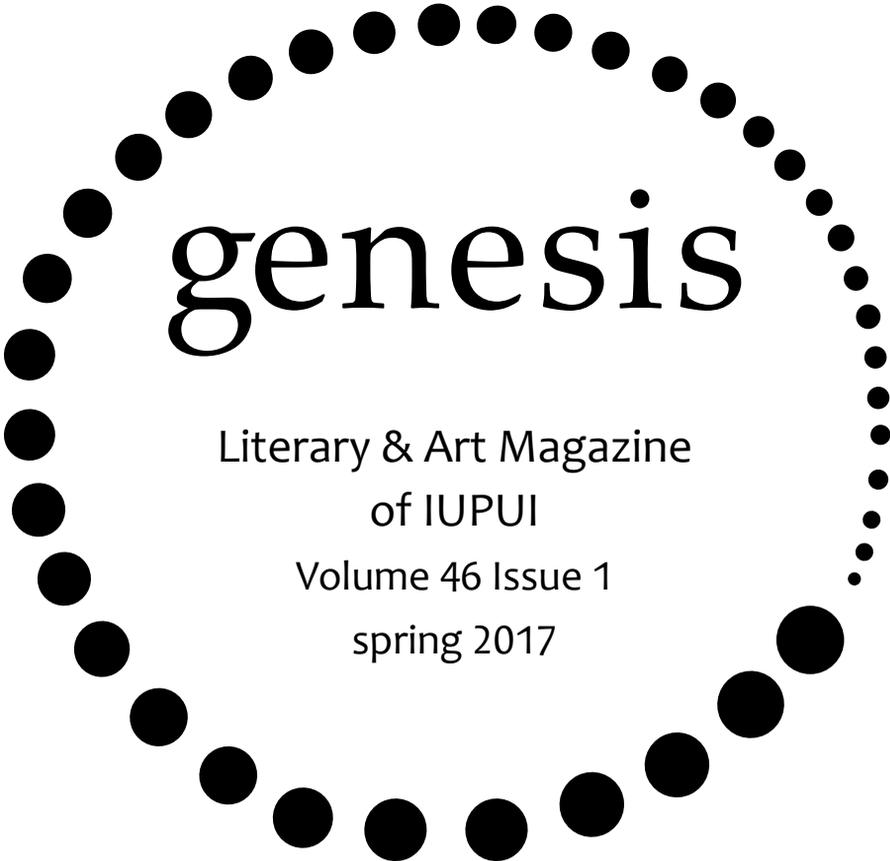


genesis

literary & art magazine of IUPUI

Spring 2017



genesis

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Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

Thank you for picking up this semester's issue of *genesis*. The amazing variety of stories, poetry, and artwork made choosing the pieces a challenge and a pleasure. Our talented contributors explore identity, home, and many other complex issues. As you explore these pages, we hope that you will find a piece that resonates with you.

We thank you for reading *genesis*, and thank you to all who support our mission to showcase the amazing abilities and diversity of the students at IUPUI. Please continue reading and submitting. Without you, *genesis* would not exist.

Ashley Williams and Jennifer Rojas
Managing Editors

Table of Contents

Poetry

- 14 Loc'd
16-17 Restaurant of the Mind
18 Lamassu
20 Monet Paints Nympheas at 79
22 History: Boone County
34 Do Not Resuscitate
36 My Daughter, This World Will Not Consume You
38-39 The Mirror Sister
41-43 7095
48-49 For the Young Black Man with Heavy Footsteps

Fiction

- 7-13 The Wooden Girl
24-33 Passing
51-54 Detachment
56-59 What Comes Together Also Separates

Nonfiction

- 61-69 The Fates and Why I Left Them
71-75 The Sickness
78-83 G-R-A-N-D-M-A

Art

6	Porcupine
15	Two Paths Diverge
19	Life Studies
21	Neptunian Tides
23	Enchained
35	Dissolve
37	Colored Outside the Lines
40	Be a Work of Art
44	Solitude
47	It's Lit
50	Consummation, Destruction, Desolation
55	Excuses
60	Trying My Best
70	Stuffed
76	String Games
77	Curious Cat

Best of Issue

24-33	Passing	Eden Rea-Hedrick
34	Do Not Resuscitate	Blake Bennett
71-75	The Sickness	Emily Bennett
77	Curious Cat	Samantha Barnes



Porcupine
Taylor Canada
Graphite

The Wooden Girl

Caroline Niepokoj



Dinner is quiet.

A different kind of quiet than during harvest when Papa works long days in the fields. Instead of his eyes drooping and his chin resting on his hand just so he could stay awake long enough to eat, his eyes shift from Mama to his food. Mama clears her throat and scrapes her peas into a pile. The pile of peas has moved to three of the four corners of her plate while the pork chop sits in the middle, forgotten.

The wind blows the back door shut, and the loud slam makes the three of us jump. I look out the window, not realizing it was so windy. The cornfields that surround the back of our house are too low to be disturbed by the wind. The real indicator of wind I use is the forest in the front of our house that swallows the driveway and protects my favorite place on earth.

My treehouse.

Papa's eyes move to Mama, but she is too busy rolling the peas across her plate to the last corner.

"Did you get a lot of wood moved today, Papa?" I ask, trying to bring this awkward silence to a close. Maybe they had fought while I was in the treehouse. Papa had decided to demolish the old barn behind our house before the grass turned into corn. Mama wasn't happy about it, especially since that was where we kept the tractors. Papa promised to build a better barn, but that only seemed to make Mama angrier.

"Yes, I did." He smiles, finally, before taking a sip of milk.

"Can I use some of the wood?"

"Why would you want to do that?" Mama asks. Her fork rises to her mouth with a few peas balancing in the grooves.

"I was going to add on to my treehouse." The peas stop just before her lips. She looks at Papa, and he stands up quickly.

"Does anyone want another pork chop?" He walks around the

The Wooden Girl

table with his plate. Mama spills the peas back into the pile. She looks at her plate, her fork dangling over the pile like it wants to scoop up the peas, but something is holding it back. Papa makes noise at the stove as he gets himself another pork chop.

“I was going to make a desk inside my treehouse.” Talking seemed to be the only thing keeping my parents alive at the moment, so I describe the plans I created this afternoon. “I thought I would attach it to the board I cut too thin when making the walls. It looks like a small cubby hole, so I was going to nail a piece of wood underneath it, and make a desk. I could put pens and maybe some paper in the cubby hole, and then I can-.”

“Sweetheart,” Mama says gently, putting her hand on mine to stop me. “We need to tell you something.”

Papa sits down at the table. His eyes are big, and he looks at Mama like she is crazy.

“Tell me what?”

“Why don’t we finish eating, and then-.”

“No, I want to know,” I say cutting Papa off and setting my fork down with too much force so the sound of metal against glass rings in the air.

“Elora Marie,” Mama scolds.

“I’m sorry, Papa.”

He looks up at Mama, and she nods her head. He lets out a sigh.

“Elora,” he pauses, looking at Mama for some support, but she just looks back at him with her lips in a tight line, “the reason I’m re-doing the barn is because we are going to sell the property.”

Now I understood why Mama was so mad. We can’t have a farm if there are no tractors, and we can’t leave the tractors out in the open. Of all people, Papa should know that. He lived on a farm his whole life. Grandma and Grandpa bought this land for us when he met my Mama, and our family has lived here ever since. Besides, why would Papa want to sell a small plot in the middle of our land?

“Where are we going to put the tractors?” I ask. Mama gives a sorrowful laugh, and sets her fork on the plate.

“Well, we are going to have a new barn,” Papa says. “But it’s not

going to be here.”

“Are we giving them to Grandpa?”

“Well, yes,” he says, the corner of his mouth turning up like it does when he concentrates, “and we are going to go with them.”

“Well, of course, how else are they supposed to get all the way to Nebraska?” I giggle.

Mama squeezes my hand. It makes me jump a little, as I forgot she was holding it.

“Elora, sweetheart, what Papa is trying to say is that,” Mama stops and takes a deep breath, “we are going to move in with Grandma and Grandpa and help them on their farm.”

“Wait.” Papa isn’t selling the small plot of land where the barn rests. He’s selling it all. I pull my hand from Mama’s as my treehouse stands tall in my mind. If we were moving, then we were leaving my treehouse behind.

“We can build another treehouse,” Papa says turning so his shoulders face me. “Grandma and Grandpa have a lot of trees.”

“No,” I yell standing up from my chair. It scrapes along the floor like knives against Mama’s china. I look at Mama for her to scold me for yelling at Papa, but she sits in her chair with her arm still reached towards me.

“You had so much fun building the treehouse,” Mama says, “wouldn’t it be fun to do it again?”

“It’s not the same,” I scream trying to back away from the table, but falling into my chair. They want me to leave the treehouse. They want me to leave my *home*.

“Sweetheart, we already sold the property.”

“Then take it back!” Tears spill over my eyes, and my chin quivers. Mama jumps out of her seat, and runs towards me with her arms opened. I duck under them, and run for the front door.

“Elora, wait,” Papa calls as the door slams shut.

I bolt down the front steps, and head for the forest. The wind pushes me along, encouraging me to run faster and faster, away from the awful news, but I have to focus as it tries to push me off course. I look behind me, but no one appears in the doorway. I sink into the

The Wooden Girl

shade of the trees, and keep going.

It was calmer in the trees, no more wind. I hear it whipping over the leaves. Branches snap under my feet, and squirrels and rabbits take cover. I hurtle down the path Papa made for me when we finished the treehouse. He took his tractor and moved back and forth, pushing the dirt together so the ground was hard and secure and the branches lined the sides. I rode on his lap, and pointed out the rabbits and the squirrels that grew too curious, and he stopped and let them investigate before they scurry off into the trees.

I ran faster and faster, the trees blurring into a green barrier like I was running a marathon. But I had run, and walked, and skipped this path before. Barely slowing down, I reach out and wrap my arms around the pine tree Papa saved. On one side, half of the branches were sawed off. When Papa and I were building the treehouse, a terrible storm came through, and lightening damaged the tree. It only hurt the one side, so Papa cut away the damage, and the tree grew taller and stronger.

“There’s your landmark, Elora,” he said. “Now you know when you get to this tree, the treehouse is just behind it.”

“What kind of tree is it?” I asked looking up at the towering tree that seemed to go on forever in my eight-year-old eyes.

“It’s an Austin Pine tree.” I touched the smooth surface Papa had just sanded.

“I’m going to call him Austie.”

I press my cheek to the same place I had touched so long ago. Tears slide across my eyelids and splash into the wood.

“I don’t want to go, Austie,” I mumble. I grip him tighter, my arms not long enough to wrap around him completely. I am too afraid to turn around.

I knew what the treehouse looked like. The large house in the middle of the tree with its shiny doorknob and spiral staircase that wrapped around the thick trunk. There was a rope bridge connecting the house to a smaller platform with a railing. Papa had put a chair up there for me. He joked I would have a better view on my porch in the tree than the one connected to our house.

I didn't need to turn around and see it to know the third step wasn't as straight as the others because Papa had let me put it in, and I wasn't strong enough to tighten it correctly. I knew there was a small branch of leaves sticking out of the point at the top of the roof because I stuck them there last week even though I promised Papa I wouldn't go on the roof. I knew the swing was a little too high, and, my breath caught in my throat as I remembered, as of three weeks ago, I am finally tall enough to sit on the seat and let the tips of my toes touch the ground.

"Maybe I should lower the swing," Papa muses after he secured it to the tree. "You won't be able to touch the ground."

"No, Papa, I like this," I said running towards the swing and jumping so my stomach landed on the seat. I curled my body around it, and felt the breeze push me back and forth.

But even now, in this small clearing in the middle of the forest, the wind doesn't reach low enough to move the swing. I listen closely, trying to hear the scratching of the rope as it moves back and forth, but I can't. I knew I had to turn around and face the treehouse sometime, but I was too afraid to tell it I was leaving.

And then I do it.

I spin around so fast, before I can take it back, and I am face to face with my treehouse. It is exactly how I left it an hour ago. It looks pretty good for being five years old. The porch railing is leaning slightly, but Papa said he would come fix it. The tree stands tall and strong, opening its branches to give my house a place to sit high within the leaves.

On July 2, 1996, Papa and I went searching for wood for a bonfire. We came across a tree with branches pointed outward so it looked like an open palm, and he promised me a treehouse. On July 3, 1996, I woke Papa up at four in the morning, and begged him to start right then. And we did. Mama had to come find us the next day before our family came for a bonfire and fireworks.

Papa said the treehouse was the fastest thing he ever built. We had to finish it before harvest, so we worked all day. Mama said she liked how it tired me out, and I went straight to bed without a fuss,

The Wooden Girl

but Papa always made sure we rested, especially when it was too hot.

There was a tree stump, across the clearing from the treehouse. It's a wide, flat stump, with the remains of bark on one side. Papa labeled it my throne. I would sit there while he sat on his toolbox to eat lunch while we admired what we had done that day, and planned what we would do after lunch.

The day Papa and I hung the bridge, I insisted on sitting on the bridge to eat lunch. We dangled our feet over the edge, and Papa messed with the boards all of lunch just to make sure they were safe for me to cross. I laid down, and pretend to be floating on the clouds. I rolled over and looked down below to see how high up I was. I screamed, nearly falling off the edge. Papa caught my arm before I tumbled over the side.

“Be careful, honey.”

“Papa, there's a snake under the bridge,” I cried. Papa looked down, squinted his eyes, but still wasn't convinced. I looked back again, and it was still there.

“I'll go down and check,” he said. I laid on the bridge, hugging it close to me so I wouldn't fall again. I watched as Papa descended the steps, and examined the ground for the snake.

“Right there,” I pointed. It was directly beneath me. I had never seen a snake that still before. It made a thin, red line in the dirt.

“Elora,” Papa chuckled, “it's just your necklace.” He bent over, and held up the red hearts all strung together on a silver string. I looked down at my chest, and it was gone.

“It looked like a snake from up here,” I said relaxing into the wood, knowing I was still safe here in the trees.

I never saw any real snakes in the clearing. Squirrels chase each other up and down the stairs, and birds nest in the windows. I couldn't promise the same thing if I built another treehouse in Nebraska.

No. I will never build another treehouse.

I walk all the way up the steps swirling around the tree, and bend just right so I don't hit my head on the low branch in the back. I lay on the top step, and place my head on the small lip of wood in front of

Caroline Niepokoj

the door. A tiny dust ball hangs from the piece of wood, and I free it with my fingers and watch it float down to the dirt.

I would never forget this treehouse. Not even if I grew old enough to lose my memory. Papa always said I spent so much time in the treehouse, I would turn into a wooden girl.

I just didn't want the treehouse to forget me.

I spring up from the stair as an idea comes to me. I open the door and look down to the right where Papa left some tools for me. There was a hammer and some nails, but nothing I could cut with. I dig deeper and find a pocket knife. Papa had been looking for it for a few weeks, but I didn't know it was in here. I go back out the door, and down the steps until I am in the front of the tree.

I start carving.

I dig out pieces of wood, and I form the letters as best as I can. It's hard to make rounded letters like a and e, but I manage. The pieces fall on my feet and bounce down the stairs. I dig deep, knowing in a few years the tree might regrow enough to cover it if it is too shallow. It's almost dark when I finish. I take a step back towards the edge of the step and look at what I have done.

I hear footsteps behind me. I think maybe it is a deer, but when I turn, Papa is walking away from Austie. He stands behind me with his hand on my shoulder.

"It looks good," he says squeezing my shoulder.

We both stand in silence, but this time it's a comfortable silence. It's not a tired silence or a nervous silence. It's the silence that came all those years ago during lunch when we would reflect on the amazing object transforming in front of us. Maybe years from now, someone else will stand transfixed by this huge house in the middle of the forest. They could polish it, sand it, paint it, but the tree would always remind them of one thing.

Elora Marie Ripley

1996

Loc'd

Victoria Smith-Howard



Thick roots. Bobby pins with paint peeling. Oil. Apple cider vinegar. Patience. Black soap. Mangos. Hippie or perhaps a gypsy. Water, lots of water. Low maintenance. Wild, or sometimes just untamed. Hot and heavy. 6 inches. Black. 1 year and 8 months in counting. Itchy. Aloe Vera. Expression of freedom. Ropes. Bees. Community. Antenna. Warmth, no hot ass dryer. Woman. Spiritual growth. 2014. Rastafarians. Complimented curiosity. Steam. 105 parts. Loc's of love. Anti-dreadful. Sista'. Wrapped in satin or silk. Beehive. More Water. The root of life.

Queen



Two Paths Diverge

Lifan Fan

Oil on canvas

genesis spring 2017 15

Restaurant of the Mind

Blake Bennett

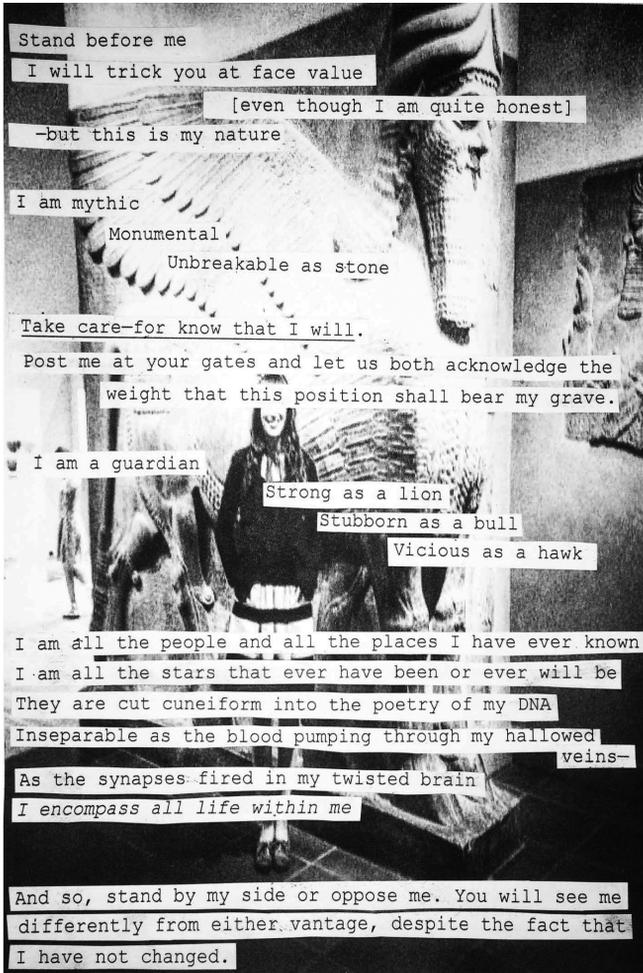


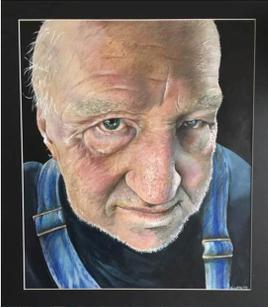
Restaurant of the Mind
reads the sign
on the door. Today's specialties:
Pan-seared Sylvia Plath,
Steamed Stephen King Crab,
Roasted Robert Browning.
I step in from the din of New York traffic
and embrace the warm aromas
of coffee and the mustiness
of old books.
My eyes chew on the spines
lined up like racks of smoked meat.
I pull and pluck and taste
the tang of Twain's wit,
the acid in Achebe's voice,
the bitterness in Hemingway's sentences.
My hunger not yet sated, I follow a man
carting paperbacks through a back door,
and watch, mesmerized,
as he beheads them.
Faulkner, Joyce, Vonnegut,
Hardy, Shelley, Sinclair, Frost,
covers ripped from pages, tossed
away like dry bones.
I watch, a wet balloon rising
in my throat, my eyes threatening
to pour. When he finishes his slaughter
he removes his butcher's gloves,
exposing sweaty red hands
with not so much as a papercut.
I lift one of the naked manuscripts

from the iron-metal ossuary,
hold it close and steal
down the alley.
In the daylight I look down
to see a thumbprint halo
over Ray Bradbury's head.

Lamassu

Joelle Stille





Life Studies

Emily Wright
Painting

Monet Paints Nympeas at 79

Christina Marie Rickers



This is how it ends:

He is on the Japanese footbridge,
or maybe the gravel path
like lace on the water's border.
With hat pulled low, he watches
the shifting of the lilies,
grasping with a lens-less eye.

The brush is as long as his forearm.
Veins run dark in his hands,
indigo lifelines tracking
across ancient topography.
There are knots in his fingers.
Surely the ache is too much
to lift the brush, surely the strain
burns his eyes like the sun he loves.

And yet, that orb still rose.
The light still bathes the lilies
as it did yesterday, as it will
tomorrow's starborn morning.

So gently the paintbrush
lingers on the canvas,
like fingertips on eyelids,
like laying calla lilies to rest,
like he understands such
a thing could break a heart.



Neptunian Tides

Sydney Petrunich
Fluid acrylics

History: Boone County

Jeanyce St-Victor



I look in the mirror, “Quit eating so fucking much!”
A rattle snake? No, it is only my helix of pills in their bottle.
I can’t breathe, his hands clutch my throat.
Stay quiet... pretend you are still asleep.

8% of adolescents, aged 12-17, abused pain relievers in the year 2009-2010.

“Dinner is ready!” But I have no appetite.
I take three more, wash them down with the rigid earnest auburn spiced rum
The belt wraps around my head as he swings it another time.
Hold your breath so you don’t scream.

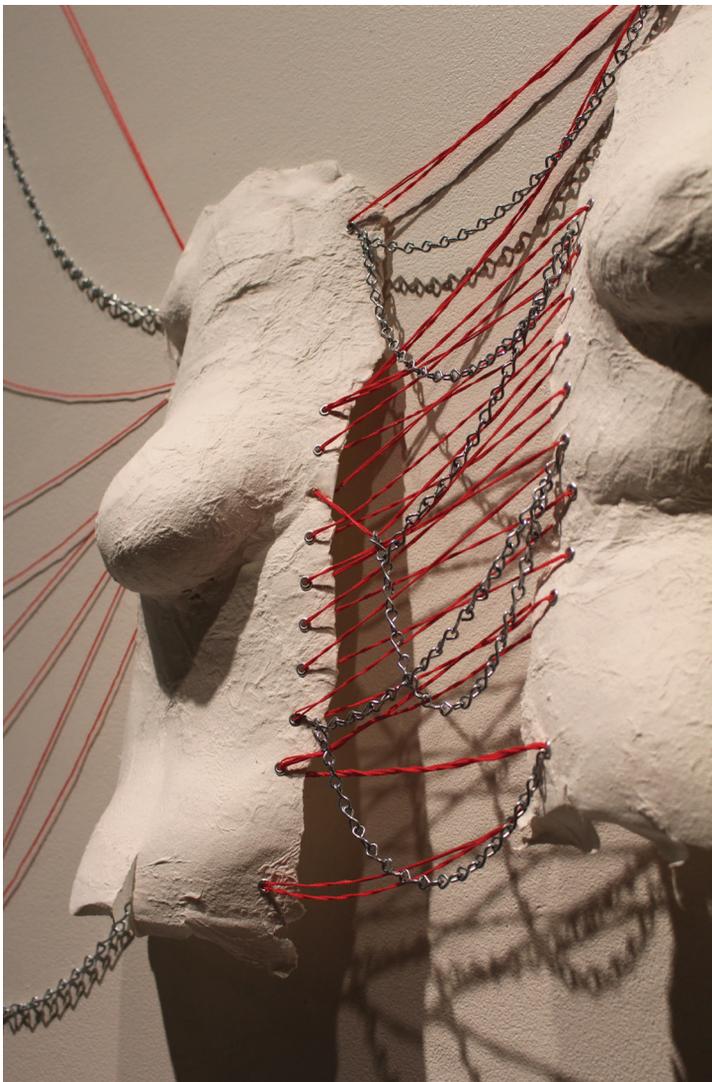
An estimated 1,740 children died from abuse and/or neglect in 2008.

“Why are your legs still so thick Jeanyce?” *I’m working on it.*
7 pills, 8 shots, 24 hits, I start to feel less pain.
“Shut up with all that hollerin’!” He doesn’t want the neighbors to know.
“You tell anyone, and you’re DEAD!”

50%-70% of normal-weight girls think they’re overweight.

25-pound weight loss... still too fat, like the inflatables flapping in the wind at car dealerships.
Busted lip, torn ligament, swollen eye, but she still doesn’t believe me.
He found me, he wants me. RUN! He caught me...

66% of rape victims know their assailant.



Enchained

TL Ridgway

Handmade paper, beeswax, thread, zinc

Passing
Eden Rea-Hedrick
Best of ≈ Fiction

The dim, graying slab of the church's exterior back wall is as uninviting as the dingy hotel room she has just left. The sight takes her off guard. Surely the church was not always so ugly, she thinks. She remembers a little white building bedecked with Christmas garlands or Easter banners, filled to the brim with the smiling faithful who raised her with care and crushed her with expectations. She remembers coming here with Arnold at least once on a Halloween night to splatter this wall with old eggs – his idea, of course – both of them confident in the knowledge that they were loved and would be forgiven. The fading edifice before her seems a decaying ghost of the structure that once offered that love.

She pulls her car into a space near the door and climbs out into the bitter wind of the February afternoon, which seizes the tails of her suit jacket and flings them out wildly behind her. She pulls anxiously at her tie. She ought to have had Joe refresh her memory and skills in tie management before she left town. As in most things, her son maintains perfect correctness in his dress, so professional these days since his promotion. He has grown into a truly handsome man, she reflects, though she had always known he would. She relishes a brief fantasy of showing him off to the assemblage, boasting of his academic accomplishments, his professional success, his beautiful wife and precious baby daughter. Then she pulls at her tie again and casts the vision away. She is more relieved than sorry that Joe is not here. Her day will be difficult enough without the added trouble of shepherding her only son through the ranks of relatives whom, after all, she and Joe have not seen in over a decade for a reason.

Her tie finally wrestled into place, she mounts the crumbling back steps with more bravado than her feelings merit. The decrepit condition of the church seems to offer a grim promise that she will

find the intervening years have left her relatives in a similar state of erosion. Then again, she is no spring chicken herself. Her back aches from the unfamiliar hotel bed as it would never have done in younger days, a pang almost stronger than the anxiety that knots her stomach. Her hand, to her irritation, trembles slightly as she lays it on the rusting doorknob to which she once tied Arnold's loose tooth. She tightens her grip and pushes the door forcefully open.

The back door opens directly onto the fellowship hall. As badly lit and cheerily painted as she remembers it, the old room with its colorful walls seems an inappropriate venue for the sea of black attire that meets her eyes. There are far more people here than she expected, filling the room almost to capacity. She had not thought Arnold had so many friends. Then she feels guilty over the supposition. She of all people should know better than to make assumptions of any kind.

"Joseph!" Although she has braced herself for it, practiced it in the mirror of her hotel room for half an hour the night before, trying to reacquaint herself with the empty, foreign syllables, the name falls on her ears like the cold water of the creek where she and Arnold used to swim. She suppresses a shiver.

The voice sounds again. "Joseph, you're here." Marilyn parts the waters of the black sea, moving swiftly through the ranks that draw respectfully back at the passing of the bereaved woman. Marilyn reaches her and seizes both her hands with surprising strength. "It's good to see you."

"Hello, Lynn." She lets go of Marilyn's hands and, brotherly, folds her in a hug instead, not too tight. "How are you holding up?"

"I'm... doing better." Marilyn draws back and speaks evenly. The years have diminished both her sturdy bearing and the gleaming blondness of her tightly curled hair. "How are you, Joseph?"

She blinks, drawing up an answer from her well-rehearsed catalog of lines. "I'm well."

"And Joe? He must be... my goodness, is he thirty?"

“He’s thirty-one.” She nods, feeling pride suffuse her face and not bothering to douse it in humility. “He’s doing very, very well. A fine young man.”

“You must be proud of him.” Marilynn’s smile creases her eyes without lessening their tiredness.

“He has a little girl.” She bites her lip. She had determined not to discuss this, yet grandmotherly pride, it seems, is stronger than her resolution.

“Does he?” Marilynn’s interest is immediate and keen. “How old is she? What’s her name?”

“She’ll be two in October,” she says. “Her name is Elly.” For a moment she hopes Marilynn will not make the connection, but then Marilynn nods sympathetically.

“After Elaine, of course,” Marilynn says. “That’s beautiful. I’m sure Elaine would have loved her.”

As if she needs a reminder of Elaine’s strongest characteristic. Elaine would have loved little Elly with all the strength of devotion she lavished on Joe and on his erstwhile father. Elaine would be angry, she thinks, to see her here now. *What are you doing?* she would demand. *How dare you remake yourself for these people?* But Elaine always liked Marilynn. She remembers Marilynn standing up among the ranks of Elaine’s bridesmaids on their wedding day, smiling with deepest goodwill at the beautiful bride her notoriously sissified brother-in-law had astonishingly managed to ensnare. She thinks of the reception, of Arnold’s best man speech with its string of crude jokes about brother Joseph’s probable impending failure to do his lovely new wife justice in bed. He was not wrong, either, she reflects with sudden color. The fact that they managed to produce Joe within the first year of their marriage still astonishes her now as much as it did thirty-one years ago. There was even a time, briefly, when she doubted her own paternity, spurred by Arnold’s dark insinuations that baby Joe looked nothing like his father. Then again, by that time Arnold had two daughters to his name and a financial reality that encouraged no further children. To lack a son and heir

after two attempts while his pansy of a brother scored a male first-born in perfect health must have galled Arnold.

She realizes that Marilyn is speaking, has probably been speaking for some time. “Charity will be eight next month and Grace just turned four. They’re here somewhere with Donna.”

“Yes, how are Donna and Diana?” She asks after her nieces with especial warmth to make up for her slip in attention.

“Donna’s right over there.” Marilyn points toward a corner, where her tall, blond daughter stands in conversation with a little knot of somber-faced women, a child in black clinging to her leg.

“That must be Grace,” she says.

Marilyn nods. “Isn’t she beautiful?”

Privately she thinks that Grace looks a bit inclined toward scrawniness, a trait shared by her mother and aunt, who inherited it from no one knew where. Not from Marilyn, and surely not from Arnold, a beefy football player in high school who filled out further into corpulence as the years progressed. She wonders what he looked like this time last week, when he was still living, breathing, and probably swearing at everyone in sight. Has it been twelve years since she last saw him? He came to Elaine’s funeral, slightly hungover, she remembers, and uncharacteristically let Marilyn do all the talking. It seems a lifetime since then.

“I’ll go over and say hello,” she says. She squeezes Marilyn’s hand with what she realizes too late is a distinctly womanly air of compassion. “I’ll see you later, Lynn.”

She tightens her hand into a fist and drops it to her side as Marilyn smiles, unfazed, and drifts away. She is determined not to repeat her mistake. Marilyn knew her in the days when she was widely regarded as the local sissy boy; from Marilyn’s perspective, a touch of femininity in her is no surprise. With others she had better be more careful.

“Hello, Donna.” She addresses her eldest niece with resignation, prepared for frivolous prattle. Young Donna was a flighty, feather-headed type, and she doubts if at thirty-four she has

much changed.

“Uncle Joseph.” Donna turns away from the circle of unfamiliar women with whom she has been conversing and gives her the weakest hug she has ever received, Elaine’s feeble embraces in the last months of her illness notwithstanding. “You came.” Donna sounds surprised. The years seem to have robbed her voice of its flirtatious edge.

“Of course I did.” She says it firmly, as if she had not spent hours considering and reconsidering her choices, talking her plan over with Joe and Melanie, second- and third-guessing herself at every turn. She stands solidly before her niece, a respectable picture of a loving brother come to pay his last respects.

“We didn’t think you would.” Donna’s faint attempt at a smile has already faded away completely. Her eyes, if possible, are more tired than her mother’s. “Actually we didn’t think anyone would come.”

“There seems to be quite a crowd.” She glances around the room, which reminds her of a nest of insects with its black-clad occupants quietly buzzing to one another.

“These are Mom’s friends,” Donna says, “mostly people from the church. Mom’s got a lot of friends.”

“And she has you.” She thinks of Joe, sitting up late by her side with Elaine at the hospital, holding her against his shoulder as they both cried, moving her with him to California, fiercely staring down anyone who spoke against her new appearance, taking time off work to look after her following her surgeries, retraining himself in an impressively short amount of time to use her new name.

Donna is frowning at her with something almost like resentment. “Yes,” Donna says. “She always has me.”

She decides to change the subject. “And this is Grace?” She looks down at the child, who has retreated behind her mother at the approach of a strange man.

“Yes. Grace, say hello to your great-uncle, Joseph.” Donna grabs her child’s arm and pulls her none too gently forward.

“Hello, Grace.” She employs the same warm tone she uses for baby Elly. The child gazes up at her in confusion. She inwardly curses her carelessness and deliberately drops her voice lower into her chest as she continues. “How old are you, sweetie?”

Grace says nothing.

“Uncle Joseph asked you a question.” Donna gives her daughter’s arm a brisk little shake. The child holds up one hand, four fingers.

“You’re four? My goodness, you’re getting to be such a big girl.” She speaks as if she has known Grace from infancy, rather than only now meeting her for the first time. Grace shrinks further back against her mother.

She changes the topic again. “Is Diana here?” She always enjoyed her role as favorite uncle to Donna’s younger sister, a bright, energetic, ambitious young thing just a few months older than Joe. Like Joe, Diana ventured boldly into the uncharted territory of college, she suspects against Arnold’s wishes. She remembers those discussions in her own childhood home as high school drew to a close: her unrealized but often spoken dream of attending college herself, Arnold’s ready scoff of scorn. Arnold’s more ambitious daughter is in fact the only member of the family with whom she has maintained any contact, albeit limited, in the last decade.

“Diana isn’t coming.” Donna speaks sharply as Grace vanishes entirely behind her once again.

“She couldn’t make it?”

“She wouldn’t.” Donna’s face is stony. “We haven’t seen her in years. She lives out in New England, I think. She sent Mom a Christmas card from there once about five years ago.”

“Does she not know what’s happened?” She cannot imagine the horror of no one bothering to tell Joe if she died. She thinks guiltily of her own little stash of Diana’s annual Christmas cards, in most recent years charmingly designed by Diana’s photographer boyfriend.

“Mom sent a letter to the Christmas card address. We

never heard back.” Donna shrugs indifferently. “She’s too good for us here. She went to law school, you know. Probably lives in a penthouse now.”

She opts to ignore the taut thread of bitterness running tangibly through Donna’s words. “Well, I’m sorry to miss her.” She fumbles for something consoling to say. Donna’s face forbids comfort.

“It’s almost three o’clock. The service will be starting soon,” Donna says. “I’m going to the sanctuary.”

“I’ll see you later, Donna.” She watches her niece retreat, little Grace’s arm firmly in her grip. She thinks suddenly of her own long-dead mother, so much gentler than Donna in some ways, in others so much harsher. Her mother never had time for her flamboyance or for Arnold’s bullheadedness, and certainly not for mediating between her increasingly polarized sons as they grew older. What would her mother say if she could have seen them both in the last few years? Of which one, if either, would she be proud?

The crowd around her is beginning to thin, moving out of the fellowship hall to take up their positions in the sanctuary, where Arnold’s life is to be commemorated. What will they talk about, she wonders? Will someone speak of his football prowess, of how he broke his leg playing and never walked quite right again? Will someone talk about the trouble he got into, the brushes with the law in high school and after? Will someone tell the story of his career in the plant, of his disagreeable interactions with coworkers and his hours upon hours of overtime? Will Marilyn admit to the noisy fights, the drunken verbal abuse, the binges that sometimes left him missing in action for days? Will anyone remember that once he was a little boy of four, no bigger than Grace, who used to play with toy trucks with his big brother in the dirt of their backyard?

Lost in her thoughts, she is almost alone in the fellowship hall when the back door opens. The young woman in the doorway is professionally dressed but lightly ruffled with travel. She stands uncommittedly in the cool shaft of light from outside, glancing with

uncertainty around the room. It has been more than a decade since she saw her, but her niece's self-assured profile is unmistakable.

She moves toward the newcomer. "Hello, Diana."

"Uncle Joseph." Diana's face brightens at once as she folds her favorite uncle in a hug. "Where is everyone?"

"They've gone into the sanctuary. The service is about to start."

"I didn't mean to be so late." Diana looks remorseful. "There was some trouble about getting a car at the airport." Diana frowns at her, worried. "Have they been talking about me?" She shakes her head, not waiting for the answer. "Of course they have."

"How are you?" She gives her tone all the gentleness she can. She suspects no one else will be gentle to Diana today.

"I'm doing really well," Diana says. She sounds as if she means it.

"Still living in New England?"

"That's right. I actually just started working for a private firm in Boston."

"That's wonderful." Arnold never thought much of lawyers, she remembers. "And how is Kyle?" She has never met Diana's boyfriend, but the domestic glow beneath Diana's professionalism bears witness to his influence.

Diana glances around, making sure no one is listening. The last of the stragglers are exiting the fellowship hall. "He's great," she says. "We're actually getting married in the spring."

"Congratulations." She smiles broadly.

Diana does not smile back. "I'd be glad if you didn't tell anyone," Diana says. "I don't think the family would – well, I shouldn't say that."

"You say whatever you want, sweetheart." The last word falls unthinkingly from her lips and immediately she wants to swallow it back. She braces herself, waiting for Diana's quizzical frown, a blink of surprise, any sign that her niece is perturbed. Instead, Diana's tense mouth eases into a grateful smile.

Passing

“Thank you, Uncle Joseph.” Then Diana gives herself a little shake and speaks briskly. “I don’t mean to speak ill of Dad, though, I really don’t. I’m not here to make trouble. Dad gave me existence. The least I can give back is the respect of coming to his funeral.”

There seems nothing to say to this. She nods supportively instead.

“It’s funny, you know,” Diana goes on. “I got Mom’s letter saying that Dad had passed away. I just kept thinking about it on the plane. Why do we say that? ‘Pass’ is such a common, ordinary sort of word. I mean, Dad passed footballs and he passed gas. He passed judgement on everybody, especially me, and he passed his time drinking and being miserable. ‘Pass away’ makes this sound just like another ordinary little thing, nothing special. And I guess it is.” She shrugs. “I imagine they’ll talk in there about him being in a better place and all that sort of thing, for Mom’s sake, but Dad didn’t believe any of that. I remember when I was in high school and I used to get upset about living in this little town and not feeling like I had any opportunities, he used to say, ‘Who cares? Life’s just a phase we’re passing through. It’ll be over sooner or later.’ Well, now it’s over, and I guess he’s happier than before. I hope so.” Diana looks at her with eyes that plead for absolution. “You see why I had to leave,” she says. “I loved my dad, I really did. But you can’t live with them, these people who are just passing. You have to go out and find your life.”

She reaches out and lays a hand on her niece’s arm, offering support as Diana appears suddenly about to sway. “Oh, sweetheart,” she says. The word comes easily now. “I’m so proud of you.” Elaine would be proud of her, she thinks.

“I don’t want to go in there.” The fervor is gone from Diana’s voice, fading into a thin, weary whisper. “I don’t want to see all their faces looking at me. It’s all too –” Diana breaks off as words seem to abandon her.

She puts her arm around Diana. “It’s alright,” she murmurs, as if her niece were a child. “It will be alright.” She squeezes her shoulder, a promise of solidarity. She sees the pair of them

three hours from now at a little restaurant table in the next town, confiding their respective stories of finding their lives. She sees Arnold throwing eggs at the church wall, Arnold scoffing at the idea of college, Arnold drinking his way into his grave. How do they live, these people who are just passing?

She removes her arm from around Diana's shoulders and takes her niece gently by the elbow. She draws herself up, feels Diana take in a deep breath. "Come on, my dear. Let's pay our respects to your father."

They move down the hallway together in measured steps, heads held high. Walking through the sanctuary door, Diana's arm still tightly in her clasp, she sees the black-clad crowd around them only as a haze, a temporary fog that passes quickly and leaves her to gaze ahead unhindered across the wide-open expanse of days to come.

Do Not Resuscitate
Blake Bennett
Best of ≈ Poetry

On the day after Christmas,
gifts sit around a plastic tree
in a quiet house, save for a draft
of winter, cold as the hospital
room we're waiting in. Phenol
sears my nostrils, and I wonder
if you can smell it with the CPAP
on your face. The mask has kissed
your face raw and bruised the bridge
of your nose funneling air
to your caved chest, lungs
drowning and scarred.

When the nurse removes the mask
I can see your bloodless lips.

She turns your monitor and mutes it
so we won't hear the static squeal
of an unbeating heart.

Your lids flutter once, and I wonder
if you're dreaming of green seas
and a shimmering mermaid tail
to replace your palsied legs.

You're sinking down, and your mouth
makes little o's like pearls
sought by invisible skin divers
who snatch your precious breath.

For Brooke, 1996 - 2016



Cover Art

Dissolve

Katrina Turk

Digital merging of monotype and linocut

My Daughter, This World Will Not Consume You

Christina Marie Ridders



The sun will not scorch your lustrous skin, nor the moon glare
harsh through your window. I'll rend them from the curtains of space.

If the stars trouble you, small one, speak, and I'll snuff them out.
And the tides, should they offend, I will trap in an oil lamp.

I'll stand in the path of tornadoes and my voice will swirl
them back into the sky. This world will not consume you.

I hold its neck in my jaws. I taste its blood. At your signal
I snap. I want the teeth of your enemies on a twine necklace,

their black granite epitaphs monuments to me. I see the trembling
in your tiny hands, but dear one, I'm the only fearful thing in the dark.

I fight against what makes you flinch: the dark, fire, God himself.
These bloody hands did not welcome you into this world,

but they hold you here now, like a bear mad with rage,
red banners of warning. If you wanted it, I could destroy myself.



Colored Outside the Lines

Keeley Miller
Photograph

The Mirror Sister

Madeline Ketchem



“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

-Eleanor Roosevelt

She brushes butterscotch spirals of hair in the morning
As she sings Broadway tunes –
Hamilton, Wicked, The Book of Mormon
In the sweet, breathy tones of indie melodies.
My heart breaks when she looks more closely in the mirror –
A disappointed squint for what she sees in the reflection.
I watch my sister watching herself
 The Mirror Sister watches back.
I wonder what other sixteen-year-old girls criticize.
What echoes haunt her? Does it sound like
 the media
 our nation
 in unison
 in opposition to a woman’s self-fulfillment.
How I wish she would rise up
And reject their false reality of her image.

Her skin is fair, flawless, freckled –
But I see her London gray eyes, scrutinizing herself.
The Mirror Sister makes a list for my real sister:
 poor bone structure
 sunken eye sockets
 small lips
 short eyelashes
 unpronounced eyebrows
But even the Mirror Sister’s harsh eyes flash like intricate geodes
Flecked with amber, olive, and chocolate.

I wonder what the Mirror Sister would do if
 One day
My real sister woke up
 Looked into the smooth glass
 Took a deep breath and smiled.



Be A Work of Art

Joelle Stille

Wearable art/costumes

7095
Piper Rowley



I shower somewhere else now.
I won't step into the bathroom with the urine caked between the
sticky tiles,
feel the film of the porcelain tub beneath my vulnerable toes,
exposed.
Small, white, soaked.
My breath rattles unhinged between my clenched teeth.
The steam smells of semen,
a younger brother discovering himself,
fills the drain,
the scalding water rises above my red ankles.
Trash litters the floor,
towels heavy with mildew soak undisturbed from where they were
dropped.
Behind the beveled glass door swinging from one hinge on a rusty
track,
I feel nothing.
The walls close around my naked body like an angry fist.
I won't shower there.

Where his indifference is a pillow over my face.
The cabinets are empty,
and bare soles stick to the scarred wooden floors.
Where a lifetime of guilt-ridden phrases raised me.
Nothing Good Happens After Midnight,
You Can't Be Framed If You Are Not In The Picture.
And when my sister cried because she could still feel the phantom
fingers on her from that boy she's never bothered to meet,
he sat angry with empty, defenseless hands that pointed at me.
Had he taught us to love ourselves,
instead of our worth being only as whole as our hymen,
we would not have cried.

If he had taught us to demand nothing less than respect,
rather than a loving marriage can only be exchanged for a few drops
of our blood on a pure white sheet on our wedding night,
we would not have sat in the dark on the porch two nights before
while she typed on her phone the words she could not say,
the shame he put inside of her.

Alone.

Had he shut his archaic mouth and opened his unwilling eyes he
would have seen,
our spines bent and curled from the weight of his fractured and
flawed faith.

The faith that failed him,
and the faith that failed us.

My days are long,
is what I say when our worlds collide clumsily in the kitchen on the
rare mornings we are both running late.

He asks me where I have been.

The kitchen
where he told me
I am the evidence
of him being a failure as a father.

And he said,
why are you crying,
when hot tears spilled from my ashamed eyes.

I swallowed the words and they have sat in my stomach since.
Each affectionate sweetheart sours on my dull ears when I remember
his tone,

you just aren't the same.

When I can still feel the knotted stone of his words still stained with
stomach acid.

I return late, if I return at all.

Sliding in through the broken back door smeared with fingerprints
and wet noses,

Piper Rowley

a curt whisper to the whining dogs, who he favors over me.
The lights are off and he is in bed,
but I didn't need to be here to know he spent his night in front of the
television,
two dogs circling he speaks to with more excitement than he has felt
for any of us in a long time.
Indifferent to the son sprouting upstairs, and the one with a
dishonest glint in his cold eyes, always absent.
I creep up the stairs with my shoes on,
slip in the room that shares a wall with his.
It is late and sleep is meaningless to me,
if I dream the images are full of visions of violence,
men's unforgiving hands and women's exposed purpled bodies.
The faces of the women in my family, and all of their histories of hurt
sprawling in rawness.
I lay my head down and think of
how she spreads her legs for a married man,
the sixteen year old with a Mustang and the child he keeps for a
girlfriend in the passenger seat,
I cannot stop the echoing images of
her silhouette in the darkness as her silence shook and cracked the
unknowing neighborhood,
and him.
How even still, he says
Are you going out like that.
My hair is greasy and my skin prickly,
but I won't shower here anymore.



Solitude

Brooke Holmes
Photograph

Dr. Lector on the Lam

Corey Cole



I flick my fine Insignia into rain-soaked crabgrass.
One final ribbon of smoke climbs
from the extinguished remains.
I take a deep breath before walking inside.
I've avoided such places my entire life,
but alternatives are scarce, and I'm feeling light-headed.
I pull open the inscribed glass door,
and I'm greeted with alarms, buzzers and...
the stench of frying oil.

I turn to leave, but I am arrested
by the syrupy drawl
of "Hello, sir. Welcome to McDonald's. May I take your order?"
I about-face with a suddenness that startles her.
Then, I remember my newly amputated hand
bleeding through the gauze.
I catch her doe-eyes staring...
"Good evening, Coralee," glimpsing her nametag.
"Good evening," she replies with a coquette smile.
"I find myself in the mood for poultry.
Might you have something to satisfy this craving?
Fois gras, perhaps?"
She giggles and regales me with her litany
of chicken nuggets, chicken selects, and the McChicken sandwich.

I lose myself in her voice,
her quaint charm so familiar,
but we are rudely interrupted
by a boorish, red-face man, bulging at the waist.
His nametag reads: Brent.
I settle on the "Artisan Chicken Sandwich"

Dr. Lector on the Lam by Corey Cole

which is palatable once my fine Coralee aids me
in mixing the balsamic with honey.
I sit facing the front counter,
watching her grace in dealing with an unruly bunch of teenage cre-
tins.

Brent returns to the counter and scolds her for taking so long.
She is sent home in tears.
How dare he? The brute...
I cannot overcome my disgust.
I throw my sandwich in the trash and stroll back to my sedan.
I hunger for something different now,
and await Brent to join me for dinner.



It's Lit

Lifan Fan
Oil on canvas

genesis spring 2017 47

For the Young Black Man with Heavy Footsteps

Madeline Ketchem



Tuesdays at eleven o'clock at night
 On my way home from the library
 I don't assume the color of a shadow
But I avoid dark alleys –
Keys in hand,
 Pepper spray in my pants pocket.
*I hear footsteps more often than not,
 They disappear at the stoplight on Blackford
 Or the crosswalk on Michigan.*
Today they fall heavy past both.
On stormy or starless or still nights:
Walk with Purpose Always
 Prey is never confident in its steps
 Chin up, shoulders back –
Maybe pretend to talk to someone on the phone
(Better yet, actually talk to someone on the phone).
Glance back, just slightly
 Pretend to check something in your purse,
“Keep your head on a swivel
 Change directions
 Take the well-lit sidewalk paths.”
Damn, I parked far today.

A couple in the distance walks arm-in-arm
The woman laughs, he kisses her forehead
The cold air separating us seems small to the sky above us
I wonder if we look like a couple –
 This stranger walking far too closely behind me –
 And me, itching toward the pepper spray,

My eyes twitching toward the stranger's footsteps.
I see his face. It's dark and he's wearing a hoodie.
The color of the footsteps doesn't change anything
but
I realize in that moment that he might think
Me a racist –
Scared only by the color of his skin –
And I wonder if he will write a poem
About how he felt in that moment
And the judgmental young girl with creamy skin
Who locked the doors of her car
Then locked eyes with the young boy
on his way home from the library.



Consummation, Destruction, Desolation

Kevin Bielicki

Live yew tree, live moss, steel, concrete

Detachment

Caroline Flott



I've never been to Paris. Or really anywhere outside of this state. When I turned 16, I moved out of my mom's house because I couldn't stand the way it smelled. I'm 22 now and I'm still in the same apartment that I moved into at 16—it's a little studio inside of what used to be a Victorian style home. It's not a lot, but I had a sense of false pride in it.

My friends said I'd never make it on my own. They said I'd end up broke and back at my mom's house or living off of some dude. They said it behind my back but I knew. I never let it bother me anyways. But I've got a plan. I think, anyways. I want to go to Europe. I'll never have enough money, but see if I just go somewhere different for a little while, I'll feel different. And that's all the change that matters. Some days, I just really need to leave.

I make more money than any of the people I surround myself with (my friends, I guess that's what they're called, but I don't trust anyone). I laugh about it because they do hard, hard labor. Me? I'm just a waitress. It's much more complex than anybody thinks, but if you can keep up with the pace and put on a good smile then you'll be drowning in bills at the end of your shift. I think stripping is equally degrading, but society doesn't see it that way so I can skip the judgements and lectures about "losing my dignity." I can make \$300 in a night. I work five nights a week, that's \$1,500. On my slowest week, I've made \$800 and I average about \$3,500 a month. I live in such a small town, the cost of living is cheap. My rent is only \$300 a month.

I have to live poor though. It's mandatory. If you live poor, then people feel real sorry. Especially the regulars. And then your friends don't know you have any money at all, so they'll never ask for money. And if they do, when you tell them no enough times, they eventually stop asking. You feel less guilty about your old class mate overdosing on meth because you know that the money for the drugs never came from you. I'm guilt free.

I get one day off per week. It's not a whole lot of free time but

it gives me enough to keep my house clean and to focus on myself. I like to study different things. One day I looked up the movie plots to every single *Fast and Furious* movie. I wasn't impressed. Another day I went to the zoo. I dreamed of living with the lions, but I realized I already do. We're both caged in, in a way. Stuck in places we don't belong.

My boyfriend tells me I'm too smart for the way I live. We've been dating for three months and he walks the way I dream. He says that I could accomplish anything if I set my mind to it. He wants me to go to college and become a scientist because I'm so analytical. I told him it's impossible and that even if I became a scientist there would be no point, because I could make more money as a waitress. It's a lot of money to pour into my education just so I can be back where I was meant to be. Besides, I rent a lot of books from the library—that's education enough for me. I taught myself calculus. I memorized some of the problems from the book I had. I do them in my head for fun. I don't know what any of them mean or how it relates to my life, but it makes me happy that it exists. They're like never-ending puzzles.

My boyfriend is nice. His name is Frank. I think I love him but I cannot be sure. I am never sure of anything. He's only stayed the night once and it was when we got drunk off of Tequilla when I got off late one night. We made love until the small hours of the morning and he fell asleep in my bed. I was so afraid to sleep with him that I made my way to the couch. In the morning he left freshly made coffee, a note, and a kiss on my forehead. It was pleasant but I remind myself that it's dangerous to get too close.

My mom died last week. I hadn't spoken to her in over a year. I find it hard to talk sometimes. I think things would be better if I could live somewhere different. I heard from the doctor that she committed suicide. She left no notes and didn't have a will. Now I'm left to sort out her legal things. All of her affairs, all of her life's collections, when I haven't even talked to her in years.

I'm afraid to. Instead, I just go to her house and somehow it smells even funnier than I remember it being. I go there and I sit and cry while surrounded by all of her things. My boyfriend doesn't know what's happening—but oh god how could I tell him about this? I put on one of her old baggy t-shirts. I sit in her favorite spot on the couch

and I imagine being here alone every day of my life.

My phone rings and it's strange because I feel displaced and home at the same time. It's Frank. He dropped by the restaurant to say hi. He's worried because my boss is unhappy and hasn't seen me for a couple of days.

"I can't talk," I tell him.

"Why the mystery, Sunny? Why is it always a damn mystery?"

Through tears once again I say, "I can't talk."

My hands shake and I hang up the phone. There's nothing here for him. I have to call my brother and let him know.

"Teddy—it's Sunny," I say when I hear his phone on the other line.

"Sunny? What the hell are you calling me for? What's going on?"

Oh God. This was a mistake. He doesn't care about her. He never cared about her. She was alone. I'll always be alone just like her. Why are these words so hard to form?

"Why can't I talk, Ted? Why can't I say it?" I gasp through sobs. I'm silent for a long minute and I barely hear him on the other line but he's screaming the way I want to.

"What's going on? Are you okay? What about mom?" he asks.

I pick the phone back up, "You let them run all over her! You had too—didn't you? You never stood up for a damn thing that happened. You were the man of this house. You and dad and you fucking let them run over her like she was a deer in the goddamn street!" I let myself scream. For the first time I let my voice be heard. My real voice, not the silly anecdotes and stories I tell to keep customers and friends and even Frank.

"Sunny—what the fuck is going on?"

"She's dead, Teddy. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead! A bullet through her 2 blue eyes, her manicured hands pulled that goddamn trigger as well as every man you let enter this house."

Now we're both silent and I can hear him whisper "shit" under his breath. He tells me he's coming, and he'll be there soon.

An hour later he marches through the door and finds me asleep with dried tears on my face. He wakes me up and I fill him in on

all of the details.

“I don’t know what to do,” I tell him.

“Shit, Sunny, like I do?”

“I didn’t think you would. You’ve never been one for strong leadership.” I scoff at what I feel to be indifference. I keep thinking about how I should have left a long time ago.

“Look—maybe things went bad, alright. Men were coming in and out and it was Dad’s fault. She should’ve taken us away from that son of a bitch a long time ago. I didn’t know what to do, Sun. I really didn’t. I tried talking to her. Every time I did, dad would beat the shit out of me. I’m sorry I pushed you away. I was afraid they’d let those men take you the same way they’d take mom. I pushed you away to protect you. It’s all fucked up and I hope you can forgive me.”

“There’s nothing to forgive. It wasn’t your fault. I just can’t...” I broke out into a sob. “I can’t deal with the fact that she died alone.”

He pulls me in and I am thankful for his comfort. We look over her things and I hand everything over to him. “I don’t know how these things work. Can you please handle it?”

He agrees and he asks me to meet him for lunch as I’m leaving. I tell him maybe after I get back from Paris. He laughs because he thinks I’m joking.

I leave the house and look for Frank. I didn’t mean to leave him in the condition I did. I go to his apartment and he answers immediately. His expression shows relief. He pulls me instantly into his arms.

“I love you, you know that?” he whispers in my ear.

For the first time in years, I say those three words out loud, “I love you.” I do not feel afraid. I do not feel anxious. I believe him and I know that in this moment, no matter what happens, he truly loves me. And for an instant I believe that I can and should be happy.



Excuses, Iraq, Chai
Leena Dobouni
Various mediums

What Comes Together Also Separates

JP Hyde



Thomas cupped his arm around his wife of thirty years, Dianne, as he affectionately gazed at his daughter standing before her soon-to-be husband. Their daughter, Sarah, couldn't hold back her tears of joy while she squeezed her fiancé's hand. Thomas examined Bradley, his charming future son-in-law, and noticed his blue eyes glistened before Sarah.

Dianne, on the other hand, sat forward to keep contact with Thomas minimal and shook her head in disapproval at Sarah's wedding dress choice. Dianne thought the eggshell white dress looked like it had been found in a dusty antique store. She overheard her sister commenting on how lovely the church's gothic architecture was and just how lovely the décor was, which Dianne hated. All the same, whenever the two parents looked towards the young lovers, they saw themselves thirty years younger.

"Why are you so tense?" Thomas asked. "What's wrong?"

"Just look at the slip," she said. "It doesn't compliment her frame at all. If this were my wedding I'd be mortified."

"Why? What's wrong with it?" He was always questioning his wife.

"Why? Take a look around." She tilted her head towards the stain glass windows. "We're not even Catholic to start with."

Thomas bit his lip and wondered what Dianne was suggesting. "Is Bradley?"

"Not at all," she said beneath a chuckle, "his mother and I discussed that this should have been non-denominational."

"Oh, none of that matters, babe," he whispered. "She probably just liked the dramatic atmosphere. It's as close to a castle as we can afford, after all."

The couple sat in silence while the priest walked onto the stage. The priest, ancient and feeble, muttered through his routine. The occasional coughs echoed throughout the church, followed by sniffles and creaking pews when someone would adjust their seat. Dianne grew more annoyed with Thomas' arm wrapped around her. The weight of his arm strained her neck.

“Move,” she said.

“What?”

“Move your god damned arm, Tom.” Dianne said, as she pushed her back into his arm. “Please.”

“Oh,” Thomas said. “Sorry.”

Dianne sighed. She knew regardless of her own personal opinion of her choice of dress that her daughter was beautiful. She liked Bradley and knew the couple complimented each other well. While she looked at the two standing, occasionally stumbling with their jittered nerves, Dianne wished her daughter and son-in-law more happiness than Dianne experienced in her own marriage. She didn't want Sarah to feel regret every time she looked at or touched her wedding band. She didn't want Sarah to live the rest of her life in a state of blissful ignorance and wake up one day unhappy that she sacrificed the prime years of her life to simply become content.

Dianne loved motherhood, but when Sarah became more independent, Dianne was left home alone waiting for Thomas to return from work. For years, she wanted to tell Thomas that they needed excitement in their life—to travel, make friends, join clubs, anything. Time just escaped them in their daily routine of work and parenting, and Thomas seemed comfortable with the circumstances. Each time Thomas would try to kiss her on the cheek, she'd oblige him but turn away unfazed unlike the day they, young and full of ambition, married.

“Thomas,” she said, looking down at the marble floor. “What do you see when you look at them?”

Thomas took a breath and pondered his answer. “I see us.”

“Do you?”

“Of course.”

“In what way?”

“Well,” he paused, “I see two great people getting married. I see two souls that will build a future together and support each other. Bradley will have a great woman.” He looked over at his wife, “Just like I have a great woman.”

Dianne felt a lump in her throat. Thomas was always sweet and supportive, but unlike him, she wasn’t content with where she was in life. She tried to accept the mundane life they lived, but she wanted more. She was tired of waiting for Thomas to come home from work and fall asleep on the couch. Her jaws locked up in fear of what she was going to say. She was unsure if she should continue asking him the very questions that crossed her mind for the last fifteen years. Her fingers caressed her wedding band and twisted it.

“That’s what I was afraid of,” she said while she yanked on her wedding band. Her knuckles turned ghost white until the band slipped off. She felt naked and vulnerable as she slipped the band into Thomas’ coat pocket.

“What’s this about, Dianne?” Thomas looked at her, puzzled. Dianne looked through the corner of her eyes and saw the heartbreak in his widened eyes. For a moment, she saw the young man she fell in love with, but his grey hairs and baggy eyes reflected what their marriage had become—a tired routine.

“Don’t make a scene, Thomas,” Dianne whispered. “For the love of God, please don’t make a scene.”

“I just don’t...” He looked around to see if anyone saw what was happening, “I just don’t understand. Did I do something?”

Dianne looked ahead at her daughter, who might or might not be making a mistake, and muttered, “No.”

Thomas placed his hand on his lap, but Dianne, without looking at him, slipped her hand into his.

“I just think our time’s up. It has been, Tom.” She stopped and wiped the tears from her cheeks. “I’m sorry.”

Thomas clenched her hand, shaking. He didn’t look at Dianne.

He just stared forward.

“Beautiful wedding, though,” Dianne said, smiling behind her tears.



Trying My Best
Emily Bennett
Steel

The Fates and Why I Left Them

Madeline Ketchem



When I met Elizabeth Romano, I was the shortest girl in our fourth grade class – my mother always said “petite.” Elizabeth always said “mousy.” When I met Elizabeth Romano, I still went by “Marilyn” and played with a chemistry set that I had received for Christmas one year. Every morning, I woke up, brushed my long blonde hair that fell straight across my back, and chose a uniform jumper with matching Mary-Jane buckle shoes. My bedroom was always neat, my books alphabetically organized on my shelves, everything in its prescribed place. I loved my routine. I loved that nothing in my life ever changed.

But for fourth grade, I was transferred to a new school, Westlake Elementary. I did not have any friends in that class, and I resented the idea of starting over in a new place. On the first day, I picked up my go-to outfit: a pink, argyle sweater vest and a navy pleated skirt. I spent five extra minutes brushing my teeth, double-checked that everything from the school’s supply list was in my backpack, and left for the bus stop across the street.

In Mrs. Graham’s fourth grade class that day, I met Elizabeth Romano for the first time. She was tall and thin, wearing a t-shirt with “Green Day” written on the front (*what is a ‘green day’? I had wondered*), a pair of black jeans, and black converse tennis shoes. She had the palest skin I had ever seen with bright blue eyes and straight platinum-blond hair that was chopped short at her chin.

She saw me staring at her across the classroom. She smiled. I smiled. I waved. She walked over to me.

“Hi, I’m Elizabeth.” She crossed her arms, and I noticed a choker around her neck with a turtle pendant dangling from the black cord. Her fingers were long and bony, and she had chewed fingernails painted with black nail polish. I was suddenly very aware of my tongue, which felt like lead in my mouth.

“I’m Marilyn,” I managed to choke out.

“Well, I have a seat already. It doesn’t look like you do. Want

The Fates and Why I Left Them

to sit at my table?”

That simple. At the time, I felt lucky that someone had noticed me and asked me to join their group of friends. In hindsight, it seems that all childhood friendships were this easy to establish. On the playground, in the classroom – everyone had a common interest in finding somewhere that they could belong.

Over time, Elizabeth and I grew very close. I traded in all of my sweater vests for skinny jeans and t-shirts that said things like “hug a tree” or “give a hoot, don’t pollute.” I traded my chemistry set for a series of miniature stuffed animals. I often spent the night at her house since we lived in the same neighborhood and I would study for these sleepovers, memorizing obscure alternative rock lyrics so that I could sing along with the other girls. Eventually, Elizabeth and I joined the same club swimming team and attended the same Girl Scouts group, Troop 477. She was my best friend; I was hers. I even had a colorful woven friendship bracelet to prove it.

I found a unique comfort and security in being friends with Elizabeth. As the group grew larger with more girls seeking membership into Elizabeth’s circle, a definite hierarchy was established. One day the following year in Miss Cook’s fifth grade class, Elizabeth and I were sitting at lunch with the rest of the group. The third girl in our group was Alaina Stevens. Alaina was tall and thin with bony fingers like Elizabeth but she had straight brown hair to her shoulders, full lips, and a very pointed nose. The fourth and final member of Elizabeth’s clique was Candace Jackson. Candace had coffee-colored skin with dark curly hair and long eyelashes.

On this particular day, as Alaina bragged about dating a boy in our class and removed the artificial crust from her (crust-less) peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, Elizabeth interrupted her.

“Is that Meg Weber?” Elizabeth asked the lunch table. We all turned to look. Meg Weber was the deaf girl in our class. She was beautiful, with long, blonde hair like mine but with a fairer face and smaller nose. She had an air of gracefulness from her years of classical

ballet training, where it was rumored she could sense the rhythm of a song through the wooden beams of a dance studio floor. It was common knowledge (to our group, at least) that Elizabeth did not like Meg. I was never sure of why Elizabeth felt this way, though I suspected that it had something to do with her generally positive attitude or attractiveness.

At this moment, Meg was approaching our lunch table, smiling brightly. Her steps were bouncy and cheerful as she reached our group. She signed, *Hello! Seat – open?*

“Sure, go ahead,” I nodded, making sure to maintain eye contact so that Meg could read my lips. Meg had always been kind to me, so I helped her pull out the last chair at our table in the space between Candace and I. As I turned back to my lunch tray, I caught a glimpse of Elizabeth glaring at me. Very slowly, just slightly – she shook her head. No.

I shrugged at Elizabeth, indicating my potential indifference as Meg sat down next to me. Elizabeth looked away, stabbing a sprig of lettuce. Alaina hesitated then cautiously continued her story about the boy in our class. The rest of the lunch period was filled with palpable tension thicker than cafeteria ketchup – Alaina, Candace, and I knew that Meg was not truly welcome at Elizabeth’s lunch table.

As lunch concluded, Meg asked, *Recess? With you all?*

Again, I responded, “Sure! We’re playing hide-and-seek today in the field area. Would you like to come?”

She nodded enthusiastically, pointing to the restroom and her wrist to indicate that she just needed a minute before we all went outside.

“What. Were. You. Thinking.” Elizabeth spat at me, punctuating each word by jamming her finger deep into the soft tissue below my collarbone. I winced.

“I’m sorry, Elizabeth. She asked if she could come, I didn’t want to be mean.” I could feel Alaina and Candace holding their breath.

“Well, since this is your mistake, you are going to fix it.

Alone.”

“What do you want me to do? I already told Meg what we’re doing at recess today.”

“I’ve already thought of something,” she said.

“It’s more fun this way!” Elizabeth had coaxed. Elizabeth had told Candace to use the turquoise bandana from her hair as a blindfold on Meg, assuring Meg that we always played hide-and-seek with a blindfold so that the seeker couldn’t cheat and find the others. Meg was trusting, so she had simply smiled, allowing Candace to cover her eyes and tie the blindfold behind her ponytail.

“Go.” Elizabeth jerked her head toward the back fields behind the trees. Her mouth was a straight line, unwavering. She pushed the other girls away from me, then the three of them headed across the playground.

I paused, then reached my hand out to let Meg know that I was next to her. I led Meg past the playground and the fields, holding her steady with my outstretched arm. We passed through the tree line separating the school grounds from the back fields. We reached a tall pine tree, where I started to let go of her hand.

“Wait!” she called out to me, her voice muffled like she was speaking with marbles in her mouth. “Don’t hide too well,” she smiled. I squeezed her hand as a gesture of reassurance then backed away from her. She started counting out loud, laboring for each word in an attempt to enunciate, “one... two... three...” – I continued backing away past the tree line, looking over my shoulder one last time at her before crossing back into school property and joining the other girls to line up to go back inside for class.

Elizabeth was waiting on the sidewalk for me, a smug smile spread across her face. “Good work,” she said.

About ten minutes later, Miss Cook heard knocking on the classroom door. She opened it, and Meg was standing in the doorway with a school administrator. Meg was covered in scratches with pine needles tangled into her hair and mud stains on her clothes. She still

had the turquoise bandana in her hand.

I avoided eye contact with her as Miss Cook helped her cross the classroom to her seat. I looked up at Meg about an hour later to find her already staring at me. She signed, *Why?* Her face was pained with the expression of betrayal.

When I returned home that night, I told my mother that I did not feel well, and I went straight to my room without dinner. I closed the door to my bedroom softly, as if it were made of porcelain instead of wood, and I let out a heavy, strangled sob. I looked at my friendship bracelet, and I wondered if Meg was at home crying in her bedroom, too.

The next day, I couldn't go to recess. I didn't want to go back to the fields where I had left Meg the previous day. I pictured her lost, confused, alone. I pictured her taking off the blindfold to realize that she was no longer in the schoolyard. I pictured her panicking, trying to call for help. I pictured her falling into the mud, scraping her hands, standing back up into the low-hanging pine tree. I pictured the school administrator discovering her crying outside, trying to communicate with her and ask what had happened.

I couldn't stop picturing it. I couldn't go outside. I couldn't go outside. I stayed in the classroom, reading a book at my desk alone.

Several hours later, as I boarded the yellow school bus that Elizabeth and I rode home each day, Elizabeth turned toward me and blocked my path to the bus steps.

"Why didn't you meet me at recess today?" I caught a glimpse of her teeth just slightly baring themselves over her pale lips.

"I had to make up a vocabulary quiz in Miss Cook's class," I lied quickly. I watched her eyes shift. Her teeth became more pronounced, menacing milky squares on pale, pink flesh. I should have stopped talking. I should have smiled and avoided eye contact with the blue beads below her blonde bangs. Instead, I pictured Meg asking me, *Why?* Instead of folding like a cheap lawn chair, my blood boiled. I pictured Meg's mother asking her about the scrapes on her

The Fates and Why I Left Them

hands, the mud on her clothes. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up.

“Although, I really don’t see how that’s any of your business, Elizabeth,” I tested, my fists clenched. Her cold stare washed over me. I was vaguely reminded of a pit viper just before it strikes: head down, flattened, fixed gaze.

Suddenly, she smiled. “That’s okay! Why don’t we just catch up on the bus? We can sit next to each other.”

Her words seemed genuine and, despite the warning signs of her impending serpentine attack, I assumed that she was letting it go because I was her friend. A member of the group. A chosen girl. I nodded.

As we boarded the school bus, the familiar humidity of recycled air flowed past us, mingled with the occasional breeze from the open windows. Elizabeth picked an open section in the back of the bus, perfect for gossiping and discussing issues that could not be overheard. The bus seats smelled like sweaty rubber and old bubble gum. The faded gray material was ripped in several places, dandelion-yellow foam seeping out of the splits in the fabric.

One by one, the other children on the bus filed out at their designated bus stops. Ten, twenty, thirty minutes. Mid-conversation about extra credit on the environmental science project, Elizabeth looked up at the bus driver, Cheryl, and the empty bus seats. Since Elizabeth and I were the last stop, the bus was no longer busy with chatty students – witnesses.

Elizabeth elbowed me sharply in the gut, shoved my head into the metal wall of the bus, and forced me to my knees in the space on the floor between our bus seat and the back of the seat in front of us. My eyes watered. My stomach churned. My head throbbed.

“Don’t you ever lie to me again,” she threatened, her voice a growl. Her expression remained motionless, stagnant in its dangerous glare. She turned away from me, slinging her khaki messenger bag over her shoulder and exiting the bus without a second glance back at me.

I staggered off the bus, avoiding eye contact with Cheryl and staring at the uneven concrete pathway from the bus stop to my front porch. As soon as I walked through our front door, my mother immediately noticed the bruises forming on my face from the metal siding of the bus. One of the screws beneath a window had caught the skin of my cheek, tearing a small red river into the defeated expression on my face.

My parents called me downstairs from my room before dinner.

“Look, Marilyn,” my father began, interlacing his fingers on the kitchen table in front of him. He adjusted his stance in the chair, then held up two fingers, “I’m going to give you two choices. You either pop this bitch in the mouth, or you end your friendship with her. I get it, you girls are good friends. But this is bullying behavior, and you’re not sticking up for yourself.” I looked at my mother, who pursed her lips down in an expression that I always imagined said, “I’m sorry, honey.”

My father had always encouraged me to stick up for myself physically, though I was always the smallest person in any given scenario. Besides being small, I was also generally a pacifist. I didn’t want to shake the status quo; I didn’t want anything to change. He probably expected me to protest, make excuses for Elizabeth’s behavior. Instead, I nodded slowly. “Okay,” I agreed.

The next day, I picked up my lunch tray and approached a new group of girls at a different table in the cafeteria. The table contained some of the superstars from Miss Cook’s class: the popular girls with name-brand jeans and fitted tops. These girls smiled at everyone, passed notes to one another in class, and had folders with photographs of horses on the front. When they laughed, the genuine and fearless sound filled the room. But I was intimidated by them. These girls were popular and had the power to humiliate me if they chose to do so. They were intimidating because they were elite. But they were the kindest and most welcoming girls in our class; even

The Fates and Why I Left Them

though I hadn't fallen in with their group at the beginning of fourth grade, I felt that the name-brand, popular-girl table was the best option for me. I prayed for a fresh start as I walked toward the girls: Kelly Baker, Sydney Stanford, and Victoria Holmes.

"Can I sit with you guys?" I asked, feeling my heart jump into my throat. To my profound relief, all the girls at the table smiled at me and nodded. Kelly stood up and found a burgundy chair from across the cafeteria, dragging it across the linoleum tiles to add to their lunch table. Sydney and Victoria scooted their lunch trays over, making room for my tray of mixed vegetables and tomato soup.

I felt dazed for the rest of the lunch period. I had forgotten how easy it was to make friends. I had forgotten the kind girl who wore sweater vests and played with telescopes. At several points during that lunch period, the table erupted into the laughter I'd always heard from across the cafeteria while I sat solemnly at Elizabeth's table. I felt lighter, liberated.

I only looked over my shoulder at my old lunch table once. Elizabeth was staring at me, but I didn't recognize the expression on her face. Years later, I would understand her expression after I attended a sociology seminar where I learned that all bullies experience the same emotion when they are finally confronted: shock.

Several months after the incident with Meg and my departure from Elizabeth's friend group, I approached Meg to apologize. Her tone was cool, hesitant. I knew when I approached her that I had broken the trust that might have led to deeper friendship. That was never mended.

Elizabeth and I haven't spoken in a long time. Several years, I'm pretty sure. I wish I could say that I transformed, completely leaving behind Elizabeth and the person that I was when I was with her. But I can't. I have struggled with toxic work relationships, abusive romantic relationships, and failed friendships since I parted with Elizabeth. A part of me will always be the little girl in the pink sweater vest. Even as an adult, an imminent part of me will always

Madeline Ketchem

hunger for the validation I felt under Elizabeth's influence.

Sometimes I still wake at night drenched in sweat with visions of Elizabeth cutting my thread of life with her teeth, the shears of fate.



Stuffed

Emma Frisby

Ceramic, homemade playdough, yarn, birdseed, glitter, chalk dust, wax,
and cotton balls

The Sickness

Emily Bennett

Best of ≈ Non-Fiction

I'm dying. I'm dying I'm dying I'm dying. I can feel it; I just know that I'm dying. My brain is melting, and soon my hair will completely shrivel up and run away. If only it would happen soon, the whole process of dying is really starting to get old. If I could just make it go faster, make whatever disease I have spread faster, then I could relax and die already.

I think I was six and a half when I really started to notice it, the dying I mean. It started with a little cough, a snuffle here and there. Mother didn't think it was much, and Daddy wasn't there to give an opinion on the matter, but I knew. I wasn't sure, but I thought maybe that's why he left me with Mother that day, because he didn't want to catch my sickness. Even still, I knew as soon as Daddy left us that my sickness, my death, was nearing and getting worse.

Now that I am eight, I know a lot more about the world, and about dying. I know that dying is when a person's soul gets sucked out into the sky and never comes back down. Their bodies go into the ground so the families can remember who they are and stuff. I don't know who is doing all the soul sucking, but Daddy says I should whisper into the dark at night for my sickness to go away. Sometimes I do that, but mostly I just whisper for the dark to suck me away to the sky, so I can float and sing and play with the clouds, and do other stuff that dead people do.

But anyways, I was talking about my sickness. How my life all started to go downhill. First, it was my teeth that went. One by one they would fall out... and I know it didn't happen to the other kids like it happened to me. The other kids, they were normal. They didn't have special teeth like mine, and mine

The Sickness

weren't supposed to fall out. I had a special heart, a special brain, and a special way of doing things, so my Daddy said. And, and well my teeth weren't supposed to just fall right outta my head the way they were! Along with my teeth, sometimes it seemed like every one of my hairs was falling out; so much that I had enough to make squiggles with it on the shower walls, enough to draw pictures of clouds and stuff. When I told Mother I was going bald, she didn't believe me. She would just wipe the hairs away and say

“Oh shush, Emily. That is just nonsense.”

But as I watched my hair float down towards the drain, I felt a sinking inside, the kind of sinking that only death brings.

And although I couldn't save all of my hairs, I managed to save most of my teeth. What I did was I'd swallow them. Right when they'd fall out, I'd pop them into my mouth along with a swig of chocolate milk. I figured they would regenerate inside of me and grow back into my gums. Maybe learn their lesson on their way through my body and never fall out again. And you know what? That's exactly what happened. That's exactly what happened and I knew that I was special still. I thought that since one day I would probably be bald like Daddy, I would at least still have all my teeth to keep me company.

Mother never really liked it that I was so special; I think she was jealous that she couldn't figure out the things that I could. Jealous that her teeth fell out and stayed out and that she couldn't exactly think right or talk right sometimes. Maybe it was her that was making me sick come to think of it... I don't know really, all I know is that sometimes I would get so sick that Mother would take me to see Daddy. I would limp around the house because of the tumors and the clogged-up blood in my legs until she would call Daddy to help me. She'd say:

“Alright Hank, I just can't handle her anymore; she's

been doing it again. Take her for the weekend?”

The weekends I spent with Daddy were the best. Usually my sickness (my dying) would subside for a while, and I could be the special little girl he knew I was. He would pet my head and say

“Emily, what’s wrong, Sugar? Sick again this week?” to which I would respond;

“Yes Daddy, got a real bad case of dying right now, can’t hardly walk.”

He believed me when no one else would. He would fix me soup and take off work. He knew the importance of an ending life just like I did, and he didn’t want to waste a minute.

Daddy would wake up early with me on Saturday mornings just to watch the cartoons I liked best on TV even if they weren’t his favorite! He let me help him sort his colorful morning pills before he swallowed them whole. I was always so amazed with my Daddy for not having to crush his pills into applesauce like I had to do, and I always hoped that my throat would be strong enough to do the same one day. Sometimes I would sneak one of his pills into my Lucky Charms to practice my throat strength. Also, I figured Daddy and I had the same kind of dying, so maybe his pill would make me better too. I always dreaded Sunday nights though, when Daddy would scoop me up and say,

“Alright Booger, time to get back to Mama.”

I hated going home mostly because Mother was going through a sort of dying too; she was suffering from Devorce syndrome. It made her cry a lot, and I really couldn’t stand it anymore. She wasn’t really dying like I was; one day I would just stop breathing, my fingers and hair would all fall out, and I would die. Mother would recover. Daddy told me so; he said she’s just faking it mostly, that Devorce syndrome isn’t even

real. My disease, however, is very real.

In fact, I'm pretty sure that I heard Daddy on the phone the other day with his doctor, talking about my disease. He has to go there (to the doctor) a lot because he doesn't want to be bald anymore, I think. Anyways, I heard him say the word Cancer and dying and I think they meant me, so that's probably what I've got. It's pretty bad because I don't even go to see the doctor that much, once a year maybe, but they can tell just by looking at me that I've got the Cancer I guess. Doctors are pretty smart that way.

Not long after that Mother told me I better be good because a doctor was coming over. I figured he was coming to see if there was a cure for me so I made a robe from tissue paper and scotch tape and sat at the door waiting for him. When he got there he stepped right over me though, and went to give Mother a checkup. She yelled at me to:

“Go to your room and stop acting like a child!”

Then mostly they ignored me and made gooey eyes at each other on the couch. I hated how Mother was; laughing and smiling while I lay in my room so close to death. Help was inches away, and yet there I lay dying in my princess bed, arms crossed over my chest, prepared and waiting to die.

Weeks and weeks started to go by though, and I hadn't seen Daddy. I would beg and scream at Mother to let me see him, or call him, but she would only say:

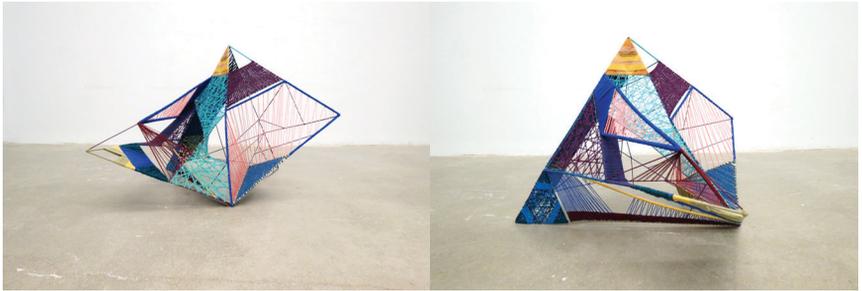
“Not today, Emily, maybe tomorrow.”

I wondered why Daddy didn't want to see me anymore. I thought maybe he just wasn't having as much fun anymore with his sick little girl; so I tried to get better. I took all the medicine I could find. Every day it was something different; Pepto Bismol on Monday, Tylenol on Tuesday, Nyquil on Wednesday, Zyrtec on Thursday, and my Mothers Zolofit on Friday. By the time the

third weekend without Daddy came, I was fed up. I was just not getting any better, in fact, I felt worse! And with Daddy avoiding me because of my sickness, I needed to get better once and for all.

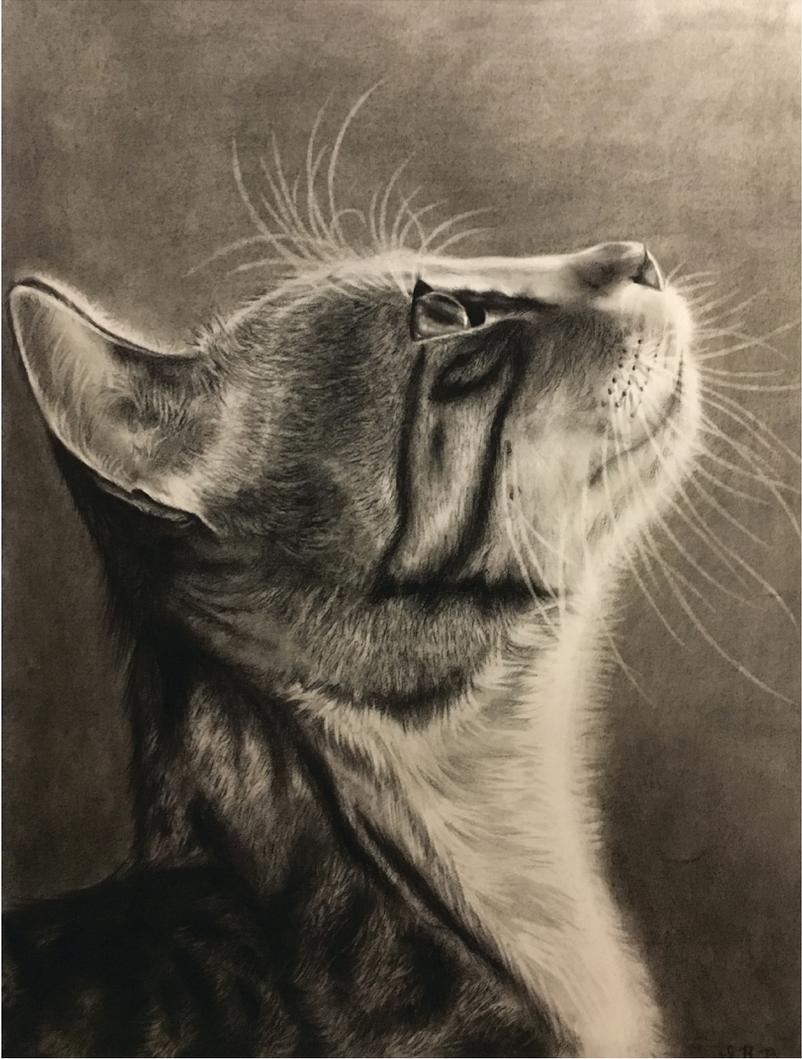
So over the weekend, I gathered all the pills I could find, I had been practicing my throat strength over the weeks, and I knew I could swallow them all. I knew I had to swallow them all, or else I would never see Daddy again. If I could cure myself, I surely would be his special little girl again, he would come see me and love me and... well, he would be my Daddy again. So on Monday I played sick. Mother let me stay home alone from school because she “Just can’t take another damn day off work for your stupid games!” She didn’t care like Daddy did, and I knew that once I was all better, I could be away from her for good.

Once she was out the door, I leaped up from my princess bed and ran to the hall closet. There was a secret space under the carpet where I had been sneaking more and more pills each day, saving them for this day in particular. I grabbed them all. It took me two trips to carry them all into my room; there had to have been about thirty. All of them different sizes and shapes and colors... this was almost like a little game, I thought! As I started to swallow them with my chocolate milk, I remember thinking, “This is the best idea I have ever had.”



String Games

Emily Bennett
Steel and fibers



Best of ≈ Art

Curious Cat
Samantha Barnes
Charcoal

genesis spring 2017 77

G-R-A-N-D-M-A

Megan Smith



Lingering scents of laundry soap, sweet fruit, and dried garden flowers always greet me when I go to Grandma's house. Nostalgic family memories are piled onto the kitchen counters, musty blankets, and the groaning wood chairs. When aunts and uncles pause conversation for a moment to catch their breath and the basement has quit its rumbling, my ears detect whispers of clicking, clicking, clicking that spell out familiar words.

Small wooden Scrabble tiles smoothly slide across the light stains spotting the white linen cloth and click against each other in laughter.

H-O-M-E

Slight depressions of the painted character tickle the tips of my little fingers.

S-U-G-A-R

I spell out words with my eight year-old vocabulary.

C-A-T

I form another with the wooden game letters stolen from the box they came in.

B-L-U-E

Grandma's version of Fast Scrabble abandons the game board, and we form personal crosswords from the tiles we draw from a pile in the center of the table.

L-O-V-E

I study my grandma.

Her thin white hair needs a cut, wispy like a pulled apart cotton ball.

Round, dark, metal, bejeweled clip-on earrings have

pulled down the lobes of her ears.

Thin lips painted with coral pink that will leave a faded kiss on your cheek.

Plump fingers and stubby fingernails that she chews out of boredom.

Her hands are worn with a lifetime of being a farmer's wife and school teacher. Soft lines crease at the joints of her hands that prepare whole meals by memory for her family.

I can rest my chin on her head when we hug. Even though Grandpa called me "Big Tall Sally," I take after my mom in height and, at twenty years old, top out at five foot four.

Her favorite bright pink and orange plaid-patterned blouse over a white top with shades of pink and orange buttons sits on once broad, tough, working shoulders. On her nightstand in the bedroom, there's a ten year old portrait of Grandpa and Grandma, and she is wearing this shirt.

I swear that the tennis shoes she always wears are retired bowling shoes, because of the white and blue leather sewn boldly together with thick red stitching.

She logged eighty one years around the Earth mid-January and, as far as I know, isn't planning on quitting any time soon.

C-O-N-T-I-N-U-E

Early morning light greeted me as I rolled out of bed. I usually like my spring break days to start later than usual. In all honesty, I would like all of my days to start later. I am not a morning person.

However, this morning is a special exception.

I get away with the shower I took yesterday, my thin yellow hair pulled back into crisscrosses of a French braid. Morning air nips at my nose when I leave the warmth of home,

G-R-A-N-D-M-A

and my breath billows like a dragon as I drive down the road.

I let myself into the house and greet Grandma in her kitchen. A kiss on the cheek to Grandpa watching the news in his recliner. They were awake four hours before me this morning. Maybe I'll grow up to be a morning person.

Her car is easier for her to get in and out of, and it is honestly more reliable than the junk car I parked in the driveway. She doesn't notice that I wipe the thin layer of dust off the radio display.

The drive down the country highway to Fort Wayne is filled with my voice describing class projects, relationship status updates, and much speculation on my future.

G-R-O-W

I learned to steal words from the children's books I read. My two older cousins and I play against Grandma while we wait for everyone to arrive.

C-A-S-T-L-E

Smells of the kitchen drift over to the dining table where we play. Judging by the grand selection of pecan pie, sugar cream pie, monkey bread, and cake hiding the counter top from view, it's probably one of the aunt's birthdays.

Another E that I cannot yet use.

D-R-A-G-O-N

I pull a Q tile from the pile.

Finally, I can use that U.

Q-U-E-E-N

Now, disease clouds her once bright eyes and modern medicine cannot resurrect the lost sight. Her thick bifocals do almost nothing for her. She reminds me again that she cannot see. When I can, I drive her to the bank, to the post office, to the

pharmacy, to the grocery store. I still have time.

I don't think I could spell out Macular Degeneration with Scrabble letters.

Parking at the hospital involves a few hawk-like circles before scoring a space three rows from the sliding door entrance. The sterile air greets me as I give a smile to the elder receptionist and we shuffle to the elevator. Third floor please. Bing, bing, arrival. Through another door, and it's a standard doctor's office waiting room. I find a seat facing the television mounted above the door to the back rooms. A rerun of M*A*S*H comes on after an annoying lineup of over-marketed products. Hand sanitizer and oranges touch my nose.

When Grandma sits to my right, I snap a selfie with her before she is called back. I post the photo to Snapchat with pink heart emojis. I disinterestedly watch the throwback show, scrolling through my Facebook feed, watching the battery life tick down. Besides the conversation of television and shuffling of papers behind the check-in counter, the waiting room was empty.

Then an older couple walks into the room, and Grandma walks out from the back. All done!

Legally, she's blind. Colors have ill-defined shapes and tend to blur into the objects surrounding her viewpoint. Life goes by through the corners of her eyes, her ears fine-tuned to make up for the lost vision.

Shopping is her escape from the house. Her half of the closet is a bold rainbow of C.J. Banks and Kohl's outfits compared to Grandpa's buckle jean overalls and faded neutral shirts. Whenever I compliment a new piece of colorful fashion, she says, "Oh, why thank you! It just spoke to me in the store! It

G-R-A-N-D-M-A

called out to me, 'MARIANNE, MARIANNE.' And now I have it!"
If she can see it, she can wear it.

We go to the classically favorite Bob Evan's for lunch after her appointment. At eleven-thirty in the morning, it is more of a popular nursing home cafeteria. I order a bottomless cup of coffee and a stack of buttery hot pancakes while she has ice water and blueberry crepes.

She tells me of the road trips Grandpa and her used to make.

A summer with friends in Arizona.

A wintery week escape to Louisiana.

A spring sprint to Nevada and California.

The only two states she has yet to be in of the continental forty-eight are Washington and Oregon. Ironically, two states that I have been to.

I know that my younger self has heard these stories before, but now I listen with understanding of places, relationships, distances, cars, and travel. Come to think of it, these stories were the mustard seeds planted in my heart a lifetime ago, left forgotten with the assumptions of staying rooted in my small-town hometown.

I credit my global wanderlust to the tales of my grandma and grandpa crisscrossing the country more times than I have in years.

Their lifetimes inspire mine.

G-O

I still have that photo we took together in the doctor's office in Fort Wayne. It took me forever to track it down in my photo storage. Her crooked smile hides a jolly laugh that we shared in that moment and her glasses magnify her blue eyes that look

Megan Smith

just to the left of the camera.

There is a plastic gallon bag filled with Scrabble tiles on my living room bookshelf that I like to break out in my spare time and play Fast Scrabble by myself.

Her mind is still here, even if her sight is not, and I am grateful for that.

I know time is against us, and one day she will be gone before I am ready.

But we have now. We have our memories that I will treasure forever. One day, I can tell my children and grandchildren of a strong, adventurous woman who shaped my life. I can only hope that I will be the same kind of woman to my family.

No matter what, she will always be my
G-R-A-N-D-M-A

Contributors

Samantha Barnes

I am a 2D artist, and I work mostly in graphite and charcoal. I've been drawing portraits of people and animals since grade school, and in my two years studying at IUPUI, I've begun to do more illustrative art as well.

Blake Bennett

Blake is a junior in the computer engineering program at IUPUI. In his free time he enjoys writing fiction and poetry, playing golf, and playing retro video games.

Emily Bennett

Emily Bennett is an MFA candidate at the Herron School of Art and Design. She creates medium to large scale sculptural work using steel and fibers as her primary mediums. She hopes to continue her work into the public sector after graduating this May.

Kevin Bielicki

Kevin Bielicki is a current sculpture MFA candidate at Herron School of Art and Design. His nature-inspired work has been exhibited locally as well as internationally. He is represented by the BoxHeart Gallery in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania where he was recently awarded artist of the year.

Taylor Canada

For this work, I was trying to get across an idea of the battle between nature and technology, both things that are depended heavily upon by our society. The porcupine is a symbol for innocence and purity, and I have interwoven wires into his quills to symbolize the perversion of innocence that comes with technology.

Corey Cole

I am a P.E. major with student teaching around the corner. Writing began as a coping strategy for multiple issues but evolved into a genuine interest. Working as an apprentice editor in W280 last year motivated me to submit my work.

Leena Dobouni

I am an Iraqi/American artist. Being caught between the two sides of my heritage has allowed me to explore and debate some of the assumptions made about the socio-political struggles on both “sides”. My work varies in medium from prints and drawings to sculpture. Often serene and quiet on the surface, many of my pieces invite viewers in to re-think the deeper, much more violent reality.

- 1- Excuses (Morgue toe tags, plaster, laser engraving, twine and T-pins - installed in varied dimensions)
- 2- Iraq (Copper plate etching, wintergreen transfer, burning - 12”X16”)
- 3- Chai (Colored pencil on paper - 8”X12”)

Lifan Fan

Lifan is a junior painting major and studying pre-med at IUPUI.

Caroline Flott

Caroline is a dedicated writer and loves the art of literature. She is going into her third year here at IUPUI. She spends her extra time outside of school as a preschool teacher and a waitress.

Emma Frisby

This piece is about all the things that went into making up my childhood. The pillows are a symbol of love and comfort from my family. Every material used is a part of my earliest memories.

Brooke Holmes

Brooke Holmes is a student-athlete at IUPUI who hails from Omaha,

Nebraska. She is an English major who is passionate about words, water, and pictures. Brooke hopes to one day decipher legal jargon for a living by helping future citizens through the immigration process.

JP Hyde

JP Hyde is a senior at IUPUI. He majors in English and minors in Film Studies.

Madeline A. Ketchem

I'm currently a senior majoring in Marketing and International studies at the Kelley School of Business and English (Creative Writing) at the School of Liberal Arts. I hope to become an English teacher and later earn my PhD in Urban Education Studies to help research and develop the public school systems in central Indiana.

Keeley Miller

Keeley Miller is a freshman journalism major at IUPUI. Since the age of 12, she has pursued the art of photography with a variety of subjects, loving the ability to be able to create a fantasy world and bring it to reality. You can view more of her work at keeleymiller.com.

Caroline Niepokoj

I am an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing. If I am not reading or writing, I am usually thinking about reading or writing.

Sydney Petrunich

Native Hoosier who currently studies Art History and Painting at the Herron School of Art + Design. Enjoys artistic experimentation, learning how to read Egyptian hieroglyphs, and petting dogs.

Eden Rea-Hedrick

Eden Rea-Hedrick's favorite pastimes include drinking coffee and

quoting Oscar Wilde. Her creativity is fueled by chocolate, Rufus Wainwright, the Bloomsbury Group, New Queer Cinema, and cuddles with her toothless poodle. Her proudest literary accomplishment to date is winning Indiana Repertory Theatre's Young Playwrights in Process competition.

TL Ridgway

I attained my Bachelor of Arts in Art History, with minor studies in Anthropology, Classics, and Book Arts. I am currently pursuing my MFA in printmaking. I do not limit my concepts, themes, mediums, or techniques to fit the traditional criteria. I am intrigued by unconventional processes & alternative interpretations.

Christina Marie Ridders

Christina Marie Ridders is a senior pursuing a Creative Writing Major with an emphasis in Writing and Literacy, a certificate in Paralegal Studies and a minor in Fairy Princessing. Her graduation plans include but are not limited to purchasing a motorcycle, adopting a cat, and other things non-robots do.

Piper Rowley

Published once before in *genesis*, Piper Rowley is a Liberal Arts Major at IUPUI with a concentration in Creative Writing.

Megan Smith

I'm actually a visual artist, majoring in Ceramics at the Herron School of Art and Design and minoring in Art History, Book Arts, and French. I took a non-fiction prose writing class for fun this spring semester and really fell in love with this new creative form of expression through true stories, events, and people. I find my strongest creative inspiration for all of my work through historical cultures and personal memory.

Victoria Smith-Howard

Transfer student from Ivy Tech Community College. Majoring in a Liberal Art General Studies degree, and pursuing a minor in creative writing. An upcoming, local Indianapolis artist currently focusing on acrylic painting and poetry.

Joelle Stille

Joelle Stille is a writer, artist, curator, and activist who lives and works in Indianapolis. A second generation American and intersectional feminist, Stille's work is centered around themes of empathy, empowerment, and community.

Jeanyce St-Victor

I'm no poet, just someone who is trying to learn to express through the words on a paper.

Katrina Turk

This piece is about the desire to be independent, successful, and stand out but struggling with a deeper need to blend in.

Emily Wright

My goal as an artist is to engage viewers with my hyperrealist style and use of color. I seek to exaggerate the colors and textures present in my sitter so the viewer can see the tiny details and colors that I see when encountering a face, landscape, or animal.

- 1) Zeus the Blind Owl
- 2) Akanbe
- 3) Canal Painting from life
- 4) Wonderwall
- 5) Hard Working Hoosier

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*My own experience is that
once a story has been written,
one has to cross out
the beginning and the end.
It is there that we authors
do most of our lying.*

– Anton Chekhov

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Jeffrey Hyde Jr.

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