

2024

Genealogy

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Recommended Citation

Brimhall, Traci (2024) "Genealogy," *Nelle*: Vol. 7, Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/nelle/vol7/iss2024/6>

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Traci Brimhall

GENEALOGY

My mom tells me my grandfather tried to die but God,
she thinks, would understand. This story is given to me
like a gift, a fistful of dandelions that I must also keep
from dying. My son makes a butterfly out of clementine
slices, no feet to taste the sweet pollen, wings too thick to fly
but flap when he bends them. When she was young
my mother's pastor led her to his basement and touched her body,
said he didn't need forgiveness because he was a man
of God. I am ten when she tells me for the first time.
Today I get on all fours and put my nose between blades
of grass to find the damp cellar smell of dirt. When I rise, dizzy,
dark paisleys swim across my eyes, and I can smell the rain
that isn't falling. Everyone's favorite way to suffer is love, but I
prefer God. When he's dying, the pastor finds my mother
and asks for forgiveness. My son eats the flightless butterfly
and smiles. There is no storm here, but lightning jumps
from heart to mouth. The splinter of God in me—a burning topaz,
a shameful kingdom, the flower's long memory of bees.
Though I tell her not to my mother forgives him, says he was
gentle. I can't heal her pain by taking it from her.

I tell my son when he should lie to be kind, his fists sticky
with dandelion milk, but he wants to be honest all the time.

Someday I will ask him to forgive me for the stories I drown
in a field. How I try not to hurt anything but startle every

bright thing in my path, how lovely the lies I tell him when
my hands are wet with the wrong weeping. And how true.