

1984

## Firstborn

Katherine Gallagher

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### Recommended Citation

Gallagher, Katherine, Firstborn, *Kunapipi*, 6(3), 1984.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol6/iss3/5>

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## Firstborn

### Abstract

For years I dreamt you my lost child, a face unpromised. I gathered you in, gambling, making maps over your head. You were the beginning of a wish and when I finally held you, like some mother-cat I looked you over my dozy lone-travefler set down at last.

The young gravedigger, coming back from the new section, where he'd just finished digging a grave, told his boss what had happened.

'This old lady came running towards me, calling out «Reggie, Reggie.» I looked behind me, thinking there must be someone else she was waving to, but there was only me. As she got up to me, I started to say, «My name's not Reggie», but she threw up her arms like she was going to hug me, and as she did that, she must have tripped, and she went flying. She hit her head on that rock over there. I ran to get help, but when the doctor came he said there was nothing that could be done. After she fell, she never moved. Funny though, she just lay there, looking peaceful, sort of smiling to herself.'

As he turned away, his eyes caught on the lilies, arranged neatly on the gravestone. He disapproved. People always brought fresh flowers which died off so quickly. These lilies, for instance. Although they looked strong and waxy, like the plastic flowers he preferred, they were already turning yellow in the heat, tingeing on the edges, curling into an orange frill. It was sad. Nothing lasted.

## Katherine Gallagher

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### FIRSTBORN

For years I dreamt you  
my lost child, a face unpromised.  
I gathered you in, gambling,  
making maps over your head.  
You were the beginning of a wish  
and when I finally held you,  
like some mother-cat I looked you over —  
my dozy lone-traveller set down at last.

So much for maps,  
I tried to etch you in, little stranger  
wrapped like a Japanese doll.

You opened your fish-eyes and stared,  
slowly your bunched fists  
bracing on air.



Illustration: Paul Vella