



*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](https://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