

PRISONER EXPRESS POETRY ANTHOLOGY VOLUME 22



Len Whitman

Note from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Poetry is private and intimate, and it takes a type of bravery to send in a piece for consideration. We would like to sincerely thank each and everyone of you that sent in a piece for consideration. For the past five months we have been diligently reading the thousands of submissions and giving each piece the respect it deserves. We loved seeing the self-reflection and personal growth you each displayed both as writers, and more importantly, as people.

The hardest part is deciding which ones will be selected as we only have limited space within the anthology. Each one of us working on the project has our own method of selecting poems. We try to keep in mind who the audience of the anthology is, and which poems will resonate the most with others as we try to balance universal experiences and individual perspectives. There were many wonderful poems that could not make it in due to space constraints.

If your poems were not selected, we sincerely hope that you continue to write and submit poems to future anthologies. We were truly inspired by the poems we received and can't wait to see what comes next.

We would also like to acknowledge the instrumental role Gary has played in making both this anthology and Prisoner Express possible. His dedication and passion to the service of others is unparalleled.

We hope you enjoy volume 22 of the poetry anthology as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Your editors,

Prashasti and Rowan

The House Upon the Hill

By Elliot Gornall

Its windows stay dark and its siding is pocked,
Though people come to visit it sill,
To maintain the grounds and check that the door
 remains locked,
This is the house upon the hill.

Surrounded by pines who list from e'er present
 wind,
Protection is granted by Providence's will,
The roof has survived many a tempest's din,
Strong is the house upon the hill.

Steadfast through birth and solemn at passing,
Harboring tenants, its had its fill.
Now just a shell, vacant years amassing,
Proud is the house upon the hill.

Yes, the house upon the hill, I know it well,
I watch is every day from the window in my
cell.



Gary Farlow

Welcome Home

By Brandon Rushing

A simple door mat.
Hand woven hemp strands
inlaid with colored swirls.
That in their simple existence
exert upon you
a profound sense of comfort
as you are completely accepted
at last.

Playing Ball

By Unknown

Hitting the ground, it bounces back into the air.
Bright...yellow...
Like the days of yesteryear.
As we watch them play, time seems to hold still,
Like the path of the sun.
We remember...A time when life was free...

Voicemail

By Matthew Feeney

[BEEP]

Cheers!

You've reached the home of Matthew Feeney...
If I still had a home (or even a phone). I have a
new number now... it's only six digits long and
provided by the Department of Corrections.

Go ahead and leave your name and number and
your message... like how you hate my guts or
you missed me too much to write or it hurt too
much to visit.

I know that 10 years flies by when you're having fun- but I wasn't.

So thanks for everything- I'm not expecting you to call once I'm out either, but if it makes you feel better, leave a message after the beep.

Calling Home

By Chad Frank

My mother
complains, mostly
about work and my stepfather
Her demeanor gruff
as she vents her frustration.
Beneath the bluster,
I hear a hint of vulnerability—
the tender spot where she hides
the teenage girl forced to grow up too quickly.

Between Googling things for me,
my sister
shares details about her own days—
mainly consisting of
caring for my nephew
and studying to become a schoolteacher.
All the while,
my nephew chirps in the background
like the bird he's named after.

I escape through the phone lines
and am there with them in Philly.
But inevitably,
I must always return here to Butner.
Skulking back to my cube,
I try to stay lost in the memory of their voices,
but the constant cacophony pulsing around me
keeps me cemented in this
razor wire reality

Tell Us What It's Like

By Shawn Block

"Tell us what it's like in there," they say.
But how can you describe monotony
punctuated by violence?
How can a captive capture inhumanity
in human terms?
"It's terrible" or "It's fine" can never suffice, but
they have to,
because the full truth is too large a burden
on all those who truly care.
A permanent war on every front
makes for weary news reels.
And the most difficult battle
is the one with yourself.
So we who write home,
Those of us who have people to call,
we lie.
We lie to them because to them
what it's really like in here
is to share in that cruelty.

What it Feels Like to be in Prison

By [Unknown]

Imagine
a seagull
trapped in razor wire
watching its friends and family
fly south for winter
and you'll begin
to understand
what it feels like
to be in
prison.

The New Yorker

By Adam Christopher

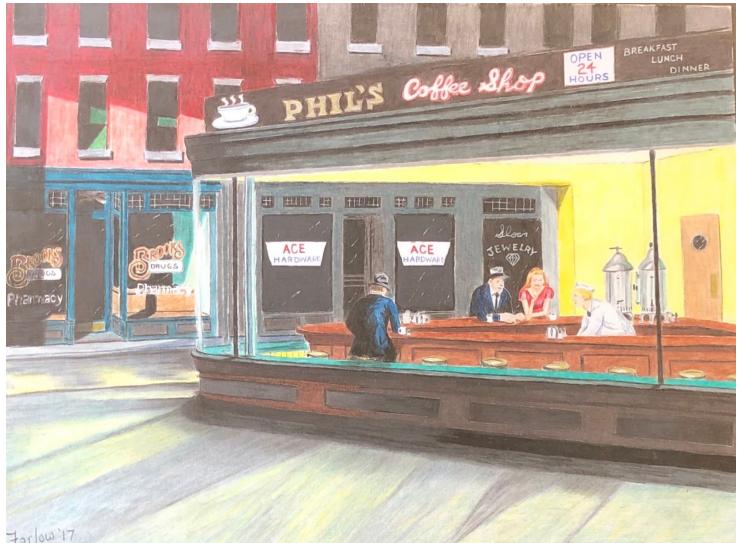
I do not understand the poetry in *The New Yorker*. It doesn't rhyme. It has no meter. It's usually just one long train of thoughts sometimes broken up into Really. Short. Lines. And sometimes about chirping insects. And something about a plant I'd never recognize if I saw it. And that I'd always assumed was a weed. And something about how pregnancy is a mixed bag. And something about a person who committed suicide after reading one too many poems in *The New Yorker*.

Just Write

By Natasha Maready

So much crap what do I want to say? Just get it out, maybe it will be a treasure amongst all the trash. It's all a numbers game. If one thousand monkeys, for one thousand years write constantly statistically, eventually, one will write a masterpiece. But I am only one monkey with much less time.

I suppose that means all this is so much crap.



Gary Farlow

My Ars

By Claude Kelley Kirk

A poem is a prophet
and a mirror of the self
An all seeing oracle
made of heavens, both, and hells
It lies with killing kindness
to ragged, ravaged hearts
and cracks the whip of truth
in sacred, scarred savages
of jagged, jaded art
A college-ruled confessional
of charities and sins
enumerated and collated
of beginnings, both, and ends
Dichromatic and dichotomous,
emblematic and anonymous
at once servant, both, and king
It is self-serving solitude
secret, sensile, and seminude
it is the nothing
...of everything

Shelf Material

By Nathan Aguirre

As I sit alone in prison, sharing thoughts with myself,
some of the best things in life are found lying on this shelf.
Damaged material that's cracked but not broken, like a can collecting dents, we're beaten up but not open.
Though sometimes we are forgotten, we won't lose our design.
No matter how much dust collects, our inner value won't decline.
Like a bottle of liquor, our purity only increases, no longer bound or restrained, the essence within releases, revealing all the past-times that created out sincerity
and exposing deeper truth, bringing light to insecurity.
Everything contains a flaw, and on the shelf there's no exception, but only few can see beauty when it comes to imperfection.
Primitive minds tend to be blind to basic principles,
and opportunities are lost while in the state of being cynical.
Only those with understanding find the diamonds in the rough.
Every object craves attention, lonely comfort is not enough.
Isolation comes with peace, but does that justify the price?
Benefits are less rewarding, when they come with sacrifice
I wonder if I'll ever share the inflictions that I've suffered.
I'm just shelf material hoping one day I'll be discovered.

Island

By Alec Cook

Half-way in between misery and indifference there is an island.
An island that has a population of two.
The first one stranded is me.

Wishing of different past choices amidst a swirling of lost voices too lethargic to wish me dead.
They are a fan without a breeze twirling around my head.

The ocean spans so grand seeming larger everyday or perhaps I make the shoreline shorter hoping the voices go away, but no.
They don't.
And the lifeboat has sailed to sea.

So I segue into building my wall, constructed large of brush and palm.
Because if I can't see the sea then maybe the sea can't see me

And then they'll let me be.

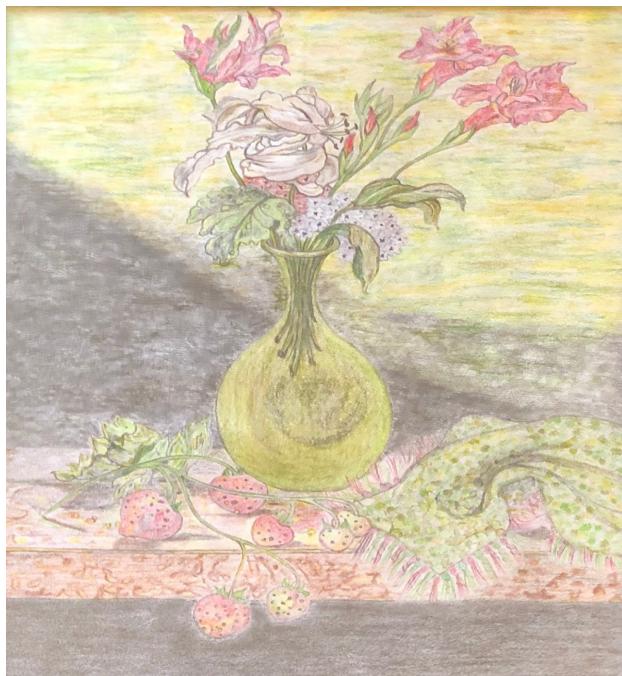
Here I sit in my pleasure dome cast off at sea and all alone.
This way there's no one to fail, not even myself.

Little did I know, the island's other guest sat next to me, But I did not have the eyes to see in my misery that this guest was the rest Of humanity.

Ripples, Stipples, Spring Dances

By James Cepak

Gray days abound
in Ithaca's space
yet May flowers
help count hours
toward brighter days
and summer music and plays.
The mind sets the stage
even as storms rage
across a North Texas sky
where one spirit drives
many fires.
Every beauty ripples
as sun stipples
through trees
that dance on the breeze.
Spring transitions
to summer's positions
where beauty and revelries
thrive for wonder and dreams.



Michael Thomas

Spring Fever

By Robert Andrew Bartlett, Sr.

Young man sits alone,
With one unanswered question:
How to talk to her.

Young girl with a pail.
Young man with blood running hot.
Water spews from a hose.

Water everywhere.
But the bucket now is dry.
Still she ignores him.

Does the girl not know?
Is she really unaware?
He dares not ask.
Wet girl at the well:
Why is it hard to be kind
To the ones we love?

Melissa

By Claude Kelley Kirk

I remember it was exactly one mile
to her house.
But I can't remember,
how many shoes I wore out.

I still carry the joys, and the follies
that were to follow.
Some would call them scars.
And I failed to find
a gentler word.

She was beautiful, I'll give you that.
However, I was young, dumb,
and full of... vigor.
If I recall, there was
springs and summers, autumns and winters,

still winds and blusters, cold rains and droughts.
But seasons turned eternal back then.
My memory, that hackneyed broken watch
is right twice a day.

Mornings, noons, and nights I wore that road
Oh what a young man will do
for that singular, dewy kiss
on a front porch country night
of braying bullfrogs and fireflies
like stars, close enough to catch.

But she was a breaker.
I really can't blame her,
having been broken,
it was all she knew,
all she could do.

And I was willing, heart, body, and soul,
the order didn't matter, I gave them all
at one time or another.
She took what she wanted, the body.
And what she needed, the heart.
My soul she gave back, battered and useless,
as it was.
There was a preacher, and a license,
then a lawyer, and a decree.
I was her broken one, full of wisdom,
but empty of trust.

And she?
She was free, wasn't she?

I saw her only once more, as I drove by
that house I had walked to so many times.
I'd like to say my heart hurt, play the martyr,
but, I don't remember.
I only recall it was a lovely day,
her hair shining as the sun tilted her way,
it always did.
And I don't think she noticed me.

I heard she died at thirty-eight.
Left behind a young son.

I'd always hoped to hear her say,
'I'm sorry'
But now, I only wish I'd known how,
to fix her broken.
At least, now she is,
finally free.



Kristopher Storey

Absent Lullaby
By K.D. Lovett

How do I sleep at night
without the blazing supernova
of your embrace?

If I kissed the stars you wrote your name in
I'd taste the fear
in the distance between us

You walk my dreams
and upon that secret bridge
before the day is reincarnated
we can live and die
in the mirror you've been looking for

I can switch the beat
to avoid this dance
but change doesn't breathe
as you escape with the detuned notes

Now you're just another poem
for me to write
A lullaby
forgotten to be sung.

Sorrow's Reflection

By Taj Alexander Mahon-Haft

Sorrow is a chaotic silence
but it echoes tiny hope

For to be lonely
you must recognize love
and miss somebody

Sorrow is outer space
ever bubbling vacuum
pricked by scalding light
63 percent dark energy
guiding all without a trace
within it enough potential
to reverse the universe's spin
enough light to bring
every dawn

A Letter to Myself

By K.D. Lovett

If I could make amends I'd say I'm sorry
I'm the reason why
you've been digging a six foot hole
in the ground, searching
through an endless bottom
I opened the gateway
that laid a foundation of
glass pipes beneath your house
under your mattress
I built the tracks
for the freight train
to collide with your
fragile unblemished world
I was the bomb
beneath the bridges
your paths to love and peace of mind
slipping through your fingers
the only thing I'd let you grasp
was fear of letting go of me
I opened your eyes
to keep you from dreaming
of keys to open doors
I am the pain masquerading
pleasure
the reason you're ashamed

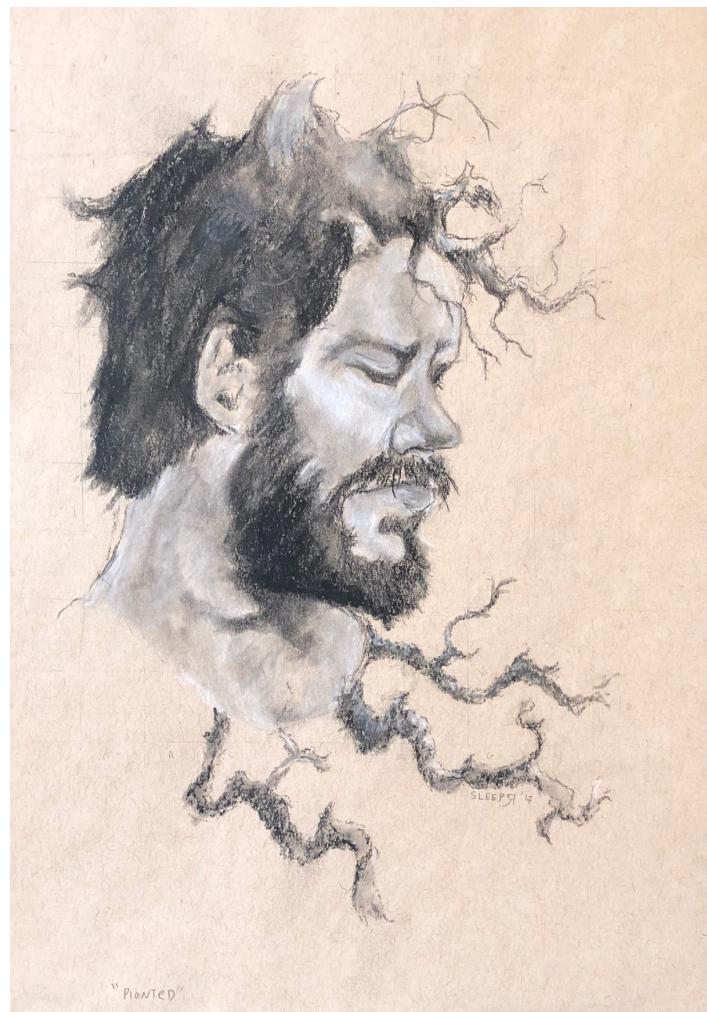
The Wind Blows My Name

By K.D. Lovett

I live in a cocoon
of steel and concrete,
camouflaged
into the background of society.
Time has become silent.
Falling between
fear and peace,
I feel blurry.

My future hides
behind the hallucination
that I am broken,
trying to force
a square to a curve.
I soak in desperation,
inhaling change,
coughing uncertainty.
My shadow laughs.

Thirsty for hope,
snaring the sun,
I shed my skin.



Jesse Osmun

Scars
By Tika English

A scar
That still remains
Replaces slashed skin
In exchange
In time
A numbness
Replaces the pain
But the flesh
Is forever changed

Untitled
By Robert Downs

Emerging from the ashes, my head held high.
Depression, anxiety, fears, shrugged off, lying in
my wake.
Surrounding by confidence, strength, willpower,
love.

Breaking new ground—obstacles jumped and
bridges crossed.
New construction is underway; the remaking has
commenced.
Mending of my psyche has begun—hammering
and nailing nonstop

Mortar, boards, bricks, and nails are holding,
their grip unfaltering, unfailing.
Foundations braced, rafters bolted, shingles laid,
walls up, paint dry—
the building is finished, the mending complete;
the future is mine

Standing tall and moving forward. My Past
has no grip, no hold on my mind, on my soul.
The possibilities are endless as I look to the
horizon,
as I look to the future.

Untitled**By Julian Pelagos**

I woke to see the sunrise,
but walls stood in my way.
My windows to the world
are filled with mortar and decay.
I close my eyes and search my mind
for happy times now past.
The memories now fleeting,
images fading fast.
Where are you God?
Am I forsaken?
I feel defenseless,
weak from aching.
I'll lay back down
and fade away
back to the dreams
of sunny days,
my life devoid of rays.

Rec Cage**By Zachary Chyle**

Relative freedom wrapped in fence.
Clean air stinging nostrils
Sunrise over walls
Pacing in circles
Hopeful vegetation infiltrating cracks
Seeds blown in by an elusive breeze
White clouds on light blue skies
Framed in concrete

Behind the Wire**By Robert Saldaña**

Behind the wire I hear the cries
Of men condemned who've come to die
Behind the wire I hear the screams
Of tortured souls and haunted dreams
Behind the wire I hear the tales
Of broken men hung in their cells

Behind the wire I hear the pleas
As they beg for mercy on their knees
Behind the wire I hear the pain
Of men gone crazy and insane
Behind the wire I hear the tears
Of men who've lost count of the years
Behind the wire I hear the weeps
Of grown men crying in their sleep
Behind the wire I hear the calls
Of evil spirits as darkness calls
Behind the wire I hear the sounds
Of chains and shackles drag the ground
Behind the wire I hear the grind
Of broken men who've lost their mind...

Escape**By Shaun Blake**

In desperate times the prisoner,
To enhance his vision, closes his eyes,
Presses his head into the puff of his pillow
Clasping it tightly to hold out reality-
To hold in the fantasy- nobody really knows.
To those on the outside? They could care less.

Shop Talk**By Thomas A. Littek**

Locker room
Post-incident

Handcuffs boast:
“We’re the most important.”

Mace scoffs:
“You’re nothing without me.”

Baton, Taser and Body Cam snicker.

Pistol, cocked and loaded, rolls his eyes.

Stone Walls and Steel Bars, completely ignored;
But, oh! the stories they could tell.

Rebuking the Razor Wire Fence

By Chad Frank

You confront me
with your sharp scowl—
constantly reminding me of my failures.

You've embedded yourself into my psyche,
towering over my hopes, dreams and memories.
You've severed ties from
freedom,
friends,
family,
and hold my future at bay.

My pleas for mercy
remain unanswered.
You just stand there,
stern and silent
in your steely apathy.

And for this, I despise you.

How Many

By Sandy Blazinski

As I sit here in this dungeon
Admiring the artwork on the walls
The flowers, peace signs, and mushrooms
The hearts that say "Beth loves Mark"
And verses like "To thine own self be true."
I wonder how many books she has read to pass
the time
And how many songs she has sung to unsung
ears.
I wonder how many sobs have echoed off these
walls
And how many tears have washed these floors,
As some lost soul has rocked herself to sleep.
Each one has a story to tell
"I'm innocent. Don't you see. It wasn't me." or

"I'm so sorry. Please give me one more last
chance."

All so different. Yet all the same.
Wondering how many years they will be taken
away
Just hoping they will get out before they go
insane.



Unknown

Prisoner's Sky

By Shaun Blake

Night sky is unseen.
My starry sky is only
Diamonds from my soul.

Used to Be
By Al Coleman

When Cohen compared
a bird on a wire
to the burning desire
to be free,
he wasn't thinking
of the bird alighting
atop shining
concertina wire.

He hadn't been here
so how could he see?
How could he know
the bottomless ache
of the cold space
where freedom
used to be?

If he had then he'd know
there's no burn
only dullness.

Maybe there once was
maybe there used to be—
desire, fire, and room
for clever similes
and midnight choirs.

Here he'd soon learn
not burn or yearn,
no spark or smolder
just colder
and colder;

No tomorrow
only
used to be.

Nothingness
By Matthew Feeney

Nothing. No news.
Nothing is the worst
because there is nothing to respond to.

Waiting.

My heart throbs in the stillness
the nothingness
of not knowing.

Is no news good news?

At least with Bad news
you can appeal
or accept
and plan.

Nothing is
trying to build
a foundation
in the clouds

Watch out for falling bricks.

Haiku in Main Yard
By David Bohm

Haiku in main yard?
What inspiration is there?
Amazingly much.
Green woods all around,
it would be nice to walk there.
At most, we may look.

A bug crawls along.
Does it know how slow it is?
Does it wish to fly?

Looking up at clouds,
What would a cloud think about?

Clouds look down on us.
 Rain starts pelting down.
 No shelter is to be found.
 We will all get wet.
 Winds blow free out there;
 We can not get out of here.
 The wind comes to us.
 The sun is shining,
 Photons destroy the shadows;
 Dark gives way to light.
 Surrounded by fence,
 but our souls are not captive -
 our minds are still free.
 I just have a spoon;
 You have bought too much ice cream.
 Serendipity!

*LeRoy Sodorff*

Outsider Artist By Jon Albert Kaspar

I am a flex pen writer
 A spoken word poet
 On a vow of silence
 All my heroes laid low
 No reason to look up
 A flower pulls me down
 The is becomes a was
 For all of us
 Perception the only reality
 I count my cares on one hand
 And I'm thinkin' about
 Bitin' my fingers off
 I carefully protect
 The delusions
 I've constructed
 Just to get through the day
 I tell myself
 I am a poet & writer

As It Is Written

By Matthew Feeney

words crawl onto the page
 the pen scratching the
 parched paper
 like fingernails
 grasping for a hold
 in this world
 ethereal thoughts being
 born
 crying, screaming, sleeping
 a light shimmers through
 the cracks in the paper
 tasing the new world with a
 split-tongued lightness of being.

Which is real
 Which is imagined?

What's the difference &
 does it really matter?

Dream Sequence

By Taj Alexander Mahon-Haft

Staring in the dark
close enough to feel
the breath of our love

from the shores of shared pillows
do grow two-headed hopes
fed by midnight kisses
moistened by blue moonbeams
impassioned by our wordless exclamations
bearing the fruit of our dual dreaming tree



Antonio Garcia

Travels

By Taj Alexander Mahon-Haft

You can't predict where a butterfly will land
flying flower with no vector
surfing the wind's whisper
so soft the waves unseen
if you see it alight
that's lightning in the stillness

You'll never know where an octopus is headed
true fluidity lacks constant forward

and her home is hallowed hollow
just maybe not where it was before
hovering on air beneath the sea
appearing uncertain of the route
her heart a compass true but varied
so her trail and ink are guaranteed
to paint the reef

Close to tangible

By Geneva Phillips

Watching the moon grow
Like a fingernail until
Magically it turns into a coin
That eats itself down to nothing

Trees shed hopeful dressings
The grass withdraws from life
Birds flee through the air
Holidays are just small words
Printed at the bottom of the boxes

On the calendar
—Days the bed can go unmade
The refuge of sleep, undenied.

Memories are mud
And you can get stuck in them
If you're not careful which paths
You take, which dreams
You dream

Everywhere the eye lights
On blue words and pictures
Tattooed on face and body
Telling their stories
Mine are told in scars
And in silences
I don't find uncomfortable
Or speak to fill
I spill them on papers instead

This is the part where I shape
 My words into something
 Close to tangible
 That tastes like smoke and pills
 And looks like frost glittering
 On bars and fences and concrete
 It sounds like a cricket
 Lost in a vent
 Day after night after day
 It smells like burned brillo, fresh coffee,
 Baked chicken, sex on dirty sheets
 And warm spoons dark with residue.

It feels like being too high
 Driving too fast
 The wreck
 The morning after

It would tell everything
 And change nothing

(I would seal it up in a box
 If I could
 And mail it to you
 Wherever you are
 So that it
 Would trouble me
 No more)

A Poem

By Alec Cook

A poem is momentous
 In oceans with
 Openness
 Flows
 And it grows
 Like the nose of
 A hopeless kid
 It swells and it tremors
 Got hells to
 Remember
 It rings
 And
 It dings
 Like a bell in
 December
 Tides fall
 And they rise
 And it's all a demise
 When one covers
 Their eyes
 To beguile the
 Guise
 You read
 It to please it
 This empty inside
 To find it's to mind it
 To revel in Time
 Yes, a poem's
 An omen
 That stands before
 God. An ocean
 A moment
 We're no
 Longer
 Lost.



Jane Marzell

Rainwater

By d.b. hughes

Rainwater—
down my window pane,
seeks a path with no such strain.
I watch it work its way to end.
Search for another drop to begin.

Constant flow—
it seems my eyes do find,
distant thoughts that brought to mind.
those that splash they come to serve,
the days of old, most some with verve.

Rainwater—
down with certain pace,
droplets ducted trickle down my face.
whenever not within my reality,
it always rains when I stir memory.

Constant flow—
from my eyes become,
a path to which the hears succumbs.
I'll allow it to run its course to end,
to wait for another episode to begin.

Rainwater—
remind me when it pours,
it's time for me to let it rain some more.
I should let it rain with no such strain,
till it cleanses my saddened soul of pain.

Wanting

By Joanna Madonna

I want to stop
breathing.
eating.
falling for it.

getting up.

I want to know
why he did it.
why I stayed.
where my lawyer is.
what's for dinner.

I want to leave
the past behind.
something for my kids.
better than I came in.
yesterday.

I want.
Maybe that's the problem.

A Last Letter to Love

By Geneva Phillips

Love,	You are untrustworthy
	Ambivalent and
	Hard to let go
	The Best part of you
	I held once
	Upon my chest
	In small warm bundles
	Once
	Upon our time

I have known you by different names
Recognized you by the solar flares
In your eyes,
The karmic magnet of your gaze
Your faces pulled at me

Whether in a hundred and eighty
degrees of brown
Or tracing the curve of your
blackest mood
To leave you white around the edges
I was not unsatisfied but never content
rewind. pause. repeat.
Ad infinitum

Love, In public you were unspeakably
kind

But once the lock snicked into place
You flashed bright and hard,
An Axe ready for Battle
Mean and fuming with
Liquor soaked Violence
Heavy with fists
And apologies After
But
Not sorry enough to stop

Even as I choked on the words
And blood soaking my chest
I asked, "is this what you look like, Love?"

I can pick out the letters
Of your name from the scars
That you gave me like jewelry
In unexpected gifts

I burned your promise off myself
With a Black & Mild
Blowing on the glowing tip

Even now as Old and tired
As I am, I cannot deny
That you are Beautiful, Love,
And Dangerous
You are cold-poison-bitter,
A killing-sweet-fire

And I Hate You
More than you ever wanted me

Propinquity

By Travis Sicklovan

Don't you know me by now?
Did you not hear the desperation
in between each of my laughs
when I joked about the sanguinary stains
covering my pale hands?
There was flailing truth inside my eyes
while I showed you slivers
of ugliness, testing your temperance,
yet you stayed near.
Maybe you were edging closer...
I'll admit, I was searching inside you
for familiar demons.
Inside your eyes I was seeking
memories of a mutual hell.
I silently rejoiced as I spied
your dull tepid empathy.
I enjoyed a selfish spark
when I spotted
your tendency towards the dark.



Richard Rivera

Next Spring, Mama Bird

By Al Coleman

I hope you will forgive them, mama bird.

Perhaps it was always there, in their hearts
the same flaw that brought them here
led to this

Or maybe it just clicked into existence
when they snapped those keys
on their belts;

Either way,
this malignant cyst grows and grows,
oozing poison into their veins
and into their brains—
Why expect anything else?

Whatever it was, console yourself with the truth
that

there was no thought in this, mama bird,
No premeditation
No consideration
No rationalization
Just automatic cruelty
ossified in the tracks of daily routine
disdain and hostility
steel and ice and concrete that
gets them through the pay period.

What if this sacrifice had a purpose, mama bird?

Maybe there's hope in it, somehow

Perhaps as they stomp the scattered remains of
your nest,
strewn about the sally port,
to take their posts—

Just maybe
they'll step around the shards of eggshells that
are
all that remains of your family
instead of the usual grinding under boot heels.
And, with luck, those white speckled chips

Just might
reflect the light for an instant
so the steel and ice and concrete thaws a bit
A tiny crack
spiderwebs outward
and brings down these walls
all of the walls
everywhere.

But if not, mama bird,
You can try again next spring.



Zachary Banes

Contested

By Travis Sicklovan

Inward I search,
pushing aside my scars,
looking beneath the dirt
and in between those hidden hurts.

There lies a flickering flame
just beyond a spark
desperately trying to achieve
worthiness to challenge the dark.

It knows of abuse.
 It knows how brethren use,
 how women lie,
 how snakes can have beautiful eyes,
 how devils pat backs,
 and how victory often arrives
 on the second try.

A flickering flame
 a fighter's chance
 something once consumed
 something once certainly doomed
 that fire freshly found
 triumphs call to contested ground.

Complicit

By Travis Sicklovan

Laughing like pure maniacs.
 We didn't need anything
 other than this wild kinship.
 These were the years before
 the scars of love,
 before prison's lingering lessons,
 before obstinate treacheries,
 before sweet songs switched
 into vassals of stinging memories.
 Seven young men
 delirious with fraternal promises
 of synchronized death, with
 battle cries, whispered secrets,
 united in collective crimes;
 death defied another time.
 Our clasped hands
 created an unrealized power.
 A flicker of immortality
 which was proven fickle
 by Time's barrage on youthful myths.
 Our myth, beautifully flawed,
 allowed young men to walk
 as temporary Gods.

The Promise

By Gary K. Farlow

As I gaze upon the majesty of the stars,
 I can see your face;
 As the winds whip through the trees,
 I can hear your voice;
 As I walk upon the soft grass and feel the earth's
 warmth,
 I can feel your presence;
 As I smell the sweetness of flowers in bloom,
 I can taste your goodness;
 And as I wander in the dark desert of my life,
 Your love lights me the oasis,
 to the promised place,
 where alone never is.

Evening

By Adrian Fraijo

A narrow window.
 My eyes are heavy,
 my legs sore.
 Outside there is a sapling,
 a tiny evergreen,
 it shudders and shakes.
 Up in the sky the clouds drift.
 The evening sky,
 gust and gale.
 Up in the sky, the clouds they have no choice
 to be pushed, shoved, to be shrieked at.
 My eyes water,
 water for the sapling,
 tears for my foolishness.

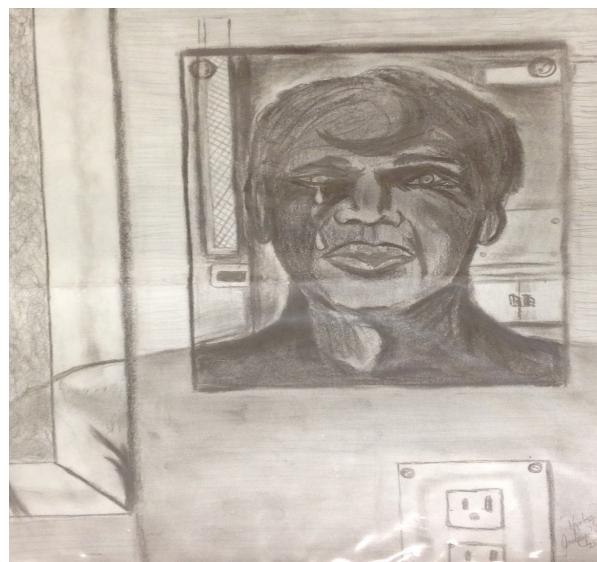
Even Tough Guys Cry

By David Hehn

I just admitted in a poem that at times I cry
 Do I include this poem in the book I want
 published?
 Do I allow people to know that I cry?
 I'm a prisoner right now and people think
 prisoners are supposed to be tough
 They think prisoners aren't supposed to cry
 It doesn't matter if it's in the middle of the night
 in the dark
 It doesn't matter if no one sees me cry
 But it does matter that my poems are accurate
 record of how I felt and what I thought
 And that they speak the truth
 I worked hard to try to express myself,
 share myself
 and know others and myself in my poem
 And I want there to be a record of that
 In my poems I speak of empathy
 I speak of caring for the people I know and the
 people of the world
 I don't know
 I speak of caring for animals and caring for
 plants
 But I don't allow myself to admit in my writing
 that I cry
 How can my readers know that I have true
 empathy if I don't allow them to know I
 cry?
 I feel in prison I've really grown as a person
 And grown as a writer
 And good poems are supposed to contain your
 innermost feelings
 your brutally honest impressions
 your most poetic descriptions
 Poems are above all supposed to be about the
 truth
 Some day I will die
 And I want people to know me
 The real me

The man who was tough enough to write about
 his true feelings

The man that didn't hold back and gave it his all
 A man who was sensitive enough to cry and
 brave enough to admit he cried
 Maybe then people won't have just seen me as
 someone who once was
 a prisoner and a writer
 People will have me seen for what I truly was
 A human being
 A man that truly cared
 And to be honest in my poems I have to admit
 that at times
 I cried



Jackey Sollars

Bitter Tears, A Letter in Return

By Jeremy Miller

It's for those bitter tears
 I'm sorry sister, for all those wasted years,
 10 left, it's just beginning...
 See those cloudy skies? It's never shifting
 I'm sorry for missing graduation,
 I should've been there to tell you
 "Congratulations!"
 It wasn't a lie, I was so sick,

but it wasn't the flu, I was dope sick
 Felt so worthless, and at times I still do,
 You don't deserve this or anything I've put you
 through.

The most precious flower wilts right before my
 very eyes,
 Watch the delicate petals fall, reaching their
 demise.
 How did this happen?
 The guilt is mine with the bloodied hands that I
 hold,
 I shattered a little girl's glass heart after
 breaking the molds.
 Can't believe I've missed so much, and I'll only
 miss more,
 Lifetime of scars inflicted at once, heart's in
 pieces, torn.

I'm so ashamed...I'm supposed to be there to
 protect you
 And make sure the world does nothing but
 respect you,
 I'm sorry, I never meant to neglect you
 or your feelings,
 I know you're tied up and still dealing.
 I'm sorry I'm not there to fend off fears
 and I'm sorry for every time you wept for me
 And all those bitter tears

Little Eyes Upon You
**By Herbert Shackeefood (check this name
 spelling couldn't read handwriting #504949)**

There are little eyes upon
 And they're watching night and day.
 There are little ears that quickly
 Take in every word you say.
 There are little hands all eager
 To do anything you do
 And a little boy who's dreaming
 Of the day he'll be like you.
 You're the little fellow's idol
 You're the wisest of the wise.
 In his little mind about you
 No suspicions ever rise.
 He believes in you devoutly
 Holds all you say and do
 He will say and do in your way
 When he's grown up just like you.
 There's a wide-eyed little fellow
 Who believes you're always right.
 And his eyes are always open
 And he watches day and night.
 You are setting an example
 Everyday in all you do
 For the little boy who's waiting
 To grow up to be like you.



Kristopher Storey

Kevin's Brother

By Claude Kelley Kirk

I don't remember his name
 I just remember him as Kevin's brother.
 Kevin was a friend of mine
 in a tiny town called Fredonia.
 Where three cars at noon
 was a parade
 and five was a traffic jam... or a funeral.
 So small that the whole downtown
 burned to the ground one night.
 Took only three hours.

Kevin and I used to hang out, a lot
 and get high... a lot.
 There was nothing else to do
 just ask anyone in Fredonia

I never once talked to Kevin's brother.
 Kevin's brother did not talk.

To anyone.

Apparently he hadn't talked in
 over thirteen years.
 When I asked Kevin why, he told me
 that his brother had once fallen in love.
 Said the girl rejected him.
 So, he stopped talking.

I was still a teenager, and I can't remember
 if it was just too uncomfortable to ask more,
 or if it was something in Kevin's voice,
 his eyes, his body language.

I just remember
 not asking more questions.
 Probably for the best,
 for Kevin,
 for his brother.

I do remember clearly
 what Kevin looked like,
 lanky and pale
 AC/DC shirt and Levi's jacket
 with the sleeves ripped out.
 One of those wide-brimmed
 floppy leather hats
 like Jimi Hendrix wore.
 Scraggly goatee and eyes that looked just past
 you,
 like you were standing
 one foot behind yourself.

Kevin's brother was much the same,
 gangly and sun-starved,
 same penchant for denim.
 But I can't see his face.
 Maybe I never looked.
 Then again, maybe I couldn't.

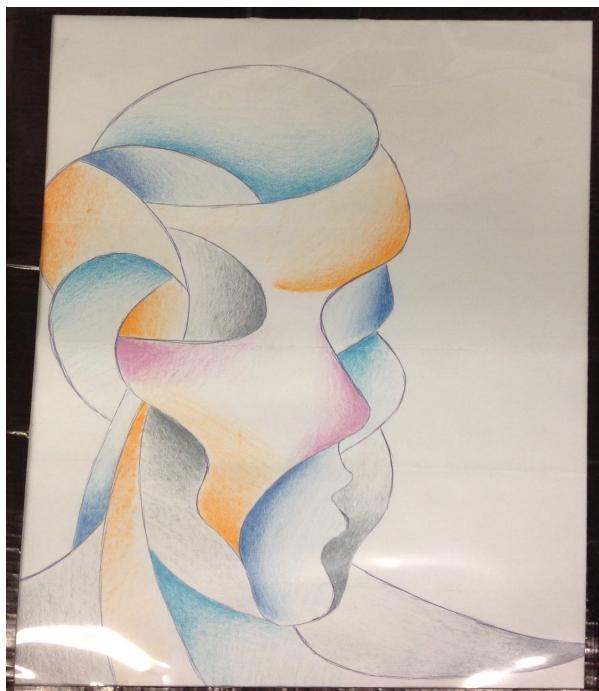
I do remember, though,
 stopping to watch him one gray afternoon.
 He was walking away, down the railroad tracks.
 By himself.
 Truly by himself.
 See, the tracks were abandoned,
 our town no longer warranted a train.
 The tracks were just a speed bump
 on the way out of town.

I was curious what he thought about
 on his walks.
 Did he think about
 what went on around him,
 or did he focus on her?
 Was he trying to work it out,
 or did he just want left alone?
 Was this world too hard?
 Too cruel? Too ugly?
 Did he not care anymore,
 and just check out?

Where was he?
 Here? Nowhere?
 Just counting railroad ties?
 For as little as I knew about him,
 I learned a few things from him.
 About myself. Maybe about human nature.
 I learned it is possible to envy someone
 that you feel empathy for.
 I envied his ability to love so completely,
 as to lose one's own self.
 And I mourn the ravage
 of love unrequited.
 I also learned that,
 there is no such thing as normal.
 While other thought of him as abnormal,
 he lived his life just like the rest of us
 ... just without us.

On day, not long before I left town
 for the last time,
 I was at Kevin's house.

And his brother spoke.



J.E. Forbes

I just don't remember what he said
 just that he sounded like
 thirteen years of silence was but a day.
 I asked Kevin about it later,
 he said that a few nights before
 his brother started crying.
 He cried all night, wailing,
 like the world had broken.

The next morning he began to speak again.

I never found out why.
 I left town not long after,
 I've never returned.
 I guess I've carried those memories
 around for thirty years now.
 Occasionally I wonder about him,
 if he came back for good,
 or if he ever really went away at all.
 The only one who knows, is himself,
 and I may be wrong about that.

I had always believed
 he was alone with his thoughts.
 But maybe his thoughts were alone
 ... without her.

Untitled

By Claude Kelley Kirk

I'm kept here where I'm kept,
 to dream of lost things, little trinkets of you.
 In this bleak of distance, empty wilds of the soul
 where you still live,
 and move through me, like you moved through
 rooms
 where love once was sown in little pots on this
 sill
 and grew,
 as many-fingered oak leaves sieved sun from
 shadow.

But we too
had our solstice.
Leaves fell.
In the blue-bitter of wintered hearts
astray in sidelong silences,
we found a love that ailed us.

Now, through so many hours
so many pens speak
so many images of you,
in black and white swirl-snow of words
at the edges of your uncollected light.
Aloud, when I read these words
and in silence, touch their scabs on the page
the static of lost things spark,
then gutters

I've come to know not, the day from the night.
I know them just the same.
And if a new day were to break,
would I find it broken?

Glue made of YOU

By Sean Fox

The toy top spins
The birds fly the coop
The puddle of mud
let dry on the stoop.

The beehive kicked
Let fly the raw rage
Running for shelter
End up in a cage.

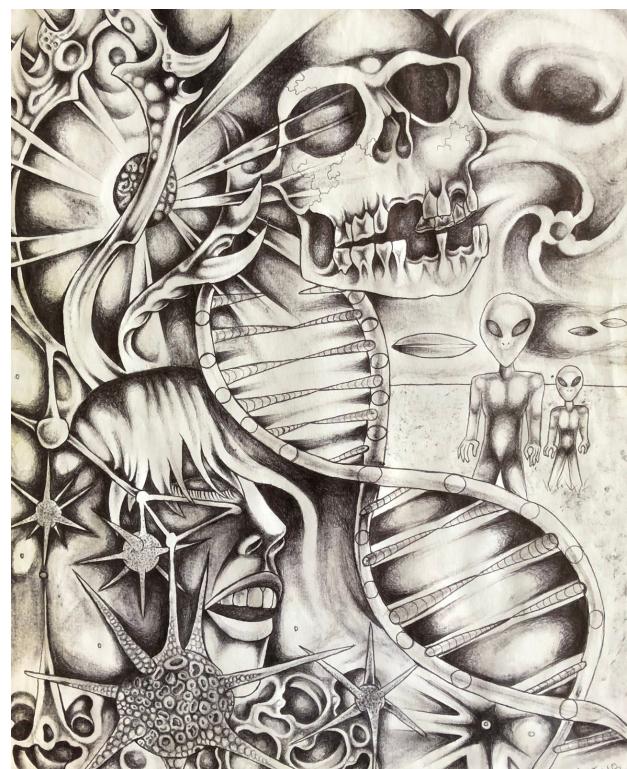
The Judge says "I'm sorry"
a little too late
So I drink cold coffee
Jack Spratt licks the plate

Shake off the nightmare
Breathe deep the new life
Lock up the sorrow
Banish the strife

Ride a UFO
Beyond outer space
To the place of my dreams
On a couch at your place

Where the little garden rests
And the corn fields thrive
The sunset is for pictures
Good just to be alive

A cage of your making
Yes, that will do
I'll gladly stick
To glue made of you.



AJ

Guiding my thresh

By Sean Fox

Reaching out to touch your hair
 Like sand in an hour glass that was never there
 Slipping through the void in my heart
 The driest desert distance can't keep us apart

So you say "run to me, I'll wait."
 The skeleton key breaking rust from the gate
 Tear through the thorn bushes, ripping the flesh
 Your cry in my ear, guiding my thresh.

I find myself lost, the memories slip
 the could mountain stream, skinny dip
 or a handful of flowers in a coffee mug
 Or you and me, an old glove, snug

Is it all worth so much?
 To die and live and die for your touch?
 I have to say yes, to say no means too much
 To die and live and die without you
 I cannot bear...

So I do my armor, set steel in my heart
 This broken down man must play his last part
 The part of the Knight set high on his steed
 Then focus the violence with light bending
 speed

To die and live and die for your touch
 Only a fool could hope for so much
 But I will touch your hair, fill the void
 Cross the distance,
 I will run, tear and guide
 I will find myself...
 ... lost in you.

Hate Mail

By Jonas [no last name]

You're a felon!
 Ha Ha Ha!
 That's what the hate mail said
 The guy writes me so often
 He'd cry if I were dead

The hours that are wasted
 In unkind notes to me
 After awhile
 Make me smile
 I'm a celebrity

Bilious letters
 Like kind ones
 Are just the price of fame
 So keep those missives coming
 And don't misspell my name



David Wade

Frosted Glass

By Daniel Huffman Jr

In my cell is a window and the glass is frosted
 I pretend to stare out the window until my
 imagination is exhausted
 All I can do is daydream about what is on the
 other side
 What wonders does the frosted glass hide
 Looking beyond the glass and beyond the fence
 Oh my at the suspense
 Like traffic on the open road
 For the seed of freedom has been sowed
 But everything is a blur to me
 As this frosted glass is all I see
 On the windowsill the paint is chipped and rust
 has formed some
 Yet here I stand until my legs are numb
 Just past the frosted glass, ever wondering what
 could be
 If only I could see
 Now another shadow does pass
 As I wonder what is beyond this frosted glass

What If?

By Natasha Maready

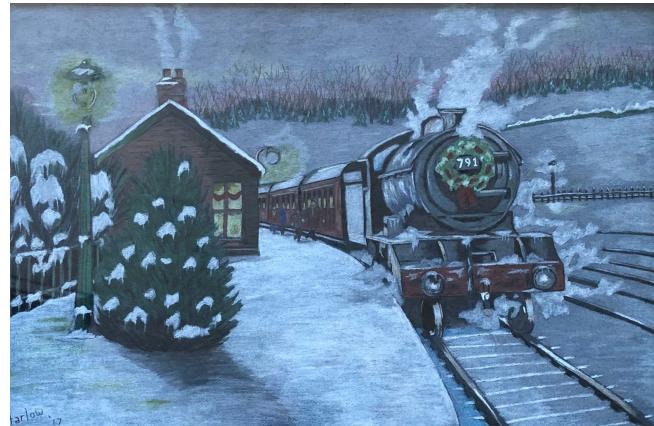
What if I grew wings?
 What if all the guns just stopped working?
 What if, instead of acid rain, lemonade fell from
 the sky?
 What if I said I love you?

 If I grew wings I would fly home.
 If all the guns stopped working we'd have to use
 water balloons
 If lemonade fell from the sky everyone's hair
 would get sticky.
 If I told you I love you then maybe you would
 love me.
 Then maybe all those other things would be
 possible too.

A Christmas Even in Prison

By David Hehn

Through bars and windows,
 past sharp fences, far away
 a christmas tree blinks



Gary Farlow

Yes We Do

By Jonathan E. Cantero

I am
 where nothing matters
 to anyone
 but us
 we care
 if pancakes are too small
 or if every piece of cake is a corner piece
 we care
 if someone steps
 in front of the canteen
 line or any line
 we care
 about the dichotomies
 between black
 and white and the words
 of one spoken
 behind the back
 of another

we care
 about the 65 cents
 you've owed
 since last week
 and the principle
 you make a mockery
 we have died
 stealing a bar
 of soap or a cup
 of coffee
 we have felt
 effusive happiness
 when random goodness
 smiled on us
 with an unexpected goulash
 we have cried
 when the simplicity
 of universal misery
 took a turn
 to make us all human
 we know you
 laugh at what
 you see as pettiness
 but which defines
 the borders of our
 community
 we have but
 a block of concrete
 and a box of steel
 to call our home
 so we've learned
 to cherish the
 little things
 which have become
 more important
 than life itself



Kristopher Storey

A World Left Behind

By David Bohm

I hold this powerful potential in my hand and wonder.
 Such a simple device to convey so much.
 Its relatives: a reed, a feather, chalk, a stick of charcoal, a finger in the dust.
 The lead laid down from the end of this harmless little barrel has been the opening shot of many conflicts.
 Some say that its predecessor is mightier than a sword. If so, how mighty is this?
 Once a conflict ends, it continues to serve both sides; recording actions, agreements, apologies, and history—real or distorted, witnessed or assumed.
 It's a mass-produced wand, working magic for the skilled wielder—crafting love spells, weaving illusions, and displaying the content of one's heart and mind for the entertainment of others.
 It's a wooden key opening doors of imagination. This inverted rocket, leaving gray graphite contrails in its wake, takes followers on the pilot's flight.
 Giving tours through space and time: "To the left, you'll see the past; to the right, the future unfolds..."
 Through the curves and lines it makes, the swirls and angles, it leads people on a journey—creating worlds and leaving the world behind.