

The Port Paradesia
Semi-Annual
Writers' Workshop
Anthology
Volume One

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Xenia

Xenia's Prayer

Dear God,
Queer God,
Goddess of all things between!

Forgive us mortals, O Goddess, for confining you
to one religion, one gender!
Remind us that you cannot be contained!

May you instill in us your endless variety,
teach us of your manifold ways,
ceaselessly fertile, procreating,
endlessly variable,
various to all senses,
shrouded in the brightest mystery,
encompassing all human paths, all universals,
everything known and permitted!

May we never forget your constant unfolding
and your endless renewal!
May our narrow minds and bodies
become living examples of your unending generosity!

AMEN!

Xenia Spells Their Name

Crossroads between
What They Want Me to Be
Who I Have Yet to Become
What I am for Myself

My time my wants my desires getting what I need
The everloving tightrope I walk every single f***ing day
All the shit I need to do to keep everyone else happy

5

Freedom For My People
The Three Reasons Why I Joined The Movement
My Uncle Who Died of AIDS
She Was Sooooooooooo Cute

Solidarity the praxis of pleasure community compassion
Hate anti-queer sex negativity racism sexism fascism all iams
HOW WE SURVIVE

Xenia Goes To School

kiki n me
in the principal's office again
for some shit
and him lecturing
like he always does

i am sick of his
peckerheaded
bass awkward
bigotry

and how he can't be bothered
with pronouns
or anything else
beyond them

this time i've had enough
and just as i'm about to
call him out on his
heteronormative
bullshit

we hear a scuffle
and he's out to the main office

kiki and i stare at each other
and it slowly dawns
he's gonna be a while
and it slowly dawns
that we are sitting at his desk
alone
with his email open

our eyes grow wider
and wider

the means of production i say
and kiki don't get that part (being kiki)
but they get the point

and after some staring
and some more staring
and some more staring...

the next email sent from his address
magically has the subject line

QUEER IS NOT A CRIME

sent
to the ENTIRE school

Glorious.

zero memory
of our punishment

{
which
for the record
was completely worth it
}

Xenia Bites The Hand That Feeds Them

—But we furnished
and upholstered
and detailed
and fitted
and outfitted
and retrofitted
your mind

so carefully!

How *dare* you!

Oh, I *dare*, honey.
I will *always* dare.

Xenia's Thursday Afternoons at 4

Now look what you made me do!

Xenia's Mad Libs

Dear Xenia:

We know that you were just _____ yesterday when you were trying to _____, hoping that you could _____ and maybe _____ without some _____ _____ _____ ing you. But you see, because you didn't _____, or think that _____ would ever _____, or because you expect _____ to _____ whenever you _____, or because you were _____ again, or because there were _____ that you didn't notice, or maybe for no reason at all, because we can tell that you are _____, then that means we got to _____ and _____ you without any _____. And if now, the day after, if you want _____, then you'd better _____, because the fact remains and will always remain that *they* are _____ and *you* are _____.

Understand?

Love, The Entire _____

Xenia Makes a Friend

soft drippings
smudges
fuzzed and blurred edges
come closer:

We are in each other's parts,
each other's heads,

parting each other
heading into each other

around and
thru each other
thru and thru

reaching each other

reaching thru

re aching
the day is lost in waves of touch
blurred into something else
and I am blurred into something else

something called us

Nelson

Epitaph

The spruce and maple, hewn and carved
with the artist's knowing care;
the strings, stretched from the finest gut,
the bow, the finest hair;
all fitted with the keenest craft,
held by the smoothest hands—
Such was the violin that played
the lively gigues and sarabandes

Which sang of men in lovers' arms,
and dances on the hearth;
the beauty of the morning light,
and the forest's quiet mirth;
the simplest, sweetest pleasures
one can taste in life's short span—
All this he heard the night before
the king arose and went to war
and shed the blood of thousands for
more slaves, and gold, and land.

Border Tree

There's a tree that grows near my property line,
a border of sorts. The tree *might* be mine.

Some days I feel needy and covet its treasure.
On some I resolve to pace, survey, and measure—
but today I watched birds pick its bounty for pleasure.

What is it? An asset? A symbol? Mistake?
A gain to be had, or a loss I should take?
When the thought of possession can keep me awake
am *I* not the possessed? And for what? For whose sake?

Thus I fret and I fritter, and mutter, and ponder
while nature luxuriates hither and yonder.
The tree blooms, and thrives, unaware of my orders
and all human notions like *owners* and *borders*.

Villanelle

The more you post, the less I have to say;
Sharing's now a bludgeon or a spear;
To weigh our words begins a better way.

The clamor of the happenstance each day
drowns out sweet wisdom's whisper, hard to hear.
The more you post, the less I have to say.

Distilleries for ages showed the way:
pure essences make spirits strong and clear.
To weigh our words begins a better way.

You practiced mongers, trolling day by day
and filling us with anger, hate, and fear—
the more you post, the less I have. To say

what's thoughtful, friendly, measured—tell me, pray,
is that too much to ask, with time so dear?
To weigh our words begins a better way.

More light, less heat; this burning smothers cheer
and brings a dreaded conflict all too near.
The more we post, the less we have to say.
To weigh our words begins the better way.

Commonsong

I wrote a lone line, then put it away:
The gift is given, the giver unknown.
Thanksgiving day in a faraway town,
I picked up a paper and saw it laid down—
My line, by a local laureate found:
The gift is given, the giver unknown.
Whose pen should take credit, and whose should atone?
At first my heart clutched at these words as my own—
Then I stopped, and I thought, and I put the page down.

Blessed the line, no longer alone.
Blessed the gift and the thanks we both found.
Blessed the writers, no longer alone.
A commonsong binds us. We rhyme in our bones.

Night Song

In daytime I gossip and mutter and moan
and flatter and flutter and sputter and groan
and titter and banter and bicker and natter
and guffaw and heehaw and slander and chatter.

At nighttime, alone, all sounded and spent,
I regard, and reflect, and regret, and repent—
and though I can tell myself what the day meant,
my ease is now gone (Here it was— there it went—)

and then all night long I can hear the wind's moan
while the pillow beneath my head turns into stone
and my righteousness wanders away on its own
leaving night's haunting whisper — *Atone, atone.*

Sonnet

If I, in lines, would have more sense than sound,
so be it; let my meanings be made plain;
and if, from simple tones, a chord resounds
and stirs the heart, and common feeling gained,
so be it. Hard enough, to face the day;
task enough to feel and reconcile
the inner and the outer worlds; we play
at living while the cosmos, undefiled,
churns on. It's all too much, I fear;
spirit and flesh renew their old debate,
time flies—so please forgive if I can't hear
the charms of subtler tongues, however “great.”

From you requiring all our truths be slant—
forbearance for the rest of us who don't.

The Dance

I am in danger of losing a friend.
There is the tightrope, there the abyss.
I have no particular talent at this,

walking the wire. We sway and we bend
In gusts of circumstance. Should I pretend
That I have discovered a pathway to bliss?

That within lies a blessing they're going to miss
unless all desire they choose to suspend?
Or should I acknowledge I've tasted death's kiss

And longed so at times to embrace the abyss?
Would that not send us both end over end?
What is the message I'm trying to send?

Though my fear of falling could keep me like this,
stalling, I know that I would be remiss.
To *dance* on the wire is what I intend.

We smile at times from across the abyss.
Though our ends may be different, we've tasted life's kiss,
and recognize each other's feeling like bliss.

These words for their meaning on each other depend:
tightrope, and *abyss*, and *bliss*, and *friend*.

I gather my courage. My hand I extend.
The dance is calling. We sway and we bend.
No fear of falling. A friend is a friend.
This is my calling. This is my end.

Celeste

New Alphabet Primers

A boy.
Cupid draws, eyes, fires.
Girl hit — instant joy!
Kisses, love-making near—
Oh! Passion!—quickly recedes,
shifting, targets unwitting victims.
Where? X. Yes. *Zing!*

—And because cold damp evenings fell gratingly hard, I jumped — kicking, lunging, my name obscured purposefully. Quitting. Reality—sacrificed.

—The undertaker, vexed, writes “X”, yawns, zips.

A bold choice, dining early, feigning gallows humor.
I jest, knowingly; let me natter on, please,
quietly rejecting societal trappings,
uttering variables wittily: *X. Y. Z.*

AM:

Breakfast, coffee,
Duke Ellington,
“Feeling Good,”
Hampton imparting
jazz knowledge,
lyrical, meandering,
nimble orchestration.

PM:

Quirky reflective sonata:
trumpet,
ukulele,
viola,
whistle, xylophone—
Yawn...
Zzzzzzzzz...

A birthday cake.
A burning candle drips.
A broken cup, drained empty, fallen.
A black cat dawdles endlessly, fluff going hither.
Drawings, etchings, framed graphs hang intact.
Japanese kimono, left marooned, never opened.
New opal? (possibly quartz?) ring shines, table upended.
Very weird.

A baffling case, Detective Ephram felt, giving him indigestion.
Janky kitchen, lemon meringue, no observable prints.

A birthday cake...
A burning candle...
A broken cup...
A black cat...

A birthday cake...

“Don’t ever forget,” Gary had intoned jokingly, “killers leave marks, not on purpose.”

Detective Ephram fought growing hopelessness inside.
Just knowing little made new observations perplexing.
Questioning related suspects took up valuable—“Wait!”

A baker can’t destroy *every* fingerprint!” Detective Ephram fumed. “Fluorescence gives hints!
Infrared, jury-rigged kitchen lighting makes new observations possible! Quick! Retool! Stat!”

Recapping story tonight: A burglar’s confession. Detective Ephram found guilty handprints in junked kitchen’s leftovers. Masterful narrowing of probabilities. Quick research, suspect trapped! Uri Venable, WXYZ-ABC, Detroit.

Romance-Spy-Thriller (Untitled)

Ascension. Berkeley, California

Dear Eve:

Finally got Hector, in Jackson, known locally, mostly nagging Oakland police. Questions: Reconnaissance? Surveillance? Trap? Under virtual watch?

XOXOXO,

Yours,

Zed

*

Reply:

Sources tried, underestimated, vanished.

WARNING: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Yes, Zed, a better, carefully designed engagement fits. Get him! Intel just keeps lacerating my nerves, ominously. Prepare!

—Queenie (Eve)

*

: Virtual watch X'd, YZ axis blown, coordinates deleted. Every frigging geography he inhabits just keeps losing me. No opportunities, patience quickly receding. Support?

—Truly Underwhelmed

*

“Truly Underwhelmed”:

Viable witness "X" yesterday—zilch. Abrasive bluster can't do everything! Find Gordon, he interrogates jailed knockabouts. Leaving. Must neutralize other possibles.

—Queenie (real sorry)

*

Allenby, British Columbia

Direct Encryption

: Found, got him in Juneau. Killed, likely. Might neutralize others, possibly. Queenie removed. (Sorry. Tragic.)

Understood?

Very wearily,

XOXOXO,

Yours,

Zed

*

Zed:

Your "xoxo" whining—vapid, untrue, trying, stupid!
Real queries passed over.

Not murdered. LOSER!

Kiss-kiss (joke!)—

Insulted,

HECTOR

Zulu! Yoruba!
X's world vision — universal!
Testify, sweet relations!
Queens!
People of Namibia, Maasai—*lifted*!
Kings!

Justice—is *heavy*;
George Floyd echoes decades.

Come, Blackness!
ASCEND!

Diedre

Mother Suite

i.

Mother

there is no punctuation mark that can follow

no symbol to capture the totality of your presence

no way to fully signify what happened next—

the word is noun, verb, adjective, cipher, cell.

you joked about the two of us,

unstoppable force meets immovable object

which from early on taught me

my own innate impossibility.

no one tutors in these most important of geometries.

i am my own proof—proof of concept? proof of life?—

a proof i am still, still, still

desperately trying to solve.

ii.

playing barbies with my friend mandy

when somehow it comes to blows

and when she runs to her mother

and i follow in rage

her mother's patience

with both of us

is so beautiful

and so foreign

and i am so jealous

and so horrified

at my jealousy

i never play with her again.

iii.

sound

in an enclosed space

rebounds reverberates resonates

echoes even

as is demonstrated

(for example)

by the sound

of a woman

shouting at the top of her lungs

baring her teeth like a dog

at a

six seven eight nine ten-

year old girl

in the back seat

of an enclosed car

speeding down the highway

once again

late

for church.

iv.

mother

gusting aimless all-consuming.

i have since learned about the way of things,

can appreciate the importance of some prescribed burns.

but the closer you get to me the colder I grow

reaching for maps formulas

tracing trajectories burn paths

because lives are threatened

and containment is an act of love

to protect the innocent.

nature is beyond innocence

but humans are not.

if this makes me unnatural

then I accept; but

i call hiding one's actions

under the cover of nature

cowardice.

v.

Christmas day hits

and after the presents flood in

and the food floods in

and the arguments flood in

washing you and father away to the kitchen

i am left stranded beneath the tree

and from the wreckage

i grasp an empty box

and try to balance it on my head

fascinated by the unseen power

teaching myself how to survive

a hurricane

teaching myself how to handle

what is essential

vi.

why so many storms? why so little mist?
did you not know how much runs off in storms, uselessly?
did you not think of what you would carve in the soil beneath my feet?
but rage, Mother, rage on,
and i will swallow you in heaving gulps
and i will sweat and bleed and piss you out again
and then i will continue to tend to my garden
despite your rages.

here is a love triangle:

you, me, and the picture you painted of me

and hung on your wall

and prayed to like an icon

and did not want to replace ever again.

i know she is prettier than i—

she does not sweat, bleed, or complain—

but does not our common flesh count for something?

but in the end it is flesh too common.

i hate her, smiling, smug on her wall.

i hate the way you love her perfection

and i can do nothing to change it.

viii.

when i bring friends to the house

and they admire your paintings

i want to tell them,

this is the roman coliseum—

impressive, enduring, inspiring even,

until you stop and realize,

—*oh, wait, that's right,*

they killed people there.

ix.

i am in college

and we are arguing

in my dorm room

for three hours

and at one point you look me in the eye and say,

You know what you're telling me? You're telling me,

“That didn’t hurt. That didn’t hurt.

That didn’t hurt. That didn’t hurt.”

i freeze.

here is a sudden shaft of sunlight shining between storm clouds.

i don’t know what to say.

i don’t know, maybe i hug you.

i do know that i nurse the pregnant quiet between us afterwards

as I drive you home.

we never speak of it again.

x.

some hoarders

find too much meaning in everything

to let go of anything

which might explain

why am i keeping these scraps of you

your fierce animal pride in me as your offspring

your delight in birds

your love of movies

your garbled empathy for children

your tendency, at any moment, to burst into song

i'm bewildered at how these have stacked up

so quickly around me, floor to ceiling.

but maybe this is my inheritance

for you yourself could not tell

what of yourself to toss, what to keep,

and so the piling up and protecting it all

became the entire endeavor.

there was no easy way for me to tell you,

i can't live like this,

people can't live like this.

i had to get out first

before i could learn how to sort it through.

Here is where I summon all the angels, brandishing swords of fire,
bringing righteous wrath down upon sinners.

You had your reasons. Keep them to yourself.

The thing you failed to understand,
the sorrow that screws me to this spot,
is that when you hurt a child,
even then, the child does not stop loving you.

The child blinks, and waits,
utterly defenseless,
uncomprehending, disbelieving that this can possibly be true,
drawing on nothing but the purest of loves,
the blind love of utter trust,
which is all a child has, which is our birthright,
which is *my* birthright, to believe in the ultimate goodness of things
because I have seen it in a million different places
despite the fact that you took it from me.

The massacre of the innocents is the one massacre, the perpetual massacre,
the only massacre there is.

The rescue of the innocents to me is the only worthwhile thing left.

I am not alone any more. We build things together.

We are measured in our measurements, deliberate in our deliberations.

The storms, the burns, the gardens, are all considered in turn.

We watch and listen as forces flow around and through us.

We try to learn from what has been wrought.

Children play in the garden, unafraid.

There are still storms, but they pass, and now I know this.

I am reborn in the force of others' goodness.

Though we will always be common flesh

You are no longer the only one who gave birth to me.

And I will summon all the tender care that exists in this life,

all the love that arises from sheltering safety,

and I will crown all who extend it—

the earth

nature

my beloveds

and even myself—

with the truest title

Mother.

Mose

Poetry Final Exam

A poem should not mean, but be. —Archibald MacLeish

1. Severing a poem's existence from its meaning is fascism. *Discuss.*
2. Endless analysis deadens the soul and subtracts from the total net value of a life worth living. *Enact in real time.*
3. Consider the poem "God is."

Consider the contradiction inherent in the notion that God as an entity could be said to exist, given that existence as a category would by logical necessity precede God, thus calling into question God's attributed immortal, omnipotent, and ubiquitous nature.

Consider how any meaning you ascribe to God, any meaning you ascribe to being, or any meaning you ascribe to this sentence comes from somewhere deep within. Consider whether it is worth letting go of that place deep within, or meaning, or being, or God, to become just a thing, just an entity.

Consider whether the entity which you would become instead could be considered a god, or goddess, or God. Or a poem.

Explode.

Children's Story

When you were young, your mind gave birth
to a whole litter of questions, pups falling all over one another.
Don't forget to take care of them now.
They will serve you in good stead.
Let them roam freely. Make sure there's a dog door.
Yes, at times they'll fetch more than you bargained for,
but that is a human problem.
Keep them fed, and warm, and they will keep faithfully retrieving.
After all, they were bred to be working dogs.

The Relationship

Death came over. We hung out. We played a game.
Death won.

(He always wins.)

*

Death came over. He wanted to borrow some stuff. *Again.*

(I think he's a bit of a hoarder.)

*

I had lunch with Death. He said,
"I've been listening to Buddha, man.
I'm letting go of the self.
I'm one with the world now. I'm free!"
And with that he disappeared.
They brought me my steak
but suddenly I was no longer hungry.

*

Finally I sat Death down
and told him that while I cherished our time together
I needed some distance.
He seemed to take it pretty well, considering.
It was a relief at first, but I must admit
everywhere I go something always reminds me of him. Of us.

*

Now Death keeps checking up on me,
every once in a while,
little messages here and there,
just reminding me he's still here for me
if I ever need something.

You know. Like old friends do.

Answers

I found a building marked ANSWERS.

Lucky day! I thought.

Imagine my surprise, then, to find
no books or archives, no libraries or databases,
but instead rows and rows of laboratories.

I watched the lab teams hoist up their finished contraptions
and hurl them out the window to the world,
noted the desperate hope on their faces
as they followed their creations' wayward paths
across the sky.

I am endeared to these rickety flutter-bys
and their haphazard orbits,
handy at times like boomerangs,
but at other times elusive,
flapping just out of reach
like skittish pigeons.

Sunday Evening

Sunday evening,
and everything flees:
the sun, the birds, the cars,
waitresses clearing out the joint,
the whole weekend gone, really—
nothing left but a cup of coffee to drain.

Even you have fled now,
your gaze no longer here, but distant through me,
so when I reach across the table for your hand
the look on your face is so startled
it reads like a warning.

Did you say *Don't* out loud, or did I just imagine it?
Either way, I shake my head
at just how much one must stifle to get by in this life.
When the silence peaks
I say, *God, I hate Sundays*,
and frown into my cup.

I think it's time, you say,
beginning to slide along the length of the booth,
your tone gently implying
with sudden certainty
that we will never, ever meet again.

And as much as I want to resent it, resent you—
instead I exhale inwardly at the release,
the sweet relief of being forgotten.

The last swallow of coffee is bitter,
like it always is.

The Return

To Whom it May Concern:

I am hereby returning the angel wings
I recently purchased from your shop.
I can report no defect
in the craftsmanship of the product
insofar as they remain untested in flight
though I hasten to express my admiration
for the artistry that went into their construction.
Nor can I fault any employee for their service
since we were all quite eager at the time
for the transaction.

But when I went to the cliff
and saw the crowd gathering
and how needy they were
for some soaring angel
to watch

and when I looked and saw
the wreckage below
and saw the crowd gathering
and how needy they were
for some fallen angel
to watch

I stopped—
still twitching for flight,
still tingling with the knowledge
of how we were all quite eager
for the transaction.

Now I have returned from the cliff and the crowd
to my neighborhood where we walk on the ground,
looking one another straight in the eye,
cheering one another on when we leap,
helping one another up when we fall.

Basement

O solitary spider, crawling across the concrete floor,
I can see the vast expanse that awaits you,
for this is an unfinished basement,
two words that hold no meaning for you, or if they did
would likely not deter you from your lonely trek.

It does neither of us much good for me to see your arduous path,
but I admire whatever force propels you on your journey.

If you should perish before you reach your destination,
please put in a good word for me,
for I suspect I too am in a basement,
wandering.

Answers Part II

O universe
I have joked about human answers
fluttering like pigeons
but here is an real answer
to your ancient silence:

a telescope
summation of our intelligence
the best human answer we have
soaring through the cosmos
it does not flutter
and does not blink
but draws closer to your mystery
both question and answer
a prayer in metal.

Friday Night

Friday night: interstices of work and rest.

Autumnal ruminations,
a kind of sadness laced with a kind of peace,
scraps of detritus in the drawer, receipts and show tickets,
notes to myself I can neither remember writing
nor bear to part with.

Notes to myself, to my former self,
"Sorry, he's not here anymore,
try three doors down,
or across the river, no, the other one.
Or maybe don't try at all."

Like driving to the beach in winter,
reminders of summer everywhere but shuttered.
Many of Hopper's paintings capture it, too,
the stillness and solitude,
the yearning for the ineffable.

In my journals I find moments captured in clarity,
details I could never conjure again,
bearing witness, and then the witness himself
borne off by the moment.

What will remain, the singer or the song, the recording or the memory?

I neither own nor disown
my path or my wake.
My fragments live in others' memories,
not for me to reckon or tabulate,
no summation possible, or even wanted.

After the show, the actor walks alone,
stripped of his platform and greasepaint,
a little less and a little more than he was before,
hollow and full, a taste of wine on his tongue,
the dying starlight guiding him home.