

WATCHING for the
MOON ABOVE



POEMS

Arlo Pate &
Kevin L. Tarver

Watching for the Moon Above

✱ Poets Across Lines ✱

Arlo Pate

&

Kevin L. Tarver

Program Mentor ✧ Erika Wade

Program Advisor ✧ Salaam Green

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Foundation. The Poetry Foundation recognizes the power of words to transform lives and
works to amplify poetry and celebrate poets by fostering spaces for all to create,
experience, and share poetry.*

Note from PEN America

Poets Across Lines, a pilot program, launched by PEN America with support from the Poetry Foundation connects emerging poets in Birmingham, AL and Tucson, AZ with established community poets, guest speakers, and most importantly each other. The program's aim is to amplify the voices of poets whose viewpoints are under-represented within contemporary publishing and lack access to the industry. During the program, the emerging poets were asked to create poems around the themes of housing, immigration, and LGBTQIA+ identity—themes that were surfaced by community members in Birmingham and Tucson as essential discussions within their cities. *Watching for the Moon Above* takes its title from a line from June Jordan's poem "Poem to Take Back the Night." Shared in class with the poets, the line came to embody the mission of Poets Across Lines—uplifting one's unique poetic expression, giving voice to community, and celebrating the power of poetry to connect people.

PEN America would like to thank our Birmingham Program Advisor, Salaam Green and our Birmingham mentor and instructor to the poets, Erika Wade. Our gratitude and thanks to the two emerging poets, Arlo Pate and Kevin L. Tarver, for their dedication, thoughtfulness, and gracing us with their art. Audre Lorde wrote, "Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action." We hope you are as inspired and moved by the vital and necessary poetry of Arlo Pate and Kevin L. Tarver as we are.

Note from Salaam Green, Program Advisor

Poetry Brings Hope to Life

Poetry is how we hope
Poetry is how we calm the stories of dread
Poetry is how we tell the tales and wish the fables free
Poetry is the script that distracts the mind from the difficult
Poetry is the in the voice of the forgotten
Poetry is the liberation of a nation
Poetry is the unity that crosses every divide
Poetry is the sharing of humanity and belonging.

Poetry in Community,
How art and artists draw justice into the world.
How art and artists mend and heal and give back to one another.
How art and artists help us find our way back to ourselves.
How art is medicine and artists will continue to care and confront.
I am celebrating the collaboration with Poets Across Lines as each poet from Birmingham and Tucson reminds us how necessary poetry is and how the expression of spoken word sets us all free. As the first Poet Laureate of the City of Birmingham, having PEN America bring this accessible program to poets and listeners has sparked growth for the poets whose words are written with power and truth, and provided a sweet balm. This program gives voice to the people and for the people. Poetry for the People is how we can bring hope to life. I am so proud Birmingham was chosen to show off our talent and collective with these diverse emerging poetic voices.

Note from Erika Wade, Program Mentor

People often ask why I chose to return to Birmingham as a working artist. Many view the South as a place of limited opportunity—a barren land where dreams wither. But to me, the idea that poetry isn't thriving here is just as misguided. Mentoring Arlo and Kevin has been an absolute joy. They embody the qualities I sought for the Birmingham cohort: fearlessness and a commitment to elevating their craft. Programs like Poetry Across Lines showcase poets already making strides in the literary world while placing them on a global stage. It also reveals Birmingham—and this vibrant community we've cultivated—for what it truly is: a magical city.

Arlo Pate
Birmingham, AL
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SANCTUARY

Your back on
my back

spine, spine
you know

my dreams have been more grotesque lately
snarling beasts nipping at my heels, bleeding me out

herding me to cold blue states far from home
I'll come back when it's safe again, promise I'm saying its been dark

hallways, gridded days
rotten, powdery sick-green carpet, the only way forward until

your plane flew overhead
so low I could touch its belly

pink exhaust in
pink sunset and you

carried me slung across
your back

my back bowing
to the weightlessness.

BLUE RIDGE

Gray stucco fell off at the corners
under the porch, but it was ours.
Window beams shining through,
dusty buttercream chiffon on my face
whisking off Montford Cemetery hill.
Sometimes we'd hear the mourners and feel
lucky we had not yet felt tragedy like that. We would

TRIBUTE

S working the nightshift at the cineplex

six nights a week

R selling his extra adderall to queers trying to stay awake

so they can make art when they're off the clock

H trying cam work

her clients stay in line mostly

the money is good

the eyeliner, transporting

C going home to Florida after selling

his shit on facebook marketplace

ME licking envelopes for some democrat's mailing campaign

M picking up trash by the creek under the bridge

by the road

working for amazon for two weeks before quitting—

it was bad then

running the mail for four months—bad, too

K trying again for the head bartender job,

their boss is a racist fuck, so they keep

turning tables so hard

they can't fall asleep

for hours after their shift

ME filling in as banquet staff

using masking tape to get the cat hair off my black

pants

C bringing his coworker with him on this next HVAC job

the guy hit on him last time

this time he gave both boys \$100 tips

for being cute—

I mean they are

J mowing lawns

ME cleaning up vomit from bachelorettes who stay at courtyard
marriotts

K not leaving the house for a month to save on cash

he said he liked the quiet time, but his smile looked

lonely

Z moving in with C

M moving in with M

C, K, and J moving in together

C lending E money

A lending K money

for the first of the month.

TRACKS

Looking back, I could have made it. Hopped down off the tracks
right before the

train passed. Just like he said. If I had been braver, I would have seen
the oncoming tracks

weren't connected and I could've piano-stepped my way across while
the Cumberland stayed two hundred feet underneath. Following him
to safety from a danger we both created. We did not need to cross
train bridges. We never needed to walk the tracks. Russian roulette
our toes on pig iron nails littering below was a choice.

Looking back, I could have faked it, at least until I fell apart. I could
have stayed a girl a little longer, moved next door, stayed up until 3am
over Mexican SciFi labor films then walk to the storm drains under
Tennessee State U's gates and harmonize little songs in the hollow
darkness our backs curving in the culvert he would have said,

looking back at me, You're astounding. Exactly what I want. So good
and I would be a girl

not a girlboy impersonating a girl liking a boy doing things a boy
might do to a

girl but he's not a girl he's a boy and I am too, kinda. So here we are.
Seven years buried

and he motions for me to walk across the train bridge and I don't.
There are more fun ways to accidentally die.

Kevin L. Tarver
Birmingham, AL



Spill

My poetry
Begs me to be
Honest.

It's hovering
Over me,
Waiting

For the spill
Of feelings pressurized
And bottled inside.

Outside,
Poetry wants me
To be Brave.

Spill it all.
We're not
Making a mess.

Roots

I come from roots
That grow pecan
And sweet gum trees.

Honeysuckle
On the bushy vine,
clinging to the gate

Potholes
In the roads and
Cracks in the pavement

Kids riding their bikes
Down that steep hill
On 4th Ave S
At high speed

The candy lady
Supplied all your
Snackin' needs.

Cool Cups,
Fruit Chews,
Chips, and
Pickled Pig Feet

Sitting in front
Of the dusty air conditioner
To beat
The Bama heat,

While I'd refreshingly say,
"Air,"
As breathly
As I could

To express gratitude
For keeping
Me cool.

These roots
Had me zoned to
The nearest
Public school.

Not middle school, though. Ma wasn't having that.

She wrote a letter to the BOE,
Spitting straight facts.

My Son is Gifted,
He's Brilliant,
And, honey,
He is Blessed.

Know what the board said?
“Say less.”

Trips to Payless
Shoes and
Shoe Carnival

Ordering from
The JC Penny and
Avon catalogues.

Stage Plank cookies
Dipped in milk.

You could buy them from Wood’s Drugstore,
Western Supermarket,
and Conoco.

Roots that are
Barely here
Anymore.

Roots bearing
The weight of thin
Potted plants and
Barricades

Making way
for safer streets

Holding town hall
Meetings with every block
Barely there

But those who are
Barely have the capacity
To share
Their true feelings

What good
Are these meetings
If we're not
Following through on the proceeding

That these barriers
would be uprooted,
But I reckon
For all good reason

Because these Blocks
Are still here
Going into the
Winter season

On my roots,

Where
Village Market
Is gone.

Where
East Lake Public Library
Is just an empty building
In front of the fire department

Response time,
Questionable

From my experience,

And surely,
We can do
Much better
Than this.

My roots are
4th Ave S off
Oporto Madrid
By way of

Gate City Projects,
Birmingham,
Alabama.

Icarus

I saw Icarus fall from the sky.

They said
It looked like that boy
Flew too close to the Sun.

His waxen wings melted,
As he crashed
Into the sea
Never to be seen again.

I wasn't the only one
To witness this incident.

Other people saw him fall.

The phones were out
Capturing the fall,
But no one thought
To capture Icarus.

Others didn't flinch or notice.

Ships continued to sail by
Without missing
One wave,

But that ain't what happened.

I saw Icarus fall from the sky.
It happened on first Ave North,
Near East Lake Park.

He didn't fall.
He got shot down
Before he could reach
The Sun.

It was a fly-by shooting.
Turned that boy's wings
Into swiss cheese,
With

Nary a feather in place
Nor a recognizable face,

Spiraling,
Downward,
Crashing
Into the lake.

Never to be seen again.

I wasn't the only one

To witness this incident.

Other people saw him fall.

The phones were out
Capturing the fall,
But no one thought
To capture Icarus.

Others didn't flinch or notice, And some,
Kept on fishing.

And the geese
Continued to
Roll on by.

Sadly,
I'm not surprised.

Icarus and his Daddy
Been flexing
On the Gram
And in the streets.

They talk a lot of shit,
And they have beef
With the Cretes.

I heard they from Ensley,
so they got Minotaurs
And heat.

From AK's to Glock's,
With those bullets on repeat,

Switch to:

Mr. Bourgeois poetry class,
As we learned W. H. Auden's Musée des Beaux Arts.

Oh how the world works
When it comes
To our suffering.

The ships
Will continue to sail
Without missing a wave,

The ducks and the geese
Will continue to paddle by,

I saw Icarus
Die in the sky.
Right before

He could

Reach
The Sun.

It was all
Captured
On camera.

A note from Pansy Press

Pansy Press publishes chapbooks and puts on workshops, events, and readings in Tucson, AZ. Too often, poetry is relegated to exclusionary academic and institutional spaces. We want to function as an antidote to that—more like an indie tape label than a publisher. We're putting out art by our friends & neighbors, and we don't care if you have an MFA. You can find our other chapbooks online at *pansy.press*, or locally in Tucson at Warm Shape.

Pansy Press is anti-institution and anti-capitalist, pro-art and pro-liberation for all.

Thanks to Gabriel Dozal for your genuine support of local poetry, and thanks to Sarah Dillard for being a patient liaison between the PAL participants and Pansy.