1. **Willow Peyton (West Virginia)**



**SONNET 55: NOT MARBLE NOR THE GILDED MONUMENTS**

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Not marble nor the gilded monuments

Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,

But you shall shine more bright in these contents

Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time.

When wasteful war shall statues overturn,

And broils root out the work of masonry,

Nor Mars his sword nor war’s quick fire shall burn

The living record of your memory.

’Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity

Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room

Even in the eyes of all posterity

That wear this world out to the ending doom.

    So, till the Judgement that yourself arise,

    You live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes.

1. **Sulette Lange (Pennsylvania)**



**OCCASIONAL POEM**

BY JACQUELINE WOODSON

Ms. Marcus says that an occasional poem is a poem

written about something

important

or special

that's gonna happen

or already did.

*Think of a specific occasion*, she says—*and write about it*.

*Like what?!* Lamont asks.

He's all slouched down in his seat.

*I don't feel like writing about no occasion*.

How about your birthday? Ms. Marcus says.

*What about it? Just a birthday. Comes in June and it ain't*

*June,* Lamont says. *As a matter of fact*,

he says, *it's January and it's snowing.*

Then his voice gets real low and he says

*And when it's January and all cold like this*

*feels like June's a long, long ways away.*

The whole class looks at Ms. Marcus.

Some of the kids are nodding.

Outside the sky looks like it's made out of metal

and the cold, cold air is rattling the windowpanes

and coming underneath them too.

I seen Lamont's coat.

It's gray and the sleeves are too short.

It's down but it looks like a lot of the feathers fell out

a long time ago.

Ms. Marcus got a nice coat.

It's down too but real puffy so

maybe when she's inside it

she can't even tell January from June.

*Then write about January*, Ms. Marcus says, *that's*

*an occasion.*

But she looks a little bit sad when she says it

Like she's sorry she ever brought the whole

occasional poem thing up.

I was gonna write about Mama's funeral

but Lamont and Ms. Marcus going back and forth

zapped all the ideas from my head.

I guess them arguing

on a Tuesday in January's an occasion

So I guess this is an occasional poem.

**Emily Wang (New York)**



**DISCRIMINATION**

BY KENNETH REXROTH

I don’t mind the human race.

I’ve got pretty used to them

In these past twenty-five years.

I don’t mind if they sit next

To me on streetcars, or eat

In the same restaurants, if

It’s not at the same table.

However, I don’t approve

Of a woman I respect

Dancing with one of them. I’ve

Tried asking them to my home

Without success. I shouldn’t

Care to see my own sister

Marry one. Even if she

Loved him, think of the children.

Their art is interesting,

But certainly barbarous.

I’m sure, if given a chance,

They’d kill us all in our beds.

And you must admit, they smell.

1. **Morgan Jane Cole (New Hampshire)**



**LIFE CYCLE OF COMMON MAN**

BY HOWARD NEMEROV

Roughly figured, this man of moderate habits,

This average consumer of the middle class,

Consumed in the course of his average life span

Just under half a million cigarettes,

Four thousand fifths of gin and about

A quarter as much vermouth; he drank

Maybe a hundred thousand cups of coffee,

And counting his parents’ share it cost

Something like half a million dollars

To put him through life. How many beasts

Died to provide him with meat, belt and shoes

Cannot be certainly said.

                                     But anyhow,

It is in this way that a man travels through time,

Leaving behind him a lengthening trail

Of empty bottles and bones, of broken shoes,

Frayed collars and worn out or outgrown

Diapers and dinnerjackets, silk ties and slickers.

Given the energy and security thus achieved,

He did . . . ? What? The usual things, of course,

The eating, dreaming, drinking and begetting,

And he worked for the money which was to pay

For the eating, et cetera, which were necessary

If he were to go on working for the money, et cetera,

But chiefly he talked. As the bottles and bones

Accumulated behind him, the words proceeded

Steadily from the front of his face as he

Advanced into the silence and made it verbal.

Who can tally the tale of his words? A lifetime

Would barely suffice for their repetition;

If you merely printed all his commas the result

Would be a very large volume, and the number of times

He said “thank you” or “very little sugar, please,”

Would stagger the imagination. There were also

Witticisms, platitudes, and statements beginning

“It seems to me” or “As I always say.”

Consider the courage in all that, and behold the man

Walking into deep silence, with the ectoplastic

Cartoon’s balloon of speech proceeding

Steadily out of the front of his face, the words

Borne along on the breath which is his spirit

Telling the numberless tale of his untold Word

Which makes the world his apple, and forces him to eat.

1. **Emma Rose Frisbie (Connecticut)**



**INVISIBLE CHILDREN**

BY MARIANA LLANOS

Invisible children fall

through the cracks of the system

like Alice in the rabbit hole.

But these children won’t find

an eat-me cake or a drink-me bottle.

They won’t wake up on the lap

of a loving sister.

They’ll open their eyes on the hand

of a monster called Negligence

who’ll poke them with its sharp teeth

and bait them with its heartless laughter,

like a wild thing in a wild rumpus.

But the children won’t awake

to the smell of a warm supper,

nor will they find a purple crayon

to draw an escape door or a window.

Instead they’ll make a mirror

of a murky puddle on the city street

which won’t tell them they’re beautiful

but it’ll show their scars, as invisible to others

as these children are.

1. **Richmond Parris (North Carolina)**



**TO HAVE WITHOUT HOLDING**

BY MARGE PIERCY

Learning to love differently is hard,

love with the hands wide open, love

with the doors banging on their hinges,

the cupboard unlocked, the wind

roaring and whimpering in the rooms

rustling the sheets and snapping the blinds

that thwack like rubber bands

in an open palm.

It hurts to love wide open

stretching the muscles that feel

as if they are made of wet plaster,

then of blunt knives, then

of sharp knives.

It hurts to thwart the reflexes

of grab, of clutch ; to love and let

go again and again. It pesters to remember

the lover who is not in the bed,

to hold back what is owed to the work

that gutters like a candle in a cave

without air, to love consciously,

conscientiously, concretely, constructively.

I can’t do it, you say it’s killing

me, but you thrive, you glow

on the street like a neon raspberry,

You float and sail, a helium balloon

bright bachelor’s button blue and bobbing

on the cold and hot winds of our breath,

as we make and unmake in passionate

diastole and systole the rhythm

of our unbound bonding, to have

and not to hold, to love

with minimized malice, hunger

and anger moment by moment balanced.

2. **Jessie Leitzel (South Carolina)**



**DIAMETER**

BY MICHELLE Y. BURKE

You love your friend, so you fly across the country to see her.

Your friend is grieving. When you look at her, you see that something’s

     missing.

You look again. She seems all there: reading glasses, sarcasm, leather

     pumps.

What did you expect? Ruins? Demeter without arms in the British

     Museum?

Your friend says she believes there’s more pain than beauty in the world.

When Persephone was taken, Demeter damned the world for half the

     year.

The other half remained warm and bountiful; the Greeks loved symmetry.

On the plane, the man next to you read a geometry book, the lesson on

     finding the circumference of a circle.

On circumference: you can calculate the way around if you know the way

     across.

You try *across* with your friend. You try *around*.

*I don’t believe in an afterlife, she says. But after K. died, I thought I*

*might go after her.*

*In case I’m wrong. In case she’s somewhere. Waiting.*

1. **Milla Hartford (Virginia)**



**TO HAVE WITHOUT HOLDING**

BY MARGE PIERCY

Learning to love differently is hard,

love with the hands wide open, love

with the doors banging on their hinges,

the cupboard unlocked, the wind

roaring and whimpering in the rooms

rustling the sheets and snapping the blinds

that thwack like rubber bands

in an open palm.

It hurts to love wide open

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It hurts to thwart the reflexes

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diastole and systole the rhythm

of our unbound bonding, to have

and not to hold, to love

with minimized malice, hunger

and anger moment by moment balanced.

**9.**

**Isabell Thill (U.S. Virgin Islands)**



**WHERE THE WILD THINGS GO**

BY D. GILSON

The night Max wore his wolf suit

made him infamous, bred the child star

never sent to bed. Middle school,

Max started drinking. *Not in my house*,

his mother begged, *No, no, no, wild thing*.

Max reminded her who bought

this condo, who paid for her meds.

Freshman year, Max raved. Roared

his terrible roar, rolled, and almost

wound up in a warehouse dead.

Where, oh where, do the wild things

go? To rehab in high school.

To college on residual book sales.

Max kept his head down. Laughed

at drunken frat boys. *Bro, let the wild*

*rumpus start*. Max said, *No thanks*,

and volunteered for the Peace Corps

instead. Two years in Kenya, one

in Belarus, the president thought

Max might be of some use. Max

moved to Washington, appointed

at the State Department a cultural

attaché. One important day Max wore

his wolf-gray suit, then drove home

well past rush hour in a freak snow storm.

Max drove on the deserted beltway,

thought it his throne. *Yes*, Max belted,

*this is where the wild things roam*.

**10.**

**Maiss Hussein (Delaware)**



**THINGS YOU MAY FIND HIDDEN IN MY EAR**

BY MOSAB ABU TOHA

*For Alicia M. Quesnel, MD*

i

When you open my ear, touch it

gently.

My mother’s voice lingers somewhere inside.

Her voice is the echo that helps recover my equilibrium

when I feel dizzy during my attentiveness.

You may encounter songs in Arabic,

poems in English I recite to myself,

or a song I chant to the chirping birds in our backyard.

When you stitch the cut, don’t forget to put all these back in my ear.

Put them back in order as you would do with books on your shelf.

ii

The drone’s buzzing sound,

the roar of an F-16,

the screams of bombs falling on houses,

on fields, and on bodies,

of rockets flying away—

rid my small ear canal of them all.

Spray the perfume of your smiles on the incision.

Inject the song of life into my veins to wake me up.

Gently beat the drum so my mind may dance with yours,

my doctor, day and night.

**11. Lucas Wilson (New Jersey)**



**DIPTYCH**

BY KEVIN YOUNG

night watch

You can fall in love

in a museum, but only

with the art

or its silence—or the stranger

you don’t mean to follow

suffering past the Old Masters

& the unnamed

servants. Rembrandt’s face

half in shadow—

you can fall for what

isn’t there already, or

with the 13th century—the swan

raising up, roosters hung

upside down to die on a cross—

Even the tourists gathered

round the docent, the same

jokes & half-truths,

loom beautiful—

the children crying hurried

out of sight. Forget

*The Night Watch*, the crowds,

instead follow the quiet

to the portraits of light

entering a room. These walls,

few windows, hold

the world—what the world

couldn’t say till someone

saw it first—and now

it’s everywhere. The braids

    of that woman’s hair.

self-portrait with felt hat

One should never be in love

when in a museum—

    better to be alone, if not

utterly, then practically—

tired of feet, & routine,

    forge ahead beyond

the bounds of audio-tours

& family, isolate, avoid

    this couple oblivious

to it all, the captions & arrows,

kissing like no tomorrow

    beside Van Gogh’s sunflowers—

bruised, chartreuse, brilliant

& wilting for years, yet never

    managing to. Skip

holding hands & Gauguin’s

portrait of Van Gogh

    painting what he saw. The crows

gather like clouds, black—

or the crowds—that the couple

    doesn’t care about—

numb to all else. Best

    believe in the world

more than yourself.

**12. Jennifer Shon (Rhode Island)**



**HOW TO TRIUMPH LIKE A GIRL**

BY ADA LIMÓN

I like the lady horses best,

how they make it all look easy,

like running 40 miles per hour

is as fun as taking a nap, or grass.

I like their lady horse swagger,

after winning. Ears up, girls, ears up!

But mainly, let’s be honest, I like

that they’re ladies. As if this big

dangerous animal is also a part of me,

that somewhere inside the delicate

skin of my body, there pumps

an 8-pound female horse heart,

giant with power, heavy with blood.

Don’t you want to believe it?

Don’t you want to lift my shirt and see

the huge beating genius machine

that thinks, no, it knows,

it’s going to come in first.

**13. Madison Harris (Maryland)**



**NOTHING TO DO**

BY JAMES EPHRAIM MCGIRT

The fields are white;

The laborers are few;

Yet say the idle:

There’s nothing to do.

Jails are crowded;

In Sunday-schools few;

We still complain:

There’s nothing to do.

Drunkards are dying—

Your sons, it is true;

Mothers’ arms folded

With nothing to do.

Heathens are dying;

Their blood falls on you;

How can you people

Find nothing to do?

**14. Nyla Dinkins (District of Columbia)**



**WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE**

BY HARRYETTE MULLEN

We are not responsible for your lost or stolen relatives.

We cannot guarantee your safety if you disobey our instructions.

We do not endorse the causes or claims of people begging for handouts.

We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone.

Your ticket does not guarantee that we will honor your reservations.

In order to facilitate our procedures, please limit your carrying on.

Before taking off, please extinguish all smoldering resentments.

If you cannot understand English, you will be moved out of the way.

In the event of a loss, you’d better look out for yourself.

Your insurance was cancelled because we can no longer handle

your frightful claims. Our handlers lost your luggage and we

are unable to find the key to your legal case.

You were detained for interrogation because you fit the profile.

You are not presumed to be innocent if the police

have reason to suspect you are carrying a concealed wallet.

It’s not our fault you were born wearing a gang color.

It is not our obligation to inform you of your rights.

Step aside, please, while our officer inspects your bad attitude.

You have no rights we are bound to respect.

Please remain calm, or we can’t be held responsible

for what happens to you.

**15. Lyra Legawiec (Maine)**



**THE ROBOTS ARE COMING**

BY KYLE DARGAN

with clear-cased woofers for heads,

no eyes. They see us as a bat sees

a mosquito—a fleshy echo,

a morsel of sound. You've heard

their intergalactic tour busses

purring at our stratosphere's curb.

They await counterintelligence

transmissions from our laptops

and our blue teeth, await word

of humanity's critical mass,

our ripening. How many times

have we dreamed it this way:

the Age of the Machines,

postindustrial terrors whose

tempered paws—five welded fingers

—wrench back our roofs,

siderophilic tongues seeking blood,

licking the crumbs of us from our beds.

O, great nation, it won't be pretty.

What land will we now barter

for our lives ? A treaty inked

in advance of the metal ones' footfall.

Give them Gary. Give them Detroit,

Pittsburgh, Braddock—those forgotten

nurseries of girders and axels.

Tell the machines we honor their dead,

distant cousins. Tell them

we tendered those cities to repose

out of respect for welded steel's

bygone era. Tell them Ford

and Carnegie were giant men, that war

glazed their palms with gold.

Tell them we soft beings mourn

manufacture's death as our own.

**16. Amanda Braig (Ohio)**



**ALL THIS AND MORE**

BY MARY KARR

The Devil’s tour of hell did not include

a factory line where molten lead

spilled into mouths held wide,

no electric drill spiraling screws

into hands and feet, nor giant pliers

to lower you into simmering vats.

Instead, a circle of light

opened on your stuffed armchair,

whose chintz orchids did not boil and change,

and the Devil adjusted

your new spiked antennae

almost delicately, with claws curled

and lacquered black, before he spread

his leather wings to leap

into the acid-green sky.

So your head became a tv hull,

a gargoyle mirror. Your doppelganger

sloppy at the mouth

and swollen at the joints

enacted your days in sinuous

slow motion, your lines delivered

with a mocking sneer. Sometimes

the frame froze, reversed, began

again: the red eyes of a friend

you cursed, your girl child cowered

behind the drapes, parents alive again

and puzzled by this new form. That’s why

you clawed your way back to this life.

**17.** **Greer Kennedy (Vermont)**



**LIFE CYCLE OF COMMON MAN**

BY HOWARD NEMEROV

Roughly figured, this man of moderate habits,

This average consumer of the middle class,

Consumed in the course of his average life span

Just under half a million cigarettes,

Four thousand fifths of gin and about

A quarter as much vermouth; he drank

Maybe a hundred thousand cups of coffee,

And counting his parents’ share it cost

Something like half a million dollars

To put him through life. How many beasts

Died to provide him with meat, belt and shoes

Cannot be certainly said.

                                     But anyhow,

It is in this way that a man travels through time,

Leaving behind him a lengthening trail

Of empty bottles and bones, of broken shoes,

Frayed collars and worn out or outgrown

Diapers and dinnerjackets, silk ties and slickers.

Given the energy and security thus achieved,

He did . . . ? What? The usual things, of course,

The eating, dreaming, drinking and begetting,

And he worked for the money which was to pay

For the eating, et cetera, which were necessary

If he were to go on working for the money, et cetera,

But chiefly he talked. As the bottles and bones

Accumulated behind him, the words proceeded

Steadily from the front of his face as he

Advanced into the silence and made it verbal.

Who can tally the tale of his words? A lifetime

Would barely suffice for their repetition;

If you merely printed all his commas the result

Would be a very large volume, and the number of times

He said “thank you” or “very little sugar, please,”

Would stagger the imagination. There were also

Witticisms, platitudes, and statements beginning

“It seems to me” or “As I always say.”

Consider the courage in all that, and behold the man

Walking into deep silence, with the ectoplastic

Cartoon’s balloon of speech proceeding

Steadily out of the front of his face, the words

Borne along on the breath which is his spirit

Telling the numberless tale of his untold Word

Which makes the world his apple, and forces him to eat.

**18. Ailin Sha (Massachusetts)**



**WHAT THE ORACLE SAID**

BY SHARA MCCALLUM

You will leave your home:

nothing will hold you.

You will wear dresses of gold; skins

of silver, copper, and bronze.

The sky above you will shift in meaning

each time you think you understand.

You will spend a lifetime chipping away layers

of flesh. The shadow of your scales

will always remain. You will be marked

by sulphur and salt.

You will bathe endlessly in clear streams and fail

to rid yourself of that scent.

Your feet will never be your own.

Stone will be your path.

Storms will follow in your wake,

destroying all those who take you in.

You will desert your children

kill your lovers and devour their flesh.

You will love no one

but the wind and ache of your bones.

Neither will love you in return.

With age, your hair will grow matted and dull,

your skin will gape and hang in long folds,

your eyes will cease to shine.

But nothing will be enough.

The sea will never take you back.

**Round 2 Poems**

1. **Willow Peyton (West Virginia)**



**HOW TO TRIUMPH LIKE A GIRL**

BY ADA LIMÓN

I like the lady horses best,

how they make it all look easy,

like running 40 miles per hour

is as fun as taking a nap, or grass.

I like their lady horse swagger,

after winning. Ears up, girls, ears up!

But mainly, let’s be honest, I like

that they’re ladies. As if this big

dangerous animal is also a part of me,

that somewhere inside the delicate

skin of my body, there pumps

an 8-pound female horse heart,

giant with power, heavy with blood.

Don’t you want to believe it?

Don’t you want to lift my shirt and see

the huge beating genius machine

that thinks, no, it knows,

it’s going to come in first.

1. **Sulette Lange (Pennsylvania)**



**RESPECTABILITY**

BY TINA BOYER BROWN

We ask our children

to act calm/nervous/whatever

innocent looks like when

some cop shows his badge/pulls his gun/slows his car.

We beg kids

to say soft yes sirs.

We beg kids

to get on the hood of that car/empty their pockets/shut up/put your

     hands behind your head.

No is an existential threat.

No is an existential threat.

No is an existential threat.

No is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.

We dare ask for humility

in the face of this oppression?

We have no idea what the threat feels like,

but we know

Breonna

Rekia

Sandra

Nia

Bettie

Yvette

Miriam

Shereese

Ahmaud

Trayvon

Eric

Laquan

Michael

Philando

Stephon

Alton

Amadou

Akai

Quintonio

Rumai

John

Jordan

Jonathan

Reynaldo

Kendrec

Ramarley

Kenneth

Robert

Walter

Terence

Freddie

Samuel

George

Tamir

and more

and more

and more

There’s no open wrist declaring our innocence that will confer peace

     where innocents need.

Our children

stand in front of doors/pages/words/in the streets.

They shut down/they shut down/they shut down

the forces that burn against them.

1. **Emily Wang (New York)**



**NIGHT BIRD**

BY DANUSHA LAMÉRIS

Hear me: sometimes thunder is just thunder.

The dog barking is only a dog. Leaves fall

from the trees because the days are getting shorter,

by which I mean not the days we have left,

but the actual length of time, given the tilt of earth

and distance from the sun. My nephew used to see

a therapist who mentioned that, at play,

he sank a toy ship and tried to save the captain.

*Not*, he said, *that we want to read anything into that*.

Who can read the world? Its paragraphs

of cloud and alphabets of dust. Just now

a night bird outside my window made a single,

plaintive cry that wafted up between the trees.

Not, I’m sure, that it was meant for me.

1. **Morgan Jane Cole (New Hampshire)**



**ODE**

BY ARTHUR O'SHAUGHNESSY

We are the music makers,

    And we are the dreamers of dreams,

Wandering by lone sea-breakers,

    And sitting by desolate streams; —

World-losers and world-forsakers,

    On whom the pale moon gleams:

Yet we are the movers and shakers

    Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties

We build up the world's great cities,

    And out of a fabulous story

    We fashion an empire's glory:

One man with a dream, at pleasure,

    Shall go forth and conquer a crown;

And three with a new song's measure

    Can trample a kingdom down.

We, in the ages lying,

    In the buried past of the earth,

Built Nineveh with our sighing,

    And Babel itself in our mirth;

And o'erthrew them with prophesying

    To the old of the new world's worth;

For each age is a dream that is dying,

    Or one that is coming to birth.

A breath of our inspiration

Is the life of each generation;

    A wondrous thing of our dreaming

    Unearthly, impossible seeming —

The soldier, the king, and the peasant

    Are working together in one,

Till our dream shall become their present,

    And their work in the world be done.

They had no vision amazing

Of the goodly house they are raising;

    They had no divine foreshowing

    Of the land to which they are going:

But on one man's soul it hath broken,

    A light that doth not depart;

And his look, or a word he hath spoken,

    Wrought flame in another man's heart.

And therefore to-day is thrilling

With a past day's late fulfilling;

    And the multitudes are enlisted

    In the faith that their fathers resisted,

And, scorning the dream of to-morrow,

    Are bringing to pass, as they may,

In the world, for its joy or its sorrow,

    The dream that was scorned yesterday.

But we, with our dreaming and singing,

    Ceaseless and sorrowless we!

The glory about us clinging

    Of the glorious futures we see,

Our souls with high music ringing:

    O men! it must ever be

That we dwell, in our dreaming and singing,

    A little apart from ye.

For we are afar with the dawning

    And the suns that are not yet high,

And out of the infinite morning

    Intrepid you hear us cry —

How, spite of your human scorning,

    Once more God's future draws nigh,

And already goes forth the warning

    That ye of the past must die.

Great hail! we cry to the comers

    From the dazzling unknown shore;

Bring us hither your sun and your summers;

    And renew our world as of yore;

You shall teach us your song's new numbers,

    And things that we dreamed not before:

Yea, in spite of a dreamer who slumbers,

    And a singer who sings no more.

1. **Emma Rose Frisbie (Connecticut)**



**THE WISH, BY A YOUNG LADY**

BY LAETITIA PILKINGTON

I ask not wit, nor beauty do I crave,

Nor wealth, nor pompous titles wish to have;

But since, 'tis doomed through all degrees of life,

Whether a daughter, sister, or a wife;

That females should the stronger males obey,

And yield implicit to their lordly sway;

Since this, I say, is ev'ry woman's fate,

Give me a mind to suit my slavish state.

1. **Richmond Parris (North Carolina)**



**ANOTHER ONE OF THE WORLD'S LIARS**

BY MOHJA KAHF

I am just another one of the world’s liars

believe me

I have a few charms

worn-out peddler’s trinkets

with grand names like beauty

friendship, truth, passion

—and this one’s a real item, sometimes

I even buy it myself: love

Check my record; odds

are not in your favor

that I won’t sell out

my goods, bolt by night

deny you three times

before the cock has crowed

Consider this fair warning:

never fall for my spiel

If you do

and end up with a huge bill

for damage done

never forgive me

1. **Jessie Leitzel (South Carolina)**



**I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER**

BY THOMAS HOOD

I remember, I remember,

The house where I was born,

The little window where the sun

Came peeping in at morn;

He never came a wink too soon,

Nor brought too long a day,

But now, I often wish the night

Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,

The roses, red and white,

The vi’lets, and the lily-cups,

Those flowers made of light!

The lilacs where the robin built,

And where my brother set

The laburnum on his birthday,—

The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,

Where I was used to swing,

And thought the air must rush as fresh

To swallows on the wing;

My spirit flew in feathers then,

That is so heavy now,

And summer pools could hardly cool

The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember,

The fir trees dark and high;

I used to think their slender tops

Were close against the sky:

It was a childish ignorance,

But now ’tis little joy

To know I’m farther off from heav’n

Than when I was a boy.

1. **Milla Hartford (Virginia)**



**ORANGES**

BY ROISIN KELLY

I’ll choose for myself next time

who I’ll reach out and take

as mine, in the way

I might stand at a fruit stall

having decided

to ignore the apples

the mangoes and the kiwis

but hold my hands above

a pile of oranges

as if to warm my skin

before a fire.

Not only have I chosen

oranges, but I’ll also choose

which orange — I’ll test

a few for firmness

scrape some rind off

with my fingernail

so that a citrus scent

will linger there all day.

I won’t be happy

with the first one I pick

but will try different ones

until I know you. How

will I know you?

You’ll feel warm

between my palms

and I’ll cup you like

a handful of holy water.

A vision will come to me

of your exotic land: the sun

you swelled under

the tree you grew from.

A drift of white blossoms

from the orange tree

will settle in my hair

and I’ll know.

This is how I will choose

you: by feeling you

smelling you, by slipping

you into my coat.

Maybe then I’ll climb

the hill, look down

on the town we live in

with sunlight on my face

and a miniature sun

burning a hole in my pocket.

Thirsty, I’ll suck the juice

from it. From you.

When I walk away

I’ll leave behind a trail

of lamp-bright rind.

**9. Isabell Thill (U.S. Virgin Islands)**



**SIREN SONG**

BY MARGARET ATWOOD

This is the one song everyone

would like to learn: the song

that is irresistible:

the song that forces men

to leap overboard in squadrons

even though they see the beached skulls

the song nobody knows

because anyone who has heard it

is dead, and the others can't remember.

Shall I tell you the secret

and if I do, will you get me

out of this bird suit?

I don't enjoy it here

squatting on this island

looking picturesque and mythical

with these two feathery maniacs,

I don't enjoy singing

this trio, fatal and valuable.

I will tell the secret to you,

to you, only to you.

Come closer. This song

is a cry for help: Help me!

Only you, only you can,

you are unique

at last. Alas

it is a boring song

but it works every time.

**10. Maiss Hussein (Delaware)**



**IF THEY SHOULD COME FOR US**

BY FATIMAH ASGHAR

these are my people & I find

them on the street & shadow

through any wild all wild

my people my people

a dance of strangers in my blood

the old woman’s sari dissolving to wind

bindi a new moon on her forehead

I claim her my kin & sew

the star of her to my breast

the toddler dangling from stroller

hair a fountain of dandelion seed

at the bakery I claim them too

the sikh uncle at the airport

who apologizes for the pat

down the muslim man who abandons

his car at the traffic light drops

to his knees at the call of the azan

& the muslim man who sips

good whiskey at the start of maghrib

the lone khala at the park

pairing her kurta with crocs

my people my people I can’t be lost

when I see you my compass

is brown & gold & blood

my compass a muslim teenager

snapback & high-tops gracing

the subway platform

mashallah I claim them all

my country is made

in my people’s image

if they come for you they

come for me too in the dead

of winter a flock of

aunties step out on the sand

their dupattas turn to ocean

a colony of uncles grind their palms

& a thousand jasmines bell the air

my people I follow you like constellations

we hear the glass smashing the street

& the nights opening their dark

our names this country’s wood

for the fire my people my people

the long years we’ve survived the long

years yet to come I see you map

my sky the light your lantern long

ahead & I follow I follow

**11. Lucas Wilson (New Jersey)**



**SONNET 145-THOSE LIPS THAT LOVE'S OWN HAND DID MAKE**

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Those lips that Love’s own hand did make

Breathed forth the sound that said “I hate”

To me that languished for her sake;

But when she saw my woeful state,

Straight in her heart did mercy come,

Chiding that tongue that ever sweet

Was used in giving gentle doom,

And taught it thus anew to greet:

“I hate” she altered with an end

That followed it as gentle day

Doth follow night, who, like a fiend,

From heaven to hell is flown away.

   “I hate” from hate away she threw,

   And saved my life, saying “not you.”

**12. Jennifer Shon (Rhode Island)**



**THE NEW COLOSSUS**

BY EMMA LAZARUS

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,

With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame

Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name

Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand

Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command

The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she

With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

**13. Madison Harris (Maryland)**



**BLACK MATTERS**

BY KEITH S. WILSON

*after D.H. Lawrence*

shall i tell you, then, that we exist?

there came a light, blue and white careening.

the police like wailing angels

to bitter me.

and so this:

dark matter is hypothetical. know

that it cannot be seen

in the gunpowder of a flower,

in a worm that raisins on the concrete,

in a man that wills himself not to speak.

gags, oh gags.

for a shadow cannot breathe.

it deprives them of nothing. pride

is born in the black and then dies in it.

i hear our shadow, low treble

of the clasping of our hands.

dark matter is invisible.

we infer it: how light bends around a black body,

and still you do not see black halos, even here,

my having told you plainly where they are.

**14. Nyla Dinkins (District of Columbia)**



**HOW DARK THE BEGINNING**

BY MAGGIE SMITH

All we ever talk of is light—

*let there be light, there was light then,*

*good light*—but what I consider

dawn is darker than all that.

So many hours between the day

receding and what we recognize

as morning, the sun cresting

like a wave that won’t break

over us—as if  light were protective,

as if  no hearts were flayed,

no bodies broken on a day

like today. In any film,

the sunrise tells us everything

will be all right. Danger wouldn’t

dare show up now, dragging

its shadow across the screen.

We talk so much of  light, please

let me speak on behalf

of  the good dark. Let us

talk more of how dark

the beginning of a day is.

**15. Lyra Legawiec (Maine)**



**WEIGHING IN**

BY RHINA P. ESPAILLAT

What the scale tells you is how much the earth

has missed you, body, how it wants you back

again after you leave it to go forth

into the light. Do you remember how

earth hardly noticed you then? Others would rock

you in their arms, warm in the flow

that fed you, coaxed you upright. Then earth began

to claim you with spots and fevers, began to lick

at you with a bruised knee, a bloody shin,

and finally to stoke you, body, drumming

intimate coded messages through music

you danced to unawares, there in your dreaming

and your poems and your obedient blood.

Body, how useful you became, how lucky,

heavy with news and breakage, rich, and sad,

sometimes, imagining that greedy zero

you must have been, that promising empty sack

of possibilities, never-to-come tomorrow.

But look at you now, body, soft old shoe

that love wears when it’s stirring, look down, look

how earth wants what you weigh, needs what you know.

**16. Amanda Braig (Ohio)**



**AMOR MUNDI**

BY CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

“Oh where are you going with your love-locks flowing

   On the west wind blowing along this valley track?”

“The downhill path is easy, come with me an it please ye,

   We shall escape the uphill by never turning back.”

So they two went together in glowing August weather,

   The honey-breathing heather lay to their left and right;

And dear she was to dote on, her swift feet seemed to float on

   The air like soft twin pigeons too sportive to alight.

“Oh what is that in heaven where gray cloud-flakes are seven,

   Where blackest clouds hang riven just at the rainy skirt?”

“Oh that’s a meteor sent us, a message dumb, portentous,

   An undeciphered solemn signal of help or hurt.”

“Oh what is that glides quickly where velvet flowers grow thickly,

   Their scent comes rich and sickly?”—“A scaled and hooded worm.”

“Oh what’s that in the hollow, so pale I quake to follow?”

   “Oh that’s a thin dead body which waits the eternal term.”

“Turn again, O my sweetest,—turn again, false and fleetest:

   This beaten way thou beatest I fear is hell’s own track.”

“Nay, too steep for hill-mounting; nay, too late for cost-counting:

   This downhill path is easy, but there’s no turning back.”

**17.** **Greer Kennedy (Vermont)**



**DIRGE WITHOUT MUSIC**

BY EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard

     ground.

So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:

Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely.  Crowned

With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.

Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.

A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,

A formula, a phrase remains,—but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,—

They are gone.  They are gone to feed the roses.  Elegant and curled

Is the blossom.  Fragrant is the blossom.  I know.  But I do not approve.

More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave

Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;

Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.

I know.  But I do not approve.  And I am not resigned.

**18. Ailin Sha (Massachusetts)**



**THE CHILDREN'S HOUR**

BY HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Between the dark and the daylight,

      When the night is beginning to lower,

Comes a pause in the day’s occupations,

      That is known as the Children’s Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me

      The patter of little feet,

The sound of a door that is opened,

      And voices soft and sweet.

From my study I see in the lamplight,

      Descending the broad hall stair,

Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,

      And Edith with golden hair.

A whisper, and then a silence:

      Yet I know by their merry eyes

They are plotting and planning together

      To take me by surprise.

A sudden rush from the stairway,

      A sudden raid from the hall!

By three doors left unguarded

      They enter my castle wall!

They climb up into my turret

      O’er the arms and back of my chair;

If I try to escape, they surround me;

      They seem to be everywhere.

They almost devour me with kisses,

      Their arms about me entwine,

Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen

      In his Mouse-Tower on the Rhine!

Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,

      Because you have scaled the wall,

Such an old mustache as I am

      Is not a match for you all!

I have you fast in my fortress,

      And will not let you depart,

But put you down into the dungeon

      In the round-tower of my heart.

And there will I keep you forever,

      Yes, forever and a day,

Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,

      And moulder in dust away!

**Round 3 Poems**

1. **Willow Peyton (West Virginia)**



**THE POEM YOU’VE BEEN WAITING FOR**

BY TARFIAH FAIZULLAH

I saw then the white-eyed man

leaning in to see if I was ready

yet to go where he has been waiting

to take me. I saw then the gnawing

sounds my faith has been making

and I saw too that the shape it sings

in is the color of cast-iron mountains

I drove so long to find I forgot I had

been looking for them, for the you

I once knew and the you that was born

waiting for me to find you. I have been

twisting and turning across these lifetimes

where forgetting me is what you do

so you don’t have to look at yourself. I saw

that I would drown in a creek carved out

of a field our incarnations forged the first path

through to those mountains. I invited you to stroll

with me there again for the first time, to pause

and sprawl in the grass while I read to you

the poem you hadn’t known you’d been waiting

to hear. I read until you finally slept

and all your jagged syntaxes softened into rest.

You’re always driving so far from me towards

the me I worry, without you, is eternity. I lay there,

awake, keeping watch while you snored.

I waited, as I always seem to, for you

to wake up and come back to me.

2. **Sulette Lange (Pennsylvania)**



**INVICTUS**

BY WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

Out of the night that covers me,

      Black as the pit from pole to pole,

I thank whatever gods may be

      For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance

      I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeonings of chance

      My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears

      Looms but the Horror of the shade,

And yet the menace of the years

      Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,

      How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate,

      I am the captain of my soul.

1. **Emily Wang (New York)**



**THE DEBT**

BY PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

This is the debt I pay

Just for one riotous day,

Years of regret and grief,

Sorrow without relief.

Pay it I will to the end —

Until the grave, my friend,

Gives me a true release —

Gives me the clasp of peace.

Slight was the thing I bought,

Small was the debt I thought,

Poor was the loan at best —

God! but the interest!

1. **Morgan Jane Cole (New Hampshire)**



**SLANT**

BY SUJI KWOCK KIM

If the angle of an eye is all,

the slant of hope, the slant of dreaming, according to each life,

what is the light of this city,

light of Lady Liberty, possessor of the most famous armpit in the world,

light of the lovers on Chinese soap operas, throwing BBQ’d ducks at each

     other

                 with that live-it-up-while-you’re-young, Woo Me kind of love,

light of the old men sitting on crates outside geegaw shops

                               selling dried seahorses & plastic Temples of Heaven,

light of the Ying ‘n’ Yang Junk Palace,

light of the Golden Phoenix Hair Salon, light of Wig-o-ramas,

light of the suntanners in Central Park turning over like rotisserie chickens

     sizzling on a spit,

light of the Pluck U & Gone with the Wings fried-chicken shops,

the parking-meter-leaners, the Glamazons,

the oglers wearing fern-wilting quantities of cologne, strutting, trash

     talking, glorious:

the immigrants, the refugees, the peddlars, stockbrokers and janitors,

     stenographers and cooks,

all of us making and unmaking ourselves,

hurrying forwards, toward who we’ll become, one way only, one life only:

free in time but not from it,

here in the city the living make together, and make and unmake over and

     over

Quick, quick, ask heaven of it, of every mortal relation,

feeling that is fleeing,

for what would the heart be without a heaven to set it on?

I can’t help thinking no word will ever be as full of life as this world,

I can’t help thinking of thanks.

1. **Emma Rose Frisbie (Connecticut)**



**TRUTH IS I WOULD LIKE TO ESCAPE MYSELF**

BY NOUR AL GHRAOWI

Truth is I would like to escape myself.

                                     Detach my body from my skin,

peel it layer by layer to uncover

                                     beneath the surface of petals

and thorns piled up year after year,

                                     who I am and who I want to be.

I want to be the flower that grows

                                     in dirt, the feather that flies free between

the cracks of fences. A wise woman

                                     once told me, don’t worry about you,

worry about who you could be.

                                     I want to be the woman who sits

on a desk and writes pieces of oceans,

                                     rivers on a white space in a place

where imagination has no border.

1. **Richmond Parris (North Carolina)**



**IF I HAD KNOWN**

BY ALICE MOORE DUNBAR-NELSON

If I had known

  Two years ago how drear this life should be,

  And crowd upon itself allstrangely sad,

  Mayhap another song would burst from out my lips,

  Overflowing with the happiness of future hopes;

  Mayhap another throb than that of joy.

  Have stirred my soul into its inmost depths,

                    If I had known.

  If I had known,

  Two years ago the impotence of love,

  The vainness of a kiss, how barren a caress,

  Mayhap my soul to higher things have soarn,

  Nor clung to earthly loves and tender dreams,

  But ever up aloft into the blue empyrean,

  And there to master all the world of mind,

                    If I had known.

1. **Jessie Leitzel (South Carolina)**



**OLD MEN PLAYING BASKETBALL**

BY B. H. FAIRCHILD

The heavy bodies lunge, the broken language

of fake and drive, glamorous jump shot

slowed to a stutter. Their gestures, in love

again with the pure geometry of curves,

rise toward the ball, falter, and fall away.

On the boards their hands and fingertips

tremble in tense little prayers of reach

and balance. Then, the grind of bone

and socket, the caught breath, the sigh,

the grunt of the body laboring to give

birth to itself. In their toiling and grand

sweeps, I wonder, do they still make love

to their wives, kissing the undersides

of their wrists, dancing the old soft-shoe

of desire? And on the long walk home

from the VFW, do they still sing

to the drunken moon? Stands full, clock

moving, the one in army fatigues

and houseshoes says to himself, pick and roll,

and the phrase sounds musical as ever,

radio crooning songs of love after the game,

the girl leaning back in the Chevy’s front seat

as her raven hair flames in the shuddering

light of the outdoor movie, and now he drives,

gliding toward the net. A glass wand

of autumn light breaks over the backboard.

Boys rise up in old men, wings begin to sprout

at their backs. The ball turns in the darkening air.

1. **Milla Hartford (Virginia)**



**LOVE ARMED**

BY APHRA BEHN

*Song from Abdelazar*

Love in Fantastic Triumph sat,

Whilst Bleeding Hearts around him flowed,

For whom Fresh pains he did Create,

And strange Tyrannic power he showed;

From thy Bright Eyes he took his fire,

Which round about, in sport he hurled;

But ’twas from mine he took desire

Enough to undo the Amorous World.

From me he took his sighs and tears,

From thee his Pride and Cruelty;

From me his Languishments and Fears,

And every Killing Dart from thee;

Thus thou and I, the God have armed,

And set him up a Deity;

But my poor Heart alone is harmed,

Whilst thine the Victor is, and free.

**9. Isabell Thill (U.S. Virgin Islands)**



**IF I HAD KNOWN**

BY ALICE MOORE DUNBAR-NELSON

If I had known

  Two years ago how drear this life should be,

  And crowd upon itself allstrangely sad,

  Mayhap another song would burst from out my lips,

  Overflowing with the happiness of future hopes;

  Mayhap another throb than that of joy.

  Have stirred my soul into its inmost depths,

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  If I had known,

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  The vainness of a kiss, how barren a caress,

  Mayhap my soul to higher things have soarn,

  Nor clung to earthly loves and tender dreams,

  But ever up aloft into the blue empyrean,

  And there to master all the world of mind,

                    If I had known.

**10. Maiss Hussein (Delaware)**



**SONGS FOR THE PEOPLE**

BY FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER

Let me make the songs for the people,

   Songs for the old and young;

Songs to stir like a battle-cry

   Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,

   For carnage nor for strife;

But songs to thrill the hearts of men

   With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,

   Amid life’s fever and fret,

Till hearts shall relax their tension,

   And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,

   Before their footsteps stray,

Sweet anthems of love and duty,

   To float o’er life’s highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,

   When shadows dim their sight;

Of the bright and restful mansions,

   Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,

   Needs music, pure and strong,

To hush the jangle and discords

   Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,

   Till war and crime shall cease;

And the hearts of men grown tender

   Girdle the world with peace.

**11. Lucas Wilson (New Jersey)**



**SNOW DAY**

BY BILLY COLLINS

Today we woke up to a revolution of snow,

its white flag waving over everything,

the landscape vanished,

not a single mouse to punctuate the blankness,

and beyond these windows

the government buildings smothered,

schools and libraries buried, the post office lost

under the noiseless drift,

the paths of trains softly blocked,

the world fallen under this falling.

In a while, I will put on some boots

and step out like someone walking in water,

and the dog will porpoise through the drifts,

and I will shake a laden branch

sending a cold shower down on us both.

But for now I am a willing prisoner in this house,

a sympathizer with the anarchic cause of snow.

I will make a pot of tea

and listen to the plastic radio on the counter,

as glad as anyone to hear the news

that the Kiddie Corner School is closed,

the Ding-Dong School, closed.

the All Aboard Children’s School, closed,

the Hi-Ho Nursery School, closed,

along with—some will be delighted to hear—

the Toadstool School, the Little School,

Little Sparrows Nursery School,

Little Stars Pre-School, Peas-and-Carrots Day School

the Tom Thumb Child Center, all closed,

and—clap your hands—the Peanuts Play School.

So this is where the children hide all day,

These are the nests where they letter and draw,

where they put on their bright miniature jackets,

all darting and climbing and sliding,

all but the few girls whispering by the fence.

And now I am listening hard

in the grandiose silence of the snow,

trying to hear what those three girls are plotting,

what riot is afoot,

which small queen is about to be brought down.

**12. Jennifer Shon (Rhode Island)**



**SAY GRACE**

BY EMILY JUNGMIN YOON

In my country our shamans were women

and our gods multiple until white people brought

an ecstasy of rosaries and our cities today

glow with crosses like graveyards. As a child

in Sunday school I was told I’d go to hell

if I didn’t believe in God. Our teacher was a woman

whose daughters wanted to be nuns and I asked

*What about babies and what about Buddha*, and she said

*They’re in hell too* and so I memorized prayers

and recited them in front of women

I did not believe in. *Deliver us from evil.*

*O sweet Virgin Mary, amen*. O sweet. O sweet.

In this country, which calls itself Christian,

what is sweeter than hearing *Have mercy*

*on us*. From those who serve different gods. O

clement, O loving, O God, O God, amidst ruins,

amidst waters, fleeing, fleeing. *Deliver us from evil*.

O sweet, O sweet. In this country,

point at the moon, at the stars, point at the way the lake lies,

with a hand full of feathers,

and they will look at the feathers. And kill you for it.

If a word for religion they don’t believe in is magic

so be it, let us have magic. Let us have

our own mothers and scarves, our spirits,

our shamans and our sacred books. Let us keep

our stars to ourselves and we shall pray

to no one. Let us eat

what makes us holy.

**13. Madison Harris (Maryland)**



**HANGING FIRE**

BY AUDRE LORDE

I am fourteen

and my skin has betrayed me

the boy I cannot live without

still sucks his thumb

in secret

how come my knees are

always so ashy

what if I die

before morning

and momma's in the bedroom

with the door closed.

I have to learn how to dance

in time for the next party

my room is too small for me

suppose I die before graduation

they will sing sad melodies

but finally

tell the truth about me

There is nothing I want to do

and too much

that has to be done

and momma's in the bedroom

with the door closed.

Nobody even stops to think

about my side of it

I should have been on Math Team

my marks were better than his

why do I have to be

the one

wearing braces

I have nothing to wear tomorrow

will I live long enough

to grow up

and momma's in the bedroom

with the door closed.

**14. Nyla Dinkins (District of Columbia)**



**LEARNING TO READ**

BY FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER

Very soon the Yankee teachers

   Came down and set up school;

But, oh! how the Rebs did hate it,—

   It was agin’ their rule.

Our masters always tried to hide

   Book learning from our eyes;

Knowledge did’nt agree with slavery—

   ’Twould make us all too wise.

But some of us would try to steal

   A little from the book.

And put the words together,

   And learn by hook or crook.

I remember Uncle Caldwell,

   Who took pot liquor fat

And greased the pages of his book,

   And hid it in his hat.

And had his master ever seen

   The leaves upon his head,

He’d have thought them greasy papers,

   But nothing to be read.

And there was Mr. Turner’s Ben,

   Who heard the children spell,

And picked the words right up by heart,

   And learned to read ’em well.

Well, the Northern folks kept sending

   The Yankee teachers down;

And they stood right up and helped us,

   Though Rebs did sneer and frown.

And I longed to read my Bible,

   For precious words it said;

But when I begun to learn it,

   Folks just shook their heads,

And said there is no use trying,

   Oh! Chloe, you’re too late;

But as I was rising sixty,

   I had no time to wait.

So I got a pair of glasses,

   And straight to work I went,

And never stopped till I could read

   The hymns and Testament.

Then I got a little cabin

   A place to call my own—

And I felt independent

   As the queen upon her throne.

**15. Lyra Legawiec (Maine)**



**NO COWARD SOUL IS MINE**

BY EMILY BRONTË

No coward soul is mine

No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere

I see Heaven's glories shine

And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear

O God within my breast

Almighty ever-present Deity

Life, that in me hast rest,

As I Undying Life, have power in Thee

Vain are the thousand creeds

That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,

Worthless as withered weeds

Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one

Holding so fast by thy infinity,

So surely anchored on

The steadfast rock of Immortality.

With wide-embracing love

Thy spirit animates eternal years

Pervades and broods above,

Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears

Though earth and moon were gone

And suns and universes ceased to be

And Thou wert left alone

Every Existence would exist in thee

There is not room for Death

Nor atom that his might could render void

Since thou art Being and Breath

And what thou art may never be destroyed.

**16. Amanda Braig (Ohio)**



**SELF-INQUIRY BEFORE THE JOB INTERVIEW**

BY GARY SOTO

Did you sneeze?

Yes, I rid myself of the imposter inside me.

Did you iron your shirt?

Yes, I used the steam of mother’s hate.

Did you wash your hands?

Yes, I learned my hygiene from a raccoon.

I prayed on my knees, and my knees answered with pain.

I gargled. I polished my shoes until I saw who I was.

I inflated my résumé by employing my middle name.

I walked to my interview, early,

The sun like a ring on an electric stove.

I patted my hair when I entered the wind of a revolving door.

The guard said, For a guy like you, it’s the 19th floor.

The economy was up. Flags whipped in every city plaza

In America. This I saw for myself as I rode the elevator,

Empty because everyone had a job but me.

Did you clean your ears?

Yes, I heard my fate in the drinking fountain’s idiotic drivel.

Did you slice a banana into your daily mush?

I added a pinch of salt, two raisins to sweeten my breath.

Did you remember your pen?

I remembered my fingers when the elevator opened.

I shook hands that dripped like a dirty sea.

I found a chair and desk. My name tag said my name.

Through the glass ceiling, I saw the heavy rumps of CEOs.

Outside my window, the sun was a burning stove,

All of us pushing papers

To keep it going.

**17.** **Greer Kennedy (Vermont)**



**MEZZO CAMMIN**

BY HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Half of my life is gone, and I have let

   The years slip from me and have not fulfilled

   The aspiration of my youth, to build

   Some tower of song with lofty parapet.

Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret

   Of restless passions that would not be stilled,

   But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,

   Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;

Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past

   Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,—

   A city in the twilight dim and vast,

With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,—

   And hear above me on the autumnal blast

   The cataract of Death far thundering from the heights.

**18. Ailin Sha (Massachusetts)**



**SELF-PORTRAIT WITH SYLVIA PLATH’S BRAID**

BY DIANE SEUSS

Some women make a pilgrimage to visit it

in the Indiana library charged to keep it safe.

I didn’t drive to it; I dreamed it, the thick braid

roped over my hands, heavier than lead.

My own hair was long for years.

Then I became obsessed with chopping it off,

and I did, clear up to my ears. If hair is beauty

then I am no longer beautiful.

Sylvia was beautiful, wasn’t she?

And like all of us, didn’t she wield her beauty

like a weapon? And then she married,

and laid it down, and when she was betrayed

and took it up again it was a word-weapon,

a poem-sword. In the dream I fasten

her braid to my own hair, at my nape.

I walk outside with it, through the world

of men, swinging it behind me like a tail.