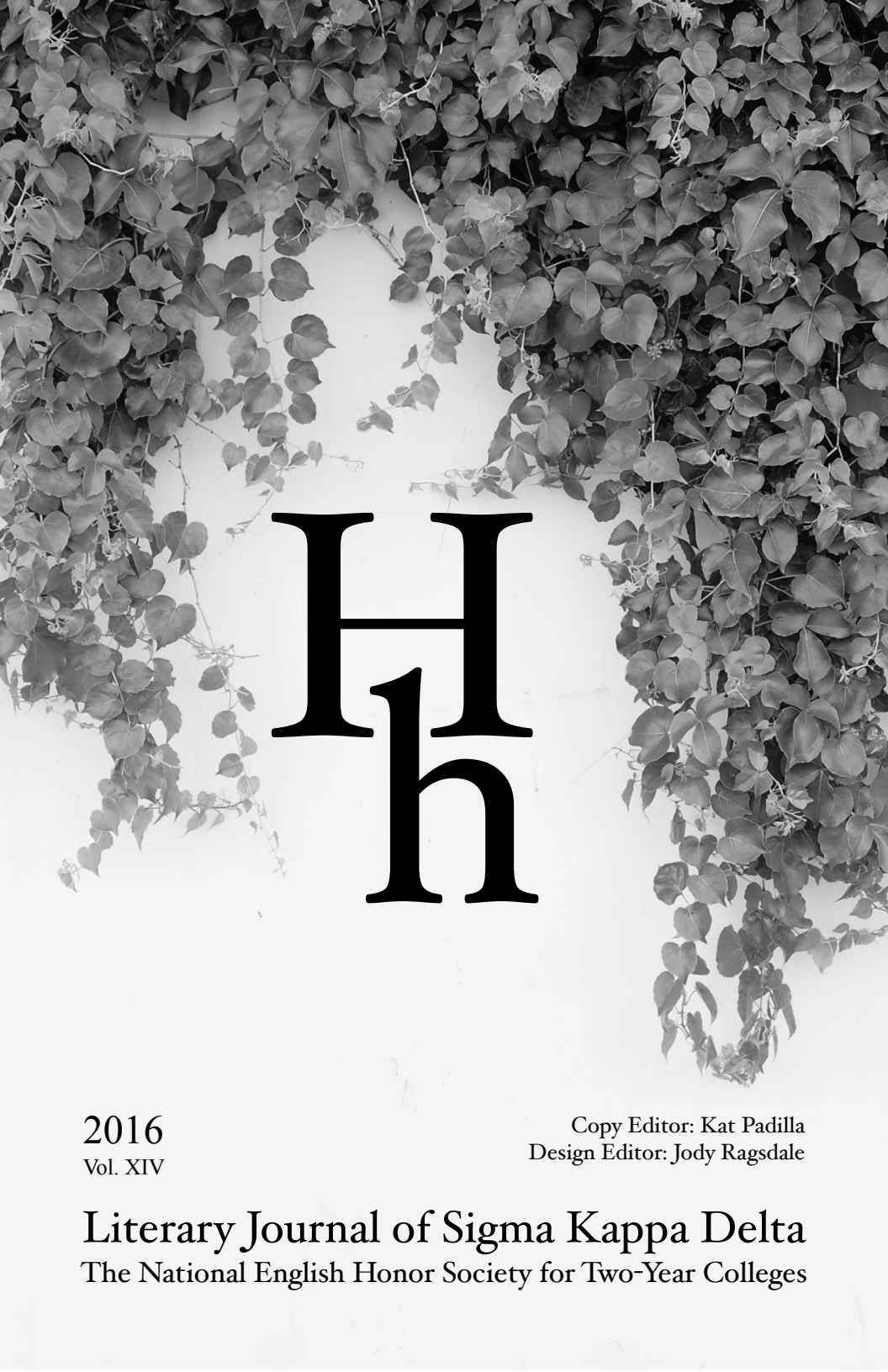




2016

Vol. XIV

Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta
The National English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges



H h

2016
Vol. XIV

Copy Editor: Kat Padilla
Design Editor: Jody Ragsdale

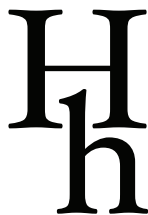
Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta
The National English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges

Purpose of Sigma Kappa Delta

Sigma Kappa Delta serves two-year college students who achieve academic excellence in English. Members need not be English majors but must demonstrate an interest and proficiency in literature and writing. ΣΚΔ offers members opportunities for

- Scholarships
- Awards
- Leadership
- Competition
- Publication
- Travel
- National Conferences
- Networking

Visit www.english2.org for complete eligibility requirements.



Hedera helix—the scientific name for English Ivy and the national plant of ΣΚΔ, symbolizes resilience and individual growth. In keeping with the Greek spelling, we use the lower case “h” for helix.

Copyright

Copyright © 2016 by Sigma Kappa Delta

All rights reserved by Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society for two-year colleges. There shall be no copying of the content of Hedera helix without express written permission from Sigma Kappa Delta and the author of the literary piece. Each author maintains his/her individual copyright and may sell or copy his/her work.

Copies of Hedera helix may be obtained at the cost of \$5.00 per copy by contacting ΣΚΔ National Headquarters, Calhoun Community College, P.O. Box 2216, Decatur, AL 35609.

Designed by Jody Ragsdale, Northeast Alabama Community College, Epsilon Alpha Chapter co-sponsor.

Printed at Calhoun Community College.

**Sigma Kappa Delta Board of Directors
2015-2016**

Executive Director
Dr. Sheila H. Byrd
Calhoun Community College

President
Ms. Joan Reeves
Northeast Alabama Community College

Vice President/President Elect
Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea
Calhoun Community College

Secretary/Historian
Dr. Charlotte Speer
Bevill State Community College

National Regent
Dr. John Pruitt
University of Wisconsin — Rock County



L to R: Ms. Joan Reeves, Dr. Charlotte Speer, Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea, Dr. Sheila Byrd, Dr. John Pruitt

Editor's Note



Each year I insist that SKD's writing and photography submissions could not get better, and each year our SKD members continue to prove me wrong. Within this year's pages, you can find the dangers of curiosity, the poignant reminders that life is not always what we hope for, and the many emotions of unconditional love. I hope you enjoy this year's writing and photography submissions as much as I did. As always, I look forward to seeing and reading more outstanding work next year. Submissions are due November 15.

In addition to next year's writing and photography awards, I am excited to announce a unique opportunity. As you all know, *Hedera helix* is Latin for English Ivy, and is both the name of our literary magazine and a key symbol for Sigma Kappa Delta. Every year, the cover of the magazine contains English Ivy in some form or another. In 2017, we are going to (possibly) break with this tradition. We will be looking for a piece of original artwork to grace the cover of the 2017 *Hedera helix*. More information will be forthcoming on due dates for submissions. Oh, and did I mention there will be a cash prize for the piece chosen to grace the cover? So, not only will I have the opportunity to read outstanding essays, poems, short stories, and literary analyses, I also have the opportunity to view outstanding photographs, and now—original artwork! Have I mentioned how lucky I am to work in SKD?

Wishing you the best in 2017.

Kat Padilla

SKD National Office

2016 ΣΚΔ Scholarship/Award Winners

Scholarships

Dr. William C. Johnson Transfer Scholarship

Josie Crider
Northeast Alabama Community College
Epsilon Alpha Chapter

Dr. Don Perkins Service Scholarship

Austin Tanier Dutton
Bevill State Community College
Phi Alpha Chapter

Dr. Susan LeJeune Service Scholarship

Carson Gregors
Darton State College
Pi Delta Chapter

Dr. Sheila H. Byrd Service Scholarship

Marnie Tabor
Calhoun Community College
Theta Beta Chapter

Ms. Joan S. Reeves Service Scholarship

Samuel Lucas Hughes
Northeast Alabama Community College
Epsilon Alpha Chapter

Chapter Awards

Literary Magazine/Journal

The Muse
Theta Beta Chapter
Calhoun Community College

Chapter Activity

A Celebration of Poetry
Epsilon Alpha Chapter
Northeast Alabama Community College

2016 ΣΚΑ Award Winners/Table of Contents

Essay

1st Place: <i>Sharecropper's Wife</i>	7
Ann K. Phillips – Northeast Alabama Community College – Epsilon Alpha	
2nd Place: <i>Stars Dancing Over Albuquerque</i>	8
Jessica Cook – Beville State Community College – Phi Alpha	
3rd Place: <i>HIM</i>	10
Anne Showers-Curtis – University of Wisconsin—Rock County – Gamma Delta	

Literary Analysis

1st Place: <i>Scapegoats, Allusions, and Tradition</i>	13
Victoria Cottles – Calhoun Community College – Theta Beta	
2nd Place: <i>Scarlet A for Anonymous Sin</i>	15
Matthew Wilbanks – Northeast Alabama Community College – Epsilon Alpha	
3rd Place: <i>Patriarchal Defiance</i>	19
Carson Gregors – Darton State College – Pi Delta	

Photography

1st Place: <i>Reflection</i>	22
Chrystal Hunter – Darton State College – Pi Delta	
2nd Place: <i>Home on the Range</i>	23
Cheryl Monroe – Northeast Alabama Community College – Epsilon Alpha	
3rd Place: <i>Soldier's Sacrifice</i>	23
Cheryl Monroe – Northeast Alabama Community College – Epsilon Alpha	

Short Fiction

1st Place: <i>Burning Bright</i>	24
Caitlynn Hughes – Collin College – Chi Gamma	
2nd Place: <i>Stepping Away</i>	29
Ann K. Phillips – Northeast Alabama Community College – Epsilon Alpha	
3rd Place: <i>Signs of a Struggle</i>	30
Stephanie Nichols – Collin College – Chi Gamma	

Poetry

1st Place: <i>The Language of Wonderland</i>	35
Anne Showers-Curtis – University of Wisconsin – Rock County – Gamma Delta	
2nd Place: <i>Lost Labour</i>	36
Austin Tanier Dutton – Beville State Community College – Phi Alpha	
3rd Place: <i>The Artist Within</i>	37
Matthew Wilbanks – Northeast Alabama Community College – Epsilon Alpha	

First Place Essay

Sharecropper's Wife

Ann K. Phillips

For a few years I belonged to a local writer's group. The group was considering writing a book on outstanding women in the county known for their contributions in the fields of arts, education and community service. As I was pondering this book project, I thought of the women I knew when I was growing up on the farm. They were the women who would never have a chapter named after them. Most people would never know of them. Even though their lives left no footprints, they left a permanent mark on my values and opinions. The following is the chapter I wrote for the book.

Her name was Willie Kate, Maude, or Lucy. She was white and she was black. She never belonged to the PTA and was never a member of the Garden Club or any civic club in the community. Therefore, she was never eligible for a plaque, silver bowl, or her picture in the paper. Her husband planted and harvested a crop on another man's land for a share of the crop's income.

She lived in the house the landowner provided. Although some homes were comfortable, other homes were not, and she stuffed newspaper in the cracks of the wall to keep the cold wind from blowing through the rooms. Her yard was not mowed, but instead swept because there was no grass, only dirt. She cooked on a wood stove and washed clothes in a machine with a wringer attached. She hung the wet clothes to dry on lines connected to trees. Sometimes she earned extra money by washing and ironing for the upper class.

The list of what she did not have was much longer than the list of what she

had. She did not finish high school and would never see a college campus. She did not have a garden tub in her bathroom. In fact, she did not have an indoor bathroom. If she were lucky, she had a plank framed little shack over a cesspool with no windows, just cracks to let in light. The best had two seats instead of one. The worst was a trip into the woods.

Before the foster care program provided funds, she took in nieces, nephews, and neighbor children when their families could not provide. She had the least funds or time, but she had the greatest love and concern of anyone in the community. In her younger years, she hoed and picked cotton and then went home to cook and clean. In her later years, she took care of her grandchildren. She raised children who became teachers, lawyers, writers, blue-collar workers, doctors, and athletes. Occasionally, a child broke her heart and turned to crime or alcohol.

The books written about great southern women do not have a chapter on her, but she was the backbone of the emerging South. Accolades given through awards and recognition are well deserved by those who contributed their time and resources to education, the arts, and community. Education and the arts enriched our lives and community service benefited society. However, the progress of today's South would not have been possible without the manual labor and sacrifice of Willie Kate, Maude, and Lucy.

Second Place Essay

Stars Dancing Over Albuquerque

Jessica Cook

In March of 2015, I had my first experience visiting the American Southwest desert. Growing up in Alabama, I have become accustomed to luscious green plants and vegetation, humid days and nights, and the constant visualization of natural life all around me. Before traveling to Albuquerque, New Mexico, I expected to see nothing but wearisome dead land with no life whatsoever; I couldn't have been more wrong. My most unique memory in Albuquerque was the night I stood on a gravel path on the side of one of the mountains which made up the Sandia Mountain Range. That night will always be imprinted in my mind as one of the most peaceful that I have ever experienced. I could smell the crisp, cool, and enriching high desert air, which was far from humid. I could see the lights of the flat landscaped town which balanced in coordination with the glistening starlit sky. Although pure silence surrounded the mountain that night, my mind could almost hear the ancient songs and dances of the natives which once inhabited this land.

The evening was coming to a close, and the setting sun was casting a faint rose-colored hue over Albuquerque. The hues slowly faded from colors of hope to gloomy darkness. The light of the full moon began to blanket the dimmed land. The buildings below the mountain had turned to silhouettes, and heat waves shimmered from the sizzling, waterless, and dreary day, causing the lights of the city to have the appearance of shimmering glass for many miles. Thousands of stars were softly scintillating above, coordinating with

the colossal moon, bringing light to the side of the mountain. One star shot across the sky, creating the opportunity for a wish. The nearby hardened volcanic lava had been scratched and engraved by the ancient, native Pueblos and Spanish settlers who once inhabited the land, bringing 700 year old stories to life. The threatening prickle of the spiny cacti was dangerous to touch, yet safe to observe. The Russian thistle bushes were luscious and green, incorporating themselves throughout the cacti. They were destined to be uprooted and blown down the mountain only to tumble through the desert as dry, dead weeds that had once lived a beautiful life.

The side of the mountain was so still that the silent twitch of a scorpion would have been heard. The scene consisted of such tranquility that the chants and drums of the native Navajo tribes were faintly whispered through zephyrs that traveled the peaks of the Sandias. This serenity lasted only for a moment after the darkness came, as if all of the nocturnal creatures were only taking a moment to rejuvenate themselves from a long day of sleep. Soon the wind began to whistle through the gritty and dehydrated dirt, singing habaneras to the ears of observers while stirring dust devils in the sand. A road runner briskly hurried to the lowlands surrounding the mountain, through the rocks and plants, running to his habitat of brush, ready for a good night's rest. The New Mexican Lobo wolves were howling way off in the dark side of the desert, suggesting the beginning of their long hunting venture. A pop of the gravely sand, and away went a

groundhog making sounds of chaos as he went grinding through into his underground burrow. Not far from where the groundhog was muddling, a night owl rejoiced with a screech just before he swooped in on a stranded pocket mouse.

The air consisted purely of the minute whispers and groans of the cold, parched land that only showed signs of life after sunset. Although the atmosphere seemed to be empty, never to live again, the minute signs of life and prosperity were obvious and undeniable. A whole world of commission and labor came alive throughout the night. The Southwestern desert became a hunting ground, a haven, and a place of peaceful chaos all at once. The chilled air gave the land an unwarming impression that was opposite to that of the scorched, sun burned day, sending shivers down the spines of human observers. A deep rumble of thunder gave caution of a strong gale way off in the distant miles of the flat and mountainous terrain, away from any form of human civilization. The eerie, yet impervious environment gave off beautiful feelings of confusion and apprehensiveness.

During the day, the Sandia Mountains are peaceful and warm. The sun beams radiant waves through a cloudless sky upon the dry desert environment, allowing no shade for the inhabitants. The day is deceitful in its bright and glorious wonder. It isn't until the sun goes down that Albuquerque's true beauty comes out. The world seems to make a drastic change. Everything that is certain during the day turns equivocal at night when the murmurs of the high-

desert air consume the atmosphere. My imagination runs wild imagining the events that have occurred in this area before my time: the Spanish settlers historically making their way through the Sandia Mountains, the Navajo and Pueblo singing and dancing on the hot desert sand, and the many different types of plants and animals that have existed and died. I need not imagine; the land tells its own story through the life and excitement that is exposed after the moon and stars arise. There was an enchantment throughout the darkness of that night that has followed me to this day. One of the most beautiful nights I have ever witnessed was in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Third Place Essay

HIM

Anne Showers-Curtis

I walked the mile or so to Jesse's house because I didn't want my mom to know where I was going. That was new—the secrecy that came along with this relationship. I'd never really kept anything from my mom, but there I was ringing the bell at Jesse's while my mother thought I was roaming the neighborhood. He opened the door and, as usual, ushered me straight to his room, even though the rest of the house was empty. Secrecy was on his side as much as it was on mine. His mom didn't think the age difference was appropriate, and I completely disagreed. Jesse always said that age was just a number anyway, and that there was nothing wrong with a twelve year old girl dating a fifteen year old guy.

A new poster hung on the sky blue wall above the head of his bed. It looked huge among the various album art fold-outs that inevitably left jewel cases completely clear. The background of this new poster was a deep hot pink with a pattern that made it look like fabric. A man looked down at me over his cigarette, cocked to the right side of his mouth. He was a very feminine man with wavy black hair that touched the middle of his neck. He had high cheek bones, and eyelashes that looked caked in mascara. The text of the poster crossed over his bare chest; two lines of translucent-gold font. The first line read "HIM" in all-caps and stuck out. The second line, also all-caps, but smaller, read "RAZORBLADE ROMANCE."

I tore my eyes from *HIM* to find Jesse sitting on his blue-clad, twin-sized bed. His long dark hair hugged the sides of his narrow face as he stared at me

with his chestnut brown eyes. I sat down on the bed, my full attention now on Jesse. "So, when will your mom be home?" I asked.

"About two hours," he said.

"That's not a whole lot of time."

"No, it's not." He leaned in for a kiss and for a moment, things were beautiful. Clichéd butterflies in my stomach made me fold into the kiss. I wear my heart on my sleeve, because I'd found it: what every girl wanted and how every movie ended – true love, romance, happily ever after. And then he reached for the button on my pants, and all that love and happiness froze, along with the rest of me.

"No," I said, my hand pushing his away, "I told you, I'm not ready for that."

He pulled back and looked at me, an utterly annoyed look on his face. "You will be once it happens. It's not as big a deal as you're making it out to be."

"Yes it is," I said, my heart beating with anxiety at all the thoughts that returned to me every time we had this conversation. Anna and Holly both said that it hurt to lose your virginity, but that it was worth it. Two years older than me and from a completely different world than my own, Anna and Holly spent their weekends smoking cigarettes, drinking, and attending "rainbow parties," which to my understanding involved girls with different shades of lipstick, and blowjobs. I didn't know whether their opinions on this certain subject were worth much. Besides, the pain wasn't my only fear.

"What if I get pregnant?" I asked.

"That's what this is for," he said, waving a packaged condom in the air.

"Those don't always work," I said, nervously.

"There's like a one in a hundred chance that it won't," he said.

Yes, I thought to myself, *and knowing my luck, I'd be that one in one-hundred.*

"Well..." my eyebrows felt very close together then, and my breathing became rapid.

"Well what?" he asked. "This is the same discussion we've been having for weeks. What if you get pregnant, what if the condom breaks, what if it hurts, what if, what if, what if!" He was almost shouting, the irritation in his voice changed to anger. "Well what?" he asked again, sternly.

I glanced back up at the goth-esque figure leaning ever-so-slightly against the pink background of the new poster. "Who is that?" I asked quietly.

"That," he said, "is Ville Valo. He's the lead singer and lyricist of HIM."

"HIM?" I asked.

"HIM. A Finnish band. It stands for 'His Infernal Majesty.' Ville is one of the most poetic songwriters I know of."

"Oh." I said. There was a silence then, and in that silence I hoped that the subject would change. That he would cross the room and put on a movie or something.

"You know," he said, "if you loved me, you would do this." Disgust soaked his words, and shone in his eyes as he looked into mine.

"I do love you, I tell you all the time. I'm just scared. I'm not ready."

"This is how I show my love." his tone wasn't angry anymore, it was

gentle. "I want to show you how much I love you. Don't you want to show me how much you love me?"

"I do, but I'm not ready for this. It's a big step and it can't ever be taken back."

"You should want to prove that you love me," he said, angry again. He turned away from me and crossed his arms.

"I - I... isn't there another way I can do that?" I said, my heart beating hard again. I didn't want to lose him because I wouldn't prove that I loved him. He said nothing; he wouldn't even look at me.

"Okay," I said. Tears of confusion welled in my eyes. The silence then was deafening as he turned back to look at me. Neither of us said a word as I undressed. I felt like a wild animal on display for the first time - terrified, exposed, and slightly awkward, submitting out of some obligation I didn't even understand.

As I lay down on the bed, the silence was broken only by the tearing of the condom wrapper. Not knowing what I was supposed to do next, I did nothing. I didn't look at him because if I had, I would have cried. So instead, I turned my head to the side and stared at our reflection in the television across the room. I watched as he dominated the body of the captive animal, and I felt an unforgettable pain. I was completely dry, and the condom didn't offer much lubrication. It felt like a hot curling iron being shoved into a space far too small. My body tensed from the pain, and that only made the burn worse. Out of instinct I whimpered, "ow." After the initial reaction, I couldn't keep myself

composed – I shook, I tensed more rigidly, and I continued to whimper, feeling just as pathetic as I looked reflected on the TV screen.

Jesse stopped, and I looked up to see the same annoyed look he'd given me before.

“How am I supposed to get off with you crying like that?”

My face was drenched, and I hadn't even noticed.

“I – I'm sorry,” I said, not meeting his gaze, and not knowing what else to say. When he started again, I looked up and back, and I kept the gaze of Ville Valo – holding my breath, telling myself

inwardly not to cry, and not to let out a single emotion – until Jesse was done.

In my mind for days afterward, I stared into Ville Valo's eyes, not letting myself feel anything at all. It was harder to control my emotions when Jesse didn't answer my calls, and harder still when he didn't return them. I finally realized that I was alone; alone because of some affliction in my mind that had told me I wasn't ready for sex. Shadows danced in my stomach then, every time I looked into Ville Valo's eyes; shadows of what was taken from me, of what I'd left behind in that sky blue room, and of all that I was left with – a broken cherry and a broken heart.

Scapegoats, Allusions, and Tradition

Victoria Cottles

Nothing is as unnerving as finishing a story with a character screaming, "It isn't fair, it isn't right" before she is stoned to death (Jackson 266). In Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery," the protagonist, Tessie Hutchinson, is killed for winning a prize she does not want. In the same manner, Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" describes how a child must be kept locked away in the dark in order for a city to prosper. The heavy influence of society prevalent throughout both stories can suggest several disturbing interpretations. "The Lottery" and "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" are two unsettling stories because the characters, settings, and themes allude to how overwhelming and unmoving real societies can be when doing what they believe is necessary.

The main driving point for the plot for both stories is the use of Tessie Hutchinson and the child as scapegoats. Both are considered necessary sacrifices for the happiness of others. "The Lottery" suggests the villagers believe that the lottery hails a bountiful harvest, according to their saying "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (263). Some villagers might believe that if they were ever to abandon the lottery, their village might not be so successful. Similarly, the child locked in the basement in "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" is known by all the people in the city. Not one person offers aid to the child because they believe, or sense, the child's unhappiness secures the prosperity of Omelas. One might even go as far as to say that the village and

Omelas orbit around Tessie Hutchinson and the child because they are the scapegoats needed to keep the communities moving forward.

These stories may be interpreted as literary allusions to real world places and societies. In real world geography and global studies, there are areas called sacrifice zones: small, poverty-ridden countries that sacrifice their resources, time, and lives to support far off developed countries like the United States. To put things into perspective, the village and Omelas are first-world countries, and Tessie Hutchinson and the child are sacrifice zones. The village from "The Lottery" is secluded and, therefore, may represent developed countries that live in bubbles and are oblivious of the outside world; the village ignores Tessie Hutchinson's cries of pain in much the way many Americans turn their heads away from small countries that cry out for our aid. Omelas is a prosperous city that "depends wholly on [the] child's abominable misery" just as America is a prosperous country that thrives off the hard work of smaller countries (Le Guin 607). The people of Omelas know the child is there and will take everything they can from the child's grief, but when the child cries "'[p]lease let me out. I will be good!' They never answer" (607).

The most disturbing theme of "The Lottery" and "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" is the use of tradition. The village has forgotten the original use of the lottery, but it still continues this horrible yet sacred practice because that is how the village has operated for generations upon

generations. The people of Omelas do not know why, but they do understand that the child cannot know happiness because in that same hour they know their beautiful city would wither and die. Likewise, not one person questions the tradition in "The Lottery" even if it is a family member who is chosen. Even more disturbing is the speed at which Tessie Hutchinson's family, friends, and neighbors turn on her; the villagers do not even realize they are committing an act of cruelty because they have been conditioned for this behavior all their lives. The light-hearted foreshadowing of "Bobby Martin hav[ing] already stuffed his pockets full of stones" is just as eerie as the moment when Tessie Hutchinson voices her objection but is quickly drowned out by the crowd surrounding her (Jackson 259). The power of a large group accustomed to violence and easily overwhelming one person is something that is often seen in real world societies. The children of Omelas, and some adults, do object, but their voices also fall on deaf ears and they leave because "[t]hey know that

they, like the children, are not free. They know compassion" (Le Guin 608). They break away from their perfect lives because they know they cannot maintain a peaceful existence if another must suffer. Even if a tradition is still followed, that does not make it right, or fair, or just. These two stories are instances when not one light could pierce through the darkness. These stories are truly tragic because small voices that object cannot compete against years of tradition and conditioning.

The scapegoat characters, secluded settings, and dark themes tie together to create two stories of epic proportions. Any stories like "The Lottery" and "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" that can hint to shocking parallels and truths between each other and to real life are frightening because they strike so close to home. Just like Tessie Hutchinson crying, "It isn't fair, it isn't right," sometimes what a society does out of necessity is cruel and morally horrific (Jackson 266).

Works Cited

- Arp, Thomas R., and Greg Johnson, eds. *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense*. 12th ed. Stamford: Cengage, 2015. Print.
- Jackson, Shirley. "The Lottery." Arp and Johnson 259-66.
- Le Guin, Ursula K., "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." Arp and Johnson 603-08.

Second Place Literary Analysis

Scarlet A for Anonymous Sin

Matthew Wilbanks

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is a classic novel of the Romantic period. First published in 1850, this novel deals heavily with the issue of secret sin. The writers of this time period were greatly influenced by the eroding state of the country leading into the Civil War. Hawthorne, who is related to one of the judges of the Salem Witch Trials, was affected significantly by what he considered the sins of his family's past. Therefore, though the novel deals directly with the secret sin of adultery, the actual issue of this piece of literature is that of an entirely different sin committed by the Puritans. The main sin observed in *The Scarlet Letter* is that of hypocrisy as illustrated by Hawthorne's view on the world, the scrutiny of Hester, the innocence of Pearl, and the secrecy of Dimmesdale, each showcasing the double standards put forth by the Puritans.

Hawthorne's view on humanity was exceptionally grim, especially as viewed in the morality of America. Contrasting the popular ideology found with Romantic writers that everything in the universe was inherently good, Hawthorne found that humanity was inherently evil and that all men faced a secret sin. This gothic view of the world was largely a result of the shame Hawthorne felt for his Puritan ancestors and greatly influences his writings. Hawthorne considered the emphasis that Puritans put on the sins of the individual without being able to recognize it in themselves a source of great shame. Often in Puritan society, the justice system was operated under the authority of revenge and shame as

the primary markers of punishment. The justice system had begun shifting toward more fair and just practices. Perhaps this phase toward a new criminal system enhanced the shame Hawthorne felt toward the transgression of his Puritan ancestry and their shunning of individuals whom they saw as guilty. The reader is able to experience an example of the ostracized sinner in the character of Hester Prynne.

Hester Prynne undergoes an immense amount of scrutiny upon the admission of her guilt. In the second chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*, the reader is audience to conversations about what the Puritan women think should be done to the adulteress. Hester is wrought with the punishment of embroidering all of her clothing with a scarlet letter "A" and is forced to display the fruits of her sin, Pearl. However, the women of the town believe that this punishment is not harsh enough. These women are depicted as very critical. They speak of how they would do a much better job passing down judgment and that the magistrates can "thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray" (Hawthorne 6). Upon seeing Hester, they express their disdain for the elaborate embroidery sewn above the adulteress's breast. However, the reader later learns that these women are actually envious of her sewing skills. Hawthorne mentions that Hester's "handiwork became what would now be termed the fashion" (39). Not only are these women so envious that they are willing to pay for her works, but the style also becomes so popular that it can

be seen all through the town. Virtually everyone is wearing a garment fashioned by Hester's elaborate sewing skills. Just months earlier, these people had demonized Hester for sewing in this manner. In an act of hypocrisy, the entire town pays her to sew in the same manner. This action symbolizes that everyone in the town is just as guilty of sin as Hester. They all wear her elaborate embroidery. However, the embroidery she is forced to wear expresses her transgressions. Where they mock and shun Hester for her sin, they continue to hide their sin while blending into society.

Even though Hester begins assimilating into normal society, she often remains the focal point of sermons and social lessons on morality. Hester is not a lone sinner here. However, very little attention is given to the search of her male counterpart. Hester's reaction to this matter displays the strength of her character. Instead of attempting to shift focus onto the father, she maintains the secret of his identity. In doing so, the entirety of the sin is on her. Knowing this fact, Hester acknowledges that she has done wrong and uses the opportunity to improve upon her character. Hester feels that the curse of the letter gives "her a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts" (Hawthorne 43). Therefore, the reader can infer that Hester is both the most humble and the most noble of the sinners in town.

Another character whom the Puritans see as embodying sin is Hester's child, Pearl, who is truly innocent. Pearl is the progeny of Hester's adulterous relationship. However, even as she is the result of a sinful act, she grows and behaves as a normal child. Pearl has

nothing to do with the sin her parents committed, but Puritan society still punishes her for it. Occasionally, Pearl says or does something that triggers the Puritan townspeople to question her origins. Even Hester eventually questions from where Pearl was sent, and Pearl responds with a naïve laugh. With a light heart, Pearl remarks to her mother, "It is thou that must tell me" (Hawthorne 55). At this moment, the reader understands that Hester is overthinking her suspicions. Pearl is her daughter, and the young girl's moral sense depends on the teachings of Hester.

Through the character of Pearl, the reader finds a neutral third party to unearth the true nature of her two parents. One marker of this child's ability to do so in *The Scarlet Letter* is found when Dimmesdale watches as Pearl plays below his window. Pearl is overheard saying, "Come away, mother! Come away, or yonder black man will catch you! He hath got hold of the minister already. Come away, mother or he will catch you! But he cannot catch little Pearl!" (Hawthorne 95). Each line gives insight into the theme of the novel. Here, Pearl tells her mother to come so that the "black man," who represents the devil, cannot catch her, yet he has already caught the minister Dimmesdale, alluding to the fact that Dimmesdale refuses to confess to his part in the sin. Pearl tells her mother to keep traveling toward the direction she has been seeking. This direction is toward truth and forgiveness so that she may assimilate into the culture. Only by continuing to repent and confess her sins will she remain humble.

Alternatively, Dimmesdale has taken the route of secrecy. He displays

hypocrisy by being seen as saintly by the congregation, while Hester has been shunned and scrutinized to the point of almost having her daughter taken away. They have committed the same sin, but Dimmesdale's hiding of his actions leads to his being a greater sinner than Hester. In fact, later in the novel, as Dimmesdale kisses her head, Pearl runs off to wash away the kiss. The reader sees that Pearl has a disdain for Dimmesdale so severe that she despises the touch of him. Pearl also mentions that she will never be caught by this devil, and this shows her as a truly innocent soul. She will never be caught by the devil because she has done nothing in regard to devious acts. Pearl is truly innocent of the sins surrounding her throughout her life, yet she must suffer along with her parents.

In contrast to the innocence of Pearl and the humility of Hester, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale can be seen as one of the prime examples of hypocrisy. Reverend Dimmesdale is found to be the father of Pearl. However, he does not suffer the scrutiny Hester must face because Dimmesdale refuses to acknowledge his part in the sin of adultery. Many times throughout the novel, Dimmesdale delivers sermons on sin. During one of these sermons, Dimmesdale faintly admits that he has taken part in sinful acts, but this admission demonstrates hypocrisy because of his spiritual position. He knows that he can claim to be a great sinner while still being upheld as humble and holy. He flaunts his holy position and uses it to redirect the point of his sermon to serve as an example of his piety, showing not only his hypocrisy but also the hypocrisy of the entire town. The Christian Bible serves as the

law that Puritans must follow. Within the scripture, the reader gains knowledge that all sins, with the exception of blasphemy can be forgiven. Therefore, all sin should be treated the same. In spite of this scripture, the Puritans continue to scorn Hester's sin. While Hester is locked in jail, Dimmesdale remains a respectable and honorable citizen and minister.

Even toward the end of his life, Dimmesdale remains insincere. In his death scene, he confesses to sinning, but he does so in a way that feels as though he is dancing around the truth. He claims that he wears "his own red stigma" equal to that of Hester's (Hawthorne 227). This statement is quite bold considering Hester's external mark left her open to public scrutiny. Dimmesdale may deal with an internal struggle, but with the world against her, Hester raises a child alone. Even when Dimmesdale confesses, he does so out of selfishness. This confession emerges as a way to give himself an ultimate internal peace. Correspondingly, the town behaves just as bewilderingly as Dimmesdale. They soon forget his sins and dwell on his piety. The townspeople react this way most likely because they want to remember this man as he had always been. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the reader sees Dimmesdale as "a true priest, [and] a true religionist" (83). Dimmesdale is quite likely the greatest case of hypocrisy found throughout the novel; this hypocritical man is so revered as a minister that his actions allude to a common theme in the religious institution of this time. By showing Dimmesdale in this light, Hawthorne indicates that the majority of Puritans were hypocritical.

Throughout *The Scarlet Letter* by Hawthorne, readers experience a shift in proclaimed morals. The initial reaction one may experience throughout the novel is a disdain for the sin of adultery. However, this reaction is soon found to be a misrepresentation. Hawthorne does not truly feel as though adultery is the greatest sin. When one understands that Hawthorne

has an exceptionally bleak view on the world and the people within, he or she understands the true intentions of the novel. Through the character development of Hester, Pearl, and Dimmesdale, Hawthorne reveals that his true intentions are to showcase the hypocrisy found among the Puritans in Colonial America.

Work Cited

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Fort Wayne, IN: Sweetwater Press. 2012. Print.

Third Place Literary Analysis

Patriarchal Defiance

Carson Gregors

The short story “Sexy,” written by Jhumpa Lahiri, centers around the life of an independent, young woman named Miranda. When observed via a feminist lens, “Sexy” shows how the author gave feministic characteristics and behaviors to this character. Furthermore, Lahiri uses those qualities to display how, through the achievement of equality for women and traditional gender roles, the patriarchal mindset of society can be erased. Though this achievement is depicted, Miranda also displays one aspect that is challenging to overcome as a woman having grown up within a patriarchal society—woman’s emotional dependence on man. Yet, even this characteristic of a patriarchal woman is abolished as Miranda becomes a dynamic character through transforming from an emotionally-dependent patriarchal woman to one that embodies feminist ideals.

Miranda is a woman who defies society’s idea of a patriarchal woman in many ways. A patriarchal woman is dependent on men for her means of living in society—not only financially but also socially. Miranda leaves her family in Michigan and moves to Boston alone, therefore, cutting her financial and social ties (Lahiri 1227). This form of independence contradicts the patriarchal woman’s mindset, for she would never abandon the responsibilities she has within her parents’ household—unless submitting to a new rule of authority brought through marriage to another man. However, Miranda is not married, leaving her to support herself financially. This she achieves by obtaining a job,

enabling her to rent an apartment. In her own house, she is able to abide by her own rules. Independence, once again, rewards Miranda when she uses her apartment as a refuge in which she and her lover can freely interact. Another anti-patriarchal characteristic within Miranda is her willingness to become a mistress—an act to which no patriarchal woman would succumb. From the beginning, Miranda was aware of the existence of Dev’s wife, yet, “without the wife there, [the affair] didn’t seem so wrong” (Lahiri 1226). These examples display how Miranda embodies feministic characteristics; however, due to her rearing within a patriarchal society, she has internalized one characteristic of a patriarchal woman. This revelation remains hidden until the story begins to conclude.

Due to her emotional dependence, Miranda allows herself to be sexually objectified by her lover. At first, his objectification is hidden in the form of flattery: “Dev said he liked that her legs were longer than her torso, something he’d observed the first time she walked naked across the room” (Lahiri 1227). In an effort to please him, Miranda seeks sexual attire to wear during their times together. She purchases several items including a knee-length silk robe and a silver cocktail dress. To her dismay, Dev failed to notice the robe when she wore it during one of his visits after his wife returned: “He carried her over to the bed, wearing sweatpants and sneakers, and entered her without a word” (Lahiri 1229). This display of sexual aggression, accompanied by a lack of verbal acknowledgment, is exemplary of his

objectification of her. After that encounter, Miranda ceases to care what clothes she wears when he comes to her apartment. This change in mindset reveals she has subconsciously accepted her gender role as an object for sexual gratification.

She grows to embody this role to the point where she even performs it for a child. This child, Rohin, is the nephew of her friend, Laxmi. Miranda agrees to watch Rohin for a day so Laxmi can spend time with her cousin. During their time together, Rohin discovers the silver cocktail dress Miranda purchased with the unmet intentions of wearing for Dev. Upon the child's request, Miranda dons the sexual dress and is rendered speechless by Rohin's assessment and his definition of it: "You're sexy," he declared . . . 'It means loving someone you don't know'" (Lahiri 1237). The child's statement forces her to face and evaluate the nature of her relationship with Dev. Therefore, one can see how Rohin's observation acts as the catalyst for Miranda's transformation. This process of becoming an anti-patriarchal woman can only occur through breaking the bonds of her emotional dependency on Dev. This dependency is what enticed her to become his mistress from the start.

Both Dev and Rohin call Miranda "sexy." However, it is when Rohin uses the term, she realizes that being loved as an object is different than being loved as a person. The child's definition awakens Miranda to the reality that Dev does not love her as a result of knowing her, rather, he loves her for the physical pleasure she provides. Only the reader is able to detect Miranda's enslavement to emotional patriarchy. This enslavement

is evident through how she orchestrates her life around encounters with Dev; she sets aside each Sunday for their time together. Under the patriarchal mindset, women are objects, not valuable people. Dev's value of Miranda derives strictly from how she performs during their time together in her apartment. From the beginning of their relationship, the physical dynamic is not enough to satisfy Miranda, although it is for Dev. Granted, she finds herself meditating on how "he'd propped her feet on top of his shoulders, and pressed her knees to her chest, and told her that he couldn't get enough of her," but Miranda also spends time trying to learn about Dev's culture (Lahiri 1225). She makes several efforts to gain a better understanding of the history behind the man she is growing to love. Miranda studies a map he leaves behind at her house, practices writing her name in the Indian language, and travels to an Indian store to rent an Indian movie. These actions prove she is interested in more than a merely physical relationship. Not only does this display how Miranda interprets their encounters, but it also reveals Dev's perception of them.

Miranda is aware that Dev is married and knows he deceives his wife in order to spend time with her. The character, Dev, fully encompasses the characteristics of a patriarchal man. He balances between two women, gaining from each the things he desires. From his wife, Dev finds emotional stability and social status. From his mistress, he receives the ego-boost attained through winning the affections of a younger woman and the thrill of forbidden sexual intercourse. Dev even proves he only wants Miranda for sexual gratification when he fails to pursue

Miranda as she begins to distance herself from him. Simple things, like the weather and movie plans, invade the Sunday afternoons they had set apart for each other. Soon, their relationship dissolves, and they each return to their former lives. The dissipation of the relationship proves the truth behind Rohin's definition of "sexy"—it is possible to love a stranger.

This story concludes with Miranda's defeat of the emotional bonds that are often ingrained into women by a patriarchal society. She does this by encapsulating characteristics of the traditional male gender role: strength, rationality, and proactivity. Miranda realizes the unjustness in the affair and decides it must not continue. At this moment, she becomes protective of her emotions and rights as well as those of Dev's wife. The fact that she initiates the conclusion of their relationship proves she has escaped her emotional dependency on him—she decides to end things, not him. Instead of the man taking the lead within this relationship, Lahiri gives Miranda power over Dev. The reversal of gender roles becomes evident as Dev, in a way, becomes her

sexual object. After Miranda realizes her relationship with Dev is based solely on physicality, she is left with a choice: continue to use and be used by him or discard the relationship. Miranda, once again, chooses independence. This idea is reinforced by the concluding action of the story. Miranda walks through her city, by herself. She is now independent in every form: financially, socially, and emotionally.

This text challenges modern women to break the chains of patriarchy in every sense—including the internalized emotional aspect. This dynamic of the patriarchal woman's identity may be the most challenging for women to overcome because many fail to recognize it. However, this is something no law or regulation established by the government can achieve. Emotional freedom must derive from within women themselves. It is their choice to embrace the qualities attributed to men by traditional gender roles instead of submitting to those defined by the traditional female roles. In order for total social equality to be achieved for women, women must first choose to achieve it for themselves.

Work Cited

Lahiri, Jhumpa. "Sexy." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym, et al. New York: Norton, 2012. 1222-39. Print.

Jan I. Anderson Black and White Photography Awards



Reflection by Chrystal Hunter, First Place



Home on the Range by Cheryl Monroe, Second Place

Soldier's Sacrifice
by Cheryl Monroe,
Third Place



First Place Short Fiction

Burning Bright
Caitlynn Hughes

The boy has a tiger's pelt draped over his shoulders like a cloak. The men that find him are on a hunt for big game, and they see an opportunity. A rich family would pay a hefty price for any skin-walker, but this one would fetch a pretty fortune at auction.

They take the pelt from the boy, and the boy has no other choice but to follow them. The boy gets them roughly half a million from a French lord who wants the protection for his children.

He moves from hand to hand, passed down through wills, freedom a distant, unattainable ideal he eventually stops believing in.

#

Chief Valreau calls her into his office two days before his early retirement.

"What can I do for you, Chief?"

He waves her into a chair, studies her over his laced fingers. She squirms under his scrutiny.

"I figure I'd give you a heads up that you'll be offered the position of chief when I step down. You'd probably get voted in unanimously."

"I'm honored, but I like where I'm at putting out fires. I'm good at it, and I can't do that from behind a desk."

He shakes his head with a grin.

"No, I suppose you can't. I figured you'd turn it down. I guess that brings us to the next topic."

"And what's that?"

"Since I'm stepping down, I figured you'd be the best person to pass this on to," he says, reaching under the desk. He pulls out a large bundle wrapped in butcher paper, tied with twine. He passes it to her.

"I'm touched, Mike, but why me?" she asks, trying to guess what she's holding.

"You've been like the bratty daughter I never wanted. Headstrong and clever. Nice to this old paper shuffler, too."

"You aren't that old," she protests easily.

"See? Anyway, I think if anyone needs what's in that paper, it's you. You hold on to that, you'll have a pretty loyal guard."

"This is a...?" she trails off. She's never seen a skin-walker before, though she's heard the stories since childhood.

"Yes. It's been in my family for years."

"And you want me to have it? This has to be worth millions. I can't take it, Mike." She tries to hand it to him, but he won't take it.

"I have no one else to give it to. No children, no remaining family. I figure you can use it."

She lets that sink in. "Who? One of the fighters?"

"Yes, but you can't tell anyone. I've worked hard to give him a normal life."

She nods mutely, hugging the skin to her chest.

"So, who does this belong to?"

#

She corners Mac in the garage bay. Mac is good at the job, but he has always been distant from the rest of them. Now, she understands why. His eyes zero in immediately on the item in her possession.

"That doesn't belong to you," he says calmly.

"The chief said I could have it," she says, clinging to skin.

"It doesn't belong to him either. Return it to me."

"Where would you go if I did?"

"Home," he responds immediately.

"And where exactly is that?"

"Does it matter? Please let me have it back."

She stares at his outstretched hand. "And if I don't? Will you hate me?"

"Yes."

She shrinks back. "Let's make a deal. I keep it until I'm no longer working in the field. What's a few more years protecting another human to you anyway? As soon as I either move up, or quit, you can have it back."

"I have lived a long time, Charlene Gage. Long enough to know that humans don't keep their promises. Keep it. Like it matters anymore."

She watches him walk away, guilt swelling in her chest. She promises herself that she'll keep her word.

#

At home, she unties the twine and stares. She runs her hand over the fur. It's beautiful.

She locks it in her gun safe and wears the key on a chain around her neck. She's heard stories of skin-walkers stealing their pelts back.

Mac begrudgingly begins spending time with her, if only out of duty. His eyes follow the chain around her neck.

Over time, they get to know each other.

When she's feeling optimistic, she'd even go so far as saying they may be friends.

#

"Why did you do that?" Mac asks, a confused frown on his ash covered face.

"Do what?" she returns, hands on her knees as she tries to catch her breath.

"Come after me into the building?"

"Because you were going to get hurt and you're my friend?"

She waits for his response, but they're interrupted by one of the paramedics. She bats his hand away when he tries to put an oxygen mask over her face.

"I don't think I was in there long enough to need that," she complains, dodging away.

Mac follows her, still frowning. "Smoke inhalation and fire wouldn't damage me like it would you."

"So?"

"So you didn't have to do what you did."

"You're my friend," she repeats.

"Thank you," he says, and she stops to look at him.

He still has a look on his face like he doesn't understand her. She grins at him, despite being dirty and exhausted.

"You're welcome."

#

Mac follows her into the burning building for a cat trapped in apartment B315. The woman thanks them a little hysterically when the cat passes into her eager hands.

Mac has been watching her with the confused frown he often wears around her.

"We went into a burning building for a single cat," Mac ponders as they ride to the station.

"Sure did," she says cheerfully.

"Why?"

She looks at him and tries not to think of striped fur. She looks out the window, fiddling with the chain around her neck. "You like cats."

"Does that matter?"

"Of course it does."

#

And somehow, despite his promise to hate her, they are friends.

Sometimes, late in the night, she opens the gun safe and looks at the pelt. She never touches it. She's heard before that you have to let the things you love go. She locks the safe.

In her dreams, gold eyes watch from the bushes.

#

The smoke obscures Mac's face as he leans over her. He slides in and out of focus. She watches his mouth move, but can't hear through the ringing in her ears. She stares up at the hole she fell through, tries to breathe through the smoke and the weight of the beam pinning her.

Hearing returns to her suddenly. The crackling of the fire, and the popping of wood as it burns. The wailing of the sirens outside. Mac's voice above everything else.

"Charlie, answer me."

"Hey." Her voice is gravely, and she thinks she'd cough if not for the beam.

"Thank God. I'm going to get you out, okay?"

The building groans ominously.

"You gotta get out, Mac. Seriously, get out."

"I don't think so."

She shakes her head. Another beam snaps and falls somewhere close by.

"You have the door code for my apartment, right?"

"Yes, but is this the time to wonder who's going to take care of your lizard?"

She grins even though she's losing the feeling in her legs. "That's not what I meant. Gun safe in the closet."

"What about it?" he says impatiently.

"Here," she reaches up and tugs firmly at the chain around her neck. The clasps comes undone. "Think you'll find something of yours in there."

"Put that back on. Take it back. You're not retired."

"I got a funny feeling I won't be needing much after tonight." She clumsily folds his fingers over the key.

He inhales sharply through his nose. His eyes flash yellow-gold. "Stop."

"Get out of here. The building is coming down around our ears. I know you're kind of immortal, but better safe than sorry."

He starts to say something to her, but the world goes hazy on the edges, more than just the smoke obscuring her view of things. Mac's words sound garbled, and she closes her eyes for a second.

#

She wakes up briefly in the ambulance. She wonders aloud, "Do I need an oxygen mask this time?"

There's a sharp prick at the inside of her elbow. At the edge of her vision, eyes flash yellow-gold.

"Tiger, tiger, burning bright," she mumbles, and the ambulance fades.

Gold eyes follow her down into the dark.

She spirals down, the gold eyes swirling by. She feels like Alice. And down the rabbit hole she goes.

Her mom used to listen to that old country artist. His song is playing in the rabbit hole, muffled and echoed.

"I've got a tiger by the tail," the song goes.

She hums along as she rolls end over end.

The gold eyes are always watching.
#

When she actually wakes up, she feels numb down to her toes. The half drawn curtains let the sun stream through. She tries to gauge the time, but she doesn't know what side of the building she's on. She sinks back into the bed. Not even a minute later a nurse bustles in.

"Oh, you're awake. Any pain?"

"Not right now."

The nurse moves to the side of the bed.

"Good. Let me ask you some preliminary questions. This is the standard procedure for anyone who has experienced a significant head trauma. What's your name?"

"Charlene Gage."

"Occupation?"

"Firefighter."

"Birthday?"

"April 6th, 1989."

"What's the last thing you remember?"

"Falling through the floor in a burning building. Being pinned."

"All seems to be there. You took a significant blow to the head, but the internal bleeding was the real threat. That's been dealt with. You'll make a full recovery."

"And Mac?"

"Is that the tall fellow? Doesn't talk much?"

"Sounds like him."

"He's been haunting the hospital. You were in ICU for a while there. He was very terse when he wasn't allowed to see you. I'm glad we've had you moved.

I'll fetch him for you once I check your vitals."

She sits through the nurses fussing quietly. Then the nurse puts the clipboard back at the foot of the bed and glides away through the door. She waits anxiously.

Mac comes through the door, clutching a cup of coffee. He stops inside the door to stare at her.

"What are you doing here?"

"The nurse said you were awake," he says uncertainly.

"No, I mean still here. I thought you were going home."

Mac digs into his pockets and pulls out the key, still on the chain. "I think the deal was that you'd give this to me when you were retiring or moving to paper pushing. Seeing as you're doing neither, I think it's still yours."

Charlie shakes her head. "No, it's yours. It wasn't fair of any of us to keep it."

He lowers his hand slowly. "Just like that?"

"Just like that. I'm not holding you here anymore."

His smiles at her. "This is where I want to be. I'd like to get my pelt, though. I haven't had a good run in a long time."

She nods. "Of course, Mac."

#

They go for runs in the woods behind her apartment. A tiger loping through the trees with a lanky young woman. He outpaces her easily, but he never leaves her behind. She doesn't have his grace, even in his human skin, stumbling over the uneven ground, but still, he doesn't leave her behind.

Years later, he'll burn the pelt. Shed it for the final time, and stand a mortal beside the only person who loved him enough to set him free. They'll

H
h

2016 Hedera helix

stand together as it burns, smoke curling
up into the sky. He will be content in a
way he hasn't been since hunters found a
young boy with a tiger pelt draped over
his shoulders like a cloak.

Second Place Short Fiction

Stepping Away

by Ann K. Phillips

As I looked up from my desk in the small reception room, I saw them crossing the parking lot. He was a handsome, elderly man, who had aged gracefully, with neatly combed silver hair. He held himself in a military erect stance as he walked slowly beside her. She was leaning on his arm as they walked into the building. She had obviously been a beauty in her youth but had faded into a caricature of her former self. Her clothes were too young, her hair too blond, and her makeup too much.

He opened the door of the reception room and led her into the building. Before he approached my desk, he carefully seated her in one of the chairs. I looked more closely at the couple and could see they were the product of a long and loving marriage. The elderly man walked to my desk and signed a name on the appointment sheet outside my sliding window. Then he returned to the chair beside her, took her fragile hand pressed it gently to his lips and kissed it. I looked at the name and pulled up the information in my computer.

I called the name, and they came through the swinging door and sat wearily in the chairs opposite my desk. I could see that her lipstick had slightly missed her shrinking lips and her once lustrous skin had become the texture of crepe paper. Her blue eyes were cloudy and did not seem to focus well. He appeared very tired, and I began to ask him questions. Following the routine procedure, I asked if they had children. His voice cracked a little as he said, "We had one daughter, but she was killed in a

car wreck last year. My wife and I have not been apart one time since that day." She leaned closely to him and whispered in a trembling voice, "What was her name, dear?" Her words seemed to cut through him like a cold, March wind and he winced. With practiced patience he replied, "Her name was Mary, the same as your middle name."

I finished the paper work and did what I had been trained to do. "Ma'am, would you please come with me? Hold my hand and I will lead you back. Sir, we ask you to wait a couple of days before you return." Her hand was trustingly in mine, but her eyes would not leave her husband and held a desperate, mute plea. As he turned his back to leave, his shoulders began to stoop and shake as he swallowed, stifled a sob and stumbled slightly. His erect stance was gone and his body grew older before my eyes. I turned my back and slowly led her down the hall to her new room.

Signs of a Struggle

by Stephanie Nichols

"Where were you last night?" Gentry demanded as I stepped into my office. His exhausted eyes focused on mine, and I realized that he had been waiting for a while. He took a sip from his steaming coffee as I hesitated, wondering how I should answer him. I went with blunt and to-the-point.

"I got a late call. Double homicide at the old Stevenson place."

Gentry sputtered, barely swallowing his coffee. Gagging, still coughing, he gasped as he spoke. "Again?"

"I know," I said, shaking my head. "Third time this year. I could have used your help, you know. You might have picked up on something we missed. Place was a mess."

"Always is," Gentry muttered. He turned away, clutching his cup like a security blanket. Of course they wouldn't have called him to the scene. On a good day, he was still a magnificent cop. But those days were growing shorter, harder to come by. Now he was more like a shell, slumped over my desk with pencils and bits of paper scattered around him, holding onto a Styrofoam cup as though it was the only thing keeping him rooted on earth—and I suspected it was. Caffeine was his attempt to mask the effects of the alcohol that filled most of his nights. The booze helped to kill the pain, but it was the coffee that kept him sane.

"Gent, I'm sorry. I didn't mean..."

"I know, Callie." He tucked his head into his hand, pinching at his temples. The other still clutched the coffee. It was growing cold and no longer steamed. I let him sit for a couple of moments to get his mind back. If there

was anyone in the world who deserved to check out for a while, it was Gent. But it was my job to keep him on his feet and to coax him back into reality.

"Why'd you need to know where I was last night?" I asked.

"What?" He said. He was still zoned out, and I could physically see my question working its way through his consciousness. Three seconds. The first to process the question, the second to analyze, and the third to formulate an acceptable answer. I could only hope it was the truth. "Oh. I was hoping you could come over and help me look over some old case files."

The truth, then. I had been over those files countless times and could recite them to anyone, word for word. The papers had been flipped and folded and dog-eared so many times that the ink was fading, and the crime scene photos were cracked and worn from being meticulously picked through hundreds of times. Gentry was convinced he had missed something at that scene. There was an answer in one of those photos—some pattern to the blood, a missing toy, a disturbed lampshade—something, anything that would crack the case. If I had been through the files a hundred times, he had been through them a thousand. He would stare at them for hours, drink in one hand, and pen in the other, always making notes, shifting through the pictures like a child looking for Waldo.

There was nothing left to be found. I had been there at the scene that day. It was the last murder case he worked with me. There was nothing we missed, no clue undiscovered, no stone unturned.

But Gentry wouldn't give up. He kept re-living that day, hoping some bit of information would spring from the pages and slap him in the face. It wasn't that I didn't understand his need to find answers. This case had struck him a low blow, and I understood that fierce desire he had to see it finished. But it had been over a year, and there was nothing to work with. The department had more pressing cases to work on. There was always something new, always another case, always a more immediate issue that was happening right now, and this case had been put on the backburner for everyone.

Everyone but Gentry.

Last March, we had gotten a call about a murder at the old Stevenson place. The gigantic, three-story house had been abandoned for many years, ever since Old Man Stevenson stated in his will that the house was to stay in the family. His daughter wanted nothing to do with the place, but, as she told a member of the town council once, "I'm not about to go against my daddy's wishes and sell the place. He'd be rollin' in his grave."

So the house just sat there in a constant state of disarray. Every single year more shingles would blow off the roof. The windows had been boarded up when a bunch of neighborhood kids had thrown stones through every pane of glass they could reach. The only intact window was the single, porthole window that hung slightly out of joint in the center of the attic. The front door to the place had once been painted a bright, cherry red, but it was now the color of drying blood. The size of the

house made it popular with kids, particularly teenagers, who wanted a place to hang out and play pranks on each other. The kids claimed it made an excellent paintball arena which accounted for the various splotches of blue and green splattered all over the walls inside and out. And no matter how many times parents warned it was dangerous, the kids kept going back. One officer even tried to contact Ms. Stevenson to have her tear the place down, but she just laughed and told him to let the kids have their fun. Gentry and I were not the first on the scene that day. In fact, we had been off-duty at the time, but the department had called us in anyway, due to Gentry's reputation for solving murder cases.

"Anyway, when I dropped her off at school this morning, she was still pissed with me," Gentry said as he stepped out of the car. "Said I had never met him, I hadn't even given him a chance. But I know boys. I know how they think. They're nothin' but trouble." He paused, slamming the car door. He must have noticed my amused expression, because the next thing out of his mouth was: "What?"

"If you keep trying to control her, she'll just run off and do what she wants anyway," I said, closing my own door and heading towards the house. "You might try meeting this kid. He may not be as bad as you think."

Gentry's eyes were on my back as I made my way across the cobblestone drive. It took him a moment to comprehend what I had said. I heard him mutter "Yeah, right" under his

breath, then jog to catch up with me. "Shut up," he told me, chuckling.

"Ya'll won't be smiling when you get inside. We got a dead boy in there. Fifteen or sixteen, by the looks of 'im. I've never seen 'im before. And the whole place is such a wreck..." He trailed off, gesturing to the mass of broken house that was the crime scene.

"Who found him?" Gentry asked as Parker led us both towards the house. I fell into step beside them.

"Couple of neighborhood kids. Their buddies were supposed to meet 'em later, but instead, they found this." Parker stepped away from me and pushed open the door to reveal the scene. Cluttered around the large room were paper plates, cups, and empty soda cans.

Just barely visible, a hand peeked out from behind one of the spotty couches. I walked carefully around the room to get a better look, and had to swallow a lump that grew in my throat when I squatted next to the body. The boy was lying on the floor with his cheek to the carpet, his blond hair framing his face. The carpet around him was stained dark, almost black. I could tell that he had been no older than sixteen, just like Parker had said. His brown eyes were still open, and a deep gash had been torn into his throat. I did not, however, see any scratch marks or bruises. It didn't appear that he had known death was coming.

"He didn't fight back," I said when I stood. Gentry bit his lip, a gesture I was familiar with. He was trying to put some pieces together; he had noticed inconsistencies that might explain what happened. I left him to it. Meanwhile, I finished taking measurements and photos of the body and its surroundings.

The other officers had already taken some, but Gentry and I liked to have our own data. Soon I was the only one left with the kid—everyone else was processing the rest of the downstairs rooms.

I had only taken a couple of photos when I heard the scream. At first I didn't know what it was—it didn't sound human. But I soon recognized the voice. I bolted up the stairs, reaching the top before realizing that I should have brought backup. Gentry shouldn't have even been up here. Not yet, we hadn't finished downstairs. But instead of going back down for help, I pulled my gun from my belt and made my way down the hallway.

A trail of blood led all the way back to the last room. Now and then there were smears on the wall. A handprint, blurred from movement. A patch of blood here. There. A dented door where someone had run into it hard enough to crack the plasterboard. Glass on the floor from a photo frame.

Signs of a struggle.

I found him in the last room. He was sitting on the floor near the closet of the master bedroom. His back was to me. Blood drenched the carpet around him, and he was rocking, back and forth, shaking.

"Gent?" I said, pointing my gun to the floor. "Gent? It's me, it's Callie."

He mumbled something incoherent. I stepped into the room, started towards him—two steps. He was still six feet away from me.

"Gentry, I can't hear you. Are you okay?"

He only moaned. But he was sobbing hard enough that his weight shifted, and I could tell he was holding something. A body. Jean-covered legs and bright

purple shoes were all I could see from where I was. But as he moved, a lifeless hand slipped from his grasp and fell over his lap so it was visible to me. It was a girl's hand, her fingernails painted bright blue. And in that moment, I knew. I knew that they would match the blue of her eyes without seeing them. I knew her hair was brown, and streaked with blond highlights she had to fight for. I knew because on the girl's wrist was the bracelet I had given her for her fifteenth birthday.

He just sat there, sobbing, rocking, mumbling incoherently.

Holding his daughter.

"Oh, my God," I whispered. I don't remember moving, but I must have run, as the next thing I knew, I was outside, staring at the ground. My stomach heaved, trying to expel what was already on the ground at my feet. And Parker was there. He was beside me, holding my hair, yelling for someone to bring him some water.

"What happened?" he asked a moment later, handing me a paper towel and a bottle of water. I wiped my mouth, and rinsed it out with water.

"Gentry." I said. My brain felt like it was trying to work a thousand times too fast, while being clogged with cotton at the same time. I blinked, shook my head, trying to clear it.

"Is he okay?"

"Yes... No... I mean... He's not hurt. Not injured."

Parker grasped my shoulders, gently but firmly, and pulled my gaze to his.

"What happened?"

"It's Alicia. He found her. Upstairs."

Parker blinked, and for half a moment, his jaw slackened. He glanced up at the top story window. His hand

covered his mouth, then dragged over his chin. "You're sure it's her?"

I could only nod.

I waited outside while the rest of the officers went upstairs. I heard Gentry cry out when they took her from him. I heard yelling as people tried to calm him, to make him see some sense. Shaking, I remained outside. When he finally did come out, his eyes were puffy and bloodshot, and he was coated in Alicia's blood. Someone had cuffed his hands behind his back, although probably more for his own protection than anything else.

My own shock dissolved at the sight of Gentry. Parker, with a split lip and swollen eye, was guiding Gentry down the front steps. I walked over to them.

"I'll take him," I said, grasping Gentry's shoulder. My voice was barely a whisper. Parker nodded, opening his mouth as if to speak, but when no sound came out he closed it again.

"I know," I said, meeting his gaze. He blinked, then turned and walked away. I let him go.

I guided Gentry back to the car, took the cuffs off of him and helped him into the passenger seat—he just let me guide him. Now that Alicia was out of sight, he had no will to fight.

"I'm so sorry," I said as I closed the door. He just stared out the windshield, not blinking, not crying, and not moving. He was like that all the way back to his apartment. I slept on the couch there that night, and for the next few weeks, it became my second home. Alicia was all he had left after his wife had passed away, and after she was killed, I was afraid to leave him alone.

Against my better judgment, Gentry returned to work only about six months after the murder. As time passed, the

case lost momentum, and leads were exhausted. Everything had been gone through. No one had any more ideas. Including me.

“Gentry, we’ve been over those files a thousand times. I’m sorry, but there’s nothing there.”

He was still sitting at my cherry wood desk, papers scattered all around him. His cold coffee sat abandoned in front of him. “There is, Callie. There has to be.”

I pulled the chair from the other side of the desk and sat next to him, putting a hand on his shoulder. He looked up, his tired eyes meeting mine.

“We will find who killed Alicia. Understand? We’ll solve this,” I told him, not really believing it. “But you have to stop obsessing. It’s killing you, Gent. Let me hang on to the files for a while—so you can catch your breath.”

He nodded, dropping his head. I stood, picked up his cup, and went to go get him more coffee.

First Place Poetry

The Language of Wonderland

Anne Showers-Curtis

I know the language of Wonderland, their vouns and nerbs, unright.
I've seen the weaselwork of sinking sand, taking lives out of spite.
I've watched the grinning cat, its teeth all razor sharp.
I've noticed those he's led astray, and I've seen their lasting scars.

You may say a pessimist sees the thorns and not the rose,
But if you've wandered Wonderland, you know they only pose.
It shines like a carnival, to a child who's never been,
But if you look keenly, you'll see their lying sins.

Have you followed the dormouse, inside his sugar pot?
Only to discover, he hoards and snorts the lot.
Tiny, white crystals make the mind feel sweet,
A sparkling, numbing essence that loneliness can't defeat.

If the March Hare is as crazy as he seems,
Why has not the Hatter left him to his dreams?
And if illusion scares you, why do you sit right down?
Unless the doorknob dared you, and offered you the crown?
And do you take your tea, with just a splash of cyanide?
If not then you should walk away, for here the fools die at night.

Have you followed the timely rabbit, hopping through the maze?
Only to be run astray, by playing cards throughout the haze.
Have you seen the roses, petals dripping blood?
The shining paint comes from the serfs, whose necks were split like wood.

And when you meet the queen, don't look her in the eye,
For when you stare down a witch, you will surely die.
If you lose your head, don't say I didn't warn,
And no one across Wonderland will stop or think to mourn.

I know the language of Wonderland, their vouns and nerbs, unright.
With such a warning, a fool would only venture, but if you think you might,
Be ready for the trip of a lifetime – or a deathtime, if you would,
Falling for curiosity, just as an Alice rightly should.

Second Place Poetry

Lost Labour
Austin Tanier Dutton

Pencils cast aside;
d r a f t s scattered
with curled chit
in the corner.
The backlight betrays
a blank p_a_g_e.
BuLbS oscillating
incessantly as the
playwright caresses
his own eyes.
The clock's whisper,
"One-"
can't be heard.
NightandDay
have merged; time's
forgot. A faithful
bed lost –
the artist flopping
down
on a second-
best couch.
Sleep cascades
a deluge
of dreams
to be
or not
to be
lost
by mourning; love's
labour will be
lost.

Third Place Poetry

The Artist Within

Matthew Wilbanks

Chaos
thrown onto the
tightly woven material
looming cautiously.
 Oceans flow
 vicariously beneath.

A flicker of light
casts shadows into
dense air.
 Explosions of
 indestructible hues.

Inevitable voids
forced away into
inquisitive
 vibrance, securing
 mended souls.

Satire on thinned,
bristled tips
 releasing extravagance
 within the confines
 of transfigured cloth.
Wherein,
 hope lingers.

