

# genesis

fall 2011



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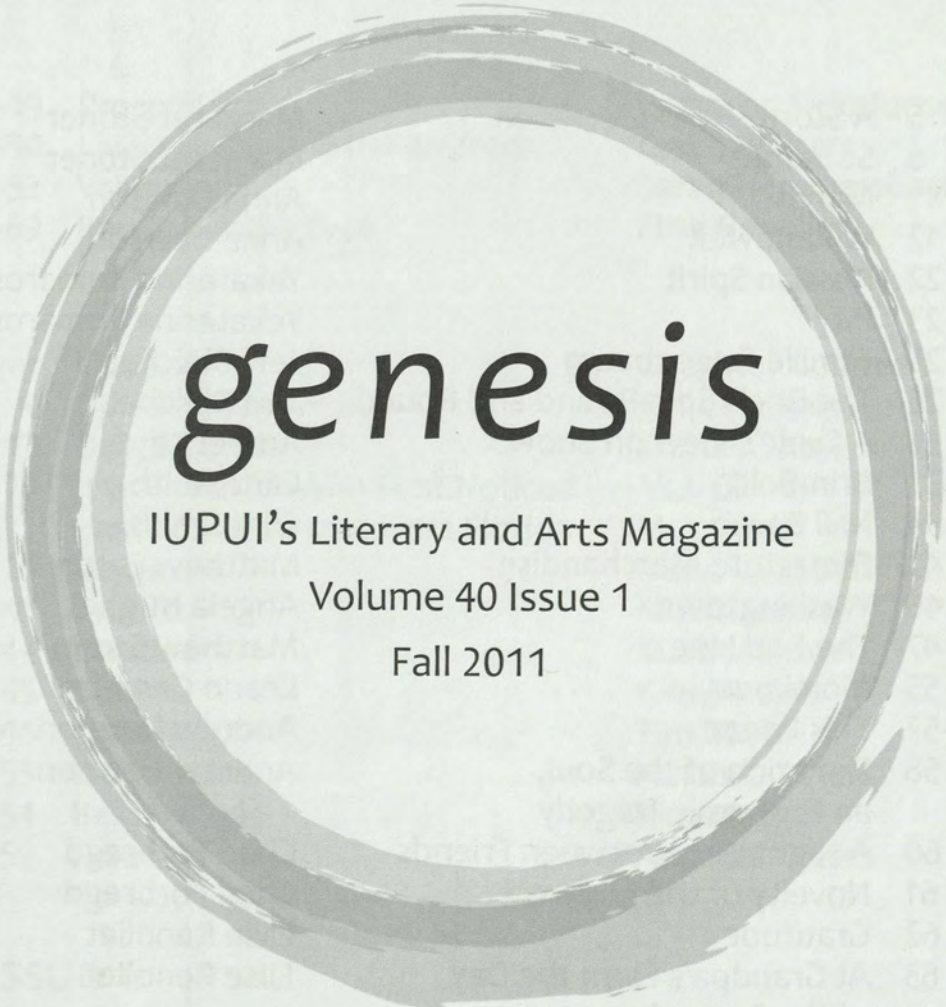
## **Editor's Note**

There is always something special that comes out of creating each issue of *genesis*. Through our selection and editorial process each issue forms differently. Each issue consists of its own special creative DNA. Our team of editors worked hard this semester to discover and share the earnest and passionate visions of our student contributors. As our last semesters editing *genesis* near an end we are honored to present the fall 2011 issue.

Hannah Geier & Chad Redden  
Managing Editors

Cover by:  
Courtney Cooper

Untitled



# *genesis*

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## Poetry

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## Upside Down World



# | Best of Poetry |

Margaret Stoner

## A Storm

I.

*What was your first memory?*

A storm.

My father in the garage,  
door open, watching  
the lightening.

I was looking at the tree  
from the crib, through a window.  
Or was it in the bathtub?  
Touch of wet skin, creak  
of a swinging door,  
wind cracking in the tree.

There was structure  
to the sky: layer of sun,  
layer of cloud, layer of black rain.

II.

*What was your first memory?*

A storm.

My father filming the lightning.  
Or was I watching the film?  
Lines of light, or scratches on the lens.

On a country road we stopped  
when mud set the tires spinning.  
Light flashing—I waited.  
A man's blue truck twisted  
around a tree. *He'll never walk again.*  
I didn't understand.

*Try to imagine a twisted spine.*

III.

Then, all I knew of danger  
Was a frog with no legs,  
porcupine needles,  
three leaves and a red stem.  
Until the cat caught a rabbit,  
left bleeding and alive.  
*It's a pity, to watch him suffer like that.*  
So we put him out of his misery.

## St. James

2008: Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

*[Inn-keeper, Leon]*

They tell me your body was borne,  
beaten and exiled from Jerusalem.  
Those half-bent pilgrims, clinging  
to their fifty-nine beads. They trudge  
old-world dirt paths and paved city streets.  
They say scallop shells protected your bones  
from war-time seas, and use them to strain  
clean water from soil. Their eyes drip on every  
wooden cross, their voices are dry from calling  
your name. St. James, at night I hear them plead  
that these paths lead straight to your grave.

*[Pilgrim]*

It's like walking into sound,  
the gates of the cathedral open wide.  
Monks call from its mouth and my head  
bows to the gilded stone of your tomb.  
I kiss the floor. Forgive me, there were times  
when doubt dripped down my forehead  
into my eyes and I asked you: St. James,  
did you really drink from Jesus' cup?  
I fall to my knees and bear witness to your bones.  
I believe you resurrected a setting sun.

*[Priest of Santiago]*

Science knows that the Milky Way  
was not formed by dust kicked  
from pilgrims' shoes, but still I preach  
in this field of stars, *your feet have bled  
for penance.* They weep at my pews,  
and kiss the Cathedral's floors. *But first,  
you must swear that you believe.*  
In the early morning, before the first pilgrim  
comes and asks me for forgiveness, St. James,  
in your name I pray that these paths flow  
straight to heaven, that this tomb holds  
more than dust spat from the seas.



Margaret Stoner

## The Art of Impermanence

After the first customer of the day left, she looked satisfied. In the red lawn chair behind her booth, my mother took a sip of iced tea, and closed her eyes. On a hot May morning when I was fourteen, I helped her set up, run, and tear down her booth at the annual Broad Ripple Art Fair. For three days, we moved across the grass underneath her tent, following the shade casted by large signs on top of the tent next door. My mother's first sale was a large mosaic mirror with broken blue tiles bordering the carved profile of a woman who sat, presumably looking at her own reflection. The woman who bought it was short and fat, nothing like the elegant woman carved into the mirror. She wandered into the booth and stood, glaze-eyed, for five minutes staring at herself in the mirror before she gently lifted it from the wall and examined it.

My mother is a potter. My oldest memories are vague images of her pulling blocks of gray earth up on a spinning wheel and shaping them into bowls, mugs, and vases. As I grew older, I watched her art change. She pounded out tiles, carved sculptures, and experimented with fire and glaze to create textures that crawled and twisted up bowls, and colors with the sheen of burnt rainbows. She started making mosaics the year my father left. I watched from my bedroom window as she broke tiles in the backyard. She raised the hammer high, and without hesitating, smashed smooth tiles to pieces, their shards flying to the far ends of the driveway. From my room, it looked like the ground was

sparkling. She then spent hours pushing together pieces that did not match. From it all, something formed that was nothing like anything she had broken.

After the woman bought the mirror, my mother left in search of food, promising to bring something to sustain me until lunch; I was left alone with her art. Watching my mother shaping clay at the wheel or rolling out slabs of on a flat table was so commonplace that I often forgot to look at the final results. A woman with her baby tied to her back wandered into the booth and asked if I was the artist. “No, it’s my mother’s art,” I replied. She seemed disappointed, and left without really looking. Alone again, I stepped close to a wall, and picked up a small, textured tile, the color of rust. My fingers glided smoothly up and down the small crevices and hills that covered its surface.

It always made sense that my mother was a potter. She is grounded in the earth like clay—her hair and eyes are the color of red Indiana soil, and the freckles covering her face, arms, and legs are like wheat berries in the field. She is careful with her words, soft-spoken much of the time, as if she is retreating into the ground, into the silence of its density. Often, she doesn’t notice when people are talking to her.

Once, when I was very young, my mother, new to the art world, took me to a show of local artists in Fountain Square. The early years of my mother’s art were, as I would learn later, the beginning of the end of my parents’ marriage.

Though he tried, my father was never able to relate to ceramic art with its physical, sharp edges and smooth, textured inlays. So on weekend nights when my dad and his band-mates made jazz and blues, his dark, curly hair hanging in front of his eyes and smoke creeping from underneath the basement door, my mother would take me along to local art events at which she hadn’t yet made close friends. That night, the adults towered over me as we walked into the gallery. I tugged on my mother’s sweater, uncomfortable as the only child in a room of strange adults. She handed me a cup of lemonade and told me to look around. Standing with her back to me, she chatted with a tall man with short, grey hair and a black beret. The red wine she drank stained her lips.

I wandered off into a narrow hallway with huge, tri-color paintings hanging on either side. From all angles, the paintings were indecipherable to me—I saw no picture, no form, nothing but bright red and yellow, deep orange and forest green: colors that seemed to bleed from the canvas. I moved on. In the very back of the room, in dim, blue light, a sculpture of a naked man stood alone—his face looking upward, as if he didn’t realize he was naked, his hands resting on his right leg, which crossed

“I saw no picture, no form...”

over his left. The sculpture was glazed a deep, opaque turquoise. I was embarrassed to look but stared anyways. After a few minutes, I turned around to find my mother behind me, admiring the piece. “It’s kind of gross,” I muttered. She laughed and brushed my hair away from my eyes, as if to force me to look closer. “I like it, his expression is so organic,” she said. And she walked away and left me alone.

As noon approached at the art fair, the sun grew stronger, and my pale shoulders began to burn. More customers ventured in and out of the booth without buying anything, and I continued pick up and examine my mother’s tiles. The woman who bought the mirror had looked for so long not at the artwork, but at her own reflection in it. I wandered if what she saw is what I saw, a middle-aged woman with long, blonde hair and a lazy eye—or if, surrounded by a frame of broken glass, she saw herself differently. I walked, my eyes just inches from the tiles, in front of one side of the booth, noticing how my fingers felt against the textures, comparing my skin tone to the glaze, finding the one tile that perfectly matched my hazel eyes.

I was intrigued by the idea of art. I had begun writing at a young age, mostly late at night, when I couldn’t sleep. At first, I tried just writing about what I had done that day. That bored me. Later, I wrote down my ideas, and let them flow out of my mind and onto the page—it helped me to calm down my always-racing thoughts. Late at night, as I sat on my wooden floor, leaning

against my thin wooden door, I heard my parents argue. My mother stormed up the stairs, her voice growing louder as she approached my room, until my father beckoned her back down, “you’re scaring the kids,” he said. When this happened, I moved to the other side of the room, where I could still hear their voices, but not what they were saying.

My mother returned to her booth with a small bag of kettle corn and a lemon shake-up. I was hungry, and asked if she brought me anything, “Oh I didn’t think about that, sorry, have some kettle corn,” she replied. I was not surprised, she often forgot about me in this way, and I couldn’t really be angry because I knew it was not intentional. After years of such instances, I had come to expect them. I held a blue bowl in my hands, and as I pinched its sides between my fingers, I felt how thin and fragile it was.

“Mom, if someone offered to pay you full price for all of the art in your booth just so they could smash it all to pieces, would you sell it to them?”

My father is a fast-paced man—his speech never catches up with his thoughts. I am a lot like him, and as I wrote faster and faster, crouching on the floor under the small table lamp, squeezing the pen between my fingers, filling up notebooks in weeks or sometimes days, my ideas sped up more and more as well. My mother is different in that way—she seems to maintain a stillness of mind, one that allows for both creativity and pain to flow through her in

great force.

I repeated my question.

“Sure I would,” she replied nonchalantly.

“How could you do that? Don’t you respect your art?” I blurted out. The thought of something as solid and real as my mother’s pottery being destroyed was unsettling. A foreign object in my hands, the bowl I held felt more like my mother’s creation than I did.

She looked at me, as if she was about to teach me a life lesson about the nature of impermanence, how nothing ever lasts and you cannot expect it to, like seventeen years of a marriage between an artist and musician—two titles that could easily be interchanged. Or maybe she wanted to show me the problems with materialism, like all the times she went out and returned with lemonade for herself,

and nothing for me, because that lemonade was just a thing, and things don’t matter. Or maybe it was a warning about the danger of having expectations, of wanting the words that lived inside my notebooks to be read and cherished. My mother never tried to shelter me, not from the nakedness of a sculpture, not from her desire for independence, and later, though I sometimes wish she had, she did not shelter me from the breakdown of her marriage, but pulled my hair from my eyes, and forced me to watch.

She turned her head and looked at the sky like I wasn’t even there. “I’ve already had the joy of making it, what do I care what someone does with it?”

And then she laughed. To this day, I’m not sure if she was laughing at my question, or her answer, or something else entirely.

Anna Dawson

## March

"If only" is such a terrible phrase  
but it often makes its way to my brain  
through a thick and ugly haze  
my halo of self pity and pain,  
hostility which seems to stretch on for days

Like an animal found caged,  
I stalk and sulk and pace,  
constantly enraged,  
glaring at others or hiding my face,  
till I feel jaded and aged

My mind wanders to unspeakable violence  
wondering if others can feel the waves swell,  
the hate that rolls from me in silence  
And of course the more I dwell,  
the more my blood pressure rises

Yet the boiling point is never quite reached  
I thrash for some time then cease  
Like a whale through struggling when beached  
Finally finding an ugly peace  
My last resources, leached

## Wild.flower.

I move between them now  
like a bee between flowers  
pick, choose, I guess you'll do  
get some sweetness  
get what I want  
And then I'm gone, moved on, past it  
see ya later, nice while it lasted  
on to the next one, whoever it is  
carnations, impatiens, tulips, narcissus.  
get on, get on,  
the flower grows,  
but I'm gone

Cameron Sickafoose

## Prosperity

Robert struggled to picture Ellen in her youthful glow that had captured him those many years ago. He had been twenty-six then and she twenty-three. They had met at Molly O's Café where he often ate breakfast on Sunday mornings. He ate there because it brought back memories of his childhood when his parents would take him to similar little hole-in-the-walls in the small town where he grew up. This particular café was quite small, it had one row of tables, one row of booths, and a long counter lined with padded maroon vinyl. He had been ready to pay the bill on that particular morning when she walked through the café's door, chiming its small bell. She had been wearing a blue and white flowered dress which resembled a spring sky, and her golden hair was the sun upon it. She was accompanied by two of her friends who, although pretty themselves, only provided a backdrop for her beauty. She was perfect then, but how was he to know of her future expectations.

"What do you mean we don't have the money?" Ellen said, charging at Robert until their noses almost touched.

"I just don't think we have enough to go on another cruise this year," Robert said taking a step back. "Our stocks have dropped in this slump, and my yearly bonus was cut almost in half, and with the renovations to the kitchen."

"So are you saying that with all the money you make at Rolls Royce, and with all of the

money my father gave us at our wedding we still don't have enough," Ellen interrupted with glaring blue eyes.

Robert paused, flexed his shoulders which now felt heavy in white button up, and thought of what to tell her. Those things were all true. Ellen's father had given them \$750,000 at their wedding, but that was all spent on their home in the nicest part of the city, and yes Rolls Royce paid him well as an executive engineer, but with Ellen's shopping habits and their getaway vacations he would have to own Rolls Royce in order to keep up with the bills. "It's just been a slow year," he said gently trying to calm her anger.

Ellen didn't respond for a moment. She just threw a few things into her purse, turned and started to walk away from him when over her shoulder she said, "Robert, when we got married I was under the impression that you were supposed to provide for me." He opened his mouth to reply, but Ellen cut him off. "I'm going over to my parents', and I hope that when I come back you will have fixed whatever mistakes you have made with our finances." She slammed the front door as she left.

"Could I get another refill?" Robert asked as his waitress passed by. He normally only drank one cup of the extra strong coffee with his breakfast here at Molly O's, but he needed an excuse to stay longer and observe the girl who had just walked in. He wondered what she

would order; the pancakes were his favorite, they reminded him of small town comforts.

"I'll have the oatmeal and a side of fruit," he heard her say as the girls' waitress jotted down their orders. He had never tried the oatmeal, or fruit, maybe she was concerned with eating healthy. He looked down at his plate with the remnant yolk of fried eggs mixed with the syrup which had drenched his pancakes and thought he would try the oatmeal and fruit next Sunday.

As the girls waited for their breakfast, he heard them crack jokes, and saw his girl's perfect smile which drew him in. Robert wasn't the type to ask out a girl he had never met, he had even struggled with introducing himself to his new bosses at Rolls Royce, but this was different. She was different.

After Ellen had left, Robert paced through their home and ended up in the dining room which stood with its expansive walls and lofty ceiling. He shook his head as he studied the antique table and matching chairs with their rosettes and lion's feet. Ellen had seen the dining room set at a local museum exhibiting 19th century English home décor and told Robert that it was the perfect set for their existing humdrum dining room. Robert had never thought that you could buy pieces from museum exhibitions, but he was proven wrong when Ellen decided to make a large "charitable" donation to the museum, securing the ornate furniture as an appreciatory gift. This was only one example of



the ridiculous ways in which Robert's money had been spent, but he knew that these things made his wife happy. And he would have kept paying for them if Ellen's expenditures had not continued to grow. His accounts were emptied almost as fast as they were filled, and that's what led him to this unique moment where he had to tell his wife no.

Robert knew that he should have had some inkling of Ellen's expectations when he introduced himself to her for the first time.

"Hi, my name is Robert," he said after he built enough courage to leave his coffee and walk over to the beautiful blonde and her friends. "Are you new in town? I've never seen you in here before." He had tried to pretend as if he were asking all of the girls but his eyes betrayed him and eventually steadied on only her.

"If you call this part of the city town, then yes, we are new to this town," she replied turning back to her friends.

Robert had felt his cheeks warm, "I was just asking because it seems like only the same people are ever eating here, and they tend to be over the age of fifty."

"I can tell," she responded with a smile, eliciting giggles from the other girls. "We were just on this side of the city shopping and this was the only place we could find to eat."

"Oh, okay," he had responded. He had almost been ready to turn around and head back to his booth when he blurted out, "Maybe

## “His hands started to shake,”

sometime, if you wanted, I could show you another place to eat around here." His hands had started to shake, so he had put them into his pockets.

"I don't think I'll ever be around here again. It's a little too down home for me," she replied bluntly, looking as if she expected the conversation to be over.

"There is a really nice steakhouse just a few blocks down the road. It's one of the nicest in the city," he said, not noticing that the blonde's two friends had started their own conversation.

She had rolled her eyes a little and said, "A college student like you normally saves the money they have."

"I'm not in college," Robert has stammered, "I graduated last year. I work at Rolls Royce."

At that moment Ellen straightened her posture, "So you work on the cars?" she asked.

"Actually I work on jet engines. I'm an engineer," he replied taking his hand out of his pockets.

"Sounds like a nice job," she said. "I tell you what Richard."

"It's Robert."

"Sorry, Robert, I'll let you take me to that steakhouse. Here," she took out a pen from her purse and wrote on the napkin in front of her, and handed it to Robert. "It looks like our food

is coming. It was nice to meet you Robert. Call me.”

The piece of paper had had a phone number etched into it followed by a name — Ellen.

Robert didn't sleep well that night. He kept wondering about what Ellen was doing over at her parents' home, and he also tried to come up with a plan to boost his income, but his nerves kept him from thinking straight. With him alone in it, their king-sized bed felt like the ocean on which he was slowly sinking.

He had finally drifted to sleep, when he was awoken by noises downstairs. He hurried out of bed and found Ellen in the kitchen.

“You're home,” Robert said with a relieved smile, but was met with an uneasy silence until Ellen spoke.

“I talked with my parents last night, and I think it would be a good idea if we had them over for dinner tonight.”

That wasn't what Robert had expected to hear. “Is there a special reason?” he asked.

“I just think you should talk to my father. Maybe he can help you sort this thing out,” she said staring at the unfinished kitchen cabinets.

Robert took a step towards her. “Ellen, if you're asking me to borrow money from him I'm not doing it. It isn't that big of a problem. We just have to look at our spending a little more.”

She looked away from the cabinets and directly at him. “If it wasn't a problem, then we wouldn't be talking about it. And if by our

spending you are referring to my spending I think that I have a right to spend our money however I want. It's just as much mine as it is yours.”

Robert felt a headache coming on. “What time are your parents coming over?” he asked knowing that she had already invited them.

“Six,” she said.

“Well I need to head to work,” he said knowing that that was a lie.

“It's a Saturday. Are you just trying to avoid me?” Ellen asked raising her eyebrows causing her forehead to crease.

“No, they called me last night. There's a problem with one of the new models we're building,” he blurted. Robert felt bad for lying to Ellen, but he just had to get away for a little bit.

She had cautiously believed the lie, so Robert now was driving, all dressed up in his tie and dress shirt, with no real destination in mind.

“Why can't she understand?” Robert found himself thinking and growing angry. “I know she's used to a pampered life, but she has to be realistic. And now she's having her parents come over to sit me down. How can they give me advice, they probably have never had any real financial issues with Ellen's father owning half the real estate in the city and its surrounding suburbs.” Robert had driven quite a distance and found himself in familiar neighborhoods he hadn't seen since moving into his home with Ellen.

He drifted into thought again. “It will be the



Kimber Shaw

## Daily Routine

three of them against me, so I might as well just give in and do whatever Ellen wants. Her father will probably just write me a blank check and say, "Take however much you need. A man and his wife should be able to enjoy the best in life." I'll just have to swallow my pride."

Robert turned down a small street almost habitually and found that he was right in front of Molly O's Café. He had rushed out this morning and hadn't eaten, so he pulled into the small parking lot beside the café. When he walked through the door it was like passing through time. He heard the same jingle of the bell on the door, smelled the familiar smells of salty meats and buttery syrup, he even saw a few of the old faces he remembered from almost a decade ago.

He sat down at the very same table he had always dined at back when he frequented the small café. He glanced at the menu to see if anything had changed and of course it hadn't. He pondered over what to get, but then heard Ellen in the back of his mind telling him to watch his weight. When the waitress came, he ordered the oatmeal and bowl of fruit, and as she wrote the ticket the rumbling in his stomach turned into more of a sharp pain.

As he waited for his meal to arrive he sipped on some coffee, which he now ordered decaf since Ellen said that regular made him irritable. As he slowly mulled over the steaming cup a young couple in their early twenties walked through the door. They both had a gleam about them, and he watched as they playfully talked to

## "Simpler things,"

one another and every once and awhile pecking the other on the cheek and lips.

Robert's food arrived, but instead of digging in he watched and listened as the young couple took their orders.

"What can I get you dear?" the waitress asked the young man, who looked down at the menu and pointed with a finger.

"Um, I'll have the hotcakes with a side of bacon," he said.

"And for you?" the waitress turned to the young lady.

"I'll have the same, but with an order of two scrambled eggs also."

"Alrighty, I'll be right out with those," the waitress replied.

Robert found himself smiling, and the pains that were in his stomach seemed to disappear. He ate a little of the fruit, called the waitress over, and paid the bill, leaving a large tip. He hopped back in his car, and drove straight home, enjoying the scenery of the drive.

When he pulled up in front of his three-story home he didn't park in the garage. He just pulled his car up to the curb on the street and got out there. He took a moment to look at the home with its colonial architecture, pristine façade, and perfectly sculpted landscape. He then walked to the front door and knocked despite his keys

being in his pocket.

Ellen opened the door and asked with half confusion and half disdain, "Did you lose your keys?"

"Nope, I've got them right here." Robert patted his pocket.

"Then why did you," she started to reply but Robert cut her off.

"I have something to tell you," he said calmly.

"Okay?" Ellen said with irritation in her voice.

Robert looked straight into her eyes and said, "I think we should get a divorce."

"What?" Ellen asked out of confusion.

"Ellen, from the first time I saw you I thought you were the most beautiful girl I had ever seen, and I instantly wanted you to be my wife, but now I realize that there are so many more things to being happy than beauty and wealth—simpler things."

"Simpler things," Ellen's jaw muscles were clenched now, "like what?"

"I don't know—like pancakes," he replied.

"Pancakes?" her voice cracked, "Robert you're insane. You need to come in the house and stop making a scene. My parents are coming over and you need to get cleaned up."

But as Ellen spoke, Robert was already turning back towards his car.

"Where are you going?" she demanded, but he was almost to the car.

"Robert!" Ellen screamed from the doorway, but he was almost to the car.

"Robert!" she echoed as he loosened his tie and threw it behind him on the lawn. He unlocked the car now, got in and ignited the engine. Robert flipped his satellite radio from a news station to classic rock and turned the volume knob up to where he couldn't hear Ellen's screams, even as she came out onto the lawn. He took one look, more of a glance really, at Ellen screaming out in front of the cold brick palace he had mistaken for home shaking his tie in her hand. He put his foot down on the gas and took off, out of the suburbs and into his life.

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| Best of Art |



M.J. Gillot

It was the Cat  
who First Noticed



M.J. Gillot

## Pants de Leon Discovers Florida

Yekaterina Komarovskaya

## Russian Spirit

A holy place, a monastery,  
white walls and towers,  
nature, monks, and death,  
it used to be a concentration camp.

We wait – a huddled group.  
The northern Russian wind,  
penetrates our clothing.  
the ferry home is late,

neither religion nor death,  
can stifle Russian spirit.  
Spirits have been passed around.  
The young care not for old.

At last the boat arrives.  
The liquor jumps on board.  
It argues and it punches.  
There is a brawl on board.

We stare petrified,  
as wife beats man,  
who beat her husband.  
Oblivious, the crew drinks on.

We leave the place of spirit,  
carrying spirits with us home.



## Pity

Like candy to a thirsty man,  
pity can be so sweet and useless.  
When it is gone the heart cries for it,  
but when there, it disgusts.  
Condescending, fake, revolting,  
it does not heal our troubles,  
it rips the wounds apart,  
as sugar rots beneath,  
the condescending touch.  
All of us want pity,  
but for the man in the desert,  
no amount of candy will suffice.



Nicholas Jackson

## Itsy Bitsie

Jeff Bleicher

## Familie Feigenbaum

In the beginning a picked fig spoke.  
As soon as she ate of it she saw, and wept.  
She slung the leafed twig over her body, her mouth agape.  
There was a whole tree full of that forbidden fruit.  
But it takes one to fall.

The Giant was her body.  
The boy was her son.  
The sling her twig,  
the stone her fig.

The leaf was likened to the leaf  
on David's marble mantelpiece,  
the fig beneath the sheath.

## The Reels Spin Round and Round

*You.*

Take *me*.

What do you know about  
keeping promises?

We were a family  
till all eyes gazed on us  
like creaking pews over  
the money basket.

Your vows are  
a proud pope,  
like speaking in  
tongue-in-cheek

like the dirty old  
man in the subway  
swishing gestures at  
me, a sexual oath.

Naysayers be sayers  
of the truth, never less  
what *this* time forsooth,  
sayers of who cares

anyway what rose-  
petaled pathways mean on  
Sunday sidewalks, prime  
and spinning off the rose.

No life in this projection  
screen, although they are the last good  
times we clung to one another.  
It clinks with my heart heavy with

the leak in the sink you said you'd  
fix, the seasons skipping offbeat, a  
film device full of dissonant duets,  
flower girls falling over and over and  
over...

... to have and to hold  
from this day forward,  
for worse, for poorer,  
in sickness and in  
death do us part.

Claire Wolters

## Living Doesn't Grow On Trees

The young elephant stood with her feet cemented to the ground. Len swatted her tail with a sponge, but she wouldn't budge. He raised his voice from a whisper, but always found himself unable to scold her. Zahara pushed a gust of breath out of her trunk and shook her head.

Len had worked at the zoo for over nine years. He always loved the African elephants, ever since the first time he watched them on his father's shoulders so many years ago. Zahara was his main responsibility. Each day he scrubbed the dirt off her back and took care of her delicate feet. The grounds of the Plains Biome were heated to help keep away the painful callous stillness brought, but Len had to make sure she learned to keep moving. He brushed the dust off her heels and wished she would move with the other elephants. The longer she remained frozen her feet became in danger of infection.

Zahara refused to look at Len. The young elephant stared at the ground with stubbornness not unlike his wife's insistence that his nightly empty beer cans grew from years past. A ladybug zipped to the side of her trunk and her eyes shifted to each place it landed. Len blurted her name in almost howls, but the ladybug held her attention. With only an hour until he was off for the day, Len wandered around the biome.

Tiny wildflowers peaked out of the cracked dirt. Len recognized the red, star shaped flower-- royal catchfly. He plucked the flat part

of the plant from the cone it shot out of and pressed it inside of his worn pocket Bible. He flipped through the pages. Inside were his floral treasures and underlined passages that once meant something to him.

•

Air clung to the trees like sweat. It seemed like there wasn't a breeze in the entire Midwest, but this sticky heat was normal for July. Len stood at the glass door of his house waiting for the mail carrier to pass. He watched the man drum the air as he shoved piles of letters into their boxes.

Len usually waved and startled the man's headphones loose. He would burst out of his door yelling, "Good afternoon!" But the past few days he waited inside. On Thursday the man had asked Len about his wife, Evie.

The truck rolled two houses down and Len ventured outside. He opened the mailbox filled with bills and cell phone ads. Yellow flowers drooped in the corner of his neighbor's yard. Len recognized the hoary puccoon and scurried over to snag a few.

The Bible of flowers was the closest thing to a Sunday mass Len would allow and the dried flowers took the place of his old garden. He'd given up growing years ago when his routine

began to revolve more around beer and TV. Len drowned in cans of Budweiser and let his forget-me-nots wilt. He'd become a slug, his garden's sworn enemy, and his wife's too.

As he headed inside the phone sang in endless intervals. Len stumbled to open the door and rushed inside his empty home.

"Hi, hello", Len finally said.

"Daddy! Hello Daddy!" Al replied.

It had been four days since Len had last seen his eight-year-old son, Al. Len heard those days apart bottled up in Al's voice. He imagined his son wrapping his grandma's old telephone cord around chair legs, excited for story time. He wondered how long he'd wait before he was part of Al's stories again. Len closed his eyes and widened his smile.

"Guess what?" Al said.

"Tell me."

"Gramsie let me pinch all her dead Petunias today!"

"Did she really?"

"Yeah, she didn't even make me watch her first."

"Well, how about that. How'd you know which ones were good and which ones were bad?"

"She told me, Dad! Some'a them get all wilted and stuff and hang. She said when they do that you just pinch off the gross parts and it fixes everything and it re-grows!"

Len remembered holding Al's hand while he walked him through the flowerbeds in their

“He'd become a slug...”

backyard. Al used to pet all the buds and petals. He'd run past the daisies with his arms out as he grazed each one. He always told Len the flowers missed him and he wanted to show them he was there.

They traded 'I love yous' as Len hung up the phone. His feet were sore. His face, shaded by whiskers, had gone unshaved since Wednesday. His hands, cracked and dry, ached from long day of work. Len lumbered to the fridge. The door swung open as it revealed an almost barren stack of shelves. Evie hadn't been around to fill it with his favorites. No bologna and mustard, no pears, no roast beef, no rocky-road ice cream. A few browned apples sat in the back next to a can of tuna and on the face of the fridge was the letter from Evie. He grabbed it off the Buzz Lightyear magnet and read it for the twenty-third time.

Evie's hair reminded Len of the black coffee he drank each morning. It lay on her shoulders like a silk robe. He ran his hands through each strand of memory, as he imagined wrapping the ends of her hair around his fingers. It was almost nine summers ago when he first saw her. The humid August heat hung above the waters of the canal and Len lay back in the grass. In the summer locals played jazz every Thursday night and Len loved to lean on the hill and see the city's lights sparkle with the music. He noticed her as she stood in front of the light post on the

**“It's like I'm not even there,”**

edge of the grass. Her eyes were half closed, blinded by the sun. She squinted to find open patches in the grass.

Evie's hand always stayed shoved in the pockets of her shorts with her shoulders hunched forward. She held her head high, but she couldn't decide where to sit. Each grassy seat looked better than the last. Len watched her step forward and back again. He loved the way she almost danced as she moved towards possible spots. He sat up and smiled at her as he patted the empty space next to him. She tilted her head and glided his way.

When Len opened the front door last Wednesday, he noticed a strange feeling to the house. It felt overrun by termites that feasted on the last taste of home. He knew there was nothing left. The front room seemed empty, but Evie lay in the dark. She sprawled out on the couch like a venomous weed and pointed to the pizza on the oven.

"There's dinner, sweetheart," she said.

Len looked to the oven and tried to decide what to say. He knew something was wrong, but something had been wrong for a year and he'd ignored it this far, so why stop?

"Thanks," he said with a smile and turned the lights on. "Work was good today, nobody threw anything at the cage or anything. But Zahara still won't listen to a word I say."

"Is that so," she said.

"It's like I'm not even there," he said.

Evie said nothing. She rolled her face into the pillow to soak up the few tears she let escape.

"How was your day? Where's Al?" he asked.

"Fabulous," she snorted and looked to the door. "He visited Gramsie today after school."

She got up, grabbed the keys and her purse, and headed for the door. There was no second-guessing in her movement. She kept her eyes to the ground strode past Len.

"I'm picking up Al. I'll be back"

Len went for the fridge and popped open a beer. He nodded at her, but thought less about her exit and more about the game that started in three minutes. He forgot about the pizza until an hour later. On the front a note, taped and labeled "Len", stuck to the box.

•

He read the letter over. Each sentence stung more than the last, but the word that clawed at his eyes was "bored." She left because she was bored. Len knew reasons multiplied, but boredom seemed juvenile. She claimed he didn't notice her. Len knew she was wrong though,

because he noticed the way she stopped cooking dinner, the way she smelled like expensive cologne, the way she rolled her poison ivy eyes almost to the inside of her brain when he spoke.

He leaned back in his chair and looked out the window at the vacant backyard. The flowers were mowed over during his lazy days of yard work. He thought about Zahara and her feet. He thought about the heated grounds and moving around. The calloused form his chair molded him into felt like it had swallowed him whole. He felt like stone. He thought of Al and how excited he was to pinch petunias. Len shook the stillness from his feet and headed to the garage.

He found old shovels and fertilizer gone unused for years. He loaded the wheelbarrow with supplies, headed for the backyard. As he stepped over spiraling weeds, he noticed a strange wildflower. He recognized it, but it was certainly out of place. A flower usually growing out west found his neglected yard. It was a strong flower with deep, thick roots, a blossoming bitterroot flower. Len didn't pick it. He left it to grow instead of pressing it in his Bible of dead floral gems. With the resurrection flower at his feet, he unloaded the wheelbarrow.

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Amber Lane

## A Cynic's View on Snow

Most say the harvester of souls  
is dark. Hooded and skeletal,  
scything his gathering crop.  
Death is not dark, but white.  
It clings to the branches of trees and lurks,  
frosting the graves of those in its care.  
It's a cliché whisper in the wind  
that you aren't sure you heard  
because it sounds like silence.  
Some might call it beauty,  
but a thousand deaths hang in the air  
and cyanide falls from the sky.

Clint Smith

## Brimfield

It was early when I tore out west on 74, that gray scar—  
mouth: soured with bourbon mildew.  
Skull: stuffed with a cluster of swollen thorns.

There was an echo there too, from the one  
who tucked me in—her giggles drowned  
by distance. The windshield became a convex lens, magnifying  
the June burn—the monotonous insistence of the sun.

Dostoevsky on the seat next to me  
(where she would be)—a black-covered copy  
of *The Brothers Karamazov*: this summer's obsession.  
And a dog-eared edition of Babel—his *Red Calvary*.

The echo was replaced by a cheep entreaty  
when my car murdered a bird in Brimfield, a sparrow,  
No less, at the intersection of Clinton and Jefferson.

I stopped to see if there was a chance, shoving aside thoughts  
of Babel's *First Goose*. This is how notions unravel:  
Please note the languid motion of green-silk ribbons  
of the knee-high cornfield under the baby blanket backdrop,  
tiny feathers giving their last twitch in gravel.

Silence was an indifferent witness. But in the farmhouse beyond the fence,  
I squint-glimpsed a window, arthritic-twisted fingers parting faded drapes.  
I waved to where a face should be, but the black slit slowly sutured itself shut,  
the drapes swayed back to stagnation. I wanted to go home

for the same reason I came here—both absent now of a confessor.  
All that remained were sinister whispers from my Grand Inquisitor.  
She would not have me after hearing this.  
I thought about Ivan leaving for Moscow.

I escaped—back to the car, back to the highway. The gray scar.  
And now, at the height of the sun's afternoon brutality,  
the magnifying glass focused on my chest, setting me on fire—  
the flames doing what they do best:  
Chewing me down to sun-scoured bones  
as I flailed with stuntman absurdity,  
as I fled from destiny's deathbed, back home  
to my Midwest Odessa.

## Nailbomb

The absence of hearing you breathe  
became intolerable; thus, one night I retrieved

A foggy mason jar filled  
with nails (rusty, flawed ones we  
yanked from the paint-chipped sills  
and rafters) and poured them over the concave vacancy

where you used to sleep. I blew out the candle,  
closed my eyes, and ran my hand  
over that soft, moonlit ditch  
where I saved you from bad dreams.

I pinned your pillowcase at four corners with brass tacks,  
coiled ribbons of barbwire (from the fence around our farm)  
to fill in the missing parts. Boredom, isolation  
led to the nail bomb—my shrapnel masterpiece  
which I placed over that mess of hardware,  
waiting for sun-up's tongue to lick the wick.

Janice Bankert-Countryman

## Letting Go

Touching, tasting, seeing, smelling, and hearing. Amazing is the capability of the five senses to arouse the most visceral emotions, the most tangible memories. It is more than a decade later and still the sound of a phone ringing before eight in the morning steals my breath. When the phone wakes me from sleep, it is worse. I clutch my husband's arm and huddle into his warmth as I again see myself being awoken from sleep by a ringing phone at seven-thirty on a Sunday morning fourteen years ago.

I stretched and stumbled to the white phone that hung on my kitchen wall, mumbling curtly, "Hello?"

"Janice. Janice, is that you?"

"Jacob? Are you ok?" The voice sounded like Jacob's, I wondered why my friend was up so early on the day after the Halloween party. Then I smiled, thinking that he had never gone to sleep at all.

"No. Janice, it's Jim. Um. Jacob can't meet you for lunch today." Jim's voice sounded distant, like he had his hand over the mouthpiece.

"Huh? Whatever. Put Jacob on the phone." I rolled my eyes. Jacob was trying to freak me out. He said I was too responsible, too grown up, and he liked to help me, as he called it, live a little, loosen up.

"I can't," Jim responded quietly. "Janice, I can't. Please..." Jim pleaded. "He's dead. He hung himself. I came home, couldn't find him..." Jim's words ran together in a torrent of

jangled confusion. "I didn't see him leave. We couldn't find him until I looked in the basement. He was still warm, Janice. There was spit...on his chin. It was warm. But his face...he was just hanging there." Jim was whispering. I could barely hear his voice over my own labored breathing. I closed my eyes and saw Jacob. His face slack. His face blue. His face tilted, unable to lift in laughter. His eyes closed.

"Mom. Jacob. Mom. Mom. Dad. Jacob. Oh, Jacob. Mom," I rasped as I stumbled from my side of the duplex, past my parents' bedroom window, to their stoop. I made it almost to their door before Dad flew down the steps to catch me in his arms to hold me up. I tried to look him in the eyes, to tell him what had happened during the night, but I cowered in my sorrow. I bowed my head and whispered, "Dad..." Sobs broke from my body, tearing away from my chest and leaving me breathless.

"My God, Janice!" Mom had appeared beside me. She cradled my head against her chest and turned to my father, "Bryan, What is it? What is it?"

At a loss, my dad whispered, "Beth, I don't know. She hasn't said."

Mom's hands clutched my waist as my knees began to give way again. I could not avoid it any longer, so I plunged headlong into what I had to say, "Jacob's dead." I could not shield them; there was no gentle way to do this. Jacob was my friend, but they had adopted him in their hearts as their only son. "Mom. Jacob..."

I searched in their faces for a way to say the worst. "Jacob killed himself last night. He hung himself." The words dangled starkly among us. For a moment, there was nothing but the still life of a family holding one another, the early-morning burnish of autumn gilding our hair and faces. I remember staring at our knuckles clenching one another's skin, growing whiter as all three of us shook into the next breath. Dad began to sob and a wail erupted from my mother. I just stood there, already hidden within myself, the grief of my parents slowly becoming intangible to me. Jacob's death was my only reality.

The next hours and days remain largely vague to me, but I recall some moments as crystalline shards. I cannot define whole days or even sets of hours in the orders of time and space; such coherent memories are not within my reach, even now, over a decade later. No amount of journaling or counseling has birthed them. Because I am ashamed of certain truths my family does not know, I fear asking them about Jacob or his funeral and burial. What if they ask me questions in turn? Maybe the snapshot moments available to me are all I need in order to find comfort and have the strength to mourn once more. I have wondered, too, if we were each to share our stories of Jacob and his death that this anger I hold toward myself would dissipate, allowing me to remember clearly and to finally forgive Jacob and myself. However unreasonable, I still feel cloaked by a sediment of

guilt about his last choice.

Jacob and I were lovers. I would like to say that our relationship was over before his death. This is the truth that my family and most of my friends believe to be true; it is the one that I perpetuated because when Jacob died, I was engaged to another person. Jacob and I had never enjoyed a typical relationship, and so it was easy to keep silent about the secret we shared. He did not tell his friends or family what I meant to him. I was, in public, only his friend. In private, we did not discuss or analyze our relationship. We were just together.

When I was seventeen and a freshman at the Indianapolis campus of Indiana University, he walked into the student center and stood by the doors, watching the March rain pelt the sidewalk outside with a half-smile on his face. He had walked through the storm, so his black hair dripped a few raindrops onto his cheeks, which glowed red from the icy early spring damp. Earphones hugged his head, and he tapped the Walkman in his hands. I liked the way he looked and moved. I asked around my group of friends, but no one knew him. So, I approached this mysterious boy who was dressed in a red hoodie and jeans. He was built on a small scale, no taller than my five feet and three inches, no heavier than my 145 pounds.

I stood by his side and said, "Hi," smiling coyly as I waited for him to respond.

He didn't hear me over the roar of his music. He didn't see me because he was bending

## "Jacob and I were lovers."

his head to adjust his Walkman. So, I pulled the headphones from his ears. My brazen act shocked both of us. We stood there staring at each other for a full minute before he asked, "What the hell did you do that for?"

I shrugged and handed him his headphones, "Because I wanted to talk to you. And they were in the way." I plunged ahead, "My name is Janice," and held out my hand to him.

He stared at me, and I wondered if he would walk away in a huff or even slug me for being so rude. Instead, he laughed. He laughed so hard that he bent at the waist and gasped for air. His guffaws slowed to a chuckle before he said, "Janice. Well, that was a great way to get my attention. My name is Jacob." He grasped my waiting hand and shook it. His face dimpled when he smiled at me, and his laughter continued in the flash of his brown eyes.

The spring I met Jacob was the rainiest I had ever seen. I enjoyed it at first. The smell of tulips and then lilacs seemed especially sweet, and the warmth of the drabest university building was heaven after walking across campus. But it began to wear on me, and I started to feel depressed by the never-ending dampness that seeped under my clothes and crawled along my skin. However, Jacob thrived in the torpor that spring pressed upon us. He was used to gray skies, he said. Until he had graduated

high school the previous year, he had lived in England and attended a boarding school for military brats, a term he used to describe himself. His father was in the Navy, and his mother had walked away one day when we was two, leaving him, his father, and his infant brother behind. She didn't leave a note, and he never spent time during our conversations guessing why she left—other than to wonder if the loneliness of being a Navy wife finally became too much for her. But he did not dwell often on these or other melancholy subjects. His stories were mostly ones of hilarity and adventure; like the time that he got drunk in Italy when he was twelve or the time when he and his friends escaped from being caught by the military police for being out past curfew or even the time that he biked across French countryside with friends. He raised his t-shirt regularly to exhibit the tattoo of a black panther that climbed up his right shoulder blade, an emblem the males of his graduating class shared.

Jacob and I spent time together almost daily. I began spending the night at his house, most of the time in the same bed. Eventually, we became lovers. However, in the daylight, we were just best friends. The soggy spring finally abated into a blazingly hot summer. We found relief one day in the shadows of my basement and spent hours knocking down walls to get rid of the rot and the smell of dog urine from the past tenant's Doberman. I stepped on a board and nail pierced my foot. All I could do was whisper

Jacob's name. He flew to me, assessed the situation, and asked if I could stand very still.

"I can. What are you going to do?" I already felt nauseous from the pain.

"Just stand still. Don't move," he warned me in a sing-song voice. His eyes were fastened to my white tennis shoe and the board beneath it. He lifted my foot straight off the board and bolted to stand behind me. I stumbled backwards into his arms and felt the world shape shift around me. He picked me up and carried me up the basement stairs, putting me down on the stoop and elevating my leg on the railing. All the time, he kept chanting, "Don't move. You'll be ok. Stay still." He pulled the car up and carried me to the passenger side, then drove me to the immediate care. He wouldn't let me go down into the basement again until he had carried all of the remaining boards to the rubbish heap behind the garage. Jacob expressed his deeper emotions through actions, not words.

Jacob was not always so kind to me, though. In private, he was tender, but his public self was sometimes mean. I didn't like his friends, and I didn't like Jacob when he was around them. His friends, whose names and faces are indistinct to me now, were what my mother called "rough." They worked only when they felt like it, and drank and cussed. Jacob became a stranger to me when his friends came to his house for a Saturday night of drinking. One early July night in particular stands out in my memory.

Jacob had already been drinking for hours.



"Look at Janice, guys! Isn't she pretty? Ask her out! She's single. She has a job. She's in college. She's perfect." He frowned at me for a long moment and then laughed, "Take her out! Show her a good time!" He picked up a bottle of vodka and sipped it, his eyes closed tightly against the burn.

"Jacob." I gasped. The room had gone quiet, his friends and their girlfriends looked from Jacob to me and then to each other. No one knew what to say. Because he and I were constantly together, they probably all figured that he and I were dating, but Jacob found a hundred ways to convince them otherwise, such as saying, "Janice, don't you have a date tonight? Some nice fraternity guy?" He got up and walked to the kitchen without looking back. I left. He called me to apologize the next day.

I had thought that one day he would overcome whatever kept him from telling me and everyone, that he loved me. These glimpses of a different Jacob caused me to start to back away from him. By the end of the summer, I was spending more time at home and had started dating a guy in Chicago. I didn't stop going over to Jacob's completely. Jacob stopped touching me after I told him about my boyfriend, but I still wanted him and wanted to be his girl. I hated myself for my duplicity, and I was angry with Jacob for not wanting me enough to say it out loud. I felt forced to move on.

In August, I moved to Virginia and volunteered with a Christian ministry for six

weeks. I believed I could become someone new, someone honest by working daily in a church office. I thought that time away from Jacob, as well as my boyfriend, would help me categorize my feelings so that I could be just Jacob's friend and be true to my boyfriend. Before I left, Jacob bought me a tiny gold cross and said as he gave it to me without looking at me, "I asked the sales lady to help me pick something that would last... couldn't be broken easily... I told her it needed to look strong and feminine—like you." He put the chain around my neck and kissed my cheek.

I wore the cross every day in Virginia where I prayed to God to forgive me for cheating in my heart and to help me be a better person. The prayers went unanswered. I was naïve to try—not because I believe now that God is incapable of those things but because I didn't really want to let Jacob go. I just wanted to not hurt anymore. I wanted to feel love requited. After six weeks of frustrating, seemingly one-sided conversations with God, I went back to Indianapolis. First, I called my boyfriend to let him know that I had made it safely. Then, I called Jacob to surprise him and to tell him that I had come home. Jacob and I never had sex after I got home, but there were times when he wrapped his arms around me, and we sat in silence as the night wore on.

As autumn set in, I grew restless with my life. I had to find a way to be around Jacob without wanting to be with him. This was not a fairy tale. He would not finally proclaim his love for me.

## “How do people move on?”

My boyfriend was a good person who deserved a better woman than I was, and so I became determined to become worthy of him. I had to find a way to let any romantic feelings for Jacob go. I wanted to be his friend, to not feel my heart skip when I saw him. I owed those feelings to my boyfriend, and since he was willing to love me, he deserved whatever I could give him in return. I was 18, and that was how I saw life. I had learned that it was not really possible for me to have what I wanted, so I tried to be who others expected me to be. At least I could please them, and maybe they would love me in return.

Two weeks later was the weekend of the Halloween parties. I didn't celebrate because I was brought up to believe that it was the Devil's holiday, and I was not ready to break that taboo yet. But it was Jacob's favorite day of the year. He told me stories of his escapades and his costumes, and he tried to get me to go to the party with him. "Sure you don't want to go, Janice? It'll be fun!" he said making ghost sounds between puffs on his cigarette. He poked me in the side with his elbow and laughed.

"No, but thanks. Stay home with me, Jacob. I'll make us supper. We can put in a movie or something." He took several long drags of his cigarette and blew the smoke out slowly. A quiet settled between us for a minute. I studied his

profile in the streetlight, watching the reds that cold always caused to grow in his cheeks.

"It's Halloween! Party! Party!" he suddenly laughed, pumping his fist in the air. He kissed me on the cheek and held me close before tousling my hair and laughing again. He grabbed me a second time and hugged me. Then he danced away acting and sounding like a ghost then a cackling witch.

I shook my head and got into the car, trying to hide my smile, trying not to laugh. I turned on the engine and rolled down my window. "So lunch on Sunday then? I'll pick you up after church? Say, two o'clock?"

"You bet. 'Bye now." He knocked his knuckles against my car, squeezed my shoulder, and danced away, still pretending to be a ghoul. I watched him as he entered his house and waved back at him when he saluted me from the doorway. When he had closed the door, I laid my head against the steering wheel and cried, tightening my grip against the wheel so that I would not knock on his door and try to talk to him about us. I had tried before, while we were sleeping together and after I had started dating my boyfriend. Nothing worked. It was time give up, but I didn't know how.

He died on the night of the party. Some say he was sober when he walked home. Some say he was drunk. He was either sober enough or drunk enough to hang himself from a rafter in his basement, using his bench press as a kick-off, wearing his letterman's jacket, his face still



Kim Mezger

Graffiti

painted like a vampire. These are facts, but they did not help me make sense of his death. For weeks afterward, I closed myself off and struggled to understand what Jacob had chosen to do and why. My father helped me begin the process of healing a few weeks after Jacob died. I was just waking up from a nap on their bed when I heard my parents talking outside of the window. I peeked over the windowsill and watched as Dad loaded the boards from my basement onto his trailer. Mom watched him for a moment before continuing the conversation.

“But how, Bryan? How? How does anyone survive this?”

Dad threw the wood onto the trailer bed and paused before turning to her. He walked to her and held her close. “She will make it, Beth. We will all make it.” He let her go and picked up another armload.

Mom watched him for a few more minutes, and I watched them, thinking that I was not the

only one that Jacob had left behind. Mom lit a cigarette, took a few drags, and then threw it down and stomped on it. “But how, Bryan? There is no getting over this... this nightmare. How do people move on?” she sobbed.

Dad dropped his load of boards onto the trailer and turned to her. He folded her into his arms, lowered his forehead into her hair, and said, “They just do.”

“I won’t,” I whispered, staring at the shadows on the ceiling. Night was coming on, and I shut the window against the chilly breeze. Then I leaned against the cold pane of glass and watched as they came inside. I listened to Mom set the table and fill the water glasses. They were small sounds, quotidian and comforting. I was still seesawing hourly among abject depression, anger, and numbness. But I realized in that moment that I was also still sleeping, eating, talking. I didn’t know how I would ever be okay again, but I realized as I moved down the hallway toward the kitchen to eat supper with my parents that I would. I just would.

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Matthew Eaton

## Dimestore Merchandise

Cheap laughter, cheap cigarettes, cheap booze  
A house so full, people so empty  
Personalities thinner than skin  
*A dozen a dime these ones.*  
But then there's you  
Across the room  
Bright and beautiful  
*Priceless.*  
Nothing like the busted mannequins  
Littering every room.

If only I had the guts, the gall  
If only I knew the words, the moves  
Call me a coward  
*Coward.*  
Call me a damned fool  
*Damned fool.*  
But both escape me.  
So I sit and scrawl  
Hoping you will read this  
And know it was meant for you.



Kimber Shaw

## Untitled



Kim Mezger

Wow

Angela Huges

## Washingtown

Enormous comforters, like cumulus clouds,  
console wrinkled and worn sheets.  
Socks dazzling white and dingy gray,  
search for sole mates.

Blue denim jeans, rough and tough,  
face the dryer and get tossed around,  
the washer swirls black lace panties  
and satin bras ever so gently.

Cotton candy pink cashmere sweaters  
hang out to dry.  
Green madras shorts and candy cane tees flirt  
with each other in a far corner.

The fabric softener and detergent gossip,  
watching the train roll by,  
its cars hauling delicates, whites, and colors.  
Relax. Here it's okay to keep colors and whites from  
fraternizing.



Matthew Strain  
The Red Line

The metro, drawn straight to me.  
I am express. You are dwell time.

I stand and stare at the third rail,  
and I wonder how it would feel.

So easy to reach down and grab,  
but that would mean leaving you.  
Something I would never.

Everyone dies, not everyone lives.

Once I gave you a transit card,  
it had a blood red heart on it.  
You held it in your pocket for awhile  
before swiping it at the iron maiden.

In that very moment the fault lights  
went away, and you were alive.  
You knew I would be waiting, standing  
on the altar at Chicago & State.

In this very moment I am the king and  
will always wait at the front of the church.  
No matter how long you hesitate at the gap.  
I can tell it is time. I have waited all my life.

This true facing point will show us the way.  
The starting light is ours, it has been given.

I will hold your hand on the platform,  
and whisper happy v-day.

We will stand and stare at the  
sunset through the glass,  
riding away on tracks and feeling so alive.



Tim Davis

## Connection

Sarah Hemmersbach

## Validation

### Validation

"I'll have a small coffee and a plain bagel, toasted, with cream cheese."

"That'll be \$5.48."

The nonchalant barista took my money just as she had the day before and every other day this week. I am about as exciting as my coffee order. I am incredibly predictable—just another man with nothing to offer but a ratty notebook full of mundane stories no one seems to want to read. But I still sit here in this dismal coffee shop cliché every morning hoping for a burst of inspiration while I write story after story about a man still looking for purpose in life. Autobiographical fiction doesn't seem to be working for me, but I'm a grown man who doesn't know how to do anything else.

So I sat there with my French roast and bland bagel, holding the pen to the paper waiting words to appear on the page, but I was just stuck there frozen by the same writer's block that had been plaguing my notebook for weeks now. The bell clanged from the door and I looked up and saw her. I'd never seen her in the café before and she didn't have the same look as every other woman who walked through that doorway. Her dark red hair fell in waves on her shoulders that were covered by the floral dress that cut off just above her knees. Her eye's brightened up the room, and the hair on my arms stood on end when she sent a smile my way. Energy like nothing I'd ever experienced surged through my body, as I looked straight down at my blank notebook.

She waltzed right up to the barista with a sort of ease that you only see in a flawless figure skating routine—the kind you watch in the winter Olympics on your dusty TV from the deteriorating couch in your apartment.

“I’ll have a small vanilla latte with an extra shot of espresso and one of those delicious scones you’ve got displayed on that funky little plate right over there,” she said. “This little lady has got to get her caffeine fix for the day.”

Her order was so exotic to me, and she did not seem like she needed that much caffeine in her system.

The barista chuckled, “That will be \$6.89. I’ll bring that right out to you.”

“Thanks, chickadee.” And with that same smile that gave me chills she flew to a table right by mine and floated into her seat. She pulled out a sketchbook with a paisley case full of colored pencils and began to draw. I watched as her hand swam over the page with the same energy she’d already infected me with. I was fascinated how quickly she could switch gears from enchanting the barista to sketching in her notebook. I’d never witnessed anything like her. I had to know her. I wanted to know everything about her.

I put forth my best effort at a saunter and walked right up to her and sat down at her table. “Hi, I’m Jacob Grayson. What are you drawing there?” I was trying hard to be suave and to hide my clammy hands.

Her big blue eyes peered over her sketchbook

at me, “Well, mister Jacob Grayson, you sure do have a big pair of balls to waltz up to a lady like that and just pry about her deepest darkest secrets.”

The grin on her face made me wonder if she was kidding or if she was entirely serious., So I just sat there—fixated and dumbfounded.

“Don’t get yourself in a fix there, khaki pants, I’m only kidding. I’m working on things for my grad portfolio but it’s not done yet.” Her grin flexed up a bit more around the edges of her mouth, “I’m Jacklynn.”

That was Jacklynn with two n’s, as she told me how irritated she got when people spelled it wrong.

“Where are you studying?” trying to get the conversation rolling.

“Well, I did my undergrad at Western Kentucky, and now I’m doing my grad work at Columbia,” she said. “It’s an interesting adjustment, but I like all the hustle and.

We talked for the next few hours about so many things. I found out she was a twenty-five year old fine arts major; had moved as far away from her hippie parents and their small town in Wyoming as possible; and had a passion for her pet tortoise Clayton. The ease of the conversation astonished me. I’d never been so comfortable talking with a perfect stranger and I was shocked at myself as I told her the little details of my life: about my stint as an English professor, my overbearing Jewish mother that liked to call me every week to remind me how great my brother was doing, and how proud she was that he

“buckled down and found a real job.”. I don’t tend to break out of my comfort zone. Yet, it was like she had a rope tied around me and was just yanking me out of the big cozy hole I’d dug for myself over the past few years.

“You know what, mister Jacob Grayson, I think you’re an okay sort of fella. Let’s say we go enjoy some of this day.” And just like that she gathered her things, looked straight through me, and walked out the door without making sure I was following her. But of course, I did.

We spent the rest of that day meandering about and laughing at the two ducks fighting over a piece of bread. If you’ve ever seen ducks fight, you know how hilarious that is.

She looked at the angry ducks, “Did you know that when ducks mate, they mate for life. They don’t have any other partners, ever. That is just the most peculiar thing. But clearly those two won’t be mating anytime soon.” Then she chuckled and kept walking.

I hadn’t had that much fun in a really long time, and I’d forgotten how it felt to be like that with someone. Once it began to get dark we decided to go back to my dingy apartment for a drink. After her third glass of wine, it was like a switch had been flipped—her contagious effervescence turned into intoxicating seduction. How did she do it? I couldn’t keep my eyes off her; the little pubescent boy inside of me had no clue what to do. She came closer and my hands fumbled like a fifteen year old attempting to unclasp a girl’s bra for the first time. She could

tell I was a little rusty.

“Just go with it,” she said. And you know what? I did.

When we were lying there in my bed, I still in a state of shock about my day and the glorious naked woman lying next to me she began to talk as nonchalant as ever,

“Ya know, I love having sex with someone for the first time. I live for those awkward fumbblings infused with anxiously passionate moments.

They say you really get to know a person once you’ve lived with them, but I actually think its after you have sex with them. Some guys try way too hard the first time, some guys get nervous and hold back, and the rest are sprinkled somewhere in between those two extremes.

And ya know what? I appreciate every single one of those men, because it is one of the few times you can witness an honest moment. When a man is standing naked in front of you in all his masculine glory, I always take a second and look ‘em right in the eyes. You guys give it all away in the eyes, you know that, right? So in a way I know you a little bit better than you know yourself now. Ha, funny how that works because all you men, you all want the same thing from women. It’s priceless.”

She got up, started to dress herself, and gathered her things.

“Well, what is it that all of us guys want?”

She looked at me straight in the eye, still half naked, and shrugged, “Validation, you want proof of your worth.”

Then she finished getting dressed, grabbed her purse, and walked out the door. Just like that she walked in and out of my life, leaving me to ponder about myself and if I thought she was right. Was she? Could it be the only thing I was searching for was someone to hold up a mirror to my face and say, "Yes, you are a man. I declare it here and now." How could this girl—this nearly perfect stranger—be able to read me like a book, cover to cover? I had to see her again.

So the next day I went to the coffee shop, hoping she would be there to get another caffeine fix like the day before. There she was at that same table as she had been the day before. Today she wore weathered jeans topped off with a t-shirt from some band that I'd never heard of and her hair was in a messy bun on top her head. She was vigorously sketching, only taking breaks to sip on her coffee and to bite from her breakfast pastry.

She looked up, "Well if it isn't mister Jacob Grayson. Having a good morning so far?"

It was as if she was saying hello to an old friend that she only moderately cared for, just a careless greeting before she looked right back at her sketchbook. It took me a moment to answer. I was having trouble finding my words.

"Um, alright I guess. I was wondering if you

were free this evening? Maybe you'd like to get a drink again?" I felt like a tennis ball was in my throat and I struggled to get any words out.

"Aww, what harm could it do? Sure thing, sweetheart. You can pick me up at 8 o'clock." And with that she wrote down her address on her napkin, passed it over to me, and went right back to sketching. For some reason I knew our conversation was over. So I left with the napkin in my pocket not sure what I was going to do with the rest of my day.

I couldn't get what she'd said the night before out of my head. How could she understand the one thing that I struggled with after only knowing me for a few hours? It was eating away at me. Even if she didn't realize it, all I wanted to do was get on me knees and beg for her approval. I'd only known her for a few moments but she already had my heart in her hand and was squeezing hard.

I went back to my apartment, and while sitting at my desk I looked out the window. I smiled at the two ducks crossing the street heading toward the pond in the park by my house. "Life partners," I thought. "So peculiar." I opened my notebook and began to write.

Amanda Peters  
Last Resort





Kim Mezger

## Best Friends



Leann Gemelas

## Mortimer

I am alone in my house  
except for Mortimer,  
but he's often away,  
chasing innocents in the night.

Mortimer is in denial  
that he belongs to me;  
he looks at me sideways  
whenever I tell him so.

He once tried to give me  
the liver of a mouse.  
I think he forgot that I'm a vegan.

Just last week  
we were talking about work  
and I was telling him  
a story about my boss.  
"He's a little crazy about his coffee," I said.  
"Non-fat soy and skim half-caf latte,  
two inches of foam."  
"Who," he asked?  
"My boss," I replied.  
"Who?"

It was all I could do to not sigh.

One thing we like is to watch movies.  
Our favorite film is *Cool Hand Luke*.  
He says that it inspires him  
to be free.  
Sometimes I catch him  
watching *When Harry Met Sally*.  
He tries to pass it off  
like it was already on TV  
but I know he put it in himself.

I am alone in my house  
except for Mortimer,  
but he's often away.  
He needs to get some air.  
Sometimes I think that maybe I should get a dog.

Andrew Harmon

## This Poem

Like a card house, each crisp leaflet lying  
in tender balance against another,  
every sliver oblique and freestanding,  
touching at the edges. Sounds are my diamonds.  
Verbs are my clubs, driven into the ground;  
like Vlad the Impaler's pikes and all your heads are stuck upon them.  
I can't use hearts in my card house. I'm scared to use hearts.  
My first loves were Wonder Woman, Agent Scully, and Sonya Blade  
and I'm sure all three could kick my ass.  
So of course I can't trust hearts.

This poem was to have a tongue as sharp as a Shakespearean imp,  
but we talked it over and cut that part out.

I wanted to put this poem in my coat pocket,  
carry it around like Frank O'Hara carried his  
and Paris Hilton carries her Tinkerbell,  
but I'm worried it may quiver and relieve itself  
in the nylon depths of my breast pocket.  
I'm worried the syntax has made it too furry.

This poem seems too much like my pet.  
This poem seems too much like me.  
Now I seem too much like my own pet  
and who's to say I'm not.  
I feed myself from bowls, I wake myself up  
to pee. I groom myself  
and take myself on short walks if the weather's not too bad.  
Don't act like you don't pet yourself now and then, too.

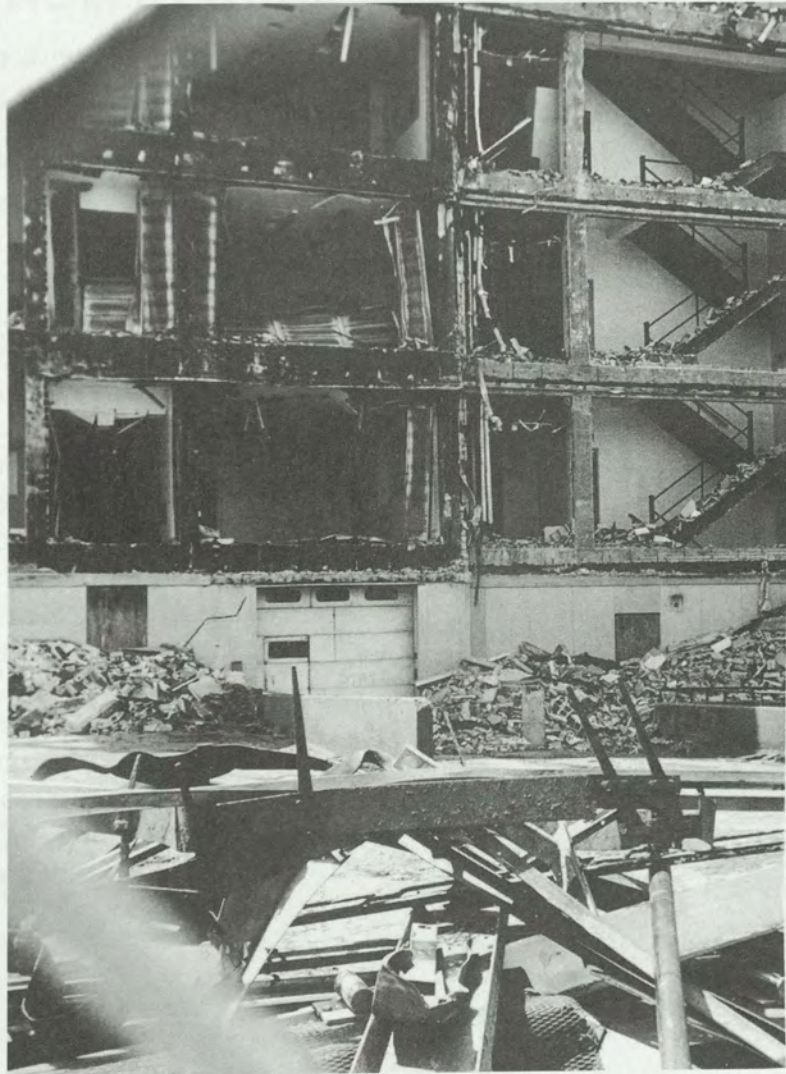
This poem is as rich as a doughnut,  
topped with the coolness of sour cream,  
kicking like a weathered jalapeno,  
washed down with a root beer and uncorked  
with a thunderous belch.

## Deflation of the Soul, an Economic Tragedy

It's not a soul-selling market.  
The devil don't travel door-to-door  
anymore, and his offers are lower than ever.  
If you're looking to cut a deal,  
you'd better have better than a butter knife.

Now he's got the market cornered  
and pretends not to hear your wager.  
He picks at his nails, sighs unimpressed smoke,  
balls his lips until you lay your shabby spirits  
at his toes and plead for whatever he has left.

Amanda Peters  
Future



Chad Forbregd

## A Nightmare Between Friends

*after Goya's Disparate sin título*

I want an escape, someone new  
stretched out in the sidecar of my slumber.  
I am a scapegoat of habit, a coward  
reaching for some fellow passenger  
to share my nightmares with. Before sleep  
I arrange the events of the day,  
compile faces I have stumbled past  
in my travels: anxious young strangers  
who have nodded towards me  
or sat shifting in their seats, edging  
towards the door. I collect them,  
file them neatly in my hand  
as I pull back my sheets and slide  
my arm under the cold pillow.  
In dreams, I'm looking for the shape  
of a girl, personal armor,  
someone to occupy this temporary hell with.  
A person I can lie to, not next to.  
Someone who believes the world is humid,  
someone stuck reconstructing  
the anatomy of a roadside snack.  
I need a reason for sleep.  
Someone to taunt me awake.

## Novelty of the Midwest

It has me sucking dirt out of a pipe,  
licking at the sides of a rusty bucket,

dyeing my hands  
as I pull away.

Like the taste of expired milk,

I lingered.

Someone says: "You know, you can use  
equal parts whiskey and water

as medicine." No one asks what for.

"Jim or Jack, hell even Makers will  
do the trick. Half and half," they say.

A child in another room  
spills something and cries.

The ignorant Father, the messy child.  
Interest is lost and minds wander

to images of the West, a camera zoomed in,  
out of focus. A young actress pumped

full of pills that blur reality more than  
hopes and dreams.

A tide breaks in the distance, someone's  
prayers are answered.

A fifteen year old drunk on the beach  
stares at the girl draped in white...

The boy repeats over and over...  
"Don't play your violins, just feed me  
rum."

Elise Renollet

## Gratitude

Orange juice shot through with sun  
from ruminating months in Floridian green,  
a handful of steel-cut oats, each grain full  
from the royal black of Midwestern earth,  
bone-white milk birthed in the slick machinery  
of cows clung through with clover  
raw and rambling in the Great Plains,  
curly cues of fairy vapor dancing  
from coffee culled in Cameroon,  
a Grecian kiwi gleaming emerald,  
a blizzard of sugar blown sweet from Brazil,  
and Goji berry tea heavy with a red tang,  
a petite water-color sea in my cup  
hand-painted in Chinese calligraphy  
and ripe peonies:  
a feast gathered by hands  
olive, cream, ebony, copper,  
plucked from the four winds  
and placed on my small square of table  
in a dawn-lit room.



## At Grandpa's Farm the Day of the Funeral

Black shoes scuffed the kitchen floor  
that could not hold the gullish voices  
trying to smother the silence with lectures  
on cold fronts as if storm clouds could be  
measured.

I stood in the doorway of your den  
and saw the piano, whites and blacks sliding  
one by one like drops in a dead waterfall,  
Cs and F-sharps and A-flats breaking  
with me into a black sea that had no bottom  
until the melodies of "Chopsticks"  
and the "Boogie Woogie" dissolved  
and the quiet tide rose louder and louder.  
Who knew emptiness could be so full?  
I choke with non-words and violences  
beyond words for the house is filled with silence  
as if music never sang.

## | Best of Fiction |

Elise Renollet

### Ilora's Masterpiece

Under the florescent lighting of his windowless basement, Elias Hash rotated a bottle of IBC cherry cola in one of his trembling, sun-mottled hands while lifting the edges of its cap with a bottle opener. Moisture gathered at the roots of his thinning gray hair and began to trickle into the furrows of his brow.

Elias collected bottle caps. Cardboard boxes and plastic crates filled with bottles choked the underground room, leaving only a small path that led from the stairwell to his tidy workbench where he sat now. After he unscrewed the caps, he placed them in a polished oak shelving unit that he had crafted himself: an elegantly symmetrical structure that formed one of the basement's four walls and was comprised of ten square cabinets of glass whose glistening centers were engraved with one of ten labels: fruit soda, water, fruit juice, beer (domestic), beer (imported), root beer, cream soda, specialty drinks, ginger ale, and cola. Behind the cabinets were hundreds of tiny velvet-lined drawers that were organized by date and boasted the depth (or rather the shallowness) of a CD case. Each miniscule compartment was painstakingly fitted with tiny custom knobs sanded into perfect spheres.

"Gently, now. Easy does it," he said, coaxing the bottle cap to move. With the measured, nigh-imperceptible, ponderous movement of the earth rotating on its axis, the cap began to twist.

A brisk rapping at the door jarred the heavy quiet of Elias' meticulous undertaking. He

“Surely, this was enough.”

dropped the bottle onto the cold cement of his basement floor, shattering the auburn glass that scattered under a hissing pool of cherry cola. Elias cursed under his breath. Shoving the bottle opener away, he jerked the sleeve of his plaid flannel shirt from his wrist to note the time: 7:15am. “That woman doesn’t miss a beat does she?” he said. Grumbling incoherently, he began to shuffle his way up the basement’s bare wooden steps.

Making his way through the neat angles of his house, Elias recalled the surprising phone call he had received a few weeks ago from his only child, Sally. It was the first time he had heard from her in years. He had never been a great father, or husband for that matter, had spent his days at the Ford factory assembling engine parts and his nights shut up in the basement, tinkering with his tools. His orderly mind, enraptured with detail, with smallness, with the intricate connectedness of disparate parts, with anything that demanded examination under a magnifying glass, brought him into a comfortable isolation, where he forgot about the world he could not control, about his wife and daughter and their beating, needy, human hearts. Elias, whose own parents had been as distant as winter moons, feared their warm touch and felt much safer handing the cool iron of his tools. How he had

ever stumbled into marriage to begin with was a mystery: such a quick affair propelled by his ex-wife’s domineering personality, stunning blue eyes, and fateful lack of foresight.

But Elias had paid the bills, made sure Sally had tennis shoes, and generally picked up his socks. Surely, this was enough. But his ex-wife hadn’t thought so, and had left one night twenty-two years ago to her sister in Nevada, toting a suitcase, a hairdryer, and five-year-old Sally. The day after they left, Elias pocketed his first bottle cap.

Listening to the tentative voice on the other line, Elias guessed that Sally probably wanted something. He was right. Apparently, Sally had moved back in town a few of years ago for a job and had married soon after that. But then her husband of eight months had left her, and she couldn’t afford to send her daughter, Ilora, to preschool anymore. She wondered if he could watch Ilora during the day, just until she could get back on her feet again. Elias had refused. He had more important things to do. But Sally kept calling, cried about not having anybody else in the world, about Ilora and her future. He begrudgingly consented.

When Elias arrived at his front door, Sally was there coatless and unravelled, attempting to hold up a weak smile that seemed too heavy for her. Her eyes were the same blue he remembered, but burdened by years and circumstance. “Hey, daddy. It’s good to see you,” Sally said after an awkward pause,

wrapping a slender arm around his hunched neck in a brief embrace. "I'd like you to meet my daughter, Ilora," she said and coaxed from behind her legs a little girl in a puffy pink coat. Elias glanced at his granddaughter critically, sniffing as if she hadn't met his expectations, as if she was too short or too quiet. "Can you say 'hi' to your grandpa?" Sally asked. Elias bristled at being called "grandpa" and gave Ilora a warning look. The child just stared at the snowflakes on her scuffed Mary Janes.

Frustrated in her attempts at forging even a semblance of a relationship, a bridge to cover the chasm of many wasted years, Sally wearily unloaded several canvas bags stuffed with books and toys onto the wide front porch. "I've packed her a PBJ and some crackers. She doesn't need much. Oh, I'm almost late for my shift." Bending down, she gripped Ilora in a tight embrace and kissed the top of her curly blonde head, the soft pink of her cheek. "I love you, baby," she said. "Be good for mama. Bye, Ilora. Bye, dad." The child stared after her mother with big, solemn eyes. Then she stared up into the harsh lines of Elias' face.

"Well, come on, then," he said, picking up the bags and motioning for her to come inside.

Once Elias had dropped Ilora and her bags off in Sally's old room, he made his way

to the basement and settled into his routine: unscrewing the bottle caps, molding them to shapely perfection with a specialized contraption he had invented himself, washing them of dirt and sticky sweet, drying them, organizing them according to the inscrutable method of organization that only he understood. He took a sort of delight in this process that was a curious amalgamation of work and pleasure. In the little round disks before him were rainbows of color, miniature canvases of line and contour, imprinted with human creativity. Each label was different, like the spectrum of variety seen in the various ethnicities, sounds, languages, tastes, ideas that made up the universe. Here was everything, and it fit into the weathered palms of his hands.

"Grandpa." The quiet intensity of the voice shocked Elias as he was draining some bottles of soda down the basement's sink. He never drank from the bottles whose caps he collected. Turning around, he saw Ilora standing next to him.

"What in the Sam hill is it?" Elias asked as he threw a couple of empty bottles into a large metal bin he used for recycling.

"Where's the bathroom?" she asked in a near whisper.

"Huh?"

"The bathroom?" she managed to say.

Elias sighed. "Down the hall to your left."

"What's left?"

Elias groaned. And so it was. It seemed that every fifteen minutes, Ilora had lost her green

“What’s left?”

marker or had seen a robin outside or was thirsty. "Doggone distraction," Elias would mutter.

"I'm hungry," she said a few hours later, playing with the edge of her knit sweater.

Elias looked at his watch. It was nearly one o' clock. "Pushy little thing, aren't you? Alright, then. Let's go eat."

Upstairs, Elias opened Ilora's lunch box with the awkwardness of one unaccustomed to dealing with children and their accoutrements. He glanced back into Ilora's sharply conscious eyes. Nervously, he took out the sandwich wrapped in cellophane and an apple and placed them before the child who was sitting at the square kitchen table. He seemed unsure if he should open the sandwich or let Ilora do it. Finally, he decided to open it for her, and in the process dropped it onto the linoleum of the kitchen floor. Ilora stared at him wonderingly, innocently, as if this were all part of the show. Grunting, he picked up the sandwich, handed it to her, took it back on second thought to blow off any dirt, then handed it to her again, and sat down. He wouldn't even touch the apple. Sighing, Elias began to eat his Jack Benny, hiding behind his latest copy of *Cap Collectors' Digest*. Ilora continued to stare at him. Elias could feel her eyes behind the glossy pages, squirmed as if those eyes were the president's or God's. They seemed to know and see and understand him right down to his dusty soul.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Pray?" she asked and folded her hands.

Elias frowned. "Pray? Haven't prayed since I was a kid." But Ilora's eyes were persistent.

"Fine," he said. He wrinkled his nose and cleared his throat. "Dear God," he said. "bless this, er, food. Thy will be done on earth as it is...up there. Now I lay me down to---wait, no. Amen."

Ilora looked up with solemn eyes as if the pope himself had just spoken with the divine.



Every day, Sally dropped Ilora off at 7:15 am. Sharp. Every day, Elias moved his granddaughter into Sally's old room with her toys and books, before he scuttled off into the basement to work. Lunch came when Ilora would remind him of the world where time passed and little girls' stomachs needed steady filling. She insisted that they always pray. Beyond that, Ilora bothered him only when she deemed it absolutely necessary, fearing the iron line of his lips, the bent in his brow. Sally would come back long after dark had erased winter's white, exhausted from the invariable grind of menial labour, but exuberant to see the beauty that made everything worth it: her precious Ilora.

One day, Elias took Ilora for a walk. Settling into his fedora and walking shoes, he would often stroll around his neighbourhood of decaying Victorian structures to search for bottle

caps. This time was different. Ilora was with him. As they walked, the child stared at her grandpa, his eyes glued to the sidewalk below him, alert to any miniscule flash of color or curve.

"Grandpa," that voice again.

"What?" Elias said.

"What're you doing?" she asked.

"Looking for bottle caps," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"So I can clean 'em up."

"Why?"

"So I can save 'em."

"Why?"

"Because I collect bottle caps." Elias's voice was slipping into an irritated grate.

"Why?" Elias looked at Ilora, frowning, the tips of his cheekbones beginning to flush with frustration.

"But you're missing everything," she said, her perfect pink brow curved in puzzlement.

"Huh?"

"You can't see the sky when you're looking at the ground," she said.

Elias returned his eyes to the cracked concrete and grumbled something about wasted time.

•

A few weeks later, after Sally and Ilora had left and driven away in Sally's muffler-less beater, Elias sat down at his kitchen table with some leftover chicken and noodles from MCL

## "To Grandpa, love Ilora."

and "50 Most Valuable Bottle Caps," an article from the *Digest*. He was comparing the caps in the pictures to some of his own, eyes half-greedy for any advantageous similarity. Before he ate, he bent his head to pray out of habit, but caught himself, and then cursed loudly to make up for it. Suddenly, something arrested his eye. Looking down, he noticed a piece of yellow construction paper, brilliantly embellished with swirling fireworks of crayon. Little Ilora had used every color in her box of twenty-four Crayolas. At the top was written in an unsteady but determined hand, "The Sky," and at the bottom was written, "To Grandpa, love Ilora."

Elias picked up the drawing, taken aback, unsure of what to feel or what to think. Then with an agitated "bah," he dropped the drawing and returned to his bottle caps. But after a few moments, he stopped, studying the caps as if for the first time, as if he were determining their weight. Then, he looked again at Ilora's masterpiece.

For the first time in many years, time seemed to stop and beckon him to pause, to lift up his eyes from the smallness of his own isolated world to grander things. An uncomfortable sense of something unsettled his stomach as if he had awakened from a heavy slumber and seen the world for the first time. What an alien world it

was, a writhing, living world that twisted into unexpected arabesques and flew up higher than dimension itself and burst in surprising color that defied law and known fact: a world that couldn't fit into a narrow drawer. What was this feeling? Shame or sadness or perhaps conviction? Elias suddenly forgot about his meal, for it seemed so insignificant in the face of a deeper hunger that seemed to quake in his soul. Suddenly, Elias's felt a curious wetness about the corners of his eyes, a phenomenon he vaguely remembered from a very long time ago.

•

The next morning, Elias opened the door before Sally could knock. Clearing his throat and summoning his courage, he suddenly dropped to his knees, slowly and painfully, as if his rusty joints hadn't been oiled in an age, had lost their ability to kneel. Facing Ilora, he wondered at her as if she was a strange unearthly being, as if he had never seen her before. How blue her eyes were. How brilliantly, stunningly blue. Like her mama's. Like his. Elias brought up one calloused hand and, hesitating, touched the smooth arch of her cheek. Ilora bravely smiled back; then, touching his hand, she noticed that it was bandaged and raw. "What happened to your hand?" she asked.

It had all happened the night before, when he realized that everything that he had called

precious was worthless; and everything of true value he had disdained. Setting down Ilora's picture, now pattered with uneven wet drops, he had suddenly felt a futile sense of anger. Heaving with passion, he made his way down into the basement and stood before the cabinet of all his empty dreams. "Oh, God," he said. Eyes blurring, he grasped a sledgehammer from his workbench. Then Elias took a deep breath, pressed the heavy tool with his gnarly hands and swung it with all of the weight of his dead past. The hammer clashed into the cabinet's glass with a peeling, white rush. Again and again he swung, the polished fibers of the wood twisting, gaping, flying with each agonized swing, the caps falling to the ground like a hard, metal rain. After hours of merciless beating, he crumpled into the shards, the splinters, and wept.

Slowly, Elias' mind eased back from the night before to the new, frigid morning and Ilora standing before him. What did happen to his hand? More so, what had happened to his heart?

"I wanted to see the sky again," he said. Ilora nodded knowingly, with a child's lucid wisdom. Puzzled at the exchange before her, Sally mentioned something about being late, and made her way to the car. But Elias couldn't hear her. He slowly stood up, took Ilora by the hand, and said, "Let's take a walk today. The sun's shining so beautifully this morning."

•

**Janice Bankert-Countryman** enjoys most engaging in the iterative processes of research and writing. She spends her hours pondering life in general and relationships in specific. Janice is thankful to Scott, James, and Marianne - as well as all of her loved ones - for how they inspire and spur her on.

**Jeff Bleicher** one day might take this whole writing thing seriously.

**Courtney Cooper** is a student at Herron School of Art and Design. She previously studied Elementary Education and Nursing at IUPUI, but realized she needed to study something she was truly passionate about if she is ever going to graduate!

**Tim Davis** his piece is inspired by the electric connection involved with music. This electricity is carried through the piece as diverse atmospheres are created. These atmospheres are parallels of the different emotions evoked by the sounds of the music.

**Anna Dawson** is currently a sophomore Biology major at IUPUI. She hopes to have a career as an osteopath one day. Anna has been writing poetry since sixth grade. In her spare time (when there is any), she likes to dance, paint, do yoga and party.

**Matthew Eaton** is a sophomore this year at IUPUI, studying Media Arts and Science with a focus on video.

**Chad Forbregd** doesn't look a gift horse in the mouth.

**Leann Gemelas** is a second-time student, trying to find her purpose in life. People usually shake "their heads and say, "Good luck with that," whenever she tells them this.

**M. J. Gillot** is an old mommy with a young boyfriend. An eternal fine arts major at Herron, she is currently having soup for dinner and nursing a bad sinus infection.

**Andrew Harmon's** goals in life are to live in an apartment above a bar, edit a literary magazine that no one will read, and write books no one will buy. He's from Speedway.

**Sarah Hemmersbach** is a sophomore Communications Major, Creative Writing Minor, varsity member on the IUPUI Speech team, and she lives to create characters.

**Angela Hughes** is a junior majoring in English (creative writing). Besides attending school full-time and working part-time. Angela is also a single mother of 4 children. After graduating she plans on focusing more on my writing with the ultimate goal being to complete my first novel.

**Nicholas Jackson** began his interest in photography while a freshman in high school. He photographed black and white 35 mm film while in High School. Now he shoots with a Canon Powershot g11.



**Yekaterina Komaroskaya** is a freshman, pre-fine arts major at Herron. Currently living on campus in the Honors House. Her Russian nationality, interest in the arts, and love of literature are the main influences in her work.

**Amber Lane** hails from the Beech Grove area. She is a fourth year English major with a concentration in Writing and Literacy, and words are her sword.

**Kim Mezger** is a procrastinating perfectionist who likes to write, when all the planets align. Given that this doesn't happen very often, she spends most of her creative days organizing the chaos of her life by creatively juggling studies and work with her beautiful family of five.

**Amanda Peters** is currently double majoring in English Literature and Spanish at IUPUI. She does not consider herself a photographer, but has endless fun doing it. She has no idea what she wants to do with her life at this point, and often wonders about the sincerity of those who do. All she can do is try to live the life she has imagined.

**Elise Renollet** is a Senior studying English and French. She has a passion for writing and literature and hopes someday to work with words for a living.

**Kimber Shaw** enjoys the art of reproducing life through the act of capturing images. Photography is an escape for him and uses it as a vice to see his surrounding world.

**Cameron Sickafoose** is a creative writing major who is graduating this May.

**Clint Smith's** stories have appeared in the *Weird Fiction Review*, the *British Fantasy Society Journal*, *Paper Nautilus*, and *Something Wicked*. His column "Get Cooking with Clint" appears each week in *The Southside Times*. Clint lives in the Midwest, along with his wife and two children.

**Margaret Stoner** is graduating from IUPUI this fall with a degree in English. She enjoys writing, reading, and hiking. She served as a genesis editor for three years and is happy to be able to submit her work.

**Matthew Strain** is an English major and currently works at The Excel Center here in Indianapolis. He teaches writing to students who previously dropped out of high school. This is his first work to be published and he plans to continue writing poetry and fiction in the future.

**Claire Wolters** is twenty-one and a lover of adjectives and metaphors. She has two cats. One is orange, which is a sign of greatness.

# get published in genesis

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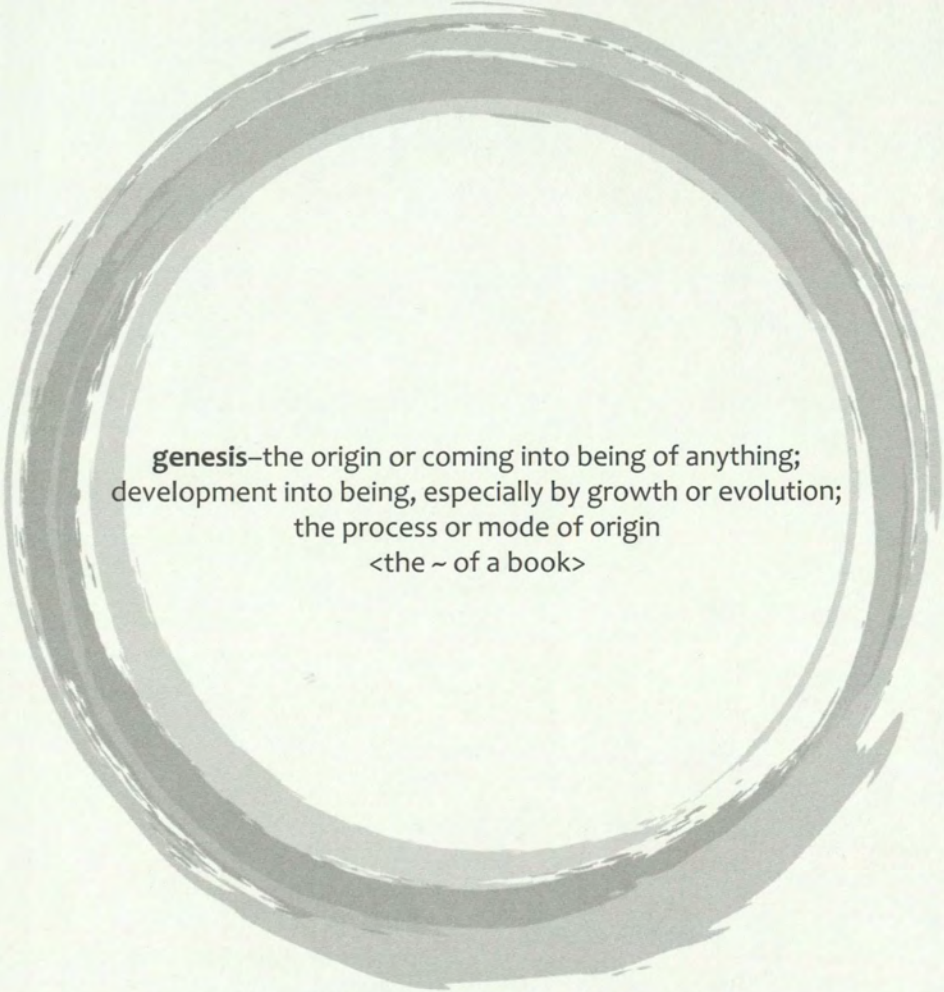
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**genesis**—the origin or coming into being of anything;  
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# genesis



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