

genesis
Spring 2011



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Editors' Note

An issue that can naturally present its own theme is rare, especially with such a diverse student body and an eclectic staff of editors. We are privileged, however, that this issue has done just that. As the issue began to take shape, it became clear that this semester's selections had a common theme of cheating. Whether attempting to cheat death, both physically and figuratively, or cheating in a relationship, many of our contributors found themselves fixated on it. They search for solace in the gray areas between right and wrong, between living and dead, and if it's possible to cheat the choice altogether.

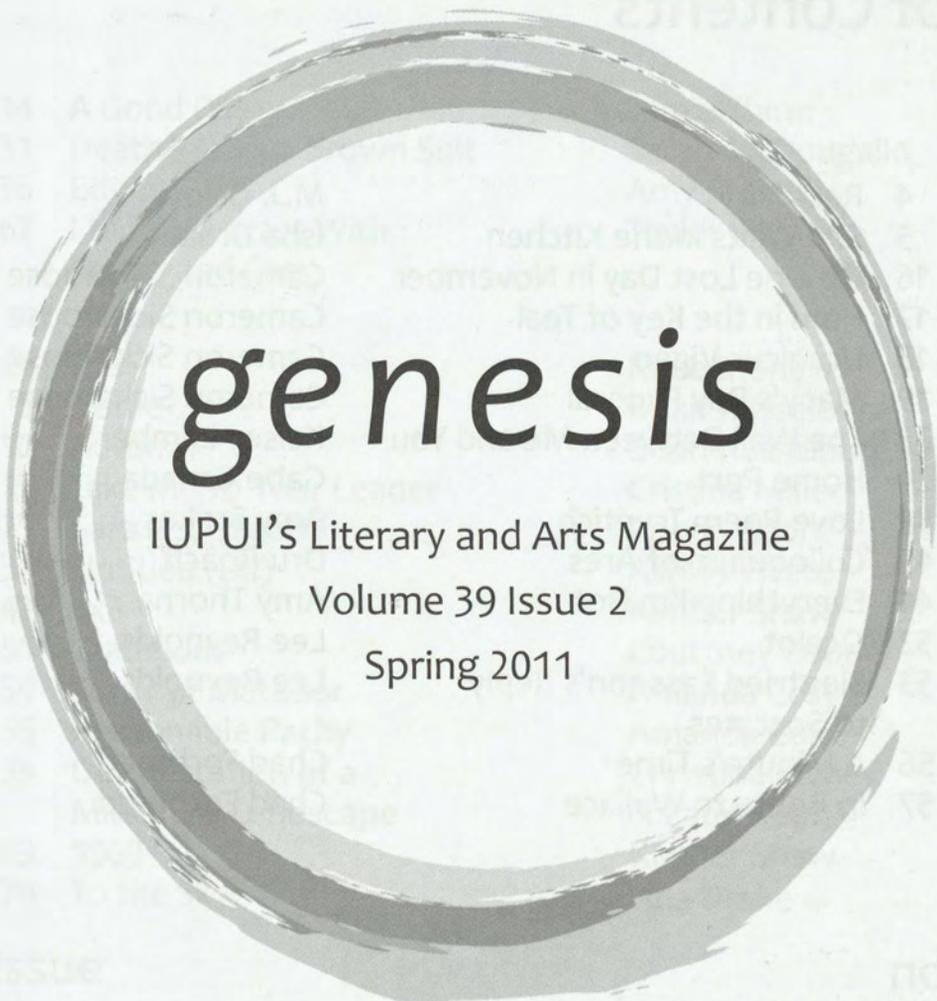
We are very honored to be a part of the dedication and creativity this issue has demanded. We want to thank our great staff and the wonderful writers and artists featured in this issue.

Andrew & Hannah

Cover by: Kimber Shaw

Lost

Photography: Inkjet Print on Canvas



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| Best of Poetry |

M.J. Gillot

Relativity

Overtuned in quickening water, I
rise to breathe
silt.

You've stolen my soul on film
so many times,
I am certain I'll never die.

My hands impact the
floor of the lake,
penetrate its wispy bed,
and grasp tiny fossils
Interred therein.

The faster you go,
the flatter you become,
and time slows gradually.
When you reach the speed of light,
Time stands still.

Eels are already odd-looking
without being wrong side up.

This is how it works:
My Light passes through your lens,
where it flattens on the back wall
of your camera.

I was going so fast,
my brakes ran out of time.

I wish you could see my mermaid hair.
Pretty greens, pretty browns.

Isha Drake

She Waits in the Kitchen

The widow leans against the kitchen sink
washing dandelion dishes.
Her throaty voice sings a hymn.
The branches on the elm, like baggage,
sway to the rhythm of her song.
The fragrant saffron hangs in the air
like unrelenting oiled hands. The sun sinks
just below the horizon creating haloed trees,
and a pink hue ghosted
her kitchen walls.



Home

Brian Russelburg

Photography:
Color Gelatin, C Print

A Good Day

Jamie Shinn

The house was tranquil and silent; it was only nine in the morning. She still had an hour to sleep before making lunch for Grandpa, then having to leave for work.

"Kay! Elizabeth! Someone!" called a faint, fragile voice from across the house. She sprang out of bed, zipped down the stairs and into her grandfather's room. His Lazy-Boy chair imitated quicksand and pulled him deep into the core of the chair.

"Yes? Grandpa, I'm here," Elizabeth said.

"Mom is at work already. What do you need?"

"I need... oxygen," he said breathing heavily.

"Remember how the nurse said to breathe through your nose. Close your mouth, see, look at me, breathe through your nose."

Elizabeth's grandpa got out of the hospital a week ago but he still had the same reoccurring problems. He thought he wasn't getting enough oxygen even though the tests showed he had plenty. The doctors told the family, "His lymphoma cancer should be gone now since he received the treatments for the past month. However, it is the worst kind of cancer to get rid of because it travels in a person's lymph nodes and spreads quickly and easily, so keep a close watch on him." This wasn't the news Elizabeth hoped for; it sounded to her that the doctors were playing a game of *Risk* instead of *Life*.

"Elizabeth, I'm going now. I don't know what will happen to you kids but you'll be alright. This... is my last... breath," her grandpa said as he sucked in air. He didn't move; he sat

perfectly still. Elizabeth stood there watching, not believing him. Just as she was about to check his pulse he gasped for air.

"Grandpa!" she said. "Don't do that to me." A little, weak smirk crept in the right corner of his mouth. "I'm going to call Mom, okay?"

Elizabeth called her mother, explained his symptoms and asked what to do. The only advice her mother had was to try to make him eat, which was a hard concept after he received chemotherapy. "Nothing tastes right," he'd grumble. Regardless, Elizabeth made chicken noodle soup, his favorite, and called her father to let him know today was not a good day.

The days all started with the same complaints and slow movements. He never wanted to get out of bed, but he always would no matter how bad or sore he felt. Some days would end with a three course meal of: salad, chicken with mash potatoes and green beans, and a slice of apple pie à la mode. He would even have energy to play fetch with the family's pet poodle. Other days ended poorly, with needing help going to the bathroom or getting out of his chair or even eating a bowl of grits.

On days such as this, Elizabeth would make his soup and serve it to him on a tray. Every once and a while he was too limp to pick up the spoon. "Ugh," he'd mumble under his breath.

The first time this happened, Elizabeth smiled sadly and asked, "Do you want me to help you?"

"No, I'm fine." He struggled harder to lift the

spoon to his mouth, but it slipped again, and he spilt some of the hot broth on his shirt.

"Here," Elizabeth said wiping up the small puddle. She pulled a chair next to his and grabbed the soup. She could see the disappointment in his eyes, but he didn't resist when she held the spoon in front of his mouth. Elizabeth figured this was good practice for being a mother someday. After he wouldn't eat anymore, Elizabeth would curl up in the other Lazy-Boy next to her grandpa's and read her summer book while he sat with his eyes closed. Occasionally he'd peak at her, "Isn't school out yet?" he'd say. "Why you reading?"

"Yes, silly, but I like this author," Elizabeth replied. She'd read and sip coffee until she had to leave. "Grandpa, I have to go to work now. Dad will be home soon to check on you. I'll see you later, I love you."

"Alright," Grandpa said. "I love you too." These words were ones he rarely uttered and two years ago, when he first moved in with his son's family, was the first time he said I love you. And he said it to Elizabeth. His usual remark was "I love me too." After this event the family dubbed Elizabeth "The Favorite Granddaughter." Along with the title came the duty of asking Grandpa questions he would most likely answer no to. But all she had to do was shine her teeth to receive an "Okay."

Elizabeth arrived at her factory job and transformed from nurse-granddaughter to hard working, college student summer help.

The factory made foam mattress toppers and pillows; they packaged them and shipped them out to local stores. Her father was the head of maintenance there and encouraged her to work in production on the assembly line for the summer. Surprisingly, she loved the heavy lifting and sense-of-urgency atmosphere. She also enjoyed her co-workers; most of them were Hispanics and spoke broken English, but there were a few other college students too. Work generally took her mind away from her family situation, at least until she turned her phone on when work ended at midnight. A text message always awaited her from Mother about the happenings with Grandpa. "We admitted grandpa into the hospital again, same floor new room," read the text message. Elizabeth took a deep breath and got into her car. "I guess today really was a bad day," Elizabeth said to herself as she drove home.

The next morning she woke up early, got ready for work, and headed for the hospital. She slithered in his room to see him sitting up in bed with his eyes open and lively.

"Well it's about time you got here," he said. "Did you get lost?"

"Yeah right, I've been here enough this summer," she said. "Did you order lunch?"

He nodded as Elizabeth grabbed a towel and washed his face with warm water.

"You're going to have to drop out of college and take care of me," he said.

"Ha, you going to pay me really good?"

"These words were ones he rarely uttered . . ."

"I didn't think about that," he said and cleared his throat. His eyes shifted to gaze out the window for a second then slowly back to her. She grinned at him and noticed his eyes held a more serious look than usual. "Elizabeth, listen, I want you to know something that I never told anyone before. In life, you should never let anyone, no boys, or anyone, change your mind or distract you from accomplishing your goals. Just be happy with what you do and work hard, but not too hard."

"Okay, grandpa," Elizabeth said with an agreeing but skeptical grin. She had just introduced her boyfriend to her grandfather the week before, and although it was a new relationship, the friendship had been there for years. Her grandfather was having a decent day when he met her boyfriend, but he was weak and glued to his chair. The only acknowledging words he had to say were, "Now you better take care of this pretty girl for me, otherwise I'll find a way to haunt you." Elizabeth laughed and shook her head at his comment, but her boyfriend promised he would take care of her; which seemed to please her grandfather.

Elizabeth and her grandfather sat and ate lunch together, discussing the politicians he watched on the television. He took pleasure in watching, but always complained about



Autumn

Brian Russelburg

Mixed Media:
Acrylic & Laytex Paint
Photo Transfer

them and their supposedly “new plans.” Elizabeth didn’t mind though; this was the first grandparent she felt close to and enjoyed his company. She would listen to him ramble on and nod her head even though she had no knowledge of politics. After lunch it was time for Elizabeth to leave; she kissed her grandfather and bounced off to work. It was a good day.

After the hard day of work, Elizabeth waved good-bye to her co-workers and drove for home. On her passenger seat sat her cell phone as it went through its introduction of turning on. Soon enough she heard the beep that indicated a new text message: “Wake me when you get home, Sweetie.” Why did her mother call her “Sweetie?” The text message made Elizabeth tap her fingers on her steering wheel, and her eyes impatiently glimpse at the green clock. Maybe she could speed down the back county roads to get home faster.

When she arrived home, the house was dark. But she still sprang out of her car as soon as it was parked. Surely her mom and dad would have called her if something terrible had happened. She walked through her parent’s dark room and knelt at her mother’s bedside.

“Mom,” Elizabeth whispered.

“Hmm...” her mother sleepily replied.

“So... is everything okay?”

“I just wanted to tell you a little bit about Grandpa,” she began. “We went up after dinner and stayed until ten o’clock. But he wasn’t really there, mentally anyways. If he could

have formed his words better he would have been very talkative, but he muttered too much for anyone to understand what he was saying. Something about Grandma was all your dad could make out.”

“He was happy and lively when I left him!”

“I know, you told me, but the doctors said because of all the medication he’s taking his emotions run wild, he dreams more, and is really out of it. They said we won’t ever know what to expect of him from day to day. They are just trying to keep him comfortable.”

“Is the cancer back?”

“They’re going to run test tomorrow, but yes, they think it might be back. And I would recommend that you call tomorrow before you go to the hospital because they weren’t sure what time they would do all the tests. No sense in going there for an empty room, okay?”

“Alright, Mom,” Elizabeth said peaking over at her dad sleeping, “How’s he doing?”

Her mother took a deep breath, “You know your dad, he’s strong, but it’s still hard.”

“Yeah, okay well I’m gonna go to bed.”

Elizabeth kissed her mother good-night and went upstairs to sleep. Besides the fact that her mind was wandering, she fell asleep pretty easily. Again, in the morning, she woke up early, put her hair in a ponytail, dressed in her grungy work clothes and made a quick phone call to the hospital. The nurse told her that her grandpa should be done with tests soon, so Elizabeth decided she would visit before work.

When she walked into his room, it was dark and almost eerie. Her grandpa was lying flat in bed and motionless. Elizabeth walked up to his side and squeezed his hand to help him acknowledge that someone was in the room.

"Grandpa, I'm here," she said quietly. "Are you sleeping?" she said a little louder.

At that, her grandpa opened his glossy eyelids and tried to grin. He cleared his throat, which sounded like dry sandpaper. Elizabeth grabbed the water cup beside her and held the straw steady for him to drink out of.

"Are you tired from the tests, Grandpa?"

He bobbed his head a little and closed his eyes. Elizabeth sat at his bedside and held his hand; she glided her thumb over the back of his hand's bulging veins. He looked like part of the bed, so perfectly tucked into the sheets.

The nurse that was overseeing her grandfather peaked into the room, "Hi, you're his granddaughter, right?"

"Yes I am," Elizabeth replied with gumption. "Has he eaten anything today or just been sleeping?"

"He wouldn't eat anything, but I got him to drink a few sips of chocolate milk. He's mostly been sleeping and mutter things about a Mary," the nurse said looking for some kind of explanation.

"His late wife, my grandma," Elizabeth said shrugging her shoulders. "Apparently he was talking about her last night too when my parents were here, but they couldn't understand more

“Your father called . . . He wants you to go to the hospital.”

than her name.”

"It sounded like he said something about not wanting to go through what she went through or waiting around. I wasn't really sure."

"That kind of makes sense. She had Alzheimer's and was in a nursing home for five years 'rotting away'—his words," Elizabeth said glancing at her grandpa. "He never liked watching her forget everything and everyone, and he always said that it was the worst way to go." The nurse nodded her head as Elizabeth glanced at her watch, "I have to leave for work soon."

"Alright, well I'll be here looking after him for you," the nurse said as she exited the room.

"Thanks," Elizabeth said and turned back to her grandpa. She squeezed his hand and rubbed his arm. "Grandpa, I'm going to work. I love you. Get some rest and I'll see you tomorrow."

He squinted his eyes and tried to wave his hand as if to say, "Okay," but it was too heavy for him to succeed. A few tears rolled down his cheek as he closed his eyes, and Elizabeth bit her lower lip to keep her tears locked in as she left.

She was thankful for the distraction of her co-workers; especially the Hispanics, because she used every opportunity to learn more Spanish. She would eavesdrop on their conversations but barely understood any of it, and would also ask them how to say certain words or phrases.

In the middle of learning how to say *you will feel better soon*, their supervisor came over and said, “go to break,” accompanied with the signal. He put his fist together and pretended to break a stick, so that those who weren’t fluent in English understood what he was saying. He then proceeded to pull Elizabeth apart from the group. “Your father called,” he said. “He wants you to go to the hospital.”

Elizabeth was scared to know what exactly this meant, and she felt as if gravity had tripled, pulling all her weight down on top of her. She quickly gathered her belongings and left for the hospital.

She glided into the bare-walled room, not knowing exactly what to expect. The clock wasn’t mounted on the wall. It was lying on the sink counter because her grandpa didn’t like watching the time move sluggishly. Except for a faint hum of the blue heart monitor with a red horizontal line, it was quiet. The nurse was holding a stethoscope on her grandfather’s chest and concentrating to hear a beat. She moved it around a couple of times before looking up at Elizabeth’s father and mother, who were huddled close beside the hospital bed. The nurse studied her watch and said “10:23. I’ll leave you alone for a while.” She left the square room as Elizabeth gazed, through blurry eyes, at the bland, dingy pink curtains.

Elizabeth’s mother grabbed her father and pulled him in as the first tear rolled down his cheek. She stood there for a second, apart from

her parents, and thought how she never saw her father cry—she couldn’t believe this was the end. Her grandfather was gone. He would no longer be held captive like a bird in a cage. He was free to soar beyond this pitiful room.

Elizabeth’s eyes couldn’t hold the tears anymore. Her heart pounded loudly in her ears, and between gasps of air her cheeks became perfectly wet as her tears to slid down and hung on her chin before falling to the floor. Her father extended his arm and pulled her in close. She felt content being squished between her mother and father. They stayed there for a while, in the moment of realization.

Elizabeth looked over at the few “Get Well Soon” cards on the small wooden table near the hospital bed. Her parents settled themselves upon a small, musky, blue love seat at the foot of the bed. She slid up next to her grandfather and kissed his forehead. “I love you,” she whispered, “Usted se sentirá mejor pronto. You will feel better soon.”

As she examined him, she noticed how pale he was, almost grey. This was probably normal for someone who was not alive, but this was the first time she’d seen anyone without oxygen. His skin was cold and slightly clammy, almost like how Elizabeth thought a vampire’s skin might feel like. His mouth was open and because he didn’t have his dentures in, his lower lip rolled into his mouth.

Elizabeth remembered how he used to love taking his dentures out and talking to them.

Sometimes he would blow up his cheeks and release the air quickly to make his face jiggle. She and her mother would always giggle at him, but he always looked dumbfounded, as if he had no idea what he had just done.

It was still hard for Elizabeth to comprehend how he had gotten sick so quickly. When she first returned home, at the beginning of the summer, he was able to walk without help and planted pansies and gerber daisies in the gardens around the house. He would even spend hours mowing the three acres of land. He'd bounce along with a huge grin on his face, making sure he was cutting straight lines and not missing any patches. The only trouble he had was driving an actual vehicle. That, or maybe he was a little worried to drive on the road with others. Elizabeth came in handy then too and would drive him around to the bank or the market to pick up pie or anything he wanted.

In early June, when the doctors found the cancer, his energy dropped as he began treatment. Nothing was ever the same. The day he stopped making his bed, Elizabeth knew was a bad day because his bed making was always a habitual action. She took it upon herself to make his bed; she knew it would help make him feel satisfied. Elizabeth's mother and father were too wary to let him go outside alone, which only seemed to depress her grandpa, but he agreed with them. He obviously didn't feel secure enough to leave his own living room, because he barely ever stepped outside the door. Every

weekend night when Elizabeth didn't have to work, she would help her grandfather to the dining table so the whole family could eat dinner together. Even when he was in the hospital, the family would go visit during dinner and eat whatever fast food they picked up on the way, whether he was lucid or not.

The treatments apparently did not delay the inevitable. The family had the visitation and the funeral in the following days.

At the end of the week it was time for Elizabeth to return to college. She tried to sink into her classes and retract away from her personal life. She went on with life as if nothing had changed.

Her first weekend with her friends was a classic bar hopping night. As they walked across the street to the second bar, Elizabeth spotted a girl in a tube top dress. As she admired the floral pattern blowing in the wind, the girl pulled up the top and adjusted it to her chest so it wouldn't fall down. Elizabeth couldn't help but to remember the time her grandpa saw her have the same problem and he, being his witty self, said, "You know I have some suspenders that will help hold that thing in place."

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Graphic Design:
Digital

Take Me To Your Leader

Cristina Miller

Cameron Sickafoose

On One Lost Day in November

On one lost day in November
a storm drain at the edge of suburbia
spit and gurgled in disgust,
refusing to swallow the collapsed figure
laying at the edge of its hollow throat,
for this breathless tunnel was no scavenger
and would not accept the scraps of discarded humanity,
this not quite mother,
with her greenish blonde hair
swirled by knee deep water
floating like weeds
floating, like the innocence inside her,
with tiny fingers and unformed eyelids,
taken from her,
as she was killed and dumped onto the plate
of this concrete being
which tastes, and refuses the bitterness
of one dead child
within another.

Hum in the Key of Teal

Not quite the down-on-your-luck,
got-no-money-in-your-pockets,
old-lady-just-walked-out-the-door blue,
and not the ship's a-swayin',
hold-onto-the-toilet-bowl,
belly-full-of-jumpin'-beans green,
but more of an in-between,
a washed out sickening sadness
that lurks at the bottom of your belly,
sometimes crawling up your chest,
but never fully jumpin' out your mouth.

No, this feeling's the lingering kind,
The kind that keeps you up at night,
tossing and turning
but not quite pacing the floor,
the kind that rolls you off the wrong side of any bed,
no matter if it's rainin' that morning or not.
The kind that plops you on your couch
in front of the TV you don't feel like watchin',
but do so anyway
cause there ain't nothin' better to waste your time with.

Yes, this color has its own tune to sing
that's not quite here and not quite there,
but you can always hear its universal sound
flowin' from the lips of some poor soul,
sighin' their way down the street.

Uranicus Vigeo

At night I lie on my back
plucking the stars that have bloomed
in centuries long before me;
primeval petals thrown,
as by flower girls,
scattering vast into gardens named for Greeks,
but these roses, bluebells and daffodils
were far from seeds
long before heroes and gods were birthed
on the tongues of men.
Greater than the Hanging Gardens,
these wonders have been seen
by every mother of every child,
and these children have grown old
and withered,
while ancient flowers shimmer
with the dew of their endless Spring.
I lie with blooms above me,
and know that I am dying
in the flowered casket where
all fathers and mothers sleep.

Macy's Day Funeral

Siren like merchants sing behind glass counter cages:

This exquisite Garibaldi blouse was made just for you.
Made from the richest indigo dyes which reflect
off of your eyes like the blackest blue ocean.
Do you know
how many tiny fingers went into making this piece?
Dozens. Each artisan studied their craft
since their prime formative years, because
with innocent minds comes tactile perfection.
Their labor may not pay out a six digit salary,
but they earn back much more just knowing
that they are clothing AMERICANS,
kings and queens of the globe.

Oh, and this gold locket pulls your outfit together
with such worldly elegance.

Come closer.

Do you see

those tiny red specks?

Yes, that's right real souvenirs from the Beaconsfield collapse.

The sacrifice that went into creating this finely crafted chain
make it almost too good to sell,
but for you, today, I'll take 10% off.

Of course the matching earrings are a must.

Don't the diamonds just pierce you,
with mesmerizing beauty, like the ivory teeth
on a sun-baked skin's smile,
but we do like to be eco-friendly and recycle.
For every faultless gem we unearth,
we bury 20.

Life To Her

Evan Pullins

I imagine her, black down coat and rubber boots, trudging through the snow. Her thick, pink-rimmed glasses curve to a pinch at the corners just above her black bushy eyebrows. Fifteen years of wishing her mother would drive her home from school; she clenches her brown trumpet case. Its shell, worn and torn from years of handling, rattles in the winter wind—*ding-tink, ding-tink, ding-tink*—making its own melodies as she makes her way across town. The icy wind blows through the ends of her curly brown hair, the top of her head protected by a lime green crocheted hat. Her steps become heavier, making the pavement kiss her size-six feet. She tries to lengthen her stride, but she can't risk stumbling over her five-foot-tall body. Her older sister is up ahead, about thirty yards, chatting with her cheerleader friends. God forbid she be seen walking with her younger sister.

My mother is one of six kids. She's the second oldest by two years. Chicago born, she spent most of her adolescent years growing up in northwest Indiana. By the time she was twelve, she was working afters chool at the nearby hospital as a dishwasher. "I absolutely hated it!" she remembers, tossing the toilet paper onto the slimy counter top at our local Walmart. "My mother was so mean. I practically raised my brothers and sisters."

Her mother was a full-time, stay-at-home parent. She was an x-ray tech at the local hospital. Before she was twenty, she was a proud parent of two and barking orders at her husband,

who worked multiple jobs. Never did she allow her children to see her soft side. She had to keep the kids from acting out. Boxed up, in the two-bedroom, one-bathroom house, my grandmother bottle-fed babies and clothed them with the finest hand-me-down threads she could afford. They lived on the small budget of a car salesman which also left them unable to try out for sports. "If only I could've been on the track team..." she says, sliding the flimsy debit card through the machine. "I probably could've recieved an athletic scholarship if my mother would've let me run."

The track at Valparaiso High School in the 70s was gravel. It didn't even have a chain-link fence around the outer edges of the football field, yet. The track team wasn't bound for the state championships either—they waited until my mother's youngest brother made the team. The natural talent for running wasn't present in all of the kids, just the second and last born. My mother was nineteen before she started competing in long-distance races. With my father at each race to cheer her on, she broke small town records and collected over a hundred trophies. Running was in her blood. Like a lover, it became her companion—comforting her when times got rough.

I'm not sure what ran through my mother's head as she watched her oldest sister walk in front of her. Was she a sad child? Shoulders slouched, covering her boyish figure, I picture her humming under her soft breath. Her

silhouette looks back at her from the drab cement, foreshadowing a life waiting patiently on the train platform. Returning to her birth place, Monday through Friday, she sits in a cubicle just big enough to fit her petite frame. She quietly eats her cereal as she fingers the newspaper, trying to find some amusement within the classifieds. The oats become soggy as she dips her silver spoon in and out; the heft of the metal growing heavy in her small hand. The white of the milk becomes a different shade of gray. Her what-ifs only linger, stay afloat in the milk that becomes too warm.

She wears her hair short these days. Her stature is still short and petite as I peer over her head at 5'5". I pretend to look for the flavor-blasted Goldfish, not letting her know I've been staring at her light brown eyes. They look the same as at her father's funeral. That same bit of hoplessness still lingers in her pupils. Will a tear be shed, or will they just well up with pain? Her skin is also light brown, not as dark as it used to be. She doesn't tan anymore, no need to spend money that isn't there. I get in the car, the sun-kissed seat stinging the back of my legs. "So why do you love running so much?" I ask her, trying to sound confident. "I guess I just always wanted to know..."

“I imagine the wrinkles as the city roads she once ran on.”

She used to run a five-minute mile. She used to cruise along to the beating of her heart, listening to the rhythm her tattered shoes made on the concrete. She ran away from insecurities, from fears, from abandoned hope. "I never felt good enough as a kid." She replied. "As much as I despised my abusive mother, I hated myself. Running became my release. Without it, I wouldn't be able to breathe." She clutches the tan steering wheel the way I imagined her clutching her worn trumpet case. Her fragile, pale fingers intertwined in the bitter winter air. The pads of her fingers become red when she is deep in thought. I know this because I observe her at every waking moment. I'm afraid to miss a moment, her actions are tranquil and addicting to watch.

The wrinkles crease her forehead, the corners of her mouth. They intertwine, making a road map of sorts. I imagine these wrinkles as the city roads she once ran on. Running made her

travel. Chicago, Boston, Indianapolis--cities only champions could defeat. I loved waiting at the finish line, anticipating her arrival. My brother and I would try to spot her white and blue hat, frantically yelling at strangers--mistaking them for our awesome mother. We would watch in awe, our mother being decorated with medals that hung heavy from her delicate neck. "I love you mom," we would say as we wrapped our small arms around her sweaty waist.

She hums to the music playing on the radio as if no one is listening. I peer over to her, quietly trying to see her pearly whites. What does that look like, I think—trying to remember the last time I saw her smile. These days she asks me questions far beyond my knowledge, almost philosophical. She yearns to watch me succeed; the last child to make her dreams come true. "Just be happy," she says. That's all she wants. If only I could say the same to her.

•

Kelsey Lambert

The Wall between Me and You

During one of Southern California's eternal
summer dusks, you heaved a square capstone
atop the wall's final segment—triumphal,
smooth finish to a fortress constructed
with method and over-worked hands.

Thirty-five years later while driving
up the peninsula's coastline,
I come around the bend at Via Lorado
and see it first through Pacific mist
with jet-lagged eyes, still as my father
described.

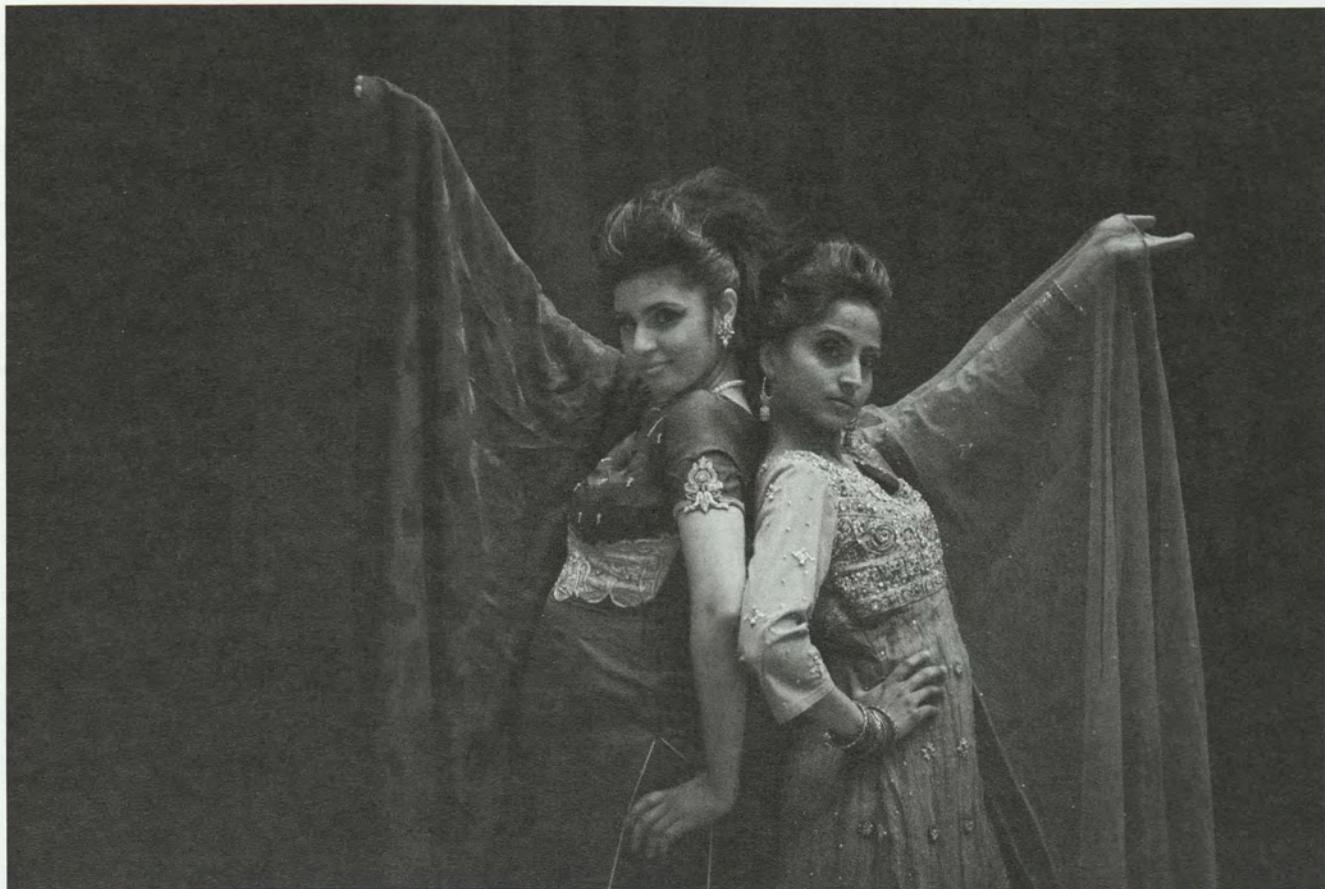
The same rough stones encase the yellow
stucco ranch, no cracks in the mortar,
no uneven settling prove the quality
of your workmanship on this wall
I now pace alongside.

Eighty miles east of Rancho Palos Verdes,
beneath parched hills, lies a crevice
under earth's liquid caverns. Just
one tectonic shift in San Andreas could send
ripples through your indestructible stone
and into the fleshy walls of my heart
that aches to have known you.

Gabe Canada

Home Port

Orange bricks pave the street,
bleeding into black tarmac.
Just as the shore bleeds,
into the horizon
and the ocean waves.
The pockmarked sidewalk,
buckled with the wear of time,
falls into concrete valleys.
Navigated with the care of a sailor,
by bicycles and baby carriages.
Dusk arrives with street lamps,
As the lighthouse is kindled by storms.
A mother calls her children home,
just as a harbormaster calls his ships to port.



Portrait:
Digital Photograph

Sara and Shruthi

Ronni Moore

Death Wears A Brown Suit

Sarah McDougalle

On the eastern shore of North Carolina, just where the coast turns southwest toward South Carolina, lies the port town of Morehead City. On a cold November morning in 1894, a coastal steamer was debarking passengers at the public docks. A closed carriage left the docks piled high with the proceeds of a wealthy matron's shopping trip to Charleston. The notable sat silent, nervous fingers fiddling—ignoring the coach's other passenger. A nondescript, brown-suited man sat across from the woman and smiled wryly at her apparent discomfort. *She feels my presence* thought Michael Nex, the Angelus Mortis. With a sigh, he leaned forward and whispered, "Be easy, it's not your time yet." He turned away and watched their progress.

The carriage drove north on Main Street through the shopping district and neighborhoods where skilled craftsmen lived. It turned west on Fisher's Street, a wide tree-lined boulevard paved with cobble stones. Brown brick sidewalks paralleled the street on both sides giving access to large stone, pillared, and porticoed houses set back of beautifully manicured lawns.

The carriage paused and then turned left on Tilney Avenue. The unremarkable man in the brown suit now stood across from 615 W. Fishers Street watching its blue painted door open. A middle aged woman, graying hair in a tight bun, clothed in an ankle length dress of black bombazine and a starched white apron stepped out onto the polished marble porch. Her right

hand clutched a black derby hat and a black silk scarf. A worried frown clouded her face.

A tall, thin, sixtyish man followed her through the door. His once handsome face was marred by a scowl of perpetual discontent. His frame might have been described as lanky, if he ever relaxed. He was, instead a fence rail in formal dress. Truman Wade adjusted the fit of his coat and reached for his hat. "I'll be gone for several hours Mrs. Swain," he said. "My business down town is pressing. I won't be back for lunch, but I'll expect dinner at the usual time."

"Yes sir," responded the housekeeper, her brow furrowing deeper. She glanced across the street. "Won't you reconsider going to town Master Truman? I saw the shadow of death last night. Someone will die soon. It's a dark sign... and right outside this house. You're not safe!"

Truman Wade sighed long and deep, as if his patience was strained. Michael Nex shook his head over the man's attitude. He couldn't fathom these mortals. Some, like Janet Swain could see him, but none wanted to make peace until it was too late. The woman glanced at Nex again. Wade pretended not to notice.

The man's stiff body relaxed. His perpetual scowl slipped. *He knows his time is near* thought Nex. Wade spoke gently to the housekeeper. "Mrs. Swain... Janet, you know I don't believe in omens." Sure you don't, thought Nex. "Silence your doubts," continued Wade. "Nothing is going to happen to me. And if it does, well I'm as ready as I'm going to get." The Angel of Death

shook his head. The woman glowered. Seeing the negative effect of his words, Truman Wade became a rigid fence post again. "The weather good for November," he said.

Janet Swain cast sad eyes toward Death in his brown suit. She turned back to her employer holding out the scarf. She stared past the man's left shoulder. Her eyes would not meet his and her voice trembled as she spoke, "At least take this. It's cold."

Tears threatened the old man's face. With eyes averted the woman didn't see. Brown eyed Nex saw regret in the elderly bachelor's face and felt a twinge of pity. Say something, he thought. Don't let it end this way! Wade reached out and took the scarf, gently touching Janet Swain's hand as he did so. "It's too late for us," he whispered. More audibly he said, "I'll wear it Janet."

Truman Wade turned away and walked down Fisher's toward Main. His gaze locked on a spot across the street for a moment. The pause was imperceptible to Janet Swain, but not to the reaper. He senses me. He'll be able to see me soon. He must know that his time is near. Death tracked the man south with his brown gaze, then turned his attention to the woman.

He saw fear in Janet Swain's eyes. She took a step back toward the door. Suddenly she stopped. Her spine stiffened, and she stood board straight. A harsh laugh escaped her throat. She stared unswervingly at the man in the brown suit. "Hello," she managed.

The stranger smiled and crossed to the foot of the steps. Bowing low, he spoke. "You have eyes that see lady. We've met before?" Janet nodded. Death cocked his head, as if listening to something Janet couldn't hear. He smiled again, a reminiscent gleam in his eye. "Yes, Roann Swain was your grandmother. You were quite young when I came for her. I seem to remember being surprised that you could see me. I was even more surprised when you informed me that you had come to wish her farewell. She sends her greetings by the way."

Janet nodded again. "Is it my time then," she said.

Nex shook his head, "If it was your time you'd know. That's part of your talent. You've seen me a number of times over the years. You've always known whose time it was."

"My mother is ill. You'll be coming for her soon no doubt," guessed Janet.

Death cocked his head to the side again, and then smiled sadly. "Oh Janet, face the truth. It will hurt less if you do. Your mother will recover. Neither she nor your father is my mission."

Janet's eyes drifted past him and stared in the direction Truman Wade had gone. The bitter sadness on the woman's face pulled at Death's sympathetic heartstrings. "It's him then," she said as scalding tears rolled down her face. "Not him. Not yet," she pleaded. "He's not ready. He never got over that hussy Linnet Jones rejecting him for a carpetbagger after the war." The woman's voice rose to a wail as she continued

“There was regret on both of their faces . . .”

her grief-stricken declarations. "He's never admitted that he loves me! God help him, he never accepted Christ!"

Desperation was written all over her face as she turned toward Death again. The Reaper cringed, knowing what would happen next. "Take me instead," she pleaded.

Pity is the hardest part of this job, Michael thought. Aloud he said, "Each child of Adam has his own appointed time, Janet. You know this. Changing that is not within my power." He stood by helpless, watching the woman weep. Groaning, he spoke kindly to her, "He loves you. He wanted to say it but pride got in the way. There were tears in his eyes as he walked away."

The woman's tears slowly began to dry. "He knows it's coming then," she said.

With a nod, the man in the brown suit tapped his cane on the pavement and walked toward Main Street. Janet watched for a minute, wiping at tear tracks. A crow flew by her head. She blinked. When she turned her attention back, the faded man was gone. Shaking her head, Janet wiped the last tears from her eyes and sent up a prayer, "Let this all be a bad dream."

Nex quickly caught up to Wade and paced right beside the man as he made his way down the street. Wade shivered and glanced to his left. "I can't see you," he said, "but I know your there. I've been around Janet Swain enough years

to know it's my time. I've got it. You don't have to hang by my ear and whisper at me. Just stand back and let me set my affairs in order.

"Thank God I had the forethought to change my will last year. I'll just swing by Wilson's law office and have a cup of tea, while he assures me it's legal. I don't want any problems at the reading. Janet will be upset enough when she finds out she's inheriting everything.

"I wished to God I'd used my brains. I should have let go that business about Linnet Jones long ago. If my damn pride hadn't gotten in the way, I'd have married Janet Swain when she turned sixteen instead of promoting her to housekeeper. It shouldn't have mattered about Janet being a servant. I should have told my parents to go to hell and married her anyway. I've wasted thirty years and my chance is gone. The best I can do now is see that she's provided for.

"I better swing by the funeral home and make those arrangements. I don't want Janet to have to deal with it. As it is, she'll probably be the one to find my body. Thank God for her talent. At least she's forewarned."

Nex frowned. He was used to seeing his clients go a little batty when they realized how short their time was. It was frustrating though to be unable to talk to most of them. He wanted to grab Truman Wade by the shoulders and shake him until his teeth rattled. He wanted to tell the man that Janet Swain was far more concerned about his soul than she was about how she was going to earn her living. Instead he said, "You

better get yourself to the church and bend those knees," and hoped Truman got something from words he couldn't hear.

The Angelus Mortis stood outside 615 W. Fisher's later that evening, holding the reins of an ash colored horse and watching Janet Swain leave. Janet saw the Angel and stopped. Michael tried to convey with his eyes that this was the last time she would see Wade. Her face went white, tinged with pink at the edges like a Death Lilly. She turned and ran back to the house yelling his name. Truman appeared instantly. They stood staring at each other. Suddenly Janet spoke up.

"I know that you know," she began. "I can't stop it, but I am not going to let you leave me without saying it. I love you Truman Wade. I always have." Tears tracked down her face.

Tears shimmered in Wade's dim blue eyes. He reached up, wiping tears from Janet's cheek. "I love you Janet Swain," he whispered. "I've loved you for many years and in my bitter pride I've wasted those years." His papery lips brushed her tear stained cheek. He pushed back a strand of hair that had escaped her bun. He could do nothing more. "Go home," he ordered.

Michael Nex watched the scene with a sad heart. There was regret on both their faces as the woman caressed the man's cheek. "I wish..." she said. The words trailed off and she turned away. She walked blindly down the steps, passing

Nex as if he weren't there. Michael realized that in that moment, for her, he wasn't there. Janet turned back after half a dozen steps. Man and woman looked at each other longingly, and then sadly waved a final goodbye.

The angel didn't bother to stay with the old man. The escort knew the exact time and place where the man would meet Death. Instead Michael Nex mounted his pale horse and rode off to the appointed place.

Truman Wade watched the housekeeper out of sight. When he could no longer see her in the failing light he walked through the house and straight to the stable. A groom waited by the stable door holding the bridle of a saddled black gelding. Wade mounted the horse and saluted the groom saying, "Go on home, Jim. I'll stable Lightning myself tonight. Have a good evening."

The groomsmen nodded and said, "Goodnight then sir. I'll see you tomorrow." He put on his hat and walked away wondering why his master was suddenly being so considerate.

Wade was distracted. He let the horse have its head. Since he had taken the same run on the beach every evening for years, the horse had no real need for direction. He just ambled down the street toward the shore. Lightning reached the edge of the beach and stopped.

Truman looked up and suddenly realized where he was. He rattled the reins and put his knees lightly into the horse's flanks. "Let's have one last run, Lightning," he said and the horse stepped out willingly. Seconds later, horse and

rider were flying down the beach.

Brown eyed, brown suited Death appeared, out of nowhere, astride his pale steed. Lightning reared in fright, throwing the startled Wade from his back. Fear shot through the old man's heart as he left the saddle. "God have mercy," he cried out. An expert horseman, Wade rolled as he fell, avoiding a broken neck, but Michael Nex's gray stallion reared, challenging the black gelding. Already up on his rear legs and off balance, Lightning gave ground, tripping over Wade's prone form. The horse fell backward, crushing its master in the process.

The frightened animal struggled to its feet and ran toward home. Michael Nex dismounted and walked over to where Truman Wade lay. Wade looked up at Nex bemusedly. "Did you see what happened?" asked Wade. "Lightning rolled right over me. I thought I was dead for sure. It hurt pretty bad for a minute, but everything's fine now."

"Let me help you up," said Nex, holding out his hand. "You're probably pretty shaky. Why don't you mount my horse and I'll see that you get home safely." Wade reached out and took the hand. With little help he regained his feet. He let the stranger help him up onto the ashy horse.

"I hope Lightning is okay," he said. "He's a good horse; I wouldn't want to put him down. Are you alright? You came out of nowhere. How did you manage to stay in the saddle?"

"I'm fine. Lightning is fine too. Janet Swain will make sure that he's cared for. I'm sure

“Let’s have one last
run, Lightning.”

she passed him on the way here,” replied Nex, pointing to the woman running toward them.

Wade looked in the direction Nex indicated. “That’s Janet alright. I wonder why she’s here. Running like that at her age can’t be good for her.” Wade turned a questioning look on Nex. Michael indicated the ground with a gesture of his head. Wade looked at the spot where he’d been lying a few seconds ago. Comprehension dawned in his eyes. “Oh,” he said. “I’m... You’re... She...” “Oh God, don’t let her see me like that!” Wade exclaimed. “Do something. Stop her.”

“You said it yourself this morning,” replied Death. “She would be the one to find your body. Let it go. This will make it easier for her to grieve.

“Why did she come?” asked Wade. She’s never followed me out here before.

“She knew your time was near. She knows you very well. She knew exactly where you would go after she left. I think she came, hoping to prevent your death.”

Janet fell to the sand beside the broken body of Truman Wade and pulled it to her chest. A cry of devastating pain was torn from her throat. “No! No! No!” she wailed. “Not this way! He wasn’t saved. No, please, not this way.”

Pain crushed the chest of the man on the pale horse. “To the last,” he moaned. “Her thoughts

are for me. All of her life she has served me and cared for me and when I die she’s still thinking of me. Janet... Janet...”

“She can’t hear you or see you,” said Death.

“She must!” cried Wade. “Just this one last time; let me tell her that I’m alright.”

“I can open the veil between life and death so that she can see you,” said the Angel “but if I do she will die too. Is that what you want?”

“No,” replied Wade shortly. “I want to find a way to comfort her, not kill her. She has the talent to see you without opening the veil. Isn’t there something you can do?”

Death looked up at his newest client wondering how sincere the man’s change of heart was. Michael cocked his head, listening to something that Wade couldn’t hear. He nodded his head and spoke quietly, “Yes, Father.” He looked up at Wade again and smiled. “There is something I can do.”

Leaving Wade and the horse several feet away, Michael Nex, Angelus Mortis, went to the side the weeping Janet Swain. He went to one knee beside where she knelt holding the battered body of Wade to her bosom. Death placed his hand on the woman’s shoulder and drew her attention to him. When her sobs slowed he whispered: “From the saddle to the ground, mercy he sought and mercy he found.”

| Best of Fiction |

Edges

Amy Stokes

You see her first on a Thursday, outside the central library. You're preparing to parallel park, an exercise that, after ten years of living in cities, still requires a little pep talk. She startles you, almost touching your bumper as she crosses the street. You park perfectly, backing in and then rolling forward just a little. You sit in the car for a minute, savoring the small victory, and see the girl lingering at the base of the building's steps, casually watching you as she finishes a cigarette.

You walk up the stairs a few yards behind her. Normally you'd take them two at a time, but you're hesitant to rush past. She's wearing ragged jeans and an old striped button-up over a bluish green undershirt. The button-up looks a little small, and as she ascends, you watch it slide up her back to the place where her waist narrows, carrying the undershirt with it. She pulls it down, which is really for the best. She's young, probably still in college.

There's some confusion at the door with the people coming out. Everyone wants to be polite. You lose track of the girl, but don't give it a second thought. You haven't been to a library in years. You walk across the new carpeting of the main room. It's much bigger than it looks from the outside. Windows reach from floor to ceiling, five or six stories high. Simple white supports curve up to the center of the room and you remember, vaguely, the Gothic cathedrals of college art appreciation.

You sit in the café for a while, taking it all in. Coffee is tempting, but you question the morality

of designer coffee in a library. Something about it brings to mind a rumor about a church that has cup holders in its pews; if that doesn't turn a person off religion, you don't know what will. You resist the coffee and wander into the children's section.

You try to remember a story you liked as a child, but nothing comes to mind. Instead, you recall your younger brother's favorite book, the one about a pig that painted houses. You wonder if it's normal to remember his favorite and not your own. You think of calling your sister to see if she remembers, but she has three kids, and it's four in the afternoon. She won't have the time to humor you, and she wouldn't want to anyway.

As you enter the reading room at the back of the children's section, you see the girl from the steps again. She's looking at a picture book and spinning in a chair that resembles an astronaut's helmet. She glances up at you, and you remember. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. A common choice, but you're glad to have had, even in your youth, a propensity toward classics. With this thought, you smile at the girl. She laughs a little and spins herself in the other direction. As quickly as it came, your nostalgia cracks and crumbles. You leave, disheartened and embarrassed.

Back in the main room you're struck by a second wave of self-consciousness. Your chest

tightens and purpose escapes you. It started in junior high and destroyed your social life in college, but as years passed, growing out of it seemed more imminent. You never imagined it would last into your thirties, this panic; paralyzing and chronic. You joined cross country in high school, imagining that physical pain and the elusive "runner's high" would calm your inexplicable fear of existence. But no amount of running could counter Camus, and you learned well "the loneliness of the long distance runner" while the "runner's high" proved to be more illusive than God Himself.

You went to college fifteen hundred miles from home, and after graduation, surrounded yourself with parental types and started a business. You're a programmer or a systems analyst or an investment banker. The women you date rarely comprehend or care what you do, and your family has a vague understanding that you deal with numbers and data and that this allows you to send generous giftcards for Christmas and birthdays. You're successful and well respected, six feet tall with a swimmer's build. Disappointed, bored, and impossibly lonely.

The following Saturday you wake up early and a little hungover. The night before you attended a work-related party; it was an obligation. You spoke to prominent educated people and felt sixteen again; trapped and

**“You question the morality of
designer coffee in a library”**

disgusted at the adult world revealing itself—its wicked foundations and faulty cornerstones. You had hope, but in the end you just drank wine.

You have a pot of black coffee and wash and wax your car— one of several time-consuming and methodical tasks that temporarily quiets your compulsive inclinations. You go for a swim, and after a quick shower, decide to visit the library again. You can't quite remember what made you go there in the first place. While you aren't looking for anything in particular, your visits are almost purposeful. You're hoping for something.

Something. You often think, at three in the morning when you've forgotten how to sleep, that it may be in the refrigerator. Or it could be at the gym, in a respectable bar on a Friday after work, maybe underneath six bottles of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. So you drink, talk to women in pencil skirts and heels, and work on your biceps. And, more often than not, you stand, cold and tired in your underwear, bare feet sticking to the ceramic tile, unsatisfied.

The library is busier than last time. You decide to sit in the café and watch the people. This time, you get coffee, and you aren't sure if that's a defeat or a victory. Ultimately, you realize it's a negotiation more than anything else. Just like anything else.

There's a man sitting on a bench nearby, fooling with his Blackberry.

He probably has ten years on you and at least fifty pounds. He could be answering some

“She looks up at you. This time she doesn't laugh”

important emails, but you'd like to think he's playing Snake or Tetris. His clean-shaven face folds in concentration. He's a husband and a father. Maybe his kids are a little spoiled. Maybe he has high blood pressure. He eats his breakfast standing over the sink. Loves to go camping, never really had a father. Maybe he'll have sex tonight.

The air around you stirs, and you look up. It's that girl again, the one from the steps, the one who laughed at you. She leaves the smell of outdoors in her wake. She must have walked here, giving the cool afternoon time to collect in the fibers of her clothes. It's a smell that you like; it's a smell that can't be faked.

She sits and pulls a wad of crumpled gold foil from her oversized bag. She unfolds the foil to expose a thick dark chunk of chocolate; it looks like the kind of bitter chocolate that, when eaten before bed, gives you strange, dark dreams. She tries politely breaking a piece off with her front teeth, but when the chocolate proves too hard, sticks the corner into the side of her mouth and gnaws, uncaring.

A few minutes pass and she rummages in her bag again, this time for a notebook. Bits of paper sprinkle the floor and an ink pen rolls toward your right shoe. You pick it up along with an old receipt that drifted your way.

“Oh, thanks,” she says as you hand them

back. "I'm kind of a disaster."

"Join the club." As soon as it leaves your mouth, you regret the cliché. "I'm sorry. I hate to use clichés like that. They just allow people to have conversations without ever actually thinking. What I meant was, don't worry, I think being kind of a disaster is pretty common. Obviously."

She looks up at you. This time she doesn't laugh. Recognition floods her face and as you're about to walk away, she smiles. "Hey, you were here the other day, weren't you? I saw you parking out front. You did a good job. So many people are shit at parallel parking."

"Yeah. I think I remember seeing you; I always worry that I'll forget how to do it. It's one of those things you can't think about too much or it just becomes impossible."

She laughs, "I can't do it if someone else is in the car with me. So many things are like that, impossible if you think too much. Sometimes I become aware of my own voice and I get so self-conscious I can't talk." She looks at you for a second, then back at the foil she's restlessly folding and unfolding. You don't know what to say. You take a step back, check the time on your cell phone. She keeps you, "Isn't this library great? I think it looks like a church. Only filled with knowledge."

"That's what I thought too. I mean, that it looks like a church, those shapes remind me of Gothic arches; I like that, a church filled with knowledge. That's pretty good." You like the

way she speaks, willingly, like she's been waiting all day for the opportunity, like she'd wait all year if she had to. She's too old to be called precocious and too young for sagacious. You settle on insightful.

She stands up and pushes the junk back into her bag, "I'm going to go upstairs and try to find some books. For research. You can come if you want."

You immediately want to go with her. You're intrigued. She's unusually open but not naïve; most of the people you know are guarded, if not deliberately secretive, and probably with good reason. It seems a little inappropriate though, talking to this young woman. You abstain, "Oh, I don't want to distract you from your studies."

"It's not for school. If it were for school I'd do my research online like everyone else. It's a personal endeavor. Come with me, you can help. Have you ever heard of female hysteria?"

You laugh. "Sure, that was when they thought a woman's depression was caused by her womb wandering around in her body. And then they'd have the doctor come and—" You stop. Uncomfortable.

"Yeah, they'd have the doctor come and give the woman a pelvic massage," she gestures air quotes around pelvic massage. "And it was this perfectly acceptable thing. And the doctors were really busy, obviously, so that's why vibrators were invented."

"I think that's where the term 'hysterectomy' comes from too. Removing the hysteria caused



Untitled (Lili)

Ashley White

Black & White Portrait:
Silver Gelatin Print

by the wandering womb, right?" you say, following her to the escalator.

"Probably, God, don't you love words? Anyway, I think I've got it." She says this earnestly, and looks at you. There's no suggestion of jest or innuendo in her tone. Her expression is honest, like that of a child too young to know the benefits of lying. She continues, "Unfortunately, modern society is drunk on political correctness and my affliction has been reduced to playfully-sexist, dinner party talk."

You're willing to bet she has that statement written out word-for-word in her notebook, the thesis of her fictitious research paper. Either way, you're impressed by her choice of words and understanding of society. You wonder if she's more or less than ten years younger than you. You wonder what it would take for that not to matter.

She leads you all the way to the top floor. You expect her to head for the history section, but instead she veers toward the 800's saying, "Nobody knows female hysteria like Charles Bukowski." And that's all it takes.

On Wednesday you visit the library for the third time in six days and wait on the front steps. She left you four days earlier with the indistinct impression that she'd meet you there. You did not exchange telephone numbers and no specific time was set; you're hopeful but not confident

you'll see her. Each minute you wait lays another brick of anxiety on your chest. You feel dissonant, ambivalent. The chance meeting with the girl left you pleasantly startled and refreshed. She seemed to possess the wonder and intuitive powers of a child and the maturity of a woman, all with a savage sense of irony. And though you are well intentioned, meeting her again seems somehow scandalous. You don't know how you'd explain it to your family and co-workers. You decide to leave in five minutes, and when they're up, decide to wait five more.

You're on your fourth set when she appears. Her unhurried approach gives you time to look at her body, an indulgence you didn't allow yourself as you discussed your favorite Bukowski poems. She's wearing close-fitting jeans and a baggy gray sweater. Her hips are broad, affable, almost providential. The waistband of her sweater creeps upward, just as the button-up had a week before, and you catch sight of a soft line of unthinkably white flesh before she pulls it down. She smiles and sits beside you. The cool stone step feels good under your body. You look at the sky and hope it doesn't rain.

"Let's go inside for a while and touch the books," she says.

You follow her through the fiction section. She seems to favor the older books, the ones with two-tone patterned covers, once bright, but now faded and worn, 1960's wallpaper. Every so often she pulls one out, admires the cover, and buries

her face in it. She makes a comment and offers it to you.

This one smells like my grandma's sewing room. That one smells like stale cigarettes. This one smells like an old book. That one smells like Atticus Finch. This one smells like homemade soap. That one smells like gin. This one smells like Halloween. That one smells like a pawn shop. This one smells like damp basement. That one smells like the Salinas Valley. This one smells like a wool sweater from a cedar chest.

Once outside, she lights a cigarette and stares over the parkway at the city. You watch her smoke. She stands to your left, downwind-considerate, but unapologetic. She has black and white movie star lips, and you like the soft suction pop as the cigarette leaves them.

"Do you want to go get milkshakes or something?" You ask before you have time to change your mind, and she answers before you begin to doubt yourself.

"Yeah, Actually. That's exactly what I want." She finishes the cigarette, and as you leave the library's front steps, you think you feel fingertips tracing almost imperceptibly down your forearm. You feel lost, and found, and very lost.

By the end of this, her pockets will be filled with stones. Your empty places will join with hers and you'll step toward each other, expecting common ground, but finding instead a void. By the end of this, her head will be in the oven. Concessions will be made, you'll resent her for her youth, and she'll resent you for taking it. You'll bury yourself in work, regress to clichés. Plenty of fish in the sea, better luck next time, it just wasn't meant to be. By the end of this, you'll have a shotgun pressed to your forehead. Figuratively speaking, by the end of this, you'll both be drinking Hemlock tea.

Love Poem Tryptich

Girlfriend

What could be more luscious than watching her

sit on the carpet and cross her legs, Indian style,
with thighs like loaves of Wonder bread,

popping Brussels sprouts into her mouth,
braised and buttered between thumb and forefinger

and then tapioca with the salt still on her lips,
with a wooden spoon in a drunken fist.

Valentine's Day

I sit beneath the neon signs with a vodka tonic and a withered lime. My date plays pool, stripes and not so solid. His shirt's sweaty, soaked in sawdust and gasoline. He's lost and seething, smoking a cigarette. His hair's a mess, thick and Irish. And the stubble's scraping my face, he's saying, we'd better be leaving, and the meaning gives a pinch like a razor nicks. Otherwise he's tight-lipped for the exit, grips my wrists and I'm smitten.

I catch my sweater on the bricks and throw a sticky liquored kiss. Everyone likes to take a risk— we sometimes win and often lose, but who'd resist such cracked and chapped and angry lips? I bite the bottom where it's split, he laughs and then he says that's it. Already I can feel the blooms, red and purple, violent blue, the kind of kiss that leaves a bruise.

A Sinking Ship

Cadillac sounds like Catholic sounds like carsick
tried to slide but the vinyl sticks.

Should've picked peach instead of peppermint
(that skirt sure made her thighs look thick.)

Dru Roach

Colloquium of Ares

Slang like slings slays the fiercest of foes
Twirling twice to towers moving away from your ghost
You speak, and you spoke too much

Feral froth ferments from those clenching jaws
Taking hold of my face in a sanguine thrall
I'm locked, eyes cocked like steel

A cacophony of coercion sweats on a gleaming cusp
Perforating your skin as everything turns dusk
You've hit me once, and you hit me too many times

The fork is on the floor
I am not mad anymore
And Ares's spell alights

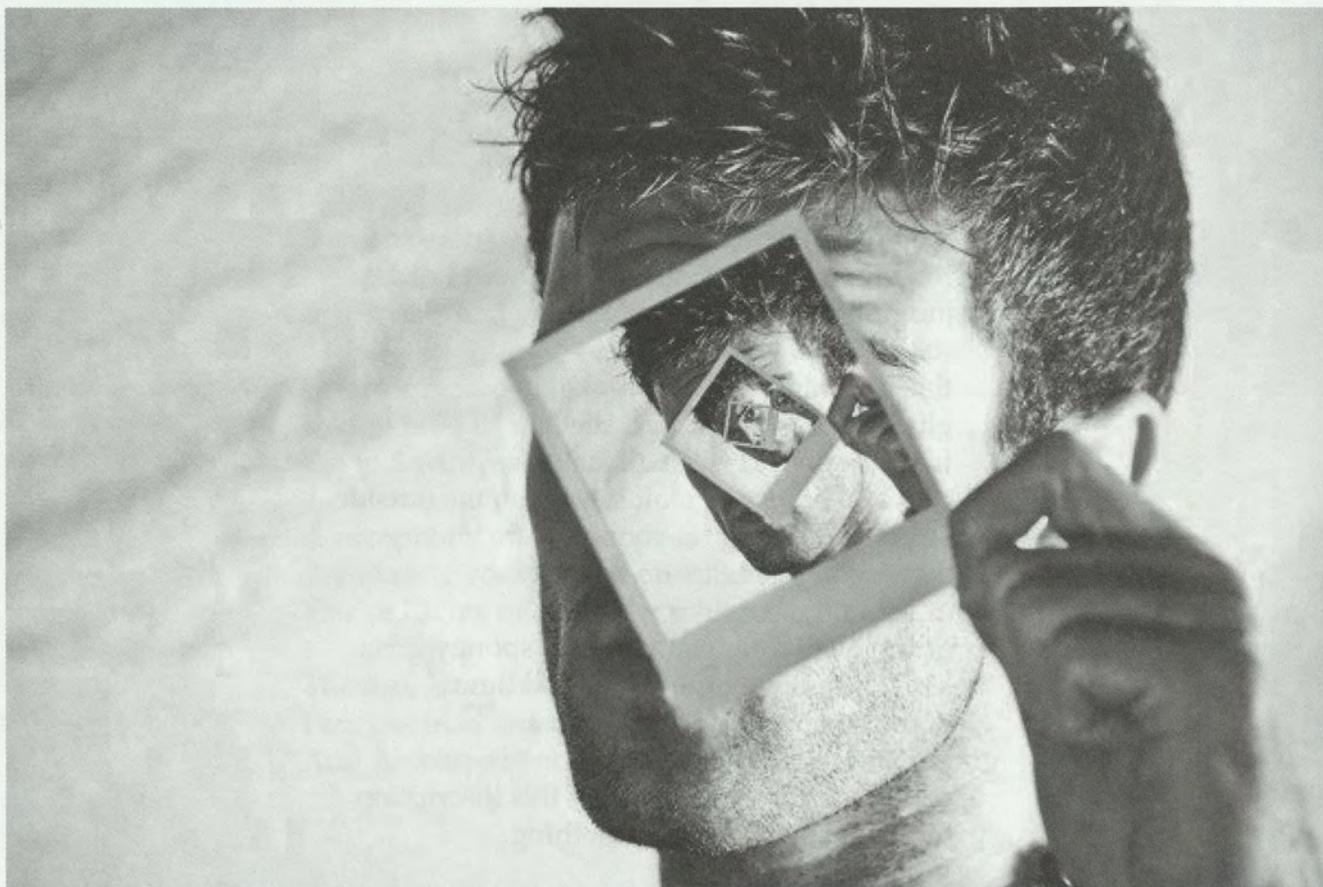
Amy Thorne

Everything I'm Not

this is the most personal poem
i've ever written.
stupid and self-aware,
it rests on the third shelf above your head,
judging with eyes closed.

this is a small red musicbox
glued over with cracked shells
from the shore of Palm Beach,
cool and breezy (if a bit sandy) on the outside,
sweet, crumbling on your tongue,
melting in your ears on the inside.

or is it a ladybug perched on a spongy green
leaf? listening to the proverbial hum
of the sun, fluttering insignificant
red and black wings, making no impact
on the world -- wondering if this inscription
finally makes it mean something.



1 X 3

Kimber Shaw

Photography:
Inkjet Print on Canvas

Life of a Whore Wife

Autumn Stewart

Discourse D

Life of a Whore Wife: 10 Easy steps

“I went through this phase - Am I gay? Am I straight? And then I realized... I’m just slutty.

Where’s my parade?”

—Margaret Cho

One: Establishment

It rarely rained in the desert. Most days the scorching heat sizzled my brow, shoulders, and back. I lived in the Valley of the Sun most of my life and my looks surely reinforced that. My eyes moved up and down, back and forth as I scanned my exterior in the full length mirror nestled in my mother’s room. The placid curves of my not-yet developed body gleamed a honey-brown color. My miniature tank top exposed the shape of my collar bone and slow sloping shoulders. *Man, I thought, I’m going to look great in my halter-top wedding gown. It’ll be white, with blue flowers and shimmery ivory piping...*

Two: The Man

“He said he loves me,” I confided to my best friend, Sam. She closed her locker slowly, creating an intense moment of fright for me.

“What should I say?”

“You mean you didn’t say anything back?”

Sam gasped.

“No. No I didn’t. I just sat there...”

“Well, do you love him?”

“I don’t know, I guess so.”

Jacob was the most wonderful boyfriend I’d ever had. He didn’t hit me or yell. Actually, he was quite fond of the opposite. Some nights when I couldn’t sleep, or had terrible nightmares, I would call him. He would drive to my parents’ house, sneak in through the window, and hold me until I fell back asleep. When he held me, my dreams of pain and anguish slid deep into my subconscious where they would hunker down until their next opportunity of emergence.

One night we took my insomnia to the roof outside my window. Climbing out I almost slipped on the shingles, but Jacob had my arm. We laid flat, looking deep into the blue-black sky. Sparkles of light crept through the darkness and shimmered across our faces. Our gaze moved from the immeasurable sky to each other.

“I love you,” Jacob said in his smooth baritone voice.

“I love you too.”

Three: Ah, Love.

White and orange caps burst into the air and filled the gym like confetti. I turned to Sam and hugged her tightly. I glanced up to the bleachers where my parents and Jacob sat watching the

“The silence of the car
penetrated my eardrums.”

moment that just a few years ago most of my family thought would never happen. But there I was. Graduated. Graduated and ready to move away for college. Well, almost anyway.

“I can’t let you leave me,” Jacob said later after the parties died down. “I mean, come on, we’ve been together for two years now. You can’t just leave me to go to some college a thousand miles away.”

I looked at him not knowing what to say. I had worked hard to graduate and get into college. Granted, I was going to be living with my father and starting out at a junior school, but I was proud. I wanted to do this—needed to do it.

“Look,” he continued, “I am almost done with this semester. Wait for me. Wait for me to finish this fall, and I will transfer my credits and go with you.”

Go with me? I thought. *Wow, that’s big.*

“I love you. You can’t leave me,” Jacob said with tears welling in his eyes. “Wait for me.”

The summer was unusually humid, and I tossed what seemed like hundreds of shirts behind me while I rummaged for one that would be suitable for my interview. It needed to be presentable, but also needed to be light and airy so I wouldn’t walk into a potential job looking like my body was covered with tacky fly paper. I found a bright-pink, short-sleeved, linen top and threw it on. Checking myself in the mirror,

I turned to see how my back-side looked. From this angle, my hips and butt protruded out in a voluptuous way, far surpassing the adolescent body I stared at years ago. But my shoulders were as fine as ever. Still tanned, still gently curved. *I wonder if we'll get married*, I thought to myself, imagining what colors I would have in my fairytale wedding. *I mean, after we finish college and move.*

Four: Love Grows All Sorts of Things

The silence of the car penetrated my eardrums. I couldn't stand it anymore. "What if I am, Jacob? What are we going to do?"

"Don't worry so much," he said with a confidence that made me want to punch him.

We parked the car, and I opened the door, my eyes on the drugstore. Jacob stayed in the car. Perhaps he wasn't as cool as he thought. He certainly wasn't as cool as it was outside. It was downright cold, my breath still shot out mist as I passed through the automatic doors into the building. Fluorescent bulbs hovered above my head, watching me as I made my way to the isle of doom—the isle that housed my fate in a morbid pink box advertising 99% accuracy. I grabbed the package and meandered my way to the counter where an older, stout woman proceeded to call me forward. She didn't look like my grandmother, but she could have been someone's. One thing's for sure, she gave me a look like my grandmother would have. *Please*

don't talk to me. Please don't talk to me. She didn't? She didn't. Thank god.

My body heaved, my face was a tomato, my eyes swelled with every burning tear, and I couldn't make out two syllables between the mortified sobs. We were downstairs; Jacob's back was to me. *Why isn't he looking at me? Why isn't he helping me?* I couldn't speak, I couldn't move. I was a ball of anger and frustration exploding in my parents' study. Just then my sister walked in and asked, "What's wrong?" She came to me and crouched beside me, grabbing my shoulders. Those damn shoulders. "Did somebody die?"

Jacob turned to face us and I realized then why he was turned away from me in the first place. In his hand he held the pregnancy test and his face held a smile that would have put any clown to shame. "We're having a baby!" he said.

"The fuck we are!" I managed to crumble out of my spit-soaked cries.

Five: The Wedding

Pregnancy sucked. Six months along and my belly poked out in front of me, squeezed on my insides, put pressure on my back and my bladder. I didn't want to walk, I didn't want to move, and I certainly didn't want to be at the department store with my mother looking for a wedding dress.

"What about this one?" my mother asked,

with hope that my negative streak would end soon.

“Cute.”

“It’s stretchy. You should try it on.”

I took the small white dress into the fitting room. I couldn’t remember the last time I had seen my own feet as I slipped off my super-stretchy maternity pants and top. I crumpled the dress in my hands to put over my head, one arm in, and then the next. I had to use both hands to massage the fabric over the intruding life form’s habitat that just happened to be my belly.

The mirror showed a young girl with the pale skin of winter, the dark eyes of someone who couldn’t sleep, and the spirit of a withered tulip. I looked the dress up and down. It was cute, I hadn’t lied about that. It was short and lacey with a v-neck top. Fabric dangled from the top and draped my shoulders. Covered them. Suffocated their curves.

“How does it fit, Sweetie?” my mother called to me.

“Fine, Mom,” I sighed. “It’s fine.”

I was late to my own wedding by fifteen minutes, but I looked great. My hair was curled and my heels were high. *No sense in sacrificing a good outfit just because I was growing some alien in my body.* Jacob looked at me with disappointment when I finally arrived at the courthouse. “The judge is ready to start,” he stated.

“Oh, right. Sorry about that.”

We walked into the courtroom. The Justice of the Peace was not exactly what I had in mind for my big day, but you take what you can get. And I was 18, having a baby and in need of insurance. Since the news of the new arrival, Jacob had dropped out of college and begun work at a nice job with benefits. He used that as a selling point to becoming a “Stewart” when he proposed to me the day before Valentine’s Day.

It was pretty painless, the wedding. His Honor performed the task in less than ten minutes. The papers were signed and sent downstairs. Simple. Painless. Sort-of.

Six: Baby Blues

Muffled cries echoed off the stark, white walls of the apartment. So tired. The clock on the bedside table claimed it was 12:30 AM. *Ugh. It’s only 12:30?* I peered over at Jacob, who was undisturbed by the baby’s cries. *Just once I wish you’d get up with him. Just once.* I got up and stumbled my way to the bassinet. Lying inside was our second son. Three weeks old. His little hands were sporadically waving back and forth, and his screams were immensely louder than our first son’s. Groggy, I rubbed my eyes and picked him up. We sat in the rocking chair. Back and forth, to and fro. His miniature fingers tried to grab at me as I prepared myself for the next ritual, feeding. Oh, how I hated breast feeding. The process frustrated both me and the baby. I could never get either of the boys to latch on

“Down the hall, gunshots exploded from the living room”

correctly, and so it was excruciatingly painful. Like having a million crawly insects surround my nipple and bite in unison with their jagged, little teeth. *But Jacob thinks its best.*

I unclasped my maternity bra and winced as I tried to get the baby’s small lips and hard pallet to latch. We tried for five minutes before he was there, finally. I held him in one hand and with the other I wiped the tears that had gathered in my eyes.

Seven: Typical

R over D equals T. Right. So, if the train ran 50 miles at 75—

“Mommy, Mommy, we’re hungry!” my oldest son Calum claimed.

“Baby,” I returned, “Mommy’s trying to do some homework. Did you ask your Daddy if he could make something for you?”

“He told me to come get you.”

Of course he did. I lifted myself from my chair, leaving algebra behind me for now. Down the hall, gunshots explode from the living room. The television swamped with blurred images and a violent orchestra of mortal wounds.

“Jacob?” I called to him through his gaming daze. “Jacob. . . JACOB!”

He finally looked up at me from the couch.

“What?” was all he managed to muster.

“Will you please make the kids something to eat? I am trying to finish my math homework before I have to go to work.”

“Yeah, yeah. I guess so,” he said as he looked at me with contempt. “Let me finish this game.”

I walked back to the room that housed my computer. It was small and hard to work in. Over the years it had become the catch-all room. Well, for Jacob’s things at least. I was not a pack-rat by any means, but he was. Boxes stacked top over bottom, trinkets and pointless wonders overflowed the built-in bookshelf that towered above me as I worked, and old electronics that hadn’t worked in who knows how long scattered the floor. *I hate this room. How many times have I asked him to clean it out for me? I should just do it myself.* But, I knew he would get upset at me if I did, just like when I threw out his old, high school t-shirt.

Back into algebra I tumbled. Not that I hated math, I hated doing math homework—it just took so long. I finished four more word problems before Calum came back to me again.

“We’re still hungry, Mommy. When are we going to eat?”

“Daddy hasn’t made you anything yet? Back to the living room I went.

“Seriously, Jacob? It’s been at least forty-five minutes.”

“What?” he replied, acting in innocence.

“Nevermind. I’ll feed them.”

Eight: Bed Time

Water and slippery bubbles seeped into the hallway from the three dripping children in the bathroom. All three, wrapped tightly in their towels, brushed their teeth with delight. Halyn especially. She had just recently figured out she could hold her tooth brush like a “big girl” and loved it.

“Ok guys,” I said, “let’s go get some jammies on.”

I picked up Halyn, her wet arms clenching my shoulders tightly. The boys ran to their room with little wet feet pattering the tile. I put Halyn down, and she ventured elsewhere while I worked on her big brothers.

“Find your jammies, boys, then put them on and hop in bed.”

I went out to gather up Halyn, who never wanted to be found at bed time. *Where could she have gone this time?* I looked back in the bathroom. Nope, not there. *Maybe the kitchen?* Nope. No Halyn in the kitchen, either. *She must be with Jacob.* I went to the living room where he sat with his bottle of rum and headphones over his ears—an investment he made so he could hear his video games with less interruption. He needed to hear the blood-cracking gurgles perfectly, and couldn’t do it when the kids were in the house talking to him, or me for that matter.

Halyn was sitting next to him. He was completely unaware. I picked her up once more, her arms wrapping around my neck and

shoulders again. I reached out and tapped Jacob on the head, he looked up at us.

“She wants to say goodnight,” I said.

He stretched his face toward her as she leaned down to kiss his cheek. I stopped asking long ago if he wanted to read a bed time story with us, I would only be disappointed in the answer. So, Halyn and I went back down the hall to get her jammies and pick a story for the four of us.

The clock on my night stand beamed 2 AM. Still no Jacob. There’s never a Jacob in bed with me at this time. And sometimes there’s never a Jacob at all. I looked at my dresser; the large circle mirror above it reflected a tired face, a lonely face. I climbed out of bed and stood, looking at the woman I’d become. My cotton shorts and tank-top revealed the three children I’d bore. I don’t look too bad, though. My hand caressed my body’s curves, its fingertips glided from the wrist of my opposite arm slowly to my elbow and up to my shoulder. I pulled back the strap to my top. Then I moved to the other side. Inch by inch, I pushed my top down, along with my shorts and panties until I stood completely nude in the reflection.

I don’t want to be alone tonight.

Leaving all shame behind, I walked slowly, seductively to the living room. The blue glow from the television washed my naked body. I stood at the end of the couch for a moment

“The clock on my nightstand
beamed 2 AM. Still no Jacob.”

waiting to see a response. Nothing. Foot in front of foot, my longing swaggered me in front of the screen. I looked down at myself as I went, watching the shadows my body made: the colors flaring from behind me darkened my breasts and belly. *I look extravagant in this light.* I looked up, knowing he could see me now. Knowing I was asking for him, begging for him. I looked up and saw him. He leaned his body to one side to see around me. He looked around me.

I stood there in shock. Instantly I felt ashamed that I had gone to such an extreme and wasn't even worth a glance. I went back to my room, for that's what it had become—my room, not ours. I put on my top and shorts, and climbed back in bed. Alone. Again.

Nine: Captain Badass, I am setting
your heart on fire

“You are a lioness,” he said to me. “You're so beautiful and powerful and strong.”

His gentle touch flowed from the curves of my face to the slope of my shoulders, sending a fire deep into my soul. He had the bluest eyes. They stared at me. Deeply. Thoughtfully. Longingly. I wanted to look into those eyes forever.

Ten: Leaving as the whore

He sat on the floor of the kitchen, smoking a cigarette.

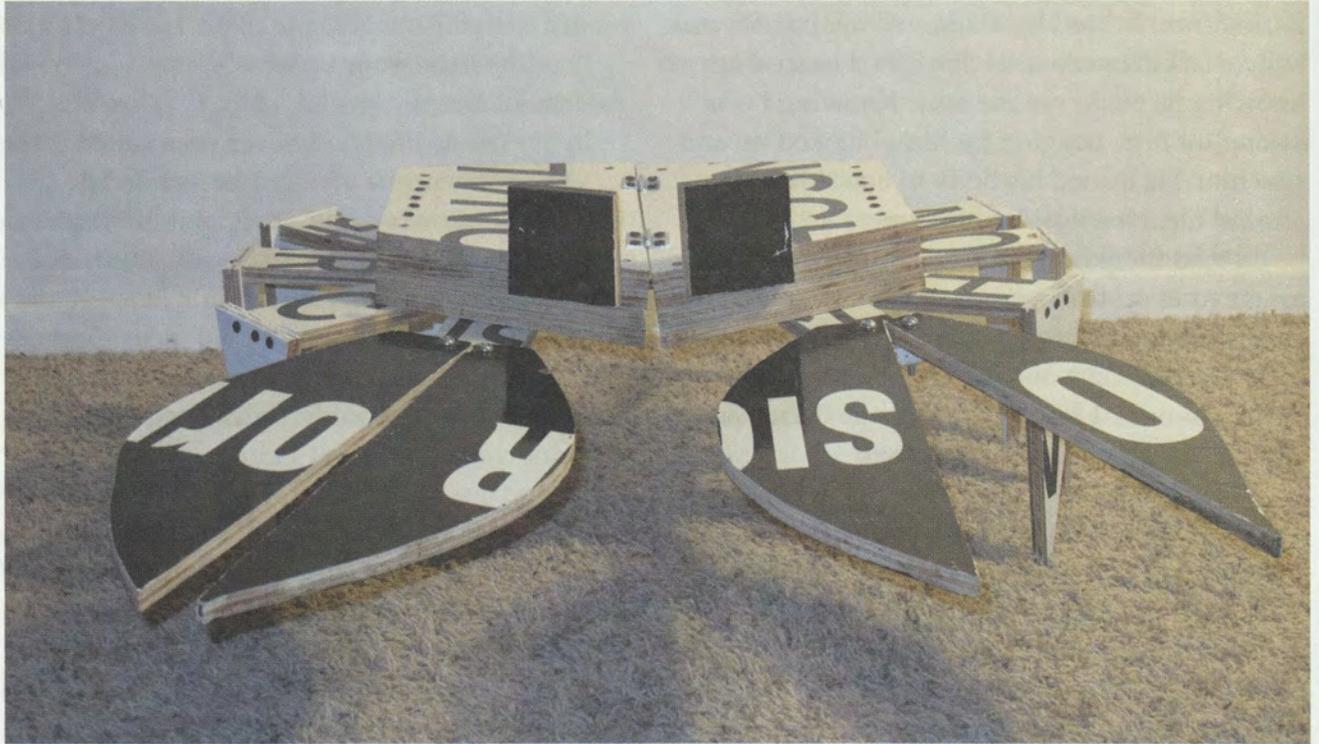
“How did this happen? How are you going to sit there and tell me you've been whoring around with this man?!”

“I understand your upset—”

“You're a cunt.”

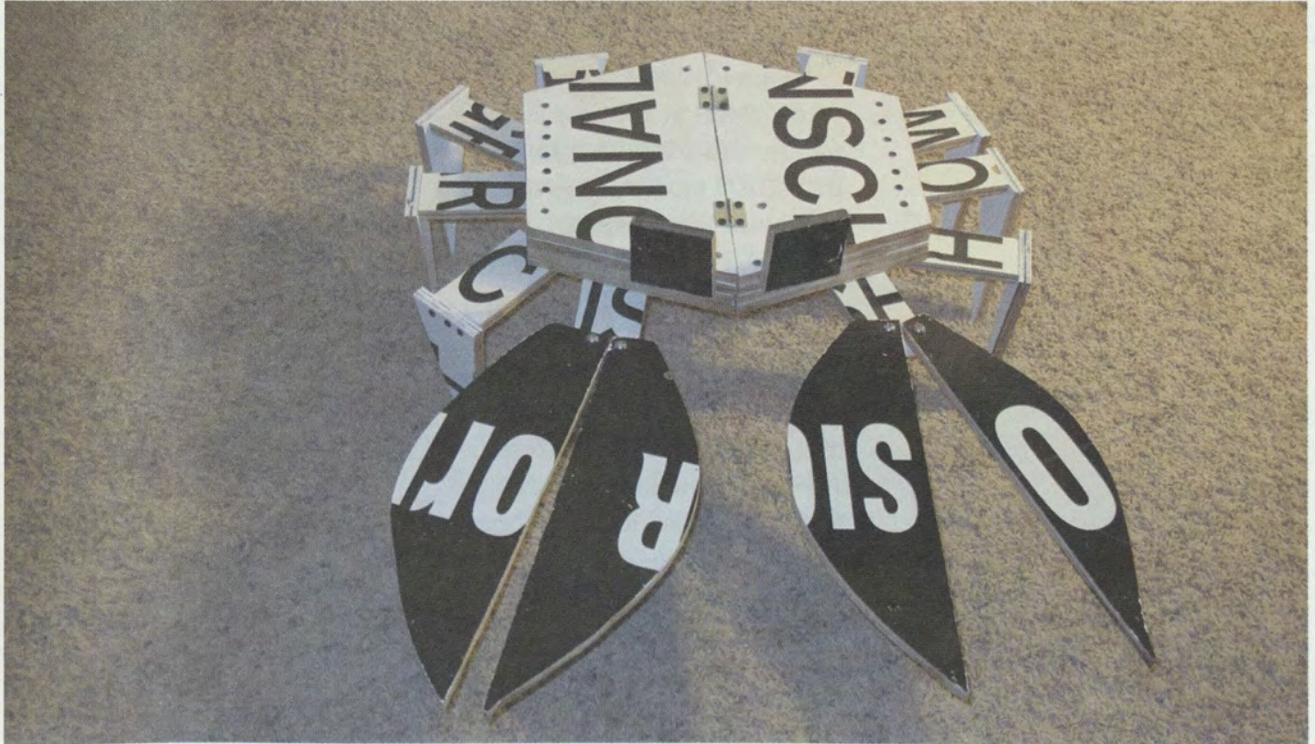
In my whole life I had never been called the “C” word. It was one of only two words I put my foot down on not tolerating, and he went there. He went there because he was angry and he wanted to hurt me. *But you can't, Jacob. You've hurt me enough already.*

I stood from my chair and walked away from him, back turned, shoulders gleaming, out the front door.



Crabitious

Courtney Cooper



Sculpture:
Recycled Plywood Sign

Lee Reynolds

Ocelot

We saw ships floating on
wide water waves for days.
Gods, shining like mirrors.
But still, I stood my ground
and pointed my spear. High
on ebe, I asked the gods to
grant me ferocity. I flung
the snot from my nose and
face and charged with the
speed of a tiger. My stick
met his chest, but shattered.
I fell on my back and stared up
at the sky and watched in horror
as the god's blade opened me
with ease; tracing a line from
throat to abdomen; and
shoulder to shoulder.

Siegfried Sassoon's Reply to Socrates...

"There are no words that
you could say to sway me.
It's not that the other side
is too loud; no, the louder
argument does not ring
truer in my ears. Truth is
the sunrise set against a
bold blue sky contrasted
with white, seemingly
designed dreamy clouds
and butterflies flittering
from flower-to-flower...
And *that* is what I know."

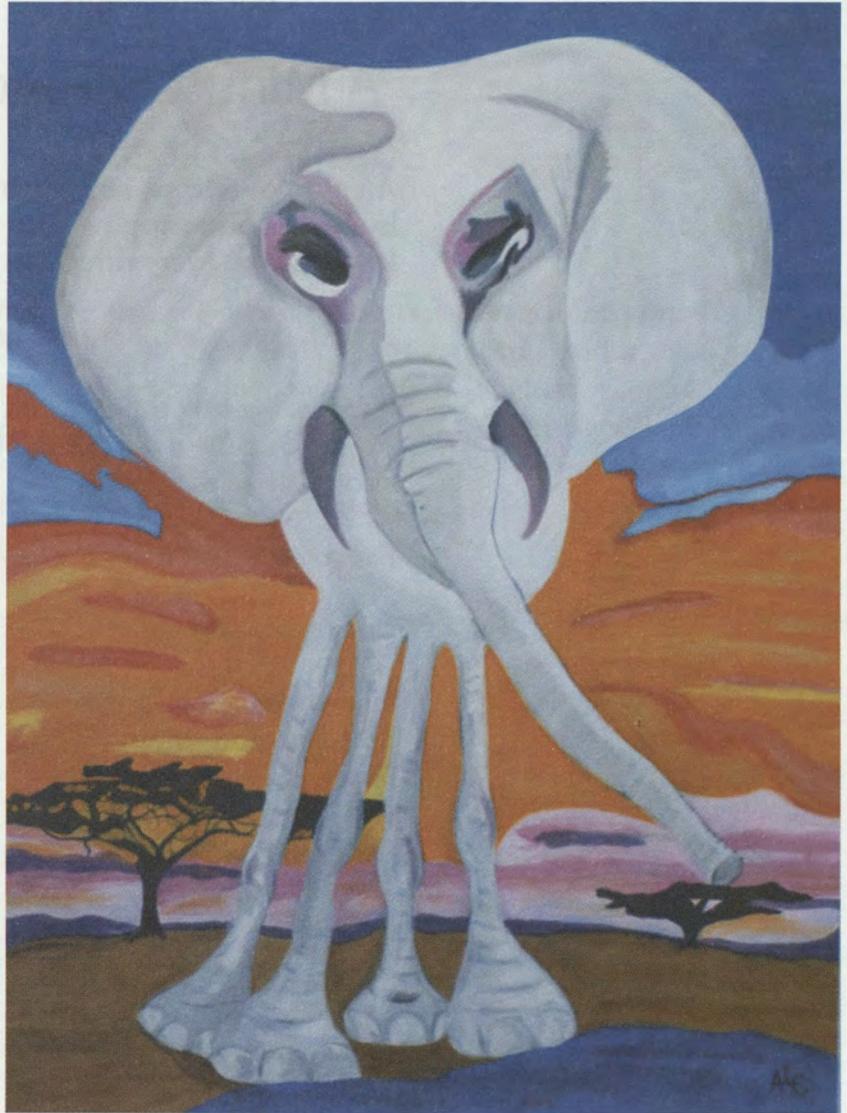


Realism Painting:
Oil on Canvas

Study of Matador

Amanda Cory

Reasonable Pachy



Expressionism Painting:
Oil on Canvas

Chad Forbregd

A Minute's Time

An alcohol-related, single-car crash,
leaves Pollock dripping with vodka.
It spills from every direction,

over the glass and onto the hand.

It stings the tiny little cuts on the fingers,
from biting the nails or fumbling
nervously with papers.

Everyone is just a drink away

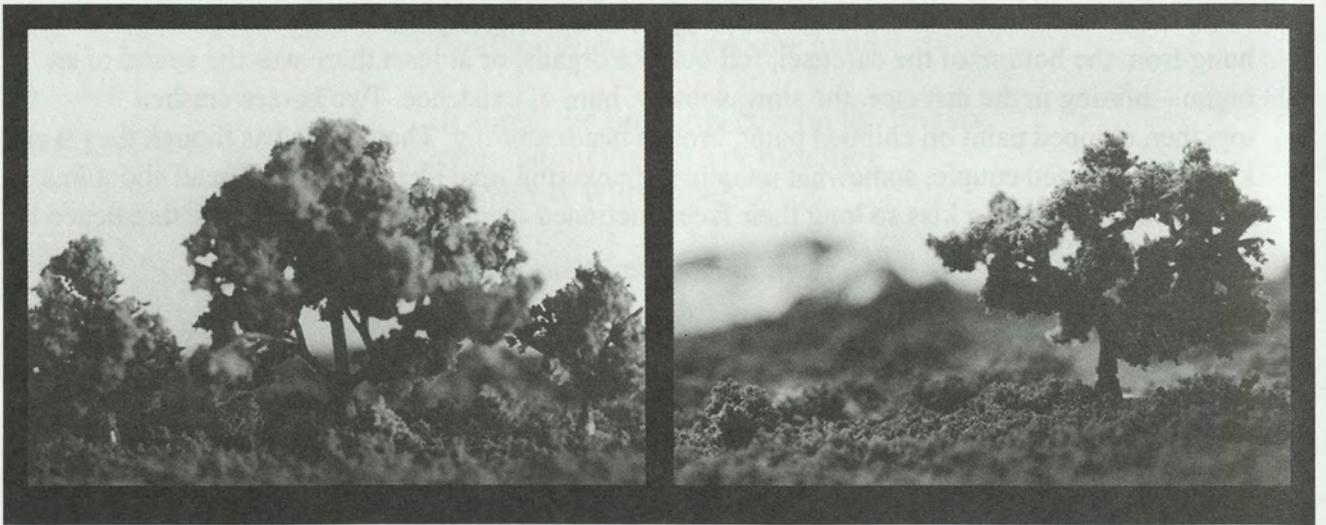
from being sober.

Elsewhere, a folk singer,
nameless and skinny,
finger picks at his guitar,
and hums along.

*Things are born,
live, and die,
all in a minute's time.*

In Route to Wallace

A carnival de-rooted and thrust from the cement, everything exposed. Wires and pieces of steel hung from the bottom of the carousel, fell out like organs, or at least there was the sound of an organ – hissing in the distance, the slow, solitary, hum of existence. Two horses crashed together, chipped paint on chipped paint, broken heads smiling. They looked as though they were kissing, a married couple, somewhat unnatural, puckering lips, like the couple I read about in a magazine. They held a kiss so long their faces suctioned together and the resistance threatened to tug out their *God Fearing* guts.



Sculpture/Photography:
Silver Gelatin Prints

Deforestation of a Miniature Landscape

Christina Richey & Catie Keith

I Hide My Scars With Booze and Cars

Taylor Wood

Anderson Hood had a secret. He often wished he were dead. He drank, drove fast, smoked cigars, and gambled all in hopes of tempting Death. He wanted to die, but did not have the strength to take Death's hand voluntarily. Even though they call suicide the coward's way out, it takes a powerful man to take his own life. Especially if he's already been fighting with all his might to simply live.

Anderson loved to party, or in other words, drink himself into a stupor, which he had spent the last few months, an entire summer's worth, doing. He was drinking to forget lost love and have fun, but mostly he drank in order to break social barriers, as he was quite shy. He also drank as a way to keep his mind off of the issues that constantly ate away at his nerves.

You see, Anderson Hood was a young man who cared too much. Even the smallest inconvenience would send him into a spiral of self-pity and misery for days. No matter how much he tried to turn his thoughts to positive subjects, his mind was constantly stinging with what was wrong in his life, which in his case was everything.

Tonight there would be a party at his friend Matthew's apartment. The music would be loud as the whiskey flowed free like the Mississippi. As soon as Anderson heard of this party, he began to prepare himself. He showered and shaved and dressed in his Friday night best. While most kids his age dressed in casual button-ups or polos, Anderson preferred to look as

dapper as possible to at least attempt to please himself. Tonight, he dressed in black, pinstripe slacks and a matching vest over a black, silk button-up and black tie. For comfort, he wore polished loafers that were also, of course, black. To top off the ensemble, he wore his standard black fedora, which also had pinstripes, and his favorite aviator sunglasses. The fedora and the glasses were his trademark. If you ever saw this guy, he'd probably have a cigar in his hand and that old fedora on his head. He looked like one of those bootleggers straight out of the moving pictures. He was now dressed and ready to get tight.

He drove his old, crappy car to Matthew's place. It's he demeaned himself with this decrepit jalopy because he spent all his money on clothes and booze and cigars. Maybe he figured an old car was more likely to explode and blow him into a million pieces. Who knows? Probably, he just didn't give a damn. He passed row after row of corn stalks as he drove. Anderson wanted more than anything to get out of this Midwest hell, but his car was evidence enough to show that he didn't have the money to do so. He had always wanted to live in some place like Chicago or New York. Granted, he did live in an urban area, but it seemed that corn even grew through the cracks in the sidewalks. When he arrived at Matthew's, he saw he was the first person there, as usual.

"Hiya, Andy!" Matthew said as he let Anderson inside. "Whaddya hear?"

"Nothin' much, Matty Boy. Where is everyone?"

"Well obviously they ain't here yet. You're always gettin' here quick as a blink."

"Yeah, I guess I am."

"Say, ya got one of your famous poems tonight? Ya know everyone's gonna wanna hear one."

"Yeah, I do."

Besides being a sharp dresser, Anderson was also a poet, and a damn good one at that. At almost every party, he was coaxed into reciting his latest poem against his will. He had to drink plenty before he was willing to actually read it, though. The crowd always loved his verse, even if he didn't. He didn't find them to be particularly interesting or skillfully crafted. This is one reason he hated reciting them. Mostly, he just hated people.

"How's about givin' me a little preview, huh?" Matthew asked with a sly grin. "Whaddya say?"

"I don't even wanna read for everyone else, let alone just you. No."

"Well fine. How bouta drink then?"

Anderson smiled.

"Now you're speakin' my language," he said. "Don't mind if I do."

The two friends sat and talked over a whiskey as they waited for the rest to arrive. Perhaps "friends" isn't the best word to use. Anderson Hood was a young man with few true friends. This is not because no one liked him.

On the contrary, most people found him quite endearing and humorous. He just wasn't very trusting or good at socializing. He mostly kept to himself, even in a room full of people, drinking, smoking, brooding. To Anderson, Matthew was an acquaintance, but not much of a friend, though the others seemed to love him for some reason despite the fact that he was quite a bit younger than them. Anderson found him to be good company when no one else was around, but he could become irritating. His voice was high like a hummingbird's, and he dressed like a child. He was one of those center-of-attention types. But he always had a drink for Anderson, and Anderson could respect that.

Eventually, Jack and Thad arrived. These two were best friends and could always be found together. Jack was one tall son-of-a-bitch, so most people called him "The Tree." He was good with the ladies. They all loved him, but he barely ever returned the favor. Anderson, who had trouble talking to women—talking to anyone for that matter—was pretty envious of old Jack, and never understood why he didn't engage any of these broads who clearly wanted him. Thad, on the other hand, could usually be found hidden in some room with a girl, doing the business. Anderson thought Thad was a real swell guy. He was very calm and always pointed out how

"nice" a moment was. Anderson loved both of these fellas. He considered them good friends, but he was envious of the bond they shared. He knew that they thought of him as friend in return, but he'd probably never get into their inner circle.

"Look what the cat dragged in," Matthew said as Jack and Thad entered.

"There he is," Thad said and he shook Anderson's hand. Jack did the same, then they both shook Matthew's hand. "You got one of your poems tonight?"

"You betch'er ass he does," Matthew answered for him.

"Well let's hear it then," said Jack.

"Not yet, Jackie Boy," Anderson replied. He smiled and reached up to pat Jack on the back. "Get me another drink, and I'll see what I can do."

They all sat and drank for a while and shot the shit and played a few rounds of poker. Anderson began to feel lonely. The others were all talking about baseball as that night's game played out on the radio. Anderson didn't follow sports. In fact, besides drinking and smoking, he didn't do much of anything most guys do. He didn't chase skirt. He didn't play sports. Hell, he didn't even read the morning paper. He wrote poetry and sang songs to himself, all alone in his mother's home. And now he felt all alone in this home. He'd make little jokes and comments here and there, but the others would just look at him, then continue on with their own conversations.

“Mostly, he just hated people”

Some friends.

Eventually, Stacy and Amber showed up. These broads were like Jack and Thad, always together. Stacy was a slender blonde, pretty in the face with a not too shabby body to boot. There's not much to say about Stacy besides her hair wasn't the only blonde thing about her, for she was quite air-headed. Amber was much more sound of mind, but a little chubby. Anderson still liked her more than Stacy, though. She was much more trustworthy and a hell of a lot more intelligent. For the most part, she was a good girl.

"Hey there, boys," Amber said. "What's a girl gotta do to get a drink around here?"

Thad perked up and said, "She's gotta take a seat on this lap here."

He patted his knee and winked at her. She rolled her eyes and made her way to the kitchen where the drinks were clearly displayed. Stacy loyally followed. They all sat down for another round of poker. The girls quit early in and just watched. The room was filled with a haze of cigarette and cigar smoke.

"This is nice, ya know?" Thad stated. He was sitting out a few rounds. "All of us here, havin' a good time and all."

Anderson nodded at him and raised his glass. Thad smiled and took a long drag from his cigarette. The girls were starting to get bored.

"This is such a stupid, male game," Amber complained.

"What are you, one 'a them feminists?" Jack

asked jokingly.

"Yeah, don't be mad just 'cause you don't know how to play right," Thad threw in.

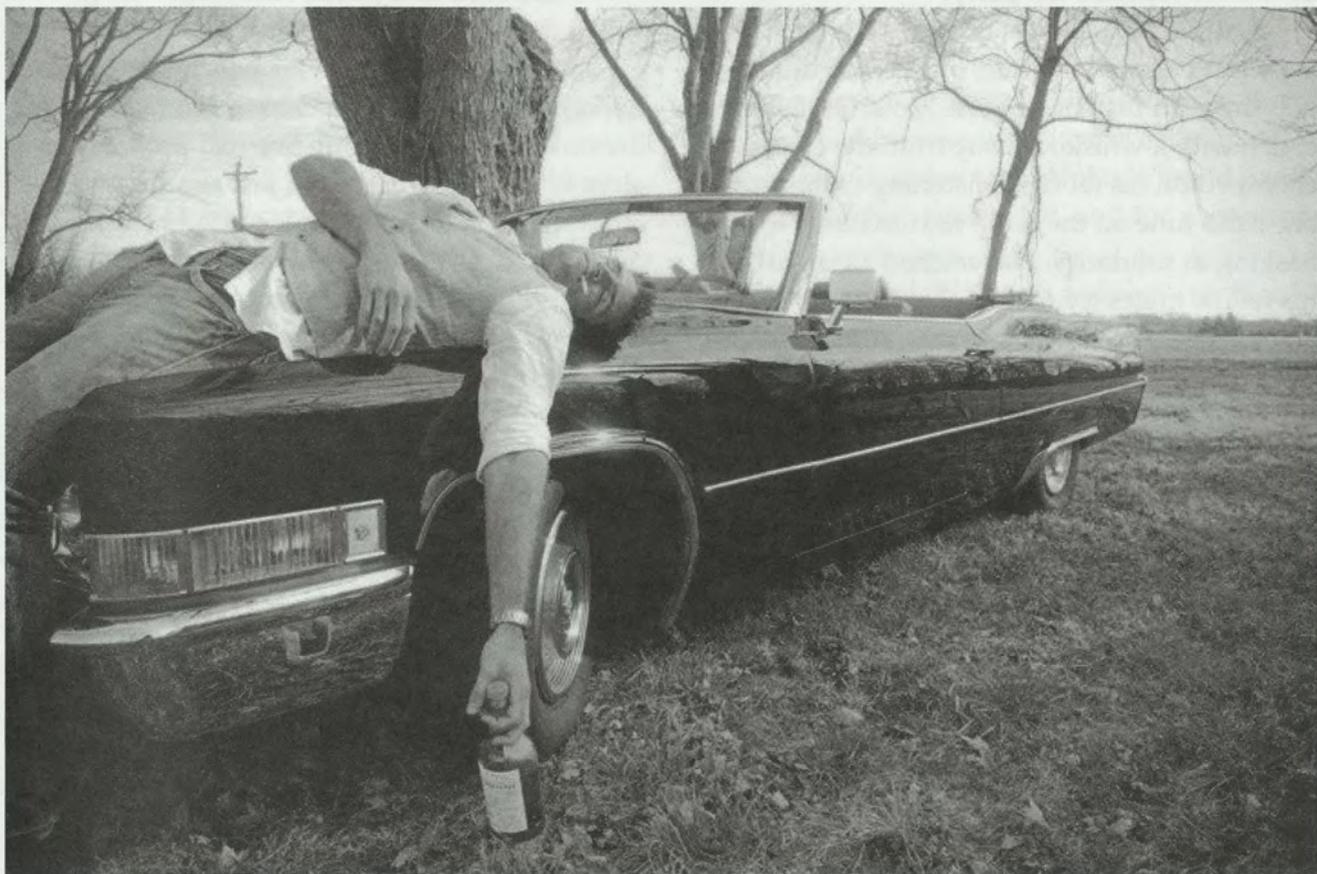
Jack laughed, and Matt said, "Yeah, you just have a little woman brain. Did you hear me, Andy?" he slapped Anderson's arm. "I said she has a little woman brain." Anderson smiled, but didn't say anything. "Did you hear me?" Matthew repeated.

"Yeah, I heard you," Anderson finally answered in annoyance.

Stacy laughed and piped in, "Didn't ya know, Matty? Andy never talks. He just sits by himself and smokes and pouts."

The whole group laughed. This was a very accurate depiction of Anderson Hood. While everyone else was howling with ridiculing laughter, Anderson just sat and took it. His face became red as a tomato, but he showed no other evidence of being bothered by the comment. Inside, however, he was mortified. He knew this is exactly how he usually acted, and he hated it. Beyond the embarrassing misery he felt in this moment, he wanted to strangle this Stacy whore. He went against his usual, subdued nature and decided to act. He looked her straight in the eye and said, "And what the hell do you know about it, huh?"

Everyone got very quiet. Stacy was taken aback. She didn't say anything and looked pretty embarrassed. Anderson stood up and walked to the bathroom to relieve himself of urine and of the other's presence. He felt a blackening rage



Photography:
Inkjet Print on Canvas

1969

Kimber Shaw

that didn't come around very often. He was quite an un-confrontational person. He splashed some water on his face to mentally and physically cool down. He rejoined the party.

By now, Anderson was a little less than sober. He wasn't angry anymore, but he was done playing with the rest of these fools. He sat on the couch with a whiskey, away from the crowd, and chomped on his fat cigar, listening to the latest big-band tune on the radio next to him. He was basking in solidarity. He watched all three of his fellow males try their luck with Amber and Stacy. They'd all drunk less than Anderson, but were acting as if they were far drunker. The girls stumbed around, spilling drinks, while the guys took advantage of them. This was a shit show. Eventually, Matthew tumbled over to where Anderson was sitting and fell down next to him.

"Shit, Andy, I forget you was here," he said. "The famous Anderson Hood. Robert Frost be damned!"

He began laughing hysterically. Anderson didn't say anything

Amber approached, Stacy in tow, and said, "Did someone say Robert Frost? I absolutely love Frobert Rost." She looked at Matthew. "What the hell is he laughing about?"

"Beats me," Anderson said.

She sat down on the floor in front of the couch. Now Thad and Jack had arrived to see what the commotion was about.

"Is Andy gonna read a poem?" Thad excitedly asked — mumbled to be more accurate.

**"Anderson Hood's audience
was eagerly waiting."**

"Yeah, read us a poem, Andyson!" Stacy yelled drunkenly.

She plopped down on his lap and threw her arms around him. Anderson grimaced. Her breath smelled like vomit. She had probably already embraced the toilet, just as she was embracing Anderson now. He pried her arms off his neck. She fell sideways off of his lap, but didn't seem to mind his rejection. She probably didn't even know where she was. She sat up and waited patiently for the poem recitation to begin.

"Gee, I dunno, guys," Anderson said. "Dontcha ever get tired of hearing 'em sometimes?"

Jack thrust his drink in the air and bellowed, "Hell no! Poem!" Stacy laughed and jumped into his arms. The rest of the crowd followed Jack and yelled out "Poem!" several times in unison, or as close to unison as they could get. Jack sat down next to Amber and put his arm around her, as Thad leaned against the nearby wall. Stacy fell back onto the couch next to Matthew. Anderson Hood's audience was eagerly waiting.

Anderson let out a deep sigh and downed his eighth, ninth, or tenth whiskey of the night. "Christ, why the hell not?" he said with a crooked grin. They all cheered. He pulled a crumpled up piece of paper out of his back pocket and read it over one time in his head before he began.

“Read the damn thing already!” Matthew said and slapped Anderson on the back. Anderson turned towards Matthew and gave him a piercing look. Matthew knew why, and he quickly apologized.

Anderson sighed again and said, “Alright, this one’s called I Hide My Scars With Booze and Cars.”

The whole crowd sat up real straight, eager to hear. A few were already applauding for the name alone, though it’s doubtful that the name really moved them in any way. They were just excited to hear Anderson speak. He began:

*I might dress real nice,
But it’s all just to cover the real strife.
And I might drive real fast,
But only ‘cause I want to outrun my own ass.
And I might drink and smoke to excess,
But it’s only to forget that my life is a mess.
And I might smile and follow it up with a joke,
But you have to realize, folks, I feel nothing but broke.*

*Because I’m not what you think I am.
I am a male, but much less than a man.
I don’t have much, but tears and complaints.
I’m a just a victim of this life and all its restraints.
So I hide my scars with booze and cars.
I wish my body to the grave while I keep my head in
the stars.
But I can’t see myself as the deceiver much longer.
I hope someone saves me, ‘cause I can’t see myself
getting any stronger.*

Anderson folded the paper and returned it to his pocket. He looked out over the crowd. Their eyes were wide. They were totally immersed. Though Anderson hated performing, he loved the feeling of a successful performance, even if none of his audience could understand a word of what had just clumsily fell from his lips. But even if he had been speaking coherently, none of them would understand. Nobody could ever understand. They applauded, and for a moment, Anderson was happy.

But Anderson’s bliss was suddenly replaced with confusion. For the next thing he knew, everyone was back to the shit show they were in before the poem, laughing and tripping over one another, and he was wrapped up in Stacy’s arms, kissing her hard. They stopped kissing, and he held her close, whispering, “Don’t worry, baby, I’ll take care of you. I’ll take care of you.” Then, he suddenly found himself in the bathroom vomiting his brains out. He would remember none of what happened next, but the others would tell him in the morning.

Anderson spent the next three hours stumbling around and gruffly informing everyone of how good a poet he was and how bad he wanted to read again. Eventually, he ended up in the bathroom again, singing his new poem to himself loudly and puking every so often. “I hide my scars – bluuuugh! – with booze – uuuuuugh! – and cars – bleeeeck!” He sporadically shouted out random obscenities, cursing everyone, but especially his own pathetic

self, and laughing uncontrollably for irregular lengths of time. He punched the walls and bashed his head against the door and slammed his chest into the toilet bowl as he rid himself of booze and pain. When Amber finally took the initiative and went into the bathroom to check on him, she found him passed out on the toilet, bent over forward, and almost completely naked. After showing everyone else the spectacle and nearly dying of laughter, she woke Anderson up and helped him get dressed. They sat down against the wall.

"You've been putting on quite a show in here," she said. She spoke very gently. She had sobered up a bit by now.

He laughed.

"Don't worry," he said. "I'm not gonna hurt nobody. Honest. Tell everyone I ain't gonna hurt 'em." He laughed again. He was still pretty trashed.

"What are you talkin' about, Anderson?"

"I know they all are afraid of me. I seen the way they all look at me. They think I'm strange or somethin'. They always say I look angry, like I'm bouta hurt someone. Just 'cause I dress like a gangster don't mean I am one. Just 'cause I smile don't mean I'm happy, ya know?"

"Well, you do look pretty rough," she paused. "But no one's afraid of you. We all love you, Andy. You're just different than us, that's all. But we don't hold it against you. Hell, I think little Mattie's even jealous you write so well."

He smiled and said, "Honest to God?"

"Honest to God."

"I don't write well. I just whine, is all. That's all my poems are. A buncha whining."

"Andy, you just spent an hour telling everyone how good you are."

Without warning, Anderson began crying. Amber put her arm around him. It all only lasted a moment.

"When am I allowed to be happy and have fun like you guys?" Anderson asked after composing himself.

"Well, I think you can be happy whenever you damn well please."

"I wish. Sometimes I think I'm gonna die bitter, ya know? All alone."

"Don't even think about that. You got a lot of years left in you."

He smiled.

"Maybe, maybe not. A cyclone could rip through this house right now. Or those Red bastards could drop a bomb on us at any moment. With the bad energy I carry around with me, I wouldn't be surprised if somethin' like that happened."

Amber didn't say anything. They didn't speak for a moment.

"I'm sorry," Anderson said to break the silence.

"Sorry for what?"

“He was still alive, despite his best efforts.”

"I know men aren't supposed to cry. But I can't help it. I cry all the time."

"I don't think there's anything wrong with a guy crying. Besides, you're an artist. And who ever heard of an artist who didn't cry?"

"You don't think I'm a girl for it or nothin'?"

"Nope."

"That's nice. You're a good girl."

Anderson laid his head down on her lap. Before he fell asleep, he whispered, "I hide my scars with booze and cars," and laughed again. After he fell asleep, she quietly left him.

When Anderson awoke, it was about nine in the morning. His right fist was split and bloody, as were the walls. His chest was bruised from slamming into the toilet as he vomited uncontrollably. There was a bump on his forehead. He had really done a number on that bathroom and himself.

On top of everything, I can't even hold my liquor, he thought.

As he left the destroyed bathroom, he noticed that everyone had already left except Amber, Stacy, and of course Matthew. Stacy was asleep, sprawled out on top of the kitchen table, but Amber and Matthew, who were sitting on the couch smoking dope, howled with laughter as Anderson entered the room.

"There he is," Matthew said. "We didn't know you was a poet and a singer."

"What in the hell are you talking about?" Anderson replied as he sat down on the floor in front of the couch.

They explained to him how he had spent his time after he'd finished reciting his poem. Amber didn't mention their talk. When the explanation was finished, Anderson put his head in his hands and sighed. Though it was quite humorous to picture himself passed out on the toilet, he mostly felt shame for the way he had acted. But really, he had nothing to be ashamed of. He had practically told them all how he felt about life through his words and his actions, and they were completely oblivious. They were too busy enjoying themselves. Not even Amber knew his secret. Nothing had changed, for better or for worse. He was still alive, despite his best efforts. He was still alive to continue living on the edge and trudge through the wasteland of this life until Death finally took pity on him and showed mercy. He stood up and walked to kitchen to make a whiskey, then returned to the living room with it.

"Quite a night, huh, Andy?" Matthew said.

"Real funny night."

"Yeah," Anderson responded. "A real riot."

He sighed and took his first drink of the day.

| Best of Nonfiction |

The Parasol

Kimberly Mezger

Grandma's whole house was her bag of tricks. I could never be bored there, no matter how hard I tried. When you move all the time like I did, in my other life, you don't have the luxury of accumulating trinkets and mementos and forgotten items that curious seven-year-old girls might find in the nooks and crannies of an old, lived-in home.

There were cabinets everywhere, and in them she saved everything: buttons, wallpaper scraps, yarn, seashells, pinecones, rocks, paste, old catalogs, greeting cards, magazines—you name it. Big, out-of-town-family dinners were occasions for her to pull out fancy textured card stock—stickers and glitter and markers and glue—and teach me the art of making place cards for the table.

This was long before Martha Stewart hit the scene. Grandma was a trendsetter, I guess. We were at the onset of the “free love/no spanking” of the 1970s, and I got lots of affection and encouragement and explanation. Grandma *talked* to me. She taught me that each moment could be exciting, each moment could be creative; that each moment—if she and I were in it—was very, very special.

I don't know if she knew it was me, that I was there. I want to believe she did.

There was this one moment—when she moved her head towards me and opened her eyes deliberately, and pierced my brown eyes

“Grandma talked to me”

with her blue ones for a good long time—where I really think she took me in. And then there was a little smile. Not a big one, but there was a peaceful, comforting, impulsive up-draw of the corners of her mouth. I could tell that it took a lot of effort to make even that small gesture.

I want to forever believe that she knew it was me. That, even after all this time, she felt me and was happy that I had come all that way just to hold her hand.

Looking back, I wonder why she had that parasol. I mean, why did she have any of this stuff, but why especially the parasol? I only vaguely remember the first time she pulled it out for me, and I don't remember the story behind it, if there was one.

Again reaching into one of those magically organized cabinets in the hallway, out it came, and my future was forever changed. No, I do not have an unnatural attachment to umbrellas or Geisha girls or “Singing in the Rain,” but I do have an attachment to that one paper parasol.

After the first night of me playing with it, *“Be very careful, Kim. You mustn't tear the tissue paper as you open or close it,”* I could always find that parasol in the front closet. Year after year, as my own closets were purged and boxes were packed and home base was moved to who

knows where, that parasol was, oddly, always in the same spot in Grandma's house.

She really liked the apple juice. Each time she sipped it from the straw, she reacted like it was the first time she'd ever tasted it. “Mmmmm... That is SO good,” she would exhale, as animated as a dying old woman could. It made Lauren and me chuckle.

She was like a little toddler. I wanted to hold her and cradle her like one too, but she was frail, contorted, and almost comfortable in the hospital bed that had been set up in her old bedroom. I couldn't do anything I wanted to.

While on the four-hour flight that morning, I had envisioned my Hollywood soliloquy. You know, the one where I sit at her bedside and tell her everything she's meant to me—everything I've learned from her. How she represented stability, taught me resourcefulness, introduced me to adoration, and sentenced me to a fiery imagination. How I'm probably a good mom now only because I had her as a Grandma. I couldn't say any of that though.

She had been hard of hearing for as long as I can remember, but now, at ninety-two, she couldn't hear a thing without us screaming it. Even then she often misheard what was said. Watching her face contort as she attempted to make sense out of what she thought she heard—is it wrong that I thought it was funny? Probably. Who am I fooling? I am pretty sick. But



Photography:
Digital Photograph

To The Sky

Isha Drake

I mean well, and I probably got a lot of that dry humor from her anyway.

The Good Life. I was happy the day my dad married my stepmom. Not only was I the flower girl in a new dress, but Dad wasn't going to be alone anymore, and I knew Carol loved me. Plus, she came with this cool family who actually seemed to think I was terrific. I was six and had not one memory of my parents together. Dad's side of the family, including this new extended branch, was the "good" part of my life. These little glimpses of normal (probably a lot better than "normal," to be honest) got me through a lot of the bullshit that was piling up and becoming the foundation of my "real" life.

The highlight of this good life, of course, was spending time with Grandma, my new stepmom's mother. She retired from school teaching within a few years of the wedding, but I was able to go to school with her once or twice before her thirty-plus years came to an end. I couldn't have been any prouder, sitting in that classroom with twenty-five or so of my peers, watching them idolize the woman who was going to drive me home at the end of the day. After stopping for ice cream, of course.

"Oh, I wish there was something more that I could offer you girls," Grandma whispered to Lauren and me as we stood on either side

"Her skin was so thin, like paper. Like the parasol"

of her. Yes, here was our beloved matriarch on her deathbed, but still acutely aware that we are guests in her home and she should be a better hostess! Again Lauren and I laughed, and exchanged "can you believe this?" expressions. Her hands were cold. Carol had stocked up on those hand warmer packets you can get at CVS, so we opened one and placed it in her palm. Her skin was so thin, like paper. Like the parasol.

"Look at all of the pretty flowers, Grandma," I shouted to her, pointing to the high table at the foot of the bed. Vases filled with sweet peas, English roses, and an assortment of other colorful hand-picked bouquets filled the foreground of her sight.

"Oh yes...aren't they just lovely?" her voice crackled. She sounded like a witch, except for the fact that I knew her heart. Afraid it would somehow burn through, I removed the hand warming packet from her hand and rearranged the sheets—feeling helpless.

When I was eleven or so, Grandma started taking me with her to a nursing home where she volunteered. I looked forward to making the rounds with the ever popular "Flower Lady." Grandma would scrub out Lauren's used baby food jars, collect flowers from her and Carol's

gardens. She would borrow an empty push cart from the medicine room, and proceed to spend an entire day each week wheeling up and down hallways, in and out of rooms, delivering miniature vases of pretty flowers to these abandoned, old personalities.

To me, my grandma was old. To these wrinkly, smelly creatures, my grandma was young. In fact, to some, she was their daughter, or their baby sister. I was called by a number of names, as I was a stand-in granddaughter for many. They were either alone and wishing, or alone and delusional, but either way I quickly figured out that there was no point in correcting them. I just followed Grandma's lead, and played along.

Remembering everything can be joyful, but then sadness hits, and it's usually in spurts. Tears filled my eyes, and I moved to the sliding glass door to get myself together. This just made it worse.

Grandma's house was a time capsule. The painting of Cindy, the dog they had when I was growing up, was on the wall to my right. In front of me was a view of the back yard, and all of its flowers and bird feeders and brick paths. That backyard is where my dad married Carol. It's where I raced against the "hotter/colder" callers during Easter egg hunts. It's where both of my grandpas—who passed away years ago—once picked oranges on Christmas Day with my

"I just followed Grandma's lead, and played along"

husband. This is The Yard. The House. And it dawned on me: I am not only saying goodbye to my hero, but to her home as well.

I quickly walked out of the room and down the long hallway, passing by the magical cabinets that flanked me on either side.

The living room and family room were sunken off of the entry way, which gave an "elevated" feel to the 12'x12' tiled platform. It was a natural stage. The hallway had a pocket door, so the hallway became, logically, Stage Left. The parasol was in the closet at Stage Right. Many a performance, starring Kim and the parasol, were put on right there in that entryway. Imagine Shirley Temple, but with a shag haircut and bell bottoms. Ugh.

I remember making up a song about zucchini after I tried it for first time and declared that I loved it. To the tune of the Mexican Hat Dance, I matched lyrics that repeated "Zucchini, Zucchini, Zucchini... my favorite vegetable..." about a million times. It was legendary, and probably annoying. I also performed tributes upon request, such as the "Thank you, Thomas Jefferson" song I penned and choreographed for one Fourth of July family celebration.

My place cards may have started dinner,

but the parasol and I wound up the evening. I had found my muse, and a willing audience. A strange prop for a grandma to have, that parasol was the vehicle for me to do something outside of myself. It offered me an escape from my real life, and a gateway to the good one. That lady had a sixth sense about me.

I was fairly certain that Grandma would not still have that parasol—and surely it wouldn't be in that closet—but I just had to check. I moved

everything around frantically, wanting it to be there. For every thing that hadn't changed—every picture, every nicknack, every wallpaper pattern, carpet style and piece of furniture that hadn't changed in thirty years—the truth was, so much else had.

I was saying goodbye, and thank you. The parasol wasn't there, and soon Grandma wouldn't be either. At her side again, I kissed her forehead. I drank in her eyes and touched her arm. I remembered—everything.

Gabe Canada is a journalism student here at IUPUI and a lover of poetry. His favorite poem is "The Dream Keeper" by Langston Hughes.

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

Amanda Cory has a degree in Engineering and Technology of Interior Design from IUPUI. She is currently pursuing a degree in Art Education, and looking to earn her Masters in Art Therapy from Herron School of Art and Design. Art is a part of everyday life for all people if they realize it or not.

Isha Drake is creative writing major with a much loved minor in Religious Studies. After graduation she'll be tying the knot, creating some awesome babies, and swinging on the front porch swing. She enjoys getting lost in fields. Laughing is the cure to all her ailments, kissing helps too. Vaya con Dios.

Chad Forbregd has worked as a screen printer, photographer, bass player, substitute teacher, guest teacher, paraprofessional, sales associate, inventory specialist, copywriter, warehouse supervisor and freelance journalist. Poems have appeared in various and irrelevant publications.

M. J. Gillot draws, writes, paints and creates in any way she can. She has a nine-year-old son who often shares her adventures. She has written and illustrated one book, "Belle's Wings," which is available on Lulu.com. Her second book, "Zola Yearned for an eXcellent Waffle," is creeping toward completion.

Catie Keith of Thorntown, IN is a junior photography student at Herron School of Art and Design. Her recent work focuses on her memory loss and rebuilding her past.

Kelsey Lambert is a graduate student at IUPUI, studying English, focusing on teaching writing and technical editing. She works fulltime as a technical writer for an Indianapolis-based software company. This semester she is taking a poetry class that is her first foray into creative writing in over five years.

Sarah McDougalle is 50, a wife, mother, ex-truck driver, aspiring writer, and returning student. She has two majors; English, and Philanthropy. She hopes to use her writing to make a difference in the lives of people who are insufficiently represented in our society.

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 days organizing the chaos of her life by creatively juggling studies and work with her beautiful family of five.

Cristina Miller is a student at the Herron School of Art and Design, majoring in Visual Communication Design. She is an Indianapolis-based artist, illustrator, and designer, aspiring to become an art director.

Ronni Moore is a School of Science student completing pre-requisites for Optometry school. A wanderlust, Ronni loves to travel the U.S. and spends her summers in Jackson, Wyoming. She loves portraiture and sports photography, and is always looking her next photographic project.

Evan Pullins often finds himself sitting under his favorite tree in his hometown park. There he seeks creative refuge as he doodles in his sketchbook and pretends not to eavesdrop. He hopes to one day become super famous and make millions. If that doesn't pan out, then molding the minds of young people in English will simply suffice.

Lee Reynolds likes prose style poetry because he feels it's a challenging way to express an idea, but it doesn't restrict his imagination. It's just him playing on paper with pens and pencils: *illudo chartis*.

Christina Richey is a photography student at the Herron School of Art and Design. She has been working with constructed sets and miniatures. Her latest work deals with time and the anxiety she associates with time.

Dru Roach is a Virgo/Leo cusp that recently decided his major in his sophomore year at IUPUI. He delights in writing, and revels in his snap judgments, only to feel guilty about them later.

Brian Russelburg is a junior Photo major at Herron School of Art. He spent many years doing film photography in his own darkroom as a hobby, while balancing a family and a 30 year career at the USPS. He has since retired, gone almost totally into digital, and come back to school to learn and get a more artistic feel for the hobby he loves.

Cameron Sickafoose is a Creative Writing Major and is in his final semester before graduation.

Kimber Shaw Photography has given him the privilege to reveal what is happening in his life through something as simple as a photo. He tries to collaborate simple ideas in his mind and see what happens when those ideas are taken into the physical realm.

Jamie Shinn is an English creative writing major in her 4th year. She enjoys watching all kinds of movies while eating a variety of food, especially cookies! Her main goal in life is to just have fun with whatever she is doing.

Autumn Stewart is a crazy person. Crazy for life, love, laughter, companionship, luster and writing. With the help of her partner, M. Panther, she personifies herself as a Lioness: protective, strong, caring, and not to mess with for her claws.

Amy Stokes is certain of herself, or at least of rights and wrongs. She enjoys improving paper, wood, human backs and other surfaces with her hands, especially her left hand. She attends the Herron School of Art and writes with pleasure. Her favorite word is mouth.

Amy Thorne is a full time writer, artist, student, and food-industry worker. The first three are passions, and the last is what puts coffee down the throat and enables the magic to happen.

Taylor Wood is a young writer just beginning his career in fiction. Influenced by writers such as Hemingway and Bukowski, he found a new passion in writing some years ago. Last year, he was published for the first time in *Evergreen Review*. He is currently studying Creative Writing.

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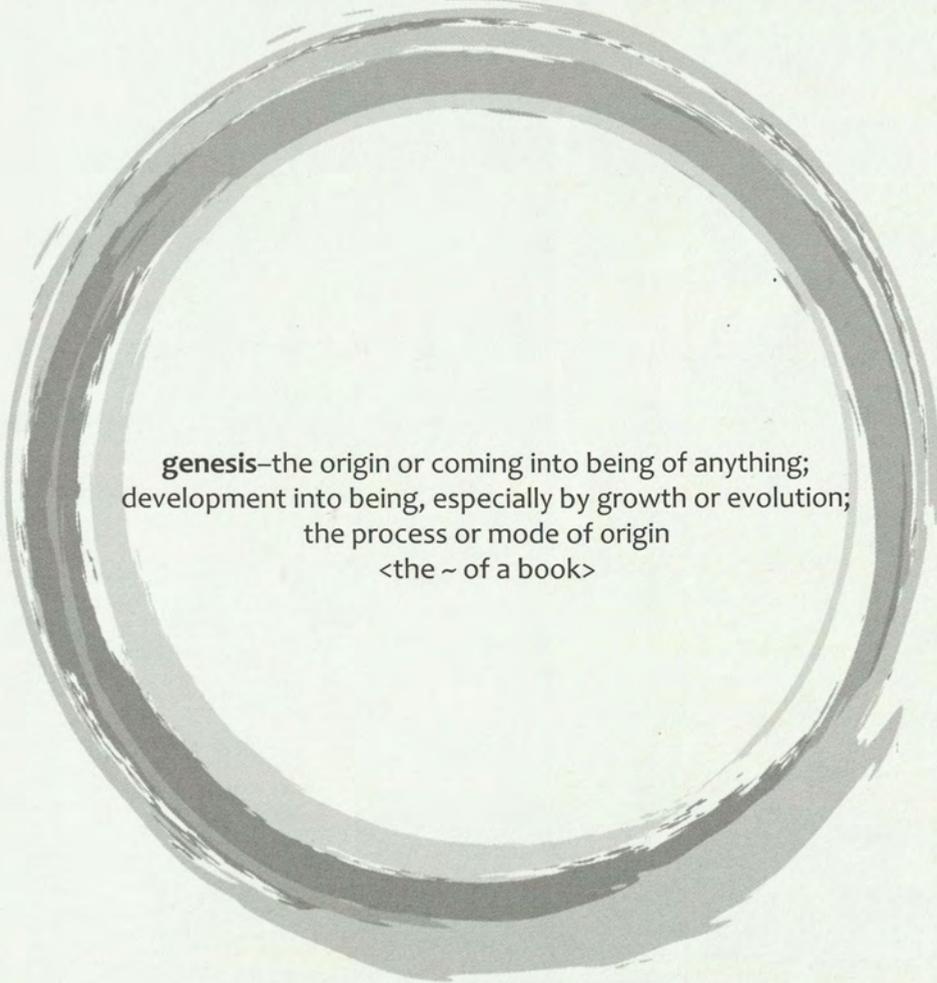
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