

The broken c | i T | Y



DIY

The broken



Summer 2024 Issue 34

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In this issue:



Welcome to *The Broken City's* Do It Yourself collection.

Our writers are making, fixing, baking, fishing and ignoring all the instruction manuals. "We'll figure something out" is their clarion call for doing it your way.

Cover art:

"Brightening a Street"

For most of her life, **Edna Garte** has juggled art, writing and a little music—combined with teaching until her 2014 retirement from Oakland Community College in Michigan. Her exhibition venues have included the Southfield Public Library, Waterford Public Library and Waterford Arts Council. Now living in Maryland, she's enjoying full-time attention to the arts. Recently, she's been exploring water-based, mixed media. More of her work can be seen at facebook.com/edna.garte.

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The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2024 edition: "**Greetings, Starfighter.**"

For those who weren't yet alive and/or watching movies in the mid 1980s, that means the magazine is running a **video game issue**. We want to hear about anything game related, from the C64 to the N64 and into the present. Esports! Tron! Minecraft! We dare you to write something interesting about Pong.

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, illustrations and photography to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com.

Deadline is: December 1, 2024. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

After the St. Petersburg Grand Prix

Nicholas Finch

For Wallace, for Dad

My son builds a racetrack. Snipped bike tubes flank a chicane, tightly rolled up shirts border a long sweeper turn as barriers. I remind my son that his grandfather once raced St. Pete before I was born. *Here's a picture of you together when you were a baby.* Blocks and cutout slivers of box barricade the straightaway then skirt

a double apex. The track itself is mostly carpet and cardboard where it banks for a hairpin turn. We practice racing noises with our lips, a sound like armies of bees, how to change the pitch to shift through gears. Pencils mark out the pits; the carefully balanced hardbacks construct a paddock populated by a crew of R2-

D2, C3PO, and a harem of battle droids. St. Pete is a city circuit, so we pile paperbacks atop one another for skyscrapers, hotels, condos. LEGO men, women, mutants, aliens, DC and Marvel superheroes, wizards, and robots adorn the bindings of the book buildings. Little bits of string line the

staggered start. A phantasmagoria of toy cars makes up the competitor pool: Bburago 1:43 scale diecast models of Ferrari, Red Bull, and Mercedes Formula 1s—1:64 diecasts of Indys—fantastical Hot Wheels—little tin nondescripts from CVS—Star Wars speeders—knockoff Nascars—Lightning McQueen

and the attractive Pixar Porsche. *Who is going to win?* I ask. He points to Pato O'Ward's open-top diecast with two LEGO figurines nearby. *Is that my dad racing? Are we*

the toys next to the car watching? My son replies incredulously, *No, I'm the one who's racing. That's Han Solo and some builder guy. I don't know where you are, Dad.*

Nicholas Finch is a writer and educator in Southwest Florida. Most recently, his translations of Josip Pupačić's poetry appeared in Faultlines. Most importantly, he and his partner have the most incredible 7-year-old son. Finch's writing and other projects can be found at finchandcrown.substack.com.

Farmer Wants a Wife™: My Network Pitch

Lynn Aprill

To begin, let's stop
trotting out the Gen Z princesses
and Midwest daddy's girls

greeting the new farm day
in peep-toe wedges
and mini crop tops,

ready to stab the competition
with a conveniently packed
stiletto. Instead,

let's make this
a marriage tournament
appropriate to the venue—

testing which prospective Mrs.
can dash to the garden,
pick and can

a dozen quarts of green beans,
wring the neck of the slowest chicken
and turn it into pot pie or stew,

chase down the errant calf,
race to finish mowing the lawn
before the next storm,

and fall across
the finish line
of his bed,

exhausted
(but not
TOO exhausted)—

an agricultural Squid Game
where the winner
gets the rock.

That's how you find the farmer a real wife.

Lynn Aprill is an award-winning poet and retired educator whose work has appeared in Copperfield Review Quarterly, Sky Island Review, Willows Wept Review, Pure Slush, and others. Channeling Matriarchs, her first chapbook with Finishing Line Press, was published in August 2021. She resides with her husband and various dogs on 40 acres in Northeast Wisconsin. Her work can be found at lynnaprill.weebly.com.

The Elemental Parental

Addison T. Schoeman

The art of soupmaking starts
with a cold onion of distrust

and ends with two images of a face
superimposed to create a chronicle

of flavor, impish on the fungiform
tongue, little pitchfork limbs

saying "drink up, Drainy! You're
our silver dish" that floats

behind your eyes and collects
residue. Blend it. Put the leeks

and the potatoes in the bowl
and blend them. It's the way

of all root vegetables to shout
"Absalom!" as they grind. Don't

listen. Family life is little more
than this era of descriptive vigilance:

child, diaper, feces, blood.
Strap your little idiot in,

the soup's getting cold.

*Addison T. Schoeman teaches at
Columbia University, where he
completed an MFA and served as
poetry editor for the Columbia
Journal. His work has appeared
in Eunoia Review and Bicoastal
Review.*

Building Ezra House *Eugene Stevenson*

A place to write may be carved out of the space that surrounds, invisible, or, ideally, visible walls erected, not to keep the outside world out, but keep the inside world in. Ideas want to escape, that is their nature. After a fleeting appearance, witnessing the observer take note or not, the idea takes wing & flies elsewhere.

A place to write may have light, window light preferably, the framed visual that floods the room, provides a place for eyes to wander from the page, pull on the idea's tail to keep it close longer. Light is the thing, light from café window, apartment window, office window, hotel window, airplane window, studio window. Light, necessary light, why, to see.

A place to write may have a chair, desk, books, pens & laptop, notebook ready, music, objects made, photographed, painted, sculpted, once upon a time, to anchor an idea close at hand, to keep it if it must fly, flying in circles about head, heart, hands & fingers from which words take shape on the page, on the screen, on the inside of the eyes in translation.

A place to write may offer refuge inside the convolutions of the brain, free from skeptical predations, the doubting, the questionable, the dismissive, the judging, all that would turn the work into so much *frou-frou*. Perhaps, the work is in finding that space, growing that space, embracing that space, & finally, living in that space to write.

Eugene Stevenson, son of immigrants, father of expatriates, is author of the collection, Heart's Code (Kelsay Books, 2024), & the chapbook, The Population of Dreams (Finishing Line Press, 2022). His poems have appeared in Atlanta Review, Book of Matches, Door is a Jar, Gyroscope Review, Instant Noodles, San Antonio Review & Slipstream Magazine, among others, & have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. More at eugenestevenson.com.

follow the instructions *Geoffrey Aitken*

she suggested
i turn it around
and stop fighting it
as if it were a bull

run with it
as if holding onto
the horns

before it became too late

and we found ourselves
back in that shop
seeking assistance.

so i used a little strength
took calculated risk

became judiciously reckless

knowing
it was built for neo-moderns

and it was a flatpack

with clear instructions
for do it yourself
assembly.

it should be so much easier.

Geoffrey Aitken writes on Adelaide's unceded Kurna land, and is an awarded minimalist poet communicating his "lived experience disability" for publishers (AUS, UK, US, HR, CAN, FR & CN). Recently, Verge Anthology (Monash Uni AUS) & ZiNDaily (HR), soon at, Social Alternatives (AUS). Nominated Best of the Net in 2022.

Mangoes

Camille McCarthy

1.

Mangoes were on sale today, stringy
Mexican imports I sliced in a grid and
scraped from the skin and added to my

imitation of a lassi, too sweet, lacking
that sour, fermented fizz, and I remembered
when you and your sister flew from Delhi

to London with two crates of
mangoes and the racist customs officer jerked
them from her—she was

pregnant—confiscating them, and you
emailed me *I hope he gets sick from them*,
from the mangoes you were bringing

to your relatives there,
nectar taste of the subcontinent
at the peak of ripeness.

2.

We met one last time before leaving Delhi
for opposite coasts of a country
we were estranged from, at that

new mall in Gurgaon. I turned
in a circle on gleaming marble
looking for you; you crested

an escalator, grinning at me, sun at your
shoulders, a snapshot I return to
often, but probably plagiarized from *Krrish* or

another cheesy movie. We wandered aimlessly
and I tried to memorize every moment,
uneventful until we emerged into an encompassing heat

and an ashy beggar girl, maybe twelve
years old, chased after me, hands
outstretched, leaving sticky

charcoal smears on my pant-leg, while you yelled,
laughingly, at me to *Be less white!* and
we searched for your car. I wonder

if that girl has her own children now, sent
out to cars stuck at red lights with
trinkets and rag cloths in hand.

On the way to drop me off
you played “Lonely Holiday” by the Old 97s, and now
it’s summer again, mango season in a pandemic,

when all my friends
feel imaginary and far away.

Camille McCarthy lives in Asheville, North Carolina. Her work has been published in the Great Smokies Review, Typishly Literary Magazine, Still: the Journal, Absynthe Magazine, Quiet Diamonds 2024, and La Piccioletta Barca, among others. She was a finalist for the 2023 Sally Buckner Emerging Writers' Fellowship and a winner of Carolina Woman Magazine's 2023 Annual Writing Contest.

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee **I Went to Alaska on TV**

And it was not cold. It was not scary.

It was beautiful, with mountains I could count on,
with remoteness I could dwell in, not like loneliness,

such as the loneliness of a suburb, where there are people
I see but never meet. In Alaska, animals will roam the same
forests as I will. Birds will swoop in my direction.

The bear will likely saunter as it usually does, not paying
much attention to me. I will chop wood, bait
a hook, learn how to load a gun for hunting, which

I swore I'd never do when I lived in the lower 48.
I'll get used to the cold, relish the sun when it sets down
over the wilderness. I will breathe the clearest air

I've ever known, smell real pine and grass. I swear
I will enjoy clearing snow, building a fire, gutting
fish, skinning a moose. I'll fatigue with the wildest

of nature. I'll forget the ways of people in my previous
state. Few of them will visit me, but neither did they before.
I'll actually use an outhouse. Actually bake bread.

Learn how to fix a flat. Pump gas. I'll get muscles
I never had, brains I never used. I'll gaze at
a mountain in real time, be amazed at the curious snowfall.

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee is the author of two award-winning collections, Intersection on Neptune (The Poetry Press of Press Americana, 2019), winner of the Prize Americana for Poetry 2018, and On the Altar of Greece (Gival Press, 2006), winner of the 2005 Gival Press Poetry Award and recipient of a 2007 Eric Hoffer Book Award: Notable for Art Category. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals internationally, including The Dalhousie Review, Existere - Journal of Arts and Literature, Feminist Studies, The Massachusetts Review, and Vallum: contemporary poetry. Her website is donnaigelagotislee.com.

Midday

Abhishek Udaykumar

Yellow tumblers stood up to stretch and catch a glimpse of the sulphate heaven. Like the wooden spatulas and the crusting batter, hung beside the summer window and the loud nakedness of heat. Happier now, she waltzed between the kitchen cut-out and the wheatlike lawn, finding herself framed inside each moment—as the shapes of sky between the foliage began to melt, so the trees could copulate in peace.

She could hear someone unscrewing a rose from her rotund bush. By the grouchy gravel near the sandstone wall that ran around her house, the mysterious robber hidden inside the bush—agitating her flower dome like a beehive. She reclined. In her grilled veranda, in her light pink dress, as her big blue sofa held her like a glove, she fell asleep with her cold chamomile beverage and the scent of sandalwood in hair.

A classic is that which stands the test of time, she argued. Like *A Raisin in the Sun*, her student replied, but she grew momentarily fatigued, before the breeze set in, and they watered their tongues so they could breathe. Yes, she said, though I suggest you take a walk and find something suitable to you. A bird squashed a mulberry and pasted it along the compound. A leaf fell on its babylike head, scaring it away forever. She spent the evening mixing her flaky white with her crimson lake, and her crimson lake with her flaky white. Before she rolled her canvas into a cylinder and slipped into an eloquent anguish. He returned with a pot of foaming river; clearly, he was mired inside his lettered head.

The night was sultry. She wandered in her insomniac outfit, searching for air in the stagnant bushland, down the suburban paths dotted with glaring cats. She reached the little cubic grocery store blinking by itself in a quiet lane. Blue and white like a boring train. The storekeeper was winding up for the day; he waited patiently for her to circle the aisles, inspect the instant noodles and whisper to the oracle refrigerator. A bus tilted against the sidewalk and spilled a passenger. An apple spilled from the fruit shelf into the bread shelf. She sat against the fridge and shut her eyes, cooling her neck as memories danced before her in a war of

lights. The dead keep coming back, she thought, even if they are still alive. The street was empty again; the storekeeper stood at the end of the aisle, telling her about the television in his neighbour's car.

She melted her pastels and added an ounce of linseed oil. She felt like a witch when she experimented with pigments. The house was long and hollow like a harmonica, she laughed and imagined the music her voice would make through its many cavities, to the deaf and distant ears of the world. It sometimes took her days to stop drinking, and years to start again. She rolled about her rooms, and across the yard under the obtuse evening sun, like a pinball stuck inside its maze, with her mustard yellow sienna and Prussian blue green. A lot of people never saw the beach, she said to herself. She wasted her colours in her disillusion and dug her sweet potatoes with disdain. Her student talked about Nietzsche and Rothko and Expressionism, as she painted her fingernails, not bothering to share her lemonade.

She combed her grass and looked for snails and grasshoppers playing in the shade. The dogs gathered outside her gate and the breeze shook the trees over her roof, freeing them from one another and letting them walk down to the curdled lake. I want you to draw first and then paint, she said, her voice was harsh despite her milky eyes, she was tired of his swirling, aimless paintbrush. I just try to break the form, he said, and allow my colours to discover their voice. She scowled into her brass bowl, an idealist at eighteen, kids were smarter these days. You must make an outline first, she sighed, it will improve the quality of your figures. The day felt like a poorly baked bun, with no pores or colour; as the sun erased the earth's skin, turning it into a quarry.

Her pigments were hazy and stuck to her sheets like an ancient ointment. It made her paintings ghastly as they climbed up her walls, she hated them but she painted all day till she was too hungry to cook and too tired to eat. Her money had turned into a dusty dream; the gasoline in her car didn't take her beyond the book store, she moved her sofa indoors and lay on the cool white floor. Lunch was

arduous and accompanied with ice. Dawn was cool enough for a stroll; there was a rich neighbour down the road who asked her for a painting when he saw her. It was midday again; bastard, she said, thinking about his lanterns that kept her awake at night. And her student came along with his arrogant outlines and asked her for a new “idea,” despite her aversion to abstraction.

Her yellow tumblers crumbled as they observed the sun like watchmen. The cookie dough fermented under the kitchen window, waiting for her to eat and be happy again. She plaited her hair and painted with her knives, slash-

ing her canvas gently with her angelic whites. A cinnamon brown filled her fields and drank the blue out of her sky, with stout yellow houses sitting like cheese in the hinterland. She made clumps of people in the roundabout town, and ran her brush along their fingers with care. Her student wouldn't last beyond the summer, and something had to fall from the sky. She would litter her house with art and stand on top of it like a flag. It was still better than the city, she told herself. She cried about the roses and wrote a bad poem, then she went to bed.

Abhishek Udaykumar is a writer, filmmaker and painter from India. He graduated from Royal Holloway University of London with English and Creative Writing. His work explores the distinct characteristics of natural ecosystems and their intersection with civilizations—informed by visual culture and carnivalesque tales. He has been published in several literary journals across different countries and has made thirteen independent films and a diverse collection of art.

We'll Figure Something Out

Erin Jamieson

The year I turned 16, our refrigerator went out.

My mother, already working as a clerk at a dollar store by day and an activities assistant for BrookHaven Nursing Care most nights, just smiled.

We'll figure something out.

It was the same thing she'd told me when I was ten and our car broke down. She calculated that, with an extra shift or two, we could afford a bus pass to get by until she saved up enough money for a used car.

And it was the same thing she told me when I wanted a birthday party like all the other kids in my fifth-grade class had. She baked a pound cake from scratch, crafted a piñata from an off-brand Cheerios box, and shaped crowns for me and my two friends out of newspaper.

“We'll figure something out” meant we'd make something out of nothing. Do it ourselves because, despite how many hours she worked, we were always falling behind

on bills. I knew her work didn't pay well. That she dreamed of going to college. And that anything she might have saved for college, she spent on our basic needs.

Bonuses were saved—not for her college education, but mine.

But I was also 16, and this time, I didn't agree.

What are we going to do, live off ramen and Goldfish crackers? Never eat anything that needs to be refrigerated?

My mom probably should have yelled at me for that. She wiped her forehead and turned our standing fan on a higher setting. In the middle of a heat wave in Atlanta, I'd been spending more and more time at my friend's house and at her complex's pool, because fans did not make up for the fact we couldn't afford actual AC.

I'm going to the store, my mom said after a moment.

She didn't ask if I wanted to shop with her.

She and I both already knew the answer.

Continued next page

My mom returned not with ramen and other shelf-stable food, but a lime green cooler and a grin. Her dark hair was extra curly from the humidity. There were faint lines under her eyes—a sign she'd known about the refrigerator and stayed up, worrying about it.

Here we go. We can keep food cool this way.

Coolers only last a few hours.

My mom smiled. *Not if we keep replenishing the ice.* She explained how there was a food bank, supplying ice and water for everyone who needed it. There were some power outages not far from us, and they wanted to make sure everyone stayed cool.

I wore my hair over my eyes, hoping no one would recognize us. I had a talent for finding clothes under ten dollars at Goodwill, or at garage sales, and even though I'm pretty sure no one would mistake me for being rich, nobody—not even my best friend—knew how poor we were.

We spent most of the week walking back and forth between the food bank and home. While my mom worked, I searched for rummage and garage sales near us. It took me until the end of the week before I found one that was selling appliances.

Mom! We have to get there before 8 am!

Thank goodness she had Saturday mornings off. I hopped in the car, eager as a kid at Christmas. And there it was: an off-white, almost yellow refrigerator at the curbside. When we opened it, I was overwhelmed by the stench of old

tuna fish and spoiled milk. I had to breathe into my t-shirt to keep myself from gagging.

We'll take it.

We were warned it was noisy when it ran. That no cleaning or anything else would be done by them. My mom handed them their asking price—probably worth at least a day's work. The owner—maybe guilty how much he'd ripped us off—strapped it to the top of his car and dropped it off at our 600-square-foot house.

We got to work. Scrubbing, airing it out, scrubbing more, more until our arms ached and there was only a hint of tuna.

The refrigerator was louder than a little noisy. It groaned, moaned, rattled.

We'll—my mom began.

Figure something out, I muttered. But then I looked at the clean shelves, our food resting in them. And I decided I'd help. We researched reasons why a refrigerator would make so much noise. I don't even remember what the solution or problem ended up being—only that we were able to ease it to a soft hum, one that was deafened by our fan anyway.

It would be much later before I realized that these DIY projects were what stitched us together.

That together, we took others' trash and made something not beautiful, but needed.

Erin Jamieson's writing has been published in over 80 literary magazines, and garnered two Pushcart Prize nominations. She is the author of four poetry chapbooks, including Fairytales (Bottle Cap Press). Her debut novel, Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams, was published by Type Eighteen Books.

The Water

Stephanie Suesan Smith

"Dad, it was awful. You were in Europe for the week. I fed the horses and dumped the water trough. The water wouldn't come on. I went to the windmill and the elbow joint under the tank was broken. I got it off and went to the plumbing store and the jerk teased me when I asked for another one like it. I got the joint and yes, I remembered the primer and glue. I went back and put it back together. It leaked a little but worked. Finally, I could water the horses. It took forever."

"You fixed something?"

Stephanie Suesan Smith has a Ph.D. in psychology that she mainly uses to train her dog. She has been a freelance writer since 1991. Dr. Smith has been a master gardener since 2001 and writes extensively on gardening. You can see her writing samples at allaboutgrowingguides.com.

J.I. Kleinberg

*to make
a rainy day,*

approach the
point of
expressed
empathy

conjure

thick

lichen

Capture the
syrup

**THAT'S
RAIN**

An artist, poet, and freelance writer, J.I. Kleinberg lives in Bellingham, Washington, USA, and on Instagram @jikleinberg. Her visual poems have been published in print and online journals worldwide. Chapbooks of her visual poems, *how to pronounce the wind* (Paper View Books) and *Desire's Authority* (Ravenna Press Triple Series No. 23), were published in 2023; *she needs the river* (Poem Atlas) was published in 2024.

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