Flight

2013

An Anthology of the Written and Visual Arts

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Table of Contents

Poetry

Alkeema Soul Bey / Beautiful 30
Tommie Brown / Waiting to Exhale 4
Isaac Calderon / Alliteration Aside 75
Samuel Cantrell / The Pianist 91
Carrie Castillo / Spite 6
Amber Clark / The Joy of Hearing 59
Mercedes Costello / Dark Moment 63
Tiffany Diaz / You’re in Paris, and I Am Here 90
Katherine Downer / Spring Has Not Yet Come 28
Deja Easter / I Am Me 18
Cianna Garrison / The Masquerade 67
Shelly Gutowski / If I Could 35
Kelly Horn / The Beggar’s Plea 17
Jennifer Knelange / Bones 5
Alyssa Landau / Would You Do the Same for Me? 62
Kasssondra Larsen / Untitled 29
Leah Marshall / Birds 19
Alexander Maya / Pleasers 34
Theresa McGrath / Cell Phone Art 33
Angie Medrano / Parts One and Two 41
Albia Miller / Riverside County 68
Lovie Morgason / Stars 66
Donald Padgett / A Canopy of Trees 11
Dennis Rowley / Generations 92
Cody Rukasin / Toast for Change 56
Ryan Russell / Untitled 57
Linsey Sanders / If They Only Knew 55
Desiree Vasquez / Untitled 20
Breanna Williams / Black America 64
K.A. Wilson / Release onto Me 40
Alex Yamada / Perceive 32
Table of Contents

Prose

Roberto Barradas / Wonder Woman’s Invisible Jet 24
Ernie Brewer / Opening Dialogue on Human Potentiality 89
Lynzee DeSantis / Scavenging for Forgiveness 58
Natalie Ducatenzeiler / The Duel 76
Patricia Estrada / Blackbird 36
Kaitlin Fields / A Battle of Wits 72
Danielle Perez / Memory 52
Diane A. Rhodes / From Gil’s Point of View 79
Ojan Salehabadi / Across the Caspian 8
Adam Sharp / Haura Held Court with the Sea 82
M. Taylor / One Call 14
Flavia Toscano / Lucky To Be Alive 86
Tyrena Williams / Artistic Flow 78

Visuals

Megan Barber 43
Prudence Detzel / Perris Lake 22
Olivia Eliseo 49
Katherine Jackson 51
Laura Lankford 44
Elizabeth Madsen / Halo 45
Rachel McInnis 71
Lidia Melaku 70
Ahjile Miller / Ari Pout 12
Matthew Neeley 46
Angela Petersen / Classic Ride 47
Elizabeth Povroznik 80
Dennis Rowley / Attitude 23
Liliana Sanchez / Let There Be Light 48
Delia San Martin 42
Jessica Swanlund / December 13
Wendy Walczak / Toucan 50
Alex Yamada / Flowering White 81
Everyone is always concerned with high tide and low tide. But there has always been something that has fascinated me more than both.
Rests.
Rests is the small time window between the shift of high and low tides.
When the water movement comes to a complete halt in order for the tides to move in opposite directions.
It’s as if the ocean, the entire universe as far as we are concerned, decided to hold its breath.
Inhale.
And for a moment, the world has fallen still.
The moon’s gravitational pull has loosened while the wind decides to watch and wait.
And in a flash, before anyone notices, the ocean has reinvented itself.

More often than not,
I feel that I am in rest period.
In between two lives,
finishing up one,
But not quite starting another.
Holding my breath,
waiting for the tide to come.
Completely still.
But unlike the mighty ocean,
Reinventing itself daily,
I fear the exhale.
Protruding beneath a thin layer of skin,
Sharp at the edges, my bones
Gray and pasty they glow beneath opaque pallor
Dipping smoothly between each solitary rib
As they taper into the concave of my naval

A finger can trace the outline of my pelvis
Each vertebrae of my spine in eye’s view,
My arms sensually wrap around my own waist
In passion, in admiration of my bones.

My muscles feel weak, yet the feeling still thrives
And drives me to dance with more force
The scale feels the warmth of my bones in obsession
Two numbers are better than three

The burning grows strong in the pit of my core,
Yet the hunger I crave is not food—
But the sight of my bones, the pair of my bones
My love
For my beautiful bones.
Karrie Castillo / Spite

Her black tears rolling, as deadly as tar
Her hair tangled, pulling, tearing it apart
The smeared ruby lipstick, kiss of sin
Let the tale of her story begin
Shadows creep whispering her name
Feeling so alone, her mind playing games
But why is she here, what went wrong
The judgment rose once she refused the bong
A goody too-shoo, an honor-roll student
Those in envy had only bad intents
First began the looks, the piercing of fire
To state her body of purity, marked as a liar
The rumors flew and the words began to bruise
Began to believe there was nothing left to do
The slapping of books, the shoving of shoulders
Could these peers grow any colder?
Threats began to grow and grow
Soon, her blood began to flow
Misery, depression;
What has the vulgar use of words caused?
Innocence has never felt so lost
She reaches for a hand, she makes the reports
Who knew, behind her followed full support
But nothing shows for the effort
Once the curtain closed, no one seemed to care
She ran, as fast as she could, she hid
Listen closely, she was just a kid
Scorned for being different, not following the crowd
Now look at the life that she’s found
Strolling the streets, barely getting by
Never knowing if it will be her last goodnight
The dense waters of the Caspian climb up a pair of feet, over the ankles and all the way up to the knees. And momentarily retreat, occasionally leaving behind foam on the tips of the toes. Sulmaz lay there on her back, savoring the sensation, listening to the waves, looking up at the stars, feeling at home. She knew that if she would sit and stare into the dark of the seashore, looking down the path for him, he would never come. *Nobody comes like that; they always come right when you look away*. He had sent a friend to tell her he was going to be there. Suddenly, she heard the sound of footsteps on the shore. She sat upright and stared into the dark. “Mehdi, is that you? Mehdi?”

He replied, “Yes, it is me…keep your voice down. The sea…it has a way with the sound.”

“Oh, I am so glad you are here. You never called. You promised you would call. I was worried. Tehran is all over the news. I could not shut my eyes for a minute thinking of you being there.” She bid him to sit by her.

“Yeah, things are pretty bad there. They threw a few of the students off the balcony; it’s a massacre.”

Sulmaz wrapped herself around him, and moved her hands up and down his body to console him, but also to make sure he was real. She wanted to physically feel his presence. Mehdi suddenly shrieked in pain and then covered his mouth to muffle it.

Sulmaz released him, angrily. “They whipped you, didn’t they? They caught you, didn’t they?” she said, looking away. She was so outraged; there was no room for words.

“A hundred lashes. I was lucky they even let me go—”

Sulmaz raised her voice, “You had no business going to the city. Your home is here; your future is here…” She turned towards him, “I…I am here.”

They sat quietly for a while not knowing what to say. Sulmaz had begged him not to go. “This is no revolution and you are no revolutionary,” she had told him, but he had left anyway. She didn’t care about the revolution anymore; it would never happen. This would be just like any other time, some uprising, then the Basijis would kill a couple of students and
everything would go back to how it was before. Moreover she
cared for little else since she had met Mehdi. It was the first time
Sulmaz had ever fallen in love. She was impatient to get married
to him and put an end to the nightly beach meetings, the after-hour
love making in the dark and the lies—the lies she had to tell her
parents about where, what and hows of an unmarried Muslim teen.

It would happen soon, Mehdi had promised.
“I have to go,” Mehdi broke the silence.
“No, my father is asleep. He will not know.”
“I have to go away...”

There was silence. “I...we cannot have a family here. It is
unfair to our future children. It shouldn’t be. I have to go.”

Sulmaz’s eyes twinkled in the moonlight as they grew
larger. She charged at him and squeezed her delicate body ever so
tightly against his frame.

“No, you are not going anywhere. Are you listening to
me... you are not going anywhere.”

But he wasn’t listening,
“The closest U.S. Embassy is in Turkey, and so is the
United Nations and the UK Embassy.”

“You have gone mad. Mad, you hear, totally crazy.” She
stood up again, pacing around. “What do you think you are going
to do, ha? Go to their doorsteps, with your bleeding back, and say
what?” She then spoke in a mocking tone, “‘Open the door, Mehdi
here, let me in!!’ And they are going to say, ‘Sure come right in.
We have been expecting you.’ You must be out of your mind. Let
my father hear this, and he will think I am marrying a lunatic.” She
crouched close to him again. “Plus, what do you think? They are
going to let you just dance your way out of the border after getting
in it with the Basijis?”

“No, there is no way they will let me out.”
“So what did you have in mind?”

Mehdi pointed towards the reflection of the moon.
“The sea!?” she screamed.

“Keep your voice down.” He stood up. “United Nations has
a branch in Moscow. There is also a US embassy there. If I cross
the sea, I may be able to talk my way all the way to Moscow.”
“How would you go?”

He took a deep breath. “I will swim there.”
Mehdi paused and let the words settle. Sulmaz stayed quiet. He then approached and kneeled by her, held her hands and kissed them.

“It can be done, Solly my love, it can be done. I can do it.”

Quiet.

“Say something, Solly, say something, please.”

“You are going to die,” she whispered. “No one can survive that.”

“Oh, bite your tongue… Don’t say things like that.” He walked up and looked deep into her eyes. “Think about it, Solly… Think about it, I am going to go there and apply for asylum. I will be a refugee. I will be approved. I know I will. And then they will send me to some country, England? France? Think about it, Solly… Maybe even America. And then I will get you, my love. My dear, have faith in me. We will have a family, children… imagine that, Solly, you and I, our own family out of this hell.”

He embraced her rigid body; she was in shock, unresponsive, the aura of a woman who has lost all. “I will have something to eat in a plastic bag and bottled water.” He continued, “Only a few days of hardship for years of happiness. Think hard, Solly.”

Her voice quivered, “This is not fair. You promised me.”

Tears rolled down and left silvery paths on her cheek.

Mehdi’s voice began to crack too. “What is unfair is that we step on the same earth as men and women everywhere else. We share the same sky, the same starry night as people anywhere else, and yet I have to cross the Caspian to find happiness.”

The Caspian rinses Sulmaz’s feet every night while she looks up at the night sky and waits.
a canopy of trees
the chilled wind biting
sweating beneath the layers
fingers numbed
the trail turns
emerges into the sunlight
and everything changes
blinding brilliance
warmth penetrates
pause to remove a layer
catch my breath
wipe my brow
and appreciate the lay of the land below
before soldiering on
to the next canopy of trees
His rape attempt had failed.

Sprawled out on the floor, John held the wound in his chest as the blood began to dye his white shirt red. The adrenaline coursing through Liz’s veins made her wrist twitch the knife uncontrollably. She wasn’t a murderer and the very idea of being in this situation at all nearly petrified her. A little voice inside her head told her to get the phone out of her purse and call 911, and before John bled to death. But she couldn’t move. Apart from the shaking in her wrist, which was steadily increasing up her arm, Liz couldn’t make her body do anything.

John coughed and groaned, clutching his chest. “Are you going to finish the job or what?” he asked between heavy gasps for air.

In spite of the horror he had tried to commit, Liz felt a small sting of human sympathy. John’s voice relieved some of the shock and she slowly came to the countertop. Taking her phone out, she stepped away to the far end of the room.

John let out a moan. “You honestly think the cops are going to believe you?” he said, propping his head against the island.

Liz’s teeth were chattering, but she managed to calm them long enough for a single word: “What?”

“The only thing I’m going to tell them is that you tried to kill me. Unless I’m missing an invisible eye witness, you’ll be suspected of manslaughter.”

Liz held the phone tightly in her hand, wondering if what John was saying held any kind of truth. John had been a polite co-worker and a good friend, but when he invited her to dinner at his apartment he assaulted her as if some monster overcame him. He’d slapped her face and pushed her to the floor. There wasn’t even a hello, just a shout from the inside telling her the door was unlocked. Then he opened her blouse, but nothing was torn and the buttons were still in tact. Even if she left it open so as not to disturb the scene for the police, it might appear she had fabricated the rape as a cover up for the murder.

What about her cheek? John had slapped her during the assault. Was it visible? Liz looked at her reflection in the glass coffee
table near her. The lack of lighting might have concealed it, but there should have been something.

What about the scream? She had screamed fairly loud, but if no one in the apartment complex had noticed by now, maybe they wouldn’t or maybe that, like her open blouse, would be seen as an after action, a cover story.

“Y… You’re crazy,” she said. “No one’s going to believe that. It… It was self-defense. You tried to-” she blinked though a mist of tears and backed up to the hallway near the door, sinking to the floor.

“Come on, Liz. You don’t have any proof. It’s going to be your word against mine.” He stopped to cough a small bit of blood. “And I’m the victim. You’re a felon now. I suggest you start running.”

His point was starting to make sense as much as Liz didn’t want it to. But then came an idea.

She knew she ought to let him bleed out on the kitchen floor of his own apartment, but she had to make sure she wasn’t to blame, one way or the other. And that’s when it came to her. Suicide. She hadn’t touched anything apart from the knife, which could be remedied with a cloth. It probably wouldn’t be the best suicide story, but it made sense, even if it only did to her at that moment.

No! That was crazy! She should call the police. Tell them everything. They have to believe her. What John had tried to do was wrong, but letting him die? If there was one thought that certainly made perfect sense at that moment, it was this: She wasn’t a murderer.

Liz opened the phone.

“What are you doing?” John mumbled.

Liz paused.

John grabbed one of the legs from the nearby stool and pulled himself up partly. “If I make it out of this alive, I’m never going to stop until I get you. There isn’t anywhere you can go or hide where I won’t find you and finish getting what I want from you. You only have two options here. Either let me die and go down as a felon, or help me live. But I promise you, as long as I’m alive, I’ll never stop coming after you.”

Like a light switch, Liz’s mind suddenly went blank. Hearing the voice of John seemed to leave a hopelessly dark presence in her
mind. She closed the phone and gripped the knife tighter. The son-of-a-bitch had made his point clear. And as much as she didn’t want to be a murderer, her subconscious wouldn’t let her live with this bastard after her.

Coming to her feet, Liz approached John. Blood dripped from the edge of the blade as she crossed the tile. John smiled at her. She hated that face. That horrible face. But in a moment, she’d never have to see it again.

“That’s right doll, do it.”

Liz looked down at the bloody weapon in her hand. There was a small moment of pre-remorse, but it faded as if it had never been there. She lifted the knife and aimed for his throat.

“Hello? What’s going on here?” A man’s voice from the hall.

Liz lowered the blade instinctively. What was she about to do? How did John talk her into this with so few words? Shocked once again, she backed away and dropped the knife.

“Holy shit,” said the man. He surveyed the scene.

“She tried to kill me!” John burst out in a quiet voice.

Liz turned to the man, tears dripping down her cheeks, and in a quiet voice said, “He tried to... he... he tried to...” “He tried to... he... he tried to...”

“Don’t move. Nobody move.” He took out his phone and dialed.

That was it. If she had finished off John and left before the neighbor showed up, she could have gotten a head’s start. But the shock from everything sucked up her time and now the decision was made for her. All she could do was cry. Cry for nearly being raped, possibly killing a man, and probably going to prison for it.

“Kill him,” John whispered.

Liz looked at him. The man had his back turned while he spoke into the phone.

“Kill him and run; you know it’s your only option.”

Liz paused, but before she could contemplate another one of John’s suggestions, she heard the man speak a few clear words and she knew, she knew, she’d be okay.

“No officer, I came in at the last minute. This was self-defense.”

16
Kelly Horn / The Beggar’s Plea

To the bearer of this jacket I leave you a gift a check for one million dollars to do as you wish
I hope that you will not do as I did
Be blessed but bless others remember the poor, those that have less now that you have more
I beseech you my child from down in the grave give more to the needy than I ever gave.
The penniless mother who asked for spare change to rent a room to get out of the rain
Not a beggar was he whose hand was held out, but a man in need whose hope had run out, whose faith in people died after many of me, the selfish, the bitter; thriving on greed
A man whose car had run out of gas, in need of change to be on his way was judged one day, by thoughts that he would drink it away.
A beggar I am now pleading with you that what I have done you will not do, for I fear that one day my fate may meet up with you.
Deja Easter / I Am Me

We live in a microwave society,
On demand prodigy,
Direct deposit all I need
Quick-paced society,
A speedy cash economy,
An instant soup-type society,
The quicker the better
A faster 3G is all I need,
But we’re blinded by society,
And adapt to what we don’t need,
And brainwashed by the media to think thoughts we don’t really see
But instead we’re told be,
Something we actually don’t need to be,
So the next time you’re influenced,
Stand up and say I am me.
Leah Marshall / Birds

The gentle man, must keep in mind, my mind.
He must be careful of his words.
The birds, they are quietly watching me.
I see, them always watching clearly.
Dearly, I love them. With such silly things and wings.
Their wings, I will cut them, so I can tie them to my little, little hand.
The man, he sees me with my birds and knows the crows
nesting in my heart are tripping, slipping, and dying out. He is running, coming
to take them away. I will cry and die, if he takes them away. Don’t take or break them. My birds are so fragile, they obey not even me. I wish I would, and could, become a pretty bird. When I do die I’ll leave the man more than a word; a bird.
Desiree Vasquez / Untitled

As she could feel her heart breaking she knew that nothing would ever be the same knowing that she would never love ever again wishing and hoping that the pain would go away Feeling her heart fill up with blood and tears memories filling in her head a million times over and over again wishing that it was all just a dream remembering her scent on her pillow looking over and seeing her face no longer remembering holding her in her arms feeling her heart against her own
caressing her with
her fingers ever
so lightly and softly
  watching her fall
asleep in her arms
  feeling her breath
knowing that she is alive
  in her arms
and in her heart
  this is no longer
  as she reminds
herself over and
over again
feeling her heart
break with every
memory inside of
her head
knowing that this
will never change
no matter how many times
she pleads for
this woman to
return to her
but she never will
and forever she will be broken
Prudence Detzel / Perris Lake
Dennis Rowley / Attitude
The dark road appeared to be never-ending on this warm spring night. I was exhausted and my eyelids kept coming closer and closer to their embrace. The only thing that kept me awake was the little yellow sedan in front of me that kept swaying side to side in its lane. Through the tint of the car’s back window, I could see an ominous glow coming from the driver’s seat. I suspected that the driver in the swaying sedan was in a heated text messaging debate with somebody. The sentences this person was writing were probably so long and so emotionally charged that he or she needed to let go of the steering wheel occasionally to make sure the point was made with the 145 characters allotted. Or maybe I was wrong? Maybe the driver was in my position and was exhausted after his or her long 14-hour day. Or maybe the driver was on his or her way back from a bar or a friend’s house after a few drinks of the “good stuff.” I could not shake the concern of the ominous glow.

Regardless of the reason for the swaying, I decided to keep some space between my truck and the little yellow sedan. I could see a beacon of safety in the glow of the lights of my town coming up in the distance. I felt a little safer knowing that my turn was coming up soon and I wouldn’t have to live in fear behind the little yellow sedan. As soon as I could see the sign that read “Alessandro Blvd,” I turned on my left-turn signal. I was almost back into town safe and sound. But my short-lived calm was broken when the little yellow sedan’s left-turn signal began to flash.

Great... This reckless driver lives in my town.

We both turned onto the two-lane road. The continuous swaying of the little yellow road hazard made me want to reach home even faster. But for now, there was nothing I could do but go at its slow and menacing pace.

After what seemed like days, I could finally see a street light where the lane split in two. I could finally come face to face with the driver whose driving reminded me of an ocean current as it crashed into the rocks of the shore.
I’m finally going to solve the case of the little yellow sedan and see who is behind the wheel.

I could see the sedan’s brake lights engage as we got closer to the streetlight. I slowly stepped on my brakes as the glow from the streetlight moved from the hood of my truck to my driver’s seat. As soon as the other lane opened up, I pulled up on the driver’s side of the sedan.

Finally, I have you in my sights.

The satisfaction of knowing I was right was all I was after. I had no intentions of saying anything to the driver or initiating any sort of contact. I just wanted to look over and see who it was.

I couldn’t believe it. The driver wasn’t some drunken extremist or angry text message debater. The driver was a young girl with both hands on her steering wheel, bawling her eyes out. From my truck I could see that she had her iPod connected to the stereo in her car and she kept flipping from one break-up song to the next. I finally saw that the glow wasn’t a hazard, but a signal of despair.

Well, that explains the glow.

She dropped her face into her hands as her body shook uncontrollably. I contemplated opening my window and offering her some encouraging words.

Everything will be okay. It must get dark to see the stars.

But I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t look away. As soon as she lifted her face from her hands, she stepped on the gas. I hadn’t even noticed the light for us to go had turned green because I was so captivated by the scene of the beautiful girl who could not stop crying. I began to drive following not too far behind the girl. She was driving a lot straighter. Maybe she was finally all cried out? We drove for less than a minute before we hit another streetlight.
When we stopped at the next light I looked over to see the girl. This time she looked like she was done crying as she wiped her eyes and turned off her iPod. She looked ahead and let out a few labored breaths. I saw that she counted ten breaths as she lay back into her seat. She was done crying. I kept watching as she began to talk to herself. By the looks of it, she was talking herself into not crying over her break-up. I could imagine her saying:

“He’s not worth it anyway. I’m better off without him. It’s for the best.”

She even let out a slight grin once she conquered her sadness. I did not know who she was, but I was happy for her.

The entire time she was going through her episode, I was glad that she did not catch me staring at her. She was in her own little world. Whenever we are in our cars we feel completely free to do almost anything we want without the consequences of other people seeing us. Like Wonder Woman’s invisible jet, only she could see it and control it. On one hand, this girl felt completely free to cry her eyes out and play her favorite songs that reminded her of her recently broken relationship. On the other hand, I felt like a bird just watching her from afar without the risk of being caught staring. I was comfortable in my own invisible jet. These walls that we create in our cars hide us from the world. When we are inside these walls, we are free to sing, cry, laugh, and even dance without the worry of catching anybody’s attention. These invisible walls block out the outside world and leave behind only what we want to bring into them. We are the gatekeepers and as soon as we get behind the wheel and drive, we are in full control of our invisible jets. Sometimes we cannot wait to be inside our cars because of the privacy it brings. “Hold on, let me get in my car.” “I’ll call you when I’m driving home.” “We’ll talk in the car.” These are all sentences used and said every day that bind us to the privacy offered by our cars. At times we save phone calls and special conversations for our sanctuaries. They are invisible jets, our private phone booths, recording studios, and counseling sessions.

We act as if our subconscious has embodied itself into an
invisible someone in the passenger seat of the car. Someone who can talk back to you, sings with you, and can give you advice. This girl had convinced herself that she was going to be alright, and her invisible jet was the only place she was going to do this.

As soon as the next street came, she turned right and I turned left. The last glimpse I got of the girl was a happy one. She was smiling. It wasn’t a huge smile, but it was enough to know that she was going to be alright.
Katharine Downer / Spring Has Not Yet Come

Everywhere I turn people laugh and shout.
There are smiles and everyone is out.
But for the life of me, I don’t see how people can have fun,
For spring has not yet come.
The sun is shining and the flowers have grown.
The people are laughing and a ball is being thrown.
The children are playing and I feel sort of dumb,
Because for me, spring has not yet come.
To me it’s still winter and the cold has set in.
There’s an icicle now where my heart should have been.
There’s a feeling inside me that’s as cold as the rain,
Not even the sunshine can shield me from the pain.
I can’t stop shivering and my body has gone numb.
And I still don’t understand why spring has not yet come.
All these days,
Haven’t been in my head,
I’ve lost my ways,
How’d I even get into bed?
Full head of thoughts,
Is sure to get me lost,
Trapped in my own mind,
My sanity I will have to find,
Do I have to shout?
I want out!
Can’t you see?
I need to be free!
Do you even care?
I should ask but I wouldn’t dare,
I’ve got something to say,
This won’t just go away.
Beautiful used to mean something, but I can’t use it anymore.

See Beautiful used to be the way to describe what made you speechless as you fumbled to gather the letters of the words, so your mouth could speak the language again.

Beautiful used to mean something.

Beauty was like her description. Like you are as beautiful as a million solar systems and not one star could think about not shining in your galaxy.

And not one planet could spin away from your gravitational pull because they even want to be near you.

Like her eyes that embodied the colors of the earth spinning on its axis and you couldn’t help, but get lost in her rotation.

See beautiful used to mean something. Like a woman with curves in the all right places making her the perfect picture of geometry.

And I’d stay up hours trying to figure out her mathematical equation, just so I could solve how she came to be so beautiful, again.
It was like the unknown particles of heaven seemed to be in alignment with her face.

Beautiful used to mean something.

Beautiful could stop you dead in your tracks and no matter how far the journey, your gaze would make another road for admiration.

Beautiful by definition means pleasing to all the senses, but Webster didn’t know that your beauty was felt far beyond smell, taste, sound, sight, and touch.

Saying Beautiful used to be said with honor and it was a privilege to hear.

Not the gateway to play her the mind and not a highway to a broken heart built with the fear of being alone.

Beautiful used to mean something. When it was said the vibration of the word always made the rhythm to her smile.

See beautiful used to mean something but it doesn’t anymore, but I swear if beautiful were to mean something again she would be its definition and the word beautiful would then mean everything to me.
Alex Yamada / Perceive

Everything is fine when the sun is up
When Night falls, croak, squeak, bump
Sounds that make one’s blood run cold
Shadows that frighten, forget being bold
Things that wouldn’t concern you in the day
Make you cover up, as if a blanket could keep them away
Run to flip the switch and shine the light
Things are scarier in the Night
Theresa McGrath / Cell Phone Art

Flags of Our Fathers

My father served in World War II aboard a U.S. Navy ship

That flew the red white & blue

My brother served in Vietnam he fought for me and you

He was Army/Air Force those flags Red White and Blue

My love of country through and through, what is it that, I might do

Extra in this photo title and the flags Red White & Blue
**Alexander Maya / Pleasers**

Is it crazy or is it the truth
Watching them come near me;
    and watching them go by
It’s the whisper that you hear;
    that’ll make you want to cry
It must be crazy;
    and can’t be the truth

Is it crazy or is it the truth
Telling her to stay;
    that’s what makes you want to cry
You beg and you pray;
    so then she says goodbye
It’s so crazy, it’s the truth

Isn’t it crazy isn’t it the truth
No matter what you do;
    she always says goodbye
So then you get blues;
when she says to just stay fly
It is crazy, it is the truth
If I Could

Breathe underwater just like the fishes
Walk upon the water
And skate barefoot on the ice without a freeze

If I Could

Touch the sun
Go across a dessert without a thirst
Outrun a cheetah
And rest beside a lion

If I Could

Slide right back up a mountain
Pick a flower that lasts forever
And stand in the light at the end of a rainbow

If I Could

Do a few circles around the moon
Bounce from star to star
And fly everywhere with the wind
Oh! Nothing could, compare to meeting Jesus
My Best Friend
I never thought my whole life would be based on a lie. That it would be something I never expected. I couldn’t imagine how my life would lead up to this…

One Month Before

I went downstairs to eat breakfast when my mother’s husband stepped in front of me. “Alright Raven, I know you … dislike … me, but we need to talk seriously,” he said.

I sidestepped him, and went to the kitchen to grab an apple. “Raven!” he yelled after me as I left through the front door.

I was about to bite my shiny red apple when I tripped over a crack on the ground. I blushed, though I knew no one saw. I hate being this awkward weirdo. I admit I am weird especially with wearing baggy, dark clothing with worn-up chucks. I have a piercing on my nose. I have very light skin with barely any freckles on my face. I have hair that matches my name — Raven. It’s silky black hair that is always worn down to cover my face. I have eyes that change colors … from blue to black. Kids at school ask me what I do to have eyes like that, but sadly, it’s natural.

Now, my social life isn’t interesting. I am a seventeen-year-old with no friends, not even people I hang out with at school. It’s sad.

A guy on his skateboard passed me by, but stopped. He turned to look at me and smirked. He’s an average-looking boy with brown hair and brown eyes. Has a nice smile and bushy eyebrows. 

_Farrin. Class Clown._

He came over to me, and said, “Well, lookie here. Miss. Raven Forsythe.”

I smiled shyly. I’m not much of a talker, either.

“You’re not going to talk to me, are you?” I shook my head.

“Well, would you like to come hang out with me and … some friends?”

I shook my head again.

“Come on. You’ll feel welcome once you step foot into
our … secret clubhouse. You can only be invited in and you will be our special guest today … Blackbird.”

Blackbird. I’ve heard that before.

“Blackbird?” I repeated, a bit perplexed.

He smiled widely. “Do you accept my humble invitation?”

He bowed.

I laughed, “What if this is a scam?”

He gasped, offended, “Never.” He smiled again. “For real, we don’t intend to hurt your feelings. Please, come.”

I hesitated a bit, but I finally accepted. I followed him for a few miles until we arrived at an abandoned house outside of town. The windows were boarded up, and parts of the steps in the front were withering away.

He opened the front door for me. There was white sand across the door frame. It confused me. Farrin lead me to where the living room should be. Beaten-up couches took place there and also Farrin’s friends. They stopped talking when Farrin and I walked in. Everyone looked at us.

I’ve always seen them around school. They’re a joyous group. They’re always having fun, but they only keep to themselves. They seem like very outgoing people.

There were at least six people. An ivory-skinned girl walked up to us. She was a tall beauty with light auburn hair and the greenest eyes ever. She seemed sweet. “Hi, I’m Willow,” she introduced herself. I shook hands with her and exchanged my name. She smiled and went back to her place next to a mysterious boy.

He was tall, also, but with black crazy hair and dark blue eyes. He nodded at me and said, “Liam.”

A blonde girl with brown eyes smiled at me, “Yaminah.”

A short girl with curly red hair raised her hand, awkwardly. She had tanned skin and hazel eyes. She cleared her throat and said quietly, “Valeraine, but everyone calls me Raine.”

The girl named Yaminah shot the other two guys a look. They rolled their eyes. They came up to me and bowed.

One guy was tall and buff. He had ash-blonde hair and clear blue eyes. He looked frightening. He introduced himself, “Hello, Blackbird. I’m Zander.” He sat back down.
The other guy was scrawny and had the same light skin as me. He had orange hair and light-brown eyes. He smiled half-heartedly. “I’m Hagan.”

Farrin looked at me and smiled. “I’m Farrin, but you already know that. So … we all consist of Aloysius.”

What?

Yaminah groaned angrily and said, “She’s not ready. She hasn’t had … occurrences.”

“You don’t know that,” Hagan said.

“They’re close,” Farrin said, seriously. “Abaddon is closer than you think.”

“Who’s Abaddon and Aloy … Aloy … what’s the name?” I asked.

“See?!” Yaminah exclaimed and walked away. Liam followed her.

Willow looked sadly at me and said, “She’s not ready, Farrin. Sorry.” She walked in the direction Yaminah and Liam went. Everyone else left except Hagan and Farrin.

I felt sick. I had a tendency to always be alone. “Wow,” I said sarcastically. “I can really clear a crowd.” I felt hot tears welling into my eyes. I turned to walk away, but something stopped me.

“Farrin…” I whispered. No one was touching me, but I felt something forcing me back. The white sand from the sand dissolved, but appeared in a heap in front of me.

Hagan gasped and ran away. Farrin laughed, relieved, “And they said you weren’t ready!”

“Farrin!” I exclaimed and the sand was gone. I ran away from that house. I ran into my house and into my room I went. I slammed the door shut.

I didn’t notice how agitated I was until I sat down and my whole body was trembling. It wasn’t because I was afraid, but because I felt … I belonged. It scared me, but it felt good.

My mom — Raison — came into my room with a worried look on her face. “What’s wrong? What happened?” She was about to hug me, but I stepped away from her.

“What have you kept from me, Mother?” I asked her.

“What?” she asked back, innocently.
“Why are there people calling me ‘Blackbird’?”
She didn’t reply. She had the look that meant she wanted to hide something from me. “Oh … honey.”
“Mom?”
“I guess it’s time for you to know. Well, you are of age when you learn of your true self.”
“What is it?”
She sighed, and looked at me, sadly. I knew it was going to be something that I would have a hard time coping with. At the moment, I didn’t know if I was ready to actually know the truth. I deserved to know who I was.
**K.A. Wilson** / Release onto Me

I know just when, your arm will get tired.
When you’ll drop your hand, with starry-leather belt
to your right side and walk away.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight...are you tired yet?
I no longer feel the sting of your belt,
Your lesson has been forgotten.

Nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen...
is your arm tired yet?
Your breath becomes labored.

Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen...twenty...twenty-one...twenty-two...
you are tired and
finished.
You have taught me your lesson.

Your arm is so tired now,
but I still love you, mom.
I know you need your release.

I know just when, your arm will get tired.
When you’ll drop your hand, with starry-leather belt
to your right side and walk away.
Angie Medrano / Parts One and Two

Part One

Do you not feel it?
The pain that grows within me,
Overtakes my soul.

Part Two

Stoic, I am not.
Let this anguish be gone.
Let me hear your song.
Elizabeth Madsen / Halo
You are beautiful.

Matthew Neeley
Angela Petersen / Classic Ride
Liliana Sanchez / Let There Be Light
Wendy Walczak / Toucan
Katherine Jackson
“I’ve gotchya.” These words hit as hard and genuine as a full-throttle, unabashed, truly given, and completely received—Embrace.

I was out watching a film that evening. It was one of those coming-of-age stories, where friendship is tested by fiery trials. After a long period of separation, two dearest companions reunite with one spectacular hug. “I’ve gotchya.” Such a simple sentence, it was. No need for an elaborate speech or an artificial show. “I’ve gotchya.”

That’s all it took. The cinema beamed into my eyes and ears and that deeper, intangible organ which is superstitiously called the heart. And it was at that moment in the film that I, the viewer, instinctively swerved to my left. My left was disappointing. The seat was empty where Michael usually sits. He had gone up North for college weeks before, but I still wasn’t used to it.

*He won’t be back for a while*, I told myself.
*Adjust*, I told myself.
Maybe he’ll never be back.
My hand remained empty without his Guatemalan-American palm to clutch. I missed his soft, olive-toned fingers then.

I still do.

Wading in a pool of memories, I loomed in silence as the credits rolled up screen. Everyone was named—each significant and seemingly insignificant partaker in the production process. I wonder now: on whose credits will I find my name written in the afterlife?

Quiet stayed its course on the road home; it cast upon me an introspective alchemy of heartache, reminiscence, and gratitude. Save for a few conversational responses to deflect any unnecessary concern, I scarcely said a word. No, I was not upset. Reflective is the adjective that best described me.

*Reflection*

What process of selection does the mind use to capture and recall glimpses—fragments—of memory? Recollection can cause pleasure or demise, after all. Who knows what may become of cerebral dissection.
Who knows the direction, the method, of Thought’s independent flow, playing back our keenest joys and deepest woes?

I remember as a child, I would imagine I was filming every memory on an imaginary “air camera.” I would hold a make-believe lens to my eye, press record, and roll film. Today my love of cinema remains. This love stems from what it evokes; audiovisual peeks into other, alternative lives can hark back to my own. Film can tear the ancient veil between conscious thought and subconscious memory.

In my friendship with Michael, I have always been the keeper of memories. In these seven years, I have cataloged what he deems our “many fond and incriminating moments” because I know these moments won’t happen twice. They are singular treasures in a fleeting, transient existence.

Like reels of unrecorded film, the future lies in front of me pregnant with possibility. I’m ready and willing to savor, to absorb it all. Old acquaintance shall not be forgotten; the new will be met with equal zeal.
Amber Clark / The Joy of Hearing

I have heard beautiful music,

And I have heard terrible noise,

I have heard the stillness of a forest,

And I have heard the cars of a city,

I have heard the echo of laughter,

And I have heard the fall of tears,

I have heard the rushing waters of a river,

And I have heard the roaring of a mob,

I have heard a lot of things in my life,

And still, I have not heard it all.
Linsey Sanders / If They Only Knew

Sitting in my room with the lights turned down low
Thinking of things that I only know
Wishing that someday they will come true
Those dreams and wishes
If they only knew
If they knew what I thought or what I’m thinking
I hope they will also do some thinking
Thinking about things that will never come true
Only in my head
They thought they knew
Knew what I’m thinking and wondering all of the time
All they know is that I rhyme
Rhyming away the whole day
How I feel no one likes me
If they only knew
But I will be myself that’s all I can be
I’ll be myself me
Just me
Cody Rukasin / Toast for Change

Growing…

A part of my heart, wants to stay right
On the path of decline.

They aren’t watching every move I’ve made
So why shouldn’t I accept all my mistakes
And move on,

Emptiness can stray below the lakes
Where fish’s gills believe they are complete
Cycling water, endlessly
But, do they ever really live?

To perform feats of perfection,
What will I need to give?

Blessed be he,
That the king is perfect
And we are able to tell a fib,

His gift to me, metamorphosis
A toast for change.
Feelings fade, and falter fairly often,
Like ashes to a shadow, merely peaked.
Blood from the spider veins soften
I find myself today so weak

Stand above the world so strongly
Relentless in the stair of old
Looking to fate as some may come to pass
Like of shadow and gold we shall outlast

For light the absence of darkness
Dark the peeking presence within
Seeming strong solemnly remark
Be tall. Be strong, and you will win

So they may always say another
Feed time like it is your brother.
“Lucas Van Dominick.” Pronouncing his name aloud conjured that deep gutted feeling of loathing she never intended to possess as long as she existed. Yet, the words pooled on the tip of her tongue like a glob of salt biting into the taste buds.

“Bethesda Morgan.” The insolent tone of his words drew blood like a bad paper cut. A cough resounded from a guard in the left corner of the mediation room. It was a signal for her to behave herself, although she’d like to leap across the table and tear the prisoner from limb to limb until he cried like a child.

“You know why I’m here, I assume?” Anxiously, she traced her russet hair behind mousey ears and reached for the file folder in her leather shoulder bag. In a thick manila envelope, the contracts splayed along the edges of the table like a deck of playing cards. Lucas shuffled them, and dealt. At first, she watched his hands, rigid and bony from malnutrition like an old man’s arthritis. Then her eyes fluttered to meet his. Against her wishes, they deadlocked.

“My lawyer told me what you wanted. I’m not interested, and I’ve told you this. You lawyers, always pushing deals and screwing people backwards. You’ve nothing more to offer in this piece of paper than you did the day you had me locked up in this hell. What makes you think you have the right to let me out now?” His statement dripped with resentment. Take a deep breath, Bethesda reminded herself, he only holds power over those who lie down willingly. For weeks she’d prepared herself for this rendezvous, but it was one of those moments in life that hit with forces you can never brace for.

“If you read the papers, which I’m sure a man of your intellect is capable of comprehension, you’d be aware of the fact that the accord stipulates that you would be paroled in a year, after you give us everything on Scott Priest and if he’s convicted. And I did not put you here, you put yourself here when you killed my sister.” Empha-
sizing killed, her words were firm and ironclad. Watching his jaw twitch gave her a satisfaction lined with guilt. A softness then touched his face for a moment—a sense of remorse—no he wasn’t capable of that.

“Vehicular manslaughter is not murder. It was an accident. I don’t know any other way to make you believe.”

“I don’t care what you think.”

“And why, Miss Bethesda, is this so important to you? Would you like me to be released?” His mockery was clear and Bethesda fisted her hands, the knuckles protruding angrily from white strain of flesh.

“Just sign the papers, I know you’re eager to begin working away at escaping. I’ve no interest in your welfare, the system will take care of you. Personally, I do not feel bad at locking up a potential threat to all people who come into contact with you. For your benefit, you better hope that you can convince otherwise. This deal expires in the next ten minutes. I have other cases and I need to get going.”

He was baiting her. Truly, she felt like grinding his pretentious smirk right into the icy metal table, but her self-control kicked in and held her back. He shifted smugly in his peach jumper, faded from multiple washes. Although the color drained him, stripping away the life leaving a gaunt face, he still was incredibly handsome for his twenty-six years. Bethesda stomped her foot against the floor and glanced at her watch, faking impatience. The less time spent with him, the better. She couldn’t help but remember what it felt like when she got the phone call that her sister had perished in a collision because of drunk driving, and that the drunk driver was her fiancée. But that was all history now.

“Alright, tell you what, Lucas, I will be back to visit you and you can tell me all about what happened—when you agree to the terms and help me put away Priest. It’s all I’m asking for. The man deserves it. Deal?” She propositioned him, giving into her final and last resort.

“Deserve? Like I deserved to be here? It was a tragic accident. I made a mistake. But you caught the wrong guy. I wasn’t driving. And now you’re trying to make up for it. Well you can’t.”

“Why didn’t you just take a cab home like every other night!” She felt herself truly begin to unwind and reel out of control.
“I don’t know! How was I supposed to know Audra was going to be with us?” His outburst quieted the room with a silence that spoke volumes.

After a minute, Bethesda finally found her voice. “This would be an out. Take it.”

“How can I trust that you won’t just sabotage me? That this isn’t some ambush technique you’ve cooked up. Isn’t it enough for you? See these four walls, these are all I will see for the next eight years—because of you.” It was futile, they were getting nowhere, Bethesda ascertained.

“I’m asking you to redeem yourself. Whether you believe you played a part in Audra’s death or not, Scott Priest needs to be held accountable for.” Begging would be the last thing Bethesda would do, backed up against a wall with a gun to her head. She really disliked the fact that she had to play nice with the one man she didn’t believe deserved her solace.

“Alright, Bethesda, I will sign it. On one condition—”

Exasperated, she cut him off with a sigh. “No conditions, the variables have already been decided, take it or leave it.”

“When I’m released I want you to help me get a job. Have my records sealed or whatever magic it is that you lawyers do.”

He paused a minute to gauge her reaction before adding, “It was her idea to drive home. I said no, so Scott drove.”

“That’s it. I’m done. This is too personal. Don, let me out. The court will just have to let us proceed without Lucas.” She rose quickly from the stiff chair, her eyesight blurred by dots as the blood drained to her extremities.

“Beth, Okay.” She swiveled a one-eighty at the shortening of her name. It was an endearment, not for him to use. Ridiculously, she found herself drifting towards him.

“Don’t Beth, me. Sign the papers.” Complying with her request, he shoved a hand towards her, nearly missing her brassier.

“What?” A questioning look plastered her face.

“I need a pen.”

“Oh.” Red flushed her cheeks, a pen, of course. Embarrassed at her assumption she turned her backside to him and waited for him to etch his name across the clearly marked lines.

“Here you go.” Bethesda shivered and neatly stacked her papers, shoved them rapidly into her bag and nodded at Don, who
tightened Lucas’ cuffs.

“I’ll return to do the interview tomorrow,” she responded curtly.

“I’ll escort you out first, Ms. Morgan.” The bulky black man, whose true calling should have been bouncing, placed a beefy hand on the small of her back, urging her to the door.

Lucas inched in his place to give her a weak smile before she left. She almost felt sorry for him as he reached out desperately for her forgiveness. But then she thought of how much time it would take to stop missing Audra. There wasn’t enough. Maybe Lucas knew that too. Unfortunately, the case depended on his cooperation, she realized with a chilling premonition.
Would You Do the Same for Me?

I would bleed an eternity for you,
yet would you do the same for me?
You ask me if you should stay,
when I wish you would tell me you want to.
At times your mind seems so far away,
why can’t we start again, become like new?
It becomes so hard just like today,
sometimes it’s like you have no clue.

I would do anything to make you happy,
yet would you do the same for me?
Withstanding this hurt for a hope that seems so far away,
when you just make countless hurtful mistakes.
I wonder if you care the way I do,
the way your friends are like your glue.
You put them before your flickering love,
yet would they do the same for you?
“I’ll never do it again” is what you say.
My heart bleeds now for you,
am I tortured enough to finally say adieu?

My heart of hearts is cracking, about to shatter,
the once burning fire now turning into a dim ember.
Am I forced to be a withering dweller?
Having my heart feel like it’s been crushed with a hammer?
I would patch up your failing heart, baby,
yet would you do the same for me?
You search for your feelings within your heart
You find yourself trapped in a world that tears you apart.
You can’t be yourself; you just get crushed down,
This feels like the end, you just want to drown.

Swallow your dark desires, let go of your past
Don’t hate your life, the future comes fast,
People make mistakes, they’re not perfect
Don’t be afraid of them, it’s not worth it.

You ask why people are this way.
Perhaps they’re jealous, but it’s hatred they say.
Most people hide the pain they go through,
If everyone cared then problems would be few.

Though the darkness of the world makes you hate,
You can still travel to a secret place that’s truly great.
Your mystical fantasies and a wild imagination,
Create your own stories, which rid you of abomination.

The moment comes and stops at your door
Leave your hurt behind you to be something more.
Lift your hands up and reach towards the sky
You are the person to make your spirit soar high.

You may feel scared and perhaps afraid,
Just don’t end your life, value it today.
Through the years, your life becomes a treasure
Just have faith to make your life one to remember.
Breanna Williams / Black America

The chants and rants of a young black teen with a young black mind.
Living in a world that tell you ain’t nothing.
Instead of taking that arrogance,
We turn it into ignorance.
Go around hollering free booise.
When we should holler better our schools.
Don’t let the helpless children suffer from the cracked-out mother
Or let the dope boys steal their soul.
Quick money, fast money...
You get taken out as soon as you get it.
Ironic ain’t it...
We sit and say our black is beautiful and we do what we do.
But in the same sentence start a black race war
Between the same culture.
Redbone, Yellow Chick, Dark skinned, Light skinned.
Doesn’t matter when at the end of the day you still get
called a nigga.
Loud mouth, illiterate, ghetto, monkey, nappy-headed hoes.
Funny how the only thing we can say back is cracker.
Not only the race, but the intelligence gets tested.
With the oh I’m white because I don’t talk like I’m hood.
When you wanna sit and talk about getting out the hood.
Making it a joke when others are looking at you talkin
about what’s ebonics.
When all they have to do is look on TV and see the video hoe.
But it’s cute and “sexy” until you’re called out your name.
When you should have thought about it before you dropped it low.
Wanna bring down your family that went and got the degree,
When they can laugh at you cause you got a dollar in the bank.
We all sat and watched and saw Obama become president.
Most of us voted cause he was black.
Instead of seeing he was smart, knew what he was talking about,
and can handle his business,
and be a family man all in one jump. But we the first ones to turn when he’s not doing enough. Enough for who? Us. Just cause he black he gotta focus on us first. I mean do we really have to worry about it? We wipe each other out every day. Black on black crime. Cause of what? Oh that’s right he disrespected you. It’s called grow up and look past the nonsense. Single moms everywhere, pregnant at 17. Wanna sit and be the baby mama and holla “He a deadbeat.” But what do you expect a boy to do Working minimum wage or no job at all. When he was just gettin off, And you thought it was fun. Now sitting here crying, Because you don’t know how to feed your son. Want to get mad at everyone but you, The one who laid on they back and took. The one who put yourself in the situation. The one who said “You only live once.” The one who thought it was going to last forever, you didn’t need a condom. The one having the one-night stand. I’m talkin about you, yea you. Don’t look around or double check your race. Don’t sit looking mad. Black America. Black Pride. Lost its sense of value... How are we going to get it back? That’s the question we all have to ask.
Lovie Morgason / Stars

Believe in stars moonlight signs of winter
Believe tracing tracks unseen
Believe tears of hurt captured in a bottle
Believe thoughts in time never yet seen
Believe in another dimension
Believe the weave between parallel lines
Believe in flying you can do that
Believe in winds sweeping into wide oceans
Believe there are evil ways on the earth
Believe you better move quick don’t get hurt
Believe in sweet tastes of bitter cold
Believe because sweetly it kills
Believe because it kills the body mind and soul
Cianna Garrison / The Masquerade

Put on your masks; costumes for the ballroom.
Only the best can attend the charade.
Gentlemen, leave your hats in the cloakroom.

The music, it swells, and its ricochet
Is heard through the halls; the echo remains.
Only the best can attend the charade.

The guests in the room have gone to great pains
To beguile and orchestrate fallacy
That’s heard through the halls; the echo remains.

Fake smiles, fake countenance—they dance blithely:
Perpetual, unceasing, enduring;
They beguile and orchestrate fallacy.

The bachelor; the lady he’s luring;
Doubtless, they are all impersonators:
Perpetual, unceasing, enduring.

Join us for the masquerade in whispers.
Put on your masks; costumes for the ballroom.
Doubtless we are all impersonators.
Gentlemen, leave your coats in the cloakroom.
Riverside County you used to be the place to see
Wild horses, health spas, and historical Grand Oak trees.
Now, material progress runs for miles
Tract housing has stolen your natural beauty
As bulldozers and sirens run daily.
Democracy has become a 3-minute public meeting capsule tally
while city council members, Board of Supervisors and water districts have
listened to the developers and not stopped the projects
on land they wreck
that take the names of the nature they replace
in fast tract haste:
California Oaks, Oak Creek, Sycamore, Bear Creek, east and west, to and fro
and the oaks are in a tree corral on the plateau.
30,000 people will be added to Menifee and Hemet alone, miles of distribution centers will cover the county:
collection houses for foreign-made goods imported
at the environment’s expense tragically
and, therefore, the people will suffer from
the carbon and environmental impact
When will it end? Not as long as the second most intense contributor to political campaigns
from Washington on down is developers and campaigns in California collect over 6 million dollars
The Christians say the Creator is coming to solve it all
while there is disturbing suffering from weather turmoil
and it will be worse if we disrespect our home with urban sprawl.

Your physical and spiritual future is in jeopardy
as is your water supplies’ purity
from lawns, refuse, military bases, and construction waste.
Toxic dumps and industrial haste set your pace for the human race
because the chemical compounds seep into the Earth’s face.
Riverside County you used to be the place to see
Wild horses, health spas, and historical Grand Oak trees.
We meditated in the shadow of the Ortega, San Jacinto,
Gorgonians Mountains, our purple majesty.
and are now under disruption
from your Board of Supervisors permits for construction.

Build our dreams to the sky
However, leave the land for wilderness trails, fields
Historic hills, orchards, Nature’s vegetation
and not falling under your land grade blade

Just because someone wants to design a LEED
award-winning building
doesn’t mean we should build it.
We should celebrate the rock formations and fields
from our travels on buses and light rail
which would create jobs.
And make a new science and art of energy-independent
already existing buildings.
We should remodel already designed buildings to supply
their own energy
and recirculate their grey water, repair our water leaks,
socialize our utilities
so water and electric engineers and technicians can focus
on their jobs
not on figuring out how to make money while we are
respectfully conserving utilities

Riverside County

Your physical and spiritual future is in jeopardy
as is your water supplies’ purity
from lawns, refuse, military bases, and construction waste.
Toxic dumps and industrial haste set your pace for the human race
because the chemical compounds seep into the Earth’s face.
Lidia Melaku
Take a deep breath. You can only run for so long. He wasn’t moving very fast. You made so many turns, how could he possibly know where you are? Lean against the wall. Let the sweat cool you down.

Footsteps. The sound echoing through the halls. That’s definitely the sound of footsteps.

Don’t panic. So many people pass by this area, it could be anyone. Besides, the sound is faint. Even if that is him, he’s far away. And how would he know you were here?

I’ve had my time to rest. I can only be safe if I’m far away. Once I leave this place, he’ll be clueless. How could he possibly hope to find me? I can quietly sneak away in the opposite direction.

He’s so far away. Your heart doesn’t need to beat so fast. Just relax and calm your breathing. He isn’t going to find you.

The steps are getting louder, quicker. I need to move. I don’t know my way around this place, but surely he does. He must know where to look. How much longer do I have if I stay here?

Don’t be so panicked. When you panic, that’s when you do stupid things. If you let yourself become panicked, he’ll find you for sure. No, you’ll be fine. Just take deep breaths. You can handle this situation.

I have to move. I remember the way I came. He surely followed me down that path, but this place has so many twists and turns. I can find another way, or at least lose him. Can’t I?

There! You see that? That’s the room you were in when you first started running. You made it back without running into him.

What if he never followed after me? What if going back through that
large, open room is the only way to leave. What if he’s been sitting, waiting for me to return? Would I just be running back to his chilling glare?

Don’t worry. Even if he is there, what’s the worst thing that’ll happen to you? Are you over reacting to this situation?

No. If he sees me, that’s it; he will kill me. That is inevitable. If I can get away without him ever seeing me… that is my only option. That’s all I can do. That is what I must do if I am going to see tomorrow.

The walls are made of glass. You can look in to see if he’s there. If you hide behind the wall and peek around, you can see inside the room. You’ll know if he’s there, and you’ll be hiding safe outside.

I can see into the room, but I don’t see him. I can get away!

You fool! You can’t run on these floors in those shoes, the squeaks echo so far in these halls.

I’m screwed now, he had to have heard me! I can hear rapid footsteps coming from behind me. I have to move! His voice is calling out to me. Does this mean he knows where I am? Does he see me? I can’t see him.

Don’t abandon faith. Take a deep breath. Listen to him, he’s running through the halls. He can’t be in the room, it’s your chance. Go!

Oh no! He’s only a few feet away… I can’t move. He’ll hear me before he sees me. It’s too risky. But I can’t stay here. He’ll find me. I’m in a corner now. He’s getting near. That scent is his.

You’re so close you can smell him.

I can’t give up. He might not have seen me.

You know he’ll find you. He’s right in front of you.
Maybe he won’t turn his head and find me.

But he just did. He sees you.

He’s walking closer and closer to me.

You’re up against a wall. He’s boxing you in.

Looks like I’m out of options.

I’m sorry, but you won’t be seeing me tomorrow.
Mobile apps are at an all-time altitude
Bashing on boyfriends has become big business
Credentialed crooks cower behind cunning commercials
Diplomatic doppelgangers defer to deceivingly devious despots
Egotists are enigmatic enemies to the enterprise
of emotional equality
Failure is not far from failure, foolery and frivolity
Guys are grifters gripping girls with guileful grimaces

Alliteration aside we live in a throw-away nation
Constantly pursuing sensation
The proclamation:
Let us enhance our interpretation
Natalie Ducatenzeiler / The Duel

“Galatians 5:16-17”

A lesbian named Lindsey split from the closet yesterday—her parents were not pleased. It took a single moment for their aversion to unite with their faith in God, and the family bond felt destroyed. The sire remained speechless while the mother unleashed her disapproval. In the midst of confusion and sorrow, of denial and scorn, came a shield well made of tempered steel. Conquered by this weaponry, Lindsey learned she was no soldier. When the morning ensued, Tlaloc thundered from the sky with his fierce and mighty torrent. Meantime, a young girl sat quietly alone in her peaceful home.

“Someone is knocking on the door.”
She sat up from her kitchen table.
The front door opened.
Shock exploded.
“Stay away from my daughter!”
The Woman was furious.
“Excuse me?”
“You’ve filled her head with poison. It is detestable and always will be, understand?”
“You’re out of line, Mrs.”
“No! My daughter’s perfectly normal. This whole thing is your fault.”
“I don’t have power over Lindsey. Maybe she can live despite acceptance from others.”
The visitor grasped tightly to her convictions.
“You sinful child!”
“Love is my sin. What a blind, old woman.”
“I know what I see standing opposite. I pray for sinners like you even though none have shown me any remorse. But worst of all, you call it love! That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. The Lord hates your kind because it is nothing more than a disease or at the very least, an abomination to the world. So I advise you beg forgiveness from our Savior and start praying toward salvation, before it’s too late.”
The Young Girl paused to reflect on her previous remarks. She decided to bridge the gap between them and attack at full force.

“I wonder every day what God can see. Sometimes, I wonder if he just closes his eyes. How do you know the best course for people like me? You think we should sell our deepest truth and purchase a deeper lie. If that’s the righteous path, then I will never understand. Believe it or not, last night I prayed for Lindsey. I asked God to let her sleep the next thousand years. I prayed for her to arise at some distant daybreak and relive in a new world. But it was a waste of time. Lindsey has already perished. Your words killed her and now she’s gone.”

It was then the Woman’s armor fell from her clasp. Deprived of mercy, an iron sword swiftly stabbed, twisted, and retreated. The Young Girl obtained her victory. In turn, she closed the door and went inside her peaceful home.

The Woman stood on the doorstep deep in thought. She shut her eyelids subtly and saw a little match girl, remembering, “I read that story to Lindsey once. It was New Year’s Eve.” The flame burned vividly in her mind until the Woman vanished in a black hole of desolation. Nothing was left except sheer darkness and it seemed to paralyze her soul. With every bit of strength, a prayer surfaced from the depths and softly pleaded, “Father, please don’t leave me alone.” The Woman gazed at the door and silence lingered. On the back of her neck she could feel a sting of sunlight. It warmed her body enough to move again. Finally, she turned around and tramped off the front porch. Several hours later, the day began its demise. Dusk beheld rainfall anew.

The Young Girl lay in bed without hope or despair. She stared long at the broken ceiling. She listened to waters hit the ground and caught a glimpse of raindrops falling down her window pane. Suddenly, the Young Girl waded through a freezing river surrounded with icicles, pines, and prolific snow. A voice dwelled in the cool, sharp breeze. It summoned to look up at the firmament above. Instead, she proceeded forward. With every other stride, it whispered its plea for a final abdication. By and by the scene went dark; only to keep her in a realm of blackness, save for a small light that dimmed in the infinite stream.
Tyrena Williams / Artistic Flow

In a dark room with a bright soul my thoughts illuminate the walls with freshly painted passion and I’m feeling poetic.

My silhouette pounces in the meadows of light, seducing it with frail and soft colors bursting with infrared dramatics and lavishing platonic.

These walls beat with the echoing of a heart craving for the sound of a hymn or symphonic line filled with beauty, outlining the shades of true meanings in a poetic feeling.

Swaying through the grays and blacks in the corners of the canvas and refueling the dullness of this masterpiece with charged adrenaline.

The pores of my hot flesh sweat from anxious strokes, splattering the moistness of my gray breath and transitioning to a bright shimmering ecstasy, in love with me feeling THIS poetic.

The time is endless in the room made of just this artistic flow, pouring in an hour-less glass made of papier mâché.

The sharpness of my ego cuts out the today’s and tomorrow’s and folds them into crescent suns that sunlight shines in moonlit determinations only possible if I’m feeling poetic.

The heavy eyes are wide open in the light feeling of blended love and crafty desire, dozing with dry truths and glossy with the beholder, never shutting for fear of seeing the end of this artistic flow.
As I approach the door of my home I already feel stronger. Being at the hospital undergoing chemotherapy makes me feel weak. Not physically; that comes a few days later. It’s being at the mercy of the nurses and doctors and not being able to change what is being done to me that makes me feel powerless. I feel like they expect me to be sick so I can’t let them down. I need to play the helpless patient.

Once I get home and sit down on my couch I look around and appreciate the fact that I can control everything around me. I can hang paintings or photographs on my walls, I can stand a sculpture in the corner or have flowers draping my mantelpiece. It’s my choice and it can be changed as often as I want. I can create a mood with a splash of color from the throw of a pillow. I can easily brighten up a room – and the world of those around me.

Gazing at my handiwork I am happy with what I see but look forward to changing it many more times. I smile inside — and out — because hope feels good. And as my eyes scan the room I realize it looks good, too.
Elizabeth Povroznik
Alex Yamada / Flowering White
Haura opened her bright little eyes and sighed softly. She could feel her last dream floating up and out of her head. She sat up on her bed of leaves, shivering as the cold sea breeze washed over her. Looking out into the darkness, she tried to imagine where the sky ended and the great ocean began. She listened to the waves crashing, the way they seemed to drown the sounds of her own breathing. She stood and dusted sand from her makeshift clothes, shaking off her fear with all of her might. The black sky would soon give way to blues and reds, the sunrise of a new day.

Haura spent the morning collecting rocks from the shoreline. She diligently filtered out the rougher ones and amassed a fortune in smooth stones. She was so driven by her task that before she knew it, she had gone halfway around the island. She dragged her haul of stones back in the other direction, passed her bed of leaves and over a steep hillside near the shore. On the other side sat a sandcastle with towering walls. It was so big that Haura herself looked as though she could almost live inside. The castle was in a state of great conflict, with some walls knocked down and others freshly built up. Haura dumped her stones into a pile and as the day shined on, she worked to repair what she had made.

When her arms were heavy and she could not lift another stone, she went back down the hill and sat quietly by her bed. It seemed that time had gotten away from her. It was getting late, and her heart fluttered nervously. She rocked softly back and forth as her eyes roamed the darkening sky. She seemed to be counting the seconds, steeling herself against some impending impact. And then it happened, as the day died and the light was swallowed by darkness, a shadowed figure descended toward her. “Souga,” she squeaked, unheard over the roar of the evening tide.

The figure landed at her feet, the waves crashing at his back. Haura shook and rattled as she listened to his low growl. She felt her tired arms raising autonomously, her fingers clasped tightly in what looked like a prayer. Moments passed slowly as Haura sat paralyzed, her cold hands shaking above her crown of dark hair. The
shadowed figure stared at her forever. Every second felt a minute. She struggled to hear her own breathing over his growls, or to hear anything over the hardening ocean waves. After what seemed like an eternity, the figure barked like a large dog. Haura felt her heart and body explode. Her teeth clacked noisily as she put her head between her legs and covered it with her arms. “S-So-Souga...,” she stammered. Her voice was little more than a muffled hum against the roar of the waves.

Souga barked again, louder. The sound seemed to cut the sea. Haura knew that if Souga had come to her, unwilling to talk with words, then his mood and this night could turn out to be exceptionally bad. He circled her now, growling and barking, nipping at her edges. “S-Souga, please,” Haura pleaded, her hands rising back up into a prayer. She felt his teeth at her knuckles. “Souga, please,” she repeated.

His growl softened, and Haura thought the waves receded a bit. When he barked again, Haura could hear bits of words tangled up. “Haurrrra,” he growled.

“Souga...” Haura stammered.

“PLAY,” he barked at her. Haura flinched, standing up. “PLAY!” Souga repeated.

“I want to be free,” Haura spoke earnestly. Souga’s wings twitched at her final word.

“NO,” he barked. “WE PLAY!”

Tears ran down Haura’s face as she backed away from the water. “Souga, please,” she spoke carefully, unable to meet his gaze. He stared back through her, his eyes darkly aglow, grinning with gross teeth, and pulled at his filthy blonde hair.

“No,” Souga repeated, and he dragged her to the water’s edge. Haura’s heart skipped as the cold waves struck her legs. “Play with me,” Souga repeated, raising his arms, the waves rising behind him. He knocked her sideways into the surf, the waves taking her under. Haura swallowed water as she screamed. This is the night, she thought, Souga is finally going to bury me beneath the ocean. She made her way to the surface, and Souga struck her back down, the waves toppling her flat. He barked a laugh as she continued to struggle.
For as long as she could remember, Souga had chosen their games... and they had always been some variation of his sick amusement at her great expense. They played in the surf for hours, until Souga tired of Haura’s cries. As he dragged her out of the waves and onto the sand, she stared distantly into the sky. It was not until he had completely stopped that Haura realized where he had taken her. “Souga… Please…” Haura repeated, as she slowly stood. He had dragged her over the hill, to her sandcastle. Souga was usually satisfied by simply drowning her in the surf, but sometimes he needed more misery to sustain him. Haura wondered if her own sadness wound up powering the ocean or strengthening Souga’s control over it. Her musings were shattered as he trampled the highest tower of the castle. She fell to her knees, managing a weak hiccup as Souga devoured her life.

“HAURRRRA. GOTOSLEEERP HAURRRRA,” he growled as he danced over the castle in a manic finishing attack. As the tide began its turnaround, Haura felt herself falling backward into a sad sleep.

She awoke at first light. Her sleep had been the kind reserved for one who’d gone through a profound suffering and needed immediate healing. She sat up from the sand and looked upon her ruined castle, tears filling up her eyes. The moat, the wizard’s tower, and the courtyard were all in shambles. Haura could not bear the sight, and ran down toward the water, crying and hiccupping all the way.

As she sat and sobbed, she stared up at the sunbeams cutting the grays of the morning fog. There was a soft rumbling from beneath Haura, as the sand and water seemed to come to life. “Hello child,” spoke a deep voice, seemingly from the water’s edge.

“What are you?” asked Haura, sniffling as she stared at the shifting elements.

“We are Nesoi,” replied the voice.

“Nesoi?” Haura repeated quizzically.

“We are the governors of land and sea, and these fringes where their energies intersect,” the voice spoke.

Haura stood up, approaching the anomaly for closer inspection. “Then please,” she spoke, “free me.”
"Nothing is keeping you here," the Nesoi replied simply. "Souga is keeping me!" Haura raged, her fists tightly balled. "With the sea!" she finished, pointing out into the water. The face of the Nesoi sharpened, its eyes shining up through the water’s surface as it spoke through its mouth of sand.

"The sea is not only his," the Nesoi said firmly, "it is also yours." Haura had not considered this. She had always been content to be completely afraid. In fact, after so much time, her fears were rather like a cloak that she could simply wear in Souga’s presence.

That afternoon she dragged her rocks down the hill and rebuilt her kingdom nearer to the water. She then waited all day for Souga’s arrival. When he flew in over the waves that evening, Haura was waiting for him. "HAHAHAURA! LET’S PLAY!" Souga barked. He bounded toward her, arms swinging madly, but she was not afraid. He collided with her near the water’s edge and they tumbled into the surf. She fought him late into the night and onward toward the morning, holding out for the tidal turn. As the sun circled back, Haura smacked Souga square on the nose. He stumbled, the waves pulling at his legs. "NO! HAURRRRA!" he snarled as he widened his stance, digging his feet into the shifting sand. Her little wings flapped furiously as she flew about him, battering his bobbing head. The sea swelled up around him, stinging his nose. His wings felt wet and heavy. He stood up onto the tips of his toes as the water rose higher. "No. NO! PLEASE!" he blathered as his toothy mouth filled up with saltwater.

"Souga," Haura said, rising higher above him. "I will be free." She folded the sea over top him, watching as he was enveloped in darkness.
When my father did not come home on that cold and rainy night in 1967, I knew we were in trouble. It had been raining for several days and the dirt roads leading to our neighborhood had become virtual lagoons. There were rumors that the dam located a few miles east of our home was reaching its capacity. It had been constructed in 1927 and it was feared it was not strong enough to hold any more water without bursting.

We had moved to this neighborhood just a year earlier when my father purchased this house from an acquaintance. This was a great opportunity for our family to own a home. We had been renting since we moved from our hometown in Zacatecas, Mexico to the border town of Tijuana. When my father announced that he had purchased a home for $95, I figured that for that much money the house must be nicer than our present one-room home. We put all our belonging in my father’s truck and we moved in one trip.

Our new home was located in a neighborhood that had no electricity or running water. The two-room home had no windows. My father had to cut out a window for ventilation as we used a petroleum stove for cooking. He also constructed a staircase and two more rooms in the second floor. I was eleven years old at the time and all I knew was that we finally had a home of our own. What I did not know was that we had moved into a riverbed.

Authorities had announced through the radio that they were opening the flood gates to release water to ease the pressure on the dam. My mother feared that if they released too much water, it was going to flood nearby homes and leave us in an island as we were against the hills and the natural river channel surrounded our neighborhood.

The morning after the gates were opened, we learned that the water had flooded the south side of our neighborhood near my grandmother’s home. The sun was shining and the air was fresh.
after the heavy rains the night before. My mother, my three sisters and I walked the five blocks to my grandmother’s house. We struggled to keep our shoes on our feet as we walked through the muddy streets in one-line formation holding our bodies against the wooden fences to avoid stepping into the water. Cars passed slowly through the streets, now lagoons, sending ripples of muddy water into our already soaked feet.

As we approached what used to be a dry creek and our only exit road to the south, we were taken aback at the sight. The water was rushing in front of us carrying uprooted trees, furniture and other debris. I saw a large wooden home being swallowed by the river current as it came crashing down into the water. The force of the current turned entire walls into matchsticks that swirled in the water with other debris. My grandmother’s house was three houses away from the river current. My mother pleaded with her to come with us but she refused, fearing that an opportunist might steal what little she had. The river surrounded the neighborhood, the only way out or in was to walk through the hills in the north. My father did exactly that when he came home a couple of days later.

On the days that followed the floods, we learned that many people died and many others were missing. Two of our neighbors drowned when they fell in a water-filled crater. Careless truckers extracted large quantities of sand nearby leaving huge craters that filled with water when the heavy rains came. Some families washed clothes by the edge of these sandy lagoons. My older sister, who was twelve at the time, convinced my mother to let us walk to the place of the accident. We ran towards this desolated area as the cold wind of the afternoon announced another storm. As we approached the small group of people that had gathered, we were startled to see the lifeless bodies of two women lying face down in the dirt.

In the months that followed the floods, I often had dreams of water rushing down from the hills above and reaching our home. In my dream, I remember being terrified as I struggled to keep afloat. I never mentioned my dreams to my sisters for fear of being laughed
at, but I came to find out years later that they also had nightmares just like me. My grandmother’s house was eventually taken by the river when Tijuana flooded again in 1976. This time she had no choice but to evacuate just hours before her house was carried by the current taking most of her possessions. She would often rant about her loss and say, “Why have a government if they are useless?” as she adjusted her mismatched shoes.

As my sisters and I got older, we helped in one way or another to move the family to a house on higher ground. My experiences growing up shaped the person I am today.
Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* wrote: “Men can and do exist without doing philosophy, but it is only when they engage in philosophical thinking that they are fully actualized men. Any man is potentially a philosopher by essence, but only some become philosophers in actuality.” Engaging our minds in the contemplative task of understanding of ourselves and the cosmos we are embedded within, is not only the task of the philosopher-sage, but now; of the artist, the scientist. Being, in this quote, is from an ancient Greek chauvinist. Being our equals women, too, can potentially be philosophers, or as other men, ignorant and devoid of reason.

The *Buddha*, a being of enlightened-awareness from Antiquity, saw that life was beginningless: the world was beginningless; however, he also understood we emerged out of a great chain of evolutionary life-forms. He understood that our species emerged out of a biological hierarchy: man was of the Earth, like the plants, the animals, and the stars above.

Two terms:

*Affinities* – A similarity of characteristics suggesting a relationship; a resemblance in structure between animals, plants, or languages.

And,

*Kinship* – A relationship between any entities that share a genealogical origin, through either biological, cultural, or an historical descent.

How can affinities help us understand the many possibilities for forms of kinship to emerge from human inquiry, which otherwise renders us vulnerable? What forms of kinship could you imagine, from which we could emerge transformed, through some type of metamorphosis?
You’re in Paris, and I Am Here

Wondering of what the air tastes like in London, in Spain, in Moscow, even Maine…of everywhere I’ve never been

Does it taste of fish and spices and smog and vices?

Or of earth and ocean, of all things green, of pure and clean?

And when you inhale does sand impale your mouth and tongue?

Does it taste of bread and delicacies of sex and fantasies?

I imagine it is dry or that it is thick or that it is any number of possibilities

I’ll never know I guess,

but tell me what does the air in Paris taste like?
Samuel Cantrell / The Pianist

The artist
Approaches her instrument
Fingers calm and ready
She begins

The trumpet blares
As the drums rumble
First is Louis
Loud and strong
It starts

Now comes her turn
The keys begin to click and clack
Next is Duke
Calm before the storm

And then the
Refrain Ting!

The harmony of the band
Crescendos
As Monk appears
All come together
Under the wail of the sax

Things start to swing
The message it means a thing

Things are dying down
As Ray takes the stage
Hit the road Jack

It ends
Dennis Rowley / Generations

They wear cool clothes; I wear clothes to stay cool.

They get a ride to class; I got a class ride.

They have smartphones that rule; as a rule, phones outsmart me.

They’ll fail if caught reading a text in class;

I’m required to read one to pass.

They’re curious about what it was like then;

I try to make then the ’80s.

Some of them are really hot; I try to keep from getting really hot.

They say stupid things; I say things that sound stupid.

They try to sound older; I just sound old.

They should floss more; I don’t need floss anymore.

Their headgear is cool; mine covers a thin spot.

These youth drink from a fountain;

I look for the fountain of youth to drink from.

If they’re sick, it means they’re hot; If I’m hot, it means I’m sick.