A photograph of a dirt path winding through a field of tall green grass and purple flowers. The path is made of light-colored soil and small rocks, leading from the foreground into the distance. The surrounding vegetation is dense, with many tall, thin stalks of grass and several purple flower spikes. The background shows more trees and bushes, suggesting a natural, outdoor setting. A dark brown rectangular overlay is positioned on the left side of the image, containing the title and author's name in white text. A small, solid pink square is located at the top right corner of the dark overlay.

Collected
Poems
2020

Amanda
Quraishi

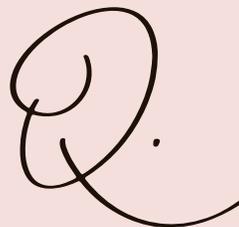
About this Collection

I have always been a writer (and rabid consumer) of poetry and fiction, but throughout my adulthood I've watched with regret as my creative writing became increasingly diminished and replaced by a purely functional, professional kind of writing that is more concerned with romancing search engines than with evoking any sense of beauty and wonder in the human heart.

At the end of 2019 I went about rekindling my life-long love of writing by going through a well-known creative writing program called The Artist's Way with my friend Sarah. I realized how much I've missed writing poetry, and as 2020 dawned I committed myself to writing a new poem each week. My expectation was not that I would be churning out brilliant poems, of course, only that I knew the key to getting anything good out of me was to be consistent.

When the coronavirus hit in March, life was turned upside down. I found myself stuck at home, and the two escapes I quickly started to rely on were my creative writing and daily walks.

As 2020 comes to a close, I've decided to select the best (or at least, my favorite) of the poems I wrote this year and compile them with photos I took on my daily excursions. I'm sharing these with the world and I hope you'll read them kindly.



Dedication

For Sarah Orman who, in 2019, reminded me that I was a writer.

And for Ammi, who understood better than anyone that a life well-lived is what we create for ourselves.



I want to scrape it all off.
The agony of raw flesh exposed to the salty air
Is nothing compared to
the agony of staying inside this decaying shell

I want to scream,
Not with my voice
But with my
Muscles, bleeding
Roughly torn from their safe places
Oozing, stinging
Crying Dead Sea Tears
Knowing that I've traded everything
For just a tiny glimpse of truth,
A flash of glorious light and then,
Darkness that cannot be
Prayed away.
Knowing this is all I will ever get.
Knowing it was still worth it.
Now,
The incineration
Of choices made for me
Of weaponized hope
Burn it up
Burn it up
Burn it up
Watch it shrivel in the heat of
Merciless knowing
And I'll stand there blinking
In the light, unfiltered
Naked for all to see
Nowhere to hide
Nothing to say
Ugly and throbbing
But free.

Exposed



Tweeting Offline

What are they saying?

What do they mean?

Is it a song of love?

A message of truth?

News?

Poetry?

Or is it just the sound of pleasure

at hearing their own voices

carried on morning air?

Crossing channels, highs and lows

Chirps and whistles

Urgent, then luxurious

From all directions

At different heights

Symphonic chaos in late spring

I'll sit in blissful ignorance for my concert,

Rapt and still,

A gift of sound so common,

And so rare.

Good morning.

Battle Prep

The morning energy of the soldiers is palpable,
Like performers about to take the stage.
Some jitters, some posturing.
Idle chatter and the sounds of busyness
Arms and legs are being bound and reinforced
Stretching
Clanking
Checking and
Double-checking.

Waiting for the signal.

Waiting to be told that it is time to give all.

How purposefully they move about!
As if they are responsible for their own destiny.

As if their choices were their own to make.

As if someone else does not decide when it is
Time for them to die.



June 2020

The heat and humidity are already stifling
On this June morning,
And my skin is sticky,
And the mosquitoes are aggressive,
But I'm going to sit outside and listen to
A Love Supreme.

Part 1.

Acknowledgement.

That's the thing, isn't it?

The ostrich is not native to this land.
Pull your head out.

Listen. Listen.
A million truths
Are being spoken in every corner
Of the nation,
Some loud
Some soft
Some hopeful
Some broken
Listen to them all.
Hear them in your sleep.

They will give you better dreams.



In the Time of Covid

I've been feeling some sharp
but not entirely unpleasant discomfort
and I keep trying to brush it off
as anxiety
or sadness
or fear.
But I know that it's none of these.

I'm only just admitting to myself
the limits of my time here
and the quiet, finite edges
of being human.

I'm embodying the truth - that there will be a humanity
that goes on without me;
that discovers what I will never know;
that evolves and thrives
while I fade into the passing seasons
with only the faintest,
imperceptible echos of my one-time existence
all but forgotten by our collective,
rippling out slowly in an afternoon breeze
and perhaps, in a brief pause
that someone, someday makes
before going about the important business
of being alive.

Stories

I came from a place that you will never know.
(Hell, I can barely remember it most of the time)
But if it sit long enough
and let my mind wander
she always finds her way back
to that point of origin
where redwoods and salty air seeped into my young blood
and made me who I am.

We are, each of us, the songs and stories told to us
when our eyes were still wide.
Tender hearts of innocence
imagining a world that could never be.

A solitary cocktail of times and places and colors and sounds that cannot be
claimed by another.

Now, I shall hear your memories with my heart.

And I will know you like a beloved book
masterfully narrated and crafted
recounting an enchanting tale that
despite my best intentions
makes me fall in love with it.



A Piece of Sky Fell on the Ground

A piece of the sky fell on the ground.

Stark and simple against the muddy earth.
The outline of her rounded corners
Making it look like a blue balloon
Had landed there.

But, no, it was the sky.
Just a small piece
Of heaven on earth.

I peered into her depths, wondering if I should try to help her
Get back to her place,
Where she belonged,
Far above me.

Was there a gaping hole up there somewhere?
A void where this piece of sky no longer perched?

It felt like she was laughing at me.

I know now what I didn't know then:
That she had not fallen,
But descended of her own accord.
Seeking a moment of peace
Beneath the expanse she once was.





Texas

From my window
I can see springtime
laying out her finest.
The song plays sweetly,
Acoustic guitar and a voice
like a breeze through the wildflowers.
And right now, in this moment,
I think maybe you might know
How my heart wants you to notice it,
How long I've been here,
in the chords and harmonies,
In the bluebonnets and the long grass,
Waiting.

A son of the east coast, ascendant.
Yin to yang
in the most western sense.
Brilliant, and
unable to Believe.
But resolute on your path,
never straying as you cross the sky.
Because your heart is good, after all.

Coastal

There's always too much on the line, isn't it?
Too much on the line.
They all need you.

Golden gates swung open,
With a crown of poppies in my hair.
And I am all you never knew you wanted.

I'll not make demands.
Come, sit and breathe deeply on
the tranquil shores of a pacifist girl,
gentle and verdant.
Drink my wine, and your soul will sing.
I promise that I won't take advantage of you.
How could I? You are far above,
and I am not made to touch the sky.

As you slowly set below the horizon,
pulling down the edge of blue
with blazing colors that look
like my heart on fire,
my farewell will be a final kiss,
a gift to the one who gives
without taking,
even in the brilliant heat of desire.



Better

My music has a gray and gritty sound,
Not like your slick, sweet songs.
I dance to music that sounds like
The making-do with whatever we could find
And the dreams we had
That weren't even big or beautiful -
Just better.

Better than this.
Better than us.
Better than the gray and gritty noises
That rocked us in our cradles
That followed us to school
 as we walked there alone, chilled and worried;
That comforted us in the wake of screaming,
 and plates breaking,
 and maternal tears.

The rhythm of life isn't always lovely.
Not for everyone.
That's why we listen to
Music that could be better.



Stranded

There's no place you can go
When the very vehicle with which you've arrived
At this godforsaken spot
Finally breaks down,
Leaving you stranded

Here, in this place you never intended to be
On the side of a road
That has no end

The midday heat
Begins to crack your lips and
The visions you see on the shimmering horizon
Mock your desperation
And there is no shade or water

An occasional car speeds past without slowing down
Or stopping to see if you need
Help.



Herd Immunity

Have you heard
the news today?
Thousands are sick
Thousands are dying
And the stores are packed
And the bars are crowded
And everyone is talking
And no one is listening
Have you heard

what the doctors say?
Stay inside.
Don't gather.
Be calm.
Wash hands.
And everyone is buying
And everything is selling
Have you heard

what's happening?
In other places
In other lands
Where people didn't listen
And the hospitals are full
And everyone is terrified
And warning us to get ready
Have you heard

his speech today?
He lies, he fumbles,
Mocking our system,
Denying our needs
And everyone is wondering
And no one can be comforted

Have you heard?
Have you heard?

The Deep

You are a siren
I am the sea
Together we will lure the
Foolhardy to their death.

What do they know of
Our depths?
They'll soon find out.

Drowning in hot and salty
Oceans of blood, sweat and tears.
Begging for rescue.

And We will ignore them.

Any sailor
Who takes the sea for granted
Deserves his fate.



Love, Personified

I have no use for those for whom the mystery of love
Can be reduced to biology
Or psychology
Or whatever measurable thing
Brings them comfort in their
Discomfort of Not Knowing.

Nor have I any use for those
For whom love is purely subjective,
Relative to their
Relatives,
Their Religion,
Their Country,
Or their Personal Narrative Which Must Not Be Questioned.

I am here for The Lovers,
Who, in their surrender to the Not Knowing,
Are Love Themselves.

1:36 am

I think of all those pretty songs
That make a girl
Want to dance slowly
And forget
The time.

Record needle hits and
Seconds later
The long, low sound
From that instrument of
Pain.

Play it again, Sam.

I've got all night.

Naturally

I know how the sand feels
when the wave breaks against her

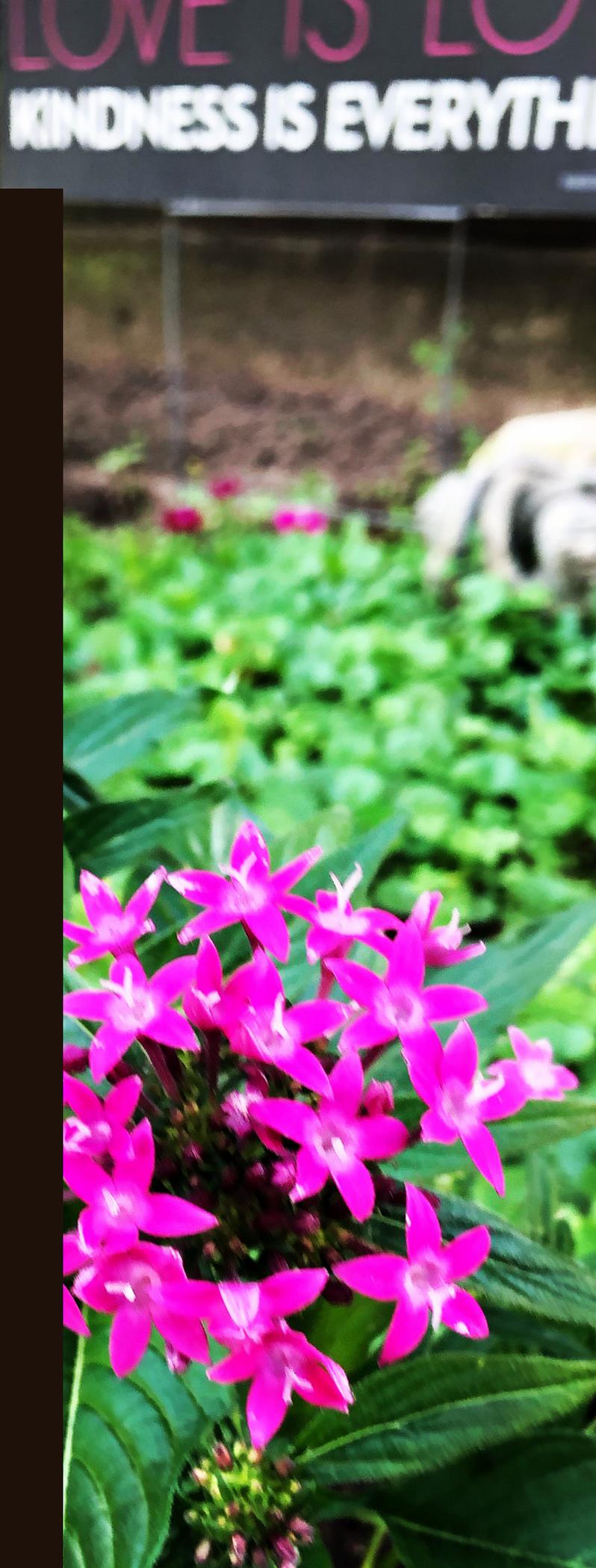
Can you taste the salt and feel the rush?
I know you can.

From one thousand miles away
I can hear you whisper.
Are those words so pretty
Not for me?
Are your stories
Of cosmic passion,
Your deep romantic sighs
And afternoons
Under emerald leaves
Not mine?

A single bloom,
Capturing memories
I haven't lived
But know
As if they were my own.

I'll be your audience, rapt and
Adoring.
Still and reverent.

The choice is not mine.
It was made for us a long time ago.



Precipice

In an instant, all may be lost.
In an instant, all may be gained.
But you'll never know until
You walk right up to the edge
Face the abyss,
With its swirling clouds of uncertainty,
And take a step forward.

Have you killed your self?
Have you learned to fly?
Have you opened the door to another world?
Did you finally, truly live?
Did you finally, truly die?

I'd like to promise you I'll hold your hand
And take the leap with you.
But I know it's not for us.

Deep breaths, friend.
Steel your heart.
The steps you take are yours alone,
And mine are for me.
But there's some comfort
In being alone, together.

The View

Oh you Great and Powerful People!
(And also, those of you who are nipping at their heels -
Who want that power for yourselves,
To impose your own egos
On the rest of us
In the name of progress...)

I ain't out here tryin' to solve the problems of
Past and future generations.
I'm just looking for a reason to be,
For a life well spent,
For a place to put this energy.

Fight among yourselves, if you must.
But leave me to this tiny patch of the cosmos,
Wherefrom I can see the opal arc
Of time and space
Moving, changing
Glowing with love
And immune to your plans.



Walk

Words are lovely, aren't they?
The way they curve and jut.
The way they amble across the
page,
A scenic route to my message for
You.

Let's walk this path of words.
We can stop along the way to
drink in the view.
I'll hold your hand and lead you up,
And brace against you coming
Down.

And when we are done,
Our destination reached,
You'll know what I wanted to say
to you,
But also, the terrain of my heart.



He's starting to fade.
Body and mind are beginning to fail him:
The god
who has lived each day of my life
with an unshakable faith in his own immortality.

For a moment, I was part of his truth.

Now,
just a witness,
looking on,
craving a glance,
sometimes worshipful,
but never confident
that he knows where
my altar sits.

The End is Nigh

The good news is,
he's a loving god.
The bad news is,
that love is not for me.

So I'm watching him discover
that his time is growing short.
And a part of me believes
he'll set aside the delusions,
and claim his mortality,
and truly live among us
before it is too late.

But I know enough
to not have faith.
Because I
am not
like him.

Common Sounds

That tiptoe up the stairs.
The clanking of breakfast pans
waking us from our slumber.
The distant noises of traffic.
An alarm clock in the other room.
The record needle as it seeks that first groove.
A chirping bird sweetly breaking your reverie,
even while you find yourself in a place that is covered
with concrete and despair.
A clearing throat. (I think he's awake)
The faintest padding of paws on carpet
coming to remind me of my commitments.
The shrieks of neighborhood children
startling me, and then
taking me back to those days
when my own children
startled the neighbors.
The sounds of cleaning.
Of cooking.
Of passion.
Of grief.
We know them.
Our eyes deceive,
Making us believe that there are substantial
Differences between us.
But the sounds of our lives
Are undeniably similar.
Come and sit next to me.
Listen.







White Sky

Sometimes, the sky is white

No color

No cloud defined

Just a pale, empty canvas

That hurts to look at for too long



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