

# VOICES

Vol. 1 Issue 1  
May 2016

*Literary Art from the #MillionsMissing*





Issue 1, May 2016

# POEMS

<b>10TH – ME</b>	<b>1</b>
By Trish Davis	
<b>9TH – CLOSE CALL</b>	<b>2</b>
By Tami Russel	
<b>8TH – NOT YET DEAD: PAPERWEIGHT</b>	<b>3</b>
By Emma Blake	
<b>7TH – A MILLION COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>4</b>
By James Davis	
<b>6TH – MUSIC SOARS ALOFT</b>	<b>5</b>
By Elenor Dent	
<b>5TH – FATE RAPE</b>	<b>6</b>
By Lena Reed	
<b>4TH – UNDER THE SNOW</b>	<b>7</b>
By Barbara A. Tourgee	
<b>THIRD PLACE: SPROUT</b>	<b>8</b>
By Geneva Pierce	
<b>SECOND PLACE: MIRROR</b>	<b>9</b>
By Marion Mitchell	
<b>FIRST PLACE: THE SLEEP THIEF</b>	<b>10</b>
By Katherine Reynolds	

**ME**

I live within a sonnet's four white walls  
staring at the ceiling from my bed.  
I shuffle ten small steps before I fall  
and lie in darkness like this line, unread.

A fractured sequence, we can only meet  
in cyberspace, a million sonnet poem.  
Our hearts, once sure of their iambic beat,  
recite perverse arrhythmias of their own.

When every muscle aches and exercise  
brings on a dose of multi-organ 'flu  
it hurts to know some shrinks hypothesize  
malingering... hysteria... Would you  
choose life confined to ten steps by fourteen,  
malignant, redacted, spurned, unknown, unseen?

Trish Davis

**Close Call**

Millions of spaces dissolving the sequence  
Let go of the order, the place in the fiction  
The bookmarks are missing, the pages fly free

Millions of pictures, the past seen in fragments  
Let go of the remorse, the truncated branches  
The unsteady limbs and the longing remains

The day you went missing, I measured the falling  
with proven equations and logical methods  
Mine wasn't a life where the real people thrived

So what was I missing, the landing, the impact  
To hit the hard surface of pain everlasting  
The coma that dragged me down under the sea

And soon I was missing and dreaming of kissing  
No, dreaming of nothing like never before  
Emptied in darkness upon the sea floor

Then waking to sirens and millions of questions  
While nurses went poking the veins in my arms  
A lecture, a scolding, referrals, dismissals

Millions of judgments that weaken your core  
The two-faced, the righteous, the barkers of  
brightness, the self-helping gurus promising more

Millions of moments to lie in this bedroom  
Let go of the thinking, the hoping, the grieving  
Come rest with me now in in the fetal repose

Weave me the story of when you first slipped up  
Those shoes you were wearing, how shiny the  
leather, do tell me again how you fell at my feet

These stories, please tell me, in case all those  
karmas took place in a sentence, with millions of  
commas to offset the words, please give me the

Reasons, the millions of reasons I wasn't your girl  
Or if you're still lying as I'm busy dying, how  
strange how the missing will never be closed

Tami Russel

**Not Yet Dead: Paper Weight**

I was shocked instead by her  
rapid descent, overnight a  
flour sack, a rag doll with  
expressionless face, flaccid  
paste or wax, human essence  
seeping out unstaunched

He carried her everywhere  
like a child and the guilt of  
dependence crushed her soul  
Some thought her selfish

They never spoke of pain  
air thickly infused with it  
she could barely form words  
not without great effort

mute exchanges between them  
played all sides of fortune  
poised as they were over every  
inhalation except for that rare  
abandon to a vibrant riff of  
irrepressible, childish laughter

Emma Blake

**A Million Complaints**

Chirping cicadas  
sing endlessly in my ear  
a serenade of torment.  
Ghostly voices of  
insects that don't exist.  
Twitching eyes,  
twitching fingers,  
little lizards running amuck  
under my skin.  
I can't rub them away.

My toes trick me.  
They pretend to be  
fuzzy caterpillars  
tickling my feet.  
I'm not giggling.

My brain, a cold mist  
over a warm water pond  
clouding memories,  
irretrievable names,  
lost treasure chests.

Gremlins stab me –  
repeatedly. My bowels  
bellow and legs tremble,  
rusted joints,  
tired parts.

Sleep offers refuge  
when the elusive night  
can be found.  
I think often of  
That Good Night.

I don't fear that  
eternal night –  
misery isn't living.  
I fear the pain  
unabated, unending.

James Davis

**Music Soars Aloft**

Today he put the music in the attic  
where I won't have to see it and remember  
I once could play. That flute went everywhere  
serenaded cicadas by Cretan sands  
hogged the bathroom in snow-bound Salzburg dorm  
attracted rats in Holland Park marquee  
when, locked out of the hostel after Hamlet,  
surprised rodents scampered  
from the shrill pitch. It took me to  
Connecticut, New Jersey and New York  
while the dots stayed home and rested on the shelves.  
Bach was tired and old, his spine grown weak  
from my demands, while Mozart never aged.  
Good friends, constant companions, barely touched  
since illness sucked the power from my lungs.  
Just paper, taking space, redundant, useless  
best out of sight in boxes in the dark.

Elenor Dent

**Fate Rape**

He put words into  
my mouth forcing  
me to gag on them  
slipping them into  
Tabasco sauce  
foul oyster shots

for love  
I let them slide

scalloped childhood photos cannot save us  
had he ever cared to ask exactly what I had for  
breakfast or how I managed to dress myself

this interminable illness  
millions of absences

these daily Passovers, when the lentils of the  
house bow low to supernatural forces and no  
amount of blood letting spills the truth

Waiting in fading biscuit tins  
on shelves where desiccated  
cockroaches dress themselves in  
dusty promises and locks of platinum hair

out of reach to those who swallow pain whole,  
spitting out bones and skin like barn owls do

Lena Reed



**Under the Snow**

Snow slants in from the north  
sliding down an invisible hill,  
no wind, just this arctic bias  
as if we did not already know  
what cold is.

White sky, white earth.  
Hiding so much, this layer of serenity,  
making us want to believe  
the surface is everything  
while below

earthworms lie in torpid seclusion  
beyond the solace of dreams.  
Chipmunks curl up in leaf-lined darkness  
wrapped only in their tails  
and the conviction of spring

a conviction  
deeper than knowledge  
a thin persistent reservoir  
of still water beneath thick pond ice  
where waiting happens.

Who knows how many  
lie beneath white sheets?  
All the small sleepers  
wrapped in their silence  
are easy to forget.

How many linger in small rooms of grief  
hope gone dormant  
waiting under the ice  
not for snowmelt  
but for a different kind of spring

Barbara A. Tourgee

Third place: Geneva Pierce

## Sprout

The pain is a seed buried deep in my hip;  
It is green and thorn; it runs down my leg and out each toe.  
A golem sits on my chest  
and pins my arms and legs and head.  
Sometimes, I cannot get enough air;  
sometimes my scalp tingles like the leg, to the point of pain.  
Worse than these, though, is the brownout of my brain,  
like a library shut down for the night, doors locked –  
Each book rests on the shelf, and in its proper place,  
not (yet?) gone, or erased –  
but who can find anything in this darkness?

I am sister to the women who died of polio,  
of scarlet fever  
of sepsis  
when the men did not know to wash their hands –

I can trace my problem in  $-CH_3$ , in  $NOS^-$   
I can discern which pathways are malfunctioning.  
I can follow the branches with my fingers  
Except as far back as the root.

I excavate myself;  
I exhume myself;  
I dig  
    And I dig  
        And dig

But none of it fits together. (None of it is the right kind of wrong.)  
It is a tangled, thorny labyrinth of possibility  
That is branched and choked and long –  
Still, I persist.

Which of us can say he knows how to sing a better song?

The primitive-me and the intellectual are in agreement, for once.  
They chorus, drum-beat steady, and steadfast, and strong:  
*Fight.*  
*Fight.*  
*Fight on.*

Second Place: Marion Mitchell

## Mirror

Then fatigue throws a blanket over me, thick and felted,  
fills mind and limbs with hush. The nervous system  
catches fire though, stokes long forgotten pains, strikes

hammer blows in curious places. I want to map them  
in red string, trace their trajectories – on skin,  
through muscles, organs, bones.

Instances of can-do dwindle. Body is cold  
and clammy, sallow hued, as if I had rolled in ashes  
and morning dew, but then I neither bathed

nor washed in days. Insomnia scoops eyes  
from hollows, the better to see me with; strips skill  
and craft of constellation; sews daytime shut.

When the pain goes I half suppose my flesh  
marked, transformed. A growth of lichen, say; layers  
of cool, slippery fish-scales; traces of a glacial burn.

But there is nothing. Not a wound, not a bruise,  
not even the flushed tone of a limb pressed  
against the mirror, straining elsewhere.

We wake, each and every morning, delirious  
with hunger for an active day.  
Eyes wide, so a bit of the world pours in...

First Place: Katherine Reynolds

### **The Sleep Thief**

for ME patients everywhere

She lives inside my house and steals my sleep.  
Some nights, she tiptoes silently around the bedroom  
like a bare-footed slow walking zen student,  
holding my sleep in her cupped hands then  
slipping back into the dark corners of the zendo.

Some nights, she lurks under my bed  
using her hard fists, her sharp elbows, her bony knees,  
so I toss and turn on the painful lumpy mattress.

Some nights, she crouches out in the starless night  
teasing the beagle behind the grey battered fence  
rattling the gate latch with her invisible hands  
until the beagle barks and barks,  
the tired neighbor popping his head out his door,  
screaming at the dog to shut up at nothing.

Some nights, she crouches in the bathroom  
giggling in the dark, her nimble fingers  
quietly turning the faucet,  
just enough so that water drips:  
a splash that sounds like a slow crash  
into the white porcelain sink.

Some nights, she stands forlorn in the corner,  
her mournful voice moaning about how I am *bad* daughter  
for not sitting vigil at my dying mother's bedside,  
the one night she didn't blow out a breath,  
the one night when she finally rested, finally dropping  
down into sleep, the deep sleep.