

genesis

spring 2012

40th Anniversary



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Editor's Note

It is with great pleasure and honor that we present our contribution, the Spring 2012 issue, to the forty year publication legacy of *genesis*. It is a magazine that continues to evolve and serve as venue for creative minds to share their work with the Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis student body. We wish the best to *genesis* and its next forty years.

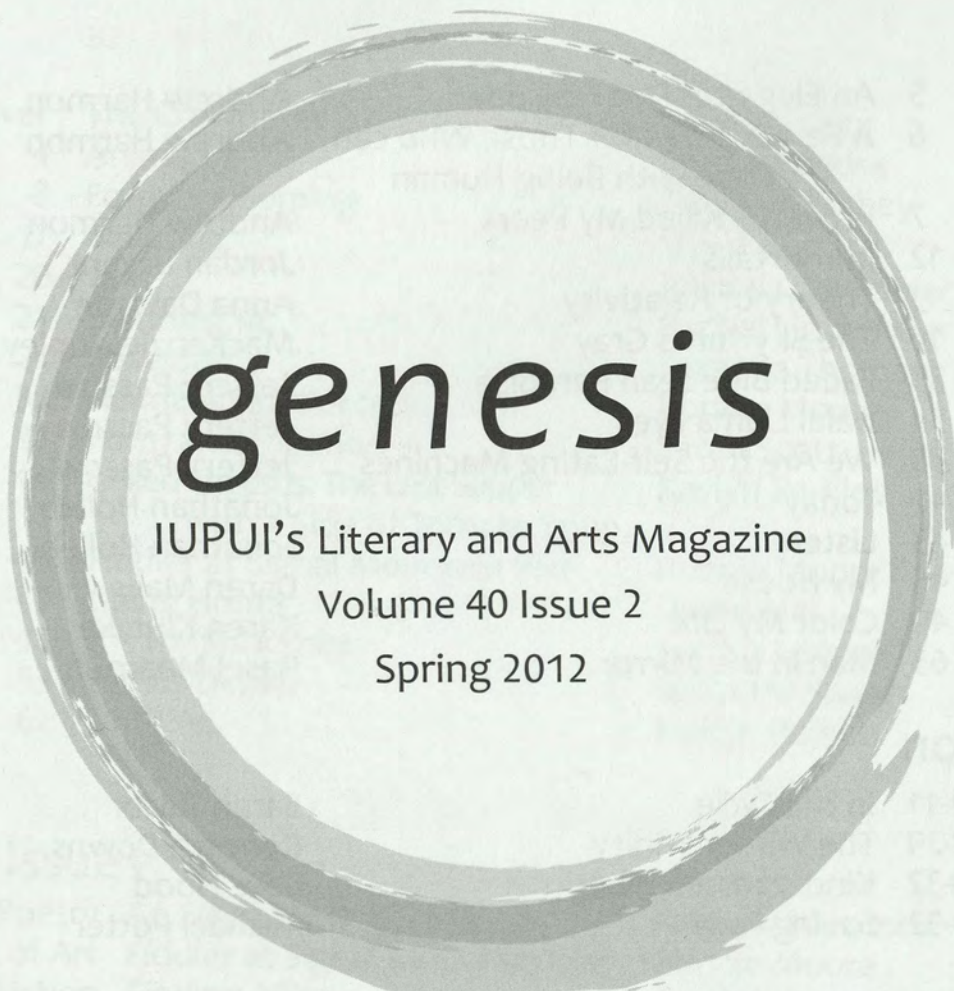
Hannah Geier & Chad Redden

Managing Editors

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Manav Gupta

The Crownicles



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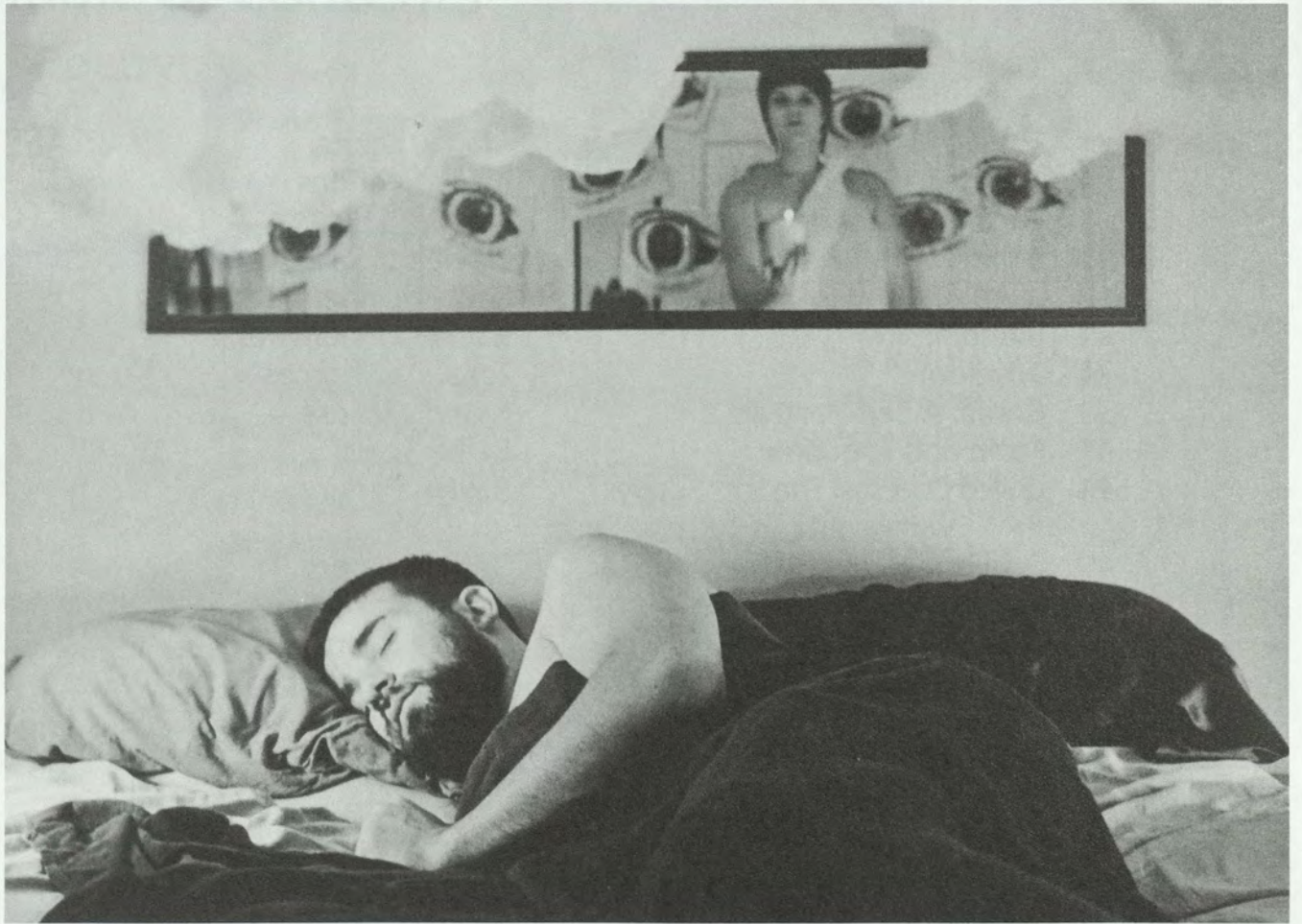
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Kaylyn Perkins

Anima

Andrew Harmon

An Elegy for Doc Holliday

You were swallowed up by the stale air
of Arizona--the hot dust meant to
help you breathe through
your wheezing disease

the air you sucked in
through your sable mustache
between shots of dirt whiskey
and double doses of laudanum.

You pushed slow daisies in the doldrums
of the untamed west.
You offered to be our huckleberry;
a man doomed to stand dead-
center with streetsweeper
and six shooter, no longer afraid
of the weathered crosses that burn
under the sun of Tombstone.

A Few Stanzas for Those Who can Cope with Being Human

1

You treat reasons like trinkets:
invented for show, but devoid of real value.
You know that Why stands
in Newtonian opposition with Why Not.
That Why, when left to its own will
drowns itself in recursion.
You slide from pleasure to distress
as easily as a slab of smooth slate over ice.

2

You know love can be real as a summer day
depending on time and the position of the sun.
That its warmth settles on the skin
draws salt from you, and bakes you dry.
That its heat fades, leaves you with a crisp kiss
of cool air and the beauty of simple white.
That the memory of summer night will crop up
in the trudging and dark days of January.

3

You pony your face through the room
but saddle your mind at the door.
You know that getting by by anything more
than the skin of your teeth risks giving up
too much of who you are.
You nudge your luck into the future
like a man, in search of a closer shave
daring the razor to bite his flesh.

Proverbs Killed My Peers

I was told that if the grasshopper frolicked
through summer while the dutiful ant toiled
then Jack would be a dull boy.
That the bird in my hand is worth two in any bush
because when nothing is ventured, nothing is gained.
That the pen is mightier than the sword
but actions speak louder than anything that pen can produce.
That I should beware Greeks and their gifts
but never look their horse in the mouth.
That clothes make the man, and if that man
is reading a book, I should pay no heed to its cover.
That if I'm a squeaky wheel, I'll earn my grease
and if I'm a nail sticking out, I'll get the hammer.
That the only constant is change
in a world where there's nothing new under the sun.

I was told I could be president
and that I should set realistic goals.
That I should follow the passions of my heart
into a stable and marketable area of study.
I was told that love is all we need
and to avoid abstractions.
But please, just take me for my word
because a man without words
is a man without thoughts
and a man without thoughts
is a man without words
and a silent man is a wise man.



Christina Richey

Forever Looming

Sarah Taylor

In the Cycle

The rush of clean, humid air overwhelmed me as I opened the door to the Cloverdale Laundromat, dragging behind two bags and a hamper full of dirty laundry. The crisp scent of Tide, Gain and Snuggle drifted about the room, reminding me I'd left my own detergent back in my truck. There was no way I was paying three dollars for a box of Purex from the vending machine. As if the task wasn't tedious enough, I realized that the largest washers were already taken as well. I'd have to sit even longer hoping no one would speak to me as my clothes agitated. I didn't want to be associated with these people. To me, there always seemed to be something inherently shady about a laundromat.

I shoved my things toward one of the white, plastic lawn chairs that encircled the room. I had to squeeze past two Latino men because the island of washers in the middle of the place left little room on either side. I picked a spot that distanced me from them—I never liked doing my laundry around men. I always felt like they were watching me put my “delicates” into the machines, secretly judging and wondering over my choices: A bright pink bra or blue granny panties. Was I a harlot or a spinster? It put me into a frenzy, shoving clothes into the barrel before judgments could be made. It made me feel better that a motherly-looking woman was standing near, folding her own clothes quietly.

Everyone seemed to have their own method to clothes washing. Nearby, an older woman sorted her whites from darks, creating a pile

of each on the cracked linoleum floor. Beside her, the girl who was running the laundromat was hanging freshly dried shirts up, pulling at creases on the sleeves. My methods seemed rather primitive as I shoved colors and whites into the machine, not caring if there were socks or shirts or jeans in the bundle. I was going for speed. I crammed two washers full, trying to get my eight dollars of quarters worth, pouring two full caps of Gain onto the top. I wound the Wascomat 2000 into its fastest cycle and watched the suds pour over my clothes through the clear door. Unlike most of the people around me, I didn't come here out of necessity. I was here because I'd let a month's worth of laundry build up and it would've taken two days to get it washed at home.

As I sat, a weary-looking woman in sweat pants and Crocs came through the side door, pulling at least five bags of laundry and three equally dirty kids inside with her. She dropped her things in a heap, pushing one of her children out the door for something forgotten. She set the other two to work sorting through the bags, arranging clothes in different piles, swatting at them when they piled something wrong. The majority of it looked like men's clothing: ripped flannels, Rustler jeans, mud-stained tube socks. The clothes looked worse for wear, something that even the hottest water couldn't help. Yet, the woman and her children tenderly sorted what was there, pulling socks and shirts right-side-out, shaking the legs of pants out, and checking the pockets for change.

That was another thing laundromats reminded me of—poverty.

My own clothes had started their spin cycle and I was in the midst of an article on beach-themed living rooms when one of the Latino men approached me. I was hoping he would simply pass on by for the vending machine, but he stopped before me, holding out a magazine of his own.

"How you say?" He was pointing towards a photograph of a sea turtle.

I smiled unevenly. "That's a turtle."

He repeated the word with a giggle. Clearly the word seemed funny to him. I was relieved when he walked away. I tried to immerse myself deeper into my own magazine. The motherly woman had left earlier, leaving me alone on one side of the room. My clothes were nearly washed and I pulled the laundry cart over just as the Latino man returned. He had a Pepsi in one hand and a Mountain Dew in the other. I looked desperately around the room.

"You take." He held them out to me.

I felt very white and girlish then. "No, no thank you."

"Yes, you take." He smiled fiercely, dumbly.

I forfeited and took the Pepsi. He seemed pleased and finally walked away. I ripped my clothes from the washers, piling the cart too

**I felt very white
and girlish then.**

high with them. I watched for the Latino man out of the corner of my eye, badgering myself for letting my clothes get so far behind. This whole awkwardness could have been avoided if I'd only been a little more meticulous over my laundry days.

As I shoved my clothes into a large dryer that was still warm from the last patron and had fifteen minutes left on it—that's how you save the most money on drying—I tried to focus on the TV blaring above me. It was always stationed on soap operas or CNN. I could never understand why CNN would be on. I guess the judgmental side of me always assumed people at laundromats wouldn't care much for world events. I was mollified momentarily at the fact that *Days of our Lives* resumed after the commercials.

When I took my seat once more a woman in pressed athletic wear had pulled her laundry basket to the washer next to mine. It was filled with comforters and sheets, things one couldn't fit in a washer at home. I looked over to the Latino man, secretly glad that this woman would probably prevent him from pestering me anymore.

As my clothes dried, the Latino man finally left, taking his small bag of clothes with him. I felt a little guilty over my relief at his leaving. I think he mostly wanted someone to talk to. I turned to the woman in pressed athletic wear. She didn't look at me. Instead, she sighed over a

cheesy Janet Evanovich novel. Clearly this was merely an annoying task for her, as well. She probably could have washed her comforters at home if she wanted to.

I wondered idly if she'd talk to me if I said something to her. I didn't try, though. Instead, I pulled my clothes from the dryer. I folded them hastily, sweating from their rising heat. It was the only moment I savored when washing clothes. The clean smell of softener sheets would still be fresh when I packed them home, knowing I wouldn't have to worry about laundry for another two weeks. It was a tantalizing thought.

Finally, as I dragged my last bag through the door, straining to hold it open with my hip, I caught sight of the woman with the three children once more. She was folding what I assumed to be her husband's clothes in neat, purposeful piles. Watching her, I was suddenly struck with the strange image of a woman from long ago, standing in a river, scrubbing and beating clothes against the rocks, laying them out to dry in the sun; clothes that belonged to her husband and children, stained and worn. Those clothes were all they had.

I tried to turn away from the image, but I couldn't. Even as I started home, with the easy scent of Gain wafting through my truck, she remained. But, I suppose everything eventually comes out in the wash.



Jordan Bryant
Immortalis

First impressions are crucial.
"It was a pleasure to burn."
I want a start like that-
a stark beginning that commands attention.
Simple, elegant, but fierce in connotation.
Enigmatic in meaning.
I want to be blinding.
Unforgettable.
I want to be the curly tattoo
across his shoulder blade
or scrawled across her wrist.
I want to be a fresh truth
so simple it hurts and so real
you can hold it in your hand
warming your palms
pricking your fingers.
I want to be remembered.
Forgotten and then rediscovered
scribbled on margins, graffitied on buildings
I want to be loved and feared.
Banned and worshiped.
Burn me for striking a devastating nerve
because that will immortalize me.
I shall be remembered.

Anna Dawson

Theory of Relativity

Your atoms
should get with my atoms
you can be Adam
I'll be Eve
forever naive
pretending other women didn't exist before me.
When you ignore me
it's because you're busy
(orjustnothorny)
not because you don't care.
My cross to bear
is affectation, humiliation
as I draw myself to you through commiseration,
while desolation of my own soul
eats at me like acid through a rose petal.
I hoped when you settled
it would be with me
but I still can't kill that dove
with the spirit of a cockroach
nigh beyond reproach
for it is Cupid after all
that shot the arrow.
It is his dove to kill
my pain, his thrill.
So I rot and rust
in love and lust
wishing for deliverance from you.

Carrington Kujawski

How to Serve Scotch

"My cat died. Can I come in?"

He hadn't seen her in nearly five years. Her red hair was longer, twisted up into a knot on the top of her head. Her blue eyes had remained the same, still innocent, still sad, and still able to make him uncomfortable. Annie stood shaking under a huge umbrella, cold from the icy rain and night air. She pulled her thick knitted scarf closer to her neck, staring straight through him. Drew swallowed and let her inside.

She slipped off her boots by the door and hung up her umbrella, scarf, and trench coat on the coat rack. She walked in without saying anything else, as if she'd never left. She curled up into Drew's leather armchair, hugging her legs and picking at a hole in her knitted socks.

"Well, it's a surprise to see you," Drew said, flicking on his kitchen light. He leaned against the wall, his arms folded across his chest and his eyes on the girl. He wanted to drink in as much of her as possible before she disappeared again.

"I do that," she muttered, pushing stray curls out of her face. "You know me."

"I do."

"Don't sound so bitter."

"Don't tell me what to do," he said, smirking. "Still drink Scotch?" he asked. Alcohol was the only thing he could offer her.

"I could use one." She was distant, locked up in her head. "My cat died."

"I know," he muttered from the kitchen.

"Was it a good cat?"

"No." She laughed. "He ignored me, bit me

when I petted him, and he was stupid. Ran out into the street, smacked by a bus."

She shut her eyes and heard the clink of glasses, the sound of thunder outside. He was quiet in the kitchen which was illuminated by the buzzing florescent light bulb. The house sounded the same as it had five years ago. As long as she kept her eyes closed, time hadn't passed. It was only when she opened them that the changes showed. The walls were no longer covered by band posters and pin-up girls, but by paintings crafted by local artists, movie posters, and polished mirrors that reflected Drew's job working for a film company. The patched couch had been replaced by suede, the wooden table now glass and sleek. She shut her eyes again and waited for her drink.

"What was the cat's name?" Drew asked, pouring single-malt scotch into crystal glass, adding lots of water to hers so she'd assume he'd given her more than he actually had.

"Juice."

"That's a good name to drink to."

"I guess," she mumbled. Drew handed her a glass. "To Juice."

"May he find peace in his little kitty grave," Drew said, smiling as he watched her drink the Scotch in one gulp. She set the glass on the table, giving a small cough. He was glad he hadn't wasted the 18-year Scotch on her.

"Just *why* does this always happen to me?" Annie said, rubbing her eyes.

"You always have cats die?"

She held her face in her hands, unraveling her hair out of its knot. Drew waited for her to fix it, to undo it completely and swish it up into a ponytail. She wanted to fix everything. This time, she let it sag into a muddled disarray, a few tears falling down her cheeks. Even so, she still looked like a model, her cheek bones high, her eyes wide and scared. He couldn't hold eye contact with her. He hated when women started crying, it made them instantly right.

"I must've missed something," Drew said under his breath, sipping from his own drink. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"No." She rubbed her eyes for a moment, picked up a book on the table and began to read, as if to say she really didn't want to talk about it.

"You gave me that," he said, pointing to the book. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde.

"Did you ever read it?" Her laugh caught in the back of her throat.

"More times than you'd expect."

She flipped to a section in the beginning of the book, knowing it quite well. "*The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful.*" I really like this view on temptation, it seems appropriate right now."

"I've missed you," Drew chuckled. Her eyes were dry now; her favorite author had cleared them. They were back on Drew, asking him to come closer. He'd answered that look too many

times in the past. His words caught in the back of his throat. He was unsure of what feelings to act on. Annie was here, and he'd waited so long for that. Too long. The cat was no reason to show up on his doorstep. She'd given no reason why she was here, just as she'd given no reason why she left. But he'd learned his lesson. She was beautiful in the same way a forest fire was beautiful—best admired from a distance.

"Oscar Wilde lived such a sad life... do you know what his dying words were? He was dying in Paris, in this cheap hotel with horrible wallpaper. He looked up at his attendant and said, 'Either this wallpaper goes, or I go,'" Anne said softly, untangling herself. "He had such a fantastic sense of humor, even in horrible situations . . ."

"Imagine that." Drew finished his drink. "Why are you here, Annie?"

"Can I have another drink?"

Knowing she had hidden intentions, he couldn't say no. As tempting as it was to throw her out of his house while she could still drive, he knew something was wrong and she was in pain. He wanted to know why she was here. He hated himself for loving her; it made his life complete hell. He fixed her another watered-down scotch, making a stronger one for himself. He needed it. She didn't. She was stronger already.

He handed her the glass.

"Nope, mister, that's not how we are going to play tonight." She put the drink back in his

The house missed her noise.

hand, and picked up his drink instead. "Why are you serving me watered-down Scotch?"

"Some things don't have answers," he said. "I had to learn that a while ago."

She was silent, swirling the amber liquid inside her glass. She liked the feel of the glass, the weight of it, and how the cut crystal caught the light. She sighed. This small noise sent shivers down Drew's back and made his stomach feel like a vacuum. The house missed her noise. He'd managed to rearrange the furniture, but the walls still remembered Annie and now that she was here it felt whole again. He remembered their trips to Ikea, picking out brightly colored furniture and weird knickknacks she insisted on having. As soon as she left, he'd sold everything, redoing his house and erasing her from his life. He wondered if he'd have to rearrange his furniture again to forget this night.

"Annie, is everything ok?"

"Is everything ever ok?"

"Don't be a smartass. Why are you here? Why did you leave to begin with?"

"Some things don't have answers, Drew." She took a drink out of her glass, leaving a red lip stain on the crystal. "You ask too many questions."

He glared at her as she walked over to his couch. He was trying so hard to be angry at



Sylvia Burlock
Ballerina

her, trying to remember all of the pain she kept bringing into his life, but the closer she got to him the harder it became to see her clearly.

She straddled him, taking his face in her hands. "I'm here to stay this time."

"You should leave." Drew didn't look at her. He couldn't. "Now."

"Why did you serve me scotch with water? I do not appreciate this." She grinned, brushing the hair out of her eyes.

"Filler," Drew said. "Exactly what I was to you. Leave."

She said nothing. Her breath was on his neck, charged with anger. He shut his eyes and kept them closed as he felt her weight shift off of him. He heard her put her glass on the table, and then another glass—she finished his scotch, too. Her footsteps died softly, he heard the rustle of fabric, and then the slamming of his door. When he opened his eyes again, she was gone like before.

He sank into the couch, stared at the empty chair, and imagined mapping out the tangles in her hair. He picked up the book on the coffee table and turned to a dog-eared page. *An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them.*

He saw her number flash up on his phone. He waited for the vibrating to stop. A little red dot signaled a voice message. He watched it

blink, over and over again, until he finally picked up the phone and threw it against the wall. The battery fell out, and he fell asleep, dreaming of her.

He woke in the morning and poured himself a glass of orange juice. He flicked on the TV, but immediately wished he hadn't. The pictures and the words on the morning news made him numb.

He dropped his drink, the glass cutting into his hands as orange juice and blood stained his carpet. He couldn't move, or even breathe.

Woman dead in car accident, 27. He recognized the car.

He picked up his phone and shoved the battery inside. He wished his phone would start up faster. The casing was dotted with his blood, but he didn't care.

"Drew, it's me. . . pick up. I want to talk to you. I'm sorry, that's really all I have to say. Something happened... I... I'm not thinking very clearly." He could hear her sobbing. He pictured her crying and driving at the same time, enough scotch in her system to blur the stoplights and make her swerve. She cleared her voice. "But you know what? What you said?" Her voice dropped to a whisper. "Fuck you. The one time I needed it straight, you watered it down."



MacKenzie Nunley

The Sky Turns Gray

She watched him as he walked away
Her feet stood still
The sky turned gray
Her love passed through his bitter soul
She closed her eyes
The wind grew cold
The memory of a relationship
Too heavy to bear
Too grand to lift
She tried to run
Though she could not move
And soon that stillness became her wound
She thought of all the days before
When she wanted nothing
But needed more
Of how he used to make her feel
Of good days and bad days
Of what wasn't real
She felt the leaves scatter around her feet
She reached for him
Though could not speak
For the image of him was now gone
Though it would stay with her
For years beyond
In the distance
His steps left prints
That would cover each new lover since
For as she watches them walk away
Her feet stand still
And the sky turns gray

Rachel Linnemeier
Jays





Blending In is a study in texture and color. The goat's fur is rendered with a mix of dark and light tones, while the dog's coat is a blend of black and white. The grid surface provides a strong geometric contrast to the organic forms of the animals.

Rachel Linnemeier is a contemporary oil painter known for her detailed and expressive work. Her painting 'Blending In' captures a moment of interaction between a goat and two dogs, showcasing her skill in rendering different textures and colors.

Rachel Linnemeier
Blending In

Rebecca Downs

The Winter Trinity

"And if you're looking for Heaven, it's north of the bridge."

—Albert Shoady, Escanaba in da Moonlight

It's 9:30 p.m. on an early September night, and since the TV lost signal I'm sitting in bed with nothing to do. The sky outside my window is orange, blue and black, and the smaller trees are bent at forty-five degree angles from the strong storm winds. Thunder cracks and lightning briefly illuminates the parking lot below my window. Raindrops speed down the glass like racecar drivers. I wish it were wintertime, I think. Then at least this could be snow. Lots of snow.

I've been thinking about Michigan's Upper Peninsula a lot lately. Right now, the U.P. is warm. Even Lake Superior is relatively warm, which means maybe a few brave souls will dunk their heads underwater. Maybe. The forest trails around Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore are worn down from the heavy traffic of July vacationers who have since scattered back home.

The weather is cooling, though, and soon Rick will have more time to perfect his Harbormaster sandwich for the smaller autumn crowds, and Ellen will have fresh apples to bake into her heavenly pies. Their West Bay Diner will soon smell less like sweat and grease and more like cinnamon and maple syrup: a sure sign of autumn. During this time of year I daydream of the U.P. the most, particularly of a vacation that will carry on through the winter. Winter is when living in Grand Marais is the toughest, but the most reviving. The harsh conditions are ideal

for our family trips, because it usually means fewer vacationers and more fresh, biting air for outdoor activities. Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing are most enjoyable when the landscape is covered in feet of untouched snow.

•

It was Christmas morning in 2000 and I sat Indian-style, tearing neat wrapping paper to shreds. I no longer believed in Santa Claus, but my little brother Gavin still did so I was careful to thank “Santa” while I hugged my parents after each gift. One present was in a big box, which always seemed the most exciting. I tore into the present, and inside was a pair of small, plastic, forest-green snowshoes. At ten years old, this wasn’t something at the top of my wish list. I was also immediately disappointed that the shoes did not look like the tennis rackets I imagined Eskimos tied to their boots. I cast the L.L. Bean kiddie snowshoes aside with the other presents that didn’t bring immediate gratification (in other words, the clothes and books). I did not appreciate the snowshoes until weeks later when I tried them out for the first time.

•

The U.P. in January is a miserable and yet peaceful place. Lake Effect snowstorms hit the small towns like train wrecks and make travel dangerous and difficult. But the forced vacations make everyone realize the beautiful effects of the snowfall. The dark forests glitter and everything is quiet.

That January after Gavin and I received our snowshoes, we left Fort Wayne, Indiana with Dad and Grandpa to head to our family’s new cabin in Grand Marais, which is located on the coast of Lake Superior. The drive usually takes about eight hours. When we arrived, the snow was deep, which is ideal for snowmobilers, skiers and anyone brave enough to weather the elements. Since our family prides itself in our deep-rooted Irish toughness, we set out for the ski trails a few miles away. Dad and Grandpa, dressed in their usual U.P. style clothes (very warm clothes that typically don’t match), strapped on their skis and Gavin and I tested our snowshoes for the very first time.

My grandfather was a bigger man – he had an appetite for foods he shouldn’t eat. He did, however, always make time to exercise. Almost every day he biked to IPFW (Indiana University Purdue University-Fort Wayne) where he was a Political Science professor and he took a daily walk. He almost always frowned, whether he was deep in thought, or felt severe frustration, lighthearted amusement, or any other emotion. I’m not sure how old I was when I saw a picture of Winston Churchill for the first time, but I remember mistaking the picture for a photo of Grandpa. That’s who he looked like.

Together, the four of us set off into a tunnel of trees on the trail. The sensation of snowshoeing was nothing like I had expected; snowshoes grant one the ability to walk nearly weightlessly over feet of snow, and yet walking in snowshoes



Texanna Thomas

Poseidon

is no easy task and certainly takes some getting used to. I whined about my snowshoes flipping over and tripping me. And since I was ten and Gavin eight, our whines soon snowballed into a heap of complaints about the cold, our tired legs and our growling stomachs. When we reached a small bridge, Grandpa stopped and took two Rice Krispies Treats out of his winter coat pocket.

“This is the only food we have. You can eat it now, but it has to last you the whole hike.” We stuffed our mouths at once. Grandpa continued, “Now a timer has been set, because those Rice Krispies Treats were bombs. We have to be back at this bridge before the bomb goes off, so let’s hurry up.”

We set off without another complaint, because even when Grandpa was joking, he was still being serious.

I woke up on my own one early January morning in 2001. It was strange – I had a feeling mom should have woken me up for school earlier. An unusual silence hung in the air and the sun shone in my room. A nervous feeling grew in my stomach as I wandered downstairs. Mom and Dad were sitting on the couch together, wrapped in each other’s arms. That was unusual. They normally went through their separate routines, like making coffee or reading the paper. My parents always loved each other, but no one in my family was “touchy-feely.”

“It’s because we’re Irish,” Dad would always say, “We’re not that sentimental.”

The moments we stared at each other – my parents together on the couch and me standing in the doorway – probably did not last long. But the drumming of my heart both slowed down and sped up at the same time.

The windows braced and creaked to keep the cold winter wind out of the cabin. I stared out at the road; the plow must have come through early in the morning, because I could only see a few inches of snow. Regardless, running didn’t seem like an option today. It was to be expected, though. Coach Sanders knew I was in the U.P. for winter break, and I would probably have to find other means of working out.

Dad walked down the creaking cedar staircase in his red flannel shirt, long underwear and Stormy Kromer hat, doing his best to look like a natural “Yooper.” Gavin was sitting at the dinner table – the one from the old cabin in Onota that Grandpa built – playing a game of solitaire, and Uncle Andy and his brother Adam were already outside.

“Well, let’s strap on our snowshoes,” Dad said.

The wind was cold enough to freeze your nose hairs instantly. I wasn’t wearing many layers though, because I was intent on the kind of snowshoe hike that made me sweat, even in such cold conditions. This was a workout. I was twenty years old and training for my college cross country team. But I wasn’t just concerned with my training; hiking, skiing, and

snowshoeing were some of my favorite hobbies. Especially snowshoeing.

Every year since trips to Grand Marais had become a regular occurrence, I had felt a seasonal urge to strap on the shoes and forge through feet of untouched snow. This could have been for the fitness factor, or more poetically, it could have been because of a longing to feel the same eerie, yet peaceful, feeling I felt just ten years prior. It could have been due to a little of both.

This day's trek took us from the cabin around the entire Grand Sable Lake and back. Eight miles. Four hours. During the hike we stomped through a cedar swamp and jumped over a creek (no easy task in snowshoes – my foot fell in the water), and then Dad and I hopped out on the frozen lake. This was the most dangerous part of the whole adventure.

"Are you sure we should be doing this?" I asked my dad. I have always been the worrier.

"No, I'm not sure," he replied. But he kept walking along the cracking ice, so I continued behind him. Our weight was a strain on the ice that had been exposed to the sunlight. Occasional cracks kept us alert, because if we fell in the lake in snowshoes it would be difficult to get back out. And in such cold temperatures, one dip in the water could be deadly. It was an unnecessary risk, but our adventurous spirits were guiding our hike.

Dad and I halted a moment after we crossed a particularly thin stretch of ice. "I wonder if Gavin, Andy and Adam are having a fun

adventure," I thought out loud.

Dad rotated his head to capture the panoramic view. We were surrounded completely by tall cedar, balsam fir and red pine trees, and the entire land was covered in sparkling snow and ice. A blast of icy wind shot us and leaked through the small gaps between our clothes to our skin.

"I take you some pretty cool places, eh?" Dad said, then turned and grinned at me. I knew this was a direct quote from Grandpa. We continued our hike and I smiled at his memory.

•

The snow fell noiselessly and our crunching snowshoes and skis frightened the animals away long before we would ever catch them. As Dad, Gavin, Grandpa and I trekked along, we spread out quite a bit. The snowy ski trails "Up North" can be so eerily quiet. Dad and Gavin were just enough in front of me so that I could catch them as they turned the corners, but Grandpa trailed far behind me, completely out of sight. This worried me; bears, coyotes, even something as simple as a failing heart, could overcome him without our knowledge. Because, even though I could hear nothing but the wind rustling the treetops, our voices still would not travel far. I continued on, trying to adjust to the

| **...but I knew something
was wrong.** |

funny snowshoe walk and enjoying the unique peacefulness and beauty of the picturesque landscape.

"Is Grandpa okay?" I asked Dad when they waited for me at a fork in the trail.

"Of course; he's done this many times before," he answered. I detected no tone of worry in his voice, which is good enough for any child, and we moved on in determined silence. When we finished the hike we did not have to wait long for Grandpa to return behind us. Of course he was all right. He was always all right. After we loaded up the truck we drove back into town for a well-earned but hardly-remembered feast at the West Bay Diner, which we swallowed down before we could even taste it.

•

I was only ten years old but I knew something was wrong.

"Come here." My mother motioned for me to sit on her lap. I felt bewildered; Mom never asked me to sit on her lap. "Grandpa passed away last night," she said slowly. I don't remember much else after that, except that Dad told me Grandpa's last words: "I don't know." Grandma had woken up to Grandpa's gasping. She asked him what was wrong, and he said, "I don't know."

"It's ironic," Dad said, "the man knew everything. He was the smartest man in the world, and 'I don't know' were his last words."

I spent the morning in bed, clutching the small, brown coin purse filled with Sacagawea coins Grandpa gave me for Christmas. I thought

of the important things he would miss, which in my young mind included the Super Bowl party at the end of the month (his favorite "holiday") and my wedding day. I also thought of the most wonderful times we had together.

"I have a game you two can play," Grandpa says. We're sitting in the old cabin far north of the bridge near Onoto, Michigan. The fire is crackling and I'm still recovering from the repulsive bowl of oatmeal Grandpa made me eat. "Take these stopwatches." He hands Gavin and me each our own yellow stopwatch. "Now, start your watches and see which of you can last the longest without making a sound." Beep. We sit in silence, trying desperately not to giggle at Grandpa's funny faces or inappropriate sound effects. I try instead to keep my mind on the prize: probably a handful of coins.

Grandpa always made competitions for Gavin and me, and he always rewarded the winner with quarters. Small change did wonders for our bravery. One time, Gavin and I rushed into Lake Superior to see who could dunk his or her head underwater first. Just for Grandpa's coins. He also liked for us to jump out of our comfort zones and experience something new.

It's dark outside of the cabin. Dark is really an understatement; only the stars and moon give us direction. Grandpa, Dad and I are standing on the gravel road by our old cabin in Onoto, Michigan. Onoto is no longer a functioning town – it is a ghost town with a few stubborn residents who live miles

“I dare you.”

away from each other. The only other residents are the animals that creep in the dark, dense forests. The static hum of the crickets outside is the only sound, besides the occasional crunch of our shoes on gravel. Dad and Grandpa wanted me to see the stars. So far away from city lights, the entire Milky Way shines visibly above us.

“What if a car comes?” I ask. I am seven years old and very concerned about standing in the middle of the road at night.

“Don’t worry,” Grandpa says, “I can hear cars come from miles away.” Grandpa’s assertions that he has superpowers never faze me. I believe him, because Grandpa always knows everything.

As happy as my memories made me feel, I felt a strong sense of regret that they mostly took place in the U.P. When we all were home in Fort Wayne, we hardly visited each other outside of holidays. I tried to think of hikes or walks we took together from his house, but I could think of none. I thought again of the U.P.

“How much farther till we get to the Point?” I ask. I try not to sound too impatient, but the walk to the lighthouse is long and tiring in snowshoes. Gavin and I are practicing the awkward snowshoe stagger, and we have ski poles to help us keep balance. Dad and Grandpa ignore my question. I struggle to keep their pace.

Our walk to the Point (the lighthouse at the northernmost tip of Grand Marais right on Lake Superior) involves a hike down a residential road and then a trek through the sand and rocks. However, in the winter the crashing waves freeze the beach and form a wall of ice along the lake’s north edge. This wall reaches about ten to fifteen feet tall. On the west side of the Point, the cement wall is covered in a sheet of ice. Gavin and I inch close to the edge so we can peer down into the dark blue water. A gust of wind could easily knock us in, but Mom isn’t here to tell us no, and Grandpa is here to tell us, “I dare you.” Dad then takes a picture of us pretending to fall in. After admiring the frozen yet tenacious lighthouse, shining and blaring despite Lake Superior’s attempt to drown it in ice, we hike west along the south shore of the lake.

Together, Grandpa, Gavin and I find a patch of sand that escaped the snow and ice. We play a quick game of tic-tac-toe with our ski poles. At his moment, while we are hunched over our game, Dad snaps a photo of us from away down the shore and captures the moment forever.

I laid my head back on my pillow. The Sacagawea coins slipped through my fingers and I drifted off to sleep.

Hundreds of people lined the edge of D.O. McComb & Sons’ large funeral home showing room. The line extended a long ways outside, too. I never knew Grandpa was so well-known. This was hard. Not just because I was sad, but it was tiring to talk to a constant stream of

strangers. One-by-one in a never-ending line they shake hands with the family. "My, how big the kids are!" they say as they pass my brother and me sitting in chairs behind Mom and Dad.

I didn't cry much that day until the burial. It is at that point – when the body enters the ground – that everyone has to accept that the deceased is indeed deceased. No longer could I imagine that Grandpa would wake up and jump out of his coffin, maybe yell, "Tricked ya!" and then smile at our relieved faces. No, at this point we all had to understand he was gone.

The priest stood on one side of the perfect, rectangular hole and faced the family. We were lined in rows on the other side. It was wintertime, but no snow was on the ground save the fresh flakes that had started accumulating when we arrived at the cemetery. Everything had a gray tint and the wind was bitter and painted our ears and noses pink. I thought it was beautiful, like a painting, and I was sad Grandpa wasn't here to see it. I knew if he were alive he wouldn't waste such a picturesque day and

he'd insist on taking a solitary walk about the cemetery. Maybe he'd even let me come along.

•

The temperatures are dropping outside and before long the pouring rain from thunderstorms, like the one outside my window, will turn into a sheet of snow. Running will become a nuisance and perhaps even impossible. What then?

Years ago I grew out of those tiny green snowshoes. After snowshoeing last winter in a spare pair the family keeps at the cabin, I've realized I would like a pair of my own again. Soon, the open landscape of snow, which has no roads, sidewalks or trails, will inevitably remind me of days when I struggled awkwardly in my kiddie snowshoes and worried about Grandpa. I know I'll wish for all three – snowshoeing, Grandpa, and the U.P. – because the three thoughts coincide in my mind. For years they always have and I hope they always will.

●

Sally Flood

Kindergarten Blues

We skip along toward kindergarten, Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I, happy despite the knowledge that the grim-mouthed Mrs. Thomas, who does NOT appreciate our helpful suggestions on how to run her classroom, awaits us. Mrs. Thomas will not allow girls into the boys' domain, the block corner. She says girls have to play in the housekeeping corner and pretend to cook and iron and put dumb old rubber babies to sleep. She says Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I cannot sit together because we are DISRUPTIVE. Mrs. Thomas will not allow Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I to use the glitter either, not after that first experience. Mrs. Thomas doesn't love us like our mothers do.

No, our happiness is not derived from the prospect of kindergarten itself, but from the beautiful, shiny new shoes we each are wearing. They match and we LOVE the idea that we inseparable friends could be twin girls in our twin shoes. Our footwear sparkles in the early morning sunlight, the black patent leather squeaking with each dancing step.

Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I aren't babies. We are five now and can walk ourselves to kindergarten, thank you very much. We have been sent forth with kisses and admonitions: "Don't talk to strangers!" "Don't get into anyone's car!" "Stay on the sidewalk!" "Don't walk in the street or anyone's yard!" "Eat all of your bread and butter!" This last is unnecessary. Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I ALWAYS eat all of our bread and butter. Snack time is the highlight of the dull kindergarten morning.

Mrs. Thomas is a kindergarten drill sergeant, all frowns and strictness, with a voice that pierces

our tender little ears. She is full of sharp orders for us: "Sit Indian-style!" "Don't slouch!" "Tie your shoes!" "State your name, address and phone number!" "Eat your bread and butter!" "Rest time means heads down and eyes and mouths SHUT!" We must master each of these commands before we may pass on to first grade, the Promised Land where we will LEARN TO READ. Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I, sadly, have mastered none of them, except for the eating of bread and butter.

Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I are no longer worried about shoe tying, though. We have found a way to defeat Sergeant Thomas. Our beautiful, sparkling, new, patent-leather shoes have lovely, shiny, silver buckles! Just wait until she sees our buckling abilities!

We pause in our merry progress to pluck handfuls of sunny dandelions and sweet violets for Mrs. Thomas, being careful to keep our feet on the sidewalk. We revel in the plucking, the giving only, remotely, secondary.

As we near School #62, more and more students appear on the sidewalk until we turn the corner and join a great surge of children, all trudging toward the same goal. Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I slow our progress, proudly displaying our new shoes with sedate steps.

Ahead of us the crowd splits into two groups, one walking in the street, the other walking on the grass of someone's yard. A dirt-smudged man kneels at the curb, rubbing a tool over the smooth sidewalk, which is framed by yellow plastic ribbons tied to little sticks. A big truck in the street rumbles as its drum slowly turns.

Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I look at one another. Walking in the street? Walking in someone's yard? What are these bad children thinking of? The traffic guard, a big, eighth-grade boy who wears an official white belt and silver badge, will surely report the lot of them to the principal! We smile smugly, confident in OUR superior behavior, and step over the yellow ribbon.

To our utter bewilderment, our feet sink into the sidewalk! Our beautiful, sparkling, new, patent-leather shoes with the lovely, shiny, silver buckles disappear under ankle-deep grey mush. We drop our grubby bouquets and our bread and butter sandwiches. Our feet are suddenly VERY heavy. We struggle to lift them. The dirty man screams at us. He shouts words we have never heard before. He is even louder than Mrs. Thomas! We slowly slog down the middle of the seemingly endless sidewalk. The great surge of school children stops to laugh and hoot at us. Voices jeer: "Look at those stupid little kids!" "You dumb babies!" Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I begin to cry great baby tears as we slowly pull each foot out with a great sucking sound and set it down into the mushy sidewalk over and over and over again along the block-long sea of muck.

At last we reach the second ribbon and, with a mighty effort, pull ourselves over it with our weighted feet. The sidewalk is firm again. But our travails are not over. Sobbing aloud, we drag our enormous, grey, elephant feet toward the school. A kind eighth-grade girl comes to our aid and works hard to help us lift them up the huge steps in front of the building. The other children are falling over and rolling on the school lawn with laughter.

Finally Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I manage to heave ourselves through the kindergarten doorway, leaving a trail of grey sludge in our wake. To our tearful dismay, there is no comfort to be found here. Mrs. Thomas' grim mouth draws into a straight line with no lips showing. Her eyes snap with fury. "How in the world did you two DUMMIES manage to walk a full block through wet concrete!?" she hisses. She sends the eighth-grader to the office to tell Mrs. Dinwiddie, the school secretary, to call our mothers. Then she draws out the dreaded ... PEEPEE CHAIR!

The Peepee Chair is a teacher-size chair where kindergarteners who wet their pants sit on a paper towel to wait for their mothers to come bearing dry underwear. It is the chair of shame for all of Mrs. Thomas' kindergarteners. Mrs. Thomas seats us both on the Peepee Chair. Our sobs increase. "Be quiet NOW!" she snaps. And, terrified, we immediately stop our caterwauling. She drags the chair, with us aboard, to the front of the classroom.

As our classmates file in, they each pause, open-mouthed, to stare at the spectacle of Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I balanced precariously on the Peepee Chair. Our heavy feet hang over the edge of the seat, a foot or more above the floor, and gravity is making it difficult to stay on the chair. We slide downward, pull ourselves up, then slide again. When the kindergarteners assemble for Morning Circle, we are the center of attention. As Mrs. Thomas leads the class in the mumbling of

The Pledge of Allegiance and The Lord's Prayer and a wavery singing of Little Drops of Water, she snaps her fingers in an attempt to draw their attention away from us. It doesn't work. Mrs. Thomas, herself strictly ignores us. She will not look at Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I or call on us; even when we raise our hands as high as we can and cry, "Uh! Uh! Uh!"; even when we are the only ones who know the day of the week (Wednesday) and the date (the sixth). She radiates a profound disgust toward us.

The longest of hours trickles by as Sarah Jane Quirk-and-I struggle to keep our seat. Weighted by our dangling concrete-coated shoes, our legs go numb and our feet fall asleep. At last hope appears in the form of our mothers, bearing clean shoes and socks. They pat our backs and dry our tear-stained faces. Our mothers tug and pull and somehow manage to remove our enormous footwear. The sparkling, new, patent-leather shoes with the lovely, shiny, silver buckles have turned into shapeless lumps of drab, grey stone. Our tears start afresh as they draw the old, scuffed, too-tight, plain, brown shoes with the frayed laces onto our feet. Our mothers begin to knot the shoestrings.

"GIRLS!" barks Drill Sergeant Thomas. "TIE YOUR OWN SHOES!"

We're sunk.



Jeffery Passow

Faded Blue Jean Paradise

Your jaw line breaks through valleys
hanging high in the weeping willow shade of your hair
the Manifest Destiny of your love
makes me tremble and break
like a sinking ship
turning over on my side
it helps me get that rusty idea out of my head

I decline your offer to scrape that metal face
slowly against my wooden chest
just let this weary carpenter rest and
carve out his own niche

I would rather finger-paint with murky colors
on your stomach
in crooked circles
and listen to stories passed down from your mother's mother.

I'm rotting away in a faded blue jean paradise
soon the kids on the corner will play in the puddles I left behind
make sure to save my tattered clothes
and make a collage

Dalai Llama Eyes

You have those Dalai Llama eyes
they pierce through my nightly sorrow
you draw little black squares
with lipstick
on my back

We laid in the wine bliss that our parents taught us to love
when we wake up we look
down the road and
watch our children place their wishes under pine trees
chasing fireflies with jars
teaching smaller kids how to swim

Now you draw little black triangles instead but
these glow brightly in the night
those eyes of yours never faded into the pillows on the bed
through Dust and April showers
your arms were longer and still growing
I sleep so soundly now.

We Are the Self-Eating Machines

We are the self-eating machines
that climb onto each other's shoulders to see
all the while keeping our eyes closed
the pebbles fall from the sky and cut our chins
but our blood never spills
We save that for The Wonder Years

for days when a timpani drum sounds and the names of everyone
we know
can be inscribed on golden tablets and thrown out to sea
for days when best friends leave unwelcoming notes
on our welcome mats

We tear through bushes and thorns with no armor
saluting every flag that we see
when the morning finally rolls around
the hangover refuses to leave
And we lay blessings on the heads of undeserving kings
Grinding our own organs into dust
To make tea
We are the self-eating machines

Sarah Spomer

Finding Allison

Allison Kramer was not one of the Raging Queen Bees at Clear Creek Jr. High. Phil knew this. If his secret ever spilled, his friends would never let him live it down; in his defense, he thought, she was not one of the Total Losers, like poor Johnny Blake in the corner, who forced his words as though through a strainer. Still, he could tell her frizzy dark curls, slightly oversized nose, and nagging asthma forced a shyness that hid her at the bottom of the social heap. Yet to him, in a way he knew he couldn't explain to his buddies, she was beautiful. He saw little of the face she kept hidden behind a curtain of hair, but loved to watch her tuck her arms around her midsection so he could see the small frame her dark turtlenecks curved over. There was so much he understood about her from half a year of lovesick observation. Each day, she showed up to Algebra I in black pants or tights, the occasional pleated skirt, and the same ragged Mary Janes she'd worn for as long as he'd known her. She was painfully introverted, never speaking to anyone or answering any questions in class, even when the teacher barked her name. It sometimes seemed like her soul was elsewhere, in a world far more interesting than this, and her body simply sleepwalked, making it from eight to three thirty each day simply to go home on an empty school bus and return to solitude.

But what Phil knew more than anything else was this: for the first time in his short thirteen years, he had fallen in love with someone other than Blackie, his beat-up childhood teddy. And thanks to only the thin wall separating living room from living room in the drafty, dilapidated apartment building where they both lived, what little he understood about Allison was probably much more than anyone else in the student body of two hundred.

Years later, he would look back fondly on each ride home with the five other students on their dwarfed school bus. He would stare longingly at Allison's tiny head bobbing to the rhythm of the bumps in the road, and bite his lip at the soft bounce of each curl, longing to stroke her caramel highlights. Each day he'd try to force his nerves down long enough to strike up a conversation; yet each day he walked two or so meters behind her up the cracked sidewalk to their building, terrified beyond his wits and utterly silent, always painfully aware she knew he was with her, and doubly aware she still didn't fully notice him due to the tiny pink headphones stuck in her ears.

Even so, every failure was comforted by his own gentle reminder that tomorrow was a new day and he'd have another chance just twenty-four hours later. He could spend the night healing his shame and building up the courage to try again. And in the meantime, the peephole in the wall kept him company when he grew bored of the same two Gameboy games and black-and-white TV re-runs. It had been no surprise when he'd discovered the hole four years earlier. The building was slowly falling apart and his father liked to keep as many cracks, peelings and holes covered as possible, attempting to give the illusion of at least some pride in their humble home. Phil had finally found it when he and his friend's afternoon roughhousing had shaken the walls a tad too hard and the framed photograph concealing the blemish had jolted loose of its rusty support, toppling behind the sofa. Neither he nor his father knew how the hole had originated; his father brushed it off, telling Phil not to worry—someone had probably had a simple accident. Yet at the prime of the mystery, it had run Phil's nine-year-old imagination wild with thoughts of battles and

gunfights like those on the old Westerns he saw on TV.

Now the only thing he cared about was the fact it drilled straight through the wall, giving him a front-row view into Allison's living room, as her mother did not seem to care enough about the aesthetics of her home to try to cover its misgivings. This was how he knew Allison was usually there by herself, except on Wednesdays, when she took care of a little raven-haired boy for the afternoon. When she was not doing whatever Phil could possibly imagine in the bedroom off the abused living area, she sat on the torn, creaky couch and poured over her mother's copies of *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan*, or read books from their school library. On occasion he'd discover her giggling over comics in a paper or chatting away on the phone. From nearly half a year of observation, he'd deduced that between six and eight PM was the best time to Allison-watch; that was when she made herself dinner in the kitchenette, sat in front of the TV to eat, and finally hunkered down with her textbooks to polish off her homework.

Day after day, week after week, Phil switched between his Gameboy, homework, and TV, always taking a few minutes every two hours or so to check in on the girl of his dreams. His thoughts about somehow becoming her knight in shining armor kept him entertained through the dreary afternoons—perhaps one day something would happen and he'd have a chance to prove his worth. Perhaps one day those cruel twits, Vanessa, Rachel and Harriett of the Poms squad, would do something too nasty for her to ignore, like tripping her in the hallway or knocking her books from her arms. Then up he'd run, tissue in hand, to help her off the ground, nurse her hurt and show those witches what a true hero was. And she would be



Ronnie Moore

Ronni: A Self-Portrait

genesis spring 2012

in his arms, sobbing and kissing and declaring everlasting love, and they'd walk hand-in-hand out the front doors and down the boulevard, her beautiful, dark-chocolate hair rippling down her back, her graceful arm resting on his shoulders, and from then on their lives would be perfect, their less-than-ideal environment and ever-absent parents no longer an issue because they'd have each other.

Seventh grade passed, each day an opportunity missed, each night a web of plotting for how he would find the virility to stand tall and catch the woman of his dreams. In early June he was shipped off to spend two months in New Jersey with his pot-addict mother, a thousand miles from home, from Allison. Summer dragged by, slow as ketchup in a glass bottle. It wasn't until the day before school started that he finally returned, and the minute his father drove off to work Phil tore the photo off the wall to see what Allison was up to.

Instead of his curly-topped princess, however, he discovered a stranger in a pink halter-top standing before Ms. Kramer's old vanity against the far wall (as, he well knew, there was no extra space in those teeny bedrooms); her platinum hair cascaded halfway down her back in a mess of wave and tangle; straight as sewing thread here and trying to curl like shaved wood there, it seemed it couldn't decide what shape it was supposed to assume. At the moment, the young woman was drawing a plastic object sort of like Phil's mother's curling iron down her bangs. When it reached the tips and she released her grip, it sprang into a V-shape, revealing metal plates on the inside. The girl stood up straight and flipped her makeshift locks behind her shoulders; her pale face met the mirror, and Phil jolted in shock.

"Allison?" he whispered, biting back the bile

forcing its way up his throat, for it was indeed Allison: a skinny, dyed, sparkly version of Allison, setting the iron on a stained plate on the vanity top and rummaging through a red-and-white plastic bag at her feet. The afternoon sunlight caught the glittery pink nail polish on her fingers as she pulled out a tiny blue tube and yanked free what looked to Phil like a cone-shaped, black toothbrush attached to the cap; he clutched his collar as she dragged it slowly over each side of her eyelashes until they were all longer, blacker, and sharper. Then out came a clear tube, which sported a cap brush similar to the one in the bottle of mascara, only white; this she dragged over her lips again and again until they appeared laminated with a thick sheet of ice. After rolling glitter on her cheeks and bright blue color on her eyelids, she turned this way and that, evaluating her work. She must have been satisfied, because she gifted herself a small half-smile and began packing her various cosmetics into the last item she pulled from her shopping bag: a vinyl zippered pouch. She then skipped her hands over her shiny, skin-tight jeans, scattering glitter to the floor, and reached for a bottle on the other side of the vanity.

Phil wondered exactly what look she was springing for. She looked nothing like the made-up beauty queens of Clear Creek Jr. High; in his opinion, she resembled nothing short of a Martian. He realized he was breathing too fast, and his hands came away from the wall shaky; his Allison, the girl whose uniqueness he had become so attached to, was gone; the very things about her that made him love her so had been exiled, vanquished, replaced by the flavor of the month in the glossy magazines scattered across her mother's coffee table.

He knew he should stop right then, run away and find something else to do on this, his last day of

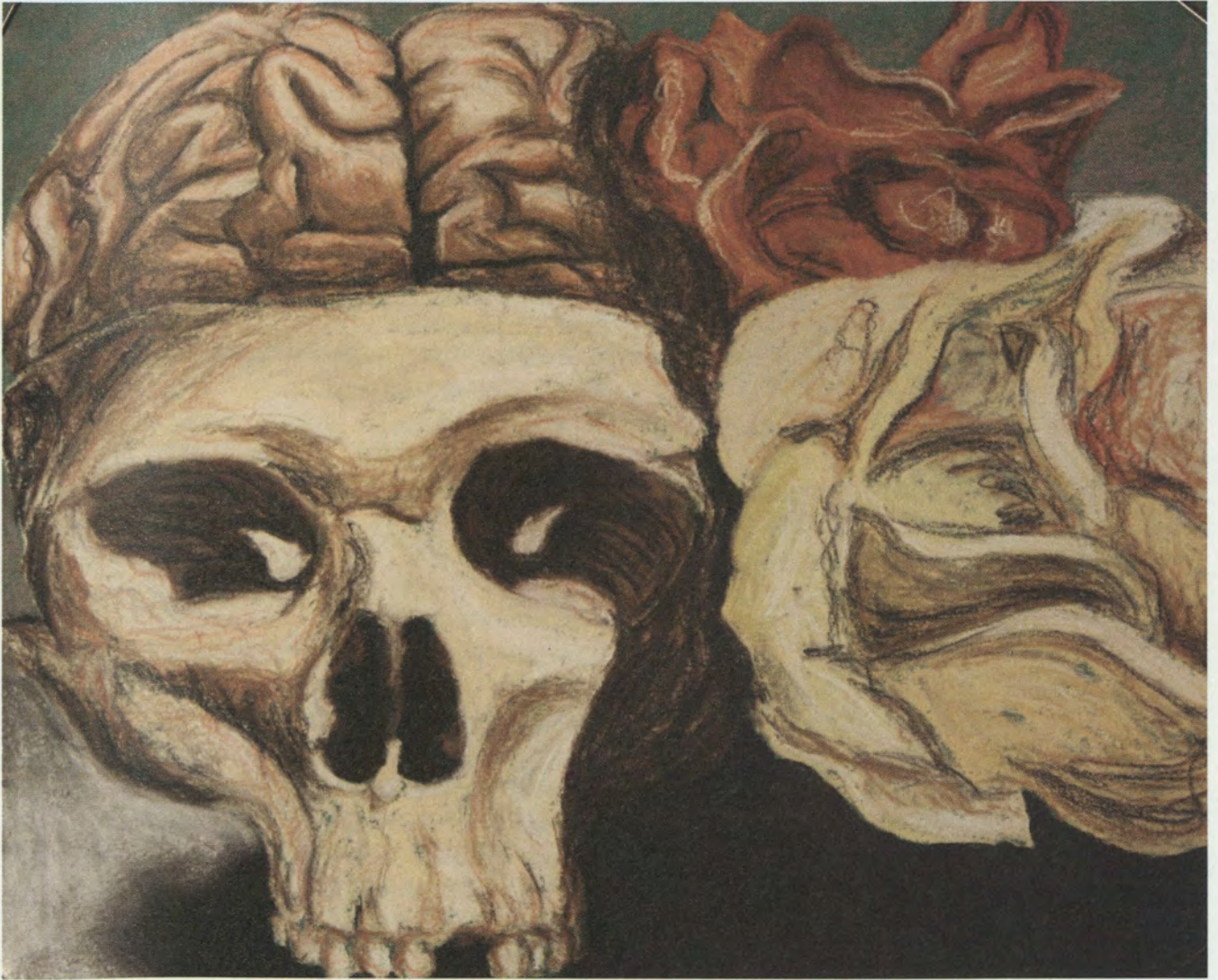
freedom; however, his curiosity and fear pulled him back to the hole. The tiny hope of seeing this girl's face wrinkle in disgust, to see her disappear behind the battered bathroom door and bring Allison back to him, kept him watching the show until its end. Now the bottle she'd reached for was open on the vanity, and she was swabbing at the top of her ear with a cotton ball. His eyebrows pinched downward in confusion; what the hell was she doing now? Even the sight of Allison tearing open a plastic package of crystal earrings couldn't convince him, nor could the hair-thin glint of the needle; it wasn't until she raised its tip to the soft ridge of skin that it hit him square in the chest, paired with her cry of alarm and the sound of his heart breaking.

The makeup was removable. The dye would grow out, he knew, because roots always showed in the dyed hair of other girls at school. But this, this was irreversible; even if his Allison did come back, there would always be a scar on top of her formerly perfect ear, always a reminder of the time she became someone else; he knew this, because there were dimples in three places on his father's ears, from when he had been a young rebel decades before.

The girl who was supposedly Allison was crying now, her painted cheeks stained with trails of black tears. Yet she was a sport; after yanking the needle out the back of her ear, she wiped off her left cheek, not yet trained to keep her hands off her face, and

fixed the tiny stud through the homemade piercing. Then she reached for larger hoops and fixed them in her earlobes, where before she'd always worn either a pair of gold balls or tiny crystal hearts. Finally she replaced the lid on the bottle and swept everything into the top drawer of the vanity, clearly unaware of the trail of blood trickling down the back of her ear.

Phil had seen enough. Nauseated, he replaced the photo and flew to the bedroom he shared with his father, where he curled against the wall at the head of his creaky bed and hid beneath the quilt his grandmother had sewn. His ecstasy about seeing Allison the following morning had dissolved to dread like salt in water. Unwelcome thoughts, scenarios of what was to come, pierced the front of his mind: he'd wake up, as planned, eat his toast, throw on whatever wasn't in the laundry basket, and stand yawning on the sidewalk to wait for the bus...but for the first time in as long as he could remember, Allison would not be waiting with him. He'd be with a Vanessa, a Harriett, and this would be the one time he wouldn't look, for the sake of his own sanity. Instead he pictured himself focusing on the crack between his feet, at the biggest of the tiny blades of grass pushing up from below, and wondering if the creature standing next to him had finally discovered happiness in her plastic Target bag.



Sarah Scott

Form and Function

Jonathan Holleb

Today

Today is the season of
symphonies blooming from static
& flowers growing through
the gaps in scrap metal wreckage.

It is the escape from
tomorrow's huffing & puffing
burdens of complexity
scratching their sharpened claws
across your door.

The vaulted promise
torn to shreds by the
mad dogs that feast
behind its locks.

The wolf that feeds
on the blood of lies
& regards its own deception
as holiness.

The trumpet's call
echoing down the daylight
& ushering in the midnight
procession of nostalgia
until the moon bids it a time of rest.

The foundation of
moments on which the
pendulum in the heart
gains momentum.

Listen

Listen to the silence weave its way
through the rooms of the mind.

Listen to it crash
through the corridors of slumber.

Listen to it twist its magic
into the metropolitan madness of shouts & sirens.

Listen to it travel
through the foundations which hold our tears
& collect the payment left behind by years of weariness.

Listen to the noise
rumble down the alleyways of ignorance.

Listen to the incessant tape
of what you should or shouldn't have said
play back in the VCR of your brain
until it detaches itself from meaning.

Listen to the noise of thunder
shake the night to its core.

Listen to the lightning
split the horizon into electric wonder.

Listen to a thousand voices
holler out for their beliefs to be recognized.

Listen to the midnight rain
patter on rooftops
like meditative nourishment for the soul.

Listen as it slows
& slows
& subsides.

Listen to the silence weave its way
through the rooms of the mind.



Kaylyn Perkins

Grilled Cheesus: The Last Supper with a Side of Tomato Soup



Ronnie Moore
Fiddler at Signal Mountain Pier

Daren Mai
My House

Do you know what my house is made of?
Stone, clay, and lonely days.
Civil rights, city lights, and star-lit nights.

Childhood memories becoming distant dreams,
Learning nothing is what it seems.

And now echoes of home are haunting me, but why?
I'm so far from where I've been,
I don't know if I'll ever see home again.

My best days are far behind.
All around, I see bruised clouds and darkened haze.
Stone, clay, and lonely days.

All I have is borrowed time and deep regrets,
Emptied pockets and deep in debt.

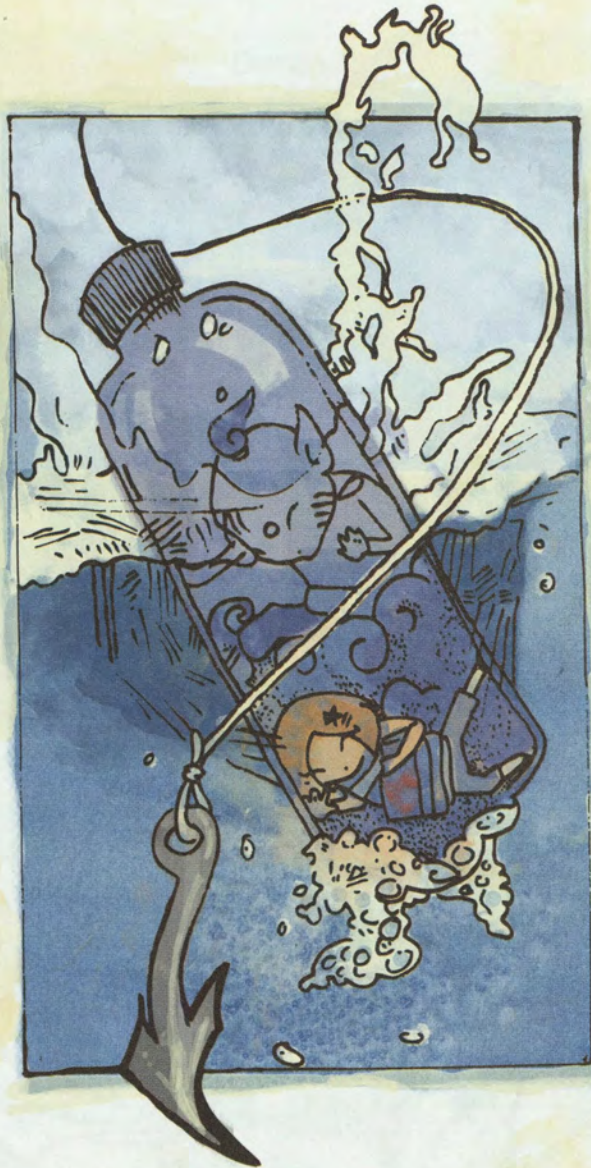
Do you know what my house is made of?

Stone, clay, and lonely days.
Civil rights, city lights, and star-lit nights.



Daren Mai

Going Home



Jessica Leonard

F is for Fisherman

I am six and I am blue
as I pose under the blooming cherry tree.
We're in our Easter best, but my dress is
the wan pastel of a washed-out sky,
made perfect in the wrongness of its color
by a polyester robin-egg bow.
I scowl at the camera. I want to be pink.

I am twelve and I am green.
Gangly limbs pump as I race across our grass,
the grind of school past and the promise of summer
rushing through me like the Elixir of Life.
I stop to let my breath catch up. A breeze
drapes me with the gauzy smell of fresh earth,
while dappled leaves whisper their secrets to the sun
and finches twitter to each other in the garden.

I am ten and I am purple
in a people-eater costume, parading
through the village and demanding candy tribute
from terrified peasants. I gobble their chocolate
levy and store the remainder of the sweet toll
in my grinning jack-o-lantern bucket.
The harvest moon peers down with a baleful eye
and dead leaves scuttle across my path, sounding like dry
bones.

I am eight and I am white.
At night the wind whips under the eaves of my house,
wailing like a lonely ghost as it searches for a way
into where I listen under my warm blankets.
Defeated, it blows away and leaves in its wake
drifts the height of windows and a glorious Snow Day.
The crystal flakes glitter and their many-hued quintessence
burns my eyes, leaving them watering.

Karen Klutzke

Color My Life

Michael Potter

Saving Face

When I was very young, my parents cheated me. I was the first-born child, and so should have gotten new clothes. My clothes would then become the hand-me-downs my younger siblings wore. Instead, my parents shopped at Goodwill and took clothes that their friend's children had worn. My peers mocked me mercilessly. My pants were always flooding, my shirts were too big or too small, and my shoes were laughably tattered. I wore cheap, "made in China" clothes that couldn't compete with the American-designed and Chinese-made clothes my classmates wore. It wasn't till high school, when my dad started making real money, that I was able to even get a date. With just a change in costume, I suddenly had the attention of a group that had before ignored me completely. Over the years, I've designed my costume; I've pieced it together carefully, purposefully even.

Sunglasses were invented in China in the 12th century, when smoky panes of quartz were used to block sunlight. The United States imports over \$900 million of sunglasses a year. My sunglasses are imported from their homeland of China (along with 47% of all imported shades). I like to wear my sunglasses because they hide my eyes, which I think are too expressive. Besides, they always have bags beneath them because my sleep habits are awful. Finally they stop me from getting tension headaches caused by squinting. I like to have my picture taken in sunglasses because they reflect back whoever is taking the picture, and we all like to see ourselves. I buy aviator sunglasses because I want strangers to think I'm a confident, popular young man. You know, a douchebag.

Half the time I wear a t-shirt because I am lazy. T-shirts are easy to clean, comfortable, and don't need to be hung up in the closet. I wear shirts that are probably a size too small, both because I am vain

and also because I want my body to shrink. That is also why most of them are dark: it's a slimming color. 64% of my T-shirts were made somewhere other than China. Most of them have graphic prints on them, generally of something abstract. The one I am currently wearing has a guitar and some flying birds, depicted in a style best described as neo-don't-give-a-shit. I choose shirts like this, or band shirts, because music is something most people have an opinion on, and that means I can start a conversation. I want to start a conversation because no woman is going to go home with me because of my looks.

The other half of the time, I wear a polo shirt. Polo is a sport played on the backs of horses by very rich people, and the perception of wealth has stayed with the shirt. That is funny, because every one of the jobs I've worked in college has required a short-sleeved, collared shirt, and none of them paid more than \$10.60 an hour, which is just under six times what a Chinese factory worker makes. I wear thick, heavy polos that, like my t-shirts, have badly designed graphics printed on to them. I wear these because my best friend wears them, and people seem to like him very much. I don't really care about clothes, but I do very much want people to like me. Monkey see, monkey wear.

The shorts I wear are party pants: plaid shorts, a trend that exploded into markets in the mid 2000's. I wear size 34 waist pants, which is the average waist of an American man. It makes me sad because I was a size 32 when I was younger. At neither age could I have bought pants that fit outside of Beijing in China, because the average height of a man there is 5'7". Men (American or Chinese) are fortunate; no one cares if we think we are fat so our clothes are measured in the actual inches around. Women need to think they are skinny, or society tells them to hate

themselves; they call pants with a measurement of 24 inches a size 0, because admitting that a very attractive waist is still two feet around is just beyond our society's capabilities. Men on the moon: easy. Conquer a nation: did it in a month. Adjust body expectations to fit reality? Work-in-progress. I wear party pants because the pattern attracts the attention of people. Hopefully girl people, who have 24-inch, size 0 pants.

I wear flip-flops, which are probably the oldest form of foot-wear after the slipper. My friend Jon, who is from Hawaii but currently lives and works in Beijing, insists that what I call flip-flops are actually called slippers. Of course, in other places they are called thongs, but in America that name is reserved for a very specific form of underwear worn by beautiful women and people-who-shouldn't-wear-thongs. I wear flip-flops so much that during the winter, when I wear shoes or boots, the tan line never quite fades. I like flip-flops because I am lazy, and they are easy to take off. I also like them because I can feel the sun and air on my feet when I take time to pay attention. Then I remember running through the grass in my bare feet when I was little, and I smile.

I wear boxer briefs, a style of underwear that AskMen.com says is still briefs but that women apparently find sexy. I didn't know that until I looked up the popularity of boxer briefs, but I am certain that it will now become part of my reasoning. I buy packs of new underwear a few times a year. The average American spends over sixty dollars a year on underwear, which is sixty times what the average Chinese spends. I wear boxer briefs for a wide number of reasons. I prefer the support and fit of briefs over boxers, because certain anatomical features will find their ways into unpleasant spots if given too much freedom. A health teacher in

9th grade told us that if we wore boxers, our asses would sag and that this is why old men have no butts. I have an enormous ass for a man my size and weight, so this was a real fear for me. I like boxers, though, because they have interesting colors. Clearly there are more reasons to wear briefs here. But I need the coverage of boxers, too. In the period between when pants come off and underwear comes off, there is generally a pause where both parties appraise the parts of the body that have just been exposed.

This is the moment, of course, the *entire* outfit has been bent towards. I am not wearing these clothes because they ACTUALLY say anything about me. They are fabric that I put on my body, because it is illegal for me to walk around naked (which I would honestly prefer, even looking the way I do). If I am going to wear clothes, as I must, then I should wear them to maximum effect. I wear the clothes I do because I want women to like me, and women care about how a man dresses. Men don't, so long as you don't look too ridiculous. We just don't pay attention to that because we're still primitive hunters at heart and our brains are looking for cave bears not clashing tops and bottoms.

I wear boxer briefs for a different reason. Obviously very little of them would show in the appraisal stage that comes before clothes come off. I wear boxer briefs because in that brief moment when they are the only "outfit" that I have, I need a woman to not look at my thighs. I have wicked scars there, self-inflicted cuts from high school. In a moment when my entire biology is bent towards sex, I don't want her asking awkward questions about my past. "How did those happen?" "When did those happen?" "Why did you do it?" "When did you stop?" "Why did you stop?"

In Chinese culture there is a concept called "face." It is from this concept we get the expression "losing face." It is not about the front of your head, the location of the physical face. It's a psychological face, the appearance of one's honor. "Saving face" and "losing face" are very real concepts that dictate Chinese interactions. One must always seek to gain face, but above all, you must not lose it. The play of the words is incredibly powerful, because of what a face is to an American.

If you lose your honor, you are faceless.

It's all saving face, this outfit, but the last layer especially. I cover the scars because they are not as superficial as the clothes. They cannot be removed or changed out. I cover my scars because I'm ashamed. Ashamed I was so mad I struck out at the only victim I knew couldn't flee me. Ashamed that I was so weak that I had to hurt myself to convince myself I was strong. Ashamed I was so scared that I screamed out for help in the only language I had left. Ashamed that at that distant time I scarred my skin forever.

I cannot throw my skin into the washer and clean them away. I cannot get rid of my skin and grow a new, better one, like one donates clothes to Goodwill and goes on a shopping spree. My skin is far more honest than my polos, with far more careful designs. Unlike my shorts, I don't want its patterns to catch a woman's eye. My skin is not a product of some poor Bangladeshi sweat shop worker; it (and its scars) is made by me. No lover will peel my skin off, like she will my shirt, to see what's underneath. It's the barrier that will always stand, the final costume that never comes off.

It's the only mask that covers my face.





Lynnette Sauer
Family Dinner

Michael Potter

Yellow Line

Gerald stood and watched the rain at the Fort Totten station. It was coming down heavy, and the sound of it crashing against the concrete in curtains filled the empty space left by all the people who'd decided to stay in for Saturday rather than brave the storm. Gerald didn't miss them, or really notice they were gone. Not because the rain was so interesting; he just didn't care anymore.

It was only three, but it looked like twilight, the heavy clouds suffocating the sunlight and leaving only an eerie green twilight. Representative Dowsing had called him two hours earlier for an emergency lunch at some sushi place on the Maryland side, and now Gerald needed to get back to Arlington for his appointment. He needed to get to the appointment because Dowsing's chief-of-staff had told him he was fired if he didn't stop moping. Not that getting fired would matter much, but work cleared his mind and that was something.

Gerald lifted his eyes from the tiny explosions of raindrops and scanned D.C.'s squat skyline. The city was strange, over five million people and only two buildings taller than two hundred feet, at least till you left the district proper. The nation's capital sat low and uniform and he didn't mind that the sheets of rain seemed to wash the city away past a quarter mile. Most people hated when the early hurricanes rode their way up the Atlantic coast to dump on the city. Gerald was glad; like the remnants of the storm named Arlene, he could feel himself falling apart.

The train came blasting through the rain, its lights bright and its breaks protesting loudly as it rumbled to a stop. Gerald waited for the bell

announcing the doors were open, then started towards the car. He crossed the rainy gap between the train and the awning in five long steps, but that was more than enough time for the rain to soak through his hair and stain his overcoat with long wet trails.

He sat down heavily in one of the seats his friends in New York called clean. They didn't feel clean to Gerald. He grimaced as he thought about the long parade of ever more self-absorbed asses that had sat there before him, though he smirked at his own pun. He shook his sleeve and checked his watch, an anachronism he held dear because it was exactly that. The train was three minutes late, and while Gerald would normally have been annoyed, this time he sighed with relief. He wasn't looking forward to his appointment with Dr. Hannah Felder. At best, it would be a brief talk and a prescription for some antidepressant he had no intention of taking.

He ran his hands through his damp brown hair and down over his face. He felt stubble there, something he hadn't allowed until two months ago. He could feel the bags under his green eyes, and let out a sigh. His face was warm in spite of his frown, and that helped the pain in his fingers.

With a frown Gerald flexed his hands. They ached when fronts and storms moved through. The ugly scars that marked where a dog had bitten him years before stood out against his pale skin and shifted as he tried to loosen them up. He'd been trying to get his favorite toy away from the neighbor's prized Rottweiler. His hands had broken in six places in the left and eight in the right, and the joints had never recovered. He still struggled with typing and was almost incapable of writing. Since he'd been fourteen,

he'd had only partial use of his hands. Gerald sneered and let out a soft, bitter laugh to himself. That was what happened when you fought for things that weren't worth it.

"Crazy people laugh to themselves," someone said, the male voice brittle.

Gerald's head snapped up and his eyes darted over the car. A stout Guatemalan woman who must have been forty was sitting a few seats ahead of him. She was the perfect analogue for the horde of Latin immigrants that kept D.C. clean. She looked up with surprise herself. That left the bum with a guitar sitting in the back. He was a skinny guy, kid really, with pitiful tuft of a beard clinging to his face. An unseasonable, enormous coat, stained with an incredible amount of filth, seemed to consume the kid.

"Excuse me," Gerald said, forcing a smile.

"You're not excused," the boy said. After a minute he glanced up, flashing a brilliant white smile, before looking back down to the ground.

Gerald watched him briefly before shaking his head and looking forward again. His eyes fell to his hands again. He massaged each in turn, using the stiff fingers of one to rub their equally crippled partners on the other. It brought a little release, and he closed his eyes as the painful tension faded.

His reverie was broken by the sound of an acoustic guitar being tuned. Gerald had heard the progression enough walking past the steps of the dorms in college. Every guy who could play three chords would sit out there during freshman year, hoping to earn the attention of a girl. Gerald felt himself sneering at the memory.

The kid was evidently better than those serenaders back in college. Soon the car was full of music, a song Gerald knew he knew but could

not identify. His brow bunched as he tried to anticipate the rhythm, and his mouth pursed as it became more and more frustrating.

“Free Bird,” the Guatemalan woman said with a helpful smile.

Gerald flashed her a wan smile of thanks and nodded. “Free Bird.” This kid was playing “Free Bird” by Lynard Skynard. Jesus. Gerald was 28, the song had been old by the time he was born—why the hell was this kid playing it? And how the hell did a Guatemalan woman know it? Did they play Lynard Skynard in Guatemala? Andrea would know, she’d studied abroad there.

Andrea.

He shook his head and looked out the window at the walls of the tunnel. His right forefinger brushed the empty spot around his left ring finger where a white gold band once had been. Where it should have been. Instead it was in an envelope in his desk, beside the matching ring she had handed him two months earlier.

Handed him. She hadn’t thrown it at him in a rage. She hadn’t screamed that he could take it and sell it for all she cared. She hadn’t left it in his mailbox, too distraught to face him. She had handed it to him, calmly, with eyes that were sad but already looking ahead. And like that, it was over.

“Doors opening,” the automated voice alerted. Gerald turned from his reflection in the window with a start, shaken from his thoughts. Almost immediately the music descended into a few discordant notes as the kid started cackling.

“You were pretty zoned out dude,” he said.

Gerald didn’t have anything to say. He just glared at the kid, who smirked and looked somewhere a few inches from Gerald’s feet.

Except it wasn’t Andrea.

“What’s up man? What’s in the window you’re so pissed off at?”

Gerald flushed and his eyes narrowed. Then he forced a smile. “Sorry, it’s been a rough day.”

“Oh, man, I bet. Shoes that expensive, it’s gotta kill you to get em wet.”

Gerald flushed hotter. His throat was tight and his hands clenched painfully on the rail. “Must be nice to not have to worry about that.” He nodded towards the worn and broken boots on the kid’s feet.

The kid let out a hoot. “Oh man! You got me! It’s true, I don’t give a good goddamn about my shoes! Shit. Sick burn bro.” He made brief eye contact during the last line, sneering with his white white teeth. Then he turned back to his guitar.

Gerald shook his head in disgust. “Get a job.”

“Ooo, then I could be like you,” the kid said with a sneer, starting “Free Bird” up again, drowning out the conversation.

Gerald glowered and turned back forward in his seat. His face was burning and he struggled to keep his composure. He felt like he was in middle school again, getting embarrassed by the kids in sports. It made him nauseous to feel that way again, and he was furious with himself for letting the little shit win.

The jerk of the car at the Mount Vernon Square stop shook him from his rage. He let out a final sigh and looked out at the group waiting to board the train. There were more people than

at the previous stops here, a small crowd. As the doors chimed, Gerald's breath caught in his throat and he grabbed the seat in front of him.

Andrea was there, getting ready to get on the train.

Gerald's mind went blank as his chest tightened painfully. She was right there, he was looking at her. They hadn't spoken since she'd given him the ring; what would he say? How could he convince her in the brief moment they had on the train to call him again? This was how it happened; people bumped into each other after a long time and remembered why it had been so wonderful before.

And it had been wonderful before, hadn't it? Yes, meeting her when she'd interviewed him back before she changed majors had been wonderful. Taking her to his parent's place in the Piedmont had been wonderful. Her gasping out yes when he'd proposed at the top of the Washington Monument, looking out over their city had been wonderful. It had all been perfect and flawless and there she was again.

Except it wasn't Andrea.

After staring far too intensely at the woman for ten seconds, Gerald realized it wasn't Andrea. Her hair was the wrong shade, she didn't have the freckles dusting her cheeks, her eyes weren't the right chocolate brown. It was just some girl; she was slender and graceful and not Andrea. Gerald let out a shuddering breath and slumped back in his chair as she walked into the car ahead of his.

The doors chimed and slid shut; the train rolled forward.

Gerald licked his lips and swallowed hard. For a second, the girl had looked like Andrea the night they'd listened to the National Orchestra

at the JFK, her cheeks blushing and her hands shaking with excitement. But Andrea had been excited by the violins, not his flowers, and whoever that girl was, she didn't care about either. The momentary butterflies turned to bile that crept up his throat and into his mouth.

The train slid along its course through the center of the city, a short fat snake that wound its way down towards Virginia. Gerald liked that thought, that he was in the stomach of some enormous serpent. He felt like he was being digested. No, he felt like he was digested. He felt like shit.

Andrea was gone. She'd never been there, as it turned out, but even thinking she had been brought the real leaving into sharper relief. Four – five years? He was livid with himself for caring. She was the one who had lost something, had lost everything really. She was a school teacher, for Christ's sake. What the hell was she going to do with that Georgetown apartment without his paycheck? He smiled to himself grimly; Andrea couldn't even afford the fee for breaking the lease. Things not worth fighting for.

He watched not-Andrea get off at L'Enfant, and thought how real Andrea was really no different from everyone else. So full of her own ignorant certainty that she'd left, and like them, she would regret it. He opened doors, brought flowers, sang soft songs he'd written just for her. Where would a woman get that these days? A romance novel? No, he was keeping chivalry alive and the stupid bitch had left. Like the guys from the frat. Oh, they talked a good game about brotherhood, but as soon as they'd graduated they hadn't had time. And they'd wanted to do such stupid, childish shit. Idiots. Everyone was so damn stupid it was sickening.

The train exploded out of the tunnel and barreled toward the bridge over the Potomac. The sky, Gerald instantly noticed, was even darker. Thick bands of lightning stitched the clouds together in black mounds. The rain hit the windows with a sound like gunfire, and the kid finally stopped playing the guitar; the rain was drowning it out. The world was a blurred wall of falling water, the dark shapes of nearby buildings looming just outside the veil of rain.

The regular rocking of the subway gave over to erratic swaying as the wind buffeted the city. Gerald looked outside and let himself forget everyone for a minute. He'd never seen a storm this bad, not back home in Illinois or here in D.C. The lightning was like the inside of the clubs the guys always drug him out to back in school. He was glad he wasn't epileptic.

The train hit the bridge and Gerald looked down to watch the water heave. Waves ran west on the river, and he watched the barges struggle to stay afloat. There were no cars driving along the shore, no people walking. Gerald's skin prickled. The storm had shut the city down completely, except for the Metro. Nothing stopped the Metro.

The world went white and then exploded in the loudest sound Gerald had ever heard.

The train was shaking, first with the sound of an ear-shattering explosion, and then with the struggle of the breaks which screamed and sent visible sparks flying along the sides of the car. Then, with a painful jolt, the train stopped.

Gerald rubbed his eyes and blinked. The dark cabin of the car swam into view, the lights all off. Only the frequent flashes of the lightning revealed where the windows were. Slowly everything else came into focus.

"Rayo," the Guatemalan woman breathed, and Gerald didn't need Andrea to translate "lightning" for him.

"Damn," the kid grunted.

"Yeah," Gerald muttered.

The three people in the car were fine, and everyone else in the adjacent cars seemed fine too. At first the shifting of the train as it was hit by the wind roaring down the river startled them, but after a few minutes they got used to it. The rain still slammed into the sides of the car, but it wasn't nearly so loud when the train wasn't going forty miles an hour. The rattling when the thunder rolled over them gave Gerald goose bumps, but as the minutes wore on, it became less frightening. After ten minutes, worry started giving way to frustration.

"What the hell," Gerald growled. He pulled out his phone and dialed 9-1-1. After a brief conversation with the operator, in which he assured her everyone he could see was safe, she told him help would be on the way. Then he called Doctor Felder's office to cancel. No one answered, and he assumed they'd gone home because of the storm.

After that, they waited. For what he didn't know and didn't really care. It was almost predictable that something like this would happen. This is what the world did to him; things never went the way they were supposed to. He let out a loud sigh and stared out over the water to watch the monuments get silhouetted by the lightning branching towards the ground.

Then the kid started plucking at the guitar. Gerald turned, incredulous, to stare at him. He was playing "Free Bird." Again.

"Is that the only song you know?" Gerald demanded.

"It was my dad's favorite," the kid said, intent on his playing.

Gerald winced and softened his tone. "Maybe try another one please?"

"He'd play it to me all the time growing up. It wasn't the first song I learned, not by a long shot. But it was the first one I played for him."

The Guatemalan woman nodded with a knowing smile. "Is good."

"Thanks," the kid looked up at her and smiled. This time more naturally, and with less of those white teeth showing it, didn't look so much like a snarl. Then he turned down the guitar, his eyes wet. Something soft slipped from his mouth, but got lost in the sound of the rain.

Gerald cocked an eyebrow. "What was that?"

The Guatemalan woman lifted a hand to her mouth. "I'm sorry."

"Excuse me?" Gerald was confused.

"Don't worry about it man," the kid said, his voice thick. After a minute, he stopped playing and put the guitar in its case. When that was done he closed his eyes and leaned his head back in the chair.

Gerald turned back to the storm outside. He was irritated with the Guatemalan woman and the kid for leaving him out. Not that he wasn't used to that feeling. He was always finding out about parties at the frat only when he'd ask what everyone was setting up for. Andrea was always texting someone else, and telling him it was nothing when he asked. He'd checked her phone

to see when she was in the shower once, and had been ashamed to discover that's really all it was. Just nothing; a nothing he wasn't a part of. He took a deep breath and watched the rain as it fell into the river a hundred feet below.

A familiar desire entered his mind then. He could undo the latches of the window. He could force it out from the frame. He could climb up on his seat, out the hole left by the glass, and just fall into the river. He wouldn't pencil-dive like everyone said could save you. He'd spread his arms and legs and scream like hell and then he'd die. He would not have to listen to the kid's music. Or think about the kid not giving a shit. Or the frat guys not giving a shit. Or Andrea not giving a shit.

He'd just be dead.

"He said he miss his father," the Guatemalan woman said softly.

Gerald blinked and turned to her.

"I think he's father is dead," she said sadly, looking at the kid, who seemed asleep.

Gerald hadn't expected that. A deadbeat father, sure, but not a deceased one. Something fluttered in his mind, like he was trying to remember a fading dream. His own father was distant, but there when Gerald needed a loan or advice on which scotches to drink. Gerald didn't know how he would react if his father died, but flushed when he realized he certainly wouldn't be as upset as the kid clearly was.

Gerald looked back out the window again and sighed. He imagined his father would honestly feel about the same way if he, Gerald, were to die. Sad in a distant, things-left-unsaid kind of way, but no genuine sense of loss. Just a little disappointment, an extra glass or two of scotch each night for a month, and then?

**| He'd spread his arms and legs |
and scream like hell... |**

Then back to work.

"Tempting, right?" The kid's voice was flat. Gerald whipped around to see the kid looking at him with deadened eyes.

"Yeah," Gerald replied softly.

"You could do it," the kid said.

Gerald flushed. "Well so could you."

"I'm just saying," the kid offered with a shrug. "You've always got that, man."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you have that power." The kid turned to look down at the river. "I mean whatever else you lose, whatever else you've already lost. You can always end it."

The hope in the kid's voice was uncomfortable. Gerald wasn't in any place to talk someone else down.

"Why don't you?" Gerald blurted.

He regretted it. Who the hell asks that question? The Guatemalan woman gasped and glared at him in outrage. The kid just chuckled softly, and let out a long breath.

"My dad didn't spend all his money on orthodontia just so I could grin on my way down," he said, his voice slightly amused.

"What happened?" Gerald asked.

"I got a call, that he'd gotten real sick." The kid kept watching the water as the wind fanned it out in waves. "I was in my first semester of school. I tried to take a Greyhound back, but it got a flat in Cleveland. I hitchhiked here, but by then dad was in a coma. He'd always had a cough..."

The kid faded out for a minute, just staring out the window. Gerald guessed it had been cancer that got the kid's father. If you didn't get check-ups, didn't catch it early, it could happen like that. Andrea's mom had been an oncologist,

he'd heard the stories.

"I'm sorry," Gerald said.

"Yeah," the kid said. "Yeah."

Gerald mulled the conversation over for several minutes. He had no idea what to say to the kid. The Guatemalan woman just watched the kid sadly. Gerald felt small and stupid. He put his head against the cool glass of the window and let out a soft sigh.

He woke up when the train moved forward slightly. The car smelled like an ashtray, and Gerald was only slightly surprised to see a cigarette in the kid's mouth. Gerald rubbed his aching neck, and absently checked his watch. He'd only been asleep for fifteen minutes. The kid looked better, there was some color back in his face and the wry sneer was creeping back up.

Gerald pressed his face against the glass and looked towards the last car of the train. Another train had pulled up and had just gently pressed its bumper against the back of theirs. The train started moving forward, rolling along the tracks at a careful crawl. Twenty minutes later they pulled into the Pentagon station. Two ambulance loads of EMTs stood among a small army of police as the train came to a stop. The doors were pried open, and the passengers all filed out in a numb silence.

An old black woman who worked for the Metro took Gerald's name and contact information.

"In case of litigation," she said helpfully. Gerald just nodded.

He walked outside, where a half-dozen metro buses and cabs waited to ferry passengers home. People were filing past a streetlight and onto the buses. Gerald thought he saw the Guatemalan woman amongst them. Behind them, an

awkward figure with a guitar case slipped through the halo of the streetlight, walking down the sidewalk through the rain.

Gerald jumped in the nearest cab and pointed at the kid. "We're picking him up."

The cabby raised an eyebrow and looked from the shabby figure retreating down the sidewalk to the expensively dressed Gerald.

"Just do it," Gerald sighed.

As they pulled up, Gerald rolled down the window.

"Get in," he said. The kid blinked and his mouth fell open slightly. He looked around, narrowed his eyes at Gerald, and then opened the door. He wedged the guitar between them and sat heavily in the car.

"Where to?" The cabby turned in his seat to appraise Gerald.

"Where do you live?"

"This is stupid," the kid said, reaching for the handle.

"Don't be an idiot, it's pouring," Gerald said. "Where do you live?"

The kid's hand fell back from the handle, but he just blushed and glared at his own feet. After a second Gerald nodded and gave the cabby his address.

They rode in silence for several minutes, the cab rolling through the mostly empty streets of the district. It was the lightest traffic Gerald could remember.

"I'm not staying at your place," the kid growled, his voice almost shaking.

"You can just wait out the storm then," Gerald offered.

"K," the kid muttered.

"My name is Gerald," Gerald said, thrusting a scarred and slightly shaking hand at the kid. His face was flushed and his throat felt tight.

For a long moment the kid just looked at the hand. He was frowning, and Gerald felt like an idiot. It was a mistake, the cab, his offer, everything. This kid didn't give a shit, and why should he? Gerald could feel himself getting nauseous.

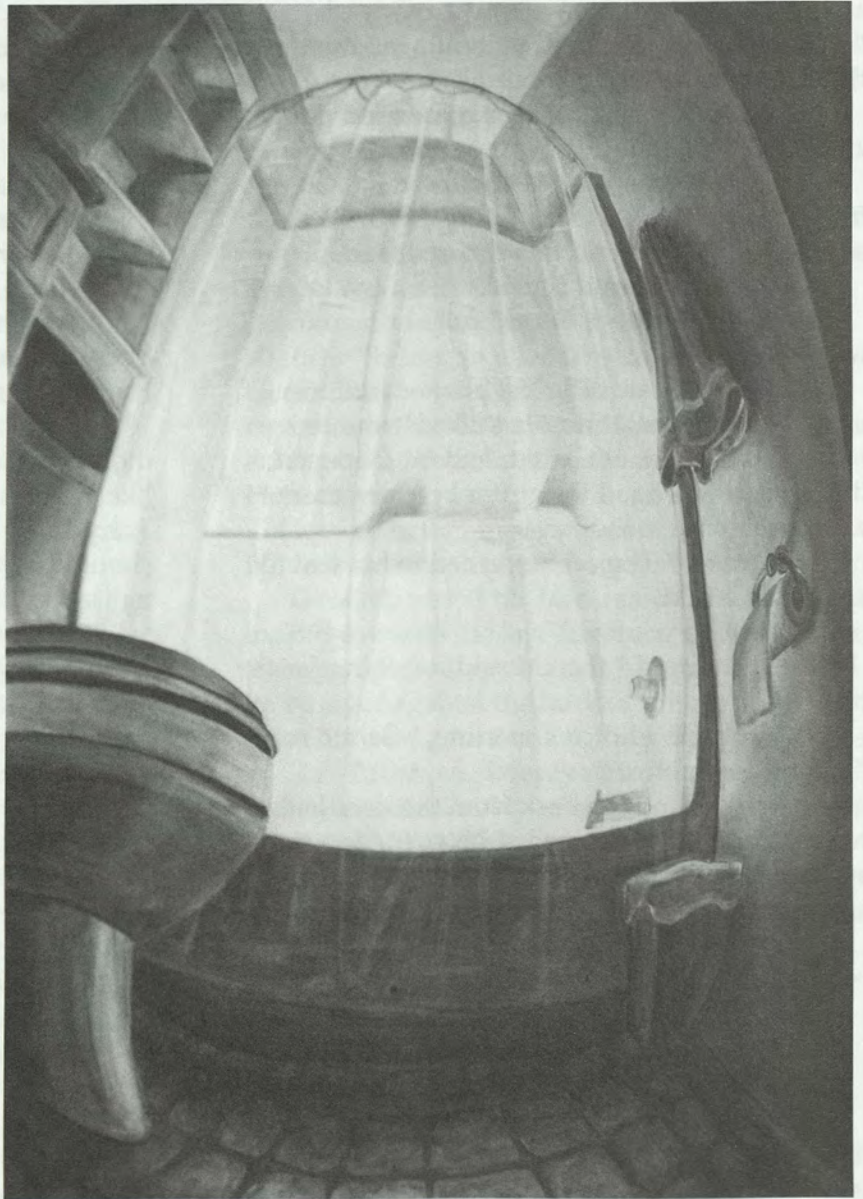
"Matt," the kid said finally, taking Gerald's hand and giving a single strong shake.

"Nice to meet you," Gerald said, smiling at the awkwardness.

"Yeah," Matt said, returning the smile. "You too."



Untitled
Kaylyn Perkins



Basel Maarouf
Man in the Mirror

I gazed upon an empty shell
I pondered heaven, but mostly hell
I focused on his lifeless eyes
I ignored his screams
I ignored his cries

I reached through the mirror
And pulled out his tongue
I should have listened
When he was young

He's starting to die
He's falling apart
I opened my chest
And gave him my heart

It's all in my head
It doesn't exist
He pulled me in
I couldn't resist

He told me this is where I should be
The man in the mirror
Was no longer me

Clint Smith

Mums

In the predawn dimness of his bedroom, Larry Boggs buttoned a faded flannel shirt, tied his boots, and quietly slipped his wallet and keys from the nightstand, taking special care not to disturb his wife. Nora was facing away from him, but he was certain she was still sleeping; he hoped she was still sleeping. She needed rest. Larry listened to her breathing—a steady, feathery sound. His eyes had adjusted to the anemic hue here—a grayish tint, like light glowing through gauze—and he watched her shoulder blades moving under the thin sheet.

Larry crept toward the window and pushed two fingers between the blinds, peering through the slats. Out beyond the sharp angled roofs of the neighborhood and jagged tree line beyond, the sun was just beginning to strain its tint against the bruise-colored sky.

“Larry,” whispered Nora.

He quickly withdrew his hand from the blinds and made a few urgent strides toward the bed. “Yes, sweetie?” he said, leaning near her. “I’m sorry, did I wake you?”

“Will you please take the blankets off the annuals?”

Larry said, “Yes, I promise. And I’ll leave the paper on the counter for you.” He licked his lips and was silent for a few long seconds. “I’m going to run into town for a few things. Do you want me to start a pot of tea?” Nora didn’t answer. Larry decided she may have fallen back to sleep. Again he watched her—the slender hump of her shoulder resembled a miniature version of a white-sheeted ghost.

Once out of the room, Larry quietly maneuvered through the house—though they’d lived here for several years, he still felt like he was getting acquainted with the place—and grabbed

He hoped they'd last a few more weeks.

his coat, gathering a few things he'd need to run his errands. He stepped out on the front porch, his breath instantly appearing as a foggy streamer in the autumn air. Nora's small garden skirted the curvy walkway that ran across the front side of the house. With great care, Larry uncovered his wife's small garden, folding the frosted blankets and chilled sheets and placing them in the entryway closet. Before leaving, Larry set the Saturday morning paper on the kitchen counter.

As he backed the pickup truck from the driveway, he considered how pretty the modest little garden appeared in contrast to the frost-faded blades of grass and dead leaves clinging in the trees. He hoped the color—crimson, rust, purple—of her plants would remain undamaged. He hoped they'd last a few more weeks.

As the sound of Larry's pickup truck recedes to silence, Nora Boggs pushes the sheets aside and slides her legs over the edge of the bed. She remains there for several minutes, her bare feet planted squarely on the carpet, her head and long hair hanging down as if she's dozing. When she rises, she does so with stilted movements, shuffling toward the dark rectangle threshold of the bathroom. Minutes later she emerges wearing a white terrycloth robe. Exiting the bedroom, Nora passes several mirrors without angling her face toward them.

Nora appears to be more comfortable now as she walks through the house, moving smoothly through the corridor that leads to the front door. Out on the concrete

stoop, Nora shutters slightly, drawing her arms closer to her willowy frame, and inspecting the thin bed of geraniums and chrysanthemums. She lingers there for a few moments before glancing around the neighborhood. Suddenly appearing uneasy, Nora clutches the y-fold of her robe closer to her throat and returns to the house. In the kitchen, Nora's bare feet patter over the hardwood floor as she retrieves a ceramic jar from the cabinet along with an ornate tea kettle from a rack. Nora and Larry had received a similar jar-and-kettle set as a house-warming gift for their first home. That had been roughly ten years ago. After the first set was lost, Nora eventually insisted on finding an identical pair.

With lithe movements, Nora fills the kettle and clicks on the gas range—a hissing blue circle glows before her. She turns on the radio and rolls the dial to a classical station, the reception of which is weak and crackling with static. Nora lifts the front page of the newspaper that Larry had left on the counter, giving it what appears to be a cursory glance before frowning at something—the date, perhaps. She lays the paper down and her expression grows vacant.

Nora sets out a white china cup, matching saucer, and demitasse spoon. Humming along with Vivaldi, Nora, in her white robe, walks toward the hallway, moving so smoothly that she appears to glide down the dark corridor as she returns to the cobalt light of the bedroom.

Standing in line at the hardware store and clutching several packs of nine-volt batteries, Larry, for a countless time, scrutinized the L-shaped scar running across the web of flesh between his thumb and forefinger on his left hand. The stitches had fallen out years ago, but initially the black thread of that sutured wound stood out in stark contrast against his pale skin, and on more than

one occasion Larry mused that—because of his first name—the “L” was a personalized affirmation that the accident was Fate, or bitch irony, or something like that.

Larry abandoned these thoughts, hastily observing shoppers preparing to wrap up their autumn projects—young couples browsing through fall decorations, an elderly man solemnly inspecting a stand of rakes.

The woman in front of Larry was purchasing a gazing globe on a pedestal. In the mirrored sphere, Larry caught a glimpse of his distorted reflection. His once-boyish features, which had been so deceptive during his late twenties and early thirties, had now yielded and been replaced by a haggard mask of lines and wrinkles that had their genesis in anxiety and exhaustion. While Larry’s hair maintained its deep brown shade, it had pulled back from his temples, evoking in his face the illusion of lupine length. He returned his attention to his scar.

The *chick-ding* from the cash register drawer popping open indicated it was his turn. Larry looked up, recognizing the young cashier from previous visits; she was cute, college-aged probably. While they were certainly strangers to one another, this morning the girl—her name tag said Holly—grinned as if she’d been expecting Larry, greeting him with some sort of small talk, momentarily fumbling with a button on her smock. Larry managed a smile and a nod as the cashier continued talking about the bouts of chilly weather,

“It’s not as bad as it looks.”

about the leaves changing color.

The girl palmed the packs of batteries before slipping them into a plastic bag. “Nine-volts,” she said, chomping her gum, grinning, clearly trying to joke. “Let me guess—are these for a remote control car or something?”

Larry was absently spinning his silver wedding ring. “No,” Larry said, discarding vividly assertive images of his son’s motorized cars and remote control trucks.

Absently, Larry’s fingers moved from the wedding ring to trace the inferior tissue of his scar. “No.” He cleared his throat, tried to smirk and failed. “They’re for smoke detectors.”

The young woman gave a tight smile and quietly handed Larry his change.

Typically, on mornings like this, Larry would simply return home and tend to Nora. But today he thought flowers would be a nice surprise. Yes—something lurid and alive to fortify her in case the garden didn’t survive the frost.

The sky was clear, painfully blue, and the sun warmed Larry’s face as he walked across the parking lot. Once back on the road, he rolled down the window and let the interior fill with crisp air.

Larry had buried his son on a similar autumn day. A month after Sam’s funeral, Larry began making these habitual trips to the local hardware store.

Six years earlier, Larry’s construction company had been contracted by a local business acquaintance—a man named Wheat—to renovate one of the several homes he owned, this one a slightly dilapidated Victorian located over fifty miles away, down in a place called Sycamore Mill. In preliminary conversations, Wheat had

mentioned that his daughter would eventually take ownership of the house—an initially inconsequential detail to Larry, who agreed to the terms of the contract. But it wasn't so much the prospect of money. It was Nora.

Shortly after the birth of their son three years earlier, Nora had started acting unusual. At first, Larry figured it was some sort of depression about the baby. But things got worse. Her behavior grew erratic and unbalanced. Unbalanced—not Larry's word, but rather their therapist's, who also used terms like bipolar. Abnormal. Borderline. As things progressed, Nora politely declined further treatment, and she and Larry ended their sessions with the counselor. Larry had no problem with this. The therapy sessions—what he refused to call marriage counseling—were expensive. And besides, whatever problems they had, he was certain Nora would either get over it or they would fix it themselves. But three years of watching Nora sullenly fluctuate between varying degrees of moodiness had narrowed Larry's threshold to cope with her. So the opportunity for completing a renovation contract over fifty miles away felt less like a lucrative, long-haul pain-in-the ass than a convenient vacation from his lifeless wife.

On the morning of the accident, Larry was standing on top of a ladder in what was going to be the remodeled parlor. Covered in drywall dust, he was leaning out to catch a bent nail with the claw of his hammer, thinking about Nora, about how miserable they both were, and how, if not for Sam, he would have suggested splitting up a long time ago. Everything was different now. Nora was different, her body was different. He wrenched his upper body too far, and when he felt himself titling he blindly reached out to catch anything.

A framing stud from the original layout—fractured and exposing a rotted ten-inch sliver—was closest; but instead of grabbing hold, the shard punctured Larry's outer palm, the momentum of his fall causing the oversized splinter to tear a jagged path along his hand.

Natalie Wheat happened to be in the house at the time. She had been upstairs and must have heard the crash. Natalie jogged into the parlor as Larry was pushing himself up from the dusty floor, wincing, holding his hand in front of him as rills of blood coursed along his wrist and forearm.

“Oh, Jesus,” said Natalie, wide-eyed, lifting her fingers to her lips before repeating, “Oh, Jesus.”

Aside from exchanging a casual greeting, he had never paid much attention to her when she dropped by. He looked around for something to stanch the bleeding, but everything was filthy. Despite the nasty gash, Larry tried to joke about it. “It's not as bad as it looks.”

Natalie twisted around and ran from the room, returning with a wad of paper towels. Without hesitation she pressed them to his hand. “I think you need to get to the hospital.”

Larry kept his eyes on his hand. He was shaking his head no, but she was right. “I'll have one of my guys drive me—”

Now Natalie was shaking her head. “Mr. Boggs,” she said. Now Larry looked at her. A stern little expression there—furrowed brow, thin lips parted as she breathed in a rhythm of calm urgency. The swell of her small chest rising and falling. “Please—we have to go.”

Natalie helped Larry to her car, handing him a towel she'd retrieved from the kitchen. The two spoke very little on the way. From time to time Natalie glanced over at Larry, awkwardly tucking

ribbons of hair behind her ear, saying soothing things as if tending to an injured pet. And when Larry walked out of the hospital to find Natalie waiting for him in the parking lot, she somehow looked different. Her plainness had given way to something delicate and sensual.

Things happened fast after that. Because of the driving distance between his home and the renovation job, Larry had taken to occasionally spending the night in Sycamore Mill. Nora, he was certain, understood. For months he and Natalie met at a motel called "The Montenegro," an anonymous roadside inn with an open parking lot facing the interstate. Natalie never explained why it was inappropriate to have these encounters in her home. Towards the end, Larry was spending nearly every weekend with Natalie.

On one of those nights, Larry woke in one of those cheap beds in the cheap motel room. Someone was pounding on the door. He looked over at Natalie, who didn't stir from her sheet-tangled sleep as the knocking continued. Larry fumbled for his jeans and stumbled across the room. He twisted the knob and pulled open the door. The security chain caught and Larry peered through the narrow space between the door and the jamb.

It was Ben, one of his younger employees from the renovation crew. Ben had a cell phone pressed against his ear. Squinting, Larry said nothing as he unfastened the chain and opened the door a little wider. Ben's work truck, with its engine still running and its headlights on, was parked directly in front of the room. Larry was about to ask Ben how he known where to find him, but it pointless. The entire work crew knew by now. Larry opened his mouth to politely ask the kid to mind his

"Please – we have to go."

goddamn business, but Ben cut him off.

"—hold on, he's right here," said the younger man, offering the cell phone to Larry. Ben looked pale.

Larry's heart surged and he began blinking rapidly. He reached out for the phone and answered.

"Mr. Boggs?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Boggs, my name is Paul Denbrough." The man's voice was steady, measured, and morose. "I'm a chaplain with Colfax County." Silence. "Mr. Boggs, there's been a serious accident..."

Larry listened, absently allowing the door to swing open all the way. The work truck's headlamps illuminated the room, filling the depraved space with stark, antiseptic light. As the chaplain continued speaking, most of what the man was saying was lost under the rush of blood thrumming in Larry's ears. *There had been a fire...at your residence...one child...deceased at the scene...your wife was found near the front door...burns covering much of her body...the property has been secured by a sheriff...we're doing everything we can...*

When Larry arrived at the hospital, he passed family and friends in the waiting room. They reached out and said things to him. Nora's mother was hysterical, and she wept against her husband, who glared at Larry. Neither spoke to their son-in-law.

Larry was guided to a group of doctors who explained Nora's extensive tissue damage, what to expect as far as her chances of survival. Larry was ushered to meet with men from the sheriff's

department. He told them everything. A few officers stood in a semi-circle around him, glancing furtively at each other during the interview. A detective informed him that an investigation would ensue to discover exactly what caused the fire. One of them asked if Mrs. Boggs had ever exhibited any abnormal behavior.

He was spoken to by members from the local fire department who said his wife and son may have had some sort of warning the home's smoke detectors had been working.

Eventually, Larry found his way to his wife's room. Nora was wrapped in bandages and hooked up to an array of machines. He sat, listened to her labored breathing, listened to the humming ventilator and the beeping cardiac monitor. He watched Nora's frail chest rise and fall under the thin hospital sheet. He watched her as he had years ago, in their bed, as she slept.

Sam. Sam was gone. Larry dropped his head onto the edge of the bed and screamed.

•

The hum of hospital equipment faded and was replaced by the pickup truck's engine as Larry drove down a back road just outside of town. But the tears remained. Larry took a rough swipe at his eyes. He missed being a dad. He missed being the kind of husband Nora believed he could be when she married him. He wanted Nora to let him love her and love her body. Nora had been given a second chance, and Larry felt he'd been given one too.

After picking up the chrysanthemums, Larry decided to take the long way home and drive through town. Outside the shops on Main Street, the sidewalks were filled with people—families selecting pumpkins from large crates in front of the market, kids gawking at Halloween costumes in the display window at the drug store. The wind picked up briefly, scattering some leaves along the curb as Larry steered away from town and headed home.

The smell of Nora's chrysanthemums filled the cab, and through the open window Larry thought he caught the distinct autumn aroma of burning leaves. Then he, saw the thin trail of smoke.

Larry reached his street and brought the truck to a violent stop. The side of the house—the one nearest the kitchen—was being eaten by flames, turning gray as the fire crept toward the front of the home. Neighbors were standing in their yards, some on their cell phones, some simply clutching their hands to their mouths. The wail of sirens echoed in the distance.

Larry tumbled out of the truck just as the first fire engine appeared on the street. He was halfway across the lawn when he remotely registered that he was cradling Nora's mums against his chest. Larry didn't slow as he threw his shoulder against the front door, disappearing into the house as smoke spilled through the threshold, the dark cloud ascending like a charcoal scar against the expansive canvas of unmarred autumn sky.

●

Jordan Bryant is a twenty-year-old Creative Writing major who enjoys music and film almost as much as she enjoys writing.

Sylvia Burlock is a creative writer and thinker. She loves photography and musing while looking at open blue skies.

Anna Dawson smells better than the average hippie.

Rebecca Downs is a Junior majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing while also working on Spanish and Geography minors. She is the captain of the IUPUI women's cross country and track teams. She also enjoys reading and writing.

Sally Flood is working on her second bachelor's degree, majoring in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Illustration and taking courses in Creative Writing and Children's Literature. Her dream is to write and illustrate children's books.

Manav Gupta is a student by profession, a photographer by interest, a lusting traveler, a numismatist geek, a word-games nut, a rookie violinist, a sports enthusiast, a friend, and an annoying brother and son.

Andrew Harmon has already exhausted all of his short biography ideas.

Jonathan Holleb is a writer and musician, who often has poems come to him while strumming a guitar or playing a harmonica.

Karen Klutzke is a nontraditional student with ambitions of becoming a physician assistant—hence, her undergraduate academic career at IUPUI is stuffed with Chemistry and Biology. Although she loves science, she loves a good story better.

Carrington Kujawski is twenty years old and has lived all over the world. She believes in the small things in life.

Jessica Leonard is a Senior Herron student focusing on Illustration. Her main focus is in watercolor.

Rachel Linnemeier is currently a Junior Painting major at Herron School of Art and enjoys working in oils. She loves to create depth by glazing on thin layers of transparent color.

Basel Maarouf is an Exercise Science major. He loves playing soccer and is always hungry.

Daren Mai is a Creative Writing major. His poem and illustration were created for a poetry class while on a trip home.

Ronni Moore is a photographer with wanderlust from Indianapolis. Ronni is a School of Science student who dreams of having a dual career as a sports photographer and optometrist.

MacKenzie Nunley is a Senior majoring in Communications and hopes that the words in her poem are as special to the reader as they are to her.

Jeffrey Passow is currently a Philosophy major at IUPUI and spends his free time writing poems about bridges, reading about the Harlem Renaissance, and drawing Karl Marx on an Etch-A-Sketch.

Kaylyn Perkins is a Photography major at Herron School of Art and Design. As a photographer she enjoys producing work that has surreal as well as post modern influences.

Mike Potter is an undergraduate pursuing a double major in Creative Writing and Journalism. He is a desk editor at the *Campus Citizen* and an intern for *Indianapolis Monthly* magazine. He thinks cooking, cycling, the third person, and you are all cool.

Christina Richey is a photographic artist residing in Indianapolis, IN. Most recently, her work can be seen on the cover of the award-winning, national children's magazine *Jack and Jill*, as well as in *Edible Indy* magazine. Artistically, Christina has been constructing sets and exploring concepts relating to time and the anxiety she associates with time.

Lynnette Sauer is a first-year student in Herron School of Art and Design who has "found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way – things I had no words for" (Georgia O'Keefe). She enjoys working in pencil, charcoal, acrylic, and mixed media.

Sarah Scott is a Freshman Biology major at IUPUI, pre-med. She enjoys drawing in her free time. "Gray Matter" was completed for her AP Studio Art Portfolio.

Clint Smith is an honors graduate of the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago, Le Cordon Bleu. Winner of the 2011 *Scare The Dickens Out of Us* ghost story contest, his stories have appeared in *Weird Fiction Review*, *British Fantasy Society Journal*, and *Paper Nautilus*. Clint lives in the Midwest, along with his wife and two children.

Sarah Spomer, under the pen name Sarah Natalia Lee, has published the dark fantasy/romance novel *Saving Amy* (Vanilla Heart Publishing, 2008) and "The Cafeteria" in the anthology *With Arms Wide Open* (Vanilla Heart Publishing, 2009). She is a Junior at Herron School of Art and Design.

Sarah Taylor is a Creative Writing major with a passion for growing giant pumpkins.

Texanna Thomas was born in Gary, IN on the thirteenth of February, and art has always been a big part of her life. Throughout her Herron career she geared her art towards animal subject matter while working her way towards a degree in Ceramics and Illustration.

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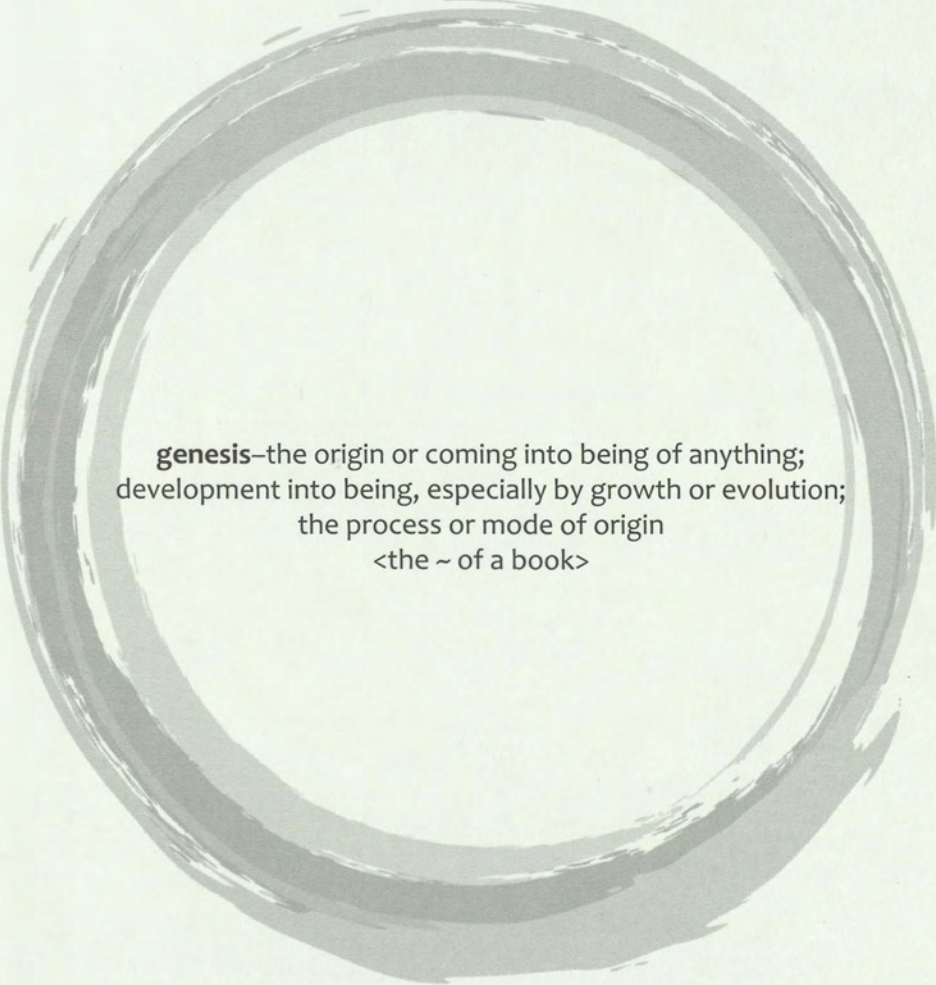
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