

Poetry Collection

(2012-present)

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Author's Note: This is my sporadically updated collection of poems circa 2012. Some are fictional, some are based on my own experiences, and others inspired by the world around us. Writing poetry is one of my creative outlets. It's a cathartic exercise and a way to record what I felt at one particular moment. Sometimes, I crave to play with words and escape from the dry, technical writing in scientific research.

[Last updated: January 21, 2021]

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We Identity

If we were beasts,
we would stash necessities for survival,
leave nature at be because reason is alien
know no passion for which to pursue,
no long-term plans to look forward to.

If we were cannibals,
we would tear each other's hearts out
crack open curved bones of ribcages
stuff flesh in our blood-stained mouths
and not blink an eye.

*But we are equal parts passion and reason, we
conscious species, crown jewel of evolution.*

So if we were human,
we would link our chains and cry,
smooth that friction between us,
we might fight
together.

women: speak for
minorities: fight for
proletariat: protest for
un-equals: write for
e q u a l i t y
equality.

Let them see our united forces
each not for its own sake or its own pace
but passions turned toward, for each other
always.

Unbreakable Spirit

Dark light shall never conquer me tonight—
my body burns, my spirit unharmed
locked within the future I long to live
safe from monstrous claws injustice leads.

I cannot tear Nature away—
it is within, my love that sway.
All that I love, you strip me bare;
my heart you seek, you would not dare

So I judge the Hell within frozen flames—
never, never, my will to kneel before.
You, undignified monster, look out!
I will see this through, my word now you have.

Pause, glance back, faint, and breathe—
death away through my teeth.
Down Hell's stairs, Virgil my master,
show me the path I am after.

Oh, the water shed, the sweat now begone—
the beginning again, I now move on.

Wrinkles and Dents

Masks absurd color rough and rude
fake plaster voices gossip crude
nothing more than internal hurt
lashing out random snark and curt.
Cowards they are, lie a whisper
proves nothing, that cold always were
safe under that sarcasm galore,
dare deny your depth of core.
Bid them adieu and let them learn
life is precious — how not to mourn.
Never let them dent your today,
just smooth the wrinkle, if you may.

Meant to Be

Oh beautiful moon,
wouldn't you say these swings rock gently beneath your limbs?
A gentle swagger of leaves dip into silhouettes,
and pouty breezes sift through the night.
Two shadows crossing in starlight,
singing memories your eyes cast
like old bridges clothed in windswept dust.

Rainy Nights

Swift turmoil, the pitter-patter from heavens darkening
the frosty night 'gainst heat from windows withdrawn.
I feel the coolness sneaking past, circling my back exposed
to pre-dawn winter — notes intermixing, the band of morning.
The crescendo of leaves and cars leave me with a sigh
as Zeus' teardrops wash the sins of the night away.
I see you, the world, the heart, clear as lifted day.

Contemplation

To be this walking, talking
glued together mass of atoms, molecules, organs
that so happens to be my ragged outline
and to be alive in this time
to hear the church bell ring eerily
during heated philosophical debates
that late night breeze
and words spilling in waves
pulled in and out by lunar gravity
that somehow even exists:
what are these moments
of time?

Dueling Phoenixes

Timber ignite, flames part, hands of kings,
 as two phoenixes take flight, their wings
 spread and embrace the hideous bow,
 underbelly that was once a loving vow.
 The birds circle like fires of winters,
 sparks meeting in the rain of feathers.
 When north winds gift again blizzard cruel
 and kin collides until wane of the duel,
 an icy shard impales one of the two,
 its golden tear cast, eye of the fool.
 The other, it burdens, the lone's vice
 to enrage by fire and part by ice.

Inner Demons

A tear tumbles with dirty raindrops distorting her face
 and she stumbles, not in apology for herself or the
 pain that rumbles against the cavity of her ribcage,
 where skin fumbles and screams with puckered smiles
 as if mocking the rapid breaths scraping her tongue.
 Instead, she unfurls her hands like spring's beloved child
 and cradles the invisible stitches lined up on her body
 like a wall of pawns that shivers, yet stands up to
 an angry queen at her doorstep a-knocking.
 Enclosed and diluted is this rusty well of shadows
 harking at the gates that she close tonight,
 but they are ink on paper at tomorrow's conscience,
 feeding on her patched-up sanity, clawing at bay.

Magnolias

As magnolia petals parade in my wake
 I wonder if we have also let our silence
 easily ride on spring breezes to its grave,
 where it browns and decays and blends
 in with soil, finding its next life in
 the insides of earthworms.

Brighton Beach

It's a quiet day.
 The salt ocean licks my toes and engulfs my ankles
 undulating below my black folded jean cuffs
 shedding sand grains recycled back to shore
 where my numb feet break packed flatness
 dug up, replaced by cursive letters that spell:
 МЫ БЫЛИ ЗДЕСЬ. We were here.

Night, Exposed to Day

His sorrows suffocate in a brown paper bag
if only for a second as his gaze fixes on a small boy
who grins at his stale touch, and breathe as
the mother steers her son away, her hand in his
to the other side of the subway car,
backs facing him, the drunk man in daylight.

His thighs slump in stupor and his large
foot catches another man's in
a clink of leather boot and sneaker,
the violent fight of the feet
shuffling scuffle, fists hidden.

His hands fumble for the brown paper bag
beneath his overlarge gray sweater
his mouth begging the drops of whiskey
clamped to the glass bottom to rain
into his sun-dried caked throat
and scatter the bystanders glued
to his dark universe.

Crossroads

palm tree meadows Poseidon's bay
white fountain birds Medusa's prey
to taint or heal that sunlit way
yellows cast on this painted gray

Playtime

beanie bag spilled beans
books vessels ball pump
flat tire beats burnt lamp
mingle sing we teens

Disaster Afar

Cracked skulls dangle like icicles
the flakes of its bone dripping
white dust on checkered flags when
death draws its saber from an
empty scabbard, I lift up my pen
whose metal cap cools my tongue
curling against some inkling of
human hope inside this dome
of safety nets I am locked from
fires, glass, bullets, and stones.

Beasts of the Night

Stay with me, don't leave me come night
 There are ghosts in my closet, whispering vengeance.
Stay with me, don't leave me come night
 There are monsters beneath my bed, sneering at me.
 Stay with me, *don't leave me* come night
 There are groans of spirits lost, floorboard rust.
 Stay with me, don't leave me *come night*
 There they are again, silent sounds of haunted nights.

If he would scream at night,
 thrash in sleep and dream
 of monsters enclosing from shadows
 breaking his hold over his writhing body,
 he would cup his ears tightly over his elfish ears
 so that wrinkles condense around his eyes,
 wishing it were all in his overactive imagination
 and not a darkness lurking in his soul.

If he would scream at night,
 as curtains cling to invisible hands
 through the small crack at the windowsill
 and a cool zephyr circles his squeezed-shut eyes
 sweat beads dance on his forehead and nose,
 his hands would shoot up in empty, still space,
 grasp some demon and squeeze his neck — tight
 until a crack rips the air in two.

If he would scream at night,
 walls would enclose around him and grind,
 stone on stone, vertical, horizontal planes
 even the ceiling compresses down.
 He would be small and shivering
 in the middle and alone, curled up
 until he opens his limbs tentatively,
 embracing, lying flat and staring above
 waiting for the end, compressing.

If he would scream at night,
 climb up next to him in bed,
 and hold him tight until darkness recedes,
 and he gazes into the warm, brown eyes of

only she would listen,
 sling an arm over his sweat-soaked torso,
 until sun's warmth tickles his eyes open,
 his mother.

Running Away

We used to stroll:
 spread our limbs and backs on cool grasses
 eyes tracking cloud shapes and shooting stars;
 breathe outside air and boast of nature's gifts
 that satiated our meager appetites for activity.

Then we started to walk:
 horse-drawn carriages, bicycles, cars, airplanes
 every whim channeled, every step saved;
 we settle into homes, knowing we'll be safe
 from local resource limits.

We caught wind, and ran; we never stopped:
 why convene with nature, when the activity
 we so craved is on lit screens at our fingertips;
 why stroll, why walk—when we can run
 like marathon runners we cheer on.

We used to give our time generously,
 flowing liquid gold from our hearts.
 But then we walked and ran, *saving* time,
 gold bars stacked higher, still higher
 locked them up, threw away the key.

We used to paint oil landscapes,
 now we stare at empty canvases.
Time ran away from us.

We play a false charade of keep up,
 jailed in so-called mobility.

Time *thrown* away, friends kept at bay,
 we still run, run, run...

Dark Night

Late night, that draft curled up my spine
 Late night, fluorescence beamed at me.
 It's only fitting my head had hung bowed low,
 meeting my keyboard and half-finished
 essay. Voices churned downstairs,
 how can they be awake still?
 My ear buds dangling halfway to
 the carpet, I am draped like a
 shawl across my armchair.

Sea You

I stood where the shore kisses the sea,
and you were there, in murky waves, calling out to me.
But then you just smiled that wide, silly-toothed grin
turned your back, swallowed by horizon's mouth
despite the waves rolling to me endlessly.

On that day I walked late into the classroom,
you were there, one in a crowd of third-graders—
I met you.

On that playground we spent hours playing tag,
hollering in our small, high-pitched voices—
I got to know you.

On those field trips we held hands as partners do
and I was so glad you were by my side—
I was proud to be your friend.

On that sidewalk we said our goodbyes
you to stay, I to leave—
I would never see you again.

But I still hope
for that reconnaissance
of two lost in time, in novels and dreams.

Tenses

(past) glaciers ice
pre- waters -sent
vapors f u t u r e

Stage Fright

What is this fluttering, cluttering, spluttering
oxygen-less, heart palpitate, brain-dead?
What is this cracking, hacking, dragging
cough, voice box — wires pulled out?
Silence.

Knee-deep quicksand tornado gutter
hair like troll dolls, gate upturn spikes,
jailed voice, echo of doubt: where is that
escape ladder up and retreat?
Retreat.

Swings

Playgrounds dust off blankets of shadows
and swings free to soar into the sun — morning again.
On the edge, pushing past, barriers indefinite

Two Haikus of the Mind

Unfolding paths lie
Where dreams slumber and grow mold
Waiting for our cry

Dry abysmal plains
The mind wanders unbroken
nevertheless pain

Duality

We are tongues of light and dark, candelabra shadows
light chained to life, dark to death, this fictional duality
we speak for the harmony of yin and yang, yet
act in the name of black or white, symbology divide.
Light upheld, dark forbidden, like hero and villain.
What is then one is now two estranged tongues.

Farmer's Hands

Those hands were a thousand eyes of blisters
like clover seeds bursting from sun-dried clays
thirsting for immersion.

They were weavers of deserting earth
dirt-caked, dried, and roasted alive
crackling embers—uncrated.

By the Pond

Sitting on the dock three after noon
rolled-up soiled pants tasting pond,
I rock ripples away under planks
and smoke thins, wispy air snakes,
I drink in pure nothingness.

The Dead: Flesh and Memory

Some bury the rotting corpse, whose head lolls in shut coffins,
the failed vessel that corrupted the spirit inside, and enslaved it to life
the corpse in its coffin, corpses within their coffins breathe,
breathe that earthly death song through the porous soil.

Others burn flesh to ashes dispersed in cremation jars or calling wind,
revered like an angel, entombed where stone repels decay
sacrificed fake money, that rainbow, razor-thin papers aflame
dying in this world and being reborn into another
through cemented crates painted with spirit faces
gathered that afternoon in the midst of names engraved
and animal statues and monks and regal photographs
something makes light bend from life to death and back.

Rain-Walking

There's something about walking in the rain
without an umbrella.

Maybe it's the way the rain threads under my skin
like a needle,

and clings to it like a thin layer of sweaty aluminum foil
molding to a egg-wich

or maybe it's that I'm more aware of today—
more of tomorrow

I wonder when it will subside, lifting and drawing
electric chuckles

in which I let my hair drown while it is still here
beneath the gray

so I can feel its weight. Feel it invading the crevices
in my sneakers.

Friction dissolved, voices and tires and sirens mesh
in drum solos.

I am forced to feel. In my rain bubble.

To Reflect, To Be

I am kneeling where the moon quivers
and the badge of shame is stuck with gum
to reflections.

I hid my crayon art I drew in kindergarten —
the ones the teacher thought were less than a hundred —
in a dark, dusty drawer.
I taped the “perfect” ones on my bedroom walls
and I posed for a picture, smiling,
with my portfolio aligned neatly behind me.

I crumpled the salty pages of poetry,
a fall-themed project, graded on a rubric
now rotting in a landfill.

I ripped scabs from my face and knees after they
painted asphalt like a street mural,
my blood froze like ice crystals.

My heart cries in the cost of facades.

Falling, I razed.
Rising, I stitched
my self-worth.

Nothing to see here
but smiles
but shields
but song and dance.

But the other self is a not a goodbye ripple
but a ghoulish stirring attic dust into a hurricane
that whirls about my rain-walking path.
In the eye of the storm, I hear
the frail specter I stitched within
myself long ago.

"Un-stitch. Undo. Set me free." It says.
"I don't want to be weak," I shudder.
"Weak?" It scoffs. "I'm your greatest ally.
I'm your tears when you cry,
your sweat when you run,
your scars when you heal.

I'm your humanity
in blood
in breaths
in imperfect."

I am kneeling where the moon shivers
with laughter at its reflection. My patched-up heart
is pounding.

Rose Garden

The purest white of winter snow
glide and twirl into Boreas' wrath.
Invisible hands of sweetness flow
in tendrils of smoke shrouding the path.

Breach

Metallic promises bend with strain
weak mind of heart refrain.
Lost in translation the written law,
scroll of contract vows that we saw.
A knocking far away, Truth to expect
in vain, dying, Lies to reject.

Harlem Pier, 125th Street

Pinking, seeping skies
river metallics sheen
Under half moon cast
words lost to the wind

思想

早从森林我寂寞
那天白云挡日落
一步跨过桥底河
脚底泥水跟着我
风大刮走冬树叶
心里盼家火不灭

Reminisce (Translation)

I emerge bored from the forest in the morning,
white clouds shroud the sunset that day.
With one step I leap across the river by the bridge,
the water of muddied steps follow me.
Strong winds blow away winter leaves,
but flames endure in my homesick heart.

Red

Red. Dark, red blood spills, painting cities.
 Red. The noon sun is harsh with judgement.
 How much red must we see
 to see through the cloud of mosquitos
 we've dried on the whites of our eyes?
 How much red must rust in graveyards
 until we dig up our tears, but not be silent?
 Bullets ripping through all that matters,
 and we, the hypocrites who protect *them*
 at all costs but not yet our likeness
 from hollow metal.

Summer Walk

Mandarin lights puncture black ink nights
 Frogs croaking through summer prelude
 Wind blister across rusty bar bridges
 The mist of sweet, wild purple flowers
 Intermediate repose, the gift of silence

Listen

Heatedness breeds on cloudy days when the spikes of pine
 perk up to acerbic words. And when reason is drowned in

 the hurt of misguided spell, the trail is a trial of broken leaves
 and yellow shadows that whispers to the pain locked in bone,

 trying to set itself free by forcing itself on another, on a stranger,
 in anonymity. Pain is a wild flame buried deep within, that sometimes

 cannot be caged any longer. It is a pollen seed that infects
 foreign soil but breeds without the limitations of nature.

 It cannot be forgotten, lied to, or subdued into submission.
 When it shares its story, pain is simply asking for an audience

 that says, *I'm listening.*

Airpocalyse

Red-lipped skies and fog-bathed fires
 plot murder, choking the winter city:
 the air is a gas chamber prison,
 where life bleeds poison.

Filaments

We are filaments entangling on a string of time,
 pools of rainwater seeping into asphalt depressions,
 parallel planes bound to never intersect
 encased in hazy spheres of ignorance
 we see as we are — a fractal, a leaf, a piece
 of a puzzle that knows not the others
 within the true geometry of
 human experience.

Solace in Late Nights

I find solace in the night past-midnight quiet
 No one is awake.

I crave the meditative peace of
 silence that draws back the curtains
 on birds chirping, thunder rumbling,
 rolling, droplets of water cleansing
 the streets and my mind
 of daytime radio static.

Joy Hides

Joy hides in stolen moments of inner quiet,
 glances out the window as the last rays of light
 blossom across shadows painted across the prairie sky;
 a quick afternoon nap to raindrops tap dancing
 on window panes like gray piano melodies.

Savor this fleeting moment, this long second of joy
 so you can look back during the hours when
 everything hurts and hold on to that candlelight,
 that flickering, wanton breath of life to fill
 the empty spaces swallowing you whole.

Not Yours

I trusted you until the tides finally receded, baring the beach where your words
lie. I wish I could un-feel the needles of sour dread threading through my heart.
 To tell this story, it's easy to pretend that I'm an angel and you the Devil,
 to arbitrate right or wrong on Anubis' scale, past those raw grayscale details.
 But I can't help but wander back to our past, the past that's a part of me,
 no matter how tall I forge my walls to hide the trail of charred regret
 you tattooed on my back. This war you fan from dying flames to
 the beat of your conquest is your Dracula thirst for victory: to erase
 your history in other arenas. But I am not your answer nor your casualty.
 I am not the salve to your wounds. I am not hostage to your game.

Sudden Storm

I am a ghost of midnight smoke
not a footstep, not a whisper, nor a word
echoing across this blissful forest
ephemeral quiet.

I am a cackling spitfire
sharp, whistling wind and raindrops slicing
through forest canopy like a battering ram
sudden storm.

Out of Familiarity

From that crowd of unfamiliar faces I wanted to flee,
I tugged my mom's hand so she would stay with me
in the classroom where my teacher pulled my other hand
to this Akron, Ohio with a language I didn't understand
I shook like a scarecrow, arms taut and parallel to the ground,
mercy to the wind, blowing on my straw-filled wound-
up terror-bound train of thought, I cannot say a single
word, a single word, a single word to mingle
tongues.

Time Past

Time is a tick-tock tome. Pages unfurling at city life pace to the end yet too eagerly we fall along the one-way street of life looking back we cannot because we are in the driver's seat. How many times will friendships ebb and flow, when change is too high a barrier for differences to overcome so we grow up and out of habits and love but only to obsess and fall harder still. So much to cherish but chasing after is what we do. Predictable us throws the balancing act out of wack, moments out of reach without second thought and now, when the end looms to reflect on this story, our memory is moot in time past.

Sometimes

Sometimes, this novel virus makes all so quiet, eerily so,
except the occasional sirens and overnight rainstorms.
Sometimes, doubt creeps in when loneliness reigns and
imprisons your mind to those moments you wish you'd forget.
Sometimes, you play those memories on repeat in your dreams and
hope you had righted the past when you wake up.
Sometimes, you'd rather jump on a rollercoaster of emotions
just to feel something rather than nothing.

November 3, 2020

As I'm refreshing the election results on *NY Times*, I'm thinking:
 Maybe I've watched one too many doomsday (alien) movies
 on Netflix this week. Or read too many teen dystopian novels for a lifetime.
 Well, to be fair, everything might... inevitably be horrible, so says climate change,
 whisking up its wildfires and earthquakes and landslides and floods (and disillusion).
 But now compounded. One disaster after another. At the same time.
 So in a world looking more like *Don't Starve Together* (Total Landscaping),
 maybe it's not too far-fetched to brace for the worst [insert-fiction-turned-real-life].
 At least you'll know how the protagonist(s) survived (or not...).

The Lie

If the Lie is a monsoon deluge of raindrops,
 Truth is the roof that rots and leaks.

If the Lie is repeated and embraced into our home,
 Truth is vulnerable to siege from within.

For a devil's bargain, the Liar trades power for infamy,
 this calculated ploy seals his undoing.

And yet if the Lie finds willing hosts and unwitting carriers,
 a raging epidemic finds our doorsteps.

Tinderbox

California sleeps in a tinderbox of matches
 bathing in a sea of candles,
 lit up red by a gust of wind;
 it's no accident.

Caged for decades is fire,
 the vengeful ghost bidding for
 ashes to recede and jam
 its starved belly of dry grass
 and oxygen and attention.

Fire caravans in hot tornados,
 pitting tree trunks with lava
 flames, to rocket smoky chimney clouds
 to space and signal a revolt for all the embers
 snuffed out too soon;
 fire re-takes & re-makes
 its forest from sooty soils in
 a rebirth of nature.

Borneo, Retreating

You can see Borneo's rainforests from space,
shrinking, when fires retreat underground
and rain drops smoke out of the sky;
in its wake trails a lawn green corridor
of manicured oil palm trees, a monolith
grid of green stars in a barren desert,
one invasive species to prop up another.

There is no hint of the orangutan's messy playground
of vines; the plantations are clinically clean,
but do not mistake them for hospitals or a cure.
They are morgues sinking into ancient layers of peat,
coffins stuffed with paper money, reapers taking
our last gasps of air. Every drug has side effects
in small font; we take the drug anyway.