

Aquila

Rockin

2020

Aquila Review

**Volume 13
Fall 2020**

Texas A&M University-Texarkana

2020 *Aquila Review*

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Aquila Review is a nonprofit arts journal that Texas A&M University-Texarkana publishes. Funding for this publication comes from ads, private donations, and subscriptions to the journal.

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Submissions

Aquila Review publishes original art, creative nonfiction, drama, fiction, music, nonfiction, and poetry.

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Writers may send submissions via post or in the body of an e-mail to brian.billings@tamut.edu. Query for simultaneous submissions. Please include a SASE when mailing hard copies if you would like to have the editors return your submissions. *Aquila Review* cannot accept any responsibility for the loss or damage of any materials sent via post.



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Country Living

Meredith Weaver

Cruising the back roads.
Overflowing ponds.
Unleashed pets running free.
Neighbors at a distance.
Trees in abundance.
Restless deer grazing in the pasture.
Yellow gleam from the beaming sun.

Land to hunt.
Iced tea on the porch.
Venturing into the woods.
Ice cream made from scratch.
Napping in a hammock.
Green grass growing tall.

Colorful Harvest

Leah Pickering

Stooped in glaring heat,
She picks a juicy harvest.
She cooks with rainbows.

Cherry Tomato

Leah Pickering

Red fruit,
Plump and juicy.
I pop one in my mouth.
The sweet juice gushes as it bursts.
'Mater.

Crow!

Jasmine Geyer

Crooning on a perch is a midnight bird.
Reaching for it might cause it to flee.
Oh, its sundown song sounds so sad.
Will it sing a happy tune at dawn?

If I Were a Bat

Hanna Gross

If you were a bat,
Off where would you fly?
Would you fly to the moon
Sitting high in the sky?

Would you glide through the treetops
Or over a lake
Only stopping to rest
When you felt your wings ache?

If I were a bat,
I'd do all of these things.
I wish I were blessed
With a small pair of wings.

Clouds

Courtney Muñoz

I like to float down the river
With you in sight, my love.
We float along the riverbank
And watch the clouds above.
The clouds are forming into shapes
As they drift slowly by.
We call each cloud out by its name
And wave up to the sky.

Boat Ride

Hannah McElroy

The waves are choppy
On a warm, bright sunny day.
No sweaters in sight.

Sand of the Shore

Christian Poe

Let me be the sand of the shore, not hard stone,
cold, rigid, standing with wind always in my face.
I have already been crushed, my will and all my bones,
and stand ready for a new form, a new shape.

You can build me up tall, to reach for the sky, or out wide around,
fill me in with details, intricate or simple, or trenches shallow or deep.
Trials and troubles have made me fertile ground for your
imagination; I stand ready at your feet.

I will no longer be scarred by the pressures of the world, or
by the horrors of my past, what I've done.
The ocean daily cleanses my face and my core.
Now my future is bright as I bask in the sun.

Cowboy Is My Name

Danny Verdic

I've been chasin' this
dream ever since I was a kid
Ridin' stick horses
and spittin' in the wind.

Bustin' broncs in my sleep
and lastin' eight seconds for
that gold-buckle dream.

My little ol' cowgirl pickin'
me up when I needed a helpin' hand,
this rodeo life is the best there is in this ol' land.

Drivin' my ol' pick-up truck,
ridin' around in that ol' summer haze.
Thinkin' about the sore places on my body
and the smile on my cowgirl's pretty little face.

Rodeo isn't just any ol' game,
the dirt and the mud,
the blood, and the cheers that have came,
the roar of the crowd from those little country towns . . .
Rodeo is my job;
Cowboy is my name.

Talon's Ride

Casey Purifoy

Talon rode the carriage in the billowing dust of the wide desert. It was a black box drawn by a team of six horses. It was the only way to reach the town of Desolation, that hideous skeleton of prosperity resting in the shadow of mountains. Night arrived quickly there . . . as quickly as trouble. Talon sat in the red velvet of the carriage, and he was dressed in black—black boots, black hat, and a black duster. The holsters for his guns were black, and the guns themselves were black with ebony handles; but his face was white and hairless and scarred, and he wore an eyepatch over his left eye.

Talon watched the dust stir up in the wooden wheels, and he listened to their rattle as they rumbled over rocks, sand, and the divots from other vehicles. There was dirt and sand and mountains as far as the bounty hunter could see. The sky was as blue as water, something that the badlands had not seen during the summer months, when the heat stole the moisture from the air. There were no hopeful clouds, not even a wisp, but Talon was used to the heat. He turned one of his guns in his gloved hands. Six chambers for six people in a tiny town called Desolation.

The carriage grumbled as the journey stretched into night. Eventually, a few lights peeked around the foothills. Then they became a cluster of lights vying for attention. They reminded Talon of the wildfires he would sometimes pass way out in the middle of nowhere. A destructive inferno showed its leftovers with embers.

As the town drew closer, the structures became more visible. Some hollowed-out buildings. There was the old general store—a poverty of walls and ceiling with no grocer and empty shelves. Then there was the prosperous undertaker with his wares out on public display even well into the evening. No one would steal those. The only source of noise and life was the saloon. Every few seconds, a gunshot would go off like a dog's howls into the night sky.

The carriage stopped at the edge of the main street. The driver held his reins close, and the shotgunner's knuckles were white. They took off as soon as Talon's feet left the carriage. He descended to the carriage step and walked into town. The dirt was like bone powder and just as white. The moon reflected off it.

The vagrants, prostitutes, and panhandlers were out under the few street lights. One would hold out his hands, but Talon kept his hands in his pockets. The prostitutes would croon, but Talon may as well not have heard. His eye locked onto the saloon. It was the anchor to his perspective. Everything else was eddies and lost currents in the night.

The closer he came, the more the din grew. The saloon was a mutt of laughter, screams, arguments, and scores being settled. When the saloon doors

opened, Talon felt as if a great many-eyed beast was coughing out a demon that didn't agree with its stomach. So many demons would go in and then leave with a darkness. It made Talon smile. It made him smile because every town has a character. The farther those towns were from civilization, the more real their characters became. They were the kind of places that had grown him.

He pushed through the doors of the saloon, and the noise stopped as if something had stepped on its windpipe. Eyes under low-slung hats or behind make-up and bruises invited Talon's gaze, but he only looked past it all, even the walls. In the crossfire of that stare was a card table. *They usually sit there*, thought Talon. *That's what the crippled veteran said*. And they *were* sitting there: six people laughing and drinking and trading hands. They didn't notice Talon.

At times like this, the bounty hunter often thought about the wildfires in the dry places. Sometimes, he'd arrive long after the inferno had begun to die. Other times, he'd arrive well into a sea of flame. Either way, he never saw one begin. They reminded him of the fires in New York. The tenements were rough, and the firemen fought each other while the blazes would rage. Sometimes, nothing could be saved.

Talon lit the match. The shot was deafening in the small saloon. One of the six fell with a gunshot to the back of the head. Three reached for their pieces. Three more shots—one head, one chest, one heart. Then the last two tripped over their chairs and scrambled. Talon put two shots into one and drew his other piece with his left hand. The man scrambled and stood and stumbled and scurried. Talon could only smile as he sent three shots into the man's back.

By then, the saloon had cleared out. Talon never even heard the screams of the patrons, and no return fire barked out. No one else was shooting. Talon knew the character of the town: there were no heroes.

The men were rapists, as the story goes, and Talon was under contract to the widower. He dropped by the sad man's home and collected the envelope. Talon smiled when he opened it, and he reminded the man to tell his friends.

Electric

Meaghan McBay

We were never meant to be.
Water, electricity.
Your sad lips collide with mine,
A violent storm,
Love divine.
We made sense,
But not for long;
This love we built
Was not so strong,
For when you'd speak,
Your words left me
Emptier than a gallery
Fifteen past the clock at three.
Surrounded by paintings
Of memories,
You dragged me away,
And now I see.
As you trap me inside
And toss the key,
You wanted me weak,
But I broke free.
And now it's you
That's left empty.

Gaslighting

Trista Aikin Rodgers

I'm sorry.
I didn't mean to upset you.
How can I make you happy?
Tell me what I can do.
I'm sorry.
I shouldn't have reacted that way.
Yes, I can do better.
Tomorrow will be a better day.
I'm sorry.
I shouldn't have accused you.
You wouldn't do that to me.
I deserve this. I do.
I'm sorry.
Yes, I know how much you love me.
No, I'll never leave you.
You make me so, so happy
Even when you treat me how you do.
See, I'm conditioned.
Wake up, girl.
Open your eyes.
I'm sorry
You think this is what love is.
I'm sorry
You're used to being gaslighted.
I'm sorry
Things have been like this for you.
I'm sorry
For all that you've been through.
I'm sorry,
But it's time for you to leave.
I'm sorry,
But you have to spread your wings.
I'm sorry
That you have to heal from this.
I love you,
And it's time for you to live.

Stardust

Meaghan McBay

I was blue;
You were yellow.
Night and day,
Loud,
Mellow.
Passing smiles
On the street.
I needed you;
You wanted me.
Colliding light,
Dawn,
Dusk.
Broken life.
Stardust.

Overcoming Self-Sabotaging Behaviors in College

Jenny Walker

When she entered college at Texas A&M University-Texarkana, S. Walker (2020) had a full-tuition scholarship, and she was on track for success. However, like many college students, she began to engage in self-sabotaging behaviors that impacted both her mental and physical wellness, and these behaviors ended up ultimately causing her to leave the university before completing her degree. Harris (2018) defines self-sabotage as “a collection of cognitions and emotions (unconscious or subconscious) that result in self-defeating patterns and negatively impact behavior” (p. 80). These patterns can include engaging in unsafe sex, skipping class, arguing with professors, using drugs and alcohol, failing to complete assignments, and procrastinating, among other self-handicapping behaviors. Walker says her self-sabotaging habits began her sophomore year:

I was around eighteen, and I had just gotten back together with my boyfriend. Everyone told me it was a bad idea to get back with him, but I didn't listen. At first, I made sure to be safe. That is, until I just didn't. Shortly after I turned nineteen, I found out I was pregnant. I had already been missing classes to hang out with said boyfriend, but then I found myself skipping classes more. (Walker, 2020, para. 1)

Walker said her professors tried to help when she told them that morning sickness was preventing her from doing her best. She said that she failed to turn in four papers, but her professor offered to allow her to have the summer semester to finish. Even with the extra time, Walker did not do the work:

My favorite professor gave me an extension to turn in papers that I'd been having trouble with. He gave me a branch and reached out to offer help, and I didn't take it. I ruined his view of me and many others' views of me. Most of my teachers and professors used to tell me that I was one of their brightest students, and now I'm just another student that passed through. (Walker, 2020, para. 6)

She ultimately ended up losing her scholarship, and she soon stopped attending classes altogether. Stories like Walker's can be told across college campuses everywhere. According to Török, Szabó, and Tóth (2018), academic institutions create perfect environments for people to engage in self-handicapping behaviors since they must “continuously face situations requiring them to demonstrate and prove performance and abilities in front of others” (p. 1180). Research by both Harris (2018) and Török et al. (2018) points to self-sabotaging actions as a defense mechanism that allows students to avoid facing the sting of failure. In other words, it is easier to blame poor performance on these

activities than for a student to face the reality that they may not have the skills to make it in college.

Robinson (2020) is a licensed professional counselor on staff at TAMU-T, and he said he sees students engage in these behaviors because of “fear of doing better, can’t see themselves achieving, feeling inadequate, self-esteem issues, or coursework is more challenging than something they ever experienced” (para. 1). He says that many students do not realize they are self-sabotaging until much later. This was the case for Walker (2020), who did not have a wake-up call until months had passed after she left the university and she found herself working two jobs to support herself during her pregnancy:

I was in denial for so long about how I’d let myself go. I told myself that there must be some reason that all of this happened, and I didn’t do it on purpose. It’s hard to admit that to myself, to say that I’m the reason I’m not where I wanted to be right now. I’m the reason that my plans are falling behind. (Walker, 2020, para. 5)

Although these behaviors often cause students to drop out of college before completing their degrees, there is hope for those who work hard to overcome self-handicapping habits. A great example is Adair (2020), who was able to bounce back from her self-sabotaging behaviors and ultimately graduate from college . . . but not before she took a hard hit after immersing herself in online gaming as a way to connect with others early in her college career:

In those chat rooms, I could create a new character, a new life, make friends, and be something else besides this lonely depressed girl far from home. I began creating intense friendships through people that I only knew online and found myself skipping classes to spend more time in my digital environment. (Adair, 2020, para. 1)

She had a chance to bring up her grades during the second semester, but her GPA sank even lower. At the end of that semester, she was placed on academic suspension and was not allowed to attend a second year. She returned home and had to start over at a local junior college, where she attended classes while working full time. Although the move was difficult, it ultimately ended up leading her to success:

Having to come back and look my grandmother in the eye, knowing that I failed was a huge waking-up point. I am thankful that she met me at my darkest with grace and love I did well with my classes and did great at my job. I had a more rich personal life due to being around more people, and I spent less time online. (Adair, 2020, para. 4)

Adair (2020), who now works as an art teacher, ultimately finished her bachelor’s degree and went on to earn a master’s degree with a 4.0 grade-point average. She says that as she spent time reflecting on her failure in that first year

of college, she began to see patterns in her behavior that she was able to learn to predict. Understanding these patterns helped her prepare for and better control the circumstances that caused her to self-sabotage. Similarly, Robinson (2020) says he advises students to reflect upon patterns in their behavior in an effort “to get them to understand their behavior and figure out why they self-sabotage. After that, we come up with a plan to change thinking patterns which affect behaviors.” Adair (2020) said this awareness and reflection made all of the difference in her being able to find a pathway to success. She said behaviors can even be tracked on a calendar or through apps and that “this will also help identify the triggers in your life that may begin a self-sabotaging cycle. Knowing what those are will help you avoid them” (Adair, 2020, para. 6).

Although many years have passed since her college days, Adair (2020), who is almost forty years old, said she still finds herself sometimes falling back into the trap of self-sabotage. In fact, she says that continuing to self-sabotage is “one of the areas of my life that I want to change the *most*” (para 4). She still struggles with obesity and said that she knows what she needs to do to lose weight, but she simply does not do it. She recognizes that this lack of motivation is a form of self-sabotage. Engaging in self-sabotaging behaviors when a person lacks motivation is something that Walker (2020) encourages students to avoid, even when it may be difficult:

Don’t let yourself take the “easy” way out of something because, most of the time, the path you take isn’t actually easy at all, and if you decide later on to get back on your original path, it’s only that much harder to do so. It also doesn’t only affect you. I lost perspective, and in doing so, I lost the respect of some of my favorite people. (Walker, 2020, para. 6)

In addition to understanding patterns in behavior and finding motivation, Harris (2018) also believes that a strong support system is key to helping students put their self-sabotaging behavior in check. She founded a Masculine Transition and Campus Support organization that provides students on her campus with academic support, mentors, leadership opportunities, and counseling in an effort to help struggling students. These organizations employ mentors who help students recognize when they are heading down paths of self-sabotaging behaviors; these mentors help students hold themselves accountable for their actions.

College students who engage in behaviors of self-sabotage often struggle with lasting effects, but with self-awareness, motivation, and a strong support system, they can get back on track for success. Mental-health counseling programs are valuable resources on university campuses for students who self-sabotage, and those who learn to recognize and manage problem behaviors will have a clearer path toward overcoming and lessening damage to their academic records and their

personal lives. Overcoming self-sabotage in college is difficult, but it is not impossible.

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Love, Waxing

Lori Vakidis

I left town and followed the waning moon,
looking for Andi's apples.

She spoke of laden trees,
branches sagging,
growing once in
someone's front yard.
Now they grew slow, old
and living desolate and in anonymity.

Down a gravel road I found them, that tiny orchard,
those barrel-chested trees
holding court,
waiting for the bears.

Killing the motor and the headlights,
I waited, too.

My eyes drew in
the deep shadows;
trees' broad shoulders framed
by stars, illuminated
by that moon . . .
and in the light
I saw them:
great bears with greedy paws
and child-bears playing
with the fallen fruit.

I saw that boy, then, blonde
and almost thirty now,
but forever the child. He
played with the child-bears,
the father, on the tractor,
watching.

His crops tall and green,
he would find the brightest
of the apples for her.
He'd put it by the porcelain sink
as she washed his coffee cup
and wait for his kiss.

Nightfall, later, and on
the farmhouse porch
they watched that waning moon.

Clay

Laron Deen

The clay on the wheel of the Potter
is a muddy, misshapen lump.
It's been beaten, twisted and kneaded.
It is still the same muddy clump.
The Potter, with hands strong and knowing,
gently shapes it, smoothes it, and molds,
to make it a work of great beauty,
or humble, unfit to behold.

As the Potter is working the clay,
revealing its shape to our eyes,
it becomes a beautiful vessel,
or one we're prone to despise.
As He adds the finishing touches,
refining its form with His hands,
there remains one step to completion,
For the clay is soft, though it stands.

Now the Potter lifts the clay vessel
and places it into the Fire,
for it takes the heat of the furnace
to retain the shape He desires.
So we, as our Potter has formed us,
after all must endure His test.
Don't worry. It will not destroy us.
Instead, it will bring out our best.

Thanksgiving with Richard

Te'yana Pugh

Characters

GRANDMOTHER, 85, a matriarch

JADA, 19, her granddaughter

KASSIDY, 19, her granddaughter

KYLEE, 20, her granddaughter

SHAEDON, 21, her grandson

WILLIAM, 20, her grandson

Setting

The action takes place in GRANDMOTHER's house on Thanksgiving Day. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(Gary Jules's "Mad World" rises and slowly fades. Lights rise on the dining room in GRANDMOTHER's house. The grandchildren are seated at the dining table, which is nearly set for Thanksgiving dinner. GRANDMOTHER enters holding a silver sauceboat, which SHE has always claimed Paul Revere made.)

GRANDMOTHER: Okay, y'all, we just have to wait for Richard! He's on his way. I can feel it

WILLIAM: Here we go. Call the news station. Call out to God. She's bringing out Ye Olden Sauce Boat.

SHAEDON: Oh, hush! It doesn't matter. It's tradition. You know how she gets about it.

(HE shoves his brother.)

GRANDMOTHER: I know, I know. You don't understand what's so important about this day. Even after ten years, he always comes.

WILLIAM: Not to be selfish, Grandma, but how long is this going to last? Me and some of the boys want to go ride into the city. We've got some friends to meet.

SHAEDON: You've always got some friends to meet.

(GRANDMOTHER sets the sauce boat on the table and starts humming.)

See. Now look what you've done. She's over there humming.

WILLIAM: It's not my fault. She knows we have our own lives now. Things aren't the same. We can't all just wait around for Richard.

(GRANDMOTHER keeps humming. SHE starts stirring a bowl of macaroni and cheese with a nearby serving spoon.)

SHAEDON: Just who do you think you are? You think the world revolves around you?

WILLIAM: No! It revolves around the world.

SHAEDON: What does that even mean? Dummy! How about you leave and the rest of us stay here?

WILLIAM: All right. Fine. That's just what I'll do. You stay in Loony Villa. This is a dumb holiday anyways. I don't even like turkey!

(HE rushes out the door and slams it behind him. SHAEDON walks up to GRANDMOTHER and takes the spoon and bowl away from her.)

SHAEDON: Grandma, I got it. Why don't you go and rest?

GRANDMOTHER: Yes. I guess I will rest. We've got a little time. It isn't time yet.

(SHE crosses slowly to her room and goes inside. SHE shuts the door behind her. A few beats later, KYLEE pulls out a bag of smokes and heads for the front porch. SHAEDON calls out.)

SHAEDON: Hey! Save some for me.

(SHAEDON puts down the bowl and spoon and heads after KYLEE. Lights dim on the dining room and rise on the porch. SHAEDON and KYLEE light up.)

SHAEDON: Girl, you got a lot. You made sure he rolled them tightly, too. Don't want none of it falling out or burning weird.

KYLEE: Smoke, smoke. Yes, that's all we like to *dooo*! If you don't smoke, I would hate to be *youuuuuuuuuuuu*!

SHAEDON: I'm already feeling high. We should put this out.

KYLEE: No! We need to smoke all of it. Especially if we have to stay here . . . with that sauce boat.

SHAEDON: I don't know. I feel sorry for her. We never stop by. Staying today is the least we could do.

KYLEE: Well, I don't know about you, but if she doesn't come out of that room soon, I'm gonna make a run to the store. I heard that the bodega has wine on sale. We could get some and visit Central Park.

SHAEDON: Maybe, but I think she'll be fine. We just have to give it some time.

(KYLEE calls inside.)

KYLEE: Grandma, are you ready? We're getting hungry! Is Richard here?

(Her sisters yell at her to shut up from inside the house.)

SHAEDON: She's probably in there crying. Someone should go check on her.

(KYLEE laughs.)

KYLEE: It's not my turn. You do it. I'm gonna go to the bodega. If I'm not back soon enough, make me a plate.

(Joint in hand, SHE heads off through the front yard. SHAEDON finishes his piece and heads back inside. Lights fall on the porch and rise on the dining room.)

JADA: Where did Bean go?

SHAEDON: She went to the store. Have you checked on Grandma?

JADA: No. I'm just gonna wait until she's ready. He should have never said what he said.

SHAEDON: Yeah, I know. He's an asshole.

(JADA and SHAEDON sit on the couch DS. The other grandchildren start prepping plates.)

SHAEDON: Remember when we were kids, and she'd build us a fort, and we'd spend all Saturday watching TV?

JADA: Yeah, I remember . . . and she always made us chocolate milk.

SHAEDON: Do you think there's still some chocolate milk in there?

JADA: We haven't been here in so long, I don't see why she would buy any.

SHAEDON: Do you remember that one time that she sat in the middle of the grocery store crying on the floor because they didn't have the perfect turkey?

JADA: Yeah, I remember. You sat down with her. You always tried to protect her.

SHAEDON: Well, that's because I didn't want us to get taken away. I told the police officers that it was me—that she threw a fit because I wouldn't get up off the ground and that she was only being a mother.

JADA: A grandmother. She was always so old.

SHAEDON: Yes. A grandmother.

JADA: It's taking Bean a long time. Should I go find her?

SHAEDON: Yes, but hurry back, okay?

JADA: Okay. Want anything?

SHAEDON: No. I'm good. I'm just gonna wait.

(JADA gets up and heads for the front door. Lights dim on the dining room and rise on GRANDMOTHER's room. SHE is rocking in a chair and humming. SHE is still holding the silver sauce boat. Suddenly, SHE stops humming and whispers.)

GRANDMOTHER: What's that, dear? You think they're all unappreciative goons? Well, honey, they're only acting like they always do.

(SHE laughs.)

Oh, when I am going to go out? In just a few minutes. I just wanted to spend some time with you.

(SHE resumes her rocking and humming. Lights fall on her and rise on SHAEDON and KASSIDY in the kitchen.)

KASSIDY: Well, I have the table set. The only thing we're waiting on is Richard. Do you think I should see if he's here?

SHAEDON: No. She always tells us when he is. Besides, I don't think I can bear to see her cry. Remember last year when he didn't show up and we had to call the ambulance? I think we should just wait . . . but it's already 4:30. I have to clock in to work by six. The hospital waits for no one.

KASSIDY: I know. I know. You're always so punctual

SHAEDON: Well, I have to be. It's my means of survival. What about you? Do you still work at the airport? Getting those free frequent-flyer miles?

(KASSIDY laughs.)

KASSIDY: No. I quit last year. You would think that flight attendants get respected, but they don't. We get treated like crap. I work as a travel agent now for a bunch of rich folks.

SHAEDON: I wish I were rich

KASSIDY: No, you don't. Mo' money, mo' problems. The folks are assholes.

SHAEDON: Well, I'm an asshole now . . . just broke.

(THEY burst out laughing.)

KASSIDY: I feel like we're missing something.

SHAEDON: Richard?

KASSIDY: No. Something else. Let's see. We've got turkey, green beans, ham, cranberries Oh, yes. That's it. Dessert! What are we gonna have for dessert?!

SHAEDON: Well, do you think we need dessert? We've already been here for four hours. I told you I can't stay long. We really should call the others. I need to be gone and ready for work soon.

KASSIDY: I know, but I think we should get something. I mean, this is the only time we visit her. I'm thinking Key lime pie. Something like that. What do you think? Do you think she likes Key lime pie?

(SHAEDON laughs.)

SHAEDON: You know her better than me . . . or any of us. You always paid attention, and we just tried to pretend.

KASSIDY: Well, we can't pretend, anymore, can we? When we were younger, we didn't know any better, and now that we do, it's just hard . . . hard to have a Richard. I hope I never have a Richard.

SHAEDON: What do you mean?

KASSIDY: Well, to have a man, any person really, who just shows up when he wants, never making an announcement

SHAEDON: Well, we both know that he doesn't ever really show up.

KASSIDY: I don't know. He does, and we just don't see it.

SHAEDON: Yes. So about that Key lime pie Are you going to get it?

KASSIDY: Yes. Sure. This time . . . but next year, it's your turn! If you come.

SHAEDON: Do you need any cash? I have a twenty.

KASSIDY: No. I have it. Just try and get her out of the room, will you?

SHAEDON: I'll try. Just hurry back.

(KASSIDY leaves. Lights dim on the kitchen as SHAEDON crosses into the dining room. HE puts his ear to GRANDMOTHER's door and knocks politely.)

Grandma, are you ready? Is Richard here yet? Please come out. Everything is almost ready. I'm sure he'll show up eventually.

(GRANDMOTHER can be heard through the door singing "Can't Help Falling in Love" in the style of Elvis Presley.)

I can hear you singing, so can you please let me in? I know you hear me. I have to be at work soon, we need to hurry and eat. The others should be back shortly.

(Rummaging noises come from the room, and the door creaks open just a few inches. GRANDMOTHER peeks out.)

GRANDMOTHER: Who's all out there? What are y'all doing?

Shaedon: We're waiting on you and Richard, so please come out. The others went to get more things for dinner.

GRANDMOTHER: So it's just you?

SHAEDON: Yes. It's just me. Is it just you?

GRANDMOTHER: No. Richard is here, too.

SHAEDON: Hello, Richard. How are you? Are you ready to eat?

GRANDMOTHER: Richard says that he'll eat when he gets ready and that y'all should be thankful for a gal like me.

SHAEDON: We are thankful, Grandma. That's why we're all here.

GRANDMOTHER: No. It's just you. You're here. The others have left like they usually do.

SHAEDON: Well, will you come out so we can spend some time together? Please.

GRANDMOTHER: No, dear. I need to be alone. You go ahead and eat. I'm not hungry yet.

(GRANDMOTHER slowly shuts the door. SHAEDON knows that the others are not returning any time soon. HE puts together a plate of food and carries it into the kitchen. HE returns and knocks on GRANDMOTHER's door.)

SHAEDON: Grandma, I've waited long enough. I have to leave now. I know this is hard for you. It's hard for all of us, and, well, I've made you a plate and set it in the microwave. I'll lock the door on the way out. I hope you enjoy dinner. Next year will be different.

(Beat.)

Isn't that what we always say?

(Beat. GRANDMOTHER does not reply.)

Life's the train, and I'm the track . . . always putting up with it.

(SHAEDON throws up his hands and leaves. After a beat, GRANDMOTHER opens her bedroom door. SHE is carrying the silver sauceboat. After making sure that the house is empty, SHE crosses to the table.)

GRANDMOTHER: I feel you, Richard.

(SHE pats the sauceboat.)

I know you're in there, love. I knew you'd come back. Same as every year since you died.

(SHE sets the sauceboat at the far end of the table. SHE fixes a plate and sets it in front of the sauceboat. SHE finds a bottle of wine on the table and pours some wine into a glass set near the plate. SHE pours some wine into a glass at the

opposite end of the table and turns out the seat there. SHE sets down the bottle and retreats into the kitchen. SHE returns with the plate of food that SHAEDON left for her. SHE sits down in her waiting seat. SHE toasts.)

GRANDMOTHER (CONT.): I'm so thankful you decided to show up this year.

(A deep, echoing voice speaks from the area of the sauceboat.)

RICHARD: I'm thankful, too . . . thankful for you.

(GRANDMOTHER drinks. Blackout.)

Rumpelstiltskin's Revenge

Corinne Billings

Present Prince,

 gifted to the maid wooed with murder—
 guillotine kisses
 impaling embraces—
 the bloody marriage bed
 spun with gold thread
 bought with parental bonds—
 an unwanted package
 spearing her bosom—
 freed by the jailer,
 jailed by the reward,
 rewarded with a severed savior
 torn in twain
 who whispers warnings
 to wagging tongues.

Anty's Mother^{*}
Corinne Billings

Three aunts! Three faeries!!!
For a three-times lazy girl.
While my scold and subterfuge
catapulted the comely *colleen* to the crown,
her slumber spun flax, wove a web,
sewed shirts.

My wheel spins still—
incessant industry,
but sloth's reward
is satin sheets,
and dawdling delivers
her a comfortable couch.

The fae fold her into the arms of a posh prince
while the flax stings my hands as I spin
the sparse seconds of my serfdom
round the spindle.

* This poem was inspired by “The Lazy Beauty and Her Three Aunts.”

B. P. S. (Bairn Protective Services)*

Corinne Billings

O spinning faerie queen
green
gentlewoman
conning the twice-conned

Goodman gone
neighbors do naught
while the breadcrumbs scatter
and melt in grumbling bellies.

My Goodman?

—a sow.

My neighbors?

—a fae mistress

willing to wet thumbs
and wrest bairn from breast
a terrible tax
that tears tears
from bleeding eyes

stumbling to the woods

for wolf—

for wight—

—for wheel-whirring witch!

boasting bitch

Whuppity Stoorie—

* This poem was inspired by “Whuppity Stoorie.”

my barrister's brief
pitched from the precantor's pipes

the judge declares
this Trickster mum
acquitted
awarded

My Son
My Sow
My Song

Getting Milk

Te'yana Pugh

It was the middle of April. There was no lightning, nor any thunder, and the rain that fell seemed to do so in silence. It was that calming mist we are all so familiar with that incites our desire to sip warm tea and curl up with our favorite book.

Although she had not been able to go outside to play on account of the timid April shower, Krishna didn't mind and spent most of her day making the perfect birthday card for her father. Her mother had made a point to keep her busy with the task by giving her a large container full of construction paper, markers, and other supplies.

Per usual, Krishna's father, a security guard, had already left for his overnight shift at work. When her mom called for her, she quickly put her glue-stick down and folded the construction paper in half to make the card complete. She stuffed her feet into her pink rain boots and rushed down the stairs with fierceness, almost crashing into her mom, who stood waiting in the doorway. Their final task of the evening would be to head to the local Save-a-Bit to buy milk, as it was the only ingredient they were missing to make the birthday cake. Baking a cake for her father had become their small family's tradition.

Her mother asked her to buckle her seat belt before slowly backing out of the driveway. The rain, for the most part, had subsided, and Krishna had made a game of drawing stick figures in the fog of the window.

Once inside the store's parking lot, where her mother parked the car, Krishna quickly unfastened her seat belt and erased her drawing from the window as her mother reached over to grab her large, oversized purse. Meanwhile, just a few feet away Jack, a thirty-two-year-old mechanic, had cracked the passenger side window of his 1980s Chevy to let the smoke from his cigar escape. He took a sip of his Coors Light, and, with almost perfect timing, noticed Krishna prancing across the parking lot in her pink boots. He chuckled at her repeated attempts to adjust her large pajama pants.

Krishna had caught his attention.

He noticed Krishna's long braid, which rested about an inch from her bottom, and the pink beret that was fastened beside her left ear. He figured she was eight, maybe ten if she was naturally small in stature. In observance of her skin

complexion, he assumed she was probably of mixed race or Latina, which was especially lucrative, as a mixed raced or Latina child was frequently requested by his most wealthy clients.

He reached into his pocket for his phone and saw the time: 7:22 p.m. Jack then went to his contacts and clicked on the name Pat. He sent a single text that read, “*pink boots, pajamas, with mom.*” He watched as a woman, clearly Krishna’s mother, placed her hand on the child’s shoulder as she guided her toward the entrance of the store.

Krishna and her mom went to Aisle 7 and started to comb through the many colors of decorative icing. Krishna was fascinated with the icing that contained edible glitter.

“I think Daddy would like this one,” she said as she held up Gold Glitter icing to her mother’s face.

“And this!” she exclaimed while lifting a birthday sparkler.

Her mom quickly put the two items into the basket and advised Krishna that they needed to go get milk.

“I have to go to the bathroom first,” Krishna said as she squeezed her skinny legs together.

Annoyed at Krishna’s sudden need to relieve herself, her mother looked around and saw that the stalls were only an aisle away. The store was, for the most part, empty, and with her parental judgment she decided that Krishna could go by herself. She lifted her hands into the air and signaled to Krishna before saying, “Hurry up. I’ll be getting the milk.”

Pat was a nighttime stocker for Save-A-Bit, and most of his evenings consisted of organizing products or replacing prices tags. It was an honest living for what it was, and he worked at an admirably steady pace.

His pace was a part of the procedure; he needed to work as if it were his only source of income. He had painted the picture of the perfect employee. His coworkers always referred to him as dedicated.

That he was. Dedicated to Jack and the business they had built.

When he had received Jack’s text, he knew he had to shift his focus. He searched for a little girl with pink boots and pajamas. Finally, he saw them. From afar, he anticipated a moment, any moment that would enable him to get the child away from her mother. Just as he was thinking of an excuse to bump into them, he saw Krishna energetically skip to the lady’s restroom. He texted back to Jack, “*RESTROOM.*”

Jack took one last sip of his Coors Light, shut off the Chevy's ignition, and headed inside the store.

Pat walked toward the refrigerated section of the market and pretended to scan items like yogurt and cheese, which would ultimately lead to the little girl's mother. When he finally made it next to her, she greeted him a smile. In silence, he watched the curve of her back as she reached inside the cooler to pull out the milk from the very back. It was a habit of hers to reach for the product in the back. She always thought the items in the front were less fresh. Pat continued to stare at her and, by instinct, licked his lips as the woman's shirt yielded to her movements and revealed caramel cleavage, her waist, and the braided belt that hugged it. He thought she had a nice body and wondered if she worked out.

When Krishna's mother closed the cooler door, she noticed Pat standing next to her. His stillness was startling.

"Excuse me," she said, thinking she was interrupting his pricing.

"No, ma'am, excuse me. Customers first," he replied while adjusting his name tag.

Krishna's mother let out a small giggle and adjusted her bun.

Pat had to think fast.

"You know, it's not true what they say about us putting the good stuff in the back."

Krishna's mother, embarrassed, replied, "Really? Well thanks for telling me that. Next time I won't make such an effort."

Pat put his scanner down and reached out to take the milk from her. "Here," he said, as he attempted to take the carton of milk and accidentally grazed her fingers.

Their hands fumbled over the carton before she gave in to Pat's extraordinary customer service. There was something mysterious and unrelenting about the gentleman who stood before her.

During that moment of awkwardness, she thought of Krishna in the restroom, and her heart skipped a beat.

Though she was grateful for his attempt to show kindness, the simple act had left her feeling uneasy.

She forced a "thank you" to him, quickly pushed her shopping cart forward, and rubbed her neck to relieve the sudden onset of chills.

Once she made it to the rest area, she opened the bathroom door and called Krishna's name.

Krishna did not answer.

She called her name again, a bit louder.

Her mother then pushed the buggy inside of the bathroom.

Though she saw no feet, she assumed Krishna might be playing a trick on her, so she opened the first stall and said excitedly, “Got ya!”

She did this with all seven of the stalls before she confronted the stark truth: Krishna was not in the bathroom.

She quickly went back to Aisle 7, expecting to find her there, as Krishna was most excited about cake decorations for her father’s cake.

Aisle 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 . . . she could not find her daughter.

Panic had officially set in. She had never lost Krishna before. Krishna always did as she was told and hurried back when her mom let her go off alone.

She left her buggy and ran to the customer service desk, where the cashier’s face quickly mimicked her own: a face of desperation.

“Krishna. I need you to call Krishna over the loudspeaker. My daughter went to the restroom, and now I can’t find her.”

The cashier quickly pressed the page button and announced, “Krishna, please come to the front of the store. Your mother is waiting for you.”

The intercom was alarming, but nothing was more alarming than the absence of Krishna’s presence.

“Hi. I like your pants,” Jack said to the little girl.

“Hi,” she said. “I like your bear. Where did you get him?”

“Well, if you like this one, I can give it to you. I have another one in my car just like this one, except he has a red bowtie.”

“Really?” Krishna grew excited and started to think of a name for the bear.

“Do you think you could go get it and bring it to me? I have to go find my mom.”

Jack started squeezing the bear, and he knew he was running out of time.

“How about we surprise her? We can get a bear for her, too.”

Krishna thought about it for a second and looked at Jack. She saw kindness in his eyes and grabbed his hand.

Relieved, Jack said to her, “Tell me about yourself.”

Krishna obliged as she walked through the sliding doors with Jack.

“I like candy and to play with my stuffed animals. I even have names for all of them, and they sleep with me every night. Tonight, we’re baking a cake for my dad, and I get to decorate it. He’ll be forty-six. He already has gray hair, and he tells me I’m the reason that he has them. My mom should be coming to look for me soon, and when she does, she can show you what I picked out.”

Jack held her hand a little tighter.

Author's Note: Both men and women may be victims of trafficking, but the primary victims worldwide are women and girls, the majority of whom are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation (www.stopvaw.org).

Ballerina
Meaghan McBay





***Flowers for Eyes:
A Poetry Chapbook Reflecting
on Mental Health and
Happiness***

by

Grey Powell

Strike

Heavy doors give way to stagnant air
Decades of untouched memory.
The telltale sound of collision touches your ears
as strangers walk in each other's shoes.
You are dwindled down to a bare liminal existence
where only patterned floors and grease triangles exist.
Invisible strings tied to your fingertips
fulfill the duty of discarding the weight.
Time passes between what is and isn't conscious
until you are no longer sure which way the sun rises.
To be trapped within the outdated world forever
seems probable and not concerning.
This is now your existence.
That is, until you step away.
Give back the stranger's footwear.
Hand in your crystal ball.
Push open the barrier to the real world and step out.
The sun feels nice on your skin.
You forgot.
You were too busy thinking about bowling.

Refusing to Jump

The thing about the constant ache in my chest is
that it is the same feeling you get when you look
out across the trees.

Serene, peaceful maybe, even calming.

But something is out of place.

Something doesn't belong.

That thing is you.

Sunny Side Up

A chill set upon the empty road
the tires circled, just as your thoughts did.
Casting quick glances, my mouth opened and
closed with silent questions.
Your head was in an unknown space.
One where I was not able to be.

I took the next left and pulled into the empty field.
It was near your home.
I looked to you as we stopped and became as still as the crepuscular night.
The light from your phone illuminated each salty drop as they rolled down
your face.
A hand fell onto your thigh, pulling your eyes to mine.

“Everything is going wrong.”

I place a kiss to your lips, and you hold my thrifted shirt tightly,
your tears wetting both of our faces.

“I love you.”
The first time
the words
have been shared between our breath.

We move to the hood of the car.
We lay back and hold each other like the world is soon to end.

The stars shine in that empty field.
But they are no where near as large and brilliant
as our tear-stained proclamation.

“Maybe with you, everything will be okay.”

Boiling Point

our bodies swayed like trees
warm summer air passing through their leaves.
night in the middle of August,
the air is cool enough to be close,
our palms still clammy.
there was no music
just the cicadas
our friends inside celebrating
all things that we couldn't;
love, togetherness, simplicity.

for a night we could pretend that it was all okay.
but we knew that when the moon fell,
the tranquility would shatter
as easily as the stars fell from the sky by morning.
we didn't need years to fall in love.
it only took moments like this one.
being with you was simple.
I could just close my eyes and fall,
too in love to worry what the future might hold.
our moment was then.
the now could wait.

I wish time would have stopped all together in that instant.
the memory is just not the same.

Ann Arbor, Michigan

Green eyes harbor old love and secrets.
Memories of times that were easier
and didn't leave your chest aching so.
Soft, long fingers stroked your hair,
pulling the bad thoughts out of you—
as a child tugged blades of grass
from their place on the earth.

You didn't know any better.
You didn't know that you were inevitably
causing the reeds to take their last full
breath of purpose.
Just as you didn't know that the person whom
you found your purpose in would
wrench your heart right out of your chest
and walk out the door,
with your love left in their wake behind them
on the floor like a trail of your blood.

Why do you settle for this?
What good is half-love on you?
On your heart?
Step back.

Love yourself so you don't have to rely
on the love of a person who never put you first.

Full Rooms Are Often the Emptiest

Seeing you never fails to make my heart leap,
no matter the time sprawled
between the last meeting of our eyes.
You smile a toothy grin as you pull me into an
embrace that leaves no space to miss you.

It's the kind that you melt into.
The kind that makes every trace
sadness or doubt
erased from your body,
even for a few seconds.

The kind that holds the emotions
that you both feel but don't act on.
You don't act on them because when you did,
it was a whirlwind of passion and becoming
everything to one another.

And while that might seem like a fairytale,
the truth is that this is reality.
And life gets in the way. Tragedy happens.
And you're stuck looking across the room with
yearning eyes and fast beating hearts.

Paper Dreams

Soft rain on a chilly morning where you get to sleep in.
Warm tea during a grey stormy day.
The first leaves changing during fall.

You remind me of everything I love about life.
You make my heart gentle and soft.

Perhaps if it were both cold and wet,
I could welcome my sadness in like an old friend,
waiting at the door.

I am a body that is overflowing.
Not with the holy spirit
or calmness as the bars of a familiar song plays,
giving old stab wounds an ache.

But rather that I know the most frightening fact;
I am all alone.

Casual Heaviness

“Instead of saying you suck,
think about why you say that.
Find a purpose.
Find who you’re supposed to be.”
You mutter this as we roll down
the cold road,
both staring out of our respective windows.
You hold my hand,
but it feels half-hearted even as you squeeze.
“I have you.”
I say this as a joke for you.
I don’t haven’t you.
I simply try to relieve the tension in the air.
You buy it.
Of course, you do.
Oblivious boy.
You plant a soft kiss on my lips.
I hate that my heart jumps.
It’s casual for you.
You use me.
I am your shoulder to lie on.

Traveler's Guide to Anxiety

I speak with care most of the time.
Words flowing out
like the kinked green hose I watered my
garden gnomes and daisies with.
Once in a leaden day though,
my box of sounds seizes,
my appendages are leaves in the wind,
clinging to the wooden bones before my trunk.
There is no siren or alarm to notify.
Dead silence consumes.
If a tree falls in a forest when no one is around,
does it make a sound?
I can't know for sure—
It would be falling on deaf ears and silent lips.

Captain's Quarter

The sea rocks
The waves crash
My body hits walls of crystal
Sleep evades
I might drown if I stop seeing
The sea rocks
The waves crash
Unknown waters lie below
High ho, high ho.

Atlas

Gray skies pour into my window
in the form of tiny water droplets.
The color of the sky fills me
desolate emptiness
my chest aching
my lungs wailing;
an inhuman sound matching
my brain's meteoric thinking.
My jaw has a faraway tenderness
that is much too physical to notice.
I am in my head.
I watch my hands
clench and unclench
on my stomach,
a nonstop pattern of anxiety.
Even as I lie in my bed,
I feel the need for the rain to touch my skin.
Maybe I'll feel something then.
The quiet numbness holds me
like a forgotten lover—
too cold, too distant.

Asylum

Ghosts walk down the empty,
abandoned halls of your body,
representing the things that once did more.

As the ceilings of your mind crumble,
the ghosts sing their haunting melody,
as if to invite you in for some camaraderie.

One by one the visitants slip into the spaces surrounding you
Until you begin to choke on their cloudy forms,
The zeitgeist of their essence leaving behind a shell.

End of the Line

Blank crystal pools stare
like a storm over the ocean.
Everything is lost on you.
The years have depleted your chance.

Heart in a cold, metal vice
Lost to what comes next.
In all scenarios, this is the worst outcome.
Your mind is gone, your hope its passenger.
That blank stare is full of secret fear.

If you cannot find yourself,
then how can you know for sure
whether or not you're the bad guy?

Waltz in a Forest

The rise and fall
Smooth and parallel
Dirt clings to souls.

A long step
A gradual rise
Beneath towering pines.

Forward, left
Forward, right
Joy comes with the melody.

The dance begins
Choose your partner
Try to Waltz.

Mother Mary

Life and I often don't jive.
My compass is off 180 degrees.

Like a fish out of water.
Like a boy who fell in love with the sun.

The home within me is vacant.
But it is loved.

The sink is filled with dishes.
The books have creased pages.
There is paint on the carpet.

Life doesn't always have to mix,
it simply must *be*.

Dirge

My prayers are a kaleidoscope
messy, colorful, meaningless.
I spin in the shapes.
The sun aluminates my mistakes.
Do I look out at the garden?
Or into the hospital window?
My candle burns at both ends
Melting, melting, melting.

Flowers for Eyes

The Devil dances loud and bright
blurring the lines of terror and glee.
A hot vice of a grip, like you're
burning until you're cold.

'Round and 'round
Faster and faster
Try to keep your pistil focused.

A smile so sharp and warm
like liquor and sunshine
filled with glass and blood.

Hell has levels
And they are all inside your head.

Pen

Casey Purifoy

I wanted Hope: that unrepentant faith
(A last summer night against fall sunrise)
All those dreams slip farther into the day
I open my eyes and then climb inside

Not all with wings know how, or when, to fly
I couldn't be more unaware today
I hold my hand, not knowing write from right
I see it all clearer beyond the cage

I don't see difference between pen and page,
Box and stage, moon and night, left and right
There's inside that's outside: ink wearing rage
A puddle that's mirroring old moon light

I search and know: shadows will show what's bright,
Realizing love even inside the hate
I know the ground waits beneath sunny sky
I hear the wind singing inside the cage

Mail Call

Cleo Martin Horton

Darkness and loneliness fill my cell
with pain and fear too great to yell.
I wait for the mailman to deliver to me
as I wipe away tears that no one will see.
I pray—so sincere—with my head raised above:
“Please, God, soon send a letter of love.”
I longingly gaze upon pages so dear
with riches to bring my loved ones near.
Words of diamonds on pages of gold.
A message from heaven as their story is told.
“We love you, miss you, and pray you’ll be free.”
A treasure-filled envelope just for me.
Please bring memories of joy I once knew.
Family, friends, and things I would do.
The darkness and pain of my cell will prevail
as my name once again was not called for mail.
The call for the mail is a beautiful tune.
I love you and miss you. Please write to me soon.

The Long Night

Casey Purifoy

It's going to be a long night.
I know that even in the morning,
And when I sleep in until afternoon.

I know the thoughts aren't right,
And I see in them a warning:
They will not finish anytime soon.

Not to feel new nightmares tonight
And not to waste myself scorning
And not to be locked in my tiny room . . .

I fear I'm willing to pay the price
To quell this endless, black storming,
To erase the thoughts, the constant doom.

If only I could just be "all right."
If only I could end the lies my mind keeps roaring.
Oh, but I think it would be too soon then.

My mind is high away and stuck like a kite,
But how long will I wait to cut the frayed string,
And could I even tie it to a balloon?

I don't want it to be a fight.
I don't want to step back into the old ring.
I don't want to dance in this tiny, dark, locked room.

I just want to say, "It's going to be all right.
Don't get scared of all the warnings,
And don't worry. It'll all be over soon."

But instead, I know it's going to be another long night,
A long night of constant mourning,
Of trying to sleep in a cold, dark mind with little room.

The Narrative

Keeyon James

Blame me for the things that are wrong with society; I get it,
because I have raped, murdered, robbed, stolen, lied and cheated.
Let most of my friends, family, teachers and community as a whole down,
lost my respect, admiration, and morality foolishly acting like a clown.
Although my rearing at home was religious, spiritual and full of love and care,
all I fully embraced was a lack of economics. Why are these closets and cupboards bare?
Couldn't understand why I had to be so cautious walking to school alone;
colors were another serious caution for me. I couldn't afford to get that wrong.
Karma must have had her grip on me at my miraculous conception,
knowing I would embrace the street mentality to survive my street perception.

Looking back, I sincerely wish I could've done things much differently;
life changes a lot when you educate and intellectualize ignorant.
Inspience, Impecunious, Vagabond, and Imbecile were my shameful depiction;
ironically, I was an athlete, honor student . . . spiritual and very respected; non-fiction.
Very few get to right their wrongs. Most don't believe it can be done,
but veneration can be won; the perfect example is the prodigal son!
Ever since my awakening, I am impelled to be revolutionary,
enamored with being the answer not a liability, understanding and welcoming any scrutiny.
Susceptible no more to misguided perspectives or falsehoods,
seeking truth, love, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding all of life's goods.

Men mentoring men of integrity is such a passion for me,
maximizing my talents, thoughts, and character to inspire people to be the best they can be.
Anxiously looking forward to being on the best platform to be heard,
acknowledging the sentiment of some . . . that is a privilege I may not deserve.
To those of you who can forgive, thank you. I couldn't and wouldn't ask you to forget
my deepest regrets; time is an ultimate healer and reformer. On its success I place my wisest bets.
There is validity to my shared mentality's being blamed for the social, economical, political
failures of the past,
but the question going forward? Who's responsible for its continuance now that I'm on a
destructive no-more-forever fast?
Endogenously, my revolutionary inspiration and motivation has superbly abounded
egalitarian, so my narrative is not hidden; if you look closely, you've found it.
Regaining respect, admiration and morality is not personal but a movement for a nation;
respect to those who cohesively stand to bring injustice to cessation.



*Sunflower:
A Poetry Chapbook*

by

Te'yana Pugh

I Am

I am sunflower, in search of the sun, a worm on a hook, the moss on a tree, the
gum stuck on the bottom of your precious red bottom shoe

A depressed, yet happy, light in the dark

A buried alive, suffocated, sad, liberated, work of art

A sexual being

A student

A single, creative, biracial mom, watering two biracial seeds

I am barely hanging on, like a 2nd-grader's loose tooth

She Said

She said, tell me, to which I replied
Do you really want to know what it is like?
Or does it just make you feel good to say that you do?

Insecurity

It punctures my skin
like a sharp pre-historic blade
It is ancient
It presses the back of my neck like the abuser I ran away from
Waters my eyes like fresh onions, which I hate
It is bitter like the taste of the merlot that I won't stop drinking
I think of it . . .
at the bottom of every glass I greedily consume
I feel it when I read out loud
In the eyes of my mother
It swims within my collapsed veins
and
stares back at me in the mirrors of the Dillard's dressing room

In My Dream

They're screamin', I am asking them what they want
they just keep screamin'
I tell them to use their words
but suddenly they don't know any
I turn the radio up, hoping to drown out the sound
Tash Sultana sings, Can you feeeeeeeeeeeel?
Yes, Bitch, I can feel, that is EXACTLY the problem
Their screams are louder . . .
I speed up, foot hard on the gas
I look up to the sky
I tell God, This is it, Mother Fucker, are you ready?
I take a hard left
we all go soaring through the air, radio still blasting
They are silent now,
and so am I

Dancin' Feet

I used to dance around in my underwear
listening to my favorite tunes
barefoot and laughin'
but now I wouldn't dare
I just shuffle, slow and directionless
from here to there
like the little old lady pushin' a cart down Stateline
depressed and lagging
Everyone feels sorry for her
but no one feels sorry for me
so here they are: lifeless as can be,
my dancin' feet

Men

I didn't want men, they wanted me
I only settled, trying to be
what Christ, my grandmother, and my mom expected of me
Now, it seems I will spend my whole life single, instead of living in vain
one thing his fist taught me is this:
If you try to deny who you are, you will live a life of pain

As Many It's (An Ode to Alanis Morissette): Mental Illness

It's wanting to be alone
but then complaining about how lonely you are
It's initiating sex
but then crying afterwards and feeling violated
It's calmly expressing yourself
when all you want to do is scream
It's the bug that splatters on your freshly cleaned car
It's running a hot bath and only staying in it for five minutes
It's the guilt of wasting water, there are children dying of thirst
It's crying because your favorite plant died, I can't keep anything alive
It's overwatering your favorite plant because you are afraid it will die,
it died anyway
It's the white professor, who calls on any other person, a white one, who is not you
fucking white man, and your white assumptions, and your white confessions
It's choking when he finally does call your name
It's overeating or not eating at all
It's being upset that the day is cloudy
but staying indoors when it isn't
It's driving down a country road
reminiscing on the past, but hoping for a future
It's loving the sun but secretly worshiping the moon
It's drinking alcohol even though you hate the taste
It's springing forth with the energy of the Gods
but then sitting on a couch and doing nothing at all
It's your physical body begging for life yet wasting away
It's as many it's that you can and cannot take away

Sonogram

The nurse said
with a fucking stupid smile
Look at that, God gave you a diamond ring
I know I shouldn't have a favorite, but I do
you and I were once one and then separated into two
you felt the kicks, the slaps, the abuse
you reacted with contractions and blood
you felt the fear
the rapid beating within my chest
but you came out smiling
and you are still smiling now
and when you smile with that smile
I am reminded that we made it through
I tried to get rid of you
that good old plan B
but you stayed, stuck to my placenta
determined you are
determined to be with me

Mother

Angry, and irritated
My mother
beautiful and petite
hair as thick as wool,
soft as silk
the product of being Biracial
My mother
eyes, bright like the sun
they burn a whole through me, through my existence
words as sharp as Maleficent's needle
as deadly as her own perfectly failed opioid overdose
My mother
passed to me, all of her glory,
all of her darkness
and all of her gloom
My mother, the mother who never understood
what being a mother means

Beautiful

They look at my face, at my body
and when they tell me I am beautiful, I shrink away from their lies
I know the truth and always have
which is that real beauty only exists on the inside

I Just Can't!

you know how we walk?
yes, one foot in front of the other
Step forward, my Grandmother says, Step with intention, Step with desire!
well, when I make an attempt, it's just a fumble
Life is the Kicker, and I've got butter fingers
I drop the ball
you are all my cheerleaders
and while it's not like you are asking me to make a touchdown,
I still feel as if I am sitting on the bench!
That is why I prefer to stay in bed
AC on 60
Blinds shut
Curtains drawn
Blasting 4 Non Blondes
I just can't
not today
and probably not tomorrow
In fact, it's amazing that I even took a shower
it's been seven days since I have brushed my hair
ten since I've washed the dishes
Five since I have prayed
I've watched one hundred and thirty-nine videos about self-love
a total of two hundred hours
and it hasn't made a difference,
so don't invite me out!
no, you may not ask to come over!
Last week when I TOLD YOU I was busy I was actually just staring at the wall
tears were stinging my hot face
I found myself fascinated with how they had seemed to effortlessly fall;
falling into place
so when I say I can't, I just can't!
and when I say I can't, what I really mean is
that I can't do anything at all.

To My Children

I don't deserve your smiles
I don't deserve the way you kiss my face
I don't deserve your laughs
your curiosity
your facial expressions
the way you come to me in pain
begging me to kiss your hurt fingers
I don't deserve your intelligence
your love for the moon
and the way that you sing
that one flower you picked for me
yes, I still have it
or the way you reached for me when I arrived
I don't deserve your concern
I don't deserve . . .
no, I do not deserve you . . .

Something Beautiful

I won't tell you the stories; I won't tell you how bad it hurt.

I won't tell you about the pool of tears, the waking up at 2 a.m.

in a smothering fear

The sweat: the reason why I often wash our sheets.

A perfectly painted piece of artwork painted throughout the years.

Today you look up at me in search of something beautiful.

You only find the Wicked Witch of the East.

I tell you to eat your vegetables, that it is time to go to sleep and that it is time
for you to brush your teeth.

And when I tell you you can do it yourself, I am not being cruel, I am just
preparing you for the time that my body will decay in the earth's cold, nurturing
ground, a time when you will have to think for yourself 'cause I won't be around.

Remember when you climbed into the pantry? I wished I could climb into it, too.

And when you scribbled on the walls, I wanted to join you.

And when you spin in a circle, arms far-reaching and wide, you collapse beneath
the hot sun; I watch you, in search of something beautiful.

See, when I watch you, I am reminded of a little girl who watched cartoons all
Saturday morning, and climbed trees, a little girl who collected frogs and got lost
in the woods, a little girl who read all day and skipped dinner.

She made wishes on dandelions and cast spells, a little girl who thought she was
an explorer and told all the little neighbor boys what to do.

Follow me, look, see there? It is a fossil.

She was something beautiful.

Today (In Terms of Depression)

Today, I opened all of my windows

I lit incense

Burned sage

Today I re-potted my plants

Swallowed my vitamins and

Read a book

Today I sung

Today I danced

I took a long drive

I wrote in my journal

I smiled,

But I know Today is just a day

And Today has no real affect on what might transpire

Tomorrow.

Depressed, Nappy-Headed, and Useless

Before I sprang out of bed, I thought I was gonna be useful
Do some homework, twist my hair,
Dig my feet into the earth's soil, plant some seeds,
Ignore how many times I've failed,
Wash some clothes,
Cook a nice dinner,
Paint my toe nails,
But here I am like I've got some sort of addiction
Nose deep in some other writer's work of fiction
Depressed, nappy-headed, and useless

Not My Type (The Dating Scene)

Oh, she's pretty all right
dressed just right
too much make-up, too skinny, not my type
oh, look at this one in a button-up
tucked in, hands-in pocket
hair all greased up, I bet she's got a cock waiting in her glove department
Not my type
oh, how about her
I like my women natural
she looks mean and wears heels
her blouse is unbuttoned, much revealed
I like modesty, honestly
Not my type
but then there is her; she wears a lot of make-up
I wish she wouldn't
she's got the type of hair I like, greying and flowing like waves
she dresses nice, too, combat boots, a yellow blouse
she speaks well
and she's got the right amount of meat
her eyes dart around the room in search of something that ain't me
but she has the prettiest teeth, the prettiest mouth, the prettiest grin
and pretty petite feet
and when she walks by I feel like a cat in heat
she is my type
but I am a single mom, and it seems that my type
don't "type" me

God

Do you know who God is? the saint asked me, as we stood in the Catholic church
I just looked at her, and thought
Yeah,
I know Him; he watched as the predator attempted to molest me
it was my furious rage that kept it from happenin', not HIM
God, Him, the one who watched me get abused
watched as that devil of a man put a knife to my throat, kicked me while I was
carryin' that unwanted seed
I'll kill you, he had screamed
God watched, he did, from the heavens as I jumped out of a moving truck
my two children asleep in the backseat
my kidnapper, of course, is still thriving and well
no point in askin' him to go to hell
God, the one who saved my fragile life, I was premature, 2 pounds
God, the one that I prayed to
keep my Grandma alive until she is one hundred and two
and sure enough she's rackin' up years
I know Him all right; he tells me what to write about in my dreams
he wakes me up each day and blesses my children
God, what a fickle man
Yeah, I know God, I told the saint,
but does God know me?

Cigarettes

I think I have cancer

Breast

Brain

Lung

I feel guilt when I look at my children

I feel guilty when I hug my Grandmother

My sister tells me I should stop

My mom just looks proud

I only do it sometimes, I say, and that is the truth

When I am writing

When I am stressed

When I am drinking

And after sex with my ex, girlfriend that is

I smoke cigarettes, I think,

And cigarettes are smoking me.

When I Write

When I write, I write for you,
the one I saw crying, and scantily dressed in a New York subway
When I write, I write for you,
the painter that once painted me on Canal Street
When I write, I write for you,
the girl who taught me everything about my sexuality
When I write, I write for you
my children, who will pass on my legacy
When I write, I write for you
the woman I desire, the one with the wide grin and feminine power
When I write, I write for you,
distant places, mountains, and un-walked trails,
Mother Earth
and when I write, I write for you,
the little girl, who was just a little girl
when the men came and taught her to do adult things
When I write, I write for you,
the single mom who feels the weight of the world
and when I write, I write just to write
because when I write, I find the most authentic version of me

Spring

One early morning, he looked out of the window, his eyes large and bright like the moon. He was a scrawny six with head full of hair that stuck out like the branches of a wide oak tree. He watched as the sky showered the town. The town, notably small, both in size and open-mindedness, seemed to shrink even more on rainy days. He placed his hand on the glass of the window and quickly pulled it back. Cold. Lately, always cold.

“Mother, where is the sun?” he asked, and then, “Today should have been a good day.”

“Today is a good day,” his mother replied while rubbing her eyes. They had just woken up, but the boy, a ball of energy, moved faster than the engine of a freight train. Quick and furious, he had already put on his shoes.

They had no place to go, no plans.

“No, not when it rains. Why must it always rain?” he continued.

His mother, admittedly tired of the dreariness that accompanies the winter months inhaled, for she, too, thought the same. The rain made her lifeless and lazy, but as a mother, one must always think before one speaks and think before doing.

“Mother,” the boy, now eager to hear her reply, pulled at her oversized t-shirt.

“I guess it has to rain and rain often,” she blurted out, “so that we can appreciate the spring, and this applies to all aspects of life.”

Surprised at the thoughtfulness of her words, she began to reflect on them.

She thought, *My tears, falling down like rain . . . are they preparing me for MY spring?*

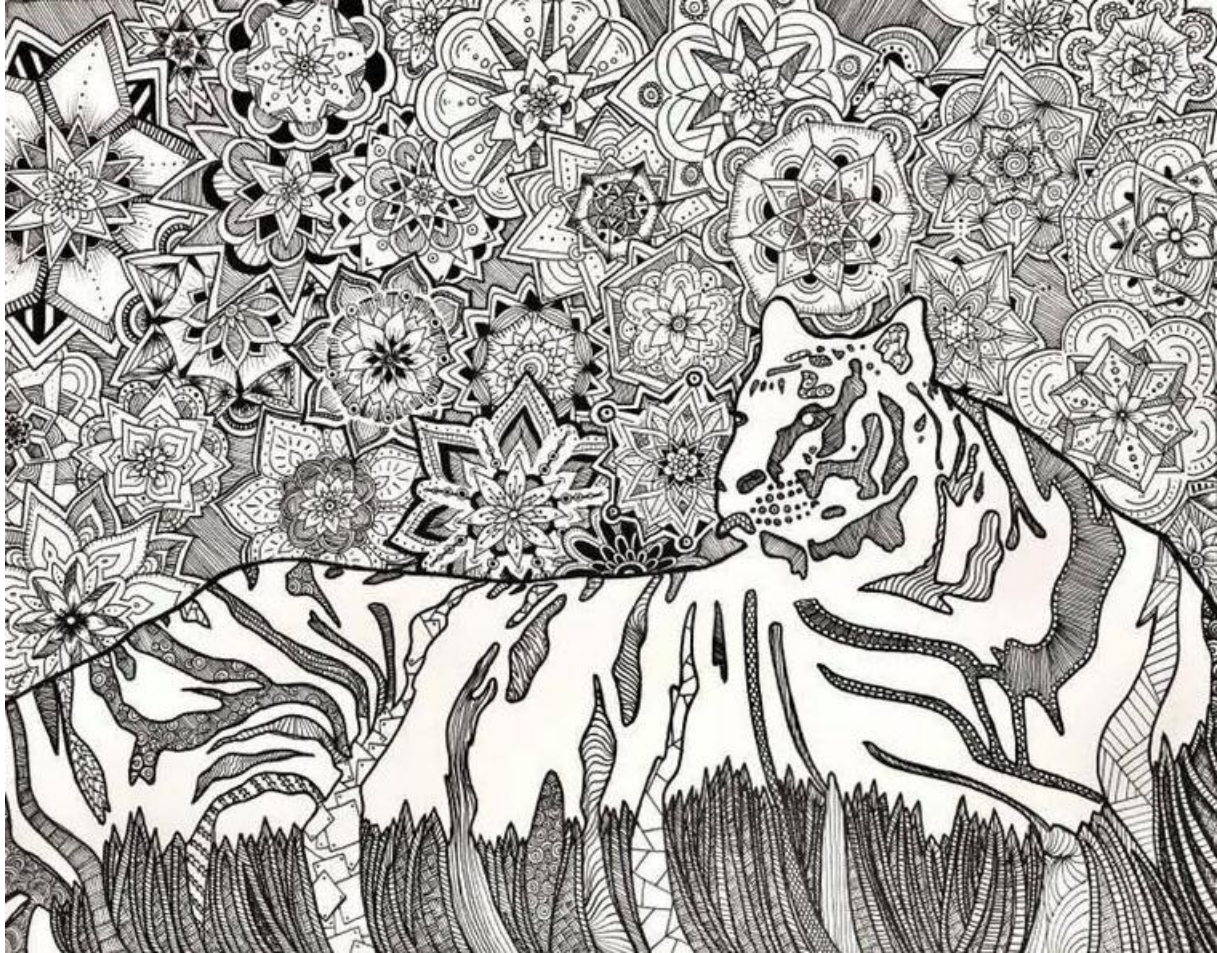
After a few moments, careful to hide his dissatisfaction with her answer, the boy whispered to himself, not realizing that she could hear him, “Well, it wouldn’t have to rain, if it were always spring. Wouldn’t it be nice if it were always spring?”

His mother smiled at the obstinacy and whispered back, “Yes, it most certainly would.”

Cocoon

In the middle of the night
and in the early morning
I form my cocoon
When I am lost and in pain
when I can't stop thinking
when my wounds won't stop bleeding
I form my cocoon
When they look at me and judge
or when I judge myself
When I succeed
and when I fail
I form my cocoon
When I look at my past
and I hope for a better future
when I laugh
sing
dance
or cry
I form my cocoon
like the moth
like the butterfly
When the time is right
I will spread my wings and fly
beneath the light of the moon

Tiger
Meaghan McBay



Five Haiku for Winter

Casey Purifoy

The way the sun cuts
Past the frozen pine needles . . .
That's how cold it is.

The first morning frost.
I'll just sleep in a little
This postcard morning.

Snow day. Slow day. Still.
A frozen patch on my car
Melts away by noon.

The warm sake glass.
A snowflake melts inside it
During the night's hours.

Searching for pure lights
Throughout sleeping neighborhoods,
We talk in Christmas.

Five

Cendy Zuniga

One man has a big mansion with Christmas lights.
Two towering Christmas trees loom in his picture window.
Three giant, inflatable reindeer roam his front lawn.
Four wreaths hang from his frosty gables, but
Five decades of decorations don't help him give love.

Snowman Cott

Cendy Zuniga

A handsome young snowman named Cott
Did not do so well feeling hot.
He went out to have fun
And got caught by the sun,
And now my poor Cott's simply not.

Twelve

Nancy Galvan

One beautiful and colorful tree standing in the living room.

Two silly looking snowmen standing in the driveway.

Three big red bows adorning the front door.

Four eager children waiting patiently.

Five days of snow.

Six beautifully wrapped gifts under the tree for the children, mom, and dad.

Seven rides on the sled down the snowy hill.

Eight stockings hanging on the fireplace (because double is always best).

Nine reindeer guiding Santa's sleigh.

Ten cookies ready for Santa and his reindeer to enjoy after the long ride in the snow.

Eleven poinsettias adorn the house; one more added will make one for each of the

Twelve days of Christmas.

About the Contributors

Laron Deen is a Christian whose life ended and began in 2003, when he surrendered his heart and life to his Lord, Jesus Christ. Loren's poems are his way of giving glory to God. He hopes that his readers find rest for their souls.

Nancy Galvan is a resident of Pittsburg, Texas, and the mother of four wonderful kids. She graduated from Pittsburg High School back in 2009 and is currently a member of the Teacher Preparation Program. She would love to teach students in the third or fourth grade, but her main focus is teaching special-education students. "Twelve" is about how her family spends Christmas. She wrote this poem so that her kids can remember the good times they had when they were little.

Jasmine Geyer is a full-time student working toward her mass-communication major and English minor at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. Her aspiration is to meld her skills with design and writing so that she may work in the field of video game UI/UX design and script-writing.

Hanna Gross is a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She is currently studying to fulfill her dream of becoming an elementary-school teacher.

Cleo Martin Horton is a young-old country boy who loves to express himself through his poems. Cleo finds writing a great stress reliever as well as a spiritual uplifter. He wrote "Mail Call" due to his being incarcerated and rarely receiving mail.

Keeyon James was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, where he lived with his grandmother until he was fifteen years old. Keeyon moved with his mother and stepfather to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and, eventually, with his mother to Little Rock, Arkansas. After making some bad decisions, he is currently serving year twenty-one of a fifty-year sentence.

Meaghan McBay is a sophomore at Texas A&M-Texarkana who is studying English education. Formerly an art major, Meaghan still spends her free time creating art and writing. She believes that art is a form of therapy from which

everyone can benefit. Her goal is to foster a love of art and writing in her six-year-old daughter and future students.

Hannah McElroy is a senior at Texas A&M University-Texarkana who is pursuing a degree in elementary education. She has two beautiful dogs and three gorgeous horses. “Boat Ride” combines her love of the sky and watercolors with her love of riding a boat on a lake.

Courtney Muñoz was born and raised in Mount Pleasant, Texas. She is pursuing a career in special education. The inspiration behind “Clouds” is a day spent kayaking at Beavers Bend State Park with her partner.

Corinne Patterson aspires to become a published writer of novels for young adults. Currently, she teaches English at Southern Arkansas University in Magnolia, Arkansas. She resides in Texarkana, Arkansas, with her husband and their four children. Her hobbies include attempting to learn to play any musical instrument she can get her hands on, dabbling with a room full of arts and crafts, and reading until she cannot see the print any longer.

Cainan Patterson is a high-school senior at Arkansas High School in Texarkana, Arkansas. He has played character and chorus roles in the A&M-Texarkana musicals *Gabriel Grub*, *Herr Hedgehog*, and *Once upon a Wood*. His hobbies include photography and video-gaming.

Leah Pickering is a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She is completing a history degree with a teaching certification for grades seven through twelve. She is a wife and mother who enjoys working in the garden and sewing.

Christian Poe has learned how to count in three foreign languages and how to greet a person in fourteen (if you want to count incomplete fictional tongues). He is fascinated by how certain words elicit certain concepts, which differ from language to language and from person to person. Christian is currently enthralled with Old-Norse kennings.

Grey Powell is pursuing a master's degree in English at Texas A&M University-Texarkana after graduating from that university in the spring of 2020 with a BS in English. When not writing poetry, they research Vietnam War literature and its resulting psychological effects on war rhetoric. As of now, Grey has written two poetry collections: *Flowers for Eyes*, featured in this volume of *Aquila Review*, and *Bloom*, which won second place in the 2019 PLACE Writing Contest.

Te'yana Pugh was born in Los Angeles, California. She is a student, a wordsmith, a literary enthusiast, a creative, and a humanist who pursues life optimistically.

Casey Purifoy works as a tutor in the Texas A&M University-Texarkana Success Center, where he helps students with their writing assignments. In his down time, he enjoys writing when he should be asleep, studying creative writing, and researching marketing and publishing. His poetry and essays have appeared in *Aquila Review* and *TypeWrite*.

Trista Aikin Rodgers is a wife and a mother to four high-school students. Pursuing a BAAS at TAMU-T, she plans to obtain her teacher certification for middle-school science or English. She enjoys the outdoors, reading, writing, and learning to train her dogs. She draws inspiration for her writing from her past and hopes to help others who are going through similar experiences.

Lori Vakidis graduated from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M University-Texarkana) in 1993 with a bachelor's degree in general studies. She is married to a Greek man from Montreal, Canada, who also happens to be a professional chef. She enjoys writing, playing Bananagrams, and a really good New Haven-style pizza (locally known as apizza). She is currently pursuing a BAAS degree.

Danny Verdic was born in Huntsville, Arkansas, in 1977. Danny's interests include the outdoors, reading, writing, and, of course, rodeos.

Jenny Walker is pursuing her doctoral degree in education leadership at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Meredith Weaver currently lives in Pittsburg, Texas, out in the country with her family and her two dogs. She is a college student who is working on her bachelor's degree in education. The country is a big part of who she is. She wrote "Country Living" to help others understand why she loves the country so much.

Cendy Zuniga is from Mount Pleasant, Texas. She graduated from Northeast Texas Community College (NTCC) in 2018 with an Associate of Science degree, and in 2019 she earned an Associate of Arts degree in teaching. She is currently attending Texas A&M University-Texarkana to earn a bachelor's degree in bilingual education. She enjoys soccer, running, and painting as her hobbies. Taking Children's Literature at TAMU-T with Professor Brian Billings taught her new things about art. If she could take the course over again, she would do so.

