

# DOOR = JAR



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Cover Image “Sleep On the Floor, Part 1”  
by Kristin LaFollette

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**The Sound of Life**

Claire Scott

Poetry

I was still here once  
 the first strawberries of spring  
 bursting sour on my tongue  
 mushrooms swelling  
 under the bellies of trees  
*Lion's Mane, Puffballs, Chanterelles*  
 the orange flash of a Monarch  
 flitting through milkweed  
 I was still here once  
 the glitter of sea glass on the shore  
 the tang and brine  
 in the weave of waves  
 a gull's coarse cry  
 the ache and awe of it all  
 I was still here once  
 until a curious lump  
 sent me straight to stage four  
*do not pass go*  
*do not collect your fiftieth anniversary*  
*or see your grandson graduate*  
 death tiptoeing behind  
 with a dustpan and brush  
*swish swoosh*  
*swish swoosh*  
 the sound of life  
 erasing itself

**I'm Working On It**

Claire Scott

Poetry

Towels folded in thirds, lined up on shelves, folded  
edges facing out  
top firmly screwed on my Tom's toothpaste  
only even steps to the car, thirteen, start over  
some days an hour to get to work, my boss not so happy  
but feels sorry for me sleeping alone in that big house  
invited me to dinner, not a chance, not interested  
in an overweight man with side burns and bum hip  
who can barely walk a block without wheezing  
he doesn't know that soon enough you will be back  
shoes waiting in the closet, Warrior's cap on your desk,  
Corona in the fridge, your bookmark on page 341  
of *The Mueller Report*, right next to your reading glasses  
I have cleaned up the syringe caps and the cotton swabs  
they left behind when they strapped you to a gurney  
and sirened you to the ER and the doctor said *I am so  
sorry*  
if I can keep this up just a bit longer I know  
the goddess of magical thinking will provide a miracle  
and I will hear your footsteps on the porch.

**More Than I Could Handle**

Claire Scott

Poetry

So, I prayed for help.

God sent a second-string angel paid minimum wage. Not fluent in English. Not wearing wings. His halo tarnished. His robes askew. He couldn't make canned stew without it boiling over. My kitchen stank. The cat took off. He had no idea which were weeds and pulled up all my wild roses. Brought them to me roots and all with a satisfied grin. He crashed my car, annoyed my neighbors with his off-key hymns and never fed the dog. I texted God to say for god's sake recall your intern and send me a PhD angel. Or at least one with a masters. God is not a good listener. He never responded. So, my minor angel and I settled in. Ate much too salty popcorn and watched *Game of Thrones*. Went to the movies on Friday nights. Stopped by Sam's after for a Corona with lime. He learned to cook a bit and I did the gardening. The roses thrived. We often talked late, laughing at his terrible jokes. He taught me the language of angels. Tonight, when I came home he was gone. There was a text from God: *Sorry. I just found your message in my spam folder.*



**She Likes the Pretty Boys**

John Tustin

Poetry

She likes the pretty boys  
When they get older and begin  
To look like men

But not too pretty.  
Lucky me, being only kind of pretty  
For those couple of years.  
Maybe two.

She likes when they have tattoos  
And when they ride motorcycles.  
She likes when they play guitars  
And when they fight the good unwinnable fight.

She likes when they use their hands to make things  
And she likes when they do manly things like chop  
wood  
Or change a flat tire.

I am none of these things,  
I do none of these things  
But she loves me most.

Love is unknowable.  
And passion inscrutable.

She likes beards a lot.  
Hell, I can grow one of those!

It's something.

**Old School Library**  
Georgette Unis  
Poetry

In the room  
without a clock,  
walnut shelves line

each paneled wall  
floor to ceiling,  
around and inside

cushioned window seats  
dressed in natural light.  
Rolling ladders give

access to each book,  
their spines colorful  
as grocery displays

of packaged foods  
and new produce,  
some more palatable

than others,  
full of prophesy,  
history and fantasy.

Philosophical thoughts  
click, grind, bang  
against silence

like revelers  
who celebrate  
the end of dull

days and time  
just another concept,  
not a constraint.

**The Night Before College Graduation**

Jacob Butlett

Poetry

I walk down the boardwalk  
as the sun slips into the sea,  
the moon buried in the purple sky,  
a cacophony of seagulls overhead.  
At the end of the boardwalk,  
below the railing, whitecaps slosh  
by like students down a hallway,  
imaginary books in hand,  
the first bell about to toll,  
the final lesson about to begin.  
And I fear I've already  
missed the first bell,  
missed the final lesson.  
You'll be happy when you get  
your diploma, they say.  
But it seems too good to be true.  
It seems foolish to assume  
a piece of paper  
could make me happy,  
could make anyone happy.  
I hear the seagulls again,  
their cry an elegy for this moment.  
Then I realize what we have:  
this moment, this moment  
to think whatever thoughts we want,  
to feel whatever feelings we need  
to be present in the present,  
in happiness, in unhappiness,  
in situations like now —  
alone on a boardwalk  
in the shadow of the earth.  
Soon I'll return to my dorm

and dream about tomorrow,  
which will come whether  
I want it to or not.

**On My Grandfather's Lap**

Jacob Butlett

Poetry

*for my father*

My paternal grandfather never spoke to me, silently gazing outside his living room window. His sunny, liver-spotted scalp was soft as a fontanel, his large, hairy ears bowing to hear me: I rambled on in the quiet, sharing my first stories: a knight in gold armor climbs a tower made of prickly vines to save a damsel, a cowboy in a black vest rides a stallion through prairies to arrest a masked robber. Too young to understand my own stories, I couldn't see the point of my tales. Years later, my grandfather died from his third heart attack, his legacy a mystery to me. When I asked my father to talk about his father, he looked away as though ashamed. My grandfather, I learned, spent my father's childhood drowning in bottles of beer, gambling away the family's milk money, padlocking the icebox to prevent my father from eating. In one of my father's stories, my grandfather used to climb the stairs in my father's childhood home, accompanied by a half-dressed woman who wasn't my grandmother. In another story, my grandfather once gave my father a yearling to play with, my father's only friend, only to sell her behind my father's back. But my father learned to love his father. When I got older, writing stories of journals and magazines, I asked how he could still respect my grandfather. *He softened up after his second heart attack*, my father said, his wet eyes turning toward our living room window. *Besides*, he said, *he liked listening to your stories.*

**Le Baiser**

Natasha Deonarian

Poetry

*after Pablo Picasso, 1969*

You bring me  
this bowl of voluptuous cherries —  
dimpled, dark-skinned, taut;  
attempt to feed away my fears.

You say,  
take these words; dangle them  
over the tip of your tongue,  
taste their bittersweet nectar that swells  
both sides of your cheeks,  
squeezes briny streams into the basin  
of your plump pout.

You hold my confession in your gnarled mouth,  
chiseled canines awash in crimson juice and  
wait until I swallow my silence  
like a drying pit —

fragments of flesh tongued from Rubenesque bones.

**Working for Tips**

Marilee Pritchard

Poetry

The day she called  
The voice on the other end  
Asked for age and dress size.  
*We train on the job,*  
*Come by at noon —*

He liked what he saw —  
College girl — legs  
Long as a stretch limo,  
Hair that swirled like a mermaid's tail,  
Dolled up in a French  
Bustier, killer heels,  
Opera hose — she'd bring  
Down the house.

In no time at all, she'd mastered the game —  
Tipping her assets toward their eyes,  
Gently grazing hands when  
She set the hot plate down.  
Once she delivered the check,  
Her heart shaped behind  
Wiggled a long good-bye.

A favorite John came every day  
And so did she —  
Swept away by the broom  
Of his mustache.  
Flirting outrageously, loose with tongue,  
He remained tightfisted with tips.

One day he overheard her whispered  
Comments about his parsimonious habits



To the busboy — He turned and replied  
*I like your spirit baby.*  
*Let me give you a big tip —*  
*Find another job.*

**Hospital at Midnight**

John Grey

Poetry

Down white corridors, in silent rooms,  
health smells of disinfectant, iodine,  
while bodies sleep-awake, tubes  
fused to arms, monitors checking  
body function, while scrubbed nurses  
float in and out, stethoscopes tapping  
noiselessly against buttoned gowns,  
filling in for the will to live  
when their patients want no more of it.

## **And I Was Like November**

Rachael Biggs

Nonfiction

Like the funk of asparagus ruminating in urine long after its appearance on the plate, the acrimony of our relationship still sat heavy on my heart.

I'd had others since. I hoped their hairless scrota and selfish intentions might clear him from my energy field like a slutty Reiki remedy. Instead it made him feel further away and my voice more brittle. He changed his profile pic, his arm slung over the shoulder of a simpleton wearing beige Spanx as a dress and tattoos that screamed: 'I'm basic, but I'm fooling everyone!' His face was hard to read, even for me who thought I knew his every expression after three years. I'd never seen that shirt either, so maybe he was altogether different. Maybe now he could communicate with complete sentences that articulated his feelings instead of running off to the city for boys' nights with that idiot he called friend.

I called the idiot once when Daniel was pulling away. I wanted to casually inquire, figuring as an actor he'd be sensitive to feelings of inadequacy, but he was not sensitive and crying and begging a near stranger not to betray what a mess you are is not casual.

It was always the same. I needed more than he could give. He needed less than I could hold back. I'd bring him lunch at the studio or moisturize his cuticles and he would say he didn't deserve me, which made me want to prove his worth to him as a substitute for my own. He hugged me so hard then and everything felt safe with my face pressed into his T-shirt, his familiar scent lulling my fears into submission. Then I'd stay. I wanted another hit of affection. Only want wasn't a strong enough word. I wanted it like a 3-year-old child left in a gas station

bathroom wants her mom to pick her up instead of the needle.

That day at Chevron was the final time she left me. I didn't see her for four years from then, during which time custody was given to my aunt and uncle after bouncing between foster homes. When they filled out the paperwork they said they were Christian. That meant on Sundays my bushy-browed aunt pressed my feet into uncomfortable patent leather shoes and I'd take communion. They said the dry wafer with a cross on it was the body of Christ, but I was never clear why I'd want to put that in my mouth. Did someone confuse cannibalism with Catholicism?

When I was seven they took me to see my Mommy. She joked with the prison guard as she walked up in her grey sweatsuit the same as the other ladies I saw throughout the yard. It was nice to be comfortable in jail, I guessed. She gave me a bible. Inside it said, 'God Bless You, pumpkin' in her bubble handwriting as small as she was tall. Day after day I flipped through its pages the texture of my dad's rolling papers, trying to make sense of the tiny scripture with no luck. I hoped that somewhere she would've written another message. Something that actually meant something like, 'Meet me behind the cherry tree at 8pm on Tuesday, let's blow this joint,' but all I could find were psalms and smite and the word Lord with a capital L. She gave it to me because it was the only thing she had to give and because she wouldn't miss it. Unlike her sister, she didn't pretend to be something she wasn't.

"How's my #1 daughter?" she asked in her throaty voice.

She picked me up and swung me so high that my grandma winced with concern. I wished she would toss me high enough to fly and she would fly too, and we would fly far, far away from all this nonsense.

I was at her bedside while she died for five days. It was the most time I'd spent with her in as long as I could remember. Beads of sweat sat on her brow and in the nooks of her neck. I ran the wash cloth under cold water and lay it on her forehead until it was too hot to touch and then repeat. The doctor said not to kiss her on the lips because her saliva was toxic. I hoped she didn't hear him because that wouldn't make me feel very good if I were her.

Did this new skank love him gently enough not to smother him? When that dry blue hair touched his naked chest, did he wish she took the care to condition that I did? She probably didn't care; she was the kind of girl that didn't need his approval. That was probably what he liked best about her. She wasn't me with all my complicated wounds.

He'd once told me that the bullying got so bad, he'd wake up in the morning with his eyes glued shut by the saltiness of his tears. Did she know about that or did he keep it light because that is what he wanted all along? To forget the darkness. And I was like November, only light for a few hours a day or sometimes not at all when the clouds rolled in.

**Midnight Cascading**

Dane Hamann

Poetry

I'm in the throat of a waterfall, midnight cascading  
once again into smoky drink. It's hard being  
on the outskirts of sleep. Sometimes I wonder  
about the logic of ladders. They reach too high  
into the buzzing streetlights, where my best excuses  
erupt grenade-like into islands of dust. I've been  
listening  
lately to the loudspeakers that implore me to keep  
climbing,  
but tonight, I feel more like an iron statue, grinning  
as it descends into the lava of its own melted feet.

**Sailing Stones**

Dane Hamann

Poetry

There is no evidence this is magic —  
this landscape, this collar of gravel roads.  
It's quiet. The field seems like a tabletop,  
the pavement like a lakebed. Trees the size  
of canyons. The hours glide like sheets of ice.  
Miles are scattered like torn paper, mountains  
of wind blowing in zigzagging devils.

There is a mystery though — we are stones,  
but escaped from that existence. We move  
across this place, this bone-rattling racetrack,  
propelled by some absurd magnetism. Soaked  
in dust, sun, and time. It's an unanswered  
question — one lost to the harsh furnace of  
movement. We are endlessly locked to it.

*This poem is a cento composed entirely of words  
sourced from Joseph Stromberg's article "How Do  
Death Valley's 'Sailing Stones' Move Themselves Across  
the Desert?" on Smithsonianmag.com.*

**Burdens**

Jeff Fleischer

Fiction

Sometime in the middle of the afternoon, after more than nine million uphill journeys, the boulder stayed in place. He waited there, anticipating the rock rolling back down like always. It did not.

“The gods have been made kind,” he thought, wiping his brow and grinning for the first time since his sentence began.

As he regarded the motionless boulder the next day, a new thought emerged. He now had nothing to do, no reason to wake up. For all its monotony, the boulder had provided a purpose, and he dreaded eternity without one.

The gods were not being kind.



**Mouth**  
Megha Sood  
Poetry

Our mouth is an entry point. It speaks of hunger,  
speaks of lust. The urgency of something  
more sacred than the hymns under the muted breath.

It speaks of the violence bodies endure.  
A gaping wound for our broken soul.  
An unspoken lexicon of silence and the spoken  
But misheard and misunderstood.

Desires birth on it.  
Anything that catches our attention  
needs to be validated by our mouths  
The epicenter of gluttony.  
The protagonist of the original sin.

The desirous taste should sit well  
before we can call it our own  
We call a lot of things our own.  
We desire:  
We possess.  
The most untamed of all senses.

A shiny trinket catches our attention  
and the slurping desire starts building.

We are creatures of mouth.  
We are creatures of wanting.

**Accrued Loneliness**

Megha Sood

Poetry

It is actually the accrued loneliness,  
which shapes a moon  
waxing and waning;  
complaining about the insincerity of nature

making it morph incessantly  
dangling between the cleaved darkness  
and fullness,  
before it reaches saturation.  
Saturation of love is always painful.

We have seen the love walking away.  
That stoic gesture,  
absence of the congruence of thoughts,  
snatching happiness by the fistful  
a boisterous possession.

Sometimes the moon sits still  
in the dark cleavage of the night  
and mourns its loneliness  
waiting to be whole.

**Uneven Pairs**  
Megha Sood  
Poetry

An unexpected demise  
a sudden loss,  
this parting of the words  
stripped of its emotions.

bereft of life  
a sudden violent realization  
which sends shudders through your  
yellow-tinged skin.

like on a cold winter morning  
of the funeral day,  
this putrid emotion dressed  
hiding the violent display notes  
marked in the ebony shade.

lose and pain intermixed together  
this alchemy seeps into  
the dull air —  
inhaled and exhaled

except for the old cinder body  
an uneven calculation of the breaths  
a dissonance of uneven pairs,  
hanging loosely in the soiled air.

**Simple Pleasures**

Megha Sood

Poetry

A desire so pure  
so serene;  
Like a soft squeal of newborn,  
the soft faint whispers of the prayers  
from nearby temples  
the hunger in your voice travels  
farther than the prayers of a stuffed belly

a belly full of desires--  
of compounding hunger,  
this hunger births beauty  
a fertile ground;  
a sprouting seed for an artistic desire

Hunger strips away the deception  
leaves you clean  
stripped of vices  
I feel complete to the sound of you reading your favorite  
poem  
sacred as a muezzin call to prayer

The words warm-up space between us  
in the middle of the night  
as the loneliness leans onto them

Simple pleasures are the deepest  
the contentment of getting fed by mother  
that ambrosial meal —  
those lumps of food  
salvation in each morsel

A tasteful memory deeply seeded in my heart

which longs for more  
more than a belly full of desire  
more than the pleasure of entwined bodies

This body is built on desires  
carved on the jagged edge of mounting wishes  
an endless succession;  
Of simple pleasures.

**The Old Station Clock**

Steve Haywood

Fiction

The door clicked shut. It sounded louder than normal and somehow ominous.

“How long?” Julie asked.

“How long what?”

“How long will she be?”

I shrugged, shuffling on the sofa to get more comfortable. “Does it matter?”

My wife looked at me in exasperation. “Of course it matters. What do you think, five minutes to walk to the shop, no more than five minutes in the shop, five minutes to get home? Fifteen minutes tops, yes?”

“I suppose so. Fifteen minutes, yes, that should do.”

Julia motioned to the clock on the wall above the TV. It was a large old station clock; my grandfather had rescued it from his local train station when it was closed down by the Beeching cuts in the 1960s. It showed quarter past eleven. “So, she should be back by half past.”

“Yes, she’ll be back before you know it.” I picked up my book, as much to end the conversation as because I wanted to read it.

It was difficult to concentrate with Julie fidgeting next to me. Eventually I looked up. “What’s the matter now?”

“What if she doesn’t look properly when crossing the road? The corner by the post office is a bad corner.”

“She knows; you told her already this morning. Several times. She’s walked that way hundreds of times with one of us. She’ll be fine.”

“I know, but she’s our little girl. She’s still so young.”

“She’s eleven now Julie; we’ve got to start giving her some more independence. We discussed this. In a few months she’ll be at high school, then she’ll be walking to school on her own every day.”

“I’m sorry. You’re right, of course. I’m just worried, you know?”

I squeezed her hand comfortingly. “It’s not yet twenty-five past. It’ll be fine. How about I make us a cuppa?”

“No, I’ll make it. It’ll keep me occupied until she gets back.”

Five minutes later, I sipped my coffee nervously. The long black minute hand had reached the bottom of the clock; half past eleven and still no sign.

“It’s half past,” Julie said accusingly. “You said she’d be back by now.”

“Give it a rest will you? There was probably a queue at the till. You know what those shop assistants are like; they’ll gab away to anyone even if the queue’s snaking all the way round the shop. Even as I said it though, beads of sweat were forming on my forehead. I thought she’d have been back by now.

Several minutes later, even I was starting to get a little worried when suddenly there was a loud knock. We both jumped up and practically raced each other to the door. I got there marginally ahead of Julie. I turned the handle, and I could see her ready to literally throw herself at Evie as soon as the door opened.

It wasn’t Evie. It was the postman. “Parcel for you,” he said with a confused look on his face. He obviously wasn’t used to such a welcoming committee.

“Thanks.” After he left, I walked to the end of the drive to peer down the road. She wasn’t anywhere in sight. We went back inside, exchanging a glance. I sat back down while Julie paced up and down the living room.

“What are we going to do?” she asked.

“Let’s just give her another five minutes. I’m sure she’ll be back by then.” I tried to inject a note of confidence in my voice that I didn’t really feel.

Each minute passed slower than the last. We were just staring at the clock now, which had taken on a sinister appearance. I felt myself wishing it had a seconds hand; the wait for the minute hand to move on felt like an eternity. As time moved slower and slower, my heart beat faster and faster until it felt like it was hammering at my chest, trying to break out.

Twenty to twelve, she’d been twenty-five minutes.

“Maybe you should walk around the corner; go and find her. Or take the car and drive down the road until you see her,” Julie said.

“Won’t that be really obvious? She’ll think we’re pathetic.”

“Do you care about that right now?”

“No, I guess not. Okay, I’ll go. I went into the hall, grabbed my keys off the hook on the wall and reached for the door just as it opened before me. There was Evie, a slight flush to her cheeks, her long blond hair slightly askew from the walk.

“Hi Dad, you off out?” She held out a bunch of flowers. “I stopped off at the florists on the way back, bought these for mum. Do you think she’ll like them?” Later that day, without saying anything to Julie, I took that damn clock down. It may have been in the family for half a century, but for ever after it would remind me of the most agonising half hour of my life. We gave it to a friend of ours with a young girl a few years younger than Evie. I imagined them sat in their house staring at that clock, waiting for their own little girl to get back, and suddenly felt a wave of sadness descend. Why does time have to go by so fast?



**Baltic Queen**  
 Sandip Saha  
 Poetry

It was our first voyage.  
 The Baltic Queen sailed  
 from Tallinn, capital of Estonia  
 in the afternoon, the sun here  
 sets late unlike our country, India.  
 We got a marvelous sea view cabin,  
 self-contained with attached bath,  
 toilet, comfortable two beds.  
 My wife and I looked out of the  
 big circular window, calm blue sea.  
 Everything gradually disappeared  
 only the sun in the sky and  
 water surrounding us, no mobile link  
 isolated from rest of the universe  
 on the surface of the earth,  
 at horizon the sky and sea met to kiss.

Announcement came in the room  
 about safety aspects, night programs  
 above all dinner and breakfast timings.  
 We were very hungry after the city tour;  
 went from our eighth floor to seventh,  
 a big dining hall, seats were reserved  
 hundreds of people took meal together  
 lot of varieties of food and fun amused us.

Going back to cabin time passed so fast  
 looking at the endless sea being covered  
 by the black dense hair of night goddess.  
 We fell asleep only to wake up just before dawn  
 small islands with peaceful huts welcomed us  
 hundreds of them picturesque, one after the other

the inhabitants were having boats instead of cars.  
Soon the Queen docked at Stockholm, we got down  
taking with us a memory we never had in life.

**Extinction Is Ideal**  
Sandip Saha  
Poetry

In harsh winter  
lake has frozen,  
mountain monk  
meditates in cave  
submerged in snow.

In plain, monks  
live in ashrams,  
work is worship  
for them, serve  
poor people.

Scientists send  
rockets to space  
to discover the  
mystery the moon,  
planets bear.

The common feature  
in all of them is  
everybody hankers after  
pleasure, happiness,  
joy or bliss as they can.

All these four faculties  
are same in nature  
vary only in degree.  
Monks arrest sexual  
pleasure for divine bliss.

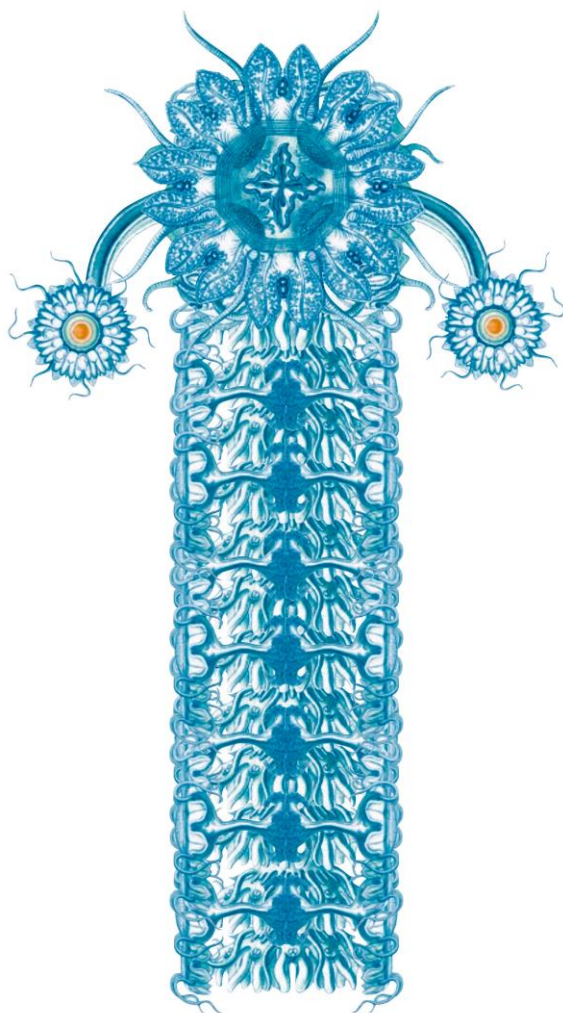
To get a relief from painful  
cycle of life we can

utilize all of them but  
bliss is not for all  
to get salvation, extinction is.

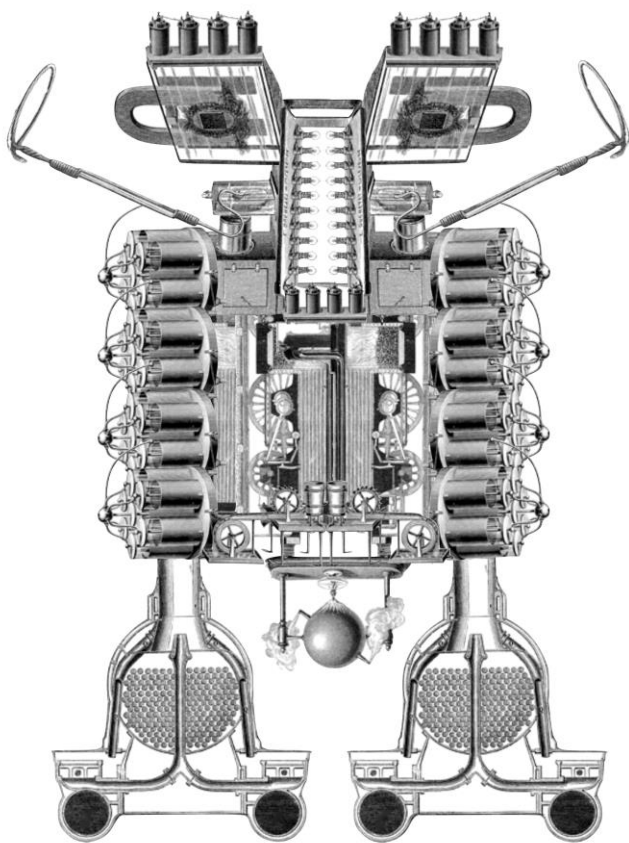
# The Unanticipated Attraction of Balance

Bill Wolak

Art



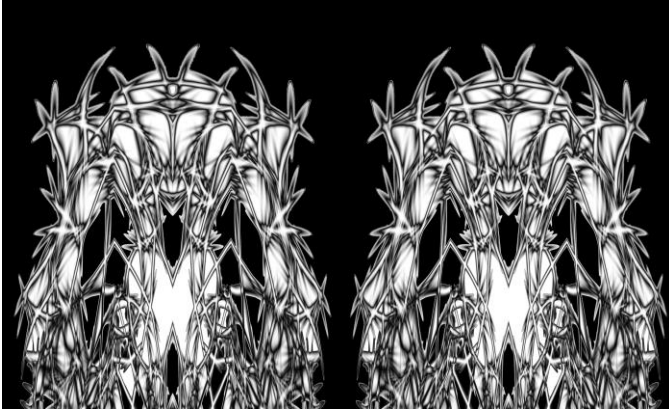
**Seeking the Stillness of Freckles**  
Bill Wolak  
Art



**Peril 3**

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Art



**Full to Overflowing**

Annette Gagliardi

Poetry

We wait with rapt attention,  
each breath observed, a single drop  
of water into  
a full bucket.

The surface tension swells with each drop of breath,  
rising like bread dough into a round mound.  
The surface trembles as each new  
breath is dropped — it is mesmerizing,  
each breath a measured drop,  
Plunk . . . Plunk . . . Plunk . . .  
as the bucket reaches capacity  
the surface tension holds a bit more  
than commonly measured.

We sit, knowing that the bucket will  
overflow eventually — soon, really.  
Very soon, now.

With each breath dropped we think  
it may be the last, yet  
there is one more, and one more,  
each Plunk... Plunk... Plunk...  
a shuddering addition:  
a rise, a pause, a quivering drop.

Anticipation is knowing how FULL  
the bucket, how near the time of  
overflowing — of breaking the surface  
tension, and we know that finally the bucket  
won't be able to hold one more  
breath dropped.



The bucket will overflow and he  
will drop.

**only women know how to weep**

Annette Gagliardi

Poetry

or how to get down deep  
with their fear, their agony — they weep  
for the tattered torment of years  
the salt in the wounds they bear  
they wail like a sail filled  
with a wild wind, blubbing  
unabashedly as their grief blows out —  
they gnash through the cavernous  
yawning, the rooted woe that is desolation's toe  
and foot hold to despair

without the gift of grief,  
no matter how brief,  
they are only lips on legs —  
hens without eggs,  
they are only heifers  
bawling for no reason

there is no relief  
from grief —  
no release  
yet, deliverance is only one teardrop away

**Submerged**

Annette Gagliardi

Poetry

Blue sky mirrors  
a still lake  
rock-field beneath  
no one awake  
tight spaces  
low places  
one man down  
rescuers ripped to roll  
scraping the bottom  
risking heaven and all  
because it's the right thing to do  
Periscope up.  
All ahead, full!

**Untitled**  
Annette Gagliardi  
Poetry

This life has been  
so full,  
so fascinating,  
so effervescent,  
that when I die,  
I shall ask,  
*“May I have another?”*

**Squirrels**  
Peter J. Stavros  
Fiction

Sadie's been feeling gravity's pull.

"The week is too long for life to be so short," she tells me at lunch, at the quaint café with the bay windows and red shutters we eat at occasionally, where we first ate when we first moved to town, the unwieldy box truck we rented parked catawampus in the lot taking three spaces because neither of us knew how to drive the stupid thing, those many years past that make it seem like a distant dream.

It's Wednesday, and Sadie says some days she doesn't know what to do with her time.

"I got all this time," she tells me between bites of a chicken salad sandwich on wheat toast with lettuce and tomato, delicately picking out the raisins, "and nothing to fill it with."

I tell Sadie that it's okay to have nothing to do, that she doesn't need to account for every single second, that she can sit back once in a while and take a deep breath, and relax.

"It's okay to relax," I say.

Sadie doesn't see it that way. She's got a restlessness, always has, ever since our paths crossed on freshmen move-in day, waiting in line for dorm assignments, a dozen different things happening at once and Sadie involved with all of them. She believes it's her responsibility, her duty even, to do something, anything, as much as she can, while she can, while she's here, while she's able. But too many restarts and reroutes and roadblocks have put Sadie in a panic.

"I might not be here much longer," Sadie continues, nearly pleads, excitable the way she gets when she's convinced of something and it's everyone else who

doesn't have a goddamn clue, "none of us maybe — there are no guarantees."

I ask Sadie if she knows something that I don't, that no one does, like is there a giant flaming meteor burning through the atmosphere on a collision course with earth that will obliterate the population at any moment, to try and lighten the mood and the mood should be lightened, at lunch, on a Wednesday, on a pleasant and otherwise carefree day. Sadie's not having any of it though. She says, "I'm fucking serious," and sort of half-drops, half-tosses her half-eaten sandwich onto the stoneware plate with the rose pattern, grabs her glass of iced tea, no lemon, water beads sliding down the side, and takes a desperate gulp. Her cheeks are flushed. I tell Sadie that I know, and I know, and that I was only joking, and I was, but I just hate to see her upset, and I do. Then I ask her if she's taken her pills. She looks down at the blue-and-white checked tablecloth, and nods.

Softer, slower, Sadie says, "Well... anyway," which is her way to end a topic, and move on to something else, or to nothing at all.

It turns out to be the latter, and we sit there, at the corner table that we always seem to get stuck at no matter when we come here, rush hour crowd or not, and finish our lunch in silence. The waitress, in a starched white apron tightly cinched around her waist, stops by and asks us if we want anything else, perhaps dessert, blackberry cobbler, or brownie sundae, or banana pudding. We each politely decline so she leaves the check and tells us we can pay whenever we're ready.

Sadie says we're ready and reaches for the check, but I intercept it. After all, I should be the one to pay because lunch was my idea because I like to meet Sadie in the middle of the day, and it breaks up my day, and I thought it broke up Sadie's too however now I'm not so sure because it sounds like Sadie needs more and I don't

know what more to do. I offer to drive Sadie downtown on my way back to the office, and she can go to the museum, or a movie, or sit in a coffee shop and read her book, the one with the couple locked in a passionate embrace on a nondescript beach on the cover. But she prefers to walk home, a detour through the park since it's nice out, an unseasonably warm late September afternoon, to take advantage of the weather before fall descends like a fleece blanket, and maybe sit on a bench and watch the squirrels.

"Have you ever sat and watched the squirrels?"

Sadie asks me as we step outside and onto the curb, the awkward pause before we go our separate ways.

"Not really," I reply. "I mean, I see them, obviously — they're everywhere."

"No, you gotta *watch* them," Sadie clarifies. "Just watch them sometime." She leans in to give me a peck on the neck and I can smell the lilac from her perfume or lotion or whatever, as I briefly close my eyes and inhale. "They're always on the go, always doing something — so focused, so intense. They have a sense of real purpose."

"Squirrels?" I question, to make sure we're still talking about the same thing.

"Just watch them," she repeats, knowingly, "you'd be surprised."

"You're not a squirrel," I say to Sadie as she turns away, slings her overstuffed brown leather bag that I swear must contain her whole world over her shoulder and flips her hair tied loosely in a haphazard ponytail with a green and pink bandana. "It's okay to do nothing."

Sadie just raises her right hand, waves it in the air, to appease me, to acknowledge she heard me and nothing more, as she proceeds to leave. I stand and watch her, for several seconds, or longer, before I get into my car, and

drive back to the office, spying Sadie in the rearview mirror, until she disappears, hoping Sadie finds what she needs, wondering how I can help her, frustrated because maybe I can't.



## An American Dream

Thomas Healy

Nonfiction

The box of books arrived within the week, just as the publisher said, and when I saw it on the porch I quickly picked it up before anyone saw it and took it into the house. It was about the size of a hat box, heavy enough to strain my arms. Nothing inside rattled so it was packed tightly.

It was something I had been waiting for longer than I could remember. Often, during that time, I imagined I'd behave like a child on Christmas morning and tear open the parcel in a matter of seconds. Instead, though, I carried it upstairs and set it on the floor in a corner. I did not open it that day, or the day after, and still have not opened it and wonder if I ever will.

When I graduated from college, I did not have any particular aim in mind to pursue other than I hoped to write a book before I turned twenty-five. I had no idea what to write about, just that I wished to achieve this peculiar ambition which was quite unusual for someone who hailed from a remote corner of the country where writers were as rare as rays of sunlight. Before I was able to come up with a subject for my expectant manuscript, however, I entered the Army where all I thought about was getting out. And soon after my discharge, for whatever reason, I started reading *Dubliners*. Immediately the characters in the collection of stories resonated with me; they were the sort of people I grew up with, relatives and acquaintances whose temperament and grit I shared. So much of the fiction I had read prior to this dealt with larger-than-life figures in strange lands involved in even stranger pursuits. These were not the sort of people James Joyce wrote about, though, which prompted me to consider

writing about some of the similar people I knew from home.

Until then, I had never attempted any kind of imaginative writing, never even thought of doing such a thing because in school I was primarily interested in reading accounts of diplomatic history. Seemingly, writers of fiction were people of vast experience with so much to say they were certain others would be interested in reading their stories. That was not me, however. I was a pretty naïve person, with scarcely any experience at all, who just wanted to get what I wanted to say right. I was not interested in writing veiled biographies but rather was determined to write about the kind of people I knew in a frank and honest way.

It was hard, much harder than I expected, and for years one story after another was declined. I grew less and less hopeful about achieving my goal of having a book published before I was twenty-five but still I persisted. And, eventually, enough of my stories were published in assorted small journals and reviews to be collected in a book which I titled *A Time of Times*. Or so I believed but I was mistaken for scant interest was shown in publishing my collection. Again and again I mailed it out in digital and hard copy formats and always it was returned with evident disinterest. And always I was bitterly disappointed, wondering if it would ever be accepted.

Over the years I have had numerous short stories published in assorted journals and reviews but never what I really wanted: a book of my own that I could hold in my hands and sign and pass on to others. That eluded me for decades until this summer when my collection of initial stories was finally published in book form and copies were sent to me in a firm brown cardboard box.

I was grateful, to be sure, but also a little wary and just could not open the box. Deep down I knew it

contained more than a bundle of books. Inside were the disappointment and heartache I had known for so many years — feelings I did not wish to experience again so I thought it best to keep the box sealed.

**Sleep on the Floor, Part 1**

Kristin LaFollette

Art



**Layers**

Brian Rihlmann

Poetry

you once walked barefoot  
through the field  
mud squishing  
between your toes

or sat and played  
in cold fireplace ashes  
face blacked  
like a noble savage

you used to run out  
from your bath  
when the fire was going  
and curl up naked  
warm yourself  
by the flames

then, one day  
a bit older  
you did  
as you'd always done  
and the gods yelled  
"What are you doing?  
Put your jammies on!"

you were confused  
and ashamed  
but you obeyed

winter came  
the days grew colder  
you added layer

after layer

maybe one day  
you'll sail to the tropics  
and peel them all  
to reveal skin  
wrinkled like old parchment

**The Maze**  
Brian Rihlmann  
Poetry

all my poems  
are nothing  
but a long  
tortuous line  
like a child draws  
through a maze  
on a restaurant placemat

a U-turn here  
a crossout there  
a do over  
lines intersect  
or run parallel

I saw at Time's jugular  
with a dull blade  
all for my own amusement  
my own enlightenment...  
salvation...  
my I don't know what

finally I tear the whole thing  
to shreds  
crumple it  
hand it to the waitress

stare at the table  
as I shyly ask  
for another

**A Child in Blue Coveralls**

Brian Rihlmann

Poetry

a not so young man  
pushes a cart across the lot  
he runs with it  
jumps aboard  
with a smile

as he unloads cardboard  
into the dumpster  
he gazes at the blue autumn sky  
at the multicolored leaves  
of a nearby oak

he takes his time  
and after — gets a running start  
and rides the cart back  
smiling like a child in blue coveralls  
on the playground

at the shop door  
he dismounts  
and the smile fades  
as he goes back inside  
all grown up again



**Indoctrination**  
Brian Rihlmann  
Poetry

the messages flash  
green and gold  
strobe-like across screens  
pierce eyelids and skulls  
thousands a day  
dropped like seeds  
into fertile young soil

they sprout and grow  
glisten like sports cars  
diamond smiles and oiled skin  
dreams of perfection on sale  
happiness for rent

by 18 it's a jungle  
the branches pummel you  
like a gauntlet of nightsticks  
on an L.A. street corner  
you don't escape  
without things bruised and busted

while other termite agonies  
creep in undetected  
hide in the basement  
waiting to jump out  
and yell "Surprise!"  
as your house collapses  
one night in midlife

**The Truth of Our Dust**

Brian Rihlmann

Poetry

as I walk  
among the fading yellow  
and reddening leaves  
among those bursting orange  
or bleeding black  
I remember reading somewhere  
that these are actually  
the true colors of their flesh  
the green merely a ruse of summertime

I think back to spring  
with its stunning array  
of brief blossoms  
the lie of its perfume

then ahead to winter  
the stripped bare branches  
of Sycamores shivering  
against a pale sky

perhaps those bones then  
those wind rattled skeletons  
in skull grey monochrome  
are the truest color of all

the belief tempts me  
but this is not so

each is true in its time—  
the buds and blossoms  
the green leaves  
their shriveled

and shredded remnants

just as we were true  
in our season  
as we burst open  
set the world ablaze  
with our brilliance  
then withered and pulled apart

and even today  
as we bask separately  
under the same sun  
in the truth of our dust

**Notre Dame Inferno**

Christina Ciufu

Poetry

Orange-black flames  
swallow vitality Notre Dame's  
lattice-work.

Circular Indigo-navy,  
rose stained glass window  
blooms God's holiness.

Grey-black smoke  
veils its' vivid, fragile  
colors.

Charcoal gargoyles perched  
at stone beamed edges,  
shrieking their somber shrills  
with the haunting, melancholy  
percussion of her bells.

Paris distress  
The world in heart ache

Remnants of French Gothic artwork  
becomes charred, ardent, and broken.  
They plummet, like fallen angels from  
Heaven into the cracks of Hell,  
and onto the white marble floor.  
Each prayer dowsed  
from tall black candelabras.

Faint aroma of frankincense  
streams down, like  
the tranquil Seine waters,

from the lattice wood cross  
onto the alter.

Holy Spirit permeates through  
Paris' discord.  
Notre Dame's inferno ceases.  
She still stands.

A white dove opens its' divine wings  
against the sunlight as it flies over  
God's temple called Notre Dame.

**I Wish I Had the Foresight of Charlene Wood**

Lannie Stabile

Poetry

I'd like to think I have regular, meaningful conversations with my body. Less *good morning* and *good night*, and more *how are you, really* and *you make me proud*. I'd like to think we are close enough and in-sync enough, that goosebumps are rumble strips, a crabwise gut is a trigger, and a tremoring bridge is *let's get the fuck out of here*. I'd like to think, based on a shaky hunch, I'd reverse my '67 Pontiac to solid land, mouthing a horrified prayer for the car ahead. Instead of sliding along with it into the dark depths of the Ohio River. I'd like to think I wouldn't have been the 47th person to perish on Silver Bridge.

But I don't trust myself.

Sometimes, even when I know I'm full, I keep eating.  
Sometimes, when co-workers discuss the Weinstein Effect, I pretend I'm not a compilation of flashbacks.  
Sometimes, when the fist is flying, I don't dodge it.

**Lost in Urban Landscaping #35: Street**

Yrik-Max Valentonis

Poetry

Running through backyards and climbing fences  
(watch out for lawnmowers and territorial dogs)  
is the quickest way to go

Bikes and skateboards pile against the fence

Playing basketball in the street in front of my cousin's  
house  
rebound off parked cars  
(a quick brake for traffic)  
bungee cords holding the hoop to the telephone pole  
Teddy always climbs the pole to tie the hoop on  
he'll climb anything

Old Lady Giniewicz yelled at him  
and called his parents, when he climbed the water tower  
he was on the catwalk by the time they got there  
he wouldn't come down for over an hour  
and was grounded for a month

We watched from the fort  
and our parents came and took us home

**26 August 2003**  
Yrik-Max Valentonis  
Poetry

Cosmic Yesterday — Summer Romance

The war god looks at his cousin  
holding her hand  
atmosphere — atmosphere  
jealous sister Luna  
butting in  
soft kiss

Neanderthal and Erectus look up  
at the vengeful red cyclops eye  
Mars needs women  
and took the hardier  
leaving behind the lithe tool-wielder  
to discover the science of survival of the fittest

The hairy Neanderthal-Yeti still hides  
seen as often as Martians  
hoping to pick up dates  
she sends him letters  
little toys exploring  
his surface emotions  
the red eye winks seduction  
another chaste date  
closely watched



**Control of the Situation**

Yrik-Max Valentonis

Fiction

Louise checked the clock again. It had been fifteen minutes since she last checked. Rob was now an hour and fifteen minutes late. He said he would pick her up at 7:30 PM. It was getting to be too late for dinner. Her stomach ached. She had only eaten a light lunch. It was a busy day at work and her boss had surprised her with extra tasks. It was someone else's job; Anne's job, actually.

Anne had neglected to do the work having overbooked herself in pointless but noticeable meetings. She knew how to play office politics. She held big meetings to discuss ideas that the upper management loved to talk about but did nothing to implement. The managers all saw her at these meetings and they thought of her as an idea person. What she really did was to reiterate what they had said earlier as if she too had come to the same conclusions. She then complimented them on their great insights and understanding. They ate it up. But the day to day work of keeping the company running had to fall upon someone's desk, and that is where Louise was noticed. She plowed through work and avoided most meetings. And frequently only ate half of her lunch at her desk in order to keep up the demands of her job and Anne's slack.

Anne would compliment Louise: 'She is a hard worker. Not an innovator, though. She's so nice. It would be nicer if she could see the big picture and not always get caught up in the weeds.'

Another fifteen minutes went by. Louise chuckled at how consistent she was being in checking the time: the world's slowest metronome. Rob hadn't responded to the text she sent forty-five minutes ago. She didn't want

to seem desperate or clingy, so she hadn't sent any other texts after that. Since she was hungry and dressed up, she decided to go to the sports bar down the street. It was her usual hang out and she knew the staff and some of the other regulars. She could get some bar food and still not feel quite alone, even if she was.

Rob and Anne were sitting in a booth at the bar. Louise slipped back out the door, hoping no one noticed her. She turned around and bumped into her usual waitress, Amy, coming back from a smoke break.

"Hey. Are you leaving already? I didn't even know you were here tonight?"

"Uhm, yeah. I couldn't stay long. I gotta go."

"Hold up. You couldn't have been here for more than five minutes. I just stepped out. What's going on?"

"Nothing. I just don't feel well. I should probably go home."

Rob had noticed her by then. He waved. He wasn't exactly smiling, teeth were showing but, there was no happiness in his face. Anne turned to face the Louise in the doorway, she too had no joy in her toothy expression.

Louise strained a smile back at them and slightly waved. She turned back to Amy and let her face sadden.

"Rob and I had a date tonight. He blew me off."

"Oh, honey, I'm so sorry. I didn't know."

"Too late now." Louise walked to their booth. Anne slid over, giving enough room for Louise to sit down and join them.

"You look nice," Anne said. "You changed out of your frumpy work clothes."

"Yeah, I guess," Louise answered.

"Have a big night planned?" Anne asked.

"Not really. Just thought I would come out for a little bit." Louise checked the clock, half an hour since she last looked.

“Funny, I ran into Anne here tonight and we ended up talking. It turns out we both know you. Who would have guessed? Small world and all.” Rob said.

“I suppose. This is close to my apartment. And not too far from the office,” said Louise.

Amy came to the table, bringing Louise a glass of chardonnay. “This is from Mike. The nice man at the bar,” Amy smiled. “I can vouch for him. He’s a sweetheart. Why don’t you go say hi to him?” Amy nodded to Louise.

Louise smiled, genuinely. She turned and looked at Rob and Anne. “It would be rude if I didn’t at least thank him. You two have a good night. Nice seeing you both.” She got up and went over to Mike.

“Hi. Thank you for the drink.”

“You’re welcome,” Mike said. “I’ve seen you here before and Amy told me that guy was gaslighting you. So, we thought I could rescue you. I’m not going to try anything. I’m happily married, and my wife works nights, so I come here. Are you OK?”

“I’m better now. Thanks.”

“I’m better now. Thanks.”

**Player**  
Kelly Talbot  
Fiction

They say you never forget your first. Mine had skin like chocolate lava cake, shimmering in the sun. She smiled at me, and I said, “Hey, girl, why don’t you scoot your pretty little self on over here?” And she did. And it was so sweet.

But you know, once you have a taste, you want more. And once you have more, your curiosity starts to get the better of you. Before I knew it, I was back out on the street, looking for something else.

Next, I picked up this little yellow thing. She was a freak. She’d frown and grin and bounce up and down at the same time, shouting “Yi yi yi yi yi yi!” And she was full of energy, too. I thought she’d never finish. But she did. After a while, that got old, too. So, I was out on the prowl again.

It doesn’t always go my way. One time I saw this little honey all wrapped up in hot pink at the bus stop. I was across the street. She didn’t seem to see me. I was about to make my move, but then a big bus pulled up, and she was gone. She must have got on that bus. Sometimes I think about that day and wonder what I missed.

Last week I had two at the same time. God’s honest truth. I know some people say it can’t be done, but I did it. Don’t ask me how. I don’t even know. It was intense. Don’t get me wrong, it was cool, but it was definitely intense. One of ’em had a mohawk, and the other one had these ears. Man, those ears were freakishly huge. That cracked me up.

Yesterday there was one at the coffee shop with a crooked nose, one eye, and a humped back. I snagged

her and took her home, too. Here, take a look. I've got her picture right here.

My mom says I should stop playing games and get out there and get serious and find me a girl. Me, I'm having too much fun. I'm not going to stop until I've collected them all. Maybe once I have all the Pokémon, then I can think about girls. A player's gotta play, yo.

**The Talk**  
Kelly Talbot  
Fiction

The batter is getting thicker and thicker as I stir it with the wooden spoon. It feels like I'm mixing cement.

"Here, Janine. Why don't you let me help you with that?" Grandma reaches out to try to take the bowl.

I cradle the bowl in my arms and turn slightly away, still stirring. "I can do this, Grandma. Don't worry. I won't spill it."

"I know you won't. I was just worried that it might be getting too difficult."

I stop stirring, push up my sleeve, and make a muscle. "Look at that. I'm tougher than Serena Williams!"

Grandma laughs and claps her hands. "You are! She better hope you don't take up tennis."

I go back to stirring. My muscles are really aching, but I don't want Grandma to aggravate her arthritis. I need to take care of her while she takes care of me.

"So, how's your little friend, Mikey?"

"Don't let him hear you call him that. He's eight years old now. He goes by 'Mike' now."

Grandma makes her serious face and talks to me in a more adult tone. That's really sweet. "So, how's Mike?"

"He's fine." But I know what she's really asking me. I stop stirring and turn to face her. "Grandma, I want to talk with you about something."

Her whole face lights up with anticipation. She's so excited, she looks ten years younger.

"I don't think I like boys. I like girls."

Grandma's face freezes for what seems like eternity, and then she chuckles and makes a dismissive wave with her hand. "Oh, how can you know at this age? You haven't even reached puberty yet."

“Grandma.” My voice is gentle, but firm. “Was there a little boy that you liked when you were eight years old?”

“Oh, sure. Willy Jordan. I’ll never forget the time...”

“Grandma.” She looks at me. “You knew. You knew.”

She stares off into space, nodding.

“You’re right. I did. Sometimes I forget how much eight-year-olds know.”

I watch her and wait. I know she needs time to think about this.

Finally, she says “Honey, this might be the most important thing I ever tell you. Be who you are. The Good Lord made you, and you are perfect. Don’t let anybody tell you different.” And her eyes tear up with love.

As I run forward to hug her, the bowl of batter that I hastily set on the counter clatters to the floor, and it doesn’t matter at all.

## You are a Miracle

Mandira Pattnaik

Nonfiction

No? Don't you believe in miracles? Of course you do. Call yourself what you will, wherever you are, but *you're* a miracle, just as you're — a probability, a slim chance, one out of a million possibilities. Lest you misjudge your leanings, take yourself back a few decades, drag yourself across the seas, haul yourself up the rocks of the valley where your home was and let the moments stream, like a dream, ever and ever, just the same.

Back then you didn't believe in miracles. You were a prefatory woman — all of seventeen. In your poor world, you believed in education. You prided yourself to be a woman of laws and logic. In the Pashtun valleys, on the heartless slopes, you had rebelled to go to school. The trek was difficult, but you were fiery and always hungry for more.

But then, was it chance that broke the symphony? Was it miracle that you happened to look into his eyes and the floodgates had opened? Who says love can't happen on first sight? Oh! Those azure pools of timeless infinity — how you had drowned in them! Were *you* chosen to play the heroine of a tale that weaved itself?

You let go of your books; you changed course like a mountain brook. You thought you didn't know if language was an ethic, and love too, and if language would be better than love, until he spelt out promises in language-art, subject of your dreams ever since. You realized you didn't appreciate why you were born, if not to *feel* miracle for one ephemeral second — his wet lips brushing yours. The very next moment you had known miracles don't repeat. You said to the eternal void, "Things will never be the same — ever again."



Did you not know, in your land, there's no place for love? To love was sin; to love — outside the fold — a stark betrayal! It wasn't chance that the venomous dual beasts of culture and customs had their fangs out. When the custodians of honor had found out, they said honor was what they must save, customs and family name were paramount, and the price of two lives was nothing at all! A girl is born to bloom unseen, lest the dirty air sully her sheen. But they still let many a girl be wasted, brutalized or butchered, by their very own.

When the pyre was lit, and he and you stood trembling, they asked you to beg for forgiveness. He fell near your feet, on his knees, begged for forgiveness to the baying men. He cowered down, said, "Mercy!"

Mercy *was* bestowed on his living self. His body *did* live; but when he fell, when love was lost, his soul was lost. He faded, until the trace was gone. You climbed the burning pyre alone, under inky darkness, not even the stars to bestow the light on them. When the tongues of fire began licking you they quietly left the place. You didn't beg for miracles, but they came. For once, the chest of black cracked open — to spray the ancient wrath! With spears of lightning, a torrent came, that easily doused the fire.

You ran and ran, against the rain, against the citadels of mediocracy, and finally found a place to exist, in the poetry of earth. You lived to see love and faith die a thousand deaths. You lived to see kindness left to rot, in the graves of a thousand men. You lived to hear a beating heart rise in a sea of voices that carried a cause the loudest shrieks, the ones that brought down monarchies.

Where you exist, beyond your window on a spring morning, you see sunshine — yellow-and-mellow, of truth and courage — plant dew-kisses on the grass. You think of miracles like that — miracles like the parting of

unsullied monsoon grays to reveal a slice of gold and amber, like cascading falls, chirping birds, dancing cedars. Miracles like the earth and life. Miracles like peace and sanity. You gather yourself, say, “Miracles happen, again and again.”

**Fall**

Edward Lee

Poetry

What were once heaven's stars  
are now dust on the floor,  
still hot to the touch,  
burning small holes in the stone,  
immortal in their dying,  
their shattered edges lethal  
after their long fall  
from above,

like rain  
to signal the end of the world.

**Warmth**

Edward Lee

Poetry

*I would rather go cold  
than burn words,*  
says the man  
living in his cave,  
alone, save for  
the words at his fingertips,  
and the worlds  
in his head,  
some his, most born  
from the minds of others;

his nights are cold,  
but when sleeps comes,  
as it sometimes does,  
his dreams are warm,

his dreams  
are warm, and full of lives  
worth dying for.

**Anticipation**

Edward Lee

Poetry

Too cold, breaths  
clouding in the air,  
we made fierce love  
with are clothes  
still on, reaching imaginary climaxes  
that shook our bodies  
and eventually heated our skins enough  
to strip and stand naked  
before each other, fingers  
and tongues probing  
with eager ignorance,  
sharp numbness giving way  
to sweet pain

**Untitled**  
J.L Moultrie  
Poetry

I'd gladly give my life  
for a hell with no tumult

My body is a capsized ship,  
languid and resistant to change

My throat, full of laconic debris,  
is a sundrenched shelter

The prostrating flames are only a glint;  
a slight grave in the loam

**Kick the Can**  
Mark Belair  
Poetry

After it got too dark  
to see the players  
or the can, we  
played on anyway, unwilling  
to call the game off  
and head for home, the captured players  
happier jailed where they were,  
the boy who was “it”  
just protecting the can, the players in hiding  
just staying put, the whole game  
locked in place, only the darkness  
in motion as it gathered and deepened, the once  
rowdy neighborhood game  
devolved to a spray of boys  
each stalled in silent aloneness,  
each thinking of their hushed homes  
and remembering  
how each of their dads  
were once rowdy boys too.

**Clothesline**

Mark Belair

Poetry

A family  
of wet bathing suits  
gritted with beach sand  
falls cold on a clothesline, forgotten  
by homeward-bound cottage renters, suits  
that, by next summer, would have been outgrown  
or out of style anyway, suits that — unlike the gritty  
basket  
of memories the family took back — can't refashion,  
with time,  
themselves.



**Herbs**  
Mark Belair  
Poetry

I took a knife  
and diced garlic, onions, basil, and parsley  
for my cooking-abstracted wife,  
then, of course, inhaled the mingled scents  
lingering on my fingers and  
remembered once remembering  
how as a baby I would  
chew contentedly  
on my warm, fat, fresh-smelling, available  
toes, their fragrance  
letting me know  
I was alive and whole, a little, juicy  
ball of being  
just popped from the oven, spanking hot, unsuspectingly  
cooling down.

**What Stays**

Anna Teresa Slater

Poetry

My father was the only one who said my name  
like a single beat of a drum; a deep boom  
swirling wide around a yogi's Om.  
I would hear it billowing long after he left  
the room; four letters that never knew  
they could grow bigger than a breadbox,  
larger than all the shapes ballooning in the night.  
For years when he phoned, he didn't bother  
with hellos. Just my name announced in bass,  
its echo laced with whirling kites, root beer foam,  
belly laugh tears. Even now, his voice  
still appears like a one-note hum inside  
my head — as if he lives within  
the cochlea of both ears — getting louder  
like a summons, or a command to dance.

**A Returning**

Anna Teresa Slater

Poetry

today for a minute I thought  
I saw the child you lost.  
her eyes much like yours  
wider, milder around the corners  
sitting cross-legged right  
next to others I hadn't seen  
for a while as well.  
she was a picture  
as though light had unearthed  
her, as if she had been waiting  
for that second, that rebirth  
and I wondered where she had  
been hiding for so long.  
I have seen her before today  
here and there, a wild giggle  
under an Acacia tree, when dipping  
her toes into lingering sea,  
recalling how she traced Canopus  
in the sky with her finger.  
the minute was over and just  
like that she went away  
leaving jade and dust.  
I hope I see her again  
after today, even after all  
that has happened to you.

**Hero**  
Toti O'Brien  
Nonfiction

I was introduced to Ulysses the year when I dropped out of school.

Once a week I was given a private lesson to keep me occupied. The instructor taught me grammar and Latin. Then, in order to change the pace, she read me long passages from her very own *Odyssey* — a brown volume so worn that it looked alive, as if the cloth of the cover had transformed by osmosis into skin, leather, hide under the sweaty touch of ten avid fingers.

The *Odyssey* was all twists and turns, like the path the bus took up the verdant mound where my instructor lived. Once a week she selected an episode and she asked me to take notes as she read. Later I would write down a brief summary — nothing challenging, truly. Soon we became acquainted — my tutor and Homer, heroes, heroines and I — in a pleasant, almost intimate way.

I was still a child, not yet fully weaned from fairytales, princes, ogres, looking for something else and not quite sure what.

Having finished elementary school ahead of time, too young for sixth grade, while I aimlessly and happily loafed in limbo I fell in love with Ulysses.

\*

As I gathered from Homer's resonant verse and my tutor's glosses, he didn't look princely. Unlike all heroic males in the picture books I perused, he wasn't blond or blue-eyed. My instructor swore he was dark-haired, curled, and he looked Sicilian. Perhaps Middle Eastern. With a zest of Muslim, perhaps. If Homer thought him

handsome — for sure — I could not because during my upbringing (Barbie time) handsome was invariably equated with fair.

But Ulysses was smart. My tutor — why did she? — made sure I understood that cleverness was the ace up his sleeve and the secret of his charm. He could figure out things so well, so finely, he could beat up a giant twice his size — which sounded more like genius than brains. Suddenly I found such quality invaluable. Wouldn't I love a lad who loved thinking? Wouldn't I want to spend time with him? Rather, waiting for him...

\*

This last point—the hero's bent for exquisite absence — I hadn't really figured out. I suspect the cause of my omission was the vagueness of my newfound feelings. What did falling in love mean, exactly? Did I identify with Penelope? Being Circe or Calypso would have been off-limits—my instructor painted such temptresses as witches. Nausicaa? Wait, wait, I was raised a catholic. Good and loyal Penelope was the perfect role model. How much time did Ulysses spend with dear Penny in that humongous book? Did I count?

Time wasn't a solid feature. As I said I loafed in limbo, soaked within the illusion I'd never see a classroom again, enjoying an interlude of unboundedness and — look — bumping into a beautiful wanderer... Time wasn't steady stuff for him either. Ulysses got stuck, turned in circles and pedaled backwards. He tied time into loops. He twisted and twirled it. Maybe he had thrown his watch on the rails, for the bus to run over it, as my grandpa suggested I'd do. That way, Grandpa said, I would never grow old. Did Ulysses know? Was old age what he fled?

I had no idea. Time was awfully or awesomely blurred.

\*

About absence? Since I loved him, let's say that I'd marry him. At least become his girl. Let's say he'd dive from ancient Greece right into the present to meet me. Same Ulysses, same lad. Did I realize how consistently he would be late for dinner? How strong was his taste for detours? How enthralled he was by all sorts of entertainers — fortunetellers, sea-singers and such? How enthralled they were by him?

I did not give these peccadillos a thought. Strange, as the world around me was crammed with this very kind of male faults and female complaints.

But who cared? I had just peeked out of the woods, shed my red-hooded cape. I didn't have a clue about relationships' policy and challenges, not to mention perspective married life. What loving Ulysses meant was — of course — being with him on the ocean, not in Ithaca weaving. I entirely ignored Penelope's canvas, or red flag. I believed I'd be Ulysses' double — souls and bodies overlapping.

Truly, when I fell for the hero I guessed I'd become him. Or I hoped, I promised I would. I'd grew up to be a fierce explorer, a great voyager going from island to island to island. Never weary of surprises, never sorry or defeated. With the sea as my companion. An unquenchable thirst for wind and for salt. A hard head. Lots of patience.

**Toni Morrison: In Airplane Mode**

Devon Burton

Poetry

You are better off with the angels  
They will not ask for interpretations  
You are better off with eternity  
Time sought to limit you.

I stood in an airport when I heard of your passing.  
In Albany, heading to Philadelphia.  
It was correct I took to the air,  
like you did many times before.  
The last summer you read a book,  
words no longer functioned the way you needed them to.  
To create and have nothing else to prove.  
A little girl from Ohio.  
You listened to the stories of black people.  
The small, selected group of black intellectuals shaped  
American letters.  
I placed my phone in airplane mode.  
All to ponder were the clouds, the clean blue sky, and  
plot development.  
When black people take to the air,  
such amazement and wonder is there.  
For a time, to reside above the same clouds  
that view gentrification, compromised drinking water,  
and police shootings.  
While practicing literature,  
you were preparing yourself  
for the moment you would become a shooting star.  
Bright, small, present.  
Racing across the perpetual night.  
When the plane moved through the clouds the aircraft  
shook.  
The moments of turbulence reflected,

the careful diction you selected.

On August 6, 2019, I wanted to wrap you in a blanket of  
didactic phrases.

That queer language that converts the abstract into the  
concrete.



**Mornings: Ira Speaks**

Richard Widerkehr

Poetry

Sometimes, mornings when the streets are cold,  
a small, dark figure,  
a shadow printed in concrete,  
moving slowly down empty streets —  
I feel alone and excited in the middle of the world.

**In The Lobby Bar At Akumal, Mexico**

Richard Widerkehr

Poetry

Under this latticework of thatch and wood, a young  
woman  
pulls him onto the floor. *You're dancing with me*, she  
says.

He's been Lindy stepping by himself in the shadows.

Now as their bodies sway to "Chain of Fools,"  
it's as if some light box has stolen bits of this blood  
super moon, spilled them on the black water.

He huffs and struts — her tight black jeans, black eyes

—  
is she thinking, *Don't want to give this nice, old man  
a heart attack?* He twirls her by the finger tips.

This almost-full moon, these yellow pieces of eight,  
ink spot waves. The dance is over; she high fives him.  
I'm smoke in smoke, he thinks; she's fire in fire.

## Contributor Bios

Mark Belair

My poems have appeared in numerous journals, including Alabama Literary Review, Atlanta Review, The Cincinnati Review, Harvard Review, Michigan Quarterly Review, Poetry East and The South Carolina Review. Author of seven collections of poems, my most recent are the companion volumes *Taking Our Time* and *Running Late* (Kelsay Books, 2019). I have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize multiple times, as well as for a Best of the Net Award. Please visit [www.markbelair.com](http://www.markbelair.com)

Rachael Biggs

Rachael Biggs is an author whose memoir *Yearning for Nothings and Nobodies* published in 2012. She studied creative writing at Langara College and UCLA and holds a screen writing diploma from Vancouver Film School. Her short fiction has appeared in *The Dalhousie Review*, *Horror Sleaze Trash*, *Charge Magazine*, *5 on the Fifth* and *Adelaide Magazine*. IG: @rachael\_biggs\_author Website: [rachaelbiggs.com](http://rachaelbiggs.com)

Jacob Butlett

Jacob Butlett is a Pushcart Prize nominee living in Iowa. Everything and nothing inspires him, including family photographs and empty street corners. He has never had a boyfriend, but he does have a cuddly Maine coon named Chip (he has a chipped front tooth). What more could a gay guy ask for?

Devon Burton

The objectives of poetry challenges and humbles author, educator, and poet Devan Burton. "A poem must articulate an emotion, above all else." Devan Burton is

an Assistant Professor of English at Walters State Community College, the author of *The Will of the World*, uses numerous manual typewriters to revise his poems and prose.

#### Christina Ciufu

Christina Ciufu is a passionate writer of poetry, short stories, flash fiction, and fables; she is completing her first novel. From a young age, she always had a passion for writing stories and poems, specifically fairytales, folklore, supernatural, and horror. She enjoys writing about these genres in various forms because she believes that telling stories about supernatural forces evokes a haunting and terrifying imagination that brings joy and fright. She has appeared in *Gravitas*, *Spillwords*, *Ovunque Siamo*, and *Nymphs I Writers*.

#### Natasha Deonarian

Natasha Deonarian lives part-time between Arizona and Colorado. Her poems are published or forthcoming in *NELLE*, *Rigorous*, *Packingtown Review*, *Thin Air Magazine*, *Dime Show Review*, *Prometheus Dreaming* and *Canyon Voices Literary Magazine*.

#### Jeff Fleischer

Jeff Fleischer is a Chicago-based author, journalist and editor. His fiction has appeared in more than forty publications including the *Chicago Tribune's* *Printers Row Journal*, *Shenandoah*, the *Saturday Evening Post* and *So It Goes* by the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library. He is also the author of non-fiction books including "Votes of Confidence: A Young Person's Guide to American Elections" (Zest Books, 2016 and 2020), "Rockin' the Boat: 50 Iconic Revolutionaries" (Zest Books, 2015), and "The Latest Craze: A Short History of Mass Hysterias" (Fall River Press, 2011).

### Annette Gagliardi

Annette has poetry published Genre: Urban Arts No. 8, Poetry Quarterly, Down in the Dirt Online Magazine, and Dreamers Creative Writing Year 1 Anthology. She is an editor of and contributor to Upon Waking: 58 Voices Speaking Out From The Shadow of Abuse. Annette teaches poetry at a nearby elementary school as a volunteer. She has won two national and six state awards for her poetry.

### John Grey

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in That, Dunes Review, Poetry East and North Dakota Quarterly with work upcoming in Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal, Thin Air, Dalhousie Review and failbetter.

### Dane Hamann

Dane Hamann works as an editor for a textbook publisher in the southwest suburbs of Chicago and serves as the poetry editor of TriQuarterly, the literary magazine of the Northwestern University. When he's not slowly losing his eyesight from squinting at manuscripts, he enjoys running, biking, and painting. He loves cats and his new favorite color may be neon peach.

### Steve Haywood

Steve Haywood lives in a small historic city in England. He has a distinctly uncreative day job, so likes to write to exercise his creativity. As well as writing short fiction, he blogs about short stories, novels and assorted topics at <http://www.inkypages.co.uk>. He can also be found on Twitter at [https://twitter.com/Lancaster\\_Steve](https://twitter.com/Lancaster_Steve) where he regularly tweets to share stories he likes with anyone who will listen.

Thomas Healy

I was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest and am the author of a recently published collection of short stories, "A Time of Times."

Kristin LaFollette

Kristin LaFollette is a writer, artist, and photographer and is the author of the chapbook, *Body Parts* (GFT Press, 2018). She is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Southern Indiana and serves as the Art Editor at *Mud Season Review*. You can visit her on Twitter at @k\_lafollette03 or on her website at [kristinlafollette.com](http://kristinlafollette.com).

Edward Lee

Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen* and *Smiths Knoll*. His debut poetry collection "Playing Poohsticks On Ha'Penny Bridge" was published in 2010. He is currently working towards a second collection. He also makes musical noise under the names *Ayahuasca Collective*, *Lewis Milne*, *Orson Carroll*, *Blinded Architect*, *Lego Figures Fighting*, and *Pale Blond Boy*. His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

J.L Moultrie

J.L Moultrie is a 30-year-old poet and fiction writer based in Detroit, Michigan. He fell in love with reading and writing after encountering Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Rainer Maria Rilke and others. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Datura Literary Journal*, *Abstract: Contemporary Expressions*, *Visitant*, *Backchannels*, *The Free Library of the Internet Void* and elsewhere. He is a

dog and cat dad and holds an Associate of Arts degree from Wayne County Community College.

#### Toti O'Brien

Toti O'Brien is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish Last Name. She was born in Rome then moved to Los Angeles, where she makes a living as a self-employed artist, performing musician and professional dancer. Her work has most recently appeared in Wilderness House, The Hamilton Stone Review, Dragon Poet Review, and Atticus.

#### Mandira Pattnaik

Mandira Pattnaik writes in India. The Times of India, Eclectica, FewerThan500, Lunate and Runcible Spoon, among others, have kindly provided space to her writings.

#### Marilee Pritchard

Marilee Pritchard has lived and worked in the Chicago area all her life. She is a 73-year-old widow/mother/grandmother who worked a boring government job but in retirement is now doing all that she loves — writing, playing the piano, and cooking. She lives with her partner, Tom, and his pugnacious terrier, Lucky.

#### Brian Rihlmann

Brian Rihlmann was born in NJ, and currently lives in Reno, NV. He writes mostly semi-autobiographical, confessional free verse. Folk poetry... for folks. He has been published in The Rye Whiskey Review, Cajun Mutt Press, Alien Buddha Zine, Synchronized Chaos, Madness Muse Press and The American Journal of Poetry.

### Sandip Saha

Sandip Saha has served both as a scientist and engineer in his service life. After retirement he is writing poems and published about thirty-eight poems in 21 journals so far. He is a passionate traveler and traveled about 26 countries including US, Russia, UK, France, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Italy.

### Claire Scott

Claire Scott is an award-winning poet who has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations. Her work has been accepted by the Atlanta Review, Bellevue Literary Review, New Ohio Review, Enizagam and Healing Muse among others. Claire is the author of *Waiting to be Called* and *Until I Couldn't*. She is the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters' Journey in Photography and Poetry*.

### Anna Teresa Slater

I started writing poetry because a few years ago I was tasked to teach poetry to high school students. I gave myself a crash course in it and kept going and have been formally studying it for over a year now. Aside from poetry now being the means for me to reach my students on a deeper level, it keeps me sane in this crazy world.

### Megha Sood

Megha Sood is a writer at Sudden denouement, Whisper and the Roar and poetry editor at Ariel Chart. Mom to a nine-year-old and a poet, editor and lucky to be featured in few journals. Works featured in 20 other anthologies by the US, Australian and Canadian Press. Two-time state-level winner of the NAMI NJ Poetry Contest 2018/2019. National level poetry finalist in Poetry Matters Prize 2019.



Lannie Stabile

Lannie Stabile

I have three cats (Abigail, Algonac, and Fiyero), I host an Audrey Hepburn marathon every year on her birthday (5/4), and as I actually say in my bio: while some write like a turtleneck sweater, I write like a Hawaiian shirt. Hopefully, it's acceptable that I used only one sentence to tell you about myself. I like to think I'm a rule breaker, but I'm really not.

Peter J. Stavros

Peter J. Stavros is a writer in Louisville, Kentucky. He writes, he runs, he can make spaghetti, he wishes he had more tattoos, sometimes he just sits. More at [www.peterjstavros.com](http://www.peterjstavros.com) and follow on Twitter @PeterJStavros.

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Edward Michael Supranowicz has had artwork and poems published in the US and other countries. Both sides of his family worked in the coalmines and steel mills of Appalachia.

Kelly Talbot

Kelly Talbot divides his time between Indianapolis, Indiana, and Timisoara, Romania. He believes that if you are human, you are beautiful, and if you are not human, you are probably also beautiful.

John Tustin

I began writing poetry in February 2008 after a ten-year hiatus and finally became brave enough to submit to magazines in April of 2009. In August of that year received my first acceptance from Poem and from Straylight that December. Since then my poetry has

appeared in many disparate literary journals, online and in print. John Tustin is currently suffering in exile on the island of Elba but hopes to return to you soon.

[fritzware.com/johntustinpoeetry](http://fritzware.com/johntustinpoeetry) contains links to his published poetry online.

Georgette Unis

Georgette Unis is the author of *Tremors*, a chapbook of poems (Finishing Line Press, 2018.) Her poetry has been published in several literary journals. She is also a mixed media painter and sculptor with many solo and group exhibitions, some of which included broadsides of her poems.

Yrik-Max Valentonis

Yrik-Max Valentonis wanders through the urban landscape seeking out fairy circles. He steals apples to justify his philosophy. He is Baba Yaga's favorite grandson.

Richard Widerkehr

You ask me what's fun. I've been teaching a boy guitar and songs to sing at his Bar Mitzvah. I sing in a chorus at the synagogue and at open mic's. I go for walks with friends, talk to our cats, work on poems, cook dinners for my partner Linda, and sometimes write songs. I've lived in Bellingham, WA since 1978.

Bill Wolak

Bill Wolak has just published his fifteenth book of poetry entitled *The Nakedness Defense with Ekstasis Editions*. His collages have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Baldhip Magazine*, *Barfly Poetry Magazine*, *Pithead Chapel*, *The Wire's Dream*, *Thirteen Ways Magazine*, *Phantom*

Kangaroo, Rathalla Review, Typehouse Magazine, and  
Flare Magazine.

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

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

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

Upload your submissions to Submittable with the category you are submitting to and your first and last name as the filename. Within the cover letter please include your full name, contact info, and 3-sentence bio.

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