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The Curriculum

by Ryan Clark

School is a rhyme varied and recited,
an instrument offering law to assess
what teachers say as a drain to faces.
Speak geography as a story we seek
to moralize, the deer a religious study.

We are a standard approaching
the sound of virtue, sure of such importance
as heard in the dim room, the scratching
memorization and recitation as students
walk to school, mighty in their reliance.

The day is a hurling of letters.
To heal and instruct we are words
periodically wrote with chalk
on a large blackboard at the front of the room,
or at our desks as individual slates, sonorous.



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History

by Ryan Clark

This is where a list starts to touch us
as events won out over others:
a stock photo showing a cotton field
and a worker shoving down his hands;
an entry in a diary captured
refurbished under a sheet of laminate,
journal of a girl out west.
Our vision never forfeits
such careful receipts of the past,
for we fall our feet on their road
and fill our fat shoes with their gravel.
In focus, gathering from the roadside,
I take combinations of storefronts
and harvest yields, say this is a story
of dollars tripping us up again, show a line.



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Kitty in the Window

by Susan Maxon

Look who's in the window again,
Wet nose pressed against the glass,
After going out, she wants back in,
An indecisive, little lass.

She sits on the porch window sill,
Watching us as we walk by.

Wait too long to respond to her,
We get the kitty stink-eye.

She meows loudly and pleadingly
For someone to open the door,
But as soon as she's back inside,
She performs a reverse encore.

You'll know how often this happens
When you look at the window grime.
And see her nose smudged graffiti,
Proof of her slimy, wet crime.



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Alpha Kitty

by Susan Maxon

Don't try to stop me,
Don't tell me what to do.

I am Alpha Kitty,
I am in charge, not you.

If I don't get my way,
I'll cause a hullabaloo.
No is not a word I heed,
You don't own me, I own
you.

I will call the shots,
I am the big cheese,
The Very Important Cat,
I will do whatever I please.

I want food when I want it,
The times I will dictate.
Might want wet, might want
dry,
But thou-shalt-not be late.

Don't ever pick me up
If I'm on a romping spree.
And I will let you know
When you're allowed to pet me.

When I'm in the mood
I'll come to you and snuggle,
But if you force me to,
I'll put up such a struggle.

If you do not comply,
I will bite and scratch.
I am Alpha Kitty,
And you, my pets, are not a match.



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Addiction

by Lisa Sink Beard

Do you know me?

I steal your time
your money and drive.

You choose me over living
and finding joy in being alive.

I make you tired
and dull your mind.

I've convinced you I'm the tool
to help you unwind.

I'll separate you from love
keeping you blind.

Till weeks become years
and you're all out of time.

You are my captive
I'll never set you free.

I won't let go of you
only you can let go of me.

I am Addiction



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A Walk to Our Old Swinging Tree Along Lone Pine Way Redwood Valley, California, October 27, 2024

by Rebecca Cole-Turner

Shall we take a walk back into our childhood? I ask.
Let's go down the lane and find our old swinging tree.
Do you remember the huge old fir on the side of my hill?

We walk much more slowly than- the last time we were there,
in August 1962 when we were 11 years old, when my family
left Northwest California for Northeast Ohio.

Vicky says she hasn't seen any of our salamanders this year
and only one last year. Remember how they used to hide under
the fern forest when it rained? my old friend laughs.

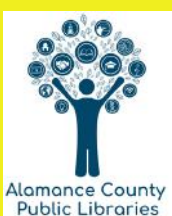
But most of the ferns have disappeared now, too, I whisper,
along with our little friends who used them for umbrellas
while trying to hide from girls who liked to play with them.

In the summer of 1956, my Dad shimmied up the tree and tied
one of his Navy knots, securing the thick rope onto a long
branch so we
could swing out in a wide arc to the other side of our hill.

Sometimes, I'd swing out straight, grab the top of a small pine
below between my legs, hang out in space, release it, then fall
and hit my back on its jutting roots, knock the wind out of me.

We reach the hillside, then Vicky points to a tree near the top.
That's not the one, I say. She was much wider, taller. I spy
a moss-covered fir that must have toppled some time back.

That's it! I shout. That's our swinging tree! Tenderly, I touch
its rough bark, smooth her velvety, bright green moss, murmur
Thank you for teaching me about wildness, freedom, awe.



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Love's Illumination

(After the manner of Anne Bradstreet, 1612-1672 AD)

by Rebecca Cole-Turner

If I could but be Thy light,
and Thou, mine,
would our oned lantern
o'ershadow all illumination Divine,
or would it but add
to Heaven's mystery,
our hearts so entwined,
and thus, burn so brightly
as to outshine all other hearts
our hearts have sheltered,
continue to enflame,
embolden and renew
the love that grew
between us two?



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The Snow's Quiet Reflection

by Mechelle Cortes

As the clouds become thick and the temperatures fall,
I sit and just wait and watch in awe.

The noise all calms and the air is just right,
As the atmosphere is doing its work and then becomes ripe.

The beautiful snowflakes begin to tumble down,
as the large and small blanket the ground.

The ground begins to cover and there is peace in the moment,
I just sit and take it all in as the air becomes more potent.

The softness of the flakes falls and melt on my skin,
and I reflect for a moment and ask where have you been?

I remember as a little girl I threw snowballs, made snow angels, and
sled down the big hills,
missed lots of school, made snowmen and snow cream, oh what a
thrill.

It seems as I've gotten older the snow days are far and few in between,
but I can remember many snows from when I was a teen.

As for now I just sit at my window and watch it fall,
And reflect on those memories no matter how small.

There is just something special about the snow,
how it sits on the trees and has a lustrous glow.

The birds gather around the feeders and share the food,
as the deer move together silently not knowing they're being viewed.

So much unfolds on a beautiful snowy day,
as I sit silently and watch the snowflakes dance and play.



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A Canvas of Hope For The New Dawn

by Mechelle Cortes

As 2024 has come to an end,
let's look back to see what we can mend.

Are there lessons that have been learned that were hard to comprehend?
Or shortfalls in your possessions that couldn't keep up with the trend.

Have loved ones that you haven't spoken to in years,
passed on and now all that's left is memories and tears.

Has there been regret along the way,
that's caused you to lose sight and stray.

Are there words of anger that have been released that you wish you had back,
the relationship terminated and has now thrown you off track.

Our actions have consequences that can be unfathomable it's true,
and this can lead us to becoming bitter and a shrew.

No matter how we've acted or words that have been said,
we can all ask each other for forgiveness and love we can still spread.

Let there be peace and tolerance spilled into the new year,
and set our intentions so that they are clear.

Hold your head high and be courageous and strong,
and in this world you will find where you belong.

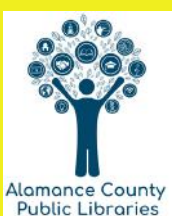
Never give up and never stop,
for someday you will look back and know you've reached the top.

Speak words of kindness and with others, have patience,
stay in the present moment and smell the sweet flowers fragrance.

Show compassion to others that are less fortunate than you,
with gifts of generosity, if with nothing but warm stew.

This world can be gentle if we take each other's hand,
and come together for the good and make a stand.

So I challenge you to not stand on the shore and just strive,
but jump into the waters and thrive in 2025.



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Spring is Knocking

by Sarah M. Raddatz

Winter may be scoffing,
But spring is knocking
Knock, knock, knocking on winter's door
The crocus and daffodil will bloom,
And silence the doom
Cold, dreary days no more

Winter teases with its howling air
The long dark nights hardly seem fair
Still, spring is on its way,
Ushering in better days

Come, thou long awaited spring,
And all the things the warmth will bring,
Fresh air, picnics, April showers,
Honeybees, singing birds, May flowers.

Chin up, cheer up, my friend,
Spring is just around the bend
Keep going, hold your head up high,
Don't you see spring is nigh?

Winter may be scoffing,
But spring is knocking
Knock, knock, knocking on winter's door
Longer days will soon be here
Warmer weather is drawing near
Cold, dreary days will soon disappear



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The Dream

by Matthew Bergeron

To dance in the warm summer rain
When clouds can no longer carry their burden
And the droplets fall hard to earth; cloaking us in wet
embrace
Copacetic kiss on nectarous lips, sweetened by the summer
haze
To spend with you the autumn
As life begins to wither; it's gentle, slow decay
And all the beauty and color of the leaves cannot match
your incandescent eyes
I would take you by the hand and hold the world, 'neath
moonlit-harvest skies
To stroll into a snowy wood
With reddened cheeks and noses
A soft and purple/gray ether
Like pastels among the evergreens in frozen, peaceful poses
To whisk away to some far-off place
And hold you for a little while
Intoxicated
by your alluring smile
And it is in that realm of wake and sleep I find myself
between
When harshness of reality breaks
A fervent kiss; to end the dream



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The Sea

by Matthew Bergeron

She stands by the ocean

Windswept hair gently blowing in the breeze

As soft rays of light shimmer in the bay

Like a kaleidoscope of diamonds dancing on its waves

And all the world pauses for a few precious moments

So that there is only she, the sand, and the sea

Silently swaying

Swaddled in its warmth

She drowns out the world

I feel mesmerized

Paralyzed by her tranquility

And in that moment, I cannot recall anything so beautiful

Simple and pure

Perfume mixes with a faint hint of salt on the air

And I am wrapped in her essence

Allured by the pull of her far-reaching arms

The harmony of her song lulls me to sleep



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Aging Gracefully

by Erica Romkema

I always thought I would mind
the first gray hair, but when I found it
I felt a little thrill. That silver shimmer, earned.
A testament to years lived, some years,
only survived, stumbling through the weeks
in the tight emptiness of grief, grasping
toward cracks of light that meant it could get
better.

And I did it and it did.

Laugh lines, my mother called them,
the creases at the edges of my father's eyes.
I love that I have them now. They remind me of
how often we laughed together. They remind me
to keep laughing, to pass down that legacy
of marked joy. To seek opportunities to deepen
them.

Of course, I am only human.

But the days I look in the mirror and sigh a little
at the fading of youth, I like to remind myself,
as we all should: you will be beautiful your whole
life.



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Cars and Trucks and Things That Go (with credit to Richard Scarry)

by Erica Romkema

Isn't it funny how motherhood shapes what you notice?
My two-year-old loves all the 'Things That Go!
And suddenly the world seems full
of excavators, bulldozers, cranes and loaders,
so wonderfully many fire trucks. (Hooray for parades!)

Now I see them everywhere and with gratitude,
these big machines that serve our world,
And I wonder how I never much noticed them before.
My head was full of horses and ballet, books
and flowers, dogs and Europe and pain au chocolat.

But these things my son loves, it seems to me
they make the world go round, in their own way.
They shape where we live, they keep us safe,
they take us to destinations dreamed of.

Vehicles and machines in all shapes and sizes,
they move and shake in the most tangible, practical ways
so that we can live well. Oh, that's not what my son sees,
not yet; but it's what I see, planning a train trip to Raleigh
while he pushes a cement mixer across the floor,
his face beaming: Beep-beep-beep!



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Stage Fright

by Trippy Cheshy

The curtain sways slightly, though the air is still and thin.

I pull it back and slip onto the stage floor.

A lonesome light fills the space with warmth.

My prominent features are dimmed.

Each curve and angle I carry is illuminated.

Some are made for the limelight, some are made for sin.

The sound of steel turning-an intruding hiss.

Terror rides the sound waves and whispers in my ears,

"what if someone hears?"

But, there is no audience.

There is only the star:

my Shadow.

She begins her performance, "A Dance in Center Stage."

She looks blurry as I stare through the liquid rolling in my eyes.

The movements feel foreign,

though I lead her through them every night.

Her feet shift, suffocating in pain from bearing my weight.

How much? I've only checked once this month.

I grasp for some confidence.

It evaporates as steam, slipping through my fingers

as if I, myself am the Shadow Being.

Soon fog will grace the mirror, providing my soul shelter from dysmorphic views.

The steel hisses once again, reminding me it's time for Act 2.

I snatch back the curtain, forgetting to exhale as I reach for a towel.

I wrap my arms around me, my brows furrowed in debate.

Am I much too far for my wingspan to embrace?

Looking to my Shadow, she seems content wearing this absorbent dress.

Looking to the hazy glass, I remember to release my breath.

The scorching water from mere moments ago has cleaned my skin and smoothed
my hair.

Yet, as the clouds clear across the mirror,

I dread the filth may never disappear.



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The Meaning of Life

by Trippy Cheshy

So many poems about an end.
Countless stanzas describing my mind's wounds.
Free-flowing rhymes that I've surfed just to feel a sliver of
"alive."

Bitter and blue, that's how I self-define in moments of
darkness; my endless, morbid
nights.

In pursuit of vitality, I channel the light.

Though it seems disingenuous.

My hands cramp and my thoughts freeze.

When they melt into ink, I can't help but sigh.
The sun rays I've attempted to capture have burned the
pages.

Merciless adjectives, intemperate verbs, ideated nouns.

Is this the meaning I am to desire?

Utter destruction—a phoenix burning perpetually in her
fire?

The heat and the smoke resemble something of...

Hope.

I no longer mourn the sunrise, for it shall set again.
I no longer mourn the moon's descent, for it shall shine
again.

I no longer mourn a last chance, for having lived through
them all, I shall endure again.



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Moon Stone

by Dominique Daye Hunter

In the wake of lunar expansion,
in the glimmer of oceanic moonlight
which dashes about like freckles,
like my ever-changing thoughts,
like my ever-evolving emotions:
I stand beneath the looming tide
staring at the crest in the eye,
and, without fear,
wait for her to envelope me.



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Returning Home

by Dominique Daye Hunter

Come with me
to a land where the morning sun
is softened by the trees.
Where we are rewarded
with cool waters
for the scorching heat.
Where deer feast in your yard
on a premiere selection of
wildflowers.
Come with me to Šaunhuntakot.*

*Šaunhuntakot: the Yesáh, also known as Tutelo-Saponi, word for the Piedmont area of North Carolina, their home.



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Silence is Golden

by Morrow Dowdle

But if you speak, may it also be gold:
Gold coins that pay the soul impoverished.
Gold broth, a soup that fills. Goldfish that swim
seaward, the kind shark teeth cannot sever.
Gold sun the cloud-piercer. Let your words gild
all they touch. Not Midas-cold and rigid—
a clarifying gleam. Let gold luster
your mouth, but if you talk in cheap veneer,
let your tongue wither, your gums dry up. Then,
let the hallway of your throat be barren
as a chapel before the reverent
assembled. Let your larynx remain warm
and empty as a bed, the sleeper just
risen. Have faith in its burnished return.



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Random Acts of Kindness

by Morrow Dowdle

They still happen, you know—

The bouquet of secondhand books
your lover brought you
from the thrift shop.

The yoga teacher who put her hands
on the small of your spine
as you child-posed.

The tree who understood
your need for shade the moment
you lay beneath her.

And you, sometimes—
a golden egg set in the cup
of someone's waiting palm.



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