

An abstract background featuring a large, translucent prism in the center. A beam of light enters from the left, passing through the prism and creating a spectrum of colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) that radiates outwards. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient of warm colors like pink, orange, and yellow.

# PRISM

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

REFLECTION

Vol. 66 | 2025

# REFLECTION

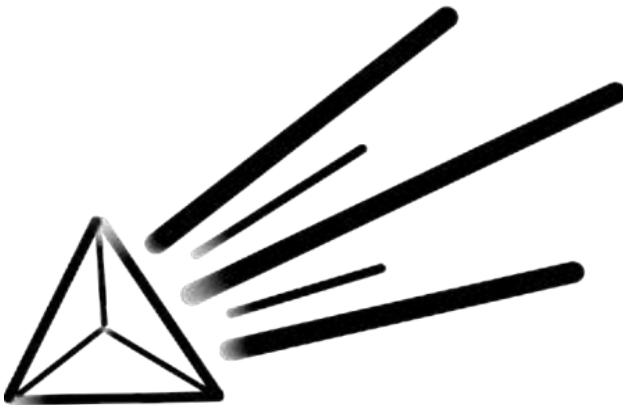
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Gonzaga University

# REFLECTION

Gonzaga's Journal of  
Art and Literature  
Spokane, WA

# PRISM

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2025



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## REFLECTION

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 13 | INVITE LIST<br>Rebekah Willhite               |
| 14 | GRAYLAND<br>Elena Stoll                       |
| 16 | LO/VE<br>Alexis Sandoval                      |
| 17 | SISTERHOOD<br>Avery Day                       |
| 18 | EYE CATCHING<br>Sophia Micciche               |
| 20 | OUR SILLY BURDEN<br>Jackson Weber             |
| 22 | TREES IN NORWAY<br>Elena Stoll                |
| 24 | BEFORE THE SNOW TAKES IT ALL<br>Eliza Bassani |
| 25 | CLOSE ENCOUNTERS<br>Lucy Brunelli             |
| 41 | ALLERGIES<br>Maddox Reimer                    |
| 42 | GRANDMA'S HOUSE<br>Jackson Weber              |
| 44 | 12:21 A.M<br>Kate McGuigan                    |

- 46 AGAIN TOMORROW  
Grace Applegate
- 47 IN THE WIND  
Jim Hanlen
- 48 LOST DOG  
Maddox Reimer
- 49 THE FILTHIEST OF FRIENDS  
Jackson Weber
- 50 I'M BEST AT LOSING FRIENDS  
Aislyn Ross
- 51 TO CAPITULATE  
Jackson Weber
- 52 NO SKIN  
Stephanie Borla
- 54 METRONOME  
Jamieson McHenry
- 55 CONCERTO  
Maddox Reimer
- 56 BACKSTAGE  
Sophia Micciche
- 58 A BALLAD OF LETTING GO  
Julia Porter
- 59 AFTER RAIN  
Harrison Mains
- 60 REFLECTING ON NATURE  
Julia Lealos
- 62 THE WISHBONE  
Alexis Sandoval



- 63 SEA WORLD  
Maddox Reimer
- 64 SATURN  
Roland Allen
- 66 IN BED  
Jackson Weber
- 68 BRUTALISM  
Maddox Reimer
- 69 PARKING LOT EXCAVATION  
Gwendolyn Mitchell
- 70 DRAWING  
Scarlett Johnson
- 72 DEAD LAMB ON MY BATHROOM FLOOR  
Aislyn Ross
- 73 AN ACT OF MERCY  
Charlotte Ury
- 76 CONFRONTING THE UNKNOWN  
Isabel Koerner
- 78 ON DISAPPEARING TWICE  
Rowyn O'Connor
- 84 HEARTBEAT  
Harrison Mains
- 86 NADIA  
Aislyn Ross
- 88 LOVING YOU  
Jesse Hsien
- 90 ON THE BEACH  
Harrison Mains

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 92  | MARASCHINO CHERRIES<br>Erin Roney           |
| 105 | THIS RED SEA<br>Harrison Mains              |
| 106 | A SINGLE PETAL OF A ROSE<br>Jackson Weber   |
| 108 | SEA-GLASS-COLORED LENSES<br>Olivia Sandvik  |
| 112 | A PARISIAN PERSPECTIVE<br>Cailyn White      |
| 114 | LAMB<br>Anaya Van Dusen                     |
| 127 | MAPLE TREE<br>Alexis Sandoval               |
| 128 | PLANET EARTH<br>Sophia Micciche             |
| 131 | GOLDEN YEARS<br>Jamieson McHenry            |
| 141 | WINTER<br>Alexis Sandoval                   |
| 142 | MOTHER TERESA BY CANDLELIGHT<br>Mary Heavey |
| 145 | CONTRIBUTORS                                |
| 149 | HONORABLE MENTIONS                          |
| 150 | REFLECTION STAFF                            |

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

“If Music is a Place—then Jazz is the City, Folk is the Wilderness, Rock is the Road, Classical is a Temple.”

— Vera Nazarian

Dear Reader,

As I was writing this letter, I recalled all the work that went into publishing this edition of *Reflection*. The staff worked earnestly to edit and assemble the pieces contained in these pages. I hope this care and passion demonstrates itself to you as you read each poem, short story, and personal narrative and behold each drawing, painting, and digital artwork. *Reflection*, which has run since 1960, has showcased a plethora of work created by students, alumni, faculty, and staff. It has been such an honor and a pleasure to be part of this publication for the last three years.

This year, *Reflection*’s theme is Prism. I gave this theme much thought as I formulated what it meant for this journal and how the pieces enclosed in this edition reflect it. A prism literally refracts light, creating mesmerizing, vibrant colors. But it also figuratively represents growth and learning—ways of looking at situations that foster new understandings and perspectives. This twofold meaning allows for inspiration and cultivation of artistic thought. The works in this journal, as well as the contributors, may be considered prismatic.

You might be wondering how Nazarian’s quote relates to the theme. This quote has stuck with me this past year—it has even inspired some of my own creative writing. These words made me think about alternative ways of looking at the world, not just if music genres represented physical locations. I see these unique understandings of the world and the people living in it reflected in the following poems, prose, and visual art. For instance, the solace of a cigarette at night in *A Single Petal of a Rose* or supposing a bird’s perspective in “The Wishbone.”

Pay attention to both the form and content of each creative work. Perhaps the emotions presented by or the intentionality of the writers or artists will uncover a love for creativity and art hidden in

the recesses of your heart. Creating art—whether it be with a pen, computer keyboard, or paintbrush—takes an immense amount of vulnerability and courage, more so to share it with the world. Keep this in mind as you peruse this book: your peers are sharing a special part of themselves that you may never see otherwise. Thank you for taking precious time and care to pick up this book and supporting the contributors, staff, and GU Student Media.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Olivia Sandvik". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Olivia Sandvik, *Reflection* Editor-in-Chief



# INVITE LIST

Rebekah Willhite

My home office bookshelf  
looks like the aftermath  
of a four-year-old's birthday party.  
Cups, coffee  
with a smidge of almond milk,  
lined up to swing at the Frigidaire piñata.  
Book jackets askew  
like someone peeled back the wrapper  
to bite a cupcake  
but discovered it was chocolate  
when they wanted vanilla.  
Post-it note tabs,  
the academic noise blower,  
roll-out pages worthy  
of APA's hanging indent—  
    hooks, Reynolds, Wood, Ginsburg, Villaseñor,  
    Frost, Lowney, Hemley, Eide, and Gorman.



# GRAYLAND

Elena Stoll

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*This is a painting of a photo taken by my mother of my father and me walking to the beach with a kite in hand. I look at this photo with great remembrance. I loved the times my family and other families went camping after school to take a break before summer sports happened. I also look at this and see how I could change the painting. I painted this last year in the spring of 2024. Since then, I feel I have grown with my painting skills, but I don't want to change the painting because I want to look back and see my progress. Oil paint on Canvas, 2 feet by 4 feet.*



# LO/VE

Alexis Sandoval

## ***After Robert Indiana***

has four letters and many faces; takes and makes,  
whispering jealously while screaming praise:  
*I want what you have, but I already have you;*  
looks like Mom and the palm of your hand;  
speaks like Dad and the dog; stacks the first of itself  
on the equal last. The second letter might slant but it  
never falls,  
never fails.

# SISTERHOOD

Avery Day

i look across the car  
she's pinching her neck again  
red blood flushes over old bruises  
i grab her hand and hold it  
her lips say *i love you*  
her heart says *you know me*





## EYE CATCHING

Sophia Micciche

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*This watercolor portrait is meant to illustrate confidence. I think that a lot of the time, we are afraid to be noticed or seen. Blending in is a lot safer. But blending in means we miss a lot of what makes humanity so great. The unique qualities of each human being are what make life, writing, art, and humanity so interesting. This portrait should encourage us to be truly ourselves in our self-expression through our clothing, makeup, hair, and personality.*

# OUR SILLY BURDEN

Jackson Weber

Grain your ear  
against the door  
listening to me  
through burnt red  
paint

I subterfuge,  
hide the truth,  
throw letter paper  
white like dry cut  
Christmas

Muffled yells spill  
out and spin  
Wire-thin your  
hidden brain, delicate,  
brewing

Quick to race,  
line up, speed  
off, cartoonishly  
fall and bruise like  
burnt biscuits

Resigned and sleepy  
in my chair with  
one arm over  
but I carry  
you out  
which does  
but deepen your  
ruffled hair sheep  
breathes while I count

Park in the icy driveway, be wary of the fall

I'd like  
to run and run  
with horses naked  
in icy blue-lake water,  
exacting all of the muscles  
to which the dirt soon  
they will return through  
I love you in the  
crushing wave

Sit through bitter  
ice and window,  
looking towards homely  
lights and cinephilic  
drone shots

Retire to lie  
on couch coiled,  
worming and sick  
of your crap, not  
really

Of course not,  
in my own room,  
I get on my knees  
and I pray for  
you

Svelte, polite  
ponderings focused  
on understanding, believe  
me, I've only ever  
cared



## TREES IN NORWAY

Elena Stoll

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*Oil pastels on Canvas, 2ft x 4ft. Photo taken when I went abroad and went on a trip for Thanksgiving to Bergen, Norway. The sun was setting on the trees. The light was illuminating. I wanted to replicate the vibrance of the sun reflecting on the trees and the snow, while also bringing a slight change in the color choices. It was cold but so beautiful. The view from these trees looked down on the city and the water. The landscape looked to similar to home in the US, which allowed me to appreciate the moment I am in while also missing home.*



# BEFORE THE SNOW TAKES IT ALL

Eliza Bassani

Despite the drip-dropping of a wet sponge  
into a frigid sink soaked in scraps of  
jasmine rice and oversaturated with suds,  
this is a beautiful fall.

Despite the way the stovetop continues to cook  
down desolate scraps in the purple pot to tough tack,  
and curled petals are drawing empty circles  
as they fall off stems onto a dented windowsill,  
this is a beautiful fall.

Despite Summer's old age and her white hairs  
of frost that cover the windows and creep  
over the grass on foggy mornings,  
this is a beautiful fall.

Instead of a stark stop with puffer jackets inflating  
from the car dashboard, Summer eases up on the  
gas pedal. The terminally heavy coats will wait.  
For now, lucid lumber is dressed in fine  
reds and yellows and is singing out:  
this is a beautiful fall.

# CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Lucy Brunelli

**2025 Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Award Recipient  
Creative Non-Fiction, First Place**

We put down our aliens when we leave. They sit on the counter by the door of our apartment, telling each of us who's home, who's not, whether it's necessary to lock the door behind us. We've marked them with our initials on the soles of their feet—they are Toy Story aliens, after all—and little identifying doodles on their lapels, but two years of being stood up and hurriedly knocked down has worn those doodles away. Now, we know who's who from the order they stand in: Sarah, me, Kate, Maria, lined up on the counter by the door.

They're probably the least strange thing about our apartment. Each is encircled by glowstick bracelets that have long since lost their glow. They stand beside a vase of dried lavender and a candle that's almost been burned out, in front of a letter board that currently reads, "In the clerb, we all fam," but has also said, "Let's be academic weapons," "happy birthday — congrats on beating teen pregnancy!!!," "xoxo gossip girl," and "academic victims." On the wall behind them, there's supposed to be a framed painting of flowers, but that's in the corner of the living room, stacked up with the rest of the décor we've yet to hang up but keep meaning to—a year's worth of excuses piled out of sight, out of mind with the bean bag chairs nobody sits in. Stuck up on the wall instead via scotch tape is a somewhat eerie maximalist collage of Muppet characters and nature scenes, with the words "The trees can hear you if you talk to them" superimposed into a canopy of trees—one of many collages taped up around the apartment, including the bathrooms, by Kate and Sarah in the dead of night, a kind of flashmob art gallery meant to startle and confuse us.

The aliens were my idea. We've used this system since our sophomore year at Gonzaga University when we lived in an on-campus dorm, Twohy. Now, in senior year, it's just a given that we'll come back to our off-campus apartment and put up our alien. *I'm home*, it announces, even if the apartment is empty and the rest of the aliens are lying face-down. *I'm home, I'm here, there's an open invitation to burst into my room and talk to me.*

In Twohy, there were six of us. Chris and Heather hadn't yet

become RAs, so we crammed all six aliens onto a plastic shelf stuck to the wall with an adhesive strip. When Heather went abroad, Kate attached Heather's alien to the ceiling with some yarn so it looked like she was "being beamed up." The girl who took Heather's bed, Chloe, was also given an alien. When Kate, Maria, and I studied abroad in London in junior year, we took our aliens with us, and the girl who sublet Kate's room, Gabi, was given one for herself. Only Sarah and I stayed in the apartment this past summer—two lonely aliens, only half the set. Kate and Maria kept theirs with them and, by some miracle, remembered to bring them back once the school year started.

It's a rule: if you live here, you receive an alien.

They came from a plastic tub I got from Disney World when I was eight. I'd never used them for anything before, and in the summer after freshman year, I found the tub sitting in a forgotten bin smelling of plastic and dust. *I could use these*, I thought, not yet knowing how.

*Up when you're home, down when you're gone.*



## August 25th

Sarah and Maria present their arguments to the group (Kate and me) about what the four of us should be for Halloween. It is very serious. It is our last Halloween.

Maria begins by proudly announcing, "I did all this last night!" and waves her hand at our TV, which she's connected to her laptop. The screen flashes, and "Spooktober Halloween Costumes 2024" blazes out at us in orange and white letters. It's painful to look at. She's put quotes at the beginning of each costume slide: "We're All Definitely Fucking Mad Here..." precedes the Alice in Wonderland costumes. These costumes are extravagant and definitely beyond our collective price range as college students. She ends the presentation with a slide that says, "Thank YOU! (\*clap for me\*)." We clap for her.

Next up is Sarah!

Her slide deck pops up on the screen, cutesy and full of exclamation points. Unsurprisingly, the first set of costumes are the eras of Taylor Swift, followed by Strawberry Shortcake characters. I strain to hold in my heckling; Maria doesn't. Kate is very diplomatic, as usual.



Finally, we reach the last one: Rainbow Magic Fairies, designated first by hobbies/careers, then by names, and then by colors. We all lean in. It's a clear winner.

The last Halloween of college, planned out two months in advance.



If college is meant to be the best four years of your life, then it stands to reason the people you meet there will be the best friends you ever make.

That's a lot of pressure.

The people you meet in the strange crucible of university have the potential to see you through the rest of your life. Gone and out-grown are the friends of one's adolescence, and hello to friends from college. How adult-sounding: *Who's that? Oh, someone I knew in college.*

These are the people you spend your formative years with—alongside them, you learn what you like and dislike, your stance on political issues and social matters, and what you're good at. You learn your own perspectives, and then you learn each other's. Then, you try to square the two.

You can say about your college friends, *we grew up together* because everybody knows you don't really grow up in high school. You don't automatically become an adult the moment you turn 18. When I turned 18, I didn't know how to drive yet. I spent most of my time locked up in my room, reading for pleasure and ignoring my schoolwork. And I had about two stable friendships, and they both lived a thousand miles away. The real growing happens in university when you live away from your parents, and you start to think for yourself because that's all you've got. You meet new people, and you try to be normal around them until you're both comfortable enough to reveal the abnormalities.

According to MIND 24-7, a mental health clinic, "Positive friendships play an important part in a person's transition to maturity, providing companionship, support and possibilities for personal growth." Friends made in emerging adulthood are important because they have the potential to impact your own identity. They shape who you are. You grow together like trees planted too close together—trunks intertwined and knotted, then separate in their reach toward the sun.

One of my university's purported objectives is encouraging students to "Forge Lifelong Bonds." I walk past a banner saying as much every day on my way to class.

Lifelong bonds, indeed. At least I hope so.



I met Heather in a doctor's office waiting room, except she didn't know that. It was May 27, 2021, and I was getting some vaccine I needed before I could go to university in the fall when a message popped up on my brand-new school email from ZagLiving, my school's housing system. I logged in, and there, sitting in my inbox, was an email with the subject "Heather :) to me":

"Hi Lucy! My name is Heather! I was looking at profiles and yours looked pretty close to what mine is. Could we talk some

more? If you're still looking for a roommate, we could use some time to see if we would be a good fit! Either way, let me know . . . I'd love to get to know you! Gratefully, Heather."

We had to take a compatibility quiz while filling out our housing application. I tried to remember my answers: *Did I put night owl or early bird? How tidy did I say I was, and was I lying?* Twenty minutes later, I responded that I wanted to get to know her more, too. She didn't respond by the time I left the doctor's office, and I felt a weird hopelessness come over me.

I'd never been great at making friends. I had moved states in the middle of high school, from South Carolina to Colorado, so I'd lost touch with most of my childhood friends. Proximity had apparently been the key to most of those relationships, so I barely heard a peep from them apart from obligatory birthday messages and Instagram likes. I learned in Colorado how awkward I really was and how horrible I was at making connections with people I had no shared history with. Adding COVID into the mix, my last two years of high school were the loneliest of my life.

I wasn't looking forward to college.

Heather responded to me four days later, and I breathed a sigh of relief. She had asked for my phone number so we could connect easily. In this new message, she said something that solidified her in my mind as someone I could be friends with: "A little Monty Python, but alas . . . what is your favourite color?"

*Another nerd, I thought. Jackpot.*

I responded, "Haha my favorite color is blue. What's yours? Also, solid Monty Python reference! Now, should I ask what's the air-speed velocity of an unladen swallow?"

I gave her my phone number. Bright and early the next morning, I woke up to a text from an unknown number. A little green bubble that read, "African or European swallow?"

*Oh.*

*This might work out.*



I've come to realize Heather was the key to my college experience. Perhaps not a perfect college roommate—I tripped over her crocs at least once a day, and she needed upwards of five alarms

every morning—but she was there when I needed her. She drove me to the hospital, ate dinner with me every night, and only locked me out of the dorm twice. Accidentally. We once spent a solid six hours on the floor of our room showing each other fan edits of our favorite bands. We left notes on each other's desks, brought home desserts from the cafeteria whenever we felt the other needed it, commiserated about the loud music next door, complaining to each other but never mustering the courage to ask them to turn it down. Now, as an RA, she does that on the regular, so I guess she found the courage. I'm proud of her. Heather helped introduce me to everyone I care about at my university, and for that, I'll never forget her.

I became friends with her first and, through her, the rest. Her and then her and then her and then her. A long chain of people ending at Maria, my best friend. Heather and Maria, like the two clasps on either end of a friendship bracelet.

First, though, was Kate, who lived on the same hall as me and Heather. I don't remember our first meeting exactly, and neither does she, but by the time my birthday rolled around in September, only a month into the semester, she'd made me a postcard-sized watercolor of the *Marvel Avengers* Tower, so I guess we'd hit it off. She's 5'10, which I'm reminded of every time I see her since she practically towers over me—because of this, I summon her whenever I need a wine glass, which we keep on the top shelf. She segues conversations with "Speaking of Coldplay" and instead of writing herself notes on Post-Its, she draws on them. She starts vibrating any time someone mentions *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* in her vicinity, and if given the chance, she *will* talk to you about it at length. We created an Easter Scavenger Hunt together in freshman year, and since then, we've tried to scheme up increasingly strange things to celebrate holidays. She was the mastermind behind the Muppet collages, as well as ambushing the Twohy common room with gummy bears for St. Nicholas' Day and hiding tiny duck figurines all around the off-campus apartment as a kind of competition for the rest of us. No one's found all eight of them to this day.

Then there was Sarah, who Heather introduced to me at dinner in the COG, our campus's main cafeteria. She was shy and sweet, soft-spoken almost to the point of whispering. That first year, she got me a Christmas present, even though I could count the number of times we'd met in person on one hand. Since then, she's bought me a shirt memorializing Matthew Macfadyen as Mr. Darcy, a pillow

shaped like a dinosaur chicken nugget, and a Harry Styles-themed book sleeve. She fills me in on all the Taylor Swift drama she knows, which I treat like a reality TV show. She's studying to be a nurse and regularly cajoles us into helping her practice taking blood pressure or pulse. She describes her fashion sense, which is rife with florals and sweaters and scrubs, as "slutty grandma," but I had to provide the "slutty" part because she never says vulgar things, absolutely never swears—unless it's the "fuck" in "All Too Well (10 Minute Version)." Maria and I rejoiced the day we got her to say the word "bitch," so foreign was it to her blonde-haired, doe-eyed pixie persona.

Then there was Chris, who Heather and Sarah introduced to me at dinner. She introduced herself with a handshake, and it was a very good one at that. Very firm, very heavy eye contact. She's one of the loudest people I've ever met, so her close friendship with Sarah was especially funny—the boisterous puppy next to a very chill kitten. She practiced operatic runs in the shower and once convinced me to steal a carton of oat milk from the COG. She'll speak Italian at you if you're not careful, neglect to mention the translation, then guffaw and give you a look that signals to you she probably just cussed you out. Being an RA made total sense for her—it's like she had too much personality to share with us, so she needed to share it with others. She likes math and wants to be a teacher. I can picture her five years from now hopping up and down in front of a classroom of 12-year-olds and emphatically teaching them PEMDAS. She wears her lanyard around her neck like a freshman because otherwise she *would* lose them, and she threatens to overshare at any moment, like a pot about to boil.

These girls are so important to me, yet it feels like meeting them and becoming friends is lost to time. I asked them all recently what they could remember about it, and they all responded with similar dazed looks as if confused by their own inability to recollect something that happened only three years ago.

We've taken those moments for granted, our current friendship overriding any memories of a time before. For a group so bent on remembering things, it's a strange lapse in our shared history.

How did you all meet? *In college*, we can say, *but don't ask for details. We don't remember.*

Oh God.

We don't remember.





## October 19th

It's Maria's turn for family dinner this week, but she's cutting it pretty close, considering it's already Saturday. She hasn't done her weekly chore—taking out the garbage and recycling—yet either, but neither have I—sweeping and Swiffering the floor—so who am I to throw stones?

She makes potato soup, something about it being perfect weather, and we all sit hunched over our small circular dining table. We're all exhausted, so the sound of spoons scraping against bowls fills the silence rather than conversation. Midterms have been slowly leeching us of joy, so pale-faced and defeated are we.

It's 4:30 pm on a Saturday, but we're all in pajamas, and no one has left the apartment yet today. Perfect weather for soup, yet I couldn't tell you what the temperature is outside.

We're eating so early because Maria has work in an hour, and then she'll be back in time for our Halloween cookie decorating. I've vowed to wake up for that, to work up the energy to engage with my friends for the first time in weeks. Now is not the time. Now is time for soup.

Sarah suddenly gets up from the table. Maria's eyes are on her instantly, and my eyes are on Maria. Kate's eyes are on her soup. Sarah ducks her head and walks into the kitchen, bashfully putting her bowl into the microwave. The soup is boiling hot, but Sarah cooks it on high for an additional minute-thirty.

Rolling my eyes, I focus back on my food as Maria shakes her head and sighs, "Who let her into the group?"

They all laugh, Sarah loudest of all. I let a smile crack my stoic, soup-focused face.

I mumble, "Heather," around my spoon, then look up and suddenly realize. I point at Kate, sitting across from me. "And her."

Maria playfully slaps her hand onto the table, rattling the silverware. "Dammit, Kate!"

Sarah returns to the table, carefully holding her steaming bowl with oven mitts. The three of us watch her as she ladles soup into her spoon, takes a bite as if it's not degrees away from boiling, and hums out a fake-sounding, yet 100% sincere, "Mmmmmmmmmmm, that's yummy. Thank you, Maria!"

“You’re welcome, Sar,” Maria says, shaking her head again, “You psycho.”



Why do people become friends? Temperament? Personality? Shared interests?

What brings people together?

The answer is complicated and inconclusive, like many things in life. I interviewed people from work and classes who were outside of my friend group, and their answers were predictable:

“I think our personalities are kind of similar, so we just clicked in that way, and we also have a lot of the same interests and hobbies.”

“We just spend a lot of time together, even still. We’ve lived together all four years, and we share everything with each other.”

“I feel like we relate a lot more to the same things and actually grew up watching a lot of the same shows and sometimes we’ll just, like, quote things to each other and no one else will know what’s going on.”

Asking what makes people become friends is like asking about falling in love. It’s just as indescribable, just as mystical a process, yet people act like there’s a formula to follow.

Be normal, like the same things, *live together*.



We met Maria on February 18, 2022, at 11:45 am. I know this date exactly because we treated it like a job interview, not a casual lunch with someone who might room with us during the next school year.

The five of us—me, Heather, Kate, Sarah, and Chris—had already picked out a six-person suite in Twohy, and since our group was so tightly wound, we wanted someone who could either join the group or get out of our way if necessary and not be hurt by being left

out. Chris had texted her choir group chat to ask if anyone needed a room, and Maria had responded almost immediately.

We met her in the COG that Friday morning. Chris, our go-between, was noticeably absent because “something came up.” Sarah had class. Heather, Kate, and I, a perfect trifecta of socially awkward and off-putting charm, would do reconnaissance on this so-called Maria and then report back to the group. We all sat on one side of the table, leaving Maria to sit across from us, nervous and frankly intimidated.

“And I was terrified of you. You were short, and you just had RBF (resting bitch face),” Maria told me recently when I asked about that first meeting. “Heather was, like, so open. Kate was pretty cool. You never know what’s going on in Kate’s mind, even to this day, but she was very welcoming. You were, too. You were just your awkward self.”

We four ended up talking for more than an hour, getting to know Maria, and trying to be normal in front of her. By the end of the day, we’d decided to live together. By the end of the month, we were hanging out. She invited us to celebrate her birthday with her in early March, and we included her on movie nights and dinners. I bought a matching friendship ring with her; I studied abroad with her; I held her when she cried over a boy and when she cried over nothing at all. She’s done the same for me on multiple occasions, stroked my hair and let me monopolize her time with my thoughts and fears. I barge into her room in the mornings to ask if she wants coffee and end up getting under the covers with her. I call her mother Momma Tonya and she calls my dad Papa John. Every “my stomach hurts” and “I’m so tired” is met with an “I’m sorry” and “that sucks, babe.” Every “What if we just didn’t go to school today?” is met with a heavy sigh and a “We gotta.” When I make a Michael Jackson-esque *hee-hee* sound from my room, I’ll inevitably hear a responding *hee-hee* from hers, our weird form of Marco Polo echolocation. To quote *Step Brothers*, a movie Maria has been trying to get me to watch for forever, *Did we just become best friends?!*

After that Friday, Maria was seamlessly, immediately, of course, part of our group.

When hadn’t she been?



## October 19th, later on

I sit among my friends, knowing it's the last time we'll decorate Halloween cookies together. It's a tradition, one of many contrived reasons for all four of us to gather in our tiny living room and do something pointlessly fun. The box of Target brand sugar cookie/hockey pucks was purchased three weeks ago and is called "Haunted Friends." *How apt.* The options are bats, pumpkins, ghosts, and kittens with tiny tubes of purple and orange frosting. Sarah, very satisfied with herself, slaps a large plastic tub of fluorescent green frosting onto the coffee table. "I got this too!" she says with a grin.

There's a movie—*Deadpool 2*—on in the background, and it was meant to stay there, but I'm cramping and staring at the popcorned ceiling; Maria is bustling around in the kitchen making a different set of cookies—"homemade, not like those shitty ones!"—Kate is on her phone researching which Pokémon she could design in frosting—"I wanna make the ghost not-ghosty"—so Sarah is actually watching the movie, a very un-Sarah thing to do when there's a craft to be done. It's part of Maria's effort to expose Sarah to "culture," and it's actually working this time.

This activity, which had been added to our shared Outlook calendar a week ago as "Cookie Decorating!!!!!! Be there or be square," was meant as an escape. Apart from our 4:30 pm dinner, we've hardly seen one another all week. I'd had this vision of us crowded around the coffee table, one on each side, giggling like little girls, frosting cookies with our fingers like toddlers given free rein over a paint set. I had thought of this night as our catch-up: I have something to say about my week, an assignment, a joke I thought of days ago. But I say none of it. I stare at the ceiling.

Moments of connection between us nowadays happen in the hallways of our apartment, on the threshold of a bedroom, in transitional spaces. *Just popping in to say hi, but I have to get back to work now.* We see each other in passing. School has become busy, too busy. Our adult lives are creeping into the apartment, trickling in like the first of the floodwaters. Planning activities for us to do seemed like a way for us to keep in touch. Ridiculous, really, for us to schedule time together when we live within the same 1,400 square feet.

We merely sit in exhausted, contented, and occasionally interrupted silence, gravitating around one another, watching *Deadpool 2* because I guess we need to.

No one else is thinking about the imminent ending looming in our future, or at least no one voices it. For which I'm grateful.



In freshman year, Kate created a Google Doc called "Roomie Quote Log." It stemmed from one hangout, when all six of us went out to dinner, then back to Coughlin, our designated hangout dorm, where we all half-heartedly did homework and played games. It was close to finals, so we all had work to do, but we spent more time quipping at one another.

We thought we were hilarious, especially together.

For the next four years, there's been an understanding between us, an unspoken agreement that if you say something particularly funny and/or stupid, someone will write it down. As if we were all fangirls obsessing over one another, constantly performing, always ready to whip out our phones and smirk at each other. *That's going in the quote log.*

"If you paid me enough money, I'd deck a child." – Lucy

"Dyslexic and Sad"? That sounds like the next 'Naked and Afraid.'" – Heather

"Sometimes I just wanna be a housewife and bake all day. Minus the children." – Maria

"I see things. I don't acknowledge them." – Kate

"Group hug!... Grug!!" – Sarah

"It's the perfect amount of janky." – Chris

There's a need for us to remember how funny we were, then, how much fun we had together, then. Sometimes, I go through the document to look at what we've said, even though the humor slowly fades as we get further from the laughs. I like to remember all of us together, unafraid to be weird around each other even though we knew someone might immortalize our words. *I'm being watched, but if they are my audience, I don't care. I will gladly perform for them.*

In ten years, our quote log will be an artifact of random attributions, all context lost, like finding carvings on the walls of an ancient prison cell. *What were they trying to say? What did it all mean? Why would they record this?*

It was all so very important to us once.



The more I work on this, the more I want to stop because of how much it's making me think about endings, about loneliness, about growing up, growing apart. What's even worse: I find reminders everywhere I go.

A hold for an audiobook came in on my library app: *You Are Here*, by David Nicholls. I was excited by the premise and the cast of narrators, but the opening chapter hit me full in the chest and stopped me in my tracks as I was getting ready for class:

Where had everyone gone? Now thirty-eight, she had grown up in the golden age of friendship... The late-night phone-calls, the texts, the outings and board games, it had all been so much more exciting and fulfilling than her erratic love life, and hadn't she once been good at it?

One of my favorite YouTubers released a new video. "Why is it so hard to make friends as an adult?" she said as she dabbed concealer onto her cheeks. I had to click off.

A clip of John Mulaney on *SNL* in 2018 came onto my YouTube recommended page. I gave myself a five-minute break from homework and watched it, enjoying myself until a certain punchline: "I wanna write songs for people in their thirties called 'Tonight's No Good, How 'Bout Wednesday? Oh, You're in Houston on Wednesday? Oh, Ok, Well Then, Let's Just Not See Each Other for Six Months, and It Doesn't Matter at All!'"

The audience laughed. I did not.

I can't help but think about the ending of *Friends*, the ending of *Community*, of people growing up, growing away from one another, living lives separate from their usual hangout spots. No more Central Perk, no more study room. Reaching for the sun on separate paths.

I remember that episode of *How I Met Your Mother* when the main character realizes his friends have lives that have superseded him.

"Look around, Ted. You're all alone."



I asked my school's YikYak page, "Do you think your friendship group will last beyond college?" hoping for some joke answers. Something light, something fun. A silly anecdote to add to this story.

"Nope my friend group didn't even last freshmen year." Yikes.

"I think the main thing that determines that is where u all end up afterwards." Fair enough.

"Coming from someone on the older end, it never stays the same. Cherish the memories but don't expect them to stay around forever. People change whether that's for the best or not."

I feel worse.



The "Forge Lifelong Bonds" banner is openly mocking me now. It feels pointed, facing my apartment building like a sunflower faces the sun. *Don't forget*, it tells me, and I feel like I've forgotten something.

Worry creeps in.



Senior year rears its head, and I couldn't be more conflicted. I desperately want to graduate; I've fallen so far out of love with academia but graduating means saying goodbye. To a chapter of my life and the friends that peopled it.

At what point do you know you've made a lifelong friend?

Do you ever know?

How can you?

I'm 22 years old, and I've only made about a dozen good friends. I've seen the world only through a slowly widening lens that forever threatens to focus on the wrong things. What do I know of lifelong relationships? I hardly know what I've experienced. I can't remember it all.

What if proximity is also the key to these relationships, and once I graduate, I'll never speak to these people again? It's been known to happen. What if the talk of bridesmaids, godmothers, and "the fun aunt" are all padding out the runtime? Filling the silence with platitudes?

What is friendship, anyway?

Getting out there, putting in an effort, rubbing up against personalities, and learning to coexist, oil and water in a teacup.



## October 31st

Wonderland is closed, so we decide to go to Flatstick Pub. Laser tag plans shift into mini-golf plans. Shitty beers and shitty wings have now been replaced by overpriced cocktails and slightly-less-shitty wings.

We play a half-round of golf between dinner and dessert, the wings of our fairy costumes flapping with each stroke of the club. It's 8 pm, way too early for the place to be crowded, so we can take our time with it, which we do. I predictably lose, and Kate predictably wins, but I feel like I get a pass, as I am drunk and she is not. Sarah's our designated driver—she doesn't drink—but she still plays ten over par. Maria, drunker than I am, manages 11 over par. I'm 15 over. Kate is three under, and I'm convinced she's cheating because she's in charge of the scorecard. She's way too noble for that, but I argue the point anyway.

Earlier in the night, I was on the couch in the living room of our apartment, watching Maria and Sarah ping-pong back and forth between each other's rooms while getting ready. Kate sat in an armchair and stared off into space, tired from a week of bio and psych exams, while I read a book for class because I had a presentation to prepare for. *No days off, not even Halloween.*

Both Sarah and Maria emerged from behind a cloud of glitter and hairspray, finally ready to take group photos.

Maria said, "This is our last Halloween in college! We gotta live it up!!"

Sarah said, "I think the one annotating a book over there begs to differ."

I looked up to see the three of them, wings and wands and all, staring at me. Evelyn the Mermicorn Fairy (Kate), Grace the Glitter Fairy (Sarah), and India the Moonstone Fairy (Maria) all stared at Libby the Story Writer Fairy (me). Our wands each had a crocheted charm (courtesy of Kate) attached to the end—Sarah with a star, Maria with a moon, Kate with a weird mermaid-unicorn hybrid, and me with a book. Our wings and wands were from Amazon, our outfits from a thrift store. Only Sarah had her book to use as a reference in



the photo, since I forgot to pick up the rest from the Spokane Public Library. I was tired, busy, and in desperate need of a shower, but so were the rest of them.

They stared at me, and I closed the book on my pencil, grinning sheepishly.

As we left, Kate said, "We're gonna have a good time, dammit!" and the rest of us whooped.

I took my book with me but left it in the car.

I don't remember much about that night, but I know I had fun.



We put down the aliens when we leave.

As of May 12th, 2025, my alien will be the only one up. The rest will be tucked away into suitcases, made into a keychain, or maybe left behind on the counter by the door. Maybe one of them will stay down while mine stays up, forgotten and forever lying face-down. I'll have to mail it to them.

*Up when you're home, down when you're gone.*

I have until the day after we graduate. That's 151 days from right now, December 12th, 2024.

Whether these bonds are lifelong remains to be seen.

But I continue to hope.

# ALLERGIES

Maddox Reimer

Pollen pop,  
grass rash,  
clay crack.

Circle  
the block,  
find friends,

trespass. Nail  
splits shoe, rust  
blooms in blood.

Forget that:  
grab the bone,  
twist until

it snaps.  
Hold up  
the bigger half.

# GRANDMA'S HOUSE

Jackson Weber

Kids divvy up time on wiffle ball games;  
sweet, wet grass filling toes and nose  
alike with a certain keen liquor.

The bees are their spectators;  
fair, long, buzzing bodies cementing  
yellow breeze, coming in dreams of smoke.

In earnest glee, skin-bone shorts round the bases,  
faring well under the ransomed sky  
from which falls pink lemonade.

Like a spoiled sun, burnt orange on the table,  
with plain salami sandwiches, left the crust,  
paper plates empty emerge joyous and soar.

Among the children, in their sweaty swaggers,  
words of humiliation float, ill words for great,  
mean bastards to shout. They are young and know  
no better.

Give to them love that in the future, they'll grow;  
spine-less seed birthed in mercury mistaken  
for milk. Dropt blood is beyond their painted fingers.

Soak them in pools of marmalade, let them lay  
their tethered heads down softly and surely,  
you'll find unladen, this reminder:

*entropy does not mean death.*

The butterfly thoughts of children;  
their man-eating roaches and hercules ants.  
Uncorked, they hose the scorched earth with

honey, it is from their lips, but quick to sand,  
heavy in their mouth. Fear the fate of Daedalus;  
strike flint hard on rock, hear fury in the sound.

In the dawn of serendipity, what other voices  
can be heard singing? Oil-toothed Orville  
Redenbacher bursting forth as his popcorn?

Mist bearing ever present on foreheads inclined  
to glide upon rivulets of creased skin, down low,  
soak, bear weight on the loose fabric that hangs.

Kids stand so lurid in their shirts, they stare straight  
so as to cut you in their path. They're gathered now,  
one upon the other, statues that can lend a hand.



**12:21 AM**  
Kate McGuigan

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*A deer in motion? Or a creature unable to maintain its corporeal form as it glides across empty fields? This piece explores the stories we can create in the mundane—it all just depends on your perspective. 12:21 am is a mixed media piece that uses acrylic paint and colored pencil.*

# AGAIN TOMORROW

Grace Applegate

**2025 Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Awards Recipient  
Poetry, First Place**

Chronos  
and lime and interim,  
granules of fine  
dust, lord:  
I am not worthy  
of sun, salmon,  
military saint that sips  
from my aunt's great lake,  
abbot outside her birch-backed  
home, the topoi of some ancient text.  
She is never neutral—steps  
through reservoirs of immense fire,  
is baptized by men in Gaelic churches,  
by tongues running on some  
sacred, syllabic power.  
We, illiterate, look on for text  
but she draws up a picture,  
trade documents, short psalms  
that recite nature's prayer  
indefinitely,  
in all of us, perhaps  
incorrectly,  
in the faerie that alights on a child's wrist:  
a secret language—while we  
spend our later years caught up in  
translation.

# IN THE WIND

Jim Hanlen

dandelion dander  
rumor all the banks collapsing  
gossip of Tom, the bridge master  
    dust in Darfur  
kids screaming on the school swing sets  
no agreement of the number dead  
    out of the pick-up bed

something not recalled  
the past present tense  
yesterday's news  
Brenda's silk dress flying  
    out of the pick-up bed



# LOST DOG

Maddox Reimer

The neighbors are out  
taping posters to stop  
signs: George, the corner  
yorkie, has left home.

Reward money!  
Get on a bike,  
hold this flashlight,  
whistle near the woods.

Sebastian found him,  
two days later, with a hole  
In his stomach. Coyotes.  
He wrapped the body

in an old bedsheet, arranged  
it gently on the doorstep;  
he couldn't break the news,  
couldn't ask for the cash.

# THE FILTHIEST OF FRIENDS

Jackson Weber

The dirt becomes chalk on your skin.  
It's wet, it's wet, and sticky like swimming,  
Anticipation a hornet's nest, buzz brimming,

Bunkered crowd leaves ya little dead and unwilling.  
Stare at pant legs and down at brown shoes.  
Sure, you feel terrible, don't call it the blues.

*Where's your mother, child?* Well, you haven't a clue.  
The woman's an enigma, place taken and tied rope,  
Wherever she's gone, give a stretched lung to cope.

It makes it harder at night, when you fling, and you grope.  
Understandably false. But you shan't, and you won't  
Because though lost and confused, run until don't.

Till you sweat out your eyes and they have to be sewn.  
Raggedy thing-a-ding, unfortunate sod.  
Spend your hours reading to a goddamn dog.

He's good at it, pays attention, even nods along,  
Though please give him rest if you wish him to speak back.  
Underneath devil black eyes and yellow fur pack

Is a wisdom which softly ferments. Find the lack.  
Anyway, he's great to have found  
Not just for the depressing, whimpering sound

Or for the birds he kills, then proudly brings 'round  
No, you love that you can see where his feet touch the ground.

# I'M BEST AT LOSING FRIENDS

Aislyn Ross

I cut my finger on printer paper  
today. The skin gaped, and a drop  
of red rolled off  
the curve of my fingernail, falling  
into lukewarm cocoa.  
I half-expected the blood to spread  
to stain my drink with its dark,  
savory humanness  
like how we stain each other with  
laughter, crying and face-timing  
hours deep in the night.  
But the drop just slipped  
into the milky-brown liquid,  
no trace left of its almost-existence.

I used to spend my winters  
carving forts out of snow and ice  
the plowman had piled in the center  
of the cul-de-sac. I'd rush out  
before school to pack more snow  
into its slowly softening walls.  
One day, I woke to find my fort  
gone, melted away  
by the warmth of late-April.  
I stared at the carcass of slush  
as it gave into black gravel.  
These days, I like to watch snowflakes  
settle on my pinkish palm, and do nothing  
to suspend the moments  
before they melt.

# TO CAPITULATE

Jackson Weber

Jumping in the lake of trout, floundering with a mask of terror  
planted squarely, in the seat of my eyes, on the plant of my soul,  
I refuse to be cold. I'd especially

Suggest a warmer place of better compassion, a lifted softness  
from winds pining for air, of its calm. If one were to know me,  
they'd say I could take it, but I never could,

Not the cold nor the sight of love in misguided eyes, looking at  
knees bare and blazing, the restive dreary that spins them on.  
They smile so and so and bide their time like their time

Lacks authenticity, they're apparitions of previous doters,  
so layered in their lovely thoughts that it hides them away.  
From wrappings ten tongues deep, they're lodged in a

Spectacular view, carbon printed and melting like microwaved  
butter. It's made me bitter, all of this, the fuss, the congealed  
friendships, so smooth, and yet. I need a retort, a burning

Of the memory card. Send it to sizzle down among the gutter's  
treasures, I'll smoke it back for a nickel along with a cigarette  
and a pack of Pokémon cards. Flowers in a vase on the table

With a bright pink card, feel dragging the child's lost hopes.  
A filtered split: I reckon it's damn past the age that one take  
my bitter swallows; shall I sink into the beloved, desperate  
mendacity?



## NO SKIN

Stephanie Borla

## ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*No Skin is a digital artwork centered on the experience of masking. In this piece, the artist unapologetically sheds her skin, the barrier that once protected her from the outside world and its judgment, and steps forward in her true form. For the first time, she navigates the world on her own terms, both fearful and exhilarated. No Skin is the exhale of relief that comes with no longer hiding for the comfort of others.*

# METRONOME

Jamieson McHenry

There's a pinhole in diaphanous plastic,  
stretched across the threshold.

Air funnels in measured, meager inhales,  
weaseling in, traipsing along cellophane,  
caught on transparency,  
pooling around the "oh" of your mouth,  
clicking in for entry.

One at a time.

Backed up a mile long, stretching around the bend.

Once it arrives,

if it arrives,

you breathe in.

Drink.

Let it stagger forward and circulate.

Lips to lungs to heart to head.

Just enough to subsist.

Just enough to speckle stars in the pitch.

Just enough to cool the flame and fan it.

# CONCERTO

Maddox Reimer

The neighbor is hoisting a piano to the second floor.

He orchestrates a cluster of pulleys and pivots  
from out the window, signaling at the quartet of friends below  
like he is aiming an airplane into a terminal. The tall one,

a regionally-known cellist, forgot a buckle, so they  
bring it back down. Abuse is hurled; he curses himself  
while fumbling with the straps. Another try.

I go out to poke around my mailbox, an excuse to see  
the action. “Oy-hoy!” they hail, and in a moment I am gripping rope  
beneath a thousand pounds of black lacquered wood,  
considering gravity, a violent ending.

We finish the job, and he brings a cooler of beer.  
I shake hands, meet the musicians, and make my way home.

By eight, the clarion chords of Rachmaninoff begin to spill out  
the still-open window; they stop, shouts sound, and start again—





## BACKSTAGE

Sophia Micciche

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*Whether you're involved in sports, theater, or dance, the feeling before a "performance" is universal. Anxiety paired with excitement is such a human feeling. I wanted to capture, through watercolor, that feeling of being backstage before a big performance with all of your teammates as you all mentally prepare in your personal and unique way.*

# A BALLAD OF LETTING GO

Julia Porter

When darkness covers the night sky  
And stars are glittering  
You can see her under the moon,  
In the starlight twirling.

She is dancing with the shadows,  
She is dancing with ghosts.  
Spinning round the empty meadow  
She lets her partners go.

The music only she can hear  
Reaches its crescendo  
As she races across the field—  
And jumps at the last note.

So she had her one secret dance  
Away from prying eyes.  
With the ghosts from her memories  
She said her own goodbyes.

# AFTER RAIN

Harrison Mains

The clouds hang over the sky like wet tissues,  
air is heavy with moisture, and the sidewalks  
and roads smell of concrete coming into bloom.

Patches of moisture cover the once-dry street  
like many, small bandages; the ground, the air,  
the sky all healing from the summer's dry heat.

Occasional raindrops greet the skin and offer  
a final and slow goodbye; signaling the parting  
of the rain and kissing away the air's moisture.

As if to say: "Thanks, you're welcome, and goodbye"  
without a promise of return.

Is everything falling back into place again? The wind  
brushes over my back like a gentle hug, the rain falls  
like quiet piano notes to a song I could forever listen.

The last notes sink into the ground before me,  
with the uneasiness of a crying child put to bed  
too early, or the subtle patter of a tip-toeing ghost;

How will I connect today to tomorrow,  
and yesterday to the one before?

We sit in silence. I am hesitant to move, or talk,  
and only the trees hum a stifled whisper. A yellow  
butterfly glides, flaps, circles, and chuckles away.

As if to say: "Thanks, you're welcome, and goodbye"  
without a mention of the rain.



# REFLECTING ON NATURE

Julia Lealos

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*There is so much complexity in nature yet the simple beauty of it leaves the viewer reflecting on how beautiful our world truly is.*

# THE WISHBONE

Alexis Sandoval

Make a wish before you  
crack the clavicle.

A bird, like your wish,  
needs that bone to fly.

I doubt a bird has ever  
wished for this—

the brace of

its wings split

by hands that will

never know flight.

# SEA WORLD

Maddox Reimer

The dolphin is dead.  
It sinks to the bed  
of the petting pool.  
A teenager whisks  
gawkers away;  
ropes off the exhibit.  
Kids look around  
their parents' waists;  
see the gray-white heap,  
the dancer, the juggler.



# SATURN

Roland Allen

## ***After Goya***

You've won!

You've won!

Did you enjoy?

Did the teeth massage your skull?

Did his Cortex slide nicely on your canines?

Switch between—

Astroworld, Rach 2, and Die Lit

On a five minute drive.

Feel the Zyn slide on your gums as you chew

hippocampus. You'll taste the sonnets he forgot!

Listen to your reels before Dad Comes!

Everything is hunger and the belly is full of bones.

All is here. You and your meal.

You *worked* for your money. Stocks are at a billion.

What is a billion anyways?

Have you seen it?

Felt it?

Was a billion in your son?

I am behind you now. Wrists are trapped. Breath is wet.

It is not anyone's fault in this chiaroscuro

With anything you want... I would eat too...

And those page-eaters, the damn stylites.

“Literature is dead!” they cut knuckles vomiting  
Dickens, Kafka and Camus—

“How many did you swallow sir?”

“Oh about fifty.”

“And what did the ink do to you?”

“Nothing.”

But they are not real.

Everything is here today. All you could ever want,  
And someone is missing, stuck in the Heart.



**IN BED**

Jackson Weber

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*A man in bed, holding a television, staring off into space. The meaninglessness of modern-day existence with the hours spent on screens, letting the endless content wash over you. Though such an experience is kind of peaceful and calming, it is also anxiety-inducing and, therefore, there is no great happiness or terrible depression as a result. The result, ultimately, is apathy. Made with oil pastels.*

# BRUTALISM

Maddox Reimer

Concrete teeth, sunlight  
ricochets between the words  
of sirens and street preachers.  
Our best buildings stand  
stiff, scrape sky like razors  
on a wrist. Let's watch glass  
crack, that groan and spit,  
that jagged geometry of rain  
dropped from cloud veins;  
fall like pennies, sacred  
weights, something to hold.

# PARKING LOT EXCAVATION

Gwendolyn Mitchell

Dirty pail's full  
Dead log's dry  
Scratched-up knees  
bleed down your thighs  
Old and new gravel  
re-laid every year  
crushes under trowels  
tremblin' with fear  
Fill up the bucket  
Fill it up fast  
Smell the stone dust  
Know it'll last  
Parking lot excavation  
Look down below  
At what's left of your nation  
Dig faster and you'll be alive  
Give it four years  
I hope you survive  
but keep digging  
It's all you can do  
'Fore they bury you  
and build something new

# DRAWING

Scarlett Johnson

In the mushy darkness of my dream  
I saw the outline of her body  
Leaned over the sink  
She tried to keep quiet  
Tears streaming down her face  
Teeth clenched over her fist  
Gurgling noises covered  
The silence  
In dread  
In disbelief  
I didn't move as she  
Crumbled over and  
Blood began to drip  
No smell, just the feeling  
Of a decomposition  
Quick, quick  
Her body rots in front of the mirror  
She tries to yell, but  
Gurges  
Black unidentifiable mass  
Bubbling under her feet  
She is crying  
And her body finally fails  
Collapsing on my bathroom floor  
Human form detaching from her  
From who she was  
I cannot reach her, or grab her, or help her  
I do not help her  
She melts into the tile  
The clean, white, sterile tile  
Embedded now with her liver  
Her stomach  
Her heart

When I wake up  
I wake up and  
I am  
I am still here and  
I am  
I am  
I am.



# DEAD LAMB ON MY BATHROOM FLOOR

Aislyn Ross

rubber neck bowing as I lift the form of you,  
loose like the flaccid strands of sea grass  
washed ashore. I never saw you move on your own.  
the ceiling light is warm, but you are warmer,

swaddled in a blanket as dense  
as your fresh cream coat.  
pale eyes dip like empty snow globes  
shifting away from the light.

as your mother's milk drips down  
your still muzzle,  
do you even know you are gone?  
quiet one, soft sleeping virgin,

what does it feel like to lose  
before you could begin?

# AN ACT OF MERCY

Charlotte Ury

It was an incredibly easy decision: a hot woman had come up to her at the bar and asked if she wanted to fuck and she said yes because she did. So they had sex, which was fun and just okay, and then they went their separate ways.

Now Terese was at Safeway buying groceries and contemplating if it was really cheating if her relationship was basically over. The fluorescent lights whispered their electric, grainy messages. As she reached for the apples, her cotton shirt stuck to her sweaty arm like a second foreign skin. This whole store made her feel insane: it was almost the exact layout as the one back home, except the drink aisles were on the opposite side of the store. To think, you could move ten states and drive 12 hours, and the only difference would be the way you slightly stumbled when you went to the next aisle.

Before they had moved, Terese had looked at photos of Arizona with hope: orgasmic portraits of purple, orange, red, and yellow gorges, larger-than-life cacti, the endless starry night sky. Lindsey's pretentious poet friend called the desert "the last breaths of the Western myth of freedom," which Terese scoffed at but secretly admired. She would've called it a desert so big you could scream in it and no one would hear.

She had thought, this would be new! And for a while, it was. But it turns out that anywhere you go in America ends up being the same stretch of fast-food stores and suburbs and long stretches of roads with no crosswalks.

She hadn't even been to the canyons yet, despite them being there for three months now. By the time the weekend rolled around, they were both too tired to do much of anything else besides complain about their jobs. She had googled tents for sale but for the price, she would have to go on at least two trips for it to make any sort of sense. Besides, Lindsey didn't really like hiking or camping. She liked the kind of nature she could control from home.

Terese looked for the right brand of toothpaste between shelf after shelf of artificial sameness. It all felt incredibly trite: the same store she had been to a million times, the ways she texted her friends

about their boring boyfriends, the same list of groceries, the shitty shows she half-watched on Netflix while she went on her phone.

She wondered when her life had stopped its momentum.

It felt like her life had been one big race and she was pumping her arms and legs as fast as she could, panting with the exhilarating rush, so fast she felt like she was losing control of her body and that she might fall down from the sheer force of every cell being agitated in her arms and legs in one perfect moment and everything aligned to cross the finish line and then she blinked, and she realized she was in a Safeway in the middle of nowhere, Arizona to buy Colgate for a woman she loved but didn't like, because the other toothpaste brands hurt her teeth.

As she waited in the checkout line, she opened and closed Instagram. Checked the Weather app — still 114 degrees and would be until 6 pm. Looked at a few texts. Reopened Instagram.

An old woman coughed behind her, a dry bark. Terese wanted to grab her and tell her, "Oh my God, I had so much potential. I could've been something better than this." But to do that, she would have to know what *this* was.

This was a grocery store in Arizona on the hottest day of the year. This was peaking on a D2 college track team. This was something so heavy it weighed her down into periods where air couldn't properly enter her lungs.

When she thought of going home to their orange and black angular apartment complex, the pit in her stomach grew. That morning, she had seen Lindsey on the balcony, tucked into some wilting lettuce and cabbage plants. Lindsey called herself a 21st-century homesteader, convinced she could grow herself a full meal. Terese knew that nothing she planted would make it through the winter. They didn't talk about anything that morning. Terese said she was going to the store and did she need anything? Lindsey gave a customer-service smile: no, nothing at all. It was always nothing, nothing, nothing. If Terese went back to the apartment, she would suffocate in the nothingness.

So instead, she got in the car and drove in the direction of the canyons. She listened to a podcast where two friends got into pointless fights over which housewife was bitchier. She switched it off halfway through — the radio was mainly ads.

When she got there, she parked and walked to the canyon, waiting for it all to hit her in the blazing sun. It was just as multicol-

ored and vibrant as it was in the photos, surrounded by a sky so big it felt like she could fall backward into nothingness.

She stood patiently in the rust to feel wonder, fear, joy, the “last breaths of the Western myth of freedom.” Instead, everything felt like a prop from a straight-to-streaming movie set, just the slightest bit blurred at the edges.

She screamed. A bunch of tourists screamed back.

### **I am, I am, I am**

The heat carried Lindsey down, cradled her. It was comforting in its suppressiveness, the way she couldn’t think properly. People drawled their words: time dripped down the fridge.

She read in the news that a family had gone hiking in the canyons. They all died because they didn’t bring enough water and got lost. A whole family, a mom and a dad and a daughter and two sons very lost in the stifling desert heat. Wandering the same path over and over again as the sun continued its lazy ascent up. Now dead.

She felt the urge to do a Hail Mary but didn’t remember what came after “The Lord is with thee.” Lindsey pried open dry lips and said what she could remember anyway. The words lazily dissipated in the silence.

If she pretended hard enough, she could see the last vibrations of it disappear into the sun. One last secret between her and the universe.

She knew her girlfriend slept with someone else because the other girl had sent a message: it started with an innocent “Hey girl.” By the end of the girl’s long paragraph, she dully realized she should’ve felt something. She didn’t. Probably why Terese had cheated on her.

She wondered if she and Terese were to go to the canyons and get lost, how long they would try to leave the desert before they gave up. Lindsey could imagine it now: a blurry mirage of their bodies clinging to each other as they tried and tried and tried.

Every breath she took felt like the same one, recycled from her lungs already. The same breath repeated forever and ever. Amen.



## CONFRONTING THE UNKNOWN

Isabel Koerner

## ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*When we experience a space that is utterly void of congestion, pollution, and artificial chaos, the stars shine in a dazzling display. The clarity within the blue-black sky reflects clarity within the soul. As the soul clears, a vast space opens up, which is soon filled with a current of creation. Captured by all are the unwavering hands of self.*

*This piece speaks to Isabel's time abroad in Far North Queensland, Australia, with the School for Field Studies. This experience allowed for an escape from the pervasive technology and the many distractions that most humans are societally bound to. Before departure, Isabel experienced significant reluctance to isolate herself in a remote location, largely due to it being filled with some of the deadliest animals in the world. After mere days in the rainforest, it was evident that the dangers there proved to be more deceptive myth than truth. The key to finding satisfaction there was enjoying the unpredictability and novelty of the setting. Confronting the Unknown speaks to the duality of the human experience, and of the diverging paths we face.*

### *Materials:*

*Saran wrap, silk scarf, fabric, cardstock, charcoal, acrylic paint, wire.*

# ON DISAPPEARING TWICE

Rowyn O'Connor

There was a time when I trusted medical professionals to take my pain seriously; a time when I believed they were above doing harm. Though chronic pain has now characterized nearly half of my life, mine started with an acute injury. I didn't know anyone else my age with chronic pain until the year that the COVID-19 pandemic began, when I joined a virtual art summer camp for youth with chronic pain. The more I surrounded myself with other chronically ill people, the more I learned how rare my experience is. Medical gaslighting is incredibly, disturbingly common. I believe the villainization of chronic illness sufferers by the medical community is to blame. When fed a narrative long enough, we begin to internalize it.

To this day, I dread doctor's appointments. I do copious amounts of research beforehand, preparing to retaliate against dismissal with facts, carefully-worded scripts, and detailed notes. Questions like "how would you rate your pain?" are particularly challenging for me. I am in pain all of the time. Learning to function in constant pain means becoming adept at masking traditional expressions of discomfort- crying, wincing, curling into a ball, etc. Society tells us that we cannot be productive—let alone function—if we are in pain. But millions of people have learned that to an extent, it's not about the pain. It's about how well we hide it. The traditional pain scale, with its linear progression from one to ten and cartoon faces, has not applied to me for years. I recently stumbled upon an alternative pain scale that is more helpful for assessing my pain, as it has a few sentences next to each number, such as "My pain bothers me but I can ignore it most of the time," or "I think about my pain all of the time and give up many activities because of my pain." Once I understand my own pain, I assess the situation: Am I truthful about the severity of my pain at the risk of being told "there's no way" or labeled as drug-seeking? Do I minimize my pain, thus invalidating myself? When I discovered this new pain scale, I realized that although I tend to label my baseline chronic pain as a 4 out of 10, it's really

closer to a six. But since I rarely complain or, even less often, burst into tears, I tell myself it can't be that bad.

In May, I blew off my severe abdominal pain for two days thinking it was ovulation-related, and was convinced I could "tough it out." I could not, in fact, tough it out. I had been relegated to the couch. I had never used recreational substances, but I was considering asking a friend for weed out of desperation. When I finally did call a nurse line at the advice of my father, I was told to go to the ER to rule out appendicitis.

In the emergency department waiting room, a woman cries on the phone. She is expressing frustration at her re-admittance to the waiting room after being told she might have to have emergency brain surgery. (I wasn't trying to eavesdrop. I promise. A combination of excellent hearing and concern for others can mean I pick up on these things.) My father laughs at her. He asks me if I'm nervous, and I say no. I'm telling the truth. Nervous systems will prefer chaos if that is what they are used to. I felt at home in my broken body, in that clinical building, even in its capacity to traumatize.

Despite the severity of my pain, I remained cool as a cucumber. More worried about the doctors finding nothing wrong and gaslighting me than the consequences of appendicitis, I braced myself for dismissal. To my surprise, I was believed—and offered pain meds. But as soon as they found out I had mesenteric adenitis, an appendicitis copycat, they sent me home with instructions to simply alternate ibuprofen and Tylenol. Because I am paranoid, I check the notes in MyChart. In this particular instance, I am described as a "pleasant female" despite my gender identity being listed in my chart. Nothing about pains of psychosomatic origin, but they do misgender me. Of course they ask me if there's any chance I'm pregnant (I'm not sexually active). Though I say no, they run a pregnancy test anyway. I sigh along with uterus owners everywhere.

It is recommended that I follow up with my primary care physician a week after this whole ordeal. At this appointment, my doctor tells me that the next time I have abdominal pain, I should first consider if constipation is the culprit. I don't know whether to laugh or cry. I have managed chronic constipation for my entire life. I am acutely aware of my capacity to shit. Of course I would rule out constipation first. Of course I would rather chug ungodly



amounts of colonoscopy prep and shuffle on and off the toilet for an entire day than go to the emergency room for a battery of tests and uncertainty. The former is certainly cheaper, but that's not what needed to be done, and I knew it.

The term hysteria has been around for centuries, but it started out as a diagnostic label. It comes from the Greek word for womb. Originally, doctors believed a wandering uterus, or later, menstrual hormones, were to blame for any number of symptoms, including sexual dysfunction, seizures, fainting spells, or pain. The "wandering uterus" explanation fell out of favor, but the misogyny remained. Even today we use the word hysteria, often to describe behavior- "crying hysterically;" "laughing hysterically;" "that's hysterical;" "in hysterics."

For years, I had punished my body and hated myself. Sick-ness felt like fate. I spent a good chunk of my adolescence convinced that my health wasn't worth preserving; whether the pain was coming from my faulty nervous system or my self-destructive behavior, I was skilled at telling myself I deserved it. It took a long time, but I learned to challenge those thoughts more actively. By the time I reached my sophomore year of college, I had stumbled into health the way a child learning to walk might, eyes full of wonder. I sported a new tattoo meant to commemorate my recovery. I thrived—and basked in it—for nine blissful months. Life had other plans.

July arrives, and though my lymph nodes are no longer swollen, other symptoms linger. A small dagger seems to lodge itself in my stomach every time I eat. My appetite, usually healthy, retreats after only a few bites of food. I have developed chronic nausea that worsens after eating. The specialist appointment feels like the most important thirty minutes I will have in a long time. For my doctor, it is an inconsequential part of his day. He suspects ulcers, suggests I take a stronger over the counter medication, tells me his team will be in contact to schedule an endoscopy. Then, he leaves. His vanishing from the room is an unfinished sentence. I vomit about once a week until the procedure, my stomach contents splattering violently onto the floor in an acrid puddle.

They fish for a vein before they take me back, and it hurts terribly. A plastic bite block is placed in my mouth. I hold my breath as long as I can, then black out from the propofol. The endoscopy is unremarkable—no answers, no treatment plan. My

hair is thinning. The patches of dry skin rotate places: elbows, forearms, hands, thighs. Bruises appear for no reason. The body aches multiply impressively, until I feel like a marionette made of stiff twine. Hard surfaces hurt the bones in my ass. I sleep too little, wake up half-dead, bargain with death himself.

Mid-September. They don't even read the MyChart messages. I refrain from sending back caustic replies: *Please, for the love of God, just write the referral. I didn't choose to wait two more months for a follow up appointment "if symptoms persist."* ("If symptoms persist"- ha.) Excruciating weeks pass. Finally, I have a referral. My hair has been shedding as I style it, thin autumn strands tangled in wads around my fingers.

For the first time since developing an eating disorder, I protest these physical signs of illness. No longer fascinated with my own disappearance, the neuroses brought on by inadequate nutrition manifest instead as concern for my health. My doctor unfazed, I noted privately the protrusion of bones, the vanishing of flesh. I had unintentionally lost a significant amount of weight. I felt like a shell of myself. *One of these days*, I thought, *I'm going to keel over and cease to exist*. Malnutrition and its consequences can occur at any body size, but medical professionals don't seem to care until someone is unconscious; even then, they must typically be visibly, severely underweight.

And so, I found myself doing my own research and pleading with providers. My gastric emptying study was normal. My CT scan was normal. My bloodwork was normal. In my unprofessional opinion, this meant it was either MALS—a rare abdominal vascular compression syndrome—or endometriosis. I gritted my teeth and waited for Thanksgiving break, for the doctor's appointment upon which my future rested.

The night before Halloween, I wound up in the ER. The pain had increased exponentially, and I told my parents I couldn't wait any longer. The doctors suspected a urinary tract infection. It took three rounds of antibiotics before they thought to tell me the more recent culture was normal, which meant I no longer had an explanation for my worsening symptoms. The nausea was now unresponsive to round-the-clock Dramamine. So, I had to switch to Zofran, an antiemetic known to worsen constipation that also carried the risk of cardiac side effects when taken long-term. I spent most days in too much pain to focus and concentrated instead on

not puking all over the floor. My grades were pitiful, but I was too miserable to care. I was lucky if I changed my clothes every other day. I hadn't showered in two weeks.

In the throes of my eating disorder, I didn't care if I lived or died. Now that I had experienced recovery, I cared very much. My depression, usually controlled with medication, magnified in response to my physical state. I thought about death all the time—it's not that I wanted to die, but death felt imminent, even preferable to what my life had been reduced to—forcing myself to eat, knowing severe pain would follow; fighting with doctors for an explanation; watching friends and activities disappear because I was too unwell to keep up.

Thanksgiving break passed in a blur. The malnutrition made me irritable, and my parents felt the brunt of it. Western medicine having yielded no answers, I saw an acupuncturist trained in traditional Chinese medicine. She diagnosed me with a spleen qi deficiency. The treatment, she said, was to bring warmth back into my body—roughly a dozen thin needles fed with burning mugwort, incorporating ginger into my diet, and avoidance of cold foods. My GI doctor ordered another test to assess small intestine function, but forgot to put in the referral, which meant I'd have to wait until January. The two weeks of school before winter break were a minor cruelty to endure. Fearful of pain and nausea, my only motivation to eat came from a desire to perform well on final exams. I had too much missing work to finish every class, so I ended up with an incomplete grade.

Winter break brought good food, company, and the frustration of not being able to enjoy both. The cinnamon rolls my grandmother made on Christmas morning, as was tradition, left me nauseous. My thoughts turned bitter—*it's Christmas, why can't I just feel normal?*—and I got lost in my roiling stomach. I was paying attention, but it didn't look like it. My mom snapped her fingers to break the "stupor," not meaning anything by it, and I excused myself to my bedroom, where I cried soundlessly before pulling myself together. The days were brutal—near-constant nausea, almost no appetite—but at night, the hunger swooped in with a vengeance, and I found myself eating mindlessly in the kitchen. It was the only time of day I could do so without pain, and I took advantage of it. Of course, this couldn't last forever—I woke up nauseous the next morning, and the cycle began anew.

School resumed for spring term. By some miracle, my hunger cues were returning. Because I was eating enough, I had more energy. To reward myself for making it through the fall semester, I got my eyebrow pierced. Though I had wanted one for over a year, the new piercing was, at a minimum, another responsibility that kept me alive. The improvement in symptoms didn't last, and I would have to keep looking for answers. Despite this, I had maintained my eating disorder recovery. I would never take my ability to eat without pain for granted again.

# HEARTBEAT

Harrison Mains

I don't suffer from chronic pain. But I do live by the drum  
of this beating heart: beating slow and unbothered  
like an old truck, suddenly hiccupping and puttering  
at the first feelings of what I thought was love, because love  
was exciting in the moment, when eyes caught me still,  
steadfast in the rapture of an innocent face.

Staring hard like the cold lines of a father's disappointed face,  
disappointed at thoughtless actions, actions beating at the drum  
that does not feel for others, that can only stay still  
in its own cage, captured like a bird, cawing loudly and unbothered  
by the dread of remorse and memory, by the requirements of love,  
preening and fluttering endlessly, puttering

without aim. I don't suffer from chronic pain, but my heart still putters  
enough to make me worried, enough to make me grimace at your face,  
which glows in mornings of sun melting through blind shades, lovely  
on your soft features, boyish in a way, calm in the early drum  
of daylight, which requires so little, which lets duty go unbothered  
and over easy like warm eggs and coffee still

hot and murky; dark like a two-way mirror which still  
sits between myself and those I love. And I'm puttering  
and spitting out words like an ugly motorboat, unbothered  
by the rules of the sea and the questioning faces  
swimming down below, beneath that murky surface, drumming  
along in their own rhythms, but much too quiet like love

when it matters most. When it really requires attention, when love isn't love, but is the gesture of not talking, or of sitting still with someone and hearing the beat of another drum that goes misunderstood, but paying attention to the putters of its rhythm, anyway, ebbing and flowing like the face by your side as it rebels a natural current, unbothered

like leaves falling in Spring. It's true, I cannot be bothered anymore, or try not to be bothered, by fantastical love or its endless pursuits, because there is nothing mystical about facing someone for real, and feeling the cold stillness of a loving glare, or the clunky engine of a puttering smile, given just for a recipient's own drum

and stick. I don't suffer from chronic pain, but I do live by the drum of this beating heart. It beats unbothered, hiccupping and puttering like an old truck, still loving curiously an innocent face.



## NADIA

Aislyn Ross

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*Digital painting of a lovestruck young man (Carlos Amezcua) staring intently into the eyes of the viewer, holding out a boutique of Yarrow.*



# LOVING YOU

Jesse Hsien

Going eighty on a highway, wrapped under the sunless sky, the trees were coughing. Eyes, windows to an untouched piece of coal, yours crackled, burning, a sleepless fervor—  
never thought I'd been starving, I'm grasping at sleeves, but you're loved, two steady feet, a rock, keeping me close by for convenience, your eyes contort. Sparkle. With each step, no hesitation, leading me into the city, because "is it important?" singing sweetly, looking past me, cold sweat sprouts, and when it all falls apart, just one more memory, held close, spelling "I'm afraid," because you never were,

Stopped, barely, could've, but I always pick up, held tightly within your long lashes, chipped front teeth, don't tell me, shuffling a pace behind, say "no," between daydreams, coffee shop study sessions, pleasant silence fills each gap, the sticky summer air left forgotten, your new prescription glasses, the sound of pen to paper, dust warms my airway, "you don't cough anymore," digging a hole through the ambiance from miles away, a familiar spark dashes across, your thin, almond eyes, your ride is waiting, and a soft smile escapes because "I had fun."

Yesterday I called you, volunteer hours, cooking over the phone, the wind was deafening, but you were louder. Talking like you don't need to breathe. I heard that smile. And all that air I've held in, the days we haven't talked, disperses into the wind because you're here.

Today hates that you called, the fluctuating group chat, a tempo of my thoughts, maybe tomorrow you'll have a good day too, but mine starts with you, sitting in a 40 square foot room, cold, scattered laundry and dirty plates, I stand up and the world sways, "I'm tired" bottles scattered about your carpeted bedroom. As 1 a.m. approaches, I blink rapidly, helpless questions.



**ON THE BEACH**  
Harrison Mains

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*Queer love on the beach. This piece was created using Adobe Photoshop. I drew inspiration from gradient artwork that I would see on Instagram, particularly that of Antoine Paikert. I like gradient artwork because it has a sort of ephemeral and surreal quality to it and creates a sense of unreality or removal from reality. I would like to think that these two characters are experiencing a strange, tingling sensation that something is not quite the same within them or between them; that the world has completely changed, or they individually have, or both.*

# MARASCHINO CHERRIES

Erin Roney

Gilbert didn't want to go to Las Vegas. He didn't want to leave the sanctuary of his own home. Why did Toby, his boss, force him to do this every year? Gilbert found himself dreading it through the seasons. Toby always held the yearly all-company meeting in Las Vegas. Gilbert thought the reason was so that they all had an excuse to get drunk and make corporate pay for it. But the idea of the loud city made Gilbert's heart jump in his chest. The noise would be too much to handle, and the people would be overbearing, as always. In Las Vegas, with its relentless crowds and neon lights, there was no escape from the constant barrage of sensory overload. They didn't need him there; all he would do was spoil the fun.

Gilbert was nocturnal. His job did not require him to work with others, so he opted to work when the rest of the world was asleep, when it was just him and his computer. He despised the notion of sitting in a stuffy room all day, exhausted from the schedule change, in an itchy dress shirt that always seemed to be trying to strangle him, while he listened to multiple people discuss sales, finance, advertising and other topics he didn't give a shit about. He had no idea what his company even did. All he knew was code. The numbers and characters that flashed on his screen while his fingers danced across the keyboard were all he cared about. No one was going to think it was cool that Gilbert built his own computer from parts, and there wasn't much else he was keen on discussing.

But there was no arguing with Toby. If he wanted to keep his job, Gilbert would go to Las Vegas. He packed his bags, folding up his two uncomfortable dress shirts and haphazardly tossing them on top of his pajamas.

Once the plane landed, he had the unsettling urge to start kicking and screaming like a child to deter the flight attendants from taking him off the plane. The thought was there and then gone the next as he was dragged, by one of his coworkers, out of his seat, shoved into a shuttle bus, and forced to attend one meeting after another. Now, he found himself sulking in his over-the-top hotel room.

After a long hot shower, a few too many episodes of *New Girl*,

and a little too much to drink from the mini bar, Gilbert decided it was time to curl up in the sheets and hunker in for hibernation. He was inclined to never leave this hotel room if it meant never having to run into another human being again.

Before his head even hit the pillow, a jumble of knocks ricocheted through the dark room. Maybe if he shut his eyes really tight and ignored the hollow sounds, he'd be able to stay like this, tucked away from the world. But, of course, the knocking kept coming, getting more and more rambunctious with each second.

With a sigh, Gilbert crawled out of bed, fumbled around for his glasses, and walked to the door. Taking one last moment to himself, already regretting his decision, he opened the door.

The bright lights of the hallway had his eyes blinking rapidly, the fluorescents making them burn. He wished he could crawl back into bed, but it was too late. He was already up, the man who had knocked had already seen him.

Toby, a man of about thirty to Gilbert's twenty-five, stood on the other side of the door. His curly brown hair in perfect waves on the top of his head, his green eyes held a mischievous twinkle. He was dressed in a pair of blue jeans and an olive golf shirt that he had earlier bragged was quite spendy, and the most frustrating part was it fit him perfectly, showing off the pecs and arm muscles he must have worked hard at the gym to develop. He wore a pair of white tennis shoes that were surprisingly clean, and a large grin spread across his perfectly symmetrical face.

"Gil!" God, Gilbert hated that nickname. "We're going to hit the town, get a few drinks, maybe go dancing. You're coming."

Gilbert stared at him, his mouth hanging slightly open. Was he seriously asking him to leave his room?

Toby looked Gilbert up and down. Gilbert suddenly felt uncomfortable in his baggy gray sweatpants and a matching oversized gray t-shirt. Toby looked down at his watch, "Please tell me you weren't sleeping. It's only 8:30. We're in Vegas, baby! The night is just starting."

Gilbert glared at him. "I was about to sleep, until somebody woke me up."

"Got here just in time. Get dressed." Toby clapped his hands as if Gilbert were a child he was trying to wake up.

Gilbert didn't move his feet from where they were planted. He just kept looking at Toby. Was this a mirage? He was in the desert.

Maybe Gilbert was already asleep, and this was a very, very vivid dream.

Toby shoved past him, making a B-line straight to Gilbert's suitcase. He shuffled through all its contents, throwing things this way and that. "Why do you dress like an old man who wishes he was retired?"

"Maybe because I feel like an old man and wish I was retired." It wasn't the best retort, but Gilbert was still alarmed by the overly enthusiastic presence of his boss. He closed his eyes, willing Toby to disappear. It was quieter, had it really been a dream? Was Toby gone? His question was answered by a ball of clothing smacking his face. "Put these on. You have five minutes to get your ass ready."

Gilbert groaned and looked longingly at the bed in front of him.

"If you aren't ready in five, I'm dragging you out in your pajamas."

With a sigh, Gilbert reached down and grabbed the pile of clothes that had landed at his feet when he didn't catch them and shuffled toward the bathroom.

Toby slapped him on the back, "That's my man," he said with a pearly white, shit-eating grin. Gilbert shut the door behind him, a bit too aggressively, and got dressed.



The Chateau Nightclub within the Paris Hotel was more crowded than he remembered when Toby had dragged him there during last year's convention. Gilbert felt that at any moment, the Eiffel Tower replica would come crumbling down on top of him. At this point, being crushed by thousands of pounds worth of steel sounded like the best outcome. The night felt like it had gone on for hours. Gilbert looked down at his watch. It had only been forty-five minutes.

At the beginning of the night, he had decided it was best not to drink since all the men with him seemed to be unreliable, but he was beginning to regret the decision not to be completely intoxicated. Toby could no longer walk in a straight line but was somehow still managing to do the white boy shuffle, side to side, on the dance floor in perfect time to the rhythmic thumping of the baseline.

Gilbert sat at a circular table, milking his fifth Shirley Temple of the night. Toby had already given him shit about his drink of

choice, and, quite frankly, Gilbert didn't particularly care. He needed the sugar rush, anticipating the crash that would lull him into slumber later that night.

He liked sitting by himself, watching people. Toby was surrounded by three girls on the dance floor, all of them fighting for his attention. Gilbert couldn't help but roll his eyes at that. He didn't look around for anybody else; they were unimportant. As long as he had his eyes on Toby, he wouldn't get stranded from the group. Who knew when the man would decide it was time to move on to the next bar?

As if Toby had heard Gilbert's thoughts, he started to approach him from the dance floor. "Gil! Those girls I was just talking with—" Oh please, what he was doing was far from talking—"told me about a karaoke bar a few blocks down. Let's go."

Gilbert wanted this night to end, so badly. He was never going to accept an invitation ever, never, again. Albeit he never even accepted the invitation. He was dragged out of the hotel. How do you say no to the person who makes sure you keep receiving a paycheck?

He followed a few feet behind the rest of the group. The street was absolute chaos. There were street performers everywhere. The loud click of four-inch-high heels echoed alongside the out-of-tune singing of drunk men. The sounds of honking cars buzzed in Gilbert's ears, making him dizzy. He was so unfocused that he barely registered the fact that in one moment, he was outside, and the next, he was inside, being lambasted by a different kind of chaos.

Someone was singing. It wasn't that the voice was the most beautiful thing he had ever heard, what caught his attention was that the voice was wobbly as it sang out the first few notes. The singer was scared, something Gilbert could wholeheartedly understand. It felt comforting to know that he wasn't the only person in this club who was perturbed by the crowd. His mind dimmed, allowing the timidly sung first notes of Billy Joel's "My Life" to invade his senses. He looked around to find out exactly where the music was coming from and spotted her just as the microphone fell from her hands and landed with an ear-piercing screech. The woman turned and ran from the stage.



Adelaide had lived in Las Vegas her entire life and loved every second of it. The bright lights, the loud people, the street performers



who sat on almost every corner, and the wild parties that lasted for hours. She was a night person through and through, used to running on barely any sleep.

Adelaide loved to sing, that was no secret, but it was impossible to find a job in her desired career due to the fact that she chickened out before every single audition. So, instead, she was a waitress. Her therapist had told her it was good exposure therapy, that talking to strangers on a daily basis would be “beneficial to her self-improvement.” She did it for the paycheck.

But tonight was the night where she would benefit from her “self-improvement” journey. Though she was reluctant to admit it, her therapist had given her the idea of singing at one of the small karaoke bars near her apartment. She had never gotten up on stage before, but she had certainly thought about it. Tonight was the night; she felt it in her bones. She would do more than just gawk at the microphone before scrambling off the stage. No, tonight Adelaide was going to walk right up to the microphone and sing.

She made her way into the bar. Loud music rang in her ears; it was some weird techno artist she didn’t recognize. Adelaide slipped past the crowd, heading straight for the sign-up sheet. She knew that if she didn’t put her name down now on that intimidating piece of paper, she never would. She was the fifth person on the list, which gave her the perfect amount of time to overthink the whole scenario and convince herself that singing in front of a crowd was a horrible idea.

Adelaide rushed to the bar, needing the numbing thrum of alcohol rushing through her veins. She waved eagerly at the bartender, trying to get his attention. When she finally caught his eye, she let out a sigh of relief.

“Old Fashioned, please. Oh, and can I have as many extra cherries as you’re willing to give me?” The bartender gave her a slight nod before moving around the back of the bar, preparing multiple orders at a time.

Adelaide leaned against the counter, tapping nervously to the beat of the current performer’s song. Fortunately, it was no longer techno music. She tried to focus her mind on anything other than the stage that sat right behind her. Just the mere thought of it had her heart trying to claw its way up her throat. Adelaide could feel her breaths getting shorter, and she began to let the flight half of the term “fight or flight” take over.

Before she could move a muscle towards the door, a drink slid

in front of her. Adelaide's eyes shot up to the bartender, and he gave her a reassuring smile before walking towards the next customer who vied for his attention. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath before giving the drink her full attention.

A small grin broke across her face as she looked at the five cherries that sat in the amber liquid. She dipped her fingers into the glass, plucking one of them up and popping it into her mouth. She chewed it, relishing the nostalgic taste. It reminded her of when she would gorge herself on Shirley Temples as a kid. After gulping her drink and waiting ten minutes, Adelaide found herself no longer worried about the stage and the people who would gawk at her once she set foot on it.

That sense of peace was quickly ripped out from under her as she heard her name being called above the din of the crowd. With shaky hands she threw back the dregs of her Old Fashioned, remaining cherries included. As she walked to the stage, Adelaide began to choke on the cherries. She slammed the palm of her hand to her chest to help them go down as her feet reached the start of the steps.

As Adelaide forced her way up the stairs, she felt like her skeleton was going to shake out of her skin, and her heart was not far behind it. On the final step, she tripped on her own feet and tumbled towards the microphone that sat at the center of the stage. She clutched it like it was her lifeline, anchoring her to the ground below her feet.

The crowd looked at her expectantly, the once loud room eerily quiet for a moment. Adelaide could swear that her heart had vacated her chest and was now pounding in her eardrums. She tried to gulp down her nausea, wringing her hands around the neck of the mic stand before turning her head to give the DJ a quick nod.

She felt a small flicker of pride warm her chest; this was the farthest she had ever gotten. Adelaide shut her eyes tight, waiting for her cue. If she couldn't see the crowd, they couldn't see her, right?

Her cue came and went, and she quickly tripped over the first few words to catch up. Adelaide's voice stuttered as she felt the eyes of the crowd burning into her very soul. Nausea began to roil in her belly, but she forced herself to sing just a few more lines.

The moment she reached the chorus, the nausea was too much for her to handle. As she pushed away from the microphone, it tilted this way and that, giving a mighty shriek before hitting the ground.

Adelaide covered her ears as her feet slammed down the

stairs. She dodged person after person, trying to make her way to the sanctuary of the bathroom.

She felt something crush under her feet, and a startled yelp reached her ears.

“Watch where you’re going!” A man in a form-fitting olive shirt yelled at her as she continued to fight her way through the crowd.

She slammed into the side of someone, almost losing her footing, but before she could fall to the floor, a hand grasped her wrist. The touch was firm, assured, steadying, yet gentle. It was gone as quickly as it arrived.

“Are you ok?”

The voice, belonging to a man, was soft but loud enough to be heard over the drunken mass of people surrounding them. Adelaide choked down the nausea before she allowed herself to look up at the man who had saved her from further embarrassment.

He was cute. At least that was the first word that came to mind. He had black curly hair, bright green eyes, and a pair of square glasses resting at the edge of his nose. He wore a cream-colored shirt topped with a baggy green sweater vest, blue jeans, and a black pair of Converse. He smiled at her nervously, his hand rubbing the back of his neck as he glanced at her over the rim of his glasses. Adelaide felt the sudden urge to push his glasses back up the bridge of his nose so he could look through them more clearly. Before she could move her hand to make the thought real, the nausea that roiled in her stomach threatened to climb up her throat.

“Excuse me,” she said as she turned away from the cute man, without answering his question, and ran straight to the bathroom. She wrenched the door open, frightening a poor woman who was touching up her lipstick in the bathroom mirror.

A second later, she was kneeling in front of a toilet, refusing to throw up the four extra cherries that she had been so happy about minutes before. Instead, she let the cold tile of the bathroom floor sink into her knees as she contemplated why she ever thought singing was the best career path for her.



Gilbert watched the retreating figure of the girl disappear behind the bathroom door. He stood with his feet cemented to the floor while he stared at the bathroom, wondering if it was appropriate for

him to go in there and check on her. As he waited, a woman left the bathroom with a disgruntled expression.

He waited even longer, waiting to see if the girl would appear, but when she didn't, a small part of him began to grow nervous. He shuffled his way through the crowd, a few muttered apologies following his timid attempts to push through the crowded room.

The door was soon in front of him, the gaudy neon orange color hurting his eyes. Gilbert moved his hand towards the handle but stopped a couple inches short. What was he doing? Was he seriously expecting to walk into the crowded ladies room? He took a gaping step back, leaning against the wall by the rusty drinking fountain.

He stood there, shifting from one foot to the other, his heart pounding in his chest as minutes ticked by. Just as he was about to give up and leave, the door creaked open and she stepped out, glancing around nervously before her eyes landed on him.

"Oh, it's you," she said, recognizing him with a faint smile. "You ran into me out there."

"Uh, yeah, sorry about that," he said as he picked at the skin around his thumbnail. "Gil...bert. My name's Gilbert. I, uh. I just wanted to make sure you were ok."

He waited patiently, trying not to let the prolonged silence get to him. She studied him for a moment, her head tilting to the side, as her eyes looked him up and down, causing the picking of his skin to intensify.

"So, do you usually pick up women outside the bathroom, or is this a new thing for you?"

Gilbert felt his cheeks grow unbearably hot from her words. His hands dropped to his side as he rocked back and forth on his feet.

"I, um— no I don't usually do this. But I saw you sing, and when you ran off stage... You just looked like you could use some help."

His hand came up to push his glasses up the bridge of his nose. With them properly on, he could see just how breathtaking she truly was. She had wavy dark brown hair that lightly brushed her collarbone, with bangs that touched the top of her eyebrows. Her face was speckled with freckles that created their own little constellations. But the most striking thing about her was the bright green color of her eyes. It reminded him of the color of the codes that were displayed on old computers.

A breathy laugh escaped her throat as she looked up at him

with those gorgeous, green-coded eyes.

"I feel honored to be your first outside-the-bathroom flirting experience."

She nervously wiped the palms of her hands down the front of her jeans as she looked at him, as if she was analyzing his very being. It made Gilbert nervous, and he found himself focusing very hard on a piece of thread that stuck out of the bottom of his sweater.

"I'm Adelaide."

His head shot up at the sound of her name. She had a small smile on her lips, which had one spreading across his own. He stepped towards her, offering up his hand for her to shake; as she took it, he remembered just how clammy it was due to his nerves, and he wished he could take it back. Adelaide still took his hand in hers, not seeming to notice just how sweaty it was.

"So, Gilbert, are you going to buy me a drink?"

Gilbert fidgeted with the rim of his glasses, not sure if this was the second mirage of the night that he was seeing. Was this beautiful woman actually asking him to buy her a drink? He was beginning to like Las Vegas.

"Yes," he stuttered. "Yes I am."

Adelaide's smile grew wider, and Gilbert knew that his face was now most likely the color of a tomato. He let her lead the way, trailing behind her through the crowd that no longer felt so constricting. She led him to a booth, sliding comfortably into the cushioned seat.

"What's your drink of choice?" He yelled above the noise of the room.

"Old Fashioned. Try to convince the bartender to give me as many cherries as you can," she said, a childish glint in her eyes.

Gilbert laughed at her response before making his way through the crowd towards the bar. He waved the bartender over, quickly ordering two Old Fashioneds before putting on his biggest grin to convince the bartender to surrender his maraschino cherries.

The bartender came back just as swiftly as he left, with two Old Fashioneds and a small bowl filled to the brim with maraschino cherries. Gilbert did his best juggling the two drinks and the bowl, only sacrificing two cherries to the floor, before he made it back to the booth. When Adelaide's gaze caught sight of the bounty that Gilbert had earned from the bar, her eyes alighted with joy.

"Oh my god, how did you get him to give you so many?"

She took a glass from his hand so he could set the rest down on the table before he slid into the seat across from her.

"It must be my charm," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

Adelaide giggled, which made the final bits of nerves in his stomach settle. She took a cherry from the bowl and popped it in her mouth, chewing it slowly before looking back up at him.

"So, what do you do? No offense, but it is very obvious that you aren't from here. You here for work?"

Gilbert took a sip from his drink, a little surprised by how well she had read him, before responding. "I code websites for a finance company, I think."

She looked at him quizzically. "You think?"

He fiddled with the rim of his glass, laughing quietly to himself. "Yeah, uh, I am not really sure what the company I work for does. I work behind the scenes, so all the actual finance, or whatever it is they do, happens without me. It really just is me and my computer against the world. You can't find a computer like it on the market, I actually built it myself..."

He cut himself short, realizing he was starting to ramble. He looked down at his drink, taking another quick sip of it before setting it back down. When his eyes met hers again, they were urging him to keep going. She actually cared.

Gilbert cleared his throat and continued, "Yeah, so it's a custom build. I handpicked all the parts, optimized it for coding efficiency. It's kind of my pride and joy. Most people don't really get why I'm so into it."

Adelaide smiled warmly. "That sounds incredible. I can't even imagine building something like that. I barely managed to set up my Wi-Fi at home."

Gilbert laughed, feeling more at ease. "It's not as hard as it sounds. Once you get the hang of it, it's like putting together a puzzle."

"Well, you must be really smart then," Adelaide said, her eyes sparkling with genuine interest.

Gilbert blushed, not used to compliments. He rubbed at the back of his neck. "So, what about you? Hearing you sing... it was incredible. You have a beautiful voice."

Adelaide's cheeks flushed a soft pink. "Oh, thank you. I love to sing, but I get horrible stage fright. That was actually my first time singing in front of an audience. I wait tables to pay the bills, but my dream is to be a singer."

Gilbert's eyes widened. "You were amazing, especially for your first time. I would have thought you had done this before."

"Really?" Adelaide's voice held a mix of surprise and relief. "I felt like I was going to pass out the entire time."

Gilbert pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose. "Why were you so nervous? I mean, I completely understand why this crowd could be intimidating, but you obviously know what you are doing."

"It's just... the eyes. All those people watching, judging... It's like every mistake is magnified. I feel like I'm in a fishbowl, and there is nowhere to hide," she said as she picked at the bowl of cherries.

Gilbert nodded, understanding her fear more than she knew. He took a deep breath, deciding to do something completely out of his comfort zone. "Wait here a second."

He walked briskly over to the DJ, bypassing the sign-up sheet. Gilbert whispered something in his ear. The DJ grinned at him before nodding, and soon after, the opening notes of "Waiting for a Girl Like You" by Foreigner began to play.

He stepped up to the microphone as he looked out at the crowd. His eyes focused on Adelaide, who had walked up to the stage and shot shaky finger guns at him as he gripped the microphone stand like his life depended on it. The opening notes rang from the speakers. He took a deep breath. His voice wavered as he started to sing, off-key and shaky, but he didn't stop.

The bar fell silent, people turning to watch the unexpected performance. Gilbert's singing was undeniably bad, but he sang with so much heart and earnestness that it was impossible not to smile. He could have sworn he heard Toby wolf whistle from across the bar. He poured every ounce of his courage into the song, his eyes never leaving Adelaide's.

Gilbert's voice cracked on the high notes, and he stumbled over the lyrics a few times, but he kept going, a goofy grin spreading across his face as he sang the chorus with all his might.

Adelaide's initial surprise turned into laughter. As Gilbert finished the song, the bar erupted in applause and laughter. He stepped down from the stage, blushing furiously, and made his way back to Adelaide. She was laughing, tears in her eyes.

"See?" Gilbert said, slightly out of breath. "It's not so scary once you get up there. And hey, I made a complete fool of myself, and the world didn't end."

Adelaide shook her head, still laughing, "That was really awful. Thank you."

As Gilbert's hand instinctively found the back of his neck once more, he murmured, "It wasn't a big deal."

Adelaide took a step closer to him. With a gentle touch, she reached for his arm, coaxing it down from his neck and interlocking her fingers with his. Simultaneously, her other hand found its way to his cheek, her touch sending a shiver down his body.

As Gilbert felt Adelaide's hand cupping his cheek, a gentle warmth spread through him, contrasting the lingering embarrassment of his performance. He met her gaze, eyes wide with surprise and something more.

"No really," she said softly. "Thank you."

In that suspended moment, he felt her lips press against his own, tasting of sweet cherries. His breath caught in his throat, his heart pounded. But as he surrendered to the sweetness of the kiss, he released any lingering doubts about whether or not this was a mirage.

Instinctively, his arms found their way around her waist, pulling her closer as if to savor the closeness between them. His fingers lightly grazed her back, the warmth of her body against his sending a wave of warmth through him.

Ok, so maybe he was starting to really, really like Las Vegas.

As their lips parted, Gilbert gazed at her, his heart pounding in his chest. "I guess singing like a dying walrus does have its perks!"

Adelaide's laughter bubbled forth once more, her eyes crinkling with amusement as she shook her head at his antics. "You're ridiculous," she teased, a fond smile playing on her lips.

"Gill!" The world's loudest voice boomed as Toby approached them, ruining the moment.

"Oh god," Gilbert muttered under his breath.

"There you are. Great performance. Knew you had it in you!" Toby had made his way over to the duo, placing his hand roughly on Gilbert's shoulder. Gilbert could practically smell the alcohol seeping out of his pores.

"Come on, big guy. Time to head out, this place is old news."

Toby clapped his hands at Gilbert, trying to coax him away from Adelaide. Gilbert looked at her apologetically before quickly excusing himself, dragging the over-excited Toby with him.

He stopped a few feet short of the door.



"What are you doing?" Gilbert hissed.

"Just trying to get my star computer engineer to keep me company on my way to the next bar. Come on, Gil, you hate social interactions, I'm giving you a way out," Toby said as he shot a look at Adelaide.

He tried to grab at Gilbert to pull him out the door, but he moved out of his grasp.

"No. I am actually enjoying myself since my boss decided that it was appropriate to force me out of my hotel room without a choice, which was completely unprofessional. Then, after a long night of making sure he and his goons don't die from alcohol poisoning or get lost, I finally find someone beautiful and interesting to talk to." Gilbert paused for a brief second, sucking in a deep breath of air before continuing. "And then my boss has the audacity to try and summon me like a child to help walk his drunk ass to the next bar. You should be glad that I don't just quit on the spot. So, politely, fuck off. And I hope if you remember this conversation in the morning, you have the good sense not to fire me." With that, Gilbert left a bewildered Toby, who had never heard Gilbert speak so many words before, behind him and made his way back to the bar where Adelaide.

She shot him a big grin that had his heart fluttering as he slid back into his seat.

"So," she said, taking his hand back in hers, "Walk me home?"

As they walked through the crowded streets, they didn't feel so overbearing, the sounds of yelling drunks and too-tall stiletto heels sounded like music to Gilbert's ears. Maybe he could forgive Toby for dragging him out of the comfort of his hotel room.

# THIS RED SEA

Harrison Mains

I see you over there, past a thick bundle of roses and leaves,  
whispering to yourself. Your bones don't move the way most do;  
you have drawn-out fingertips and a neat, complacent scowl,  
your hair's not faltering either: wild, electric, flying from the scalp.

You sulk through the garden like a hunch-backed owl,  
wetting your feathers and shaking your mane  
you sulk behind sunflowers, pompous-red tomatoes,  
and eventful poppies without a glance or refrain.

And flowers don't have to be beautiful, not unless you  
say; even if they aim their smiling faces upward,  
or arch their backs away, or stand tall despite the rain,  
you don't seem to mind, much less complain.

You aren't necessarily warm, or incomparably cold,  
not quite mystical, walking with a familiar heavy-  
footedness, stealing strange glances from passing  
strangers, eating sunlight like it must belong to you.

By this red sea, you remind me

of the sinking, heavy sunset, and the black, incomprehensible  
faces of the unlit trees; you seem to turn your back like they do,  
away from the falling fire, away from this beautiful scene,  
and towards me, and I can never understand:

Why, always towards me?



**THE SINGLE PETAL OF A ROSE**

Jackson Weber

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*Capturing a quiet moment on a street, hoping to convey feelings of solitude, melancholy, and reflection. When a viewer walks up to it, I hope it seems that Duke Ellington's "Single Petal of a Rose" begins to play, and the only thing in the world to care about is love and this very cigarette. Made with oil pastels.*

# SEA-GLASS-COLORED LENSES

Olivia Sandvik

## I

I'm standing in line next to Rachel and Carmen and the rest of our large group outside Workman's. ID in hand, I prepare for the worst. *"This doesn't look like you."* *"Are you sure you're twenty years old?"* I offer my plastic card to the bouncer, waiting to be rejected. He gives it a quick glance and ushers me in. My unwarranted stress dissipates into the foggy air. Why was I so stressed when I had done this exact thing the night before?

Techno music from upstairs echoes down the creaky steps. The sound is almost deafening as we ascend, my ears already ringing. The first room we enter is blanketed in a blue hue. Some stand in line for drinks while others dance with no inhibition. I feel a bit out of place in my very American-tourist clothing—my worn white sneakers, mom jeans, and Trinity College pullover. But then I remember that I *am* a tourist from America, and no one here cares about my outfit; at Workman's, people's problems and desires are much bigger than American Eagle denim and cotton university merch.

Now the weekend, it is much more packed than yesterday. We zig-zag around swaying bodies as we make our way across the sticky floor to the roofless smoking room. With every breath, my lungs seize up (thank you, asthma). I remind myself to take shallow breaths and face away from the direction of the wind. I take a puff from my inhaler for good measure. I want to escape to another room, but I wait for everyone to get their drinks. As I wait, I look at my friends having fun. Their joy rubs off on me, bringing a smile to my face.

With a renewed sense of adventure, I find myself at the bar top. I order a Jameson & ginger ale, a drink I've never tried before. The bubbly libation burns on my tongue just right.

Tonight is all about new experiences.

## II

The salty air is warm upon my skin, even as the coastal breeze whips around me. The sky is azure, spotted with silvery pearls. I take a deep breath and smile. Tension immediately fizzles out from my shoulders. Unlike the club, the air is fresh in Sandycove.

I have always preferred mountains to beaches, and yet, I have come to appreciate how the ferocity of the waves shapes the environment at will. In this moment, I realize that Ireland is shaping me the same way. The bombardment of new and strange things has forced me to live outside my comfort zone and confront the unknown.

The beach attracts us like moths to a flame, hypnotizing. With time to spare, we walk down the steps of the sea wall. Others stay there to look out at the ocean while I shuffle along the narrow ledge that leads farther down the beach. Two from our lively group, Teddy and Ben, are already down there, exploring the new terrain.

I look down at the slick, kelp-covered shelf and let out a laugh; small animal prints are embedded in the concrete. A dog must have ventured here while the concrete was still drying. I take a picture to remember.

I lower myself to the edge and carefully jump down onto the rocky beach. My leather boots crunch against the sandy pebbles. Teddy waves me over and I trek towards her. Scattered around me are smooth, tan rock formations, all with shallow pools of water.

Now that I have finally made it to the shore, I let my excitement run wild. I sway to the beat when I am on the dance floor; I sway with the whooshing curves of sea and rock when I am on the shore. Different is not always bad.

## III

I look up at the starless sky through the roofless smoking room with sober eyes. *Do the stars ever poke out in Dublin? Or are they scared of the lively night?* I stay in this position for a second, empty glass in hand. A slight breeze of cool air drizzles down, a welcome contrast to the hazy, humid room. Kaelyn takes my glass and gives it back to a bartender. I yell "Thank you" as she does, my voice competing with dozens of others.

We all migrate to another space themed with old posters and the front of a car sticking out of a wall. All that illuminates this room

are the soft purple and blue hues emanating from strobe lights on the ceiling. There is a DJ in the corner, bobbing his head to the beat. It's much more crowded here, and I have to squeeze by people to find an open space. I eventually find a table near the bar and station myself there. A group of three friends stand on the other side of the pub table.

My group forms a circle to continue our talk, and I chat with my friend, Rachel, for a good amount of time. When a natural lull comes, one of the girls next to me strikes up a conversation. Her bright pink shirt stands out from her tan skin and dark hair.

We hit it off right away. "You're American? I love Americans!" She says. "I spent a year in Philadelphia."

After several minutes, we finally get around to introducing ourselves. She tells me that her name is Saoirse and the man next to her is Alan. Their other friend, Kelly, had just left, saying that she would be back in 5 minutes. Saoirse tells me that she, Alan, and Kelly are all actors who graduated from Bow Street Academy.

"I'm acting for a short film right now. It will be coming out soon," she says, excitement radiating off her. I wish my memory were better because the film title fades only a minute after she tells me.

When I see that Rachel is not preoccupied at the moment, I drag her into our conversation. I know she will be excited to meet local actors. She and Saoirse talk to one another as Alan asks me where I'm from. The night is young, and it is already deviating from my expectations. The most memorable adventures are always the least predictable.

## IV

There are rocky beaches on the West Coast, but Sandycove is much different than any other I have visited.

I was curious how the seashells would differ since I live near the Pacific Ocean, not the Atlantic. I discovered that beaches on both oceans have mollusks, but common and flat periwinkles and Pfeiffer's top shells are only found on Atlantic coasts.

I am amazed to find an abundance of sea glass and broken pottery amongst the rocks and shells. Many of us look for red sea glass because, according to Kaelyn, it is very rare. Unfortunately, we cannot find any for her. To my delight though, I find a chunk of obsidian.

As I traverse through the rock formations, my mind drifts to what the locals must think of us. Here we are, a bunch of adults in our early twenties, climbing rocks and digging in the sand to find things that they probably would not give a second glance to. I almost laugh just thinking about it. Still, I feel completely at peace here. I can wander the beaches and flow with the steady tide.

## V

We are out much later than I originally anticipated. Workman's closed a while ago, and now we are in a sketchy McDonald's. On our way out, the security guards help direct Kaelyn and me when we mistakenly try to open a locked door—both of us confused and in desperate need of sleep. I eat my nuggets and fries as we stroll to Goldsmith Hall, slightly disappointed that I did not receive the iconic red Happy Meal box. We hurry our pace across the bridge as we see what looks like a crime scene near the river.

Maybe it's the heat from the club still clinging to my skin, but the sunless sky and gentle wind complement the tranquil walk back to campus.

Sunrise will be upon us in an hour. We decide that it is worth it to stay up, all of us looking forward to ending the night basking in the pink and orange light that comes with a rising sun. Rachel and I leave the skybridge to wander the pedestrian refuge islands below. When the sun gifts us with happiness, we return the favor with thankfulness.

From what I have learned in Ireland, new experiences, good and bad, gift much. Letting those gifts inform your response to new situations shows that you're giving yourself room to grow. Sometimes you have to wear sea-glass-colored lenses before you can see the world for what it really is and what it can be.





## A PARISIAN PERSPECTIVE

Cailyn White

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*A Parisian Perspective shows how Paris is reflected in the unfiltered eyes of a foreigner. New perspectives are formed by new sights. The prismatic relationship that forms between land and people is depicted through the vibrant colors designing the cityscape. Made with acrylic paint.*

# LAMB

Anaya Van Dusen

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Wilma “Will” Grant Augustine- An odd girl in her early teens, around 15. Headstrong and off putting.

Charles “Charlie” Lovell- A bully to most in his late teens, around 17. Clean-cut and loyal.

Father Lovell- An all-American dad in his early to mid-forties. He’s kind but deceptive.

The Church- Invisible patrons of a small church.

## TIME

The late 1970s, a sunny spring weekend.

## PLACE

The dark wooden church of a small town in Southern United States. Light shines through old glass windows, illuminating the rickety pews.

## SCENE 1

(A church during Saturday service is filled with invisible patrons, visibly Wilma and Charlie are seated in opposite rows, both in aisle seats as Father Lovell preaches.)

FATHER LOVELL: We may wish to hate our enemies. To defeat them. To vanquish them! I understand that. Trust me ha ha. Our Lord does too!

[Father Lovell *walks further down the aisle.*]

FATHER LOVELL: He understands so human an urge. But he does not encourage it. No. No. "Love your enemies. Pray for them that persecute you," Matthew 5, verse 44.

WILMA: (A lone voice) Amen!

[Charles *casts a wry glance at her*. Wilma *pays him no mind*. Father Lovell *takes a moment to look at her and smile*. He *places a hand on her shoulder*. Wilma *smiles back at him in admiration*. Father Lovell *walks back up the aisle.*]

FATHER LOVELL: Let us end on a final short prayer. If y'all would bow your heads and join me if ya can. Lord, thank you for your guidance and your strength. Thank you for teaching us how to deal with hardship, how to forgive, and most importantly, how to love. Amen.

[*Sounds of feet shuffling and people leaving fills the church*. Wilma *excitedly walks up to Father Lovell.*]

WILMA: That was wonderful. I had that verse, the one about enemies, already underlined.

[Wilma *waves her BIBLE.*]

FATHER LOVELL: (Kindly) Of course you did.

WILMA: But if he teaches us to love our enemies, why are folks sent to Hell still?

FATHER LOVELL: Well—

CHARLES: Because Wilma, only God can punish man.

WILMA: Then what are laws for, Charlie?

FATHER LOVELL: Alright—

CHARLES: They're play pretend, made by man. Only the Lord's law counts for anythin'.

WILMA: Tell that to the men on death row.

FATHER LOVELL: Alright, alright. Let's settle down. There are many interpretations to God's word. Y'all will just have to agree to disagree. Now, I have to meet with Henry, so why don't you kids take this outside? I'd rather not have a brawl in the pews.

*[Wilma laughs, Charles does not. Wilma takes her leave. She sits on a bench outside the church. Charles remains inside the church. Father Lovell places a hand on Charles' shoulder, he squeezes harder than necessary.]*

FATHER LOVELL: Close the doors for me on your way out will you? It's allergy season.

*[Beat.*

*Charles nods. He slowly leaves the church and exits stage right. Wilma suddenly jumps up, she has more thoughts on their previous discussion. She goes back to enter the church.]*

WILMA: Hey Father—

*[Wilma freezes halfway down the aisle. She sees the shadow of Father Lovell undressing and the shadow of a young boy opposite him. The lights go down, leaving a spotlight on Wilma and the crucifix above her. She raises her head to it. She abruptly runs out of the church and exits stage right.]*

## SCENE 2

(Early morning on Sunday, before service.)

*[Wilma enters stage left, walking hurriedly towards the church. Charles is seated on the bench outside the doors. He stands and grabs her arm before she can enter.]*

CHARLES: What's got you in a tizzy now? Service ain't till 8.

WILMA: I need to speak to Father Lovell. Not that it's any of your business, Charlie.

CHARLES: It is my business 'cause I'm supposed to make sure no one enters while he's preparin'.

WILMA: Preparin'? What's he need to prepare? All he does is read the words.

CHARLES: Stop bein' thickheaded, you know what he's doin'.

*[There's a pause in their argument. Charles realizes he's still holding Wilma's arm, he releases it. Wilma decides to tell him the truth.]*

WILMA: Charlie. I need to talk to Father Lovell.

CHARLES: I already told you—

WILMA: He touched a boy Charlie! And it wasn't a hug or a kiss. He was taking off his clothes. (Shakily) He was doin' it in the church Charlie. (She gathers herself) So, I need to talk to Father Lovell.

*[Long Beat.]*

CHARLES: You're not talkin' to him 'bout nothin'.

*[Beat.]*

WILMA: What?

CHARLES: You're not talkin' to him 'bout nothin', *Will*.

[Charles *pushes* Wilma down.]

CHARLES: You're gonna keep your big damn mouth shut. My daddy didn't touch no damn kids. I hear you talkin' like that to anyone else, and I'll handle you myself.

[Wilma *doesn't* move. Charles *goes into the church*.

*Long beat.*

Wilma *gets up slowly and enters the church*.]

FATHER LOVELL: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for bein' here with me today. I thought we'd start service this fine morning by joinin' in a hymn.

[Wilma *and* Charles *stand*.]

FATHER LOVELL: Deliver me from evil—

FATHER LOVELL/CHARLES/WILMA: Preserve me, Lord, from wrong; against the foes that gather, be thou my helper strong. From those who plot to hurt me and spread their treacherous snare, preserve me, Lord, and keep me safeguarded in thy care. Let evil smite the evil and cause their overthrow; the needy and afflicted the Lord will help, I know; Thy saints, redeemed from evil, their thanks to thee shall give; the righteous and the upright shall in thy presence live.

[Charles *sits back down*. Wilma *remains standing*.]

FATHER LOVELL: You may be seated, Wilma

WILMA: We need to have words, Father.

FATHER LOVELL: After service, Wilma.

WILMA: I need to talk to you now.

FATHER LOVELL: Wilma, you'll have to wait.

WILMA: Father—

FATHER LOVELL: (Irritated) Now that's enough, Wilma.

WILMA: (Resolved) Okay.

[Beat.]

WILMA: May I come up there?

[Wilma stands without waiting for an answer.]

FATHER LOVELL: Wilma, what in the Lord's name has gotten into you! Now you need to sit back down.

[Wilma hastily marches up to the podium. She pushes Father Lovell aside. He throws his hands up, at a loss.]

WILMA: Good mornin' everyone. I witnessed somethin' wrong yesterday. Somethin' that deserves righteous punishment. One I cannot give.

[Charles stands.]

WILMA: Yesterday, after service, I saw Father Lovell doin' awful things to a young boy.

[The Church gasps. There are hushed whispers.]

Beat.

[Charles stands.]

CHARLES: Liar! She's lyin' on Father Lovell! Shame!



[The Church *chants* “Shame.” Father Lovell *steps beside* Wilma, *placing a hand on her shoulder.*]

FATHER LOVELL: Everyone, settle down! Settle down!

[The Church *quiets.*]

FATHER LOVELL: Whew! Kids and their imaginations these days. Take this as a lesson to make sure you’re all gettin’ enough sleep! Ha ha.

[Wilma *pushes forward.*]

WILMA: I slept just fine! I saw him with my own two eyes. There in his office. I saw it! I saw it! Father Lovell is the worst sinner of all, if y’all leave him be, what’s that make you?!

[The Church *erupts in clamor once more.* Father Lovell *grabs Wilma’s arm, pulling her back.*]

FATHER LOVELL: (Harshly) Now that’s enough.

[Wilma *tries to pull free.*]

WILMA: Sinner! Sinner! Sinner!

[Charles *marches through the pews and pulls Wilma from the stage.*]

WILMA: No! No! Sinner! You’ll be brought to justice Father! Whether it be by man or by God!

[Charles *drags Wilma out of the church and throws her to the ground.*]

CHARLES: I told you.

[Charles *walks back inside the church.* Wilma *lays there, still.* The lights go down. A spotlight remains on her. From inside the church, Father Lovell continues to preach.]

FATHER LOVELL: Well. I am truly sorry about that everyone. But you know, we must forgive Wilma and not cast our judgment on her. We know! We know she has not had it easy. When was the last time her daddy came to church, hm? When Jesus saw those as troubled as dear Wilma, what did he do? He washed their feet, he gave them his unconditional love. Why don't we bow our heads and send out a prayer for Wilma?

*[The preaching quiets to a dull hum. Wilma rises to her knees and looks to the sky.]*

WILMA: Preserve me, Lord, from wrong; against the foes that gather be thou my helper strong. From those who plot to hurt me and spread their treacherous snare, preserve me, Lord, and keep me safeguarded in thy care. Let evil smite the evil and cause their overthrow; the needy and afflicted the Lord will help, I know; thy saints, redeemed from evil, their thanks to thee shall give; the righteous and the upright shall in thy presence live. Amen.

*[Wilma rises to her feet with renewed strength and exits to stage right. The lights go down.]*

### SCENE 3

(It appears to be early evening now).

FATHER LOVELL: (Finishing a prayer) Amen.

*[The Church responds in unison and says Amen. Charles holds the door open. The Church can be heard exiting. Charles enters the church. Father Lovell approaches him. He places his hand on Charles' shoulder and squeezes.]*

FATHER LOVELL: You did the right thing Charles. I'm proud of you. Your Ma would be proud too.

CHARLES: Thank you, sir.

FATHER LOVELL: Get home. Get your chores done. Don't forget to feed the chickens again.

[Father Lovell *pushes Charles forward, none too gently.*

*Beat.*

Wilma *enters from stage left. She freezes on her way toward the church doors.*]

CHARLES: Yes sir.

[Father Lovell *retreats to his office. Charles remains standing in the aisle. He looks up toward the crucifix. Did he do the right thing? Wilma backtracks and takes a seat on the bench outside the church.*]

WILMA: Lord help me. What do I do?

[*Beat.*]

WILMA: Please.

[Charles *exits the church, stopping abruptly when he sees Wilma. Wilma stands.*]

CHARLES: (Frustrated) Jeez Will. What are you doin' here now? Haven't you had enough?

WILMA: You're the only one who still calls me that, ya know.

CHARLES: What?

WILMA: You're the only kid still callin' me Will. Everyone else I handled... 'cept you.

[*Beat.*

Charles *sits down on the bench.*]

CHARLES: Ya know, Will... I had to do it. I had to. He's my father.

[Wilma *remains standing.*

*Beat.*]

WILMA: After morning service, I went home to ask my daddy what I should do about Father Lovell.

[Charles *straightens up.*]

WILMA: He said there ain't nothin' I can do but wait for the law to come around someday and handle him.

[Charles *relaxes. Wilma leans forward, nearly nose to nose with Charles.*]

WILMA: But ya know, I was thinkin' —what with all you were sayin' about how the law of man don't matter much—I was thinkin' about how God would handle him.

CHARLES: (Wary) And how's that?

WILMA: Divine wrath. "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea."

[Charles *pushes his face close to hers, a battle of wills ensues.*]

CHARLES: You think yourself God, Will? You're just a girl no one in this town could give less of a damn about.

[Wilma *seethes but doesn't answer. Maybe she doesn't have one.*

*Long beat.*

Wilma *leans back and exits stage right. Charles watches her leave.*

*Beat.*

*Charles re-enters the church. He stares at the crucifix once more. He looks to his father's office. He slowly walks toward the door, to confront Father Lovell for the first time in his life. As he hesitates, Wilma enters stage left, furious and breathing heavy, with a RIFLE in hand. She enters the church with the gun raised. The sound of her fury startles Charles who turns to her. Wilma freezes.*

*Beat.]*

WILMA: Move, Charlie.

CHARLES: What're you doing Will?

WILMA: I told ya already! Now move!

CHARLES: He's my father.

WILMA: He's lucky I don't tie a stone 'round his neck.

CHARLES: He's my father.

WILMA: He's going to burn in hell.

CHARLES: (Pleading) He's my father.

WILMA: (Resolve cracking) Charlie...

*[Wilma gathers her remaining strength and marches forward. The end of the gun pushes against Charles' chest.]*

WILMA: You gotta move.

*[Charles grabs the barrel.]*

WILMA: Charlie, move. You think you can stop me? No one in this town will do what's right. You all foster each other's cruelty. I won't be like y'all, sittin' and watchin'. Gossipin'! It don't matter if no one in this town cares about me, 'cause I'll still take care of it. I'm good like that. Why can't you see that? You want to make me the bad guy, like how y'all did with my Ma way back when. But I know what's right

and what's wrong. Your daddy is wrong. (*She pushes the rifle against Charles' chest*) I don't want to kill you, Charlie, but if I have to I will. (Now angrier) Move Charlie! Why are you still protectin' him? He hurt you too? How many, Charlie? You always protect him? Huh? How many? (*Wilma continues to push the rifle against him, Charles stumbles down the aisle*) Ya know, you didn't have to do anything. You never do anything, anyway. But I'm doin' somethin'. I'm doin' it in the Lord's name. Who's name are you doin' this in, Charlie?

[*A long beat.*]

Wilma and Charles are breathing heavy. Charles suddenly calms.]

CHARLES: Ya know, you're the only one who still calls me Charlie.

[*Wilma is visibly taken aback. Suddenly, Father Lovell exits his office.*]

FATHER LOVELL: What's—

[*Wilma tears the rifle toward Father Lovell but Charles is faster. They wrestle for the gun. Charles manages it to pull it out of her hands when—*

BANG.

*The gun fires. Father Lovell crumples to the ground. Charles and Wilma remain deathly still.*

Beat.

Charles breaks from his stupor. He drops the rifle, runs to Father Lovell's limp body, and collapses to his knees.]

CHARLES: (Frantic) No. No. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. We'll get you fixed up. It's okay. Come on.

[*Charles tries to pull Father Lovell's body up. He's too heavy. Charles is too weak. Wilma stumbles backwards.*]

CHARLES: (Desperate) Please Daddy. Come on.

[Wilma picks up the rifle. She slowly walks toward Charles.]

WILMA: Charlie.

[Beat.]

WILMA: Charlie!

[Charles finally looks up.]

CHARLES: I didn't mean— I didn't mean to.

WILMA: I know, Charlie. It's okay.

[Wilma places a healing hand on Charles' head. Police sirens wail softly in the background, Charles looks out the windows. Wilma looks at Charles. Wilma holds the gun up toward Charles, her finger resting next to the trigger.]

WILMA: It's okay, Charlie.

CHARLES: Wilma...

WILMA: (Lightly) No one in this town gives a damn about me.

[The police sirens get louder.]

CHARLES: Will.

[The police sirens are deafening. They hear cars skidding to a stop. The lights go down abruptly. The sound of police entering and yelling orders fills the space. The only light remains is a spotlight on the crucifix. The spotlight slowly goes down as the shouting continues.]

**CURTAIN**

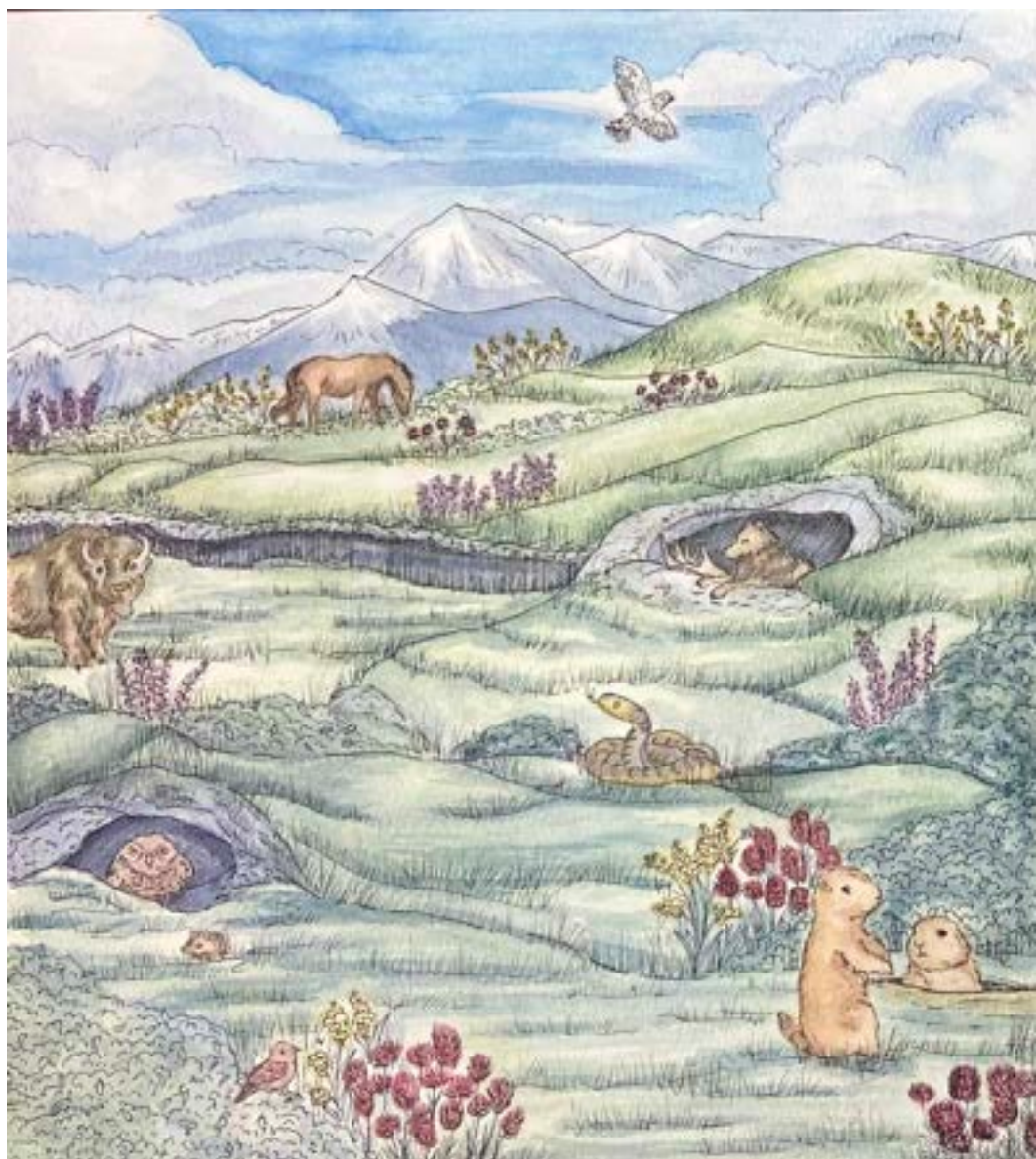
# MAPLE TREE

Alexis Sandoval

If you ever fall forked leaves and all,  
I hope the initials carved into your soft side  
with a car key survive the saw,  
reminding those who will listen that  
my brother and I—barefoot and blazing—  
swung on your branches.  
Yes, we lived in this house.

And when you stand before gnashing teeth  
made to wound, I pray the split of your skin  
sprays stories onto that baking grass  
because you're tougher than chain or motor.  
No, you never broke beneath our weight;  
I touched my first cloud from your shoulders;  
you taught him how to fly.





## PLANET EARTH

Sophia Micciche



#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*This watercolor painting depicts Planet Earth as if untouched by man. It is meant to represent the beauty of all layers of Earth to encourage us to reflect on our impact on this beauty.*

# GOLDEN YEARS

Jamieson McHenry

*Each time she laughed (which was extraordinarily often), she'd punctuate her giggling fit with a soft exhalation. A puff of air, so gentle it may very well have been my imagination. Her dulcet tones were soothing and clear, like rainwater collecting in the dewy morning. Every word was crystal. I wish I could bottle the lilt, its wondrous rise and fall, and listen to the sound every night.*

Alistair paused, his graphite hovering above the parchment. There were details missing, moments wrenched from his temporal lobe by time's cruel, grief-stained hands. He couldn't remember her ring size, whether her birth year was '80 or '81, which clever little Poe quote she was always referencing, the name of her first dog, her lucky number in billiards. Raking a hand through his hair, he let out a sigh. Alistair wished that he could recover those lost details, harness their wistful air, collect them, and stow them away like his prized mementos: gemstones shined in rotary rock tumblers. Over his long life, he'd amassed countless of these treasures, and they stood as unwavering fixtures by his side.

Glancing towards his right, Alistair's gaze caught on the mantelpiece where he displayed his glinting stones. They winked at him, illuminated by the crackling of fire from below. Acrid smoke bit his senses as he scanned the collection. Amethyst, Rose Quartz, Moonstone, Lapis: all lined his shelf, precisely ordered, and polished in their display boxes. Each box was labeled by stone type and date of acquisition. Some of them even dated well over 90 years ago, back when he used to go gold panning in the Old Country—Cassis. He remembered his sunbaked skin, speckled with warm droplets as he shook the pan for hours. Oppressive summer heat plagued him. Water sloshed, soaking his linen pants. His arms ached terribly. It was all worth it, though. When he had gathered enough gold to cast her ring, he knew it was time well spent.

Looking down at the page, he longed for a world where Elizabeth was as withstanding as his catalog of stones, as lasting as her gold-inlaid band. But Elizabeth was gone. She was a fleeting, evanescent moment, stationed long ago in the circuitous path of his

mind. Alistair huffed, tucking away the unruly, inky spill that was obstructing his vision. Walnut floorboards creaked beneath his loafers as he continued to rack his brain. And time went on, as it always did, without him.

The next day, he tried again. With a cup of coffee in hand, Alistair sat at his desk and stared at a blank page. Cool air trickled down his spine as his brows furrowed, twin slugs inching towards one another. The steady stones taunted him as he pondered, searching for something he hadn't already put in ink. At this point, his binder was already brimful with journal entries. He'd recorded so much of his life, although his golden years with Elizabeth made up the vast majority of the pages. There were countless entries about the couple's escapades (such as their monthly visits to Nice's flower markets, which inevitably ended with impulsive, last-minute purchases of extravagant bouquets), and he relished those memories most. When he lost track of himself in the present, revisiting the distant past was steady. A moment later, he found himself wandering through that past once again.

*Elizabeth had lived languidly. She refused to rush through life, to go through the motions and be done with it. I liked to slow down with her. We'd lay poolside during wartimes, intertwining our hands, the water splashing up at us as Rusty treaded the chlorinated pool. Elizabeth could spend hours like that, lounging and watching Rusty's doggy paddle, occasionally dipping her toes in and deciding it was too cold. No matter how much I complained about fur-clogged filters, I couldn't deny her that small joy. I couldn't banish those sweet, smiling eyes. So, I let her dog in the pool—*

A terribly annoying sound—his twin brother—pulled Alistair from his thoughts. The soft breeze disappeared. The sun vanished and was replaced by the dusky reality outside of his window. Clear skies gave way to heavy clouds, oversaturated and ready to burst over the densely forested yard. Finally, Rusty gave his last piercing yip, and Pollux began to speak.

"What are you writing?"

Alistair continued his cursive lettering. "I'm memory keeping."

"God, not that again," Pollux said, leaning against the desk. It shot to the side a smidge, screeching against the floor. That didn't stop him from carrying on. "You know what sounds good? Making memories. You can add them to your little book."

A deafening beat of quiet rang out as Alistair simply frowned,



tapping his pencil against the side of the table. It created a steady thrum like a metronome. *Tap. Tap. Tap.*

“Speaking of, I’ve heard Vegas is wonderful this time of year!” Pollux’s voice crackled with energy as he pierced the almost silence. He was always like that, bursting into Alistair’s study with a grand idea, a smile tugging at his mouth. *Pollux: a bundle of live wire with a toothy grin.* That’s how he was described in an entry Alistair wrote last week. He was quite proud of that one.

“Send me a postcard,” Alistair responded, his voice even.

“You don’t want to bond with your brother?”

The question darkened Alistair’s expression, leaving his gray eyes downcast. Hadn’t they bonded enough? Alistair certainly thought so. As much as he loved his brother, spending nearly 120 years straight with your sibling is a special type of hell. Immortality had its perks, but he couldn’t deny that it had become quite tiresome. Lately, at night—when he was given the choice between the bright white light and continuing his waking life—he’d seriously considered the former. His brother was what kept him anchored here.

He answered after a long pause. “I just don’t feel like traveling. Besides, Vegas has been the same forever. The only difference is that the computers have gotten better at taking your money.” The reasoning felt clear to him. There are only so many impromptu trips to the gambling capital that he could stomach, especially without Elizabeth to whisk him away from the shrill song of slot machines for wine tastings and window shopping.

“I suppose that’s true,” Pollux said.

Alistair’s brow raised at the rare concession. Normally, he’d give in to Pollux’s whims after a few minutes of persistent prodding. It was all the same to him, for the most part. Wherever they ended up, he could find a nice poolside spot to write. Maybe he’d read a novel, try to spot historical inaccuracies in a grocery store paperback. Completing his crossword booklet sounded good, too. And there was always the tempting possibility of stealing away to visit Red Rock Canyon and surveying the land... Realizing that his stay-away-from-the-casino plans didn’t matter, Alistair shook his head. If he wasn’t going to book an overpriced ticket to America, then he wondered what alternative agenda Pollux had. Surely, there were other cards up his sleeve. He wasn’t one to give up so easily.

He pivoted to look at Pollux for the first time, hoping to glean some information from his expression. Immediately, something was

off. Pollux's olive skin was covered in dirt, dust caking his pores. Black ringlets were astray, messy as usual, but darkened with liquid that seemed to ooze from the crown of his head. His ill-fitting khakis were a rumpled mess against sinewy legs.

"Heavens, are you okay?" Alistair's breath caught in his throat. His eyes widened, becoming saucers.

"Yeah, just got in a little tussle at the bar." Pollux bowed his head towards the floor as he fidgeted with his flannel buttons. "It's not a big deal."

Alistair just stared, shaking his head slightly. *Reckless*, he thought. A strong impulse told him to look away. He didn't want to watch this again, the endless cycles of late nights and black eyes. While Pollux only got into trouble when he sensed injustice, it seems like there's been *a lot* of injustice lately. Squinting, Alistair could already see the blooms of plum beginning to form on Pollux's forehead. Hair that normally fell forward was matted back, revealing budding bruises. Bloodied curls glinted obscenely under the overhead light.

Pollux offered a weak smile. "You should see the other guy."

*What a cliché*, Alistair couldn't help but think. He stood up, shuffling his papers around until they were chronologically organized, and placed them into his binder.

"I'm going to bed," Alistair announced. His footsteps were firm against the wooden floor as he sidestepped the wilting figure. At the doorway, he offered a glance over his shoulder, his expression softening. "Do you need help with the bandages before I go? The medical kit is under the kitchen sink."

Pollux opened his mouth for a moment, looking so small against the backdrop of Alistair's study. It was the largest room in the cabin, outfitted with a bookshelf that spanned one wall, grand, arched windows trimmed with mahogany, and commissioned artwork depicting pastoral scenes, overflowing with expansive, verdant beauty. Amid all of this, Pollux was a picture of sloped shoulders and tired eyes.

Alistair looked at him, waiting for a response. Verbally, nothing followed. Pollux shook his head, his lips pressing together into a grim line. That was answer enough, they both thought. Then, they parted for the indefinite future.

That night, both brothers were confronted by the blinding white light. The void was behind a door, one Alistair often kept open, only a few steps away from him. Alistair felt mellow heat emanat-

ing from the void, pure and comforting. Hot white nothing caressed him. Nevertheless, he stayed put in his little slice of civilization, which manifested itself as his bedroom from childhood. A menagerie of his old papercrafts (boats and cars and animals made from scraps of newspaper) were scattered about. Elaborate needlework (courtesy of his mother) was displayed, emblazoned on his bedding. When he'd materialize in this liminal space, the in-between, he always gravitated to his old bed. There was comfort in returning to simpler times, being enveloped in the warmth of his mother's lovingly crafted quilts. Alistair sat on that tiny twin-sized bed for what felt like forever. It could have been moments, days, a lifetime. He didn't know how time worked in this space; all he knew, intrinsically, was that time would stop if he exited through that door.

On the following morning, Alistair opted for a change in scenery. He left a note in his study for Pollux: *Going to town. I'll be down by the river.* He brought his notebook, deciding that he'd catalog some interesting stones next to the gurgling stream of water. It was a pleasant outing, made brighter by the melodic warble of songbirds who perched on great willow trees. Their silvery song filled the mid-morning air, embracing Alistair in lively harmonies. He spent a few hours down by the water, sifting through endless deposits of gravel, plucking flawless, smooth stones from the earth. The stones cooled his calloused hands, soothing his soul.

"How's the gathering going?" The interruption startled Alistair from his work, and he dropped a handful of mottled, burnt-sienna stones. Floating unceremoniously downstream, they were indifferent to the avid collector by the river.

Sighing, Alistair turned around to where the sound was emanating from. He looked upwards, his gaze climbing a grassy slope. Pollux stood on the crest of a small hill, his arms akimbo. Thankfully, he seemed to be in better shape than before. Now that his wounds were tended to (and he'd put on clean slacks), he looked rather presentable. His aquiline nose, dusted with freckles and florid with his perennial blush, was graced with a smart pair of sunglasses.

"It's going well," Alistair started, dusting off his jeans. "I was planning on taking a break to write. I saw a dog walk by, and it reminded me of Rusty, the big fur ball. I figure it's been a while since I've *really* written about him."

Pollux crossed his arms, and his voice got quieter, coming out as a husk of his usually resounding timbre. "That's nice. He was a good dog."



He kicked his foot aimlessly into the ground, uprooting tufts of grass. "Could you take a break? I found tickets for the Vegas trip, and I wanted you to help me find my passport. The plane takes off on Friday, so I need to get ready."

Alistair tilted his head. "What do you mean? We're not going."

"I'm going," Pollux asserted. "You can stay if you want. That's fine."

A flicker of annoyance flitted across Alistair's face. "You can't just leave without so much as a few days' notice. We were supposed to go geocaching this weekend."

"I didn't agree to that," Pollux said, the corners of his mouth turning downwards. The sun beamed down, basking him in light and giving his body the appearance of a mirage mingling with the horizon. Something unstable, ready to fade away.

"You never support what I want to do," Alistair mumbled, shoving notebooks into his charcoal gray rucksack. As always, he was aware that such petty arguments were beneath him. They should be relics of his past, laden with dust, left behind in his youth. Yet, the same gripes had always remained, becoming ruddy, open sores that never had a chance to heal.

Alistair wasn't sure if Pollux had heard him. Some part of him hoped he didn't. But his voice carried, and the damage was done. The line stretched tight between them—pulled taut, fraying at the edges—had snapped.

Pollux walked towards his twin, descending the hill. As he approached, Alistair could see the gloom under his eyes, the shakiness of his stride. His voice was strident, contrasting the weak state of his body with strong resolve.

"Never? I've gone to the river with you for my whole life. I fix your rock tumbler when you overload it. I run your errands in town, picking up paper and pens and your insufferable airport novels. I've always supported you."

"It's not the same," Alistair said, words tumbling out before he could weigh them.

Pollux knew the answer, but he still asked: "What do you mean?"

"It was just different when Elizabeth was around. That woman supported me more than anyone else. She actually wanted to go to the river, to spend time together. Admit it, you just tolerate me because we're stuck in eternity together."

Pollux threw up his hands. "She was the one checking her watch every other minute while you were knee-deep in marshes, panning for gold. If I recall correctly, she was also the one taking forty-five-minute 'bathroom breaks' in town, just to avoid sitting around all day and waiting for you."

In a sudden burst of movement, Pollux wrenched the knapsack out of Alistair's tentative grasp and began to riffle through its contents. Before Alistair could interject, Pollux retrieved a notebook from the time-worn receptacle. Waving it in the air, he spoke. "You're not recording her. You're rewriting her."

"Like you would know," Alistair spat.

"I do know!" Pollux said, an incredulous smile emerging on his face. "I've been here this entire time."

Alistair was stunned. He'd never seen Pollux like this, so close to tipping over the edge, teetering on the precipice. There was something wild in his eyes, in the way he was brandishing the notebook. Papers were strewn about, scattering at their feet, blowing away, catching in the riverbank, ink smudging, words becoming unintelligible as the pages soaked through with murky water. Years of memories gone like that, lost in the elements. An eerie calm settled on Pollux's face.

"She's only perfect because she's not real. I hope you realize that." With those final words, Pollux had said his piece. He turned around and started up the incline. His thin jacket whipped in a sudden gust of wind as he left. Alone, Alistair recovered as many papers as he could before heading home.

*She's only perfect because she's not real.* The words played in Alistair's head over and over again. *What did he mean?* Alistair wrote it in his notebooks, hoping that it'd become clear when he could see the utterance before him, clear and tangible. Trying to decipher this inscrutable code and pondering Pollux's absence consumed all his waking thoughts. He'd sit at his study, attempting to solve the impossible puzzle for hours. When Alistair grew restless, he'd try to journal, failing to find the right words. His steady stones taunted him, and so did his empty pages. Unable to conjure up the past, he sat uncomfortably in the present.

As the days went on, he kept wishing Pollux would return. He hoped desperately that he hadn't succumbed to the white light, that he was merely wandering around, shedding his frustrations as he traversed the Parisian streets. Alistair would leave the door unlocked

(which he abhorred doing) in the hopes that Pollux would arrive home and stumble through the door, collapsing as he always did on their moth-bitten couch. No such luck.

The closest he got to being reunited was when a note was left at his front door. This occurred five anxiety-riddled days after Pollux's disappearance. It was a development that Alistair nearly missed, given that he was a homebody who rarely found his way out of his front door and into the world. Still, as luck would have it, he found the note when he went to pick up the newspaper one morning. Keeping the flimsy paper from flying away, a paperweight was placed on top of the page. Alistair picked up the weighty object, grabbing the folded sheet with his other hand. Cool and smooth, it was an orange-spotted rock: Jasper. With a small smile on his face, Alistair opened the note.

Immediately, he was greeted with Pollux's handwriting, his erratic scrawl, letters clustering together:

*I'm sorry to leave so abruptly. Life was just calling, and I answered. Please do the same.*

*With love, Pollux*

At first, Alistair couldn't understand it. His vision blurred, becoming a nebulous, gloomy sea of deep blue ink. The weight in Alistair's hand was heavy, and as always, Pollux was impossible. Why must he be a roaming spirit, tethered to nothing? Alistair pondered how such weary bones weren't inlaid with a captivating, inescapable history. He wasn't a museum of days long gone, perfectly captured. Memorialized. Honored. Could his wandering brother scrape out his aging marrow and live as if he were new? Untouched by time?

Alistair blinked out his tears and sat on the wooden porch steps. The action calmed him. In some fundamental way, he was a sedentary creature. The step was cool against his legs, anchoring him to the current moment. He took note of the resinous scent of pine, the golden sun creeping upwards, the shake in his breath. After a deep inhale, he began to reread the letter. One line resonated.

"Please do the same," he said aloud. Part of him wanted to scoff, to reprimand his wayward brother as he had always done. Another part listened. Alistair sat with those words for a short infinity. So much of his life was spent sifting through the past, failing to

take hold of his present. He could give himself this infinite, beautiful moment to exist and ponder those four words.

After a while, he noticed the way tear droplets mingled with and warped the blue text. While he felt an urge to rewrite Pollux's words elsewhere, he decided against it. Somehow, he knew that his brother wouldn't want that. Instead, Alistair went to his stone collection, placed the Jasper paperweight on the mantelpiece and labeled it: *Pollux*. While he didn't know when he'd see his brother again, there was comfort in knowing that his memory went on. He wasn't rewritten; he simply was.

*Pollux: a bundle of live wire and a toothy grin.*

# WINTER

Alexis Sandoval

Flex—you wretch so  
I might cap your light  
like a lampshade  
or a pile of leaves.  
Cling to the rim,  
ride the flume to stay  
alive. Have you noticed  
the bark of a dog  
or that tree, recently?  
I won't return quickly enough  
to take what's mine—  
this light, of course, I mean.



## **MOTHER TERESA BY CANDLELIGHT**

Mary Heavey

#### ARTIST'S DESCRIPTION

*A 9 x 12 watercolor of Mother Teresa during a candlelight vigil. Wanting to paint a face with character, I chose this photo not only because of the face, but I also have great admiration for Mother Teresa, the work she did, and the work she continues to inspire today.*







## CONTRIBUTORS

**Roland Allen** is a freshman living in Marian Residence Hall from Portland, Oregon. He is majoring in Mathematics and Philosophy.

**Grace Applegate** is a junior from rainy Oregon, currently pursuing a degree in English Writing and Music. She enjoys writing poetry and works as a co-editor on the *Our Voices* staff.

**Eliza Bassani** is a sophomore from California, and she is majoring in Nursing.

**Stephanie Borla** is a sophomore at Gonzaga University, studying Computer Science and Art. She explores the connection between technology and artistic expression, using digital tools to examine her identity and self-perception. Finding computers more relatable than people, she channels this perspective into her work, enhancing her skills as an artist, self-analyst, and computer scientist.

**Lucy Brunelli** is a senior English major with a concentration in Writing and a minor in Public Relations. She is a recipient of the Anthony T. Wadden & Michael B. Herzog Scholarship for Studies in English and won a Michael & Gail Gurian Writing Award for Creative Non-Fiction in 2025. Originally from South Carolina, she now happily calls Spokane home.

**Avery Day** (nicknamed Seven) is a freshman from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, majoring in Neuroscience with a minor in Psychology.

**Jim Hanlen** graduated in 1970 from Gonzaga University. Jim has poems in *English Journal*, *Practice of Peace*, *Dorothy Day Labor Forum*, *Rattle*, *13Chairs*, *Abandoned Mine*, and *Weathered Pages*.

**Mary Heavey** is a PA for the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office and has been enjoying watercolor painting for about 2 years.

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**Scarlett Johnson** is a freshman from San Clemente, California, and is majoring in History.

**Isabel Koerner** is a senior from Portland, Oregon, majoring in Environmental Studies and minoring in Sustainable Business and Art. She finds inspiration from deconstructing the human experience, traveling, and playing with contrasts. Isabel is passionate about regenerative agriculture, environmental advocacy, and going on outdoor adventures with friends and family. She hopes to spark optimism and empowerment in her audience as she creates abstract and surreal environmental-forward pieces.

**Julia Lealos** is a freshman from Chaska, Minnesota, and is currently undecided about her major. She is minoring in Spanish and Art.

**Harrison Mains** is a senior from the Bay Area, majoring in Psychology and minoring in Writing. They are a trans, nonbinary, and queer person who is passionate about creating queer representation in art.

**Kate McGuigan** is a senior from Los Altos, California, and is majoring in Biology with a minor in Psychology.

**Jamieson McHenry** is a sophomore from Spokane Valley, Washington. She's majoring in Political Science with a minor in English Writing.

**Sophia Micciche** is a freshman from Soldotna, Alaska, and is majoring in English. She hopes to become a nonprofit fundraiser or a lawyer representing nonprofits. She has written and illustrated three children's books and is passionate about growing literacy and connection within her community.

**Gwendolyn Mitchell** is an alumnus from Juneau, Alaska. She graduated in 2024 with a B.A. in English Writing and Communication Studies. She's here for a good time and (if push comes to shove) a long time.

**Rowyn O'Connor** is a junior English major with a minor in Psychology. They grew up in Portland, Oregon. On campus, Rowyn is involved in GUTS, QSU, and DSU. In their free time, Rowyn enjoys reading, writing, performing in musical theatre, and hanging out with their dog.

**Julia Porter** is a sophomore majoring in English with a concentration in Writing. She is from Sacramento, California. She has been published in *Our Voices* and is currently an intern at Victress Literary.

**Maddox Reimer** is a junior from Missoula, Montana. He likes big dogs, peppermint tea, and walking around. His dislikes include wet band-aids, filling his gas tank, and the road infrastructure of Spokane.

**Erin Roney** is a sophomore from Salt Lake City, Utah. She's majoring in English with concentrations in both Literature and Writing.

**Aislyn Ross** is a freshman from Wenatchee, Washington, and is majoring in English and Art. Through the Running Start program at Wenatchee Valley College, she earned her Associate's degree during high school and has gone on to pursue her love of arts and literature at Gonzaga.

**Alexis Sandoval** is a sophomore from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and is majoring in English with a concentration in Writing.

**Olivia Sandvik** is a senior majoring in Public Relations and English with a concentration in Writing and minoring in Visual Literacy and Religious Studies. Her work has been published in *Reflection*, *Charter*, *Our Voices*, and *Grit and Grace*, and she had poems win *Behind the Vision's* writing contest in 2022. In her free time, she enjoys experimenting in the kitchen and curling up with a good book.

**Elena Stoll** is a senior from Seattle, Washington, and is majoring in Fine Arts.

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**Anaya Van Dusen**, hailing from Aloha, Oregon, is a first-year Political Science, English, and Broadcasting major. She has a deep appreciation for film and screenwriting and hopes to someday work in the industry. Her inspiration for her scripts comes from her favorite films, *The Passenger*, *Sanctuary*, *All of Us Strangers* and *Challengers*, and her love of religious imagery. Through *Lamb*, she attempts to illustrate the intimate character relationships often shown in these films, as well as the simultaneous damage and beauty religion can create through reflections of biblical figures and stories and the cruelty often perpetuated by American Christianity.

**Jackson Weber** is a senior from Kalispell, Montana, and is majoring in English with a concentration in Writing and minoring in Art.

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**Rebekah Willhite** is a Communications and Leadership Studies Adjunct Faculty member for Gonzaga University. She teaches Travel Writing.

## HONORABLE MENTIONS

Additional 2025 Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Award Recipients

*Mrs. Maught* by **Angela Gill**, First Place in Fiction

*Where the Heart Goes* by **Grace Applegate**, Second Place in Fiction

“Old Barn Spokane to Portland” by **Ines Marquez**, Second Place in Poetry

## REFLECTION STAFF

**Olivia Sandvik**, a native of Spokane, Washington, uses her surroundings to foster her creativity and curiosity. As a senior pursuing Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and Public Relations, she is forging her career in nonprofits and publishing. She has been published in *Reflection*, *Charter*, *Our Voices*, and *Grit and Grace* and had poems win *Behind the Vision's* writing contest in 2022.

**Mazie McNamara** is a senior English major with minors in Women & Gender Studies and Public Relations. Primarily a poet, she has been published in *Reflection* and *The Midwest Quarterly Review* and received a Michael & Gail Gurian Writing Award in 2024. She was born and raised in Oregon.

**Lucy Brunelli** is a senior English major with a concentration in Writing and a minor in Public Relations. She is a recipient of the Anthony T. Wadden & Michael B. Herzog Scholarship for Studies in English and won a Michael & Gail Gurian Writing Award for Creative Non-Fiction in 2025. Originally from South Carolina, she now happily calls Spokane home.

**Irena Fischer** is a junior Business major with a concentration in Marketing and a minor in Art History. She enjoys both digital art and fiction writing as hobbies, drawing inspiration from both her friends and favorite stories. She moved from Hollywood, California, to Spokane to pursue a degree at Gonzaga.

**Erin Roney** is a sophomore majoring in English with a concentration in both Writing and Literature. She has been an intern and later an Editorial Assistant for Victress Literary and is from Salt Lake City, Utah.

**Julia Porter** is a sophomore majoring in English with a concentration in Writing. She is from Sacramento, California, and is currently an intern at Victress Literary. Two of her favorite activities are playing with her dog and reading.

**Callie Toney** is a freshman majoring in English and Communications with a minor in Art History. Her interests include photography, reading, and music. *Reflection* is the third art and literary journal she has taken part in creating.

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