



POETRY | FALL 2022

Polypharmacy

By Jonathan Grubbs

Up he creaks, the hinges straining,
yearning for the oil they've lost over years
of ceaseless operation. With the shades drawn,
his camera-lenses, battered by years of luminous onslaught,
stretch and strive to find the glass.
And now, like an aged computer dimly recalls a nursery rhyme,
he sits on the edge of the bed and counts.
One pill, two pill, red pill, blue pill.

He rises, slowly, propelled by a pump that works too hard,
fueled by bellows that protest too greatly—
that snap and pop in the ears of his mechanic.
Red pill. Blue pill.
He expectorates the wages of his labor,
the fruit of his years of servitude.
Building the planes and trains and bullets and bandages
that saved men and women he never met
from a faceless evil in a country 4800 miles away.
Repaid in black, sooty, coagulative mucus,
tar, gumming up the works.
One pill. Two pill.

The shiver rises through his foundation,
through pump and bellows and computer and gnarled, rusted wrenches.
The vice-grip loosens as he drops the glass.
Tremulous, indefatigable, inconsolable shakes—punishment for his thoughtlessness.
Was it two pill? Or blue pill?

Jonathan Grubbs is a third-year medical student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine. He received his B.S. in Biology with a minor in Psychology from North Carolina State University, where he also assisted in teaching organic chemistry and volunteered at community hospitals in the area. He has a passion for volunteering to improve health access for underserved groups. He led one such organization, the Samaritan Health Center Mobile Clinic, at the University of North Carolina. His work focuses on confronting the uncomfortable necessities of modern medicine and medical education with a mixture of sincerity and humor.

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