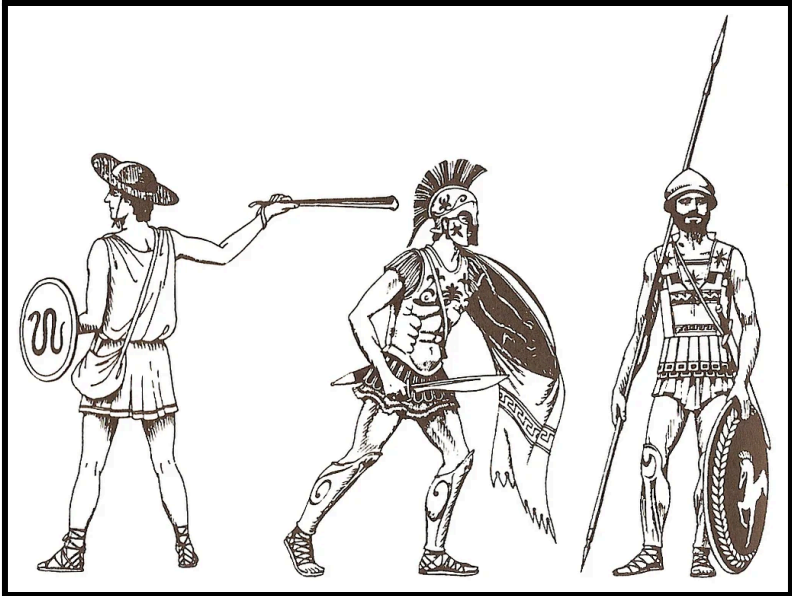


Ready or Not



Poems by Jesse McDaniel

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Part I: Metamorphosis

Insomnia

When we can't sleep -
our thoughts run deep.
The brain is a funny thing.
There is a fine line between
keeping it together and going
insane. Our minds stay active
despite our bodies remaining
still on a misleading mattress.
Our bodies may be tired,
but we can't seem to put
out the fire that burns
out of control. There is
a machine in our soul
that does not shut off.
Gears continue to grind;
the operator who
controls our conscious
does not care if we
endlessly stare at
the ceiling. It's a weird
feeling when we become
drowsy. It feels like we are
drowning. We lose count
of the sheep as they
leap and vanish into
the daunting darkness.
It's like we are climbing
the tallest mountain without
a harness. We start to see

shadows crawl across
the walls to torment us.
It is a different world
when the day transitions
to night. When we stay up,
we begin to question
if we are sane or if we are
living in vain. We lay
awake, wishing we could
drift into a senseless
state. There is no use in
shutting our eyes.
Whether we sleep or not,
the sun will always rise.



Cabin Fever

Insanity inside four walls.
Voices bouncing around me.
Hallucinations and colorful
vibrations. Nightmares manifest.
Pain in my chest. Insanity:
nothing more - nothing less.
Pacing back and forth.
Boxed in and shut out.
I can't open the door
or check out. I just need
to ride it out. Is this what
self-discovery is all about?
No one can help me out.
It's okay, though. It might be
my fault I am stuck. I have
locked the door. On the other
side is a life unexplored.
I must find myself before
anyone else can. I have to
break out of my mind, then
I can leave. I believe I will
get better and beat this
cabin fever. It's not too late
to get out of my head.
This room will not be my tomb.

Guardrails

Sometimes, we lose grip
of the steering wheel.
We may get a flat tire
or run out of gas.
Things will happen that
are out of our control.
Life has a funny way
of humbling us: reminding
us that, regardless of our
preparation, we can't
predict every situation.
Every day, we hope to
arrive at our destination
without leaving a trail
of destruction. We trust
that our car won't break
down on the way. There is
no way to tell when
our engines will fail.
We could be driving in
the worst of weather,
but that shouldn't keep us
from reaching the finish
line. It may take more
time, but driving slowly
is better than staying
home when we know
that we should go.
We may swerve and drive
outside the lines.
Remember: accidents happen.
Before we think about

crashing, we must remember
that there are guardrails:
barriers keeping us safe
from causing more damage.
Guardrails won't always
be there, but when they are,
We should feel a sense
of peace when driving a car.



Change Lanes

I've stayed in my lane
far too long. Now is the time
that I cross the line.



Part II: Lost and Found

An Unstoppable Force

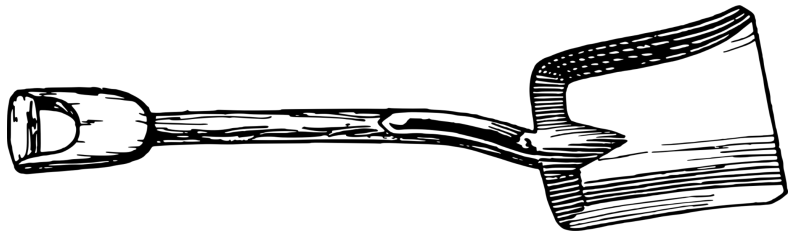
Don't believe everything
you're told. Trust yourself.
Ignore the propaganda.
Stand up for what's right.
It can feel wrong, but know
you are dancing to your own
song. The confidence you
build will combat the guilt.
Do as you wish in this life.
Let's face it, your patience
will prevail. You are battle-
tested; each scar you get
will be another story
to tell. Don't be surprised
when orange skies turn blue
or if the quiche you spent
hours baking isn't sweet.
Let it be and breathe;
searching for answers
is not worth the madness.
When the world keeps
spinning, and you lose
your balance, understand
that you are not the only
flibbertigibbet. Dizziness
and Confusion is an illusion.
Disjointed thoughts causing
jumbled words can still be
eloquently said. It only
takes a few blinks for day

to become night. Don't lose
sight of what is important.
Family, love, and kindness
can make moments timeless.
Give grace and keep
the faith. There's no energy
to waste. Make no mistake,
There is a warrior inside
all of us. It's up to us
to shake off the rust.
You're an unstoppable
force running the course
designed just for you.
Life can be unfair,
and you may be the only
one who cares, but you
have the power to push
through the hard times.
Your resilience is a source
of inspiration. Your bravery
to face all of your fears
is never stifling. In the end,
We will be remembered
by the love we shared
and the words we said.
All that matters is how we
cast away the darkness
with the light that we shed.

Digging Deep

Don't forget your shovel.
Who knows? Maybe you can
hit a new level. If you
dig deep enough, you may
reach the devil. He might
show you a hell that
makes heaven seem that much
better. How deep are you
willing to dig? Scratch and claw
until you find what's been buried.
No one can stop you from finding
the truth. Beneath the surface lies
a world uncharted: unseen.
Go to where you've never been
before. Find the key and walk
through that locked door.
I know you feel safe on this
floor, but there is another
story underneath your feet:
a story that hasn't been told.
Don't accept defeat. It's hard
to understand that you have
the tools to find meaning
when you forget about
the ceiling. All that you
have known has been built
from the ground up - built
by others long before your
time. Look under the covers:
dive headfirst into the dark abyss.
The further you go, the more you
will know. Don't stop digging

and you will uncover mysteries
unsolved - buildings crumbled -
civilizations dissolved. Take that
leap of faith. Now's not the time
to feel safe. Free fall from the tip
of the iceberg. Who knows what
you will learn? Close your eyes
and jump because the drop
can be more meaningful than
standing at the top. We will both
survive when we hit rock bottom.
We will look up and see a different
sky with the same pair of eyes.



Footprints

There are many miles
between us. The distance
never made a difference.
I can follow your footprints
that will lead me to you.
I know that you will be
waiting. What took minutes
to walk to you now takes
days - those days turned into
weeks - those weeks turned
into months - those months
turned into years. I tend to
lose track of the time I can't
get back. I have followed
the same path many times.
I will never forget where we
started and the day you
departed. Still, I don't know
when I became point A,
and you point B. No matter
how long it takes, I will keep
walking until we are together
again. I step into each footprint
you left behind. Yours became
mine. I reached my destination:
what I suspect to be the end
of your path. As I take another
step, I look at the ground
and see your footprints fade.
Where did you go now?
I think I know. It's a place
I can't go. One day, I will join

you there when my time
is up, but until then, I'll leave
my own footsteps behind:
footprints that will lead
others to me. The day I take
my last step will be the day
that I take my last breath.



Trials of a Trivial Traveler

I feel so alive in the dead
of the night. I've learned
how to navigate the darkness.
The moon and the stars
glow when my anxiety grows.
I feel a wave of happiness
rise and fall. As I walk
through this worn-down
town, I hear a faint scitter
in the distance letting me
know that I'm not alone.
Whatever is making those
sounds can help me find
my way home. I am starting
to feel tired on this long walk.
I can't help but think that
there is a rivener wedging
itself between my reality
and dream. I must be a solivagant
desperado who can't escape
his sorrow. I need to discover
something apotropaic before
night turns to day. I need a sign
that it'll be fine. In the beginning,
I was full of hope and strength.
I realized the best ships can still
sink. Despite the harshness
of the night, I've never quit.
I won't stop walking until
I reach my destination. I'll
see the sun rise. Darkness
will turn to light. There's no

doubt that I'll prevail. I refuse
to become another tall tale.



Missing Posters

You are gone.
Where did you go?
I think I know.
I feel empty
some days, yet I am
still full of hope.
I've been missing
you. I run into signs
you have left behind.
I walk around with
a hole in my heart.
Still, I feel at peace
believing that you
are in a better place.
When I look to the sky,
I see your face. Now,
I can rip down these
missing posters that
I hung up many years
ago - the day you went
away. I knew you couldn't
stay. I can call off the search
because I know where
I can find you: in dreams,
my children's laughter,
the smell of fresh flowers:
when I look in the mirror.
You are missed, but you
are not missing. Today is
the day I can stop guessing.

Riddle Me This

What wears a mask
during the day
but doesn't at night?
What walks past mirrors
and runs away when
its shadow appears?
What walks tall
but feels small?
What has the answers
to questions
yet to be asked?
What shines bright
but hides in the dark?
What can't paint
but appreciates art?
What feels hurt
but is numb
to the pain?
What wants to be
loved but doesn't
know how?
What is searching
for meaning
but lost their way?

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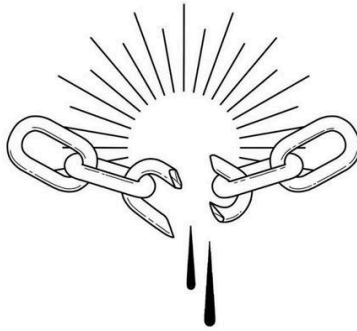
If you guessed "you",
you guessed right.
I know you are not
a "what". You are
someone who
lives without fear.
You solved the riddle.

You are not just
another "thing".
Despite what you may
think, you are someone's
everything. From point
A to point, you walk
the line that divides
space and time.
You could be in love
or in pain. You are
all of the above.
You are sunshine
and the rain. You are
everything in between.
You are strong enough
to uplift others while
carrying the weight
of the world. You are
yourself, and that
is just fine. If you
don't love yourself
now, you will
in due time.

Part III: Freedom

Broken Chains

I have been set free.
I am no longer bound to
the chains inside me.



Born to Fly

Stuck inside a mind
where the key to the cage
is hard to find. I stare
at the torn wallpaper
that continues to peel.
As time goes on, memories
begin to fade into this life
I create. I hold onto the bars
as tight as I can. My knuckles
turn white, and I often lose
my grip on this reality.
I lose sight of what's important
when I become dormant.
I can't wait around
any longer. I have to move
on, change the song, and live
this life that's slowly slips
into oblivion. I must remember
to never forget to appreciate
the things and people who
are still here. Nothing is forever;
everything can change faster
than the weather. Bless the rain.
Release the pain. Feel the sun.
Praise the moon before night
is done. The last chapter is
over, but the next will still
begin. Learn from the losses:
celebrate the wins. This life
is short. Our time is borrowed.
What a miracle it will be to see
tomorrow. I refuse to sit

with this sorrow. I will not
let fear cripple me. I will
break free from these chains
keeping me captive. I will live
a life worth living before
the opportunity is gone.
There is no need to be afraid
because all will be well. Trust
me, everything will be okay.



Survivor

These scars don't define
me. I've never stopped walking
on life's burning coals.



Better Days

Better days are on the way.
The sun will show its face.
in the morning. It will do
so without warning.
Today's rain runs down
a cracked window pane.
Bad thoughts pollute
a worried brain.
Tonight's silence joins
an alliance with invasive
memories. Guilt creeps
in, demons come out,
and worry washes over
me. My mind tells me
things I refuse to believe.
These voices in my head
will not leave, but it's okay
because there are better
days around the corner.
Cold nights take some time
to get warmer. Without
nightmares, sweet dreams
wouldn't be as good. When
my eyes close, and I drift
away, I will walk across
the bridge from reality to
a distant land. I will awake
and take a deep breath.
The sun will be shining;
the birds will be singing.
I left the bad times behind,
as a better day is beginning.

Part IV: Revelations

The Gathering

The table is set.
Once a year, stress fades,
food and memories are made.



Hold my Hand

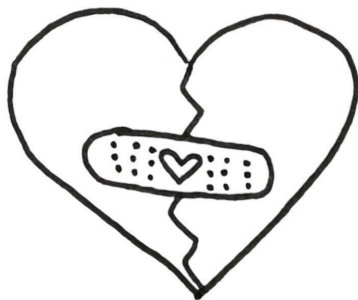
Hold my hand;
tell me
your story.
Look into
my eyes.
Show me
the pain
you've hidden
from the world.
Break down
the walls
keeping others
out. Let it go.
Let the tears
fall. Let all
those years
of worry fade
into nothing.
Reveal how
you feel.
Hold my hand;
let me
learn about
the days
you had
to carry
the world.
Let me gain
your trust.
Let me know
your struggle.
Let me on

your level.
Please don't
save me
the trouble.
Let me inside
your mind.
Let me have
some of you.
I hope you
don't mind.
Take your time.
Let me be
there for you.
Hold my hand,
and I'll give
you the world.
Let me hold
your hand,
and I won't
let go. If you
want me to,
let me know.

Love is the Answer

Love is the answer
to every question.
No need to mention
how it heals the hate
that resonates with
so many. Broken hearts
are a result of unwarranted
damage not managed.
There is beauty all around
us, but we must recognize
it. All things that pass us by
will surely be missed:
time, loved ones - every
hug and kiss. We must
accept the love given
to us, but we need to learn
to love ourselves. Love is
the currency we need to
build spiritual wealth.
Like a boomerang,
the love given comes back
to us in this fragile thing
called life. The thoughts
that come to us each
night carries over to
the following day.
Love is the answer
to every question:
How will I go on?
How can I feel fulfilled?
What can I do to heal?
When I fall down, what

will lift me up? We know the answer. Coming to that conclusion is easy. If you need help solving the puzzle and you start to struggle, ask for help. Love will be waiting for you. If it doesn't, I will be waiting too.



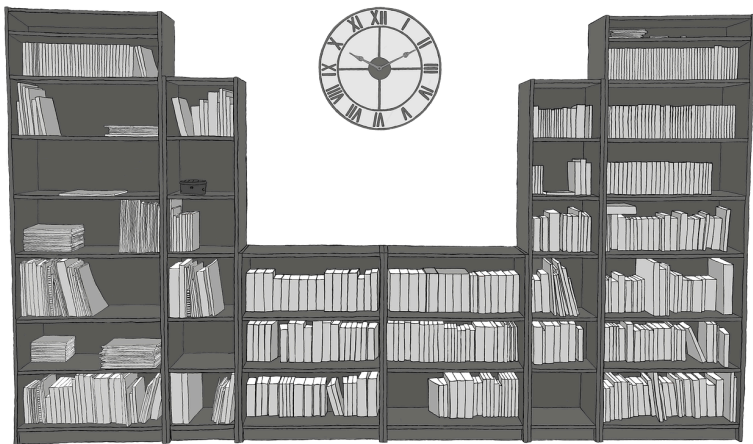
A Limitless Love

It is special to share
a love so strong. Falling
for you took only
one song. As time goes on,
it is clear to see that we
are meant to be. To be
with you is an honor.
There is nothing that
we can't conquer.
As days pass by, we don't
even need to try, as it was meant
to be. The stars aligned. Right place.
Right time. I will never get tired
of your radiant smile. The way
you look into my eyes
shows me that true love
will never die. I am so happy
to see our love grow.
From the places we've been
to the places we'll go,
this fairy tale will have no end.

The Book of Life

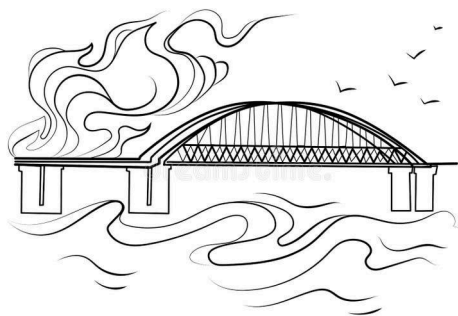
Some days, I put down
the pen and walk to
the library where people,
past and present, have
etched their life's story into
the history books - recounting
moments unique to them.
Each chapter captures
memories: different points
in time. Some chapters mention
important characters who
were once important to
the storyline but are never
mentioned again. Some chapters
may not make sense to the reader.
Some chapters can be filled
with struggle and strife,
as others contain instances
of bliss and light. I can turn
to the next page and notice
a shift in tone. The mood can
shift like the day turns to
night. Settings change. People
evolve. Conflicts arise. Tension
builds. The plot thickens.
A chapter can take a day
to write or it can take years;
it all depends on the writer's
journey. Sadly, some people
aren't able to finish their story
before the ink runs dry,
but what was once written

leaves a mark that can't be erased. I can take any given book off a shelf and know the pages between the front and back cover contain someone's story meant to be told. Every written word came from one's heart and soul. I put back each book in its designated spot for someone else to read. I took a break from writing to learn from someone else's story. Tonight, I set down my pen, but I'll pick it up again and start writing a new chapter tomorrow morning.

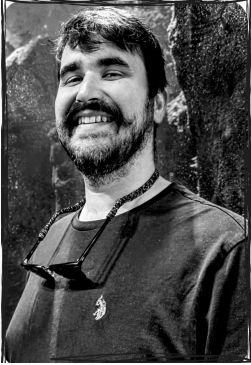


BURNT BRIDGES

You can't cross a burnt bridge.
Friendships turn into Sunken ships.
Love turns to hate. The time
it took to cross the bridge
went to waste. Your fiery words
struck a cord that has been
cut. I was never enough.
Now, there is a lifeless body
of water separating you and I.
My eyes fixate on the pouring rain
as the sky cries. Burnt bridges
can be rebuilt. It just takes time.
We must leave our matches behind.



About the Author

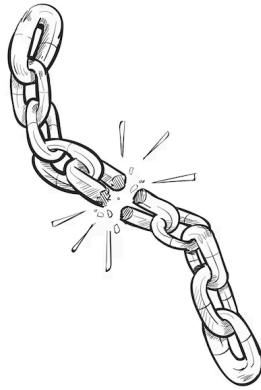


Since 2018, Jesse McDaniel has maintained a relentless pace of literary production, curating an expansive library centered on the themes of human resilience and journeys of self-discovery. Having written over 750 poems, this represents a sophisticated body of work dedicated to documenting the subtle metamorphosis of the human condition, with visitors from 115 countries worldwide engaging his online archive of creative stories and poetry.



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*"The pages between the front and
back cover contain someone's
story meant to be told."*



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