



genesis

Spring 2009

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Front Cover:
Beth Zyglowicz

Matsuri Girls

watercolor and colored pencil 16" x 24"

Editors' Note

Lurid and tender, graceful and harsh, urban and exotic—all these juxtapositions are fitting to depict the Spring 2009 issue of *genesis*. Inside you will find work as diverse as our university: art inspired by Japanese anime; confessional poetry of family loss and mental illness; and snapshots of memories that make us feel alive. This collection of student creativity will entertain, amaze, and inspire. Can any other magazine bring together the cultures of Hawaii and Fiji with the Hoosier experience?

genesis takes pride in the fairness of our blind selection process. Of the hundreds of student submissions we anonymously review every year, each has an equal chance to rise on its own artistic merit. This is our privilege and honor to feel the heartbeat of IUPUI's literary and visual arts. Of the pieces we publish, the best of the best are chosen to receive the \$100 "Best of" award in the four genres of poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and art. Congratulations to Joseph Cahall, Davinia Yalimawai, and Beth Zyglowicz for their imagination, skill, and triumph in their craft.

Ryan Baggett
Managing Editor

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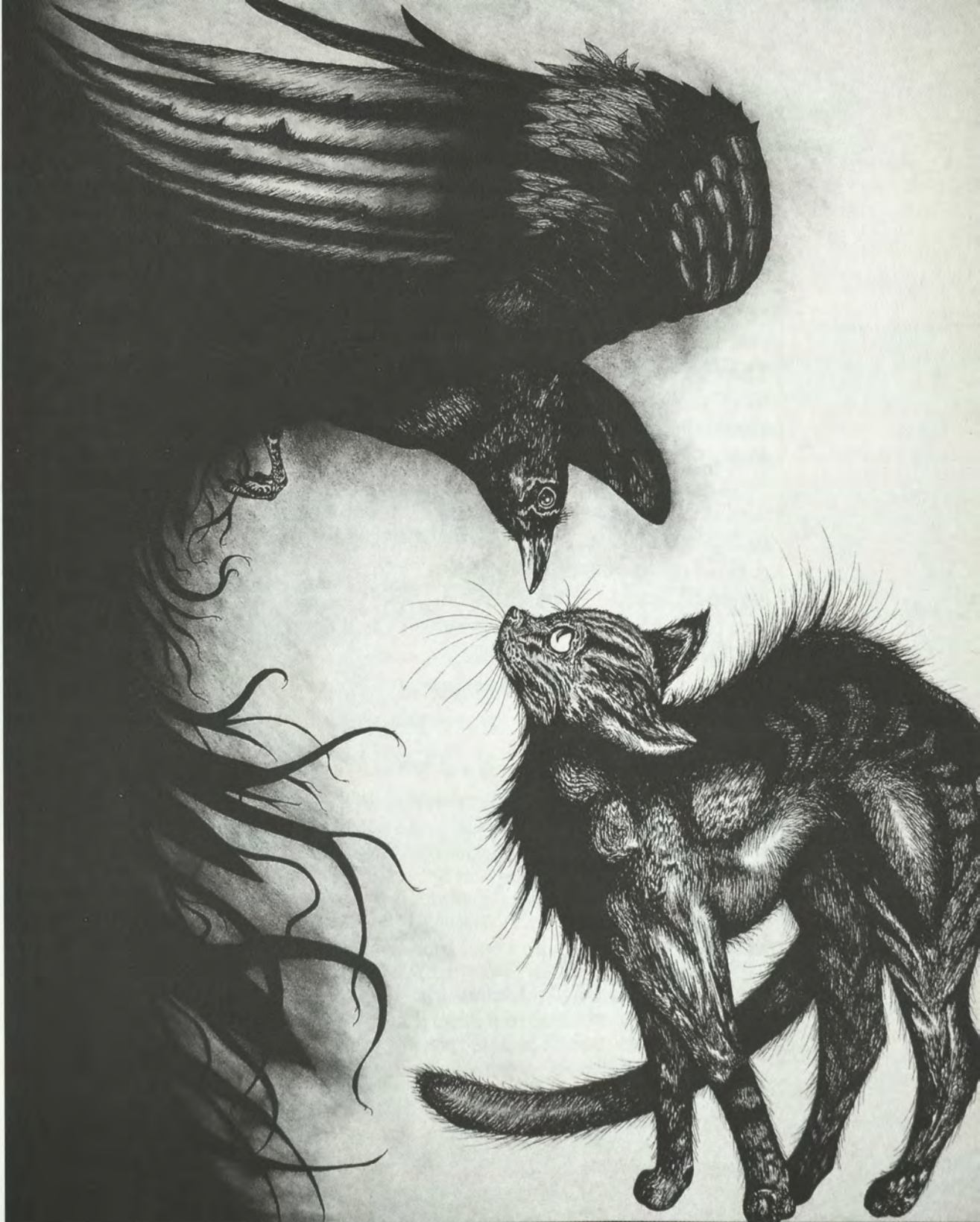
genesis—the origin or coming into being of anything; development into being, especially by growth or evolution; the process or mode of origin <the ~ of a book>

genesis

IUPUI

Literature and Art
Volume 41 Issue I
Spring 2009

Taylor Saville
Grimalkin Corvus
ink and charcoal 19" x 24"



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Green Eggs and Spam

Davinia Yalimawai

Keola Beamer, one of Hawaii's best known slack-key guitarists, eats Spam and loves poetry. Let's just call him the Dr. Seuss of the Hawaiian island chain. Although he isn't a published author like the late Ted Geisel, Beamer collects Spam haiku poetry that he posts on his website. Once a fun pasttime, Spamku is now Keola's religion. But can a local island girl like me blame him? After all, Keola is a descendent of the great King Kamehameha I, unifier of the Hawaiian Islands. If Kamehameha's descendent is wrong about his Spam religion, then I don't want to be right! In fact, our love of Spam in the islands brings us so close to Keola that, when spotted, it is not uncommon to hear shouts of, "Eh, howzit braddah Keola? How yo maddah? You hungry? You like come grind wit us?"

To the tourist who decides to grace our islands: never say "No" when we ask you to come eat with us. Your noncompliance will be taken as snobbery, and your inability to adapt to our local standards will be held against you for generations to come. Yes, we will tell our grandchildren of the rude *haole* who said, "No." Trust me, you don't want to be labeled a foreigner for your entire visit. And there is always enough Spam to feed everybody thrice over. So, hang loose, Brah, and no worries! I have taken the liberty of picking out my favorite Spamku from Keola Beamer's website to show just how much we treasure this fine meat:

*And who dares mock Spam?
You? You? You are not worthy
Of one rich pink fleck!*

After eating with us, some uncle or aunty will always bring up braddah Keola's first song, "Honolulu City Lights." It might not even be a blood uncle or aunt considering that we

Best of Non-Fiction

call everyone older than us "Uncle So-and-so" or "Aunty This-and-that." Nevertheless, Keola's first hit is a classic. And, if you are a local who doesn't like 1970s Western-style Hawaiian music, you keep that information to yourself. God forbid that blasphemy ever leaks out because what ensues is a good two hours of drunk relatives singing and saying, "Braddah Keola, why you nevah wen bring yo slack-key?"

There might also be some talk about his mother, Winona Beamer, during this musical jam session. Winona is one of the key activists of the Hawaiian revival movement in our high schools. This is obviously where Keola received his calling to pay homage to the voiceless Spam. But usually the mood is too light to get into any political stuff – especially on a sunny surfing day like the day a friendly tourist decides to eat with a local family.

*Born in World War Two
Hogs marching off to battle
Dressed in tin armor*

If this were *Animal Farm*, it might be easier for a non-Hawaiian to imagine the haiku above: pigs going off to war, marching in blue armor, ready to defend their country. Or perhaps the "hogs" suggest the raw power of actual human soldiers who went off to fight during the war. Either way, history shows our lovely Spam did not migrate to our islands until the mid-1900s. Hawaii became a strategic location to send American troops during World War II. Being in the Pacific Ocean, and midway between continental USA and Japan, troops often stopped off at Hawaii, particularly Pearl Harbor, to refuel and strategize for the next attack. Unfortunately for the food and farming economies, this meant thousands of troops

continued...

entered our small Hawaiian chain. Trying to feed the locals and the soldiers proved to be a bigger task than anticipated. It was also a waste of money to ship fresh meat all the way out to the Pacific Ocean just for it to spoil by the time it reached land. And then there was Spam:

*Pink tender morsel
Glistening with salty gel
What the hell is it?*

Shoulder of pork and ham or so Hormel Inc. has us believe. No one really knows for sure the exact ratio of pork or ham or feet or fat or unknown substance that is in Spam. All we know is that it is salty, and meaty, and that it tastes good with just about anything: Spam musubi (Japanese sushi made with Spam), Spam saimin (hot soup with noodles and a slab of Spam), Spam fried rice (self-explanatory), Spam and eggs for breakfast (now on our McDonald's Dollar Menu), Spam and cheese sandwich for lunch, and Spam and shoyu rice (white rice covered in soy sauce) for dinner.

*My friend pork shoulder
I return to you. This time
I've brought mayonnaise*

Soldiers during the war found it to be a convenient source of protein that they could depend on when food was sparse. Since Spam doesn't have to be refrigerated, we locals buy it in bulk. During the rare instances when the islands are placed on hurricane or tsunami watch, we stock up on three necessities: water, toilet paper, and king-sized cans of Spam.

*Jelly for mortar
Seven hundred tins and more
I build a Spam house*

Surprisingly, Hawaii is not among the fattest states in America. However, you might disagree with me when you see my three-hundred-pound Aunty Leilani. According to Calorie Lab's "United States of Obesity Map for 2007," Mississippi weighs in as the fattest state in America, with a few states like Alabama and Indiana coming close behind. In fact, this map makes Hawaii one of the leaner states.

I'd now like to insert my expert opinion on the matter, completely unbiased, of course. Apart from the various Hawaiians, and Samoans, and other Polynesians of slightly smaller numbers: we have Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and *many* Asians populating our islands. Most of our Asians are Japanese: the ancestors of farmers who came to Hawaii to work on our rice plantations. I'm not saying local Japanese don't eat Spam. Au contraire! Remember the Spam musubi? It was invented by the Nagasaki family, or the Hayashis, the Nakamuras, maybe the Tanakas. The point is this: local Japanese families in Hawaii eat just as much Spam as any other group in the islands. But ask yourself one question: have you ever seen an obese Japanese man or woman? Exactly. (Sumo wrestlers were not taken into consideration during my extensive research on overweight Asians in Hawaii).

Where, then, do all of the side effects of consuming millions of cans of Spam end up? And why is Hawaii *still* not ranked among the fattest of fatties? Because "fat" in American standards means overweight. Whereas all the other medical problems that come along with constantly eating crap, such as diabetes and heart disease, can affect even the skinniest of us.

*Old man seeks doctor
"I eat Spam daily," he says.
Angioplasty*

We still have our share of big-boned people. Hawaii is a Polynesian island, and, like all Polynesians, we love us some food. Fish is an essential food if you want to live on an island. Pork is also an essential, especially if you don't want to be excluded from family get-togethers. A *lu'au* – a

local celebration where we eat a big pig that's been cooked underground for a day – stems from victory parties hosted by the great King Kamehameha. Girls (big, small, and in-between size) dance the *hula*, and Auntie This gets into an argument with Auntie That over whose husband provides the best for his family. My bet is on Uncle So-and-so.

So imagine how my dad's side of the family reacted on the fateful day of my freshman year in high school when I announced I wanted to become a vegetarian. They reacted the same way any Polynesian family would. They laughed.

"You realize you can't eat meat anymore, right?" That was my Uncle Peter. He's about seven years younger than Dad, but his daily ritual of consuming *yaqona* (a slightly intoxicating root drink) and beer, has left him with wrinkles and ashy skin which make him look a million years older.

"Yes," I replied.

"You know Spam is meat, right? You can't eat Spam." Uncle Iguanodon, I mean Uncle Peter, has great deductive reasoning skills.

"My teacher says Spam is for poor people and that Spam is trash." Strike two.

"Trash? What are these schools filling your head with? You tell your teacher that God made three things in this world: Spam, sex-I-mean-marriage, and more Spam."

*Pink beefy temptress
I can no longer remain
Vegetarian*



Lita Luginbill
Crab Cake

stoneware 8.5" x 8.5" x 11"

1. Keola Beamer's official website, "humor," "spam haiku," http://www.kbeamer.com/spam_haiku.html

My Father's Keeper

Ashley Mack

1

There are no pictures of my father up in our house. We only say his name after 9. After dinner when we are all huddled together in my mother's bed and the cordless phone passes between our stiff fingers. We say *Hi Daddy* slow like the words sting our mouths. My mother just says *your father, your father* and places the cold plastic in our hands, one after the other. Oldest, me, then the baby. This is the only quiet hour of the day in our

house. The rest is running water, pounding feet and Boyz II Men and Duck Tales and Mortal Kombat and *shut up* and *leave me alone*. (Nobody asks about daddy). We are happy (except Mommy who closes the door behind her and does not say a word). No one cries.

My sister is Aarika (with a double A like my father Aaron). My name is Ashley (after my great-grand father). My brother is Aaron Joshua (we always say both names so no one gets confused). The A is the only thing that reminds me of Daddy. In first period when I write my name on the top of a paper, before the subject, before the date, I think about the day we went to the City Market and had shrimp fried-rice on the patio. Then I think about my dead grandpa. Mommy gave me a picture of him standing next to a rusty red and white Mustang holding a beer in one hand and a wrench in the other (I think I must be more like him.)

2

The road trip is just like going to Kings Island. Grandma fries chicken and waits on the porch swing with a foil-wrapped Pyrex dish resting on her lap. We pack a cooler and tapes (gospel and Marvin Gaye because Grandma's ears can't take rap). The city street turns into a four-lane highway with cars whipping past us and blue rest stop signs. When we are hungry, and ask for McDonalds, Grandma passes us chicken wings wrapped in flowery napkins, and we forget the golden arches and Ronald. Mommy says that we are still in Indiana, but I don't believe it could be the same place with the houses set so far back from the street that they don't look real. We play I Spy and Outburst Travel until the one lane is lined with red dust that kicks up around our Caravan windows, and we remember where the road leads. We remember the gray penitentiary walls. In that last thirty minutes everything is still. Everything is quiet except the occasional crackle of the tiny rocks that pop against the belly of the van.

Now Daddy is on the other side of a round table. There is not enough space between us to pretend he isn't here, and I concentrate on the other people in the room. There is a woman with a blond boy curled up in her lap. They are both sobbing. I look at my brother and sister. No one cries for Daddy.

Of a memory, beHolden

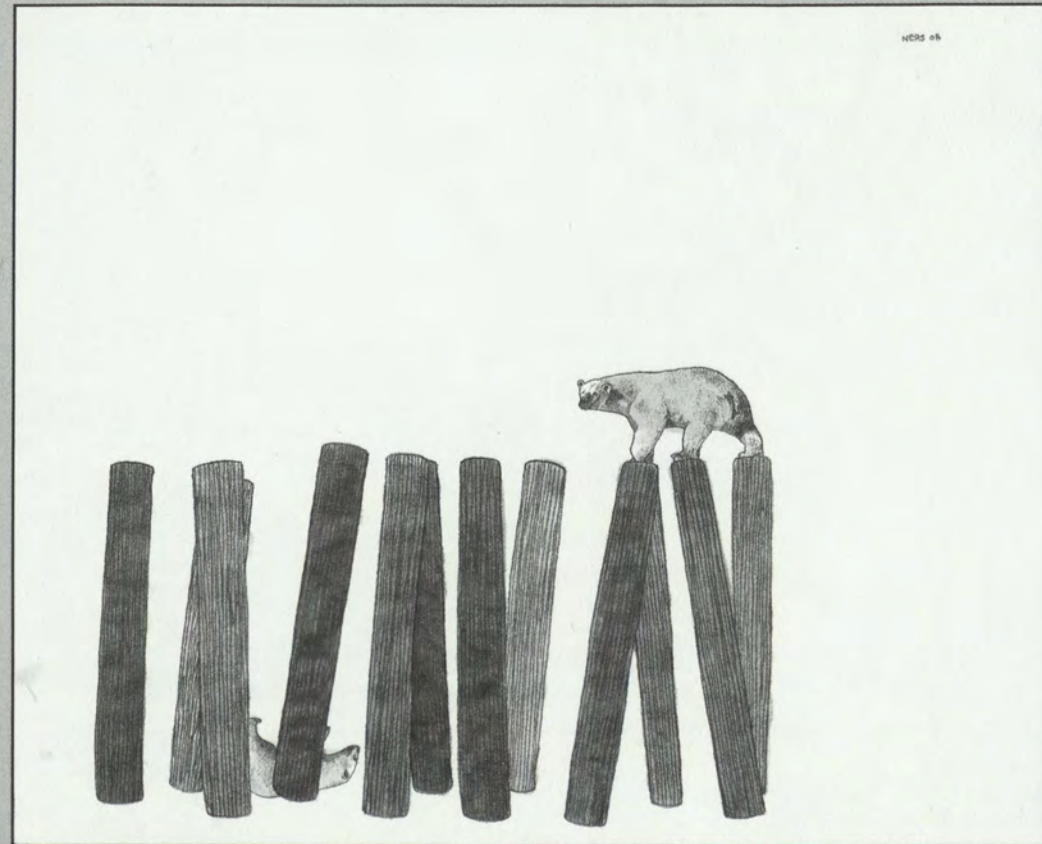
Joseph Cahall

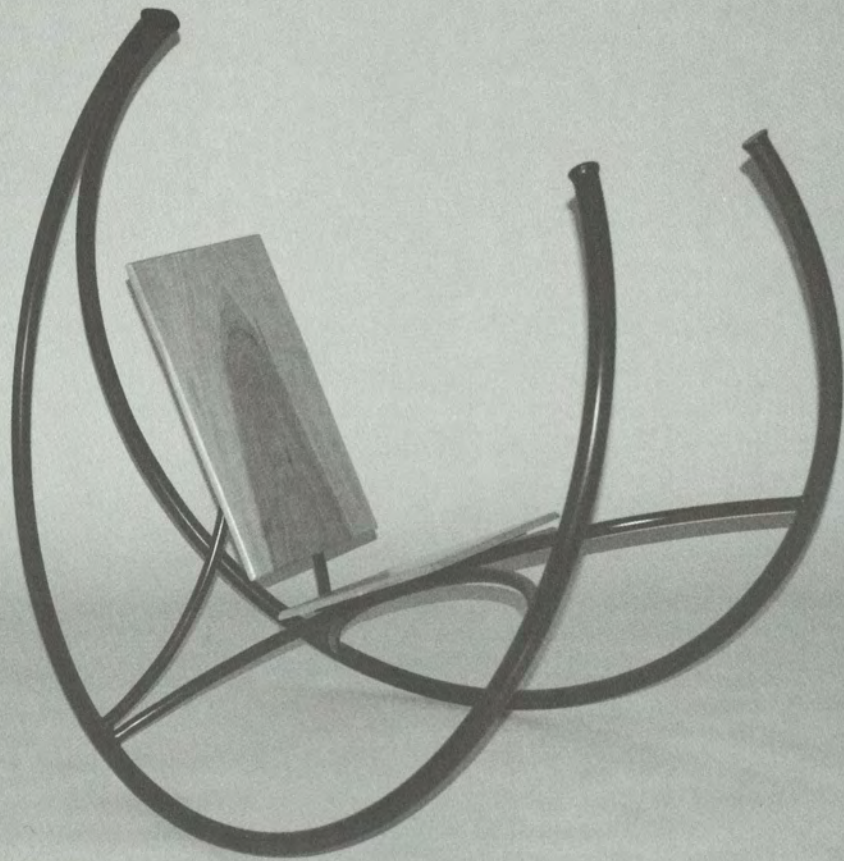
Thin paperback, simple cover, no art,
like an afterthought or manuscript,
white background and black letters.
Dog-eared corners trace crooked patterns,
tracks of my years, openings and cracks,
a binding neglected. Glue stiff in the crease
of my youth, of the youth of the shoulders
upon which I perch, to escape on a flight
of fancy, like the ducks southward
when the pond freezes, if they choose.
Old passages reanimated like dogs barking,
cracking through brisk air with gunshot echo.
John Lennon dead on the sidewalk, killer
thumbing dog-eared corners, thin paperback.

Ners

Polar Bears

acrylic and graphite on paper 8.5" x 11"





Moral Sin

Jessica Valentine

my mother killed herself on Valentine's Day.
our unspoken family name hanging in the air –
a silent saint –
my youngest brother screaming like a Sicilian widow
throwing himself over the body as it dripped its
death fluid onto the gurney.
my other one, oldest and by far the tallest, stood
holding his lips together to prevent the murmur of
“thy will be done”. and me
in my atheism and me in my robe,
wrapped up in holy nothing, simply watching
as the coroner taketh away.

Treva Mitchell

16 Weeks

wood and metal 5' x 5'

For the Child Who Will Never Play Again

Davinia Yalimawai

(Jerusalem 2008)

...an Israeli force comprised of 8 soldiers heavily beat [a] child while he was on his way home. Soldiers claimed they were confused by a toy-gun the child was playing with.

- International Middle East Media Center News
April 19, 2008

The object of the game
is to stay alive.
Israelis carry guns.
Israelis are men.
Palestinians are boys.
They run away.
They are worse than whores and blasphemers.
I always play an Israeli.

Won't you come out and play with me?
brother asks across the street.
He always plays a Palestinian.
Last time I let him get away.
Today he won't be so lucky.

The object of the game is to stay
alive.

I enter the street,
toy-gun in hand,
and I shoot that bastard.
I shoot until every red-tipped suction dart
falls.
I do not see the soldiers.
Only Israelis carry guns!
they say as they beat me,
all eight of them.

We'll teach you a lesson, you filthy Palestinian.

The soldiers' eyes
follow the piss trail
on my American jeans,
proving that I am not an Israeli,
proving that I am worse than a whore and blasphemer,
proving that I am only a
boy.

Power Windows

Erik Osburn

Non-Fiction

My first car was an '82 Cavalier. My dad bought it for \$400 from an old lady in Lebanon who had backed it into the side of the garage, crushing the right fender. After that, her kids had decided it was time to take her keys away, so the old lady's last car became my first. To her, the Cavalier had been a ticket to the drugstore, bridge-club, and all the other places she went for a change of scenery whenever watching Lifetime and thinking up ways to spoil her grandkids got boring. To me, the car was a magic carpet to go camping or hang out with my friends, since going places in rural Indiana without a car is kind of like trying to walk between solar systems. To both of us, the car was freedom and a badge of full-fledged personhood. Getting a car marked me as an adult, while her not having it meant she was now something less. It has always struck me as sad, if somehow appropriate, that for me to have a car, someone else had to lose it.

The Cavalier was a flat shade of blue usually reserved for industrial refrigerators and off-brand plastic lawn chairs. The stereo's speaker cones were cracked, so that bassier notes in songs on the radio made a weird rattling sound. The plastic of the steering wheel was gradually breaking down so that when you drove the car in warm or humid weather your hands would stick to its surface. A pair of yardsticks wedged between sections of the interior trim pinned the sagging headliner up against the ceiling. When I first got the car, a chunk of the muffler's underside was rusted out. Though the car was only a four-banger (and a pretty small one at that), it still sounded like a P-51 cruising in for a strafing run anytime I pulled into the driveway. It was a rattletrap, and I loved it. The car cried out for bumper stickers. Once I almost put flame decals on it but, fearful of my dad who had paid for the car and was a strict no-sticker person, I chickened out. It also leaked badly when it rained. To

mask the stench of the soaked carpet, I bought a Hula dancer car freshener. I named her Pandora and, together with a pair of oversized fuzzy dice, she became the car's figurehead. Sailing ships of old had busts of Greek goddesses; my car had a cardboard Hawaiian chick that smelled like synthesized pineapple and was named for the woman who let evil into the world. Somehow it just fit.

There were other benefits to having Pandora hard at work. She helped disguise the reek that lingered after my best friend John Mark and I smoked gas station cigars while tooling around Northern Indiana. They say everybody's got their vice, and in high school raspberry-flavored, paper-filled tobacco products were ours.

Of course the only thing better than smoking in the car was doing dumb stuff with the car while smoking. One late-July evening, the summer after I got the car, John Mark and I were on our way back from the Tipton Flea Market armed with Chinese cane-swords, Romanian knife-combs, and a potato gun big enough to kill dinosaurs or shoot down a B-52. A thick plume of smog from our paper-filled smokes trailed out the windows of the little blue car as we roared down the road. We had just pulled out of a White Castle along U.S. 31 when John Mark noticed his cousin Billy's Festiva (instantly recognizable by the million-and-one bumper stickers plastered across its rusting tailgate) about a half a mile up the road.

"Turn your lights off," John said, as he fished around in the back. I grinned at him and pulled out the knob.

Slowly, so as not to frighten our quarry, we crept up behind Billy until I could count the teeth on the tiny Jolly Roger pennant that fluttered from the Ford's radio antenna. John primed the potato gun with hairspray, and crammed the barrel with the "Slyders" we'd been too stuffed to eat.

"Okay, now," said John, as he looked over at me, Bic lighter at the ready.

continued...



Evan Roberts
Continuum
digital photograph

I jumped into the left lane, pulled up next to Billy's car, and honked the horn. Billy, who had been off in his own world listening to the radio, looked over through his open window.

Boom! The gun went off, coating Billy and his car with grease-soaked bread, steam-grilled beef, and the distinctive White Castle onions. The Festiva swerved, and for a second I was scared Billy was going to crowd us off the road. Food wrappers, crushed pop cans, broken sunglasses, and one of his old driver's manuals bounced off my Chevy as Billy threw stuff back at us with both hands. Spotting the turnoff for County Road 750, I made a quick left before he could do anything that would tear up either of our cars. To this day, Billy gives John a dirty look if anyone so much as mentions the Festiva or anything related to White Castle.

The Cavalier was a good ride and a fun little car to drive — or at least it was until a Mack dump truck with an eighteen-ton load of gravel and a sleepy driver at the wheel slammed into me while I was waiting to make a left turn. The truck crushed the car's left side, spun it around, and then the truck rolled over on top of it. Only the area immediately around the driver's seat escaped being smashed or blown full of broken glass. I walked away from the car with a scratch on my wrist, carrying Pandora and contemplating the complex interplay of free choice and fate to which I had just been a party.

"Son"— said one of the Lebanon cops while surveying the twisted metal that had once been a car — "do you have any idea how lucky you are right now?"

In such situations, I think the things people discover about themselves are surer than the things they find out about what actually happened. Fact: Human bodies are delicate. Fact: Twenty tons of steel and rock moving at forty miles an hour is an awful lot of bone-crushing destructive power. Fact: Even a "Like a Rock" Chevy Cavalier doesn't have a whole lot of metal in it. Now, with all that in mind, there are basically two ways to look at what happened to me that Tuesday morning on State Road 32. One kind of person looks at my Cavalier — a pop can crushed by a giant's sneakered foot — and sees random chance. To him, I was a gambler

at the poker table who walked away lucky — this time. Another kind of person looks at my Cavalier — a pop can crushed by a giant's sneakered foot — and says there is something more at work here than what can be seen, measured, and plugged into a calculus equation. To him, whatever that thing is, it protected me during that wreck. As I walked away from the hunk of twisted blue wreckage that, by rights, should have been my coffin, my first words were, "Well, I'm glad I've got that done with. Lightning never strikes twice, right?" I suppose this means that, right then, I was the sort of person who saw everything in life as one big role of the dice.

My second car, a '94 Bonneville, was a hand me down from my grandparents.

"It's a real good car," said Grandpa as he stood there, his eyes shining with pride as he surveyed the sturdy, American-made car he was about to pass on to me. He spoke with a husky Southern Indiana accent, a manner of speech that stretches out the vowels in words so "wash" becomes "warsh" and "fish" becomes "feesh." Grandpa was from rural Sullivan County in Indiana's coal country, cut his own hair, and had a face that could have been chiseled from sandstone.

The car was big and not exactly nimble (two major strikes against it in my book). Although it was new enough to have many computerized parts, it was American-made, and that made it at least a partial winner to my dad. Cars, according to Dad, should be old enough to avoid having electronic fuel sensors, mass airflow sensors, or "chips" of any kind. There were several reasons for this. First, "shade-tree mechanics" could not work on them, meaning that we would have to resort to a garage for repairs. As a result, such cars would be expensive to fix.

For dad, however, the second reason was more important.

"What if Al Qaeda nukes Chicago?" he would say. "Or Iran."

That Timmerman book I read told about how they've been buying trawlers that they mount SCUDS on. SCUDS will shoot close to 700 miles. One of them could be clear up at Detroit and still take out Indianapolis.

You know they're gonna get the bomb soon. That EMP goes out whenever you have a nuclear blast and cooks all that electronic junk. Without it, your car won't run."

I had to admit there was a certain logic to this. However, as I always pointed out, if Chicago or Indianapolis was a bubbling glass parking lot, we probably wouldn't be around to care about the fact that our cars wouldn't run.

According to Dad, cars should be of American origin. Rice grinders were out; Detroit muscle was in. Even after *Consumer Reports* proclaimed Camrys and Accords better than their American counterparts for so many years in a row that my siblings and I accepted the superiority of Asian cars as a fact of life on par with gravity, my father still made comments about the inferiority of "Jap cars."

This attitude probably has more to do with my grandfather than it does my father, if the truth be known. Grandpa, known to rest of the world as Earl Thomas Osburn, was born in 1926 and was 15 when the Japanese Imperial Navy launched its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Enlisting in the navy, Grandpa served aboard the ill-fated destroyer, USS *Bache*, which was hit by kamikazes off Okinawa. Riddled with red-hot shrapnel from the plane that blew up deep inside the ship, Grandpa recuperated in a naval hospital on Saipan. Later in life, doctors could not give him an MRI, because the intense magnetism generated by the device would dislodge some of the chunks of metal still stuck inside the old man's body.

"Them goddamn little yellow fellas tried to kill me," Grandpa would growl, a cold backbone of menace running through his Sullivan County brogue. Thus, buying an Asian-made car follows closely behind joining the Communist Party or converting to Satanism in terms of Osburn-family taboos.

Despite the doubts I had when my grandparents gave me the Bonneville, it turned out to be a pretty cool set of wheels. Compared to the Cavalier's right angles and rust, the Bonneville's sleek, star-cruiser lines and glossy white paint looked ready to take off and make tracks for Alpha Centauri. The dash was lit by red LEDs and bloomed with oversize gauges and indicators. The upholstery was blue, decadently plush, and had

a persistent Dollar General perfume aisle smell courtesy of my Grandma. Best of all, it didn't leak, it had a tape deck (which meant you could buy an adapter and play CDs), and it could comfortably haul five people and a whole lot of junk while traveling at speeds that would have shaken the Cavalier into tiny pieces.

The summer after I got the car — almost exactly a year after the incident with the dump truck — a Connecticut man driving a Ford Custom van ran a red light ahead of me. Boom! I hit the van full on. When the talcum powder from the airbags settled, my second car was a wreck as well. My girlfriend, Andrea, and I walked away with stiff necks and a bruise or two but, other than that, we were okay. Standing there watching the antifreeze from my big, white car gush out in a neon torrent of automotive blood, I looked over at Andrea. I thought to myself how pretty she looked as her brown eyes caught the August sunshine. If I had been going a little bit faster, the van would have t-boned her side of the car. I swallowed and decided that, whatever the universe is really like, I would rather be the kind of person who believes he sees something moving the machinery of the universe — directing traffic so to speak — instead of someone who sees life as just a series of crap-shoots where you win some, you lose others, and sometimes you settle for a rain check. ■



Beth Zyglowicz
Forward March
watercolor 10" x 16"

Through My Eyes: Our Memories

Davinia Yalimawai

Kai, ocean waters around my *'aina* – my land,
small white bubbles forming on the skin
weightless hair following as I turn
I cannot cry under the wave

a morning out at sea a father's lesson
first drowning then learning how to swim

Honu, great turtle of the Pacific,
swim back to land
Endangered lists cannot save you
the shark god is illiterate

a midday out at sea an aroma of birth and salt
turtle hatchlings warning signs posted along the beach

A'ama, king crab of the shore,
hide between sand and stone
from exploding tides
and children with sticks

an afternoon out at sea rainbow parasails
papaya seed dressing in chicken sandwiches a nap in the shade

Humuhumunukunukuapua'a, beloved state fish,
I speak your name for tourists
who ask me to "talk local"
who burn, not tan

an evening out at sea abandoned sandcastles
littered shorelines eighty-dollar string bikinis

Nai'a, dolphin friend of the deep,
let me ride with you
my brother has joined the troops
I cannot see under the black water
he cannot breathe through gun smoke

a night out at sea departing soldiers of nineteen and twenty
wanting more time a father's regret

Letter to an Inmate

Davinia Yalimawai

Fiction

Dear Dad,

Remember my first little league game with the West Texas Monahans? I don't either. Had it even happened, it might have been sometime between you giving me a black eye, and Scottie and I running away from home. I miss that dog. "Matt, you better shut that mutt up before I do it myself!" Mom told us Scottie ran away with Toto and Dorothy, but I saw the stains on the driveway.

But that's just blood over the rainbow. The reason I'm writing to you is that Shirley is getting married in two weeks. His name is Esteban, and he's a black Cuban. Can you believe our Shirley is marrying a "nigra?" Boy, I'd have loved to see your face the first time she brought him home. Miss Honey, our adoptive mother, was all sorts of happy when she saw the way Esteban made Shirley smile. I had almost forgotten the sound of my baby sister's laugh.

Remember the nights you had to work late, and Mom let us into the big bed so she wouldn't have to sleep alone? She would tell her own versions of bedtime stories like how Mr. Pan – as in Peter – had grown up and married the Wizard of Oz. Shirley said, "That's silly! A boy can't marry a *boy*." "My dear, who said anything about a boy? The Wizard of Oz is a Russian princess!"

We'd laugh and laugh and dream about really living in those fantastic worlds. Each time you beat us, her stories would get a little more fantastic. When you broke Mom's collarbone, we learned that Aladdin married Jasmine solely to kill her pet tiger and make a coat. When you shattered Shirley's elbow, Rapunzel's hair grew into a giant ball that the Cheshire cat choked on. Mr. Pan and his wizard-wife divorced when you broke my nose, and Humpty dumped God-knows-who when you "taught" Shirley and me how to swim by shoving our heads into freezing bath water.

But like I said, that's just pneumonia under the bridge. Shirley is getting married in two weeks, and Miss Honey and I are going to walk her down the aisle. What has this got to do with you? Well, you're the reason for her parents not being there. Mom is dreaming ten feet under, and even if you were allowed to leave the compound for a day, Shirley wouldn't want a murderer at her wedding. Neither would I. I guess it's a good thing you didn't kill Mom, huh? "She was an alcoholic and a damned druggie," you said. You may not have physically forced the pills down her throat, but our Southern judicial system knew you were the reason for her suicide. God bless Judge Thomas. What'd you call him? "That nigra judge!"

I quit teaching at the high school. Now I work with Social Services on 22nd and Eastern Boulevard. It's easy to spot a child who comes from an abusive home. I see Shirley in every little girl who hesitates to laugh for fear of being too loud. I see myself in every boy wearing an oversized Astros cap to cover his black eye, wondering if he has ever thrown a ball with his father. I can't just write up a report and think I've done enough, knowing a child has to go home every day to that environment. So, I tell them Mom's stories. I allow them to live in a world where anything is possible—a world with an alternate ending.

Yesterday little Tay asked, "Why would Peter Pan marry a dude?" "Who said anything about a dude?" I replied. "The Wizard of Oz is a Russian princess."

I've reached the end of the page, and I don't feel like writing on the back. Give my regards to Tay's dad. I heard he's also sentenced for life.

-Matt





Evan Roberts
The Facility
digital photograph

Sky...scrapers

Joseph Cahall

The air stretches me, becomes my new skin,
pulled taut like a drum head's tension.
Through floor-to-ceiling window-walls, I stare at the people
crouched at their cubes. The building surges skyward.
Gravity rides my back, passing floors, descending:
twenty-eight, twenty-seven, twenty-six, twenty-five.
They look happy on the phone, alive
ordering cashew chicken and office supplies.
Calling husbands and calling wives,
or maybe someone else's wife.
They're on the phone making sales
and telemarketing timeshares
to lonely people with time to listen
and dream of someone else's life.
Passing floors twenty-two through nineteen;
there I am, staring right back at me.
Or maybe it's just some burnout loser,
searching the gray sky for answers,
but the sky's only response,
some hapless dumbass plummeting
past the floors he passed this morning
in that moldy elevator, slowly shaking.
Some guy falling
like a tossed stone returning,
to its home or wherever
the sky and little chickens fall.
The air rips a muffled scream from my open mouth,
tears from my dewy, worn eyes.

I've been falling so long that I can't recall
If I'm grasping a cord, or a note in my palm,
or a ledge or a thread or a mirror on the wall.

Lita Luginbill

Structures in the Sky Part IV
watercolor 15" x 22.5"



Smoking in My Kitchen

Kenneth Sweet

She was smoking in my kitchen letting the vines of white
Climb under the hood above my stove.
I stepped from the shower and under the warm buzzing ceiling heater,
A faint odor of cigarettes came to me mingled with the smell of heat.
I was on my Grandmama's green stone porch and a kid again
Coming out of the cold going into her warm smoky house.
The fragrance of affection. I just felt it again.
Twenty years later in love standing naked in my bathroom.
The next day in the indifferent dusk
She came in from the cold wearing her wool coat.
Cigarettes and the smell of the cold and the wool embraced me
A second before she did the same.
The immeasurable edifice of memory. I was young again.
She was my youth.

Anthony Deak
Lone Wolf
photograph 7" x 5"



Best of Poetry

Thanks, for the mem-ries

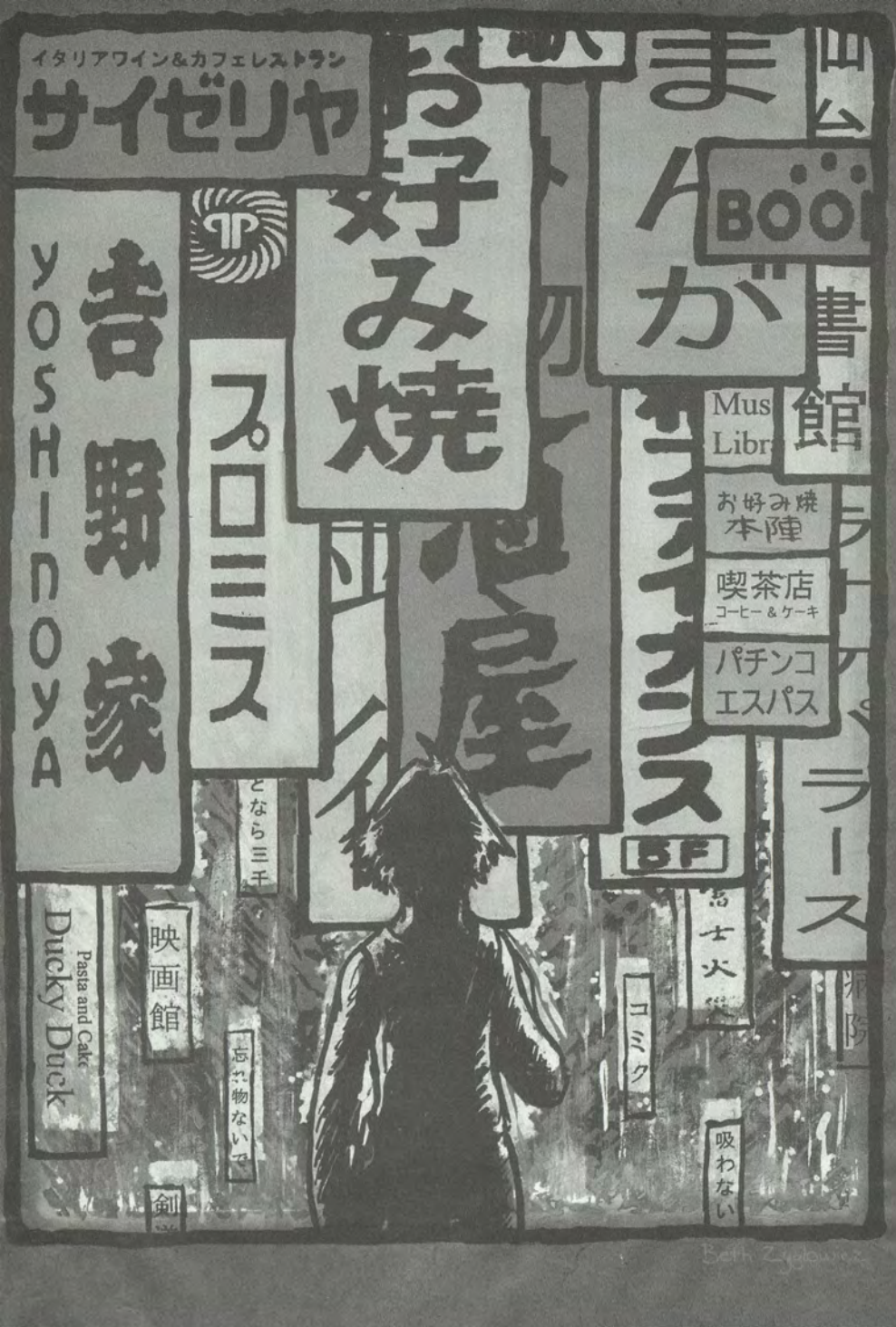
Joseph Cahall

Thanks, for the mem-ries, faded pleasantries, of days passed.
Kaleidoscopic fragments, my mind stuffed in
mental storage closets erupting
at the neural seams with rural scenes
from road trips past when time slipped fast.

Thanks, for the mem-ries, puzzle pieces,
of my past. Jigsaw scattered, across kitchen tile
bits of horizon to be my guide when
the border only frames the distorted remains
of kings, horses, and men to be put back, together again.

Thanks, for the mem-ries, banana peels, my skin.
Reel-to-real home movies, playing matinees, within
the attics of me insulated with exposed beams
exposed lightbulb dim like old faces I see.
Cobwebs in the places you never used to be.

Thanks for the mem-ries, please excuse, forgetful me.
Trap-doors in the floorboards
hide the tell-tale threadbare family trees
synapse to recall waiting, forgotten by the phone.
Waiting, by the empty room, (where) my memories
have gone.



Beth Zyglowicz
City of Blinding Lights
screen print 15" x 20"



Beth Zyglowicz
Dream Tree
digital media 6" x 10"

And of the night

Steven Elminger

And of the night
worlds will not trickle or prance.
Women will not fall
or shimmer.

Both and either will never cease
their resounding ways.
And neither you nor I
will impress them
or surpass their standards.

But they will,
ever-resounding,
learn of new needs
that were not quite visible
before.

And of the night I will say to them,
“I can’t sleep,”
and them to me,
“just try and dream.”
And I, like a cat
furrowing without claws
on the moon’s welcome doormat,
will lie on my back
against a wooden fence
and drink from bottles
and puff on cigars.

And of the night
I guess you slept too late,
and I not at all.
But the lanterns led me
to the umbrella
and BOOM!
The lights went out
and the skies turned from black to blue,
the food went cold
and the ice was melting.

But I know what you are thinking,
and yes,
the medication was fine.
And of the night,
from now and on resounding
sleep shall be very swift
and star-like.

In Defense of Wheat Pennies

Ross Waitt

They're duller than the rest,
having long ago lost
that burnt sienna shine,
from traveling in and out
of thousands of purses and pockets
through all sorts of hands
over the dimming decades.

Sent on silent migrations
to rural church collection plates;
ornate urban fountains;
name-changing banks; wallets; and those
dusty, green-tinted glass jars
atop Hoosier cabinets.
The things they must've overheard
(but about which they are eternally tight-lipped)
on buses; in bedrooms.
I tell myself each cent
is worth a fortune in stories.
There's a romance in that.

Which is why I get to work early:
to open the till first,
freeing those copper/zinc captives
from their paper-roll prison.
With baited breath,

ever-watchful (hopeful!) of the dates,
I search, with twitching fingers, for the coins that shun
the stoic fashion of memorials,
and dress, instead, in natural wheat.

'93. '97. No. No. '81. No. '67. Not quite.
Sometimes, it's like looking
for the redstart among the sparrows:
you just don't see it, and you're left
with a wistful wander to your step.

On other days, like today, just as I approach
the last few coins:
1917.
There it is. One. Only one,
but that's more than enough.
I have to squint and check the date ten times
before I'm sure it's real.

I exchange it with a coin
from the 'need a penny, take a penny' dish,
securing my precious find in a pocket.
Then I allow myself
a quick, private smile.
But, like the penny itself,
I keep quiet.
It's my imagination that's loud.

Bowl of Music

Suzanne Robin

Diana Ross and the Supremes
dance in the grooves of a huge donut,
black and shiny.

I watch the hard melt to soft,
falling from music to art,
through the oven window.

I shape a bowl from an old record
to hang in my bohemian bedroom
with a border of Motown music.



Anthony Deak
The War on Coffee
photograph 7" x 5"

digging for gold

Kenneth Sweet

i saw a sunfish slick with the river
in an old black man's hand
in the midday sun.
he wore white coveralls
and told me
"he bit the bare hook."

Treva Mitchell

Bounty

photograph 8" x 10"



Caffeine and Hair Extensions

Leeza Finch

Fiction

My entire body felt zapped of energy, and a headache brewed beneath my right temple. I needed caffeine. In specific, I needed a Diet Coke. My fifth period algebra teacher, Ms. Lortraine, had kept me after class to unravel my work on a tricky equation from last night's homework. By the time I had extricated myself from Ms. Lortraine's torture chamber of numbers, the rest of the eighth grade class, including Max, had already gone to lunch. Max was the answer to my caffeine withdrawal. He was also my sweet-natured if not slightly pimply best friend. Every day I vowed to stop drinking caffeine and left my cash at home, and every day Max had a dollar waiting for me; knowing I would break down before Ms. Lortraine assigned us homework for the following day. As I made my way through the empty halls to the cafeteria, I pictured grabbing the dollar from Max's sweaty hands; racing hysterically to the pop machine to jam it into the small, unforgiving slot. Surely God knew there would be a bloody massacre of my fellow eighth graders if I, Gabby Evans, was denied my Diet Coke.

The cafeteria was an overwhelming mixture of clamoring students, garish colors, and offending smells. The noxious odor of overcooked broccoli assaulted my nostrils before I stepped through the door. Amid the chaos, I made out the hunched and shaggy form of Max Leopold. He stared intently through his smeared glasses at a comic book I had never seen before, while he shoveled some of the aforementioned wretched broccoli into his mouth.

"Such a nerd," I muttered under my breath and smiled. I maneuvered my way through the swarm of people and carefully avoided a chair pushed out in front of me.

"Oh, sorry," grunted a large, angry-looking kid. Bushy eyebrows arched in an expression of menace over tiny black eyes didn't make him appear very sorry.

"That's okay," I whispered as he turned back to his equally-large

and angry-looking friend. I grimaced and caught Max staring at me with his dazed "I-think-I'm-awake" look. I gave him a small wave to assure him he was, in fact, conscious and at Clover-Hines Middle School; not caught in an alternate universe described in his latest comic. He waved back at me, and I noticed a splotch of ketchup on the white collar of his Ralph Lauren polo shirt. I weaved my way to his table. He gave me a lopsided grin and pulled out a perfectly smooth dollar bill. I grabbed it with a sheepish smile and plopped down in the seat next to him.

"She keep you over again?" he asked as he picked up his fork and stuck it into some kind of meat substance.

I made a face and ran the dollar through my fingers.

"You're going to get a paper cut," Max nagged.

"You have a great big gob of ketchup on your collar," I shot back.

Max dropped his fork and investigated the stain. I snorted, pulled a couple of paper napkins from beneath his tray, and threw them onto his lap. He grabbed one and dabbed at the ketchup.

"Aw, man!" he groaned. Giving up on the stain, he slumped back in his chair.

"Just go to the bathroom and put some of that crap industrial soap on it," I commanded. I grabbed one of the French fries that wasn't smothered in ketchup or snuggled up to the odorous broccoli.

He nodded, despondent, and gathered the soiled napkins. "Watch my stuff," he mumbled before trudging off.

"Hurry, okay? I've still got to get my Diet Coke!" I yelled and shook the crisp dollar bill. He waved without looking back, and I threw another fry in my mouth. In his absence, the din in the cafeteria became louder. I felt the heat of a hundred or so students pressing in around me. I sighed and pulled Max's tray and newest comic book towards me. I flipped idly through the brightly colored, action-packed pages while I polished off



Three Girls

Jordan Arrasmith

acrylic and ink on paper 10" x 12"

the rest of his fries. I stopped at the picture of a well-built, busty woman. No wonder Max was so enthralled. I snorted again and gagged as the French fry stuck in my throat. That's when I heard it — the sing-song voice of Amie Reeser.

“What’s so funny, Grubby?”

Grubby was Amie’s nick name for me. Amie was at least six inches taller than me with a mane of long, blonde hair; the kind they have in shampoo commercials. Model hair. Her blue eyes, so pale they were almost grey, sparkled in anticipation. Amie was always looking for trouble. Marianne Glossberg and Sandra Cohen flanked her, suited in armor of Baby Phat and Juicy Couture. Marianne, clearly bored, was texting someone on her new Chocolate iPhone. Sandra, however, watched me struggle with the French fry in bizarre fascination. I turned, swallowed, and summoned what little guile I had. I met Amie’s eyes with what I hoped was indignation and not fear. She raised a single, perfectly-groomed eyebrow, and I was forced to answer.

“I can’t believe how fake-looking those hair extensions are!”

I blurted out, laughing again before I clapped a hand over my mouth in horror.

Marianne looked up from her phone, her eyes widening in interest. Sandra seemed almost rabid as she glanced from Amie, to me, and back to Amie again. Amie’s eyes narrowed, cold and calculating. She pursed her glossy, strawberry-pink lips, tossed her hair, and placed a manicured hand on her hip. Then she uttered the most vile and grotesque sentence I’d ever heard.

My tentative calm exploded in fiery rage. I lunged at Amie screaming in total abandon. She gasped and tried to push me away, but I was already reaching for her hair. I grasped the fine strands and tugged hard. She shrieked in my ear and smashed her heel into my foot, but it was too late. I held in my hand a blond curtain of hair.

“Oh. My. God! You are wearing a hair extension!” Marianne screamed.

continued...

Sandra reached out to touch it, but Amie snatched it back; her face twisted in fury. Unfortunately, my fellow eighth graders weren't as oblivious as I thought. The cafeteria went quiet, and a hundred stunned faces with gaping mouths stared back at us. All I could do was stand, motionless. My right foot throbbed, and my hand still clutched an imaginary hair extension. I had no clue she actually *was* wearing hair extensions. I just guessed.

Mr. Harkin, the until-now-absent cafeteria monitor, stomped over. He smelled of smoke and rain. He grabbed me by the collar of my favorite jean jacket — the one I had rescued from a garage sale — and dragged me out the door. He muttered angrily beneath his splotchy orange mustache. As he hauled me away, I caught sight of Amie's flushed face. I could tell from the vindictive pleasure in her eyes that she would recover, but would my already shaky record bear the weight of this new crime?

The empty hall was cool and refreshing in comparison to the tension of the cafeteria. Mr. Harkin pulled me past the water fountain as Max ambled out of the boy's bathroom. He stopped dead in his tracks. "What happened?" he mouthed, looking perplexed.

I rolled my eyes and slipped him his dollar.

Mr. Harkin let out an exasperated sigh and gave me a little shove. "Let's go Ms. Evans. Mr. Leopold, you had better head back to lunch. You don't have much time left," he drawled.

Max nodded, hair flopping up and down. With one last glance of concern, he clutched the dollar and scurried back to the cafeteria. When we reached the principal's office, Mr. Harkin deposited me in one of the cold plastic chairs in the lobby and stomped off to finish his cigarette. I waved at Ms. Gleeson, the early-thirties, punked-out school secretary. She gave me an amused smile.

"Back again, Gabby?" she asked as she walked from behind her desk to the mini fridge in the corner.

"Yup."

"Would you like anything? Water? Orange juice?" she asked. Her head, with its bleached-blond crop of hair, was deep inside the refrigerator. She knew what I liked.

I picked up a ragged People magazine and flipped through it. She turned to look at me. I rolled my eyes and gave her what she wanted.

"I'd like a Diet Coke please." ■



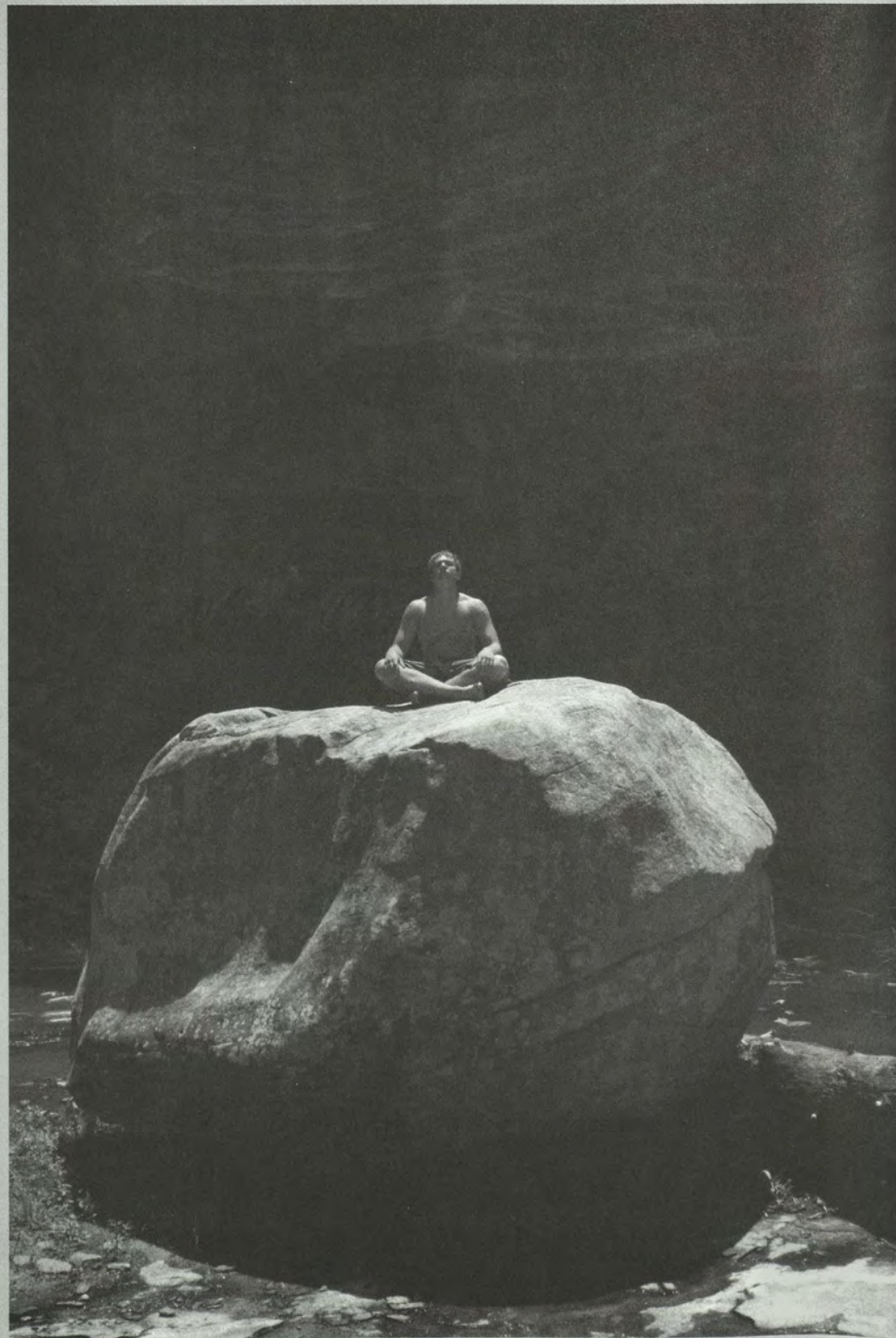
Justin Oakley
Escape
photograph

Yes, Maybe We Were a Little Crazy

Chad Forbregd

It's called *folie à deux*, not this, not the wine,
but the madness shared by two. They pass love like smoke
trapped in a French kiss. (The boy calls it a shotgun.
A blowback.) Delusional beliefs from another human fulgurite,
a castrato, trussed up like a Christmas ham or a modern day
Matthew Barney. The girl whispers and calls him Kyle,
a soft name, wonders why he keeps his charity a secret,
and quietly prays to be the boy's Icelandic lover.

Justin Oakley
Harmony with Nature
photograph



Not Goodbye

Joshua Verbeke

You are a hungry scavenger
picking at my bones and taking
the last morsels as I take
in the last breath. My stomach
was in knots waiting for you
and baiting for you: myself
on a hook. If time could tell,
I bet it would say the best
times will eat me alive. I guess
for once we agree. I lie
here pretending to be dead,
knowing you'd come back for
the last of what was left. Thought
maybe the time had passed,
but it's the past that never left.
I'd paint us into the sweetest
dream, if you hadn't already
framed me. You became the
iconoclast to my special cases;
the beast to hopes of angel
graces. I know now that all
the history isn't gone. You are.
I close my eyes and call your
ghost into my arms. Reach out
to you, Pavlovian, in our soft
half-empty bed. Sometimes still
smell you on my shirt. I can't decide
whether to be blissfully nostalgic

or hurt. I'm swinging on your closet
clothes, trying to will you into them.
If you're freewheeling now,
I'm wearing tire tracks. You ran
me over, treading stardust
into a field of glass where light
pierces you in splinters. The autumn
of a lifetime passed now proceeds
to winter. I'm swinging on your
closet clothes, and sinking
to the floor. You'd think maybe I've
had enough but I know I want more.

Express Lane

Joseph Cahall

6:31 p.m. (39°46'20.45" N 86°10'25.97" W)

Otto delayed {rubberneck} *10 miles per hour*

A small incident seen in a street or in a store

My head swiveled

nervous tic

Like a mosquito buzz

crashed in my ear

A fender-bender

or double-coupon heat stroke

6:31 p.m. (39°46'20.45" N 86°10'25.97" W)

Hope crashes {brake check} *40 miles per hour*

A slightly larger incident

felt in a street scene

My head swiveled

ringtone recognition

Like being chosen first

for kickball or advice

Red lights brighter

and my bear-hug seatbelt strains

Breathing in antifreeze

but exhaling no glass

6:31 p.m. (39°46'20.45" N 86°10'25.97" W)

Gloria fades {supermarket checkout} *15 items or less*

A serious incident created a scene

in a store on a street

My head swiveled

vacuum sounds

Like a balloon deflating

played in rewind

Humid like a smoky room

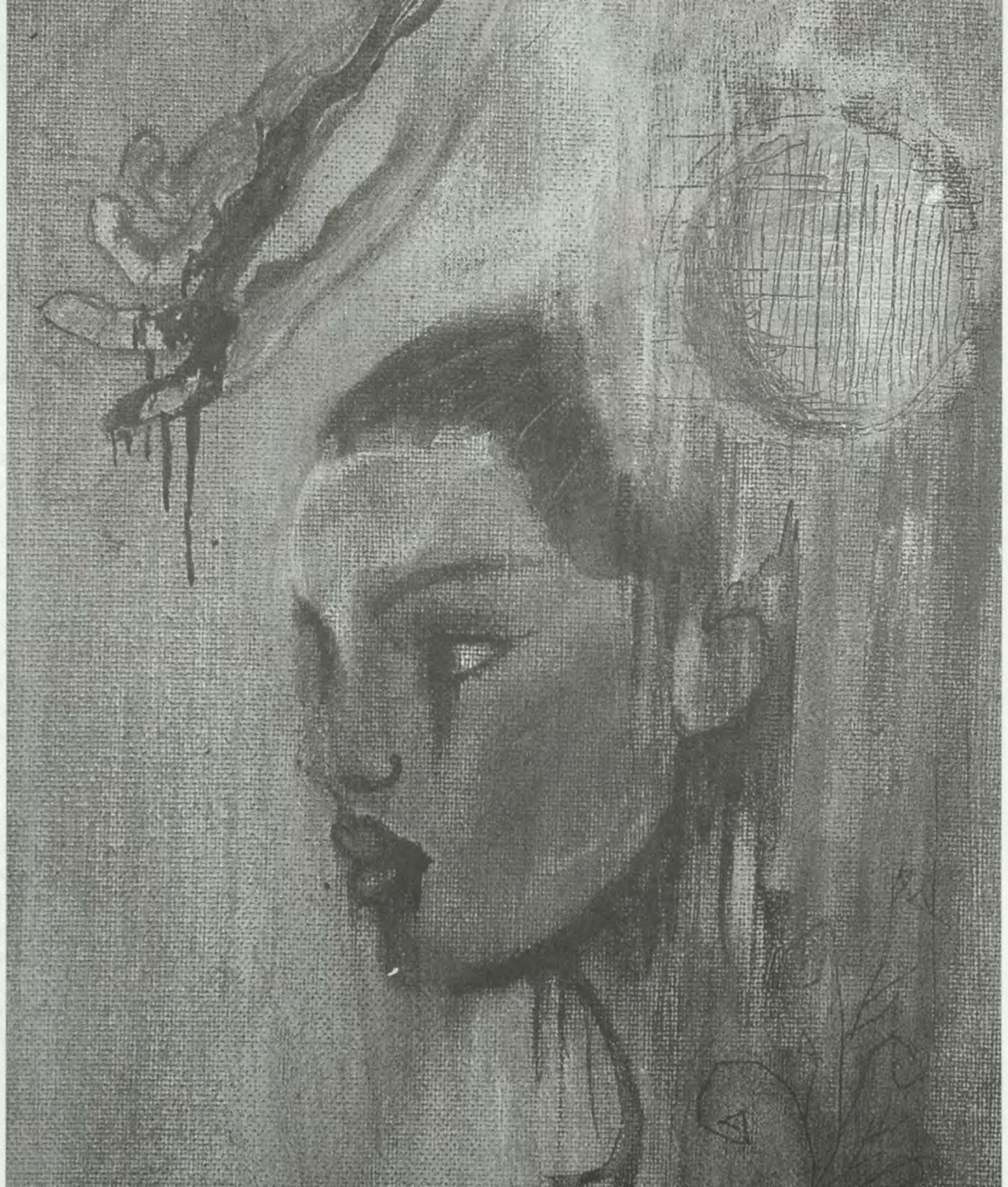
head swimming in silence

And the floor rising fast

to take my coupons

An incidental check-out

on a one-way street



Jordan Arrasmith
Untitled
acrylic on canvas 8" x 10"

Sisters of the Lotus

Davinia Yalimawai

Best of Fiction

My name is Padmaja, and I am sixteen going on seventeen.

“Padi, stop brushing your hair and help your sister make breakfast for your father!”

Actually, Maatajee, I’m combing my hair not brushing it, I’d like to say to her. But it’s too early for talking back and suffering the wrath of mother’s backhanded slap. Besides, it is fishing season, and Fiji Pacific Fishery is sending my father and the rest of his crew out to the Koro Sea. I won’t see Pitajee for a month, so I don’t mind making him breakfast.

“Yes, Maatajee.” But my twin sister Ela has already fried the cassava, warmed up the can of corned beef, and poured out a glass of whole milk for Pitajee. “Maa, Ela is done.”

“Then go do something with your hair! I will not permit you to leave this house until it looks like Ela’s.” Ela has straight Indian hair like Pitajee’s. Every Tuesday she French braids it, straight down her back and ties the end with white hair bands — just like Brigitta von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*. Like Maatajee’s natural hair (she has it chemically straightened every three months) my hair is coarse and curly, and only a large-toothed comb can chew through it enough for me to tie into a massive ball of cotton. The hair bands that freely sway at the bottom of Ela’s braids will get lost in my field of hair.

I kiss Pitajee goodbye and wish him another successful fishing trip. Maatajee tries to smooth out my cotton ball as Ela and I pass her on our way out the door.

Ever since we were little, I always felt safer walking to school holding Ela’s hand. Part of the reason is that I know she will always protect me. Another part of me still hopes that the longer I hold on to her hand, the more like her I will look. Despite the morning’s events, today is no

different. Ela reaches out her hand for me to grab and leads the way to Natabua High School.

“I hate it when Maa does that. Sorry, Padi.” Part of Ela playing the big sister role often involves her apologizing for everything offensive Maatajee says or does.

“It’s not your fault,” I say as we reach the school gates.

Ela and I are fraternal twins born five minutes apart. She was the first one out, her delivery normal. I, however, did not want to leave the womb. The medicine men performed an emergency C-section on Maatajee, permanently damaging her lower stomach nerves and denying her of any feeling there. She tried to say no to the men and their “unqualified hospital instruments,” but Pitajee was on a fishing trip. And in Fiji, a woman has no say on most matters — including the birthing of her own twin daughters.

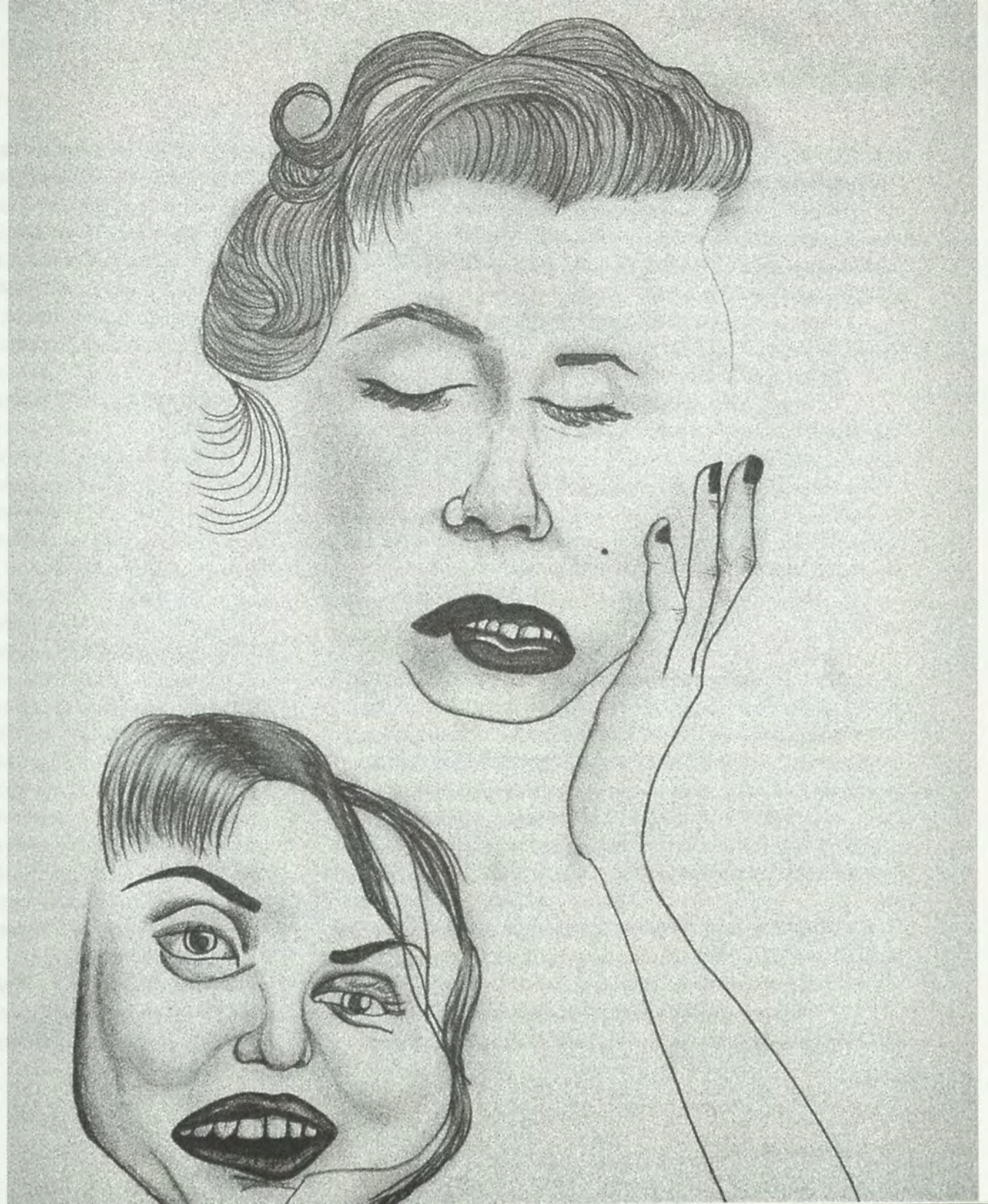
“It’s not your fault,” Ela says when Maatajee absentmindedly rubs her stomach. I know it isn’t, but sometimes I wonder what would have happened if the medicine men had listened to Maatajee. Ela would be an only child. Would they tell her of me?

As Ela and I enter our lecture room, the sea of white uniforms tells us that the rest of our grade eleven classmates arrived early today, and they are frantically going over notes. Quiz-day Tuesday. I had planned on reviewing the History of Polynesia this morning, but Maatajee’s high-pitched voice works like an eraser to my chalkboard memory. I look at Ela’s face, hoping she forgot too. She remembered.

We take our assigned seats on opposite sides of the classroom and soon after, Mr. Redhi — “because I am always *ready!*” — tells us to clear our desks. The goat curry he had for breakfast lingers on the pocket

continued..

Jordan Arrasmith
Monster
pencil on paper 12" x 14"



of his baby blue shirt. I start praying to the gods, asking for grace and knowledge. Jesus, my savior, have mercy on me. Saraswati, Hindi goddess of knowledge, help me to remember. Degei, great-god of the islands and Fijian warrior after my own heart, help me when I try to explain my unsatisfactory grade to Maatajee. Results-day Thursday tells me the gods have more important things to do.

“How can you shame me like this?” Maa says. “How can you shame your father?”

“How do you know Pitajee is ashamed? He isn’t even home.”

“Ela got a ninety-seven, Padmaja. Ninety-seven! What is a fifty-four? Fail? You failed! You might as well drop out of school and work at the sugar mill with the other Fijians.”

“Maatajee, last week I got an eighty-two. If Mr. Redhi had quizzed us on the stuff I knew, I would’ve done better. I’m serious, Maa. Ask me who the first Christian missionaries were that came to Fiji. Ask me who was Chief of the Lau Islands during that time.”

“*Adhajal gagari chalakat jaay!*” The half-filled pot goes spilling out water.

My name is Padmaja, the half-brained pot.

Maatajee is what the locals call *kai Viti*, or “of Fiji,” because her father was Fijian. Since Pitajee is Indian, he is *kai India*, “of India.” Though she is only half, there is no mistaking Maatajee’s Fijian ancestry. I never figured out how she tricked Pitajee into marrying her, but “trick” is the word Maa uses nonetheless. According to her, she tricked him with food, her brain, and a beautiful smile. Pitajee says she won him with her love.

I wish I spoke more Hindi. Maatajee’s father died when she was young, so she had no reason to learn the Fijian language. And she believes that speaking fluent Hindi makes her look more Indian.

“Padma, your Hindi is excellent,” people say when they hear Maatajee talk. “Did your husband teach you?” I sometimes feel

embarrassed for her. No matter how much she straightens her hair, or how much she speaks Hindi, she can never hide her ancestry.

I can never hide my ancestry. My Hindi is broken because we only speak English in school, and sometimes it is hard for me to talk with my relatives. This, according to Maa, is a good enough reason for me not to go to India with Maatajee and Ela this November for Diwali — the festival of lights — my favorite time of year: the season when Ela was born and I was ripped out of my mother, Padma’s, stomach.

My name is Padmaja, and it means born from the lotus, *padma*.

It has been two and a half weeks since my fifty-four on the quiz. This should be a sufficient enough time for Maatajee to meet Kavi Kumar, my boyfriend. He is full Indian, and his straight hair is one of the reasons I decide to bring him home to Maa. Kavi is also the only male, apart from Pitajee, who calls me beautiful.

“But my hair is not straight,” is all I could say when he kissed me behind the Headmaster’s office on my birthday last year. As he pulled his lips away from mine, his eyes slowly darted to the top of my head, as if only seeing the curly strands for the first time. My heart sank, and I was angry for breaking the spell that the gods conjured up for me. An embarrassed tear ran down my cheek. Just before I could wipe it away, I felt Kavi remove his hand from the small of my back and gently touch my face. I flinched; a reflex from Maa’s many slaps.

“No, my hair is straight. Your hair is beautiful.” Unlike Maa’s hand, the warmth radiating between Kavi’s palm and my face felt like Sparklers and Moon Whistlers – the firecrackers that Ela and I lit later on that beautiful Diwali evening.

The other reason I decide to bring Kavi home today is that he is going off to the University next year, and we plan on announcing our engagement before then. We follow the smell of warm sugar, almonds and milk. Maa is making *halwa* – my favorite dessert. I lead the way towards the kitchen and extend my left hand back for Kavi to hold. I also

find myself praying. Oh great Saraswati, could this sugary sign foretell a peaceful evening? Maa takes off her apron and looks Kavi up and down as we enter. The setting sun from outside shines directly through the window and onto Maa. She has not yet given us permission to turn the inside lights on. The corners of her eyes briefly tense up when she sees us holding hands. She turns around and walks back to the stove to check on our dinner. I see that she has picked up a few hair tips from Ela and has decided on the Brigitta-style braid, straight down the back.

“You are *kai India*?” Her voice is clearly heard, though it seems like she is talking to the pot of boiling lentils.

I can tell this question startles Kavi because he takes a step back before answering. “Yes, Aunty,” he replies. His palm begins to sweat, but all I can do is offer an encouraging squeeze and a little tug to bring him back closer to me. I want to say, Stand up to her, Kavi. Control your quivering voice.

Maa keeps stirring, clockwise. “How old are you?”

“Seventeen.”

That’s it, I say in my head. Puff out your chest, Kavi.

“When is your birthday?” Maa asks as she adds salt and spices to the pot.

“January twenty-second.”

“So, you are one year and ten months older than Padmaja?”

Kavi’s eyes dart back and forth as he calculates our ages in his head. “Uh, yes,” Kavi answers with a bit less surety than I hope for.

Maa tastes the lentils, adds a bit more salt, and continues stirring.

“What is your mother’s maiden name, Kavi?”

“Prasad.”

The wooden spoon Maa is stirring with drops to the bottom of the pot and she turns to face us. “Is your mother *Vijayata* Prasad?”

“Yes, Aunty.”

“Padmaja, help me bring the clothes in from the line.”

I throw an apologetic look to Kavi as I follow Maatajee outside. She’s silent for the first four minutes, robotically removing the clothespins

with one hand while throwing the skirts and socks into a basket with the other. Curly strands are starting to show at the roots of Maatajee’s head and soon she will need to straighten her hair again.

“Why did you bring this boy to my house, to your father’s house? Have you no shame?” she says.

“But he’s Indian. I thought you’d approve of him.”

“His mother is a Prasad!”

“Yes she is, and my father is a Singh. We are both Indian.”

“He is not like you. You are not allowed to date him, *accha*? After dinner you are never to see him again, understand?”

“First I’m not Indian enough, and then my boyfriend is too Indian for me? I may look like you, Maatajee, but I am more Indian than you!”

And with that, she slaps me. “Go inside and wash your face. Tell Ela to set the table.”

My name is Padmaja, and tonight I hate my mother.

Maatajee rubs her stomach with the same hand she used to slap my face. All throughout dinner she rubs. When Maatajee and Ela take the dishes to the kitchen, Kavi asks me to have dinner at his house the following evening. I am ashamed of the prejudice my mother feels towards me, her own daughter, so I smile and tell him I’d love to have dinner with him and his mother. Like Pitajee, Kavi’s father also works in the fishing industry and has been called away to work.

I cannot sleep tonight. Although Maa slapped only my face, I feel as though my whole body is aching. Ela, as usual, apologizes. And, like always, I tell her it is not her fault. I let her make it up to me by helping me flat-iron my hair the following evening.

We tell Maatajee that the pastor’s wife thinks we need an extra choir rehearsal, and that is why we won’t be home for dinner tonight. Ela is really going to watch Bollywood films at a friend’s house, and I will meet her after my dinner with Kavi and his mother.

continued...

Sisters of the Lotus/Davinia Yalimawai

Staring at the massive Kumar house, I find my walking pace slows as I get closer to the front door. Although bright yellow is my favorite color, seeing the underarm stains on my new blouse tells me I should have worn something darker. But, I am more than assured by the hug Kavi gives me as he welcomes me into his home. Unlike our house, the lights are turned on inside the Kumar residence well before the sun sets. Dinner is already set on the table as I go inside and Mrs. Kumar, a more Indian replica of Maatajee, looks like she just stepped out of one of Ela's Bollywood films. Kavi has her smile.

All throughout dinner she smiles at me. I begin to talk more freely with Auntie Vijayata, because her friendliness leads me to believe that we have known each other for years. We talk about school, and me being a twin, and how mixed children often feel unwanted by our society. I can tell by the way she encourages Kavi to speak that she has never slapped him for disagreeing with her. Kavi even tells her of our plans to marry, and Auntie Vijayata's genuine smile never falters. I fantasize about Maatajee being more like Auntie Vijayata. As if she also has my mother on her mind, Auntie Vijayata's voice suddenly grows softer.

"What is your mother's maiden name, Padmaja?" I look at her red lips and perfect teeth as she talks to me. Her golden *nath* attaches at the piercing on the left nostril and extends in a half-circle to the piercing on her left ear lobe.

"Tailevu."

"Is your mother Padma Tailevu?"

Oh no. Please Degei, don't let her turn out to be as close-minded as Maatajee.

"Yes, Auntie."

"I knew her once. We were best friends. You are beautiful, just like her."

Apparently Maa did not feel the need to tell me that the love of my life's mother was her childhood friend. Auntie Vijayata, on the other hand, was more than happy to tell me my mother's history.

My mother, Padma Tailevu, and Vijayata Prasad grew up together. Padma's first boyfriend was also Vijayata's brother. Although Padma's mother was Indian, by government standards Padma was one hundred percent Fijian because her father was *kai Viti*. Unfortunately for Padma, she was labeled a "half-caste", or half-breed, and Vijayata's brother would never shame his family by marrying a half-caste. Padma would later marry a different Indian boy, a Singh, and they would have two daughters, Ela and Padmaja.

My name is Padmaja, daughter of a half-caste.

I do not know how to take in the night's information. Maatajee knows how much it pained her to be denied love because she was half Fijian, and yet she tries to deny me mine? I'm even less Fijian than she is. I rapidly walk to Ela's friend's house, a bit surprised by the chilly island air. At least my underarm stains will dry. Ela is already saying her goodbyes when I meet up with her, and we walk the rest of the way home. It is almost ten-thirty when we arrive, and the smell of ripe dates and whole wheat flour tells us Maatajee is baking scones for tomorrow's breakfast. Though the oven is on, the cold air follows us into the kitchen.

"How was choir practice?" Maa asks with her back towards us.

"Fine," says Ela.

"Okay," I say.

Maatajee turns around to acknowledge us, disinterestedly looks past our heads, and continues to knead. I linger in the kitchen while Ela leaves to get ready for bed.

"Maa?" I watch her fold the dates into the dough.

"Padi, go to bed."

"Maa, I need to talk to you." I imagine my body as the dough, oozing slowly between her fingers, hitting the kitchen counter, only for her to pick up and pound again.

"Can't it wait until tomorrow, child? Mummy is busy."

I suddenly realize that if I don't tell her now, I will lose all

courage.

“I went to Kavi’s house tonight and Auntie Vijayata told me about you and her brother and her racist family and I’m really sorry that happened to you but she’s different and she thinks I’m beautiful and Kavi and I are getting married next year before he leaves for school.” I close my eyes after my sudden burst of words, and try to relax my cheek muscles to soften the blow of the sticky-dough hand that is sure to come. “Maa?”

“Go to bed.” She is done kneading, and now molds the dough into perfect spheres, placing them gently onto the already buttered baking pan. Each sphere has the same measurements – one-quarter dates, three-quarters everything else. Without the dates, the scones will have no taste. Without everything else locking in the moisture, the dates will shrivel up and die. It is said that the gods never die, but that their souls pass on from generation to generation. I am not a god.

My name is Padmaja, and I am a breakfast scone.

“Maa, please, just look at me. I am going to marry Kavi but I want your blessing. Maatajee, I need your blessing.” My voice quivers as I whisper the last sentence.

Maatajee places the pan of scones in the oven. She rubs her stomach as she turns around to face me. “What do you need my blessing for? It is clear that you have already made up your mind to marry that boy.”

“That boy is Kavi Kumar! He will be eighteen when we marry, the same age Pitajee was when he married you.”

“Don’t you dare raise your voice at me, girl. I will not be disrespected in my kitchen, *accha*? I told you to go to bed. Sleep will clear this nonsense building in your head and you won’t end up in a marriage you regret.”

“Like the marriage you are in with Pitajee?”

Maatajee looks around the kitchen for something to throw at me. I bite my lower lip, afraid of what she will do. I taste blood — warm and salty — my Indian and Fijian blood. Unable to find anything in arms

reach, Maatajee strides over, raises her right arm, and hits my head. And, as suddenly as that violent swing ends, she regains her composure. Her breathing quiets down, and her eyes slowly move from my face to the window.

“Go to bed, Padmaja.” Maa turns back to her scones.

Frustrated and dizzy, I wipe away the Judas-tears forming in my eyes. I will not allow them to betray me tonight. How can I both hate Maa and want her marriage blessing at the same time? How am I still standing when I have this splitting headache? Room, stop spinning. Legs, stay strong. Gods, help me...

The hard tile feels cold on the right side of my body and I realize I have fainted. I forget about my other side until I feel a hand on my cheek. I recognize that hand very well — Maatajee — but something is different. Whereas moments before that hand trembled with anger, this hand is a little softer. It lingers longer. I look up into Maa’s face and wonder how the Judas-tears managed to get into her eyes as well.

“*Maaf keejiyega*, Padi.” I’m so sorry. “It is getting late, and all will be better in the morning.”

The look she now gives me, the way she cradles me in her arms, makes me want to believe her. I want to believe that she truly is sorry for hitting me, and for wishing I looked more Indian. I want to believe that she will take me with her and Ela to India this November. I want to believe that she finds me good enough to marry Kavi. So I smile up at her, and she smiles back. But Maatajee pats my head and gently stretches out the curls of my hair, slowly trying to pin it tight and straight, just like Ela’s.

My name is Padmaja, and I was ripped from the Lotus. ■

Contributors' Notes

Jordan Arrasmith

is a freshman at the Herron School of Art and Design with a particular interest in painting and drawing. Jordan enjoys making sandwiches and short films with friends, as well as watching horror movies and riding roller coasters. Jordan looks forward to lots of travel in the future.

Joseph Cahall

is a senior Psychology major who plans to pursue postgraduate studies in neuroscience.

Rebekah Crowmer

majors in Illustration and IT New Media Digital Storytelling at the Herron School of Art and Design. Born in San Diego, but raised mostly in Noblesville, Rebekah taught herself to draw as a child. Hobbies: comic books, manga, anime; sleeping, gaming; being sarcastic and satirical; hanging with friends; making art. She loves WTF moments and robot zombies.

Anthony Deak

currently attends the Herron School of Art and Design and pursues a BFA degree in photography.

Steven Elmlinger

says "And of the night" is a poem he wrote in reflection of his life until that point. Stream-of-consciousness writing helps Steven realize the worst that can happen and bring it to the forefront of his life. This poem helped him cope with big themes and strains in life, like rejection and karma.

Leeza Ann Finch

is a junior at IUPUI. She balances her passion for writing with her love for health information administration and her Chihuahua, Orli. Leeza thanks her friends, old, new, and imaginary, without whose encouragement and delightful conversation she would never have submitted a single thing to *genesis*.

Chad Forbregd

is a student, writer, musician, and small-business owner. Chad spends his free time staying up late to curse the first rays of the morning. He is a collector and a connoisseur; he is neither bad nor good at these things, but simply average.

Lita Luginbill

is studying ceramics at Herron School of Art and Design. When Lita grows up she wants to have her own studio so she can make anything she wants, and show people how to play with clay. She can be found carrying a pail of clay and roaming the streets of Indianapolis.

Ashley Mack

is an Indianapolis native, a creative writing major, and a University Library Diversity Fellow. Ashley was published in the 2005 issue of *Drumvoices Revue* and was invited to attend the writers' retreat of *Callaloo* at Texas A&M University.

Treva Mitchell

is a student at the Herron School of Art and Design, with a double major of Sculpture and Furniture Design.

Ners

grew up sandwiched between the White River and a coal-fired power plant in an old suburb next to a cornfield.

Justin Oakley

is a twenty-one-year-old junior at IUPUI, majoring in English. Justin enjoys creative writing and photography.

Erik Osburn

is a super senior. In his spare time (what's that?) he likes to hike, sail, and watch weird movies.

Evan Roberts

is a junior in the New Media program at IUPUI, and is a photographer, videographer, and all-around media artist. He enjoys playing rugby for the Indianapolis Impalas in his free time. Evan gets most of his inspiration from his beautiful daughter, Summer, who fills his life with joy.

Suzanne Robin

is a twenty-year-old junior with an English major and a Religious Studies minor. She loves to laugh, sing ridiculously loud in the car, and watch Wes Anderson films.

Taylor Saville

is an English major at IUPUI. She says her drawing, "Grimalkin Corvus," symbolizes fear, or a sense of dread, as well as representing the spirit of Halloween.

Kenneth Sweet

grew up in Rushville, Indiana. He has been attending IUPUI intermittently since 1997, and is currently a junior English major with a creative writing focus. Kenneth plans to obtain his MLS, and work the rest of his days as a librarian.

Jessica Valentine

is a Religious Studies major and is currently deeply contemplating becoming a Philosophy major as well. Jes has ten fingers and ten toes, and is grateful for this capacity.

Joshua Verbeke

says writing has been the anchor in his dreamland since childhood. It keeps him from getting too grounded. With Marketing and Public Relations majors, Josh gets quite enough reality. He enjoys writing as a Self other than his own, and feels that the "you" in a piece is commonly the Other, or something nebulous outside himself.

Ross Waitt

a lifelong Hoosier, was raised on a dairy farm in Big Springs, Indiana. Ross is now majoring in photography at the Herron School of Art and Design.

Davinia Yalimawai

was born in Fiji, and raised both there, and in Hawaii. Her parents have mixed ethnicities, making Davinia and her older brother the literal definitions of global citizens. She loves reading and writing about world mythologies and religions, but she loves the ocean even more, and dreams of it constantly.

Beth Zyglowicz

is currently in her fourth year (though not her last) at the Herron School of Art and Design, majoring in Illustration and Japanese. More of Beth's artwork can be seen at <http://flameraven.deviantart.com>.

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For submission guidelines, and more information about *genesis*,

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Thank you.

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