**A Special Thanks To The Following Contributors:**

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If Love...
by Benjamin Rivera

If love was a crime
I would take life without parole
Locked inside my cell
or permanently in the hole.
If love is blind
then I would rather not see
as long as I know
that you would be there to guide
me.
If love hurts
then let me feel the pain
Let my heart be tortured
until I went insane.
If love was a star
then I would shine super bright
so that you would see me
every single night.
If love was a puzzle
then I would solve it every possible way
by adding new pieces
every single day.
If love expresses feelings
then it would be compassion
but you must put forth an effort
and show it with your actions.

For which we all share the blame
Condemning and forgiving
To feed the frail and dying flame

Is there truth enough in this world
To build a steadfast foundation
That withstands the weight of trust
That sees not race, appearance or station
And that time will not erode, decay, or rust

Beauty and Truth, ever intertwined
Inextricably linked, as body and mind
Where beauty is lacking, truth also is missed
Yet as long as one lives, so both will persist

I know I left the path you chose
and started one of my own,
For every question I assumed I had the answer so I let my curiosity roam.
So here I am broken, bruised, shattered and all alone,
Asking you to please forgive me and welcome me back home.
I hope you hear my prayers tonight and open up your arms,
And give me everlasting love like the day that I was born.
I know right now you’re smiling down proud of what you see,
That’s why I’m asking everyone to say a prayer for me.

Spring Free
Justin Begandy

Prison cell—cold concrete and steel,
Makes time slow; slower than the free
Who watch time fly by—Busy Bee’s.

Sleep late, wake early—
it’s count-time.
  Breakfast for some,
sleep for others.
Others await the call for work,
Some will go to the yard, call-outs
For those with appointments today;
  Everyone’s appointment
is time—
  Monotonous and repeating.
Calendar pages turn; repeat
Another day, a month, a year.
Autumn has come ever slower;
  Soon the fall will end, come winter,
  And time moves a little faster.
I count down the time anxiously
Until I reach the final page;
My calendar’s about to end.

Say a Prayer
by William Nettles

Say a prayer for me tonight I hope that God hears your plea,
And sends down his gift of mercy and shines his light on me.
Ask God to save me from this evil that is the devil,
And keep me from the depth of hell where it’s hot on every level.
I know God will hear my call but I’m afraid to get on my knees,
And bow my head to the mighty Lord and beg him please please please.
It’s been so long since I talked to God I doubt I remember what to say,
With tears in my eyes I fold my hands and to God I begin to pray.

Art by Kelly Frederickson

Linked
T. Williams

Is there sufficient beauty in this world
To ease the pain of living
The end will come on a spring morn’
As my cell fades from my mind—FREE!

Love
by Warren Daniels

Love is something we all try to find
Not knowing others have left it behind
Some will give up others will keep trying
Love is not what you ride in
Neither how much you can spend
But it is something we all need every now and then
Love starts out when you meet a friend
Thank you Prison Express for being mine!

Father’s Cry
by Jason Adkins

A father’s cry
To help his children
Caught like seeds
In whirlwinds twisting
Violent and uplifting
Not caring nor knowing
Where the winds are blowing

Feeling forsaken
My children were taken
To a foreign land
Raised by another hand
Yet fates left unwritten
Meaning they are given
In the light of doom
Still—potential to Bloom.

Feel My Pain
by Benjamin Rivera

Feel my pain
My pain
of cuffs and chains
chains around my waist
Cuffs around my wrist
Poor blood circulation
Hips and fists
can’t feel my fingertips
got no grip
on this trip
for trying to get a grip
Loose lips sink ships
My ship sinks quick
No bartender but,
received a tip
No bills, just dimes
and for the crime
I clock the watch
at 8
My Time

Farewell Summer
by Chad Frank

Geese land
in the prison’s rec. yard; fall breeze whispers,
“Farewell summer, farewell summer”—
too soon!

Limited
by Daniel Peterson

I count my stamps,
I count my books, I check the rules,
I can’t go over the limit!

The guard scans my room numbering, counting
“does he have too much?”
I have to make sure
limited

I know what he’s thinking

I see his eyes dart from the books on my floor
to the stack on my desk limited

‘Damn!’, I think,
I’ve drawn his attention
I’m over my limit and he knows it
Think fast!

“Oh, I was just donating those books on the floor to the library.”
I causally say with a wave.
The guard nods
“Just make you don’t go over the limit”
he seriously advises as he walks away
I need my books
I want to learn
I want to grow

My life is so limited
My time is so limited
bounded, defined, restricted

The light of day is so limited
books are boundless, inestimable, considerable, vast, unlimited

The nature of prison is summed up in one word
limited

The nature of prison is summed up in one word
unlimited

I smile to myself as I nod at the books
on the floor,
as the guard walks
away.

Those are the ones I’ve
already read
I give a soft chuckle
unlimited.

**Time**
by Geneva Jewell Phillips

I don’t have enough left
Yet I find there’s too much
on my hands

I consider
reconsider
sell my soul to the highest
bidder
if it would reconfigure
my future

my present presence
is no present
of time

but a curse
unable to worsen
sealed ad unguilded
this cage
time has wrought
by body – its own
slow prison –
sentenced
to prison
Irony
Behind
Bars

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**I’m losing it!**
by David Corbin

My mom always told me,
That someday in due time,
All the things I was doing,
would make me lose my mind.
Well, I think that time has come,

Things have gotten really
strange.
I don’t feel the way I use to,
Everything is starting to change.
I don’t sleep good these days,
My memories are almost gone.
Darkness brings me peace of
mind,
And I’m starting to enjoy being
alone.
Silence is now a welcome
sound,
And laughter has almost died.
No tears ran down my face,
The last time I cried.
My soft heart has hardened,
From years in this desolate
place.
Maybe if I lose my mind,
These terrible memories will be
erased.
And my past will be forgotten,
The future will stay the same.
It won’t matter as much to me,
If I end up going insane...

**Shoo Fly, Shoo!**
Benjamin Rivera

Shoo fly, shoo!
Before I swat you!
A sway of my hand
was part of my plan
then I got you.

Shoo fly, shoo!
I actually missed.
While buzzing around
your vibrating sound
is getting me pissed.

Shoo fly, shoo!
Just go away.
Spread your wings
go do your thing
and live another day.

Shoo fly, shoo!
I’m trying to stay calm.
You’re bothering me
and with lightning speed
you’re captured inside of my
palm,
Shoo fly, shoo!
I shall set you free.
Cause I know how it feels
to be a fly in a cell
and “time” will shoo fly me free.

Lonely River
by Blair A. Blanchette

In my heart a river flows
Whose waters have been poisoned
By Bitter toxins of broken promises

And dismantled dreams;
Each breathless lie,
prevaricated
With every barren kiss
(screams!),
Hammering against its vibrant,
green banks,
Swelling the thick, slimey-slug
Coating its feral shore;
Staining tomorrow’s smile...
A smile with powerful undercurrent’s
Straining to survive –

Resilient, yet restrained.
Every miles span contains a dam
Resurrected from the remains
Of another snuffed-out flame.
Change becomes a crisis –
Trust, a danger –
Therefore, I only share my water with strangers;
Drifters camping out for the night;
Visitors passing through taking solitary sips;
Vagabonds, as coy and alone as I;
 Forgotten in the twilight
Of yesterday’s moon.
Yet, in that juncture womb,
Where our two mouths merge,
The surging waters of our symbolic seine’s
Overflow their domesticated streams
Escaping, in an ecstatic rush, their embankments
And, momentarily, flow free;

Free from the prisons of the past –
Daring to - once more – froth
and foam blissfully

In my heart there flows a river

Haikus
by Michael Lanning

Clock sits on my shelf
I remove the batteries
Did I just kill time?
-----------------------
A black man chasing me
Banana peel on the ground
gave my shadow the slip

Poetry
by Steven Inman

Poetry is expression of self.
The definition of you.
Your thoughts and feelings.
Your point of view.
A reflection of opinion. Your lies become true.
You can be tickled pink, mad red, or down and blue.
Poetry is an escape to free your emotion.
A way to organize your mind of commotion.
To describe feelings, use words deeper than the ocean.
But, never use words that exploit erosion.
Poetry is real and pure. Poetry is raw.
No photographs. Write about what you saw.

Poetry is the needle in a stack
of hay straw.
Dreams become reality and reality seems surreal.
Don’t just say something – let your heart spill.
And just the spelling of a word expresses how you feel.
Death becomes alive and broken hearts heal.
Poetry is the colorful art of expression.
The release of charity and aggression.
Explain an opinion or make a suggestion.
Poetry is a poetic like engulfed in confession.

My America
by Debbi Jones

An accidental fire burns down a barn,
The neighbors come together bringing
food, lumber, nails and strong backs.
In two days in new barn is up
and ready to house the horses and cows.
The tractor is running from dawn to
dusk plowing the burning field
laying fertilizer, making rich soil
to grow vegetables and feed families.

$5 fills a #20 grocery bag
saddle oxfords and bobby socks
starched and ironed clothing
playing hide and seek
black and white TV
a brown and blue panel station wagon
built to last 14 years
barbeque grills in the park
concerts where joints are passed
around to one and all.

Tattoos and earrings, blue and purple hair,
wearing drops and carrying guns
selling drugs and popping pills
fake passports and ID.

Innocent people
at the wrong place and time
shot down
kids with knives and guns
pregnant at 12 and 13.

In the street life early, leaving a past home of pain and abuse countries at war, a world of unease and uncertainty.

Nothing built to last, everything temporary.

Each generation there is less stability, people seeking happiness in their own way. Love and people’s hearts and acts of kindness stay the same, they’re just harder to see behind the masks created and lost souls.

She sobs, lets her tear ducts flow
Rain plummets the earth below
Now he will never grow old
Never have a hand to hold
Never glance that wondrous

high
In his newborn son’s eye
The same he once possessed
In his mother’s warm caress
She frowns, exhales, glares
Hail blasts the window where
His murderer sits and stares

Alive?
by Damion Jackson

The nauseating buzz of a florescent bulb
Drilling a hole in my frontal lobe

Killing me softly with songs of silence
Boxed in a cell filled with vibes of violence

My friendship bracelet attracts no friends
Only sounds of slithers and dark dead ends

My mind fills up with joyous thoughts
Only to be rudely interrupted by the sound of cops

To hold my son is all I ask
Instead of this torture behind the glass

Brick by brick and day by day
I watch my old self fade away

I only hold on by a thread
Am I still alive or am I dead?

Because if I’m living then I know hell

The fucked thing is – you can’t tell

Love is...
by Kent D. Simon

Love is remembering
Love is patient
Love is blind
Love is compromising
Love is forgiving
Love is happiness
Love is unconditional
Love is a stage
Love is trust
Love is blissful
Love is having no idea
Love is not dying alone
Love is honest
Love is everything
Love is caring
Love is special
Love is not to be played with
Love is 23 criminals knowing what love is to them

Love’s Summer Breeze
by Michael Winkler

Just the other day
I walked quietly
Through the fields
As a summer breeze
Spoke gently
Of love
& I was caught up
In the wondrous unity
Contained within
Beautiful diversity
As each step I took
Reminded me to be grateful
Of the love
Spoken gently
By the summer breeze
That floated beside me
Around me
& through me
As I walked quietly
Through the fields
Just the other day.
Welcome to the Fort
by Huett Johnson

Let me tell you about a place I know
That's filled with broken dreams and lost hope,
A place if visited within your dreams;
Would turn nightmare by thoughts provoke,

A place that was created many years ago
When a father was taken from the only son he knew,
Now he's stuck in memories as time goes on,
Trapped in a world where thoughts never move,

A place you need to see in order to believe,
Filled with desperate cries and dreamy screams,
A city where angles turned dark and cold,
Now demons plundering for the hope of lost souls,

A place where children are stripped from their youth,
Left alone with no direction and confused,
As time ticks forward, away from its past,
They run backwards towards time they never had,

This fortress was built to captivate souls,
Whose burden on society was way overbearing,
Within it are worlds residing in a timeless space,
Which humanity has chose to ignore.

Haikus
by Lou Tompkins

Reading Braille
Your fingertips are like my eyes – they read letters, words, sentences, worlds.

Always Today
What if eternal life is just like today but it lasts forever?

How Much She Means To Me...
by William T. Floyd

How I wish I could send her a dozen roses,
Just so that they could all see...
How beautiful she is both inside and out,
And how beautiful she is to me...
I wish I could give her beautiful diamonds,
Sapphires, emeralds and pearls...
To show her the clarity of undying love
From a heart as big as this world...
I'll give her clouds with silver linings,
A world made of platinum and gold...
A painted sky with comets and rainbows,
With millions of stars to behold...
White sandy beaches down by the ocean,
Where we could walk and hold hands...
We could sit beneath a beautiful moon,
Just so that she'd understand...
How I wish to tenderly kiss her,

And hold her up close to my heart...
Wrapping my arms gently around her,
To insure that we don't drift apart...
Beautiful mercy with sweet surrender,
A gift from the lord up above...
A beautiful angel to call my own,
For me to hold close and to love...
How I wish I could send her a dozen roses,
Just so that they could all see...
How beautiful she is inside and out,
And how beautiful she is to me...

Goodbye and Hello
by T. Williams

I said goodbye to life several years ago. In another handful, I will say goodbye to purgatory and go out in search of whatever is left of that life, and fill in the blanks with who-knows-what.
I knew when I said goodbye that some pieces of that life would be set aside to be picked up again in the not-too-near future, some pieces would be reshaped so as to never again fit into my life’s puzzle, and other would essentially vanish. What I could not know, however, was the level of gut-wrenching pain that would accompany this parting.
This pain would grow into a sentient and sadistic being, ever-present and always ready to give a small jab or, as permitted, to fan glowing coals behind heavy eyes; to eviscerate, stealing strength
from both body and will, breath
from the lungs, and hope from faith.
After nearly 40 years of life, already having endured some of the greatest losses imaginable, I was “reasonably confident” that I knew a thing or two about this life. I could not have been more wrong.
Since that time, things I had thought once unshakable have not only been shaken, but have crumbled to dust. I have witnessed a part of humanity of which I would have preferred to remain ignorant (and, as I am a part of humanity, this includes me). The most surprising thing is that this rewrite of my portion of life’s script took only a few short years. It does not escape my notice that these “reformative” years have coincided with my incarceration. Sometimes I’m not sure whether to be grateful for this fuller understanding of our world, or upset at having decades of experience and understanding polluted by this microcosm of negativity operating under a network web of misinformation and deceit.
One thing I believe I have learned in all of this is that I never truly know anything until I realize I know nothing. At least, I am “reasonably confident” of this.
So for now, I wait. Tomorrow will bring what it will. I look forward to my next goodbye, knowing it will not be my last, and stubbornly hoping it will yet lead to another hello.

It
by Craig J. Tooney
I have no right to be happy, It only gives me pain. I cannot see the sunlight, Its always pouring rain. I try to keep my sanity, It’s a life for the insane. I even prayed to god, Its shown me there’s no such thing. I try to think of family It keeps their words from me. I dream of days of freedom, as it It mocks me in my dreams. I’m convicted by my nature, It feeds upon my blood. I was sentenced by the system, It’s the system where I live. I’ve done my first sentence, It’s taken that and more. I keep my secrets hidden, It will never let me free...

Gray Sublime
by Tony DuPree

My days made Confederate gray, there are enemies to blame, but no use to say. I pray and pray just to hear from family such as cousin Kay. Our story is written like a wartime novel ‘The Mocking jay’. There I see it in the clouds a trace our kindred’s loyal ways. Swept through the wind on southern pines is their voices and mine. Searching and pacing back in time, for a place of rest that is sublime. Feeling and finding a sign of joy and laughter in warm sunshine. Ways with both rhythm and rhyme, spinning and spinning me back through the echoes of my ancient wealth of mind.

Cotton tops with blazing blue eyes filled with honest down home love, sweet as grannies home made pies. I see Granddaddy’s gray whiskers, and hear his words to the wise. “We all must live, love, forgive and die.” Ravens fly under the Owl’s dangerous vine, true to legend short was cut the time. My princess daughter Jennifer Marie DuPree. She is now free on a breeze, sweetly she moves on the fragrance of the evergreen trees. Our beloved ones welcome her to our lords paradise, so to glory is her soul from this old gray male.

The Unseen Hand
by Leonard C. Williams

I once read a poem about a Panther cat held in captivity, like me. This regal and majestic big cat paced in cramped circles, like me. Cramped spaces and pacing over and over being held in By hunters of men I see nothing but endless bars and locks And good people held in many of these blocks My movement in my cell or cage is like a ritual dance my soft strides and glides Are filled with a black prisoner pride Upon deeper observation one would come to realize On display is a mighty will that stands paralyzed While I’m not free to roam the ghetto’s, barrio’s, or my city streets Yet I vow my thoughts, opinions, hopes, and dreams C.D.C. will not defeat

9
They roam the concrete jungles and beyond
Its my faith that is my engine and drives me on
I genuinely once believed I was free to dissent religiously and politically
My mistake back then was just not thinking realistically
Now I’m locked away by a smug class of people, C.D.C. superficially
California department of corrections is not just a set of institutions, it’s also a hell bent state of mind. Lock them up, lock them up, and lock as many of them up as we can, that’s their plan
But not aware are they? Of a much more powerful hand
Any joy or suffering collected from this wrongful captivity or imprisonment they may not understand
Was not just mere chance
But what I believe is an evident plan
For a spiritual dance
And while I’ve been disregarded, tossed about like garbage, and banned
My divine shine and life’s true work is guided all along, by an un-seen hand.

The Door in Cell A-21
by Michael Chris Morales

It was kind of cold, and lonely, in my prison cell that night.
I had a funny feeling, like something wasn’t right.
I tried looking down the hall, to see what I could see:
It was only the shadow of a face looking back at me.
He reminded me of someone, but just who, I couldn’t tell.
I heard him quoting scripture: he knew the bible well.

His still small voice was soothing: and he even called me “son”;
As I tried hard to see his face, over in cell A-21.

I stood there and I listened. He said he had a plan,
A way to escape from prison that will work for any man.
He said, “I know the only way through the only door there is.”
That’s when I told him my name; but he never told me his.
He said, “The door is called Jesus.” Then I sat down on the floor,
And asked if he would tell me more about this Jesus door.
All night we read the bible until he said, “Did you want to pray? Son you can be completely free before the light of day.”

He led me to this Jesus door and now I understand.
I began by reading scripture, and soon was “born again”.
For the first time in my whole life, I did not feel alone.
I felt so free and happy that it felt like going home.
I wanted to tell someone, so when the first guard came,
I told him what had happened but did not know the old man’s name.
The guard said, “Are you crazy? Look, now all the lights are on,
For three days and nights there’s been nobody, in cell A-21.

Jesus Still Weeps
by Jeff Keeran

We’ve all bowed our head in an attempt to ignore the poor strugglin’ in the storm
That we’ve titled life

Scorned, adorned in rags but thankful for clothes though worn and torn
We’ve winked blind eyes to the fact that he lives in the cold and lonely streets
We’ve called him a freak but really we’ve only looked skin deep
We’ve judged him for the bottle he holds yet its manifest his only friend
He hits the bottle in hopes of drownin’ the sorrow
Prayin’ that tomorrow he’ll experience peace again
Shunned in his defeat by the world’s elite
No hand has ever reached except to mistreat the Jesus we cast to the streets

Jesus Weeps

There’s an imprint of Jesus somewhere in our world confined in a pen
The guilty one that we’ve all condemned
We’ve forgotten him now he’s lonely, so afraid and in need of a friend
He faithfully prays everyday and into the night
Please dear lord, let somebody write
Late night regrets perpetuate and keep the prisoner awake
So many nightmares, scares of abuse, abandonment and heartbreak
 We’ve labeled him a menace, declared him a thug
But if we looked through the eyes that see
Then we’d see that it has been Jesus we’ve been hiding our face from

Jesus Weeps
We may not have seen the orphan abandoned by all the
love he never knew
The one who’s been prayin’
“Dear Lord” hopin’ to find love in
me and you
He’s the boy that’s never known
the arms of embrace
He’s never been absorbed in a
hug
He’s never been cradled in the
aura of love
He’s never sensed lips upon his
cheek
Only the impression of tears
week upon week
As he beseeched the only God
he’s ever known
But lately he’s been sensing
that the God of Love has
abandoned him too

Jesus Weeps

The book of God’s love has
somehow been misread
Maybe misplaced, but it’s God’s
love that pours from this pen
When does it end? When will
we obey?
The Hand of Love that we solicit
every day
Why do we take but refuse to
give away
This is the conundrum that my
pen ponders today
We live in a world that worships
ice
We make it rain leavin’ the
homeless cold, but hey, our
necks look nice
We have dough but we break
no bread
So many families go left unread
All in search of fulfillment that’s
only found at the Father’s feet
If we’d just kneel down there
then we would meet
The destitute man that we’ve
cast to the streets

The prisoner we threw away
who’s still prayin’ we’d manifest
in his life today
The orphan still longin’ for a
home
And the widow we left to fend
on her own
Still praying we’d call so she
could just answer her phone

Jesus said that whatever you do
to the least of these you do unto
Me
Now we know why Jesus Still
Weeps

Where I am From
by Bernadette Bradham

I am from closets big and small,
From belts and broken glass.
I am from nightmares that are
way too
real for a child to feel
And many darkened corners
with prayers of
not to be seen or heard
I am from the oak trees that
surround our house,
whose mighty branches held a
battered girl
grown before her time.
I am from broken dolls and
broken beer bottles
From Kish to Howard
And from my immigrant
grandmother’s
courage and my Cherokee
grandmother’s
strength to endure.
From walking everywhere and
many places.
I am from Christmas midnight
services and
a loving God who loves me no
matter what.
From murders and rapists,
And from Adam and Eve who
started it
All.
I am from the moments…

Symphony in Prozac
by Heather Coffey

Petals decorated with the
lavender shade,
A pressed flower alone on a
stage.
Leaves swaying to a light
breeze,
drinking the sun like a
strawberry freeze.

I watch quietly not wanting to
distract,
this exotic bloom performing her
act.
She dances erotically as if for a
lover,
oblivious to me watching from
deep undercover.

I am drawn to her like a moth to
a flame,
wanting to take possession;
staking my claim.
My fingers grasp the stem of my
new friend,
As her sugar plum dance
comes to an end.

Prisoner
by Brandon Pierce

When I think of you,
I remember what I lost that day.
I find myself a prisoner,
spending, life locked away.
When I fell for you,
truly, I fell hard.
Now every door is shot,
and every window barred.
Within the memory of you,
all the pain is the warden.
My heart now guarded,
ever since the end.
Put in solitary,
threw away the key.
Waiting now,
for someone to set me free.
From Father to Son
by Brandon Rushig

Do not fear the grey whisper of the wind
as it prowls within the dry bush and grass.
Or those pale, streaked, savages of lost kin
that glide like ghosts behind the mirrored glass.
Hold steady your heart as it pounds away,
in shadows and moonlight that

And held true to a dream. One day surely!
Do not go quietly from life to dream.
Or accept that it is, not what it seems.

Finding Me For The First Time
by Terrylee Nelson

In the barren wastelands of this mind
Somewhere is something I left behind

Is there anything to quench this thirst?
I went through the bad can it get any worse?
All I see is desolation
All I know is isolation
Each step is more labored than the last
How much time has really past?
This sun over me seems to never go away
 Burning into me
this bitter betray
As my lips crack and fingers start to bleed
All I want is all I will ever need
As my vision dances before me
Embodied apparitions is all that I see
As I collapse and fade away
Only to awaken in better days
As I question as to why I got here
This complacent comfort seems like fear
As I realize the tribulations are weathered and gone
In this peace I gaze upon

A pain birthed in serenity
Filling the no longer empty!

Dark-Thirty (check if this is the title)
by Stephen D. Laud

Who to write to. What to say?
Why?

Bricks, steel, pipes
Exit doors,
And lights bright enough to read by.
Steel boxes of specimens in cotton beds.
Concrete, bricks of floors
Steel table of powder
Toothpaste, deodorant, pictures, soap,
water in a bottle, non-aspirin, chapstick

Pictures-- Lynn, Mom…

Radio-- Sublime in the ears;
Love is, is what I got

Once, long ago, Lynn is standing
next to the singer of this song. A picture
 taken. In a locker box of steel under a
bed of cotton.

Poem (untitled)
by Santiago Duran

I look up to heaven for the first verse to my poetry.
While worms are feeding on apples that grow on trees.
The bad apple has fallen though nobody seems to notice,
When the seeds are planted and up sprouts the newest poet.

I triumph over adversity and understand the very essence of life.

Art by Robert Dennino

cross your path.

Or give up all hope of tomorrow’s day!
And moan, or grope about; but never laugh.
Stand tall like green pines
against the sky
that howls and rumbles with
such sad fury.
Or those two brothers who swore they would fly!
Just like those who lived in complete darkness know the true value of light. And I can't even begin to express to you my truest feelings, Only that at sometimes in my life death becomes appealing. I've looked for my way out all I hit are dead-ends and sand storms.. And friends who've turned foe and dark roads with land thorns. But something is stirring, awakening deep feelings in my heart. While foreign words are dotted on letters when we're apart And it seems that your genuine affections have fostered these feelings that seem brand new With a love that mends hearts and makes life as sweet as you. And it's quite a change from jagged roses that've been frozen by cold emotions. Still they fought to live on even though love came in small portions. And I really appreciate the love that you've given me without conditions. So I thought I'd write you a poem with respect and one mission. To express my gratitude 'cause it's important for me that you know this. Thank you for picking up this bad apple, that no one seems to notice.

**Trapped in the Cage**
by Lawrence Stewart II

Every day it eats away I feel it though I dare not say Inside me a burning fire Fueled by my vengeful desire. This fire, it burns my soul away More and more each passing day My heart, mind, and soul consumed By the flames of wrath and doom. The blaze burns me and knocks me down Pinning my true self to the ground My true self tries to fight But is blinded by the fire's light. This fire inside is my rage I tried to lock it in a cage One day it stole the key Now I'm in the cage where it locked me.

**Silent Nightmare**
by Bradley A. McMinn

Dark eyes of liquid night, Watching you all through the twilight, You feel their gaze and tremble with fright, Begging for the air you know comes with the light, You fear the things hidden within the silent dark, You hope the bleakness doesn't leave its mark, You envision the horrors of an endless hell, Wishing for the down at the toll of the bell, Praying for a guide to come in your time of need,

Your ravaging appetite for hope, a guide would feed, You compel the intolerable darkness to disperse and unbind, Quoting the most comforting bible verses within your mind, You begin to lose your sanity in the deafening silence in your ears, You'd be happy to hear anything for alleviate your fears, You hear a voice from far away, You fear that it might lead you astray, Your feet are stuck and you're gasping for air, You are not alone...someone else is there, You hear your name from a voice that you know, The sound so gentle...like falling snow, You open your eyes to a painful stinging, The light is like the sound of angels singing, The down is here and now you are safe, The next night is looming...it doesn't mind the wait.

*Art by Jimmy Coleman*

**Untitled**
by C'Leo Michael Pavia

I was but a child fighting a war not mine. He was my partner in death, my co-murderer, my associate executioner
in the decadent art of killing; my teacher of debauchery in life and death. He taught me to hold my breath, To aim, To gently squeeze, not to look at the lifeless bodies we daily left in our path.

Remembering Michael, my Vietnam, M.S.M.C.-D.D. partner – may he rest in peace.

**The Tortoise, In the Air**
by Jonathan Holeman

Swimming in the sandy dunes of deserts and dusty dawns
To arise upon the horizon A phantom moon, full, will soon be gone.

Shadows stopping at high noon A tortoise cries inside his shell Waiting for the fire of life
To pass across his hidden room.

Fading warmth, and gusting wind
Push violet hues amongst the clouds
The tortoise pushes out from underneath
A buried tomb of stale air
Into the night, and frozen cold
Of quiet, ice, and solitude.

**Today We Die**
by Robert Richter

They landed out by Allentown out in an open field We’re gonna die right here, today we are not gonna yield We don’t know where they came from and we don’t know why they came We’re gonna stay right and kill them and die just the same.

The Army said they’re coming but they can’t make it today There’s no one else to do the job that’s why we die today My wife and kid are hiding, or they’re running to the west I’ll stay right here and die today doing what I do best. I’ve got a little water, but I don’t have any food

Don’t matter won’t live long enough to do me any good I’ve got six hundred bullets, there’s no way they’re gonna last.

One thing I know is that I’ll die before I let them pass.
I see the one, I see the ten thousand I must kill
I’m gonna die right here today right up here on this hill
I didn’t travel overseas, invade some foreign land
Don’t fight for politicians or for oil out in the sand.
Can almost see my house from here, but I won’t make it back There’s no damn way for anyone to live through this attack
I’ve got three hundred bullets and that will not be enough
When they run out, I’ve got my knife and that’s when it gets rough.

No history will ever be about our doomed last stand
Tomorrow will there even be a single living man?
If anyone survives to find these words I wrote today Remember that we died before we let them pass this way.

**No Regrets**
by Daniel Grunvold

I have no regrets for the pain of life, for it has given me strength. Nor for the sorrow, for it has made me real and helped me to understand myself. Nor for the despair, for I have cast off illusion. I have no regrets for the loneliness, for I have made friends with the night. Nor for the rage of anger, for I have found inner peace. Nor for having made enemies, who taught me what not to be. I have no regrets for the death of loved ones, for they showed me how to live. Nor for rejected love, for I have learned to love myself. Nor for the passage of time, that which has given me my memories. I have no regrets for the shackles of deception, for I have broken through the walls of the prisons of my mind. Nor for the wandering, which has led me home. Nor for the road taken, which has opened my eyes to destiny. I have no regrets, for life is born of struggle, and the will to survive.

**Perversity**
Jacob Blue Baladez

The perversion of my sins, feels the pleasures of the skin… filled with blood, skin of fire… pleasure in pain, tears of desire…
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
By Uhuru B Rowe

It sings because it is trapped in a life of hell, inside a tiny cage, unable to move but a few spaces in one direction or the other.

It sings because it is alone, treated with indifference, held captive in an unnatural habitat against its will.

It sings out of pure desperation, hoping that someone or something will hear its cries and liberate it from its unjust enslavement.

It sings while patiently waiting for its captor to slip up, make a mistake, and leave the cage door ajar…

Them, it will escape, fly speedily away, only briefly looking back to behold the misery and torture of isolation that it was fortunate to leave behind.

It will fly to the land where its ancestors dwelled, and dance in the fields where its distant cousins socialized and sung freedom songs while collectively foraging for food.

But the fear in your eyes reveals one more lie.
Death before dishonor; that’s what the vows allege.
But your vows are worthless; time to uphold your pledge

Traditional Spelling
by Anthony Tinsman

One time
in county jail
an old black man
writing a letter home
sat beside me at the table
he stopped
and shook his head and looked around
then he asked me to spell

T H E

“Well, I believe it’s tee
8che
eee.”
He wrote it down painfully certain
both of us somber
sensing it, waiting for it
then he looked at me again
I joked
this had better be a short fucking letter
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