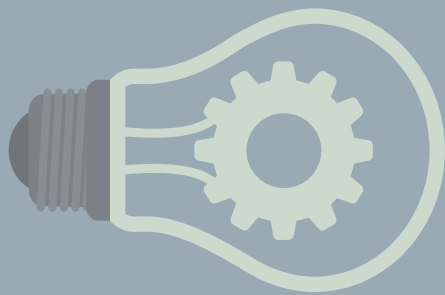


stolen *time* e

an anthology of poems written at desk jobs



FEATURING WORK BY

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CLOUTIER / TODD DILLARD / MARISA
CRANE / ROSANNA JIMENEZ / KARI A.
FLICKINGER / KEITH WELCH / STEPHANIE
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MAR 2020
WHATEVER
KEEPS THE
LIGHTS ON

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editor's notes

MICAELA

When I first tweeted about wanting an anthology of poems written at desk jobs, I mainly was looking for a community of people who write in similar creatively restraining environments. I used to work in a desk cube where I stared at a grey wall for 8 hours of a day, 5 days a week, and often writing poems was the only thing I could do to continue feeling like a person. I was surprised that so many people felt the same way, and even more surprised that Whatever Keeps The Lights On was willing to work with me on putting this anthology together. It has been so fun to see what everyone has submitted & how they've turned mind numbing working conditions into beautiful, funny, and haunting poetry. Thank you to everyone who believed in this anthology from the beginning, and thank you to the contributors who brought it to life!

TAYLOR SUE

After graduating college, I spent the summer in an office working as a secretary. I remember coming in at eight after listening to an audiobook desperate to write. I remember the frustration of sitting at the desk, feeling so ready to start my next short story only to find myself having to organize a stack of files for long periods of time. I got an hour for lunch, so I would shove food into my mouth, desperate to eat as fast as I could to use the remaining half at the desk, writing line after line of a story. When Micaela first tweeted her idea about an anthology of poems written during the desk jobs, I thought back to that experience, realizing that there could be a whole community of people like me who had to create art in less than ideal places. I have been blown away by the response to this anthology and by the beautiful poems we at Whatever Keeps the Lights on were privileged to read. This anthology shows that beauty can come from restrictive settings, and that artist writers and creators who find themselves working in the spare hours of a desk job, you are not alone. Thank you to the poets for your work, my co-editor for her hard work, as well as our guest editor Micaela for the work she put into making this a reality.

JESSALYN

With this anthology, we wanted to show a unique aspect of what life is like behind a desk. Working an office job can be difficult, time may drag on and it can be draining. Reading these poems brought forward an interesting perspective from the minds of a literary community that have nuanced, complex lives, as we all do, brought to light in the form of art. I for one, often find the office an outlet for me to write poetry when there's a lot of downtime, and it brings me comfort to know that so many others find the same relief in doing so. Taylor Sue and I were thrilled to get to work on this project with Micaela, and we hope all our readers enjoy it as well.

STOLEN TIME

A SPECIAL ANTHOLOGY OF POEMS
WRITTEN AT DESK JOBS
BROUGHT TO YOU BY WHATEVER KEEPS
THE LIGHTS ON



alfred o. cloutier

CUBICLE CANTO I

a little man is under my cube
a Styrofoam cube
the man is not little
he is crouching in a cost-efficient stance
he is walking while holding his coffee
a harness ergonomically molded to his shoulders
he is walking on a track of white poly foam dust
he is carrying my cube on his back
i sit up straight and keep my center of gravity stable
the computer and desk are sloshing, full of gallium
the gait of the crouching man
creates micro-tides of liquid metal in my furniture
the rhythmic bumping
of
the

cu-
bi-
cle

generates electricity
serves to widen the blood vessels in my skull
serves to blind me with moaning pain
i sit up straight and push down on the singular metal kick-panel
the panel stabs into the shadowed skin of the little man
the blood meter inches up like an old thermometer
a red line growing in a spike of glass
i'm seeing colors and synth waves rolling in my ears
it's raining white weightless polystyrene balls
i'm passing out from the pain
i kick the metal spike panel
the little man, crouching, spits out his coffee
the little man yells
takes a step
the cubicle advances

CUBICLE CANTO II

Update: my coworker is flooding
Her cubicle is full; a bulging meniscus
rises over the walls
She is casting the spell that turns her into a transparent fish
She failed, now the walls are glass, and she is still a person
She is looking out at us
She is passive aggressively trying to breathe in the water
The boss is watching so we are pretending to be in slow motion:
I grab a stapled stack of papers
and throw them—pretend slow—so they land
on everyone's head and inject a bit of staple-glue
into their scalps
My underwater coworker nods at me but the boss sees it;
he takes his Calloway golf club and sprays
Limp Bizkit brand cologne on the club head
He swings the club right at my head,
almost hitting another coworker on the backswing
But my head is already injected so I roll up the boss and his club
with my gluey scalp excretions
He lays on the ground vibrating with the forever twitch
that comes from being rolled up by a stapled underling
My underwater coworker makes a series of signs—another spell—and she transcends death
Her tears sparkle in the water and her cries seek the core of the cubicle world

ALFRED O. CLOUTIER is a cubicle-dweller who lives with his family in Boston, Massachusetts. He has been previously published in the role-playing industry, appearing in *Dragon Magazine*.

chloe gorman

OPEN PLAN

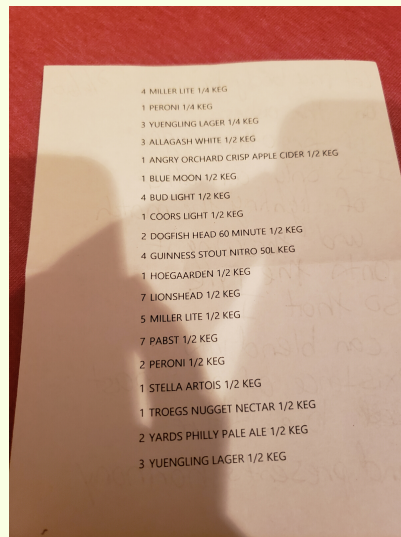
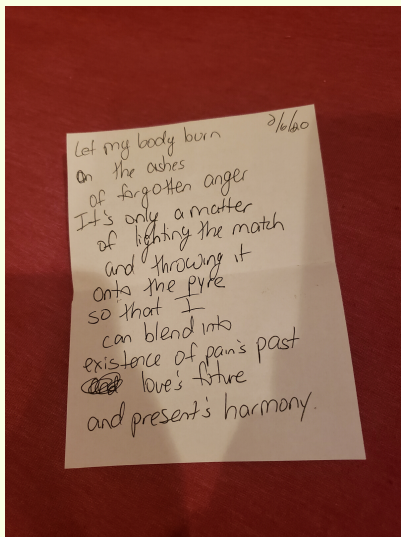
Open plan.
A phrase that sounds like freedom, but feels
like a cage.
A desk.
Full of the detritus of a creative mind.
Coloured pens, scribbled pads, thank you cards and piles of books.
This place looks like it is free.
Free for expression.
Free for you to decorate at will.
But there are days, it feels like a shackle.
A window.
A glimpse of glowing skies and swaying branches.
A portal for escapism.
A bird flies across the cloud speckled sky.
You wonder where she's going.

CHLOE GORMAN is a poet & aspiring author. Her work leans towards gothic themes. She has an MA in Professional Writing from Falmouth University. She has poems published in journals including Black Bough and Rhythm & Bones Press. Her debut flash publication was published in January 2020 from Twist in Time Magazine.

emily clauson

TIMELESS

Let my body burn
on the ashes
of forgotten anger
It's only a matter
of lighting the match
and throwing it
onto the pyre
so that I
can blend into
existence of pain's past
love's future
And present's harmony

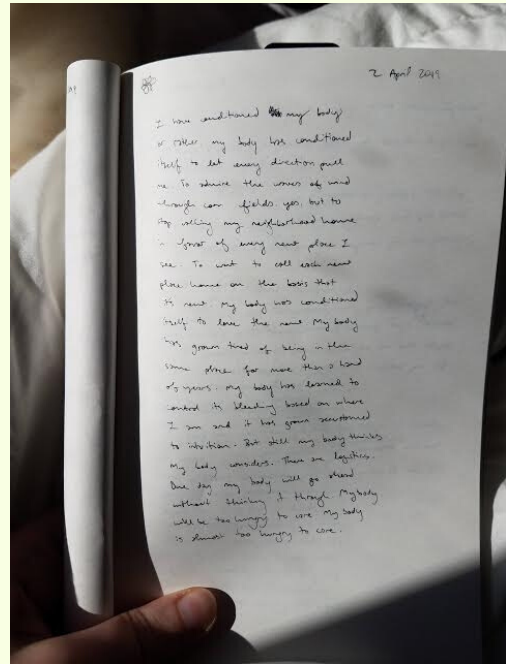


EMILY (EM) CLAUSON lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with her boyfriend and their cat. She works at a beer store in the city, where on slow nights she'll fill up ripped-up keg lists with random poems. She loves reading those poems to her cat who seems to enjoy them, too.

haley winkle

I HAVE CONDITIONED MY BODY

rather, my body has conditioned itself to let every direction pull me. to stop calling my home my home in favor of every new place I follow it to. my body has conditioned itself to love the new. my body has grown tired of comfort. who is really agentic here? my body controls its bleeding based on where I am, accustomed to intuition. still, my body thinks. my body considers. there are logistics. one day my body will run away without thinking it through. my body will be too hungry to care. I am almost too hungry to care.



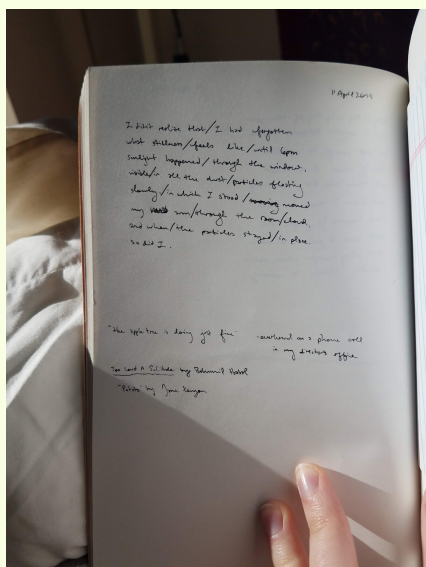
ON CHOOSING WHAT TO SACRIFICE, OR THOUGHTS WHILE COMMUTING

deciding to walk out of spite—I would have missed the bus and gotten to work later anyway—a girl in yellow totes past a tall potted sunflower and I spot a regular of mine. I say hello to no one. wildflowers lean my way, or just toward the mid-May sun. on Fifth Avenue, the resigned and unspoken rushed nature of 9:13 echoes and it smells like burning. *I am always so late.* I don't rush anymore. construction workers have already begun demolishing the block that moving trucks packed only two weeks ago.

IN WHICH I CONSIDER MYSELF

with snow melting atop scraggly
grass, it's too soon for strawberry
crowns collecting, hiding white
fruit flesh bits. even they're
not ready for us. not fully
awake yet. far from summer
and I wonder, why are there
seasons? to rest until sweet?
is my season the daytime,
after hours of sleep does my
crown of green leaves sprout
from my bright red body and
does a bite make someone
forget that frozen winter
nights ever even happened?
best enjoyed in sunshine.

"THE APPLE TREE IS DOING JUST FINE"



I didn't realize that / I had forgotten
what stillness / feels like / until 6pm
sunlight happened / through the window
visible / in all the dust / particles floating
slowly / in which I stood / moved
my arm / through the room / cloud
and when / the particles stayed / in place
so did I.

HALEY WINKLE is Ann Arbor-based poet, artist, and collector of floral tattoos. She's an editorial assistant at the local university press, where she sends a lot of emails and chose the cube near the window because sunshine is necessary. Her poetry can be found in Funny Looking Dog Quarterly, Hooligan Magazine, and Vagabond City Lit. Her analog photography can be found in Honey & Lime Lit and Hel[icon]

kari a. flickinger

A MUMBLE OF CLOUDS

sets above the office-building
like condensation on a banana pudding

skin that has been in the shared corporate
refrigerator

too long—a thin skin holds it in.
Through the wall-sized plexi-windows
just squeegeed by a mustachioed man
in a sling waits cloud.

Construction
workers gather below with a man-sized blow-up
rat.

How to tell whether the tower
or the road is the drawn line.
Which line is this side? How do we step
over the line without falling into the
concrete sidewalk abyss. I watch a family
of geese toddle in the strategically planted
shoots below. An empty lot.

The skies transform
as wait gives way
to dissipation

—to carols, carries mostly
and karens tossing their single
recycled blue-patterned
use bowls into bins.

But how long to wait—cloud? How long? How
ong before I touch my spoon
to the grey—to the atmosphere

to the mealy half
frozen mess
to the spotted ceiling glass
to the colliding object

up the elevator

a glass and a half above
the increment of floors
the same security-smile each monday
through friday. I unhinge
each

monday through week rotation
friday, I absorb
stout beyond all belief.

That sticky plumpness
that pinking swell in the fixed
hemline. Flats that tell a cloud

will never
climb higher
into voracious
slow tongue
touch you
before you were.
Tumbling now.

Shatter
the world we've pretended into this
system
we've compounded us.

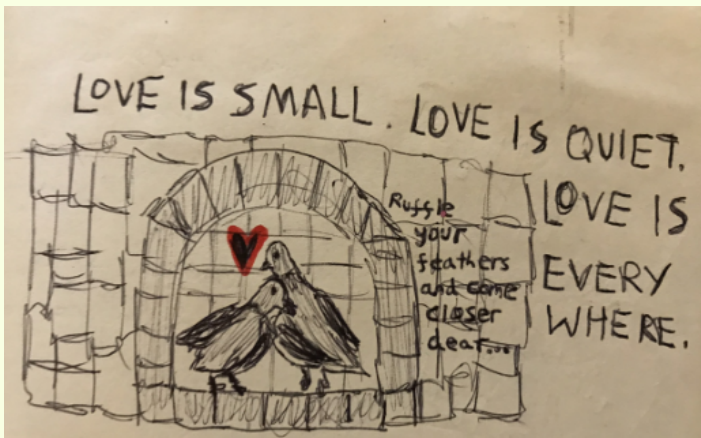
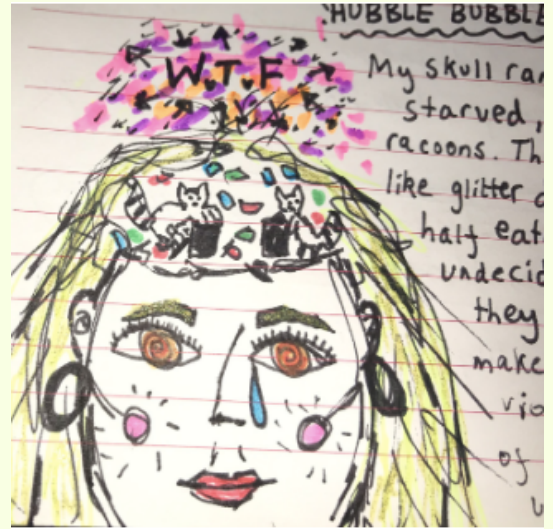
Come on. Let's break
through this immoveable glass.

KARI A. FLICKINGER was a 2019 nominee for Best of the Net and the Rhysling Award. She is an alumna of UC Berkeley and the Community of Writers. When she is not writing, she can be found singing to her unreasonably large Highlander cat, Bear. Find her: kariflickinger.com @kariflickinger

breaking out
above the wires grey
landscapes organizing

life
for me
myself
a cruelty

as it turns out
nothing good is
actually good I cannot stand melodrama
retracing steps taken
in morning back
to the front door
red traffic lights cannot stop me bounding out
across the concrete stoics stand
crooked
hunched over cigarettes and a fox
lays unburdened
of its employment vermin
empty like the plastic bags
we're not supposed to
buy I am
exactly on time
for the packed train
home



LUNCH-BREAK

January whips up a fresh clarity, the early afternoon winds digesting stratus and mote- a diaphanous softening as granules dislodge in their concrete, towers quiver like acoustic strings making room for the air; A rawness making me beloved. Clouds move their blue between us people of London as I peel my orange; amber spray from pores and craters the simplest evanescence. A burst short lived radiance of tartness in the cheek-like mouthwash stings but lovelier. Spritz a firework display of miniscule precisions, droplets catching numen the golden hour before glittering back into nothing. I tug my thumb under the shape of this miniature sun- quintessence and rind, bitten nails invigorate. I scrape the tenderness out, veins of shy pith which I extract like knots from a child's mussed head. Later, I'll be picking out this moment more, from beneath cuticles and pillows- the flesh and acid before collapse. Sunshine travelled through galactic emptiness the bones of trees to sit, in my hands here.



MOLLY BEALE is a current Masters student studying Poetry at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. Her work has previously been published in So To Speak Journal and The New River Press 2019 Anthology. Twitter: mollygbeale, Instagram: mollygbeale

rosanna jimenez

WINTER DENIALIST

My father tells me of how he spent his first winter here in an
Attic apartment, a dubious space heater at his bedside and I can
Smell metallic heat radiating the bakery plant flour off his clothes
 If only it were enough to cook him a loaf
White surroundings both inside and out and out
This is when he learned to master discomfort and
Carry on with the seasons without being evil because
Ice like a warm fire can redden the flesh
 Hold on the injured area to relieve swelling
Snow falling on its frozen sister sounds like a crackling fire
In the frigid air an invisible heat
The always-on blue flame lights the old estufa
 That heat can be blue is an incongruous miracle

HEARTWOOD

Spread myself over
All the plants and the animals
Those whiskered and those taloned
Envelop the water and the winds
All weather systems
Those churning behind the anchors at their desks
Those serene on laptop screensavers
Embrace the whole world
Knowing it won't hold me back -
Did you know the core of a tree is called the Heartwood?
The strongest part of a tree -
I want to peel myself,
Unfurl and expose the Heartwood
Become rooted into the earth while all those
Velvety paws and greedy beaks come and go
And the inconsistent visits paid by whirling havoc and soothing
warmth
Let claims be made upon me while
I stand reaching up and out
Holding all that hurts me and loving it all, all the same

ROSANNA JIMENEZ is a writer and tech researcher based out of Boston. When she is not writing about tech, she's working on her poetry. Rosanna's writing appears in Variant Literature Journal, The Athena Review, Azahares Literary Magazine, The Evocations Review and others.

todd dillard

THE GRAPEFRUIT

Put me on trial
I will confess
all along I planned to murder this grapefruit,

to drill my thumbs into its navel,
to peel with glistening
fingers the rind,

citrus fireworks
like welder sparks flowering
over my long-hard-day knuckles.

But then too I will describe
the delicate work of undressing
the pith's lace,

individualizing each wedge
from its cluster.
Yes, your honor,

I turned a plate
into chapel glass, I drizzled noonlight
honey onto a rose-tinted clutch.

I swallowed those ruby
slivers the way night
guzzles prayers. Constellated,

my interior sketches
a September mythology: bitterness,
but also a wind-

chime sweetness,
a hymn among so much
shatter.

SMALL FIRE OUTSIDE 34TH STREET STATION

It smolders in the bushes, smoke
prolific as the steam-tongue of a sewer grate.

7am pedestrians twist into ampersands
to avoid looking at it. *Work!*

That's the only word fire knows
Though I take a moment to show it

foot, stamp, water bottle and now
stink like a well-used machete.

"God bless you," someone says,
but they don't know on this same sidewalk

I once saw a cockroach globed in a wineglass
and did nothing! I didn't even pause

to thank the Lord for His offer
of amber flint, His morning cup.

I scurried to work. I drown in air.
I am always drunk with places to be.

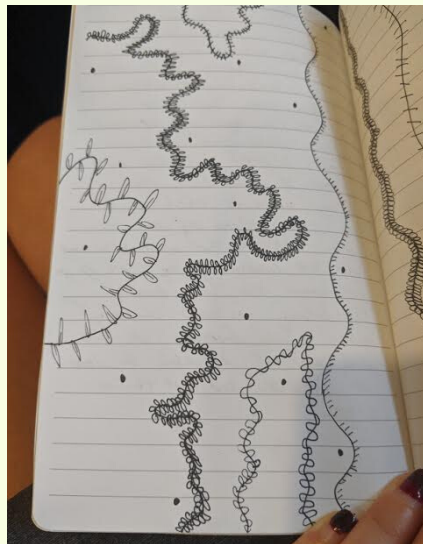
Even when I hurry into a moment alone
I arrive late, reeking of smoke.

TODD DILLARD's work has appeared or is forthcoming in many publications, including Booth, The Boiler Journal, Superstition Review, Electric Literature, and Split Lip Magazine. His debut book "Ways We Vanish" is forthcoming from Okay Donkey Press in March of 2020.

courtney leblanc

ON THE WAY TO A COCKTAIL RECEPTION FOR WORK

This life isn't / what I expected / how am I sitting in these meetings / stiletto heels / and
business cards with / my name / boss lady / money maker / game changer / sometimes / I
still cry / in the bathroom / still fake it / still worry / this isn't my / life / I ~~died~~ dyed / my
hair / purple / pull it back / top knot / top bitch / still hustling / still writing / still
wondering / what I'm doing.



COURTNEY LEBLANC is the author of Beautiful & Full of Monsters (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), chapbooks All in the Family (Bottlecap Press) and The Violence Within (Flutter Press). She has her MBA from University of Baltimore and her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She loves nail polish, wine, and tattoos. Read her publications on her blog: www.wordperv.com. Follow her on twitter: @wordperv, and IG: @wordperv79.

erica a. fletcher

I WOULD LIKE THE LAST HOUR OF MY LIFE BACK

one dozen employees around a table
at a meeting with no agenda
group editing a Word document
projected on a screen
wait while someone types in the edits
another hour of our life gone
nobody knows I wrote this poem

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF POETRY ANYWAY

to ensure an immortality in ink
words that will last when we know flesh won't

to burn down the houses of our pain
pull something valuable from the ether

to record something more than a list
groceries, chores, email inbox

meetings calendar, appointments to make, calls to return
oh look I'm doing it again

if each day must be a list
at least let each day be a poem

ERICA A. FLETCHER works in biomedical research and writes wherever and whenever she can. Her poems are forthcoming in *Writing in a Woman's Voice*. Her first poem was published in *YM Magazine*. She has played organ, guitar, and bass in the rock band *Nurse & Soldier* since 1997. She lives in Boston with her family.

kersten christianson

HOW TO DISAPPEAR

i. Magic Cloak

Felted wool, silver stars. Drink morning's high-cragged coffee. Disappear in abyssal folds of hood, stack of papers, click of heels; still here, or perhaps Iceland.

ii. Silent Voice

Open door, chatter and run. Light pours in, seeps through open windows. Flag snaps in the wind, frozen broccoli breeze cools annoyance. Bite that wagging tongue. Say nothing.

iii. Walk Away

No boxes. Leave behind the books of tabbed pages, torn-from-magazine poems, sharpened Ticonderogas. Carry a wry smile, the underwatered geranium. Run.

TIDAL ZONE

Paperwaves crest
the gunwales of the inbox,
crash upon the tideline
in foamfroth: essaystories,

editrevisions, latework, nowork.
Awash in paper, the last breath
of winterdays tumble
into springrains.

Each day, fullbasket
empties; each day
I wonderwant
for change.

Kersten Christianson is a raven-watching, moon-gazing, high school English-teaching Alaskan. She serves as poetry editor of the quarterly journal *Alaska Women Speak*. Her latest collection of poetry, *Curating the House of Nostalgia*, will publish in 2020 (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions). Kersten holds an MFA from the University of Alaska. www.kerstenchristianson.com

kelsey zimmerman

HOW STRANGE

It is
To exist
In someone else's mind
The way a ruby
Flashes in the dust
Like a collar
Around a snake head
Or a feather
In a nest

Then a dog barks
In the open field
Behind the bleachers
& your gram whispers
To fall asleep
Find the corner
Of your mind
Where petals fall

And here you are
In her brain
Gem in your palm
Feathers falling
In pattern to
A secret song
Sung by the part
Of you both
With no voice

KELSEY ZIMMERMAN is a writer and photographer living in Madison, Wisconsin. She's really just trying to do her best.

stephanie athena

valente

SIRENETTA

when i don't know what to do i think of the ocean. a compass is an empty beach. a brass whisper is the waves. i think there was always a part of me who inhabited the ocean, was born among sand dunes, fully formed, full of sea foam like some kind of myth. some kind of myth is that my hair is dark and red and brown and short and long all at the same time. my hair is a myth and i am like a kind of prayer in this ocean. chunky waves, crashing, brushing against thick walls of wet sand. it's a calling. waves. it's telling a story i don't know all the words to. can't you agree? the sand is pale. it feels cold. like a memory. My hair curls, it is alive, full of iridescent fish, shells, and

the ocean, the sand dots my neck like a rosary necklace. i think of archangels and saviors and gods and witches and monster. i am all of these these on a quiet, empty beach. i am a wolf in human skin. It's beautiful, and it's okay to be something human but not feel human at all. this is my myth. this is the place i can be. no train stations. no blue light computer. no marketing sales. my ancestors are tiny grains of sand. They whisper pain, ecstasy, ecstasy, and that little dreaded word: hope. together, alone, and with my spirits, i dance. i ponder. i'm not alone. i am alone. this is how i tell you my myth. close my lips. a feral thing with love and red hair. this ocean doesn't exist. sometimes, this ocean is palm springs. she ocean finds me, with woman spirits in long hair and we dwell on laughter. sometimes, we cast spells. Sometimes we kiss. i kiss a stranger who feels like a parking lot. the stranger is the darkest person i've ever known. he tastes delicious, like a midnight sky. the stranger is palm springs. the stranger is a vampire who follows me in gray corners of daylight. the rosary necklace tights around my neck. the stranger says, i'd be a beautiful bride. so pretty, so feral. the stranger pulls me into the waves. the stranger is calm. my throat feels like nettles. i should be scared, but i'm not.

i wake up. sand sticks in my hair.

TEMPORARY SWEETHEART

let it be the truth: i don't really know
what living means.

i'll tell you this: valentines linger in my throat
like swallowed diamonds, or
dreaming of too many stars.

i'll yield you the future: in tea leaves,
in trading stories over late night dreams
together, we'll chase
like foxes who never stop running

but the secret is this: if i am the fox,
rusted, small, & sleek
then you are the horse
full speed ahead at the gate,

running past me, with a memory token
the smell of my hair,
the lipstick print on your coffee,
a temporary sweetheart

i'll dream: of us in swimming pools,
of teal-crystal water, where we kiss
where we whisper sacred vows, lest we be pulled apart.
it's romantic: to seal fates in a swimming pool.
life. death. romance. it's the same, you know?

THERAPIST HUNTING

feeling like an anchor
washing over warm water
so long, it stops
feeling like water

that feeling is a mask, comfort
i forget to open the mail, envelopes
slowly curl, unread letters

my anchor dips,
i live by the sea
i am salt, a glass
spirit, full or empty

it's the same, you know

i am blue, teal, & most things
there are glimmers that haven't happened yet

i tell myself: so many e-mails unread
so many strangers to meet
so many stories to turn into crystals
hiding under my bed, inside my teeth

i'll tell them
how you licked the peach juice off my wrists
while i waited for nothing, but
in that sliver of time, it was everything.

LAVENDER LAKE

i check my phone
more than i care to count
my ancestors are ghosts, lost to oceans

i am just salt water, rosaries buried in sand,
filled with secret hexes and prayers
white tulips for a mouth,
turning leaves over in my palms

when you ask if i still taste
like swan meat, i'll part my witch lips,
to make a shell.

YOU'RE A REAL WITCH NOW

the sea-salt has nearly
matted my hair

i shed bruises,
a night in jail
my hair tangles

soft angles shaped by
a huntress, so stern
so brave in nothing,

but love,

i signed my name
like stars in my hair

she never told me
the cost of emotional labor

yet here i am.

CHANGELING

you turned into a myth:
salt spray mixed with cosmic air
lover, i'd like

to be dreaming instead
nothing was, or felt beautiful
my hair curled, salt cased my skin
i looked for your ghost by the window
heard an apparition whisper in the living room
i can't. you did. my cigarette matches turned grey.
the ocean wind shook my fig trees, leaving me
in a still house watching ash burn.

FEEL MYTHOLOGICAL

[once again, my voice cracks
i came here for gold, olive crowns, and pretty glory

are you an
oracle
a mermaid
or a trick?

either way,
i love
the idea
of us

here i am: chasing night stars
in a car, for you
with you

i'll champion the night sky
if you'll cut yourself
let me see your blood,

i'll drink wisdom
take a night drive
with me,

no fortunes told,
no piercing arrows

cross my heart.]

STEPHANIE ATHENA VALENTE lives in Brooklyn, NY. Her published works include *Hotel Ghost*, *waiting for the end of the world*, and *Little Fang* (Bottlecap Press, 2015-2019). She has work included in *Reality Hands*, *Maudlin House*, and *Cosmonauts Avenue*. She is the associate editor at *Yes, Poetry*. Sometimes, she feels human. Stephanievalente.com

eric lochridge

A STERN NOTE TO MY 15 YEAR OLD SELF

When you're a sophomore in high school
you're not really thinking about a lifetime
behind the computer more like life
as a surgeon or a pro ball player or fighter
pilot top gun so I get it when you have a choice
between Typing 1 & first period free
you choose extra sleep the easy life over
the swift brown fox & asdfjkl; not knowing how
thirty years of hunt & peck echoes
through the tunnels of your bones
through to the shoulders' slump
not knowing how one's wrists twist
the joints of the pointers how
the stress of the job balls up the hand
a fist that has no outlet other than to flatten & stiffly
poke the keys like they're the boss's eyeballs
to pound them like joystick buttons that fire missiles
that detonate bombs that declare the game over
not knowing the shades of pain that sandbag
your dreams—dull throb numbness dead
nerves—not knowing deterioration
is constant & for real & begins with the flip decision
of a boy who has not yet learned the keystrokes
that will spell out the name of his true self.

THE CAPITALISTS, ENDING WITH BITS WITH PSALM 23

the first day of your first job they give you the uniform
cap polo shirt nametag stamped with the company logo

they give you a look like all the others

they give you the training you need for them to succeed
they give you the key to success but not the lock

they give you the corporate-mandated pep talk
interchangeable parts without telling you you're the part

they give you the assembly line the get-in-line the gosestep
they give you a downturned heart like all the others

they sponsored your favorite toons Saturday mornings
now they give you the illusion of ownership

the specter of a hand in the means of production
controlled supply manipulated demand

they give bootstraps upon which you pull when
they push you down like all the others

they give you a day for a religion they do not believe in,
a puppet god to elevate duty over family, to enshrine

rugged individualism—pride in your work—
but as soon as you ask for greener pastures—

better pay, vacation, safety in numbers
they promise rod and staff for their lost sheep

they give not the shadow of death
but death like all the others

ERIC LOCHRIDGE is the author of three poetry chapbooks, most recently *Born-Again Death Wish* (Finishing Line Press, 2015). His poems have appeared in *DIAGRAM*, *Okay Donkey*, *Slipstream*, *Ghost City Review*, *Vamp Cat*, and *Dark Marrow*. He lives in Bellingham, Washington. Find him on Twitter @ericredits.

marisa crane

IN THE MCDONALD'S DRIVE THRU I CONSIDER HAVING AN EPIPHANY & THEN MANAGE TO SHAKE OFF MY FOOLISHNESS

my loneliness smells
like day-old beer
spilt in the cupholder
the problem is

that I loved you too much
to like you
outside the car
the sky is

falling
there are so many ordinary words
that I do not understand
like heaven-sent
like peace
like disciplined
I am a modern-faced disaster &
the drive-thru cashier
knows it my glove compartment is stuffed full
of old AIM away messages
sorted by band
& where my body was in space
my away messages are hot to the touch
or maybe that's just my id learning to project
I rarely ever left my chair
simply sat at my computer & waited
for a message

a shot of dopamine
it's not like I had anywhere to be I was barely
in the limelight
of my own life
when the night settled into my skull
I'd message girls I wanted to both

be & be inside of

truth is I lived
 for that surreptitious tingling
 this damsel / dyke knew exactly what she wanted
 truth is this was never going
 to be a poem about what it's like to see yourself
 represented
 correct me if I'm wrong but they don't make
 poems with faces as ugly as mine
 living exhausts me / the slow bite of it
 if I had my way
 my birthday would be every day
 for a whole year & then someone anyone
 maybe even
 you
 would make a wish & blow me
 out
 forgive me but my coping mechanisms have
 their own coping mechanisms to attend to
 consider me sweating through my shirt
 consider me considering you
 considering my body
 McDonald's no longer carries habanero ranch sauce
 my loneliness tastes
 like the end of a joint
 stubbed out on my arm
 the problem is
 that I needed you too much
 to want you
 at the stoplight
 someone inside a giant bubble
 switches places with me

 & I find myself
 aroused yet
 out of season
 I hope when you think of me
 you picture me this way

& READER, I'M TIRED

I am running outside
the gym
drenched in sun showers &
the shadows of
hope gone bad

my chest heaves
my thighs shake
why I do this,
only my distorted
body knows

someone in my class
runs by
wearing a smile
keep it up, girl!
they chirp
not knowing / not caring
to know
that I have not been a girl
since the summer of '95
when I begged my friend Jamie
to let me play Simba
while reenacting Lion King
in the basement,
two blurred balls of light
tumbling amongst the cushions,
the girl-boy of my bones
singing so loudly I could hear nothing
else

MARISA CRANE is a queer, nonbinary writer whose work has appeared in *The Rumpus*, *Hobart*, *Jellyfish Review*, *Wigleaf Top 50*, and elsewhere. She is the author of the poetry chapbook, *Our Debatable Bodies* (Animal Heart Press, 2019). Originally from Allentown, PA, she currently lives in San Diego with her wife. Twitter: [marisabcrane](#) Instagram: [marisa_crane](#)

keith welch

THE PRESENT STRUGGLE

Endless fits of future spool
from nowhere, slip between

my fingers, fleeting tastes
of present joining

unrelenting decades of past,
piling up like junk mail drifts.

It's easy to see how some topple
into their past and get lost.

I grow old. Older. I don't want
to live in my own obituary.

Please, just let my present BE
the present. Leave the past

safely in its ratty brown shoebox
on the coat-closet shelf.

KEITH WELCH lives in Bloomington, Indiana where he works at the Indiana University Herman B Wells library. He has poems published in The Tipton Poetry Journal, Open: Journal of Arts & Letters, Dime Show Review, and Literary Orphans, among others. He enjoys complicated board games, baking, talking to his cat, Alice, and meeting other poets. His website is keithwelchpoetry.com. On Twitter: @TheBloomington1.

advice from

the poets

We asked some of our poets to provide writing advice and share it with our readers for times when it seems impossible to push through, especially as work drags on and the creative juices begin to dwindle.

Haley's advice: Subscribing to daily poetry emails and reading them/journaling on my lunch break has been wonderful both as creative stimulation and clearing my head halfway through the day. Instead of using fluorescent lights, I also recommend using natural light/lamp light where possible—I always feel so bland below the overheads.

Kari's advice: My advice to those who are struggling to feel creatively stimulated while in the office is simply: Get out of the office; go for a walk or sit outside the building and watch a squirrel shimmy up a tree. See your environment with new eyes and delight may arrive.

Keith's advice: As for advice on how to stay creatively motivated at work - read and appreciate the poetry of others. If you're lucky enough to work with an internet-connected computer, poetry is easy to come by. If not, you can prime yourself by reading at home. Finally, every topic is fair game!

Kelsey's advice: My advice for folks to stick it to the man, creatively, is to use the Pomodoro Technique, which calls for focused work interspersed with periodic breaks, and using those breaks to be creative.

Rosanna's advice: My advice to those who struggle feeling creative when they have an office job is to embrace the belief that only you can set the pace for your life. That means, not rushing your creative work because there may be a sense of "falling behind" as a non-full time artist/writer.

Molly's advice: My sentence of advice for how to survive in difficult places is to never let the child inside us die: remain curious and naughty. Also make sure you have outlets to vent psychic diahoreah-whatever it may be.

Stephanie's advice: I keep creativity fresh at work by committing to writing something for just 5 minutes every day. Sirenetta was written in a five minute burst during my lunch break. Beats a regular sad desk lunch, eh?

