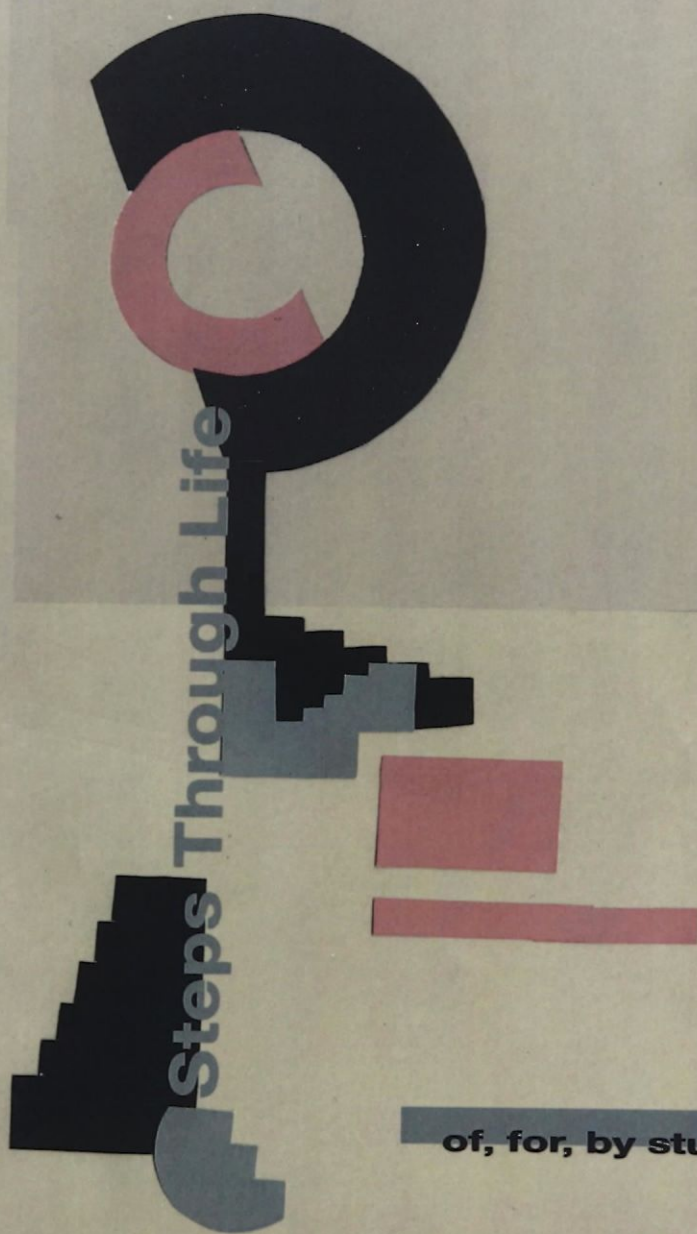


# the crucible

Lock Haven University

2015  
2016



of, for, by students



Lock Haven University's

# The Crucible

## Steps Through Life

2015 2016

## Acknowledgments

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## Table of Contents

Angels Justin Nobrega .....	1
Untitled Josephine Sallo Johnson .....	2
First Date Melissa Weber .....	3
Pictures of Truth Tabitha Fisher .....	9
The Break Up Dakota Griffis .....	16
Depression: A Primer Tabitha Fisher .....	18
Longing for an Open End Angelica Cromatic .....	22
The Duck Story Celina Ouellette .....	24
Samsara Trent Wisler .....	30
Fire/Rescue and EMS Brook Snyder .....	32
Distraction Michael Eubanks .....	33
Burning Conor Kyser .....	41
HUNT Timothy Squier .....	43
Roy, Alone Tyler Dinsmore .....	48
You're Not Alone, Even in Death Timothy Squier...	60

# Art

## Table of Contents

Sun Salutations Jessica Streeter .....	4
Boat Jeff Foulsham .....	8
Untitled Corey Betush .....	8
Bumps and Curves Jessica Streeter .....	10
The Hendrica Sessions:1 Joanna Harlow .....	13
The Hendrica Sessions:2 Joanna Harlow .....	15
Untitled Yuqi Zhao .....	17
Shape Vance Godfrey .....	21
Thoughts Zach Hommey .....	23
Lock Haven in Spring Paula McHenry .....	27
Untitled Kristi Replogle .....	29
Complementary Logan Eck .....	31
Blender Corey Betush .....	37
Squirrel Delton Rager.....	39
Untitled Emily Appolonia .....	40
Structure Zach Hommey .....	42
Triclops Jordan Dykes .....	44
Morrigan Savanna Wolfe .....	44
Flower Emily Appolonia .....	47
Untitled Yuqi Zhao .....	49
Untitled Caitlin Mallory .....	55
Charlie, 1 Caitlin Mallory .....	58
It's All Rot in the End Chris Jones .....	61
Untitled Vance Godfrey .....	63
Charlie Caitlin Mallory .....	66

## Preface

Heartbeats.

Some people have many heartbeats, others have few.

Steps.

Some people take many steps, others take few.

Years.

Some people live many years, others live few.

No matter how long you live, we all go through stages in our lives.  
Each heartbeat, each step, each life is significant.

Hidden in the pages of our literary and arts magazine, Lock Haven University's artists and writers have given us glimpses into the heartbeats and steps of life. And with each step we take, each of piece will allow you to experience a fresh sorrow or joy. But most importantly, each piece will lead to another.

Like this magazine, each reader and artist has their own story to share. Take a walk through these pages, heartbeats, and lives, and follow our steps through life.

- *The Crucible* Editors

## Angels | Justin Nobrega

Eyes that are deeper than any hole,  
a smile that is brighter than any light,  
a voice lighter than any cloud,  
and laugh more infectious than any virus;  
these are the things that make an Angel.  
Someone pure and beautiful, smart and experienced;  
these are the things that make an Angel.  
Hurt and broken, sad and worried,  
someone whose words are mixed with the experiences of her life,  
someone whose heart was torn and mended a million times;  
these are the things that have broken an Angel  
and kept it tied to this earth.  
This broken Angel's heart still aches,  
her eyes still water and pain remains seen,  
held together by her strength and the strength of others,  
pushed forward by the thought of a brighter future.  
And now, I look upon this broken Angel brought down to Earth,  
feeling the pain and wounds that scar her so.  
I now take these troubles upon my heart and mind,  
so that she becomes the beautiful creature she was meant to be.  
In heart and mind she is healing,  
her smile returning, and laugh sounding.



Untitled | Josephine Sallo Johnson

Unloved is a child that knows no joy.  
Unloved is a child that has no one to admire,  
no one to look up to.  
Unloved is a child that reaches out for someone to rely on,  
a shoulder to cry on,  
drowning in her own darkness of sorrow.  
All she seems to do is cry because she feels hollow.  
How is it possible to continue with a happy muse  
when anger,  
hate,  
pain,  
and sadness all ignite the fuse?  
She tries to remain optimistic,  
to see the glass half full.  
At every turn she encounters,  
there is disappointment.  
Where does she get the courage to succeed,  
when it seems there are no means?  
Who will she make it for?  
What is her purpose?  
If she does it for herself,  
what does it matter?  
She feels with every obstacle,  
with every struggle, she's losing herself,  
breaking down.  
Piece by piece her soul continues to shatter.

## First Date | Melissa Weber

Tony licked his lips nervously and gripped the steering wheel just a bit harder than necessary, causing his knuckles to turn white. He was trying to hide the fact that he was nervous as hell, but he didn't think it was working. Sitting in the passenger seat of his jeep and staring out the window at the fading light was Diamond Elizabeth Fitz.

"So where are we going?" she asked, still looking out the window.

Tony glanced over at her. "It's a secret. You'll see."

Diamond nodded and hummed noncommittally in response, not taking her eyes off the scenery outside. Tony glanced over at her again, eyes taking in every bit of her: the small freckles on her nose and just under her eyes, her short, thick eyelashes, and a peculiar scar cutting through her eyebrow.

"Where did you get that?" Tony asked her.

Diamond turned to face him, slightly confused.

"Get what?"

"The scar. In your eyebrow."

Diamond stiffened slightly and shifted uncomfortably in her seat.

"Playing ping pong," she murmured. "I tripped and smashed my head against the edge of the table."

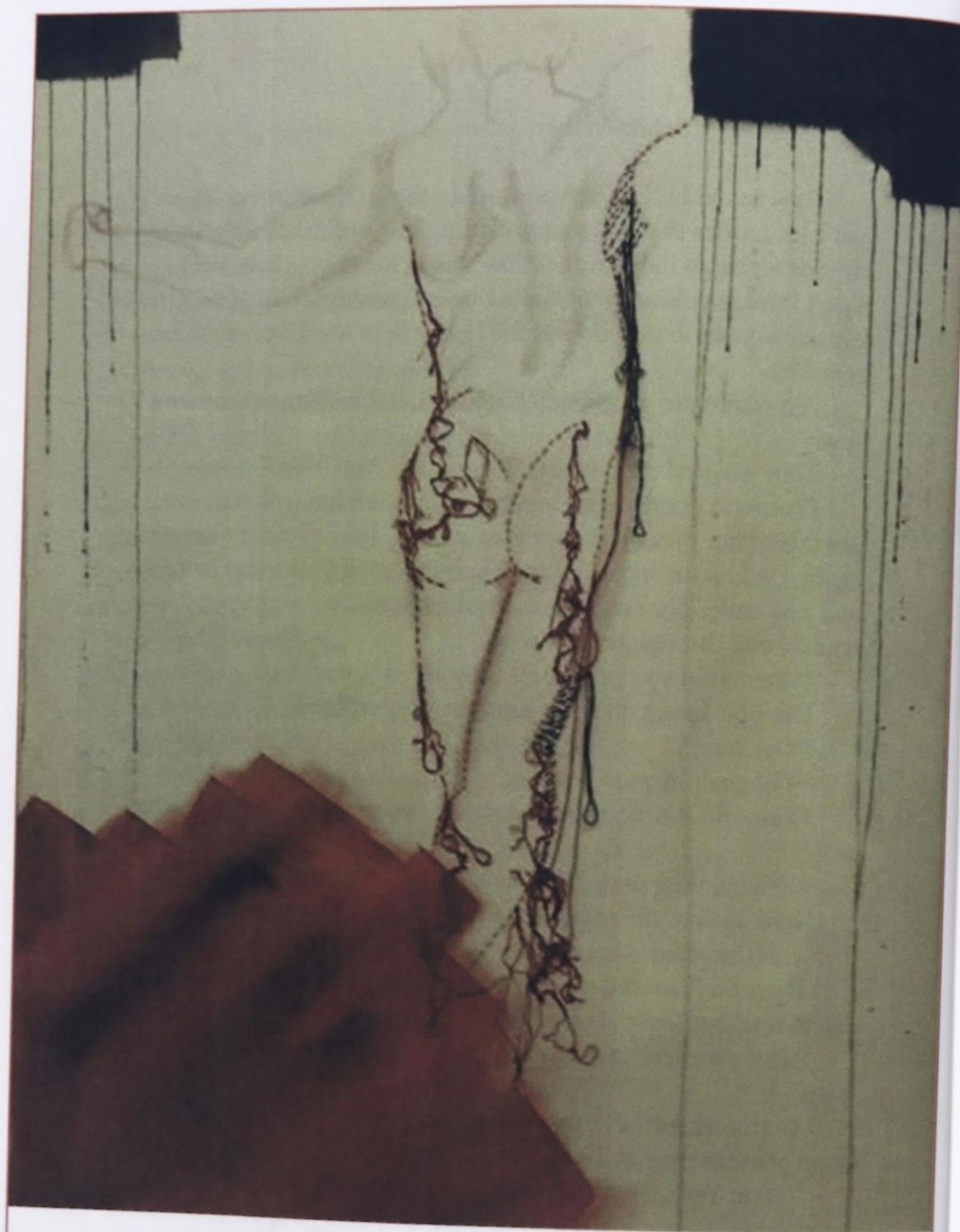
Tony laughed. "Sounds like something I would do."

Diamond cracked a small smile and ran her finger over the small scar, her smile slowly disappearing.

"Here we are!" Tony said proudly, turning off the ignition in his jeep.

Diamond stared at the place in front of her in confusion, and then glanced over at Tony. "An...airport?"

"Heh. Yeah. Don't worry, I'm not planning to kidnap you or anything." Tony winked at Diamond, and then jumped down out of his jeep. He pulled out a blanket and a mini cooler from his backseat, and motioned for Diamond to follow him.



*Sun Salutations*  
Mixed media  
Jessica Streeter



He's insane, Diamond thought as she hopped out of his vehicle and followed him over to a chain link fence. What could they possibly do at an airport?

"You want me to climb over that?" Diamond asked incredulously, eyeing the incredibly tall chain link fence with barbed wire at the top.

Tony laughed. "No, Diamond." He leaned down and pulled up part of the fence, the chain creaking and groaning as it was pulled up. "I found out about this last year. I bring my little sister here all the time."

"Is this legal?" Diamond asked, stepping through the torn gate.

"Uhh," Tony followed suit and put the gate back down, marking the spot with a rock. "I'm pretty sure."

"Okay," Diamond said, not very reassured. "So what exactly are we doing here?"

By now it was almost dark out, the November air surprisingly warmer than usual, and Tony marched right on through the field, holding the blanket and dragging the cooler behind him. Diamond followed him slowly until Tony stopped and spread out the blanket.

He gave her a cheesy smile as he sat down on the blanket and opened the cooler. It held a surprising amount of food for how small it was, and when she sat down, he pulled out a bottle of water and handed it to her. "Thirsty?"

"Yeah, thanks. But you still haven't answered my question. Don't you think the daylight is a better time to have a picnic?"

Tony grinned wildly, his eyes sparkling. "It would be. But in the daylight, you wouldn't be able to see this." He put his hand under her chin, and with his warm, long fingers, he lifted her head up to the sky.

Diamond couldn't help but slightly gasp at the sight above her; the sky was dark now, but unbelievably clear. Stars shone more brightly than she had ever seen them before, thanks to living in a busy city, and the lights of the airplanes taking off and flying in the distance were almost mesmerizing, like shooting stars.

"That's beautiful." Tony smiled softly at Diamond, not letting his hand drop completely from her chin, but instead, running it down the length of her arm. "Como tú, mi querida," he murmured.

Diamond tore her gaze away from the brightly lit sky long enough to give Tony a confused grin that made his heart skip a few beats. "What?" she asked.

"I said you look beautiful, too." Tony grinned as Diamond bit her lip and blushed, looking away. "And now you just look adorable. I think I'm gonna have to make you blush more often."

"Okay, rule one," Diamond said, trying not to smile.

"What?" Tony's smile grew even bigger, and his voice took on a teasing tone. "There are rules to this date? I didn't sign up for this."

"Rule one," Diamond looked up at him then, smiling brilliantly, Tony felt the air rush out of his lungs, and holy shit, had Diamond honestly just taken his breath away?

"Yeah?" he whispered.

"Speak only in English for the rest of this date. I'd like to be able to understand what you're saying to me."

Tony's face took on a mockingly serious expression and he saluted her. "As you wish. Rule two?"

"Ah, well." Diamond furrowed her brow. "I guess it's just the one rule then."

"And if I break it?" Tony gave her a half-grin.

"Well then maybe you won't get a good night kiss." The words were out before Diamond could stop them, and the moment they left her tongue, her smile froze on her face, and she felt like her heart was going to explode.

Holy crap, did I seriously just say that out loud? Oh my gosh, no, I can't believe I said that, that was so stupid! No no no no no-

"Well I guess I better stick to English then."

No no no- Wait, what? Diamond's normally top speed brain was having trouble functioning with what had just happened.

"Um, yeah," she managed. "English is...English is..." Diamond's brain went completely blank as Tony started leaning closer and



closer, and suddenly he was right in front of her, his warm breath on her cheek, his curls tickling the top of her head, his impossibly dark eyes slowly disappearing as she closed her eyes, and slightly opened her mouth...

“Oh shit,” the words came out in a puff of hot air against her lips, and Diamond frowned with her eyes still closed.

When she opened them, Tony was kneeling, looking at something behind her in horror.

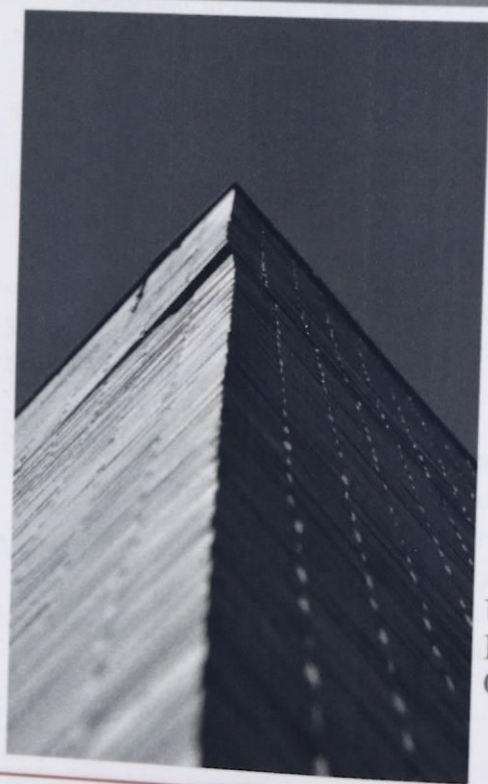
“Oh shit,” he repeated.

It wasn't until Diamond saw the flashing red and blue lights reflected in Tony's eyes that she realized what he was so afraid of.

Read the rest of the story on our website:  
[www.community.lhup.edu/crucible/2016](http://www.community.lhup.edu/crucible/2016)



*Boat*  
Digital print  
Jeff Foulsham



Untitled  
Digital photograph  
Corey Betush

Jules Bastien Lepage certainly wasn't painting with me in mind. Walking the streets of Paris and roaming the countryside of France in the late 19th century, the young artist's mind wouldn't have conceived anything about my world. He lived in a universe that turned around him, reveled in it. He dipped his brush into the colors of the fields, drew the blue from the eyes of the people, and stroked existence across the canvas. Royalty and aristocracy didn't draw his eye. The worn children of the fields were reborn on the page; blind beggars were suddenly seen by all. He drew what was real. As an early naturalist, he sought to depict the truth.

I discovered him because of my mother. My mother never went to college, but she was an artist. In every house we've owned, she's had a room in the basement to store her paint and brushes. She painted unicorns and fairies on my bedroom walls. My closet doors became a giant mural depicting the Tree of Day, whose leaves glittered with gold, and the Tree of Night, whose silver leaves glowed neon blue in the dark. It was my mother who imprinted upon me the names of the famous impressionist artists. She likes bright colors; gritty realism never appealed to her. So Monet's and Renoir's flaring blues and oranges decorated our calendars and sat in cheap reprints on the walls, their colors seeping into my psyche and enriching my blood. I knew I wanted to be an artist, just like my mother.

I never really made it far into art. I always enjoyed art class, and I constantly came into school with paint congealing under my fingernails. But I never really had a passion for it, no drive. I didn't have much talent either, something I expected to inherit from my mother, as though her hard work would just pass to me through an umbilical cord. I enjoyed using charcoal in high school; portraits were my favorite, although I could never get the lips and the mouth right. Teeth were the bane of my existence, and when it came to three-point perspective, I was hopeless. I soon decided that anything that required me to use a ruler was a waste of my time.





*Bumps and Curves*  
Digital photograph  
Jessica Streeter

When I grew up, I moved on from ideas of paint and charcoal and began to marvel at words. I was enamored with language, with stories. I began to return to writing that journalism classes had turned me away from during my freshman year. I took two creative writing courses with a teacher who encouraged me to no end, regardless of my inability to take criticism. When she told me she was teaching her first AP class, composition, I signed up, hoping to encourage her the way she had me. The potential college credit didn't hurt either. I learned to analyze text in a way I never had before. Suddenly, every political column was recognizable as bullshit and every paper or story had a motive. I pushed the magic aside and for the first time, I began to see the skeleton of language. It was fascinating.

This is also when I learned that "text" doesn't explicitly refer to words on the page. A few weeks into class, I received an assignment: to take my newly-honed skill-set, one that allowed me to take speeches and essays and tear them down to rhetorical shreds, and apply it to a painting of my choosing. The basis of analysis was sketchy at best; my teacher recommended breaking down the painting by movement, where the eye is drawn. But focal points, colors, expressions, figures, a thousand other aspects of the painting were also options. Picking the right painting was crucial in this new exercise.

There were a few suggested for me. *Guernica* and Frida Kahlo's self-portraits were popular ideas for their distinctive styles and heavy symbolism. One student worked with *The Birth of Venus*, while another worked with a video game cover. But picking one of the classics felt wrong, and a modern piece felt like a cop-out. With the wealth of information and criticism ripe for the taking, an honest and original rhetorical analysis felt impossible. So I began a hunt for obscurity, starting in the only art movement I really knew.

Lepage's name originally caught my eye. Like many Americans, I take an inordinate amount of pride in a genetic heritage to which I have no cultural claim. The fact that the artist was French urged



me to look a little longer. But it was his art that really struck me: the smooth strokes of peach and white in swathes of flesh, the ragged lines of brown and grey, the haphazard backgrounds of swirling color. He painted in a way that shocked me, with his Renaissance-perfect simulations of people with ruddy cheeks and startlingly sad eyes clashing against the short and rough strokes of his backgrounds, the ones that would characterize later artists of the movement. It was stunning. It called to that childhood fascination with art in a clear, ringing shout that was impossible to ignore.

I would look at quite a few pieces by Lepage, charmed by his portraits of children and horrified by the poverty he represented, before finally settling on a piece that I never found a definitive title for. *Flower Seller in London*, *London Flower Seller*, *Woman Selling Flowers*. I called it *Flower Seller* in my essay, the two most common words in the numerous "official" titles I came across. It was accurate; the piece is a portrait of a young woman, no older than I am now, holding still for her likeness to be sketched. She is curled in on herself, wrapped in a fraying shawl that covers her arms completely. The only flesh we see of her is the barest shadow of her hand, supporting a basket full of greenery and a few flowers, her long, pale neck and her face. Her beauty immediately took me. Her slightly rosy skin, her shining chestnut hair, her lightly curved nose, her burgundy lips all captured me immediately. It took me a while before I noticed her eyes: piercing, dark and full of ineffable sadness. And she was looking right at me, at the artist, at the world. Her eyes pleaded with me, pulling at my heart, but I didn't know what she wanted. She stood there in silent desperation, stoic and concealed, offering up nothing to the viewer but her eyes. She made no motion, offered no sign. She just stood there and silently begged.

My eyes traveled the painting for far too long before I found him: a blurry man, well dressed and ill defined, leering at her from the left edge of the page. He was clearly rich and she clearly poor. He had a firm intention. She had no escape.



*The Hendrica Sessions: 1*  
Oil on paper  
Joanna Harlow

It pains me to come back to the painting now. Every time I look at it, I get lost in the beauty of the scene, of the young woman's doll face and intense eyes. And every time, my eyes wander and meet the leering man's, and I have to realize that this was a real girl. A real woman, with no name and no options, no help. I have to face the brunt of my anger, impotent fire flickering behind glass. This girl is long since dead and her oppressor as well. This snapshot is over a hundred years before my time, the deeds that may have followed the painting lost in the currents of decades. It is useless to think about it all now, to burn with ineffective fury. There is nothing I could have done; Lepage did not paint this for me.

But I still think about it. I write about it, just as I write about the things I see in the world that bother me, the things I've lived through. I write my helplessness, my inability to control the world around me. My words do not change anything. Simply transcribing the event does nothing. So why do I do it? Maybe I do it for the same reason Lepage did. Maybe he and I have been compelled to chronicle truth, in any way possible. Maybe if we don't leave a trace of something wrong, that trace will disappear. Maybe if we don't transcribe it, no one will think about it a hundred years down the line. Maybe we do it to keep the truth alive.





*The Hendrica Sessions: 2*  
Oil on paper  
Joanna Harlow

## The Break Up | Dakota Griffis

All it took was one message, a simple sentence consisting of five words, "I don't love you anymore," to destroy her. Those five words echoed in her brain; each time the echo got louder, the only thoughts keeping her sane grew quieter. It took that one message to destroy her mentally. As the words echoed, time slowed down. She could feel her body growing heavy; she became helpless. She had no feelings to feel, for he had stripped them all away. She read the message continuously, and each time she read it, the words on the screen and the message behind them changed. A million memories of a million happy times played throughout her head. In those few moments of lost sanity she entered another place, back in those memories, reliving the greatness she was once lucky enough to experience. But the good remembrance was shattered by reality. Questions poured from her thoughts and out of her eyes in the form of tears. Her vision grew blurry, her heartbeats heavy and hard, in perfect sync with her head. She sat in complete ruin, allowing five words, one sentence, to destroy her. Each breath she took gave her less air than the one before, almost as if she was suffocating inside an enclosed box with no air holes. She was suffocating and drowning, drowning as the thoughts continued to flood her head. As much as she wanted them to stop for just one second, she wasn't strong enough to make that happen. The thoughts tore her down a little more each time they crossed her mind. She eventually ran dry. No more tears could fall, no more thoughts could run; she could breathe. The second she read the message she had fallen weak to the heartache, but the second the last tear fell, she stood up stronger than ever.





*Untitled*  
Digital photograph  
Yuqi Zhao

I don't think I can remember ever planning to take my own life. I knew girls in nearby schools who had done it; I was inundated with news of my peers worldwide who'd willingly plunged into the dark. Tyler Clementi's image came to me over and over again during my freshman year, like the ghost of Hamlet's father came to drive him mad. My mind painted a picture of his swan dive off the George Washington Bridge; my brain was spotted with his contusions. The stories scared me; I was afraid. But I knew, knew, I'd never do something like that. The consequences of such a thing were far too great. I didn't want to traumatize my sister or break my family in half. Even when a part of me felt that no one cared, my rational mind knew that suicide would send shockwaves across my family. I couldn't abide the imagined impact of my own selfishness.

But I did want to kill myself, at least sometimes.

Most of the time I remember just wanting to fade away, wanting to disappear, to slide into a warm, dark place until the cacophony of life dwindled away. To come back when the slate was clean, when I could smile again without feeling hollow inside.

That's one of the things they don't include on the symptoms list. There are a thousand boxes to check off, little tick marks that make you feel guiltier the more you scrape them onto the page. I can see it now, the pink Xeroxed sheet, the blank white computer screen, the cartoony quizzes and the questionnaires.

Have you had or experienced any of the following symptoms:

- Loss of pleasure
- Feelings of numbness
- Nights spent tossing and turning
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Overwhelming negative thoughts
- Reckless behavior
- Uncontrollable self-loathing



There's a lot more, but that says pretty much all of it, right? The hatred, the hollowness, the suffering. I think the list is missing something though; maybe it's boxed in by the checkmarks or vivisected with the graphite slashes already apparent in the text. It's somewhere else, though, in a place that's far more physical: in the wrinkles of the face, the cracked skin of the lips. In the hollowness of the belly that rises up to lick at the heart. No pamphlet or medicine bottle has ever warned me about the inability to smile.

You know that feeling when you have a thought in the middle of a conversation, and you hold it and hold it because someone else is talking and it's rude to cut in like that? Maybe you've done it too many times before this, used up your allotted outbursts. Maybe it's just a really bad joke and you're waiting for a golden moment to drop this eye-roll-inducingly awful pun. Either way, a gap clears up, an opportunity. And you open your mouth to finally speak, to breathe that word into the air and unleash all of the potential it holds...but it just vanishes. But it doesn't really vanish; you can feel it there, hunkered down in the gyri of the frontal lobe, perched and waiting for you to knock it loose, waiting to roll down the puckered surface of your tongue, come on, come on, I'm ready to go. You reach and you reach, straining with hands you wish existed, phantasm limbs, but it's out of grasp, because it's not there anymore. It exists and doesn't, at the same time. The absent thought becomes a memory; the column of air casts a shadow. Unattainable, impossible, and visible.

That's what a smile feels like when you're depressed. It isn't impossible to do, but it's pretty impossible to do honestly, wholesomely. A manic grin is tainted; a half-hearted smirk is empty. It may technically take more muscles to frown than to smile, but no one could convince me a smile is an easy thing. It may be a comparatively simple pull of muscle fiber and thrills of electrical charges through motor neurons that control the mechanics, but no one can tell me that it's all chemistry and physics, science and logic. The body doesn't just smile. It needs a reason, and the lack of reason is felt just as much.

But back to the other symptoms. That desire for emptiness, for a clean finish, for a temporary nonexistence, it's common with people who are depressed. It's written between the bullet points; what's the point of living with guilt shriveling your intestines, with hatred pouring off your breath? Why should you even want to be here?

It's a horrible train of thought. But it's common, and that makes it even worse. But atrocious commonalities happen all the time. Five thousand people and counting have died from the earthquake in Nepal. People regularly strap bombs to their children in the name of warfare. About twenty-one million people tried to kill themselves last year. Ho hum, right? It's a number on the news, a statistic. There's always some quantifiable amount.

But those people aren't numbers.

I'm not a number.

I'm on a drug called Bupropion. It's a knock off, a generic brand of the drug my military-grade insurance refuses to cover because they fail to see "adequate need." I can't pronounce its name properly, but my doctors seem to have no trouble. More practice, I guess. It's a norepinephrine-dopamine reuptake inhibitor, which is a fancy way of saying that it keeps the pleasure and the chill-me-out molecules alive and bouncing around in my synapses for a little longer. Smokers use it to kick the habit; nervous wrecks like me use it to take the edge off. It does a decent job at treating the depression part of me, damn decent considering that balancing my mood isn't even its job. My special little friend doesn't do shit to keep serotonin whizzing around my happy little skull, but it gives me enough bursts of the good-job waves to keep me keen.

I tried to go off it for a bit on my own, just to test the waters, to see how deep the pool goes. It's exactly the thing they tell you never to do, but maybe that's just the tic in my reckless behavior box. I didn't feel any more depressed when I started; I didn't spiral out of control. Instead, I became a raging bitch. Every response came out in a crooked voice I didn't recognize as my own. My face was a permanent scowl around everyone I talked to. Every question



seemed an assault on me. And I could recognize it: my attitude, my aggression. I didn't feel it emotionally; insult became impulse, just another action. I told myself to stop, to get a grip. My mouth spit venom in turn.

This was never a symptom before. I started to worry that maybe that was just me, my "natural" demeanor. The old fears and myths of personality-warping happy pills came back to me. I started to doubt my worth as a person, if I meant anything if I could only be kind on a drug. I began to wonder who I really was, as if I had never known myself. I felt that maybe I never had.

Read the rest of the story on our website:  
[www.community.lhup.edu/crucible/2016](http://www.community.lhup.edu/crucible/2016)



*Shape*  
Digital Photograph  
Vance Godfrey

Longing for an Open End | Angelica Cromatie

Often I long to wander,  
to tear the film off my eyes  
and leave them open to wonder.  
I'll throw myself to the world,  
melt into the throbbing and spitting  
because I know I'm just a girl.  
But there's something in my ribs that just isn't fitting,  
a dormant core like a time-bomb ticking.  
When will it burst forth?  
When will I shine through  
all the muddled contraptions I set for myself?  
I drown in intentions and reach for no help.  
I'm not scared of dying,  
just guilty of resigning  
to a life in the dark where I quit my own spark.  
So I'll give up to You,  
and the people who pass through  
to mend my split thoughts and tear me asunder,  
to hold the candle to my shadow that's pulling me under  
and when You're done  
I'll be naked again,  
stripped to my Soul like an open end.





*Thoughts*  
Digital print  
Zach Hommey



## The Duck Story | Celina Ouellette

In the eyes of my children, I am the world's best storyteller. I can take what seems to be a regular daily event and turn it into a hilarious and over-exaggerated tale that has my children begging me to repeat the story over and over again until they can no longer speak coherently because they are giggling so much. I never censor my language or my images for them, and I fear one day this will come back to bite me on the ass. For now it is fun, and it keeps them grounded to the real world. As children living with only one parent because of domestic violence, they have already experienced more than most. Sugar-coating stories for them would cheapen what they have already lived through. I tell them stories to let them know that life continues. We have picked ourselves up, dusted ourselves off, and moved on with our lives.

I figured out that the perfect time for me to tell stories to the kids is dinnertime. I used to try telling the stories at bedtime, but it would get the kids all wound up and then they would have trouble going to sleep. In hindsight, it was not a very well thought-out plan. By trial and error, we landed on dinnertime. This is the perfect time to tell stories since we are all gathered together around the table focused solely on being together as a family, and of course, eating our meal.

After one particularly interesting day, I could not wait for dinner time to finally arrive since I had the best story to tell my children. I had the most bizarre interaction with a duck at the park, and they were not going to believe what happened. It all started with my bi-weekly session with the new counselor I had been seeing for my depression and anxiety.

I was sitting on the couch in my counselor's office. The mini waterfall made of rocks he had plugged into the wall trickled in the corner opposite from where I sat. The tranquility it was supposed to induce mocked the shock I was in. I could not believe my ears. Did my counselor really just say what I thought he said? I tilted my

head as though maybe looking at him from a different angle would help the suggestion sink in better. It didn't. His round face and cocoa-colored beard still looked the same. His eyes still stared at me from across the room. I swear I must have been hallucinating. I was pretty sure I'd just heard him tell me to take the rest of the thirty minutes we had in our session, walk across the street to the park, sit under a tree, watch the ducks, and relax.

"You could even go up the street to Cool Beans and get yourself a nice cup of coffee first," he offered. Cool Beans was the cutesy little coffee shop up the street from his office in downtown Bellefonte where coffee is served in huge mismatched mugs. They have the most delicious homemade desserts which are so heavenly you almost don't feel guilty about how many calories you have just consumed. The counselor's blue eyes sparkled with mystery. He figured out that the way to persuade me to do something I did not want to do was through a reward system. Coffee was definitely a reward.

The air of mystery in his eyes concerned me. I didn't know why he was so keen on taking the rest of the counseling session off. The slightly paranoid part of me wondered if he had other plans and just wanted to get me out of his office. Or maybe he had grown tired of my ranting and couldn't deal with me for another thirty minutes. Those eyes, though; there was something about them. He was too excited. He had stumbled across something in treating me over the last couple of months that I had not yet discovered. I suppose that is why he sat in the computer chair, and I had to sit on the chocolate-milk-colored microfiber couch. Every time I left his office, I had a craving for a Kit-Kat bar, and I blame it on that darn couch! I was wound tighter than a two-dollar watch. More importantly, I was on the verge of breaking.

"You don't have to tell me twice. Coffee it is. I'll see you next week."

I tore out of that office as fast as I could. I swear wings must have grown out of my high top Converse sneakers. Every business lining the street rushed past me in a blur of color. I barely looked



out for cars as I crossed the two side streets I needed to navigate in order to arrive at my destination. I almost sped right past the giant coffee-cup-shaped sign indicating I had arrived. I took a deep breath and pushed the door open to enter the sacred world of amazingly good coffee.

Once I decided on a flavor, caramel apple latte, I was good to go. Then out of the corner of my eye, I saw the opaque Tupperware container sitting on the counter next to the muffin rack. Inside were the most wonderful-looking homemade fruity, nutty, oatmeal cookie bar treats I had ever laid eyes on. I could not resist them. I had to have one. I asked the woman working behind the counter if she would add one of those to my purchase as well. She smiled politely, cut a huge square of the gooey goodness out of the container, and wrapped it up.

I paid for my treats and reminded myself not to skip as I exited the place that would forever be known as "coffee nirvana" in my mind. I only walked a little more slowly down the street than I had walked up the street to get to the coffee shop; I did not want to spill hot latte on myself. I still kept up a pretty fast pace since I was focused on getting to the park as quickly as I could. I flew past the Governor's Pub restaurant where the faint familiar notes of a pop song drifted into my ears. I was so wrapped up in getting to my destination that I actually forgot to look for cars on one of the side streets and was almost run over.

As I passed the karate dojo, my nostrils were bombarded with the stench of sweat and dirty rubber wafting through the open glass door. I sped up a little when I finally got to the last corner before the park. I strutted across the wide street with an overwhelming sense of urgency. I had to get to the park to enjoy my coffee and my treat. In the back of my mind, I also knew I had to figure out why I was sent to the park in the first place.

The grass was soft beneath my shoes. It was such a sharp contrast to the hard concrete sidewalk I had been traveling on, it forced me to slow down and take my time. Somehow, the grass immediately





*Lock Haven in Spring*  
Oil on Canvas  
Paula McHenry

started the relaxation process. Finding the perfect spot to sit made the process even easier.

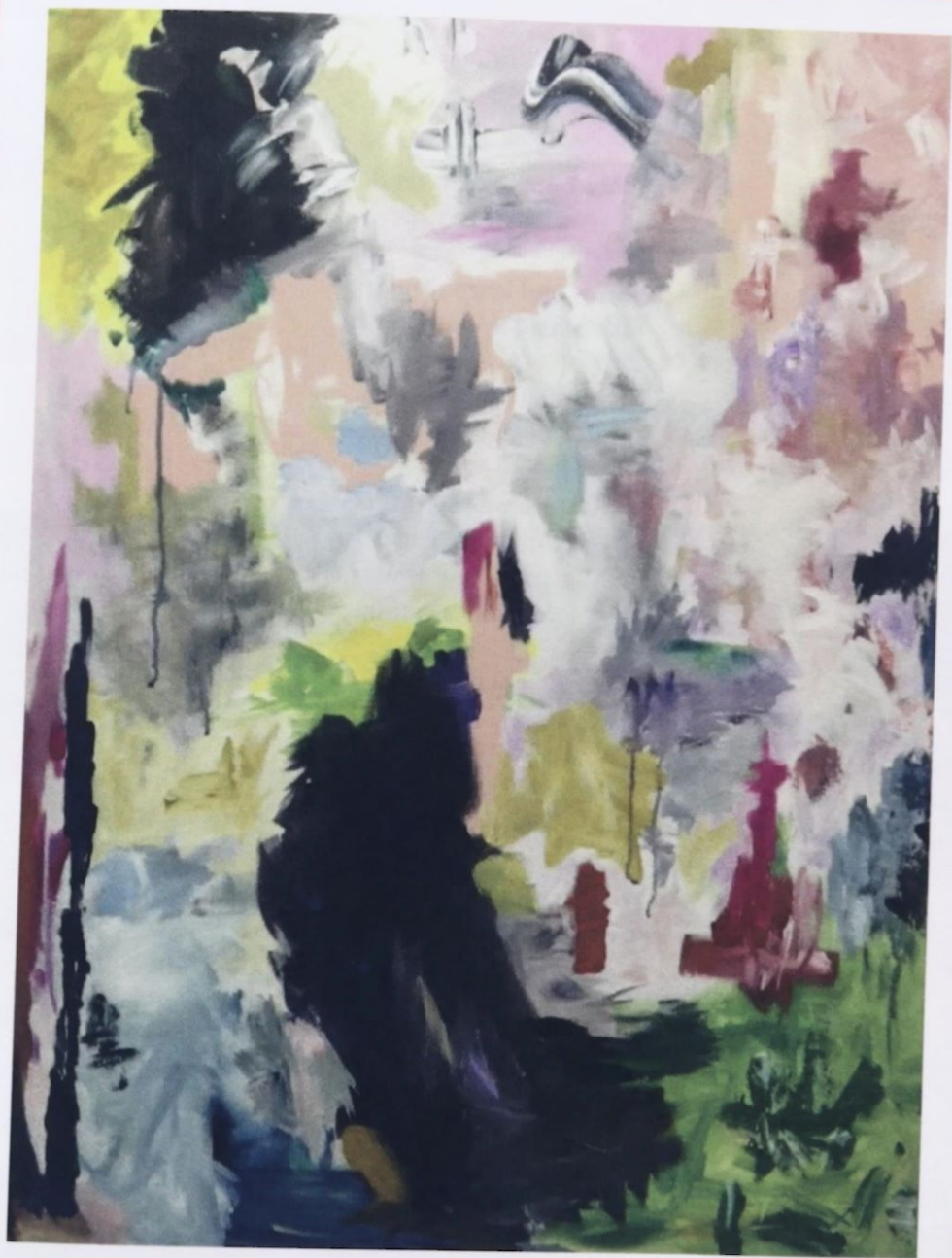
It was a wooden picnic table overlooking the river that ran through the park. The river divided the park perfectly into a colorful child's playground on one side and a lush green area of calm on the other. I sat down on the wooden bench and leaned back against the picnic table. I inhaled deeply and closed my eyes. I smelled the lush green grass and the faint bark smell that came from sitting right next to a tree. I was far enough away from the other park visitors that all I could hear was the rush of the mini man-made "waterfall" and the intermittent quacking of the hundreds of ducks who had made their home at the park. This was a good idea.

I could already feel the serenity of the park flow up from the ground into my body. I opened my eyes and brought my paper coffee cup to my lips. The sweet smelling caramel apple latte tasted as luscious as it sounded. I pulled out my special homemade treat. I may have drooled a little. It looked even better enveloped within the serenity of the park than it did back at the coffee shop. Fruit, pecans, oatmeal, caramel, and other baking essentials had never before been blended in such a way to make as amazing a cookie bar as I held in my hands. I was about to take my first bite when I felt a tap on my sneaker. I looked down and there he was.

The events following my entrance into the park made for such a perfect story for the kids I was practically vibrating with excitement. The table had been set for dinner by the children. I brought the food to the table and began dishing out tiny child-sized portions of vegetables, rice, and baked chicken onto red plastic plates. I remembered the event from the park so vividly I could almost smell the grass at my feet.

Read the rest of the story on our website:  
[www.community.lhup.edu/crucible/2016](http://www.community.lhup.edu/crucible/2016)





*Untitled*  
Oil on canvas  
Kristi Replogle



Welcome to this world,  
we call it Earth.

Grow and learn from us,  
take refuge by our hearth.

Digest all that we know,  
take all of our knowledge.

Test us, we keep you  
safe from the edge.  
Now go off and learn,  
no more with us you stay.

You must make your choices,  
in your own bed must you lay.

We've fed you, we've clothed you,  
taught, nurtured, morals instilled.

Go off with this girl,  
with this choice, both of us you've killed.

No longer we feed you,  
no longer we pay.

Say goodbye, come back,  
choose us, choose us we pray.

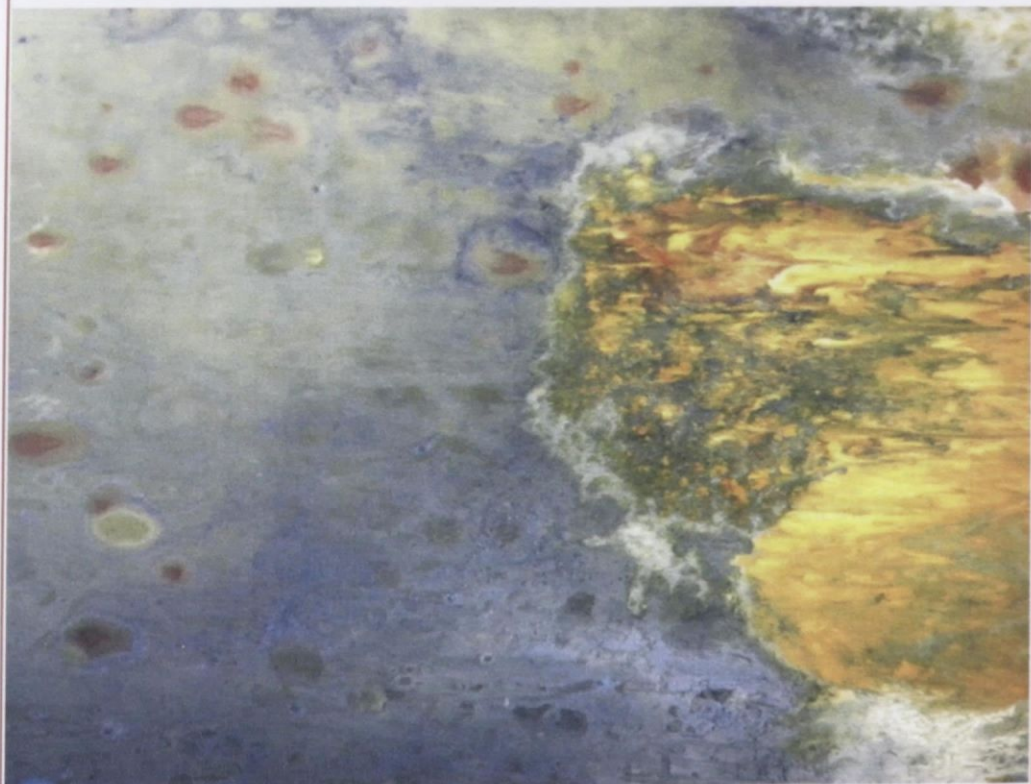
We know you must grow up,  
but why must it be this day?

You say that you love her,  
now we feel so betrayed.

We will always love you,  
it just feels an unfair trade.

Now we are your parents,  
and now she is your wife.

Now we accept it;  
this is your life.



*Complementary*  
Digital Print  
Logan Eck

Fire/Rescue and EMS | Brook Snyder

I would rush into a burning building to rescue you.  
I would give you CPR.  
I would come as fast as I could to you,  
if you have crashed your car.  
For anyone I would put my life on the line,  
whether you're a complete stranger, family, or friend of mine.  
I can use the jaws of life to get you out of a mess,  
and I can give you medical care just as efficient as the rest.  
I can dress your wounds and splint your knee.  
I can save your child from a fire or your kitten from a tree.  
I can pump water from a hydrant and put out your fire.  
I will work through the night even if I grow tired.  
I can go hours without rest and without eating.  
I can give you oxygen if you grow anxious in a meeting.  
There isn't a person I wouldn't help the best that I can.  
In Fire Rescue and EMS you can be a woman or a man.  
I endure long shifts and training when I am able.  
I will repeatedly check your vitals to make sure you are stable.  
In a firetruck or ambulance I can come to you,  
in any emergency, medical, fire, or rescue.  
I do not wish an emergency on anyone,  
but if you do need something, call 9-1-1.



I'm prone to distraction. I'm writing this in an unused room of my house that I have repurposed into a makeshift office. The walls have blue-trimmed panels of rich orange, mostly. I'll finish that project someday. I've hidden the green of the former paint scheme behind other objects for the time being. The chaos of my inner life replicates itself in stacks of partly-read books and other manifestations of assorted clutter. The sprawl continues across the surface of the old dining table that houses my computer. I clear the stacks of unread mail, jotted notes, and oh-that's-where-I-left-thats away from the keyboard and begin to type, sort of.

Distraction has become such a part of the modern routine that I feel empty in the absence of its constant hum. There is the obligatory glance at my email, a status check or two, and possibly a detour on the information highway before I open my document files. Of course, I'll open several. The official designation is multitasking. I like to make no-progress on several projects at once. New efficiencies of the digital age have allowed me to become highly proficient at getting nothing done.

I'm not a Luddite by any means, but my relationship with technology is one of notable dysfunction. The advantages of mobility are lost on people like me. I'm still catching up to the immobile. A living fossil? Sure, I'm a throwback to the primordial age before computing technology became a household reality. I still remember my way around the dial of a rotary phone, and I have even left the confines of the couch in order to change the channel. I'm not pining for the good old days, and I promise not to segue into the story of my two-mile trip to school in a raging snowstorm, but I'm a dinosaur. Change is outpacing my ability to adapt. A brave new world is here, and I'm not ready for it.

I'm the product of a simpler, purer time. The thunderclap of technology was booming on the near horizon, but we were not yet drowning beneath its waves. A trace of the primitive still flowed

through our veins. We had to create our own distractions. Video games still existed in the wild. You could find them in their natural habitat until the arcades disappeared from the strip malls. A group of three or four of us would take the shortcut along the railroad tracks to the local hangout. Seeing Pac-Man on a smartphone is not the same thing. There is something sad about his current confinement to the digital reservation. We used to feed him quarters right out of our hands.

Long before my journey into computing became personal, my uncle introduced me to the modern era. Computers were a novelty then. He was managing a retail store near Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania. Geek culture hadn't arrived in any organized sense, but Uncle Bill was among its forerunners. He certainly loved his technological toys: working replica airplanes, electronic musical instruments, and in that magical time in the late 70s, the wondrous TRS 80. By modern standards, this Stone Age relic was neither pretty nor practical. In its day, it was something of a miracle. The primitive operating system was housed on a tape drive. In the time it took to boot up, a reasonably competent child could have beaten this glorified calculator with an abacus. The screen showed text only; graphics were unheard of at this point. The esoteric privilege of operating this contraption was a mystery known to a privileged few. The thing was unwieldy and marginally functional at best. But it was one of my earliest exposures to computing technology. I was fascinated.

I'm still fascinated. Technology is still a wondrous distraction. Each new electronic device sparkles, captivating our glance for its moment in time. I'm at a strange crossroad in more ways than one. In the recent economic downturn, I've returned to college to pursue a degree in English. Everything has changed. Our concept of humanness is evolving. The ways in which we think, work, play, and communicate have all become fluid. We are adapting. Our new role: sojourners on the information superhighway. One morning, I stood in the hallway, waiting for a room to empty before my next class. I watched a crowd pass by without one of them making eye contact.



We've developed a new posture, head down, thumb-typing, oblivious to our surroundings. We are new creatures. Our DNA is marked with our distraction.

The process is called neuroplasticity. Our Silly Putty brains will mold themselves into the forms established by our habits. Our mental landscapes conform to the topography of our patterns of travel. Retrace familiar roads often enough, and our footpaths become well worn. Our maps are eventually redrawn. Momentum is hard to resist. Patterns are easily formed. Our brains are already predisposed to distraction. Nicholas Carr is an expert on the effects of digital technology on our brains. He notes that in our prehistoric incarnations, this habit allowed us to avoid danger. In an interview with Samantha Murphy, Carr recognizes that early man needed to shift focus quickly. His survival depended on the ability to take in as much information about his environment as quickly as possible. Focus, on the other hand, is a learned behavior that we have developed over time. The development of language, and eventually books, has given us the ability to think more deeply and to develop more sophisticated, abstract modes of thought.

Deep critical thinking requires us to filter out the distractions in our environment. It requires concentration. Most of what we consider consciousness takes place in the portion of our brains known as working memory. It stores a limited amount of information for a limited time. Deep thinking allows us to integrate new information into complex systems known as schemas. These schemas make up the core of our intellect. They give us the raw material out of which we are able to construct new ideas and engage in abstract, creative thinking. The problem with distraction is that it overloads the relatively small capacity of our working memory. It clogs our ability to absorb new information effectively.

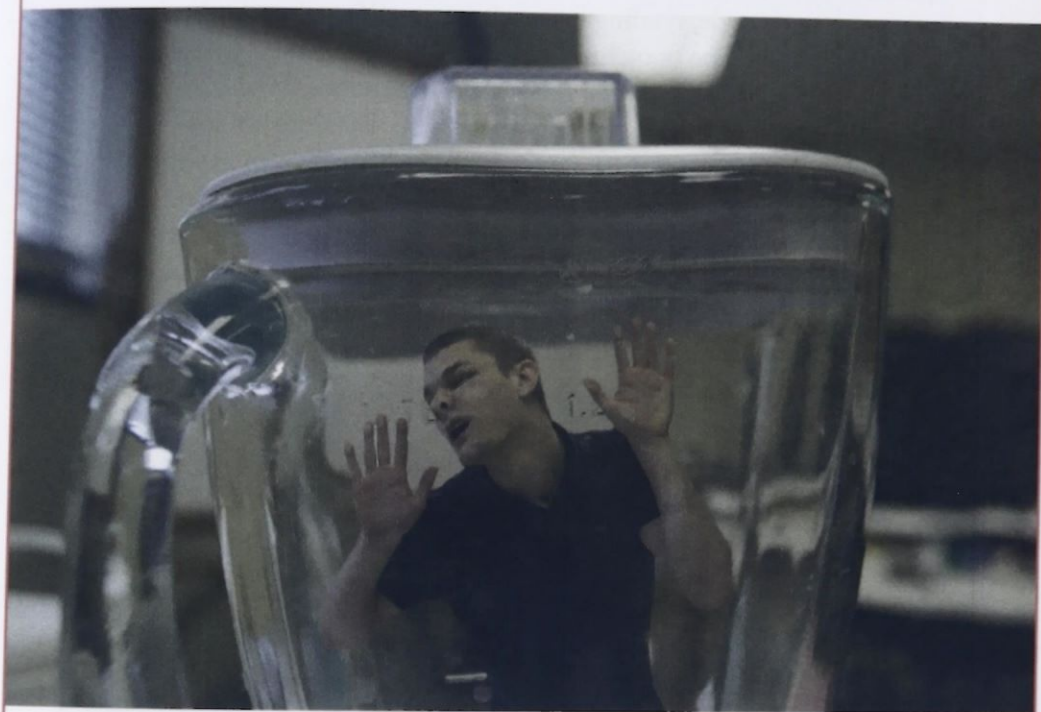
In an interview with William Leith, Carr defines the internet as a distraction machine. The very business model of the web is concentrated on its ability to throw as many distractions, from as many directions, at us as it possibly can. In addition, the very nature of the



media constantly bombards the user with an overload of stimulation. Pop-ups, links, multi-tab configurations, and social media apps running in the background are all vying for our limited attention span.

Carr initially became interested in the distractive nature of the web when he began to notice the deterioration in his own attention span. When he sat down to digest a book or lengthy article, Carr would notice that he had trouble focusing for any length of time. He wondered what role the new technology was having on his ability to concentrate. There are advantages to this technological wonder. For one, the information load that would have once taken weeks to unearth in dusty libraries can now be tracked down in minutes with an electronic search. The web is quickly becoming what Carr refers to as our universal cultural media. With the advent of the smartphone, we not only use the web for everything, we carry it with us everywhere. It now has the ability to distract us while we are walking, driving, or having a quiet dinner with friends. The universal availability of Google is drawing us inescapably into its well of gravity.

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the web is not that it is distracting us, but that it is rewiring us for distraction. Carr writes extensively about the adaptability of our brains. Neuroplasticity is the method by which our brain adapts to our usage patterns. The mind actually alters itself physically to our habitual activities. Neural pathways reroute themselves over time and form patterns that will then establish themselves as the new expression of normal. The web accelerates this tendency because it is similar in function to the natural inclinations of our brain. Our primal urge to shift focus quickly is reinforced by the very nature of the web. Its entire business model is based on getting us to click on as many links as possible. The web bombards us with so many distractions that it is almost impossible to completely avoid them. However, books are, in fact, an unnatural technology. They are arranged in a linear pattern. We read them from front to back, and assimilate the information from them in an ordered linear fashion. Books are something that requires adaptation to process.



*Blender*  
Digital print  
Corey Betush

While researching the subject of neuroplasticity, Carr consulted with experts on brain science, including Maryanne Wolf, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University. While speech is etched into our genetic code, reading is not. It is something that our brains must learn to do. The book has changed the way in which we think and is to some extent the technology which has allowed the concept of the modern human identity to develop. Reading a book and reading from a screen are neurologically very different events. Screen reading is not deep linear absorption as books tend to be. People tend to scan electronic print in an F-shaped pattern. Reading a web page is generally a quick, scrolling search for a particular snippet of information. Electronic reading is not really reading. It is a frenzied hunt for relevant nuggets of information. A book forces us to move our way through it in a linear fashion. We absorb as we go, digging out the information as we read. The Internet reinforces a power-browsing habit, where we skim horizontally for relevant bits of information. We often skip much of the reading and typically absorb much less of it.

Books are one of the few things that have ever held my attention. I devoured them when I was younger. Now distraction rules, even in my reading. I can't manage to focus long enough to keep the steady pace that I once held. We are being reprogrammed for the web. We are redesigning our patterns for the new reading and reinforcing the trend by forming our content around the new patterns.

We may lose books in my lifetime. They no longer meet the needs of our digitally-trained distractible brains. I'll miss them. The connection to ritual is something that I still need. I need to brush the dust off the tattered jacket, to breathe the scent of yellowed paper. I need the tactile feel of the cover in my palms there to remind me that the world, though imaginary, is still solid. The turning of pages weighs on the consciousness with a sense of continuity and a promise of completion. But I've already scrolled down and skimmed the fine-print. The venerable book's days may be as numbered as fading pages.

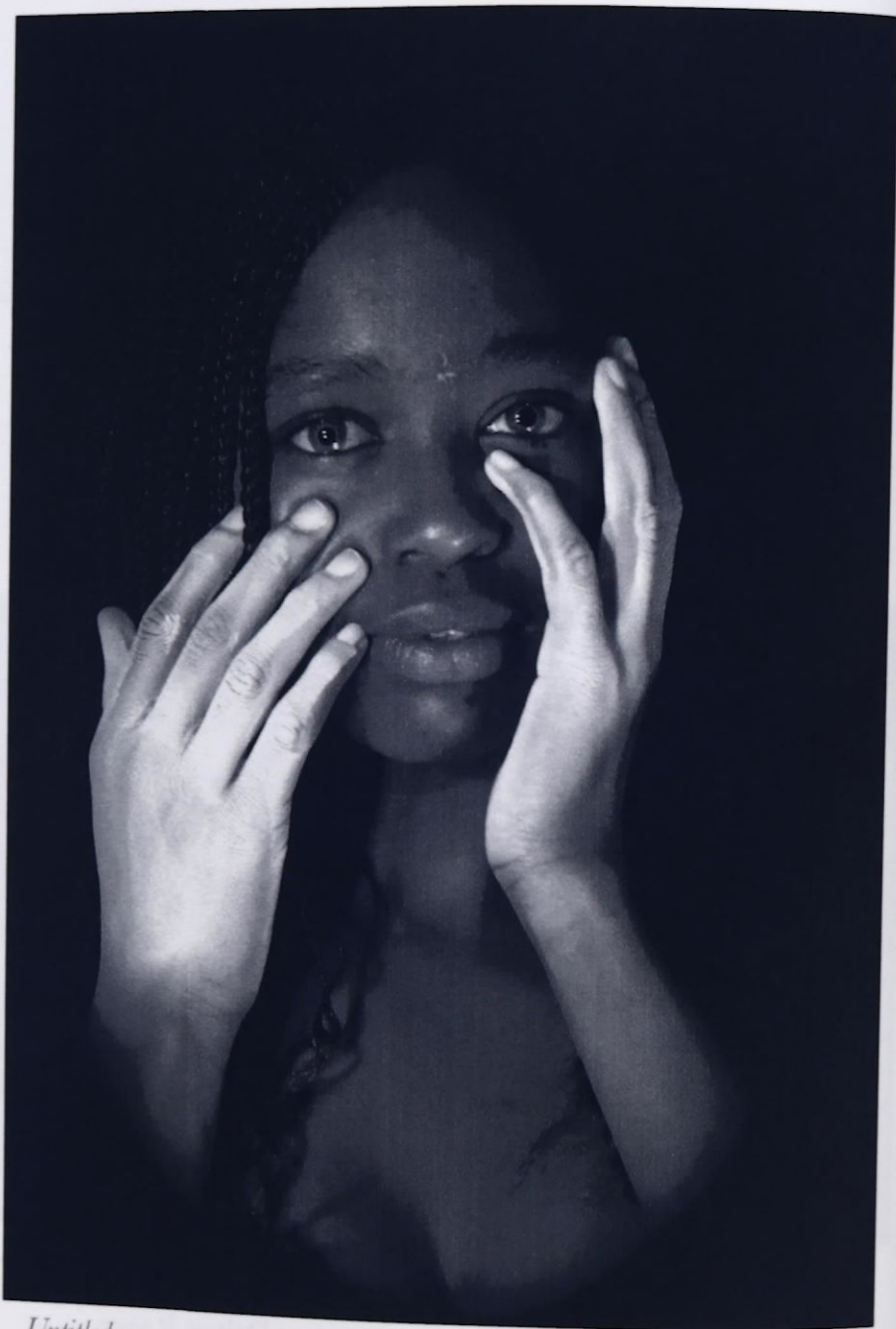


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*Squirrel*  
Digital photograph  
Delton Rager



*Untitled*  
Digital photograph  
Emily Appolonia

All the world is burning, and we don't even know it. It starts at breakfast with the toast in the oven. You run around, panicked, burning calories you don't have, and let the toast char in the oven. When it's pulled out, you find it black, destroyed. You scarf it down anyway. Swearing under your breath, you run out the door and buy a cheap cup of coffee, scalding your tongue. Putrid gasoline burns in your car as you stop and go through the maze of streets. Spinning and screeching as you rush, your tire rubber burns marks into the once-boiling asphalt.

The world turns and the world burns.

Burning the midnight oil at your desk every night, electricity fries and scorches the wires in the walls, in the ceiling, in your computer, in your brain. While you slowly burn your gaze into that screen, the world is burning with you. Men in Honduras and Nigeria are slashing and burning forests for their crops. As they hack through brush, grass, and trees, the fields will soon run red and black as rain washes ashes into the earth.

Over and over, it burns.

In the eastern-most portion of Northern Brazil, the world burns. Men tilled the fields for hundreds of years as their skin blackened and broke open. Now refreshing blue rain refuses to fall from the sky, and the earth bakes. Once fertile soil is now reduced to charred brown hunks, scarred by the deep furrows as the earth dies. The only rain from here is green as corporations and world powers drink down green bills.

The world turns, and the world burns with white tears.

The world is burning. Mile-high smokestacks spew black clouds and red sparks into the air. Rivers, once the lifeblood of nations, run venom green and putrid cyan as their waters burn. The oceans burn and boil as the Earth's stresses force magma onto the seabed. The skies above our head burn as the ozone is shredded. The sky reflects the ocean, and the air reflects the pock-marked, acid



scorched rock. All we see is green and white on paper as the earth turns black and red.

All the world is burning, and it seems there isn't enough water in the oceans to put it out. All the world burns as all the world turns, and we must do something about it.



*Structure*  
Digital Print  
Zach Hommey

As far as I could tell, the place was abandoned, what with its plant overgrowth and rusted-shut windows.

An out-of-place breeze blew across me as I approached the porch of the Victorian townhouse, and the sting of the regular winter cold assisted in the bitter feeling. A dashing of snow was cast across the wood floor, like it had been sprayed on. The wood of the patio creaked under pressure; it was clearly beginning to rot from weather and could snap at any moment.

I raised a hand to knock out of habit, but after realizing I didn't care who resided here, if at all, I slowly pushed open the door and stepped inside. It felt oddly warm, like there was a space heater. Sure enough, off to my left was a space heater, in fully functioning condition. That raised a question. The only things nearby were fields for crops, useless in winter, and a water wheel, also rendered meaningless by the cold. Who could be out here and survive night after night? Who would bother?

I heard footsteps echoing down the stairwell ahead. I wanted to hide but I remained still. If another human existed in this forsaken land, I might stand a chance.

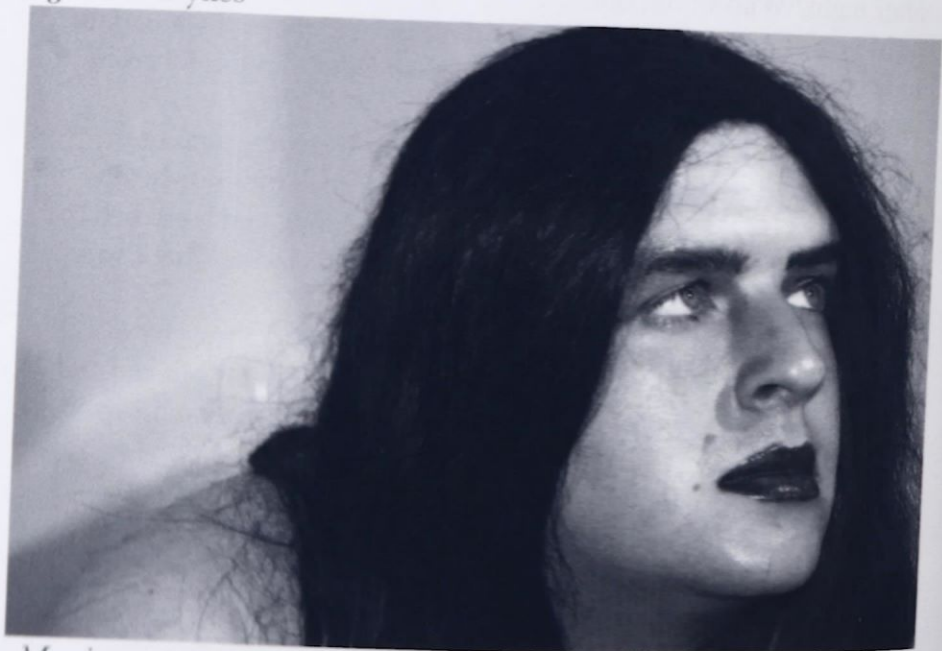
He held a revolver in his hand, his finger twitching against the trigger guard. That didn't bode well. I raised my hands slowly to show that I meant no harm. The moment was long and tense before he finally holstered the weapon and approached, asking what I was doing out here in the countryside.

I left out a few points, but I explained that I was a traveler of sorts and got caught in the impending storm. He simply blinked and gave his name like we were friends. I was reluctant to say mine in return; who knows how this man would react?

Nevertheless, with a nod, he led me upstairs, showing me the house. It turned out he owned the entire property, field and all. It was a family farm, according to him; he never wanted to keep the place but felt he had an obligation, just to keep his sanity.



*Triclops*  
Digital print  
Jordan Dykes



*Morrigan*  
Digital photograph  
44 Savanna Wolfe



Funny how the things that bring the most painful memories can be the most comforting as well.

He escorted me to my temporary room. I figured I might as well make myself at home; the storm was going to last for a few more days. I disapproved of having to take advantage of this man, despite his somewhat welcoming hospitality. At least I was at ease without fear of being booted out.

I had an inkling he knew who I really was, but if he did, he hadn't let on.

I suppose it didn't matter. I had to plan my next move.

I drew from my satchel a map of the land, various x's strewn about marking locations I've been to (and essentially destroyed). I regarded it carefully, but nothing out of the ordinary was visible to my eye, only a pattern of dots that circled around the boundaries of the land. I was frustrated; what reason was there for such a wild chase? Their only goal was capture and return... right?

A knock at the door of my room shook me from my daze. I quickly put away the map and swung open the oaken barrier. The owner stood outside, a cup of bitter coffee in his hand. He gestured to the stairs, allowing me to pass into the kitchen. During the past half hour I spent staring into the void of my map, he had prepared a marvelous feast, set out before me now. A large turkey, buttered corn, apple pie, bread, and butter; it was like Thanksgiving all over again. I could feel myself yearning for the delights.

He tapped my shoulder to get my attention and stated that I could only eat on one condition: explain myself entirely. Why had I left Paradise behind?

I instantly stood frozen, stunned. He obviously knew my name already; it was plastered all over the news, after all. I shouldn't have been so surprised; most who sheltered me asked the same.

Solemnly, I agreed. I was starving and it couldn't be helped, not even for five minutes. I sat down and piled as much as I could onto my plate, scarfing it down. All the while the owner of this rundown shack glanced at me as if I was a work of art. I only had the courage

to speak of the events leading up to my departure once I had a full stomach.

The last president had somehow disappeared from the capitol one day, and shortly after, I was appointed leader, despite my actual lack of experience. With only a goal of assisting the country, I did my best to help the people, but that damned Cabinet did nothing I told them to. They claimed they had a better idea of what the common people wanted. They had years of experience over me, so I went with it. But they passed laws without my consent, overruled my suggestions and orders, and filled their guts and wallets with whatever they could. I was blind for so long but finally had my eyes opened. I had to try something against them.

Gunshots sounded off before I could give a speech, scattering the people and getting security to haul me away. Several more attempts to calm the people were made, but they ended the same. It was only through eavesdropping during congressional proceedings that I came to understand why I had been chosen: as a scapegoat. To be an icon the world over would blame for their downfalls. I needed help, so I fled in search of an army to tear down the government. Apparently, the Cabinet doesn't take kindly to runaways.

I became quiet once more, letting silence become the conversation. The man across the table paused to think. But when he opened his mouth to respond, I caught wind of a sound I feared most.

Barking. They weren't far behind. They had caught up so quickly. How?

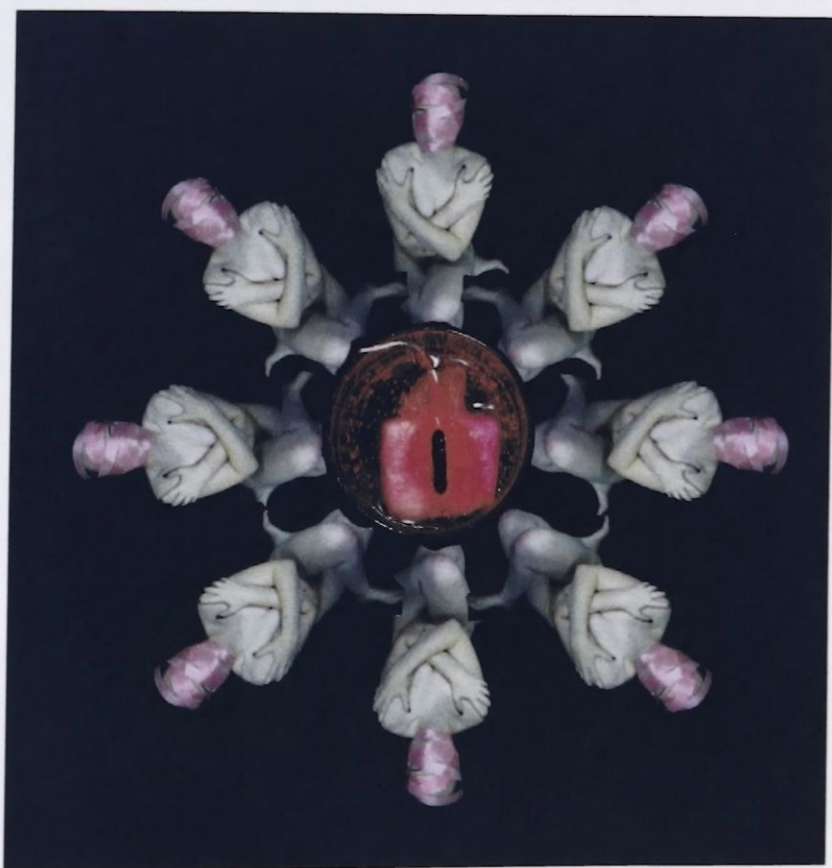
Without warning, the man gripped my collar and dragged me to his basement. It was extremely dark, and as I fumbled for the light switch, I heard a gun click. Would he turn on me now, shoot me dead? Turn me into the authorities?

I managed to hit the light switch. My eyes became as wide as dinner plates as I took in what surrounded me. An entire bunker was full of ammo, weapons and emergency survival supplies laid out on shelves. He seemed well prepared for this type of situation.



He motioned to the guns, that I should arm myself as well. I hardly knew how to shoot, but I was grateful for the defenses nonetheless. I selected my weapons with haste and turned to face him. "You'll be happy to know I'm on your side," he stated boldly. I smiled. How I hadn't recognized him before, I'll never know. "Thank you, Mr. President."

Read "A Short Letter" by this author on our website:  
[www.community.lhup.edu/crucible/2016](http://www.community.lhup.edu/crucible/2016)



*Flower*  
Digital Print  
Emily Appolonia



I

I thought my grandmother was just old. Old people have bad memories, right? That much is common knowledge. My parents are in their fifties and even they are starting to show lapses in memory. My mother habitually calls me by the dog's name without realizing it, and I'm convinced that the only reason my dad can ever remember what he had for breakfast is because the only thing he'll eat in the morning is oatmeal. Human memory isn't perfect in the first place. I usually can't even remember where I sit for my classes, and I'm barely twenty-one. But my grandmother, Nana (as we affectionately called her), wasn't just old.

I still remember the exact moment that I realized this. My parents and I had met up with my grandparents at Gilligan's, one of the few restaurants my grandfather, Roy, would actually agree to go to in his stubborn old age. The man loved Old Grand-Dad, and Gilligan's was one of the few places around that didn't water down their whiskey, or so he claimed.

I ate hot wings with the ravenous hunger of a thirteen-year-old who didn't care for adult conversation. I paid no attention to their talk of finances and mortgage payments. If I had, I might have noticed that Nana barely spoke. I might have even noticed her hands trembling and her eyes squinting to recognize her dining companions. She was losing motor control in her hands, which I later learned was a result of the carpal tunnel syndrome she developed while writing letters to my grandfather during the Vietnam war.

I had very long hair that curled down to my shoulders, which was a popular trend for middle school boys at the time (one that most of us would rather forget). I greatly resembled my mother with this hair, which I suppose was a direct cause of Nana's confusion. Five children and ten grandchildren were too many for her to keep straight with her brain slowly losing functionality.

"Boy," Nana began, obviously interrupting my father mid-sentence, "she eats well!"



*Untitled*  
Digital Photograph  
Yuqi Zhao

My dad chuckled until my mom elbowed him hard in the side. Roy froze. He stared at his wife with a look of familiar fear on his face. This was more than just a comical misunderstanding to him. He knew what his wife's confusion meant for her—for their—future.

"Jeanne," Roy said after a few moments of silence. He was cautious in his proceeding. He didn't want to alarm her. "That's your grandson, Tyler. Tim's boy."

"Oh!" Nana cried out. "Tony! Your hair is so long!"

"No, Jeanne, that's Tyler," Papaw told her. "Tony is the older one." My parents stared at Nana as she tried to understand.

Shit. I sat in my chair wide-eyed, waiting for someone to say something.

She thought I was a fuckin' girl! I panicked. Do I laugh it off? No, none of them are laughing. I glanced down at my plate of hot wings and lost my appetite. My stomach churned and I wanted to vomit, but I collected myself in order to deliver a non sequitur. I wished to distract myself, as well as my parents, from the awkward mistake Nana had made. "Yeah, I think I ate too fast!"

Nana and my parents laughed, but my grandfather remained sternly silent. My grandmother had no idea what had just happened. She laughed and went back to eating with trembling, unsteady hands.

What the hell is wrong with my grandma? I asked myself. She doesn't know who I am. Nana doesn't even know who I am. As I panicked, my grandmother returned to her fruitless effort of cutting her steak with a butter knife. She went at it for several minutes before her husband noticed and discreetly cut her meat for her.

## II

My grandfather was stubborn—so stubborn, in fact, that he refused to listen to my father and uncles tell him that Nana had to be moved to a nursing home. She would hit him violently each time she forgot who he was, leaving bruises and cuts that he couldn't hide from his concerned sons. Yet he insisted on keeping her at home with him. He could handle the occasional beatings. He'd fought in



three wars, been run over by a jeep while invading Germany, and sprinted through shattered glass in his bare feet in Vietnam. If he did all of that for the love of his country, I believed that he would be willing to do far more for his wife.

But eventually Nana became too much for him to handle. She beat the nurses that Roy hired to come to their home. She answered the front door naked. She screamed in restaurants and threw food. She needed to be in a nursing home—in an Alzheimer's unit, a place that was equipped with trained staff to take care of her and protect her and other patients from the damage they could easily cause each other. My grandfather finally agreed, but not without first deliberating for months and hearing passionate pleas from his family, who wanted nothing more than Nana's health and safety. It was a long process, but Nana was eventually moved to an Alzheimer's unit, away from her husband, whom she barely recognized anyway.

The first time I visited Nana in the nursing home was nerve-wracking. I hadn't wanted to go, but my father insisted and had my older brother join us so as to make me feel more comfortable. Every excuse in the book was employed: homework, headache, stomachache, even yard work, but none served to free me from the unsettling trip. The walls of the place were sickly yellow, and the open doors of the residents' bedrooms allowed us to see that the rooms were dark, barely lit by dim lamps with tiny switches that I couldn't imagine Nana's fingers being able to grip. The paintings on the walls were all of dark and grey ocean scenes, creating a forced sense of serenity. I was particularly struck by the presence of keypads at each door that led out of the Alzheimer's unit. Can't they just watch the caretakers enter the number and let themselves out? But they couldn't. I watched several residents push against the doors with what little strength they had left, desperate to get out and return to their families and homes. I watched others bump into the doors as though they were the pale yellow walls that made me sick to my stomach. The oblivious residents would readjust their courses to

compensate before returning several minutes later to collide with the same wall or door.

The halls were silent. The patients spoke rarely, if at all, producing only the occasional incoherent mumble. The caretakers spoke even less. Pushing patients in wheelchairs and feeding them, the employees of the facility treated the patients as though they were paperwork at an office job, going through the motions with no visible compassion or interest. They preferred to communicate using facial expressions, smiling at us with a distinctly apologetic look of pity as we walked toward one of the common rooms. My grandfather would later accuse the employees of neglecting to bathe and groom his wife, as their occupation required them to do. Whether he had a legitimate reason for concern or he simply needed to take out his stressed aggression on someone, I can't say.

"You're late," my grandfather said. He sat with his wife, holding her shaking hands. There was a man sitting in a chair across from them. He could have been part of the group, but he only sat there in a seemingly comatose state, dull eyes staring into nothing. He could have been a permanent installment in the room, sitting and staring for days on end as caretakers walked by him. They had no reason to bother him; he couldn't hurt himself sitting in an armchair.

"No, I told you we'd be here between two and two-thirty." I glanced at my brother's watch and saw that it was two-twenty. My grandfather grunted with displeasure anyway, even after being proven wrong. "Hey, Mom," my dad said. "We—"

"We're supposed to call her Jeanne now," said my grandfather. "She doesn't know who Mom is." He turned toward Jeanne and pointed toward us. "Jeanne, you remember Tim, don't you? He's your third son, after Tom and—"

"Dad, you're gonna confuse her."

"—Terry. And these are his boys, Tony and Tyler. You remember them, right? And I'm Roy, your husband." Jeanne was silent for a few moments before making an odd noise halfway between a cough and a silent laugh. From that day until the day she died, it



was the only sound I heard her make. It was as though she wanted to speak but couldn't open her mouth. Her tongue wouldn't move the way she wanted it to. Her throat wouldn't—no, couldn't—push the air out.

Roy rubbed her hands with his, comforting her. She looked afraid in her new home, not that it was much of a home. She shared a room with a woman who called everybody Mike. I don't know if she thought everyone was named Mike or if she thought everyone was a Mike that she had known before her time in the nursing home. I didn't care either way. She didn't scare me, but seeing her made me glad my grandmother couldn't talk. I didn't want to hear what she would say with a damaged and slowing brain formulating her thoughts. I imagined she would have asked for help, not fully understanding that neither science nor family could free her from the bonds of the building's eerie, yellow walls.

### III

Roy visited Jeanne every day—every day—until she died. And he didn't just visit, he would spend hours with her, making sure she was well groomed and exercised. He had nothing else to do with his time. He wanted nothing else to do. Jeanne loved to walk laps in the halls of the Alzheimer's unit, even after she became bound to a walker. She seemed to be the only one who could walk without somebody having to hold her hand and guide her. But I knew she was only wandering without a destination, reaching the end of each hall and turning around, just to return to the same dead end minutes later.

As Jeanne's health declined, so did Roy's. He was constantly stressed, worrying about when Jeanne's next emergency trip to the hospital would be or when he would get to take her out of the unit to dinner at one of their favorite restaurants. He lost weight and rarely left his house except to visit his wife. He was distracted at all times, leaving water running in the sink and frequently forgetting to put in his hearing aids. His wrinkled skin sagged more than ever before and his eyes seemed to lose their ability to focus. It was hard



to talk to him. He forced away anyone who tried to console him or divert his attention from his wife for even a moment.

One day, while Roy was with Jeanne in the hospital after a fall, my father and I went with my uncle Ted to my grandfather's house. We scoured the entire home for firearms and hidden bottles of liquor. I found a shotgun in his closet that my dad took home for safekeeping. My uncle found a bottle of whiskey behind the couch and another in the bathroom, under the sink. We took his straight razor and replaced it with a nice expensive electric one—one that he couldn't use to cut his wrists open, should his wife die.

The house was different without Jeanne. It looked exactly the same as it had before, but all noise seemed to die inside. When my father, uncle, and I left, there would be no conversations or pleasant exchanges. There wouldn't be a happily married couple sitting in matching chairs in the living room. When we left, the house would remain silent. Roy would return and be alone—painfully alone, with little other than memories of his wife to keep him company. He would drive alone to the nursing home the next day, sit alone with an oblivious woman beside him, and return home to sleep alone again.

I visited Nana in the hospital a few days before she died. I held her hand, but didn't want to say goodbye to a woman I didn't even know. She was different now. Still the same body, but her memory wasn't there. Her personality wasn't there, not that I'd known her personality before the onset of her disease. She couldn't laugh or cry or even smile at her husband. This wasn't Nana.

I chatted with my aunt and cousin when they arrived. We hadn't seen each other in some time and shared a few laughs to lighten the mood, but Roy wouldn't allow it.

"For Christ's sake, be quiet!" he shouted. He gave each of us a furious look of disdain and returned his gaze to his wife, where it became a sad and fearful stare. My aunt and cousin were afraid for Roy. They'd lost their son and brother abruptly a year before. They experienced the pain of a sudden death, but Roy was experiencing



*Untitled*  
Digital photograph  
Caitlin Mallory

Jeanne's death with each passing moment, desperate to hold onto his beloved wife for as long as he could. To witness a slow death of a loved one unable to articulate her thoughts, unable to understand her situation, must be worse than simply discovering a body.

#### IV

At Jeanne's funeral, my mother told me to approach the casket with my father. I didn't want to. I'd never seen a dead body before, but I went anyway, watching my father shed tears as he looked down on the woman who raised him and his four siblings as their father fought in wars and worked for the state.

"She looks good," my father said, remaining upright with his hands in front of him so as to not allow his emotions to be visible from behind him. "She looks like Nana." I knew what Jeanne looked like, but I couldn't remember Nana. But she did look different. She looked as though she was dressed by someone who cared about her appearance rather than a caretaker who simply dealt with the sick geriatrics until his shift was up. The makeup made her look younger, supposedly restoring her body to the days before she started forgetting. Saying nothing, I gently clapped my hand on his back as I turned to walk away.

Roy had fought in three wars. He witnessed true evil and the extent of human desperation. He was a hardened man who refused to show emotions, but I saw him cry that day. Roy bawled like a child from the service's start to its finish, with one of my more religious aunts reassuring him that Jeanne was in a better place, saying whatever she could to calm him down. I disagreed with her afterlife idea, but I hold the belief that to cease existing entirely would still be better than living in an Alzheimer's unit, unaware that you even had a life outside of the pale walls and locked doors.

But Roy, as with all grieving spouses, didn't want Jeanne to be anywhere but beside him, holding his trembling hands as his tears fell to the floor.



## V

Roy orders a water. There's no alcohol in his system these days, and he's actually willing to go to Red Lobster rather than Gilligan's. He's gained weight back since Jeanne's death, is well-groomed, and generally open to conversation more than when he was caring for his wife. He smiles and asks about Cole and Chase—my nephews, his grandsons.

"They're good, last I saw 'em," I say.

"Cole starts tee-ball this week," my father adds.

"What's that?" Roy reaches for his ear and turns his hearing aid up.

"Tee-ball," my dad repeats. "Cole's starting tee-ball."

"Oh, right. Okay."

His water arrives with a lemon slice. Years earlier, Roy would have sent the water back, reminding the waitress rudely that he asked for water without a lemon. My father knows this well, having tried countless times in years past to convince Roy to simply remove the lemon himself.

"You want me to take your lemon, Dad?"

"Huh?" Roy realizes the mistake. "Oh, no, that's fine. I like a lemon slice once in awhile." He invites us back to his new apartment at a retirement home, having moved out of the house he and Jeanne shared. He seems to have adjusted well, making friends out of people that he wouldn't have even acknowledged years ago. We've even heard from other residents that he's a helpful gentleman who won't let a woman carry a pencil back to her room unassisted, let alone a package. He's a changed man. Calm. Happy. Friendly.

We agree to play cards with him. The old man may be forgetful, but he knows how to count cards. My father and I are guaranteed to lose as he laughs at our aggravated groans.

After three hands he speaks up. "How's Cole and Chase?"

"Dad, we talked about this already," my father answers. I shuffled the deck and listened with minor concern.

"Huh? Cole and Chase. Tyler's boys."

My dad and I exchange glances. Roy's mental slips are nothing



*Charlie, 1*  
Digital photograph  
Caitlin Mallory

new to us. Sometimes he thinks I'm his nephew rather than grandson. It's nothing we haven't dealt with before. But Roy is different from Jeanne. She had Alzheimer's disease, and it tore Roy to pieces for years, testing his willpower like no war ever could. But again, Roy is different. He's just old. He drives his car to lunch and cuts his own steaks, conversing with waitresses in a coherent and intelligent manner—something that could not be said about Jeanne late in her life.

He hugs both my father and me when we leave—something that old Roy would have never done. But he's happier now, and in his best shape in years. He waves to us as we pull out of the parking lot. He's not sad to see us leave because he has a life of his own now. His eyes shine, as though they'd been freshly polished. I turn in the passenger seat of my father's car and watch as Roy holds the door for a stranger and walks back into the building to join his friends and acquaintances and women who think he's charming. Roy isn't alone anymore. His hands are in his pockets, calm and still.



I woke up to nothing at all. A literal black stained the landscape around me. Sure, there were mountains and trees and valleys, but there was nothing. No wind, no sound, no sun. Black was all I saw.

I started up and gasped for breath, feeling my neck for something that didn't exist anymore. My invisible heartbeat shot up as I realized what happened. Everything had finally come full circle. I looked down at my hands and saw only the outline of them in the sharp contrast of the light; the same applied to the rest of my body. I, too, was nothing at all.

"Why, hello there," rasped a voice. The sound was that of a snake mixed with human speech and put me on alert. I swiveled my head to see a cloaked figure standing by what looked like a fire. The fire was black and white, yet somehow seemed brighter than everything else. "Please come closer," said the figure again. "I won't harm you."

Very afraid of this man—I could assume it was a man based on the voice—I hesitated to draw near. My legs froze and my arms shook; my own head still pounded from the transition. Aware of this, the figure turned his head to look at me. I saw his face, a skull attached to a body of bones. The one my gothic friends raved about: The Grim Reaper.

Immediately, I regained my senses and crawled backwards into a tree, pressing myself away from the demon before me. I let out a shout of fright and desperation, which only made the Reaper stand and come closer. He left his scythe at the fire, probably to use later to execute me again. I buried my face in my hands and began to sob, calling out, "No! Go away! Please! Leave me alone!"

"Hush, child, all is right," said the Reaper. He came even closer, even when I kicked out at him to shoo him off, and knelt by my side. "I only wish to talk." He suddenly scooped me up with his arms and began to carry me. I felt a strange sense of ease and trust wash over me, and I burrowed my face into the skeletal chest. I'm still unsure



*It's All Rot in the End*  
Digital photograph  
Chris Jones

as to what made me do that.

The Reaper brought me back to the fire and held me in his lap for a while, making no sound, not interrupting my sobs. The crackle of the fire mixed with my sorrow, and I felt warm once again. It never occurred to me how odd this scenario was. Wasn't the Reaper supposed to judge me or something? Why am I sitting with him, bawling like a child?

Eventually he let go and I instantly moved off to another seat close to the flames, sniffing and wiping my eyes and nose dry.

"Tell me," said the Reaper. "Why are you so afraid?"

"Because...because I've died, that's why," I replied weakly.

"I've gone and ruined everything."

The Reaper gave a tsck sound. "Well, what you've done deserves punishment. However, that is not my place to decide. We have a long way to walk, so if you feel ready to move on...we should go."

I slowly nodded my head and stood, turning away from the dark fires. He snapped his rickety fingers and put the fire out, then started to march towards a tall mountain in the distance. "Come. The gate to the afterlife is at the top." This puzzled me. Was I not already in the afterlife? Or was this some sort of—

"I would welcome you to this place, but I am not sure what to call it," The Reaper's words cut into my thoughts. I quickly followed after him and tried to keep pace. For a skeleton with a cloak, he was a fast walker. "You called it something, though I cannot place the name. It began with a 'P'..."

"Purgatory?"

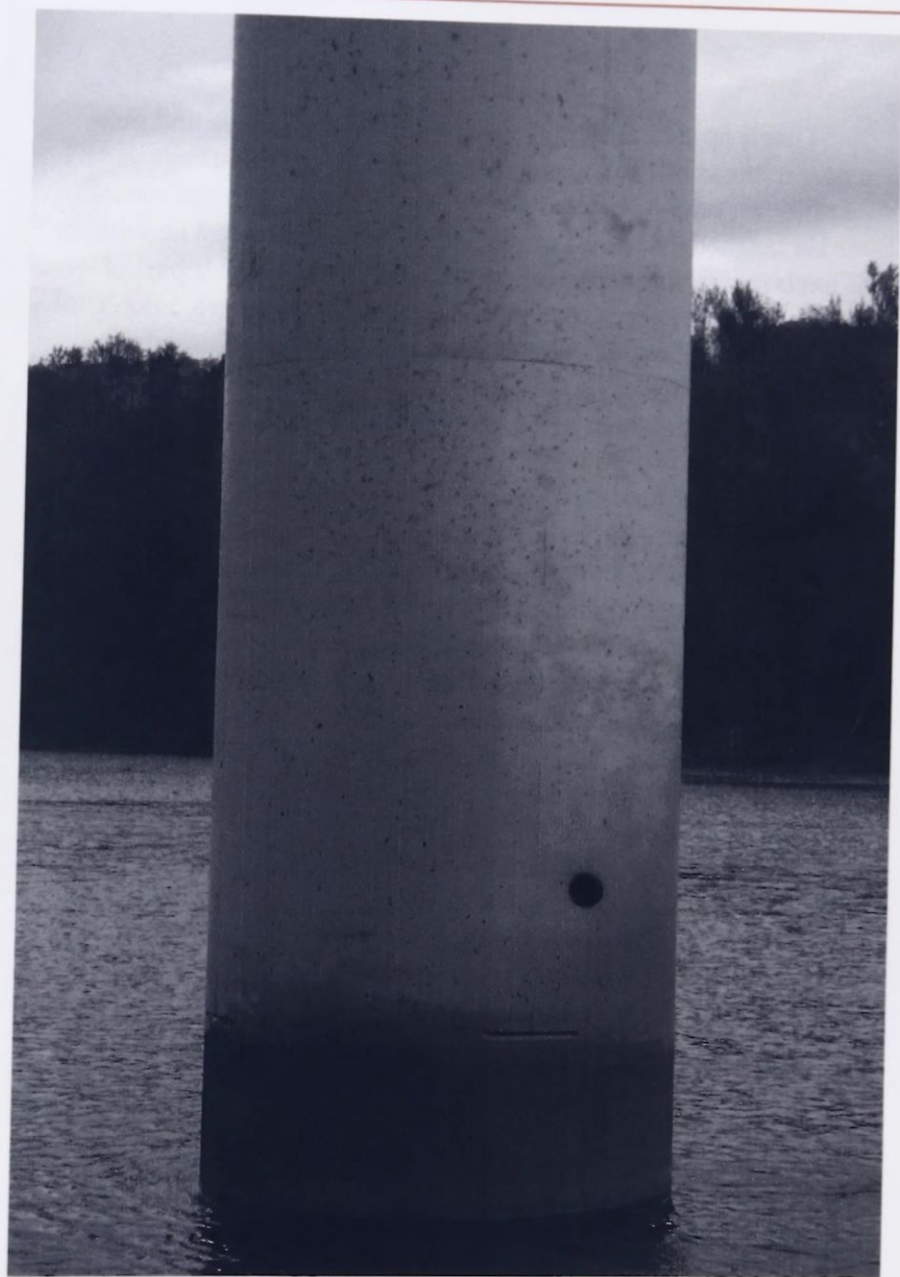
"Yes, that's it! Thank you."

Silence befell us briefly as we trudged up a well-used trail on the mountainside, weaving our way through black trees and still, gray rivers. I didn't like it at all and wanted to leave as soon as I could. But while I was stuck here, I might as well try to talk to this somewhat kind and caring deathbringer. "Reaper—"

"Please, call me Gris."

"...okay, Gris. What exactly happens next?" Gris shrugged.





*Untitled*  
Digital photograph  
Vance Godfrey

"That is up to the Fates, not me. I am merely a guide and messenger to those who fall into the clutches of death."

"But isn't that your job?"

He laughed, heartily, I might add. "Oh no, dear me," he said. "That is merely a misconstrued truth. That is no longer a part of my eternal task. Erebus took that away from me eons ago. I don't miss it at all. In fact, I revel in being free of that title. You see, I prefer having a lively talk with the souls of the dead rather than forcefully bringing them to their final rest. It's much more relaxing and stress-free."

This was not how the Reaper was presented to me when I was alive. He was supposed to be a nasty and evil being who would snatch away someone to the afterlife whenever he pleased. I wasn't taught that he would be more of a friend than a foe. Perhaps this would be better. Perhaps that's why I felt at ease in his arms.

"By the way, may I ask your name?" he inquired.

I took a gulp of air and replied, "Adam."

Not that a name makes a difference now. I didn't bother to question how he knew what I'd done but not my name. Gris put a bony finger to his jaw.

"Ah, a name befitting one who should have sought after creation instead of ruining possible great ones."

"There was nothing left for me to do, okay?" I retorted. For the first time in a long time, I was frustrated. "I had nothing to offer; I only took everything away. I'm useless and pointless. It's better that I'm dead."

Gris said nothing for a short moment, probably to process my thoughts. "Well, it's not my position to chide you for your actions. I do believe that you could have done better, but that's just my opinion. I can have one, too."

Before I could reply, we reached the top of the mountain. On the plateau was a large and rising gate that looked to be made of marble and gemstones. I took a step closer, captured in awe and wonder. "Where does this lead?" I asked.

"That is to the Court. Your final fate will be decided there."  
The Reaper placed a hand on my shoulder. "I'm not supposed to influence any soul's fate, but you seem like a nice fellow. I'll put in a good word for you."

I nodded. It was a kind gesture, one I surely hadn't seen for so long. "So... I'll see you again?"

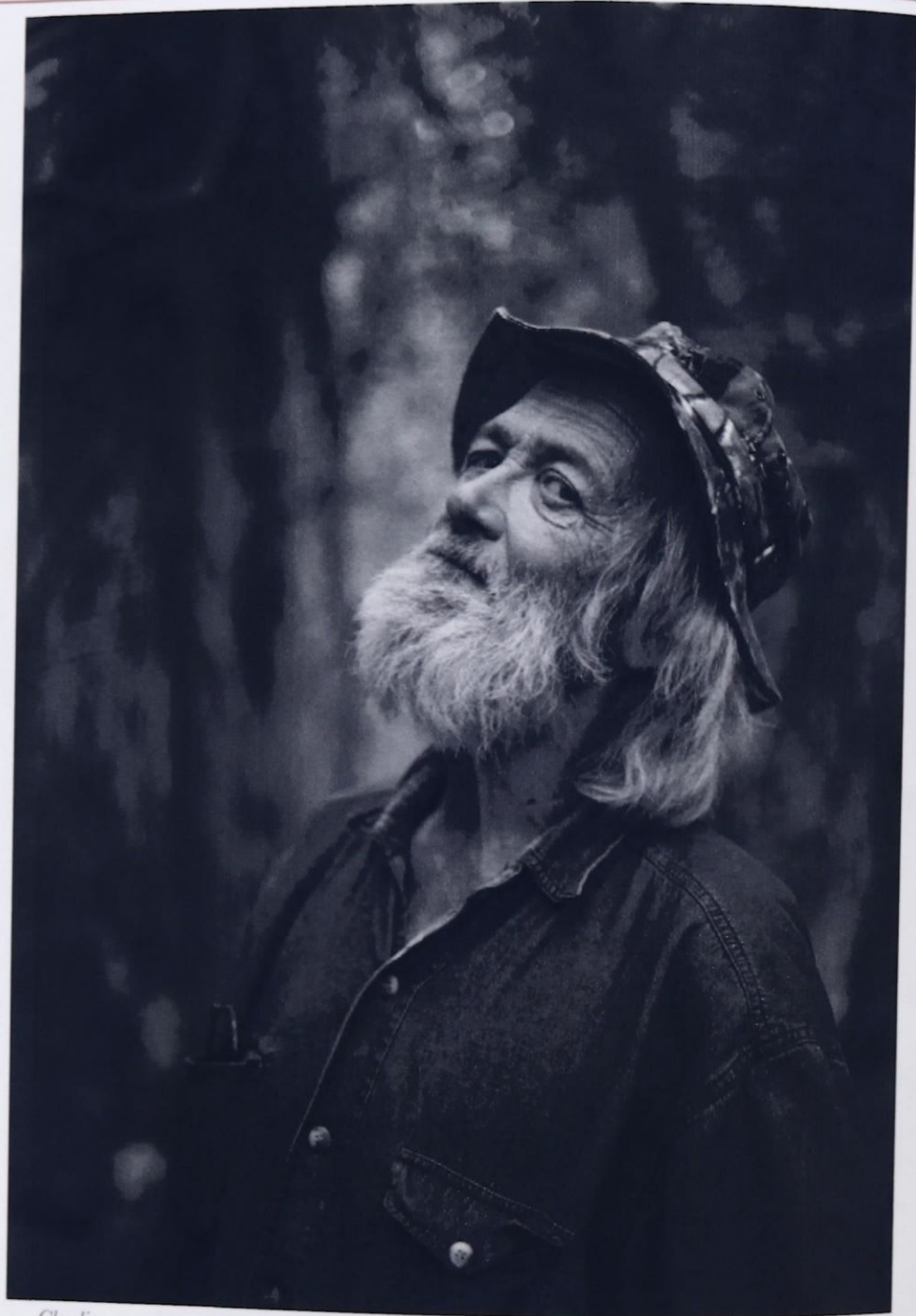
Gris shook his skull. "I'm afraid not. I can't pass through there as my place is here. Once you go through, you won't be able to come back." So I would lose my newest friend. Some things never change.

I turned to look at him once more. He seemed a bit sad, now that I think about it. Perhaps he was like that every time a soul left his realm. "Well...goodbye, Gris. It was...nice of you to guide me here."

"I wouldn't let anyone go alone. That's simply rude." I swear the Reaper smiled. "You go have fun in Heaven now. I have a post to keep."

I turned and stepped through the gate, letting it shut behind me.





*Charlie*  
Digital photograph  
66 Caitlin Mallory

## Author Biographies

Anjelica Cromatie is a junior 3+2 Pre-PA major.

Tyler Dinsmore is a senior English major with a writing concentration. He is from Lewisberry, PA and is a member of the Lock Haven University Rugby Football Club.

Michael Eubanks is a junior English major.

Tabitha Dawn Fisher is a sophomore with an English writing concentration. In her free time, she works at the writing center and helpdesk at the library, enjoys Phi Sigma Pi Honors Fraternity activities, and loves Sailor Moon.

Dakota Griffis is a freshman Criminal Justice major. She originates from Jersey Shore, PA and has many hobbies including Competitive Cheerleading.

Josephine Sallo Johnson is a freshman Criminal Justice and Social Work major.

Conor Kyser is a junior Psychology major. He says that his main goal in writing is to understand the world.

Justin David Nobrega is a freshman studying Secondary Education/Social Studies. Although he is from Pleasant Gap, PA, he spent much of his childhood in New England (specifically Rhode Island). His hobbies include writing, reading, history, and card games. His poem was written in high school as a gift for someone before being published in *The Crucible*.

Celina Ouellette is a junior Exercise Science major. She was born and raised in Rhode Island. She has resided in Pennsylvania for nine years now with her three children. She has a passion for the medical field and a love of literature, which she hopes to instill in her children as they grow with her through this experience.

Brook Adele Snyder is a senior Psychology major from Wellsboro, PA. She is an EMT/Firefighter who loves to serve the community. She loves to sing and write, and she is involved with Bible studies, Big Woods Bible Church, and NewLife Student Fellowship. When she isn't spending time with her family, she plays sports, snowboards, and enjoys hunting and fishing. Brooke sends a special thank you to her friends who have always encouraged her to write!

Timothy Squier is a freshman from Latrobe, PA. His hobbies include extensive video game playing, roleplaying, and creating fictional worlds.

Melissa Weber is in her first year at LHU. She is majoring in English with a concentration in writing.

Trent Wisler is a junior Secondary Education English major. He is from York, PA and can be found juggling or hanging out with friends in his free time. This is his first submission to *The Crucible*, but he really enjoys writing. He recently finished a novel which he started in 7th grade. He is working avidly to get it published.



## Artist Biographies

Delton O. Rager is a super-senior graduating with a B.A. in Writing and Advertising/Public Relations. Photography is a hobby of his which he hopes to incorporate into a career. The little beastie featured in this journal is one of his "first victims." He captured the squirrel in late spring 2015 with his Canon EOS Rebel with a 55-250 mm lens.

Paula McHenry is a first semester junior pursuing a B.A. in French and Art. The plein air piece featured in this journal was created during the first oil painting class she took at Lock Haven University. The central tree is located at Riverview Park in Lock Haven, and between its branches LHU's main campus can be spotted. She aspired to capture the bright morning sunlight of April, as well as some of the emerging vibrant colors of spring.

Jessica Streeter is a graduating senior. She tries to communicate a body positive message through her artwork. *Bumps and Curves* is a digital photograph which celebrates the uniqueness of the human body, and *Sun Salutations*, a mixed media piece, is about embracing our femininity.

Chris Jones is a senior art student. The intent of his work can be described as follows: "We spend our lives searching for something, never really knowing what that something is. Live in the now, because it's all rot in the end."

Zach Hommey is a sophomore at Lock Haven University. His work consists of silhouetted photographs manipulated in Photoshop.

Logan Eck graduated from the Lock Haven art program in December 2015 with a B.F.A. in Studio Art.

Kristi Replogle is a senior working towards a B.F.A. in Studio Art.

Savanna Wolfe is a second semester senior who has taken interest in utilizing her skills in makeup to create figures that convey mystery and androgyny. In this particular piece she made over a dear friend with dark colors and a black wig, placed them in her bathtub and asked them not to look at the camera. She wants to give the viewer the desire to know more about the figure and give them the incentive to look at them up close, as if the figure is beckoning to them. It is that kind of attraction that makes a successful portrait.

Jordan Dykes is a senior graphic and online design major. His inspiration for the piece *Triclops*, which appears in this journal, was a photographer named Jerry Uelsman. Uelsman creates wild surreal images with his photos. Jordan was inspired to make a dream-like work of his own.

Caitlin Mallory is a Graphic Design major from Mill Hall, PA. She is a nature enthusiast and photographer. The series which appears in this journal shows the connection between nature and humans. Charlie (the subject) lives in a camper on a plot of land owned by a friend. He's been living there since the 70's when he returned from Vietnam. He uses no modern technology and has a deep love for the outdoors.

Corey Betush is a senior art student working towards a B.F.A. in Graphic Design.

Yuqi Zhao is a senior studying Graphic Design.

Vance Godfrey is a sophomore studying Graphic Design.

Emily Appolonia is senior working towards a B.F.A. in Graphic Design.

Jeff Foulsham is a junior art major.

Joanna Harlow is the art editor of *The Crucible* and president of the Fine Arts Society. She is also vice president of the English Club, online editor for the *Eagle Eye*, and student ambassador to the Clinton County Arts Council. She has a strong interest in politics and literature which she incorporates into her visual work.

