

# DOOR = JAR



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ISSUE 21

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Door Is A Jar  
Issue 21

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Cover Image “A Light Dusting”  
by Cameron Rogers

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**The Term, Tomboy**

Kay. T. Fields

Poetry

She usually appeared dirty-faced  
with uncombed, tangled hair  
hair and preferred to go barefoot.  
Her disdain for bows, curls, and  
simpering looks was legendary.

Here is what happened to that  
gawky young girl who loved to  
climb trees, always had two skinned  
knees, played Roy Rogers never Dale  
Evans, considered her wasted space  
on a saddle.

She grew into a graceful lady, fair of  
face, curvaceous with long lustrous locks,  
but still was woefully out of place, a misfit,  
even a pariah.

Still, she loved all things rough and tumble,  
and considered outdoors her natural habitat.  
She remained entranced with knives, ropes,  
fishing tackle, waders, wrenches, work benches,  
sawdust, drills, bats, rackets, and good rye whiskey.

She never aged out of her tomboy self. I  
ponder what to call her now. She is no longer  
a child, but a mature matron. I could say, Tomman,  
or Tomguy. Tomfellow would fit the bill. Tom  
would become Thomas, as is appropriate.

A tongue twister of a title would be the result.  
Thomasman or Thomasfellow is a mouthful.

What if our lovely lady became royalty? Sir  
Thomasfellow or the Earl of Thomasman would  
be required.

A myriad of possibilities boggles my mind.  
It is just too damn much tomfoolery!

**French Exit**  
Robert Steward  
Nonfiction

Have you ever snuck out of a party without telling anyone? You know, like when you can't be bothered to say goodbye to the host? Apparently, it's called a *French exit*. I saw it on a TV series a few weeks ago called *Us* or *Them* or something like that. It's about this guy who tries to save his marriage on holiday. Quite good actually. Anyway, it made me think because I used to do it all the time when I was young. It seems bad now, even rude. In fact, I feel quite guilty about it. But back then it was just something I used to do. Whenever I was bored or didn't know anyone at a party, I'd slip away into the night. If it was a big bash, I could simply walk out without anyone noticing. But if it was a small gathering like a *soirée* or something, I'd have to wait for the right moment, such as when the other guests were distracted or deep in conversation. That's when I'd make my move. My usual plan of escape was to slink off to the toilet, but instead of returning to the party, I'd grab my coat and make a hasty exit. The worst part was opening the front door without making a sound, tricky if the music was low. Just the thought of being caught would fill me with excitement and fear. But once outdoors, I'd have this tremendous feeling of freedom. Like a man on the run. Sometimes this was better than the night out itself, and would continue for the whole journey home. Whether by car, train, bus or on foot, it was so liberating. But from what I can't be sure. Maybe from the burden of excusing myself to the host for being such a lightweight, or from the pain of making polite conversation to people I barely knew. Whatever it was, the way home would make me feel light and free, like the fizz of sparkling wine. It was a time for wandering



curious thoughts, listening to my favourite music or just  
treasuring the beauty of the dark city streets.

**Icarus After the Crash**

Konstantinos Patrinos

Poetry

Think back, he said, when  
mosquitos landed fiercely

on ultraviolet light, tiny  
fireworks crackled

confused. Curiosity left us all  
with empty hands and melted

wings. You see, those flat  
blues and whites above

weren't meant to be openings,  
arcane passages to other

worlds, unless one became spectral,  
odorless mist— almost invisible.

We hide now in shadows  
of olive trees, cling to phantom limbs,

dry-salting their translucent contours  
in hot archipelago air, under

the mistrusting searchlight beams  
of sun, ceaselessly sweeping—calling.

**Dancing Ellipses**  
Konstantinos Patrinos  
Poetry

Self-inflicted alcohol insomnia at a misty dive bar. Hope  
fires  
blanks then flutters white flags on battlegrounds of lost

causes. Paper coasters overflow with scribbled phone  
numbers  
of unrequited romances and recommended  
hematologists. Bottle

openers are the last patron saints holding position. Can  
you  
prompt me through the last act for tonight? Can you lead  
me

home through freezing dark landscapes with my jacket  
unbuttoned  
and my limbs gone autonomous? I stagger outside like a  
jinn

out of a bottle without wishes to grant to anyone,  
swallowed  
by the unknown. The oldest wrinkle on my forehead  
mocks

me the loudest. Wobbly feet stepping forward and  
sideways  
like a played-out knight on a chessboard with only one  
Pyrrhic victory

to show among defeats. Streetlights stretch and shrink  
my shadows

on the sly, observing me from blind spots with stern spy  
eyes

void of direction, my legs clatter like loose screws  
of defective machinery, clinking on concrete slabs. But I  
won't stop

dancing ellipses on these empty sidewalks, mimicking  
the movements  
of the universe, stumbling and falling like a shooting  
star, burning.

## The Scarecrow Speaks

Konstantinos Patrinos

Poetry

Left for dead on scorched and haunted flatland,  
in vertical sleep. Nightmares lie prone in ashen wheat,  
waiting for the right moment to tiger-pounce on me  
cawing like swarms of pined-away  
crows landing with open beak.

Drained of purpose, me nameless, me  
the dispensable one, me haloed with straw hat,  
coated in tarp gown. Winds animate stiff  
hay palms, once used to chase away  
tiny Icaruses too hungry to go for the sun.

Mummified by the dark, hardened by frost,  
blazed in breathless summers. Me the descendant  
of some chopped sick tree. Me, disinherited history  
without childhood memories of evenings  
falling asleep drunk on cow's milk.

Knighted by an absent god, praised silently  
by psalms hidden in holy books. Extended arms  
on thin body pinned in heavy mud  
like a crooked cross left vacant, half-dismantled  
by nibbling rats shooting out

of abandoned shacks. Too much infinity  
and fear in a humanoid made  
of a spared wooden stick, too weak to lift  
a roof, too light for fireplaces to warm  
a baby's cheeks. Me a half-failed reincarnation

of an audacious carpenter's passed away dream.  
Boneless behind my eyes riveted on the horizon,

scanning its blues and greys, a stranger's face  
with no familiar wrinkle or jawline to touch  
and find comfort. Naked air howls up

in my sleeves. My lips sealed and stitched poorly,  
as if there was nothing to say. Or as if opening  
my mouth to speak was equal to being cursed.  
If one dared to cut them, they'd reveal  
my red tongue bathing in bubbled spit.

**because he's my friend**

Michael Estabrook

Poetry

Rick was so attractive he was a cliché —  
tall, dark and handsome, slim, fit and personable  
his wife “the most beautiful woman  
in the history of the universe.” (I might’ve had a few  
drinks).

Recently he’s had a hip replaced  
and had to sell his boats. Even though  
he’s a golden boy I’m feeling sorry for him —

**because it's so cold outside**

Michael Estabrook

Poetry

Sometimes I become completely overwhelmed  
by merely being in her presence  
like this afternoon  
at McDonald's with the grandchildren  
suddenly I'm choked with emotion  
barely able to speak  
while simply watching her  
sitting there eating her salad, quietly, unassumingly.  
I had to work at not crying  
dabbing at my eyes with a crumpled McDonald's  
napkin.  
Guess my eyes are watering —



**The year I believed there was no such thing as love**

Andrea D'Souza

Poetry

It was an interesting religion. I watched and I watched.  
My mouth went naked. Friends paired up

for an ark that never came but still grieved the grounds  
for which at last, they were too good. Alone, I grieved  
bries  
and goudas I'd devoured as I'd once swallowed bodies

that followed me home then lingered on my face  
for years in shame's clothing. I said my own name,

named my own speech, but every other week

without fail, I would be there, in the upstairs room  
of the bookstore by your house. I didn't want you back.  
I wanted just to study, to see you with a woman

and at last, understand. If it wasn't love,  
what was it, the anchor that kept you in place  
for all of that time, never turning to look

at any island? In the cold, I would stash my hands  
in your shirt's front pocket, but I didn't want you back.

I needed your eyes. If it wasn't love,

what wasn't I believing, the year I built a church  
on my knees and never moved when the glass split the  
sun?

Hearing soft rain on the roof of that bookstore,  
I told all who asked I was there just for that.

**What We Can Watch**

James Croal Jackson

Poetry

without some satisfaction none of us will live

the dark will come back with leaden boots

we live on a screen we can watch every beat of our  
hearts

imagine how long our hair will curl

love tiptoes into deception

I can see the movie I made with her

we stare into the crowd with too much innocence

**Mauve, actually**  
 Gathondu Mwangi  
 Poetry

You felt heavier that last time  
 Softer to hold, harder to grasp,  
 Still, you moved like you always did,  
 Syncopatedly.  
 Later, when it was all over,  
 You said ...  
 Think I'm pregnant?  
 A pair of purple/pink parallel lines,  
 Which you insisted was mauve actually,  
 the answer. You cried,  
 What shall we do?  
 I don't know... I'm not ready...

Outside, the boda-bodas<sup>1</sup> buzzed about,  
 Head lights blazing, Sean Paul blasting,  
 Drowning out almost, the blue gums' murmurs,  
 Whispering disapproval, to the silences,  
 Cobwebbing between us.

---

<sup>1</sup> Motorcycle taxis used in East Africa.

**Purple chrysanthemum**

Gathondu Mwangi

Poetry

And when the leaf falls  
to moulder into mulch  
at the foot of the stem  
that once held it aloft,  
later to leach,  
root and xylem,  
stalk and stipule,  
petiole and lamina  
leaf feeding on leaf,  
in a stew of sap and chlorophyll  
Purple chrysanthemum,  
nourished in my imaginings  
by sunshine and raindrops  
embodiment of the dialectic  
between earth and sun  
are you too, I wonder,  
a cannibal?

**Loneliness**

Gathonde Mwangi

Poetry

It's like hypothermia  
The first touch chilling,  
Live with it long enough  
And you warm up to it  
Embrace its embrace  
Succumb to its whispers  
why resist ... why resist  
Echo longing for Narcissus  
The song of Lawino, lamenting Ocol  
She sings,  
Go home,  
To yourself,  
Even when you're alone,  
I am with you  
A constant companion,  
Godlike.

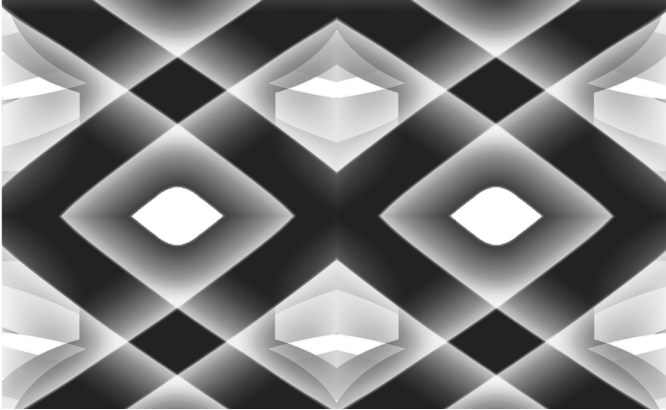
**Innocence of the Storm 1ab**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



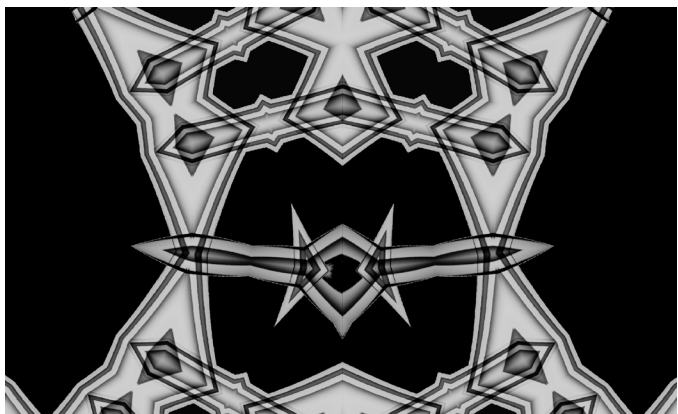
**Saftey Harness**

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Art



**Empty Words 2**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



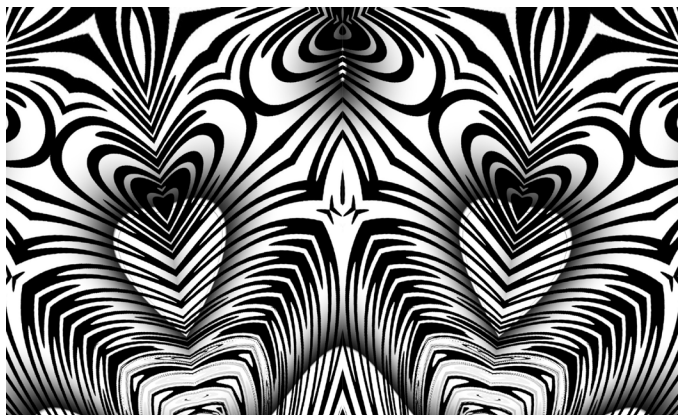


The Crowd Goes Crazy  
Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



**Ripples 4**

Edward Michael Supranowicz  
Art



**Midnight Radio**  
Andrena Zawinski  
Fiction

Once I reached the bank drop across town in my neighborhood to deposit the night's restaurant receipts, a task delegated by my boss at La Papaya, I looked around nervously.

The Wilkinsburg Rapist had been apprehended, but I remained frightened that some legal glitch would get him out and back on the streets where I lived and where he operated, his modus operandi for ambush assaults to jump from behind bushes or any kind of thicket, overcome then drag his victim into them, beat and rape her, then watch her whimper weak and afraid to move for fear he would make good on his threat to return. Even though my bank had no fancy gardening, I remained afraid. He had attacked dozens of women.

At home, after showering the vegetarian restaurant's onion and bell pepper smells from me, I sank into my bed. Safe but wide awake, it was just in time to tune into "Midnight Radio," a community access call-in-show some of us dubbed "The Insomniac's Dream."

That night the topic turned again to the Wilkinsburg Rapist, covering everything from individual fears to locally available self-defense classes. There was one woman's call that really made me sit up and take note. She was waging a battle to hold officials accountable for releasing him on a crime lab mishap, demanding he be remanded. My fears became a reality. He was out.

She had firsthand information on him. He was living with his mother in the home where, expecting a lengthy incarceration, she rented out his attic apartment. The voice was my friend Mia's. She and her partner Shelly were living in that very apartment, having moved back from New Jersey where Shelly finished her dissertation

at Rutgers in Women and Gender Studies.

That next weekend I had a reunion date with them to cook Rainbow Quiche followed by Sister Strudel, dishes they enjoyed that I invented as La Papaya's Sunday brunch chef, dishes to please Shelley as a French Swiss and to celebrate finishing her PhD work.

Later that evening, after we did some catching up, our talk turned to the Wilkinsburg Rapist and how appalled we were that a feminist attorney had taken his case. That's when I told Mia I was part of "The Insomniac Dream Team" and recognized her voice on "Midnight Radio."

She unraveled, hands trembling, as she explained not only was he out of jail but living downstairs, and worried aloud, "What if he was listening? What if he recognized my voice?"

After dinner, we reassured each other that we were safe in the house since he would only jump women from behind bushes, plus they had just installed a security alarm. It was a stuffy night, and I couldn't get comfortable on their couch; so I raised the sash for some air, setting off the alarm that shorted out the lights.

Shelley rushed in swinging a baseball bat, her eyes bulging and long hair swinging this way and that, as I screamed, "It's just me, just me!"

The three of us, all jittery, went down to the basement to check the fuse box. As we changed one, Mia turned abruptly and gasped: "You scared me!"

There he was, standing quietly and looming large behind us. As Shelly and I turned to face him, he said, "I'm going back to bed like you should," and "that baseball bat won't help you one bit, just like 'Midnight Radio' can't."

As he stomped up the steps, he turned his blinding flashlight on us and added: "Just stay away from the bushes."

**Did You See Death**  
 Kathryn Knight Sonntag  
 Poetry

*for Brandon*

break the horizon  
 sunset shivering the line of woman  
 born *mirage*

as night trailing incense  
 of distant suns, datura *angel*

*trumpet* to your door  
 did you yield  
 under her press

of palm—temple  
 her murmured  
 oath *I have no past*

held without  
 your chambered longing  
 your nose, your mouth

relieved of breath

did you feel  
 her allay  
 desire

mutter *rest*

as you slept belly  
 down as new  
 born

as unmade

**Spring Couplet**

Kathryn Knight Sonntag

Poetry

Robins return and the cedar waxwings cleave soured  
sunken cores — my wild apple a winged tousle —  
unwinged.

**my mother's mother's hand**

Kathryn Knight Sonntag

Poetry

not water but rippling  
blue beneath sun spots

in gossamer, every broken  
line an alabaster

prism a pang in my small  
body answering my touch-

question *will she hold* —  
where the shimmer of pain

dwells larger than my own  
green life in the garden

of death *what rivers*  
*remain unnamed*



**The Flower Girl Tale**

Tim Moder

Poetry

She reveals ornamental tapestries from the velvet  
dynasty  
the colors of oyster sand.

Course hair, henna. Broadside wry smile.  
Desert skin sprayed with flecks of snow.

I traced the rainbow in the sky  
with tiny fingers, placing light in her eyes.

Indelible. Strands of hair and flowers  
stretched in the warm wind.

One by one they fall.

Taste her in the desert rain; anointed drops of new life  
soft on my tongue like the honey of a prophet.

Write her in the sea; never-ending sonnets, wave after  
wave.  
A breath in the thrum of the tide carries her name.

Paint her in the sky; deep blue brushstrokes.  
Laying under the clouds memorizing her skin.

**Scissors in Second Grade**

Richard Widerkehr

Poetry

"Richie has trouble with his scissors," read my teacher's  
note  
to our mother, as if I were an errant fawn  
who had not yet learned to print his feet  
exactly on construction paper.

The fault was the scissors, I thought, which went  
their way  
through jagged red-yellow thickets, maroon zigs  
and zags, umber branches, not a clear procession  
of hooves in water, stepping where

they're meant to go, which would become one story  
of this life. "It's wayward," said my accountant father  
of my handwriting, aligned not on, but precisely  
above the pale blue line.

**Near Whatcom Falls in Late September**

Richard Widerkehr

Poetry

*- in memory of J.W.*

At last this big-leaf maple on my path,  
red and ochre. At last low waves  
on the sides of black rocks. I pick up a leaf,  
crush its pale, scarlet tent

to my lips. Allegedly, she took her life—  
her body, *they sprinted it away*,  
you tell me. Sun on sandstone  
ledges and gray lichen.

I turn the stem in my fingers;  
I had thought she was fire.  
White bodies of water falling—  
the leaf shimmers, rocks in the light.

**The Line of Chalk**

Lorelei Bacht

Poetry

What if you were not the limit of me,  
if I could outgrow you, the bristle edge,  
the line of chalk? What if

I could overflow, unbounded, could mail  
you back to the seaside, juice box and all,  
any old pile of rocks? What if it was

not my business to address the old  
envelope, but yours, and mine simply  
to walk myself into whichever glorious

homelessness, this morning or  
tonight, in a minute, a month — what if:

I was already out of the door imagined?

But the absence of a prison, how to  
word it? What else to do but sit, sit in  
the sun. There is: an art to silence, which

I have not yet mastered.

**Death**  
 Simra Sadaf  
 Poetry

A curious son asks his dying father,  
*"How many times does a man die in his life?"*

each time memories terrify the soul,  
 there is a lost boy in an old house,  
 strange men enter his mother's bedroom,  
 they are gone by sunrise like the moon.

*"How did this not kill me then?"*

growing up with conflict, being godless,  
 a drunkard becomes a poet — impoverished,  
 once faithless, now reads the Bible,  
 ties the knot, sleeps with his best friend's wife.

*"Why did God not kill me then?"*

now wifeless, hopeless, helpless,  
 writes of his loveless life,  
 writing is a curse he says, while the  
 neighbour's kid says he is a whore's son.

*"Where is this death that people speak of?"*

your grandmother is rising from  
 forty years of death to see me,  
 but your mother, living 20kms away,  
 would not visit for a goodbye kiss.

*"Instead ask me,  
 How dead one is when he finally dies?"*

**SECOND-HAND PINK**

Nicole M. Wolverton

Nonfiction

I was nameless as a fetus. Other parents agonize for months over the perfect name. My mother — faced with the need while awaiting the appropriate level of dilation to start pushing me, pink-faced, out into the world — randomly chose my name from the film that was on the television in her hospital room. A French film. A French name. Nicole. Victory for the people. Variant of Nicholas — so a hand-me-down, rib-of-Adam type of situation.

\*\*\*

I am 48 years old, staring at the bathroom of my circa-1920 house. At the baby pink tiles that a previous owner — likely in the 1950s — installed. Everywhere. Pink bathtub. Mamie pink, it's called. First Lady Mamie Eisenhower bedecked the White House in pink during her stay, including the bathrooms. The White House press corps took to calling it "The Pink Palace." My pink palace — a hand-me-down — is an ancient, horrifying eyesore. Stained. Chipped. Pink. I have dwelled in this house for nearly twenty pink-stained years. Now, pandemic-bound, the bathroom haunts me like a nostalgic ghost. It is time for an exorcism.

\*\*\*

In my baby book, Mom tied up a twist of my pale blonde hair and pasted it to the page where it lists my eyes (blue) and my complexion color (peaches and cream). Peaches and cream? Did she get that description from her French movie, along with my borrowed name? She tells me later my skin was plain old pink.

\*\*\*

I am 45 years old, washing dishes in the stainless-steel kitchen sink. The water is lukewarm on my weathered

hands. I set the plate I've just scrubbed on the gray laminate counter, covered over with a red dishtowel. The plate is square and white. I've just donated a set of flowered *Pfaltzgraff* — my mother's old plates that I've carted with me since I moved out at 18 — and replaced it with something simple and new. But this kitchen. The pink laminate cabinets giggle at me because that's what pink laminate cabinets do. They giggle. They simper. This kitchen I've inherited wants me to be a Barbie doll. Someone else's idea of me. I imagine the previous owner who decorated, stiff-limbed and vacuous blonde. Almost ten years in this house, and another minute of all this cursed pink is too long. Within minutes, I am armed with sand-paper grit and determination.

\*\*\*

"Don't you want to wear pink?" Mom says. She holds up a pink frilly dress on a thrift store hanger. A confection of icing sugar and lace. "You'll look so sweet."

I demand instead to wear a black dress with bulbous orange buttons and a crescent moon at the hem drawn on with silver glitter paint. Mom sewed the dress for me — *for me* — using fabric she bought fresh and new from the store in town.

\*\*\*

I am 29 years old, sitting on the stairs in the dusty emptiness of my just-purchased house. Mint green wall-to-wall carpet. An 80s floral mint and pink floral border — wallpapered and stenciled — throughout. What sins the previous owner wrought. I discover an entire wall of painted-over pink wallpaper. The hell of this house that I can remake. Make new. All this pink. Disturbing and raw as ground pork. I yank up the corner of the carpet — it hides handsome hardwood floors.

\*\*\*

“What did you do to my bedroom?” I am aghast. My first weekend home from college — my former bedroom, now rose-pink rugs and petal pink walls. I can almost see the dark purple beneath the paint, fighting to overtake all this sweetness. The walls of this room that were never really mine to begin with.

“You know I’ve always loved pink,” Mom says.

\*\*\*

In psychology circles, pink is thought to calm. It is the color of piglets, erasers, cheap wine — the color of my grandmother’s peonies planted in my mother’s yard. Sugar and spice and everything nice little girls. The pink fairy armadillo is the smallest of all the armadillos.

I am not the smallest of all the Nicoles; all this second-hand pink only makes me small.

###



**Low Visibility**

Ace Boggess

Poetry

Second morning of city fog  
like a silver silk robe tied with a dark belt.

32° in that opacity, &  
walking through it, I greet the neighbors —

wearing pajamas, feet bare, standing  
on the porch steps, smoking cigarettes,

their exhales disappearing, another mist  
in the mass. I want to join them

in loving fire, but what would I say to them  
that does not begin with the weather?

Such a lonely, haze-enshrouded space —  
it would feel like an invasion

of privacy. Better to leave them  
to enjoy their peace as I do mine

amidst dreamlike dawn, my head  
in conversation with itself.

**Congratulations**

Ace Boggess

Poetry

I celebrate you: your great success  
painting portraits of demons,  
writing a fantasy  
allegorical of how low self-esteem

destroys you. Small wins, too:  
getting out of bed for work  
as though average in your day's  
assumptions, swallowing

medication, maintaining  
calm when rude voices intervene.  
I celebrate the you of you,  
the god in you, the molecules

that sculpt you out of emptiness.  
I celebrate, drink a toast,  
invoke troubled spirits  
from your past, resistance.

You are the cat once stuck  
on a branch of the tallest tree:  
you cried out, yet did not leap, &  
now you're on the ground again

wearing a medal for bravery — gold,  
as with kintsugi, stitching seams.  
I celebrate your scars.  
I celebrate the beauty of your wounds.

**Boggeses**  
 Ace Bogges  
 Poetry

Another Bogges in the morning mugshots  
 (not me) — grand larceny. Don't know him;  
 could be distant family. Last week,  
 two on attempted murder, kidnapping.  
 they looked like stereotypes of men  
 in a movie scene set in a junkyard  
 where shadowy monsters must be fed.  
 The one today is younger, bearded,  
 face half-bruised as if a port-wine stain,  
 price paid for struggling. I didn't realize  
 a collective of criminal Boggeses existed,  
 as if I were alone with drug habit &  
 trembling blade. Where do they come from,  
 these dastardly not-kin (maybe)?  
 Might the family tree have rotten branches?  
*A good tree can't bring forth evil fruit,*  
 says the Word. Don't like to think of myself  
 as evil, but eaten by worms from inside out.  
 Boggeses wear their shackles well:  
 jewelry, serifs, adornments. This one,  
 even battered, has a charismatic smile  
 that could charm his way into bedrooms.  
 In my frame, I carried the look of a mad scientist  
 who blew up his meth lab by accident.  
 Wish I had worn a better suit,  
 combed my hair, flattened lips  
 into the stone face of utter despair.  
 I see criminal Boggeses everywhere.  
 Our wallets wield the bondwoman's number —  
 she always calls back, a hard-edged warrior.  
 Boggeses lurk in her files like a litany  
 of dead friends on her Facebook wall.

**Abacus**

Kaitlyn Crow

Poetry

When I was younger, Mom strung up our laundry  
on Sunday afternoons.

In the spring, pollen from Grandma's garden  
caught in the cotton  
and made Dad's eyes burn and itch.

I learned to count by adding up the sum of his sneezes,  
pushing my abacus beads one by one  
as Dad fumbled for air  
between sneezes and laughter,  
eventually having to pick out a shirt  
that had already been in the drawer for a while.

It's different now.

We bought a clothes dryer.  
Dad doesn't sneeze anymore  
when he buttons up for work Monday mornings,  
but there are no more flowers in the garden, anyways.

Sometimes I wonder if it's wishful thinking to believe  
that if we're slower to string the abacus beads  
along the clotheslines,  
then by the time it takes to count to home,  
we'll already be there.

**Back Row Baptist**

Kaitlyn Crow

Poetry

I wore this dress last night, and  
on Tuesday, and last Wednesday.  
I'll get four more wears out of this dress  
before I buck up the energy to wash it —  
to see the dirt become muddied  
while I scrub out the stains in the sink.  
I wonder if they'd still want me on this pew  
if they knew that.

White lilies line the aisle.  
The preacher stands at the pulpit  
with his mouth gaping open,  
words like cockroaches jumping out  
into the congregation,  
the way they sit on his tongue  
for just a second  
before launching themselves  
into the air and  
landing in the very foundation  
of the chapel.

This is their holy space:  
the God they all look up to  
is feeding His will into it  
like He is letting a rope down  
into a pit of starving villagers and  
they are climbing over each other's filth  
trying to come back to the surface.

I look around and wonder  
who would make it out first.  
Then my neighbor looks at me

with reverence in his eyes  
and opens his mouth.

*This is how they get you,  
with piano music.*

The notes fly through the air and everyone is praying  
but us, and I am no longer wondering about  
what the pit will look like  
once their almighty reels His rope  
back in.

**The Patris**  
Joshua Kepreotis  
Fiction

was my name, once. You know me as 2C, or 3B, even 5A, depending on what stage of my dismantling you're up to.

You're coming for the last of me soon. I know it because I no longer feel water under my belly. Chains tie my front to the sand at Gaddani Beach, waiting for the last of me to be cut away. You afford me no final meal or prayer. This chance I have left to tell my story.

You should've seen me in my day. When piers, ports, and beaches were crawling with people waving goodbye, or hello, waiting for me to take their family and friends to the life they'd been promised, or welcome them to it. The blue and white flag of freed Greece undulating in the wind on the tip of my nose. People marvelling at my white shell hard as stone, with a bow that could slice through ice.

I am ashamed of this condition I find myself in. Beached as half a husk in a Karachi breaking yard. This place is a morgue for ships. I was sent here after a fire started in my engine room, which wasn't my fault. The truth is that they had no use for me anymore.

Bit by bit you've torn skin from my face until I'm nought but a skeleton. I don't blame you, though, you are but the executioners carrying out the deeds of others. Your lives not dissimilar to those I ferried. Your sparks singed my insides while I was being burned alive. My soul has become disfigured, dismembered. Did you hear my screams carry across the land? We feel pain too.

Us ships in the breaking yard still talk of the old days. I tell the '74 story when Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin and devastated the city. I was re-directed there and became a floating home for the homeless for 9 months.

Australians distraught and at their most vulnerable. It was Christmas Day.

You don't know that about me, do you, or that I completed 91 trips between Greece and Australia? Thousands of peasants and farmers flowed through me. I can recall the desperation of each trip. That's the overwhelming sensation. Newspapers onboard had a way of making it look simple. But I saw their sunken eyes, dark and afraid. Hands curled in pockets. Shame, guilt, the burden to succeed smothered them like the cheap suits they wore.

They were holding suitcases as if they were boarding in Greece and two months later would walk straight into an office in Sydney's CBD. Offices they wouldn't make it to. I'd see them walking the pier as if it was the plank, searching the air to pluck a single word they understood. Orders barked, herded into lines and place names such as Bonegilla and Benalla hung from their necks like the cattle they once tended to.

It brings tears to my steely eyes remembering the young woman, little older than a girl, who threatened to jump off my side outside of Fremantle. The photo she had of her husband-to-be bore no resemblance to the frail man she met on disembarkation. Her brothers standing with him told her they'd do worse to her should she bring shame on their family.

Or the man who held the chipped paint of my skin to his cheek and whispered for me to take a message back to his family. That he was okay, and he loved them. Their names choking him as he cried and prayed. I did my best, but never found them.

Honestly, it meant little to me what their papers said about them, or what story their faces told, or if their hands were rough. When you mix them up in the cabins, humans are all the same. Some of us here on the beach



think of The Ark as our God, and that's a ship that took every kind.

I'm now 72 years old and feel like I've lived a few lifetimes. I was once a sleek ship with a wooden deck that was a ballroom in the sun. I had blue trimming along my base and a white and blue X on my funnel. I was refitted in Piraeus to become a passenger car ferry. I was then sold to another company and painted bright yellow. But I lived a life of safekeep. At least I got to have that.

When you get the next ship to be broken down, do me a favour, rest a hand on it and hear what it has to say. Think of the souls it has left behind. Comfort it. Tell it that it lived well, in all its forms. Pray for the ones sunken by the ocean, and by those who patrol the sea armed with sharp words of politicians. As if it is theirs.

Remember us for what we were, the full lives we lived. Listen, if you can, to the stories we tell. The sun must be rising because I sense the purple glow surround me, and see more workers walking across the sand.

**A Light Dusting**  
Cameron Rogers  
Art



**finding/missing**

J. Thomas Burke

Poetry

*in memory of Harrison*

I heard her say, *In the snapshot*  
*we find one we find absent.*

The hole I see seems shaped, a boy,  
maybe a young man just months before  
his brothers took a temporary stage  
to collect his vinyl folder,  
official notice of completion.

Newspaper clippings and retweets often  
flood to fill a void, but in clinging  
to absence only  
nothing slips away.  
To bask in loss is to yield  
to a smile, to accept tears  
falling on a musty basement carpet  
that feels too ordinary to stage our grief,  
too common, like any stain  
on any kind of floor.

We who are so many  
often remain so few, too.  
Billions, but how many  
mourn the one we find  
in the missing?

**distance/masks**

J. Thomas Burke

Poetry

To bridge this distance only through my thoughts  
Across a possible near-future when  
On city streets, the surgical mask blooms  
A search obscured, a black barn, faces half  
Now, brother, unveil footage kept online  
Or push more pills atop another ill  
All wear the mask of the protagonist  
Reveal relations rather than conceal

Compassion, some experimental task  
From doorknob hanging negligent at last  
This world to me became a broken gauge  
For life, like yesterday, I bore my mask  
Beyond my window, black boots march on past  
Imaginary futures quit the page

## Home is Where the Home Is

J. Thomas Burke

Poetry

### I. Iowa

Another child leans against the cinderblock wall,  
 beige of course, questioning empty parking lot spaces  
 through the window of her small room, which resembles  
 a dormitory in the late 80's if not  
 for the hospital bed — where the open notebook  
 holds no lines from Plato's *Symposium*, rather clues  
 for the next visitor: *9 am, doctor stopped in,*  
*will run tests tomorrow if Mom's breathing troubles*  
*worsen* — and ignoring the rattle of wheels  
 as they pass her open door while Grandma admires  
 another crayon sketch — mom, dad, tree, dog, me —  
 from one of countless great-grand-children.

### II. New Orleans

Here, I write letters from a sinking city  
 buried good and deep by banks breaking open,  
 flooding our streets with wishes and nitrogen.  
 Over broken plates of sidewalk,  
 I wander and recognize the call of no birds.  
 Camellias bloom, while I, in late December,  
 stand on near-white tiles, scanning a street corner,  
 empty below hanging, black power lines — *zap,*  
*zap* — for some sign to remind me where.

**Cast**

Elena Ender

Poetry

I have been so terrified of breaking a bone, I've never let myself tumble. The snap of a wrist and a hospital trip that I cannot afford doesn't seem worth it to do a flip on my friend's trampoline. I don't know what the pain feels like, the break, clean or otherwise; I just know the ache of sitting on the patio and watching the other kids fly and fall, shrieking with excitement. Maybe the crack wouldn't be so bad. But maybe nobody would sign my cast afterward.

**STATIC**

Jessica Sarlin  
Fiction

As a human child born to a couple of televisions, Adam was reluctant to invite people over to the house. It was hard to maintain friendships.

Of course, his parents did the best they could. He loved them and they loved him back in their own way. Still, he mostly raised himself. They couldn't hear him. They couldn't see him.

If he really needed them, he would turn the dial from channel to channel to make himself known. They would always eventually respond and produce some guidance or a distraction to temporarily shake him out of his unease. Usually, the flow was interrupted by a stream of unhelpful advertisements, but they were *televisions*. I mean, what do you want?

They taught him everything he knew. They were responsible for his worldliness and his tender view of humanity, traits he knew were important and would serve him well. He was so grateful to them for that. Some of his classmates were completely lacking in empathy – and they had flesh and blood parents!

When he felt dark or full of self-pity, he almost always came back around to being grateful for his particular set of challenges. Chin. Up.

Things did not improve much when his sister was born. Despite his childish hopes, she was born a television. A modern model, but still an appliance. She had more channels and buttons than her parents, but was somehow even more self-absorbed and distant. She was not receptive to Adam. She was mostly concerned with her own shows, her own brightness and contrast.

Once, he grew so frustrated with the lack of attention at home, he turned the three of them off for a whole day.

The house was unbearably lonely without the glow and ozone crackle of his family.

\*\*\*

Adam was intelligent and well-mannered, which was enough to get him through school and his early work life. He stayed shy, though, and awkward in most social situations. He didn't even know the things he didn't know about communicating and living with other people. He felt fragile and groundless in the most routine interactions with strangers.

When Adam met Lisa on the train, he was at the height of his loneliness.

He noticed her as soon as she stepped into the car. She was pretty and full of cheerful energy, which petrified Adam. He never would have approached her on his own. Fortunately, he didn't have to; she was drawn to him like a magnet, as if she sensed his particular family peculiarity. Her parents were a mixed couple. Her father was a television.

Adam had never heard of anyone like that, didn't even know that such a thing was possible. He was intrigued, but he was more relieved to finally find someone who understood his situation. They spent hours comparing notes about their unconventional parents. Lisa's relationship with her father filled Adam with hope. She had learned to accept her father's limitations and seemed to be utterly clean of bitterness about it. She loved him in her way and vice versa. It seemed so *healthy*.

They spent many happy days together, but never consistently. Sometimes, Lisa needed a break. Adam had never been in a relationship, so he assumed it was normal. He would catch Lisa in an unconscious moment and shudder at the sudden look of disconnection on her



face. He could watch her flickering profile at the movies and know the night would end with the familiar wan smile and a promise to call.

Adam's phone chime would startle and disappoint him for days. Then, Lisa, recharged, would bounce back into his life and make him forget the pain of her absence. He was in love.

\*\*\*

When they finally made love, it was transformative for Adam. Lisa insisted on leaving the lights on — a wonderful kink, Adam thought, and one that heightened the whole emotional experience for him. After a lifetime of feeling ignored, he loved being seen and Lisa's locked gaze was sexier than anything else she did.

Finding himself lightly awake at 2am, he listened to the trailing echo of a police siren until it blended with the muffled music of the city. Lisa rolled over in her sleep and moaned. Adam smiled and lovingly traced the sideways shape of her with his eyes.

He noticed a soft, blue glow from beneath the bedclothes. He gingerly peeled back the sheet to reveal a tiny screen embedded in Lisa's lower back. It was no larger than one inch diagonally, surrounded by the peach fuzz of her otherwise perfect skin. It was softly broadcasting electric snow. The snow pattern shifted with her comfortable breaths.

Adam gasped, but did not wake her. He was surprised to find himself more fascinated than frightened. Seemingly under its own power, his curious hand lifted and floated out towards Lisa's sleeping form. He needed to touch it.

**The Crow's Foot**  
Miniature Malekpour  
Art



**Party girl**  
Shiksha Dheda  
Poetry

Will she come to my party?  
She who holds balloons in her cheeks,  
she who sings karaoke with her fingertips.

The girl with the confetti eyes,  
the girl with the champagne laugh.

The girl with the streamer hair,  
her hands tied up in ribbon,  
her feet held together with gift wrap.

Will she come to my party?  
The girl with the clown lipstick,  
she who paints gold across her nose,  
the girl who stays in the faded mirror,  
she who used to smile back before.

**Dybbuks**  
Jeff Fleischer  
Fiction

“Why did you let that dybbuk in?” Hiram’s mother asked nearly as soon as the man closed the bathroom door.

“Shhh.” Hiram looked back to see if the visitor had heard. “Ma, he’s just a repairman. We called him to fix the leaking pipe under the sink, remember?”

She’d been forgetting things lately. Hiram hoped it was just the rote nature of this months-long lockdown, with every day bleeding into the next. He still met patients by video every day, and he now needed to take pages of notes to replace what he used to be able to hold in his memory. But his mother was also getting older, and there was a family history.

“I don’t like him being here, Hy,” she continued. “He has unfinished business.”

“Yes, he does. To fix the sink. I told you.”

They’d had variations of the same argument about the bicycle messenger who brought Hiram some patient records, two pizza deliverymen, and a woman from FedEx.

“Sometimes I think you want the dybbuks to stay so you don’t have to be alone with me.”

When the repairman left, Hiram turned on the water and stood at the sink a long time. Thinking about how much longer this lockdown would last, and what his mother would be like when it ended.

**Childhood home dream #24**

Merridawn Duckler

Poetry

## I

Either a dog or your mother-in-law is licking our feet.

## II

In New York City, I hired some fake construction workers to sing a lullaby as we lay in a plank, me on top of you.

## III

Then you pointed out how several people were sleeping sardines while an entire choir sang on the next block.

## IV

And I thought: goddamn these New Yorkers are so competitive!

## V

We ran barefoot eternally toward our rental. Our little feet were so sweet and tender I despaired crossing the filthy streets, imagining how we would wash them when we got home. I tried not to think about what we were stepping on.

## VI

A boy threw rocks to wake my sister and I opened my window & said please proceed to the next window down.

**Resolution**

E. F. S. Byrne

Fiction

The Christmas decorations swung to the noise of bickering and a blaring television. Jasmine had no intention of waiting for New Year's Eve. She needed a change right now. She grasped the biggest balloon from under the tree, and snuck out the back door. Her family was too busy sulking and pouting, snarling themselves in arguments about what to do next, to notice she was missing. They'd been locked up for far too long.

She took a deep breath, and another, until she was going red in the face and about to explode. She let the air out in an enormous sigh. Puff by puff, her balloon took shape. Gingerly, she bent, curled, squirmed, until she squeezed through the entrance and tied it firmly closed behind her. Slowly, like a child reaching for its mother, her bubble began to rise, sluggishly upwards, grazing the garden fence, gathering confidence as the air lightened and gravity lost its appeal. "Mars, here I come!" she shouted. Faces glimpsed upwards but Jasmine ignored them. She was on a mission: ground control had no place in her plans. Her mother ran to the gate. Jasmine grinned: she'd taken the entrance with her. She soared, the figures below fading to sticks, then melting into their burrows, schools, homes, the entire landscape jumbling into the crooked shapes of a jigsaw she could never put together. She'd escaped. She left them behind, locked up with their fears. She was sailing off into the New Year and promised herself it would be the best yet.

Jasmine turned cold. Her limbs began to tremble. Clouds swarmed, the sun was blurring into a moon. She poked at the invisible membrane with a blunt finger-nail. Air hissed. She'd made a hole. Her bubble wobbled like a bloodshot eye, a badly fried egg. She was sweating

suddenly. The balloon was rolling, the landscape spinning. She needed to come back down to earth.

She fumbled in her pocket. Her fingers skimmed the crisp edge of her mother's credit card. Her hands slipped as she made an incision, slicing gently, sketching her own personal horizon. The wind gushed in. Her globe lurched. She cut another slit. Air hissed as it was sucked outwards. She was tumbling. The balloon sizzled. It was spinning out of control. She was going to land with a crash, in some unknown cabbage patch. She braced herself for the thrill. That was all she ever wanted, a garden without lockdowns and fake news. She wished she'd brought a pillow as the damp soil bit into her cheeks and a rock chipped her front tooth.

**Note on a Napkin**

Linda Conroy

Poetry

I watch with surprise, disquiet,  
indecision, as you wipe your mouth  
and leave the table, cross the room.  
We knew each other once, another life,  
a circumstance beyond our choice.  
I see you reach to check your pocket  
for your wallet, keys perhaps.  
You're leaving soon, lamentably,  
but do I want to catch your eye?  
I know you live in town these days.  
I've seen you in a three-piece suit,  
outside the library, near city hall.  
I was too shy, then, to step across  
the space of years, but now,  
I think I'll slip this paper to you  
fast, entice, before you step aside.



**Of Smoke and Mirrors**

Linda Conroy

Poetry

I left your letter on the bench, beside  
the paper coffee cup I'd crumpled

while I sat in silence interrupted only  
by the faint street rumble and a trill of birds.

I thought I'd break the pattern of my day  
and not invite you to appear, not waste

my dreaming time on mirrors held before  
the twisting image of your smoke.

It would be a kind of calumny to think  
about the times you looked at me as if I were

the silver ribbon for your pride, as though a wild  
transcendent wish could shape a cadillac

trundling down the highway of my life  
and once more wave you into it. Birds eating

cast-off crumbs beneath the lonely bench,  
know contentment doesn't grow like this.

**HUSH MONEY**

Suzy Eynon

Fiction

When did Daisy first realize her high school reputation was irretrievable?

Daisy realized this lesson on the occurrence of a school bully requesting the sum of twenty USD in hush money.

What age was Daisy when she first had this realization?

The incident involving the bribed bully occurred in the year 1993 when Daisy was fourteen years of age.

The average daily temperature at the time of the incident was sixty-nine degrees Fahrenheit.

Why did Daisy pay her classmate the aforementioned “hush money?”

It began with misunderstandings against which she failed to correct or fight. She was so quiet in class that the words just never came out in the face of such slights, and they grew until they stuck to her. Misinformation grew into reality, as it does. Daisy travelled in a van with a teacher and two classmates while they were on a school-sponsored trip to Sea World in San Diego, California, United States of America. One of the girls in the van spoke of a boy in their class who had a reputation for being grabby with girls.

Did Daisy report this boy’s wrongdoings to the authorities?

She did not. The teacher who drove the van overheard the conversation, since it occurred in the van in which she sat with the girls, and which was lacking in concrete details but had enough and reported the incident to someone. Nothing became of it except that word got out that someone riding in the

van had ratted out the boy, and who would be the assumed ratter — the popular girl, or Daisy?

Was that when she realized?

Someone also took cash from Daisy's backpack, the cash her mother had given her to spend on whale souvenirs at Sea World, while she took a restroom break on the bus for the trip, and when she noticed, she turned around in her seat to see if anyone in the vicinity looked guilty. She didn't want to be seen as a tattletale, so she didn't tell anyone.

What was Daisy able to buy in the absence of this spending money?

Daisy tried to stretch the bills the thief left behind to buy something to bring back to her little brother. She always thought of her parents and brother when she travelled to a new store or on a field trip. Telling her parents about the missing money was shameful, an admission, maybe an acknowledgement that she wasn't well liked at school and was therefore a failure of a child, a B+ student of life but not an A student. So, she pretended it never happened. She hoped they figured the small stuffed whale she bought for her brother, purchased with the single bill the thief left in her backpack, was overpriced.

After this monetary loss, was Daisy able to find her voice and cease the bleeding of cash funds?

No. After the Sea World incident, another boy from their class, different but the same in intent and teenage bravado though this one named after a former football giant turned alleged murderer told Daisy he was going to write a love letter, erroneously signed by Daisy, to an unpopular boy in their class.

When did he become a murderer?

The football star, in 1993, was famous. He became an *alleged* murderer later. He was never convicted.

His namesake, aged fourteen in the year 1993, was neither alleged nor convicted, as far as Daisy knew. He remained a well-liked boy at school.

Did Daisy attempt to rectify this situation with the namesake?

“That’s not even how I spell my last name,” Daisy said when she saw what he had written on the paper he threatened to drop in a high-traffic area. He laughed. They both knew it wouldn’t matter. She paid him the ransom in cash from the emergency lunch money her mother forced her to carry to school, but despite keeping the bribe money, he laughed in his cruel way. He dropped the fake document on the sidewalk for anyone to pick up and read. Or maybe he handed the letter off after “finding” it himself. The memory blurred over the years, so that Daisy could no longer remember the fine details of her humiliation, only the main points. That was what bothered her the most, aside from the fact that he got away with it — that it made no sense. Why would someone misspell their own last name? They’d probably seen this in a movie or on afternoon television which they all watched at home alone, all latchkey kids.

To whom was this forged love letter addressed?

The twist was especially cruel, meant to make fun of both the writer and the receiver, two outsiders cast into roles to dance for the crowd, selected only for the part because they were outside the circle. Daisy assumed she had no control of her narrative as it played out in her small desert town, in high school, in life on a grand scale.

How did Daisy feel about her perceived role as the seeker of love of this other outcast?

She was disappointed by the clichéd trap: that her peers imagined she might be so foolish as to write a

love letter to a classmate in the first place, then to misspell her own name, then, on top of that, to carelessly drop the letter from her backpack onto the dusty ground just outside the stretching shadow of a common variety of low desert shrubbery. In a teen movie, she would team up with her co-star. They would laugh together at the absurdity of the letter, fused in their faux new love. But in this version of Daisy's life, they never spoke of it, or to each other. The role chosen for her in her silence didn't even fit. At what point do you become who others say you are?

**Why I Ran from the Mystic**

Caleb Knight

Poetry

The Oracle at Delphi sentenced Socrates to die a starving martyr,  
not by smoke or divination,  
but ego, the bane which Athen's wisest man  
did not know he had.

The Greeks really did perfect the art of irony.  
Socrates should have sprinted down the fire escape  
and onto the crowded Manhattan sidewalk,  
just as I did when I ran from the mystic

who held my hand for twenty dollars  
while her daughter did schoolwork  
behind satin curtains.  
Which of us was most guilty of knowledge?

While Socrates' commitment was admirable,  
to not fear death as it tugged his beard,  
I do not need to die to decide  
I'm not ready to let a good thing end.

Fear is not necessarily thinking the worst,  
but loving too much what you already have,  
which is why I ran from the fortune-teller,  
and why Socrates should have looked that Oracle

right in the eye and said he was fine.  
For all that Socrates did not know,  
which according to him was everything,  
he seemed to know he had no choice.

Bravery is not knowing your future

but deciding how you'll get there.  
All I heard before I ran, that the lines on my palms  
were markers of an old soul.

I am Socrates reborn a thousandth time,  
finally deciding to run from the Oracle  
before I am cursed with a singular knowledge  
amidst a crowded New York sidewalk filled with  
nothing else.

**None of Us Needs to do Anything**

Caleb Knight

Poetry

A deer awakens in the glade  
when I enter. It does not mind  
my worship. We spend  
a windy 2PM with our ears  
all swiveling, entertained  
by robin-song. Another person,  
another God, approaches,  
asks if the deer looks injured  
because of its stillness and lack  
of perturb, and I respond, “no,  
that is God, I am God,  
you are God, and the robins  
are God, and none of us needs  
to do anything.”



**Winter**

Kyle Rackley

Poetry

Talking to Helen's brother  
is like talking to a skipping  
record — you can speak,  
but it doesn't acknowledge  
and it never offers a new idea.

Helen hooks the phone on her ear  
as her brother drones about sports,  
the weather, or whatever irritates  
him today. She watches snow  
tip-toe to the ground to meet its mates

when her mind turns to Chris —  
No, it's the holidays, time for joy.  
“Are we Christmas caroling this year?”  
She asks. “Don't think so,” he says.  
“Did you want to this year?” Helen shields

her eyes, even though no one  
sees them. “Of course I do,”  
she says. “No Halloween family  
reunion and no Thanksgiving dinner;  
why wouldn't we carol?”

Mom organized all the family  
events; she died this summer.

**Red Napkin**  
Thomas Elson  
Fiction

The dinner — turkey, latkes, dressing, gravy, and my wife's cauliflower and black olive salad — impeccably set upon a red tablecloth with white lace placemats — reminded me of the red cassock and white lace chasuble I had worn decades before as an altar boy at midnight Mass.

Resting on the lace placemats were red napkins and flatware in the exact order my great-grandmother had dictated generations earlier. After dinner, I placed my fork upside down in the far rim of the dinner plate, wiped my lips with the red dinner napkin, folded it to cover the stain, then nestled it back on my lap. It was my final holiday dinner — only I knew it. Others would know soon, but not today.

Not my grandson, Matty, whose diapers I had changed and watched grow along the Pacific coast. Matty, my brilliant little boy, now twenty-six, an electrical engineer, soon to be married.

Not my grandson, Nicky, so like me no mirror was needed, same walk, same shoulders, hands, and head — an artist with an entire orchestra in his heart.

Not my daughter, the bright light of my life, more like me than she wanted; the one who keeps my spirit alive.

Not my wife — whose glow transformed my life into technicolor — a gifted teacher with a beautiful heart — in front of whom former third graders, now mothers, doctors, and teachers, morph into eight-year-olds bouncing with joy; and six feet three-inch men became little boys - once again looking for her approval.

My family did not know. Only I knew. I knew I was being devoured from within by something that left blood on my red dinner napkin.

**Swing Creek Road**

Thomas Elson

Fiction

When a Ninnescah county road worker discovered me, I was buried under leaves hidden inside a grove of trees two miles west of a country restaurant where my husband and I shared our last meal. The parking lot where I left my car now inhabited by weeds, potholes, and mud flung from tractors.

Within the hour, surrounded by sheriff officers, state investigators, and the county coroner, strangers in blue uniforms photographed, identified, tagged, and stripped me. They scraped my fingernails. Analyzed my skin. Examined my scalp. Studied my hair. Ripped, poked, dissected, and mauled my body. Forensics not only adopted me, they owned me.

And, within that act of ownership, they constructed a backstory based on the caliber of the four shells found near my body, the angle of the bullets' penetration, the ambient temperature, contents of my stomach, witnesses to our dinner, and myriad other elements which they laid out with such agility the only thing the county attorney had to say was "Yes".

Within a week, my husband was questioned and arrested. Within ninety days, he was tried by my old boss — the county attorney, convicted by a jury, and a life sentence imposed by the judge. Within a year, the state supreme court unanimously affirmed the lower court's decision.

#

Were I able, I would have told them: Three hours after my final dinner with my husband, the same county attorney who prosecuted the case had pressed a pistol to

my head, and pulled the trigger. His right hand jerked. The second bullet grazed my skull. He corrected himself. Pressed the gun under my chin. The third and fourth bullets exited my skull. Then he hauled me inside the grove of trees.

After which, the county attorney drove to my family's lakeside cabin where he and I frequented during our assignations, and returned the pistol to the nightstand on my husband's side of the bed.

**Pretty Polly**

Oisín Breen

Poetry

I dream I'm always holding Polly's hands.  
We were naked in the garden.  
She twisted flowers with her fingers.  
She asked if could I love her.

I knew she suffered terrible dreams,  
But also laughed at night,  
As dead flowers fell on her body,  
And I knew that I would wake each morning covered in  
the red blood of flowers.

We often argued, especially when Jack was coming  
home.  
He would bring roses and letters, one for each day he  
was gone.  
Polly used to write long letters too, then she started  
walking on her tiptoes.  
When we last met, she was pregnant.

Jack loved Polly like he loved sunsets, he told me.  
But I remember when she first betrayed him.  
She was lying naked in the garden.  
But I never said I loved her.

**Ghost Stories**

Jacob Budenz

Poetry

A lightning storm over foggy marshland,  
and you, curled around a trembling chicken,  
your back against the knees of a gnarled cypress.

This is not a story that ends in your death  
although it is a haunting of sorts, of the image  
of you in that swamp, the specter of your cracked  
lips on my neck, your translucent hands guiding  
mine to the rosemary bush on your rooftop garden.

You know what happens to ghosts in this house, right?  
To men who make us fancy dinners, fuck us,  
and never call us back? They are haunted,  
too, threefold, in the ways they haunt us,  
fated to live on as canned goods decades past  
their shelf life, remembered as fuckboys  
who treat experiment chickens with  
more care than their lovers,

and doomed  
to be ghosted  
thrice as often.

**The 17-Year Summer Brood**

Jacob Budenz

Poetry

A man enters your muggy room  
with a fat cicada on his shoulders  
and one crawling around his cheek  
and one resting on his upturned palms  
and some more, some more, some more.

Buzzing.

His skin is sandpaper.  
His lips are bark.  
His tongue is chalk.  
His hands are intelligent  
and abrasive.

Wings flutter against your stomach,  
smoothing it, scraping it  
as butterfly kisses pinprick your forehead  
and needlepoint nails carve  
Cyrillic across your chest.

His long hair like charred straw twitches  
under the fan's lazy whirlpool.  
When he leaves, spiderwebs spin  
and sibilant summer whispers slink  
through your open window.



**Liar**

rani Jayakumar

Fiction

Ben lied like he was born with a silver tongue. He came up with such daring lies, and he told them with the straightest of faces, and the most brilliant sparkle in his eye.

You could never tell when he was lying. Last week, when he got home late he told Mama, “I came as fast as I could. Those older boys were chasing me because I beat them in the races at recess! But I had to go the long way to throw ‘em off.”

I could confirm that he did outrace them at recess. We could see he was disheveled and panting. Jade would know if he was running past her house, but she never saw anything amiss.

But Mama was smart, too, and didn’t care. “Well, if you were being chased, you shoulda come home faster then.” That was the end of that conversation.

His lies always had some truth to them, so we almost never found out. Except that one time.

We’d been goofing off in old Mr. Murphy’s backyard, where the weeds grew up to my shoulders. I loved hiding in there, and Ben would try climbing the fence. He called me over to boost him up. I wasn’t strong enough. He fell on me, hard, and I couldn’t move.

Later, the doctor said my elbow was busted. Ben told Mama how we’d been playing, how he’d climbed the fence by himself, and didn’t look where he was, and fell on me. It was true, but not true.

That’s when he said it.

“It will never happen again, I promise.”

I never found out if it was the falling or the lying that he meant.

## Another Way To Name Fortitude

Goodness Olanrewaju Ayoola

Poetry

my soul is heavy. and i am still learning how to not name a poem like this. are you with strength? i am trying to weigh happiness. let us weigh happiness. is it light? too light? too fragile to last a moment? we rejoice for life. we rejoice for life. but death is not impressed by the libation of our harvests. not by our songs at newborn. in the next minute we are laying two beautiful bodies today into early coffins. in the next minute. we share a common tear. in the next minute we are not calling *Awero* again by the first name of her only child. *he is gone too soon. she is gone to soon.* we want to refill — *honey for the rusty horns of happiness.* but how? *when we are hedged. hampered by the howls of hades.* i look at the eyes of the darkness in the corner one more time before i fall into the night within. she is watching me. In silence. waiting to take my eyes. waiting to jump into my dreams. and take my tongue to theatre a drama of death. but i am not sleeping tonight. i am shredding my skin into the mouth of June. and ask *for forever and a body of water.* perhaps for bereaved souls. i can always rain fortitude.

**And Then**  
Richard Luftig  
Poetry

My daughter would return afternoons  
from kindergarten to tell me about her day.  
*You know what?* was her intro. *And then*,  
the signal that this was going to take a while.

*Honey, am I going to get the long  
or the short version?* I would tease.  
But if she got the sarcasm, she never  
let on. *The short*, she would say

and then pick up where she left off.  
*And then*. I contemplated making  
myself a drink, getting my sleeping bag  
from the closet, perhaps remodeling the kitchen.

My students would often drop in  
at my university office unannounced,  
replete with long, involved stories  
as to why they couldn't take a test,

or complete an assignment:  
Their grandmother had died  
for the fifth time this semester,  
their computer had gone to sleep

or into a coma, I couldn't remember  
which, taking their term paper  
into hibernation with it.  
*And then*, they would say,

me stealing glances at my watch  
and wondering if their stories

would ever end. And now  
with our children grown,

gone and with spouses of their own  
to tell their stories to, my wife  
sits at the kitchen table and tells me  
again about how we met, fell in love,

wed. How I was so shy that none of this  
almost took place, how she decided  
after something like our fifth date to take  
matters into her own hands and kiss me first.

*And then*, she says as I get up,  
pour us another cup of coffee  
from the pot on the stove, and think  
again how I wish this story might never end.

**Some Sort of Monster**

Stephen Jackson

Poetry

The first sign that something might be amiss  
was the way all the cats behaved, whereas  
in the past they'd run up to greet me, roll onto  
their backs to lay down their territory, anxious

to get their fair share of love from me, often  
upon parting, having even to turn and insist  
they not follow me — now, they stop dead in  
their tracks, and short of arching their backs,

they just stare at me — no, more like *glare*  
at me, as if I've become some sort of monster  
unlike anything they've ever seen, and if I  
crouch down to encourage, extend a hand out

slowly, they squint, turn to run from me, as if  
I smell of death, as if in fear for a life, and  
I look carefully in the mirror, to see what they  
must see, yet nothing appears different to me.

**Wet January**

Anna Kirwin

Poetry

In the gloom of the tea-time kitchen,  
She spreads her hands across the worktop  
And lets the scuffs and bumps and scratches  
Wake her from the auto-pilot  
She'd switched on some four hours ago,  
When work had hit a low point,  
The low point it reaches everyday,  
When clouds of commands surrounded her,  
Pinning her to the floor,  
So until she'd walked out of the door  
Late,  
She could not move for dashing.

Here, in this not-yet-heated home,  
Before the gas kick in,  
She slowly pours the gin  
And lets it flood across her plains  
Until she's silently regained  
That little speck of hope  
That someday flowers might bloom again here,  
Long-stemmed and verdant  
So she might pick herself from this oblivion,  
Transport it somewhere else,  
Somewhere better for her health and reputation.

More tent than coat, she lets the water-sodden  
waterproof slip to the floor,  
pours herself a little more  
And whilst the lights are still turned off  
Not even the cupboards could testify against her.  
She raps her fingers on the worktop,  
Taps a ritornelle that shouts of ennui

And wonders if a second could be improved by a third.

Kitchen stools were not designed for long stints of sloth.  
She can feel the damp fabric underneath her sliding off  
And as she grabs a handle,  
Just to keep her steady, she is struck  
That she needs to get a handle on potential regrets  
That a wet January might bring.

**In the Story**  
Celia Meade  
Fiction

In the story, a woman wakes up and discovers her husband is missing. She's perplexed by the placement of a whisk on his pillow, which she thinks is a message he will elucidate upon his return. Over the course of the day, she gradually realizes he will not return. She begins to wonder if the whisk *is* her husband but dismisses this as foolish and tries to push it from her mind. In fact, the whisk is on her husband's pillow because of certain actions taken by the dog, but the woman cannot know this. She slept through her husband's departure.

In the story, the woman entertains theories of her husband's whereabouts: he's on a walk, he has transformed into a whisk, he has died in the woods through some unforeseen event — a heart attack, a fall, or an ambush.

In the story, the police theorize that Frank has started a new life, perhaps with ill-gotten funds. Frank had taken a leave of absence from work, and his computer was bloated with research on the Caymans, a land of numbered bank accounts and hidden money.

In the story, the woman decides to pursue her husband to the Caymans for reasons that are unclear to her. He was not who she believed him to be. In fact, the husband never left New York but was living in the city with a secret lover, in the same apartment building he had lived in with his wife. He'd created a fictional bad back in order to visit his lover, ostensibly to walk and give his lower back relief.

In reality, the author's husband has a bad back that needs constantly walking out. His personal trainer describes his back as "made of glass." The author does not worry that her husband will leave her, in spite of the



trainer's history of stealing husbands and her prominent silicone implants.

In reality, the author's husband spends hours researching different types of luxury cars. He also reads up on hotels in Hawaii, where they go almost every year. He drives a Boxster and a Macan. In the story, the husband researches the Cayman Islands on his computer as an escape from the confines of his life as an unfaithful husband. The wife plans to pursue him there, to find some kind of closure. What will she find there? The author has no idea.

Will lemon trees grow in profusion along the roadway? Will she walk by trees laden with green lemons, allowing them to ripen and fall, rotting, to the ground? Will her character pick the odd lemon to cut up into her drink, to breathe in the citrusy oil of its skin, or to make lemonade?

The author remembers visiting family friends as a child, who brought out a big, glass jug of homemade lemonade with swirls of sugar crystals in the bottom of the pitcher under dozens of ice cubes. She remembers the slosh of ice pouring into her glass. The lemonade was presented as a summertime treat, and she sipped her drink cautiously. She, a child who hardly liked anything new, was conservative in her tastes: Rice Krispies for breakfast, soda crackers and butter for lunch, and a soft-boiled egg with bread soldiers for supper. For snack she enjoyed a peeled apple; for dessert, chocolate pudding.

But the lemonade was everything the kind woman had intended: cold, sweet, sour, and refreshing. It quenched her thirst and healed a tiny piece of her. That's what she hopes to find in the Caymans when she goes to research her character's journey. That's all we ever hope to find.

THE END

## Contributor Bios

Goodness Olanrewaju Ayoola

Goodness Olanrewaju Ayoola is a Nigerian poet and teacher of English who reaches out to poetry as escapism from the contentions within and around him. His poetry appeared recently in Hellebore, Mainsqueeze, Querencia, Periferias Journal and elsewhere. He is a Best of the Net Award Nominee and author of *Meditations* (WRR, 2016). Say hi to him on @GoodnessLanre

Lorelei Bacht

Lorelei Bacht (she/they) is a person, poet, queer, multi-, living in Asia. Her work has appeared / is forthcoming in *Visitant*, *The Wondrous Real*, *Quail Bell*, *Fahmidan*, *Abridged Magazine*, *Odd Magazine*, *Postscript*, *PROEM*, *SWWIM*, *Strukturriss*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *Slouching Beast Journal*, *Hecate*, and others. She is also on Instagram: @lorelei.bacht.writer and on Twitter @bachtlorelei

Ace Boggess

Ace Boggess is author of six books of poetry, including *Escape Envy* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2021), *Ultra Deep Field*, and *The Prisoners*. His writing appears in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, and other journals. Living in Charleston, West Virginia, he is an ex-con and former addict, subjects that provide much inspiration for his work, to everyone's chagrin.

Oisín Breen

Oisín Breen is a 36 year-old poet, part-time academic in narratological complexity, and financial journalist. Dublin born Breen's debut collection, 'Flowers, all sorts in blossom, figs, berries, and fruits, forgotten' was

released Mar. 2020 by Edinburgh's Hybrid Press. Primarily a proponent of long-form style-orientated poetry infused with the philosophical, Breen has been published in a number of journals, including the Blue Nib, Books Ireland, the Seattle Star, Modern Literature, La Piccioletta Barca, the Bosphorus Review of Books, Mono, and Dreich magazine.

#### Jacob Budenz

Jacob Budenz is a queer writer, multi-disciplinary performer, and witch with an MFA from University of New Orleans and a BA from Johns Hopkins University whose work focuses on the intersection of the other and the otherworldly. The author of *PASTEL WITCHERIES* (Seven Kitchens Press 2018), Budenz has current and forthcoming work in journals such as Slipstream, Ghost City Review, Wizards in Space, and Entropy Magazine as well as anthologies by Mason Jar Press and Mad Scientist Journal. You can follow Jake's work on Instagram (@dreambabyjake), Twitter (@jakebeearts), or the internet beyond ([www.jakebeearts.com](http://www.jakebeearts.com)).

#### J. Thomas Burke

J. Thomas Burke teaches poetry, writing, and literature in New Orleans. Recently, he's been working to revise his courses using Asao Inoue's antiracist writing assessment ecologies as a foundation. When he isn't writing or teaching, he's usually chatting up his cat or reviewing comic book journalism from the 1980's.

#### E. F. S. Byrne

E. F. S. Byrne works in education and writes when his teenage kids allow it. He blogs a regular micro flash story. Links to this and over fifty published pieces can be found at [efsbyrne.wordpress.com](http://efsbyrne.wordpress.com) or follow him on Twitter @efsbyrne

### Kaitlyn Crow

Kaitlyn Crow is a queer poet based in Richmond, Virginia, who longs for the mountainside. They serve as an Editor at K'in Literary Journal and Chaotic Merge Magazine. Find them on Twitter @queeryeehawpoet.

### Andrea D'Souza

Andrea D'Souza is a Jersey girl living in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her interests include treasure hunting at flea markets, collecting/snuggling stuffed animals, and finding that perfect snack to eat in bed just before sleep. Outside of her job in digital marketing, she co-leads a poetry group, runs a women's book club, and volunteers for a local hospice program.

### Shiksha Dheda

Shiksha Dheda uses writing to express her OCD and depression roller-coaster ventures. Sometimes, she dabbles in photography, painting, and baking lopsided layered cakes.

### Merridawn Dukler

I'm a writer from Oregon where I live with my husband, sons and daughters and a wildfire plan. I came in first in The Buelah Rose poetry contest and many contests involving who was right about that exit being closed. I'm an editor at Narrative and the international philosophy journal Evental Aesthetics and was recently the librettist for an oratorio based on thirty years of minutes from monthly business meetings.

### Thomas Elson

Thomas Elson's stories have been published in numerous venues, including Ellipsis, Better Than Starbucks, The Cabinet of Heed, Flash Frontier, Short

Édition, Journal of Expressive Writing, Dead Mule School, The Selkie, The New Ulster, The Lampeter, and Adelaide. He divides his time between Northern California and Western Kansas.

Elena Ender

Elena Ender has loved every bit of reading for and editing literary publications Tin House and Masters Review. She spends her time writing snarky fiction, listening to 2007 pop-punk, and driving around the streets of Portland, OR. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram as: @elena\_ender.

Michael Estabrook

Michael Estabrook has been publishing his poetry in the small press since the 1980s. He has published over 20 collections, a recent one being *The Poet's Curse, A Miscellany* (The Poetry Box, 2019). He lives in Acton, Massachusetts.

Suzy Eynon

Suzy is from Arizona and lives in Seattle where she works in college admissions. She has a BA in English Literature and a certificate in literary fiction from University of Washington, and an MEd in Adult Education from City University of Seattle. Her fiction and poetry are published in *Hungry Ghost Magazine*, *Daily Drunk*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, *King Ludd's Rag*, *Versification*, and others.

Kay. T. Fields

Kay. T. Fields has worn many hats. A former credit analyst for a leading auto company, she has raised rabbits, practiced calligraphy, made a major move to another part of the country where she knew nobody at the age of sixty-seven, and now focuses on her two life-

long passions, reading and writing poetry. Her memoir will be published in the Spring of 2021.

Jeff Fleischer

Jeff Fleischer is a Chicago-based author, journalist and editor. His fiction has appeared in more than sixty publications including the Chicago Tribune's Printers Row Journal, Shenandoah, the Saturday Evening Post and So It Goes by the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library. He is also the author of non-fiction books including "Votes of Confidence: A Young Person's Guide to American Elections" (Zest Books, 2016 and 2020), "Rockin' the Boat: 50 Iconic Revolutionaries" (Zest Books, 2015), "The Latest Craze: A Short History of Mass Hysterias" (Fall River Press, 2011), and the upcoming "A Hot Mess: How the Climate Crisis is Changing Our World" (Zest Books, 2021).

James Croal Jackson

James Croal Jackson (he/him) is a Filipino-American poet working in film production. He has released two electronic albums in ten years and no one really knows about them.

Stephen Jackson

Stephen Jackson lives and writes in the Pacific Northwest, where he loves communing with nature and conversing with friends on long walks. He was the sole proprietor of the Seattle small press So Many Birds publishing (SMBp) and the creator of Harness literary magazine. He is powered by vegetables.

rani Jayakumar

rani Jayakumar lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband and two kids. They love to sit around the dining table together making up silly stories one

sentence or word at a time. She also enjoys mindfulness and music, and can be found humming to herself while writing at [okachiko.wordpress.com](http://okachiko.wordpress.com)

Joshua Kepreotis

Joshua Kepreotis is a writer born in Australia and of Greek heritage. He has published essays in 3AM Magazine and HuffingtonPost Greece, prose and poetry in 100 Words of Solitude, Lucky Pierre and others. He placed 3rd in the Strands International Flash Fiction Competition July 2020. He writes through his experience, his privilege, and challenges dominant ways of thinking. Twitter: @joshkepreotis

Anna Kirwin

Anna Kirwin is a writer and artist, living in London, but dreaming of the Arctic. Her last published piece considered exploration, but more generally, her recent work deals with language, thought and time. She sees light in the darkness.

Caleb Knight

Caleb Knight (he/him) is an undergraduate student of Music Therapy and Creative Writing at Montclair State University. He is in long-term recovery from a substance use disorder. The crowning achievement of his life is the night he performed in a circus as a child, where he balanced a feather on the tip of his nose for an impressively long time.

Richard Luftig

I am a former professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio now residing in California. My poems and stories have appeared in numerous literary journals (INCLUDING

DOOR IS A JAR). I reside with my wife of 48 years who has been nominated for sainthood.

Miniature Malekpour

Miniature Malekpour is a Ph.D. scholar and artist at the Australian National University. She is a contributing writer for Diabolique Magazine. Her writing and photography have also been published in The Dillydoun Review, Drunk Monkeys+ Literature & Film, Beyond Words Literary Magazine, and Fatal Flaw Literary Magazine.

Celia Meade

I am attending Sarah Lawrence for an MFA in creative writing, studying under Marie Howe, Jo Ann Beard, and Afaa Michael Weaver. My work has been published in BoomerLitMag, Glint Literary, The Inflectionist Review, Lake Effect, The Louisville Review, Lunaris Review, The Opiate, Paragon Journal, Perceptions Magazine, Scarlet Leaf Review, Umbrella Factory Magazine, and others. I enjoy oil painting, traveling, and dogs.

Tim Moder

Sleeps between stacks of books and unfinished manuscripts. Holds annual meetings of temperamental Haiku painters. Once fell into a painting of the Grand Canyon.

Gathondu Mwangi

Gathondu Mwangi is a geographer who occasionally dabbles in poetry. When he is not ducking and diving, he is cartography-ing and scribbling. He spends his time between Massachusetts and Kenya, his home country.



Konstantinos Patrinos

Konstantinos Patrinos is an aspiring writer. When he's not writing poetry, he enjoys getting punched in the face during kickboxing classes. He teaches philosophy and political science in a Berlin high school, and dreams of the day his class doesn't fall asleep :(

Kyle Rackley

Kyle Rackley is an author of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. They live where the Platte and Missouri Rivers meet with their wife and kids. They hold a BFA in creative writing from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and their work has appeared in Menacing Hedge, Spank the Carp, The Bookends Review, Danse Macabre, and other journals and anthologies.

Cameron Rogers

Cameron Rogers is a photographer living in Arlington, MA.

Simra Sadaf

Simra Sadaf, from Chennai, India, has pursued her Master's in English Literature. With a Bachelor's degree in Sociology, she has an abundant knowledge about the workings of a society which she incorporates in her writings. Literature drives her spirit and words churn her soul.

Jessica Sarlin

Jessica Sarlin is a writer and artist from New Jersey. She is a polymath, which is her mom's polite way of saying that she still doesn't know what she wants to be when she grows up. In the meantime, she writes short things, tortures plants, raises eccentric children, and makes a mess in the kitchen.

### Kathryn Knight Sonntag

Kathryn Knight Sonntag is the author of the poetry collection *The Tree at the Center* (By Common Consent Press, 2019). She has recent and forthcoming poems in *Colorado Review*, *Ethel*, *Sublunary Review*, *Psaltery & Lyre*, *The Curator*, *Amethyst Review*, *The Inflectionist Review*, and the anthology *Blossom as the Cliffrose* (Torrey House Press, 2021). She works as a landscape architect in Salt Lake City. [kathrynknightsonntag.com](http://kathrynknightsonntag.com)

### Robert Steward

Robert Steward teaches English as a foreign language and lives in London. He likes drinking coffee, reading and going for walks. His dream is to sail endlessly around the Greek Islands with his wife.

### Edward Michael Supranowicz

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

### Richard Widerkehr

Richard Widerkehr's work has appeared in *Door Is A Jar*, *Writer's Almanac*, *Verse Daily*, and others. His third book, *At The Grace Cafe*, has come out from Main Street Rag. He reads poems for *Shark Reef Review*. He enjoys singing and playing his Taylor guitar.

### Nicole M. Wolverton

Nicole M. Wolverton was raised in the hinterlands of Pennsylvania and now lives just outside Philadelphia city limits in a 100-year-old house. She is a speechwriter by trade, a DIY handyman by necessity, and a gin aficionado by choice.

Andrena Zawinski

Andrena Zawinski, primarily a poet, also writes flash fiction and is an avid shutterbug. Her working class and feminist backgrounds slip into all her work, one way or the other.

## Submission Guidelines

Door Is A Jar Magazine is looking for well-crafted poetry, fiction, nonfiction, drama and artwork for our print and digital publication. Please read over these submission guidelines carefully before submitting any work.

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

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

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

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

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

For more information please visit  
[doorisajarmagazine.net](http://doorisajarmagazine.net)