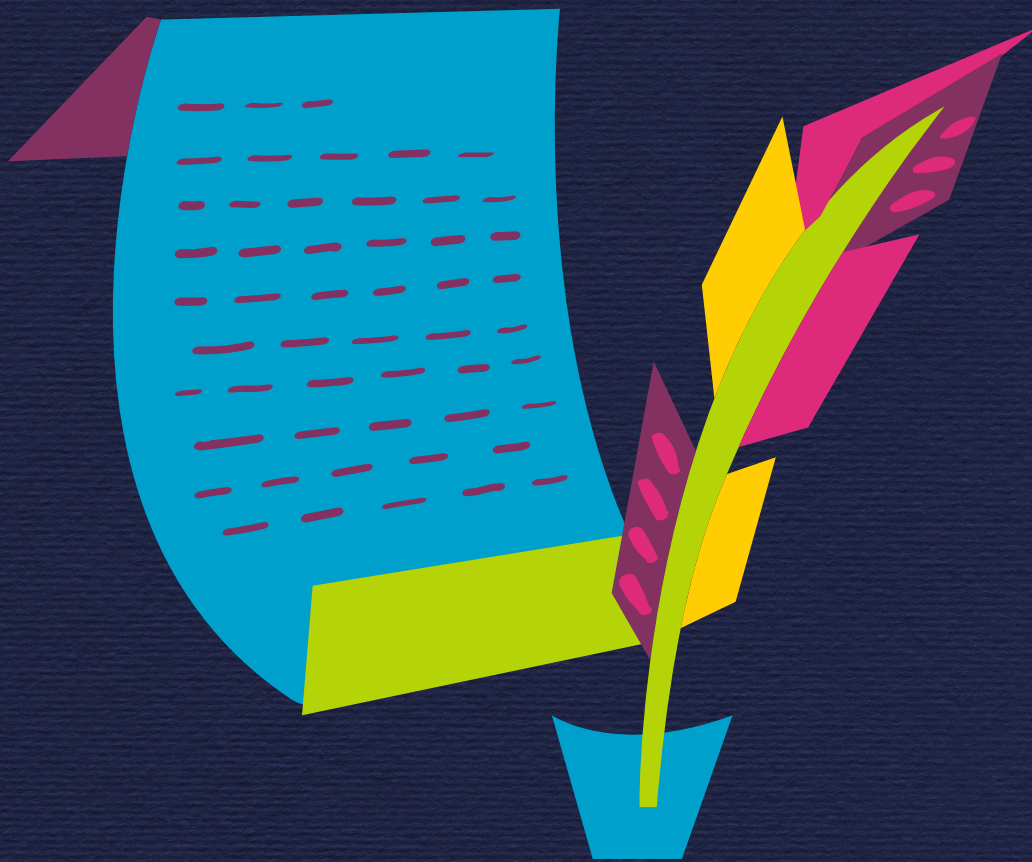


2024 Poetry Contest Submissions



*The
Westfield
Athenaeum*

Table of Contents

1. *“Dog Years” Is the Cruellest Math* by Amber Sayer (1st place winner)
2. *The Bishop Apologizes* by Elizabeth Ozorak (2nd place winner)
3. *Clary Sage* by Lauren Benoit (3rd place winner)
4. *FUL* by Belinda Behnava
5. *Tableaus and Light* by Lynda Daniele
6. *Untitled* by Anne Garvey
7. *MOSAIC* by Danny Flynn
8. *Arabesque* by Sophia MacQueen Pooler
9. *To Seek A Smaller Book* by Robert Stephen Herrick
10. *Shoes* by Sarah Meiklejohn
11. *Land of Possibility* by Nancy Marie Farley Rice
12. *Treasured Tool* by Robert Mangini



“Dog Years” Is the Cruellest Math

I’ve always called you *Black Fur, Brown Face*.

It’s a silly nickname you’ve worn for over 14 years of cuddles, countless walks, six or seven moves, and one major tragedy where your demonstrative concern for me transcended our language barrier and helped me save my own life.

Today, I could call you *Grey Fur, Cloudy Eyes*, but my heart insists you’re still a puppy.

Like me, your joints are now stiff, your body noncompliant.

Like me, you catch yourself forgetting this reality.

You get caught up in the joy of seeing my face and try running up the stairs and stumble.

Then, you remember that time is passing and your body is failing.

You look up at me as you regain balance and limp up the remaining steps.

Your eyes tell me you’re scared, sad.

“Slow down, honey.”

You don’t heed my instructions as your hearing is long gone.

It wouldn’t matter anyway because I realize my words aren’t guidance for this moment.

They are prayers to the universe so that I will never have to miss you.

The Bishop Apologizes

On Easter night the Bishop and
The priest stood side by side.
It was her job to consecrate;
His, merely to preside.

But she was tired, distracted, or
Who knows? In any case,
The priest forgot some of the words
And struggled to save face.

The Bishop reached across and pulled
The collar from her shirt -
Then said, "Just kidding!" but the priest
Stood silent, looking hurt.

Evidently, women may not falter
While they are serving on the altar.

Two weeks went by. The Bishop then
Made his apology.
"I meant it as light-hearted fun,
But I was wrong, I see.

"I'm sorry for that act, and hope
I will be granted grace."
He signed his post with flourishes -
His collar's still in place.

Job's comforters came out in force,
And many of them spoke:
"Where is your sense of humor, girls?
He meant it as a joke."

"To err is human; to forgive
Is holy," many say.
"And if you can't forgive the man,
You need more time to pray."

A page of print's enough, it seems,
To pay for violated dreams.

The priest won't comment, but she feels
Again with each new day
The cold air on her naked neck,
Her priesthood ripped away.

<https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2024/04/15/massachusetts-bishop-alan-m-gates-apologizes-for-removing-female-priests-clergy-collar-during-easter-vigil/>

Clary Sage

Do you know wide blades of grass?
Those darling devils,
so thick and sharp they slice your fingers,
paper cuts at the gentlest touch.

The ones that dance in May,
and send out silver waves,
to roam the fields for days and days.

Yes, those little swords of home,
we trapped between our thumbs,
and held against our lips,
our breath becoming song.

It is the scent of that –
or lemongrass
or fresh cut hay
sort of pepper-sharp
and all at once,
heavy in the lungs.

A laugh upon the wind,
life was so much simpler then,
cross-legged in a wild grassy sea,
only you and me and me.

FUL

When I am sorrowful and shameful and feeling
pitiful, regretful, remorseful, even woeful and
mournful,

I remember
God is

Wonderful
Powerful
Merciful
Faithful
Trustful
Worshipful
Graceful
Bountiful
Delightful

And at that moment, my cup is full!
I am peaceful, hopeful, grateful, so thankful
And God's love makes me beautiful!

TABLEAUS AND LIGHT

MRS. LYNDA DANIELE, O.P., JUNE 4, 2023

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED HOW THE 3:00 P.M. LIGHT PLAYS WITH THAT OLD MIRROR IN THE HALLWAY?

AS THE SUN PASSES THROUGH THE WINDOW, THERE ARE TABLEAUS;

SHADOWS OF LEAVES FLITTING IN THAT MIRROR THAT GIVE WAY TO BLINDING LIGHT THAT ONLY LASTS A FEW MINUTES.

THAT OLD ITALIAN MIRROR, ODDLY SHAPED, HOLDS GENERATIONS OF TEARS, FROWNS AND SMILES.

FROM SIX YEAR OLDS CLIMBING ON A CHAIR TO SEE THEIR LOST TEETH AND PRACTICE THEIR SMILES PREPARING FOR FAME AND FORTUNE; TO GREAT, GREAT GRANDFATHER WHISTLING EACH MORNING AND SHAVING WITH HIS STRAIGHT EDGED RAZOR AND BRUSH.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER STRAIGHTENING HER BEST SUNDAY HAT AND HER SON, MUCH LATER, MAKING SURE HIS BOLO WITH THE HORSE ON IT WAS TIED RIGHT AND THAT HIS HANDKERCHIEF WAS PRESSED PROPERLY TO FIT IN HIS BREAST POCKET.

YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN A YOUNG LADY WILL NEED TO BE GIVEN THAT FOLDED PIECE OF CLOTH FOR DAMSEL TEARS.

TRAPPED FACES, VISIONS OF TIME, CAPTURED IN A GLIMPSE, A GLINT, GRASPED IN A GLANCE.

ONCE, ONLY ONCE, I BELIEVE I SAW THEM ALL IN AN INSTANT, MY FAMILY, PEERING BACK AT ME. I NOTICED.

Untitled

The waves are sky blue
Do you think so too
I do that's true

I wish it be true that
Waves are indeed so blue
Say it be true say it be true.

MOSAIC

From blank slates into
broken shards—
some intentional
some accidental

Jagged, jaded fragments
now lying in wait
to slice paper skin
in mass graves of iridescence

Carefully (or bloodily)
treading the mess with a vision,
finding the right body,
smoothing its stinging surface

Some shattered further to fit.

Joined as a new whole.

Together, no longer called broken,
broken.

Arabesque

drips gold, melting
from fractal lines

and logarithmic spirals:
red upon seafoam.

sculpted flowers
as though paper,

pinched from clay
to recall Fibonacci --

one,

one,

two

arms reaching
towards light withheld,

as tree branches
condemned to paper lives.

To Seek a Smaller Book

When the times come
for smaller matters to be shared,
to seek a smaller book
shows how little things go
in important aspects of life
as size can matter from
a big perspective to tiny details.

When life gets heavy and large
as volumes trudge on to no end,
to seek a smaller book
goes to fulfill little pleasures
offering treasures concise
and pleasing to the mind's eye.

As life can overwhelm the very soul
and its weight being a burden,
to seek a smaller book
throws out the too much and too vague
as size can matter from
a good, quick read light in its weight.

To seek a smaller book
is to find the line between
too much and too less to read
and many things can be found
just by quick glimpses in which
life is seen, shared and offered.

From poetry to vignettes to short
stories to be read in passing
for the heart can be light and the mind
knows what's right to see and feel
life in short concise concepts,
in the little ways things are to be.

Shoes

The threads on my walking shoes are breaking,
The rubber toe is discolored, though not peeling.
So different from those soft leather pumps I was
Excited to be old enough to wear,
Or was it the stockings instead of socks,
Or the illusion that I was now a woman
In full bloom, ready for the picking,
Which if one wished to be popular and accepted
Was a necessity.

Those who didn't pass muster turned to sports.
I played them all: field hockey, basketball, lacrosse.
These old, well-worn shoes are the
Antithesis of the ballet shoes I dreamed of
As a little girl.

Ballerinas are so graceful, twirling on their toes,
Podiatrists must love them -- think of how
Much punishment their feet take just to
Present us with breathtaking
Beauty.

These gray shoes with worn treads have
Seen me through many hikes, many gardens,
Guided me through many miles.
I know I should get new ones because
Soon the sides will separate from the
Sole.

But, it's hard, you know;
I will have to learn to trust a different
Shoe. Will they be as sturdy, as comfortable
As reliable?

It's an important question
Since none of us knows what lies ahead
How rocky or smooth the journey will be
Or how long before the path we walk will end.

Land of Possibility

I live in a land of possibility
where dreams spring forth like great avenues,
the ebb and flow of its oceans
rendering hope and serenity in each pulsation.
I live in a land of possibility
where loons sound the alarm
as eagles soar overhead,
and my hands toil rather than fret,
where eyes meet
and people greet,
the threads sewn in coats of many colors.
Possibility defies ignorance,
bigotry,
and furrows of planted seeds used as mini wedges.
Possibility, itself, never denies,
never pulls the wool over closed, blinded eyes.
As the oceans rise and the icebergs fade,
the land's fragility shines and offers opportunity for
changing lanes and rerouting plans.
In the land of possibility we are all holding hands.
There is nary a thorn
or a book page torn,
the thought giving rise to inevitability.
King's dream, yet unseen,
lives on in every borough.
Lips speak truths as eyes, open wide,

murmur in fluttering fashion.

I live in a sea of hope,
of gratitude and grace.

Grace, gracing every visible trace
of gravel and guillotine and mace.

Step into my world,
and I'll hold your hand,
and you lead the way
to new paths untaken
and energies yet to awaken,
lilly pads yet to be shaken.

The land, inside me and inside you, exists,
a cornerstone ready for taking.

Treasured Tool

I have a most
Treasured tool
I hope to pass it on
Someday

It's a steel
Wood handled
Philips-head
Screwdriver

It's in nowhere near
Pristine condition
Having been used
On countless fixes

The handle has been
Worn smooth and
Dark by Dad's
Hard working hands

The same hands
That cradled me
When I was born

The same hands
That held mine
On his last
Days on Earth

I think of him
Every time I
Pick it up

Another job for
Me and Bub