

A romantic painting of a man and woman embracing on a balcony. The woman is wearing a long, flowing white dress, and the man is wearing a red tunic and green hose. They are standing on a stone ledge, with a large, twisted column and a view of a city in the background. The scene is set in a classical architectural style with arches and columns. The lighting is warm, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

# Sweet Sorrow

Debi Swim

Salvatore Buttaci

Christopher Hileman

Roslyn Ross

Walt Wojtanik

Irene Toh, Editor

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Poems by

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Prompts by

Irene Toh, Editor



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But, I  
disappear one small piece at a time  
leave behind the rasp of withering husk.  
–Debi Swim, “Collateral Damage”

And the highlight of this old man’s confession?  
I have forgotten more than you or I have known.  
–Salvatore Buttaci, “Remembering”

I sat for days in the shade  
hoping for a vision of love  
–Christopher Hileman, “Do Not Go Dark...”

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## Poems by Debi Swim

### Reflections On Love

Who can understand love?  
It is a tarnished mirror distorting  
images, little chinks of  
silver missing, reflecting poorly.

It is algebra, quantum physics,  
a nursery rhyme of counting  
one, two buckle my shoe.  
It is a recipe with vague measures...  
a sprinkle of salt, a pound of butter,  
enough flour to make wet dough,  
sweeten to taste and bake in a hot  
oven. We never seemed to get the  
ingredients just right, the measure  
near enough. Must we throw it out?

Let's try something new like chicken  
tikka masala or the old math, with no  
division, only the multiplication table  
at which to eat our fill of love.  
Let us get rid of this ancient mirror  
and gaze into each other's eyes.  
Let's be clear in our reflections.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 245.



## Coming And Going Colors Of Life

I began in righteous redness  
knitted like yarn into a  
recognizable thing. I grew  
in darkness, inky onyx,  
warm and snug in my fleshy bed.  
I came wailing and kicking  
purple-tinged, red-faced,  
mottled mess of blood and vernix  
into the afterbirth of turbulence...  
and still I struggle to become,  
probably always will, and yet  
I've made a little progress  
toward the coming end when  
in hues of blue and parchment,  
I'll close my eyes against the bloody,  
mottled mess I leave behind,  
and snuggle into the inky onyx darkness  
of my alabaster marble rest.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 246.

## Picturing You

Old photographs and 8mm home movies  
boxed and stored away waiting for a  
rainy day of perusal and the usual  
smiles, embarrassed grins, tears and yens  
for those old days, gone days, nevermore days.

Christmases, birthdays, picnics, family reunions,  
graduations, weddings, babies, toddlers and teens,  
the years fly by like a dream, a stream of poignant  
memories and faces no longer seen. Alive then,  
long time gone now, just a hiccup, an interrupt

in the continuum of life. And the rain pours down,  
peters out, the sun comes blaring through the clouds  
and the seconds fly by and here am I wondering  
who'll be next. Someday, on another rainy day,  
who will be looking for my face?

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 247.

## The Voice In My Head

This poem doesn't want to be written.  
Its voice taunts me that I don't know  
enough. It shouts that I am not a poet,  
for goodness sakes, who do I think I am?  
Well, obviously, I'm not a Poet with a  
capital P but I do write something I call  
poetry and what does it matter if I'm  
not published or well known or whatever,  
my voice trails off softer and softer.

The voice snickers.  
All the great poems, she says, have been  
penned, all the great topics taken. All the  
glorious words, lissome phrases, perfect  
forms used. You, she sneered, are too late  
to this hallowed task. Just a want to be.

Well, but we can't all be a Dickinson, a Heany,  
an Oliver, or a Pardlo. Besides when they first  
got those itchy fingers and those emotions  
clamoring to be thrown up like yellow bile,  
and hurt that throbbed like an abscessed tooth,  
well, did it all come out ready for publication  
or did it all come out in a rush of whooooo  
I needed that. I needed to say that. I NEEDED  
to hear myself say that.

Okay, so answer me that, voice. But, voice had  
left. Voice had no more sneer or snuff left. And  
I thought, humph, well, and so. I am going to  
write me some words. I'm going to let these  
words speak for themselves and if, if, IF, they want  
to tumble into a poem, well, okay, then. Like, I  
have anything to do with it. When the words want  
to come, when they are ready to be born, when that  
head crowns, baby, you got yourself a lusty cry of life.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 248.

## Collateral Damage

grief did not ask if it could come.  
nor beg my leave. nor was civil  
in any respect of civility...barged  
in, she did and changed my life  
again. Beside the thin ghostly  
lines marked in rows over my heart  
she, with surgeon's precision, scalpel's  
keenness cut the wound with one swift  
straight slice removed another part  
of my heart, daubed the blood, and sewed  
with the finest measure and skilled hand  
the daintiest seam that would in time  
leave the faintest trace of white. But, I  
disappear one small piece at a time  
leave behind the rasp of withering husk.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 250.

## No Degree of Separation

Ah, sweet sorrow that accompanies me  
in waking hours and in night's sad dreams.  
That you should give such pleasure and such pain  
is a curious thing to me, burden  
and yet, a comfort. You show me all the  
places we have been, point out a stranger's  
shy smile and how it dimples just as his  
and in my dreams that feel so tangible  
I'd swear I felt the weight of his tender  
touch, exquisite sweetness, exquisite sting.  
Mind and body so entwined that thoughts, thoughts  
could make the heart ache, the eyes tear, torture  
the lungs with air withheld. Oh, sweet sorrow  
that transcends transient time to weave her  
paths from mind to the very core of life.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 254.

## Mew Muse

The morning dawns, becomes a familiar thing,  
after the night's forgetting. I sit at my laptop  
waiting for the words to come, a direction to  
point the way. I feel your presence out in the

hall, you are stalking the light that speckles  
the floor. Stealthy, slyly, you reach out a paw  
and pounce. I will you to come into my room,  
to twine between my feet, rub against my shins,

jump in my lap and mew music into my thoughts.  
But, no, I hear you out on the sunny side  
of the patio. You sit on regal haunches,  
looking out over the dewy lawn, completely

ignoring me. At first, I am merely impatient, a  
little huffy at your attitude but as the moments  
draw a long line on the day I become afraid...  
wonder if this time you've gone for good.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 255.

## Copper Mettle

Beginnings are copper, newly minted pennies  
promises dropped into the piggy bank for  
a rainy day, the value in the collecting, saving,  
looking forward. Hope squirreled away in a  
fragile thing to be broken in the end. For all  
things end with a verdigris coating, blue-  
green from sweat, tears and the rust of time.  
And for every ending there is a new beginning  
with a blue-green patina promise at the end.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 258 and Prompt 259.



## Dark Forest Of The Soul

It smells like fear  
acrid, sharp, razor sharp  
after the safety of knowing,  
not questioning, having faith.  
I don't like this part of the woods  
I'm finding myself in. It's lonely  
here. Quiet. Every snap of a twig  
sounds like a gunshot. I flinch.

It smells like disease. Unhealthy,  
musty, rank cheese, beginnings  
of rot. Yet, if truth is true then  
perhaps this isn't the end though  
it must seem that way to a tadpole,  
a caterpillar, polyps. Metamorphosis.  
Not death. Development. Growth.  
Transformation. Transmutation. Change.

It smells like petrichor. Rain after a long  
dry spell. Refreshing. Healing. A tinge of  
newness, beginnings, hope, something  
more than before. Deeper than. A quenching.  
I can't go back. I'm too far in. I'll follow  
this path to its end. I'll trust that this path  
brings me to the light and I'll blink my eyes  
at its glory after the darkness of the forest. Amen.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 281.

## A Line In The Sand

I look at earth, sea, air and all things therein. The detail, design, intricacy, variety, purpose, how things work together and it is a sign to me of something supernatural... other than. I see in all peoples a bent toward worship, service, and some acknowledgement of God that interprets itself into a religion. The very few who eschew the concept of a creator have rejected one God for another. They become their own god living for their own ends, gratified in their ability to shape their own lives, and answer to no one but their own conscience. It is all a choice. That I choose one over the other doesn't make me more enlightened – or less so. I speak for myself, not for you. I've drawn a line between what I believe and what I can't believe and those things I will take on shaky faith.

In this universe  
immense and mysterious  
there's room for magic.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 289.

## Alone Not Lonely

I didn't choose solitude;  
solitude chose me.  
Hurry, bustle, noise  
of the world bruised  
my soul till I could not  
hear the song of the lark,  
the music of the wind,  
the wisdom of the clouds,  
the slow, steady pulse  
of the earth's heart  
so I began to withdraw  
to the subtle call of quiet.  
She soothes my spirit  
with whispers, calm,  
colors of rich, luscious  
hues of marigold sun  
and turquoise skies  
goose grey of storms  
that toss the static and  
spark of strife away.  
Even this room from which  
I write is so quiet I can hear  
a faint hum, a strum of OM  
nothing distracts. Solitude  
chose me.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 294.

## I Am A Poem

I am a poem who doesn't want  
to be understood. I don't want  
a reason to be, I just want to be.  
To be swished around the mouth  
like the first sip of wine. Savored.  
To be heard as a whole then  
separated into instruments  
lyrics, impressions and emotion.

I am a starting place, off ramp,  
corollary route, tertiary road and  
little gravel lane where memories,  
experience, longing reside restlessly.  
I am of the many and yet individual.  
I sing. I dance. I cry, rage, laugh.  
I speak plainly and in riddles.  
I am a poem. A song. A voice.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 295.

## Cycles Of Life

Hi, Dad, It's me again  
Do you have time to talk?  
(Oh, here's a pretty vase of  
flowers from my garden.  
The roses are from the bushes  
you used to prune for me.)  
I wanted to catch you up  
about what's been going on.  
Seems like things happen so fast,  
then, sometimes they just drag.  
Same old, same old... I guess,  
School, work, soccer games.  
Braces for Billy, Julie into dance,  
Aunt Millie, she's in the nursing home.  
Ellen had a little girl, finally.  
She and Bob are so excited  
after waiting so long.  
Oh, Stan died. Heart attack.  
But maybe you knew that already?  
Are you here, Dad?  
Can you even hear me?  
I wanted to ask. I need to know.  
Is there more than this  
endless cycle of  
living and dying?

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 296.

## Shadows of Memory

We dwell in  
a river of time  
of eddies and currents  
sharp rock and soft silt  
beneath our feet  
and the water flows,  
trickles, rushes, floods  
passing behind  
as we stand in this moment  
watching the water  
flowing toward us  
an eternity,  
we hope, of spill.  
Then that moment is gone  
yet it is still now.  
Soon you'll be gone.  
Soon, I'll be gone.  
Then we'll just be  
shadows of memory  
wavering in the stream.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 300.

## Broody Hen

I sit before my computer keying thoughts.  
They came smooth and swift, a bird soaring,  
once. Now they perch on a limb, refusing  
even to sing. I pretend this bird is nesting,  
warming eggs and I wait for them to hatch.

How long does it take? Days? Weeks? Months?  
I wait and wait like a broody hen. Impatient.  
Anxious. Despairing at the lifelessness.  
But, still I sit and wait hoping for the day  
when something new comes into the world.  
I wait for the sounds of breaking free.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 309.

## The Pleasure Of Your Words

You will forgive me, I hope, for crashing your party.  
I'll just sit here on the fringe and only breathe.  
You probably won't even notice my presence for  
I'm so totally in awe that I could not utter a word,  
in fact it would be a kind of heresy even to speak.  
I'll be inebriated with the elixir of conversation,  
the excerpts of your writing, the praises, the critique,  
the literary acumen, the laughter, the jokes,  
the comradery of good friends. I will silently raise  
a toast to my good fortune to be in the presence  
of giants though I'll have little inkling of what I hear.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 310.



## The Smell Of Death

They urged me forward, “Go say hello”  
they said, but he was asleep... I hoped,  
sleeping behind the wrinkles of pain.  
I tried to remember him tall and gentle,  
a shy smile lighting his eyes, toting the black  
bag he carried to doctor sick animals.  
He took us kids on calls sometimes  
in his 1940s Chrysler Sedan.  
By that time he was retired,  
just doctoring as a favor and passing time.  
But now walking into this quiet room, shades pulled,  
the sounds of shallow puffs through thin lips,  
an occasional quiet moan, sheet drawn over  
yellowed parchment skin and sharp bones  
frightened me. My first face to face  
with the ancient foe, and I’ll always recall  
the smell of death not quite disguised  
beneath the medicinal scent of Lysol.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 315.

## Like Bourbon It's Best Aged

Can it be possible  
you look at me and see  
something I don't see?  
You fell in love,  
I can understand that,  
cause love is blind they say.  
What puzzles me is that you stay –  
not stay with me, you're a faithful man,  
but stay in love with this old crone  
of loose flesh and thinning bone.

Can it be possible  
after all this time  
of plodding forward arm in arm  
you forgive the passing years  
and gravity for the damage  
to sweet young flesh?  
Can overlook reality  
and view instead  
with eyes that gently see  
beyond this shell  
to the very soul of me.

Can it be possible?  
Oh, yes.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 319.

**Debi Swim** is a wife, mother, grandmother and happy WV poet.

## Poems by Salvatore Buttaci

### I Climbed The Steep Embankment

That one time I could have turned away.  
I could have set my feet toward safer ground;  
instead, I hesitated and was found.  
Demon-free I climbed the steep embankment  
Where high above I saw inviting light  
That flickered come-on fingers at its height.

Like all those years before I could have turned away.  
I could have held more tightly to false gold  
And missed the treasures a loving God could hold;  
instead, I grasped the stones and climbed away  
with God's Name on my labored breath I prayed.

Yes, that one time I could have turned away  
like all the other times I shut my ears  
to the One Who could put to rest my fears.  
He stretched His hand. He touched my heart and mind.  
Content was I to leave the world behind.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 269.

## Papa Called It Polka

In his Italian accent  
Papa called it “polka,”  
and when he found a deck  
hidden in my dresser  
he’d toss it in the garbage.  
“We don’t need no gamblers here,”  
he’d say. “It’s the devil’s game.  
“Stay away from polka.”

At weddings Papa danced  
the polka like Astaire.  
He’d have his nieces puffing  
out of breath (Mama didn’t dance)  
then when one polka ended,  
Papa was ready for the next.  
He refused to let  
his nieces sit one out.

Years later Sharon taught me  
how to shuffle, deal,  
hold and fold my poker hand.  
She showed me how to wear  
the inscrutable poker stare  
unlike the happy beaming face  
Papa wore when he danced the night away.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 271.

## She Hardly Remembers Anymore

Hiding in the wine cellar,  
she presses her grapes against  
the clear glass that offers proof  
it can help her forget the toasts  
of years so distant in the past  
she hardly remembers anymore.

When the darkness settles in,  
she gratefully accepts it,  
takes it in her upturned palms,  
a gift she wants to deserve,  
clasps her hands as if in prayer  
so darkness cannot escape.

But once more dawn slithers  
another new sun  
between her closed fingers,  
pries them open  
while she pretends the wine,  
possessively demanding,

is instead a red knight  
who saves her,  
not the enemy, a friend,  
helming in a carmine sea  
to sail her free  
on the placid Waters of Death,

that last red wound  
to whisk her away to abstinence.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 272.

## Remembering

In youth, I said in my superiority,  
“I have forgotten more than you will ever know.”  
Pompously I stood so tall on the pedestal  
of my own making, arrogant know-it-all  
at the ready to make claims beyond the unseen  
territory of my life. I stomped through the years,  
teeth bared, fist clenched, convinced I would live forever,  
the face reflected in the mirror set in stone.  
I laughed when Papa said, “We’re machines. We break down.”

Now in my declining years, I beg apologies.  
The sure step of younger days is gone. I stumble.  
The pedestal was swept away in the torrents  
of my life. The mirror is a friend of mine no more.  
And the highlight of this old man’s confession?  
I have forgotten more than you or I have known.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 273.

## Happinella

It was the task of Happinella to stir joy into the Cauldron of Dissatisfactions. Eons ago the Senior Crowned Heads had designated her worthy of such a role. Add to that, her persistent badgering of these Seniortors to award her the magic stick.

“Allow me to rid Arondor of sadness and pain,” Happinella begged them.

After much hawing, they relented; after all, she was resolute in her request and, perhaps more important, she was the only offspring of the now deceased Senior of Seniors, Yezzerai.

The pandemic plague of evil infested nearly all Arondorians. While they slept, the flying squadrons of wasponias descended, strafing them with venomous transformations. The good morphed into evil; the content into malcontents. Victims of these attacks were defenseless. Someone had to once again stir the Cauldron that had for too long remained untouched.

The consensus? In the daughter of Yezzerai, they rested their hope. Since the recent wasponian invasion of Arondor, most of the afflicted, carriers of the evil strain, waged war against the good.

Happinella spent her lonely days and perilous nights stirring the Cauldon, convinced she could save the subjects of Arondor by destroying the giant stinging wasponias that threatened to conquer them.

Then one morning, on her way to her stirring after a brief rest, Happinella saw a child climbing out of the Cauldron into which he had tumbled. The aromatic waters, the sweetness of harvest time, a temptation too alluring for a young boy to avoid.

Happinella said aloud, “Out of a bad thing will come a good thing,” for it dawned on her that when the boy stood drenched beside the Cauldron, he sparkled like a river sprite, gold as the flowered fields, and smiling like one who had discovered joy.

“Drink from the Cauldron!” cried Happinella to all the land. “Drink joy and gladness. Fill yourselves with goodness.”

The following night, the wasponias dropped down from the black sky and found their prey, not cowering in their beds, but peacefully asleep.

The whirr of their stingers rotated, barely piercing their skin.

Happinella left her stirring long enough to command the sweepers to gather up and burn the dead scaly wasponias and toss them into the fiery pits of the Ire River.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 276.



## Find The Courage

It can happen that one,  
confronted with joy,  
can wince as if in pain.  
Accustomed to sorrow,  
steeled for sudden jolts,  
she can mistake festoons  
of scented spring flowers  
for requiem wreaths,  
tramp instead of ramble  
through nature's delights,  
sidestep the pavement cracks  
to avoid the pest of misfortune.  
Joy is everywhere!

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 282.

## May Again

In floral finery  
these petaled debutantes  
come alive in spring,  
bursting from beds of seeds  
in May's post-winter sleep.  
The garden celebrates!

Teeming rains of April?  
the capricious madness  
of March? All gone at last.  
The warm winds, once brutal,  
Now lead flowers to dance.  
The garden celebrates!

This be their season's joy:  
To delight in the waft  
of their fragrance carried  
by the breeze and divided  
among lonely lovers.  
The garden celebrates!

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 286.

Lorca

after his murder in the courtyard  
his body was sent to the cellar morgue  
where men of science dissected his flesh  
in search of those seditious words unsaid  
that waited for the right poem  
in the depths of him from which  
they might one day metrically sail free

all they found were not unlike discoveries  
made in the battlefield autopsies of heroes  
who lie gut-wrenched, organs exposed  
to the elements of snow and ice and time  
while their filmed eyes like cameras  
indelibly capture life's passing  
which the souls of them carry away

he wrote poems in his Spanish tongue  
danced them down paper roads like village songs  
meant to be sung if only to rally the listless  
but those unversed in the art of sweet language  
those whose iron hands wield iron guns  
can only rattle destructive syllables of fire  
can only murder the poet but never the poem

can never hear the language that trilled within him  
those sweet birds with so many stories to tell  
about sharing the expanse of land and sky

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 296.

## The Muldoon

Worst place you can drop a melancholic boozer  
Is some dew drop inn or Cliff's Hangout or Saloon.  
The muldoon can go from sober to fried-to-the-gills  
quicker then you can say, "Make mine Bud," and he often  
does, socking steins away like a brewery fills  
barrels. Don't expect him to try something new.  
St.Pauli's Girl, Tuborg, even Miller. He's a muldoon,  
meaning he's staunchly opposed to changing his mind.  
The hour doesn't matter. He's got a lifetime to spit at time.  
When the beer level suds up behind bloodshot eyes,  
he starts singing old songs like "Heart of Gold,"  
not that he has one, or "Maggy May" he never knew,  
or "Hotel California" he couldn't afford.  
Besides, he hates the beach, those pesky flies, sand grains  
in his sandwich or weighing down the foam  
in his canned beer. "Last one," says the bartender.  
We're closing up." The Muldoon can hardly stand  
but he orders two Buds, one for now,  
the other for the road.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 298.

## No Regrets

Naysayers insisted I'd rue the day  
I married a woman much younger than I,  
but time has vindicated me of their folly  
because not once have I ever regretted  
taking Sharon for my loved and loving wife.  
Love demands courage, a risking of the heart,  
a deep plunge into unknown waters.

To not take the chance invites the pain of  
loneliness, unshared light and darkness,  
a heart crusted with sadness, an emptiness.  
The only day we shall rue will be the closing  
of our together life, but even then,  
in our sorrow we'll keep the faith alive:  
Love never dies. We are forever.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 302.

## Closed Circle

The bargains I made with life were games played  
without rules or prior preparation.

I aimed for what greed dictated, fudged efforts  
to reach goals, trying hard to climb each rung,  
patted myself on the shoulder when I won;  
kicked myself in the rear when I lost.

Life was a game of seasons. I watched flowers  
grow, bargained with the wind, then sadly  
watched them die in autumn. I marveled  
at the floral cycle of life,  
but never wondered about my own,  
how the flight of time hardened the soft face

of youth, bent the bones, clouded the mind  
and blurred the advent of my winter.  
Like the drooping rose, I wait the clank  
of shovel, the pings of clumped dirt,  
a new spring, a new life, a circle closed.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 304.

## Waiting For Shelley

My dear brother in poetry,  
I waited for your prompt return  
from the Gulf of Spezia where  
you sailed the Italian waters  
with two friends who likewise loved  
to sail the Ligurian Sea.  
Only the month before, we cheered  
your thirtieth birthday. Mary  
prepared your favorite supper.  
We toasted goblets filled with wine.  
We cheered your poem "When Soft Voices  
Die." Now July gallops away  
with you in tow. Percy, silent  
the lyrical lines you will not write,  
unheard laughter at *Casa Magni!*  
How deep the sorrow, how great the loss!  
I spend my hours now reading  
your poetry, your timeless sonnet  
of the colossus: "...boundless and bare  
the lone and level sands stretch far away."

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 310.

**Salvatore Buttaci** won the \$500 Cyber-wit Poetry Award in 2007. His story collections, *Flashing My Shorts* and *200 Shorts*, were published by All Things That Matter Press. His work has appeared in such publications as *The New York Times* and *The Writer*. He and his wife Sharon reside in West Virginia.

## Poems by Christopher Hileman

Do Not Go Dark...

I sat for days in the shade  
hoping for a vision of love  
or some story I could share.  
My cat rubbed me up,  
leapt to the bough behind me  
and settled in to wait for God.

When the rain began,  
we went back in the house.  
The cat wandered off.  
I cooked my tea, then sat,  
looking out the window.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 278.



## Foggy Dawn

She said there's room for  
some kind of flash in the pan,  
some flare up of hope,  
some change in the shape  
of slithery things to come  
once the sun rises...

if the sun rises  
on this latest weird damn day  
of all the long days

that trail behind us  
and are still rolling over  
our crushed and shattered  
arrangements and poise

(we had no right to them all)

as we lay them down  
with the feathers shed  
in our summer's latest molt,

We call as swans do.  
our bodies newly pink  
and utterly bare.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 299.

## Taking The Chance

“Marry me,” I say,  
casting all wisdom aside.

You look like a cat  
looks to an entrapped  
mouse and I change my whistle  
from tenor to shrill  
in that sudden squall  
from a flensed and open heart.

I stand by my words.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 305.

## The Gale

I've had to change out  
the ropes that hold the willow  
upright despite rain  
and wind, gale sized stones  
that fall at the shallowest  
slant and bounce along  
our path through the brush.

You told me this was my job.

Not that I ever  
refused you a thing –  
I have never refused you.  
You know this is true.  
and yet you doubt my  
purity of heart and soul,  
love and devotion.

The gale is winning.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 308.

## Not This Time

I showed up, opened  
the program and hoped for sauce  
to squeeze out my heart  
with my red red blood  
that my words might mean a thing  
for once, and maybe  
appear soaring with  
the flock of full fledged word birds.

Maybe I will get  
it right this one time...

Then my head just exploded  
and the heat of me  
dispersed like day fog  
on a summer coast morning  
and I fluttered by –  
a boy of all boys  
in my dreamy escapades  
from stumblebum shores.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 309.

## Feeling Distant

I took a wrong turn  
on the way to Pluto's moon.  
I forget the name  
of the place I've been  
searching for in all this time  
circuiting the edge  
where the sun is just  
a bright, largish star.

It's cold  
out here, as you know.  
I hoped to find signs  
and I still might at a guess  
but it feels remote  
and getting more so  
as the oxygen runs low  
and the windows freeze.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 314.

## A Lonely Man

A sense of the end  
dogs me all around the slope  
behind my log house  
as I pull slivers  
out my dad-blamed body parts  
and hear the rooster  
crow in his cage built  
by Jose for him last spring.  
A fine black fellow  
is Leo, with eyes  
that pierce the hen perfumed air  
and his hens stay close.  
I have no hen, me.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 320.

**Christopher Hileman** moved to Oregon in 1973. He has retired to live on the volcanic bluff overlooking Willamette Falls in Oregon City, Oregon. He ascends the stairs from his basement digs to improvise on his Yamaha keyboard or the house Playel grand when the calico cat releases him from below. The part-Irish Wolfhound here likes him.

## Poems by Roslyn Ross

### Reflected

Reflected, in the mirror  
of your eyes, remembering  
in that dream of who you

were, who I was, or might  
have been, if things had  
been different, if the depths  
of your being, had, like the

lake, flung back the truth  
of who you were, who I  
was, or might be; and yet  
even if it had, I would only  
ever have been a reflection.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 245.

Crack

Crack the moment magical,  
ramble through the past,  
find the pest of sorrow;  
wince in memory's grasp.

Hiccup through the thoughts,  
try to catch your breath,  
let regrets be banished;  
festoon in face of death.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 282.

**Roslyn Ross** is a former journalist, who has worked in newspapers and magazines around Australia. In recent years she has worked as a freelance manuscript editor. Born in Adelaide, she has spent much of her time living overseas, including Antwerp, Belgium; Bombay, India; Luanda, Angola; Cape Town, South Africa; Johannesburg, South Africa; Lusaka, Zambia; Vancouver, Canada; London, United Kingdom and Lilongwe, Malawi. She has also spent extended periods in Russia, Portugal and the United States, as well as living across Australia, including Adelaide, Port Pirie, Wagga Wagga, Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane, and is now settled in the Adelaide Hills. She began writing poetry at the age of twelve and has had work published in a number of anthologies, mainly in the US, but also more recently, in *When Anzac Day Comes Around, 100 Years from Gallipoli Poetry Project*, edited by Graeme Lindsay.



## Poems by Walter Wojtanik

### Nine Minutes

You come and stay for hours,  
amidst the psychedelic flowers  
and impossible scenarios.  
Running past streets and barrios  
with Joses and Marios, looking  
for solace in a nightful of frightful  
turns and plot twists. You've wished you  
can finish a complete thought,  
but your REM cycle keeps running out of gas.  
In the foggy distance, a wail. It never fails.  
It seems just when you get  
to the good part of your dreams you have to depart,  
trying to restart every nine minutes for an hour  
until your snooze alarm comes back to call.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 253.

## Homesick Blues

A hard rain's gonna fall, and all I can think of  
is my sad eyed lady of the lowlands.  
A rainy day woman, she stands  
down in the flood watching  
the river flow. The current is strong  
and I've been gone far too long;  
bound with cold irons. I miss home.  
And if I gotta serve somebody, it may as well  
be her. I'd been stuck inside of Mobile  
with the Memphis blues again.  
I shall be released and I'll be knocking  
on heaven's door; her blue nightgown  
tangled at our feet. No longer love sick.  
Memories thick and windblown, she's shown  
she can love just like a woman. Lay lady.  
Lay with the pent up passion of the  
hurricane within. Don't have second thoughts.  
It's alright. It's a changing time and  
I have resurfaced; have a purpose.  
Your rolling stone has come home.

Note: Written in response to Red Wolf Poems, Prompt 295.

**Walter J. Wojtanik** is a poet, composer, playwright, story teller, and carpenter. Yes, he is adept at woods and words. He had been named the Poet Laureate of the Writer's Digest.com/Poetic Asides 2010 April Poem-A-Day Challenge. Somewhat of a poetic nomad, his work can be found all over this great big world wide web! His poetry collection in three parts, his *Dead Poet Once Removed* trilogy is his happiest achievement as of now. He continues to work at his craft with so much more to learn.

## Prompts by Irene Toh

“Sweet Sorrow” it is. It calls for one to revisit the past, find the sap at wherever points can be found, and let it, at each point, all ooze out. That’s one reading I suppose.

### Prompt 245

I read that Tommy Page had died of suicide at age 46. I’d been listening to his cheesy love songs. Hey I’ve nothing against cheesy love songs. Maybe it’s even a secret pleasure? His hits are “I’ll Be Your Everything”, “Paintings On My Mind”, “A Shoulder To Cry On”, among others.

On a different note, I also read a poem by Elizabeth Bishop called “Insomnia”.

The moon in the bureau mirror  
looks out a million miles  
(and perhaps with pride, at herself,  
but she never, never smiles)  
far and away beyond sleep, or  
perhaps she’s a daytime sleeper.

By the Universe deserted,  
she’d tell it to go to hell,  
and she’d find a body of water,  
or a mirror, on which to dwell.  
So wrap up care in a cobweb  
and drop it down the well

into that world inverted  
where left is always right,  
where the shadows are really the body,  
where we stay awake all night,  
where the heavens are shallow as the sea  
is now deep, and you love me.

In your poem write about remembering and like the moon, “find a body of water, or a mirror, on which to dwell.”

### **Prompt 246**

In looking at your storyline, you might want to include births. Every life begins with a birth. A lot of stories begin with “I was born on (this date).” They normally don’t say “I died on (this date)” unless it’s a posthumous narrator. So I’m suggesting to you to write a birth story. Whose birth story? You get to decide, since you’re the omniscient narrator.

Or the other option is to think of the beginning of stories. How does one begin? Here’s one example from Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, which is an all-time favorite story of mine.

“My father’s family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.”

Include some kind of genealogy detail if you feel like it.

### **Prompt 247**

The thing about vintage stuff is that they die. I’m thinking about one of those old school coffeeshops that I’d go for dim sum and congee, and reading that it’d be closing end of the month. You know how it is. The people get old. There’s no one who’ll take over the business. So each generation that dies off carries off with it a trade that, if it doesn’t get passed on, die. It’s poignant really. Used to be that the generations passed it on. No longer. I really like my old coffeeshops.

In somewhat the same vein, I’m sharing with you a poem by an Argentinian poet called “The Future”.

And I know full well you won’t be there.  
You won’t be in the street, in the hum that buzzes  
from the arc lamps at night, nor in the gesture  
of selecting from the menu, nor in the smile

that lightens people packed into the subway,  
nor in the borrowed books, nor in the see-you-tomorrow.

You won't be in my dreams,  
in my words' first destination,  
nor will you be in a telephone number  
or in the color of a pair of gloves or a blouse.  
I'll get angry, love, without it being on account of you,  
and I'll buy chocolates but not for you,  
I'll stop at the corner you'll never come to,  
and I'll say that words that are said  
and I'll eat the things that are eaten  
and I'll dream the dreams that are dreamed  
and I know full well you won't be there,  
nor here inside, in the prison where I will hold you,  
nor there outside, in this river of streets and bridges.  
You won't be there at all, you won't even be a memory,  
and when I think of you I'll be thinking a thought  
that's obscurely trying to recall you.

by Julio Cortazar, translated by Stephen Kessler

Hope you're inspired to write something.

### **Prompt 248**

A poem is kind of an assembly line, and you choose what to assemble. Only it isn't a McDonald's assembly line, so each one carries with it a uniqueness of perspective. But as with an assembly line you need to give your reader, your client, a takeaway. What does the reader take away? I'm reading poems where there isn't a sense of a takeaway. You have assembly but you end up with a crumbling takeaway that flakes to nothing. So try again please.

Think about what you take away in this powerful poem by Argentinian poet, Julio Cortazar.

## To A God Unknown

Whoever you are  
don't come.

The seeds are mixed with tiger's teeth,  
an endless fire pours down on the helmets,  
nobody knows when the grimacing will stop,  
the erosion of a time in pieces.

Obeying you we have fallen.

–The tower went up straight, the women  
wore bells on their ankles, we enjoyed  
strong fragrant wine. New routes  
opened like thighs to the happy greed,  
to the insatiable holds of the ships. Glory!  
The tower defied all caution,  
like a strategists' celebration  
it was its own reward.

Gold, time, destinies,  
thought, treaties, violent caresses,  
agonies, races, tributes,  
they rolled like dice, with their fiery points.

Whoever you are, don't come.  
The record is legend to these timid eyes  
with their focal and bifocal, polaroid, nonglare glasses,  
to these hands coated with cold cream.  
Obeying you we have fallen.

–The stubborn professors make ratlike faces,  
they vomit up Gorgias, pathos, amphictyoies and Duns  
Scotus,  
councils, canons, syringes, skalds, trivets,  
how tranquil is the life, the rights of man, Ossian,  
Ramon Lull, Pico, Farinata, Mio Cid, the comb  
for combing Melisendra's hair.  
That's how it is: preserve the legacies, worship you in your  
works,  
eternalize you, the lightning flash.

Turn your living rage into a precept,  
codify your free laughter.  
Whoever you are  
don't come.

–The whiteface fiction dangles from its monkey,  
the alarm clock gets us out of bed on time.  
Come at two o'clock, come at four,  
too bad we have so many commitments.  
Who killed Cock Robin? Because he didn't use  
deodorant, yes ma'am.

As for the rest, the H-bomb, the musical comb,  
detergents, the electric violin  
lighten the passing time. The waiting room  
isn't so bad: it's carpeted.

–Consolations, young anthropologist? Supplied:  
you see them, you try them on and you take them away.  
The tower went straight up,  
but we have Dramamine.

Whoever you are  
don't come.  
We'd dump you, garbage, made  
in our nylon and orlon  
image, Jahweh, oh my God.

It's an assembly alright, but it's very powerful discourse isn't it? Whichever  
discourse you decide on, let your assembled poem give a clear takeaway.  
What? That "something is rotten in the state of Denmark"? What? Think  
about what a line like "The waiting room/isn't so bad: it's carpeted" says.  
Why does it sing with irony? Does yours sing? And of course, the repetition,  
"Whoever you are don't come", said so many different ways now. So yea,  
assembled poem, clear takeaway, said so many different ways.

## Prompt 250

The theme of our current issue is...grief. Here's what Julian Barnes said about it:

“Early in life, the world divides crudely into those who have had sex and those who haven't. Later, into those who have known love, and those who haven't. Later still—at least, if we are lucky (or, on the other hand, unlucky)—it divides into those who have endured grief, and those who haven't. These divisions are absolute; they are tropics we cross.”

If life is a maturation process, then these are tropics we cross. I could think of another one: parenting. These crossings are into another continent.

And of course, what is grief but the work of memory? Even if sometimes it tries to obliterate it, the weight has only shifted elsewhere.

Julian Barnes had lost his wife, a literary agent, in 2008 to brain tumor. He had married her in 1979.

He said, “It took a while, but I remember the moment—or rather, the suddenly arriving argument—which made it less likely that I would kill myself. I realised that, insofar as she was alive at all, she was alive in my memory. Of course, she remained powerfully in other people's minds as well; but I was her principal rememberer. If she was anywhere, she was within me, internalized. This was normal—and irrefutable—that I could not kill myself because then I would also be killing her. She would die a second time, my lustrous memories of her fading as the bathwater turned red. So it was, in the end (or, at least, for the time being), simply decided. As was the broader, but related, question: how am I to live? I must live as she would have wanted me to.” (Julian Barnes, *Levels of Life*, 2013)

Do you have a story about grieving?



### **Prompt 253**

Another day, another poem? Today I feel rather Sisyphean about it. Is it a curse or a blessing to write? Soon enough April will dawn on us and that always brings to mind Eliot's lines:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.

Isn't it easier to be forgetful? To not put in any effort or the minimal effort? Whereas spring asks that we awaken from slumber. See the parallel here? And is that why National Poetry Writing Month falls in April? We're seasonal creatures. Life is seasonal. We cycle back. We repeat. Write a poem that has something repetitious or seasonal about it.

### **Prompt 254**

What is the state of your mind? Is it related to your body? Guess so. If so then those peeps with beautiful bodies would have beautiful minds, and vice versa. No? Yes, mind and body's related. I think a lot of the time it's body over mind. Guess if your body is ailing in some way you'd not feel so good huh? If you have a killer bod, you'd be over the moon most of the time? Awkward pause. My job's only to ask the questions okay?

When we are not rigor mortis, and are functioning relatively okay, we ought to induce in ourselves a state of bliss. That's mind over body. Maybe these two take turns to dominate each other? Really it should be mind over body, because the mind transcends every effing thing. Anyway this train of thought has me feeling macabre, morbid and what-have-you. It's also due to this poem I read too. Read it and respond to it in some way.

Suddenly the worlds of death and substance seem to pause  
in their mechanical obedience to the rules of time

And tension: we, the holders of Philosophy's new Bibles,  
look away from everything we know corrodes, and speak

Pentecostally, if cautiously of the Plan of Man, the engines  
of his mind's consistency, the freedom from delay his towers

Know, forever rising from cartographies of hope!  
But the ghost which Yeats would revel in will not be sent

Out naked on the roads for punishment—no element  
may carry life's prefigured comical audacity

Beyond its blood-veiled site: nothing waiting on this moment  
or this pen will freeze the spirit to a mind-free shape.

Peter Porter, "No Heaven Cold Enough"

### **Prompt 255**

So it begins. I'm half-heartedly starting on this month-long poetic spree called National Poetry Writing Month. But I console myself that it'd be my last (I always think that). Anyway I just sat down and a poem came. There's no telling if one will come. Or which one. But you, you can will it to come, can you? While you can, you might want to be coopted into this annual poeming extravaganza.

The prompt is to write a reminiscing poem (this from Robert Brewer).  
Alright, I reminisced.

### **Prompt 258**

Robert Brewer asked for a beginning/ending kind of poem. Either/or, but of course you have to do both. Because an ending is a beginning isn't it? Think about how one thing ended and another began. So it's the transition that's frightening. No one likes to be in limbo, especially if it seemed a chronic kind of situation. So what's your current situation? Are you starting, ending, or gestating like a caterpillar?

### **Prompt 259**

So what floats your boat? That's a really important question. If you find that out, then you'd not be bored. It's like finding gold. Alright you get the drift. Also, Robert Brewer asked us to choose an element from the periodic table and I chose gold. Do check out the periodic table. I'm also reminded of a poem titled "Argon", one of the noble gases, by Larry Thacker that was included in the Fall/Winter 2016/2017 issue of Red Wolf Journal. You can read it here.

### **Prompt 269**

After the heaviness of Good Friday, today's Easter vigil. It's not that it's too much to bear. It is and it isn't. It is because things take a toll on oneself. It isn't because one can always pick oneself up after a fall. So if you've fallen, please pick yourself up. It's not that one can pray for no natural disaster to befall. But one can pray for the means to survive it. I can't wait for tomorrow—Easter. Easter is when life conquers death isn't it? Speaking of which, the prompt is to use the phrase "That one time". That one time he walked through the valley of death but lived to see the sun again. So do not forget to pick yourself up. Like Lazarus.

### **Prompt 271**

Perhaps Robert Brewer watched someone dance. That's why he asked for a dance poem. Dancing is one of the best things in the world. It's best to do it while you still can. Because sadly, there'll come a day when you no longer can. With each year your body rusts a little or a lot. Dancing is your body in lithe movement. There're all types of dance too. So dance the form that your body likes. For instance I'm not much into hip hop. Too funky. I rather like lyrical dance. Surprisingly I find belly dancing the hardest to master, alternating between feeling entranced and repelled, and maybe both at the same time.

### **Prompt 272**

He asked for a death poem. Or a life poem, but no, death it is. What? Do you deal with it? How do you deal with it? Do be do be do. I know it's a serious topic because it's the-end-of-the-world-as-you-know-it. But people, like things, run their course. When death stares you down, do you feel like you've ran the full course? If you're going to be undone, have you done everything you'd wanted to do, and of course it's impossible to do everything so to rephrase, do you feel you've lived the life you were meant to have lived? Because it would mean you're somehow ready to die? That it wasn't all a mistake? Your life.

### **Prompt 273**

What I like about Robert Brewer's prompts are their simple open-endedness, so it's entirely open to interpretation. Memory is a bit like that. It's open to interpretation so one person's memory of the same thing is different from another's. This is called subjectivity. It's my favorite thing about literature. It calls to question memory itself. Is memory a fiction of the self? The self must be made up of memories for it to remember itself. What do you remember? Oh right, Robert's prompt is to write a memory poem.

### **Prompt 276**

Ah a fable. Storytelling with a moral. You know, like "The Tortoise And The Hare". Everyone knows that one. Its moral is something like "Slow And Steady Wins the Race". It's a worthy moral. Just like those who are writing poems in the whole month of April, right? Do you think you're mercurial like the Hare? Taking catnaps? Do you feel like the Tortoise? Steadfast and diligent. I guess if you managed to complete the course, you'd be that one. I feel tortoise-like in that aspect. But in the other aspect, in the aspect of swiftness, I feel like the Hare. I write super fast. So that makes me a hybrid. Am I off point? The point, my dear, is to write a fable.

### **Prompt 278**

Hey guys, would it be ok if I go dark on you? As if I no longer existed kind of thing. I do feel like it, this kind of retreat, which is really a retreat from humanity. Why? Because why impose one's self on another person right? Why say or do anything that will say, look at me. I'd rather no one's looking. I don't mind if strangers are looking. After all I'm just a pixel, another stranger. I'd just as well be an anonymous person. And after all, I'm not really seeking your attention. I'm really seeking... God. And I want to know, for myself, that I really do exist. That's who I am in conversation with, alright. What? Faith, that's the thing I'm looking for. And Robert Brewer too.

### **Prompt 281**

Where did yesterday go? Well, it went for a walk in the forest and I lost its trail. So you'd have to wait till I find him. Or is it an 'it'? I checked out Robert Brewer's smell prompt and decided to jump right to it. One has to follow gut instinct right? Right. So technically there're two more days to go. Let's go. Wait. What's the scent?

### **Prompt 282**

It's a word list: pest, crack, ramble, hiccup, wince, festoon. Use them in a poem—what Robert Brewer wants us to do. Truth be told we're nearing the end of this delectable month, said with a bit of irony only. Stranger things have happened. Why do I say that? I thought about it and this isn't the most natural thing to do, to write a poem a day. It isn't. It's even unnatural to a lot of people. And even pointless I suppose. Anyway I've better things to worry about than to think about what other people think. So this is just me trying to be in their shoes. Those shoes don't fit obviously. I'm taking them off and putting on my own festooned sandals.

## **Prompt 286**

May is a turning point, like the universe is doing a balletic performance and you're truly astounded. Well it's kind of like that for me. Which only goes to show, what?...grace and beauty, the leaps and bounds of a beating heart, the sanguineness that comes with the belief that everything's going to be alright even though the universe is trippy as hell. So what is your point of view? Tell me now. In a poem of course.

## **Prompt 289**

May 13 was the centennial celebration of Fatima. Three shepherd children had seen the apparition of Mary in the spring of 1917, whom they called Fatima, and received three prophecies. They then saw her a couple more times, a total of six, between then and 13 October 1917.

On 13 October, a large crowd had gathered at the Cova da Iria, in Fatima, Portugal, and witnessed a sun dance.

“According to accounts, after a period of rain, the dark clouds broke and the sun appeared as an opaque, spinning disc in the sky. It was said to be significantly duller than normal, and to cast multicolored lights across the landscape, the people, and the surrounding clouds. The sun was then reported to have careened towards the earth before zig-zagging back to its normal position. Witnesses reported that their previously wet clothes became “suddenly and completely dry, as well as the wet and muddy ground that had been previously soaked because of the rain that had been falling” (Wikipedia)

On 13 May 2017, Pope Francis canonized two of the children, Jacinta and Francisco. They died at age 9 and 10 respectively. The third child, Lucia, lived till age 97.

In your poem, reference the supernatural.

## Prompt 294

I'm drawn to Robert Bly's poems. They have a clean, meditative quality like a Chinese painting. Imagistic and anti-intellectual, spiritual but not religious.

Do you gravitate toward this kind of style? Write a poem that's inspired by a Robert Bly poem. Here's one, which to me reads like "What Solitude Is".

### Winter Privacy Poems

I

About four, a few flakes.  
I empty the teapot out in the snow,  
Feeling shoots of joy in the new cold.  
By nightfall, wind,  
The curtains on the south sway softly.

II

My shack has two rooms; I use one.  
The lamplight falls on my chair and table,  
And I fly into one of my own poems –  
I can't tell you where –  
As if I appeared where I am now,  
In a wet field, snow falling.

III

More of the fathers are dying each day.  
It is time for the sons.  
Bits of darkness are gathering around them.  
The darkness appears as flakes of light.

### IV On Meditation

There is a solitude like black mud!  
Sitting in this darkness singing,  
I can't tell if this joy  
Is from the body, or the soul, or a third place!

### V Listening to Bach

Inside this music there is someone

Who is not well described by the names  
Of Jesus, or Jehovah, or the Lord of Hosts!

VI

When I woke, a new snow had fallen.  
I am alone, yet someone else is with me,  
Drinking coffee, looking out at the snow.

Hear Robert Bly reading it.

### **Prompt 295**

I imagine a poem being spoken sometimes. By anyone I fancy, like Bob Dylan for instance. Then it becomes like a song. It's like the words going through someone's vocals get communicated in a very personal way.

Dylan had spoken in his Nobel speech about meaning. For Dylan a song doesn't have to have a meaning, or he doesn't need to know its meaning. How often have you read or listened to something, music especially, not knowing the meaning and yet it has such emotional power, fills you with some ineffable longing?

I don't think though if you're a student of literature you can get away with not knowing the meaning of a work. You have to put your own meaning into it. You interpret it. That's your work, as opposed to the work of the author. Sometimes I write a poem and I don't even know its meaning. Yet I know it expresses something...ineffable. Think about writing in your poem.

### **Prompt 296**

I know I'd asked for a writing poem. You know, a poem about writing. Often it's language that's steering us. It shapes a world view. There're so many competing world views. And yet we own only our own. And believe it to be the true one. What's your prevailing world view, that's what I'm asking now, and relate it to writing if possible. Surely when we see the creatures in the world, and how amazing each is (for instance, think of a kangaroo, whose world view must surely rests on those powerful legs), and how different (contrast it with a snail who has a large and very flat foot),



wouldn't you begin to see how just writing names something for us? But do things exist because we speak of them? Of course not. Ultimately everything in the physical world is outside language, is "silent". The poetic realm tries to address this "silence" too.

## **Prompt 298**

In case you're not familiar, Omakase is a Japanese phrase that means "I'll leave it up to you", you meaning "the chef". To quote Wiki, customers ordering omakase style expect the chef to be innovative and surprising in the selection of dishes, and the meal can be likened to an artistic performance by the chef. Dining like this comes with an element of surprise because you don't know what's on your table next. I just had my first omakase experience and it was like a total dining experience because the chef popped by our table in between courses "to chat". That turned out to be totally delightful and personal. Anyway you guessed it, the prompt is to write about a food experience.

Is "omakase" a new word to you? Then you might like to try out another word. As an alternative, we have a dictionary prompt brought to you by my guest prompter, Josh Medsker. This is from Josh:

### **Dictionary Entries at Random**

If you ever feel yourself stuck in word patterns with your fiction, and especially poetry, try this: Go to a dictionary and flip to a random page. Point to any entry, and force yourself to use that word in your piece. If you don't have a dictionary handy, for god sakes, go buy one. Contrary to what many may think, inspiration isn't something you wait for—it's something you practice. This constraining exercise will force you to think on your feet and challenge you to find new ways of communicating. You can find Josh [here](#).

## **Prompt 299**

I don't know about you guys, but a lot of what I write is improvisation. It's written on the spot, at one sitting. I've had the chance to witness how it's done in theater too. Improv theater: "in which most or all of what is performed is unplanned or unscripted: created spontaneously by the

performers. In its purest form, the dialogue, action, story, and characters are created collaboratively by the players as the improvisation unfolds in present time, without use of an already prepared, written script.” At least that happens at the collaborative stage of creating a script out of nothing for theater. There’s something to be said for randomness, and how that contributes to the final product. So show me how you incorporate random things into your poem.

### **Prompt 300**

It’s already begun—the dying. I meant our parents’ generation. I went to two wakes today. One was that of a college mate’s dad. I read his children’s eulogies which celebrated his life story—a brilliant career as a brigadier-general, a trailblazer of his generation, and a doting dad. Of course life complicates things so there’s a whole other side of the story. And you know what? What redeems all of us in the end is the love that we gave. That’s what people remember you for. Because we’re each of us capable of doing harm to others whether or not we wanted to. Think of your enemies, or those who have done you wrong in some way. It’s hard but we’re called to let go of the hate, perhaps only at some end point, when the person is about to die. The other person who died was Buddhist, and briefly took care of my kids. I remained in gratitude for her care-giving. You could talk about life’s impermanence or its fleeting beauty in your poem as you think about your own life and/or the lives of others.

### **Prompt 302**

Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains Of The Day* is said to be one of the most highly regarded post-war British novels. It was made famous by the movie starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson. It is a quietly moving story about the stirrings of the human heart. What if the heart is misguided, by blind loyalty, for instance? Does it mean that the premise of one’s existence is being taken away? In the movie, Hopkins played to perfection the butler who served with utter devotion. But it is his relationship to the housekeeper, Miss Keaton, which is of interest. Suffice to say he never moved the relationship to the next level.

“Rather, it was as though one had available a never-ending number of days, months, years in which to sort out the vagaries of one’s relationship with Miss Kenton; an infinite number of further opportunities in which to remedy the effect of this or that misunderstanding. There was surely nothing to indicate at the time that such evidently small incidents would render whole dreams forever irredeemable.”

When he met Miss Keaton, now Mrs Benn, 20 years later, she seemed to be not happily married but reconciled with her married state. And he had the occasion to reflect on the life he had led. He didn’t actively regret those lost and misguided stuff on which his life was based though but set out to live out the rest of his days according to the mold he had cast for himself. Is it a worthy life? If he thinks so, so it was.

So hopefully this will make you reflect upon regrets and lost opportunities in a poem.

### **Prompt 304**

Now that you’re nearer to the end of life, does it seem like things have come full circle? Or does it seem like it takes a lifetime to untangle the mess that attends to most lives? Or maybe you’ve satisfied your work goals and you’re now looking at other ways of self-fulfillment? I mean, there’s got to be new growth at every stage of life, am I right? Or do you believe in renunciation? Or if not that, then to simplify your lifestyle? You tell me, I’m curious to know. Whatever it is, your life isn’t really settled, or is it? What have you settled and what have you not? Do you feel smug because you’ve got it all figured out? Try to answer this in a poem.

### **Prompt 305**

June’s pretty much wedding season. And the holiday season’s not quite over is it? Frankly the past year(s) have been illuminating. In terms of friendships, life, love, writing, whatever. And no it’s not quite over yet. Because we’re not done living yet. I watched a Ted talk yesterday. The guy talked about human needs. The need for certainty. Sure. The need for uncertainty. Err yes, because life gets boring otherwise. The need to feel significant. Wahoo. The need for connection and love. Connection, yes.

Love, too scary. I'll leave you with a quote from Vladimir Nabokov: "At eighty-five...he saw his decline as a ripening and an apotheosis." Hope you're inspired to write already.

### **Prompt 308**

Sometimes I feel that I'm just a steward. You are too. What are you given stewardship of? Would that be duties that you carry out? Each in our world do we carry on performing acts of stewardship. This too, this writing stuff. I don't even know why I do it. Does it even matter? But because it happens so naturally for me, I feel I'm just going with the flow. Then the wind changes direction, as it must, and the flow goes elsewhere. I'll have to go then. One more month. So for today, think about the question of stewardship.

### **Prompt 309**

I just listened to someone say to show up for work, that's what we writers do. Everyday or every other day. William Stafford used to wake up at 4AM everyday to write. And not everything you write is fodder for eternity, and that's ok. It's expression that matters. Why does it matter? Because it keeps you grounded somehow. Real. Less fake. Because in the real world we keep up appearances. In writing, in fiction, we show our true faces. Isn't that ironic? Like someone said today, Irene takes the best videos, but god, that sounded ironical, like so artificial. So in writing, ask yourself, is it the real thing? Or are you saying something trite? So today, it's just me showing up for work. You try doing that and see if anything happens, ok?

### **Prompt 310**

I'd been reading the letters of Iris Murdoch and getting stoked. For one she studied in Oxford. It's a place I would have asked God to send me to. Why didn't you, God? Yea I get such vicarious pleasure out of reading. It's one step away from having the life you had wanted. Alright, many steps, I fibbed. I was just reading the part where she said: "Writing is the only activity which makes me feel 'Only I could produce this.' Whether or not 'this' is any use is of course the crucial question to which I know not, and may not ever know, the answer." So do I have silent readers? No doubt

reading and writing gives one such pleasure. A deep sort of pleasure. Depends of course what you read. It's so satisfying that there's no word for it...at least in English that I know of. It's like being in the company of ...Iris Murdoch, or whoever you're reading. So for today write as if you're in the company of someone.

### **Prompt 314**

I've been making up these prompts, you know that. Often they come to me as I type out my thoughts. And sometimes do not have a clue what my thoughts are, until they're set down. Aren't thoughts amorphous and then through the magic of writing they take on a definite form? Aren't poems also like that? And then what about received thought? You know, like what the Bible says. If you live your life by the book then wouldn't your thoughts be shaped by the book. Yes? Yes. Then if you believe in another book, you have different thoughts. So which book do you live by? It matters terribly.

As for me I live by the book of fiction. You know, fiction. You make things up but they're as real as you think they are. Surely fiction has to seem real or it'll blow its own cover. So what's fiction and what's real? For today, write a fictional poem.

Here's mine:

A loaf of bread?  
She looked at him coldly.  
It's barely enough to feed—  
she started, then stopped  
thinking about the Bible,  
that rebuke of small faith.

A largesse awaits surely.  
She married him anyway.  
Something egged her on but  
did she refuse all deception?  
All that slyness,  
how do you feel now?

Years later she went to  
a faith healer. But she'd  
barely spoken to him.  
There's an impertinence in  
questioning what happened.  
Sometimes time will placate.

### **Prompt 315**

I felt ill yesterday for no rhyme or reason. Maybe it's all the junk food I've been eating. It was a kind of nausea that presages death, that's how it was. All I wanted was sleep. But I've come back from the dead now. Good as new. Maybe. I slept through the entire National Day parade. Reminds me of the time it happened during Christmas and I slept through the entire Christmas party. Not good. So guys, try to eat healthily. For today, write about illness.

### **Prompt 319**

Love is always a good idea, isn't it? I've been reading stories about love and it's always about illusions. It's a kind of obsession that is ultimately illusory. What is true love but real love? And that's about not having any illusions. It's about pain rather than excitement. Real love is painful. It is kind of like thinking about the other person's mortality, and your own, and then dealing with each other in tenderness about it. It's about emotional support. It's never about physical ecstasy, although that seemed to be a selling point. Think about the idea of the labor of love.

### **Prompt 320**

We're indeed drawing to a close. The bar's closing up. Don't ask me what happens next. I'm thinking of those vintage places—so many—whose occupants are mostly dead and well, you know. At least we'll be thought of as vintage. For today write about something that has a sense of an ending.

And for every ending there is a new beginning  
with a blue-green patina promise at the end.  
–Debi Swim, “Copper Mettle”

Like the drooping rose, I wait the clank  
of shovel, the pings of clumped dirt,  
a new spring, a new life, a circle closed.  
–Salvatore Buttaci, “Closed Circle”

We call as swans do.  
our bodies newly pink  
and utterly bare.  
–Christopher Hileman, “Foggy Dawn”

...I would only  
ever have been a reflection.  
–Roslyn Ross, “Reflected”

Your rolling stone has come home.  
–Walt Wojtanik, “Homesick Blues”