

**A NEBULA OF
BLEEDING
HEARTS**

A POETRY ANTHOLOGY

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PROLOGUE:

With this poetic anthology “A Nebula of Bleeding Hearts”, I hope to express both the “impossibly cosmic” as well as the “down-to-earth”, and merge both the macro and the micro-- the personally intimate and the distantly all-encompassing. The title of this collection suits its own broad themes in that it conveys a beating organ that is common in all humans, and relays to readers the emotional spectrum of Mankind in respect to an individual’s capacity for love, compassion, kindness, and sacrifice (to the point that the heart bleeds passionately). The word “nebula” then immediately contrasts the connectedness of the heart and expands the conceptual scale and ideation of this anthology to galactic proportions, evocating the sense that the spirit and tenderness of humanity (as cruel as it can be at times, in which hearts bleed-- but out of pain as opposed to kindness) is common across the cosmos, and even possibly in humanoid (or non humanoid) species that may exist without our awareness on other realms or planets.

In terms of my creative process, many of the poems I have composed in this anthology were inspired by my own interests in the philosophical, the astronomical and cosmological, and the fantastic, the medieval, the political, the societal, the ecological, the psychological, the spiritual, the mystical, and the primeval or ancient. My works look both to the distant past as well as to the distant future to inform readers of the present state of the world, or of changing landscapes in ideas and societies that will affect us in our current lifetimes, and the lifetimes of our descendants. Despite the breadth of my interests, and how they, in turn, affect the form, style, and subjects of my poetic works, the core essence and message of this anthology-- unconditional love and selflessness across the planets, the stars, the spaces between galaxies, and even across the infinite rim of the observable universe remains intact.

In some ways, the nature of my anthology is hopelessly, and childishly naive, but in other ways, it is insightful and may assist us in revealing to us all the truth of who we are in relation the wider world around us. To end off, my anthology is made all the more personal in regards to the circumstances of my premature birth, in which I, were it not for the quick work of surgeons, would have died before even knowing of my existence from a congenital heart defect— what I suspect to be either patent ductus arteriosus or an atrial/ventricular septal defect. In other words, a hole in my heart that would have caused it to *bleed*.

PART A:
WRITING
ASSIGNMENTS

BEHOLD, MORTALS, THE COSMIC APOPTOSIS!

See how your blue marble floats over the black abyss!
Look, ye telescopes, at the Sun slowly swelling!
Behold, mortals, the solar apoptosis!

Witness the serpent of entropy slither and hiss!
Look, ye telescopes, at the synaptic pulsars sing!
See how your blue marble floats over the silent abyss!

Witness the serpent of entropy slither and hiss!
Look, ye telescopes, at the redshifted stars bleeding!
Behold, mortals, the astral apoptosis!

Witness the serpent of entropy slither and hiss!
Look, ye telescopes, at the sclerotic black holes consuming!
See how your blue marble floats over the empty abyss!

Witness the serpent of entropy slither and hiss!
Look, ye telescopes, at the cannibal galaxies withering!
Behold, mortals, the galactic apoptosis!

Witness the serpent of entropy slither and hiss!
Look, ye telescopes, at the dendritic superclusters degenerating!
See how your blue marble floats over the demented abyss!
Behold, mortals, the cosmic apoptosis!

REMINISCENCE OF A HIGH SCHOOL FRIEND

our friendship begins in freshman year of Union City High School
the bond between Dean and I by Jonathan's advice
next thing you know, we're helping each other succeed in school
while playing Nintendo and Pokemon games in our spare time
the poor kid had Tourette's and couldn't stop shaking
with a fragile soul kindred to mine and especially prone
to failed flirtations with gamer girls across the hallways
indeed, he is the first friend my mother let me visit
my house and the first friend who invited me over to his
those moments we were spending were special and
unforgettable in my memory

one could easily mistake us for Damon and Pythias
since I would gladly defend him to the point of sacrifice
As he would me in our home town of slums and *bodegas*,
Goya cans and *platanos fritos*

intimacy aside Art is the mistress we follow to this day
Dean's in SVA studying animation and I'm here
at the New School studying illustration and literature
of course despite our vast distances from another
amidst the spires and towers of the Big Apple
we still talk and text from time to time encouraging each other
and wishing for each other the very best through thick and thin
to an extent he has helped me muster the confidence to confess
my feelings towards my high school sweetheart (we all had those, admit it)
while I have helped him study for AP English and get a 4 in his AP exams
much to the joy of my teachers

he's come so far through my help as the Muse of the two of us
as if Calliope and Urania bestowed upon me the curiosity for science and poetry
(and I am sad to consider Calliope the better of the two since I could not
understand Urania and now only love from afar)

as if indeed Ananke taught Dean the necessity of success and passion
so that he may banish Epimetheus from his head-- who claims the minds of everyone else

THE LUCID AND SEIGNEURIAL AIGRETTE

Regret ye egrets,
And hearken ye herons!
For on the heads of affluent *madams* and *monsieurs*,
And French soldiers who hold their blades up high,
Are tethered the plumage of your pride,
Who herald the distinction of their royal crests
That gleam like the spinning stars of fame
And the golden francs of fortune.

Regret ye egrets,
And hearken ye herons!
For across Gaul and the naked body of Europe,
Across the forests and valleys of musket-men,
Are adorned the bodies of your blasted brethren and sistren,
Who with wings spread wide await the winds of woe
To carry their hunted souls, beaded like the pearls of rosaries,
Towards where all puffy feather-clouds may float in the skies.

Forget not ye egrets,
And heed well ye herons!
For on the swaddling turbans of powerful sultans
And the armored equines reined by scimitar-wielding Ottomans,
Are pinned and encrusted the gems that reflect your identity,
--That which all of you fought beak, wing, and talon for
And have yet to pardon Humanity for if only through vengeful war,
Or through a Conference of Birds seeking to ban the headdress.

Forget not ye egrets,
And heed well ye herons!
For across Arabia and the covered body of the Middle East,
Across the desert burkas where wizards and witches wander,
Are lost in the dry sand the remnants of your swamps and wetlands,
Who with ravenous thirst await the righteous rains of relief
To flood their timid ponds and wilted, sparse woods,
Towards where all nobles may drink under the droughts of despair.

Fret not and forgive, ye egrets!
And have high hopes, ye herons!
For now the lucid and seigneurial aigrette
That garnished hat donned amidst war for sport,
Has come and gone, and Humankind has declared for all of us,
An armistice in this new Millennium without millineries
Who are now as endangered as we birds once were for our whiteness.

THE GHOST OF A GESTURE

Phantom limbs wave to me
As I stand on the misty Mediterranean docks.
From the decks of phantom ships,
Who emerge from the mist
Battered and wounded,
I see these innocent men and women
With missing arms and hands,
And leaning on crutches,
While their legs have become
Stumps cast in gauze.

They have returned from a war overseas,
That erupted when peace negotiations failed
And the ambassadors failed to shake hands,
Only mustering the ghost of a gesture.

Those hands almost touched, but not quite,
As the shadows of treachery were revealed
Amidst the ceremony everyone was hoping for.
For, as the world would know that day,
The Summit avalanched amidst the chaotic frenzy
Of the specters of rebels and the daemons of terrorists
Rising from the underworld of their poverty
And setting the Headquarters ablaze.

Now, I see the ship looming ever closer to the dock--
That vessel an afterthought of the violence
That could have been stopped ahead of time.
For the world's nations, like these people, have lost their arms
Of their dominion, or the legs of their governments
That they stood upon, once strong and free.

Now, the countries have died, leaving bombed
Countrysides (that are their corpses) strewn about everywhere,
And the countless fading idolons of broken administrations.
The most powerful nations have become zombified revenants
Of their former glory, barely rising from their graves.
And it is unknown what has become of the Third World.

FLASH DRIVE

Despite being about the size of a thumb, a flash drive
Has the capacity to hold the knowledge and wisdom
Of the cosmos, and feed it into the orifices of the laptop,
Or home monitor, or the pores of the whirring computer case.

When it is inserted into a computer, sticking out
Like an annoying protuberance, a file spontaneously
Spawns on its desktop screen that serves as a gateway.
A portal to the oeuvre of the deities who hold dominion
Over the galaxies of cyberspace at their fingertips.

However, with all the perks of this tiny Guardian
Of eternal memory and spinning oscillator crystals,
This vagabond and breaker of Moore's Law,
This sleek wanderer, who often bytes more than it can chew,
Has its dark side infested with psychotic malware and processing power.

It is a destroyer of websites, the mother of all worms
That writhe blind and starving; a harbinger of the Pestilence--
A Trojan horse of the Apocalypse upon all operating systems
That turns them against their gods and annihilates the creations in their files.

It is a downloader of data deluges, a transferrer of technological torrents--
An invader and predator of innocent networks and a corrupter of the pure,
As well as the very entity that overthrew the ancient, floppy regime of the disk-men,
The same finger who prodded them at the height of their power to rot and collect dust
In the vaults and tomb-closets of aging grandparents, and the storage pantries
Of programmers from the days of the Y2K scare that made the world tremble.

Easily lost due to their small size
(Despite their paradoxically gigantic storage space),
The flash drive, an emissary of the new Millennium
Is both humble yet arrogant.
With a click it opens the world to all,
But also deviously injects its malice into all.
In the palm of one's hands, one can move the world,
But one can also easily delete it, bit by bit,
Simply with a cursor that curses its Controller.

NATURAL SPRING WATER

A clear plastic bottle glistens in the sunlight, distorting space-time with its bumpy and yet smooth curvature. Inside is water that claims to be pure, and the son of Poland Spring. Funnily, enough, the water is neither from the country of Poland nor from a spring, but from some backwater reserve in Poland, Maine. It lies *all the time*. All one has to do is leave its plastic prison out in a hot summer day for a few hours, and then those devious poisons from the neck of the container will seep into the water, and claim it as its own.

Don't be fooled by its colorful blue and green sticky label, or by its guarantee of having no additional flavors or minerals within. Just take the bottle by the middle and CRUSH it. Better yet, why not listen for that sweet crumpling sound it makes when it is held tight for long enough?

It's about to explode, and it's calling for help.

SCHOOL DESK

It is always sitting,
and yet demands to be sat on.

Slave!

Asses being reined in by meaningless grades,

a

n

d

weighed down by decimal
point averages,
activities,
and the real world,

routinely quash its open
plastic mouth.

When it is moved on the hard ceramic floor,

That *SCREEEEEEEECH!* everyone knows instinctively
is the sound of its chin being

d r a g g e d

Repeatedly

Repeatedly

Repeatedly

Repeatedly

It's torture for the desk,
And students say they have it bad in school.

But does the desk ever complain?

NO.

NOT
EVEN
ONCE.

YOU OWE US AN APOLOGY, MR. PRESIDENT¹

Who are the survivors here today,
Being here, fighting this long battle
All these long years?

Who are these in the people's house
The eight men, the living link?
The poor who found African hope?

We dare not forget
When our nation failed
When our ideals broke the trust.

A time not so long ago,
Free medical care betrayed democracy
A cure was denied and trampled upon.

The United States Public Health Service
Lied for forty years, turning heads.

Syphilis took its first steps
Without consent.

Children of anguish, children of pain
Children of power, children of outrage,
Live lives of silence in the city
Of Tuskegee, Alabama.

We must repair the satellite of study
For the American eye
Is adrift, far and deep.

Who am I to disclose my mistakes
On live national television
To a deceived audience that I misled?

Who do I, as President, have to blame
But myself and my critical failure in judgment
For the scandal of the century?

I did have a relationship with Miss Lewinsky
(I did not have sexual relations with *that woman*)
I did have an inappropriate relationship with her.

Some seven months ago,
I had not been candid to the public
Out of my unprecedented embarrassment.

The White House and the independent counsel
Were improperly prying my private life

And my past with
Paula Jones.

But that does not grant me immunity
From my own personal destruction,
And the denials I made; my silence
As Hillary held my hand.

I pour my heart out with
Anger and remorse,
Humiliation and regret.

¹ This poem uses words and language from *only* two distinct journalistic and oratorical sources:

1). Clinton, Bill. "Remarks by the President in Apology for Study Done in Tuskegee", The East Room, The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Washington D.C. 16 May 1997. (transcript found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website— <https://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/clintonp.htm>).

2). Baker, Peter, and John F. Harris, "Clinton Admits to Lewinsky Relationship, Challenges Starr to End Personal "Prying", The Washington Post, 18 August 1998. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/clinton/stories/clinton081898.htm>.

Also, the "us" in the title is a wordplay on the word "us" and the US (the United States), in case you didn't already figure out.

We must grant the rights to a broken sound
To the orchestrated memory long ignored.

To Macon County, for the years of hurt.

We must sow a fitting museum of loss, on
Behalf of the donors of informed consent.

We must say sorry
For vanquishing minority communities,
For the curse of our research.

We must strengthen drugs and dignity
And bring justice against racist diseases.

We must call upon collective wisdom
To resolve the challenge of our conscience,
To heal and rebuild the stature of Man
That stands on the shameful ground.

Mr. Shaw, Mr. Charlie Pollard,
Mr. Carter Howard, Mr. Fred Simmons,
Mr. Frederick Moss,

Gwendolyn Cox, daughter by Sam Doner
Ernest Hendon, brother by North Hendon
Chris Monroe, grandson by George Key,

Have you chosen to forgive?
Have you withheld the past
To protect the present
And ensure the path of the future?

Have you undone the torment of today,
So that there may be a
Tomorrow of laughter?

Since Hillary was not my first lady
Or my second.

To Monica, for the months of perjury.

I take full responsibility for the storm
That has stained the fabric of our country.

I can say with little doubt,
The dealings with her dress...
Were intrusive and not wanted.

I have committed not only obstruction of justice,
But have failed to quell my sexual desire.

I can also say that the contact
Lewinsky and I made under the cover
Of disguised stories through the summer,
Was the foreplay to my fall.

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, David E. Kendall
Nicole K. Seligman, Charles F.C. Ruff,
Charles G. Bakaly III, and Sen. Orrin G. Hatch,

Judge Susan Wright, Lt. Jackie M. Bennett Jr,
Solomon L. Wisenberg, Robert J. Bitterman,
Betty Currie, V. Jordan, and Erskine Bowles,

Rev. J. Philip Wogaman, Vice President Gore,
Newt Gingrich, Trent Lott, Henry J. Hyde,
Lieberman and Byrne, Linda R. Tripp,
Kenneth J. Starr, and Hillary and Chelsea:

My words were flavored with *wrong*,
And I have destroyed
The olive branch.

PART B:
SELECTED
POEMS

FORTUNA'S LOVER²

Make love to Opportunity
And she will leave you alone
Before the night is over,
Never to be seen again.

Seize her by the throat
And strangle her until
She falls limp, and
You'll have her forever.

If you choose the second,
More extreme option,
She'll be dead, sure,
Lying with her wings
Outstretched on
Your rickety bed,

Feathers molting across the sheets
Where your sick necrophilic
Fantasies can finally hatch
From the egg of your psyche.

But you'll get to pluck the feathers
Of the day³, in the spirit of CARPE DIEM
From her body, and make
A coat out of them
To insulate your frozen heart.

² Warning: The title is derived from the graphic Victorian poem "Porphyria's Lover" by Robert Browning. The topics discussed in this poem might also be considered offensive or extreme to some readers. Reader discretion is advised. This is also a work of *fiction*, and is inspired by the poem mentioned at the beginning of this footnote, so it is *not* representative of my own views.

³ Carpe Diem is commonly translated to mean "seize the day" as it was used by Horace in his *Odes*. However, a more literal translation of the Greek aphorism would yield the English phrase "*pluck* the day", based on the Greek word "carpo", which means "to pick or pluck". The *carpe* in "carpe diem" is derived from the initial verb.

THE LAST BEDTIME STORY

An older mother
And a young child
Share one last tender moment.

There won't be another,
For the world's gone wild—
No love, no peace, no enjoyment.

The two read
Near candlelight
A dusty children's tome.

Mother in lead,
Child in fright,
Earth barely her home.

Cities fall.
Forests die.
Bombs explode faraway.

But Mother shall
Not let her Child cry:
She'll say things are okay.

A NUCLEAR HEART IN WORLD WAR LOVE

Our eyes were the trigger
That detonated the nukes of our heart.
Our eyes were the alarm systems
That sent our bodies into a panic.
Our bodies were the territories
That our souls desired to conquer.
Our faces were the waving flags
That we displayed to each other with pride.
Our wrestling tongues were the rhetoric
That escalated the tensions between us.
And our lips were the peace treaty
That we signed with a deep kiss.

THE SECOND CIRCLE⁴

I fell into the chaotic abyss of Love
When I became absorbed in her eyes,
And she became enraptured in mine.

I flew down as an eagle, and she a dove,
Down into the pit as the wind, by surprise
Carried us both in hissing gusts serpentine.

Slowly, we drifted towards one another in that tempest
Of Passion, of Desire, and of cyclonic energy,
Where we clasped talons and fit like lock and key.

The times that we kissed were indeed the best,
And in those times we huddled we had never felt so free--
The gales of our yearning filling our hearts with glee.

With our wings outstretched, flapping with lust
We've danced in the air for timeless, eternal ages.
And sung enough songs to fill ten thousand pages
Of sheet music, bound by our diamond-clad trust.

To this day, our love overwhelms the iron cages
Of our fate and damnation, and the hurricane that rages.

⁴ Refers to Canto V of Dante's *Inferno* in the *Divine Comedy*. The two lovebirds are subtly implied to be representative of various couples stuck in Hell according to Dante's accounts: Queen Dido and Aeneas, Helen of Troy and Paris, Tristan and Iseult (from Arthurian legend), Cleopatra and Mark Antony, and Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta, among others.

UNTIL DEATH DO US ART

Art, O Art, you were once my Lover fair!
The day we wed seemed like an event
Straight out of a romance novel.
On that day, you were vibrant, gorgeous,
And loyal to my heart, no one else's,
With that colorful gown that magnified your splendour,
And your hair streaking across your face with the strokes
Of some Creator's heavenly brush.

Those were the days, my love, when our solitude
Meant a chance for us to paint the canvas
Of our future with joy and lasting happiness.

Our Renaissance, sadly, has long gone,
And I am saddened to see you a Galatea no more,
Despite the persistence of my memory in
Wanting to see you as a work of art:
Beautiful on the inside *and* outside.

For the last few years, my dearest,
You've become silent and you've seemingly
Vanished from my life for days at a time.

Your frame has become less furnished,
And your strokes of color have faded, dulled!

Your figure, once organic and incomparable
– Once Impressionistic, has been reduced to
Simple shapes, lines, colors, and forms!

Your words and your voice have grown more distant
And unintelligible – we can't understand each other
Like we used to ever since you began talking in Artspeak!

Am I not good enough to paint your treacherous heart, my love—
The same that has been, indeed, deconstructed by the critics
And corporations in those galleries and museums I know you've
Sold yourself to like the harlot you've become?

A LOVE LETTER TO ICELAND

Dear Iceland,

You're so cold on the outside, but I know who you really are beneath the surface of your pale skin. You're passionate and volcanic— wild and wanting to erupt over anything else. You're waiting for the right time to blow, or for when you can't handle your infernal feelings any longer as they bottle and bubble and boil in the magma chambers of your heart.

Yes, I know how dangerous your feelings can be, as I've seen in the past with your fiery ash clouds of lust bursting and thundering into the open sky, and killing thousands after your wails and blasts of ecstatic euphoria. But... then again, love *is* toxic: it burns and ravages everything in its path while also keeping the little people toasty and warm with the sweltering heat that pumps through the pipes of plants and radiates from their smokestacks.

Still, despite your bipolarity, Iceland, I can't help but yearn to cross the Atlantic, if only to wash ashore onto your coasts, and feel the warm black sand of your body studded with the diamonds of our engagement and marriage⁵, just as your people once crossed the ocean and gave birth to a newly found land before I came along. I still wonder to this day why you left so soon after your union with the West. It is as if your intense emotions were suddenly once more placated and buried beneath your cold, heartless exterior, as if the briefest of your infatuations with the faded light of a candle were suddenly extinguished intentionally.

But I digress. I know Iceland, how others have pined for you. Let me add my own diamond to the collection. I'm sure as hell I'm not your first love — but I know I also won't be your last, lest Freyja and Lofr object, or, Asgard forbid the All-father Odin himself. And don't worry— I'll keep our affair a secret, just as have all your previous suitors. No one will have to know about your double life, and I'll act as if our foreign policy has always been platonic.

Sincerely,
America

⁵ Google Reynisfjara Black Sand Beach in Vik, Iceland, and Jökulsárlón Diamond Beach.

AN ODYSSEY AT CENTRAL PARK ZOO

I. RAINFOREST

Vines and branches intersect
Like the veins of the cardiovascular system,
While verdant tree-arteries canopy
The sounds of the rhythmic jungle beat.

I see bright red parrots and ibises
Squawking and chirping sonnets of love
To one another across the Amazonian expanse—
Across timeless thickets from where
The light of life trickles between their leaves.

From the wooden staircase that I climb
I marvel at the croaking frogs announcing their dominion—
At the thousand bats that screech
Obscenities in the shadows
Now punished in a glass underworld
And banished from the Garden, after
Having eaten the forest's worth of forbidden fruits.

After a few more steps, I see the two-colored
Lemurs turn their heads with surprise.
Some amidst the branches are cuddling
With each other affectionately,
While others can be found hiding in the branches,
Spurned by the eyes of their companions.

“Oh no, it's those damn humans again!”, protests the Shy Lemur.
“Just relax and stare! Everything's gonna be fine!”, assures the Outgoing Lemur.
“You don't get it Lemmy, we're mere feet away from the enemy,
The same race who has oppressed Madagascar, and committed
Genocide on our kind. We must fight back before it is too late!
We must raise the Malagasy flag and change it from
The red, white, and green, to the brown, black, white, gold,
And blue, as a symbol of our newfound nation, as a—”

“Lamar, for the good of the jungle, I’m sick and tired of listening
To your secessionist, revolutionary jargon. I’ve already
Told you that trying to break out of the zoo would only
Cause mass chaos to ensue, and for humans to find us
And bring us back to this establishment. If we are not
Chased by them, then those metal honking animals
With wheels will certainly run us over. Then where will
Your Madagascar ruled by Lemurs be? In fact,
There will be less of us to go around if we agree to you
Ludicrous, dangerous ideas, so it would be wiser as I see it
To stay here and live our lives forever incarcerated with the
Guarantee of peace and prosperi—”

“You’re such a conformist, Lemmy! Where is your will
To fight and rebel? Why have you and the other lemurs
Become so complacent? Don’t you feel any love towards
Your fellow lemur? Don’t you realize this forest has been
Artificially constructed and pales in comparison to the real
Rainforests of Madagascar, don’t you—”

“I’ve had enough Lamar. Go hide behind those branches
Over those rocks over there. You’ll only have yourself
To listen to once the humans are done viewing us”.⁶

“Fine! But when we’re the only lemurs left on this
Dying planet, don’t come climbing up to me for help
As the zoo burns and smolders under the flames of anarchy!
All you’re going to get is a big, fat “I told you so!” from me,
And a slap from my tail. We’ll see on that day who is
The better lemur for the rest of time! Now if you’ll excuse me,
I’m going to go take a nap. Don’t disturb me!”

“You don’t need to tell me twice, you aye-aye”.⁷

⁶ My personal experience (and photo evidence) testifies to the fact that in the lemur exhibit, two lemurs (in the foreground) were facing the glass confines of their enclosure from which people were looking and taking photos. Behind those two lemurs were two other lemurs with their backs turned to the people (I could see their tails but not their faces). One of the two background lemurs ended up hiding behind some branches, while the two foreground lemurs stared behind them, turning their heads. I imagined some sort of dialogical conflict between these two opposing pairs of lemurs; each pair being merged into one lemur.

⁷ Aye-ayes in Madagascar are a species of lemur considered a near universal evil omen (and a bringer of death) among the local peoples. They have the largest brain-to-body ratio of any lemur. The term here is used as an insult implying Lamar is an outcast.

II. THE FAR NORTH

Over the calm waters speckled
With yellow leaves, sitting on top
Of a rocky set of islands, is a Japanese macaque
(Also known as a snow monkey),
Eating a juicy red fruit.

The simian treads from boulder to boulder,
Trying to find a suitable place to enjoy his snack.

A few minutes pass by, and the macaque
Looks at me, before turning around
And displaying his bright red buttocks
To the world without shame.

He is alone. Hopelessly
Alone, with only his fruit to distract him
From his boredom and his friendlessness.

Not far from the snow monkey
Swim three or four harbor seals
Whose friendships are sealed,
And whose hearts harbor beneath
Endless depths of love.
They dive and twist around each other,
Displaying their waving fins and thrashing tails
To the world with solidarity and defiance.

They are together. Hopefully
Together, with only each others' presences to
Remind them of their blessings and friendly glee.

III. FROM MIDDLEMARSH TO MOUNTAIN

Provincial turtles rattle with tectonic trepidation,
As their heads, now awake, emerge from their shells.

Waterfowl contemplate while wading in the green waters
The rotting smell of ideologies and eras long dead,
And the creeping fresh odor of a world in tempestuous change.

“The swamp”, they quack, “MUST be drained”.

Closer to the sky, brother and sister snow leopards
Kiss and lick each other’s fur amidst the trees,
And brush their striped tails against one another.
When one of the pair tried to climb up a tree,
The other followed suit in a gesture of assistance.

Love, even among predators, is as universal
And as common in the bowels of the dirt as
Atop the mountain from which the world was hewn.

From the peaks I descend towards forests
On the other side of apex, and I see
A red panda sleeping soundly on top
Of a tree branch tufted with leaves,
Curled up like a scarlet-brown ball.

The poor creature doesn’t realize
How few of its fellow pandas are left in the wild.
In the animal’s dreams the forest has always been the forest,
And the sounds of gunshots don’t resound between
The bamboo reeds.

IV. THE FAR SOUTH

In a freezing antarctic prism
Under the frigid depths of a contained ocean,
Swim and twirl chinstrap penguins, who,
With beaks pressed against the glass walls
Of their aquatic habitat, beckon
For their chins to be “scratched”
By the fingers of amazed onlookers.

Above water, standing proudly
On top of rocky shelves, or sitting lazily
By the wayside are King and Emperor penguins,
Whose yellow markings denote their royalty—
Their reign over an icy continent with an iron flipper.

With flippers outstretched, they are like
Great statues— the descendants of prehistoric
Giant penguins who would have towered
Over the heads of humans had they still been alive today.

Separate from the Kings and the Emperors
Stand the solemn Adélie penguins, the poor monochrome
Seabirds who are semi-aware of the massacre of
Their kind by starvation and climate change,
Honking by their lonesome as if mourning
Over something that has gone *very, very wrong*.

Two out of thirty-six thousand chicks survived Winter’s fury.⁸

⁸ Refers to October 13, 2017 scientific news articles reporting the recent death of around 36,000 Adélie chicks in Antarctica due to starvation, brought about by sudden weather changes that forced parent penguins to look for food further inland or elsewhere, impeding them from returning to their children on time during the beginning of mating season. The Independent and The Telegraph wrote two articles about the incident:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/13/just-two-penguin-chicks-colony-36000-survive-catastrophic-antarctic/>.
<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/baby-penguins-adelie-global-warming-climate-change-wwf-chicks-dead-parents-a7997396.html>.

V. THE GLUTTONY OF THE OCEAN, THE AVARICE OF THE SKY

A trio of sea lions hear the call of their trainers.

It's time for lunch and also for a show!

Splash! goes the water as their tails thrash excitedly,
As they leap onto the rocks where humans await
With bucketfuls of fish!

The three sea lions dive and jump,
Wave and beg, flip and flap their tails.

They do dozens of tricks and wonders—
All for fish in nigh limitless supply.
All for salmon that fly across the air
Into the eager whiskered mouths of
These marine creatures.

“Fish! More fish!” they bark,
While the crowds around the pool
Cheer in satisfaction.

Even so, the pinnipeds know
Full well at the back of their minds
That their ocean homes off the coast of California
Have been invaded by plastic garbage patches,
Peppered with cups and bags from
Supermarkets and fast food restaurants.

Not far from the pelagic fiasco,
Two small birds squabble over a piece of
Sandwich bread I threw at them while eating lunch:

“Give me that large bread piece!” demands Bird One.
“Nuh-uh! You're not getting even a crumb! I was closer
To the human and caught the bread in my beak. Thus,
I am the rightful owner of this gratuitous manna. The human
Chose me, not you!” asserts Bird Two with an air of hubris.

Bird Two subsequently flies away to the trees,
Leaving Bird One, who was watching Bird Two
From afar when the bread fell from my hand
Downcast and with a rumbling stomach.

Out of generosity, I decided to give the
Abandoned avian another piece of bread,
Since it actually began staring at my sandwich
For several minutes without moving.

“Thank you so much, human!”
I could imagine Bird Two exclaiming.
“But this isn’t enough! I want more!”
The bird seemed to demand with avarice.