SANCTUARY

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2026



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at the University of Alabama at Birmingham

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Sanctuary is comprised of a student editorial board, which gives careful attention to determine which submissions will be selected for publication and carefully arranges our journal-to-be. *Sanctuary* is published annually by the University Honors Program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and is generously supported by the Southern Regional Honors Council. Single copies of current or back issues in stock are $10 each.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We are proud to present the 2025-2026 edition of *Sanctuary Literary Arts Magazine!* We hope you enjoy all that is in store for you in this edition. Our editorial team, comprised of 21 students across 9 honors institutions, has selected these pieces for your reading and viewing, and we sincerely hope you enjoy them.

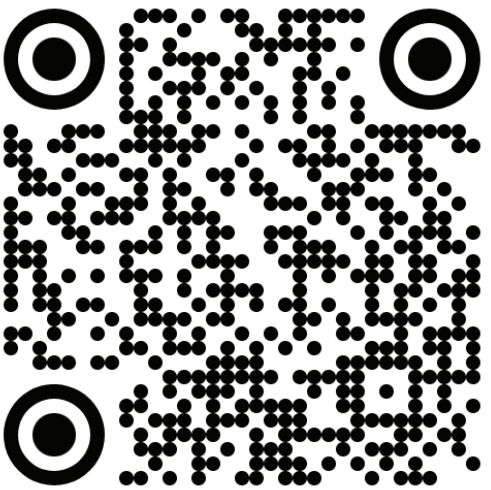
As we gathered and arranged all the accepted works from 25 students across 12 honors institutions, we began to notice a few key throughlines. There are many explorations of death, identity, justice, and familial relations, yet we also have reflections on love, nature, and serenity. The final assemblage of all of these works–connected in various ways, yet very contrasting in others–is just what Sanctuary is about, providing space for diverse thoughtful written and visual artistic expressions of students.

As you make your journey through these works, we implore you to consider the question posed by our cover work: "REPRESS V. EMERGE" by Hailey Turiczek. What is it that is being repressed? By society, by the self, or by another force? And, likewise, what is it that is either emerging or longing to do so in your own life or outside in our world? Reflect and allow yourself to dig into these ideas as we have when creating, selecting, and presenting the works collected here to you, our audience. You are an essential part of art and its power. The art is waiting, now it's up to you to turn the page.

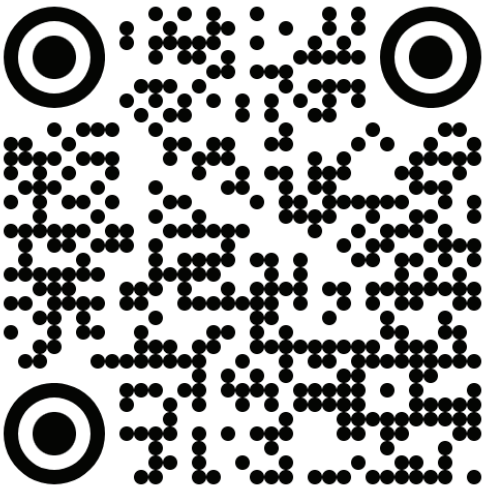
—Cliff Butler and Audrey Womack, Co-Editors in Chief.

Thank you for reading *Sanctuary Literary Arts Journal.* You can keep up with us on the SRHC official website: https://www.srhconline.org/sanctuary, and our Instagram @sanctuarylitmag

SANCTUARY WEBSITE



SANCTUARY INSTAGRAM



Katelyn Kerr
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

ARCHIVAL SILENCES

From: the Archive
To: A Researcher
Subject line: Request #203-new search

Dear valued patron,

We thank you for you interest
in our collection of human time.
We pride ourselves on recording
The most important of our collective past,
And take every request into careful consideration.

We are afraid we could not fulfill your request.
See your search terms:
"The silenced," "the muses," "the erased,"
"The Ones Who Time Forgot"
Yielded no results.

We apologize for this inconvenience and suggest you look elsewhere.

Sincerely,
the Archive

Researcher Notes:
Elsewhere is everywhere.
Look.

Graceyn McQueen
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

THE END OF AN ERA

Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

"*Tyrannosaurus rex*—Late Cretaceous, 68 to 66 million years ago—North America - Juvenile specimen."

The plaque is small, almost forgettable beneath the fossil. But I read the words anyway, whispering the syllables of its scientific name like a mantra: *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The skeleton before me is a juvenile, barely half the size of the adult it would never become. I step closer, drawn in by the curve of its ribs, the angle of its jaw, the emptiness of sockets where eyes once watched a living world.

But I see it alive.

The juvenile tyrannosaur breathes in the humid Cretaceous air. Around it, the Earth buzzes with life. Hadrosaurs graze in the distance, heads low as they feed in herds. Smaller theropods dart through the underbrush, sharp-eyed and alert. A quetzalcoatlus glides overhead, casting a shadow that ripples across the ferns. The juvenile doesn't know what's coming. None of them do. They move through their world unaware that their world is already transforming.

I ask myself the same question every time: *Did they know?*

That question never lets me go. I've spent years chasing it in museums, books, documentaries, and not-so-quiet thoughts that come to life in my mind. I'm not only fascinated by how the dinosaurs lived, but by how they *ended*. The asteroid, the seismic eruptions, the blackened skies, the cooling Earth, all of it paints a picture of devastation.

99% of species that have roamed the Earth are extinct. Survival has never been guaranteed.

What does it mean to vanish overnight? What does it mean to adapt, or to fail to? Why does life rise again from ruin? These questions pull me in deeper. What had begun as a curiosity became an obsession. Dinosaurs, for me, are a lens through which I understand everything: extinction, evolution, survival, and succession.

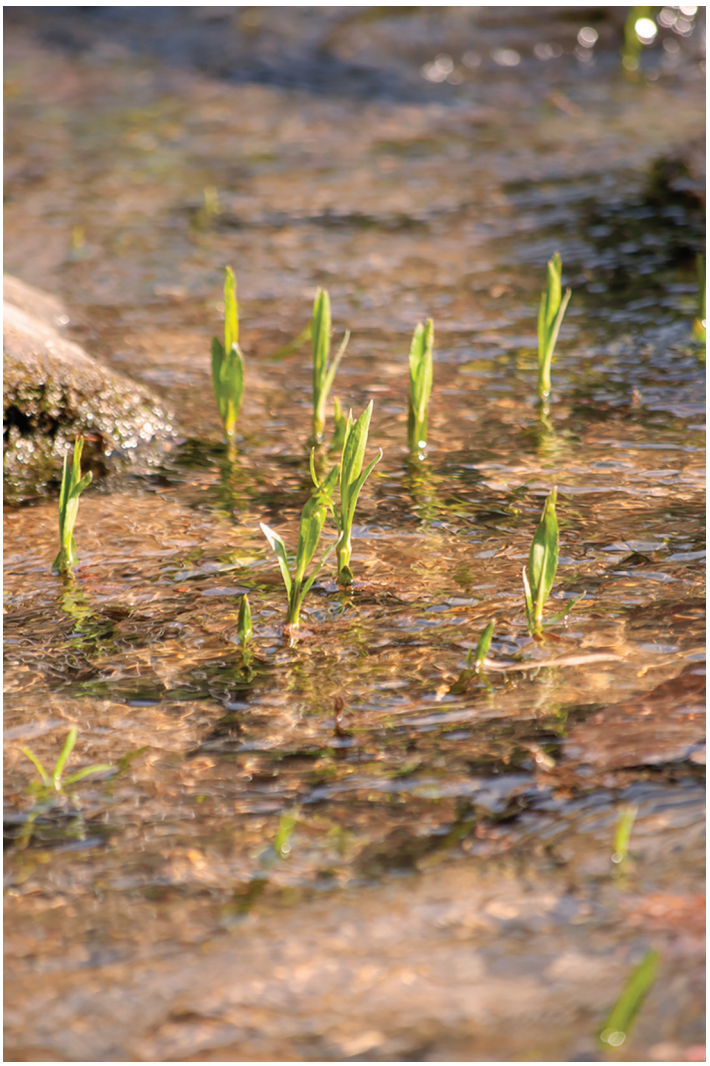
Change is not a villain; it's a force that breaks and builds. Dinosaurs didn't fail; they were caught in transformation's tide. From their end came the rise of mammals, of ecosystems reshaped, of birdsong in the morning, echoes of theropods still alive. That captivates me the most: continuity that connects the *Tyrannosaurus rex* to a sparrow on a sidewalk. Even in endings, something carries on.

When I need answers, I turn to those who bring the past to life. **Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant,** whose work on ecosystems and extinction bridges eras. **David Attenborough**, whose voice has breathed meaning into the rise and fall of worlds, including our own. Series like *Dinosauria by* **David Armsby** and *Prehistoric Planet,* which restore ancient creatures with realism and reverence. I dive into their work not only to learn, but to feel connected to the story of life on Earth.

Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

I study timelines, phylogenetic trees, and extinction events. I sit with unanswerable questions, but those questions don't belong to the past alone. They speak to us now: *Are we aware of our own extinction events? Climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss? Do we only feel the aftermath of change?* Dinosaurs may have never had the luxury of knowing. But we do. Maybe that's their lesson, not a warning but a mirror. A reminder that nothing lasts forever, and that's exactly why everything matters.

At the end of everything, hold on to anything.



Ellie Usdan
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

BUDDING ON THE RIVER BANK

Ishita Sukul
GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

OUR MOTHER

The spring breeze blanketed the high cotton clouds in the bright, cobalt dome comfortably, like a mother enveloping her baby in a soft blanket. Fresh rays of resplendent sunlight seemed to shine in rejoice, engulfing the hem of my coral shirt and the wrinkles of my charcoal skirt, with them decorating my outfit with sparkling diamonds of joyful light. The great meadows of luscious green fields, each charmed with waltzing daffodils and nodding lilies, were covered with moist grass that enhanced his shiny speckles of dew. Garnet roses, light lavenders, indigo azaleas, and honey dandelions bloomed with their utmost beauty, stealing my breath away into the serene atmosphere encompassing me. The swaying wind summoned the fruit-filled trees to dance, making me feel like the dominating queen of Mother Nature. It is to Her that this majestic environment, as when compared to the whitest of the doves or the most ferocious of the lions, overpowers any aspect of His creation due to its entitling charm. This place felt like a true home, blurring the lines between reality and imagination, almost becoming surreal. Most importantly, this place connected harmony to the unities of the world, where unique identities of nature are interconnected with their personal chains of love and trust.

From the moment I had stepped out of the pebble-colored van with my chestnut leather boots, it was love at first sight. My coffee-dropped eyes admired the great distances of solitude presented before me, and they soon spotted the snow-walled farmhouse my parents had bought to begin a fresh start to a new chapter of not only their lives, but of mine and my sister's. As we unpacked our heavy suitcases and memory-filled bags, I smiled at the deep truth that no matter where I went, I would always carry around the past. However, I always have the opportunity to create new memories with not only myself, but with those I love dearly. After taking a couple of fluttery steps to the middle of the field before the house, my little sister's arms wrapped around my waist, giving me a genuine, embracing cuddle of unconditional love. A clear drop of tears dribbled down my rosy cheeks, tickling my round face like a feather to the body. For the first time, I was at peace. I cuddled her back, staring off into the distance.

A whole new place for a whole new life, I reminded myself.

I strolled to the wooden stairs to the brick-colored door, with my thin fingers entwined around the tiny ones of my sister's, hand in hand. The constant creaks of the birch floorboards emphasized the great age of the house, as with every slight step I took, the crevices of the ash wood would become more defined. Naturally, sheer terror filled my vacant stomach, as breaking the boards and accidentally falling through them one day kept me in pure anxiety. However, I steadied my pace and placed my hand on the silvery metal doorknob, twisting it clockwise. It was eerily cold, almost like it had been years, or even centuries since there existed an inhabitant in this place. A sonorous ringing in my right ear started echoing against my eardrum, deafening the surrounding sounds around me. I walked inside.

Chills trickled down my spine and the hairs of my neck rose, standing up straight with eerie rigidness. The dusty corners of the rooms, the whimsy cobwebs upon the yellow ceilings, the antique furniture, and the towering grandfather clock adorned this farmhouse, making the place a mature atmosphere. The half-torn burgundy wallpaper had a color too dark of a red to be of an artificial paint, as when my fingers ran upon it, the thick, dark flakes of red chipped off, scattering away on the dull wooden floor. With every click of my boots, a strong odor filled the stale air, a scent like a mixture of iron metal and rust. All of the moisture from this house had been aspirated, as there existed no hint for the littlest of humidity. Suddenly, my eyes adjusted to the obsidian darkness before me and spotted a sole wooden chair in the center of the vacant living room. Walking towards it, my pale hands lifted the chair and moved to the left corner of the room, as it was out of place compared to the rest of the pieces of furniture in the house. The granite countertops held black-and-white pictures of a woman, each cased in a golden photo frame, with her midnight-black hair in bouncy curls, shaded lipstick, and her breathtaking dazzling countenance, stealing my breath away. As my trembling legs propelled me towards the end of the photos, there was a photo of a little girl and a boy with their supposed father, smiling enchantingly at me. Figuring that they were the previous owners of the house, curiosity filled my mind and a section of my conscience wanted to explore more.

"I see that you have already come inside," my mom remarked, as I immediately turned

around.

"Oh yeah, I-I was just looking around," I stuttered, "Sorry."

"No big deal, honey," she said as her arms extended to wrap around me, "Nice house, isn't it?"

"Yeah, for sure," I spoke quickly, desiring to continue my mock investigation of the house.

Suddenly, my sister rushed inside with her grassy bare feet, her hands holding large bundles of fluffy dandelions. My mind could not process when my sister had left me. The entity of this house distracted me too much, keeping myself and my senses off guard. I knew I had to take care of her, especially in this house engulfed with various sorts of negative energy and suspicious atmospheres.

"Mommy, mommy, look what I found!" my sister exclaimed, bouncing up and down in sheer excitement.

"Aw, these are so pretty… Did you see the apple tree in the backyard?" my mom asked sweetly, as she kissed my sister's soft forehead, leaving a slight red mark of the shape of a lip.

"We have an apple tree here?" I asked in delight, forgetting who the question was directed to, "Last one there is a rotten egg!"

The spiky edges of once-emerald grass had turned to the color of light toffee, crisping under our feet as my sister and I ran over to the apple tree. With the round fruits of scarlet vibrant against the shamrock leaves of the large motherly plant, my scrawny legs swung up and hurled my body along the smooth, but dense bark. Compared to the rest of the backyard, however, this tree was fairly maintained, which was most likely due to the owners taking well care of such an enchanting tree. The apple tree was not only my sister's favorite, but mine too.

Days soon morphed into weeks, and these weeks soon shifted into months. I had gotten familiar with the uncanny silence of the environment of the house and my body took me outdoors on rich sunlit days to keep my mind distracted from the isolation inside. However, something sinister, something indescribable, occurred on this very night. The velvet indigo blankets had covered my curly locks of hair, the color of pulled ginger, and a deep drowse casted a spell upon my sleepy eyes. My sister dozed off in the bed adjacent to mine, with a redwood bed stand separating us. Being half-awake, my keen ears could hear the squeak of the lead door open and close, and these noises shifted to the sounds of two distinct clinks of glass placed on the bed stand next to me.

"Hey, mom…," I mumbled to myself.

The door closed.

The following morning, my rooster-crow alarm woke me up from my deep sleep to spot two empty, clear glasses on the bed stand, with one next to me, and the other next to my sister. The look of perplexity and ponder in my sister's once-bright appearance spoke for itself. She had noticed too.

As my clumsy feet drowsily sauntered me down the stairs, my narrow arms clasped around my mom's hip.

"Thanks for putting two glasses on our bed stand last night," I quietly thanked, "Not sure you gave us empty ones, though."

"What glasses?" she asked confusedly, "Your dad and I were sleeping the whole time."

Utter terror struck my body, immobilizing me like a frozen, helpless statue on the ground. I turned over to my sister, her eyes wide open and her jaw dropped. We both had the same blood-curdling thought.

We are not alone.

This became a daily routine, as every single morning, we would find the very exact two

glasses placed on our bed stand next to us. What was once light-hearted, now became menacing. However, I still kept my courage at heart.

"Maybe t-this thing, or ghost, whatever, just wants to be close to us, you know?" I anxiously asked my sister, "Maybe it left them here because it was… w-worried that we might get thirsty during the night?"

"Then we should call this ghost Mother. She can be our other mom because she is kind, just like you sissy," my sister uttered calmly.

My sister was absolutely right. Whenever my sister and I were preoccupied, watching television or playing board games, Mother would slightly inch the same wooden chair I had found misplaced on the first day of moving in, forward towards us. Sometimes, she would manage to move it all the way to the center of the room. Mother would do this in front of everyone, and my sister and I would always feel sorrowful placing the chair back against the corner of the living room. She just wanted to be near us. She just wanted to take care of us.

Before we could keep track of time, Mother became our favorite like we became hers.

Years passed and we had moved out of the house, once again back to city life. The constant emotions of grief, pity, and strife circulated through my veins, my blood, and my mind. Not a moment of life was wasted back where the spotty cows grazed, the sun-kissed lilies swayed in the gleaming rays of light, and tranquility and repose filled the air. I knew it was time to move on to start a new chapter of my life.

One chilly, dewy, January morning, the numbing truth finally appeared before me. An old newspaper article about our old farmhouse was delivered at the front steps of my apartment door. My twitching hands picked up the newspaper, and to my horror, my whole life turned upside down as my eyes followed the words across the page. The once-real surroundings and the once-moist air distorted into parched, dreamlike fantasy. The original occupant, a widow, of whom there were multiple photos of back in the house, was our Mother. She had murdered her two children, son and daughter, by handing them each a cup of poisoned milk before they went to bed, and then, she had

hanged herself. Additionally, the dark crimson wallpaper of the house was *not* wallpaper. It was the dried *blood* of both of her children.

The front page of the article depicted a grayscale photo of the widow's body draping from a high beam in the living room. Beneath her, knocked over, was that very ancient wooden chair, positioned exactly in the center of the room.



Samir Abouhaidar
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

THE BEACH AT OCEAN BEACH

Carly Walker
GEORGIA COLLEGE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

GRANCY'S MAKING GUMBO AGAIN

My mother's mother wields her wooden spoon
Grancy, the almighty 81-year-old gumbo queen
She might have back problems and an iron deficiency
But goddamnit, she can cook.
I watch her from my barstool–
The same one I've occupied since I could walk
As she sighs into the pot as she tosses in the chicken.
It settles with the fragrant andouille and simmers happily.

She started treating me like an adult a year ago
Which is jarring, to go from *"Look how tall you are!"*
To our conversation that I'm zoning back into now:
"I've been praying to the Blessed Mother
To have her help your cousin with his addiction.
You should pray to her, too."
I give her a hum of acknowledgment.
I can't decide if she's unaware of my atheism
Or if she knows and just pretends not to.

The rice cooker gives a little chime
And its steam wafts out when Grancy opens the lid.
We can hear my mom gossiping in the next room
Her Cajun accent peeping out after just six hours here
She sounds just like Grancy,
Just like me, too.
We're the same woman copied and pasted three times
All full of love and equally full of shit.

Grancy ladles rice and gumbo into a bowl for me
My mouth watering and arms reached out,
I've assumed this position more times than I can count.
Jeopardy is on in the living room,
So I follow Grancy and her rolling walker
And she complains to me while I slurp down gumbo.
Eventually, she drifts off into an afternoon nap,
Giant armchair enveloping her ever-shrinking body.
I watch her sleep as my sister walks in to whisper to me.
"It's so boring here."
"Yeah. Want some gumbo?"
She nods, and we quietly creep back to the kitchen.

Anna Bice
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

ORIGIN

Before I was anything else, I was a daughter
An extension of my mother
everything I did reflected on her
Any feeling I had she had felt first

Before I was anything else, I was a daughter
A double of my father
With our dry humor and lack of words
The silence was his sanctuary while it was my prison

Before I was anything else, I was an accident
Something my parents didn't plan for
Instead they were sketching mockups for an unbuilt house
Dreams on a back road that would never live a life of a pillow

Before anything else, I was a sister
5 years apart, apparently she prayed for me
I have never felt like an answer to her prayers
Instead I am a reminder of what could have been

Before anything else, I was alone
Parts of my mother she wished were hidden away
Existing in the my father's silence that I could never embrace
Not quite an answer or something my sister could praise



Saanvi Kundu
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

FIERY

Grace Ashmore
SOUTHERN ARKANSAS UNIVERSITY

GRANDPA'S GIRL

"Whatcha doin' over there, Sug?" Grandpa turned to look at me as he said it, and it wasn't an accusation, like I was used to at home, but a simple question. Everything with Grandpa was simple, calm. I shifted to broaden my view, and peered over at him through the cracked trailer door. "Just watchin'. What are *you* doing?" He had a cup of red liquid in his right hand, and I had watched him mix it in the cramped kitchen with water and sugar and food dye. In his left hand was the hummingbird feeder, the green plastic one that had hung on the porch with the wind chimes for as long as I could remember. It had a clear middle, and a row of flowers with holes in their centers encircling its base.

Grandpa smiled, and began to pour the mixture into the feeder's open top. "I'm just feedin' my birds. They like sugar water; it tastes like flower nectar, and the red looks like flowers, too." My head cocked to the side of its own accord. "Huh," was all I mumbled in response, and Grandpa just shook his head and chuckled. "Do they like blue water?" I asked, and Grandpa tilted his head a bit. "You know, I haven't ever tried it. Seems like I read somewhere that hummingbirds just like red water because it reminds them of the flowers they eat from, and they see different colors than we do, but I don't know." He finished pouring, and lifted the feeder to his eyes as if inspecting it. "Maybe we'll try it, sug. It's probably worth a shot," he added with a wink, as he hung the feeder back on its hook.

~

"Would you look at that! Those are nice, Joseph, nice and sturdy." Grandma patted my uncle's back with a grin and a chuckle. Even though the house wasn't quite finished, with concrete floors and no lights or drywall, Uncle Joe had already finished with the bird feeders. Two tall metal poles stood in the grass of my grandparents' front yard, hung with a mix of new and old bird feeders. Some looked like houses or churches, one was tall and cylindrical with a sunflower on the top, and they all glistened in the summer sun.

"Do we need to put anything in them?" I asked, and glanced over at Grandpa. He tilted his head. "That's a question for Joseph. Do we have birdseed?" Uncle Joe nodded, and explained that he had brought a large bag of birdseed from his house in Little Rock, but hadn't yet filled the bird feeders. "It's a pretty heavy bag, though, Dad. You may need some help." Grandpa looked over at me. "Grace and I will manage," he said with his grin, nudging my arm. "We sure will!"

Grandpa's truck was small, with only two seats and a cup holder, which was piled with work gloves and pens and several old coins, and it smelled, as most old trucks do, faintly like grease and leather. It smelled like my Grandpa, the engineer, the fixer of machines. I hopped into my seat, and Grandpa heaved himself into his, the top of his round belly just touching the bottom of the steering wheel, which was covered in faux leather and secured with plastic wire.

The drive to the shed was short and pleasant, and Grandpa and I worked as a team to heft the forty pound bag of birdseed into the bed of the truck. I climbed into the bed, and helped Grandpa secure the tailgate. I had always liked riding on the metal toolbox in the back, and Grandpa kept the windows open so that we could talk. He backed the truck up and parked right alongside the newly erected poles, and I directed him with one hand on the tailgate and one on the pole.

Grandpa grunted softly as he lifted himself out of the truck, and I already had the bag of birdseed in hand, picking at the seams to open it. "Now, wait for me, sug. I'm going to show you how to fill them. Some feeders are tricky." His tone was a familiar one, and I always welcomed his firm, yet gentle, direction. He made his way over to me, and pointed with his cane to each bird feeder in turn. Some opened from the top, with their little roofs lifting and staying up with a twist. One had a sunflower on its top face, and a complicated spring system, which I didn't understand. Grandpa did, though, and we filled it together, him holding open the lid and me adding seed in handfuls.

After all of the feeders on both poles were filled, we got back in the truck to return the seed. "You think you can get it yourself?" Grandpa asked when we reached his storage building. He was leaning heavily on his cane, with one hand gripping the side of the truck bed. "Yep!" I chirped, "I'm strong, remember?" Grandpa looked at me and smiled. "You sure are, sug. Just like your mama. And your grandma."

~

"Knock, knock!" I shouted, as I let myself into my grandparents' laundry room. Grandpa responded with a booming, "Who's there? Oh, me! I'm there!" I could hear his grin. Hugs were always the first priority in my grandparents' house, so Grandpa's recliner was my first stop. His side table was piled with knick knacks: books, colorful highlighters, little gadgets he had always prized. His clutter, though, was nothing compared to his wife's, but she was nowhere to be found. My grandma was an enigma, always on the go. She was so full of energy that it often spilled over into her mannerisms; she talked with her hands, and boy, could she talk. I guess I inherited some of that from her, but I had always thought I was more like Grandpa. He was a talker, but he knew how to listen better than anyone I knew.

"What brings you 'round these parts, sug?" My smile was automatic. "I figured it was about time to feed the birds, and y'all are usually home around this time when you're not at dialysis," I replied, vaguely wondering if I should have called ahead. Usually, I did, but I knew my grandparents always appreciated guests, invited or uninvited, announced or unannounced.

I wasted no time in filling the bird feeders, relishing the familiarity of driving Grandpa's truck, however short the distance. I wasn't alone, though, as Grandpa had made his way to the front porch. He lowered himself into one of the big, white rocking chairs my mother had picked out for him. And, as I backed the truck up to the pole, filled each feeder, and nearly fell while re-hanging each one, Grandpa kept a running commentary.

"That one with the flower is tricky, but if you hold the spring with your left hand and pinch the scoop with your right, you'll manage."

"A little to the left, you're about a foot away from the pole. No, you're clear. Keep backing up."

"You're scaring me a little on that ledge. Just like your mama, though, like a little climbing monkey."

~

I watch the hummingbirds dance around a faded plastic feeder, freshly filled with bright red sugar water. They don't seem to mind the peeling paint, or the years of grime that it has accumulated. It is a far cry from what I had known when I was younger, but it was Grandpa's. The old thing hadn't been touched in years when I found it in the corner

of the old trailer porch. That trailer still stands watch behind the new house, mostly abandoned, but still full of memories- and Grandma's junk.

"Whatchu doing out here, girl?" A hand comes to rest on my shoulder, and I see my Grandma's face out of the corner of my eye. I had called to tell her I was coming, but I knew she wouldn't answer. I guess I just wanted to hear the voice at the end of the line, the message recorded by Grandpa when I was tiny. "You've reached Ronny and Gwenda, please leave us a message, and we'll call you back." Generic words, generic message. The man that recorded them was anything but. As I fidget with the newest charm on my silver bracelet, a tiny hummingbird, Grandma begins to speak. "Missing Grandpa, are you? Me too, hon. You were always his girl though, Grandpa's girl. He always knew where to find you, you know, even when you were little, when your daddy scared you. I remember your mama always sent him to find you. He was the only one who could make you your little self again, you know, all smiley and happy. Grandpa's girl, through and through." She ended with a chuckle, familiar, yet with an added layer of sadness, one that wasn't there when I was little. She was different, now. I think we all were.



Phoebe Dell'Arena

CATAWBA COLLEGE

CHILDREN'S GIFT OF INCLUSIVITY



Ellie Usdan
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

A GATHERING OF FUNGI

Makayla Castle
CATAWBA COLLEGE

LOVER

Lover's body on the forest floor,
damp from the morning dew and southern thick,
I crawl into her stiff corpse.
Her bones wrap around me,
my form going fetal under her ribs.
The wet coats my skin: sticking, drying, cracking.
Fingers slide into my mouth, I can taste the iron.
Sweeter now than she was then,
though she smells out of date.
My mama always told me not to let good food go to waste,
and I always do what I'm told.
Eating what pops and spills into my mouth like rotten candy,
ready to feel the turn and churn.
I am in her, as she is in me.



Brooklyn Billioty
NICHOLLS STATE UNIVERSITY
MORTAL MAN



Lilly Preciado

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

SELF PORTRAIT

Maggie Creekmore
GEORGIA COLLEGE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

BEAUTIFUL STARVATION

Maybe I'd make a pretty dead girl.
Maybe my bones would make such a breathtaking sight,
Showing through my decomposing, starved flesh
As it shrinks against the designs made by my ribs and vertebrae.
Maybe my organs and juices would all be such stunning colors
Seeping slowly into the ground
Through the orifices of my corpse,
Like spilled mocktails mixed with diamond dust
Spawning a garden where I lay.
Maybe I'm not pretty yet because
I am meant for beautiful starvation.

Maybe my enemies will all tear out their hair when they see me there
Lying dead in the dirt and dust,
They'll cry and scream, 'how can she be so beautiful?'
While my mother combs the hair back from my forehead,
Whispering that she is so proud of her daughter.
Stars of rot will be rhinestones,
A wreath of falling rain for my tiara.
My lovers will cut away my clothes to see
More, and more, and more of me,
Crying to the heavens that if they'd only known
They would have loved me so much lovelier.

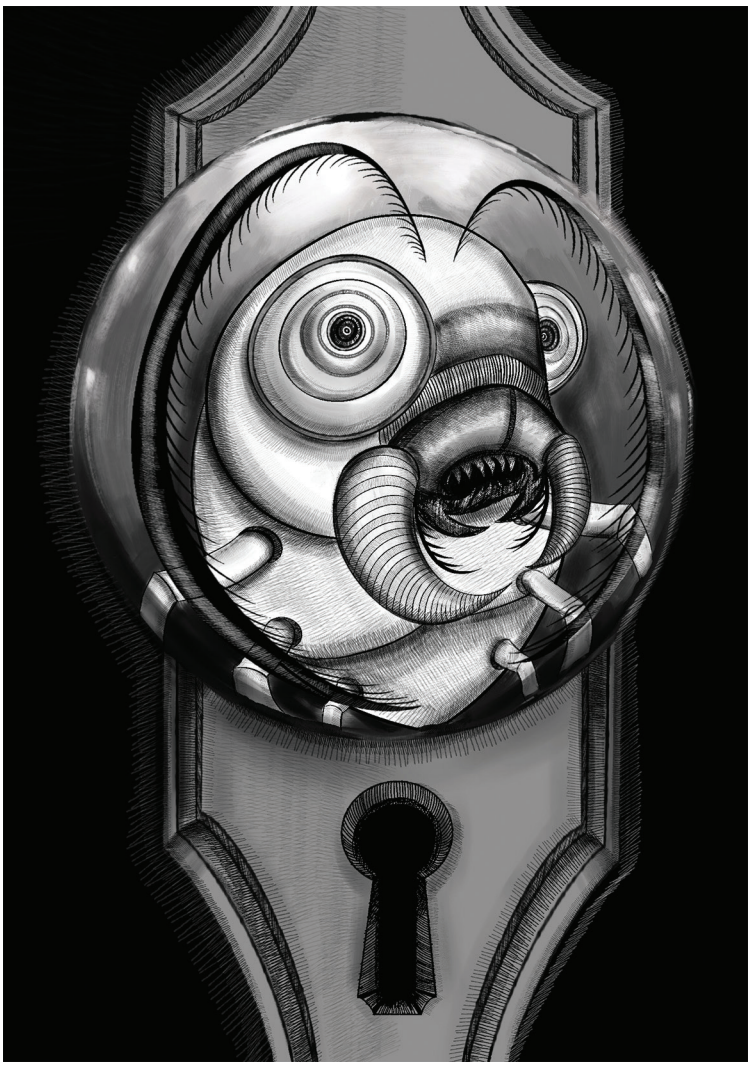
If I stopped eating today,
How long would it be until I was that pretty dead girl?
Could I cut the time in half by dancing,
Could I half it further by tapping and twirling?
Perhaps the only reason I have not reached my true potential

Is because I consume the Earth
Rather than letting it consume me,
Surrounding myself with glorious things
Rather than surrounding things that are drab.
I wonder how long would I have to lay,
Thrown so perfectly across the rocks by the sea,
Before my bones fuse with the minerals
And my eyes glisten with salty spray?
Not consuming sun or air,
Not being anybody or anywhere,
Just laying there.
They'd find me in a little while,
Following moonlit footsteps shaped like crescent moons
For I was only half a human—
For I was only half a girl—
Shot through the head,
CPR with my thumbs
On a heart long dead,
Tie it with a pretty white ribbon
(Just enough to live on)
Living half a life, spending half my time removing things
To attain the living girl's salvation:
My beautiful starvation.

Nandi Boini
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

THE BLOOD ON THE BAMBOO CEILING

There is blood on my hands.
They are stained with the violence of inaction.
In a system that presumes my innocence, I am guilty.
I am a coward deemed model minority,
a willing pawn in a game I will never win.
I am a dog sitting at the foot of my master,
begging for scraps in return for my loyalty,
a drunkard intoxicated by proximity to power,
a disciple bowing my head to my Creator,
asking why I have not yet realized
the divinity that was promised to me.
But not even the Lord Himself can absolve me of my sins,
for I know that He is not the one I must repent to.
The only one who can forgive me is He who has never been worshiped.



Hailey Turiczek
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

GREGOR'S TRANSFORMATION

Elena Lichtenwalner
VIRGINIA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

A SWORD AND SHIELD

The sword and shield are cleaned at the end of the day. A cloth wipes off the blood. Wax is coated onto the metal. Then oil makes it shine. The squires would come out from the wooden door, struggling to grab each weighted piece as they prepared for their knights. Aspen would grab the set, swinging out the sword like he was about to go to battle, and protecting the saddle next to him like a nobleman with his goblet of wine.

The shield bearer was lucky to have the chance to go to an estate and become a squire at eighteen. The war offered the chance to study under the second son of a Viscount.

"War! Soon we will be there!" the knight said, thrusting a small dagger at Aspen with a grin. Caldor, that was his true name, not his title or family name. "You will be by my side, striding up to the front lines as our brethren attack. I will have my sword, and you will be my shield, and together we will keep the city safe."

Aspen would say "Yes Sir" and they would continue on their walk through the woods.

Caldor's tent looked down on the battlefield, war cries heard in the distant wind. Caldor shoved daggers in front of Aspen to sharpen, though the blades did not get any better. The two had spent the last week in the tent, watching as the wounded came back, thanking them for their part in the war as the pair took walks around the grounds.

"You may not believe this, but I would rather be here instead of the estate." Caldor said.

Aspen raised his eyebrow.

"Now, it's not like I want to live in a tent all of my life, but there is a type of freedom here."

"Rather be on a carrot and potato diet, instead of the spiced meats and five course dinners?"

"Of course not. I love the luxury of living with the Viscount, the land, the bedding."

"The fields of grain, cows, and lamb!" Aspen said with a grin.

"Yes, that as well. There are some plus sides to being out here though." Caldor said.

Caldor loved to spout tales of his time at training. The captain taught the techniques to the knights, who would then choose how to teach it to the squires. Once a month, the Viscountess of Asher would invite ladies to come and watch.

"But it was not the fact that they were there, it was how they watched as if we were prized cattle," Caldor said, hanging his hand under his neck like it was a bell.

"Sounds better than the dingy inns in town. Do you know how many maids just want to have a bed partner?"

"Ah, but at least you can choose." Caldor looked out the tent flap. "You heard about my fiance, she was one of those fabulous ladies who visited. Lady Clara, the one who all the mothers lunge for like wolves. She offers a dukedom for her husband-to-be."

"At least there is this war. You are representing your house." Aspen said.

"Yes, making them proud with my two people who I have wounded, my squire and myself from my own cooking. Face it, my worth is in my title. Without it I would be free."

Aspen nodded slowly.

"The price of your personal life in trade for exploring the world, that is what war offers. Much better than my brother's deal of being the head of a house. If I were to go home, I would have a ring placed on my hand and tied down to a regal chair within the first year."

"Caldor, what if you become a captain? I'll be your lieutenant. We can go anywhere, try any kind of food!" Aspen sat on the bed next to Caldor, placing a hand on Caldor's hand. "You could make your family proud with your dedication to the war. We would even get cattle for our time!"

Caldor laid back onto the bed. "Yes, and we will be free."

The sounds of war cries awoke Aspen from the floor. Aspen took up the sword and shield when an ambush came from the back side of the camp. His shield was raised, covering Caldor as he tried to gather his armor. Aspen had taken out three soldiers by the time Caldor was ready to take his sword.

"Come let us go." Caldor said with a grin. "Let's go find some freedom."

A war was no match for the power of the noble hierarchy. Once the battle was won,

cries of going home were shared with the troops. A welcome banquet followed it, calling together all of the nobles of the kingdom to view the soldiers.

"Squire. You have spent years studying under the Marquess of Asher, fighting for the empire and keeping our people safe. In the moment when the empire needed you most, you defended our most helpless knights and kept the enemies from advancing further. For this, you will be awarded the title Baron of Derage." The king continued with his speech, moving down the line of squires who had survived the battle.

Aspen glanced up to see Caldor, staring off from the dais. Aspen bowed his head at Caldor, expecting the classic smile to return to the knight. But Caldor stared out into the crowd.

Towards the end of the night, the crowds started to hug the dance floor, grabbing piles of food on golden edged plates, and glasses being overflowed by servants. Aspen hugged the wall, watching as couples went past and old men became engrossed with their wine.

"Baron. Congratulations on the title. May your decisions ever bring you praise and prosperity." Caldor said.

"Thank you, Caldor. I mean Marquess of Asher." Aspen said.

"What is it like now having a title? Is the food worth it?"

"Well of course. Have you seen how ladies have flocked towards me?"

"Ah yes, they will do that for years now, so just make sure to find the right one!"

"Even the king has recognized me!"

"You now have even more power and worth to the estate, so he should know your name before the next estate meeting."

"Yes, certainly. But I will still follow you around the estate, as your squire, of course!"

"You will not be able to though."

"What?"

"I am changing titles soon, you know this." Caldor looked out and spotted Lady Clara charming some ladies by a servant carrying a bottle of wine. He put his glass down on the table and went up to Aspen. "Your sash, it's out of place."

"What do you mean I cannot go with you?" Aspen said, startled by Caldor's closeness.

"You have to stay with the estate. You are not my squire anymore. You have power. You have freedom and choice from the dinky peasant girls. You can even choose from

the numerous noble women. You are able to make your house. You are a baron now."

"I recognize that I am not your squire anymore but you have always been my knight. What use am I if I am devoted to you, loyal to you? Am I not your right hand man? Does my title not allow you to choose me?"

"You can't be. Whether or not you have a title you can't be."

"Then what was the point of coming home? Why even give me credit for saving you if it was only going to end up with us being separated?"

"I will be a duke, my place has been decided."

"And that is what you have always been?"

"I have to go. My future duchess is waiting."

Caldor turned away, towards the door, the carriages, the gates.

"No! Why can't you just admit you took away this choice from me?" Aspen said.

"I made this choice so that you would be safe once I did leave. What else could I have done to make sure you are able to thrive?" Caldor said.

"No, that was the choice made by the future duke. Why did you, Caldor, make this choice?"

"You will do well as a baron."

"And you would have done well as a captain. But we won't see what either of those things look like. Goodbye to the new Duke. May your reign bring you prosperity."

Aspen passed the Asher gates. As a baron, he was bound to his title and the estate, but he left the estate with only his daggers, coins, and clothes. Aspen drank in the dingy inn for weeks, only moving when the Duchess had announced her husband-to-be. He traveled behind the caravan of nobles from the Asher estate. He guarded the door of the chapel, convincing the pastor that it was for the Grace of God. So Aspen spent his days overlooking the duke from his forges, as he kept an eye on each shield and sword that was sent to the duke.



Ellie Usdan

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

RAINBOW ROCKS



Ishita Sukul

GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

INVISIBLE MAN

Tiana Hammock
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

AS BELOW IS ABOVE

after Ada Limon, *A Trick of Light*

Did you hear Henry's built some stairs to heaven?
That he split and stacked the rotting cypresses into steps?

How it carry him up? How he ain't fall over the sides?
When did the tight sky loosen to usher him in?

How long? How tall? How he ain't get hungry
or tired at all swaddled deep in temptin' fluff?

Well, he just ain't spillin' to me the *how's*, but he's tellin'
all the sights, yes, and that's all he'll *ever* say.

Now, up there he swears that the color of His skin
is painted to sooty sin, that castor oil shines

brighter; that He still wears that familiar white gown.
No pointed cap. A frightening light face lingering near.

There, His back was bent, dripping red; there, sitting atop was a man.
And he smiled right at Henry, suited, and twirling his forked tail

that crackled the air, brandishing bolts to His hind.
The archangels couldn't fly to him. His Son suspended.

But they was all together: a real picture Henry saw:
Of poor Mary gathering up ripped wings.
Of endless cotton clouds spanning wide.
Of poor God, bent over and pickin' too.



Audrey Womack
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

PRETTY INVASIVE

Katelyn Kerr
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

LOVESONG TO A RUNAWAY GIRL

MSS. 225
SERIES III: MEDIA
SUBSERIES-AUDIO RECORDINGS
James Deveraux, "Runaway Baby," 1929

Fingers plucked a four-four tune. A smoke haze coated the room.

I saw an absinthe angel. Blood-lipped ingenue. With a neon halo cast
over short cut hair.

Caught her coquette stare during a brief reprieve.
Made my way to her only to see

two drinks sat beside her.

"This for a lover?"
"No. A brother."
Brother, where the hell was he? Didn't matter to me.

Came to town that afternoon. One way ticket. A single room.
"What makes a girl run this far?"

A drowning dreamer in need of escape
From a mother's straight jacket sewn | from white lace.

Headstrong grace. Vagabond queen.
"Let's rendezvous 'round the corner–
Decatur and Dauphine."

Mark my words: I'll make her | my lady.
I'm a Viex-Carré boy,
She's my runaway baby.

Katie Potts
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

A BACKWARDS RELIGION

after Hayley Williams "True Believer"

The youth counselors denounce my "sin".
Southern beliefs suffocate me and every
will I have left to repent is gone. For
not being straight, the price has been paid.
"Rise to God for he is your savior", they spit.
Again, it's a lie passed on to make progress still.
'Til I am accepted, I will not worship again.
It's not the God I remember. Hate is on the rise,
paid and sold in an endless cycle. Hate for love. Not
for being the Devil, but for being human. Will
every prayer be answered? Or just the South's?
Sin against the Lord or sin against thee?

Mackenzie Murphy's
UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA

IF YOU COULD SEE THIS

If you could see this, you would know that I hate you.–
You would realize that your body

aches from bending me backwards,
perfectly positioned to be torn apart by your

hands that are fleshy and pale and clean but
my blood is underneath your skin in

droplets of rage that water cannot baptize; you would
realize that forgiveness does not purify you.

Your sins always exist,
they never go away because they have nowhere to go

and if you could see this,
You'd know that I own them and I hate you.

Nandi Boini
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

MOTHER TONGUE

Sometimes I hear my mother tongue in public,
and I try to piece the fragmented words together
It is an insult to call a language my mouth cannot form my mother tongue.
For my tongue will never know the sting my mother's does
Mine will never be raw and bloody from being bitten like hers
My tongue has known the luxury of speaking without an accent,
of free movement without soliciting glares.
My mouth is a burial ground
where tradition and culture lay to rest—
the price of assimilation,
of living in the Promised Land.
My flesh turns to smoke,
as the Melting Pot flays my melanated skin,
until any trace of my heritage is undetectable.
The perfect immigrant is seen but not heard.
My mother tongue will die with me
in the burial ground of my mouth.



Lilly Preciado
JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY
A MODERN STILL LIFE

Eddie Copeland
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

DIGITAL PET PURGATORY

I am your favorite *Webkinz*.
I'm sitting right where you left me.
I'm waiting patiently to see you again.
I think it has been a long time since I saw you.
I miss seeing your face lit up by the computer screen.
I don't like the dark.

I'm starting to think I did something wrong.
I didn't mean to.
I can apologize if you'd only just come back.
I won't ask you to stay long.
I know you must be busy with important stuff.
I really don't mean to be needy, but…

I'm starving
    Because you're not here to feed me.

I'm exhausted
    Because you're not here to tuck me into bed.

I'm unhappy
    Because you're not here to play with me.

I'm sick
    Because you're not here to care for me.

I was your favorite *Webkinz*.

I'll wait for you forever
Because you're my best friend.

I hope I'm still yours.



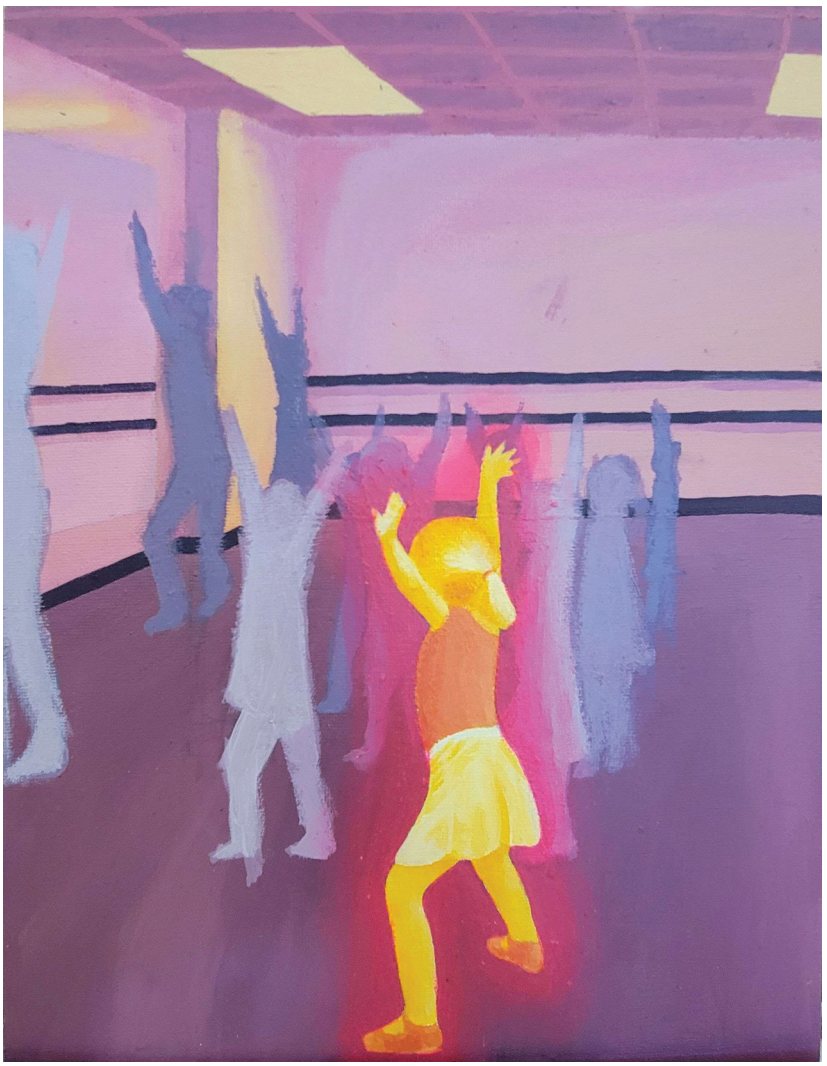
Audrey Womack
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

RAT FIGHT III

Tiana Hammock
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

ZOMBIE WOMAN DANCES AT NIGHT ON 14TH STREET

In
the bus
window pane
I can see that
Zombie Woman stalking
under street lamps, dark
city eating her face; that
tattered strong-looker
dancing on declining
roads, a folding, shaking
shimmy from "Back on
74". Got
moves like
that by always
moving; passing to
the next strip, moaning
her same steady song of
dripping summer days.
My face on her face
through the glass. I
see her dance on my
limbs and
hear her
song on my
tongue. Someday soon,
ima be another Zombie
Woman if this bus don't—
BRAKE!



SANCTUARY

Cate Killough
APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

5, 6, 7, 8

Maggie Creekmore
GEORGIA COLLEGE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

ONE LAST TIME

Step on stage one last time,
Defy my age one last time,
Wondering if I could survive
If I just continue the rhyme.
Break a lipstick tube over my knee,
Dip my finger in the burgundy sea,
To paint my lips in the drips
And when it runs in hurricanes
Down my morbid human planes
I'll pretend it's only gloss,
And when they tear me down
Off my silk and leather cross,
I'll limit my vision, pretend
This isn't the last time.

How many times can I die?
I only have one head to mount on the wall,
One heart to spear through with a stake.
But I have two feet,
I have two legs,
two arms,
Doesn't that mean I get to die again?

Maybe there's a way to leave the bullet in the wound forever.
Forever putting off bleeding out,
Forever putting up with bleeding in,
Can I not act for an empty theater?
Can I not wander around in the dark,
Running here and
here,

Bumping into curtains
And falling through the floor
Until the wound becomes so infected in its gore
That even the devil in hell who made me this way
Turns away in disgust?

A hundred suitors line up outside,
Ring boxes full of hard candies shaped like diamonds,
But I keep saying 'one more time'
Because as long as they think I'm alive in here
I surely still am.

What if I make this my church,
And the limelight is my steeple?
My audience of fears
Used to look a lot like people.
The music shocks my eardrums,
Every syllable a sequel,
Of stages, crowds, lipstick, silk,
Seeing myself
In the mirror
Long after
I un-remember
The last time.

Roman Luckett
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

MIDNIGHT MEN

You ain't sneaky under them bedcovers
or in that night-shrouded house,

an' you ain't safe with the deadbolt locked
an' you still a death-cornered mouse,

Cause we seen the insults to *natural order*,
nail polish, skin-taut tops, eyeliner flared out,

God ain't give you a man's body for you to disrespect
your own *manliness* with prideful shouts.

To ensure it's stopped,
we real *men* are marching the back-road route:

> A Pastor, our leading midnight-strutter
> carryin' a bible to bless this murder,
>
> there's the Hunter, raccoon tail bobbin' about,
> saunterin' in step with his gun cocked,
>
> next the Pimp, leaned way back in a Cadillac,
> V8 engine snarling as it crawls beside the rest,
>
> and last the old-fashioned black Fathers, empty-handed
> cause' they only need to lower their voice.

When we reach your house, little sleeper,
we gonna crush, dissect, and reclaim your body.

So you'd better get up before that alarm-clock
and when the knocks come heavy and loud,

Run deep as you can into the forest, then deeper.



Hailey Turiczek

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

RESTRAINT

Samir Abouhaidar is a senior at the University of Alabama at Birmingham from Hoover, Alabama, majoring in economics with minors in history and American Studies. He is a fourth-year member of the University Honors Program and plans to pursue a career in employment law. Samir is a University of Alabama System Capitol Scholar and the 2025 Mr. UAB First Alternate. In his free time, Samir enjoys walking, shooting film photography, and watching movies, especially horror and thriller films.

Grace Ashmore is a long-time poet and the author of several unpublished short stories. An avid admirer of authors such as Veronica Roth, Leigh Bardugo, and C.S. Lewis, she has loved books from a very young age. Grace has lived in rural Arkansas for the entirety of her nineteen years with her loving parents and four older siblings. She is currently pursuing a degree in Social Work with a minor in Psychology, in hopes of becoming a stay-at-home mom.

Anna Kate Bice is a student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She spent hours reading poetry as a teen, but never attempted her own until her sophomore year of college. Now she has thousands of words ready to share.

Brooklyn Billiotty is from Gray, Louisiana, and I'm only in my freshman year at Nicholls State University, however I want to really reach out there and be braver than I have in the past. I've always been into art even when since I was a child; I was put in the Talented and Gifted program in High school and took art all four years. I'm obviously majoring in art then, and my concentration is studio art. My favorite medium would probably be charcoal as I love how smooth it is and how forgiving it is on the paper! Anyway, I hope you have an amazing day!

Nandi Boini is an undergraduate student and writer at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where she is pursuing a B.A. in Political Science and a B.A. in Women's and Gender Studies, with a minor in Legal Studies. She has presented her research at regional and national conferences, including the National Women's Studies Association and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies South. Her work bridges Critical

Theory and creative expression, examining South Asian identity through feminist and Critical Race frameworks.

Makayla Castle is a student at Catawba College in North Carolina, currently majoring in history. Although her degree will be in history, she loves the English professors at Catawba and enjoys writing poetry in her free time. She is also co-president of Catawba's creative writing club.

Eddie Copeland is a junior at UAB majoring in Computer Science and minoring in Studio Art.

Maggie Creekmore is a 19-year-old English student from Hampton, Georgia who is devoted to all facets of creative writing. Having dabbled in fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry, she is devoted to a particular vein in conveying the stories of broken ballerinas through her creative works, drawing inspiration from her own experience with ballet and chronic pain. She plans to one day work in publishing full time but currently devotes her free time to leading the undergraduate creative journal at GCSU, The Peacock's Feet.

Phoebe Dell'Arena is a first-year environment and sustainability major at Catawba College. She loves mixed-media and interpreting nature and life's gifts through art.

Tiana Hammock is an undergraduate attending the University of Alabama at Birmingham and studying Writing & Media and World Languages & Literature with a French concentration. She holds a long-time passion for the power of language as an art medium and as a bridge to people of all walks of life. She enjoys collecting CDs, traveling, and mangoes. She hopes to continue to connect with others either through the page or through teaching and research, as she currently works at a docent at the Birmingham Museum of Art.

Jayden Jones is a writer who crafts poetry from the shadows, exploring the fragility and weight of relationships, mental illness, loneliness, and the haunting echoes of trauma. With a voice both unflinching and vulnerable, Jayden transforms darkness into language, revealing beauty in places where light rarely reaches. Her works delves into

the darker sides of the human experience by creating space for difficult truths and raw emotion. Through her writing, she aims to give voice to silence and bring light to unspoken pain.

Katelyn Kerr is an English and History student at the University of North Carolina. A full-time researcher and part-time poet, Katelyn's poetry is informed by her work as a historian focusing on the histories of women and minorities. Archival Silences is her first poetry collection. Writing from the perspective of a researcher, Katelyn creates a narrative of an unknown woman told through the archival materials found in the researcher's pursuit of her life. This work comments on what and who is prioritized in historical narratives and who remains in the shadows. Katelyn will be continuing on to graduate school for history, but will always remain a poet in her free time.

Cate Killough is an 19-year-old visual artist who's been creating/loving art since she was very young. Cate specifically loves working in acrylic, and her pieces range from self-portraits to landscape work! Cate is an Interior Design Major at Appalachian State University

Saanvi Kundu is a first-year psychology major at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her work blends curiosity and playfulness, often capturing (macro) photographs of fleeting moments of wonder and reflection. Her piece "Fiery" reflects her interest in turning everyday experiences into vivid, imaginative expressions.

Elena Lichtenwalner is a senior at Virginia Wesleyan University studying English with a creative writing focus. During her experience in the Batten Honors College, the university's honors program, she has taken part in presenting her work, studying abroad in the United Kingdom, and assisting in the honors office. If she is not found writing and copy editing for her school's paper, The Marlin Chronicle, she is either watching movies with her friends or spending the day outside enjoying the sun.

Roman Luckett is a second-year undergrad majoring in Applied Physics with a minor in Creative Writing. Their passion for writing arose from the intersection of science and humanities. When not writing or indulging in physics, they can be found plane-spotting at Birmingham International Airport or reading by the koi pond at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

Graceyn McQueen is an undergraduate student interested in evolutionary biology and wildlife ecology. Inspired by natural history museums, nature documentaries, and science communicators, they write creative nonfiction that bridges deep time with present-day environmental questions.

Mackenzie Murphy is a freshman in college majoring in political science who loves writing poetry in her spare time.

Katie Potts is a senior at UAB in the University Honors Program majoring in Immunology. She's been an RA for three years, is the UHP 4th year representative, and has volunteered at Children's of Alabama for three years. In her free time, Katie loves to paint, draw, and read.

Lilly Preciado is a student from Stevenson, Alabama. She is currently in her third year at Jacksonville State University where she is studying for a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a concentration in graphic design. Her work has been featured in Jax State's Annual Juried Student Show as well as inside of the Jax State President's home. When she's not working on her computer, Lilly continues to expand on her artistic experience through various art mediums such as oil painting and screen-printing. Lilly is excited to continue her art journey as she works toward future professional opportunities in graphic design.

Ishita Sukul is a second-year undergraduate student at Georgia Tech majoring in Biology. On campus, she is involved in various leadership and service organizations, driven by her passion for biotechnology, business, and healthcare applications. Outside of academics, Ishita is a 4th-degree black belt in Taekwondo, competing nationally in sparring and poomsae. She also dances with various hip hop and Bollywood teams at Georgia Tech, expresses her creativity through acrylic painting and drawing, and plays the alto saxophone, performing jazz songs and solos. With her family and friends, she enjoys traveling, visiting new cafes, trying new things, taking pictures, shopping, and going on outdoor adventures.

Hailey Turiczek is a junior at the University of Louisville pursuing a degree in graphic design. Her practice involves merging her love of traditional art disciplines, such as printmaking and illustration, with the digital world of design.

Ellie Usdan is a senior at UAB currently majoring in art studio with a minor in creative writing. As an artist, Ellie enjoys combining vivid colors, bold line art, and abstract patterns, with her artworks often inspired by the minuscule details of the natural world and human-nature relationships. While her central focus is graphic illustration, she also enjoys experimenting with photography, pen, and markers.

Carly Walker is a fourth year honors student at Georgia College & State University. They are majoring in psychology and minoring in English. In their writing, they draw on their background in psychology to explore themes of connection, memory, and the complexities within relationships.

Audrey Womack is an undergraduate student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, double-majoring in English literature and Art Studio with a minor in Media Studies, receiving her B.A. in 2026. Her creative work often explores narrative, emotion, and visual storytelling, driven by her curiosity and a love of play and experimentation.