25. What Is the Key?

Let your poem talk about a key or keys, actual or metaphorical.

The Missing Key

The doors are locked and I’m searching for a way in.  
I circle my house intent on finding a crack in the system 
I painstakingly created, a loose bolt, a faulty window.  
It’s still light in Vermont but in one hour the sun will dip 
behind the mountain, temperatures will fall, and I may still 
be stuck outside, cursing. There are friends. There are neighbors.  
Or I could resolve nothing, sit on the cool grass and wait.  
On my iPhone, I view my furious attempts to break in 
recorded on the outdoor cameras. There are family members 
who hold a key, but rescues have never worked for me in the past.  
I consider places for lost or hidden keys. They say gratitude is a key.  
Solitude is a mountain. There are pines, cedars and hemlocks,  
a range against the mango-magenta horizon,  
a red-tailed hawk circling its prey.

Heather Newman  
anthologized in How to Love the World: poems of  
gratitude and hope edited by James Crews

Key Ring

When my grandfather was very old  
to one small room confined  
he gave me his big bunch of keys to hold.

I asked, “Do they unlock every door there is?  
And what would I find inside?”

He answered, “Mysteries and more mysteries  
You can’t tell till you’ve tried.”

Then as I swung the heavy ring around  
the keys made a chuckling sound.

Virginia Hamilton Adair  
in Ants on the Melon
Finding an old key in the drawer,  
I try to remember what it is for, 
an old apartment, a car 
on a hill somewhere 
with weeds growing out of its motor. 
I’ve forgotten. 
I should throw it out 
but won’t, even though it couldn’t 
fall into the wrong hands anymore. 
The locks are all broken or changed. 
It probably opens a door in a wall 
or doors around a building site 
or lying in a stack on a wrecker’s lot. 
Yet it shines. Dull and unpretty, 
it shines into a blind spot in the eye 
where nothing is certain: 
I may have forgotten someplace. 
We may have to go back. 
Tunnel through the years. 
I may need this key. 

Keith Althaus 
in *Rival Heavens*

We stand shivering at the door,  
terrified and panicked 
that we have lost the key. 
We waste lifetimes 
in the waiting 
because of the haze, 
the painted fog 
of our fear, 
we forget 
to check the handle 
and discover 
it has never been locked 
at all. 

Tyler Knott Gregson 
in *Chasers of the Light: poems from the typewriter series*

The key that opens all gates 
is strapped to love’s chest. 

Rumi/Barks