



genesis
the literary & art magazine of IUPUI
Fall 2016

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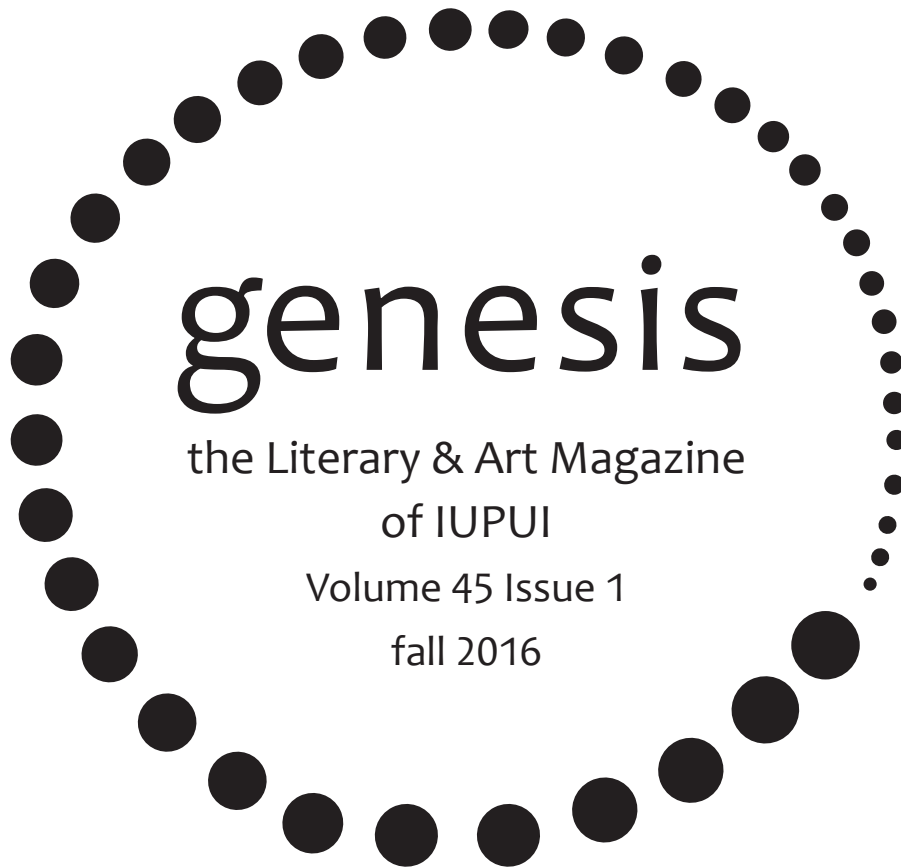
Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

We hope you find the pieces in this issue as interesting, challenging, and amusing as we did. Our contributors and fellow editors made this issue a pleasure to put together, and we look forward to the new pieces that we will encounter for our next issue.

Read on. Keep creating.

Jennifer Rose Rojas and Aaron Broom
Managing Editors



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of IUPUI

Volume 45 Issue 1

fall 2016

We would like to thank the following:

IUPUI Office of Student Involvement,
Liberal Arts Student Council,
Indiana University School of Liberal Arts,
IUPUI English Department,
Western Publishing,
and friends of genesis

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Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

Thank you for picking up this semester's issue of *genesis*. We are pleased to present a variety of interesting, challenging, and amusing work by our collaborators this semester. From photos to plays, the talent they demonstrate made this issue a delight to assemble—and we hope—to read. As you explore these pages, we hope that you will find pieces that may strike a chord and start a conversation.

Once again, thank you for reading *genesis*, and thank you to all who support our mission to showcase wonderful student work. Please continue reading and submitting. Without you, *genesis* would not exist.

Jennifer Rose Rojas and Aaron Broom
Managing Editors

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Victoria Johnson
Keeley Miller
Victoria Johnson

The Song of a Sparrow Trapped in a Supermarket

• • • • •
Rachel Smith

Amidst the melody of beeping registers
and the harmony of whirring carts,
I stand at a table of graphic tees
in the men's department, folding a shirt depicting
a cat on the moon, dressed as an astronaut,
when a couple and their five- or six-year-old son
stop to look at Ball State hoodies.
The boy, bored with clothes not meant
for him, zips between the racks,
unaware of smears of bird droppings
left on the metal frames like notes on sheet music,
the sparrow's unwitting addition
to the song of supply and demand.
After a while, the boy tires of his part
in the store's rhythm section and throws in his own refrain.
I wanna look at toys.
When his parents answer with the resolving
notes in their chord of *no*,
his piano pleas crescendo
into forte wails; a countermelody
taken up by the bird in the rafters.
Only when the parents drag the boy away
does his chorus of demands decrescendo
into silence, but the bird remains,
belting out his dream of free air,
unheard by anyone except me.



Golden Deer Still Life Lifan Fan

Oil on Canvas

For the Freckle in Her Eye



Rachel Leonard

*You said, When I'm dead, do my hair like Madonna.
Dress me for Bonnaroo. Sew a smile across my face and float
flowers in my hair. Prop me upright in a photo booth.
Fake mustaches, top hats, feather boas. Go all the way.
Put a bounce house in the backyard, sneak the kids champagne.
If I die tomorrow or in one hundred years, same rules.*

Last fall I read a poem out loud to you and a room of strangers.
It was about the day we Nair-ed the hair off our vaginas together. You
didn't even turn red—but you cried during the line about the old yellow house;
I know it reminded you of your dad.

I hadn't seen your face so soaked since the night that yellow house turned
into a war zone and we pitched a tent on the lawn. We fell asleep hand-in-hand
singing that Postal Service song: *I am thinking it's a sign that the freckles
in our eyes are mirror images and when we kiss they're perfectly aligned.*

(Although we have never kissed except for one Halloween,
and what could be real between a mere mermaid and an elf queen?)

For the Freckle in Her Eye

For your eighteenth birthday I bought you a fifth,
a lighter, cigarettes, and lotto tix. They were the only
wrapped gifts you got that year. So quickly we became
family: you, me, the kitchen table, and our coffee machine.

In December we made stockings with our names at the top but our home
had no hearth to hang them above. On the coldest mornings
I'd squint over coffee cups and soggy waffles, trying to spot that freckle in your
eye.

But we no longer aligned. So you packed yourself up in a box
like a coffin and I mourned the U-Haul that drove you away.

In January I watched the Christmas tree in our living room die
and I remembered one hundred years ago, telling you that when I wither
I want to be rolled into a ball of good soil. I said, *I want to grow a tree.*

I'll braid your branches, you had told me earnestly.



Adam and Eve

Photograph

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| Kyle Matthew Englert

Like Clay and Shale

• • • • •
Rachel Leonard

When the first frost came and snuffed out my marigolds,
his cigarette butts bloomed in my clay flower pots.

On Christmas we drank watered-down lemon vodka and toasted
to diesel-flavored gas station coffee and cold leather car seats.

His calloused hands carved my bed into a warm wooden bowl,
where our porcelain bodies rested delicately like eggs.

By spring the frost melted and his pocket change puddled
on my nightstand. Morning was rich with the scent of Parliaments

and the gasps of matches scraping brick. He was rough,
like clay and shale; I burned slowly for him.



The Red Queen | Keeley Miller

Photograph

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Cookies to Die For

• • • • •
Kathryn Staublin

There is a skeleton guarding the cookie jar.
The jar is pumpkin shaped and made of glorious
Golden-orange porcelain pieces rippling down
Into a bone-white cavernous cookie-less hole.
He lives within, wishing to smell the scent of
Chocolate Chip Chewy Munchables Crunching with age.
In the middle of the night, he knocks on the porcelain
Pumpkin, just to hear it sing a sweet lullaby,
Reminiscing about the sweets gone by—crumbs still
Linger at the bottom, a dusting of sugar coated delectables
Just waiting to be replenished by the elves living in the walls.
The skeleton would consider baking his own delicious delights,
But until the day his tongue regrows and he can taste again,
He will guard the cookie jar with his life.

Waitressing and Us

Victoria Johnson

Best of Nonfiction

For all the ones who got away

Year I

The cafeteria was pretty busy my first night at Gray Brother's, a local cafeteria that had been around since the 40s. When people came to visit, you took them to Gray's. It was unique, one-of-a-kind. Something you could call your own. At the entrance, sat a massive assembly line for your dinner sat in front of you. You grabbed your tray, napkins, silverware, dessert (yes, before the main course), and then the kind workers behind the counter asked what you'd like and you'd pick a meat and sides, rolls or muffins, and a drink and you would seat yourself.

I worked there for roughly six years. That's the thing about Gray's. You either worked there for a few days, weeks, or months, or you were there for years and people thought, "May I never have the luck of that person."

I was nervous my first night, wearing my black dress pants, non-slip shoes, full apron, "girl" bowtie, and maroon short-sleeved button-up. However, I quickly found a rhythm: introduce, take trays, check on, refill drinks, buss table, answer the bell, and repeat. Except "answer the bell" was more like every few minutes. Because Gray's attracted the older generation, a doorbell was installed and the cashiers rang it every time someone needed help carrying their tray. This bell was the annoyance of the entire restaurant. It was like some kid kept playing ding-dong-ditch without running from the door but wanting to chat every two minutes.

I met Donald toward the end of the night. He'd come in to check his schedule and I saw him out of the corner of my eye as I bussed a table. He watched me as he talked to one of our co-workers. He was average height, skinny, and had glasses. A little scruffy. He was cute. I admit it. That night all he did was introduce himself and I don't know that we talked about much else, but I knew from the start that he was attracted to me. Typically, I would've second guessed it.

Maybe he was just being nice. But with Donald, there was no denying it.

*

"He's so annoying," one girl said.

"He creeps me out," said another. We were in the break room, taking one of two of our five-minute breaks for the evening. I ate some crackers dipped in strawberry jam (free).

"He's not that bad," I said. They shrugged.

When I got back to my section it was dead. Donald leaned against his hutch, pulling off the slouchy, I-don't-want-to-be-here look seamlessly. The quick and (hopefully) interesting history of hutches is as follows: the hutches are wood and quite large, larger than most grandmothers would have in their kitchens or dining rooms. They have glass windows where antiques are displayed. But more importantly, they have just about every single thing a server would need: pitchers of sweet tea, un-sweet tea, water, coffee, boxes, ketchup, and all the other necessary condiments. Just about every server had their own. They were our property. Mess with someone's hutch or steal their water pitcher and you were in for it.

"Victoria," he said. "My someday wife." Maybe it is odd that he greeted me this way, but it was our normal. He put his arm around my shoulders. I side stepped away and tried to shimmy out from under his arm.

"You know, you're the kind of girl any guy would want to marry."

Despite shrugging his arm off, I smiled. I always did, and I hated it because I didn't want to encourage him.

"Whatever," I said. What I really wanted to say was: Donald, people wouldn't think you were such a creep if you wouldn't act like one.

For the rest of the night, I found random bits of trash and straw wrappers hidden on my hutch. Each one was like a treasure hunt. Donald would walk by, smile mischievously, and I'd know he'd hidden something somewhere. I took them and put them back on his hutch. No matter how much I shrugged him off, I seemed to always give in just enough to encourage him.

Year 2

The honest truth that took me years to admit is this: I looked forward to working with Donald, slightly flirting, and telling my friends the stories. I liked that they didn't know him: that he was mine alone, separate from the rest of my life. But the ambivalence I felt toward him was palpable. That's the crux I kept tripping over.

We leaned against my hutch (such a normal position for a bored worker). It was before the dinner rush and we'd just finished discussing how we hoped the line would be gone by seven-thirty: a normal conversation at the beginning of the afternoon shift. Seven-thirty was exactly an hour before close and the time of our last break of the evening. If the line was gone by then, our tables would have plenty of time to eat and be gone by

time we closed, and the hope was that we'd have an empty section ready for cleaning by closing. In a perfect world it would happen.

"How's the boyfriend?" he asked. He'd ask every now and then. He probably wanted me to tell him how awful my boyfriend was so he'd have the opportunity to 'sweep me off my feet'.

"Oh, we broke up." My first boyfriend and I had fun. He kind of came out of nowhere and I honestly was just enjoying hanging out with him and then I started to like him and he liked me, but it kind of went downhill from there, honestly. And that's a completely different story. Suffice it to say that even though he never met Donald, he didn't like him, and my immature eighteen-year-old self liked that Donald made him a bit jealous, and well, vice versa.

"What?" His grin was undeniable. "When?"

"A couple months ago."

"You never told me." I wanted to wipe the Grinch-esque grin off his face. You just don't grin about something like that.

"Didn't seem important."

"This is fantastic. Didn't I always tell you I could see the future? You and me, we're meant to be."

"You have a girlfriend," I said. I wanted to punch him for her. I really did. He'd recently met a girl that lived in Chicago. For a good year or so people joked that she didn't exist. Such persistent attention from a guy was not something I was used to, especially from someone who had a girlfriend already. It made me feel like "the other woman" when I wasn't even doing anything. For four years a fear hung over my head that this mysterious woman from Chicago would come down and yell at me for something I didn't even do.

"Right now, but I can see the future, remember?"

“Donald, you’re like five years older than me.”

“And your point is?”

“It’s, I don’t know, weird.”

When you’re nineteen and a guy that is twenty-four is hitting on you, it’s a little strange, for me it was anyway, but the more I got to know Donald, the more it didn’t seem that big of a deal. I was more mature and he was less mature, so I guess it evened out.

“Will you help me clean the rest of my tables?” he asked from across the room. I was a pro at clean-up by this point, swift, fast, and with a rhythm.

“Absolutely not,” I said. “You can do it yourself.” I packed up my things and prepared to leave.

“But Victoria,” he said, elongating the syllables. That was when I found him most annoying—when he acted as if he couldn’t do things himself, whether kidding or not. It wasn’t that I was against helping him, but he didn’t legitimately need my help.

Year 3

Donald became my safe space at Gray’s. He kept me entertained, sane, and laughing. Whenever I was cleaning a table or talking to someone, he’d come up behind me and poke me in this spot under my shoulder blade that made me cringe. Or he’d put his arm around me and tell whomever I was talking to that I was his girlfriend, especially if I was talking to another guy.

Whenever I came into work, I’d look for him, and I’d often find him standing with his

hands in his pockets in the opening to the New Room, which wasn’t even the newest addition to the restaurant. He’d smile at me and wave, and I’d smile back, happy I had someone to smile at.

But all the while he was dating the illuminous Chicago girl, and it didn’t sit well with me.

“I’m going to move a little bit away from you,” Donald said. “Jackson is watching.” Jackson’s family owned the restaurant. My cousin married him. He’d told Donald that he had his eye on him. Donald had a sort of reputation for flirting with girls (obviously), and I guess Jackson saw it as his duty to make sure Donald didn’t get too close to me. I laughed and shook my head, enjoying his fear of my cousin-in-law.

“Seriously. He scares me.” After a pause he said, “So you’ve got a boyfriend now?”

“Sort of. I’ve known him since high school.” All of my relationships at that point had been long distance, which in hindsight, I’m grateful for. To quote myself, I once said about this relationship that it

was like I was single, but not. I kind of liked it that way—then, anyway.

“You think you’re going to marry him?”

“I don’t know.” I knew I wasn’t, but sometimes you just don’t admit it to yourself. Hindsight. Really a beauty.

“Well, you’re not. It’s you and me, future wife.”

“If you say so.” Nonchalance epitomized my outward attitude toward Donald. Arguing never got me anywhere, so I just passively accepted whatever he said. Donald would say something he’d said so many times before and instead of completely shrugging him off, I’d kind of play with it, be ambiguous, or pretend not to show any

Donald became my safe space at Gray’s.

interest. Maybe that was wrong—I don't know.

"So you admit it," he said. I could hear the smile in his voice. I tried not to make eye contact because I knew I'd smile back. I shook my head and laughed, knowing no response would shut him up.

"Why don't you think we'll work?" he asked.

"You don't even really know anything about me, Donald," I said.

"Sure I do. I know you're beautiful, funny, and amazing." He said it as if it were all that mattered. It wasn't. "Besides, you're the Lois Lane to my Superman."

"I don't like Superman." I couldn't help but laugh at his shocked expression.

I can't say I didn't enjoy the attention. It was like I had another life at work. One no one else really knew about. Sure I'd tell stories about Donald, but it was understood nothing would ever happen between us. My friends would say, Oh that Donald. He's so ridiculous. My mom would ask if I had any more Donald stories. That's what he was in the end: a mess of stories.

Year 4

We stood in a doorway, watching customers come through the line and find a table. Donald put his arm around my shoulders. I didn't shrug it off as I used to. It was just an arm. He'd just finished some spiel about how perfect we were for each other: books, nerdy stuff, and well, we just *were* of course.

I found out Donald told someone he'd leave his girlfriend for me, but I didn't want that. I never wanted to be the "other," the one who ruined everything, the one who stole someone's boyfriend. It doesn't always work out like it does in the movies.

"Oh, Victoria," he said. "When will you realize we're perfect for each other?"

"You have a girlfriend," I said. The same old tune was getting, well, old. "I don't like you flirting with me when you have a girlfriend. It makes me uncomfortable." What I'd wanted to say for years finally came out. Actually, I alluded to it at work, but couldn't quite form the words, so I sent him a Facebook message (classy). After that, he was cold and didn't say anything to me.

"Donald, did you hear about the Doctor Who 50th anniversary?" A shrug.

"Donald, your table wants regular coffee." No eye contact.

The next week, he walked by me singing "Heartbreaker" by Pat Benetar. My jaw dropped. Both relationships I'd had, they'd kind of ended up mutual in the end, so I'd never left someone heartbroken. It felt like that time I sprinkled salt on a slug and ran immediately away because I felt like the worst person in the world.

When I finally found a free moment, I apologized—for what, I wasn't quite sure, but I apologized anyway. The restaurant bustled with customers wanting coffee refills and complaining about the temperature of their food.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," I said. I really couldn't even figure out how what I said was so wrong or even why I finally said it. We weren't anything. We were barely friends.

This moment I remember perfectly: I stood over a round table by one of the big windows, cleaning. He stood on the other side, holding a tray full of dirty dishes. His voice quivered as he spoke. He didn't make eye contact. I knew he was being sincere, speaking from the heart. No one, not even the guys I'd dated, had expressed their affection for me with such emotion before.

"I meant everything I ever said," he said. "You're a great girl. You're, like, what every guy

dreams of as the perfect wife.”

I stared back at him in shock. I didn’t know what to say. Obviously not every guy would think that, and I wouldn’t want them to. So I just looked at him. His voice cracked.

“I can’t believe I’m telling you all this. But I really do like you. I always have. I’m sorry.” He walked away, speeding toward the dish room. I stood dumbfounded with customers staring at me.

When I finally found the time to talk to him, he was cleaning one of his tables, which was the perfect time to talk to someone when it was busy. I took a deep breath, with my heart nearing my throat, and said, “You know, Donald, maybe it would’ve worked in another life.”

That’s when I said it. That mostly empty, but heartfelt phrase. Did I mean it? Partly, but at the end of the day, we were different. Our lives were on different paths.

“You’ll always be the one that got away,” he said.

I liked that. I liked being the one that got away—the one that was unattainable. Being that to someone felt significant.

Year 5

“So you’re really doing it this time,” I said. After talking about moving to Chicago for months, Donald said he finally was.

“In a couple weeks.”

“It won’t be the same without you. Who will I talk to about Doctor Who?”

“I’ll miss you too, Victoria.”

One of the last things I remember before he left is this: I was working on pies, where you cut pie all night and dish it up all nice and pretty on

plates. I was pretty good. I could even cut a mean strawberry pie, which was a beast to cut. It was just before close. Only a few people made up the line and I was trying to get a head start on clean up. Donald stood next to me, saying something he usually said about our eventual marriage, when a guy came in and started getting his tray and silverware.

“You guys are perfect for each other,” he said.

“We’re not together,” I said. Smiling and feeling awkward. Always smiling though. It was my downfall with Donald. My inner emotions coming out when I least wanted them to.

“I know we are,” Donald said. “She won’t admit it.” His grin was ear to ear like the Cheshire Cat.

The man looked at me and said, “She likes you. I can tell.”

When he got down the line, Donald bounced over to me. “See! I told you. Even he can see it.” I don’t remember what I said. I probably told him everything I usually told him, waved him off. He was being ridiculous. He had a girlfriend. Etc. etc. But I did feel something. I really did. A leap, a butterfly in my stomach at the man’s words. At Donald’s words or his smile or the times he’d put his arm around me.

A couple weeks later, he left and didn’t say goodbye. He said he would, but he didn’t.

Year 6

I left the cafeteria too, but after a year of volunteering abroad I came back, something I said I’d never do, but I was going to get my master’s degree, also something I said I’d never do, and I needed a job. Many people were new and most-

**“You know, Donald,
maybe it would’ve
worked in another life.”**

ly high schoolers. I wondered if I was like them at their age. I had a pretty good idea that I most definitely was not. I held no hope of remembering their names. I'd always been awful with names.

Everyone had their own people to talk to. I stood near them, sat next to them, but rarely joined in the conversations. I knew people and was still known as a veteran, but we weren't close. I was there to work. I stuck to myself even more than before.

I went back to my section in the New Room, leaned against my hutch, and observed the room and the subtle changes that had occurred since I'd left. I looked out the window and remembered the night Donald and I watched a bird peck at the window all evening.

"I think he comes every year," Donald said. The bird kept tapping at the window, fluttering up and down.

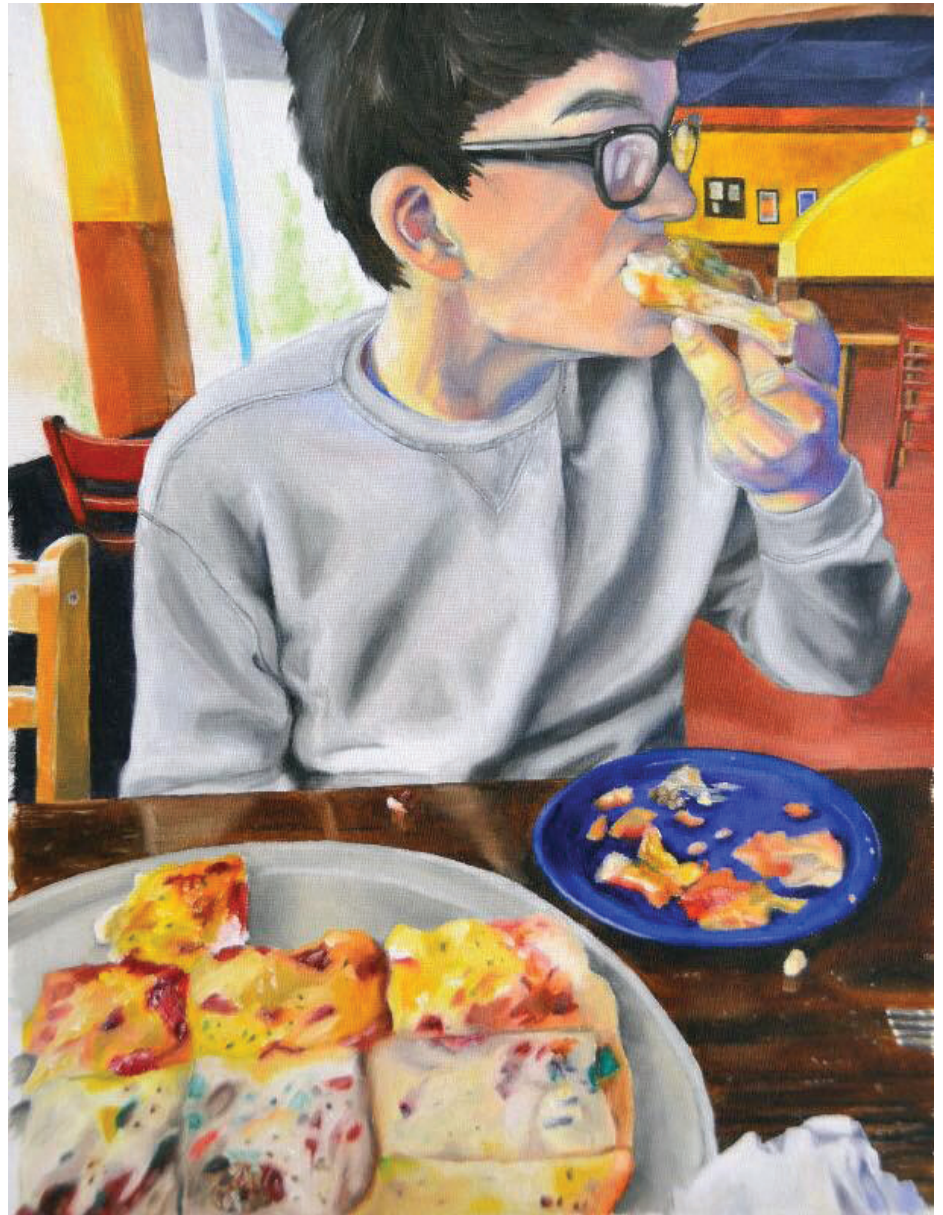
"I feel sorry for the little guy," I said.

"He'll figure it out eventually."

I never thought I'd miss the hidden straw wrappers, random pokes in my back that made me jump, and having someone to lean against the hutch with.

But I did. I do.





Pizza Brook Lowry

Oil on Canvas

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In Bloom Keeley Miller

Photograph

22 genesis fall 2016

*Flower Preservation in
Victorian England*
• • • • •
Courtney Duff

Best of Poetry

White oleander fingers drip down her daughter's back,
lacing up filaments of ribbon on the corset cage that, like
decoupage, preserve the girl in pressure—
and cotton the color of calla lilies snares her taut
between whalebones like porcelain petals.
Her freckles maculate her sweet smelling skin,
where petunias bloom beneath the corset,
staining her belly. Held fast between pages of Wilde
she stays static, staples bending under the weight.



CHAINS Kyle Matthew Englert

Photograph

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First Sleepover

A Night with Van Gogh and Picasso

Victoria Johnson

I stood fixated on a painting
of the night sky, and I traced
the moving wind with my fingers.
It's just a painting, my friend said.
She pointed at one of a woman
with yellow lips who seemed
to be in all places at once,
and she laughed.

But as I lay in her foreign bed,
I saw the swirling stars, wind,
and sky surrounding me.
The woman pointed her finger
at me, beckoning me to look,
see, and feel her colors.

In the once quiet darkness
of her room, I felt my knees
buckling although I wasn't
standing: greens, yellows,
creams, and dark, dark blues.

A thirst kindled in my throat
and a tang ripened on my
tongue for shapes and patterns.
I breathed in the motion around me
and fell asleep in a thick dark blue.

Free Falling

Claire Christoff

"More coffee, sir?"

"Thanks, sweetheart." He looked up at her from his booth, eyes level with her chest, grinning like a hungry wolf. "You haven't got any of that pecan pie back there, do you?"

"Just apple, I think."

"That'll be just fine." The waitress slipped her notepad back into the pocket of her apron and filed back to the kitchen.

"Oh, so now we're staying for dessert. Didn't you say you've done this kind of thing before?" Dick's companion, a noticeably smaller and more nervous-looking man, was fiddling anxiously with the crumpled bills in his cheap pleather wallet. A fly buzzed against the smudged plexiglass window, mimicking the hum of the fluorescent bulb threatening to burn out overhead. "This was a bad idea—not just some restaurant, but a truck stop diner? What do you think this is, *Pulp Fiction*? We've been the only customers in here for the last hour, if you haven't noticed."

"Look, Sam—can I call you Sammy? If you can keep your mouth shut and do what I tell you, we'll be just fine. Can you trust me?"

The waitress returned to the table with the wedge of apple pie, a waxy slice of neon orange cheese congealing onto the crust. "Y'all ready for the check, boys?"

"I'll take care of it"—Dick snatched the receipt from her hand—"Brandi," he added, appraising her nametag with a salacious eye. Before she had the chance to return to the kitchen, Dick drew a small, gleaming gun from inside his jacket and slammed it onto the countertop with an uncer-

emonious thud. "I hope I won't have to take care of you, too?" Brandi's watery blue eyes flashed with terror as she stood frozen in place, shaking her head fervently. "Good. I didn't think so."

Sam jumped to his feet in the booth, firing a shot into the ceiling. Broken glass rained onto the green linoleum floor, and Brandi bolted for the door. He fired another shot, hitting her squarely between her shoulder blades. A bright blossom of blood bloomed onto her starched white blouse as she staggered backward, breathless and wide-eyed as ever.

"What's going on out here?" The cook, a large, toothless man with a paper hat and a child-like face, bumbled out of the kitchen.

Sam leapt to the floor, glass crunching beneath his boots, and jammed the butt of his pistol against the unsuspecting man's neck. "Where's the cash register?"

"I, uh, I don't have a key; I'm just, you know, just the cook, and—"

"You want to end up like her?" Dick's voice boomed from across the small diner, gesturing at Brandi's lifeless form lying crumpled on the grubby tile.

"I, uh, no—no! No, I just don't know where—"

"Well, she had a key, didn't she? You better find one, buddy, or things aren't going to be looking so good for you, either."

The cook, whose eyes threatened the kind of big, blubbery tears usually only shed by a toddler, scampered over to Brandi's limp body and reached tentatively into the pocket of her apron

for her set of keys. They were hanging neatly from the kind of coiled rubber bracelet you find at hardware stores—a sort of telephone cord reincarnate. “Open the drawer.” Sam pointed his weapon at the cash register, then back at the cook. “Now.”

The cook opened the drawer, his stubby pink fingers shaking violently. Sizing up its contents, Sam turned to Dick accusatorily. “There’s probably not two hundred bucks in there,” he surmised. “I told you this was stupid, and now this girl is dead.”

“Where’s the safe?” Dick demanded.

“We don’t have a safe, sir,” the cook said earnestly, sweat beading on his bald forehead. “You’ve been our only customers today, I reckon.”

Dick knocked his gun against the counter in frustration, accidentally firing another bullet that grazed the cook’s side.

“Yeah, you’re good, Dick. Real good.” Sam shook his head.

“That’s a lot coming from you, Dillinger.”

“I’m twenty-two years old. Give me a break.”

The cook wailed in agony, and Dick drew his gun a third time, shooting him cleanly in the chest and not bothering to spare a glance as the man collapsed on the floor. He shuffled through the unimpressive sheaf of ones, fives, and the occasional twenty before looking up at a languid Sam. “Let’s get out of here, Sammy.”

The night rushed past in a blue haze as Interstate 10 turned into the Pacific Coast Highway. Down below, the rusty, moonlight-bathed wreckage of less adept drivers and their cars struck Sam as being a sort of creepy memorial to something he couldn’t quite put his finger on. He wanted to stick his head out the window of Dick’s pickup truck like a dog and breathe in just one more

taste of that deliciously thick air he had missed so much, but he had a feeling Dick wouldn’t like that. He had just killed a woman—a truck stop waitress at that—and what did he have to show for it? Half of two hundred-odd dollars?

Tom Petty’s nasal twang droned from the half-broken tape deck, singing something about gliding down over Mulholland. “Now what do we do?” Sam wondered aloud, not really expecting an answer. They had money now—a little, anyway—but what did it matter? They had just been released from Chuckawalla Valley State Prison, but they would be headed back if they didn’t do something soon.

Just as Dick was fiddling with a cheap plastic lighter, an unfiltered Camel wagging from his lips, the unmistakable combination of wailing sirens and flashing lights behind them became all too apparent. Craning his neck, Dick jerked the steering wheel to the side, and his truck toppled off the road and into the night’s unforgiving black maw.

Now I’m free, free fallin’...

Yeah I’m free, free fallin’...

Relief washed over Sam as he realized they would never be going back to Chuckawalla Valley again.

• • •



Eye Samantha Wright

Acrylic

28 genesis fall 2016

Phil the Plastic Prop Skeleton

Kathryn Staublin

ACT I

Scene 1

The curtains open up to a quiet stage full of darkness. There is a soft humming sound—the ice machine of a refrigerator. We hear small footsteps, and then there is light as the silhouette of a small girl appears opening the refrigerator door in the center of the stage. There is darkness once more.

For a moment, nothing changes, and then the lights slowly begin to turn on, leaving a dim morning cast over an empty kitchen. The refrigerator is attached to a set of cabinets and countertops, while a large kitchen island sits in front beside a small square table. On stage right is a set of stairs. Everything in the scene is either black, white, or gray.

MARSHALL, the stepdad, enters from stage left. He is tall, thin, blond, and is dressed in business attire. He slowly makes his way to the fridge, yawning, and opens the door to reveal Phil, the plastic prop skeleton, who is sitting on the top shelf.

MARSHALL

Holy mother of biscuits!

(He shuts the refrigerator door quickly and spins around on tip toe, facing the stairs) Emily! Would you come down to the kitchen, please?

Emily, a six-year old girl dressed in bright pink clothing with a pink bow in her hair, flops down from the

stairs on stage right. She stops at the bottom and stares at Marshall, who points at the fridge.

Darling, why is your uncle's prop skeleton in the fridge?

EMILY

He said he needed to cool off.

MARSHALL

To cool off?

EMILY

Yeah. He's always dreamed of living up in Alaska where it's cold. It's too hot here. He said it makes his bones sweat.

MARSHALL

Emily, would you take him out of the fridge?

EMILY

No.

MARSHALL

Please?

EMILY

You can't make me!

Emily sticks out her tongue and runs back up the stairs without another word. There is an uncomfortable silence, and then DELILAH comes from stage left. She is wearing a gray dress with a light gray decorative scarf, and she is pinning up her long brown hair.

DELILAH

Good morning, Marshall.

MARSHALL

Good morning, Delilah.

(He walks over to the counter awkwardly and begins to make coffee) You won't believe what I found in the fridge this morning.

DELILAH

I find it hard to believe that I won't believe what you found in the fridge this morning. But try me.

MARSHALL

That prop skeleton your uncle gave her. Pretty big fridge, you know. That skeleton is at least three feet tall...would you like some coffee?

DELILAH

Please.

MARSHALL

Two spoonfuls of sugar?

DELILAH

Your idea of two spoonfuls and mine is different. *(She gets out a few mugs from the cabinet and retrieves a sugar bowl from the stove)* I never level off the spoons.

MARSHALL

Oh. Well, I don't prefer sugar, so I wouldn't know.

DELILAH

That's right. You like your brew bitter, don't you?

MARSHALL

(Pause) Can I ask you a personal question?

DELILAH

We're married. Not sure how much more personal we can get. *(She pours her coffee, kisses him on the cheek, and then sets it down on the table)* What's on your mind?

MARSHALL

Well, I've been thinking—

DELILAH

That's dangerous.

MARSHALL

—about, you know, the afterlife and such. And I was wondering how you felt about it.

DELILAH

About the afterlife?

MARSHALL

Yeah. I mean, what you believe. Do you...you know. Believe in ghosts?

DELILAH

I don't see how that's really a personal question,

dear.

MARSHALL

I think it is, kind of.

DELILAH

Do you?

MARSHALL

Do I what? Believe in ghosts or think it's a personal question?

DELILAH

Marshall, we don't really have time for this. Emily has to get ready for school, and I haven't even started breakfast.

Delilah walks over to the refrigerator. She pulls the plastic prop skeleton out of the way briefly and retrieves a gallon of milk. She then replaces the skeleton and closes the door. She walks around the rest of the kitchen, rummaging for breakfast.

MARSHALL

I can help with breakfast. *(He pours his own cup of coffee, watching her)* Would you like me to make some eggs or something?

DELILAH

No, dear. We're running a bit late. Cereal will have to do.

Emily sneaks halfway down the stairs. She peeks through the railing to spy on her mother and step-father. Unaware, Delilah sets the gallon of milk on the table.

MARSHALL

You never answered my question.

DELILAH

Yes, Marshall, I believe in ghosts.

Phil the Plastic Prop Skeleton

MARSHALL

Thank god. I mean, I don't exactly believe in them, but at the same time, the idea kind of scares me, too.

DELILAH

I never said they scared me.

MARSHALL

What?

DELILAH

Ghosts. They don't scare me.

MARSHALL

What do you mean?

DELILAH

Think about it. In real life, and in real life alone, ghosts are simply something we don't understand. A ghost isn't there, in our world, like us. A ghost can't hurt you, Marshall. People can.

MARSHALL

What about poltergeists? You know. Spirits coming back, haunting places, throwing things, possessing people...talking about how they wish they'd moved to Alaska.

DELILAH

Alaska? *(Confused pause, then she shrugs)* Movies aren't real either, you know. I would be far more terrified of someone breaking into the house than finding some object randomly moved from one side of the table to the other.

Marshall looks at the jug of milk expectantly. Nothing happens.

DELILAH

What's sparking this conversation? Did you have a dream or something?

MARSHALL

I'm just curious. There's a lot we still don't know about each other, and since the wedding we ha-

ven't really had much time to ourselves. I mean, the honeymoon was nice, but we didn't really talk much—

DELILAH

It's not my fault we had to cut the honeymoon short, Marshall. Funerals aren't exactly planned weeks in advance.

MARSHALL

I know, that wasn't really what I was getting at.

(He pulls the prop skeleton out of the fridge by its spine and looks at it uncomfortably. Its plastic joints crackle and its jaw wiggles due to a loose screw)

MARSHALL (cont'd)

Your uncle, was he a big Halloween decorator?

DELILAH

Not exactly. He collected lots of weird stuff. He actually had what he called his "creepy room" in the basement, where he kept all these strange things he found at antique stores and whatnot. *(She begins pulling bowls and silverware from the cabinets)* I don't know why he felt compelled to share any of it with Emily. It must have meant a lot to him. His things, I mean.

MARSHALL

(Sarcastically) Shame I never met him.

DELILAH

I miss him.

Delilah moves all of the breakfast items to the table and sets them up neatly.

Marshall doesn't say anything. He is still holding the plastic skeleton by its spine.

MARSHALL

Hey, I noticed it's been a while since Emily went to stay over at any of her friends.

DELILAH

What? Are you interested in a romantic night alone?

MARSHALL

Well—actually, that would be nice, but I was just thinking about Emily. She and her best friend were so close way back when. And I've noticed her grades are dropping a bit, she's forgetting homework...

DELILAH

Emily's grades always go up and down. Kids can't be perfect all the time. You'll notice that after a while.

MARSHALL

She definitely has a vivid imagination.

DELILAH

So she does.

MARSHALL

You know, I caught her laughing with that skeleton the other night. She must crack herself up.

DELILAH

Marshall?

MARSHALL

I just—*(He shakes the skeleton in front of him lightly)*
I don't know if she should be spending so much time with...out real people. She might end up—

DELILAH

Like you?

MARSHALL

What?

DELILAH

Introverted. Like you. Is that what you were going to say?

MARSHALL

I'm not introverted. I'm the best salesman in my department.

DELILAH

I know you are, dear.

MARSHALL

Delilah, let me be frank for a moment. Emily and I...haven't spent a lot of time together. We're not close. And I can't say I know what's best for her. But I'd like to think I could help her, you know, with her friends and her grades. I could even read to her if she'd let me—

DELILAH

She's too old to have someone read to her. She likes to do it on her own.

MARSHALL

See, that's what I mean. She can't raise herself.

DELILAH

(Pause) Excuse me?

MARSHALL

No, I didn't mean—

DELILAH

No, I'm sure you didn't.

MARSHALL

Lilah—

DELILAH

Marshall, don't dig yourself into a deeper hole.
(She takes the skeleton from him and puts it on the counter) Hurry up and find something for breakfast.

MARSHALL

Do you want to talk about this later?

DELILAH

There's nothing to talk about. You're talking in circles.

(She checks the clock on the stove)

Ten minutes.

MARSHALL

Lilah, I think Emily should talk to a professional.

DELILAH

Professional? Why? *(She takes a dish rag from the*

Phil the Plastic Prop Skeleton

sink and begins wiping down the counter)

MARSHALL

I think she's going through some problems right now that you can't help her with. She's just been so withdrawn.

DELILAH

I'm not sending her to an overly educated knob-by-nosed psychiatrist when she can talk to me about anything.

MARSHALL

Well, you, yes, but she doesn't say anything to me—

DELILAH

You're not her dad, Marshall.

MARSHALL

(Somewhat irritated) Legally, I am. Listen, Delilah, please. I'm the most non-violent guy I know. I would never hurt you or Emily.

DELILAH

I've heard that before.

MARSHALL

Just because Emily's father got sent to jail for stabbing his boss one too many times with a box cutter doesn't mean I'm going to do the same. Give me a chance to be everything that man never was.

DELILAH

(Throws the rag into the sink, frustrated) I didn't marry you so Emily could have a father. I married you because I didn't want to be alone anymore.

MARSHALL

Well, did you ever think about why I married you? Did you think that maybe, just maybe, I wanted to have a family, and to be part of a family?

DELILAH

If you want to be part of a family then you need to act like it.

MARSHALL

What's that supposed to mean?

DELILAH

Great, now Emily doesn't have time for breakfast. Toaster pastries will have to do.

MARSHALL

Delilah, you need to listen to me.

DELILAH

I don't want to hear it. *(She dumps the rest of her coffee in the sink and begins putting away breakfast items)*

MARSHALL

(More desperate) Delilah? Delilah, look at me!

Marshall steps in her way. She pauses, then walks around him, putting away the gallon of milk.

MARSHALL (con't)

Why do you have to make this so goddamned hard?

In a moment of passion, Marshall knocks the plastic prop skeleton off the counter. The skeleton breaks into pieces. Its head pops off, its jaw comes loose, and one of its legs disconnects at the knee. The pieces, including plastic screws, roll around the stage and then settle.

There is a moment of silence, and then Emily, who is still sitting on the stairs on stage right, begins to cry. Marshall looks up at Delilah, who is shaking her head, and then he looks at Emily, realizing what he has done.

EMILY

Why? Why did you do that? *(Emily holds onto the railing of the stairway for dear life)* Don't you know that I love him? Why would you do that to him?

Emily sits on the stairs for a moment, crying, and then she gets to her feet and stumbles upstairs. Her cries fade out only seconds before Marshall faces Delilah.

MARSHALL

I-I didn't mean...

DELILAH

Save it.

Delilah goes over to where the plastic skeleton has fallen. She gathers the pieces in her arms while Marshall stands alone, watching. She stands straight and walks up to him.

You said you wanted to be part of a family. If you really want to be a father—*(She shoves the plastic skeleton pieces into his arms)*—then prove it.

Speechless, Marshall looks down at the bits of skeleton he's now holding. Delilah crosses her arms. Marshall looks at her, and then he takes the pieces of skeleton with him to stage left.

Delilah covers her face with her hands, shakes her head, and then puts her hands on her hips. She walks over to the stairway on stage right.

DELILAH (cont'd)

Emily? Emily, would you please come down here? I'd like to talk to you.

A few seconds pass and then Emily ambles down the stairs to her mother. She wipes her nose on her sleeve. She looks around, but realizes the prop skeleton is missing.

EMILY

Where's Phil?

DELILAH

The prop skeleton?*(She looks over to the other side of the stage)*Marshall is looking after him. Here. Sit with me for a moment. *(She sits down on the last*

stair and pats the spot beside her) We need to talk about...Phil.

EMILY

Why? *(Emily rubs her eyes and sits down by her mother)* Is he going to be all right?

DELILAH

Honey...you didn't know your uncle very well, but he was a pretty strange guy. And carrying around a prop skeleton all the time—well, that's not exactly normal. But honey, all that matters to me is that you're happy.

EMILY

I don't understand.

DELILAH

You like Marshall, don't you?

Marshall looks over his shoulder uncomfortably, aware of their conversation. He waits for a reply that doesn't come. He then sits on his knees and uses a multi-tool pocket knife from his back pocket to help screw the skeleton back together.

DELILAH (cont'd)

I know you don't always get along. But can you try, just for me? *(She hugs her daughter and sits quietly in the moment of silence)* Why did you name him Phil?

EMILY

Because that's his name. It's Uncle Phil. But he just wants to be called Phil.

DELILAH

(Whispers) Do me a favor?

EMILY

What?

DELILAH

Don't ever tell Marshall that.

EMILY

But why?

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DELILAH

Marshall can't handle things like that. You know, ghosts, stuff he doesn't understand. And I think it would be best to keep anything about Phil away from him. You don't want to upset him, do you?

EMILY

No.

DELILAH

Good girl.

EMILY

Mommy?

DELILAH

Yeah?

EMILY

You do believe me, don't you?

DELILAH

What?

EMILY

About Phil. That he talks to me. That he's real.

DELILAH

Honestly, honey, I don't know. But it doesn't matter. *(She sighs)* If you're happy, and if you keep in mind the fact that Phil might bother other people...then I don't see why you can't keep him. I don't want to take him away from you. After all, it was, in a sense, the dying wish of your great uncle.

EMILY

I like having him around. He's good company.

DELILAH

Is he now? *(She wipes a tear off of Emily's face)* Are you ready for school?

EMILY

Yes.

DELILAH

Good. I'll bring some toaster pastries so you can have breakfast on the way.

EMILY

Okay.

Delilah kisses Emily's forehead and then walks to the kitchen. She begins putting the rest of the breakfast items away.

While she is going through the cabinets, Marshall stands from stage left with a fixed plastic prop skeleton. Emily sees the skeleton first. She stands up from the stairs, wipes her eyes, and walks slowly over to Marshall.

EMILY (cont'd)

You...you fixed him?

MARSHALL

Yeah. The plastic screws were just loose. Everything popped back together pretty fast. *(He hands her the prop skeleton, somewhat reluctantly)* I'm sorry I broke him.

EMILY

You fixed him. That's all that matters.

Emily goes up to Marshall and hugs his leg. He looks down at her, astonished, and then pats her awkwardly on the head. She pulls back, grins, and then lifts the prop skeleton up to show Delilah.

EMILY (cont'd)

Look, Mom! Phil is all better!

DELILAH

Well, would you look at that. I think it's an improvement. *(She smiles at Marshall, who smiles back)* Go get your backpack, honey. I don't want you to be late to school.

EMILY

Okay. *(She rushes over to the stairs)*

DELILAH

Emily?

Kathryn Staublin

EMILY

Yeah?

DELILAH

Would you leave Phil here? He's had a long day. I think he could use the rest.

EMILY

Yeah. Okay. *(She puts the prop skeleton on the bottom step, runs upstairs, grabs her backpack at the top, and then runs back down)* Got it!

DELILAH

Go out to the car honey. I'll catch up.

Emily exits stage right. Marshall is still standing awkwardly center stage. Delilah walks up to him and kisses him on the cheek.

MARSHALL

What was that for?

DELILAH

It doesn't take much to be a good dad, Marshall. You just need a little practice. And maybe a bit more patience.

MARSHALL

Thank God it's Friday.

DELILAH

Come on.

Delilah laughs briefly and exits stage right. Marshall just stands there for a moment. He looks over at the plastic prop skeleton now sitting on the stairs.

MARSHALL

You really creep me out, you know. *(He walks over to it and examines it closely. Nothing happens)* Huh.

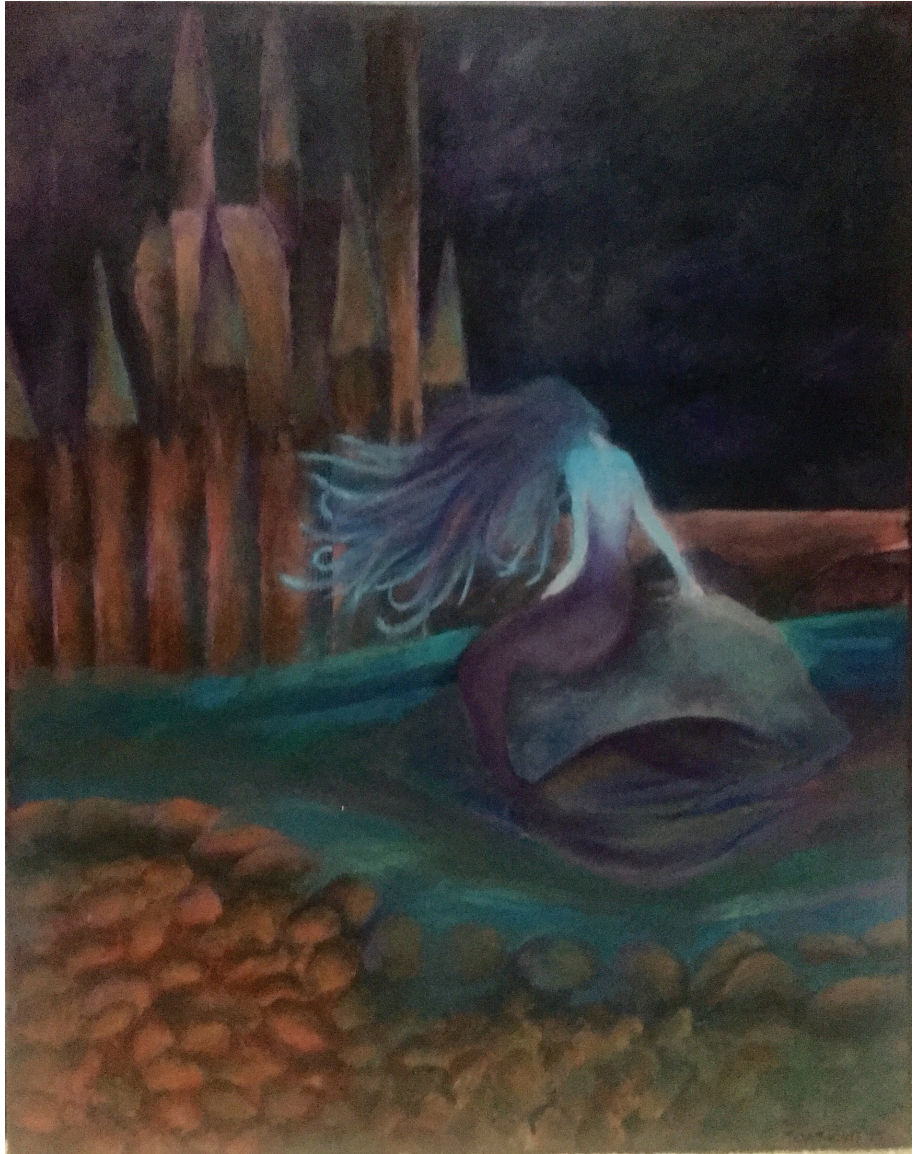
Marshall shudders visibly and exits stage right. There is an audible click, and the lights dim, as if someone has shut the light out in the kitchen. There is enough light

to see the prop skeleton still sitting on the stairs.

After a moment, the plastic prop skeleton's head moves to look straight at the audience. Its jaw goes up and down, making a loud clacking noise. Black out.

The End.





Mermaid Samantha Wright

Acrylic

Funky Bones

Thinking of *Funky Bones*

by Atelier Van Lieshout

Victoria Johnson

At first it's a mess of white blocks
lying on an open, green lawn
with people walking and jumping
from block to block.

A kid sits on his father's shoulders
to get a better view: it's a skeleton.
All by itself in the clearing.

A couple leads their daughter across
the blocks, making a fun lesson:
five toe bones, just like you, they say.
The girl jumps from bone to bone
with her father holding her hand.
This is the longest bone in your body.

Standing on the hip bone,
a young couple takes a picture.
The girl hops around them.
Here's the spine. It's in your back.
This is your skull.
The holes where the eyes should be
stare openly up at the sky.
The girl jumps off, runs to the next
exciting thing.

The skeleton is alone.
All it has is grass and sky.

Leaping from each bone,
we see what we look like under our skin:
at our bones, we're all the same,
staring up at the sky with open eyes.



Modern Art Keeley Miller
Photograph

The Bee Whisperer

Victoria Johnson

Best of Fiction

When I close my eyes, what I remember most about the farm is the mornings and how the sunlight came through the sheer curtains and the breeze blew through the screens. The earthy smell of the farm: hay, horses, chickens, manure, would blow in too, but it was a good smell. A rooster would crow, and I'd hear the coffee percolating downstairs. I always woke up sticky and my hair greasy. My older sister Meg complained and constantly examined her face in the mirror for new zits. The rest of the time, Meg flipped through the latest edition of *Cosmo*, taking quizzes, and avoiding explaining to me what some of the words on the cover meant. I didn't really want to know anyway, after I thought about it, but sometimes my curiosity won out and I'd ask her questions about boys and she'd pretend to be uninterested. Meg was sixteen that summer, and I was twelve.

In early June, we loaded up the car and drove for two hours to Grannie and Grandpa's farm, except Grandpa passed away a couple years before, and Grannie slept in the recliner most of the time with a patchwork quilt over her legs. She couldn't gather the eggs from the chickens anymore. It was my job, and she gave me a quarter for it every day. Dad worked forty hours a week back home at some plant. I think they made engines for Ford. On the weekends, he drove down to the farm and tried to keep it under control: he mowed the lawn, cut the hay, and attempted to keep the brush from taking over the fence lines. It wasn't much of a farm anymore, really. But we called it that out of necessity—even though it wasn't a farm anymore, it had to be to us.

Some mornings, mom cooked a big break-

fast. Usually on the weekends when dad was home. By the end, the kitchen would be covered in flour and grease and the left over scent of bacon.

One such morning, I sat at the table, drawing a picture of the tree out back, the one with the tire swing. The tree was picturesque. Mom bustled into the room, her hairline sweaty. Meg pulled her blonde hair up in a ponytail and took some eggs from Mom and cracked them into the skillet. I sat my sketchpad down and walked over to the stove.

"How do you make pancakes, Mom?" I asked.

"Can you crack an egg?" she said. I nodded. Mom placed the mixing bowl in front of me. "Now scramble it in here and I'll add the flour." She gently poured in the flour and I kept stirring.

"Don't stir too hard," she said. "Pancake batter needs to be a little lumpy. That's how they're fluffy." Mom brushed her hair out of her face and smiled at me. Meg stood at the stove, flipping bacon with a fork and drinking black coffee. I knew she hated black coffee, but it was vogue. Whatever that meant. The month before, cappuccino was vogue. That was before it had too many calories.

"When do I flip them, Mom?" I asked.

"See how this one is getting little bubbles in it?" She took the spatula and lifted up the bottom of the pancake to check the its progress. Pleased, she flipped it over in one swift movement and a perfect golden-brown pancake stared up at me. I flipped the rest by myself, sometimes making a mess, but I placed the plate, toppling with pancakes, on the table proudly.

"I guess you are growing up, aren't you, Kiley?" Dad said. I looked up from spreading but-

ter on my pancakes and didn't know what to say. I'd never thought about growing up, really. It was inevitable and I had dreams and things I wanted to do and be, yet it seemed so far off, so I didn't bother with it much. What about making pancakes signified growing up?

By mid-June, I was sick of the house and the smell of old wood and paper. I wanted my own bed and bathroom. I wanted central air. It rained sporadically and steadily for nearly two weeks. Grannie slept or watched her soaps with the sound blaring. If you turned them off, she'd know immediately whether she was asleep or not. While Mom and Meg organized the attic, cleaned and cleaned until they smelled like bleach and lemon, I collected the eggs from the twelve hens, trying not to think that I was taking away their children. Every morning, I wore my red rain boots and rain jacket to collect the eggs, I washed them and wrote the date on them in pencil, and placed them in cartons. After my chores were done, I stared out the window and drew whatever I saw.

Then my aunt called, and said her and her son Danny were coming to help out. I'd never met Danny, and I hadn't seen my aunt since she was pregnant.

I was in the chicken coop, trying to coax an irritable black hen away from her precious eggs when I heard the car rumbling over the gravel driveway. I ran out of the coop, letting the creaking screen door slam behind me, and into the barn lot, where dad stood, brushing the Appaloosa, Joker. I skidded to a stop when I saw them getting out of the blue SUV. Mom ran outside and hugged my aunt, her sister.

"Come on, Danny," Aunt Janet said.

"Come meet your Aunt Molly." He was small, smaller than I'd imagined, but I didn't know many four-year-olds. He had red-brown hair and freckles and wore khaki shorts and a blue t-shirt. Mom bent down in front of him and said something I didn't hear. Instead of giving her a hug, he shook her hand at first. His mom gave him a nod and he wrapped his arms around my mom. They both laughed.

"Oh, Kiley," Mom said. She waved me over. "Come say hello to your Aunt Janet and Danny." I walked over, my boots sloshing in the yard and the pail of eggs creaking with very movement. I felt strange, as if I'd taken on some persona.

"Hi, Aunt Janet," I said.

"Look at you," she said. "You look so grown up. Danny, this is your cousin Kiley."

I'd never met Danny,
and I hadn't seen
my aunt
since she was pregnant.

"Danny," I said. "Would you like to see the chickens?"

"Can I, Mom?" he asked. His bright blue eyes opened wide, excited at the prospect of real-life chickens.

"Of course."

I held out my hand for Danny to take, it seemed like the right thing to do, and led him over to the coop. A couple chickens clucked outside, eating the rest of the corn I'd thrown out earlier. Inside the coop, the air was dusty. Bits of feathers floated here and there. It wasn't anything exciting, but Danny let go of my hand and walked slowly up to the ornery black hen.

"Be careful," I said. "She doesn't know you yet."

"Hello chicken," he said. "I'm Danny. Does she know me now?"

I laughed. "I guess she does." She ruffled her feathers, stretched, and hopped off her nest, leaving two brown eggs. Danny's eyes were wide. He asked if he could carry one, and I said yes. He

held it with two hands, as if it were the most precious thing he'd ever seen. I wondered if I ever looked at anything that way before.

I'd come to understand that everything was precious and exciting to Danny. Everything he'd never seen before and everything he had. While the adults took care of the farm and Grannie, I watched Danny. I didn't mind.

The first day I saw him do it, it was so hot that I didn't want to move. We sat in the shade under the oak tree, drinking lemonade. I heard the muffled TV from inside and marveled at how Grannie still had a quilt over her legs and longed for the days when she too sat out in the yard drinking lemonade. I decided I would never get old if I could help it. Danny sat next to me, coloring a picture of some superhero, and I sketched him with charcoal. I couldn't get his hair right. It fell in waves across his ears and forehead, especially in the heat. When I looked back over at him, he was gone. Crayons sprawled in his place.

"Danny?" I said.

"Shh." He turned around and put his fingers to his lips. The overgrown flower garden we called the jungle was in front of him and he tiptoed quietly and slowly toward a light pink peony. I joined him, careful not to make any noise, and curious whether he was simply playing a game, or whether he was after something. He pointed his finger to where a fuzzy bumble bee sat on the flower. He inched closer and closer, his eyes focused.

"Don't Danny," I said. "You can't touch bees. They sting." What would Aunt Janet say if he got stung and I was supposed to be watching him? What if he were allergic and I didn't know?

"Not me," he said. Just before I grabbed his arm, his finger touched the bee gently and it stayed there. I stared, mesmerized, puzzled.

How did he pet bees? How did he not get stung? When he removed his finger, he grinned up at me and clapped his hands. The bee buzzed away. I couldn't believe it.

"How did you do that?" I asked. The humming echoed in my ears.

"Gently."

"But Danny," I said, chasing after him. He tried to pull himself into the tire swing. I lifted him under his armpits and he flung his legs into the opening. "Why didn't it sting you?"

"Bees never sting me," he said, as if it were obvious. "I like bees and they like me."

"Sure. I guess so. But isn't it scary to try and touch bees?"

Danny turned around and glared at me. "I don't try. I touch them every time and it isn't scary at all. Wasps are. Bees are just tiny and fuzzy. You can touch them too, if you try." He slid off the swing and ran inside. It didn't make any sense. I never heard of anyone touching or petting bees. Why was Danny special?

"Aunt Janet?" I said. We sat on the front porch, savoring the cool breeze and watching cars pass by. Danny sat in the yard, waving his arms back and forth, trying to get the cows across the street to look at him. Aunt Janet looked over at me and smiled. Her and my mom looked a lot alike: long wavy, brown hair and green eyes, freckles speckled across their noses. I liked to think that I looked like them. They were pretty in a classy, down to earth sort of way. Aunt Janet was supposedly wilder than my mom, though. She dropped out of college and ran off with some guy, Danny's dad, and no one heard from her for quite a while. She didn't seem so wild anymore; I guessed having a kid made you grow up.

"Did you know that Danny can pet bees?" She laughed. "It's curious, isn't it? The first

time he was only two, and I turned my back for one second and when I looked back around, there he was, with his little finger on a bee. I picked him up immediately, but he was okay, happy even. He looks for them now, whenever we're outside."

"But why do you think he can pet them?"

Aunt Janet thought for a moment and watched Danny, who was trying his hardest to sound like a cow. His moos got deeper by the second.

"I've wondered that, but I don't have an answer," she said. "He always says he isn't afraid and that he touches them gently. It's almost like someone coming up to a dog or a horse for the first time. Maybe bees are just misunderstood. Sometimes the most brilliant things in the world are the ones we can't explain."

I may not have understood everything about Cosmo, or why my sister needed to take tons of quizzes to know her personality or know how to get the "perfect guy," who according to her was some guy named Jeremy who played guitar and wore Converse tennis shoes. But I did understand that at some point, my body would change and I dreaded the thought.

It was supposed to be a good day. Dad said I could finally ride Joker, as long as he held a rope and I held on tightly to the reins. Joker was old and a little temperamental. Everyone stood at the gate, watching. I put my left foot in the stirrup and my left arm up on the saddle. Dad hoisted my other leg over, but I slipped a little and my chest fell on the saddle.

"Ouch," I said. I rubbed it, despite everyone looking. Mom and Aunt Janet looked at one another. Dad was oblivious. He led me around the barn lot at a slow trot. The wind blew through my

hair and Joker seemed happy. Dad ran and Joker picked up his speed. I laughed and held on tighter. I felt high off the ground and invincible. Joker was majestic and beautiful, even mysterious. When Dad helped me down, he gave me a couple apples to feed Joker. I put them in my palm, fingers straight, and laughed when he took them in one bite. His big, brown eyes looked at me and he shook his head, trying to get the flies away. I wondered what he thought about and what he saw. Was the world only apples and straw to him?

My stomach hurt a little all day, but I didn't think much of it. I thought I'd eaten too much at breakfast or maybe I hadn't eaten enough. I was too focused on riding Joker to think about anything else too deeply. But when I went to the restroom, there was blood.

I stared at it, confused and scared at first. Why was I bleeding? Was I hurt? Did I need to go to the hospital? Through the panic, I realized I was fine—I'd started my period. But I cried anyway. I cried harder than the time Meg accidentally hit me in the face with a softball. Ever since I heard about periods, I dreaded getting it. It seemed a nuisance and that it came much too soon—I was only twelve. I wasn't ready to be a woman, yet.

"Mom," I said, through the crack in the bathroom door. She rushed over, concerned. When she came, I closed the door behind her and told her I'd started my period. She didn't say a word, she just wrapped her arms around me and let me cry.

"I know," she said. "I'm sorry. I know. It'll be okay." I washed my face, changed, and pretended nothing was wrong. I couldn't make eye contact with Dad. We girls loaded up the car, drove to a Super Target, and got everything I needed, and a

It was
supposed
to be a good day.

training bra while we were at it.

"Do you like this one or this one?" Mom said, holding up two different colored bras.

"Mom, people will see," I said. I pushed them down and out of the way. "It doesn't matter."

"I'll get both."

When Mom and Aunt Janet were out of ear shot, Meg took me aside in the cereal aisle. No one was around.

"I know it sucks," Meg said. "It actually, really sucks. But you get used to it. Everyone understands, so you don't have to be embarrassed."

"You weren't embarrassed?" I shifted from one foot to the other and pulled at my shirt.

"Of course I was," Meg said. "Remember that pool party Cam had a few summers ago? You thought I was sick, but I'd actually started my period. I was the first of my friends to. It was awful. But I know now that you don't have to be embarrassed or anything. Every girl goes through it some time."

"But doesn't it mean..." I choked on the words. "Doesn't it mean I'm not a kid anymore?"

"I guess so, but that depends on you, I think."

On Grannie's good days, we played gin rummi. She always won, no matter how hard I tried. At seventy-nine, she was still as competitive as a teenager. I didn't mind though. I guessed it gave her something to feel accomplished about.

"Oh Kiley," she said, after she'd just squashed me in a game. She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. Danny ran past the window trying to catch a butterfly. Aunt Janet ran up behind him and swung him around in the air. It was a rare day in late July when the heat wasn't sweltering. "Will you promise me something?"

"I guess," I said. Grannie and I didn't talk

much, not since she'd gotten sick. When I first saw her after the stroke, I didn't know who she was. I wondered if that was what happened when you got old: you forgot who you were and not just your name, but what made you, you. Like when you're a baby, you don't know who you are yet and you discover yourself and make yourself over time, but in reverse. Her eyes were usually far off after that, but the real Grannie sparked in them that afternoon.

"Don't ever let yourself forget how beautiful the world can be. That's what happens to a lot of grown-ups. Even me. There's always something to appreciate."

"Okay, Grannie. I won't." She fell asleep after that, leaving me confused. I wanted to ask her what she meant. What had she not appreciated? Before I could ask, she clutched her chest and gasped for breath. The adults crowded around her and gave her oxygen, while I backed away, picked up the cards, and joined Danny and Meg outside. Danny kept saying, "Push me, Kiley! Push me!" He rocked the swing back and forth impatiently.

My stomach tightened and my ears grew hot. Meg and I exchanged a look of wide eyes and fear. I held my breath and watched everyone through the window. It wasn't the first time Grannie had an attack, as we called them, but they were never easy. I pushed Danny, slowly. He kicked his small legs, trying to do it himself. Inside the house, it calmed down. Grannie was okay. I exhaled, relieved. Mom handed Grannie a glass of water and helped her drink it through a straw. Grannie's hands shook, and Aunt Janet rubbed her shoulder.

I heard a bee buzz by my ear and backed away. Even though we called Danny the bee whisperer, I was afraid they'd sting me. He heard the bee too and stood in attention. The bee landed on a red rose on the side of the house. I didn't think anything of it. I'd seen Danny pet bees a dozen times

by then, but this time, when he ran toward the bee, he must've frightened it. When he screamed, I jolted out of my day dream and ran after him. Did he prick his finger on the bush? Did he step on something? He was always running around barefoot. Did he trip? Meg reached him first and picked him up. He held up his finger—it was red and swelling by the second. The bee stung him.

He wailed, more out of his feelings being hurt than anything, I thought. Aunt Janet ran outside and took him from Meg who couldn't get him to calm down. We followed aunt Janet inside. Grannie sat in the recliner, her hand still on her chest, but okay. Still here. I watched as Mom mixed baking soda and water together and to make a paste to relieve the sting. I felt as if I were witnessing some alternate reality. How could Danny get stung by his small, fuzzy friend? I didn't understand how everything could change so quickly. Or maybe I didn't want to accept that it could, even though the evidence was in front of my face.

Danny didn't pet bees the rest of the summer. I tried and failed to coax him to. I searched and longed to hear the familiar buzzing. But he wouldn't budge. He looked at his finger and shook his head. He preferred to run around and play tag or swing. I realized he was afraid. He'd been hurt and his little life had changed, too. I didn't want him to be afraid; I didn't want to be afraid.

On our last day at the farm, I collected two dozen eggs. A farmer down the road bought the chickens and Joker. We couldn't stay and take care of the farm. We had our own home and lives to get back to. I said goodbye to each chicken, fed Joker an apple, and packed the cards Grannie and I played gin rummi with in my bag. They were worn, brown at the edges, and flimsy. But that was what made them special. We took Grannie to a nursing home, and I figured we could play when

we visited.

I sat near the garden, watching Dad and the farmer load up the animals, and I sketched a bee. It looked harmless on paper, lovely even. I flipped through my sketches and came across the one of Danny coloring. I ran my hand over the picture and watched Danny draw with a stick in the dirt. That's when I heard the loud hum of a bee, and I knew what I had to do.

"Danny," I said. The bee landed on the pink peonies. Danny walked over, hesitant, sure I was trying to get him to touch a bee again. But I wasn't.

I held out my finger, and slowly, gently moved it forward. The bee moved over the flowers and I winced, but smiled at Danny. I had to go through with it. I felt the fuzzy bee underneath my finger and I laughed and Danny did, too. The bee flew away without stinging me. I had pet a bee.

• • •



Whale Watching Lifan Fan

Oil on Canvas

46 genesis fall 2016

Contributors

Keeley Miller

Keeley Miller is a freshman journalism major at IUPUI. Since the age of 12, she has pursued the art of photography with a variety of subjects, loving the ability to be able to create a fantasy world and bring it to reality. You can view more of her work at keeleymiller.com.

Brook Lowry

I made this piece to focus on the colors in flesh tones. This painting was completed while I was working on a concentration of portraits. My goal was to use color in a way to make a piece more dynamic and aesthetically pleasing.

Samantha Wright

I'm a transfer student from Ivy Tech. I was there for three years, and then transferred to Herron. I currently have an Associate Degree in Fine Arts. My major is in Sculpture; however, that may be changing next year. I hope you enjoy my dreamland of art!

Kyle Matthew Englert

I am a 21-year-old aspiring editorial photographer whom specializes in portrait, fashion, and fine art photography. I am inspired by pop culture and the world around me. I style, design, and create my own conceptual ideas for my photoshoots.

Lifan Fann

Whales are cool. They make me happy.

Claire Christoff

Claire Christoff is a senior studying English with a concentration in Creative Writing.

Contributors

Victoria Johnson

I am in the second year of the English MA program. I listen for idiosyncrasies, get my head caught up in the clouds, and enjoy a good rainfall. I'm a writer, designer, adventurer, and collector of mugs. My happy place is anywhere with paperbacks and hot tea.

Rachel Leonard

Formerly an infant, Rachel now finds herself barefoot often.

Rachel Smith

I am a junior in the English Creative Writing Program, and I'm also working toward a minor in English Literature. My interests include reading and writing fiction and poetry, and these are what I'm usually doing when not working or doing homework.

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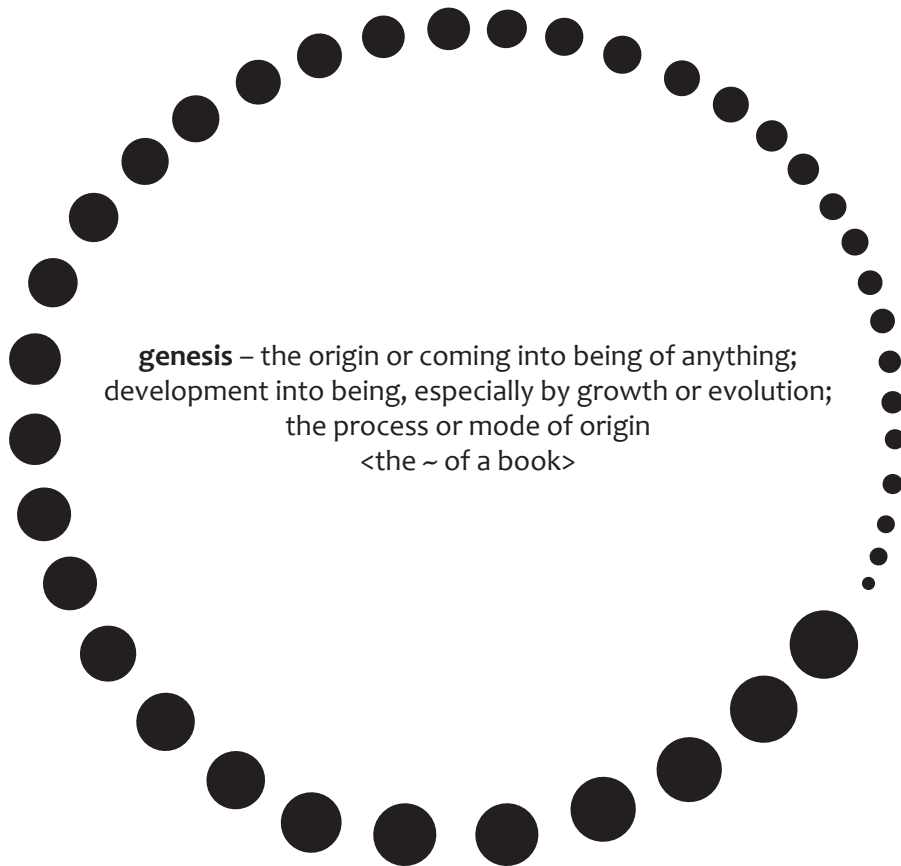
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Upon publication, copyright reverts to author. *genesis* is
published in the spring and fall through a grant from the Office
of Student Involvement of IUPUI and the Indiana University
School of Liberal Arts.

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