

genesis



96

spring

→

Lubec, Maine
black & white photograph, 8 3/4" x 8 3/4"
Jennifer Baynes



In
dedication to
Senior Editor

Amy Johnson

1946 ~ 1996

who will be fondly remembered
by the staff of
genesis
and student body of
IUPUI.



genesis:

a semiannual art and literary journal
devoted to publishing artists' and authors'
work within the IUPUI system. Content is devoted
to imaginative and critical writing in the areas of fiction,
drama, essay, poetry, criticism and various forms
of visual artwork.



Volume XXIV

genesis

Number I

art & literary journal

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~ Acknowledgements ~

English Department of the School of Liberal Arts, IUPUI
Herron School of Art
Multimedia Language Resource Center, IUPUI
Western Newspaper Publishing Company, Indianapolis

Copyright, 1996 by the Trustees of Indiana University. If any violation or infringement of copyright has occurred, upon notification amendments will be made in future issues. *genesis* is published in the spring and fall of each year by the *genesis* art and editorial boards. Publication of *genesis* is made possible through a grant from the School of Liberal Arts and the Student Activities Fund, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

founded in nineteen hundred seventy-two

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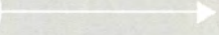
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Contemporary Poetry
Volume 1



poetry



Costume Girls

Katherine Ellison

We've arrived,
the solid and the smooth,
edging into harnessed moves
like dances
steady trances
still, unblinking
through our newborn eyes.

Pretty things
in pretty shoes,
wearing satin
greens and blues.
20 sterile gloves in pockets,
laughing back behind the sockets
of our newborn eyes.

Pages left
with blotted ink
crack our lips
our mouths of pink.
chapters chewed in pointless bites
don't reflect the sour sights
before our newborn eyes.

Slender hips
and slender fingers
sense the musky smell
that lingers
in the sheets and in the pillows
in the driveway weeping willows
above our newborn eyes.

We've arrived,
the costume girls,
flashing red cheeks, nails,
and curls.
speaking only in pauses,
drowning out the voice that causes
us to shut our newborn eyes.



Portrait of Dana

black & white photograph, 8 1/2" x 12 3/4"

Jack C. Hartigan

Drowning of the Daisies

Kristi Jensen

My eyes closed.
Tips of blackened lashes fluttering in the wind.
The little girl resting on the edge of the dock does not see me,
Her eyes open,
Spotted by the sun.
Only the dolphin sees my listless shell floating among the daisies.
A bed of yellow supporting my head:
Keeping it from drowning in the pale blue waters,
Surrounded by an island.
With nothing but an eroded dock and a little girl who stares at the sun,
Grips the strangled stem of a headless daisy,
And still can't see me.

Lullaby

Yolanda Ball

The calm of the night and silence of the dark gave way to an uneasy feeling
No sound of trees swaying gently to the midsummer breeze
No sound of dogs barking at a night traveler passing by
No sound of a car coughing its way down the street
Only sounds of crickets singing in the distance, searching for
survival guided by the moon's light
The stars twinkling like never before as if they knew a secret,
but wouldn't tell
The ebony sky like a blanket which hides the fear
The stars, glitters of hope that guard and protect the blanket
The moon, nothing less than a mighty overseer of peace.

The falling rain on a summer's night beating heavily against
the window
The drops of water falling onto my face
The wet cool touch, the steady sound so soothing, easing away
the despair of a long scorching day
puts my mind into a trance
the drops seeping through the ajar window falling on my face
Tantalizes
My eyelids are heavier, my mind bleaker
The sound lightens, the wet touch of the drops less frequent
quietly but just as sweetly as the lullaby it just told
the rain whispers good night

Sable Island

Iuliana Monica Ward

The cry of the stormy petrel
Pierces the foggy morning veil
That surrounds Sable Island.

The horrid sweet scent of the humpbacks
Hangs thickly about the shore
While powerful puffs of vapor
Rise in the distance.

This is the Nova Scotia splendor
Where dolphins play with the ship's bow
And the cheery yellow sun gently kisses
And caresses grayish ocean ripples.

Swells of molten lead around Sable Island
Wash the burnt sienna sand
Underneath my naked white feet
While snow white frosting captures one ankle.

The Nor'easter dissipates the fog
And waltzes off singing a great legend:
Home sweet home, Sable Island.



Untitled

black & white photograph, 8 3/4" x 8 3/4"

Jennifer Baynes

Across the Street

Lyn L. Coles

Huddled alone he sits
arms wrapped around knees
murky eyes, marbled stare
eyelids crusted half closed
unclean, uncombed
exposed.

Tangled hair wildly matted
fingernails torn and jagged,
blistered lips scarcely cover
tarnished
spikes in ruin
countless spaces
vacant.

Battered skin barely clothed
trousers rotten, tattered
gaping holes held by
mangled threads
unraveled.

Naked ankles inward twisted
stagnant feet in muddied shoes
ragged laces, sole
unglued.

The Chair

Susan McMullin

Shrouded under a shaft of hay-dusted
sunlight rests the old man's chair.
Claws ticking and clicking in the long
silence, mice gnaw arms and legs
and weave the stuffing into their nests.
Pigeons by day and bats at midnight mar
in their own way. Below, the pails rattle
and creak to and fro with the cows;
roosters at sentinel mark the dawns.
Over the pond frost stretches its
fingers and clutches the water hard.
On the far hill, apple trees froth,
fruit swells, falls and rolls
sweet-smelling in bee-ridden wrack.
The dust drifts like petals colder than
snowflakes that soften, hide and erase,
marred only by tiny unheeding feet.

My Rocker

Kristi Jensen

I moved a cherry wood rocking chair into my colonial home today.
My Great-Grandfather crafted it for Ma Patterson as an anniversary present.
Dad says it used to rest on the porch of my grandparent's red brick farmhouse,
creaking and crawling along its wooden floors.
I remembered it once.
Mom wrapped her arms close around me on that last Christmas Eve while
sitting in front of the fake and dimly lit Christmas tree.
Dad had no use for it.
His new wife detested it.
She thought it didn't match her perfectly white furniture.
So, it slept in a storage facility a few miles outside of town.
I discovered it when I was looking for something else.
Now it sits in the cramped corner of the living room,
no longer making that familiar rocking sound.
Perhaps muffled by the shag carpet it was resurrected upon.

Superbowl XXX

René L. Britt-Hartloff

A flash of blue
A swish of white
A grunt
Some sweat

Hurling, diving, grasping
Glint of Hope

Ray of sunshine
Oh, god of the game

prayer
Silence, deafening silence
Clamorous adulations

I can feel it
I know we can win

Almost there...
3 more yards
Bitter, Bitter disappointment
Cold fate
Heads hang, Hearts sink
We go home.

Hummingbird

René L. Britt-Hartloff

I wish I were a hummingbird
Away up high I'd flit
Always moving, never stopping
No, no time to sit
Every flower's nectar sip
'til no more can I drink
There is no greater pleasure
Than this bird's life, I think
A million times a millisecc
My wings they buzz and hum
I know they watch me from below
yet I'm too quick for some
I fly so fast
I seem to zoom
Nothing slows me down
I'm sure that's why a hummingbird
Never sports a frown

Through Winter Eyes

Iuliana Monica Ward

As a cardinal nestles on a pine branch
A cloak of snow feathers drapes his back
While he dozes off to the creek's ice crack
And the wind waltzing on the farmer's ranch.

The muted hoot of a great horned owl
Shutters the solitude of the forest
Summoning its mate to come and rest
Cuddling and listening to the wolf's howl.

The golden hue of the pock-marked moon
Scatters penetrating rays through the dark night
Feeble brightening the icy brittle site
With its comforting shawl so very soon.

Through winter eyes is beauty at its best;
Natures magnificence outlasting time tests.

Canadas

Jane Bowman

On sunny September days
They become restless,
Moving from farm to farm,
Setting out from one sanctuary
For another.
And I stand and stare at their travels
In anticipation.
Throughout cool October
The farm pond turns black with
Bodies, nestled in the early morn,
As the mist blankets the whole valley.
They stir as the dogs run from the barns barking.
I call the dogs, hoping not to disturb.
But they rise, gaggles becoming flocks,
Masses turning to vees of military precision,
Lines crossing lines as they swoop and swirl.
I try to count them.
Fifty? A hundred?
Surely, at least two hundred.
It seems the flapping wings and wailing cries
Lift me, and the ground I stand on, and the dogs

Into a furious vortex as they surge skyward.
The cacophony, like drill sergeants barking orders,
or troops calling cadence,
Blots out this morning world
And engulfs me in a maelstrom of winged fury.
Even as my heart races and my breath rasps in brief blasts,
I become the eye in a twisting tempest of flailing feathers.
On a new day in November
Heavy clouds hang low, hiding the rising sun's rays.
I blow on my mittens as I trudge to the barn,
Watching my breath make little puffs in the cold air,
Matching the clouds above.
The dogs begin their barking frenzy,
But no answering calls, or pounding of wings split the air.
Around the pond, grasses held fast by the frost of a hard freeze
stand sentinel, undisturbed.
I turn, searching the horizon for a sign
Of one left behind, hurrying to catch up,
Winging through the clouds pregnant with snow,
skimming the treeline along the valley.
But they are gone.

The Lingering Fingertips of Dusk
color photograph, 5" x 3 1/2"
Antonia Lawrence

In the House Next Door

Laura McPhee

somewhere between
what she is willing to see and
what she pretends to ignore
lies reality

the untamed beast
feigns domestication
but in his dreams and nights out
he paces and prowls
and devours the darkness
before returning to the suburbs
licking his lips
savouring the last remnants
of lust tasted explored and satisfied
in the secret places
where she is not allowed access

quiet key and shoes in hand
he enters the house
the room the bed quietly
silence like blame lies between them
they do not touch
they do not sleep
together
they find distant corners
from where they rest
designing complicated masks
masking complicated designs

and she waits
as he plans dreams of escape
mental inventories of packed bags
and unused maps
and he looks at her
with long distance eyes
pulling deeper into himself
pushing further into every
dark space but hers

and she wishes
he was man enough
to say goodbye
instead of gradually
disappearing

Waiting

Sean Monkhouse

Eyes wide
side by side
on my barren floor
you
happily asleep
me
consumed
with thoughts
of your lips
seconds away
from turning
and carrying
out the act
or maybe asking
permission
agreement
concession
admission.

Eyes wide
side by side
I
stare at the wall
you
drift
quietly
all night
I am seconds away
waiting.



Christy
coloured pencil drawing, 18" x 12"
Ian Wai Yan Yee

August Afternoon

Laura McPhee

summer in the midwest

I remember now why I left
and further regret returning

mosquitoes
humidity
electric fan
distract me
from my reading

briefly consider
burying my books
in the backyard
in the hope
a forest will grow
drowning out
the sight & sound
of the neighbors
and their swimming pool

sitting at the kitchen table
smoking another cigarette
watching the child outside
playing in his makeshift sandbox
digging with a plastic red shovel

yellow hair
blue eyes
inherited from a dead father
sometimes make his mother cry
when he isn't looking

closing my eyes
whispering "happy birthday"
to the one
who would have been
thirty-five today
had he lived past
thirty-two

while outside
our son sings
the Flintstone theme
and calls me to come
applaud & admire
his achievements

standing in the doorway
unable to suffer the heat
or the family next door any longer
I offer him a trip to town
for ice cream and cake

accepting eagerly
he rushes to find
his socks and shoes
inadvertently demolishing
his carefully constructed
castle of sand

feigning sympathy
while
relishing secretly
its reduction to ruins
like all dreams born
of fairy tale propaganda
where men and women
actually live
happily ever after.

To My Sweet Boy C—

Susan McMullin

Like Robert come unto his 'roads
(but as yet unlike those who
hit the brakes in mid-trip
in order to change lanes),

I could have gone
another way: it might have
been less lonely, more
brilliant, more bright.

No lack of bleak the
way I've come: the pebbles
in my shoes I call regret
and might-have-been.

If there are tears,
it's just the grit blown in
from all the barren years
in the long trip from the altar.

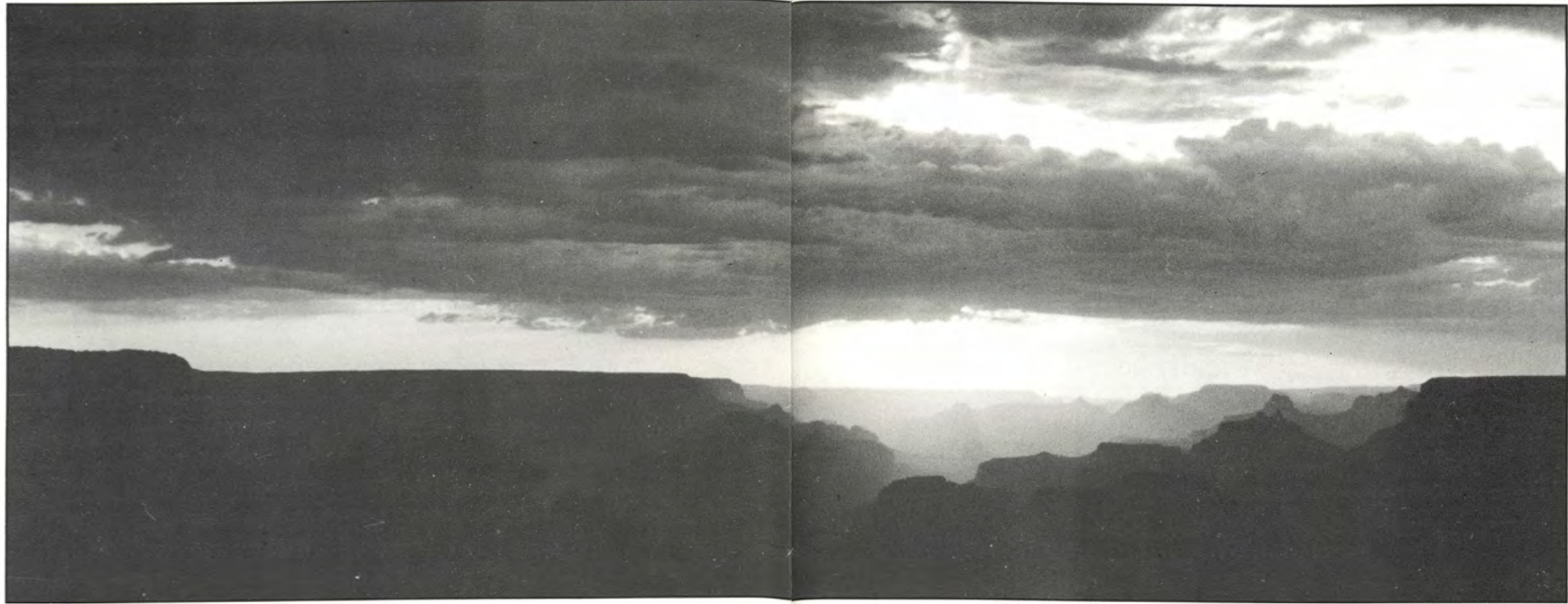
One light I've had along this
road: it has your face and name,
the single light out of the dark
that lies beneath my heart.

For the universe of knowing you
I'd never take the chance,
if offered, to go back again. You
have made all the difference.

The Marker

Kristi Jensen

A grave rests in the pit of my heart.
No markings represent an identity.
No name to remember, no past to forget.
Only a bare patch of grass where the blades,
Waver freely,
And a longing to love what no longer exists.
Forget that time, remember it now.
Love what is and can never be.



Colorado Cloudscape
panoramic color photograph, 9 1/2" x 3 1/2"
Antonia Lawrence

A Lesson on False Teeth

Katherine Ellison

When I eat at home, I don't bother to glue them."

(Grandma clicks her false teeth

in and out

in and out.)

"Unless we have company, and then—"

(she drops them into her palm

and holds them

under my nose.)

"I put Fixadent right along here."

(and she traces a bone finger

along the shiny pink gum.)

"But even if I don't get it even,"

(she says as she looks

at them

under her glasses.)

"then they get loose on one side and—"

(she wedges them

back between

two red stained lips.)

"that is very painful."

(she runs her tongue

along the inside

of her cheek.)

"the trick is, little one—"

(she stares past me

and out the front

checkered curtains.)

"knowing when you've got enough."

(Grandma clicks her false teeth

in and out

in and out.)

Grandfather's Chant

Iuliana Monica Ward

Thick, callused hands
Forever clutching a heavy hammer.
The unmerciful, icy wind
Whiplashing his numb fingers.

Disfigured, rough hands
Struggling to button his Sunday Coat
And not succeeding, his inner chants:
"Gheorghe, keep on trying."

Cold, damaged hands
Designing a new, intricate church roof
By grabbing the half frozen saw
And toiling from dawn to sunset.

The sinking, rotten roof,
Slowly recuperates its weather wounds
By listening to Gheorghe's chant:
"Keep on trying, keep on trying."

A Letter To My Great-Great Grandmother

April S. Kenyon

I developed in my mind an image of you
and the ancestry I know to be mine.
I stare into the eyes of deepest Cherokee brown,
understanding that these are the eyes of my past.
An instant warmth arises into my soul
as a single tear falls silently
at your bare feet—in the snow.
You walk on as if I'm not there,
leaving me behind with questions
unanswered.

I cry out for you to stay, but you only
look back with pain in your eyes,
and I know you must go on.
As you fade into the distance,
I lift my hand to my cheek—
Only to wipe away the tear
I know is there.

I look for the path,
the trail you left behind,
but it is gone—
Lost in the overgrowth of life—
Forgotten with the passage of time.
Somewhere in the
honeysuckle, wildflowers.
And tangled thickets,
far beneath the chaparral,
lies a story
untold.



Angela Stewart

portfolio



Visual artist Angela Stewart attended the
Pont-Aven School of Art in Brittany, France
last summer through the
International Studies Program
on the
RCI International Scholarship, IUPUI
and the
Ian Fraser Travel Scholarship, Herron School of Art.

The series of work featured on the following pages is influenced from organic forms in nature and human anatomy and how the artist perceives them.

"I use these forms incorporating abstract techniques to invite the viewer into the image. The subject matter is not ultimately a specific representation of any certain thing. From this state of abstraction, a process of discovery can develop leading the viewer on a journey from one image to the next."



Untitled
lithograph, 8 1/2" x 10"
Angela Stewart



Cavity
lithograph, 11" x 12"
Angela Stewart



Untitled
etching, 5 3/4" x 8 3/4"
Angela Stewart

prose



The Birthday

Jane Bowman

February morning sunlight slanted through mesh curtains at the window and pooled at the feet of Sharona Hudson as she sat asleep in a wheelchair near her bed. Her head lolled forward and her plastic rimmed glasses hung precariously from the bulbous end of her nose. The bridge of the frames had been broken several times during her falls in the bathroom. These falls had been duly noted by the head nurse on the shift and Sharona's niece had been notified. On two occasions the falls had necessitated stitches and an all day stay in the local hospital emergency room. However, the drugs had rendered Sharona unconscious and she had missed some of her infrequent trips away from the home. The sun also illuminated the dust devils which danced over Sharona's roommate's mouth in rhythm to her deep, sonorous snores. It was now 9:00 a.m. and breakfast had been over for an hour and a half, its menu forgotten and the activity replaced with the more important life function of dozing.

An aide, clad in a green scrub suit, with a hospital gown worn backwards as a jacket flapping behind her, swept through the door and placed her hand on Sharona's shoulder. Gently shaking the old body, she placed her mouth near Sharona's ear and bellowed, "Sharon, are you awake? You need to go to the bathroom."

Sharona's head snapped back, her acute hearing allowing the shrill voice to stop and then jump-start her heart. The movement of her head had caused her glasses to lose their perch on her nose and fly over her lap to land and bounce softly on the bedspread. She craned her neck and peered up into the aide's distended nostrils. Who was that woman? she wondered, and who was Sharon? and why was that woman worried about the bathroom? Sharona didn't need a bathroom. She could feel the warm urine trickling down the back of her legs to pool in the chair seat.

"No," Sharona said. "I've already gone." *That woman* was obviously talking to her. Nobody in this place could seem to get her name right. It had taken months and many calls from her niece to get them to change the spelling on the little sign on her door. Maybe it hadn't been that long. She didn't remember so good. Not like she used to.

"Well," yelled the aide, "let's get you cleaned up. Do you know what today is?"

Sharona looked at her expectantly. She wasn't going to try and remember. She knew *that woman* would tell her. Everybody around here asked you questions and then answered them before you could think of an answer.

"This is February 12, 1996. Does that help you?" The aide busied herself getting a pan of warm water and a washcloth.

That woman just didn't know the rules, Sharona thought. She made a frown to make the aide think she was studying the question. It was a wasted effort for the aide had her back to Sharona.

"It's your birthday. Do you know how old you are?"

Ah, Sharona knew she wouldn't have to think. She shook her head and mused, "I didn't know it was my birthday." What was that other question? Oh well, *that woman* would answer that too.

"It's your... Oh Sharon! You wet yourself. You're supposed to push the button when you have to use the bathroom and I'll come and take you." The aide waved her hand in the general direction of Sharona's bed where a small call button was attached. Sharona didn't notice. "I'm going to have to strip you down and start all over again. We can't have you smelling on your eighty-seventh birthday." The aide bustled to the bureau and began to take out underpants, Depends, and socks.

Sharona was still thinking about the button. She had one button on her tab-collared blouse, but her pants were pull on style with an elastic waistband. Which button was *that woman* talking about? Sharona thought the aide must be crazy if she thought she could hear anything when Sharona simply pushed that little pearl thing at her neck. Maybe that was why *that woman* screamed so much. There was such a thing as a screaming nut. Or was the woman just a little hard of hearing? Sharona might not remember what she had for breakfast but she could hear just fine. And you'd never hear her raise her voice. The woman in the next bed would yell out, "Help me! Please, help me!" But Sharona could never seem to find any reason why the woman needed help. She thought it would be nice if someone would undo the wide belt that wrapped around her waist and fastened at the back of her wheelchair. Why did they say she had to keep that thing fastened?

It was always *they*. *They say*. *They wouldn't like*. And on and on. Sharona wondered if *that woman* was one of *they*. Oh yes, she remembered now. *They* said she had fallen asleep and pitched forward out of her wheelchair. *They* had taken her to the hospital. Sharona would like to have seen that. She wondered if it looked like it did on "General Hospital." Did that nice looking Dr. Hardy work there? She wondered what happened to his sister-in-law, Marge, who was a nurse there at General Hospital. Sharona tried to focus on the missing sister-in-law nurse of Dr. Hardy's as the aide transferred her to the bed and stripped her out of wet slacks, leaking Depends and sopping underpants.

It was hard for Sharona to allow anyone to see her naked. She had never married and except for a few fumbblings in the dark as a very young woman, she had kept her modesty intact. That was until she arrived at Meadowview Convalescent Home. Here everyone seemed so preoccupied with timely evacuations of bodily by-products. How anyone could spend her day inquiring about urination and bowel movements was beyond her. Well, *that woman* did. Maybe crazy people who screamed couldn't get a decent job, so they had to work here and scream about puke and piss and poop.

Sharona smiled at her private joke. Mom would not approve of such language, she thought. She wondered what her mother was doing now, if she was in a home like this one. Well, she realized, Mom was probably dead. It seemed like her mother had died at seventy or some young age like that. Sharona knew that her mother would be proud that she had lived to be

"Old Deborah would end up here."

eighty. . . eighty. . . eighty-what?

"Now you're all clean and sweet-smellin'." The aide kept her shrieking ramblings apace with Sharona's mental ramblings. "Look here, you got you a visitor, Birthday Girl. Now aren't you glad you're nice and dry? I'll just get these soppies out of the way so you can have a nice visit." The aide swept out of the room as she had swept in, shrieking to passing patients, "Morning Mr. Johnson. How's that new hearing aid? Won't have to yell at you now, huh? Alberta, you'll catch your death in nothing but your pantyhose. Better let me take you back and find some clothes."

Poised in the doorway like a startled bird ready for flight was Sharona's visitor. With her hair in a whirl and her long fingers clutching the base of her throat, Sharona thought the woman was the spitting image of Sharona's sister, Deborah. Deborah, pronounced with the accent on the second syllable, would go nuts in here. *They* would have a field-day with that name. Probably just call her Debbie. That'd piss her off.

"Happy Birthday, Aunt Shasha." Marian chirped, using her aunt's nick-name.

Hmm. . . the bird could speak, Sharona mused. What a quiet little titmouse. "Well, thank you so much," Sharona beamed. She couldn't remember the bird's name. . . Maryjane? Maryanne? Mary had a little lamb? Mary, Mary quite contrary? Sharona forced her smile wider. Couldn't do anything to upset visitors. Lord knew when you could have another. And this one seemed to have brought presents.

"I brought you something." Marian abruptly left the doorway and lurched across the room to perch on the bed. A graceful entrance was not one of her strong points. In fact, she really wasn't very graceful at all. Those qualities had gone to Robin. But Marian was the dependable one. That's why she was here this Tuesday as she was every Tuesday to sit with her mother's old-maid sister.

Marian peered into her aunt's strangely bright eyes to see if this would be one of her lucid days—a time when they could have a complete conversation, when Aunt Sharona would know who she was and make some nasty crack about being in the home. Marian had been the one to admit her to Meadowview, one of the finest convalescent centers in the area. And she had done it alone, without help from anyone, even her sister. No, Robin was never there for the tough times, but always there to get the glory. She didn't have to listen to Aunt Sharona's acid tongue that day when her body didn't work anymore but her mind was still bitterly sharp. Now, mini-strokes (or TIA's as the doctor called them) were taking her aunt's mind bit by bit. On the plus side it was also taking her acerbic tongue and nasty disposition. Still, there just didn't seem to be any justice. It didn't seem fair that her mother lay cold in her grave and this old harpy, who couldn't even remember that she had a sister, could roll along merrily in an Alzheimer haze.

Sharona peered at the bird perched on her bed. She looked just like Deborah. Deborah, who had shared a childhood bed, had rested cold feet on Sharona's back and had made excellent grades, had been a klutz too. God,

"Everyone did sooner or later."

she sure bred true. Sharona would say something about this the next time she talked to her. Old Deborah would end up here. Everyone did sooner or later.

"So, how's your mother?"

"She's been dead for eight years." Marian squawked. This was the way all Aunt Sharona's conversations went. It would only take fifteen minutes to exhaust all the topics of conversation and then Aunt Sharona would ask the same questions again and again.

"That's too bad." Sharona's tone conveyed a bored rather than sympathetic attitude. Her mind had skipped on to the present in the bird's hand. "That for me?" Sharona nodded at the flat box with blue paper and a white ribbon.

"Oh! I'm sorry. Yes." Marian lurched again and all but hurled the box at Sharona. "It's caramel creams. Your favorite."

Oh yes, Sharona groaned inwardly. The caramels were her favorite over thirty years ago. Now they wouldn't go so nicely with her dentures. Maybe she could use some of them to fix the bridge of those damned glasses.

"Why thank you. . .ah. . .ah," What was this bird's name? "Sweetheart." Sharona forced a smile. She would like to have gotten a shawl or sweater, maybe a bright red one. Oh well.

"Well, I must go. Got to pick up the kids from school." Marian cooed. This was a lie. It was only quarter until ten in the morning. But she didn't think Aunt Sharona could tell time anymore.

Sharona blinked and wondered if they had chatted for very long. It seemed that this bird had just flown in.

"Well, thank you for the candy. You come back now. Say, how old am I anyway?"

"Oh, I will." What had the old woman said about age? "Oh. . . well you don't look your age," Marian chirped a little hatchling chuckle. She flew to the door and out.

Sharona was alone again. She fingered the button on her tab collar and wondered if *that woman* would miraculously appear if she pushed the button. She could feel another stream of warm urine seep out one leg of the Depends to pool again in the seat of the chair. No, *that woman* would come in another hour. That was the schedule around here. Sharona had time to enjoy her moist bottom. Lord knew that was the only part of her body that never seemed to be freezing. She could feel her head begin to nod lower, slightly listing to port side. She would just spend the time before lunch dozing. She could do that and more. After all, today was her birthday, and she was eighty...eighty... eighty-what?

You and Hannah

Katherine Ellison

You are in the peach and turquoise bathroom and you are trying to shave. The mirror is fogged up and you have to keep wiping it off with your forearm. Hannah is wasting water, trying to get it the perfect temperature so as to not burn her little toe, which she keeps dipping in periodically. She has to stretch out her leg to do this, because the toilet is some two feet away from the ceramic rim and she doesn't want to get up. She is reading.

"Have you ever heard of Phineas Gage?" She is staring down at a magazine in her lap and her legs are now crossed. You are shaving right above your top lip so she continues.

"You know, he's that guy who worked on the railroad. There was an explosion and a rod went through his brain."

You look at her in the mirror, a dab of lotion by the side of your nose. "I can't say that I have. What channel was it on?" You know this is a meaningless question because Hannah doesn't watch television. She gets all of her facts out of the magazines that are sent to the house in trucks.

"No," she looks at you quickly through a squiggly strand of hair. "It's here, in this article." She uncrosses her legs, checks the water, and then looks back down. "Listen to this: 'The inch-thick tamping rod rocketed through his cheek, obliterating his left eye on its way through his brain and out the top of his skull. The rod landed several yards away, and Gage fell back in a convulsive heap.' what do you make of that?"

"Sounds like upbeat Monday reading to me." You swish the razor in the sink and stubby whiskers float about like ants. "That reminds me, did we get a paper this morning?"

Hannah is nibbling on her thumbnail. "I don't know, I haven't looked outside. So anyway, this guy has—"

"Don't change the subject, you always hear the paper come because it hits the screen door. So did you hear it yet this morning?"

She looks up impatiently. "Yes, it's here. Now can I finish my story?"

You raise the razor up to your right ear, careful to bend your left hand just so as not to slice sideways. "I'm listening."

"O.K., so a rod has just shot through this guy's head and you know what he does?"

You take a wild guess. "He dies?"

"No! And that's the beauty of it. His brain is Swiss cheese and what does he do? He stands up, shakes himself off, and walks around. So they rush him to the hospital of course and I mean, you could totally stick a finger in his cheek and a finger in the top of his head and they would meet, and when he's in the hospital, the guy says, 'so when can I go back to work?' Isn't that amazing?" She looks up, the magazine flat on her lap, her drawers around her ankles, her eyes so wide they could pop out onto the turquoise rug.

"Was that the punchline? Because it's not very funny. I mean, there are a million punchlines better than that, like—so this guy has a hole in his

head and he says 'doc, . . .' well, I don't know, but there's gotta be something funnier than yours."

Her eyebrows do a dive and she tilts her lips a bit like she always does when she's trying to act like she's upset. "It wasn't a joke. This really happened."

"What is your source, *Ladies Home Journal*? *Mad*? 3-2-1 *Contact*?"

"No, this is the January issue of *Discover*."

"Hmm. So what else has *Discover* discovered about this Finnish character?"

"It's Phineas."

"Whatever."

Hannah checks the water, is satisfied, and turns off the knob with her foot. Then she unrolls the toilet paper, stands up, flushes, and lays the magazine down on the seat.

"So? What happened? Does he live?"

She doesn't look at you but instead kicks off her jeans. The belt buckle scrapes against the side of the tub. She mumbles as her back is turned. "I'm not telling you."

"What?"

She turns around. Her bra is white and that little flower is in the middle, slightly bent and folded from the wash. "I said I'm not telling you the rest of the story because you're obviously not interested."

"Fine."

"Fine."

You finish shaving, pat your face dry, and go into the bedroom to find some clean clothes. Hannah is splashing and singing in her wretched Julie Andrews voice: "I'm picking out a thermos for youuu. No ordinary thermos will dooo." There are two piles of clothes at the foot of the bed. On each is a yellow post-it note, and scrawled in fat high-school-girl writing is "clean" and "dirty." The "i" is dotted with a big fat round smiley face. You look at the area in between the piles and sure enough, there's the shirt you wanted to wear today. It is right in the middle, as if it is undecided as to which pile it would like to be in.

"So is this shirt clean or dirty?" You raise your voice so your wife can hear you over Mr. Bubbles.

"Huh?"

"My favorite blue shirt, is it clean or dirty?"

"I don't know, which pile is it in?"

"It isn't in a pile."

"What?" She sounds surprised. Her foolproof laundry method couldn't possibly have a flaw after the hours she had exhausted perfecting it. You hear her get out of the tub and open the drain. Her wet feet slap against the floor as she walks into the bedroom to clear up the misunderstanding.

She stoops down, picks up the shirt, and smells it. "Hmm, this is a toss up. I'd say it's clean. What do you think?"

You smell it. Can't tell. "Hannah, come on. Can't a guy just wear his

“...singing in her wretched Julie Andrews voice...”

favorite shirt feeling secure that it's clean?”

“Wearing clean clothes makes you feel more secure? That's odd.”

She unwraps her towel, lets it drop near the dirty pile, and walks over to the chest of drawers. You look at her, not in a perverted peeper way but in the way that a husband looks at his wife of three trillion years. She is tiny, energetic; she walks on the balls of her feet and her hair swish-swishes from side to side. She has two perfect dimples where the small of her back eases into a slope, and the backs of her knees are pale and turned slightly inwards. You have always noticed the oblique angles of her body, the subtle changes of shadow into light, of a hue of pink into a hue of olive. You have never seen her naked. You have only seen her nude.

“What color panties should I wear today?”

You have decided to wear a different shirt. “I don't care. It's not like anybody's gonna see them.”

“Oh, you know what mother always says, ‘Make sure you've always got clean underwear on, just in case you're in an accident.’”

“That's stupid. Everybody has dirty underwear after they're in an accident.”

“That's only if you die, and besides, we're talking about a woman who takes a cooler full of food when she goes across the street to get a pack of cigarettes. ‘You should always be prepared, you never know what's going to happen.’”

Hannah has chosen a burgundy ensemble with more lace than an 'eighties prom dress. You dig out a clean pair of crinkled khaki pants and roll up the legs a bit.

She looks over at you. “Geez, I'll go get my fishin' pole, Huck.”

“Did I roll them up too high?”

“Um, a little, here—” She bends to straighten them out and you look down at the top of her head. The part is crooked in her hair.

“We've got to hurry up, I can't be late anymore. Mr. Hobbs said, ‘Mrs. Quinlan, when I say nine o'clock, I mean exactly that, nine o'clock. That doesn't mean nine o'one and it doesn't mean nine o'two. One more time and we switch the office radio back to AM. He's on an ego trip because he's having an affair with some girl in the photocopying department.’” She emphasizes her Os in mockery. Hannah doesn't like her new boss; she says he has earthworm lips, whatever those are.

As you're pulling out of the driveway, Hannah yells and you slam on the brakes.

“Wait a second, my shoestring's caught in the door.” She leans out and yanks it back into the car.

“Why didn't you tie your shoes?”

“I forgot.”

“Oh.” Hannah has a habit of forgetting the little petty details, like turning off the stove.

You lean to turn on the radio, but the knob comes off in your hand, leaving the little metal rod sticking out. “Damn't, piece of crap. Hannah,

could you put this back on?" You hand the knob to her and she takes it and holds it on her lap.

"Ah, look at the sky. Look at the clouds and how different they are from the lines the airplanes leave." She has the window rolled down and the wind is flipping her hair around like fire. You are concentrating on the roads, which are a bit slick.

"Do you mind putting the window up a little; it's below zero out there."

Hannah gives you an adolescent roll of the eyes and presses her finger on the automatic window button. "I think a little cold is worth the price of being so close to nature. I mean, here we are, stuck in this ugly scrap of bent metal, and outside everything is beautiful. Wouldn't you rather just walk to work?"

"Yeah, when it's eighty degrees out. I love nature just as much as the next guy, but why should I abandon technology and prance around in a loin cloth?"

Her eyebrows do a dive, but this time in contemplation. "I don't want to get into a huge discussion about the positives and negatives of technology. All I said was that the clouds look beautiful today, and I compared those to airplane exhaust, and that led me to us stuck in this car."

"Hannah,"

"What." She is nibbling on her thumbnail and looking at her reflection in the side mirror.

"You shouldn't read those magazines first thing in the morning; they make you feisty."

"No, you're just a bore in the morning."

"I can't help it if I don't wake up at six with enough energy to run a marathon. You don't even get morning breath." The light ahead turns green and you accelerate a little.

"I know, that's pretty cool isn't it?" She smiles the sort of smile that would wake anyone up and then turns to look out the window. Suddenly she yells for you to stop, but you don't react, thinking she has just noticed that her other shoestring has been caught in the door this whole time. You move your head slowly and see past her into the street.

Hannah's face is frozen and there is a car coming towards the intersection. Engines roar, tires scream, metal pops, spinning. You see the faces of men standing, their bodies leaning oddly under the weight of a briefcase and their mouths moving. You can't hear anything over the metal and the concrete and the tearing noises, like cloth pulling at the seams. Your cheek meets the side window and slowly everything becomes very cold, and then very warm. The spinning stops, the popping stops, and everything is silent. Your head is tilted and all you can see is blue, the puffy airplane lines criss-crossing and wrapping around the sky.

It took less than five seconds for your car to spin around and face the same direction. It took less than five seconds for your head to bust open the window and make tiny cuts on the side of your face. It took less than

"...a burgundy ensemble with more lace than an 'eighties prom dress."

five seconds for you to look over at the passenger seat and see that Hannah was slumped over on the floor, blood trickling down her neck.

"Hannah." You reach over and pull on her shoulders. Her head falls back and you can see the gash in her neck, which seems to stretch with the movement of her skin. Blood eases out in clots, and it is so dark, almost brown. "Hannah."

Her eyes move under the eyelids and her eyelashes quiver. Then she is there, her dark eyes staring up. She looks around, begins to move her neck, and then scrunches her face in pain

"Ow, what the hell's wrong with my neck?"

"You have a little cut, no big deal." The gash is drying and you see that it really isn't a gigantic lie, it isn't a gaping hole.

She crawls back up into the seat, trying to feel the wound with her fingers. "How did I cut my neck?" She looks around stiffly and studies the area where she was lying. "Oh my god, look at that." She points to the radio. The rod, which sticks out at least two inches, is bent and covered with blood. Then she opens her hand, which is still clutching the plastic knob.

"Don't move your head. Your neck could be broken. Just sit there until somebody comes."

"O.K. Good thing I'm wearing clean underwear, right?" She looks at you with those big eyes.

"Yeah. Your mother would be proud." You kiss her on her uneven part and get out of the car. Everyone else is O.K. and waving angry fingers at anyone within a mile of the accident. You jump in and holler with the best of them, stopping periodically to peer over a shoulder and check Hannah, who is sitting there with a huge smile on her face. The entire passenger side door is collapsed and she has to sit a little off to the side because it juts into the maroon interior. You question whether you should get her out of the car, but you are too afraid to move her. Her neck looked mighty nasty at first and you remember the story your father told you once, the story about the guy who was in an accident similar to this. He only had a few minor cuts, nothing anyone thought was serious, and he didn't complain about anything. While the police were cleaning up the scene and the paramedics were helping the severely injured, the man went to the side and sat down on a bench, feeling great about his luck. Then an officer called his name (he evidently wanted some information on the accident) and the man turned his head to answer. Then he slumped down, dead. His neck was broken and he never even knew it. Stories like this don't help you feel any better.

It takes forever but the proper white noisy vehicles finally arrive. Hannah is secured with a brace and they pull her out the driver's side and lay her out on a stretcher. You can hear her complaining. "I can walk. This is silly."

The hospital smells like mothballs and antiseptics. Nurses scamper by outside the room on their cushioned shoes and doctors swagger along, shiny technology hanging down their chests. Hannah has just arrived from X-rays and is getting her neck wrapped. They have

already picked the glass out of your cheek and you have a big Band-Aid on it. She looks over and grins. "Cut yourself shaving?"

"Heh. Such a lively sense of humor for just being hit by a car. That reminds me, were you wearing your seat belt?"

"No, I forgot. Besides, the doctor told me that it's a good thing I did, because the door came in so far. And you know what else is cool?"

You can't imagine.

"The doctor said that if the rod would have went in just a millimeter to the right it would have punctured a major artery and I would have bled to death. The way it was it just kind of slid right past it. They saw it in the X-rays. Isn't that exciting?"

The thought makes you sick to your stomach but you agree, yes, that's pretty damn exciting.

"My faith in technology is renewed," she says, "but I don't like the smell in here."

"Hannah?"

"What?"

"You never answered my question."

"What question?"

"What happened to that Finnish Cage guy?"

"Phineas Gage."

"Whatever."

"Well, his frontal lobes were severely damaged, and these are what balance out our intellectual faculties and animalistic tendencies. He underwent a dramatic personality change and came up with extravagant schemes that were never followed through. In other words, he became very hard to get along with."

"Feisty?"

"Yeah, I guess you could say that."

"Well, then, we don't have anything to worry about, do we?"

Hannah smiles a smile that would wake anyone up, but neglects to tell you that Gage died in an epileptic fit thirteen years after the accident.

Phineas Gage information provided from the January, 1995 issue of *Discover*, "What Happened to Phineas?"

Husband

Meghan Hicks

I kissed his forehead, smooth like marble but hot. It burned my lips, both from the heat and from the salt of his sweat. The dark curls of his hair lay against the pillow, and his eyes, not like eyes but like brown velvet behind a gauze of thick eyelashes, grasped mine. He turned his head to the side in search of water, and I couldn't resist the reedy muscles of his neck. I placed my lips against his skin and felt them stretch and crease with life as he drank over my shoulder. Rivulets of sweat ran between our chests as he gasped a breath.

"God," he breathed, winding my hair around his fingers absently as he moved his leg under the sheet. He breathed out again, exhaling the heartbeats that were audible against my lips.

I raised up to look into his beautiful face again: the dark eyes, the tanned skin, the muscles writhing under it. His lips formed the shape that children use to indicate birds in flight. Behind them were pearly teeth that clacked against my earrings, against my wedding ring. Further back was the taste of him, having tasted me.

"I love you," he said, and his eyes meant it. "God, I love you."

And then he smiled and kissed me gently.

"More babies, more babies," he said a little later, with a quiet laugh. Already three girls lay folded into their flannel pajamas, their comfortable beds. Three baby faces with his graceful brow, his flawless skin, his dark curls. Whether they were accustomed to the nighttime noises from their parents' room, I had no idea. To look into their faces, at their little bodies, was to see the combining of our genetics, the mixing of our cells. The youngest cried with a voice that had been stolen straight from her father's throat.

"More babies," I repeated.

"Why not?" he asked, drawing his hand over my bare stomach.

"It's expensive," I told him.

"It's worth it," he said.

"You just want a son."

"I don't care," he said, and then his lips met my shoulder. "Three beautiful girls. Four would be..."

"Difficult," I answered for him. We both laughed a little, thinking of the times when the girls seemed like less than a blessing.

"Aren't you afraid it would ruin my body?" I asked him.

"Never," he said, drawing a gentle hand down my hip and across to my thigh. I shivered from the thrill of his touch. He kissed me again, his lips caressing my jaw, his eyelashes brushing my cheek.



One Sunday morning the girls had given me fits and he had walked to Mass by himself. Once when their white dresses had been arranged like lilies and the patent-leather shoes had found their ways to the right feet,

we entered the huge cathedral with the glass-stained sun at our sides. The pews were not yet filled, and I could see him a few paces before us, kneeling in prayer. I directed the girls to follow me quietly while I carried the baby, and they did such a good job that he didn't see us coming up the aisle. For a moment, with the golden sun slanting across his face, his head bowed, his hands folded gracefully before him, he looked like Jesus Christ, himself.

It caught in my throat just how beautiful he was—silent, serene, reverent. I froze with awe for that moment, watching him pray or think or whatever he was doing, and then surprised myself by reaching out and touching his face with my hand. He blinked a moment, and then smiled up at me and rose from his knees, his eyes mahogany in the gentle sun. He took the baby from me as I watched him move, watched him place a hand on Theresa's dark curls, and then Grace's. He waited for them to sit, made sure they were placed properly before he sat down himself. He straightened the baby's dress, wiped away a stray slobber from her pink mouth.

I genuflected quickly, and then took my place beside him. He placed his hand over mine, and blindly I looked deep into its folds, into each crease and wrinkle of every finger until I was sure I could see the cell structure of him, flexing and flowing in the complex mechanism of human physiology. Except that day was entirely different. In the square slats of aureate sunshine, it was as if he were made of the spun gold that creates the helix of angels' wings.

"What's the matter?" he whispered, and I looked up at his otherworldly presence, something too good and precious to be solid flesh. I forgot, for a moment, him in bed, where he was satisfyingly heavy upon my body, where every part of him could be touched and weighed and compared against me. I couldn't answer him just then, and he gave me a curious look.

"What's gotten into you?" he asked. The baby lay cradled against the lapel of his jacket, looking at me as queerly as he was, a plump, heart-shaped rendition of his face.

"Nothing," I finally said. It took a couple of minutes to wear off, that strange feeling that he was not my husband right then but something lent to me because I had cared for lepers or turned water to wine in a previous life. As the organ music swelled and pooled around us, the whole service felt like a devotion to him, and I clung to his arm as if, in a spectral finale, he would float to the ceiling and disappear.



I had pleaded with him not to change jobs, and when he did it anyway, I was so angry that I convinced myself I was inches away from marching down to City Hall to file for divorce. Anything I had felt on that cool summer Sunday was tucked away into an unattainable place. If I had recalled it, I would have laughed out loud and reassured myself that he was definitely a human being, and a son-of-a-bitch at that. The church thing had been a dirty joke, a prank God had designed to pull the wool over my eyes.

A cop, he wanted to be.

"Why?" I asked him.

"Because," he answered, tired of fighting with me.

"You've got three girls at home, three babies. What if something happens to you? What's going to happen to them?"

"You can marry somebody else," he said.

"Don't say that to me!" I screamed. "You son-of-a-bitch, don't talk to me that way!" I was so angry my vision felt tilted, my eyes as if they were careening to the side, with a headache that felt as if someone had placed nooses around my optic nerves.

"Are you going to leave me or what?" he asked, the vein in his temple throbbing. His eyes, usually so soft and lovely, now were ugly with hate and sarcasm, and his mouth turned down in a malevolent, broken-arrow frown. "Because I'm not fighting with you over this anymore. We've been over it a million times. I made my decision."

"I could leave you now and be without you," I cried, "or I could wait until some criminal shoots you down like a dog in the streets and be without you."

"You got better odds on the second one, babe," he said, and then gave me a smile that absolutely sent me over the edge.

Eventually, I got over it.



In the same cathedral, the windows that had once been colorful dresses had transformed themselves to bleached rags hanging limply from the walls. The room that had been full of living sunlight was now full of men in blue uniforms, coughing silently over the burdened sound of the organ. The girls were dressed as violets on this day—the darkest color to be found in the closet. One does not buy black clothes for children.

The faces were as familiar to me as those filling the arena of a football game. They blurred together in one long, continuous, heaving mass of flesh with watering eyes and gaping mouths. It reminded me of things I had read about huge ovarian cysts, complete with hair and teeth. Almost the immaculate conception, but not quite. Almost meaningful, but not quite.

The fact that I had walked down this aisle on my father's arm occurred to me as I drifted forward, my feet listing in their high-heeled moorings. He had stood at the end of it, young and scrubbed and tuxedoed, his eyes luminous, one finger scratching absently, nervously, at the other hand. I remembered that more than anything—the light of his polished eyes, the love on his nervous lips.

As I met with him this time, I was as breathless, as trembling. One hand clasped his other, but did not scratch. His face wore the same blessed seriousness, but now it was forced on him, arranged by some human person. I had never seen my husband wear makeup until this day. His curls lay, neatly arranged, against the white satin pillow. His body had been fluid

with motion, even in sleep, even in prayer. Now the weighty stillness of it stopped my life's growing.

"I love you," I whispered. "God, I love you."

I had nothing, finally, except money and children.

To see another smile, to request another kiss, was too much at this point to ask. He had given me his last, his white teeth in the morning not granting me the smallest hint that I should hide it in my mind for safe-keeping. I kissed his forehead, smooth like marble and just as cold—it burned my lips with the certainty of its sentence.

*"...something lent to me because
I had cared for lepers or turned water to wine..."*

Rotten Peaches

Katherine Ellison

It's morning. No one is here but us and he won't let me answer the phone. I've got a black-cherry bruise on my thigh the size of a man's thumb and smoke-stained eyes. I hear the car growling in the garage and a cough as it dies again. I hear a yell, a curse, goddamn piece of shit, why didn't mother give us the Buick instead. I roll over onto my back and stare at the ceiling. The fan swings around and around and a little plaster falls onto the foot of the bed. The room is musty with the sex smell, and there is no light except for the angle of sun that pierces through the tear in the blind. My eyes are burning, my mouth is dry, my stomach is upset, and I slept on a folded ear. I reach down and rub my finger over the scar on my stomach, it is so smooth and thick it feels as though I just got it yesterday. A few more words come through the battered veneer door that leads to the garage and I jump with a start when I hear my own name thrown into the middle. I know he is coming, even before the wrench slams onto the concrete floor. I take my hand out from under the blanket. I don't want him to see me playing with my scar.

He appears and leans in the doorway, and although I can barely make out his shape, I can smell the grease and the sweat, and I know without seeing that he is wiping off the sweet sticky antifreeze with a clean kitchen rag.

"Why don't you get your lazy ass out of bed and come hold the flashlight." He moves towards the bed with cowboy boot ease. I roll over on my side and face him, prop up on a sore elbow and reach for a smoke on the endtable.

"I don't feel like gettin' up just yet." Silence. I hit the match against the metal bed frame and keep my eyes towards the doorway. He takes a breath.

"You're not still mad about last night are you?"

"Nope. Why would I be mad." It isn't a question. He moves and sits on the edge of the bed, his back against my stomach, looking down at me from his shoulder. He grins a little.

"I'm sorry I was a little rough; you just looked so sweet." I don't reply.

"I don't know what got into me," he pauses, "you looked so pretty in that dress, I just," He pauses. I take a drag and let the smoke float up into his face. He stops grinning.

"Get up. You've been laying here all day. You'd think you were sick or somethin'."

"Maybe I am."

"You're not sick; you were fine last night." I roll over onto my stomach and stare at the wall. We haven't bought a new headboard yet, and the old one is still propped up against the wall in the garage next to the lawn chairs. The hole he kicked through it is getting larger from termites, which of course is what he blames the hole on in the first place.

I hear the screen door creak open and Melba, my best friend, paddles into the house with a screech.

"I brought you some more coffee!"

I know without seeing that she is eyeing the kitchen distastefully, frowning over the scattered beer cans and crusty uneaten grilled cheese sandwiches from last night. I know without seeing that she is instantly angry because she knows it has happened once again. By the time she enters the living room her tone has already changed.

"Are you all right? Where's that bastard husband of yours?"

I see the muscles in his jaw tense up and he leans over to grab a shirt on the floor. The scar on his side stretches and shines, and when he sits back up it wrinkles and disappears. He looks over at me and sees me glance at it, and his face reddens and the muscles tense once more.

"I told you never to look at that, what the hell were you doing?"

"Looking at what?"

"Don't play dumb, you were looking at my scar again."

"I was not, I was looking at your back."

"Well, don't look at my back either. I don't want you lookin' at me unless I say you can."

I reach over and grind out my cigarette. He grabs my wrist and twists my shoulder into the mattress. His fingernails are clogged with black dirt.

"If you ever look at my scar again, I'll give you another of your own, OK?"

"ok."

He lets go and my arm falls to my side. Melba appears in the doorway. He pushes past her and I hear the garage door slam. The pictures on the walls rattle and I know I'll have to go through the house and straighten each one back up.

"Are you all right?" Melba sits in his warm place on the edge of the bed and rubs my shoulder. She didn't see him twist it, but she knows. Somehow she always knows. I nod my head, turn around, and sit up. The blood rushes to my ears and I black out for a second. I've blacked out a lot since we moved the headboard into the garage.

"I'm not going to lecture you again. I just want you to pack up some of your favorite clothes and get out of here. He's going to kill you someday, you know that, don't you?"

"You're being dramatic. He just can't control his temper, all men have that problem."

"No they don't, just the men you've been around."

"Well maybe I'm just meant to be around that type of man then."

"No one is meant to be around that, you've just been unlucky. All you have to do is leave."

I fall back on an elbow and look at the fan. A little plaster falls onto the foot of the bed. Melba clicks her tongue and silently wonders where my next scar will be.

As I walk towards the kitchen, I pause to straighten up the photos in

“...only a peach, a fresh, soft peach...”

the hallway. A hundred me's look up shyly through chubby scrubbed faces and a hundred fathers stand perfectly erect, large hands on small shoulders. Jimmy won't let me put any of his family pictures out, said they only remind him of his shitty childhood. I want to tell him what a shitty childhood was really like, and that I don't need an old scar to remind me of it.

The dining room is a mess. It smells like rotten peaches and scented candles. Smells left over from last night.

Jimmy came home yesterday from work, his arms filled with two large grocery bags. He set them down on the table and called me into the room.

“Hey honey, lookee what I got for us tonight.” He waved his hand over the bags. I was confused, Jimmy never did the grocery shopping.

“What's it all for, we having company?”

“No, it's for us. Tonight. We're gonna use it tonight.”

“I don't understand, what's it all for?”

“Well now,” he slid a hand around my waist and swung me around, “I want you to slip into your pertiest dress and look like a lady. I'm going to romance you like you ain't never been romanced.” He smiled broadly.

“But Melba and I were going to a movie tonight, you knew that. We've been planning it for a month.” Jimmy's lips tightened and his grip around my waist pinched and jabbed up under my ribs.

“You fucking somebody, ain't you.” He looked hard into my eyes.

“No Jimmy, I'm not fucking anyone. We just planned on going to a movie. That's all, I swear.”

“You gonna crawl into some man's car as soon as you're around the corner, right?”

I shook my head and his fingers pushed in further under my ribs.

“Ah, come on Rosie, you can tell your old man. Tell him that he's not enough and you got to go out fuckin' the whole town. Go ahead. Tell the truth.”

I tried to turn my head and avoid his stare. I tried to loosen his hand around my waist. I wanted to black out, right there in his arms, but I didn't. I never black out when I want to.

“I'm not lying baby, I'm not fucking anyone but you. You just had a rough day. Go in and watch some TV while I finish supper.” I tried to look him straight in the eyes, tried to look up all innocent-like, like the girl in the pictures. His grip relaxed and he pushed away.

As I stirred the chili and turned the grilled cheese over, I could hear him laughing in the other room. We just got cable, last ones on the block. I couldn't think of anything that could make me laugh like that.

So later that evening I called Melba and told her to go on without me; I had too much laundry and I had to sew Jimmy's namebadge back onto his shirt. She reluctantly gave in and let me alone. The dial tone blared like a siren. I had wanted to see that movie for so long.

I paraded out into the living room in Jimmy's favorite dress. It was red and white checkered, kind of short, and with two little spaghetti straps

holding it up. The top was way too tight, because he bought it for me when I was sixteen and barely had two small buds where my breasts are now. My hips stretched out the sides and the straps kept falling down over my shoulders. When I looked in the mirror I almost cried. Not even twenty years old and stuffed into some little dress like a used whore. But Jimmy liked it, liked it so much that the sight of me in it made his cheeks flush and sweat gather around his hairline.

"Hot damn, you do look like a lady in that dress, Rosie. Turn around, let me get a look at your ass." I rotated a little and stretched out my arms. I could feel his eyes tracing up my ankles, my legs, my stomach.

"You do something different to your hair?"

"No. Just combed it."

"Well, it looks mighty nice. Mighty nice indeed. Reckon I'll be sleepin' with my face in that pile of hair later on." He nodded his head and grinned. "Now sit down here next to me. I got a surprise for you." I moved over and sat in the middle of the couch. He rattled around in the grocery bag next to his feet, and when he looked up, he frowned. "No, not on the couch. You're too far away, cutie pie. Sit here on the floor between my legs." So I crouched down between his knees, trying to pull the dress down far enough to cover me.

He really is an attractive man, just three years older. I met him at the county fair. I had four paintings in the show and he was in the tractor pull. He had been looking at me all afternoon but unlike the other boys he hadn't approached me with a worn-out line. His silence interested me, the way he would lean against the brick wall of the courthouse and just look me up and down, up and around. His hair was tousled like a little boy's, his eyes dark and his jaw strong and sharp. He looks the same now, except his stomach's a bit fuller from the evenings out with the guys. Working in the shop keeps him in good shape, though. Keeps his hands strong.

I looked up at him under my grown-out bangs. He reached in the bag but kept staring at me. "Now close your eyes, Rosie. And tell me what you think this is."

I didn't want to close my eyes. I didn't know what he had and I didn't want to find out in the dark. But I squinted them tight and waited. Soon I felt something on my lips, around my mouth, under my nose. "Open your mouth, Rosie, open it wide." And so I offered him my tongue, and my teeth, and my throat, planning on biting down hard if it was something that could hurt me. But it was only a peach, a fresh, soft peach, and the juice ran over my lips and off my chin. I felt his hand on my chest, smearing the juice across my shoulders. He fed me apples, oranges, watermelon, pineapple. He had seen it on cable a few nights before. Now I remember the reaction he had to that movie, a reaction much tamer than he had while watching the fruits spill onto my dress. If the headboard was still on the bed, it would have been knocked off again last night.

I gather up the spoiled fruit and throw it in a garbage bag. Jimmy is still out in the garage, cursing away at the old Firebird his mom let us have

"All you have to do is leave."

after she bought a new car. He has turned on the radio and an old eighties tune creeps through the hallway, giving the wood an even cheaper look. He has it so loud I can't even hear the wrenches and screwdrivers slamming onto the concrete. I lean against the sink and itch at the scar on my stomach. The dish towels are all soaked with antifreeze so there's nothing to clean off the counter with. I stand here and itch away, thinking about my body and that dress and the peaches on my tongue and then there is a high screeching sound out front, down the street. The garbage truck is late again, and Mark and Eddie are feverishly dashing from one house to another, the brakes squeaking at each stop. I hurry and gather up the trash and haul it out to the curb. I've put on some old jean shorts and a tank top, but didn't have time for shoes.

The truck roars up and Eddie swings off the back.

"Hello Rosie, how you doing this morning?" His skin is very brown and his eyes light, like dancers.

"Oh, just fine. You guys are running a bit late today; Sarah keep you up last night?" Sarah used to be my locker partner in high school. She wore too much lipstick even then.

"No, Mark just slept in a little." He grins and swings a bag over his shoulder. "That husband of yours treating you all right these days?" Eddie knows all about Jimmy and his temper. We have spent many "guys nights out" discussing that very thing. Eddie even offered to set me up in a motel until he could end things with Sarah, but I couldn't do that to her. You just don't stab old locker partners in the back like that. I don't want to marry a garbage man, either. Doesn't seem like much of an improvement over a mechanic.

"Well you know Rosie, that offer still stands. Whenever you wise up and wanna get out, just give me a call." He jumps back onto the back of the truck and waves. I can see him hanging from that pole far down the street and it crosses my mind to just run and jump into the back, trash and all. I look down at my feet, remember that I don't even have any shoes on, and go back inside.

It's afternoon. No one is here but us and he won't let me answer the phone. I hear the car growling over the music and a cough as it dies again, god damned piece of shit, why didn't mother give us the Buick instead. I lean up against the sink and itch at the scar, pale and swollen. I itch and itch, looking out past the driveway, past the garbage truck, and towards the end of a road that seems to fall off into nothing.

essay



The Bridge at Owl Creek

Tom Birch

Inspired by the short story
An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge
by Ambrose Bierce

Ironic isn't it? Me, a structure built to bring two sides together being used by one side to punish another.

A structure designed and built to traverse the difference between here and there being used to punish by execution, the difference between here and there.

The men in the blue coats are going to hang the man in the dark suit because he supports and sympathizes with men who wear gray coats, who are white men who want to own black men.

Colors seem to play an important part in these peoples' lives. I do not really understand.

The white men say the black men are ignorant and savage as a result of their color. I have heard as much ignorance from the white men who cross me as I have from the black men. As far as savage behavior, what is more savage than war? And I believe it was the white men who started this war.

I see red birds fly over and I see black birds and blue birds fly over and one seems no more ignorant of its abilities due to color than the other. Are they?

I do not understand this thing between the men in the blue coats and the men in grey coats over the right or wrong of owning black men. But I do not understand anything regarding ownership, I own nothing and have the world at my feet (or supports).

White men cross me going to and coming from where ever it is they go.

Black men cross me going to and coming from where ever it is they go.

I've seen some red and yellow men in my time, but not nearly as many.

They are free to cross me if they wish—that is why I am here, to traverse the distance from here to there.

I have heard some of these men speak of their differences as they cross over me. Some say they are fighting to free the black men from slavery: ownership by other men. Some say they are fighting over who will run the country. Others say it is over the rights of the states to decide things for themselves.

This could go on forever.

I have also heard black men talk as they cross over. Some say they want to be free of ownership. To be able to live and work as they please. I have heard some say there is no freedom—it is only a myth. You are only free to choose the poverty you live in and even then the choices are few. You may have freedom to run from a beating if you are lucky, rather than stand there and take it.

The only thing I know of freedom is that the creek is free to flow, the birds are free to fly over, and all of these men are free to walk on me. Blue coats, gray coats, black, white, red or yellow.

Me? I am just a bridge, here to span the difference from one side of the creek to the other, not to judge or execute.

I can feel the man in the suit begin to tremble as he stands on the plank looking over the side into the creek.

The creek, that is free to flow where it must.

The creek has told me of things it has heard on its travels and of things it has seen. Of men killing and dying and pouring their blood into its waters. The same waters that all of these men drink from.

The creek does not care who drinks from it anymore than I care who crosses over the creek by way of me.

I can feel the guards as they position themselves before they drop the man in the suit over the side toward his end. He will stop, most abruptly, at the rope they have tied to his neck.

Funny, I should feel more animosity towards him than they—he was going to destroy me, so they say.

I, however, do not feel animosity. Only feet, hooves, wheels and the occasional set of paws.

I wonder what he is thinking of? Will they miss him? Will he miss them? Do they even know he is here?

I do not miss things. I touch this side and I touch that side. I miss the creek, but that is my job. To traverse the distance, to bring two sides together. Mine is a fair distance, is theirs?

I feel the guard step from the plank. A difference of inches.

The man in the suit falls toward the creek. A difference of feet.

What is he thinking know? I wish I were home?

The rope tightens around my beams. A difference between life and death.

Do the others?

I, a bridge, cannot traverse that distance any more than I can traverse the distance between the men in the blue coats and the men in the gray coats. Or the distance between the white men and the black men.

I am only a bridge.

I can only cross this creek.

“...traverse the distance between here and there.”

artists & authors

biographies

Jennifer Baynes ~ Commercial and fine art photographer and Indianapolis native, holds a BFA in Photography from Indiana University and is currently continuing studies at IUPUI.

Tom Birch ~ A forty-four year-old sophomore at IUPUI studying education.

René L. Britt-Hartloff ~ A freshman majoring in English and Psychology. She is married and has two children. This is her second year being published and working with *genesis*.

Jane Bowman ~ "My story *The Birthday* comes from my life and members of my family and friends in their forties or fifties. We find ourselves caring for our parents or other elderly family members while we still have our own children at home. We are also faced with the reality of what our own lives may be like in our declining years."

Lyn L. Coles ~ A returning student and registered nurse working in research at the IU Medical Center.

Katherine Ellison ~ A sophomore English major at IUPUI.

Jack C. Hartigan ~ Visual artist focusing on Painting and Photography. He currently works for Young Audiences of Indiana, helping bring professional artists to schools throughout the state. This is his second year working with *genesis*.

Meghan Hicks ~ Junior English major at IUPUI, this is her first publication. "Now I can tell my grandmother I'm a writer and not feel full of it."

Kristi Jensen ~ A senior English major and Psychology minor attending IUPUI. "I plan to pursue poetry after graduation and continue the process of learning."

April S. Kenyon ~ Transferred from Vincennes University to IUPUI in August, 1994. She is a twenty-one year old senior majoring in English.

Antonia Lawrence ~ Twenty-four-year-old British artist who originally started a Business Degree at Edinburgh University, Scotland then moved to the United States in 1993. Currently pursuing an Art History degree and Museum Studies Certification at Herron. Past awards include the 1995 Outstanding Upperclassman Scholarship. "I enjoy working with oils, watercolors, or just about anything I can get my hands on."

Susan McMullin ~ Originally from Philadelphia, she is a nontraditional student majoring in English at IUPUI. She also has an MA in Journalism from Ball State University.

Laura McPhee ~ Continues to work towards her BA in French and English literature while raising her five year old son, Ian. Goals include graduation in December, giving birth to a second child in July, and figuring out how she got lucky enough to marry her favorite blonde-haired, blue-eyed poet.

Sean Monkhouse ~ "I am currently finishing my undergraduate degree in English at IUPUI. After my graduation this summer, I plan to teach English in Costa Rica and continue my exploration of the written word."

Angela Stewart ~ A recent BFA graduate of the Herron School of Art. She attended the Pont-Aven School of Art, France last summer and will be exhibited in a group show of Pont-Aven alumni in Massachusetts this year.

Iuliana Monica Ward ~ Originally from the Transylvania region of Romania, she came to the United States in 1990. She speaks three languages fluently and tutors at the University Writing Center while majoring in French and English at IUPUI.

Volume XXV

genesis

Number II

art & literary journal

prospectus

Writers' manuscripts & visual artists' works are invited from all persons attending IUPUI at any time during the last eighteen months for publication in *genesis*. Working deadline is 30 September 1996 for the fall issue.

Manuscripts of essays, one-act plays, fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art or literary criticism may be submitted on any topic before the above deadline. Manuscripts must be typed; prose pieces should be double spaced, classified as either fiction or nonfiction, and be no longer than 2,500 words. No more than ten pieces should be submitted for each issue by one author. Please include a separate title sheet containing the author's name, address, telephone, and a short biography. All manuscripts are considered by a student editorial board. Names should not be placed directly on the manuscript, as authorship is not revealed to the board until the manuscript has been accepted. Authors will be notified of acceptance prior to publication; submission will be considered authorization for publication. Please do not submit work being considered for other publications. Selected manuscripts may be requested on computer disc for publication process.

Please send or deliver to the following address:

genesis

c/o Geneva Ballard
English Department, IUPUI
Cavanaugh Hall, Room 502L
425 University Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN 46202

Artworks of any type may be submitted before the above deadline. Photographs are encouraged, but slides or actual work of all media will be accepted. No more than ten pieces should be submitted for each issue by one artist. Please identify each piece with the title, actual dimensions, artist's name, address, telephone, and a short biography. Artists will be notified of acceptance prior to publication. Please do not submit work being considered for other publications. All original artwork or slides will be returned. Please send or deliver to the following address:

genesis

c/o Geneva Ballard
Office of the Dean
Herron School of Art, IUPUI
1701 North Pennsylvania St.
Indianapolis, IN 46202-1414

***genesis* will soon be available on the Internet.**

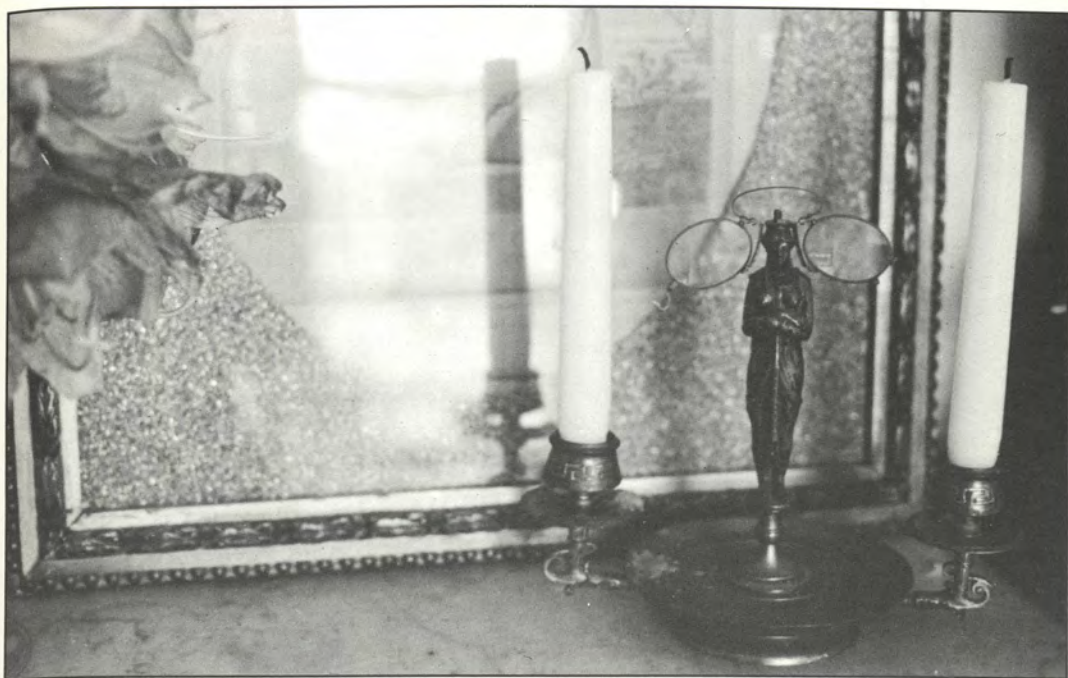
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genesis is seeking new board members to participate in constructive feedback about the journal for the fall issue. If you are interested, please submit a resume including your name, address, phone, e-mail, fax, class standing with GPA, and a statement about you and your interests in this publication before 30 September 1996 to:

Geneva Ballard, Faculty Advisor
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Interior at Michaels

black & white photograph, 5" x 7"

Jack C. Hartigan



Erin
black & white photograph
Jack C. Hartigan



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