



SPRING
2011

Decorative flourish

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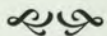
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Cover: Best of Art

Benjamin Joseph Garza
Pete
17" x 11" Black Ink

Editors' Note

We received a plethora of amazing submissions for this issue, which caused a lot of late night discussion and debate. One of the best things about being an editor of *genesis* is reading others' work. *genesis* picks apart each submission and discusses the good, the bad and the... not-so-pretty. It was challenging but inspiring to read poetry aloud, to dissect prose, and look at art from all angles. It is our job to decide not necessarily what we like but what our audience will respond to. And this is not an easy task.

Hopefully, we've chosen works that you, as our audience, can appreciate. But if we haven't (or even if we have) please don't hesitate to ask us questions about our motives for publication. The editors of *genesis* can always be reached via email at genesis1@iupui.edu or via snail-mail at *genesis* 425 University Blvd, Room 502L Indianapolis, Indiana 46202.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank:

Benjamin Joseph Garza for the front cover logo
IU School of Liberal Arts at IUPUI
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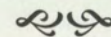
genesis the origin or coming into being of anything; development into being, especially by growth or evolution; the process or mode of origin <the ~ of a book>

genesis

Literary and Art Magazine of
Indiana University
School of Liberal Arts
at IUPUI

Volume 39 Issue 1

Spring 2007



Becky Vasko
American Beauty
Photograph

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Friends of *genesis*,

genesis has made great strides in recent years. In addition to establishing a course around the writing, editing and production of the magazine (W280 Literary Editing and Publishing), we have created a more dynamic magazine, which better showcases the art and writing within.

In W280, we have learned what we value in writing and art, as well as why we value it. We have learned the ethics and politics involved in choosing pieces for publication. We have learned how to work in committees with respect and open minds to select a variety of work that exemplifies the result of thoughtful craft.

But *genesis* would be nowhere without the support of its donors, contributors and readers. The students who produce this journal ask that you continue your support and would like to thank you for being a part of the past, present and future *genesis* family.

Gifts in support of *genesis* have allowed us to fund our "best of" prizes, and now we are looking further, especially as we bring *genesis* to the Internet at <www.genesis.usg.iupui.edu>, where student work can be shared more broadly. We invite you to join those listed here as "Friends of *genesis*" with your gift today.

Gift checks may be made payable to IU Foundation/*genesis* Fund and mailed to the IU Foundation, 950 North Meridian Street #250, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204. Or you may go to the IU School of Liberal Arts website, <http://www.liberalarts.iupui.edu>, and make your gift online by clicking the "Give Now" button.

Sincerely yours,
The Editors of *genesis*

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On Tape

by Laura Polley

Best of Non-Fiction

And though your dreams may toss and turn you now
They will vanish away like your daddy's best jeans
Denim blue fading up to the sky
And though you want them to last forever
You know they never will...
And the patches make the goodbye harder still

Cat Stevens, "Oh Very Young"

Intro

When I was young I sang songs with my father. He would open the big stereo console by the living room wall and lower the needle reverently into the record groove; then we would huddle together in two heaps against its speakers and cast our spell upon the falling darkness. His baritone steady, my small voice chiming, both of us basked in a grand illusion of something eternal, something complete. I followed his cues, observed his emotions, and his favorite songs became mine too. Barry Manilow and the Carpenters, Linda Ronstadt and the Eagles—my memory of Dad as a happy man fuses irretrievably with the sounds of the 70s.

Verse One

I had no idea, then, that my wholeness was not permanent. I thought things were either perfectly intact—neat and tidy on a shelf or in a cupboard—or they were broken, just as neatly, and ended up in the trash. Done. No use for fragments, and no laments. But the process of growing bursts a child's world many times over, popping illusions like cloudy bubbles, until the adult emerges bruised and contorted, looking back on childhood dreams like so many shed and hole-ridden skins. I am older now than my father was when he shared his music with me, and as

the generation gap closes, my perspective approaches his.

Back then, I see now, Dad was still hopeful enough for dreams. His breathless youth still boiled and bubbled, not yet evaporated, not yet burned dry. And I mimicked him in that too, believing in wonders not yet distilled. I let the songs play and never thought to savor them. They were just media that I associated with Dad. But my father used the music proactively, as an escape—like a tape overdubbing, erasing by replacement the bitter surprises of his life. For me, that big stereo was just a console; for Dad, it was consolation.

Verse Two

At around ten-years-old or so, my path began diverging from my father's. I took his quietness, his air of shrewd wisdom, and applied it to the artistic aura I'd inherited from my mother. I had no interest in his world of computers, logic, or programming. My aptitudes pointed to the holistic and the abstract. Worst of all, I did not crave the "real jobs" that my father championed, and wanted only to indulge the warm creativity I felt within. Because I idolized my father, I tried to understand and to follow his directives. I knew where he had come from, because I kept his stories alive in my head. I knew he'd grown up in the 50s in the backwoods shadow of an affluent suburb, shuffling to the outhouse in the cruel dead of winter. I knew he'd been the poor kid in a school full of socialites' children, wearing hand-me-down scrubs and improvised coping skills. I knew he'd spent many darkneses staring fire-eyed out his window, hoping that this would be a night which his mother would bother to come home. And I knew that all his life his strongest ambition was to be a good father—another tape playing

in his heart, replacing the father he never knew. As the first child, I carried the unfortunate burden of being a guinea pig, a litmus test. By what other measure could Dad determine his success, or his failure, at the performance of parenthood? I was it, for eight years, until my siblings showed up, and by then I had my own clouds to chase.

Refrain

I have spent my entire life trying to patch things up with Dad, minor things like unpaid loans, minute betrayals like teenage hardheadedness. Thirty-seven years later, we have finally arrived at a wholeness again—the wholeness of a repaired pothole, or of reconstructed dinosaur bones. The seams show through. The lines are well-marked. A few long-gone pieces will elude us forever. But I realize that in applying the glue, the tape, that would repair me to my father, I have imitated him yet again. He never could stand to feel his heart break, never could stand to throw away his emotions. Like him, I would rather have the wholeness back, even if the fault lines overtake the surface—even if the sutures are all I can see.

Bridge

One night a few years ago, before Dad moved away, we took our newly mended father-daughter bond to an outdoor concert in the cornfield outskirts. It was a Barry Manilow concert, so I was surprised by the vast span of ages represented in the audience. We climbed to the top of the lawn and perched on a few square feet of blanket, chatting away the time before the show, rediscovering time together as the sun scrolled down.

My parents had recently divorced, inevitably, after nearly thirty-five years. My mother, according to my dad, had spent those years married to the church—the same church which declared, for a standard fee, that she and Dad had never been married. I knew he was lonely and had been for decades. I found myself in the strange and fascinating position

of screening the audience, trying to help Dad determine his “type,” trying to commiserate with his alienation. He felt it was no use, and said so. “See all these people, Laura, all these women? See how they have fun? I never could get Mom to have any *fun*.”

We had fun, though, me and Dad, out on the open lawn under the sky, listening to the familiar playlist of memories, the beloved soundtrack of a time gone by. For me, the clock turned back, resurrected the little girl I once had been. It was easy, under cover of sharp stars and a chilly night breeze, to imagine us huddled once more like two heaps against the stereo, applying the tape, covering our wounds.

Verse Three

A while back, I talked to my father on the phone, letting him know I’d won some award. He was happy for me, and then asked about my brother, but I couldn’t tell him anything new. As the conversation unwound, my father did too, lapsing into stories about my brother and the last time he’d punched in Dad’s door. “It was Father’s Day, Laura,” he muttered, with wistful



Benjamin Joseph Garza
Musica
23" x 16" Colored Pencil

“What we try to make newly whole is nevertheless something once broken.”

distaste. In addition to ruining the door, my brother had broken my other brother’s nose, called my father all kinds of pungent epithets, and driven my father to tear up the Father’s Day card that only hours earlier had meant so much. “Then I realized,” Dad told me, from sixty miles away, “that it wasn’t my son who had done these things to me—it was that

monster he becomes when he’s drinking.” Thinking he shouldn’t have shredded the card, my dad went and fetched it in pieces from the floor. “I taped all those pieces together, and I still have it, right here on my shelf.” I thought of Dad’s earnest investments in his first, handsome son, and of the mess our lives make of our plans. “Now it’s scarred,” I said, wishing I could cure my brother and rescue my dad, all at once. “You know how that night ended, Laura?” Dad said, and I could imagine him shaking his head. “With him in my arms. I held him and rocked him—he just cried.”

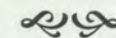
“Was he sorry, then?” I hoped for the best.

“Hell, no,” Dad said, with irritation. “He was just drunk.”

Reprise

I suppose it makes sense that my father collects his pieces, arranges them lovingly and tapes them up into a fractured, fragile whole. The multiple parts and their makeshift joints help him remember what’s left of what’s lost. I follow his lead and do the same, though I try to keep focus on the future. Some days we squint our eyes and make the past appear unbroken, and we pretend it has always been so. On other days we ignore our pretty pastiches altogether, channeling emotions to the all-consuming tasks we have at hand. But it’s hard not to acknowledge the cracks in the sidewalk square, the seams between patches, the welded links of chain. From my Barry Manilow concert to Dad’s fissured greeting card, we can’t hide from these scars that we’ve applied to ourselves. These radiating reminders keep us vividly aware: what we try to make newly whole is nevertheless something

once broken. Most days—despite our best efforts—all we notice is the tape.



Benjamin Joseph Garza
Grandure

23" x 16" Colored Pencil and Watercolor

How to Build

Catherine Coppage

My mother is gone. She's not dead, just across the street with a neighbor whose son likes to lock me outside in the dark. When I knock, he opens the door, laughs in my face, at my footy pajamas. Whispers *you're a baby* through his teeth as the sound of my mother's high-pitched laugh stops midstream and the door shuts. I make my way back across the street, eyes focused on the door to our apartment, away from the things in the trees. I ache for my father. Tomorrow, on the swings, the son will pretend to be my friend. He'll say, *get on, I'll swing you*—and so I do. But soon he won't stop pushing, even after I am almost completely upside down. He laughs. I hold on tight, and wait. These are the little things that make you.

My father is gone. He's not dead, just at the house my mother and I left after the divorce. Now we are here, with the other divorced mothers. And the son. He puts a lighter to the bottom of a Coke can and waits. I watch the bottom of the can turn black. *Touch it*, he says—I know it will burn me, I don't want to do it, but I do. I scream. Pulling me into the bathroom, he jerks my finger under the faucet and growls, *don't you dare tell*. I never have. These are the little things that change you.

Echo

Laura Polley

My sister is canvas rolled up around bones as we sit in our shoes and compare art to

art. I say artists are builders, stacking layers of meaning, just look at my poems and her

lithographed prints—but she slices the air with her arms thin as bobby pins, tapering down

to her scars at the wrists and she says "*that's so nice but you're missing the point*—

you see art is negation, making sense of what's left. It's our measurement of emptiness that gives the echo its voice."

Then she leans back, defined and I'm fifteen again, helping Mom with the baby—*this* baby, grown

brittle. I see our old home broken up into rooms, each alone with its walls, and I hear

hollow sounds: the dull ring, the deep well, my artless foundations turned to rubble in her mouth.

Charleston On My Mind

Barbara Anne Bennett

I

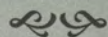
I listened for an enchanted hour to the voice of a poet from Virginia, captivated not so much by the words she had written as by the fragrance of her intonations, awash as they were in the essence of wisteria vines in spring, the hypnotic scent of magnolia trees on a sultry summer evening. In the rise and fall of her inflections, I heard once more those long, lyrical vowels capable of extending a word of one syllable into two or three; those pliable a's, e's, i's, o's and u's that seem to drawl on into infinity, the lilt of them carrying me back to my beloved city by the sea, land of my heart if not of my birth, where conversations were excuses for telling stories—where time stood still while everyone listened.

II

The reading came to an end, and with the author's final words clinging as closely to my skin as the humidity of the Carolina low country in August, I left the auditorium and drifted outside, impervious to the cool, dry Midwestern night. I imagined instead the damp aroma of the salt marshes, the pervasive perfume of pluff mud at low tide, the nipping of sand gnats at my ankles as I ambled toward my car with a slow southern stride. Still wrapped in the spell woven by a kindred spirit from the southland, I aimed my car north along Meridian Street, where stately homes hewn from Indiana limestone loomed on either side; but my thoughts had already begun to meander among the places and people so reluctantly left behind. A voice from the radio sang softly, "Carry on, sweet southern comfort, carry on," the lyrics blending with the music of Charleston on my mind.

III

I have heard that our eyes play tricks on us in the dark, and this must be so; for there was a moment, the briefest of moments, when, in the glow of the streetlamps, the scene before me was transformed and I was crossing the muddy-green expanse of the Ashley River once more, headed out of the historic district over the familiar old bridge, going west, going home. In the sudden changing of a traffic light from yellow to red, visions of live oaks draped in Spanish moss evaporated into the darkness from which they had come, and I was returned to the streets of this northern town. I felt the sting of saltwater on my cheek; my longing rose with the chorus, "Carry on . . . carry on . . ."

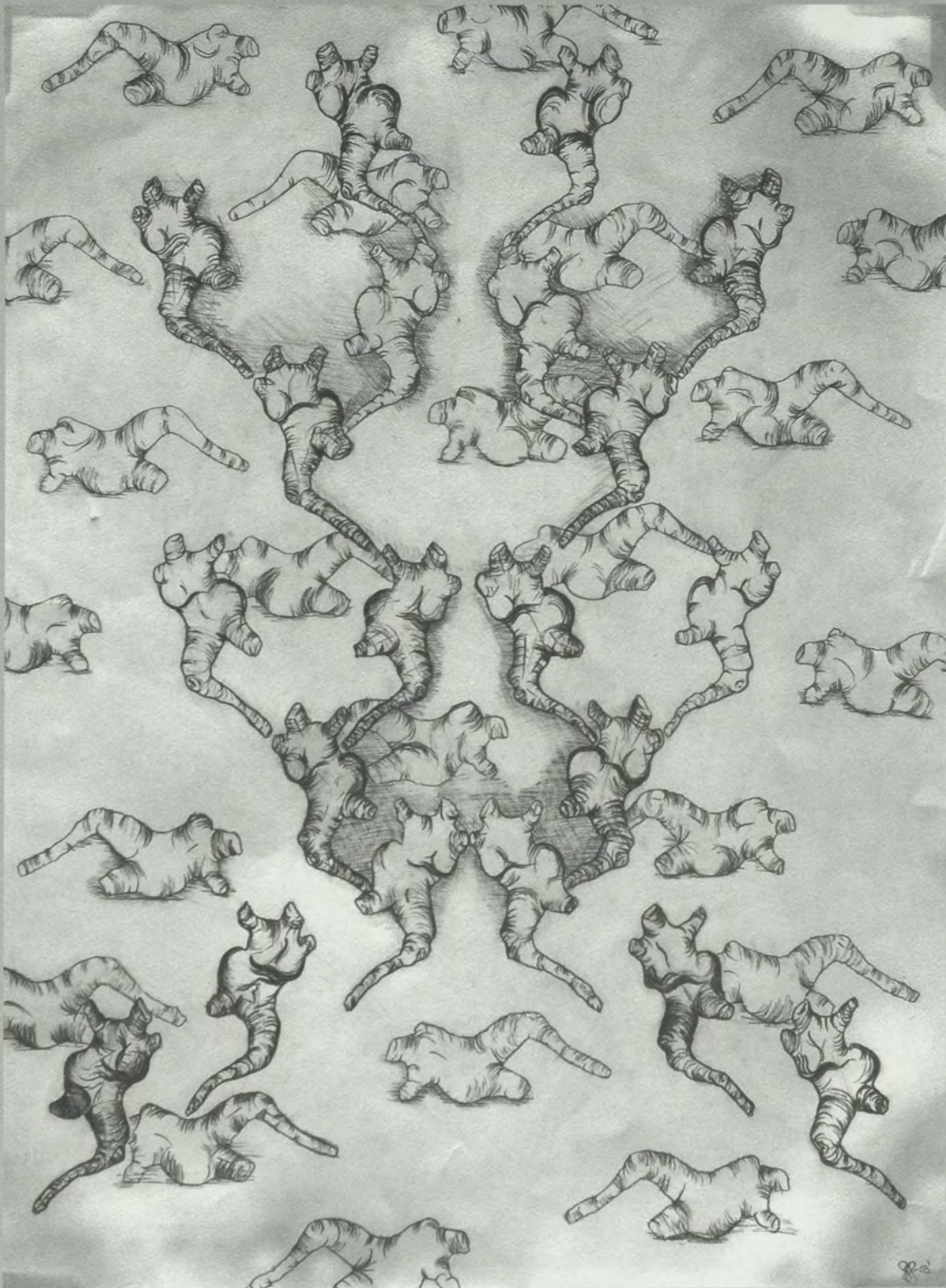


Ashley Richardson
Journey
13" x 10.7" Photograph

Sweet Sin

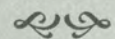
Katie Fleetwood

The thick blades of grass
bit into our ankles
as we ran barefoot through the field,
our breath rushing in and out—
in and out—
heavy, uneven gasps
that burned our lungs like a branding iron.
These were the days we came to the field—
when we squeezed forbidden chocolate chips in our fists,
sweetness that oozed between each finger.
We tried to hold in the rumbling
that tickled our throats—
the little giggles begging to be born,
even though we could already feel
the sting of Daddy's hand against our backsides.
Even still we laughed,
easing down into the grass,
watching the sun explode into a million tiny stars
that danced barefoot through the sky.
And just as the laughter began to die,
we licked sweet sin off our fingers.



Haiku for a Hot Day Karen D. Mitchell

cows swimming in ponds
black and white melts into cream
yin and yang moo song



Sarah C. Strong
Dancing Ladies
30" x 22" Charcoal on Paper

Learning Your ABC's

Laura Polley

Art is the taste of wild buttercup petals.
Before too long you'll be forbidden to eat them.

Christ is a god wrapped in gauze, dressed down.
Dogma groans when a spirit seeps through.

Elephants wrinkle with the flow of the hunt:
Faith is a great ear flapping, unflappable.

Gender will press you to pick from a tree.
Hew to the orchard, and carry no axe.

Illusion finds depth in a shallow pool;
Justice is a lung exploding at the surface.

Knit a lace from sorrow and scraps of fog:
Lock the holes together and let them stand.

Monkeys, disguised, lend bananas to apes.
Names are the hypocrite's *Origin of Species*.

Origami cranes and paper planes take flight.
Penguins without fingers unfold the sea.

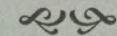
Queens collect honey from those who dance.
Rebellion is a stinger discovered by accident.

Savannas exhale, continental and dusty.
Tarantulas sigh as one with the tigers.

Umbrella bravado makes love to the sun.
Victory shakes off the rain like a dog.

While preachers and prophets would never admit it,
X marks the spot where their sins become yours.

Youth is too new for a language of nuance,
Zero too old for the logic of grownups.



Jennifer Hutchinson
Federico y Guero
11" x 14" Watercolor

A Year in Books

Katie Fleetwood

Non-Fiction

New Year's Eve.

I had to work late at the nursing home. I hosted a New Year's Eve party for the residents, and after welcoming the new year at seven o'clock, my boyfriend Brad arrived to take me to a New Year's Eve party at my brother's house. That night, when the ball dropped and the confetti was flying and all the other couples were kissing, Brad hugged me and asked what my New Year's resolutions were.

"I want to eat more vegetables," I said, "and I want to read seventy books this year."

"Whatever makes you happy," he said. Brad had read exactly one book in his life—*To Kill A Mockingbird*. Reading it had been a prerequisite for dating me. I couldn't imagine respecting someone who'd never met Scout and Atticus Finch.

January.

I read *Gone with the Wind* for the third time, a book of Truman Capote's short stories, my sixth Princess Diana biography, bits and pieces of Augustine's *Confessions*, and for a little insight into the world of all things "men," I read *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*.

February.

Started Camus' *L'Étranger*. Abandoned Camus' *L'Étranger*.

Watched Philip Seymour Hoffman portray the great Truman Capote, and shortly after, began *In Cold Blood*.

Next, there was *War and Peace*.

Brad and I went to a Colts party the day I started the book, and while Brad watched his beloved Colts get defeated, I attended Anna Pavlovna's soiree.

The ball was beautiful—the women wore their finest

dresses, and the matchmakers were mulling around. Inevitable.

Brad pounded his fist into the couch. Someone must have made a basket. Or hit a hole in one. Or made a touchdown. Whatever they did in this sport. "Manning, you've got to learn how to throw straight." He ran his fingers through my ponytail. "If there's one thing we should know how to avoid, it's interceptions."

I smiled, scooting further from him. Back to the soiree.

"Good grief..." Brad's voice was angry.

I looked over at him.

"Harrison. Get in the game. Can you believe this?"

"No, unbelievable. I wish Harrison would get in the game."

"That's my girl."

And Anna Pavlovna was greeting more of her guests.

"Dallas Clark. Now there's a real football player for you."

"Hey, Brad, I'm going to go to the bathroom, okay?"

"Sure." His eyes were glued to the television.

I tiptoed downstairs, Anna Pavlovna under my arm. I sat at the table, savoring the dances, falling in love with Natasha, crying with Sonya, until at half time, I heard the stairs creak.

Brad.

"What are you doing?" He asked, leaning against the table. He kissed my forehead.

"Reading," I replied. I placed a bobby pin in the book: the *vicomte* was about ready to tell a story about Louis Quinze.

"Best you've ever read?" Brad asked me this about everything. About pasta. About sweaters. About movies. Is it the best ever?

"Yes." I always answered "yes."

“What’s it about?”

“Oh, well there’s this lady, and she’s throwing this enormous party. Everybody who’s anybody is there. You know? One of those. And Brad, there’s this little girl—Natasha. You’d love her.” While I talked, he walked to the kitchen for a cookie. Beautiful, delightful little Natasha didn’t interest him.

“I wish you’d come upstairs and watch the game with me.”

I told him, “No, thanks.” Though he didn’t push the subject any further, he clenched his jaw. Jaw clenching never led to good things. He stood for Colts. I stood for literacy. After the game, he drove straight back to Ball State University, while I rode home with my friend, Leanne.

Valentine’s Day.

Pierre’s father was dying of a stroke.

Brad and I had planned to meet in Muncie for dinner at Johnny Carino’s. But, at 9:07 in the morning, my brother David called.

“Did I wake you up?”

He had, but I said “No.”

I can’t remember anything else he said. I only remember black. Everything was black. My bedspread. My lamp. My closet.

Brad.

Brad had had a stroke.

I-69 North.

Couldn’t see the road. Only tears. My phone rang. A lady from church was behind me, on her way to see Brad, and was watching my car swerve from lane to lane. She told me to pull over. I did, and she drove me the rest of the way. Her car moved so slowly I began to feel

angry at the speedometer. Why wouldn’t it go over seventy? I forced myself to stop watching the needle as it danced between sixty-five and sixty-seven. I turned to Prince Vassily, Anna Pavlovna, Natasha and Pierre instead.

Ball Memorial Hospital.

One of Brad’s classmates walked into the hospital, a concerned look on her face and a bouquet of roses in her arms. Her boyfriend had woken her up that morning with the flowers, a kiss and a poem. I looked at the roses; I didn’t feel social.

War and Peace.

Natasha was being naughty. Naughty, naughty Natasha. She wanted to know which pudding would be served for dinner.

People kept touching me—holding my hands, patting my head, rubbing my arms.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t feel responsible, honey.”

“The doctors said it was completely a fluke thing, there was no way anyone could have known.”

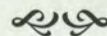
But I should have known. Had he had more migraines than usual? I couldn’t remember.

I walked into Brad’s room. His eyes were closed. I reached out and held his hand.

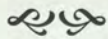
“God, make him know I’m here,” I prayed.

Brad’s finger traced an “I,” a heart, and the letter “U” on my hand.

I wanted to talk to him, but I couldn’t find anything to say. All I could think was that he might die having only read *To Kill A Mockingbird*. So I told him the story



Karolina Valentine
Sewn with Love
20" x 30" Mixed Media



Sondra Hansen
Old Master Pop-Art Portrait
11" x 8.5" Charcoal and Pastel on Paper

cried; but you can't...no one can understand...what a soul he has." She loved him so much.

I loved Brad so much. I saw him stealing apples from the apple orchard, buying me those hideous lime green daisies, driving to the nursing home to help me lead the Senior Citizen Line Dancing Seminar, singing the *Gilmore Girls* theme song at the top of his voice. What a soul he had.

Methodist Hospital.

The doctor told me he needed to remove one third of Brad's skull. That way his brain could swell without killing him.

of Guy de Maupassant's *The Necklace*. I fed him the abridged version of *Les Misérables*. I'd made it halfway through *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* before the nurses came to take him away.

The waiting room.

Brad had been wheeled off for surgery. They needed to dislodge the clot.

Sonya was crying to Nata because Nikolay's papers had come. He was going to war. She was sure he was going to die. She told Natasha, "I shouldn't have

A nurse, in the Neuro Critical Care Unit at Methodist, weaved her arm around my waist as we sat on a bench beside the elevators. "Don't worry. Methodist has some of the best neurological surgeons in the country. He's in the right place now."

Don't worry.

I never was very good at following directions.

"In another four years...then I shall ask for your hand.'

Natasha pondered a moment. "Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen..." she said, counting on her thin little fingers."

"Did you know Brad already has the engagement ring?"

Brad's sister told me, as we huddled on the floor in the waiting room. I didn't want to talk about weddings, so I pretended I was asleep. Brad's winter coat was balled underneath my head, acting as the pillow I didn't have. I felt something crunch. An unopened bag of cheese crackers sat in his pocket. Brad.

March 1st.

Brad moved to the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indianapolis. He called me as I was walking to my car after having finished my Geography lab exam. "I thought you should know I'm not at Methodist anymore."

I heard Brad's dad in the background, prompting him. "Tell her about the pool—oh, and tell her about your occupational therapist—Brad, and you should tell her that you love her."

"Bye," he said.

"I love you," I replied.

He hung up.

I arrived at the rehab hospital and saw him sitting in a wheelchair on the porch. He stared at the sky, tears rolling down his face.

"Brad?"

"It's just the way I remember it."

"What is?" I asked.

"The sun."

Pierre's wife, Elena, died. I didn't want to care—but I did. I understood Elena. Elena understood me. I already saw what was

coming: Pierre would find Natasha, Elena would have been nothing more than a stand-in wife.

March 13th.

I skipped my eight o'clock logic class and tiptoed into the gym. Brad was leaning heavily against a walker, the physical therapist saying, "Come on Brad, just one more step. You'll get it this time."

"I wish I could remember how to walk," he replied.

"You'll get it, Brad. Try again."

Brad stepped forward, his ankle twisting, falling into a heap as the therapist rushed to grab hold of him.

I jogged outside. Brad wouldn't have wanted me to see him fall.

I walked back in five minutes later to find him sitting in his wheelchair, ready for someone to wheel him to breakfast.

"Morning, Brad." I said.

"I can't walk."

"You can. I know you can."

He looked at me, eyes swimming with tears. "You don't know my body—I know my body. I can't walk. I want you to find somebody else, don't stay with me."

I grabbed his hand. "I don't want anyone else. I only want you." I thought of a book I'd read in fifth grade—a book where a Civil War soldier's leg had been blown off by a canon ball. He tried to call it quits with his fiancée, but she told him, "I didn't fall in love with your leg. I fell in love with you." I had always thought that was cheesy.

I kissed Brad's hand, "Brad. I didn't fall in love with your leg," I said, "I fell in love with you."

He turned away, his jaw clenched. I hated that clenched jaw. He was stubborn. Oh so stubborn.

I had been right. Pierre and Natasha met again.

Brad's ex-girlfriend, also named Katie, began visiting twice a week. The first time Katie drove to see Brad at RHI, she wore a shirt that read, "Kindness is meant to be shared." I felt

like she could have kept her kindness to herself. But still, she brought Brad homemade dinners, baskets full of candy, gift

certificates to restaurants, and memories of their first kiss at summer camp underneath the weeping willow.

She brought me a "Hello Kitty" coloring book.

Brad and Katie laughed together, while I pasted a smile on my face and refilled Katie's paper cup with water.

April Fool's Day.

Brad moved home.

Pierre and Natasha married.

April 9th.

War and Peace was over. I felt empty. A piece of my heart was gone.

"I think I might love someone else," Brad told me.

We both pictured Katie.

I wished that Elena hadn't died. I wanted to hug her, cry together, say things like, "Men. Can't live with them. Can't live without them." Only Elena wasn't real. I wished Katie weren't real either.

I asked Brad if he loved me.

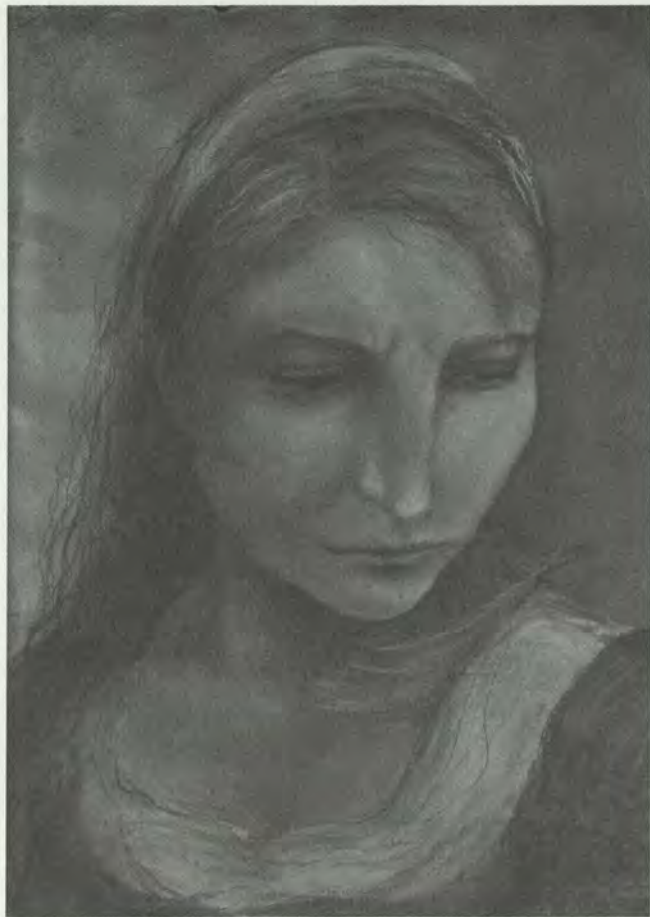
"No." He closed his eyes. "No, I don't. I don't know if I ever did."

No explanation.

I took off the blue topaz necklace he'd given me for Christmas. Amputation. I set it on his dresser beside a picture of me dancing, in a teal bridesmaid dress, at my brother's wedding. The same day Brad had shuffled up to me, cell phone in hand, saying, "I'm trying to build up my phone book; can I have your number?" The day I learned why the French called it *le coup de foudre*—a strike of lightning. Love.

I thought of a Desnos poem I'd memorized when I was younger—before I'd known what love tasted like. The words were playing so loudly in my head, I could barely hear what Brad was

"I took off the blue topaz necklace he'd given me for Christmas. Amputation."



❧

Sondra Hansen
Old Master Self-Portrait
12" x 9" Charcoal and Pastel on Paper

I remember walking to my car. I kept thinking of the scene in *War and Peace* where Natasha found her mother lying in bed, mourning her son's death. All I remember is the mother saying, "Natasha, he is gone. He is no more."

I closed myself in the car, gripping the steering wheel so tightly my palms felt on fire. I wasn't sure where to go, so I called my sister. "Andrea, he's gone. He is no more."

April 10th.

saying. "J'ai rêvé tellement fort de toi. J'ai tellement marché, tellement parlé, tellement aimé ton ombre qu'il ne me reste plus rien de toi."

"I have so fiercely dreamed of you, and walked so far and spoken of you so, loved a shadow of you so hard that now I've no more left of you."

I tried to ignore the poem—I reached for *War and Peace* instead. But it wasn't there. Because it was over. Wars had been fought; peace had come.

I remember

I didn't bother getting out of bed. Just read *You Didn't Complete Me*. I learned the first rule of breaking up is never, ever, under any circumstances, call the ex.

I called Brad.

May 4th.

My phone rang.

I was undergoing a round of shopping therapy and sat down on a bench in the dressing room. Brad's sister was calling, wondering how I was doing.

"Fine." I answered. "I'm fine." I could already feel the blood rushing to my head and knew my voice wouldn't be able to sustain a longer answer.

"Whatever happens, promise me you won't do anything to hurt yourself. I got dumped once. I parked my car on the train tracks and waited. I didn't want to live anymore."

I promised I wouldn't hurt myself.

The Hours.

Natasha and Elena were gone, but I met Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Brown, who didn't like to get out of bed. Mrs. Brown who read Virginia Woolf book by book. Mrs. Brown, who "is fascinated by a woman like that, a woman of such brilliance, such strangeness, such immeasurable sorrow; a woman who had genius but still filled her pocket with a stone and waded out into a river."

May 19th.

The Awakening.

"The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander abysses of solitude."

I read aloud, my breath slowing as I tasted the words. The sea lulled me to sleep.

June 14th.

Reread my favorite parts of *War and Peace*. I felt like I'd attended one of those five-year high school reunions. Elena was there. Pierre was at the punch bowl, Natasha grinning beside

him. We were together again.

June 18th.

I sat on a hardwood floor that was littered with wrapping paper, ribbons, and colorful birthday cards that read things like, "Now you're 21..." and "Happy 21st Birthday!" and "Roses are red, violets are blue..." I'd gotten twenty-one new books. I lined them up alphabetically—my little children.

Brad called, but I didn't answer. I was too busy reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

August 30th.

A Movable Feast. I got the call that Grandma had passed away in the night—she hadn't been sick, but somewhere between falling asleep and waking up, her heart had forgotten to beat.

I drove to Wisconsin for the funeral.

One night, as I was lying on the air mattress in the basement, clutching *War and Peace* to my chest, I heard someone moving around upstairs. I tiptoed up the steps and saw Grandpa sitting on the couch.

He was reading.

"Grandpa?"

He didn't hear me. Tears were slipping down his cheeks.

But he kept flipping the pages.

I walked to the couch and sat beside him. He didn't look at me, so I reached for his hand.

"She was beautiful. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"We were married for over sixty years, you know?"

I nodded.

"I've never slept in that bed without her. She was always there."

I listened to the rhythmic ticking of the clock, and we stared at Grandma's empty Lazy Boy, neither of us ready to say anything.

Eventually, Grandpa looked at me, pulled the reading glasses off, and asked, "Have you heard how we met?"

I had, but I said, "No."

"She was a waitress at a restaurant in Arkansas. I was on leave from the army, and the guys and I decided to stop at every restaurant with a red sign. We walked into your grandmother's restaurant, and we all ordered beer. She brought one beer for each of my friends, but a coffee for me. She told me, 'I don't date men who drink.'"

"That sounds like Grandma."

"It does." We sat silent for a minute, before Grandpa said, "You still miss him, don't you?"

I nodded. "Pretty bad."

"Badly. Don't forget the Lee Boys, young lady."

"Pretty *badly*."

"He was a fool, you know. You're a good kid."

"Thanks," I smiled. "Hey, Grandpa, remember when you used to speak in Swedish to Grandma?"

"Yes."

"You were asking her to kiss you, weren't you?"

"Of course not." He whipped his head around to look at me, "We never kissed." He paused for a minute, squinting his eyes at me, "You never kissed that boy, did you?"

I grinned. "His lip felt like a worm."

"Katie..."

"We only kissed once."

"Once?"

"Only once."

"Are you lying to me?"

"Yes." I nibbled my lip and stared at him for a minute.

"Grandpa, what do you miss most about Grandma?"

"What do I miss most about your grandmother?" His eyes looked glassy. Far away. "Tell me: what do you like most about reading?"

I closed my eyes. "I like that life changes. Everything's more beautiful when I'm reading. I feel like living's—I don't know—*worth* it when I read."

"Your grandmother made everything more beautiful.
I wanted to wake up because I knew she would be there.
You ever read C.S. Lewis?"

I nodded.

"Not just those *Chronicles of Narnia*, I hope. He's got more than that."

"I like *The Chronicles of Narnia*."

"You're a disgrace to this family. See this? *A Grief Observed*." He tapped the book's cover with his index finger. "Now, listen—this is what I miss about your grandmother." He positioned the glasses on the tip of his nose and read, "The one thing I want is the one thing I can never get. The old life, the jokes, the drinks, the arguments, the lovemaking..."

"Grandpa, you said you never kissed."

"Shut up and respect your elders, 'the lovemaking, the tiny, heart-breaking commonplace.'"

I thought of Brad. I saw him sitting at the table, eyeing the burnt chicken, saying, "I've always liked my meat well-done." I thought of the way he tied his shoes—always double knotted. One knot just couldn't do. He was standing between two parallel bars, moving one foot forward. One foot at a time. The tiny, heart-breaking commonplace.

"Grandpa?"

"What?"

"We're going to make it, aren't we?"

"Go downstairs, and get yourself a book."

I did.

But as I stared at the white page,
I watched Grandpa out of the corner
of my eye.

We were going to make it.

His pages were still turning.

Ghazal for Savage Love

Joe Conley

I want to cut you apart and to sew us together,
and the night to pass beneath our blood-stitched quilt.

I want the liquor in my midnight coffee to taste of your sweat
and my dreaming terrors reflections of your dripping face.

If the stars are as small in your heaven as they look from here
and the hearts as empty, I'll never die. I'll never be born again.

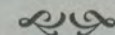
I want the streets we live on to melt into flowing gold
and the breath in our lungs to sing like boiling kettles.

I can feel your cold hands slipping under my eyelids
and see your look, blank, bloodshot in the morning fog.

I fight with your memories in my suit of tin armor
and slash at your ghost with my paper sword.

But don't be afraid of me, I'm hollow and dry,
like a bird's skeleton—slender and white and clean.

Leave me here in my nest with my ashes and skins,
but don't forget this, "Joseph, I'll always be yours."



Joe Bieschke
Celestial Bodies
30" x 40" Charcoal

I have walked in the graveyard today

Laura Polley

long enough to be lulled
by these layers of leaves, pale ghosts
of flame, stillborn, complete;

long enough to be spelled
by damp auras of trees, by decay
growing dank under planted feet;

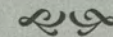
long enough to believe
this is no ground for laughter, no
carnival of music, no dissonant sin;

long enough to behold
every sight as a sign, every tombstone
a whisper of *not if, but when*;

long enough to be wakened
by a thundering deer, with his hooves
of abandon and his muscle of will;

long enough to be shaken
by his run of defiance, pounding graves
like pebbles, trampling valley into hill;

long enough to be shamed
by his mastery of antlers, his brazen
indifference to the prophecies of bones.



Ashley Richardson
Autumn
13" x 9.7" Photograph

The Octopus Jessica Gates

She rests like a queen on her throne,
not of gold, but of the eggs she laid there,
stuck to the wall of the aquarium by her own glue,
oozed out from her tentacles,
the ultimate mother, waiting, starving, craving,
suspended by her suckers and strength,
thinking that she can eat
when the baby octopi blossom and flower out,
tentacles first, into the cool, dark water.

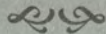
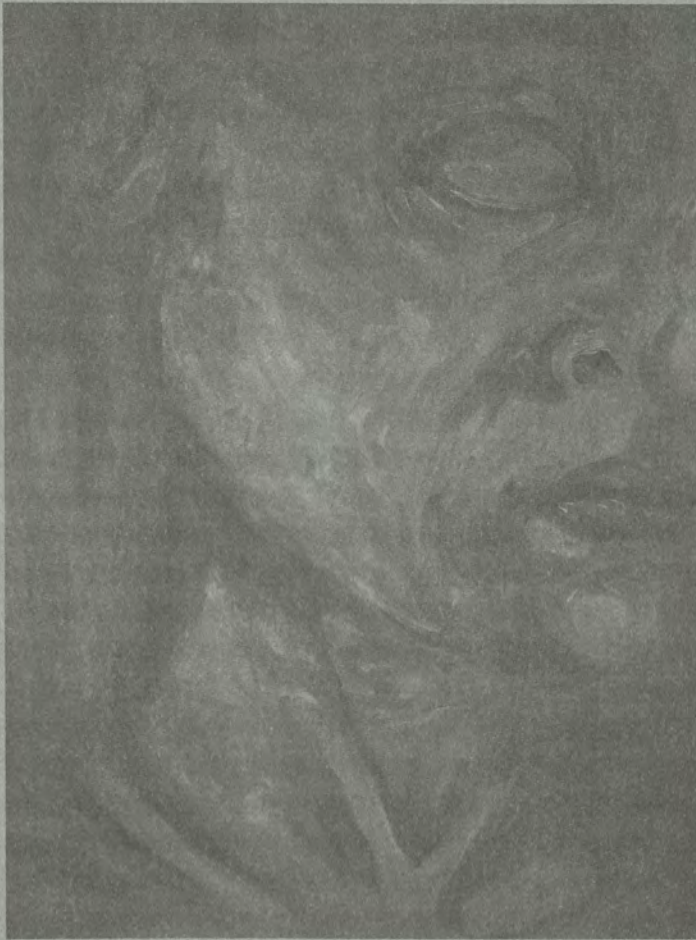
All of us pass her by,
in front of the secluded tank labeled "Octopus,"
gazing at her mysterious eyes,
overlooking the desperation, the patience,
her careful concentration and composure,
in her jar of preservatives,
her box of saltwater,
soft lights illuminating her gray skin to silver,
like funeral parlor lamps,
making her appear alive, glowing,
content to be dying,
an inescapable distraction for people to gawk at.

Yet most of us miss the sad and quiet volunteer,
gazing at her from his staff aquarium uniform,
solemnly telling those of us who will listen
that her eggs will never hatch,
and she will starve to death waiting,
while all I can do is wonder
what they will do with her glorious, tentacled body,
her suckered mane and wizened eyes,
and whether or not she'll ever release her eggs,
or if she'll have to be pried loose
with a screwdriver from the wall.

Others march around us, pointing
and shouting "Octopus!" and "Looky there!"
on around the corner,
awaiting the start of the next shark demonstration
pressed on tiptoes,
breathing face and fingertips onto once clear glass,
not knowing what it would be like
to reach the end of the sky,
stretch out clammy, trembling hands,
and have it break and shatter into your skin.



Benjamin Joseph Garza
Creation
12" x 10" Black Ink



Joe Bieschke
Head
20" x 16" Oil

Vanitas

By Jim Pavlik

We had our heads lying on the table
and you've always been prettier than me.
Your smile has always been straighter
and your eyes, so dark and seem to go so far.
My empty head only knows that what I feel for you
is love built on proximity.
There is a rose between us.

We had been drinking gin and lighting matches
tossing them one after the other into the shadows
at the back of the room.
And now the sulfur in the air was mixing with our sweat
and the tears from our laughing made rashes down our cheeks.

The room is filled with smoke and echoes
and I don't play the guitar for you anymore.
You've gotten stranger since you broke all the mirrors
and left their pieces on the floor.

You get angry when I walk away from you
and I can't step between you and the window
without insulting your actor's heart.

The house is dusty now
and heavy velvet everything
holds the funereal smell
of burning incense and drying flowers
and the ticking of the clock has gotten slower over time
and we just lay there
our skulls on the table, staring at nothing
smiling, crown touching crown,
acting the part of the naked king and queen, nearing love
after so much rest and wickedness.

Cleaning the Bones

By Joe Conley

When we got back to your bombed-out shell of a house,
we unbuttoned the citrus fruit's robe,
stripping all pith from the flesh.

We shed our skins
in your bathroom,
left our husks in the tub,
and fled west in a stolen car.

We skinned a black rabbit,
a stray German shepherd,
and a flock of squab doves
in the unpaved courtyard of a church.

We flew to the Arctic, shaved
polar bears' coats, blew away
all the igloos, sucked the blubber
and ambergris from great whales.

Next we sloughed houses
from cities, cities from states,
rotted the people from the highways.
We erased all the armies from war.

We stripped thunder from clouds,
scoured trees from the hills,
dug the soil from the earth,
poured the seas into the sky.



Benjamin Joseph Garza
Contessia
11" x 17" Black Ink

We took the fire from the sun,
put Saturn's rings on our fingers,
ripped the stars out of heaven,
and scuffed the silver plating off the moon.

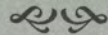
We found God and the Devil
arm wrestling by the river.
We stole their crowns, gouged their eyes
and made them wander blind in the desert.

Now we live in a naked universe,
and we shiver all of every day.
Clean, bleached skeletons rattling
together in the new, unsullied cold.

Politics & Pantomime

Taylor Lamm

A man gestures wildly on a street corner
as the world responds in sound.

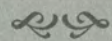


Ashley Richardson
Fizz
11.8" x 8.9" Photograph

pudding (Bajan Bread)

Kimberly Licorish-Holly

I think of it, the bowl of pudding
mix in my grandmother's lap.
She sat on her old hammered chair,
her arms twined around the bowl,
the way she must have held her children.
My grandmother slapped, turned
thick clouds of yellow dough
over into itself, the way cornmeal
is rolled in okra to make coucou.
Her feet rocked back and forth
to the beat of her slapping spoon
as she scraped the brown sugar, eggs,
vanilla, and flour batter from the bowl's
edge. As she whipped, the batter smelled
like morning glories. I watched her pour
it into dented silver pans,
as if it had a life of its own,
watched it rise, like my mother's chest
when I buried my face
between her golden breasts.
They too smelled like pudding.
I thought my grandmother a god
who produced food from her lap,
molded and shaped by her hands.

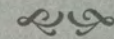


Rachel Geesa
Sea and Oil Rig, Azerbaijan
8" x 12" Photograph

The Migration of Sea Roaches

Kimberly Licorish-Holly

We plucked eggs from the back of sea roaches
as they marched up the ledge
of the crevice cliff. Their bronze wings
heaped with eggs like caviar on crackers
or the skin of sugar apples.
Your lips moved down my neck and you nibbled—
the delicate pinch of insect legs.
It was my first time. Your curly black hair
feathered my inner thighs. You wiggled
between closed legs, spread them like a pair
of wings, pressed firm. The tattooed print
of blood resembled dissolved eggs on our tongues.
The sea roaches found their way back to the sea
as you did so many times. I watched
as they marched up the ledge of the crevice cliff,
waiting for you to return.



Jennifer Hutchinson
Sad Girl
14" x 11" Watercolor

A Midwinter Night's Hallucination

Fiction

Joshua Cook

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

WILLIAM THE C. insolent mailroom laborer

NIGHT MANAGER of mailroom & dock

EMPLOYEE POINT-THREE

EMPLOYEE POINT-FIVE

TODD a little boy

BESPECTACLED GRANDMOTHER a high-toned old Christian woman

JESUS CHRIST AND KOALA BEAR

COWBOY

BUM

THE MEANING

“Delete the feeling. Delete the feeling.” Manic Street Preachers

SCENE: *The loading dock of any small, Midwest American newspaper, 3am. Complete and dead cold: the three huge garage doors at entrance to dock are wide open, and it is wintertime. The place is an utterly dismal, stinky swamp: rats crawl and snakes slither hither and thither. Three figures are sitting on a long bench spanning the dock. First, on the far left, is Employee Point-five, an elderly woman who chain smokes, coughs and does crossword puzzles incessantly. Employee Point-three, a dirty, toothless old man of about the same age as Point-five, sits Indian-style on the far right end of the bench, sucking childishly on his thumb, which, we will find later, is the color green. He is looking up at the far wall, on which a great portrait of Bill Gates is hung. William the C. sits directly in the middle of them, with a free space of at least ten feet on either side. He is reading ancient Chinese poetry that he can't bring himself to understand.*

We can see through the large doors and outside of the building. At the edge of the parking lot shines the clear, bright water of a river which was once a paved road. Somehow, in the freezing cold, the water has refused to turn to ice. No one can explain it, but then no one speculates, either. A broad, red covered bridge leads across the river and into a dark, vast, forested area, in front of which stands a sign. As one goes in, the sign reads, “In omnia Paratus,”¹ and as one goes out, it reads, “In medias res.”² Infinitesimal lights, about the size of the eye of a needle, flicker occasionally in between the shadowy leaves of the forest.

Back on the dock, there is a general aura of boredom and silence, until Point-five raises her head from the crossword puzzle and breaks it.

POINT-FIVE (*melancholically*):

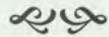
And here we are, working for a living,
But not living as we once had liked to;
For we are true failures, godless beings—
Or are we the pawns of Fate? Neither youth,
Nor reputation helped us land a job
(*Points to picture of Gates.*)
So lucrative; we are wretched, forsooth.
Yet our door to dreams still has a gold knob.

WILLIAM (*looking up from book*): A most profound poem—and the conjunctions serve the function well.³ But I do think you would be much better off if you were to trade in the knob for some cold, hard cash. The money from it would surely get you out of this job, which pays pennies for the hour.

1. *Latin.* Ready for all things.

2. *Latin.* In the middle of things.

3. The first words of each line of Point-five's poem are each conjunctions, or joining words.



Josh Green
The Portraitist
10" x 5" Photograph

POINT-FIVE (*esoterically*): My metaphors are lost on the close-minded.

WILLIAM: Ah! A starving artist. Your statement would be true, if only it weren't false. I simply fail to see any significant metaphor in the golden knob. Then, if one were to think further on it—a tedious activity which most of our fair land's citizenry would certainly decline—one might begin to speculate that the knob refers to the door itself. Alas, you had referred to the door earlier in the self-same line, thereby rendering null any chance for synecdoche. So in rebuttal to your accusation that I, as a close-minded individual—which I may very well be—am unable to catch your quick metaphors, I respond

that you had no metaphor to begin with. It was only a *statement of fact*, which has no place here. Besides, I was only offering you some advice.

(*Todd enters from the mailroom through the door, advances to the right of the bench, and hides behind a few stacks of local newspapers.*)

POINT-FIVE: I'm sorry if I happen to hurt your feelings, but I don't feel like getting into any deep philosophical, philological, or logiological⁴ discussion about poetic terminology with you. It's not in my nature, and anyhow, you creep me out just a little. Tut! (*mockingly*) Synecdoche—*vasectomy*, more like it!

4. A nonsense word. I wouldn't begin using it to impress my friends if I were you.

WILLIAM: I have no feelings to hurt; my heart is made of stone. (*looks coldly at her*) But you, I'm sorry to say, have just done yourself in. (*Points his finger at her, and she spontaneously combusts into flames, leaving nothing but a pile of dark ashes in the shape of a ten-gallon cowboy hat.*)

TODD (*surprised*): 'SPiece!⁵ A plague on both your testicles.

WILLIAM: I'd wish the same, if the disease were serious enough to have me admitted into a hospital: anywhere—inside the Beltway, even—is sublime Heaven when contrasted with this dismal swamp of a work place. (*Point-three snatches a rat in mid-run, lifts it to his lips, and gives it a little kiss.*) I would freely give my soul for some divine way of combating the awful stench of this place.

(*Not long after this last sentence is spoken, the painful sound of a firing ignition is heard from the forested area across the river, and a pair of bright white headlights is seen through the trees. The vehicle crosses the red bridge; as it approaches we see that it is a sky blue school bus. Smoking, screeching and sputtering it comes to a halt in the parking lot just outside the dock. The door opens; the driver emerges. Flourish. It is Jesus Christ, clothed in traditional white robe with halo. He is strangely Anglo-Saxon. From his right shoulder protrudes an obtrusive tree branch, upon which a Koala Bear is perched, carelessly munching on Eucalyptus leaves.*)

WILLIAM (*celebratory*): Like a thief in the night!

JESUS (*confidently, brushing his sleeves*): As was prophesied by me.

WILLIAM: What's been the holdup? We've been waiting two thousand and five years! So much has been done in your name, man! Not even a call—a letter—a text message!

5. Atavistic reference to mild expletives of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, such as "By Christ's foot" or "By God's Blood." Here, it would apparently mean "By God's codpiece." During the 15th and 16th centuries, a codpiece was frequently worn by men as a covering for their genitals. "Atavistic:" Pertaining to a throwback.

JESUS: It is written in the most apocryphal of apocryphal scriptures—the enigmatic *Gospel of Ted*—that the Messiah will come, but only when the earthly stench is so atrocious that mortals wish for a divine way of combating it. Which, unless I am wrong—which I am never—you have asked for, only several moments ago.

WILLIAM (*scratching his noggin*): Hm. That's funny. I've never heard of a *Gospel of Ted*.

JESUS: You wouldn't have. The book was so offensive to Tertullian,⁶ the great Christian theologian, that he heartily ate the pages upon which it was written and pooped them out onto a large bonfire. My hearing of this unheard-of Gnostic gospel is thanks to my intellectual friends, Tart and Trizzy, with whom I meet at Denny's regularly for coffee and conversation and an occasional game of chess. Trust me on this one: they are young, hip, modern intellectuals and know everything. But to inform you of such rich, albeit erased, history is not the purpose of my Coming here. (*pulls a small golden cross from his back pocket, hands it to William*) Rather, I Came here to give you this.

WILLIAM (*perplexedly*): OK. So what is it?

JESUS: It is a *cross*, shit-for-brains. But it is also a deodorizer: a *divine* deodorizer, if you will. And would I be wrong in presuming that that is what you had wished for not some moments ago?

WILLIAM (*thinking back on it*): No, indeed I did wish for a divine way of combating the fumes of this fetid hellhole.

JESUS (*excitedly*): Fantastic! And the Good Lord and I have a Divine Monopoly, of sorts, on Divine Deodorizers. (*enterprisingly*) Refresh my memory, if you will, William: What was it, exactly, that you said you would give in

exchange for a way of combating the cesspool-like stench of this insalubrious swamp?

WILLIAM: I'm not telling.

JESUS (*chuckling*): Oh come on, man; don't be a baby. Spit it out: you're talking to the Messiah here—who knows all and sees all—the Alpha and the Omega, the—

WILLIAM: I can't—I can't—I can't—

JESUS: You can, and you will! Now out with it!

WILLIAM: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK! I said I would give my soul—there! Are you happy?

TODD (*poking his head out from behind newspapers*): Fart! Flibbertigibbet!⁷ Flub-a-dub!

JESUS (*ignoring Todd*): Once again I have been proven right.

Now, perhaps much to your chagrin, I will be forced to collect what is rightfully mine. You see, running a place as vast and golden as Heaven has become quite an expensive operation. What with overhead costs growing rapidly with the passing of each and every day—hour—minute, even—there is a continuous flow of new recruits lined up at the Pearly Gates; Christians are dropping like flies these days! (*indignantly, almost homosexually, perhaps with a lisp*) You don't want to know how much we spent on renovations over the course of this past fiscal year. Let me tell you, it's an ungodly outrage how much the construction crews are charging for materials and labor—simply *ungodly*. And don't even get me started on our thankless tenants. The Man Upstairs and I have given these ungrateful little suburbanites an eternal place of residence, for free, no less, replete with running water, air conditioning, and included utilities; yet they continue to protest that there's not enough *entertainment* in Heaven. "We want Hanks," they chant, or "Where's the Donald?" They fail to understand that we, being in the highest level of Heaven, are entirely too far out of range for satellite reception. But Father and I are still working on some way of giving them what they want, which

7. A funny looking word, borrowed obviously from Shakespeare.

6. Tertullian (c. 160 - 240 A.D.). Great Christian theologian. The author of various diatribes against paganism and Gnosticism, Tertullian was an Asshole with a capital "A."

**"Get a load of this:
No taxation without
Clay Aiken."**

is why we've recently imposed a small tax on each citizen. It's all for their own good—you know, so they can watch their little *televisions*—but they came right back with such an outcry that you would think they had never paid taxes before. Do you want to know what their newest protest slogan is? Get a load of this: “No taxation without Clay Aiken.”

WILLIAM: Christ, you may benefit from one of the most popular sayings by the great Basicles.⁸ Tell your subjects, “There are only two things you can be sure of in Heaven: Death and taxes.”

JESUS (*wryly*): An insightful insight. Thou art a noble scholar.

WILLIAM (*taking offense*): Are you mocking me? (*in retaliation*) You are—a Messiah.⁹

JESUS: Thus spake Zoroaster.¹⁰ You have tested the limits of my ever-enduring patience, you decadent pseudo-playwright. Failing to give me your dues for my extremely generous gift, you have chosen your fate. What was it that I once said? (*remembering one of His own maxims*) Oh yes: “Let he who has no sin cast the first stone.” I, being the Christ, am therefore free from sin. (*Picks up a rock and heaves it towards William. He misses on the first throw; the shot bounces off a window and lands on the bench next to the cowboy hat. His second effort is successful; he knocks William in the forehead.*)

8. William the C., as a charlatan, prankster, and mock-intellectual, has a habit of contriving his own scholarly authorities. Basicles, w may assume, was a nonexistent Greek philosopher of the trivial or obvious.

9. Quasi-ironic echo of Iago's response to Brabantio in Act One, Scene One of Shakespeare's *Othello*: “You are—a senator.”

10. A play on two famous works; first, *Thus Spoke Zoroaster*, by the German composer Richard Strauss; second, Nietzsche's influential *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. It would appear that Jesus is attempting to belittle William by calling him an ancient Persian prophet, but here we believe the insult is altogether ineffective and the author is just plain not making sense.

WILLIAM (*rubbing his forehead, dramatically*): I've been hit! Call in the boss!

POINT-THREE (*standing up as if being called to attention*): Manager! Manager!

(*Enter Night Manager from mail-room door.*)

POINT-THREE (*saluting*): All rise for the President of the Press, the King of the Classifieds, the Sultan of Syndication—

(*They rise.*)

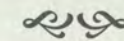
MANAGER: Be seated!

(*They take their seats.*)

MANAGER: Now then. What's all the commotion?

WILLIAM: You see, sir—ouch, that really hurt, Jesus—I was simply keeping to my own affairs, preparing for a hard night's work, making sure all the important equipment was in working order,¹¹ when all of a sudden this gentle Savior appeared from the forest across the way. He then attempted to obtain illegal funding by forcing this “Divine Deodorizer” on my person and requiring me to pay for it.

11. This is a lie. There is no important equipment on the loading dock. However, it is okay to lie to your boss if it will get you out of serious trouble.



Joe Bieschke
Upstairs/Downstairs
30" x 24" White Pencil on Black Paper

MANAGER (*angrily*): Harassment! Extortion! (*noticing Point-five*)
And what is the story behind yon cowboy hat?

WILLIAM (*guiltily, twiddling his thumbs*): Well—um—you know, sir, I'm not really sure as to what went on there. It just kind of happened. Chemical reaction, I suppose?

JESUS: Have you ruled out the possibility that it was the will of God which brought this about?

MANAGER (*with increasing anger*): The will of God? The *will of God*? Look, Jesus, you may very well be the King of Kings, but your philosophical philosophies have no place here! I've got a business to run! (*points to the cowboy hat*) What you see before you was once damn near a whole one-half of a human being. And now? Do you realize that I'll be required to hire someone else to take the place of that cowboy hat? Well, do you? I'll bet that hat is still on the clock! Point-three, go clock the hat out this instant!

(*Point-three runs inside the mailroom.*)

JESUS (*calmingly*): You fail to grasp the important thing that comes out of all this. That hat is a good hat. It will someday make a certain cowboy very proud. Don't get your knickers in a bunch. We'll rally the armies of compassion and find another employee for you, one much more committed to the job, of course, since he or she will have been rallied by the armies of compassion. (*The Koala Bear perched upon Jesus' shoulder begins to dance.*)

TODD (*out of nowhere*): A bull's scrotum!

MANAGER: Little boy, you have just described this entire situation in a nutshell.

JESUS (*clearing his throat*): If I may be so bold as to redirect the conversation to the reason for my Coming here. (*pulls out a gun, points it at William*) Pay up man; your soul or your life.

WILLIAM: What's the difference?

JESUS (*didactically*): Essentially the issue boils down to ontology,

my boy. Or semantics, whichever one floats your boat. You take the soul, for instance... (*His mouth continues to move, but no words come forth. We might hear faint jazz music from somewhere in the distance. As this is going on, a Bum enters from outside and interrupts Jesus' soundless speech.*)

BUM: I'm a remote control car; give me ten dollars!

JESUS: (*Reaching into his back pocket, he pulls out his wallet and hands Bum an indistinguishable bill.*) Here's a twenty. Now get out of my sight!

BUM: Five more dollars, man, five more dollars.

JESUS: I said get out of my sight! (*Bum hobbles off to side*) And now a song. (*Jesus sings this short song to light piano accompaniment, which comes from an undisclosed source.*)

Song

That bum, that bum, it's not his fault
he's poor, does drugs, made me distraught.
For he's but a product of "society,"
and you can't spell that without a "T,"
which, when lowercase, is a cross like one
long, long ago I died upon.
Thus bum and Christ are one; it's true.
I hope my meaning's not lost on you.

(*He smiles, and gives a thumbs-up to everyone present.*)

WILLIAM (*expressionless, robotically*): I am close-minded, and your meaning is lost on me.

JESUS: What do you mean? The Meaning is quite written all over your face. (*He holds a small mirror up to William's face, over which The Meaning suddenly appears written in non-toxic, washable black ink.*)

WILLIAM (*confessional*): I guess you've got me there, Jesus. I've been caught up in a meaningless search for Meaning my whole life, only to realize that it was right here, written across my face.

JESUS: Excellent. And now a song—

MANAGER (*breaking in*): No! No more songs! Listen, Christ, it's time to get down to business! This charade has gone on too long, and is getting nowhere! We're talking aimlessly of the Meaning and this and that, and you, with your schlematic¹² jargon and your little songs—we're only running around in circles!

JESUS: I would have preferred triangles. It evokes images of the Trinity: Father, Son (which is me, of course) and Holy Ghost.

WILLIAM: But what about the Bum? If he is you, and you are him, wouldn't he be the newest member, or something? Why don't you rename the Trinity the Tetrad: Father, Son, Ghost and Bum.

JESUS: Yes! And it's a good thing I thought of that, too. Another grand idea, by me.

TODD: Malignant Mooching Messiahs Make More Mistakes than Prodding Pariahs—¹³

JESUS (*furiously, directed towards Todd*): Blasphemy! Revoke your statement! Immediately!

TODD: Not for all the tea in China!

JESUS (*with fomenting hatred*): Take it back now!

TODD: No way!

JESUS: Take it back I say!

POINT-THREE: (*returning from mailroom to declare recent discovery*)
My thumb is green.

MANAGER: What of it? Get back to work! Time is money and you're on my time!

POINT-THREE: You are my time and I am your money.

TODD (*as if pointing out important truth*): Money lies in the wilderness.

12. Night Manager's corruption of "semantic."

13. The author apologizes for this useless poetic outburst; he had been reading Allen Ginsberg shortly before sitting down to write this section of the work.

JESUS: Truth is money and money is—

MANAGER (*interrupting*): Salvation! Now get to work, you derelict!

POINT-THREE (*determined*): I will travel to the wilderness to plant and cultivate money with my green thumb.

JESUS: There is no wilderness left.

MANAGER: You're not going anywhere. (*Point-three is already gone.*)

WILLIAM: Monsieur Le Vert-Pouce est entré dans le désert inexistant.¹⁴ (*slightly irritated*) Who's that over there? (*pointing out to parking lot*) You there, what's the idea?

(*He is referring to the Bespectacled Grandmother, who for some time now has been standing out in the parking lot with her head cocked to the side and her hand cupped over her ear, as though she were trying to listen to a private conversation through an invisible door. When she sees she's been espied, she puts on a casual act.*)

GRANDMOTHER (*innocently*): Oh...well, certainly you people must understand that I only had in mind to catch a glimpse of and hear a few comforting words spoken by the Son of God. Don't you understand? (*When no one says anything, her tone becomes that of desperation.*) The King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Carpenter of Carpenters; the sweet Lamb—the way and the truth—

JESUS (*loudly*): Truth is money!

GRANDMOTHER: —and the light; the character represented by the Fish on so many bumper stickers—the Prince of Peace, I'm telling you!

JESUS (*gruffly*): You've got me all wrong, Grandma. See, I'm so sick of groupies like you claiming to *know* me...to be *special friends* with me...to *pray* to me, asking for *cars* and *jobs* and *money*. You people make me want to vomit.

(*He approaches her, his arms outstretched as though he's planning on wringing her neck. She cowers back with fear, uncertain of what*

14. French. Mr. Green-Thumb has gone into the nonexistent wilderness.

to do. *As this is going on, a Cowboy enters from side, riding a white horse and holding a powerful dart rifle.*)

COWBOY: Freedom of expression! *(He fires a shot into the skin of Jesus' neck.)*

JESUS: Deus ex Machina!¹⁵

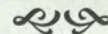
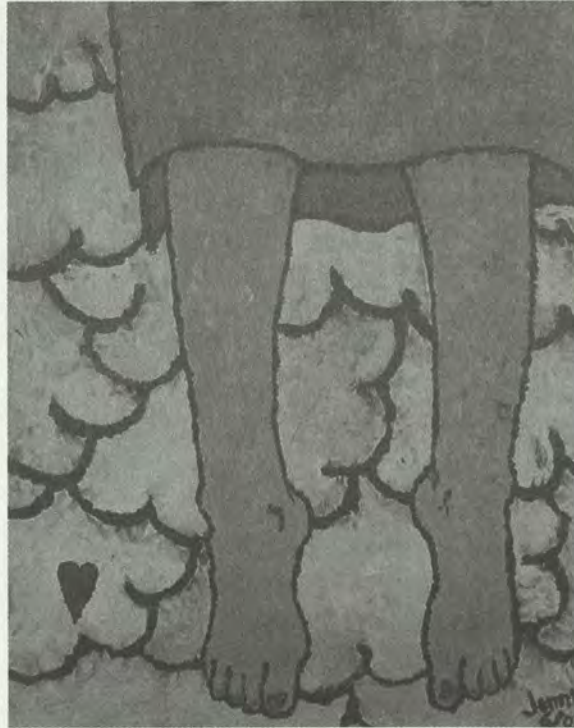
(The dart, having penetrated his neck, has caused a leak; we hear a high-pitched squealing sound, and gradually, Jesus deflates until he resembles nothing more than a toy punching bag which has been deprived of air. The Koala Bear that had been perched upon his shoulder walks around aimlessly for a moment, taking in the scene from the pavement. He appears to be smiling as he looks around at the characters, and his last gesture to humankind is a shrug before he disappears in a puff of purple smoke.)

WILLIAM: My friends, we have just witnessed the culmination and deterioration of the Great Accident.¹⁶

COWBOY *(in perfect John Wayne fashion)*: I don't know about that, sailor, but I do know that this here Savior sure warn't no Son o' God. *(points to the toy punching bag)* Look at his gentle remains; no Messiah o' mine'll be Messiah'n me up to Heaven lookin' like that. *(notices the cowboy hat of ashes on the bench)* Well, what in tarnation—

15. *Latin.* God from a machine.

16. ?



Jennifer Hutchinson
When I Left Mexico
20" x 16" Acrylic on Canvas

if it warn't m'lucky day. *(Dismounting his horse, he walks over to the hat, picks it up and puts it on his head.)* A perfect fit. Now if y'all'll excuse me, I've got a war to win. *(Mounting his horse again, he rides off into the darkness, much to the consternation of the remaining characters.)*

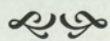
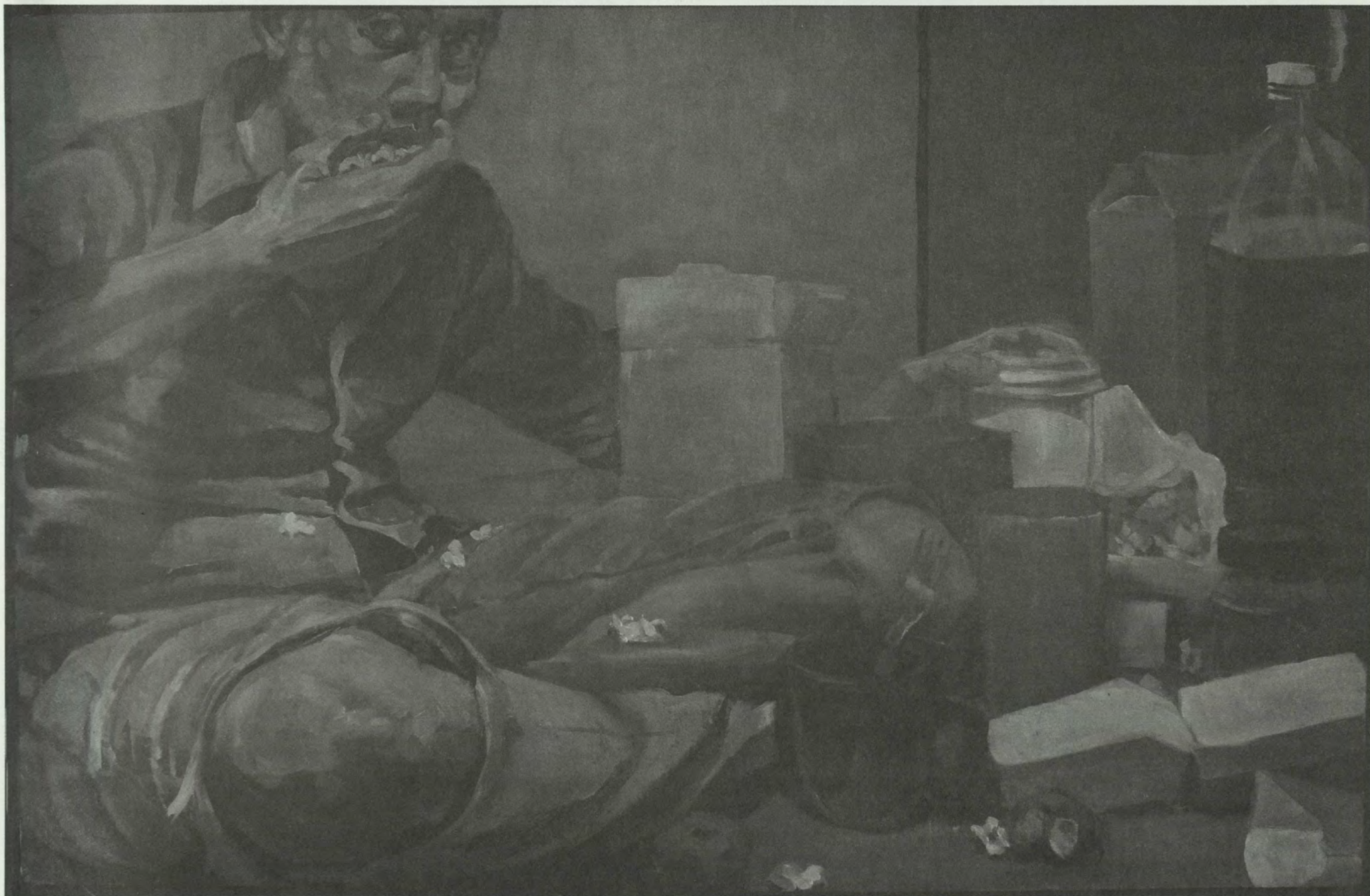
WILLIAM: What is the Meaning of all of this? *(Curiously, he begins to pull at the printed words on his face until the ink, spinning and undulating, flies free from his face, hovering above them like a whirlwind, which he now addresses.)*

Who—or what—are you?

THE MEANING *(godlike)*: Vox et praeterea nihil.¹⁷ *(The Meaning, as whirlwind, continues to spin, gaining momentum and size, until it is about as large as a small tornado. We would expect it, then, like a tornado, to tear down everything in its path—trees, buildings, woodpeckers—but it does not. Instead, it sends a beam of blue radiation forth, and everything it touches, including the mail room, the bridge, the forest, and the remaining characters, are now seen to be melting, much like a pack of snowmen standing in a sun-infested winter landscape.)*

(Dissolution.)

17. *Latin.* Voice and nothing more.



Heather Shebeck
Hungry
22" x 33" Oil on Canvas

Nevada Gray Matter

Clint Smith

At once, capturing this range holds sway
over my senses—my preoccupation, so
I might (soaring above) transform the black-pined, snow-
sloped mountains. Stone vertebrae giving way

to the adobe dust of Nevada. Here (just west
of Vegas) Joshua trees are scorched; their branches
torched as a methodic precaution; no chances,
hence the practice of controlled burns—lest

the precious flora be wiped away outright.
The fear emanates from, let's say, the synaptic spark
of a lightning strike—the initiate lick to bark
transfigures the brittle boughs into dendrite

limbs; naïve trees now black capillaries spread
like rivulets of spilled ink against the red
rock backdrop. We too summon similar defenses—
pyromanic machinations to save or make sense

of our own memory remnants (if you can stand it). The man at
the helm sails over the canyon—announces our descent, while I
try to capture a synaptic scrap; gray fissures and folds of my
cortex twisting, turning into thirsty gullies, into granite.

Transcendence

Jessica Gates

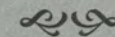
An aging woman prepares for bed every night
checking and rechecking to make certain
all lights are off, doors are locked,
and no aerosol spray cans are lying about,
becoming bombs if toppled over.

Stewing into the night,
nerves wired like a land mine
war dust and E-coli intoxicating the air
she begins to choke, reminding her of
some man that was strangled on 42nd Street a week ago
only two blocks away,
until she can finally convince herself
to sink into the recliner,
in the middle of the living room,
trade the paper for knitting
and begin to loop the thread around the needles
one stroke at a time
counting each stitch
like God knew each hair on her head
not thinking about what could come up from behind her.



Insomniac **Colleen Card**

Swimming in seas
of rumpled sheets
tossed by errant actions
of hours past
translucent minnows
dart through veins
nibble behind eyelids
feed upon self-accusations
in pools of perception
just
beyond
grasp.



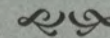
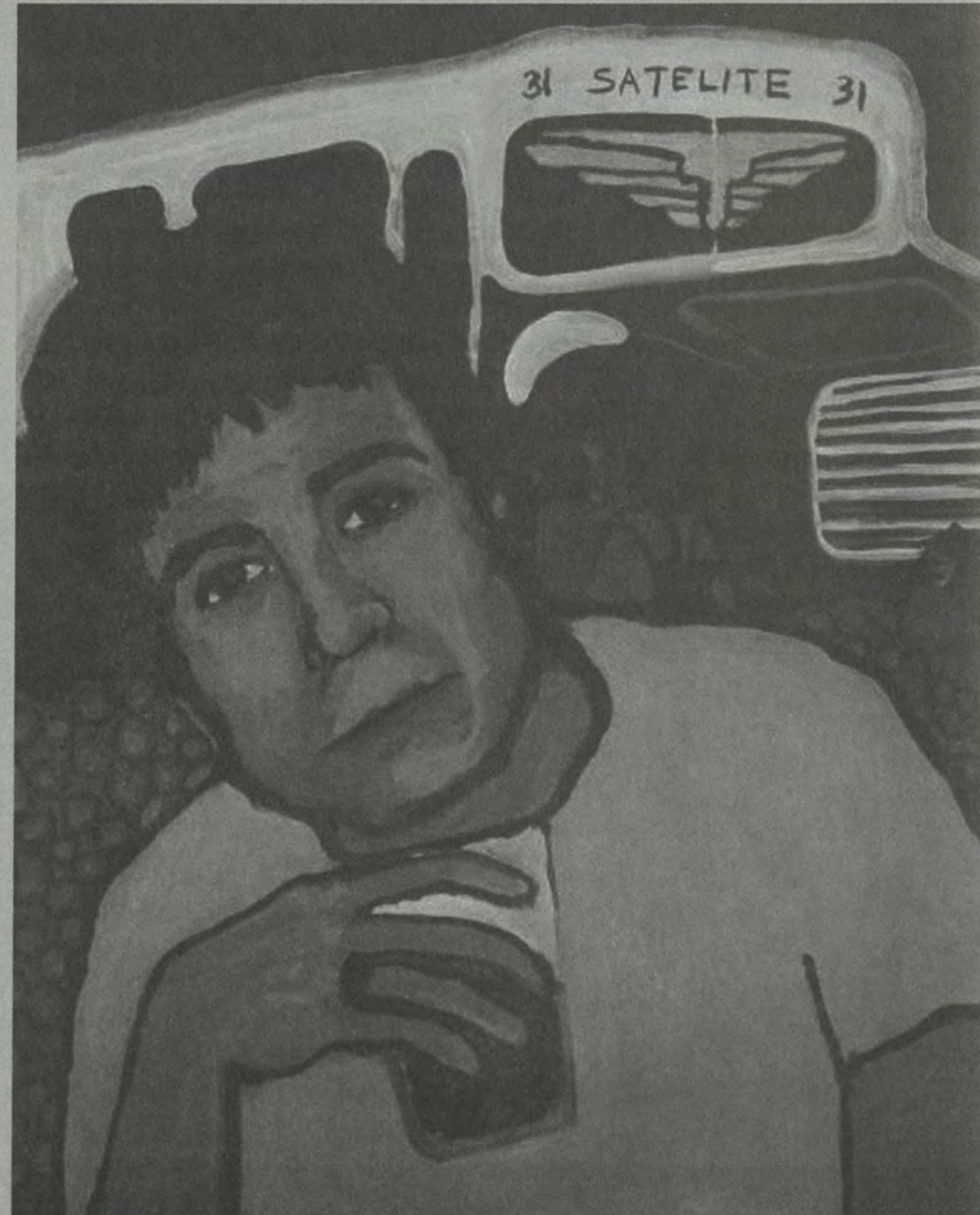
Ashley Richardson
Welcome to My Nightmare
22" x 13.2" Photograph

Aubade

Katie Fleetwood

If there's one thing Cosmo and me agree on
it's *don't have sex in socks*.
I'm sure you understand:
legs are tricky enough bare—
fat thighs, knotted calves, and butterball ankles.
Add socks and you've got more problems
than Michael Jackson in a plastic surgeon's office.
I've always felt that the no-sock rule
was common knowledge: cap your Sharpies,
call your mom on Mom's Day, don't have sex in socks.
It probably dates back to Aristotle.
But you missed the memo.
Because there you were, sprawled across your bed
wearing nothing
but socks.

The rubber-bottomed socks hugging your feet
mocked me, as leg hair sprouted between the holes
in the ankles, and blue veins waved at me from your bony knees.
I turned onto my back, counting the pictures of Brooke Shields
in the early years on your ceiling, wondering if these beloved
socks would make an appearance
if she were here. So I stared at Brooke's nose,
waiting for the light to come
dancing through your windows, and as soon
as the first sliver of daylight came,
I hopped out of bed, pulled on my t-shirt and jeans
and barreled to the door.



Jennifer Hutchinson
Bebo

20" x 16" Oil on Canvas

Illusion Caused by Refraction

Jim Pavlik

We ordered gin martinis
with pearls for garnish,
and they were green and pink and yellow and white.
And we drank them down for luck.
But sometimes they would settle in
the bottom of our stomachs and grow,
and it didn't seem like such a good idea anymore.
But we did it every night
gin martinis and a garnish pearl.
For luck.

And the hookers circled friendly,
their hands on our backs
and they were cold and warm
and made us feel like we belonged
even on the days when we didn't.

And we ordered gin martinis
with pearls for garnish,

and the businessmen looked on
from above their drinks
and tried to hide their stares
under their melting ice cubes.

And they were green and pink and yellow and white.

And there were kids fresh out of college
but older than us,
and they never called them whores
and we never called them hookers
but we knew and we laughed,
and laughing made us look younger
but more at ease, and the bartender
would look away.

And we drank them down for luck.

And the whiskey made us wince and shake
and we carried each other home
with knives in our boots
and dog chains for bracelets.

But sometimes they would settle in
the bottom of our stomachs and grow,

the stink of beer and whiskey
and the pride of being drunk
and being able to fall asleep anywhere
and be naked there
because people weren't about at those hours.

And it didn't seem like such a good idea anymore.

But they didn't sleep for fear they'd dream
and the wind with its wrinkled skin
would bite them on their arms and wake them.

So they lay still and waited
and prayed for sleep and sleep without dreams
and they pretended not to hear us
on their lawns and on their neighbor's lawns.

For luck.

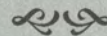
Dusk
Katie Fleetwood

And I see you.

You crawl through the rafters
of the old, old barn.
You lap up the creamy porridge
of daytime.

I lie in bed, beneath my tattered quilt
while you tiptoe along the drainpipe, seep
between the shutters,
into my room.
I squeeze my eyes tight.

And I see you.



Sarah C. Strong
First Try

18" x 14" Woodcut Print on Paper

Take Me Home

Becky Armoto

For C.T.S., a great editor and better friend.

"They're take-me-home boots."
She laughs in the night air,
dismissing the notion with words like,
comfortable and *on-sale*.

As he explains, she focuses on her boots:
the caress—soft-as-skin suede, as if made
to press perfectly against her calves;

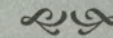
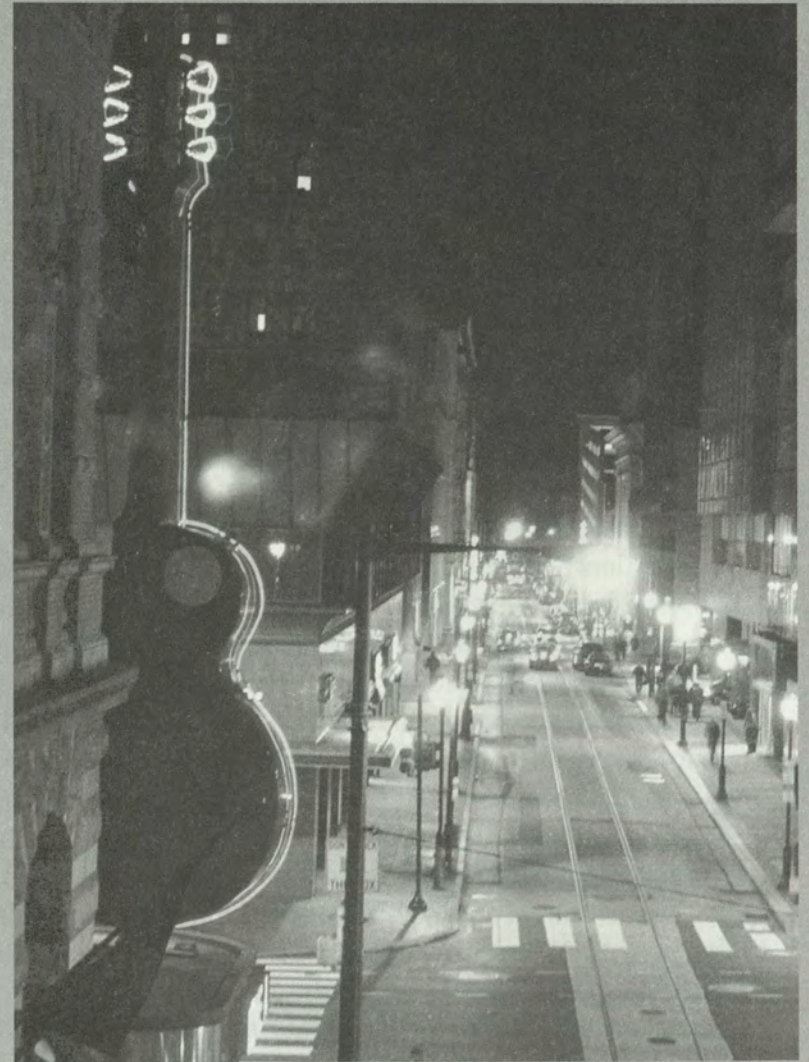
the slight whisper of a zipper
starting near the ticklish spot behind her knee,
ending along the hip-shaped curve of her instep;
the sound of heel meeting sidewalk—night echoes:

take me, take me,

She owns these six inches,

long and lean

in her stride. The next time she goes shopping,
she buys a pair in black.



Becky Vasko
Night Rock
Photograph

The Lucky Ones

Katie Fleetwood

Best of Fiction

“Cake?”

I stare at the slice of sweetness and scowl. “Are you asking me if I want cake?”

The nurse nods in her perky, I-should-have-been-a-Barbie style, and chirps, “Yes.”

“You seriously want me to eat this birthday cake?”

She creases her brow, the question too intense for her to comprehend. “Yes.”

I silently note that her answer was slower this time.

“I don’t eat birthday cake. Ever. Get it out of my room.”

She looks hurt for a minute, and I consider apologizing, but then I watch her flutter away in her pink butterfly scrubs, making a silent retreat that Napoleon himself would applaud. Too late for apologies.

In all honesty, it isn’t that I hate nurses. I’m not particularly fond of this one, but I don’t hate her. If I had to make the judgment, it’s birthdays that I hate. You see, birthdays aren’t happy occasions for me. When I turned eighteen, my girlfriend broke up with me in favor of dating her forty-five-year-old dentist. When I turned nineteen, I totaled my brand-new Mustang convertible, while backing it out of the car dealership. And this year, for my twentieth birthday, I had a stroke while blowing the candles out on my cake. No explanation for the brain clot. Just wham. A stroke. Wasn’t quite what I imagined the big 2-0 feeling like.

So that’s why I’m here, laid up in this hospital, on a rainy night in April. And just so you don’t think I’m rude—let me introduce you to my roommate. That’s Jack, over there, across from me. All things considered, I’m one lucky dog compared to

him. You hear people say things like, “Wow, you were at the wrong place at the wrong time when that drunk driver ran that light and knocked off your bumper” or, “You were at the wrong place at the wrong time when that thief made off with your purse.” But Jack. He’s a living testimony to being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Back in January, Jack was walking past a construction zone, and somehow, had an unfortunate encounter with a bucket containing seventy pounds of steel that grazed off his head. No one expected him to live, but somehow, even after they took him off life support, he woke up.

So here we are. Two scrawny twenty-year-olds, with slices in our brains and malfunctioning appendages. We’re a sad pair—Jack’s dropped sixty pounds, and I’ve lost about forty-five. Overzealous family members tote in sympathetic “bags of fun” for us. So we find ourselves with handheld electronic games, that neither of us are able to play, as I can’t move my left side and Jack can barely move his right. We’ve tried making a dual effort, but somehow, claiming half a victory on Tetris isn’t very satisfying.

It’s about ten o’clock, so it’s just Jack and me. Visitors leave at nine o’clock, and we’ve already been showered and put to bed. A few months ago, we’d have been lying here in shame after exposing the family jewels to Hendrick, our 6’5 male nurse, but now, we couldn’t care less. We just stare at the ceiling, trying to sleep.

My eyes are closed, but I hear the springs of Jack’s bed creak and can picture him leaning over the side of his bed, reaching for his leg brace. He does this every night—puts his brace on and attempts to wheel off into the sunset. But it never fails. The alarm outside the dining commons will ring, just as it has

a thousand times before, and a broad-shouldered, mustached female nurse will wheel a cursing Jack back into the room, and as she leaves, she'll pull out her walkie-talkie, and say, "Get out the harness." So I don't open my eyes. I know the drill.

"Jack, get back in bed. They'll bring you back anyway." I say, wondering if he'll listen.

"Tonight'll be different," he says.

I don't argue. I roll onto my good side and try to fall asleep. I have strange dreams now—almost hallucinations. Last night, I was in an airplane, but usually I'm pregnant with Richard Simmons, only I carry the baby in my butt. The nurse says it's my pain medicine, so I don't complain. I'd rather believe Richard Simmons was growing in my butt than feel the pain that comes from hospital life without drugs.

"Did I tell you I'll be left-handed after this?" Jack asks. I look over to see Jack scooting slowly toward his chair, calculating the distance between the bed and the chair. He squeezes his eyes closed, and sort of falls into the waiting wheelchair. He groans as he tries to reach his bad arm down to release the right brake.

I grunt in response to his question.

"Yep. I'll be left-handed," he says. I hear the door creak open, and he whispers, "See you in ten years, big guy."

I don't bother responding.

I roll onto my back. I feel my arms and legs get heavy, and the beeps and buzzes of the equipment around me compose a calming sort of lullaby. I'm almost asleep when I hear Jack's angry voice fill the room.

"Just you wait till I call my lawyer!" he yells, and I open my eyes to see Imogene, the man-woman nurse with the moustache, shove a livid Jack into his bed.

She walks toward the door, pulls out her walkie-talkie, and says, "Get out the harness."

They never harness Jack. Probably because he might really call his lawyer. See, after Jack's accident, some fancy lawyer read about the case in the paper, and took it on with no upfront

money. Now, he and Jack are settling for almost three million dollars. Jack says he'll never work again—just sit around on his butt and drink bourbon until he vomits. I say "Shut up." Jack laughs.

But he's not laughing now. "I'll call my lawyer!" he shouts.

"Jack," I say, "you want to do me a favor?"

He calms down for a minute and says, "What d'ya need?" I say, "Shut up."

He mumbles something under his breath but stays quiet. I'm almost asleep when he says, "Hey Junior."

I grunt.

"Did I ever tell you I'm going to buy myself a Taco Bell?" he asks.

"Yeah," I say, pulling my pillow over my head. "Only about a half a million times."

"Yeah. I'm gonna buy me a Taco Bell for fifty-grand, and I'm going to be richer than anyone you ever did see," he continues, ignoring my lack of response.

"Okay," I say.

"And I'm going to pay my employees more money than the Pope."

"Okay."

"Maybe even twenty bucks an hour."

"Okay."

"You want to work for me?" he asks, and I hear his bed creak. He's probably sitting up now. Jack doesn't sleep.

"Work for you at the Taco Bell?" I ask.

"Yeah, sure."

"No," I say, "I'm going to be an accountant. I'm going to work my way up to partner, and I'm going to make \$250,000 a year."

"Oh," he says, and I hear the bed creak again. Hopefully, he's laying down now. "Then I'm gonna buy me a mechanics shop," he says, and I begin to wonder if I could wheel myself over to his bed fast enough to strangle him. Probably not.

"After one paternity test, where Jack learned that ninety-nine and a half was more than the call numbers of a radio station."

Too many witnesses.

"Hey Jack."

"Huh?"

"Do me a favor?"

"Sure, what d'ya want?" he asks.

"Shut up," I say.

And then he's quiet.

"Hey Junior," he says after a few

minutes.

"What?" I ask, rubbing a weary hand over my eyes.

"You got a girlfriend?"

I look over at the silver-plated picture frame on my dresser and say, "Yeah, why?"

"Did I tell you I'm engaged?"

"Yes." I say.

"Oh, well, she's real cute."

"Yeah. Mine is too."

"We're lucky guys," he says, and I move my hand to my shaven head and wonder what he's smoking and if I can get some. I feel my fingers dip into the fleshy soft spot where my skull should be and sigh. About a third of my skull's over in a freezer in some hospital, waiting for me to go into surgery in a few weeks. My head is caved in, inhuman and unnatural, and a long scar runs from the top of my head down along my ear.

"I don't feel so lucky," I say, resigning myself to another sleepless night.

"Well, I do. I mean think about it, girls love us."

I almost laugh. "They do?"

"Yep. They do," he says. "The way I figure it, when I tell women I'm supposed to be dead, they'll want to sleep with me. They'll think it's their last chance. I could be dead tomorrow. Take Victoria. I wasn't even crippled yet and she dived into bed with me. I probably should have thought about telling my fiancée I was sleeping with her, but you know, it's hard to think on your feet. But Junior, we're lucky," he says.

"You keep telling yourself that," I say, looking back to the

picture frame. That's Annie. She's a year younger than me, and lives an hour away. We met at church about a year ago and have been dating ever since. She sends cookies sometimes but doesn't visit much. Probably repulsed by me. I squeeze my eyes closed. Jack's still talking.

"I got her pregnant too."

He must still be talking about Victoria. Victoria's been here two or three times—more often than Jack's fiancée, who works two jobs to save for the wedding—but Victoria's the mother of Jack's two-year-old son. He says they met up at a party when she was on a sex rampage. Apparently, or so he tells the story, she slept with eight guys that night, but he was the lucky winner. After one paternity test, where Jack learned that ninety-nine and a half was more than the call numbers of a radio station, his life changed forever. He stopped dreaming about college, as he began fixing junked-up cars to pay child support. Yes, Jack was the lucky guy who had the chance to father Victoria's son. Nothing like winning the lottery.

I smile, thinking of the difference between Annie and Victoria. Annie and I haven't slept together. Not yet at least. She's on a "no sex till marriage" kick, so I figure it'll cost me less money in the long run. No condoms. No post-sex trips to the bakery down the street to get her breakfast in bed. I sound crass, but I love her.

"Junior, you know what?"

"Huh?"

"You're keeping me up. I've got some intense therapy tomorrow."

I roll my eyes, and slide my functioning hand underneath my head. "Me too."

"You got Kim?" he asks.

"Nope. Tomorrow I have Suzanne."

"Uh. You are one unlucky guy. You got Suzanne," he pauses, as though letting the information set in, "I've seen a pig rolling in the mud that was cuter than she is. If I'd known what I know now, I would have been a speech therapist. I would've

come here and worked with Kim, and she'd want me. Want me bad. I'd have a whole herd of kids. Victoria'd have one of 'em, Kim would have another six, and I don't even know how many my fiancée and I could scrounge up. Women all want me."

"Who wouldn't?" I yawn.

"I don't know. Like I say, the women all want me."

I smile. "You know it."

"Hey Junior?"

"Huh?"

"Are you sure you don't want to work for me at my Taco Bell?"

"Nope," I say. "I've got my future all planned out for me."

"It's funny, isn't it?"

"What's funny?" I ask.

"Our plans. We thought we knew what we wanted, where we were going, and then, one day, you're walking down the street and seventy pounds of steel falls on your head. Everything changes."

I feel a few tears tingle behind my eyelids. I clear my throat, glad the room's black and Jack can't see me breaking down. "Everything did change."

"But you know what?"

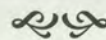
"What?"

"We're the lucky ones, Junior."

I think of Annie, an hour away, sitting at her computer, finishing an essay on "Rap as a Cultural Force" or "The Rebuilding of Post-War Germany" and I sigh. "I don't feel lucky."

"Let me ask you something, Junior. What do you want most in the world?"

"To live to see tomorrow," I answer, feeling like I'm answering a college admission essay.



Joe Bieschke
Exposed

22" x 18" Graphite on Vellum

"See. That's why we're lucky. Junior, me and you—we know what death tastes like, and we'd rather taste life. So, we'll be good citizens, you and me. We'll be the guys people will point at and say, 'Why's he always so happy?'"

I can't say anything. I'm not ready to admit that he might be right.

"Hey Junior?"

"What?"

"Did I ever tell you I'm gonna buy me a Taco Bell?"

"No," I say, and I roll onto my back.

"Well, I am," he yawns. "I sure am." And then there's silence.

I almost smile when I realize it's been about three seconds, and Jack hasn't started rating the hotness of our nurses. We're making real progress. I'm close to sleep now; I'm feeling slow breaths crawl out of my nostrils and heat my pillow. So close to sleep...

"Jack!"

The angry voice wakes me with

a start, and I watch our lights flicker on.

"Huh?" he mumbles sleepily, and I squint my eyes against the sudden brightness, trying to make out who's entered our room. "Rachel?" Jack asks.

A slim, platinum blonde marches into the room, her heels clicking impatiently on the tile floor. I wish I could tell you what her eyes looked like, because you'd be able to understand the depth of emotion boiling there, but I don't think there are words to describe the anger that fizzled inside her. If she were in a cartoon, there'd be fire rushing from her nostrils and smoke exiting through her ears. But this wasn't a cartoon. Too bad. I'd prefer reading thought bubbles than hear the waterfall of words

that flowed from her.

“Who’d you think it would be, Jack? It’s your *fiancée* unless you’ve forgotten me.”

“Nope. I haven’t. I’m about three thousand in the hole after buying your ring. I remember who you are.”

“Then why didn’t you tell me?” she demands.

Jack looks over to me, and I shrug. “Why didn’t I tell you what?” he asks.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were a cripple?” she demands.

“Are you kidding?” I ask, really to myself, but loud enough for her to hear.

She turns on me, planting one hand on her hip and flipping her carefully tinted blonde locks with the other hand. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t talking to you, baldie. I was talking to my *fiancé*.”

I rub my head, feeling suddenly self-conscious. I’m not balding early, you understand. The lack of hair is a complete result of a run-in with a razor. That’s all. Really.

“You’re crippled?” she hisses, tossing his covers aside. “Move your legs.” She demands.

Jack stares at her, as if she’s a ghost. I shiver as I watch the exchange. “I can’t move them,” he replies, his voice high and unnatural, like a child’s.

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t move them,” Jack repeats, eyes wide.

“How are we going to live? Have you thought of that?”

I wonder if Jack’s going to mention the three million, but he looks at me as if to silence me and shrugs, “I don’t know.”

“I can’t just *survive*,” she snarls. “You’ve lied to me all along, haven’t you? Tried to make me believe that everything was going to be okay. But everything is *not* okay. It can’t be. Jack, you’re...you’re...” she hesitates a minute, and I silently will her to stop before she spouts words that could emotionally handicap her *fiancé* forever. But I’ve never been telepathic, and she continues, “Jack, I’m sorry, but honey, you’re broken.” Her voice chokes up at the end, and I consider feeling sorry for her, but I see Jack, and all sympathy toward this woman vanishes.

Jack slumps against the bed, and I feel my head pound.

I take a breath, preparing my words carefully and finally manage, “Rachel, you need to leave.”

She glares at me, pent-up tears glimmering in her eyes.

I refuse to bend.

“Excuse me?” she spits the words at me, half filled with anger and half with sorrow.

“Please leave,” I repeat.

“You can’t tell me what to do. I’m...well, I mean...”

“Leave.” I state firmly.

“I’m trying to have a conversation with my *fiancé*.”

“Well, he’s not trying to have a conversation with you,” I reply, placing my hand meaningfully near the nurse call light. “Are you leaving or do you need help?”

“This is ridiculous,” she mutters, pulling her purse onto her shoulder, her fingernails digging into the fabric. Absently, I note that it’s one of those Vera-somebody purses that look like they belong to your grandmother. I only know this because Annie wanted one for her birthday, and I refused to buy it, because I didn’t want my girlfriend looking like she deserved the senior citizen discount.

“And by the way, I hate your purse,” I mutter, as she huffs on her way out the door.

She pauses in the hallway, but stomps back into the room.

“I don’t love you, Jack.”

Jack’s shivering violently now.

“Go,” I say, my eyes darting between my frozen roommate and his girlfriend.

Neither of us say a thing as she prances out of the room, swaying her hips as she moves down the hall.

Jack and I sit in silence. I wonder what I can say, but I can’t find the words. I almost consider asking if I can get hired at Taco Bell, but fear he might hold me to it, so I say, “We’re going to have to get tighter security. These women all want us.”

I wait for Jack to chuckle. But his face is stone. He’s staring at me, but he doesn’t really see me.

“Hey, Jack?” I say, “what are you thinking about?”

“Are hard shell tacos made with yellow corn or what? I mean, they’re yellow, but soft tacos are white. They can’t really be made out of the same corn, can they?” he says.

“What?” I ask.

“At the Taco Bell. I don’t have to buy the corn to make the tacos, do I?”

“Jack...”

“Probably not. I’ll just get the shells that are already made and just put the meat and cheese inside.”

“You’re thinking about Taco Bell?”

“You wanna work for me?” he asks.

“The Taco Bell, Jack. You’re thinking about the Taco Bell.”

“I’ll pay everybody twenty dollars an hour.”

“At the Taco Bell?”

“Yeah. Are you deaf? I’ll pay my employees twenty bucks an hour.”

“I know you will.”

“I’m not broken,” he says, and I shutter. He did hear.

I was hoping, by some miracle, he’d escaped to another world and had remained untouched by Rachel’s hatred.

“You’re not.” I say, embarrassed as my voice shakes. “I know you’re not. Broken is on the inside.”

I don’t say anything. I can already see Jack processing, and know he’s about ready to feed me a spoonful of Aristotle.

“Junior, it’s Rachel who’s broken. Her heart doesn’t work right. She doesn’t understand what it is to love. You know, just because my legs don’t work doesn’t mean I’m broken.”

“You’re right,” I say.

“At least I still know how to love.”

“You do,” I say, hurting for him, and knowing if I were a girl I could hug him, but as a guy, should probably smack him on the butt or punch him to show my support. He’s too far away, so I cough.

“We’re the lucky ones,” he says.

“You know why, Jack?” I ask, picking up where he left off, “because we know what death tastes like, and we’d rather taste life.”

“Who told you that?” Jack asks with a smile.

I ease down into the comfort of my bed, prop myself onto my side and yawn, “Oh some idiotic philosopher.”

“He sounds pretty smart to me.”

“Well, he’s not,” I reply.

Jack pauses a moment before asking, “So you’ll work for me at the Taco Bell?”

I groan. “I might like you, but I don’t like you that much.”

“Not even for twenty bucks an hour?”

“Are you trying to buy me off?” I demand.

“If it works.”

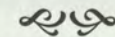
“Okay, Jack?”

“Huh?”

“Do me a favor?”

“What’s that?”

“Shut up.”



Rachel Geesa
Moving Steps, Azerbaijan
12" x 8" Photograph

Contributors' Notes

Becky Armoto works at the Indiana Partnerships Center by day, earns her M.A. in English by night, and raises her three beautiful sons with her husband. In her spare time, Becky scribbles furiously on random pieces of paper with her purple pen.

Barbara Anne Bennett enjoys writing in multiple genres while pursuing her English degree at IUPUI. She also has an interest in editing and publishing.

Joe Bieschke is currently a junior attending Herron School of Art and Design, majoring in fine arts and illustration. He currently teaches a class in comic illustration at Herron for their Saturday School community program, and he works at the Herron Gallery as a gallery monitor. An online portfolio is viewable at <http://joebieschke.mosaicglobe.com>, and an online sketchbook at <http://aphexjb.deviantart.com>.

Colleen Card is a 46-year-old mother of three beautiful daughters. She has been working on her degree since 2003. She loves language and has always immersed herself in the written word. She hopes to pursue an M.F.A. after earning her bachelor's degree.

Joe Conley is a creative writing student at IUPUI. He lives and works in downtown Indianapolis.

Joshua Cook was born in the early 1980's and currently attends IUPUI as a graduate student in English literature. He is employed as a teacher at a private school for children with autism and attention-deficit disorder. He is interested in literature as a method of initiating so-

cial protest and/or general chaos but has had very little luck with respect to either.

Catherine Coppage is a sophomore at IUPUI majoring in creative writing and psychology. She has been writing since childhood and last year began to share her work at IUPUI's student readings. She is now on the student readings committee and is currently concentrating on poetry.

Joseph Crone is a 25-year-old Herron Student. Under the inspiration of Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio, Joseph strives for perfection in his drawing technique that uses sense of lighting and detail to create a grim feeling within his work. Joseph also enjoys skipping through potato fields on a starry night.

Katie Fleetwood is a fourth year French major at IUPUI. From french fries to french vanilla coffee, Katie enjoys all things French.

Benjamin Joseph Garza is a 24-year-old Herron student living in Indianapolis. He believes that the arts are a reflection of all things, unveiling existence at its core.

Rachel Geesa is a graduate student in art education at the Herron School of Art and Design. She is currently studying various ways of using photographic images as art. She received her bachelor's degree from Purdue University in art education, art history, fine arts and photography in 2005.

Josh Green is an Indianapolis journalist, photographer and freelance writer. He helped found The Daily Sun

newspaper in Boone County, a feisty little publication. He studies English at IUPUI and has not been arrested lately.

Sondra Hansen gave up a posh Martha Stewart lifestyle to pursue a degree at Herron School of Art and Design. She now wears cruddy clothes and lives in the city with two cats, one of whom is freaky and six-toed. In her very spare, spare time, she runs and bakes kick-ass pastry.

Jennifer Hutchinson was born and raised in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. She moved to Indiana in 2003 with her family and currently attends Herron School of Art and Design where she hopes to become a more skilled artist.

Taylor Lamm is a frequent emcee, would-be writer and sometime poet.

Kimberly Licorish-Holly Words did not come easy./Abundant frustration and a powerless/pen became my constant friend./Even now as I write,/words still flee this dark empty sarcophagus—/my imagination./Sell me a poem filled with substance/to revive foolish empty words/into a language that is astonishing.

Karen D. Mitchell is obsessed with cats, poetry and the new "Battlestar Galactica." Her goals are to receive her English degree before she retires, visit Edgar Allan Poe's grave and wipe out terrorism with her growing army of feral cats. Her life's mission is to embarrass her husband and daughter.

Jim Pavlik is perfectly adept at not earning money writing, playing the harmonica or brewing beer. He has therefore rushed back to the welcoming embrace

of university life. He is studying Spanish, international studies and philosophy. His friends tell him he is doing well, but he's starting to have doubts.

Laura Polley is an English/creative writing major and a professional designer of handknitting patterns. She will begin her M.F.A. in poetry in January 2007 at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Laura believes in genre-bending, gender-bending and challenging assumptions.

Jessica Schoettmer-Gates is currently a graduate student of social work. She has always enjoyed writing and finds it to be a very healing form of self-expression. She hopes to continue writing, continue growing, continue healing and learning.

Ashley Richardson began as a student at IUPUI in fall of 2006. She is taking classes at Herron School of Art and Design and plans to major in photography.

Heather Shebeck is a junior at Herron School of Art and Design studying art education and painting. She loves eating.

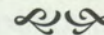
Andrea Short is a sculptor, mother of three, an editorial assistant at Journal of Teaching Writing, and an undergraduate student at IUPUI, where she spends several days each week taking art history, mathematics and whatever other classes strike her as interesting and challenging. Whenever she decides to show sculpture, Andrea is represented by Abend Gallery in Denver, Colorado.

Clint Smith is an Honors Graduate from The Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago, Le Cordon Bleu, and is currently the Chef Instructor in the Culinary Arts Department at Central Nine Career Center. In the fall of 2005 Clint received the "Best Of Poetry" award from *genesis* magazine for his poem "Lucky," and was recently nominated by Jim Powell (who does a bit of cooking himself) for a featured interview titled "Cooking Up A Poet" in NUVO's 2006 Fall Arts Guide. When he is not teaching Clint enjoys reading himself to sleep, writing, raking leaves and Chaos.

Sarah C. Strong is seeking her Bachelor's of Fine Arts in printmaking at Herron School of Art and Design. She is also an art teacher in various places and a very proud mother of two.

Becky Vasko is an English major with a minor in American studies. She works with a great group of people in the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture in the IU School of Liberal Arts.

Karolina Valentine never envisioned herself as a teacher due to a congenital deformity that affects her everyday life. Teaching is not a desire but a need; to share not only art, but to help children understand and embrace each other's differences.



Andrea Short
Thirst for Desire
Sculpture

\$100 Prizes for Best of Issue Poetry, Fiction, Creative Non-Fiction and Art!

Beginning this issue, *genesis* will only accept submissions from **current IUPUI undergraduate students**.

All submissions due by: Thursday, March 22nd 2007

All Submissions:

E-mail submissions are preferred for all genres if possible. Please include your name, title, contact information, a short biographical note (no more than fifty words), genre, medium, and dimensions in the body of an e-mail and submit each piece of work as an attachment. Do not include your name on the file as all submissions are judged anonymously.

Send submissions to:

genesis1@iupui.edu

Writers' Guidelines:

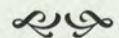
Literary submissions must be sent via e-mail as Microsoft Word attachments. All genres should be in Times New Roman font, single-spaced, and contain no more than **3,500** words. Students may submit a maximum of **nine** pieces: **five** poems and **two** prose pieces per genre. Do not put your name on the manuscripts.

Artists' Guidelines:

A maximum of **five** art submissions may be sent via e-mail or on a CD as EPS, TIFF, or JPEG files with a **minimum resolution of 300 dpi**. Include titles, medium, dimensions and a short bio. Please note that all artwork, except those which go on the front and back covers, will be reproduced in black and white. All CDs should be mailed to the address below or put in the *genesis* mailbox in Cavanaugh Hall room 502-L. E-mail genesis1@iupui.edu for information on scanning high-resolution images or submitting original artwork.

genesis

c/o Department of English
Cavanaugh Hall, Room 502-L
425 University Boulevard
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202
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Back Cover Art:

Joseph Crone
Untitled
11" x 14" Pencil



Becky Armoto
Barbara Anne Bennett
Joe Bieschke
Colleen Card
Joe Conley
Joshua Cook
Catherine Coppage
Joseph Crone
Katie Fleetwood
Benjamin Joseph Garza
Rachel Geesa
Josh Green
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Jennifer Hutchinson
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Clint Smith
Sarah C. Strong
Karolina Valentine
Becky Vasko