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DOOR = JAR

Door Is A Jar
Issue 39

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Nuisance
Parker James
Poetry

Pebble in the boot.
Kamikaze gnat into the eye.
Nearby, a black hole opened up.
There's a tug on the sleeve.

Reclaiming Grace
Linda Conroy
Poetry

The fading year has limits.
Summer couldn't stay, shine sapping,
getting sloppy in its later days.

The cycle turns to fall with ripened apples,
fir cones, wood smoke, reed-thick rivers,
ivy tight around the trees.

Change selects a gradual reveal,
bringing brightest color, as if
with one last wish, to hold back time.

Sensing the meter clicking,
stealing minutes, I scoop
gifts from nature's lavish bowl.

On the Bank of Some Pond

Linda Conroy

Poetry

a frog may jump, splash and disappear
into muddy shallows. Someone might
stare and wonder what comes next.
Flies skitter on the surface. Some
will sink while others rise and mill about
as if it were a warmer day.

At the brink of some decisions
hesitation may take hold, not for the frog
or fly whose instinct takes command.
They don't need to think about
the consequence, or worry what someone,
somewhere else, might think.

At Once Elegant and Awkward

Linda Conroy

Poetry

A duck on the shore at a rocky coast
investigates the tufts of grass
that thrive between the wet sand
and the stones.

Webbed feet go splat.
It waddles, clumsy, bends its neck,
its iridescence shines
in the long slant of evening sun
that slides behind
the notched horizon line.

The duck pecks a morsel,
its orange bill a blaze of light,
then lifts and glides away
into the cool of rolling cloud.

Nature's Order
Linda Conroy
Poetry

Small trees, broken, fall in decayed brush,
bare branches, piles of leaves,
molded, rimed, prepare to turn to dust.

Weeds in fields fold beneath wind's fling
as bare pastures pale to beige, to bone.
Fences, untended, crumple, twist and tip.

Along rough roads hard grizzled berries
still grip on black-thorned twigs,
and as air whips cold as stone. A swirl

of snow geese settle in the wide salt marsh,
a moment, and one more, rise again
and float as one across the faint horizon

that evokes in me a whim to lift a pen
to tint that line with clarity, a hint of rose,
to hold it firm, before it fades again.

Gravity of the Distance

Burcu Seyben

Nonfiction

Friends. Dispersed. All over the world. It isn't easy to have friends after a certain age. It is also difficult to hold onto those who live far, far away.

I don't really have friends now, per se.

I have always had very few friends. I know a lot of people. But there were hardly any to trust fully. For me, a friend is someone I can trust with many secrets. They likely do the same.

My very few friends used to tell me my mistakes as well. No hesitation. Genuine, caring support. Those honest conversations were precious. Helped shape who I am today.

Exile is different. It steals your friends away. It takes a piece of you. Making it hard to connect with new people. Hard to find a new you.

*

Friendship is cultural, I think. Not just as a context. But the process of making and keeping friends. Long and arduous. Many tests and trials. Which only makes sense to your culture. A durability test for a friend in Turkey? Go on a journey together. See if you can still trust them afterward, away from comfort. Safety net gone. Being too close to someone. They see the real you. How you react in a fight or flight mode. Today's experts would say it that way. Fail the test? Fail the friendship.

A friend and I went on vacation once. I was pregnant. Husband was working. She didn't hesitate to go with me. We swam. Cooked. Took a boat trip. Sunbathed. Went to the bazaar. Selected the best vegetables and legumes. My friend treated me like a

baby. Like I would treat the one in my belly. She made me feel at home. Thought I could carry that feeling everywhere from then on.

And conversations. Neverending. About the philosophy of life. Living. What it means. To be alive. How the future will shape us. We. Assessment of what we've been through. How much we've come. Aging together. When we first met, research assistants in a university. I asked her, how we traveled from there to best friends. She said, "I came to you one day. Didn't know you. Asked if you could read my paper. You said yes. You did. Didn't question anything. Didn't ask for extra time. No doubt about helping someone unknown."

"Could you predict I wouldn't send any paper without your feedback from then on?" "That, I didn't know. But it doesn't matter now. Does it?" We laughed. Philosophized more on the deep giving and taking friendship requires. Importance of knowing someone to the core. Secrets even significant others can't hold. An invisible, invaluable bond. No legal or moral obligation. Only the worth you put into another person. Like a precious stone, you aren't allowed to take it across a border.

*

Friendship is old. Like us. Rarely communicate through Zooms or phones. Prefer letters. Letters require commitment.

Every letter sent, handwritten. Sailing across the Atlantic. On a weathered boat. Drifting quietly. Swaying gently. Empty—except for my words or hers. Precious cargo. Invisible to all but us.

*

A world map sprawls, cities we've lived in, marked with pinpoint. Like breadcrumbs from Hansel and Gretel. That's how I think I'll find my way back. I gaze at the map—Germany, the US. Everything is so close on paper.

I wish our lives mirrored that map. A bird's-eye view. Clearer. Yesterday. Son taught me about time. How it moves differently. At different altitudes. Earth's pull to the core. Gravity—stronger here. Curving spacetime. Time is slower on Earth. Than in space. My memories with her? They're my Earth. But today's forgetfulness? Feels like our space. Will we ever build new memories again? Here? On Earth, I mean.

*

I in a desert, relentless sun. She in the cold, layers upon layers. I'm in a town; she's in a city. I have family; she's alone sometimes, unless she visits our old home. Country sometimes. She shares photos of places we frequented in a past time, documenting absence where presence once was.

*

Wonder what it would feel like if we were able to visit each other now. I'd travel across the Atlantic. To where she lives. Germany. What would we do? Go to museums. She'll take me to the theater. Walk in the city. Stay at her place. Endless talks. Things that happened. Things that are happening. Things that will be happening.

What if I actually did this? What if I were able to? Then I went back home. Lightened. Brightened. Only to

realize the next visit is years away. A decade, maybe. But we built some time. Some memories.

In a city somewhere on the world map. A place that feels somewhat like home to her. Tourist-y for me. Do memories hold onto places like that? Places that don't feel ours completely. Is the gravitational force enough? The altitude?

*

In such a trip, I'd confess. Never tried to find a new friend. In my new country. Someone who knows everything. Too old for that. I'd say. She'd accuse me. A bit conservative.

Friendships, like home countries. Place-specific, I'd argue. But she'd challenge. "Hey, stop being nearsighted." Same city. Hardly saw each other. True. In the last years. "Close because of proximity? No. Close because we understood. Even without knowing where the other was."

"Do you know what I'm going through?"

"Yes!" "No, you don't. Omit so many things in letters. You too. Filter them. Leave only the best bits. Never really talk about loneliness. That boat that carries those letters."

"No, I fill the gaps. Like always. Friendship is time. Not words or countries."

But I want to say—time is different. My elevation, 3,745'. Yours, 112'. Plus, you're in Berlin. Closer to home—the gravitational core of our friendship. Time might be moving more slowly for you. Here, it's moving far too fast. I've aged. So has our friendship.

Eye of an Iguana
Willy Conley
Art



Multiple Views of Dallas
Willy Conley
Art



The Memory of Paper

Trystan Popish

Poetry

Archivists and conservators speak
of the memory of paper. It remembers
a fold, a crinkle, the press of a pen
several sheets down with such clarity,
each action an irreversible impression
marring the paper. People handling pages
must be wary, wear gloves, and take care
not to press a thumb too hard and leave
a permanent crease. Heaven and curators
forbid they fold the paper, or dog-ear
a page to better find it again, to make
a mark and mark their place. No, paper
must be handled delicately, for it remembers
everything. Every accident. Every incident.
Every intentional but subtle detail
of slow destruction.

I must be made of paper,
so easily worn, a highway of scars
where I've folded myself into someone smaller,
where I've scribbled frantic words on my skin
with a pen pressed so hard it punctures,
where I've crumpled myself in my own fist only
to smooth myself out again with loving strokes,
pretending I'm not an archive of ruined pages,
rippled and crippled and forlornly torn.

dust
Lee Clark Zumpe
Poetry

I remember your brittle voice
cracking on the phone—
unsure, tentative, distraught,
and terminally vulnerable.

I imagined the long midnight drives
coming home to malicious silence,
solitude, segregation, abandonment,
empty rooms and fading whispers.

I envisioned you kneeling
before tigers stalking your nights—
meditating, pleading, haggling
with tentative deities.

She spent days in darkness
amidst a tangle of tubes and shadows—
tears, prayers, promises, lies
uttered by family, friends and impatient doctors

She stabilized, improved, stirred
from her protracted slumber—
science, miracles, will power
partnered for her gradual resurrection

You cannot shake lingering scars
inflicted by her secret battle—
hostility, exasperation, aversion
accumulates like dust settling in a vacant house

Almost
CL Bledsoe
Poetry

They threw me in a box, waited
till 5 a.m. when I was too sleepy
to argue, nailed a lid on and spent
the next three days knocking
and asking if I'd seen the remote.
I wrote my life story in blood
on the inside of the lid. Well, it
was a red pen I had in my pocket.
But still, it was a nice effect.
Birth, the early years I don't recall
which must mean they were better.
A montage of cheeses I'd never
tasted before. Peanut butter combined
with various things. Someone
who once said my name and meant it.
On the third day, they let me out
to use the bathroom. There was so
much color everywhere. The majestic
brown of the grave. The warm pink
of the worms. The sky was a vibrant gray
above the parking lot. I couldn't help
but be thankful.

The Moon
CL Bledsoe
Poetry

I wanted to hide, like the moon
behind the Earth, and maybe that
would cause shadows on your day,
but you probably wouldn't even look up.

But that's your prerogative, just as
it's mine not to answer the door except
for the prettiest faces, who never make
deliveries. It's a good plan

to never have to speak if there's no one
to speak to. That means never having
to think and never having to remember
what to say, when there's nothing, really,

that would help any of us. Even the moon
is cold in the light, sleeping through
the days as well as it can.

Hole
Michael Matejcek
Fiction

James hikes down Aspen Circle past the neat rows of Split Levels and Ranches, all with their fresh sod and spindly saplings that look more like sticks than trees that might someday cast some shade. He heads to where the asphalt turns to gravel, where that half-finished Craftsman has been abandoned for weeks. Today he doesn't slip behind the plywood slapped over the entrance. Today he's not interested in what's inside. Today he scrambles up the dirt pile by the garage and slides down the other side to where the trench stretches out to the stubbled cornfield. A gash in the earth no one has bothered to fill.

He hesitates, then tosses his school backpack into the hole, knowing it will force him to follow. The leap sends a jolt through his spine, but he sits still, breathing deeply until the pain passes. The air down here is cool, almost damp. The dirt walls are lined with roots, the backhoe's grooves still clean in the clay. He stretches upwards, the trench's edge an arm's length away. He sits in shadow, cool and heavy, while the layers of soil at the far end are bright with sun. Overhead, the sky, a rectangle of blue, is framed by the jagged earth.

He unzips his pack—two tuna sandwiches, a box of raisins, his mother's garden trowel, a half-crushed box of rice from yesterday's takeout, the last of the Ho-Hos. He frowns at the Ho-Hos. Those are Chris's. For sure his brother will be pissed, that is, if he's even home to notice. Lately, he's been pretty much living at Linda's, but today is Saturday. Linda has a shift at the diner, and his father, who's been doing seventy-hour weeks, sometimes takes the afternoon off, meaning there's a

chance both he and Chris could be home. A small chance, but there.

He'll eat one sandwich now and save the rest for later—something he picked up from his mom, who, in her last year, made the day's meals early while she still had the strength. When she could no longer get out of bed, it was just him and Chris in the kitchen. Tuna sandwiches were his thing. Nothing fancy, but something Chris would eat. He forgot to pack a drink, so each bite is an effort to get down. That's all right, though. He has time. He leans back against the dirt, staring at the narrow sky, chewing slowly.

The sun is out of sight, but the shadow slashing across the dirt makes it easy to place it in the sky. The line of light makes him think of Marcie Mosier, the girl behind him in fifth grade, her whisper delicate on the back of his neck. *See the light? How it climbs the wall? How it lines up with the whiteboard? You can tell the time if you know how to watch.* He fills his lungs, slowly exhales, and lowers his lids to follow the shadow creeping up the trench wall. He wishes Marcie could see it with him. But Monday, he'll describe for her the shadow wrapping its way around the spidery roots, the dark slowly engulfing layers of soil. She'll smile, and he'll feel its warmth filling his chest, flushing upward until it reaches the back of his skull.

The excited barking startles him, and for a minute, he forgets where he is. Above, frantic movements, a flash of yellow fur. A dog pacing, ears flattened, yapping madly until its ears prick up to some far-off sound, and is gone. James holds his breath, straining to hear beyond the sudden silence. There it is—voices, muffled but distinct, calling out his name. In his mind, he sees them clearly—neighbors gathering, calling to each other, Chris and his father among them. His

father's face tight with worry, Chris offering one of his socks or maybe a tee shirt to the dog to catch his scent. He should call out, but not yet, let them search, let them sweat. He closes his eyes to feel the comfort of their concern, the crew spreading out, their eyes sharp, alert, until finally, the barking grows near, the lab leaping eagerly at the edge of the hole.

Then, as if the wind has carried them away, the yaps and yells are gone. Only the tarp flapping over the eaves of the house. He opens his eyes, not sure how long he's been there, or if he's heard any sound at all. The sky, before a piercing blue, has washed out to a heavy dusk. The trench is now swallowed in a darkness so heavy it's almost solid, a thing he can't imagine anyone penetrating from above.

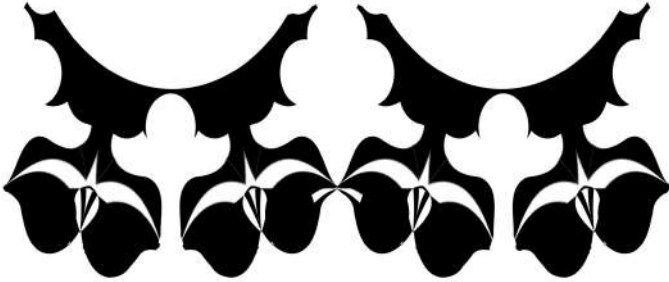
His breath plumes before his face. He is suddenly very cold. And hungry. He can't stop shivering. He voices his mother's familiar scolding, "James, you need to eat," the words startling the silence. He devours the second sandwich, the raisins, but he cannot stomach the rice. He's still hungry, but he'll leave the Ho-Hos. Those he'll return to the cupboard above the refrigerator for Chris.

His eyes have adjusted to the dark. The wall opposite the house is less steep and is thick with roots. The earth is loose. The trowel bites into it easily, giving him footholds. The roots are as stout as ropes, and it's not long before he's clambered over the lip of the trench. The sky has deepened to an inky blue, thin streaks of crimson stretch across the horizon over the cornfield. The gravel crunches under his feet until it turns back to pavement flanked by orderly homes, each with windows glowing yellow in the twilight.

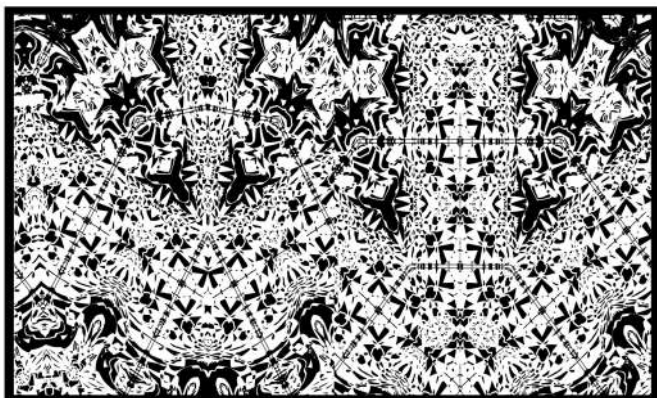
His own house at the end of the block stands unlit. A silhouette against the sky.

Without warning the street lights flicker to life, the glare washing over the street, a sight he's never seen before, and for an instant, it seems as if the world has whispered a secret meant only for him.

Birdsong Morning
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



Lost in Candyland
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



The Assistant
Thom Hawkins
Poetry

Igor was Frankenstein's assistant;
I was the assistant to the monster.

It was a hard job to find clothes
to fit him, and keep fire away.
He had few meetings, but a standing
appointment with the doctor.

When the villagers came with pitchforks,
I had to arrange a press conference
and explain the monster's motivations.

Celebrities can't be held to the same
standard as normal folk, I said. You
can't cancel him for killing one kid.
What about monster's rights?

They called *me* a monster.
That's my job—a monster's monster—
a role stitched together from scraps
even the monster himself refused.

And the next time the villagers came
with pitchforks, I saw in their midst
Frankenstein's monster,
a gleam of regret in his eyes.

Replaced by Robots

Thom Hawkins

Poetry

One afternoon we dressed as robots,
with metal tins tied with twine
to our arms and legs and cereal

boxes with eye holes and antennae
over our heads. Janie was Wheaties
and I was Corn Flakes. We clonked

our way to the factory at the end
of the lane and inside, they put us
to work. When the whistle blew,

we tried to leave with our fathers,
but even they insisted we stay.
You're robots, they said, you don't

need to eat or sleep, and they locked
the doors behind them. They went home
to our mothers and never returned.

Blood Rate
Thom Hawkins
Poetry

“I’m sorry,” she told me.
“My teeth must be longer
than I imagine them to be.”

An excuse I foolishly accepted
until she bit me again, this
time on my bottom lip, and
even after I cried out, she
clung on, extracting a few
drops more, and exchanging
in return the same excuse—
currency I’d accepted once
and was now forced to
recognize as the market rate
for my blood.

Time and Time Again

Thom Hawkins

Poetry

He wears two watches, one on each wrist,
so he has plenty of time. Six square

meals a day, work for sixteen, lunch for two,
four fifteen-minute cigarette breaks, and two
happy hours. He sleeps, rolls over, and sleeps

again. He takes his time
because he has all day,
plus one more.

She's Blue
Kristin Mosely Jones
Nonfiction

Dr. Plusght had a haircut. We'd probably talk about this later. How this surgeon that cuts open chests and tried to fix the broken bits of our mother's heart also gets haircuts. He needed one, too. He was a big man, and his hair was way up there, wild and thoughtless. It floated from his head, like it was trying to get away from him. It was also thinning, especially at the top, but the sides and back were long and wavy and didn't stay put. He kept some of it in place with repeated tucking behind his ear.

This was not a planned meeting. We didn't have an appointment or anything like that. We ran into Dr. Plusght in the surgical ICU. Turned a corner and he was standing at the nurses' station, hunched over a chart. It probably wasn't even our mother's chart. Certainly, he had other patients. It was a small hospital, though, so maybe he was there for our mother, just like we were.

He looked up and saw us. Despite the two-visitor limit, there were three of us and we all looked alike. Twins and a slightly older sister who everyone thought was younger, each one threatening to spill out on the hospital floor. I was crying freely, while Jenna and Sarah were more composed, though still teary-eyed. We held tissues to our noses and blinked at him. He put the chart down and rattled off a list of medications.

"It's down from eight to five. We pulled 3200 CCs off her yesterday and we'll do it again today. I know it doesn't look like it, but she's getting better. You have to trust me."

He was trying hard to tolerate us, but slowing down to interact was obviously hard. I bet the haircut was too. The scheduling of it, sitting down for what, 10 minutes at least, while someone pulled a comb through his hair,

leaving maybe an inch, maybe more, dangling, the blade moving quickly along the comb. But it was clear that it had been done.

We stared at him and nodded. “She’s blue,” I said. She had been yellow and swollen yesterday because her liver and kidneys were failing. Now she was blue and swollen, like we’d pulled her out of freezing water.

“That’s the methylene blue. It’s working.” He reached his hand up to his ear, but there was no hair to grab anymore. “You have to trust me” he insisted again before he turned and headed toward the hallway. He had a loud walk, almost a stomp, except he shuffled some, too, like he was never any good at sports.

We stood still and watched him leave, and I kept thinking about the missing hair. I wondered if he’d get used to the shorter length or keep reaching for it until something was finally there. “He looks different.” Jenna noted.

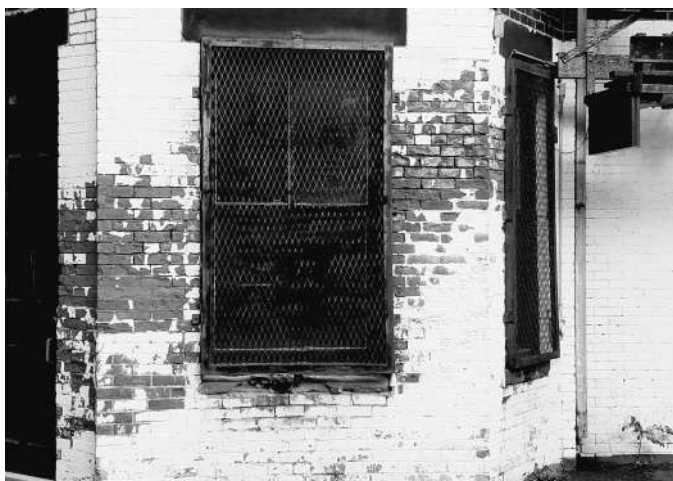
“It’s the haircut.” I answered. “It’ll grow back.”

Sarah steps towards our mother’s room. The push and pause of a ventilator audible just outside the door. “We’re like a GoFundMe family,” she says, and Jenna chokes out a laugh, while I look for my mother through the sliding door, our likeness laid bare in that hospital bed.

Allston Illustrated
Phillip Temples
Art



Back Bay Alley
Phillip Temples
Art



Anachronism
Phillip Temples
Art



Silent ... stones
Diane Webster
Poetry

Stones stacked
upon each other
wait ... wait ...

for wind,
for freeze/thaw,
for human intervention
to topple silence
to sprawl in the dirt
to lie in the sunshine
apart and silent
again.

Silent ... movie
Diane Webster
Poetry

Silent movie silent
as woe-is-me heroine
clutches her face,
flings her arm
across her forehead,
pleads with praying hands
to anyone
who might listen,
might hear
her silent words
mouthed to someone
she knows not.

She swoons gracefully,
lady-like to the floor.
A close up
of her eyes fluttering
to regain her gaze
like a child peeking
to see if Mom is looking.

She struggles to lean
against the table leg
and lies limp
as a banana peel
dropped on the floor.

Screen fades to black.

Silent ... falling
Diane Webster
Poetry

Tree fallen without anyone to hear;
from there to there it rests
until lichen and moss
green its bark like a shroud
bestowed upon its body.

A pretend life spouts
along its grains
running sideways now
like planks of a bridge
over peril below.

Like mushrooms popping
open in umbrella style
or moss growing a lawn
for chipmunks to sprint
across in muffled paws
or a tree fallen with branches
poking through like bones
on a decomposing skeleton.

Silent ... dandelions
Diane Webster
Poetry

Blooming dandelions line
each side of the road.

"Follow the yellow brick road"
echoes in my mind.
"Because, because, because ..."

Silent ... greenhouse

Diane Webster

Poetry

Abandoned greenhouse—
once-tamed, vegetation inside
leans against the door
and shoves it open.

Vines venture through
to see the world of wildness
blooming in feral tangle
around their controlled
environment now exposed
to a tickle of wind
waving purple and yellow
greetings from relatives
outside.

Like emigrants
crossing the border
the vines latch on
to their cousins,
and petals wave in the air
like welcoming confetti.

Daddy's House

TK Hudson

Fiction

My daddy's house is dark.

Not walking up to it. Looking at it it is all beautiful and white, three stories with big balconies, wide windows, and tall columns out front of the porch. It is shaded, of course, by the tall pines and the old oaks of the wood the house is buried away in, but the shadows are cool, not grim.

Inside, too, is lovely. The front room is sky blue, and the oak floor is polished to shine back the glow of the hall lamps. The parlor has panels, but the wide French-doors and bay windows let in the morning light, and the view of the gardens are bright and airy.

Daddy's study and the library (the two are joined) are papered, and the paper is cream, printed with roses and violets. The windows have heavy velvet drapes, but they are always pulled back, letting in the light.

Down in the basements is gloomy, but the servants keep cheery, and it keeps the rooms from feeling dark.

Upstairs, the bedrooms are all painted: blue and rose and cream and emerald. They have sparkling chandeliers of crystal and gold, and the lamps all burn rosy. The beds all hang curtains, rose fabric in blue rooms, gold in green. Their furniture all match the room; my room, painted rose, has a rosewood vanity and padded bench, and the four-post bed and the chaise are also rosewood, with viridian cushions and bedclothes. The wardrobe isn't rose, it's mahogany, but the rose one caught fire two years before I was born, and daddy had to buy a new one. It doesn't match precisely, but the contrast adds to the charm of my room.

The house is beautiful, inside and out. In daylight you would never say it was dark. But you have never

lived there. You have never seen it at night. You have never been in the bedrooms at night. Nothing is different at night, except the feel of the rooms.

As a girl I would cry at night. Not because I was frightened of the dark, understand; it was the feel of the house. I heard—or I thought I heard—screaming at night. I cried, and when my daddy came in he never comforted me; he told me not to be a silly girl, that there was no one screaming. But after the door was closed, when the lights were dimmed, I would hear the screams again, echoing from everywhere.

They echoed from the basements. They echoed from the stables and the carriage house. They echoed from the bedrooms and the parlor. They echoed from the bricks and the mortar and the wood.

As a child I was frightened of the screams, but other than fear they held no allure for me.

I did not know what they were, other than terrible. But I know now.

They were the screams of the slaves who built the house, and who were whipped for a mistake. They were the screams of slave-women whose children were ripped from their arms and sold to live in different houses, and on different plantations. They were the screams of boys being beaten for telling their master's sons they were entitled and arrogant. They were the screams of women and girls, black, being taken into the barn, or the stables, or the carriage house, or even into the bedrooms (my bedroom, the screams were always loud in my bedroom) against their will, and having only-God-knows-what done to them.

They were screams of the bereaved, the grieving, the suffering; screams of loss and agony; of rape and the lash.

My daddy's house is all beautiful and white, three stories with big balconies, wide windows, and tall columns out front of the porch.

But the beauty belies the suffering, the horror, that built the house.

I have not seen my daddy's house since a girl. I married, and I left, and the house I live in now is modest, and ugly, and at times, in certain lights, looks grim. But the house does not scream injustice.

When my daddy dies the house will pass to me. And I will pass it to fire, the justice that sort of beauty accords.

City
Rachel Turney
Art



Insomnia's Ten Line Limit
Phillip Periman
Poetry

my uncontrollable independent brain
rebels at four a.m.

everything I read says its unhealthy
to be awake, but I wonder

as a thought, a creative act before
daylight clarifies my messiness

I have learned until I've scribbled
a few words, there'll be no sleep

how much should be written is unclear
as I've been arbitrarily limited

anticipating my exit

Phillip Periman

Poetry

She offered to water my plants when I am gone

I am sure she had every good intention

I walked around the block thinking of revenge

if I leave them outside in the first freeze,

will she understand how distraught she made me

SYCAMORE
Dustin King
Poetry

Bones of the forest.
Bone holding the riverbank in place.
Receiver of lightning, ember bearer,
you streak the sky and everything that moves in it.
You widen the Boulevard when it rains.
Bone, where will I go in awe when
the river runs indigo, the sunfish all one eye up?
Will I live in that hollow?
Bone camouflage, map etched in bone.
Bone older than nation on Monacan land
polished and splashed with muck.
Flakes of bark the color of wastewater,
of cloud cover. Puzzle pieces.
Bones splayed like branches,
like twigs betraying their broken song
to a child laid out in leaf litter,
the sky a second river, angrier, quieter
somehow. I've run out of names.
I've given everything the same name.
The blue jays angry in the sycamore.
The crow presenting her broken song
in a sycamore chorus of starling.

MOSS

Dustin King
Poetry

Start with the sidewalk cracks.
Blend with buttermilk
& trace your shadow. Spritz.
Start an Ice Age ago.
Train the children to train
distant descendants
with a small pair of scissors.
Train the mind,
the dark corners of the park,
the potholes.
A statue no longer looks human,
microfauna dancing unreasonably
in its new hair.
Would you rather make love to asphalt
or the rain?
Mist lover,
slow down the wind,
ventriloquize the fronds,
paint this town yellow, pale green,
hunter green, electric green,
mint, pistachio, chartreuse,
deep neon and brown.

The Lindworm Highway: A Mini Musical

Brian C. Billings

Drama

Characters

Annali, 16, a shepherd's daughter from Grundtvig

Lindworm, 22, the enchanted prince of Grundtvig

Karin, 18, formerly the Princess of Wigström

Gunilla, 20, formerly the Princess of Forsslund

Setting: The prince's bedchamber in Grundtvig Castle at night.

Act 1, Scene 1

(The Prince of Grundtvig's bedchamber appears as light from various lamps and candles rises. The room curves out US in a stone wall set with three triangular windows. SL stands an unlit walk-in fireplace. SR features a canopied four-poster bed. Annali, dressed in a white shift underneath three slips, sits in a chair. A tub of lye and a tub of milk rest before her. Three switches rest across her lap.)

SONG: NO CHOICE

ANNALI

My pappa saw me sold
 To satisfy the king
 Who had to have a girl
 More heavenly than spring
 To lay before the lindworm,
 Who surely shall rejoice.

My pappa is a shepherd.
 My pappa had no choice.

A witch appeared to warn me
 Before I went away
 That lying with a lindworm
 Demands a lady play
 A trick of tubs and magic
 All tied into her voice.
 The plan is plainly crazy,
 But peasants have no choice.

No choice is mine for making
 When monsters are around.
 No choice is here but heeding
 What help can still be found.
 The choice to lure the lindworm
 Doesn't bide with either-or,
 And so I sing to try and bring
 The lindworm to the fore.

(The fireplace roars to life, and the
 Lindworm, a large serpent, slides
 through the fire. An orange hood
 around his head trails into a fin that runs
 down his spine.)

SONG: A BRIDE FOR ME

LINDWORM

I thought I heard a lonely voice,
 And here's a morsel for my eye.
 You're such a tantalizing dish.
 I think I'll nibble on your thigh.

The king has brought a bride for me,

Supplied for me a wifely meal.
 Soon I'll see she's died for me
 Inside of me from head to heel.

I notice that you're nicely round
 With full protrusion front and back.
 I like packing when I'm snacking,
 And I like that you've no lack.

A bride for me the king has brought.
 He sought for me the perfect bite.
 He's done just as he ought for me
 And caught for me a rare delight.

(ANNALI slaps him with a switch.)

ANNALI

Back away, worm! The king bought me to be here, but I
 never said I'd let you eat me.

LINDWORM

Dragons are for fearing, bride!

ANNALI

Dragon? Hardly. I've dealt with wolves about your
 size.

LINDWORM

Lies!

(The Lindworm suddenly stills. He
 tastes the air and crosses to the tubs.)

I smell something sweet and creamy.

(He drinks from the tub of milk.)

Milk. Delicious. And what have we here?

(He drinks from the tub of lye and
 retches.)

Lye! Would you poison me, bride?

ANNALI

Those who steal happiness deserve some sickness.

LINDWORM

Enough play. Let me see the flesh my father's gifted me.

SONG: SHED A SLIP, SLOUGH A SKIN

Shed a slip. Let it drop.
 Let it fall with a plop.
 When you're no longer breathing,
 You'll have no need for sheathing,
 And clothing tends to catch along my jaw.
 Pull the hem. Make it rip.
 Shed a slip.

(Annali turns in a circle and removes a slip. She dips a switch in lye and batters the Lindworm with it until the switch breaks.)

ANNALI

Slough a skin. Time to shed.
 Split apart what's long been dead.
 You're straining in your scaling.
 Your outer hide is failing.
 You're like a sausage plumping in the case.
 Think you're fine? Think again.
 Slough a skin.

(He throws off his hood and a layer of skin.)

LINDWORM

Shed a slip. Make it slide.
 Send it gliding down your side.

My dining should be easy,
 And garments make me queasy.
 I'd rather have the roughage be removed.
 Snap a strap. Snip and clip.
 Shed a slip.

(Annali drops another slip, dips another switch, and beats the Lindworm until the switch snaps.)

ANNALI

Slough a skin. Have a molt.
 Your hide's prepared to bolt.
 I see your muscles twitching.
 How painful is the itching?
 Resisting further might make you explode.
 Stop the strain. Just give in.
 Slough a skin.

(He casts away his fin and another layer of skin.)

LINDWORM

Rip!

ANNALI

Split!

LINDWORM

Snap!

ANNALI

Strain!

(She strips to her shift and dips her final switch.)

LINDWORM

Snip!

(Annali strikes him and drops the switch.)

ANNALI

Slough a skin!

(She grabs the tub of milk and douses him with it. He collapses into an empty skin and lies still. She kicks him in the stomach. A voice calls out from the first discarded skin.)

GUNILLA

Hey! No kicking!

(Gunilla climbs out from under the skin. She wears a shift. A sheathed silver dagger dangles from a belt around her waist.)

The head and the back are one thing, but the scales on the stomach are super loose. I don't need to waste a whole day sewing. Lay off!

(Another voice rises from the second discarded skin.)

KARIN

Don't scare her, Gunilla! You were in the same place once.

(Karin, also in a shift, pushes aside the second skin. A small crossbow and a quiver of arrows hang from a harness across her shoulders.)

GUNILLA

I had wine and water in the tubs, and I used my hands against the worm.

KARIN

We can't all be warriors.

(She turns to Annali.)

Well met. I'm Princess Karin of Wigström. The disturbingly loud lady over there is Princess Gunilla of Forsslund.

ANNALI

You're the first brides—the ones the Lindworm ate.

GUNILLA

You've heard of us?

ANNALI

Everyone in Grundtvig has. There's a ballad going around.

GUNILLA

Have a listen to that, Karin. We're famous!

(She turns to Annali.)

Where are you from, girl?

ANNALI

Right here. Grundtvig.

GUNILLA

I didn't know Grundtvig had a princess.

ANNALI

I'm a shepherdess. Annali. The princesses all stopped coming after you two—

GUNILLA

Bit the big crossbow quarrel?

ANNALI

When the crier came around, I put myself forward to help my pappa. Sheep aren't cheap.

KARIN

How valiant of you. Our fathers told us to go, so we went.

ANNALI

I'm sure they were sad. My poor pappa cried.

GUNILLA

Mine threw a party.

ANNALI

But you're princesses!

GUNILLA

Who wants to be a princess? At least marrying a monster was exciting. I could go down fighting. You can't do that with a regular prince.

KARIN

We also had a witch helping.

ANNALI

Old Märet.

KARIN

She was Astrid for Gunilla, and Malin in my case. She has many names.

GUNILLA

She told us how to confront the Lindworm. Then she watched us do it.

KARIN

She wanted us to see that we could help ourselves.

ANNALI

So the Lindworm was never real.

GUNILLA

Oh, he's the prince of Grundtvig all right. He didn't become a Lindworm, though. Just the skin of one.

KARIN

He's reasonably right in the wits before he starts peeling, but the two of us move the body. He's not the only worm, you know. The witch works with a crew of us.

GUNILLA

Wyverns, cockatrices, hydras . . . Even a sea serpent. That one takes eight princesses.

(She waves at Annali.)

Excuse me. Girls.

KARIN

I guess you don't have to be royalty to feel trapped.

ANNALI

That's not how I feel . . .

KARIN

But?

ANNALI

Pappa didn't try all that hard to stop me.

GUNILLA

And?

ANNALI

There's . . . an apprentice.

GUNILLA

Ah. The son he never had.

ANNALI

I tend to the flock, too. Pappa needs me. No. Needed me.

KARIN

I know. Take a moment. This next bit is official anyway.

(She fishes a small scroll out of her quiver and reads from it.)

On behalf of the Lindworm Highway, we handlers of the beast you've bested do offer you translation from this location and the opportunity to aid and abet others in need of finding their way forward from entrapment of the body or mind. Do you understand these terms?

ANNALI

I . . . guess I do.

(Karin rolls up the message and returns it to her quiver.)

KARIN

Now you choose.

GUNILLA

Join us or go your own way.

ANNALI

Could I ever see Pappa again?

KARIN

Going back home? Gracious. Gunilla and I—

GUNILLA

Would rather groom a gryphon . . . but your father might actually miss you. You could go back in a year or so.

KARIN

After the king declares you dead. Dead is good.

ANNALI

What do you think I should do?

KARIN

No! No advice! It only cheapens the choice.

SONG: YOU DESERVE TO CHOOSE

GUNILLA

When the time to decide
Comes to visit,
You might feel equal parts
Glad and scared.

KARIN

It's your moment to shine,
But, well, is it?
Your answer may not
Be prepared.

GUNILLA AND KARIN

But whether you're waiting and ready
Or whether you're feeling the screws,
To achieve or atone
Is on your head alone.
You deserve to choose.

KARIN

I turned away from my riches
Without any outside advice.

GUNILLA

I ran into the arms of adventure,
And I didn't have to think twice.

KARIN

The fork in the road only matters
If you can commit to a path.

GUNILLA

A girl plus a voice
Adds up into a choice.

KARIN

It's really the simplest of math.

GUNILLA AND KARIN

You might act on your intuition.
Perhaps you'll depend upon clues.
You'll move back or onward
Based on what you've pondered.
You deserve to choose.

KARIN

A scholar can hide or share knowledge.

GUNILLA

A warlord can murder or spare.

KARIN

One thing we all share

That is perfectly fair
 Is the way we consider and muse.
 (She crosses to the second skin.)

GUNILLA

You might make a mistake,
 But that's your slip to make.
 (She crosses to the first skin.)

GUNILLA AND KARIN

You deserve to choose!
 (They crawl under the skins. Annali runs over and searches the skins, but the princesses are gone. She starts to leave, but she stops herself. Reflecting upon her father and his unnecessary apprentice, she crosses back to the skins. The fireplace glows faintly.)

SONG: THE LINDWORM HIGHWAY

ANNALI

I will ride the Lindworm Highway,
 For I've come to hold the reins
 On a stronger sense of knowing
 How to reach for better gains.
 I've been gathering the wool,
 But now it's time to card and spin.
 I will ride the Lindworm Highway
 So my living can begin.
 (She gathers up the second skin and folds it around the third skin.)

I will ride the Lindworm Highway
 Where the blood has been asleep
 In the bosoms of my sisters
 With too many chores to keep.

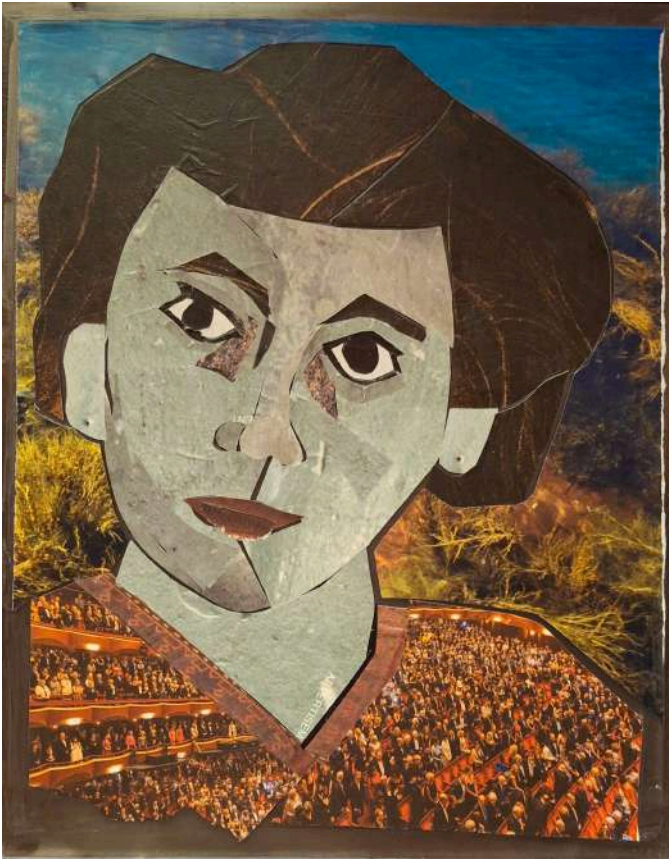
They'll awaken when the worm
Helps them realize their wiles.
I will ride the Lindworm Highway
For at least a thousand miles.

(She gathers up the first skin and folds it
around the others.)

I will ride the Lindworm Highway
Into countries that are bound
In the chains of ancient thinking,
And I'll rattle off the sound
Of better lives for women.
I'll call voices to the song.
I will ride the Lindworm Highway,
And I'll pass the ride along.

(She wraps the skins around her
shoulders and strides off through the
fireplace. The fire flares and then falls
dead. Blackout.)

Carla
Kim Suttell
Art



Geraniumish
Kim Suttell
Art



Blue Pitcher
Kim Suttell
Art



Workman
Kim Suttell
Art



Anniversary
Philomena Amalfitano
Poetry

Leaves stopped falling,
the maple tree
split its skin.
Shards of bark
gashed clouds
till bones grew
over our shutters.

I waited till winter to pack his shirts.

Dissolving
Philomena Amalfitano
Poetry

I dream my skin is slipping off
and I fold it over my bones.

I spill things from fluted limbs;
a man's soft shirt, the light
laced in his womb

Tonight, my legs gallop off
without me
and even my ghosts limp

Tonight, no one knows
what I am called

Mistress
Philomena Amalfitano
Poetry

I am feral, even for ruins.
Something in the ungreen
forest shrills for me—

and I must look.

I am ribboned
in this grove. Bells beg,
beg like gnawing jewels.

I listen for a yellow, and
when I see the river shutter
it almost feels like a thrill—

tongue-tied foxgloves
in the moon's thread,
waiting.

Off Chicago Ave.

Hannah Roy

Poetry

And it's still a garden
rust tulips fresh
you skinned the
aspen until you could see
its bone
home is just another word for a body

often you rain more than the clouds
often you rot under the air that's
the hardest to breathe
to keep you alive
you need even the grave keeper

to be a ghost. You trim the roses, grasses
lay your parched hands on the stone
and clip away the tangles of doves
mourning on the wire
your last words as its song

your lost words hidden beneath the places
that you were raised and held
by your mother in the golf ball
sunshine and laughter made of
root beer; your brother was there then

and you are gone like cranberries
sunk and fed into your open
newborn lips.

Conservatory
Hannah Roy
Poetry

Our leafy bodies
drift down the sidewalk
glazed with ice
our steps leaving sounds of
broken glass
in place of footprints soft
like sponge cake.
I've spent so long
waiting for you to
come out of your
sorrow. It seems
timely to set foot
in humidity, like
we're going back in
time before frost
sunk into our skin.
Eucalyptus fronds
tickle our arms, steam
settles on the windows,
bamboo shoots perch
like prairie dogs
oversized pastel pink flowers
sit stately like easter bonnets
atop coiffed church hairdos.
So many hidden spots in my speech,
I wish I could patch,
but you manage to sew words and
understanding over the rips.

Human Zoo
Isabella Ronchetti
Nonfiction

One day I woke up with an unshakable urge to meditate in the middle of Times Square for 24 hours. It felt inevitable. Like it had already come to fruition as soon as it occurred to me.

I would do it without eating, drinking, sleeping, speaking, or ever standing up.

On a sticky June night, I darted through the crowds of Midtown with a meditation cushion under my arm and my heart where my throat should be.

Times Square was at its busiest at 10 pm when I arrived. A frenzy of bodies.

Most people barely noticed me as I sat down, some slowed for a moment in confusion.

The passing “she’s meditating *here*?” or “find that PEACE girl.”

Someone threw a few dollars my way. A homeless man with a parrot snatched them up as he hobbled by.

Within an hour I’d attracted the attention of two protagonists: a manic little man-child in red sneakers, and a clean-cut Hispanic guy with a blue fedora.

Red Sneakers came first, snickering. He bobbed up and down in my line of sight for a while then rolled his eyes and ran off. I thought my telepathy had worked, but he returned soon after, and with renewed angst.

“Looking into your eyeballs makes me happy,” he explained.

Then Fedora came into frame. Guarded, he sat down directly in front of me.

I fixed his gaze for a long time—with reservation at first, then in compassionate bewilderment. Finally, I started laughing. For this man sitting with me on the floor of New York City. For the comical absurdity of my undertaking.

“You’re amazing,” he whispered, joining me in laughter.

Little did I know, he would stay until morning.

As the tourists trickled out, Times Square took on an eerie, dystopian gleam. A frail woman crouched down beside me.

“Giants come out at night,” she warned, “They crush skyscrapers under their feet.”

As if on cue, a shadow slid into my peripheral vision. I turned to face an ogling old man with his arms outstretched like wings.

The bulge in his jeans got awfully close to my face. Fedora intervened.

The sky turned blue.

A woman in a wedding dress handed me a fake white rose.

Around maybe 9 am, I started to realize how much energy was being drained by the continued gaze of my odd companions. Fedora had been staring at me for 12 uninterrupted hours. Red Sneakers had been coming, taunting, and going for thirteen.

I broke my silence.

“Please keep sitting, but look somewhere else. You’re taking energy from my eyes, and I don’t have enough to give.”

I surprised myself by tearing up as the two men plopped down on either side of me.

A layer of grime crept up my skin.

My perception of time started to dilate at the halfway point. Each breath seemed to last minutes, and I lost the ability to locate sounds in space. My legs went numb. Thoughts warped into fluorescent fever dreams, incoherent voices beckoning me to sleep.

An unsettling fog of déjà vu.

Every time my mind quieted, a siren would shoot through my nervous system or a billboard would remind me that what I was doing didn't matter when there's always something new to wear / watch / eat.

At some point, Fedora tipped his hat and disappeared.

Then the sun hit. Hard. My thirst and knee pain had become excruciating. I was melting, almost envied Naked Cowboy.

I overheard passersby place bets on whether I'd make it. A few workers recognized me from yesterday and shook their heads in disbelief.

I seriously considered going home.

But something kept me glued to that patch of concrete—the hope that maybe, if I sat long enough, the city would give me a reason for all the pain.

As the hours crept by, I grew porous. I could feel myself seamlessly with and through everyone who walked by.

A little girl ran up to me waving a tarot card—“The World”. Beaming, she explained that the woman depicted at its center was me, and that the elements surrounding her were the city.

She was right. Agonizing and uncanny as it was, Times Square had become my world.

Friends gathered during the last hour, and the half-moon peered down at us.

Fedora reappeared momentarily at the very end, shouting “My hero!” as he ran past.

I didn’t have time to react before he was gone again.

After 24 hours, I stood up very slowly and walked home, alone, with a plastic rose in my hair.

For weeks, I was overwhelmed by loud noises and cognitive dissonance.

I had been secretly hoping for an epiphany, itching for it all to make sense somehow.

Sitting there, I longed to be praised. To be *seen*. For the city to witness my suffering, if only in passing. And I fed off the energy of the people watching.

Still now, my ego clings—to what you think of me, to the meaning you make.

My attention wanes. I check my phone.

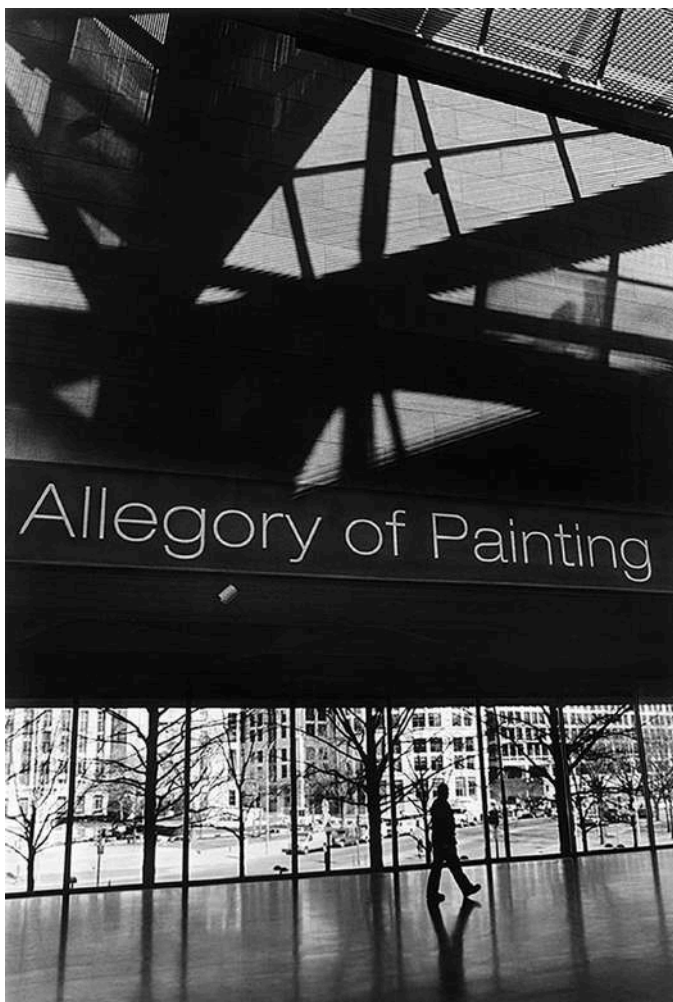
Turns out there was a live-cam trained on the spot I’d chosen. I got a message from a woman who happened to tune in at earthcam.com/usa/newyork/timesquare just as I sat down—and proceeded to watch me the entire time.

“Who was the kid?” she asked, “And the guy with the hat?”

Allegory of Painting

John Martino

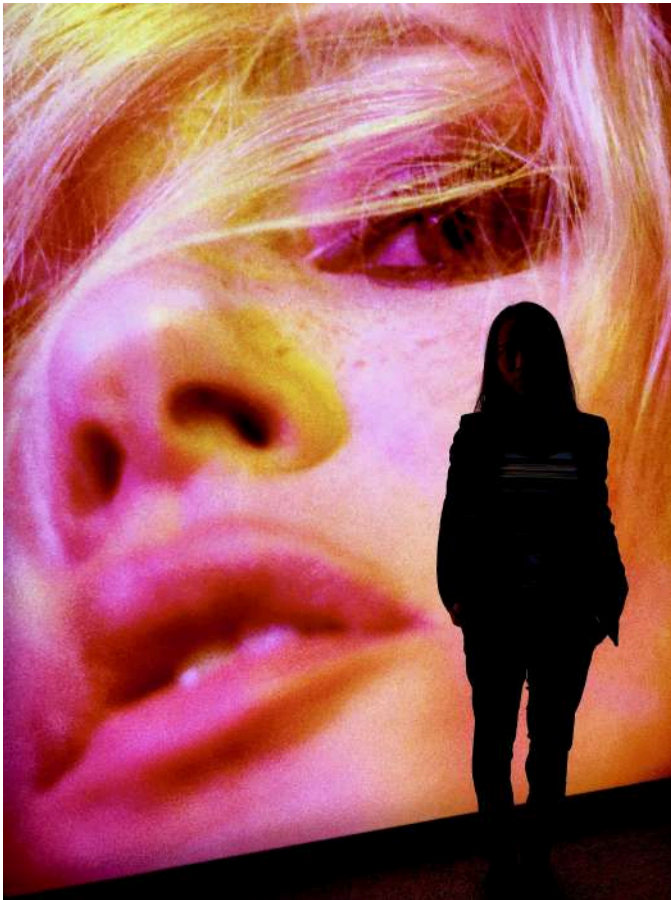
Art



Free Fall
John Martino
Art



The Last Thing I Remember
John Martino
Art



The King's Pawn
Nicole Mensick
Poetry

Bobby Fischer died
at sixty-four.
The same number of squares
on a chess board.
My father taught me chess
at nine,
but since I was a girl
he focused on my brother.
When Fischer died he said
“Nothing is as healing
as human touch.”
Of course, he was paranoid.
My father died
at sixty-four not knowing
I liked playing chess.
He was paranoid
of people seeing him
frail and adrift in the world.
Sometimes it is
what we don't want
rather than what we do.

Dedication
Robert Beveridge
Poetry

This one's for the whippersnappers
and the factory workers, the five-
dollar maddog drunks, the butchers,
the kids who take a pharmacy just
to get out of bed every morning.
This one's for your mom's old station
wagon with an everpresent slow leak
in the passenger rear tire that got
five miles a gallon on a good day
but you drove it to all those shows
on the other side of town anyway.
This one's for the folks who can get
up and walk to the mic and read
without a half-hour puking
in the farthest stall beforehand,
the ones who never complain
when you bum their last smoke.
This one's for the sleet bouncing
off my chest right now, for the hard
stark trees and the two songbirds
who don't give a fuck about snow.
This one's for a world that spins
no matter what we stupid humans do.

Torrents

Mercedes Lawry

Poetry

The gutter sky releases torrents
like pebbles' clatter on the roof.
I read flood warnings
imagining the brown spill of rivers and creeks,
hillsides inching loose.
Such mutable chaos, such threat.
Mud's willingness to give.
A broken bottle swallows the rush.
near a hollow log, bobbing.
This winter of odd dreams, offers no
possible sense, no map against collision.
I wait for the rise.

Last Murmur
Peter Kaczmarczyk
Poetry

Beauty is trees without leaves
Sky without sun
Clouds shades of gray and white
Swirls of monochrome haze
Beauty is the first frost
Early this year
A stream's last murmur of the season
Downed leaves disappearing
Soon just hints of faded color
Poking through the snow
Fingers trying to escape the grave

Adorn

Peter Kaczmarczyk

Poetry

Your lingering touch coats my skin
I adorn myself in your words
People say I shine in a way
They never thought I could
Though it confuses them
As they know you are gone

I turn aside to wipe a tear
Still smelling your final breath
That barely had strength to caress my face
I tamp down the slow burn
As echoes blow upon the embers
Your voice still keeping me warm

Winter Don't Mean Dead

Gretchen Uhrinek

Fiction

Grandma broke her leg sledding. Again.

This time, she was being pulled down the road by our neighbor Ronnie's ATV. At the hospital we asked her why.

"Why? Because I'm too damned old to walk up that damned hill in the snow, that's why."

This coming between the tucked lips of her sucked soft gums, dentures in a plastic cup on the hospital sink next to the stainless-steel grab bar and red rip cord they hang up by the toilet in case you fall. From hangdog cheeks that drip down like once-melted, twice-frozen roof ice. Her dandelion head.

See, Grandma gets her hair teased down at the beauty parlor every Friday morning, has done since just about forever. The ladies there make it so her baby bird skull peeps out pink from underneath the white fluff, always sprayed back a little too far from her forehead, making Grandma look like she'd just crawled out of a wind tunnel. It's how she likes it, she says. Keeps the grease off.

Last time Grandma broke her leg sledding, she'd been riding on the metal lid from our garbage can. Its handle tore something like a trolley line down the hard-packed hill, a straight deep gulch we filled with our whooping and our hollering when she hit the jump full bore and did one, two, three somersaults across the snow. Laid there in a heap, afterwards. We all thought she was crying, her body shaking up and down like that. Ronnie ran off to go start his truck—who's got ambulance money?—while Daddy and I slip-scooted to the bottom of the hill fast as we could to check on her. But Grandma wasn't crying. She was laughing. It

wracked her body in waves and so we started laughing, too. That is until Daddy reached his hand down to help her up and we saw how when she went to stand her body wouldn't listen. She started cussing. Daddy started cussing. I would've cussed if I wasn't so young as to get smacked in the ear for it, and then down came Ronnie's truck and we loaded her into the backseat. She was laid up in a cast until the fourth of July.

Grandma made the doctor give her the cast after he'd sawed it off, stinking thing that it was, and after dark she had me stick a bunch of M-80s through it. I blew the thing to high Hell. For her. Maybe even for America. Plaster chunks and singed bits of cheesy-smelling cotton flew across the backyard, catching in the trees, a grand finale more grand than final, as when I looked back at Grandma to see her face, I caught in her cataract eyes that twinkle of fun yet to come. Her one leg was propped up on a rickety old lawn chair, pickled white and prunish, skinnier than the other on the ground with its knobby knee bouncing a steady beat. A beat tapped into the heart throb and ache and joy of time's slick slope. She wasn't yet done sledding. Anyone could see that.

Discarded Shells, Resurrection

Donalyn White

Poetry

Like the cicada song,
silent, still,
and drenched in slumber.
Until nature's circadian rapture
pulls them to the surface.

Our own timing aligns.

Through my dormancy,
I hear your voice call to me.

You say my name.

Then all at once: I burst.

Not The New Thing

Joseph Geskey

Poetry

Your wish at the end of writing
a sentence with so many erasures
it has holes in spots, earned
period like a mic drop, turns
out to be a teen dismissively
scrolling through boring content.

Gig worker resume: wandering
troubadour—no job available
for authenticity, trumpeter
with smoke-wracked lungs,
patrons want a full-sprint solo
from lungs of a marathoner.

Patinaed leather, varnished silver—
set pieces from a long-running play,
thought you might want them—
hand-me-downs, estate sale
for a few dollars, keep it sleek,
clean, modern.

Answers today without leaving
your chair, wasted days comparing
September ocean water temperatures
in Maine, measured by how much my arthritis
pain was relieved, alone between
sea and sky, asking different questions.

Old Piano
Donna Pucciani
Poetry

I rarely play any more,
but like an old friend
who needs contact, touch,
the whispered nostalgia
of intimacy, I feel each key
bubble up with desire.

The piano is ten times
my weight, sits like Buddha
in the corner, meditating
until interrupted by my
searching fingers, a chaos
of rhythmic highs and lows.

The tuner says he's done his best
with the aging beast. Now I must
attempt the old Broadway tunes,
no longer able to navigate Bach.
Music is a glorious irrelevance
in this age of political violence

and autocratic cruelty. One forgets
the virulent hatred of oligarchs
while searching for the right
sharps or flats, foiling melancholia
with the inexplicably sunny
major keys. And nobody's listening
but me.

Hands in the Air

Donna Pucciani

Poetry

In a small Midwestern city,
clergy kneel to pray in the streets,
having gotten their affairs in order.

Crowds, dressed for sub-zero cold,
assemble, singing amazing grace
under their frozen breath. They hold

their hands in the air to show
they have no guns, only truth.

Moses in Pine Woods
Frank William Finney
Poetry

A part of me wanted
to walk my pet skunk.

A part of me
wanted salvation.

The rest of me
shook

when I parted the trees
and beheld all the seedlings

dried up
and dead.

Some scruff in a tanktop
popped out from the bushes.

Saw the skunk
and the fire

and flew off
like a quail.

Popcorn for a Fan
Frank William Finney
Poetry

Does bile
in ink
help you to think
how much to munch
outside the box?

If a piece goes broken
in the blades
what is
is not
what used to be.

Shelf Life
Frank William Finney
Poetry

The nasty things
the sponges say
to jars of jam
across the aisle.

Packs of coffee
shake their beans
while tea bags leak
dark secrets.

Saltines crack
a dirty joke

while stacks
of soap bars
mock the scene
with characteristic

silence.

From Kite Strings

Rebecca Karas

Fiction

It appeared three months after you left. The blue-handled kite spool materialized on the kitchen table one morning, blatant and shining. A relic from my childhood—I had once used it to drape string around the house on lonesome summer days. Over the mantle, under the couch, hooked on the bannister, trailing from one room to the other. Once finished, I'd walk into the fiber lines, relishing the pressure on my limbs, the way it connected everything. Furniture shifted and creaked rooms away like ghosts of my own making. The thread was meant for something else, to drift into the atmosphere with a colorful dancing wing, but existence doesn't honor the proper environment sometimes. I had long survived without you, anyway.

The ritual could sway my loneliness again I thought. The spool led me to the bedroom like an oar in water. I swathed the bedframe first, tying string to the posts on your side. My eyes didn't meander as my fingertips guided the rope; I still wasn't ready to face the churning, corporeal memories of our mattress. Sleep only found me on the couch lately. The spool shuddered while I walked backwards into the hallway, and the bed cemented itself as the first leaden kite of our apartment. I led the thread through corners that held less painful memories. The foyer proved safer, more neutral, where your breath had kissed my cheek as we slipped on our shoes, how close we stood, leaning on each other when balance was lost. The empty closet that once held your coats, scented like you and the rooms you traipsed without me. Now the rod only held my weather-clad transgressions, the wood warped regardless of the

weight it once held. I flipped the kite string around it, over and over, wondering if I could relieve the rod of its invisible burden. Once I reached the kitchen, the fibers ached for something more substantial. The drywall succumbed to my prying, hands reaching past the gypsum, so I could lace strands over structural beams.

The apartment had darkened once the spool ran out, blue and naked beside me. My fingers were marred with blisters, long gashes where I had tugged the fibers to my liking. I laid on the ground, barely perceiving the lines above me. The clumsy cat's cradle became my ceiling, a cave of strands. I couldn't stand if I tried. Before I could sleep, before the threads consumed me and lulled me into a pressure-filled rest, I heard your voice in the bedroom. The tones were frantic, wavering, asking for a release, as if you had something to tell me and it pulled at the corners of your mouth. I hadn't heard your voice lilt in such a way in months.

So I crawled toward the bedroom, finally ready to exist in its walls again. It stood barren, with only a few strings slicing through the emptiness. *What a wasteland* I thought. But still, your plush, muffled speech continued. A form lurched and shuddered underneath the covers while I ducked through the doorway.

I pulled the blankets away slowly. At first, I didn't notice your shape, I couldn't conceive what the unspooling had done. For on your pillow were your mouth and hands only. Three perfectly formed fiber sculptures from kite strings, laid in a triangle formation. I wondered if you had been there the whole time. Did I drift and fumble around for nothing? You were attached to all of the ligatures throughout the apartment, but I didn't make you. Did your nerve endings braid together in my absence? But you were pale, and no longer twitching synapses.

When I finally pushed past my shock, I knelt next to the bed and took your hand, aching for you, but hesitant. I couldn't feign composure much longer. Your fingertips were soft, slightly fuzzy, though not unpleasant against my wounds. I brushed my palm against your lips, waiting for your funny, staccato hand kisses. Your fabric mouth tugged against my dry skin, puckered knots hindering movement as we were stuck together once more. I wasn't even offended by your silence, because what words were needed, now that I held your touch again?

I pulled you out of bed, your hands draped over my shoulders and your mouth of strings on mine. We were a better match now, the way your soft, airy yarn held my moisture. I was your chair to wrap around, I was your bannister to ligate. Ropes grew taut around the apartment, I pulled you closer and closer, until I was cast in a cocoon of string. And when it all crumbled in, when the strands could no longer hold us, I welcomed the rubble, pushing so hard against me that I could only breathe you.

Restitution

Micaela Kreuzwieser

Drama

Characters:

MADELYN- late 20s-early 30s, calm, seemingly assured and confident to hide resentment

ROSE- early 20s, nervous and anxious, surprisingly gains surety in crisis

Setting:

A circle of chairs in an empty room cleared expressly for a conversation, for listening, to take place.

(MADELYN and ROSE sit in a circle of chairs, four of which are empty. An awkward silence ensues.)

MADELYN

... did you drive?

ROSE

No. Train. I don't have a car.

MADELYN

In the city? That's admirable.

ROSE

It's not that difficult. Public transportation, you know.

MADELYN

Right.

ROSE

You drove?

MADLYN

Part way. I don't live in the city so I drove but the parking is terrible—

ROSE

That's what I hear.

MADLYN

—so I had to parallel park at the edge and then Uber the rest of the way.

ROSE

Wow.

MADLYN

Mm-hm.

(More awkward silence.)

ROSE

Do you have support coming? Or Zooming in? Since they said we could have someone.

MADLYN

No, it— the whole thing was upsetting enough for my family as is. Especially my husband. I didn't want him to hear it all again.

ROSE

That makes sense.

MADLYN

I didn't even tell him about today.

ROSE

Oh.

MADELYN

Mm-hm.

(Silence.)

MADELYN

Anyone coming for you?

ROSE

My sister. She's Zooming in. At work during her lunch break.

MADELYN

Good for you! I didn't mean—well, this really isn't good for anyone.

ROSE

I know. No, I wasn't—

MADELYN

Well, this could be good for closure at least. And for her since she's so young.

ROSE

How young?

MADELYN

Fifteen.

ROSE

God.

MADELYN

Yeah.

ROSE

I knew they were teenagers but still. Fifteen.

MADELYN

Yeah.

ROSE

Were they all fifteen?

MADELYN

I have no idea.

ROSE

I knew they looked like teenagers from the security cam footage.

MADELYN

You were by a security camera?

ROSE

Not intentionally. My old apartment had one out by the front door. My landlord's idea.

(She stands and moves forward, acting out the story with her movements.)

Anyway, I was coming back from the airport. I was out of town at a friend's birthday party for the weekend and I walked up next to my place. They got out of the car and literally stopped next to me as I was getting my keys out. I thought they lived there too—new move-ins maybe— so I didn't say anything. I actually walked right past them which meant they had to follow me to get

closer. Which meant I led them into full view of the security camera.

(She hyperventilates.)

And the next thing I know... pepper spray...

(She crouches.)

MADELYN

Hey hey. It's okay. You're okay.

(She approaches and kneels)

ROSE

Uh-huh.

MADELYN

Breathe. Focus on breathing. Five things you see.

ROSE

Hm?

MADELYN

Can you give me five things you can see? Just name them.

ROSE

Uh. The rug. My shoes. Your necklace. The fan. The chairs.

MADELYN

What are four things you can hear?

ROSE

My breathing. The air conditioning. The lights humming. The silence.

MADELYN

Very good. Three things you feel.

ROSE

My own hands. The rug—can I say that again?

MADELYN

Yes.

ROSE

And my hoodie.

MADELYN

Two things you smell.

ROSE

Febreeze. And I think someone was eating McDonalds in here before.

MADELYN

Yeah, I thought it smelled like a Quarter Pounder.

ROSE

Really? I just smell French fries. What's the last thing?

MADELYN

What can you taste?

ROSE

My breath mint.

MADELYN

Now breathe five more times. Slowly in 1... 2... 3...
Now out 1... 2... 3... How do you feel?

ROSE

A lot better.

MADELYN

Good.

ROSE

Did you learn that whole thing online?

MADELYN

My therapist. She's great.

ROSE

I guess so!

(A beat.)

ROSE (CONT.)

How are you so calm about this?

MADELYN

I'm really not.

ROSE

I haven't seen you hyperventilating on the floor! Not that you should be, I know everyone has different ways of handling things.

(A beat.)

MADELYN

Part of me wants to be here to help her. Because she's so young. Because she has a chance to change and learn and grow and be better... But the other part of me is so... angry and so scared still. It's like I've been splintered into pieces and they all want different things.

ROSE

How many people were there?

MADELYN

There's no confirmed specific number, it keeps changing.

ROSE

There were three on the security camera my apartment had. And there had to be a fourth driving the car, there may have been others, it was a sizable SUV.

(MADELYN opens her purse and pulls out gum.)

MADELYN

Gum?

ROSE

No thanks.

MADELYN

I don't even like this flavor, it was just the first one I saw and pulled off the drugstore shelf.

(She chews furiously.)

ROSE

Actually, I think I will have some.

MADELYN

Don't you have a breath mint already? I forgot you mentioned that. Not that you can't have both, I'm not your mother.

ROSE

It was almost gone then, it's vanished now.

MADELYN

Then here.

(ROSE takes her own gum.)

ROSE

Oh, I love this flavor.

MADELYN

Lucky you.

ROSE

It was my go-to while I was in high school. I had a lot of AP tests.

MADELYN

Hm.

ROSE

What's her name again?

MADELYN

Lia.

ROSE

Lia.

MADELYN

I know, it feels strange. Knowing she has a name like that. It's so pretty too, sweet. I'd trust a Lia.

ROSE

Well...

MADELYN

Not now.

ROSE

Maybe after this...?

MADELYN

Possibly. Maybe. I don't know.

ROSE

I don't know either. I mean, I want to believe that people change. And she is still young enough to grow. You make a lot of stupid mistakes at fifteen.

MADELYN

Did you ever jump on someone and pull their hair to get them on the ground so you could steal their bag?

ROSE

Well, no, but I wasn't perfect. I wouldn't do the things I did now at fifteen.

MADELYN

I wouldn't either.

ROSE

So there's still a chance for her. It's good that we're doing this. Like the counselor said. If she sees us, sees that we're people, that she caused harm and hurt that we didn't deserve, she'll think her actions through next time.

MADLYN

I heard it was partially peer pressure. She got in with the wrong group. You know how it can be wanting to impress the wrong people.

ROSE

I shoplifted once. In fifth grade. It was gum, funny enough. One of the popular girls said if I stole it for her, she would be my best friend.

MADLYN

She lied?

ROSE

No, she was my best friend for a day. Then she stopped and when I said something, her response was “one pack of gum equals one day of being friends.”

MADLYN

I’m surprised you didn’t steal more.

ROSE

I felt too guilty by then, so I went and told my mother what I did. She took me back to the store and made me apologize to the cashier. He looked so bored the whole time like he couldn’t have cared less. I actually don’t even think he was the same person as the one on duty when I stole the gum.

(They laugh.)

ROSE (CONT.)

But I know why she did it. I needed to apologize, to recognize that I did something wrong and make it up somehow.

MADELYN

Lia's mother is coming with her to this. I think she's doing the same thing.

ROSE

Only we care a lot more than that cashier. Because we were affected a lot more by what happened. I'm scared I'll freeze and won't be able to say anything.

MADELYN

I'm worried I'll start shouting.

ROSE

That could blow off some steam.

MADELYN

You know what, I'll do it now. Can I just vent for a second?

ROSE

Sure.

MADELYN

She—She and the rest of that group jumped me! They're the ones who attacked me, I was just going to the gym, minding my business, and then suddenly they're in front of me and they're punching me in the head and pulling my hair and trying to rip my backpack off... I was the one on the ground after they left. I was the one with the broken ankle and chunks of hair torn out of my scalp! The people in the gym had to call an ambulance for me because I was bleeding so much from my face! But now, I have to help her? The reason I ended up like that? I'm paying a therapist and I have huge hospital bills I still don't know the total for and I'm wondering how I'm

going to cover rent for this month after all that and I'm still having dreams from hell where I wake up because they killed me... but now I have to be here so I'm a good person?!? It's all so screwed up and they call it restorative justice but- god, the taste is gone already.

ROSE

Yeah, it does that.

MADLYN

It's why I always hated this kind.

ROSE

I just think the taste is that good. It's fleeting, but still addicting. Stays with you.

MADLYN

Maybe not everyone. For some, it becomes a distant memory fast.

ROSE

I guess it depends on the person.

(The sound of a door opening far off.)

ROSE (CONT.)

Is that them?

MADLYN

I think. He did say he was bringing them up next once we were settled. We're settled, right?

ROSE

Yeah, we're good.

MADLYN

Got everything out we needed to?

ROSE

Everything we can't say in this meeting.

MADLYN

It might come out. Even passive aggressively.

ROSE

We just need to make sure it doesn't. Not in a way that isn't constructive.

MADLYN

Like saying she's a bad person.

ROSE

Right. Because she isn't. She isn't. She's young and confused and she made a mistake.

MADLYN

Right. Like we did when we were younger. Not the same mistakes, but still. Wrong choices. And we did agree to be here. We didn't have to do it, they said.

ROSE

It'll be okay. We'll be okay.

MADLYN

I'll be screaming that in my head the whole time.

ROSE

That's what I did when it happened.

MADELYN

I think I might throw up. I did once already before coming in here.

ROSE

It's okay. Breathe, remember. Breathe.

(Footsteps come closer. A closer door opens.)

Lights down.

Selling Girl Scout Cookies at the End of the World

Adrienne Egolf
Poetry

They skip
down the sidewalk.
Literally. Not just a bounce in their steps.
A literal skip, hand in hand,
down a tidy, white sidewalk.
Yellow sunshine, the color of lemon icing.
And the neighbors answer and say,
Oh yes, of course. Or, sometimes—
I already bought
from my granddaughter, my niece.
And we smile. No hard feelings.

Except all the feelings are hard.
Elsewhere, girls slip
on sidewalks covered in ice.
Elsewhere, ice melts too fast,
like a sticky, chocolate coating
in warm, greedy fingers.

The cookies — all sugar.
Jagged, beautiful
Crystal shards.

They skip.
They ring doorbells,
melodic as bird song.

Do You Remember?

Joel Bush

Poetry

On summer nights
we climbed out
your bedroom window
to lie down on the roof.
The breeze banished
the day's heat.
Cicada violins accompanied
a star-speckled sky.
I rubbed my thumb
across the rough shingles
'til it was numb.
For us, the future was open,
ever-stretching,
like the cornfields below.

When I moved out west,
I realized how hard it is
to see the stars out here.
I'd break my ankle
trying to get up
to my apartment roof.
Most nights I can't
stay awake anyway.
And the next morning,
I've forgotten
whatever dreams I had.

Christmas Lights

Joel Bush

Poetry

Last night's rain
stained the sidewalks
with strange halos.
I walk around the neighborhood
and watch as everyone takes down
their Christmas lights.
I used to do the same
with my grandfather,
the old man fretting
the tangles, the bad bulbs,
the tight stretches to the outlets.
This was my first Christmas
without him.

A couple streets down
there's a father-son duo
in their driveway,
loading lines from a ladder
into a truck bed below.
Next door, a lone man
on a balcony
smoothes his strings
for a large red tub—
their hibernation chamber.
They're all hoping
the lights last until next year,
that none of them burn out.
I didn't bother
putting mine up this year.

Distressed
Joel Bush
Poetry

You gave away your jacket one day
without a second thought.
I've worn it for
the last decade,
placing fissures in the leather.
The cuffs have split,
exposing the white stitching inside.
Its edges are hard and sharp,
like an insect's armor.
Every wrinkle on the sleeves
is matched on my brow.

I got a new leather jacket
for my birthday this year,
but I couldn't bear
to throw yours out.
It's given me all
the warmth and comfort
you should've had.
And the older we get,
the more layers it takes
to stay warm.

One
Joel Bush
Poetry

Let's be honest, Abe.
I'll look you in your copper face,
bristling beard and all.
You were shiny once,
but years of service
have lined your cheeks with clogs.
In your day, a penny could
fill a bag to bursting
with peppermint sticks,
lemon drops,
and neon yellow wafers.
Now they've decided
pennies aren't worth the punching.
You tried to keep us one.
But in America,
one is never enough.

Recalling What Did Not Occur

Kelly R. Samuels

Poetry

Tell me there wasn't pitted blacktop
and an adjacent field we ran in
on days of no rain, or that all
the swings' chains weren't rusty,
the treacherous merry-go-round
rustier. They were, then, as there was
totality we prepared for, for days,
with our cardboard boxes and blunted
scissors. Fretful, anxious, speaking
of blindness in biblical ways learned
in other rooms and eventually
relinquished, we worked away
at our pinhole windows. The eye!
The eye! It was spring if only
because of the dandelions.
We stood as the light began
to falter and she called out, *Now!*
and all grew dark or darker
and cool, so that we shivered
a little, even in our windbreakers
that were no good for hide-n-
seek. We were facing south,
the school low to the ground
before us, and there was not
one shadow for as long as it took
for us to see some semblance
in our muffled, cheap, handmade ways.

Pain and What Came After

Kelly R. Samuels

Poetry

It was the year of dry socket
and the long needle into the gums.
I paced in the kitchen before calling
to say I could not take the pain
anymore. Someone had to do some-
thing. This was in the apartment near
the river with the inoperable fire-
place and centipedes.
Mary lived below me.
The mail was delivered
in the morning—a blessing
I've never had
the privilege of again.
I know I cried when he numbed
me. I recall he said I had deep
pits and eventually all would be
well. Down, down the ache
into the neck, the excruciating
inhalation of air. The need
to not eat, to rest.
All of it was unfortunate.
Someone brought flowers.
Someone made chilled soup
the color of new grass.

Dorchester County Whispers

Anna Drasko

Poetry

Arizona shaved her head
 in third grade, the lice
 kept coming back. I thought
 she looked pretty cool
 in that classic red bandana
 but living specks marching around
 my scalp horrified me. Athletic
 in my obsessions, don't try too hard
 to make sense of them. Or maybe

I'm just like everyone else. I'd go out
 to the apartment complex pond
 each evening to watch the alligators
 glide. Our neighbor would bring her wiener dog
 to bait them to shore — lowcountry
 pastime two thousand five. One dusk we took
 the narrow path home & Dad threw out
 his arm as my foot skimmed the top
 of a copperhead. We laughed the way you do

when you escape the clutches of teeth
 by a hair. Sitting beneath the bald cypress,
 I'm thinking of Arizona's head & Katie's
 Lunchables that smelled so bad I thought
 I might have to stop being her friend, but I didn't
 know how, so I just held my breath at lunch

& stopped talking to everyone. The teacher
 pulled me aside & said *you're being a bad
 kid*. Something I think I already knew,
 but I don't say a word.

No Party Line to the Imagination, a review of *The Things We Do To Protect Our Own*, by Jeff Weddle

Peter Mladinic

Book Review

The Things We Do To Protect Our Own

Jeff Weddle

Meat For Tea Press

Holyoke, Mass

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The Things We Do To Protect Our Own is not divided into sections; it has no categories. Its underlying message, compassion has no borders, draws readers into a conversation with the poet about the freedom of the individual and the tyrannical forces seeking to erode that freedom. Key words in the book's title are "we" and "our." These "poems of the polis" call for people to rise up in anger and love; they reflect despair of the present and evoke hope for the future.

What are we protecting? Our own. The voice in the poems is that of a spouse, a father, a son, and a friend. The poet's "our own" is inclusive, taking in what was once called "the family of man." "Way up above us/ are the same constellations / the ancients saw." What is here to protect? At the end of "Cassiopeia" the poet says "this life is the story of your dreams." What or who seeks to destroy "this life"? "Meanwhile, in America" begins:

The fascists are all the noise
that floats around our boredom.
We are the crimes they seek to kill.
Another day, another roundup

of brown skinned people,
whether they talk funny or not.

The fascists seek to divide and conquer. The poet sees what is. "The whole world is afraid / because we are bullied to death." And what could be. "The idea is to call God by his true name, / the hidden name that everyone knows / but is too beaten down to whisper." In "A Proper Madness" he conveys hope. "Words ...that would have saved your life ...are still out there."

He amplifies. We are protecting are own from tyranny, from the enemy within. Sure, there are outside forces, but inside forces as well seek to take away the freedom of the individual. To some extent, they have succeeded. The poet says, "Regret is worth the world / if it gives you eyes." In "Not Much Else to Say" he sees what is ...the manifestation of tyranny, its human face:

Soldiers murder children in faraway lands,
and right here the police commit horrors
that, even now, mostly go unnoticed.
Millions chant for democracy's end.
They would happily be ruled from prison.

Implicit in this tyranny are the forces that seek to erode the separation of church and state. "Millions say the world / is what their blood-smeared holy books / tell them."

How we protect ourselves and others from tyranny is met head on. Others will think for us, if we let them; and speak for us, if we let them; and subvert our freedoms for their own personal gain, if we let them. The poet will not. In his poem "In America We Love" his candor gets our attention:

We love prosperity and the Bible
 and we hate women.
 Shit. Did I say that out loud?
 I mean we love women, the vessels of life.
 It's the poor we hate,
 except for the poor
 who vote to give the rich what they want.

He doesn't stutter. He speaks clearly and directly, to "America" and the world. He acknowledges that he is a person "composed of years and error," "An accessory to ICE, ...to genocide in Gaza ...to the end of democracy." Not separate from but part of the whole, he asks, "What can I do?" In "Arise and Walk" he says not only to himself but also to us, "Awake and march on ...Awake and rise up!" Living for himself and others, he puts words into action. Acts of kindness that convey a compassion without borders.

Things We Do To Protect Our Own is a book of the past as well as the present and the future. Jeff Weddle's poems tell stories of family and friends living and dead, of writers who are now departed: Charles Bukowski, Richard Brautigan, Barry Hannah, and Larry Brown; of his translator and friend Fadil Bajraj, and his friend John Yamus, a poet who "has his blade ready, / never doubt it." The abiding love and affection in these poems attest to the poet's individuality. They are Jeff Weddle's acts against the lies, hatred, and cruelty that follow in the wake of tyranny and injustice. He tells the world things the media does not, in poems that will last for many years to come.

Contributor Bios

Philomena Amalfitano

Philomena Amalfitano is a Sicilian writer based in New York. Her poetry appears or is forthcoming at The Berlin Literary Review, Wild Roof Journal, American Poetry Journal, South Broadway Press, San Pedro River Review, and others. Connect with her on Instagram at PhilomenasPalette.

Robert Beveridge

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry on unceded Mingo land (Akron, OH). He published his first poem in a non-vanity/non-school publication in November 1988, and it's been all downhill since. Recent/upcoming appearances in AC|DC, Adelaide Literary Magazine, and Periwinkle Pelican, among others.

Brian C. Billings

Brian C. Billings is a professor of drama and English at Texas A&M University-Texarkana and the editor-in-chief for "Aquila Review," the university's literary journal. In addition to managing TAMU-T's drama program, he teaches courses in drama, creative writing, and children's literature. Publishers for his scripts include Eldridge Publishing and Heuer Publishing.

CL Bledsoe

Raised on a rice and catfish farm in eastern Arkansas, CL Bledsoe is the author of more than thirty books, including the poetry collections Riceland, The Bottle Episode, and his newest, Having a Baby to Save a Marriage, as well as his latest novels If You Love Me,

You'll Kill Eric Pelkey and The Devil and Ricky Dan. Bledsoe lives in northern Virginia with his kid.

Joel Bush

Joel Bush reads things. He also writes things. Well, sometimes he reads the things he writes. That tends to help. His work has been featured in The Spotlong Review, Meniscus, and Muleskinner Journal.

Willy Conley

Willy Conley, born profoundly deaf, is an award-winning writer and photographer whose nine books include Photographic Memories, Plays of Our Own, Listening Through the Bone, and The Deaf Heart. Early in his career he worked as a medical photographer at leading hospitals in the U.S. before earning certification as a Registered Biological Photographer. He is professor emeritus of Theatre and Dance at Gallaudet University, the world's only liberal arts university for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in Washington, D.C. For more info about his work, please visit: www.willyconley.com

Linda Conroy

Linda Conroy is an observer of people and finds they offer a rich abundance for the creation of poetry, which recognizes and records the complexity and simplicity of human nature. Her poems have appeared in many journals, and in her poetry collections, Ordinary Signs and Familiar Sky.

Anna Drasko

Anna Drasko spends their time in the Great Smoky Mountains, hardware stores, and music venues listening to bands they've never heard of. They walk around with their camera, capturing the sacredness of ordinary life.

Ideal ordinary life for Anna is getting themselves a lil pastry and sitting under the Sunsphere.

Adrienne Egolf

Adrienne Egolf is a climate change communicator for the global environmental organization, The Nature Conservancy, where she has worked since 2010. Based in Central Florida, she is interested in writing that explores parallels between the human experience and the natural world. She has written poetry since college and has been published in Thimble Literary Magazine.

Frank William Finney

Frank William Finney can often be seen tracking clouds in Massachusetts. He is especially fond of cats, owls, and most kinds of tea. He is currently counting Gaeta olives from a jar.

Joseph Geskey

Joseph Geskey lives outside of Columbus, Ohio. His second book of poetry, *Vigil*, was published by Broken Tribe Press in 2026. His poetry has appeared in *Verse Daily*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Dodge*, *Poetry East*, and many other literary journals. Please visit josephgeskey.com for further information.

Thom Hawkins

Thom Hawkins is a writer and artist based in Maryland. His poems have appeared or are scheduled to appear in *Brilliant Poetry* (prize short-list), *Chiron Review*, *COMP*, *Excuse Me Magazine*, *The Fieldstone Review*, *Last Stanza Journal*, *Linked Verse*, *Poetry Box*, *Red Ogre Review*, *Sinking City*, and *Uncensored Ink's Banned Books Anthology*.

TK Hudson

TK Hudson lives in the Midwest with his dog and two cats. His short fiction can be found in *Locust Shells Journal*, *Black Sheep Magazine*, and *Ascendancy Magazine*. He is seeking representation for a novelette and a novella.

Parker James

Parker James grew up in Woodbine, Maryland and now lives and writes poems in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Kristin Jones

Kristin is an immigration lawyer and children's rights activist. She writes stories, mostly other people's, but sometimes her own, too. She lives with her family in New Orleans.

Peter Kaczmarczyk

Peter Kaczmarczyk was raised in Massachusetts but was willing to leave the comfort of Red Sox country when he learned there were Dunkin Donuts in Indiana. His writing is assisted by cats. They believe they can write better than him by walking across the keyboard. Sometimes they do. Peter's poetry has been included in more than 100 journals and anthologies. He has also published three chapbooks: *Distant Yet Always Heard*, *The Scars Across My Thigh*, and *Could Have Gotten a Cat*, and a full-length book, *More Than a Whisper*. Peter is co-creator of the Captain Janeway statue in Bloomington, Indiana.

Rebecca Karas

Rebecca is a poet and weird fiction writer from the midwest. Her work has been published in *Michigan City Review of Books*, *DON'T SUBMIT!*, and *Blood +*

Honey Lit. You can find her rambling thoughts
 @rebeccakaras.bsky.social / instagram @rebecca.karas

Dustin King

Dustin would always rather be sneaking a bottle of wine into a movie theater. When nothing good is playing, he teaches Spanish and exchanges dreams with loved ones in Richmond, Va. His poems pop up in New Letters, Prism Review, Marrow Magazine, and other rad spots. He is a poetry reader for Sublunary Review and co-curates the poetry and performance event "Yodel Farm." He had two chapbooks out in 2025: "Last Echo" from Bottlecap Press and "Courteous Gringo" from Seven Kitchens Press.

Micaela Kreuzwieser

Micaela Kreuzwieser is a recent graduate from the Catholic University of America with an MFA in Drama/Playwriting. Though she usually loves writing for and about kids and whimsy, she also enjoys delving deep into emotionally complex and honest moments that cannot be easily explained or categorized.

Mercedes Lawry

Mercedes Lawry's most recent book is Small Measures from ELJ Editions. She's also published Vestiges from Kelsay Books, three chapbooks and poems in journals such as Nimrod and Alaska Quarterly Review. Additionally, she's published short fiction as well as stories and poems for children.

John Martino

John Martino is a photographer, writer, and educator currently residing in Hong Kong. His photographs have been exhibited at numerous venues, including the

Museum of Fine Arts—Boston, 1650 Gallery (Los Angeles), MPLS Photo Center (Minneapolis), and Limner Gallery (Hudson, NY). His images have also been published in *The Boston Globe*, *The Advocate*, *F-Stop Magazine*, and *New Orleans Review*, among others. He is the Executive Editor at Home Planet News (homeplanetnews.com).

Michael Matejcek

Michael Matejcek's work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Broad River Review*, *Prairie Fire*, *Adelaide*, *Blood and Bourbon*, *34th Parallel*, and *Main Street Rag*, which nominated him for a Pushcart Prize. He currently lives in St. Paul with his wife, Lisa.

Nicole Mensick

Nicole is often learning and rarely knowing. The curiosity leads to art, as though in dialogue with life. It is best to get most life advice from nature, for humans know very little of living.

Peter Mladinic

Peter Mladinic's most recent book of poems, *The Whitestone Bridge*, is available from Anxiety Press. An animal rights advocate, he lives in Hobbs, New Mexico.

Phillip Periman

I grew up in the Texas panhandle. Left and worked or played in more than seventy countries. Came home after twenty years and have stayed for the last forty-nine. For fifty years as a doctor I cared for folks with cancer, half of them died. Now I am 87 and facing my own death. I write every day about what it means to live, what it means to die—that is I write about ordinary life.

Trystan Popish

Trystan Popish is a poet from Colorado. She inherited the poetry gene and her middle name from her grandmother. She credits her ear for meter, however, to her mother reading the works of Dr. Seuss to her as a child, in particular *The Sneetches*. As a result of this early and repeated exposure, Trystan writes poetry and will never name all her sons Dave. trystanpopish.com.

Donna Pucciani

Donna Pucciani, a Chicago-based writer, has published poetry worldwide in *Shi Chao Poetry*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Li POetry*, *Agenda*, *Gradiva*, *Door is a Jar* and other journals. Her seventh and latest book of poetry is *EDGEs*.

Isabella Ronchetti

Isabella Ronchetti (b. 2001) is an Italian-American conceptual artist. She holds a BA in Art Direction from NABA (Milan, Italy) and an MFA at New York Academy of Art. Drawing from depth psychology, pop culture and philosophical thought, Isabella investigates the internal landscape across an ever-expanding range of formats—from oil paint to textile and performance art. Her inventions can be found in galleries, magazines, and on billboards in Europe and the US.
www.isabellaronchetti.com

Hannah Roy

Hannah Roy is an aspiring writer from St. Paul, Minnesota. She enjoys seeing the surprised reaction on people's faces when she shares her affinity for pro wrestling. You can find her on Instagram [@hannahjoroy](https://www.instagram.com/hannahjoroy).

Kelly R. Samuels

Kelly R. Samuels lives where three rivers meet and meld in the Upper Midwest. She often has her nose in a book. If you wish to find her, you can find her here: <https://www.krsamuels.com>

Burcu Seyben

Burcu Seyben is a Turkish academic, writer, and theater director who has been living in the U.S. since 2017. Her creative nonfiction has appeared in publications such as *The RavensPerch* and *The Brussels Review*. She won the Adjudicators' Award for her one-act play, *Intro to Greek Theater* (2025), and was featured at the Mid-America Theatre Conference with *The American Letter* (2024). Burcu writes about women growing up in a patriarchal world, the power of language, and the ways exile can create new identities. She enjoys mixing these themes in her work.

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 more than 700 poems published and been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.

Kim Suttell

Kim Suttell, a retired bureaucrat, carries into her art the centrality of paper (as a medium) and a will to make order from unconnected pieces. She transforms scraps into collages inspired by quilts and print making,

inviting viewers to find beauty and narrative in what would otherwise get thrown away. Instagram
@page48paperart

Phillip Temples

Phillip Temples is a product of the Midwest, but he's lived in the greater Boston area for nearly fifty years. Phil has had six novels, a novella, and eight story collections published, in addition to over 320 online short stories and photographs. You can learn more about Phillip by visiting his website at <https://temples.com>.

Rachel Turney

Rachel Turney, Ed.D. (she/her) is an educator and artist located in Denver. Her poems, research articles, reviews, and drawings can be found in a variety of publications. Rachel is passionate about immigrant rights, teacher support, and empowering other artists. She is a Writers' Hour prize winner and Best of the Net nominee. Her photography appears on a few magazine covers. Rachel runs the popular online reading series Poetry (in Brief). She is on staff at Bare Back Magazine with her monthly column Friday Night in the Suburbs. She reads for The Los Angeles Review.

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Gretchen Uhrinek

Gretchen Uhrinek lives in the woods north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she spends an inordinate amount of time combing her dog for ticks. She is a fiction editor at The Hopper and writes across genres, with work appearing in Dishsoap Quarterly, Folklore Review, and elsewhere. Her website is www.gretchenuhrinek.com.

Diane Webster

I draw strength and peace from walks in nature. Enjoying a sunset from front door expands my appreciation for life as the colors blaze across the sky. I caw at crows as they fly by or perch on parking lot streetlights. Early mornings I listen to sparrows tell each other their dreams from the night before. My website is: www.dianewebster.com

Donalyn White

Donalyn White (they/them) is a teacher, Ph.D student, and tender of archives living in Southern California. Their work can be found in academic periodicals, poetry magazines, and leftist journals, but they would like just as much to not be perceived at all. They spend their spare time wandering around museums, sloshing through tide pools, and saving the world from robots at the arcade.

Lee Clark Zumpe

Lee Clark Zumpe, an entertainment editor with Tampa Bay Newspapers, earned his degree in English at the University of South Florida. He began writing poetry and fiction in the early 1990s. His work has appeared in a variety of literary journals, genre magazines, and anthologies. Recent publication credits include Spectral Realms, Dreams & Nightmares, and The Literary Hatchet. Lee lives on the west coast of Florida with his wife and daughter.

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

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.

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