

Nashville Poets Quarterly is an online and quarterly print publication dedicated to giving a voice to the poets of Nashville, Tennessee. While we do select the poems, we do not exist to curate, but rather to collect.

Our intent is to feature poems from all caliber of poets to provide an accurate cross-section of the work being created by the community.

Welcome to the poetic voices of Nashville,
we hope you'll stay a while.

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UNTITLED

I fell in love with her like,
Like a meteor falls to the earth

Screaming and on fire

The corners of her lips fold up like curtains
And I'm standing on my chair
An ovation
For her teeth

I fell in love with her like,
Eighth grade
Fingers barely skimming each others
All wrists and knees and anxious giggling
The first time you held someone's heart

No,
I fell in love with her like kindergarten
Ma telling me to lower myself in

With the ladder, slowly, the water's cold,
you just ate
And I just,
fucking,
cannonball

I fell in love with her frantic
Like if I stopped
Even for a second
She'd disappear

I fell in love with her
Lush and slow
And

And let's be honest,
Overnight

Her fingers twist and tap
They fit so well, locked into mine
That it makes me glad all the attempts
Were failures

I fell in love with her like lighting
Fills a bottle
Never, ever the same again

Stephanie Grattan

TEACHING CURSIVE TO KIDS

The older woman ahead
Of you in the checkout line
Up in arms, her coupon
Won't be validated twice

I am to your left
Beguiled, angry
I want to zest her mind like an orange, but
Careful not to reveal her bitter pith

She is teaching cursive to kids
Nice, but no longer needed
She tries, but can't cry walking
On stilts
Goosebumps, dotted beads of sweat

I once stopped in the road
Picking flowers for myself
Potted in cracks of
Concrete
Hell, I'll stop traffic for a street
Blossom like you

We, no longer capable of this, are
Sustained on pre-tossed salad
You see we buy cherries
Pits removed
Take the stems from our mouths
As if to say
"I too can tie knots in folded
tongue"

We search for personal preachers
Contractually breathing life into us
These days, these times

As I go to speak
I remove the cherry stem
The noose on my tongue
I accept her coupon again
She, out automatic doors
Then looking at you
To say "Next"

Caleb Jones

BIG THINGS

Nonna said shoot the moon
aim for the center and follow through

when I was young I would point
my finger to the giant in the sky
make sure it knew
my town wasn't big enough for the two of us
sound my gunfire with my lips

Nonna never told me how it would look
falling from orbit
no longer what it was
she never told me
how the tides would stop

Nonna said shoot the moon
but she never told me what to do with this lifeless thing
I heard people used the bones of the bison
ate its meat stretched hide over trees and made homes
but the moon is such a big thing

Ryan Wilson

HONEYCOMB

Honeycomb lover!

Darling, the end product of a sticky situation

Has never tasted so sweet.

You love me golden

You gave me a thousand new reasons to sing of spring.

That's right—you've stirred up quite the buzz

Like the time we fell asleep laughing so loudly

That Mother Moon asked to be let in on the joke.

"Sorry, you had to be there," we told her,

"And besides, don't you have some stars to be putting to bed?"

So she wrapped us gently up in silver ribbon and said:

"You two kids have fun."

We took her advice and began to run.

Sarah Morris

FRUIT FUNERAL

When I was a kid
my grandmother
taught me how
to juice a lime
she would take
the lime and
with the gentle
pressure of her
hands roll it out
on the countertop
letting the green flesh
rock back and forth
between her fingers
and palm
I never told her
that I hated cooking
or that it seemed
like a useless skill
or that the taste of
limes disgusted me
but to my surprise
ten months later
I stand in the kitchen
rolling out limes
crushing them
beneath my weight
and watching their
juices leak out of
the bruised skin.

Matthew Smith

RELIC

i've painted you red in my mind,
not carnation but blood,
and you stand there
in my memory,
a marble statue
graffitied from
my public eye,
and i, your worst critic,
the one who holds the spray can
and desecrates a relic,
gaze at you, past tense precious,
resting in a dusky corner of my museum

Jessica Armstrong

HEAVY METAL

Little French lighter of mine

Magical vintage fire still alight

To the surprise of the saleswoman in the streets of Montmartre

How long is your life?

In whose flame do I share?

Did you spark her spirit with a turn
Like you light my blessed wood and herb

Did you burn a sad ciggy on a plump Parisian lip

Like you burn the sage that I spread around our old house tonight

Which I ignite in my mind
To turn our painful memory into ash

A cleansed breath in to accept unrequited love's brass bullet to the chest

Matching the glinting color

Heavy metal

Magic lighter in my hand

Alexandria M. Rowland

CANDY

you come here
in all of your stature
make my lips turn up
mute mouth talk
stumbling
over its own sounds
my feet race to you
heavy on the ground
my feather heart sinks
as soon as it hits
your ocean
now I am submarined
in quicksand confusion
I'm a lamb
in the spotlight waiting
for your lion's claw
to play
with my hair then tear
me apart
I bite down hard
into all of your charms
tonight, but next week
I'll be picking
your sticky candy
out of my teeth.

XEAH

YOU

I looked at it different
even if only for a moment.

And I felt that difference
— *pulsing* deep in my bones —

Ringin a new truth
wonderin how long it will take to fade.

MM

WHEN YOU RISE

You're standing in the steam,
Breathing in that heat.
Just you and the pieces of magic you thought you lost along the way.
They have been there.
Tucked behind your ear where you like to secure your hair.
In those moments of unreserved laughter you thought you might not live to see again.
The blue light trickles down your small hallway,
begging you to rest.
So you rest,
And when you rise,
You will hold onto those little pieces,
Your very own heirlooms of moments passed,
Precious memories you've packed tightly in your carry on.
Whispers and memories.
Dimples on cheeks.
Freckles on skin.
Bear chest in a waterfall.
Maybe you won't name children,
Maybe you won't move across the country,
But you have this.
You have peace.
For now, for now.

E.H. Hoffman

SPRING

The smell of the rain that evening was something pure.
Wet foot prints painted the hardwood floor.
Clothes clung to their skin.
She pulled her hair back, he pulled her in.

Bay Rooney

MASTERPIECE

That feeling when you want to
Show people what you've made
(To justify the spent Time)

And what you've made looks to you
Like a glistening marble statue
Under museum spotlights

But to everyone else it looks
Like a loaded gun or like a
Tornado on the horizon

Tova Oberon

PORTAL OF HOPE

Little things in life comes at us like a barrage of bees,
necessary for the flowers indeed
but they're a damn scary thing for those who can't run.

I can't find the right outlet in this cafe
I keep plugging into the wrong one
this one shocks me and that other one
falls apart, needs screws

I asked the guy next to me if he had a USB
but he just stared at me, thinks I'll rob him,
he mumbled, "you smell like leaves."
I nodded and then decided to move on

and now my coffee is cold, my computer is
shutting down, I'm running out of options,
I don't know what to do and this assignment
had to be completed by nightfall!

everyone looks so busy, with their books
and their jowls
and who else is losing their mind like me?
everyone else has what they need it seems

I'm simply looking for a way to plug-in
so I can manage the ordinary workload like an
ordinary drunk at a coffee shop wearing black,
sitting all alone and tired of overhead lamps

“their heat is unbearable,” I thought to myself
but I’ve been sober for a month
and I need to charge my things
“where’s that portal (?),” I asked out loud

to myself and
to whomever
it concerned
at the time

but there was nothingness
not a voice to turn up
not a hint of help
just a blank canvas

black screen
no time
and one problem,
everyone appears to fade into my dreams

the illusion has been
that they have hope
and I
don’t

APA

THIS MORNING, MY SON FELL ASLEEP ON MY CHEST

I hear the sirens of an end time
Drowning out the external joy
Of a suburban neighborhood boy
The time to look back has come
To an end
Onward, we go
Or is that just wishful thinking?
Maybe, that's the test
Does anyone know?

A man yells at mankind
"They did me wrong!"
On a network tv show
An honored guest
No thanks, he suggests
Angry, with us
For doing him wrong
For what purpose?
He chants his rage
For a paycheck
A money page
The attention stage
Social media craze

This morning, my son fell asleep
He fell asleep on my chest
Then time changed in an instant
For some reason I wasn't looking
Forward
I wasn't looking backward

I was just... still
I hate being
Still
Painful
Still
requires focus
And focus requires being
And being requires feeling
And feeling requires seeing
And seeing requires being
And feeling seeing and seeing feeling
The things I don't want to
Because I fear I may not like them
I fear, I may not want them
I fear, I won't

This morning, my son fell asleep on my chest
and all I can think about is now...
What am I doing, now?
I spend my time thinking about
What is next
That's the entrepreneurial way
Today!
Innovate! Move forward! Progress!
Yes, that's the best!
What's your value proposition!?
What's your value? Your mission?
What's the need in your disposition!?
I have a fix
Let me investigate
A proposal
A client

Make money, today!
At all cost
Move the needle
Or the eye will
Change the tide
Act now!
Don't be shy
Don't be that guy
But why!?

This morning, my son feel asleep on my chest
and I can't imagine anything else....
I want to gain
Develop! Prosper! Retain!
A warehouse of significance
I desire to raise the future
Off the fingertips of a new generation
That remains to be seen
Remains to be heard
Remains of a forgotten world
Broken and stolen
Among the dark caves
Of digital lantern's decay
Snuffed

Lights out
Goodnight to the American Dream
Tucked away
Is it a pyramid scheme?
Have I been made a meme!?
My brain wants to scream
At the top of my lungs
It reams

A paper trail
Of gleams
And beacons
Of destinations
Lucrative preparations
A destiny of transgressions
A vicious cycle of sensations
I want to cast out these
Dreams of vast
Illuminations

And stop.
This morning
My son fell asleep on my chest
I don't know what's next
The truth is
I have forgotten to rest
There is no past, and no future
Just here and now
My son, asleep
On my chest.

Wendell Moon

X (DONUTS/GONUTS/DIRTYWORK)

hands and clinging
breath
both like clay
working to earn
what i
handle and say
breaking the white and the red and the brown and the black dirt
down with my eyes,
mind these
weaponized vessels
straining remainders of nations through
broken
borrowed teeth,
like mud til blood comes clean
nourishing the bones that we fought to call home
and then forgot to call
completely

Magnolia Lee

KING FOR A DAY

I bought a castle
And filled it with birds
Just to see what they would do

Maybe I'll return to a garland of feathers
Draped around a dusty chandelier
Or maybe I'll see memories of flight
Splattered down a winding staircase

If you ask kings to build your home
They'll build it on a hill
And look the other way
When you slip into the sea

They'll leave a bible in the nightstand
But rip out the final pages
And keep the answers for themselves

They'll fill castles with birds
Just to see what they'll do

Joanna Collins