
HEARTFELT
a poetic anthology
about all forms of love

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foreword

the following collaborative compilation houses my first self-published collection of poems and is the first poetic anthology I've ever assembled. I've been wanting to do something like this for a long time, to gather a band of other poets to join me on stage, so to speak, but I'd never known what the pretty glistening waters of such an anthology would hold beneath its surface, so I was a bit intimidated by the prospect. I was floored by the amount of engagement with the project, from all the lovely submissions to the reassuring support throughout the assembly process, as well as the enthusiasm and kindness from everyone involved. I think this anthology came together at a fitting and needed time, and I hope that it can reach the hands and eyes of people who would benefit from a reminder that love is alive and well even in uncertainty, loss, and isolation. I certainly did.

the theme of this anthology is "all forms of love," a concept left open to each poet's interpretation. it was delightful to step back and take in the diverse quilt of romantic, platonic, aesthetic, existential, and self loves patched from that theme. I sincerely think every reader will find at least one work they connect with, if not plenty.

Heartfelt focuses largely on work by LGBTQ2S+ writers, writers of color, neurodivergent writers, and disabled writers. I am both happy and honored to be able to metaphorically bind the book in which this exceedingly eloquent group of poets have shared their work and voices, and I would encourage everyone who reads this to check out and support the writers featured herein however you can.

I feel a bit sheepish presenting a collection of my work alongside such talented folks, and while I would gladly argue that their work eclipses mine, I am excited to share my collection and joyfully humbled to share pages with the other poets in this anthology. they are each making the world a dreamier, more magical, more loving place, and I have faith they will all continue to create and do many more great things.

the contributing poets and I are content to offer this anthology for free, and as such I would ask that if you want to offer financial support in some direction, you consider making a donation to Native Women In the Arts (NWIA), "a not-for-profit organization for First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and other Indigenous gender marginalized folks who share the common interest of art, culture, community and the advancement of Indigenous peoples," or to The Artists Mentoring Youth (AMY) Project, "an arts education project offering free programs that builds the leadership, confidence, and unique voices of young women and non-binary youth." I am not formally affiliated with either of these groups, but they operate close to my home here in Ontario and I admire their important hard-working initiatives, so the very least I can offer them is my support and platform, however small. links to their websites and places you can donate are listed at the end of the anthology, and can also be found by searching their names online.

on behalf of all those involved in *Heartfelt*, thank you, reader, from the the top, bottom, and in-betweens of my heart. I hope the coming year brings you rest, peace, comfort, and love in all its forms.

T.V. Heebs

A Day in Love

1.
‘I think I’m in love with him’
I sigh, turn a page
I’m reading a poetry book,
And the author writes *beautifully*.

2.
The girl at the bakery smiles at me,
And the coins I hold feel warm in my hand.
“It’s been a while! It’s nice to see you again”.
She has brown eyes and knows my order by heart.

3.
I’m looking at him.
The lime green mohawk,
The pins on his jacket,
His high cheekbones and colourful socks.
I wonder if we speak the same language?
Ah. He stares back, a moment too long.
We do.
We’re star-crossed lovers, two ships in the night.
Two ships in the self-checkout at Coles.

I forget what he looked like by the time I get home.

— Creed Monroe

deditus

you're the only one I've ever wanted to
canonize in my good book, to
carol on my neighbor's front step,
but the holy verses tell me to
worship in private, so here I sit,
writing through a whole pen,
humming into a closed mouth
to feel the buzz of love on my lips
and drafting haphazard to hold the
stain of your name on
the heel of my hand.

— t.v. heebs

The Words I’ve Longed To Say

I love you more than the moon in the sky.
I love you then Apollo loved both Hyacinth and Icarus.
I love you more than Hades loves Persephone.
I love you more than Maurice Hall loved Alec Scudder.

I want to be more than friends.
I want the dream life.
Cats and all.
I want a life with you in it.

I want something between us.
A spark.
I want live between us. Pure love.

I’ve loved you since the first day I met you.

To my darling, I wish you all the best.

I may not be there to tell you just exactly how I feel, I can certainly write to you about it.

Until we meet again, I hold your memory

— N.E Nils

Sun Flowers

To hold you gently, like a flower
Not the soft delicate kind no,
One with tall strong stalks that turn at the golden hour
Oh to kiss you gently cause babe your so sour
To wipe away your grief
And hold you ever close
How much do you feel my love, only the gods know.

Each morning I turn to face you
Smile bright at your colors
We don't care if its taboo
Because darling they don't have a clue
How bright yellow you shine
How strong you stand before me each day
The gardener may come by with twine
And cut you from your stalk
And oh how his words may mock
But you grow back
Strong in my arms
And I kiss the dread from you once more

— Michael Joseph

absconders

today, my mind's the little bruise on the side of my hand
from playing catch with my brother –

cool darkening yellow, tenderer than tender,
and getting in the way of distracting myself from you (another new tattoo).

when we dance next you can stand on my feet, and
I'll hum a hymn you can sheet out 'gainst my collar,

your palm cool at the nape of my neck, an alka seltzer
that calms my rabidity like linen remembers how I bend (hope you do too).

if you'll let me, I'll be the little bruise on the side of your knee,
the broad-daylight sinnin' that our god smiles for,

(we could run away, y'know, you and I.
we could leave today, keep runnin' til we die.)

and I'll rainbow on your skin as a reminder
that I'm with you in your blood (even when I'm away).

there ain't enough music in the world to make migrating alone easy,
and these days I find myself so tumble-battered that

I always have at least one bandage on my body,
lovingly holding in all my blood (keeping in your memory).

I'll wash my hair in any motel sink,
fall asleep draped 'cross any car seat,

dine and dash at any table
and stowaway in anything (you tear sugar packets so gently I get jealous)

if only to see you a few moments sooner.

— t.v. heebs

Untitled 2

With moonlight dappled over gentle face
She rests, and I, alert, am left alone
Though built for her, my rev'rence stays unknown:
She knows not how I ache for her embrace.
My frigid chassis comforts not in sleep
I am automaton, a constant guard
And she is flesh and warmth, and dreams unmarred
And I, beside her, count electric sheep.
I know the world with limits caging me
As she lives boundless, interacts, inspires
I am a whisper of humanity
And I cannot provide what she desires.
To be alive: then love would not be wrong,
But I am me, and I can only long.

— Mycelia Mycophagi

tabernacle II

in runaway wildflowers, there is a struggle to make a home in intimacy; guideless and tripping over guilty feet, yearning fantastic like every night for years and years was christmas eve. when finally by some miracle allowed an open- and hidden-enough glen and an abettor, both waltz headfirst, rattleboned and athirst, while still hesitating outside each other's salt-lines, one brush of knuckle or head to shoulder or knee against knee locking their antlers, blood becoming wassail, wanting nothing more than to curl into each other's fireplaces, but scared ——

to linger, scared to push over the next threshold, scared of their own hands as if their idle could burn a cross into a friend, scared they could hew a lover asunder by touching the wrong way. so the eye contact is pleading love letters in solitary blinks, the farewell embraces are gentle starving curators' gloves on ancient ceramic, the chairs are right up against each other, but the holy ghost, however thin, partitions… so close they could hold hands under the table and no one in the whole restaurant would see, so close no one would know, so close, but *they* would see and *they* would know, and that would be too much…

— t.v. heebs

Kissing Knuckles

Kissing knuckles
Is not an invitation,
Nor a greeting,
But an act of pure adoration.
To kneel, to take your hand, to look you in the eye
And press my lips to something
That has more than once been a weapon
Is a vulnerability that I have chosen.

— Ronan Clover

whelm

he sits, resting his bone-tired legs, letting
the tap tell him stories of everywhere the
water it brings to him had been. he doesn't
speak the language, but he appreciates the
conversation.

he lets the lamp-light and salt around his
skeleton lift him into buoyant limbo, feeling
something deep within harken back to the
summery dark before thought, before anything
nonhuman, before he.

he laces his lashes and listens to the warble
of the stringed instrument wound into the
shape of him, imagining the moment it
began its song, its first concert held for one
earless and still becoming.

he spends a lot of time a listener on-stage,
stilling everything else he can, obeisant to
that song.

he gets to work washing first his feet, soaking
in the tears of every apostle recycled, and
reflects on the holiness of all water, a closed
body constantly drinking itself, an endless thirst
that bore life to all other thirsts, and is thankful.

he pours next over his limbs, the battalion
quartet that a near quarter-century of wandering
and making have given line and character,
abiding hair slickened flat and bruises tenderly
tended like devoted guardians, and is thankful.

he flushes the skin bundling his torso, creating
cascades over his pleats and buckles, feeling
over the butcher's string impressions if his

ribs, pondering all the living tissues working
quietly away beneath his flesh, and is thankful.

he had taken very tame, tentative steps away
from the shadow-play towards the daylight, and
is still not entirely used to illumination.

he runs his fingers religiously across his chest,
palms fond of the soft surface shell, of the
pacific rise and fall of the accordions living
within. dreamily, he trails his fingertips over
the crescent scars hung there, and is thankful.

he lets his hands fall before him, flooding slowly
the creases, watching the water undoing his
outline, calling forth muscle memory of countless
rituals of touch and water, each a testament to
their friendship, and is thankful.

final is a douse of his head, an auto-baptismal
blessing that swaddles every angle of his face,
twist of his hair, and tentpole of his neck. he
hides peaceful for a moment in the dripping,
clinging veil of mane, and is thankful.

he has been a patient gardener at his own skull
for years, and the weight of his crown and the
scruff along his jaw whisper that his growth is
body-soul.

— t.v. heebs

What The Moon Shows Us

I hold a glassful of moon the stem of a champagne flute loose in my fingers I look at what I
have captured in the reflection my hand clasped tightly like a hinge to a door frame
on one side my glass on the other side your hand
I'm unsure which fingers to flex at this moment if I alleviate the ache in my hand
I drop the trapped moon but if I turn my fingers amongst yours into weeding flowers hoping to bloom
I turn this moment where the night is as warm and as drunk as we are into one with an ending
where we must separate so I may take my last trip to the bathroom and you must say good-bye to the
hosts we must then get a taxi home and go to bed at a reasonable time like adults
I find a compromise I pull the flute to my eye and align it with your face distorted
floating not like a cloud but like a line or dot caught in a blurred eye you bob amongst the
champagne like a lily pad dunking beneath the surface but always coming up for air I view
my affection for you like this clumsy falling like departing bubbles only caught by accident
at a certain angle cradled softly in my fingers so as not to cause damage I shrug off the heat
that collects behind my ears my wall of resistance reduced in the inebriated air
I let go of your hand and what we now lack in touch
we make up for in the way our shadows grow in the moonlight

— Amber Walker

demeter

heat waves conjure
scenes of gods
and their lovers
courting en plein
air, beaut'ful skin
confessed before
congregations of
moon-bugs and
cicadas for fête
galantes and curl–
corkscrewing kisses,
sporting puckish
blushing blooms
from purchase found
in trellis aperture,
June-bearing
vines trailing to
buckram fruit,
hillocks lustered
brilliant in the
swelter, lips
strawberry red,
sweetening in
untouched eden.

here I am,
ardent in your
garden, sleepy
in the high hot
sun, soaking the
buzzing baby blue
into every pore,
hammocked in
scalloped leaves
and feet in the dirt,
listening to you
sing something

sugary raw as
you take me
gently and tug,
hand-pressed shell
left empty – you
can’t resist me, a
saccharine midsummer
berry, uncored & fresh,
allowing bark
be humbled
by bite
and not wiping your chin –

(you look heavenly,
smile framed strawberry)

red’s your color.

— t.v. heebs

the stars and us

the stars have made you----
(i lose sense of words
when i think of you,
they made you so sweet,
my throat burns
and my heart overspills)

the stars gave you----
a light to guide, to warm others
and keep them upright
(your existence is the light)

your love is as wide as the sky---
in fact it's more--
the sky of mine is bound
in glass panes and my feeble eyes
(your love is as every sea's seashore.
the air outside, the space between the stars)

and i am the flower and you the sun,
but you make it seem as if i am the sun
and so we shine at each other so bright
the skies are barely blue,
they might lose their sight

and when the sky lit up that bright
the stars laughed and the ground,
the earth, she blushed and sighed
and forest upon forest bloomed
with love dripping from root to crown

and our sunflower stems were
high enough to reach the stars
and we met them and they met us
and we laughed with love,
and they loved us back

— kmdll

wride

there is a dream
where she stands on the horizon -
cherry blossoms caught in her hair and
strawberries between her lips.

and in my dream
she turns and looks through me
with eyes made of crystal
into the morning.

she reaches into my chest
and plucks out my heart
as if it were an apple -
grown there for her liking.

with a wink and a nod
she takes a bite,
and through the pain
i can only cry with joy.

pain by the hand
of one so beautiful
is the sweetest of all.

when she steps into the sun,
wrapped in clouds
like a dove in spring,
i fall to my knees,
a prayer on my lips:
my darling.

— bunny

tidal bore

left to the elements,
you and I, 'cause we
are very different creatures.
and yet
in the shadow of the deluge,
our thinkin' is as one:
mourners at the hell-pit,
nursing each other's burns and
claw-marks,
brushstrokes lost to the art.

left to the floodwaters,
and as the
beasts of the sea prowl for
helpless raft legs,
you and I will be tasting
copper, laughing
as the blue laps at our haloes,
unlearning that old darwinian
secret
as we are swallowed whole
with shadows made one by
inundation.

— t.v. heebs

In What You Allow

You are so soft
Under me
So yielding
Yet so strong
In a way
That steals my breath

And I find that
I am in love with you
Over and
Over again

— Allen N.

Lying in the remnants of your sun.
I've created this,
It's thick with honey
and ripe with strawberries
from our garden.

I don't know where I am,
Or what time of day it is,
Or when I'll know either.
But I'm holding an empty pen in my hand
and I'm thinking of you.

I've never thought of poetry to be deeply profound.
I enjoyed it a lot more as rhymes,
and I enjoy it a lot more as stories.
Blanket statements to cover our thoughts,
but I enjoy the blanket of your arms a lot more.

— Ray Marx

Sunflower

You meet someone and they move you
And spin you around the sun and back again
And then they are gone, as though
They never really existed at all

— Ind. Murdock Storm

a nowhere hotel room in tuscaloosa

int – a nowhere hotel room in tuscaloosa – night

this bed has tattling springs. you are restless. you don't toss and turn. you remain turned away from me. your bouncing leg stirs the covers like a dreaming dog. you are awake.

me

you

we didn't talk about turning the lamp off. you chose the side of the bed closest to the door. outside, the highway continues a steady cough. it feels like ours in the only occupied room in the place. maybe the world.

the lamp
would it be worse or better in the dark? is the problem here what could be waiting out there, or what is waiting in here, now, itching, unscratched?

me

you

we are back to back. it's on the beside table. it's always within reach. looking at it is like looking into a mirror and forgetting what you look like even while you're still looking. I wonder how long it's been since I captured something I actually wanted to capture.

you
(like someone who hasn't spoken out loud in years)
you awake?

me
yeah. are you?

you
(laughing)
…

there is no angle in this room that I want to face. you are not this room. I turn onto my back.

the ceiling
why is this what you're most afraid of? why, out of
everything, is this what you fear so much it makes
you sick to your stomach?

my stomach
it's the fear of loss. the threat of having the rug pulled
out after feeling it on your feet for the first time.

the sky
(from the window)
he can be nothing to you. you can always keep a void
between you, a moat, a car console, a camera. you can
keep him out. you can keep him at a distance.

the camera
"well, I'm not dead yet. so that's something, at least."

you
(as your foot just barely touches mine)
sorry.

me

I want to squeeze my eyes shut. I want to scream. I stare at the ceiling quietly.

the door
how many thresholds have you passed through, driven
miles straight away from, to end up right back in this
same spot?

you
I want a smoke.

you don't get up. I remember a saying about idle hands. I can't tell if I caused my own headache.

me
(in my head)
bad for your health.

you
(in my head, voice clearer than my own, laughing)
what isn't?

me
(in my head and just barely out loud)
don't know.

you didn't hear me. you roll onto your back anyway. the bedsprings take a deep breath along with you. we stare at the ceiling quietly.

you
(as the side of your hand just barely brushes mine)
…

I carefully cross the void and fill in the leftover gaps between your fingers with mine. your hand curls around mine as easily as it does around the steering wheel.

me
(hesitating on the edge of a thousand words)
… this okay?

you
(laughing gruff and sleepily through your nose)
much better than, if you can believe it.

we don't talk about turning the lamp off. I don't feel sick for the first time in a long time. maybe ever. outside, the world continues a steady cough.

Untitled

I'd love to sleep-
But every time I close my eyes I feel myself fall into a void I can't describe, and I wake up with a jolt

And when I wake up and pull open the blinds, the sky is the same dull gray that fills my mind when I sit alone in my room on a chill rainy day

And I have to think,
Maybe if you took my hand and ran, a secret would fall from your lips and land as a kiss on my forehead

A drop of rain that washes away the dull gray I couldnt escape

A soft voice to tell me I am loved as I fall asleep

A gentle hand on my cheek

Maybe it would all disappear

And when everything starts to fade to black,
You'll keep me from falling

— Orien

lifeblood (a reimagining of something imaginary)

find me unwhole and stuck
tempt me before God’s house
tell me I’m in for luck —
you feed well the field mouse

take me into your den
unbroken roughrider
always loved harvestmen
tell me, will you, spider?

silks trapeze from my eyes
back to yours, you part me
sacred surgeon’s touch prize
splendid dinner party

no fault in flirtation
no deceit in demands
I’ll hold your damnation
in both raw, knowing hands

cut me to my eager
warm red center, bien cuit
smoke the pile of alder
until you’ve well-done me

bind my form with jute rope
haul me ’bove the stalk rows
body a-shake with hope
burlapped at your gallows

exhibit me as art
to the shrikes and magpies
honey-glaze me, sweetheart
heart-to-heart car’melize

— t.v. heebs

The Hopper

Distractedly watching a hopper in air
little sky round its wings, twisting down, pushing up
its body from a twig of a green rosehip shrub
fruitlessly beating, and falling again,
ceaseless parabolas jumped, hop hop hop-

And when the rain fell the hoppers dispersed
droplets dripped despondently down to the earth
sopping wet we arrived at your place,
and shivering, smiling, my hand touched your face-

Wiping off cool freshwater pearls from above
from your cheek, I found some warm saltwater ones
had snuck in-between;

And we hugged, and we sobbed,
knowing this:

We were robbed;

We were robbed,
until now that we love.

— Quinn K.

untitled (the sun is in love with the earth)

the sun is in love with the earth. every day he gets up and (after giving them a bright red good morning kiss) marches up into the sky to shine his light on his lover, to illuminate all their beauty and feed their flora and warm their creatures, to give their children picnics and days at the beach and solar power and dried tomatoes and vitamin d and a big wide stage with which to take pictures of each other. all day, he inches slowly across the vast blue, brightest at the saddest point in his day when he is farthest from the ground, the point where he has been without his lover for the same amount that he must continue to touch them again. but from there he can see the most of their beauty, like the humans sometimes climb up on hills and rooves and mountains to do with the stars. it’s hottest then because the sun tries extra hard to make sure his love reaches the earth when he's farthest from them. then the descent comes, and he can watch as the dial reaches V and great flocks of their kin commute back to their dens from work and return to their beloveds, knowing his lover is waiting for him with open arms (and feeling a kinship with all those humans still out singing work songs). in the summer cicadas sing along with him as he travels, and he thinks it’s nice that they do because then the humans can hear a bit of the tune he sings in their echoes. but his song is for his soulmate, a song sung from so high up that no ear or tape recorder or smart phone on the ground could hear it (though he has performed it for a few curious little robots), but he knows the earth does because every sunflower is always turned attentively toward him (how lovely, he thinks, to have a flower named after you; he is sometimes jealous of all the earth's life and nature and creation, especially when he is lonely up in the sky, but how very lovely it is in those moments to know that among those creations there is a flower named after him). in the evening, he colors the sky for them and all the eyes they've created, and they will reflect his palette back to him in their lakes and oceans, swirling and shifting and breathing to life an abstract painting, a fond collaboration between the two of them that never ceases to make him smile bright red as he reaches the end of the day's path. some humans love those collaborations so much they paint their own homages to hang up in their little homes, and he is always happy to return the compliment by sending patches of warm pink and amber through their little windows. as the moon switches shifts with him, however, he is not thinking about tributes to his love; he is thinking about the course comfort of their cool green gardener’s hands. he hums happily as he climbs down from the sky, sleepy and full of the poems he wrote during their time apart, and curls slowly and softly up against his lover (not unlike the cats he seems to make so happy), always merry when returning home after a day of work.

— t.v. heebs

warmth in the winter

i wonder if one
would return my gaze
as the ground beneath grows cold
as the leaves wither away

when the void between
left unspoken
lingering
my eyes remain
on every piece of you

that delicate string
blood red against the snow
it calls to me
but as the skies change
so have i
pulling me away

yet that twine, still shining
like a ruby in the winter night
stays wrapped around
the flesh of your finger

my own hand burns
a reminder
the same string entangled
around my own skin

nothing but string
it sings out
nothing but string

that is all we are
in the sea of snow
blood and bones

the days no longer come

only moonlight to guide
as we carry one another forward

not through the touch of our skin
not through the brief passing
only the string that unties us

yet as my feet, one step after another
the same as yours,
crunching beneath the fallen snowflakes

i wonder if one
consumed by the dark
grows comfortable with the company

murmuring memories
stuck on loop
reminiscence of you

— Lynn

T4T

To find love like this, you gotta dig.
Dig down, dig down deeper than dirt,
deeper than discarded Blockbuster
shells showing white bread cishets
kissing.
This love lives further in the earth
than Hollywood thinks makes fiscal
sense, far enough that the people
pouring the cement think it oughta stay
unseen.
But this love, this love down deep
where the tears never dry but
instead mix with the sediment
and brew a muddy magic, a
rebirth,
it's a buried treasure, a soul soil
sanctuary, darker than any nightclub,
hidden from His Eyes under layers of
discreet salt. This love lives surrounded by
bones,
by fossils of loved ones lost to the
hate or the cops or the harsh tug of
gravity when the world weighs too
much, donated bones that decompose into
compost,
compost that lets new things grow.
This love is nourished by courage, by the
black clothes the bugs eat to better the
biome, by the bubbling raging core that keeps us
warm.
This love likes the lights off.
This love leaves a buffer seat for
the holy ghost on the subway, not
because it's ashamed, but it keep itself
safe.
This love, if you can find it, fingertips brushing
after years of forgetting to breathe,

inching, writhing, eyes closed first times, if you can
find it, it'll stay on your tongue and under your
fingernails.
This love shapes and reshapes and reshapes itself,
no masters, no shackles, no roles.
This love holds your fingerprints, but
never holds you to yesterday's
translation.
This love is heavy and tough and
delicate and wet and alive, full of
little flecks of all the other lovers who've
laid down, down deeper than dirt, down deeper than
bodies.
This love, if you can find it, will
take a while to warm up to the fire,
but it is the oldest art, the home of
every eloping root, and no matter what,
it will outlive.

— t.v. heebs

i want a tattoo of a running greyhound

i want a tattoo of a running greyhound
over my left knee,
poked by somebody i love.

to piss off my parents,
to establish my ties to my loved ones,
to establish my love for myself.

it represents everything i run from
the abuse
the lack of love.

and everything i run towards,
my independence,
my sense of self worth.

when i get him,
i will name him luke,
after the broken person i always knew i was;

after the kid who cried himself to sleep
seven days a week,
the kid who never thought he'd make it to sixteen.

a commemoration of who i used to be,
a tribute to the person i thought i would always be,
a way to immortalize my own growth.

at thirteen years old,
i decided that i loved
that front bottoms lyric:

"i am not
a dirty god
and i don't have a dirty body."

at seventeen i decided,

i am not a dirty god
and i don't have a dirty body.

it took me fifteen years to feel loved,
another two to accept it,
even though it's from unlikely places.

i have never felt more loved
than i do now.
maybe that's the lexapro talking.

my body is a work of art.
it is not bad,
it is not unloveable.

one day, i will decorate my entire body with art
and, on that day,
i will be the most beautiful i've ever been.

— River Michael

three people I love

candlelit altar warm, radiating scribbled lines; a bare-bulb lamp from across a
smoke-drunk room, a citrus-scented split-side in a new and secret month outside of the
pressure of time.

rosy calamine cool, haloed in frayed yarn; a hand-annotated cozy bookshop soulmate,
a Miyazakian daydream of footpaths and dappled summer sunlight across
picnic-eloping country.

ash clement tepid, backlit by utopian bokeh; a mad-passioned all-nighter mapped on
blueprint paper, a comfortable silence on a balcony carefully overlooking a
misty urban thing.

— t.v. heebs

Solace

Should I grow out my hair?
Would that still look nice?
Is it too long, too short?
For the times when I
don't speak, just
look, invite your
hands in my
hair, you
oblige

shave it, cut it, let it flow!
I'll still run my hands
through and over
braid or ruffle
it's still your
hair in my
hands

Stay?
With me?
I'm hearing
things that I
know aren't here
Whispers, Feverish
Accusing, Beckoning
can you stay up with me?

of course of course of course!
I wouldn't leave you!
in the dark alone
we can call
to laugh
or cry

Would
you listen
to my rambling?
In the light and dark?

Every day or night!
when all your
thoughts
spill

And if my
head floods
and the deluge
pours from my eyes
typhoon and monsoon
uncontrolled and untamed
would you be the eye of my storm?

I'll be there to dance in your rain
with you right beside me
until we catch a cold
and we are both
drowned rats!
smiling

Even if my blood isn't yours?
And your blood isn't mine?
Would you still be here?
If we don't use words?
To say what we are?
Would'ya still love?
If I can't kiss you?
Or give up mine?
Is that still love?
Is it even you?
Is it meant to?
Feel like this?
Confusingly?

blood isn't!
what binds us!
transcending use!
for words or names!
of no kisses required!

no sacrifice needed for!
me to have all your heart!
or for you to have all of mine!

So then I can hold your hand
your warmth to my ice-cold,
press my head into the
space of your neck
where it hides my
face, when the
world is too
loud, too
bright?

Always!
there to
keep you
tethered to
Earth, keeping
you from drifting
away into outer space
where the Sun's rays and
light cannot reach so far away
where black holes threaten to take
and not give anything of you back to me.

— Creature

kitchen from the living room

hearing those two speaking
gently from the other room
soft laughter about soup
is the most comforting experience…
I want to spend the rest of my
soup-eating days
with them.

— t.v. heebs

acknowledgements

I am currently writing from Southwestern Ontario, wherein the place that I live and create exists on the traditional territory of several Indigenous groups, including the Attawandaron (Neutral) Peoples, the Algonquin Peoples, the Haudenosaunee Peoples, the Anishnaabe Peoples, and the Lenni-Lunape Peoples. I think it is important to acknowledge that these peoples, past and present, have faced and continue to face hardships as a direct result of colonialism, as well as recognize that the significance of the many Indigenious artists, creators, activists, and community members in all the places I have called home are a vital part of the communities in which I exist, local and cross-country. as a settler to this land, I will continue to actively work to make my practice as an artist and movement through life reflect and uphold this acknowledgement, and to stand with and support the Indigenous peoples of Canada in the obtention of reparations and equity from the Canadian government and establishments..

I would like to very lovingly thank everyone who made this anthology possible: Allen N., Amber Walker, bunny, Creature, Creed Monroe, kmdll, Lynn, Michael Joseph, Ind. Murdock Storm, Mycelia Mycophagi, N.E Nils, Orien, Quinn K. Ray Marx, River Michael, and Ronan Clover, for sharing your works with me and every other lucky soul that comes across them; Shaun/Axel**,** for providing the beautiful face for this collection's words; The Soft Scrawl Collective, for being an ever-lovely little brood of creatives and some of my biggest supporters as a writer; Jeffery and River, for being the poles of my creative world and better friends than "friend" has bread for; and last but all but least Perry, for giving me first-hand evidence every day that I am a deserving two-way street for love, and that any life-path, no matter how wicked or wearisome, can lead you to a warm hearth built hand-in-hand with a soulmate.

about the cover artist

Shaun/Axel (he/him) / 17 year old illustrator from New England
@ark-harpy (tumblr) / @ark_harpy (instagram & twitter)



about the poets

Allen N. (he/him) / My name is Allen and I'm 24 years old. As a trans man and a pagan from the American South, I'm used to hiding myself. Poetry is a way for me to break out and express what I normally hold close to my chest.

Amber Walker / I am a poet and blogger working out the UK. I have a degree in English and Film, and I use this to give opinions no one asked for. I am (very slowly) working on my first collection of poetry, as well as maintaining a film and culture blog, with hopes of becoming a full-time writer.
muckrack.com/ambercanwalk (portfolio) / ambercanwalk.blogspot.com / @ambercanwalk (twitter)

bunny (she/he) / bunny is an amateur author and artist who writes mostly creative fiction but once in a while whacks up the ginger for a bit of poetry. she's dedicating her last two years of high school to learning as much as possible about theatrical costume design and rigging. he loves all things beautiful and eccentric (including but not limited to vintage clothes, stuffed animals, romantic and renaissance artists, and anything pink).
@butch-snufkin (tumblr)

Creature (they/them) / I go by Creature, and my pronouns are they/them. I'm new to creative writing, but I've always had an interest in making my own poems and stories. Currently, I'm working on my first piece of writing in the form of a fic on AO3. It's somewhere to start, and I'm trying to improve bit by bit.
@wildly-empty (tumblr)

Creed Monroe (they/he) / I'm a writing student from Australia, with aspirations of eventually publishing a poetry collection, a short story anthology and maybe a novel or two someday. I typically write free verse poetry centred around themes of trauma/recovery/mental health, growth, identity and art. My works are very much inspired by Richard Siken and the lyrics of Hozier and The Amazing Devil.
@wordsbycreed (tumblr)

kmdll / I've been writing poetry and prose since school and it saves me word by word. My poetry is centered about everything which resides in my bones-- all my love and my anxieties and hurts. I write about warmth and honey and blood. I write the people I

meet and love words to try and articulate a piece of the joy they give me. Sometimes I write about a single word that turned the world on its axis just by existing.
@kmdll.sang (instagram)

Lynn (they/she) / hi ! i've always written stories since i was a kid and i think poetry is one of those few outlets where you can explain so much with only a couple of lines. anyways, i had a lot of fun writing this :)

Michael Joseph (he/him) / Hello :) My names Michael and I'm a trans gay guy who has an interest in poetry, writing, and the general arts like sculpting and drawing. I have synesthesia and try to incorporate it into my poetry whenever possible, and my senses play a large roll in descriptors too.
@IveB33nGh0sting (instagram)

Ind. Murdock Storm (he/him) / Murdock is a zoology major with hopes of going into a marine biology graduate program, and spends his time working (on aquariums!) and spending time with his chinchilla Hermes. He writes poetry in his spare time.
@havingmeaning (tumblr)

Mycelia Mycophagi (they/them) / I'm a writer and a poet; sometimes an artist. I collect glass bottles and shiny things I find on the ground. I'm inspired by things that I like, and I really like robots, angels, bog bodies, ancient poetry, and Macbeth.
@medumyce (tumblr)

N.E Nils (he/him) / 19 year old writer/poet who's both gay and trans.

Orien / I'm Orien and I'm a queer youth. I've found that writing about my identity and experience have helped me figure out who I am, and find peace with myself.
@qxirkz (instagram) / @0rien (tumblr)

Quinn K. (she/they/it) / Quinn K. is a writer, translator, artist and game developer from Vienna, Austria. They create stories and poetry preoccupied with liminal places of the mind, body dysphoria and dysmorphia, and LGBTQIA+ rights. They are presently working on an indie game called "An Outcry", have published a myriad of poetry and prose zines on their itch.io page, and have a novel called "What Ebner Did" on the backburner. Their work is strongly inspired by their strong affinity for theatre and video games.
quinnk (itch.io) / @quinnpixelart (twitter)

Ray Marx (they/them) / My poetry and writings are often personal statements dealing with trauma and grief of love, but I find that writing about "softer" things really settles the soul. I believe creating things is what I was meant to do from the very start, either by shaping things with clay or playing with the rhythm of words, and I'm a deep believer in creation being a form of healing.
@panellefruit & @rayver (tumblr)

River Michael (they/he) / River Michael is a 17 year old writer of prose and poetry from the American Mid-Atlantic who, despite his best efforts, writes mostly about love, nostalgia, and adolescence. This is his first published work but hopefully not the last.
@gnashingmyteeth-likeachildofcain (tumblr) / @saltinthew0und (instagram)

Ronan Clover (any pronouns) / Ronan Clover is a transgender multimedia artist located in Portland, OR. He's a poet, ceramicist, printmaker, painter, illustrator, and collage artist. His works explore themes of gender, romance, the natural world, and self-discovery. His main motivation is to create art that sparks dreamy feelings of warmth and love, and inspires empathy. He hopes to eventually quit his day job to focus on art full-time, but until then, he'll keep on dreaming.
@kissthecrows (instagram) / ronanclover@gmail.com

T.V. Heebs (he/him) / Heebs is a multimedia artist, writer, & experimental storyteller based in Ontario, Canada. a great many of his creative endeavors fall somewhere within the lines of illustration, poetry, fiction, photography, film/moving image, and performance, but he is very fond of experimenting with different media and finding weird and exploratory ways of telling stories. his body of work deals with themes of identity, queerness, community, the uncanny & the supernatural, and is largely a curious exploration of love and fear as two of the most human experiences. he is currently working on several longform story projects, including a video game and an audio drama, and is doing his best each and every day to surround himself with art & love.
tvheebs.carrd.co / @hee-blee-art & @tvheebs (tumblr) / @heebleeart (instagram) / heebleeart@gmail.com

donation information

Native Women In the Arts (NWIA) is a not-for-profit organization for First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and other Indigenous gender marginalized folks who share the common interest of art, culture, community and the advancement of Indigenous peoples.

learn more: nwia.ca/about/
donate: nwia.ca/donate-to-nwia/

The Artists Mentoring Youth (AMY) Project is committed to transforming the arts landscape by providing accessible, affirming performing arts training & creation programs for women and non-binary youth from equity-seeking communities.

learn more: theamyproject.com/about/
donate: theamyproject.com/how-to-donate/