

DOOR = JAR



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Door Is A Jar
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Editors

Maxwell Bauman, Editor-in-Chief/ Art Director

Jack Fabian, Managing Editor/ Nonfiction Editor

Nina Long, Fiction Editor

Corrine Nulton, Poetry Editor/ Drama Editor

Cover Image “Reach Out in the Darkness”
by June Levitan

Table of Contents

p. 6	Searching for Answers by Eileen Coughlin
p. 7	Salt Lake City Airport by Eileen Coughlin
p. 8	morning by Adam Todd
p. 9	Team Insomnia's Post-Game Locker Room Speech by Philip Venzke
p. 10	The Couple at Dinner by Constance Brewer
p. 11	The Family Rate by Constance Brewer
p. 12	The Miracle by Joachim Frank
p. 15	love letter to my body :: even when craving some sugar by j.t. andrews
p. 16	Somewhere Over the Rainbow Jell-O by Elaine Sorrentino
p. 18	Love Story by Elaine Sorrentino
p. 20	Denial by Elaine Sorrentino
p. 21	Psychedelia by Lindsey M. Heatherly
p. 22	Actias luna by Lindsey M. Heatherly
p. 23	That was the last of the summer by E J Saleby
p. 25	THRESHOLDS by Leslie Lindsay
p. 29	Dead Cat At Ballona Creek by Francesca Brenner
p. 30	The Brink by Francesca Brenner
p. 32	February 22, 2013 by Francesca Brenner
p. 34	Nothing by Kaci Skiles Laws
p. 36	Phantom Fangs by Kaci Skiles Laws
p. 37	Haunt Me by Patricia Feeney
p. 39	The Guts of a Maniac by Steve Gold
p. 41	Now Look Here by Edward Michael Supranowicz
p. 42	Angels in Capes by Edward Michael Supranowicz
p. 43	Cityscape by Edward Michael Supranowicz
p. 44	Ill at Ease 1a by Edward Michael Supranowicz
p. 45	Miss Congeniality 2 by Edward Michael Supranowicz
p. 46	I Like Eternity by Benjamin Bagocius
p. 47	Lazy Eye by Benjamin Bagocius
p. 48	you died by Christine Brooks

- p. 49 the mail by Christine Brooks
- p. 51 Portrait of an Artist and His Muse by Yelaina Anton
- p. 54 NO GHOSTS, HE SAYS by Rachel Vinciguerra
- p. 56 BIG PURPLE ONES by Rachel Vinciguerra
- p. 57 ONE MORE LEAF FALLEN by Rachel Vinciguerra
- p. 58 wanting the wild swim by Annie Powell Stone
- p. 59 Before any alarms by Annie Powell Stone
- p. 60 Reach Out in the Darkness by June Levitan
- p. 61 Ralph, Percy, & Me by Andre F. Peltier
- p. 62 The Follower by Matt Schorr
- p. 66 in the kingdom of lesser ideals by John Sweet
- p. 67 GUEST OF MYSELF by John Grey
- p. 68 MISSING PERSON by Claire Scott
- p. 69 WORDS by Claire Scott
- p. 70 DARING TO DREAM by Claire Scott
- p. 72 A Love Poem for The Wounded by Alexis Garcia
- p. 73 Sour Smiles by Margaret Norris
- p. 74 Pink Flags by Margaret Norris
- p. 75 Fifteen Minutes of Fame by Steve Slavin
- p. 79 Losing Balance by Charles Grosel
- p. 80 Her Absence by Charles Grosel
- p. 81 Poodle Skirts and Ponytails by Charles Grosel
- p. 82 Self-Portrait as Rusty Wheels by Ashley Wagner
- p. 83 Every Contact Leave a Trace by Ashley Wagner
- p. 84 Whale Fall by Ashley Wagner
- p. 86 First Dates on Your Birthday by R.J. Patteson
- p. 88 “Me” as Mirror by Camille Ferguson
- p. 90 Metamorphosis by Camille Ferguson
- p. 91 Contributor Bios
- p. 100 Submission Guidelines

Searching for Answers

Eileen Coughlin

Poetry

We order pork fried rice, crispy crab Rangoon,
sautéed shrimp and Chinese dumplings.

You eat very fast, pack up left-overs
for later, forego the fortune cookies.

I don't. I make a small pile of brown bows,
individually wrapped and creased.

At the kitchen table I crack them
open and slide the small slips of paper

out from the thirteen grams of vanilla
and sesame sugar coated calories.

A pile of crumbs collects on the tablecloth
I don't care about the broken pieces

falling off the edge landing right where
the dog can lick them off the floor.

I study each sentence, anxious to read it,
sorting the lines into stacks of save or toss.

Fate fixed and folded over, baked inside.
Waiting to be opened. The next strip is blank.

Bare, naked. In the silence, Confucius says
Everything has beauty, not everyone sees it.

Salt Lake City Airport

Eileen Coughlin

Poetry

Hanging on the wall
Between terminals an
exquisite photograph of a ballerina
delicately balanced on point

her sheer garment
welcomes the weary traveler
arms outstretched
inviting those who vacation to pause

Just long enough to notice the
grave marker in the background
located just
below her 6th rib

The headstone
Is set in the Salt Lake City cemetery
downtown
between N and U streets

art is life
death is a dance
boarding
in just a few minutes

morning

Adam Todd

Poetry

walking into my office
i think to myself that it is night in japan.
the dew lays heavy on the grass
it is foggy in every direction but up
and with me moves a breeze
that is carrying a million possibilities for the day.
but over there, they know nothing of this.

Team Insomnia's Post-Game Locker Room Speech

Philip Venzke

Poetry

What a fantastic game tonight, everyone!
Can't say enough about our team.
You tossed and turned them at every chance.
And what about our great coaches:
Anxiety on Offense; Stress on Defense;
and Depression on Special Teams.
They did a tremendous job in game planning.
And PTSD made some great adjustments throughout
using alcohol and caffeine to change up the tempo.
What about some great plays from a lot of different
guys:
Reflux, Nocturia, Dementia, Apnea to name a few.
We knew that their team would try just about
everything:
Melatonin, Chamomile, Tryptophan.
Even Warm Milk.
But you guys never rested, never napped.
You turned their night into one long bad dream.
In the end, I can't say enough about your tireless efforts.
Everyone deserves the game ball;
but panphobia's big play, with a minute to go,
using hopelessness and worry, sealed the game.
Everyone - enjoy this victory!
You left everything you had out on the field.
Now, it is time to go home to your families.
And enjoy a good night's sleep.

The Couple at Dinner

Constance Brewer

Poetry

We read at the kitchen table,
turn pages in sync over spaghetti,
chewing punctuated by sporadic
murmurs of listen to this.
Our orbit is backwards.
You self-soothe with non-fiction
me with fiction genres,
reading material thick and juicy.
Both of us devour cookbooks,
neither touching a magazine.

Another night, book, dinner.
Scrape of fork on plate,
knife sawing through steak,
playlist in the background
soft through Alexa's tinny speakers.
You offer an interesting tidbit,
me a delightful turn of phrase.
A half glass of wine later
the dog licks scraps from the plate
dishes washed and stacked,
we go our separate ways
bookmark the passage,
our fiction, an essay on life.

The Family Rate
Constance Brewer
Poetry

My son leans into his work, intent on the truck engine a problem to be puzzled out, a tangled mystery to solve. Lost in mechanical mindfulness, the world outside fades to white noise broken by the ratchet of a wrench. A black canvas work bag holds the tools needed for this month's fix. He hums under his breath as he works, grease sliding over his knuckles, transferred to cheek as he absentmindedly rubs his face. Solutions flip through his mind like a game of solitaire. The loose bolt card, the electrical card, the faulty distributor card. He reaches into the work bag and grabs the right tool. Disconnecting wires, he sets parts on the hood ledge, pokes around, raises a hand in triumph. A gentle ah-ha and he turns to me with a grin, meditative inquiry complete. A faulty spark plug. He's happy to fix it, solve the problem, help his mother. Another job accomplished with skills he's honed over the years, trial and error, where hands-on learning beats book knowledge. He replaces the plug closes the hood, starts the truck. It hums. Pleased, it's time to place the tools carefully back in their assigned slots, wipe his hands on a greasy rag, give a smile that crinkles his eyes. He hugs his mother goodbye, mindful of the dirty hands, mission complete, satisfaction high as he refuses the money his mother tries to shove into his hand.

The Miracle
Joachim Frank
Nonfiction

We had just bought the house on Blue Valley Road. On the grounds in the back of the house there was a giant apple tree that spread its wide branches over the hollow close to the edge of the forest. It had plenty of miniscule worm-ridden fruit, leaves marked with black spots, and bark covered with lichen. In the first year we didn't touch anything in the whole backyard since we considered everything just part of nature, sacrosanct. The tree was part of the harmonious scene we had bought that would last forever. Flowers came up in unexpected places. A love seat under a canopy of vines swung lightly in the wind. A sea of forsythia near the fence to the neighbor stood in bloom for several weeks.

In the second year we hired a contractor to cut the apple tree back, with the hope to restore it to serious apple production. The man assured us about this as a strong possibility and went to work. Nothing came of it, except that the worm-ridden apples became a bit smaller. The love seat collapsed because the planks of the seat were rotting near the edges and the hook supporting it had rusted through. The forsythia did not sprout a single flower and remained a bastion of green all spring.

In the third year we hired another contractor to take the tree down altogether and make chips out of it, which I could use to cover the weed in our flowerbeds. He did take the tree down but, in our absence, misunderstood the instructions and heaped the chips into our parking space, next to the house. I repaired the love seat, but the forsythias refused to bloom again.

We had visitors the weekend after the tree was felled: my nephew Fred, his wife Miriam and their little daughter Annabel driving over all the way from the

Boston area. After they arrived, I recruited Fred to help me cart the wood chips back down to the spot where I needed them, with a wheelbarrow. Meanwhile Miriam with Annabel on her arm did the rounds of our property. When they came back Miriam asked, “So what is this business about the quartz crystal?” It sounded as if she was accusing me of trying to hide something of great significance from our visitors.

“What quartz? What crystal?”

I went with her to the tree trunk in the backyard and, right there, I found a snow-white, fist-sized crystal sticking out from the middle of the freshly-sawn surface. It made no sense.

First, how did it get there, into the middle of the tree?

Second, how did the man and his crew manage to saw off the tree? They must have approached it with the saw from several directions, each time running into fierce ear-splitting resistance, until the cut was complete around the mineral intrusion.

On close inspection I found one clue to the answer of question number one: there were faint marks of boundaries on the surface, suggesting this tree was actually three trees grown together, enclosing this piece of mineral as they grew. It was still not clear how it got there in the first place. A child might have placed it between three slender saplings? And who in his right mind would plant three apple trees within inches of one another?

I promised myself to honor the unprecedented constellation. How often in your lifetime do you see a crystal sprout from the middle of a tree? I decided to polish the surface of the stump, stain it, and coat it with a fine resin. It will look like a postmodern sculpture; like a piece of living room furniture smack in the meadow of a country estate.

But then after a few days had gone by, the crystal got me thinking of charging admission. Public interest could be substantial. Woodstock, where many of the crystal lovers used to live, is not far away. A fair number will still be alive. Parking will be a problem, but isn't it always the case?

Being a true miracle, the crystal might even attract religious believers of all sorts. I can think of this going viral and global, of becoming another destination of pilgrimage. I could think of printing brochures, of selling trinkets, bibles, Korans, plastic replicas of the tree trunk, complete with the quartz sticking out. Maps of the Berkshires, with our town marked by a little icon. Memory sticks with a virtual reality environment that lets you touch the crystal with your hand, and go right through it.

love letter to my body :: even when craving some**sugar**

j.t. andrews

Poetry

i didn't think you would hold me
this long, though you fall apart

a little more each day. i suppose
i should first say i am sorry.

you have seen me at my most violent
and you have called me blight.

i gargled poison from a candy bowl,
a buffet, a bottle,

(this is how i chew on glass)
(this is how you howl in the night)

and still here you are, walking
through mountains and listening to quincy jones.

you are a body who loves to dance
and do handstands and how wonderful is that?

so second i say thank you, for holding me
as no one but else but the wind has done.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow Jell-O

Elaine Sorrentino

Poetry

In our house
Happy Birthday was proclaimed
not with cake,
but multiple layers
of Rainbow Ribbon Jell-O,
a colorful masterpiece
of gelatinous proportions,
each seductive slice
akin to a roll
of five flavor lifesavers.

Failures leading to certain doom—
green added too early
sour cream added too late
yellow added without a spoon
to cushion the stream,
orange so hot it melts
all five previous layers;
toss the disaster, back to the store.

A two and half hour juggling act
boil this, measure that, cool it off,
eye on the clock,
(contemplate Jell-O shots next time),
the timer's ding announces
I may have waited too long,
definitely shots next time...

Congealing complete,
tepid water cradles the Bundt,
it could be a soupy mess
the top layer could stick,

whisper a prayer,
hold breath and invert,
sweet release from its non-stick cocoon,
out slides the retro rainbow triumph,
awaiting its whipped cream kiss.

Love Story
Elaine Sorrentino
Poetry

Sixty-five years later
she still cannot believe
he asked her out,

the dishy buyer
in the men's department
with dark smiling eyes,

deep dimples
long, sweeping lashes,
the man who became my father.

Her diminishing memory
remembers his first visit
upon returning from Korea

calling on her brother,
embarrassed about answering the door
in her old ratty housecoat

her hair in pin curls
unprepared to meet
the man of her dreams,

yet there he stood the following day,
in all his handsomeness
asking her to dinner.

*I still don't know
what he saw in me
she says with amazement*

as her damaged brain
transports her
to a happier time.

Denial

Elaine Sorrentino

Poetry

It was just a kiss,
a harmless kiss, a friendly kiss,
two colleagues bidding adieu
wishing each other safe journey
with a kiss that may have lingered too long.

Swept away by the jazz and the heat
and the wine and the moon,
two vulnerable lips touched,
a shy, delicate brush at first,
sweet and contemplative in the middle,
then passionate and urgent
before we stopped to catch our breath
and our senses.

It was just a kiss,
a harmless, friendly kiss,
and it will not change anything.

Psychedelia

Lindsey M. Heatherly

Poetry

I watched him bend at the knees
his six-foot-six frame a praying mantis
that tightened into a paper crane
& collapsed into streams of confetti
as I followed him out that rooftop window.
The sky was a backdrop of purple-orange ribbons
& electricity towers glowed fire
between the pines on the mountaintop ahead.
His bare foot tapped loose shingles
as psychedelia played from his busted-up phone
& I traced the home-drawn circles
that danced on his legs. He looked through the trees
into the horizon & saw California —
told stories to anyone who would listen
stories of a simpler life, one lived on a commune
& how he once clipped buds for twenty bucks an hour
& he left, *Oh, why did I leave?*
He took a drag from his last Marlboro Red
& gazed out into the Carolina sunset. I reached
for his hand. *I'd give anything to go back*
he said & his hand became a moth
with fractal wings that fluttered on his cheek.

Actias luna

Lindsey M. Heatherly

Poetry

maybe if I whisper my love
ever so *gently*
to the words I never say
they will feel safe enough to build
a cocoon and transform
into a silk moth the size of my hand
that will settle on the collarbone
above my heart
where it will dance and flutter
lime-green wings
until it gives birth
to all the versions of myself
I tried to pack away

That was the last of the summer

E J Saleby

Poetry

We were rich then, rich in time.
The beer gardens and the bifters,
kickabouts on the Common.

That rich girl with the dreadlocks, she knew her destiny.
Not us, though.
We were just drifting.

Joss sticks, king size skins,
that poster,
"take me to your dealer".

Driving up to Spitalfields, queuing up for a nightclub.
... it's all gone a bit
Pete Tong.

Slipping into that pub on Wardour Street,
there were still punks in those days.
Heavy metal.
Soft rock.

We were alright though. We had the Pixies, Nirvana,
dance music.
That was ours.

Six of us in the car, driving back over Waterloo Bridge.
Round the Elephant and Castle, down through Peckham.
Ah, that pub with the pool table.
Those long-haired middle-aged men.
Those narrowed eyes.
Too posh for them, we were.

We all made it, one way or another.
I don't know everyone. Not anymore.
But we all made it,
 or at least, I think we did.
I think we made it.

One of us is a graphic designer. There's a consultant,
 somebody in tv,
 something with IT.
There's a teacher,
 two vegans, three divorces, several children.

A house
A flat
One holiday a year.

And a lot of very, very large televisions.

We were rich then.
 Rich in time.
That was the last of the summer.

THRESHOLDS

Leslie Lindsay

Fiction

She starts thinking about what doors mean. How she can just walk out. Or in. Doors. They are always half-open. She believes they are a primal image. A slip. A slot. Rectangular. Square. Plumb. Normal, from the Latin, *normalis*, made according to a carpenter's tool. A pattern. Repeating. Here is what else she thinks: doors represent desire and temptation. To open or close? Conceal or reveal? To shut away or open up.

The baby cries. Sudden and hollow. She does not want to cross the threshold to the bedroom, which is not a nursery, just a crib next to Hers and His, to comfort the child with her arms, a bottle. Her eyes glance the door. She years to return to a distant past where she dreamed of oak groves and boys in blue canoes and helped her father plane wood, where her mother *tsked* about roses and dirty knees. She thinks she sees a spider mite crawling on the brick work of the fireplace in the little apartment. All the bricks are shimmering red and brown, tremulous. They are everywhere, the mites. She lets them crawl onto her hand, watching as they skitter among freckles then mashes them with the pad of her thumb, smearing red. A whole life obliterated.

The child's screams rev another octave.

Open door. Turn key. Enter. Close door. Turn knob. Close door. Turn knob. Closed. Bolted. Padlocked. Open. Wide-open. Ajar. Slight push. Well-oiled hinges. Your fate is visible. Rusty? Forget it. Your fate is buried. Out west. With the dead kin of your husband. In the dust. Ashes to ashes. Under the pewter sky where the little stone house sits in disrepair, a storage shack now, but once was the prettiest house in all the desert, with a picket fence! But they were just descendants.

Here, she wants to sit in the graveyard. Next to Sabie. And Frederick. Long gone. The tumbleweeds would roil across the parched earth, seeking. Searching. Nourishment. Hydration.

She wants to sit in the graveyard, among the dead.

Want. To lack. A deficiency. A dearth.

Funny how dearth is only letter from death.

Separated by an 'r.' *Our.* Is there an our?

She doesn't like it there anymore. Wants to move. She'll take the baby, now a toddler, and go. The house across the street is bigger and better. And for sale. So long musty apartment with brick fireplace and spider mites.

He is at work now, wearing a khaki uniform. Shirt tucked in, black belt, sturdy shoes. His hair slicked back, smelling of pomade, freshly shaven, square jaw. God, he's handsome as the dickens. Good at his job, too, a mechanic for the Frisco. He returns smelling of grease and aftershave, tobacco. The money is rolling in, more than they've ever seen. They are living high on the hog. A tiny foot has been poking her ribs. She is pregnant again. They need more space.

Across the street, the lace curtains billow in the window. Someone left it open. How irresponsible. She can visualize a hot apple pie cooling in the window. The child makes a noise, she tilts her head. The sunlight reflects off the bird's metal cage causing her to squint, to worry after freckles. A ridiculous notion, being inside.

She scans the space. Table. Four chairs. Three rugs. A sofa. Coffee table. Stack of books. Lamp. A sign: *Our Home.* In the bedroom, a double bed, crib, nightstand. His reading light corkscrewed into the wall. More books. She peers in the closet. Three dress shirts. Six work shirts. Four day-dresses, two pairs of clam diggers, seven blouses. Seven! She assesses the shoes. T-straps

and lace-up shoes with a heel. There are undershirts and pantyhose and brassieres.

The baby has a few things: a stack of blocks and a pull toy with a string. Rattles and blankets. Cloth diapers. Bottles and spoons.

She thinks she can do this. Deep within, she has the power, pulpy and meaty. She cannot bear the apartment one more day. The cracked linoleum. The perpetual dust. The mites. It's oppressive. Johnston Street. Grant Beach. Nichols Avenue. Why must everyone make such a fuss over moving?

The house is tangible. She can throw a chair out the window of the apartment, and it will land on the yard of the new house.

She asks the young woman next-door, in 3C, to watch the baby, and hands over a glass bottle, a blanket, a toy. "I won't be long."

With a great heft, she maneuvers the sky-blue sofa through the twists and turns of the hallways, the stairwells. Sweat blooms on her back, darkening her blouse. For the mattress and box springs she uses the child's stroller, easing the bumbling mass through the corridors.

At the house across the street, she yanks open the window, the one that had been left cracked. Big enough now to fold her body through, which is think and pliable, like a stick of Wrigley's. She finds her way to the front door to unlock it. She overseeing her handiwork, their life dispelled on the emerald green lawn, she sees the cockatiel in the cage, swaying, displaced. One day, she'd plant marigolds, in the boxes and the beds. She places her hands on her hips, pleased, never mind that she's trespassing. She checks her watch. The bank will be open for another two hours.

Above, the apartment house loomed, casting a great shadow on the lawn. A snicker boiled from the pit of her

stomach, like the buzzing of bees. She erupted into laughter. What would he say when he arrived home to a denuded apartment? Her body crumpled over in hysterics. She would lean out that kitchen window, with a loaf of bread, a ham sandwich, a thick crunchy pickle and say, “Yoo-hoo, over here!”

Dead Cat At Ballona Creek

Francesca Brenner

Poetry

I will give the gutted cat a burial at sea
scoop her spine, shrinking ears,
black fur into a cedar box
drive her to Santa Monica
walk the half mile spit of sand
give her to the ocean

Her last living breath a horror
she deserves the sweet caress of waves
seaweed scratching under her chin
sea foam teasing a-now-
you-see-it-now-you-don't-game

I imagine she grows a new life
delicately weaves through the current
on the ocean floor, rubs in and around
octopus arms, her feathery tail
tickling the underbelly of a low gliding seal,
backing up on her haunches
to pounce on a half-buried crab

At night she will curl around a sea anemone
lick paws and tendrils until eyes
no longer able to stay open
her whiskers will start to twitch

What will she dream?
How the light, so hard to catch between paws,
illuminated dust under the couch?
How crickets slid under the door stop.

The Brink
Francesca Brenner
Poetry

This is what you've prepared for since
you were a kid stealing matches
a piece of bagel, Band-Aids, a stubby,
sharpened pencil, stuffing them in your pocket
ready to be teleported to another time in history,
days you wore three layers of clothing
in case you woke to a medieval winter

Would it be the past or the future
or what part of the globe?
You prepared as you could

Put aside it never happened
you were ready or readying
in case of emergency, the steeliness
in your blood would tourniquet
someone's machetied artery-geyser
You along with others would tip
the Buick from hood to wheels
medic the family of four and the dog
all before the vehicle ignited a fire ball

Or the last days on earth before a meteor
or a tsunami or the sun, predicted to flair,
scorched and evaporated all moisture
you not only wanted to be there
felt honored by the obligation

So, here you are now in older age,
being called for active duty (though you hadn't
factored into your young imaginings
being older) so be it

Swig back a tequila, stockpile truthfulness
be ready to be an elder, December the arrow is
out of the quiver and arching in the sky
January 20th it falls back to earth

February 22, 2013

Francesca Brenner

Poetry

For Lee Brenner

The last time I saw my mother, I was straddling her in
my childhood twin bed.

A foot on the ground, a knee by her left arm, my hand on
her chest working to sync my breath with hers. She was
in the tee shirt I had silkscreened for her, silhouette of a
black cat

looking into your eyes, its image fading into white.

Waiting to see me for the last time, my three-thousand-
mile trip delayed in Boston due to a storm, when I
arrived she was lying on my old bed in my old bedroom
in an agitated morphine sleep
the teabag from her last cup of tea in the silver antique
strainer by the sink, four hard boiled eggs in the fridge in
a plastic cottage cheese container.

You can take route 6 from Long Beach CA, travel 3,517
miles across the belly of the United States turn left at the
stop light on Conwell and find yourself landed in
Provincetown. Here's where my folks met in the '50s,
where I was taken two weeks after I was born, where we
summered every year until 1973, when we became year
rounders.

My mother never knew where I was. The town, 3 miles
by a mile, surrounded by water, I couldn't be far. The
only rule, back by dark. Freedom until dinner when my
father and I swallowed her criticism. Like the fishermen,
she knew how to scale and gut a fish, its entrails
wrapped in yesterday's newspaper, driven out to the

dump.

Her last year was full of last choices. “My body. My life,” she said. When she stopped the chemo, she stopped telling me how much soap should go on a sponge, when to brake when driving, to remember to turn off lights when leaving a room. Had we a few more years, she might have grown into the mother I’d always wanted.

If I’d known I’d never see my mother again would I have taken an earlier flight? Maybe not. She’d avoided the morphine, waited for me until it was unbearable. Seeing me might have caused more pain. As it was, she was tucked into my old bedroom. I brushed a piece of her hair off her forehead, placed my hand on her heart, its beat slow and soft under my palm. We breathed together until I breathed alone.

Nothing
Kaci Skiles Laws
Poetry

I have a sick feeling
in my stomach when you
leave. I say, *I'm afraid you'll die.*

I'm really afraid you won't
recognize my distress,
know how to care.

I practice saying, *I feel*, and find
a defense to fit your absence
or indifference.

I don't have reason. I can't
identify.
I feel like something's wrong
all the time.

I worry and twist and chew my blanket;
I digest it in intervals; no one
notices. It's a good feeling being obsolete
when I can't stop
doing things everyone hates.

You need babies to feel love; cute
is fleeting. Being
a girl reminds you of how to hate me;

having a boy that belongs to you
is all you ever wanted
because your dad never loved you.

Age of reason leads to teens,

counting the days
to justify cutting ties because you feel
like you lost out on love again.

You say — *told you so or* nothing.

Phantom Fangs

Kaci Skiles Laws

Poetry

We dug graves for our addictions.
Had more than we liked to admit
holding onto the ends of our fingers,

tried shaking them loose
as they clung like warts, disappearing,
returning more bulbous and stubborn.

We cut at some, the blood was deep, red,
hard to convince it didn't need them.
It never did. We'd never lived.

We thought we were dying. Scarred,
we were afraid of being disfigured
and different. We swelled in other places

as moles and cysts, headaches, backaches,
reflux, depression; the worst of it all
were the phantom fangs
of insurmountable anxiety.

Haunt Me
Patricia Feeney
Poetry

The day you left us, I stood on the hospital parking lot
and spotted you across the plain of painted lines,
your legs powerwalking with purpose,
your back tilted forward.
In that infinitesimal moment,
I turned to you.

Slow down.

I need to talk to you.

My left foot lifted ever so slightly from the asphalt
as I leaned toward your image:
your dark hair, salted with age,
your gait that said, "I've got places to be."
In that infinitesimal moment, I needed to tell you
of our loss.

Then, as if shot with electricity,
my nerve endings frayed and disconnected.
My foot hit the pavement.
I gasped.
In that infinitesimal moment, I realized you were not
there.
You were our loss.

An aging woman once told me "The losses get easier."
She said she was accustomed to death.

Perhaps she knew I held to what once was.
Perhaps she meant to comfort me with lies.
In that infinitesimal moment, I wanted to believe her,
but I did not.

Don't make it easier for me.

Haunt me.

Haunt me with your purposeful stride.
With your blasts of laughter.
With the subtle tilt of your head as you smile.
With your penetrating gaze.
Haunt me with a lifetime of
infinitesimal moments.

The Guts of a Maniac

Steve Gold

Drama

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Floyd: A Capitol Building Invader

Time: January 6th, 2021

Setting: The Capitol Building, Washington D.C.

SCENE: THE RANSACKED OFFICE OF A CONGRESSMAN IN THE CAPITOL IN WAHINGTON, D.C. PAPERS ARE STREWN ACROSS THE FLOOR; AN OVERTURNED CHAIR. FLOYD ENTERS UP STAGE RIGHT, BRIEFLY LOOKS ABOUT THE PLACE, THEN MOVES TO DOWN STAGE CENTER. HE IS THIRTY, WHITE, DRESSED IN DUNGAREES WORK BOOTS, ARMY JACKET AND BASEBALL CAP. HE ADDRESSES THE AUDIENCE, INITIALLY JUBILANT

FLOYD

Can you believe what's happening? I mean can you fuckin' *believe* all this shit? It's like I'm dreaming. Here I am in a congressman's office. And right now, he's not here and I *own* it! What a great feeling that is. If that congressman wasn't such a coward, he'd be here to see me — he's probably a Democrat — they're all cowards. Maybe for his sake he's not here, because if he was, I would beat the shit out of him — and Pelosi — I'd love to get that bitch in the same room. But you know who's even worse than Pelosi? *Pence*. At least with Pelosi, you from the start where she's coming from. But Pence was one of us. He betrayed us, betrayed Trump. I hear Trump is pissed off at Pence because he wouldn't overturn the

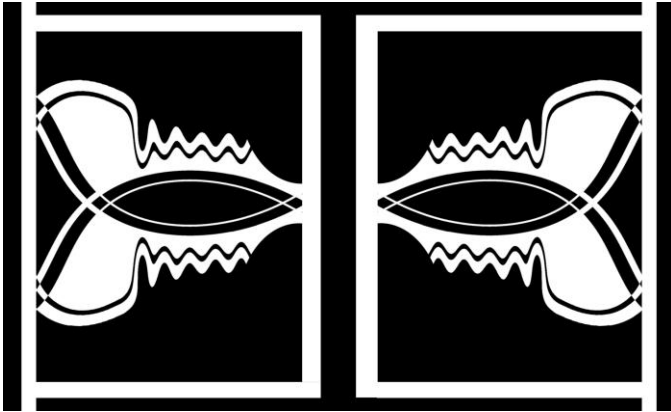
election fraud, like he was supposed to. Pence is a traitor and I'd like to beat the shit out of him, too.

(PAUSE)

Maybe you think I'm a maniac. I've got the *guts* of a maniac, but I'm no maniac. I know what the score is. Fox News told me. They're the only ones telling the truth. They know the score, too. They know the election was stolen right out from under us. So Trump told me to "Fight like Hell," so that's what I'm doing. And here I am. I climbed up the outside wall of the Capitol like I was fuckin' Spiderman and got into the building. I thought there'd be more cops here to stop us, but there weren't that many at all. It was really easy. We came rolling in like a bunch of oranges. It's a great feeling it must be how George Washington felt. I'm a revolutionary, just like him, only my enemy ain't the British. It's all those people who think I'm a low-life, the ones who went to college and work for CNN and MSNBC and the New York Times; the ones who call me an "unmentionable"; the ones who hate Trump. I love Trump because he says to those people, "FUCK YOU!" Through Trump, I get even with them. I'm a nobody. CNN doesn't pay attention to people like me. But they do when Trump opens his mouth. He speaks for me. Remember what happened in Michigan a while back? Well, that was just a rehearsal. What's happening today is the beginning. What'll happen tomorrow? (OMINOUS TONE) ...Wait and see... you just wait and see....

End

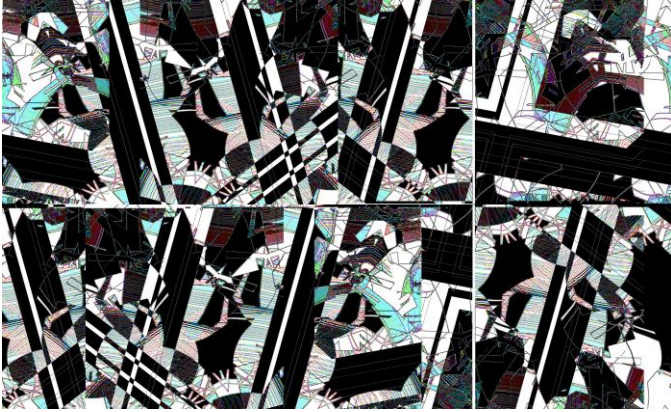
Now Look Here
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



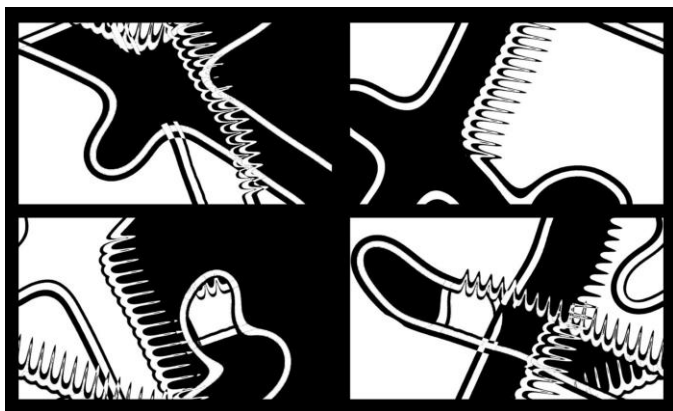
Angels in Capes
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



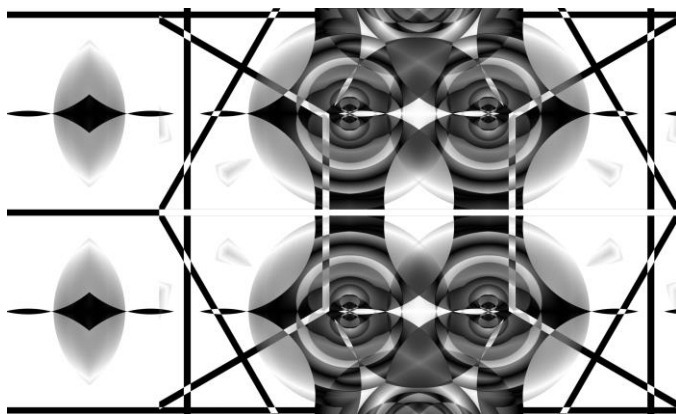
Cityscape
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



Ill at Ease 1a
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



Miss Congeniality 2
Edward Michael Supranowicz
Art



I Like Eternity
Benjamin Bagocius
Poetry

I like eternity
like I like lions at the zoo
In cages
Behind glass
Let someone else feed them
I think their manes are beautiful,
so, too, is the way their bodies are so relaxed
lying in the exhibit like they own the place
But they don't own it. People do. That's how I like
eternity
I gaze into the glass, call everything it shows me
beautiful,
but it's disturbing. It's not quite right, the magnitude of
lion majesty
boxed in a cage. And it's a little scary how peaceful their
lethal paws are
I get to decide how long I stay
I get to decide when I look away and go home
I like that the zoo closes at 6 p.m. and reopens
at a reasonable mid-morning hour

Lazy Eye
Benjamin Bagocius
Poetry

My eyeball was smacked, an innocent bystander
Now it uses crutches. It moves slowly
up the steps of blue. It doesn't take corners
quickly. It holds the handrail, lifts
its crutches over curbs
of light. There's nothing lazy about eyes
When the world pauses, the eyeball doesn't
Just watch your eyes. You think you've stopped
to look. But each eye has never stopped
Feel how it traces the running
shadow of lace. Look: unlike your leg,
your eye follows the foam
down the river
Hold your gaze as still as you can
and watch. Your eye is never still
It drags you to vision

you died
Christine Brooks
Poetry

ten months after the world sheltered and isolated
days before the vaccine became available

tired
in pain
confused and alone
wishing harder to be with her than to be here,
 anymore

with the chance to call and say goodbye
meeting death head on as warriors do
unafraid of the valley because
paradise was waiting
calling

or so you wanted to believe

you called
asking to come off the breathing machines
so you could be on time for dinner with mom

and I was not invited

the mail

Christine Brooks
Poetry

I was on the front porch today
when the mailman came
he could not see me slouched
down low on the futon and
we had no mail so
he had no reason to stop

I watched him
the only face we saw for so many
daysweeksmonths
the only order in our lives that
for reasons we did not understand
not completely anyway,
had been put on hold, frozen
shuttered sheltered quarantined

we got through those March days
with only each other, in the small
house on the loud street that I
cursed for its inability to be peaceful

just,
me and him and the mailman

tonight, I saw the
mailman across the street
walking fast trying, it seemed
to not look this way
but he did
as he made his way to #7
he glanced this way
and his face frowned so hard I

felt it deep
in my tummy, but

he did not pause, as he had so many times before
did not take a knee, as he had when I told him
you had Covid
and he did not cry, as he had
at your casket
because the mail
must go on

and that, well that,
that
you would have loved.

Portrait of an Artist and His Muse

Yelaina Anton

Fiction

His hands were blue, burgundy, and beige. Indigo under his fingernails, wine at his wrists. Magenta and lavender, cerulean and aubergine.

Life came to the canvas, first in clouds of bright, nondescript shapes, then crawling from the cotton like the art itself had grown sentient. He, in fact, had to do very little, simply add a shadow every now and then.

The artist dropped the paintbrush into the jar, and the oils met fresh tap water, curling in diluted rainbows. He wiped at his brow, and in doing so, drew a certain shade of cider from his temple to his sideburns. It brought out the green in his eyes, that vibrant, underlying shade that could only be called crocodile.

“She’s gorgeous,” Marianne, his wife, said from the door. She tugged her shawl tight around her shoulders, which shook as she breathed. There was a wistful smile on her lips, her eyes fixed to the portrait.

Vince turned to look at her. Looking at Marianne, he often found, was like stumbling upon an angel cast down to earth, glowing in lemon and tangerine and daisy, so many happy, living colors he could never recreate. She was vivid in the sunlight filtering through the stained-glass window on the western wall. The faces of cherubs etched there lined near perfectly with her own. Vince felt the urge paint her, as he did every day. He had promised her as much on the night they first met. She’d been flattered, but called it a waste of paint.

“Something’s not quite right,” Vince said. He was talking about the portrait, but his crocodile eyes remained on his wife.

Either oblivious or unbothered, she approached the easel, tiptoeing around piles of empty paint tubes and

dirtied palettes, around ripped up canvases and bundles of brushes with their hairs bent at odd angles. This was the life she had willingly embraced, one where simply breathing in the same vicinity as Vince meant acrylic stains at your elbows and watercolor at your knees. This was the life of a painter's wife, always welcome yet detached from the studio at the front of her own house. This was what Vince didn't see. He saw masterpieces, techniques, and styles, but never the waste, the ruin he wrought. There was an ugly side to every pretty face in his portraits. He liked to believe he had not yet found Marianne's.

When Marianne reached the easel, meadows and sunsets from the stained window replaced the cherubs cast over her body. She lifted a finger and traced it along the chest of the woman in the portrait. "There."

Vince leaned forward, brought the glasses on the end of the chain around his neck to his eyes. He could make out errant brushstrokes and inconsistencies in texture, but nothing glaringly wrong. "What do you see?"

"It's what I don't see," said Marianne. Their heads were touching as he hovered over her shoulder. He reeked of oils. Their eyes met as she said, "You haven't given her any collarbones."

Indeed, the woman's chest was bare as day. She was swarmed with color — the magenta, cerulean, emerald — but she was lacking the distinct cuts across her sternum. It made her look unrealistic, just as strange as the hurricane of color behind her.

Vince's hands found their way around his wife's waist. Her shape was made spongy by the drape of the shawl, but she still felt frail in his arms, reminding him of tracing paper. His chin came to rest by the base of her neck, and his jaw quivered in time with the shake of her shoulders. Her hands went to meet his. Together, they

pressed against her stomach. It felt hollow, but there was something else beneath that. The beginning of something, someone else's portrait.

This was the life he had embraced too: torn between the colorful women he painted, strangers with familiar qualities; and the colorful woman he had married, wrecked by her own system yet still willing to fight for something that had potential to destroy them both. This was the third try. It might be the last.

Together, they stood there, admiring the face of a woman that did not exist and never would. Cherubs watched from the window, putting halos above their heads and lights in their weary, aging hearts. This painting would fade, just as all paintings do — but not quite yet.

NO GHOSTS, HE SAYS

Rachel Vinciguerra

Poetry

My partner says there are no ghosts here.
He grew up in a place where the

Spiritual world kissed the living.
With sirens and zombies, and salt circles, and magik.

I grew up in one where death and the soul
Were not polite dinner conversation.

He says it's too clean and built up here
Or something like that.

What are ghosts, I ask, at the core? Are they not
beings violated, seeking peace and closure for this
world?

If so, we must have ghosts here —
Of women burned for their words,

Black children robbed
Of their future and genius,

People of this land
Forced to march to disintegration.

Though we walk past without seeing,
This nation must be teeming with spirits

In water coolers, construction sites, beer booths, dentist
chairs,
Conference rooms, parking garages, sidewalks, gardens.

And mustn't it gut the spirits and us both,
To imagine they're a fantasy?

BIG PURPLE ONES

Rachel Vinciguerra

Poetry

Would you believe me / if I told you big, purple clouds
are moving across the sky / slow, fat, and lovely / at this
very moment / and you're missing it?

ONE MORE LEAF FALLEN

Rachel Vinciguerra

Poetry

Are you ever filled with a desire
to get close to the Earth?
It comes on quickly like missing
the last step in the staircase.

And you have to drop down
to the level of the dirt.
Belly to the grass,
tops of the feet on the cool ground.

One more leaf fallen and left,
precisely as you landed.
For a moment,
called home.

wanting the wild swim

Annie Powell Stone

Poetry

words are the only substitute I've found for the ocean
— since lockdown started,
since priorities became clearer —
the only vastness
the only chance to submerge
get purposefully
lost
without keeping track of the shore

but we had never missed a year at the beach before and
I miss it

I keep dreaming about the sea
waves and fins and empty mussel shells
all flapping
keeping me up at night
dry in my bed but my brain is ambushed by
a giant squid made out of stained-glass bursting into
restless rest
and the deep dark calling
always calling

and I had forgotten about stars
— which is weird because we can see them in the city
dimly —
but it's not until I dream of the ocean that I remember
them
and how I shine, too, when I swim beneath them

Before any alarms

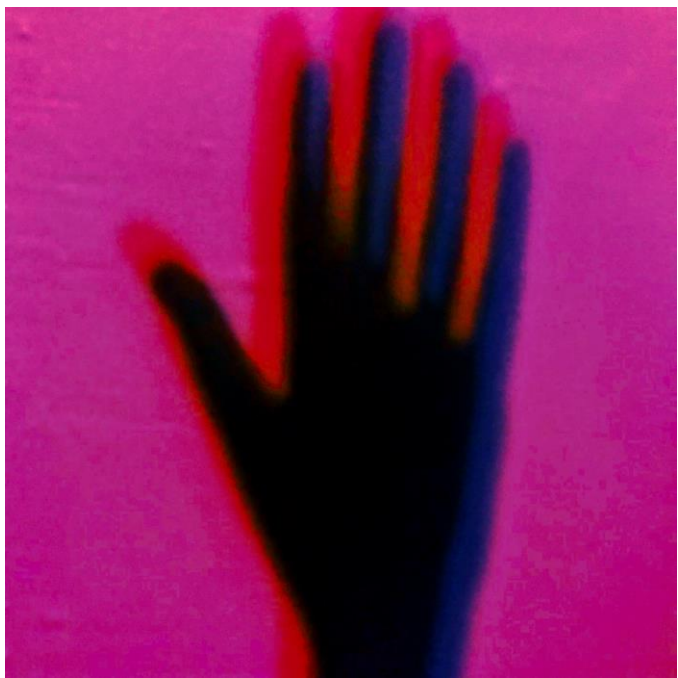
Annie Powell Stone

Poetry

I'm awake and it's my secret.
I roll as gently as possible to keep the bed
springs quiet and let my husband sleep.
He has the late shift of baby duty and I have the early,
but here it is — early — and I'm the only
one up. I keep my breathing
in a sleepy cadence (the only way to fool
the cat who waits on the other side of the door).

A bird outside, however, attends to no such subterfuge.
She sings her awakening and praises
new cherry blossoms, pink beneath a dazzling full moon
on dark periwinkle pre-dawn.

Reach Out in the Darkness
June Levitan
Art



Ralph, Percy, & Me
Andre Peltier
Poetry

I am not a transparent
eyeball.
I stand & raise
my voice &
demand
notice.
An attention whore
of the first
order.
Look on my failures,
fellow failures, &
disrobe.

The Follower

Matt Schorr

Fiction

“Do you believe in demons, Father?”

Father Hannigan considered the question and the girl asking it. Anna was young, no more than fifteen. Her adolescence and rounded cheeks made her look almost boyish, but the priest believed time would be kind to her. Within just a few years, he suspected, she would become very beautiful indeed.

Anna’s hair, thick brown locks that fell past her shoulders, already had signs of emerging beauty. If she wasn’t yet popular with boys, he mused, she would be soon.

Her dawning good looks were hindered, however, by the fear in her eyes. They should’ve been a deep and radiant blue, but they seemed almost faded, as if the color had drained from them. They stared at him, gray and wide and trembling.

Hannigan answered by asking another question. “Why would you ask me that?”

Anna glanced down for a moment. She sat beside the priest on an old pew in the back of the sanctuary. Her hands gripped the cushioned seat beneath her, hard enough to make her knuckles white. A vein was even visible in one of them, pumping and throbbing just beneath the skin.

“What do you suppose they look like?” she persisted.

Hannigan frowned. He reached out, slow and deliberate, and placed his hand on her shoulder. She shuddered once against his touch, and he almost pulled away. Then she relaxed and looked back at him.

“What’s happening, Anna?” he asked. “What’s made you so afraid?”

She opened her mouth to answer but stopped. She looked away again, toward the front of the sanctuary, considering what to say.

Hannigan followed her gaze. She was staring at the life-sized crucifix hanging near the ceiling. Dressed in a loincloth and thorny crown, Jesus hung from it with his head drooped low. Unlike other crucifixes where the Messiah's eyes were closed, this one's were open. No doubt, the artist intended for those eyes to look heavenward, portraying Christ as he offered his final prayer to the heavens.

Given the angle, though, Hannigan often believed those eyes seemed to glare at anyone who looked at Him. Rather than offer supplication to God, this Jesus demanded answers from humanity.

I died for this world, and what have you done with it?

"Do they have horns?" Anna wondered. "Yellow eyes?"

Hannigan turned to face her again. He reached out with his other hand and gripped her opposite shoulder. He forced her, though she offered little resistance, to face him.

Her mouth was tight, and a single tear slid from one eye. She sniffled and wiped her nose.

"Anna, talk to me." The previous gentleness in Hannigan's voice was gone. "What's wrong?"

She sniffled again and whimpered, head down in a feeble effort to hide her face. Her mouth twisted into a grimace, and another tear slid down her cheek.

"Just please tell me," she murmured. "Are they real?"

Hannigan pulled her close and hugged her. Again, she offered no resistance. She fell into his embrace and leaned against him.

He opened his mouth, then hesitated just as Anna had done, uncertain if he should speak. What, he wondered, was the right thing to say? What was troubling this girl so much? What comfort could he give?

His mouth felt dry, and he couldn't help craving a long sip of Jack Daniels.

"I ,, I've seen people do ... evil things in my lifetime," he said. "Sometimes they were like saints before ,, and then ,,," He bit his lip, then said, "Yes. I believe in demons."

Anna pulled away so she could look into his eyes. Her own were now red and puffy, smeared with tears.

"How do we stop them?" she asked. "How do we ,, get away from them?"

"You pray, Anna," Hannigan answered. "Pray and God will protect you."

But will He? Hannigan hated the thought, but it swirled around in his head just the same. *How many good, praying people have you seen do awful things? Quite a lot, isn't that right, Father?*

Hannigan's mouth felt very dry indeed.

"Does the Bible tell us what they look like?" Anna asked again.

Hannigan pressed the sleeve of his arm against her cheek and wiped the tears away.

"What's happening, Anna?" he pressed. "Please, is something wrong at home? What's making you ask these questions?"

Anna's eyes drifted from Hannigan's. "They shouldn't be able to enter a church, should they?" she wondered.

Hannigan's tongue felt thick, pressing against his teeth and the roof of his mouth like an expanding balloon. At the same time, it was dry and coarse, like sandpaper.

So thirsty, he thought.

So very thirsty.

"Talk to me, Anna," he said. "What's wrong?"

Anna looked into his eyes again. She hesitated, her mouth trembling. Then she half-whispered, "I think a demon is following me."

Hannigan said nothing, letting the statement resonate in the empty sanctuary.

"I see it everywhere," she continued. "At home. At school. At..." Her voice cracked, and her face tightened. When she spoke again, her voice was a full octave higher. "... night."

"That ... that can't be," Hannigan breathed. It couldn't be.

Can't it, Father?

Can't it?

"What ... does it do?" he asked.

Anna sniffled again and recomposed herself. "Most times, it just follows me," she said. "Other times, it sits and waits."

"Waits?" Hannigan echoed. "Waits for what?"

Anna shook her head. "I don't know. But it's getting closer. It's always getting closer."

Hannigan felt a cold tingle sweep over his body. All the hairs on his neck and arms felt as if they were standing.

"Anna," Hannigan whispered. "Where is it now?"

She sniffled once more, and fresh tears streamed from her eyes. "It's behind you, Father."

in the kingdom of lesser ideals

John Sweet

Poetry

we were dead because it was the
best of a thousand bad choices

we were sorry for
things that would never matter
or at least i was

you weren't speaking

kept the windows rolled down and
the radio up loud and it was
another 200 miles to the desert's edge

it was the clenched fist of
early august
pressing hard against my eyes

the screams of children
locked in cages and the laughter
of the men who'd lost the keys

this idea of freedom, which can
only ever be defined in
terms of those who have none

GUEST OF MYSELF

John Grey

Poetry

I'm at this party, so loud, so crowded,
it reminds me of every place
that is not where I am.

Music batters ear-drums.
Conversation screams out to be heard.
Bodies bump against each other.
And alcohol is two parts drunk, one part worn.

Luckily,
I am silent, alone, sober
and talking to a toadstool.

A woman asks me,
"Are you enjoying yourself?"
I often wonder
who else is there to enjoy.

MISSING PERSON

Claire Scott

Poetry

Looks about seventy, springy white hair
Irish blue eyes, webs of wrinkles
five foot two on a tall day, but not today

Last seen reading Merwin or Milosz
or playing with a grandchild at the shore
sailing tiny dolls on bits of driftwood

Maybe hiking alone, listening to the land
or writing by poem light
late at night

Missing since the day he was
a driver that didn't
a doctor who said

Leaving me standing by the side of the road
with a stuttered heart
and a bouquet of blackened roses

I put posters in the market, the library
the drugstore, the bus stop
hoping to be found

WORDS

Claire Scott
Poetry

Words as spells, swords, lullabies, curses, prayers in
midnight's desperate hour
holding our sister's too warm hand, we dole out words
haltingly, hastily, sparsely,
softly with a sleeping child in our arms, angrily, ugly
words we can't retract,
regret filling the air.

Have we each been given a certain number of words, say
eight hundred million,
by some trainee saint or second-class deity, randomly,
casually, carelessly,
methodically, haphazardly depending on whether she
slept well the night before
or slept sleepless in an alcoholic haze.

When words have all been spoken do we peter out, our
used-up words
piled around us like floating flotsam or fallen angels,
maybe we should
all live like Buddhist monks in the silence of a mountain
top,
speaking little if at all.

DARING TO DREAM

Claire Scott

Poetry

A girl in a lavender tutu laced with ribbons
and radiant dreams
dances in front of the full-length mirror
in her parents' room
pirouettes and jetés
her pony tail snaking loose, smiling
at the tilt of her reflection, her private
world where anything is possible

Let her dance
let her hear the roar of applause
smell the fresh flowers at her feet

Soon enough life will cut across her dreams
leaving scraps and shreds and wistful memories
soon enough her mother will laugh at her pliés
her sister will say she's too fat
and she will set her tutu aside
tuck her slippers in the back of her closet
and join the soccer team, running
down the field, Stravinsky singing in her head

Let her dance
let her reach for the moon of Margot Fonteyn
the stars of Misty Copeland

Soon enough she will buy her daughter
a lacy tutu, soon enough they will watch
Cinderella and her child will spin and swirl
on chubby legs, delighted with herself
knowing her mother is watching, knowing
her mother is sharing her special world

where endings are happy and
the slippers always fit

A Love Poem for the Wounded

Alexis Garcia

Poetry

It gets better, they say
And will continue to say until
You have been forced to believe it
Or start telling it to yourself
When you begin to spiral
And nothing you do ever seems to be right
You gravitate towards people who take
The pieces of you that best suit their
Needs at the moment
Leaving you to try and recreate who you
Once were but things will never be the same
Since you have become a cliché
You hate that you allowed yourself
To be probed and prodded
Dissected by shaky hands
Chiseled by slippery fingers
And your willingness to
Go through it all again
Makes you wonder if masochists
Could ever be deemed sane
When nothing has motivated
You more than
The potential for pain.

Sour Smiles

Margaret Norris

Poetry

If what's left unsaid, says it all
Then you're too busy
Talking over me
To hear what I'm saying

It almost feels as if
I could forget about you
But life is short
And forgetting is long

Storms make trees grow deeper roots
And the most beautiful flowers
Take all spring to bloom
But I am still unsure where the love goes
When it's done

Pink Flags
Margaret Norris
Poetry

When they ask you why you stay
And it feels like it translates to,
"You deserved it this time"

Tell them how you sat with your excitement,
Counting down the minutes to see him again
But he greeted you with fist-sized holes in drywall
And the expertise to make you feel smaller than you
could imagine

Remind yourself holes in the wall
Were not taught to you as a red flags
You weren't supposed to know
That the wall could be swapped out for your cheek

You weren't supposed to know
That instability can feel consistent
When they ask you why you stay
Tell them you didn't

Fifteen Minutes of Fame

Steve Slavin

Fiction

In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes.

— Andy Warhol

Whether or not the longtime arbiter of pop culture was right or wrong, most of us have at least one remembrance of our *own* fifteen minutes of fame. My own fifteen minutes happened years before Andy Warhol even *said* those words

Marty Feinstein and I were bar mitzvah partners, and ours would be the first bar mitzvah at the newly constructed Temple Ahavath Sholom — aka the Avenue R Temple — in Brooklyn. The old temple, built in 1909, had been torn down to make way for a modernistic replacement, complete with a beautiful gym where my friends and I played pick-up basketball games.

The day of our joint bar mitzvah was September 6, 1952. Marty was a fairly good Hebrew student, but I spent most of my two years writing over and over and over again: “I must not talk in class.”

Not only was learning Hebrew immensely boring, but I was especially poor at learning foreign languages. Still, each one of us needed to learn enough to be able to perform adequately at our bar mitzvah. Like most other temples in Brooklyn, this one was reformed, but even *these* guys had standards.

On beautiful fall and spring afternoons, I’d sit restlessly in Hebrew class, just looking out the window. Why couldn’t I be outside with the other kids playing stickball in Kelly Park, or just hanging out on my block?

My mother had insisted that I go to Hebrew school for the obvious reason that every Jewish boy needed to

have a bar mitzvah. Who could argue with *that* kind of logic?

My father agreed that a bar mitzvah was very important, but he thought that Hebrew school at a reformed temple would be complete farce. Little did he know that even the low standards of the Avenue R Temple were far beyond my capabilities.

We would need to read a passage in the Torah, which of course, was in Hebrew. And to make matters still worse, Hebrew is written without vowels, so you needed to know the pronunciation of each word you would be reading.

A few months before our bar mitzvah, Marty and I were given our *haftarah* passages. He was able to read *his* flawlessly within a few weeks, but without vowels, I was completely lost.

Marty had a great idea. He persuaded the rabbi to give me what we called a cheat sheet. It was my Torah portion with all the vowels. The plan was for me to memorize this and then just breeze through my reading.

On the day of our bar mitzvah, I was all set. I would pretend to be reading, but I actually knew it all by heart. For the last few weeks of August and the first week of September, Marty and I would run through it. We were a *team*.

The service that day went on and on. I was even more bored than I had been in Hebrew School. But I knew that I was extremely well prepared. When Mr. Shooter — that really *was* his name — would hear me reading from the Torah, even *he* would be impressed.

My parents, who must have been sick of hearing me practicing — well, maybe even *they* would be proud. As Marty and I were called to the *bima*, or lectern, I saw them looking on hopefully. I would *not* let them down.

Marty and I would take turns reading. He'd read a few lines, and then I would read. We'd each get four sets.

Marty read his first lines flawlessly. I took a deep breath and began to recite. How did I *do*? I am forced to admit that I matched his reading — and maybe even *then* some.

Marty did even better the second time. The entire congregation seemed to be in awe. Again, I did at least as well.

And so it went, through our third reading and Marty's fourth. But then disaster struck.

I had not realized that Marty had finished his reading. I was looking out at the congregation, thinking about how I would wow them with my last reading.

There was an awkward silence. The rabbi knew immediately what went wrong. Marty bumped my shoulder with his. Seconds later I realized my terrible screw-up.

I tried to recover, but it was too late. Everybody knew what had happened. I'd never be able to live it down.

After I recited my last lines Marty and I took our seats facing the audience and would not utter another word until the service was over. Soon we were singing *Adon Olam*. I had always loved singing that song because it concluded every Sabbath service, which had always bored me as much as Hebrew school.

A minute later, Marty and I were both mobbed by our families and friends. Everyone was shaking my hand, patting me on the back, and congratulating me. They were all smiling.

But I knew they were just being polite. This was the most important event of my life and I had embarrassed myself. And then, finally, my father walked up to me.

There were tears in his eyes. I realized how ashamed I had made him.

First, he hugged me. Then he held me at arm's length. I knew he wanted to say something, but he appeared to be too upset to speak. Finally, he said, "I have never heard such a beautiful *haftarah*!"

Losing Balance

Charles Grosel

Poetry

It's harder now
to reach the mugs
on the top shelf,
to bend for the tray
in the oven,
balance off,
back stiff from use
and a young man's
folly. Yesterday
I backed into a
pickup truck and
today I can't
remember
Led Zeppelin's
lead singer,
am having trouble
stretching for the
high-shelf words.

Her Absence
Charles Grosel
Poetry

is missing
from my life.
No gnashing
of teeth,
no scarring of
cheeks or
rending
of garments,
just the phantom
of her voice
fading.

Poodle Skirts and Ponytails

Charles Grosel

Poetry

Once it was real,
and not just a TV show.
Poodle skirts and ponytails,
saddle shoes and pointed toes,
blue jeans and checkered shirts,
collars turned up against
the Cold War. Almost
every family Mary Ann knew
had a car now, and the gasoline
to run it, a radio to play
a new kind of music,
their music, though they might
have been surprised to find out
where it came from.
Everything done for family,
crowd, or country,
unheard of to go it alone,
smoking the sole rebellion,
because everybody did it.
The faint pink rings
on the filter recalled
the nosebleeds of childhood,
and the later bleedings
for which neither mother
nor nun had quite
adequately prepared her.

Self-Portrait as Rusty Wheels

Ashely Wagner

Poetry

Progress slows
indefinitely

but refuses
to stop for anything.

Hand-me-down
skates, ripe with age

& cracked white leather
& fraying laces

still manage
to get the job done.

We face each day
(my quads and I)

with self-actualization
& sweat & bandaged knees

& sometimes
that's all it takes.

Every Contact Leaves a Trace

Ashley Wagner

Poetry

The eye of God opened
up over a swamp one evening
and crickets stilled in the mud
and low light. Stars dimmed
before vanishing. Restless
hands in the nearby village
fluttered blind
and tugged bed linens
close to chins. The world
bent and creaked like trees
in the wind as she crawled
from the depths
and demanded our sins.

Whale Fall
Ashley Wagner
Poetry

When I die
somehow
I want life
to find its way
back to me. Maybe
in thousands
of crustaceans
tinier
than the human
eye, sleeper
sharks, *hell* even
hagfish, those jawless
mouths rasping open
and shut
over soft tissue.
Bring on
your bone
eating worms
to make a home
of the ribs; your
bacteria —
scavenger's
scavenger,
spread yellow
and waiting
across the seafloor,
left only
the deepest marrow.

In my wake,
leave a reef
built from the

basest minerals
of my body, hard
and inorganic, that
legendary
star stuff
returned
to its planet
once more.

First Dates on Your Birthday

By R.J. Patteson

Fiction

“This is the doctor, I’d like to set up an appointment.”

He could just tell me over the phone that I’m dying but he’d rather tell me in his office, me sitting above him, crunching the paper of the bed. He’d confirm it with his stethoscope. This is a dying heart. My nails are lacking vitamin B7. How many fingers was he holding up?

I’m in a fight for my life the next three days. I’m tacking a page to the wall and seeing how much I can read as I step backwards. How many steps? How many words from where? And my legs don’t skip rope like they used to. And there’s hair on my brush. Skin is peeling from my elbows and the bottom of my feet.

On the third night, I have a dream that I’m decomposing on my mattress in the way that deer are shown sinking into the earth in time laps. I wake up cold-sweating and download some dating app and try to sell women on the sentiment that newspapers can’t resist the story of a woman marrying a dying man. Never mind my hobbies. Also, my occupation isn’t important.

The next day, in my doctor’s office, he sits me in a chair by his desk and lifts the ball bearing on Newton’s cradle and lets it go clacking. He tells me how perpetual motion is a myth. That gravity gets us all. He confirms that I only have forty-two years to live if I’m lucky and I tell him I knew it all along.

I pull my buzzing phone from my jeans on the bus ride home. It’s a message from Cynthia who’s thirty-eight with an average build. It says on her profile she wants to see the world. To jump out of planes. She wants to write a book and learn languages and laugh until she

cries. But what she's really saying is, like me, she's becoming dead.

I Thumb back, "How soon can we meet? Where do you live? I'm on the bus already."

“Me” as Mirror

Camille Ferguson

Poetry

“What I hope to do all the time is to be so completely myself, to be so much myself, that my audiences & even people who meet me are confronted with what I am, inside & out, as honest as I can be. & this way they have to see things about themselves, immediately.”

—Nina Simone

When I was struck by lightning,
 god replaced my head with glass,
 my face turned mirror.
 Silvered & stripped of the potential for vanity,
 I walk about honestly. An opportunity
 or a threat, depending
 on mindset.
 In my head: the echoes of a million
 entities, each
 more genuine than the last, because it has endured
 duplication, & repudiation.
 In me, now you see that
 which you most actively avoid. I am a fire
 opal in the street: burning
 with the faces of the crowd & the white light
 of sun’s unflinching reflection.

When the sun hides,
 I lie on the forest floor & let the moon flood
 into me. The ghost of her endures: even when she’s not
 seen, she’s full.
 When I wear her face the deer
 try to drink from me. Their mouths are warm,
 fogging up my metal surface.
 I lie with my limbs splayed. I feel a peace

like moss climbing over me.
How many moons have I been here?
Still & happy & not chasing anyone.
Friends have stopped coming to the light-pit. They don't
like what they see.
They don't like when I remind them what they're seeing
isn't me.

Metamorphosis
Camille Ferguson
Poetry

I was abused in the summer of cicadas:
soft-shelled & emptied bodies bewildering, skittering
over gravel, husks crushed on asphalt under hot
rubber tires. I wept a lot.

I've written of this in bee stings, leeches.
I haven't used the word *abuse*. It feels like I'm falling
out of love with poetry — that I still
struggle with need to make
something of this. For every poem I write, I apologize
to the animals I make of us. The bees are being
misrepresented.
The cicadas are joyous, rapturing. I have no way of
capturing
unbodied bodily experience. & isn't it over?

I try to create meaning, only to paint
highway side billboard sign scenes that scream your full
name.
Is *this* what I need? Accountability? Already
the sweat-stench, the irrational
fear of the liar you'll make out of me —
how what you did to me wasn't violence, & that song
you wrote in my dedication, titled *moodkiller*.
Like the throngs of screeching insects, what was
happening to me
was always an inconvenience.

I hear they're coming back, this June, even furioser.
Last time I took fallen wings, stuck them
haphazardly to a canvas of deep blues.

I've never been one for permanence, & I didn't varnish
the art.
Eventually, it crumbled under the weight of dust.
Can you imagine? The things which can bury.
I wasn't afraid to touch them, then.
They'd been desecrated. I'd been violated
past privacy. I'm closed off now. It's a wonder, what we
convince ourselves
means *healed*.

Contributor Bios

j.t. andrews

j.t. andrews (he/him) is a poet from Texas, but he is unfortunately not a cowboy. He currently lives in Colorado, where he spends most of his time painting portraits. His work can be found in *horse egg literary*, *perhappened magazine*, and *lanke review*.

Yelaina Anton

Yelaina Anton is from Boston, USA and somehow ended up in Ireland. Don't ask her the difference between who and whom. She does not know.

Benjamin Bagocius

Benjamin Bagocius (he, him, his) teaches writing and literature at Bard High School Early College in Cleveland, Ohio. He writes at intersections of literature, spirituality, and queer thought, and his work appears or is forthcoming in a range of venues, including *On Being*, *Tiferet*, *Pensive*, *The Other Journal*, *Soul-Lit*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *After the Pause*, and elsewhere. He facilitates *Soul Salon*, an online spiritual writing-and-conversation gathering. Join us! Learn more and reach out at benjaminbagocius.com or IG @benjaminbagocius.

Francesca Brenner

Francesca Brenner grew up in NYC's Greenwich Village and on the Cape in Massachusetts. She currently lives in Los Angeles though her heart remains bicoastal. Her poetry has appeared in *After the Pause*, *The Alembic*, *The Best of the Poetry Salon*, *Common Ground Review*, *Crack the Spine*, *Cutthroat*, *FRE&D*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *OxMag*, *Sanskrit*, *Slab*, *Talking River* and *Writing In A Woman's Voice*.

Constance Brewer

Constance lives in Wyoming, not quite in the middle of nowhere, but you can see it from the back porch. She is a big fan of Welsh Corgis, weekends, and whiteline woodcuts. Constance is currently supervised within an inch of her life by a vocal Tuxedo cat nicknamed "Meathead". www.constancebrewer.com

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 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. Her first book of poems, *The Cigar Box Poems*, was released in February 2020. Her second, *beyond the paneling*, is due out in April 2021.

Eileen Coughlin

Poetry allows us to live our life over and over again in an intimate sensory encounter with ourselves. It is a second chance, a looking over our shoulder at who and what is chasing us to the edge of becoming. I write to explore who I am.

Patricia Feeney

Patricia Feeney lives in St. Louis, MO, and teaches creative writing in Lindenwood University's MFA program. She is a member of the St. Louis Writers Guild; the association of Writers and Writing Professionals; and a founding member of the Crooked Tree Writers critique group. Feeney's essays and poetry have appeared in the Muse Press anthology, *Shifts*; *The Lindenwood Review*; *Inscape*; *Windmill Journal* of

Literature and Art; Adelaide Literary Magazine; Persimmon Tree; Grub Street; bioStories Magazine (forthcoming 2021); and Bayou Magazine, which nominated her essay, “Lifeline,” for a Pushcart Prize.

Joachim Frank

I used to live and work and write in New York City but now still hold out with my family in the Berkshires. Links to all my pieces of flash fiction and short stories, and a collection of opinions about my novel AAN ZEE are found at franxfiction.com.

Camille Ferguson

Camille Ferguson is a queer poet living in Cleveland, Ohio. Camille recently graduated from Cleveland State University where she received the Neal Chandler Creative Writing Enhancement Award. Her work is published or forthcoming in Okay Donkey, Drunk Monkeys, Flypaper Lit and Zone 3, among others. You can follow her on Twitter @camferg1.

Alexis Garcia

Alexis Garcia is a Queer Hispanic writer from Harlem, NY. She has had a passion for writing since the 1st grade when she began to create picture books. Currently, she writes poetry, short stories and creative nonfiction.

Steve Gold

NYC-based playwright. Plays: Smash the State; Women and Guns

John Grey

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Orbis, Dalhousie Review and the Round Table. Latest books, “Leaves On Pages” and “Memory Outside The Head” are available through Amazon.

Charles Grosel

An editor, writer, and poet, Charles Grosel grew up in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio. After stints on both the West and East Coasts, he now lives in Arizona with his wife and daughter. He studied English literature at Yale University and fiction writing at the University of California at Davis, where he was a Regent's Fellow. To earn a living, he has been a teacher, editor, trainer, and ghost writer, among other jobs, but through it all he has kept at his true vocation, writing poetry and fiction. He has published stories in journals such as *Western Humanities Review*, *Fiction Southeast*, *Water-Stone*, and *The MacGuffin*, as well as poems in *Slate*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Cream City Review*, and *Harpur Palate*. The *Sound of Rain Without Water*, a chapbook of poems, came out in December 2020.

Lindsey M. Heatherly

Lindsey lives with her daughter in Upstate South Carolina. She loves to eat olives and writes poetry to keep her brain healthy. She thinks frogs are the coolest.

Kaci Skiles Laws

Kaci Skiles Laws is a closet cat-lady and creative writer who reads and writes voraciously in the quiet moments between motherhood and managing Crohn's Disease. She grew up on a small farm in a Texas town alongside many furry friends, two sisters, and a brother. She has known tragic loss too well, and her writing which is often dark and honest, with themes of death, suicide, codependency, generational trauma, night terrors, and other bizarre musings, is a reflection of the shadows lurking in her psyche. Her work can be viewed at: <https://kaciskileslawswriter.wordpress.com/>

June Levitan

June Levitan is a retired teacher from the South Bronx. Now she takes photos for fun.

Leslie Lindsay

Leslie Lindsay is an author, book reviewer, and photographer. Her photography and writing have been featured in numerous literary journals, including, most recently, *Psychology Today* and *Brushfire Arts & Literature*. Her memoir, *MODEL HOME: Motherhood, Madness, & Memory* is currently on-submission. She resides in the greater Chicago area with her family, www.leslielindsay.com. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram @leslielindsay1.

Margaret Norris

My name is Margaret and I am a twenty-one-year-old student living in Portland, Maine. I have had a passion for writing for as long as I can remember, and decided on making some submissions after about a yearlong writer's block. I like to write with the windows open and candles lit, a form of self-care for me.

Andre F. Peltier

Andre F. Peltier is a Lecturer III at Eastern Michigan University where he has taught African American Literature, Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, Poetry, and Freshman Composition since 1998. He lives in Ypsilanti, MI, with his wife, children, turtles, dog, and cat. His poetry has appeared in *Big Whoopie Deal*, *Fahmidan Journal*, and *Tofu Ink* and is forthcoming in *The Great Lakes Review*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, *Prospectus*, *Sledgehammer*, *Griffel*, *The Write Launch* and an anthology from Quillkeepers Press. In his free time, he obsesses about soccer and comic books. Twitter: @aandrefpeltier

R.J. Patteson

R.J. Patteson is an author/screenwriter from Toronto. You can find his stories in X-R-A-Y Magazine, Ghost Parachute, MoonPark Review, and other places. He tweets @rjpatteson.

E J Saleby

E J Saleby writes music and words quietly in the front room whilst Canterbury goes past the window. He likes dreaming and staring into space and wondering why, a lot.

Matt Schorr

I'm a weekly columnist for The Leaf-Chronicle newspaper in Clarksville, TN — where I live with my wife and two children — and I've also been published by Pinnacle Entertainment Group and Asylum Press.

Claire Scott

Claire Scott is a recently retired psychotherapist who is enjoying having more time to write, take long walks and try to stay ahead of the weeds. She is looking forward to finally seeing her five grandchildren and sharing big hugs. Claire is the author of *Waiting to be Called* and *Until I Couldn't*.

Steve Slavin

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

Elaine Sorrentino

Elaine Sorrentino is Communications Director at South Shore Conservatory in Hingham, MA. Although writing

is her passion, the best hours of her week are spent in front of a class of four and five-year-olds teaching them cooking, showing them how NOT to act at the dinner table, and playing Veggie Bingo. She has not yet been booed off the stage at Open Mic, but there's still time.

Annie Powell Stone

Annie Powell Stone (she/her) is an organized hippie, a social introvert, and a fan of peanut butter toast. Poetry has come back to her after many years away and has absolutely saved her sanity during quarantine. She lives on the ancestral land of the Piscataway people in Baltimore City, MD with her husband and two kiddos. IG: @anniepowellstone

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 Sweet

John Sweet sends greetings from the rural wastelands of upstate NY. He is a firm believer in writing as catharsis, and in the continuous search for an unattainable and constantly evolving absolute truth. His latest poetry collections include A FLAG ON FIRE IS A SONG OF HOPE (2019 Scars Publications) and A DEAD MAN, EITHER WAY (2020 Kung Fu Treachery Press).

Adam Todd

I'm originally from Kentucky, but now I live in Indiana. And thinking about my family makes me smile.

Philip Venzke

Philip Venzke grew up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. A fervent Zymurgist, his fermentations take many forms. He is currently digesting fermented pickles and sauerkraut.

Rachel Vinciguerra

Rachel Vinciguerra (she/her) lives in Pittsburgh with her cat and chickens. She identifies as a hummingbird person, following curiosity where it leads often in unexpected directions. When she's not working, Rachel lives for time meditating or creating outdoors, by a fire or on the water.

Ashley Wagner

Ashley Wagner is a queer writer, reader, and roller-skater living in Baltimore. She is the poetry editor for *Ligeia Magazine*, and her work has appeared or is upcoming in *FOLIO*, *Stentorian Bitch*, *Door is a Jar*, and others.

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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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