





THE GUITAR DEVIL

Stephen Philip Druce

I strummed upon
the riverbank to
serenade a star,

it twinkled back as
if to thank us -
me and my guitar,

and in a black sky
turned to red, the
devil spoke to me
and said -

"hey I heard you
play in hell, you
pluck a mean axe
man - so well,

I play myself a
little too - so
a proposition just
for you,

a six string
challenge competition -
a head to head for
the best musician,

to be the king
of rock n' roll, just
beat me or I'll
take your soul".

His talk was tough
as if he'd won,
I called his bluff -
now bring it on!,

He launched his
flying v machine - an
electric repertoire routine,

he funk'd the groove
with Wah Wah pedal -
a lightning shred
of heavy metal,

he jazzed it
good in fingerstyle -
the happy chords to
make me smile,

he slapped the bass
with disco dashes -
soloed in flamenco flashes,

each string stroked
with sublime feel -
a delta blues for
my wounds to heal,

with sublime bends
in blurred contortion -
he lit the skies with
flames of distortion,

and then with animal attack -
he played one handed and
behind his back,

he said "you're done -
I've got you beat,
I'm too good man -
you can't compete",

I said "you're good
but you're not in my class,
you want my soul? -
go and kiss my ass".



Dream (at Nineteen)

James Croal Jackson

In North Olmsted
visiting Noelle,
I bring Summer with me.

I want to appear
taken, and surprisingly
she plays the role.

There is a food line
like at Central Catholic.
We fill red trays together.

Summer sits on the same
side of the booth as me.
She crosses her leg over mine,

rests her head on my shoulder.
I put my hand on her side,
my body clouded with want.

When I wake it is in a house
that stands empty in a field
I have passed in Ohio, weathered

wood and broken windows.
A place I should not yet know,
but recognize completely.



We make music while the world is dismantled around us

William Bortz

this quiet is what we've begged for
we have scraped and scrapped, pleaded
for it

the reflection of dusk splintering in your eyes
the acid clouds, the green hue of tomorrow, taking
form as a wish

I've had my share of poisons, smokes
beneath streetlights, clear liquor out of
plastic cups

your hand in mine is a small bird
I have watched it yearn—its small wings
inhaling before the first flutter

I cut down a tree to get the highest apple
it was sweet, but I was alone
you would have stopped me

nothing can grow in the dirt
and yet, we plant
we sing to the seed

our voices dripping, heavy
I'd give any air left to this—
to belief

we sing because we are here
from seemingly
nothing



views of the heart that tends to see

Allyson Kling

Observances of the silhouettes
dancing gaily though white linen curtains
as I kick and shuffle the snow beneath me
making my footsteps blurred
but my direction quite obvious.

Over the silence of the heavy fluff
and the sealed, wreathed door there
the clinging of sparkling glasses be be heard
along with distant, warm words here and there:
“Darling... marvelous... truly...”
The silhouettes embrace into one another.

Shimmering lights against frosted brick
music of kinship from within muted behind them
humming tunes from a life I have forgotten to live.

I stall in my tracks and I gaze there,
the snow atop my boots slowly chilling my toes,
and my eyes shine as the lights do, I promise...
May I open the door?



Residue

Natalie Gachoka

You hover over the sink, water rushing over your trembling hands as you scrub away layers of skin marring your palms. Artificial scents cling to the air like fungus, thickening with each pump of soap. The red ink has made a home, burrowing deeper into every crease and contour of your hands. You scrub harder; skin peels away. The water burns against raw scrapes, but the red will not relent. The water swirls crimson down the drain, staining the steel.

I had to do it

You whisper into the drain. It does not respond.

You know I had to do it

You clench the counter until the faded paint clings to your dirty nails. Your knees buckle onto the hardwood floor. Water pours over the sink's edge, drenching the floor and soaking into your clothes.

He would have killed me.

You say these things to reassure yourself, but the words fall flat. The audience does not believe you, no matter how hard you try to convince them.

That's not true

You yell. But what's not true? Your performance or your confession?

Neither, I am not a murderer

You yell again, but to whom? You look at your hands again. The proof is carved into your skin. Because you know, no matter how hard you scrub, how hard you pray, how well you lie, your hands will always remind you of what you are.

Shut up

You cover your ears, trying to drown out the outside world. It's just you and your hands.

Stop

Stop from what? You claw at your ears, trying to rip them from your head. Do you think that will make you feel better? But we both know you enjoyed that; you always wanted to do it.

I did not, you don't know what you are talking about

Turn and look at him, then. Look at how his corpse rots into food for the rats. Look at his lifeless eyes sear into you. Look.

I can't

Look!

You can't make me

I can and I will.

You look at him, the man who gave you everything. You know he was flawed, but that does not matter. He was trying to get better, but you weren't listening. It wasn't his fault for hitting you. It was yours. If only you had just been better. Why did you bring up leaving? Where would you even go? You have nothing. He did everything for you. And you were ungrateful enough to kill him. How could you do this? You bitch. You slut. You whore.

I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry

You repeat those words over and over again, each one growing more frantic, becoming more pathetic than you already are.

I'm sorry I will never do it again I'll always be with you

You crawl to him. You touch his chest like it might still rise. You wrap his body into yours, becoming one, cradling him like a newborn. The smell of iron feels like vanilla. You know he will always be a part of you. You know you can't wash me away. Dead or alive, we will always be together.



the piano player

Daria P.

there's a man playing the piano
who traveled from the eastern wetlands to the western concrete,
from the monochrome room to the crowd-pleasing screen:
not silver anymore, unlike his hair

a trace of one more star
that shined before my birth
and burned before i got to know it

i'll cry if he reiterates the theme,
he does,
before the screen becomes a black dwarf,
its light flickers in my tears

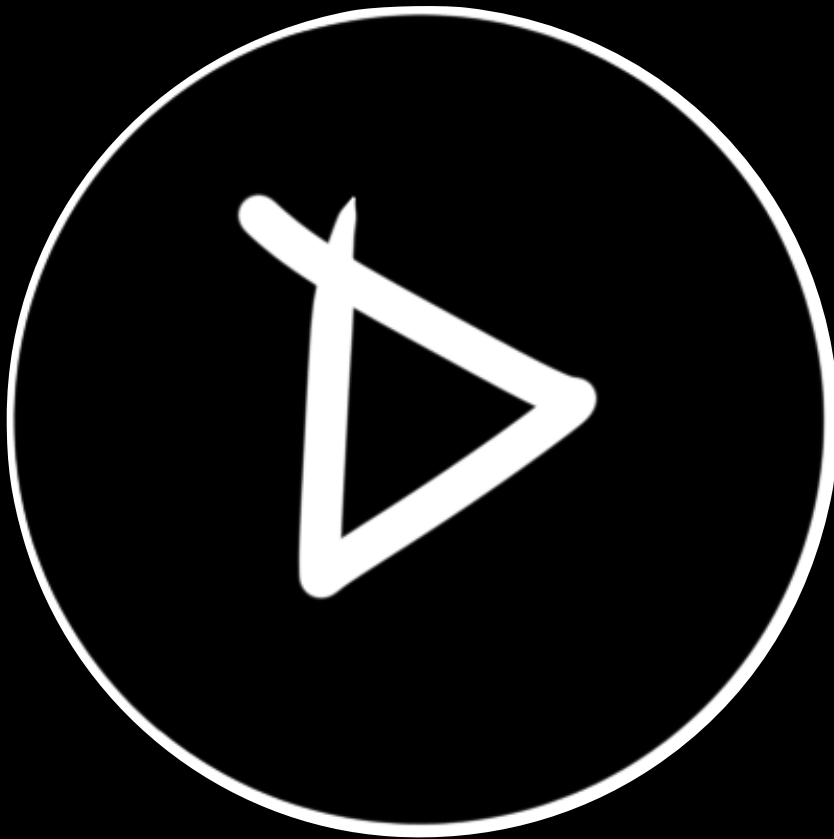


Anxio-threat

Scott C. Holstad

Strangers frighten me.
They remind me of you.
Blood-like-wine spills
into the cracked porcelain
tub. Cramped quarters.
Essence of fire, garlic
and gunpowder. Sweaty
palms and images
of the Diva rock me.
Is it too late? If so,
what of it?

Strangers frighten me.
They hover, crowd, leer.
I dance puppeted steps
while killing myself
hundreds of times
over and over in an
untended loop.
I have sicknesses
to battle and too
with you always
there waiting
at the end.



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Book: [A Shrewsbury Poet](#)

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Book: [I'll Leave a Light On For You](#)

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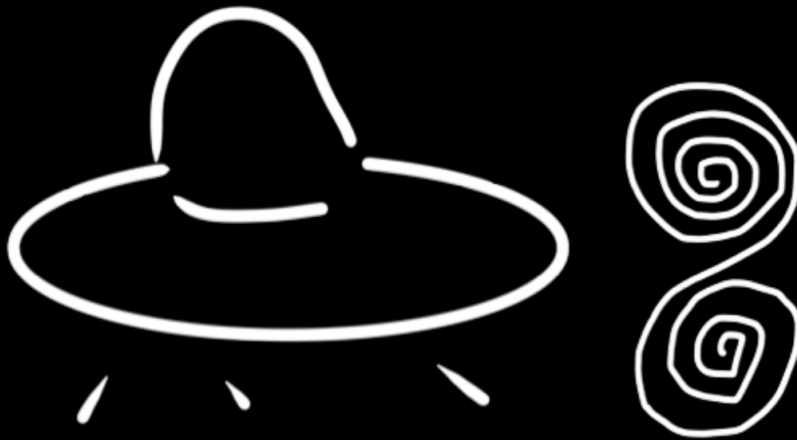
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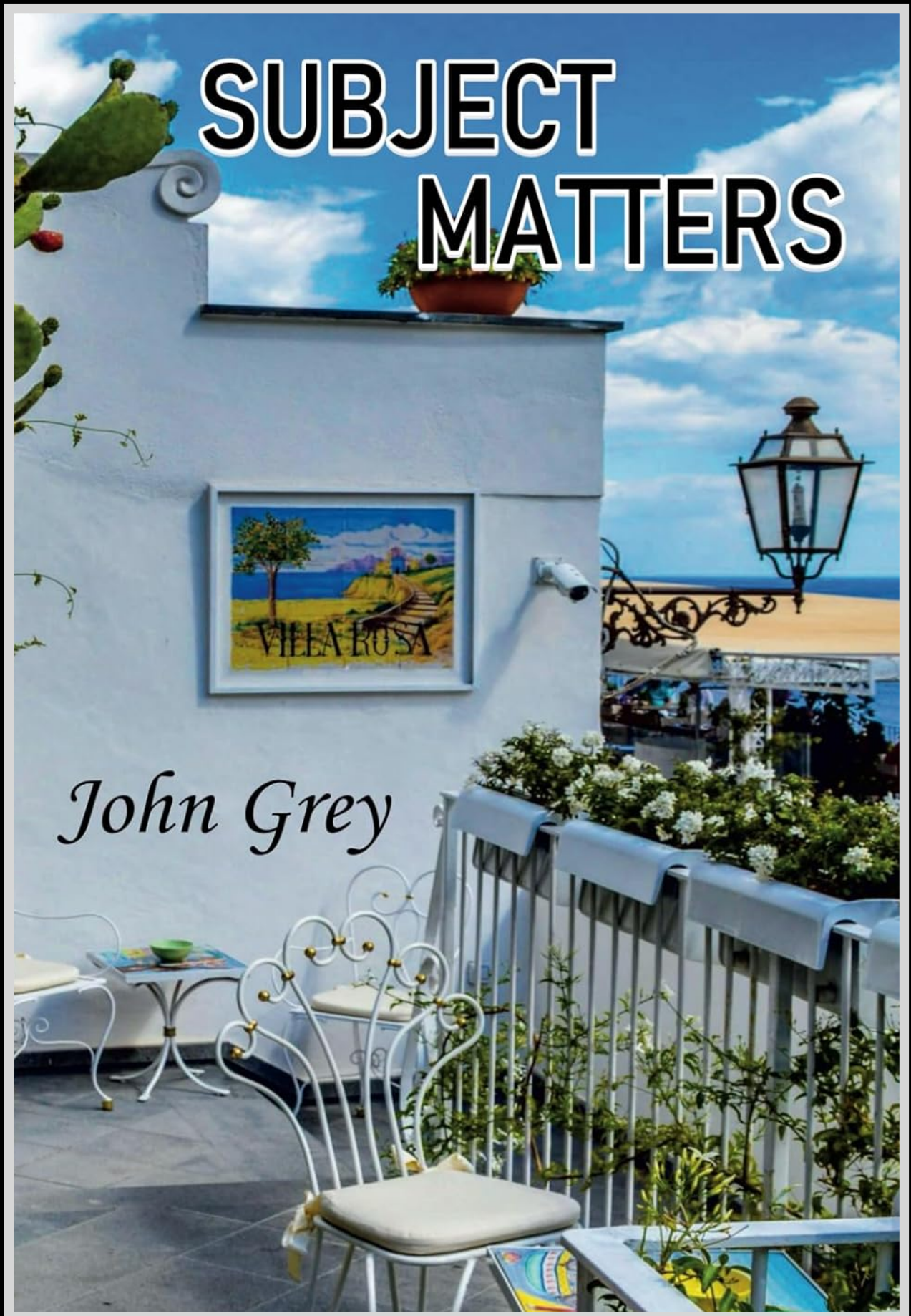


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