

Head in the Clouds:

# NOSTALGIA

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Cover art done by Emma Mayer



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## Worlds Away

How am I to feel the rain? The quaking  
Drab of day, so critical past my curtains.  
Once abandoned, near and along the widened  
World, I saw treasure.

Castles tall and wondrously bold, resplendent.  
Cloaked in sunrise, glorious – dreaming aimless,  
Passing time by driftwood and embers, picture  
Perfect but gone now.

Magical and innocent, softly laying  
Here beneath the willow, to wake and find a  
Dream destroyed by growing old, snow that keeps on  
Falling with pity.

I hear songs that torture my poorly beating  
Heart, so shattered daydream and soul I linger,  
Caught between the worlds in which sweet and pensive  
Visions are dancing.

## Hot Air Balloons

As cold and foggy, distant mornings go,  
the clouds rolled faintly off of the meadow.  
The sunlight glistened on the mountain side  
As the stars said goodnight, then ran to hide.  
a hot air balloon flew over the trees,  
The smell of honeydew rolled off the breeze.  
A woman wore yellow; she felt confined,  
And in the yard, her clothes hung on the line.  
In dawn and mist, the horses bellowed on,  
And grandma sipped her tea and watched the swans.  
beehives buzzed, her cat meowed, honey flowed--  
She watched those far balloons as they glowed.  
Over the mountain, past the horizon,  
The fading dream of a far-off diamond—  
She prayed to God and hoped light would give way,  
But those balloons drifted slowly away.

## A Million Reasons

There are a million clouds that twinkle  
Through the pine trees' waving limbs.  
Shapeshifters who lack delight,  
Because they fade too quickly.

There are a million bluebells dancing  
In a patch of bottle green  
Outside my window in the shade  
Of a quiet, shadowed cottage.

There are a million whispers in the wind,  
Invasive and desperate for news.  
Why won't she come out?  
What is she so afraid of?

That's why there are a million stars  
Who know me better than anyone else.  
And old Sirius, his grey eyes sparkling  
In the dead of dark between him

And a million stars that swirl  
In the purple velvet night  
And I, a falling star, wish more than ever  
Against the pale moonlight.

Oh, there's a million things I'd like to ask  
That old familiar star,  
Like where he goes when the sun comes out,  
And why I'm down here instead of where they are.

## A Feeling Like Cinnamon

In fields of auburn colored rose,  
Her freckles splashed across her nose,  
Her eyes were filled with candy hearts,  
His laugh could tear the world apart.

He hid behind his sweater paws,  
She found she loved him without cause.  
Or maybe, just maybe, she'd cry,  
A hundred thousand reasons why:

Like how his ivy satin eyes  
Even outshine the brightest skies;  
In his corduroy covered soul,  
She lost her sense of full control.

Her world would surely go amiss  
Without his cinnamon filled kiss.  
He hung the moon up high with string,  
Then plucked the stars and made a ring

And asked if she would spend her life  
Beside him, void of any strife.  
In that moment, it came so plain  
That in his arms she would remain.

Within his honey coated smile,  
She would stay for quite a while.

## A Contemplative Mourning

In mist and shadow, dim and quiet, I,  
The restless writer's pale grey citrus dreams,  
Force me to lay awake when I should sleep.  
The birds and me, a symphony of song  
And thought; A roar of cymbals crashing as  
The night meets day. The yellow flowers reach,  
Stretching their hands towards my windowsill.  
Birds come and suck the sweet nectar dry,  
And I catch eyes with my own reflection—  
The woman cries by candlelight and shakes,  
And scribble words on scraps of paper. Tired  
And worn, but sleep escapes me; desperate  
To dream with my eyes closed for once. Preserve  
The beauty seen at night, that light now turns  
A glimmering and cloudless day. Until  
The sky bends under rainy, mute fog, collapsed  
In wintery tides. See the oracle  
Of nature as it wakes, blinking in rays  
Of green, wild and naïve. Flowers wilt, makes  
Me think: if the sky cannot hold the weight  
Of the storm, how am I expected to?

### The Lost Girl and the Sea

There was once a young girl, and she slept by the sea,  
From her hair she took seaweed and used it for tea.  
Her days were spent well, wand'ring the shore,  
And her feet had been hardened by the ocean floor.  
She was a wild young thing; much too wild to keep down,  
Her gold hair was home to her shining seashell crown.  
When the tide starts to rise, she hides back in her cove  
And her dreaming mind strays, beneath the waves she dove.  
In the night she returns to the beach and she lays  
In the sand with the crabs. Together, they stargaze.  
this slice of heav'n is all she has to call home  
She never grows old, forever freely she roams.



## I Saw God in San Francisco

The locals call the bay a place of grace;  
You can see God when you walk Lombard Street.  
The tourists say their souls have been replaced  
By cable cars, crab, and veils of concrete.

But when fog starts to settle and the bay  
Begins to bellow, tourists disappear—  
As addicts tweak and junkies rot; decay  
Like the undead; diseased and lost in fear.

You can see God in clouds of smoke exhaled  
From lungs burnt black by chasing hope too much,  
And in the corners of the city that failed,  
Some people use their poison as a crutch.

But in cathedrals of divine redwoods,  
I sat and saw God reach his great hand down  
and grab the Golden Gate; beneath their hoods,  
veiled from the rain, some swore they saw God frown.

## When I Have a Son

To my sweet son, who will get this someday:  
Before you're born, I will speak to you like  
You have already changed the world. One day,  
You'll rise above the rest of us and strike  
With the force of a hurricane unlike  
Anyone has ever seen. You will be  
The planet I will orbit; you and me.

I hope you are as sweet as you are strong,  
I hope you dance if there's no more music.  
I'll teach you to admit when you are wrong,  
And I'll take care of you when you are sick;  
On your first date, I'll find you flowers to pick.  
My sweet son, someday soon I'll build a boat—  
When you swim too far, I'll keep you afloat.

## War Song for Thomas

Oh you poor child, you never asked for this.  
The world has put its weight on your shoulders  
And told you: climb. You are your own Atlas;  
There's fire that coats your veins; your blood smolders.

You did not ask for war, but death won't leave

You be; Quick, close the door and you may grieve.

But here you are, so what will you do now?  
Now that Apollo hides his fiery star,  
Who will you turn to? We follow you down  
Like Orpheus to hell, to depths as far

As time can end. Let's break the partition;

Where will you be when dust starts settling in?

## When an Artist Paints the Stars

A single star in the sky did sway,  
A diamond dazzling against a dingy blue.  
It lit the loveless, limpid night  
And put the placid pond to rest.

While the world turned wildly on its side,  
The bumbling banter of the burgh was silent  
And the only life whose light lingered on,  
The painter with his pots and portraits in disarray.

He climbed, clumsily clattering to the lake  
As the dangerous dark dared deny the light,  
So the star stretched its shimmering limbs  
And caressed the craftsman's cavernous soul.

His eyes expressed his eccentric content,  
As the vagabond voices, so vivacious in volume  
Went as still as softening souls could shatter.

The artist, animated in the azure of the sky,  
Breathlessly bathed in a beautiful war,  
Took his life, tenacious and tender  
As the wind whistled its wishful tune.  
And the star sat strong and spry,  
As another ardent artist joined him

in the sky.

## Death's Indulgence

She wears the night like a glistening robe,  
With cerulean limbs that squeal.  
As she walks along the barren street,  
Her skin she idly peels.

By the dock she sings a haunting tune,  
Her feet submerged beneath.  
The waves bring forth the hungry fish,  
With their keen and gnashing teeth.

Her hair did fall around her face  
In thin and balding strings.  
Her eyes were bloodshot, crimson orbs  
That only death could bring.

Her moans and wails pierce the soul  
And all who rest above;  
Tears of ghoulish, ghostly sadness  
For her lovely, living love.

The man with whom she planned to marry  
Now sat beside a tree.  
Her bones beneath now lay decaying  
For her murder he committed first degree.

Thrice he stabbed her as she lay sleeping,  
His fear turned into glee.  
The bridegroom's plot sinisterly hatching,  
For he was finally free.

She woke to whispers of a winter in the dirt,  
Soaked in savage cold,  
Tore through the ground without a sound  
Dreaming of glittering gold.

But she could not reach the palaces white,  
For she still had work to do.  
Her bridegroom lived and she had died,  
And revenge, she felt, was due.

The ravens cawed and the sky did rumble  
As she made her way inside.  
And there he slept in soundless slumber  
In all his menacing pride.

"Till death do us part," she hissed in scorn,  
As she leveled the knife at his heart.  
And with a kiss upon his lips,  
She carved his chest apart.

When you sleep, you can sometimes hear  
them,  
Chained in death, confined.  
They will creep along the solemn streets,  
And approach a wandering mind.

Don't ever laugh as the hearse drives by,  
For it could be you that's next.  
Beware the kiss of the living dead,  
For love is quite complex.

The Sun, a great god whose light shone  
 Through a dim lit sky, his inevitable rays  
 Cascading as liquid gold on those Grand mountains,  
 Sat lonely, his heartache inevitable, tears drowning oceans.  
 Amid the starlight, the ever glow of her,  
 The Moon, her warm, dazzling shine brought effervescence  
 To his monochrome musings. Moon reflected his light  
 And taught the sea to dance for him.  
 He reveled in her silver crystal blazing beams  
 And admired her power, the stars bowing down  
 To her every will—he was no different.  
 She loved him, his lava burning, marking time  
 Since they had met; the dazzling joy of  
 A hundred-year wait. They moved through skies,  
 Once a century, vast masses slowly reuniting again.  
 She trekked her way across the sky, vacationing –  
 Her destination set before her. He waited there,  
 Watched as stars moved aside, let her through.  
 Lost behind her shadowed figure, he turned crescent,  
 The earth growing dark. Shifting, face to face  
 They stood—the sun nothing but a sliver  
 In the sky. Shrouded in black, we watched  
 As the Moon embraced the Sun. Streaks of  
 White, coiling glowing tendrils around his frame as  
 They kissed, shone behind her grey, darkened silhouette.  
 It only lasted a few minutes. Gravity forced  
 Her onwards, and as she kissed the Sun  
 goodnight, not wanting to let go, she pulled  
 away. His fingers, scintillating rays, dragged across her  
 shoulder, coming apart like tendons pulled from bone;  
 Held tight as long as life let him.  
 Drifting further apart, flickers of light passed between  
 Soft fingertips, floating away as life below illuminates.  
 Sun caught a glimpse of her onyx colored  
 Soul as she faded behind an opalescent sky,  
 Freely commanding the stars, reflecting him every night.  
 We went about our day like we hadn't  
 Just witnessed the Sun and Moon say goodbye.

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## REFLECTION

### I. Worlds Away

“Worlds Away” was my classic sapphic imitation exercise. I happened to be incredibly burnt out the day I wrote it and as the clock neared midnight, I figured I had better put something on a page. I wrote the poem with an old castle from my dreams in mind and tried to capture the idea of growing up by relaying the images of a fantasy land I always dreamt of as a little girl. To find that one’s childhood is “worlds away” is quite heartbreaking, and I found myself in that state of mind and pain as I wrote.

To me, the classic sapphic was difficult, but it wasn’t *the most* difficult one we’ve done. I had a hard time grappling the stresses and unstresses, but then again, I didn’t truly really get the hang of meter until maybe last week. I found that while I struggled through the form itself, the words flowed out of me easier than they had done before.

I know that most, if not all, of my meters are imperfect. However, this was one that I revisited much later in the semester and found that (while I didn’t totally remember writing it,) I felt incredibly proud of it.

**This poem will be published in the Rising Phoenix Review on December 25, 2020.**

### II. Hot Air Balloons

Unlike the first, this one caused me a lot of strife. So many words and rhymes did not fit into the meter the way I wanted them to, and no matter how long I sat coming up with different rhymes or synonyms, I couldn’t get it *just right*. As a heroic couplet goes, I think if I had tried to just start from scratch and write a brand-new poem, I might have done better, but there was something about this one that I just couldn’t seem to let go of.

I wrote this poem about my grandmother; a wonderful woman who emanates the feeling of sugary sweets on Christmas; of the way that bees buzz past your ear, the way that honey tastes straight from the comb, the way fresh peaches smell picked right off the tree. She is the essence of kindness and patience.

When I was little, I remember waking up at her house. I remember how I would sleep in her bed, and wake up alone, and know exactly where to find her. She would be sitting outside on the swing in the yard, drinking her coffee and staring at the Tetons, and the hot air balloons in the Village would take tourists on sunrise trips every day. Her fresh linens would be drying on the line, the chickens would be pecking softly, and the swans and geese would fly overhead and land in the pond over the fence

where the horses roamed. She called me Chickadee and let me lay across her lap as we watched the hot air balloons go up and then back down again. My grandmother is one of the strongest people I know, and I couldn't help but write about her, but looking back on this poem now, I don't think I did her enough justice.

I think my successes in this poem was the imagery, but I forced myself to choose between the images and the meter, and ultimately had to choose what I loved. I am a menace when it comes to reversals within the line (as you well know) and there was nothing I could do about the ones in this one; nothing I tried seemed to fit. Has that ever happened to you?

I want to continue to work at this one, because I feel like it has so much potential if I can get past my reversal frustrations. I managed to change a few, and one that managed to work nicely was the change from the line: "Over the trees, a hot air balloon flew / And pushed through air that smelled like honeydew" to the much improved, "a hot air balloon flew over the trees, / The smell of honeydew rolled off the breeze." Simple improvements such as this one gave me an air of confidence that was short lived, but lived nonetheless. The final four lines in the poem were ones that simply could not be fixed, and I'm not sure if it was simply my emotional exhaustion when editing this one or if I'm just hopeless.

Above all, this poem taught me—more than any other—that poems don't just "happen." I think of the poetry by classic authors, and I bet those didn't come easy either. We always read examples of such beautiful poetry, where meter is perfected and everything comes together in a way that makes them truly timeless; and now I can't help but laugh and think, "gee, how long did *that* one take?"

Patience is a virtue—somehow, my grandmother is an expert at it. If only I were more like her, then this poem might have been more like her too.

### III. A Million Reasons

This poem was a free verse poem that I wrote, but alas, did not turn in. When doing our exercises for free verse, I wrote quite a few different versions. I thought to myself, "how hard could this be?" Because I had always considered free verse the best kind of poetry. No rules, no limitations. I must admit I hated the idea of having to use rhyme or meter when I started this class.

And then it came time to write the exercise, and my mind went completely blank. Nothing I scribbled down in my journal seemed good enough, no matter how hard I



tried. I felt like I had been writing too many poems about stars, so that was off the table immediately (even though stars are basically my identity and I put them in nearly every poem I write).

I suppose the inspiration for this poem was because my friends had been annoying me about staying home this semester, and I was getting tired of it. They kept asking me why I had stayed home, and I told them there were plenty of reasons, but I couldn't name them. Suddenly, my situation seemed pointless.

So, I wrote this poem. There are a million different reasons, and a million voices on the wind trying to understand, but no one truly will. It seems an anomaly in the people I associate with that someone might care about covid-19.

My house is the "quiet, shadowed cottage." My forest of a backyard are the trees I discuss, the bluebells dangle off the hillside by my window in the summer, and I was feeling nostalgic for the season as well (nostalgia is a common theme).

And of course, it wouldn't be a poem by Emma Mayer if she didn't talk about the stars or the night sky, right? No matter how badly I might wanted to refrain, it seemed like a good place to throw in a space reference. Sirius is my favorite star, and not just because of Harry Potter, but because there was a time in my life where I considered that star in the night sky my only friend. A million times a day I wished I could be up there, walking down Milky Way boulevard (I used to want to be an astronaut).

I'm not honestly sure why I didn't turn this one in – I liked it enough, the anaphora I use with "there are a million..." flows well enough, perhaps I was just tired. Either way, I like this one now.

#### IV. A Feeling Like Cinnamon

Ah, the good old iambic tetrameter. I think I vaguely remember almost crying trying to write this one. My poor, tired head couldn't wrap around the idea of meter or counting syllables. (Sometimes it still can't.)

Out of all of my work this semester, this one has come the farthest from where it started. As you might remember, I was so far away from getting it right the first time, that you allowed me to try it again. On the first attempt, the scansion was so off that I couldn't even see what I was doing incorrectly. After a few days of googling, "how to

scan poems” and practicing, I tried again, and that was the best feeling ever. The idea that I might have finally gotten it! Could it be?

Well, not exactly. But we got much closer than before! After learning to scan, the number of errors in that poem became apparent. There were so many reversals, syllables missing, and Lord knows what else.

I rewrote it, and it was definitely better. The second time around, I didn’t have as many reversals as before (although there were still way more than there should have been,) and I managed to count syllables correctly. I’m not a huge fan of tetrameter though, because I’ve found that I have a very hard time containing my thoughts to only 8 syllables per line.

Beyond that, the second editing stage of this poem was much better. The change from the line: “Outshine the brightest of sunrise” to “Even outshine the brightest skies” was one of the easiest ones that gave me a sense of internal peace. This poem, as far as I can tell, was one poem I feel like I managed to make all the necessary corrections to, hopefully without leaving any reversals behind (perhaps I will be wrong though).

In regard to the theme, I thought about what it would be like to love someone I know is unattainable. It may seem sweet, but all poetry for me cannot be completely 100% happy I suppose.

## V. A Contemplative Mourning

I feel like I had to put my iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter right next to each other, so here we are. This poem was a night over the summer where my insomnia was worse than usual, and I stayed up and watched the sunrise through my window. I happen to love summer in my cabin home, and everything that flowed around me that morning that I stayed up and watched come to life again was one of my favorite memories of 2020. By candlelight, I wrote out a large piece of prose detailing everything I was seeing, and later, when I needed the inspiration for this poem, I read through that and turned it into poetry.

I liked this one from the start. Perhaps because it was such a beautiful memory for me that I just felt it came naturally enough and it wasn’t too hard to throw it into meter. I had some great corrections from Professor Spear on this one and I took those to heart as I edited, fixing the line, “Birds come and suck the sweet nectar dry” of what was previously “Their sweet blossoms are sucked dry as the birds”, or changing “A glimmering and cloudless day. Until” from “To a silvery, cloudless day. Until”. Even the smallest of changes seem to make the largest difference!

The one line I struggled with and ultimately had to give up due to time pressures, was the line that reads: “Of green, wild and naïve. Flowers wilt, makes” which I know for a fact is not in the correct meter. I couldn’t figure out how to get that same idea across in a way that fits the meter, and it will bug me continuously until the day I figure it out—and I will keep trying.

## VI. The Lost Girl and the Sea

I am disappointed to state that this is my least favorite poem in the entire collection. While in my mind it is a beautiful image, I cannot stand triple meter and I feel as though I butchered the idea by not understanding the meter. It is so unnecessarily difficult for me that it hurts.

Growing up, I used to spend time nearly every summer in a quiet coastal town in Oregon called Port Orford where my grandparents used to live. Me and my mother and my sister would go and stay with them for nearly a month or so and pretend like we were locals.

One of my favorite games to play was “lost boys” (a game I happened to have made up). The inspiration came from my favorite Disney movie, *Peter Pan*, and involved me parading around the beaches and inlets barefoot with a stick I carved into a sword, fighting off Captain Hook and getting the “island” ready for Peter Pan to return (from where, I do not know). My sister, who was only a few years old at the time, would dawdle around behind me pretending to be one of the lost boys as well, although I usually just made her run my errands.

The beach my grandparents lived beside had a large rock that, when the tide went out, would reveal a hidden cave that I used to think was magically appearing only when I was there. Thus, the game and the magic inspired the lost girl in the poem who lives on the beach and fends for herself.

My frustrations stemmed only from the meter itself, and not the content of the poem. Trying to fit it all into the correct triple meter had me nearly ready to pull my hair out and beg for mercy. Thus, my edits are very poor indeed. I changed the line “With seaweed in her hair that she used for her tea” to “From her hair she took seaweed and used it for tea” which I think managed to at least fix the reversal in that line. Beyond that, I did make other edits, but I really can’t say if they did anything to improve the meter or not.

I’d like to write more on the game though, as it was played in many different settings at many different stages in my life. I think I could do it more justice in another form.

## VII. I Saw God in San Francisco

I feel incredibly proud of this poem. A while back, I was brainstorming for the quatrain metric exercise and I remember thinking, “my poetry is so bland. All I do is describe my surroundings, and my poems never have any true meaning.” Something about the way that my poems always seemed to lack a deeper understanding, at least in my mind, was really bugging me, and so I told myself that the next poem I wrote would mean something.

The quatrain form wasn’t hard to follow at all, surprisingly. I found it easy to write, and as I started to write, it really just seemed to flow out of me. I love it when things click like that.

This poem was obviously inspired by San Francisco, but more than that, it’s an ode or sorts to everyone in that city who struggles with addiction. San Francisco is very well known for its copious amounts of drug problems, and I wanted to home in on that more.

One of my favorite books (and movies) is *Beautiful Boy*, the book written by David Scheff. It is a memoir of a father witnessing and retelling the story of his 17-year-old son’s addiction to crystal meth. The story took place in San Francisco, and I watched the movie again before I decided to write.

Some edits to the lines that I made was changing “city” in the first line to “bay”, the lines “The tourists will say their soul’s been replaced / By cable cars and crab, that veil concrete” to “The tourists say their souls have been replaced / By cable cars, crab, and veils of concrete.” I also changed the incredibly reversed line, “there are people who use drugs as a crutch” to “Some people use their poison as a crutch.” There are a few more words and lines which were switched as well, but these were a few edits I made that I feel really helped me get into the root of what I wanted to say.

Being in San Francisco, as crazy as it does seem and as someone who knows God, can see him everywhere. I did see Him in San Francisco, in the faces of the men I passed who were sleeping on the street. I saw him in the beauty of Muir Woods and across the Golden Gate Bridge. It’s truly a beautiful city, and I was happy to be able to write something that depicted it and the people, in a way that was bigger than me just describing what it looks like.

**This poem will be published in the *Rising Phoenix Review* on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.**

## VIII. When I Have a Son

This poem was definitely out of my comfort zone, in writing it and in trying to learn the rhyme scheme. I feel like I handled the rhyme alright, but thematically, it was odd.

I'm definitely the friend who resists all ideas of marriage. While my friends are getting married, talking about children, trying to find husbands, I'm the only one who resists.

So, when my friend asked me what I was writing about this week, and I told her I wrote a poem about being a mum someday, she laughed loudly and could hardly believe it. When I read the draft to her, she teased me, saying that she always knew deep down I only hated it because people were trying to force it onto me.

Maybe she's right—but I wrote this poem and definitely cried afterwards.

I had watched a film about a single mother and her 4-year-old son, which is what inspired this poem. I knew I always wanted to have a son, and as sad as it might sound, the idea of also being a single mother always fascinated me as well. Logistically, it sounds impossibly difficult, but the idea of just my baby boy and I made me feel heartsick for someone I didn't even have.

Metrically, this poem wasn't hard. I struggled a bit with some rhyme, like "music," "sick," and pick." More than anything though, it was just hard to get the ideas to fit within the confines of the iambic lines. I believe I fixed the reversal in the line "The planet I orbit; just you and me" so it says, "The planet I will orbit; you and me." The one reversal that really hurt my brain to try and fix was the line, "I hope you dance when there is no music." It now says, "I hope you dance if there's no more music" which, to me, sounds choppy and a bit awkward, but it was all I could come up with.

I think one thing I'm seeing that's a pattern is being stuck in the idea that if I can't fix the one line, it needs to stay the way it is instead of taking the whole thing apart and trying again. That, to me, is a better way to edit, but I'm always too afraid to dispose of what I have for fear of never being able to improve it. For the future, I will dive deeper into editing in a way that may seem painful, but we'll see if it comes out better in the end.

## IX. War Song for Thomas

This Venus and Adonis poem was inspiring to write; not just because of the content, but metrically, I tried something new in my writing process that I feel ended up being pretty successful.

I usually have a journal that I carry around with me almost everywhere, and I'll write silly lines or lines that come to mind at random moments throughout the day down, and later on I'll see what I can do with them. My journal is full of applicable "one-liners." When I sat down to write this time, I took out my journal, and I just started writing one-liners. Many lines came through in that time, including "You did not ask for war, but death won't leave you be," "Now that Apollo hides his fiery star, who will you turn to?" and "Where will you be when the dust settles in?" These lines were obviously incorporated into the poem, but I took those lines, dispersed them in the stanzas, and wrote around them. I had never done that before, but I liked the way it turned out.

A few things that happened in the editing process: we went from this line, "The fire that coats your veins, your blood smolders" to "There's fire that coats your veins; your blood smolders" which I feel is improved; I'm not sure though about the ending, I had a hard time understanding how I could have made that a feminine ending.

I also am a huge fan of Greek mythology and used a few references, specifically to Atlas carrying the world, Apollo and the sun, and the tale of Orpheus traveling to the Underworld.

Thomas is a man I highly admire. He was put through hell and back and forced to deal with everything life ever threw at him, even though he was really only a kid. The poem is truly what the title says, it's a war song for Thomas; the boy who couldn't seem to give up even if he wanted to.

## X. When an Artist Paints the Stars

This poem was the first exercise I wrote this year; the Anglo-Saxon alliterative strong stress meter, (quite the mouthful,) at first was incredibly intimidating. As we began to share some lines in class, however, I became inspired by my classmates' ease and was determined to do it for myself, and for a first-time draft in writing with a particular meter, I think I did fairly well.

This particular poem was inspired by Vincent Van Gogh, my favorite artist to date. I love his work and his heartbreaking story, and always feel so inspired by the man that I knew I had to write my first poem about my idol.

The alliteration was tricky; I used a great many thesaurus resources to find the right words for it, and somehow still managed to miss a few. I changed “alive” to “animated,” learning that the stress was on the “-live” part of the word and tried to fix the number of stresses in the last line by breaking up for stylistic purposes. I feel as though I could have edited more with this one, but my notes were taken so long ago that I didn’t understand them when I sat down to finally edit, and that was my mistake.

## XI. Death’s Indulgence

I will hate to be honest here, but I didn’t make a single edit to this ballad. The significant amount of praise I received for this one was enough to haphazardly boost my ballad-writing ego, and while I feel that there may be one or two lines I could have improved to some degree, I didn’t dare touch this one.

Inspired by some of my favorite things, namely: Halloween, Edgar Allen Poe, The Corpse Bride, and Tim Burton films, this tale was brought to life at my kitchen table on a warm, Sunday afternoon in September. A black candle lay burning, festive paper bats hung in the bay windows, and flickering light up candles swayed as they hung from the ceiling across the living room by fishing wire to appear as though they are floating (because we go all out with holiday decorations). My mother baked pumpkin cupcakes in the kitchen as I wrote a harrowing poem about death and love and revenge.

I’m still bloody proud of it and can’t thank my classmates or professor enough for the relief they gave me in their response to it – I hate reading things aloud, especially things I’ve written. I was terrified, and this poem helped me get over that fear for the rest of the semester to come by being so lovely and welcoming. It was truly an icebreaker and I have this poem to credit for giving me great friends and peers to edit my work since then.

## XII. ECLIPSE

As you can see, I decided to end my collection with my two strongest poems; Eclipse was a Nonce form poem that I was very excited to write. I think this was finished the Saturday before it was due on Tuesday, which is much different from my usual “late Monday night” writing sessions.

That Thursday, Izzy had shared the video of the solar eclipse set to Sleeping at Last’s song about it, and suddenly I felt overwhelmed with inspiration. I saw the way the sun’s rays looked like a hand, reaching across the back of the moon as they pulled away from each other, and imagined lovers in an embrace. I wrote it down, and

proceeded through class, eagerly awaiting the break between poetry and Russian literature that I could write a few lines and see what happens.

And happened, it did. I figured I wanted 8 words per line, because 8 is the month of August, when the solar eclipse took place in 2017. We had read the nonce poem, “Icicle,” which I liked but learned from, in that I knew I needed to make sure that every word was useful and necessary. This was really a poem that let me focus on what I was good at: imagery. Describing a rare astrological phenomenon as though it was a romantic film is no small feat, I found, but I had a really splendid time trying to figure it out.

I didn’t make many edits to this one either; I swapped the placement of the words, “embrace” and “kiss,” but that was about the extent of it.

Amidst all the other assignments, tests, quizzes, and presentations that surrounded me this semester, I will forever be grateful for the freedom of poetry between them. This class gave me a newfound appreciation for meter, rhyme, syllables, and stresses. I have always loved poetry, but I was a “modernist” poet, so to say; I believed that poetry needed no confines, that meter was suffocating, and that rhyme was cliché. I never thought poetry could be such a growing experience for me, but I will be forever grateful for the lessons I learned this semester.



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I want to say a massive thank you to my family, friends, peers, and professor who were my inspiration and my support this semester. You helped me create this collection, a series of poems that I can be so very proud of. I never considered myself a poet before, and now I am (and a published one, no less!) Thank you. Truly, thank you.

Em xx