



blooming
IN THE WHIRLWIND



Poetry Collection

LEVEL GROUND

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Blooming in the Whirlwind is an experimental film and poetry collaboration inspired by Gwendolyn Brooks and produced by Level Ground.

The project aims to offer thoughtful, challenging and ultimately hopeful reflections on how we may continue to 'bloom in the whirlwind' of this turbulent year.

Explore the full project including the films and Q&As with all 19 filmmakers and poets at levelground.co/projects/bloom.

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For the Aliveness of Living

by Simone Tetrault

There is a rising obsession with the norm
As the rules: The Order of things
Continue to wane
No matter how many
boxes
Have been sorted

Fresh hobbies
Picked like wildflowers once
bright and fragrant
Now rot from the stem in the months old
Stagnation--one cannot endure
For long
Without roots

There is a suffocating obsession with the norm, its
Pickling its
Salting while masking
The truth
Through twinkling clinking
 To drown out
Signs
Of opposition

Lonesome sits
And gathers up photos of what would have been
To drink,
Too thickly sweet to swallow in
The hot afternoon beneath
Expectations
And fronds of ire

There is a roaring obsession with this norm
Yet the days continue.
Minutes breathe
stretching and folding regardless

Do not allow this mind to be tempted!
To fill up on such great big junk
As glorious tasks
And sugary busy
Such a reckoning comes scarcely for the world at once

Let go the burden of lack
Take off the mask of showing of doing
It is now we must take to task the I, the We
And the truth of them

Seek the center
It is a verdant place of hope and
ancient wisdom
Before your acquisition of thoughts and things that have
Stripped away the beauty of
What grows
In the
Thump thump thump
Of this heart

It is now for the aliveness of living

Look down!
These feet
These roots
Find themselves grooving, pressing
Pointing
Stretching

Across the cool of black
And white
Tiles
For they are: still wiggling
aliveness
In spite of things

Look up!
This day
This sky
Winds itself round the stretchy taffy, gurgling
Whistling
Glimmering, humming
love and
Loveliness, sunshine hot and sticky
For it is: still whirring
aliveness
In spite of things

There is a rumbling obsession with the norm
But, it will mean what it has always meant
Dance, pass
This thing of the past as
All things are
In some hour neatly tucked away
Where scores of brimming boxes of tasks and busy lie: dusting, faded, forgotten
Oh, dance, pass
It must ever be now
For the aliveness of living

Girl in Isolation

After Olivia Gatwood's instagram page collaging self-portraits of girls in isolation.
by Jireh Deng

While she was away at college,
the blankets uncreased in her
absence, the books on her
shelves peeled themselves open
to imitate the sensation of
fingers thumbing pages, the
clothes in her drawers
wandered to remember
movement in air.

In the month she's been
home, the backyard
lemon tree and green
onions have no idea what
to do with a teenager
sprawled in St. Augustine
or when she throws rocks
into her neighbor's
backyard to scare the
squirrel teething on
telephone wires. They
reason her roots are not
transplanted yet.

The steel frame of her bed
grumbles under her shifting
weight at all hours of the day, her
stories collect dust, the drawers
are in riot, she hasn't changed her
sweat in four days, toothbrush has
been released of plaque scraping
duties for the week.

Then the poems spill from the baby
blue walls to pool in her arms and tell
her to drink. There is a soft rebirthing
when she draws the liquid and
strength required to let herself cry.

Holding On

by Noor Jamal

There will be times
when the world is colliding
and the tears won't stop flowing
screams trapped in the unheard of
words lay in the unspoken
Unthinkable
Undeniable
Unpredictable

Lights shut off.
Dim within me
yet they shine elsewhere
The sky above me
watching the earth revolve
wrapping each wish in it's eternity

And in even the emptiest of spaces
my mind will wander
my heart will pour over
to connect the dots
which my tongue wishes to utter

Allow my prayers to unfold
as I bow down
to make sense of a new world
Unfamiliarity is man's biggest woe
my love for life must continue to grow

One Such Experience

by Daniel Binkoski

Deprivation then binge.
Drink and bile.
Smokes:
One body toxic
and soul advil.
One body aromatic
And soul placebo.
My grey matter turns over
in its filth
to speak this version
of existence.

My skin is scarred
with more than immediacy.
Every metaphor
is thinly veiled reality.
I am sitting on a stool
on a sub roof
on your planet
smoking a cig.
From before to now to your perception,
only surroundings change.
A goldfish in a rain forest.

We all accidentally beget
unique experiments.
Mine has plants
and mental illness;
arted walls,
and arted body.

If I leave this stool long enough
to our earth
it will become a prized artifact.
Substance remembers
the warping of itself
from its place in a life.
It and I now share
this unbreakable understanding
of caring and fondness.
The wood bends unnaturally
from the elements,
like me.
We have soul bond.
Inanimate object connection
finds all

in this sitch.

Context betrays nuance.
The ground is littered
with glass shards and bugs;
with loneliness
and long running ink.

I had a dream the other night.
Nothing epic,
just an old Finnish friend
too long unspoken to.
I reached out across time
and told them about it.
We laughed.
Subconscious sees my needs
and speaks connection into my unconscious.
I wake in two senses,
and launch tingling mirth vibrations
translated into crackling pulses
and airwaves
shooting across the earth
into mirror ear drums.
Mutual needs
fulfilled from magic.
A heart from over there,
thrumming with mine.

Here,
Downtown is same same
but different.
Everyone smiles at each other
in identical measures
as before they wore masks.
Those wandering without a home
are still homeless.
The sun shines and sidewalk trees grow
Dogs shit
and their owners still don't pick it up.
People still get on and off the bus,
just a few fewer than before,
except they might not catch it again.
My roof sounds and feels almost the same.
The central heating behemoth's roar
drowns out any silence.
But also the missing white tracks in the sky
left by steal birds,
and the quiet hope
pulsing from deep breath R.E.M.

turned stagnant
with despair.

Elsewhere,
my mom still texts me saying,
"He has risen!"
Add a snake to my writhing intestines.
Forgotten nightmare dilemmas
follow remembered dreams.
To betray the morality implied,
with a lie,
or to tear down facade
heavily leaned on by a saint
who vests self worth
in God and her children alone?
True truth is,
we both lean
on that barrier.
Blocking hard conversations,
and a true
devastating
relationship.
"He has risen indeed!"
Fingers crossed
behind my back.
Caring cowardice
wins.

In the future,
July ends
and a friend texts
with classic questions
actually meant,
so I speak truth.
I am stagnant and shadowed.
The world burns in injustice,
and I am beset
by my own insignificance
and inability
to effect change.
I am a machine cog locked in a coffin;
both purpose and situation reviled.
I am an exhale in a tornado;
purposeful lifeforce torn instantly
into ether.
I am an ember
smothered
under a thick
soft

comforter.
I am an infant.
I am an old man.
I feel like
I can feel nothing
but everything
and both are too much,
and worst of all
it all pales in comparison
to what others must feel.

Context betrays nuance.
The ground is littered
with glass shards and bugs;
with loneliness
and long running ink.

Folks talk about seeing someone's soul
deep in their eye wells.
Have you ever looked for yours?
Staring so intently,
so closely into a mirror
that you see your own reflection
in the blacks of your eyes?
This incense and vice
help heal the wounds of the day,
but open oozing fissures
in my reality.
Careful of introspection
less you find yourself
and you don't particularly like them.
The necessity of the times
demand you let that double replicated reflection
look back with compassion,
knowing
there are infinitely more iterations
to look beyond to.
It's new selves
all the way down.

Context betrays nuance.
The ground is littered
with glass shards and bugs;
with loneliness
and long running ink.
Long live
the unnoticed
small truths.

post cyclone

by Madeleine St John

There you go,
chopping coriander in a cyclone

Squeezing mangoes in a cyclone

Dabbing your neck with
bergamot

You, are the warm front

I guess

Look at this mess:

Wrought palms
Wrought dupattas

Jagged branches once alit by the pigeons

Faceplanted awnings
no longer fit for their purpose

This morning, your neighbors saunter

Instead of Paul Desmond
you dance to the drum of their hammers

Rebuilding, rescaling

Coffee in your grip
and mangoes on the mind

Tendrils of steam
flush with cloves, float
five stories high

We must be fed, each of us,
amidst the mess

Steadfast

by Karly Kuntz

To bloom is to offer
Sweet petals that spring from the core.
Soft in their unfolding, leaving dust on
Fingerprints that press against them.
To offer is to know
There will be a taking
Of dust, color, or light,
Understanding withering is just
As alive as budding and opening.
No wonder they stay sleeping in
Their swaddle of sepals for five
Or so days before dawning.
Can you blame them? For nurturing
Themselves before sharing their blossom
With honeybees and unfocused eyes.
But what a grand and quiet emerging,
A genesis followed by discovery
Of neighbors experiencing the same.
A welcoming and waking to sunlight, fellowship,
And the imperfections of being.
To bloom is to live in boldness
To know showmanship of your yellow
Stamen may serve as ammunition against you
But to flaunt it gladly, even if in fear.

stopped

by DeiSelah

the world stopped long enough for
me to fly to Massachusetts to save
my life

while people died outside of their own doing
while i was killing myself by hand
almost succeeded

i would've been in the number of the death toll, but
not dead by a virus, but of the disease of a
dopamine fiend

the story wouldn't have made the news
these stories don't make the news

usually no one hears the cries of an addict
only looked upon with disgust of *'that could
never be me, or i would never'*

i use to say that until it became my reality i made every
justification inwardly/outwardly, while i cried inwardly/
outwardly fearing for my life

questioning how this could happen, mixed
with thoughts of this feels so good until good
left and feel stayed

feeling of dying, feeling of regret and shame

then the bravest thing occurred
somehow courage got me on a plane

on a flight to sobriety

There is No Such Thing As Bloom

by Christina Brown

What does it mean to bloom to
open your eyes wider than you
could yesterday to peel off the
armor and reach toward the
sky with your softest parts first

nature only lets the average rose bud live
loud like this for two weeks before
withering falling away to make room for
someone new

but here you are trying to splay yourself
open for hundreds of seasons at once
like your mothers never taught you cycle
or sleep

let us teach ourselves a new love
that is more forest than branches
more trust than slice open to
count the rings let ours be a
chorus of hearts knit together
with daisy chains and sunlight

but really before we start the
braid what does it mean to bloom
here? in the ashes of our old
lives? let me be more clear

you must pull your own self out by the
roots leave the rotten behind but open your
jaw wide enough to swallow the dirt that
made you

there is no grow no progress no
unpeel or bloom without a rear view
mirror a burden of bloodline or
consequence
you inherited the gold and the gun you can be
nothing without whatever ugly you came from

so hold grateful and angry between your
teeth but now

now is the time for dancing for
disentangling the roots that choked
someone else for shaking the fruit from
your own body to feed on now, you can
suck the poison back out from the
water

you cannot abandon yourself or the ghosts
who watched you grow up but whatever
runs through your veins doesn't have to
flow from your mouth if we have always
moved by river let us teach ourselves to
love like reservoir

but only for a moment there is no such
thing as bloom without untangle and
lose good love has never been still or
silent

when the revolution comes a
tidal wave foaming at the mouth
and full of life spill into it you will
not be ready but reach or bloom
or run to it old and new roots
dragging behind your bare feet

pull as many hands as you can
along with you let your new ears
unfold like petals while you follow
the music

this is the only way up.

Untitled: In Response to Emergent Strategy

by Tamisha Tyler

Become free
untether yourself from your uniqueness
connect yourself
once to the ancestors
once to those who call you ancestor
stretch out in the in between
rest
you are but a cell
who discovers purpose in growth
Become free