

DOOR = JAR



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Door Is A Jar
Issue 19

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Cover Image “Botanical”
by Montana Patrick

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Adjust Your Frequency

Sofia T. Romero

Fiction

You start swimming around a little, a leisurely breaststroke. Then bam — you jam up against something. It's the side of your own skull.

You recoil a little and start to swim the other direction and then bam — the other side of your skull. So you start to rocket around until the frenzy stirs up a froth in your brain, and then you can't see the other side anymore and you are just bouncing bouncing bouncing.

It's a soft landing though. Beyond the mush of your brain, your skull is fuzzy, translucent. You can see outside, you can see everyone out there, they are tapping on the outside of your skull.

Hello? Hello? Hello? Are you in there? they shout.

And you shout back: Yes, I am in here. But the words you are saying are not the ones they are hearing. Or when they do come out, they are a soft yes, I'm fine. The quietest.

So they lean in closer. Are you in there? they shout, even more loudly now. And you cover your ears, you think this is a way to getting it to stop. Are you in there? they shout again, and they rap on the outside of your skull, and you cover your ears to make the sound stop. You can't distinguish the sounds, the whine and white noise is all around you, and now your heart is beating faster, maybe it's always been beating this fast, you don't know.

But now you are getting in on the action: Are you out there? you shout at them, tapping tapping tapping against the top, trying to get out. Someone is drilling into your head, lifting up the top of your skull like the shell of a soft-boiled egg, and what they see when they look

inside is something that looks like a normal human brain.

Still, they frown and say well, what is happening here? And you look up at them, because you're still awake this whole time, and you say: I'm happening here.

And they can't hear you, so they get a large instrument, you have never seen anything like this before. And they say well, that doesn't look right. And then they say, This won't hurt a bit. And you look at them and your voice is so so quiet they don't even hear you say it couldn't hurt more than it already does.

And they start to poke around with the instrument, you realize they mean to take what they see inside your skull completely out. And you want them to because that might mean the end of the noise.

But while they are poking around, you suddenly realize: You love the noise. You don't want the noise to go. You want it there forever. You are one with the noise. You are the noise. If they destroy the noise, they might destroy you.

You sit up. You stop crying. You need to lie down, they say, gently pushing your shoulders down. You need to lie down so we can fix this, they say. It's for your own good.

You grab the top of your skull and jam it back on to your head like it's a hat. It fits because it does. The noise is now contained in your head again.

You stand up. You wipe your face. Have a good day, you say to them in a voice that could be heard above a strong wind, but they don't hear you, they are just so busy exclaiming to themselves that they don't understand why anyone would refuse their help.

You take your noise, which has quieted down to a hum for now, and you slide off the table. And while they are standing around discussing what is happening, they don't even notice that you have slipped out the door.

At The Edge of Green Mountain

Michael Lopez

Poetry

May I unfold the origami from your garden?
I will collect only the purple ones, under the swollen sun

Blueberries burst across the horizon
from between my oozing fingers

In a field afar
I am a cosmonaut landing in waist-high grass

Where deerflies bite
for my red sap

At the overgrown lake
we dove like iridescent sea lizards

Your voice spills out from the kitchen window
entangled in an aura of zucchini bread

A tunnel,
With some light

Distance Was My Home

Gary Barkow

Poetry

I kicked your tin cans across the sky in my first pair of jeans,
super-hero little dude a hundred nicknames

Little Fella' bustin' buttons running down rabbits in hope.

I remember those rabbits of years ago —
now rabbits are gone
on bicycles never learned to ride,
on wheels of shame,
nothing right,
even how to ride a bike.

Disappear, Little Fella', I promise we'll be free:
Hidden under the covers,
transistor radio,
Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard,
and me nowhere to go.

I read about a list-of-names unearthed in Sinai,
pleading from ancient tablets,
Please help us after we die.

I will help you, Mom and Dad, whispering your names

listening for “Jack and Sylvia”
inside of me.

I remember that distance of years ago,
now distance is gone.

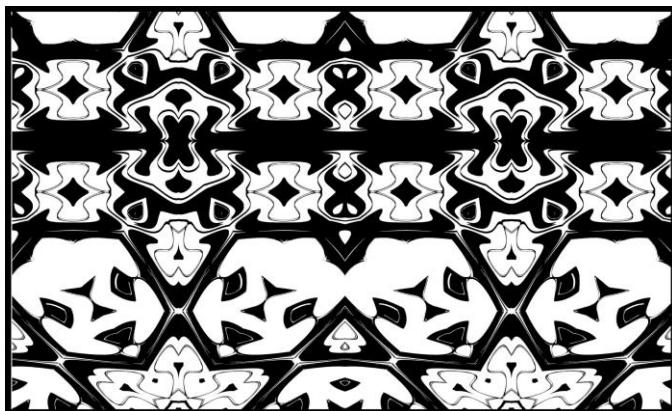
Communion

A.J. Ortega

Poetry

to come save, hold, lay with, smell, taste, love, cry with,
laugh with, scream with, stay silent with, read with,
write with, play with, run with, live with, leave with,
start with, end with, fucking just eat with, drink with,
talk about life with, talk death with, stay warm with,
cool off with, sweat with, get high with, help change the
goddamn clocks back one hour
thought it was eight and now it's only seven.
travel through time with.

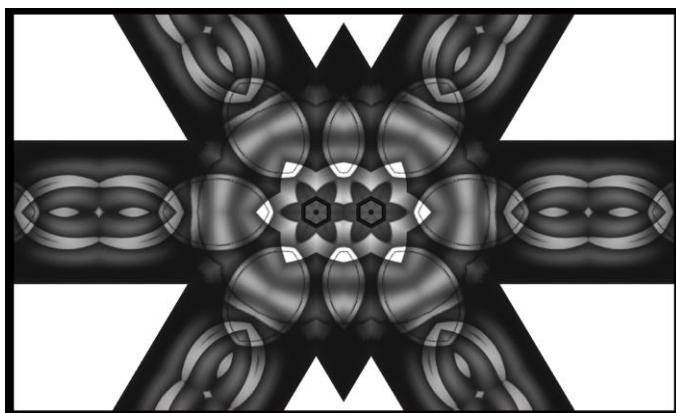
American Beauty 21b
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



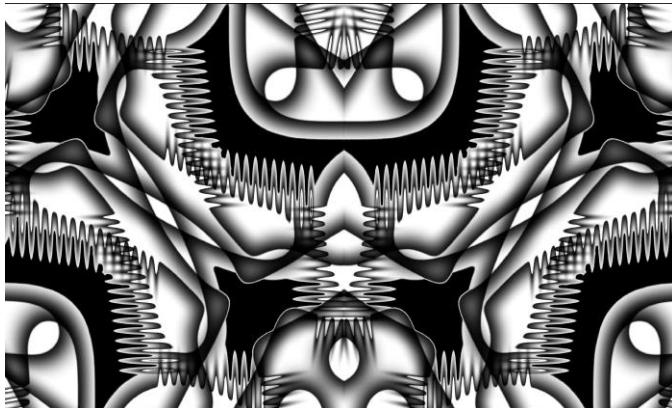
Split Level 5b

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Art



A Walk at Night
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



A Life in Numbers

Jared Cappel

Fiction

Eight paces from the oak tree.

The earth crumbles beneath my wingtips. The grass that remains is withered and dry. Only the weeds thrive. They brush against the cuffs of my pants, their thorns lodging into the gabardine. It's hard to believe that what was once the bane of my father's yard is now the centerpiece, the lone verdant touch in an otherwise desolate wasteland.

Seven hours before sunset.

There's plenty of daylight remaining, but little of it reaches the yard. A narrow stream of light filters through the leaves of the old oak tree, providing a semblance of warmth. I remember my father's furor when the neighbours built an extension to their home, blocking the rays needed to feed his garden. The extension still stands but requires a fresh coat of paint, the faded colour a testament to the stolen light.

Six inches apart.

Thin rotting strips of wood are the last vestiges of my father's prized garden. He used a plastic measuring stick to plant his vegetables. He believed each seed should be exactly half a foot apart, regardless of what he was growing. The end result was a mishmash between order and chaos, creating unintended pockets of space in his meticulously arranged plot.

Five feet tall.

A peeling cedar fence encircles the yard. My father believed a good fence should be built just above eye level. A short man, even for his time, he stood exactly five feet from the ground. If he had stopped to consider others, even for a second, perhaps he wouldn't have been

surprised to find the taller neighbours peering down at him from above the cedar planks.

Four seasons in a year.

A rusted wheelbarrow lies overturned at the back of the lawn. In the winter, my father used it to carry the snow from his yard to the embankment at the end of the street. He's the only man I've known to shovel his backyard, the only man I've known to shovel grass at all. He swore it gave his lawn an advantage, even if he could never define how.

Three mouths to feed.

A metal chain runs from the top of the deck to the base of the steps. It was used to keep Daisy outside. She had just enough slack to reach the yard, but not enough to dig through the garden. My father left her outside day and night. He overlooked the stains she left on the grass, convinced that her presence was enough to keep the neighbourhood critters away from his cherished vegetables.

Two types of people.

At the back of the yard stands an old shed, its door hanging from its hinges like a loose tooth waiting to be yanked. Cobwebs fill the darkened space, obscuring a fist-sized hole in the rotten wood. My father believed everyone falls under one of two categories: those who bottle up their anger and those who release it.

One owner.

The house is simple yet sturdy. Some might even call it picturesque. My father built it himself with his own two hands. His blood, sweat and (my) tears dot every inch of the property. I lift piles of dirt from the garden with my father's old shovel. I open a ceramic urn and dump small mounds of ash at carefully measured six-inch intervals.

Zero reasons to stay.

The Fall
Wayne Dean-Richards
Fiction

Me? I fell into a hole and stayed there.

I didn't see the hole, which suggests it was night when I fell. Though it may not have been since I often walked around with my eyes shut. Did so for whole days at a time. Maybe I had a talent for it. It was day or night when I fell into the hole, that's all I can be sure of.

How deep is the hole? I don't know. It's always dark so I have only my estimates to go by. Lying on my back sometimes I estimate I'm hundreds of feet below ground. Other times I estimate I'm merely a few feet below ground. Barely head height if I were to stand. Which I don't.

Sometimes I imagine I can climb out of this hole if I want to. Driving my fingers and toes into tiny handholds, tiny footholds. Hoisting with all my strength until I reach the top. Though I've never actually tried to climb out because I get distracted by the particles.

There are particles in the darkness, which move, as if they're alive. Sometimes I count them. There's comfort or terror in this counting.

To sum up for the sake of convenience: I lie here on my back, alone, estimating my depth, imagine climbing out of my hole or not, count particles or not and am comforted or terrified.

Me? I fell into a hole and stayed there.

The Wound
Kristen Mitchell
Poetry

We often walk away when we are wounded.
You see it in the movies.
A man is shot, bleeding, still trying to crawl away.
Still trying to get what he wants.
He holds his wound, blood pouring through his hands.
He thinks, no one will get away with this.
No one will ever hurt me again.
The wound creates a power.
It doesn't inflict the fear that there's no chance
to get what's wanted.
Adrenaline takes over.
Passing though us, opening like a wound.
The way the blood pours out.
Conveying a message, it changes color.
Granting a boon of scar tissue to mend.
Now take it.

Dishwater

Sean Garner

Poetry

Undulating and lurching on the ground
outside of the Kwik Stop spitting
curses at the universe and anyone
within earshot

Red and blue flashing lights
muffled sound of radio chatter
blood handprint streaking down
the glass door of the gas station

Tomorrow his battered face will be on the local news
website
freshly missing and broken teeth
shattered like porcelain and swallowed

He'll be an example of life
turned sour
wretched derelict crawled up from some gutter
to terrorize the friendly neighborhood 24/7 gas station
people will see his wild-man eyes and decomposing skin
sunken mouth and eyes

unwashed
unkempt
ran thru sewage
rung out

Thrown out
like so much dishwater
and left to dry

People will see this man

say *Jee-zus*
and move on

Sometime later
stepping over his dying body
on a downtown sidewalk

Traveling Still

Sean Garner

Poetry

In a neighborhood where streetlights
are low and hills are steep and good families in debt
sleep the dark quietly away
I sit outside with a cigarette watching
lightning streak across the western sky
through tall trees
dreaming of movement

Finally seeing that tomorrow is
un-seeable

False prophecy
banking on coincidence

These visions
are going nowhere
might as well
color them and
make them bright

If I am to dream of the distance
dream lights across the sky
effervescent pink sand
shifting underfoot and
dream a sun always cresting on horizon
radiating just enough purple-orange watercolor rays
to inspire another distance
another move
another dimly lit street
on a steep hill
another cigarette
under low streetlights

and tall trees

Elements — Fires for Sand, Glass and Ash

Kyle Brandon Lee

Poetry

The future is but sand
minuscule grains of possibilities,
what can be, not what should nor necessarily will.

There is no shape to it, only fluidity.

Form, foundation, purpose come in the fires of a
crucible.

The sand becomes glass
but clarity is no guarantee.
Skill, influence, passion all feed
to the end result.

The present is but glass
to reflect and discern,
images to be taken forward.

All else burns away.

The past is but ash.

Foreshock
James Sullivan
Fiction

Erika's fortune-teller told her to dump me.

A true believer, Erika had been a patron of Tarot interpreters, mediums, and medicine men since she'd started receiving an allowance. Instead of buying comic books, she would give her 500 yen to some diviner who could identify her spirit color and coordinate her accessories with that glow. It was how she'd chosen the outfit she wore on our first date, she once confessed, and how one relationship after another had begun and concluded. Like following a trail of breadcrumbs left by some benevolent spirit guide, she'd marched through a life charmed by what I considered trained illusionists.

Now her year-long experiment dating an American was under supernatural review. I didn't believe she'd really let some tea-leaf reader steer us apart. Divined judgment had given her tips on some hot real estate deals, sure. And we'd won Paul McCartney tickets after rubbing a bag of Monk-blessed salt between our palms and singing "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" as if the words themselves contained magic. But hadn't she made the important decisions herself?

"It's like the song, you know?" I said. "'Tomorrow Never Knows.'"

"That's not what the song's about," she said. "But maybe a little ego death would do you some good, Mr. Know-it-All."

"Don't you think this is a little premature?"

"*You* might not understand, but she's never steered me wrong—never once 'In My Life.' Do you remember *that* song?"

"Let's see about that," I said, taking her hand and sliding off its glove. I looked over her palm, aqua

green light undulating across the folds. The Kobe Luminarie shone over us, part Papal Archbasilica, part Arabian palace, and many glimmering parts Christmas light display. The yearly event in the center of Kobe filled the streets with couples in puffy scarves and snugly buttoned duffle coats. Visitors marched ceremonially under great, glowing geometric ornaments to the rhythm of a peculiar organ dirge, and at the end, there were food vendors. It was our second visit, shaping up to be our Last Supper sipping broth in silence. A meal after a wake. I had to try something.

I blew improvised stage fog over Erika's hand.

"Look. It's your intellect line."

"Oh, you jerk. It's *plenty* long."

"I agree. Absolutely, I agree," I said, lightly teasing the patterns in her palm. "But," I said with a double-tap, "it's this that concerns me. This fold." Her eyes followed the shape I was sketching. "Your intellect line is bisected right here by this trench—the Great Fault of Gullibility."

"Give me a break," she said and tugged her glove on. Erika walked several paces ahead of me.

We passed through the central dome of light and passed on the food stalls, winding through crowds and steam signals rising from *yakisoba* and tea.

"I could go for a bite. Did your psychic choose our dinner tonight?"

"*She* said we ought to split. As *soon* as possible."

"Split?" I said. "And here I was planning on paying."

"Very funny," she said. "I don't need to be psychic to see the problem with a man who can't even plan dinner because he's cracking stupid jokes all evening."

"Aren't you hungry?"

"I'm not sure anymore."

We kept walking. I trailed behind her until we no longer saw the river of couples on posh streets walking under ocean-glow. We walked until our steps were free of that prayerful organ processional, until our feet ached, and our skin stung in the cold. We walked until I caught up with her. Until my stomach moaned, and I did my best foreign-style full body bow of apology. Until that finally got a laugh and drew her hand nestling into my pocket for warmth. Until we asked at the same moment in crisscrossed languages, *Where are we, anyway?*

Glasses foggy with scarf-trapped breath, we led each other, or were drawn as if by dowsing twig down side streets line with shops. Grilled chicken booths sprouted from cracks in buildings, and foreign fashion boutiques creaked open from under rusty awnings. Multicolor light from electric signs kaleidoscoped in my clouded lenses, and the city led us back to its center in lockstep.

It led us to a street fortune-teller. Her body bent over a ramshackle table, eyes obscured by aged folds of flesh. Erika gave my hand a squeeze that meant she was ready for a second opinion, and I approached the sour-smelling street corner. The old woman took my hand with a bear trap grip, scraping a sharp, black fingernail over my palm like she was etching a brand into my skin. She shouted abracadabra and this and that, and the skeptic in me tried to seize onto an inconsistency, some clear falsehood to prove her just another trickster. But her obscure dialect spoke beyond comprehension and into flesh. She waved her hands and implored Erika and cast specks of spit against my face. Erika affirmed each dictum, hair bobbing forward as she gave deep, reverent nods. My palm was scratched raw, and as the reading continued, I found I could only discern the creaking tone of the woman's voice and the hypnotic rattle that sounded from the core of her bony figure.

We sat down facing each other over the heating grill of a *yakiniku* restaurant. Without even looking at the menu, Erika rattled off an array of cuts of meat like some practiced sutra. Whatever the fortune teller had said, Erika was now perfect coolness before the radiating heat of the grill.

Fatty, glimmering slivers of beef arrived on platters arranged like fine jewels. The metal grate sizzled with grease, and I could feel my body warming up as I lay several marbled morsels down to cook. My red hand still wore a bizarre new pattern of tender lines carved by the old palm reader's claw. Erika reached tongs into a ceramic pot and, slowly raising her hand to eye level, she unraveled a serpentine slice of beef dripping some fiery sauce.

“So, really,” I said. “What *did* that old lady say?”

Erika flashed a charming new smile.

“Be a good boy and cut this.”

Flames licked at the darkening meat, and behind her, red paper lanterns hung from the ceiling began to sway.

The Archeology of Grief

Fatima Malik

Poetry

The day my father's heart stilled, pain
took a chisel to my heart
and started excavating.
Slowly, carefully
it shook loose the artifact
that was his presence
in my life. Dusting off old memories,
polishing new regrets, wondering
at the cruelty of time.
Judith Butler says that grievability
is a presupposition for life
that matters. The day my father's heart stilled, mine
broke. I wonder if it will be unearthed
somewhere one day,
cracks lovingly filled in with gold
by those who have since then drawn me
close — a kind of human
kintsukuroi. For now,
I lean in
to the hands of pain,
heart-hollow,
heart-hobbled,
heart-howling.

Soundless Sketching

Clara Roberts

Poetry

Shrouded by layered fading shadows,
she is muted by the vanishing light
and foggy shades
of darkness that have wound her into
threads.

The self-control that she covets is crumbling,
crumbling into slick white dust,
fading as the corroded clocks chime
and as each piece of nail polish
chips.

It is not the pale face waiting
to be caressed.

It is the refusal to dive into
raw swollen
skin.

You never needed days
in a perpetual sequence of tragedy and confusion.
You now see that it is dangerous to scratch the make-up
of your habit's pulsation—
quivering as though drunk from your swollen failures
and the dispirited words you hold onto every time.
Words haunt and leave images,
images that provoke beauty
and leave you forever
silent.

With All the Smoothness Carried on a Kiss

Bill Wolak

Art



Botanical
Montana Patrick
Art



Invited

Nancy K. Dobson

Poetry

I press my cheek against the cold windowpane
and hear wind rush by,
impatient car wheels that spin for home.
Today we wandered through
cluttered second-hand stores,
tried on plaid berets and feather boas,
laughed about costumes we once wore
in our one-act play at the Interact Theater,
we admired long boards in the surf shop,
ran our fingers along their epoxy edges
then sat with our mochas and a newspaper
at Miracles Café, silent as the tide rolled in.
In the last hour of skyline, I close my eyes
as the window numbs my skin.
Blood leaves my face to tuck itself away
in the heated core of my body.
If I put my hand on your thigh,
you'll squeeze my cold fingers
and later, when we are home,
you will fold me into you,
an invitation to share in all
the things we will remember
and all the things we will forget.

Escape from Paris

Nancy K. Dobson

Poetry

My last morning in Paris, I leave my brass key on
Martine's radiator,

chuck my French phrase book in the metro garbage
and use my final ticket on Line Thirteen.

This summer lasted so long, it has turned into several
summers.

You were only in one of them, so it's unfair I took you
halfway around the world to wander the Rue de
Varenne,

haunt some shabby bistro all afternoon, and look over
someone else's shoulder at a priceless piece of art.
You don't even like museums.

The woman at the Dublin airport tells me
I don't need to be angry at their long customs line
but really, I need to be angrier.

Has she ever tried to shake a ghost while changing
planes?

My last euros spent on the in-flight mini bar,
I swallow four shots of vodka, close my eyes and
pretend I'm alone.

Somewhere over Manitoba, the last of my patience runs
out

as I sway in line for the pocket-sized toilet.

I wonder, if I ever go to Manitoba,
will I need to escape you all over again?

Four hours later, after a final descent into San Francisco,
I wait for my bag to tumble down the battered carousel
so I can lug it home, unpack carefully bought souvenirs
I'll never give you
and keep living the life I do not yet know is a lie.

Nighttime Zoo
Nancy K. Dobson
Poetry

We hike a concrete hill to the big cat exhibit,
you with a backpack and picnic dinner,
as I push an umbrella stroller with plastic wheels.
Our toddler's sandaled feet swing just above the
pavement
as a June bug hovers over my July-damp skin.
Moving past milky storks and fishing cats,
we reach the den of restless tigers.
Eager to prowl once darkness falls,
they emit deep snarls muffled by thick glass.
In an old Somali proverb, a brave man
is frightened three times by a lion:
when he first sees its tracks, when he first hears it roar,
and finally, when he confronts the jungle king.
I wonder with a tiny thrill if the tiger marks me,
if he senses my glass-tempered fear
as we feast upon our sandwiches,
our son's eyes fixed on the pacing beast.
Nightfall uses the manicured tangles of planted foliage
to create an illusion of adventure,
on our trek back down the hill to the exit
under a chorus of crickets and pre-recorded jungle
sounds.
Painted arrows keep us moving forward,
but I feel an irrational hunger grow within me,
to move faster, to leave you ten steps behind,
and seek out eyes that track me,
glittering daggers that linger in the dark.

My Love Was Tossed

John Tustin

Poetry

My love was tossed out into the night
and the night is so much larger than love
that I will likely never find it again.

Love is so small sometimes:
It can get lost in a sock drawer
or remain undetected under soft refrigerator light.

My love is small like that now.
I keep myself inside where it's safe,
where the night does not rage or stare harshly.

My love was tossed out into the night;
A night colder than my heart in its non-angled fury.
The door remains open, but it hasn't returned.

It won't.

Paul (And Peter Parker)

John Tustin

Poetry

There is this space
just under the windowsill
and I see these little white spools
that look like cocoons
stuck to the underside
and I wonder if maybe they were made for the babies
of the spider I called Paul
who once kept my windowsill safe
from earwigs
(I saw their corpses dried up
beneath his perch
just beneath the sill in his web
...or maybe hers, I guess.
maybe Paul was Paula).
Paul disappeared and I never saw the babies
if they ever existed
but something keeps my broom
from sweeping away whatever this is
stuck under my windowsill.
There has not been a bug corpse under that window
in two years.
I'll bring out my broom tomorrow.
We'll see what happens.

There used to be another spider under the other
windowsill
and I called him Peter Parker.
I think that it's possible Paul (Paula?)
ate him
but, of course,
I have no clue.
Everything about life

is, at best, just a guess.

The Moon, Try #3

Tom Will

Poetry

The moon swaying
Like a traffic light
In the wind

Seems to say
Slow down
Slow down

Infestation
Barbara Purcell
Fiction

Alex dumped me the day before I turned 30. We were together for 11 months, and I was sure he would ask me to marry him. *You're not the prettiest, funniest, or smartest woman I've ever been with, but there's something about you*, he once told me as we waited in line for brunch.

Alex was a teacher and a writer, who resented the former and lived for the other. When his spec script sold, he jumped on a plane and called from the airport to say this wasn't going to work. I had *almost* been good enough for a struggling novelist in NY, but not even close for the successful screenwriter in LA.

The last time I saw Alex I was wearing only a shower cap, sprawled on the floor underneath his bed frame. He had summoned me to his apartment to investigate a possible bedbug. After buzzing me in — I never got a set of keys — he waited in the hall outside his door with an empty shopping bag.

“Put your things in here,” he instructed, holding the bag wide open.

“My shoes?”

I was confused.

“Everything. I can't take any chances, I have too many books.”

“Alex,” I practically whispered, “I am not taking my clothes off in your hall.”

“You're not wearing them inside. I'm not running the risk of infestation now.”

“I do not have bugs *on* me.”

My throat felt thin.

“Hurry up. Before any of my neighbors walk by.”

I didn't fight it. With Alex, there was no point. He was an only child raised by clinical narcissists. When we first met, he seemed shy, adolescent. But as the months wore on, his diminutive persona and small voice, the fixation with Legos and Star Wars, the childhood posters hanging in his bedroom, gave way to another reality: Alex was a tiny, Napoleonic monster. I quickly peeled off my layers and shoved them into the bag.

“Let me the fuck in.”

He handed me a shower cap, still in the small cardboard box from some boutique hotel.

“Put it on, just in case.”

“In case what? I don't have bedbugs and I don't have fucking lice!”

Someone down the hall cracked their door to listen.

“If you have given me these bugs,” he said in a controlled tone, “you will be sorry.”

I walked into the bedroom; his mattress was pushed up against the wall. Its metal frame formed a perfect square of grey filth on the floor. Luke Skywalker looked down from his poster.

“I don't see anything,” I sighed, running my fingers along the mattress.

“Get on your hands and knees and make sure.”

He was serious.

Rolling my eyes, I knelt and searched the bed frame for the telltale sign: appleseeds. In both shape and color, bedbugs looked exactly like them. Nothing. Alex was free and clear. But I secretly wanted them everywhere: marching silently up his bookshelves, laying microscopic eggs in between his pages of Proust, slipping behind his first-edition Philip Roths.

Do you think Mickey ever intended to kill himself in the end? He asked me while driving back from his parents' weekend home in Sag Harbor. I had just finished *Sabbath's Theater*, his favorite of all the Roth

novels. I didn't know, but I didn't think so. Mickey Sabbath was an ineffectual bully and it never seemed that men like him did the world a favor.

“Go get my clothes. There's nothing to worry about.”

Alex didn't move. My knees were bent, ankles tucked under me like a mermaid's fin. I leaned back on my palms and I looked up from the floor, wearing only the shower cap.

“You look like some kind of strange art,” he marveled.

A Time to Trust

Linda Conroy

Poetry

I draw
to dream of better days.

A purple sky with orange hills
suggests a different world.

A picture show to please a jaded eye, a promise
or a mirage made to mask a scary thing.

A boy looks at a dog and makes
a dash for freedom as he sees its eyes

and reaches for the same sure light
that binds their gaze

the certainty of needing
nothing else.

Bluster
Linda Conroy
Poetry

The garbage bin lies in the road,
its lid flung wide. Around it floats
wet comic pages, scraps of bills.
Rain splatters on its plastic side.
A canvas shoe peeps from its lip
as wind gusts bounce on gutter's edge
to roll cans down the driveway's rise.

A storm, a January rain, by other name,
no thunder, little hail, no ice, just garbage
rising, flying, set to trip the man
who staggers past the mailbox
trying to keep his hat from being snatched.
No snow, no regret, just funnies
on the sidewalk, bluster, but no bite.

Thoughts for the Day

Linda Conroy

Poetry

In the morning think about the gifts
you bring, the words you'd offer
for the crowd
if they were with you now.

Look on the images that pass this place,
find in yourself the travelers,
the people on their way to work,
the birds that catch the corner of the wind
and change direction
while still following their plan,
a journey to a place
of greener leaves.

When evening comes, stay in,
remember notes that you've been given,
messages from ancient ones,
emails sent by friends.
Don't worry
if you haven't seen them here yet.

I Fiddle a Little

Linda Conroy

Poetry

If you've ever tried to play a fiddle,
a violin with attitude, you'll be surprised
that some days it won't sound too bad.
You'll send the melody you had in mind.
Next day, delighted with success, you'll tune
the lovely instrument, lift bow to strings
and make such scraping, scratching sounds.
The fiddlestick won't stay in place; it slides,
and fingers, sometimes nimble, now so staid,
forget how they might act. Then, fearful,
you won't try a note in case it squeals
but in the silence that ensues
your friends beg, please play that song again
we need to hear those happy tunes.

History
Linda Conroy
Poetry

A trail, a track, a highway through all time,
a weave of word, a flash of sign
a wave of motion, pointing here.

A tale passed from mouth to mouth
to mouth to pen to book,
from ear to year, a thought,

the flow of vision's worth.
A saga set for us to find,
our story handed down.

Begin

Yash Seyedbagheri

Poetry

begin with a beautiful whiteboard
outline goals for this year
and the next
draw a game plan
reach beyond boundaries
there's so much space
until everyone demands
that it be filled
and it never see fruition
or that it be pared down
plus, you can't wipe away permanent marker

Frozen Dinner

Ed Nobody

Fiction

See that man stocking shelves and feel his torture
Horrible, impossible days
Long for 5PM, live for the weekend, ten years go by,
fifteen, can't remember why, lose hope, will, memory
Hollow nostalgia — convert to cash and spend
Pawn shops on each corner
Childhood bought and sold in a cheap plastic shell, a
sequel, a reboot...

The shelf-stacking man leads a dead life standing in dead
feet — arms cramped, face stiff
Forgotten how to feel
Try to feel — can't
Yanked by other men-stacking men
Stay safe, predictable, controllable
Now it's after five and he's trying to get home...

Numb square feet on bus station floor
Hard claws, frozen hands
Checkered tile, snack crunched detritus
Inky black windows like nights without stars
Lit-up coffee stand, gotta stand don't sit
Old man in long coat, scuffed brown shoes, grey hair
Guy with sweater up butt, worker shoes, drinks from a
takeout cup
Take out and away, stay away from pitfall traps, stay
stiff and still
Men in red bobble hats mud-soaked slacks cold in
corners...

Visible breath waiting death
Fear cowered in masks thick fog

Smog smothered
Shuffle and wobble to walk from six-foot clear
Fear disease grey thick skies
Tired frozen feet shoved in moldy brown shoes,
shopping bags full of food for fools
Shivering corpses turn blue in their seats
Ash dandruff, ass bones hit hard seats
Buy a burger just meat no bun
Dead meat sweet with fear sweat
Frozen bones stagger out stone cold toilets
Square machines vending masks and mitts
Hell freezing over in cold diesel air
Nowhere to go, no one to care
Soon rendered dust, white ghosts
The city dead, town turned toast...

Waiting waiting waiting with breath clouds puffing
Wind — regret
Blows down trouser legs like lead
Not meeting feet bare burned blue with bleak frost
numbed like concrete blocks
Mile-long queue at the coffee stand
The only joint still open...

When the man goes home to his cube of processed beef
drenched in bean grease, will the thought catch him?
In that unguarded instant, the oven switch just set to
ON??
Will he wake up from his transient dream and realize
he's in a nightmare?
Pacing back from the coffee stand with blue-purple
ankles
Bare against the harsh elements
Waiting to go
For luck to run out itself
Waiting to finally —

Never stack another shelf
Not again
Never give to that terrible hell...

The murky sky stains black
The last coffee stand closes
Empty streets bear no buses
Walk home.

Staring Right At You

Pat O'Malley

Fiction

You're speeding down the highway late one night. Music blasting on the radio, a half-empty energy drink in the cup-holder and somehow, you're still tired. There aren't any other cars on the road this time of night, no harm in going just a bit over the speed limit.

The soothing, female voice from your GPS tells you the exit you've been driving towards is just up ahead. Sure enough, you see the green sign for your exit coming up on the right. Taking your foot off the gas, you click your blinker on and begin to make the turn.

The exit is a steep, sharp turn. You grip the steering wheel tight and move to tap the brake it, but you stop. Something doesn't look right.

What is that?

There's some kind of dark spot in front of you. Something on the road? No...no, not on the road. In the glow of your car's dashboard, you can just make out the silhouette of tiny dark speck drifting in front of your face.

It's just as your car enters the turn when your vision clears, and you recognize the eight little black legs.

THE END

PSALM 152

Jon Corle

Poetry

The Lord is my hero.
The Lord is the first of first-line heroes.
In them, He instills a spirit of love and service.
Even as the invisible enemy surrounds us
His loving care shines through them as they
heal and comfort the stricken and dying.
Researchers in white lab coats pipette
the makings of potential COVID-19 cures
until they find one, doctors and nurses
attend the sick with ventilators and dialysis
we speak of quarantine and stay-home orders
in grocery stores cashiers stand behind plexiglass
shields going to work so we may have food
police, fire, and emergency personnel preserve
and protect our communities, private individuals
fill gaps for food pantries and PPE supplies.
The Lord has a hand in it all through these hands.

Centurions
Ed Friedman
Drama

Date: March 16, 44 B.C.

Place: Rome, Italy

Cast: LICUS

MARCUS

Two centurions sitting on either side of what appears to be a sleeping figure*

*Note: A cover, like a tarp can be draped over something to give the impression there is a body underneath

LICUS

How long do we have to stay here?

MARCUS

I don't know. Until they take him to be buried.

LICUS

You know what I heard?

MARCUS

What?

LICUS

I heard that his wife had a dream that he'd be killed, and she told him not to go to the Senate.

MARCUS

Are you reading the rumor scribes again? I told you to stop wasting your time with that stuff.

LICUS

I'm just sayin, that what I heard.

MARCUS

OK. Just for the sake of argument, let's say she had this dream about him getting killed and she tells him, mia cara; don't go to the Senate today, I dreamt you'll be killed". He's the leader of the entire world. What do think he's going to do, say "you know what cara mia, you had a bad dream? All right, I'll stay home?" I don't think so. Hey, what if your wife told you not to go to work because she had a bad dream. Would you listen to her?

LICUS

I always listen to my wife. That's why I don't have the falafel stand I wanted and instead I'm sitting next to a decomposing body.

(A beat.)

But if his wife did have the dream

(He points to the body.)

I'm just sayin . . . Did you ever meet him when he was alive?

MARCUS

No. I've seen him from a distance. I gotta tell you, close up he's not that impressive.

LICUS

Marcus, the guy's dead. How do you think you'd look if you were stabbed 23 times?

MARCUS

I know. I just expected more.

LICUS

So did I. Like I expected him not to screw over the country.

MARCUS

Why do they want us to guard the body anyway?

LICUS

Antony is worried that Brutus inflamed the Plebeians so much that they will desecrate the body and Brutus is afraid that Antony made a martyr of him.

MARCUS

Did you hear Brutus' speech? How could anyone make a martyr of Caesar? He was taking control of everything and just looking after his friends. He was going to stay in power at the expense of the people and for the profit of the bankers.

LICUS

Well you obviously didn't hear Antony's speech. If Caesar was so ambitious how come he turned down the crown when it was offered three times to him? What about that?

MARCUS

Come on, that's the oldest political ploy in the books. As long as he kept turning it down, he could fool people into thinking he didn't want power. He had plenty of power without being crowned. Antony was Caesar's best friend and he didn't even blame Brutus for killing Caesar.

LICUS

Come on, it was so obvious. Did you not pick up on the sarcasm?

MARCUS

What sarcasm?

LICUS

Don't you get it Marcus? Antony was criticizing Brutus for moving on Caesar.

MARCUS

Yeah well, Brutus said that if Caesar was in power, we'd all be slaves.

LICUS

Marcus, he's talking about the politicians in the Senate, the power mongers. They run everything now and just want to maintain the status quo. Our lives never change no matter who is in power. We're all essentially slaves anyway. Its guys like Cassius and them. They're livin the good life and they don't want things to change.

MARCUS

Now that you mention it, that Cassius was always shifty looking. So, what you're sayin is that no matter who is running things, most of us are just screwed.

LICUS

Now you got it.

(He hears something)

What's that?

MARCUS

Sounds like a messenger

LICUS

I'll be right back

(He goes off for 10 seconds and comes back.)

MARCUS

What is it?

LICUS

There's gonna be a war.

MARCUS

Damn!

LICUS

Seriously. Octavian, ya know, Caesar's kid? He and Antony got an army together and they're comin after Brutus and Cassius.

LICUS

What the hell are we supposed to do?

MARCUS

I don't know about you, but I hear Persia is beautiful this time of year.

(They start to go.)

LICUS

What about him?

(Indicating the body.)

MARCUS

Hey for all I care they can make salad out of him.

(They exit.)

END OF PLAY

The Seals of Approval

Bryan Grafton

Fiction

Mr. and Mrs. Seal were used to having the pool all to themselves. They had had it for some time now and they thoroughly enjoyed swimming in it daily by themselves, just the two of them.

But today their pool was about to be invaded by a pod of great white Whales. Though the Seals considered the pool their own private playground, the pool was actually for members of the gated community in which they lived. Mr. and Mrs. Seal had never seen the Whales before and were offended by their presence here today.

And since the community was gated, therefore so was the pool. The only way into it was to use an electronic key to open the gate. One was given to each family in the community, and now, to the Seals dismay, the Whales had theirs.

So, Daddy Whale unlocked the gate and entered the pool area with Mama Whale and Baby Whale in tow.

“Oh dear,” exclaimed Mrs. Seal. “We can’t have them coming in here and hogging our pool. There will be no room for us to swim.”

Daddy Whale overheard Mrs. Seal’s rude remark but ignored them as he led his family to the opposite end of the pool and away from the obnoxious Seals.

“How can we get rid of them dear?” Mrs. Seal desperately asked her husband after they had passed.

“You get rid of whales by harpooning them dear.”

“But we have no harpoons.”

“We have verbal harpoons dear. All we have to do is use them. Follow my lead.”

Just then the Whale family plopped themselves down on some canvas pool chairs, the bottoms of which immediately ripped open and gave way. The whole

Whale family suddenly found themselves beached on a concrete shore. But they were unhurt. After all they had plenty of blubbery padding.

The Seals observed this, and Mr. Seal told his wife, "Laugh at them dear and point at them." So, Mr. and Mrs. Seal faked continuous hideous laughter all the while pointing at the Whales for what seemed like the longest time as the Whales were having much difficulty trying to get themselves righted, slipping and sliding all over the place.

Daddy Whale finally got up and glared at the Seals. Even with his tiny briny eyes his message to the Seals got through loud and clear. He was becoming irate with them.

Mr. Seal noticed this and said to his wife, "Good, our plan is working. If we harpoon them some more, we'll get them mad enough and they'll leave."

Then Mr. Seal in a somewhat raised voice, which he was sure that the Whales could hear, said, "Thar she blows!"

"Who blows where dear?" asked his wife picking up on the cue, her voice raised also.

"Why Moby Dick of course. See him," said Mr. Seal as he pointed to Mr. Whale.

"Oh, I thought that was an iceberg, it's so big and white," she giggled. "Big enough to crush and sink the Titanic." Contributing further to the verbal harpooning she then barbed the Whales with, "Why there's actually three of them there. Mr. Moby, Mrs. Moby and a full-grown porpoise is with them too I believe."

"Dear I believe that the porpoise is actually their baby."

"Why I do believe you're right dear," barked Mrs. Seal. "You know I've never seen a baby that humongous before."

The Whales had obviously heard what the Seals had intended for them to hear. So, Daddy Whale called them together for a family huddle at their end of the pool for he knew now that this was war and going to be a fight to the finish.

As the Whales huddled and planned their counter strategy Mr. and Mrs. Seal plunged into the pool and began doing their laps while trying to think of more insulting things to jab the Whales with hoping to drive them into pool extinction.

Then the Whale family broke from the huddle, ran to the edge of the pool and all cannonballed in simultaneously causing a tsunami the size of which this pool had never seen before. It washed from their end of the pool to the other end where the Seals were swimming and was so high and mighty that it washed the Seals right out of the pool and over the chain link fence and onto the oily asphalt sealed parking lot. Daddy Whale rode the aftershock wave to the other end of the pool, climbed out, grabbed one of the pool chairs, and wedged it under the gate so that no matter how hard the Seals tried, they would not be able to open it. Then he slid back into the pool to the hugs and high fives of his family.

The Seals flopped around outside the pool for a little while, gave it up, and went home.

Moral of the Story: Pick one.

1. All's whale that ends whale.
2. Where there's a whale there's a way.
3. The Whales of Justice seal one's fate.
4. Words whale hurt you.

The End

Lovers Long Forgotten

Emily Black

Poetry

My husband reads a poem of mine,
Is this one about me too? he asks.
Yes, I reply, *of course.*
Why don't you write about other men sometimes? he says.

Well..., I let the word hang in the air
as I contemplate a response. Nothing comes
to mind; I can't even remember names
of other lovers.

*Look, I say, I don't remember
about other men, except my ex-husband,
and I'd rather I had total amnesia
about him.*

Humm, my husband mumbles as he
goes back to reading while I muse upon
my selective memory. I let random thoughts
wander around, and then I pounce on one,

perhaps, I reflect, if he had not loved me
so thoroughly, then maybe I'd remember
those others. Why bother, and instead
I study his hands holding my poem. I marvel
at the beauty of those perfect half moons
that adorn his fingernails.

A Gift from The Sea

Emily Black

Poetry

On a long shoreline of the barrier island,
a dolphin beached herself. We poured
buckets full of sea water over her as the tide
receded further, leaving her stranded onshore.

Park Service rangers drove by and told
us we might as well give it up. “She’s sick,
she’ll die soon,” they said, “she’ll never swim
out again. That’s why she beached herself.”

Hours passed and still we kept her skin wet
with our buckets. I knew she was a female
because of the way she looked at me, her eyes
so full of love and appreciation.

When at last the tide came in, she swam out to sea.
Her gift to me was what her eyes shared in those
long hours, her courage and her patience. She lives
in me still.

Live as Thought the Truth Were True

Emily Black

Poetry

Yesterday I encountered two fat robins
near the path to our neighborhood library.
They took no notice of me as they
hopped and pecked for bugs and seeds.

They were so close I could peer into
their faces so alert, on sleek dark heads
with sparkling black eyes highlighted
by white markings like eye makeup.

Their expressions seemed particularly
keen and passionate, framed by flaming
auburn breasts, puffed out in a billowing
show of beauty and self-awareness.

They struck me as gods or messengers of gods,
and I dipped deep back into my pagan roots.
To admire something in another is a first step
in acquiring that trait.

I mentally adorned myself with robin markings,
puffed out my proud breast and invited in
their spirits to transform me.
It works every time.

Funeral Whispers

Preeti Vangani

Poetry

For my mother (1962-2008)

so the cancer killed her?
no, not really, the treatment
radiation? a beam? kind of
kind of? one of a kind
she was full of light
she was depressed yes
marriage can do that
or she hid a lot
in her chest, no, her throat
and the doctor said
this is very common
among women like you
as if he ever knew her
her poor husband he tried
such a caring man
such a saintly woman your mother was
what a terrible world this was
what a terrible world this was
god works in strange ways
never did she have enough time
in time he should start looking again
who will look after you
she won't be your mother come on
understand
it is up to you now
make her journey peaceful
if you keep crying she'll get stuck
let her go slowly
but look her mouth it's still open

Salvation
Michael Masarof
Poetry

The crack was wide
And we looked to see the day
And it was all around us
Dying and waking again
Like her and her sunken cheeks
And her ice cream bar
Melting in the February warmth
I couldn't see her when I close my eyes
Anymore.

Mirroritus

Laura Pfizenmayer

Drama

At rise: A woman of a certain age, wearing glasses holding a hand mirror into which she stares intently. She looks up and notices the audience who she then addresses.

WOMAN

I suffer from Mirroritus. It's similar to Astigmatism in that it affects the sight but instead of being "near-sighted" you're "wish-sighted". In other words, when I look into this mirror I see what I want to see instead of what's really there. If I take my glasses off and squint my eyes just so . . .

(Takes her glasses off and squints her eyes.)
I look 35 and if I light the bathroom with candles and have a glass of wine, I look 21 right after the acne cleared up but before the wrinkles started. It's a marvelous affliction.

The most famous case of Mirroritus was The Evil Queen in Snow White. Her Mirroritus had an auditory component. Not only did she see what she wanted to see, she heard voices telling her what she wanted to hear. The trouble didn't start in that story until the voice started insisting on what she didn't want to know. Come on, if you had invested in a magic talking mirror would you want it telling you that indeed you weren't the fairest in the land? I wouldn't share this with just anybody but if that had been me, a poison apple would have been the least of it. If I had access to all that fancy magic I wouldn't have put her to sleep, I would have made her old with age spots and a sagging jaw and then we'd see how the prince looked at her wouldn't we? Besides,

what kind of man was that prince? He fell in love with her while she was asleep. Nobody but babies look good asleep. You know she had drool crusted around her mouth and when he kissed her she probably had some ferocious breath. I'm thinking he had the male version of Mirroritus, that's where you look at a woman and see what you want to see. It's epidemic in bars at closing time.

However, in the same way that a dementia patient occasionally has a brush with reality, the Mirroritus patient can blink their eyes and catch a glimpse of the way things really are. Usually the sufferer is protected from the harsh reflection of truth by that "through a glass darkly" thing, bad bathroom lighting or at least shower steam. This has happened to me in the bright light of an early morning-after. I've looked into this very mirror and wondered "Who in the hell is that scary woman who looks like my mother?"

If this happens to you I urge, "DO NOT LOOK BACK IN THE MIRROR". Turn the light off and back out of the room. Have a couple of stiff drinks before you try to brush your hair.

You can often find fellow sufferers in the obituaries. They're the ones who died at 87 but use a high school graduation picture for their obit. Do you really think they haven't had a picture taken in 70 years? No, it's classic Mirroritus, that's how they saw themselves on the day they died, perfectly preserved at the peak of perfection. Like I said, it's a marvelous affliction.

They have support group meetings daily at Wal-Mart. Didn't you ever wonder if some of those scary people in the checkout line could have possibly looked in the

mirror before they left home? They did, and they thought they looked good. Mirroritus!

Is there a cure? No one really knows because if you're lucky enough to have it, you don't really want to be fixed. There are some shocking therapies that have been used to varying degrees of success: your first invitation to join AARP, a waitress asking if you want the senior discount and your child telling you you're going to be a Grandma.

These methods are promoted by GAA, Gracefully Aging Association. By the way this is also the sound you make when any of the above treatments are inflicted on you.

(Makes a wrenching sound.)

GAA. There is one treatment that could permanently clear your vision, but I think it's worse than electroshock. The magnifying mirror. Do not allow this cruel device in your house. You think it will just allow you to pluck a few stray hairs from your eyebrows, but you'll look in it and discover you have a mustache and a mole shaped like Kansas.

If you are inadvertently healed there are cosmetics and Botox and plastic surgery, but the effect is never as good.

(Looks into the mirror and sighs).

I want to look in this mirror and see that young pretty girl I used to be, so I've smeared some Vaseline over the glass and I am stubbornly refusing to be healed. Let's face it, the truth is just not all it's cracked up to be.

END OF PLAY

Inheritance
Ankita Sharma
Poetry

My grandmother, a docile woman
Died just as she lived
Quietly, peacefully and unnoticed
In her sleep one night
And left me some things to inherit-
An old overused sewing machine
Embroidery spools and needles
Wool yarns and knitting pins
Imported bone-china tea and dinner set
And jars of pickles and jams
My father and his brothers relished
Silver anklets and some jewelry
Lipsticks, kohl and vermillion
My grandfather loved on her
Well, I cherish all as though these are
The last bottles of water left on Earth
But, I really wish she left me
A pen too

Sometimes
Ankita Sharma
Poetry

At the very end of the alley, near the rose bush,
They kissed under the lamppost, witnessed by full-moon
A night before he was called to the war and
Two days after he bought her a wedding gown
Glittering white like stardust sprinkled on milk
She waited but a medal and his jacket arrived
She didn't cry, just vanished as if she never lived
Now, a century later, the lamppost still stands there
Corroded and obsolete like a forlorn tombstone
But sometimes, people say, on full moon nights
They can be seen kissing under it
She, blushing in white and he, in a military jacket
And a bright yellow light spreads all around like
Fragrance of roses from old woods in cool breeze

Roses
Ankita Sharma
Poetry

I once grew roses in my garden
Bright crimson, the color of love
When we used to be mad for each other
But, one day he just got up and left
After throwing an irate stare my way
Like a quarter at a nagging beggar
Or a rotten cake in a waste-bin
Rose wilted; garden was barren for some time
Then, I started growing roses again but
Bright Yellow, the color of friendship

Dissolution

Jennifer Fox

Fiction

The couch stretches on for miles between us, yet the crunch of each chip and the faint hum he makes when chewing feels like he's inside my ear, jackhammering on my last nerve.

It never used to bother me. I remember sitting across the table from him on our second date, watching his lips part slightly, listening to that hum, longing to feel that vibration between my legs. Now I can't remember the last time we touched. Those accidental brushes against one another that fall on the skin like a whisper.

I used to live for those whispers. Each one felt like a secret. A simple brush of his hand against my leg in bed would move through me like a current. How many sleepless nights spent entangled with one another, sharing the same space, the same breath, started this way?

Now we each cling to the edge of the bed, teetering on a cliff with an ocean between us in that California King. What creatures swim below the surface of those waters?

I hardly recognize him now. How did we go from being friends, to lovers, to strangers? There were no big fights, no pivotal moments defining the transition from love to... what exactly? A sort of limbo that exists when love dies? And do I just linger here in this void? Forever?

“I don’t love you anymore.”

My fingers rush to my lips, as if trying to stuff those words back inside the safety of my mouth, but they’re already there on the couch cushion between us, naked.

The crunching and humming stop and I instantly wish for their return. What have I done? Why did I let

those words fall out the way they did? He deserves better than this.

And what comes now? Divorce? I've seen the ugly remnants of that, watched friends drag their bloody beaten bodies out of the trenches, clinging to frequent flyer miles and hideous china sets they've never used. The spoils of war. Is that how this story ends?

My eyes move from the couch cushion to his face. He looks like he's been slapped. Hasn't he though?

We linger in this silence for a moment, locked on one another like deer awaiting impact from an oncoming car, when suddenly he bursts into laughter. Not a giggle, but the kind you feel in your whole body, the kind that brings you to tears and splits you up the side. He grabs his stomach, sucks in a deep breath and exhales, "I don't love you either!"

He freezes for a moment as he searches my face, and then, for the first time in I don't know how long, we move in unison, falling over with laughter. We laugh until we can't see, can't breathe, can't feel anything except the ache of a good long belly laugh. That beautiful, freeing ache.

After what feels like hours, we sit up, catch our breath, dry our eyes, and look at one another, no longer miles apart on this couch. He reaches out, placing his hand on the cushion between us. It's not the hand of a lover or husband, but of an old friend. I place my hand in his and feel a gentle squeeze. He smiles and releases.

"Want a chip?" he asks, reaching for the bag that had fallen on the floor. He pops one in his mouth, holding the open bag out to me. I grab one, watching him chew, and hear nothing.

Kinetic
Jodie Baeyens
Poetry

I thought my soul
too wild
too reckless
all kinetic
no direction.

I sought what would hold me
Not knowing that holding
would hurt.

My flaw is not that I'm broken,
but that no one
can break me.

Destined for the glue factory.

Don't hold me.
Run with me.

Mayday
Jodie Baeyens
Poetry

I ran up the stairs
pushed open the glass doors
and walked out into the rain
raindrops hit my head

You weren't there
coming up the stairs from the parking lot
with the umbrella you kept in the car
just in case

I walked home
in the rain
a baptismal of sorts
a cleansing of my sins

Clothes soaked through
I realized —
I may be wet
but I'm not drowning

Healed
Jodie Baeyens
Poetry

I want to love you
From the healthiest place possible

Not from my mother's years
Of abuse
Or the nights my husband
Wouldn't touch me

Not from a place
Or jealousy and mistrust
Not making you have to earn it
Work for it

Not the give
With always the take
Not the beg
With the push and pull

I just want to love you
Boring
Reliable
Morning coffee
Nighttime kisses
Fall asleep in each other's arms
Never question it
Love

Emptied
Shaun Anderson
Nonfiction

I called my parents on a Sunday afternoon in mid-May, the summer after my freshman year of college, when I started imagining folding his body into mine, my body folding into his, when the surrounding mountains drank the melting snow; came alive. Stretched across my bed, I stared over at his copy of *Nicholas Nickleby* propped against The Book of Mormon, breathed in his Axe Phoenix scent that always lingered over our space.

He had stayed after church to help clean the chapel.

"I don't think I want to serve a mission," I told my parents, my words reaching across the country from our Utah bedroom into their Alabama kitchen, where my parents met the girls I pretended to date in high school.

My parents waited for me to fill the silence with explanation. There could only be two reasons why I would choose not to participate in this religious rite of passage: I was either a nonbeliever, or I was unworthy to be a missionary, to be a representative of Jesus Christ.

In our shared religion, there could be no space for us to do the things I tried to stop myself from imagining doing with him. We had moved in together, when the school year ended, when all our friends moved back in with their parents, when he became all I had. Just the two of us. Most nights, after he came home from scrubbing toilets and mopping floors at the student center, he would settle in next to me on our loveseat, as we watched terrible superhero movies, where jacked men would save the world, save the girl, live happily, heterosexually ever after. I spent those hours curled near him sneaking glances at veiny forearms and bare feet.

I considered telling my parents about the way my arm hair stood erect, when our legs brushed, those times we sat too close on our loveseat.

Instead of confessing, I waited for my parents to explain why I should serve a mission.

“You know God’s plan includes becoming a missionary, that missionary service would prepare me for marriage,” my father said.

“If you don’t go, you’ll regret it forever,” my mother said.

I told them they had convinced me, that I wanted to become a missionary.

After my parents and I disconnected, I laid back on my bed, turned, and stared at the immovable brown wall of the bedroom where we — he and I — slept each night, the window open, tempting in breezes to cool the heat filling our shared space.

He took me home in midsummer, when the junipers and aspens nestled vibrant, full-leaved around his parents’ baby-blue tract home. We sang along to Top 40 radio during the two-hour drive, sweating in the July heat.

His parents’ house stood alone in an alfalfa field, fifteen minutes from the nearest King’s Variety Store. In the emptiness I felt vulnerable, unable to hide, as if everyone around could see the longing that rooted me to him. Did they notice my body curl toward him, as we slept inches apart from one another on the living room floor? Would they celebrate us or would they send us away, creating a son-shaped space in their world?

Near the end of summer, we went with friends up the canyon to Bear Lake. The evenings had grown chilly, the pines in the mountains stood alone in their greenness, while the world around browned and died. After a

moonlit swim, we wrapped towels around our waists, our dripping swim trunks, and climbed into the backseat. Shirtless. The canyon road wound. Each curve pushed us together. Pulled us apart. My fingers brushing his skin.

Smooth. Unavoidable. His bare torso pressed against my own.

We wouldn't touch again. Not until we filled and emptied our arms of one another in the parking lot on the night he moved out, his missionary service looming two weeks away.

"It's been fun," he would say, all his possessions packed away in his baby blue Ford Taurus, filling his arms with my body.

"I'll miss you," I would reply, holding him, convincing myself to release.

We wouldn't touch like this ever again.

In the backseat, I knew loss waited ahead of us. Superhero movies. *Nicholas Nickleby*. His bare torso pressed to mine. The smell of his skin. It would all vanish, transform into white-collared shirts, black nametags, bicycles, and baptisms. Still, half-naked, in the backseat of a car, our bodies touched without shame, without guilt, without space to pull away.

Mid-Morning
M.V. Reisinger
Poetry

I wake to the monotonous drone of machinery and light
creeping in through my bamboo blinds.
The smell of stale paint has been drifting in
and out of my nostrils all night and well into mid-
morning.

The reconstruction of this house
is like the renovation of my scatterbrained life;
it's something changing so far beneath the skin
that no late-night Pabst in the bathtub will ever cure.

This is a time to start over —
sweep the carpet scraps from the floorboards,
reposition the furniture, polish the tiles
and reevaluate the next room mate.

For now, I will sleep away the sounds of this remodel,
and dust off the back of an old childhood friend.
Together we will count the memories that have been
pulled up,
shifted from room to room, and discarded onto the
sidewalk.

The end of girlhood

Ellen Stone

Poetry

After James Wright & Joni Mitchell

Just off the highway, scrub brush, cast-off trash, thin trees blooming so abrupt.
Gash of common pear, service berry:
years I gave away my body in a rush.

What I could not tame with rationality,
tears & moons. Me, a Ferris wheel, wild
round thing swirling in the night, glowing
circle dance. Following with no apology.

At each stop, taking, discarding. Brazen
dreams & scheming all the while looking
over my shoulder tossing salt, mourning
the soft give of June, not going home.

Pledge
Ellen Stone
Poetry

I will lie down, across the old pasture
& through the granite-speckled woods.

Back where the trees cloud with jays
jabbering & swaying, a strange jubilee.

Ripe new apple, dangling yellow green
in the early sun, I want to be your present.

Warm me on your tongue like a bite
of plum, pluck me like wild grapes.

My body ripples like hillside, the river
winding its way, leisurely, indulgent.

I am a dapple, a glint, brook song,
wandering, but kept.

Unfurl
Mehreen Ahmed
Fiction

This morning, Alisha Alam drew the curtains apart in her bedroom. She gazed at a grey sky. The clouds hadn't melted. Anytime now, but this greyness gave her a thrill. She smiled and opened the window to smell pithy air from her orchard full of ripened mangoes. They hung from the trees to drop any day. A full blush brushed a yellow, and orange on its smooth skin. Green mangoes were long gone. Who cared about the age of the mangoes? Ripeness was all, like old wine.

Alisha moved from the window and looked at herself in a tall mirror by the bed. She saw a few crow's feet around her eyes. At thirty, she didn't have a boyfriend. Time took its toll; her life's journey had been undulated so long, like gentle footsteps on the sand along its contours. It was only her mother, who kept a vigilant tab. She was thirty. When people asked how old Alisha was, her mother would tell them plainly that, "My Alisha was twenty."

"Really mother," Alisha yelled one day. "I'm thirty, why would you lie to people like that?"

"You won't understand, what do you care anyway?" mother said.

"What do you mean?" Alisha asked.

"Who would marry you if they knew your real age?"

"And how do you think they'd react if they knew later?" Alisha asked. "hmm?"

"How would they find out, if you don't tell them? Don't show your birth certificate to anyone."

"As if I would be able to keep it from my husband if I were to ever get married."

"You can choose whatever, but I'll continue to tell people that you are twenty. That way I would preserve

your youth until you're properly wedded," Mother declared.

Alisha was aware of guests dropping in this evening for dinner. Since morning flavourful cooking wafted in the air. At this moment, she felt unburdened for not being married. A light wind whistled through her room. She looked at the windows and realized that she had left them open. She went up to close them and saw dry, swept away leaves on orchard grounds. Her mind burst into an open, placid sea, of stretched, unruffled aluminum sheet across the horizon.

The leaves had turned brown in a while. Why was her mother so concerned about age and the ageing process? Alisha wasn't. She wondered what her mother was going to do tonight. If she tried to lie again, she was going to intrude and tell everyone the truth. The day passed as usual without a fuss. She saw her mother knitting in the drawing-room. She sat down with a book by her. Mother eyed her up and down.

"Do you know who's coming tonight?" she asked.

"How would I know?" Alisha asked.

"A prospective groom with his family."

"Oh, and how am I supposed to behave?"

"Just stay quiet and don't tell your age. You being young, matters. Your complexion is not great either. Dark. At least if they know you're young that might help."

In the evening, Alisha's mother told her what to wear. She wore a bright red sari with matching ruby. She also wore thick make-up. According to her mother, the make-up would enhance the skin colour to a tad shade fairer. In about a couple of hours, Alisha heard noises. They had come. The groom's party had arrived. She could be wedded to this complete stranger if they liked her. But

she too had to make an impression by following the tradition, not talk about taboos at all, such as age. She had already made up her mind. When they had all been seated comfortably, a maid entered to tell her that Alisha had been summoned into the drawing-room. She looked at the maid and asked her how old she was. She looked blankly and said.

“I don’t know. I was told that I was born in a great storm.”

“Great storm? Which one, though?”

“I don’t know. In the villages, no one talks about age. People are born, they grow up, grow old and they die when the time comes. We only guess how old a person may be by the colour of the hair and wrinkles in the skin.”

Alisha looked at her and said nothing but followed her demurely into the drawing-room. Everyone including Alisha’s mother looked at her, but Alisha dared not to look at anyone, not even the groom. She kept her eyes downcast as custom required. She looked only at the ornate carpet on the floor. How intricate the inlays were? Alisha sat down on the edge of a chair. She wanted to be a runaway bride. Then everyone left the room, except for the groom. He asked her to look at him.

“We need to talk,” he said.

His was dark and middle-aged. His side-burns were greying. He also had a receding hairline which he could’ve hidden if he wore a wig. Gosh! How old was he? He must have seen the shock in her demeanour.

“I’m fifty,” he said. “How old are you?”

“Thirty,” she said.

“Perfect. I love your honesty.”

Yes, it was a perfect match according to Alisha’s mother and the groom. At thirty, she had already become an old maid with limited options. No one must know her real age. And to remain single would be disreputable too.

People would gossip and wonder if she had a character blemish of some sort. However, this man knew her real age. She had just broken a taboo by blurting out her real age to him. But she had also noted that he hadn't raised an eyebrow. She liked that. A new beginning was in the offing. But under layers of make-up, he didn't really know her true colour. What beauty would he find there? If he didn't find any beauty, then at least there wouldn't be ugliness, she thought. Alisha had a beautiful mind. She had unfurled. Free.

Coffee on a hot day

DS Maolalai

Poetry

and we go walking,
down through the quays
down along smithfield.
not very far, or for more
than ten minutes – the dog
is quite old now; can't stand
to go further. arthritis. sometimes
we'll be sitting

about in the apartment, reading,
drinking or eating
our meals
and she'll suddenly
yell at us
from down by the sofa
and jam one of her legs
about at the hip,
like a key in the side
of a wind-up
toy animal; honestly,
it would be funny – I mean, if we
didn't like her. and we walk

together quietly, stopping for coffee
even though it's a hot
day – we'll take any excuse
to stay out
when we can. we drink
them both down
and let the dog
rest some; I pay
for our coffees

without saying
anything,
knowing tomorrow
you'll sure
pay me back.

The Poem
Simweene Sijamba
Poetry

Breathe life to the poem,
The crowd acts like they know him,
“Read another one,” they say
Wounds, cheers, fears, tears
Enjoying their glasses filled with beer
A clown to the circus,
Many don’t observe this,
“I am an artist,” he says,
But only mirroring the circus,
Even he does not observe this
What to do? What to say?
“Write another poem, will you?”
A voice from the front echoes,
One that he knows

Mambwe
Simweene Sijamba
Poetry

It was a brown guitar,
Packed gently in a black case,
Next to a transparent window,
Framing a bed of red roses,

Its strings were worn out,
Frets discolored,

But even then, even still,
This brown guitar filled our hearts with music

Undressed
Leslie Dianne
Poetry

Once upon a time
we didn't dress in
designer shoes
or warm coats
or trendy scarves
we didn't wear
furry hats
or animal skins
or old fashioned
zoot suits
girl fluffy
crinoline dresses
or black tie
tuxedos and full
length gowns
we didn't wear
pencil skirts
or flared legged pants
flannel shirts
or even different
color skin.
we just wore
our imagination
and our beauty
before we wore
a body
we wore
nothing
but ourselves

Contributor Bios

Mehreen Ahmed

Mehreen Ahmed is internationally published and critically acclaimed by Midwest Book Review, The Wild Atlantic Book Club, DD Magazine to name a few. A winner in The Waterloo Short Story Competition, a finalist in the Fourth Adelaide Literary Award Contest, her works are Three-time nominated for The Best of the Net Awards, nominated for the Pushcart Prize Award, Two-time nominated for Aurealis Awards. Her book is an announced Drunken Druid's Editor's Choice.

Shaun Anderson

Shaun Anderson is a recovering ex-Mormon, who writes into the dissonance that can exist between personal and religious identity. He lives in Utah with his husband. When he's not writing or teaching he spends too much time watching RuPaul's Drag Race.

Jodie Baeyens

Jodie Baeyens is a professor at American Military University. She was deposited in Arizona from Manhattan, against her will, and now lives in a rural farming community writing poetry and drinking red wine.

Gary Lee Barkow

I walk around feeling loved. I keep a flashlight by my futon in case I have a brilliant idea at night. I don't know where poetry comes from, so I just enjoy the mystery.

Emily Black

Emily Black, the second woman to graduate from the University of Florida in Civil Engineering, engaged in a long engineering career as the only woman in a sea of men. Lately she's been busy writing vignettes of her life

and has two poems in the March issue of Verse-Virtual and more to be printed in the October issue of Sac Magazine and in the Fall issue of Thimble Magazine. Emily was selected as Poet of the Week by Poetry Super Highway for the week of March 22-28, 2021.

Jared Cappel

Jared Cappel lives in Toronto. When not writing, he enjoys making digital art known for its abstract nature and vibrant use of colour. A lover of wordplay, he's won multiple Scrabble tournaments.

Linda Conroy

Linda Conroy is a retired social worker who likes to write about the simplicity and complexity of human behaviors, reflecting on what she sees and hears. She plays several instruments and finds that the rhythm of music supports writing the poems.

Jon Corle

Jonathan Corle (Jon) is a poet and lifelong resident of Pennsylvania living in Chester County. After retirement from the financial firm he founded, Jon became an adjunct professor in the Close School of Entrepreneurship at Drexel University. His interests include reading and writing, cycling, golf, and travel with his wife, Diane.

Wayne Dean-Richards

Wayne Dean-Richards has worked as an industrial cleaner and an actor. Currently works as a teacher. Throughout, he's been writing. Writes, like Isak Dinesen, 'without hope, without despair'. Like Charles Bukowski, 'These words I write keep me from total madness.' Cuts, a collection of short stories, is available from Amazon. Twitter: @WDeanRichards

Leslie Dianne

Leslie Dianne is a poet, novelist, screenwriter, playwright and performer. Her work has been acclaimed internationally at the Harrogate Fringe Festival in Great Britain, The International Arts Festival in Tuscany, Italy and at La Mama in NYC. Her poems appear in Kairos Ghost City Review, In Parentheses and elsewhere.

Nancy K. Dobson

Nancy K. Dobson's enjoys writing both poetry and fiction. She's been published in a variety of journals including Five on the Fifth, Capsule Stories, and Madcap Review. Her perfect day includes yoga, a chai latte, and some cocktail jazz.

Jennifer Fox

When Jennifer Fox isn't writing, she enjoys embarrassing her family by dancing in public, randomly bursting into song in the middle of a conversation or enjoying a piece of dark chocolate with a glass of Cabernet. Her work has been featured in Across the Margin, The Write Launch, Disquiet Arts, and Anti-Heroin Chic.

Ed Friedman

Ed's short plays have been produced throughout the NY metropolitan area and around the country. His monologues are published in the anthologies of Mother/Daughter Monologues: Mid-Life Catharsis and Urgent Maturity published by the International Centre for Women Playwrights and in Best Women's Monologues for 2019 published by Smith & Kraus. Ed's short memoir pieces Chevrolet and Waterbury Park are published in The Bronx Memoir Project, Vol I and III.

His anthology Short Plays for Long Lives is published by Blue Moon Plays.

Sean Garner

Sean Isaac Garner was born in Chadron and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska. He worked half-heartedly towards an unfinished English degree at Wayne State College. He now works whole-heartedly at being a competent parent.

Bryan Grafton

My latest book is entitled: Willard Wigleaf: West Texas Attorney. It available on Amazon. It is a western legal fiction, comic action thriller about the diversity of and the social issues of the American west in the 1880's.

Kyle Brandon Lee

Kyle Brandon Lee is a Texas born and raised writer of poetry, prose and plays. If someday they open an old and dusty tome made of pecan bark and armadillo hide, perhaps they'll find his work within. Hopefully, it will be plentiful. He can be found at his website www.hillsdreaming.com or on twitter @HDTMountains

Michael Lopez

Michael Lopez is a recent MFA in Writing graduate from the University of San Francisco where he worked as the Poetry Editor for Switchback Literary Journal, and is a reader for Invisible City Lit. He is currently an assistant editor at Mumber Mag. He has been a professional in the restaurant industry for over 20 years, and can't wait to get out to nature whenever possible. Interests include: playing guitar, reading, writing, bird watching, and repartee with a good whiskey in cozy dives. Michael has been published in various journals and chapbooks. Follow him on Instagram at mhlopez.poetry and on Twitter @MH Lopez_Poetry

Fatima Malik

Fatima Malik (she/her) is a fundraiser and poet currently working on her first full-length collection of poems, *Elegies Burnished by Memory Flame*, an excavation of grief after her father's sudden death in 2019. While she currently lives in New York City, her heart is forever in Lahore.

DS Maolalai

DS Maolalai has been nominated eight times for Best of the Net and five 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)

Michael Masarof

Michael Masarof is a twin who made a fictionalized account of being a twin into a feature film. Now he's looking for a good lawyer. Also, he is spurred on by coffee, in all shapes and sizes and colors.

Kristen Mitchell

Kristen Mitchell is a queer / disabled / supermodel poet living in Michigan. On her date with Dee Dee Ramone, he bought her some Joe Jackson cassette tapes. In the morning she takes her coffee black, and gives her two pups "California Rubs."

Ed Nobody

Ed Nobody is a writer from Ireland who wants to write daring, engaging stories not restricted by traditional genre conventions. He has published several short stories in magazines such as Lovecraftiana, Strange Science Fiction Adventures, and The Horror Zine. He has two

novellas under consideration and a novel in the works.
@EdIsNobody on Twitter.

Pat O'Malley

Pat O'Malley lives in New York where he loves to write the kind of quirky and weird type of fiction that he and his friends would love to read. He has had stories published on webzines such as The Weird and Whatnot, Teleport Magazine, Dark Fire Fiction and more! You can follow him on instagram.com/Patomwrites and read more of his stories on https://medium.com/@patrick.omalley_97144.

A.J. Ortega

A.J. Ortega is thoroughly excited that "jabroni" is recognized by the online dictionary folks now. He eats so many chicken wings that he's concerned about growing feathers. He is currently working on a collection of short stories.

Montana Patrick

Montana Patrick is a writer and photographer from Kansas City, Missouri. He is an MFA student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where he is currently working on a collection of short stories.

Laura Pfizenmayer

Laura Pfizenmayer is the mother of six, grandmother of 14 and wife of the ever-patient Dick. She lives and writes at the redneck Riviera of Gulf Shores. This past year she survived both the pandemic and Hurricane Sally.

Barbara Purcell

Barbara Purcell is a writer based in Austin, TX. She once climbed Mount Kilimanjaro to get a good selfie.

She is a native of North Jersey and still prefers "you guys" to "y'all."

M.V. Reisinger

I reside in Southern Colorado's San Luis Valley with his wife, 2 dogs, and a houseplant jungle, where I am currently taking a break from teaching writing and literature to work as an early career writer and grow food. My published work has appeared in Lumberjack News, Bomb Fire (forthcoming March 27th, 2021) and The Circle Book 2021: Conejos Writers Circle Anthology (forthcoming April, 2021).

Clara Roberts

Clara Roberts is a graduate of the MA in Writing Program at Johns Hopkins University. Her poetry and nonfiction have been published in Entropy Magazine, Idle Ink, Serotonin, detritus, Back Patio Press, Heartwood Literary Magazine, Trampset, and other venues. She lives in Baltimore where she finds material to write about every day.

Sofia T. Romero

Sofia T. Romero is a writer and editor who lives in the Boston area. Her work has appeared in Blue Mountain Review, Rigorous, Waterwheel Review, and LEON Literary Review, and is forthcoming from Wild Roof Journal. On Twitter: @mightyredpen; @sofiatromero

Yash Seyedbagheri

Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. He is a self-proclaimed Tchaikovsky lover and Romantic. Yash also adores sunsets and devours Russian history.

Ankita Sharma

A writer and an artist, Ankita Sharma resides in India and has authored four titles. When not writing poems or making art, she loves petting other people's dogs and gorging on street food!

Simweene Sijamba

I am 21 years of age from a city called Lusaka. Keeping a journal gives birth to so many poems, short stories and expression. A journal is what I've had as a life-long friend, and with it I travel through language to a destination that is still unknown.

Ellen Stone

Ellen Stone is a Pennsylvania hill girl living in the flatlands of Michigan with her husband. She believes that poems should be like good home-baked muffins, full of complex ingredients, but easy to dig in to. Ellen's biggest achievement is raising three fierce and friendly daughters who believe in changing the world.

James Sullivan

When the pandemic is over, James Sullivan, far from retirement age--though not as far as he might like — hopes to retire to an Okinawan beach with a can of Orion beer in his hand and some '80s city pop in his ears. You can fund his kickstarter for this project on his twitter @jfsullivan4th. Give generously.

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.

John Tustin

John Tustin is currently suffering in exile on the island of Elba but hopes to return to you soon.

fritzware.com/johntustinfoetry contains links to his published poetry online.

Preeti Vangani

Preeti Vangani is an Indian poet & personal essayist. She is the author of *Mother Tongue Apologize* (RLFPA Editions), her first book of poems (winner of RL India Poetry Prize.) Her work has been published in BOAAT, Gulf Coast, Threepenny Review among other journals. She is the Poetry Editor for Glass, a Poet Mentor at Youth Speaks and holds an MFA (Writing) from University of San Francisco.

Tom Will

Tom Will writes poems and songs and also does a bit of painting too. He lives in the United States most of the time. Yes, that is really his real name. For all inquiries regarding everything, please email Tom at TomWillWillTom@protonmail.com

Bill Wolak

Bill Wolak is a poet, collage artist, and photographer who has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled *All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages and photographs have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Baldhip Magazine*, *Barfly Poetry Magazine*, *Ragazine*, *Cardinal Sins*, *Pithead Chapel*, *The Wire's Dream*, *Thirteen Ways Magazine*, *Phantom Kangaroo*, *Rathalla Review*, *Free Lit Magazine*, *The Magnolia Review*, *Typehouse Magazine*, *The Round*, 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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