

ONLINE ANTHOLOGY

*The Poetry
Marathon:
2023*



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Introduction

Thank you so much for the honor of reading all these amazing poems! By way of introduction, I wanted to share this extra poetic gem by fellow Marathoner, Denise Krebs. I felt it was a fitting way to dedicate this anthology, and to honor the creators!

-Erin Lorandos, this year's editor

Hour 16

Title: Dictionary Entry

By Denise Krebs

Poetry Marathon

Definitions:

verb

1. to create confidence
2. to whisper creativity
3. to witness a worldwide community
4. to climb expectations
as in We've been Poetry Marathonning for 15 hours so far.

noun

1. a chapbook full of admirable achievements
Bring on the Poetry Marathon!
2. a day of hope in the life of a poet
It's been a Poetry Marathon kind of day.
3. a gift of love from Caitlin and Jacob
Thank you for the 2023 Poetry Marathon.

Cindy Thompson, Lakewood, Colorado, Hour Two

Nevergirl

Tinkerbell. My she-ro!
My child eyes drank in her
pixie-dust coquettishness.
Neverland sprite, Peter's pal,
Wendy's rival.
"I will someday soar,"
I believed,
noticed for my own perky
insouciance.
But not to be.
I was Nevergirl.
Never noticed,
never picked until the last for teams,
always back-to-the-wall flower.
A Lost Girl
evading barbed hooks
of mean girl bullies,
plank-walking on low self-esteem,
dodging teenage angst-ridden ticking crocodiles.
Nevergirl,
living kaleidoscopic flights-of-fancy
adventures only in my mind.
Oh, the fun I had!
In retrospect,
I really was Evergirl.
Ever ready to concoct
a multi-faceted gray matter universe,
Psyche personified,
to while away introspective days.
Ever ready to beckon all
outside my inner world,
"Crawl inside my mind;
see how much we are alike."

Betty Jean Steinshouer, Florida, Hour One

the past draped about us like a cloak

(after Diana Khoi Nguyen)

You called me your cancer mentor,
cancer buddy, but already you knew
how to do the colostomy bag.
I watched you and my dear friend, your wife,
drag that thing, during COVID,
up and down the street, to the beach.
History wonk, Vietnam vet, surfer dude,
Jimmy Buffett had nothing on you.
Just notice how he hurried to catch up,
to schmooze, to find out all you knew,
as if you could help him, help all of us, find our groove.
I don't know about Jimmy, but I'm taking notes,
the past draped around me like a cloak.

Mildred Achoch, Nairobi, Kenya, Hour Thirteen

The I just jest job

I just jest for a living,
wearing striped pajamas to work,
singing structure and swinging
from chandeliers made up of characters.
There's no treatment for my ailment.
Well, maybe when artificial intelligence achieves alignment...
No! Even the AI overloads won't want this work,
wading through the swampy, sinking sand second act,
turning fake news into film fact,
alchemying a load of...lead into silver
screen,
staring into the abyss of a blank page,
then feeding it warm weighty words,
that with careless whispers and shouts,
suited people chewing the curd,
will play the "I'm the boss" card
and Oppenheimer it all.
I'm no cry Barbie,
so I will pick up the pieces,
the torn structures and the splintered chandeliers,
and begin all over again,
because I just jest for a living,
and there's no treatment for my ailment.
Well, maybe when artificial intelligence achieves alignment...

Amanda Potter, Jacksonville, Florida, Hour Seven

When Words Echo

A Viator

when words echo
between the lines
we breathe, in or out
in bleeding from thy pen

my eyes lifted
when words echo
memories better left behind
keeping one foot in the past

the caress, of the good times
etching the ache of the bad
when words echo
through the bloody chambers of my heart

running empty, towards the end
pleading, I was placated
my heart whispered ~ not again
when words echo

Renata Pavrey, Mumbai, India, Hour Eleven

Extraordinary in Ordinary

A speck of dust
Blown in by the wind
Through the window
To greet me
Traveling on a sunbeam
Like gold it sparkles
Weightless with the burden of nothing
Coming to life
It dances with the morning rays
Swirling towards the floor
In the warmth of sunshine

Katie Scholan, Bristol, Hour Sixteen

Missive

Captain of our fairy band,
A missive from the human land;
These four tired centuries
Have not forgotten you to me.
Lord, I've known no stranger space
In any cursed demon place,
I watched the mortals hollow hills
And burn the stone to drive their mills.
Such beasts they raised of brick and bone
And to their maws were children thrown.
Ever have the mortals fought
For pride in some exalted court
But king of shadows, I have seen
War beyond the Keres' dreams.
I wonder that no fiery power
E'er disturbed your sleeping bower.
Jealous king, so rich adorned,
They've stolen Amaltheia's horn.
It sits there heaving numbers out

For half the world, when half's in drought.
Fairy king, beloved master,
Never has the time gone faster.
Ever I bid your return
To bramble mounds beside the turn
Of roaring tarmac scars of land
Where our woodlands used to stand.
I must go, my letter's done.
Round the world again I'll run.
Alone this pageant I must see;
Lord, what fools these mortals be.

A note from the poet:

'Missive' takes inspiration in the characters, quoted final line and a few references (the titles used, like 'king of shadows') from Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Relatedly, it is following the style of Puck's lines in A Midsummer Night's Dream (which are capitalised throughout). The capitalisation in the poem is a deliberate choice.

Diane O'Neill, Chicago, IL, Hour Twenty-Three

Thanksgiving

It would be my first
and only

Thanksgiving with my father

with two (half) brothers and a sister-in-law;
another sibling calling just as
Dad pierced the roast turkey's skin.

We ate at mahogany table
that had been my Gran's,
used gold-trimmed dishware
Dad gave me.

We shopped beforehand,
my father making sure
to buy every delicacy
I might want—creamed spinach,
flavored creamer, cherry pie--

My son fell asleep in his lap
after we put up the tree

hanging ornaments Dad had brought--
carved Santas and reindeers
from my siblings' childhoods.

Could he make up
for not being around
when I was little?

For my siblings and I
not knowing each other
as kids?

Can you undo
holes you left
in your child's life?

But isn't it worth something to
make what amends you can
with moments you have left--

to buy the treats and desserts,
join your gathered children
and hold your grandson close?

Britton Gildersleeve, Blacksburg, Virginia, Hour Six

At the edge of the earth

at the end of the time and space continuum
water stands still and the leaves of trees
hang unstirring. Nothing breathes
nothing moves.

It must be something like
grief when the large hole that once
moved in synchrony with another
rose to greet him breathed
almost in the same key
tempo determined by another's
rhythms.

Now the edge of earth opens
a vast desolation of darkness
where even heartbeats quiet
in the knowledge
that beyond that sharp knife edge
is nothing.

Liane Sousa, California, Hour Nine

Escaping

Looking forward to escaping for a week in a rented lake cabin.

Imagining pristine water and comfortable accommodations.

Discovering a rustic shack on a beet farm located near a bayou with a single lightbulb and an elk-antler-adorned carport.

The inside cupboards only have elbow macaroni and cinnamon, and buckets are strategically placed to catch leaking water.

Tremors start when a book jacket reveals a slasher novel on the counter.

Definitely not a match to the brochure.

Now looking forward to escaping back to my own home.

Nykki Norlander, Morgan, Minnesota, Hour Twelve

Unveiled

My closet is full of memories throughout my life,
and some of my dad's.
He didn't want to believe his stuff had to be sold
so I hold the last of it for him.
At the assisted living, he doesn't have a closet,
just a wardrobe.
I haven't spoken to him for a while.
During our last phone call, he was in attack mode.
I had to step away.

In one of the boxes is my Girl Scout vests.
I could create a pillow.
In another is stories me and my cousin wrote for our grandma as kids.
Empty boxes take up the most space;
waiting for my next chapter to be unveiled.

Lori Carlson, Madison, New Jersey, Hour Three

Sand Echoes

The rocks of longing in my heart build cairns
that balance tenuously on dunes built of sugar,
like the sweet and sticky buns of my youth.
Sounds of sucking my fingertips
before dipping them in the sands of the Ocean City beach
where I lie in ageless wonder at Vanessa's poise
as she topples the stones,
only to rebuild them with sand hands.
Outlasting the incoming tides with their sweet memories,
the wandering waves of grief
create as they reclaim
Vanessa's laugh, coming now from my throat,
the little sis who I still am
with the broken shells she gave me as a joke
that I now treasure and always will.
The sickly-sweet sounds of breaking seashells
that burst me open,
freeing my tears.
"Grazie Mille sis"
the waves seem to whisper
lapping up against the cairn in my heart.

Vijaya Gowrisankar, Mumbai, India, Hour Two

A story to write

An empty pristine white wall
 A light-shaded ladder to climb
It's there somewhere in my vision
 Vague, enticing and mysterious
What touches the secure ground
 is perhaps just my feet
What reaches for the challenging sky
 are the dreams I've seen for years

I stand watching
 the blank wall that beckons me
The light-shaded ladder is there
 Encouraging me to touch great heights
Will I find the strength to climb?
 If yes, what will it take?
The will to risk it all
 Decisions and choices I'm yet to make

Will I reach out? It's a race against time
 It's a duel of emotions, for I want to try
A part of me calculates
 what I have to leave behind
The comfort of my home, family, and friends
 to explore a land that I have in my mind
I just stand staring, undecided, as time slips away
 for there's an empty pristine white wall and a story to write

Lee Montgomery- Hughes, North Ayrshire, Scotland UK, Hour Seven

IMAGE 7

A Wonderful World

To those that can see
This is no mere swing
It is a portal to another land
Where Dorothy takes you by the hand
And leads you down a yellow path
To meet a scarecrow
A lion and a tin man
Each on a special quest
To find what they feel is missing
From their life
In this magical place
Of style and grace
And wickedness and of love
But once the game is done
And

there's

nowhere

left

to

roam

There

really

is ... no place like home.



Enscriptor
Lee Montgomery-Hughes

Tanya Gogo, Hoquiam, Washington, Hour Two

Ten Years Ago

Another milestone

"The New 20"

something new is dawning,

born of desires renewed

and possibilities waiting.

Free

Me

Sandra Duncan Black, Portland, Victoria, Australia, Hour Twenty

Born to wander

Time always seems to be still in the dawn.

I stand above the shore, waves dance in,
sometimes a waltz, sometimes a funky chicken.

Light ripples across the horizon, shades of summer
mixed with a winter storm, or blue skies, a sea mist.

My heart slows, my breath is singing good morning
to the new day.

The sun slides above the distant line between sea
and sky, spreading into my peripheral vision.

My soul replenished, my spirit high on nature.

I retrace my steps to civilisation, my cups filled.

Katarzyna Stomska, Scotland, UK, 11:45 pm

Stained Soul

My stained soul
Silently crying for freedom
My stained soul
Desperate for a loving touch
My stained soul
Craving unlimited hope
My stained soul
Grieving what we never had

Amber Crabtree, Mesa, Arizona, Hour One

Opine

I was raised to believe my lovability
is akin to a house at the end of a treacherous road.

Travelers wonder if they'll ever get there,
and if the journey is even worth the destination.

Their discontent seeps in like an intolerable joke
told at an inopportune time to ruin the party.

I trickle in to ruin the party.

If I could have simply been an enticing house
on the side of a gorgeous hidden hill,
maybe one of them would have stayed.

Thought they could love me.

At least until I thought I had learned to love myself
with a personality that has always been too much.

Yet not enough to be lovable.

Bavishya Tai, Chennai, India, Hour Two

Ten Years Ago, I

Ten years ago, I'm in love,
I'm in adolescence.
A machine opens up,
revealing Captain America's bare chest.
My crush, one day,
sits next to me at recess.
Silly little thing, an adolescent heart.
It flutters.

Little stares from strangers seem mean,
seem kind,
seem scary.
Seems to me like they're judging.
Or admiring?
Or leering?
Scared little thing, an adolescent body.
It cowers.

Ten years ago, I'm a dreamer.

I'm making pretend movies
with pretend cameras,
casting pretend neighbourhood child stars.
Amusing little thing, a girl's imagination.
It made us all laugh.

Ten years ago, I feel alone.
I feel stupid,
feel ugly,
feel melancholy.
Words hurt more
when they come from one's own family.
Timid little thing, a girl's mind.
It bruises easy.

Ten years ago, I'm thinking.
Thinking of the world,
thinking of love,
thinking of the woman I'll be,
thinking of the life I'll lead.
Hopeful little thing, that adolescent girl.
She raised me.

Jill Halasz, Texas City, Texas, Hour Seven

We Breathe Life

We breathe life -
into every intention,
every interaction,
every sense of promise.

When we walk down the street,
we breathe life -
into every smile, every wave
every step, marching to our own beat.

Each time we console a loved one -
hugging them or easing their fears -
We breathe life,
by simply sharing our cares and concerns.

Each second or minute,
hour or day on the planet
and in every way, shape or form:
We breathe life.

Kim Smart, Kansas, Missouri, Hour Twelve

Backward to Forward

Born a perfect soul with knowledge and vision,
from out of the closet comes the monsters
of generational rage, institutional derision,
mandatory conformity and societal musts.

The first decades spent conforming
to laws derived by marketers, politicians, and others
selling, controlling, and reforming.
Deep inside, the soul struggles.

Rejected for originality,
imprisoned by corporate rules
and left lonely and sensitive to brutality,
apathy takes residence in the soul.

Finding herself, she emerges
a siren of sincerity.
Connected with the timeless voices,
she paves a new path
of restored originality.

Ian Barkley, Carbondale, Illinois, Hour Four

Content

NEXT

For You

It's yours alone and everyone's too

reverse engineer broken fundamentals

Years are just a human timescale

Count the days, pretend to be sick

IV drip

Lights in a screen

5G

What can you see?

Blurry

Rot in your imagination while conjuring playlist ghosts

Zeenat Shaikh, India, Hour Twenty-One

Words

Aren't words beautiful
like does the word
alluring
not make you feel seductive
wavy
lost control
or the word
I
brings a complex intersection
of vibrant thread
Don't tell me
the word first rain
does not rush
the smell of petrichor
flaring your nostrils for more
aren't you consumed
with an uncontrollable desire
to eat
like the rain has unleashed
the treasures hidden beneath
Isn't there a word that reminds you of someone
a word that puts a smile across your face
a word that cracks you up
a word that annoys the crap out of you like hell
a word that feels squishy, dissolving as you say
a words that reminds you of innocence
a word that seems pale
a word that feels like home
that you only use with a sibling or a friend
or a word that's indifferent
like an extra piece
Aren't words beautiful?
to know a word
is to let it live
inside of us
it's to feel it
it's to be it

Mardiosa Yanez, Manila, Philippines, Hour Twelve

Unbound

Streaks of golden sunshine twirl into
bouquets of pink and crimson flowers,
embrace the wind's symphony, and
stir the sleepy stream in my fantasy;
The energy dances with the beat.

I hold onto the rhythm and move,
while the earth pushes me to the clouds.
I am breathless with the wind;
against the carefree wings of butterflies,
my soul converges with the rising sun.

Through the season's cycle, the beat
vibrates, a sound in the heart.
My mind connects with the truth
when the sky paints on its canvas
radiant colors of the rainbow.

I open my eyes; my spirit is alive.
I dance with the beat.

Joshua Factor, Durham, North Carolina, Hour Five

did you know that there's a tunnel under ocean boulevard?

It runs all the way through to the other side of the world.

I don't go down there a lot;

there's not much left but every now and then,

you just might catch a glimpse of hope (although it is quite adept at hiding).

I've always had a complicated relationship with it.

When's it going to be my turn?

Some people think about it until it drives them insane

but I have more cogent matters to attend to right now.

So much mystery behind it &

a lot that doesn't add up but maybe it doesn't

need to. Maybe it's not defined by descartes or

kierkegaard or some higher power that only cares about itself.

Maybe the anomaly is part of its charm.

When all is said and done, I'm ready for what's waiting for

me down there. Walk until you can't move anymore & then

accept your fate.

When's it going to be my turn?

Ingrid Exner, Half Marathon, Burlington, Ontario, Canada, Hour Eleven

My Magical Path

My path bathed in Moonlight
And serenaded in Song,
by crickets and tree frogs
as I continue along.

Laura Daniels, Mt Arlington, New Jersey, Hour Seven

Censorship, Not Protection

Here we go again
hiding history, curses
us to revisit corrected
wrongs over and again

Banning books
here we go again
John Steinbeck's
Grapes of Wrath

Toni Morrison's
Beloved
here we go again
is nothing teachable?

Communist propaganda
enslaved injustice
bad language, too graphic
Here we go again

Cristy Watson, Calgary, Alberta, Hour One

un-grafting

(after diana khoi nguyen)

your hands separating peach halves from a core
(like the arduous un-grafting of maple trees from
astrophytum coahuilense after the fade of

brown summer tan; september's sun lost—
white clouds rushing across the sky)

picking up the pieces of broken fruit dispersed
during the thunderstorm, too soon to be ripe

*(hands separating peach halves
from a core)*

and swallowing the pit; anticipating some
new genus:

deft branches, reaching like fingers;
core hardy and steadfast

the trunk of you moving forward

as multitudes of deep periwinkle,
magenta, soft fuchsia, amethyst
and red plum flowers colour
your hair

petrichor purifying the air

Claire Keogh, Dublin, Ireland, Hour Twenty

Making Tea

Do you mind if I don't

Make you tea tonight, dear,

I quite fancy coffee.

I got a new brew, and I can

Make it in the new coffee pot, dear.

Would you like that?

No, of course, you'd prefer tea,

With your little slice of cake,

Madeira, isn't it? Of course

It can be arranged, but just tonight

Do you mind if I don't

Make you tea, dear?

Ana Marie Dollano, Philippines, Hour Fifteen

This Cup

Amidst the rush of the morning
a cup awaits silently it
holds a liquid— coffee or tea that is
shared between friends or family.

In moments profound I find ease
in this gentle companion for
it carries the food that bestows
sustenance to the body.

More than simplicity, it is
a reminder of remarkable victories or
a welcome embrace— the
mark of hospitality.

But more than just a bowl this
cup is special for it calls
to mind the vessel that holds the
wine— a sacred offering that
nourishes my soul.

Kell Willson, Anglesey, North Wales, Hour Five

The Mysterious Mr. Knox

The first rule of Detection Club: play fair

Rather, the zeroth rule because rule one

Is introduce the criminal early on

And keep their thoughts off-air

The next three rules restrain the gothic trend

No ghosts, no made-up drugs, no high-tech tools

No more than one mysterious hidden room

To get you to “the end”

The fifth rule reads as racist in our day,

Though written to confront it at the time.

Let’s say: Do not use “foreign” to mean “crime”

Or “danger” in that way.

Rule six rules out the lucky guess to win

Rules seven, eight and nine forbid the ruse

Of ever purposefully withholding clues.

And ten: no secret twins.

So if you swear detection tales to tell,

Shall Knox, GK, and Christie wish you well.

Tobe Tomlinson, Essex, Vermont, Hour Fifteen

Sightings

Take a look closer
In the pattern of a leaf
For the stripey rocks
And roadside flowers

Desperate weeds that poke
Dragonflies who visit
Bunnies hiding underneath
Chickadees that flurry

See the big picture
In the small things
Rain filled brooks
Acorns tumbling down

When your eyes understand
Then ears can hear
The geese leaving town
And Santa on the roof

Janice Mendonca, Melbourne (VIC) Australia, Hour Twelve

Closeted Hoarder

I am a closeted hoarder
I collect everything
And find it hard to let go.

Each item in my possession holds
sentiments and memories.

I am a closeted hoarder
I collect everything and
I am unable to let go.

I am trying my best
to cleanse myself of this God awful habit
Like a cancer it spreads– invading my self
esteem, y being...
and I can't seem to shake it off.

I reaffirm and remind myself
"You don't need this, you think you do, but,
you don't."

I am a closeted hoarder
I collect everything
And find it hard to let go.

I am ashamed of myself
And I hate myself for it.

I know I need help – however, I am not
ready to ask for help from the outside world.
I'm not there yet...

I'm trying to be strong
I'm trying to help myself
but it doesn't seem to be working
only worsening -sickening habit.
"I will get better." I lie to myself.

I am a closeted hoarder
I collect everything
And find it hard to let go.

I see myself letting go
and forgetting everything.
My memories deny me access
to reminisce
-this is my worst fear.
And why I hold on
and struggle to let go.

Jenny Olsen, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Hour On

The Last Ride

Son by her side
What made her decide
Headed for the airport
Looked out the rearview window
Of that cab
Leaving this city she loved
Son, all she had now
She'd make it somehow
Headed away from here
Looked out the rearview window
Of that cab
Was he following them?
Faster
Faster
Faster
Drive faster
Did he believe her?
When she said she was headed
To the laundromat to wash
The baby's clothes
Did he believe her?
Did he know she was gone?
She'd break that bond
Threatened to kill her

She believed him
Leaving it all
Everything she owned
Left in that hotel room
Looked out the rearview window
Of that cab
Leaving this man she loved
The one who didn't love her

Gail Marie, Knoxville, TN, Hour Seventeen

Bird Girl

(An Ekphrastic poem of a bronze statue by Sylvia Shaw Johnson)

So many years,
Alone.
Not known,
Not appreciated,
Except by the birds.

Just a fixture In the valley of death.
“To be absent
From the body Is to be present
With the Lord”
But you were neither.

Til one day, Your simple beauty
Left an indelible mark
On an artist's emulsion
Immortalizing
Your story
For all to enjoy.

Now you stand,
Imprisoned by
Human admirers.
Denied your
True purpose
And only love –
The birds.

Kim Sami, New South Wales, Australia, Hour Eleven

My Favourite time of Year

Bare branches, stark against grey, cold sky
Now with tiny buds of promise.
Skies of blue, sunlight shimmering on gurgling creeks, streams

Coming out of hibernation,
that cosy cocoon,
rejoicing in nature's warmth
reborn, renewed.

In the season of my birth,
me too?
Something emerging, waking, becoming
in me?

A tiny ember of creative spark
waiting to become a raging fire,
Metamorphosis...

The time is coming -
like spring, like dawn...

And it will be glorious.

Shloka Shankar, Bangalore, India, Hour Twenty-One



Harvey Schwartz, Bellingham, WA, Hour Five

Puppeteers

suspicious muddy boot prints on
steps to a home, brazenly left
and obviously meant to be seen
because the perpetrator
wanted to throw us off the
track of what's really the score

or maybe it was someone
so oblivious that they
were just bumbling
into a heist

and maybe this
was their first, since being
so clueless you'd think
they'd have been caught

or maybe this is a metaphor
and our lives are that house

and we are pawns in the game
of those pulling the strings
of puppets we vote into office
and buy our stuff from

who don't make it hard
to see their boot prints
all over the labor we've
done to try to create
what we think as a better
life as they pull the strings
tighter and we can almost
feel our limbs constrict
while forces we can't
control tell us
what to do.

Ramona Elke, Maple Ridge, British Columbia, Canada, Hour Ten

I remember in highways

I remember in highways

what is love
but remembrance

and I remember in highways...

in moments on lines,
like beads moving on thread,
strung to make pictures from pixels of glass.

I remember in fragments of myself,
in pointillist pops of colour against light –
stained glass memories of sun on
shuddering leaves
in hot, August winds
who had forgotten how to weep
until September arrived.

these longings
these recollections of highways,
like sutures,
binding pieces of me
to all those open flaps of wonderings,
wanderings,
of wanting –
anchor me to the spaces between
re-mem-bering
and
longing to completely forget.

when I land “there” –
in these moments of recognising myself
against the backdrop of forgetting why I
wanted to know me –
I pretend to ignore the pain in my ankles,

from the impact of the landing,
I feel only gratitude for the journey...

ok,
maybe a little loneliness, too,
for the pieces of me I had to leave when I
arrived.

that’s always the bargain
when we remember in highways:
the place never leaves without you.

Gopalakrishnan Prakash, India, Hour Five

kaleidoscopic mind

When a thousand hammers beat a devastating rhythm
shaking your squeamish, screaming innards to the core
When you are feeling lower than the underbelly of a snake
When no one remains whom you can count as your own
When the dice and cards are stacked against you
When the tide has turned entirely against you
When the world lies shattered in front of you
like the broken pieces of multi-colored bangle pieces
pick them up and build a kaleidoscope with them
look through the lens at the shifting shapes of color
girdle up your loins and march on long strides
Yours to conquer lies the entire rainbow universe!

Aarthi V. Karanam, India, Hour Two

Ten years ago...

I closed my eyes, invisible to the world,
I felt at peace, his darkness my escape blanket
I drifted off into a deep slumber
dreamt of fairies and sunshine and quiet
When the piercing peals of the alarm sounded like the death knell
they had plucked me from the warm lap of the night
And shoved me into the scorching bosom of the brilliant day
the infant wailed, the toddler screamed
the sink beckoned me with its dirty dishes
piles of clothes stood everywhere, like the leaning tower of Pisa
I ran out of bed, infant on my hip, toddler tailing me
I cooked, I mopped, I cleaned, I fed
It was twilight when my rumbling stomach reminded
me of an act of self-service called eating
I checked the kitchen for food but found only the ingredients
My husband sailed in from the office early, my savior!
I pounced upon the blueberry cheesecake and hot Chinese
I ignored the mess that was my house and my life
I had decided this was permanent.
But alas! Nothing is ever so
The ten years have flown away
The house is no longer messy or reverberating with wails and screams
Everything is in its place; it is too quiet
O! That I would give an arm and a leg, to conjure it all back...

WREN, Tokyo, Japan, Hour Sixteen

A Dozen of Broken Hearted Cookies

You'll need a minimum of

- 2 cups of your own heart
- 1 cup of love bombarded at you
- A dash of salty insults wrapped in compliments
- 1 teaspoon of explosive aggression powder
- 1/2 cup of melted cuddles
- 1 golden egg saved for make-up sex
- 2 teaspoons of silent tears
- A few drops of your blood for color
- Your bare hands for shape
- The lying daggers used to break your heart
- Sprinkled petals from the cheap gas station roses
- The icing made with the rotten chocolates from the half empty Valentine's Day box

Wendie Donabie, Muskoka, Ontario, Hour Nine

STORY GESTATION

The air fills with words and phrases,
metaphors and similes bounce off the walls
seeking their place in an awaiting paragraph,
not yet complete.

Writer's mind whirls and swirls,
spinning notions, inspirations
clashing and merging, morphing
into tales to be told.

Keyboard clicks and clatters,
fingers fly across the keys,
letters court the virgin page,
its maiden head breaking.

From the writer's loins
an idea is born,
a story - raw, filled with potential,
an intense, yet joyful delivery.

Siobhan Geraghty, Ottawa, Ontario, Hour One

In the In Between

Here is the place in the in between

Where hardened trees guard the softness of hearts
Where moonlight traces a satin screen
And time casts its questioning shadow

Here is the place in the in between
Where feelings pause in the dew of dampened dreams
Where the past taps a desperate reminder it's here
And what will be hovers in a hopeful haze

Here is the place in the in between
Where tepid souls breathe a placid peace
Where paths fuse in a canary coloured hue
And the guidance of grace is granted

Amy Bostelman, Leander, Texas, Hour Ten

“Fairytale Love”

What love is—
not Cinderella and the glass slipper

Rather it's slipping on the glass
then given a hand to stand up;

What love is—
not Sleeping Beauty awakened by the kiss of a century

Rather it's breakfast in bed
after sleeping in on Sunday morning;

What love is—
not Belle dancing at the ball with a kind atrocious Beast

Rather it's permission to miss the ball
and cuddle with that kind atrocious Beast;

What love is—
not being awakened with a kiss after biting into poisoned apples

Rather it's being loved enough for a
back slap to dislodge the apple pieces;

Love is Living the Real Life—

With all of the slips and falls;
Sleeping through mornings;
Staying home for the night;
And rescues from unruly apple chunks;
Now that's the true story of Love.

Ipsita Banerjee, Kolkata, India, Hour Fifteen

Question

Lady in the waiting room
vermillion smeared on forehead,
dots of sandal paste on her neck,
hands buried in beads,
fumbling fingers moving
the mouth muttering a prayer.

As her mother's tired eyes
watch her mumble,
lost in words un-dead,
her hand clinging
to her colostomy bag,
patiently, just as the doctor said.

Surely they come from the temple
and in this cancer hospital, it's common.
Many take that route,
Church, temple, mosque, synagogue,
sometimes a Godman or a few;
clinging to life in a clear plastic bag.

The homeless orphan tries not to stare,
to forget that he hasn't eaten for days
as he sits by his dying sister's side,
looks away, whispers softly, to himself,
*"Has He ever heard you, then
He to whom you pray?"*

Ekawu Elizabeth Imaji, Abuja, Nigeria, Hour

Fourteen

For the love of God and survival.

Mother decided to carry out an anatomy experiment,
She used my body, because I fawn with sleep everyday.
This is not a healing poem, here I'll teach you how to die
I dipped myself into my bed for hours and mom
Collected my body to preserve me from death
I swear, I'm tired of this place
I hold my palms up to my head
My way of ablution and reaching heaven
For what miracle is it to live in a place where you name your problems
And no matter how long you tuck them into cabinets they do not expire
So when Mom decided to carry out an anatomy
When she collected my body to preserve me from death, I melted.
Is there any gain working on an already festered land?
So mother, I sleep
Because that's the closest I am to death everytime.

Anne Paterson, Calgary, Alberta, Hour Four

inside

a child's breath, a pane of glass; foggy inside and out. crystallized water droplets outline wooden casements, a spider's web hung shiny and white. the outside world was a flurry, another day stuck indoors. warm air meets cold fingerprints dotting a film of dew, funny faces, and curlicues drawn upon a clear pane of glass, their patterns melding together.

covered treetops, their heavy branches drooping, bending towards the earth. pellets of ice bounce in chilly breezes, obscuring rooftops, roadways, and sidewalks. outside, the world is quiet, muffled by a blanket draped, covering all that it touches. icy roads, unsafe to cross.

the image of a child, pouting and sad, only wanting to play. dreaming of snow forts, angels' wings, sleds, throwing snowballs, skating on frozen ponds, busting up icicles, making snowmen with friends.

long winter days of hot chocolate and marshmallows, watching movies, playing videos and board games. the first day of winter has arrived with the promise of snow days are growing shorter. days and weeks spent indoors, no fun for little ones.

a child sits at the window, sad eyes looking out, almost wishing for sunshine and grass. longing to run, laugh and shout.

Pamela Salmon, Colts Neck New Jersey, Hour Eight

Water Nymph

Spirited away, your swamps' moody ghost
somehow he returned to you.
Your newly found creature, nearly forgotten,
and then you remember somehow, he was your son.

He was a child, unable to speak, when he was
spirited away, your swamps' moody ghost,
just as he came out of his shell hearing his mom's
mixed up bedtime stories and

In the grip of her attending to business, he was
spirited away, your swamps moody ghost.
He was spirited away by someone he once needed
who didn't need him anymore.

Spirited away, your swamps moody ghost
by the only person
he ever needed who didn't even say goodnight
when he was spirited away, your swamps' moody ghost.

Davion Moore, Sandusky, Ohio, Hour Eleven

What is Love?

Love is

You

Love is

Unconditional

Love is

A feeling of joy

Love is

Passion

Love is

Everlasting

Love is

Yin and Yang, coming together

Love is

World wide

Love is

Harmless

Love is

The answer

Love is

The key

To saving the world

D. A. Foster, North Vancouver BC Canada, Hour Eleven

Extraordinary Ordinary

My old guitar mostly out of tune
remains my parents' loving gift.
Through stressful years we had a rift,
yet still its song their love communes.

These strings now softer music croons,
gentles the heart, its heaviness lifts.
My old guitar mostly out of tune
remains my parents' loving gift.

Now they are gone, yet their care attunes
my soul and heals; my memory sifts.
Arpeggios sing, sweet melody drifts
and opens my heart to know their boon.
My old guitar now mostly out of tune.

Danielle Wong, Pierrefonds, Quebec, Canada, Hour Six

Too Shocked to Snap

Deep in the meadow,
armed with snack bag and camera,
deer and man's eyes meet.

Idorenyin Udofia, New York, New York, Hour Three

In the Circle of Thought

Space, is where I want to be sometimes
away from the crowd, noise
and any distracting obligation
to pause from the need to
participate, discuss the mundane things
wear the cap of, "please tell me more"
when I'd rather be, covered by my invisible
cloak
impossible to detect
in the center of my marvelous
mental boundary

Oh, my desire
to dine on the feast of isolation
disengage, energize
and emerge fully re-charged
to pour some of me into others
having the wisdom to know
when it's enough
self-sacrificing out the door

Progress, the motivation for a clutter free
existence
silently meditating
creating air, crisp and clean
blowing through my mind
removing waste that took up room
to make space for peace and growth anew
born again in spirit and brain
as I sit in the void created in my head
without a care
of anything they say

She seems relaxed
as I need to be
enjoying privacy

I wish I could
but that's not me
even when I'm alone
my thoughts, they take up time
though she seems free to think
she is exposed to prying eyes
from above and probably around

Could she be surrounded
by the shadows of her harsh conception
of self-condemnation
or, sitting before a panel
of the ones in her outer circle
united to judge her
as they reach in, absorbing her light?

I hope she has created
distance between she and the world
and is watching the drama of life unfold
far away from her circle of thought
if only for a while

Nandhini G. Natarajan, Rockville, MD, Hour Twelve

WHEN WE VISITED LOURDES

We visited Lourdes (France)
like all devout Catholics, only for favors.
Our girls were two and one.
The younger one had milk allergy,
and drank protein milk, which resulted in deposits
of the foulest odor.

We arrived late for the only English mass,
entered the crowded church,
with two strollers, two toddlers
and myriad backpacks and bags.
The faithful were determined
not to let us through.
We were as determined to
make our way, into their midst.
We settled on the floor amidst glowering looks
which we ignored.
Then Natasha decided to unload.
The dreadful smell reached the rafters
and settled on the faithful.
We couldn't pretend it wasn't us,
not after the sounds Natasha made.
When we stood up to leave,
the crowd parted like the red sea.
We were out in the fraction
of the time we went in.

Natasha Vanover, Seattle, Washington, Hour Eighteen

Come as you are.

Love asks you to come as you are.

Love is always a pleasure to hold even when it's old.

Love stirs the heart, excites the mind, and is full of mystery and knowing.

Love is unpretentious and real.

Love finds beauty even in defeat.

Love will make a seat for you and invite you to the table to eat soul food, and drink to quench your thirst.

No moment will be dull in love's eyes.

She is bliss.

As is he.

He can feel and she can see.

Together they both can be.

Love desires to be set free and captured by the same person.

Love releases you from fears and convention.

Love makes you tremble in angst with just the mere thought, and ought not hurt.

Pleasure and pain's principle is taken lightly in love.

Love is you, God, and everything in between.

Love can take you to the highest high and the lowest low.

Love is nature.

Love is thought.

Love is real in a harsh world. It is kind, loud, and quiet at the same time.

Love knows no borders, yet boundaries is a must.

Loves needs to be deep.

Real love come find me and capture my heart.

Come find me soon. The mind is willing, and the heart is strong.

Make sure we enter into this meeting of the hearts mutually.

This is the way for me to enter into love.

Bhasha Dwivedi, Lucknow, India, Hour Nine

Monsters' Ball

Welcome to the Monsters' ball!
Here you can meet them all~
Vampires, zombies and the Mummy,
Frankenstein's monster and even Sully!

But cautious you must remain!
For here you might also see them,
The most terrifying of all creatures—
Yes, a Human! With all its features.

Thrill seeking species, impossible to kill!
They survive disasters solely on their will!
Persistence and perseverance is their key,
If you see them, maintain distance and let them be.

Bones that will bend and mend all on their own,
They can live anywhere and call it home.
Anything and everything humans will consume,
Even the harmless looking ones.. Yes, best not assume.

Oh well, enough with all these tales of horror!
Do not worry and just enjoy this myrrh.
But really if you see a human, avoid any eye contact,
They have always been the true monsters and that is a fact.

Jo Eckler, Austin, Texas, Hour Twelve

The disappointment of a solid wall

In younger years my closet was deep and oddly narrow
Ending in a wide shelf, Narnia nowhere
So me and my horse books had to suffice.
Oh, the healing power of having a door to close
A space to exist unseen
And gateways to other worlds.

Margo Wilson, Dunnellon, Florida, Hour Six

Flower Power

He may be a nice guy.
I don't know him.
Parting his way through the wildflowers,
white lacy ones as tall as he
and lavender, all giving way.
A bold explorer,
a real Crocodile Dundee,
Oversized backpack,
giant telephoto lens.
Mystic mountain in the distance.
Just half his face.
Can't read his expression.
Let the flowers grow over his path
and may he study the mountain
and the flowers
and look into his heart if he already hasn't.
Maybe he'll set aside the pack
and listen to the flowers
and the bees,
and to the mountain.
The camera won't help him,
the pack won't save him.
But if he hears the flowers,
he just might find his path back.

Deanna Ngai, Airdrie, Alberta Canada, Hour Six

World View

I take a big step to find the edge of the world.
I look down.
I look to my left.
I see a magnificent waterfall.
It is cascading down to bathe the stars,
splashing droplets into galaxies and
creating rainbows in the moonlight.
I look to my right.
I see a mountain range on the edge
with a boulder tumbling
 down
 down
 down
to alight onto the trunk of an elephant below
that is riding on the back of a slow moving turtle.
Skipping, I make my way around the edge,
taking my time and enjoying the view.
Along the way I meet new friends...
Learn new things...
Try new foods...
Take in everything.
Even if the earth is flat,
I plan on being well-rounded.

Trudy Bosman, Gresham, Wisconsin, Hour Eleven

The Path

I had need of solitude.
The pressures of the day
Were crushing my spirit.
I needed to get away.
I wandered down a quiet path.
Gentle breezes blew.
Birds sang sweet tunes.
I spent a restful afternoon.
My spirit was refreshed.

Nandiya Nyx, Portland, Maine, United States, Hour One

Same Same

they never told us
that memory came before
the land, desecrated
our people, scattered

to new lands;
holdings,
we the fiefdom.
here or there --

same same
(but different).
what is victory
when all that remains

is ruin?
we make our bodies
small
knees to chest

bowing
bowing
prayer or repudiation?
same same

(but different).

Sue Storts, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Hour One

My Friend, Rae

Dark cloud hovers above her.

Hails misery.

 Plink Clink

Drops a brother

 Husband

 Dog

 Almost a lover

 Another brother

She moves on

 moves on

 moves on

I want to rush in,
grab her tight,
roll us both to safety.

It doesn't work that way.
Can't control the weather.
I can only hold a worn umbrella.

Ofuma Agali, Lagos, Nigeria, Hour Twenty-One

POEMING

Running, that motion
Sprint or marathon, scripting
Verses are running

Katelyn Dunne, Chicago, Illinois, Hour One

How Things Change

Once
you
were

my
light,

not
fade. You slowly let
things knowing go. me

Maria Riofri, New York, NY USA, Hour Nine

How I know

Under a single lightbulb
I pulled on the old jacket
hideously wrinkled at the elbow
that I'd worn for way too long
but you once told me you liked it
and smiled
I'll never throw it away.

In my dream
we are walking near a bayou
(you dared me to eat crawfish in bayou country)
I stumble a bit off the trail
and when you grab my hand to keep me steady
I feel a certain tremor under my skin
that tells me yes.

Alva Maurissen, San Jose, California, Hour Thirteen

Enter the Dineon

Many voices speaking

Only some worth hearing

Peanut gallery and gaggle

As lil gems roll

Across the table

Scent of paint and snacks

Sound of monster attacks

Crinkle wrappers

“Oh snap!”s

Gold and chocolate trading hands

And dwarven rhymes exchanged

A Scottish orc and party play

For rings of yu-an-ti

And at the end I am exhausted

Consistently at odds

With children after school

A DM to would-be Gods

Renae Ogle, Glendale, Arizona, Hour Five

Passionate Crime

Lies are all he knows.

Narcissism leaves a bloody trail
in its wake.

There was a crime,
An organ theft.

The clock on the wall
reveals all as it ticks
loudly in her head.

She knows she must act quickly.

She drives all night
to the place he lives –
Set on organ recovery
of hers- and annihilation of his.

Upon arrival, she sees him giving
his organ brimming with her
loving energy to another.

SHING! – switchblade pops,
its shining surface
gleaming with intent.

She has honed her skills.
One well-aimed slash and
the offending organ lay
writhing and helpless
in the dirt –
bleeding out.

The lawyers gather –
Unlike him,
she does not deny her crime...
20 years.

Sitting quietly reading in her cell,
she has no remorse.

She feels vindicated,
she has recovered her organ –
and the offending organ
will offend no more.

Katrina Moinet, Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, Wales, Hour

Nine¹

Salvation Lady

She jostles and elbows her way front line
at the five-and-dime on Cinnamon Street.
Fried bucket thighs & whiffs of pickled beet
assault the non-judgmental clientele.

She spots an army coat, the double-breast
kind that keeps you snug through the winter's rough.
An elongated stretch, she snags the cuff
her elk-like bulk splayed on a mountain of stuff.

The trestle-table tremors and the underside groans
Till the table folds and she lands in a heap.
Now she shops out of town and tries to keep
her penchant curbed for bargains on the cheap.

¹ 'Hour 9 asked poets to write a response using at least five of the ten prompt words: beet, jacket, tremor, bayou, elbow, lightbulb, cinnamon, bucket, elk, carport'

Sandra Johnson, Houston, Texas, USA, Hour Twenty-Two

Pizza Musings

Lately, I feel,
all the fighting, unreal,
my toppings should not
cause friendships to stop.

There's pineapple, whew,
causes quite a to-do;
arguments ensue
with spam, they say eww!

But pizza's like people
no two the same, or equal -
toppings they vary
with four cheeses, or nary.
Some people are hot,
peppers sprinkle a lot
and pepperoni, to boot,
keeps a dude at salute.

Some, they are tougher
cheesier, meatier;
thick crust they do have,
like people who're bad.

Sweet ones, they have many
tart apples and berries
with Gouda or cheddar;
these girls make it better.

In the end, they all rock
like different socks;
whatever may thee choose,
just do pizza for you.

Silvester Phua, North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, Hour Five

“House viewing”

“And here, we have the kitchen, fully equipped, and all brand new,”
(says the agent in an unconvincing timbre.)

“Ooh, this is lovely,”
(says mother, ever so polite.)

I leave them discussing the merits of ovens conventional vs. convection.

Down the long narrow corridor I go, exploring the emptiness of each successive room.

A pervasive smell of fresh paint wafts out of the second last room on the left.
So many coats, it begins to overwhelm.
I peer cautiously just outside the threshold.

One chair, simple, wooden, incongruous, sits in the centre.
“How bizarre,”
(thinks I, feeling a tremorous frisson.)

I almost see her now, this tiny child, placidly swinging her legs to and fro.
Looking at me squarely, pleadingly.

“No, I’m sorry. I cannot help you,”
(thinks I, even as I retreat in indecorous haste.)

“Was it occupied?”
(asks mother, on the drive home.)
I nod once, slowly.

“I thought so; it was all just too new. Never mind; we’ll look at another place tomorrow.”
She smiles in my direction.

I look quietly out the window, at everything and everyone.

Even if they don’t see me.

Ellen Solinger Walker, Safe Harbor, Florida, Hour Five

Mystery

in the golden sunset

two roseate spoonbills

silently glide in tandem over my head

against the dying light

their wings are translucent pink agates

jewels of a balanced spirit

here's the mystery—

why was I so blessed

to behold this miracle?

Torri Brown, Saint Louis, Missouri, Hour Twenty-One

The Ville

Running

through my impoverished

historical neighborhood as children during play

transitioned to the battlefield as adults

In the midst of being poor

As kids we never had to look to one another for safety

As adults street corners had an unlimited range that once contained an invisible boundary that you knew you would get into trouble if you crossed

Now we tailor our lives away from the ignited rage of poverty where gunshots keep you running.

Brandee Charters, Dayton, Ohio US, Hour Seventeen

PRISM PRISON

kaleidoscope

Broken Bits

of tiny colors

Getting Dizzy

spinning

For My Pleasure

Zara Ibrahim, Nigeria, Abuja, Hour Twenty-Four

The final hour

The last time I saw my mother smile at me
Was the day she said she couldn't handle the world anymore
She decided to go, be a part of the body that went unseen
I pray for light to escort her to her journey because I don't have any left in this body
Wrapped with grief
I always find hope to lay on my bed every night
Today,
Mother still sing lullaby songs for my broken ears