

STUCK IN THE LIBRARY



SPRING 2022 POETRY EDITION

Brooklyn College's Creative and Literary Magazine



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(vic)tori(a)

V. Ritchie

that which they called their little girl
by shortening of said name
would apparently be
far less feminine

mom's heart was broken when
the kitchen floor was littered
with baby curls and
(vic) and (a)

i secured the severed remains
with a barrette found near the jungle gym
the one that busted my lip

pink and glitter shining bright amid
hand-me-downs and black and blue

i walked my nose to the timeout corner
celebrated my little (vic)tori

480 MAIN ST, "RIVERWALK POINT"

Melany Tapia

Gorged between unknown flesh torsos--
riding a train named seven crossing a bridge.
To the left: windows that soar to the sky
covetous eyes, lead to a sigh.

One has a mural by the top of their head,
another, a television as big as a bed.
There's two or three with counters big
enough to fit a whole football team,
others have raindrop chandeliers with blinding gleam.

Guess I should thank God for at least being healthy,
bet there's no time for prayers when you're wealthy.
Aching bodies that clean up their mess, hold tight to:
"Money can't buy happiness"
To sweat every day just to make rent
or to budget each check down to the last cent.

Faking humility, I think I might pass.
I dream of the items I want in a mass.
The jewels in these windows displayed so proudly:
the trinkets and things the flatscreen played loudly,
the king-sized beds and private parking,
the enormous condos without all the barking.
Downstairs bar and rooftop included,
but I'm part of the 99% excluded:
mules cemented with minimum wage,
if only I could bellow all of my RAGE!

TIP YOUR CASHIERS

Heaven Stith

Tip Your Cashiers
Retail workers
Are the warriors of the working world
They've seen things
Heard things
Done things
That perhaps they're not proud of
Cashiers especially
We've seen it all

As we sit behind our work stations
Awaiting our next master
We ask so many questions
Will the cart be full?
Do I have enough bags?
Will there be kids?
Do I have enough stickers for the potential kids?
Do I have time to go to the bathroom?
Fingers tap against desks
Feet tap against tile
Sometimes to the tune of copyright-free grocery store music

Some of us get lucky
We get the brief honor of serving
Chill college students
Humble senior citizens
Newcomers to the city
Or newcomers to our store
The ones that actually have good conversation
Not just
"Did you find everything you need?"
"Do you need any bags?"
"Will you need help getting to your car?"

Sometimes
Luck is a second-hand luxury
There's the entitled teenagers
Using their parents' credit cards
The snobby parents
Tossing a bag of dog treats with reckless abandon
The dog
That won't stop barking no matter how hard you glare

And the unholy cries of
"Bring me your manager!"
The mindless complaints without evidence
The step-by-step instructions
On how to pack their bags
The "You get paid to do this. I don't have to help you"
The passive aggression
Or just outright aggression
It comes with the territory
We know
But it still hurts

But with every shadow
Light has to come from somewhere
The decent folks that make sure we're okay
The ones that help pack their bags
The ones that have hearts of gold instead of stone
They are our light
So just like how you sympathize with the waitstaff at your diner
We humbly ask of you
Reach into your heart and please
Please
Tip your cashiers

UNTITLED EPIPHANY

Natan Ben Shemtov

I took a step into forgiveness
on a winter day with a summer feeling
when the sun shined but didn't warm us
like it used to.

And I stayed up all night, waiting for a sign
that everything would go back to the way it always was
back to normalcy—but I'm glad it never came.

Each day without you felt like fresh air in a desert
the sun shone brighter than before and it felt warm this time,
it healed every crack and burn that you left in my skin
so the remnants of you, I killed in my memory.

I fell asleep at sunset—and in a dream, you came to me
and begged me to let you go fly somewhere else
so there'd be a chance you might come back
again.

And I told you that I'd only let the memories fly away
if you promised *never* to come back.

For I am *far* better off without you.

I AM A CAMERA

David Shapiro

I am a leaf,
Plucked from a tree
Falling,
Carried away by the wind
To directions and points unknown,
Wherever the wind decides to take me.

I've seen a lot of sights,
Spectacles of wonder, shock, and awe,
Terrifying crimes against the very fabric of nature
And glorious valorous deeds of moral heroism,
Shining down on a world too often filled with darkness and horror,
A forest brightened by sunlight streaming through the leafy canopy after a dark and
terrible storm,
Illuminating the beauty so often unnoticed in the weary travails of life,
A rapturous, joyous splendor that sings to the heavens as it glistens on the earth.

I've seen all this on my journey,
And it's been invigorating
Exciting and inspirational
As I flutter buffeted by the wind this way and that, stimulated and shocked by the vast
contrast in the shades of man's behavior towards man.
Yet as exciting as this seems, my heart yearns for a place to rest,
To lay down my head and sleep, leaving the world behind for a while or so,
Looking for a home.
But everywhere I go seems to be a fleeting stop, and I must carry on my journey,
A camera recording and recording but never shut off.
I know I can't go back to where I came from, but I'd like to find where I'm going.
And so, I float on the breezes soaring through the zephyrs east and west,
Until I find a place
I can call my own.

MOM WOULD BE A CARDINAL

Arthur Russel

Mom would be a cardinal,
the brown beside the red one
who perched along the fence rail,
and picked apart the seed pods
gathered from the hosta,
exposing seeds like rice grains,
and scattered them profusely;
then she would land beside him,
they'd eat their fill of hosta,
and leave a mess of seed coats
and seeds along the fence rail,
and, flying off together,
she'd chase him through the pine boughs.

Their nest was in the privet;
she called him from the privet—
she called him from the privet.
His head cocked toward the privet
he seemed to think about it
as older men consider,
then rose up from the railing
and flew between the houses.

Dad would be a cardinal
the red one in the spruce tree
who wore his red cap backwards
and celebrated winter
by rooting through the holly,
fighting with the squirrel
who tried to raid the feeder,
and perching in the blue spruce
as noble as a wind vane.

Mom would be a cardinal,
the slow-remembered springtime,
the brown beside the red one,
the dirty snow on fences,
the air that bore them forward,
how, dusty brown her plumage,
she called him from the privet,
she called him from the privet,
she called him from the privet.

stooped

V Ritchie

synapses fire and misfire
keep the meat suit alive
i'm willing some serotonin to kick in
while i drown in adrenaline
and remember everything i haven't done today

a familiar dysfunction
nibbles at my cortex
haven't washed my hair in four days
but i can shave my legs?
i don't make the rules

the meat suit is still alive
though it's gasping and leaking
and making the neighbors uncomfy

but in the silence between heavens
glitter in periphery

m y e y e l a s h e s

like the frosted branches that

frame the bushwick streets

MOTHER POETRY

Xarena Pagan

Poetry are you awake?
I have some ideas of what I want to say!
I think I'll talk of the bright blue sky
Or maybe about the chill of the breeze
Maybe I'll tell the story of a faithful day
Or maybe I'll write so that I cry
Instead of giggling all day
Maybe I'll write sonnets about birds
Or an ode to the world
I want to write it all

My child I am awake
You do not have to scream your words at me
You don't have to explain it all clear as day
Write it slowly and dripping with liquor
Write what you think
Write what you cannot say
My child I am awake
I cannot sleep ever
I will always be awake
Whenever you need I will be here

Yes you always are Mother Poetry
You are my dreams in the day
You are my lessons at night
You are my breaths I take
You are my tears I let out
You are all of my memories
And the future I have yet to play

I love you Mother Poetry
Stay with me a moment longer

Yes Mother Poetry
There you are
I'll visit again soon

Come sit with me child
And listen to my words
So that I may flow through you
And help you be free as the breeze
The one you feel so tenderly
I am there to guide you
To the home hidden inside yourself

And I you my child
Do not forget
I have never left
Just take a quick look inside
There I am awake
Hidden inside

I'll be waiting
For when you are ready
I'll see you soon

VOICE BOX ALTERED BY DISEASE
Shannon Wong

To my dear voice box,
so different from others
you've endured a war.
An attack on the lungs,
the throat
by outside enemies
yet you've stayed standing,
persisted against,
with every breath I took,
and fought on to victory.
Despite the tough times we've been through,
You give me the ability to speak
in rough, deep syllables that sound
odd or beautiful to other ears.
These are your battle scars.
You're truly like no other,
unique and strong.

“LA SIRENA”
Melissa Morales

Déjame escribirte un poema
susurrarlo en tu oído
bailemos salsa a la luz de la luna

Tus brazos encima de mí
nadando en la mar
estrellas brillando sobre nosotros

Mi amor, te prometo que
no te voy a hechizar

Pero por favor, no me dejes
cantando en estas aguas sola

ROSE 4.0

Skyla Medina

The rose I could not touch.
The rose that always made me bleed.
I grabbed it once again,
Blood streaming in my grasp.
The prickling pain slowly dissipating.
The bright red petals, more vibrant than ever.
Some petals are dark brown,
Completely dead,
Sometimes the thorns tear into my fingers again.
But I still hold on,
I hold on even when it's wilted,
Even when it's near death,
Then I hold on even tighter.
Then it becomes a bright red again,
And it brings a smile to my face.
It gives me hope,
That maybe one day I can finally hold a thornless rose.
A thornless rose,
Able to hold it without causing pain,
Without causing tears.
Maybe one day you'll be my thornless rose,
But for now, this is the closest I'll ever get.
You're the rose that I can't let go.

THE STILLNESS IN SILENCE

Eliel Mizrahi

Chasing after a ghost,
Leaving footprints of the past—
Circling around the caverns of the heart.

Emotions arouse the dead memories buried
in between the fjords of reality,
tucked behind a stoic stillness;
Sinking starry skies,
Setting sizzling snakes,
Seizing sunrises—Snatching sunsets;

And as the last dawn drizzles down,
Drowning desires,
Submerging life,
A burning desire to be remembered,
A lasting call for inner peace,
A dwelling of silence,
Immerses the soul.

THE TRUTH LIES NORTH

Eliel Mizrahi

Let go of the past,
Let your head rest on the shoulder of another,
Never forget the hand that gives,
Or holds you when you fall.
Remember not to dwell too long on regrets,
On emotions that don't serve you well;
Forget the limiting doubts that chain—
Coiling you into a cage without a key;
Forgive with compassion
Live with passion,
And never overlook the promise of a new Tomorrow—
A Dawn filled with Hope,
A day full of Pride;
A life lived: True to your North.

THE WAIT

Asmaa Muzeb

“Good things come to those who wait” is what many say
But I waited endlessly
just to see the good things get passed on
Passed on to everyone but me
Passed on to those
with more ambition than me
To those who spent long nights
And chased the good they sought
And me
I was a fool
I thought good things would come as long as I wait

PRAYERS

Victoria-Lynn Moscoso

sometimes i ask father for forgiveness
until i remember i'm an orphan
sacrificed on account of my sins
on the account of the fact that i loved a woman
whose mouth was honey sweet
hiding the venom coating her teeth

and all my siblings stared at me
singing hymns and humming prayers
watching me with worried eyes
hoping i would return home

how do i tell them that when i go home
i shed my thoughts and hang them
in her ears like a coat rack,
leave my bags at the door,
and make myself comfortable
in between her teeth?

so tell father i bought a welcome mat
because his bedtime stories stuck
and that i still have the stuffed lamb he gave me
and that i'll love him until kingdom come

ODE TO THE LETTER IN MY GRANDFATHER'S LAST NAME

Yubelka Nuñez

upside-down minuscule "u"
with a squiggly line on top
you make the endings of letters sweeter
friendlier than a "-" to sign off
two of you is close enough, but not exact
a tilde to the number workers
you wear many hats
an accent and tilde to Spanish writers, readers, and speakers
you hover like a halo
a mustache to the English alphabet "n"
so masculine for no reason
otherwise angelic
aunque we call you la ñ
i imagine you as a nonconforming dash
taking your time, filling up space
you exist in my tongue, long after you leave
in the center of my last name
a bridge to the new and easy
newness
we sound like newness

NU—E-Z
a connector of english and spanish letters
eñe
close enough to enyu, enye, enya
pronounced EHN-yeh
you are not an alternative
not an alt key pressed in conjunction with n key
you are my favorite of the invisibles, hidden
up there with
doble eleh
and ch (seh ach-eh)
a symbol of my heritage
although, not exclusively
a sound of our own

HEARTBURN

Melissa Morales

Last night I woke up
with your name in my mouth
I bit my tongue for spilling it all out
A sound so new but I couldn't risk
Being charred again by another false bliss
So I pulled out the pieces of you
and placed them in my ashtray
But I think some is still stuck
And now I'm left with a bitter aftertaste

BORICUAS

Victoria-Lynn Moscoso

sometimes i look at my face in the mirror
and try to make sense of its puzzle pieces
i try to find myself
in this crooked nose
and lips shaped like hills and valleys
of a place i've never seen

i tried to find myself in english
but the words never made sense
and i tried to find myself in spanish
but my tongue was too fat and slow
to keep up

i tried to find myself in America
but the only thing left for me
was the ethnic foods aisle of Shoprite
between cans of coconut milk
and Sazon

i tried to find myself in my family
but their boricua has been scrubbed from their skin
beaten out by school teachers
and professionalism

i'm tired of living in pieces and fragments
looking in the mirror and seeing a stranger look back
barely tethered to an island i try to call home
but it does not call me daughter

my mom calls me puerto-rican american
americans don't acknowledge that puerto rico exists
and i know it's not much to complain about
but i wonder if i'll ever belong to
more than pieces of myself

MORE & MORE

Diana Athena

Stop!
Go back to bed
Wrap up in the darkness of the night
Fall into the comfort
Of unknown

Pour
Your art down the drain
Let the calmness of the moment
Carry you away
Into the barrels of vineyards

Chase
Pricey leaves of worthless paper
The country's dream
Can be enough
To stay alive

Go down
The hole of I want more
More cash, more fame
More space, more game
More... of myself?

Wake up!
Feed the purring warmth that curled up
At your feet
Make coffee, then
Go back to writing.

COLD

Khurram Ali

Sweater on my chest, breath upon my breast
I know what it means, I'm open and uncovered
I know how it seems, I'm unloved and undiscovered

Been searched for on every ride, slower and slower
A frozen zone found between my thighs, they waver
A frozen throne, behind my lips, behind my lies, I shiver

Scream, to unleash my glistened voice, I'm reaching out

Tie a knot to let me in, strain upon my breast
I know what it means, you're closed and covered
I know how it seems, you're unloved and undiscovered

Hiding in your infinite Neverland, farther and farther
A warm zone found between your dreams, they fade
A warm smile, behind your lips, behind my lies, I quiver

Scream, hear my glistened voice, my shattered doubt

Forgotten how I've come so far, to your warm land,
Through shouts and broken doubts, I no longer shake
Reminded why I've come so far, to your warm land
Through your smile, I've always thought "I miss her"

THERE IS ALWAYS ROOM FOR GRATITUDE

Diana Athena

This year has cleared the streets
And emptied the buildings
Downtown

New York is silent in it's concrete glory
Spring is taking over
The city

Is quiet. Suspended from human emotions.

The illness has carried away
So many lives
Every soul matters.

The lockdown has stripped away the layers
Of protection people tend to wrap themselves in,
Giving

Room for new feelings to root down
Bringing gratitude for the simplicity
Of life

Of trips to the beach
The sunrise
Seeing friends every Thursday (on Zoom)
Sharing tea and secrets
Feeling the warmth of each heart

The quarantine has tied us closely
So we can stand along, but never
Alone,

Protecting fragile dreams,
Learning to trust the humanity and
Each other.

LOS CONQUISTADORES

Michael Anchor

Command and conquer
That's all we know
As we spread our offspring
From sand to snow

Hunting down the enemy
For their weapons and land
Twisting religions
For our ambitions so grand

The movement must live
The empire mustn't die
Victory must be achieved
Before our subjects question why

Children of the empire
Orphans of the universe
Our actions have razed the world
Mother will be forever cursed

STILL I GO

Michael Anchor

Behind me,
A legacy, a home,
In tattered ruins.

All over me,
A cover of skin,
Scarred and burned.

Within me,
A stimulant, a shot of life,
Pumping my will to live and breathe.

All over me,
A shield of skin,
Seared, yet resistant.

Ahead of me,
A rising sun, a new path,
For no matter the tragedy,
still I go.

NEIGHBORHOOD MUSINGS BY A NEWKIRK PLAZA NOBODY

Sara Byrnes

A neighborhood is

only as good as its

worst 99 cent store

ode to my strong pelvis

Faith Cummings

you swaddle my aptitude to hold life in your warm bloody arms
my core, all life is connected to you
your importance develops the longer i mature
you are my balance, my calibrator
like the anchor that holds the ship at shore

you stand like a door keeper, the queen's guard,
the roaring vicious dragon outside a hardly used tower
protecting a fair maiden, a pristine vision
sacred—a crown that adorns my legs. legs that are incompetent void of you,
and i understand that now, only when you are out of commission
ilium, ischium and pubis, the trifecta
the resemblance and creation of the very Godhead, three in one
the sacrum and coccyx make the five— a team, a band of heroes
one direction, scooby and the gang or the incredibles
you are so strong, and you've been through so much
fractured, beaten, battered and bruised
on both sides; not a part of you spared
your pain, open and obvious for everyone to see
you are so strong.
you've been through so much.

you've been dependable
you're protective, and have repaired yourself through growth
i draw from your might and magnificence
perhaps in the future
you will pry yourself open
and expand to release more life
the life you held.
cherished.
you are *so* strong.

wildflower

Faith Cummings

my parting reflection startles me—
the salty matter on my face dares me to ask
but also dares me to stay noiseless
broken
broken and tussled
crushed in the palm of my hand,
till the shape of a crescent moon is transparent to my palms
my face is red and unyielding
where did you go?

my parting glances aren't conventional—
but observing your little moments feels like oxygen
how does it feel? staring at your noiseless
broken
broken and tussled second choice?
crushed in the palm of my hand,
till the shape of a crescent moon is transparent to my palms
what would it take to be the one you glance at?
you bloomed from nothing
and are now the petulant feeling in my stomach
a loss for words, an outpouring of
relentless unreachable expectations
you are my breaking point
you are where i face myself,
but i am where you go when you can't have her—
i am your second base, your safe house
and no matter how deeply it wounds me,
i give in.
for you, i will always give in

AT THE MOSQUE

Zahraa Fares

Don't scream and shout at the mosque

Why did you kick him out?

He came for advice, but you pushed him away

Allah (SWT) shows mercy, but you led him astray

Don't scream or shout at the mosque

You have one job to do, save us

Is it so hard to let us cry on your shoulder?

Do you expect us to be perfect; like a soldier?

Are we not one ummah?

Linked together by "La illaha ilallah"?

Don't scream or shout at the mosque

Do we not sin?

Do we not come to receive healing from the one who can heal us best?

Al rahman, al khaleq, al mudather

Don't scream or shout at the mosque

Be nice and kind

For you will find internal peace with the one

Most high

rainfall

Sayquan Wooden

The clouds aren't supportive enough for my weight and demands
unless creates a that'll me and land.
It rainfall complement my

enlightened by the wetness

that creeps up on me

something so cool and sexy

that it hovers in the sky

secured in knowing the drops are bound to cover

for when I'm down

I tend to love it so very much

becoming its soft landing

they become my pedestal

it'll support my weight

not for long though

the freedom

the willingness

to not care

bodies running

into the disappearance

isn't presented anymore

going back to the old ways

as I least expected

it's goodbye for now

even when I'm scattered along the earth

years from today

I'll still feel it

when it touches me

I see it as profoundly inevitable.

THE WHALES OFF MANHATTAN BEACH

Arthur Russell

1.

I have never wanted anything but to be understood and accepted,
except from my father, from whom I wanted to be appreciated,

but he did not believe in praise. If I got a 96

he thought it was thrifty to ask where the other four points went,
because acknowledging success was prideful.

I was so hungry for his praise, I got to know his mind as Ancient Greek sailors knew
the islands of the Aegean, how their shapes rose on the horizon, conjuring
olive groves and monsters in their caves.

I scanned his inconsistencies for deeper, hidden consistencies.

I listened for approval in the caverns of his silence,
and read his eyes for signs that weren't there

from boy to man, and still he was ahead of me, withholding praise
and holding out the possibility of praise and withholding praise again.

2.

Then he got sick and very old and spent the last two years
of his life in a bed in a home that smelled like a bowel

that had been washed with minty disinfectant.
He was embarrassed by immobility and proud in his mind.

He took no visitors, and referred to himself as "The Potato In The Bed,"
and to the antidepressant pills as "Nursing Home Not So Bad."

His legs swelled, grew purple, oozed pus, scabbed over.
He spoke like an oak tree.

His fingers were smooth, flesh purses of stymied bone;
and yet, when he could no longer reach the control that made his bed rise,

he invented a string with a 3/8-inch nut tied to one end and looped over
the bed rail to help him fish it up. Patient as a prisoner planning an impossible escape,
he loved his engineering; he loved his invention; he loved his mind.

3.

His weight dropped. His eyes were failing. One Sunday afternoon, that autumn,
we were watching the Jets, when he said, "Shake me." I looked at him sideways.

He blinked and smiled winsomely, almost coquettishly, like a high cloud on a summer day.
"Like a baby," he said. "Shake me like a baby."

I knelt astride him on the bed, threaded my fingers under his shoulder blades,
lifted a little, then let go. "Faster," he said, speaking like the air
from a tire when you press the valve pin.

So, I went faster, maybe one pulse every two seconds, up an inch and down again.
Then he began a moan so low I could not hear it, only a vibration in my chest,
and the whales off Manhattan Beach breached and fell back into the water.

It was crying, but not the regular kind, because he was talking with someone
I had never known. Then he fell asleep. I got off the bed, and sat

in the chair again, and the Jets were losing, and the linoleum at my feet was thick with wax,
and I imagined the factory in Germany where they make linoleum, big steel rollers,

the smell of bitumen; and I dreamed they were slicing the linoleum into squares
and putting it into boxes; and then we both woke up, and I went home.

4.

The next week, he said, "I asked Mother to shake me like a baby. She said 'No.' Embarrassed."
I mounted the bed and found his shoulder blades, again performed

the strange massage for the places that his heart had ceased to serve, and this time
he moaned loudly and shivered then dropped into a thick, robust, snoring sleep as if

it was 1943, the other men were off at war, and he and his friend Artie
had all of the girls to themselves, and woke up in their cars at dawn, disheveled,

dirty, thick-lipped, thirsty, sure of themselves and what came next.

When he woke, he asked for water, then we watched the Jets, though he could
not see much more than the field of green, and twice asked me the score.

Then, with his voice so low only a motion detector could hear him, he asked,
"Why is it no one understands me but you?"

S U B T E X T

Elene Tsagareishvili

I didn't know we were allowed to speak

About gay subtext

One time I shoved my rainbow flag into my bag on the Q train

And I felt shame

As the New Yorkers thought me strange

And my mother at home

I told her I'd been at the bookstore with my friend

But I'd been hiding.

What is gay subtext

If not shame

ELEGY

Janis Farrell

Whisper softly into daybreak

Lull me gently to the dawn

Because I dread dark days awakening,

Cloak me in the night's sweet song.

Suddenly old hurts and anger

Pale in morning's desperate horror

Bereft of all but melancholy,

Lost is all hope of tomorrow.

Whisper softly, whisper love

Let not morning this day come,

Night eternal has enthralled you,

I can but remember love.

I shed a tear; it can't be true,

There is no me, not without you.

One thousand days, one thousand tears

Loss has caught me unaware.

TO MY CHILDREN

Tameka Ridley

To My Children

Should you be sold tomorrow?

I want you both to know that I love you

No matter how far away you are

I will always love you like cooked food

My love won't save either of you from Hell

But trust me when I tell you, it will never forsake you

Should you miss me?

I want you both to know that I miss you too

No matter where you are, I am always thinking of you two

I will savor the way you both smile with only one dimple

And the fact that you still have each other

But trust me when I tell you, I will pray to the stars every night that you won't have to miss me too long

Should you be afraid?

Let not your hearts be troubled

God will always be there for you both.

Whenever you need Him, just call on Him.

Trust me when I tell you, to exist in this world you're going to need Him.

Should you be beaten?

Know that God will make it so that the entire world will change

If not for you but for generations after

Pray through it, pull through it & be strong

Don't waste too many tears feeling sorry for yourself

You were born to live, not to simply exist

Should you be murdered?

You will be just like every other slave

You can rest in peace at least

As long as they don't take you to New York City.

TRUMPET HEAD

Cole Fox

The Vanguard, 1971.

The West Village is teeming with streetfolk, treefolk.

Trumpets flash out of dark club windows.

Taxis open their windows because it is summer,

it is late but the sun's not yet settled. Everyone is strange, yet

everyone's similar. New York, New York

how do your sidewalks scent

when summer rain melts into your slate stone crepe?

The color of the sky is yes,

certainly jade, atmosphere pressure inflates wet skin drums.

Every color is different,

every street lamp is bulbous—the trumpet keeps crooning with bass, drums, piano.

A quartet—a four-cornered block theater

that broadcasts the Village Public Service Announcement

in all quadrant corners of summer '71.

Bang dap—swoon. Men walk slanted, sideways,

upside down

town.

Ladies clap heels on the concrete quadrant. Ivy glances

spiral up the smooth stocking pillars of

'71.

Vietnam.

GI John.

Sodium vapor gas now discharges light

on the concrete quadrant—trumpets now

flash on the street in a creamsicle flurry

Village slurry,

by The Vanguard in nineteen '71.

SCARLET

Hafsa Fatima

5th grade me was the boldest

Eyes wide

Head first into the ground

Not afraid of falling

From the swings

Eating dirt

Not afraid of telling my sister's bully to shut up

5th grade me was braver than present-year-old me

I think I could learn a few things from her

How to stop wanting what doesn't want you back

To draw even if you don't have the right colors at your disposal

To stand on the swings, and imagine jumping over the fence

To see your friend upset at the winter dance formal, because he couldn't tell the girl a grade

above him that he liked her, so you took matters in your own hands and went to find the

girl, telling her someone wanted to talk to her, only for him to disappear from the cafeteria.

Why wouldn't I do such a thing now?

Why wouldn't I act out after school, refuse to do work that didn't stimulate my mind, and

draw every day? Doodles in all my notebooks.

I miss my doodles. I miss their comforting presence on the sidelines, wrapping all the words

I didn't care about.

5th grade me would not even look twice in my direction.

Isn't that the saddest thing?

I FEEL YOU

Brenna Gannon

I want to say, but I don't.

Letting those words out would mean falling into a deep hole,
never before been completely explored.

It would mean jumping into an ice-covered lake,
suffering through those moments where your lungs seize
and your body goes numb
and you can't do anything but gasp for breath.

How strange I must look,
sitting in a seat and holding in all the air I can,
hoping that if something makes me pop,
I may have just enough to save myself
from complete deflation.

But

I want to connect.

I want to hold my heart in my hands
and trust that I'll be able to put it back together,
trust that someone else won't smash it in the first place.

It's happening.

They're looking.

My lungs are tightening.

I can feel the air swell in my chest.

Usually at this point I stop.

But what if I didn't?

What if I just

What if I

What if

and then I jump

and

then

I

fall

GOOD BOY

Omar Garcia

Songs that make me think of him
Something somber to remember times less grim
Even the ones where he belittles me
I thrive on the attention
The dog beckons to siren call
Floppy ears perk
As my tail wags at his voice memos

MURKY FAUCET

Omar Garcia

Shower thoughts turn to shower talks
The faucet's tears grab ahold
Ahold of what is really on the surface
Memories fade translucent
As echoes reveal the truth behind the running

CONVINCE ME I'M TOO YOUNG

Hifza Hameed

Convince me I'm too young
That I should do as I'm told
Convince me I'm too dumb
Convince me I'm too old

Convince me I shouldn't start this project now
It's too late, I'm too late, the doors have already been closed
Convince me every artist has already been birthed
Every star has already been named

Tell me I should've planted this tree 20 years ago
A year after I was born
Tell me my art means nothing
Every art has already been made,
Every medal has already been won

Tell me my words mean nothing
I'm no Austen, Orwell, Gibran
All the beautiful words have already been written
Every dream has already been dreamt
Every melody has already been hummed
Don't fight for women's rights, you are no Malala
Don't write poetry, you are no Rupi Kaur
Don't fight for justice you are no Mohammed El-Kurd
Don't speak up, there are too many voices, you will never be heard
Well screw this, screw that, screw you
I don't care to be Austen, Orwell, Gibran
The goal is to do what I love
It doesn't matter if I go far
The writer must keep writing
The artist must keep making art

You can't convince me I'm too young
I won't do as I'm told
You can't convince me I'm too dumb
You can't convince me I'm too old

SOLE FOOT

Cole Fox

Ode to the soles of ferret wampum
And winged sandals who fled old Greece
Callous are we that beat in succession
The march of time and the flight of hope.

Ode to the soles who came before us
The mirrored siblings of locomotion
Whose tamed claws dig in soil and turf
To await the cannon that marks the start.

Give warmth and comfort to our humble numbers
Whose archaic figures can only be loved
By the descending gaze of those above us
Who rely on our burden in unison grace.

Ode to the pod that cups the Earth
Its firmament creases to reveal a nature
Of unique arbor that unfolds again
To drive the seed of a horny plant,

To the soil womb that beckons life—
Ceaselessly does the future come
So long as paths do lay before us:
The movers of a burdened soul.

PHIL GLASS

Cole Fox

When my door is shut
and my mirror is clear,
can strange eyes view
my nude skin through
the glassy image
like a portal:
and if I am private and
flat footed flatmates

shave them heels

across hallway gangplanks,
the silver shakes
my lewd form taut.
Am I not relaxed but
tensing too?

If the curtain is drawn,
and the lamp is dim,
and the mirror is flush—will my whimper exist
as the solo prayer
to the doughy David
or Greek god that shrugs his sex
and erects his gaze
to look back into my freakish head?

And if I splinter this mirrored-portal,
will I be private
in my own life—
my own scarred and
tawny leather,
primitive pulse

BLOOMING WITH LOVE

Keisha Jackson

As the flowers bloom
And the seasons change
My love for you remains the same
Time doesn't seem to change a thing
My heart still calls for you
I take pride in clinging as long as I can
But I really long to hold your hand
For as long as possible
I want to be the one you love

As seasons change
So have I,
I've come to realize
I need you here by my side
The air's getting warmer,
Likewise my heart is warming up to you
For as long as possible
Starting with today
Will you be my summer love?
Forever and always summer...

HALLWAY

Riana Kolari

grief is a fairly new feeling to me
but I can tell you this:
Grief is a long, empty hallway
filled with nothing but pictures on the wall
and videos playing
of all the memories we created together.
But the hallway never ends
and I can't get to you.
All your favorite songs are playing—
Our song is playing
I wanted to see you grow old
with kids and a wife
I wanted to see you
finish your life.
But all of that got taken away
when you became a hero
on that cold winter day.

HARLEM'S NEPHEW

Shawn Lackerson

I'm Harlem's Nephew
That Young King
Fried Chicken, Cheese spot KFC
That Big Mac, Philly Cheese Steak
Take the Cake, eat it up in your face
I Got friends
New Beginnings
Square Root of Four is Two Man.
That Orange Soda
That Sunkist
12 ounce can soda Boy We Reminisce.
On The Good day...
Call it Corn rolls
Walking down 42nd street with a dollar for Doritos.
I Study Hard Books & Pens.
Highlighters, Concentration, Yeah I'm focused Man.
I'm Harlem's nephew.
I am that young king.
Fried chicken cheese spot... philly Cheese
I'm Harlem's nephew.
I am that young king.
Fried chicken cheese spot eating KFC.

BROTHER BELIZE

Shawn Lackerson

I hope you put in a good word for me...
to the man upstairs
Hope you share the changes...in me...
that I can't see in myself
I never really believed in the cross...
until you crossed my path.
...Oh Freedom At Last

You died in your casket like Jesus died on the cross.
Almost like you died for our sins
Then you died for a cause
Like you died to make sure Jesus is real
Then you died for a reason, to make sure he had

Hear my cries
Yet you lied
Down peaceful at death
But we all knew you suffered
From stories about you in the hospital

You flatlined like Jesus

Then rose from the dead
Come back to send a message before
That green light straightened
You came back from a flat line
Like Jesus Christ come back for his children
Come back to send a message...
Before that last line finish

You didn't come with no bible, no scriptures
But you did want your people to follow
So if you're like Jesus
Then let me write your bible
To learn your ways,
Before Judgment day...

You died in your casket like Jesus died on the cross.
Almost like you died for our people sins
Then you died for a cause
Like you died to make sure Jesus is real
Then you died for a reason to make sure he hears

I love your God, God knows I do
Now you're Free as can be
Just hope you put in a word to Jesus

to save a seat

up in heaven...
Just for me...
Please...

IT'S THE AROMA HONEY

Reubena Kaidanian

There's an aroma that fills your frequency,
a sort of warm glossy glow that surrounds you.
It's what makes you move with ebullience.

This aroma deepens depending on your choices towards growth.
The scent peaks when you free yourself from needless weight,
and when your energy is purely sterling victory.

This aroma, you may ask, how so is it created?

it'll fuse through you when your heart and mind are
ready and aligned to carry yourself free-flow.

Oh honey,

ALLOW YOURSELF TO EXPERIENCE

HAPPINESS

Hannah Lazerowitz

i feared the
inevitability
of ecstasy
walking out on me
and the disappointment
of abandonment
so, i lingered in my
depressive shadow,
blocking any iota of sun
from my existence
joy had to be permanent,
otherwise, it was pointless

now i'm being
swallowed wholly
by a perpetual darkness,
unable to accept
a sensation
of which stays stuffed
in a jar, labeled
as a curse:
happiness

SOME DAYS

Hannah Lazerowitz

some days it's simpler
to stay in bed
some days i define my worth
by the devils inside
some days i feel unalive,
choking on tears and trauma

but some days i channel
courage to weather
downpours
some days i state
that things will be okay,
despite my current state
and not just some days,
but every day
i make it to the next,
stronger than before
practicing self-compassion
more

LADYBUGS

Carina Louis

We killed three ladybugs this summer
Waiting for a love that was easy
Someone who can build me up and forget how easily I break

They sat on my ceiling
But I mistook them for someone else
Their reds turned into shades of brown
Dark like your mother's coffee
Where the love is brightest

We killed three ladybugs this summer
Waiting for a love that was easy
Someone who wouldn't hurt me anymore

I ate the wings that turned into freckles hiding beneath your skin
Poison enough to feed for years
Bathing in the forever of your sins

We killed three ladybugs this summer
Waiting for a love that was easy
I'd like to know it was for the best

S U N S H I N E

Elizabeth Llangari

You shine so bright.

I see it, the whole world sees it.

On the darkest days, you still shed light.

You have shed light in my world.

You have shown me true friendship.

You have been my shoulder to cry on.

You are worth it.

You are loved.

You are cared for.

You are strong, stronger than ever.

My sunshine, you are my sister

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