

POETRY | FALL 2020

## Risk Benefit Ratio

By Terry Cox-Joseph

She bit the last nurse.  
No one dared approach.

Ebony eyes bore. Taloned  
fingertips twitch. Careful.

Redirect. “Mrs. B,  
do you like chocolate?”

Her eyebrows rise,  
caterpillar hairs

above her glasses.  
First time in forever

she has smiled.  
No sugar, chart says.

Monitor glucose daily.  
I blink back bite marks

on colleague’s arm,  
purpling swells. How

much sweeter they  
look on a chocolate bar,

irregular edge of moon  
curving a smile. I should

treat myself when I get  
home, minus my N95.

I circle Mrs. B’s back  
with gloved fingers,

epidermal lullaby, change  
her diapers without a scene,

tip her Haldol from a paper  
soufflé cup, wipe chocolate

from her lips  
before lights out.

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**Terry Cox-Joseph is president of the Poetry Society of Virginia. She is a former newspaper reporter and editor, was the coordinator for the annual Christopher Newport University Writers’ Conference and Contest for ten years. She has been published in *Northern Virginia Review*, *Allegro*, *Chiron Review* and *Red River Review* among others. Her first poetry chapbook, *Between Then and Now*, was published by Finishing Line Press. A graduate of Minneapolis College of Art and Design, she displays and sells her watercolors and acrylics at shows, galleries and shops.**

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