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JUST POETRY!!!

submissions may be made online at www.justpoetry.org or through the U. S. Mail to the address below. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is required for all U. S. Mail entries. Only one entry per poet, per 90 day period will be accepted. Poems must be 20 lines or less to qualify, not counting the title and any spaces between stanzas. Any subject matter will be reviewed. Our address is
Live Poets Society of NJ, P. O. Box 8841, Turnersville, NJ 08012

“BEST of ISSUE” WINNER
(*\$500 SCHOLARSHIP PRIZE*)

luminary

i am wanting & i am wanting & i want the audience to sing my praises
as if my tendons are circuits of brilliance, my teeth crowned
in gold. tell me my ambition is fruitless & i will reap a fleur-de-lis
from eden. no, no, it is not short sight; i approximate myself
as a crimson star transducing prominence, i am not blinded
by the spotlight (on an axis & tilted nine thousand degrees fahrenheit).
what do you mean tantalus never spits the nectarine pits
from his lips? lie to me. say it again—this time tantalus will consume,
& so will i. this time, i will transform the stellar core into
the parabola's focus: no limit as x approaches infinity, no asymptote to stifle
my trajectory, asymptomatic for failure. what? am i satisfied now?
at the point of no return, do the spectators extol me? this is a confession:
the false notion of some stars never burning out is one i pray to be true,
so i lyse the faults & keep wanting. let me explain—i arrange my heart
into arrays & my tongue into binary notation to feign nothing hurts.
how long does it take a heavenly body from nebula to protostar
to prime glory? how long does it take to fall from grace? no matter.
i am taking a bow now—& my pulse echoes applause, but
apoptosis awaits. my dreams are supernovas programmed to die.
Claire He, IN, Carmel High School

EDITOR'S CHOICE SELECTION

(\$100 SCHOLARSHIP PRIZE)

pantomime

paper wad crashes, microphone ashes, handwritten slashes
pens break when lives shape the cracking fate of fiction
courtroom heads shaking, raconteurs fading, pioneers waiting
ink dies as veiled crimes of modern signs strip diction

silent is the obsolescence in the mind of storytellers
dwellers rush their trite endeavors with a sense of looming Never

storm-perfect timing, cartridges drying, arguments flying
page turn to fresh words as children learn the standards
flip ahead lessons, handling blessings, diverging questions
path take for whose sake when we all make same patterns

mimic claims the observations of a splintered person's lifetime
life is just the imitation of an art form in the meantime

screens swallow focus, books go unnoticed, cremated opus
submerge vintage verses and enter the currents
juxtaposed phases, archaic phrases, modernized places
no one fears if tongues go blindly undetermined

Max Lee, GA, Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology

Disorder for E

There is only so much I can hold in my skin. I breathe through mustard-filled lungs, hand overflowing with blood that erupts into dust. It's called no man's land because no one can survive here, suspended like smog, a living purgatory. I'm a shell-shock of what I used to be. & I've wandered too far, lost with only an empty spoon of ammo. So I learn to shoot bullets of fat & muscle & soul. Then when this flesh runs out I'll bite into tin, savoring starvation like a penny I can't yet spend.

This is a battle you thought I could win.

You believe in the days when the winter snowfall chills the urge to purge, and Christmas carols shoot through gunfire. The rotten-egg-smelling vomit drains as the dust rolls back & the air is no longer heavy to breathe.

But you also hook two fingers around my heart—call it thin like the fishing line I'm grappling with, swinging like a drunk soldier between assaults and haunted pasts—and you tell me to pick the right side. Does the soldier know even his heart is not on the right side?

Now after so many bullets, so much sin, no single pore on my body is left unbled. There is only so much I can hold in my skin. So I dye the battleground, lower my chin to the dirt and bonedust. I make friends with my eternal neighbors, skeletons still ten times thinner than me. & these open-lipped wounds will starve me for a lifetime of death.
Stella Wu, CA, Taipei American School

In these empty hands I held your head.

The morning fog behind your eyes seeped
Out to plug my ears with cotton thoughts
Still stuck with thorns.

Mirror, you watched me leave:
Enter a cloud, float upstairs, and pause.

M: Old lady, my girl, hi there

she smiles

Your final lesson wrapped my lungs.
These empty hands humming for a scratch, itching to
Tear out my heart. I cannot swallow it.

Deaf ears opened to mute tongues.
Your solid head.
Pressing chest to knee, arm and arm,
Folded in half—into nothing at all.

They haven't taken you away,

Still lying in bed

Made me look at you, still warm and still there.
And I saw the truth in the theft,
That you would be so kind as to take just a
Piece of me with you.

Alexandra Arnoldi Nanis, VA, West Potomac High School

menisci in march, except i miss you.

my sister visits me again,
each year earlier than the last —
and it is raining.

it would be snowing now, she jokes, *if the sky loved me enough.*

if the rain loved itself enough to crystallize

(and did i know no two snowflakes were alike?)

instead of the indiscriminate drops
bleeding fingers down her blazer.

i don't tell her that no one on earth has found the shape of a raindrop
and no scientist has solved the young-laplace equation.

it sounds like a sunday cartoon: *the mystery of the menisci.*

but we are young, and the lilies that will rest

on the curve of her frozen stomach are younger still;

i don't tell her that i miss her. that the sky loves her

more than lily-pink snow and that is why it rains, heavily:

to reach her faster.

Emily Wang, NY, Horace Mann School

Creature of the Forlorn Night

O, insatiable beast

your howling inanition,

Grieving a fantasy

bound with wistful,

moon-drunken cries.

Bloodthirsty winds of change

carry your ululation

to ashy wicks of sky.

Enkindled by love

forged from your lies.

Chloe Hanousek, NY, West Genesee Senior High School

Matches In A Row

When I was born, there was already soot in my eyes
I was polluted in my mother's womb, and she hers, and she hers
We took our first breaths in a smoke filled room
We spoke our first words around the ashes in our mouths
We were never girls; never mother and daughter
We are matches in a row
Am I doomed? The flames lick at my skin
Am I doomed to ignite and burn my daughter's fruits before she is born?
Are we all doomed to mirror exactly who we swore we would never become?
The realization sets me apart but not out of line
I am gasoline; I am not any less flammable
I am my mother's daughter
We are burning, blistering, smoldering
In a row
I am thankful for the row
There is still soot in my eyes. But I am beginning to see sky
Sophia Jimenez, AZ, Shadow Mountain High School

A Ghazal for Genesis

The missed skip of a heartbeat floats the boundary one-sided death
another birth of a newborn wound on the chest where red death
seeps from effeminate blooms from beneath a child making room
for the ghost of youth coiled around His finger. One plighted death
once before resurfacing earth and its mother, promised for a dollar
and a half to live by it. Years ago I had entered the world abided, death-
bed already pitless under my soles — a perpetual falling, time a line so
blue tomorrow and yesterday would differ barely. Yet with death
everlasting, it is not long before time consumes you as it has,
gnawing like a beaver at your patience. And there was death
on her mind, silken pillow salt drying in the wash, there is death
in which she is the poem and I am the one who writes.
Chloe Wang, CA, Taipei American School

Forgive Me (Not)

Mother, I cannot help it-- I was born in this body
Mother, forgive me
My skin turned into orange zest, my blood into citrus juice
I am starting to believe that people undergo metamorphosis
Mother, do not call me blasphemous

Call me an alabaster ornament, white and beautiful
Call me alabaster, and I would turn orange with joy
But the zest would melt off my skin
It would reveal my interior, which is my new exterior
Which would undergo transmutation: orange zest to fleshy pulp to alabaster
To kneeling, to please listen, to peeling myself back in front of you
Makes you want to say that transformation is a transgression
Makes you want to beg for my regression
Makes me hate my alienation
But I crave to win through the emulation from others

Mother, I want to be like the others
Mother, I just cannot
Mother-- forgive me (forgive me not) for hiding
Mother-- forgive me (forgive me not) for revealing
Mother-- forgive me (forgive me not) for living
Amy Lilman, NY, University Heights High School

She Will Bind Us Into Sinew

In my adolescence I have heard people speak
About how humans hold other humans
But I never hear the gentle whispers
About how nature carries us in her palms
And how she could choose to crush us into sawdust
But she doesn't

If I were to kill myself in a meadow,
If my pallid body introduced itself to the soil
Perhaps blood gushing or mouth foaming
What human would hold me then?
My mother's tears may fill my carotid
My father may write me a eulogy that rivals biblical scripture
But they would not hold me in their arms

Instead, tendrils of her vines would caress my wrists
And turn my shoulder blades into orange peels
She would plant tulips in my eye sockets as if it were my grave
Send termites to eat out the rotting cartilage of my nose
And fungi to fill my kneecaps with budding seeds
If I were to kill myself in a meadow
The earth would hold me like her child
Skylar Christensen, CA, Orange County School of the Arts

the preservation of tainted blood

Click

the curator's abacus
awakens the museum walls,
analyzing even the most minute
freckle on our foreign-looking faces

Click

for those allowed to escape antiquity,
their pain preserved for historical fallacy
protection for the historically ignorant,
leaving a breathless empathy

Click

we chant above the echo on our frames,
stern as death and calm as white,
unified in all but our stolen language,
we shun this curator's Narcissus gaze

...

we mash our faces into the walls,
abstracting the beauty of our canvases,
ruining their story before they can turn our
blood into anything less than blood.

Alexis Washington, VA, Appomattox Regional Governor's School

funeral rites

my fingers ravage the earth,
 fumbling until they grasp
a tuber. i wrangle
 the sweet weight from the ground
and feel repulsed when i behold
 the chaff soiled with mold,
the flesh sticky with dirt.
 my hands are sullied, and i itch
to peel the plastic gloves off my
 fingers, slowly
so i can feel the way soil clings to my pores,
 like a child clutching her mother's hand.
i uproot dozens of bulbs
 and feel ashamed when they are stunted;
embryos slick with fluid,
 silent.
i bury them quickly,
 flinging mud upon flesh.
i bury them here,
 deep down in the dirt.

Hazel Thekkekara, GA, Alpharetta High School

Reunion

You were stolen from yourself,
Stranded in a different hand each day:
Taxidermist to cape your head,
Tanner to cure your hide,
Twist of fate to crack land into canyon, cast you down.

Now the wind sings of a giddy beast laying nations low.
The chant: Oh, unrelenting creature
Unrepentant, unadorned—
The ballad: Oh, creeping danger,
Dance in your ever evolving valley.

I was steeled against myself,
Armed & tied with other eyes' barbs:
Hunter's bow slung on my shoulder,
Butcher's knife stowed in its sheath,
Coward's spine sore from votive atrophy, axons deferent.

Yet when body spies soul
Bounding in the col, twirling atop the yardangs,
You move as the sough said I could:
Unfettered quicksilver, exalted & primed for our reunion
To howl the fear of me into the gale.
AJ Almeda, WA, Bellarmine Preparatory School

The Death of a Poet

One can hope you may forgive me for my blunder—
I can feel the weight of stones on my breathless chest,
I've been knocked off my feet by the tide, I've been torn asunder.

The thought of the past spirals into hapless wonder—
Curiosity scooped up from the couch, tucked in and put to rest,
Lost to the black of its eyelids, victim to the first human blunder.

Black midnight waters clasp at ankles, pulling man under—
A scream for help, every other syllable stressed,
Fourteen lines to sway the waves, to rip them asunder.

Ten syllables each to convince the great depths life is not theirs to plunder,
To show them I have naught to do with the sun's final death—
Yet legends whisper to my fingertips that hubris remains the eternal human blunder.

The storm roars back poetry woven from thunder—
Black waves force me to the sea floor, words dying on my tongue, unexpressed.
I die with poetry in my lungs, a song to shred the night's rage asunder.

The waves roll back with the moon, the storm falls into desolate slumber—
Each syllable sung on seafoam is a martyr's final request:
One can hope you may forgive me for my blunder—
I had simply been knocked off the righteous path by the tide, torn forever asunder.
Sunshine Holstead, SC, Academic Magnet High School

Fee

turn off that damn kitchen light
you are too cheap to pay the bill
fingers singing songs that stain my ribs berry purple
costing a loin but cheating a fool
trace my spinal cord to the root
and dissect where skin meets bone
slip it out and laugh
it's lymphatic and weak anyways
take it as compensation for the words that stick to my throat
spitting at me with a placate empty stare
as I choke and gag on my heart
before throwing it up onto your lap
leaking bile and staining your dress
you block the sunlight with your branches
stretching limbs every which way
laughing as the color drains from my skin
shrieking buckling knees
painting roses on your cheeks
you break every knuckle in my hand one by one
and then intertwine yours with mine
Devyn Stokdyk, CA, Crossroads School For Arts and Sciences

Fire, They Said. It cannot be.

Her eyes were fire, but it was cold in the summer.
They lurked in the shadows, ink-shrouded eyes taking in her misty face.

Fire, they said. It cannot be.

And she, stumbling through the fog
With vines around her legs,
Catching her like a faithful friend,
Heard their frosty words.

Fire, she said. I cannot see.

So she tore through the blanket of white
With the strength of a thousand arrows
And thrust herself into the river.

Icy, cold words clung to her
As she threw herself about,
Grasping at nothing,
Pulling against the frigid tide,
Until she finally came to the surface.

She stood on the bank, a cloud of apprehension shivering in the cold.
The new chill of the summer. The chill meant to satisfy.

Ice, they said, mirth prickling like thorns on a rose. It shall always be.

Her eyes were now ice, and she was blind in the cold.

Brooke Hunter, UT, Maple Mountain High School

Wintry

Pale and cold tendrils of ice creep up into a woven net to ensnare the passersby foolish enough to peer into those steely eyes that reflect back an ugly chilliness. Winter appears, once again like the first time: alone and lost and dark and umbral. Though, it holds a glad interlude to disrupt

the impasse, a reminder that the cold has come before, that it is nothing new. Except, this assurance does little, for the cold seems still colder this year. The way in which everything brakes, gears creaking to a sluggish drag, jammed by frosted attacks, seems to have been only a poco rall e dim before, intensified into the year's stagnation. Truly, how strange it is

that this harsh coldness becomes so forgettable so easily in the passing of bright summertimes, that every new bout of cold comes up as a surprise. It really seemed that these days would be of cozy and unbridled leisure, void of chill, easily countered with a pile of warm blankets and sweaters,

but that was just the fall's last echoes before the winter sang its dirge. Stepping foot in frozen time now quickly dips down into a trough of bitter chill, gently sloping beaches dulling into a cliff's edge over a harsh sea.

Winter likes to break down and up, likes to smelt and braze, likes to render into a coarse surface that is jaggedy with splinters. It will not be reigned in, but still, perhaps it will all fade away, and soon, lost in a jumbled dream will be the days dreary and wintry.

Lavinia Lei, CA, Monta Vista High School

Compass

Nature is a fickle being,
A torment of the young and seeking.
Stars shift slyly in the sky,
Clouds hide mountains from the eye.
Leaves shed colors, wilt, and die,
Wind howls false and blatant lies.

Man from his bare genesis,
Wandered through the world, amiss.
Sought to master latent barbs,
Found his place in gilded garbs.
Wary of his artful trail,
Grabbed the woven threads of tale,
Spun to find the way he goes:
A forgery of the cryptic rose.

Winding words in twists of string,
Yet brazen from a rustic ring.
Hail the honest compass bloom,
Glean the buds of covert loom.
Twist with iron, steel, and tin,
Watch the compass spin, and spin, and spin.
Eden Hen, NY, SAR High School

sizzling donuts

Deep fry ballerina
Into desired figure

Soaked veins lead to
Amelioration

Bend way up
Stretch back down

Deboning pirouettes
Bite-sized en dedans

Across stage
Bursting limbs

Contort body
However instructed

From stick figure
To lithe

Dance 'till beginning

Elizabeth Gao, CA, Portola HS

[Scrape Cycle]

Did I embrace the dirt

I'm green

He rests, succumbed by wear

I'm lying where I left him, bruised boy

the product of the ugly, like my mother's morning sickness

whisper "she's drunk on the transitory"

It's white. The milk of the fruit

tastes primordial

It's my great great grandfather's sore hand

raping the "great" from his kin's kin;

us, we squirm

not quite caterpillar, something almost annelid-ical

And his?

Hibernation of his generation

compulsive such as the dandelion I fed myself

years ago forgets she's a weed.

Stretching the word hysteria

until it's led broken by the leash from his mommy's drowned dog

Coupled, we stir the scrape cycle; now hereditary is coated in dirt.

I'm green

Courtney Kinken, NC, Rocky River High School

a creation, a bird, a malfunction

My dad tells me ill never be full
like a child his lap is the universe and i'm learning of the stars
as my own person i fear i really am his daughter
i'm in love like my mother
thinking of her i am rose quartz, a torch, a force to be reckoned with
i am in love and for now that will be enough
as my father's blood runs through my veins, she cannot touch me i will never
become anything
how do i love like poppy when two storms created me, he is dark but at night i feel
him thumping in my chest
i want to be a good partner
like a rainbow my mother fills you with colors but acts like the rain's invisible
you see my father believes in science it's concrete, real, it doesn't hurt
this invulnerability between the two i'm sure created me
i believe she is this light the whole sun beams inside her sneaking rays my way
she takes form in her birds flying in a pattern there is no where she cannot land
even though she is the universe you want to give her the galaxy
the apple does not fall far from the tree i put you on a pedestal
god i look so much like my mother
now it's night and i'm incomplete and me and my father avoid our therapy meetings
i'm sorry i'm confusing while i try to figure out who i want to be
i want to learn from my creators but love like me
Poppy Bradshaw, UT, Syracuse High School

Birth in a Kitchen

the government is calling me by my name & who am i
to refuse? hands bound, vanity mirror still on the tip
of my tongue. i sign my family away on the blood-
swept veranda, red scarf over my mouth, like a carcass curled
over a neck, thin & newborn. listen, as the zither is ringing
in my ears. it is playing my birthday song while auntie
kneels on the hazing asphalt, calves skinned. & i learn it only stops
when a new casket is born hungry & feral. here, our lips
kiss the Americans for fun & scallions turn into perfume
as my body rumbles, shrinks. the pope is laughing
at us, *ayi*. now my ancestors are hugging
like skewers in a Chinese oven. *laoshi*
warned us last month & here we are, spine up
for the neighbors, bones
crackling like a mussel in our Shenzhen kitchen. spill your language out,
princess. my mouth is sewed shut, body cheap again.
& in this house, we are watching the black hair fall
from my scalp as the zither is playing
our warsong, proud & static.

Vivian Huang, CA, University High School (Irvine)

on raspberries and solitude

you perch amongst the dusty, lonely sand dunes of your living room carpet,
plaiting your hair with two hands, idly scratching your barren face.
time disintegrates under the flame of the candle on the coffee table;
saccharine hints of raspberry emerge with the smoke
that curls languidly up toward the tilted chandelier.

seconds etch themselves into fractured walls.

everyone else has long since vacated, leaving aching, pulsing remnants
of themselves in half-folded clothes and fogged-up windows and
discarded-pizza-boxes like black holes, threatening to uproot
unforgiving, stagnant memories of yesteryears, of intimacy, of mirth.

now, only your raspberry candle keeps you company.
you burn side by side, twin flames, for eons upon eons.

how lovely and lonely is an existence of solitude,
such that when your hands grow weary of plaiting, no one will object?
when your flame goes out and no one bears witness to your existence,
what will you become? such are the mysteries of the universe,
simple marionettes that dance tauntingly past rapacious fingertips,
slowly bleeding out, pooling stubbornly at your feet, staining your shoes.

and still, you plait. till time runs into the ground, or perhaps until
the sick-sweet raspberry scent leaves your side. whichever comes first.
Sayli Limaye, NJ, South Brunswick High School