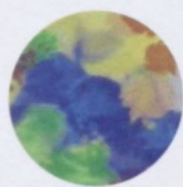


THE
CRUCIBLE
2019-2020



Expulsion

The Crucible
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The Crucible
Expulsion



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Preface

The word “*expulsion*” generally refers to the act of casting out something or someone. Throughout each individual’s life, expulsion is experienced in one form or another, whether they are removing a fly from their car by opening a window or casting out a thought by writing it in the form of a poem. The pressure of feelings can be relieved easily by eliminating the chatter of the fly or the buzz of torturing thoughts.

This year’s edition of *The Crucible* examines various themes of expulsion and expression as the writers and artists relieve their minds by putting their pens to the paper, brushes to canvas, hands to clay, and eyes to lens. Their pieces burst with the need to express a wondrous experience or with the desire to expel negative thoughts through their creation. In a world where one can be stifled by biting back thoughts, holding the tongue with a firm grip, the act of expulsion, of shouting consciousness into the world, is a freedom we embrace and encourage.

What you will see beyond here, encapsulated in the fine works of our authors and artists, is the expelling of words to paper, of thoughts and emotion to physical substance. In this year of Lock Haven University’s 150th Anniversary, we, the editors, are proud to display the creative expression of our fellow students for the 80th time since *The Crucible’s* creation.

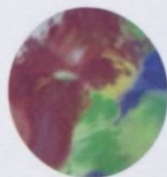


From the Depths by Nicholas Pompeo

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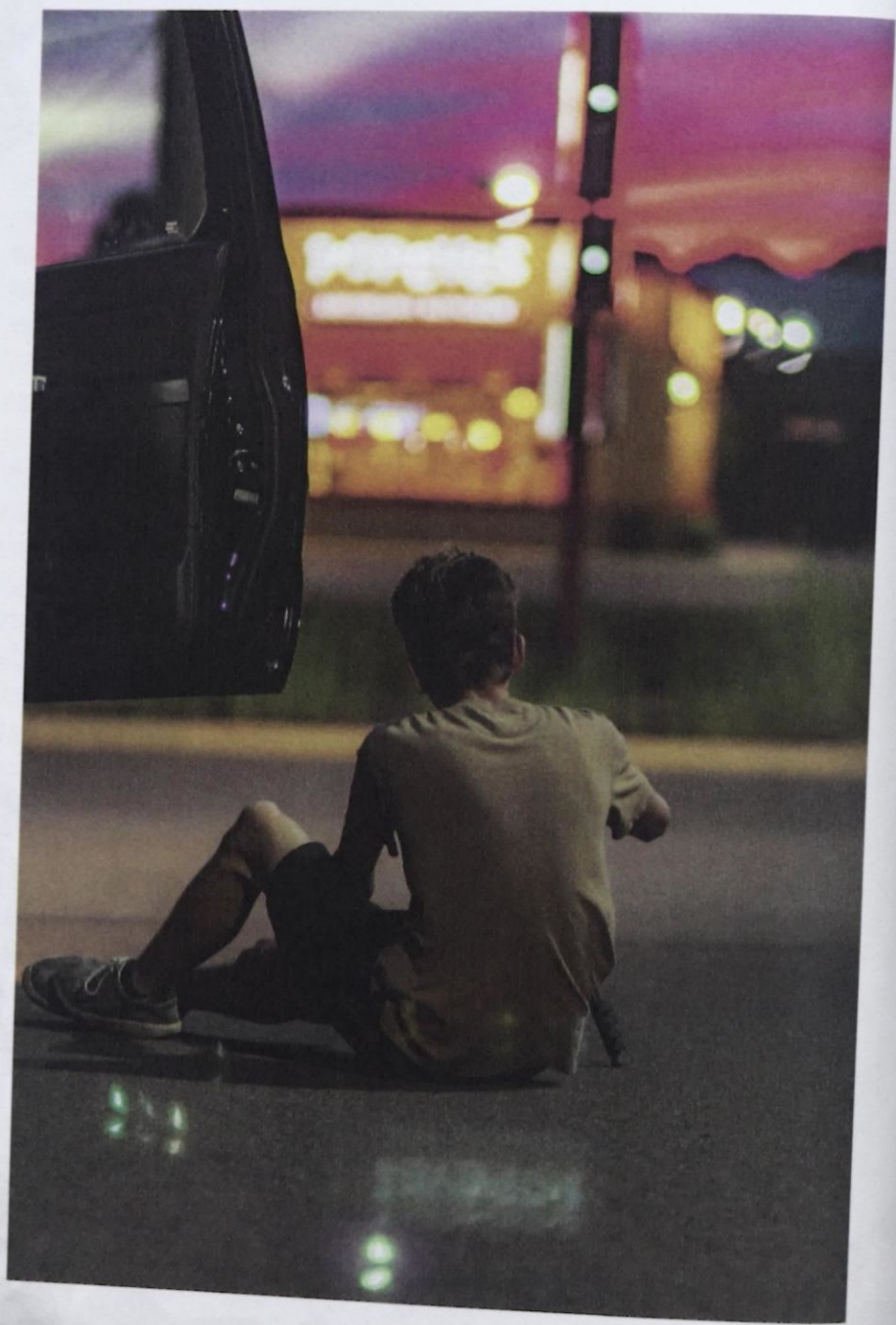
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Urban Halo by Jacob Heylek

Things Unsaid

Amanda Hall

The fluorescent light above his head hummed endlessly and flickered constantly. As if the lighting in that shit-hole of an auditorium wasn't bad enough, the apparent flickering cast shadows on the faces in the circle. Split-second shadows, like the inner demons that they came to talk about were trying to say hello. Jeff tried not to look at the other people's faces too long for fear that accidental eye contact would invoke an unwanted conversation. Instead, he pretended to assess his surroundings as if this was his first time seeing them. To his left, a decrepit stage protruded slightly from behind a moth-eaten curtain. The only thing adorning the stage was an American flag that slouched sadly from its pole. The color of the walls was something that Jeff never expected to figure out. It resided somewhere between blue and green, but the poor lighting never made it easily distinguishable.

Jeff took a sip of the cold coffee from his cheap styrofoam cup. It was already cold when he arrived at the meeting, but he poured himself a cup anyway to wash down the knock-off-brand Oreos and to busy himself with when someone shared something a little too personal. Jeff never could have imagined that he would end up at some underfunded, free group-therapy meeting. He especially wouldn't have expected to become as regular of an attendee as he was. His wife always joked that he would need therapy, for one reason or another, but there was never much sincerity behind the jokes. Ironically enough, his wife was the reason that he was there. She would never believe him if he told her. She knew her husband well, or at least, she'd thought she did.

A few months earlier, when she thought he was cheating on her, she was upfront and didn't waste any time before confronting him. She called him as soon as she got into her car after work and made sure to keep a level tone. She told him frankly that she'd heard through some twisted vine of work colleagues that he had been with some woman the night that she worked the night shift. Jeff hadn't been cheating, but that was not the easiest thing for her to believe coming from the person she was questioning. Of course, she would think he'd lie about cheating. Jeff understood that.

"I can prove it," he told her. He really could, so he wasn't concerned. He'd been with a friend the night that she worked late, and he knew that his friend would vouch for him.

"I sure hope so." His wife's unconvinced tone forced its way through. She could never believe anything he would have to say for fear that it was formulated and rehearsed. Jeff understood that. No cheater ever openly confessed their sins. "We'll talk when I get home." She hung up the phone before he could respond.

Based on the curtness of the last line, Jeff guessed that she threw the phone in the passenger seat. He understood why she might be mad. If the accusation had been true, it would be awful to learn the truth from a coworker that she probably hated.

When it took his wife longer than the typical forty minutes to get home, Jeff wasn't worried. He was sure that she'd just stopped somewhere on the way home to cool off. He thought that was a much better alternative to her busting through the front door and frantically cramming her things into boxes. Not that Jeff would let her leave him like that. Jeff loved her too much to let her go over a false accusation. Their marriage hadn't been a long one, but it was as happy as could be as far as Jeff was concerned. He wouldn't have let her go.

A few hours later, Jeff's phone rang. He was sure that it was his wife calling to apologize for staying away so long and say that she was now on her way home. She always did have a tendency to overreact in the moment, but she always came to realize the silliness of her actions. When Jeff answered the phone, though, it wasn't his wife's voice, it was a man's.

"Is this Jeffery Bridger?" the voice asked in a tone that sounded like it wanted the answer to be "no."

"Yes."

"This is Sheriff McKinley from the Kansas State Police. Your wife's been in an accident, and we need you to come to the hospital."

Accident? Hospital? Jeff wondered if he was dreaming. Was that really why his wife had been away for so long? Had she been trapped in her car, bleeding out or—

"Sir?" The male voice prodded, more like a statement than a question.

"Yes." Jeff didn't remember what was last said, or if 'yes' was the right

answer. All at once, he remembered what the phone call was about. "Where was the accident? What happened?"

"She was headed east on I-99 when a tractor-trailer ran her off the road."

I-99 East? Jeff and his wife lived west on I-99. She was going the wrong way. Why was she going the opposite way?

"That's not—" Jeff started. "Did she say why she was going—" Suddenly, as if he was struck in the chest, Jeff lost his breath. His stomach turned to stone. She was leaving. She was headed away from home and towards God knows where. She probably didn't even know for herself where she was headed. Just that it was away. Away from him.

"Sir, if you could just come down to the hospital, we can sort through all of this there."

"Is she okay?"

The sheriff faltered. "Sir, just come down to the hospital—"

"Is she okay?" Jeff interjected. "Or not? I won't leave until you tell me."

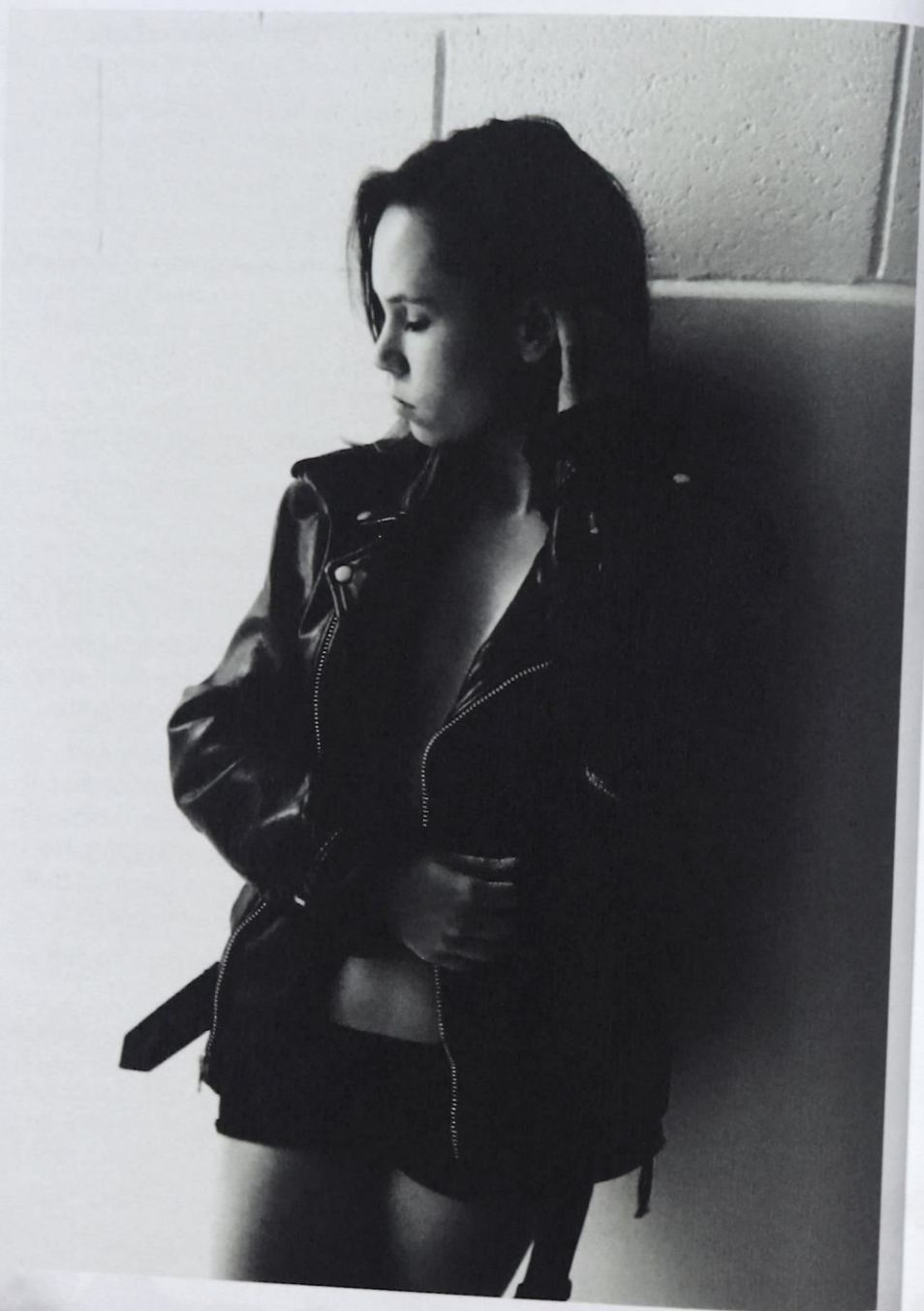
Sheriff McKinley sighed. It was late, and Jeff could tell that it had been a long day for the sheriff. He probably wanted nothing more than to go home to his own wife. "I'm sorry, sir. She didn't make it to the hospital."

She left him without ever intending to hear his explanation, and because of that, she died believing that her husband cheated on her. It was like she'd left him twice. Had she not hung up the phone, Jeff could have told her to call his friend and clear up the misunderstanding. He should have called her back. Then, she never would have been on that road in the first place. Jeff didn't know how he could ever live with that.

"Jeff?" The group leader's gentle voice prodded sharply into Jeff's mind. He looked up. "Would you like to share today?"

Jeff looked down at the coffee as he swirled it in his cup. It reminded him of the sky the night of his wife's accident. Pitch black with no moon or stars to cast any light. Not a glimmer of hope in sight.

Then he said, "Nope," and took a big sip.



Improper Lady by Destiny Schmidt

Slow Talker

Raven Fortson

My tongue is the metamorphosis of language,
painting my lips to match the color of my thighs.

You,
wild man,
stumbling over your thoughts,
stripped raw.

Me.
Slow talker,
fast walker,
hidden in the shadows of your chin,
my heart beating to the pace of each syllable leaving your mouth.

My breath hushed over your chest like morning mist.

Wild man.

Your padded fingers ran over my back in a pattern of circles and lines,
a southbound train in the midnight air.

Me.

Deep thinker,
swayed to the dew drops singing on your hips,

wild man,

kiss

me.

Slowly.

Preserve me like wine,
like I preserve my words.

Me.

Slow talker,
fast walker.

You,

wild man,

bring me home.



Derailed by Kayla Shutters

Silent as Love

Isabelle Collier

Yesterday I repotted a Fittonia
while you lay napping in the sun,
and each day before that is stuck inside my throat.

And I think perhaps
everything I've ever done
has been to make someone else happy,
except gardening,
and perhaps staying alive.

Some days I wonder if you even remember
my middle name,
and if my love is just a waste of your time.
Other days I contemplate how even
my deepest bite,
words meant to cut
fail to make you flinch.
I imagine loving me isn't easy.

Monday night you asked me to go on a walk in the cold
and you apologized every single time
the smoke from your cigar drifted across my face.
You did not have to; you knew that.

And in that moment,
amidst the fog and the stars,
I was fairly sure
that if I had never met you,
I would be the coldest bitch on this planet.
Yet,
somehow,
here we are.



Homage to His Back

Lacey Snyder

His back is ripped with muscles,
flexing with every thrust.
It is the perfect place
to take my pain out on.
I sink my nails in
and drag down towards
his ribs.
Then again.

It is amazing
how he handles it.
His back attacked.

The muscles shiver
as he hits his breaking point.
He gets up
and walks to the bathroom.
Staring at his mesmerizing back,
I see the sad red droplets,
almost as if
they too were sad we're done,
forever.

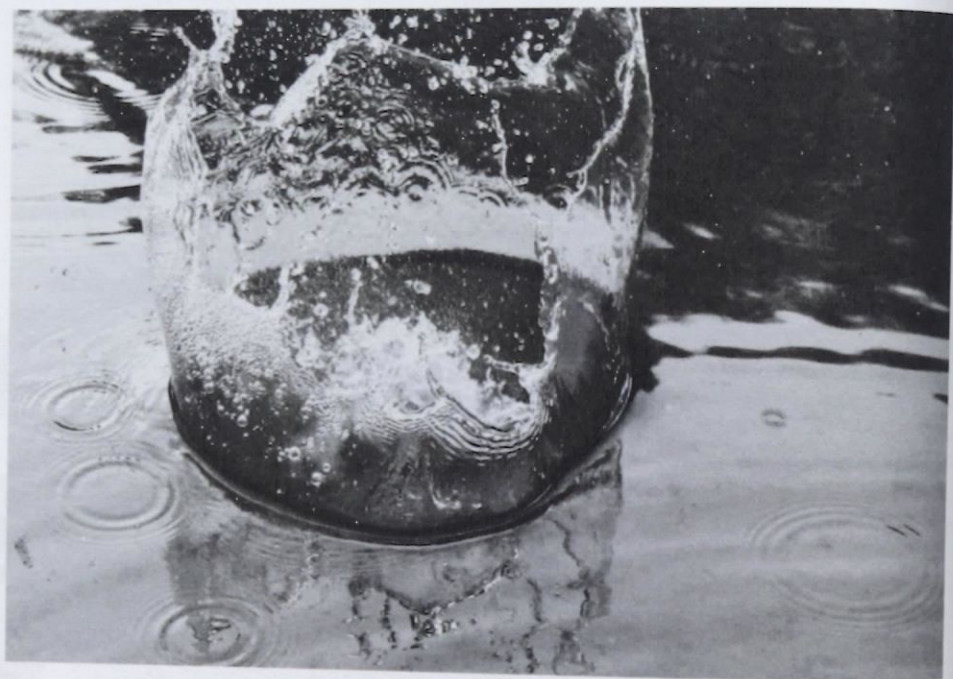


Eyes by Symone Terrell

Homage to My Lips

Kiara Tinnin

These are black girl lips:
these lips don't peck or graze; they take souls for the keeping.
These lips are the warmest shade of brown sugar.
Where on sunny days they tell tales
of black boys and girls with joy so sweet,
your momma's homemade lemonade couldn't beat this.
These lips break barriers,
hop fences, sweet talk their way through borders,
stretching so far beyond the horizon they know no boundaries.
These lips have talked back, protested louder,
put misogynists on their knees and encouraged women to their feet.
They've cursed at lovers and
sung those curses like praises in their ear.
These lips do what they wanna do.
They speak different languages
and sing to the highest His praises.
These lips may frown at appropriation,
but grin for black girl magic.
They have the power of life and death
rolling off their tongue.
These brown sugar temptations will make a saint
beg to be their sinner
with a sweet prayer for revival.
So when they speak,
obey the command, bow low and
pay homage to my strength,
my voice,
my power.
Pay homage to my lips.



Reverberation by Kayla Shutters

The Pennsylvania Fog

Isabelle Collier

I started drinking my coffee black;
some things do not deserve to be
subdued. A bit like me,
a bit like you.

Often, I even drink it cold,
not out of preference,
but necessity.
The world moves on without me.

I have a habit of living too slow,
always leaving the glass half full,
and when you told me today, you
would have proposed to me today,
had the sun not receded behind the clouds,

I took a joy in knowing that I exist
inside your mind
when I do not
exist in front of you.

You have started to drink out of my mug
every time I put it down,
knowing that I would never reach the bottom
without you around.
And our lives fall together.



Jelly Toast by Alexis Hynd

Everything I Can't Tell You

Amanda Hall

Ghosts are scary. Seeing one makes you jump or gasp. When I see you, my heart skips because, at first, I don't remember that you're gone. When I see your ghost, I first think that you're coming to say hello or to tell me the last crazy thing that happened to you. But then you just float past me, lifelessly, and I remember that you are no longer with me.

Things are better this way, I know. People tell me that your world and mine are happier and less complicated now that they are separate. But that doesn't change the fact that I instinctively want to hug you when I see you coming around the corner or down the stairs. People tell me that it's for the best and sometimes I can see that, but it's not always obvious. I can see, now, the ways you manipulated and controlled my life, but that doesn't mean I forgot all of the wonderful times that we had. Some of my favorite memories are ones that I made with you, but now they are tainted by this terrible pain you left me with. After all, how can things really be better after I lost my best friend?

I talk about you like you're dead, but you're not, not really. You're only dead to me. The ghost that I see in your image isn't your soul trapped on Earth, it's the image of you when I knew you as my friend. I don't see the stranger that you are now; I see the you who talked with me until 5 a.m. for no reason other than the fact that neither of us wanted to say goodnight. I see your dorm room. I spent more time there than I did in my own. I see spending every minute of the last day of the semester together because neither of us wanted to say goodbye. But we did say goodbye. And then, neither one of us wanted to say hello again.

It happened gradually, our friendship withering like a leftover Valentine's Day rose in early March. Valentine roses have a connection to love, and that is the only reason they are kept so long. That love was why I didn't want to throw the rose away. Why I didn't want to throw you away. I thought I could fix things if I just kept adding water to the rose and kept appeasing you. Apologies work like fertilizer, even when they aren't necessary. But eventually, I knew that there was no saving the rose, and there was no saving us. The petals withered to nothing, and our friendship was strained until there was no joy left in it. You know that I don't like

flowers because all they do is die, and you know that I hate to watch them do so. Still, you just stood by knowing that our friendship would wilt the same way. The rose is a ghost, too. Your ghost holds it in her hand and reminds me that I couldn't keep it alive.

Keeping my friendships alive was crucial for me. I used my friends to create a sense of love and support that I hadn't always gotten from my family. In that way, I got very close to my friends, and they became a different family. It didn't take long for you to take a seat at the family table. Almost immediately after we met, we were doing everything together. We got along so well it didn't make sense for us not to spend time together. It was like Sonny and Cher except, when you weren't there, I wasn't Sonny anymore. I was someone else. It took me a long time to see my double personality and even longer to understand where it came from. Later in life, when our friendship hung by a thread, you told me that someone who acts differently around specific people isn't genuine. You were right, because the person I was when I was with you wasn't genuine. Without my noticing, you crafted me into someone who resembled you. That is why our friendship was so strong. We had so much in common and always seemed to agree. I thought it was perfect. I realized later that it was because you were present on both sides of the friendship. If we were two halves of a whole, then you were holding part of my half, too. You convinced me to hate your enemies and adapt my opinions to accommodate yours. You wanted to eliminate anything that could stand between us.

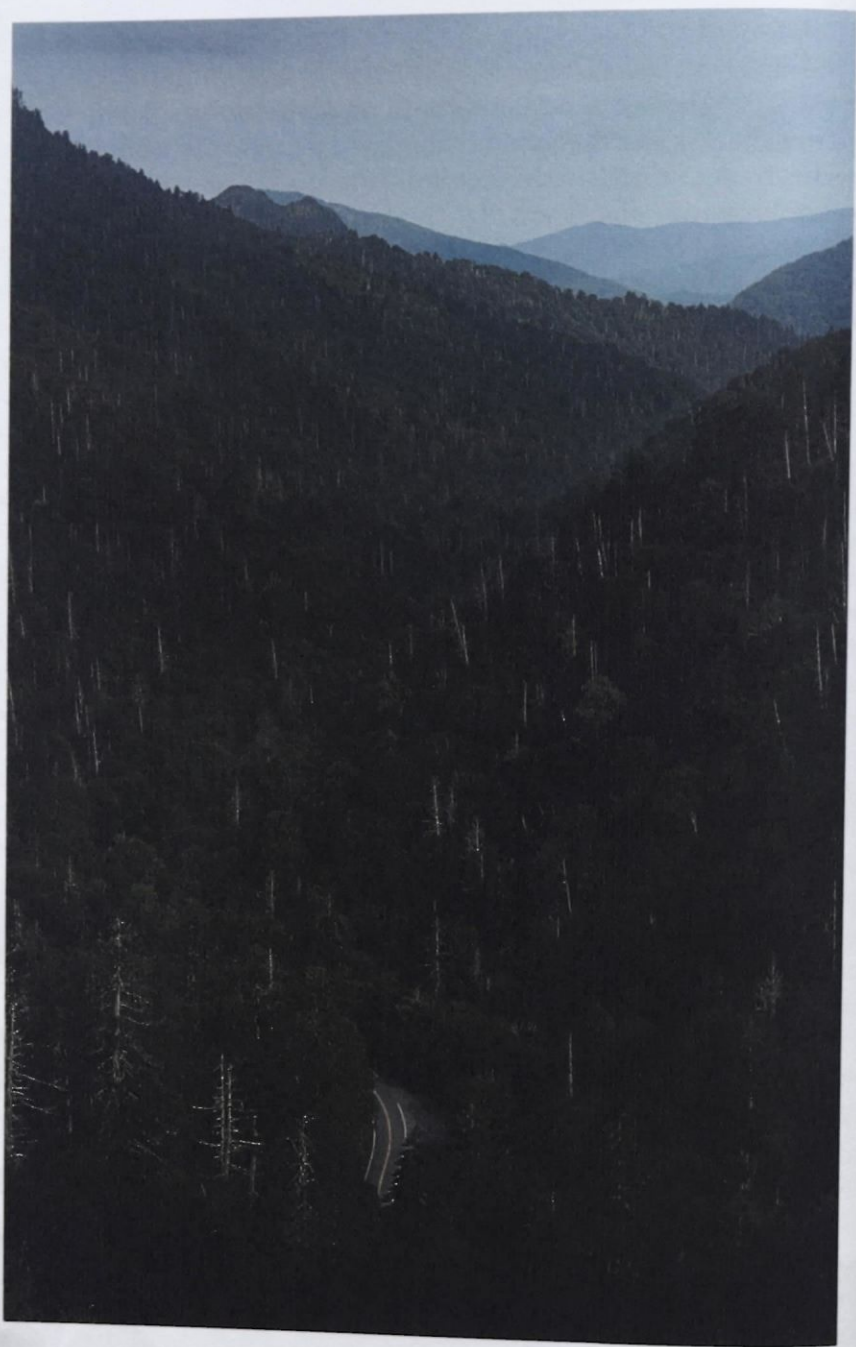
I was warned that you manipulated people this way. I, of course, didn't believe it. From what I had seen, you cared about me and would do anything for our friendship. We hardly ever fought and when we did, all I had to do was apologize and it was like the fight never happened. It took me longer than it should have to realize that I wasn't always at fault. But you needed atonement from me. Like the rose needed water, you needed to know that I didn't want to lose you. It was what kept us going and what made you feel secure. Unfortunately, your security was toppled by just one major disagreement. That was all it took to make me realize that our friendship was anything but stable. You wanted me to dismiss someone from my life because you didn't like them.

It didn't matter how many times I told you I wouldn't do it and that I could be friends with you both separately. That wasn't good enough for

you. You thought you could change my mind as you had before. But when you couldn't, you couldn't handle it. It destroyed you. You said it was you or them, and I chose the side that chose me. I chose the side that didn't make me change and that offered me friendship without a cost. I chose them. It was then that I stopped doing things just to please you. That cessation delivered the killing blow to our friendship and to you as my friend. After our friendship ended, you showed me a side of yourself that I never knew. You were cold and uncaring. This was when I started seeing your ghost.

When you left, you left a gap between my heart's front teeth. I changed noticeably after you left. I started to move like a hunted animal, tiptoeing and peeking around corners just in case every footstep I heard was yours. I was so afraid of seeing you. I was afraid of what else you might have to say. I know that ending our friendship was a good thing for me to do. It drastically changed me and helped me to gain a stronger and healthier sense of self. But I'm still haunted. Just because our friendship morphed into something I couldn't recognize doesn't mean that I don't miss it. When I hear your laugh, it scares me more than any boogeyman's cry because, at that moment, I am afraid that I made a mistake. What if I was wrong about you and I lost something good? That's the hardest part. I don't know how my life would have turned out if I had kept trying to water a dead rose. Perhaps, by some miracle, it would have sprung back to life. As unlikely as that seems, that is what my heart clings to for some reason. Maybe it's to fix the gap in its teeth; I don't like that people can see the difference from before and after you. I don't want there to be any missing pieces, and there shouldn't be because you weren't good for me, but I guess that's the risk you take when you let someone into your heart. You never know how much they'll change it.

I don't know when you will stop haunting me, or if you ever will, but I remind myself every day that I did the right thing. This routine is my sage to keep your spirit away. I don't want to forget you, just the bad memories that you brought. I want to explain that fact to you because I know you think the opposite is true. I want to tell you all of my reasons for ending our friendship; I want to tell you all of this. But this is everything I can't tell you because your ghost only speaks in EVP, and you just wouldn't get it. I lost your friendship but I found myself, and I know that things are better this way. Still, every time I see your ghost, it's like I lose you all over again.



Where the Hell is the Bottom?

Hayden Smith

Get up.

Go to class.

Focus.

Hey she's kinda cu-

FOCUS.

Come back.

Do work.

More work.

Not that much work.

HA! Just kidding, more work.

Lunch?

Lunch is for quitters.

Finish that paper.

Write more summaries.

Go back to class.

Hope you're ready for that test, boy.

Yeah, I think I'm ready.

You look ready.

...You weren't ready.

Way to freaking go.

More work.

Dinner?

Yeah, dinner.

Need food to live.

Eat food.

Go to your job.

Sit there.

Eternal sentinel.

Guard the residence hall.

No, I can't take that seriously:

you get paid nothing to do nothing.

Keep doing your job.

Hey, she's REALLY cu-

KEEP DOING YOUR JOB.

Job's done.

Bed?

No, required reading first.

Is the book good?

Don't make me lie to you.



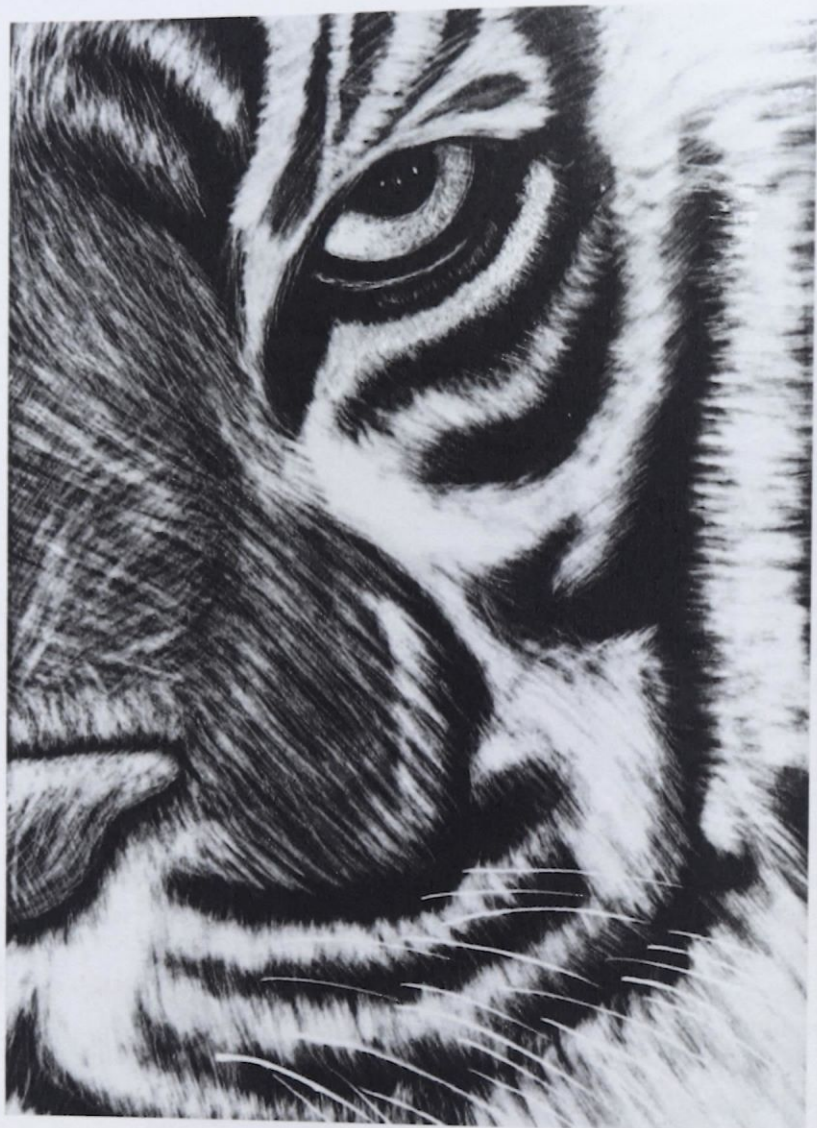
Hiraeth by Destiny Schmidt

Who Protects Us

Kiara Tinnin

The beautiful sunny days always remind me of bittersweet moments. During these days, I wondered who would come to my aid and wash the pain of yesterday away when my hope began to fade. To the man that follows me home after I went to the store for a bottle of water. *Who*.

The 105-degree sizzling summer Sunday as you held up the line at the counter like all Philly men do wasting time. Eyes gliding up and down as you try to say something amusing to keep yourself from looking like the sweating jackass you are. I found that feeling that all women get sitting in their breast when they know something's wrong, *I wondered*. You moved closer. Telling the cashier you just want one more thing, offering me things I didn't want. I took my water as I left; you moved to follow as I made my way home. I kept wondering how do I get out of this situation, how do we get out of this situation. The situation of wondering when this was ever going to stop, the situation of who was going to say something, protect us. *I wondered who*. Who protects us when strange men follow us? Who protects us when they say 4C hair isn't beautiful? Who protects us when they want to purchase our features for their consumption? Who protects us from the ways of the world? Tell me who protects us. Who protects the little girls that get sent to the store but get watched by prying eyes trying to see their form through their school skirts? Who protects my cousin who cries the truth but is not believed so she cuts it into her skin? Who protects my co-worker that wears the pain of sexual assault on her skin at the age of 56? By that time you had followed and my sunny day had become a bitter taste in my mouth that I couldn't swallow. I waited for the call but I never got it.



Tiger Eye by Alexis Hynd

Metamorphosis

Kayla Shutters

My voice felt like a CD stuck in its player,
flinching, jerking,
claustrophobic in its containment;
it was getting
scratched,
etched into with utter confusion.

My questions shot like
darts into the air,
but none seemed to strike an answer.

I wanted to know
why I was being thrown away
like a pair of just-bought-sneakers.
I was tried on,
walked around in,
claimed to be loved, and then
left on the sidewalk outside of the bus station.

He acted as if I was
malfunctioning, stained, ripped, muddied;
his face was cement to me: a plain countenance.

Words slugged from his lips,
flat, mundanely shifting to my ears, chilling.
At this moment, his sudden indifference only
infuriated more questions of "why."

Why drop a brick
 composed of love on my head and then
 throw a brick constructed of goodbye through my face?
Why caress his words of
 passion along my neck, only to have them
 loop around and choke me?
I was lost within his rose-petaled words,
 turned to cement walls,
 suffocating my
 runaway-train-of-thought.



Bait by Andi Loihle

Angry Black Woman

Symone Terrell

She wakes every day,
the weight of oppression bears on her soul
as if to eradicate all that is light,
her never-ending fight with herself,
constantly searching for the right tone.
Who will she be today:
well-dressed, tamed, reserved?
All to curb the urge to rip out of her skin.

The taste of microaggressions stings,
the intensity of cyanide chased with vodka.
So HELL YEAH she is angry!
You try all the demands to:
change your hair, bleach your skin,
switch your dialect.
Even to lose a son at the hands
of those who swore to protect him.
Wouldn't you be angry?

They have forced her to claw and fight
through systemic housing segregation,
discrimination, education inequities,
high poverty, and murder rates.

Being her ain't easy.
But the Lord is her shield,
the one who lifts her head high.
Without the grace of God,
she would be the lion tearing prey to shreds.

She is resilient, unwavering,
strong. She endures suppression,
scarfs it down for breakfast, lunch, and dinner,
digesting shards tearing through her,
hiding behind her smiling society-accepted persona.
Built from her historically covered past,
and assumed future.

Is she really Angry?
Or just tired of the bullshit.



This Shit Is Bananas by Alexis Hynd

High Stakes

Chase Bottorf

The smell of iron and nickel singses my nasal cavity. Sweat drips down my brow as I watch Liam aim the robust barrel to his head. He stares at me without emotion in his eyes. One breath escapes his mouth, then two, then three. I nod my head; it is time. Liam slowly pulls his pointer finger back on the trigger. Click. I sigh with relief to see him able to go at least another round. He doesn't give the same expression of satisfaction. He stays collected as he looks up toward the host in a pinstripe suit, black hair slicked back with a game-show grin.

This wasn't our first rodeo together, Liam and me. We had already been through the wringer with our department over the infernal game of roulette. The last time I saw him, he was nervous, and I saw fear in his trembling body that no man should succumb to. This is a game of life or death, saving the cliché. He is different now; he seems almost soulless. His eyes are dead and gaunt, like he had been on a week-long drug binge. Only he seems not to be suffering from any form of hangover. He is completely still and collected. We walked away the last time. We split the cash fifty-fifty and promised each other that the next time we competed there would be only one victor.

"Next draw." The host places the gun down to an older Italian man.

The Italian speaks with a thick New York dialect. "Let's get this over with." He picks up the silver Colt and places it just below his balding head. He pulls with ease. Click. I shudder with shivers that course down my spine. It is only a matter of time before somebody will be a stiff.

"Next draw." The host picks up the Colt and places it before the next contestant. He is a pale and emaciated twenty-something, a real William S. Burroughs-looking kind of guy. I don't know his name, but I know he is green and here for a reason. The only men who come onto *The Roulette Room* are those who are either at their last wits for cash or those who just crave a death for a reason. This young man, he isn't here wanting to die. He shakes with true horror in his heart.

"Relax," I whisper to him. "You can back out now. Take the money, not your life." I eyeball him with the best sympathy that I can muster. His reddish eyes twitch as if he is looking at his maker. Either he feels intimidated by me, or he is just that terrified. Honestly, I don't blame him for fearing either.

"I have to do this. I don't have much anymore." He stutters between words.

I scan my eyes down to his bare, pasty arms. Just below his right bicep stands a reddish black indentation. I thought he looked like a junkie. I am not surprised either; most of the contestants tend to be addicts of some variety. They all fall under the spectrum of gamblers, cheats, and drug addicts needing money for another fix. He fits the demographic perfectly.

The junkie continues his sputtering. "I'm afraid to die, but I'm just as easily afraid to live in this world among the shit." He reaches the barrel up to his temple, just above his blonde sideburns. "Please, Lord..." the young man pleads between his breaths. He screams as he pulls back on the trigger. **Bang!** One crack of the Colt and the man is face down on the wooden table, collapsed in brain matter and a pool of blood. The nerves of his body convulse in an epileptic dance. I swallow hard, looking at the gruesome scene that is before me.

The human body amazes me, especially what happens after death. Even when one perishes to the afterlife, or whatever anyone believes, the body still works. The human brain can still function for up to three minutes post-mortem. The DMT chemicals of the brain release, and it's like a dream in reality that can last forever. I mean, that only depends on the way one dies, I guess. I am sure that blasting your cranium with a .45 bullet wouldn't leave very much in the way of working synapses and chemical releases, unfortunately. But even without this, the body's nerves continue like a snake with its head of temptation cut off.

"Next round," the host announces as a guard pulls the lifeless man away. We all stay seated as we all look at one another. The host reloads the Colt and spins the cylinder, smiling with a perfect row of eggshell teeth. "Next draw! Good luck."

He places it down before me. I close my eyes and slow my breathing. "Here we go." I slowly pull my finger back. Why do I do this? Is it for the thrill of death? Or is it the satisfaction of a few thousand dollars? Either way, I am in too deep, and there is no vanity to return to. I pull back completely on the silver trigger. **Click.** My heart skips a beat between my heavy breaths. Another few minutes to live.

Liam receives the revolver, warm at the barrel. He looks at me with cold, dark eyes. A single tear runs down his face. He has changed since the first round. Is it because of me? Or does he realize his time is up? He doesn't blink away the buildup of emotions. "To us." He toasts, lifting the gun up like a wine glass. He fires his finger back without thinking twice. **Click.** I sigh with relief, exaggerating my breathing.

The Italian glares at Liam. "Y'know, I'm a veteran at this. I've sat through four of these and, well, won them all of course. But that was back in the day when this shit was underground; there was no walking away." He grins still eyeing Liam with a menacing scowl. "Give me the damn gun, kid." He grabs the gun with a fierce grip. "This'll be five."

I have watched a fair number of men die around this table. It makes me wonder how they keep it so clean. I also wonder how some pig-fuck can be so narcissistic about cheating death. He is just a man of all talk. I have never seen him before, and he has never seen me. So, with that, to me he is lying piece of shit that I hope ends up like the junkie.

"You have a problem ovah there, kid?" He chuckles at me with a shallow grimace, widening his grayish-black beard.

"Nah, I don't have any problems. Say, why don't you stick that barrel there in your greasy mouth instead. Be careful you don't choke on it." I return a very similar snarky smile.

"You have got balls, kid. Tell ya what, I will do just that, once you blow your goddamn brains out. I will consider it a minor victory against a cocky prick."

I laugh at him and lean my arms back behind my head. *The Roulette Room* is all about pissing other contestants off. We're all going to die at some point. Why not make a few ignorant enemies along the way?

"I don't usually like to interrupt a sportsmen's squabble, but we must continue," states the host with an incessant twitch and a condescending smirk.

"Fine." The Italian lifts the barrel up to his head as he stares right into my dilated pupils. He forces his chubby finger back completely in the span of a second. **Bang!** Blood spews out the back of his cranium, obscuring the screens behind him.

Liam and I look at each other, soaking with the irony of courage and cowardice. We both know the inevitability of our fates. It is just something we must accept for one of us to get a few thousand dollars.

"Wow, now that was messy!" calls out the host. "Can we get a cleanup on aisle five here?"

It comes back to me. I am either going to die or live to see my peer in a cavalcade of gibs and vermillion. The host bellows, "Then there were two!" He reloads the cylinder and hands it to me as two guards pull away the defunct Italian. I grab the Colt and swing it up to my head. I look over at the sportscaster and his cameraman. I smile, pull on the trigger, and whisper, "bang." The only word that they're so desperate to hear.



Childhood by Kayla Shutters

Consumed

Kayla Shutters

The crackling, brittle buildings are
crumbling like shale in the hand
and the screeches sound like a rake being taken to a chalkboard;
her ears are bubbling to a boil with blood when she realizes
the discontented noise is spilling from her own throat,
like a relentless black pine snake sliding out of her mouth.
The scene is disorienting with sharp breaths, accompanied by fogged eyes
as if she needs a felted cloth to wipe them clean.
Rust is smeared across the sky and grim-reaper-smoke adds to the discoloration.
The man-made city is collapsing, slowly. One-by-one a structure falls,
like sand grains taking turns in an hourglass.

Her eyes are clawing at the picture around her, trying to find him.
Her feet feel as if they are in disagreement about what they should do:
stand like a limestone statue or run aimlessly, with empty hope for sneaker
Her voice is melting at the thought of him dead;
she is afraid the city has engulfed him in its fallen concrete and steel.

She suddenly bolts, running with her screams that flow through the air.
They feel like tissue paper, rubbing across her face.
She tries not to trip over her hysteria as she
hurdles over pieces of the past.
She continues to call his name, hoping he will reply.
All she hears in return is the stomping
of buildings, the whips of cracking fire.
It feels as if he has been taken from her, torn away,
as if he was her arm, ripped off, and buried in the unknown.



Overlap by Jacob Heylek

Lost

Lacey Snyder

The lions just walk over it now;
it is nothing to them.
Some do not know the tragic story;
others wish they'd never heard it.

From a distance,
the friendship bracelet looks ancient,
still lying there in perfect 'O' shape.
Sometimes, if you go to the zoo at night,
you can still hear her screaming for help!
Nobody could move fast enough,
well, other than the lions.

Every year for her used-to-be best friend's birthday
she comes and visits;
she never would have thought
that her best friend
would die from her favorite big cat.



Big Brother by Kayla Shutters



Prophecy

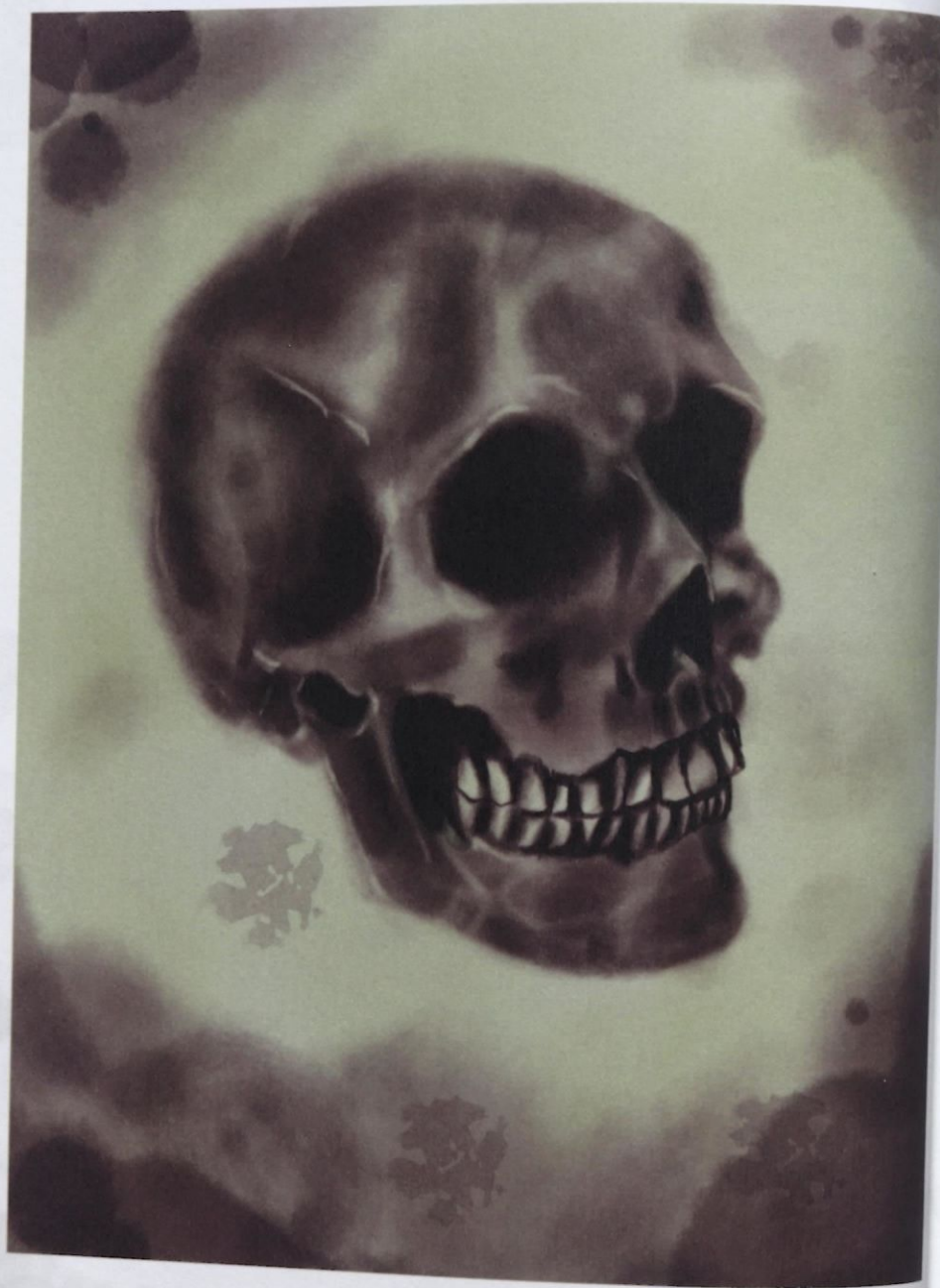
Noah Snare

I.

Summer
Will leave
Her ghost behind;
You will sense her sorrow
Beneath Winter's white burial.

II.

Her light
Will whisper
In the hospice
Of dawn;
Mute and corpse-like
Bodies will not turn
To listen.



Skull by Destiny Schmidt

The House I Haunt

Amanda Hall

I have always believed in ghosts, but I didn't come to fully understand them until I saw one. Before my encounter, I, like most others, believed that ghosts were the spirits of the dead. This simply isn't true. It's much more complicated than that. A ghost is nothing more than a powerful memory that refuses to be forgotten. In that sense, ghosts don't have to be dead. I know this because, though I am alive, I am also a ghost. I have seen my ghost because it haunts the house that once belonged to my grandparents.

My grandparents' old house was never anything marvelous. It was a small, basic family home that raised my mother and her two brothers. It has had uneven, sloping floors and cracked ceilings held together with duct tape for as long as I have been alive. When my grandfather started building their new home on the hill behind the old house, he told me his plan was to burn the old house down. He had no interest in selling; not that anyone would have any interest in buying the dated residence. My grandfather would much rather have kept the land and gotten rid of the house. So, when my grandparents started living in their new home, they left the old one with no utilities and no thoughts.

About two years later, my grandfather was admitted into the hospital for surgery. By that time, nature had started to take the house back. My mother, after picking up something from the house, reported that extensive amounts of mold had started to grow on the walls. She told my grandmother that if she wanted to keep anything from the old house, we would have to get it out now. Because my grandmother spent her days at the hospital with my grandfather, it was up to my mother and me to get the job done.

One step through the doorway and I was transported into another dimension. One where the quaint, little house that I would visit frequently on weekends was crumbling and decaying. Before entering, my mother had told me that it was bad, but I couldn't have imagined it would be that bad. The cheap painter's mask that my mother found in our basement must have helped some, but the smell was terrible. The air itself was thick like syrup, and the painter's mask struggled to filter clean air to my nose

at the rate I needed it. Ten minutes into working, my mother and I were both panting heavily. The lack of air drove me crazy, and I wanted to take my mask off, but I was afraid to find out how bad the smell really was, and my mother never would have let me due to the amount of black mold. It was difficult to understand that a house where I spent so much time was now dangerous to my health.

In addition to the heavy smell, the air carried an atmosphere of melancholy. The vents that once spouted hot air from the wood stove had gone cold, but more than that, the house contained a chilling feeling of loneliness. I remembered the house always being full of love, but when my grandparents moved, they seemed to have taken all the love with them. When a home becomes just a house, it gets lonely. These types of houses, ones that knew love but have lost it, are ideal for ghosts. They reenact moments of joy from the house's past. These ghostly actors are the only residents and the only company for empty houses.

The standing water in the back corner of the living room looked like the chocolate milk that my sister and I would drink every morning that we spent with our grandparents. I didn't know that water could look like that. The walls creating that corner were repainted in streaks of dark and earthy green as the mold coated the paint. It thinned out as the walls stretched, like the ugliest ombré I had ever seen. The light of an August day filtered through the dingy white curtains into the room that mostly contained out-of-place items. It looked like one of those abandoned houses where the occupants left in a hurry and didn't take everything they were planning to. I usually love those houses, because of the mystery, but this house had no mystery to me. I looked over to the window again. The blow-up mattress that my sister and I used to sleep on would be placed there. I used to sleep in this room. Looking at it then, that seemed almost impossible. My eyes trailed up the cracked and drooping ceiling, which was threatening to fall in more than it already had. It looked like no one had lived here in a decade.

"All this stuff is going to be ruined," my mother told me. "Whatever we leave will be ruined." I looked over to the armchair and saw that the mold had already started its assault on the items in the room. The books stacked inside the coffee table were already a lost cause. "Start with the pictures," my mother pointed to a cluster of framed pictures leaning against the wall.

I bagged the first two pictures, school portraits of my cousins. The next was my sister's senior portrait. The last photo startled me. It was my senior portrait. There was, of course, no reason for this to startle me because I'd always known that it was hung up in this room. But, for some reason, it felt like it didn't belong there. The house felt completely foreign, like it was owned by a stranger, and my picture shouldn't have been there. Seeing it was like catching your reflection in a mirror that you didn't know was there and being afraid of your own face.

When we had almost cleared the living room of items worth saving, my eye caught another framed picture leaning against the far wall. I squatted down to look at it and saw that the water and mold had already ruined it. The picture was discolored, swollen, and wrinkled behind the water-stained glass. "We couldn't save this one," I said aloud, but my mother was outside. It was then that I realized that the picture was of me. It was taken in a studio when I was too young to remember. I wanted to cry when I saw that picture. The house had taken a part of me with it, and I saw it then for the first time.

When I stepped through the doorless frame leading into the dining room, I could hear the padding of my young, bare feet on the floor, running with a string and my grandparents' old cat trailing behind me. Our usual course looped through the living room, dining room, and kitchen. I remembered how it felt when I held the string too close to my ankle and the cat unintentionally sank its claws into my soft skin. As I moved into each room, the hurried footsteps echoed endlessly, complemented by chirps of my laughter.

The kitchen was almost completely stripped. Most of the appliances were gone, leaving only their shapes where the curling linoleum was cut around them. For the first time, I realized how small and closed in the kitchen was. Cabinets that once felt so high up were easily in reach. My feet felt warm as my eyes found the vent that my sister and I used to take turns standing on in the morning to warm up. Suddenly, I could see a younger version of myself standing there. Young, bright blonde, and tiny, she was standing on the vent and smiling at the warm air. My heart fluttered. I could see it as clearly as if someone was really standing there.

Somehow, despite the predominant odor of mold, the kitchen smelled the same as it always did. Maybe it was in my head. Regardless

of how I perceived it, the familiar smell immediately reminded me of cooking pancakes with my grandmother. We did it every morning that my sister and I slept over. I stepped further into the kitchen, and the loose linoleum crackled under my feet. I saw myself again, this time, standing on the stool beside the stove watching my grandmother pour the batter into the pan. My young double was rubbing her little hands together in anticipation of what the batter would become. I could hear the sizzle of the batter being cooked, and I turned around, half expecting to see my grandfather sitting at the dining room table reading the paper like he did every morning, but not even the table was there. When I turned back around, the whole scene was gone. All that was left was silence and a moldy, outdated, empty kitchen.

On the thickly-painted white door frame leading from the kitchen, I noticed lines marking the yearly growth of my sister and me. I had completely forgotten that we did that. I saw myself stepping away from the frame, excited to see how much I had grown, as my grandmother drew the line marked by the ruler. The last mark on the frame was me from 2010. I couldn't believe how much shorter I was then.

The last place that my mother and I inspected was the attic. I told her that there was no point because I knew it was packed with stuff that my grandparents didn't care about, but she persisted. When I was young, the attic was always filled with oddities. My sister and I used to climb the steep, narrow, wooden steps and search through the stored items. For as long as I could remember, there had been a hole in the floor. Then, with the house in the state that it was, I didn't trust the floor at all. But, before I was born, the attic was my mother's bedroom. The entire time that we had been going through the house, I wanted to ask my mother if it was hard for her to see the house in the state that it was. She grew up there, after all. I looked around at the Rick Springfield posters on the slanted walls that used to frame her bedroom and tried to imagine it as it used to be instead of how I had always known it. I couldn't see my mother's ghost, but judging from her silent gaze on the room, I was sure that she could.



Jurassic by Jacob Heylek

An Ode to My Dazed Self

Kayla Shutters

Shut your eyes; sleep.

Let the air create a blanket for your anxious self.

Let the tears fall, cease, and
dry on their way off your cheek.

No one awaits you;

it is as if the world's inhabitants

departed tonight and

you remain for the sole purpose of sleeping in the vacancy.

You are free.

Time isn't running like a hamster

behind your eyes; it is conked out, hibernating.

You are safe.

Life has stopped hunting you for the night

because even he rests.

Your thoughts are stumbling, unable to grasp your attention.

Yesterday is lurking in the past, gone, and its

rampage has therefore ceased.

You are fine.

The sounds you hear are ones your head is orchestrating;

they aren't real; everything lies dead tonight, still.

Breathe in and then breathe out to

know that you are still alive.

If you wake up tomorrow, know that your

rest tonight rejuvenated you,

put your pieces back together.

If you don't wake up tomorrow, know that you

spent your last moments alive, content, happy, asleep.



Rockets Red Glare by Hannah Lorf

Tattoo

Lacey Snyder

The sound of the needle
pumping forwards
then backwards,
overtakes the small Avengers-themed room.

The needle collides with my skin,
giving me tiny kisses as it injects its poison inside of me.
The pain is just enough to know it is real.

The end masterpiece is here to stay,
welcomed or not.
It is best to keep it around
rather than go through the pain
of feeling it leave.



Hecate by Destiny Schmidt



The Walls of Churches

Raven Fortson

The hymn for today was etched into the pages of the songbook,
written on the marble tiles beside my face.

The syllables of each word hung on the pastor's tongue with the weight
of barbells,

piercing my skin and laying shadows over top of my chest.

My throat tightened.

I am a prisoner looking in on thoughtless motivation,

glass castles glinting on my fingernails,

the glittering eyes of my captors reflecting at me in

the stained glass windows,

Jesus looks down on me,

his eyes like a blade at my throat.

I bet he knows that I am sinning.

As I sit here in this pew, my body resisting the temptation to stand up and

walk out against the roaring tide of the hymn for today,

he knows that I am sinning,

but I don't care.

I feel like the Devil sitting in this church,

a spectacle of fire, blazing over the souls of the people swaying in circles
around me, chanting their praises of amazement.

The judgment falls off of them, collecting in pools around my feet;

my tears join them, a mirror of the blackness in my chest.

What a stark contrast to the marble tile beside my face.

The walls of churches are not the walls of my soul,

and I'd like to free my cell and fly like the Raven I am.



A Father's Duty

Jora Lam

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Henry	High school dropout, apprentice carpenter
Lucina	High school student, upper-middle class
Marius	Old vampire, ~400 years old
Simon	8-year-old, recently-turned-vampire

Time: Modern/Present Day, about noon

Place: Abandoned house in the mountains of the Shenandoah Valley, VA

Setting: Two rooms, a kitchen/dining room and a parlor/living room of an old, abandoned farmhouse. Everything in it is scavenged or was left in the house at abandonment. The kitchen/dining room is dressed with a table, a couple chairs, a ratty tablecloth and an overturned vase of flowers. The parlor has two chairs and a couch, all covered by sheets.

Lights come up to expose a set divided into two rooms. Stage right is what appears to be a kitchen/dining room together. Stage left appears to be a parlor/living-room with a couch and two chairs draped with sheets. Standing downstage right is Marius, dressed plainly in long sleeves, pants and socks. He appears very sickly.

(Enter Henry and Lucina upstage right. Henry is dressed in a rough band t-shirt, jeans, and heavy work-boots. Lucina is dressed in either a white dress/skirt and blouse with flats. Both are carrying backpacks. Lucina is carrying a mallet, Henry has a flashlight.)

MARIUS: (addressing the audience) Stop me if you've heard this one. Two teenagers break into an abandoned farmhouse to stake a vampire. (Pause) That's it, that's the joke.

(Behind him, Henry and Lucina appear to be talking quietly, hunched together.)

MARIUS: Ah, but it's rude to talk and not introduce myself. Marius Alrik Metzger, at your service. (Bows) The two behind me are Henry Meadows and Lucina Blake.

(The two teenagers seem to be trying to make a plan of attack, unsure of where to move first. Marius stands with his hands behind his back.)

LUCINA: Well, if you were a vampire, where would you sleep?

HENRY: In the basement, dammit.

LUCINA: But that's too obvious!

HENRY: So maybe somewhere else where people can climb in and step all over my corpse!

LUCINA: He can't be that stupid.

(Henry and Lucina freeze in the middle of their argument, and Marius becomes animated.)

MARIUS: Would you like to hear another joke? (Pause) No? Perhaps their bickering is the only joke you need. That is, of course, fine with me. But they are quite loud, aren't they? They don't know just how loud they are. They believe they are whispering, perhaps even so subtly as to not wake me from my slumber. That is rather incorrect.

(Henry and Lucina become animate again. Henry throws his hands up in frustration.)

LUCINA: (waving the mallet in Henry's face) I'm not going to sit here while you try and figure out where he is. We already know he's in this house somewhere, we just have to find him.

HENRY: *(raising his voice)* And how the hell you suppose we do that?

LUCINA: Well, we should try to anticipate—

HENRY: Or we just go down the damn stairs and see if he's there. God damn, if he is in the basement, He'll hear us if we run around up here first.

LUCINA: Okay then, country boy, what if he's not down in the basement? What then?

HENRY: We check everywhere else. If we find the kids—

LUCINA: You hope we don't find them, Henry.

(Henry and Lucina stand in a beat of silence. They freeze again.)

MARIUS: Ah yes, the children. The children.... MY children. In total, before these two arrived, I had six. One of them is a very recent addition. Simon. I find that they are good children, but not all of them start that way.

(Marius paces back toward the teenagers and lays his hands on the frozen Henry.)

MARIUS: But let us focus on the matter at hand, let us focus on Simon. Simon is Henry's only sibling, and the only reason he's still around in this town. I'm sure he'd stay for Lucina, but adolescents can be so... fickle. Childhood friends, life, love, it can all be snatched at a moment's notice and leave you without a word. Even for the smallest of mistakes. *(Marius leans in close to Henry)* But they don't know these things. In fact, what they know is little.

(Henry and Lucina return to activity. Marius stands back behind them.)

HENRY: And why not? That's what we're here for.

LUCINA: They'll rat us out, or worse. They might try and eat us.

HENRY: Simon wouldn't—

LUCINA: Simon's a vampire now, Henry. And you're dinner.

HENRY: You don't know that he'd try and take a bite out of me!

LUCINA: Neither do you! You don't know what he did to Simon! He could have ate him! Brainwashed him! Anything! If we find the kids first, we try a different room. Okay?!

(Henry stuffs his hands in his pockets and moves downstage, looking around the kitchen.)

HENRY: So, basement stairs?

LUCINA: Yeah.

(Henry and Lucina freeze again. Marius steps downstage.)

MARIUS: I don't know if those of you watching have ever been almost-murdered before, but it really is quite painful, and quite an inconvenience. Very unpleasant. I was staked once—awful thing, really, but as you can see, I am still very much alive after the incident. I even have a scar, right here *(he traces an X on his chest)*. That woman had just dreadful aim. *(Pause)* Though it wasn't nearly as bad as being actually dead. *(Pause)* Ah, but that's a bit of a tangent, isn't it? A story for another time. Let us refocus, yes? *(Advance upstage)* You see, what these children don't know, of course, is that I can hear every word they're saying. Miss Lucina is correct, I am not sleeping in the basement. It reminds me of my dreadful grave, and it's also where I'm most likely to be staked. I did learn from the first attempt on my life. So instead, I lie in wait...

(Marius folds his arms behind his back and watches Lucina and Henry's exchange, bored.)

LUCINA: I still don't think he's in the basement. He's not that stupid, he can't be. If he's this old and he's made off with however many kids...

HENRY: Yeah, but it's better to go down than up. You don't usually hear the stuff that's happening below you unless it's like, I dunno, there's an earthquake or something.

LUCINA: We can't keep stalling.

HENRY: I ain't stalling.

LUCINA: You know what—just, never mind. Stop arguing with me and let's go. You know we have to get this done before anyone notices we're gone.

HENRY: Fine, whatever you want, Princess!

(Henry moves stage left and opens the door to the parlor. Simon stirs under one of the sheets.)

SIMON: Father?

(Henry quickly closes the door. Simon peeks out of the sheet, and then returns to sleep.)

HENRY: We can't go that way. We have to go around.

LUCINA: Is that where he's...

HENRY: Keeping the kids? Yeah. They're in there.

(Lucina pats Henry's shoulder. Marius advances toward them carefully. Lucina and Henry are facing away from Marius.)

LUCINA: Don't think about that right now. Focus on him instead.

HENRY: All right. I guess that means we're...heading down?

LUCINA: Yeah—

(Marius seizes Henry and drags him upstage, one arm wrapped firmly around his neck. Henry struggles to escape.)

MARIUS: Children! Welcome! Glad to know that you've both taken the liberty of coming to visit! You didn't knock. That's rude.

LUCINA: *(Holding the mallet threateningly)* Let him go, you old prick.

MARIUS: Really, resorting to name-calling? I feel like you could have been much more colorful with your word choice. Prick seems so...vulgar.

LUCINA: I'm surprised you know what it means.

(Marius tightens his grip on Henry)

MARIUS: Oh, I know what it means. My children are very informative. Very helpful, very understanding. You should take a cue from them. Try not to be so ungrateful while I'm being so courteous.

(Henry continues to struggle. Annoyed, Marius takes the flashlight from Henry and uses it to bash him over the head. Marius drops Henry, unconscious.)

LUCINA: Henry!

MARIUS: There we are. Much easier. Though... he will be up and about soon, so we'll just have to take care of you first. *(Steps over Henry and takes Lucina by the arm)*

LUCINA: Don't touch me!

MARIUS: Oh, please, you act like I'm killing you. You're just like all my old patients in London. You come here to see me and yet you protest when I am forced to handle you. You're only making this harder for yourself, you know.

LUCINA: You're the one taking kids that aren't yours.

(Marius seizes the hand with the mallet and wrenches it from Lucina's grip. He tosses it aside.)

MARIUS: No, they're mine. I took them, I turned them, and I take care of them. But this is all just idle chatter. Let's continue.

LUCINA: Oh my god. You're insane. You can't just take people's kids!

MARIUS: Only to you, child, and yes... I can. Now where were we.... *(Pause)* Ah yes, you were calling me a prick and trying to kill me. Would you like to resume?

LUCINA: *(Spits at Marius' feet)* Go to hell.

MARIUS: Oh, please, do be more original.

(Marius holds Lucina's arm firmly in his grip and he grasps her by the chin, lifting her face. Lucina freezes for an aside.)

MARIUS: I had honestly hoped for something better from these two.
(He tilts Lucina's head, exposing her throat.) But you can't expect that from youth, especially not with what I've read these days. No doubt they are intelligent, but I suppose with that comes arrogance. Perhaps you're wondering what I'm going to do next. Do I eat them? Do I kill them? No, both would be counter-productive.

(Lucina resumes struggling. Marius pushes her to the floor, places both hands behind his back, and kicks her in the stomach.)

MARIUS: Such an inconvenience.

(Lucina lies on her side, clutching her stomach. Marius takes Henry's backpack. He opens it and dumps its contents. Several wooden stakes, batteries, and a phone fall out, just within Lucina's reach. Lucina reaches for the phone)

MARIUS: No no. Not for you. *(He steps on Lucina's hand and picks up the phone.)*

(Marius turns to address the audience. Lucina has stopped trying to reach for the phone.)

MARIUS: I'm not sure how they expected this to go. They're young. I'm sad that we had to start off on the wrong foot, really. Come, we'll talk as I work.

(Marius takes Lucina's backpack, and empties that onto the floor. There are more stakes, a sleeve of garlic and another phone. Marius tosses down the other phone and then stomps on them both with his heel.)

MARIUS (CONT'D): You see, you must be harsh with these types of children, the ones that devolve into delinquency. The fact is I'm providing a service, not different from my previous occupation, what with extending lives and saving people from ill fates. And I always envied the families with their children. I'm sad I never had my own. I pitied them too, of course. Children were always the first ones to die of plague.

(Marius drags Henry into the parlor. Marius then approaches the couch and lifts the sheet to reveal Simon, dressed in shorts and a tee-shirt with no shoes or socks.)

MARIUS (CONT'D): Look at him, sleeping here. How cute.

(Marius drops the sheet and returns to the next room. He drags Lucina and lays her next to Henry in the parlor, stage left. He then leaves the room and closes the door.)

MARIUS (CONT'D): But I'm sure that if I asked you what you thought of the importance of children, about their safety...You would agree, wouldn't

you? *(runs a hand through his hair)* I'm taking care of them in ways better than their parents did. The best part, of course, is that these children will live forever. What could be better than that? Not everyone sees it that way, of course.

(Henry starts to stir in the other room.)

HENRY: Lucina? Hey. Luce? *(he gets up, holding his head, Lucina is still on the floor)* Shit. *(Henry tries to pick Lucina up.)*

MARIUS: These children wake up to a warm place to sleep, a loving father. Much better than crawling out of a tomb, don't you think? And these youths, well...

(Simon sits up, pulling the sheet down from the couch, looking around. Henry turns slightly and sees him.)

SIMON: Henry...? What are you doin' here? Did Father bring you?

(Henry starts pulling Lucina downstage.)

SIMON: What's wrong? Why are you scared?

MARIUS: *(pacing)* You see, I've been doing some reading. Adolescence appears to be just an artificial extension of childhood and avoiding adult responsibilities. I must say that this cure will be most effective. No need to avoid adulthood when you will never be an adult.

HENRY: *(visibly shaken)* Nothin', Simon. You wanna help me get Lucy up? We gotta get out of here.

SIMON: Why?

MARIUS: I am a good father, you see, a very good father. I take good care of my children, even if they resist at first.

HENRY: Don't you wanna go home? I know Dad's not great, but we can go somewhere far away, just you and me—

SIMON: I don't want to go home. I don't wanna go anywhere. *(advances on Henry)*

HENRY: I know you don't but it's...look, he's not your dad, okay. You remember Dad?

SIMON: I don't want to remember Dad. He's a nicer daddy. I won't go home! I don't want to go home!

MARIUS: I love them more than their own parents did, sometimes. Some children must learn this the hard way.

HENRY: Simon, c'mon! We ain't got time for this! We are gonna get you home!

SIMON: No! I won't! You can't make me! *(Shoves Henry to the floor)*

(Henry sits, stunned.)

MARIUS: It really is for their own good. In the end, I've given them a gift. I've given them the longest of lives, an endless childhood.

HENRY: Simon. Simon, please. C-C'mon.

SIMON: I don't wanna go home. And 'sides...the sun's out, and I'm hungry.

HENRY: We can cover you up, all right? We can cover you up and go home—we can feed you when we get home—

MARIUS: But most importantly, I've done something that is imperative for all fathers to do. I have provided. I have fed my children.

SIMON: I'm hungry.

(The stage lights shift, going red as Simon lunges for Henry. Marius crosses to stage left, passing into the parlor. Henry struggles visibly and then goes still.)

MARIUS: Do you feel better now, my precious little one? You did very well, you fed just like I showed you.

SIMON: Yeah! But... Henry's gone all cold.

MARIUS: Don't worry. *(Carefully strokes Simon's hair.)* He'll understand when he wakes up.



A Study in Texture by Destiny Schmidt



Castle in the Sky by Nicholas Pompeo

Arcady

Noah Snare

I cut stems and cram
My coat pockets with poems
Which pretend to be foxglove petals.

Rabbits search for each other on
Wheat-veined paths, and the
Moon draws her curtain; the
Field's heart rifts, a
Moth's slumber shudders.

All ceases mid-stride;
My senses unfurl
Upon the grass shrine.



Ivy Lane by Jacob Heylek



A River Flows Through You by Hannah Lorf

The Field

Rachel Amundsen

My toe touched the warm pavement,
slipping from my summer sandal.
Running through the screen door at home,
I dropped my school bag on a table,
and we were gone.

We ran to that place in the woods,
and we were gone.
Talking, kissing, and celebrating youth,
laughing until dark.

We went to the grassy field and started
to embrace our minds.
Thinking, touching, and learning about our bodies:
the field gave us insights
to remember forever.



Balanced or Unbalanced? by Kayla Shutters

Bastet

Hayden Smith

I have been reliably informed
that in ancient Egypt
cats were worshipped as gods.

Based on my experience
with my own cat
I can conclude
that running at top speed
from Point A
to Point B
for no reason

and loudly licking yourself,
making disgusting guttural slurps
at three in the morning,
next to my head as I am trying to sleep,
must have been godlike qualities,
to the Egyptians.

Perhaps it's the way my cat follows the sun,
napping in each and every golden square of light,
spending all day basking in its warming rays,
moving only to follow the shifting heat.

Or her ability to heal,
not just her own wounds, of which she has had many,
but those of my father while he recovered from surgery,
the thunderous vibration of her purrs,
helping seal the great fissure in his chest,
and the great sadness in his heart.

Or maybe she is a god
because each and every day,
a small, cold paw
with pink toe beans
is gingerly laid on my face,
while she screeches and yowls,
demanding a sacrifice,
consisting of dry food,
and perhaps some chicken.
...or human flesh; whatever works.

From Xibalba

Hayden Smith

Yucatan Peninsula, Undisclosed Coordinates.

July 30, 1969

5 p.m. Local Time

Agent Cawley's head was pounding, and the sound of the helicopter's blades thundering just above him was no help. Then again, neither was the fact that he hadn't slept in roughly three days, nor was the transition from being on a ship to being in a helicopter with roughly zero forewarning exactly great. That was the real rub about this job. Always traveling, but never in the way one wants to.

The briefing that had been thrust into his hands right before takeoff had been spartan at best. He was to arrive in the town of Hunhow, Mexico, and work alongside Field Agent Nicosia in order to determine what exactly had occurred there earlier in the week. There were no further details provided, save for a personal note from Field Agent Nicosia himself, requesting Agent Cawley specifically be assigned to assist in the investigation, citing his expertise on local customs and folklore, as well as stating, "He knows this shit better than I do."

Upon touchdown outside Hunhow, Agent Cawley quickly noticed two things. One: there was a very distinctly rotten, iron-tinged smell emanating from the direction of the village, and two: the only voices he could hear from within the town were distinctly American.

Field Agent Nicosia was standing just outside the town gates, his short-cropped hair and clean-shaven face in stark contrast to Agent Cawley's unkempt (but still within industry regulation) beard and haircut. Both men wore sharp, custom-tailored suits that were just as uncomfortable in the Mexican summer heat as you would think they'd be.

"Field Agent Nicosia," Cawley started as he shook the clammy hands of the agent. "What are we up against?" He noticed, but chose to ignore, his co-worker's distinct lack of color and overall decidedly shaken look. Nicosia was new to the job, but what he lacked in nerve, he made up for in enthusiasm.

"I've got more details than you, but the lab boys haven't let me in without a senior agent present," Nicosia sighed. "What we do know is that it's nothing good. Whole town goes silent overnight, the place is

so isolated that the only person who notices and thinks to call it in is the milkman."

"They have a milkman?" Cawley asked, bewildered by the idea that a small farming town would have their dairy trucked in from afar and to such a remote location.

Nicosia nodded, wiping sweat from his brow. "Next town over does livestock, these folks were more of a corn and potatoes kinda operation with some mining on the side. The people living in Hunhow send some fresh veggies and metal over the hill once a week; folks over the hill in Xbalanque send back milk and cream as payment. Or...they used to anyway..." He trailed off, looking decidedly more unwell in the falling sunlight.

There was a discomfoting silence for a few moments, with Field Agent Nicosia visibly trying to steady himself, looking more sick every time he breathed too deeply and inhaled the iron scent again. Cawley, meanwhile, was trying to recall where he had heard the names of the towns before, as well as deciding what he would have for dinner tonight (most likely carne asada). Eventually, a hazmat technician leaned out the village gate to inform the two of them that the town posed no immediately apparent biohazard and that the agents could enter to begin their investigation, but cautioned that what they were going to see would not be pleasant. This turned out to be the understatement of the day.

The village square was about a hundred yards across, dozens of small single and double-room houses encircling the cobblestone plaza, which had a rudimentary fountain at its center. It was also completely covered with the town's population, who had been reduced to dessicated, headless corpses that were being worked over by American forensic scientists. The sight of all this was the last straw for the dehydrated and nauseous Nicosia, who promptly fell to his knees and vomited from disgust and heatstroke while Cawley politely looked the other way and waited for his less-experienced coworker to regain composure.

"What the actual fuck?" Nicosia finally choked, wiping his mouth before taking a deep breath to kneel down to examine the nearest corpse in detail. The bodies had been there for only a day at most, if the forensics team was to be believed, but the level of desiccation was beyond anything natural. There wasn't a single drop of blood left in any of the townspeople's corpses. "Who the hell does something like this? This is beyond murder, this is ritual genocide."

"Genocide yes, but ritual no," Cawley replied coldly, staring with great intent at where a man's head had been removed from his shoulders.



"Look at the necks. If this was a ritual, they would have used a sword or a knife. Something that cuts clean and would leave a consistent line of decapitation. None of these bodies has a clean cut. The heads were ripped off, from the looks of it, by force," he said placing his hands on his hips and gazing into the distance in contemplation. "The question now becomes threefold: what can kill almost a hundred people overnight, do that with this kind of brutality, and what does it do with a hundred heads and close to 150 gallons of blood?"

"Based on the way you asked that, I'm assuming you already have a hunch?" Nicosia asked, standing and wiping dust off onto his pants.

Cawley nodded. "Follow me. I have a theory about why the air here reeks."

The two agents began to meander across the length of the village, taking care to step over the bodies strewn with reckless abandon and the forensic scientists rendered faceless automatons by their surgical masks. After several minutes of fruitlessly trying to pinpoint the source of the stench, the agents found what they were looking for. At the village edge stood the ruins of a temple, with what little remained of its divine structure towering over the two quite mortal men who had come to examine it. From the temple's outer wall came the source of the sickly odor that had permeated the atmosphere, in the form of giant letters streaked across it that unnaturally oozed an all-too-familiar shade of crimson.

Náajalt le ka'atéen, Hunhpw

"Found the blood..." Nicosia deadpanned, staring at the dripping message with equal parts interest and fear. He looked to Cawley, who was scowling at the message with a sense of knowing indignation.

"I don't suppose you understand what that says, Nicosia." Cawley muttered.

"Never took Spanish in high school, but I get the impression it ain't a friendly greeting," he replied, still transfixed on the blood-soaked wall.

"It's not Spanish," Cawley muttered quickly, scanning the treeline and thinking back to his time spent as a grad student, working archaeological sites in the area. He began to explain his thought process with an almost calculated tone. "It's Yucatec Maya, the same language the villagers here would have spoken. Roughly translated, it says 'I win this time, Hunhow.'"

"So...someone had a bone to pick with the town itself," Nicosia mused, still not entirely comprehending.

Cawley shook his head, motioning for Nicosia to follow him as he began to move towards a rocky outcropping just beyond the treeline at

the town's edge. "Hunhow isn't just the name of a town," Cawley explained, leading Nicosia to a nearby cave, with rudimentary mining equipment strewn haphazardly around its entrance. "In Mayan mythology, Hunhow and his brother Xabalanque were warrior twins, demi-gods with about the same powers as your average looney toon, and they had a real hard on for cheating deities out of fair deals. In one particular story, Hunhow is decapitated by a bat-god during a fight, but survives when his brother crafts him a new head from a gourd. The particular god that decapitates him is a real nasty bastard by the name of—"

"CAMAZOTZ!"

Both agents froze at the mouth of the cave. The voice from inside reverberated so loudly that it shook every living creature from the trees and burned the surrounding air with a level of sheer rage that was incomprehensible to a mere mortal. Perhaps it was best likened to a volcano that had been given the gift of language. Agent Cawley cut his mythology lesson short, pulling out his standard-issue revolver and flashlight before taking point as the two men began to venture into the darkness. Neither truly wanted to confront something that lived in a cave and sounded like that, but of course that was the rub of this job, always traveling, but never in the way one wants to go.

The inside of the cave displayed the remains of a makeshift mine, as suggested by the equipment outside. Pickaxes and oil lamps littered the ground, and rotting wooden joists held up the rocky ceiling. The flashlights were little help, providing tiny, white halos of visibility in a realm of cloying darkness. The deeper the two men ventured, the hotter it became, the ground creaking and groaning as if every move disturbed the earth, and it was abundantly clear that this was no longer a place where humanity was welcome, if it ever even had been before.

Nicosia pointed out the skulls first, their bones a brilliant gleaming white amongst the rocky blackness illuminated by his flashlight. After one skull came another, and another, following the trail to a massive pile of jawbones and teeth in the center of a hollowed-out chamber a ways into the mine. Within the chamber, all was lit with the infernal, sticky orange glow of lava that trickled down the walls in enough quantity to give light and burn the air, and there at its center sat a pile of discarded teeth and jawbones almost ten feet high, and at its apex sat a monster.

A bat bigger than a man, standing on its hind legs and covered with black fur that gleamed like the purest veins of obsidian. A naked face with beady eyes glowing like white hot magma above an upturned, horn-like

nose and below giant radar-dish ears that twitched in constant search of every damnable whisper. Its mouth was filled with a plethora of razors, and blood spilled perpetually from behind them in an endless red cascade, soaking the jewelry made of the finest jade and spotlessly cleaned human skulls strewn across its chest. This was the visage of a true resident of the underworld. This was Camazotz.

"Found the heads..." Field Agent Nicosia mumbled, dropping his flashlight and pointing his gun directly at the top of the bone pile.

"Put your fucking revolver down, Nicosia. You aren't gonna kill an old god with a pea shooter."

Nicosia begrudgingly holstered his weapon as Camazotz clambered down the pile, towering over the two agents.

"WHO DARES."

It was not a question.

Cawley stepped forward, speaking succinctly and with the practiced force of a man who had had this conversation many times.

"Agents Cawley and Nicosia, Emissaries of the United States. You want to tell me what these poor folks did to get turned into your new living room furniture?"

"YOUR TONE IS INSULTING TO MY EARS, SUCIEDAD."

"Yeah, and I'm insulted by mass decapitations. Give us the why and the how of what went down in Hunhow and we might just be willing to leave without making an incident."

The staring match that followed lasted longer than one between a man and a god should have. Camazotz was apparently not fond of mortals, and Agent Cawley was not fond of self-absorbed assholes, regardless of deistic status. Field Agent Nicosia merely stood aside. Negotiation was not his particular specialty, and as he watched, he never took his hands off his service weapon. Eventually, it was Camazotz who broke the tension.

"HUNHPW TRAPPED ME WITHIN THIS CAVE. HIS BASTARD BROTHER XABALANQUE CHEATED ME OF HIS DEMISE WHEN I SEVERED HIS HEAD. I BEAT THEM! I WON! THIS WAS MY VICTORY! AND WHAT WAS I GIVEN INSTEAD? A SENTENCE TO SLUMBER AND STARVE FOREVER IN AN ETERNAL PRISON BENEATH A YUUM TOKOY VILLAGE NAMED AFTER A LIAR AND A CHEAT, WHILE MY WORSHIPPERS DWINDLED DOWN TO NOTHING. I MERELY TOOK WHAT I WAS OWED, PLUS INTEREST. NOBODY CAN REPLACE A HEAD WHEN THERE ARE NO SURVIVORS

LEFT. WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE A GOD FOR WHAT HE DOES, BA'AX LE ESCORIA CHUPANDO SUBCESO?"

Agent Cawley said nothing at first. He felt as if at any moment he would boil over and strike the Bat-God, but instead he unclenched his fists and once again summoned his forceful yet restrained tone, taking care to remember his training and not break eye contact.

"The world outside has changed while you were gone, Camazotz. I think you'll find that you're not the only member of your pantheon who is wanting in terms of followers. I'm willing to cut you a deal, if you're willing to listen."

Camazotz lunged forward, grabbing Agent Cawley by the neck with fingers that stretched from the bend in his leathery wings.

"I DON'T THINK YOU HEARD ME, X-NUK PEEK'O'. THE LAST MORTAL WHO CUT ME A DEAL WALKED AWAY WITHOUT A HEAD. HUMANS ARE MENTIROSOS. HUMANS BREAK DEALS. WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I'D EVER TRUST SOJOL LIKE YOU?"

Agent Cawley's expression never changed. He never broke eye contact. He merely produced a small radio from his jacket.

"I press this little button, and the entire destructive force of my people rains down on this village from the sky and traps you in your little cave, this time permanently. Mortals have made a lot of advances in the last couple thousand years. You really want to risk being back in prison because some guy with a pumpkin for a head did you dirty over fifty lifetimes ago?"

Camazotz considered for a few moments before dropping Cawley back to the floor and sitting back, his giant ears tilting towards the stone-faced government man.

"You got your payback, Camazotz. You got all the blood you could ever want, plus interest. You promise to keep the human sacrifice to a minimum and your followers a secret, and I promise to let the mouth of this cave stay open and not bury you down here permanently."

Camazotz seemed to mull the concept over for a moment, gnawing absentmindedly on a discarded femur, the fountain of blood from his mouth painting it a sickly red.

"I ACCEPT THESE TERMS. NOW GET OUT OF MY SIGHT, MA'ILI' TI' U DESTRIPIA BEY JUNTÚUL PUTA BARATA."

"Pleasure doing business with you. C'mon Nicosia," Cawley snapped, making tracks to leave the cave while dragging his stunned protege with

him by the collar. The walk back to the surface was dead silent, save for the occasional bout of laughter heard echoing from the bottom of the cave. Eventually, as they emerged into the moonlit night, Nicosia spoke up.

"So...we're gonna come back and kick his ass, right? That whole deal you cut with Camazotz was just a bluff until we could come back with more manpower, right?"

"No, Field Agent Nicosia, No, it was not," Agent Cawley sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Well, okay, the airstrike was a bluff, we don't have that kind of funding, but even if we did, what good do you really think a couple of bombs are gonna do against an actual god?"

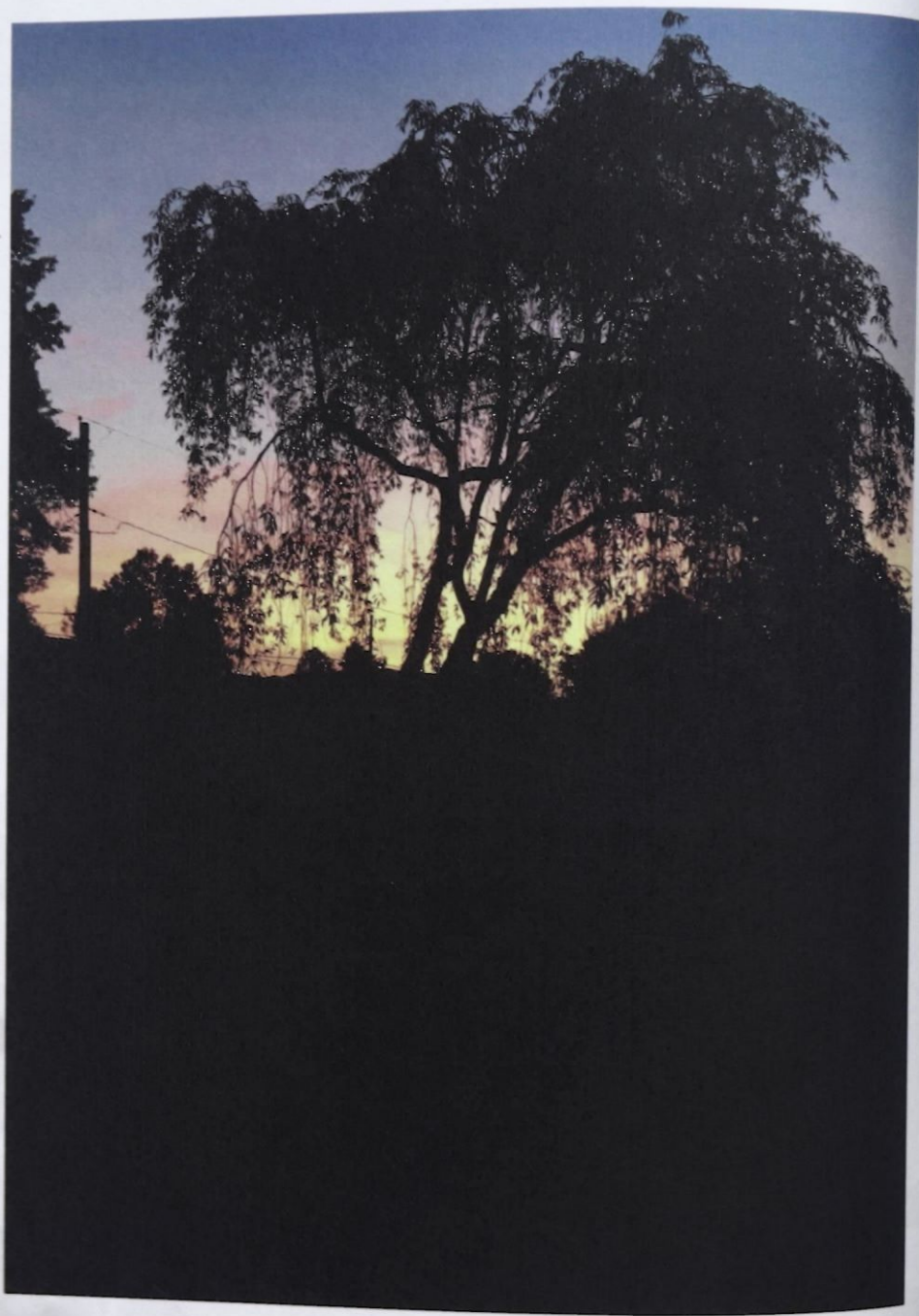
Agent Nicosia stopped dead in his tracks, the anger and shock in his voice now very much noticeable. "So what, we just let him roam free? What the hell do we do when he sets his sights on the town over the hill? What the hell do we tell them happened to their neighbors!?"

Agent Cawley snapped forward, giving Nicosia the same death glare he had given Camazotz. "We tell them that their neighbors dug too deep and hit uranium, and that they should avoid the town if they want to survive. We fence the place off, we keep guards posted to make sure nobody gets in and Camazotz doesn't start too big of a cult, put the bodies in the ground and move on. This town belongs to him now."

Nicosia didn't respond at first. He then began to pull out his gun and turn back to the cave before Cawley grabbed his arm.

"Listen, kid, I appreciate the sentiment behind your whole 'fight the biggest guy in the yard' attitude here, but that's not how this job works. On good days, we show up on time and get to do fun shit, like throwing down with Bigfoot and catching wild unicorns. But on bad days...on bad days you clean up the corpses and make the monsters pinkie-swear they'll be good little boys and girls when you know damn well they won't, and you roll with it because they have so much power that they could flip you inside out with just a look. So you can either walk back down there and try to fight a god, or you can pick up a shovel and help me give these poor folks some semblance of a proper burial."

It took all night to dig the graves. Another two days to fill them. And all the while, Camazotz could be heard, his laughter echoing from below the ground.



Author Biographies

Rachel Amundsen Rachel is a senior with a major in Writing. She started writing frequently about halfway through college, but started reading widely in high school. She loves learning about all sorts of random things in books and believes that books are the perfect way to experience an array of feelings from characters who live very different lives. Rachel hopes one day to inspire people with her work as an author.

Chase Bottorf Chase is a senior majoring in English–Writing and about to graduate from Lock Haven University. He has been writing ever since he learned how to; it was something that just clicked for him and something that he has a true passion for. He draws a lot of inspiration from authors and filmmakers he looks up to such as William S. Burroughs, Hunter S. Thompson, and David Lynch. His writing process consists of listening to ambient music or film scores to get inspired and in the mood to write. Chase also enjoys reading, watching films, and listening to and discovering all sorts of music.

Isabelle Collier Isabelle is a junior majoring in Secondary Education–English.

Raven Fortson Raven is a major in Secondary Education–English. During her time here, she became the president of the university poetry club, Lyrically Speaking. She has been writing for about eight years now, and still would never say that she has a writing process. Raven’s “inspiration” comes from an overload of emotions. She writes because she has to, because it’s her outlet. So there is no process; whatever Raven needs to say just kind of pours out.

Amanda Hall Amanda is a senior at Lock Haven University where she majors in English with a double concentration of Literature and Writing. She is a member of the Global Honors Program, is Vice President of the LHU English Club, and works as a Zumba instructor at the REC Center. Amanda has been “writing” stories since before she could write words, and she takes inspiration from nature and the people around her, especially those who she loves.

Jora Lam Jora is a graduating senior from Lock Haven this year. She’s majoring in English with a writing concentration and is president of LHU’s English Club. After graduation she intends to complete an MFA in Creative Writing. She primarily writes fiction, though she dabbles in scripts and screenplays, and finds her inspiration in fantasy, folklore, and the gothic.

Kayla Shutters Kayla is a dual major in Secondary Education–English, and in Studio Arts–Three-Dimensional Art. Additionally, she is currently the Theater Club’s

president and will have directed three plays for the 2019–20 season. The arts are a passion of Kayla's, and she hopes to always be active in the creative community. She primarily draws her inspirations from minuscule entities in life such as crumbling cement or a CD player malfunctioning.

Hayden Smith Hayden is currently an English major at Lock Haven University. He has been writing for fun since middle school, and tends to draw his inspiration from music, as well as the unforeseen consequences of his own terrible decisions. He enjoys reading comic books, playing video games, and spending time with his friends. His cat, Sagwa, the subject of the poem *Bastet*, is a very good cat.

Noah Snare Noah is a sophomore in Mathematics, which will probably change in the near future. Writing since he was ten years old, Noah was originally interested in writing short stories and novels, but found that he could not make his thoughts stick to logical plots, so poetry became the preferred route. He takes inspiration from a variety of places: Sufjan Stevens' *Carrie and Lowell*, Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me By Your Name*, and poets such as W.S. Merwin and Wallace Stevens. Noah does not have a defined writing method and usually does not know what he is doing in the early stages of putting pen to paper. His poetry is mostly a messy collection of words organized by bouts of editing. Noah's non-poetry interests include history and politics, with a focus on anti-imperialism.

Lacey Snyder Lacey Snyder is a sophomore majoring in Sport Administration.

Symone Terrell Symone is a senior Graphic Design major. She is an officer in AAUW (American Association of University Women). In her free time, she enjoys watching supernatural-themed shows and playing video games.

Kiara Tinnin Kiara Tinnin is a recent graduate with a degree in Communications.

Artist Biographies

Jacob Heylek Jacob Heylek is a Computer Science major from Wilkes-Barre, PA. He enjoys doing photography in his free time. The part of photography Jacob loves the most is the adventure aspect. His favorite time to shoot pictures is during autumn.

Alexis Hynd Alexis Hynd is a third-year Psychology student minoring in Art. She eventually plans on using her art abilities to help others through art therapy. Because of this, she is experienced in many mediums, acrylic, graphite, watercolor, photography, and more. Alexis has been creating art for seven-plus years and now incorporates it into her day as much as she can.

Andi Lohile Andi Lohile is a junior at Lock Haven University and is majoring in Biology with a Biomedical track. She is also the vice president for RHA, helps design makeup and hair for University Players, and is apart of the Global Honors Program. Andi has been interested in art ever since she was a kid, and she draws her inspirations from multiple outlets. Sometimes she is just sitting somewhere when she sees something she wants to explore through art. Other times, ideas seem to form in her head, and she begins to put them down on paper.

Hannah Lorf Hannah is a senior with a major in Health Sciences, Pre-Physician Assistant. Although she does not do art often, she is slowly increasing her interest through the use of photography. She typically likes to focus on nature and the simple things in life. She hopes that when you look at these images, you feel a sense of a new beginning.

Nicholas Pompeo Nick is a photographer, graphic designer, gamer, and just a lover of all forms of art. He uses his art to escape his daily life problems through fantastical, surrealistic creations in Adobe Photoshop. He tries to capture life with his lens and make it appear more interesting than we normally see day-in and day-out. He is hoping that through his art he will be able to travel the world capturing life and creating art for himself and others.

Destiny Schmidt “Yee-haw, ART!”

Kayla Shutters Kayla is a dual major in Secondary Education–English, and in Studio Arts–Three-Dimensional Art. Additionally, she is currently the Theater Club’s president and will have directed three plays for the 2019–20 season. The arts are a passion of Kayla’s, and she hopes to always be active in the creative community. She primarily draws her inspirations from minuscule entities in life such as crumbling cement or a CD player malfunctioning.

Symone Terrell Symone is a senior Graphic Design major. She is an officer in AAUW (American Association of University Women). In her free time, she enjoys watching supernatural–themed shows and playing video games.

Breanna Voitek Breanna is a junior majoring in Disability and Community Services.