

# DOOR = JAR



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Door Is A Jar  
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Cover Image “The Feline Florist”  
by Jocelyn Robb



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each day there is a way  
I could use your wisdom  
though I don't blame you  
for leaving when you did

the first Sunday in February  
the warmest year on record

now Saharan dust flies across the Atlantic  
blocking out the sun  
like that eclipse you wanted to drive down  
and see,  
like that movie a week before your death  
where we watched Bogart go mad over gold

while the rest of us are left  
as droplets from the gutter  
that made the leaves give way,  
weakening artery walls

the imbalanced crystals in your ear,  
your cork handled cane,  
the hours you had worked  
amounted to this golden dust  
lifting with the wind

of course it was in Florida  
where you got up from your afternoon nap  
and walked out to see the sunset  
leaving your body behind

do you still look after us?  
your daughters see sandhill cranes  
where they don't belong

**MY MOM DIED AND WE GOT A DOG**

Polley Poer

Poetry

And I offered her the howl of grief / taught her how to  
mourn / like a girl / like beast / I pissed on everything /  
like a grave / chewed / my mother's purse until molared,  
defective / a mewling anarchist teething / on tendrils of  
waste / I swallowed / whole mornings / tore them in two  
/ fed their questions / innards / to the doves / *sit* /  
someday you'll grow / into your paws—*stay* / and when  
your ears stiffen you'll hear / for miles / & smell / each  
falling body / raw meat / from the table we build without  
knowing / we're not hungry / *speak* / but do not ask the  
prey / why it runs



page. Maybe two or three or four. Scattered across the arc of my life, there are stanzas that repeat themselves, sometimes almost word for word. It makes for a very blasé book.

Once, I had a man who was my punctuation, for whole chapters of my life, I couldn't go a sentence without him interjecting. But you can hardly write a story, let alone build a relationship, on the foundation of punctuation.

!...!!...!!!!, .!..?

Unintentionally, I've left most of my pages blank. Flipping through the pages, a scattered word here and there, read together they juxtapose, collide, collapse my life into a poem of sorts. Dazzling, but sparse.

I don't imagine pages filled with relationships, words compacted next to each other, pressing so tightly against one another, blending into endless page after page until scarcely one word is beautiful, let alone decipherable from the next. Or rather, I can, and so instead I choose to keep my pages blank. Hoping. To one day turn the page, and discover one word. That word that changes my entire story.

Because words can do that, and I live too much between my empty spaces.

If each page is a day, I'm always on the cusp of turning. Afraid to commit to a new page, re-reading instead worn pages of the past, again and again, for fear the next page will be empty. And the next. And the next after that.

I'm not the kind of woman who lets someone else write her story.

!...!...!...!!!!, .!..?

So why haven't I written my own? Inexplicably, halfway through the novel, I expect a sudden plot-twist, as though the writer's block will suddenly lift like a veil, paragraphs of life gushing forward. From all those blank spaces. From one tiny dot of punctuation

.

This is how we write a life.

**Relativity**  
Carella Keil  
Art



**Jamais Vu**  
Carella Keil  
Art





**little death**

Rose Bedrosian

Poetry

it is time to go to sleep.  
stop smoking, and sing  
yourself a lullaby.  
now you must stop the deep  
sorrow, the primal kicking,  
the hollow urge to cry.

swallow down your drink  
and breathe a prayer  
or tell yourself a lie.  
no matter what you think,  
the world's unfair;  
to sleep is just to die.

**Talking on the Phone**

Rose Bedrosian

Poetry

I love your disembodied voice.  
Through the earpiece, it undulates  
burning and smooth as jamaican rum.  
I love the power it has, the way the  
vowels and consonants jostle: an  
s elbows in oiled curves, e  
is a cat curled into itself  
but poised to spring; and x,  
ferocious x, stands guard with its  
dagger points, prepared to joust.

Your voice is a landscape all its  
own. You give a muddy growl like  
a sleepy bear swimming up from his  
hibernation, and I smell honey.  
Your drawl has the rumble of an  
earthquake and buildings sway.  
Mostly, it is elemental and pre-  
historic, and I slide down it  
as off a dinosaur's back.

It is dangerously deep; it sends  
me far into a cool cavern,  
bat wings slapping near  
my head, and I am beautiful  
in my stalactite earrings.

**The Practice of Losing**

Kelly McAllister

Poetry

I lose things all the time  
I'm quite hopeless in that regard  
I'm often found frantically searching  
For my keys and debit cards

I've lost whole family branches  
One day there, then gone the next  
They're still somewhere in the world  
But for me, forcibly annexed

Between adoptions and divorces  
I've somehow managed to lose  
More grandfathers than any one person  
Should be able to claim their due

I've lost wonderful colleagues  
Without any sign or warning  
I've cried for them in conference rooms  
Performed collective mourning

But the loss of you was something new  
That shook the ground beneath my feet  
A loss that changed my landscape  
The map of my world made obsolete

I lose things all the time  
I'm quite hopeless in that regard  
But despite my practice losing  
I still got lost in your graveyard

Like an amateur cartographer  
I will redraw those maps  
But now I take it down in pencil  
For I've learned how fast it can collapse

**So Strong**  
Kelly McAllister  
Poetry

When you live with a mental illness  
People love to tell you how  
Strong you are  
With fear in their eyes

Is it because they  
See how much you carry?  
Of the battles that you fight  
In the fields of your own mind?  
Of the invisible weight  
You must lift, every day?

Or do they put those words  
Into the world  
Like a prophecy  
That they hope to be true?

Because they are afraid  
that your strength  
will not be enough  
In the end

## God, The Cinnamon Wind

Adam Katz

Fiction

It was a small house, and old. Everything creaked; and his body creaked as he made it downstairs. Some dream must have woken him up. Drinking a glass of water, he decided to take a turn in the garden and get a snuff of fresh air. He turned back through the kitchen and stepped on the dog's tail.

The dog was old, but still it raised itself and sounded the alarm, the gruff roar of the watchdog. Probably waking his sister and nephew who were visiting. Why did the tail have to be just there? Why did the dog have to be just there? That was not where it usually bedded down for the night.

The dog padded after him to the bottom of the stairs, then left, to the door that led to the outside. On went the boots and the coat and the handmade hat, a gift from his late wife, along with its matching scarf and gloves, which he did not need, but put on all the same. He put his hand on the door and saw the dog's face drop when it didn't hear the rattle of the leash. The dog began to return to the kitchen. To do this, it had to back into the corner and then turn right; but it couldn't turn all the way right, so it tried to back up the stairs, but didn't have the strength. As he watched, he was reminded that he had been putting off making a last appointment at the vet's office. He kept meaning to but it never seemed like it was time.

Without thinking, his hand left the knob and went to the leash, there on its peg by the door. The dog start panting and its fat claws made an eager *scraapp* on the wooden slats of the floor. Swearing a good-natured curse, he creaked down to a squatting position and felt for that regal, gorgeous, bearish neck, and the one place

underneath where the fur was still soft after twelve years. He fumbled for a bit, then put the gloves in the pockets of the coat, clipped leash to collar, put the gloves back on one at a time, transferring the leash hand-to-hand as he did so. He tried the knob, slipping with his slick, gloved fingers, then finally managed to open the door and walk the dog out and onto the porch. Then he heard feet on the stairs.

“Woke everyone up, did you?” Said a voice. It was Pdraig, his nephew with the Gaelic name even though the family was Jewish. “Maybe the dog woke you up so you could give him a last walk before God finally takes him to gnaw bones in the sky.”

A laugh, full, but tinged with sadness, erupted from the old man’s belly. He laughed for some time, and when he stopped, the tears were cold on his face. He shook his head. “No, I stepped on his tail in the dark. You *could* say God woke *me* up for just the reason you described. Anyway, I don’t believe in God the Destroyer.” He was almost talking to himself, low and slow. “I believe in God the Cinnamon Wind,” he finished with a smile that was as cold as he felt. The phrase had come to him in that moment, but he looked over at his nephew to see the credulous nod.

Kids.

Although his nephew was 27.

But still. Kids.

The dog sat and tried to scratch its side with its paw. It managed to connect every other stroke. Tears came once more to the old man’s eyes. The boy only saw the old man’s ironic smile.

“If you’re just going to make things up—”

“No, it’s real. I suppose God is... Well. A creator of things that don’t last. But every now and again you get a

bit of a respite, and that's the Cinnamon Wind. Where else is it from if not God?"

Padraig looked at him and said nothing, but his expression, which had gone from curiosity to contempt, went back to curiosity. What was he doing? He had expected to put one over on his nephew but instead *he* was just as caught up in it.

"I'm not sure I have a good example. When two armies meet in pitched battle, or stare at each other from over the lip of trenches, and agree to a day's truce so they can have Christmas dinner, or so they can play soccer, or even just so they can bury their dead. You hear all sorts of stories. They will go back to fighting the next day. Because they are stupid and don't learn. Fine. But what else can that day be except a miracle? When a person is in a coma or a vegetative state, but they stir back up into consciousness for just a moment so that you can say goodbye—"

"Oh, God, Uncle Ban. I—"

They stood there for a while just quiet as what remained of the night wore on.

"That's not God. That's people making the most of what they have."

"What did you think God was?"

"So then why call it—." But he just smiled and said: "Good night, Uncle."

Padraig put a hand on his shoulder. He felt how thin his own bones were under his nephew's hand. Like traffic cones giving shape to mounds of snow.

As he moved to follow his nephew inside, he heard once again the *scraapp* of fat nails against wood. It was the minute just before dawn. The light was black and white, with almost no grey. Even what little breeze there was was dying down, leaving everything still. Then the few birds too stupid to fly south started chirping all at



once, rich and thick and bright, and everything around him felt like it was being born.

Creaking on old knees, He brought his face level with the dog's and, with the fingers of one hand, clenched the scruff of the dog's neck. With the other, he put a hand on the dog's shoulder. He said to the dog—no, shouted at him: “Don’t you go anywhere. Don’t you go—”

He was near tears. And the dog looked at him and he knew. It was time.

**CHAOS**

Michael Estabrook

Poetry

... sparrows building a nest above  
our front door carrying in feathers  
and twigs and bits of cotton ...

Finally found a publisher for my 100-page  
continuous commonplace hybrid poem  
and they seem to be taking it seriously:  
editorial, proofreading, layout design, publicity ...  
They seem to like it too  
which is gratifying considering  
it's not easy to understand or categorize –  
one of those half poem half prose species  
like one of those mythological creatures  
like the Centaur, the Minotaur, the Chimera  
the Harpy, the Hippogriff, the Sphinx ...  
Nice it's found a home  
somewhere else besides  
the little dark closet in my library.

**“because you’re my number one son”**

Michael Estabrook

Poetry

Coming up on three years  
since mom's been gone  
and I find myself thinking about her all the time  
but not because I feel guilty  
for not spending more time with her  
while she was alive or anything like that  
but instead because I miss her  
and her motherly ways especially miss her saying:  
“Do you know how much I love you? This much”  
(I can see her trying to stretch her arms out  
on the other end of the phone) —

**NOURISHMENT**

Thaddeus Rutkowski

Poetry

When he was a street hustler,  
he felt like a vampire.  
But he didn't want to feed on blood.  
He wanted to feed on masculinity.  
Years later, he knows he's a man.  
He likes himself a little better.  
All of that nourishment  
came together in him.

**how to make a birthday wish**

Vivian Wang

Poetry

take a deep breath.  
grab your childhood by the hand and go ice skating on  
Christmas eve together. rest your chin on the blue  
monkey bars you used to dangle from. sit still while your  
mother braids your chlorine-soaked hair with daisies.  
play peek-a-boo with your baby brother's laugh. ride on  
the back of your aunt's motorcycle with your superhero  
cape fluttering behind you. try not to think about getting  
older. wrestle these french braided chains of regret even  
though you know it's futile. think of an answer for when  
your parents ask what you wished for—a new guitar,  
perhaps some pink Converse?  
blow out the candles.

**a wall in time**  
Vivian Wang  
Poetry

they watch as we grow tired and  
weary, forced to long for guilt-ridden  
desires that satisfy no longer than  
this moment. they never would have guessed,  
that all of our potential and our big  
shining futures amounted to  
this.

we play foolish games of deception  
with ourselves but i know it's nice  
to hope they're all just as dizzily  
powerless as we are, living  
in absence because we're  
still haunted by imaginings,  
figments that just can't cross over  
to reality.

**The Feline Florist**

Jocelyn Robb

Art

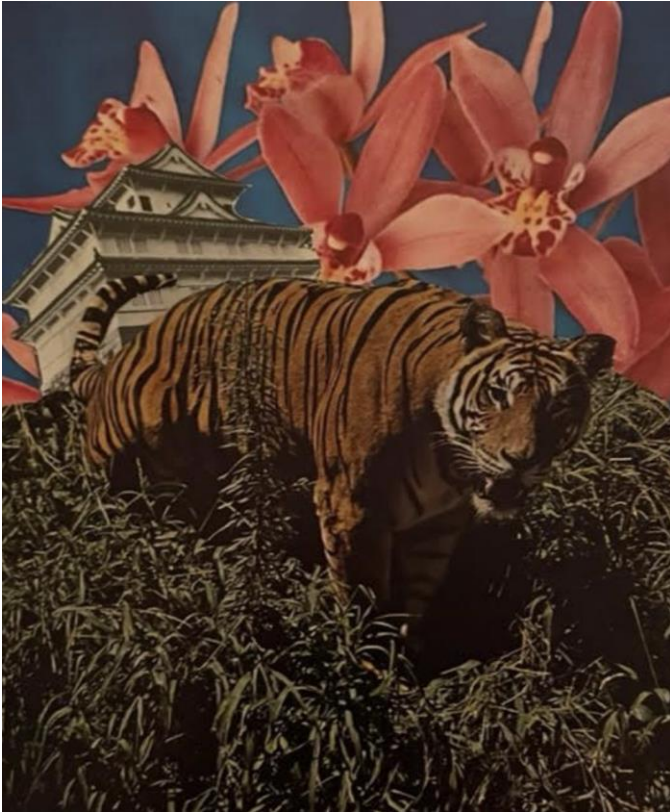


**Kenchiku**  
Jocelyn Robb  
Art





**1967 Tiger**  
Jocelyn Robb  
Art



**Reward Reward Reward Reward**

Kate Faigen

Fiction

The path to Reward is simple: do good for others, then tell Frog all about it.

This is what fifth grade teacher, Mr. Sauna, explains to his disciples on the first day of class. The flesh on his neck turns baby pink with excitement, veins as thick as his argyle bowtie. Frog sits perched atop a wooden shelf above the center of the chalkboard, watching.

“Frog isn’t *just* a stuffed animal,” Mr. Sauna warns. “Frog sees everything you do. And Frog wants you to be very good people.” The class is instructed to do nice things—for each other, for the younger kids, even for the teachers—then each week, to write one of those nice things on a piece of paper and place it in the wicker basket on Mr. Sauna’s desk.

“Frog will read your notes every weekend, when you’re at home with your parents,” Mr. Sauna promises. “And if you keep it up, at the end of the year, you’ll get *Reward*.”

The kids don’t question what they’ve been told. They simply nod at each other—in agreement, in wonder—eager to do more good than ever.

The mission begins. Nerdy Nico helps Hayden maneuver the microscope in science class. Liza quietly passes a pad to Mia during an unexpected emergency. Jordan runs over to Sal, a second grader, when he falls at recess and scrapes his knee.

As Lewis-and-Clark fall turns into Athens-and-Sparta winter, as voices crack and bodies sprout, the kids find themselves in a groove of goodness—oftentimes without thinking of Frog first. A word of encouragement here, an extra gel pen there. Sharing of bus seats and left-at-home textbooks and notes on fractions.

But at the cusp of spring, the final stretch to Reward, Bennett becomes nervous about his love, Robin. The sweetest girl he's ever known. Since she shared her graham crackers with him in kindergarten—when Jason called him Butt-Face Benny and everyone else snickered—Bennett knew she was different. "It's like she can feel other people's feelings," he once scribbled in his journal.

Of course, Robin excels at being kind in fifth grade. But she doesn't tell Frog anything.

Bennett decides to make it right, to save her. He walks up to Robin on the swings after lunch. "How come?" he asks, fidgeting with the hem of his shirt.

"Hmm?" she replies. The breeze pushes a tangled strand of hair across her eyes.

"You never write notes. About your good things," Bennett says.

Robin stomps her sneakers into the ground, comes to a stop. "I guess you're right."

"But you won't get Reward," Bennett whispers, like he's discussing a crime.

"I'm not sure what that's all about," she says. Her calm, casual tone frightens him.

"But—" Bennett stammers. "Why do good things? If you don't tell anyone and get Reward?"

Robin shrugs, swipes a twig off of her shorts. "I just want to, I guess. No reason."

Bennett's head rings in tandem with the recess bell. "*But*," he says again—forcefully, confused. His world flattens like the old tetherball near the blacktop that no one touches. Everything he's worked hard for all year... could it lead to nothing?

Robin watches carefully as Bennett runs toward the school like an angry, toy-less toddler.

\*\*\*

That night, Bennett slouches at the dinner table; his fork upright in a tight fist. “Shake ‘n Bake chicken!” his mother says to him. “*Your favorite!*” Then: “Why aren’t you eating, Bub?” Must be growing pains, his parents think. Some girl at school.

“Reward,” Bennett mutters like a defective robot. “*Reward.*”

Bennett’s parents share knowing glances. Kids and their enigmatic babble. They smile. What they don’t know is that their son will throw a tantrum that surpasses any pre-teen outburst they might’ve seen in a nightmare.

A greasy drumstick is chucked against the wall like an axe. “REWARD,” Bennett shouts. Next a thigh. Another thigh. He reaches across the table and snatches a glob of mashed potatoes off his little sister’s plate. He hurls some at his mother, then his father; both too stunned to duck.

“REWARD REWARD REWARD REWARD!”

\*\*\*

On the last day of class, just before lower school graduation, Bennett shuffles out of the door at three on the dot—half of his things in his backpack, half slipping from his arms. The rest of the kids follow suit, high-fiving Mr. Sauna and offering their yearbook for a last-minute signature. Robin is the final one.

She stops at the doorway and looks up at Mr. Sauna’s orange bowtie. It has little pencils printed in a zigzag pattern. Mr. Sauna knows exactly what Bennett knows—that Robin’s been a good kid like the rest of them, but hasn’t followed the path to Reward.

Mr. Sauna crosses his arms; repositions his feet to assert dominance. Undisturbed, Robin reaches out her

right hand for a shake, and he takes it reluctantly, almost not at all. She then points with her left hand to Frog in the center of the classroom.

“Just a thought,” she says, her eyes on his disgruntled face. “That’s not a frog.” Mr. Sauna jerks his head. Robin laughs. “I think it’s a toad.”

**“beyond the night...”**

J Mari

Poetry

i handed her a love poem  
decades ago  
when i was 15 or 16  
nervously repeating  
phrases i had  
practiced the night before:

"you know how i feel about you and  
i wanted to give you this  
because i'm moving  
to another school and  
i'll probably never see you again",

and it turned out to be true,  
until today, having found  
her social media profile  
just created  
two weeks ago.

it contains a picture  
and nothing else.

there's the expected wrinkles  
around the usual places,  
but i still recognize  
the 15-year-old girl  
i haven't seen in 30 years:

I'd like to think  
that what I see  
is a face that's tamed contingency  
with inspired silence,

grateful in self-reliance,

but i can't know

and it could be  
that it's something else  
that parts those lips like that  
and  
sets the eyes on fire that way.

30 years ago  
i handed her a love poem  
written on college-ruled paper.

**Mandate**  
Sha Litten  
Poetry

They have a date with a man  
But unbeknown to them,  
this man has had a date  
with the devil  
that sticky date,  
a pudding of a man!

It's the decree that sparks resistance  
but resistance can be defeated.  
Be very wary of dates with  
men who have questionable associations.



**NIGHT ENCHANTMENTS**

Elizabeth Morse

Poetry

Sleep has pleasures  
waking knows nothing about.

String lights stretched  
across shining wind:  
fences melt, time dissolves.

Jewels glinting on the wall  
out of reach, draw you  
to a room with a floating window.

A man grasps your gloved hand  
in another world. You both dance,  
clinging together, stepping into the sky.

Your alarm is distant. Memory  
flings it away. So much better lost.

**BLANK HOURS**

Elizabeth Morse

Poetry

I don't remember entering sleep,  
the blank hours, the solid block of time  
dropped to the basement of breathing.

I don't remember my dreams,  
the ones with shimmering clouds,  
rooms leading to unfamiliar other rooms.

I don't remember waking up,  
reaching for the too-distant coffee pot,  
not thinking the day or date, only that  
now, it's light outside.

**NEVER AGAIN**

Elizabeth Morse

Poetry

I will never again stop listening to that gray voice  
that tells me when to pull back from that carnival  
I love to get lost in. Flamboyant purples and reds  
of ferocious fun that ignite the white streets of dawn,  
as I try to find my way home wearing only burn marks.

I will never again knock at the door of that place  
I used to call home, where they don't have to  
take me in, never promised me anything. They just  
say, *Look at the time, See how late it is?* Even if  
it's morning and I got there before breakfast.

I will never again long for a home that never was,  
made only of sticks and stones in a forest.  
Who did I think I was, Goldilocks? *You'd better  
get out of that chair*, the witch said. *It's not yours.*  
I never ran so fast from the smell of baking gingerbread.

**Mr. Holy**  
Lauren Klein  
Fiction

The notice arrived with the afternoon mail, in an envelope marked “urgent.” They were seizing our little house on the outskirts of town to expand the train tracks. The train tracks were nowhere near our neighborhood but our family home, which my grandfather built himself, with the orchard and the ancient oaks, would be gone in less than six months. “Are they going to bulldoze my garden?” my grandmother asked with tears flowing down her face.

“They’ll definitely bulldoze it,” my uncle said emotionlessly. “Obviously.” My grandmother sobbed and called the other aunts and uncles. My cousin started proposing other ways to fight it, all of which my uncle rejected. We were powerless.

“This is how it goes,” my uncle said, pouring himself some whiskey. “They take all the land, sell it to developers, and in five years this whole place—” he gestured to the meadow and the trees outside the window “—is fancy apartment buildings.”

I refused to accept it. It simply couldn’t happen. There was one thing I and I alone could do, and I could never tell anyone what it was. I stood up abruptly and put on my coat.

“Where are you going?” My grandmother cried. “It’s almost dark!”

“Just a walk,” I said, and flew out the door to catch the downtown bus.

On the bus, I applied eyeliner and lipstick and practiced making myself feel numb inside. By the time I had arrived at city hall, people were already leaving through the front door, bundled in fur coats, holding

briefcases close to their bodies. I rushed against the crowd, found the number of his office, and flew down the corridor, hoping he was still there. He was talking on the phone, smiling broadly and saying in a jovial voice, "I'm gravely sorry but there's nothing I can do." He looked the same as he had in school, except for new lines in his forehead and an added protuberance to his stomach. A side table held a tray of glasses and a bottle of whiskey. I knocked on the open door, and smiled. He put the phone down.

I explained the situation and asked if there was anything he could do to reverse it. Mr. Department of Urban Planning, Mr. Thief, please help me.

"I might be able to do something," he said with his lips curling. His mouth reminded me of wet bologna. Mr. Always Liked Me But Never Got Me. Mr. Options. Mr. Resources. His mouth tasted like rotting garbage but I pretended I liked it. Afterwards, I asked him when he would change the plans and he said, as he buckled his belt, "I said might, if you see me again. Twice a week. Then I'll consider it."

I didn't want to go home yet, so I walked to the cathedral. He was there, of course he was, practicing alone. My crush of many years, the one I never saw smile, whose sombreness made him so handsome and so out of reach.

I sat down in the front row and listened to him play. The sound of the keys cascading under his fingers aroused me. Sometimes when he turned the page he pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. We were so alike. Everyone thought he was cold and arrogant but only I saw the warmth inside him.

When he stopped playing, I went up to the piano and undid a button on my shirt, staring him in the eyes. He

followed my fingers, his face blank, and for a second I wondered if I was sexually harassing him. Then he took off his glasses, folded and placed them on top of the piano, and kissed me.

Now it was time to purify myself with a man of God, a man who believed in compassion and sacred mysteries. In a tiny room in the church tower, the methodical pianist threw a sheet over the worn couch, carefully tucked the corners in, and looked at it dubiously.

"I don't know how clean this sheet is," he said. I told him it was okay and unbuckled his belt. The whole experience was wooden. He didn't know how to move his mouth and his fingers were cold as he touched me badly, with no presence or delicacy, sometimes staring fixedly at parts of me and then looking away suddenly.

He said he wouldn't make me come because it wasn't physiologically necessary and he didn't want to be guilty of any more sins. "I'm already racking them up for this week," he said, laughing for the first time all evening. Mr. Holy, Mr. Morality, thank god I have you to keep me from straying into womanly sinfulness.

While I was sitting there, dismayed, he whispered something in my ear.

"What?"

"I said, we should both go to confession tomorrow. I can pick you up, if you want."

I stood up and put my clothes on. I had been so reckless for nothing and now it was late and I would be missed at home. "I don't believe in that shit," I told him over my shoulder, and disappeared down the stairs.

I fled through the door and into a flurry of white. The December night was stained with artificial light and the snow was falling thickly. At the corner I paused and looked back at the church's spire one more time, and at the one glowing window, and, above, the golden cross

rising into the sky, declaring its false authority over the rooftops, and above that, the snow falling from the darkness as if out of nowhere.

A car rounded the corner and the tail lights disappeared down the blurry street. So this is how it goes. I felt all the heat being dragged from my body, all of myself dissolving in the cold air, as I trudged through the snow towards what was no longer my home.

**ALL IN ALL**

Margaret B. Ingraham

Poetry

In dust of monarch wing,  
in turquoise ring of gannet's eye,  
in the way the winds  
can always make  
the bowing willows sing,  
even in break of dawn,  
in all these things,  
I know that I hear  
your still small voice sing.



**CHANCE**

Margaret B. Ingraham  
Poetry

Chances are no one else  
saw what you did,  
just as you saw it,  
from just where  
you were standing when  
you turned your back  
on the swift gust of wind,  
as three small leaves  
cartwheeled across the grass  
right there in front of you  
on an afternoon that otherwise  
seemed like so many others.  
And chances are that once  
the sudden bluster had subsided,  
you simply walked on along  
without thinking about what  
you had just chanced to see,  
which, of course, you had not,  
because nothing crossed your path  
by chance that day at all.

**POSSESSION**

Margaret B. Ingraham

Poetry

He told anyone who passed  
and stopped to talk or ask  
how he owned all the land  
between the stream to the east  
and the grove of ancient oaks  
skirting his stone wall on the west.  
He would insist he even owned  
the sloping hills where sheer dawn  
slowly rolled into the fields below  
each day, and though he claimed  
that much, he didn't know the places  
where the doe would come and go  
between the stands of rustling trees,  
or where she stopped to nuzzle leaves  
before she leapt majestically  
over the sagging barbed wire fence  
into the soft, shadowed depths  
of that dense old growth forest  
which she alone possessed.

**WHAT MARKED ME**

Margaret B. Ingraham

Poetry

It has taken this long,  
a journey this far,  
for me to realize  
how the Georgia woods  
have marked me,  
have made me  
as lonely sometimes  
as the single trillium  
that pushed through  
the lichen carpet  
at the foot of that  
Southern yellow pine,  
the same tree  
which decades later  
would become the last  
place I would ever see  
the shy pileated or hear  
its heavy hammering.

It has taken this long  
for me to realize  
how I had such little  
choice in it all,  
and then to discover  
the blessings in that—  
just as I did  
in the lush moss,  
the tall pine,  
the great woodpecker,  
and most of all,  
that one small blossom.

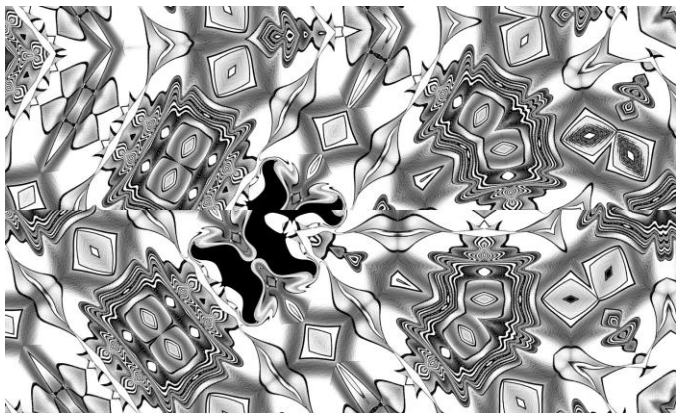
**AT SOME POINT I TOOK**

Lydia Waites

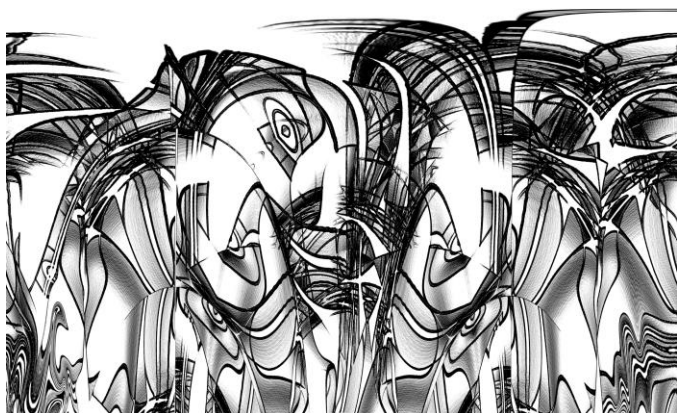
Poetry

to sleeping  
with the volume up  
to catch your late-night spirals,  
my phone within my reach and reaching  
the stage where I was used  
to talking you down or those  
nocturnal ramblings skimmed  
like headlines on a morning;  
the idle anecdotes we texted  
reflexive like the missing step  
I kept on tripping over: the gap left  
where I waited to be woken by that tone  
and it only really hit me when I opened  
my screen  
to some promotion, half-awake  
and aching with the violent  
wish for that SOS I used to dread  
but now I know won't come  
I leave  
my phone on silent.

**Overwhelmed**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



**Ruckus 2**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



**Missing You 4**

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Art



**A Safe Way for a Giant to Travel**

Ben Nardolilli

Poetry

Open at 2 AM and full of colorful offers  
to take up my remaining free time,  
I went into the supermarket  
and enjoyed the chance to be sauteed  
by the fluorescent brotherhood of lights

I was not tall enough to absorb  
all of the shine, it fell and illuminated  
the dust on the floor and unsold cans,  
as I walked, the fuzz followed  
under my steps and rolled into clumps

the clumps evolved into clods,  
and the clods grew tiny legs to carry  
the fluffy gray bodies with me  
as I went out of the door, my insomnia  
making me a god to these animals



**Face Down on the Moon**

Ben Nardolilli

Poetry

These nights I'm on the maiden voyage  
of a fresh and expanding universe,  
a dimension that showed up without asking  
to replace the one we wore out before

If this new cosmos has a direction,  
it's a mystery, it only talks in order to brag  
about all of its new amenities,  
some are still getting ready, I can't wait

The change was hard to adjust to,  
now, I use it to explain my trouble sleeping,  
if I keep turning, I'm not really moving,  
it's opening night jitters from space and time

**Preparing for Winter**

Greg Stidham

Poetry

Juvenile squirrels at sunset  
scurry from branch to  
maple branch wreaking  
havoc above our patio,  
and we worry about them,  
so small and thin  
this time of year  
when fattening for winter  
is their key charge.

Yet they seem to want  
only to play, jumping  
branch to branch,  
even rooftop to tree,  
playing during work time,  
their timid survival instincts  
worrisome as winter's  
brutal entrance threatens.

**Birdsongs**  
Greg Stidham  
Poetry

In the evening, just before dusk,  
you hear the geese in the distance,  
distinctive solo honks.

Just after dusk,  
when soft lights on the patio  
are necessary, you hear  
if you're lucky, the quirky  
sounds of a screech owl.

And you go to bed  
feeling inspired by  
these bird sounds.

In the morning  
there's the sound of the cardinal,  
and the common grackle,  
the humble robin, the  
retiring chickadee and  
the haunt of the mourning dove,

the sounds that make one  
less unhappy to be awakened  
at 4 a.m., the sounds

that help wash away sadness  
still staining from the night before,  
but today's a day made  
possibly brighter by singing birds.

**THE WOMAN AT THE FUNERAL**

John Grey

Poetry

She's undone  
like the oaks and maples,  
as the hemisphere's autumn  
is hers within,  
as life breaks from its bearings,  
trickles groundward,  
drops to the grass, the sidewalk,  
brown and arthritic,  
crinkled and achy in the head.

And she's off to another funeral,  
the third this year of her own generation,  
on a drizzly day,  
alone in her black car,  
driving slowly  
and way to the right of the road,  
as cars zip by,  
going at the speed of those who  
have somewhere to be.

Her mood's somber  
though she wishes it were angry.  
She sits through the service  
with her head down near her knees.  
Way back in the procession,  
her Toyota trundles forward  
like the car in front is towing her.  
At the gravesite, the priest's words  
may as well be all about her.

She's like a tree  
with just a few leaves fluttering.

Soon they'll fall.  
And she'll be the one  
old friends are gathering to mourn.  
She stars in the mirror,  
mouths the words,  
"I am so very sorry for your loss."

**THE FACTORY WORKER**

John Grey

Poetry

The machine punches holes  
in strips of leather.

This is all metal can do.  
Prod down and retreat.  
Click click click.  
Cut eye-lets.  
Churn out belts.

The chair  
is gravestone-hard.  
It digs bony sculptures  
in my back.

My job is to ensure  
that eternal strip of cowhide  
doesn't stray from its appointed path.

I have this conversation with the clock.  
I jabber in minutes gone.  
It talks slowly and in hours to come.

**The Reason**  
Lukas Tallent  
Fiction

The day Eric came out, Cierra's dad got murdered in Nashville over a can of beer.

"A six pack," Mom said. It happened in The Nations, not far from where Lexi and me lived, off Charlotte Avenue. "When he left the gas station, somebody tried to rob him, and when he refused, they shot him."

"Why was he in Nashville?"

"To buy beer, I reckon."

She went on to tell me how two kids at Waverly's high school shot themselves last week. But when I tried to steer the conversation back to Eric, Mom got uncomfortable and suddenly had laundry to do.

Cierra had been Lexi's best friend back when we all went to Waverly First Baptist, where Eric's dad was a deacon. I remembered when Eric got saved and went up to give his testimony.

"I don't believe a word of it," Cierra told him, afterwards, at McDonald's, when he got us two large fries for the price of one. "You're too much of a handsome devil."

She was teasing him, had wanted to bang Eric ever since 6<sup>th</sup> grade, when he grew his hair long and learned to smile. I remember her twirling fingers through his hair, wondrously saying, "it's so blonde." Even more vibrant, resting against the ocean color of his uniform.

Lexi's hair was blonde, too. Once, I walked into the cafeteria and awkwardly grabbed Eric's hand. From behind, they looked the same.

We were already together back then, and when I told my friends about the divorce, that was the reason they attributed it to.

“Y’all never had the chance to see what’s out there.”

“Dude, you got to sample more flavors before you decide what scoops to order.”

It probably would’ve been fine, if I hadn’t been so depressed and working from home, looking for a new way to feel free—a martini, *Call of Duty*, assplay.

“What do you want to feel?” I asked her one night.

“Alone,” she said, “I want to know what that feels like.”

I waited on our couch for an hour to see if she’d call to tell me about Cierra’s dad. Or the kids who died. Or Eric, maybe. For the past month, Lexi had hopped from one friend’s couch to the next in order to avoid our apartment. I would’ve texted Cierra, but we hadn’t spoken in years, and she was always more Lexi’s friend.

In the end, I drove to Waverly and got dinner at McDonald’s. I figured if Eric still worked there, he might not remember who I was and try to flirt with me. He might even understand what I’m going through—how so much of your life, your identity, turns out to be not entirely true.

But I don’t see any guys with blonde hair. Just old fogies and those girls dressed in grays. I wonder if he has the night off, or if like so many of us now, is just gone.



**done's done**  
RC deWinter  
Poetry

my ex showed up today  
carrying all the baggage from our failure  
invisible wounds slicked with a thin veneer  
of the flour and water paste of time

we sat out in the yard under a blue sky  
as pleasantries flew like blunted arrows  
across the greengrassed space  
of too many years and never enough trust

he'd have me back in a new york minute  
but that's not going to happen  
even as the ghost of love hovered smiling  
saying go on it's no good your being alone

but the scars of battles over nothing but  
the stubbornness of the fools we were  
unpacked themselves and did a line dance  
somewhere deep inside my chest

and as a bird trilled the false hope of spring  
i let him know in the kindest way i could  
that even with gloss of time's amnesty  
some things are forever past mending

**The Thing You Thought You Wanted**

Sarah A. Etlinger

Poetry

We saw a snake skin lying  
in the grass outside the garage,  
almost fully intact, shaded in places,  
traces of its former scales.  
The snake had left, entering the world  
in its new skin the way a storm slides  
to fill the day;  
the way when I asked you  
if you had seen the snake  
you said you didn't find anything,  
it had already passed:  
its deflated shape on the warm July lawn.

## The Movie Version of a Life

Dave O'Leary

Fiction

My first night of being homeless started, like so many others, at a coffee shop. I drank cup after cup, stared out the window, crumpled napkins. I lingered until closing, coffee long cold, while rereading parts of one my favorite books, *Last Orders*, and finally, having no home, thought about driving as they did in the book, driving through England to the coast and throwing the ashes of a past life into the sea. Being in Seattle, I could have driven to the water, or further to the coast, but I didn't have any ashes, just a back seat full of stuff.

"Two cheeseburgers, please," I said later at the drive through, and while waiting I imagined going to the payday loan place across the street to negotiate a price for my life, a sum to cover the costs of my \$2.00 dinners, which I got, "Have a nice night," and then drove to the parking lot of a movie theater to eat in silence, but soon a car full of high school kids pulled up next to me and got out laughing, joking, teasing as ketchup dripped on my lap.

They lingered a moment, and I made eye contact with one, a girl of maybe fifteen wearing a gray sweatshirt, Broadview High. She paused a second before her friends pulled her along, "Come on." "Okay, okay, but there was a guy eating a hamburger in that car. Did you see that?" I watched them purchase their movie tickets and disappear into the building where I imagined they'd buy buttered popcorn and maybe sip from a flask taken from one of their parents.

Would they laugh in the dark, cry, scream, dream later of themselves in movies or perhaps movie versions of their later lives, future homes? I got out, placed packets of ketchup under the wipers of their car hoping for I knew not what, and I wondered at the odds of that girl's future home vanishing in a cloud of missed payments, a once happy life turned to ashes, and then I drove, took the highway south not to the coast but to a rest stop where I'd sleep sitting up, where I'd try to dream of the movie version of that once happy life.

**Where Stars Go**

Maxwell I. Gold

Poetry

Where stars once burned above ancient cities,  
and the ghosts of tomorrow moaned, so too, did we  
wonder of days:

Where stars might smile again, spectral ebullience  
radiating o'er starry ice-castles and rocky moon-  
children;

Where stars saw sapient worlds transform with the hope  
of billions, wild innovation like dragons which crawled  
across sea and sky;

Where stars twinkled, the light of Yesterday's terror,  
looming giants as if to warn us, placate and saturate our  
minds against Tomorrow;

Where stars waited with fire and indifference until they  
were brought down by the hungry, metallic, and broken  
machinations of our worst expectations, demons who  
pulled down all hope of what-if or never-was;

Where stars soon cowered at the dark music, songs of  
soon-enough and someday-then crept throughout the  
universe in a chorus of metallic voices, Cyber Things  
who cared not for stars or gods

Where stars saw the brightest of things, but the  
subjugation of beauty by crimson faced monster who  
waited in the shadows, to slay the Last Dragon, swallow  
the moon-children;

Where stars cried across the endless expanse of light and existence with crystalline tears, jagged moments which scrapped edges of reason until the dark blood pooled;

Where stars went to die, consumed within the brilliance of Entropy, who waited patiently, methodically, happily for the day she embraced the last, joyous lights.

**Absorb**  
M.P. Pratheesh  
Art



**Mysterious Affair**  
M.P. Pratheesh  
Art





**Touch**  
M.P. Pratheesh  
Art



**Conversation**  
M.P. Pratheesh  
Art



**Toughen Up**

Abriana Jetté

Poetry

First rule of criminality: kill the man  
who steals from you. If not him, someone  
he loves. Watch his kid play ball from the stands  
while sitting next to his wife. Cheer on his runs  
like nothing's wrong; the past over and done.  
It's fun when they don't see it coming.  
Rule two makes it bearable to keep up with one:  
Make no friends. Turn into an animal running,

abandoned. Master your sense of cunning  
so they hear charm. Remember: money  
keeps you warm, which is not a rule, but a warning.  
When things go wrong, gather bees with honey.  
Make them feel as if with you, they're safe.  
When you kill him, make sure he can see your face.

## **The Crack in the Sidewalk**

Jake Weber

Fiction

“Step on a crack, break your momma’s back.” It was sorta like that for me, except I broke my own back when I stepped on the crack, and I was immediately and violently sucked down into it. I was lying down in agony. It was crammed like a coffin. The ground and walls were damp and hard. It was earthy, dark, and filled with a subway stench of human waste.

I saw the world I’d come from through the crack in the section of sidewalk where just a moment before, I’d been walking happily on my way to grab a cappuccino for my fiancé. I writhed around, looking up and out, twisting my head and straining my eyes to stretch the corners of my view. I saw a jagged bit of blue sky, hems of pants passing, a bit of telephone wire. I screamed in an animal panic. Each time I did, my back spasmed with a warm red kind of pain. My throat felt that way too. Countless shoes and high heels stepped over me. I don’t think the people who wore them could hear me. The pain pulled me down into strange dreams, waning in and out like the tide. Hours passed. My face collected thick tears that I couldn’t wipe away, my face went raw. My mind failed to understand how this happened, so I focused instead on the fact that it had. I was, somehow, below the sidewalk. The crack was all that kept me sane, being able to see the world still there. I began to count the faceless pedestrians up above. After a while, it made my head throb watching the conveyor belt people pass by, so I shut my eyes and fell into the pain as the little light of the world dimmed to darkness.

The soles of the morning commuters zig-zagged like enormous ants. In the light of dawn, I awoke silently sobbing and thinking of my mom. I watched the brown

loafers and child sized sneakers trod over me, heard distant car horns and the pneumatic sighs of busses starting and stopping. No panic remained, only whimpered exhaustion and the heavy dread of the realization I had woken up with.

*The only way to get out, is to pick someone up there to trade places with.*

I can't explain how I knew. It was as if someone had whispered the truth to me while in my humid and shallow dreams. When they stepped on the crack and blocked all the light, I would have to *choose them*. And then, I knew, I'd be free and unharmed. And what about them? They'd be down here, like I was, shattered and supine. The air was thick, my legs were wet and itchy with urine. I watched a pair of Converse All-Stars come down, practiced the timing of the horrendous decision. I repeated this for quite some time, lacking the nerve to do more than scream and cry.

In high school, the hallways and house parties were crowded by the same sort of person. A trick we picked up for spotting someone who might be cool, a sorta superficial shorthand for finding friends, was to look at their shoes. You could see a pair of shoes and know what music they listened to, what films they liked. The memory made me nauseous.

Flip flops came along, bouncing over me clumsily, clutching to sweaty feet. Black ankles in a pair of leather slides, bright and chunky sneakers pushing rubber stroller wheels, linty dress socks in boring dress shoes dragging without purpose, beat up Vans and a trailing skateboard. I shut my eyes and let them go. I let the sun slip lower, hoping for long shadows.

The person might have been a woman, a man, or even a teenager. I hope they somehow felt my regret. I hope they too toiled in restless dreams and awoke with

the understanding. All I know about them is that they wore medium black boots, and their laces were untied.

**Summertime**

Linda Conroy

Poetry

Summer seemed so long, when I was four or five. Six weeks stretching far as I could see. We rode hours to the Norfolk coast, arriving cramped and aching, sick from constant motion, engine noise, and tired of playing games. I spy a tractor clogging progress on the winding lane. Then ahead, a lightening, a widening sky, a lack of big trees that had cloaked the inland roads. A distant line of rippled white, and further out a sheen of darker blue reaching to a far horizon. My heart-beat rises to my throat, so glad I am that it's still there, the surf's fresh brink, its rolling roar, its crashing, rushing to my feet on sand that's been here since the world began.

**Welsh Farmer 1954**

Linda Conroy

Poetry

His busy hands keep the world in place.  
His elbows rise in effort as he lifts the milk can

from the dairy stand, its weight against his leg,  
and heaves it to the deck some three feet high.

He gazes at the green of rain-soaked grass,  
of celandine, behind the white and black,

the lowing of contented cows when udders  
have reset the milking clock, and time unspools.

Hills more-than-rolling buckle to the shore,  
the breeze holding a tang of buttercups.

In the lane a cat, tail high and tilted head,  
weaves dainty feet around his muddy tread.



**Reflection**

Linda Conroy

Poetry

The oak-edged mirror in the darkened hall  
sees light that slips through spaces in between  
warped wood and window sills

like an enduring eye, waiting  
for the shaft of fading sun to color change,  
catch and hold the fleeting soul.

After years of our crossing, dashing,  
tossing coats and boots onto the rack  
I wonder how this glass keeps looking,

silent save for the tick, ticking  
of Grandfather's clock, how it keeps  
the sights and secrets of our lives.

**Taking Space**  
Linda Conroy  
Poetry

Pumpkins on the back yard step,  
the garden shovel, propped  
against the garage door,  
the patio bricks I haven't used,  
not yet.

A block of wood I saved,  
a section of the fallen cedar  
from our last address.

Three empty flower pots,  
a hose not quite coiled  
spreading near a watering can,  
half-full, and waiting.

Here and there small piles of weeds  
as my attention draws  
attention to forgetfulness,  
attention to my needs.

**Lake**  
Coleman Bomar  
Poetry

There is a lake in my head.

The sign reads  
memories of us on our backs,  
painted bright red.

I jump, and your bed has sunk  
next to your dad's F-150.

A tent we busted  
camping in Tennessee mountains  
embeds itself in mud.

Submerged under moss,  
there is a gas station bathroom  
with dead flies  
pooled behind the ceiling lamp.

These were only our best minutes.

Now they reflect my face.

**Funeral**  
Coleman Bomar  
Poetry

Spirits pirouette held in memory  
like mother's hands.  
This cemetery is the dance floor.  
She spent life cultivating stillness for wisdom.  
He spends life writing stories  
and Uber-driving drunk assholes.  
When we strut across a stage named  
Jesus, Allah or death,  
and I am loved by more than thoughts of you,  
let us peel off our past selves.  
The choreographer has stepped into fire.

## The Red Victorian

Kara Q. Rea

Fiction

In an average New England suburb, among the '50s style ranch homes, gaudy new constructions and charming '40s bungalows, there once stood a red Victorian with a wraparound porch and attached barn garage. The house was a relic from the 1800s, left over from a time when bungalows and ranches and even (especially) vinyl siding had yet to be imagined. Back then it had stood alone, strong and proud beside the grooved farm-to-market road, surrounded by acres of apple orchards and corn fields, and farther out still, forests and marshes all teeming with life.

But those days were long gone. The red Victorian, now closely neighbored by manicured lawns and freshly paved drives, had evolved to have more in common with the forests and marshes than she did with the adjacent houses. The barn and the grand wraparound porch sagged like clocks in a Dali painting, and there were holes in the roof where every manner of creature could be seen coming and going, flashing feathers and fur and claws. The shingles themselves mossed over, then thickened, and then, with the passing of the seasons and the dropping of acorns and pinecones, began to sprout trees from their very skin.

Inside the house, with the birds and the bats and the squirrels and the constant *drip drip drip* of a thousand weeping cracks, there lived a tiny old woman of indeterminate age and origin. At least, that's what people used to say. No one could recall ever actually seeing her. Warm, dim lights were lit downstairs each day as the afternoon slid into evening, and as evening descended into night, the lights came on upstairs as well.

Occasionally the barn door was left propped open on its one remaining hinge to reveal a '90s era Toyota Corolla that never moved.

The neighbors talked, as neighbors often do.

"She must need help," Betty Bungalow would whisper to Ruby Ranch as they passed by on their morning walk. "That house is going to be the death of her."

"She could sell it and move to an apartment," Ruby suggested. "The lot itself is very desirable. Someone could build something nice there."

Betty sighed, and her pretty face creased with concern. "I just think that someone ought to help her. But how do you knock on someone's door and say: 'I couldn't help but notice that your house is a dump. Are you suffering terribly living in all that squalor?'"

"You should try it," cracked Ruby. "I dare you."

But of course she didn't. The years passed and the red Victorian sagged lower toward the earth, the trees on the roof stretched higher toward the sky, and the neighbors continued to discuss the house in earnest.

"Why doesn't the town do something?" Marty McMansion asked Carl Colonial while they shared a beer across the hedgerow.

Carl shrugged. "She pays her taxes like the rest of us. What right does the government have to get involved?"

"I'll drink to that," said Marty, and two long necked bottles clinked over the meticulously square-cut hedge, sending condensation flying into the humid summer air on impact.

#

The porch was the first thing to go.

One day in late fall, with the added weight of the first real snow of the season, it simply sighed and released its hold on the side of the house. None of the neighbors heard anything; they only noticed when they emerged in the morning to run their shiny snowblowers up and down their driveways. There were holes in the side of the house where the porch had lost its grip; holes that were too dark and stuffed with house guts to see into, but which had to be at around ankle level to anyone brave enough to go upstairs.

"She'll freeze in there," Betty fretted to Ruby over coffee.

"Never mind freezing," Ruby replied. "She's going to fall right through the floor. Her whole bed will go with her. Hopefully she lands on top."

"Oh, Ruby!" cried Betty. "What if that actually happened? She could be lying in there alone and hurt, and no one would even know."

"Someone should get that lady a cat," said Honey, the Bungalows' five-year-old daughter.

Betty and Ruby exchanged a look. They hadn't realized she was listening.

"Oh, Honey," Betty cooed. "That's sweet. But trust me, a pet is the last thing that poor woman needs."

Honey lowered her eyes. She shuffled her feet shyly.

"It's not about needing a pet," the little girl said finally. "It's about needing someone who loves you."

"That's a very nice thought, Honey," said Ruby. "But cats need love, too. They need to be fed and their box needs to be cleaned. It's too much responsibility for someone who lets their house fall down around them."

And perhaps Ruby Ranch was right about that. When the house did fall a few months later, just past midnight and in the dead of winter, it was a good thing

there wasn't a cat inside or it would have been crushed to dust like everything else.

#

When the house collapsed there *was* a sound that the neighbors heard, though they remained warm and oblivious in their beds; a sound that broke through their dreams and manifested in that strange sleep state as the rumble of a distant earthquake, or the cracking of thick ice over a mountain lake. In the morning everyone was shocked to behold the pile of snow and shingle and other debris where the red Victorian once stood.

The men returned to their kitchens to discuss the event with their wives.

"Should we call someone?" Carl Colonial asked his wife Cindy.

"Who?" she asked in return.

"Town hall, maybe? The fire department?"

"I don't know, Carl," said Cindy, wringing her hands until her knuckles were white. "I'm sure they already know. It's really none of our business."

And so the neighbors whispered amongst themselves and waited and watched, but no one from the town hall or the fire department came. After a while the snow melted, revealing a pile of strange mulch from which the former rooftop saplings, relieved to finally be anchored over solid ground, grew taller and thicker by the day. In the full bloom of spring someone walking by might catch a glimpse of the ghost of a familiar object—the outline of a lampshade or a nightgown, a row of balusters laid out without a staircase like the disembodied grin of a Cheshire cat. The light hit differently in that area. Everyone walked a little faster when they were passing by.



In time the trees reclaimed the lot, and it returned to what it once was before the earth was plowed for fields or carved up for roads. It was odd that such a desirable parcel was allowed to return to nature, but the neighbors had other things to talk about these days, block parties to facilitate and PTA meetings to attend.

And it seems very strange, but they forgot all about the little old woman who had lived there. Or maybe they didn't; not really. Maybe they just chose not to think of her, of what had probably happened to her, and of where she might be at this very moment. In any case, they never spoke to one another about her again.

But every so often on a clear summer's night, Betty Bungalow stands at her living room window and inhales the scent of pines and oak and detects the faintest hint of something else in the air, something dark, something secret and haunted and soaked in sorrow. In these hushed moments without another living soul around to see her, she shivers and wraps her arms around herself. Then she sighs and whispers softly to no one: "It's a good thing she didn't have a cat."

**Man in a Hurry**  
Kathryn Temple  
Poetry

Get moving, says my father  
No point in keeping this or that  
Nothing worth saving  
Off to the dump

Now dead, now gone, still talking  
To me.

My father spurned the body.  
Urns are worthless,  
Undertakers shysters,  
Coffins a waste.

He asked for a cheap death; he got it.

A plastic box, pitch black and shiny  
8 inches square. Haste, no waste.  
But so heavy in my hands  
It gaped at the seams; I tried to be careful.

I lifted it, dense, compacted, into my car.  
The box collapsed, the bag inside fell open,  
His ashes, granular, sand and bits of bone,  
Spilled out through my fingers.

Bits of my father lost  
in the ragged floorboard of the old car  
lost in the tossed wrappers, a torn receipt,  
a yellow hair elastic, debris, dirt.

He hated a dirty car.

I took him home, all I could of him.  
Driving slowly, avoiding highways.  
I would not bury him, scatter him, cast  
Or sow him. No waters of the bay for him.

Some things are worth saving.

**shade**  
Christine Brooks  
Poetry

my new bedroom does  
not  
have shades

no one looks in  
on me  
    anymore

so, I let the sun  
touch the green crocheted  
blanket  
that you knitted so long ago

and lay there  
exposed & alone

**book club**  
Christine Brooks  
Poetry

*for Sue Reynolds*

I think my mother  
would have liked the  
fact that when I felt  
most alone  
most afraid & most  
hopeless  
that they came

as ladies always do  
to embrace me  
to welcome me  
and to listen to what comes  
*after the pause*

**prayers at the end of the day**

Christine Brooks

Poetry

I used the  
last of the  
Old Bay  
that I wanted  
to save  
    forever  
because it was yours  
because it was your favorite  
because it was all that I had left  
of you

    forgive me

**SPIN THE BOTTLE**

Claire Scott

Poetry

and the bottle  
pointed at me  
not Leslie  
he would have  
preferred Leslie  
or even Mary Lee  
but not me  
certainly not me  
with a faceful  
of popped pimples  
and ten extra pounds  
seven minutes  
in the closet  
with Steve  
the hottest boy  
in the sixth grade  
my hands by my side  
fists clenched  
burning with shame  
he slobbered  
the requisite kiss  
on my acned cheek  
while we waited  
forever  
for the signal  
that would set  
us free

**THE SUMMER OF US**

Claire Scott

Poetry

We threw coins in, my young husband and I  
hoping the fountain gods would be kind  
that our marriage would last loving and long  
we did it just like in the movie, standing  
with our backs to the fountain  
tossing coins with our right hands  
over our left shoulders  
only one coin at a time  
not knowing what language the gods spoke  
we tossed francs, nickels, pesetas, shillings, liras  
to guarantee our wishes would be heard  
so the summer of us was secure  
the taste touch sound of us would endure  
we didn't know the water gods of Rome  
spoke only Latin, we didn't know  
that winter is a light thief  
and there is no way to relive  
once the light has left



**MISSING PERSON POSTER**

Claire Scott

Poetry

Looks about eighty, springy white hair  
Irish blue eyes, webs of wrinkles  
five foot two on a tall day, but not today

Last seen reading Merwin or Milosz  
or playing with a grandchild on the beach  
sailing shells on bits of driftwood

Maybe hiking alone, listening to the land,  
watching the lift of a hawk or writing  
by poem light late at night

Missing since the day he crossed the street  
a driver that didn't, sirens shrieking  
a doctor who couldn't

Leaving me stunned by the side of the road  
with a stuttered heart  
and a bouquet of blackened roses

Invisibled by loss  
living on the stumps of befores  
a sepia world where light grows less

I put posters in the market, the library  
the drugstore, the bus stop  
hoping to be found

**TRYING TO FORGET**

Claire Scott

Poetry

Wind and heat and wing on summer sand  
we wade and splash like little kids  
not like the eighty-somethings we really are  
then slather sunscreen  
and lie on the worn beach towels  
we bought years ago in Maui  
*a white spot*  
gulls shriek and dive  
fight over French fries  
*on my lung*  
but I stopped long ago  
my fingers no longer searching  
the doctor said *so sorry*  
his office smelled of Lysol and loss  
the memory returns ugly, unbidden  
and grief drills a hole  
in the summer sand

**Us in 30 Years**  
David Colodney  
Poetry

Write me a note in small penmanship  
swirls on a yellow sticky & leave  
it on our kitchen table. Tell me  
you're running errands. List  
what the fridge offers for lunch  
or snacks if you're not back in time.  
*in time.*

Let me pour what's left  
of morning's coffee & let me  
sit & stare short on sky  
as I remember the elderly couple  
toddlng past in the Winn-Dixie  
parking lot earlier, hands fused together  
brick & mortar.  
*Will that be us?*

Let me contemplate their chutzpah  
celebrate their jaywalking  
by shaking in another sugar,  
milk swirling like the reels  
of an old projector flickering  
movies in my mug.

Tell me the floating grounds  
circling in my coffee cup  
means you'll wipe wisps  
of gray hair off my face  
as my spotted hands tremble  
*reaching for you*

Tell me you'll be the last thing I see.

**syntax**

David Colodney

Poetry

your voice echoes  
 smoky like bourbon  
 I drink to anesthetize  
 another anniversary  
 of your death

I hear you croon  
 adverbs                adjectives  
 your words smolder  
 like cindered italics  
 syllables alive

you speak to me  
 in a boldface font                your hands  
 parts of speech  
*you're* past tense  
 we *were*                I *am*

joined by a conjunction  
 spliced like a comma  
 under charred  
 clouds no grammar  
 exists

to describe                good-bye

**future**  
David Colodney  
Poetry

chilled rain drips childbirth  
from azure & hours later  
our son arrives ripped  
from sky & sun & water & love

he cries a cloudburst  
smack of thunder            each tear  
bolts of lightning ambling  
down cheeks his *nana*

will spend years squeezing  
he doesn't know what's ahead  
we don't either  
we just cuddle & feed

rinse & repeat  
protect him  
from what's ahead  
we only get so far

we can only do so much  
a warm front of two  
we hold back drizzle  
turn collars against torrent

swaddle our son  
snuggled in blankets  
like shields  
never knowing what's ahead

**Adeline**

Janine P. Dubik

Fiction

The corner of the dining room table jabbed into Adeline McHenry's right thigh as she misjudged its proximity. "Damn, that's going to leave a mark."

Felix, whose sleep was interrupted, stretched into downward dog—feline-style—then settled back on Gramma McHenry's runner in the middle of the table.

On Adeline's porch waited the recap of yesterday's news. Each morning before 6, the newspaper, tossed up from the sidewalk, rudely yanked her from her dreams as it thudded against the storm door. Today, though, she had slept until the alarm buzzed at 6:30, a plus for a Saturday.

"Good morning," Adeline said to the neighbor whose Ford Taurus often occupied *her* spot in front of her half-double block house at 40 South Laurel Street.

"Morning." The driver's side door creaked as he pulled it shut then started the engine. She didn't know his name; another neighbor, maybe Wallis Vale, said he had a married son who lived in Wilkes-Barre; Adeline wished he would move in with his kid, so she could park in front of her own house whenever she wanted.

Parking—particularly in bad weather—was a headache. Nothing was worse than lugging bags of groceries and 14-pound containers of cat litter, trip after trip, up South Laurel Street in the rain or snow. Off-street parking was sparse because the neighborhood's one-way streets were lined with three-story double-blocks, clusters of townhouses, and occasional ranch-style homes. Every neighbor wanted to park directly in front of his house. Adeline included. Often, she had to circle the block before parking down closer to

Northampton Street in front of Wallis's house. The seventy-something neighbor had a driveway, which freed up space on the street. The price: Getting cornered to chat. In late spring and summer, Wallis liked to sit out on her front stoop; in fall and winter, she motioned from her front window for Adeline to come to the door. While she was beyond grateful to Wallis for being a mother-figure over the years, Adeline felt the mothering could *and* should stop. She was now, after all, a middle-aged woman who had been on her own since 20.

Felix sighed and curled his tail around his face as Adeline went into the kitchen. Sunny and Storm followed, meowing loudly. Felix kept his perch on the table: He had his human owner trained to bring his food to him.

"Felix, breakfast." Adeline showed him the dish like a waiter presenting a dessert tray. The tuxedo cat glanced up. She placed the bowl on the edge of the braided rug and stroked his head. "Don't forget: It's fair game down here." The tea kettle whistle sent her dashing to turn off the burner. With full stomachs, Sunny and Storm strolled into the other room, and she heard Felix growl gruffly as he jumped to the floor when the other two approached his dish. She spooned instant coffee into her morning cup. "I should get a Keurig." The boiling water bubbled into her Donald Duck mug. Donald in his blue sailor top and blue beret was a gift from her best friend's Disney World trip thirty years ago.

She peeled an orange and popped a section into her mouth. The juice squirted against her teeth. Sunny jumped in her lap, and Storm batted his sister with a paw.

"Now, Mr. Storm, stop that." The orange tabby looked up then sulked away. Sunny snuggled deeper into Adeline's thighs as she sipped her coffee. It was bitter.



The sugar sat in the cupboard, but since Sunny had claimed her lap, she didn't want to disturb the contented cat.

As she looked at the front-page list of obituaries, Adeline hesitated. Ralph Hartfeld? She hastily turned to the obit pages with nervous fingers. It was him. She didn't know whether to cheer or cry. When she was 25, she had been among Ralph's conquests.

She had told no one about Ralph and their affair. Over the years, she had wanted to speak, to confess, but kept her silence, afraid her friends wouldn't understand. Adeline left her job in the radio industry. She heard gossip he'd had several girlfriends around town throughout his career. Did his wife know about his philandering? Had she stayed with him?

*He is survived by the love of his life, his wife, Eleanor Holden Hartfeld. The couple met in high school and would have celebrated 50 years of wedded bliss on Oct. 7, read the obit.*

"Dumb bitch!" Adeline closed the newspaper. *You, Mrs. Hartfeld, or me?* I bet he gave you a song-and-dance every time he was out late. How many dinners did you keep on the stove? 'Oh, honey, I was out with a client. You know how the radio biz is.'

Adeline wanted to laugh at Ralph's wife's naïveté, but she imagined Mrs. Hartfeld was hurting because she genuinely loved her husband. She imagined the woman had been clueless all those years. Adeline knew Ralph had been smart enough to offer plausible excuses. And she knew she had had a part in the deception.

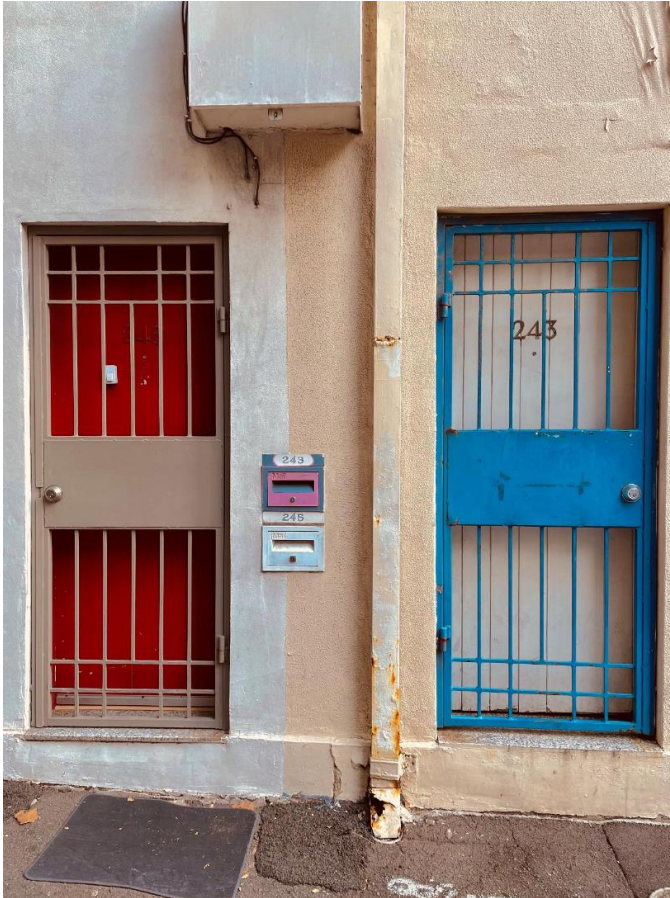
The sounds of something crashing to the floor then scurrying cats sent her into the dining room. Because room-temperature butter was easier to spread, she liked to keep her favorite antique dish on the table. Shards of

milky white glass and globs of butter were all over the floor and the braided rug.

“Damn it.” She quickly checked Felix, Storm, and Sunny. No one had cut a paw or a tongue while lapping at the butter, which was a relief. “Shoo! Damn it, this is going to take forever to clean up. Go!”

When she went for cleaning supplies, she took the paper from the kitchen table. She tossed the obit pages on the mess to keep the cats away. The butter soaked through the newsprint and left a grease stain on Ralph Hartfeld’s face.

**Next Door**  
Andrea Damic  
Art



**Bells**  
Andrea Damic  
Art



**hidden**

Andrea Damic

Poetry

from sight we stay hidden, no  
exposure of our inner thoughts, to  
curious eyes, even if they are friends'

we lead lives, secluded  
secretly hoping for more, as  
we yearn to be seen

at night, when alone  
reticent in our acknowledgement of self, still  
clandestinely we wish to be heard

yet our conscious looks for reasons, not to  
come to terms with our hidden desires, so we animate  
shackled by barriers of our own cowardice

only in dreams are we fully submerged  
into selves we wish to be, ignorant  
that once awoken

blissful obliviousness continues, as  
concealed longings elude us, if only  
we could find the courage to drop our masks

**MATRICIDE**

Jessica Khailo

Poetry

Our pain wants us to love them,  
burrowed deep between our eyes,  
spiked tails thrashing with synaptic fury.  
“Notice me, mother,” it whispers  
while I crash through all my mirrors,  
sloughing off my silhouette,  
whose calcination triggers clinging  
to its substrate. Dissolution  
sustains itself with writhing,  
but it ends.

The serpent, too, has cried us out  
and watched us die a billion deaths  
through countless mythic cycles.  
So we think that maybe, if we spoke  
in softer tones, and didn’t cause a fuss,  
she’d feel obliged to love us.  
She’d call forth the golgi apparatus  
to guide us through her fiery membrane.  
But the mother fears shrinking;  
She wants to exist.

Pray on it, darling.  
This stone in the vestibule,  
the archons won’t move for you.  
It must be dissolved, absorbed by the body  
with crying so purple, delirious, primordial,  
your blood is flushed with oxytocin  
and your swollen breasts let down  
their prismatic, opal fountains.  
Cradle this colicky genesis  
and let it kill its mother.

**ASHERAH**  
Jessica Khailo  
Poetry

When I learned God had a wife  
we weren't supposed to know about,

I folded her name into a loaf of bread  
with ginger, star anise, cinnamon,

and fed it to my family, hoping warmth  
could mimic remembrance, devotion.

I listened for their sighing in the night  
and heard "*Asherah*," through the boughs

of hazel near my window. "*Asherah*,"  
in the fluttering of dreaming lids.

"*Asherah*," as a swaddling fog  
to hold us until morning.

And I wonder if we can ever  
know her well enough

to draw her, unfiltered, out from  
the overgrowth of sacred wells,

reaching our hands through  
thorny brambles as a sacrament

to every invisible mother we  
never meant to forget.

**STARVED ROCK**

Jessica Khailo

Poetry

The end gave up on me,  
becoming tubers  
creeping through a barrel.  
What kind of hunger  
gets you digging?  
Survival asks  
for desperation,  
oily fingers  
grasping granite,  
not this weeping.



**Terrible Twos**

Nicole Reese

Poetry

A pudgy little hand in mine,  
emanating warmth that my frozen fingers  
greedily absorb,  
that my genes envy.  
She must have got it from her Daddy.

Soul-searching blue-gray eyes  
like the slate  
of a post-rain sky,  
lit up like a rainbow when she sees me.  
Must have got them from her Daddy.

Hair like burnished goldenrod,  
the color of hay bales in fall,  
but soft as downy feathers  
on a baby bird's belly.  
Must have got it from her Daddy.

Brows furrowed in frustration  
over those slate eyes,  
tearing up.  
Foot stomping with stubbornness.  
That, I know she got from me.

**Other People's Houses**

MJ Brown

Fiction

**3719 Ross Street, Dec. 2009**

It's your best friend's eighth birthday and he's sobbing into a slice of cake. You don't know what else to do but stand there and squeeze your party favor. It's a plastic kazoo that doesn't actually work, but you need something to do with your hands. A slime-green glob of icing oozes off of the plate and onto the obsessively-scrubbed floor. Snot rushes down his face, but the other kids haven't noticed. They're too entranced by the promise of ice cream in the kitchen. You just barely catch the sanded-down edges of his mom's words as she lights the birthday candles.

*Daddy couldn't*

*So sorry*

*Left you that*

*package on the counter*

*Next year we'll*

*So sorry*

She burns her finger on the lighter. You didn't know adults could do that. Parents make it sound like fire is something you age into, a taste of maturity, but this grown woman sticks her finger in her mouth when it catches on hot metal. She whimpers like a dog kicked between its ribs. As your friend chokes down chocolate

fondant between sobs, you wonder if your own father ever thought about showing up for your birthday.

Mama did send him the wrong address last year, after all.

### **498 Glen Ave, Apr. 2013**

The first time you pet-sit for a family friend, you become aware that the dog could indeed die. She's a golden retriever: seventeen years old, sensitive to heat, allergic to everything. It would be your fault. Even if there was no way to stop it, even if she just had a random stroke, you could never enter this house again. You would never look another animal in the eyes and deserve the love you found there. She's fine, really. Her tail thumps each time you shift on the couch, but every pause is pregnant with fear.

Obsession isn't the control you wish it was, but staring into her melted-chocolate eyes keeps you from looking at your screen. Not looking at your screen keeps you from answering that goddamn text. You are fourteen now, thus old enough to say goddamn—and goddamn, you and this goddamn dog are both so goddamn fragile.

*No pressure, okay?*

*Your dad won't be mad*

*This is about you*

The dog lets out a gusty little sigh that makes you jump. She puts her paws on your thigh and settles in for a nap. You want to curl up next to your mom and sleep with no care in the world, but she's at home watching

*Seinfeld* reruns. You're probably too old for that type of thing anyway.

This is your first night in a house by yourself. The dog snores.

### **4578 Kemper Lane apt 1314, Feb. 2019**

When his hand cracks against your ass, you have the grace not to flinch. It took some training, but you don't make noise either. There's something liberating about being shoved into a corner you can't claw out of. You melt into his arms as he holds you up and fucks you like he's dying, like he's come home from war. The less you fight, the more you're rewarded; you've tried brat tamers and mommy doms, but hard tops put you on your knees and don't expect anything more.

He's good. Once you're finished, he wraps you in a blanket and makes you some jasmine tea. You didn't realize a warm drink was something you were entitled to until he came along. He kisses your forehead and tells you what a good job you did. You will never go back to who you were before, swiping through dating apps and deleting foot fetish messages from strangers.

Sometimes he buys you the odds and ends you could afford if you weren't buried in student debt. You tell him you aren't a prostitute, but he just shakes his head. The corners of his eyes crinkle up even as the corners of his mouth turn down.

*That's not how this works*

*I've just been around*

*longer than you have*

*Is it so hard to believe that I*

*want to help you out?*

Once again, you are at the crossroads between kindness and manipulation. Once again, you cannot decide whether to tell him off or kiss his feet. He buys your lunch on a prepaid card during the week; he wants to do more, you can tell. All you can give him in return is the absence of tears while he breaks you down.

### **3008 Euclid Way, Oct. 2022**

You are twenty-one and you've come to appreciate affection tucked between storefronts or into your back jean pocket. Love freely given has been hard to come by, but Ash never drops your hand while you're walking. They kiss your cheek when you say something intelligent or funny, even if there's no one else around. You no longer dissect your body in the mirror each morning, looking for its sexiest and most sellable contents.

Ash is your age. Finally, someone your mom approves of! She doesn't care about the tattoos snaking up their arms, she doesn't care about the scars on their chest, and she doesn't care that they work at a rundown antique shop on Front Street. They're even coming to Thanksgiving; you can already picture them shaking hands with your uncle and slicing up pecan pie. When you got up the nerve to tell your mother you were dating again, she sighed and cleaned her hands on her apron.

*I'm just glad you're not seeing*

*that older man anymore*

*What was his name?*

*Josh? John?*

To be frank, you do not remember that fucker's name.

Now you are wrapped in Ash's arms at their parents' vacation home. Your family can't hold onto one home, let alone two; you almost cried with relief when your mom moved out of the city. Rent just wasn't worth it anymore. Ash has never had to worry about that kind of thing. Listening to them snore in the middle of the night, it's hard to worry about anything at all.

You smoke a joint on the porch. Two missed calls from Dad (allegedly). The "alleged" is part of his contact name. You haven't spoken in years, but you know he's your real father. There's just a certain power in denying his existence like he use to deny yours.

You pick up this time, joint trembling between your fingers, and tell him you don't owe him shit. It doesn't feel as good as you thought it would. His voice leaks fuzzy and half-foreign through the receiver.

*I know.*

*I know.*

*I know.*

**Neighbors**  
Charlie Shulman  
Poetry

No, I don't know my neighbors.  
They are all very weird.  
They are way more useful to me  
As polite waves and faces, I am afeared.  
They make loud noises in the hallway,  
Come and go as they please,  
And up until recently during a pandemic...  
I swore every one of them carried disease.  
Could you imagine saying hi?  
I couldn't, that's for sure.  
Because once you offer up a greeting  
Most people expect you to say more.  
And then what? Pleasantries? The weather?  
Small talk isn't my strong suit.  
Confronted face to face, I'll run home saying  
"Oops, I have to change! I put on the wrong boot!"  
A thin excuse if I've ever said one,  
I doubt any respectful dope would buy it.  
But it's stronger than my last excuse,  
"Can't spill any beans; I'm on a diet!"  
You see, there's no good way to converse  
With people you've only seen in passing  
Especially if offering up a friendly "Good morning!"  
Begets my response shout of "Who's asking?"  
So, my best bet is not to tempt fate.  
Head down, lock the door, leave post haste.  
Work all day and talk to no strangers in any case.  
Then come home, awkward exchange, wave.

**True Crime**  
Charlie Shulman  
Poetry

All cozied up for a night inside  
After a long day when your brain is fried.  
Turn it all the way off and the tv on;  
NBC, Discovery, A&E and beyond.  
These are the channels that hold the key  
To a restful, rejuvenating quiet night free.  
Ah, the story of a woman, happy and whole  
Everything's perf — oh no, her ex got parole!  
No problem, no matter, she's changed her address.  
The TV woman is safe - God, you've needed this rest!  
V.O. about problems, who among us doesn't have them  
Don't go blaming the victim, it's not too hard to fathom.  
Uh, I've got a bad feeling this story ends wrong,  
Or else this episode wouldn't be this long.  
Ooh, there I go predicting and thinking,  
A night this relaxed could use a little drinking.  
A fine wine and dine meant to unwind  
Now this is a night I can get behind.  
Back to this cute blonde feeding three heads;  
So help me Jesus if she ends up dead...  
F#\$%! There it is. He got her. Shoot.  
Just when we thought her life hit a reboot.  
Question her ex, well we know it was him,  
Although, her new husband's not looking too grim.  
Great! It's a toss-up. Who did this crime?  
It's 1:30 am but hey, I have the time.  
Oh crap! We missed it! A true crime pearl.  
The chimney theory about the rabid squirrel!  
And that's how they leave it, wow, anxiety at a ten.  
I can't wait to relax like this again.



**Spam Risk**  
Charlie Shulman  
Poetry

I didn't answer the call  
Even though I knew I should  
For fear of identity fraud  
Or being told my car warranty is no good.  
They didn't leave a message,  
Though they sometimes do,  
Like a robot yelling robot things  
About debt solutions to apply to.  
These are the calls where we risk spam  
When answered willy-nilly,  
Filling our answering machines like a dram  
And us drinking it down silly-silly.  
How they got my number  
is not something that I know;  
I definitely chose no marketing under  
That list of sweepstakes rules for Geico.  
And I signed every user agreement  
As I infamously always choose to;  
Blindly, confidently with great endorsement  
Like a man telling a woman what to do.  
So, remove me from your list,  
This is not the NYT best sellers.  
That's the only list where I'd like to exist  
Definitely not some robot marketing teller's.

**pavement bird**

Amanda Nicole Corbin

Poetry

first, a incandescent barrage of cold knuckle into my eye with childhood-rivalry fervor from the man who also holds me when i cant sleep. if he shows me the snow, i will believe its a game. then comes the warmth, blood draining from my nose like spoiled syrup onto my breasts, my hands, the carpet, until he holds me, begging his apologies like jagged wind. in this moment, i forget love doesn't bleed so dark.

freedom blows through me as i swing and kick at everything on this neighborhood street—wiffle balls and broken tags and soiled flyers—everything that reflects light. my toes numb and my skin cements and things explode: fracturing and rupturing and dancing. for a moment when i splash through the concrete, i forget he ever left a bruise.

until i feel the feathers, bursting beneath my feet, and the cracking, of small, small bones, as though whatever debris my foot creates is nothing more than twigs and dust and glue...i do not check the carnage under these flickering streetlights, but when i wash the blood from my shoe, i finally remember why doves and angels share wings.

**hatching**

Amanda Nicole Corbin

Poetry

i collect bad omens like smooth stones i roll in my pocket to keep my hands from destroying themselves. you told me you would call so here i am: spinning thickets of bad luck with hairs yanked from my head, each minute passing conjuring murals of your death: a black coated shooter, a threadless tire, a shipwrecked station from the sky. you have died in so many ways before me already. this *waiting* sits beside *altruism* and *love*, torture disguised as a virtue. STOP telling me it is good for me—no amount of lightning should be trapped in a bottle, nonetheless my chest! but this is an ageless battle; before puberty can swell my anxiety from bud to bloom, i wandered the backyard, (always) awaiting something, even then. abruptly a sharp sound: a golden peep cracking the air. i cant recall the time spent beneath the pine tree watching the fissures in the egg innervate as the small waterfowl labors through—is it patience if im unaware im standing on it? though, i *do* remember her slimy, spindly body collapsing in exhaustion, shell fragments clinging to wet feather, doey black eyes looking upwards with question. this fragile life come to earth singing songs for her mother, for worms, for the safety from snakes—does she know how long she will have to wait? i want to tell her to get used to this chronofear and to find comfort in the resiliency of the grass around her. instead, i watch as she promptly closes her eyes and enters the time-travel of sleep, resonating in the disgusting beauty of not knowing if it was worth it yet.

**the way of letting go**

Amanda Nicole Corbin

Poetry

she craves unlocking the cage in her chest and releasing  
a thousand flaming moths of her past—the fights, the  
threats, the nights spent communing with concrete—a  
*need* for the world to absolve her, for all to know of the  
failures and black eyes and complete absence of soul. a  
requirement for everyone to behold her bioluminescent  
guilt, dripping from cave ceilings the same way honesty  
takes its time.\*

\*but there are times when the day parts its lips and she  
hears the whispers of the past like leaves on the breeze  
and its then she hopes her hands are dry, mud-cracked  
vices so she may hunt each admittance to that former  
self, those damned little flying things, to grasp their  
lantern wings, and to crush them into the kind of dust  
that the wind wont let touch the ground.

**Star Jelly**  
Austin Fricke  
Nonfiction

*Stella Gelata*

Star Jellies appear on calm, quiet, and light-filled nights on the opposite side of the sky from the moon. Against the usual backdrop of meteorites, aurora borealis, airplanes, and the common traffic of the night, a star jelly may easily be mistaken for a slow-moving satellite.

What sets them apart from satellites is that instead of moving in a singular purposeful orbit, star jellies tend to wander, twist, and play in small dances that encompass light years, leaving them somehow in exactly the same location where they were first spotted. At the end of the display, you might not be sure if they ever moved at all.

If you see a light in the sky you suspect to be a star jelly, fix your gaze upon it and don't move a muscle, don't even blink, as the slightest movement or sound will startle them, causing them to retract completely back into their bright shells.

As your eyes adjust to the deep vale of space, they can be identified first by the conical skirt of dim light they trail behind themselves, and second by the long phantasmic tendrils they use to push themselves through the cosmos. These tendrils usually appear in small groups of two or three, but there doesn't appear to be any upper limit to their number. On exceedingly clear nights, a dim bubble can be seen around the bright light of the star jelly. Scientists call this bubble magnetism, and the creature generates this bubble to protect itself

from its natural predator. On the rare occasions where its whole body can be seen, a star jelly closely resembles a deadly Portuguese Man-of-War Jellyfish, hence its name.

The star jelly is a star with nothing to do. Naturally curious and covetous beings, stars grab hold of anything that passes close enough to them with their long arms and use these celestial objects to decorate their already spectacular bodies. Whether these objects are planets, asteroids, or even other stars, anything that can be captured will be captured. A star that has captured nothing is both free from adornment and responsibilities, and is thus free to flick its immense body wherever it desires as long as it returns to its post before sunrise.

Sometimes these silly creatures play dead and explode dramatically in unfathomable bursts of energy for absolutely no reason at all before putting themselves back together atom by atom and rekindling their fire all by themselves.

*See! I was just playing. I tricked you!*

However, since this particular trick takes at least a million of our years, any audience quickly grows impatient and turns their attention elsewhere. The star jelly cares not, having entertained itself.

Other stars, ancient and bored, deeming that there is nothing else left for them to accomplish as stars, having grown red and large, burst in finality, deciding to play a new game as a planet perhaps, or a nebula, or as several billion human people. It is not yet known if these scattered stars can rekindle themselves again in the same way.

Fear not, our star will never drop our Earth, as stars are naturally vain creatures and give up everything to be lucky enough for someone to behold them. The sun is just as grateful to have us as we are to have it, perhaps even more so.

I used to see swarms of star jellies in the desert sky above the Eastern Washington Desert, a place chosen by those who colonized it as, ironically, it was uninhabited due to its inhospitable climate. Such a place was the perfect location to research and construct the first atomic weapons, as any catastrophic accident would only kill the workers and their families and any wildlife within a radius of twenty-five miles, a perfectly acceptable sacrifice. Coincidentally, such an accident would be a result of these brilliant scientists having successfully replicated a single heartbeat of a star jelly.

My father is the descendant of one of these scientists, and he had chosen this location to raise a family for the rising property values of a soon to be developed neighborhood. This lack of light pollution in combination with the temperament of the desert sky are the perfect conditions for stargazing.

I would be awoken without apparent cause late in the night, usually between the hours of two and three AM, to a buzzing of energy that filled my mind and my blood, demanding I go out in the cool summer air. Vaulting over the balcony barrier on the second floor onto the roof gave me the perfect vantage from which to lay back and watch the stars dance, twinkling their light/heart/eye at me and saying in their own language,

*We are here.*

“I am here”, I would respond.

*You are here*, they'd confirm, and writhe delightfully at their own joke, which cannot be properly expressed in a medium as dull as writing.

Now the nights are bright and loud, as people sleep and dream less and less, and the noise drives the star jellies away. Every now and then I'll awake to that same energy, somewhat muted, and see one or a pair dancing with each other or by themselves. "I am still here! I am still watching", I want to shout, but they already know and do not appreciate such outbursts. Sometimes years go by between these encounters, an amount of time so inconsequential that the stars don't consider it to have passed at all.

They will always be here, even when we no longer have the attention to see them. There will always be new audiences for the star jellies to entrance, and they will create them out of themselves if need be.



## Contributor Bios

Rose Bedrosian

Rose Bedrosian lives on the central coast of California with her daughter and their three-legged dog, Sophie. She admires anything done artfully, whether it's a beautiful meal, a gorgeous arrangement of words, or music that tickles the soul. She has never been on a horse or in an ambulance.

Coleman Bomar

Coleman Bomar is a writer from Middle Tennessee. He loves his cat, Mochi. He also loves his family.

Christine Brooks

Christine Brooks holds her M.F.A. from Bay Path University in Creative Nonfiction. She has two books of poetry available, *The Cigar Box Poems* and *beyond the paneling*. Her next two, *inside the pale* and *the hook-switch goodbye*, will be released in 2023. Her first novel, *Tambo Man*, was released in 2022.

MJ Brown

MJ Brown is a queer, neurodivergent writer from Huntsville, Alabama. She is also a second-year creative writing student at Emory University, where they will be studying next year under Tayari Jones and Tiphonie Yanique.

David Colodney

David Colodney realized at an early age that he had no athletic ability whatsoever, so he turned his attention to writing about sports instead of attempting to play them, covering everything from high school flag football to major league baseball for *The Miami Herald* and *The*

Tampa Tribune. David is the author of the 2020 chapbook, *Mimeograph*, and holds an MFA from Converse University. A two-time Pushcart nominee, David's poetry has or will appear in multiple journals. He serves as an associate editor of *South Florida Poetry Journal* and lives in Boynton Beach, Florida with his wife, three sons, and golden retriever.

Linda Conroy

Linda Conroy is an observer of people, as well as nature and other surprising things, and finds they offer a rich abundance for the creation of poetry, which, she says, serves to recognize and record the complexity and simplicity of human nature. We are the same, and we are different, ordinary and unique.

Amanda Nicole Corbin

Amanda Nicole Corbin is a recovering alcoholic, er, writer, who tries to find meaning in it all through her writing. She has had her short form writing published in magazines such as the *Notre Dame Review*, *Thrice Fiction*, *Ghost City Press* and more. She hopes to someday soon publish a chapbook and spends her free time playing with her cats, dolls, and Magic cards.  
[www.amandanicolecorbin.com](http://www.amandanicolecorbin.com)

Andrea Damic

Andrea Damic, born in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, now lives in Sydney, Australia is an amateur photographer and a self-taught writer of microfiction, flash fiction and poetry. She has been writing from an early age but only recently she started writing in English and to her delight and utter disbelief, she got published. Her previous or forthcoming publications include *The Dribble Drabble Review*, *50 Give or Take* (Vine Leaves Press) *Anthology*, *The Piker*

Press, Paragraph Planet, The Centfictionist, Mad Swirl, Spillwords and elsewhere. You can find her on [linktr.ee/damicandrea](https://linktr.ee/damicandrea)

#### RC deWinter

RC deWinter's poetry is widely anthologized, notably in New York City Haiku (NY Times, 2/2017), easing the edges: a collection of everyday miracles, (Patrick Heath Public Library of Boerne, 11/2021) The Connecticut Shakespeare Festival Anthology (River Bend Bookshop Press, 12/2021), in print: 2River, Event, Gargoyle Magazine, the minnesota review, Night Picnic Journal, Plainsongs, Prairie Schooner, Southword, The Ogham Stone, Twelve Mile Review, Variant Literature, York Literary Review among many others and appears in numerous online literary journals.

#### Janine P. Dubik

Janine P. Dubik wishes her thumb were green instead of black because any living, breathing plant left in her care dies. Besides writing and reading, she likes music, played flute for many years, took singing lessons, and hopes to sharpen her musical skills again soon. Janine lives in Northeastern Pennsylvania with her husband and their three cats.

#### Michael Estabrook

Michael Estabrook has been publishing his poetry in the small press since the 1980s. He has published over 30 collections, a recent one being Controlling Chaos: A Hybrid Poem (Atmosphere Press, 2022). He lives in Acton, Massachusetts. <https://michaielestabrook.org/>

Sarah A. Etlinger

Sarah A. Etlinger is an English professor who lives in Milwaukee, WI, with her family. An avid dog-lover, she tries to pet every dog she meets. When not chasing after dogs, you can find her walking her own dog, cruising the farmers' markets, drinking coffee, reading recipes, and spending time with friends and family.

Kate Faigen

Kate Faigen works as a copywriter in Los Angeles. You can find her on Twitter: @k8faigen.

Austin Fricke

Austin Fricke is a graduate student in the CWU MA English: Professional and Creative Writing program. He has a background in secondary English education with major influences from his Arikara and Sioux heritages, writing prose fiction, surrealism, dreamscapes, magical realism, and speculative nonfiction.

Josh Gaydos

Josh Gaydos is self-taught and chasing a dream at the world's end. Despite the odds he is trying to give back a sliver of what poetry has given him. Follow him on his fateful quest at @jgwrites22.

Maxwell I. Gold

Maxwell I. Gold is a Jewish American multiple award nominated author who writes prose poetry and short stories in weird fiction. His work has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines including Weirdbook Tales Magazine, Space and Time Magazine, Startling Stories, Strange Horizons, Tales from OmniPark Anthology, Shadow Atlas: Dark Landscapes of the Americas and more. He's the author of the Elgin Award nominated *Oblivion in Flux: A Collection of*

*Cyber Prose* from Crystal Lake Publishing and co-author of *Mobius Lyrics* with Angela Yuriko Smith from Independent Legions. He lives in Ohio with his partner and two dogs, and currently serves on the Board of Trustees for the Horror Writers Association as the organization's Treasurer.

#### John Grey

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Sheepshead Review, Stand, Poetry Salzburg Review and Red Weather. Latest books, "Covert" "Memory Outside The Head" and "Guest Of Myself" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Washington Square Review and Open Ceilings. Margaret B. Ingraham Poet and photographer Margaret B. Ingraham is the author of a poetry collection *Exploring this Terrain* (Paraclete Press, 2020); *This Holy Alphabet*, lyric poems based on her original translation of Psalm 119 (Paraclete Press, 2009); and a poetry chapbook, *Proper Words for Birds* (Finishing Line Press), nominated for the 2010 Library of Virginia Award in poetry. Ingraham is the recipient of an Academy of American Poetry Award, a Sam Ragan Award, and numerous residential Fellowships at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Margaret has twice collaborated with internationally recognized composer Gary Davison, most notably to create "Shadow Tides," a choral symphony commissioned by Artistic Director Gretchen Kuhrmann for Choralis to commemorate the tenth anniversary of September 11th and performed on that date in 2011 in Washington, DC.

Abriana Jetté

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Abriana Jetté is an internationally published poet and essayist. Her work has been published internationally in journals like Poetry New Zealand, The Moth, and Plume, and she is also an editor for the Journal of Creative Writing Studies.

Adam Katz

I graduated from Stony Brook University in 2019 with a PhD in English. I am the general editor of [2RulesOfWriting.com](http://2RulesOfWriting.com) and the newly appointed editor of [StorytimeSolidarity.com](http://StorytimeSolidarity.com), which is a library resource site. My work has been published in Spoonie Press (<https://www.spooniepress.com/magazine/adam-katz-story-061522>) and has recently been accepted for publication in the Academy Forum for the American Academy of Psychodynamic Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis.

Carella Keil

Carella is a writer and digital artist who splits her time between the ethereal world of dreams, and Toronto, Canada, depending on the weather. Many of her published short-stories jigsaw together into a magical realism narrative, and she is currently working on the connective tissue for this novella, tentatively titled "Salt Gardens." Her work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in Columbia Journal, Skyie Magazine, Wrongdoing Magazine, Wander, Shuf Poetry, Myth & Lore, Empyrean Literary Magazine, Deep Overstock, Paddler Press, Burningword, Nightingale & Sparrow, Existere, Superlative Literary Journal, Stripes Literary Magazine, Writersque, Free Verse Revolution, Boats Against the Current, Bloom Magazine, Chestnut Review, Glassworks, Grub Street, Sunday Mornings at the River, Musing Publications, Sheepshead Review,

MONO, Troublemaker Firestarter and Vocivia.

[instagram.com/catalogue.of.dreams](https://www.instagram.com/catalogue.of.dreams)

[twitter.com/catalogofdream](https://twitter.com/catalogofdream)

Jessica Khailo

Jessica Khailo (she/her) lives in the state of Washington with her husband, two children, and one very good dog. When she isn't writing, she enjoys complaining on walks through the woods, knitting, creating dodgy artwork, and singing her heart out like no one is listening. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in The Citron Review, The Jupiter Review, Gastropoda, Coffin Bell Journal, Phantom Kangaroo, and Amethyst Review.

Lauren Klein

Lauren Klein is a writer and (kind of) illustrator who delights in uncovering the bizarre and absurd that are present in everyday life. When she's not writing, she enjoys climbing trees and learning about the many secrets of nature. Read more at [fruitstains.com](http://fruitstains.com) or find her online at @fruit\_stains.

Sha Litten

I am an unpublished poet who has never submitted anything to date, so waters are untested. I never seemed to have the time and didn't make it a priority while my full-time teaching role already took more hours than I had to give.

J Mari

J.C. Mari resides in Florida and has authored the poetry collection "the sun sets like faces fade right before you pass out".

Kelly Mary McAllister

Kelly Mary McAllister (she/her) lives in a concrete shoebox in the Toronto sky with a scruffy little black dog, often found furiously scribbling poems for her soul, stories for her nieces, and far too many emails for her day job in the non-profit sector. Her work can be found in Beyond Words Literary Magazine, The Closed Eye Open and Drunk Monkeys

Elizabeth Morse

Elizabeth Morse values the quirky, the darkly humorous. She is hard-wired to be a night-owl and writes exclusively after 9 PM. Her work has been published in literary magazines such as Ginosko and Kestrel, as well as anthologies such as Crimes of the Beats. She lives in New York City's East Village and supports her writing with a job in information technology.

Ben Nardolilli

Ben Nardolilli currently lives in New York City. His work has appeared in Perigee Magazine, Red Fez, Danse Macabre, The 22 Magazine, Quail Bell Magazine, Elimae, The Northampton Review, Local Train Magazine, The Minetta Review, and Yes Poetry. He blogs at [mirrorsponge.blogspot.com](http://mirrorsponge.blogspot.com) and is trying to publish his novels.

Dave O'Leary

Dave O'Leary resides in Seattle where he is a husband, a Cat Daddy, a Gunner, and one of those two guys playing their acoustic guitars in the corner of Bad Jimmy's Brewery. [daveoleary.net](http://daveoleary.net)



### Polley Poer

Polley is the recipient of the Academy of American Poets' Arthur Rense Prize. Their work has appeared in Madeworthy Magazine and Texas's Emerging Writers. They currently live in Columbus, Ohio.

### M.P. Pratheesh

M.P. Pratheesh is a poet and artist. He lives and works in Kerala, India. He has published ten collections of poetry in Malayalam language. His poems and object poems have been appeared at various places including Singing in the dark (Penguin), Greening the earth (forthcoming from Penguin, 2023) RIC journal, Tiny seed, Indianapolis Review, kavyabharati, Nationalpoetrymonth.ca (Angelhouse press), The bombay Review, Keralakavitha, Guftugu, Acropolis, Osmosis, True copy, Indian Literature and elsewhere. His recent books of object poems include Transfiguring places (Paper View) and Charam-Acharam (Notion press).

### Kara Q. Rea

Kara's work has appeared in Marrow, Sylvia, Birthing Mag and elsewhere. She is currently seeking rep for her debut psych suspense novel. Kara lives in rural New Hampshire with her husband and three feral children. Find her on Twitter or Insta @karaqwrites or at [www.karaqwrites.com](http://www.karaqwrites.com)

### Nicole Reese

Nicole Reese is a stay-at-home mom to her four-year old son and two-year-old twin daughters. During nap time, she is also a freelance writer. She hit the last name lotto with her husband, since Reese's peanut butter cups are her favorite candy.

### Jocelyn Robb

Jocelyn Robb lives and works in Nagoya, Japan. On weekends, she collects materials for her collages at secondhand bookstores in the city, that are more often than not, run by helpful, chain-smoking septuagenarians. If it weren't for these stores, she would spend too much time on Reddit or in taprooms.

### Thaddeus Rutkowski

Thaddeus Rutkowski is the author of seven books, most recently *Tricks of Light*, a poetry collection. He teaches at Medgar Evers College and received a fiction writing fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

### Claire Scott

Claire Scott is a recently retired psychotherapist who is enjoying having more time to write, take long walks and try to stay ahead of the weeds. She is excited to be spending more time with her five grandchildren who are scattered over the country.

### Charlie Shulman

Charlie Shulman is a writer, improviser, podcaster living in New York City. Originally from Philadelphia, he can be heard on the music and concert review podcast, *To Whom it May Concert*, or the true crime comedy podcast *Killer Pillow Talk*. His writings and musings are displayed at [www.peoplesayimfunny.com](http://www.peoplesayimfunny.com). And, in his free time, he daylights as a civil engineer.

### Greg Stidham

Greg Stidham is a retired pediatric intensivist (ICU physician) currently living in Kingston, Ontario, with his wife Pam and their two foundling "canine kids." Greg's passion for medicine has yielded in retirement to his other lifelong passions—literature and creative writing.

He is the author of a memoir, a short story collection, and one poetry chapbook.

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine, The Door Is A Jar, The Phoenix, and The Harvard Advocate. Edward is also a published poet.

Lukas Tallent

Lukas Tallent lives in New York City. His work has recently appeared in autofocus, On the Run, SORTES, and many other places. You can find more of him at [lukas-tallent.com](http://lukas-tallent.com).

Kathryn Temple

Kathryn Temple loves long-haul flights and short layovers and is learning Italian. She is passionate about images, words, and forms that spur emotional reactions. See r some of her work here: <https://medium.com/@templek> and here: <https://georgetown.academia.edu/KathrynTemple>

Lydia Waites

Lydia Waites is an East Yorkshire based writer and Creative Writing PhD student at the University of Lincoln. She is a fiction editor for The Lincoln Review and Editor-in-Chief of Tether's End Magazine. She can be found at @lydiawaiteswrites on Instagram or @waites\_lydia on Twitter, or being dragged around the Wolds by a springer spaniel.

**Vivian Wang**

Vivian Wang (she/her) is a senior at Saratoga High School in California. She spends her time writing poetry and college application essays. She also loves playing the piano and guitar, swimming, and rewatching TV shows from before she was born.

**Jake Weber**

Jake lives in Austin, Texas with his sweet pup June and fiancé Tessa. He likes drinking coffee, playing chess, and making music. He writes monthly about anything he is curious about at [polymathematics.blog](http://polymathematics.blog).

## **Door Is A Jar Staff Bios**

### **Maxwell Bauman**

#### **OWNER/ EDITOR-IN-CHIEF / ART DIRECTOR**

Maxwell is an M.A./M.F.A. graduate from Wilkes University in Creative Writing with focuses in Fiction and Publishing. He is a contributor to Chicken Soup for the Soul. Some of his LEGO art is currently on display at the Dr. Bernard Heller Museum in NYC. You can learn more about him on his website:  
[maxwellbauman.com](http://maxwellbauman.com)

### **Jack Fabian**

#### **MANAGING EDITOR / FICTION / NONFICTION EDITOR**

Jack Fabian is a queer writer of horror fiction and lives in Wiltshire, England with his partner. He has a Master's degree in Creative Writing. In his spare time, he can be found playing video games and reading things that make him scared to turn off the light.

### **Corinne Alice Nulton**

#### **POETRY / DRAMA EDITOR**

Corinne Alice Nulton is the Writing Center Coordinator at the University of Scranton. Aside from being the Poetry and Drama Editor for Door Is A Jar, she's written for each of the Night Bazaar anthologies published by Northampton House Press. She had her play "14 Symptoms" produced at the Brick Theater's Game Play Festival back in 2014. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Composition and Applied Linguistics at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

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Please read over these submission guidelines carefully.

Our magazine features new artists and writers and works that are accessible for all readers. Please look at our current and archived issues before submitting your work. Works that are confusing or unnecessarily fancy will not be considered.

We only accept new, unpublished work. If you have posted something to your website or social media, this counts as being published.

Contributors can submit to multiple categories; however, only submit once to each category until you have received our decision about your piece.

In your cover letter please include your full name, mailing address, email, and 3-sentence bio.

We accept simultaneous submissions; however, please notify us immediately if a piece is accepted elsewhere. We reserve first initial publishing rights and then all rights revert back to the author. We do not pay contributors at this time, but everyone published will receive one print copy.

For the complete and most up-to-date guidelines on how to submit to our magazine visit **[doorisajarmagazine.net/submissions](http://doorisajarmagazine.net/submissions)**

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