

## Second Prize 2022

### Delicately Wrought

by Jenny Mitchell

This latest bruise is all my fault, skin delicate,  
all shades of blood where he last gripped my arm,  
pulled me from the door, tears shaken from my eyes.  
It only really hurts to take a breath. A woman  
with more stamina, more strength could stand  
the pain when she is slammed against a wall.

It must be safe to press my back against the wall,  
stand stiller than the wealth of roses delicately  
wrought on paper so expensive. I cannot stand  
to see blood stains. It isn't a deep wound, my arm  
cut by the door's sharp edge. A clumsy woman –  
yes, he's right. I don't deserve the pity in his eyes.

Now he is walking up and down again, eyes  
trained on the floor. If he comes close, the wall  
must open up, miraculous, a door that's woman-  
shaped. I'll escape the moment as it's delicate.  
A breeze would help to sooth my face and arms.  
Both are bruised – not badly – though I understand.

He didn't mean to grab so tight. If only I stood  
still, had sense to know when he is on the edge, eyes  
wild and strange as if I've never been held in his arms –  
breath, once sweet, now sour on my face, a wall  
made by his sweating bulk, not caring I am delicate,  
manhandled like a piece of furniture, not a woman.

I wish he wouldn't say I am the type of woman  
who must be kept inside the house. I couldn't stand  
to lose my clothes. He picked up shoes so delicately,  
said he'd clean them all. It was odd but his eyes  
glared so I dare not argue, pressed against the wall  
until he left the house, shoes bundled in his arms.

He set a fire on the lawn, stood close as both arms hurled the shoes, a high-pitched laugh like a man who's lost his grip. Now he's coming close, a wall that wants to knock me down. I pretend to understand why money has to be transferred to him. His eyes look kind but even more surprising, his touch is delicate.

Then he slaps my arm, leads me to the desk. I delicately lift the pen, edge back against the wall as he stands close. *Woman, sign at once.* A quick punch to the eye.