Copyright © 2024 by LandEscapes and Washington State University's Department of English. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission, whether in whole or in part, is strictly prohibited. LandEscapes accepts original student submissions in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, art, digital multimediamedia, and music. All works are assumed to be original and unpublished. The journal staff is comprised of undergraduate students.



This edition of *LandEscapes* has pieces that have difficult themes and might be triggering for some. If you need help, please contact the following resources:

#### PALOUSE

- Washington State University Counseling and Psychological Services (509) 335-4511
- WSU After-Hours Crisis Line (509) 335-2159
- WSU Women's Center (509) 335-6849
- University of Idaho Counseling and Testing Center (208) 885-6716
- UI 24-hour Crisis Line (208) 885-6716
- Alternatives to Violence on the Palouse Crisis Line (509) 332-4357

#### NATIONAL

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255
- National Sexual Assault Hotline (800) 656-4673

#### SPECIAL THANKS

LandEscapes would like to give special thanks to the following individuals for their part in making LandEscapes successful, in no particular order.

Donna Potts
Peter Chilson
Cameron McGill
Debbie Lee
Kim Pederson
Cheyenne Gaspar
Lauren Westerfield
David Feston
Colleen Sabaka
Grant Maierhofer
Amanda Myron
Brandy Wiser
Madison Jackson
Colin Criss

Past LE members WSU English Club Visiting Writers Series WSU English Department Avery Multimedia Lab

### LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

#### Beckham Rock

2024 is my last full year on LandEscapes staff, and I could not be more thankful for the experience I've had in my last three years. When I first joined the journal as a scared freshman who didn't have a clue what he was doing—both in college and in life, I was unsure what I was getting into. I never anticipated it leading to not only many opportunities but also friendships and an even deeper love for literature and arts. As I go through life after graduating in Fall of '24—hopefully in the publishing field in whatever capacity that may be—LandEscapes will always be a fond memory that has brought me growth and learning not only about writing and publishing as a concept but also community and myself.

The journal before you is made up of 50 pieces with over 30 contributors putting themselves out there to spread their creativity and artistic expression. It would be nothing without the students putting it together in both the forms of staff and contributor, and no member of that is more important than the other. I am grateful and proud of all the hard work everyone has done, and getting to see it all firsthand makes the experience of watching this journal come to life that much more rewarding.

We've had a tight-knit staff this year, finishing out with 12 members, all of whom have done amazing work throughout this year. And a special thank you to our copyediting team, led by Jamie Diamond, and Hannah Te—my co-Editor-in-Chief who graduated in Fall of 2023 but still offered her help despite time zone differences and spotty connections—for working against the clock and tight

deadlines, going above and beyond to make sure every piece was presented their best.

This year, our staff had the idea to play with the cover being based around a gothic theme done in black and white by creating a rainbow on the inside pages to highlight the vibrancy of every piece. We strive to showcase the creativity in every piece of work and the unique ways everyone finds art in their lives. We hope we've done all these talented students justice and hope you enjoy.

### LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

#### Shana Huang

For my last year of undergrad, I've had the pleasure of serving as one of LandEscapes' managing editors. When I joined LandEscapes at the start of my sophomore year, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. With my first year of college being fully online due to COVID-19, I hadn't been able to explore many literary avenues at WSU. This all changed when I became an editor for LE.

I started my journey with LE as a fiction editor. It was during this time that I started to learn the ins and outs of publishing, especially in regard to what editing entails. One of my favorite memories from that year was my first time being a part of SpookyEscapes. Between scary story readings, craft booths, and costume contests, SpookyEscapes has been an integral part of my experience in LandEscapes and will remain among my favorite memories in LE.

When I stepped into the role of Executive Poetry Editor at the start of my junior year, I felt excited and nervous. At the time, poetry was still a rather new genre to me, as I hadn't worked with it very much previously. However, as time went on, my interactions with poetry, both within and outside of LE, increased, and my confidence did as well. Now, as both the Co-Managing Editor and Executive Poetry Editor for LandEscapes, I've had the opportunity to explore and work with our editors and authors on many unique and varied forms of writing.

This past year has been a season of change, both for myself and for LandEscapes. Being a managing editor is my

first foray into leadership in LE, and along with this, I had the opportunity to work on merchandise design for the first time. Additionally, this year Professor Grant Maierhofer became LandEscapes' advisor, and it's been wonderful having him on board. Professor Maierhofer's care for the literary arts translates strongly to his role in LE, and under his guidance, I am excited to see where LandEscapes will go.

I am beyond proud of what our contributors and editors have accomplished this year. Each piece of literature and art in this edition is truly filled with so much depth and meaning. By reading through students' pieces and gazing at their works of art, I hope that you will find a story that speaks to the depths of yourself.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Renaissance Painting   Ashley Knight	10
Birthday Without the Cake   Savannah Madison	11
"His Name Was Arthur": Disintegration in	12
Architecture   Steinar Goheen	
A Single Lily in a Vase   <i>Adaline Grace</i>	32
Scars of Pain   <i>Darshanika Panda</i>	37
A Very Good Dog   <i>Mars Seemiller</i>	39
Mirror   Allison Hilliker	40
Promise   <i>Xuejiao Li (Judy)</i>	44
One Last Time   <i>Brianna Bernal</i>	45
Lies of the Lock   <i>Amaka Chigbolu</i>	46
Graveyard   <i>lan Wells</i>	62
My Mother and I   <i>Danny Dudarov</i>	63
Reaction   <i>Emma Austin</i>	65
Lost in Skagit Valley   Steinar Goheen	66
Commodification   <i>Tavia Morgan</i>	68
Rondeau of Trash   <i>Emma Austin</i>	69
A Moonlit Night   S M Raihan Rahman	70
Nests   <i>Janice Parks</i>	71
Caulfield   Jacq Schroeder	72
Fields   Jacob Carr	80
The Lathe   <i>Danny Dudarov</i>	81
BLACK OUT   Madeline Goolie	82
Dreaded Americana   Steinar Goheen	84
FALL PHEASANT   Madeline Goolie	85
Star of the Sea   Allison Costantini	86

Buried Beautiful   <i>Mila Singson</i>	88
Steady   Bailey Gauthier	89
Walk to the Tree   Adaline Haley	90
Lone Tree   Janice Parks	92
Princess Frog   Noah Tyler	93
Burial   Liz Wesorick	94
Desolate   Vincent James	96
The Architect   Ian Wells	97
Mantis   Vincent James	98
A Way Out   Bailey Gauthier	99
Unfaded   Alexandria Osborne	100
Sand Baby   Kellin Normal	114
Surveillance   Kellin Normal	115
Problem   Kaitlyn Grubb	116
Shiny Little Thing   Pooja Reddy	117
Colors   Jacob Carr	118
Happy Places   Tavia Morgan	119
Lost Gallery   Michael Nunzio	120
Lavender Menace   Talia Bergman	122
Shroom Smoothie   Jacq Schroeder	123
Conversation Class Critique   Antonio Castillo	125
Boyfriend   Talia Bergman	129
Jupiter's Reign   Maria Paula Bontogon	130
Waiting Patiently   Brianna Bernal	132
Kalaloch Beach   Kylie Guenther	133
Still Life   Maria Paula Bontogon	134
Biographies	136

The body I've grown into Isn't one I've always loved.

I've accepted its changes, I've accepted its differences, I've loved bits and pieces, But as a whole it's always been a struggle.

Too much here, Not enough there. At least that's what I used to think Until I met you.

You opened my eyes, Said I was living Renaissance.

They make paintings, They make art, They make things that people tear themselves apart for.

An arm for a sketch A sketch that holds my face.

A leg for a sculpture A sculpture that includes my hips.

A head for painting A painting containing my entirety.

You looked at me with nothing but desire.

I have no doubt that I am your dream, Your perfect Renaissance art piece.



#### Birthday Without a Cake by Savannah Madison

With black paper as the background, in this piece colored pencils are used to create depth and fill the space with brightly lit candles, which are melting into nothing. It was inspired by a change in feelings about growing up. Looking towards the future but worrying about new responsibilities and hardships that come with it. Hence the title: "Birthday, Without the Cake,." This piece presenting the feelings as one gets older, the idea of growing up loses its childlike excitement, thus no more sweet cake to emit pleasure during the celebration. Instead, it's replaced with feelings of anxiety, or in this case, an ominous black void that's inescapable.

T												Mananapes					
										24							
					-												No.
																	and the second
																	- Anna Anna Anna Anna Anna Anna Anna Ann
																	-
							NAMES OF TAXABLE PARTY.										-
																	and the residence of
																	and permission of the second
		TOTAL PROPERTY OF THE PARTY OF	- TOTAL CONTROL OF THE					-	-		Name of the last o						W. Pragator on the Control of the Co
																	- Company
	-	 	ONTO VOLUME	-							*************		entrollen (su	***********		processon and	
																	and the second s
		(	-		,	Nail Proposition and a					 ***************************************			eta esperante per			"
																	A second
-		 	operated the state of the state				Name of the Owner, or the Owne		MARIA ORGANISA				0.40501111111		***************************************		
																	- Commercial Commercia
																	Annual Administration
																	C'American (Black)
			THE STREET			}	_										

His Name Was

# Arthur

Disintegration in Architecture



A retroactive piece relating to **buildings**, **drugs**, and some **French philosophers**.

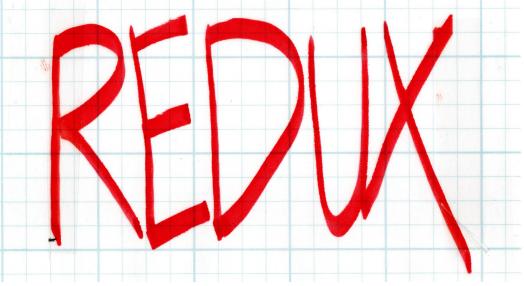
Service? Individual? ciere Masses! (Me)



Harm reduction is the belief that nobody should die of a drug overdose, ever. It is also the practice of keeping HIV rates minimized, promoting safe sex practices, and creating safer/healthier communities.

Whether you like it or not, shooting smack together creates a sense of oppositional identity; a force for fighting systematic violence. Shaming this behavior forces users to hide, making drug use riskier. Harm reduction actively combats this stigma.

# Can this be related to how we think about the built envrionment?



# Step 1: Protest

When creating a protest, historical research is important. You want to make sure your voice is credible. Zine and distro precedents for early needle exchanges are a great example of this, as these visuals were invaluable to the marketing of harm reduction to the people who needed it the most.



SCNE, Volunteer ID Card, ©Heather Edney

### **Heather Edney**

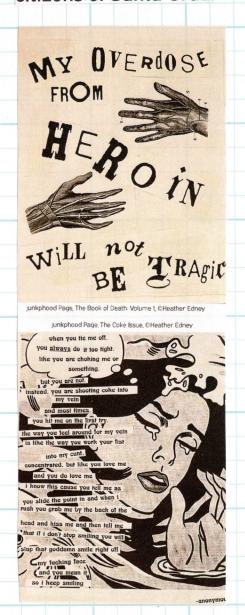
was the first executive director of the Santa Cruz Needle Exchange. She began creating zines back in the 1990s. In a series of zines entitled "junkphood", various topics were explored.



junkphood Page, True Stories from Girl Junkies, @Heather Edney

The most poignant issue of the zine was "True Stories from Girl Junkies", which explores drug use through the eyes of young women. Edney and her contemporaries utilized punk graphic methods such as collaging and photocopying to create media. Not only were the zines educational for all people, but they also lifted the narratives of a marginalized community.

The term "junkies" took an affectionate meaning and treated people who used drugs (PWUD) as normal citizens of Santa Cruz.



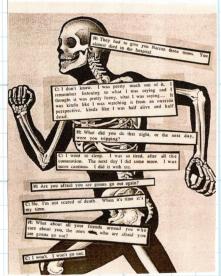
### SMACK BACK GIRLS TEACH GIRLS HOW TO FIX



When you fix your hit, try to use clean water. (Distilled water is the best and you can get that at the needle exchange) Also, don't share your cookers and cottons - if you share your works, you could also be sharing the virus and Hep C.

junkphood Page, True Stories from Girl Junkies, ©Heather Edney

junkphood Page, The Book of Death: Volume 1, @Heather Edney



"We should fight the feeling that there is something wrong with us cause we like to get high!"

-Edith Springer

This era of harm reduction was relatively short-lived, as institutions (most commonly the CDC) began assuming harm reduction was the cure-all to the ills within the post-industrial city condition. Forceful institutional harm reduction can often belittle people who use drugs for their "dirty" habits. In reality, these habits are fueled by the need to avoid being dope sick.



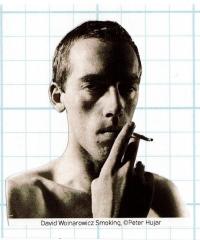


Like Edney, any architectural approach to harm reduction should treat it from the lens of raising the narratives of PWUD via pragmatic and grassroot methods. This avoids appropriation and rejects architecture being a tool for capital gain.

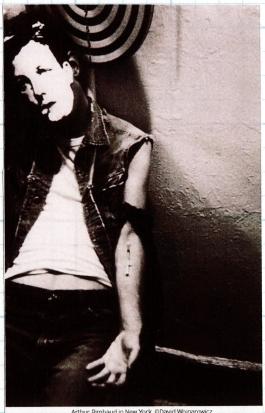




Injection drug use and HIV are closely knit, and early LGBTQ+ organizers were also harm reductionists in their own right. Someone that blurred the lines of art and activism was none other than **David Wojnarowicz**. His story is one that is filled with grief, love, and yearning; a story that I closely identify with.



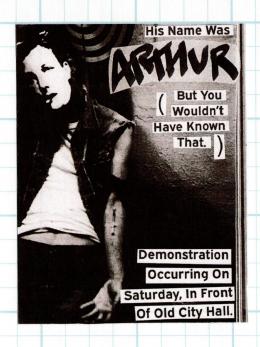
In a photography project, Wojnarowicz took a paper mask of 17th century poet Arthur Rimbaud and put it on his friend's faces. He arranged his friends in various positions and locations throughout New York to photograph them. Wojnarowicz identified with Rimbaud's early writing and wanted to bring him into the 20th century.

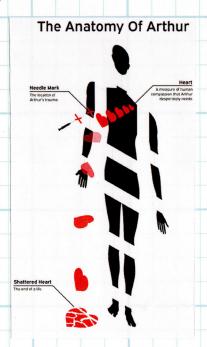


Arthur Rimbaud in New York, @David Wojnarowicz

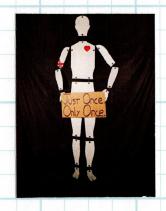
In one image, the masked figure is leaning against a wall in an abandoned pier. The person has a needle in their arm, and we can only assume that the worst has happened. The imagery is striking and is a commentary on Wojnarowicz's own connection to drugs. despair that The Wojnarowicz was able to capture on 35mm reflects the despair felt by the most vulnerable populations in an urban landscape.

# The Protest



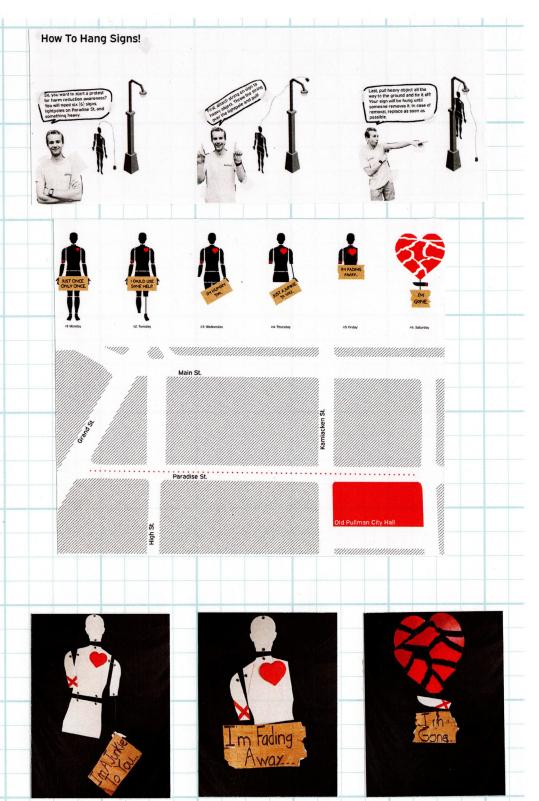


After doing research on a cause, protest signs can finally be designed. To rally for harm reduction awareness, visibility is important. Hanging "Arthur" signs are placed one by one on Paradise Ave, forcing them into the view of the Pullman community. Each one has a statement relating to visibility, until there is nothing left but the shattered heart of Arthur.



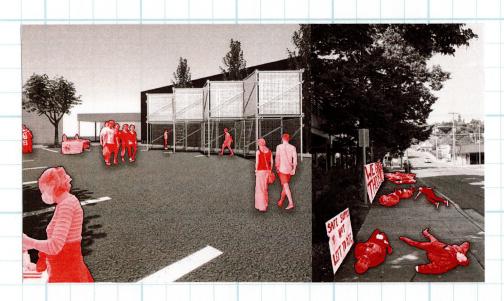


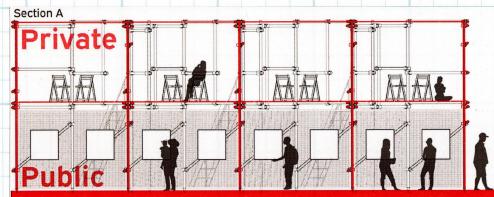




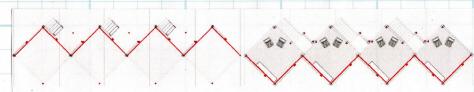
# Step 2: Pavilion

A pavilion is the first architectural intervention that can be made following a protest. It serves as a physical manifestation of the logic and thought of a previous demonstration. A pavilion for harm reduction would feature both education for the general population and services for those in need, all within close proximity to each other. Made from chain link and mesh, the pavilion can be broken into smaller modules and distributed to rural Whitman communities.









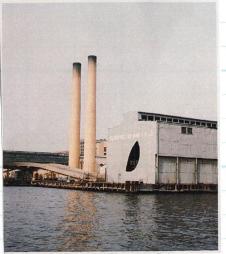




David Wojnarowicz at Pier 46, @Leonard Fink



David Wojnarowicz working on Krazy Kat Comic on Wall, ©Peter Hujar



Pier 52, "Day's End", @Gordon Matta-Clark

The materials for a pavilion or larger structure in this context should be based on the concept of reclamation. Purchasing and constructing using new materials plays into the underlying hierarchy that the built environment unintentionally forces upon vulnerable populations.

The pier in which Wojnarowicz took his Arthur photos was one of many abandoned structures on New York's Hudson River. Wojnarowicz frequently visited the piers during the 70s, to create art and cruise for sex. Architecturally, these piers represent the reclamation of space. The clandestine activities that took place within them were in direct opposition to the white collar, top-down approach that architecture was and is still known for.

Other artists, such as Gordon Matta-Clark, also frequented the piers. Matta-Clark was known for cutting holes in buildings, to reveal or frame various components of structure. His famous "Day's End" work on Pier 52 acted as an oculus to the crumbling, yet usable, world within.



rier 52, the riers, Sawin Battrop

Both Wojnarowicz and Matta-Clark treated structures as something to be reclaimed, rather than something that needs to be constantly destroyed and rebuilt. This is how I believed the end goal of the project should be. I wanted the Old Pullman City Hall to have this countercultural notion embedded within it, while keeping the main structure intact.

# Step 3: Building

After completing actual activism, how can we make a building that follows these grassroots principles? Constructing a new structure would go against these principles entirely. The best way to go about this is akin to that of the piers and every precedent discussed up until this point: **reclamation**.

The building in question is the Old Pullman City Hall, located on the aforementioned protest route. Being institutional and foreboding, this is the perfect building to reclaim ideologically.



As-Built Photos, ©Steinar Goheen

"The thing about architecture is that you end up making a building."

-Favorite Architecture Professor







### **Michel Foucault**

heavily critiqued buildings in his writings. He discovered that notions of power are reinforced via the built environment. Rigid floorplans cause dominant social relations to form. He coined this the "art of distributions."



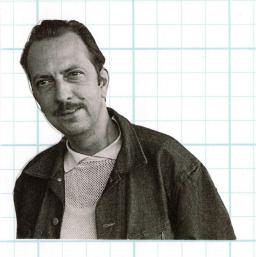
### **Guy Debord**

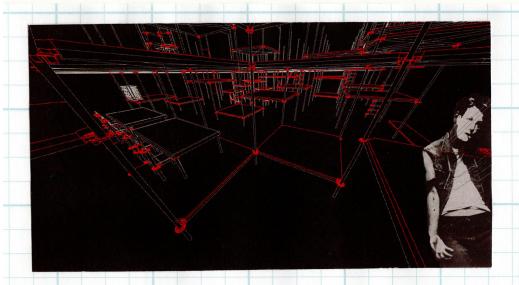
grappled with the ills of capitalism within neoliberal society. He believed that the "science of situations" would be a proper solution. "In a classless society, there will no longer be 'painters', but only situationists, who among other things, sometimes paint."



#### Constant N.

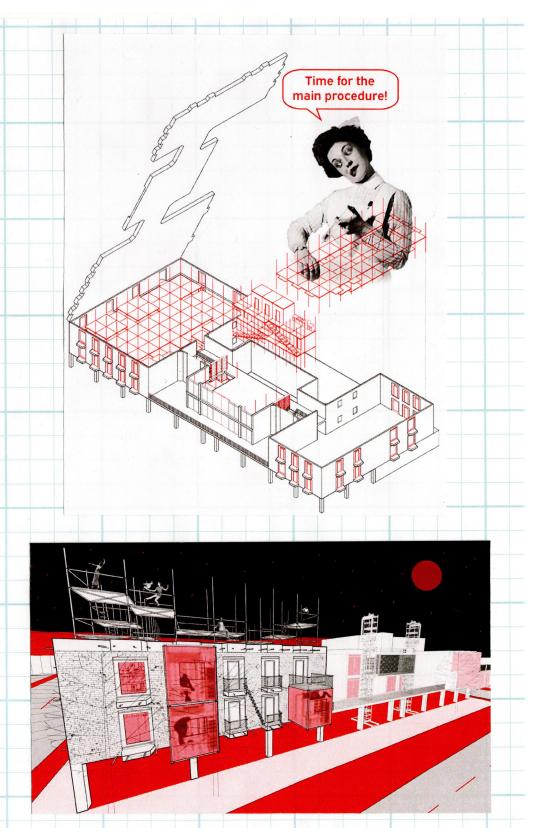
wanted to see what an architectural utopia would look like. In his project New Babylon, he created an imaginary world where architecture can adapt to an individual's needs. In that, platforms and pods moved around in an almost zero gravity space.





In response to the theories by the aforementioned philosophers, this building would serve as a place of constant change. Scaffolding frames would span two floors and could be easily moved. Sleeping pods attach to the exterior and can be manipulated in a similar manner. The harm reduction coalition that lives within the building would not be trying to force their services upon Pullman. Rather, they would be based on the fundamentals of mutual aid and would provide an alternative form of organizing/healthcare for Whitman County. The structure would serve as an alternative space for PWUD and marginalized students alike.





																	1
										16							
													punyananana				
			an made any case of					and the second second	Names a strate			22.000,200,000,000					
		custom consult	protesta de protesta de la constanta de la con			NO. CO. CO. CO. CO. CO. CO. CO. CO. CO. C	an a compression of						enerch curren				
			THE RESIDENCE			p-202040000000000	- LONG-PROPERTY COME		p.1000000000	and the second second			DATE OF THE PARTY	 and the same of th			
			o proportion de la company		protection and the contract of	- Cappel Con-One Do							TOTAL DEPOSITOR	 _		- CALABORITATION	-
																	-
																	- Inches
																	-
									and the second s	unani en el anti-	 				and the second	-	
par planet a succession on the	 	-		 									-	-	-		-

# In Conclusion...

Albeit not a real architecture project, this was an attempt to synthesize research-based design and the radical thought of early harm reductionists. As I alluded to, architecture is constantly caught up in contradictions. Even this piece isn't contradiction free. For example, how would something like this actually be built? The methods used are contradictory to what can practically happen in the real world. "His Name Was Arthur" is more of a piece exploring the possibilities of design, rather than a proposal for built work. Maybe through this process of ideation, we could begin to shrink the gap between what industry practices and what architecture school teaches.



Short story by Adeline Grace

The flower had survived the ride home.

Several hours prior, just outside the train station, a maroon lily was absentmindedly plucked from a nearby plot of earth. Abandoned on the crowded streets of San Diego, it painted the dusty sidewalk with a flush of red. He watched as this happened, eyes drawn to the shivers that the wind sent through its petals. The metal bench under him was starting to feel uneasy as his wait continued, and in an instant, he decided that it was his duty to take the flower home.

Granted, it had made for a rather awkward trip through security. With his rolling luggage to his side and a guitar strapped to his back, he held his lily in a sweaty hand. A constant beeping rang in his ears as technology whirred past him, frantically searching for illicit affairs as he walked through the mechanical archway. X-ray machines were tedious but necessary.

This bustle was juxtaposed with the silence of the lobby. Each analog clock told him his train would arrive in 15 minutes, at 11 a.m. sharp. There were many empty seats, but he had taken one next to the window where raindrops formed on the glass. Staring at his lily, he noticed pieces of each petal beginning to curl, hugging themselves as if to conserve heat.

He pulled his eyes away from the plant and gazed at people with their heads buried in laptops, books, or cell phone screens. He waited for anyone to look up and partake in the awful eye contact that fated those waiting for a train. No one obliged.

A loud, rushing noise outside the window awoke all future passengers just as the clocks hit 11. A train buzzed by the station, slowing down until it came to a quick halt. Accompanied by his flower, he boarded the train.

Standing on the platform right outside the station, he noticed that barriers were separating the landing from the tracks. This was a new addition that had been popping up at many train stations across the country, but no one seemed to talk about it. As if society created a silent understanding to not ask questions.

He was swift in making his way up the aisle to his seat, mindful of how he walked so as not to shake the petals. The train was warm and smelled of whiskey and cigarettes.

Finding his spot, he placed his guitar in the space next to him and stared straight ahead. The backs of the dark seats were worn down by years of negligence, pushing and pulling the fabric to allow for movement. He traced the stitches with an idle hand and he felt as if they might fall apart under his fingertips. He closed his eyes for a moment and remembered riding the train into California a week and a half before.

#### $\Pi\Pi\Pi\Pi\Pi$

For 11 days he lived a different life. The hostel he stayed in was dank and dusty, but it sat on the La Jolla coastline and made up for the dust with cheap rent and life-changing sunsets. His scant belongings barely fit under the bed, but at least it seemed like he would have the room to himself.

Ugly, green wallpaper lined his room. It wrapped each window with a thick shade of envy. But at least there were windows.

He checked the time on his phone and his stomach turned over the three missed calls and some voicemails, complimented only by many unread text messages. He held the power button to shut the phone down. A cry caused him to open his eyes. Up the aisle from him, a woman was seated on the train with a young boy. The child, around the age of one or two, pawed the air for something only he could see. The mother hushed him and looked around for anyone bothered.

Eye contact.

An apologetic smile flashed on her lips as she returned to her cooing, rocking back and forth the still child. His eyes returned to his personal space, and he turned to the window. Miles of land shoved by as if in a hurry to make it to work. He couldn't imagine why anyone would be in a hurry to make it to work.

 $\Pi\Pi\Pi\Pi\Pi$ 

After three days of living on neat tequila and bagels, he sat outside an old coffee shop that sold baked goods and sleep in a cup. The goal of the day was to make enough money to purchase a meal.

He unclipped his guitar case and cast a look across the street as people moved about their lives. Businessmen wore suits, families headed to parks, and leashed dogs looked for the best time to take off in a full sprint. All in anticipation of something to come.

What joy was there in waiting for the next exciting thing to happen when you could seek it yourself?

"Excuse me."

The low voice met him with apprehension. He didn't know how much time had passed, but when he opened his eyes he was met with the hand of a gentleman holding his lily.

He watched the way the man's fingers curved around the stem, gently pressing his fingertips together. He watched the way the train car's light made the man's skin appear thin, almost transparent, creating traffic in the veins on the back of his hand. He watched the way the petals of his lily were curled inward even more, and if he looked closer, he could have sworn the red color

had faded, just a little bit.

"You dropped this... this flower."

He watched as the older man handed his flower back to him and settled back into his space across the aisle. Trying to avoid unnecessary conversation, he averted his eyes from the older man and instead focused on his lily. The petals really were suffering, and the stem had begun to go limp. Instead of being met with silence, he heard the man's voice next to him.

"Where are you going?"

Since the older man insisted on socialization, he obliged.

"I'm going home. I was only in San Diego for 11 days, it was like a vacation."

He sensed movement to his right but kept his eyes fixed on his flower. He hesitated, then spoke. "I thought... I thought that maybe this trip would teach me something. Something I was missing from life back home. I wanted distance, and I thought that being on my own in a new place would show me what I needed."

His hesitation left then, along with any doubts or bashfulness he developed from his time alone that week.

"I thought that a new atmosphere would offer new opportunities, new people, or things to do. But I found myself sitting on my ass half of the time. And the other half, wondering what satisfaction I was chasing!"

His voice rose, more passionate than angry, speaking the words he had been keeping to himself for 11 days.

"I'm unhappy at home, I'm unhappy here, and I'm unhappy even when I'm on a fucking beach! I watch people, going about their days, seemingly without a care in the world. Why do I have to hold all of the care they seem to lack? I don't want to go home, but I don't want to stay here. I did this to learn something, but all I've learned is that I want to escape!"

With his last words, he lifted his hands above his head, sweeping the lily against the patterned roof of the train car. A single petal pulled from the core of the flower and drifted into his lap.

He caught his breath then and looked at the petal. For a moment his mind was empty. Unaware of the halt of the train, unaware of the people standing up around him, and unaware that his journey had come to an end.

Across the aisle, the older gentleman stood up, gathered his things, and turned to face him. Then he spoke.

"I think that's as good a lesson as anything, but it seems a little late for that."

As the last few passengers exited the train, the older man nodded and said one final thing.

"Next time you plan an escape, decide what you want to learn from it ahead of time, or else suddenly you're a plucked flower with only a few hours before fate catches up."

Then, silently, the older gentlemen left.

 $\Pi\Pi\Pi\Pi\Pi$ 

After he took a taxi back to his apartment, he gingerly carried the barely-alive lily through the door. Since his mishap on the train, one more petal had fallen off the flower, and only three remained.

He knew that it was silly. He knew that there were other flowers, ones with all of their petals. He knew that the flower could have remained on the sidewalk in San Diego, and someone would have thrown it back into the bushes eventually. But he picked it up and brought it with him instead.

The flower had survived the ride home.

I tried living the life
I tried giving up
It just doesn't feel right anymore.
My veins run dry
My eyes don't shy
My body shakes;
Can I lay here for a while to rest?
This pounding in my chest
These voices in my ears
Beg me to call it quits
But really, should I?

Pain's a constant companion,
Inching close to me, even in a crowd
full of people!
How does it feel to be at peace?
Is it like the blooming rose, or the
happy summer bees?
I ran so fast to escape you
But guess what, now is the time to
face you.
You extend your hand to me
Ask me to sit with you
Are you an illusion, or are you for real?

These tragedies nearly killed me
They changed my course of life;
The trust was broken
Yes, I am no longer a virgin to pain.
They say what doesn't kill you teaches
you resilience,
But pray tell, did my heart deserve all
this ache?
The cold floor touching my face
My memory comes in waves
I smile and tear up at the same
second!
The adult me gets how the world

### works

But say, will a child ever understand this game?

Wake me up, I don't like staying here anymore, Save me from my memories Save me from brooding Help, I just want to be free! Want to laugh and sing in joy, Just sit calmly by the sea and feel the breeze. In the end, want to look at the child and say: "You survived it baby girl, now you can lay your arms to rest." Hush little girl, I feel your pain The nights spent alone, the days longing for no rain. It will be fine, just look up Trust yourself, you are no loser. You survived, like you always do, This time, never let anyone fail you. Run if you must, run farther away But only stop when you see the sunrays. Carry those scars, loud and proud. It is your life, seize the day I remind you, never again be a prey.



# A Very Good Dog by Mars Seemiller

I was hiking along a trail near my home that I have hiked many times woods than the other side of the canyon. While looking for frosted plants to photograph, I stopped for a break and realized that Rylee's fur contrasted with the snow really well. She is also my companion for so many of my hikes, I wanted to take a picture to always remember what a good friend and dog she is.

The door at the end of the dark, tiled mile you just walked is the color of cherries—the bright ones with the sweet red juice in the jar. You've heard numerous stories about this red door with the small glass window in the center. None of them were ever good stories. The journey to get to this spot was short, but still dangerous, and one look inside that window sends your heart racing and you know, *I'm* exactly where I need to be.

The door swings open easily when you turn the handle and pull towards you, as if no one had ever thought of locking it because no one like you would be bold enough to even try to open it. All but one of the room's walls on the other side are plastered with buttons. Bright white with black letters. Four walls, with a large tube reaching from floor to ceiling in the center of the room. It almost looks comical. What an important room, yet it looks so silly. Standing by the tube is a skinny podium, home to a button blinking in the same color as the door. That one button is so bright, the blinking illuminates the room, and you squint against the glare. You take a few more steps into the room, the padding of your feet against the tile the only sound bouncing back from the

button-covered corners. It's go time.

You decide to start with the brain traits. You move closer to read the vast expanse of selections. The options are overwhelming. There are so many options, but you've thought carefully about your choices for so long that you don't have to think anymore. Your brain is blank as you watch your hand punch in confidence, kindness, and a sense of humor, blue lights marking the trail of choices. *Gosh, is there a limit?* You pick two more, ambition and emotional stability, before moving on. Your feet thunder against the smooth floor and echo as you cross the space.

A sound of footsteps near the door. Your breath catches—no one can find you here. This room wasn't meant for anyone like you, and if you were found out, you could put your entire society on edge. Putting your project aside, you rush toward the door and hide underneath the small window, so anyone looking in can't see you. The footsteps continue down the tiled hallway and slowly fade. A deep breath consumes you, and you turn back to the last part of the selection process.

Next up is physical appearance. You reach for the words "blue eyes" and "dark brown hair" a little bit faster than you'd like to admit. You pause over blue eyes and see the light of the "green eyes" button being pushed instead. Yes, that's better. Long eyelashes are a must, and full pink lips come next. You build an image in your head, and you get more anxious with each passing second. You elect high cheekbones and small freckles over the nose. Talk about attractive. You think of height and select the matching button, and stop. Pushing it again, the blue hue goes away. Your hand moves up one, two buttons to add the corresponding inches to the height. And you're done. You can't think of any more traits or qualities. Your eyes become fixed on the center of the room.

The tube stands tall, floor to ceiling, and you can see

an aurora of blue selections through the glass. The red button sits on the podium next to the tube and hardly fits underneath your hand. The button is like a hot stovetop as you set your hand atop it, and you feel a sharp prick. You watch as the podium turns red, as your head fills with static. As the faint feeling grows

stronger, you look at your reflection in the smooth glass of the tube for one last time. Gas starts swirling on the other side of your reflection, and the world spins as you feel yourself hit the ground.

Your vision is blurry as your eyes regain their focus and blink open. The glass encasing you retreats into the ceiling, and you notice the fuzzy shape laying on the floor. It's hard to find your footing as you stumble off the platform. You take a few wobbly steps and look down at the body below you. *Good riddance*, it was time for a change. A single step over them brings you

closer to the vast mirror across from you. A pair of eyes stare back at you–irises green this time–from two inches higher than they used to be. You run a finger over the smattering of freckles between them. And exit through the cherry-colored door.

Promise by Xuejiao Li (Judy)

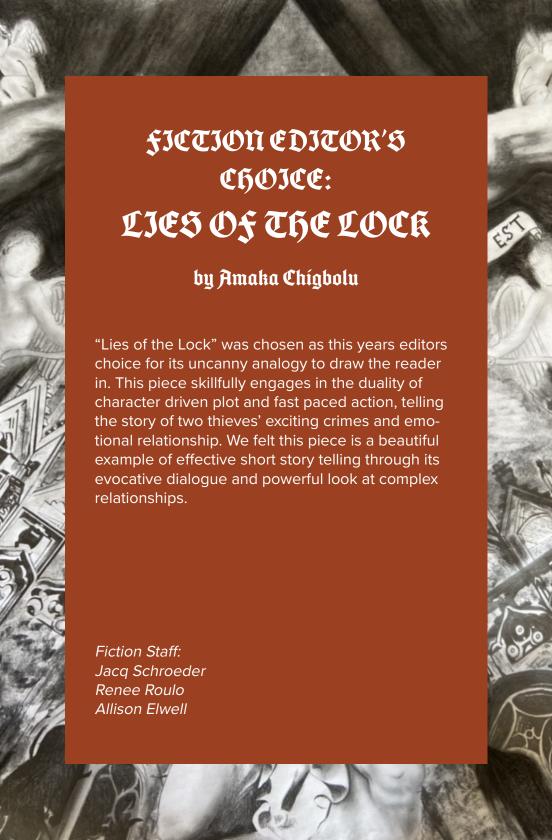


Before 2021, my boyfriend and I did not go anywhere because of COVID-19. We felt a little bit bored at home and wanted to have more adventures together outside. This photo showed our first trip together right after the pandemic in May 2022 at the Antelope Canyon. We were still required to wear masks all the time as we walked through the canyon. When we took photos together into the canyon, it did not show our whole face so clearly because of the mask and dark light in the Upper Antelope Canyon. Then I thought, let's take a photo of our hands by doing hand gestures and using the canyon wall as a background to represent our memory would be impressive. This photograph portrays the promise we made to go to more places in the future, implying our love journey will be forever, hoping to spend every day with each other. I took this photo with my phone centered on our hands. Then, I adjusted some contrast effects on shade and color.



## One Last Time by Brianna Bernal

Creating stories has always come naturally to me but when I'm given a camera, I always do my best to express my feelings. When I created this piece, I wanted my composition to be simple but also sentimental. When analyzing this picture and the composition, it creates a delicate and soft atmosphere. I came up with the title "One Last Time" looking at the small candle that the subject is about to blow out. This piece has a special place in my heart, as it is a memory that I associate with my partner that I had recently met around the time I captured the image. As I reflect on this piece, I hope that the viewer can resonate with more than just a visualization of my emotions.



The lock rattled against its metal face. The safe seemed to be the least of their problems as anger grew in one of the thieves.

"Are you sure this will work?" The small man asked the other, who was fiddling with the lock.

"'Course it will," a larger man spit from his hunched position. His knees pressed close to his chest, muscles straining as he worked, "When 'ave I ever been wrong," he quipped. The taller man thrashed the lock around a few more times. Arlen looked at him with incredulous concern, which would have gotten him knocked on the head a few times if the dirty blond had eyes in the back of his large head. Arlen rolled his eyes at the statement before scanning the room anxiously, clicking his tongue.

The room was oval shaped. Iridescent windows touched the ceiling and floor. The ground was covered in expanses of royal gray—nothing too special. There wasn't much in the room besides a bookshelf to the right of a large mahogany desk, and the opposing wall of sports memorabilia. The mounted animal heads were the true statement piece in the room. If you looked too far up you would lock eyes with several animal mounts with bedazzled plaques and jeweled eyes. This guy was awfully gaudy in his taste of room decor.

The last job was supposed to be five heists ago. Yet somehow Arlen had gotten roped into "just one last one.". Jesse let out a string of curses, striking the lock repeatedly. Months ago, in early fall, a previous adventure did not go as well as they would have liked. Arlen's patience was already worn thin by the third "one last time" that Jesse insisted with his warm green eyes and signature smirk, displaying perfect teeth. Lavish halls were adorned with jewels and draped with soft silks. The halls were warm from merrymaking and soft dancing. Arlen had just returned from scouting the inside of the party; he was still in a servant uniform with his tie loosened. From their vantage point across from the jubilee, there wasn't much to see other than the swarm of pompous aristocrats.

"So...does it still hurt?" Jesse was uncharacteristically sheepish with his question.

"Does what still hurt? If you're referring to my ass then yes!

Who knew playing the distraction *this* time would have my behind lit up by guards. You're lucky I had the castaway on me," Arlen growled.

Jesse's expression was hard to read as his eyes went wide, pulling his head back so that his nose narrowly missed the snap in his partner's words. He bit his lip to keep it from trembling, face scrunching. Arlen knew Jesse was itching to say something to him. "What?" Arlen sighed.

"It was funny watching the guards literally light a fire on your ass."

Arlen wished he could roll his eyes even harder as Jesse's attempts to hold in a chuckle turned into full-on barking. Maybe if he smacked the castaway enough times on the ground he'd end up transported to his room, away from this giant annoyance. Arlen walked over to his bag on the roof and pulled out a wrapped plate.

"What're you doing? The hell did you even get..." Jessie scrunched up his face, bottom lip pushed into a line of disgust.

"What?" Arlen chirped innocently, scooping up another bite of cake into his mouth. The fondant melted so well, mixing with the notes of...almond extract?

Jesse sighed heavily, pinching the bridge of his nose in disbelief.

"Why don't we stop for drinks as well?" The blond's voice dripped with sarcasm, "I'd like that."

"Arlen—"

"Jesse." The brown man cocked his head. Challenging Jesse's glare with a lazy look, raising both his brows. The blond broke first, moving his gaze to anything but the other man. His ears burned.

"Just—do whatev'r you want," Jesse stuck a finger into the cake, picking up a corner and plopping it into his mouth. He barked out a laugh when Arlen's jaw dropped, the brown man holding his fork in such a way that oozed malicious intent.

"I should run you through with this," Alren hissed and the blond laughed again. "D'aww feel like you'd miss me too much after," Jesse teased.

"I wouldn't," Arlen clipped.

"Wow, physical *and* emotional wounds. Really know how to do me in," Jesse held his hands to his chest, feigning hurt.

"If anything was to 'do you in', as you say, besides that wretched ego of yours..." Arlen turned his wrist out, resting the fork delicately on Jesse's sternum. Jesse swallowed. "It would obviously be me. I wouldn't let anyone or anything else have that."

Jesse's eyes went wide. Before he could retort, smirk blooming after he pushed out a sound, the party below stirred. The crowd outside the party grew more lively than usual, drawing the attention of the pair—guests wailed, fluttering about. Arlen smiled, turning back to face Jesse, who had held up a large necklace and a timekeeper up to his chest. The blond paraded around the rooftop as if he were one of those young elitist nobles. The shorter man dropped the cake plate when he finished. Arlen let out a small chuckle, and pulled out a flat piece of glass—a channel—and swiped his finger across it. The glass illuminated his face as he fiddled with the device.

"Percy will be pleased. Honestly, I've never seen a fire elemental be so testy. He's an alchemist for Umber's sake," Arlen prattled.

Jesse's nose scrunched, lips forming a tight line, "Yeah he will..."

Still, the mere mention of their employer's name had caused Jesse's mood to sour.

Jesse and Arlen returned to Percy's lab. Stark whites and metals sucked the warmth from their bodies. Tubes and large containers filled with ambiguous liquid ebbed and flowed like lava. Further inside, the experiments began to take shape. They were less robotic and more fluid. A silver mop of hair would have been almost impossible to spot if not for the dark round goggles strapped to it. Arlen could see his reflection in them as he drew near. He was tired—brown skin worn and washed out, strands

of silver peaked and contrasted with his dark locs. He had dark circles now and his lips were dry—he was beyond tired. Jesse cleared his throat as Percy shifted in his swivel chair. The old man cleared his throat too, more violently than Jesse had. Percy leaned away from his work and snapped his fingers. A cigar appeared in front of him. He licked his lips, trying to snap his weak fingers again. After the third snap his index finger held a delicate flame. He held his finger to the smoke, shaking it when it had served its purpose.

"Where's my device, Len?" The man hadn't even looked past his shoulder to see if it was them, holding his hand behind him expectantly.

"I have it here," Arlen spoke up, handing Percy the borrowed transporter. The old man finally sat up straight, stretching as he turned to the pair.

"So where's the other item?"

"|\_"

"I've got it here," Jesse saids first, reaching into his pocket, pulling out a vial with a shimmering blue liquid. Alren turns his head, narrowing his eyes at Jesse. Wordlessly, Jesse pleaded with shining determined eyes, asking for trust. Percy's face soured, the corners of his lips pushing down in annoyance. Arlen backed off, clearing his throat as Jesse handed the vial to Percy's expectant gloved hand. The man examined it with an open mouth. His glasses fell on the tip of his nose. Arlen shifted the weight on each foot while Jesse's jaw tensed like the clenched fist at his side. Percy pocketed the vial, seemingly satisfied for now.

"What about the schematics?" Percy grumbled. Arlen looked to Jesse, confused. Jesse licked his teeth before he spoke, "Couldn't find 'em."

"Really?"

"Really."

Percy looked at both of them, scrunching his nose. The tension in the room seeped out and lessened gradually.

"You're dismissed, I'll let you know when the next job is."

The city air felt like a punch in the lungs. The sun almost burned their cold skin. Squatting down to check his shoes, the brown man had to chase after Jesse, who kept walking after their encounter with their boss.

"Jess," Arlen breathed, causing Jesse to halt his steps. He turned back to face him, letting Arlen get up close. The umberhaired man pulled out a small red book. "Why didn't you let me give Percy the book?"

"He doesn't need it."

"Are you daft? Stealing from our alchemist employer is—"

"We're not stealing it," Jesse growled, "It was never his to begin with. Books don't belong to anyone."

Arlen's eyes scanned Jesse's face and then their surroundings. Enforcers tapped the side of their helmets while looking at him and Jesse argue. Passing citizens slowed their pace to watch if the situation escalated further. Arlen stood there quietly observing Jesse as he continued walking. Jesse was more on edge after that encounter with their boss. He figured this conversation wasn't as important right this moment. The enforcers continued their path, as the two cut through the whispers of the city.

\*\*\*

The next assignment in late spring was better, but—again—still less than stellar. Months later the pair found themselves in a neighboring city from their previous mission. Atlas was a capital city. Markets were always bustling, roasted coffee and spices and other aromas carried on the winds. Netzens prattled on while sharing sharp drinks and fresh bread. Past the markets and the townhouses was a building housed between two whispers. Arlen flung the safe house door open, rushing to crash on the sofa bed near the door. Jesse followed close behind, opening and shutting the door twice. The brown man sat up, raising his arms up towards the ceiling, letting out an obnoxious sound. Pans clanged in the next room--probably Jesse making a snack before the next mission. A figure walked out of the other room. Jesse dropped a

small child into Arlen's arms. The small one cooed, babbling and reaching for Jesse again. The blond cringed, pulling away from the baby who laughed at him. Arlen begins to bounce the baby on his knee, eyes blown wide.

"Wha—Where in Umber's name did you find a baby—" Arlen's harsh tone was honeyed when the baby began to fuss, the skilled thief started to bounce the baby in the air. "Please tell me we're not adding kidnapers to our laundry list of crimes?"

Jesse checked the door several times. "We're not. I have a heart y'know? Kid's a part of our plan."

Before Arlen could protest, desperate raps rattled the vermillion door. Jesse ran over and pressed a button near Arlen. A muted cloaking wall was drawn up, obscuring the part of the room Arlen and the child were in. The room looked entirely empty except for Jesse's place in it. Arlen was still able to watch Jesse through the cloak. His chest heaved before he flung the door open. A disheveled man draped himself over the door frame. Sweat poured from his forehead and soaked the pits on his clothes. The sweaty man looked up at Jesse pitifully.

"Remus! You look a mess, how were the pubs this time,"
Jesse gave Remus a toothy smile. He batted his lashes—Arlen
knew that tell— Jesse was about to ask for a favor of some kind.

"I--um. I can't find..."

Jesse leaned down towards Remus expectantly. The sweaty man wiped his forehead, nearly falling into Jesse's hard chest, wailing.

"It's my Millie! I can't find her! I was makin' a bet—said I could swipe a console from a guard. When I came back she was gone! Please Jess I'll do anything this time I swear," Remus sniffled. Jesse lifted his face and cringed at this display. He took another breath and fixed his expression.

"That's terrible, Friend. I'll help you look for her, but you gotta do me a favor." Remus pulled his snotty face away from the tall man. He nodded so hard it looked as if his head would come off his shoulders. The baby—Millie—babbled and reached forward, promptly recognizing her silly father. Arlen tried his best to keep the baby quiet as he watched the interaction intently. Jesse gave Remus a sympathetic pat on the shoulder before whispering in the man's ear.

Whatever Jesse told him was enough to put more fear into this man than losing his child for the umpteenth time day drinking. Remus started to back out of the doorway, frantically shaking his head when Jesse grabbed his shoulder, cocking his head to the side. His eyes became dark and steely like midnight granite. Remus promptly straightened up. Through his trembling frame Arlen could clearly see Remus nodding slowly. Alren tightened his arms as he felt Millie try to jump out of them. He'd gotten too engrossed in the conversation, or lack thereof. Before Remus could wonder why the walls in the house shook like parchment, Jesse gave him a faux smile, reassuring he would find the missing child before lightly pushing Remus and slamming the door.

Arlen leapt up, baby in hand, and pressed the same area of the wall that Jesse had earlier. The cloak came down and Arlen stuck his arms out with the baby. Jesse took the child and praised her for being so good. Arlen sucked his teeth, catching Jesse's attention. Millie also seemed to be waiting too.

"That poor father—Jesse"

"I know what I'm doing just trust me, Len," Jesse interrupted. His eyes no longer looked like midnight granite. They were bright and burning like a funeral pyre. Arlen's breath hitched in his chest. Jesse's eyes were determined and unwavering. The only times he called him Len was when they got injured on their first mission together, when Arlen was too busy rambling about technology to pay attention, when a mercenary got too close for comfort and Jesse wrapped a protective arm around Arlen's waist— when he was serious about something he called him Len. Arlen swallowed before sighing.

"Please just give that child back before somebody thinks we're kidnappers, walls talk," Arlen quipped. The blond flashed a grin and raced out of the safe house to return the child, not to her father preferably, but to her mother.

\*\*\*

"Would you chill out, you brute?!" Arlen hissed. Jesse stood up from behind the mahogany desk, looming over his partner in crime, nostrils flaring and temple vein bulging. "Say that again, Skinny."

Arlen held his breath from the forced proximity.

"Just—let me try," Alren attempted a half nudge, moving his hot coal of a partner. Jesse moved with relative ease. He watched with skeptical daggers as Arlen squatted down and began to work. The nickname Skinny didn't bother Arlen much more than a cactus prick in the ass did. It was mildly annoying.

Jesse is a tall blond of well built muscle. When he wasn't making ugly expressions or barking in anger he was quite handsome. Faux softness in his eyes paired with a dastardly grin became quite useful when the pair needed to talk their way out of a pinch. It worked almost half the time. Arlen was not his opposite; he was just different. The brown man was skinny—as Jesse so delicately pointed out constantly—and he was short if you compared him to the cocky brute.

No matter what he did, Arlen's dark eyes always held a gentle softness. The weight of his childhood shifted in his irises but it was always there, mixing with his thoughts. The gears in his head moved more than his mouth, a quirk the silence filler liked the most about Arlen. He had to be nimble and his sleight of hand was impressive to the blond. When the pieces came together, their "association' barely made sense. The difference in their bodies could have been the reason they worked so well together.

Within seconds the lock chimed. Before Arlen could even take a peak he was shoved out of the way. Jesse reached into the safe and pulled out a large pocket watch. The gold paint was chipped on one side, hiding the etched name in silver plating. Arlen narrowed his eyes, while Jesse barked out a laugh, kissing the watch repeatedly. Jesse began to pack up the mess of tools, throwing them haphazardly into the bag from atop the large desk. Arlen recovered from the shove, observing as Jesse stuffed the watch into his pants pocket. Arlen's slender hands reached into the pocket, snatching it out like a whisper. Jesse pressed his large hands under the desk, searching. Arlen began to analyze

the watch, turning it in his hand when Jesse patted his pocket, eyes turning bloodshot as he looked upon his prey. Arlen took a step back towards the door when Jesse lunged in his peripherals, holding his arm out.

"What is this? Is this the thing you brought me here for?" Arlen's voice was quiet and cold like lava. Jesse laughed at him; muscles in his shoulder flexing.

"Arlen are ya serious right now? We needed this—"

"Why?" Arlen stopped him. Jesse's smile faded slightly before coming back tenfold, canines bared.

"We've never failed a heist, 'member? Ya know why? Between da heaven's 'n earth I'm the honored one."

Arlen huffed, maintaining his distance from the brute itching to lunge again. Before he could respond with a few curses of his own an alarm blared through the room. Arlen's face seemed to split into concern, quickly melting to anger. Jesse was still smiling, taking a step towards Arlen. This whole thing was Jesse's plan from the start. Alren took a breath to steady himself.

"I'm going to end you," Arlen hissed. Jesse licked his lips in anticipation. Jesse rushed for the watch, which Arlen anticipated, springing backward to avoid a blow to his face. The door was no good for now, so Arlen pocketed the watch and ran for the windows. Since Jesse was bigger his reach was longer, managing to catch Arlen's opposing wrist. In a split second Jesse landed a rib-shattering strike, sending Arlen careening towards the wall of windows.

Despite Jesse's strength being overpowering for Arlen, the smaller man had a nimble advantage. The floor rumbled with fast approaching footsteps. He stopped just short of the glass. From the floor Alren swiped at Jesse's ankles disturbing his balance enough to land a swift kick to the other man's ribs. Jesse doubled over, spitting blood on his tight white tee. Some blood splashed next to Arlen, brightening up his brown skin. Skidding to all fours, the young man braced for impact, tucking and rolling out the window.

A group of guards breached the door at the same time,

forcing Jesse to follow Arlen out the window. Blades of grass, rocks, and glass whipped at his skin as Arlen slid down the side of the hill. He recovered as quickly as he could, wincing at the various cuts that now littered his

body. He limped towards the shore. Sedated waves lapped at where the speed boat was parked. Arlen's sigh of relief was cut short when a body collided with his side. Jesse had been right behind him and had closed the gap fast.

"Give. Me. That damned watch, Skinny," Jesse growled, spit flying. He looked like a rabid dog that had been chased through an alley. There was more blood on his shirt than on Arlen's black one. Arlen tried his best to protect his face from blows, but to no avail. Jesse had gotten several hits in, breaking Arlen's defense and eventually his nose as well. Arlen coughed up blood in Jesse's face. He started to flail and panic. Eventually Jesse's hits slowed. Arlen balled his fist up into the sand. An idea struck the man, but he would have to wait for his chance. Arlen raised a shaking hand in defeat. Jesse had pulled back the assault on his partner, wiping some blood off his face with his thumb and forefinger balled up.

"Why...do you want this so bad...you have hundreds of watches. We've stolen a bunch together. Why...why test the limits this time?" Arlen breathed out as best he could. The broken nose muffled his speech slightly, and the blood he choked on was still raw, burning his throat a bit.

Jesse spit before he spoke, "I need it. You got your family, but this is my loot. I didn't wanna set you up, Arlen. Just needed a way out—outta here." Arlen pushed out a laugh, turning his head to spit his own blood. Just past his fingertips was a piece of an old beer bottle, no doubt left by some teenagers at a beach party. The gears in his brain shifted and Jesse was none the wiser. Arlen locked eyes with the man holding him down.

"Heh—I can't forgive you for something like this, *Friend*" Arlen spit the last word at him. Jesse smiled for a second, preparing to bash in his friend's skull. The plan for after was too far away for the larger man to think about. Arlen tightened his fist in the sand, throwing the dust up at him. Jesse reeled in pain,

rubbing at his eyes.

Arlen bucked his hips upwards, pushing Jesse off of him enough so that he could wrestle his way out of the caged grab, he reached for the shard, cutting up his hand in the process and sunk it into Jesse's leg. He kicked the shard, sending it ripping through Jesse's thick expanse of thigh muscle. Arlen stumbled to his feet. He smashed the watch into the side of Jesse's head, limping towards the boat while clutching his side.

The guards had encroached on their position. The water lapped at the boat. When Arlen looked back at Jesse for a second, who laid there wailing and grunting like an injured animal, he looked helpless for the first time Arlen had seen in the decades they spent together. It was pathetic. By the time he got up it would be too late for him. In the sand the pocket watch rested, cracked open. The time was unreadable. As he crawled for the boat he had to make a choice.

There wouldn't be enough time and Arlen knew that. The tanned man fumbled in his thoughts about the last moments. Jesse's shining eyes, the waterfront property, the sea breeze licking at his wounds, the soldiers' guns. Jesse had occasionally left Arlen by himself on missions, claiming he would "figure it out or die I guess." He was no stranger to having to figure out everything himself, but this time—this time the act was bitter. Alren didn't understand how Jesse could stomach this swirling and slimy pit that pulled at his insides cannibalizing and baptizing his organs in a viscous black goop. He pulled out the pocket watch from his pants, flipping the cover open. He fiddled with it, guilt-ridden. Despite its aged appearance, the watch was guite intricate. The open-faced watch had a skeleton backing. The gears resembled different bones. Some of its faces were cracked, ribs missing. The blue dials were all stopped at the same time: 11:19. Why would Jesse risk his life—and Arlen's—for such a piece of junk? Before the deviant could ponder more the hyper rail came to a screeching halt.

The harsh stop jolted the passengers. As the doors open, passengers rush past each other like two converging schools of fish. The static voice of the passenger car is consistent as always,

cheery with a pinch of bridled curiosity. Arlen slipped into the crowd. The people he bumped shoulders with didn't want to pay attention to the popper who looked like he got into a street brawl with a Manx cat and lost. Outside is the center plex, a version of the city's port. In the distance, guards could be seen with large weapons, standing at attention. Their large visors reflect the sun into the eyes of weary travelers. At the entrance, a passenger scans their bracelet quickly. The others scan other identifiers such as their rings, necklaces, and earrings. Lines of information rushed through the air on a clear screen.

Arlen had put his bracelet on in the train car but the actual gate would be the final test. Arlen scanned his bracelet, and immediately the screen flooded vermillion. Alarms sounded, causing the other travelers to either look around in fear or mild annoyance. Guards immediately approached Arlen, guns drawn. He shut his eyes, accepting that he really shouldn't have gotten this far. A man screamed at his side. Alren's eyes snapped open to a profusely sweaty, pudgy, and balding man fumbling over his papers. The guards began to drag him away. Armored finger sinking into his arms. He wails a faux story about accidentally wearing his wife's ID bracelet by mistake. The guards didn't even look as they dragged the man off, like soulless robots. Arlen's gaze snapped from the man towards the guard who was watching his information.

Though he couldn't see their face, he could feel that his reaction was suspicious by the tilt in the guard's head. The onlookers began their whispers, speculating about what sort of dazzling or lackluster crime he might have committed. Arlen could feel their eyes and their whispers turn

to him for a split second. It pained him every minute to be back here in this city. A guard presses the side of his helmet, uttering something before motioning to the scanned passengers. Dazzling iridescent waterfalls pour down, towering over the entrance. The floating city seemed more like a crown missing the soft cradle of a ruler's skull. Sharp white mountain peaks hold the ring of waterfalls in place.

"Oh my apologies—Wayfarer! Praise the dawn star! Welcome

to Rivet Town, Caspian's one and only city of infinite knowledge," A young boy spoke to Arlen. The boy looked no older than 13, and his pants were a size too big, hand-me-downs that probably came with the job.

"Uh--yes, thank you," Alren pushed past the merchant boy, whose eyes gleamed at a chance to sell something to any unsuspecting tourist. He ignored him as he continued on, clicking his tongue. A few ways away a young man had been cornered by another merchant—the poor bastard. The merchant is practically salivating at the well-dressed man, dark rabid eyes bulging as he tried to shove something into the man's hand, who was sweating profusely. His face was now a bashful cherry red like he was a centerpiece in a mahogany bowl. He tried to wave the merchant off but this guy was determined. A pity really. Arlen's steps stuttered. He considered for a second to help the outsider, but then picked his current predicament over the side quest. He clicked his tongue again, lowering his head to keep pace.

If he remembered correctly the place should still be the same. As he approached a humble looking building, he stared at the large expanse of plant life covering it. On the wall and the roof read a sign:

NAOKI CIELLE: Head Researcher, High Sage Magistrate

The title was longer than the last time he was here. Back then it only said *Part-Time Irequiem Researcher*. Some things had changed but at least the building was still the same. He walked around the back of the building to an aside away from whispering eyes. He climbed through a propped window, most likely left open due to an experiment with mystical arts again. Quiet as a mouse, he rolled in and scanned the area. He was on the second floor. The research lab was down a level. Arlen was so focused on the area he hadn't even noticed the soft click until it was too late. By the time the second arrived he froze, half excited to see who would arrive and half anxious about getting caught. The wound on his body decided to make the decision for him.

"What in hell's name—wait," the woman's round frames nearly flew off her face in surprise, "Arlen?! Wha-what are you doing here?!" She squeaked. Arlen slowly stood up. The woman's eyes widened in fear at the man before her.

"Long time no see, old friend," Arlen pushed out, giving her a painful laugh as he found a surface to lean against. The woman—Naoki—let out an anxious huff. Hundreds of emotions and questions flooded her senses. If she were a robot, her glasses would have fogged up as she short circuited "Get out..."

Arlen's eyes widened. He wasn't expecting such a cold welcome after reappearing in his friend's life after all these years. He was almost hurt.

"I just need to know what this is, Ki, please."

If he could, he would bleed out on her wood floors to show how serious he was, but then he might die and would never find out the illustrious abilities of the pocket watch. The magistrate sighed with a cross of her arms, loosening just enough to push her round glasses up her slender nose. Her ears swished. She curled her lips in staring at her past dripping blood on her floor.

"I'll do it, but Lenny. Clean up my damn floor," Naoki yelled. That was the harshest tone Arlen had heard from his childhood doctor. It made him proud that she did not let anybody walk

over her now. It was like watching a younger sibling grow up, even though Naoki was older. In the back of his mind, Arlen wished he could tell Jesse about this new development. The brunet sucked in a breath and nodded. Hobbling over to a couch draped with a dark fabric—Naoki had said white was tacky and the dark color hid blood stains better. The magistrate descended her spiral staircase and went to work.

Time had passed in a tic. Arlen sat up, clicking his tongue. He looked down at fresh bandages and a little less pain from the wounds Jesse had inflicted. Naoki had smacked him awake, now standing over her friend. She held a worn red notepad. The woman loved magic technology and was an avid user of such technology, but nothing beat the feel of parchment on her soft finger tips. The woman pressed her round frames up her mocha nose bridge before she spoke.

"Where did you find that thing Arlen?."

"Uh it...it was in a safe," He tried to remember exactly as he

licked dry lips. "We were on an assignment for Percy...at least I think we were--Jess is always dragging me around," Arlen breathed out.

Naoki frowned, "Percy? I thought you were done being an errand boy for mad scientists?"

"He still pays well, unfortunately. It's easy money."

"And you're still close with Jesse? Why am I not surprised?"

Arlen laughed until he aggravated one of his wounds, hissing in pain.

"Right, well, the pocket watch. It's more than just that. It's an old fashioned teleporter but it doesn't work like our tech now. It can only locate things and take you to it." Arlen sat up straight, wide-eyed.

"This is why he wanted it so bad he's looking for something with it...he lied," Arlen muttered under his breath. Naoki squinted at him in confusion, waiting for Arlen to continue. When he didn't, she decided to say more.

"So what are you going to do now Len?"

He took the watch from her hands, his own trembling. He tightened his grip, pushing out his words.

"I'm going back for him. I'll save him myself."



These pieces are from a choose-your-own adventure story called "Ikigai: A Reason for Being." The story follows an ex-mercenary in a not-so-distant cyberpunk future on his quest for revenge. Here are the excerpts associated with each of the published images:

"By now, your wife and child had been processed and were helping grow the plants ahead of you. Returned to the Earth. Mineral resources have become so scarce with the recent trade restrictions they can't even waste the dead. At least they allow visitation." My mother never told me about the fairies sleeping in the tulips, but I still heard echoes of their chatter on the quiet summer nights.

And so the girl braided my hair that day on the grass when she asked me why I'd double knot my shoes.

She was barefoot, I should add, though I'd never realized until she did.

She told about the fairies, and I knew I'd never say a word to my mother, or the tulips would surely die by her hand.

"We came from towns of unmarked gravesites, or at least I've been told.

We wear shoes and white dresses, never callused on our feet, with heavy curtains, oh, and fear of god,", I said to her, sure that she'd understand.

She told me of the lambs she'd lay with in hot summer sun, sisters racing across woodland trails, beetles becoming friends with the worms in the ground.

My mother never told me about the fairies in the tulips, or the girls who climbed trees, Poem by Danny Dudarov



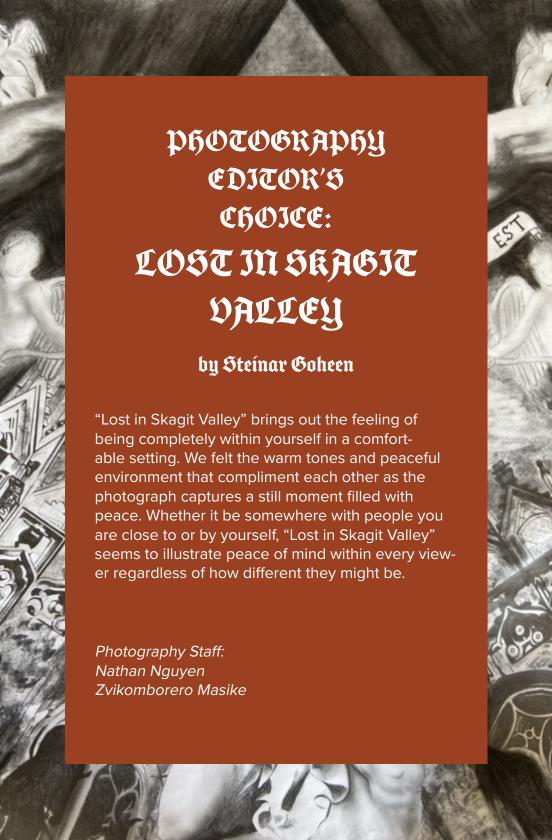
crept in the mud unearthing gold.

She never told me little girls could be ferocious and filthy, barbarous and genius, disastrous and happy.

so, so very happy.



I created this piece, *Reaction*, at Cougs for Recovery's Art & Pizza night on Fridays. A good friend of mine showed me how he uses acrylic paint and a squeegee to create a base layer of bright mixed colors. For *Reaction*, I was having a hard day, so I gravitated toward yellow and red for the base. Dark and light--mustard and ketchup--I liked how obscurely they fit together. Then as I settled into the creative "zone," by listening to my peers talking, I aimlessly painted some comforting shapes and movement.





This summer, I was exploring around rural Skagit Valley with some friends. We had no idea where we were going, but that was the beauty of it. We soon came across a bar in a tiny town in the middle of nowhere. After eating fries and playing pool, I snapped this quick shot right next to the pool table. In my mind, the warmth of the image encapsulates the idyllic feelings of being on the road with good company.







# Commodification by Tavia Morgan

beauty of something. unreadable and messy. I wanted this to display how our need to consume and commodify can alter the two pieces on their own (the orange tree on the left and the fruit stickers on the right) are legible and pleasing to the eye but the piece in the middle with them layered on top of each other makes both For this piece I wanted to explore how our need to profit off of things can ultimately damage them. The

The honeybees suckle happily upon pristine petals as the mother moth crawls into the stinging nettles keen to sleep silently as the sun smiles above nothing to be heard but the steady flapping of a dove listening closely, a beetle's whining crawls out of shiny metals. A man moves along the trail stomping. He unsettles the creatures below nesting with leaves and pebbles an anteater in anxious stride skirts across, adorning a glove faded from ripping apart. By the lily pads are various trash and hollow vessels eroded and growing moss in many stages and levels so when the fish find an alcove, the clear waters beloved. Prosperous until fishermen come, following new gov. Yielding inflatables, sharp steel and barrels faded from ripping apart.





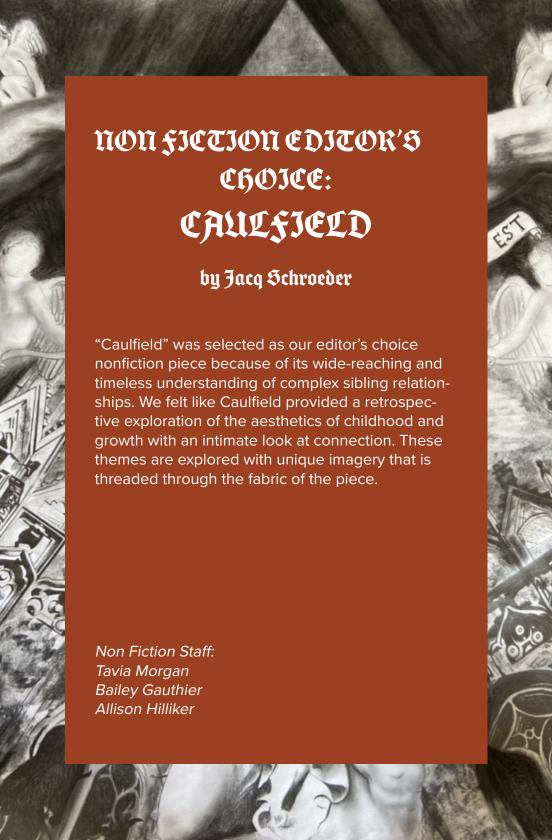
A Moonlit Night at the Zion National Park by S M Raihan Rahman

A moonlit night is always mesmerizing. The beauty of it is filled with clear blue skies, which multiply when the calming silvery moonlight sheds upon the mountains. The mountains look majestic in the silvery moonlight. When I came across this breathtaking view, I didn't want to miss the opportunity to capture the magnificent moment.



### Nests by Janice Parks

Nests gives a view of a rocky cliffside along the Colfax Trail. We often think of rocks as lifeless, but Nests shows that rocks can be the foundation of homes for many different life forms. The orange upon the rocks is lichen, which is a type of fungus that has a mutualistic relationship with another microorganism such as algae or cyanobacteria. They are extremely sensitive allowing them to be early indicators of environmental air pollution. Plant life is also supported, which can be seen by the young tree in the middle of the picture. The swift nests show that rocky cliffs can be a safe place to raise young together, giving the picture a more private feeling as if you are a visitor in a village or someone else's home.



In the summer the window sticks, dewy with the thick humidity and squeaking with the strain of the boy's skinny freckled arms. The bees hum melodically under the weight of their robust round bodies, dipping in and out of the tall grass the boys' father keeps neglecting to mow. The brother is sprawled on the ground beneath him, lying flat on his stomach--still in his pajamas--chewing quickly on a mostly-crust grilled cheese. He hasn't quite figured out how to eat and play his games at the same time yet.

The boy watches him quietly as he gives up on the window, resigning himself to growing used to the inch of hot July air coming through the fading screen. He sometimes wonders what it would look like without it, if the window opened simply to meet the air, that last degree of separation discarded and folded up in a blue trash can at the end of the driveway. He wonders if the air would feel less invasive if it wasn't as alienated, if it entered easily through a welcoming gap instead of through the slicing metal of the aging screen. Sometimes he becomes so alarmingly aware of the outside it feels like his skin is too tight; he should be growing faster like the grass or moving quicker like the flies that get stuck in the small gaps beneath their front door. He wonders sometimes if he could fall through the wall his bed is pushed against, his leg flush against the cool dry wall as he falls asleep; what it would take for it to slip through on accident, just a few inches away from the stars.

The brother groans as he stands and the boy quickly forgets his hapless wonderings, concedes himself as too young to wonder about any of that quite yet, decides he needs to stop stealing his dad's books when he isn't looking.

The brother is only three years older, or maybe, he's a multitudinous three years older. Sometimes it feels as if he can't be any older than the boy himself, because his life before the boy is so incomprehensible it feels impossible. What did he do on days like this? When he was small and alone and had nobody to laugh with or kick at night from the left side of the bed. The boy cannot fathom the loneliness. Although, sometimes his small frame is so ridden with guilt for taking up space, his brother's space--he can't wrap his head around being wanted there. Sometimes, too, the gap feels larger than the small boy could begin to understand. When the brother stays up later without reprimanding, or when he says words the boy could only wonder the meaning of.

When he was smaller, before he'd ever started school and didn't yet know the glowing light in the sky was a star, he used to crawl into his brother's bed just to wrap himself in the smell of him as he went off to class. At the time it felt as if those seven hours lasted years, eons even, of the boy lying solemnly in the unmade bed, the airplane blanket white and soft atop his stretching limbs. He'd sit on the floor in front of the bookshelf, straining under the weight of all the Lord of the Rings and Diary of a Wimpy Kids. He'd turn page after page of these soft-worn books, inherited from their soft-worn father, covered in black ink that meddled in the boy's forming mind in their abstract shapes and unknowable meanings. He'd read them slowly, pretending he had any idea what the words said, pretending he was three years older with blond hair instead of brown and a dimpled smile instead of gummy. He found it easier to just look at the pictures in the comics beneath the brother's bed, hidden away in the small dark alcove beneath. He'd hide down there for hours surrounded by the dust and fingerprints.

When he started school his brother was still there, the age difference providing what all parents defined as a "perfect gap." They had the same teacher for kindergarten, and she recognized the boy somehow, and said he looked just like his brother. He'd carried that compliment in the tight space between his heart and his lungs, warming his veins and softening his smile, ever since. She told him his brother had been one of her favorites, that he'd

been kind and good and smart and generally all the things the boy had not yet learned how to be. He'd worried his brother was the only person who could stand him, loud and obnoxious and tumbling over his growing limbs like a stumbling giraffe fresh to the world. Even when he was five he hated himself for his youth. He wanted to be older, eight maybe, old enough to go to lunch at noon instead of 11and old enough to stay up and watch those black-and-white movies his father fell asleep to after ten.

Two years later the brother graduated the fifth grade, and the boy looked ahead to third grade. The brother started school an hour later than the boy now, slept in until eight behind his peeling white door as the boy ate his favorite cereal and watched his favorite show on his own. The years until high school passed slowly and lonely, weighed down by snowless winters and subpar halloween costumes.

His brother was a senior when he started freshman year, freshly adorned with a new white car that smelled perpetually like cleaner and linen. The boy was glad to be free of the bus, always full to the brim and boiling over with screams and laughs and people far too close for comfort. He'd taken to staring out the window like a knock-off 2000s music video star, gazing longingly at the leafless trees as his busted headphones blared steadily in his ears. He'd listen to his father's favorites without ever admitting (it would in fact take another ten years before he ever told his father he liked it). The harsh sounds of Mötley Crüe carried his melancholy over the open windows and through the whipping hair of the girl who always sat directly in front of him. Once he watched a spider crawl into her seat. He didn't say anything.

Now, the drives to school were soundtracked by the brother's favorites, soft music pouring through black speakers by their feet. Sound etched itself into the furthest corners of the boy's mind where he'd find it much later, like cracked hieroglyphics spelling out an ancient story in the depths of an abandoned cave. The smooth crooning of Billy Corgan's voice

filled the silences. The boy had outgrown his own noise a few years prior. Chided time and time again for laughing a bit too loud during free time, or talking too much at lunch. His rambles had drifted off through the window in his bedroom, open and entrancing at night. His thoughts mingled with the distant stars, as far and foreign now as those gaseous entities, as impossible to understand as the black holes he'd learned gathered somewhere out there in that darkness.

The drives were silent in the morning, the brother growing accustomed to this new quietness the boy carried with him before the sun had fully risen. Once the boy laughed, free and loud, in the dark of winter when the brother didn't yet know what buttons did what and had to drive with his head out the window, incapable of clearing the frost from the windshield. He watched his now dark curly hair whip around his head, wide snaggle toothed smile swallowing the cold wind as he drove them down the blankly familiar roads, laughing when other cars passed and smacking the boys hands away from the buttons on the dash. "To Forgive" was always the first song the brother played on the way home.

The music seemed to accompany him differently than it did the boy. It carried him like a background song in a film, powerful despite somber lyrics, sonically powering him through the drive home. The boy felt that music stuck to him like wet clothes. Diving deep into a frozen lake in heavy winter layers; thick wool sweaters sticking to his bones and dragging him down, sitting heavy on his cold skin, drowning him in the words. He felt better when he watched his brother listen to the song, as opposed to listening himself. He found through his life this would become an immovable truth, that to shed some weight from his dragging limbs he had only to watch his brother move.

They'd build a bed on the floor of couch cushions and pillows every weekend and watch movies until one of them fell asleep. The boy refused Robots weekly, and it became a habit.

The end always made his cheeks wet. He'd reached the age at which he was afraid of his own sadness, cowered before it as it loomed at the edges of his bed and dark corners of the room. When he'd tell his brother why they couldn't watch the movie, his brother would smile and offer him the part of the bed without a crack between the cushions. He'd say it made him sad too, that he'd cried everytime the boy made him watch Bolt. Somehow, incomprehensibly, the brother seemed proud of this. The boy wondered just what this older boy was made of, glowing in the dark lamp light like dew on a fresh spring morning, soft and knowing and so indescribably comforting. They always ended up watching whatever the brother had picked.

When the brother moved for college the boy went along to move him in; it was only a two-hour drive away and the boy wanted to tour the college for himself. He had yet to accept that the restlessness in his chest would maybe one day carry him far away, and refused to acknowledge the burn in his throat when he thought about staying there any longer. The idea of staying close to his brother soothed it like a honey cough drop from your mother's purse. The cherry blossoms of the campus enchanted him, and his brother was so tall now the petals stuck to his unruly hair. It seemed as if almost overnight his brother had surpassed even their father in height, looming over everyone in their family but never intimidating. The boy felt, even in his smaller stature, he was taking up too much space. He couldn't figure out how to fit in it as well as the brother had, bending with graceful smiles and never seeming like he was looking down at anybody even as he bent his neck to watch them speak.

In his brother's third college year the boy found himself faced with the prospect of applying for himself. He didn't even apply to the college the brother attended. He grappled with the guilt of that decision long after the brother had already graduated.

Somehow time had a way of haunting him. Like a ghost

in your bedroom, moving past you in your sleep, leaving you unaware in your subconscious of it ever even existing. The boy found himself, far too soon, to be as old as his brother once was. He was never good at processing that. Every time he aged the first thing he'd think about was that his brother had been this age only, perhaps, yesterday. When he turned 18 he found it absolutely ridiculous that his brother's 21st followed only a month after. It felt like slipping in the shower. Too small a space to catch yourself, too big a space not to fall.

The boy moved 2,101 miles away for college. It's a 38-hour drive. He wonders how many times his brother would be able to listen to "To Forgive" if he were to make it. The windows open and close easier in the routinely cleaned dorms, but it's always cold there, snow shoving itself into the spaces between the grass the boy had only ever seen those large bees residing, lazily pausing in their work to lie on the cool dirt before returning to their daily paths between his mother's flowers. The loneliness consumes him. He wanders back to his childish brain, to questions of what it was like for his brother before he came along. He wonders if it was like this; if he was just waiting to see him, distracting himself with the other kids nearby and the walks to and from the park.

The boy finds himself, suddenly, to be a man. And the brother to be, alarmingly, a husband. Time twists itself beautifully around the creases by his eyes behind his brother at the altar, results of open mouthed laughs from long games of cards and wrestling on the soft living room carpet. Memories sit heavily in the left dimple of his brother's smile, visible to him at this angle, posed stoically behind him slightly to his side.

He cries on the drive home, quiet like he was on those drives to school, silently holding himself together as Billy Corgan sings to him once again. His lungs fill with the grief of childhood, the burden of growing. Maybe that's all it is; this feeble life he feels so weak to face. Maybe it's safe, the way his bed always

was, and the little space underneath stacked with comic books and old sagging dreams. Maybe it's the waxing and waning of time in tandem with every breath in and out of his older brother's chest. That familiar rise and fall of his lungs, the warm spot on the left of his neck where he used to lay his head. And maybe it's a little less scary when he sleeps in the old creaking round chair beside his brother's bed, crooked and cracking with the weight of a younger brother's memories. Maybe it's that crooked-toothed smile first thing in the morning, and a framed picture of those dimples on the wall beside his door. Maybe it's six and nine still at 19 and 22. Maybe it's doable, because his big brother is doing it too.

### Fields by Jacob Carr



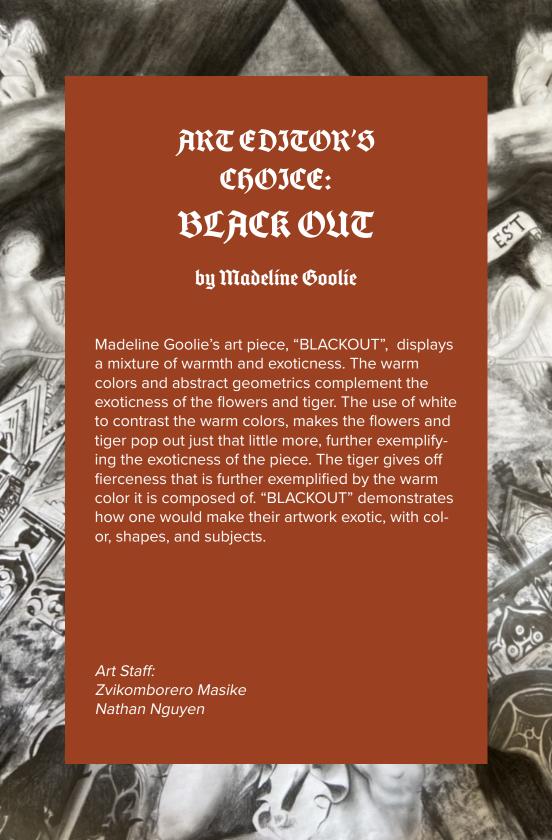
"Captured at the pinnacle of Steptoe Butte, this breathtaking photo immortalizes the serene beauty of nature as the sun gracefully descends below the horizon. The golden hour's ethereal glow bathes the Palouse hills in warm hues, creating a captivating scene that speaks to the tranquil majesty of the landscape. From this vantage point, the undisturbed beauty of the Palouse region unfolds, with its quilt-like patchwork of agricultural fields, rolling hills, and picturesque valleys. The interplay of light and shadows adds depth to the photograph, accentuating the contours of the land. Steptoe Butte was chosen as the vantage point because it offers an unhindered panorama that lets the observer take in the majesty of the landscape as a whole. This image is more than just a stunning visual display; it is evidence of the sublime moments that nature provides and inspires contemplation of the profound beauty all around us."

I can do very little to both become myself and take you with me. I promise you, I wish this were the summer of rusted swing sets and bicycle rides to somewhere we can just be small. Childhood has not quite left us but we will never again be what we once were. Hold your hands against my hands on the lathe of our memory. Yes, it's you and I riding our bicycles down the big hill. Only until the sun picks itself back up I will never see you again. We are so little. In these beautiful places

I remember you. We were here once, I think. I can see it now. Back when the land was crowned with fire and we didn't know how deeply this dark little game could hurt. You asked me to find you.

Who am I to become without you?







My recent art reflects how I felt at the time I made the piece. I try to portray my unexpressed feelings and thoughts in my work. I want others to feel something when they see my work, whether that be comforting, unsettling, or even relatable. Over the past few years, I have enjoyed sketching faces with exaggerated features that I like or do not like about myself. This theme has carried over to my printmaking and I have applied this concept to different animals. My prints have a very distinct mood to them that is up to the viewer to interpret.

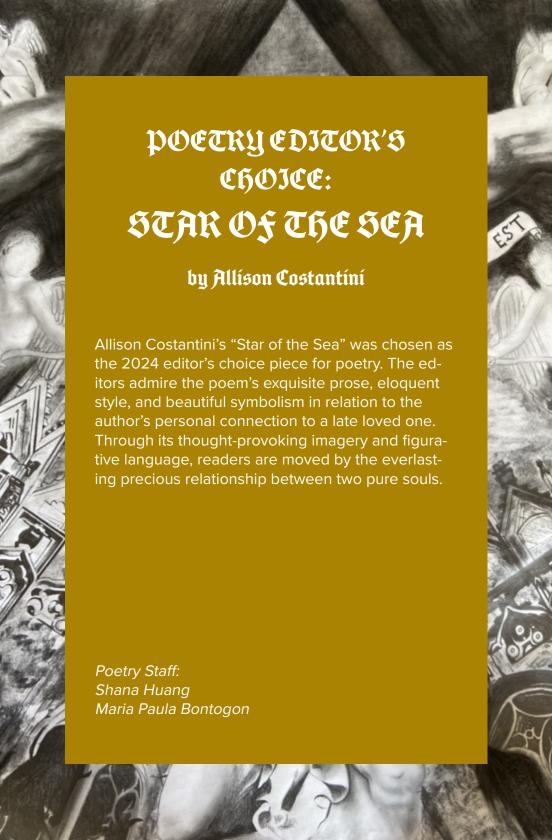


Dreaded Americana by Steinar Goheer

This snap was taken from the Greyhound bus station in Olympia, WA. I found myself waiting for a transfer, so I decided to explore around the station while I had time. The shot almost makes time stop; it makes me feel nostalgia for a time before I was born. You can immediately begin to imagine the emotions the walls have seen over the years. Consider the lovers reuniting, families being torn apart, kids trying to find themselves in the world, or the general rambling folk that the station has seen over the decades in service. These memories have been sealed forever, as the station now sits abandoned due to the rerouting of the Greyhound line through Thurston County.



Fall Pheasant by Madeline Goolie



If we could see gold entwining our lives,

If man could trade thread,

Then I would weave a new web,

Then all but you would be dead.

But the fates' design is not for our craft,

No mortal hands so blessed.

My closest brush with the divine,

Is how I loved you the very best.

But there is no reward,

No prize for all done right;

For when the specter came,

I still had to send you into that sweet night.

How I'll miss you forever,

Oh my star of the sea,

Shining bright over the horizon,

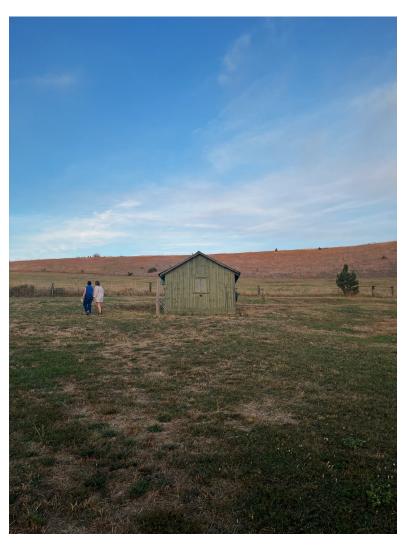
Shining bright just for me.

I know I promised to love you for as long as I lived,

But I wish my love for you had died when you did.

Skeletons in the sand lay stoic underneath paper-dry particles, warmed from the sun with gentle rays of treasured remembrance.
They lay untouched by the venom that seeps into our soil, for their tragedies came long before.

No one had found them because no one had looked; a shift in the wind unearthed them to a shallow world reluctant to deeper discovery. Layers of crystalized sugar cover their candy-coated milky bones, sparkling with sand and secrets. I wonder if they looked this beautiful before they died.



Steady by Bailey Gauthier

During the last hours of sunlight on a fall day I saw something I had been looking for my whole life: a steady love in which rest is given freely and love is seldom questioned. As I took this photo, I looked over to the woman I love and felt a piece of my heart expand in the trust that I had learned from the queer people around me. To know a steady love is to trust that you deserve the love that brings peace to your soul.

The smell of wet dirt and a coolness in the air as I remember walking through a neighborhood with my mom. Her long red, wavy hair bounced with her strides but the bangs that laid along her forehead stayed still. I would like to think that I held her hand as I admired her strong beauty. Hoping one day to resemble something of her. Hoping it will be her hair.

There wasn't a sidewalk in this neighborhood, so we walked the street. Although, somewhere along the way there was a short path separated from the street by boxed bushes. I would always take the path hidden behind the bushes, and my mom always stayed on the road following beside me. This wall of green protected me from the street that my mom's steps fell upon.

Boxed bushes, the smell of wet dirt...

snails.

On that path, behind the boxed bushes, I endangered the snail population. The path was always covered in snails, and they were always hard for me to avoid. I do remember liking the sound they made as I accidentally stepped on their delicate shells. My mom didn't like it as much.

It's funny that shells are meant to protect snails. Protect them from what, if they are so fragile? I eventually stopped taking that path to avoid stepping on the snails. It wasn't because I learned that snails could breathe, but because I wanted my mom to love me.

My shell used to be fragile.

It began to harden as my steps permanently fell upon the street.

I am now on the street. The corpses of snails, box bushes and my mom are no longer with me. The street, which once pointed forward, winds off course to a gap between the houses. A gap that opens to a field of golden-brown grass and a dirt trail. The smell of wet dirt dissipates as the gap moves closer to me, now my world is dry and scentless. Crunchy.

A single tree sits in the field of golden-brown grass. The tree's light brown trunk bent to one side over the dirt trail as if it were asking for someone to sit beneath it, as if it were reaching out. I remember the leaves being more brown than green, and there were never many, or it didn't look like that because the tree lacked many branches. Although this tree might not sound like the most magnificent tree. Definitely not a memorable tree. I still remember it. Haunting memories in a way a passed loved one watches over you.

The tree comes back to me in my dreams.

Every October, the dreams would recur. I would find my way to the tree, and once I was there, the neighborhood would disappear, revealing a large empty field of golden-brown grass extending from behind me. The tree would wait for me to get closer, and once I was next to its trunk, its branches would sway in a wind that didn't blow. A creature would extract itself from the chipping bark and reach for my hand. We walked down the dirt trail in an autumn chill, as brown and orange leaves from nowhere danced around us. At some point, the creature and I pause to face one another.

Fingers still clasped around fingers.

I hold my own hand for I am now looking at myself.

While looking into my young and wide-green eyes, I come to a realization. I love smashing snails beneath my feet and that imperfect, insignificant, lonely tree has always been me.

I walk to the tree and sit.

I allow my hair, fingers and toes to root along with it.

## Lone Tree by Janice Parks



remains spatially was likely sown but trees, the lone tree, forest. One of these expansion of the trees showing the are several young Below these cliffs steep rocky cliffs. natural shelves and from within a a sparser landscape captures the view of forest from which it the shadow of the is encapsulated in the area produced the Colfax Trail. The forested area along natural history of Lone Tree

distant from its ancestors.



Frog Princess by Noah Tyler

I took this picture at a park across the street from the WSU bear enclosure. If you follow the path, there's a clearing with a pond, and if you go behind it, there's a muddy area filled with frogs. I did some editing using the Photos app on my iPhone to try to bring out the colors a little more.



Bury me
In a pine wood box, my father says
Bury me without anything fancy
It doesn't matter, he says
I'm going in the ground
But I am selfish
I want you to

Bury me

With magic and

All the knowledge in the world

Bury me after

I have etched the dictionary onto my skin

Each word helping me breathe a little deeper

Bury me

With a map of the universe Carved into my heart

Bury me in novels

Wrap me in their pages and

Drown me with their ink

Bury me with the words

That bring me far more comfort

Than a coffin ever could

Bury me the way

That I have spent my time on this earth

Surrounded by letters arranged into cosmos

Bury me grasping

At words I can't remember

### And can't bear to lose

Bury me with all the poems in existence
Dousing gasoline over the fire of my soul
With everything I never had the power to say
But didn't have to because
They already wrote it for me
Gazed into my soul and put words to my hurt

Bury me only

After giving m

After giving me the secrets to the universe
Because I believe every poet is holding a
Part of the heavens in their soul and is handing it to me
Piece by piece
Please, poets,

Bring me your understanding of existence Bring me your understanding of your own

Soul and

Life and

Precious time on this earth and then

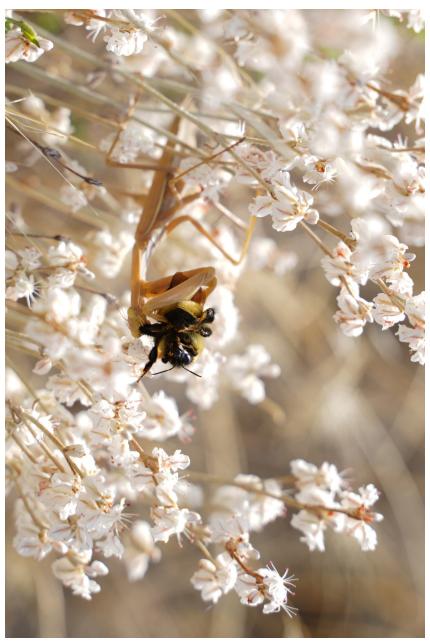
Bury me with your humanity



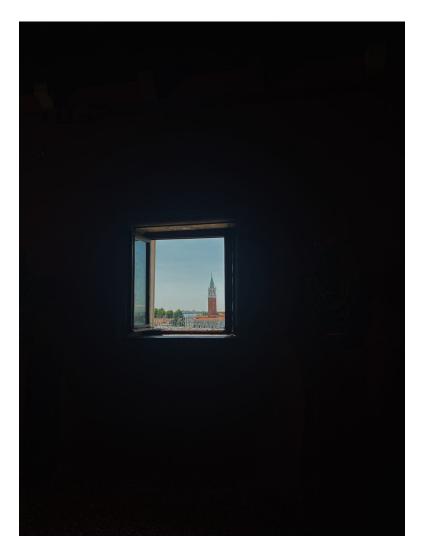


These pieces are from a choose-your-own adventure story called "lkigai: A Reason for Being." The story follows an ex-mercenary in a not-so-distant cyberpunk future on his quest for revenge. Here are the excerpts associated with each of the published images:

"You approach The Architect, clothed in the traditional robes for a groundbreaking ritual. Discussing with them, you learn they designed The Graveyard. Your family is there now. A look of pity mixed with something darker flashes across their face when they hear this. The Graveyard is one of many. The city seems to need more each year. It's good business for those making them but the amount of pain they house seems to weigh heavily on The Architect."



Mantis by Vincent James



## A Way Out by Bailey Gauthier

A Way Out: Exploring the world and getting lost in the vastness of history is one of the ways I feel the most human. In an Italian castle, I noticed how easy it is to get lost in the insignificance of each moment of our lives. I looked through this window in halls in which past lives had been lived and realized the most important moments of my life are the ones I am present for.

# Unfaded

TW: mentions of suicidal thoughts and actions

G

I stood on the side of the highway, looking at the cars flying past at 70 miles an hour, ready for the right car to come up near me. He was there, running toward me, yelling at me to come back. He knew the damage a car could do to a person. He had experienced it before. But I wanted to take it an extra step further; I wanted my lights to go out forever instead of waking up in the hospital like he had.

I spotted the right car. It got closer and closer, coming faster and faster. I was not afraid. I had been waiting for this moment for a long while now. I was 100 percent ready for this. I walked out to the middle of the road and turned to tell him goodbye, that I was sorry for what was about to happen. His tear-stained face was the last thing I saw.

В

"Only family members are allowed in the room right now."

"I am her family."

I stood there in the hospital room, looking at her just lying there, unconscious. This was all my fault: I could have held her back. I could have pushed her away. I had the time. It

could have--more like should have--been me in that hospital bed, unaware of the surrounding world.

I looked at her face—so pure, so innocent. I knew that she had been suicidal in the past, but I never truly realized it was *this* serious. I never helped her through her problems. I regretted that as I watched the heart rate monitor, hoping against all hopes that it wouldn't go flat.

I tried talking to her. I told her that I was sorry for letting this happen to her. I told her that I didn't want her to leave me. None of it mattered, though. She probably wasn't making any sense of what I was saying.

I walked around the hospital, and I saw a newborn baby in her mother's arms, and a couple minutes later, a family mourning over the death of a young boy. It's amazing how much can happen in one place, at one moment. I started questioning everything.

Why was I here, at this exact moment? How did I get here? How is it that the universe placed me in the exact time frame to meet her, and become so close to her? What if I hadn't asked her to eat lunch with me? Where would I be now?

I ended up sitting on the roof, legs hung over the edge. I stared at the ground, 50 stories up. I just sat there, staring at the concrete. I wondered how it was ever possible that she could have the urge to jump in front of that car and not think twice about it, and how I was too slow to stop her.

I was always too slow.

G

I dreamt—a lot. I dreamt of him. I dreamt of how much I liked him, how much I had hurt him. I dreamt of how he was still my friend, even after how crushed he was because of me. I dreamt of how much he still cared about me, how maybe, just *maybe*, I still had the slightest amount of feelings for him.

Thoughts ran through my head, a crazy mess. I started to panic. I couldn't breathe. All those thoughts just stayed there, and I couldn't get them out. I could feel myself taking sharp breaths,

deep breaths, just breathing in general. But my chest wasn't rising. I just laid there, motionless in a world of darkness. This was like a bad dream I once had, but this time it was real and I wasn't sure if I even wanted to wake up.

R

I was the only one in the hospital room, besides her and the occasional doctor coming in to check on her. Her parents were contacted, but they didn't really care enough to come see her. She could have died, and they still wouldn't bother showing up. Her extended family were either too far away or too stubborn to come out. I was the only person she could count on. We're like family to each other. Both of our families have somewhat stepped out of our lives in the past couple years, so for a while, we only had each other. We're each other's support system. That's a weird way to describe what we were to each other, considering the relationship we almost had, but she was still my closest friend.

I had been there for hours, and I decided to play some music, being alone and all. As I scrolled through my playlist, I came across a certain song—our song. I set it to play on repeat. I didn't want to listen to anything else during that time. The words flew right through me, and as I listened, memories of her, of us, ran through my head.

Freshman year, when we had a couple classes together, we hadn't talked to each other until we were introduced by a friend. We started talking a bit more, and I realized how nice and caring she was, and still is for that matter. As our group of friends grew, so did our relationship. She went away for a week in the spring. It felt like a year, and I wanted her to come back sooner.

The weather got warmer, and my feelings toward her started changing. I just didn't have the guts to let her know how I truly felt about her. My old friend, on the other hand, was a

different story. She came up, and confessed her feelings toward me. Yes, she was pretty. Yes, she was a good person. That didn't really change anything, though—I still had my eye on this girl now laying in the hospital bed and *only her*.

About a week or so later, a game of truth or dare came up in a group of friends—me, our friends, and her. I know, truth or dare is a stupid game to play. But we were 18 and had started college a few months earlier; we just wanted to get to know these people we had only known for a few months a little bit better. And with my luck, she asked me if I had my eye on anyone. My friends weren't really the deep conversation type of people, so I told her that there really wasn't anyone I was interested in. Everyone started ganging up on me and said I was lying—yet they knew nothing.

I argued against myself for a little bit, and decided that yes, it was time. When we all went our separate ways, I pulled out my phone and let out all my feelings for her into a text. My heart rate sped up as I waited for her response. She replied by revealing that she felt the same way. Everything after that was just a blur of emotions—happy, sad, confused, angry, everything. I snapped back to reality as a noise came from her bed.

G

After a while, I started hearing faded noises. I started feeling the faintest things. My senses started coming back, slowly. I felt the blanket on top of me, the tubes running through me. I heard the light footsteps from far away. In the distance, there was a noise, out of place. It had some sort of repetitiveness to it, I just couldn't figure out what it was. My hearing was definitely getting better. That out-of-place noise became not so out-of-place anymore, but I still couldn't put my finger on what it was. I mean, it's not like I could put my finger on anything at that point. I could barely move.

I tried to move closer to where the noise was coming from. I tried everything, but my eyelids were too heavy to open, my arms too weak to move. After what felt like forever, my leg finally shifted a couple inches to the right. And that incoherent noise, it started becoming sort of songlike. It was coming to me, slowly but surely. Then I heard them—the lyrics. *Our* song. The music made its way to my ears somehow and filled my thoughts entirely. I felt myself jump slightly. I wondered if it was him. If he was here.

I couldn't fully believe that he truly was here, but only he knew how important that song was to me and how much I could relate it to my own life. The sound was faint, but clear. Through the noiselessness I had been living in for who knows how long, it was a relief to finally hear something so familiar to me. It was the only thing I heard— the only thing I cared about in the moment as flashbacks flew through my head.

We met freshman year of college, and I thought he was so cute and adorable. He was only a few inches taller than I was, and I barely hit five feet. He still had a baby face, despite just graduating high school a couple months earlier. What really got me, though, were his icy blue eyes. I had never met anyone with eyes as light blue as his were. They were beautiful to me.

We became good friends, but that was it for a while. We started hanging out more often in early spring, and became closer than I thought we would. I started feeling a little bit more for him around that time, I just wouldn't admit it to myself. We hung out a lot. He ended up getting in a minor car accident, and I got really worried about him. That was when I realized how much I actually cared about him. I didn't talk about my feelings for a couple weeks, and my luck said that a classmate felt the same way about him. She told me about this, and my hopes were crushed. She was prettier than me, more social than me. I didn't think I had a chance—until that game of truth or dare, where he seemed to be lying about his feelings.

I walked home after we parted ways, and I felt my phone buzz, his contact popping up on the text bubble of my lock screen. I was afraid to open it. If he couldn't say what he wanted to in front of our friends, the people who we were supposed to trust the most, it most likely wasn't a good thing.

I was far off on that prediction. The words on the screen didn't register for a couple minutes. My anxiety shot through the roof, staring at the screen, those words, wondering if it was real. I had the sudden urge to throw my phone across the road.

I ended up telling him I felt the same way. We saw each other at school the next day, and neither of us brought up our previous online conversation. This went on for a couple more months. Everything after that event is just a blur of fear, confusion, self-doubt—emotions too big for me to handle.

Snapping back into the darkness that was my reality, I felt something on my left arm. It was warm and familiar. I wasn't sure what it was, but I felt a slight trace of fingers. Maybe a hand? Maybe it was him. It definitely reminded me of him, of why I fell for him. He's sweet, caring, funny. He made me happy when I was upset. He brought light into my world of darkness. I could talk to him about anything at any given moment, and he would understand what I was going through. He cared about a lot of things, and I cared so much about him. I wondered why I had made it a habit to destroy everything somewhat good that came my way. It made me remember everything that happened because of me. How happy he was, how he stopped cutting, but how upset he became, how distant we were for a period of time, all because I blocked myself out from anyone important to me. I hated that I couldn't figure out my feelings or communicate them to the one person I truly cared about. I hated how I pushed him away because I couldn't cope with what I was feeling. He was my best friend and I just had to ruin it all because I couldn't grow up and just talk to him about the thoughts in my head. I felt myself fade away as I started giving up on myself, on my life.

My heart started to race. I don't know why or how. I seemed fine a little bit ago. Maybe it was him that did it—thoughts about him, memories of him, the familiar feeling on my arm that I prayed to a god that I don't believe in was my best friend. I felt myself moving; I heard wheels squeaking, people talking. Things were being pushed onto me, needles breaking through my skin.

I tried to open my eyes; I really did, but I just couldn't. My ability to breathe started slipping out of my control. Then, a tear seemed to slip out of my eye, a breath somehow escaping me. The voices stopped suddenly; all I could hear was the steady beeping of machines around me.

I think everyone was wondering if I could come back to full consciousness; I was wondering the same thing. I didn't know if I wanted to come back. I didn't want to go back to the life I was living. I just wanted to fade away from this life; I wanted to fade

В

I started to panic as her heart rate became unreasonably fast. I had only placed my hand on her arm for a few seconds.

Did she feel it? Did she know it was me?

A doctor rushed in and told me I couldn't follow. The room started spinning, and I sat down in the chair I had lived in for the past couple days. An hour passed, then another, and another. I sat there for five hours. Soon enough, another doctor came in. She told me I should leave because they were going to do a couple overnight tests.

I grabbed the spare key to her house I have from when I took care of her dogs a couple months ago and drove over to her little apartment. I walked in and there they were, already waiting to greet the next person. She didn't live with her parents anymore. She moved out once we started college, even though she grew up only 30 minutes away from the school. She's the only person taking care of these dogs.

Realizing how long they had gone without eating, I grabbed their bowls and went to the kitchen to fill them. I sat in the living room as they ate for the first time in a few days.

As I started to leave, the two dogs ran up behind me, looking at me with big eyes that seemed to be asking me not to leave.

They reminded me of her. How peppy she was, on her good days that is. How, on her bad days, she was still adorable even though she was upset. I threw a treat to both of them, and I felt nostalgic watching them try to catch their treats. It made me remember all the times I had done this same thing with her standing right next to me.

I decided to take her dogs home with me.

I woke up to light creeping through the window, the smallest of the two dogs underneath my arms; the other one had dug herself under my covers toward the end of my bed. I didn't want to move, but I got up and felt how much my head hurt. When I walked into the kitchen for some pain killers, I saw her sitting on the chair; she looked up and smiled at me. I blinked as tears swam in my eyes and looked back after wiping them away to find that she was gone. I looked around, registering what had just happened.

That was the moment I finally snapped. I curled into a ball on the floor and cried for hours; I stayed there until there were no tears left. Even after I had calmed myself down, I still laid there without moving, my insides numb. I could feel myself falling into a black hole of loneliness again as I glanced at the scars on my arms and legs. I couldn't live without her; she was too important to me and such a big part of my life. I wondered what I did to make her feel unwanted to the point of ending her life. All I could do at this point was hope that she would wake up.

As nervous thoughts ran through my head, a noise came to my ears. Comprehending what it was, I shot up and grabbed the phone—it was the doctor.

"She's getting better. Visiting hours start in half an hour, so why don't you come see her soon?"

Those words pounded through my head, and I rushed over to the hospital. It took me less than half an hour to get there, but I managed to convince the doctor to let me see her a little bit early. I ran through the door and I saw her. She looked somewhat healthier, and her breathing was steadier than when she first came to the hospital; my hopes started rising.

I looked at her sweet face once again, and I wondered how I ever got here in the first place. I wondered how I ever let her go in front of that car, why I stopped behind to make sure I still had my keys. I should have known what was going to happen, or at least been smart enough to ask why she was being so quiet all of a sudden. Even though she seemed to be getting better, I was still beating myself up for what had happened; just seeing the bruises and road rashes on her made me hate myself even more.

I could've stopped this, yet I didn't.

I continued looking at her; even with all of her marks, she

was still so beautiful with her light blonde hair framing her face and dark green eyes peeking through her closed eyelids as they normally do when she sleeps. A surge of love ran through my body and I wanted her to wake up so I could say everything I wanted to tell her and kiss her. As that thought, that feeling, ran through my head, more flashbacks came to mind.

Our inside jokes that nobody understood because nobody else spent those late nights watching movies with us sharing our darkest secrets. Going bowling with our friends where she seemed at the happiest point in life because she was surrounded by people she loved and who loved her back. The last day of classes before we all went home for the summer, where my feelings for her were the strongest, but so was my fear because those three months would be the longest we spent apart despite our hometowns being less than an hour away from each other.

G

I heard someone come in; my hopes rose, thinking it was him. I tried reaching out to whoever it was, but it just added to all my other failed attempts at communication. Reaching out to people has always been rough for me, but he was easy to talk to. Thinking about this, memories flooded through my head. Figuring out that we were both going through the same kind of crap, him coming to some of my volleyball games, going to the football game with friends—where he was hurting but wouldn't tell me why.

We geeked out to the most random things, and made fun of each other for the smallest occurrences. I texted him through my friend's phone when I lost mine, and that was when I finally admitted to myself what my feelings were for him, because I didn't make that much of an effort to get in touch with anyone else. I guess I didn't care about him as much as he cared about me; he would do anything for me while I tried to get away from my problems, from my messed-up feelings for him. These thoughts came to mind, and I debated again if I wanted to actually wake up or not. I continued thinking about my emotions getting sucked out of me; my ability to feel and show my emotions more than

the bare minimum, was close to nonexistent. I couldn't handle my emotions correctly, both internally and externally, which was why nobody liked me, why everyone only tolerated me; it's part of the reason why I am here right now.

I started feeling myself moving slightly, twitching. I don't know how or why. Maybe he was still here, maybe I could subconsciously sense him near me. Part of me hoped it was him,

the other part wished it wasn't. People have told me that when you love someone, you never want to hurt them. I wasn't sure if I loved him, or what love really meant for that matter. I never meant to hurt him last summer; I just needed to figure out my feelings and decide for myself what they were, instead of letting myself get pushed around by a girl I thought was my friend. Even though I've hurt him recently, I know that if something drastic were to occur, he would still be waiting for me with open arms. Which made me feel even worse; it made me want out of this world even more—this horrible messed up world that I created for myself.

В

She twitched a lot, sometimes her hand, sometimes her leg. Her face seemed to start showing emotion, like more of her senses were coming back. She seemed upset—well, more like she was having an internal conflict. She was never good at hiding her emotions, and now that she had no control over what her body did, it was easier to see those emotions spread across her face. I wondered how much I meant to her, if I meant anything to her at all. I thought about whether or not she was faking her feelings toward me just to screw with me last summer. Some people say you fall in love, and that's who you spend the rest of your life with. I loved her. I couldn't stop thinking about her. Yet, I don't think she felt the same way about me; she changed her opinions so often that nobody really knew if what she felt was real—I don't even think she knew. Even so, I always found myself coming back to her, getting hurt, over and over again. No matter how hard I tried, I could never move on from her. Her life wasn't the best, but she was still such a sweet person. That's what I

liked about her: she cared so deeply about other people. She just never really cared about herself.

I continued looking at her face, once emotionless, now full of pain. I wondered what caused that pain. I wondered if it was because of me, or if her thoughts were getting to her head. It might be the reason why she's here right now—she overthought everything and it got to her in the wrong way. I should have helped her. I just never knew how. Thinking about this now, I came to the realization that maybe I should have listened more, talked to her more, and taken more interest in her body language. If I had just done all that, this situation might never have taken place. If I had made sure that she was getting help, the help she needed, maybe I wouldn't be standing here, willing her to wake up.

The girl so hard to love, yet unbearable not to love. The girl so easy to fall for, yet so easy to confuse feelings for. The girl so happy, yet so sad. The girl so energetic, yet so lethargic. The girl so confident, yet so shy. The girl full of personality, yet so dull. The girl so interested, yet so uninvolved. The girl so vibrant, yet so lifeless. The girl who loved people, yet became so isolated. The girl who loved seeing new places, yet never left town.

The girl who had hopes, dreams, ambitions—but never got around to making them come true. The girl who may never complete her unfinished goals because she wound up needing to be unplugged from whatever messed up world she had somehow made for herself. The girl who never knew what was in store for her, who didn't know what kind of events would come her way. The girl who might lose her life before experiencing the life she wanted, the life she could've had. The girl that I am in love with, the girl that will always be the biggest piece of my puzzle. The girl I wish would wake up so I could see her eyes, listen to her voice, watch her face light up as she smiles one more time.

G

I thought about him, if he was really here, hoping that he couldn't see the emotion on my face, hoping that he wouldn't think my pain came from him. It was all me. I made everything

a living hell for myself. I never meant to hurt anyone, especially him. Everyone wonders why I like to isolate myself from the world; I don't want to bring any more pain onto the people that I care about most. There was still a part of me that wanted to make it out alive, just to see him.

The boy who cared about me, sometimes a little too much and who talked to me about what I needed to talk about, but reached out a little too quickly at times. The boy so cute with his dark brown hair and almost annoyingly good posture—well, nothing could really counteract how attractive he was, and still is. This is the boy who felt the need to help everyone when he was the one who needed help the most. The boy who opened up very little to people, but who other people felt comfortable enough to opening up to. The boy so easy to talk to, who listened, who helped, who broke through my brick wall of stubborn.

The boy who never failed to allow me to show him my true self, who felt protected enough to let me see one of his deepest secrets. The boy who helped me through troubles even when I hurt him badly, who said he was proud of me, who handled my late-night phases of no sleep. The boy who made me laugh, who made me happy when I was at the lowest parts of my life. The boy who shared my overflowing joy at the happiest points in life, as he was going through the same events, same activities. The boy who had hope, hope that the best would happen. The boy that expected nothing bad would happen without the realization that disappointment comes with anticipation. The boy who never knew that nothing good ever came out of believing something wonderful could happen just because there was hope. The boy whose hopeful viewpoints on life rubbed off on me, enough to where I was let down to the point of self-destruction.

I felt like I was drowning. Drowning in guilt, sadness, fear, you name it. I didn't want to be here. I didn't want to live. My 18 years of existence were mostly terrible, yet maybe there was still a little bit of hope left that the next 18 would be better. I started to overthink. Well, more than I usually do.

Would I be happy? Was I able to allow myself to get help? Could I let people get so close to me ever again? Was it possible that I could live a better life if I just attempted to fix a couple broken patches?

But depression never really goes away, does it? No matter how much better I might be in a few years, I'll always feel like I don't belong here in the back of my head. What would happen if I woke up to a life where nobody really wanted me there? What would happen if I woke up to realize that I never wanted to live a new life in the first place?

My life was on the line, and these thoughts trapped in my head didn't help me figure out what I wanted from what little I had left to choose from.

I could feel myself getting stronger, able to move slightly and take control over my body. My legs would move some, then my arms. I could almost wiggle my whole body at the same time now, which I thought was pretty cool.

All of a sudden, I felt the weight on my eyelids lift.

Could I open my eyes?

Well, there wasn't any point in not trying. I struggled a little bit, but I finally got them to open. The light was blinding. It took a few minutes to get adjusted to the brightness of the hospital room. Once I became accustomed, I took a look at my whereabouts. The machines, the doors, the curtains--and in a chair in the corner of the room, looking out the window with a thoughtful look on his face...

"Bentley?"

В

"Gigi." My head snapped up after hearing her voice, her name coming out of my mouth as I gasped. I ran over to the bed with tears in my eyes; I could tell she was about to cry as well. She was going to be okay, and hopefully she would fully recover and get back on track to a better life than what she had before.

Gigi finally made it out of the hospital a few weeks later. She was put on crutches because of a left leg fracture, and received a prescription for a higher dose for her antidepressants. Bentley stayed with her the whole way through the hospital trip.

She was scratched up and bruised for a long time after she left the hospital. The car hit her pretty hard, but she was resilient and came out of there strong.

One day, not too long after Gigi was released from the hospital, the pair walked out by the river. Gigi was spending a lot of time outside these days since she had gone so long without it. She was starting to appreciate the life she almost destroyed more and more now.

Things went smoothly as Bentley and Gigi lived their lives with little disruption. They went back to school, entering their junior year of college. They talked out their feelings for each other, finally clearing up the communication problems they had in the past, and remained the best of friends. They planned for the future, and expected nothing less than the best.

As much as Gigi had wanted to fade out of existence, she was still there, unfaded.



Sand Baby is something I painted with no real deeper meaning other than it looked cool in my head! After the piece being finished for a long time, and letting other people look at it, I've noticed that maybe some kind of story is happening there. But since I never made it with the intention of a story, I like that it's up for interpretation, allowing whoever's looking at it to use their imagination. There are infinite reasons for the things taking place in the painting, and no way of interpreting it is any less real than the next.



Surveillance by Kellin Normal

Surveillance is a more recent painting I've done. Although I want everyone to be able to create their own interpretation, my intention was to portray anxiety as a transgender person. In my experience, a lot of this anxiety just comes from being watched and observed, and the fear that you'll make a wrong step and lose respect from your peers. Growing and getting to a point where I don't care about that as much is very liberating, but the annoyance and fear is still there. PS: my friends just call this one the "sexy tboy painting," haha.



#### Problem by Kaitlyn Grubb

As a young woman, I have spent years subjected to a specific feeling and its unbearable weight. Torn to shreds like a wolf after prey, I have had little peace. From my father lighting my tongue on fire as a child, gaslit, to the guy I fell in love with telling me my trauma was a turn-off—I was forced to believe that everything was my fault. That I am the problem of all my misfortune.

When you go years believing that fabrication, it stops you from truly living the life you deserve. A life away from that unbearable weight—away from that snarling wolf we nickname anxiety.

So frustrating to see them find Yet another shiny little thing To fixate on To obsess over To love "unconditionally"

A new bestie
A new love
A new fascination

I was once a shiny little thing A favorite trinket Each new glittering object They can't know They're **just** a glittering object

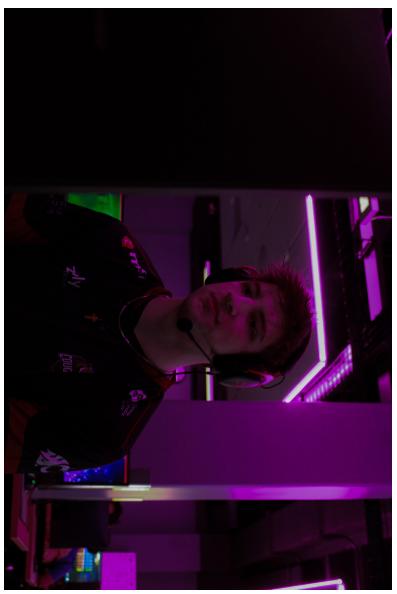
Until all that's left is A scuffed overused item No more reminiscent of the dazzling curio I once was

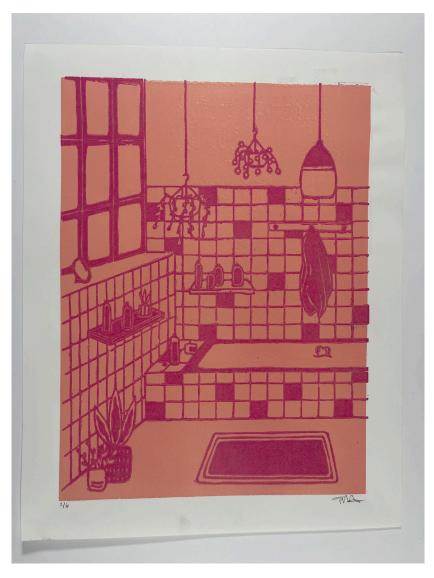
Never thought the scratches Wouldn't be smoothed Never thought the scuffs Couldn't be buffed Nothing left to mend

I never considered The impossibility of healing When I thought I was bulletproof

Never thought they'd take my memories too Till all I've ever been is lusterless and dull Till I don't recall Poem by Pooja Reddy







Happy Places by Tavia Morgan

For this piece I was inspired by vintage bathrooms from the '70s and wanted to explore that environment. I think the spaces we exist in matter because they reflect who we are, so I wanted to create a space I would enjoy spending time in. I also love bright colors but don't often work with pinks so this was a chance for me to try that.



#### Lost Gallery by Michael Nunzio

This past year has held a plethora of new challenges and problems I couldn't possibly have prepared for. I made a lot of drastic changes with my life such as moving to a new state and transitioning to a new WSU campus. Throughout that time I often found my art taking the backseat to many of my other responsibilities, like school or work. Any art that I was creating was often devoted to school projects or assignments that I wanted to add some visual flair to. As a result, when it was time for a submission this year, I only had small bits and pieces of larger projects, but no completed work on its own.

I decided to combine all my art throughout the year, creating a kind of micro art gallery within the piece itself. I grabbed sprites from games, concept art, promotional art, and gave each of them a little gallery frame. I then hung them on a digital wall, before covering them with some shadows and cobwebs. Sometimes as an artist you don't have a singular piece to point to for all your hard work and achievements, but every piece matters all the same. Every brief moment of artistry deserves its chance in the spotlight, deserves thought and compilation, deserves a spot on the wall.



#### Lavendar Menace by Talia Bergman

I hate the expectations put on us. Every time someone looks at you, they expect to see a "normal" person. You have to be polite, pretty, fit, cisgender, and every time you aren't one of these things, people recoil. If you're rude, fat, trans, they're shocked. This piece is made in reaction to that, to tell everyone and their expectations of me to fuck off. Rude fat trans girls have a place in this world, even if we have to carve it out ourselves.

there are stars sinking past me as i sit and stare on a small breathing bench of pale wood i'm drowning in deprivation gasping for depleting air

on my thigh is a scorch from my 13th year and on my scalp is a scratch from last night my nails are filled with dirt and earth and my mouth chews grotesquely on rocks

in the corner where the light drips i see myself not as i was or am or will be, but somehow indescribably fluttering and floating in the pale purple light i fall and tumble and be

a man is lit up from the inside like some burning lamp of tear drying fire i've seen him before but not like this not as he was or is or will be, standing and staring in the corner

he looks at me with a familiar smile and i try my best to imitate it through heavy tears i miss him, somehow, and i almost reach for the door or across the room to fit my head beside his in his hood

i danced on wood rotting porches in skin whipping rain as my limbs stretched and my skin peeled my nails grew and broke as my hair chopped and died my chest flattens and breathes against a soft summer sun in the fading snow i see a shape that reminds me of a green walled room somehow i am there and there and here on a bed made of engines and rumbling exhaust

one of my toes is painted sparkling blue but the bottle my mother once held has long been dumped and my best friends are on the carpet beside me but i haven't even met them yet

there are clouds falling out the window onto stain soaked grass squelching under the weight of air and through the blinking door is surely home but it opens to a dented mirror

in the sides of my eyes dance visions of once known thoughts and behind me i feel the breath of every person i have seen all around me lingers burning flames of embers i have long since stomped out

i land with tears and cold harsh wind and heat within my shirt i dry myself on wrinkled white sheets and sink into sleep on the floor

#### Conversational Class Critique by Antonio Castillo

This is a protest sign against the broad issue of growth being seen as an inherent good under our current economic model. It is zoomed in on the issue of student housing rental complexes, a specific instance of this growth's imperative being made real and causing real issues in the lives of everyday people. The sign appropriates the ubiquitous real estate sign, a symbol of the landlord class, and uses it to critique and protest against the landlord capitalist class. As opposed to the typically flat, two-dimensional signs used to appeal to fast, car-centric movement through an environment of growth, this sign is made three-dimensional to engage from different angles and create a full spatial experience.



Linere do ya he tennet ki ab ihas ? YOU DONT! This precess internalizas the landing sheether class sall Constant he bond class sall you much

Class sall you must take collective sets and UNIONIZE



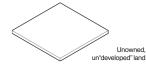
BRAND **NEW** (POORLY CONSTRUCTED)
STUDENT HOUSING
NOW LEASING

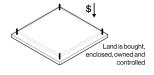
#### **AMENITIES**

- (Unreliable) Shuttle
   Services to Campus
- Outdoor Pool
  - \*Can only be used the part of the year you aren't here
- High Rents
- Poor Maintenance
  - \*We may or may not decide to solve your problems, and if we do, it may take a couple of months
- Quickly and Cheaply Constructed Units

GIVE US A CALL TODAY: 1-800-PAY-RENT

#### **INVEST**







Land is "developed"

#### **EXTRACT**



Lease units to tenants





rent, pay for services, keep surplus value

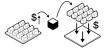


more surplus value

#### **GROW**



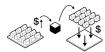
Use surplus value to buy more land, construct more units, and accumulate more capital



Repeat



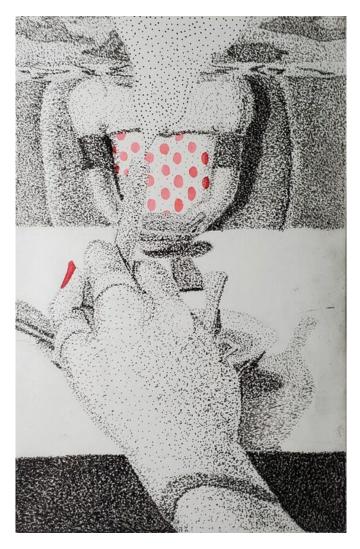
Repeat



**REPEAT** 

where do you, the tenant, fit into this? YOU DON'T! This process materializes the landlord-developer Class's Will. To materialize the tenant Classs Will, you must take collective action and...

# UNIONIZE



This piece was made for my boyfriend, Frank Maule. I often find that gender roles are very restrictive, and I decided to flip them in this piece. The male figure across the table is made small, and his head is obscured by the cigarette, which is a symbol of power. The woman's hand is shown to connect to her behind the canvas, forcing us to relate to her instead of him. The cigarette pointing at him shows that her desire is pointed at him.

# COVER HIGHLIGHT: JUPITER'S REIGH

#### by María Paula Bontogon

The theme of "Jupiter's Reign" centers around Greek mythology. the creation of life, and humanity. It shows how powerful intangible forces, such as gods or cosmic beings, may play a role in affecting and influencing humanity, like they do in the Iliad. The statues in the center are Hermes and Psyche. Psyche represents humanity as she's being watched by higher powerful beings. In Greek mythology, Psyche was born a mortal, but she fell in love with Cupid. Eventually, Zeus approved of her marriage to Cupid and granted her immortality, so Hermes takes her to Olympus, where she becomes goddess of the soul. I included the planet Jupiter because it's the Roman name for Zeus. He's up above watching over everything. The angels represent external forces like otherworldly beings watching over humanity. The hands reaching out come from Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam representing God creating human life. Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling inspired me to include architecture. I chose the building because of its perspective and how it draws the viewers' attention towards the center and top of the paper. The words are a Latin phrase, "sic mundus creatus est," which means "thus, the world was created."





#### Waiting Patiently by Brianna Bernal

In my years of photography, capturing simple beautiful images has always been my passion. I capture moments that often go unnoticed. The title "Waiting Patiently" derives from the snow left behind after a blizzard. The white snow and foggy background create a movie-like ambiance. I invite the viewer to explore this image with their own emotions and experiences with the photo I've captured. May "Waiting Patiently" echo a perfect moment that instills a sense of tranquility and captivates a mere glimpse that is the beauty of complete silence.



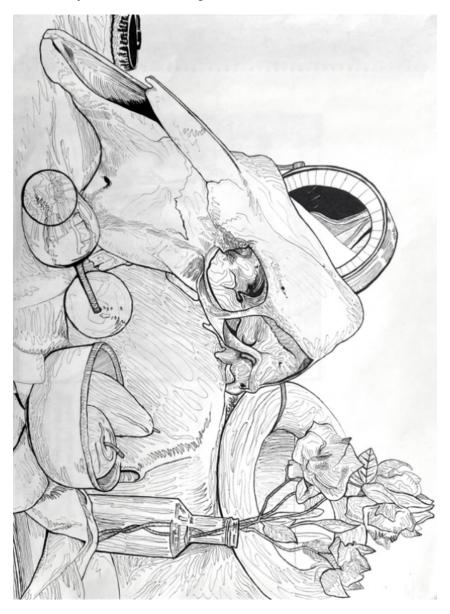
#### Kalaloch Beach by Kylie Guenther

From a very early age, I loved to create. In one form or another, I always found various ways to express myself. When I entered high school, my method changed from drawing to photography. As I grew I was able to capture everything from cherished memories to the different places I have lived. Photography became a way to catalog my life.

Kalaloch Beach was taken on an early morning walk with my mom. This trip marked one of the few moments we got together before and after a big change in my life: we had just moved to Washington months prior and I was going to graduate high school the following year.

On the right side of the beach, it was sunny and void of any people. On the left, it was foggy and dreary except in the distance three figures were walking together. At that moment I felt hope like I never had before. If these three strangers could stick together through a seemingly desolate landscape, my family could face whatever came at us as we always have and will continue to do.

Still Life by Maria Paula Bontogon

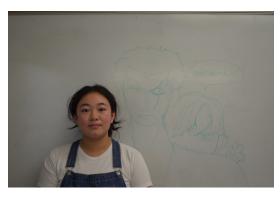


# Meet the Staff

## EDITORS-IN-CHIEF



Beckham Rock is a third-year student at WSU studying creative writing and human development. He has been on the LandEscapes staff for three years, and this is his second year as Editor-in-Chief. He also loves writing and aims to have work published one day. Outside of LandEscapes, he can be found writing poetry and novels, reading, or rewatching *But I'm a Cheerleader* or *La La Land*. He is also very enthusiastic about sharks.



Hannah Te graduated December 2023, but still is posting a bio because she's excited to have worked with this group of individuals in the 2023-2024 staff, but also because she treasures her time at LandEscapes and how it made her world in Pullman that much brighter. With degrees in English and psychology, she looks forward to finding work that combines these disciplines with her passion for design.

# manasins editors



Shana Huang is a senior majoring in English rhetoric and professional writing, as well as digital technology and culture at WSU. She is also minoring in creative writing. In addition to being the co-managing editor and executive poetry editor for LandEscapes, she is the executive fiction editor for *The Palouse Review* and the president of the English Club. Outside of WSU, she is a staff writer for *Germ Magazine*. During her free time, she enjoys reading and writing fiction and poetry and loves spending time with family and friends.



Jamie Diamond has learned a lot from LandEscapes, having at some point or another, been a member of each genre. She's constantly consuming some form of media, and thus is always open to movie, show, book, podcast, mus—honestly, suggestions of any kind!

### EXECUTIVES

Tavia Morgan is a junior at WSU Pullman and is majoring in English literary studies with minors in art and women's studies. She is from Colorado Springs, Colorado, but now lives in Spokane, Washington. This is her second year working with LandEscapes where she is currently the nonfiction executive editor. She also interns with Blood Orange Review as marketing editor. Her interests include reading, art of all kinds, going to concerts, and Formula 1. Her all-time favorite book is Daisv Jones and the Six and she hopes to eventually enter the field of either education or publishina.





Jacq Schroeder is a second-year student at WSU doing a double major in philosophy and creative writing. He is mostly interested in work that explores connecting themes between those two subjects, playing on the wandering creative mind and the art of thought within creative work. This is his first time publishing nonfiction and poetry, mostly having worked in fiction until this point. He hopes to explore further ways of breaking creative boundaries within all forms of writing.

### **EDITORS**

Allison Elwell is a junior at Washington State University. She is pursuing a major in integrative English studies and a creative writing minor. This is her third year working for LandEscapes, she is a fiction editor for the journal. She is a very passionate personality who loves to read and write and her favorite book at the moment is *If We Were Villians* By M.L. Rio.





Allison Hilliker is a second generation coug at Washington State University and is a junior this year, majoring in literary studies with a minor in communications. Allison is a nonfiction editor and is on the social media team for LandEscapes. Allison loves to read, goes to all the concerts she can, and travels as much as she has the time for. She is the author of the fiction piece titled "Mirror," in the 2024 edition of LandEscapes.

Bailey is a first-year graduate student at Washington State University currently working towards their MA in Special Education. Exploring creative spaces and people's art is a source of immense joy for her. As a nonfiction editor, Bailey enjoys working with art that is rooted in concrete aspects of the human experience. Bailey also contributed two works of art this year: A Way Out and Steady.





Maria Paula Bontogon is a junior at Washington State University, majoring in fine arts. She is a poetry editor and copyeditor for LandEscapes. She has submitted the art pieces, *Jupiter's Reign* and *Still Life* to the journal this year. She's passionate about being involved in the arts as much as possible. She enjoys music, drawing, reading, writing, and practicing martial arts.

Nathan Nguyen is an undergraduate at WSU pursuing opportunities in architectural design. They are an editor for the art and photography department in LandEscapes. They are an avid model maker, sustainability designer, and mountain biker.





Renee Roulo is a junior majoring in genetics and cell biology. She grew up in Renton, Washington. Her interests include drawing, playing the ukulele, and drinking coffee. Her favorite genres—whether books, podcasts, movies, or random voutube videos—are horror and sci-fi.

Zvikomborero Masike is a junior at WSU who is pursuing a computer science major and a DTC minor. He's a part of the art and photography department of LandEscapes as an editor. He enjoys doing the arts, programming, and calisthenics.



# Meet the Contributors

Adaline Grace is a writer currently living on Lake Coeur d'Alene in Idaho. She has a BA in English with a focus on creative writing. Adaline specializes in short stories and creative nonfiction, with a soft spot for nature and mental health topics. She loves indie-folk music, cooking, and staying active. She has a five-year-old bearded dragon named Nico who she loves very much.





Adaline Haley is a non-binary, genderfluid, queer author who has spent most of their life in Duvall, Washington. As a writer, Adaline likes to create the feelings of ick and cringe within their writing and making readers feel uncomfortable while exposing them to the harsh realities of life, death, and mental illnesses. Walk to the Tree is Adaline's first published piece! But once they have completed their bachelor's degree in psychology and English at WSU, they plan on publishing a book inspired by the battle between love and mental illness.

Alexandria Osborne is an aspiring author and journalist, pursuing multiple ways to express herself in her work and words. She is a 2024 WSU graduate with a degree in journalism and media production and a minor in creative writing, and spends a lot of her free time reading and writing. She also spends a lot of her time with her roommates two guinea pigs, Ozzy and Gerald.





Allison Costantini is a senior at WSU majoring in zoology. She has been writing from a very early age, and this is her first time sharing her work. Aside from writing, Allison enjoys crocheting, puzzles, reading, and gardening. She also has a cat named Goose, who couldn't go without a mention.

Amaka Chigbolu is a fourth year senior at WSU majoring in business administration and man yagement information systems with a minor in creative writing. They have been interested in writing fantasy fiction and they love to write about complex and deeply emotional relation ships between characters. She is also fascinated by making people feel when reading creative stories. This is her first time publishing a fiction piece. She would like to explore the deeper meanings of human connection through creative and emotional storytelling.





Ashley Knight is a third year student at Wash ington State University. She sees a beauty in emotions and enjoys sharing her own through her words and art. Writing poems has become a way for her to distribute the overwhelming passion she feels for explanations of seemingly simple things in life.

Brianna Bernal is a senior majoring in marketing while also pursuing a certificate in consum<sup>22</sup> er behavioral research. Aside from school, her passion lies in photography. Her creative outlet lets her strive to develop compelling stories by being vulnerable to her audience. Lastly, Brianna hopes to improve her skill and learn from others who share her enthusiasm, fostering a commu<sup>22</sup> nity of creativity and growth.





Antonio is a third year architecture student. He views architecture as being a series of shells inhabiting our landscape which the world flows through, at both large and small scales. In this, he believes that architecture isn't as much an art form, but instead the art of how we experience everyday life. He hopes to pursue work involving the built environment and problems people experience within it every day. You can find his work on Instagram \*a.c.archandart.

143

A qualified lawyer from India, Darshanika Panda is currently a masters student in criminal justice at Washington State University, Pullman. When she doesn't have her academic hat on, she is busy pursuing her creative talents in poetry and Indian classical dance (Odissi). Her dream is to publish novels and hopefully make a documentary in the future highlighting mental health challenges within the criminal justice system.





Emma Austin is an English creative writing major with a minor in communications. Em loves reading poetry, listening to music, and creating physical and visual art inspired by nature, the changing elements, and climate of the world.

Danny Dudarov (they/them) is a Russian-Ukrainian poet currently studying English at Washington State University. They have often been described as "a pleasure to have in class" and "unusual but with a heart." They have a keen interest in apocalyptic thinking, finding solace in writing, and goofing off. If you're lucky, you can sometimes find them at @dannydudarov





144

Ian Wells is a graduate researcher at the Washington State University HYPER Lab and is studying mechanical engineering. He focuses on optical and EM systems with experience in aerospace, thermal, and nuclear analysis. He hopes to continue contributing to aerospace research for sustaining a human presence on the moon and Mars, especially through imaging and life support systems. In his free time, he enjoys making pictures through photography and drawing, exploring the limitations of the technology used in his research, and using it to explore the world.

Jacob Carr is a junior broadcast production major at Washington State University. Jacob is from Hesperia, CA and fell in love with photography during his senior year of high school when taking his AP Photo class. That same year he won best in show for the school's art show and has continued to take photos ever since.





Janice is a PhD candidate in molecular plant sciences at Washington State University where she studies plant-microbe interactions. She started doing photography in 2023 and has enjoyed the ability to share her perspective of natural landscapes. Both her work as a scientist and the photos she takes are inspired by her love of nature, which began during her upbringing in Oregon near the Tillamook rainforest.

Studying a double degree in fine arts and marketing, Kaitlyn Grubb is a junior at the WSU Pullman campus. Aiming to share her works and inspire, Kaitlyn has dedicated the last seven years to creating works of art that tell a compelling story of her hardships and experiences. In her remaining time here at WSU, she hopes to continue sharing her insights—helping those who suffer the same pain realize that they aren't alone.





Kellin Normal is a visual artist studying for an anthropology degree at WSU. He creates paintings that explore many things, from mental illness to transgender struggle and queer joy. He often incorporates things like glitter and texture into these paintings, all done on canvas with acrylic paint. *Surveillance* specifically is about the transgender experience, while Sand Baby invites the viewer into a strange world.

Kylie Guenther is an aspiring photographer from Silverdale, Washington. After obtaining an Associate of Arts degree, she transferred to Washington State University for a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. Aside from academics, she loves to travel and take pictures of the places and people she visits. Currently, she keeps up with her favorite hobby by capturing the beauty of the WSU campus and the Pullman area.





Liz Wesorick grew up outside of Snoqualmie, Washington, and is a freshman pursuing a degree in architecture at WSU. She has been writing poetry for almost two years now and has spent her whole life reading and collecting quotes. She can also be found drawing, dancing, acting, watching *Agents of Shield*, petting a dog, or quoting John Mulaney—depending on the day.

Madeline Eileen Goolie (MEG) was born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska. She is studying at Washington State University for her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. She has always enjoyed being in the beautiful outdoors and grew up fishing, hiking, skiing, and rafting. Over the years she has experimented with painting, pottery, film photography, and jewelry-making. Recently she has been mainly working with ceramics and fell in love with printmaking.





Mars is a senior at WSU studying wildlife ecology and forestry on the pre-veterinary path. They grew up in a small canyon near Ellensburg, Washington, and spent lots of time in the woods or climbing the canyon walls. This love of spending time outdoors inspired them to start taking pictures of nature. When out taking pictures they are usually accompanied by their family dog Rylee.

Mike Nunzio is a student at Washington State University currently studying computer science. He moved to Washington in pursuit of obtaining his bachelor's degree. His main artistic mediums are animation, digital painting, and digital illustration. He has spent most of his life creating a wide variety of animated films, stories, games, and hopes to release a full-length game or animated film.





Mila is a first-year student from Lynnwood, WA who is majoring in wildlife ecology and conservation sciences. When not pursuing her dual passions of science and writing, she can be found making friends with dogs and dreaming of plans to travel around the world. Mila aims to gain a career in wildlife conservation while continuing to advance her creative writing skills.

Noah Tyler is a senior majoring in music composition at Washington State University in Pullman, WA. He enjoys reading, playing video games, and anything music related.





Pooja Reddy is a senior pursuing a psychology major on the pre-medical track. She has always had a passion for poetry and was a poetry editor for LandEscapes until last year. After graduation she will pursue a career in medicine and continue to write in her free time because she believes in the power and utility of self-expression.

S M Raihan Rahman is a PhD student in the Department of Veterinary Microbiology and Pathology. Photography is one of his hobbies. He mostly likes landscape photography. He started photography when he got his first camera phone. Besides photography, he likes reading





Savannah Madison is a sophomore at Washington State University and is majoring in digital technology and culture. She has a love for creating art and will use her skills to achieve the goal of becoming a graphic designer. It is her passion to create pieces for connecting with people and making them feel a little less alone in their struggles.

Steinar Goheen is a junior studying architecture at WSU. Steinar's interests lie within the intersections of architecture and anthropology. They are deeply involved in researching how design has the unfortunate power to marginalize people, and how they can attempt to change it in their own work. In Steinar's free time, they practice photography, drumming, and turntablism. Their goal professionally is to work as an architect by day, and a DJ by night.



Talia Lilith Rose Freyja Valentine-Smith is an artist from a small town outside Spokane, Washington. Growing up there, she often felt isolated and alone, which caused her to turn to videogames and TV.



Soon after she turned 18, she started to realize that she was queer. After accepting this, she started to come out to close friends. Soon after, on a retreat with some of her class, she came out as trans to her school and started living authentically. Living as an open and out trans woman, she moved to Pullman, Washington for college.

One of the biggest challenges in her life has been trying to be comfortable with dressing and being herself. It can be challenging for trans women everywhere to not feel like a creep, because every representation that exists shows them as monsters. This makes it hard to exist as you want to be, along with general messaging to women about not being pretty enough. This challenge of living authentically versus being

Vincent is a PhD student in molecular plant sciences at Washington State University. In his spare time, he enjoys photography, hiking, camping, gardening, and reading sci-fi. Vincent seeks to optimize and experiment with image quality and composition, with a focus on natural and architectural subjects.





Xuejiao Li (Judy) is an international graduate student from the College of Education; her research interest is graphic novels. In the past two years, her work has been presented at five national conferences and published in three journals. Her photograph "Promise" was taken at the Antelope Canyon; after she saw many pictures of canyons expressing natural beauty, she decided to add stories to express her emotions.

This year's edition was put together by Beckham Rock and Hannah Te. Special thanks to Jamie Diamond, Tavia Morgan, and Maria Paula Bontogon for inputting copy into the final document.

Title font: Black Castle Body font: Proxima Nova

Cover art: "Jupiter's Reign" by Maria Paula Bontogon