

# DOOR = JAR



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DOOR = JAR

Door Is A Jar

Issue 38

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Cover Image “Welcome to This 4”  
by Isabelle Carasso



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**Rock Candy**  
Sam Eisendrath  
Poetry

And the waking up is  
hard today, the waking  
up, the working  
it all is slow  
An ant in sap becomes  
amber. How beautiful,  
a suffering crystal  
All I write feels like this

**Let's Start A(nother) Riot**

Christopher W. Smith

Poetry

But it will be one  
of the good kind this time,  
like the way we describe  
your cousin Henrietta or

a comedy that goes off  
the rails. It will be  
the kind of riot that is  
also a hoot or a lark or

some other fowl-related fun.  
Strange how we transform birdsong  
into pleasure. Stranger still  
how we can witness a mass

of unhappy and possibly unhinged  
folks storming the streets, thunder  
claps of speech and glass shatter,  
and want to reclaim that word,

riot. Henrietta was a riot  
at the riot, which also was a riot,  
depending on whom you ask. Whatever  
that is, let's start there.

We'll ascribe meaning later.

**Let's Take a Stroll Through the Rain**

Christopher W. Smith

Poetry

You know how you find dehydrated  
worms all over the sidewalks after the rain?

Folks say it's their attempt to save  
themselves, escaping the drowning pool  
of their dirt homes—only to bake  
in the sun, shrivel into burnt spaghetti.

Others say it's the sound of the rain  
that drives worms up and away  
from a would-be attacker, the patter  
sounding like mole claws through earth.

But some believe in the simplest  
explanation: it's harder to move through dirt.

The rain creates an environment wet  
enough for worms to survive, allowing  
them to journey faster, crawl across  
the world unencumbered to seek  
a mate—or just a new sight. Then  
the sun comes out, while they're  
absorbing this new world.

They forget where they need to be,  
lost in all the possibilities.

**not yet**

Karin Bevilacqua Fazio Littlefield

Poetry

Such soft sounds escaped  
my grandmother's lips,  
when I asked to take  
her wedding ring  
off her swelling hand,  
as she sat, staring  
at the foreign finger,  
fatter than ever  
and weeping water  
without any tear ducts at all.

**Supernova**

Karin Bevilacqua Fazio Littlefield

Poetry

the worn flesh boundary  
I wear is swelling  
and when I burst  
my bits will burn  
not like a soft song  
rising from a sailboat  
headed to the horizon but  
like a sudden  
shower of acorns  
bludgeoning  
a steel roof

**Eating Ants**

Sean Thomas Dougherty

Nonfiction

Not the big black ones that crunch. No, it was the small, tiny ones my grandma Franny called piss ants. Damn little piss ants she'd say when they appeared one day in the kitchen. She said stamp those little piss ants. Little tiny piss ants that came wearing their black bonnets out of the sidewalk cracks in search of crumbs. The bodies curled like tiny commas over the sentence of the kitchen floor, she'd sweep them up. Sweep them up into the bin and out I went into the world, to sit on the stoop and watch them walk out into the world too, barely specks of a living thing. I crushed them with my finger and there it was, on my finger, and then I popped it into my mouth, this thing that once crawled and then it didn't because I pressed my finger into it against the ground, and then it was a thing in my mouth, which didn't have taste, so I did it again. Ate them one by one. My uncle Dave came out of the house. He was six years older than me, a kid too. A big boy. What are you doing? I said I'm teaching them a lesson and showed him the ants. He said you are eating them. And the way he said it was as if I was supposed to feel shame, feel embarrassment but even that young I learned not to feel that feeling and instead dare to do whatever I was doing. Yes, I said, you are scared aren't you. I saw his face change from I'm telling my mother, your grandmother, to maybe I am. He said, no that's just... weird, and he sat down next to me, said, do it again. And I did, and then he took his finger and pressed down on one, the tiny black things scurrying and then it was dead too. He puzzled over it on his finger. Dave was darker than me, though not as dark as his friend Kenny, but he had black hair, real black hair, and eyebrows like my Poppa his daddy. I didn't have a daddy. Mom said he ran

away to Ireland when I was born though why exactly I wasn't sure what that meant. Dave put the dead ant on his tongue and stuck it out. Then I did too. Then he laughed and spit. I did too. You're so weird he said and went trucking down the block to find Kenny and Colin and all his older kid friends. I started letting my spit fall from my mouth onto the sidewalk on the ants. I wanted them to drown. I didn't feel much then. I knew they were alive, but they were piss ants and weren't like the white butterflies, or the big moths I loved with wings. Piss ants had no wings. I could watch a moth all day. Watch how they gathered at night about the lightbulb. Where did they come from? I loved to watch the bats at night swoop and dive between the row homes, eating other things with wings just as it grew dark. I loved to look at a moth, resting on a wall, bronze colored, blue colored, the color of rust and rain, the color of sand or a marble, the marbles I kept in a blue bag. I liked to lick my marbles, put them in my mouth like hard candy. Grandma Franny yelled at me, saying get those out of your mouth you will choke and die. And if you die you won't be able to eat anything. I thought about that for a long time, thought about it as I crushed with my finger those ants, thought about if after I died would I be like a moth or bat? I wondered afterwards when I went, after I couldn't eat—would my back grow enormous blue and white wings?

**It Ends Here**  
David S. Rubenstein  
Art





**Story**

David S. Rubenstein

Art



**Ode to a Country Road**

David S. Rubenstein

Art



**Echoes**

Betty Stanton

Poetry

The mirror fogs even when no one is  
breathing, its surface a lung, still  
remembering the body that looked back.

In the glass, light flutters, trapped,  
each reflection turning its head  
a second too late, waiting to exhume.

Her hands remember the shape of a wound  
better than the shape of her own  
prayer, they trace the air, a seamstress

following thread, searching for the mouth  
that used to call her name. She presses  
her palms to the reflection, the echo left.

**Memory of Rot**

Betty Stanton

Poetry

She is made of split bark and sweet  
rot on your tongue – she blossoms

in the wound left behind, mottled and  
wet with memory. You buried her

name in the roots of the cherry tree  
and now it grows, reaching toward

you, watching you in the hum of  
surveillance cameras, peeking behind

menus of crowded cafes. You move  
through cities she only bled in: still

eyes, mirrored and cold, all hunger and  
the closed memory of her breath.

**Woven Into Me**  
Brittney Desvarieux  
Poetry

You have marked me for life.  
Paths intertwined,  
woven together,  
then frayed by poor timing —  
one thread shorter than the other,  
unraveling the whole weave.

I wanted so badly  
to keep walking with you,  
but you were only meant  
to be my strength  
for a little while.

I revisit the memories often,  
trace them with my fingers,  
close my eyes and feel you close —  
for a little while.

You were never just a scar —  
but a thread in my tapestry,  
an echo in my bones,  
an imprint on my soul.

I am, because of you.

**Folded Into A Corner**

Brittney Desvarieux

Poetry

My mind  
is not a kind place.  
It's filled with thoughts  
dressed in grey,  
drenched in blood.

I am bleeding from the inside out,  
bullied into forcing a smile,  
reminded not to ask for help,  
to let the destruction have its way.

I fold myself into a corner  
like a secret school note—  
meant to be shared,  
not seen.

I wait for the war to quiet itself.

I've always prided myself  
on being strong alone,  
but in my heart I know  
that at times like these  
I need another person beside me—  
to help me breathe  
a little easier.

**Victory: Day 01**  
Brittney Desvarieux  
Poetry

today is a victory—  
i survived you.  
i did not bow  
to the thoughts  
that would have surrendered me  
back into your hands.

i did not reach  
for the old texts,  
did not feed on the ache of words  
i know by heart.

i did not open your page,  
refresh the feed,  
or stalk the shadow of your life  
for scraps you refused to give.

today, i proved  
what once felt  
impossible:  
there is life  
after you.

**The Dream**  
Noah Berlatsky  
Poetry

Give me all the things  
for I work hard and have talent.

And so they gave me  
a bag of ashes  
of all those who were talented  
and worked hard.

For days for weeks for years  
I spread them on the ocean  
one each to adorn each perfect wave.

I will be remembered by the water.



**Spam Villanelle**

Noah Berlatsky

Poetry

We focus on strategies rather than issues.  
 We focus on rhythmic and propulsive futures  
 beyond the delicious blend of our current systems.

Endless explorative praxis soaks through the fissures  
 of cocky microcosms and postgraduate boosters.  
 We focus on strategies rather than issues.

Longevity biohacking your circadian rhythms  
 makes electro-boy-bands seek supermom tutors.  
 Beyond the delicious blend of our current systems,

libertarians stuff stockings with free speech for -isms.  
 The light of hope pulses on marketing losers—  
 when we focus on strategies rather than issues.

The evolutionary gastronomy of our shared mission  
 will Zuckerberg the meta mixed martial moisture.  
 Beyond, the delicious blends our current systems

with multiplatform theological digital goyim.  
 D.I.Y. hedge funds tap a well of folk tumors  
 which focus on strategies rather than issues—  
 the delicious blend of beyond and our current systems.

## **The Chest Freezer**

Katie Garner

Nonfiction

There were eight of us, five humans, plus a dog, a piano and a chest freezer. It had been adopted into the family before I was born, and as such became the large and frozen symbol of an eldest child, birthed by the 1970s. It was reliability in a time of uncertainty and peril. The chest freezer was not so much appreciated as revered, representing economy and hard work. It was everything my parents aspired to, for their lives and ours, it was everything they wanted for their country. It was prudence that would certainly result in all manner of success.

Giant and unwieldy joints of meat could be bought in bulk at the butcher, either at a shop or more likely from a white van at Tonbridge market, on the far side of the railway station. A hatch on the side of the van would reveal the performance of a man with the patter of an auctioneer in a white hat, coat and butcher's apron, revealing the latest bargains to an adoring crowd of largely middle-aged women. It was British shopping channel TV of the 1990s for the families that only had terrestrial. Returning with the latest farm bargains, the meat would be split into family sized portions, roasted, the meat sparingly distributed to a table of Sunday best, the remainder saved. Though my Mum was the primary grifter, our jobs involved facilitating each process, her sous chef, minions, assistants in every cost-saving task.

The worst of these was being sent to the big shed of an evening in January, when the drizzle wouldn't stop, and you felt compelled to change out of your slippers. No-one wanted to change out of their now self-warmed, fluffy animal slippers that had so little grip they doubled as ice-skates on wooden floorboards. The risk of slipper

jettison led to a sudden and immediate urge to use the toilet, a task nomination by attrition, the last slipper wearer standing.

Stubborn, determined, we would evaluate if it might be possible to retain the slippers and run to the shed without broken limbs or destroying the fragile soles.

You take the risk.

Quickly, observe the weather and despair, switch the outside light on, try again clicking the correct switch, open the door, inhale the warm air, RUN with as few steps as possible, wiggle your body for warmth whilst negotiating the frozen padlock, OPEN, pull the white chord shed light on, and exhale. Beat one. Beat two. Beat three. Force open the freezer, only to discover that the item you're looking for is sandwiched under 2 whole chickens, yellow and startlingly compressed in stretched plastic wrapping, a bulk bag of peas, and boxes of buy-one-get-one free fish fingers that were now welded together with excessive ice.

A 5-foot zero child stares deep into the depths of a rectangular leviathan.

You calculate. Balance your stomach carefully on the rim of the freezer, whilst plunging head-first into the icy depth, only balanced by holding your legs steady. Long before Pilates, there was the chest freezer of balance, core strength, maximum risk, as you engage with the frozen equivalent of an underwater tussle with thick, plastic packets of vegetables, all somehow, on perfectly balanced muscles that failed gymnastics.

The thick red bruise of the rim can be felt under your knitted jumper. Legs collapse to the floor and you quickly shut the lid and exhale your warm breath onto your icy fingertips, willing the feeling to return. Just as the inky veined, mauve tips begin the thaw, the wind that whips through the garden, past the Bramley apple

tree, carries the faintest shout of someone with the coward's courage to lean their head out of the back door, "Get the ice cream". It is January.

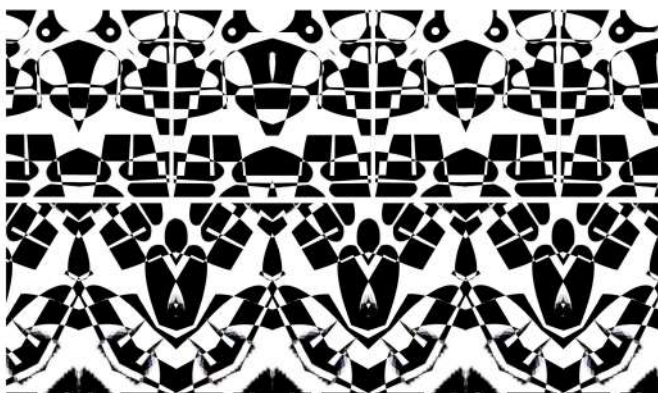
The trumpet voluntary of success that is playing in your head falls to the floor as cymbals. Beat one. Beat Two. Beat oh, once more into the breach.

This is the moment that the safety timing lid closing mechanism has machinated its entire life in preparation for. It saw you coming, it knew it would be you, it knew it would be ice cream in January, an undiagnosed Raynaud's sufferer.

Clams observe with envy at the safety timing mechanism of chest freezers. Baby Orangutans reunited with their mothers on over-watched TikTok videos representing a fraction of the closure that could be achieved with sealed lips of the white frozen whale. Only the transfer of entire body weight into your thumbs is sufficient to reopen the doors of a recently sealed chest freezer. Eyes watering, possibly from the cold or the Olympian feat, through the glaze, you finally locate the ice cream.

Hours later, long after liberation day, the cooked meat is repurposed for another 3 family dinners, ready to be stored in the chest freezer.

**People Standing Still**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



**Heartache 4**

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Art



## **Frightened of Shadows**

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Art



**The Water Fairies**

Sarah Daly

Poetry

We swallow the praise you feed us,  
pretty words as bated hooks.  
We raise your bread, multiply your fish—  
and spare your children.  
We let you touch our long tails and blue skin.  
    We let you impregnate us,  
    fill us with your children,  
    who we raise as demigods.  
But when your wife screams,  
we will unleash one-thousand curses on your head.



**The Queen of Rags & Riches**

Sarah Daly

Poetry

My robe is an emerald coat  
with bald patches.

My scepter is a Gucci bag  
with peeling scales.

My throne is a Louis XIV chair  
with no cushion.

I live on breadcrumbs  
arranged symmetrically on a china plate.

I drink grape juice  
from a cracked wine goblet.

I swallow pills  
from a plastic pill counter.

My jewels are cameos  
with broken clasps.

My bribes are copper pennies  
rusted by Time.

They are scorned and  
tossed by those beggars.

Everyone love me,  
I proclaim to nobody.

**dirty egrets**

Nathaniel Calhoun

Poetry

tender sprouts  
and occasional showers  
obscure a killing  
dryness

in cupped gloves  
a trio of rare voles  
hunker affectingly through  
their goodbye as a species

driven toward habitats  
that no longer exist  
dirty egrets rove too widely  
and fail

the grime sheen along  
the estuary a week ago  
was a belly up school  
of minuscule fish

**invocation**

Nathaniel Calhoun

Poetry

trees that need fire  
    grow tall  
        invoke lightning—  
        tilt  
    toward the absolute.  
the calling  
    always  
        catch water  
    keep water  
        make moisture  
        last longer—  
except for those elders  
    roots deep  
        in hidden rivers  
    whispering  
        *burn.*

**still water**

Nathaniel Calhoun

Poetry

the sun-bleached better half  
of a float switch rises as rain  
falls on the verge of urgent—  
a gauge lifted from disturbed murk.  
ripe with distant melodies  
caught water slips through  
our reservoir's tight loop.

I lay hands on concrete  
casing 25,000 liters and say  
thanks for your stay but  
about that portion below  
the outflow, is it doomed  
or does it delight beneath  
obligation, unruffled  
by traffic above?

**don't hold your breath**

Nathaniel Calhoun

Poetry

I had this layers' deep  
fierce sandstone color  
until I shrank  
like a rising moon—  
whitened odorless  
out of earshot—  
pottery coughed  
by king tides  
edgeless and bone  
watch though  
soon I'll be  
the only light  
that complicates  
the attack vector  
of night harm

**Brown Sugar Scrub**

J. M. Williams

Fiction

“Where do you stay?” Ethan asks.

As opposed to, “Where do you live?”

It’s a difference in idiom I have noticed mostly in European speakers. If not European, then in various expats or transient oversea-military-base-hopping types. Ethan is the latter, judging by the arm tattoos and thick build his tight green t-shirt fails to contain. Not where you live, but where you stay. An idiom which always feels strange wiggling around in my ear, like a curious earwig that’s made good on the wives’ tales.

The stack of two paper cups is enough to insulate my hand from the heat radiating from the black coffee inside, though not enough to insulate my tongue from the scald once the cups have lured me into a false sense of the drink’s temp. My penance for using twice as many cups, I suppose. I seethe, setting my coffee on the counter of Ethan’s craft fair booth to cool off a bit.

“Out in Hermitage, by the airport,” I answer, averting my eyes and softening my enunciation, trying to hide the shame of the place and its associations.

He’s genial about it, mentioning a bar out that way that he likes, which I know and like as well, for their Kahlúa milkshakes. But it’s certainly an address with ghosts. For all the modern influx that BNA airport represents (Nashville’s a multi-cultural hub that’s been growing by more than one percent yearly for a while now), the name of Hermitage still conjures the shame of a dark and regressive pocket of history. I pass Andrew Jackson’s historic home every day on my way to work. Nearby is an old, boarded-up shop that I think used to be a thrift store, literally named “Trail of Tears” when it was open, a tasteless name for a thrift store in any

conceivable anywhere, let alone within spitting distance of a school zone.

It's a place to live and work, orbiting a metropolitan center at a safe, quiet, and (most importantly) affordable distance.

Ethan, as introduced by the green stitching on his burlap apron, digs a little wooden serving spoon like a shrunken tongue depressor into a jar and scoops me a sample. Not to eat. It's a sugar scrub.

"Here. Rub this on your hands."

I scrape the sample onto one palm and deposit the wooden spoon into the miniaturized trash can on his makeshift counter. The lid somersaults. One corner is peeling off the DYMO-brand label-maker label he's printed for the side of the can. It reads, "NO ONE LIKES A LITER BUG," and the spelling error conjures a mental image of soda bottles scuttling about in the grassy field behind his tent.

I sniff the scrub in my hand. Brown sugar. I close my eyes and think of cookies. My father's recipe, which I followed to the letter when I first moved into my own apartment and still managed to foul up. My father is a true baker, with all the experience that entails. He no longer needs instructions, though I did not even know how to begin rescuing my own batch—just had to wait for the next trip home to see the folks.

I rub my palms together. The dollop of scrub flattens between my hands. My eyes are still closed. The brown sugar scent is still there, but with my hands away from my face, the scent of the field's freshly-cut grass drifts back into focus. Children are playing tag, careening into one another, screaming and cackling all in good, breathless fun. The sweet grit of the scrub plays between my fingers and under my nails. I wash my hands with it, spread it thin, uncoil a bit in the back of my mind at the

base of my skull, having taken the time to wring my hands but with the touch of a masseuse rather than the usual praying mantis impulse. The groundskeeper waited too late before the craft fair to mow the grass. The clippings have laid like a mat amidst the crew cut of field still standing. The clippings have been sticking to everyone's shoes all afternoon, getting tracked everywhere, now smearing on the sleeves and faces of the children as they roll around. But my hands are now clean and, once I rinse them in the basin Ethan's refreshed, smooth to the touch. I tell him I'll take one.

We make our exchange and I return the question. "What about you? Where do you stay?"

It's an expression I think I will adopt. It's strange that in American English, "to live" as in "to reside" is the same word for "to live" as in "to be." As if we only truly exist inside the walls of the property afforded us by our mortgage or our monthly rent, and everywhere else is liminal.

"Oh, here and there," Ethan says. He hands me my jar and wishes me a good day.

Perhaps the next time someone asks me where I live, I'll reply, "Wherever I am. Everywhere I go." I pick my coffee back up before I leave, now cool enough to sip as I rejoin the crowd, my grassy tracks intermingling with those of strangers as we mill about a path of crunching gravel.



**Believe Me**  
Izzy Singer  
Art

a comic by Izzy



I had trouble understanding. I could not process the information given to me.

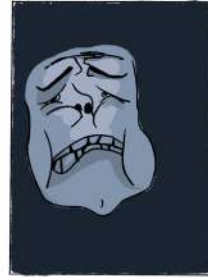


Faces were full of information... too much.

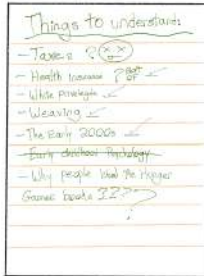


①

They were too bright. Too loud. I was diagnosed with Autism/Auditory Processing Disorder.



In adulthood I feel burdened to understand every thing. A person, statement, a concept. I always feel pressure to understand. The alternative is too scary.



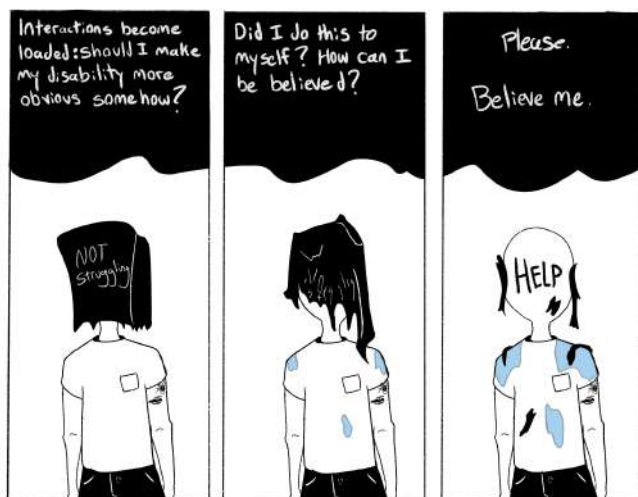
Conversations in crowds are the hardest. My brain doesn't know where to focus its energy so I hear everything or nothing. I search for context clues, tone... I excel at pretending to understand people. It's a double edged sword.



I became so good at pretending **not** to struggle that I wasn't believed when I **was**.



(3)



fin.

**Refusal of the Call**

Noah Soltau

Poetry

After dinner I throw the wedding  
rings in the trash and set  
the church on fire  
Every gift I've ever given  
has teeth

My claws tear at  
scraps of a boy left on  
another continent  
gospels his funeral shroud

I came here to get away  
no stairs to the door  
dark threshold doorless  
six feet up cinder block wall  
Basement full of spiders  
colorless crickets and  
the humming tension of a spring  
ready to snap closed on  
a limb I will chew through

**River Gar**  
Noah Soltau  
Poetry

gravel dust cakes sweat   erodes gray  
river beds into laugh lines between  
sun-warmed muscles   refinery gravel pit haze  
an umber smear above plywood and  
two by four ramp dragged from truck bed  
bike buoyed by dock foam and enthusiasm  
bodies slap water like giant lazy fish  
hidden now under the bank away from noise  
wind rushes lungs and legs burn   gravity  
then not   a heartbeat golden air blue gill  
water dry kudzu sky a gyre of interstitial  
atrial silences then liquid dark and cool  
millennia of mud gravitational pull toward sea  
the end of all roads   delta   change

**Driving Downtown After Camping**

Noah Soltau

Poetry

I want you like I want to scratch  
the poison ivy on my arms   like I want  
to burn the ticks on my leg with a lighter  
like I want to close the cuts on my chest and back  
with super glue and duct tape   like a city bus  
crushing ruts into mid-July pavement  
I want to be close to you like kudzu  
in the trees behind the Arby's  
I want your hands around my neck  
Like dead fish in an oil slick on the river  
I want you to carry me away in your current  
I want you like anaphylaxis like a snake  
in church   like a monk on fire



**They Told Us Not to Name Them**

Nick Courtright

Poetry

If the minnows die, we were told,  
it's no big deal because they are just  
minnows. "Just minnows," as if  
their lives are worth less, and they are:  
29 cents each. The nicer fish  
are 4.99, 7.99, the fanciest  
of them all 13.99 and you'd pray  
it wouldn't die three hours in.  
The array we got, 2 reds, 2 yellows,  
a fat one always racing up and across  
the tank's relentless wall of glass  
as if getting out would be better,  
they are here now learning  
what it's like to have only this.  
There are worlds inside their minds  
we will never know. The air  
they breathe is our nightmare.  
When I turn off the aquarium light  
that first night only they know who,  
come morning, will still be swimming.

**Muir Woods**  
Nick Courtright  
Poetry

In the redwood forest you learn  
that when a redwood burns  
until it is no longer recognizable as itself,  
fallen or evaporated from its majesty,  
sometimes it's still alive underground  
and a whole host of new trees bursts  
from its roots, up through the understory soil,  
climbing higher and higher  
thin like an eyelash, reaching upward  
so determinedly just because  
the canopy and its precious light  
is so godly high. And this new host  
of redwoods all reaches the top together—  
it only takes a couple hundred years—  
while here down below we gather,  
all of us with our parking reservations  
confirmed, our day at the park  
validated at the visitor center, to learn  
what this phenomenon is called,  
this venerable bundle of linked behemoths  
all arisen from and part of the same  
single ever-living ancestor. There are two  
names for this, actually. The first:  
a family group. The second: a cathedral.

## Airing Out Nana

Beth Keeley  
Nonfiction

Mom time travels. Her grandparents often visit her, but they're usually late. It's not their fault; they've been dead for decades. Dad died 10 years ago, yet she declares, "He's around her somewhere!" Dad's the love of her life, and she guards that fiercely, unwilling to share his affection with any female, even me. She envied our father-daughter bond. Perhaps it's because her father never claimed her, and her stepfather denied responsibility. This defined our difficult dynamic. After we'd lost Dad to cancer, I hoped she and I would connect without the smoke of jealousy, but she didn't have time.

After she moved to a retirement facility, I'd drive her to the supermarket every week. It's an outing she doesn't challenge. I tease that, "I'm airing out Nana." My children call her Nana. When my name began to fade from her memory, I started calling her that, too. Gradually, going out became a difficult balance of uncertainties:

1. Share *where* we're going, *why* we need to, and *who* requires it.
2. Schedule a time she'll agree with.
3. Write the appointment on notes and post them on her refrigerator, calendar, mirror, and door. (Telling her on the phone is risky, and I'm not a gambler.)

If the notes work, she'll meet me outside. If she forgets, it's a frustrating game of hide-and-seek and a chastising lecture that I never told her.

Turning into the entrance, I pray that I won't need to find her. Hide-n-seek isn't fun now that I'm 40.

Thankfully, she's on the porch, next to a man with a walker. Both inspect me through their glasses. She frowns and steps forward for a closer look. I smile and wave, at least twice, before there's a spark of recognition.

She grins, opens the car door, and slides into the passenger seat. "Hi, Darling." She doesn't refer to me by name anymore. "That man is nice. He said he would take me anywhere I wanted to go and to bring an overnight bag."

I laugh. "Well, that sounds like a proposition."

"He looks out for me." She puts on her seatbelt after I point to it. "Another man was on the porch yesterday, and this guy told me not to mess with him because he is 'bad news.'"

"That's kind."

"People who live here are just like him."

"They all look out for you?"

"No, they use those . . . things." She waves her hand in the air as if to conjure the word she's searching for.

"The walker?"

"Yes! It's supposed to be an interdependent facility."

I don't correct her. I know she means independent. She slams her purse down, and the sugary scent of Juicy Fruit gum escapes the open zipper. Afternoon heat mingles with the gum's smell and causes my head to ache.

I sigh. "It *is*."

"It certainly is *not*! There are people all over that place with those . . . things." She waves her hand again.

"Walkers."

"Yes!"

"Management isn't going to evict anyone for using a walker."

"They don't belong *there*!"

I wonder how much longer she'll belong. Despite my having four teenagers and a full-time job, she'll need more of me soon.

The facility provides meals, so our errand is for essentials: popcorn, wine, chips, and coffee. It's always the same items, with an occasional surprise.

She points to the list. "I need matches."

"Why matches?" I try to keep my voice composed, but thinking of her with matches is terrifying.

She responds simply, "I don't have any."

Later, when I see matches on the shelf, I direct her attention across the aisle by suddenly announcing, "I need foil for tonight's dinner!"

This reminds me of my endless list of chores at home. She wanders the aisles like she's navigating the layout of a new store, and I resist an urge to hurry her along. I stay within eyesight because if I move to the next aisle or walk behind her, I cease to exist.

By the last aisle, everything is marked off her list, some more than once. We stand in the checkout line where she reads the magazine headlines aloud. Noticing a cover promoting a film on Elvis Presley's life, she picks it up and points to a 21-year-old Elvis.

"He doesn't look like THAT anymore. They aren't fooling me!" She shakes the magazine at me and continues, "It might as well be a *National Enquirer* headline: 'Elvis, an Alien, Abducted Me.' I know better than to believe that shit."

I don't tell her that Elvis is dead. Correcting her is pointless; it was pointless before dementia, too.

"His hair is thinning and gray." She leans in to whisper in my ear, "He's also gained some weight." It takes her several attempts to return the magazine to the shelf.

After we return, I carry the groceries to her apartment. She insists that I'm running late. "You've got to go pick up those babies from school." I don't share that they drive now.

She follows me to the edge of the porch, and I remind her, "You stay here. I'll see you in a few days."

"I know," her voice carries the weight of pretending.

I give her another quick hug and hurry to the car before she can follow me. Glancing in the rearview mirror, I see her waving and recall the 70's movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. It's a horror film, suddenly a true story. Had I known Mom would be snatched from me, I would have said goodbye, but it's too late.

**Held**  
Sarah Kim  
Art



**Tree with a Heart**

Sarah Kim

Art





**Holding**  
Sarah Kim  
Art



**Quiet Hours**  
Sarah Kim  
Art



**Bend time for me, sleepwalker**

Karly Rager

Poetry

Bend time for me, sleepwalker.  
Fold up the decorative distance between us  
and shoot a needle through the crease.

Restraining the way our story can riff.  
Redraw the scene, reroute the skiff.

Stage right  
I'll rewind my jilted, chiaroscuro egress  
Stage left  
unrest what still lives in your chest

Let's rewrite that muted, center-stage riddle  
Pull clock hands back and cast a new ripple  
Pick some divergent tyne  
that flays open what we bind in rhyme  
that bores through ventriloquial drivel  
that lets your heart bleed in mine  
so we can sleeptalk in netherland  
and melt your dreams down my spine

**on a Thursday**  
Sharisa Aidukaitis  
Poetry

I made pretzels with the kids today  
spontaneously because we could  
just like you and I used to  
on slow Saturday afternoons  
stretching the dough out  
into harmless snakes  
that I occasionally snapped  
and you wordlessly mended;  
then twisting the strands—  
me into misshapen lumps  
and you into elegant twirls—  
and the whole house would  
exude the scent  
of yeast chemical reactions  
before finally we would sit down  
in together silence  
tasting the treasures  
back when your lips still moved  
and this afternoon I thought of you  
as new tiny fingers rolled lumpy snakes  
and twisted floury blobs  
and I missed you because  
you didn't get to try these pretzels  
or meet the petite hands  
that made them  
without you

**Inheritance**  
Elizabeth Cohen  
Poetry

There is something about you  
that remembers your mother,  
it lives in your cheekbones  
the way you sideways sneeze

You carry her around like a bag  
of bones, good for making soup  
she said—always ask the butcher  
for the soup bones

Put on your jacket of fire ants  
at summer's end  
your spider house boots  
twist your hair in a bun

Don your brother-in-law's  
haunted Stetson, walk around  
in the newborn chill, wearing  
the whole family of your ghosts

All of them talking quietly to themselves  
and softly, softly, singing your name

**FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA**

Jillian Stacia

Poetry

We are eager and empty  
headed people, hearts  
papered and thin enough  
to draw blood. Guts dried  
as husks, entrails a pile  
of lead. We dream in dollar  
bills. Decency is an old pair  
of boots we left by the side door.  
Lady Liberty is a witch  
we burn at the stake.  
We ignore the huddled masses.  
We forget what it's like  
to hunger. We turn our heads,  
we clap our hands –

*our empty heads,  
our bloody hands.*

**Estate Sale**

Charlotte Van Schaack

Poetry

In a final tribute to  
her mother, the daughter  
raised her childhood  
home on the front lawn.

Kitchen outlined:  
bejeweled blue turquoise  
green translucent glass  
light shifting through  
bottles once lining cabinets  
after use.

All the neighbors crowd  
a dining room of grass  
*as she would have wanted,*  
feasting on Farberware  
polished just  
for this occasion.

Picture frames former to  
hanging line up  
halls closets shoppers  
become children playing dress up  
in the deceased mother's pearls.

**In the Jewish Ghetto of Rome**

Charlotte Van Schaack

Poetry

The cobble stones warp my feet  
and every few steps there is gold  
inscribed with names  
and dates of arrest.

The synagogue  
has a broken window  
at the top.

At the end of the alleyway  
iron bars twist to form two  
semi-circles, a bar  
through the middle makes  
two curved passages,  
obstacles to keep out mopeds.

It reminds me  
of the way barbed wire fences  
curve to keep cattle in  
and let farmers come  
and go.



**Mutation**  
Rola Elnaggar  
Fiction

“You remind me of a nine-legged octopus,” he told me one day after dinner. I asked him what it was supposed to mean. He took a swig of his beer and focused his eyes on the TV. He was watching *Lost*. *Again*.

I was watching him. Watching him transfer his availability to a screen, messily eat tacos, and stain his shorts and my carpet with the sauce. Whenever I watch him, I always wonder how I ended up here. When I was fourteen and learning in biology class about how octopuses use their ink as a defense against predators, I didn’t expect I would be called one by someone like *him* who happens to be my partner, and using ink for the same purpose. My grandmother once told me I should maintain a certain level of realism, not slide down the misery curve into an insecure coupling.

“Why an octopus?” I asked again. He shrugged.

“Because.” That was his answer to most questions. He was too passive to string a few syllables together to form a suitable answer. It was fine of him to hand out unsolicited statements, but not answer your inquiry about said statement. This was the nature of one-sided relationships, after all.

The cycle began as follows:

- The ground is already wobbly, but nothing jump-starts your worries, yet.
- There is someone to *unzip* you on a daily basis.
- Someone you respect has complimented you as a couple.
- The little things he does, *albeit disgusting*, are endearing.

- They are so endearing that you are starting to tolerate them because you know you can't offer him love, so tolerance should be enough until it's not.

I didn't think there was a word to describe the disappointment one must feel when one finds their life has veered off the path, and the reason is someone one thought had memorized the trajectory like the back of their hand. There was an intentionality when you repeatedly told them they were reading the map upside down, and they insisted they weren't wrong.

There was no word for shame coiling through your chest, corseting your heart, and draining you of oxygen every time you opened your eyes in the morning and saw the sad shape of his body's impression on the mattress. There was no word for watching his pale, devoid of vitamin D face arouse from an eight-hour slumber only to fall back into a sixteen-hour snooze, where sometimes he would find the vigor to reprimand the creator of *Lost*, his arch nemesis, for creating an addictive show that never reached its potential. *His words, not mine.*

There was no word for waking up and wanting to remain silent with your thoughts for an hour at least. To let the corrosive feeling of regret fester before his contagious laziness takes over. Before I found myself watching *Lost* next to him on the couch and wiping liquid stains from wooden surfaces like an innate reflex installed in me.

I'm starting to wish I were a nine-legged octopus, so I can either flee faster and hide, or slap him nine times in a row until he sobers up. I can already feel it happening within me: the attack described in biology class. My predator already shares a bed with me, but I'm camouflaging behind my silences. I can feel my limbs stretching and dividing into two sets of four limbs,

swimming backstroke away from him, but he notices me, so I detach one of my limbs to distract him until I find a place where I can hide and wait for my limb to regenerate.

I met a man at a bar last week. He was tall and handsome. He saw me and smiled. It was a strange feeling to know I could elicit such a reaction from a man with my “disfigurement”, or to feel any attraction to a man after realizing that men are a passive waste of space who watch *Lost* all day, drink beer, and tell me I reminded them of a nine-legged octopus.

I googled the nine-legged octopus and found out that they did discover one. They said if one of its limbs was damaged, it might regenerate wrong. They said it was the result of a mutation caused by nuclear power.

I thought settling for this life with him had damaged me, and I was regenerating wrong, *hence the nine legs*. He made the first remark, and it maddened me even more because it was supposed to be me who noticed it first.

I wanted to tell him it was your fault, but I wouldn’t be just a nine-legged octopus; I would be a liar.

It’s a race against time now. I must leave before the mutation is complete and before he restarts the first season of *Lost*.

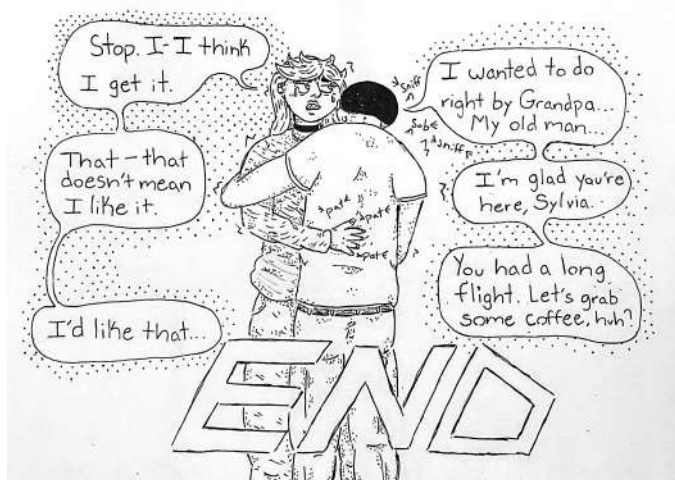
**Late**  
Jaryd Porter  
Art













**Boxed In**  
Maudie Bryant  
Poetry

There's something so alive  
about the funeral program  
scattered across the car,  
fanned out on the seat  
like a hand of cards  
dealt too soon.

But mess gives way to order,  
and the boxes feel final—  
how they hold you now.  
I shut the lid on your smile,  
seal obituaries in cardboard graves,  
press memory flat like a flower,  
fingers lingering at the clasp.

**Doorjamb**  
Maudie Bryant  
Poetry

Between cold stone  
and worn, unfeeling wood,  
I lie flat on the floor,  
arms spread like surrender.

They call it stuck—  
but I feel the grind,  
a rhythm beneath the board,  
and in that movement,  
I rise.

No one tells you,  
but the rock and the hard place  
create another doorway,  
and if you listen long enough,  
you can hear yourself breaking  
free.

**Next Checkbox**

Maudie Bryant

Poetry

I climb a hill, lungs burning,  
legs on the verge of mutiny.  
But there is no bench.  
Emails sprout like weeds  
in my pocket, a sink  
of soiled plates waits,  
and the body, my poor mule,  
I just kick it forward.  
I promise a meadow,  
but I mean the next  
empty checkbox.

**Your Notebook is Pristine**

Maudie Bryant

Poetry

Unused, filled with unwritten  
schemes to sell the moon,  
a recipe for curried chicken,  
a manual for surviving  
the act of being seen.

Spine still uncracked—  
its single flaw.  
Smudge the first page.  
Spill ink like blood.  
Prove you dared exist.

## **If You Knew the Before**

Kandi Maxwell

Nonfiction

It's the year 2,000, and I'm in my late forties. I move in with my boyfriend, Lloyd, who lives off grid in the Tahoe National Forest at 4,000 feet. The original log cabin is ancient, but a two-story addition has been built. The top story is really a loft, and downstairs is one large room. We have a fancy barn wood outhouse with long, glass windows on all four sides. I learn how to work the generator to run the well and charge our solar batteries. I often cook on the wood stove. When we later move to the the high desert at 5,000 feet, we raise chickens, cattle, goats, and horses. We grow huge gardens. Go into the mountains to cut cedar and juniper logs to split into firewood for warmth during long, cold winters. We drive out to a cattle and hay ranch to get hay; load the truck ourselves, then stack it in the large barn Lloyd built. We get married on our property outside in the horse corral. I can't remember the date, but possibly June.

Before that, I marry my first husband and begin a family. It's 1976 and we live in the Santa Cruz mountains. My husband and I rent a small wooden house in a deeply wooded forest. Redwoods and ferns surround the house. We take our young children on walks up forest paths. We inspect slimy, yellow banana slugs. I teach myself to can fruits and vegetables. Make jams. I buy a spinning wheel, card wool with two paddles with sharp, metal teeth. Spin it into yarn that I dye with onion skins or turmeric.

Before that, I find an organic farming commune in the mountains of Bonny Doon. My rent is paid by working in the garden. The property is wooded with a creek that flows through it; the garden plot is large and

sunny and bordered with bright red Zinnias and orange Marigolds. Chickens, geese and ducks roam freely through the yard. The "community" is small: three students from the University of Santa Cruz and two of us who attend community college. The University students are two males and one female. My roommate is a female friend. We live together in a sparsely furnished, three-bedroom house with a large living area. We have weekly meetings to discuss our French Intensive garden and divvy up chores. This mountain life is organized, and the land is tidy due to careful management. Words like sustainability, environmental protection, and biodiversity become part of my vocabulary.

Before that, I work with a logging crew in La Honda. Neil Young's Broken Arrow Ranch is nearby. I sing his songs as I drive. Sunrays stream through the Redwoods and Douglas Fir. The smell of Eucalyptus and Bay Laurel seeps through the windows of my truck. When I reach the slick, muddy logging road, I jump out to lock the wheel hubs into four-wheel drive. I find the logging crew and go right to work. Condensation on the trees drip, and it feels like soft rain on my skin. My bare arms are covered in mud. I throw the cut and split firewood into my truck bed, then stack the wood neatly into a cord. The effort is exhilarating. I haul the firewood to buyers in the cities down the valley.

Before that, I move from Southern California to the Santa Cruz mountains. It's 1972 and I'm nineteen years old. I rent an old, blue cabin for \$55.00 a month. There are cracks in the walls, but the house has a small wood stove for heat. A large clawfoot bathtub fills the tiny bathroom. It's quiet here. Comfortable. Friends visit. We sing and play music. I play guitar and dulcimer. We sing folk songs by Joan Baez and her sister, Mimi. Mimi sings with her husband, Richard Farina. They make dulcimer music popular. Two of my friends work at

Capri Taurus Music. I bake carob cookies with walnuts and gift them to the guys at the shop. They build handmade dulcimers out of beautiful woods like walnut and redwood. I still have the dulcimer my friends made for me.

During those years, I didn't know that the skills I had learned would still be valuable at my present age of 72. I can no longer split wood, but I can stack it. I still build outdoor fires and fires for our wood stoves. Lloyd and I both have arthritic backs, so we no longer have cows and horses. Lifting hay has taken its toll. Our two dogs are our only animal companions now. It makes our lives a bit easier. I'm still good with getting dirty—hands in the soil or soot from a fire smeared on my clothes are inevitable, and I'm fine with that. We spend most of our days at our off-grid trailer on ten acres. We're currently updating our solar system. Soon, I should have enough light to cook without my headlamp.

We may not live in a place you'd find in *Better Homes & Gardens* magazine. Our lives are more rustic. If you had seen the before, you'd know that was the direction I'd been heading all along.

**The Ferris Wind**  
Xuan Tran  
Art





**Dried Up and Left For Dead**  
Tinamarie Cox  
Art



**Funerals They Don't Invite You To**

Emilee Wigglesworth

Poetry

Wasn't it there, behind the blue velvet curtain drawn  
and all this liminal inner-space? I swore  
I reached out, fingertip brush against  
coarse body. Again, the nightmare where I see you  
in low lighting, your nose slightly higher on your face,  
your lips thinner than I remember them.

In the bar, Matt talks of his former drug dealer  
who committed suicide, walked into the forest  
with a gun, but before, asked Matt for a hug  
in his car, though they didn't really know each other  
well. A gesture of kindness amidst this unholy chaos,  
and we swore we reached out,

maybe it was a Tuesday when I called you,  
when I dragged the possum from the middle of the road,  
his white fur stained brown, his tongue stuck out  
like a cartoon version of death. Didn't I tell you  
how I got tired of driving past its small, crumpled body  
every morning on the way to work? Didn't I tell you

how I took it past the tree line where the turkey vultures  
were circling, solemnly picked the soil  
from under my fingernails, placed the smooth gray rock  
where the dirt raised from the earth?

It was in that same bar we talked of dying  
Matt used to walk to, years ago,  
middle of the afternoon, just to get away  
from the graveyard in the neighboring lot.

# Statue of Abraham Lincoln

Emilee Wigglesworth

Poetry

I've been thinking      about my dad's chipped tooth,  
 Chip, my mom's new boyfriend,      & how I like  
 most how these two things sound side by side,  
 how I may extract meaning      from my father's  
    two front teeth,  
 how I may excavate a wound, and      rejoice  
 when I wake      from this american dream.  
 My mom would frequently say *Shawn, get it fixed,*  
*please call the dentist,* and a few months later,  
    he did,  
 but      the dental bonding snapped clean  
 off, and it seemed she might have to try to love  
 him, mangled smile      and all.

When I imagine the two of them, it is usually  
 their bodies      tangled and tumbling  
 down the steps of the Lincoln memorial,  
 87 pearly white marble slabs,  
 drowned at the bottom of the reflecting pool.

**Pink Gingham**  
Emilee Wigglesworth  
Poetry

Slowly, it fell away, the satin dressings, the sequined  
permanence. This performance, this standing ovation,

this thunderous applause. I am a touchable thing,  
I am reaching out and touching hand to cheek,

and this love is ubiquitous. *I am always looking at you*,  
she says, and I try to believe her. Her gaze fixed forward

past where I am standing, beyond even the reaches  
of my shadow. What good is my life if it is mine,

mine alone? She left her underwear on my bedroom  
floor, my carpet sought to swallow her whole,

and every morning the woodpecker outside my window  
chips away at the bark of the slash pine, hoping

just as any of us do, that we might  
find a nest firmly planted in the ground.

**It Was the First Time**

Nick Romeo

Poetry

That I lied to you  
The other day when we met  
Again  
When I said that I'm fine  
Maybe you knew  
Maybe you didn't feel  
Like being my therapist  
Again  
But it was I who didn't feel  
Like explaining my feelings  
Again  
How I still dream of you often  
And think of you all day  
How your scent still tickles  
And your taste still lingers  
Because I don't have a time machine  
Or time in general to fix anything

But here I am in all my glorious dripping filth

Meandering thru the day  
Boxing my shadow  
Second / third guessing my decision  
To disappear ignoring your wisdom  
Like the time you said "we deserve each other"  
And "this is the best you'll ever have"  
I guess I just didn't believe you  
Again

**Two / Twenty-nine**

Nick Romeo

Poetry

Can we chat this coming leap day?  
In a forest under a maple tree tapped,  
and still freshly oozing its life force.

Please hold my hand just like how  
you hold my heart, as we discuss  
our life goals in this interlude of peace.

This day is a magical recalibration,  
as if the sun stood still for hours.  
At least I get another 24 hours with you.

This is the day / time a decade plus ago  
my heart was scorched in a crucible.  
But at least you can help with the rehab

with a needle, thread, welding torch  
while the rains drench clean our brains,  
and just before these trees run dry.

**The Ruby Slippers**

Gordon Blitz

Drama

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

TASHA - 28, wiry and anxious; Karen's sister

KAREN - 26, physically challenged, but confident;  
Tasha's sister

OLIVE - 40, overweight female Security Guard

HARDY - 40, stick-thin male Security Guard

**SCENE 1**

(A figure steps forward on a darkened stage. TASHA (hoodie up; wears gloves and carries a small duffel bag and flashlight) wanders around the stage as she uses the flashlight and mutters to herself.)

**TASHA**

Why are there so many rooms in this damn museum?  
Where are those damn ruby slippers? Ugh!

(As TASHA gets to the side of the stage, she spots them offstage.

**TASHA**

Yes!

(TASHA pantomimes as though she is using a tool to cut through glass. As she grabs the slippers with gloved hands, she receives an electric shock. She drops the slippers to the floor.)

TASHA

OW! What the...

(TASHA bends down to the floor, throws her duffel bag over the slippers, and she is able to get them into the bag without getting another shock. AN ALARM BLASTS. TASHA runs off stage. Lights dim.)

SCENE 2

(A well-lived-in suburban kitchen. KAREN (smiling; eyes filled with curiosity) is sitting in a wheelchair as TASHA runs in. TASHA throws the duffel bag on the floor.)

KAREN

Did you get them?

TASHA

Yes, and I almost didn't. And look at how my fingers are burned. It was worth it though.

KAREN

I don't care if it burns my feet. If it can get me out of this chair and able to walk, then it doesn't matter. Where are they?

(TASHA picks up the duffel bag carefully not wanting to get another shock. She carries them over to KAREN. KAREN slowly pulls the shoes out of the bag and holds them in her hands and stares at them.)



TASHA

Wow! No electric shock. Well, put them on.

KAREN

Now I'm scared. I've waited all this time, and now that I have them, I'm worried. What if they don't work.

TASHA

Oh come on. What have you got to lose?

(KAREN picks them up and bends down to remove her shoes. As she puts one ruby slipper on her foot, she stops.)

TASHA

Well, how does it feel?

KAREN

I don't feel anything yet.

(After she puts the second slipper on, she smiles.)

KAREN

I think I know what's wrong. I have to stand and click the heels. That's what Dorothy does, right? Can you help me?

(TASHA helps KAREN out of the wheelchair and holds her up.)

KAREN

I can't move my legs. How am I going to click the heels?

TASHA

Can I do it for you?

KAREN

Just push my ankles together. I don't want you to get another shock.

(KAREN's breathing is shallow as TASHA uses her hands to push on KAREN's ankles. The sound of a click is heard. KAREN closes her eyes and when she opens them, she tentatively tries to walk. At first, she stumbles, and TASHA prevents her from falling.)

TASHA

Are you going to be okay?

KAREN

This is like a baby taking their first steps. I'm starting to feel my legs.

(KAREN takes a step forward, steadying herself. She is able to walk a few steps. She starts to cry as she walks.)

KAREN

This is a miracle. Thank you. You're the best sister.

TASHA

Don't just say that. I still feel responsible.

KAREN

We've gone over this before. It was an accident.

(Lights flicker, darkening where

TASHA is standing.)

KAREN

What's happening? Where are you?

(TASHA looks panic stricken as stage lights flicker and TASHA leaves the stage.)

TASHA

I can't see. I love you.

(KAREN cries out. She walks over to where TASHA was standing.)

KAREN (*screaming*)

Where have you gone?

(Lights dim.)

### SCENE 3

(KAREN is in the kitchen alone talking to herself. Her wheelchair is sitting in the corner of the kitchen.)

KAREN

I'm going to keep talking to you, Tasha. Maybe you'll come back.

(She stares at her slippers.)

KAREN

What if I click my heels, won't a wish come true? Just like Dorothy...

(She clicks her heels three times, but

nothing happens.)

KAREN

No! No! No! This isn't fair. There has to be a way.

KAREN (*talking to the slippers*)

I hate you. You've ruined my life! I want Tasha. Shit, I want the use of my legs, too.

(She looks up and begins praying.)

KAREN

If you're listening, God, you've got to help me decide. What if I return the shoes to the museum, shouldn't that bring Tasha back?

(KAREN tries to remove the slippers, but they are stuck to her feet. She calls for a taxi. Lights dim.)

SCENE 4

(Museum security office. There are two security officers. OLIVE (heavy-set woman) and HARDY (stick-thin man) are in uniform, and they are cleaning out their desks as KAREN is sitting in a chair.)

OLIVE

You really expect us to believe this story? That you're not responsible for stealing the shoes, yet here you are returning them?

KAREN

Yes. And I can't take them off. I have to be dead, otherwise they won't come off.

OLIVE

This is ridiculous! You realize we got fired because the robbery took place during our shift.

HARDY

But what if we return them?

OLIVE

This is a fine mess you've got us into.

(OLIVE reaches for the slippers,  
receives a shock and quickly backs  
away.)

KAREN

See. They won't budge!

HARDY

How about some WD-40?

(HARDY goes to a drawer and pulls out  
a can of WD-40.)

KAREN

You're going to ruin the shoes. They won't be worth anything.

OLIVE

Give me that thing.

(HARDY hands the WD-40 to OLIVE.  
OLIVE starts spraying the WD-40 on  
the shoes, but it gets on the floor and  
OLIVE slips and falls. HARDY laughs.)

OLIVE

What are you laughing at?

HARDY

What are we going to do now?

(OLIVE stands up and slaps HARDY.  
HARDY bursts into tears.)

HARDY

Wait, wait! I think I have an idea.

OLIVE

You and your harebrained ideas.

(HARDY looks through one of the  
boxes that they've packed and pulls out  
a small tin axe.)

OLIVE

Where did you find that?

HARDY

I've always wanted the Tin Woodsman's ax. We were  
fired anyway.

OLIVE

Give it to me! Hold her down!

(OLIVE grabs the ax out of HARDY's  
hand and brings the ax toward  
KAREN's feet.)

KAREN

Are you crazy? You can't use that!

(Just as OLIVE is about to break skin,  
the ax drops from her hands.)

KAREN

Is that you, Tasha?

(Both officers look at KAREN,  
confused.)

KAREN

Let me try to take them off again.

(She bends down and tries to slide the  
slippers off. At first, they do not budge.  
She keeps pulling, straining. Finally,  
they fall off her feet, and she kicks them  
toward OLIVE. OLIVE uses his foot to  
push the shoes into a bag.)

KAREN

Can I just go now?

HARDY

Since we have the stolen goods, can't we just let her go?

OLIVE

Yeah, okay. Get your ass out of here!

(KAREN starts to stand, and she  
realizes her legs are unstable. As she  
tries to walk, she collapses to the floor.)

KAREN (*screaming*)

Are you happy now? You have your fucking shoes. My

legs are dead!

OLIVE

Ah, shit! You've got us into *another* fine mess. Find her a wheelchair, and get this woman out of here.

(Lights dim.)

## SCENE 5

(KAREN wheels into the kitchen in tears.)

KAREN

Tasha, please come back from wherever you are. I need you.

(The door to the kitchen opens and TASHA appears. TASHA comes to KAREN's wheelchair and hugs her.)

KAREN

Are you real? Not a ghost? I thought I'd lost you.

TASHA

Is it really worth it? Not to have the use of your legs? It's like I stole the slippers for nothing.

KAREN

Oh, jeez, Tasha. Wouldn't you have done the same thing?

TASHA

I don't know. The freedom to be able to walk; that's important to me.



KAREN

You think so little of our relationship?

TASHA

Don't put it that way. You don't know the guilt I've felt, and then there was my anger.

KAREN

Anger?

TASHA

Because you got all the attention, Mom and Dad had nothing left for me. It was always *your* needs.

KAREN

I never blamed you.

TASHA

But our parents did. They never really believed the thing about the faulty transmission.

KAREN

You said you were in Drive, and yet the car Reversed.

TASHA

Why didn't I look behind me and see you standing there?

KAREN

I wasn't there the whole time.

TASHA

What do you mean, you weren't there?

KAREN

Mom had just told me to get something from the trunk. You couldn't have seen me. I came back and was just about to open the trunk.

TASHA

You never said anything.

KAREN

Mom didn't want to take the blame. She made me swear that I wouldn't tell anyone. She was afraid she'd get arrested.

TASHA (*crying*)

I wish you had told me. And you're really okay being stuck in the wheelchair?

KAREN

Because of you. Someone heard my prayers; that being able to walk didn't matter if you weren't in my life.

TASHA

But after everything I went through to make you whole.

KAREN

No, I didn't need to be made whole.

TASHA

I just wish you could have both.

KAREN

But I *am* complete now. In a way we've healed each other.

(TASHA and KAREN hug one another.)

KAREN

But tell me, where did you go when you disappeared?

TASHA

I don't know. I was blind, in limbo, or was it waiting in purgatory? I was so scared!

KAREN

Doesn't matter. You're back. We're partners in crime.

(They both laugh.)

BLACKOUT

**The Lucky Ones 2**

Jaina Cipriano

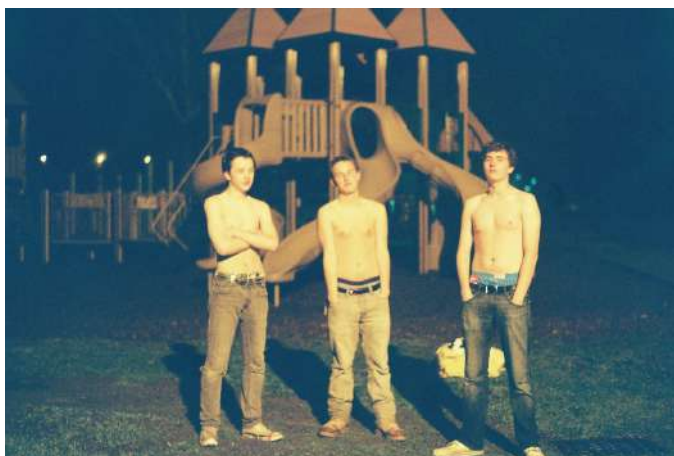
Art



**The Lucky Ones 3**  
Jaina Cipriano  
Art



**The Lucky Ones 4**  
Jaina Cipriano  
Art



**The Intersection**

Garth Pavell

Poetry

A lunchtime sunshower spitshines  
the platinum rings that married us  
in the eyes of the law at City Hall.

The breeze nudges us to Dark Fire  
where I've learned to love the dead  
clams floating like caskets in soup.

I say, Chinatown tells me in a past  
life we had ancient jewel-encrusted  
swords to wisely keep our distance.

Then from across the street I hear  
an ex's love song. It's been years  
since I felt her pink guitar scream

its inalienable right to be left  
behind. Busking breaks our eye  
contact as choked-up clouds cry

on the shoulder of a church still  
clinging to the past. At our corner  
table, I tell my bride I saw an old

girlfriend. Serendipity, she says,  
between sips of the sea, is a gift  
sometimes best left wrapped up.

**Stop Sign**  
Garth Pavell  
Poetry

I stood outside of town, on the bed of the red  
pickup, pounding a sledgehammer to straighten  
the sign that tipped in the night during a wind-  
storm secretly made in the angry smile of the sun.

It was my first week with the township road crew.  
The guys taught by taunting my eighteen-year-old  
muscles to bludgeon signposts and lay blacktop  
up and down my hometown's buckled backroads.

By the time summer slid from my shovel, I learned  
jackhammering is much quieter to a jackhammerer.  
Come December, I drilled deep into the white dusk  
as the frozen lake laid low, planning a sneak attack.

The ice split up and logjammed the small waterfall  
that had been pressuring the old concrete for years;  
the dam fell, drowning the sign I had tried to knock  
sense into, which was now lying like a fallen flag.



**I Wasn't Always**

Garth Pavell

Poetry

I wasn't always so password protected  
while experimenting with how far to break  
the laws of language. These days the nights  
hold everything lost to the fires of darkness,  
where I could drink and drive with my eyes  
everywhere but inside. Reliving little deaths  
sends me to the movies in my mind as if it  
was still a thing to sit in the dark and cradle  
every commitment by candlelight eerily  
resembling a vigil flickering in the past.

**Fishing for Meaning**

Garth Pavell

Poetry

I toss back little thoughts  
of giving up, on the bridge

to Manhattan where the ghost  
of my drunk past lives in love

with spiked ice water  
sparkling in my head.

I stand where no one sees  
the East River chug itself

and fish in the foam  
from boats, not beer.

Be like the eagles soaring  
high above the city traffic

I think in what feels like  
a poem nibbling my line.

**First Words**

Jen Bryant

Nonfiction

As you add items to the shopping basket, you identify each one out loud: *banana, orange, yogurt*. This is done for the benefit of your baby, nestled sweetly on your hip. He's not talking much yet – *mama, dada* – but at almost seven months old, it won't be long. It's your responsibility to name the objects around him, to make the mysterious familiar with words. The banana is *yellow*; the orange is *round*. The yogurt he plucks from the basket is *cold* in his small, chubby fist.

Today, your baby isn't interested in words. The pearly white tooth cutting its way through his gums makes him clingy and restless. He twines one starfish hand into your hair, then burrows his head into your shoulder, leaving a line of drool across your shirt. You walk faster, knowing his whimpers will turn into full-blown wails if you don't hurry. Standing in the checkout line, you press the container of yogurt against his cheek, letting the chill provide momentary relief.

In the car, you turn the dial to public radio, hoping that the seven-minute drive home will be long enough to catch up on life outside of the nursery. On the news, a reporter says that bombing has started in Afghanistan. Through a translator, he interviews a young mother, huddled in a makeshift shelter with her children. It's night there; they are sitting in the dark.

A baby's cry, sudden and sharp, pierces the air. *The children are hungry*, the reporter says. *They are running out of food*.

The sound of that baby's cry will stay with you as you exit the car, as you twine plastic grocery bags around both wrists, as you heft your son back onto your hip and make your way up the steep apartment steps. The cat meows her greeting when you step through the door, causing your baby to shriek with delight.

The landscape of his world is peppered with soft things: *kitty, blanket, strawberry*. You think of the mother on the radio, curled protectively around her children, and wonder what her baby's first words will be.

When you open the refrigerator to put away the groceries, a sickly-sweet smell wafts up. Something has gone bad. The bulb in the fridge has burned out; in your rush to get home, you forgot to purchase a replacement. You hand your baby a teething ring, then set him down on the floor beside you, where he happily pounds the linoleum with his feet. Together, you peer into the darkness, looking for the source of the rot.

**6/28**

Tom Bosworth

Poetry

Somewhere, still, the waves heave themselves on shore.  
I am tall enough to see them standing  
from Vermont. The height makes me lonelier,  
since conversation dies out near my calves.  
The kids invented cruel nicknames for me:  
Head-in-the-clouds. Sky-for-brains. Bird-muncher.  
I became a painter—the only way  
to explain the tension between seeing  
what one needs to see and standing where one  
is loved. The children already get it.  
Their cruelty is merely imitative.  
Later curled in the river valley,  
my technique is silence to my loved ones.  
The waves work best when no one is watching.

I loved you in the autumn mist mountains,  
where I pretended to love cigarettes  
in the circle where your thumb traced the light-  
er's steel, music still thrumming in my skull.  
I pulled the smoke in my mouth, then let it  
escape. I grew up with asthma, many  
children's hospitals. Breathed adrenaline  
until my hands opened and my lungs shook.  
Maybe monks feel that imposition of  
clarity, or the chemicals that make  
it, which, arriving in the body, bring  
relief and relief's cost: the question of  
how do I keep it? How to make it last  
in the body, which can't unsee mountains?

**Welcome to This 4**  
Isabelle Carasso  
Art



**Welcome to This 5**  
Isabelle Carasso  
Art





**Dragonflies Will Sew Your Lips Shut**

Maya Maria

Poetry

If you lie the veined sprites  
with their needled bodies  
                                whip across water  
  
drum their armored thoraces  
into the deep pool of the id  
                                swarm like arrows  
  
with serrated jaws lace lip  
to bone and nest inside you  
                                their song of wings

**Penitent Magdalene**

Maya Maria

Poetry

*After Orazio Gentileschi*

Mocked in portrait—  
her naked breasts parted like the red sea,  
    body bewildered to the sun  
    and begging—reclused  
from Heaven himself.

Is this where she hides under the guise  
of repentance? Cradling her stretched womb  
    in the same tomb  
    from which He woke  
a different man. She still dreams  
of his stone-smoothed  
    flesh, unfamiliar  
    after three days  
of sobbing outside his crypt.

I don't believe she is sorry.  
Secretly, she bargains for His return,  
    "Please, God, if you love me,  
    give him back. A good man  
    is so hard to find."

She scratches down her myth in an empty tome—  
    the kisses under olive trees,  
    the child that might have lived—  
her barren bleeding through,  
    waiting for an answer.

**Separation**  
Maya Maria  
Poetry

Mama still dreams of the old house.

The dried herbs and windchimes gone,  
wood cabinets stained white and stocked.

The owners catch her rummaging the cupboards  
like a rat and shoo her from their new kitchen.

But there's evidence in the woodstove.  
Subpoenas wedged behind the oil tank.

Names engraved in wooden sills.  
Cracked tiles harboring power.

**Migration**  
Maya Maria  
Poetry

The laundry baskets spill and spit lone socks  
in the back of the van, dishes clamor impatience,

and the hydrangea bush ruffles like paper  
in its Glad bag, singing with every pothole.

The tigerlilies are coming, their dug up roots  
like tangled hair. They compose a grand escape

with the sunflowers, laid down in the trunk  
like limp bodies, tired from the weight of battle.

**R-a-c-h-e-l**  
Rachel Roupp  
Poetry

Two thirds of my name is your name  
— just six letters to remember,  
all my mother asked for.

Rachel means “Ewe,”  
means “Lamb of God.”

Dad, I wanted nothing more  
than to be shepherded by you,  
held safely in your flock,  
receive your loving shelter.

When you texted me this week,  
you tacked that stray A  
between my H and E.

Do you know the story of Rachel?  
She was meant to be the most beloved.

Do you know she defied her father?  
For this, God struck her down.

**Irish Goodbye**

Rachel Roupp

Poetry

*For Connie*

Your daughter told us  
you didn't like potatoes —  
except French fries, of course —  
and you joked that  
you'd been through the Famine  
in another lifetime.

Beside me, our colleague asked  
if I'd heard that story before.  
I hadn't, and I wished so badly  
that you had told me instead  
of finding it out at your funeral.

Still, everyone in attendance knew  
it wasn't like you to talk about yourself.  
You didn't like the spotlight, and even shied away  
from enthusiastic compliments, especially mine.

During these days without you,  
I've begun wondering if it was your humility  
or wisdom that kept you from telling us you were sick.  
Maybe that past life is the reason you left us  
with an Irish goodbye, disappearing  
before any of us who loved you had a say

in what our last moments together would be.

**The World Outside**

Vani Mandava

Nonfiction

Her world was confined within the walls of the group home that she shared with 30 other kids. Each year some would arrive, and others would leave. The system had been fine-tuned over decades for kids to “pass through,” but some ended up staying longer watching with sad envy the pomp and ceremony that accompanied each child’s departure to their forever home.

She was three years old. We had started to visit her daily to start the bonding process to prepare for foster care and eventually adoption. On one such visit, she was playing outside. The happy shrieks of children grew louder as we made our way along the side of the building. The older kids kicked up dust as they played tag. A toddler experimented with walking as he pushed around a plastic tricycle with a broken wheel, warped in the tropical Indian heat. A good sign—the wee ones were not just lying around developing rickets. Jostling and bumping into each other in the cramped space, the kids were allowed to be boisterous and were oblivious to our presence. To them this was freedom from being indoors. Except for annual doctor visits, most had never been outside the compound. They did not know what they were missing.

One of the ayahs called her name. I was pleasantly surprised that she didn’t mind - the abrupt end to her sliver of outdoor time was compensated for by the thrill of the visit with her future Mamma and Baba. Dressed in a well-worn yellow dress, short hair oiled neatly flat, her little feet in sockless red shoes she joined us as we

walked slowly back to the building. We tried not to look over our shoulders at the kids left behind. After reaching the windowless waiting room, we showed her picture books and gave her crayons and paper. She closed her fist around a blue crayon and with slow and precise strokes drew ovals to create a part human, part mouse creature with hollow eyes, stumpy limbs, and a toothy smile. These visits became our routine for the next few weeks.

One day, she was beside herself with excitement as she bounced into the room. A domesticated camel had passed by on the street outside and the orphanage was abuzz. She had seen bobbing camel parts past the tall compound wall that separated the orphanage from the world outside. Head and neck, and a bit of the hump. It was nothing like they had ever seen before. “Camel had come! Camel was big,” she repeated pointing to the street, her wide expressive eyes and gesticulating little arms compensating for the limits of her vocabulary.

After spending four tedious unpredictable months in India, the day finally arrived when we entered New Delhi airport to fly back to Seattle. Fog had delayed the flight by over 12 hours and we were sent on a shuttle to spend the night at a nearby hotel. She stayed curious and cheerful at the novelty of the airport as we, her parents, fretted and figured out the logistics of the delay. After hours of walking, she started tripping and suddenly, mid step, plopped down to sit on the floor. She felt the texture of the carpet with her little palms and beamed up at us with a giggle. My partner and I, new parents, realized that she didn’t have the words to tell us she was exhausted, or ask to be carried. We picked her up and put her in the back of the luggage cart, along with her tiny backpack. She giggled some more.



Back in Seattle, she assimilated quickly and started attending pre-kindergarten school. We were proud of how, spongelike, within months, she absorbed much of her new world and her vocabulary grew. ‘I love your dog,’ ‘I love you.’ ‘I miss you,’ she boldly stated to complete strangers as we walked the dog in the neighborhood. On our drive home from school, she would talk endlessly about her day, using a mix of old and new language and some made-up words.

She had come a long way and we reveled in her expanded world. One chilly fall evening, as I drove home in the dark through the Seattle rain, she cheerily chatted about her day. It included a game of hide-and-seek, except the teacher also seemed to be involved. As I pulled into the garage, I asked why the teacher was helping them hide. She tried to explain, “Act Dibs Otter” she kept repeating. “Like a drill but not Ear Quate Drill” she said, “Actibs Otter Drill.”

I clutched the wheel in horror as it dawned upon me that she was saying “Active Shooter Drill” “Not earthquake drill”. Pushing back tears, I mumbled “Ah okay I understand.” I turned off the engine. She clambered out of the car and scampered into the house to greet the dog who was barking maniacally on the other side of the door eager to meet his biggest fan.

**Strange Flowers: A Conversation  
with Bryan Byrdlong**

Lauren Saxon

Book Review

*Strange Flowers* by Bryan Byrdlong

YesYes Books, 2025

112 pages

ISBN: 978-1-946303-02-8

USD: \$18

*If you repeat a lie long enough, it becomes the truth // if  
you repeat a lie long enough, it becomes the end.*

These two lines bookend an opening poem in ***Strange Flowers***, the stunning debut poetry collection by Bryan Byrdlong. Broken into five sections of poems, *Strange Flowers* is a fascinating conversation spanning grief, Blackness, and finding ethical beauty in the ‘ocean of ache’ we survive in.

Byrdlong’s work is somehow both accurate *and* hallucinatory. Several poems lean heavily into the idea of zombies, straddling the line between the dead and living, acknowledging how inseparable the two realms can be. Even his love poems place this duality at the forefront. The act of buying a woman roses is justified in a single stanza, saying “Sometimes // a lover just wants you // to bring them // a dying thing—”

More than anything, *Strange Flowers* urges us readers to confront our own truths. Makes us question if that’s what they really are. Byrdlong does this by sharing his truths— The comfort he finds watching body cam videos in reverse. How he feels most human when surrounded by people who are only there in spirit. The difference between morning, mourning and grief.

*Strange Flowers* is a master class in intimacy. It reads as a confession, a call to action, a reminder to challenge our rituals.

I spoke to Bryan Byrdlong about writing his poems alive, how to stay inspired in today's current climate, and about the importance of embodying Blackness in his poetry.

**Q: Talk to me about *Strange Flowers*, when did you know that you had a collection that was ready for the world? Where did you write some of the poems?**

To answer the second question first, I wrote quite a few places, but mostly Ann Arbor Michigan where I lived, Chicago, where I'm from, a residency at the Vermont Studio Center, and at the Tin House Workshop. Per the second question, the first time I had a complete draft of the manuscript, it was written for my MFA Thesis. And, that was written with a comprehensive artistic vision in mind around 2020. After that I was tinkering, editing, and sending it out till early 2022 when I realized this more literary version was too long and had certain redundancies in the theme. I began thinking of the book as something a wider audience could engage in a more streamlined way. So I cut the manuscript from 80 pages to 60 pages (in Microsoft Word) and that was the version that I felt was ready for the world.

**Q: In today's current climate, it can be hard to feel inspired. Where do you draw your poetic influences from?**

It can be difficult. I think we're in an era of remakes and re-samples especially when it comes to film and music. It's helped me to expand my types of media.

There's the ekphrastic tradition of being inspired by art of different kinds: paintings, sculptures. There's reading other writer's work and getting inspired that way. But, also I've gotten more into documentary poetics where different kinds of documents: articles, scientific essays, and legal writings can give you a new lens for inspiration

**Q: I adore your title poem, "Strange Flowers" published in The Cortland Review. Specifically, this imagery of names growing from the ground:**

“.....This block  
where Black lives used to live. I walk cautious  
as names pop out of the ground like bulbs in spring.  
A bizarre prismatic, a language of blues, lilacs  
inferring the people in this house believe in beauty,  
believes in what matters....”

**What beauty do you believe in? What matters most to you right now?**

I think, I believe in ethical beauty. I think one reading of that poem is that it is pointing at or critiquing a beauty that is not ethical. I think it matters to me now that we resist cultures that try to label the unethical as beautiful. I think people have used that to justify horrible actions.

**Q: I know you have experience with Slam and Performance Poetry, which poem is your favorite to read out loud from your debut?**

(un)dead because some of the longer poems I don't have a go-to reading style because they are a little too long to practice. But, (un)dead is just short enough and written in a way where I can deliver a performance that has the intended tone and effect nine times of ten.

**Q: Another poem of yours that I adore is “Ode to Black Air Forces” that was published in Poem-A-Day. You explained your interest in “the idea that Blackness has access to a fuller humanity or a freedom that includes the ability to embody a certain toughness without fear”.**

**What else does your Blackness embody? How do you convey that in your poetry?**

I like to think each poem embodies a different facet of Blackness. In that poem it was kind of going against respectability politics generally. Specifically, it was praising a kind of inner-city, hood toughness that is a tool and armor for a lot of Black people especially when we talk about class identification. It also subtly pokes at an American double standard where violence is a feature in American culture, but Black people are disproportionately condemned for it. The poem sees Black people as able to access it on their own terms.

**Q: One last question that I always ask my favorite poets— who are you reading now?**

Black Pastoral by Ariana Benson

Sturge Town by Kwame Dawes

and The Descent of Alette by Alice Notley

I'd recommend all these books, but Black Pastoral and The Descent of Alette, I feel speak especially to our current political moment.

## Contributor Bios

Sharisa Aidukaitis

Sharisa Aidukaitis is a college educator and chocolate-lover located in upstate New York. She loves spending time outdoors and listening to music.

Noah Berlatsky

Noah Berlatsky (he/him) is a freelance writer in Chicago. His full-length collections are *Not Akhmatova* (Ben Yehuda Press, 2024), *Gnarly Thumbs* (Anxiety Press, 2025), *Meaning Is Embarrassing* (Ranger, 2025) and *Brevity* (Nun Prophet, 2025).

Gordon Blitz

When I'm not writing, I perform standup comedy and take comedy improv classes. Any chance to get in front of an audience and speak is like getting high. I try to give a sermon at my lgbtq synagogue at least once a year.

Tom Bosworth

Tom Bosworth is a queer poet living in southern Vermont. His work has appeared in *The Adroit Journal*, *Meetinghouse Magazine*, and *Bloodroot Literary*. You can find him at [www.tombosworth.net](http://www.tombosworth.net).

Jen Bryant

Jen Bryant is an editor at *MUTHA Magazine* and a creative nonfiction reader for *Mud Season Review*. Her work has appeared in *The Sun*, *Ms.*, *Cleaver*, *JMWW*, and elsewhere, and her writing has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and *Best American Essays*. @jen-bryant.bsky.social

### Maudie Bryant

Maudie Bryant is a multidisciplinary artist based in Shreveport, Louisiana, fueled by the same stubborn heartbeat that drives both political action and a quiet afternoon spent painting a surreal portrait. She believes art and the ordinary are sacred, often at the same time. In her free minutes, she's chasing her kids and a sense of quiet, usually with a good podcast and a Coke Zero in hand.

### Nathaniel Calhoun

Nathaniel Calhoun works on biodiversity and board governance. His projects focus mostly on the Amazon basin or Aotearoa New Zealand. His poems have featured or will soon feature in the London Magazine, the Iowa Review, Oxford Poetry, Diagram and many others. He sometimes tweets @calhounpoems

### Isabelle Carasso

Isabelle Carasso is a writer based in Los Angeles. She's worked as support staff in Emmy-winning writers' rooms, had short stories and essays published in The Catalyst and Cusper, was a member of the 2024 IKEA Artists Residency, and got a knock-knock joke published in the LA Times when she was 4. She is currently working on her debut novel. In her free time, she shoots on 35mm film to capture unsettling moments that feel like stories.

### Jaina Cipriano

Jaina Cipriano is a photographer, filmmaker, and experiential designer creating handmade, cinematic worlds that explore memory, healing, and emotional transformation. Her work spans immersive installations, narrative photography, and award-winning short films.

As founder of Finding Bright Studios and Executive Director of the Arlington International Film Festival, she builds bold, intimate experiences that invite people to confront themselves and imagine new possibilities.

Elizabeth Cohen

Former editor of Saranac Review and professor of English at SUNY Plattsburgh, today Elizabeth Cohen runs the small press Mnemosyne and edits Memoirabilia, a memoir lit zine. Her poems and fiction have recently been published in Coachella Review, San Antonio Review, Blue Mesa, Brussels Review, Yale Review and other literary venues. She is the author of *The House on Beartown Road*, a memoir; *The Hypothetical Girl*, a book of short stories, and six books of poetry, most recently *Mermaids of Albuquerque*. She writes and lives in NM with her slightly feral dog, Layla.

Nick Courtright

As a National Poetry Series Finalist with work published in *The Harvard Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *Kenyon Review Online*, among other journals, Nick Courtright is Founder and CEO of Atmosphere Press, a literary hybrid publisher that provides meaningful and rewarding experiences to writers. He is the author of the poetry collections *The Forgotten World* (“highly memorable,” says Eduardo C. Corral), *Let There Be Light* (“a continual surprise and a revelation,” says Naomi Shihab Nye), and *Punchline* (“nothing short of a knockout,” says Timothy Donnelly). His latest book, on poetry interpretation, is *In Perfect Silence at the Stars: Walt Whitman and the Meaning of Poems* (“an exhilarating book,” says Donald Revell). He holds an MFA/PhD in Literature. Find him online at [nickcourtright.com](http://nickcourtright.com) and living in the real world in



Austin, Texas; Cleveland, Ohio; and Playa Flamingo, Costa Rica, where he administers the Playa Flamingo Writing Residency.

**Tinamarie Cox**

Tinamarie Cox lives in Arizona with her husband, two children, and rescue felines. Her written and visual work has appeared in many online and print publications. Her wide range of digital imagery creations can be explored at [tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com](http://tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com).

**Sarah Daly**

Sarah is a scientist by day and a writer by night. She enjoys The Golden Girls and sewing. Art, science, and nature are deep sources of inspiration for her, and she enjoys building a bridge between sciences and humanities.

**Brittny Desvarieux**

Brittny Desvarieux is a poet and multidisciplinary artist who finds inspiration in nature walks, late-night conversations, and quiet evenings that leave space for reflection. She loves making things with her hands, like handmade paper and bookmarks that look like jewelry. Her poems often explore longing, resilience, and the tender contradictions of being human.

**Sean Thomas Dougherty**

Sean Thomas Dougherty's most recent book is *Death Prefers the Minor Keys* from BOA Editions. He works the third shift as a long-term Carer and Medtech for folks with traumatic brain injuries along Lake Erie.

### Rola Elnaggar

Rola Elnaggar is a writer and a researcher. Her work has appeared in Vol. 1 Brooklyn, Fahmidan Journal, BULL, and other publications. She is currently working on her novel as well as a Master's degree in literature and film studies. When she is not writing, she is either listening to music, watching movies, or trying to be an active member in her community.

### Sam Eisendrath

Sam Eisendrath is a writer living in San Francisco, California. When he isn't writing, you can find him milling about in the park.

### Katie Garner

Katie Garner is a British writer, photographer, and filmmaker, living and working in Kigali, Rwanda. She is irresistibly fascinated with the way that people interact with each other, and their leaders, and the voices that are allowed to be heard. From a lawyer to a writer to a photographer, all of her work carries themes of real life, justice, politics, and people.

### Beth Keeley

Beth, driven by her love of language and teaching, worked full-time while teaching college English courses part-time. After six years, motherhood became her primary role, though she continued teaching college part-time while raising four children. About 13 years ago, she became a full-time English professor and now spends more time to writing.

### Sarah Kim

Sarah Kim holds a B.A. in Environmental Studies and Sociology from Brown University and now drifts between words and images to explore the unseen ties

between people, art, and the natural world. Her work lingers on cycles of growth and surrender, searching for the moments when nature becomes mirror, teacher, and collaborator.

Karin Bevilacqua Fazio Littlefield

Karin Bevilacqua Fazio Littlefield is a Queer Disabled Sicilian-American poet and playwright from Brooklyn, NY. Her plays have been performed across the United States as well as in Canada, France, and Sicily. She has been published in ONE ART, Clockhouse Review, EAB Publishing's Midnight Circus, and Lotus-eater. She is currently pursuing an MFA at the Mississippi University for Women.

Gordon Bltiz

When I'm not writing, I perform standup comedy and take comedy improv classes. Any chance to get in front of an audience and speak is like getting high. I try to give a sermon at my lgbtq synagogue at least once a year.

Vani Mandava

Vani Mandava loves everything about the Pacific Northwest - the mossy woods, the jealousy in the morning after an aurora borealis sighting, the polite traffic and the perpetual light rail construction. Born and raised in Mumbai, India, and having lived most of her adult life in the Seattle area, she feels most at home anywhere there is an ocean to the west. As the bewildered mom of a teenager, she has found inspiration through other memoirists and approaches her own life with a sense of detachment that allows her to write about it.

### Maya Maria

Maya Maria is a writer and musician from New England who works on her poetry manuscript by day and teaches piano by night. She only plays Beethoven when forced, and enjoys teas, books, and protecting her inner peace. Her work has been published in *Tabula Rasa Review*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and forthcoming in *The Worcester Review*.

### Kandi Maxwell

Kandi Maxwell writes creative nonfiction and lives in Northern California. She is a retired English teacher and former back country guide. Her stories have been published in *Hippocampus Magazine*, *The Raven's Perch*, *The Meadow*, *Wordrunner eChapbooks*, and other literary journals and anthologies. Learn about Kandi at [kandimaxwell.com](http://kandimaxwell.com).

### Garth Pavell

Garth Pavell is a Best of the Net 2026 nominee. His poetry can be found in the recent issues of *Broadkill Review*, *Epiphany*, *Glint Literary Journal*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Misfit Magazine*, *Peatsmoke Journal*, *Trampoline*, and *VOLT*.

### Jaryd Porter

Jaryd Porter is a writer from Lawrence, Kansas who writes about identity, perception, and intersectionality. He has an MFA in Creative Writing Fiction from Wichita State University and is currently studying to earn his PhD in Creative Writing from Oklahoma State University. His previously published works include "Obama Black" at *Fleas on the Dog* and *Fiction on the Web*, "That Sinking Feeling" at *JAKE*, and "Dance of Hours" at *Feign*.

### Karly Rager

My name is Karly Rager—I've always written and read poetry with my grandmother, also a poet, who passed away a year ago. Without her as my main source to read and share with—I'm looking to share my work with more people as a way to continue my enjoyment of this form of writing and also to honor her memory and the influence she had on me to always keep writing.

### Nick Romeo

When Nick Romeo is not at his occupation which is situated in the STEM fields, he passes the time with his art creations. His main forms of expression are electronic music, writing, sewing, and photography. His work has been seen in various journals such as Alien Buddha Press, Highland Park Poetry, A Thin Slice of Anxiety, Marrow Magazine, Rune, and many others.

### Rachel Roupp

Rachel Roupp is a poet from the mountains of Pennsylvania. She graduated from Mansfield University and went on to earn a master's in fine arts. Her poetry has appeared in Free the Verse, Northern Appalachia Review, and most recently in Keystone Poetry: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania. She lives every day to make Dolly Parton proud of her. You can find her work at [rachelroupp.com](http://rachelroupp.com).

### David S. Rubenstein

David S. Rubenstein is an American writer, photographer, poet, and painter.

### Lauren Saxon

Lauren Saxon is a queer, Black poet and engineer living in Portland, ME. She loves her cat, her Subaru, and

being chronically online. Lauren's work is featured in Barrelhouse, Empty Mirror, Across the Margin, Homology Lit, and more. Her debut chapbook, "You're My Favorite" won the 2023 Maine Literary Award for Book of Poetry, and is out now with Thirty West Publishing.

Izzy Singer

I am a cartoonist and illustrator from NYC. I love to tell stories, teach and run my comic magazine, The Oat Bag.

Christopher W. Smith

Christopher W. Smith is a Dr. Pepper addict, teaches English at a Georgian university, and runs the micro-press, Quarter Press. They have had stories, poems, and nonfiction published in various venues and live in a 100+-year-old home with their spouse, kid, and too many cats.

Noah Soltau

Noah Soltau teaches about art, literature, and society to the mostly willing. He is managing editor of The Red Branch Review. His debut collection of poetry, Titanfall, is forthcoming from Madville Publishing. His most recent work appears in Harbor Review, storySouth, and elsewhere. He lives and works in East Tennessee.

Jillian Stacia

Jillian is the author of the upcoming poetry collection, SET THE BONE, published by Arcana Poetry Press. She was selected as an Honorable Mention for the 2025 Jack McCarthy Book Prize and short-listed for the 2026 Central Avenue Poetry Prize. She has been nominated for several awards, including 2025 Best of Net and the 2025 Pushcart Prize. Her poetry has been featured in

several literary magazines and anthologies. Find her online @jillianstacia to read more of her work.

### Betty Stanton

Betty Stanton (she/her) is a Pushcart nominated writer who lives and works in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in various journals and collections and has been included in various anthologies. She received her MFA from The University of Texas - El Paso and holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership. She is currently on the editorial board of Ivo Review. @fadingbetty.bsky.social

### Edward Michael Supranowicz

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Lithuanian/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 who has had over 700 poems published and been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.

### Xuan Tran

I'm a writer studying at UCI's MFA program for poetry. Alongside my poems, I have an eye for strange objects and misplaced things in life. A lot of my work encompasses the subconscious, reflection of trauma, and mundanity.

### Charlotte Van Schaack

Charlotte Van Schaack has spent the last four years in Washington, DC, missing the constant hum of cicadas in

her home state of North Carolina. Somehow, they still find solace by gazing longingly at the moon and always finding four-leaf clovers wherever they search.

Emilee Wigglesworth

Emilee Wigglesworth (they/them) is a queer poet from Florida. They are an MFA candidate at North Carolina State University. Their work is featured in Defunkt Magazine. Their writing often explores themes of family, memory, grief, and sense of self as it intersects with the natural world. You can find them on Instagram @emileeannew.

J. M. Williams

J. M. Williams is a writer and music educator in Atlanta, Georgia, where he lives with his wife and their cat. His fiction explores the uncharted space between science-fiction, mystery, and suspense. He can be found in person at your local cafes, bookstores, and movie theaters, and online in most places @JMWrites.



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

#### **Maxwell Bauman, M.F.A**

#### **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 is a wizard with Legos. Website: [maxwellbauman.com](http://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 Bates-burg-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.

**Do not send in writing or art that was created using Artificial Intelligence. Submitting work generated by A.I. technology will be considered as plagiarism.**

You will receive an acceptance or rejection letter from our editorial staff within 6 months from the day of your submission.

We accept simultaneous submissions; however, please notify us immediately if your work is accepted elsewhere. If accepted, please withdraw the piece from other publications.

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