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DOOR = JAR

Door Is A Jar
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Cover Image “From the Ashes 3”
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Inside Job

B.J. Burton

Poetry

I don't know how it got there
this blood on the page
streaked across words
I scrambled so hard to find.

A small cut on my finger
I didn't see
happened without my knowledge
from unknown sources.

Red lines in all directions
fan out like arrows from
an aggressive editor
aimed at the heart.

She wants me to write about the
wound. I want to write about
the healing. It's what's coming
out, regardless of what I want.

i am the phoenix

Linda M. Crate

Poetry

you always called yourself
vampire,
and it made me laugh when
you told your mother that it
wasn't fair to make the
vampire get the garlic but she
didn't quite get it;

to me you seemed more
like a werewolf with your
love of rare steaks—

but i guess maybe you were
right in the end calling yourself
a vampire because you tried
sucking all the life from me,

thankfully i had the ability to
rise from the ashes;
with feathers burning brighter
than stars—

because you can take out
many birds,
the phoenix isn't one of them.

counting the scars

Linda M. Crate

Poetry

climbing through the
debris of my life,
i wonder if any of the
wounds were worth it;

i don't know how to
leave the scars behind
as i've been asked to many times—

when people ask me how
i am,
they only want to hear that i'm
doing well;

even when they can see the sadness
or rage in my eyes—

so i don't know why i am expected
to do anything but wear a mask
when no one wants honesty,

but the truth is what i am aching for;
i hate the superficial and the fake—

want something deep as the ocean,
high as the mountains;
and as meaningful as the constellations
singing to the moon—

i want to be older than saturn's rings
while being youthful as today's dandelion.

Blue Dream
Jessica Baker
Poetry

I want it to be blue, the cake, I do
not pink, waiting to become red with blood
cut, blue will cry, but they will be blue
like sky, empowered, my trembling bud

Blue will not need to know about me
stave off confessions, be two dimensions
protect my private possibilities
self-immolation, chosen congratulations

Too tied to beautiful baby shoes and life
that is not mine, only in possessive s
pink, angrily, will see through me, a wife
heavy with choice, what to make of this mess?

There will not be one of pure joy, I will say
it will always be sacrifice, searching my eyes
her future, she wonders, if I prayed for blue
I wonder if she could be, purpler, than me?

The Love and Anxiety of Simple Things

Jessica Baker

Poetry

Seeing him with his family
a macaroni necklace on the counter
their photos, of outings in daylight
maybe they are at a picnic, or a birthday party
arms strewn over one another, framed
on the mantel, in their lovingly considered places

I am reminded of the sorority girls,
and in turn, the way I felt near them
overly aware of the obstacles I couldn't clear
twirling a ponytail before falling backward
into open arms, instead, I'm torn up at the edge
afraid of ghosts haunting my head
steam pushing pistons, my own breath
fogging the glass bricks I've laid between us

But with you, there is an opening, I can see
myself bathed in the warm light of easy living,
find a temporary sense of belonging
through you, I can listen to country music,
wear pearls, pray to God with thanks
understand traditional values
protect what is, rather than agitate it

Because ever since I felt your chest
under my head, in the middle of a night's rest
the weight of you over me
the love and anxiety of simple things
I want to glue life into place
turn in the dice, take myself out of the race

Chest Elephant
Terry Sanville
Nonfiction

“What do you mean, you have ‘this pressure?’”

My wife hesitated. “It’s like something is pressing on my chest.”

“How long has this been going on?”

“Maybe three days.”

“Do you want to get it checked out?”

“Yes, I’d better go to the ER.”

Not exactly how I envisioned spending Friday afternoon. But with that first critical decision made, to seek help, we roared into action, scanning our mental checklists; this was not our first rodeo. I grabbed the list of all of my wife’s medicines along with the box holding her pill bottles. She checked her purse to make sure that her insurance cards and ID were readily available. And I fed the cats their evening meal, early. No sense in pissing them off. They have nasty ways of getting even. I also grabbed a 400-page book on the cultural history of *Homo sapiens* to keep me entertained. A history book, really? It’s actually quite good.

We exited our modest home only to find that a furniture truck making a delivery next door had blocked our driveway. Jeez, I’m glad our emergency didn’t involve bleeding. Anyway, the problem was quickly resolved and off we drove to the heart hospital on the other side of town. I chose a route that’s slightly longer but usually has free-flowing traffic with few stops. Wrong! After driving less than a block I noticed a long line of stationary cars ahead of us—probably a wreck blocking the road. I quickly hung a U-turn and selected another route. Fortunately, after having worked ten years as our city’s transportation planner, I knew the streets well.

At the hospital, I pulled up to the emergency department's door and we hustled inside. My wife is disabled with Parkinson's disease and uses a walker. Try maneuvering one of those suckers around a crowded waiting room without crunching somebody's toes. And that's exactly what we found – an ED slammed with customers. A few wore masks, a few looked in rough shape, but most sat quietly waiting for their name to be called for diagnosis and treatment. Mercifully, nobody was leaking anything, although one old guy held a barf bag and looked like he suffered from acute alcohol poisoning, not that I'm an expert.

At the counter, the staff asked questions, we proffered our insurance cards, and signed the obligatory forms dealing with payment, privacy, and who to call if things go south. When they asked my wife what her problem was, she told them that there was the proverbial elephant sitting on her chest. In a flash, she was whisked away, through a door into the ED's inner sanctum. In a very few minutes she rejoined me in the waiting room and we managed to score two reasonably comfortable seats.

“So what did they do?” I asked.

“The gave me an EKG which I guess didn't show anything critical going on with my heart. But they left those sticky tabs all over me. Yuck!”

“Did they tell you anything else?”

“No, but they'll probably do blood tests to check my cardiac enzymes and maybe a chest x-ray.”

My wife is no amateur when it comes to hospitals. With a degree in biology and eleven years working in a hospital's medical laboratory, she knows something about what to expect and what most of the tests might show. I opened my cultural history book and tried to focus, read how most of early earth's species of large

mammals were hunted to extinction or crowded out by expanding populations of *Homo sapiens*.

Every few minutes a nurse or a physician's assistant would pop through a door and call out someone's name. Every head in the room would look up. You could almost feel the hopefulness of the person being called and the despair from the rest of us, waiting. And everyone knows that each minute spent in waiting rooms feels like ten spent outside the hospital. After a while, the desire to treat our pressing medical problems can be overtaken by the desire to get the hell out of there and go home.

To their credit, this hospital staff did their best to keep things moving, demonstrating progress toward meeting the desired goal: leaving. Blood was drawn, x-rays taken. Yet even with these appreciated interruptions, time dragged. We'd been sitting there for about five hours, when an aide escorted us into a curtained-off room where a technician performed a second EKG and we waited for the doctor and his proclamations.

I stepped into the hallway to watch the action. A traffic jam of gurneys clogged the corridor. They held guys clothed in orange jump suits with their hands and ankles bound together with polished chrome chains. A couple of sheriff deputies stood next to them and chatted up the ambulance EMTs that had brought the prisoners in from County Jail. One of the inmates complained about not getting enough air. The attractive female EMT smiled a lot ... in a place where there weren't many smiles, Friday night busy, and the bars not even closed yet.

Finally, the doctor came in with a clipboard and told us that all of my wife's tests didn't show anything abnormal, that we were to immediately check in with her cardiologist, and that she was cleared to go home. Then

came the worst part of the waiting game, lingering in the hospital while staff prepared the discharge paperwork. Freedom seemed so close. I actually thought about hustling her out of there without their permission. But the proper documents arrived, we signed on the appropriate lines, then wound our way back through the waiting room and out through sliding self-opening doors into the cold darkness. We removed our masks. Following a long afternoon in overheated rooms, sucking in the night air felt wonderful. But it had been time well spent.

At home, our cats wanted more food. I told them, “Tough, wait until morning.” Sometime during the following day, my wife’s chest elephant wandered off.

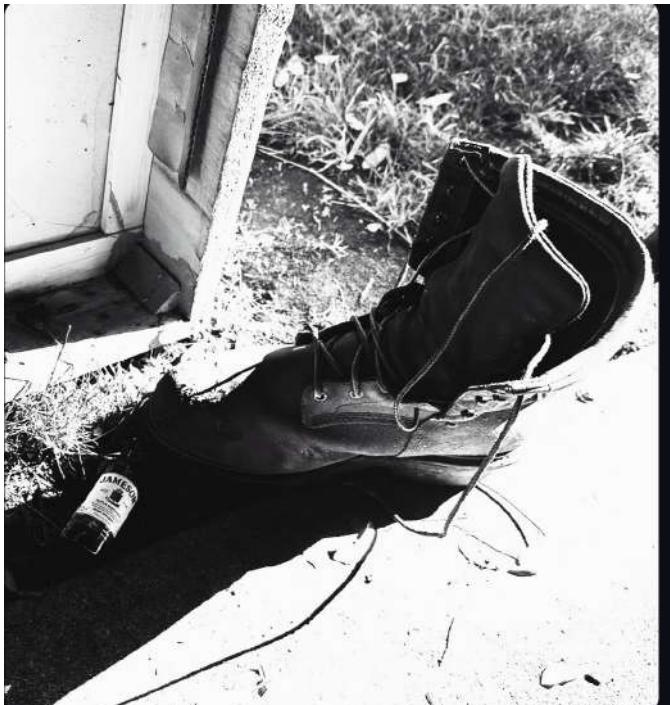
Shut
M.R. Mandell
Art



The Cove
M.R. Mandell
Art



Lost Boot
M.R. Mandell
Art



Hanging Shoes
M.R. Mandell
Art



Underdone
Valerie Hughes
Fiction

You've made me a liar on first dates. When the question about previous relationships comes up, I've talked about the ex before you. She was moving across the country to get her Masters, I didn't want to go with her, and we didn't want to do long-distance. One night we came home separately to our packed apartment and rolled our eyes at ourselves when we confessed that we'd referred to the break-up as beautiful to our friends. We still talk. It's all very lesbian and polite.

But if I bring you up on a date, I'll stutter. The past and present tense will get slippery. Something will move across my face and the girl will see all of the painful curdling things under the surface of my skin, like a hunk of pink meat left too long in the sun. My chin will wobble, and I could cry depending on how my last shift went. And I'll have to add that yes, I'm seeing her tomorrow. And the date will end twenty minutes later because the girl's smart.

After tonight's first date, I met up with some friends—they only date men—at another bar. I hadn't told anyone about you, but I'd been drinking and feeling wounded after our month of silence. I talked a lot, saying I know I don't usually like anybody so this whole thing has been exciting and nauseating but she started at work a few months ago and she introduced herself to everyone without smiling and it was endearing because she had no interest in ingratiating herself to anyone and once we were changing in the locker room with our backs to each other but the room's too narrow so our elbows knocked together and we laughed until we cried because we were delirious at the end of the shift,

stinking of shrimp and garlic, and I didn't know what the goddamn analog clock on the wall said because I'd forgotten how to tell time with those and she pointed at the little hand and the big hand and said—her mouth practically in my ear—that we always need to know because we provide a service and after that, we were friends and she texted nonstop and said that she missed me whenever I had off and anticipating hearing from her became habit and I told her all about about my good relationship with my dad and the sick family dog and my cousin's death and learning to ride a bike at twenty-two and the first and only time I had sex with a couple and telling her all of that was easy but we never kissed—she seemed almost afraid to touch me which made me feel soft—and once I met her eyes across the kitchen and she mouthed *I'm in love with you* and after that all I wanted to do was give every bit of myself to her and the first strike of her eyes on any day would grant me visions of my hand grabbing a dirty butcher knife so I could cleave myself open for her, show my red innards and entertain, to kneel and kiss the tired parts of her—her knees, wrists, eyelids—so I could consume her exhaustion myself and she'd have the energy to do anything that made her happy.

The longer I spoke, the less my friends' eyes strayed from mine, caught up in self-recognition. My voice was hoarse after I finished. All of our eyes were a little wet. It filled me with shame. For a long time, I consider my gayness an armor. It shielded me from men's inconsistent whims. But that wasn't it. I've just been lucky enough to be with girls who liked themselves for wanting me.

I got home and laid in bed fully dressed. I hadn't explained it well. I can't accurately tell it to myself. I'll spend another night staying up too late, re-remembering

things you said. The few times I've mentioned Mom, you've said that you can't wait to meet her. Every day, you stayed an extra thirty minutes after you clocked out to walk me to my subway station. You hated that everyone at work assumed we were fucking because it cheapened what we had—a 'what' you never elaborated on. Your face twisted when I verbalized the *us* during our meal break. You asked why didn't I bring this up on our walk? I asked why do you walk me anywhere? You pushed your sandwich away. I wanted to talk about it later, but you left work when you were supposed to. That night you left a voicemail after you knew I'd be asleep. *I flirt with all of my friends. Sorry if you misconstrued things. I treat you the same way I treat everyone.* I remembered the time you looked at my legs and said how badly you wanted to see me in a miniskirt. There was no convincing myself into believing you'd say that to anyone else.

I showed my underbelly and said *I want you, I like you* (I loved you) with a cold lunch salad in my teeth. Admitting to wanting made me feel exposed. Now, we don't say more than ten words to each other a day. I miss you while we're in the same room. I wonder what you choose to remember when we're standing at the same stove and meat in oil makes a wall of steam we have to blink through, so we can see the pale flesh and the clock, waiting for that flush of pink to fade before the seconds veer toward burning.

Converse Waffle Tread in the Snow

Keith Proctor

Poetry

It's too early yet for sledding this morning.
Walking the dog, the snow glitters tiny lights,
pink, green, and white from yesterday's
evening dusting. Footprints from a group
of teens walk away from the sledding hill. A set
of Converse treading steady among the others
as another set glides and stubbles on the snow.
The father in me wants to take off his black
Converse, the toe warn and scuffed,
holding his icy feet in my hands like my
father did on a Saturday when I was young—
I refused my boots too, trying to be tough.

He warmed them enough, so they wouldn't
sting too much as he slid them into the bathtub,
the warm water up to my ankles.
The teen in me wants to join this crew, out
later this afternoon, sledding on plastic disks
looking for jumps and talking about music.
Our feet and noses numb to the wind and snow,
few responsibilities—my body, homework sitting
on my desk at home.
Instead, I head home for grocery shopping
and grading papers. My kids
are still asleep.

Advice to My Younger Self
Felicia Krol
Poetry

No—I wouldn't dare.
Cruel of me, maybe, and not without guilt; just

beautiful things are coming and
I don't want to get in her way.

All I will tell her is this: *I love you*

because I know she needs to hear it
from me most of all.

Telling Secrets

Felicia Krol

Poetry

We sit, knees together, on the floor in the dark
like we're twelve and just learning
to kiss. I strip off my own.
I take those you give me, tender,
with petal-soft hands. I promise
to keep each one safe. So much of love
is a kind of unfurling;
it's a practice, being so soft
and so held. How strange, to know
that it all led us here—to this room, to this night—
bared, brave, and speaking in whispers:
I trust you. I love you.
Now hold out your hands.

Late Twenties
Bianca Amáris Rey
Poetry

I'm mid-step on a slackline between two buildings
aware of the space on either side of me. Aware
of my foot trembling, my calf aching, my toes

gripping the line. Aware the line responds
like a good listener. Aware
of wind gusts and spectators—the birds.

Aware I've made it this far unaware
there would be a step to swell fear.
I'm here. I want to make it there

faster—the ledge. The ledge.
But my first step in this direction
is memory making this posture

a lapse. The birds gather and circle above
my head. Their squawks sharpen like life
when pain assails the body. The line

shakes as a singular step remains
the prayer from grade school
I try to remember—my core

twitching.

Bar-Stool Bible
Bianca Amáris Rey
Poetry

The voice she gives to God wakes me. She praises Him as she palms grime off plates and pyrex. I listen:

I'm closer to each through the other, God and my mother; indistinguishable like the distance of a plain

in evening light. Those nights, with the nightlight on, we'd slide our fingers through columns of psalms,

voicing the words shaping the silence of our home into love we wanted. Eclipsing the psalter was 4:8,

the psalm we said every night in Spanish.
My bible shut and stowed across the rails

of the barstool, we'd close our eyes, say it twice.
She'd brush her fingers through my hair and tell me

I'd find peace in my sleep—until I sank back into belief.

Bad Advice
Jessica Dubey
Poetry

If love comes to the door today
with a bouquet of bright red clichés
and a heart-shaped box of lies,
let it in. Do it even though
this goes against everything
your mother ever told you
about opening the door to strangers.
Love doesn't need an invitation to enter.
It will find a left-open window.
It will pick your lock.
Once inside it will steal your wallet.
It will break your favorite coffee mug.
Love is a rascal. Don't try to change it.
Even if you manage to push it out the door,
it will leave a greasy handprint
on the curtains. It will accidentally forget
to take its toothbrush and spent arrows
just for an excuse to come back.
Next time when it knocks on your door,
don't bother pulling down the blinds
and pretending no one's home.
Love knows where you hid the key.

Hats Off
Ryan S. Leavitt
Fiction

To the Whole of Burlington Middle School,

It only takes one kid to make your life a living hell. And I've dreaded hundreds of them discovering what I'm about to tell you. After seventeen years, I must confess... I was the one who put a stop to Crazy Hat Day. I made the case against it, and Principal Shauna took the fall. This is an open letter crafted long after my fear of reprisals or retribution.

I must admit, the guilt has been building in me. Not for the act, but for the absence of a reason. For the underhanded way I saw to snuffing it out. You deserve an explanation.

I tried to teach you. You with your purple octopus tentacles flowing down. Your prospector's helmets and your bucket hats. I tried it out.

What's inarguable is that the universe offers us more uncertainty than we know what to do with. I think it's a grand thing to be alive, but the price of admission is a tolerance for chaos. And everyone's tolerance varies.

My purpose in life is to bolster the positive attributes of society, of rules and laws and knowledge. These things mitigate chaos. My duty was the imposition of order, even if that order is handed down, manufactured haphazardly from things my parents and teachers taught me. I didn't want to live in a new world, one where hats were acceptable inside, even if just for a special occasion. They alter the atmosphere I'm paid to cultivate. In my classroom, it was hard enough to maintain the old maxim of "order must be kept." Even on the mildest of days, it was challenging enough.

I've searched for the origins of Crazy Hat Day. Nothing immediately jumped out at me in my research, but I believe it's derived from Aloha Fridays, a much more concrete and justifiable trend. It began in Hawaii in the early 60s, spurred on by local designers. Hawaiian shirts were encouraged at the office during the summer months to free businessmen from uncomfortably hot suits. It was really about alleviating preventable suffering.

Eventually, it spread to the mainland and became normalized (Casual Fridays), its original intent lost. Crazy Hat Day had no such pragmatic purpose as that. We did it to break the routine, improve morale. To have some fun, right? Well I say, let fun come from a love of learning. An inventive and engaging curriculum. Not from some rowdy and insensible free-for-all.

Regular hats are a distraction. *Crazy* hats are a lurid cue to the student that our mission to teach is not a priority. They sublimated my lessons. Imagine the kids in the back, unable to see my whiteboard. Having to crane their necks or sit upward because of some other student's brontosaurus hat. Do you see where I'm going with this? It became an invitation, a chance to top the hats before. Indeed, one day an eighth grader came in through the foyer entrance with a very inappropriate hat on. He shall remain anonymous. Stirring old wounds is not why I'm taking the time out to do this. Suffice it to say, I had to confiscate it. To think the other teachers saw him in his self-described "asshat" and did nothing.

Had I stood by, perhaps every day could have become Crazy Hat Day. And so I sat with my colleagues, all of whom fought on the side of the crazy hats. One by one, the grief I got slowly turned into acquiescence. It was on me to remind them that clown college was a vocational option for them if they couldn't get their fill of shenanigans in the classroom. In the end,

we reached a compromise. Crazy Hat Day would be no more, but they would remain permitted at outdoor sporting events.

I took something my students loved away. In all of thirty minutes, I dismantled an eight-year tradition. Their reaction was horrifying—calls to save Crazy Hat Day, scrawls on desktops and flyers on lockers. Petitions arose, but they were short-lived. The children scowled in their deprivation. It seemed as if someone had placed a monochrome filter over the school's fluorescent lights. But don't you suppose that snap of harshness steeled them for the real world? Processes that induce such results are also my responsibility as a teacher. Subsequently, the students forgot their indignation amidst text message breakups, exams, and *Twilight*. Those who were there when we cancelled Crazy Hat Day advanced to high school. Those who came next hardly knew it had ever taken place.

Regardless, the timing of this letter coincides with my retirement. I don't think anyone stands in the way of Crazy Hat Day's return. Think wisely before bringing it back. Some things are not for school hours. The bottom line: people should wear hats to protect their heads from the elements, not to create a flashy beacon that concurrently blocks learning.

I think a lot about the progress of psychology. It didn't exist five hundred years ago. And how paltry our methods for diagnosing and treating personality disorders are today. Just imagine what they'll say about it five hundred years from now. About this Crazy Hat Day situation and the relentless woman who just had to stamp it out. How pitiful we'll all seem to them. Just barbarous.

This truth may mar my years of good intentions and tireless service. I hope anyone who reads this will

consider my dilemma whenever the call to do the right thing, even if it's reviled by others, comes your way.

My last day will be without a formal ceremony. I will not be remembered fondly. But I have that hat I confiscated all those years ago. Upon exiting this facility, I'll put it on while I walk to my car. I hope this march, under the eyes of those who'll condemn me—will one day lead me to atonement.

Yours truly,
Mrs. Grandi

Flight2
KJ Hannah Greenberg
Art



Vase
KJ Hannah Greenberg
Art



The Daughter's Zombie: A Recipe

Juliette Brookman

Nonfiction

Prep:

1. Clear off a spot on your couch.
2. Make sure one of his favorite songs is playing. He'll take a seat without asking.
3. Close all blinds and/or curtains in the room; gift him zero witnesses.
4. Grab your sharpest knife and begin sawing at his neck. This may take some time, but perseverance will surge through your adrenaline and strengthen your grip. Keep going.
5. Once his head is separate from his body, put your best, most absorbent towel over his neck to soak up the blood. Can't have the cats thinking it's Kool Aid.
6. Carry the head to the kitchen, and place it down on an empty counter top.
7. Use the same knife and begin slicing away at the top of his head, until the brain is fully exposed.
8. Grab the brain and pull it up until it wiggles free. You may need to slice at stubborn nerves; they're known to pop up.
9. With the brain removed, you may set the opened head into the fridge for preservation while you get to work on reconstructing his brain.

Ingredients:

- 1 platter
- 5 cups of self-love, the non-artificial kind
- 1 pair of surgical gloves, your choice of color
- 2 quarts of modesty
- 1 serrated bread knife

- A sewing needle
- 1 spool of skin-tone thread
- A pair of scissors
- 1 glue stick
- A box of matches
- 1 pair of earplugs

The Main Act

Part I: Ego

1. Put on your pair of surgical gloves.
2. Locate the part of the brain labeled 'ego' (this will be an easily noticeable portion, as it will be punctured with a lit-up sign featuring his name).
3. Take the scissors and snip the sign in half. Put the slices into the trash.
4. Grab the 5 cups of self-love and pour them over where the sign used to be. (This is the true, healthy ego, not used for leverage, not weaponized).
5. Self-love will be absorbed by this part of the brain, making it the easiest and quickest operation on the list.
6. It would've been so easy for him to develop it himself. This section is akin to a sponge, and yet, nothing was naturally absorbed. Only a fraudulent sense of superiority festered.

Part II: Selfishness

1. You may begin to sense an overwhelming stench of selfishness. Begin to remove this soured section—marked by its rotting and prickly outside—with your serrated knife.
2. This cutting typically takes up to 10 minutes, as it is a deep, thick root within his mind.
3. Once selfishness is removed, use your scissors to cut a quarter-inch sliver from this severed

section. We all need a little bit of selfishness to get by; I'm sure you're shaking your head, but it's true. Even he needs it.

4. Take the glue stick and apply it to one side of this crevice.
5. Gently adhere the sticky side onto self-love (the side where selfishness used to live).
7. Mold the leftover selfishness into the shape of a heart, and apply glue to the side of this section you wish to attach to the selfish crevice.
8. A balance of the selfish and the selfless has been struck. The aroma should fade, replaced with the scent of clean laundry.

Part III: Self-Importance

1. Next, you will focus on the self-important section, which loves to blurt out bragging rights. It will appear as a welt or swelled pimple, the most bloated portion.
2. Once you have located it, take your needle and pop the bubble. It is made of hot air, and based on nothing of substance, so it will deflate and pucker like a balloon.
3. You may hear what sounds like a muffled group of children crying, but it is only him, upset that his ruse has been destroyed. Blur the tantrum with your ear plugs.
4. Grab the two quarts of modesty and pour them all into the bubble until it resembles a bulging condom.
5. Retrieve your spool of skin-tone thread. Unravel the spool and fit the starting thread into the needle's head. End the thread you pulled through with a knot.

6. Begin to stitch the popped hole back together, being sure to make the seams as tight as possible.
7. Knot off the end of the necessary thread and cut off the excess.
8. Take out your ear plugs. It's quiet except for the pitter patter of his blood on the couch.

You absorb it all. The sounds, the smells, the sights. It's overwhelming, the reconstruction of a poorly designed brain, a brain without blueprints or care. Take a few minutes to step away and breathe. Sip on some water. Make sure his neck has stopped bleeding. Realize that women are born to fix men.

Clean Up

1. Returning to your workspace, retrieve your largest trash bag, preferably black. Use this if you don't have a tarp handy and drape it over his body. It's too ugly to bear.
2. Retrieve the head from the fridge and set it down beside the brain.
3. Pick up the mangled brain and situate it back inside the head. Be sure to sew the slab of skin back on top of the brain so that nothing is exposed. So that nothing can crawl in and mess up your hard work.
4. Arriving at the couch with his head under your arm, remove the trash bag, remaining cautious of the state of the blinds.
5. Quickly locate your spool of thread and needle. Begin sewing his head back onto his neck. Don't worry if the thread becomes covered in blood, the stain will fade.
6. Return to the kitchen and throw everything away. No washing, no sterilizing, just plainly

discarded and forgotten about. You argue that it's your favorite needle and knife. Well, you shouldn't have used them for this. I told you not to.

7. Sit beside him. If he doesn't flinch, give it time. It takes time for them to accept change.
8. Spray the room with air freshener. Open the curtains and let light in.
9. Smile at him. He'll return the gesture.
10. An apology will spill from his lips. Sit back and listen.

Bruises
Jarrod Laber
Poetry

Hazel
Jarrod Laber
Poetry

If nothing else, her eyes.
Please, let him have her eyes.
He can have my hair, my
nose—the gaps in my teeth.
Give his chin my cleft, but
please—please—color his eyes
hazel, honeyed rivers
that sparkle in the sun.
Give him her hazel eyes.
Let him know the human
heart, and be unafraid
of storms that cloud the sky
above. I want for him
to see a house, a strange
house, yet know that inside
sleeps a sensitive breast.
Please, let him have her eyes:
his mother's hazel eyes.
Spare him a callous soul.

Ode to the Cicada

Ashley Kirkland

Poetry

Shed your skin. Molt into yourself
& emerge with your eyes
glistening. Leave what's left,
curled, on the bark of the walnut

out back. A boy collects
older versions of you in a jar;
only he knows the forms you took
before you became what

you are. Let your veined
wings & body camouflage
your new existence in the world.
Make space for yourself

among the leaves, rattle late
into the evening. Make noise
even after the sun sinks behind
the trees and the street lights flicker on.

Burnt toast, a ghazal

Jean Janicke

Poetry

It happened every summer, sure as sunburn,
your toast wasn't done until it was burnt.

The toaster plumed like a campfire out on the porch,
perched on a tablecloth patterned in ferns.

We would shift books with worn covers out of the way,
mark Nancy Drew's place hidden in the boat's stern,

make space for butter sticks slowly softening in sun,
and grape jelly's shimmer like lake waves silvern.

As the chrome dragon scotched squishy bread black
smoke rose as if child-crafted ashtrays upturned.

We are jays; we remember those smoky vacations,
but each sibling's version varies as breeze to windburn.

Wind speed report from the deck of the lake house

Jean Janicke

Poetry

Six knots. My father's face is a weathervane.
He clocks nautical miles with his cheeks.
When my parents were newlyweds,
they spent spare time in the Navy's Newport
sailboats, exploring the bay, watching teams test
speed limits of cloth and wood, absorbing
the speed of wind in their skin.

One knot. Not a good day for sailing.

A single sailboat sits as if painted in place,
unable to push through the last stretch to shore
without puff or gust, a breath of breeze.
Waveless waters reflect shifts in sky's grey palette
as the sun sets: steel pearl,
ash, lead, slate.
Maybe the stillness means we will hear the loon tonight.
Maybe the morning will bring a whisk
of sailing weather to my father's chin.

Invasive
Scott McConnaha
Poetry

On a boat tour near Picton,
our attention is directed
to a stand of dead pines
on the island hillside.
The captain explains the Agency
has worked hard these past years
to poison them away.
Introduced a century ago
as lumber for this port town,
they now offend as invasives.

Rising above the native scrub,
the newly executed
covered with brown needles
below the naked gray skeletons
of the first lot, stand as if
warning others outside the gates
don't dare come closer.

Drifting past the pines
we're treated
to the next sample of wine and told
to look in the other direction
where we'll see some beautiful
new holiday homes.

Temptation
Scott McConnaha
Poetry

After 35 too-quick minutes
driving through warm morning fog,
I walk around to the passenger side
for my lunch and work bag.
Before touching the handle
a blue jay calls in its smoke-throaty way,
drawing my attention
to the otherwise quiet woods
that start
at the edge of the blacktop.

For the entire drive
(and sleepless night before)
I plotted my day,
rehearsing another attempt
to help them see
there's more to consider than
only what they see.

So tempting to leave it all
in the car and disappear
into the secret shroud of trees
who expect nothing.
And I'd have gone, too,
had I not worn my nice shoes.

Jagged Pink Carvings

Cat Winters

Poetry

I no longer
care about
people seeing
my scars—

my collection
of
jagged
pink
carvings—

my shiny souvenirs
from C-sections
and cancer
and clumsy old me.

Let
everyone
know
that I've survived.
 lived and
 and bled

The Washing
Katherine Cart
Fiction

They washed the armpits, out of which thin hair, they discovered, had begun to grow. *When did she quit shaving?* Nobody knew. She had always been so proper. But then, it is hard to bend the elbow like that. To twist the body to reach itself. They washed her groin, just in the areas of the tendons, really, though they debated this, they said it was indecent, but one of them began to cry and said, she'd know, she would know, so they did, and this was very difficult for some, they did not like to see from where they had come, but they reminded each other that they were there together, by which they meant, it's done now, that part of living is done. Each one beside the next. They washed her feet. How soft was her instep's cord? Later, some would massage their own feet, feeling for life, a tautness. Washed between her toes, picked what they could from her toenail rim, her toenails ten reminders that to be a living thing is to always be in some sort of conflict with the self. Toenails can be very sharp, can't they? They cut what they could. Some of their own children had long toes too, but her ankles were blue in their hollows. They wiped her empty breasts which had once fed them all. Her belly button smelled strongly of Gruyère, even from a distance. They massaged her hands with the rose lotion from her bedside. They wondered who it was that had painted her nails. Not any of them. Would they admit it? The wash water flowed from her onto the long table on which she had eaten many meals. They packed her sides like a vase with towels, and kept the floor dry. Who among them would receive the table? Who among them would eat from it many meals? They washed her ears. Hair sprouted fresh at her confused hairline. They wiped with

the softest clothes the tired skin that covered her chin bone and connected the jaw and neck and collarbones. Should we turn her over? one of them asked. A little silence. Where were they, in this world? What happens to the house of a mother who is gone? They would place her face on a pillow. One turned one leg, another turned the other, some heaved her torso, some held her neck. Would they all be so small in later years? It seemed unlikely. She had always lived in a state of compression. They washed her spine, its divots, the shoulder blade wings, thin as cats', the slack blue muscles of her thighs, long unrolled across the hollows of the pelvis, the strange silly buttocks of the very old. Did they remember the song she she had sung, when they were young? They wiped the back of the knees. One of them felt a tug on their own knee back, and said nothing. *She sang?* They deliberated washing her hair but, decided that she had taught them to wash their own hair infrequently, that that sort of dirt was not indecent. It was the only womanly dirt. They turned her once more face up on the table. *Oh*, they all said, together. Her face was remolded, a little. Just enough to make a joke of what living is. This wonderful mask. Look at the gums. Don't look at the tongue. Shut her mouth. An eyelid, too, had folded sideways and would not unfold. It kept its crease. They cleaned her. This was still her face, so they washed it again. When they were done, and she was dressed in clean clothes, they said to each other, *Thank God it's done*. If they were glad that the cleaning was done or glad that she was done, they didn't say, but it did not matter, not anymore, because now they would sit, each of them alone, with dry hands smelling of rose and her body, and write their little speeches, and that would be a different type of washing. As they departed the house out of her door, leaving for their various

homes, one after the next, she turned her head on her table to watch them go and called out, *Thank God it's done.*

Lost in the Commotion 1a
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



A Ride on the Midnight Train

Edward Michael Supranowicz

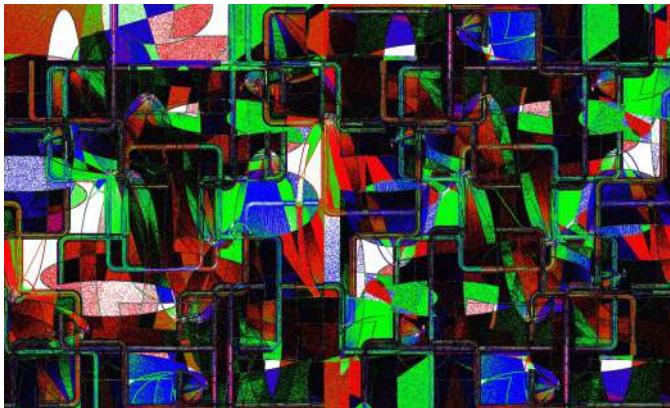
Art



Four Corners and More

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Art



A Calm Center
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



Awestruck

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Art



THE SORROW-SONG KNIGHT AND THE NIGHTINGALES' TUNE

Tiago Quintana

Fiction

Tristegard the Sorrow-Song Knight rode into the night, the black-maned steed Shadowsilk easily keeping pace with its rider's desperation. He rode aimlessly, guided only by moonlight's shine on a marble road surrounded by trees ancient and wild, for he was chased by impossible dreams, and the line between dream and derangement is only as thick as one's heart.

He might have ridden forever if not for birdsong, the sad ballad of nightingales he suddenly heard. He didn't know where it came from or how he could even hear it, lost as he had been in Shadowsilk's gallop, but for a brief moment, the quiet desperation that shrouded him was lifted, and he stopped, and listened.

It sounded nothing like the common song of nightingales to Tristegard's ears, though he knew little of such things; and in its effects, it sounded like no birdsong he had ever heard. It made him remember things he had never seen before, dream-like visions of a dozen white ships, their decks covered with a thousand black roses, sailing into the ocean's mist.

The song wasn't one of joy or cheer; it offered neither hope nor succour. But it did offer kinship and understanding, the comfort of knowing that no pain was absolute or ineffable, for even birds could sing of it.

The singing started to grow fainter, and Tristegard became fretful and upset. Moving almost without conscious thought, he dismounted and followed the fading birdsong deep into the woods, leading Shadowsilk by the reins as they made their way through the trees as best as they could. It didn't take them long to step into a

wide clearing with a pond in the centre, its clear waters perfectly mirroring the night sky.

Tristegard had hoped to finally see the elusive winged minstrels, but only their melody, now clearly audible once more, still marked their presence. He had no time to be disappointed: he was astonished to see another person there, someone in a mask and dressed in a jester's costume, a patchwork of bright, vivid colours with tiny bells hanging everywhere, dancing what looked like a circle dance all by themselves.

Such an energetic dance meant for a whole circle of people to outdo each other in displaying good cheer! Who was the fool, why did they dance? The Sorrow-Song Knight didn't know.

Despite himself, Tristegard stood mesmerised. The jester's mask, smooth and alabaster-white, had no features, not even openings for the eyes and mouth, which were painted on in red and black in an obscenely happy expression; they must have been unable to see anything, but they danced on.

Hidden atop the trees, the nightingales still sang; a song manic and despairing, the wailing of those who had everything taken from them, even their very selves, and their suffering was still at its rawest. Even the jester cried, for Tristegard could hear it, though they didn't stop dancing.

The song shouldn't have matched such joyful movements, and yet it did. To Tristegard, it almost seemed—what an absurd notion!—the birds serenaded the dancer.

The nightingales were still nowhere to be seen. Why didn't they show up, why didn't they stop singing? The Sorrow-Song Knight didn't know.

The jester saw Tristegard! Tristegard's breath caught in his throat for reasons he didn't understand, but the

jester didn't stop; instead, they gestured for him to join them. They never stopped dancing, even when the knight simply stood still. On and on, the fool danced, the rattling of the bells somehow matching the rhythm of the nightingales' tune perfectly, as birds and buffoon together performed – for who? Themselves? The world? The Sorrow-Song Knight felt like an intruder, and anger grew in his chest.

Dance, fool, dance! Dance the sadness and the madness of this world but hide your own pain behind a mask; your happiness is ugly, but your sadness offends me. Your tears make me feel powerless, me, who bears the world's grief but abandons my brother to his pain. Why do you still dance, fool?

Sing, nightingales, sing! Sing the lamentations of the lost and lonely, too afraid to walk the road ahead, too desperate not to try. Fly, nightingales, fly! Why do you fly, hidden among the trees? You will never reach the moon, pitiful birds, you can only escape your dreams. What use does a knight and his sword have for your wings, for your singing, for you? It's the sword that protects, the sword that avenges.

Why do you still sing, nightingales? Why do you still dance, fool? Whether you sing or dance, the world won't change.

Whether you sing or dance, the world won't change.

Tristegard the Sorrow-Song Knight groggily opened his eyes as sunlight mercilessly fell on them, the sight of Shadowsilk happily chewing on grass nearby greeting him to wakefulness. When had he fallen asleep? He didn't know, but despite spending the night in his armour without blanket or bedroll, he felt hale and hearty, restored in body and soul. He breathed in deeply, filling

his lungs, his very being, with the exhilaration of feeling alive.

He went to wash his face on the waters of the pond. As he did so, he slowly remembered last night's dream—for it must have been a dream, a flight of fancy from a half-awakened mind at most!

Slowly, he remembered the fool with their patchwork outfit and the grotesque caricature of happiness that served as their mask; remembered the way they moved in their dance, exuberance only heightened by grace, and their invitation to join in; remembered the song of the nightingales filling the night, melodies that captivated his soul from the moment he first heard them.

He remembered the anger—the rage!—he had felt.

Who had been the fool? The Sorrow-Song Knight no longer knew.

if we planted anger

Sarena Tien

Poetry

all too often women know
rage and fear grow in our hearts
raking its thorns down our ribs
stretching its tendrils up our throats
until every breath is a gasp

seeds that can't decide if
they want to bury the world in our rage
suffocate it so we can start life anew
or retreat, go dormant and hide
slip beneath the soil and never grow
so that the world forgets about us

today, I wonder what would happen
in a world without fear
where we could stop holding back and
let our rage take root:
would the world crumble
or bloom?

There are No Damsels in Distress

Sarena Tien

Poetry

Do not listen
to those you tell you
that you are a princess in a castle
waiting to be saved by a prince

fairy tales may paint men as heroes,
but do not be fooled

the patriarchy will not rescue you
there are no princes
and you were not written
to be a damsel in distress

no, instead you will duel dragons
move mountains and swim seas
as you learn to stifle
the mendacious mottos of men
and scream the weathered
war cries of women

so stand beneath the moon
catch a falling star
and curl your fingers
around its fire

because one day
you will write your own story
you will be your own knight

you do not need a king
to be a queen.

Maples
Taya Sanderson Kesslau
Poetry

a Hundred Acre Woods pantoum

The old ones stand,
holding their ground
in an extravagant labyrinth
of rooted fingerbones.

Holding their ground,
tops crowned in leaves of glory,
rooted in gnarled fingerbones,
they cradle life in the earthen floor.

Tops crowned in leaves of glory,
blushing in the twilight of fall,
the old ones cradle life in the earthen floor,
bowing down low for a season of rest.

Blushing in the waning light of fall,
the old ones stand,
bowing down low for a season of rest
in the extravagant labyrinth of life in the forest.

Forest Secrets
Taya Sanderson Kesslau
Poetry

a Hundred Acre Woods pantoum

Ferns in the overstory,
growing in the sky
amidst their sister system,
moss – that lover of maple bark.

Growing in the sky,
green delight! Clinging on for life –
moss, that lover of maple bark.
Thriving excellently.

Green delight! Clinging on for life
quietly, for all to see.
Thriving so excellently
high up in the cool sunlight.

Quietly, for all to see,
ferns growing in the overstory.
High up in the cool sunlight
amidst their sister system.

Valentines Pantoum
Taya Sanderson Kesslau
Poetry

for GK

Your love is cinnamon smooth
fresh berry zest
whisking me like cream
sweet spicy scoopings.

Fresh berry zest
spooning, crooning
sweet spicy scoopings
a dollop of me, a pinch of you.

Spooning, crooning
rising like yeast bread
a dollop of me, a pinch of you
cardamom scented simmering.

Rising like yeast bread
your love is cinnamon smooth
cardamom scented simmering
whisking me like cream.

My Poetry Is A Napkin

Bryan Franco

Poetry

It really tries to serve its purpose,
but it finds itself in one of those
metal restaurant napkin dispensers
napkins get stuck in that people stick
their fingers into to unstick the next napkin,
ripping it (and possibly the next one)
till a full napkin exits the dispenser.

Sometimes, my poetry is a small square bar-napkin
a bartender hands a patron eating chicken wings
as if anything besides a full-size dinner-napkin
would be appropriate which is totally unfair to
the chicken-wing-eater who won't be able to
properly wipe sauce and bleu cheese dressing
from his face.

But every once in a while, my poetry is
a fancy cloth, machine-washable dinner-napkin
that not only feels soft against my cheek but is
absorbent enough to clean any sauce or condiment
before being thrown into a washing machine
to come out rarin' and ready to excise more
messy thoughts that dare exit my mind.

POOL
Annabelle Wang
Fiction

The place is an old one. Summer lasts forever. Saltwater is king. Breaking into the community pool is now the ultimate competitive sport.

And I am the best at it; I can scale fences in milliseconds, I can hold my breath for years. I lap at the water like a dog and it knows my tongue, my taste, recognizes the texture of me coming.

Here's the trick:

When you climb, do it barefoot. Wrap your goggles around one foot, the rubber tight to your toes, segmenting your skin. That way, you will always have a good grip. And because eventually, this will cause your feet to web, you will never drown.

I swear I came here alone, but suddenly there's another girl there, all swimsuited, slick brown skin, already wet to the thighs.

She glances at me, chewing on the end of a braid. *Oh, she says, hey, looks like I win.*

No way, I say, you're wearing socks. You probably cheated. You probably flew.

She frowns at that, like she's forgotten if she had, goes quiet, meditative.

I've always wanted to fly, she finally says, and I say, swimming is a kind of flying.

That makes her laugh, so hard she bucks her head back, bearing her throat to the sky. *To me.* And I'm glad for it. My eyes graze the long brown expanse of all that damp skin, flick over to all that water. Follow the slick trickle of stray droplets beading her pulse point.

I say, I want to try something, I've always wanted to do this.

We'll both get into the water, but you hold my breath and I don't. Then, we'll seal our mouths together like push pins and pass the breath back and forth to each other, the air branching between us.

But there's no water, she says.

I turn, and she's right, there is no water, but instead a pool full of thin blue liquid. It's obviously not pool water, not even the fakest blue-dyed water, but something else, other and electric. It looks like Drano, or windshield wiper fluid, and when I dip my finger in it for a lick, it tastes like lemon coke, and burns my tongue, just a little.

Oh, I say. Well, I don't mind if you don't.

She jumps in.

Her hair scrunchies and socks and eyelashes dissolve on impact, instantly evaporating into static, but she comes up grinning, her tongue stained blue. *It's Kool-aid, she laughs. Berry flavored.*

It's definitely not, but I taste it again when she splashes me, and it drenches my mouth. And it tastes different, like blue acrylic paint and marshmallow fluff, and also vanilla-flavored hand sanitizer. *Sure, I say, lick my lips, berries and cream*, so she pulls me in.

She says, I don't mind.

Outstretched arms pull me in over her, and together, we tread water, electric waves beating over our shoulders like heartbeats, gently throbbing. I dip underwater, taking the blue into my mouth until my cheeks bulge before emerging, spouting it at her like a fountain, and she shrieks, bucks away, shirking my spittle.

It's all mental, I say. Like reverse psychology. The only way to inhale is by exhaling. The number one cause of swimming is drowning.

I read about it in a magazine once. I want to see if it really works, if we can live through each other's lips, if it will actually take.

Okay, she says, okay, but I get to take it first. You hold the breath. I'll trust you to pass it to me.

She takes my hand as I heave in, and together, we both sink.

The water is ice cold as it envelops me. I open my eyes, cheeks puffed up like a fish, and it burns, bright fizzy liquid steaming against my eyes. Eyes streaming, I watch her through that tinted film, like I'm wearing 3-D movie glasses, like TV static, and she is glowing and blue all over, stained clean through, down to her skin and bones and even her eye-whites, sparking her up from the inside out.

She takes my face in her hands, cupping my jaw, and grunts out a high-pitched sound, wiggling her eyebrows at me imploringly. *Hmmurghhrm*, she squeals. *Air*.

For a moment I think about not giving it. Imagine her choking, going blue all over for real, imagine holding her down. But I don't. I press my lips to hers, hard, sealing my mouth over her open one and exhaling, slow, then all at once. She chokes a little, eyes bulging, but takes it, all of it, greedy and gulping. She inhales like a holy tremor, gushing it out of me.

Her shoulders are braced in my hands. Her hands are clawing at my ribs. And I bob my head, lungs burning, and squeal for her to return it to me again, to brand her breath into my lungs, to breathe me into becoming again.

And she *does*, returning it into me and out again, over and over for an infinity. Some air gets lost each time, slipping through the slick seal of our mouths and burbling up, but it's *working*. We're doing it, we're taking each other's breath, sharing each other's air.

Locked together, we pass it back and forth until we can't anymore, until we are four lungs— one body, not two— and finally we burst up, kicking up foam, bodying to beach ourselves until finally, we break to the surface.

Drilling for Blood
Thomas Mampalam
Art



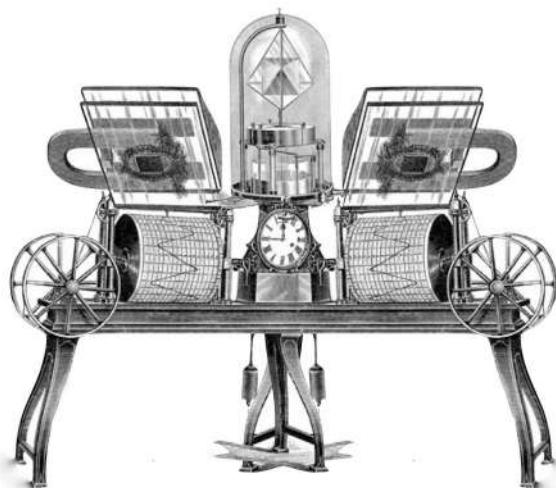
Hippocampi
Thomas Mampalam
Art



An Unexpected Bewilderment

Bill Wolak

Art



All the Light That Never Returns

Bill Wolak

Art



Soft Places
Christa Lei
Fiction

I spend too much time among spirits and sinew not to admire the human form.

I held a bone saw for the first time in medical school. I watched it hum through periosteum and compact bone, into the soft, wet core of marrow. Beneath gloved fingers, layers gave way. Skin, fat, muscle, then tendon. Bodies can be so fragile, yet fight so hard to stay whole.

We spent evenings studying for midterms by turning them into drinking games. Once, someone brought a gifted bottle of 23-year-old Japanese whisky. I sipped, picturing my liver beneath its cage of bone, steady as a metronome, breaking it down rhythmically. Each gulp slipping down my throat, warming up my stomach and settling in the small pooch I'd grown that year, soft and stubborn, like it meant to hibernate there for the winter.

Our cadaver's liver had withered to a husk. No longer supple and pink, but a mottled, crusty brown. Scar tissue threaded through it like veins set in stone. It barely looked like it once metabolized anything at all. We called him Charlie. His genitals—slack and lifeless—hadn't been dissected yet. It registered as odd and humorous. Everything else had been examined, but this part remained untouched.

Of course the penis stays intact. Some parts are spared longer than others.

At the scattering, his family members—three of them, maybe four at most—stood as close as they could to the edge of the shoreline without getting wet. The wind lifted his ashes before they ever hit the water. One woman shut her eyes in sorrow, while a man steadied

her back. Maybe they remembered his body for what it once held: visceral life and a warm heart.

I tried to imagine it too, the version of him they once loved. Who built a home from the foundation up, who held someone gently and grew old without becoming cruel. I watched their grief and pretended it explained everything we hadn't cut into.

I am sure Charlie never grabbed fragile wrists in a fit of rage, never slammed anyone against a wall just to feel powerful. I am sure he did not bruise inner thighs, forcing his way into someone who did not consent. He did not reek of gin and regret. Did not leave them untouched to shiver in a lukewarm shower, scrubbing down skin that would never come clean. He did not vanish down a hallway while she curled in on herself, willing her body to forget.

I needed to believe that some bodies slackened into death without leaving wreckage in their wake.

I still press my hand to the spot under my ribs, where I imagine my liver quietly chugging away. Still trying to clean what has settled, despite the parts of me I haven't cut into yet. The softer places, more tender ones.

Charlie's body lay still for the saw. I remember.
I carry what didn't scatter.
The sea took him gently.

The Sailor
Julie Shulman
Poetry

The ship heads offshore for steady wind,
to return home, it must navigate the shallows
a second time.

Ballast pushes the hull deeper into the waves
but steadies its course, tides remake the surface
and re-order what lies below.

To measure depth, the sailor drops a line to the seafloor
revealing what is below,
telling nothing of what lies ahead.

Any body of water can grow a new shoal
bejeweled by barnacles—
reaching toward the surface, not yet marked
by any chart.

Dead Reckoning

Julie Shulman

Poetry

My father sailed to America by way
of the boiler room of a cargo ship
from Norway as a teen. His journey
was meant as punishment for his wild ways,
he left unsure of everything except
that he'd never go back. At sea,
landmarks are noted on a chart
and compasses point to the north
and the winds are northwesterly
which is to be expected, unless
a storm is in the offing. But how
to locate a position on paper
while in the middle of the ocean
is a more difficult prospect.
Maps grow distorted over distance,
Greenland is not as big as it seems.
There is no name for water where
the chart indicates it is land.
Mariners might use dead reckoning
to locate themselves when at sea.
Estimate based on a starting point,
extrapolate. Danger lies in small
errors and missed details multiplying
with time. Three degrees off course
over one thousand miles, a hidden
current pulling eastward at six knots.
For the whole journey my father
was working below the water line.

Unlearning You

Zoe Sondik

Poetry

You never had to tell me
I wasn't beautiful.
You made sure I knew it.

I knew it when
you gave me clothes
too big for you.

I heard it when
you told our friends
I'd be pretty if I tried.

I felt it when
I gave in to your vision
of me that left me sick.

You never saw
how I starved
to satiate you.

I defined my beauty
by your rules all along.
Measured by your gaze.

But now I see,
I am far more beautiful
now that I make the rules.

Birds can't fly

Zoe Sondik

Poetry

Delicate wings fly
weightless, gliding through the air
Unconfined by *us*.

They raise the young into
A kingdom of family
Spread delicate wings

Fuel ignites chaos
They watch their friends perish
A last crying chirp

Changing their tune to
Fly from the polluted smoke
Famished from no prey

Weak from our poison
We have the audacity to step
Past lifeless relics

A nest in a tree
A mother without a chick
Her nest is *empty*.

Fire Season
Charlotte Staudenmayer
Poetry

June is a flat line like I-90,
bleeding out
when the AC went around Cleveland.
That was the state of things,
that was four states ago,
everything already orange. The sky,
the color trapped, only a reflection
like the heat
the asphalt and the buildings
sent right back to us, through
the mosquito-streaked glass
of the windshield, bleaching
the violets and snapdragon
on the dash.
We picked them in the badlands,
that day we wandered
in what felt like a desert
but wasn't, for what felt like days.
It smells like something is burning
because something is on fire.
We are driving this summer down,
straight to the source,
the west sending smoke
to the east, circling
the back of your throat, your eyes
watering. It was only
an afternoon.
This summer is a spiral.
We are driving
with the windows down.

Your Childhood Home

Victoria Hood

Fiction

I tore down your childhood home. The one you spent all day building. We made a home of love and luster and with one movement I tore it all down, lightbulbs breaking, blankets tumbling. I wanted to rebuild it for you, pave over the cracks with magic, but you told me once the lightbulbs break there is no more home, the lights have leaked out, the magic has dried up.

I walk from your childhood home to my bathroom to watch my hair thin. You yell distantly for help but all I can do is watch the hair thin and fall. I am overcome with the concept of tumbling, of losing it all in the velocity we create rolling down a hill. I am overcome with how dark the night sky looks the first time you're out past dark, the first time you sneak out, the first time someone holds your hand—gentle, soft, like we didn't need to grasp onto memory. I close my eyes and I picture the daily tumbling: your childhood home, my hair, my body, my fingertips molting off to become a new person. I dream of becoming you.

You: an epitome. You: a resurrection. You: a building of, not a tumbling down. You: built your childhood home by hand, carefully placing each blanket wall and pillow insulation, providing clips from my bathroom that no longer hold my thinning, tumbling hair. You: searching inside our home to build a home that can finally become a nest, something to hold your delicate bones. You: trying to provide. You: build and build the whole day so you can have the childhood home you only wished you had at childhood: a TV in the center, a mini

fridge in the corner chilling your juice boxes and Gatorade, fairy lights highlighting us from the background and we sink further into each other. You: resurrecting the walls of nostalgia. You: a home.

You invited me to the stay the night and I made myself a spot next to you holding myself together. My feet too big, my head too lopsided, my arms always longer than I thought they were. You ask me to grab something to bring into our home for the night, but I cannot take it any longer. I move one inch and demolish your house. I break the lightbulbs, so you'll only have darkness, I rip at the clips holding the hinges of this house together, I claw at the blankets, wrapping me in shards of lightbulb, I feel the glass embed deeper and deeper until my blood spills purple rather than red. I run from this home I tore down and watch my hair thin in the bathroom. I push the glass deeper and deeper—I want to replace my bones made of milk and jelly with the shards of glass my body has started to call home.

My body gags, I open my mouth and I pull at the threads choking me. I pull and pull until your gray felt snowflake blanket comes out in its entirety. It is hot to the touch from my fireplace heart. You pull this blanket over my head and ask me if this would be enough hair, so much that I could never lose it in this lifetime. I cry and cry until tiny pillows fit for ants crawl out of my eyes, of course I say. You shuffle me forward and my sheets for legs crumble under the weight of movement, they tumble under the tension of unraveling.

I lay there in awe of the mess I made. I am never prepared for the way I can tear it all down, for the way I am never fully human. You tell me you wouldn't have built this home if you weren't prepared for me to knock

it down. You tell me this like it is comfort, like it is knowing, not like it is a stab to balls of my feet—pegging me down to exactly who I am.

In the wake of your childhood home collapsing, I am building a new home for myself, one that could never demolish your home again. I adjust my glass bones, compacting them into a figment of stability, I scoop up the tattered shreds of blanket mixed with my surface red blood and I papier-mâché the cracks in the wall, I chew up the papers from the receipts for the snacks and I wade them together to make this house stable for impending weather. In the wake of your childhood home collapsing, I have built you something to stare at, something you can make a home out of if you hollow me out enough. Take the spoon from your pocket and gently spoon out your view, make windows into your new childhood home. Take the spoon from your pocket and gently scrape the meat from bone, sweep the muscle and tendon away like cob webs, squash the bugs inside your home like the balloons of blood they are. Take the spoon from your pocket and widen the gaping door to the entrance of your new childhood home, make it human sized again and never let me in. In the wake of your childhood home collapsing, I have offered myself to you as a nest for eternity. I hope you think of me.

From the Ashes 1
Zander Fieschko
Art



From the Ashes 2

Zander Fieschko

Art



From the Ashes 3
Zander Fieschko
Art



Tuulikki Bakes a Cake
September Woods Garland
Fiction

We live near the front. The frozen lake is all that stands between us and the enemy's encroaching line. I'm grateful to eat from its waters in these times of scarcity. The smell of my mother's stew—carp and potatoes seasoned with herbs we dried in summer—fills the cabin, promising to nourish my growing body. But even a full stomach cannot quell the dread. The arrival of more men and more guns is inevitable.

My mother does not accept this inevitability as an excuse to lie around lamenting. She sends me on errands each morning, and with our soldiers camping nearby, I help eagerly, wanting to catch a glimpse of their insignia and eavesdrop on their conversations. Their tales of foreign lands and ideas mesmerize.

Today I'm assisting with an important task. It's taken some convincing for the men to allow a young woman to participate—no one wants the honor of exposing me to the horrors of war—but I tell them I'm no stranger to atrocities.

"I watched my brother explode," I tell them. "And I cried for a week when my father fell from the sky."

I lift my sweater and trace the scar over the bullet wound on my abdomen with my finger. They watch, and I know they wonder but won't ask.

One of the soldiers steps closer to me. His eyes are a deep hazel, and when he speaks, I listen with the ear in my heart like Father taught me.

"You've seen a lot," he says.

"I have." As the words leave my mouth, I hope their sound fits his heart-ear like his fit mine.

“You know, our tactics go back generations,” he says while rolling a pinch of tobacco into a cigarette. It’s not an impressive job, but it’ll do the trick. “We use snow and ice to thwart our enemies. To hide and confuse.”

I’ve heard of these tactics—all Finns have. I’ve heard the morbid rumors and seen the rough-hewn sketches in a book my cousin swiped from a visiting journalist. The depictions stick in my mind: frozen bodies posed and stacked, their eyes pried open, partially obscured by icicled eyelashes. These were men who once lived and breathed and wore the red scarves of the opposition. Men who once left home for war like Father but fought for the wrong side.

I’ve heard all about the effectiveness of the strategy. Enemy soldiers, when coming upon their fallen comrades arranged in such a way, would crack from disturbance and horror just long enough to create an advantage. It’s then our troops would pounce.

I’ve heard all these things, but I’ve never seen the task carried out, let alone assisted in such a thing. Today we stack and pose the icy corpses of the enemy in a wild display at the shore. Moving the bodies is a cumbersome task. I lack the strength to lift them, but I maneuver and arrange limbs and heads as instructed by the men. The fingers are rigid. When I try to move them, to pose them as I’m guided, I fear they may break off. I learn quickly to be gentle, to sense the breaking point of the lifeless digits.

Despite these morbid challenges, the job satisfies. I feel purposeful. I take in the view of our work: seventeen men arranged in an icy diorama. I feel for them, briefly; I know it is the poor who fight wars for rich men’s gains. It is the peasantry dying out here. But as I take in the display of bodies at the shore, I steel myself against empathy and let the pride swell within.

Yesterday, when the bombs were falling and the men were rushing across the lake, I wouldn't have believed these events possible. I've had a hand in this and for my work I feel I have grown. Something new can happen for me.

As the day winds down, we retreat to the cabin where my mother has built a roaring fire and brewed strong coffee. I don't realize how cold I've been until the men and I enter. It's in the chattering of my teeth that I know I live. It's the pain in my bones—a deep chill—that alerts me to my existence. I count these sensory experiences and disruptions in comfort as blessings. Reminders of my vitality.

The bombs will fall again tomorrow. But today the men have silenced them. They—we—have deterred the enemy for now and will use that to our advantage. Not to advance or to take initiative. But to take the only thing worth taking: time.

This evening, my mother and I bake a modest cake from the soldiers' rations and ingredients we've stashed for a special occasion. I savor the task of frosting both layers, letting the joy of creation well up in me. I think about my father and my brother and I smile, grateful for the time we shared and comforted by the idea that I may see them again soon.

We share the cake with the men. I peer out the cabin's frosted windows as I eat, that morbid spectacle in view. I'm reminded of my good fortune; my heart still pumps blood through these veins, after all. My lungs still inflate with oxygen and my brain still commands my body to walk around talking and loving and bumping up against boundaries. My mouth can take food into it, chew, and swallow.

We finish the cake—every crumb consumed, every lick of frosting devoured. Everyone agrees, it's the best we've tasted.

Of course, it is, I think. It may be our last.

Hold On, Little Tomato

Deron Eckert

Poetry

Just another day.
The frost is coming
our way, but you are
not quite ripe enough
yet. I'd hate to leave you
on the windowsill.
The ants might get to you
before I do. There are
so many ants crawling
through the crack between
my world of walls and air-
conditioning and yours
of blue skies and green
gardens waiting
to turn grey any day
now. Just hold on
and know I love you
red, but I'll eat you
green. Would never
want you to go
to waste.

Denials and Confessions

Dennis Goza

Poetry

No, we broke no rules. We only
folded them into origami—
transcendent critters that never would bite
or steal anyone's bones.

We didn't crank up a machine
that could be programmed or disconnected.
We ignited rumblings deep underground
that shake footprints loose from cement.

We danced out of time
ignoring all the clocks and drums,
turning our faces toward strange directions
where our shoes had never pointed.

The wind was racing against our dreams.
We caught it by the tail and wielded it
to pry the world apart, in order
to reassemble it more just.

We played catch with a dragon's heart
constantly fearing it might explode.
We didn't stop a river; but pushed it
enough to make Andrew marvel.

Ambivalent Love Song

Dennis Goza

Poetry

We both dig breaking strings, because
that means we're playing hard. And hard
is the only way to play. And play
is the only way we both can thrust
through this parade of blended days.

We fancy our parades, if they last
for days. And frame our splints as well
as our trophies. We revel in
hangovers and ringing ears. Or at least
their antecedents, for which we'll pay.

We relish crying over milk
unspilt, then spilling it to laugh.
No haiku for us—only epics
of countless cantos. We prick up our ears,
hankering for a mermaid singing.

We bask in exponential zip codes,
craft onion sculptures, winter on Jupiter,
savor a diet of spices, a language
of punctuation. We don't let things
happen to us—we happen to things.

So of course, we love each other. Not just
because we filter out the filters,
turning our horoscopes upside-down,
but also, we share this: we both swear
to love, yet never to love too much.

Cicadas
Sam Aureli
Poetry

Some days, a wholeness finds me,
not like a wave, not so sudden,
but like the stillness before the wood's bloom,
light on the bark of a tree
that has stood for a hundred patient years.

Other days, I am a shell.

You've seen them—papery, amber bodies
clinging to bark and porch rail,
the husk of something that once lived
by instinct and then left.

As children, we collected them,
quiet trophies, not knowing what they meant.
Not knowing they had waited in darkness
seventeen years, just to rise up singing.

Now I know. That waiting is a kind of becoming.
That even silence can prepare a voice
loud enough to fill a summer night.

The Knowing of My Name

Sam Aureli

Poetry

The breeze brushes my arms,
a soft hand,
but brings no voice with it.

I sit still,
named for listening—
or perhaps for being heard.
Lately, neither.

Birdsong weaves through the branches,
a bright thread I once followed like a prayer.
Now I am a child again,
lost in the pattern.

A fox darts,
red as a shout,
snaring a rabbit mid-leap.

Is this the word I've waited for?
God and I, we turn our faces aside.

Still, the grass breathes under my feet,
wild and alive,
asking me, gently,
to stay.

Arrival
Sam Aureli
Poetry

You know you've arrived
at that tender, unguarded peace
when the meadowlark's bright song
catches you mid-step,
and you stop, boots sinking
into damp, forgiving earth,
to listen as if it were
the first sound ever made.

It's the way the oak leans toward the river,
limbs bowed with long-earned patience,
or the fierce, small courage
of a single daisy breaking open stone.

It's when you kneel
to the wild, untamed grass,
not minding the stains,
and let the world's green pulse
carry you
to its quiet, waiting shore.

A Light That Remembers

Sam Aureli

Poetry

When the world turns relentless,
leaves you unmoored,
slip back into the cloak of youth—
that fierce season when the sun
flared gold, unyielding,
and you ran,
a wild thing,
through fields where wheat
bristled sharp against your palms,
chasing the last slant of light.
It lingers still,
that glow, quiet as a deer
at the wood's edge,
steady as a breath held long.
It waits for you,
beyond the shadow's heavy drape,
to shake loose the dust,
to step—eager, alive—
into what comes next.

Time Change
Emily-Sue Sloane
Poetry

As we wave goodbye to Standard time
I wait for joy to set in:
We're saving daylight again!

Dusk can take its sweet time, now that
the sun is coaxing green shoots from the earth,
watching nests form and eggs warm.

But this year the task of renewal weighs heavy.
Everything we took for granted as standard
is tumbling, crumbling

in a torrent of untruths, rewritten rules.
Time is rearranging
on a map written in an alphabet

we no longer recognize.
We trusted the puzzle to reassert itself,
call us back to a familiar start:

straight-edged borders
inside which the picture would come clear.
Instead, the edges are exploding.

Shrapnel is crashing into the earth,
breaking its shell, shattering our notion
that survival is the story that will keep on repeating.

700 E. 26th Street

Diana Rojas

Nonfiction

In the beginning, there was the house. The new colossus. She welcomed us.

Of course, she was never just a house. She was the brick-and-mortar embodiment of the American Dream. A hallowed place, like Ellis Island. We were the immigrants, maybe poor, but not tired. We were raring to go. We all started there: the eight who came first, with four children. Then four marriages among the first arrivals, and 18 children followed, including me, baby number 7. She mothered us all, 30 of us, the ones who followed streets paved with gold to Paterson, and those for whom the dream was birthright.

She was a charcoal gray with bright white trim, and green casing highlighting her many windows like a demure eyeshadow. Her broad porch, classy and breezy. When the first arrivals looked at her, it was in awe of what they had been able to accomplish in three short years since their immigration: from wood planks nailed together to form one-story walls in the rainy tropics of their birth, they now had solid brick and stucco, three stories high. Their former hard-packed dirt floors transformed to oak boards, shining with varnish. They had a fireplace, French panes, claw foot tubs, crackled porcelain tiles—elegant vestiges of a turn-of-the-century American wealth they had just arrived to in the 1960s. She was like a movie star. They'd pose with her, not as the backdrop, but as the reason for the photo. She, the Victorian bombshell. She should have been adorned with a fancy nameplate, like a brooch, that read “Mother of Exiles.”

But storied pomp is only useful in ancient lands. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and it is not static. Because everyone needed to fit, they chopped her up into three apartments. The entrance sitting room with the large stone fireplace became a common foyer, where bicycles and raincoats and basketballs and shoes and bookbags and tools waited for usefulness in haphazard piles. They added hollow-core doors in makeshift frames to create bedrooms for the children. So many children, so many new Americans! In the name of improvement, they hammered in shag carpeting to soften the wood floors and went to Sears to buy plastic tub inserts to replace the old, impractical cast iron originals. They enclosed the romantic sleeping porches to maximize living space. They painted her body stark white, so she could stand out more, and her main door a deep red, like a lipsticked mouth. Her once airy front porch became a crowded repository for junk they quickly accumulated in this land of plenty. Then they yanked out the hedges and unfurled chain link around her perimeter, like an apron, to protect her. But it just made her look harried, like a busy mother with the city soot and dirt clinging to her white dress.

She remained a beacon, her welcoming glow undisturbed. The violence they did to her good looks didn't affect the sounds emanating from her. When her red door swung open, she sang a happy, boisterous song of family. There was laughter, and the clinking of silverware and glasses as they gathered every day for dinner in one or another's apartment. There were heartfelt greetings and the sounds of makeshift beds being assembled to fit yet another newcomer, not always blood, but made welcome anyway. There was the sound of music—salsa, merengue, disco—on weekends when, after dinner, the furniture would be shoved over to make room for dancing. The thump, thump of the basketball

and the hoots of the men sweating it out in the long driveway, clanking the ball through the hoop. And the ropes skipping on the sidewalk and the metal strap-on skates grating against the cement, and the higher-pitched voices of the women on the stoops, taking a break from the cooking and cleaning and mothering.

Despite the love, we tired of huddling, we yearned to breathe more freely, independently. We tired of proximity. We had outgrown her. And so, family by family, we all left. To West Haven. To Riverdale. To Rockaway. To Miami. To Australia. Thirty of us departing in waves. Barely looking back at her tired façade, her ruined lawn. We traded her in for symbols of success: gleaming modern houses in new neighborhoods, and open-planned split-levels and cool mid-century ramblers in the suburbs, with high school diplomas and later college degrees hanging from the walls. No more small rooms and janky doors. We'd become Americans. We didn't need each other for daily support. The pastures sought were greener than the surrounding city that was deteriorated, like her. She started to go quiet while around her the noise of urban decay increased: the sirens, the yelling, the all-hours cacophony. She was sold. The new owner was just a manager. He bathed her in new pink paint, but it just made her look cheap. He chopped her up some more to collect extra rents. Five apartments, no relatives, only strangers. Antennae like frizzy hair sticking up from her roof.

Her ruin was complete. In less than two decades, her progeny had made it.

Inspired by The New Colossus by Emma Lazarus

Carnival Night
Natalie Nee
Art



It's A Circus

Natalie Nee

Art



Round We Go
Natalie Nee
Art



Running Circles

Natalie Nee

Art



Post-Surgical Choir
Justin Taroli
Fiction

Night goes long in Post-Op because the machines are so sure of themselves. They count breath and blood like metronomes, a confidence I envy. After midnight the building settles into its honest sounds: ventilation, wheels, the hush of rubber soles. I'm logging waste by the red-lined biohazard bin when I hear singing. It's faint, a filament of sound that holds, gathers a second voice, as if the room were a throat learning to speak.

I lift the lid and sort through what should be mute: soaked gauze, knots of suture, a scalpel flashing like a bad thought. Beneath the dressings sits a sealed specimen jar, syrup-clear around a fat comma of tissue—gallbladder, I think. The jar is singing. The membrane hums from within, an old tune I can almost name.

I do the wrong thing. I wrap the jar in a towel and slide it into my coat where the cameras can't see. Outside, August breathes heavy, as if the night has lungs. I walk home with my hand on the contraband, keeping the melody from spilling.

Rowan is a hill under the quilt, hair spread like a map. We've been careful with each other lately. I set the jar on the counter. It keeps singing, softer now, the kind my grandmother carried around the kitchen: wrists in dishwater, hips keeping time. The apartment hears it and becomes a better version of itself. The stove's pilot watches. The refrigerator finds a timid harmony. I sit on the floor and let the sound thread my brief sleep.

In the morning I trade to another unit, the kind of favor a night nurse earns. The jar remains on our counter like a polite guest with excellent posture. "Do you hear that?" Rowan asks, toothbrush in hand. "They're testing

the alarms,” I say, and she nods as if alarms could be tender. The gallbladder answers with a small cascade that stings my throat, the way kindness can.

Three days earlier I watched a second pink line arrive like a late guest who doesn’t knock. I haven’t told her. Since then I’ve walked two hallways in my head whose doors are unmarked. In one, a crib with satin-slick corners; a woman’s hand on my shoulder that is maybe mine. In the other, a nurse touches my wrist and calls me honey. In both, there is music. Only one sounds like me.

Back at the hospital I hear it everywhere because now I know how. The bin in Day Surgery wears its red like a choir robe. By noon I can tell which organ is singing. Gallbladders prefer torch songs, ache-ovals remembering butter and bourbon and what was kept and kept-from. A kidney hums like a machine trying to be gentle. A uterus—someone else’s, done with the monthly work—croons lullabies to no one. In the basement the incinerator room thrums with a low drone that feels like power inside a tired animal. Martin runs the chute. Years with compressors left him a constant ring; he says he doesn’t hear a thing. He feeds the bags in without ceremony and the furnace says amen in a voice of heat. I stand longer than I should, listening to a harmony no one else seems to notice.

At home the jar writes melodies into our corners. At night it throws a line to the bathroom and tethers me to the sink. I tilt my face toward the mirror and look for what has changed. Rowan sways to the hum while she brushes, unaware she is swaying. “You’re in your head,” she says, kind as a diagnosis. She’s reading a dog-eared book about losing and keeping, about gardens, about seeds choosing to open. We were a no for years. Lately

the word loosened in my mouth. I feel the slack like a thread I could follow or bite through.

On my next shift a patient wakes wild from anesthesia, swallowing air as if it has a taste. I hold the mask and talk about the beach he says he sees—umbrellas faded to ghosts, his father cutting oranges at halftime of a game he doesn't remember playing. He settles. Down the hall the choir finds the key it wanted all along. The whole floor becomes a held chord. Tucked inside the chord is an answer that isn't grand, only clear.

In the vinegar-bright morning I carry the jar to the basement. Martin lifts his chin hello, a question tucked under it. I don't explain. I fold back the towel. The gallbladder gives a last neat run, bright as a laugh through a bruise. I want to keep it. I want to pickle it in apple cider vinegar, plant it under the hydrangeas, set it on the highest shelf so we can sleep beneath its weather. I don't keep it. I ask for a minute alone because I've done one wrong thing and want to do one right. The door of the incinerator opens like a yawn. Heat climbs my shins. I set the jar on the lip and hum with it, the way you hum when you don't know the words but know the shape. I let the heat take the sound and change it into something I won't get to hear. When the door closes, the room returns to its drone. What's left is my own humming, steady as a pulse.

Rowan is up when I get home, book face-down, a finger marking her place. The kitchen is quiet in a way that makes room. I say I was wrong about the alarms. I tell her about the singing and the jar, and about the way the building seemed to vote for tenderness. I touch my wrist where the nurse in one hallway would touch it. "Okay," she says, slow, giving me time. We open our calendars without naming the choice. The window is cracked. A breeze lifts the corner of the dish towel like a hand. The hum that remains belongs to us.

The Retreat
Terrie Elaine Joplin
Poetry

That night at the college retreat, in the frosted
bathroom glass, as I stood there, head tilted,
scarcely breathing, the cross appeared to me—

all four ends flared like the mouths of chalices,
glowing white, ready to receive me, just as I was.
It stayed, and stayed, perhaps waiting for others

to see, not mine alone. So I pulled my boyfriend
from his sleeping bag, whispered him to where
it waited, pulsing. He smiled. *It's just the refraction*

of moonlight through this glass. I stood there—
breath deepened, edges fluttered, shadows poured
like blood. Just what had that Lourdes girl seen—

Farmhand Wives
Terrie Elaine Joplin
Poetry

What could we do, we girls of the roads that girdled
our years, tied us to the rails of soybeans and corn,
and scattered grit like bones over our scarred tables.

What could she do, this girl of the square-mile grid—
slow, prairie-walking, asphalt miles—but come to me
to drink her two cups of coffee with Coffeemate,

watch my kids play on the rug, pluck with a trembling
finger unfiltered bits of Pall Malls from her tongue,
ask me to copy again a recipe for Glorified Rice,

and then hand me her bedroom key, saying of her
three boys under six, *They just wouldn't stop
crying—so I closed the door and locked it*—

The Jar of Plums
Terrie Elaine Joplin
Poetry

you left on top of your beloved yellow
Chrysler was the final sign your daughters
needed for the test, and although benign,
the tumor on your frontal lobe would

take you out—you who saved your fig
of a girl with milk straight from a cow
and a shoebox bed in front of the fire, and
later your own leg by living on the front

porch as the crushed bits oozed into the
summer air, you who lost tender Jack
at five to cholera, and later when your stillborn
son didn't cry, you heard the one surrendered

by his overwhelmed mother and embraced
him like you did me and my shame
on our hasty wedding, you who hoped
I could save him from his early and

long fall into alcoholism, you whose
freckled arms plucked me, clutching
our two infants, into air we could breathe,
handing us toast and jam across your table.

What Do I Owe

Terrie Elaine Joplin

Poetry

to that night, late and chill,
to that boy, beautiful and asleep—

What do I know from that walk three
miles deep in my black patent heels,

winding toward my dorm,
my skin warm from his bed, that hair,

strawberry blonde in the light-squeezed
room, those kisses along my throat—

happy he passed out too soon and my
soul startled wide—

slipping from under the covers to redress
itself, to pull into place

its tucked-away reserve, to fold the sixties
deep in its purse—

Between steam and smoke

Linsey Tankersley

Poetry

One night I floated out the window
a living ghost, suspended
between inner and outer walls

an offer

to an embryo to rejoin the water
my edges turned to steam
in the breathing night

and the fear of it

turned the steam to smoke
with the urgency of an early birth
smoldering edges refused to disappear

folding back
in the crumpling shrink
of paper on fire

I return to the window often
to look through the wall
water can take many forms
smoke only becomes ash.

Hollow Bones
Linsey Tankersley
Poetry

In most ways you weren't solid
but your bones always were
when your bones were emptied
attempting to start over
I drew you a butterfly
I thought you might become one
in hindsight, I should have drawn you a bird
they are the only ones with hollow bones
I dreamed all night of death being
indecisive, I understand hesitation
under the weight of such decisions, though
you should fly away quite easily
your bones as light as birds.

After the Flood

Veronica Tucker

Poetry

We dried the photos first.
Laid them flat on towels,
faces bloomed
like ghosts in the grain.

The house was quiet
except for the drip
and the dull throb
of loss measured in inches.

We saved what we could.
Your drawing from second grade,
the quilt Nana made,
a single shoe.

That night we slept
in the same bed,
your small body pressed against mine,
the world reduced
to the sound of breathing
and what hadn't floated away.

Still Life with Laundry

Veronica Tucker

Poetry

Tuesday.

The pile waits in the corner,
a soft mountain of obligation.

Outside, birds announce spring
like a secret they can't hold.

The kettle hisses.

I forget and let it boil over,
again.

You leave your socks in the hallway,
again.

And still,

this life insists on being beautiful.
The way the sun hits the counter.
Your voice upstairs humming off key.
A red shirt I thought we lost
surfacing
at the bottom of the basket.

Chorus of the Ordinary

Veronica Tucker

Poetry

The radio skips.
The coffee spills.
The traffic lights blink
in mischief.

I step over a worm on the sidewalk,
think about mercy.

The woman in the checkout lane
says she's having a Tuesday,
and I nod like I understand,
because I do.

We are all
just trying to hold it together
with dryer lint and tape,
hoping the world
doesn't ask too much today.

But it does.
And we show up anyway.

A Book Review of Bookworm by Robin Yeatman

Ceci Li

Book Review

Book: Bookworm**Author:** Robin Yeatman**Genre:** Dark Fantasy/Thriller**Year of publication:** 2023**Publisher:** Harper Perennial**Page count:** 288**ISBN:** 0063273004**Price:** \$8.99 (paperback)**Rating:** 4/5 stars**Disclosure:** I listened to this book on audio

This book is a fantastical story with one heck of a huge marketing dilemma.

Victoria, the married yet unhappy wife of a lawyer, has a wild imagination about every stranger she meets in a cafe. Sounds like a simple plot, right? Wrong.

This might be one of the weirdest books I've ever read.

A flawed protagonist done well, Victoria quenches my thirst for an unlikable character. She's timid, but her mind is vile. She acts like an innocent victim (granted, she is one in her unhappy marriage), but her soul was wicked to its core without her knowing it. With those raw thoughts in her head, I'm torn between wanting to see her succeed and letting her ruin her life. We've all felt trapped, unsupported, lost, or betrayed at one point or another in our lives. And the thrill of watching her (instead of myself) roll down the path of no redemption is cathartic. It's about damn time a woman becomes the asshole and destroys her own day instead of letting the men in her life destroy it.

The plot is simple. There's not a lot going on in the book, besides a woman who loves to read and make stories up about the people she meets in her head. All the drama was inside her mind. If you take out the internal monologue, the book would've been a five-thousand-word short story. But a brilliant story doesn't have to be epic or complicated. It can just be about a woman having spiraling thoughts. And it's enough to keep me entertained.

But as I mentioned in the first sentence, this book was a marketing dilemma. It blends and bends so many genres together into one confusing popping candy. On Amazon, the book is categorized under Horror/dark fantasy. On Barnes & Noble, it is considered literary fiction. When I searched on Goodreads, it is listed as Fiction/Thriller/Romance/Humor/Chicklit. What the heck was going on in the marketing meeting when they were discussing the genre of this book?

The author had only her own talent to blame—and I say that with a compliment. This isn't a romance, though it has strong romantic elements. It isn't laugh-out-loud funny, but it *is* satirical enough that I scoffed a lot. It isn't literary in the sense of it being a word-puzzle marvel, but it's profound enough to keep me wondering what the heck I was reading (because literary fiction does that to me sometimes). It isn't a psychological thriller that I have to solve some murder with a ticking time bomb, but it keeps me on the edge of my seat for quite a few scenes. And Chicklit? It might be the most accurate yet insulting definition of this book, because it has a lot of depth and touches on a lot of serious issues, but did I eat it up like I was shoving popcorn down while ogling Ryan Gosling's smolder? Yes, I did, shamelessly.

Yet, after I went through the whole book, I still didn't know what genre I'd put it under. This book may not belong to one singular shelf, but it belongs on the shelves of my favorite books inside my head.

But satire isn't everyone's thing. The humor inside doesn't exactly match the lightheartedness of the cover. And the way people love flawed characters is like the way we like our alcohol. Some like them neat, some like them on ice, some like them in slushy margaritas, and some like beer. If you prefer a sunnier story with jokes that make you laugh out loud, or a protagonist who doesn't want to commit crimes under extenuating circumstances, maybe this isn't the story for you.

On the other hand, if you're looking for a unique read and can brush aside all your genre experience and instinct, then you might find one hell of an adventure in this book.

Contributor Bios

Sam Aureli

Sam Aureli is a design and construction professional, originally from Italy and now rooted in the Boston area. After decades working with concrete and steel, he's discovered that poetry is what truly feeds his soul. With retirement still a decade away, he balances the grind of his day job with the quiet refuge of writing, often scribbling lines during coffee breaks or in the quiet of his backyard. His work has appeared in *The Atlanta Review*, *Humana Obscura*, *Underscore Magazine*, *Prosetrics The Magazine*, *Stanchion Magazine*, and other literary journals.

Jessica Baker

Jessica Baker is a writer based in Cary, North Carolina. She received a B.A. in English Literature from Florida Atlantic University and an M.Ed. from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. her work has been featured in *PopMatters*, *101Words*, and *Door Is A Jar Literary Magazine*. Find her on Instagram [@byjessicabaker](https://www.instagram.com/byjessicabaker)

Juliette Brookman

Juliette (she/they) is a senior Creative Writing major at the University of Mary Washington. She is a bisexual genderqueer woman from Henrico, Virginia. She loves writing fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and tends to delve into themes such as inequality, anxiety, fears, love, and family. Despite reading throughout her semesters, she is eager to read more books once a break begins, hoping to cross another off her extensive list. They have had poems published in their university's literary & art magazine, *The Aubade*, and in Shenandoah University's online literary journal, *The Avalon*. She is a friend to all

critters, loves to collect trinkets, and hopes you consider her works!

B.J. Burton

B.J. Burton, writer and artist, works from an emotional response to events and experiences. She especially finds inspiration in human relationships, as well as in nature. Surrounded by books, artwork, music, and accompanied by good cup of hot chocolate, she enjoys writing best when sitting by a big window where she can see the clouds.

Katherine Cart

Katherine Cart's writing can be found in such places as *Conjunctions*, *Missouri Review* and *Raritan*. She holds an MFA in Fiction from the University of Virginia, is a Fulbright alumnus, a current Folger Institute Fellow and the Phippsburg, Maine Island Institute Fellow. She is generally concerned with the stories that reside within the human body and the broader ecosystem.

Linda M. Crate

Linda M. Crate (she/her) is a Pennsylvanian writer whose poetry, short stories, articles, and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. She has twelve published chapbooks the latest being: *Searching Stained Glass Windows For An Answer* (Alien Buddha Publishing, December 2022).

Jessica Dubey

Writing poetry is like being in the eye of a hurricane. I can write about the chaos of the world from a place of relative calm. It gives me the perspective I need.

Deron Eckert

Deron Eckert is a poet and writer who lives in Lexington, Kentucky with one hot lady and two small dogs. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Atlanta Review, Blue Mountain Review, Rattle, Stanchion, Beaver Magazine, Thin Air Magazine, The Fourth River, and elsewhere. He can be found on Instagram at deroneckert.

Zander Fieschko

Zander lives in Los Angeles and shoots dark fantasy and personal editorial for artists, sex workers, and self-proclaimed witches. He approaches each project with a dialogue aimed at visualizing the personal mythology of the subject. He is from Pittsburgh and used to work in set decoration for the film industry.

Bryan Franco

Bryan Franco is a neurodivergent, gay, Jewish poet from Brunswick, Maine who competed in the 2014 National Poetry Slam in Oakland, California. He has been published in the US, Australia, England, Germany, Holland, India, Ireland, and Scotland. He performed at the New York City Poetry Festival in 2022 and 2023. He was a finalist in the 2022 and won the 2023 NAMI New Jersey Mental Health Poetry Contest and is a Best of The Net and Pushcart Prize nominee. He has facilitated workshops for Brunswick High School, Tumblewords Project, and Phynnecabulary. He hosts Café Generalissimo Open Mic, is a member of the Beardo Bards of The Bardo poetry troupe, painter, sculptor, gardener, and culinary genius. His book “Everything I Think Is All in My Mind” was published in 2021 by Red or Green Books.

September Woods Garland

September Woods Garland hails from the Pacific Northwest where she enjoys taking long, romantic walks through haunted houses and feeding Bigfoot peanut butter & seaweed sandwiches. Her work has been supported by Arteles Creative Center and Hypatia in the Woods and has appeared in SORTES, The Berlin Literary Review, and elsewhere. September serves as Editor in Chief at Weird Lit Magazine. Www.septemberwoodsgarland.com

Dennis Goza

DENNIS GOZA, who currently tours the world teaching English and theatre to children in under-served communities, previously was a touring educational entertainer across the U.S. for many years. While a film critic and actor in San Francisco, he was involved in the founding of the San Francisco International Fringe Festival. He had his first poem published at age 17, and won his first poetry prize at age 19. His poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals, and his plays have been performed in San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, San Diego, Houston and North Carolina. You can follow him around the world at activatedadventures.com.

KJ Hannah Greenberg

KJ Hannah Greenberg uses her trusty point-and-shoot camera to capture the order of G-d's universe, and Paint 3D to capture her personal chaos. Sometimes, it's insufficient for her to sate herself by applying verbal whimsy to pastures where gelatinous wildebeests roam or fey hedgehogs play. Hannah's self-illustrated poetry collections are: Miscellaneous Parlor Tricks (Seashell Books, 2024), Word Magpie (Audience Askew, 2024), Subrogation (Seashell Books, 2023), and One-Handed

Pianist (Hekate Publishing, 2021). Her coffee table books are Real and Otherwise (Seashell Books, 2025) and Gratuities: Faith Based Responses to October 7th (Seashell Books, 2025).

Victoria Hood

Victoria Hood (she/her) is the author of a collection of short stories My Haunted Home (FC2) and chapbooks Death and Darlings and Entries of Boredom and Fear (Bottlecap Press). Her book of poetry, I Am My Mothers Disappointments, released Mother's Day 2024 from Girl Noise Press. You can find her on instagram @toriellen and twitter @toriellen1. She hopes to discomfort, humor and charm.

Valerie Hughes

Valerie Hughes (she/her) lives in New York, NY. She is currently working on a novel and several (too many) short stories. You can find her on Instagram at [@_valeriehughes.](https://www.instagram.com/_valeriehughes)

Mark Jackley

Mark Jackley's poems have appeared in Fifth Wednesday, Sugar House Review, 10 x 3 Plus, A Door Is a Jar, and other journals. He lives in Richmond, Virginia, and more of his poems can be found at www.markjackley.com.

Jean Janicke

Jean Janicke is a writer and dancer living in Washington, DC with her husband and two cats. She enjoys being outside in the warm summer months and writing about the natural world. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies.

Terrie Elaine Joplin

Terrie Elaine Joplin taught English in her home state of Washington, and in Illinois and North Carolina. She received her B.A. in English Education from Central Washington University, her M.S. in Education from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, and her National Board Certification in North Carolina where she finished her career in public schools teaching in the International Baccalaureate Program. Her work appears in *Pteranodon*, *ONE ART*, and *MER Online Folio*.

Terrie and her husband reside with their multi-generational family and four tuxedo cats in coastal NY, where she enjoys gardening, painting, and road trips to geographical wonders.

Taya Sanderson Kesslau

Taya Sanderson Kesslau believes that beauty will save the world. And poetry, and cookies, and kindness. She has been a homeschooled mother, the CFO of a music business, and is a practicing Reiki Master. Her published book of poetry is called *Seven Year Silence* and her work has appeared in *3rd Wednesday*, *The Penwood Review*, and *Cirque*. She lives in Bellingham, Washington with her sweet husband and their many 4-legged creatures.

Ashley Kirkland

Ashley Kirkland writes in Ohio where she lives with her husband and sons. Her work can be found in *Cordella Press*, *Boats Against the Current*, *The Citron Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *ONE ART*, *HAD*, *Major7thMagazine*, among others. Her chapbook, *BRUISED MOTHER*, is available from *Boats Against the Current*. She is a poetry editor for *3Elements*

Literary Review. You can find her at lashleykirklandwriter on Instagram.

Felicia Krol

Felicia Krol is a writer and educator based in Detroit, Michigan, where she works as a Writer-in-Residence with InsideOut Literary Arts, bringing poetry into K-12 schools and celebrating youth voice and agency. She calls herself a gardener but she's probably just playing with dirt and bugs. She lives in a haunted house with many ghosts, her partner, two eerily synchronized cats, and one magnificent brown-spotted Dalmatian.

Bluesky: [@faelix.bsky.social](https://faelix.bsky.social) | Insta: [@faloosh](https://www.instagram.com/faloosh)

Jerrod Laber

Jerrod Laber is an Appalachian poet and writer, and previous nominee for the Pushcart Prize

Ryan S. Leavitt

Ryan S. Leavitt is an author, passionate about crafting stories with philosophical undertones. He has appeared on the briefly televised reality sitcom *Quiet Desperation*, as well as various anthologies and literary magazines. He currently lives in New Orleans.

Christa Lei

Christa Lei (they/them) is a queer, disabled Filipine-American writer based in New York. Their work explores mythology, chronic illness, intimacy, and inheritance through speculative and hybrid forms. Christa's writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Vast Chasm*, *Breadfruit Magazine*, *HerStry*, and *Beyond Queer Words*, and has been nominated for *Best American Essays*. They were selected to attend the 2025 *Disquiet Literary Program* in Lisbon. Christa lives with

their spouse and two dogs, Mayo and Kaia Papaya. More at christalei.me and isthiswhatyouwant.org.

Ceci Li

Ceci Li is a first-generation Chinese-American writer. Because maturity is overrated, she lives vicariously through her teenage characters in YA contemporary stories. When she's not writing, she's either sitting on the couch with a great book or scrolling through her phone for another new recipe to screw up. Her Bluesky handle: @writerceci.bsky.social. Her Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/creeping_between_the_margins. Her website: <https://creepingbetweenthemargins.com/>

Thomas Mampalam

I am a neurosurgeon in private practice in Northern California. I create figurative and abstract paintings that are informed by my knowledge of medical anatomy and neuroscience.

M.R. Mandell

M.R. Mandell is a poet based in Los Angeles. You can find her words in SWWIM, The McNeese Review, Door Is A Jar, HAD, and others. She is the author of two chapbooks, "Don't Worry About Me," (Bottlecap Press) and "The Last Girl" (Finishing Line Press). She is a Pushcart nominee, 2024.

Scott McConnaha

I am a former teacher, editor, and healthcare system CEO. After a career of tending others' expectations, and in an effort to reduce my number of deathbed regrets, I am turning back to poetry. This is the contribution I've always longed to share.

Natalie Nee

Natalie Nee is a novelist and latte enthusiast. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Across the Margin (Best of Across The Margin, 2023), Maudlin House, Cowboy Jamboree Press, BULL, Tiny Wren Lit, The Hooghly Review, and more. Her photography has been featured in Rejection Letters and on the October cover of Pithead Chapel. She's cooler on Twitter (@novelnatalie) or her website (natalienee.com).

Keith Proctor

Keith Proctor is a teacher of high schoolers and a writer of poetry. He lives in Denver, Colorado with his family.

Tiago Quintana

Reading has always been a part of my life. My earliest memories of my mother are of her reading Monica's Gang comics to me, and children's books of stories about King Arthur, Robin Hood and others were how I first connected with my father. For the longest time, I've wanted to tell my own stories, and now I'm finally trying to do so.

Bianca Amáris Rey

Bianca is a Queens native poet living in Brooklyn. She earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Hunter College and teaches English courses at the undergraduate level. Her recent work is forthcoming in Poetry Online and The Dewdrop.

Diana Rojas

Diana Rojas is the author of *Litany of Saints: A Triptych* (Arte Público Press, 2024), the forthcoming novel, *They Hold Grudges* (Arte Público Press, 2026), and the forthcoming children's book, *Clara's Big Green Coat* (Piñata Books, 2027). Her essays are featured in *Grit & Gravity*, *The Washington Independent Review of Books*, *Latino News Network*, and the anthology *America's Future* (WWPH, 2025). A onetime journalist, she lives, taxed and unrepresented, in Washington, DC.

Terry Sanville

Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and two plump cats (his in-house critics). He writes full time, producing stories, essays, and novels. His stories have been accepted more than 590 times by journals, magazines, and anthologies including *Folio*, *Bryant Literary Review*, and *Shenandoah*. He was nominated four times for Pushcart Prizes and once for inclusion in *Best of the Net* anthology. Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist—who once played with a symphony orchestra backing up jazz legend George Shearing.

Julie Shulman

Julie Shulman is a writer and art director living near Boston with her husband and three boys. She recently completed her MFA in poetry at Pacific University. Her work has been featured in *Third Wednesday*, *SWWIM Every Day*, *Mass Poetry*, *The Avalon Literary Review*, *The Passionfruit Review*, and upcoming in *On the Seawall*, *Ink in Thirds*, *MA Bards Poetry Anthology*, *Triggerfish Critical Review* and *Thimble Literary Magazine*. www.julieshulman.com

Emily-Sue Sloane

Emily-Sue Sloane enjoys yoga, daily walks, reading novels and writing poetry to capture moments of wonder, worry and human connection. She draws inspiration from nature, the news and the work of artists and musicians in her Long Island, NY, community.

<https://EmilySueSloane.com>

Zoe Sondik

Zoe Sondik is a 17-year-old poet from Bolton Connecticut. She is a rising senior at Bolton High School. Zoe was an apprentice at the Nook Farm Writers Collaborative which takes place at the Mark Twain House and Museum in West Hartford Connecticut. Zoe enjoys writing poetry as a way to connect with her peers and her loved ones.

Charlotte Staudenmayer

Charlotte Staudenmayer is a poet and fiction writer from Western Massachusetts. She is anti-car but loves a long drive. Her obsessions include long-distance running, the desert, her CD collection, and her friends.

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, Door Is A Jar, The Phoenix, and The Harvard Advocate. Edward is also a published poet.

Linsey Tankersly

Linsey Tankersly is an artist who works in both visual and literary mediums. Her work explores the nature of experience. She is drawn to the natural world as a teacher and a metaphor. Linsey is a mother of three children. She teaches art, science and early writing to pre-k-kindergarten aged children at a Montessori based program. She finds life to be beautifully subtle and deeply moving.

Justin Taroli

Justin Taroli is a queer neurodivergent writer based in Queens. His work has appeared/is forthcoming in *West Trade Review*, *Maudlin House*, *BULL*, *Eunoia* and others.

Sarena Tien

Sarena Tien is a queer Chinese American writer and doctor (the PhD kind). Once upon a time, she used to be so shy that two teachers argued whether she was a “low talker” or “no talker,” but she’s since learned how to scream. Her poetry and prose have appeared in *The Rumpus*, *The B’K*, and *The Hellebore*. You can learn more about her writing at sarenatien.com.

Veronica Tucker

Veronica Tucker is a physician specializing in emergency medicine and addiction medicine, as well as a writer whose poetry has appeared in *One Art*, *redrosethorns*, and *Red Eft Review*, with additional work forthcoming in several literary journals. Her writing explores the intersections of medicine, motherhood, and the quiet depth of everyday moments. When not working or writing, she enjoys travel, fitness and long-distance

running, spending time with her family, and savoring finely crafted matcha lattes.

Annabelle Wang

Annabelle Wang is a New Jersey native with a fondness for folk horror and weird poetry. She lives in a tiny apartment in NYC, where she drinks too much tea and writes about girls who really want to eat each other. She is a firm believer that erotic horror is not an oxymoron.

Cat Winters

Cat Winters (she/her) is an award-winning author of seven novels and a picture book biography. Her poetry has appeared in *Door Is a Jar* Literary Magazine and will be included in an upcoming young adult poetry anthology. She lives in Oregon.

Bill Wolak

Bill Wolak has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled *All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages and photographs have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *The Passionfruit Review*, *Inside Voice*, and *Barfly Poetry Magazine*.

Door Is A Jar Staff Bios**Maxwell Bauman****OWNER/ EDITOR-IN-CHIEF / ART DIRECTOR**

Maxwell studied Creative Writing at Wilkes University and earned his M.A. in Fiction and M.F.A in Publishing. He founded Door Is A Jar Literary Magazine in 2015. He is a contributor to Chicken Soup for the Soul, and wizard with Legos. Website: maxwellbauman.com.

Corinne Alice Flynn, Ph. D.**POETRY / DRAMA EDITOR**

Corinne Alice Flynn 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.

Dominique Isaac Grate**FICTION / NONFICTION EDITOR**

Dominique Isaac Grate obtained his B.A. from the University of South Carolina, majoring in African-American Studies with a minor in History. A 2013 inductee into the National Academy of Young Preachers, Rev. Grate studied at Wake Forest University School of Divinity, and he has pastored three congregations; Historic Trinity AME Church in Manning, SC, New Mt. Zion AME Church in Lexington, SC, and Calvary AME Church in Batesburg-Leesville. In 2023, Rev. Grate transitioned to higher education, where he serves as the Assistant Vice President for Development at Jarvis Christian University in Hawkins, TX.

Submission Guidelines

Door Is A Jar Literary Magazine is looking to publish well-crafted poetry, fiction, nonfiction, drama, artwork, and book reviews.

Please read over our submission guidelines carefully.

Our publication steers away from academic writing and publishes short, conversational works that use familiar language. Each new issue features artists and writers and works that are accessible for all readers.

Submit all work in Times New Roman font size 11

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

For book reviews, please include the title, publisher, year published, and ISBN.

Please provide your name as you would like published, email, mailing address, and a fun 3-sentence bio. (We're not as interested in how many degrees you have, or how widely you've been published. Instead, we want to hear about the real you. We want to know about the little things that spur you along.) Contributors can submit to multiple categories; however, only submit once to each category until you have received our decision about your piece.

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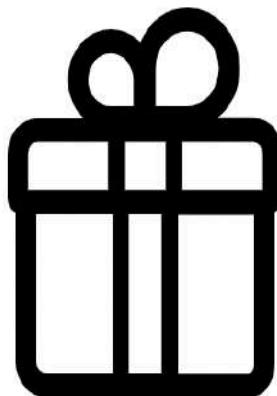
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