

Poetry by *Benjamin Sutton*

**Phantom Pain**

On the black market  
I cannot sell this soul  
Fast enough

And that girl  
Third from the back  
Fills forums  
About marrying for the  
Father figure

My soul, he refuses to  
Switch cellular plans

And our friendship depends  
On the musicality of gossip  
From yesteryear's satellites

He did not emerge  
Until late adolescence  
Waiting  
While the computers  
Calculated my personality

He taught  
Me about girls, antiseptic gum

He was the  
First to argue that F may not  
Always obediently equal X,  
And that we would rely  
On mercy of numbers

That was the year my  
Stocks dropped

That was the year I  
Took up theology

Took a nine-to-five  
Prosthetic job to fool my  
Soul into feeling the  
Phantom success.

Poetry by *John Pierce*

**A Teacher Shops for the Finer Things**

The guest bedroom  
just needs new curtains.  
That's all there is to it.  
Momma'll be staying  
in it in June, you know.  
And the Watsons may  
stop by any time...

But what's it matter?  
They're pretty, aren't they?  
Yellow, they'll lighten  
the room. Callie may  
play in there more...

It is just the guest room,  
and they do cost too much.

But sometimes,  
you just love things,  
you have to,  
a good deal more  
than they're worth.

Poetry by *Karen Kelsay*

**Spring Hyssop**

Sitting cross legged beneath the cherry tree,  
wearing her mother's seed pearl necklace  
and a sprig of jasmine on her bodice—  
she offers blossoms to a gravestone.  
The gilt and gold of late afternoon washes  
through shadows; it's springtime. Fruit hangs  
like quiet temple bells between flowering cylinders  
of white, and brides with dark branches.  
Somewhere in the sweet alone, silence caps  
hilltops and pirouettes across the tree line,  
as giant hyssop rise like spindles  
from the whorl of earth  
ready to trumpet the black of evening.

Poetry by *John Grey*

## HOW I DIDN'T WRITE SONNETS

I spent these miserable hours  
before the computer,  
despondently, inflexibly,  
skirmishing with my sickness.  
which in this drab winter  
threatened to overwhelm me.  
What depressing nights!  
Better jerk off my fingernails,  
peel the skin from my toes,  
than write poetry.  
The merest tap of finger on keyboard  
brought on the most taxing perspiration;  
concentrating my thoughts fatigued me;  
having to assign meaning  
to a regiment of words  
constricted my throat,  
threatened me with suffocation.  
Somehow, I pecked out,  
"muddy rag picker plucks threadbare maturity  
from desperate mushroom."  
The computer shrugged,  
went back to its corner.

Poetry by *Claudia Serea*

**Photos in the pantry**

*Stiff strangers stare from their frames.*

*An old woman presides  
over braided breads and cheeses in cloth.*

*Taica's mouth is stained by time.*

*Still, he looks so young  
in his tight military jacket,  
with his sepia-toned smile.*

*The door opens  
and the great-grand-daughter he never met bursts in,  
her dress overflowing with melons and berries.*

*She reaches for an apple and bites.*

*I was her age when we twirled with dust  
and loud radio tunes,*

*we turned and turned, and stomped  
until the music stopped*

*and taica panted That's how, that's how  
I'll dance at your wedding, my dear!*

*Apple picking*

*Touch me,  
lick the drop of sweat  
gathered on my lip,*

*and listen to the sound  
of this huge machine  
that hums and churns,  
and grows the apples round,  
pumps the pears,  
and turns beads into grapes.*

*Chir-chirr-chirrr—  
an invisible assembly line  
that swallows us whole,  
hands and tongues and all.*

*The trees are charged with high-voltage juice.*

*Chir-chirr-chirrr—  
root to stem to leaf to fruits and fingers,*

*the industrial sound of insect wings,  
crickets' legs scratched,  
cicadas thoraxes inflamed with song.*

*Chir-chirr-chirrr—  
touch me,  
as wired blackbirds watch  
and the grapevine swells  
its thousand nipples.*

*Touch me,  
but don't touch  
the apples fallen to the ground,*

*or they'll throw you into the sky,  
your hair full of flying sparks.*

*A song on the radio*

*A dirt road hangs from the sky  
and waits for us to finish picking.*

*Fall has come.  
We are picking its grapes  
under the violet sky  
soiled with violet juices.*

*A tremor is in the air.  
You cover my shoulders  
with your shadow  
and a song playing on the radio.*

*Fall has come.  
Our hearts are its naked grapes.*

*We crush them with our feet  
and their dark juices sink  
into the dark ground.*

*Fall has come.  
It flows from the barrel.*

*Farewell is the young wine  
you pour into the evening's glass.*

*It's sweet and tart like summer  
with a hint of grass  
broken under our bodies.*

*Take a sip, love.  
Fall has come.*

**Poetry by Bruce Whealton**

***I Wrote a Love Poem Once***

*I wrote a love poem  
Once... heard it was good –  
I remember it was good -  
the love... the love poem.*

*It was many years ago...  
lost -           lost in the fire, as it were,  
the love... the love poem.*

*I forget how it goes           the  
love...  
the love poem.*

*I just cannot remember  
the words I wrote.  
But I know I wrote a love poem,  
Once.*

Poetry by *Liam Connolly*

**Confrontation With a Train**

Driving into Atlanta one morning  
The road was blocked  
By a train.

I lit a cigarette  
And waited for it to pass;  
I watched it chugging along,  
Slowly and relentlessly,  
Like Sisyphus up the mountain:  
Hauling back and forth,  
Day after day,  
No end in sight.

The train cars looked old and beaten,  
Like a suit that needs to be retired;  
The engine let out a long, grey-haired cloud of smoke,  
Passing factories and office buildings and computer stores  
On its way to Terminus.

I finished my cigarette,  
But the train continued.

I wondered how people reacted  
In the nineteenth century  
The first time they saw a train:  
Did they realize there would still be trains  
In the twenty-first century?

And will there still be trains in the next century?  
Or will they become like eight tracks and video tapes,  
Or the typewriter that I loved when I was young?

Poetry by *Matthew Stranach*

**Morning People**

I've seen you on the way uphill  
Between stops, summers and other towns  
Half-asleep  
Doing homework on the bus  
Drowsy in the half-light  
Brush aside  
Loose strands of hair  
I wonder  
Do you still listen to R.E.M?

I'm trembling in my sneakers  
I'm the broadcaster nobody knows  
Trying to get a fix  
On how beautiful you are

## **J.D and How He Gets By**

He plays hockey three times a week  
He lives in a flophouse  
With the rest of the lifers  
Waits for payola  
He misses his mother  
He's twenty-six  
And he keeps getting fired  
Six chapters later  
Twelve glasses of moonshine  
Four games of solitaire  
Is about how long a gig is expected to last  
He doesn't want any hassle  
He gets mad easily  
That's what his last girlfriend said  
Then she went and had  
Somebody else's baby  
Life's a fore-check and then you die  
When he talks  
You don't know  
If he's just making shit up  
The truth is elastic  
It's gotten him where he is today

Poetry by *Serena M. Tome*

**Sketch #5: Pablo Neruda-Morning: Sonnet XII**

"Carnal apple, woman incarnate, incandescent moon,  
seaweed's sodden aroma, the bog's, and the marsh of the light—  
What shadowy rigors open between your columns?  
What primitive night is touched by a masculine nerve?"

*It is difficult being both Man and god*

*offspring of nothingness*

*by day*

*Concubine by night, every petal open  
wide*

*bright orange*

*buttercups in Spring*

*light winds*

*gnaw at my stem*

*causing me to shutter*

*my eyes cannot close*

*for fear of being abducted*

*by vandals*

*infidels*

*of lawlessness*

## ***Silent***

Wordless

Voices shout canticles of mercy  
In defense of Man

Leaves crack      breakfall  
Again and again from brittle limbs

Demonstrating how to die with dignity-fearless

Tear-stained earth dissolves her offspring  
Her womb swells  
Quaking contractions ripple

Magma spews from between her legs

Now—

Let our cheeks rest in the palm of our hands  
Gather our thoughts in the center of our chests  
*And breathe—*

Poetry by *Oscar Serquina*

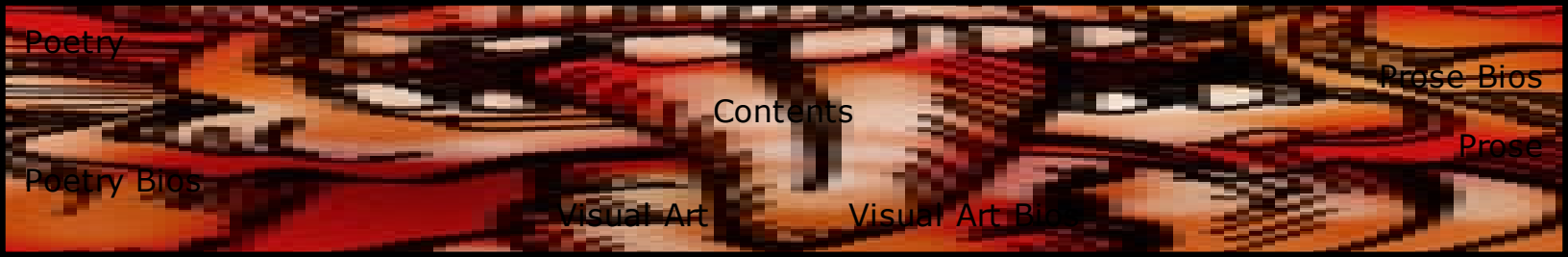
**Affinity**

Only when you stand at the edge of the portside does this spread of water scroll out the day's gentle convergence between those who stayed and sailed. What this vastness proffers to the anonymous and insecure is a contradiction to all the onerous evidence of absence, the obscured areas where life must fit.

Or a reminder of the sky's equally endless dimension over you, forbearing even if everything below it becomes unstoppably suffocating: nuances of roofs and wires, desertions and constructions, the adverse industry of the everyday—compounding in every rust and tangle and contrast.

This is the impression of what you have lived—coastal and literal, opaque as the sea's inaccessible depth. Passage is a consolation, a target contingent on what you wholly cannot catch. So this

is water to you: a hopeful territory. Its being on your being. The recurring ripples like your heart's spontaneous thudding. There are no refusals. This, this is the world as you know it.



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