh Lord, it feels like heaven as my memories awaken
I toss aside my sorrow and the years I spent alone.
We have no way of knowing How the seeds we plant are growing,
But a home-bound whistle's blowing,
And I'm glad I'm going home.

So long now, I've imagined the family round the table,
That non-essential chatter my heart so longs to hear.
The laughter of the children, the tender hugs and kisses,
To know the joy of finding what I've searched for all these years.
Some things live on forever like Mama's biscuits,
Though hands and feet grow feeble and strength is all but gone.
Life's river keeps on flowing, And the hands of time are showing,

But I feel a south wind blowing, And I'm glad I'm going home.

Buried Words by Devante Thomas

It was just a matter of time
Being born from dirt

Living through filth and grime
Causing my bloodline to hurt
Flushed away into oblivion
"never given time to grow"
To exist, to manifest
Just a wasted young seed, not planted with the rest
Lost among disease and sickness
Pills and bed rest, suffering through weakness
Now we pray to someone or Jesus
God, Allah, Muhammad, which prophet?
What profit do I get from selling my soul?
No loyalty or love stuffed into the empty hole
Of my heart, what heart do I got?
One that's dark and ready to consume
Anybody that's ready for perpetual doom
That's too easy, too grisly, too evil
Got to dig my way out of this devil
Corpse; six feet by six feet, six weeks
To eat me, rats and maggots
Take those loafers off and reveal my feet
Cufflink prints put on by those dragnets
Imagine it, to die with no purpose
Like a baby born with no heartbeat

"But remember you said you were sorry?"
 Yes, probably, but during this life there's no mercy
 I'm cursed, see! Chained forever
 Even before birth - can't wait to sever
 That rot from my mind
 Because only hate is what got me in a mental bind

Bioluminescence by Randy Carter

we the wretched receive no respite
 we resolve living forever in revolt some revolution yet
 we wither daily and b
 y generations rather than bloom a new creation
 folded in frustration
 hard
 cold

i'm studying mechanics so i can know how things work so i can build something
 and destroy something
 i'm studying explosives and foundations and structures i'm studying engineering so i can know how things stand so i can bring them down
 so i can make them fall
 so i'm studying demolition and making plans

i'm studying plants and how they begin in darkness unseen and some are known to burst through cement but really they just found a way through

the abstraction in the concrete
 the substance used to lay foundations
 hard
 cold
 but not impenetrable b
 y beauty formerly concealed in dirt which some call soil
 rich
 dark and filled with nutrients mainly those needed for plant life
 (without which we'd all die)
 nitrogen potassium phosphorus (NPK) ingredients (listed on the labels of fertilizers) used to bake bombs which break foundations & bring down structures
 (we're all made of the same stuff)
 i'm studying seeds and soil and fertilizer and mechanics and engineering
 because we the wretched remain concealed until we realize we're rich and dark surrounded by everything we need to break through foundations to BOOM
 so i'm studying horticulture and photosynthesis because we don't need to receive anything we don't need a respite yes we have been surrounded by death which precedes

decomposition which deposits what life is composed of
 (we're all made of the same stuff!) back into the soil which makes it rich in nutrients we are seeds hidden in darkness we are surrounded by richness potential concealed beneath foundations which are hard cold
 so i'm also studying warmth which is found in we in closeness
 (some organisms that grow in darkness make their own light which is called bioluminescence
 recently scientists have discovered this phenomenon in humans)
 i'm studying we the wretched in closeness in darkness surrounded by death how we are rich and how we make our light and how we will break through foundations and destroy structures by becoming gardens wild and untended blossoms and trees tangled together vines and weeds rooted in richness from death making life light BOOM

Foresight

**"I'll get my chance / and when I do!
I refuse to do what's been - and being - done to me"**

Ahead to the End by Melissa Germain-Lark

Looking ahead at a daunting scene
While coping with captivity.
Trying to envision my American dream
While surrounded by depravity.
Hoursdaysweeksmonthsweeksdayshours
The years endured without punctuation.
Despair and its stalking companion depression Are taking a toll, killing my soul.
The loneliness only another reason To just let go of this endless season.
Wanting relief, a reprieve from this pain
I can't handle much more
I'm Going Insane!

Will There Be Anything Left

by Robert Thompson

They say the waiting is the hardest part,
Not knowing for how long or where I'll be.
I feel like each day takes another piece of my heart.
Being stuck behind a locked door without a key.
Will there be anything left?

Will I ever see my dog, grandparents, mom, or dad?
What will be left in the town I

know?
Knowing that I will never have anything that I had.
I wish I had a crystal ball to give me a clue.
Will there be anything left?

Will it be five, ten, fifteen, or more?
Each day I lose a part of my soul.
Opening an internal wound that stays sore.
All the fallen tears could fill a bowl.
Will there be anything left?

I think about the day when I get to walk free.
I can go anywhere and do what I want to do.
Will there be any family or friends, or will it just be me?
If I pick up the phone to make a call, who will it go to?
Will there be anything left?

She's Dying, and It's Killing

Me by Alan Piwowar

I want to scream out, but they'll Come
My twin sister is dying
I wish she was lying
I am a perfect match
"For what?" you ask

"Stop crying," she tells me over the phone,
laying in a hospital bed now for eight months

without a place to call home

Covid did it! That dirty prick!
Added to her diabetes and CHF, it all equals death
I used to beg her, plead with her,
Don't you see you can fix this?
Lose weight, eat better, feel great...

I was talking to a wall
A big brick wall
Cinderblock
Hollow on the inside
like these ones I'm trapped behind
Where I'm dying - just to give her a kidney; left or right?
Either side!

Pray they say -
let go and let God.
Let him do what?
He's not Santa!
Take my kidney to save her life!

Oh, I can't?

Because I'm in here?
Cause I'm a pozzed up queer?
Would it show I'm too human?
I just want to Scream!

But all I can do is dream -

Of the day I will wake up, take a different path, avoid the drugs, finish class, do the math,

save a life – hers?
Maybe mine, too.

Self Care by Rolf Rathmann

At peace am I
amongst destruction
not with; in spite
of my soul; not dead
merely stilled, determined
to breathe
for yet another flight
frightening
quivering
confused
in my plight
of unknowing
wherein lies joyfulness
an end has yet to be
scribed
through choices alone I
make
though oft yearned
and aided by foolishness
my closing act
holds promise
solitary
singularly present
a drop in a moment
answers will be revealed,
A purposeful,
Beautiful,
Life.

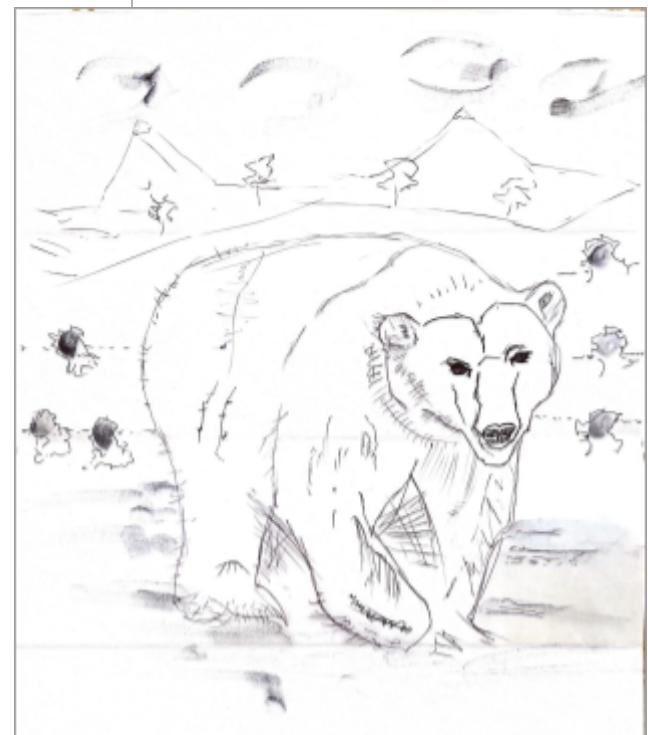
My Chance Will Come by Reginald J.

Holland-Houston III

When you hate yourself,
How can you love someone
else?
Is it even possible to care for
someone
When you constantly salsa with

death?
When you look in the mirror,
you see failure
How can you motivate someone
When you're not motivated
yourself?
Is life even worth living
anymore?
Fuck up, after fuck up, after
fuck up.
Right when you think you're on
the right path,
Doing the right thing,
You eventually find out - you
weren't.
Everything you did was for
naught.
Growing up never knew deep
inside
You could succeed.
Constantly told you'll be
nothing but a
Dead beat.
Always told you'll
never amount to
anything.
At a young age had to
get up, go out, and
FIGHT!
Knocked out, dropped,
stomped.
Dopefeened, cut,
jumped.
Gutter Guy dreaming
of being a Benz Baby.
Frugal Fellow
anticipating being a
Billionaire Baller.
Soon enough I'll get
my chance
And when I do!
I refuse to do what's
been - and being -

Done to me.
I refuse to ride onto a high
horse
And talk down to - or about -
someone.
Give me a chance, all I need is a
chance
And I can guarantee I won't
fumble.
I refuse to become this low in
life again.
Just give me a chance,
I promise you won't regret it.
My time will come, my chance
is nearing,
Humble I am now, and humble
when I'm winning.
A cry for help,
Is so humiliating,
But my chance will come...
I can feel it ☺



Jeremy Brown