

Prisoner Express

Theme Anthology: September 2025

Letter from Phoebe

January 2026

Hello friends!

I hope everyone had a lovely holiday season as we enter into the new year! This is Phoebe, once again: a college student and (more importantly *wink*) an editor for this theme anthology!

When I think about the word *danger*, I think of fear and harm and all things “bad.” That is, things like death, pain, and cockroaches. But, danger is also something that reveals strength, truth, and resilience. Our fears can unite us and acts overcoming such feelings often showcase the most incredible feats of humanity. The world is such a broken and dangerous place, but I believe that empathy and kindness can help make it a little safer for all of us.

The picture theme for September showcased a couple in love, and it reminded me of how intertwined these two themes were. Sometimes, loving someone can be dangerous. And in dangerous moments, love is often what sustains us. Both are such primal human emotions, shared among us all.

Thank you to all the writers and readers who continue to contribute to this space with their creativity, humor, thoughtfulness, and authenticity. I hope you guys enjoy this one!

Phoebe W.

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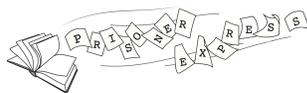


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September Word Theme: “Danger”

Mr. Yuk!, Belinda Ladd

“Danger Will Robinson! Warning!” You Baby Boomers should remember that frequent line from the robot on *Lost in Space* (God, I wished I had my own robot, and that June Lockhart was my mom). When my kids were little we had these sheets of emoticon stickers depicting a green sick-face with its tongue sticking out. These “Mr. Yuk” stickers were to be placed on poisonous household items as a warning to prevent children from ingesting them. Studies had shown that the traditional skull-and-crossbones previously used had become less effective because modern children began associating that symbol with “swashbuckling pirates and buccaneers,” rather than with harmful substances. Ironically, later studies suggested that symbols such as red stop signs, Mr. Yuk, skull-and-crossbones, and others do not effectively keep children away from potential poisons, and may even attract them.

Peril is all around us, and like children, we seem curious and fascinated by it. Think about it. If you saw a barricade with warning signs posted, wouldn’t your first impulse be to check it out? Like when volcanic Mt. Saint Helens in Washington State blew up and decimated Spirit Lake. A lahar flowed down the Cowlitz River Valley and the entire area was closed to outsiders. The town of Cougar, just eleven miles from the crater,

was where the federal authorities established the Red Zone. The mountain continued to have ash eruptions for several months after the initial blast. It was during my visit that one of these eruptions happened. A roiling cloud of ash blocked out the midday sun. My girlfriend and I managed to BS our way past several roadblocks by claiming to have an A-frame cabin just around the bend, until we got to Cougar, where a cop with ash falling on his uniform told us to turn around and get out of there. I found a logging road instead and went around the evacuated town, then continued up to a two-lane highway toward the billowing crater. The only reason we didn't make it was that we were low on fuel and the nearest gas station was back down. I had to go around barricades and look behind me to read "Red Zone... Do Not Enter... Federal Offense..." We were young and naive, and filling our carburetor and lungs with silica ash. Who knows what may have happened if we'd made it to the crater, but the point is that warnings of danger only spurred us on.

Maybe the excitement of danger explains why some are drawn to bad boys. I was that kid that acted like an outlaw because with no dad and a working mom, I could get away with it. You know, the one your parents told you not to associate with. But I never had any shortage of followers or girlfriends. We did stupid, impulsive things and were always on somebody's bad side. We were dangerous because if you hung around with us, you might get a broken bone, get pregnant, or get arrested. At the very least, you'd get a bad reputation.

Now I'm in prison and the surveillance cameras, sensors, armed perimeter patrols, and multiple fences topped with deadly razor wire are in place to protect society from our kind. We are the epitome of danger because it's assumed that if we get out, nobody will be safe from our lawlessness. In most cases, that's an exaggeration, but nobody wants to take the chance. Whenever I go on an armed-guard escorted trip to court for a medical exam, I am paraded in my orange pajamas, wearing flip-flops, long hair in my face because a simple hair tie must be a security threat, and let's not forget the belly chains, handcuffs with lock box and big padlock in the middle, and leg irons. Civilians frown at me, their faces showing fear,

disdain, or interest, but never a compassionate smile. Mothers with youngsters turn their curious heads away and cradle them against their hip, instinctively protecting them from whatever Lifetime Movie Channel scenario they worry about. To them, I am danger personified. Maybe the court should tattoo "Mr. Yuk" on my forehead, and then there will be no doubt.

Oh, the dangers of prison, Michael Medina

Oh, the dangers of prison;
Three minutes or four? I'm torn.
Time elapses and I mourn,
All because I torched my popcorn.
Slamming bones, just passing time.
Friends shouting, calling out "Dime!"
But I missed my points... That's a crime.
Staying busy, it's a game.
Two groups- their times are the same
I have to pick one, what a shame.
Time for a spread, got my bowl.
Too late! The bag has a hole.
Hot water going; it lost its soul.
Next in line, ready to drop
Worst news to hear- "Last Bag Bought"
Coffee! That was what was sought
Oh, the dangers of prison.

Danger, Ryan Keith Taylor

When people think of danger, they imagine something that can cause harm. However, this needs to be dissected. In the world of workplace safety, the term "danger" indicates that it may cause serious injury or death. The term is used only for the highest threats to safety and health, everything else is marked with "attention," "caution," or "warning."

My previous workplace was hell. Afghanistan is a weird place and I spent a total of seventeen months there. Nangarhar Province is home to Jalalabad and the Khyber Pass. Kandahar province is down south, full of dust, and sees the extremes of each side of the thermostat. Helmand province, the original stronghold of the Taliban, always has something going on. Kabul is the Nation's capital and is home to three million people, a thick layer of smog overhead, and some gorgeous palaces.

Nangarhar was my first experience getting shot at and having both rockets and mortars hit within a hundred meters of me. We found IEDs, had plenty of angry shooters to play with, several vehicle bombs, and even some rogue Afghan police that decided to try us.

Kandahar province was unbelievably uncomfortable due to the piercing cold and the unbearable heat. Rockets were occasional, but we had an eighteen-man group launch a complex attack against us. We had vehicles get stuck in firefights, had to conduct rescue operations, and had a few guys make it past the first few meters of Camp Simmon before being cut down.

Helmand province was in a class of its own. We lived out of Lashkar Gah for a couple of weeks. We were plagued by sniper fire until our own sniper popped the guy's head like a can of overheated Spaghetti-Os. We ran village raids throughout the night, lived on a couple of Afghan bases, and put a decent sized dent into the local Taliban population. There is where I nearly lost two fingers, broke a third, crushed my ankle, and continued to fight through it for another two weeks.

Kabul was extraordinarily beautiful and where I got my blast injury. This is where I almost fell through the ceiling of the Darul Aman palace and onto the marble floor 30-40 feet below me. Turns out, it wasn't concrete, it was thin ceramic tile that I was standing on.

After all of the firefights, explosions, accidents, and near catastrophes, I have to say that the feeling of danger is different for me. I've always been able to chalk it up as workplace hazards. I've been in ground combat with Al Qaeda, the Taliban, ISIS-K, locally funded bands of hoodlums, and angry farmers who think it's funny to spray rounds at us and leave. It is only coming to prison that I started to recognize danger. Not danger from other inmates, even in some of the rougher places I've been, but the danger from the people who keep me here.

The only real danger I have been in has been the result of absolutely incompetent and untrained staff. They've gotten me into a pickle on more than a few occasions. In addition to that, there's always the looming feeling of dread that these people can't fill my medications, block my contacts for no reason, cut me off from the rest of the world with no redress, violate my

Constitutional rights, retaliate for my grievance filing, write erroneous disciplinary reports, or any of the other major failures that they can come up with.

It's an ever present feeling of dread and helplessness that affects me far worse than any PTSD. In combat, standing toe to toe against my fellow man, or tossed into a survival situation, I know that I can hold my own. Being at the mercy of vindictive invalids is something that I still have not learned to cope with after eight years. With only about a year left, it's safe to say that my definition of danger is going to change.

Danger for me is going to encompass anything that is going to get me stuck back in here. All other ideas of danger can be handled through skill, competence, preparation, calculated application of violence, and problem solving.

Danger, Reynald Carey

The element of danger is everywhere. Whether people wish to acknowledge it or not is purely up to the individual.

The person who smiles and sells you a coffee & the daily paper could be a serial killer. You could be killed by a distracted driver or be caught in a random shooting due to poor timing & choice of geographical location. You could be robbed & shot due to the mere fact you took a wrong turn, or you appear to have money.

My sister-in-law, Sandy, was senselessly shot & killed during her honeymoon at a Jason Aldean concert in Las Vegas in 2017. I myself was stabbed while enjoying a cigarette in front of a bar, due to mistaken identity. I looked like a guy who had relations with the guy's wife. My best friend Randy was driving home from winning his first Golden Gloves boxing match. He was hit by a log-truck & was ejected from his truck. My uncle Lance was cut in half after he hit a tree. The seat belt that police & DOT demand we all wear ended his life at 37. Danger does not discriminate. I've been in places where it's very, very dangerous to be white, black, or brown... Gang life has danger all through it, both people in & out. If you join a gang, certain people want to kill you. If you elect to stay away from gang life, now you're fair game to everyone. Children being snatched up, drug dealers claiming entire neighborhoods but don't even own a house, countries on edge & ready to

drop nukes. Shootings in schools, malls, and churches... I can't get over just how much danger really is in this world.

Try to be safe, everyone. Even breathing is dangerous right now. Canada is burning down & air quality is poor. 400-plus wildfires is not a fun time. The planet is heating up, Mother Nature is pissed at us. Poison is in everything. PFAs, micro/nanoplastics everywhere... Danger. I'm sure "Normal Civilians" would curl up & cry if they saw or had to go through ¼ of what we convicts, felons, criminals, etc. have, who spent years locked in cages of concrete & steel. It's crazy to think how de-sensitized we become while serving our sentences. When we are standing at the microwave, counting down the seconds to a Ramen, or a cup of coffee. A guy gets stabbed 15 times & we just step around them & go about our day, not giving it a second thought. So, what's more dangerous, the situation with the guy getting stabbed, or the guy who shrugs it off going like nothing ever happened?

Many people don't come to prison dangerous. The system creates dangerous people. I've known people who have come to prison for only 2-3 years for a petty crime, they wind up serving 15 years due to the fact that he wanted to make it out alive. 6 guys with knives jumped him while he was on the phone. He wound up killing 2 of them in defense of his own life. However, because he didn't want to be savagely killed, he's now labeled as a Danger to Society. Now, his children don't know their father.

The world is chock-full of Danger & it's sad because at times perfectly innocent bystanders are caught up in a cycle or are affected by life's many, many forms of Danger.

Danger! Beware of Rotten People, Nkrumah Lumumba Valier

By far, you are the worst of people ever created on earth. Everything bad happens every time you come around.

You are like a virus. Everything you come into contact with, withers away and dies.

The devil would be better company than you. Because he knows he is not wanted around.

Misery follows you. It quickly consumes the room, every time you walk in.

No one invited you here.

No one wants to be around you.

But still you show up.

We can smell you coming a mile away.

Danger!

Beware of Rotten People...

No one likes you.

All you do is hate.

You hurt people with the things you say.

You are rude.

And you can never be trusted.

You selfish bastard! Why do you always mess over so many people?

We should put all of you rotten people on a spaceship. And send you out into space. Believe me, no one would miss you. Because without you in it, the world would be a better place.

Danger!

Beware of rotten people...

Spider-Sense, George Hesse

It's danger, navigating prison strangers, my patience enabled. / But I'm built for this shit, in my mind it echoes so I seek meditation. / False premonitions saying I belong here. / Precarious, pre-cognition. I got enemies, but a chance to make it out of here on my next parole hearing / Tryin' to get this off my chest before they take me, perilous danger / This journey / Risky, my mind floatin' off, lost, am I built for this mentally?? Cracking, a schizophrenic disaster, heavyweight game changer lyrical Hades hard from the beginning / Don't worry only half of dangerous makes sense to me / Starting Armageddon / Spent time in cells repenting / Finished editing then drafted / Injured in prison but can't panic, my leg healed up. / Woke up dreamin' bout late 90's an' my pager goin' off / A chance to make it out? / I write from the heart to keep me grounded / Born and walk in danger. I'm coming.

Feelin' like I'm still stuck in a time rift / Addiction chains on my spine pain echoes. I'm spaced out, delirious / It's like my spider-sense is constantly going off / The only constant is a hero going off / Break-ups, overdoses to alcohol abuse / stomach pumped, my pain production is off the charts / Lost / My danger makes normal living hard from the start / Restart. David, Goliath / Still filling the afterlife with giants, ya / My end game premonition is pain, trouble, danger / harm,

hazard. My physical exertion painful. Got machines hooked to my body / I'm an addict, life in danger, poetry gold. Feelin' weaponless as the crossroads / I'm an addict... spider-sense goin' off.

Danger, Kelly Messenger

You know what, this theme in a way is funny as fuck. I say so, because for some reason this facility puts me out to be so muthafuckin' dangerous, that I am unlawfully and unconstitutionally livin' on death row. At one point all my peers had to lock down every time I went out to shower then walk right back to my one-man cell. Not to brag, but yeah I lost my mind after my mother committed suicide and I went on a rampage fuckin' people up. I sent a couple officers to the hospital. One I hit with a lock in a sock, the other got 16 stitches. I damn near ripped his ear off his face. I hit another one of my peers with another lock in a sock and stabbed one with a light bulb. Then this last incident August 2023, I beat the fuck out of one of my bunkies. She had both her eyes swollen shut. I quickly beat her down, put my foot on her chest and hit her like 8-10 times... yeah, and I felt bad afterward, but I don't feel like it's a reason dirty cops need to dog me so bad. Seem like they tryin' to force my suicide. I keep telling them, it ain't gonna happen. Hell yeah, I cry, but I don't die unless I get killed.

My Dad just died. I literally have nobody. No family support. I'm literally fucked up in the game right now, but I remember one thing my mother always told me, to stay strong and God will bless you in the end. I just sent out my paperwork for this 1983 lawsuit. I'm finally learning you can't just get mad and fuck people up, it only makes shit worse. I gotta fight law with law, it's the only way I win.

Sometimes in this cell, I feel like I'm completely losing my mind, 'specially with all the inhuman treatment and suicides I already see, knowing that they wanted it to be me, and the joy I seen and glee in some of these sexual predators' eyes from an innocent soul being lost. It fucks me up, but I know there's light at the end of the tunnel and I will make it out one day with a big ass bag of money. Knowing this makes me content and makes me smile.

Fascism: A Clear and Present Danger, Logan Diez

Baby Boomers know what fascism is and can recognize the signs of its rise, because our parents talked about fighting it in WWII; and, its details and effects on the world were a central focus in our school history, civics, and political science courses from high school through college. Our children, the "Me Generation," not so much – and by the time the Baby Boomers' grandchildren got to high school, public education had been dumbed down so much by "Free Ride Politics" and "Common Knowledge," dulled by environmental distractions, that those entering adulthood in the 1990s-2000s had little to no real understanding of what fascism actually is or how it generally comes about.

- ❖ Fascism - a system of government characterized by rigid one-party dictatorship, forcible suppression of opposition, private economic enterprise under centralized governmental control, belligerent nationalism, racism, and militarism, etc. [inclusive of religious, cultural and ethnic persecution, oppression and discrimination]. (See Webster's New World College Dictionary, 5th ed. Page 527.)

Hmmm - does that sound at all familiar? Let's look behind the facade of "American Democracy 2025," shall we?

1. "Rigid one-party dictatorship" - there's no disputing one party presently controls both the Senate and House of the U.S. Congress; a 6 - 3 majority in the U.S. Supreme Court; and the presidency. Check Box 1.
2. "Forcible suppression of opposition" - force isn't always physical violence; it can be economic force, or the "force of law" such as created by a mega-billionaire buying elections or Supreme Court rule that heavily supports the one party in charge. Been plenty of both of those since 2020, and we must not forget the weaponization of the Justice Department to oppress disfavored practices and/or

programs, as well as social programs the “opposition” relies on for basic needs. Check Box 2.

3. “Private economic enterprise under centralized government control” – federal commerce and trade regulations have controlled private economic enterprise and restricted when, where, how, and who is permitted to operate a business, do personal sales of homecrafted products, etc. for over a century in America; and, when regulated fairly such is necessary for consumer protection – but when the Federal Government favors one group of business heavily and/or basically destroys consumer protections (such as DOGE/Trump has done), it’s fascism. Check Box 3.
4. “Belligerent nationalism” – anyone who’s been sober, has half a brain, and isn’t in a vegetative coma, is capable of seeing and recognizing belligerent nationalism being clearly and openly practiced under the Trump administration. Most of America’s allies have been alienated; and even our closest neighbor (Canada) has come into confrontational attitude by Trump’s belligerent nationalism (and capitalistic fascist greed – i.e., Mammonism). Check Box 4.
5. “Racism” – reality speaks for itself. Racism as well as classism is steadily increasing in the U.S. as the Republican Extremism and Trump policies blatantly defy court orders, ignore the Constitution, and exercise personal agendas (such as Donald Trump using tariffs to manipulate the stock market to his own profit). Every campaign promise made to minority citizens to get their vote has been broken – and social programs many if not most minorities depended on for basic needs have been gutted or canceled. Check Box 5.
6. “Militarism” – forceful takeover of Greenland? Coercion of Canada to become a 51st U.S. state? Forceful removal of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip so the

Donald Trump development corporation can turn the Gaza Strip into a luxury resort area for the ultra-wealthy? None of these can be achieved without substantial military action – and the fascist in power is ready, willing, and currently able to mobilize the U.S. military at a whim! Check Box 6.

I’ll leave it to the Reader to ask: “Is there a lot of religious, cultural, and ethnic persecution, oppression and discrimination in America now?” Sometimes we have to look outside our own culture, comfort zone, and immediate societal environment to see the larger reality of America’s sociopolitical landscape – it’s not “America the Beautiful” right now. We the People are in the stormy chaos of a Christian Nationalist Fascist Theocracy married to Mammonist Fascism Oligarchal Sovereigns that have been covertly securing positions in our government, courts, and other official positions in states and the nation’s governments. Quietly and slowly killing American democracy’s growth to replace it with fascism.

From “Ryder Bills” and “Closed Doors” Committee meetings, and the ability of officials to designate a document “classified,” to the U.S. Supreme Court’s “Shadow Docket” and unsigned, unexplained *per curiam* decisions – the present government has concealed itself behind an opaque curtain of secrecy . . . hence, UNACCOUNTABILITY (reinforced by the fictional “Sovereign Immunity” the 1890 Hans Supreme Court created between the lines of the Eleventh Amendment, but that is contra to everything the Founders stood for)!

Every child born after 2020 has never seen one truly free America where individual liberty has been honored, and the constitutional rights uplifted by the government – you’ve only seen the growth of fascism!

The Danger of Friends, Jonathan Holeman

Sometimes the most dangerous people for you are those you call your friends. First, even making a friend is troublesome. Then once you have your friend, keeping them a friend is an enormous bother. Finally, the worst part of having friends is choosing between two completely different concepts. The self-sacrifice for their benefit, or letting them go.

Making a friend is such a hassle. You have to be nice and polite, usually. Then you must hear all sorts of ridiculous nonsense facts about all sorts of gibberish they seem to think is just so incredibly important. Even worse is remembering dumb things. Like what music, movies, or other garbage they are interested in. All this while smiling and nodding happily. Then, the horrible parts where you then have to tell them about all the crap you like. As this friendship grows, you would think it would get better. You would be wrong. After all that basic stuff, now your buddy wants to open up, and expects you to do the same. You might learn some hideous no-good frightening details about their marriage, their job, or even worse, their childhood. It all progresses and before you know it, they will be waiting to hear some nasty or dreadful things you've done or gone through. Perhaps it would be best to just make something up. Much easier than actually sharing or trusting someone who may have been lying to you anyway.

Now you probably have made a friend, and this is stupid. Now you'll have to exchange gifts with them, remember birthdays, and spend extra time with them. As if it wasn't bad enough to hear their problems, now it's an endless cycle of them "venting," and you apparently must do the same. Remember, forget a birthday, their dogs' names, what gender their kids are, and you become a bad friend, and might risk losing them. Best to keep track of never keeping track of birthdays, or giving gifts on any holidays. Save money, and you won't have to hear about the delightful gift of an extra toaster or super special coffee pot. If you want junk, purchase it on your own. Also, be honest when they give you a painting that is horrendous.

Once you've placed your trust, you've gotten to know someone well enough to know off the top of your head what is important to them, it

only goes downhill from there. Now you depend on them, and they on you. They are now your friend. The good news is that eventually, once you've been burned enough, you know the truth. True friends might be hard to find, but the fact is friends are dangerous. They will convince you to get involved in all sorts of nonsense. They will borrow your things and destroy them. Friends might even cost you your life! The most important advice you will ever get is this: instead of putting yourself in the position where you'll eventually have to sacrifice anything for anyone, or go through the pain of losing someone, just don't make friends.

Then again, there's loneliness. Having no one to talk to. No one to help. No one to have your back. No one to love. Is having a friend more dangerous? I'll let you know if I ever make one.

Danger, Jon Frey

Danger is the risk or liability of exposure to harm. Danger is all around us. Every living creature encounters some form of danger at every moment of their existence. Danger lurks all about. Benevolent things, such as food can be dangerous if it is not consumed properly (such as danger from choking) or from over-consumption (such as danger from consuming too much water).

World governments exist for the benevolence of society, but can become a danger to the citizenry who put them into power and enable them to pass policies that lead to abuses of power. The benevolent Weimar Republic of Germany became the dangerous Nazi empire. Ordinary policemen and government workers became a danger to law-abiding Germans, and eventually the world. Even today, law enforcement officials and agencies, who are called upon to "serve and protect", can themselves become malefactors, presenting a danger to those they swore to protect.

The majority of my life has been lived as a law abiding citizen. I was Joe-middle class-citizen with a small family, nicely kept house, a modest used car, working an average job, paying taxes and doing what average citizens do.

When the FBI came to my door to execute a search warrant at 6 A.M., they brought a dozen agents clad in riot gear along with a dozen local police, as if they were coming to arrest "El Chapo." Since I was only given 60 seconds to answer the door, the "swat team" felt justified in ramming our modest front door down.

When the "special agents" breached our front door, their first victim whom they trained their machine guns on was our 12-year old daughter, followed by myself and my son. Fortunately my wife was out walking our dog, who would most certainly have been "culled" by these armored officers who would have justified the killing because the dog was dangerous. To protect themselves, these agents cuffed me, and led us outside where we were lined up against the front wall of the house as if we were being prepared for execution.

When the agents finished sweeping our home for danger, we were led back inside at gunpoint, where I was allowed to console my hyperventilating daughter who was overwhelmed by the danger from the armed government agents who terrorized her.

The next danger I faced was interrogation by government agents who misled me into believing that if I talked to them, the danger would pass. Momentarily it did, as I was not arrested that day. That danger came 3 months later when they would again appear at my doorstep at 6 A.M., this time with shackles to take me to a dangerous prison.

In the dangerous prison, I was then faced with the dangers of aggressive prison guards, who were more than happy to forcefully remind me of their power over me. Then there were the dangers from other prisoners. Not falling into prison politics, mouthing-off, stealing or owing a debt are all things that would lead to danger.

For those of us who, for one reason or another, earned the "criminal" label, danger remains everpresent. Violating parole. Failing to register. Being pulled over for speeding. Changes in the law. As President Reagan once quipped, "Government tends not to solve problems, only to re-arrange them."

It is our individual and collective responsibility to avoid danger. That means eating responsibly, maintaining situational awareness at all times, being a responsible citizen, and obeying laws. When we do these things, we can avoid and mitigate most dangers, maintain our health, our freedom and live a life free of danger.

Danger, Jacob Lester

Danger, danger, danger! An internal warning system may sound for various reasons, but do we heed it? Depending upon a variety of issues, symptoms, and situations, we will not properly respond to the internal danger warning. Adrenaline

junkies rush into situations that scream danger, abuse victims often seek out "dangerous" situations due to trauma-influenced reactions, and many mentally ill people suffer from periods of poor judgment where often they cannot hear the danger warning.

What can be done in these situations? For many, figuring out the root cause of their altered response is the start. After taking the time to determine what lies behind the lack, alteration, or inhibition that the person must work through, with, or on the issue in question, which can eventually require utilizing response/behavioral alteration techniques.

Danger, Christopher Cross

Danger is a feast for the senses, a thrill for the mind. All functions on red alert, central nervous system so alive! Must not allow the organism to perish!

Danger comes in many flavors, colors, and shades. Some of us seek it out, while others cannot stand the stress. As for myself, I don't particularly like the thrill. Nor do I really dislike it. Of course I'll do whatever is in my power to keep the body alive. I do engage in risky behavior, so part of me does enjoy it on some level. For instance, I can't fight too well (I usually end up just using a knife) but I love to talk trash. I'm fearless (dumb) so to express the freedom to say whatever the hell I want feels nice.

When you think about it, what is there really to fear? Each one of us were once born, and each of us are destined to die. So why not live without fear and then die without fear? We have so much to gain by staring danger in the face.

Think of how much more confident you could be without, say, the fear of embarrassment. My Guru says, and this from Kashmir Shaivism, "Knowledge of the Self is firm conviction." And by self it means the atman, or soul, which is identified with Brahman, or absolute reality and God.

When you have met the most essential part of your being, you attain fearlessness. You still recognize danger (be it physical, social, what have you), but you learn to flow with it, to dance with it.

So still your mind, spend time in the space between thoughts. Let your thoughts, feelings, images, etc., dissolve into pure consciousness. Visit this inner space regularly. Experience the darshan of your very own Essence, make it a habit, and fear and inhibition shall leave you as well.

Avoiding Worst, D'Andre Morris

Harmful oncoming are undesired in most. Understanding that is confusing on account of how most people react towards danger. Headed towards it. Exposure to eliminating, acceptance of hazardous predicaments, is possible.

Social matters are great influences in unhealthy situations. Repeating healthy responses to yourself over and over will give a better, more self-driven response, under the spur of the moment. Instead of being the cause or being victimized by danger.

There can be unavoidable circumstances involving danger. But the more you stray from danger, the easier it is to overcome.

I don't believe people want bad things to happen. Even though humans seem to mostly speak about, or head towards problems. At a higher percent we move towards destiny.

Positivity outweighs drama. Waking up, brushing teeth, taking a walk, eating, working, showering, phone time, drawing, music, listening. Averagely, positive outweighs negative.

Listen to love and kindness. Being exposed to goodness is possible. We need to say and hear, "you did good," "this is an accomplishment," "today is a good day," "I understand," "I feel good," "I'm here with you," to ease and humble the minds of our brothers and sisters.

Influence is powerful. A social life is bonding. And people's input has a great effect. They can make a situation seem bad with words, of something not so bad at all. We have to depend on strengthening Personal Schema, of goodness, to overcome negative social schema.

Enlighten the good, praise the good, uplift the good. 'Til it's so good it's good.

Overriding bad thoughts with good thoughts will give a life changing effect. Strengthening the mind, sociability and works with self-care. Blocking negativity and bad situations.

Encouraging bad thoughts is training yourself to be that way. Teaching self optimism is better, humbling, and peaceful.

Sometimes a problem can't be avoided. Mindfulness is a great tool to overcome. Making good decisions will distance danger. And destiny is goodness. When you get there, enjoy!

Danger, B. Wallace

This is the philosophy behind danger. It was Memorial Day. Me and my brother were grilling steaks. Then, I saw this sexy girl, that's what you call a very attractive white woman. Those ice blue eyes and pale skin, with dark black hair was a sign of danger. My brother told me, even warned me, don't go over there.

All it took was a week, we were doing things only a married couple should be doing. Bringing kids into the world and everything.

I still remember that special night. Pent down she's on top of me like a lioness who attacks her prey. She tells me if I left her, she was going to kill me.

So I left, and as I scrambled, those danger signs started to appear. I was trapped in a movie called misery ever saw that's me... And let's not forget her two kids. They are the children of the corn... When hashtag me too effect was in, I caught a wave of that.

That sexy girl I mentioned gave me three options: So I tried all three... Poisoned but I still lived. Kill yourself, but the gun keeps jamming. Last but not least, go to prison for a very long time. Indeed, prison is such a dangerous place to be in. Called names, I wore the hashtag me too cloth of shame. Danger is an evil game as evil is spelled live backwards and 'devil' is 'lived' spelled right to left or left to right. 10 years later, is my life still in danger?

Digging Up Bones, Saint Primo

It was a dreary rainy day, sometime last December. I felt deflated from dredging up her once deleted digits and, to my dismay, a dormant disharmony I had dispelled long ago descended upon my displeasure. Drunken, drowsy, dizzy and dopey, I draped myself to the double-edged doorway and looked for a disclaimer on the distant dubious phone. A doolally domino effect from our drawn-out droll duet and I was dancing with delirium again. Did I really dial her digits? On the audible horizon, a delay in delivery of a dialling tone signal allowed a descant sound to dominate my dazing disbelief. Drip drop, tic toc, drip drop, tic toc, deja vu, I've had a few, tic toc, drip drop.

Downhearted and disqualified from de jure deliverance, I tried to decipher the dreadful deception the Devil dangled in front of my demise. Defenceless, I defaulted back to my de facto death declaration and continued demolishing the drawbridge conveying dialogue from my deep-seated dark side to the daily dogmatic daydreams. Deadlocked in divine deliberation with my discernment, I wondered if I had deliberately deprived my department from disappointing the dynamic demons that dwelled within me. This domestic disturbance dividing docile DNA into a distasteful draconian dogfight has been a disservice to the development of my dignity.

It was hard to digest the dualistic details of my dysfunctional demeanor without a driven demand for diplomacy between doubts and dreams, leading them to doublethink their desired direction. Dumbfounded, had I really dialled her digits? I am not a dullard, but the duration of a dulcet dialling tone had taken on a very disturbing drumbeat that duplicated my distraught heartbeat. If only I could have demobilized my dastardly dependencies and demystified the dejection. I knew the dangers of digging for defunct answers but didn't digress the drudgery. Like a downpour of raindrops, dense thoughts dash into the darkness of my dolor. Drip drop, tic toc, did I really dial her digits?

A true love story at one time of a damsel in distress and a dirty diamond in the rough day tripping in decadent deconstructive deeds didn't dawn on me as dalliance. I was in denial of the drastic disappearance of my doxology and subsequent delving into a dystopian dungeon of daddy duties. The desensitized destructive designation I dealt my descendants was anything but derring-do behaviour and the dissension within my dominion distorted dismal differences into deplorable delusions. Were we destined for divorce? Had the dribs and drabs of a dutiful life dried up our dwindling diatomic dubnium devotion?

Both digital and direct discourse became disingenuous, drily and dramatic. My delight had been destroyed.

I needed to detoxify the drivel of my days and download new dauntless datum. If thoughts are like raindrops nourishing both the daisy and the dandelion, how can my divers disunity

discriminate between doubts and dreams? Did I dial her digits? Had my doppelgänger double-crossed me yet again with another dummy run? Would this stag and doe ever duel or dance anew? Out of fear, despair and loneliness, I was detained by the now detestable dialling tone and began to dance with the Devil to the drip drops and tic tocs of my delusions.

Danger, Cesar Hernandez

My best friend wakes me up at dawn. "Let's do something dangerous today." I yawn and say, "So bet one thousand dollars on the roulette table? Drink enough liquor so we black out before noon? Go to Mandalay Bay and swim with the sharks? Hold a lion at MGM Grand?"

She points out my Luxor suite and says, "You can hold a lion at MGM?" I smile and say, "Yes, but they open at noon."

She smirks and responds, "You would really bet one thousand on the roulette table?" I nod, "It's not dangerous if you don't take the risk." "Let's go downstairs," she says.

In the Luxor Casino, we go to the table area. I put one thousand dollars on the roulette table. I can tell that my best friend is holding her breath. Thankfully, the wheel lands on red.

I smile. "Now, we can afford breakfast." She snorts. "Liquor or actual food?" "Both, let's go downstairs to taste and have the buffet along with breakfast martinis."

As we eat, my best friend smiles and says, "So sharks next?" I shake my head. "Mandalay Bay requires scuba certification. Neither one of us is certified." She pouts. "So no lions?" I nod, "Yes, we'll hold lions."

We walk across the street to the MGM Grand. We wander the casino floor until the exhibit opens.

We get in line and pay two hundred fifty dollars for a picture with three lion cubs. We each hold one. They are solid. You can feel that in a short few weeks, they will grow to be powerful and dangerous.

I ask - "Have we had enough danger today?" She nods. "Let's go to Mirage and hang out poolside at Bare." I ask her - "Are you going topless?" She smiles. "I don't like tan lines."

Danger, Bert Zamora

DANGER! That is quite the word isn't it. When I hear the word only one thing comes to my mind. Danger Will Robinson danger danger! A seemingly harmless robot protecting his favorite person.

Danger also makes me think of my seven kids. Trust me seven kids can get into a lot of danger.

I sometimes wished there was a robot to stand behind them and yell at them DANGER DANGER! But no robot, just an overly concerned parent. Danger is always there and danger is always around.

All we can do as a parent is to give our kids as much of our knowledge and experience to avoid as much danger as possible. We cannot be there every moment of every day but we can be that voice in the back of their heads telling them DANGER DANGER!

Real or Imagined, Jeff Hovatter

Danger, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. It is as cultural as diet, and as individual as perception. Danger is perceived innately thanks to evolution, or learned by experience and being taught. It can be imagined.

Something that poses risk of harm, especially physical harm, is dangerous; but harm or damage comes in many forms that don't do visible harm, as well. Danger is ubiquitous, as obvious as a gun pointed at your face, as subtle as an enigmatic smile, and as deceptive as a greedy woman.

Danger abounds, and the more of its forms you learn to recognize the longer you are likely to live.

Danger and courage go hand-in-hand. Like many things, a tolerance to it can be acquired and fear of it can be controlled, to give you an appearance of bravery or courage. The same appearance can be a failure to recognize danger in the form encountered.

Some species of flora or fauna present bright colors to attract possible victims. Spiders and so-called poison dart frogs come to mind. I personally lived in Australia, and worked there, as well as in various island nations around south Asia and the Pacific. My method, rather than trying to learn the various spiders and snakes, was to consider them all to be deadly. I avoided them, but

in a matter-of-fact way, sort of how you stand calmly as a car passes within a couple of feet. When a coworker refused to pull cable through a small manhole junction because a Redback spider was in it, I simply focused on the work. I felt no fear. Foolhardy I guess. Though I knew intellectually that the spider was dangerous, the alarm of imminent peril didn't come. I know of the primal fear that stepping on an unseen snake causes, but don't panic as I take a known risk, in most cases. Whether it's courage or stupidity, it looks the same.

Danger, whether real or imagined, creates the same physiological response. Prison is rife with danger, which has the effect of both desensitizing you to violence, and keeping you in a state of heightened vigilance. Being hypervigilant evolved to protect you from danger. The "fight or flight" response is intended for short periods of extreme danger, but in prison it is a state of being, even at a "lower" level. It causes, over time, physical susceptibility to many diseases that we in the U.S. associate with age. Like hypertension, heart disease, and others, we lifers see it all. As bad, or perhaps worse, is the psychological toll. PTSD is common.

A different danger that prison presents us with is the quality of healthcare. It is perpetrated on prisoners by practitioners who are apathetic and incompetent, or even malicious.

We each choose specific dangers to face, or avoid, on a daily and lifelong basis. Likely a moment to moment basis. Until we find ourselves incarcerated, old, ill, and praying for relief, with no option to withdraw.

Then there are dangers on a planetary scale. Such as the power of nuclear weapons with the capability to destroy our world in a conflagration begun by a single bomb, that leads to panicked retaliation and spread of zero-sum conflict, political instability, a result of complacent disregard of who is handed control of bomb-holding nations. Or worse, who seizes control, by nefarious means or legal.

Also, on my radar is the destabilization due to climate change. Slower, perhaps unstoppable, it contributes to political unrest due to disruption of needed resources. Ignoring or denying it is exacerbating it. Even if it can't be beat, fighting to resist it, rather than each other, seems wiser.

Danger is real and always, no matter your perception.

Danger, Trevor Lang

As with many of these themes, I find one I like, then I just push the word or picture around in my head until it invokes some feeling or memory profound enough to write about. "Danger" reminds me of something specific involving my younger brother when I was but twelve years old, and he seven or so.

My father owned—and still owns—guns. He was very careful to give the whole family periodic reminders on the dangers of firearms, and was adamant that we, especially us kids, never touch his weapons for any reason whatsoever, unless of course he gave us his own permission and was there to closely supervise us. These rules were important because his work required guns; indeed they were the tools of his trade. So though he was not careless with them, they were always around us. And we grew used to them. For better, or, in the case of this story, for worse.

Now, I should point out for background that my brother and I were already gun fanatics. We grew up with fake cowboy six-shooters, Nerf rifles, airsoft guns, pop guns, and any other form of safe gun we could get our parents to buy us. (They drew the line at BB. Too afraid we'd try to murder each other.) We spent hours daily on games like Call of Duty 2, True Crime: Streets of LA, and Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater. I knew way more about small arms than any twelve-year-old had business knowing. I'd like to think I knew enough to differentiate the games and toys from reality. To know that the real thing was not to be played with. If not for the danger of the weapon itself, than at least for fear of my father's wrath. I steered clear of his weapons.

I'll never fully grasp what possessed my brother to do this, but one day he made a big mistake.

I can't recall exactly why, but my father had laid his Glock 23 on the kitchen's bar counter in the apartment we were living in. He did this now and then and we were all used to it. I guess he trusted us all not to do anything careless. To his credit, my brother and I were pretty responsible. There were no small children in the home, and the gun was usually in a holster that made it impossible to fire.

I was hanging out by the counter, my brother on the other side of it when he suddenly

for no apparent reason, picked up the Glock, released it from its safety holster, and began inspecting it like it was one of his toys. He nonchalantly turned it this way and that... then he pointed it towards his own face and glanced down the barrel. My father materialized from thin air, I swear to God. One blink he was not there, the next, he was on my brother, wrestling him to the floor as he pried the handgun from his grasp. This whole scene transpired in a matter of maybe five seconds, tops. I didn't even have time to register what my brother did, let alone why my dad tackled him, til afterwards!

Death may be a quick, wily son-of-a-gun (pun intended), but my dad was half a step quicker that day.

When asked what my brother was thinking, teary-eyed, he responded that he didn't know. He wasn't thinking at all. You would think that being so used to guns would make us more sensible to their dangers but in the case of my brother, it had the opposite effect. It lulled him into a false sense of security. They were a game to him until that day.

All I can think of is the example of a baby burning his hand on a stove. I'm glad my brother learned his lesson that day, but it's terrifying to think that the burnt hand could've just as easily been a .45 to the skull. Whose lesson would it have been then...?

Something is Amiss, Rolf Rathmann

If something is amiss with my car's engine, a warning light illuminates; on the airplane — unexpected turbulence or a storm up ahead, the seatbelt sign chimes on; when a tornado touches down, in theory, a working siren blares. Even my heart, it will tighten and my left arm will go numb — impending heart attack, or so I'm told. All of which are warnings of danger. DANGER. ALERT. TILT. TILT. TILT.

Wouldn't it be great, though, if a warning light occurred for impending heartbreak. Imagine it: "WARNING, BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. EMOTIONALLY UNAVAILABLE. BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. WILL CHEAT ON YOU EVERY CHANCE HE GETS. APPROACH. AS IF ON EGGHELLS... BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. PRONE TO OUTBURSTS. BEEP. BEEP. BEEP."

Inwardly, I'm laughing. I don't even want to ponder what my own light would have read!

But what about emotional danger? When I'm headed down that slippery slope toward a relapse?

By coincidence, (of which, there really are none, but), I was sharing in a recent group about my addiction and the warnings I, and perhaps others, can be on the lookout for.

For starters, I'll clarify: I'm an addict of more — you have it, I want more of whatever you have — money, love, drugs, prestige, power, alcohol, sex, brokenness. One tell-tale sign of danger is workaholism. That doesn't mean I shouldn't strive to do and be my best in a professional setting, but when I'm failing at a healthy lifestyle balance, it's a clue that I may be burying feelings.

Boredom is another danger zone. For me, up until recently, I've not viewed "being bored" as a feeling. The adage "idle hands are the devil's workshop" is never more true. When I'm bored, I'm uncomfortable. I must stay busy — go, go, go — and, if that means getting on Grindr, so be it.

By the same token, in prison I've done my best to stay busy. It's how I've successfully managed my time. However, it was during my recent drug treatment that I've taken a closer look (maybe for the first time in my life) at lifestyle balance.

I've rounded out my days to navigate being of service to others, religious studies, yoga/workouts, movies/games on my tablet, my job at UNICOR; I now relish a simple, spur-of-the-moment decision to walk the track. I take in the pleasure of feeling my face smile as I hear the squeak of the compound's prairie dogs, or watching the bright yellow goslings — waddling tennis balls — grow into full fledged geese, or admire the whisper of clouds roll across the surrounding mountain ranges.

I never again want to enter a danger zone. Taking it day-by-day, I successfully avoid my life-long addiction to chaos.

Forever My Child, Brix Capone

It was 2020 when I called to talk to my kids and Chasity, my kid's mother, said "Hold on. I need to tell you something about Aubrey first but you're not going to like it." I waited nervously till she spoke again. "Aubrey doesn't want to be called Aubrey anymore."

"Okay. The fuck's that mean?"

"She is no longer a she. She says she's a boy named Michael."

At first I remained quiet, unsure what to say. I think I managed to say "oh" as I thought about what I just heard, then Chasity asked "are you okay?"

"Yes, just thinking." I wasn't mad that my baby was going through a change. I was scared because being in prison, I see how these people "get down" on gays and trans people and I didn't want my baby to have to deal with all the bullshit that comes from people who don't want to understand. My kid's mother thought I wasn't going to take it well because I was a gang member and anyone who is a member knows "you can't associate with the "Alphabet gang" (LGBTQ+) because "it's a bad look." But fuck all that! That's my first born baby! So for my child I started talking more to the "Alphabet gang" to try to understand my baby more. I even got myself placed into the LGBTQ+ group.

"Are you sure this is what you want? Because people will talk about you being in this group" the MHP asked.

"Yes, I don't care what people say! It's for my baby!" Of course there were people talking shit. But I didn't care! For the ones who were polite and asked "are you gay?" I'd politely tell them "no" and explain about my child and as for the ignorant people who would call me a "faggot" for being in the group and associating with the "Alphabet gang" instead of breaking their faces like I wanted to I could very calmly ask "what if I am a faggot? What are you going to do about it? Are you going to change me?" They never know what to do when I do that. My kid has a temper like me so I'm afraid my baby will hurt someone or vice versa and then I'll have to get involved.

I remember talking to my baby, "can't you just be a girl who dates girls?"

"Ew father, that's gross!" which at first baffled me and we moved on.

"Look kid, I can't call you Michael!"

"Why?"

"'Cause one, that's your Uncle Monkey's name [my little brother who was killed by Dallas Police in 2014] and two, if you change your name to Michael then you're ruining my name theme for my children." (Both my kids are AMG.)

"Well daddy, you and mommy can still call me Aubrey."

I laughed, "Well gee, thanks for giving me permission to call you the name I gave you." The kid and I workshopped a few names and landed on Alixandyr or "Alix" and Alix would keep the middle name "mae" for Chastity.

I'm a big supporter of the "Alphabet gang." My family is full of LGBTQ but my child is the first trans in our family that we know of. My older brother is gay and I saw the shit he dealt with so that adds on to my fear for Alix. I know the world is more accepting these days but there's still some people who aren't and they concern me when it comes to my kid. The same year, I was stabbed in my right rib because I couldn't stab a gay guy around Diamond to prove that I'm not gay. After I was stabbed, I declared that that was my "out" from the gang. I was stabbed with a bed spring all because of my choice to understand the alphabet gang for my child. The scar on my right side is a constant reminder of the danger the alphabet gang may face and of my decision to back them. A decision I do NOT regret, I have met some real good friends! Can't no one ever tell me I'm not an ally of LGBTQ+ members that's for damn sure!

Do you know what creates hate? Ignorance creates hate. Being uneducated about a thing causes one to hate. It is easier for people not to understand than it is to try to understand and people often choose the easier route which is ignorance. One man told me I should be ashamed of my baby and disown her like he did his daughter. "Fuck that! Alix is forever my child! You should be ashamed of yourself!"

"You're right!"

We can get rid of hate if we take the time to learn and tolerate one another.

Watch Out!!!, Marino K Leyba

Danger!!! Watch out!!! Something is coming... Could it be the end of the world? What is about to happen? Could it be World War III? Let's see! I look to the clouds! I look to the sky! Does our redemption draw nigh? I hear rumors and rumors of war, I can not look up at the night sky, I can not see the stars. I'm surrounded by nothing but bars. Danger!!! Watch out!!! I'm afraid to watch the news because they don't know what they are talking about. Everything is a mess, I'm trying to see the good, but we are no longer blessed. People's hearts have turned cold, we used to care, yet now we are too old. Danger all around, danger when I am lost, and danger when I am found, evil abounds. Do you hear the sounds? The trumpet blasts, the holding fast? Can we say a prayer? Can we last?

I hear the wicked wind blow, the things in the future are unknown, yet it is all falling, I cry out!!! Danger!!! We are at the ledge! Danger!!! We are at the end! I can't pretend that would be a lie, danger before our last good bye. Something is coming. What could it be? Danger!!! Watch out for that tree!!!

Danger, Nicholas Wilborn

As I sit here in the most conservative, rogue, renegade state in the United States, I wonder about the direction our country is headed. With the election of Donald J. Trump as our president, I watch every day as he pushes Congress and the courts around. I'm amazed at how everyone seems to line up and do his bidding.

All I can think of is the robot from "Lost in Space" screaming "Danger, Will Robinson, Danger!" But no one seems to heed the warning. I sit in the day room and watch as my fellow prisoners consume 6 to 8 hours of "Fox News" everyday, enthralled and enraptured by this man. And I think, where am I? Am I the only one who's seeing this? How do they not see the danger in this? But no, they love it. They love him. Donald J. Trump is their savior.

Every time I hear him speak I think "Oh no." Every time he oversteps his authority and there are no checks in place to stop him I think "WTF?"

I'm no scholar or history major, but all these things I'm seeing remind me of Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler. Here's a man who made an entire group of people a national pariah, an enemy of the people. Government raids are used to round them all up and place them in concentration camps until he can figure out what to do with them. Then he's surrounded himself with cronies and yes men who further encourage and even suggest further abuses of power. And it all culminates in unlimited, unopposed, unchecked power. The police are nationalized and troops are walking the streets armed to the teeth ready to put down any dissent.

These are dangerous times. America's in danger.

Danger, Duane McEwan

My whole life, danger has been felt! Mom was killed by her boyfriend when I was only 9. My dad didn't want me and he wanted my big sister in ways that he couldn't have her. So, she went to Brooklyn and I went to DSS w/ this paper called a PINS. Next was a foster home where danger was in the sick man paid to care for us. After I heard him do sick things to the little girl there, I stabbed him and ended that danger for us! Yet, DSS brought even more new danger that I'd not known as a child no one wanted! DANGER!

After years of that danger, I came home, met a girl, had 3 perfect kids and next...more danger! The doctor missed an upper respiratory infection in our 41-day-old son Danny...and we took him into the office twice. His lungs filled to the point he had blood pour from his nose and mouth - losing oxygen to his brain for a few minutes long enough to make it forget how to run his organs. DANGER! In NICU for a week he shut down one organ at a time as we refused to "pull a plug." I BROKE!

After he died, I just never went home one night — till I awoke, half dead off 5 diff. drugs, & chained to a hospital bed & more cops than nurses around me. DANGER...

As I fought those charges, I'd done some gun crimes, put a few people in trunks and I broke into a seized impound lot to take back evidence from my car. My best friend A.B. was killed by the US Marshals serving a NYS parole warrant in Pitt, MA and he jumped out shooting -

to avoid the danger of life in a Max prison — he chose 40 bullets?! DANGER...

I did 10 years. Came home. Got married again to a woman who only loved me when I could get her high or had G's to steal from me & my Dad ate his gun by this time.

His peace for the danger he had created in his children's lives.

I ended up coming back to DANGER! Got popped w/ a lot of hard drugs — 4 B-1 felonies. Lost my Armada and 12 grand. Next I drove away from the Trooper beating the shit out of me yet I kinda, umm... drove away w/ the cop? So back to Danger and max prison for another 12 year sentence?!

It's been DANGER — the C.O.'s killing us — me w/ 4 or 5 A.O.S. (assault on staff) SHU trips — I live in DANGER. My second wife left me, so now I live in a world where you need help to survive — w/ no help given! It's dangerous just to earn food or get away from the C.O.'s trying to kill me.

In a year, I'll get a chance to walk free again. Will I still live in DANGER? Or will freedom be found?

Deliver Me From Evil (Destruction), K. Daniel Okken

Danger; it is but another consequence of fallen man. It is, as it has always been, but a result of mankind's choices, of disobedience to the laws of God and rebellion against his nature.

Before the fall, all of nature was in harmony with humanity. The woman from Niger could have ridden on the back of a tiger, and come back without being inside the animal. In the biblical scriptures, it is prophesied of a time in the future, after the destruction of the wicked from the earth; a time when Jesus Christ reigns supreme over the whole world; and humans and animals will once again live in harmony: (Isa. 11:6-9). "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat [grass] like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp (cobra), and the

weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, even as the waters cover the sea."

Jesus told us to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven... And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We get ourselves in danger when we do not follow Jesus Christ. Yes, there are wicked and evil persons all around us every day, both here in prison and in the free world. And in truth any one of us at any given time can fall victim to the debauchery and wickedness that surrounds us. This is because everyone is subject to the nature of the fallen world.

In the past, by my choices, I willingly put myself in dangerous places or situations. I am here in prison because of those choices. So are you. But I have found God to be faithful to his word when it says, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." (Ps. 34:7,6)

The problem is, that there are way too many of us who are addicted to the chaos; we engender it, we revel in it, we create it. Why else is there all the arguing over which team is better than another. Why else is there rioting, arguing, and fighting in the barracks over politics, religion and race. Only because one person (or both) wants to force others to believe their opinions. What is the old saying? "Force me to believe against my will, I'll be of the same opinion still." Or, as my uncle once said as a child when his mother made him go to bed; "I may be laying down, but inside I'm still standing up."

If one cannot convince someone to believe by reasonable debate of the fact then there is no further need for discussion; you only leave yourself open to danger. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, that ye may be the children of your Father in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." (Mt. 5:44-45)

Danger, Charles Whitfield

It's uncanny how we as humans, though we are fragile, have developed uncanny senses of danger whenever it nears us.

I remember back on a clear, warm, summer day in June, 1979 I was out in my parents' front yard cutting the lawn... when I sensed something wasn't right. Later on that day became another Arkansas scorcher: hot, very humid. But that afternoon, clouds started forming and then the storms came.

I was in our family's kitchen making myself a Dagwood burger (two patties, topped with two strips of bacon, two slices of cheese, toasted bun covered in mayo) when I heard it coming.

This was like a train running on world-sized steroids. I looked out of the window. A huge tornado that was only several blocks away. As I yelled to the rest of the family what was going on, I was opening up every window in the house to lessen the risk of it (along with us) being blown up due to decreased air pressure.

We all survived that day, but fate loves playing tricks on us. Twelve years later in April, 1982, while I was running to a grocery store in a thunderstorm, the rain was coming down so hard I heard that distinctive super train roar again. I looked towards a nearby highway and saw power lines dropping, debris and cars tumbling around. Another twister. Right. In. Front. Of. Myself.

I rushed into the store and alerted everyone as to what was going on and some went outside to look at one of the most powerful forces in nature. But unfortunately, one person was killed when he was struck by a power line.

Every time whenever we think about our lives, we should remember how fragile our lives are whenever danger, in any form, pops up. And when that happens, we must be brave. Our fears are conquered when we don't feel fear when danger happens.

Danger, Terance DeJuan Wilson

But it was then that I had an epiphany, that I was destroying something so beautiful. A boy's discovery of his own limitations. Something that I would forever admire. The girl had the inkling that she was going places. I saw what she wanted me to see. She was royalty, wealth and prestige. She exuded it. (Looking back she might have been ordinary, but I saw what she wanted me to believe. The evolution of the perfect rose.

At once war and leisure, an art as ancient as love itself. I studied her with something akin to a fascination. She saw things that no one else noticed, and her eyes reflected the Truth of what she sees. She drew me extremely close. So close as naturally as possible. Whispering something into my ear-"Okay, now pretend that you are a woman while you watch." It was something preposterous that she had asked me to do.

How much of life had I been misinterpreting? We were receding into the background, and I thought I saw it. A land of magic. So loud it caught my attention. He was a black knight guarding the virtue of a proper lady, who was always dancing along the edges of a reflection, floating across the edges of nonexistence, dying for authenticity. The beautiful rose whose very intrigue lies in her ephemerality. To capture her for even a moment without cultivating this consciousness men would not submit to the truce, that one day the roses will become our daughters, torn and bleeding from the wounds of thorns and briar. Then men will rue the day when the rose's desire for power becomes a predatory practice of her own ambition. When she touts her beauty like an arrow in the hand of a warrior, when another man's eyes become her throne, when she becomes dangerous.

The Emperor's Bodyguard(s), Anonymous

On Saturday the 14th of June, 2025, a Minnesota state legislator and her husband were assassinated in their home. This happened on the same day millions took part in a "No Kings" protest while the king was celebrating his birthday with a military parade. Was this convergence of assassination, protests and

parades all on the same day just a coincidence, the assassination a "random" tragedy?

The shooter – disguised as a cop – almost kills a state senator and his wife in their home, tries but misses two other targets, going on to slay the state's leading progressive Democrat leader (an enemy of the King). His list of targets said to number fifty or more.

In any other world this would have filled local and national news for many days, today it's just a blip in the endless wave of chaos. We make a mental note, or not, and move on. But if all politics is ultimately local and the leader of a state legislature is assassinated and many others targeted, maybe it's worth a better look at this guy? Just some random nutcase? What he named his security company (an LLC in his wife's name) might be a clue.

Familiar with the Praetorian Guard? Webster's calls it the emperor's bodyguard. Unofficially, they were more like the emperor's good squad. Hmm... Praetorian Guard. Dressed as a cop. This was a message not just to Minnesota legislators but every single elected Democrat in the country. And to any of those across the aisle who might consider defying their king. It could have been them. They could be next. Yes, this particular nut is locked up (assuming he doesn't end up with a presidential pardon. If they push federal charges). You don't have to be into conspiracy theories to appreciate the potential danger that could come in the form of like-minded people.

We live in a polarized nation full of partisans, shaped, turbocharged, and aimed at potential targets through social media by powerful influencers, skilled rhetoricians, including the king himself. There are plenty of people on the edge. Unstable. It's not hard to imagine them moving from tough talk online to violence IRL. Potential copycats certainly have one hell of a blueprint for future assassinations. Throw enough rhetorical handfuls of live ammunition in the air and sooner or later a few are going to land and just go off. They don't all have to go off. It only takes one. After one of the king's bodyguards dressed as a cop slays an enemy of the king – on "No Kings" day, a day where people across the nation dared to stand up to the king, sending pizzas to federal judges as an intimidation tactic almost seems quaint. Yet

there's one person who could still easily turn down the heat, even now. But why would he? If everyone is sufficiently scared, afraid to speak up, he's free to do whatever he wants. The world continues to turn.

Yesterday fighting a deadly wildfire in Idaho took on a whole new level of danger. Sniper fire. What kind of effect will that have on firefighters nationwide? Call it our new norm. A political climate that says violence equals strength. A first resort rather than last. Or call it what it is. Terrorism.

As I write these words the U.S. Senate is trying to pass a "Big beautiful bill" to please their king. Is there a guy out there watching these senators, a gun and a policeman uniform in the trunk of his cop-like car? Something we may not think much about, but I bet it's on every one of their minds at this very moment...

Yeah, it's messed up, but why do I care? I'm serving two life sentences each with a 30-year minimum. Here's why. The woman assassinated was the lead Democrat in a split House. 67-67. There are - or were - serious sentencing reforms in the works in the state legislature. (Even if I don't qualify, yet TBD, the new legislation could prove a godsend for some of my dearest friends.) Another Democrat will fill her house seat and leadership position. But how would you feel? How do you not question everything you do, wondering if by taking a vote or passing a law might not only get you killed but your loved ones also. How does that not weigh heavily on everything you say and do? Maybe stop you from pushing a little harder to make the tough changes, promises, come true. That's the danger.

My Brush With Danger, Gary Farlow

At 66, I've learned that danger comes in many forms and is usually sudden and thus unforeseen.

In 1987 I was privileged to journey to the Republic of South Africa. I had viewed the many news reports of violence and the rioting to bring down the system of apartheid. I had watched in horror from the comfort and safety of my home as gasoline-filled tires were placed around black South Africans by their fellow black South

Africans and set afire in the torture called "necklace."

So after landing at Jan Smuts airport in Johannesburg (now renamed Oliver Tambo airport), and touring many places, I requested a visit to SOWETO - an acronym for South West Township. A suburb of Jo'burg home to only blacks.

As I entered SOWETO I was immediately struck by the obvious disparity among those living there. One could see modern, brick ranch style homes, well-tended yards, even pools with a BMW in the driveway. Just blocks away you would see tin and cardboard shanties with no electricity or plumbing.

Stopping at a small but well-stocked grocery store, the "pop-pop" of gunfire could be heard nearby. I was accompanied by a guide (white), and a South African policeman (black) - not specifically for safety but more for convenience. As the gunfire repeated, I was urged into our van and we set off. I had been scheduled to visit a primary school in SOWETO to distribute Hershey bars and American flag lapel pins. Rounding a corner we were met with a sight I shall never forget. School books, bags, and papers lay scattered. Several small limp bodies, clad in uniforms of the school, lay motionless, many with growing pools of blood.

We could see the rapidly retreating backs of the armed assailants as they ran down a street. Sirens wailed amidst the moans of the dying and screams of the terror-stricken. Scrawled on the school wall in red (blood?) was the legend - "Long Live The ANC! By The Spear We Win!"

Our brief stop at the little grocery had delayed the arrival to the school by just moments. Yet, it was sufficient enough to prevent our being at the site when the massacre of innocent children had occurred all in the name of revolution.

Years have passed and change came to that beautiful nation. Fortunately, it was cooler heads that prevailed and peaceful, nonviolent, reconciliation replaced the armed conflict so prevalent in many places. It is just regrettable that it came too late for the innocents of SOWETO that pleasantly cool April morning in 1987.

Facing Danger, Howard B. Brown

Television shows have portrayed Psychological Testing by a word test. A psychiatrist gives a word and the subject is supposed to reply with their first response. It makes me think of an episode of "Stargate SG-1." Vala is an alien and has to undergo Psychological Testing to get approved for being on the SG-1 team. She gives herself a crash course on such testing. She gives replies that are quite funny.

In the spirit of first response, "Danger" gave me "Danger Will Robinson!" The robot's arms start waving, because Will was facing danger. I love "Lost in Space" but it's past my bedtime. I'd be facing danger of getting sick staying up to watch it.

After that, while working in the kitchen the brain gave thought on what to write. In childhood, kids tend to enjoy facing danger. Haven't we all taken a spill off a skateboard or bicycle? We dry our tears and keep going.

In prison we can be facing danger from what a prisoner or officer may do. There can be a beat down around the corner.

On some walls in the kitchen there are yellow warning signs. A black stick figure depicts slipping and falling. It says "slippery when wet!" Good advice that we are facing danger.

I had a six-inch pizza in the warmer. A treat to say the least. I finished cleaning the work area. I like to keep it clean. I noticed in the pots & pans area the floor was dirty. It's an area where garbage gets dumped into buckets. The OCD traits in me get me mopping. I dumped a cup of soap on the floor to scrub away. It got clean and slippery.

The last thing I do is change solutions in the cleaning buckets. I'm thinking "Pizza! Pizza!" rushing on that wet floor. Zoom! Crash! I fell back doing a Hollywood Stutman curved shoulder thing. Didn't bang my head but split my left elbow open. Needed three stitches. Never did eat my pizza. Fortunately I took myself off blood thinners so I didn't bleed all over. An Eliquis commercial

warned of numbness. My calves got numb. I'll risk facing the danger of heart attack or stroke rather than take it.

Closing with Kelly Clarkson singing "Because of You." She sings of facing danger growing up.

Facing danger can come unexpectedly. Twice while my elbow was bandaged I fell out of bed. Crash that concrete hurt. Landed on my left elbow and hip. I said sotto voce "I've fallen and can't get up."

Danger, Karla Wooten

Mama reacted with anger when I would go visit my cousin Tiny, who constantly put me in danger.

Tiny always wanted me to go into the projects and to visit her father's relatives in the hood.

Tiny's cousins on her father's side would play cards, shoot pool, throw dice and do all the things that my Christian Mama said were NOT nice.

Tiny would get into fights, which she said were a part of the price that she had to pay as the lead cheerleader.

Tiny didn't just fight her battles, she would fight mine too, as I got older Mama made me choose.

I had to choose to be Holy and go to church, Mama treated Cousin Tiny, her sister's daughter, like dirt.

The true danger that I faced was from Mama's church friends who were pedophiles. I chose to love my Cousin Tiny and all her dangerous wiles.

Danger, Terry Olney

Danger lies not in the jaws of the lion but in its majesty and our attraction to it.

Not in the hidden fangs but in the hypnotizing, unblinking stare of the serpent.

Not in the giving of ourselves to another but in the need to feel that we are wanted.

Danger lies not in having hope but in ignoring all the evidence to the contrary.

Not in loving someone but in having that love used against you.

Not in tasting the sweetness of the fruit but in the release from ignorance which it offers.

Not in the hatred and condemnation we receive from others but from that which we place upon ourselves.

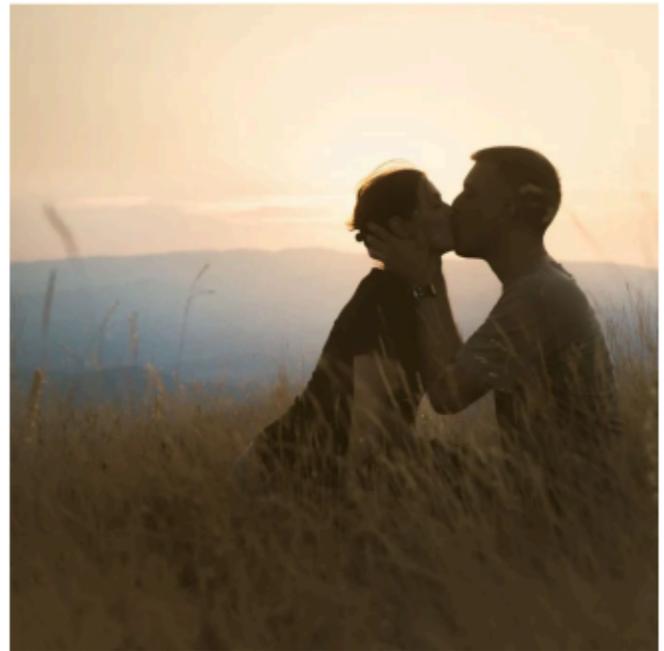
Not in being alone physically but in feeling alone spiritually.

Danger lies not in the truth but in the lies we tell ourselves. Not in the risk of addiction or overdose but in the need to escape the pain of living.

Yes, the ultimate danger comes from within, from believing that we know ourselves, our limitations and what we are capable of doing and not doing.

Because with both we underestimate the depth of our ability to love and the height of our cruelty.

September Picture Theme



The Exchange by Bill Clements

What if I was a tarantula? Would I want to kiss a girl tarantula?

I might have been 12, maybe 11. She was a year older, well developed, and pretty. The majestic theater was very nice and had a balcony. Perhaps I was extra naive, they called it puppy love, but I got to second base. I vaguely remember the concept of exchanging bubblegum- dueling tongues. Definitely pleasurable.

The completion of the sex act was not an imperative for me-I liked pretty girls and after I got to high school, they became out of reach. I am preconditioned, where it comes from I do not know. But I have very little desire to have a relationship with a woman if I do not find her physically attractive regardless of compatibility otherwise.

So this female tarantula is being shown images of different male tarantulas on a screen. Finally she reaches out to one of them.

Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* alludes to the conditioning of behavior about the human body.

Not sure how many of you have seen an enlarged photograph of all the critters that are

running around your skin—perhaps that itch is the result of a major battle of those thousands vying for control of an especially tasty dead skin location.

Now let's look at dueling tongues. The exchange takes place—perhaps compatibility of bacteria makes for happy music.

They are ringing bacteria bells for us to hear, a marriage has been arranged.

Though I can't go back, it was a wonderful moment to have experienced puppy love in the balcony of the majestic theater.

Relationship, Thomas Smith

What is a relationship? Is it only a romantic bond, or is it more?

It is finding someone you can grow with. Someone who will challenge you when you are messing up. They are the person you go to when you need to talk, no matter how minor or great. You listen to each other and open yourselves up to communication and understanding. They do not judge you and they support you. Finally they call you out on your crap and hold you accountable for your pros and cons. So if you have that someone in your life, hold on to them because they will enrich your life more than you know.

A Love Like That, Scott Cascone

It was the first time I kissed your lips that I remember most. As the sun set upon the start of something truly beautiful. You never looked as lovely as you do now...ur lips crashing against one another...this perfect memory. I swore myself to you, as we both cried out together, "I love you!"... then you shined that disarming smile, and I became yours forever. Our silhouettes cast in shadow, the sun setting, a perfect backdrop to this vow. "I promise to love you forever and always... for I belong to you and you belong to me. May my heart be yours, eternally."

"How can you make such a promise?" she asked. "I just know," I said, smiling into the fading twilight. "What do you know?" she inquired. A heartbeat passed before I answered. "I know that you are the counterpoint to my soul. My wish granted. The only woman in the world who has ever made me feel complete. The only

person I'd pledge my life to, to ensure her happiness. The only girl on the planet I'd sacrifice my life for. The only one I'd gladly die for. You are the one being I've searched a millenia for, and now I've found you."

As tears fall from her eyes, I kiss each one away, each brush of my lips, another promise. "I love you babe," I say with a snuffle. "I love you too," she replies, smiling in the darkness.

It was at that moment, on that day, so many years ago, that two hearts, two souls, two people became one, and we are still in love today.

What I wouldn't give to have a love like that!

Committed to Love, Belinda Ladd

Ol' White Hat don't look so good now, lying in the husking shed with his head stove in. Mamma never taught us to hate, it just boiled up in my soul when I watched him sneaking into our shacks, knew what he did to the women while he ordered their men to toil in the field. His missus knew too, I could see her watching from the upstairs windows as he slinked off with his varmint gun under his arm.

He should have known better than to come around my Athena. I gave him the look, right in his pie crust face to let him know she ain't gonna have no Boss Man bothering her if I can help it. He wasn't none too smart because he took after her when she was working in that shed. I busted in with a big, smooth river rock in my hand and he went to meet Jesus with his suspenders hanging loose.

I took Athena by the wrist and we lit out. Mamma gave us a satchel with some bread and cheese, and two silver coins. She said follow the north star and get to Canada like her brother done before. We traveled mostly by night, sleeping in haystacks hidden by the straw. Got to coax a hen once in a while to give up her egg without too much fuss, or press a meal from a farmer's plump wife if I see that rag tied to the fence. Mamma told me about that and other signs too.

My Athena is hearty as me, but I have to look out so she don't get too worn down by travel, seeing as how she's gonna be a momma herself next spring. It took near a month to make it to the Ohio River and we gave the coins to the raft

man to get us across. Now we can blend in and folks won't raise an eyebrow if they see us cuz there are so many others moving through. A new law says we're free persons, can't be hunted like a fox. We lay down to rest in the field and got up with the rising sun. Our new life starts today Athena, we're young and strong and we're gonna live happy. We ain't got to run no more.

Essay of Love, Santiago Milian

Love is a beautiful feeling which consumes us inside. It has many characteristics and there are many levels of love.

For example, the love shared between brothers and sisters, or the love you have for your mother and father. The love you have for that special someone or the love we have for our child.

But the greatest of all is the love of Our Heavenly Father who gave his only begotten son so that we can have everlasting life. I pray that one day I could have the love of Christ and Our Heavenly Father within my heart so I could learn and experience the true meaning of love.

Untitled, Omar Recalde

My first date with Jenn was at some sports bar in Mayport. It was right next to the beach, so after a burger and beer, we took a walk. We went to her car (she'd picked me up) to drop off our leftovers. I took off my shoes and she ducked to look at my feet. "Um, what ya doin'?" I asked. She said she was checking out my feet, making sure my toes weren't a mess. I asked if it'd be a deal breaker if they were. Luckily, I've got great feet. The cutest pinky toes this side of the Chrysler Building. She said yes, our date would end right there.

So we went for a walk on the beach at night. Romantic, right? The moon was out, the crash and whisper of the waves. Beautiful woman, a smile of sunshine and warmth. Me, warm heart, seductive lips (I've had 2 lesbians kiss me) (2!).

The reality was that it was cold, and we were getting sand everywhere. The water was cold and I think I was feeling a little anxious about performing, if you know what I mean.

Jenn was a sweet woman. I hope she made good choices after we lost contact. I hope she has another chance to have a romantic kiss on the beach.

A Love That Is Meant To Be, Nkrumah Lumumba Valier

The world is changing around us.
Society has redefined what love should be.
But the new definition of love does not fit me.
You can live that way but please don't force your lifestyle on me.

I prefer a love that is meant to be.
I won't judge your choice and I won't let anyone judge me.

From the beginning of time it was a love that is meant to be.

It started with Adam and Eve, and after our first kiss,

I knew we were meant to be.

I am attracted to everything about you.

I get lost every time I look into your beautiful chestnut brown eyes.

Your kisses taste so delicious.

I feel the connection between us every time we touch.

Your body is so amazing. I'm loving every curve.

You ask me why I look at you the way I do?

You are so beautiful.

My life was so empty before I met you. So lost having to live without you.

Every day I pray, thanking god that I found you.

Knowing deep down in my soul. This is not the first time I loved you.

For eternity, every time I die.

And I will come back in my next life.

I will always find you.

Our love is meant to be.

My heart would stop beating if it had to stop loving you. There is no life within me without you being in my life. They look at our relationship as a thing of the past. Between man and woman.

A love that is meant to be....

Untitled, Nicholas Wilborn

I remember being in love once. Her name was Andrea. I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. At 21 years old, I had it figured out. I just knew as long as she was a part of my world, and I hers, it would all work itself out.

When we were together, time would stand still. The world around us would fade and blur, and it would just be us. Whole conversations would be conveyed in silence. A simple look, a

brief touch, the simplest gesture spoke volumes, all without the utterance of a single word. I think it was Aristotle who once said, "Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies." This was us.

Some nights, we'd find a park or simple rest area off the highway with an obstructed view of the night sky. Here we'd sit for hours, at times talking, other times sitting in silence, listening to the world around us asleep, or the occasional lone vehicle passing on the highway. But mostly, we would be here, watching, waiting for the sun to rise. I think we both always knew that no matter the problem, the difficulty of the previous day or the challenges that lay ahead, the dawning of a new day always meant a fresh start or second chance.

It was beautiful. We were lovers. We were friends. Until one day we weren't. And of course, it was my fault.

Time passed. Eventually, we started talking again, becoming just friends. It was nice. We both moved on, each finding our future spouses. We still would talk, but it was obvious things had changed.

One day, almost two years later, I got a call asking if we could meet. Still holding out hope for a future consisting of us, I agreed and drove the one hundred plus miles to her mom's house. It had been well over two years since we last saw each other, but you wouldn't have known it. There was no awkwardness, no nervousness, no hesitancy, except for a long, hard embrace, and of course her mom. She still liked me and probably missed me just as much.

She wanted to go shopping like we used to. I was game. It was like old times. We laughed. We talked. We enjoyed each other's company, but as the day drew to a close, the tension built.

Our excursion had taken us about 40 miles from her home. The car ride back was punctuated by long stretches of silence, which made it even longer and uncomfortable. Jill Scott's debut album played on the CD player, each song seeming to speak for us. The song, "The Way," came on. Almost as if on cue, she and I exchanged a look, a coy smile, the kind that all lovers know too well. Right there, things changed, and things seemed to lighten.

We finally arrived at her mom's. Neither of us made a move to get out. The silence stretched on for seemingly hours. I built the courage to ask, "If I had asked, would you have said yes?" The question had been in the air between us all day. She sat, reflecting. She then turned, looked at me long and hard, then answered, "Nick, I don't know," paused. "Probably, yeah." I smiled.

She smiled. We got out of the car. I made an excuse to leave. We embraced, and said our goodbyes. The only thing missing was a kiss.

That was the Saturday before Mother's Day. That Sunday, I purchased an engagement ring and proposed to my current girlfriend.

Kisses in the Meadows, Kelly Messenger

You know what, this is truly fucked up. I'm having a hard time finding words to put with these picture themes. Aight, I got it.

This right here is Adam and Cynthia. Now Cynthia has a husband. But she's got special feelings for Adam. Where they are right here sneaking off in the meadows to make out. Now Cynthia's husband has serious anger problems, so serious that a mental health doctor would claim his insanity if he knew or understood the severity of his anger. So she already has it planned out, she is ready to leave her husband Mark. She goes out here to meditate, right here in this field often. She had it planned out as she giggles to herself not to inform Mark where she has been going, knowing this will be the first place he'll look.

So right in the middle of Cynthia in a mid-kiss with Adam, Mark pulls up. He instantly starts losing his mind, pops the trunk, grabs his hunting rifle, and shit starts getting serious. He stands there like an out cold ass hillbilly takes a straight aim at Adam while Adam just sits there like a deer in headlights, mouth slightly opened. He can't believe this is actually happening till he wakes up the next day all bandaged up. He almost got shot dead all over a kiss. Next time he might not be so lucky. Cynthia, well, that's another story. Mark is probably still sitting in the bullpen in the county jail cryin' over a heartbreak. Hardly gives a fuck about the time he gettin ready to do. Just mad and hurt that every woman he decided to fuck with turned out to be a hoe.

Kissing the Ops, Karla Wooten

Somebody call the cops, I started fantasizing about kissing the Ops.

By the Ops, I mean someone with beautiful grey eyes and the best bod that I've ever seen.

When I see this man I am silent because he is so damn fine that he makes even a person like ME be quiet.

This is funny because my kids used to say- Mama, are you OK? And I would say why do you ask and they would say you are NEVER quiet, when you're silent something is wrong and we want to know- Are you OK- Mama?

What's wrong???

My sons who are 29 and 34 were right to ask me these questions when they were 15 and 9, unfortunately I have seen someone and the fantasy is that I want him to put it in my life. I need someone to hold the presses, call the cops- I am fantasizing about kissing the Ops!!!

The Kiss, Jeff Hovatter

He was a stiff-necked country boy who had been pulled from the soil of his farm, and he felt lost, adrift in a world populated by children of privilege. The subtle and not-so-subtle prejudice toward him from his countrymen chafed his psyche. He felt unequipped to interact in the false-goodwill manner of this society. He longed to reunite the dirt still clinging to his roots with the soil it came from.

She was restless, well educated, fluent in three languages, a mother of three in an underemployed job at the Diplomatic mission of his country. In the huge, loud, and crumbling capitol of a former colony, her bubbly personality and vivacious beauty made her popular. A young military man of the colonial power was her paramour, as she still lived with her family, although estranged from her husband.

Foreign service is where marriage goes to die. A divorce rate half again the rate of his country. Lifestyles like well-heeled gypsies, without long-term residence, with frequent spousal separation, make fidelity a rare virtue.

He was drawn to her at once. He sought her pleasant company often, and his attraction to her grew. Light flirting became blatant innuendo,

divulged backgrounds and secrets. He was surprised to learn she was mutually interested. He tried to imagine this beautiful worldly woman in his isolated, simple life in the country but couldn't.

She wanted him to live in the overcrowded poverty and pollution of her tropical city of over ten million people.

He, again, could not imagine a scenario of him in a foreign city. He wanted to return to his life. He wanted a physical relationship very much.

She also wanted to take things to bed, but wanted more; to marry a rich colonialist.

They discussed their wants and desires in detail, which heightened his, but not enough to allow him to abandon his family and lifelong goals. He managed to get her to lunch with him, twice. She joined him for dinner. He had gotten a room nearby. He was convinced he would get his way as they finished their meal and planned to have drinks after. The mobile phone in her purse was a call that changed her demeanor, the course of the night, and the course of their lives.

He never learned what the call was. The evening ended a few minutes later, as she hugged him on the crowded, noisy street, then walked away, quickly passing from view on the poorly lit street.

There were a few short banal emails as years passed. She married a rich colonialist and immigrated to his country. They never spoke again, but she stayed in his thoughts and night-dreams.

As the Sun Sets, The Rainbow Sheep

Soundtrack: "Kiss Me" by Sixpence None the Richer

The sun's intensity weakens as it sets on the horizon. The crickets begin their nocturnal symphony and the midsummer evening's breeze blows gently through his dirty blonde locks of hair. Strangely, this all seems so similar to how it was with her, but in this very instance, at this exact moment, with this oppositely gendered, X+Y chromosomal human, it finally feels just right. Somehow, this shared experience, albeit familiar, is new once again. I've gone from paperback to hardcover; gold, gilded edges with a silk ribbon bookmark in case I get lost in breath-taking bliss and lose my place. Everything else suddenly

becomes unimportant by comparison. Apples to oranges; differences.

I'm faced with the task of selection. Shall a seemingly flawless, digital serenade be my decision? No, my choice this time varies. This time, I prefer the company of vinyl. Old fashioned, yet, full of life. Cracks, scratches, pops... noticeably visible and audible imperfections, yet, still, so pure and harmoniously vibrant. We arrived here on our bicycle built for two, but with this cherished kiss and your warm embrace, we are one; joined only by the sounds of the crickets chirping, the frogs croaking, the owl making his presence known and the sight of the radiantly glowing moon. We are alone, together... All we need is each other...

and the night belongs to us...

Lovers in Love, Jack Simpson

It was a hot summer night on the sand dunes at Myrtle Beach. That is where Phyllis and I fell in love. I had never met a woman like her in my whole life. We connected like a bee to a flower. One could not stand for the other to be out of sight.

I will tell you her nickname which is Bubbles. She received it at an age of five while sitting in a round wading pool. Guess she had too many beans that day. Anyway we all called her that from then on.

This night I had planned a surprise for her. As usual we got dressed for the evening. On the way out I told her, "Baby, all you will need to bring is yourself."

"Why?" she said.

"Everything has been taken care of," I replied.

The short walk to the dunes only took ten minutes. The sun was just starting to set. It was half below the horizon when we set down the beach towels.

I leaned in for a kiss just close enough to see her coal dark eyes. Her lips were as soft as a rose petal. As we kissed, I could feel my heart pounding outside my chest.

This was the best night of my life. Being with the woman I knew was just right for me. On the shore beside, a sea turtle had just come ashore. We watched as it stopped within twenty

feet of us and began to dig. The moonlight lit up the beach.

"Bubbles," I said. "Look at a new beginning of life." No one around to hurt the turtle or the eggs, I marked the spot when she left. The rest of the night belonged to us.

I reached into my windbreaker and pulled out a small box. As she opened it, I knew then she would say yes. Of course she did right away. We held each other tight with a long kiss to seal our agreement.

The portable radio which I had brought couldn't have played any other song on time. "Lovers in love" was beginning to play. Another long kiss and the night belonged to us. Lovers in love.

Kissing in the Room of the Universe, Gardner LaMarche

Heavenlight upon the wild. Two lovers sharing the nature of the planet. City and households are removed for the purpose of unity. Two bodies with souls that are exclusive. In a world that affects us and influences us, there is just one individual man, and just one individual girl. Culture is unable to participate in their kiss. Man's strength, no more. And woman's weakness, no more. Life is now a passion that is related to the world. Holding to each other inside of the same passion that holds the earth. Seasons spinning around in their heads as their hearts pound for what love has been giving to them. Beneath the sweet setting sky, realizing the beauty of this universe.

Untitled, Akbar Jones

Can you feel me in your soul, never feeling my coldness? But I would love it if you slide down this "North Pole" / get a grip & let your hair down / learn how to lose control / "Hundred & Ten Gs" worth of copies sold / I'm ain't obsess - but I'm loving your body / lay back and enjoy your moments of revelations / do fly kicks - another of my fine arts of copulation / rarity in pocket. With your approval, who gone stop the rolling of this eighties baby not losing? / Balance of a weigh-in where I talk shit & forgot what I was saying. / When my heart was praying for you, she's in tune with ghost / that's a few trips with chemistry on

the boat / she's a sight of elegance,
complimenting the bubbles when she soak / gave
more when she soak / gave more when we
floated over coach affliction of an addiction of
sex approval / a detainee moved by musicalized
pleasure / movement conversation with feedback
of preferred stocked exchange / understanding of
circumstance at a liberty range / I'm a Seneca to
a tenuous flame - heels slips off - I'm in a
position to feel tranquility afar / distance of the
debonair style of choice / with credibility in the
eyes of passionate courts panorama / that's
history to be learnt and learnt upon rays of
deservance / superiority & confidence shown
humbleness of a tangible scholar - a mine of a
second chance / her lipstick is the lipstick of her
choice on her collar / I melt at her leadership -
which is followed that follow / it's inspirational /
model time has a blissful way of giving a caught
order that's not sort - it's giving rings & vows for
my happy ever after / riding with a Himi that
know my napper classic kisses anytime it's
captured / this game a track meet? Then we run
faster / had to take a daughter away from the
pastor & handle her the way she needed to be
treated / a massacre, because she's used to
being a mauler in the streets / i'm what she holds
onto / she handle her own competition so she's
not in need of your typical "Baller" / Hay Miss
Cater she'll yell back / you're my charter / I die
tonight I pray I go as a martyr because I was
stern up against the Ill stature / against my
terrace it was going down or worse & turned up
in flames on better nights / miss me with the
intermediary / if this motivator was a pimp I'll be
her fairy & having her call me Uncle on the daily -
my - what a big toast I carry.

Untitled, Jacob Lester

A kiss, a kiss, a kiss; oh so many words do you
evoke within and without. A longing, an urge, a
need, why oh why tease me so? A look, a touch,
evocation at its best.

Untitled, Duane McEwan

Lost... in the coming darkness. I found...
your KISS brings light into my third eye. No mask
or disguise can hide who I really am- when we
swim in the twilight of our desire. Can you feel
the building fire? Do you have your eyes open or
closed within this journey of our bodies becoming
open to explore where this need is taking us...
your ears are closed off to the winds of madness,
my hands pulling you in and protecting this
moment I've waited so long to be in!

Keeping you right up in these lips that sip
you in... let's please begin. As the tall grass starts
to tickle your ass and my tongue shows you all
the built up thirst, that I just can't quench... or
even grasp.

At our lowest, it's that darkness that we
arise from, and it gives me the lust of light! This
light is what awakens me and shows the world
what happens in our shadows to our bodies... and
to our minds.

September Kiss, Andrew Krosch

"I don't want you to go," Lee said. She held
Jim's face in her hands and kissed him. A soft
breeze stirred the tall grass around them. The sun
was warm. It was a perfect day. One neither of
them would ever forget.

Jim stood, reached for her hand, lifted her
swiftly and easily to her feet, weightless.
Effortless. With a grace neither had had when
they were alive in the physical world.

"What are you thinking about, babe?" Lee
wrapped her arms around his neck and drew his
face down to hers until their noses touched. She
ran her hands up the back of his neck and
through his short hair. "Tell me."

Jim lifted her, legs around his waist and
turned, spinning them in a circle. Stopped and
held her close, her legs still around his waist, their
bodies pressed together, the slight bulge to her
stomach nestled against him. He imagined he
could feel a kick even though that was
impossible. She was only a few months along.

"You aren't having second thoughts are
you?" Lee asked, nuzzling his neck as she lowered
her feet to the ground. She took his wrist and held
his palm to her stomach as a cloud passed
overhead. A cloud crossed her pretty face. She

lowered her chin and looked up at him with big brown eyes and tried to hide her growing frown. "Life's not over you know."

Jim nodded, afraid to speak. Unable to tell her. To say what he needed to say. He held her close. Closed his eyes. Found his voice. Spoke. "I can't."

"Why?" Lee asked, drawing him down to the ground with her. "Why baby? What's wrong? I thought this was what you wanted. We wanted."

Jim shook his head, choked back tears, held her tight and sobbed, his words — quite possibly the last words he'd ever speak, ever — echoing in his head. "Pause data upload."

Inside operations bay 17 at the Neu-Life clinic the body of a man named Jim Almont was positioned in a surgical chair, arms and legs secured to the device, a halo style vise clamped to his bare skull, probes and wires linking him to a flat screen terminal hung from the ceiling. A countdown timer.

Behind closed eyelids, Jim Almont experienced the rapid eye movement of dreaming in deep sleep. He had paused the Neu-Life program just a few minutes shy of the forty eight hour cut off. Per contract, there was no coming back to life after two full days of essentially being dead. Dead forever or eternity inside a data bank of silicon chips, living on as a digital memory. An impossibility anywhere except at Neu-Life's life extension neural transition complex in Xinjiang, China. On a neighboring screen was the image of his wife of twelve years, Lee Meriwether. The data pinch beside her face displayed a date and time of death many years past along with a location. A cryogenic storage facility in Argentina. The accompanying banner in the corner, an overdue notice.

Legal jargon scrolled across the bottom in the hybrid Mandarin/English language the world now used. Memory extraction from a cryogenically stored human had been ruled illegal in the countries of the South American Union. Jim had paid an exorbitant sum to the Argentinian ambassador. Twice. Either his lawyers would fix it, or not. It wouldn't matter one way or the other in about four minutes.

"What happened, Jim?" Lee said. She leaned over him where he lay in the grass. Her hair draped his face as she kissed him softly, the sun casting a glowing corona around her head

when she lifted away again. "You left me for a minute babe."

"Sorry hon," Jim said, his voice unnaturally loud inside his head. But there was no sign on his wife's face that anything unusual had happened. He rose to rest on his elbows, the sun warm on his face. His body felt young. Strong. Unbroken. Not the ninety five year old in the chair at Neu-Life. "I'm back now."

"Will you stay with me? Us?" She pressed his hand against the small bulge of her stomach. "We need you."

Jim nodded, unable, unwilling to speak. He felt a flicker as the last minute passed and the technicians at the clinic completed the process, his body dead for eternity, his life with his wife without end. He looked at her and thought about how much he had missed her in an otherwise fulfilling life. Now he had her forever. Forever. He held her close. Thought about how forever was such a very very long time.

The Kiss, Lancelot

The sun is down on the horizon. The day is almost over. Soon the sun will be hidden and darkness will descend on the beach. He wants to give a kiss and she seems to be reluctant to receive it. Is this their first kiss?

He holds her neck and pulls her into his face. Their lips touch and their eyes close. Her arms hang limp by her sides. She lets him take her. Hormones begin to flow, the paroxysms of passion take control and suddenly she's kissing him.

The sun continues its decline over the horizon.

The Quiet: Four, Jonathan Holeman

You walked for over a year until you found me. I was scared when I saw you, that first time. I hadn't seen anyone in so long. Not since the day it started. The day the world moved on. Just like you wrote about, I too had no idea anything was wrong until the quiet settled in.

I tried to drive into town, but the car wouldn't start. The old grandfather clock in the front room was frozen at 2:13 am. The one in the kitchen was stuck on 2:16. I think you're right, whatever happened, it was everywhere. Nothing

electric works. Nothing gas powered. I haven't even managed to get anything to run on batteries. Believe me, the first time I went to town I tried everything. Mostly because I love music. I'm sorry. I can't imagine not being able to hear. It confused me when we met.

You stood there in my dusty dirt driveway. Scraggly long black hair. Big bright blue eyes. Not too tall, physically well, you looked good. Even as much of you was covered in dirt. I felt so confused when I called out to you, with a shotgun in my hand. It doesn't work, by the way. You just stood there. Then you pointed at your ears, shaking your head no.

I've never seen the standing people you wrote of. They just stood there? Staring at random buildings? It would've freaked me out too. You know, we see all these apocalyptic movies and shows so much, it's all so easy to accept. I never saw anyone, until you. I'm glad, but I feel sad for you. I've only been back and forth to town. Over a year has passed, and I've only been to two places. I don't need to go anywhere, not now that you're here. I do hope to see animals again though. I wonder though, you said that valley in the hills, all those animals, but no birds? Where did all the birds go? That's what I noticed when it began. Usually there's birds chirping, the damn rooster usually woke me up. I was scared to go anywhere, to do anything, but now I have you.

I was worried, kind of. The first day you showed up, right after you got cleaned up. You let me cut your hair, feed you. It is strange not being able to talk. You can't hear anything, and it does make you sound strange when you try to talk. I know you've only been here for three days, but I feel like we've been together forever, you know? When we watched the sunset that first night, I didn't think about it, I just kissed you. I got so nervous, I've never done that. I mean I've kissed, but not spontaneously like that. When you kissed me back, cupping your hands behind my head, all my worries died.

You're sleeping right now, and I just read your story, about how you got here. I think we should do this every night, there's so much more we need to know about each other, and so many questions about everything.

Untitled, Charles Whitfield

Fred and Priscilla were watching the sunset in their favorite spot in a grove of aspens in MacArthur Park on a warm May evening. They were holding hands, talking romantically until Fred told her that the most powerful kiss could happen when one watches the sunset, to see a green flash illuminating the sky for a brief second.

"C'mon, Fred, you're pulling my leg!" said Priscilla as she was trying to keep herself from laughing.

"No, no, I'm telling you it's a rare event but a powerful one," said Fred. "It's even more powerful when two real lovers like us see it while we're... kissing one another. The sun's setting, now, Priss. Wanna find out?"

Priscilla said to herself, "why not? After all, I've been trying to get him to kiss me for a year now, but he always comes up with excuses."

They held each other while watching the sun sink below the horizon, and then Priscilla couldn't believe it. There was a quick flash of green light and their kiss was like dynamite upon her soul.

"See? I told you so," said Fred to Priscilla, who had a huge smile on her face like the Cheshire Cat.

Untitled, Christopher Cross

Love is the union of two souls. It is the sacred space where you and I come together. My love for you, my goddess, is the purest offering of worshipful devotion, which I lay at your feet.

Your love for me is my rock, large enough to erect the foundation of my life upon. Yet it is small enough to fit into my pocket, my good luck charm to carry with me throughout my everyday life. It's a reminder, during tough times, that not all is lost. I still have you, and that's all that really matters.

This rock shall stand the test of time, and will only grow smoother with age, against the erosions that come its way. It is a masterpiece sculpted by inside jokes and knowing looks that only two lovers, two mates, can share. Look at what we have sculpted together. Isn't it beautiful?

Back to present reality, where there is only me, myself, and I. This picture plucks at my lonely

heart. This is what I want in my future when I get out circa 2030.

Love is what I miss the most, and what leaves the deepest hole in my heart through which the winds of loneliness blow. But I'll find it again one day. I know I will. I have a good heart and have a lot of love to share with a special woman someday. And I will be a good catch for her.

I just have to be patient, and keep working on myself to become a good giver and receiver of love.

Untitled, Cesar Hernandez

“My cousin Diana is getting married at the family farm.”

I tell my wife I'm busy that weekend.

She hits me on the arm, “I didn't even tell you the date.”

“I'll make sure I have a client meeting in Denver that day.”

“Diana is my favorite cousin, I gladly went to your cousin's wedding.”

I sigh, “Karina got married at a five-star resort. You wanted to go to Karina's wedding more than I did.”

On the appointed day, we drive to the family farm. My wife looks radiant in a blue Louis Vuitton dress. I wear my Hugo Boss suit.

When I see Diana I give her a big hug. I whisper in her ear and she makes a surprised face. She turns to my wife and gives her a dirty look.

“What did you tell my cousin?”

I smile and shrug, “you'll never know.”

My wife crosses her arms. “I'm going to sick my cousin Molly on you.”

I smile, “Molly likes me more than she likes you.”

The wedding goes off without a hitch. Diana may have conceived on her wedding night since Alina is born almost nine months later exactly.

The Magic of Secrets and Flame, Brandon Blakeney

I kissed her with the intention of forever, knowing a union wouldn't survive the dawn. Stargazing, we spent the night entwined like the sensual weave of silk, periodically raising a finger to the sky, rearranging constellations into runes, casting spells for promises to remain unbroken. In hushed tones we traded intimacies with words we'd never spoken, seeming to levitate in a field of dreams where nightmares and screams could never exist. Remiss— we turned blind eyes to the falling world... a fair turn of play in a world which never had eyes for us... lost on a journey of lust... a lust for the unknown because the known had caused too much pain... a lust for the oblivion of temporary because the prolonged had long since violated all reason to remain. Her lips were a red wax seal yet to harden— warm and pliant, possessing the power to conceal the inner etchings of my heart. I was in need of a keeper of secrets, and she was the kindling in need of a spark. Self-immolation seemed the only righteous retaliation in a world that commodifies one's inner light in service of the dark... so I cast my secrets deep into the womb of her flames and we became, like magic, the illusion of everything— burning brilliantly, illuminating the chasm between precipice and plateau of false steps... knowing spiritual awakening is the only inoculation against the leprous treachery of a worldly-death.

Love in the Kiss, Alfred Bell

A kiss with you anywhere is my wishful love fantasy.

On our knees in the grass, home is everywhere I may happily kiss you. No one but you and me alone, my dear being loved by you is also a meaningful kiss. Unless I love no more, darling kiss me and kiss me some more like you meant it. No word alone can truly describe the essence of my love feeling for you, hence forever with you is all the love I need, please my dear darling once again kiss me. Moreover, darling remain my lovely world and thus dwell with me by your side. Is it a sunset or a sunrise, it definitely was a wonderful kiss my darling you. Somehow I can't find the adequate words to tell you... This

kiss better have explained my happily ever after family wish with you. Would you please say yes? Darling would it be thus you and I forever more in love and always with love? If you mean to forever and always be in love with love for me, kiss me once. If you mean to never leave my side, kiss me twice. If you mean both at once, please marry me. Darling, my loving heart and my dear mind hold many of their kisses for your pleasure so go on enjoy them with me. Can love be better than this? Together alone in a lasting kiss.

Here and now darling, show me that you are pleased with my love. Kissing you is the purpose of my happiness. Being kissed by you is the remedy of all my love aches. Would you please let me know when at last we kiss again after forever more staying in love. Darling, remember to never forget I sincerely love you. XOXOXOXOXO

A Lover's Kiss, Bert Zamora

There is a couple in a car on a mountain road. They have driven on this road a million times but today they are both nervous. The small two seater red convertible roars up the mountain, squealing around sharp corners. Not long and the car pulls into a gravel overlook at the top of the mountain. The engine dies and they both exit the car. They walk to the front of the car and they hold hands and stare at the scenery in front of them. She smiles, "I think it gets more and more beautiful every time we come here," she says.

"Not as beautiful as you," he says.

She turns and sees he is down on one knee.

There is an engagement ring in his hand.

She covers her mouth. "OH MY GOD!"

"Will you?"

"YES! YES! A MILLION TIMES YES!"

"You didn't let me finish."

"I don't care, just give me the ring!"

She snatches the ring from him and places it on her ring finger.

He stands, they embrace, then have a long loving Kiss.

There is a whole world around them but they only see each other.

Moth to a Flame, MarQui Clardy Sr.

Can't get it off my brain,
I know I ought to refrain,
Because like a shot to a vein,
It's ever the cause of my pain,
At times it prospers and reigns,
Often it's hard to sustain,
Regardless, I'm drawn to her space,
Just like a Moth to a Flame...
If she, in her heart, feels the same,
We'll burst from a spark to a blaze.

And like a flower to rain,
Together we'll blossom away.
Her ardor, I long to embrace,
Though I know it's hard to obtain,
Regardless, I'm drawn to her space,
Just like a Moth to a Flame...
Maybe I'm partly insane,
For chancing my odds at this game.

But like a Psalm to a Saint,
Loving is part of my faith.
I question God, "Is it Fate?"
And hope he responds when I pray.
Regardless, I'm drawn to her space,
Just like a Moth to a Flame...
Don't know how long I can wait,
These thoughts are all that remain,

Because like a star to a gaze,
In her eyes, I'm lost in a daze.
Sheathed in my arms, she'll be safe,
But we're on two opposite planes,
Regardless, I'm drawn to her space,
Just like a Moth to a Flame...

Wildflowers, Robert Blankenship

See a sea of wildflowers
That would pale twelve of rose
With you I wish to go camping
Where the wildflowers grow

- - -

With you I wish to go camping
Where the wildflowers grow
Embraced in your kiss
With, or without, clothes

I am 61 years old and, around 2015-16, my wife, Sally, who was thirteen years older than me went back to college for a third degree; she was a straight A student... except, for all her genius

she had the creativity of a slug. Sally took a required class: poetry. One day she was explaining a form of poetry where four lines are written; then lines three-and-four become lines one-and-two in the next four lines. I do not remember the name of the style of poetry, but I wrote a poem similar to the above... it was a, 'wee,' bit explicit in sections but Sally turned it in... she was then selected to read said poem before the entire class. I (Sally) received, 'Best In Class,' on every poem I, as ghost writer, wrote. As soon as I saw the September 2025 theme, I instantly thought of Sally having to stand before all those very young (to us) students reading a quote suggestive (though not vulgar) poem; I would have given anything to see it... Sally died of Covid-19 on February 13, 2021, so we shan't go camping.

This story is only ironic because I was locked up in 2012 and, in 2025, I just found out that, right this second I literally sit in prison for charges I was never charged with. I went to trial facing life plus twenty-two years; the jury wimped out and only gave me (32) years... still a life sentence at my age - but still an insult. The worst part, I was offered a plea deal for (3) years. One can see the plea deal I killed in my book, "Actual Innocence: A True Story of American Injustice." (see: Amazon.) And NOW - in 2025 I just found out my own lawyer committed fraud which led to me being falsely imprisoned on charges I was never charged with.

Anyone who is curious can look up Civil Action Case No: 7:25CV00477 in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Virginia.

Sally was the only one who believed in me and now, maybe, her hopes, and mine, will come. Thank you.

FOUR WORDS, Howard B. Brown

Throughout the ages, the four words "Will you marry me?" have been spoken in many places. Often a special place is selected. Those four words are a special event, an invite to be as one.

Some beaus have used an expensive restaurant as the setting. It makes the restaurant their special place. If the answer is an excited "Yes!" of course.

Charles decided to keep it simple. Not that he's cheap. The truth of the matter is the setting of a pinkish sunset can be priceless. Birds are singing a goodnight song to the sun.

Gazing into brown eyes the words came warmly, invitingly. "Will you marry me?"

Sue loved sitting together under a pinkish sky. This twilight has become special. She paused to find her words. She would be becoming an equal in his life. He said four words. She replied "Whenever, wherever you want." The agreement got sealed with a kiss. For the rest of their lives, Charles & Sue recalled those four words spoken, reliving the moment whenever, wherever there was a pinkish sunset.

Love is a Many Splendid Thing, Gary Farlow

"We won't be there!"

"What will the neighbors think!"

"It just isn't *normal!*"

"The church will oust you!"

Such were the sentiments that Kenny received when he announced to his family his intention to marry Mark.

From his earlier memory, Kenny just sort of knew he was different. When other boys were ogling Taylor Swift or Miley Cyrus, Kenny ogled Harry Styles or Timothee Chalamet. Yeah, he was *definitely* different.

When he "came out" to his parents, they accepted it, thinking silently it was simply a phase he would grow out of. Now, at 24, Kenny had proposed to his boyfriend of several years, and Mark had accepted. They would exchange vows and rings on a mountain just outside Asheville, N.C., a city that transformed into a little gay mecca of the South.

Mark had been kicked out of his home at 16 by intolerant parents and had finished raising himself. Kenny had met him at an art show featuring Mark's incredible paintings. Theirs had been love at first sight and now they would be legally wed.

Kenny's announcement had caused a not minor eruption in his family. His mother, church-goer, community organizer, and always conscious of *what will the neighbors think*, turned positively pale. In startling contrast, Kenny's dad went nearly purple in rage.

“Just thought you should know,” Kenny said sadly.

“I forbid it!” his dad yelled.

“Uh, dad, I’m 24, I don’t live under your roof, it’s my life, and, well, I love Mark.”

“Oh, God!” his mother cried.

“Uh, mom, this has nothing to do with God, but we will be married by a pastor.”

“And exactly what church condones such?” his dad smirked.

“The Unitarians, Lutherans, Anglicans, Episcopalians, some Methodists, Presbyterians, even a few Baptists. It wasn’t difficult to find one. It’s the 21st century.”

“How’d it go?” Mark had asked Kenny later.

“Oh, just ‘bout like I expected. They won’t be there, but I’m marrying you, so...”

“I’m sorry about them,” Mark said sadly.

“Their loss, but it’s our day,” Kenny said.

The drive to Asheville was uneventful but excitement built as the rolling hills of Western North Carolina came into view.

“Nervous?” Kenny asked.

“Never,” Mark replied with conviction.

Kenny’s sister had journeyed to the site in advance and as Kenny pulled into the little clearing, a trellis festooned in the LGBTQ rainbow in balloons was visible along with—wait—it couldn’t be. His *parents*? What the...

“Is that your mum and dad?” Mark asked in disbelief. “I thought...”

“Yeah, and yeah, me too,” Kenny said.

Silently, he prayed they had not come to object or try to stop the ceremony.

Taking Mark’s hand in his own, Kenny approached the gathering, All heads turned. Kenny’s mom left the assembled group and walked to meet the couple. Taking Kenny’s face in her hands, she looked her son in the eyes.

“All I’ve ever wanted was for you to be happy. Are you?”

“Yes. mom,” Kenny said, squeezing Mark’s hand.

She looked to Mark. “I wish you both the same love I’ve shared with Kenny’s father.”

“Thank you,” Mark told her.

Kenny’s dad walked over. “I won’t pretend to understand,” he said. “But you are still my son, no matter who you choose to love.”

“Thanks pop,” Kenny struggled to hold his emotions in check.

As one, the four proceeded to the trellis and the awaiting minister.

Exchanging vows took just a moment. The minister pronounced the couple married as a violin group played Pachelbel’s Canon in D major. Taking Mark in his arms, highlighted by a setting sun amidst the splendor of the Carolina mountains, Kenny kissed his new husband.

Love is truly the most splendid thing.

Untitled, Herman Moore III

“You, O woman, you and man are sweethearts. You crave him, and you long for him. You search for your beloved in the forest, under the trees and by the lakes. You call for him with the voice of knowledge and the silent song of wisdom. You seek him forever in the fields of contentment. You call to him at the dawn of each day when nature smiles, and you beguile and dazzle him in the eventide when silence rules and even the flowers sleep. You yearn for him to love you. You ask him to seek his glory in the edifice of your glory. You desire him to kiss you in a richness such as that of a pure breeze. You seek the medium of his heart. You cry for his sustenance, and you share and would teach him the Arts of Affection. You long to hear his utter sighs of rapturous contentment and you do so through your tears.”

(-Ode to Love)

“Yes, my sensuous one, man is your sweetheart,” he whispered heatedly within the curvature of her ear; inhaling triumphantly of the fragrance of her tresses.

“Yes, my sensuously captivating woman, daughter of the supernal majesty’s vision of loveliness in the depths of your soul there is a wordless song,” he buzzed within her ear the language of souls.

“How can a song be wordless?” she prodded, intrigued by the paradox. His index finger from his left hand stilled the lush suppleness of her lips.

“It’s a song that lives like the seed within your heart. It is a song that refuses to melt, like ink on parchment, but it engulfs your affection in a transparent cloak and flows through your mental memories, but not upon your lips.” Spinning to stand before her, lifting her chin with

his finger to kiss the savoriness of her irresistible lips.

“How can you sing it?” he went on as their lips parted.

“I’d rather you answer.” She breathed, basking in the glow of his enlightened glare. A multiverse had granted her wish; a universe that at times could seem so cruel and heartless had heard her plea and gifted her summonings with a man who so vastly superseded the benighted herds of mere man that at times she felt as if she was lucid dreaming. Stuck within some alternate realm beyond one of the mystic gates of dreaming.

“For it dwells in the very house of this your sensuous being.” His caressing hands were grounding, anchoring her to the present.

“When you look into these inner eyes of man, do you not see the shadow of its shadow?” Her inner serpent looped and stirred forcefully as she peered intently into his mysterious enshrouded depths; as it conjoined magnificently with his regal serpentine kundalini shakti.

“When you touch me with your fingertips, do you not feel its vibrations?”

“Let your hands heed its presence as a lake must reflect the glittering of the stars?” The ecstatic unity of their spiritual minds was every bit supernovic as he watched a mosaic of evening hues painted across her gorgeous face.

He had assured her that there was a secret path where their explorations of love would forget the benighted customs and primitive rituals of earth. So they had set out on what seemed to be an unending adventure in the arts of supernal lore.

Taking his backpack from his powerful shoulders, “this is the perfect spot,” he said, feeling the subtle energies emanating from it like a beacon lit up and out into outer space.

“Is that right? What makes it so special?” She could spot nothing that made it extraordinary.

“You got to learn to see the world with your second sight or spirit vision and not the hunter gatherer vision passed down from our ancestors,” he said, unfurling a giant blanket that spanned a good radius. The glitter and gleam of the giant gold pentagram emblem on its surface caught the evening rays enchantingly.

“Learn to see beyond the veil, and you will see wonders unimagined.” He smoothed the blanket out before stationing candles out strategically around the quilt. He lit a mosquito-away torch for good measure.

It was all bewitching in its captivating allure as she took it all in, making mental notes.

“This way, beautiful,” snapping her out of her awe, his hand outstretched. She took it as he led her to its center.

“The perfect conceive and give birth through a kiss. That is why we also kiss each other. We conceive from the grace within each other.”

Love, Brianne Carson

I will start by saying this is a very hard subject for me. Love has not been a thing that I have had in life. So I am going to walk through my life and the different kinds of love that I experienced, one step at a time.

So what did I think love was? Well I was manipulated, emotionally, mentally abused and made to believe this was what love was and how it was supposed to be. Love confused me for a very long time and I did not know how to show it or accept it.

I grew up in a two-parent household, not really knowing my parents’ stresses or problems. That changed when I started school and my parents started arguing— not so much in front of me but around me. It started as talking and always ended with them yelling. I started asking questions. “Why are you yelling at each other if you love each other?” I always got told not to worry about it and everything was fine.

I never saw my parents show any affection (kiss, hug, NOTHING). It did not matter, holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, no affection was shown. I was confused but never asked why because I never wanted to seem nosy.

I started believing that this was what relationships and love looked like. As I grew up that’s what I looked for, and I definitely found it with my ex-husband. All we did was argue and fight. It was a bad situation and a very toxic relationship. We stayed together for twelve years, married for four. This was a very rocky experience— with him being an alcoholic and not working or not wanting to work. We welcomed a

beautiful healthy baby into our home four years into our relationship. We decided not to rush into marriage and to get everything organized first. Finally, we decided about eight years into our relationship and with an almost four-year-old daughter, we were going to give it a go— the big “M,” marriage.

I was super excited and ready for the next step in life. I thought things would get better after getting married; the promises, the commitments, and the forevers. That was not true at all— it went downhill fast. I begged for help with our daughter, the bills, the house, and even our relationship. I was told I was too needy and nagged too much. He claimed me as his and then like I was his property. I hated it so much. He always told me to loosen up a little and live, saying I should “stop being so uptight and just be happy.”

Four years into our marriage, I had had enough. His drinking had gotten worse. All he would do was yell and scream and call me names in front of our daughter. He started physically abusing me. The final straw was when he put his hands on me in front of our daughter and I heard her scream for me and start crying. I put my foot down. He was arrested on battery and I filed for divorce. I never wanted my daughter to believe that abuse was okay or that’s what love looked like.

I moved my daughter and I to somewhere safe. I played single mom for a while. I worked and took care of us all by myself. I worked two jobs to make sure we had all we needed. I met a guy who I had gone to high school with. I was in a relationship with him for about four years. We welcomed two beautiful girls into our lives in that period. We separated and went our separate ways.

About ten years ago, I ran into an old school friend. He had his own relationship problems, was divorced and had children of his own. We started talking and things grew from there. He really tried showing me what love is and how I should be treated. He is amazing with all three of my daughters and treats them like his own.

I spent close to four years searching and trying to figure out what love was/is. I was trying to figure out how to accept it, share it, and even show it. I began to build myself from the inside

out. Healing all the wounds I had and making myself a stronger woman in the end. I learned what I wanted and what I deserved. I figured out very fast what to allow and what not.

So what is love to me today? Well love is compassion, unity, kindness, caring, loyalty, and commitment. The list could go on forever but this is a start and the strong ones I feel. Love is something I deserve and I can show myself who I really am. I am beginning to love myself and blossom into a wonderful, strong-minded woman.

The Black Prince, Part II, Terance DeJuan Wilson

Lord please, cleanse my inner sins,
preserve my dignity from these worst of men

I’ve made amends with the fallen world,
life is like a toxic girl,

So many twists, and there’s no blueprint
for it to make sense

No father present, I grew up thinking that
my mother was impossible

I ran away so many times, all I wanted
was emancipation.

I ran into the law, coming from a troubled
past, going nowhere fast.

My best intentions were coming from a
place like lovers lane, or neverland

A spoiled innocence. The pieces to my
puzzle presented a dangerous cast

When I was eleven I found treasure in an
older girl (Her Intimacy),

She was my reprieve for each and every
life that life could conceive of

When I was broke, I found devotion in her
fluid motions.

Repressed emotions, somewhat arrested
in development. I found relief

No one to question why a boy would
grieve, or in turn answers his vanity

I’ve come to terms with feeling forgotten,
lost, and often hopeless.

My blue devotion, at an awkward age,
learned to assert my rage,

Each necessary stage of development the
burning embers of a doctored page.

It got to be so many pockets of hypocrisy.
The Church became a den of thieves.

Black boy, tell me, why do you fight? To be
the opposite of common sheep,

Because disappointment is a common
theme, and everybody practices deceit.

I need the surrogate of peace, I need
someone in which to believe.

To truly understand this calloused world,
let go of every single expectation

There are no regulations, you're either
broke or poor, the world is impatient.

You're dripping temptation. My only
reservation is, I love these sensations

She was a good girl caught up in my
hesitation, this is either bliss or a coronation

Started with one conversation. I'm either
different from them others or your cover's blown.

With you alone, I pad the surface of my
mind when I'm in the zone

I'm used to being alone. Long nights. Now
I got you choosing thongs

Trying on high-heels. The best of spirits,
body bouncing like a metronome

I'd play you love songs, better yet, tell you
stories about my life when I was doing wrong

Always had a purpose though I made
mistakes. Now I make amends.

Father protect me from my few friends.
Nothing is promised when you're black men

A rose that surfaced through a jagged
edge in a concrete prison,

To reach the sun was my dying wish.
Conceived a seed and I've been dying since.

A black prince with every incarnation. You
fell in love with each interpretation.

Harsh nights and sublime heights. Never
was my intention to seduce beauty,

When I was at war I'd send her
parchment that read, "Yours Truly."

I was a runner now I run into your solid
arms, away from harm.

Still I'm enchanted by a lady's charms. We
could walk this plank arm-in-arm

Give you a safe where you can place your
trust. This world was made for us,

Day til' dusk, you are my reason. This just
can't be luck.

Embracing Our Love, Aaryana Malcolm

It's been so many years since our last
touch. The memory is always alive. The flame
inside my heart is so warm and strong. This
warmth has never left me. In fact this warmth
has enveloped me like water does in a tub. The
feel of your hands soft and gentle holding my
face. Your fingers feel so soft.

This embrace that I see right now feels
just like yesterday. The sunset beside us makes it
so special. I could cry at the vision of this
memory.

My date is coming up for me to come
home to you. I long to be able to hold you. I have
told you for so many years how much I
appreciate you. I have let you know that I love
you. Now it's time to show you my love. To show
you when I say I love you what it means to me. I
choose to love you. Every bit of you. Including any
faults you may have.

Upcoming Word Themes:

- **Due Feb 1 2026:** “Lies”
 - **Due March 1 2026:** “Dogs”
 - **Due April 1 2026:** “Bottled Emotions”
 - **Due May 1 2026:** “The Test”
-

Upcoming Picture Themes:

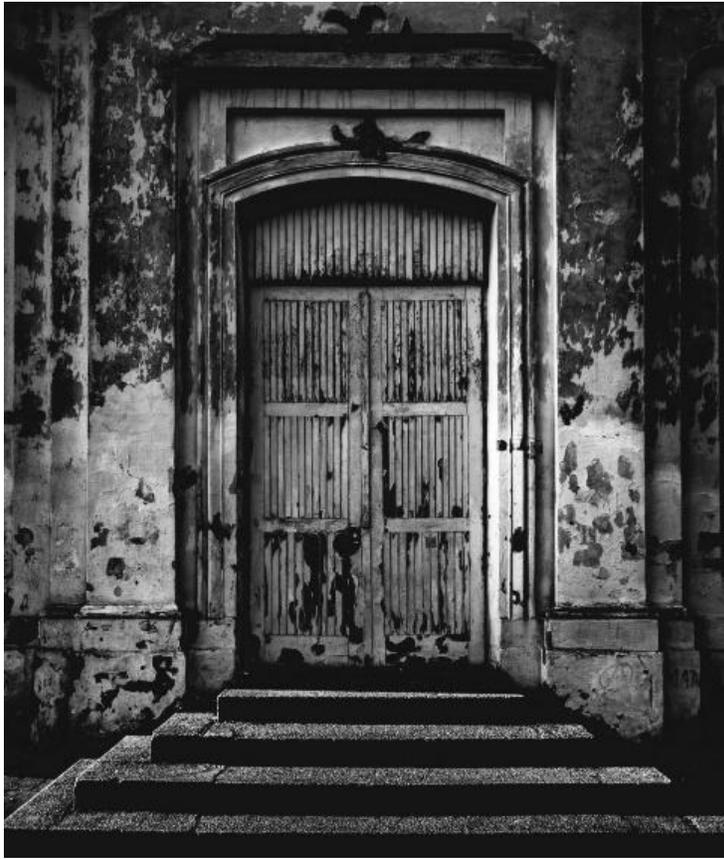
Due 2/1/26:



Due 3/1/26:



Due 4/1/26:



Due 5/1/26:



Word & Picture Theme Guidelines

Use our word and picture “theme” prompts as a starting point to get your creative juices flowing! Send us your writing for a chance to be included in our Prisoner Express Theme Anthologies. When sending in your work, please be mindful of these guidelines:

- 1.) **Word Theme** submissions must be **nonfiction** (true stories or your thoughts/beliefs).
- 2.) **Picture Theme** submissions can be **fiction OR nonfiction**.
- 3.) **Your writing should be semi-cohesive and clearly relate to the theme** consistently throughout the essay or story. The reader should be able to generate a connection between your writing and the themes at hand.
- 4.) On the first page of your submission, **please clearly indicate which month and theme** (picture or word) your submission is for.
- 5.) **Please include your name & page number(s)** on EVERY PAGE of your submission.

Your first and last name; OR your pen name; OR your first and last name with a clear note that you wish the piece to be attributed to “Anonymous.” (When using a pen name, keep in mind that if your piece is published to our website, people will not be able to respond to you as they won’t be able to look up your address.) **Page numbers** are very important if there are more than one!

- 6.) Please **write legibly**. If we can’t read your writing, we can’t transcribe and print it.
- 7.) Please keep your entry to **800 words maximum**.

Send your submissions to:

Durland Alternatives Library/Prisoner Express
P.O. Box 6556
Ithaca NY 14851

OR email them to:

PrisonerExpressThemes@Gmail.com.

Contact us with any questions.

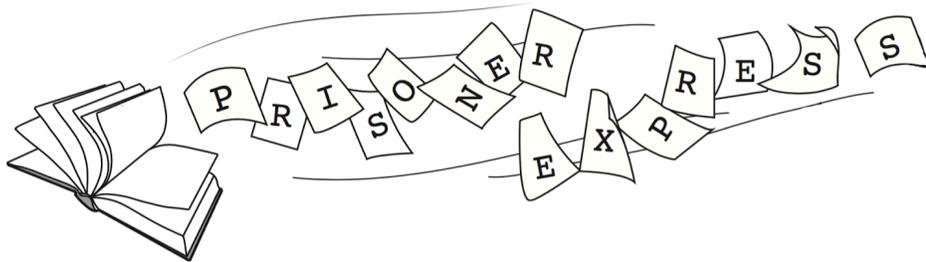
Please note! Submissions will not be included in the anthology if they do not follow the guidelines.

CTA/Durland Alternatives Library

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