

One Leg at a Time

By Jocelyn Johnson

As I struggle to put pants on the baby, I think about persistence. At nine months old, William squirms on the changing table; he grabs for the container of wipes just out of reach. Meanwhile, I manage to thread his plump thigh down one pant leg. But then he slips it out again, looks at me sheepishly, and farts.

After William's pants are on, I will write for a few minutes. I want to write, but I don't expect to get too many words on the page. As I type, I will have to hold and feed and tend to my baby. He will paw at the mouse, and click out odd patterns on the keys.

Since William's birth, my short stories seem like older siblings, anxiously awaiting my full attention again. 'Remember me?' they joke, careful not to sound too needy. Sometimes they whisper confidences in my ear; or else they ramble on, like a catchy pop song, as I try to fall asleep.

Once I get William's pants on, I will listen and transcribe them; I will write something simple and true.

But first, I must get the baby's freaking pants on him. So I make nice and sing sweetly, an old R&B tune with the word "baby" in it:

*I don't want nobody else,
'cause baby it's you...*

For a moment, William is captivated and I cajole his crescent feet into the pants openings. I scoop him up, balance him atop the changing table, and hoist the waist of his pants around his diaper-clad bum. But when William stomps rhythmically—a strange dance of satisfaction—his feet free themselves.

I let out a long stream of air and try again. Swiftly, I shuffle William's pants over his wiggly bare legs. But just as I fasten them, I realize both of his calves are crammed into the same narrow opening.

In the end, I get William's pants on one leg at a time, the way everybody does it. I piece together my imperfect stories, word by word, phrase by phrase. And in my fiction's shimmering completion, marked by my small struggles, I recognize slivers of William. I see him hidden in the mischief of one character, or the glossy stare of another: my small boy, William, fully dressed and playing at my feet.

