

# POETRY

AT THE

# BACKYARD

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Tahoe Poetry Collective



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# Salvation

Sara Hoxie

---

When you are swimming and  
You crawl out of the water  
On to the wrong beach  
and the mountains are not your mountains  
The sand is different  
even the air smells wrong,  
Poetry will save you.

When you wish it was different  
you didn't mean it to roll out and break.  
Everyone can see the bruises.  
Locate a cave in a rock, go there.  
Once in the dark - you sit  
covered with ancient dust.  
On the wall in some glowing chemical;  
Poetry stares back at you.

When all voices are voices of your captors  
there is no river or stream, not even milk  
and you have been left to look for crumbs...  
Poetry, once again your hero.

When you are cut and bleeding  
battered and numb  
with a plane ticket you can't use  
and a broken axel in the twisted heat;  
watch the tow truck.  
It may be followed by a dozen Western Tanagers  
singing about the irrelevance of tropical birds;

"We are the real color" they say.  
Poetry is their best language.

It is always Poetry  
Dangling from the lip, stuck in the heart  
Pouting and forgiving.

On the reservation  
You reach into the glove box and pull out a small bottle.  
Give your Navajo guide what money you have  
You ingest Poetry  
Hoping the visions will summon the muse.

You drive away though the wind is full of grit  
It works upon your scalp  
and down through the layers of skin  
evolved to cover your mortal pieces.

Poetry saved you  
there..... and there..... and there.  
Your pins and glue, tears that track  
And run through canyons becoming your rivers.

So here on some sand altar  
You sacrifice yourself to Poetry.  
You came back, you ... the prodigal.  
You cry real tears with your head in the lap  
swear your fidelity like before  
then you are swallowed, and you are home  
this time for good.

# Walking on the Queen Lily Road

Sara Hoxie

---

Up the Queen Lily Road  
There is a bridge that spans the North Fork.  
It is almost as old as the ferrous gorge,  
the glass patterned snakes, the hands of the sun.

There are angles in that canyon geometry can't explain.  
Places where gravity only dreams  
like up on the edge, the rim,  
anyone perched there would need to decide which way to fall.

This canyon wrestles with deep place  
That shudder and throw about time  
and time is not concerned.

I don't know if its blood or iron splattered on the pavement  
but it is waiting for the rain to come  
to spell its name  
through the ringing of heavy clouds.

Up the Queen Lily Road  
there is skunk cabbage, watercress  
and a fish in the river beneath a boulder  
waiting, like everything does, for the stonefly hatch.

There may be a mine shaft.  
A mouth in the Earth  
spitting bats like words  
into the evening heat.

I walked that road in the morning one day last summer  
In order to look closer at granite,  
as if the space between atoms explained warmth  
or the origins of all things within the spectrum of red light.

I kept walking with my fragile life and sweet thoughts  
knowing I was watched but not regarded  
not judged or valued  
betrayed or forgotten.

I was a walker, a foreigner leaving my scent  
and bits of my dry brown skin  
scattered on the black pavement  
of the Queen Lily Road.

## Fire Wind

Sara Hoxie

---

It's a fire wind blowing out of the east  
full of malevolent dust.

Don't ask where it's been don't look for its mother  
its mother is gone.

It is fickle and lifts green pebbles from corners of worlds,  
planets of heat,

planets of ice  
there is no reckoning with this

no answering,  
nothing behind your back when you are turned.

# My Father's Wood

Sara Hoxie

---

My father's wood lies stacked and dry  
beneath the corrugated metal shed roof.  
Trees downed by last year's wind

dead from time, lost in snow  
oak and pine all piled like cadavers  
after a war, awaiting the pyre.

I helped him in the late summer  
with the chainsaw like a screaming drone  
not a ghost but still unearthly

in the back by the hog wire fence.  
He left piles of sawdust among dry leaves  
and branches heaped for January bonfire

where he burns brush,  
broken kitchen chairs too old to repair  
and the Christmas tree.

We dance around those fires in frenzy  
of Pagan remembrance the tone  
and strings hanging in our brainstems.

Across the mid-winter night  
Orion floats just east of zenith  
fading in and out of smoke.

In the woodshed, each piece in time is  
set upon the stump and split with the gray ax  
singing the song that wood sings as it shatters.

Then he coaxes years of stored sunlight  
out and into the air around the stove  
as rain falls hard against the west facing windows

polished sometimes with vinegar  
and the same newspaper kept in the basket  
on the right side of the brick hearth.

# Bag of Bones

Janaiya Robinson

---

staring in the mirror, a person doesn't stare back.  
instead, a bag of bones in a body sack.  
all i am is a bag of bones  
forever, destined to be alone.

# Me or Him

Janaiya Robinson

---

me. or. him.  
it was and always will be me or him.  
and time and time again i will wait for you to choose me.  
and time and time again, you do and always will choose him.

# To Be Pretty For You

Janaiya Robinson

---

To Be Pretty For You  
Was like a drug, it had its highs and it had its lows  
To Be Pretty For You  
Was like a drug, and I was getting high off your compliments  
To Be Pretty For You  
Was like a drug, and I am an addict

# Was erwartet uns in der Zukunft

What will come in the future

Amelie Mäger

---

*Translated from the original German*

Hope, the confidence in the future, the confidence, the optimism about what the future will bring.

Expectation, on the one hand the assumption of what others would or should do and on the other hand the assumption about what is to come.

Fear, natural reaction to external circumstances, it belongs to the basic human emotions like joy, pleasure and anger. Fear is a huge part of our life. It constantly saves our lives.

Now here we are, drained. What is dopamine again? It is a substance that is supposed to motivate and stimulate us. But we haven't known this for a long time. School. Something that should be fun. I can still remember, back then my parents raved about it and to this day they just say "enjoy the time, it'll get worse afterwards". How is it supposed to get worse here? You don't get good grades as feedback for the work you put in. Where is dopamine supposed to be produced anywhere? Until recently, we were happy and cheerful, looking forward to the future, to having nice experiences with classmates and teachers. But you have school until late at night and have to study afterwards. Where can you enjoy this time? And it doesn't stop there, you already have to think about what will happen to you in the months after graduation. The future. A scary word for all of us.

I want to excel. Hit the mark with a job and family. Give the dark, gray world some sunshine. This is what I want. I hope for good grades with great prospects. Hopefully God will look at me and say he's proud of me.

Hope. The constant hope that everything will turn out well. Hope for less pressure. Hope for the right job. Finding the right person. Life is constantly about hope. Believing everything will turn out the way you hoped, only to end up hoping God is proud of you. Hope shows itself differently for everyone. Some talk to God, others talk to themselves. In the end, hope is the same for everyone and somewhere everyone hopes that someone is proud of them, whether it is God or not.

But is God really proud of me? With the accomplishments I have made? Oh, I can do better than that. What if this is not just a phase, but remains? What if I can't perform like this in the future? What if I can't find a good job to provide for my family... Can I pass on love the way my family gave it to me? What if I can't? I am afraid. Afraid of what is coming. Afraid of what will become of me.

Times like this can be dark and scary but hope dies last.

# happiness

Amelie Mager

---

Happiness is something that people seek to find.  
What defines happiness can vary from one person to the next.  
When most people talk about the true meaning of happiness, they might be talking about how they feel in the present moment or referring to a more general sense of how they feel about life overall.

But happiness is a beautiful feeling.  
Even if it's just for a short time sometimes.  
It feels like you're flying.  
It feels like you're in heaven.  
It feels like you weigh 20 pounds less.  
You could sing and dance the whole time.

Some people are looking for happiness.  
Some don't seek it but feel it at some point.

There's really dark days.  
Days in which you thought there is no sun.  
The thought of a never ending story.  
No sunshine that brightens up your day.  
Every day the feeling that no one loves and appreciates you the way you are.

And then something happens.  
You're done with school.  
Done with a tough relationship.  
Done with so much pressure sitting on you for months.  
So much pressure that you have the feeling you can't get up anymore.  
Like someone pushes you down with their hand.  
And this just goes away like it hasn't been there for months.

And you feel light.  
You're in a place you feel constant happiness.  
You can't stop smiling.  
You start to laugh at everything.  
You have time to focus on your self again.  
Focus on things you couldn't before.  
It opens your eyes.  
You realize that people actually see you.  
That people appreciate you the way you are.  
You find someone who gives you the love and appreciation you always wished for.  
Besides the love you get from your family and closest friends.  
You actually see the world different again.  
You're dancing through the streets like nobody is watching.  
Even though there actually are people watching.  
But you just don't care at all.  
You listen to music and dance.  
You don't have many thoughts.  
Just thoughts of how happy you are.  
The kind of happy you haven't felt in a long time.

You feel like your heart is blooming.  
It's blooming like a field of wild flowers in the early summer.  
Your stomach feels like there's many butterflies tickling you from the inside.  
Your head is just a cloud, light and peaceful.

It feels so good that it feels surreal.  
You just hope for it to stay.  
Stay easy and continue living and enjoying.  
Even though it feels surreal.  
But you earned it.  
So enjoy it.



# Through Sorrow and Ire, Healing

Luna Lee Lavender

---

I will watch  
The golden leaves fall,  
As summer dies  
And winter does call;

I will watch  
The season's first snow,  
As my mind grows heavy  
With what I know;

When what you wanted  
I could not give,  
You took it from me keeps following  
And my will to live,

While beside me you slept  
Silent tears I wept,  
I never wanted  
Your burden I've kept;

Through pain and through mire  
You called it desire,  
I was a warm body  
To use 'til you tired;

Past cloth, past skin,  
To what lay deep within,  
I showed you the way,  
I let you in;

Weathered and worn  
Shades of blue and gray torn,  
Your love left my very  
Being forlorn;

Bloodied old thorn  
Heart blind with red scorn,  
Your touch made me yearn  
To have never been born;

I will watch,  
And never take rest,  
'Til your skull comes to lay  
Against my breast;

I will watch,  
And never take sleep,  
'Til your soul, in pain,

I come to reap;

I will taste  
Your blood on my chin,  
As I heal from the damage  
You forced within.

# Todd

Toni Standteiner

---

There's a void now  
Where a dear friend used to be  
And everywhere I go  
And everything I see  
The void keeps following me

I tried to run  
I tried to hide  
I tried to bury it deep inside  
I asked why  
I got angry  
And tried to smash it aside  
I cried

But one day I turned and ran  
And tried to jump over the void  
and ah, what I did see?  
All these memories staring up at me  
Times of adventure  
Joy  
Rapport  
Mishaps  
And pain

Lessons in life  
Love  
Friendship  
Fortitude  
Resilience  
And strength

Character wrought

So bar none the consequence's  
Bring forth the mission  
Times ahead without thee  
Let the great void become me

I love you Todd  
Thanks for everything buddy

# Embodied Research

Iasmina Rotariu

---

i wish you'd see my chaos and think  
wow. she's the closest to human i've seen lately  
let that half of my bed filled with books  
unbothered  
just like my messy curls  
as a reminder nothing s perfect anyways  
and happy is a mindset.

hug the little you tight  
and the bigger you tighter  
cuz it needs more love  
to compensate the dead butterflies  
from burnout old flames  
and you ll find within you  
that love has no measure  
as a all sized yellow hoodie.

埴埴以為器，當其無，有器之用。  
老子《道德經》

“we shape clay into a pot  
but it s the emptiness inside  
that holds whatever we want”

Laozi 《Tao Te Ching》

we try to shape everything  
to label,  
but it is more important to give space, to let the void breathe.  
to love in such a way that silence doesn't bother  
distance doesn't shutter  
it only gives more room for love to grow.  
we give humans shapes, names, a number of qualities and an uneven  
number of flaws  
we tell them to live wild and free, as long as there are laws,  
we give everything a status so that our fear of the unknown doesn't break  
us into pieces  
because we hate making puzzles to find out what peace is  
we lust the calm waves, but it's the chaos in the storm  
that makes all the roots we plant feel like home.

## 2015

I got my driver's license six months after all of my friends. The reasoning was a mixture of my mom's fear of her first born driving a car and the lack of money we had to pay for the classes required. So I waited impatiently while the rest of my friends began to drive while I was studying for the permit test.

My first driving instructor was a loudmouth man who held the steering wheel the entire time I drove. His hand rested at six-o'clock, just above the place where my thighs met. My hands shook on the wheel and he told me I was a bad driver and if I weren't so afraid of authority, I would have told him he smelled like last week's asparagus and he was a shitty instructor.

The next time I took a driving lesson, it was with a woman named Robin and she smoked cigarettes every thirty minutes. It's hard for me to remember being sixteen with Robin and learning to drive, but I do remember she came to my driver's test and sat with my mom. They were smoking outside together when I drove up, and when I told them I passed they both tossed their cigarettes to the concrete in celebration.

## 2016

My first car was a Ford 1991 F250. The only functioning mirror was the driver-side view, my feet barely reached the pedals, and the alignment was so off, I could turn the steering wheel fully twice before the car would actually begin to turn. The seats were covered in cigarette smelling stained carpet that felt soft to the touch, even after all those years. My mom bought it for me for \$1500 and I drove it everywhere.

I learned in the truck that I loved to drive just to drive. I'd pre-choose playlists and spend hours driving around, learning the complicated streets of my refinery suburbia that was Benicia. My boyfriend at the time used to laugh at me when I'd pull up to his house in my monstrous truck blasting Taylor Swift and wearing shorts so short I'm surprised I didn't feel more shame wearing them in front of his parents. But that was the other thing about having a car. We didn't have to stay at the house anymore.

We started by driving to get food, driving to the movies, doing things no teenagers, or anyone, for that matter, should be doing in movie theaters, and then fooling around in the car before we went our separate ways for the night. We went to San Francisco on the weekends, went to Berkely for lunch, and went shopping at the mall way too often.

Back then, when we were sixteen, I'd like to think we were really in love. It makes me happier remembering the truck if I remember us in love when I had it (mostly because I can't stop seeing his face scrunch up in a mixture of laughter and love when I pulled up to his house the first day I had it).

## **2016 (con.)**

I've been in two car accidents in my life. The first was the day of my junior prom. My friend and I had just got our makeup done at her house and she drove us to the store to pick up some kind of flower I still can't pronounce to this day, and someone T-boned my side of the car. It was low impact and we were totally fine, but that was the day I realized the world is full of people who really have no idea what they're doing, especially behind the wheel of a two-ton piece of metal that could bend faster than I could. The fear kept me from letting anyone else drive me around for quite a while.

The second car accident I was in was two weeks before my eighteenth birthday. A guy I was talking to rear-ended me on the way to school and totaled my new car. (His insurance company said they fixed the problem but the car still doesn't drive so you tell me.) At the time I was driving my second car, a 1992 Dodge Stealth. It was a deep blue with a faded paint job specked with rust and dents from my inability to pay attention when I opened a car door. That accident taught me I could be the best driver in the world and still just be at the wrong place at the wrong time. It also taught me it's impossible to attempt to date a boy who totaled your car.

My first boyfriend used to text and drive a lot, which I honestly could have been okay with if he was any good at it. But the problem was he would look down or not have a pre-chose playlist and decide to listen to Frank Ocean and then he wanted to hear Post Malone, and in all the time he was looking for the song, he was also swerving to avoid the things he was about to hit.

We went to his frat formal and took his friend from high school and his date. The entire time I clutched the side of the door while we drove up I-50 and he told me I needed to relax before finally falling tired of me. No one else was worried we were going to fly off the side of the road as we got further into South Lake, higher up the mountain, driving as fast as I would normally go if I was driving. But I wasn't.

## **2019**

I don't like loud noises.

Let me rephrase. I don't like unexpected loud noises. The feeling is similar to what I would think a hammer against my skull feels like mixed with the feeling I got when Loud-Mouth put his hands above my thighs on the steering wheel.

So least to say, I really hate car alarms. When I turned twenty I was living in the dorms of my college campus still and on the weekends, car alarms would go off and the only thing I could do was stare up at my ceiling, praying to a God I highly doubted that someone would walk outside and make the sound stop. But hours would pass and I would question my sanity and then finally it would be silent as if there was no noise at all. The air was clean of the impurities that came from the man-made metal and then we could all sleep again.

In between these times I had faced hardships, like almost losing my mom, being rejected on every level possible, and going on a date with depression. But the mornings were always the same; a car alarm and my acceptance that the next day would always come.

Now I see car alarms when I walk down the street and they are silent. Bright, penetrating light against the cold air night that leaves my eyes chasing after yellow dots in its wake. I don't hear the noise and I don't know if it's because I've blocked out the blaring or if it's really not there at all. Now I'm stuck seeing the pitch-black night on my walk home illuminated with piss yellow lights and a high pitch sound in my ear trying to replicate the noise I know should be there.

I still hate loud noises but I never thought I'd miss the sound of a car alarm.

## 2020

My car for the last three years has been a 2008 Scion XD that some guy I slept with nicknamed 'The Toaster'. The white paint was fresh when I bought it, but over time began to resemble snow that had been walked through by dogs, and then a few kids after school, before finally being pushed aside by a shovel. But when people got inside they'd comment on how big the inside felt or how it was surprising I could be such a clean freak yet my car looked like I might have lived in it. The Toaster took me across mountain ranges, spending hours chugging along I-80 to Reno to visit a man who moved without asking me to come with him. I used to sing some song about driving to love, but sex in my car after six years so the roommates don't know isn't love, and my mechanic agrees with me every time I say it. So it must be true.

The difference between this car and all the others is I helped pay for it. I've invested hundreds, if not thousands of dollars fixing broken parts I only sort of understand, pep-talking the damn thing as if we're friends that get mimosas on the weekends. The people I know will come and go, sit in my front seat and tell me they love me, but at the end of the day, it's just the car and me.

Driving down another road that'll take me to my next burst of success; and sometimes the loneliest road truly needs to be traveled alone.

## 2021 (Tentative)

I spend way too much time in my car, driving to people who only sort of care about me, hiding from people who actually love me, and leaving the things I don't want to carry inside in the back seat like it's my closet. But the car is the only thing I have. The only thing I can call mine and mean it.

I find myself wanting to be in the car more than I want to be anywhere else sometimes. I hear people talking to me and I feel people brushing past me in the places I need to be, but I can't stop thinking about packing a bag and tossing it in my car, and leaving. I don't know where I would go but the idea of rubber burning against cracked tar melting in the sun in the name of taking me somewhere new reminds me of how I felt the day I saw my mom and Robin throw their cigarettes on the ground in solidarity to my success.

Like I could do anything in the world because at least someone believed in me.

## 2015

I dream about driving down the road and right out of this small town I call home. I don't know where I'll go but I just feel lucky I have a car to take me there.

# God

Julie Morrow

---

So cold without you  
Feeling basic and low.  
Watch tv, god is a cigarette  
tonight.  
Can't get over your death,  
never will.  
Don't really want to.  
You were you.  
You, never before, now  
never again.  
Your time is written.  
There's no more here and now  
with you and me in the  
same space.  
Go home if you think its best  
step into his shoes for a while.  
pee in the snow or hug a tree  
be anything you wanna be  
Just don't do anything you might  
regret.  
Like drive real fast,  
with loved ones in your car.  
Think of yourself as dust  
but also as the mighty brain.  
It's the only one I've ever known  
mighty brain, why must I fear,  
cry, and sleep.

# Chicken or Steak

Julie Morrow

---

I know what in this world  
was the last thing you ate.  
Chicken or steak.  
I kissed your last kiss,  
saw you swim in a pool  
the last time. You  
crossed your arms  
and acted so cool.  
Your last time on this place  
I was with you  
as the hours crept by on your face  
12,1,2,3,4, five, six, seven, eight

That day was your last day  
My worst day,  
your last day  
Gotta find a way  
To make myself pay  
its just not okay  
I wish you could stay  
Please God Mother May  
Tell me something to say  
we shared your last smoothie here.  
Last smoke of a cigarette  
in a parking lot  
after your last meal  
Your last car ride  
Your last song  
Your last song  
Your last song  
The last time you  
woke up from sleep  
was in my bed.  
Your last sentence  
was spoken to me.  
Your last itch

was scratched next to me.  
I was the last person you chose to touch.  
The last night of Yours  
was my first day of end.  
End of You, end of me  
My foot was your testament.  
Your last drink of water was  
sipped next to me  
as I drank from a different cup  
Conversations of the day  
I slept as you had your last breakfast downstairs.  
You looked at my lizard  
one last time.  
Danced again  
Now no more.  
It was with me and because of me.  
Your last talk to your Mommy  
was by my side, in my mom's  
office.  
I heard you say I love you  
to her for the last time.  
That day was filled  
with the end, but we  
  
didn't know it then.  
What is now forever known.

# Of The Things You'll Never Do Again

Julie Morrow

---

Of the things you'll never do again, You'll never see  
the sun burn bright my dear, never again.  
This poem is dedicated to the hug you'll never  
feel again, whether it be with your mom or a  
sweet new friend. Never again my dear, will  
you walk on the sand, diving into the ocean,  
so true, as you always loved to do. Never  
will your precious feet, my dear, feel the  
ground beneath. Oh why will you never again  
smell the piney trees. Never will you  
see the moon rise or even set for that matter.  
Are you somewhere now where things like  
these just don't matter? I sure hope  
that Paris's streets won't cry at the absence  
of your feet. Never even been to Sydney  
or Namibia or even the Southern Hemisphere.  
The world does miss you now that your life  
is gone. And the only reason for this  
is my actions and the seatbelt's treason.  
The treasure of you, your face against mine  
is lost now in my mind. Your family's  
pain based on your past, leaves a scar  
on mine. Your childhood so swiftly phased  
into adolescent nights. It all ended there,  
for you were only here. Your time ended  
swiftly without any hope. There was  
nothing they or I could do after that  
night's despair. Never will you see your  
sister's children sigh, Never to be  
the uncle and the father you dreamed  
so much to be. The only things left  
for you are in something else's hand. And  
maybe you are truly gone, though that thought's  
too hard to bear. I wish I could  
go back and take away your death,  
but there's no answer to that prayer,  
So reality is all that's left.

# One Final Trail

Bob Sweigert

---

I've lived within the great blue circle  
where every day is a new miracle.  
I've sailed her wind and skied her snow,  
so blessed Lake Tahoe was my home.

I'm leaving on one final trail.  
My heart beats down, my vision, frail.  
What lies beyond? How can I know  
life's mysteries so high and low?

Green and blue, white and black,  
Lake Tahoe waters ... take me back!  
Your colors are such perfect things.  
Eternal Life more promising?

Lake Tahoe waters are as pure  
as Heaven's riches ever were.  
Lake Tahoe, I have seen it all.  
Let Death, my life, from mountains call.

# I'm a Mountain Man

Bob Sweigert

---

I'm a mountain man, I live at the top.  
Every body below me wants what I got.  
I'm a mountain man, I've got a handle on life,  
three kids and a black lab, and a very sharp knife.  
I know these mountains, like the back of my hand.  
All the bears and coyotes obey my command!

I'm a mountain man, I can make your dreams come true  
when I'm sound asleep. I can fill you with love  
when we're stuck in my jeep.  
Yeah I'm a mountain man, I ain't the city kind.  
I live high in the mountains, now I'm high all the time!

I'm a mountain man, I can make my woman hot  
in more ways than one. When she's cold as ice  
because of something I've done.  
She's always on to me, yeah we're a real good fit.  
She's got her own gun, and she's mighty handy with it!  
We keep each other warm in every storm.  
The only time I drive her crazy ... is when I'm home!



# Desolation Wilderness

Bob Sweigert

---

Against the wind of my thoughts  
my soul cannot fly.

There goes the Osprey, soaring high  
circling the shoreline of Jabu Lake, motionless in flight  
so golden trout will come to him.

On the hidden trail to Azure Lake  
imprisoned by granite, a fallen wind  
laughs to death in the alder leaves  
and sinks to the bottom of Cascade Creek.

Mount Tallac rises high  
above the petty complaints of squirrels.  
Sounding like them, anxious for survival,  
we walk a fine line to Rockbound Valley,  
dropping our opinions like expert Gods from cliffs  
into the forest below where Oneness  
wears the clever camouflage of diversity.

Then the wind stops. The moonless night  
covers Lake Aloha with stars and our campfire  
dwindles in the Milky Way, glowing embers of what has been and still, we  
can't keep quiet.

Will we ever cross the Rubicon?  
Can we leave our hubris on Mosquito Pass?  
Will we ever know the relief of Top Lake?  
Against the wilderness wind of our thoughts  
our souls will never fly.

# Under the April moon, Februarys are forgotten

Sarah Dittmore

---

With frostbitten fingers  
they watch the ember sky  
awoken by the gossip  
of the starling's eager cry.

Woodpeckers declare  
the evening headlines  
with morse-code stories  
written 'cross tilted pines.

Golden blossoms  
pepper emerald fields  
as the fading sun whispers,  
*Let your heart be healed.*

This is where they gather:  
the lonely and lost,  
to swallow the moonlight  
and lay their souls on the moss.

The tendrils of tomorrow  
heavy in their eyes,  
they weave weeds in their hair  
and wash with chicory cries.

Carrying mud painted sorrows  
and river-washed hope,  
they come to the place  
where anchors can float.

They drop what is heavy  
and loosen what's tight,  
and stitch up the wounds  
still raw from the fight.

For tomorrow may bring  
another day of weary and toil,  
but at least they'll walk taller  
with a heart bathed in soil.

# On what comes after the fire

Sarah Dittmore

---

There's a tawny-haired girl running  
barefoot through the grass,  
whispering her dreams to lady bugs  
and burying secrets beneath the trees.

She barks more than she speaks  
and her tears create lakes  
which her laughter will skate upon  
when lights take the place of leaves.

I watch her through etched glass  
and try to remember the shape of her soul  
that I might contort this weathered body  
to fit its grooves and feel its feathered glow.

But the window is locked and the glass  
is painted with scars I don't remember  
making and all I have is a glimpse of unbrushed hair  
and a name I can no longer place.

Most days, I watch the cherry blossoms bloom  
and wonder if my scorched heart  
will ever remember how  
it once breathed in color.

But today a knock arrives at my door  
and I leave the window to open my home  
to a friend who holds out her mangled heart  
as the seams rip around her gut.

My deft fingers make quick work of sutures  
I've sewn a thousand times  
and I show her the weeds where once  
was a forest and promise her new life will grow.

I do not cry and I do not falter  
as her skin crumbles beneath my touch.  
Instead, I meet her in the ruins with a map  
and stories of a tawny-haired girl.

She takes my hand and summons silence;  
her fingers trace dried rivers across my arm.  
She smiles at the window, opaque with lost battles,  
and tells me

*I'm glad your hair is darker now.*

# No goodbye is forever

Sarah Dittmore

---

I remember the day you said goodbye.  
With a final pause in the doorway,  
you turned to me and smiled.

We both ignored the tears that filled your eyes.

"I'll see you when I get back,"  
you said. I knew it was a lie.  
But sometimes lies taste better than  
truth, so we let the sweet promise  
of tomorrow fill the room.

Countless times I held my daughter's hand  
while she wept. You boarded planes bound  
for places I'd only meet by postcard while  
we returned to defrosting peas  
alone.

But that day, she did not weep.  
Eventually, tears become too gentle  
a language for the blade of grief  
that rips your soul in two.

So don't cry for me;  
no salt-stained sheets  
will cure your hurt.

Instead,  
whenever you hold a lily,  
let the sweet scent remind you

there is always  
the promise of tomorrow.

# Simple Math

## Disembarking

## Memoir

Jonathon Burton

---

*These poems are being considered for a poetry contest and cannot be published at this time.*

# Repetition

Aimee Lowenstern

---

*Originally published in Black Fork Review*

of course it has all been written before.  
the moon has taken every form  
a moon can take, the poets dressing it  
in each adjective and verb,  
not to mention the stars,  
which are old news by now.  
look, how the sun rises  
in a sweetly derivative way,  
the birds repeating their syllables—  
yes, even the mockingbirds and crows,  
with their plagiarism.  
and we eat, despite having eaten  
on previous mornings,  
despite our ancestors having eaten  
long before we grew  
into our mother's hunger,  
and perhaps it is a homage  
or motif: the bread, the butter,  
the recipe like a quatrain,  
with only four ingredients.

# It's Summer, and Everyone is Having Fun Except Me

Aimee Lowenstern

---

I've never made it through summer without a sunburn.

I've never made it through summer without a dozen mosquito bites,  
broken open like geodes, canary-yellow glimmer  
of dried pus where the itching  
is inescapable. For three months,  
summer is inescapable.

I go to my room alone in the dark  
to cover myself in aloe vera and tears,  
and summer follows me, the heat of it  
heavy like a body, like a crowd of bodies  
at a party, an invisible dance party  
that follows me around; and nobody  
at the party will look at me or talk to me  
or scooch to the left to let me leave,  
and they whisper in the languages  
of insects and lightbulbs, saying  
who invited that visible girl,  
and why isn't she dancing?  
What a weirdo, sobbing in the corner  
and smearing toothpaste on her welts  
because she read on the internet that it  
might help.

But what else can I do?

It's summer, and all of me  
is tight and itching,  
like something healing,  
or something lonely, or something alive.

# Storage Room

Aimee Lowenstern

---

*Originally published in Barzakh Magazine*

I'll hide your heart in my stomach so no one can get it.  
Come on, cough it up. All slick and wet like fruit.  
I'll pop it like a pill. Drink it down with hot chocolate.

Every day I swallow feelings the size of fists,

or very large mice. I can take it whole.

Don't carve yourself up for my sake.  
Don't size your bites. Once I'm done,  
you won't have to worry about survival anymore,  
or being loved. I've got it all taken care of.

I'm singing with a thousand pulses  
and none of them will ever flicker out.

I'm shaking? I'm dancing. I've got a tummy full of souls

and they're all doing the cha cha slide.

No, it's not an anxiety attack. Yes, you'll keep everything  
in the divorce. Your body. My body (Your summer vacation home).  
Your mind and my poems and the dog. Take out my teeth

and leave them like broken-down furniture on the streetside.

Who needs 'em? More room in my mouth  
to choke down symbolic organs. My whole self spasms with blood.

# A Brief Sweetness

Aimee Lowenstern

---

This is a story of the boy who breathed honey:  
the tubes from his nose filled with something slow and golden.  
His slightly sticky skin.  
The starched white all around him; the doctor's coats, the sheets  
his fingers on the window, where his mother's bees  
bump into the glass. The soft buzz  
of hospital electronics.

His voice, slow and syrupy  
like mine- I visit there  
every six months for a new leg brace, arm brace,  
for doctors to stretch me, carefully, like gum from the sole of a shoe,  
and he says hello and I do not tell him the bees are dying,  
though some strange part of me wants to,  
sometimes we kiss and he tastes like you'd expect,  
I always bring him flowers,  
red, purple, yellow.

# Eclectic Love Poem

Aimee Lowenstern

---

*In the process of being published and cannot be printed here*

# Carrion

Aimee Lowenstern

---

*Originally published in Roanoke Review*

1.  
You are alive and you are meat,  
and when you are dead, you will  
still be meat,  
and you will be dead.

2.  
You want to be an angel,  
and when you are dead you will  
still want to be an angel,  
and you will be meat,  
and you will be dead.

3.  
The meat like your body  
like your corpse like a cloud  
split open all bleeding with light  
where the angels come through,  
heavenly bodies in the image  
of meat, with too many eyes  
and too many wings, white feathers  
like dust kicked up around their necks.  
They are here so you, too,  
can become an angel. They are here  
because you are dead.  
They kneel over your body  
in prayer. They have very  
sharp teeth. You do not notice,  
because you are dead. They are here  
because you are meat. They receive  
communion, mouths bloody  
with your blood, tearing flesh  
from filament, stinking of something  
that was once alive.

4.  
Baptized in stomach acid,  
they hollow your bones  
for flight. Thank you  
for becoming an angel.  
The holiest thing is to be fed.

# Catching Light

Aimee Lowenstern

---

*Originally published in Fifth Wheel Press*

My chest grows a dread  
that will never be big enough.  
I cannot comprehend the scope of this war  
because I cannot comprehend the scope of a life.  
The stars wink out one by one, but what can I do? My hands are paper  
snowflakes,  
my tongue a fish in a forest fire. I have to say, this sunset looks like any  
other sunset. I cannot differentiate their faces, I cannot spell their names.  
I'm sorry, darling.  
There have always been terrible things  
and one day we were placed here among them.

We eat fish and burn wood and watch the darkness  
creep in. We come up with words  
like "danger" and "dinner". We learn that the sun is a star and a star is a  
flame, but we still can't imagine anything larger than the space between  
pinkie and thumb. See how I cup my palm to keep the light

from your sleeping eyes? I've watched your pupil hold  
an entire sunset. My chest grows a love  
that will never be big enough.

## Poetry At The Backyard



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