Guilt on a Platter
Julie Purwin

Standing next to me are the ghosts of people
I saw an hour ago, a day ago, a year ago.
I darken their outlines, make them clear, peeking at them under this microscope.
I see through them, I see around them and keep them dancing in my room.
I don't need curtains when I have ghosts.

I drink coffee, wishing it was gin, to make the ghosts dissolve in to the now.
Alcohol dilutes the yesterdays piling up, cobwebbing the rooms of this suburban house.
I have nothing to cry about, nothing to bring the razor to my wrist—so says my mother.
after seeing a paralyzed girl struggling to eat rice.
My inner pain is nothing when there is physical pain embalming people.
I cannot light the match that will set me on fire,
I cannot burn my own stake.
I will be here for decades living in the foggy mildew of my intestines,
drinking cups of “keep going” and “it could be worse.”
What is worse than waking to broken mirrors and slumping shelves of fear?
My brain is my terrorist, my rapist, my paralysis.
It whispers, cajoles, hisses, and laughs until my elbows grow tired from combat.
Physical, emotional, sublimated agony is all brought out on the same platter at this dinner party called living.