Fading Blue Book of Poetry

and Short Stories

Volume V



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DEDICATION

To those who love words. The sound of them, the weight of them, the way they move through a room like music. And to those who show up to find them, even when the words won't come.

**"A poem begins as a lump
in the throat."**
-- Robert Frost --

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Foreword

I need to tell you something
before you turn another page.
Poetry scared me.
Not in the way a dark hallway
scares you, where you know
there's a light switch somewhere
if you're brave enough to reach
for it. This was different. Poetry
felt like a locked room with no
door. Something happening on
the other side that I could hear
but never enter. I'd read a poem
and feel the weight of it without
understanding where the weight
came from. It was like everyone
else had been handed a key I
never got.
And the worst part? It knew.
Poetry knew I was afraid of it. It
sat there, patient and unbothered,
like it was daring me. *Go ahead.*
Try. You won't get it.
So I did the only thing I know how
to do when something tells me I
can't.

I showed up.
Not once. Not when I felt inspired. Not on the days the words came easy, because those days were rare, and in the beginning, they were almost nonexistent. I showed up every single day. I wrote badly. I wrote things that embarrassed me. I wrote lines that felt like someone else's failed homework. And then I woke up the next morning and did it again. Because here's what I learned, and it's the truest thing I know: the things that scare you the most don't own you. They can't. They only have power when you stand at a distance and let them look bigger than they are. The moment you walk toward them, not running, not charging, just *walking, consistently, daily,* they start to shrink. Not because they get smaller, but because you get closer. And up close, the thing that terrified you starts to look a lot like something you can hold.
Poetry didn't become easy. I want to be honest about that. It became *mine*. There's a difference. Easy means you don't have to work. Mine means the

work stopped feeling like punishment and started feeling like practice. Like prayer. Like breath.

This is the fifth volume of *Fading Blue.* Five volumes. If you'd told the version of me who couldn't understand a single poem that she'd one day write five books of them, she would not have believed you. But she would have shown up the next day anyway. That's who she was. That's who I still am.

So if you're holding this book and something in you says *I don't get poetry* — good. Stay. That's exactly where I started.

Show up tomorrow. And the day after that.

That's how you win.

"The poem is a capsule where we wrap up our punishable secrets."

--William Carlos Williams--

HOTTO SURU & KǑUFÚ
ほっとする & 口福

In English, we don't have a single word for what happens when you wrap your hands around a warm cup and take that first sip. The way your shoulders drop, the way something clenched in your chest quietly lets go, and all the tension melts away. We say comfort. We say relief. We say warmth. But none of those words quite capture the feeling.

The Japanese come closer. Hotto suru (ほっとする) is the involuntary exhale, the release of tension you didn't know your body was holding. It lives in the muscles before your mind has a chance

to catch it. That moment when warmth arrives and the body simply relaxes.

The Chinese have another piece of it. Kǒufú (口福), literally "mouth blessing," is the quiet happiness of tasting something nourishing. Not indulgence, but the small fortune of receiving something good through the senses.

Together, these two words describe a complete experience: something warm enters, and something tight lets go.

A good poem should do the same thing.

It shouldn't need to explain itself. It shouldn't lecture or perform. It should arrive the way that first sip arrives, warm enough that the reader's soul responds before the mind has time to argue about it. The poem enters. Something releases. And for a moment, the reader is held.

But the best poems don't stop there. They stay. The way a good story sticks

to your ribs, a good poem sticks in your mind and in your spirit. You carry it with you into the next room, into the next day. You find yourself going back to it, not because you missed something, but because it became part of you. It settled in and made itself at home. Long after the cup is empty, the warmth is still there.

Summer Mood

The morning arrives slowly, stretching itself across the kitchen floor in long rectangles of golden light. Coffee steams from a favorite mug, and for once, there is no rush to drink it. Outside, a sprinkler ticks back and forth, keeping time with something no one set. Children call to each other from down the street, their voices rising and falling like birdsong that forgot to end. Dinner happens when it happens. Conversations linger because no one is watching the clock. Summer does not demand. It opens its arms, asks nothing, and waits. You sit down, you stay, and you breathe.

#100wordstory

hot chocolate

warming my cold aching hands

snowflakes drift past

the same sun
kept arriving

I had seen it before
not just yesterday
not just last year
every day ---

you recognize something
you were never introduced to

clouds

slowly unraveling

across the sky

#hay-na-ku

the wind
practicing its circles

over and over
until the air forgets
which direction was first

early morning

the pond quiet and motionless

my soul breathes

oceans

constantly whispering

to the shore

#hay(na)ku

candlelight flickers

through frosted windowpanes

cozy winter night

I watched the wind

not the air itself
but the things it knew –

leaves
branches
flags

powerful
without ever being seen –

Midnight

Barely breathing

Between two days

The Riff

There once was a man in a band

His music all sounded quite bland

His fingers were stiff

He learned a new riff

Now his music all sounds quite grand

#Limerick

Glowing eyes in the dark. She stalks her prey. Never will anyone see her coming, not when she moves like water, smooth. Her pupils dilate until her irises are no more. She readies her body into its pouncing position. Claws find their mark, drawing blood from their unsuspecting subject. Biting, clawing, and scratching until she is satisfied. Two hands pick her up and cradle her, scratching behind her ears, coercing a happy purr from the feline. Her aggressive attack rewarded with wonderful pets and scratches from her prey. She must move on to her next victim. She wants more rewards.

Jules Grant --

#100wordstory

hinaku

small poem

holding its breath

alone in the yard

amongst the decaying flowers

and broken path

sat a pristine –

red wheelbarrow

#nod to William Carlos Williams
--Red Wheelbarrow

Sunset on the Pier

the sky is brushed with violet streaks,
as fire sinks beneath the swell.
the sunset wind cools my cheeks,
and blows against the shore's shells.

the shadows lengthen on the wood,
sea birds claim their evening rest.
if time could freeze here for good,
while light and day fade to the west.

Coats

the chair
by the hall

holds
winter

where a body
never settles

Amber Light Through Blinds

the morning comes in strips,

laying itself across the floor

like something it has been meaning to

say.

the dust moves through it

unhurried, without destination.

this is enough.

P. Finch

William Carlos Williams

had no qualms

about eating your plums from the icebox,

so cold—

then writing a note that was pure gold.

#nod to William Carlos Williams

#clerihew

Beware the Bandersnatch, they say—
frumious and fast,
with claws that snatch the breath away
and jaws that hold you fast.

It moves through tulgey woods at night,
half smoke, half snarl, half dream.
Yes, that's three halves, but nothing's right
in places where things gleam

with wrongness. If you hear it hiss
behind a tumtum tree,
don't run. Don't hide. Don't reminisce.
Just cease, politely, to be.

Words
Whispers
Thoughts –

the day won't quiet

the light bleeds out in layers,

each color covering what it cannot keep.

the sky works past the surface,

scraping back blue to reach the fire beneath.

every masterpiece begins this way —

something opened,

something exposed —

words —
in and out of my head,
some,
will never be said.
I
will pick and choose,
I
will light the fuse.

I kept a ticket
to hold a memory –

the screen fades to black
the ink disappears

until the paper forgets
what it carried

but I
never do

Ocean water ebb and flow on the sand. Waves crashing upon waves in the distance lull the mind. I lay on the shore, allowing the sun to soak into my skin. It's hard for fear to reside in the same space as peace here at the beach. It calls to my soul. The scent of coconut and vanilla fills the air as others spray their sunscreen. Some vacation here, while I made it my home. Sea air fills my lungs. Filling me with happiness that this is my life. Life is what you make it, and mine is the beach.

Jules Grant

#100 word story

not loud
no drama
a quiet removal –

your name
your shadow
your voice

no traction
no reaction

redaction

relief

breathe

One poppy, then two –

The earth keeps its promises

Without being asked

Darkness covers us

autumn rain begins to fall

distant thunder rolls

the sun slowly wakes

crisp leaves line the empty trail

wind blows through the trees

soft morning jazz
the radio finds a key

I set out the colors,
cadmium, prussian, ember
the canvas says nothing –

I've learned not to rush
time takes perfection,
or perfection takes time –

I never remember
the work tells me

P. Finch

Agatha Christie
was endlessly twisty.
Her plots had more red herrings than a fish
market in May—
and Poirot, of course, had his say.

#clerihew poetry

Bitter old man
No leg to stand
Time passes you by

Jules Grant

the sky hangs low
fog threads through the trees

the birds sound tired
dragging their notes across an
Unopened day

the light refuses to shine
the mundaneness holds my mind

amber blends to tangerine

tangerine into plum

the whole mess of it

dips below the hills

as slow as honey

off a spoon

Early morning sunlight filters in through the breaks in the blinds, landing softly on the blanket that covers me. My body feels like lead, refusing to move, refusing to come alive. A weight sits on my chest, heavy and warm. Darkness behind my eyelids with every blink beckons me back to sleep, back to the peace. A ray of golden sun shifts over my eyelids, forcefully pulling me back into this world. My brain tells me it's time to awaken, but my heart tells me to stay in bed. To stay where nothing can hurt me. All in good time.

Jules Grant

#100 word story

morning coffee –

the steam disappears

before the fog

old whiteboard

faded words

refuse to leave

quiet room

the clock speaks

to us all

open window

the curtain knows

the wind

on the wall
the flycatcher waits

day after day
he returns –

I'll name you
Hunter

Hello Old Friend

rain on the glass

I watch it choose

its downward path

Beautiful big eyes
Smirk full of lies
Cheshire
Jules Grant

night train

distant whistle

in the cool air

it has no name

only a shape
that shifts

like a dream
I almost understand

you should have spoke up
it was only right
that you said something
at that hideous sight –

spinach in my teeth

the storm did not ask

it came anyway—
rain and wind
shaking the windows
like it wanted in

morning arrived
with mud on its shoes

the trees were bent,
but not broken

the flowers wore bruises
and still carried on

I stood there
damp and tired,
learning
that surviving
is the storm

the beach

where soft waves play

the waves keep time

the breeze takes part

calm and deep

the beach sings me to sleep –

P. Finch

glass painted white

silence wraps the world

stillness holds each breath

peace settles softly down

Frost

down softly settles peace

breath each holds stillness

world the wraps silence

white painted glass

#palindrome

things find their way through the cracks
I stand and listen

by noon, what held fast
by dark, full voice

evening walk
the same road curves
never quite the same

splitting oak
rings of patient years
fall open

gravel underfoot
stars appear
one by one

I've walked this path
a thousand times
every season

it always ends
where it begins

but it's never
the same twice

winter morning

the kettle's steam

fogs the window

outside—

one crow

on bare branches

after the storm

small stones

rearranged

the creek

knows a new path

now

November dusk

the woods swallow light

before five

something ancient

waits between

the trees

frost writes runes
on morning glass—
messages from winter

the ancient language
only cold
remembers

the fence post leans
a little more
each spring

what we build
the earth slowly
reclaims

By the fireplace
Embers gleam

Like fading stars
Within a dream

P. Finch

Flowers bow
As breezes play

Colors chase
The clouds away

Petals hum
Each shadow yields

Life dances
Through the fields

P. Finch

July heat—

the garden gives

and takes

what grows

also withers

in the same sun

THE CHALLENGE

This is the fifth time I have published a volume including my students' poetry.

The challenge itself has not changed. My students write one poem every day for twenty or thirty days. Not when inspiration arrives. Not when the mood strikes. Every day. They mark their progress on a simple calendar, and by the end, they have thirty poems and a much clearer sense of what daily practice can do.

By now, I know the challenge works. However, in the beginning, I was not entirely sure my students would go for it.

What convinced me to try was a story about a ceramics teacher who divided his class into two groups. One group would be graded on quantity, the other on

quality. The quantity group earned their grade by the weight of the pots they produced. The quality group needed to create only one perfect pot. When grading day arrived, the best pots had come from the students who had focused on quantity. While they had been working, failing, adjusting, and learning, the others had spent their time thinking about perfection and had far less to show for it.

I also thought about how athletes train. No basketball player saves all their practice for one long session the day before the game. No runner waits until they feel inspired to go for a run. They practice every day, whether they feel like it or not, because that is how skills develop. That is how the body learns. That is how the mind learns. That is how improvement happens. Writing is no different.

The first year, I started with haiku because its small size made it approachable. But over time, the challenge has opened up to include different forms: senryu, free verse, clerihews, couplets, whatever shape the poem wants to take. The goal has never been perfection in a single form.

The goal is showing up to the page every day.

What I have learned across five volumes is this: the challenge works not because every poem is strong at first, but because daily practice changes the way students pay attention. Somewhere around day ten or twelve, something shifts. They stop worrying so much about form and start noticing images. They stop trying to sound like poets and begin writing what they actually see, feel, hear, and remember.

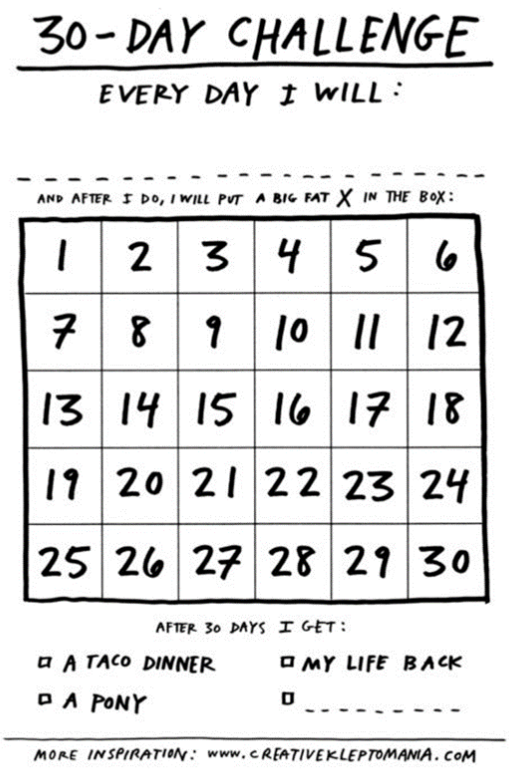
Every group of students is different. Some years, the writing comes quickly. Other years, it takes time and patience. There have been years when I chose not to publish a volume because the work was not ready. I have never wanted to force the process.

But this group showed up.

They wrote through the uninspired days, the uncertain days, and the days when the words would not come. They kept going. Some of these young writers have taken part in this challenge before, and you can see their

growth. Others are new to it, discovering for the first time what can happen when they return to the page again and again.

The pages that follow hold what they created: imagination, humor, insight, and glimpses of who they are. Together, they are the reason this challenge continues.


30-DAY CHALLENGE
EVERY DAY I WILL:
AND AFTER I DO, I WILL PUT A BIG FAT X IN THE BOX:
1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16 17 18
19 20 21 22 23 24
25 26 27 28 29 30
AFTER 30 DAYS I GET:
A TACO DINNER
MY LIFE BACK
A PONY
MORE INSPIRATION: www.CREATIVEKLEPTOMANIA.COM

"You don't have to suffer to write poetry.
A poem needs understanding."
-- Matsuo Bashō --

ELA

CLASS

POETRY

a tree by the pond

light cold wind gently blows north

a leaf drifts down softly

Cole M. – age 15

even old trees sway

dancing to their wooden songs

age fails to still them

Jasmine V. age 14

shells hide in the sand

carved and smooth from the ocean waves

treasures from the sea

Vincent C. – age 13

summer

warm, sunny

run, play, shine

sun, grass, peace, snow

ski, walk, think

cold, desolate

winter

Yukon C. age 12

a sad little tree

stands over there all alone

the weeping willow

Mercy B. age 14

fox

quite sly

silly little laugh

Genesis C. age 13

the leaves fall down slow

and they change colors as they go

fall I favor it

MacCallum K. age 13

a single leaf falls

the tree lets go gently

autumn says goodbye

Noree R. age 14

bunny in the grass

chews on a crunch carrot

hops over a log

Bailey S. age 14

the big, blue ocean

cold and sparkly waters

full of sea creatures

Claire A. age 13

dark clouds hide the skies

the air feels cool and heavy

silent streets, gray faces

Sarah R. age 16

the tree is swaying

in the bright blue shining light

just as God made it

Shiloh N. age 15

snow falls so lightly

over this grey little town

though there is no sound

Cole M. age 15

spring

is coming

life starts new

Gabby Y. – age 15

Lover of my Soul

No greater Comforter I'll ever know.
Even if my wayward tongue and all I do
May fail to resemble my love for you.
When my heart's heavy, and my head hangs low,
Your Word reminds me to let go and grow;
Your love pursues and finds me through and through.
By the blood of Christ, I am made anew,
From where I've been to where I'm meant to go.

You light the way to my eternal home;
You wash me clean from every trace of sin.
Never let me go; I yield all control.
From all the weary roads I used to roam.
Now Your vessel, so come and dwell within,
Oh, Lover of my soul.

Based on Comforter By 7 Hills Worship & Hannah Cheshire

Abigail S. age 17

the ocean waves crash

leaving small popping bubbles

pulling back the sand

Jason H. age 14

key

is lost

door stays locked

Sarah R. age 16

life

goes by

like a snap

Jack H. age 15

peacock

so elegant

and graceful too

Genesis C. age 13

the cherry blossom

the pink petals sprout each year

what a pleasing sight

Mercy B. age 14

trees

so lovely

leaves all green

Yukon C. age 12

a heart made of stone
a hideous countenance
goodbye, Frankenstein

Brooklynn M. age 17

Inseparable Memories

Blooming flowers of the new, and pictures of the past, so bright like you.

Your beauty, so unsurpassed then gone without a word, out of my view.

I ask myself in all this quiet, aching blue: what do I do?

These burning tears keep falling down, they only come along with pain for you

Don't leave me with your drifting heart and that soft, distant smile.

I reach for you in empty air, though you've been gone a while

I can't erase how far we walked in all those countless miles

I keep on looking forward, hoping fate will make it all worthwhile

The sparkles in your eyes, they never fade or ever quite subside

I can't go back through time, but your smile still reside

I see how little I have reached you, and your guarded heart inside.

Nathan C. age 17

oh how the leaves fall

spinning twirling cascading

they crunch underfoot

Joel H. age 17

the autumn leaves fall

making the ground look colorful

a pretty season

Shiloh N. age 15

Goodnight
lights begin to fade
it whispers of days well spent
sleep takes us gently

Jasmine V. age 14

green leaves on the trees

bright green shining in sunlight

they move in the wind

Bailey S. age 14

rain

looks beautiful

but can't play

Jack H. age 15

clocks tick

half time

life goes by

Gabby Y. age 15

the moon whispers

soft, silver dreams on quiet

streets Night learns how

to listen

Noree R. age 14

owl on a branch sits
big eyes watching the night move
quiet wings take flight

Vincent C. age 13

wind blows, whistling
trees swaying and leaves falling
making windows shake

Claire A. age 13

William Shakespeare wrote many plays

He created them all his days

Thousands of words he made

Over time they never fade

MacCallum K. age 13

Mrs. Finch
helps with English in a pinch
she is certainly not mean
her favorite color is olive green

Yukon C. age 12

(I love this one)

in the morning light

you sleep despite my meow

I stand on your face

Joel H. age 17

the autumn leaves fall

painting the brown ground orange

with sun shining down

Jason H. – Age 14

“God is the perfect poet”

- Robert Browning

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank God, the Master Poet and Writer, whose creation is the original poem — every sunrise, every season, every breath gives us something to admire and write about.

To Jules Grant, my daughter, my Associate Editor, and my favorite person to create alongside. Your poems, your stories, your eye, and your honesty make everything I do better. CopperMoon doesn't exist without you.

To Pete Finch, whose steady presence shows up in everything he touches. Your poems in this collection carry a stillness, and your eye for art gives our work a visual language it wouldn't have otherwise.

To my students — you showed up. You wrote, and you put up with my crazy ideas. This book exists because you trusted the process and trusted me with your words. I am proud of every single one of you.

And to my readers — those of you who have been here since Volume I and those of you holding a Fading Blue book for the first time. Five volumes. I never imagined this when I started. Thank you for making space for poetry in your life. Thank you for sticking with Fading Blue.

Spotify Playlist

Fading Blue – Vol V

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3h0gEUAg8KHeaQFSdcWt7N?si=43bOIxAqR82W7HCaRGvxsQ



ALSO BY A.K. FINCH

Poetry

Fading Blue
Fading Blue – Volume II
Fading Blue – Volume III
Fading Blue – Volume IV

Short Fiction

Westward Whispers
with Jules Grant

Fantasy

The Last Ember

COMING SOON FROM A.K. FINCH

The Canyon
A new mystery/thriller from A.k. Finch.

Yucaipa County
An anthology of mysterious short stories by A.k. Finch, Jules Grant, and P. Finch, with each story rooted in Yucaipa.

The Last Ember
Second Edition

The Last Ember, Book 2: The Dragon's Alliance

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A.k. Finch is a poet, fiction writer, and teacher whose work moves between lyrical reflection, storytelling, and the quiet details that often go unnoticed. She is the author of the *Fading Blue* series, a growing collection of poetry and short prose that explores memory, nature, longing, faith, and the small moments that leave a lasting mark.

Her writing is drawn to atmosphere, emotional truth, and the tension between fragility and endurance. In addition to poetry, she also writes fiction, including fantasy

and mystery, and is the co-author of *Westward Whispers* with Jules Grant.

As both a writer and an educator, A.k. Finch believes deeply in showing up to the page, in the power of daily practice, and in helping young writers find their own voices. That belief is woven throughout *Fading Blue* Volume V, which continues her long-running love of poetry while also celebrating the work of her students.

You can find her online at:

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