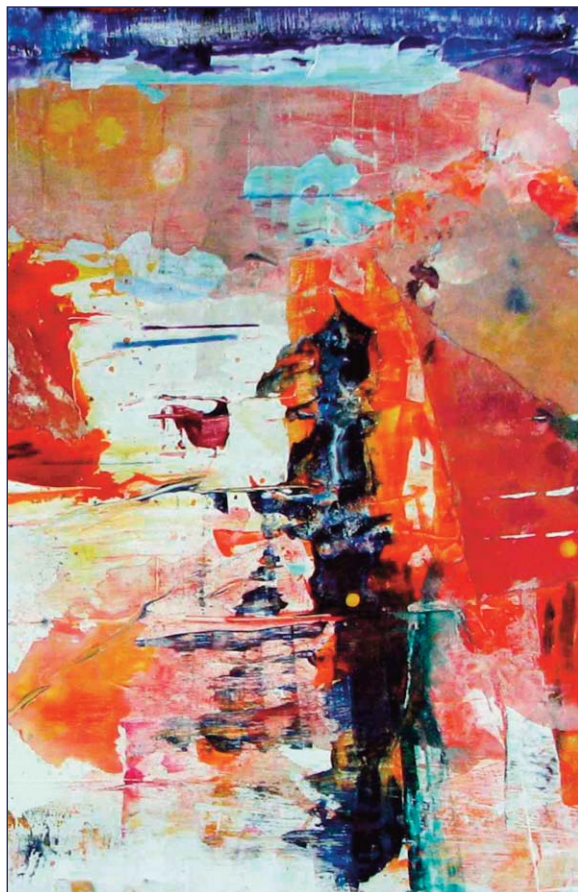


# THE PIERIAN

L I T E R A R Y     J O U R N A L



SPRING 2013



# THE PIERIAN

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L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

## FRONT COVER

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Charles Williams is an Art professor at Albany State University whose talent graciously inspires not only his students, friends and family, but the community as well. His dedication and expertise, combined with his wonderful sense of the ridiculous, make him a pure ASU treasure. The front cover detail is from a painting called *Percussive*, acrylic and mixed media on wood panel, 24" x 48". To view more of Charles' exceptional artwork, visit his website at [www.chazzwilliams.com](http://www.chazzwilliams.com).



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Contact information: *The Pierian Literary Journal*, 308 Wiley Hall, Department of English, Modern Languages and Mass Communication, Albany State University, 504 College Drive, Albany GA 31705. Email: [thepierian@asurams.edu](mailto:thepierian@asurams.edu).  
Phone number: (229) 430-6476.  
[www.asurams.edu/web/school-english-language-and-communication](http://www.asurams.edu/web/school-english-language-and-communication)

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ALBANY STATE UNIVERSITY

# THE PIERIAN

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L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

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S P R I N G 2 0 1 3

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EDITOR

Jeffery D. Mack



ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Mark Hankerson

Andre Johnson

Donnie Jones

Sandy Peacock



LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Sandy Peacock



# THE PIERIAN

LITERARY JOURNAL ♦ SPRING 2013

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# POEMS



TANNUR ALI\*

## Prayers

Prayers are regurgitated realities  
Hurled through space  
Like differences  
And commonalities  
On a mission to ascend past  
Past incompletions:  
Physics, legalities

They are the capacities of our intellect  
Reflected in “can’t do it without you” Mentalities  
And who is “You” but I  
Reflected back at me  
In the image of the unseen?

Faith is not a belief in things unseen  
It’s the sight of things not  
Previously perceived  
Hope is audacious in its handling  
Of limited understanding  
Like:

I really tried  
Gave a hundred percent of I  
Didn’t get what was expected  
Now all I got is a mission to ascend  
And a blank stare  
From the children I almost didn’t bear  
The miracle I almost didn’t believe  
Until it was conceived inside me  
And my belly swole to take note of my Ability  
To manifest destiny

We are currently creating our realities  
Just by thinking  
Just by being  
We are paying homage to a higher I  
A higher we

But what's so sweet about the high  
Except it's a separation from  
The low  
Give consideration to the whole  
So you know

It's all one  
Came from One  
Returns to One  
Can't be none but infinite  
In between  
Since you and I see the possibilities

The thought of Right is elementary Conversation  
The thought of Wrong is simply Hesitation  
To accept the truth  
It's all been integrated from the Beginning  
Then separated for examination  
Now things are beginning to get Heated  
So the simmering I think  
Brings completion

I is working on a master plan  
I being "I"  
Like the "I in I"  
The One  
Before the lights came on  
Or the sun  
Before the seven day  
Or the One  
Conceptualizing all of reality and my Capacity  
To manifest destiny

When I say "my"  
I mean "Our"  
You see all of time is mine and yours  
I mean  
Hours  
Delineated by faces and hands  
With no guts

Exaggerated on those days you wake up yelling  
What the \*\$%!

But lost in the moments before sleep came  
When  
We  
Came  
Together  
And  
Time  
Stopped  
Ticking  
Touched with the lightness of a Feather  
Or slammed to a halt  
Because of bad weather  
Or second thoughts  
Like:  
“How much time have I got, Doc?”

Sunni said something about a “hope and a prayer”  
Hughes said something about a “Crystal stair”  
MJ said “I’ll be there” and  
God said:  
“Let there be light”

I’m like:  
“Donde esta el fuego?!”  
For real, though  
Where’s the fire when you’re trying to get higher?  
Fighting lows like they don’t inspire  
All the while the middle  
Gets slammed against glass ceilings  
That really aren’t sealing out the darkness  
Or in the light

Really it’s the sight that permeates perspectives  
Brings incentives to collective thoughts  
Or movements  
Revolutions  
Moments

That seem so dim when you're not nocturnal  
So eyes close in hopes of morning  
Open wide to stop the torment of mourning

It's all really a warning  
Or a dawning  
Or the spawning  
Of a new prayer

Prayers are regurgitated realities  
Hurled through space like differences and  
Commonalities  
On a mission to ascend past  
Past incompletions  
Physics  
Legalities  
They are the capacities of our intellects  
Reflected in  
"Can't do it without you" mentalities  
And who is "you" but I  
Reflected back at me in the image of the unseen?

Namaste



ROSEANNA ALMAEE\*

Albany, GA

In pain she sits on the side  
of the Flint and picks at her wounds  
so they never heal.  
Those deep marks formed of  
chains, human bondage  
sit like evil twins on her shoulders  
screaming for attention like supposedly  
neglected children who are given  
loving care and nurturance but are so  
caught up in their own  
self-centered righteous indignation  
that they can't be quiet long enough to  
notice the love pouring down,  
the showers of compassion and the

Hush now, hush. It's all over. You're safe.

For short periods she quiets but pouts always  
ready to let out the  
riot of blame and finger pointing  
from dark to light and no  
amount of "We're sorry" can make it  
right or keep her quiet.  
She insists on proving that  
she can do it all by herself  
with no help,  
but she can't.

After all these years, she has  
not learned forgiveness or compassion.  
She insists on wallowing in her tears,  
re-opening her scars to show any  
passerby who looks her way.

See? See what they did to me!  
They – those of power, position,  
those drained of all color, ghosts with the

ability to steal babies, husbands, wives, souls.

But that was then/there and this is now/here.  
Hush, hush, there, there. It's okay now.  
You're safe. Don't cry.

Today we can be friends, lovers,  
families. We are all children of the one.  
We have learned that we can't do it alone.  
Won't you join us – build a new home?

But where the Flint and Kinchafoonee twist and turn  
she says, "No," stamps her foot, digs her  
wounds oozing with the pus of hatred and hurt  
and goes on.

RAHMEL AMADI-EMINA

## Who Am I?

I'm not the biggest guy

I'm not the tallest

I'm not the strongest

I'm not the weakest

I'm not the best dressed

I'm not a guy who will stand out

I don't have the most charisma

I don't have the most money

Actually I'm broke right now

I don't have Xbox 360's or iphones

I don't even describe myself as a "party guy"

And yes... I'm not a guy who gets a lot of girls

But what I am is a person I'm proud to be

I am a person who will pick his fellow man up

I am a person who you can trust your very life to

I am a person who stands up for what he believes

Because it is true that if you don't stand for anything you will fall for everything

I may not be the best dressed, but some jeans, a t-shirt, a pair of chucks, and a skullie will do fine for me

I may not have the greatest charisma, but if you get to know me I bet I can make you laugh once

I may not have all the girls, but that's because I'm looking for the right woman to come along

I may not have all the material items in the world, but I'm still worth a million

And because I learned that the measure of a man is not what he has but the example he sets for others

I am not just a leader, but a leader of men

I am the man that my mother is proud to call her son

My name is Rahmel Amadi-Emina, and don't you forget it!

LATRENDA BAKER\*

## I Cannot be Stopped

You may try to hold me down  
Tear away my heart from my chest  
Breakdown the very inside of my spirit  
And wish that I'm not blessed

You may call me out of my name  
Stab me countless times in my back  
Pretend to be a dear friend  
And hope for me to slack or lack

But the one thing that you do not realize  
The one thing that you may try to deny  
The one thing that will be at your demise  
Is that I cannot be stopped

A true gift never closes its eyes  
A true success will never rest  
You try and try and lie  
But you cannot breakdown the best

And the one thing that will hurt you so  
The one thing that is contributing to my continual growth  
The one thing that you've always known  
Is that I cannot be stopped

I shall make it without you  
My God, my Lord will see me through  
My goals, my achievement that stare dead at you  
Will be my most valued move

When I'm well and on my way

And your regrets look you in the face  
Remember that's the price you pay  
For even thinking I could be stopped

And when sitting in the dark at home  
Staring at my picture all alone  
Remember that I remained strong  
Because I cannot be stopped  
I cannot be stopped  
I cannot  
Be  
STOPPED!

STEPHAN BALDWIN

## Far-Side Part I

He was the son after the son, not the seventh son of the seventh son---  
he represents the conflated continuum of generational hydration---a drought  
a crop lost in the midst of a dusty southern climate and po folks hoping for a  
dream a dream—the American Dream—mama daddy a son—with dreams of  
being a genius—little Sam was he—the boy before the little maestro

he never learned to play an instrument—although he wish he had  
he wish he had mastered the discipline needed to perfect a craft  
Coltraine's Love Supreme and Alabama—and Niama swirling around in his  
head  
and Miles blowin while he sleeps Blue and Green in a silent way

In a silent way

He can hear his mother in her garden humming the songs of their ancestors--  
-Go Down Moses—tell Pharaoh to let my sons go---Let—My—Sons--  
go---as she toils the soil in her garden—his mother's lost garden, crops—she  
can never gather—seeds stunted in their youth—she holds her belly in the  
midst of her garden looking down at her budding turnips and robust collards--  
-why, why -----

He stands silent

While his father brown darkened eyes reflect the pains of chain gangs and  
broken dreams---servitude and Driving Miss Daisy—driving his sister daisy in  
the red wagon they shared as a child---Emmett Till like screams as the death  
of his son and broken chains and weed filled garden come into his vision—  
broken chains slide down his calves—but move to his mind---drunken  
repression of his seed's stunted growth—the wagon stops—the red wagon  
stops---the drought begins—as he guzzles and guzzles bud-wiser and wiser he  
becomes to suppress his pain---Prince and Beat It catch his attention---  
purple Rains and grains of ashes infest his body

he the instrument had learned to be —psychologically distraught—fought  
with years of silence He sang with the bass of Armstrong—but no wonderful  
worlds would he see---  
and he pass the Baton to he---

He Keeps on Passing he By-----

## For DJ

Crimson-red flares protrude through the air  
The tight-faced crowd opened mouths scream  
Birthing wonder and amazement as their young men battle like  
golden warriors on African shores—trying to protect their dreams and restore  
their homes.

Crimson flares adorn the air  
Reminding him of the day he was boy-king  
Bringing back the joys of his youth  
when- he was surrounded by muddy waters and golden warriors playing  
sand-lock in old cotton fields.

Glorious Blooded Crimson reminds him of home--  
the place -where a southern brown-skinned boy became a gentleman  
adorned in old gold and black.  
He sits wisely like the great Sphinx of Giza  
basking in the glory of his arrival—basking in the Glory of God's gifts.

Crimson flares sparkle in his eyes as he celebrates his life and his new birth  
The Mississippi Warrior has arrived to take his rightful place.

And Crimson flares protrude through the air!



## The Warrior and the Goddess

I lie watchin'---watching the sound of her voice as I close my eyes  
---strained in the moment of our spiritual bliss  
Osiris—Isis---Horus--/ Ogun---Oshun

the unpredictable—ness—guides me to him  
connections beyond our grasp---the warrior's and goddess' masks protrudes as  
I dip and glide on his hip.

I am mesmerized by her lips and every word that oozes out  
---the cosmic connection---  
--her verbal injections—  
soul fed injections---made to bring about ease  
dis and dat course of gendered confusion  
                        pathological illusions

the wrist we share is mad blingy  
coated by times beyond our understanding  
missing nothing but the grains of sand that paved our path---

I yawn-----He Laughs

Not at the moment but at the energy we share----  
                        at the flares in our eyes.....

the minutes and hours constrained by our distance  
                        Tortured and nurtured by our insistence to be loyal and  
                        devoted  
----to be loyal and devoted---to be loyal and devoted

The Warrior and The Goddess wear the masks

An ancestral journey beyond their scope but well---  
within their grasp.

# JERICO BROWN\*

## Langston Blue

“O Blood of the River of songs,  
O songs of the River of Blood,”  
Let me lie down. Let my words

Lie sound in the mouths of men  
Repeating invocations pure  
And perfect as a moan

That mounts in the mouth of Bessie Smith.  
Blues for the angels kicked out  
Of heaven. Blues for the angels

Who miss them still. Blues  
For my people and what water  
They know. O weary drinkers

Drinking from the bloody river,  
Why go to heaven with Harlem  
So close? Why sing of rivers

With fathers of our own to miss?  
I remember mine and taste a stain  
Like blood coursing the body

Of a man chased by a mob. I write  
His running, his sweat: here,  
He climbs a poplar for the sky,

But it is only sky. The river?  
Follow me. You'll see. We tried  
To fly and learned we couldn't

Swim. Dear singing river full  
Of my blood, are we as loud under  
Water? Is it blood that binds

Brothers? Or is it the Mississippi

Running through the fattest vein  
Of America? When I say home,

I mean I wanted to write some  
Lines. I wanted to hear the blues,  
But here I am swimming in the river

Again. What flows through the fat  
Veins of a drowned body? What  
America can a body call

Home? When I say Congo, I mean  
Blood. When I say Nile, I mean blood.  
When I say Euphrates, I mean,

*If only you knew what blood  
We have in common. So much,  
In Louisiana, they call a man like me*

Red. And red was too dark  
For my daddy. And my daddy was  
Too dark for America. He ran

Like a man from my mother  
And me. And my mother's sobs  
Are the songs of Bessie Smith

Who wears more feathers than  
Death. O the death my people refuse  
To die. When I was 18, I wrote down

The river though I couldn't win  
A race, climbed a tree that winter, then  
Fell, flat on my wet, red face. Line

After line, I read all the time,  
But "there was nothing I could do  
About race."

## 'N'em

They said to say goodnight  
And not goodbye, unplugged  
The TV when it rained. They hid  
Money in mattresses  
So to sleep on decisions.  
Some of their children  
Were not their children. Some  
Of their parents had no birthdates.  
They could sweat a cold out  
Of you. They'd wake without  
An alarm telling them to.  
Even the short ones reached  
Certain shelves. Even the skinny  
Cooked animals too quick  
To catch. And I don't care  
How ugly one of them arrived,  
That one got married  
To somebody fine. They fed  
Families with change and wiped  
Their kitchens clean.  
Then another century came.  
People like me forgot their names.

TANDIA BROWN\*\*

## Love

My love for you is limitless as the sky  
My compassion for you will never ever die  
God created you just for me  
He planted a seed and blossomed out my tree  
You are my mom and I am the voice  
Together we make harmony a beautiful noise  
I invite you to share my world and I will allow you to  
Shower me with diamonds and pearls  
So please take my hand, I commit to you, your number one fan  
I promise to give you love and support  
I will protect your heart from any kind of hurt  
I love you, I need you, I commit to thee  
Your my man, my love, my husband to be

THEDIS W. BRYANT

## Adversity or Prosperity: You Make the Decision

You are the one, who has to decide,  
Whether to have adversity or prosperity as your ultimate guide.  
So you choose adversity-- that's a poor excuse,  
To stay complacent and complain about how you're abused.

You say life is so complex, with racism and rising crime,  
And some of you believe you're living on borrowed time,  
We bring trouble on ourselves and claim it's a character flaw,  
And too frequently we attribute our misfortunes to Murphy's Law.

Why do we suffer continuously and live in a world of flurry,  
When we have a choice to turn to God who will eliminate our worries.  
You must decide to test your faith and choose the path of prosperity,  
Prayer is the key to peace and hope, and overcoming your adversity.

It's true there is a time for war and conversely a time for peace,  
But positive people know when it's time for war to cease.  
Be physically and mentally prepared for trials indeed,  
But have confidence in yourself there's no limit to what you'll achieve.

Strive for prosperity-- don't stop till you get enough,  
Don't worry about negative people cause their opinions don't matter much.  
My challenge to you is to love yourself and find happiness from within  
Be enthusiastic about others' success. Life's too short to be selfish my friend.

Look at the sunny side of everything and make all of your dreams come true,  
Think only of the best and expect the best--it's all up to you.

AÍDA BUSTILLOS DE COTA

## Destello

Hay entre mis varios y fuertes retos,  
en la batalla contra obstáculos mil,  
digamos, uno de éstos, mi edad senil,  
escribir, a lo menos, dos sonetos.

Hacer de sílabas muy bien las cuentas,  
porque ni una ni dos sobren ni falten;  
y que la rima e ingenio resalten,  
en luchas poéticas, ¡pero no incruentas!

Escoger lo feliz de cada instante,  
es un trabajo positivo y bello;  
es ir saliendo en el camino adelante;

Y ya no es dolor, sino en vez de ello,  
digamos que hay un premio a lo constante,  
¡Mayor que de los astros el destello!

*TRANSLATED BY ADRIANA PRIMO-VINCENT*

## Epiphany

There is in myself various and strong challenges  
In the battle against a thousand obstacles,  
let us say, one of them is my senile age,  
Writing, at least, two sonnets

Calculating the syllables very well,  
so that neither one nor two is in excess or lacking  
and that the rhyme and wit stand out  
In a bloodless poetic battle!

Choosing a happy moment  
It is a positive and beautiful work  
It is to go out on the road ahead

And it is not pain anymore, but instead,  
Let us say, there is a constant prize,  
Larger than the brightness of the stars!

ELLIOTT CLAYTON

## Untitled

I see the light  
But darkness peaks his ugly  
Face around the corner ever so often  
Just to distract the mere  
Thought of me giving any  
Consideration to submitting  
My entire self to His Glory.  
I'm paralyzed by the inimical actions  
That the world throws at me  
Like a speeding ball of fire  
To shake me and make me a slave  
To its relentlessly growing army of  
Rebellious spirits,  
That lurk throughout the day and night

Blind by the simple fact that this life is  
Not theirs at all,  
Intervention is the key.  
But it can only unlock the things  
That the flesh will allow it to, and infatuation  
With living the so called good life  
Defeats the thought of change.

I see it  
Plain as day  
That light that shines brighter than the sun  
And can also burn you if you  
Neglect the unforeseen  
Effervescence that is lingering  
In the atmosphere,  
And captivating peoples souls  
By their inner desires  
To make a step of faith  
To leave behind selfish  
Ambitions and sinful endeavors.



Perhaps we are all  
Programmed to be  
Presumptuous about the  
Validation that we are  
Inferior to being an efficient  
Factor in life as we know it,  
The utter feeling that love can help  
In fact the most influential  
Feeling is  
Unparalleled despite the fact  
That love is shown in  
Different ways.  
I for one  
Am a firm believer  
That only the love of Christ is  
By far the most captivating,  
Tantalizing, and most effective  
In being the pinnacle of any situation.

TRAVIS CLEMONS

## The Taurean Girl

Look at this girl  
Beautiful among everything I've observed  
my few years on this earth.  
Can't help but feel drawn to her  
but what is it...,  
Is it her innocence? Her beauty? Her smile?  
That smile.

The few days I catch your smile  
Gives me the warmest feeling inside.  
They don't last long because  
the harsh impurities of the world  
continuously lurk about  
and her Taurus eyes  
seem to catch them all.

So what am I to do in the presence of this beautiful girl?  
Cheap talk and neat tricks aren't enough  
to persuade her  
that everything will be alright.  
She's aware of this but her Taurus heart,  
that doesn't open up to most  
but is willing to give me one golden opportunity.

So what can I to do in the presence of this beautiful Taurus girl?  
For now  
I can smile  
and tell her these few words  
that even her father told her  
to comfort her on  
those nights where  
her Taurus's eyes spotted  
the evils of the world..  
"Stay You, Stay Beautiful"

DIANN COURTOY

## No Such Thing as Ghosts

There's no such things as ghosts.  
Then why can't I go into the den?  
So many cups of coffee  
"Reglah" with cream as in Boston  
So many football games  
Never missed a Superbowl  
So many Sunday papers  
Never missed a Doonesbury.  
The sense of you pervades.

There's no such things as ghosts.  
Then why can't I go into the display room?  
So many coffins lining the walls  
Walnut, mahogany, and oak.  
So many silk linings  
Never thought about an ensemble  
So many decisions.  
No headstone for the veteran  
The Army plants a plaque.

There's no such thing as ghosts.  
Then why can't I be the perfect hostess?  
So many church ladies  
Bringing fried chicken.  
So many cousins bringing desserts.  
Never needed to use the big dining room table.  
So many casseroles and so much cake.  
Must remember to write down who brought what.  
Please sign the book.

There's no such thing as ghosts.  
Then why can't I get on with it?  
So many moments  
I think I hear your voice.

Got ready to go fishing  
Before I remembered I sold the boat.  
So many nights  
I lay out your pajamas  
And bring the baby in for her goodnight kiss.

There's no such thing as ghosts,  
Then why can't I sleep in our bed?  
So many evenings I pull back the covers  
Open my book and pat your pillow.  
Then take it to the baby's room  
To cry myself to sleep.

## Tidal Movement

Four hurricanes and twelve years ago  
We left the Emerald Coast.  
No more daily walks on sugar sand  
No more sunsets from the dock.  
And the tide comes and goes.

God whispered in my ear  
Take your baby home to safe harbor.  
Walk instead the rows of corn  
Watch instead the cotton grow  
And the tide will come and go.

Her father's grave is in Fort Walton Beach.  
An Army plaque marks the site.  
We rarely visit the cemetery.  
The fragrance from the flowers sickens me  
The roar from the gun salute deafens me  
And the tide has come and gone.

## CAREY B. FULKS II

### Stop and Smell the Flowers

Every time I buy flowers I see faces  
Uncles, Aunts, cousins, dead bodies  
Thrown into a river and forgotten  
Putrid and lifeless  
Disgustingly vital to my existence  
That chair in the corner, made from wood that crushed your spine  
That bottle of water in the fridge, where you took your last breath  
That corner of life and death, where bullets chased bullets chased blood  
chased pavement  
You lay there  
Every time I buy flowers I see faces  
Friends, loved ones, echoes of regret  
Useless apologies because their life is gone  
Denouncing GOD when He's done nothing wrong  
Revival of memories that makes you reach for the bottle, that makes you  
reach for the smoke, that makes you reach for disease dressed in the flesh of  
some girl you don't care for anyway  
You're killing yourself  
Remember when roses were red and violets were blue  
And innocence was sweet, the sunflowers smell good this year, and loved  
spilled out with every word  
At every turn, the eucalyptus filled my lungs; the jasmine soothed my senses;  
the lotus calmed my nerves  
But now roses are cancer and violets are suicide  
Lilacs are gunshots and honeysuckles are genocide  
The grass is always greener but you've never seen that side  
Every time I buy flowers I see faces  
Uncles, Aunts, cousins, dead bodies  
Friends, loved ones, echoes of regret  
This silence is enough but I'm not dying yet  
I trade pain for oleander and strife for orchids  
Suffering for lilies and heartache for snapdragons  
I am overcoming, you are overcoming, and this life means something  
Don't wait until tomorrow  
Smell the flowers today.

RENNIAH GAY

## Untitled

Tones of sweet melodies  
Are my strength  
And rhythmic thuds of notes  
Make sense  
They create chords of absolute truth  
The judges of a distant time  
Could not rebuke its proof.

MARY A. GERVIN\*

## Parting Shots

Ahhhh! What a great day is this!  
Despite the pomp and circumstance  
I now pause to reminisce  
Before I take my victory dance

Only time will tell the story  
Of the days I have spent  
Treading these pinioned halls of glory  
Nestled beside the river Flint

I don't expect you will remember me  
As the busy years come and go  
I doubt that you will ever see  
The searing scars that caused me woe

I trust despite my seeming ire  
For idle hands and listless minds  
You really saw beneath my fire  
Rare gems were being refined

I trust you caught my burning desire  
For engaging inquiring little minds  
I expect amid the blazing pyre  
You avoided my warmth—at times

Expect no future tell-tale book  
Revealing secrets that you hold  
Gone is the piercing look  
That searched into your soul

Henceforth I'll stay a postscript  
In your fleeting memories  
Eventually you may come to grips  
With the reality of my leave:



And perhaps you may muse  
As I vacate my office space  
*'How can we ever fill her shoes  
Her footprints echo thru this place*

*Alas, Gervin has bade a fond farewell  
Left the pesky grind behind  
Gervin has answered the final bell  
Met the last imposed deadline*

*Ahh! Gervin has filed her last report  
She's marking a timely ending  
Perhaps scribbling at some plush resort  
In fact, Gervin has left the building!'*

## Pierian Piece

Fertile words are swirling in my head  
Germinating in my mind  
Twirling words tangling  
Elusive words sparring  
Familiar lines connecting  
New images forming  
Joining  
Multiplying  
Streaming into being  
Phrases forming images  
Images taking shape  
Swelling in my head  
Screaming for surcease  
Released through my fingers  
Scribbled onto the page  
Crossed out, switched up, removed, inserted  
Cerebral creation  
Pierian piece

ARIAL GITTENS

## My Goliath

I just wanted to let you know  
That in the middle of remembering  
My ears were so distracted by my rusty heart  
The freedom in your smile  
Pitter patter of raindrops on this leaky roof  
I envy the in-between and the going ons of you....  
Remind me of a wealth of Sundays  
I almost hope to keep this feeling  
So I wrote this to remember you  
With the best of my intentions  
I offer myself as a martyr  
Hoping to see me reflected in your smile  
Seek me when the haunting of old ghost becomes so strong  
I will stand at the foot of this mountain waiting

SHEYNA HAIRSTON

## Boyfriend

Being

Only

Yours

Forever and

Realizing

I'll

Ever leap

Near

Death for

Sweet love...

AHMAD HASSAN

## Sabbath Searching

Guilt runner,  
Soaked,  
Underneath an avalanche of prayer beads,  
Wooden knuckle fingers bending round little dots of black,  
Reflect back,  
Best hopes,  
Dying dreams,  
And faith that waivers like a half staff flag in the breeze

We rattle 'round these ruins,  
Nap sack of memories,  
All skin folds of liquor,  
All grins full of back bit words,  
Bitter blue eyes,  
Got the hell fire belly,  
And too much time to remember,  
All that hurting,  
Piano key melody,  
Melancholy,  
Full of minor thirds,  
Sevenths,  
Reverse breathing,  
And human grace,  
Grace

DAMARIS HILL\*

## Continuous Fire: A Love Poem for Sonia Sanchez

Auntie, your heels be steady.  
They plant thunder in the Earth.  
This is one way you hum.  
Your song is a peace that cracks concrete.  
The vibration is a nectar that heals.

Auntie, slow your marching.  
I am running swiftly behind,  
attempting to catch up,  
with my arms extended,  
my breath trying to lock in your hair.  
I am desperate to reach you.  
My toenails are flaking.  
I am falling from my flesh.  
The lava of my veins  
gushes furious flowers.

Auntie, your heart and fists swing,  
pumping toward heaven, propelling  
past and post-present.  
I am too slow to even  
catch a glimpse of your wrists.  
Your wings are a blur  
at this pace.

Auntie, Queen, Water Goddess Warrior,  
may I fashion you a throne?  
May I carry you on my shoulders  
as I praise you with my pen?  
Make a drum of my head.  
In our secret language,  
tell me the stories that stretch the holes of history.  
Teach me how to call  
the ancestors' names.  
Criss-cross your ankles before my heart.

Your arches resting round my breast,  
I will rub the callouses from the balls of your feet  
with my fists.  
I will wash them in kisses and eye sea water,  
dry them with my lashes in bursts of blinking.  
You are a wonder.

BRITTNI HUMPHREY

## Child I once Was

Get that out your mouth  
Put that down  
Don't touch that  
Stop it  
Stop crying  
Stop running  
Don't do that  
Sit down somewhere  
Close your mouth  
Hand me that  
Pay attention  
Go use the bathroom  
Don't eat that  
Throw it away  
Come help me  
Go help your brother  
Hold your nose  
Tell her hey  
Give your aunt a hug  
Go do your homework  
Wake up for school  
Iron your clothes  
Go to bed  
Hush that fuss  
Move out the way  
Hold this  
Don't move  
Go pee  
Read this  
Watch that glass



TOMANEKKA IRVING

## Untitled

I was once what  
Everyone wanted to be  
From the kids in elementary to the wise and elderly  
I was the talked town  
The manifestation that everyone wanted to be near  
The thing that people spent their whole life looking for  
Till it was found  
I was the paradoxical twist that changed relationships  
When walked across lips  
Now I'm unsure

TIFFANY KING\*

## Rock Me

I wish I could sit on your lap and rock right now  
Somehow I think that'll correct this moment  
'Cause a moment on your lap, in that chair made cares seem invisible  
I remember your lap, that chair  
And though there were different ones,  
I could run to you there and you'd rock me until everything in my world was  
again at peace  
A piece of time spent rocking with you  
Incomparable to any other  
No matter my mood,  
When my bottom hit your lap and you rocked,  
I would no longer brood over whatever mishap that caused my unhappiness  
It was you and me  
Steadily rocking back and forth in this contraption  
That seems to vacuum away heartaches, pain, bad choices, even  
mismanagement of situations,  
Bring about realizations of contentment, positive choices, cleared brains, and  
forsook resentment  
Left it all in that chair,  
Like when we stood up we left it sitting there  
And a breeze came along and blew everything away  
I need that moment today.  
And though today your lap may not be fit for my bottom to sit...you have two  
chairs.  
So when I come to visit we sit side by side  
Glide back and forth in those chairs

And all cares hit the wind  
I ask a question, you shed wisdom, we rock,  
You make an observation, I respond, we rock,  
We discuss situations, make conversation, we rock,  
My rock rocks with me until I stop and stand  
And she understands and stands  
Though a little slower than before when she used to rock me  
I instantly think of her aging...  
Changing hair color, failing health  
And wonder how many times are left for us to rock  
So I cherish each time like it's our last and know when the time comes  
I'll continue to rock and think of my rock and our nonstop conversations  
How they shed revelation, were confirmation, provided clarification, gave  
motivation, and are truly an inspiration  
Therefore, I'd honestly say...  
My rock will rock with me even after her last earthen day!!!

## OCTAVIAN KITCHENS

### Ode to My Pen

Patiently awaiting the moment,  
I'm so anxious to sing this to my firstborn,  
Wait a minute,  
I'm about to ask for a hour of your time in a couple of seconds.  
She said she had a bone to pick with me while her hands rested on her hips, I  
felt the connection  
My shadow asked what was it that I was hiding in the darkness but it already  
knew the answer  
Shout at me,  
I just wanna hear your insecurities at high volumes,  
In light, bright rooms,  
Enclosed tombs,  
Kill the noise complaints  
Let's awake neighboring feelings,  
Feelings that feel like they felt too good  
But that's impossible,  
Cause the possibilities of positivity seem endless.  
I usually have my sanity around these times  
We used to do the craziest things, think about the craziest dreams, dream  
about what we crazily find, it was crazy  
These were moments we both treasured,  
Our success left me afraid, scared,  
It never made much sense,  
Like a porn star telling me that it's business before pleasure  
But I want business and pleasure  
Constantly being challenged, tested,  
And I would clutch the answers tight to my chest,  
Ink bleeding,  
Ink worth reading,  
My ink..

AALIYAH KNIGHT\*\*

## Doubtful

My little girl's dreams were crushed at such a young age. She was told she was nothing and that she wasn't worth anything. They told her she was trash and that she was doomed to fail. She came home with a broken heart and a stream of tears flowing from her eyes. Her teacher had brought her home and had given the people a piece of her mind for hurting my little girl. I had tried to embrace and comfort my daughter, but she wouldn't let me only because she needed it from someone that wasn't me, someone that to her didn't have to care for her unconditionally.

CHARNELL LASTER

## Silence

Deadly and soft  
With a twist of hope  
Contortion and control  
Weaved like a rope.  
Cloudy with dust,  
A dirty slate  
Filled with quiet lust  
They meet their fate.  
Many different directions  
And tossed into confusion  
Dying like live skin cells during  
Its diffusion  
Mixed in by hatred and death  
Shall they die like living roses  
In its fiery breath?  
Silence—deadly and soft  
Snug like a blanket  
Except the chloroformed cloth  
Lies in the veil  
Over her multicolored face  
And seals the deal  
That she may never  
Fully understand  
The mysterious destruction  
At His very Hand

SHERINNA LEWIS

## Untitled

I remember  
The hungry birth I never had  
And while I'm rolling like a rock  
Down on a mountain I've never seen  
I sense the sound that does not exist  
Full of dirt  
Found inside a wave  
Following a course  
With bubbles bursting  
In a memory of circles.

## Untitled

I only have the thought  
Of existing  
In the passivity of me  
You, my mother  
The symbol of illusion  
Symbols  
And nothing more.



JEFFERY D. MACK

## Blackness 101

Little Black boy  
Sits in the dark  
Waiting for recognition  
Or for  
In the nick of time  
Divine intervention  
To crash down  
Upon his oppressed skin  
And wash him whiter than snow  
So he  
Like his blue-eyed  
Brothers and sisters  
Can be saved

But the sins of his flesh  
Hold fast  
And refuse release  
And cover him in darkness

And he wonders about the growing pain in his chest  
From the pinch  
Of the White cop's  
Black stick  
When he was struck for not moving fast enough  
While marching for his rights.

## Little Lost Girls

*In 1963, thirty African American girls were arrested for participating in Civil Rights demonstrations in Americus, GA. They were taken to a stockade in Leesburg, GA, where they were held for forty-five days without beds, sanitary facilities, and with little food. They were harassed daily, and their families did not know where they were. These girls were called the Stolen Girls. This poem is an imagined conversation between one girl and the others.*

So what can I tell you?  
America has built a reputation on  
Telling half truths and of  
Hundreds of years of discovering  
Lands that were already inhabited.  
I would love to tell you  
That we would be here  
Long enough to see things change  
But all that I can give you  
Is a word—  
A promise  
Of truth, respect, honor, and hope.

So you have to listen,  
Come in real close to what I have to say.  
Take in a deep breath.  
Inhale the possibilities and know  
That you have the power in your lungs  
To shout clear  
From Albany to the world  
When you speak positivity.  
So Listen  
Listen to the sound of greatness  
The aura of change  
The vibration of movement  
A chorus of heavenly voices  
Majestic and knowing that  
It's not about *this* dwelling.

I pray more than any of us  
That we live to see at least one more day  
Surviving on leftovers  
But still firm in our knowing  
That we are more than our circumstances—  
And capable of surpassing our fears.  
Our possibilities are endless

Our dreams eternal.  
We are (you and me) the things most hoped for,  
The evidence of our families' greatest triumphs.

So no,  
Beloved.  
We don't end here.  
We press on  
To ensure that those most dear to us  
Will hear from us again.  
And on that day  
When we see them  
We will remind them that this moment  
Has taken nothing from us.  
For it has no power  
'cept what we give it.  
We must have faith  
And mustard seed size will do  
To endure this suffering.

So yes, there will be hardship  
Yes, there will be oppression  
And yes, there will be abuse and neglect.  
But these things are not you.  
As tragic as they are  
They are not your reality.  
That resides somewhere else.  
Hardship is not the soul  
of this beautiful little girl  
who rides her bike along dusty South Georgia roads.

So, recall the scent of perseverance  
and remember  
The entire world is looking  
At this moment...  
At you...  
What will they see little one?  
What will you show them?  
They are watching.  
Watching...  
Watching you...  
What will they see...?

# What the Lord Made: To Granny Vannie on the Day of Her Passing

And the Lord said

*“Let there be light!”*

And the darkness gave way

And a beautiful light was born

Smiling bright as morning

Warm and gentle

As when you taught me the 23rd Psalm

Slow, Patient and Careful—at the kitchen table

When you said

*“The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.”*

And in the quiet

Soft and Loving

You taught me

Line by line, one lesson at a time

To hope

To love others past their pain

Despite your own sufferings

And I watched you persevere

Thriving, Becoming

Growing and Conscious

Mindful of the *Living Water* that gave you strength

*“Surely Goodness and Mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”*

And I learned

Knowing an unyielding faith

That conquers mountains

Breathes life

Teaches virtue

Offers abundance

And cancels fear

*“My cup runneth over.”*

And there at a small kitchen table

In a little green house

My world opened

As you traced each *Word*

Slow, Patient and Careful

You taught me

And I learned

*“And...I will dwell in the house of the Lord...Forever...Amen”*

HAKI MADHUBUTI\*

## A Poet's Call

it has always been easy  
to get to my heart.  
there is no other way of stating it.  
the best poets are lovers,  
are receptacles for pain, joy, injustice  
and the innocent smiles of children.  
we trust too early and easily,  
we read potential in the countless faces of evil,  
we carry many, many wounds.  
we are often crippled yet some heal quickly  
only to open their hearts to stories our  
    children can see through.  
the right words can send us on unlimited journeys.  
the hurt in children's eyes releases fury  
    in our soul and fists,  
black girls' mistreated hair brings tears.  
i do not wish it to always be this way.  
to care too much can damage one's spirit  
yet, the secret to longevity of significant poets is  
we never give up on love, poetry and  
the smiles of the young.

JAMERIA MORELAND

## Laugh, Out Wisely

Live your life  
Live and laugh  
Laugh when hurt  
Laugh for joy  
Joy is everlasting  
Joy is dancing  
Dancing in the rain  
Dancing for pain  
Pain is love  
Pain is pleasure  
Pleasure yourself  
Pleasure your lover  
Lover forever  
Lover you cherish  
Cherish your happiness  
Cherish your lover so sweet  
Sweet fornication  
Sweet temptation  
Temptation is everywhere  
Temptation is sweet sugar  
Sugar hills  
Sugar sweet kisses  
Kisses like snakes' hisses  
Kisses to start  
Start loving  
Start living  
Loving is caring  
Loving is daring  
Daring jumps  
Daring leaps  
Leaps to success  
Leaps to light  
Light up the way  
Light up the night

Night has come  
Night so dark  
Dark and lovely  
Dark sexy skin  
Skin so soft  
Skin smooth to lotion  
Lotion up  
Lotion down  
Down and around  
Down on time  
Time preciously used  
Time used wisely  
Wisely loving  
Wisely living  
Loving...  
Living...



## Untitled

He wears his confidence well  
Like a suit that fits him only  
Together forever we dwell  
In the depths of the Pierian Spring  
Enjoying life's moments that tell  
Of love's gifts  
That shape our dreams  
And as it seems  
Bind us two forever.  
He wears his confidence well.

## TALITHA MULLINS

### Untitled

I was once like Blake's child,  
sitting on a cloud, innocent and carefree.  
I was so full of joy that I laughed as I listened  
to the young piper below me playing an endearing song.

Then in the mist of my euphoria,  
things took a startling turn.  
The piper's song changed from a blissful ballad  
into a dark, dreary requiem.  
Thunder and lightning pierced the sky.  
The heavens began to shake.

I fell from that cloud  
and landed on the cold, hard ground.  
my joy turned sorrow,  
my laughter to tears.

The piper's song changed again  
into another soothing ballad.  
Yet it did nothing to ease my distress.  
I looked up at the sky,  
wondering if I would ever return  
to my soft, cozy cloud.

My heart grew weary from nostalgia.  
My incessant tears flowed to the ground.  
Suddenly, from the brown soil sprouted green grass.  
From the grass grew flowers,  
tulips, chrysanthemums,  
and roses of every color.

Since then, my teary eyes have dried.  
My sorrow has turned to joy.  
I no longer yearn for the comfort of my cloud.  
I have found joy here on the ground.

IVAN PAGE

## In Retrospect

When they put you in my arms, I thought  
How beautiful.  
All I had endured became a bundle of joy.  
So young, so active, so innocent.

It was a challenge to say no.  
I wanted to give you everything.  
As you ran around in those "Nikes," I thought  
How special you were.  
My friends noticed how I admired you.  
So young, so active, so innocent.

It was hard when the time came to say good bye  
And watch you from the class room window.  
You learned to play kickball, basketball and then football.  
I spent every free moment with you  
at practice and Saturday morning games,  
Even though work hours took their toll.  
So young, so active, so innocent.

Delighted with your every move, I never went out.  
Not sharing my love with another ensured our bond.  
So young, so active, so innocent.

Together we laughed about your first kiss,  
not knowing it would lead to Candice's baby.  
You promised to finish high school; I trusted.  
So young, so active.

Summoned by the phone, I rushed to proclaim your innocence.  
You promised never to sell again; still I trusted.  
So young, so active.

Again the phone rang with news of trouble.  
I rushed only to see you taken away.  
Fifteen to twenty-five is the pain we bear.  
So young.

Our visits are painful.  
Disappointment ends with a long blank stare.  
Wanting to find peace---I feel no trust or hope.  
So young.

## SANDY PEACOCK

### Color

God, make us one color,  
I think a fetching green,  
Close to a blade of grass or the fruit of lime,  
The moss beneath the trees.

Created by Your hand,  
What of, for us, a shade of blue,  
Perfect as the sky or the feathers of the Jay,  
The sea on a moonlit night.

As you gaze upon us,  
A fiery red might suit us well,  
Like a luscious apple, the petals of a blood-red rose,  
The fire in a slow sunset.

Make us understand, Dear Lord,  
Why we are not the same,  
Perhaps colored like wildflowers afield,  
Or the various rainbow shades.

For Your love of variety,  
Dappling color all throughout,  
Making each of us a wondrous hue,  
Together in Your name.

## Racing Time

When I look deep with wretched ache,  
At my soul's affinity in your grace;  
I oft wonder in fear for my own sake,  
If all is but a dream, and time a race.  
Oh, my life is not my own, suspended still in waiting,  
I, on my knees in anguish, pray and shall rejoice,  
To see you, adoringly, with mine eyes smiling,  
Your wondrous face, by God's own choice.  
Bring to sight before my tearful eyes,  
A vision utterly eternal, only to be mine,  
Etching on my soul furiously our ties,  
As ancient as the sands of time.  
My eyes if never saw again through sight,  
Will in my memory reflect your light.

PETER REECE

## Love's Letter

I don't need a greeting or a polite introduction  
I'm addressing this part of this letter to you little boy  
Because you defile my name so foul  
You tear it up to shreds like a fierce lion on the prowl  
My name once meant something before you came along  
Using it to touch lips hips having so many innocent girls fall for you, but  
don't trip  
Because you got yours coming, with you and your worthless ass-pirations  
My name use to hold weight  
But now it just weighs on one's heart till it aches  
I'm tired of your lies to get someone to lie in your bed at night  
Saying you'll always be by their side and at a blink of an eye you out of  
sight  
Because you open the lock to their treasure, they were taught to treasure as  
a youth  
Sporting their jewels in the street with fools who will never know my truth  
For you will be stuck in the ways of taking their innocence in a sense  
It's her naïve ways that even allows you to be in her scent  
Now I'll address this part of the letter to you little girl  
How you use my name for material objects  
You may deny it and say that it ain't the case but I say I object  
In the fact that that's bull ehh  
I don't even think you know the damage you cause when it's over  
Having some of these young boys drink to just get sober  
Because you used my name as a tool and drilled it in their brain  
And now that they're screwed all they can feel is the pain  
To believe you was once the apple of their eye  
And then you became Eve  
Having the man that once thought he was your knight, mourning  
Why? All of this because of everyone wants to slander my name  
Understand this  
Stop trying to define me because I am a feeling which can only be  
recognized  
Stop thinking I'm a fairy tale because baby I'm very much real not lie

Stop tryna emulate my voice because you can't even recognize my language  
I'm fed up and I've had it up to here  
If you won't stop using my name in vain  
Well I'll just use a simple phrase  
Here's a hint the first letter of the phrase is F  
The last letter of the phrase is U

Sincerely your boy, Love



SONIA SANCHEZ\*

## A Poem for Ella Fitzgerald

when she came on the stage, this Ella  
there were rumors of hurricanes and  
over the rooftops of concert stages  
the moon turned red in the sky,  
it was Ella, Ella.

queen Ella had come  
and words spilled out  
leaving a trail of witnesses smiling  
amen—amen—a woman—a woman.

she began  
this three aged woman  
nightingales in her throat  
and squads of horns came out  
to greet her.

streams of violins and pianos  
splashed their welcome  
and our stained glass silences  
our braided spaces  
unraveled  
opened up  
said who's that coming?  
who's that knocking at the door?  
whose voice lingers on  
that stage gone mad with  
*perdido. perdido. perdido.*  
*i lost my heart in toledoooooooo.*

whose voice is climbing  
up this morning chimney  
smoking with life  
carrying her basket of words  
*a tisket a tasket*  
*a little yellow*  
*basket—I wrote a*  
*letter to my mom and*

*on the way I dropped it—  
was it red . . . no no no no  
was it green . . . no no no no  
was it blue . . . no no no no  
just a little yellow*

voice rescuing razor thin lyrics  
from hopscotching dreams.

we first watched her navigating  
an apollo stage amid high-stepping  
yellow legs

we watched her watching us  
shiny and pure woman  
sugar and spice woman  
her voice a nun's whisper  
her voice pouring out  
guitar thickened blues,  
her voice a faraway horn  
questioning the wind,  
and she became Ella,  
first lady of tongues  
ella cruising our veins  
voice walking on water  
crossed in prayer,  
she became holy  
a thousand sermons  
concealed in her bones  
as she raised them in a  
symphonic shudder  
carrying our sighs into  
her bloodstream.

this voice, chasing the  
morning waves  
this Ella-tonian voice soft  
like four layers of lace.

*when I die Ella  
tell the whole joint  
please, please, don't talk*

*about me when I'm gone . . . .*

i remember waiting one night for her appearance  
audience impatient at the lateness  
of musicians  
i remember it was april  
and the flowers ran yellow  
the sun downpoured yellow butterflies  
and the day was yellow and silent  
all of spring held us  
in a single drop of blood.

when she appeared on stage  
she became Nut arching over us  
feet and hands placed on the stage  
music flowing from her breasts  
she swallowed the sun  
sang confessions from the evening stars  
made earth divulge her secrets  
gave birth to skies in her song  
remade the insistent air  
and we became anointed found  
inside her bop

bop bop dowa  
bop bop doowaaa  
bop bop doooooowaaa

Lady. Lady. Lady.  
be good. be good  
to me.  
to you. to us all  
cuz we just some lonesome babes  
in the woods  
hey lady. sweetellalady  
Lady. Lady. Lady. be goooooood  
ELLA ELLA ELLALADY  
be good  
goooooood  
goooooood. . .

IJIL SHEFFIELD

## Loving Me

I am beautiful  
Looking back at the mirror  
Loving what I see

REGINALD L. SWEET\*

## She Said...

I remember seeing her in my dreams  
A closed casket of thoughts  
Surrounded by well-wishers of emotions  
I tried not to miss her so much  
But she screamed miss me  
Through the cuts on her wrist  
That bled desperate for love  
And I tried to clean her wounds  
With my patience  
But she said  
She said I didn't need more time  
What I need is a savior  
But I can only love her and hug her  
I can't save her  
And as God be my witness  
She put my trust on trial  
Because she has been hurt  
More times that the law would allow  
And looking into her eyes  
I could see that she  
That she was dead to the notion of living  
But I was determined  
To be her word  
And she my Lazarus  
Come back forward was the command  
But she said  
That her knees were frozen  
In the backwards position  
Forced to pray to the wrong God  
And as a man  
I was there to change her posture  
But she said that she was ok  
Because reverse prayers  
Always seemed to be left  
Wrong always seemed to be right  
So I decided to reach for her  
With my heart and said  
Sweetheart for your life  
What would be right

And with a frozen glacier  
Fallen slowly from the corner  
Of her right eye  
She said  
He who hears my tears the loudest  
And instantly  
I knew why the caged bird would sing  
She needed to be free  
But every time I picked the lock  
With the key to my heart  
She cower into her corner  
Surround herself with her destructive dreams  
And instead of seeing me  
All she could picture were  
Reflections of Haitian women  
Covered in tears and ash  
Ethiopian women  
Snatched from their homes  
With remnants of broken finger nails  
Wedge in wooden doors  
She is reminded of the days when  
She would be beautiful  
When the reflection from her mirror  
Whispered caramel skin tone  
And dark eyes saw through men  
She said those were the days  
That her tears were the loudest  
Because they played a love song  
That could not be put on repeat  
One play and done  
Record skips  
Life be weary  
Dreams are buried  
Aspirations evaporated  
Over the boiling pot of struggle  
It's no wonder  
That she would rather  
Die alone  
Than to suffer another broken heart  
And truthfully  
I can't blame her

MARTIN UNDERWOOD

## Poetry Club

Why do all poets sound the same?  
Whyyy do they al-ways have to use so much emphasiiis?  
Maybe the poets are just scared of some different S@#t?  
Am I not poetry because I make it look cool?  
Is it not poetic to have nice things?  
Well can the poetic get some justice?  
Can I live?  
Can you find another poet to hit home like I did?



\* Albany State University 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Poetry Festival 2012-13 featured poet

\*\* Albany State University Early College Student

# SHORT STORIES





LANCE TURNER

## Regression Therapy

During another session of regression therapy, Andy Parker again told his psychiatrist there was nothing unusual about the day he was trying to remember and his psychiatrist looked over his notes. The day was August 21, 1997. Andy was three at the time, but now, at fourteen, he suffered from latent post-traumatic stress disorder. The psychiatrist explained to Andy's mother that the onset of symptoms following a tragedy can take years to develop and the fact that Andy was experiencing symptoms now was a sign Andy's mind was attempting to work through the experience and, finally, put it behind him. Furthermore, the psychiatrist suggested to Andy's mother to not worry over the fact Andy was remembering the incident because the act of remembering was essential to Andy's treatment.

In the session, Andy spoke about the incident. He said he *remembered* it was fifteen 'til seven in the morning, when he climbed the metal staircase of the apartment complex he lived in, clutching the metal railing with his tiny hand. The exact time was a false memory according to the psychiatrist. Andy knew the time now by heart. His mother kept a copy of the police report and let him read it when she thought he was old enough. And, when Andy started having dreams, his mother thought if Andy knew what they were about, the dreams would stop. She gave him the report to read. At the time, Andy was twelve.

The psychiatrist took notes as Andy described climbing the metal staircase, stepping on a gooey piece of red chewing gum. Andy was heading up to Mrs. Margaret Spencer's apartment on the second floor of the apartment complex. He reached out and turned the knob. She always left it unlocked for him, and with a look back at his mother who was delving into her purse, Andy waved and went inside.

Mrs. Spencer had been watching Andy ever since he and his mother moved into the apartment complex five months before the incident. They lived on the first floor and Andy's mother no longer worried about him when he walked up the metal staircase to Mrs. Spencer's apartment. Even though Andy was only three years old, Andy's mother told Andy she never gave it a second thought as he climbed the stairs that day because Andy climbed the stairs by himself every day. She also remembered that that day she had

rummaged through her brown leather bag looking for her tiny silver keychain.

The psychiatrist told her people remembered the strangest things.



After their first session, the psychiatrist took it upon himself to do research into the case; there were too many incidents in the city to remember each one and knowing some background knowledge helped him assist in the sessions. The psychiatrist read trial transcripts, police reports, witness statements, and watched a few of the news clips of neighbors being interviewed that were kept in the library's film archives. Mrs. Spencer's husband, Mr. Thomas Spencer, worked at the time, even though they were both in their sixties. Mrs. Abigail Grimler, a neighbor on the floor below, informed the public that Mrs. Spencer enjoyed nothing better than sitting and painting on large canvases, but only with her fingers.

Andy's mother agreed that finger painting brought Andy and Mrs. Spencer together. Andy loved the mud when he was a child. He crawled in it, caking mud on his chubby hands, almost trying to encase himself in it. Every once in a while Mrs. Spencer gave Andy a canvas, and he would plop down onto it in the middle of the communal yard and make his own muddy artwork... *Andy's Artwork.*



As Andy sat back in his chair, he pictured going inside Mrs. Spencer's apartment on August 21, 1997. Canvases were strewn around the apartment. A splash of blue here. A sun there. A blooming red flower. There were always a half dozen or so dishes on the counter or in the sink when he tried to remember the apartment, but sometimes Andy said there were broken pieces of dishware on the floor.

The psychiatrist took notes when the memory changed.

Andy saw some bright green Play-Doh on the floor of the kitchen as he strolled around the apartment and quickly grabbed it, squeezing it in his hands. While his chubby fingers molded the green Play-Doh, he scrunched up his nose; it was mushier than usual. The green Play-Doh was spotted with red paint, Mrs. Spencer's favorite color. If she couldn't envision what it was,

it was red. Andy threw the green and red mass against the cabinet under the sink and a grin spread across his face. The paint stuck and Mrs. Spencer wasn't running over to wash his hands. He ran his hands on the floor, covering them in more red paint, and ran to the cabinet. This was his canvas, he thought. Hands on hands. Hands smearing other hands. Andy's fingers overlapped and intertwined. But the picture wasn't turning out right. The paint ran and a shadow fell across the cabinets. Andy turned around and the shadow was gone. He left the paint and walked over to the dining room table, wiping his hands on his shirt as he reached for a pile of glossy puzzle pieces.

The psychiatrist told Andy not to try to rationalize what he saw. They know now the table was covered in broken glass, but *what did you think it was at the time*, the psychiatrist had said in one of Andy's previous sessions. The psychiatrist told Andy it was important just to relate what he saw and not try to figure it all out at once.



At ten after seven on the morning of August 21, 1997, Ms. Heather Johnson, a neighbor from two doors down, knocked on Mrs. Spencer's door. She was returning a casserole dish. Upon opening the door, which she said she often did seeing as how Mrs. Spencer left her door unlocked, Ms. Johnson dropped the casserole dish. She saw Andy by the dining room table, playing with shards of glass from a broken serving dish. In the report, the psychiatrist read that Ms. Johnson thought Andy's shirt was streaked with bloodied handprints.

Andy remembered Ms. Johnson running toward him from the doorway, grabbing Andy away from the puzzle pieces. Her grip was strong around him. Her breath was fast and her body shook. She lifted up his shirt and ran her hands over his body and looked at her hand.

Ms. Johnson pulled Andy's head into her shoulder and he wrapped his legs around her waist and held onto her neck as she hoisted him up. He heard the thud of her heart as he leaned into her. Ms. Johnson walked. Andy watched the living room get farther away as they went behind the kitchen counter and crossed over to the bedroom.

Ms. Johnson removed one of her hands from his back. Something metal twisted. *It was only the doorknob*, the psychiatrist said again. Andy heard

the door open and they were hit with light. Andy pulled his head away from the sound coming from Ms. Johnson's mouth and tightened his grip around her neck. Andy bounced against her body as she ran back to the front door. Andy could now see in Mrs. Spencer's bedroom as his vision rocked and swayed with each lunge Ms. Johnson took toward the door. He saw Mrs. Spencer lying on the floor with her arm stretched out like she was looking for something under the bed. Mr. Spencer was in bed. Both of them covered in red paint. He remembered Ms. Johnson screaming more, her voice raspy against his ears, and people coming out of other apartments as they raced down the metal staircase outside.



Andy did not remember much more after coming down the staircase, seeing Mrs. Spencer's door wide open on the second floor, and the psychiatrist brought Andy out from his regressive state and talked about what Andy had said. The psychiatrist then sent Andy out into the hallway and brought in his mother, telling her again that the sessions would continue until Andy remembered seeing the figure running out of Mrs. Spencer's door. Many of the neighbors, as they came out to see what Ms. Johnson was yelling about, saw the man run out of the Spencers' doorway and down the metal staircase. Since Andy was alone in the apartment with this man for twenty-five minutes, the psychiatrist felt remembering the man was the key to stopping Andy's post-traumatic stress.

JUSTIN ZARUBA

## Ambulance Driver

For seventeen years, I drove ambulances, fourteen of them were in Los Angeles. The last three were in Sacramento, when my wife found a job at a P.R. firm that offered her more money. Sacramento did not sound that bad and, in fact, presented itself as a lower-stress option. Driving ambulances in Los Angeles was the reason my hair went grey, almost entirely, like each dead body I was confronted with sucked the color right out of each strand. I would look at myself in the mirror, tired and haggard, and see the grey hairs. Each one corresponded to some face, some elderly woman or some hippie protestor. Maybe, I figured, if I moved to Sacramento that I might salvage whatever youth was still in me, even at forty-five.

Sacramento did not prove to be the step down I thought it would. This was 1960, mind you, and ambulances were not the miracle wagons like we have now. More often than not, they merely transported the dead, or if they were not dead, they would die on us. Our paychecks came at the cost of hand-holding, telling Mrs. Wilkerson that everything was going to be okay, but it wasn't going to be okay. Her stroke was massive, it had shut down the muscles in her face. She was so frozen in fear that we talked to her for ten minutes before we realized she was dead.

“We” were Daniel Stoss and myself, and Daniel was a young trainee, maybe twenty-four. He had dark brown hair and I told him on his first day if he kept with it, he would be as grey as me. He said “never,” but we finished our first shift and he was never the same after that. This was back in L.A., way back when I was only on year nine, I think. He worked the job for two years, then took his own life with a pistol. I don't think the job drove him to it, but it was a factor.

My first night in Sacramento, I got partnered up with this guy Roland. He was either as old as me or just looked it, but he had the grey hairs and so did I. We were introduced by the fleet manager, this lady named Janet Pirm. She told me later that she assumed Roland and I hated each other, because we barely spoke. We did not speak because we did not need to. We saw the grey hairs on each others' heads and we knew.

I had filled out some paperwork, I was on the clock maybe twenty minutes before Roland, and I had to climb into the back of a GMC-4 Medical

Transport. Twenty minutes and off to work. There was this kid named Daniel, not Daniel Stoss but a different Daniel, who was our driver. This Daniel would talk and talk and talk, but Roland and I barely said anything. Daniel drove. We sat in the back. We had to confront whatever came in the back, whatever it ended up being.

The back of an ambulance is the same wherever you go. Hospital parking lot, doctors office, highway, the back of an ambulance does not change. When we closed the doors, it was the white wall concrete of the hospital dispatch. But when we arrived, when Roland threw open the doors, it was night and the world was on fire. I did not know how the fire started, or how it got so out of control, but seven burning houses roared. Seven. I remember watching firemen try to put out one house fire, and that can take all night. But seven.

“Jesus.”

I cannot say if it was organized chaos, or the other kind, because I am not a fireman. It looked like chaos, it really did, but the firemen moved with confidence everywhere. The one that marched right at us, and I won't ever forget his face, he looked horrible. In his arms was something bundled up in a blanket and I thought to myself two things:

“I can't handle this” and:

“You can handle this.”

And, Jesus God, if it wasn't a little girl pulled from the fire. Even on those nights when I would have a terrifying dream, even then, I never imagined anything this bad. She seemed so small. Her skin was blackened and I thought it was from the ash and soot, but when the fireman reached us I saw I was wrong. She had burned in that fire for who knows how long. Roland and I looked at her body and I looked at the fireman. I could tell he was different now, and I had never seen him before this, but I knew. And I thought, “Why bring her to us like this? What are we supposed to do?”

Roland took her and set her on the stretcher. How she wasn't dead, was beyond me. And, for what it's worth, it would have been easier if she was. If she was dead, the fireman might not be different. Or me and Roland, for that matter, because I think we were different after seeing her, too. Roland and I were going through the motions. We put on the salves, we scrubbed away the dead skin, and it was like pulling away at shredded pork. She had cooked,

basically, and the fireman just stood there, watched us. I looked at him and snapped and said “don't just stand there and watch it, you bastard. This is shit that'll haunt you.”

He didn't have to watch it. He didn't work in an ambulance. He didn't get paid seventeen dollars an hour for that. He got paid forty dollars an hour to bring them to me. So I told him to go. He turned then and walked away, which was good. That saved him from anything worse. Roland and I were going to deal with it, there was no reason for anyone else on the entire planet to go through it if they didn't have to. No one else. In the entire world, there was this little girl, and there was Roland and I, pulling her body apart in our vain attempts to save her.







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