love letters

to 2020

Vol. 2
love letters to 2020 V.2

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About the Love Letters to 2020 project.

In 2020, the human residents of planet Earth underwent a new kind of obstacle, dreadful changes unraveling all around us. These new changes were due to the Coronavirus (Covid19) the pandemic, and the murder of Black and brown people of color in the United States by law enforcement.

We were coping. We were responding from our “stay at home” orders. We were evolving.

*Love Letters to 2020* is a series of workshops that take us through: confronting the traumas of the year, looking at the positive, and rebuilding. The journey through these topics using poetry and creative writing as a vehicle, has proven us brave, and the act healing.

Within these pages are the traumas and triumphs of our 2nd cohort, making up *Love Letters to 2020 Vol.2*.

Relate, enjoy, let go, and rise beyond the moment.

*Write on!*

Jessica M. Wilson, MFA

*Poetry Teacher*
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A poem of declaration and appreciation for the change in you, or the land of you.
Elegy:

I want that glass of wine
That makes me feel sublime as I hold the stem of it plastic is fake and glass is real so is the thick of it. The thickness has a pulse, carotid of the left side of the neck clasp it from the bottom, the coolness of the liquid has not evaporated, and the glass on the outside looks if it has sweat. Instead it is wet, and 8 ounces, fluid as I put the glass upon my lips. I want to feel the hypnotic effects of 13.5 percent from a chaotic 8 hours day for work, glean the stem between my fingers to the circle decor on the bottom as I call the glass a fool or a jerk. Who are the fools or jerks you ask as in my hand the glass collapsed and all is on the floor, the glass bits that resemble diamonds that are a girls‘ best friend. The only friend is the liquid in the glass, fluid from sweat, and easy on my lips and drunken to head to hypnotic effects I see diamonds on the floor and my other hand holds my carotid side of neck gingerly glistening in sweat.

- Michelle Smith
Monarch Matriarch

My Queen Mom wears heavens crown
A monarch butterfly gingerly flew by
Cloudy skies break
as her spirit reigns down
It touched a calla lily
Was that your greeting to me
On that March 16th spring glide?
I don't question the Lord of this and him
How wonderful you looked
Brilliant orange, spotted white and black
Moments fleeting,
seconds and not on a whim
Your wings flapped like pages of a book
A butterfly fit for a queen
Not to be caught in a jar, hand, or finger
My heart, mind, and soul
has this memory carved
Spread your bloom
And forever in God's flight
Your beauty will linger.

- Michelle Smith
RIP

I thought that I was finished losing.
I had already collected a shelf full of defeats, and I was finally ready
to make space for new trophies,
for victories.
For the first time
I had a path, and a plan.
For the first time
my shoes felt like they fit, like I could actually stand up
strong-
without falling over,
without tripping over
all of the obstacles that we put in front of me.
I didn’t mean to love you.
If I’m being honest I was just seeking another distraction in the form of your body.
If I’m being honest I never planned to text you back, after slipping out of your bed at 3 am.
Staying for breakfast was never my jam.
I didn’t mean to return,
again and again;
I had zero intentions.

But in my desire to pursue
these new, unchartered pleasures,
I allowed myself to be taken in
(emotionally)
with you.

And although you(r)
presence was sufficient to fill me up, the bits and pieces of me that I offered
in return
weren’t substantive
(Enough)
for you.

I was
(still)
like a child,
dipping my toes
(cautiously)
into the pools
of feeling.
Afraid of love’s cold sting, but willing
to slip in gradually.
I couldn’t float with you, for I wasn’t full yet.
Couldn’t give all, for I wasn’t whole yet.
So you packed your bags and drove away,
no goodbye note.
And I’m left to stay
alone,
drowning in the middle
of this puddle
that I attempted to swim in
for you
(with you).

I’m tired of writing letters and songs for a ghost who won’t appear, who
doesn’t care.
Every line is about who I don’t want to write about anymore.
I’m going to lay you to rest,
put this paper to bed,
honour your memory,
write an elegy instead.

Lover,
May you
Rest in poetry.
You took my breath away
But I need it back.
I’ve been gasping shallowly for days,
But I must reset myself on track.
My dreams haven’t been sweet
Since you left with them.
Pain, my constant relief;
Farewell, my far away friend.

I’m grateful for the smiling moments,
Thankful for the late nights.
You ignited me, fiercely and passionate,
Made beauty of daylight.
I lay you to sleep in my memories,
Preserved and forgotten you’ll be.
One last kiss to the imagery,
Lover, I set us both free.

- Ali Blanco
Ode:

Disconnect/Connect

My Coolplay Legacy phone is turned on in the morning
Before I say a morning prayer
Before I use the bathroom
I need to disconnect
From the warmth of my beds duvet cover
Before there is a river all over
Instead the bell notification seems of importance to me
The devil made me do it
doesn't apply here
Social media's truth is stranger than fiction
Connects me or magnetically
My piece of mind
That fits into that social media puzzle
Instead I question becoming an introvert
And the lack of peace
That the pandemic has created
In a year adaption to Zoom,
Google Classroom or Meet more than once a week
I want to hear, "The Sounds of Silence"
By Simon and Garfunkel
Or travel to "The Road not Taken"
by Robert Frost.

Become shaken not be stirred
Connect the dots
And walk to the other side
And not become complacent.

- Michelle Smith
Reconnect

Reflection to 2019
is a swimming pool,
Dolphin kicks
and the backstroke
I can feel the water
Blue and splashing in my dreams
Smell the chlorine and
the warmth of sunbeam touch
On my skin bronzing me naturally
2021 disconnect me from the decade
And not allow my memories to fade.

- Michelle Smith
Ode to Chris

There is a Sunflower
His brown coffee countenance
of disk florets
is framed with maize petals cheery
and happy go lucky spirit pollinates
where he goes
His laughter contagious and that Colgate smile
blooms in conversation 🌻
His body with roots
of Nigerian-American strength,
sprinkled with Melanesian,
Native American, and
Endo-European soil
firmly planted from the feet
Evident is the stem
green, vibrant leaves of for shaking hands
or arms for the best bear hug
You are unique and wonderfully made
You grow and glow to new heights and horizons
Can be seen for miles and miles
There is a Van Gogh painting by the same name
There is a Sunflower
And my son that is you

- Michelle Smith
Ode:

PANDEMIC GODLETS

GOD of tiny tender things
A Valentine on a Vine
A bird that sings
Of bramble bush and thorn
God of tree limb Weatherworn
You paint the barren
Red with Joy
And leave a Promise
Oh so Coy
PANDEMIC GODLETS
Of tiny tender
Wings

- Anneliese London
Ode to 2020

It felt like you left me with a pile of rocks to kick,
like you left me in the dusty remnants of promises,
and the weight of my ache was too heavy to lift.
How did I go from writing you a love song to writing of a phantom
who disturbs my sleep with memories of wishful thinking?
You uncorked me like an aged bottle of champagne,
    and my love over-poured,
    over flowed;
dormant emotions and words rising tumultuously from the pit of me,
up through my throat.
A raging volcano
of anguish,
molten feelings
    and tears
    and ink
    spewing violently,
threatening to land,
possibly turning everything near
(me)
to ashes.
Forcing me to decide
whether it is safer if I
evacuate my home of rubble,
or find a place to redirect my eruption of lethal lava.
My agony crashed
    in waves
    onto pages.
Blank sheets
became poems and stories
and a dwelling
of escape
to be safe in.
So if not for the pain,
I would not have tumbled down
into the book of my making.
Chapters to sit in,
spend time with reflection.
Left alone in my thoughts,
    (albeit troublesome at first)
    but after a while
        I was able to get to know myself.
And without any calls from club-hops and insobriety,
I was no longer so busy
being busy,
but productive,
instead,
with appreciating me,
and my family.
I found community-
an entire world of writers, creators, and poets,
who welcomed my lyrical down pour
with open arms and hearts.
An online collective
who values the raw outburst,
as well as the introspective.
I’ve stepped into a gift,
a passion
for performing.
And although the stage right now is virtual,
in-person connections will resume,
(eventually)
and when theaters reopen for shows,
I’ll have new soul friends
spanning from
L.A. to N.Y.C to the U.K.
(and many more places globally).
There will be a
book tours,
 fundraisers,
and marches,
because my spirit folk
have been planning,
(un-distractedly)
on the many ways
we’ll remerge,
empowered,

waving flags,
fighting for human rights,
like, “No Justice, No Peace!”

I’m thankful for the hours spent in my corner,
for I’ve been accumulating college credits,
taking classes,
hoping to advance my career a little further.

Our school days begin on a patch of grass in the park,
an outdoor classroom
beneath the trees,
where math facts and stats commingle
with the birds and the bees.
Grateful for the opportunity
to be my children’s professor, of sorts.
They grow too fast, after all,
and so I’ll hold dear the remembrance
of the year
we picnicked grammar worksheets and compassion lessons
at the park swings.
Because when there’s nowhere to be,
it seems that there’s a lot more
attention
available
to
listening,
having open conversations
like, “how are you really feeling?”
So with newfound strength and self-devotion,
    I’ve made
    (we’ve made)
a beautiful, inviting
fire pit
from all the rocks
that I was left
surrounded with,
from the debris
that I was littered with.
And I did kick them,
and haul them too,
but now my kids and I
have perfected
a s’more-roasting technique.
- Ali Blanco
The Star

The Star of Bethlehem
Sparkles for the love of Jesus
And as in Harriet Tubman's North Star
The Magi follow steadfast
For the Epiphany
Encourages us that
Our faith strengthens who believe
And the road traveled
By them empowers all
My CHRISTmas tree has its spirit
And the Rosca de Reyes ring cake
Will celebrate his crown of truth
The Lord Jesus loves you
Read in the chapter of Matthew
Their journey will enlighten
And comfort too
A jewel in the midnight black velvet sky
Is not a diamond in the rough
It is our strength through the Lord Jesus
No matter how our lives path
May become tough
Trust in him
And you will know
The meaning of the Epiphany

- Michelle Smith
A Cog in the Machine

Part 1

I feel like a cog in the machine
A robot with moves of strength, and sustainable steel
Put back
Output
Input
Build again
Oil my machine
Replenish me
Bend back and forth
My steel can only take so much more
Machinery breaks down
Factors break down
Multiples build up
Is my employment a math equation
I am married to my job
I am it's greatest defender
In all the glory and splendor
There's woe and wonder
Will I become like them
Walker, wheelchair, or rollator bound
Assisted shower dependent
Or walk to the patio with independence
I move about at a brisk walk pace and on my feet 95 percent
I hear and see a 101 year old quoting Proverbs 3:5-6
and happily singing lyrics for Amazing Grace how sweet the sound
She is the church and my revival
Good God thank you for this survival
I am married to my job and don't want a divorce
My heart, patience, and drive
Reflects in my work ethic
A deserved paycheck is not all I see
There are residents old as my mom and dad and other ancestors that are dearly departed
I cannot help to have cried at times wishing I could have combed her hair or help to select a suit and tie for dinner
I am married to my job
I work flexible hours
Accommodate one to a health appointment
or to dialysis
Walk one to his daughters' car for St. Patrick's Day dinner
And eventually I will take a 10 break sit-down
I am married to my job
A bit much than I should be
Happily and with integrity
Part 2

I am the cog in the assistive living facility machine
Robotics have nothing on me
Up and down
Side to side
Transfer from the bed to the wheelchair
or raised chair commode
I am a well-oiled machine
And the Tin Man of the Wizard of Oz with a heart
There's 15 to serve
At times they may grate on your nerves
Individual and similar
mind, body, spirit, and verve
We workers are busy and provide lovingly the nitty gritty
taking them to bingo or an exercise activity
Yes WD-40 is not the same as Red, Red, Wine by UB 40
My steel and strength can only take so much
My heart, patience, and drive sustains me
And will there be a well-oiled machine to care for me
in my silver Tsunami years
Or a Tin Man of the Wizard of Oz with a heart?
The future cog in my machine
Encourage me because one day you will be me
And I will be them.
Part 3

Eating my envy
with pizza and coke
Domino's on speed dial
my expanded waistline is not a joke
And is envy too strong of a word that reveals
My hobbies and classes have ceased since I have become a cog in the working wheel
Hectic hours of the AM shift float to the PM since CM's have called off
How much more can I take of this shit, I mean shift no I mean truly shit
As in an ADL assistance and the change of an incontinence brief
Even the seniors call them diapers not depends or always
Damn it's 4:30 in the am and time escapes me stolen from the sandman thief
Drinking my envy from a glass of chilled Cupcake Chardonnay
the 13 percentage dazes me and I hear have another drink in my head
In eight hours I shall only to gallop like a horse to the racetrack with blinders on to the starting gate as I the jockey prepare for the win, place, or show, or am I the thoroughbred
Trot my hooves on the smooth gravel and dirt
Run like my life depends on it
For the win, place, or show.
Part 4

A cog in the working wheel and I'm tired a zombie of repetition
Same thing different day, evening, or night
Will I have it any other way?
Am I expendable
certainly I am beyond dependable
and my CNA license proves that I am capable
Envy from the devourer of cherry cheesecake pairs with a glass of ice
cold milk
I laugh about Rhinestone and I  a.k.a Trump's brown-nosers Diamond
and silk.
And what are they doing these days
They can't hold a candle to me,
their wick would burn out anyway.

- Michelle Smith
Epitaph

I will no longer be controlled.
I have cut ties,
and removed bondages,
the likes of which I was told
were meant to console
me.
I will walk forward upon my own two feat,
casting off the fears of rejections
that were used a means of manipulation
to restrain me.
I will speak,
unapologetically,
and without shame.
I vow to ask for help,
without guilt,
when needed,
from the ones committed
to building healthy bridges.
And if relationships built on love
are supposed to be selfless,
and balanced in nature,
then I am free
to request
the types of affections
that align with my new self-loving communication.
I will no longer attempt
to digest toxic commandments disguised as devotion,
I reject the notion
that I was born to blindly obey.
I will no longer wield a shield of
  unforgiving,
    dispassionate,
      solitude.
Clutching to the que
of emotional intelligence,
I promise
to praise vulnerability,
   complex feelings,
     and honesty
       (outspoken).
Though everybody may not agree with me,
I find comfort in knowing
that I am pruning negative behaviors and habits,
while planting new seeds.
I will continue to fellowship with nature,
establishing roots beneath trees,
meditating with the beauty and ways
that the sky graces day,
and enjoying
each
moment
in
liberty.
I am content with my own company.
And although I’m thankful for friends,
I don’t seek
(meaningless)
distractions
to carry me.
I value the kindred spirits
whose interactions are nourishing to my person,
promoting of dreams and goals.
I will never again allow a humxn
to consume my body but neglect my soul.
I shall be ok with the unknown;
seeing glowing opportunity
awaiting me,
deserving of every joyous prosperity,
refusing
to dwell in despair when my steps are unclear.
I will not return to the safety of constriction
that I walked away from,
but will instead breathe
into
    every
    next
    unsteady
    step
    underneath
    my
    footing.
Resorted to selling my possessions to pay rent,
but I would rather lose my stuff and keep my pride,
knowing I possess gumption enough
to find solutions,
despite difficult situations.
Exhale
    through the apprehension.
Inhale
    as new beginnings
pen and perform themselves,
on every stage,
    yoga mat,        
    and park bench.
Strength and peace
will continue
to be like colorful ink
upon my skin.
I’ve burned my veil,
let down my hair,
and dismantled the alter;
marrying myself,
fists up,
in celebration.
And you’re all invited-
welcome to the revelation.

- Ali Blanco
Shutdown

When the lights turned out,
I squinted in the dark
Desperately searching for forms, lines of light amongst the shadows,
my mind cast net around elbows and armchairs, window panes, stair
way railings, plugging sense into my world.

But my eyes have never been good at seeing form
Not in the dark
Not when restricted.

In 2020, when my limbs were stapled to the cement,
Perched over the uncertain tomorrow
Without episode of familiarity, I took control only of me.
The only certainty of my doing right
To extend my life, past the typical pasture of day to day desires,
Needs, nutrition.
I forced myself to bend forward,
Stand wider, holding arms out sideways,
Double tap my toes,
Run, move, dance, move, double time
Move.
This lifestyle of activity gave me hope during the darkness
Each few days a new gift that I had given myself.

Running, jogging, walking, trimming, bending,
dancing, shaking, and sweating.
It moved my heart to a new rhythm;
A new necessity to breathe into myself,
The time to live full
My own chemistry filling me
Burning me away.
The toxic odors a drift in wind,
Toxic therapy of discontent, removed.
I gravitated to a cultural connection, rooting into the Spanish music,
That thundered into my caved ears,
Each drum a footstep that met the ground with force
A pound each time
Heavy and left behind.
The spring sweat
The summer sweat
The beauty of fulfilment and no regrets…
What I learned, when alone,
Is I needed me
To be determined, exact,
Each way to the mirror, a step to the past,
To the longevity of choice,
A horizon to last.

Jessica M. Wilson
Love Lessons

2021

Scatter joy everywhere
Tend to your family with love and care

Time to participate
To activate and liberate

Time to dream
Ponder and glean

See the best
Leave the rest

The hell with trends
Hug your friends

Do more
Want less

Transmute pain into possibilities
Honor all responsibilities

When you mess up
Bless up

Love more
Fear less

FINALLY set yourself free
Free to just BE

Anneliese London