

BLACK RABBIT

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This issue is dedicated to Isaiah Carpenter-Winch, whom we miss.

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From the Editors

The third edition of Black Rabbit, which is my favorite so far, came to be at a harrowing and despicable time: midterms. It was a fraught process, from which Caroline, Sasha, and I emerged very much scathed. But, in the words of my father, what does not kill us makes us stranger.

In this issue we the editors take a step closer to what we want Black Rabbit to be: a reflection of the artists that make it up. Black Rabbit No. 3 deals intimately with coded self image. Its stories, poems, and artwork, in two dimensions and in three, reflect back on their creators, their chosen styles and their imaginations of self, and, hopefully, reveal something about them. This is the calculus around which we designed the issue. I'd ask you, the reader, to keep it in mind.

Many thanks to Ruby Booz, an old friend, whose artwork this edition sports on its cover. Many thanks to our contributors, whose sweat and thought are the most vital part of this, and any, litmag.

David D Brown, V

Editor of Fiction and Poetry

Wither

Poetry

By Elizabeth Jensen

Now his wife is missing, missed shush
like sipping cognac and champagne when
he really wants grog or Grenache. Now he fills
to feel. Lips fat figs. In grave mouth search
swallows for her sugared skin—when sailboats
sang and urged, he gripped shores assured.

Now he reels tugboats, really tugging
Into the hollows of dim dinner.
But what goes down just gags him.
Defied the gulp, his solos level in his throat.
It's this deed, a put-up, put it up—

Ringling hands over dewed fingers heeded.
Until stove ovals purr supper needed.
Always, always wanting ways to wan,
to wane and wither her, he ate and ate without,

with her, the ghost. Now he sips her eclipse
and letups from cups, until it's that
superego vertigo, that

indigo tango,
ergo ago, go

oh.



We All Know What You Did Last Summer

Fiction

By Mark Budman

It's hard to defend a suburban house even if you have firearms and the invaders have no weapons except their teeth. People say that even their nails are trimmed. But their teeth are sharp and serrated.

My son-in-law ordered me into the attic with a Barrett M95 sniper rifle.

I said, "I'm a grandfather. I'm 92. I can't piss straight. Why do you think I can shoot straight?"

He said, "Didn't you tell me that your dad used to hunt until he was 102?"

I wanted to reply that it was a totally different place and time, but I just shrugged. Did I need to take my glasses off when peering through the gun's optics? Did I need to take a chamber pot up there with me? What would happen if I caused a fire?

My son-in-law and my daughter are armed with M16s on the first floor. They own the house, so they got the most dangerous place. On the second floor, my son mans an M60 machine gun, my wife and my son's two wives hold Uzi submachine guns. The babies A, B and C, the last line of defense at the doors of the attic, are armed with Browning Synergy shotguns. I guess the chances they would shoot us are smaller than them shooting the invaders. We shall see.

Just a month ago, before the invaders landed on our shores, the only weapon I owned was a folding knife, which I've never unfolded since '26.

Yesterday, an army truck dropped off the weapons at our and the neighbors' homes. Nothing fancy. No laser rifles, no direct

energy weapons, no personal shields.

I asked the sergeant, where is the army, National Guard and police? He said that the army is stuck in Korea and Turkey, the National Guard defends the cities, and the local cops defend the mayor's and the councilmen's houses. We have to trust the sergeant because all other means of communications are down.

We spent all day yesterday shooting our weapons.

Now, I see the first invader running out of the woods toward the house.

The invader males (no one has ever seen their female) look just like our males. But they have the third, wisdom eye on their foreheads, and they run as fast as cheetahs. And their teeth are three shades whiter than ours, as if they have better dental insurance.

I aim and shoot. One shot, one kill. This is the motto of us, snipers.

Shot. Load. Shot. Load. Shot. Once, twice, thrice. All misses. At least I'm consistent.

My son opens up with the M60, and I can barely hear the rest of the weapons over its heavy barking.

The invader keeps running until he's inside. Then it all stops. I shout into my headset: are you OK?

My wife replies that the babies got him. I watch my son and his wives, Lady D and Lady E, pulling the body out of the house. His white robe is peppered with red dots.

Then I see two invaders running. I aim carefully. I get the first from the second try. I hope it was me. Doesn't matter, anyway. Someone else got the second guy just a few feet from the door.

Then three of them run. I wonder what will happen first: will I go deaf from the noise of the shooting or will the invaders get me?

We kill all three before they enter the house. At least they have no strategy. So much for the wisdom eye.

Then four of them run. Wow. Maybe they do have a strategy. I open up again. We kill three, but the fourth one enters the house. I can hear a woman's cry above the din of the weapons. I unholster my Glock side arm, unfold my knife and hobble downstairs.

The invader lies dead.

“He bit Lady D,” my wife shouts. Lady D moans. The women are tending to the wound on her shoulder. I wonder if the bite is poisonous. Nothing I can do about it.

I relieve myself in the bathroom and go upstairs. As soon as I settle, I see five of them running toward us. I get the first one with the first shot. I'm getting good at this. Maybe I'll re-learn how to pee straight, too.

I wipe the sweat off my brow with two hands and reload the rifle with the other two. It will be a long, hard summer. Just like the summer of 2026 when we invaded.





Fractal Space by Meiyi (Maggie) Guo

Why I Left the Mixer with Tyson the Mailroom Clerk

Fiction

By Daniel R. Jones

...because I'd already unpaired from Jayce as soon as we were through the double-doors.

Jayce knew I don't like swanky cocktail parties, but he made me come under the guise of networking, read: self-aggrandizement and he was soon in semi-circle with his associates, wagging that silver tongue I fell for two or so years back.

And there was Jayce, neck deep in an anecdote about a sales-call down south, lurching forward in his easy chair like a hunter waiting to pounce. He tells it like he's letting them in on a secret, and the half-dozen or so are just eating it up, just waiting for him to be out with it.

But this is the eighth iteration I've heard of this story, and sure, it gets more polished every time, his gestures wider, his modulation punchier, but there I was, white-knuckled during the pregnant pause, holding my breath, just gritting my teeth as he lets out the punch-line: Make your mind up and mind your make up!

And the circle is erupting in guffaws and women from each of the circles on the room's periphery are turning to see what the commotion is about and men out of earshot are smirking like they were in on the joke, but they're really just embarrassed they'd chosen the wrong company to keep and they wish they'd heard the line-heard-round-the-mixer for themselves.

But because I'm a lady, I closed my eyes before I rolled them.

So, here comes Tyson, who I found out later was the mailroom clerk. Turns out, he wasn't on "the list," but he managed to slip in unannounced by wearing the same garb as the caterers: black slacks

paired with a white button down, a black bow-tie, and shiny black oxford shoes. This actually makes me like him more, but anyhow he must've somehow seen the eye roll.

He asks why I don't find Jayce funny and I say, "He's my boyfriend, and I've heard that one before."

And he wonders aloud "How can Adam be at ease with his rib wandering 'round the room without him?"

"You're clever, but I'm just playing from the script," I say. "At a cocktail party, a man's worth is judged by the number of people he can greet when he walks in. A woman's is by the number of people she can ignore."

Tyson had a laugh at that, and it felt good to know I'd made an impression.

"But really, why aren't you with him?" Tyson asked.

And I guess it was the whiskey sours, but soon I was railing on about how Jayce put on such a good act, and I fell for the character he plays, but a time comes when a woman wants to meet the man behind the mask, and come to find out there's a mask behind the mask and he's masks all the way down.

"He sounds like a headache I had last year," Tyson said, with the perfect balance of empathy and apathy.

I wondered, for a minute, if Jayce would question me for talking to Tyson. But even if he did manage to find the time to cast a glance my way, he'd figure I was just chatting with "the help." Then as if he read my mind-

"I like your dress."

This surprised me, because it was just a mustard-colored off the shoulder maxi dress I picked up off the rack at Macy's. But I was feeling flirty so I decided to test him.

“It’s not too suggestive?” I asked.

“It is.”

And just when I was ready to write him off, he said:

“It has to be suggestive. If it’s art then it has to be suggestive..”

“Please,” I said “Elaborate.”

“I think everything in the physical world has to have an artistic analogue. There is no preference or taste or desire that isn’t a metaphor. So, all fashion is suggestive—whether of sensuality or a particular aesthetic. And I’d venture to guess nothing is so repulsive as a man whose idea of ‘fashion’ is a navy-blue button down and pleated khakis.”

He nodded toward Jayce.

“I guess Jayce prefers function over fashion,” I shrugged.

“No, it’s worse than that. Loving a pair of carpenter jeans is functional. Utilitarianism, at least, is an ideal. Some people believe in that ideall. But having no connotation—believing in nothing—that’s unforgivable.”

“How does a guy as smart as you not get invited to this party?” I asked.

“I may be smart, but we can’t all be hotshot salesmen. Some of us just have to be regular Joes.”

Tyson stops to think before saying, “Sprezzatura.”

Which of course, I’m unfamiliar with, so he explains:

“Sprezzatura is an old Italian word that means ‘a practiced, rehearsed nonchalance.’”

And that’s the moment I realized that’s Jayce to the “t,” and with Tyson having cut so clearly to the heart of the matter, he was in my good graces, which is why, when he suggested we leave the

party, I wasn't indisposed. But I wanted to be sure, so I asked what he meant. I was trying not to hear more than I heard. I'm a kept woman, after all.

And he said, "Self-imposed naiveté is a poor stand in for innocence."

And it just sounded so clever; he seemed like the kind of guy that Jayce should've been; and speaking of Jayce, I don't even think he noticed when I left, but Tyson was so kind and his hair was so dark and his eyes were so light and I know it's not the first time it's happened and I should be sorry but there comes a time when it just no longer makes sense to say "This isn't me."

Contributors

Ruby Booz is a visual artist from Boston, Massachusetts. She studies Industrial Design at the Rhode Island School of Design and is currently based in Providence, Rhode Island. Ruby's work includes figurative and abstract drawing and painting as well as product design and conceptual sculpture.

Mark Budman was born in the former Soviet Union. His writing appeared in Five Points, PEN, American Scholar, Huffington Post, World Literature Today, Daily Science Fiction, Mississippi Review, Virginia Quarterly, The London Magazine (UK), McSweeney's, Sonora Review, Another Chicago, Sou'wester, Southeast Review, Mid-American Review, Painted Bride Quaterly, Short Fiction (UK), and elsewhere. He is the publisher of the flash fiction magazine Vestal Review. His novel My Life at First Try was published by Counterpoint Press. He co-edited flash fiction anthologies from Ooligan Press and Persea Books/Norton.

Meiyi (Maggie) Guo is an artist and industrial designer studying in Rhode Island School of Design. She is currently experimenting with an array of materials including sheet metal, wood, paper, and foam, etc. Her artworks vary from identity explorations to human-centered designs. Meiyi enjoys working with soft curves and elegant forms. And she believes that being sensitive to materials and being open to accidents may strengthen her creative process.

Elspeth Jensen earned her BA in Creative Writing from Western Washington University, and is currently pursuing her MFA in poetry from George Mason University. Her writing can be found or is forthcoming in journals such as the Bellevue Literary Review, Rust + Moth, Gone Lawn, The Midway Review, The Penn Review, and elsewhere. She is also the Poetry Editor for Sweet Tree Review and the Assistant Poetry Editor for So to Speak.

Daniel R. Jones is a writer from Indianapolis, IN. He's currently an MFA candidate at Lindenwood University. Previously, he's had work published in over a dozen journals, newspapers, and magazines, including Aphelion, Parody Poetry, South Bend Tribune, In the Bend, StarLine, and Time of Singing. He was a 2017 nominee for the Rhysling Award with the Speculative Fiction Poetry Association and won an award for best poem in the 2013

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