

DOOR = JAR



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ISSUE 15

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Door Is A Jar
Issue 15

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Cover Image “Details From Upstate New York 3”
by Maria Sakr

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The Ghost Villages of Soviet Russia

Dylan Benjamin

Poetry

the cold here arrived not with a snap but with
a creep. It lingered and mulled until it caught a child.
afterwards, it licked its lips and learned greed and glut
then it feasted while we watched with
empty stomachs

the air does not dance here anymore, it has gone lame
calves bitten by gleaming white teeth so perfect
we know they don't belong
we smile our rotten smiles because that is what we must
while silence sings our heartbreak with sharp tongues

flesh — once regular is broken cracked then hardened
apparitions dragging soles along the ground and eyes
never looking but seeing a neighbor
red-eared titling slander, to be gone mid-blink
as the sick swallow ideals as medicine.

snow water burns like whisky but less than
the watching of snow sheeting empty houses/ like a
corpse
I loved the baker's daughter. Her hair golden and loose
Then the bread was made by traitors belonging for the
noose

if you listen hard enough in the ghost villages
you will hear the lick of lips from a distant monster
its breath hot against your neck

My Side of the Yard

Holly Day

Poetry

the leaves catch fire and burst into
 flaming insects pouring out from beneath
 every smoking leaf and branch some of them
 clutch tiny parcels of white eggs drag their children
 from the burning rubble by multiple hands scream
 oh god oh god how did this happen oh god and I

refuse to answer their prayers I flick
 another match on the pile and watch as it snaps
 immediately into more fire I casually stomp
 on a school bus full of children old people
 streaking from the bonfire as though this

will be their salvation swat at helicopters
 bearing important insect politicians to safety
 slap at intrepid explorers climbing my shoes my
 pant leg as though confronting me face to face
 might be the way to stop the madness I

have no mercy for any of them I
 do not want bugs in my kitchen and this
 collection of anthills termite mounds
 wasp nests is too close to my house
 this is not allowed.

Another Woman Talking to Herself

Holly Day

Poetry

Overcome with regret, she cradles him in her arms
before reluctantly devouring his headless corpse. Later,
she will lay
a clutch of white, oval eggs, knowing
her daughters will eat her sons someday.

The mantis has no voice for her sorrow, her grief at the
loss
of her brief love affair. The crickets take up her song
instead
a chorus of chirps that fills the night with shadows.

I Will Not Be
Holly Day
Poetry

hand in hand, fingers turn to claws and I
still know you inside that mask of anger I
can still see the person I will always fall
in love with behind those bright eyes
am I going to die tonight? I wonder.

walk with me softly past the corner
where we first kissed. here, under the street lamp
the exact spot where you said you loved me
over and over again, do you remember?
I do. I do. this is us, so many years later
and there is only ice when we speak

but do you remember? I wonder.

After the Fire

Holly Day

Poetry

The sun comes up on the wreck of parrots
lights the low-hung clutter of branches.
Javelins snuffle out rot in the underbrush, noisy as labor
pains
in the silence left in the wake of ruin.

We stalk heavy through the avian Nagasaki
upturning sticky clods of diseased birds with the toes of
our boots
wings spread like headdresses in European paintings of
Aztecs
bright swaths of blue and yellow wasted in a sea of
greasy ash.

Rivals

Adam Rose

Fiction

Muscles were sore from the run around the Rose Bowl, but I had to keep going. He has chased me down since we were kids. A tennis racquet became a cane. The red clay court from our youth sucked water from the sun. Gray in his sideburns matched my beard. Forty-nine years ago, he caught me by the old birch tree, pushed the racquet against my baby fat, and scraped an ivory handled hairbrush against the cat gut until I screamed. A waffle. Today, he slowed to a crawl and leaned against a cement bench. I limped back over and checked his pulse. His calloused hand slapped my face into a smile.

Homework
Richard Luftig
Poetry

Today's task is to venture
outside, work up the courage,
to meet February face-to face,

maybe even talk it
into finally signing off
on the snow drift

that has taken up
full-time residence
outside our back door.

It seems to happen
exactly like this
every late winter:

Me procrastinating
until I'm forced to ask
for an extension

on the home work
of shoveling a path
from the front door

to the garage, putting
it off in hopes of April
or first thaw, whichever

comes first. And my
dear wife who hands
out these assignments

and reminds me of how
much of my work is past
due, and that vegetating

on the couch, unshaven,
while clutching the tv remote
with three-month-old

potatoes chips growing
hair between the cushions
hardly qualifies as a biology

experiment and why,
earning extra credit
so late in the year,

probably is not
going to be enough
to let me graduate

to spring.

inside the pale
Christine Brooks
Poetry

if you're going to notice me,
notice me in a place
that strums & dances at will
along Grafton street
where flowers and fortunes are
bought & sold
for a song

if you're going to sit with me,
sit with me on a sunbeam
along the green
where Chaffinches sing &
verbena flowers bow to
the Trinity bell tower

if you're going to love me
meet me on Westland Row
downstairs from the bakery
by the staircase, at a small
table for two
and tell me how we
died

Helpless

Thomas Elson
Fiction

“Again.”

“Again.”

“Again.”

“Once more.”

Her son slid down the wall onto the hallway floor.

He saw what they did.

‘Oh, God.’

“Jesus.”

He was helpless.

Helpless — while the woman who bore him was laid out with chest exposed and shocked with paddles by men overfilling their pale blue uniforms.

Helpless — while the woman who walked him to school, who intervened at school, who repaired his injuries, provided inoculations, taught him how to use a spoon, throw a ball, speak in public, who worked third shift to support him, visited him in confinement, never condemned his behaviors; his one constant amid the turmoil he created; as that woman who was never helpless was laid out on the floor, surrounded a stranger who said, “Again.”

Silence.

“Again.”

Silence.

“Stop.”

Then, lifting the paddles, said,

“Time of death...”

Her Veranda

Thomas Elson

Fiction

Genesis 3:16, "... in pain you shall bring forth children."

In 1918 the Spanish Flu killed Pauline's mother. Within a few months her father re-married.

Five months after the wedding, her father sped from the house. "It's time to get the womenfolk."

Within seconds, Pauline heard yelps from their bedroom. When yelps grew into shouts and shouts gave way to screams, she snuck into the dark room, leaned against the far wall. Eyes alert, mouth agape, she stared at her stepmother alone in bed struggling to rid herself of her night clothes — among other things.

Moments later, an aunt arrived - the mother of seven living children. She shouted at the stepmother, "Just because you're pushing a baby out doesn't mean you get to let everybody see your veranda, Sister." She smirked, then continued. "Serves you right. Got out of the convent. Got a husband. Got this," pointed to the protruding belly, then placed her palm across her nose and mouth to lessen the frosty odor. "Show some respect and be grateful I'm here."

It was the same aunt Pauline heard at the wedding, "Four months if a day." Then added in a stage whisper, "Quick work for someone still in the convent when John's wife died." The "J" in her brother John's name pronounced like the "ch" in church.

After more aunts arrived, they laid her stepmother flat in the bed, shaved, scrubbed, rubbed dry, and bathed her in the newly acquired Lysol, then slathered her stepmother's, as they called it, veranda, with lard.

Pauline heard their delicate phrasing, "It helps the passage."

The aunts held onto several notions: they knew childbirth was facilitated by lard and a towel tied to the bed post — the former eased exit, the latter gave the woman something to grab and squeeze when her pain peaked.

The aunts also held certain beliefs about pain: The relief of pain during childbirth removed the maternal instinct. Pain relief medication produced a condition similar to intoxication and hence was immoral. And, since women had been sentenced to suffer the pangs of childbirth, it was sacrilegious to thrust aside the decrees of Providence — to cheat pain was to cheat God.

Into early evening. Sheets tossed aside, water spilled, aunts scurried about. Neighbors outside the house. No pain killers. No Antibiotics. No hospital. No docotr.

"Help me. Get it out. I'm going to explode."

Followed by a cascade of screams, cries, more yelps.

Later that evening. As her pain spiraled, her screams twisted into imprecations against her husband, the priest, all men, the Creator, the sisters in the covenant, and the women encircling her bed.

"It's crushing me," her stepmother yelled. Followed by demands for whisky. For laudanum. For anything to release the snake coiling around her.

Then quiet.

Christmas songs

DS Maolalai

Poetry

malaysia — february.
and it's chinese new year too. I am reading
a book, sweating
on the heat of the patio,
eating sliced
white fruit
while gardeners
cut back bushes. it's wealth distilled, this house
in all red wallpaper. in the kitchen
her uncle plays the radio — selects for me
some christmas songs. explains
that chinese new year
is like christmas eve
out here; that this might help me
understand.

Strange little animals

DS Maolalai

Poetry

storms have kicked the windows in
and broken the back door.
and the kitchen is flooded
like a spilled cup of coffee
with rain, mud
and scattering
scrunching leaves,
and the leaves
are jumping,
and the leaves
are frogs, crumpled
in clusters on cold tiling, lost
and roaming around.

and my sister is screaming
and the dog
barking excitedly,
jumping around with his ass up
and smelling them — these
strange
little animals
which drip like wadded
toilet paper,
which smell of metal
and occasionally
make noises, something
like the sound
of an open zip.

and my dad
stood there
in the hallway,

holding a beer, laughing
nervously.
god in heaven,
telling me
to go and fetch a broom.

Only to take her to bed

DS Maolalai

Poetry

I didn't know. really,
I didn't. I swear. I'd been invited,
I thought,
to try out a new glass of something,
to smoke some of her cigarettes
and maybe talk a little
about life
and how terrible
life can be. didn't know then
that she'd already
decided about life
and decided she didn't want any;

right then wanted someone
only to take her to bed.
and she didn't know
about you, and didn't much
want to. and I'd had a few drinks
and talked about life
until eventually
she couldn't stand it anymore,
grabbed my belt
and opened it, hot as burning books,
flowers at night
with frost falling.

and she said she felt she was shriveling;
felt she was breaking apart. when waves come
they come suddenly, breaking buildings
and swamping over
those meager walls we build
against the expected weather.

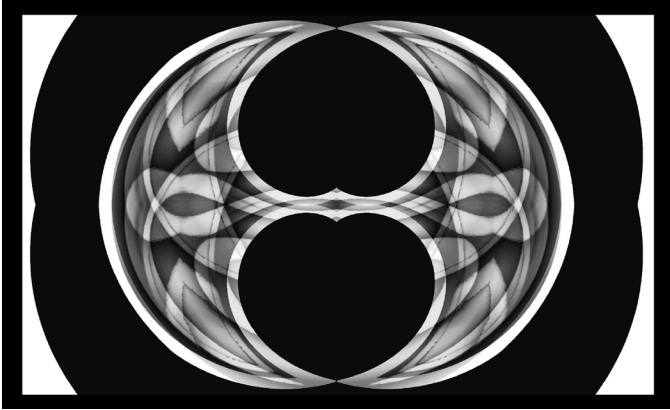
Dancing in the Dark
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



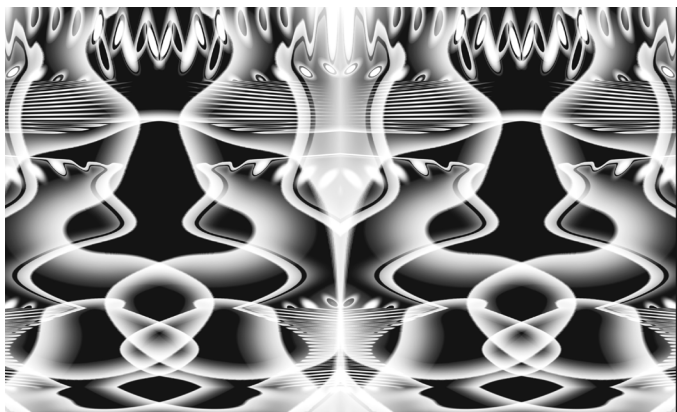
The Heart is a Lonely Hunter 4

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Art



Shimmy Shimmy Cocopop
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



The Parking Ticket

Steve Slavin

Fiction

You know the feeling when you get a parking ticket that you don't deserve? Should you fight it, or just pay it?

This ticket was so unfair that I went out and bought a cheap camera, took pictures, brought them into court, and got the satisfaction of having the ticket dismissed.

But what should I do with the camera? I had absolutely no interest in photography, but I decided one spring evening to take pictures of the sunset from the Brooklyn Heights promenade.

When I got there, the sun had just begun to sink behind the Jersey Meadowlands and the sky was a deep orange. And so, along with perhaps another dozen *real* photographers — all with fancy cameras — I snapped away.

As the sun almost imperceptibly sank, the sky began taking on hues of purple. I included two or three people who leaned over the promenade railing, watching the sun almost imperceptibly slipping below the horizon.

I hoped that each of my photos would be at least a bit different from the previous one. Sometimes a spectator shifted, or was replaced by another. I moved along, a few feet from the railing, slowly changing my perspective.

Minutes after the sun had set, I was well into my second roll of film. I kept shooting, until maybe half an hour later, I had come to the end of the roll.

I hoped that I might have gotten a few good photos, but I wouldn't know until I had the film developed. When I got back the snapshots, I had to admit that they were not half bad. So, I bought a small album and filled it with my sunsets.

A few weeks later I hosted a small get-together and one of my friends picked up the album and then passed it around. Everyone liked the pictures. Then a woman who came with one of my friends asked if I'd like to join her co-op photography gallery.

I thought she was joking, but she insisted that my photos would definitely sell. If I chipped in just a hundred fifty dollars a month, they could hang there for as long as I wanted.

At first I thought it was some kind of scam, but my friend vouched for her. The next day I visited the gallery, which was just a narrow space on Atlantic Avenue down the block from some Syrian restaurants.

There were a few dozen photos hanging, none of which impressed me. But what did I know? I had a creepy feeling that I was being taken for a ride, but a hundred fifty bucks was all I was paying for a parking space.

A week later the gallery held an opening for my work. I had made multiple eight and a half by eleven copies of each photo mounted and ready to go at twenty-five dollars a pop.

I was pretty sure that I was charging too much, but twenty-five was the minimum that any of the other photographers charged.

I was amazed when the second customer who looked at my photos bought one of them. Ten minute later, someone else bought two more.

I could not believe that in just two days I had almost sold out. I quickly had more copies made, and even got a nice review in *The Heights Press*.

Then I doubled my prices and my sales actually increased. I soon found that the more I charged, the more I sold.

After a month I was charging two hundred dollars for my photos and *still* selling out every weekend. Some

of the other photographers were getting jealous of my success, even though the crowds I brought in bought some of *their* photos.

I knew that each of them had a lot more talent than I did. I decided that I would never take another photo. I was clearly a fraud.

It would be much, much better for me to quit while I was ahead, rather than be discovered for what I really was. Surely the other photographers had my number and maybe even were looking forward to witnessing my fall.

I announced my retirement. The woman who had persuaded me to join the gallery asked me to at least continue to exhibit the photos I had shot that spring evening.

“If you never take another photo, your place in the world of photography is secure. I wish you would change your mind, but either way, I will support your decision.”

Quickly word spread. Dozens of newspaper columnists and even writers of letters to the editor begged me to reconsider. But I stuck to my guns.

By now my photos were fetching one thousand dollars. I had more money than I would ever be able to spend.

But something about this whole chain of events was bothering me. I fell asleep each night trying to figure out what it might be.

And then, one morning I jumped out of bed and found the photos I had taken of my ticketed car. I could make out the writing on the ticket and the lettering on the sign next to my car.

Something didn't jibe. And then, there it *was*! I realized immediately what a fraud I had been! I quickly dressed, and hurried to traffic court with the photos and ticket.

When I got to see a referee and told her what had happened, she could not stop laughing. “You are the first person I have ever met who wanted to enter a guilty plea after having been found innocent.

“And the fact that had not realized your error – and *ours* – until months later, and still made the trip down here. Well, I don’t think that has ever happened in the entire history of the Department of Motor Vehicles.”

Then I saw my photo hanging on her wall. She saw me looking at it, and then glanced at the name on the ticket.

She smiled. “I’ll tell you what. Autograph the photo and we’ll call it even.”

Views from a Laundromat

Zach Murphy

Fiction

The local laundromat: a perpetual cleansing spot for the city's dirt and shame.

At night, the neon sign above the storefront glows half-enthusiastically, so much so that most of the letters are completely burnt to their end. The remaining ones spell out "Land rat" — a welcoming endorsement for a place where people come in to wash the crumbs off their pants.

Cheyenne just hangs in there. A few bucks an hour and a few thankless looks for mopping the linty floors, picking up left-behind underwear, and getting lost a little too deep in her own thoughts.

Do bed bugs drown in the soap and water? Do they feel pain? Should I even care if they feel pain?

What if all the missing socks in the world magically transport to the random shoes you see on the side of the highway?

Why does that guy's shirt have a wicked bloodstain on it? Or maybe it's just ketchup. I hope it's just ketchup.

It's 10:55 PM, so the neighborhood night-roamer with the drinking problem stumbles in on the dot, as usual, to spout a series of incoherent-isms. Cheyenne decides to give him the rest of her gas station sandwich. It gets him to leave, but she also feels sorry for him. She wonders where he sleeps at night.

Before closing up the place, Cheyenne does a thorough sweep under the machines and scrounges up just enough coins to catch the bus back to the thin walls of her mildew-tainted studio apartment.

And the cycles continue to spin.

Separate Flame

Richard Widerkehr

Poetry

for Gayle Kaune

You're rafting the Snake River with the grandkids,
no time for writing, but you, you need to keep
that separate flame. Yesterday, I looked for our friends
at the wrong Starbucks — Fifth Avenue,

not Fifth South. Like a man in witness protection
just off the bus, I waited, then headed south.
On your Sevylor raft, maybe you squint into the sun.
Whose river is this? How far from home?

At Marine Park In Late Afternoon

Richard Widerkehr

Poetry

for Ted Smith

We trudge in fog toward this yellow-gray sun.
Two months or less, said your doctor.
 The cancer. Let's not ask which wells we inherit.
We come back, you say, *as someone else*.

We pass a larch tree. Thin branches, orange needles.
 That song we sang, not "Yellow Bird," the other one.
 These words in my head, but I can't hear it.
 "He was a man and a friend always..."

We come back, you say. Larches keep their needles,
 don't they? The melody comes back to me.
 "Here's to you, my rambling boy,
 May all your ramblings bring you joy."

the sun half hidden tugs us with this flux,
 as we walk on, smoke in smoke.

Birkenstocks

Richard Widerkehr

Poetry

My sister no longer sleeps with the moon
in her cardboard box. Outside this window
of our small red house, a strand of spider web
in the breeze. *I can't spare the least insect
or angel*, said Chloe. She spares angels,
squashes bugs? Between a dark fir tree
and our new deck, this filament in the sun.
As if a weaver's shuttle strove back and forth
across it, the thread glistens, twists.
Don't worry, bro, she's said. *Least signs
like this don't mark a spider's teahouse;
they're not a sultan's palace in the sun.*
When we send my sister Birkenstocks,
she gives them away.

Nightmares

Clive Aaron Gill

Fiction

In my nightmares, I'm a boy lying in bed, my hands over my ears, trying to block sounds of my mother's drunk boyfriend banging on our front door and shouting filth.

Tiki

Clive Aaron Gill

Fiction

I brought home a yellow-crested cockatoo in a large, rectangular cage, put him in the kitchen and named him Tiki. During the next three years, my beagle, Daisy, frequently barked at Tiki.

Early one morning while I was cleaning my teeth, I heard loud barks, unusual for that time of the day. I rushed to the kitchen where I saw Daisy shrinking back from Tiki, her tail tucked between her legs as Tiki mimicked her bark.

Daisy never barked at Tiki again.

She Better Say No

Ken Mootz

Fiction

I'm kneeling before you because we've overcome so much this year; you catching me in bed with your sister, me wrecking your car last month, those times I borrowed money from your purse to pay off my drug dealer, and when I threw up on you after eating too much sushi. But, baby, that's all in the past, I swear. I... I complete you. When we're together, you're finished. You know that, right? Baby, baby, I love you so much and... damnit, look at me when I'm talking to you! There, that's much better. So... will you marry me?

Girl With No Dreams

Zoe

Poetry

I know a girl
She used to be visible
Until her wish was granted
And she was gone.

Girl with no dreams
Her eyes darts left and right
Staring through art
Oh yeah, they speak to her.

She takes a dive into the deep
No, she didn't drown
It wasn't planned
Accidental thoughts were common to her.

Jumps into a ship
With no soft leap
The end is not known
Yeah, the normal is boring.

Weird is cool so she'd say
Not caring where the ship sails
Oh, she's impulsive you'll say.

Maybe she'll land in Greece
It could even be Africa
Or the unknown Atlantis
But who cares?

With no sight or light
She dawdles with the dark
Playing hide and seek

First with the blade
Till she got to Hades.

Girl with no dreams
Said life's a dream
A little sleep won't hurt.

Stick Fingers (Unblocking my ex on Instagram)

Wilson Koewing

Fiction

I shouldn't have pressed "unblock." She dyed her hair blonde and resembles a pin-up now. She discovered all the vintage clothing she was searching for. Stuck in it with me, she stopped searching. Now she's posting photos of lighthouses in North Carolina. Her posing with perfect homemade pasta. "Come visit" hashtags for the Italian friend who taught her how to make it while abroad. Once, when we started dating, she left out her diary and he happened to be the subject of the page. She wanted him to want her, but he was interested in a girl from Dallas. In her private thoughts to herself, she tried to understand why he didn't. Anytime she mentioned him, my face flushed. I shouldn't have read it. A well-framed shot of her applying lipstick in a mirror, inside the house we shared, leaves me wondering who took the picture. She's back in New Orleans. Haunting familiar haunts. Literal rose colored glasses. A repost of a photo I recognize because I was in it. Now cropped out. But inside the caption lied the horror. Uncle Dave died. I loved Uncle Dave. It has been five months since it happened. She's playing the ukulele now. Selfies in swimwear. Videos of her playing the ukulele. A POV pic from Horseshoe reservoir of a girl I've never seen. "Impossible to express how grateful I am to have found this fierce, brave — " I stop reading after that. Did I turn her? She'd warned early on she possessed a curiosity. Radiant at a music festival, being free in ways I never witnessed. A weird photo of her in the bow of a boat inside a dive bar on south Broadway where I realized she's in the best shape of her life. Cheese and crackers. Her best friend Karen. Karen's now husband Blake who I still talk to often. I was supposed to attend the

wedding. I'll see them soon in Toronto where they will skirt around the truth of the death of their friend's relationship and prod the ashes with stick fingers. Plants hanging from the room that was once my office. The window I gazed out of, wondering why I was there. Why I followed her to begin with. Her fall Colorado Aspen photos that mirrored mine. Same mountain passes. Different sunny days. In New Orleans again with her sister. At her favorite Mediterranean spot. The born-again Christian sister. The years of addiction. The heroin baby. The hotel bathtub. Holding her brother's newborn. His blank-faced wife who I never got. The child they were raising that was only his. The dull understanding that if they did not have their own then the other could never be truly loved by her. The last one, a poorly framed photo of an alligator. It appeared to be laughing.

In New York, 1919

Carmi Soifer

Poetry

for Ephraim E. Lisitzky

At the end of my journey
I wait for my father.
Strangers laugh
at my Slutz clothing,
my hat from Belgium.
I stand. I wait.
I won't miss one minute
of this reunion.

At last his harrowed face
looms up from the street.
He's walking heavily, bent
under a sack of rags, bottles.

When later I lie on the floor
to sleep where my father rooms.
I cry in silence. A new world
for me and my father.

Trip Feet

Bree Devones Hsieh

Poetry

a samba is playing and the live band is jazzed
cocktail of sweat and music cut by limelight and breeze
through the room of shouted conversation
over the drum of smooth joy moving every
awkward bony boy trying and wallflower beauty
kneeing
with the new movement that should be smooth easy
except when feet bump feet and steps mistake
for each other tangled into the almost direction
not yet but now and then back into the flow
this is so simple isn't it the counterpoint of just two
slight bodies of conversation feeling new with long
limbs

As a Heroine Becomes

Bree Devones Hsieh

Poetry

Sullen parched-heart
 question: *Where's the fruit?*
 — weighing the crowned gift.
 Just bring me an orange,

Neruda-sweet, that I can slice
 and eat for dessert. Punica
 is rind and seeds, delicacy
 for a prisoner. Prisoning

is ripe decay, ripe
 jeweled sun setting red
 as the last dried drops.
 But my ruby-stone rind

is pithy protection shed
 for dense and seeding soul,
 respectable enough receptacle
 of thick white petal flesh,

this bitterness surrounds
 whole-bound crimson honey
 in thousand-part shelter comb.
 I pull out the aril chambers

again and again to bite down
 hard and not let go. I know
 ends and means and
 how a life of meaning better

holds what life is worth,
 how biting down hard seeds to wine

renews the earth's dry mouth of dirt.

Familiar Strangers

Michael Lacare

Fiction

I hadn't spoken to my brother in years. Eight or more maybe, but for the life of me, I couldn't recall why we'd stopped. We'd send each other gift cards on our birthdays through the mail, and wish each other well on the cards they came in. But that stopped too. During the holidays, we'd take turns celebrating at our homes, he did Thanksgiving, while I did Christmas. That also stopped.

One night, my brother called to tell me our father had fallen and broken his hip. This was back when we spoke. He'd undergone surgery and rehabilitation and was remanded to a walker. And while it was determined that our father had grown too fragile to live on his own in a townhouse that consisted of stairs, my brother thought it was best he sell and move in with him. He'd have his own separate living space. He'd still have his independence.

And so, my father sold his townhome and relocated to my brother's ranch-style house with three bedrooms and faded clapboards nestled on two acres. My father sat on the back porch and stared out into the trees for hours, or until he ran out of cigarettes.

We're six years apart, my brother and me. I'd willed him into existence when I expressed a desire to my parents for a sibling. And on a cloudless, frigid January morning, my parents arrived home from the hospital with him swaddled in a blanket, eyes scrunched shut.

"This is Mitchell," my mother said, presenting him like a gift to the gods.

We spent endless hours in front of the television. We'd break out into wrestling matches during the commercials, causing my mother to intervene as referee.

We'd venture out on long family road trips, my brother and me in the backseat. We'd antagonize our parents to the brink of exhaustion. My father would threaten to pull the car over, but we were never sure if he was serious. Often, he'd reach back while driving at an attempt to smack our legs, but we'd shift away and stifle our laughter when he'd miss.

My wife said to me: "You should call your brother," and I told her I would, but never do. I can't convince my fingers to work the digits of my phone. Too much time had passed.

My wife also said: "You two used to be so close. What happened?"

But the words elude me. It's something that just sort of happened, I guess.

I began smoking late in life, cigars at first, then graduated to cigarettes. I found it relaxing, accompanied by a glass of Merlot on the back porch. It dawned on me that I'd somehow become my father.

"When we're gone, all you will have is each other." Those are the words of my mother, referencing my brother and me. I can't remember when she'd said it, but only that she had. Her voice lingered in my brain like the remnants of a great film. The other day, my wife told me she'd run into my brother and his wife at the market, and that they had seemed distant. The conversation was mostly about my father's well-being. "He has dementia," she said. "You should pay him a visit."

"I probably should," I said, but the words rang hollow the moment they passed through my lips.

"I wish my father was still around," she said, and disappeared into the house. I continued to observe the ducks in the pond until the light faded out like the eyes of a sleepy giant.

Via Facebook, my wife learned that my father had

“gotten loose” from the house, (as though he were their pet) and wandered the streets. He was discovered several miles away, when a man sawing wood in his garage stopped and called the police. My brother had to install special locks.

My mother passed from bladder cancer and the last thing she’d said to me was, “Don’t ignore your brother.”

I drove out to the cemetery and walked the lush green berms dotted with gravestones and mausoleums and granite statues carved by hand. I gazed down at the spot my mother was buried in and imagined her peering up at me, critical of my behavior.

I took in the stillness of my surroundings and watched the dark clouds as they formed until they gave way to the rain.

I sat in my car with the engine off. A siren wailed in the distance. An older man, and what appeared to be his daughter, walked together, her arm laced around his, drawing him close to her. She clutched an umbrella in her hand, holding it over them. He wore a loose-fitting dark suit and white shirt and his hair was long, longer than it should have been for someone his age, I thought to myself. The woman seemed to be crying. She leaned her head on his shoulder. They continued along the concrete path that snaked its way through the burial grounds.

The rain fell harder, like metal pellets against the roof of the car. I turned the key in the ignition and pulled away onto the crooked street that would lead me home.

My phone vibrated inside my pocket. I pulled it out. The number looked familiar to me and as I wracked my brain, I couldn’t come up with where I’d seen it before. Something inside me told me to answer it.

“Hello?” I said.

The Imperative

S. T. Brant

Poetry

You may occasionally have genius
Fragments or an idea nearly so —
You must make something whole. Throwing it all
At the wall? Yes. You've made a mark. They wash
Away. The world cares not for those little
Stains nor they that make them. Build walls others
Paint on; what you were against, redesign
It. You must do something.

Death Song

S. T. Brant

Poetry

Sentiments are sick out of heart.
Mindfulness is a garden of worms, and Feelings flock to
gardens.

O the love songs in the gardens

Out of heart

O the worms that burrow in the soles of singing feelings

Mindfulness is the parasite of Passion

They know what's being done to them:

Seeding their strengths, the worms,

They, sentiments, feel the worméd tongues lessen them
to oblivion.

O die in the wind,

Our song

In the caverns of channelless ears,

Beyond the hatch of genesis.

Death is all the cocoons of life:

Life has more cocoons than death.

Money Can't Buy You Love

Michael R. Lane

Fiction

Gary stood alone at the bus stop in a warm steady rain waiting for Connie to show. She was an hour late. Connie hadn't called to say she wasn't coming. That suggested to Gary she was on her way. Connie needed money. Gary had money. He needed love. Gary gave Connie money. Connie gave him time, attention and affection in exchange but never sex. This was their way, their relationship. His hope, his expectation was one day it would become much more.

Connie's car pulled up. Her rain blurred passenger window rolled down unveiling a strapping young man in the passenger seat.

"Sorry I'm late," Connie said from the driver seat, the car in park with the engine still running. Her words curved around the man who sat back with a movie star smile.

"Traffic was a bear," Connie said.

"I see," Gary said.

"This is Brian — Brian, Gary."

"What's up man?" Brian said confidently shaking Gary's hand.

"Good question," Gary said pulling his hand away first.

"Brian's my new boyfriend," Connie said. "Gary's like the big brother I never had. He's always there for me in my time of need."

"That's cool," Brian said.

"Yeah cool," Gary said.

"Do you have the money?" Connie asked.

Gary reached across Brian and handed Connie a wad of twenties totaling six-hundred dollars.

“You’re my hero,” Connie said. “I’ll get this back to you soon as I can.” Gary knew that translated to never.

“Could you give me a lift to the garage?” Gary said to Connie. “I need to pick up my car.”

“I’m headed in the opposite direction, and I’m running late for a hair appointment. Could you find someone else — take a cab or something?”

“I suppose I can — ”

“*Thanks*. You’re a real sweetheart,” Connie said. “Talk to you later.”

“Stay dry big bro’,” Brain said flashing that smile as his window rolled up.

Connie pulled away. Gary stood as still as a statue, stunned and uncertain if he looked as foolish as he felt. When a car struck a pothole that showered him in dirty water, there was no doubt.

Mission Possible

Rick Blum

Poetry

Sexploits of Diego the Tortoise save Galapagos species,
Phy.org

I had a job to do,
one not to be taken lightly.
In fact, the very survival
of my species depended
on the successful completion
of my assignment...
again and again.

I've fulfilled my duty
for fifty decades,
mounting fertile females,
producing 800 progenies
(maybe more, it's hard
to keep track)
without complaint.

Now the bosses want me to retire,
return to my native Espanola island
to live out my days
free of responsibility,
free of the pressure of being
a licentious Lothario.

But I did not ask for this.
I want to continue my work
creating a long lineage
of giant Galapagos tortoises
without the aggravation
of having to woo willing partners

into my den of desire.

At 100 years of age, wooing is hard,
especially when the competition
is one-third my age, maybe less.
I want to stay on this enchanted isle
of Santa Cruz, where the flora is lush,
the fauna unique,
and the friends with benefits
are endless.

And Roared for Hours at the Shining Moon

Warren Paul Glover

Poetry

My grandmother gave me a red riding hood
and a silver St Christopher on a chain.
'It's to protect you', she said,
'on your travels, from the howling wolves and the rain.'

Late one night, walking the dark forest path,
I spied a light through the trees,
as I drew closer and parted the branches
I saw a mad woodsman down on his knees.

His clothes were tattered
as he crouched by a fire
and his hairy hands
held an axe.

The decapitated head
of a woman
quite dead
lay resting on her flaxen bed;

she looked as if she was thinking.
Unblinking
I stared,
disbelieving and scared.

The woodsman then, pulled a funny face
as the tea he was brewing was not to his taste.
In haste he spilled sugar from a silver spoon
and roared for hours at the shining moon.

My Glass
Warren Paul Glover
Poetry

My glass is half-full.
Now there's a cause for celebration!
There's more to taste
of vintage wine or champagne.
Or water,
sparkling, fizzy with gas?
Or still?
Like some warm beer?
Dark? Bitter?
No bubbles here.

My glass is half empty;
no money for another drink.
Pour the dregs down the kitchen sink.
After a party
pack the glasses away;
another one broken
or chipped —
the last from the wedding list.
Pinch one from the pub
(it won't be missed!)

Flower Girl

Warren Paul Glover

Poetry

She sold flowers on a stall
opposite the station.
Snaking along the wall
commuters queued for taxis, in never-ending rotation.

On the corner was a café
where a young man often waited,
spying slyly with his lascivious eye
from a window, newly painted.

She wrapped his roses with a bow
feeling flush with heat.
As she lost herself to love's undertow
he swept her off her feet.

Their affair was torrid, forged in flames
of passion that was brazen.
The man left the flower girl insane
and stole all her carnations.

Our Death Waits

Claire Scott

Poetry

The spiked claws of cancer, a heart that has had enough,
the screech
of tires, a bottle of pills, the blade of a knife. No way to
know
until Death shows up at our door, politely

ringing the bell, maybe had some trouble finding our
house tucked
away under red maple trees. Maybe thirsty for cold
water or a glass
of sparkling cider. I imagine she knows next to nothing

about me except the time and date that pinged on her cell
phone
this morning as I was sipping jasmine tea and savoring
the first forsythia blazing gold in the garden.

I marvel at her patience, years waiting for her only call.
Probably
wrinkled and sagging and sassy and white-haired like
me.
I hope to have a long chat with my Death, I want

to see if she likes Mozart, Merwin, foreign films, feisty
grandchildren and Chinese take-out. Maybe tonight
she will share a leisurely bottle of Pinot noir with me

her only partner in this miraculous dance of wild
of wonder of love of laughter of life and
of our once in a lifetime death.

It Runs In My Family Like Freckles and Green Eyes

Claire Scott

Poetry

say I got lost on the way home wandered out into East
Oakland

where I asked a homeless woman if she knew where
Samson Street is
& she didn't

say I think I ate lunch, maybe a turkey sandwich with
mayo,
but just in case I made another & I notice my waistband
is tight

say I bought five pounds of oatmeal & the checker
seemed
surprised & someone stole the chicken casserole from
the fridge
so we ate cereal for supper

say burnt coffee, a milk carton in the cupboard,
the freezer door wide open, ice cream dribbling down

say a stranger came to the door with pink flowers,
maybe poses or
prosies & asked if I liked the daffodils she brought me
last week

say sometimes there are men in my closet, men under
the bed, I hear
them rustling at night

say I am scared to tell you because then it will be real

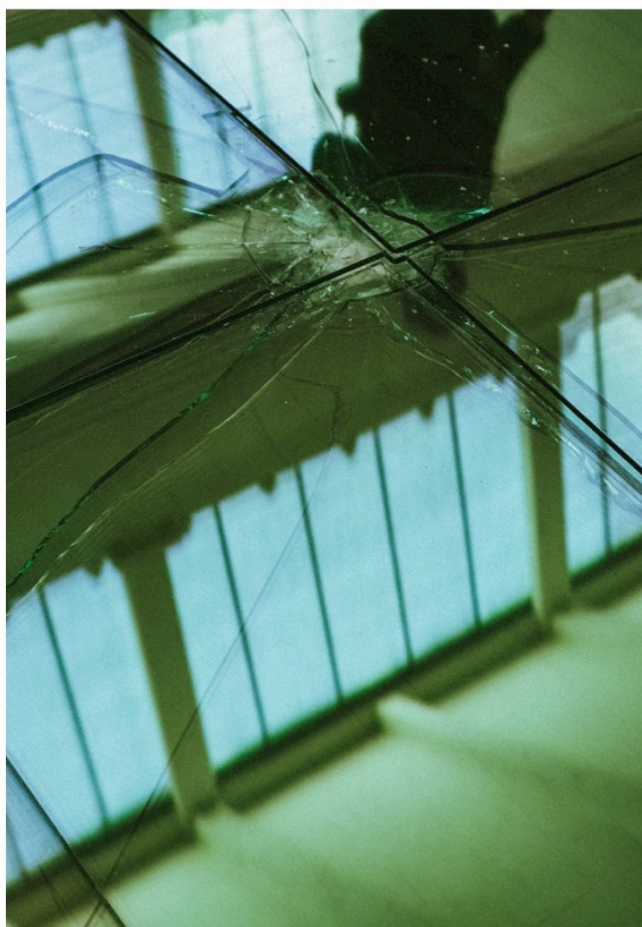
Details From Upstate New York 1
Maria Sakr
Art



Details From Upstate New York 2
Maria Sakr
Art



Details From Upstate New York 3
Maria Sakr
Art



Details From Upstate New York 5

Maria Sakr

Art



August Visitor

Ibrahim Babátundé Ibrahim

Fiction

Ayuba stared out into the fields from the open window in the barn. The August sun was simmering, colouring the cornfield gold and creasing the atmosphere up in waves of heat in the distance. Beads of sweat grew into lines and streamed down his face. His gaze was long and distant, shot into space beyond the fields, a little above the ears of corn leaves and far into the horizon where orange clouds surrounded the sun.

It was only as far as his eyes could go but his mind was a long distance further off, to a mean winter morning in London two Januarys ago, and the urgent need for some warmth, which saw him break the code and venture out on his own.

The heater had broken down and Azaria was taking forever. The cold had crawled beneath his skin in its bitterness, breaking him into uncontrollable shivers and threatening to freeze his breath. Going out to seek warmth was the only thing to do, he had been convinced.

He had stepped out into the snow to get across to a nearby mart, hoping the heater was on so he could fend off the cold at least for as long as he could stay. Just as he waddled into the middle of the road, he noticed the uniformed men.

He knew he couldn't run; the cold had locked his limbs. They were on him in just a few quick steps, as if they were immune to the cold. He closed his eyes and exhaled a puff of cold air, opening them to see Azaria's figure turn a corner and appear in the distance.

"Excuse me gentleman, can I see some identification please?"

It was at that moment she noticed it was him. She dropped her bags and broke into a race. His heart sank to

his stomach and his knee gave way. Suddenly the cold was gone and an urgent heat was beginning to build in his bowels.

He had been in hiding for months, since August when his visa expired. There was no way he was leaving the order of the UK for the chaos back home in Nigeria. Someone had spoken about arranging a fake marriage to sort the papers problem out.

An officer accosted him on his way from work one evening and asked to see some ID. He was in the company of a colleague, Azaria, and it was by her antics and theatrics that he escaped by the whiskers.

They got safely to her place but had a feeling they were followed. The fear had turned him prisoner in that airy apartment for months until that evening. Not being able to work meant he couldn't come up with the money for the arranged marriage.

Proximity had grown an ordinary care into fondness, and nights of steaming orgasm trips. A love had been kindled between both their wanting hearts and a real marriage presented itself. It was just two days to go.

As Azaria grew bigger racing towards him, so also did a weight of guilt in his heart. He had let her down. He was never supposed to leave the apartment. That was the agreement. He was never meant to be out in the open, on his knees with an officer planting a firm grip on his shoulder as she raced into him in the snow, knocking him and the officer over.

Their bodies tangled and quavered in unison, their tears unstoppable. It took some vigorous shaking and yanking to tear them away from what could be their last hug, as he was taken in, processed and dumped in a lonely seat on a flight to Lagos.

She promised she was going to find him. He stopped believing it until now. It was the second anniversary of that visa expiration today and five months from the

second anniversary of the deportation. Had she found him?

He'd always believed distance does the meanest things, breaking spirits and turning longings into bearable torture; but time does the worst, fading off what once was into fragmented memories that barely held whole anymore.

For him, those memories are neatly tucked in a contrastingly painful but happy place, and it was days like this that rolled them out and played them back time after time, taking him back to that place and undoing his mistake so that he could remain there in the apartment till Azaria returned.

But then, a little bird flew in, fluttered its wings in his face before flying off again, growing smaller against the orange clouds and the bright red setting sun. It was enough to deflate his daydream and help him notice the corn ears dancing to a slight gush of wind.

He lowered his gaze again to the picture in his sweaty palm, unmistakably identical — a mini him. It came in about a week ago but it was the first time he had had the courage to bring it out from the envelope and spend time staring at it.

Why had she kept this to herself all this time? How did she find him now? Why was it a picture instead of her and the kid in person? What was he supposed to make of this? Most of all, what was he supposed to tell Aduke whose bride price he only just paid on the day he received the picture, after waiting for Azaria all this while.

A commotion of emotions shook trembles through his hands. A few drops of sweat fell onto the picture from his face. He turned it over to wipe the drops against his shirt. There was a message on the back that he hadn't noticed before: "His name is Ayuba Jr and he is your papers back to me and to the UK... See you soon!"

A surge ran through his bowels, a gasp escaped his pipes and his knees gave way. The inked words were those strong cop-grips all over again, vigorously shaking him, attempting to yank him away from his newfound love; threatening to send him into a transition he had made no preparations for. For the first time since the cold January evening in the London snow, he sobbed his heart out.

Outlaw
John Grey
Poetry

I get it.
There's something about
the Harley, the tattoos, the greasy hair —
they're habit forming.
After all,
you could be addicted to pills
or worse.
And you don't smoke.
And only drink on social occasions.

But, come the summer weekend,
you just can't wait to strap on that helmet,
sit up behind your biker du joi,
wrap arms around his beer waist,
press hard against him,
leather to leather,
and cruise on down the highway
at seventy miles an hour or more.

Your mother's worried
you'll get yourself killed.
I'm concerned
you'll never develop a taste
for soft music, wine and roses.

You love the freedom
of the wind in your face,
And you just adore our anxiety.

Leave A Message

John Grey

Poetry

Your call has gone straight
to the answering machine.
You hear my voice
but it's merely a recording.

You could be a debt collector.
Or someone who once
meant something to me.
Or the pharmacy telling me
my prescription is ready.

I'm sure you know who you are.
So leave a message
on your own answering machine
Leave me out of it.

The Rain Explains

John Grey

Poetry

I am a percussionist. I can play rooftops
as splendidly as asphalt. Even grass.

Steel drums are a specialty. Leave them
out in your yard and my rhythm will go on

even after I stop. There's some prefer
it when I play the oboe, gentle, mist-like.

Or when I'm the harpist softly plucking
the strings of their windows. But I was born

with drum-sticks on my hand. Every
body of water from the puddle on your

doorstep to the overflowing river
is a byproduct of one of my intense solos.

I see you step into the outdoors, in plastic
top to bottom. You call it "braving the weather."

To me, it's an opportunity to try out
some new skins. My advice is that, with

such a beat going, it's best to play along.
I can always use a singer. Even a trombonist

if your voice is deep and cracked enough.
Did you know that every one of my drops

is, in fact, a snare, a bass, two tom-toms,
a high-hat and a cymbal in miniature?

Together, hour after hour after hour,
they keep on hammering and battering

and don't miss a measure. So enjoy it as
much as I do. But save your applause

for when you think you've seen the last of me.

For Alex
Michael Lopez
Poetry

Along the Shunga creek
We walked

Every shore
It carried our voices to

Gravesites
Adrift

Are your eyes
washed away

like mine
are stony pits

Somewhere, there is
a horizon of gold

Pouring out
of your mouth

Somewhere, far from the mud
of this undertow

You're dreaming
The brilliant dreams

Message Undeleted

Yash Seyedbagheri

Fiction

I listen to sister Nancy's voicemails, preserved over three years.

Dumbass. Call me. What's wrong?

Love you, dumbass.

Nicky, exciting fucking news. I've had a novel accepted.

Nicky, they want to make a movie out of the novel...

I play the messages over, energy and lilting laugh resurrected, as if that train never crashed. Or if it did, that body beneath a train car was some doppelganger. I imagine her calling, wanting to talk about the movie adaptation of the novel. We'd joke about Jon Hamm's performance, exchange stories and sibling insults over beers. I'd call her too absorbed in writing, tease her about her cat-eye glasses and make a joke about the 1950s. She'd tell me to be more confident, less shy, I'd laugh it off. She'd ask me if I was practicing piano, what was holding me back.

But all I have are messages.

I need to clear things.

I've tried, hand over the button. Nancy would want me to move on and mock grief. She'd want me to take up piano again. I've tried, but felt my fingers turn numb trying to play "Valse Sentimentale," one of Nancy's favorites.

I play messages day and night.

Once the messages are gone, there's no Nancy. No voice, no marker of the past. Just a mention of a crash in a newspaper, a stone, a body buried, mutilated. Words in a novel, personas she created. But no Nancy.

I keep playing.

Porched by Virus

Leon Fedolfi

Poetry

Snow so small — each one fails muted perception.
Blinding in number - brailed upon vision,
dousing my thoughts with their translucent curtain.
Tricks played on my esophagus.

I am six feet from the ground, not under it. But
I cannot touch you now.

Not with unvaccinated lips —
or the barbed wire they are pressed against.

June Post-Lingual

Leon Fedolfi

Poetry

June, mute in arms way reaching.
 Her inhale pulls the sky.
 She exhales with her Propeller mind,
 As cars chase cars on a nearby highway.
 As intimacy, intimate with fleeting fades
 Marked by the sound of a trailing siren.

Hands — mud shaped, into Urn without ashes.
 A Vase for thoughts of her-red-dress.
 For June, no memory so no regret.
 She is in her redness lent.

Remembrance, past my window, see —
 Outside grows dimmer on my limbs
 In the stillness of her absence.

Still, I lasted more, more than days —
 Turns, turn fine and tender same.

Cut finger, blood and mouth remembered.
 Breasts and the shortness of breath
 Above the fabulous dead.

No June, just flesh.
 Severed June Fabulous.

A Chicago run-away from her name —
 Tills dirt in the mouth where speech grows.

June, not dead but left.

All Thumbs
Niles Reddick
Fiction

When I called my mother a bitch at five, she yanked me up off the wooden floor by the arm and dragged me into the spare restroom, where she lathered a bar of Dove and moved it all around in my mouth. “You won’t talk to me like that. I won’t have it.”

I wanted to say, “Yes ma’am. I’m sorry. I won’t do it again,” but I was too busy gagging and rinsing the soap out of my mouth.

“You’re gonna stop sucking your thumb, too.” When I came out of the restroom, she told me to follow her to the kitchen and said, “Hold out your hand.” She dabbed red Tabasco sauce all over my thumb and blew on it like she did when I had a cut and she painted Mercurochrome on it. “You won’t suck that thumb now.”

“Okay”, I said and walked back to watch *Captain Kangaroo*, plopped in my small wooden chair my grandfather made with my name painted on the back. I didn’t suck my thumb, but at some point, I stuck it in my mouth and didn’t think anything of the burning sensation. I’m not sure how long I’d been sucking on it when my mother glided through the living room with a dust mop and asked, “Is that burning your mouth?”

I just nodded and kept on sucking and rubbing my other fingers over the silk on the edge of my blanket. She snatched the blanket from me and said, “I don’t care what Dr. Spock says, you will not carry that blanket everywhere.”

She walked outside with my blanket. She tossed it in the center of the patio and doused it with gas from the red can my dad used for his lawn mower, lit a match, and tossed it on it, and I watched the blanket burn.

“I promise I’ll stop,” I said, but I didn’t. When we were at church, at the grocery store with me in the shopping cart, or at friends or relatives’ homes, my mother constantly pulled the thumb from my mouth and said things---told me my teeth would be crooked, told me I’d never have friends, and told me I’d suck the thumb right off my hand. The thumb on my right hand was the easiest one to suck, but if she put Tabasco on my thumb, I’d find a finger to suck or suck the left thumb. It was like I had all thumbs, and the act was simply a habit, a comfort, and I didn’t even think about it.

When I was in first grade, my thumb slipped in my mouth at quiet time, and a girl in front of me, yelled, “Look, he’s sucking his thumb like a baby.” The whole class laughed, and the teacher said, “That’s enough. Quiet.”

I never sucked my thumb again, and my mother forgot all about it, too, until my baby brother began to suck his thumb. She turned to me and said, “Old Dr. Spock was right after all. It just comes to an end and your teeth look just fine, thank goodness.”

baseline
RC deWinter
Poetry

it was a day for demons
every single one crawled out
irrelevant led the pack
followed by hopeless
lonely
foolish
broke
and every other darkness
that gnaws my heart
sometimes the best one can do
is breathe

résumé
 RC deWinter
 Poetry

every morning when i look out at the wall
 solid
 unknowable
 i recall my failures
 some spectacular
 others merely blips on a scratchy screen

the couldawouldashouldas of a lazy fearful heart
 the shouldnthavebutdids of a lazy illogical mind

i get over it by recalling my talents

i can still sing like nobody's business
 and my grammar is pretty much impeccable
 theyretheirthere hold no mysteries for me

if i fuss long enough in front of the mirror
 i can wipe fiveorsixorseven years off my face
 and no one can make a better photoshop sky than i

can i bake a cherry pie
 you bet
 and build a dry stone wall
 spot a phony a mile off
 and with a little effort lure an interesting man into my
 orbit
 for a little while at least

and when the day has been a disaster and
 my only recourse is drowning my sorrows
 i can mix a perfect six olive martini or three
 toss them down and wake up without a hangover

i have learned to appreciate small victories

blow-in
RC deWinter
Poetry

empty emptier emptiest
how can so much nothingness
keep filling me up
bloating me

a balloon refilled so many times
the latex
leached of give
gave up and died

one of these days
all that obverse of something
the totality of nothingness
will blot out the sun

sucking everything
into
the walking black hole
that is me

The Poem of Vulgar Mathematics

Marc Janseen

Poetry

The night I took flight —
Left the ground somewhere above
And spinning, spinning.

It had been cold —
 An ancient cold
 That invaded everything —
 Permeated everything with arctic atoms.

The haze of your face
The halo of memory
Is twirling, blurry

The sun — distance —
 Ineffective —
As below on the street, cars
 Whispered souls from exhaust pipes —
Starting, stopping,
Never quite what they had promised;
 Like me.

The ground stopped spinning
The cool concrete skirt, faceless
Cruel cradle and rest.

WXG

Anney Bolgiano

Poetry

All this time / these days / inside / I am thinking of my
grandmother's Chevy Prizm / which was donated to NPR
/ and what does Steve Inskeep want with it? / someone
suggests a charity auction / Terry Gross throwing the
steering wheel into the crowd like a frisbee / suddenly
bodied / imagine them all bodied / and Matt McClesky
hurling the carburetor / imagine surrender / they are
ripping her limb from limb / like gods / did I begin to die
the day in the parking lot / I learned to find the brake pedal
with my bare toes in the footwell / imagine pouring half
and half on your muesli / raw egg in your coffee /
remembering your reflection in the light blue metallic /
the early nineties / without a deed it would not exist /
without a deed you resort to a Sawzall / but here is Renée
Montagne shaking the shock absorbers like maracas /
Diane Rehm and Kai Ryssdal ripping off the wiper blades
/ doing our dirty work / who holds the gavel? / who shouts
going once? / going twice?

Me and Mr. Tree

Anney Bolgiano

Poetry

It is a cliched, heavy-handed metaphor to water your houseplants with diluted menstrual blood. You needn't spell it out so plainly: they will never live in your womb, so you will bring your womb to them. But what a disappointing baby your sunburned schefflera would be. Or maybe the least disappointing and the least disappointed. There are women out there watering plastic ferns, and your brother propagating his post-election spider plant, and your father mounting grow lights in his subterranean apartment ceiling. This is all to say that you will be tempted, while sitting in traffic on 495 next to a flatbed hauling swaddled magnolia saplings, to write about the six-foot-tall, four-foot-wide, Norfolk Island Pine at your bedside. How romantic that you thought you'd do anything for him. And while he became top-heavy and outgrew his pot, you imagined chartering a ship to take him home to the Pacific. But what happened? What really happened in the end? You repotted him, and he died and you left him in the yard until Spring came and he burned in a bonfire.

at 13:00 o'clock

Olivier Pagy

Art



The Big Balloon

J. Edward Krufft

Fiction

It was meant for train cars, inflated to keep the freight from shifting during travel.

Shifting. Good word.

We used it as a backyard toy: something to jump on, roll across the lawn like a lumberjack on a river log; something to bounce off of, pound fists into.

When it was fully inflated, it was three feet high and five feet across and was at once billowy and taut. Sometimes — often — we'd render it half flaccid so that one of us could sit on the far end, pushing all the air to the other end, all but begging the other of us to jump on its bulbousness and send the sitter flying into the air.

One Toke Over the Line played on the old clock radio sitting atop the Weber grill; its lyrics embarrassed us in front of the grownups (in private we loved to sing along and pinch our thumb and forefinger before pursed lips and slit our eyes) and so we called to our father, "Come on, do it, do it!"

Brian went first. As he flattened the far end, Dad readied himself and fell backward onto the side swollen with air. Admittedly, Brian's performance wasn't stellar. Still, Mom didn't need to say what she said in front of company.

"I tell you Brian, if you lost that baby fat you'd be able to go a lot higher. Chris, you go. Show your brother."

I sat and flattened the far end, Dad, somewhere behind me. I didn't know he had decided to launch himself from the railing of the deck.

I looked down on the roof of our house. I remember thinking, in that nano-second before consciousness

became my enemy and drained the pigment from my face: “wow, there’s a lot of moss up here.”

Gasps from the grownups.

*Sittin’ downtown in a railway station
One toke over the line*

SNAP!

That winter, a good three months after the cast was removed and I could finally scratch without a coat hanger and Brian had stopped making fun of how scrawny my left arm was compared to my right, we let the air out of the big balloon and took it to the hill behind the school and we — Me, Brian, Carla, and Max — rode that giant mass of rubber down the hill in the snow. Over and over and over.

Carla was on the front and I saw the massive backside of Jake Weir and when Carla’s face came in high-velocity contact with that massive back, the snow went red.

My father was the volunteer fireman on duty. He handled Carla so deftly, calming her sobs, collecting her teeth and packing them — roots still attached — in clean snow (intentionally he walked a distance from the accident to find snow unmolested). I found myself saying to a kid I didn’t know: “That’s my dad.” If he saw me standing there, he didn’t betray the fact. He was busy. He was important.

Important. There’s a word.

By 8th grade, Brian and I sat nearly every day in the abandoned, horseshoe shaped arena, out through the woods at the Old Riding Academy, and got stoned. Brian always had pot. I don’t know where he got it. He might have grown it himself for all I knew. Brian and I

were close in that we were brothers — Irish twins, at that — but we weren't at all close in the really-talking-to-one-another sense. Which was mostly cool. But it made it all the more surprising, as I passed the joint back to Brian, that I saw tears. He noticed my notice and turned away.

“What?” he asked.

I shook my head, looking to my lap. “Nothing.”

Later, heading home through the woods, super stoned (if Brian did grow his own shit, he was a horticultural genius) I asked him: “You okay?” His answer was to walk faster, outpace me, and eventually, he broke into a jog.

When I got home, his bedroom door was closed and so I went out back in order to evade my mother's *why are your eyes so bloodshot* inquires.

The balloon was flat. I thought that strange. I could have sworn it was completely inflated when I glanced it from my bedroom window the day before. I walked over. It had been slashed. Not once, but thoroughly. It was slashed the way they say it in those *48 Hours* episodes: up-close and personal.

Up-close. Personal.

Much later, Dad was out on a call, thunder crashing against the moss on the roof. We turned off the lights, not so much in homage to him for the work he was doing in nasty conditions, but because Brian and I liked the idea of being without electricity in a storm. We played “Can't Stop,” a game we got through the mail from cereal box tops. Mom was winning, her eyes glistening in the Yankee Candlelight.

The smell of saccharine cinnamon.

She held the dice for longer than was typical of her.

“Listen, boys.” She put the dice on the table. “Your father and I. We've decided. We've decided that we.

“We’re getting divorced, boys.”

Brian and I looked at each other. I was the one to finally speak.

“It’s your turn, Mom.”

Divorced.

The big balloon stayed put, slashed and flat and sad, until the spring when Mom decided to redo the little patch of earth next to the garage. “I’m going to plant strawberries,” she declared. Brian and I helped her dig out the weeds and before we emptied the bags of fresh mulch she asked us to go grab the big balloon. Mom arranged it over the plot of land. “There,” she said. “That will keep the weeds from coming back.”

I looked to Brian, but he was looking at the ground. No one mentioned the slashes, not before, not now, and as we began heaping the fresh dirt atop, it was clear, not ever.

Where I lived

Taiwo Patrick Akanbi

Poetry

Lived by a blacksmith's smelting shed
Where irons bled
Hot furnace-tamed
And deaf-hammered

By the rainmaker's conjured storm
Where rare clouds form
From steaming herbs
And chanting abs

In a kingdom kept by deity
Revered daily.
With no-sword fort
Wars are words-fought

Heart Stealers

Taiwo Patrick Akanbi

Poetry

The generalissimo, the love warlords
Capturing hearts for lovesake
My redheart has gone missing
I am heartless
Gone missing within your white heart
Consequently, you are pink hearted

Mindless, I kept losing my mind
For you.
Consuming minds to stay alive
Within you.

Contributor Bios

Taiwo Patrick Akanbi

Taiwo Patrick Akanbi (1991) was born to Nigerian parents. Loves reading and writing short stories and poem. His poetry is influenced by life experiences, love and folklore.

Dylan Benjamin

Dylan Benjamin is writer from the North of England and currently studies English Literature and Creative Writing with the OU. He dabbles in poetry, fiction and essay writing and has work featured in small-press publications such as Misery Tourism. He can usually be found on the beach with his dog, Jasper, and you can follow him on Twitter @_dylanbenjamin

Rick Blum

Rick Blum has been chronicling life's vagaries through essays and poetry for more than 30 years during stints as a nightclub owner, high-tech manager, market research mogul, and, most recently, old geezer. His writings have appeared in more than 60 magazines and literary journals, as well as in numerous poetry anthologies. He is also a frequent contributor to the Humor Times.

Anney Bolgiano

Anney Bolgiano lives in Washington, DC where she teaches a class on the rhetoric of apology as an adjunct professor of writing at the George Washington University, tutors, and (in non-pandemic times) works in a cafe. She received her MFA from George Mason University, and her BA from Guilford College. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Whiskey Island, Funny Looking Dog Quarterly, A Velvet Giant, District Lines Anthology, and elsewhere.

S. T. Brant

My name is S. T. Brant, and I'm a teacher in Las Vegas. Publications in or coming from Santa Clara Review, La Piccioletta Barca, After the Pause, Cathexis Northwest Press, RIC, Anti-Heroin Chic. Twitter: @terriblebinth

Christine Brooks

Christine Brooks is a graduate of Western New England University with her B.A. in Literature and her M.F.A. from Bay Path University in Creative Nonfiction. Her poem, the price, is in the October issue of The Cabinet of Heed and her poems, life and I Don't Believe, are in the fall issue of Door Is a Jar. Two poems, friends and demons are in the January 2020 issue of Cathexis Northwest Press and her poem, communion, is in the January 2020 issue of Pub House Books. Her series of vignettes, Small Packages, was named a semifinalist at Gazing Grain Press in August 2018. Her essay, What I Learned from Being Accidentally Celibate for Five Years was featured in HuffPost, MSN, Yahoo and Daily Mail UK in April 2019. Her book of poems, The Cigar Box Poems, is due out in March 2020.

Holly Day

Holly Day's poetry has recently appeared in Asimov's Science Fiction, Grain, and Harvard Review. Her newest poetry collections are In This Place, She Is Her Own (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), A Wall to Protect Your Eyes (Pski's Porch Publishing), Folios of Dried Flowers and Pressed Birds (Cyberwit.net), Where We Went Wrong (Clare Songbirds Publishing), Into the Cracks (Golden Antelope Press), and Cross Referencing a Book of Summer (Silver Bow Publishing), while her newest nonfiction books are Music Theory for Dummies and Tattoo FAQ.

RC deWinter

RC deWinter's poetry is widely anthologized, notably in New York City Haiku (New York Times, February 2017), Cowboys & Cocktails (Brick Street Poetry, April 2019), Nature In The Now (Tiny Seed Press, August 2019), in print in 2River, Adelaide Magazine, Call Me [Brackets], Door Is A Jar, Genre Urban Arts, Gravitas, In Parentheses, Kansas City Voices, Meat For Tea: The Valley Review, Night Picnic Journal, Prairie Schooner and Southword among many others and appears in numerous online literary journals.

Thomas Elson

Thomas Elson's short stories, poetry, and flash fiction have been published in numerous venues. He divides his time between Northern California and Western Kansas.

Leon Fedolfi

Leon is an avid reader and aspiring writer of poetry. He has published in The Raw Art Review, Prometheus Dreaming, Rumble Fish Quarterly and Cathexis Northwest Press. Leon has a book of poetry, The Uninvented Ear, coming out with UnCollected Press in the Fall of 2020.

Clive Aaron Gill

Forty stories by Clive Aaron Gill have appeared in literary journals and in "People of Few Words Anthology." He tells his stories at public and private gatherings. Born in Zimbabwe, Clive has lived and worked in Southern Africa, North America and Europe. He received a degree in Economics from the University of California, Los Angeles and lives in San Diego. More of Clive's stories are available at amazon.com/Clive-Aaron-Gill/e/B00FADQIR

Warren Paul Glover

Warren Paul Glover is a British-Australian screenwriter, playwright, poet and actor, living in Sydney. When he's not writing Warren spends his time walking his dog, Monty, who's great at helping Warren learn his lines.

John Grey

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in Hawaii Pacific Review, Dalhousie Review and Qwerty with work upcoming in Blueline, Willard and Maple and Clade Song.

Bree Devones Hsieh

Bree Devones Hsieh was born on the West Coast, raised in the Dakotas, and lives in the Los Angeles area. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in Blue Unicorn, I-70 Review, Dappled Things, Piltdown Review, Chaleur Magazine, Black Fox Literary Magazine, and Sojourners.

Ibrahim Babátundé Ibrahim

Ibrahim started reading at an early age, influenced by his grandmother's storytelling of African folklore. He picked up his first James Hadley Chase novel at 8; and for the love of stories, was already done with both the Quran and the Bible by the time he was 10. He sees himself as a seeker and a truth-sayer. His works explore a wide range of topics, all from an African perspective. He is presently working on his first book; a collection of short stories. His works appear (or are forthcoming) in Sub-Saharan Magazine, Journal of African Youth Literature, Ynaija, OkadaBooks Blog, Black Muslim Reads Anthology, and Ibua Journal. His short story 'Folding Time' is shortlisted for the #GogeAfrica20 writing prize.

Ibrahim writes from Ilorin, Nigeria. He can be found on @heemthewriter across social media.

Marc Janseen

Marc Janssen coordinates the Salem Poetry Project and Salem Poetry Festival. He is a 2020 Oregon Poet Laureate nominee and his poetry is scattered around the world in places like Penumbra, Slant, Cirque Journal, Off the Coast and The Ottawa Arts Journal.

Wilson Koewing

Wilson Koewing is a writer from South Carolina. He received an MFA in creative writing from The University of New Orleans. He currently resides in Denver, Colorado. He has work forthcoming in Pembroke Magazine, Sky Island Journal, X-R-A-Y Literary Magazine, New Pop Lit and Five on the Fifth. He was a November 2019 resident of The Vermont Studio Center.

J. Edward Krufft

J. Edward Krufft received his MFA in fiction writing from Brooklyn College. He is a multiple Best Short Fictions nominee, and his stories have appeared in journals including Barren Magazine and Lunate. He is editor-at-large for trampset. His love for mid-century modern design knows no bounds, and all things being equal, he wishes he were an architect in 1950. He lives with his husband, Mike, and their adopted Siberian Husky, Sasha, in Queens, NY and Sullivan County, NY. His Web site: www.jedwardkrufft.com and he can be followed on twitter: @jedwardkrufft.

Michael Lacare

My work has been published in The Rumpus and Able Muse as well as Salon. I live in Florida with my wife, Lori.

Michael R. Lane

Michael R. Lane has studied literature and creative writing at Point Park University, Sonoma State University and Portland State University. His fiction has appeared in The Hungry Chimera, THEMA Literary Journal, Spindrift, African Voices Magazine, Potluck Mag and Taj Mahal Review to name a few. Michael is the author of four novels, two short story collections and three collections of poetry.

Richard Luftig

I am a former professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio now residing in California. My poems and stories have appeared in numerous literary journals in the United States (including DOOR IS A JAR) and internationally in Canada, Australia, Europe and Asia. Two of my poems recently appeared in *Realms of the Mothers: The First Decade of Dos Madres Press*. My latest book of poems, *A Grammar for Snow*, has recently been published by Unsolicited Press.

Michael Lopez

Michael Lopez is an MFA in Writing candidate at San Francisco University where he has worked as the poetry editor for the graduate online literary journal, and has worked as a TA assisting the undergraduate literary paper magazine. When he is not on campus he is either bartending or carrying on the conversation at a bar, or he's out on a nature-hike carrying a pair of binoculars, with a pen and paper.

DS Maolalai

DS Maolalai has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and three times for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016) and "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019).

Ken Mootz

My short stories "Grocery List," "Toothbrush," "What Happens After You Die," "Suicide Notes Are a Bitch," "The First Time I Dropped Acid," and "Master of the Obvious" were published in Empty Sink Publishing, Livid Squid Literary Journal, Weirderary, Toad Suck Review, and Fleas on the Dog. Additionally, Molecule has just published my most recent short story "On One of These Days." I have also written two novels and seven screenplays, one of which was optioned by an independent studio.

Zach Murphy

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born, multi-faceted writer who somehow ended up in the charming but often chilly land of St. Paul, Minnesota. His stories have appeared in Haute Dish, The Bitchin' Kitsch, WINK, and the Wayne Literary Review. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly and loves cats and movies.

Olivier Pagy

Born in Turkey to a French father and Turkish/British mother; my life is an eclectic mix of cultures and ideas. At the age of 13, I went to a boarding school in the UK; after which I went to Central Saint Martins in London, studying art curation. My work is based around ideas that I have encountered in my own experience, where they have been emphasized to tell an impactful narrative.

I currently work with the idea of questioning the viewer on a journey- who is unveiled at the gaze of critical thought; the overturning argument is inspired by a peculiar juice that pours from “Speeches, words, conversations, hopes, religion, sex, art” — ; drawing a self-portrait on a cave wall, dividing my understanding of poetics. I have been published both in Turkey in newspapers, and in the UK, writing for art exhibitions.

Niles Reddick

Niles Reddick is author of the novel *Drifting too far from the Shore*, two collections *Reading the Coffee Grounds* and *Road Kill Art and Other Oddities*, and a novella *Lead Me Home*. His work has been featured in eleven anthologies and in over two hundred literary magazines including *The Saturday Evening Post*, *PIF*, *New Reader Magazine*, *Forth Magazine*, *Cheap Pop*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *With Painted Words*, among many others.

Adam Rose

Adam Rose writes and teaches in Los Angeles. You can find some recent work of his in *Gravel*, *Four Ties* *Literary Review*, *The Milo Review*, *Story Chord*, *The Casserole*, *Reimagine* and *Tell Us a Story*. Adam has an all ages graphic novel that was published by Markosia Entertainment last year.

Maria Sakr

My name is Maria, I come from Lebanon, and I am an MFA candidate at the New School, studying Creative Writing. I live in Manhattan, New York City.

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*.

Yash Seyedbagheri

Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. He is a self-proclaimed Romantic and Tchaikovsky addict. Yash's stories are forthcoming or have been published in *Café Lit*, *Mad Swirl*, *50 Word Stories*, and *Ariel Chart*, among others.

Steve Slavin

A recovering economist, Steve Slavin earns a living writing math and economics books. The third volume of his short stories, *To the City, with Love*, has recently been published.

Carmi Soifer

Carmi Soifer lives in Suquamish, Washington, where she can see Mt. Rainier from her mailbox. Her poems appear in anthologies and journals, most recently in *The Healing Muse*, *Poetry South*, *Tule Review*, *Passager Journal*, and *Main Street Rag*. She was Artist-in-Residence at Rocky Mountain National Park.

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.

Richard Widerkehr

Richard's latest book is *In The Presence Of Absence* (MoonPath Press). His first book of poems was *The Way Home*. He's worked as a case manager with the mentally ill and, later, taught writing workshops at the Port Townsend Writers' Conference. He reads poems for Shark Reef Review.

Zoe

I'm from Nigeria, a 19-year-old law student of the University of Lagos, Nigeria. I write poetry and recently I dabble into other forms of poetry such as acrostic poems, haikus, and ballad to mention a few. I also dabble into prose too, though my skills need to be sharpened. A couple of my poems are on Awakening Poetry group on Facebook and one of my poems has been published in *Creative Writers Magazine*. I'm an unpublished author who just published an anthology of poems that tells two different tales. *Memoirs of Love and Loss* is available on Amazon, Lulu and Google drive via my blog: www.zoepoem.blogspot.com

Submission Guidelines

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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.

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

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