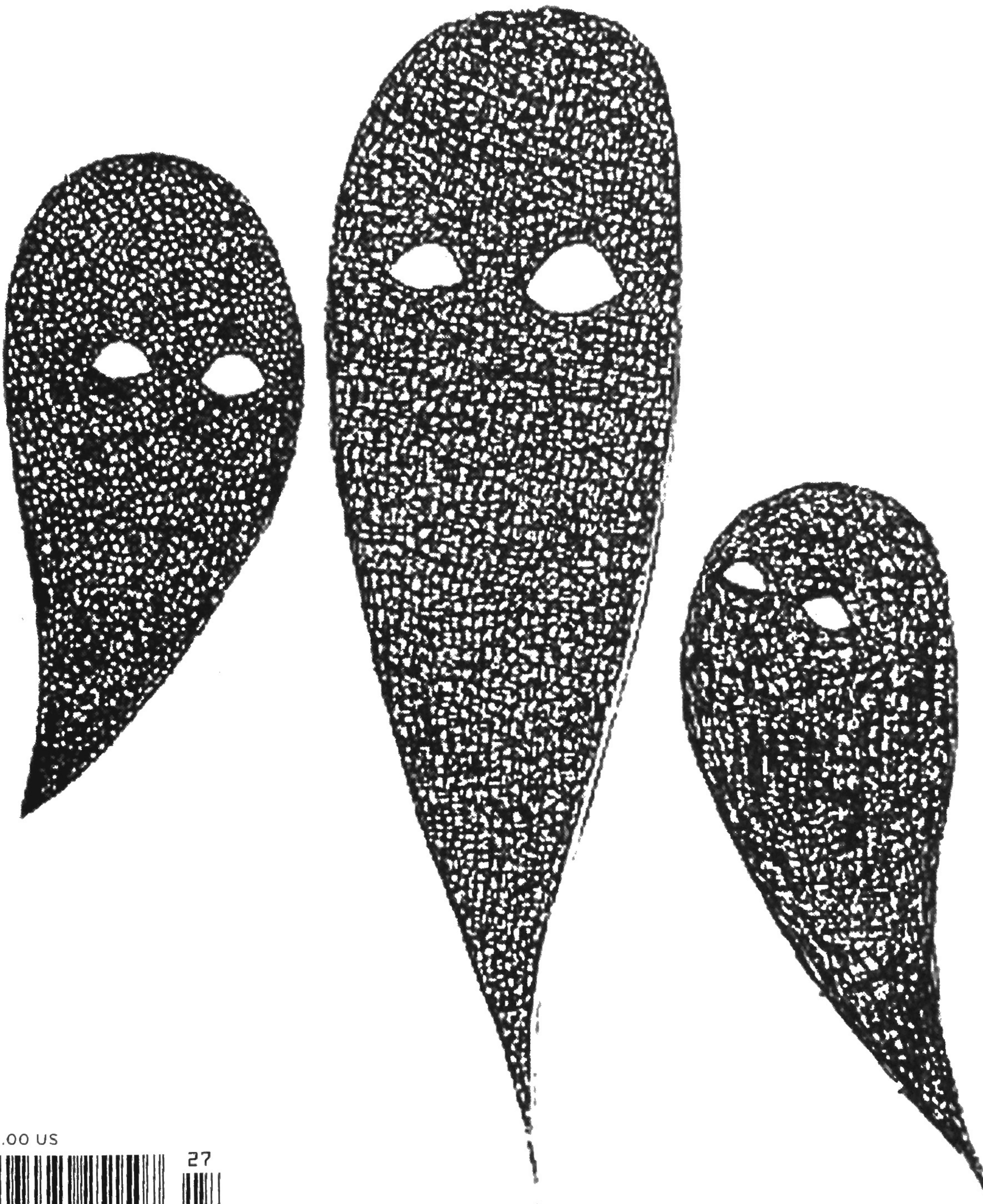


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27

MEGHAN L. DOWLING

The History of Violence, in Two Parts

Part I.

“Door” in English, German, and Dutch all feel the same inside your mouth. What Cleve Foster remembers most about his recent brushes with death is the steel door, the last one condemned men see. Glass shower doors can shatter without warning. Police say a Nashua, NH man is accused of choking a woman and throwing her dog through a glass door. Witnesses Tried to Keep Door Closed on Colorado Gunman: “People were literally being carried by normal people like us.”

See also: Janus, the Roman god of doors

Coal hole

Cat flap

Razor wire

The fastest door in the world

In a batten door, the slat prevents the door from skewing. Doors are noise barriers. Doors keep separate. A door that hinges. A door that swings or slides or spins. Doors are used to control a room. Doors prevent or allow escape. A gray man pulls open the cellar door. Frame of light on the dirt floor, her toes pared. Light cracked in floorboards above, particles of dust down. The threshing of a body from its clothing. How the damp earth felt on feet deprived of shoes. The door clicks shut behind him.

In places where timber is scarce, doors were often made of stone. Early common law said, “He will lie upon his back, with his head covered and his feet, and one arm will be drawn to one quarter of the house with a cord, and the other arm to another quarter, and in the same manner it will be done with his legs; and let there be laid upon his body iron and stone, as much as he can bear, or more.” Defendants who refused to plead were crushed to speech or death before trial. Sanctioned punishment unrelated to guilt. A theory: the body will pressure the mouth.

Fingertips pressed against fogged glass. A sliver of forearm. The small white breast slides. Starlings can reach speeds upwards of 45 miles per hour. Glass doors pose risk. A bloody smear. The US General Services Administration cautions against the crushing of children’s fingers in the hinges of swinging doors or gates. The man grabs the child’s arm. How will we interpret this gesture?

Light draws a line across the floorboards. The wash flaps at a dull sky. A stiff wind bangs the knob against the house in rhythm. Doors can cause damage to other objects. Dooryard is a colloquial term used almost exclusively in rural New England. People who use this term will also pronounce “milk” as *melk*. Will make a guttural sound to indicate both approval and disapproval. His mouth a cold slant of shadow. Eyes like tight panels of wavy glass.

The kitchen door is never locked. Her bedroom door, cracked. A tall mirror on the closet door reflects a bureau. Children hide behind a cupboard door. How much do they witness? The accordion doors allow slits of light. The curtain hangs in the door-frame. The door crack stripes a glowing face. A man came, and he blotted out the sun.

Part II.

The bedroom door is open, but I wait to make my escape. Clench and unclench muscles. Blood seeps. The heavy shape above me breathes wet and muscular.

None of this happens quickly.

The walls are painted green, but that is not how the room will feel when it is time to go. When our bodies are illuminated by weak gray dawn. When the flowers on my mother’s old couch become visible. When the light filters through cheap cellular blinds and hits the edge of the apartment door.

I slip out of the sheets. I creep across the carpet and down the stairs, and get in my car, and pull the handle slowly until it clicks shut, and turn the key, and let slip a small cry at the noise of it, and drive the streets banked with dirty snow until enough time has elapsed, until it is safe, until upon waking and noticing my absence he waits to see if I’ll return, and when I do not writes a note, writes a note and leaves it on my kitchen counter

I'll see you around.

like nothing even happened. But I’m driving. Fast. I’m two towns away by now. The sun is a smoldering hole low on the horizon of cloudless December sky. I’ve put the space of it between his body and mine and slammed the door shut.